

Research reveals deep faith but room to grow

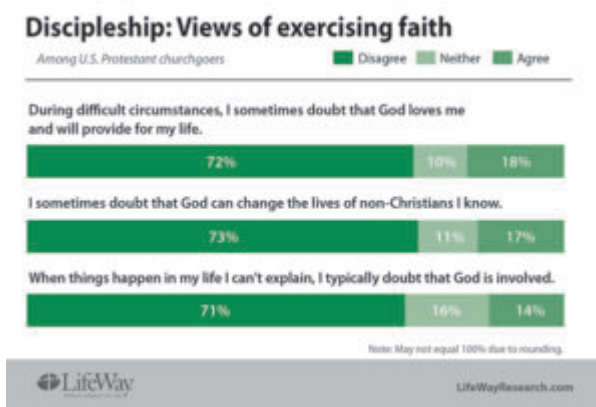
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NASHVILLE, Tenn.—When it comes to trusting God, Protestant churchgoers exercise a great deal of faith in their daily lives—whether in difficult circumstances or when the unexplainable happens.

The 2019 [Discipleship Pathway Assessment](#) study from LifeWay found seven in 10 Protestant churchgoers (72 percent) disagree with the statement: “During difficult circumstances, I sometimes doubt that God loves me and will provide for my life,” with 50 percent strongly disagreeing.

Only 5 percent of Protestant churchgoers strongly agree they doubt God’s faithfulness in difficult circumstances, while 13 percent somewhat agree and 10 percent neither agree nor disagree.

The study identifies exercising faith as one of eight signposts that consistently show up in the lives of growing Christians.



Hispanics and African Americans are the two ethnic groups most likely to exercise faith in times of difficulty, with 55 percent of both groups strongly disagreeing with the statement: “During difficult circumstances, I sometimes doubt that God loves me and will provide for my life.”

Black Protestants (56 percent) and evangelical Protestants (51 percent) are more likely to strongly disagree than mainline Protestants (42 percent).

“The Bible says believers should expect various trials,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. “The question is how does a Christian actually respond. Half of churchgoers indicate that doubts about God sometimes arise for them during tough times.”

Trusting God with material possessions?

In addition to trusting God in difficult times, giving freely of one’s money and possessions is an indication of exercising faith in God.

Slightly more than a third of Protestant churchgoers (36 percent) strongly agree they make everything they own available to God, while a third somewhat agrees.

Around one in five neither agrees nor disagrees, while 10 percent disagree they make their possessions available to God.

Researchers found significant statistical differences when it comes to gender, ethnicity, religious tradition and education. Females (39 percent) are more likely than males (32 percent) to strongly agree.

Hispanic (50 percent) and African American (46 percent) Protestant churchgoers are more likely to say they make everything they own available to God compared to 31 percent of both whites and other ethnicities.

Black Protestants (47 percent) and evangelical Protestants (38 percent) are more likely to strongly agree than mainline Protestants (22 percent). And those with a high school diploma or less (45 percent) are more likely to

strongly agree their possessions are available for God to use than those with more education.

“Where one finds their financial security is an important part of faith in God,” McConnell said. “Overall, most churchgoers give God control of their finances, but two-thirds indicate it is not complete control.”

Can God really change lives?

The study also found Protestant churchgoers are fairly certain God can work in and change people’s lives. Around seven in 10 (73 percent) disagree with the statement, “I sometimes doubt that God can change the lives of non-Christians I know,” while 50 percent strongly disagree.

Eleven percent neither agree nor disagree, while 17 percent doubt God’s ability to change the lives of the non-Christians they know.

Women are more confident God can change the lives of others. Slightly more than half (53 percent) strongly indicate God can change the lives of non-Christians they know compared to 46 percent of males.

African Americans (60 percent) are the ethnicity most likely to strongly assert God can change the lives of non-Christians. Black Protestants (58 percent) and evangelical Protestants (52 percent) are more likely to strongly indicate they trust in God to change lives than mainline Protestants (35 percent).

Those aged 50-64 (55 percent) and 35-49 (52 percent) are more likely to express strong confidence that God can change the lives of non-Christians they know compared to Protestant churchgoers aged 18-34 (42 percent).

“In a post-Christian American culture, churchgoers should have contact with an increasing number of non-Christians,” McConnell said. “But if churchgoers don’t trust that God can help others experience the same

transformation they've experienced, then there is room for increasing faith."

What about when the unexplainable happens?

Few Protestant churchgoers doubt God's involvement in their lives when the unexplainable happens, according to the study. Fourteen percent say they "typically doubt God is involved when things happen in their lives they can't explain." About seven in 10 disagree (71 percent), with 44 percent strongly disagreeing.

Females are more likely to strongly disagree they doubt God's involvement when the unexplainable happens than males (47 percent vs. 40 percent).

Protestant churchgoers in the South (47 percent) are more likely to strongly disagree than those living in the Northeast (38 percent) and Midwest (40 percent).

"One of Jesus' most frequent rebukes of his followers was how small their faith was," McConnell said. "It's not that churchgoers have no faith, but many have room for growth."

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 applied 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 that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 2 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.