



How Can We  
Ensure That  
Our Children  
Will Become  
Faithful and  
Active  
Christians?

# The Spiritual Continental Divide

## A Continental Divide

Two drops of water, falling a mere inch apart, travel in two different directions. These two drops join streams, then rivers, and eventually end thousands of miles apart.

In the same way, we watch the children of our congregation grow.

They all start up close together. Then over time, they begin to drift in different directions.



Finally, the high school and college years arrive, and our precious children end up thousands of miles apart spiritually.

Can we identify the factors that cause our children to move in different directions?

**More importantly, can we study these factors, and use this knowledge to affect the outcomes?**

**An analysis of the children who have passed through the Camp Hill Church of Christ youth group since 1973.**

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# The Spiritual Continental Divide

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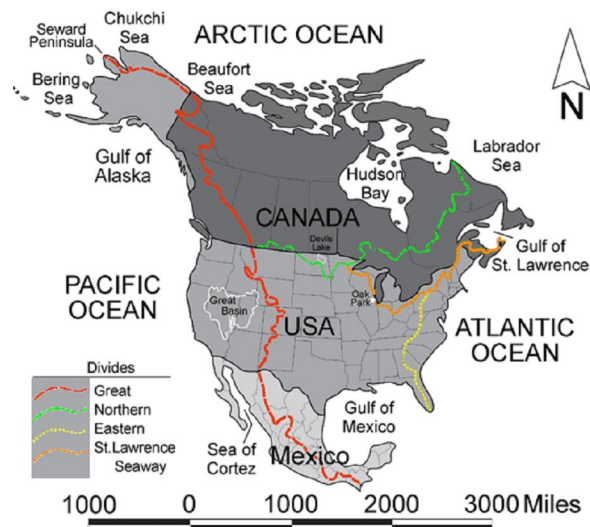
When you drive toward Cumberland on Route 68, going west through the Appalachian Mountains, you come across a sign that says “Now Leaving the Chesapeake Bay Watershed” and another sign that says “Eastern Continental Divide”.

A continental divide is a line of elevated terrain which forms a border between two watersheds. Water falling on one side of the line eventually travels to one ocean or body of water, and water on the other side travels to another, generally on the opposite side of the continent. In the case of this Eastern Continental Divide, rain which falls on the east side ends up in the Chesapeake Bay and then the Atlantic Ocean. Rain which falls on the western side eventually finds its way to the Mississippi River and thus the Gulf of Mexico.

There are several “continental divides” in North America. The two we usually think of are the north-south divides along the Appalachian and Rocky Mountains. There is also an East-West divide above us, in which water flows north into the great lakes or to the south.

Think about the concept of a continental divide. Suppose, by some miracle, a drop of rain could stay together, and not be subject to diffusion or evaporation. In this theoretical world, two drops of water, falling a mere inch apart, would travel by force of gravity downward, but in two different directions. These two drops would join streams, then rivers, and they would eventually end far apart.

Imagine it. These two drops of water are virtually identical. They drop from the same cloud, at the same time, at the same rate of speed. They hit the ground at the same time, mere inches apart. Compared to the circumference of the earth, the difference in location of these two drops is negligible.



*National Atlas of the United States,  
U.S. Government, Public Domain Image.*

Yet gradually they drift apart, at first slowly, as they run over the earth into the valleys. Then they pick up speed, as they enter the streams and rivers. And eventually they end up thousands of miles apart. This is not an improbable event – it happens continually.

In the same way, we watch the children of our congregation grow. They all start up close together, as babies and young children, all eagerly learning the children’s Bible songs, all innocent and loving God, accepting Him and the creation without question. Then over time, they begin to drift in different directions. At first, the differences are small and slow. Then, over time, they become more noticeable, and the changes occur more rapidly. Finally, the high school and college years arrive, and our precious children end up spiritually thousands of miles apart.

It almost happens too gradually to notice – perhaps only the wisest among us, or those who have watched one or two generations of children grow and mature can see the difference and be



aware. These can sometimes predict the likely outcomes after watching the children and their parents. Sometimes these wise people among us can predict when a child is going in the wrong direction. The children certainly cannot look that far ahead into their futures. In most cases, the parents cannot see the differences – as they are inexperienced, and too close to the situation to step back and see what is happening.

Children begin drifting in the wrong direction at a very early age. Sadly, by the time most parents can see what is happening, it may be too late to change a drift in the wrong direction. And those who “saw it coming” may not say anything, to avoid trampling on feelings, or because they are not sure how it will end up, or because of fear of denials or reprisals. Or perhaps their own children fell away after drifting in the wrong direction, and though this opened the eyes of the parents and made them wiser, they now feel inadequate to share this wisdom and point out to others the same mistakes that they made.



The spiritual continental divide. It is there. It cannot be denied. We see it in Cain and Abel, and in Shem, Japheth and Ham. It is perhaps most evident in Jacob and Esau. We see it in Joseph and his brothers. Godly parents have children who slip away. Like David, with Absalom. Then there are those children who rise above – like Jonathan, the son of Saul.

There are typical causes, as well as typical symptoms. It is a complex issue – it is difficult not to over simplify, or over complicate the issue. And it must be understood that children, like all humans, are

individuals, with different personalities. A family may have several children, raising all of them in the same home, with the same rules and activities and church emphasis, and some will be faithful and some may fall away. There is not 100% sure answer. But the trends are undeniable. There are certain behaviors and factors which strongly influence whether a child will remain faithful to the Lord as he or she becomes an adult.

In order to gain an understanding of the forces that push a child to one side or the other of the spiritual continental divide, we attempted a scientific approach. Specifically, we did an analysis of those who have passed through the Camp Hill Church of Christ youth group, starting around 1973. Thus, we have about 35 years of data, covering 108 people. We took each person, and looked at several factors in each one’s life during their youth, and then correlated that to whether they are faithful and active in the Lord’s church today.

We then separated these into three groups:

1. Adults (68 total) – these include those who have graduated High School recently but are not attending college.
2. College (25 total) – those students who are currently enrolled in college.
3. High School (15 total) – Those students who are in grades 9-12.

We looked at the current and previous status of each person in several categories:



Present Status

- Are they attending church today?
- Are they actively involved today?
- Are they married?
- If so, was their first marriage to a Christian?

Previous Status/Behavior

- Were they baptized?
- Did they frequently attend services on Sunday mornings?
- Did they frequently attend services on Sunday nights and Wednesday?
- Were both parents Christians?
- Did both of their parents attend with the children?
- Were both of their parents active?
- Were they active in the youth group?
- Did they attend Christian camps?
- Did they go to a Christian college?

We acknowledge that some judgments had to be made to answer these categories. For example, how often do they have to come to the assembly to be considered “actively attending today”? How much activity was necessary to be considered “active”? How many times did they have to go to camp to say they “attended camps”? Surprisingly, though we sometimes struggled to answer these questions, only a small percentage required debate or enhanced discussion. Nevertheless, we are mindful that one person’s definition of “attending” or “Actively involved” is different from another’s. Results must be taken with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, the trends you are about to see are for the most part clear and, often overwhelmingly convincing.

Raw Data Summary

The following table is a “snapshot summary” of the raw data:

Status	Attending Church Today?	Actively Involved Today?	Baptized?	Did They Frequently Attend Sunday AM?	Did They Frequently Attend Sunday and Wed Night?	Both Parents Christians?	Both Parents Attend?
Adult	67.6%	57.4%	95.6%	91.2%	66.2%	70.6%	61.8%
College	88.0%	88.0%	100.0%	92.0%	84.0%	88.0%	80.0%
H. S.	100.0%	46.7%	60.0%	100.0%	33.3%	53.3%	46.7%

Status	Both Parents Active?	Active in Youth Group?	Christian Camps?	Christian College?	Married?	If So, To a Christian (First Marriage)?
Adult	52.9%	63.2%	57.4%	36.8%	72.1%	70.0%
College	72.0%	84.0%	88.0%	72.0%	4.0%	100.0%
H. S.	26.7%	46.7%	53.3%			

Let’s examine this data and see the following points:

- About 2/3 of adults who have passed through the Camp Hill youth group are still attending services of the Church of Christ today.
- The baptismal rates of adults and college students have been very high. This clearly has not been a problem for the Camp Hill congregation.



- Sunday night and Wednesday night attendance patterns were the highest among our current college students. Rates, however, have fallen to weak levels among our present high school students.
- Our current college students enjoyed a “strong family” atmosphere – most had both parents who were Christians and active. More of our present High School students are in homes where only one parent is an active Christian. Over 50% have only one attending parent. And only about 27% have both parents “actively involved” in church activities.
- Youth Group activity peaked for our present college aged students – but is now declining to levels below those the older adults from Camp Hill – a worrisome trend.
- Christian camp activity peaked for our present college aged students – but is now declining to level similar to those the older adults from Camp Hill.
- Surprisingly, only 72% (49) of our adults have married. Of the 49 who married, 70% of these marriages were to Christians.

From this point forward, we will focus our analysis on the “mature data”, for those who are now adults. From this analysis we have gathered several learning’s that can be applied to our youth, in the hopes of improving the chances that they will mature to become faithful, active members of the Lord’s church.

Attending vs. Non-Attending - Adults

Attending Church Today?	Actively Involved Today?	Baptized?	Did They Frequently Attend Sunday AM?	Did They Frequently Attend Sunday and Wed Night?	Both Parents Christians?	Both Parents Attend?
Yes - 46	84.8%	100.0%	100.0%	78.3%	76.1%	67.4%
No - 22	0.0%	86.4%	72.7%	40.9%	59.1%	50.0%

Attending Church Today?	Both Parents Active?	Active in Youth Group?	Christian Camps?	Christian College?	Married?	If So, To a Christian (First Marriage)?
Yes - 46	65.2%	78.3%	71.7%	52.2%	78.3%	69.6%
No - 22	27.3%	31.8%	27.3%	4.5%	59.1%	9.1%

In this adult data set, we separated out those adults who are attending today (“faithful”) and those who are not attending today (“unfaithful”). Then we looked at the percentages in each category among those adults.

What can we learn from this analysis?

- 100% of those now faithful attended Sunday morning, and 73% of these attended the other services. Conversely, only 73% of those now unfaithful attended Sunday mornings, and only 41% attended the other services.
- About 76% of those now faithful had two faithful parents – only 59% of those now unfaithful had two faithful parents.
- About 78% of those now faithful were active in the youth group – but only 32% of those now unfaithful.
- About 72% of those now faithful attended Christian camps – but only 27% of those now unfaithful.
- About 52% of those now faithful attended Christian College – but only 4.5% of those now unfaithful.
- About 70% of those now faithful who married were wedded to other Christians – but only 9% of those now unfaithful.

We understand that care must be taken – Each factor in itself should not be considered a 100% direct correlation. Rather, these factors have a cumulative effect, working together to achieve a given result. But the trends are clear.

Sunday Night and Wednesday Night Attendance - Adults

Did They Frequently Attend Sunday and Wed Night?	Attending Church Today?	Actively Involved Today?
<b>YES - 45</b>	<b>80.0%</b>	<b>77.8%</b>
<b>NO - 23</b>	<b>43.5%</b>	<b>17.4%</b>

This is the most interesting data set when collating by Sunday and Wednesday night attendance. Clearly, those children who are taught by their parents to attend all services, regularly, are much more likely to be faithful as adults.

What message do we send when we attend, with our children, at every possible time? What comes first in our lives? Children learn from the behavior of their parents. When we place a high value on fellowship and worship, it rubs off onto our children. When other things come first, then our children do not place a high value on Christianity. What was of lesser importance to us becomes unimportant to them.

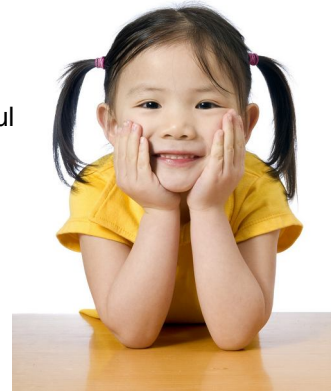
Christianity of the Parents - Adults

There are some strong correlations between the Christianity of the parents and the ultimate faithfulness of the children. Unfortunately, this factor is often out of the control of the faithful parent, and is certainly out of the control of the child.

When both parents are Christians, the children of Camp Hill have become faithful member so of the Lord's Church 73% of the time. But only 55% of "single Christian parent" households have remained faithful.

This is something that all young people should seriously consider when looking for a mate. It is not a good idea to be "unequally yoked together".

This status of the parents ultimately had an effect on their activity level in the church youth group, and ultimately in their own choices in whether to marry a Christian or a non-Christian, as shown below.



Both Parents Christians?	Did They Frequently Attend Sunday and Wed Night?	Attending Church Today?	Actively Involved Today?	Baptized?	Did They Frequently Attend Sunday AM?
<b>YES - 48</b>	<b>77.1%</b>	<b>72.9%</b>	<b>60.4%</b>	<b>95.8%</b>	<b>97.9%</b>
<b>NO - 20</b>	<b>40.0%</b>	<b>55.0%</b>	<b>50.0%</b>	<b>95.0%</b>	<b>75.0%</b>

Both Parents Christians?	Active in Youth Group?	Christian Camps?	Christian College?	Married?	If So, To a Christian (First Marriage)?
<b>YES - 48</b>	<b>70.8%</b>	<b>62.5%</b>	<b>39.6%</b>	<b>75.0%</b>	<b>56.3%</b>
<b>NO - 20</b>	<b>45.0%</b>	<b>45.0%</b>	<b>30.0%</b>	<b>65.0%</b>	<b>35.0%</b>

By Youth Group Activity Level (Adults)

The data set below has the present day adults sorted by those who were and who were not active in youth group activities.

Active in Youth Group?	Both Parents Christians?	Did They Frequently Attend Sunday and Wed Night?	Attending Church Today?	Actively Involved Today?	Baptized?	Did They Frequently Attend Sunday AM?
<b>YES - 43</b>	79.1%	86.0%	83.7%	74.4%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>NO - 25</b>	56.0%	32.0%	40.0%	28.0%	88.0%	76.0%

Active in Youth Group?	Both Parents Attend?	Both Parents Active?	Christian Camps?	Christian College?	Married?	If So, To a Christian (First Marriage)?
<b>YES - 43</b>	72.1%	72.1%	79.1%	58.1%	81.4%	67.4%
<b>NO - 25</b>	44.0%	20.0%	20.0%	0.0%	56.0%	20.0%

Note the following key points:

- Some 84% of those who were active in the youth group as teens are attending church today – but only 40% of those who were not active in the youth group are faithful now.
- The activity level in the youth group seems to be strongly influenced by whether both parents were actively involved (72% vs. 20%)
- About 79% of those active in the youth group attended Christian camps - but only 20% of non-active teens.
- About 58% of those active in the youth group attended Christian camps - but none of non-active teens.
- Do you want your child to marry a Christian? Send them to Christian camps, Christian colleges, and get them active in the youth group. Two thirds of those active as teens married Christians – but only 20% of those not actively involved.

Influence of Christian Colleges

The data set below shows some interesting statistics in regard to Christian college attendance:

- We calculate that 96% of those who attended Christian college are still faithful today. But only 51% of those who did not attend Christian college are faithful.
- Attending and enjoying the atmosphere and fellowship at Christian camps seems to strongly drive a tendency to attend Christian college.
- Do you want your son or daughter to marry a Christian? Send them to a Christian college. Some 80% of those who did married a Christian – but only one third of those who did not attend.



Christian College?	Attending Church Today?	Active in Youth Group?	Both Parents Christians?	Did They Frequently Attend Sunday and Wed Night?	Actively Involved Today?	Baptized?
<b>Yes - 25</b>	96.0%	100.0%	76.0%	88.0%	96.0%	100.0%
<b>No - 43</b>	51.2%	41.9%	67.4%	53.5%	34.9%	93.0%



<b>Christian College?</b>	<b>Did They Frequently Attend Sunday AM?</b>	<b>Both Parents Attend?</b>	<b>Both Parents Active?</b>	<b>Christian Camps?</b>	<b>Married?</b>	<b>If So, To a Christian (First Marriage)?</b>
<b>Yes - 25</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>72.0%</b>	<b>72.0%</b>	<b>96.0%</b>	<b>80.0%</b>	<b>80.0%</b>
<b>No - 43</b>	<b>86.0%</b>	<b>55.8%</b>	<b>41.9%</b>	<b>34.9%</b>	<b>67.4%</b>	<b>32.6%</b>

### Summary

Again, please take care when analyzing these statistics. It is tempting to look at a given influencing factor and result and make a broad assumption. But the reality is that there are many factors, working together, which drive the desired outcome – a child who matures into a faithful and active Christian.

So, what should we do if we want your children to mature faithfully? The best bet is to immerse them in as many of these positive influencing factors as possible:

- Bring your children to as many services as possible. Put it first – ahead of TV and recreational activities, sporting events, and other activities. Go to church when on vacation – show them that being a faithful, attending and active Christian is what matters.
- Be active as parents. Do more than warm the pew.
- Show your children, through your actions, that you love your spouse and that you are helping each other to remain faithful and make it to heaven.
- Involve your children in youth group activities and Christian camps.
- Send them to a Christian college. Tell them that you expect they will go at least two years to a Christian college, from the time they are babies.

What can you do as a Christian or a congregation to influence the paths of our children, even if you are not their parents?

- Be a mentor. Fill a gap, especially if they are from a single Christian parent home. Encourage them to be active.
- Be brave. Speak lovingly to the parents when you see warning signs that they are moving in the wrong direction. Help others by using your hard-earned wisdom.
- Host a youth activity. Work hard to invite everyone, encourage them to attend, and encourage their parents to bring them.
- Talk to the youth. Get to know their names, personalities, activities and hobbies.
- Encourage children of your congregation to consider a Christian college. Provide loving advice.
- Teach a youth class. Share your experiences with them. If you made mistakes in your own life, have the courage to tell them about it – let them learn from your mistake, so they do not repeat it.
- Don't give up on any one of them. Our database has several "outliers" – children who succeeded in becoming strong, active Christians despite having several factors stacked against them. Learn from the statistics – but don't let them discourage you.

The good news is that, unlike the two drops of water, which are moving in paths which are firmly set, the signs of spiritual drifting can be seen and recognized, and can be influenced. With help, a young person, if drifting in the wrong direction, can cross over the spiritual continental divide. These young souls are our future, and our responsibility.

It is our belief that this analysis provides information, which if properly considered and acted upon, will allow parents and concerned Christians to make wise choices that will result in more young people remaining faithful to the Lord. May the Lord guide all of us in saving "our own" in the coming years.