

Root Causes of Men's Backsliding from Church Membership

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand the reasons and root causes of men's backsliding from weekly Sabbath attendance and worship services in the Mochenwa and Rigena districts. The phenomenon of backsliding and church non-attendance among men is one of the emerging tendencies in the postmodern religious worldviews. The gradual backsliding of men from regular church attendance and participation, as observed in Nyamira West Field Seventh-day Adventist churches, is a worrying trend. This research design applied a quantitative method for data collection. The quantitative design utilised a questionnaire with structured closed-ended questions on a four-point Likert scale of measurement and collected respondents' attitudes and opinions, which factored the backslidden members in this study. The design provided the blueprint for this research. Data was analysed electronically using the Statistics Package for Social Science (SPSS) software for descriptive data analysis to capture the percentage. Based on the findings, the reasons for backsliding that stood out include but are not limited to loss of faith, loss of interest, involvement in drinking alcohol, criticism from fellow church members, lack of frequent visitation, and discrimination. Therefore, the study recommends that each church member be actively involved in weekly church activities so that the backsliders can be reclaimed, retained, and nurtured spiritually. The church should implement the following programs: small group ministry, prayer ministry, visitation program, and leadership training to curb this worrying trend of backsliding.

Key terms: Apostasy, discipleship, dissociation, dropout, falling away, disfellowship, non-attendance.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of backsliding is affecting most churches in this postmodern era, but the male gender is the worst hit. Scholarly pieces of literature have focused extensively on youth and general membership church dropouts, apostasy, dissociation, inactivity, disfellowship, and falling away while neglecting the backslidden male demographic. The backsliding of men is a situation that demands a research study to determine the underlying reasons contributing to their backsliding condition, including church worship attendance and the failure to assume their expected roles.

The churches are supposed to have a numerical increase in membership for both genders from time to time, influenced by evangelistic campaigns, outreach programs, camp meetings, seminars, departmental congresses, and spiritual revivals. However, more men are exiting churches as soon as they are baptised compared to women. They have dwindled drastically in their spiritual development, and still, some have become social misfits in society. Their absence from the church has created a gap in some of the leadership roles that need to be taken up by men only. There is scant literature to address this situation, which necessitates research to understand this worrying condition.

Nothing much has been said specifically on the backsliding of men from church membership, and yet it is a threatening phenomenon to be investigated. However, the following has been written on backsliding and membership dropouts: men convicted of criminal offences or who experienced other mental health or interpersonal difficulties (Patterson et al., 2023). Causes of membership dropout among selected churches in the East Jamaica Conference include violation of the commandment of adultery, decline of personal spiritual life, lack of support during a crisis, working on Sabbath, and inadequate preparation for baptism, leading to inconsistency (Russell, 1990).

The principal reasons for discontinuing membership and major contributing factors to the loss of faith and dissociation from the church are working on the Sabbath, smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, and using drugs, among others (Nielsen, 1977). The causes of membership dropout in the Grenada Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, as well as ways to reduce it, include a lack of inclusivity, interpersonal conflicts, and inadequate church programs (Lewis, 1999).

Another article has been written with Asia-Africa in mind, focusing on 'nurturing and retaining newly baptised members in Asia-Africa to be fully integrated Seventh-day Adventist Church members' (Harelimana, 2014).

The book "Transforming the Church in Africa" by Vernon E. Light explores the discipleship process in Africa as understood by evangelicals, covering modernism, postmodernism, African Traditional Religion, and central Christian doctrine (Vernon, 2012). There is also another article from Tanzania, which examines the concept of Christian backsliding in Christian worship services among university students. It highlights the reasons why many university students tend to backslide from attending worship services and morning devotions. The reasons include, among others, bad peer pressure, lack of fear of God, psychological problems, lack of individual trust in God, and anxieties (Kabuje & Mligo, 2021).

Locally, the one written within the Adventist Church in Kenya covers a strategy to increase the retention of members in Nyaguta District (Kiage, 2014). Little research has been conducted on backsliding, but it does

not explain why men tend to backslide from weekly church attendance and drop out of church membership. The ultimate goal of this research is to assess the phenomenon of backsliding among men.

Men play a vital role in families as well as in churches. Biblically, a man (patriarch) performed the role of a father, ruler, and priest in the family and a clan as well; he exercised authority over his children (Deut 6:6-9; Prov 22:6). He offered morning and evening sacrifices on behalf of his family and house church (Job 1:5). He was looked as the head in both religious and secular matters. The father represented the divine lawgiver and laboured in God's vineyard. Therefore, the patriarchal system, from Abraham down to several generations until the coming of Jesus, was established to preserve the knowledge of God.

The absence of male figures in churches today has had a detrimental impact not only on the church community but also on families. How will the church be affected? There are vital departments that will be affected by the absence of men in church services: eldership, deaconate, Personal Ministries, Adventist Men, Family Ministries, Community Services, Youth Ministries, Public Affairs, and Religious Liberty (Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2022). When the male fathers are spiritually inactive, then both families and the church will miss teachers and coaches, good mentors and role models to be emulated. The moral standards will be compromised both at home and in churches. Children will miss a good fatherly foundation to rebuke, admonish, instruct, and teach them good ethical values. If children lack a strong foundation at home, the churches will also be affected, resulting in children who are disobedient, unruly, and stubborn, who will later become adults without moral values.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Backsliding

Backsliding, according to Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary, is a deliberate turning away from and rejection of God. This language is found most frequently in the Old Testament (OT), especially in Jeremiah, where warnings are often accompanied by God's invitations to His people to repent and return from their sinful ways (Jer 3:11-12, 22) (Longman, 2013). The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible further explains that it is to turn back or go backwards. It referred to the Israelites turning away from the true and living God to the worship of the heathen nature gods and idols, usually referred to by the name Baal. (Tenney & Silva, 2010) Backsliding, as described by the New Bible Dictionary, is closely linked to apostasy, which means falling from the faith (1 Tim 4:1) and the living God (Heb 3:12) (Douglas, 1996). Additionally, the international standard Bible encyclopedia asserts that forsaking God was the characteristic and often recurring sin of the chosen people, especially in their contact with idolatrous nations (Bromiley, 1995). This is simply turning your back on God.

Beeke (2011) asserts that one must press on, firm in the confidence that one runs alongside other believers, that they run a well-trodden course, and that they run with God's inexhaustible assistance and support. Believers have a race to run, and every true Christian must endure great opposition. Otherwise, there will be fightings without, fears within; there will be snares to be avoided and temptations to be resisted; there will be your treacherous hearts, often cold and dead and dry and dull; there will be friends who will give you unscriptural advice, and relations who will even war against your soul; in short, there will be stumbling-blocks on every side, there will be occasion for all one's diligence and watchfulness and godly jealousy and prayer, one will soon find that to be a real Christian is no light matter (Beeke, 2011).

For as sad as it is to backslide, there is a road open to restoration by true repentance and confession. As explained above, a backslider is someone who was once baptised, has fallen away, and is no longer attending church. Someone who is not walking in the way of faith. One who neither attends weekly church services nor participates in church programs of any kind. A believer walks in a wayward and evil way, following the wicked parts.

The Reasons for Backsliding Condition

Reasons for backsliding as presented by Watts (1981), but not limited to Prosperity and abundance, false religions and idolatry, sinful environment, persecution and tribulations, cares and burdens of life, love of the world and its pleasures, lack of firm foundation in the Word, loss of faith, gradual wandering away from God and towards the world and its attractions, wilful rebellion against God and His church, smoking and drinking alcohol, changing of location, rapid and superficial church growth through public evangelism (Watts, 1981).

There is a clear picture of a paradigm shift in the way people behave in churches, as observed above; this means that many church leaders occasionally demand honour like God. Members are giving adoration to church leaders, choirs, pastors, bishops, reverends, etc. There are comparisons and contrasts from time to time among members towards their ministers. This is a dangerous ground to lead people into backsliding from God.

Research conducted by Lewis (1997) on the Grenada Mission of Seventh-day Adventists focuses on church dropouts. He reveals that the high rate of church dropouts occurs among members under the age of thirty-five. The main contributing factors given were relational problems with members, and other categories were sexual sins, worldly pleasures, financial and material needs, loss of interest, conflict with church members, lack of support, and members' criticism, among others (Lewis, 1997). The research gave measures to be taken to reduce the dropout rate, but didn't show the implementation and the outcomes.

Roozen (1980) affirms that the most frequently cited reasons for leaving the church are related to intra-church discord (i.e., perceived shortcomings or criticisms of the church, often involving a sense that the dropout was not accepted, loved, or wanted by other members of their church) (Roozen, 1980). These reasons differ somewhat from those of previous writers. He agrees with Lewis on criticism among church members.

An article by Burch (2007) on "Acknowledged and Perceived Reasons for Non-Attendance" offers another perspective on the reasons for non-attendance at Christian churches in America. Interviews were carried out on various Christian congregations, and the reasons found are parental neglect, lack of religious training, family disorganisation (conflicts), mixed marriages, personality of priests, traumatic experiences, and drifting from faith.

The reasons given by Burch on backsliding can further be divided into four categories: (1) Church-related reasons, which include – the church being too restrictive on her rules about morality, changes in mass, confessions, being terrified by the priest while being a child, the priest's aloofness, lack of cordiality, insensitivity and tyrannical methods. The church failed to lead the way in breaking down barriers: socio-economic, racial, national, and ethnic. Some people said that the church's worship services and sermons were boring; others still became dissatisfied with the community rather than with their religious affiliation.

(2) Theological reasons are that some beliefs were different from those found in most churches; some felt that they were sinners, and the church was meant for saints. (3) Personal reasons are – their lifestyles were not compatible with the church; interested and excited in making money than being with people; children are grown up, there is no need to go to church; some felt that they are grown up and now can make their own decisions without pressure; the demise of a family member that made a childlike faith to be shattered. (4) External reasons include a lack of time due to work, the church program not fitting into one's schedule, and, lastly, some reasons related to sickness or poor health (Burch, 2007).

Masillamony (2000) closely follows the same format as Burch, but provides reasons that differ somewhat from those of Burch. He focuses on the reasons for becoming inactive and eventually backsliding from the church as described below: (1) Sociological issues – Unresolved family, interpersonal, and church conflicts; the demise of a family member or spouse; an economic crisis which hinders participation in tithing and other benevolent giving; members seek government jobs, which forces them to forego regular worship attendance. (2) Church-oriented issues – church becoming insensitive to people's felt needs, and due to lack of church support, a member becomes inactive and backslid from the church; lack of the spirit of warm fellowship and concern for all members; poor worship services and programs, lack of warmth; lack of active involvement in leadership and church activities, not being mobilised to give tithes and offerings; lack of mobilisation and training for ministry. (3) Personal Spiritual Issues – Hurried, premature baptisms and a lack of prior teaching and Bible study; not given time to be born again and make a personal decision without emotional influences; a lack of spiritual nurture among newly baptised members (Masillamony, 2000).

Even though the reasons given by Burch (2007) and the ones for Masillamony (2000) tend to differ somewhat, there are some courses that have the same ideas. Indeed, many of the reasons given for members' backsliding from regular church attendance fall into four categories: church, theological, personal, and sociological or external reasons. Some members, as described above, leave the Adventist church because they perceive a lack of charisma in worship compared to other churches, such as Pentecostals, evangelicals, and many charismatic churches. Others leave because, while they were children, they were forced and sometimes beaten for not going to church. Since they are grown-ups now, going to church is optional. They can make personal decisions to go or not to go, and nothing happens. Some still, and on the extreme, feel that the church is for women and children.

Jones' (1988) reasons for becoming active in a church are not always related to the reasons for becoming inactive. Ministry to inactive members, as explained by Jones, must begin with first discovering their needs. Conversely, trying to get inactive members active again without addressing their felt needs is a waste of time – yours and theirs. It just won't work. The reasons for members becoming inactive need to be unveiled first. It does little good to treat the symptoms until you know the reasons or causes. It is clearly stated here that members become inactive due to their felt needs (Jones, 1988). To understand the reasons for inactivity, one must explore and diagnose the felt needs of the inactive person to prescribe the proper spiritual medication.

Nielsen (1977) focuses on another term, 'disassociation,' which differs from the approach of previous writers. He conducted a study titled "Disassociation: An Investigation into the Contributing Factors of Backsliding and Separation from the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Michigan." He gives the following factors for dissociation from the church: failure to find a satisfactory spiritual-growth experience, lack of

interaction and friends, lost interest, discriminated against, ignored, humiliated, unloved, rejected, disliked and degraded socially, among others (Nielsen, 1977). Nielsen (1977) agrees with Roozen (1980) on some related reasons, which include, but are not limited to, being rejected, disliked, or unloved. The reasons given here apply to both genders and age groups. He has not specified which gender has a higher percentage than the other. On the other hand, he has not developed any model or strategy to arrest the situation of disassociation.

Once people have been brought through the front door by outreach activities, it is assumed that their needs are satisfied, and little attention is given to them. They begin to become spiritually cold, as alluded to by Salazar (2011), stop attending church, and no one goes to visit them or invite them back. Thus, they have quietly left through the back door, unobserved and unattended, because the active members are posted at the front door to welcome newcomers. Some of the reasons why members stop attending church include getting too busy, having family or home responsibilities or problems, a lack of accountability, members moving too far from the church, or their work situation preventing them from attending. Lastly, many times, those who stop attending church often feel that nobody cares whether they attend or not, as they are not visited and told they are missed (Salazar, 2011).

Salazar (2011) provides further detailed information about who should be involved in visiting those who have stopped attending church. Since time immemorial, it has been traditionally known that the work of visitation was the responsibility of the church pastor visiting his congregation. The writer now states that visitation is a significant task of the church; therefore, the church is obligated to provide direction and supervision for this work. Everybody should serve as both a minister and a servant. This duty should be carried out by elders, deacons, deaconesses, and all church members, as well as by visiting and reaching out to the inactive church dropouts (Salazar, 2011). Therefore, nobody should be left aside in the task of visitation and ministering to church backsliders. All members should be involved.

The SDA Church Manual explains that one of the main duties of the Deaconate is visiting church members. When individuals with special needs are unable to attend services, they should be visited in their homes (Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2022). Visits to the homes of church members have proven to be one of the most crucial tools for reclaiming backsliders, retaining them, and keeping the fire burning for all church members. The church might not lose any members when visitations are done frequently. It will foster a sense of belonging and accountability among all members, keeping them connected with one another. On the other hand, it will instil in church members a sense of responsibility and a spirit of caring for one another.

Nothing has been mentioned so far about a particular gender. What the author has in mind is the priesthood of all believers, irrespective of gender, race, colour, and language. The church cannot survive without a well-arranged visitation program.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This research employed a quantitative research method, as affirmed by Creswell (2018), to collect and analyse data from the field through questionnaires. As such, the researcher used questionnaire survey questions as a tool for data collection. A questionnaire is a written list of questions with options at the end of each question. Respondents record their answers to the questionnaire. Thus, respondents read the questions, interpret what is expected, and then write down their answers.

Primary data were collected from among the selected congregations of backslidden men in Nyamira West Field.

Structured questionnaires were used to collect data from the backslidden male respondents. Data collection was conducted with the assistance of the first church elders and four additional individuals, who would serve as research assistants alongside the researcher. The two pastoral districts encompassed a total of sixteen churches; the researcher collected data from eight of these churches, with four from each district. This implies that the researcher had forty research assistants, with five assistants from each of the selected churches. The researcher scheduled appointments with the research assistants and arranged the days for data collection.

The researcher guided them through the instrument so they could understand it before collecting data from the respondents. Together with the researcher, they conducted house-to-house visitations to reach those backslidden men who were not attending church services at all. The assistants volunteered to help, and the researcher provided for their transportation and lunch. The research focused on men who were once church members but have since dropped out. The researcher provided the questionnaires and informed consent forms, which were completed and collected on the spot. Once the data survey was completed, the data were transferred to the Statistics Package for Social Science (SPSS) for analysis.

Data Analysis

After the collection of data, the researcher identified twenty-one missing data points, which were a result of being spoiled, double entry, and others returned blank. The raw data were analysed electronically using the Statistics Package for Social Science (SPSS) software for descriptive data analysis to capture the means and standard deviation (Creswell, 2018). Lastly, results were presented in tables and pie charts, and the interpretation was provided.

This was achieved by analysing the research questions as follows: (1) the research cumulated and listed all reported root causes for men's backsliding through pie charts; (2) the researcher assembled and grouped the personal experiences of the respondents accordingly; (3) the researcher found the percentage of the backsliders personal practices and involvement in church activities and programs as church members before they backslid; (4) the researcher assessed the respondents' level satisfaction with church programs.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Root Causes of Men's Backsliding

To answer research question one, respondents were asked to express their opinions on the reasons for leaving the church. A list of possible reasons for leaving the church was provided to help analyse the data quantitatively using SPSS. The analysis was done and presented through pie charts and in terms of frequency and percentage, as summarised in the pie charts below.

Pie chart representation of the respondents' opinion on the root causes of men's backsliding from church membership. The first reason was a lack of financial support, which is summarised in Figure 1 below using a pie chart.

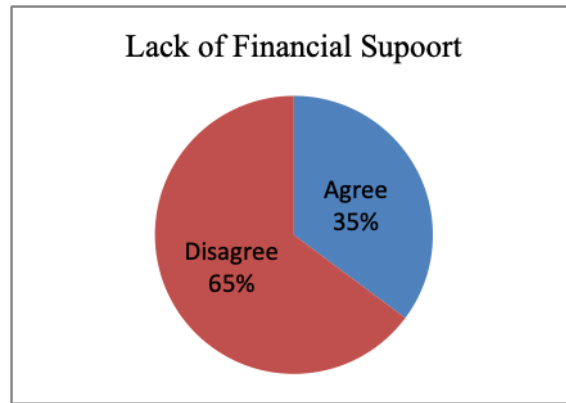


Figure 1: Members' Opinion on Lack of Financial Support as a Reason for Backsliding

Regarding whether financial support was the reason for leaving the church, 35 per cent agreed, while 65 per cent disagreed that a lack of financial support was the reason for their leaving the church. This means that the majority of respondents disagreed that they backslide due to a lack of financial support. This suggests that monetary assistance was not the primary goal in fostering church members' faithfulness and spiritual connection. Church members recognise that the church is not a financial charity, yet it offers financial support in times of dire need. The church should be educated through Scripture so that even with limited resources, they can still develop a profound reliance on God during economic hardships.

The financial support in this study is not a significant reason for individuals to backslide from church attendance and membership. The results contradict research conducted by Lewis (1997), Masillamony (2000), and Jones (1988), who affirm that financial and material needs, along with a lack of church support and felt needs, are significant reasons for church dropouts.

The second reason was working on the Sabbath, which is presented in Figure 2.

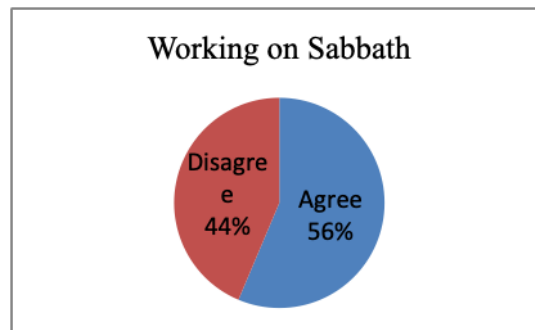


Figure 2: Opinion on Working on Sabbath as a Cause of Backsliding

Regarding whether working on the Sabbath was the reason for leaving the church, 56% agreed, while 44% disagreed. The meaning of this is that the majority agreed that working on the Sabbath was a reason for backsliding.

The implication is that people are compelled to choose between economic survival and religious practice. This further implies a shift in personal priorities, which undermines religious commitment. Working on the

Sabbath overrides Sabbath observance, leading to feelings of guilt, isolation, and disengagement from church activities. The leaders should offer pastoral support, teachings on Sabbath observance, job counselling, and spiritual nourishment. This is supported by Burch's (2007) and Masillamony's (2000) assertion that the lack of time due to work makes the church program unable to fit into one's schedule. Church members seek government jobs, forcing them to forego regular worship and church attendance.

The third reason for backsliding was not being well-instructed in the Bible and Adventist beliefs before baptism. Figure 3 gives a pictorial representation of their opinions.

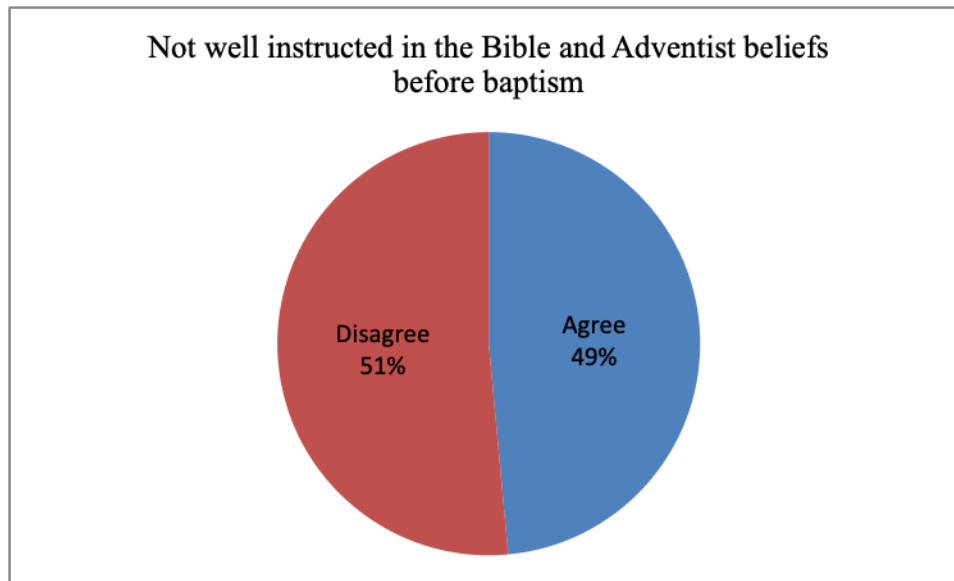


Figure 3: Opinions on Not Well Instructed in the Bible and Adventist Beliefs before Baptism

Regarding whether not being well instructed in the Bible and Adventist beliefs before baptism was the reason for their leaving the church, 49 per cent agreed, while 51 per cent disagreed. The majority disagreed that not being well instructed in the Bible and Adventist beliefs before baptism was a reason for backsliding. When Christians are not well-instructed, it indicates that they will not have a solid biblical foundation, hence become spiritually vulnerable and unable to resist temptations and false teaching. Not being well instructed in the Bible and Adventist beliefs before baptism may also imply a lack of understanding of the fundamental principles of faith. When there is no biblical and doctrinal foundation, the commitment may be shallow, temporal, rather than based on conviction, making one vulnerable to disillusionment and easily swayed by difficult times. In view of this, the church elders should undertake adequate preparation before baptism through proper systematic teachings on the Bible and Adventist beliefs, as well as ongoing instruction after baptism.

Kelsey (1999) and Masillamony (2000) see it differently; they believe that biblical knowledge is crucial for the development and maturity of Christian character. Hurried, premature baptisms and a lack of prior class baptism teaching and Bible study prevent individuals from having enough time to be born again and make personal decisions without emotional feelings. Pastoral observations align with Kelsey and Masillamony, indicating that a lack of pre-class baptism Bible study would lead to backsliding. There have been a series of evangelistic campaigns, camp meetings, and revivals, during which a call is made, resulting in individuals being baptised on the spot.

The fourth reason for backsliding was the loss of faith. Figure 4 shows their opinion in a pictorial representation.

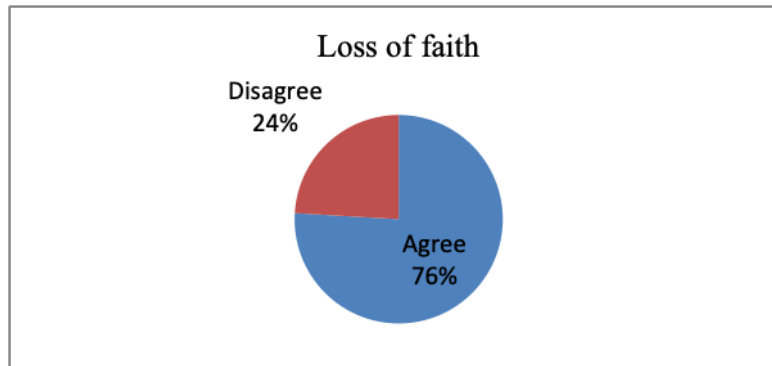


Figure 4: Opinion on Loss of Faith as a Reason for Backsliding

Regarding the reason for leaving the church, 76 per cent of respondents agreed that loss of faith was the reason, while 24 per cent disagreed. This means that the majority agreed that loss of faith was a reason for dropping out of church membership.

This suggests that someone can lose faith due to doubts, challenges, scepticism, or a complete denial of their former beliefs. This leads to a strained relationship with God, making Bible study, prayer, weekly worship, and obedience to God's commandments unnecessary. This suggests that church pastors need to strategise ways for restoration, which leads to rebuilding faith through Bible study, prayer, and participation in church programs. While agreeing with the respondents, Barbour (1994) argues that losing faith brings emotive turbulence, resulting in painful feelings such as heartbreak, guilt, loneliness, and hopelessness. All these factors could contribute to someone deciding to shy away from church, especially when not well handled by fellow parishioners and church leaders.

The fifth reason for backsliding was the loss of interest. Figure 5 shows their opinion in a pictorial representation.

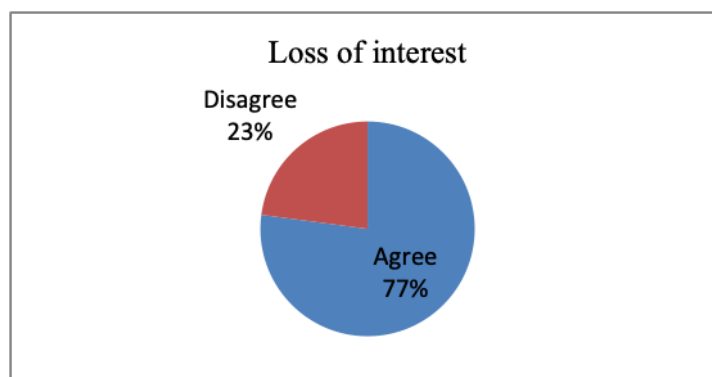


Figure 5: Opinions on the Loss of Interest as a Reason for Backsliding

Regarding the response, loss of interest was the reason for their leaving the church; 77 per cent agreed, while 23 per cent disagreed. This means that the majority agreed that loss of interest was a reason for backsliding.

Loss of interest reveals a decline in one's spiritual life, detachment from God, and degeneration of one's spirituality. There is a regression in spiritual aspects, such as prayer, Bible study, and disengagement from regular worship. Other underlying reasons for the loss of interest may include a lack of follow-up, insensitivity from members and leaders, and negative peer pressure, among others. There is an urgent call for the church leaders to rekindle their passion, renew their spiritual purpose, and reconnect backsliders with God and the church through the spiritual remedies mentioned above. This study, therefore, aligns with Lewis (1997) and Nielsen (1977), who assert that loss of interest is among the significant contributing factors that lead many Christians to backslide, with the most affected age category being those under thirty-five years old.

The sixth reason for backsliding was being involved in smoking. Figure 6 is a pictorial representation of their opinion.

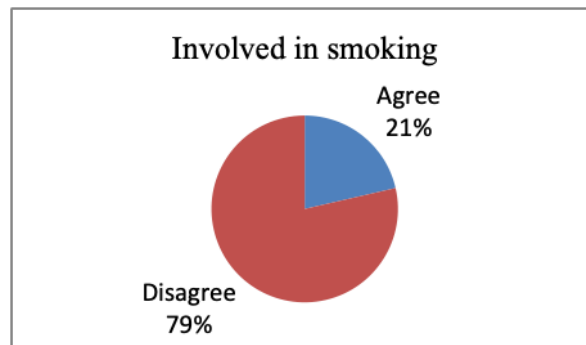


Figure 6: Opinions on Being Involved in Smoking as a Reason for Backsliding

On the response of being involved in smoking, 21 per cent agreed, while 79 per cent disagreed. The majority disagreed that being engaged in smoking was a reason for backsliding.

As much as smoking is considered a Christian vice, most backsliders do not view it as a reason for their backsliding. This suggests that engaging in smoking may reflect an unhealthy habit or addiction, which may not necessarily indicate a deliberate rejection of faith. This presents a behavioural issue, wherein someone may struggle with this habit yet still desire to follow Christ Jesus through prayer, Bible study, and spiritual growth. Indirectly, it may indicate that smokers continue to fellowship and backslide due to other influencing factors. This recommends that church leaders should focus on nurturing their faith and helping them achieve victory through prayer to God. One significant advantage the church needs to capitalise on is the presence of these smokers, as they could be gradually rehabilitated within the church community. Watts (1981) disagrees with the research above, stating that smoking, among other factors, contributes to backsliding. According to him, the fear of being seen smoking prevents individuals from attending church and engaging with church members.

The seventh reason for backsliding was being involved in drinking alcohol. Figure 7 is a pictorial representation of their opinions.

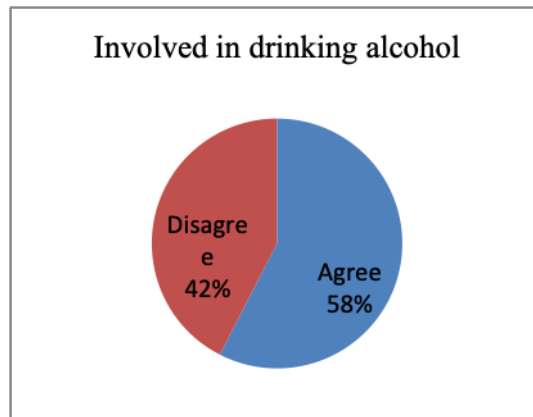


Figure 7: Opinions on Being Involved in drinking alcohol as a Reason for backsliding

On the response of being involved in drinking alcohol as the reason for leaving the church, 58 per cent agreed, while 42 per cent disagreed. The majority agreed that being involved in drinking alcohol was the main reason for not attending weekly church services and eventually dropping out of the church membership.

Even though drinking alcohol is a permissive cultural norm, it shows a deeper symptomatic spiritual departure for a church member, leading to the loss of Bible study, prayer, and interest in church matters. The individual may feel ashamed, guilty, unworthy, or condemned due to alcohol consumption, when they know they went against the church's standards publicly, the body temple, and temperance. This further conflicts with the person's understanding of the church's spiritual standards. Church pastors should take responsibility for offering a friendly environment that provides guidance, counselling, scriptural nurture, and grace. When someone becomes addicted, they should be taken for rehabilitation. In agreement with the research, Batchelor (2002) asserts that alcohol intake is unholy and unclean, lowering Christian character. The same is supported by Watts (1981), who states, among other things, that alcohol drinking leads to backsliding.

The eighth reason for backsliding was getting involved in sexual misconduct. Figure 8 is a pictorial representation of their opinions.

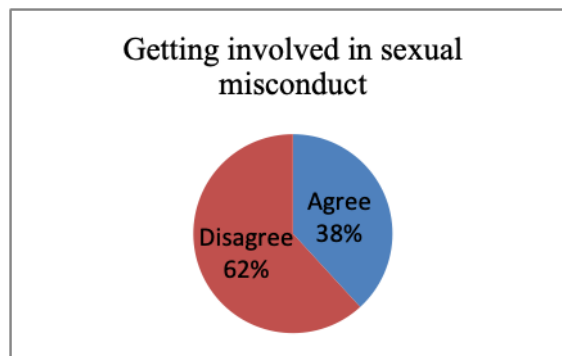


Figure 8: Opinion on Getting Involved in Sexual Misconduct as a Reason for Backsliding

On the response of being involved in sexual misconduct as the reason for leaving the church, 38 per cent agreed, while 62 per cent disagreed. The majority disagreed that getting involved in sexual misconduct was a reason for backsliding.

Sexual misconduct in this research denotes that a moral fall is not a primary vice for disconnection from church life and programs, but rather an individual choice and lifestyle. Sexual misconduct refers to infidelity to your spouse of the opposite gender, which includes, but is not limited to, extramarital relationships. It further suggests that the person engaging in this vice lacks spiritual grounding. However, an individual engaging in this misbehaviour may feel guilty, ashamed, deeply convicted, and unworthy of forgiveness. It also suggests a fear of condemnation and disciplinary action from church membership, as this act contradicts biblical and church teachings regarding sexual purity. This recommends that the issue be addressed through the teaching of truth, grace, mercy, repentance, and spiritual restoration. When the case becomes acute, a redemptive disciplinary process should be undertaken. In contrast to the research findings, Lewis (1997) asserts that individuals indulging in this vice are not spiritually grounded and that sexual sins are among the contributing factors to church dropouts.

The ninth reason for backsliding was conflict with church members. Figure 9 summarises their opinions in a pictorial representation.

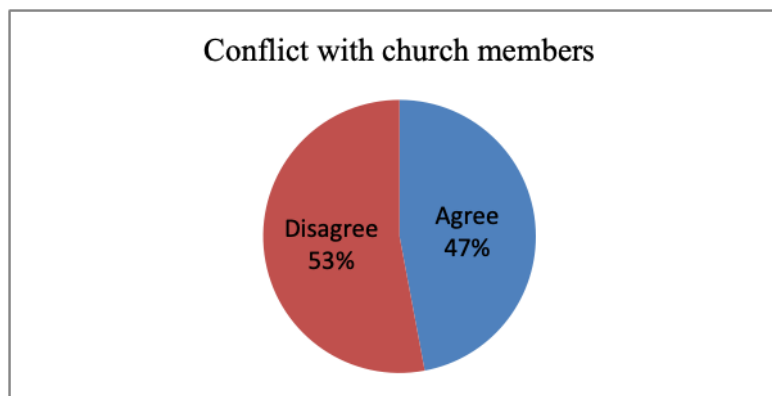


Figure 9: Opinion on Conflict with Church Members as a Reason for Backsliding

In response to conflict with church members as a reason for backsliding, 47 per cent agreed, while 53 per cent disagreed. Most respondents disagreed that conflicts with church members were reasons for backsliding. Pastoral observations indicate that conflicts with church members significantly contribute to backsliding. Unfortunately, research outcomes have contradicted this common understanding.

This suggests that disagreements among the church members do not necessarily lead to spiritual decline and disconnection from the church. It reflects that spiritually rooted church believers can remain committed despite relational challenges. However, when church members experience unresolved conflicts, it may lead to spiritual decline and a departure from one's once-accepted faith, due to feelings of condemnation, betrayal, gossip, and rejection.

Church pastors should try to make the church a place where love, forgiveness, humility, fellowship, and reconciliation are preached and practised. Conflicts should be addressed with teaching on faith, grace,

truth, and accountability. It disagrees with Lewis's (1997) and Masillamony's (2000) research, which states that unresolved conflicts with church members, unresolved family, and interpersonal conflicts may lead to non-attendance at church services and church dropouts. If left unaddressed, this condition can weaken the spiritual foundation, and members may become more susceptible to leaving the church.

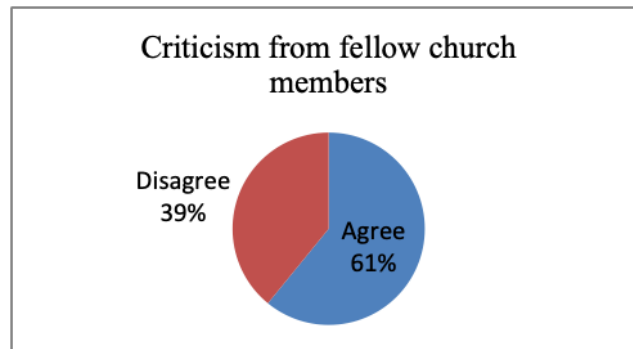


Figure 10: Opinion of Criticism from Fellow Church Members as a Reason for Backsliding

In response to criticism from fellow church members as a reason for backsliding, 61 per cent agreed, while 39 per cent disagreed. The majority agreed that criticism from fellow church members was a reason for backsliding. This means that negative, judgmental, and unloving criticism lowers a person's self-esteem and creates emotional hurt, leading to alienation, feelings of unwelcome, and discouragement, which can result in backsliding. Public criticism may contribute to the erosion of self-worth and a decline in spirituality. It eventually weakens one's faith, leading to the distortion of God's loving character. Taking this into consideration, church leaders should encourage and teach humility, peace, genuine support, and the spirit of encouragement, so that church members can grow in a safe and supportive environment. Lewis's (1997) research supports this, saying that members' criticism is one of the factors that causes church dropouts.

The eleventh reason for backsliding was the lack of frequent visitation by church leaders. Figure 11 is a summary in pictorial form of their opinions.

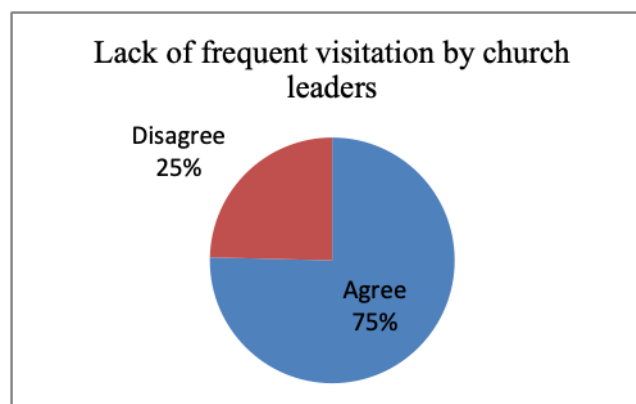


Figure 11: The Respondents' Opinions on the Lack of Frequent Visitation by Church Leaders as a Reason for Backsliding

In response to church leaders' frequent visitation as a reason for backsliding, 75 per cent agreed, while 25 per cent disagreed. That means the majority agreed that a lack of frequent visitation by church leaders was a reason for backsliding.

This means that the respondents felt neglected, there was no pastoral care during their times of challenges, and there were strained relationships. The church leaders were not discipling church members, nor were they shepherding the sick, those struggling, and the newly baptised members. The church pastors should focus on shepherding souls, providing comfort, encouragement, correction, and guidance through regular visitations. Salazar (2011) asserts that visitation is a primary task of the church. Everybody should serve as a minister and a servant as well. Elders, deacons, and deaconesses should carry out this duty, and all church members should visit and reach out to the inactive church dropouts. This also agrees with the Deacons and Deaconesses Handbook, which states that the primary duties of the Deacons include visitations to church members, new converts, shut-ins, bereaved families, the sick in hospitals and homes.

The twelfth reason for backsliding was discrimination. Figure 12 summarises their opinions in pictorial form.

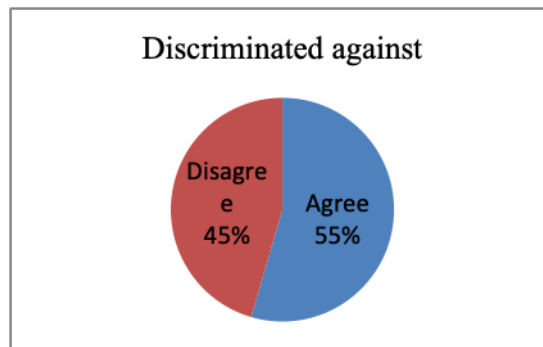


Figure 12: Opinion on Being Discriminated Against as a Reason for Backsliding

On the response of being discriminated against as a reason for backsliding, 55 per cent agreed, while 45 per cent disagreed. The majority agreed that being discriminated against was a reason for backsliding.

This indicates that in the church, there was marginalisation based on gender, social status, age, and family background. The respondents were not valued or spiritually protected as the body of Christ; there was a lack of justice, equality, love, and Christian brotherhood unity, and they could not force their place where they were not accepted. Church leaders should take responsibility for teaching members how to care for those who are low, rejected, dejected, and discriminated against. The church should be a place where the gospel of equality, love, and unity in Christ is preached. This finding aligns with Nielsen's (1977) study, which suggests that being discriminated against, among other factors, is a contributing reason for disassociation from church membership.

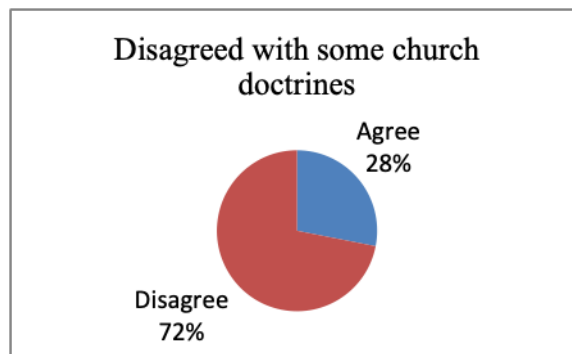


Figure 13: Opinion on Disagreement with Some Church Doctrines as a Reason for Backsliding

On the response of disagreeing with some church doctrines as a reason for backsliding, 28 per cent agreed, while 72 per cent disagreed. The majority disagreed that disagreeing with some church doctrines was a reason for backsliding.

This suggests that the respondents experienced no disconnection between their personal beliefs and doctrinal teachings, which could lead to disengagement or rejection of their faith. Doctrinal disagreement may result from insufficient biblical instruction, misunderstanding, or a lack of knowledge about fundamental beliefs. Church pastors should create a well-structured teaching program with pastoral support to foster a comprehensive understanding of the church's doctrines. Nonetheless, Nielsen's (1997) study found that most former members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church still believe in the Adventist doctrines and regard it as the true church.

The fourteenth reason for backsliding was due to sickness. Figure 14 is a pictorial representation of their opinions.

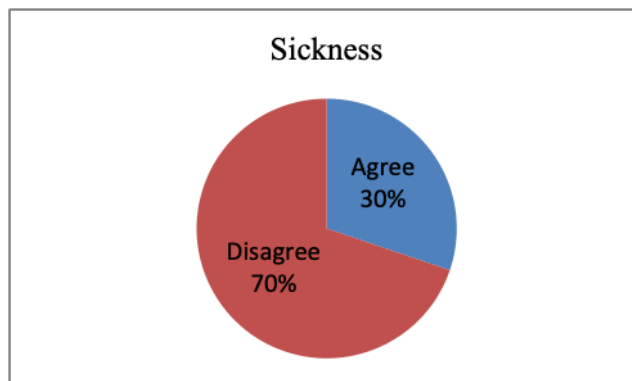


Figure 14: Opinion on Sickness as a Reason for Backsliding

Regarding the response that sickness was the reason for leaving the church, 30 per cent agreed, while 70 per cent disagreed. The majority disagreed that sickness was the reason for backsliding. This does not imply that sickness cannot lead to backsliding or falling away from the church.

It indicates that church members are spiritually grounded and remain faithful to God despite serious health challenges. The church deaconate department should establish spiritual mechanisms, including prayer, compassionate ministries, encouragement, and assistance to the sick, to minimise the likelihood that the

sick will stop attending church. While ill individuals may not be able to participate in church services, they do not fall into the category of backsliders. Their absence from church is a genuine and understandable reason that may be only temporary. Burch (2007) disagrees with the above research by affirming that sickness or poor health are among the external reasons for backsliding.

The fifteenth reason for backsliding was due to the loss of a family member. Figure 15 is a pictorial representation of their opinions.

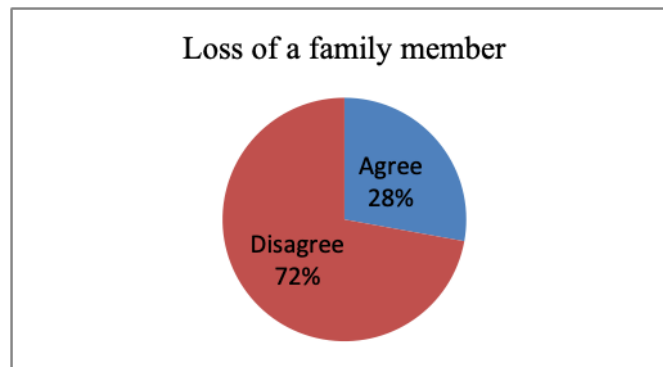


Figure 15: Loss of Family Members as a Reason for Backsliding

On the response of losing a family member as the reason for leaving the church, 28 per cent agreed, while 72 per cent disagreed. The majority disagreed that the loss of a family member made them backslide.

The suggestion is that losing a family member, though painful, should not commonly drive one away from God or lead to spiritual withdrawal. Many individuals turn to God in their times of grief, seeking comfort, hope, and meaning through prayer and the reading of biblical texts. The implication here is that church pastors should teach church members about the doctrine of the state of death. They should make people understand that death should be viewed as a natural phenomenon caused by sin, which no one can control; no one can blame anyone for its occurrence, nor can anyone blame God. Church leaders should support bereaved families both spiritually and materially, allowing them to fully experience God's presence during their mourning period. Masillamony (2000) disagrees with the research, asserting that the loss of a family member or spouse is one of the contributing factors that can lead a church member to become inactive and ultimately backslide from attending church weekly. The church's responsibility is to support bereaved families by providing both spiritual and material assistance, enabling them to feel loved, comforted, and spiritually upheld.

The sixteenth reason for backsliding was due to frequent financial contributions to the church. Figure 16 is a pictorial representation of their opinions.

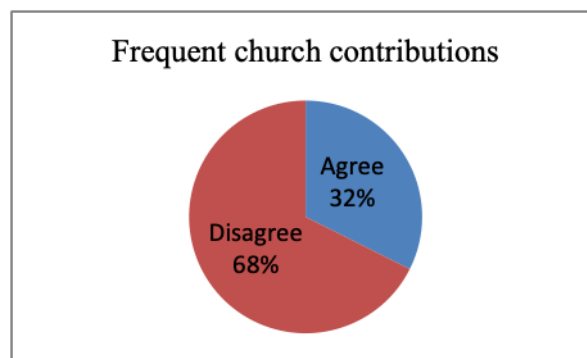


Figure 16: Opinion on Frequent Financial Church Contributions as a Reason for Backsliding

Lastly, concerning frequent church contributions as a reason for disassociation, 32 per cent agreed, while 68 per cent disagreed. This indicates that the majority disagreed that frequent church contributions were a reason for backsliding.

Contrary to this study's expectations, most respondents opposed the idea that multiple financial contributions from church members led to their backsliding. This indicates that church members were neither burdened nor exploited by regular contributions; rather, they viewed it as a sign of strong faith, loyalty, spiritual growth, and love for the gospel mission. This implies that church leaders should clearly teach people about proper financial stewardship. Church members should be taught a culture of cheerful, voluntary generosity to support the ministry. This aligns with Ahortor (2009), who affirms that the church requires monetary contributions to expand the Kingdom of God through the ministry of His word and welfare promotion, as long as there are qualified individuals to manage and direct the finances toward prioritised goals.

In summary, the reasons and root causes of men's backsliding from church membership include working on the Sabbath, loss of faith and interest, drinking alcohol, criticism from fellow church members, lack of frequent visitations by church leaders, and discrimination against others.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The primary reasons for backsliding include working on the Sabbath, loss of faith and interest, alcohol consumption, criticism from fellow church members, a lack of frequent visitations by church leaders, and discrimination against others. Other factors include a lack of financial support, lack of conflict resolution management programs, not being accepted, not being loved, lack of forgiveness, not being cared for genuinely, lack of reaching people in the community, the church members' lifestyles not being in harmony with the standards of Christian living, lack of commitment and devotion from church members, and not getting involved in all church programs. Finally, the backsliders were dissatisfied with small group ministry, prayer ministry, Bible study, handling of church finances, the elders' leadership style, the Sabbath afternoon program, mid-week prayers, the visitation program, the return of tithes and offerings, and departmental leadership. Determining which factors specifically contribute to a higher percentage of Adventist men backsliding is difficult. The respondents also shared several personal experiences related to their membership in the church. Additionally, it is worth noting that the respondents held varied opinions about their personal practices and involvement in church activities while they were members. Furthermore, backsliders express diverse views on their personal fulfilment from the church experiences they had during their time as members.

Recommendations: Church Membership: Given that backsliders have various reasons for their actions, this study recommends that church members closely examine why individuals from an Adventist background backslide more frequently than others and assist church leadership in addressing this issue. Based on the findings regarding the experiences of backsliders, it is essential to actively involve each member in church activities to ensure they feel engaged and integral to the church community. Global Church Leadership: Given that many members backslide for various reasons, global church leadership needs to develop mentorship and discipleship programs that can be implemented to ensure backsliders are reclaimed, retained, and nurtured into mainstream churches. Backsliders: Based on the findings that backsliders have different reasons for backsliding, this study recommends that active church members should attempt to engage the church leadership whenever they suspect that some members are backsliding and drifting away from the church membership, before the situation worsens and they leave the church. Church Scholars: Given the findings indicating the difficulty in identifying the dominant reasons for backsliding from the church, this study suggests conducting qualitative research that allows backsliders the freedom to identify and articulate specific reasons for their backsliding. Quantitative studies like this tend to be quite restrictive, limiting backsliders' ability to provide detailed explanations for their experiences.

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