

# THE EVANGELIST



October 11, 2020

**Evangelism:** The spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness.

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## John 10:28-29, John 3:16, 1 Peter 1:5

John 10:28-29, *“And I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”*

John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*

1 Peter 1:5, *“Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”*

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## *Dale's Viewpoint*

Since we have, I believe, security that once we are saved our names are written in the Book of Life in indelible ink. Let us tell our family and friends so they too can be saved.

It will be a sad day indeed if death comes to one of them and we missed the opportunity to witness to them. How could we look into their faces. But if we are ready, then maybe and possibly even probably, they will be saved. What a glorious day it will be to welcome them into eternal life.

In Him,

Bro. Dale

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## *What's Behind the Steep Decline in Church Attendance Among Women*

While societal norms about parenting and professional responsibilities are glacially shifting toward more equality, raising kids is still seen by many to be “women’s work.” This puts many women in an untenable situation; data indicate that as women have become more involved in the workplace, their responsibilities at both home and church have not abated. The reality is that society is asking women to do it all, but each day still has the same 24 hours.

According to Barna’s research among practicing Christians in the *Households of Faith* report, mothers are more likely to provide encouragement, advice and sympathy to their teenagers than fathers. Teenagers are also more likely to seek out their mothers more often than their fathers to discuss faith, the Bible and things that bother them.

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On a variety of dimensions of activity, these Christian women appear to be more present in the lives of their children than men.

Beyond the household, how are women present as part of a *church* family? I wanted to get a clear picture of the gender breakdown of people in the pews on an average Sunday in the United States. The data from the last 16 years tells an interesting story. Women were consistently more likely than men to attend church weekly in the 2000's. However, two important trends have emerged since 2012. The first is that attendance has declined significantly for both men and women. However, the rate of decline for female respondents is much more dramatic.

In 2009, 48 percent of women attended church at least once a week, but, in less than a decade, the share has dropped to 31 percent. During the same period of time the share of men who attended church at least weekly declined 12 percentage points. While there used to be a gender gap in attendance, that is clearly no longer the case.

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But that may be coming to an end. It's no secret that the rate of the religiously unaffiliated has risen significantly in the last 30 years, and church attendance has declined as well. However, this trend is not consistent across gender or age groups. To test that, I calculated the average church attendance of both men and women 18–35-years-old as well as those over the age of 35. The results are disheartening.

It's clear that the average level of church attendance is down for all groups, but the rate of decline is much steeper for women, particularly those in the older age group. In 2003, half of women 35 and older attended church once a week; by 2019, that declined to just three in 10. While attendance has also declined among older men, the decline is far less significant. For women younger than 35, they have always been more likely to be weekly attenders, but the rate of decline is similar. In 2019, 26 percent of women under the age of 35 were actively churched, which is five percentage points lower than their older female counterparts.

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Men used to lag behind women in both age groups. The gap between the two genders hovered around 8 percentage points in 2003 for younger women and 11 percentage points for older women. Something notable occurred among both age groups in recent years—the gender gap essentially disappeared. In fact, the data indicate that women are no more likely to be actively churched in 2020 than men. That's largely due to men's rate of decline slowing, while the women's trend line continues to move downward at a consistent pace. This is clearly a worrisome finding.

Why is this happening? It's nearly impossible to point to one causal mechanism. As previously noted, many women are being asked to do more at work, more with their family and more with the community. For many, this has become overwhelming, and church can often seem like the easiest commitment to walk away from. It could also be that women are beginning to vote with their feet in the wake of sexual abuse scandals that are rocking the **Southern Baptist Convention** and

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the Catholic Church, or as a reaction to many churches' positions on female leadership.

In a study conducted by Barna about *Christians at Work*, the data indicate that women are less likely than men to believe that they are using their unique talents and gifts to serve outside the workplace (24% vs 31%). That should sound an alarm bell for ministry leaders.

**Here are a few possible suggestions for churches to consider:**

Churches need to be intentional about speaking holistically to the value of women's calling. It would be encouraging for women to hear messages that focused on followers of Christ living out their purpose—in the home, the workplace *and* the church.

Every church, regardless of theological positions on gender roles, can find more ways to include women in the life of the congregation. Nominating or events committees should be encouraged to make sure that their gender distribution reflects that of the larger congregation.

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However, churches need to be mindful that women are already juggling a lot of responsibilities in their home and work lives. Therefore, church leaders need to think carefully about what opportunities they create for women in their congregation.

Ideal volunteer opportunities would be those that tap into their unique spiritual gifts, without making one feel overburdened. This will enhance the life of the church as well as give women a sense of personal fulfillment.

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