

Churchgoers split on visibility of their faith

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NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Spiritual topics aren't a part of regular conversations with fellow believers for many Protestant churchgoers, but most seem at least somewhat confident others know they're a Christian.

The [2019 Discipleship Pathway Assessment](#) study from Nashville-based LifeWay Research found those who regularly attend Protestant churches are split on how visible and pervasive their faith is in their daily lives. The study identifies living an unashamed life as one of eight signposts that consistently show up in the lives of growing Christians.

'Bring it up in conversation'

"In an increasingly secular culture, fewer people assume you are a Christian," said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. "Disciples now must decide if their identity in Christ is important enough to them to bring up in conversations."

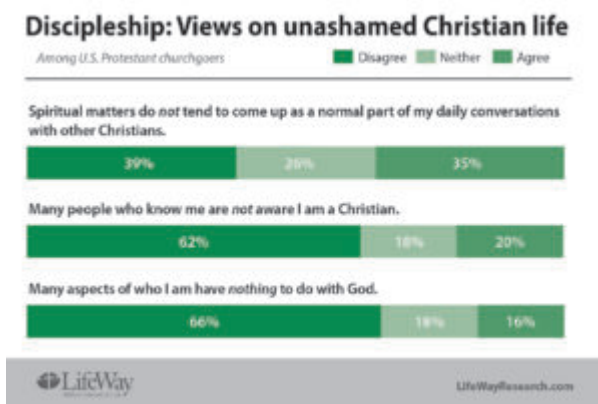
Fifteen percent of Protestant churchgoers strongly assert that matters of faith are a part of their regular conversations with fellow believers.

Four out of 10 (39 percent) disagreed with the statement: "Spiritual matters do not tend to come up as a normal part of my daily conversations with other Christians."

Around one quarter (26 percent) aren't sure, while more than one-third (35 percent) agree that when they talk with other Christians, religious issues don't usually come up.

Females (17 percent) are more likely than males (11 percent) to strongly indicate they regularly have conversations with other Christians about spiritual matters.

Hispanics (19 percent) and African Americans (18 percent) are more likely than whites (13 percent) to strongly affirm faith issues come up in their daily conversations with other Christians.



Evangelical Protestants (17 percent) and black Protestants (15 percent) are also more likely than mainline Protestants (7 percent).

The youngest adult churchgoers (ages 18-34) are the least likely to strongly indicate spiritual matters are topics of daily conversations with other Christians (9 percent).

“It is striking that so many Protestant churchgoers don’t talk to each other about the very thing that is supposed to unite them,” said McConnell. “And the younger generation either did not observe it growing up, or it was not done in a way they want to emulate.”

They will know we are Christians ... how?

Most Protestant churchgoers say others know they are Christians, but fewer are very confident in that perception.

Almost two-thirds of Christians (62 percent) disagree with the statement,

“Many people who know me are not aware I am a Christian,” while more than a third (36 percent) strongly disagree. Two in 10 agree and 18 percent neither agree nor disagree.

Women are more confident that others know of their faith. More than two in five females (42 percent) strongly indicate people who know them are aware they are a Christian compared to 27 percent of males.

African Americans (44 percent) are the ethnicity most likely to express strong confidence in others knowing of their faith.

Black Protestants (41 percent) and evangelical Protestants (37 percent) are more likely than mainline Protestants (26 percent) to strongly indicate those who know them know about their being a Christian.

“Far more people identify as a Christian on a survey than they do among their acquaintances,” McConnell said. “One in five churchgoers is missing the truth found in Matthew 10:32 that acknowledging Jesus before men is tied to whether Jesus will acknowledge us before his Father.”

Where does God fit?

Most Protestant churchgoers believe God is relevant to every part of their life and identity.

Two-thirds (66 percent) disagree with the statement, “Many aspects of who I am have nothing to do with God,” with 44 percent strongly disagreeing.

Fewer than one in five aren’t sure (18 percent). Similar numbers agree (16 percent).

Half of female churchgoers (51 percent) strongly disagree many aspects of who they are have nothing to do with God compared to 35 percent of males.

African American churchgoers (56 percent) and churchgoers living in the South (49 percent) are some of the most likely to strongly disagree.

Black Protestants (54 percent) and evangelical Protestants (46 percent) are more likely to strongly disagree than mainline Protestants (29 percent).

Younger churchgoers (ages 18-34) are the least likely to strongly disagree (34 percent).

“While most churchgoers avoid compartmentalizing their faith, it can be challenging to walk with God in every area of life,” McConnell said. “The majority of churchgoers indicate there are more aspects of who they are that can be better connected to God.”

The online survey of 2,500 Protestant churchgoers was conducted Jan. 14-29, 2019. Researchers screened respondents to include those who identified as Protestant or non-denominational and attend religious services at least once a month. Analysts used quotas and slight weights to balance gender, age, region, ethnicity, income and denominational affiliation. The completed sample is 2,500 surveys, providing 95 percent confidence the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 2 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.