

# We Don't Attend Church as Much as We Think We Do

Outsiders to the American culture must think one of our favorite pastimes—right up there with football, baseball, and texting while driving—is taking surveys. Every day my computer shouts at me with a new statistical finding:

- 9% of pet owners throw birthday parties for their pets.
- 25% of Americans have never used a phone in the bathroom.
- 2% of people with European ancestry have non-stinky armpits, thanks to a variant of the ABCC11 gene.
- 8% of men who own TVs don't watch sports. (I'm not alone.)



I have only questions:

1. Does someone stay up at night wondering about other's armpits?
2. Who cares?

I have another question that often plagues me about surveys, but let me preface that with another statistic:

- 36% of Americans attend church once a week (and another 33% attend 1-2 times a month).

So here's my question: WHO ARE THEY ASKING?

I can't help but ask that because every Sunday as I leave my neighborhood, I only know of one other car that heads to church (and he's a pastor like me). I pass a whole lot of cars in front of a whole lot of houses on a whole lot of streets.

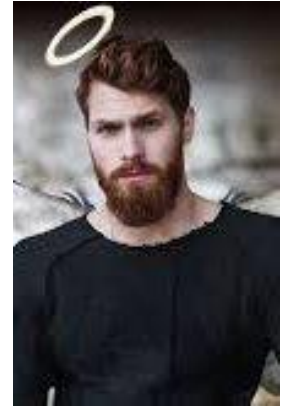
Maybe they'd be in church if they weren't busy telling pollsters about their gerbil's birthday party,

In two studies reported in Outreach Magazine, my skepticism has been validated. Both surveys find

that the reality of church attendance is about half of what is reported. It's not that occasional churchgoers are blatant liars, but the statistics are skewed by something all pollsters recognize.

## The halo effect.

We have a tendency to over-report good behaviors like voting and attending church, and we under-report undesirable behaviors like drinking or watching too much TV. People tend to report what they know they ought to be doing. It's like when I quizzed my 86-year-old mother about her exercise. Yes, she walked with her walker, but not near as much as she thought she did—nor as often as she was supposed to.



So what can you do about the low church attendance? I'm glad you asked.

If you have a neighbor or co-worker who says he goes to church—or she is a member of such-and-such church—don't leave it at that. **Go ahead and invite them to yours.** I am not advocating sheep stealing, but just because they say they attend or have a church membership doesn't mean they are connected or actually attend.

- Invite them to your Bible study group.
- Invite them to a special event held by your church.
- Invite them to a party your Bible study group is having.

Who knows? They just might hear the gospel ... build relationships ... get connected to a group that will pray for and support them. Or it just might motivate them to get active at their own church.

There's nothing offensive about an invitation. And it could change his or her life—and yours.