

Beyond the Label

Unmasking Evangelical Identity



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1** When we ask Protestants who hold evangelical beliefs to choose how they would describe themselves, only 27% choose the term “an evangelical Christian.” But when we directly ask a yes-or-no question about whether the term “an evangelical Christian” describes them, 61% say it does, while 39% would not use this term to describe themselves.
- 2** When people with evangelical beliefs are asked to describe what defines an evangelical, 14% state they have no idea. Most describe an evangelical either by a set of beliefs (mostly being saved by grace or born again: 34%) or by a focus on or willingness to share their faith with others (39%).
- 3** Those who do consider themselves to be evangelical usually either define this by a focus on evangelism (48%) or by holding specific beliefs (47%), but only infrequently by both. Those who do not see themselves as evangelical often say they do not prioritize evangelism enough to be considered evangelical (26%), but even more frequently have no idea what the word actually means (33%).
- 4** Only 2% of evangelicals mention anything about politics or political worldview as defining an evangelical. While others may see “evangelical” as a political definition, evangelicals themselves do not see this.
- 5** When directly asked why they do not use this term to describe themselves:
 - 42% were not raised with this description
 - 37% are not really sure what it means
 - 36% believe the term is misused or misunderstood
 - 27% say their church does not use this description
 - 19% simply believe the term has too much negative baggage

6

Just 7% of evangelicals personally hold a negative impression of this word, while 22% are neutral on it. Seven out of ten have a positive view of the description, including 51% who view it very positively.

7

Only 24% believe the American public holds a positive view of this description, while 49% feel Americans are neutral on the term, and 27% feel there are negative feelings toward the description.

8

Just 34% of evangelicals believe the media hold a neutral view of the term “evangelical Christian.” Eighteen percent feel the media generally look upon this description positively, but 49% feel the media hold a negative view of the description, including 24% who believe the media are very negative toward evangelicals. Even among those who do not consider themselves as evangelicals, four out of ten feel the media have negative views of evangelicals.

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INTRODUCTION

Is there a more loaded word in today's America than “evangelical”?

A quick Google search on news results for that word brings up mostly stories about politics or Donald Trump, rather than anything connected with religion. In fact, *The Economist* pronounces, “In America, evangelicalism has become as much a political as a religious identity.”

“Evangelical” has many definitions, depending on the source. Researchers estimate anywhere from 7% to 47% of American adults are evangelical. Those numbers are so different because **the way “evangelical” is defined differs radically from one researcher to the next**—anywhere from nine very specific spiritual beliefs, to what church they attend, to what people call themselves.

The challenge is that **even evangelicals themselves do not agree on what an evangelical is**, whether the term is a positive or a negative portrayal, or even whether they consider themselves evangelical.

[Grey Matter Research](#) and [Infinity Concepts](#) both have worked within the evangelical community for decades. Come along with us as we learn more about how that community actually sees itself.

Defining Evangelical

We use spiritual beliefs to classify someone as an evangelical. This is because evangelicals can be found in all types of churches (or not attending church), and they vary in terms of what terminology they use for themselves.

Working with the National Association of Evangelicals and Lifeway Research, Grey Matter helped create a simple belief-based set of four questions, with the Bebbington quadrilateral as a starting point. **An evangelical is considered someone who strongly affirms the following four key beliefs:**

- **The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.**
- **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.**
- **It is important for me to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.**

We further limited this study to those within the Protestant world, for the sake of simplicity.

Are You an Evangelical Christian?

In two separate studies, we measured this in two different ways.

Both studies gave evangelical Protestants six different terms, including “an evangelical Christian.” One study asked them to select any they would use to describe themselves. The second study specifically forced people to give a “yes” or “no” answer to whether they would use each description.

The two studies came up with substantially different answers.

- When we measure how people would choose to describe themselves, only 27% of evangelicals select the term “an evangelical Christian.”
- When we create a situation where everyone is forced to give us a “yes” or a “no,” 61% say this term does describe them; 39% say it does not. **Throughout this report, “self-described evangelicals” or “those who call themselves evangelical” will refer to the 61% who say, “yes,” when directly asked.**

39%
of evangelicals
say they are
not evangelical

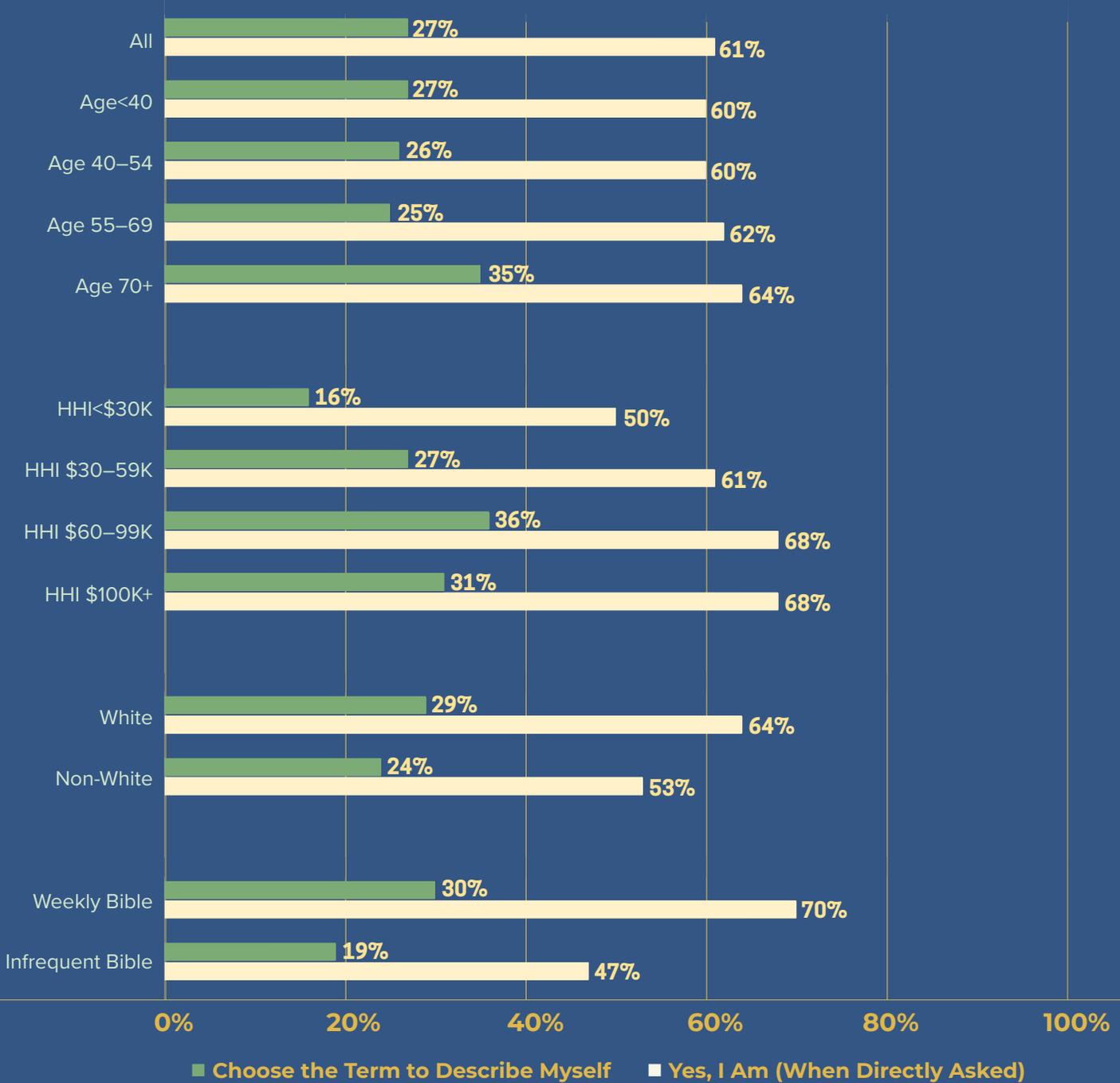
There are two things of note here. One is that even when we ask evangelicals directly whether they are evangelical, about four out of ten say they would not use this term in self-description. They simply do not feel the term applies to them.

The second thing is that far fewer evangelicals choose to describe themselves as evangelical than will admit it is an accurate description when directly asked. **Six out of ten say they are evangelical, but only about one out of four choose to use this term for themselves.**

The gap is especially wide among people under age 70, but it exists for all age groups. Lower-income and moderate-income evangelicals are less likely than others to use this self-description, either by choice or when directly asked. Evangelicals who are Latino, Black, Asian, or American Indian are less likely to use the term for themselves in both situations than are Whites.

The less spiritually engaged people are, the less likely they are to call themselves evangelical in either situation. The graph shows the numbers for frequency of Bible readership, but we find similar gaps for other spiritual activities such as attending worship services and participating in a small group for prayer or Bible study.

Would You Describe Yourself as an “Evangelical Christian”?



What, Exactly, Is an Evangelical?

We asked evangelical Protestants to describe, in their own words, exactly what defines what an evangelical is.

There is a fair amount of diversity in how evangelicals define this word. There are two main areas people talk about. One is **a focus on evangelism or sharing their faith** (39%). A few describe evangelicals as those who support evangelism/missions, or even those who evangelize professionally or full-time (confusing evangelicals with evangelists). But the most common definition is simply that evangelicals are Christians who look to share their faith and tell others about Jesus.

“Evangelical Christians dedicate their lives to spreading the gospel. It is my life goal to bring people to Christ. The Bible says, ‘go into the hedges and highways to compel men to come.’”

“I feel that an evangelical Christian is one that goes out and witnesses and meets people to tell them about faith and God. I do not easily talk to people, so I do not feel I am evangelical.”

An evangelical Christian is one who is extremely active in pursuing others for Christ. That is not me at this point in my life.”

“An evangelical Christian is called to share the good news about Jesus to everyone they meet.”

“Someone who is all about going out and preaching the word of God to everyone they can or trying to convert people to the faith.”

“Like a missionary who has made it their focus in life to go travel far away spreading the message of Jesus Christ and help the lost find their way to being saved.”

“I believe in spreading the gospel. If the conversation turns to religion, I will share my experience and why I know that this Jesus stuff is real, not wishful thinking or hoping.”

The other primary definition is that “evangelical” is a **set of specific religious beliefs** (34%). By far, the most common of these has to do with salvation: evangelicals rely solely on Jesus for salvation, are born again, are saved by grace, etc. To many of these folks, “evangelical” and “born again” are essentially synonymous. A few others mention baptism, Pentecostal or Charismatic practices, believing in the authority of the Bible, repentance, or other beliefs.

“Belief in the Bible as the inspired word of God. Belief in Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death on the cross for the sins of the world. Belief that all persons are sinners in need of a savior/ redeemer to atone for their sins. Accepting God’s free gift of salvation through His Son Jesus, the Christ/ Messiah. Belief in the command of Jesus to ‘go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.’”

“Believing Jesus was born and died on the cross to save us from our sins. We have accepted Him as our savior.”

“Someone who has accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and believes Christ is the one and only way to salvation.”

“A person who believes in the shed blood of Jesus Christ of Nazareth washing away their sins before God the Father, and Christ’s resurrection proving He is the Son of God and sharing that with others.”

“Evangelical is a term that basically means good news. The word ‘gospel’ could be translated as ‘good news.’ The good news in this dispensation is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again for our justification. This knowledge and then belief is necessary for salvation in the dispensation of grace.”

“Conservative, fundamental belief in the Bible as the word of God.”

■ Self-identifies as evangelical ■ Does not self-identify as evangelical

Only 7% of evangelicals use both of these to define what an evangelical is—specific religious beliefs as well as a focus on evangelism. Fifty-nine percent mention only one or the other, while 34% do not include either.

So, in short, most evangelicals believe an evangelical is someone who is saved by Jesus, who seeks to share their faith, or both. However, there are additional perspectives.

Fourteen percent believe part of being an evangelical is **being especially serious about, or focused on, one's faith.** They feel evangelicals are sold out to God, put Jesus first, prioritize the Bible and take it very seriously, etc.

“An evangelical Christian is one that is totally devoted to Christ. I am not quite there yet so I do not put myself in that category. I hope to be there one day.”

“I am evangelical. I take the Bible seriously.”

“I would say that an evangelical Christian is one who follows the teachings of God word-for-word, no matter what. He or she quotes passages in any part of the Good Book and lives their life completely through the teachings of God.”

“It’s someone who’s serious about the Lord. Someone who gives their all to their Lord and Savior.”

“Not watered down, Bible-believing, uncompromising, unapologetically Christian, as Christ is the only way to enter the Kingdom.”

■ Self-identifies as evangelical ■ Does not self-identify as evangelical

Another 8% say it has to do with **lifestyle**: living according to one's beliefs, living a godly life, avoiding sin, or putting others first.

“An evangelical Christian is a person who is baptized and lives life in a Christlike manner and makes an attempt to demonstrate how Christ wants us to live and reach out to others in a way that they might also come to faith in Christ.”

“We are trying to apply the Word of God alone as our standard for living, based on the five solas¹.”

“An evangelical Christian is someone who, in word and deed, lives as much as possible in accordance with the ways set forth in the Bible and encourages others to do so. Evangelical Christianity is not a political group at all! It is a collective term for a people who follow the Lord with all their hearts and all their souls.”

“Evangelical Christian means you live a godly, God-honoring life, and you renew your mind on a daily basis, and you show others with your actions that you are truly a child of God.”

“‘Christian’ literally means ‘little Christ.’ I try to live this every day. I do my best to be like Him.”

■ Self-identifies as evangelical ■ Does not self-identify as evangelical

¹The **five solas** of the Reformation, which distinguished the Reformers from the teachings of Rome, include sola scriptura (Scripture alone), solus Christus (Christ alone), sola fide (faith alone), sola gratia (grace alone), and soli Deo gloria (glory to God alone).

Small proportions say being an evangelical is defined by what church or denomination you attend (3%), spiritual activities such as attending church or reading the Bible (2%), or even simply by believing in God (3%).

“Someone who follows a church that believes the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

“An evangelical Christian believes in music during the worship service. They also believe in speaking in tongues.”

“I am not very sure, but I know that I do not share most of the views of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), so that is what I associate an evangelical Christian with.”

“Well, for one thing, they are certainly more noisy than Baptist folk.”

“To me, an evangelical Christian is one who attends a modern, praise-with-a-band type service. I do not. I attend traditional services.”

“I don’t really know. My church has been identified as such. That’s all I know.”

■ Self-identifies as evangelical ■ Does not self-identify as evangelical

Then, there are **14%** who admit they flat-out have no idea what defines an evangelical.

“I would have to look it up in the dictionary to find the meaning before I answered the question fairly.”

“I don’t really know what an evangelical Christian is.”

“I’ve heard the term, but I do not know what it is. And it is not written anywhere in the Word of God. ‘Evangelical’ is a man-made term. And traditions of men make void the Word of God.”

“I’m not sure; that’s why I choose a nondenominational church where all are welcome.”

“Honestly, I’m not sure. I just know I have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.”

■ Self-identifies as evangelical ■ Does not self-identify as evangelical

It is noteworthy to observe what people did not say ...

Only 2% define “evangelical” at least in part by politics, such as being politically conservative, supporting Donald Trump, or being Republican. Even among evangelicals who hold a negative perception of the term, only 4% define it politically. (This does not speak to whether they might associate evangelicals with certain political positions—only that they do not *define* evangelicals in any part by political perspective). So, while others, such as *The Economist*, commonly conflate this term with politics, evangelicals themselves rarely do.

“Evangelical Christians are usually the Southern Baptists. They are very right wing and vocal in their conservative politics. They confuse politics with religion, not separating the two.”

“‘Evangelical’ is a term that has become politicized or attempts to capture or categorize a group that I do not agree with (politically). The term now feels negative to me.”

“A group so far right that it is now political and has little to do with being a Christian. A group that cannot accept any view other than their own. Bigoted and narrow-minded. Homophobic.”

“I typically refrain from using the word ‘evangelical’ because there is no agreed-upon definition. If we are talking more in terms of a religious affiliation that must be connected to certain political ideals, then I’m probably not an evangelical. If we are talking about evangelical in the historic sense of the word, where we’re talking about the need for evangelism and personal conversion, and the authority of the Bible, then, yes, I am.”

“The term ‘evangelical’ puts me off. I don’t like the implication that the title gives. It sounds like a Bible thumper to me, and I am not that. I guess this comes from the negative media that the evangelicals have gotten being tied to Trump.”

“I associate the term ‘evangelical’ with self-righteous political types, such as racist Republicans and other hypocrites.”

“I can’t define it, but like porn, I recognize it when I see it. It seems to be a sect that supported Trump, despite his behavior, which was far from Jesus’ teachings.”

The other thing we did not see is many overt criticisms of evangelicals. Three percent of all evangelicals had **negative things to say about what defines evangelicals**: they are fanatical, bigoted, preachy, judgmental, legalistic, rigid, hypocritical, fake, etc. Even among those who do not consider themselves to be evangelical, only 7% are critical in their definition of what an evangelical is.

“I am not into the modern-day corrupt evangelical movement. It turns me all the way off!”

“I don’t know; I just think of evangelical as over the top, flamboyant, fake.”

“I’m not one. They are much more in-your-face and very judgmental.”

“I attended a few evangelical services and they never spread the good word. They only preached how sinful everyone was. I believe we sin way too often, but I like the good word and the great deeds Jesus did for us. In this day and age, I think we have to spread the good word to help people understand why we are Christians.”

“A fanatic that shouts and screams during sermons at church.”

“To me, it is zealous religious people who are very dramatic.”

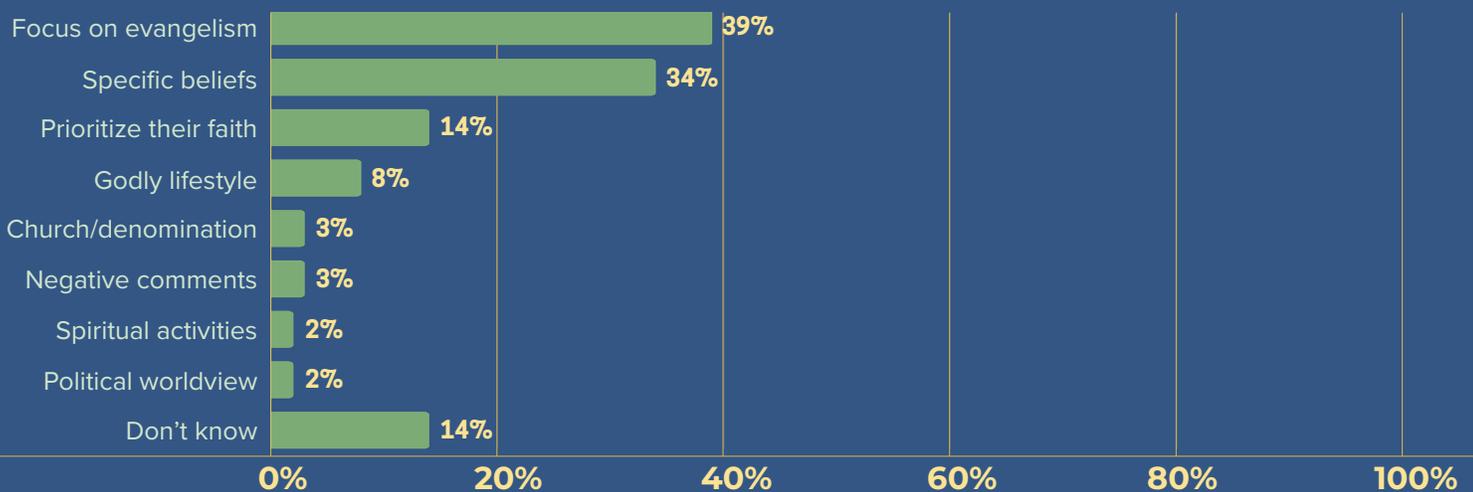
“I think of evangelicals as people that are putting on a performance for money.”

“I think the evangelical Christian is more extreme and can be what they call a Holy Roller.”

■ Self-identifies as evangelical ■ Does not self-identify as evangelical

In 2011, Grey Matter asked Americans in general to define the term “evangelical,” and in the overall American population, there were many intensely negative, insulting, even hateful definitions. At least the term “evangelical” rarely carries that baggage among many evangelicals (even those who do not consider themselves as such).

What Defines What an Evangelical Christian Is? Among All Evangelicals



Definitions of “evangelical” vary quite a bit according to whether people consider themselves to be evangelical or not.

Among those who do define themselves as evangelicals, almost all define this term according to:

- Sharing their faith
- Having specific beliefs (mostly about salvation)
- Making their faith a priority in their life
- Living a godly life

Very few discuss anything other than one or more of these four categories.

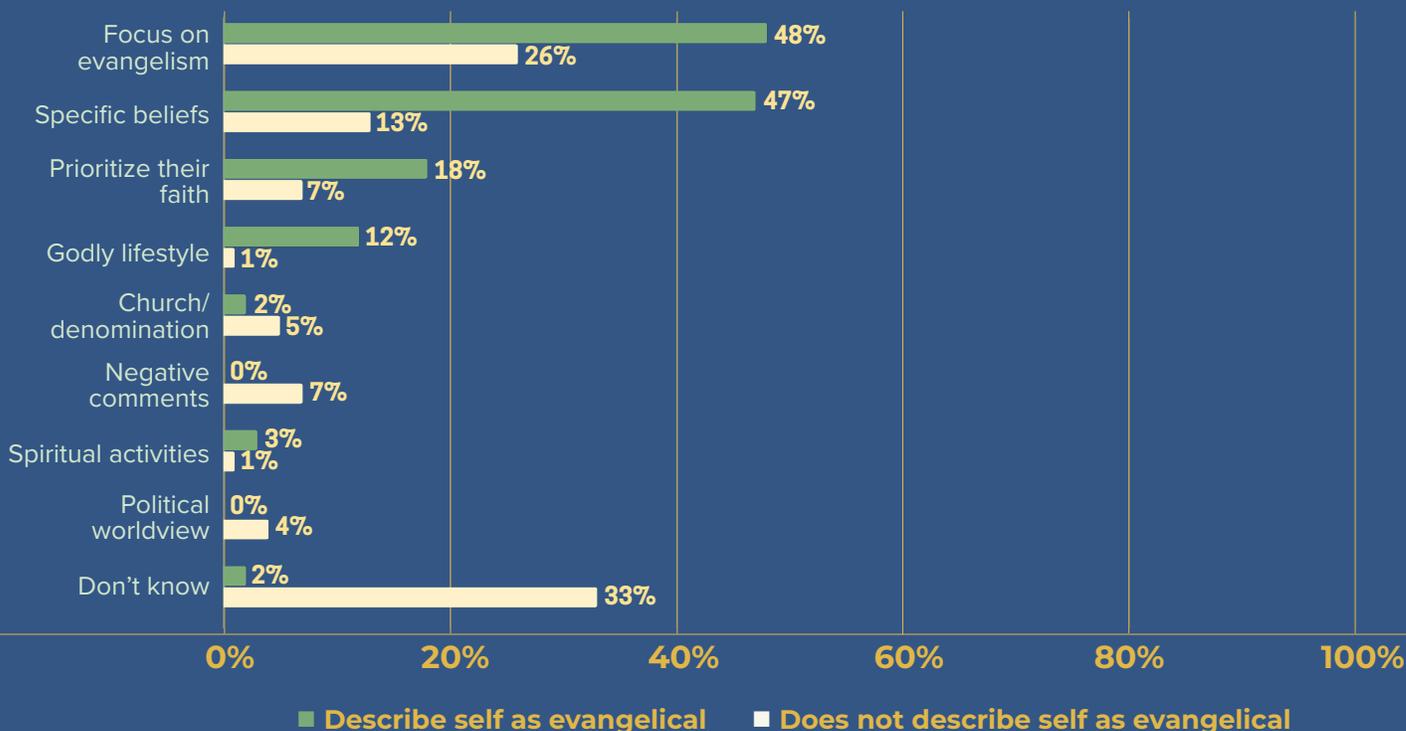
Among people who hold evangelical beliefs but do not describe themselves as evangelical, one-third have no idea what the term means.

Many others do talk about evangelicals' focus on evangelism, but say they do not focus on it to the same degree or they do not really do it much and therefore cannot be considered evangelical.

Others define "evangelical" by specific beliefs they do not share or by how much evangelicals prioritize their faith (which they do not do to the same extent). Seven percent have disparaging comments about evangelicals (clearly desiring not to be included in that group). Then there are small proportions who wrongly define this term politically, by church or denomination, or by spiritual activities.

What Defines What an Evangelical Is?

By Whether They Describe Themselves as Evangelical



Why Some Evangelicals Do Not Use This Term

The descriptions believers gave of what defines an evangelical provide information on why some evangelicals do not use this term to describe themselves. Yet this is not a complete picture.

For those 39% of evangelical Protestants who decline to describe themselves as evangelical, we asked them directly why they do not use the term.

They have a variety of reasons for their decision. The most common has to do with a lack of familiarity:

- 42% say they were not raised with this term
- 37% admit they are not really sure what it means
- 27% say their church does not use this description, so they do not use it either

Altogether, 69% do not use the term for at least one of these three reasons.

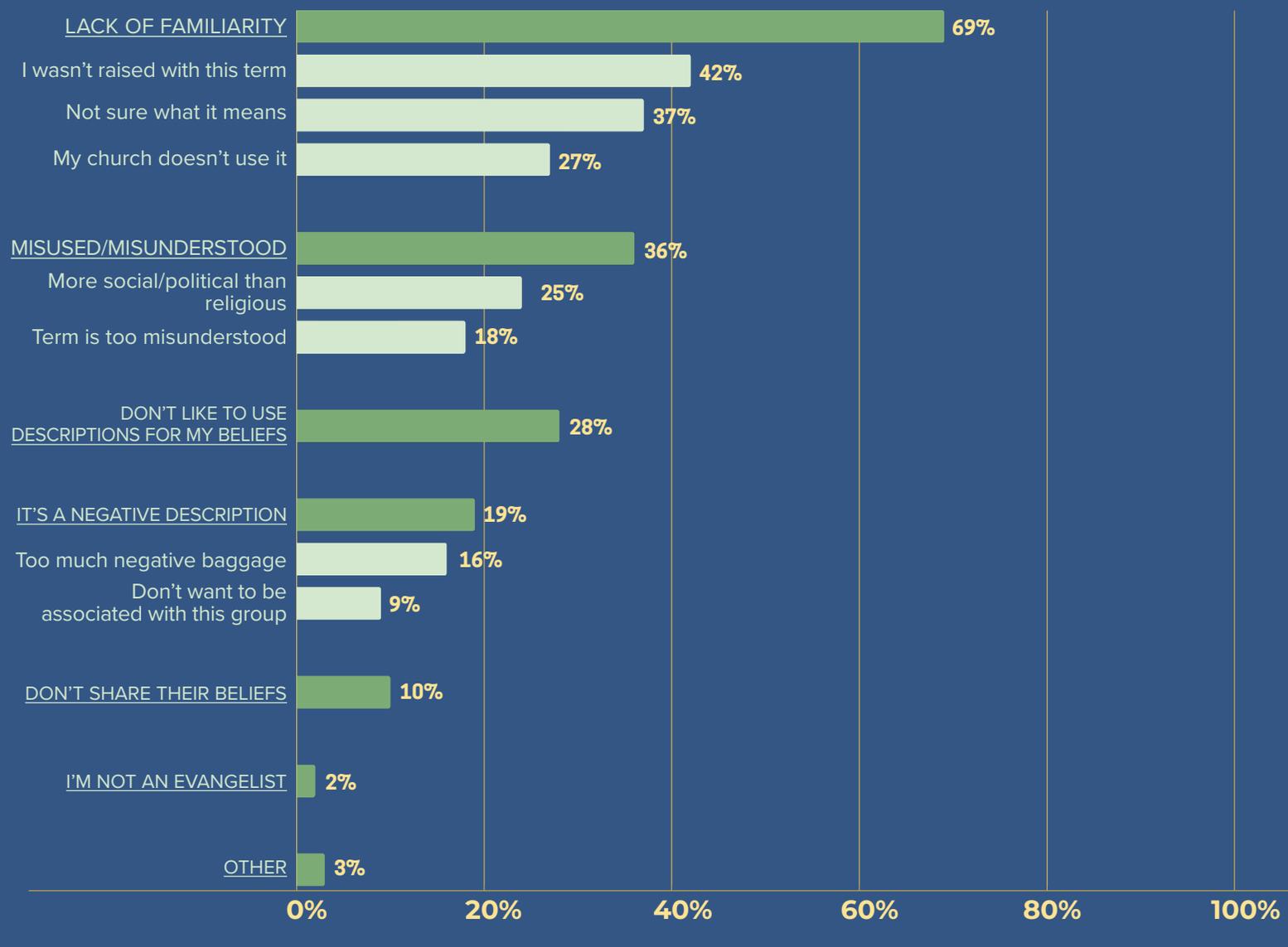
There is also a significant minority (36%) who decline to use the term to describe themselves because they feel “evangelical” is misused or misunderstood. This includes 25% who say this has become more of a social or political term than a religious description, along with 18% who believe the term is too likely to be misunderstood by other people for them to want to use it.

Twenty-eight percent decline to describe themselves as “evangelical” because they prefer not to use descriptions like this to categorize their beliefs, which means they likely would rather not employ other terms such as liberal, fundamentalist, or Charismatic any more than they would evangelical.

36%
who do not call themselves evangelical say the term is misused or misunderstood

Nineteen percent say the word “evangelical” has become a negative description, including 16% who feel the term has too much negative baggage overall, along with 9% who say they would rather not be associated with the type of people who do call themselves evangelical.

Why Some Evangelicals Do Not Use This Term



How the Term “Evangelical” Is Perceived

Within the evangelical Protestant community, there is a deep divide on how the term “evangelical Christian” is viewed. Those who describe themselves with this term look upon it quite favorably; those who do not use the term for themselves have a far less positive impression of the description. But both groups feel the American public, and particularly the American media, perceive this description in a far more negative way.

Half of all evangelicals say they personally view the term “evangelical Christian” in a very positive light, and a total of seven out of ten have a positive view of the term, with 22% neutral and just 7% personally negative toward the term.

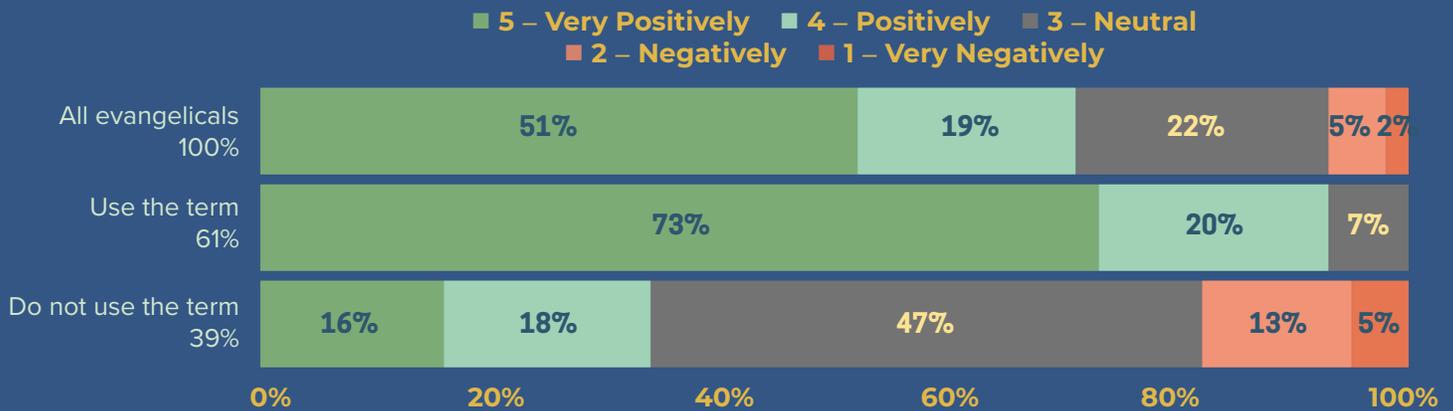
There are not huge differences in how people personally view this term by age, gender, race/ethnicity, or other factors. The more respondents are engaged in their faith (regular church attendance, frequent Bible reading, putting their faith as the single most important element of their lives, etc.), the more likely they are to have a strongly positive view of this description.

Where things really vary dramatically is according to whether believers consider themselves to be evangelical or not. **Among self-described evangelicals, 73% feel very positively toward the term**, and a total of 93% feel positively toward it. **Among those who do not use this term, just 16% have a very positive view**, and a total of 34% are positive toward it, while 47% are neutral, and 18% have a negative perception of the term.

7%

of evangelicals have a negative view of the term “evangelical”

How Evangelicals View the Term “Evangelical Christian”



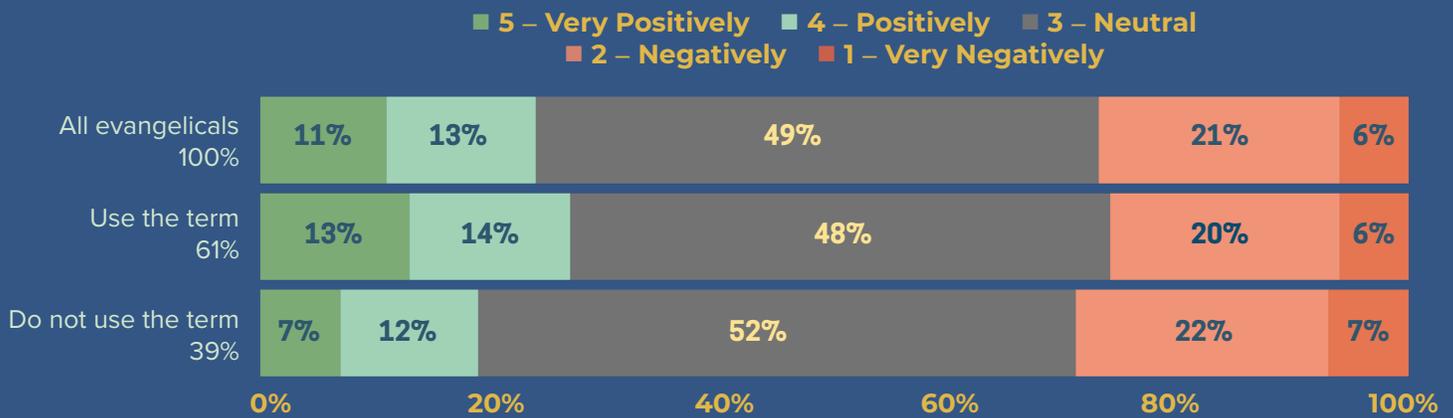
While evangelicals themselves infrequently have negative views of this term, they certainly think the same thing cannot be said about others. **Only 11% of evangelical Protestants believe Americans, in general, hold a very positive view of the term “evangelical Christian,”** with a total of 24% saying Americans are positive overall toward the term. About half see Americans in general as neutral, while 27% feel the sentiment tends to be negative about this term.

Again, we see few meaningful differences by demographic or other factors, with the exception that White evangelicals are less likely to feel the American public has a positive view of this term than are others (21% to 32%).

27%
of evangelicals
feel Americans
have a negative
view of the term
“evangelical”

What is highly instructive here is that the response is similar regardless of whether people consider themselves to be evangelical or not. In fact, those who consider themselves evangelical are about equally divided on whether Americans view this term positively (27%) or negatively (25%). Those who do not consider themselves as evangelical actually are less likely to say Americans hold a positive view of evangelicals as to say they hold a negative view (19% to 29%). About half of both groups see “evangelical” as a neutral term.

How Evangelicals Feel Americans View the Term “Evangelical Christian”



When it comes to how the media tend to view the term “evangelical Christian,” 34% feel the view tends to be neutral (which is ideally how any group would prefer to be viewed by an unbiased media). This leaves two-thirds of evangelicals feeling the media are biased when it comes to evangelicals, and **they are about three times more likely to feel the bias is negative than positive** (49% to 17%).

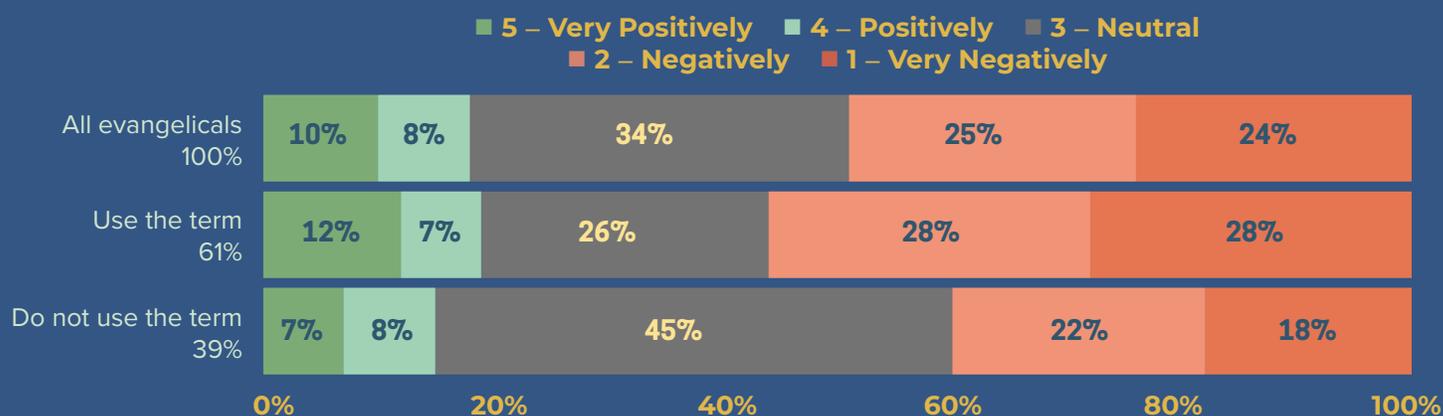
Men, ages 55 and older, higher-income individuals, Whites, and those who are more engaged in their faith are particularly likely to feel the media view evangelicals negatively.

Relatively few who consider themselves to be evangelical think the media have a neutral view of evangelicals (26%). It is far more common to believe the media see evangelical Christians in a negative light (55%, including 28% who see it as very negative) than in a positive light (19%, including 12% who believe the bias is very positive).

But even among believers who do not consider themselves to be evangelical, a majority feel there is media bias, and while 15% see it as positive bias, 40% say the media generally have a negative view of evangelical Christians.

49%
of evangelicals feel the media has a negative view of the term “evangelical”

How Evangelicals Feel the Media View the Term “Evangelical Christian”



Various studies have shown the evangelical community tends to believe they are seen and positioned in an unflattering light—that they have been discriminated against due to their faith, that the media glory in negative portrayals of evangelicals, etc. The response to this by the non-evangelical community is often that evangelicals are just feeling sorry for themselves and that little of this supposed discrimination or negative bias really exists.

While we are not measuring the extent to which any supposed bias or negative portrayals occur, it is instructive that **even believers who do not consider themselves evangelical**—who often do not know what this term means, have inaccurate definitions of the term, or even themselves have negative feelings toward evangelicals—**are more likely to see the American public and especially the media as having negative views of evangelical Christians than positive views.**

What It All Means

There is a considerable amount of research out there purporting to represent evangelicals. Often, it is contradictory.

A good example is a widely quoted study by the Guttmacher Institute claiming 79% of unmarried evangelicals 18 to 29 have been sexually active. Grey Matter Research conducted a similar study for the National Association of Evangelicals and found a figure of 44%.

That is a pretty substantial difference, but why?

Guttmacher defined “evangelical” by asking whether people considered themselves to be a “born-again Christian, evangelical, or fundamentalist.” The NAE/Grey Matter study defined “evangelical” the way it is defined in this study (**Four Key Beliefs**), plus church attendance at least monthly (this was defined as “active evangelicals”). Guttmacher included 31% of the US population 18–29 as evangelical, while the NAE/Grey Matter study included just 10%.

Hence the massive difference.

When you read research about evangelicals (or about mainline Protestants, Catholics, Christians, conservatives, or any other group), **it is critical to know how that group is being defined.**

Is a Catholic someone who regularly attends Mass and is active in her faith, or someone who was baptized Catholic and has not been back to church since? When evangelicals (depending on who is doing the research) can represent as few as 7% of Americans, or as many as 47%, **these definitions are going to have an enormous impact on the results of a study.**

We also learned in this study that how people *think* of themselves and what they choose to call themselves can be very different. While 61% of people with evangelical beliefs

think of themselves as evangelical, fewer than half that number would choose to describe themselves as such.

Even for evangelicals, the term “evangelical” is confusing. Evangelicals who use the term are essentially divided over whether the core of its meaning is a focus on evangelism or on salvation by grace through faith in Christ.

What is not confusing for evangelical believers is whether “evangelical” has become a political term. When defining the word, just 2% make any reference to politics, and almost all of those come from people who feel they are not evangelical (despite their core evangelical beliefs). In a world where some high-profile evangelical leaders are active in politics, major media conflate “evangelical” with “politically right wing,” political pollsters use inaccurate definitions of the term, and increasingly the term is even becoming conflated with “Christian nationalist,” **evangelicals themselves are steadfast that being evangelical has nothing to do with one’s political beliefs.**

In short, evangelicals who call themselves such have a positive view of the term, while those who do not use it are often neutral on it, but rarely have negative views. Yet both believe Americans, in general, are at least as likely to have a negative perception of the term as a positive one. Both groups believe a majority of the media have a bias toward this term (and a mostly negative bias at that).

This Study Is a Warning

It is a warning to be careful when you see the word “*evangelical*.”

When it is used in a news story, doubt the definition. When you see research data about evangelicals, make sure you understand how they are being defined.

It is also a warning to be careful when you *use* the word or see/hear others using it. It means different things to different people. Many have a fairly incomplete definition of the term or even a completely wrong definition.

The term simply is not common usage for many, even when they have evangelical beliefs. Seven out of ten evangelicals who do not consider themselves to be evangelical cite a lack of familiarity: they did not grow up with the term, their church does not use it, and/or they truly do not know what the term means.

In a sense, these warnings apply to *all* language. Believers can become so comfortable with the “lingo” of their faith, denomination, or church that they easily forget not everyone speaks their language. Think of a college professor who naturally uses words such as “obsequious” or “erudite” when speaking with a group of fifth-graders, or an Episcopalian who would casually throw around terms such as “rector” and “daily office” when talking with a Baptist.

Should you describe yourself, your beliefs, or your organization as “evangelical” if you hold evangelical beliefs? That is a personal choice. If you do, you will be subject to a lack of knowledge of what that word actually means, misunderstandings of the definition, and even negative bias.

But the same thing will be true if you choose some other terminology: Christian, Baptist, Christ-follower, Charismatic, believer, Spirit-filled, apostolic, Calvinist, or anything else.

Labels always come with stereotypes and assumptions. Yet it is nearly impossible to avoid labels: evangelical, senior adult, engineer, blonde, disabled, millennial, straight, Lutheran, nerd, Hispanic, white-collar, athletic, or thousands of others into which we tend to group ourselves and others.

Most of these groups consistently struggle for their label to be defined in a more positive light. Senior adults, for example, want to be viewed as active, engaged, and able, rather than by common negative stereotypes. Evangelicals are no exception.

These insights offer a glimpse into the intricate identity landscape of evangelical Christians; the tension between self-perception and external perception, the diverse understandings of what it means to be evangelical, and the multifaceted nature of the term itself. These all contribute to a complex narrative that evangelical Christians navigate in their interactions with both their faith and the world around them.

Maybe, by words and actions, it is time to do more to take back the true meaning of “evangelical.”

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 [Grey Matter Research](#) 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 offer additional reports on evangelical Protestants:

FUNDRAISING INSIGHTS:

- [*The Generosity Factor: Evangelicals and Giving*](#)
- [*The Generation Gap: Evangelical Giving Preferences*](#)
- [*The Favorite Charity: Evangelical Giving Priorities*](#)
- [*The Sustainers: Exploring Monthly Donor Partnerships*](#)
- [*Race & Gender in Fundraising: Exploring Potential Bias Among Evangelicals*](#)
- [*Who Controls the Wallet: Giving Decisions Among Evangelicals*](#)
- [*Strategic Creative Design: Fundraising Advertising Among Evangelicals*](#)

SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS:

- [*The Spiritual Journey: How Evangelicals Come to Faith*](#)
- [*The Renewalists: Pentecostal and Charismatic Evangelicals*](#)

CHURCH INSIGHTS:

- [*The Ripple Effect: Congregations, COVID, and the Future of Church Life*](#)
- [*The Congregational Scorecard: What Evangelicals Want in a Church*](#)

ISRAEL INSIGHTS:

- [*The Jewish Connection: Evangelicals and Israel*](#)
- [*The Holy Land Journey: Evangelicals and Israel Travel*](#)

PUBLIC POLICY INSIGHTS:

- [*Evangelicals in the Public Arena: Understanding Their Political, Moral, and Social Views*](#)

MEDIA INSIGHTS:

- [*Media Matters: Evangelicals and the Media*](#)

WELLNESS INSIGHTS:

- [*Faith & Wellness: Evangelical Insights on Healing and Physicians*](#)

ABOUT GREY MATTER RESEARCH



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**.

Just a Few Clients We Have Served

American Bible Society • National Christian Foundation • World Vision
National Association of Evangelicals • Young Life • Duke University
The Coca-Cola Company • Joyce Meyer Ministries • The American Legion
Bethesda Lutheran Communities • Covenant House • Northwest University
General Motors • The Christian and Missionary Alliance • Focus on the Family
The Assemblies of God • Children's Mercy Hospital • Catholic Relief Services
Prison Fellowship • Compassion International • Paralyzed Veterans of America
Moody Global Ministries • BMW • Cancer Treatment Centers of America

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*, and 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.

ABOUT INFINITY CONCEPTS

infinityconcepts®
Strategic Solutions for Success

Infinity Concepts is an integrated marketing-communications agency inspiring people of faith to action that specializes in the following:

- **Consulting:** We help you think more strategically and lead more effectively.
- **Branding:** We help you develop a strong and memorable brand.
- **Creative:** We provide effective and memorable creative including superior quality graphic design, copywriting, websites, direct mail, logos, and much more.
- **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.
- **Digital:** We create high-impact, cohesive messages to engage your target audience through multiple digital and social media platforms.

For over 20 years, Infinity Concepts has helped its clients *think more strategically, operate more efficiently, and communicate more effectively.*

Just a Few Clients We Have Served

American Friends of Magen David Adom • Cancer Treatment Centers of America
Charisma Media • Church of God of Prophecy • Eagles' Wings • Evangelical Press Association
Faithful Central Bible Church • Faith Life Now • Foursquare Missions International
Friends of Israel • Friends of the IDF • Good Life Television (TV45)
Holocaust Remembrance Association • International Christian Embassy Jerusalem
Israel Ministry of Tourism • The Jewish Agency for Israel • Marilyn Hickey Ministries
Metro World Child • Mission Eurasia • NRBTv • One Voice Ministries • Open Doors USA
Proclaiming Justice to the Nations • Total Living Network (TLN) • ZOE International

You can learn more about Infinity Concepts and how our team of experts can help you make a bigger impact. If you are looking for an agency to be your thoughtful strategic partner and impassioned advocate, Infinity Concepts may be for you: www.infinityconcepts.com

Infinity Concepts President, Mark Dreistadt, and Chief Growth Officer, Darrell Law, can be reached at 724-733-1200 or by email at Mark@infinityconcepts.com and Darrell@infinityconcepts.com.

Additional FREE 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. [Click here.](#)

■ 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. [Click here.](#)

■ 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. [Click here.](#)

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. [Click here.](#)

■ Donor Trend Analysis

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! [Click here](#) 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.

■ *Strategic Solutions* Newsletter and Blog

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.

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