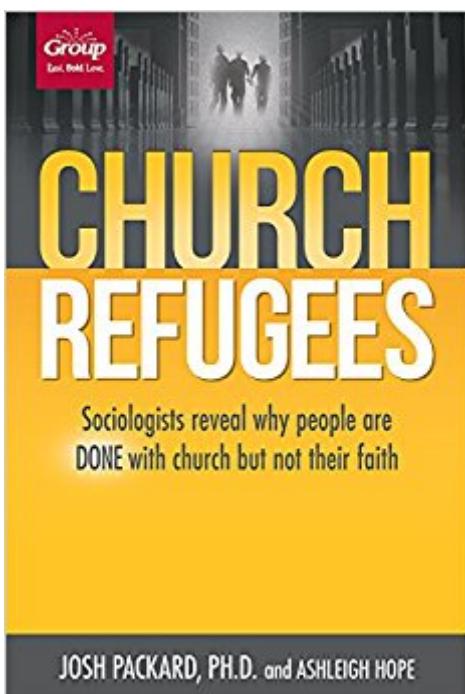


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# Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal Why People Are DONE With Church But Not Their Faith



## Synopsis

As millions of church members fall into inactivity each year, they've probably also started skipping church on Sunday. We need answers—not statistics. We need to understand and hear from people who are leaving church so we can find a way to turn around the trend. This book uses in-depth sociological research to get to the heart of the issue. The data is collected from interviews with real people about why they left and who they really are. These aren't the ones who have no religious affiliation. They're the ones who've been faithfully serving in local churches for years. This is their story.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Josh Packard is a professor of sociology at the University of Northern Colorado and the well-published author of numerous academic articles, reviews, and the book, *The Emerging Church*. He's also an active church member and has a deep desire to understand the widespread phenomenon of church decline. He can be found at [joshpackard.com](http://joshpackard.com). Ashleigh Hope is the process of gaining her Ph.D. in Sociology at Vanderbilt University where she researches topics in the areas of religion, community, and health. She is currently a member of a church in Nashville, and is interested in the various religious and life perspectives that exist in- and outside of the modern congregation.

Few books have disturbed me as much as Josh Packard's Church Refugees. Many of us

have become familiar with the “Nones” (those who select “None” when asked their religious affiliation) and their increase over the past 20 years. Packard describes a different, trending phenomenon: “The Dones,” those who have decided “their spiritual lives are better off lived outside organized religion.” Packard unveils what many of us in Churchworld have been experiencing as a trickle for years: the most committed church attenders—“those who have given most, prayed longest, served for years, and have been in the most important meetings”—are the ones leaving our churches. After a year of qualitative research, conducting a hundred interviews, Packard concludes that the Dones are not leaving because they hate God or Christ’s priorities; the Dones uniformly report that they are leaving church to save their faith. Packard argues the church in America is not the European model, and its death will not be due to stagnation. America is an innovative society, but if the American church cannot keep its most committed, devoted, and energetic followers, then its destined to become a greatly diminished social force. This is no small observation. Where analyzing the Nones is like looking at a sever burn that on the surface looks bad but over time may heal, the Dones are like a diagnosis of cancer. Some of the people most essential for the American church’s lasting health are leaving and the reasons are documented and would require major systemic change. Note, the Dones are not the free-riders. They are the folks who showed up every week and gave regularly, and they are not leaving because of the apparent dominance of conservative theology or well-publicized sex scandals. Rather, Packard summarizes, “the story of the dechurched is a story of modern religious organizations and institutions stifling people’s ability to engage with each other and their community.” So why are the Dones leaving? Packard argues, “The Dones say they left because of the judgmental posture of church people individually and collectively which assaulted the communal experience they longed for.” “The Dones say they left because they are tired of trying to serve Jesus through the bureaucratic methods of church organizations which stifled progress and often gave little attention to what they cared for most. Many wished to build the Kingdom but were only offered opportunities to build someone’s church empire.” “The Dones say they left because they want to answer questions about God through dialogue and struggle, not though prepackaged lectures and the predetermined positions of their community.” “And the Dones say they left because their church only understood “morality” in terms of substance abuse and sexual activity with a common disregard to systemic issues of equality, poverty and unjust economics. Note, Packard is not a progressive commentator. Packard is a sociologist presenting data from interviews. He is not advancing his own gripes about church life (he presently attends and is active in a church).

Instead, his book outlines what those who have already left say about why they left and why they are not likely to return. As a practitioner, this is the most challenging book I've read in some time and churches like mine – what may be termed emerging churches – are not immune. Normally when reading books on the failures of Churchword, I am part of the critics circle, but not here. Packard puts his finger on spots my church and most of those I know deeply struggle.

A great read on what is truly happening in the lives of active church members today in our churches in America! It is not something that is being discussed or viewed as a major concern to the future growth. Thanks Josh and Ashleigh for taking the time to interview, document and share from a scientific point of view the reality that is being faced by those of us who are "Done" with organized religion, but certainly not "Done" with our faith in God! We appreciate your hard work at getting this out there so some churches can embrace the thoughts and begin to see what is happening, and the changes that need to begin to happen to help us either stay or want to come back to church! Thanks for showing us what others are doing that have left, and what we can do to meet that need of having community with other believers. Look forward to see where you go from here, and what our churches will look like ten years from now!

Yup. I'm a Done. I find myself nodding when I read the book. The information in this book may be confronting to many who are comfortable in the church, especially those at the top who are keeping the machine of the institutional church running. But it's a NECESSARY book. It's important for those in and out of the church to understand this "movement", because the Dones - Christians who have decided to stop going to Sunday church services but still retain their love for the faith - are often misunderstood, even demonised by their former communities. Hopefully, the church will change accordingly so that the Dones will return their fire to the community. But I'm not holding my breath. Systems are pretty stubborn when it comes to change ....

30 million "Dones" in the United States. People with extraordinary commitment to their churches in the past, but who saw that the church was getting in the way of their personal mission, rather than assisting with it. These are folks who are fed up with bureaucracy, fed up with being voiceless in the church, but who are seeking to continue to serve God. Church must alter if church plans to survive. We must focus on building communities that enhance personal spiritual growth and encourage and support members who go out into the community with their gifts. A must read for every church leader, this is the new path to church growth.. a Christ centered mission that allows each member to

best utilize her gifts in service to God. A page turner.

This book nails it for me! I definitely fit the profile of a "Done" and based on my personal experience in the organized, institutional/denominational church I agree with most of their findings. The question for existing Churches is do you care enough to reclaim these refugees or would you rather keep on doing what you have been doing and watch the exodus continue.

This is an excellent book which all pastors need to read. It shows why people who leave the church are not actually leaving the church, but are instead simply finding a new and more meaningful way to love and serve others like Jesus. If pastors saw this, they could bless those who leave their church, rather than accuse them of backsliding.

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