

Credit crunch prompts three in four adults to search for 'meaning of life'

by Maria Mackay

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New research out this week has revealed that three in four adults are rethinking their core values and big issues like 'the meaning of life'.

Out of 2,500 adults interviewed by Christian Research in April, 70 per cent agreed they were searching because of the credit crunch, or worries about personal finances and job security.

The search for meaning was found to be occurring to similar degrees among the young and old, in both genders and across all social grades except the very lowest.

The research found that most people were turning first to family and friends to discover their meaning. Fifty-six per cent of those interviewed said they had considered spending more time with family and friends, while 50 per cent said they had actually done it, and of those, 47 per cent said it had been worth it.

"This is a sign that when things are crumbling down, people are looking for love and to be loved," said Benita Hewitt, Director of Christian Research, who presented the findings at the Christian Resources Exhibition on Tuesday.

"Jesus said to love one another and that's what people are doing," she added.

The second most popular way of finding meaning was in contacting past friends. Thirty-six per cent of respondents said they had considered contacting past friends, while 31 per cent said they had actually done it.

"This is also a sign of the need to love and be loved," said Ms Hewitt. She pointed to similar conclusions drawn by Christian dating agency Christian Connection, which has reported a 40 per cent increase in subscribers during the credit crunch.

The research also found that people were considering finding meaning by doing voluntary and community work. Although 24 per cent had considered it, however, only 13 per cent had actually done it.

"The church can maybe think about how it can help people to actually do some voluntary work," said Ms Hewitt.

More than voluntary work, 14 per cent of those searching said they had tried prayer, with 12 per cent saying they had found it worthwhile.

The research also threw up some challenges for the church, however. While 23 per cent of unchurched respondents said they were searching, only three per cent said they had considered going to church. Of them, only one per cent actually went – equivalent to around 60 respondents – and none said they would go again.

"This presents a real challenge for the church," said Ms Hewitt. "Research also shows that the Dow Jones plummeting has not affected churchgoing. We're not on the spiritual map at all."

Christian Research found that out of the non-religious respondents, 45 per cent said they had turned to family and friends, 25 per cent to past friends, eight per cent to voluntary work, eight per cent to an art or music hobby, and another eight per cent to reflective time alone.

"The research shows that if you are from a church background, then going to church helps, but if you are among the unchurched then they don't find it helpful. More than that, they aren't even going in the first place," said Ms Hewitt.

She added: "Our message to all Christians is to remember that three out of four people you know are looking for more meaning and now is the time to talk to them about that. They are looking for meaning in relationships, in love, in community, and that's what we can give them."