





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- More than 9 out of 10 evangelical Protestants **strongly** believe praying, reading the Bible, and/or having a strong Christian faith positively contribute to **mental** health.
- Just 1% of evangelical Protestants do not believe praying, reading the Bible, and/or having a strong Christian faith contribute to positive *mental* health.
- Between 74% and 82% of evangelical Protestants believe praying, reading the Bible, and/or having a strong Christian faith positively contribute to physical health, while 16% to 22% somewhat believe this is true.
- Only 2% to 4% do not believe praying, reading the Bible, and/or having a strong Christian faith contribute to positive *physical* health.
- The actions and beliefs of evangelical Protestants do not always align. Six out of ten evangelicals Protestants who strongly believe reading the Bible contributes to positive mental health still do not read it daily, while 26% do not read it even monthly.
- Ninety-nine percent believe God can heal people physically through their own prayers or the prayers of others, including 91% who strongly believe this.
- Among evangelicals who have a primary physician, 27% know their doctor is a Christian believer, while 5% know their doctor does not share their faith. This leaves two-thirds who have no idea about their doctor's faith.
- Over half of evangelicals who know their doctor is a fellow believer say this fact influenced their choice of doctors.
- Seven out of ten evangelicals feel knowing their doctor is a Christian believer would (or does) give them **more confidence** in that physician.
- The sheer number of evangelical Protestants who do not have a Christian physician (or don't know their doctor's faith) but say having a Christian believer as a doctor would give them more confidence is almost as large as the population of Texas.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

All in One Accord	4
The Benefits of Faith	5
Losing the Benefits of Faith	7
Desiring a Christian Physician	10
What Does It All Mean?	14
Methodology and Definition	18
Additional Reports	19
About Infinity Concepts	20
About Grey Matter Research	21
Additional Resources	22

ALL IN ONE ACCORD

It is pretty rare for any group of people to be in almost complete agreement. There are typically disagreements and varying perspectives regardless of whether the composition of a group is based on religion, race, politics, what type of community people live in, what type of job they work, or even what sports team they support.

Evangelical Protestants are no different. Our many previous studies have shown that although they agree on the basic beliefs that qualify them as evangelicals, they are not of one mind on giving, spiritual activities, what they want in a church, views on Israel, or even what they call themselves.

This is what makes their views on faith and wellness so unusual. When we explore with them things such as whether they believe people can be healed through prayer or whether activities such as prayer and Bible reading have a positive impact on both mental and physical health, **they almost universally agree on these matters**.

We also learned that, although most evangelicals have no idea about the religious faith of their primary physician, seven out of ten say knowing their doctor is a fellow believer would increase their confidence in that physician.

For evangelicals, it appears spiritual wellness is inextricably intertwined with both physical and mental wellness.

The Benefits of Faith

The vast majority of evangelicals strongly believe faith and faith practices contribute to positive mental health. Only 1% of all evangelicals do not believe a strong Christian faith, praying, or reading the Bible contribute to positive mental health. Over nine out of ten believe each of these strongly.

Not quite as many, but still a clear majority, also strongly believe faith contributes to positive physical health. Ninety-six percent (96%) believe a strong Christian faith contributes to positive physical health, and the same proportion say this about reading the Bible. For prayer, 98% affirm this belief.

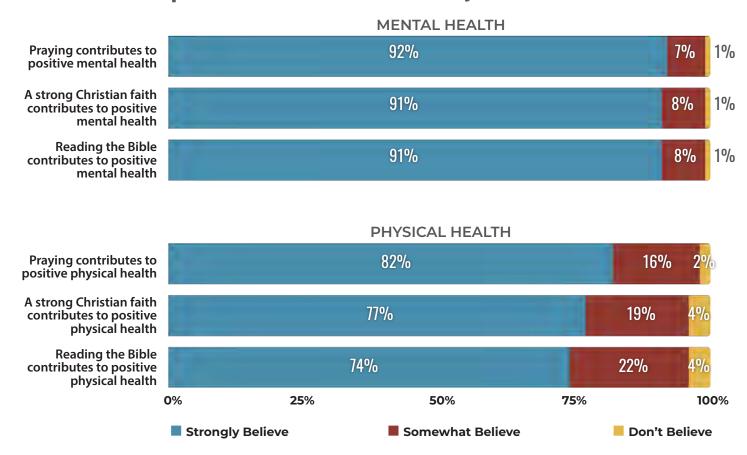
However, the strength of evangelicals' beliefs about physical health is not quite at the same level as how they feel this all affects mental health.

- Ninety-six percent (96%) believe reading the Bible contributes to positive physical health (74% believe this strongly).
- Ninety-six percent (96%) believe a strong Christian faith contributes to positive physical health (77% believe this strongly).
- Ninety-eight percent (98%) believe prayer contributes to positive physical health (82% believe this strongly).

96%

of evangelicals believe reading the Bible contributes to positive physical health

Impact of Faith on Mental and Physical Health



These beliefs are so universal it is difficult to identify any specific types of evangelicals who hold these beliefs more strongly than others. The main difference is that the more spiritually engaged someone is—meaning frequently attending church and small group, reading and studying the Bible, and praying—the more strongly they believe these things contribute positively to their lives.

However, even among people with low spiritual engagement, more than nine out of ten believe each of these things; they simply do not believe them as strongly as people with greater spiritual engagement. For example, while 82% of those with full spiritual engagement strongly believe reading the Bible contributes to positive physical health, this drops to 68% among evangelicals with low spiritual engagement.

Losing the Benefits of Faith

Unfortunately, although certain behaviors are well known to be risky or detrimental to health and others are proven to contribute to wellness, as humans, we all too frequently do the wrong things for our own well-being. Among Americans:

- 42% of us are **obese**¹
- On any given day, 37% of us consume **fast food**²
- 35% of us have had a **one-night stand**³
- Nearly a third of us drink more alcohol than is physically healthy⁴
- More than a third of us do not get enough **sleep** on a regular basis⁵
- 76% of us experience health impacts due to **stress** in a typical month⁶
- 21% of us experienced **mental illness** in the last 12 months, but only 46% who did received any treatment for it⁷
- 91% of us do not eat enough fruits and vegetables8
- 76% of us do not get the recommended amount of exercise⁹

It seems many evangelicals can add another item to this unfortunately lengthy list: "They do not do enough spiritually for their mental or physical health."

While 91% strongly believe reading the Bible contributes to positive mental health, and 74% believe this about physical health, only 39% of evangelical Protestants read the

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html

² https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db322.htm#:~:text=During%202013%E2%80%932016%2C%2036.6%25,24.1%25%20aged%2060%20and%20over

³ https://today.yougov.com/topics/society/articles-reports/2017/08/14/one-four-men-have-had-unprotected-sex-one-night-st

⁴ https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2014/p1120-excessive-drinking.html#:~:text=The%20study%20found%20that%20 nearly,the%20amount%20of%20alcohol%20consumed

⁵ https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2016/p0215-enough-sleep.html

⁶ https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2022/concerned-future-inflation#:~:text=Stress%20and%20the%20consequences%20for,depressed%20or%20sad%20(33%25)

⁷ https://www.nami.org/mhstats

⁸ https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2017/p1116-fruit-vegetable-consumption.html

⁹ https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/downloads/trends-in-the-prevalence-of-physical-activity-508.pdf

60%

of evangelicals who believe reading the Bible contributes to mental health do not read it daily Bible on a daily basis, while 28% read it outside of church less than once a week (if at all).

Among evangelicals who strongly believe reading the Bible contributes to positive mental health, 60% do not read it daily, and 26% do not read it even monthly. Among those who strongly believe reading the Bible contributes to positive physical health, 59% do not read it daily, including 26% who do not even read it weekly.

Similarly, among those who strongly believe a strong Christian faith contributes to **positive mental health**, just 15% have full spiritual

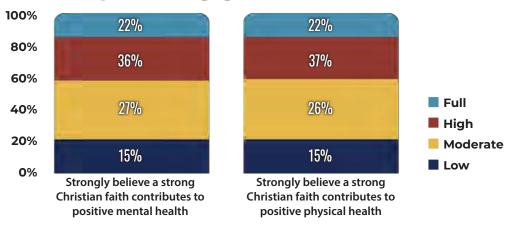
engagement (regularly attending church and small group, reading and studying the Bible, and praying). Twenty-two percent (22%) have low or no spiritual engagement.

Among those who strongly believe a strong Christian faith contributes to **positive physical health**, the numbers are identical: only 15% are fully engaged spiritually, while 22% have low or no spiritual engagement.

In fact, there is very little difference in spiritual engagement levels according to whether people believe various spiritual practices contribute to positive mental or physical health.

Apparently, to the 42% of Americans who are obese and the 76% who do not get enough exercise, we can add the nearly six out of ten (59%) evangelicals who are confident a strong Christian faith can benefit them mentally and physically but only have moderate or low engagement in spiritual practices.





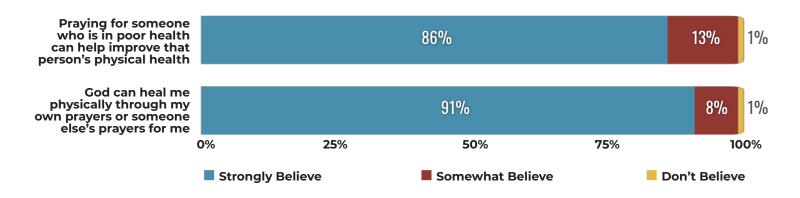
Not only do most evangelicals think spiritual practices can impact their own well-being, but they also feel believers can impact each other's well-being.

Ninety-nine percent (99%) of evangelical Protestants believe **praying for someone who is in poor health can help improve that person's physical health**, including 86% who believe this strongly. This belief is nearly universal, no matter how spiritually engaged people may be.

Another nearly universal belief is that **God can heal people physically through their own prayers or someone else's prayer for them**. Ninety-nine percent (99%) believe this, including 91% who believe it strongly. Again, even among people with low spiritual engagement, 88% strongly believe this.

of evangelicals believe God can heal them through prayer

Can Prayer Heal People?



Desiring a Christian Physician

Although most evangelicals believe strongly in the power of their faith personally, many do not currently extend this to the medical care they receive. But that does not mean they do not wish to.

Ninety-two percent (92%) of evangelicals report having a primary physician. Among those who do, **27% know their primary physician is a fellow Christian believer**, while 5% know their primary physician does not share their faith.

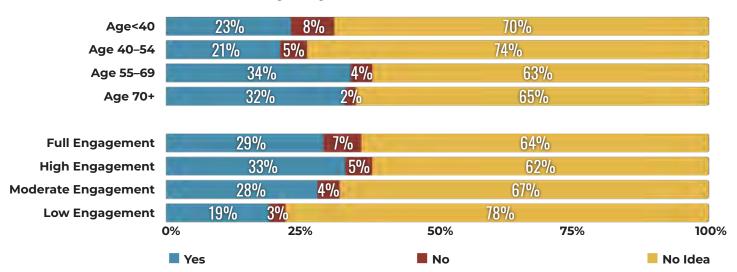
This leaves 68% who have no idea about their doctor's religious faith.

In a nutshell, two-thirds of evangelical Protestants have no idea about their primary physician's faith, but among those who do, 86% have a primary physician who is a fellow believer.

of evangelicals know their primary physician is a Christian believer

Older evangelicals are more likely than those under age 55 to know their doctor is a fellow believer, and people with low spiritual engagement are less likely than other evangelicals to know this.

Is Your Primary Physician a Christian Believer?



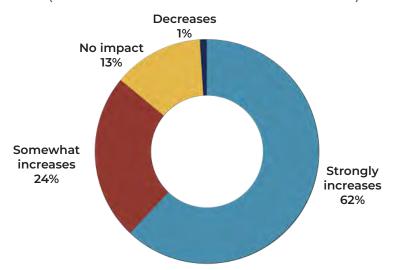
For most of the people who have a Christian physician, this fact **increases their confidence in their doctor**. Sixty-two percent (62%) say it strongly increases their confidence; another 24% say it somewhat increases their confidence. Only one percent (1%) have less confidence in their doctor because of this, while 13% say it makes no difference to them. The more spiritually engaged they are, the more likely this is to increase their confidence in their doctor.

For half of all evangelicals who know their doctor is a Christian, this fact **influenced their decision to select that individual as their primary physician**. Thirty-two percent (32%) say this was a strong influence in their decision; another 20% say this had somewhat of an influence on their choice. Just under half (48%) say this did not influence their choice of physicians. For those with full or high spiritual engagement, about two-thirds say this influenced their decision. About four out of ten (39%) with moderate or low spiritual engagement chose their primary physician at least in part because of the doctor's faith.

of evangelicals would have increased confidence in a doctor who is a Christian believer

Christian Doctor's Impact on Evangelical Patient Confidence

(AMONG THOSE WITH A CHRISTIAN DOCTOR)



What about the people who do not have a primary physician they know to be a Christian?

A clear majority say a Christian doctor would increase their confidence in that person—42% strongly, and 23% somewhat.

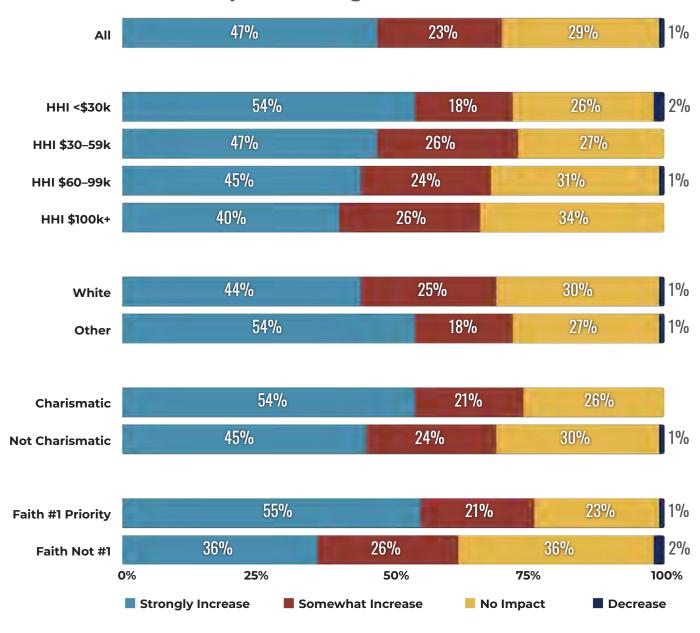
Thirty-four percent (34%) say it would make no difference, while 1% would have less confidence if their doctor shared their Christian faith.

This means among all evangelicals, **70% have or would have higher confidence in a doctor who shares their Christian faith**, including 47% who say their confidence

would be strongly increased by this. One percent (1%) would have less confidence in a Christian physician, while 29% say it makes or would make no difference to them.

Having much stronger confidence in a Christian doctor is more common among lower-income evangelicals, those who are black, Latino, or Asian-American, Pentecostal and Charismatic evangelicals, and those who put their faith as their number one priority in life, above everything else.

Christian Doctor's Impact on Evangelical Patients' Confidence

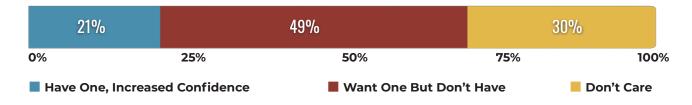


Out of all evangelicals:

- 21% have a fellow believer as a physician and say this increases their confidence in their doctor (about 12.7 million people—roughly the population of Illinois)
- 4% have a Christian doctor, but this does not increase their confidence (about 2.1 million people)
- 49% do not have a Christian as a primary physician (or do not know), but feel this would increase their confidence if they did (about 28.7 million people—almost the population of Texas)
- 26% do not have a Christian doctor (or do not know), and say this would not increase their confidence (about 15.5 million people)

of evangelicals wish they knew their doctor is a Christian believer

Evangelical Attitudes about Christian Physicians



What Does It All Mean?

Anyone professionally serving a broad population usually needs to be careful when it comes to expressing their own beliefs on things such as faith, politics, etc. What would be appealing to a Democrat could really turn off a Republican; what would attract an evangelical could well repel a Buddhist or atheist. And, of course, evangelical Protestants represent only a minority (although sizable) of all potential patients.

At the same time, when it comes to their own well-being, a sizable number of evangelical Protestants wish they had a doctor who shares their faith (or wish they knew this about their current doctor). And this does not even take into consideration the preferences of tens of millions of Roman Catholics, non-evangelical Protestants, and people of other faith perspectives who may share these wishes.

For physicians of faith, this is not necessarily a potential method of attracting a larger patient base. What it does represent is an additional way to connect with many patients who would value knowing about their faith, and for whom this would provide greater confidence in that physician. And one thing research has consistently shown is that **patient positivity and optimism contribute significantly to desirable medical outcomes**. This includes the doctor/patient relationship.

In the peer-reviewed research journal PLOS ONE, University of Basel clinical psychologist Johanna Birkhäuer and other researchers noted in their study that "From a clinical perspective, patients reported more beneficial health behaviours, less symptoms and higher quality of life and to be more satisfied with treatment when they had higher trust in their health care professional." The authors also stated, "... trust in the health care professional has been suggested to be the foundation for effective treatments and fundamental for patient-centered care."

The Duke University Center for Personalized Healthcare explains, "The physician-patient relationship is a foundation of clinical care ... Stronger physician-patient relationships are correlated with improved patient outcomes." Not only that, but, "Patients' trust in their physicians has been demonstrated to be more important than treatment satisfaction in predictions of patient adherence to recommendations and their overall satisfaction with care. Studies have also shown that trust is additionally a strong predictor of a patient continuing with their provider."

But how many doctors of faith are there, really? Despite many studies showing people who are highly educated in the sciences largely are not religious, a variety of studies also show that medical doctors are an exception to this.

A 2005 University of Chicago study found 76% of doctors believe in God and 59% believe in some sort of afterlife. The study also found that 90% of all doctors in the US attend religious services at least occasionally, which is actually higher than the 81% found among all adults in the US at that time. And 55% of doctors said their religious beliefs influence how they practice medicine. The study's author noted, "We suspect that people who combine an aptitude for science with an interest in religion and an affinity for public service are particularly attracted to medicine. The responsibility to care for those who are suffering, and the rewards of helping those in need, resonate throughout most religious traditions."

A study of US physicians reported in *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* in 2017 shows 65% of doctors believe "For doctors, addressing patients' spiritual concerns at the end of life is essential to good practice," and 67% say it is sometimes, usually, or always appropriate for a doctor to encourage patients nearing end of life to "seek reconciliation with their God" (39% believe this is always or usually appropriate).⁴

A 2011 article from the same journal noted, "In a national sample of physicians, 83% agreed that it was appropriate to pray with patients under some conditions," but that "Only 19% of physicians report at least 'sometimes' praying with patients under any conditions." And "Among nurses, between 53% and 66% frequently offer private prayers, whereas 8% – 30% report directly praying with patients."⁵

So, we see that many doctors do have Christian beliefs, and a clear majority believe addressing patients' spiritual concerns can be appropriate. However, according to

a 2017 study conducted by four Mayo Clinic Hospital researchers cited in *Journal of Religion and Health*, "Frequent prayer was reported by 44.7% of physicians, but only 20.7% reported having prayed with patients ... Despite the influence of religion on physicians' lives and medical practice, the majority have not incorporated prayer into patient encounters."

Why the disconnect? Undoubtedly, some of it is due to concerns over whether the doctor or patient may be of a different faith, no faith, or even antagonistic toward religion. But with so many evangelical patients desiring this connection, and so many doctors willing to provide it, there has to be something more.

It very well may be that many doctor/patient relationships are a little bit like a junior high school dance: boys on one side of the gym wishing one of the girls would approach them; girls on the other side wishing one of the boys would come over, but neither feeling comfortable making that first move.

Our research involved just evangelical Protestants, and it only asked about knowledge that their primary physician shared their Christian faith—not whether the doctor was willing to pray with them, discuss religion, or offer to pray for them. We only explored the comfort and confidence this knowledge would bring—not whether patients desire an active faith connection of any type with their physician. And we limited the discussion to their primary physician, rather than exploring end-of-life care, advanced cancer care, surgery, or other critical medical situations as some of the research has done.

Nearly every study we explored on the topic of faith and medical care emphasized that much more research is needed for a deeper understanding of this issue. While we hope our research adds a bit to the lexicon of knowledge, we fully agree with other researchers that much more needs to be done to understand the connection between faith and wellness.

Two things that are abundantly clear from our research are:

- Evangelical Protestants almost universally believe spiritual activity improves both mental and physical health.
- A large majority of evangelical Protestants would value knowing their primary physician shares their Christian faith.

Another significant finding of the study is that **99% of evangelical Protestants** believe God can heal people physically through their own prayers or the prayers of others, including 91% who strongly believe this. This indicates the importance in the evangelical community of faith in the power of prayer during the healing process.

In conclusion, the study shows a strong correlation between the religious beliefs of evangelical Protestants and their perceptions of how prayer, reading the Bible, and having a strong Christian faith positively contribute to their physical and mental health. However, it also reveals that **there is a disconnect between beliefs and actions**, and most do not know their physician's faith even though they would value this.

Trust is essential for successful medical care, and the study shows knowing their physician's religious beliefs can play a big role in building that trust for evangelicals. Unfortunately, most evangelicals do not have that knowledge. However, many medical practitioners are open to discussing the impact of faith and prayer on mental and physical health, and most doctors and patients have personal religious beliefs. Given these factors, it seems wise for both parties to explore ways to bridge this gap in doctor/patient relationships.

¹ https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0170988

² https://dukepersonalizedhealth.org/2019/03/the-importance-of-physician-patient-relationships-communication-and-trust-in-health-care/

³ https://www.uchicagomedicine.org/forefront/news/survey-shows-that-physicians-are-more-religious-than-expected

⁴ https://www.jpsmjournal.com/article/S0885-3924(17)30595-X/fulltext

⁵ https://www.jpsmjournal.com/article/S0885-3924(10)01022-5/fulltext

⁶ https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27071796/#affiliation-1

Methodology and Definitions

Researchers have defined "evangelical" in ways that have them representing 7%, 23%, and even 35% or more of American adults. For this study, we considered an evangelical to be someone who agrees strongly with all four of the following theological positions:

- The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe
- It is important for me to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior
- Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin
- Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation

This is the definition favored by the National Association of Evangelicals, which <u>Grey</u> <u>Matter Research</u> and Lifeway Research helped create.

Further, we limited this study to exclude those who identify with a non-Protestant group, such as Mormon, Roman Catholic, or Orthodox. This is a study of evangelical Protestants, a group representing 23% of American adults, or about 59 million people.

The study was conducted online, through a blend of research access panels. Stringent quality control was used to eliminate any responses from bots, click farms, and disengaged or fraudulent respondents. A demographically representative sample was screened for evangelical beliefs and lack of non-Protestant affiliation. Data was gathered in early 2023. A total of 1,010 evangelical Protestants participated in this study.

ADDITIONAL REPORTS

from Infinity Concepts and Grey Matter Research

If you found this report beneficial, Grey Matter Research and Infinity Concepts also offer ten additional reports on evangelical Protestants:

GIVING REPORTS:

- The Generosity Factor: Evangelicals and Giving
- The Generation Gap: Evangelical Giving Preferences
- The Favorite Charity: Evangelical Giving Priorities
- The Sustainers: Exploring Monthly Donor Partnerships

CHURCH REPORTS:

- The Ripple Effect: Congregations, COVID, and the Future of Church Life
- The Congregational Scorecard: What Evangelicals Want in a Church
- The Renewalists: Pentecostal and Charismatic Evangelicals

ISRAEL REPORTS:

- The Jewish Connection: Evangelicals and Israel
- The Holy Land Journey: Evangelicals and Israel Travel

MEDIA REPORTS:

• Media Matters: Evangelicals and the Media

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- **Branding**: We help you develop a strong and memorable brand.
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- **Fundraising**: We help you build a loyal and generous donor base that embraces your organization and supports your vision.
- **Public Relations**: Through proven strategies, effective communication, and media relationships, we will put your organization on center stage.
- **Media**: We will help maximize your media investment through optimized media planning, placement, management, and reporting.
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What do you wish you knew about the people you are trying to reach: donors, potential donors, customers, or the general public? And what could you accomplish if you knew the answers to those questions? That is where we help you make a difference.

Grey Matter Research helps our clients make wiser decisions with **valuable**, **relevant consumer insights**. We specialize in serving **Christian organizations**, although we have partnered with many secular charities and for-profit companies, from professional sports teams to vehicle manufacturers to branding, marketing, and fundraising agencies.

Our motivation is to **partner with our clients**, which is why we have been working with some of the same organizations **for over two decades**. Whether we are helping a client discover how consumers perceive their brand, learn what the donor experience is like, develop new messaging, or any other topic, we have **A Passion for Research That Makes a Difference**.

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The Assemblies of God • Children's Mercy Hospital • Catholic Relief Services
Prison Fellowship • Compassion International • Paralyzed Veterans of America
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Our work has been **covered by the international media**, (MSNBC, Christianity Today, NPR, Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Fast Company, Harvard Business Review, NonProfit Times, many others), translated into multiple languages, used in US Senate panel hearings, and included as part of the curriculum at universities in the US and Italy.

You can learn more about how we help clients, as well as check out a variety of available research reports, on our website: **www.greymatterresearch.com**.

Company president Ron Sellers would be delighted to chat with you. Call him at **1-602-684-6294**, or meet him digitally at **ron@greymatterresearch.com**.

Additional FREE RESOURCES from Infinity Concepts

■ CAPTIVATE Magazine

Get the latest news and guidance on branding, church growth, fundraising, leadership, digital marketing, podcasting, media buying, and much more by accessing the latest edition of *CAPTIVATE* magazine. <u>Click here.</u>

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Every nonprofit should have a clear understanding of what is happening with its donors by measuring key performance metrics to monitor the health of its donor file. The **Donor Trend Analysis** gives insights into your donor retention rate, average lifetime donor value, donation frequency, number of multi-gift donors, average gift amount, new donor acquisition trends, lapsed donor trends, and much more.

This Donor Trend Analysis is valued at \$800. However, you may qualify to receive this valuable report for FREE! <u>Click here</u> to complete your application to see if you qualify for a FREE **Donor Trend Analysis** for your church, ministry, or nonprofit.

Digital Assessment

Your digital presence matters, now more than ever! What does a donor experience when they give to your organization online? Are you posting too little or too much on social media? Does your website effectively communicate your story and impact? How well do you engage with your followers through social media?

Infinity Concepts provides a FREE **Digital Assessment** to qualified churches, ministries, and nonprofits. This analysis will help you improve the way you communicate and engage with people and donors online. **Reach out** to see if your organization qualifies for a FREE **Digital Assessment** by the experts at Infinity Concepts.

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Tap into a wealth of insights, tips, and information on a variety of topics from our seasoned team of experts through our *Strategic Solutions* newsletter and blog.

- <u>Click here</u> to check out the insights from our experts on our blog.
- <u>Click here</u> to have Strategic Solutions delivered to your in-box each week.

Additional Resources from Grey Matter Research

In addition to our custom research work for clients, we offer a variety of exclusive reports.

A small selection is below; **click here** for information on all of them.

■ Uneven: Success, Stagnation, and Delusion in Spiritual Growth

Spiritual growth and maturity among American evangelicals is a mixed bag. Some are highly engaged and growing, while others have almost completely checked out. **Click here.**

What America's Favorite Charities Have in Common

Donors often claim they like to support small, local organizations. The reality is they generally favor massive global brands. And most people of faith do not favor supporting faith-based organizations. Learn what sets America's favorite charities apart in the minds of donors. Click here.

■ Lost Opportunities: Faith, Giving, and Social Media

Learn how donors and people of faith use social media to interact with nonprofit organizations and congregations. <u>Click here</u>.

■ Charitable Overhead Ratios and Donor Decisions

Donors often believe ministries and charities spend more on fundraising and administration than they should. Because of this, many organizations think donors will not support organizations with expense ratios exceeding a certain threshold. We find that is often not true—and in fact, donors frequently do not have a clue what their favorite organization's overhead ratio really is. Click here.

Understanding Evangelical Mid-Level Donors

This small but critical group is not well understood because not much research has been done on them—we help put that right with this report. <u>Click here</u>.

■ Six Ways Your Survey Research May Be Misleading You

The only thing worse than no research is bad research, and there are many ways you can unintentionally receive misleading data from your surveys—even when they are conducted by professionals. <u>Click here</u>.





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