



# **The Faith Factor - How Does This Affect Your Life?**

By Dr. Linda Hancock

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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Often Canada has been called a "pagan nation" or a "non-churched country" and, on the surface, it appears that dropping attendance in our churches represents a lack of faith by our people.

Dr. Reginald Bibby, a researcher with the University of Lethbridge who has been studying our country for more than thirty years, states that this is definitely not the case. He has written several books, including *Fragmented Gods* in which he presents very interesting statistics.

He states that Canadians are a people who do have faith in God but demonstrate it differently than our ancestors. We still pray and turn to God on an individual basis but rather than joining or attending church on a regularly we tend to claim the denomination of our parents or grandparents. Traditional ceremonies for weddings or funerals are ordered on a "piecemeal" basis. Even though we have faith, we do not turn to the church to meet needs in the same manner as Canadians of past decades did.

When I grew up, church was a social center in the community where we went as a family for year-round weekend and midweek giving and receiving. After Sunday School, pews filled (and so did the choir loft) as everyone gathered to hear about spiritual lessons that could be used on a daily basis to help explain or solve problems of life. During the week there was CGIT, Ladies Circle, and numerous meetings for the ushers, Board members and other sub-groups. Holiday seasons of Easter and Christmas were ones that were more demanding but also more exciting as all ages prepared for Cantatas and concerts.

I remember being part of theatrical productions, playing sports and even taking cooking lessons in our church. There were wedding showers, rummage sales, funeral lunches and seminars at the church. We learned about and gave to other countries.

Church was a large part of our lives and we attended because that was the place to be! It was fun and everyone else was there! It also provided us with a foundation of faith that could last a lifetime.

When I work with clients I am cautious about not assuming that individuals have an active faith and when they are really struggling might ask "Is there a God in your life?" The answers are surprising and include a range of answers such as "I think there is 'something' out there" or "God is my best friend" or "It's hard to believe there is a God when this is going on". Some prefer to state that they are "spiritual" rather than religious.

Many individuals have never attended a church in their lifetime or honestly claim that they have never thought about whether there is a God let alone how that God might play a personal role in their lives. Others state they feel angry or betrayed and still others claim they are just confused about the subject.

Life is complex and there are many, many things that happen which are unexplainable. I am not an evangelist and definitely do not use my office as a platform for preaching but I do find that clients who trust in God (once they get past any personal guilt or hurt from the past) tend to let go of the unanswerable quicker than those who believe that they are travelling

through life on their own. People of faith often view the past as a training ground and the future as secure. My task as a psychologist is easier when we just need to deal with any dysfunctional "shoulds, musts or have tos" of the present and leave the unexplainable for another time.

People strive to make sense of and find meaning in life. Faith (not religion) often helps them with this.

The older I get, the more I appreciate my roots in small town Saskatchewan where my faith in God and in community began. We had a good life there - one that provided us with values, memories and a good foundation on which to build both present and future.