

Maturing believers exercise faith and trust.

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NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Christians who are progressing in spiritual maturity are more likely to exercise their faith by trusting God even in difficult circumstances, according to a survey by LifeWay Research.

“Exercising faith” is one of eight attributes of discipleship that consistently shows up in the lives of maturing Christians. The attributes are part of the transformational discipleship study conducted by LifeWay Research.

Among the eight attributes of discipleship tested, churchgoers have higher scores for exercising faith than any of the other attributes, said Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research. Yet, he pointed out, only 13 percent of worshippers were able to give the best response to all of the questions related to this attribute.

“It is easy to say God has a purpose for everything in life, but it requires faith to enjoy seeing his plan unfold in difficult times,” Stetzer said.

The survey measured responses to a set of statements indicative of a person’s level of faith. More than 90 percent of respondents agree with the statement: “I believe that God has a purpose for all events in my life, regardless of whether I perceive each event as being good or bad.” Just 4 percent disagreed with the statement.

Additionally, 86 percent agree they “express praise and gratitude to God even in difficult circumstances.”

Seventy-eight percent disagree that, in the midst of difficult circumstances, they “sometimes doubt that God loves me and will provide for my life.”

Fifteen percent agree they sometimes doubt the love of God and his provision.

The survey shows the longer believers have trusted Christ as Savior, the better their responses are for exercising faith. Being involved in a Bible study group, praying for Christians and non-Christians, and witnessing to nonbelievers also make a positive impact.

Faith also is exhibited in the belief that God can change lives, the survey shows. More than 80 percent disagree with the statement: "I sometimes doubt that God can change the lives of non-Christians I know." Eleven percent say they agree with the statement.

"Exercising faith is a mindset that says God the Father knows best," Stetzer said. "Clearly, this should then be seen in other attributes of discipleship, such as serving, obeying, engaging the Bible and building relationships."

The survey also reveals Christians who are stronger in their faith are less prone to doubt God's involvement, even in unexplainable circumstances. Just 9 percent agree with the statement: "When things happen in my life I can't explain, I typically doubt God is involved." Eighty percent disagree with the statement.

"Exercising Christian faith is more than believing God exists; it is believing in God's promised presence, provision and compassion for us," Stetzer said. "It is exhibited in a life that depends on Jesus Christ for salvation and is filled with the expectation of his daily activity."

The survey of 2,930 American adults who attend a Protestant church once a month or more was conducted Oct. 14-22, 2011. A demographically balanced online panel was used for the interviewing. Respondents could respond in English, Spanish or French. The sample provides 95 percent confidence the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 1.8 percent. Margins of error are higher in subgroups.