

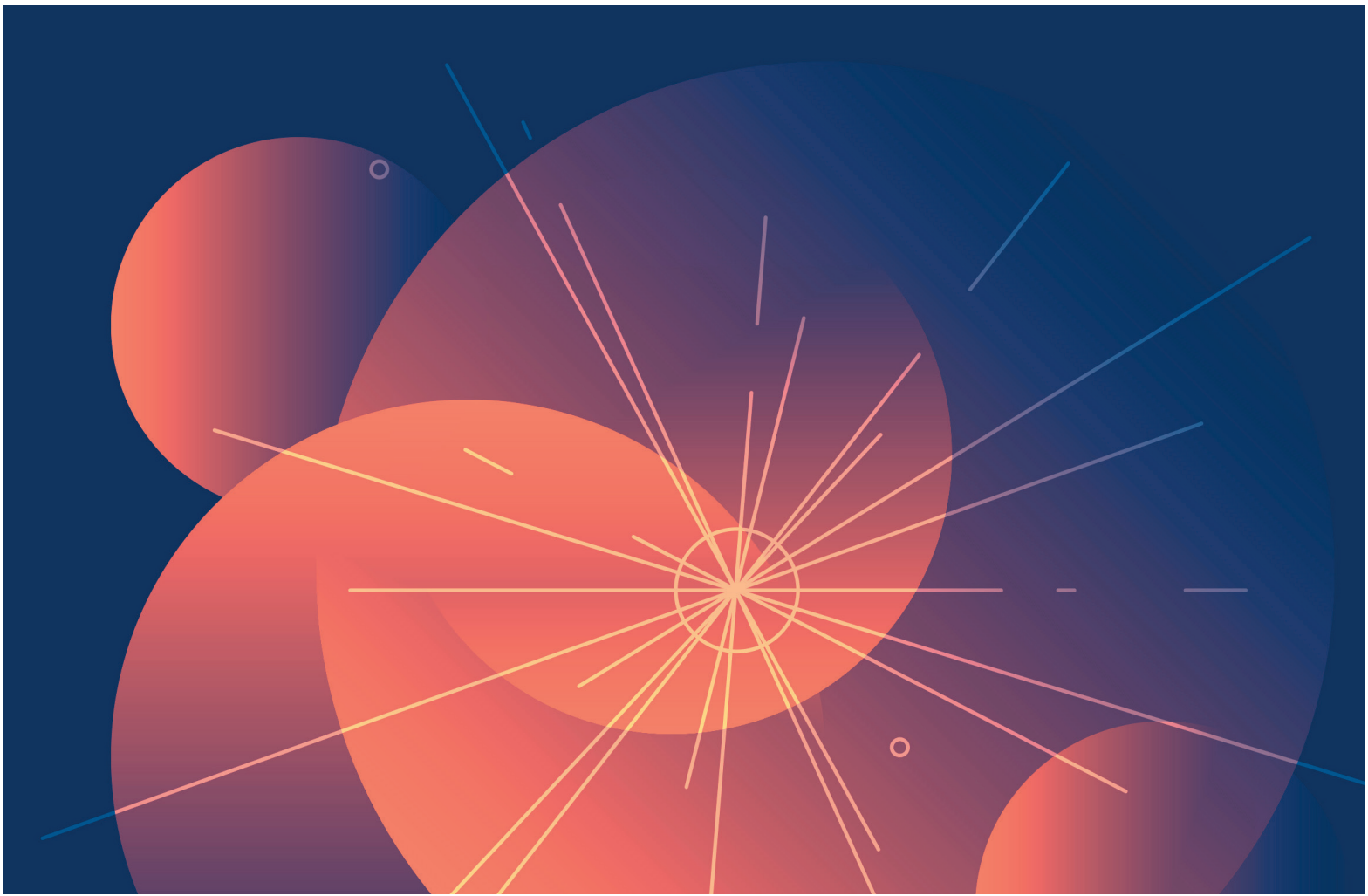
A Barna Report
Produced in Partnership
with Alpha USA

Barna



REVIVING EVANGELISM

Current Realities That
Demand a New Vision for
Sharing Faith



REVIVING EVANGELISM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What's the first thing you want to do after you experience a defining moment? Share it! It's natural to want others to experience what we love. Unfortunately, when it comes to evangelism in America, this instinct is fading fast; U.S. Christians are losing a desire to share their faith.

Why is this happening? Is there an increase in self-centeredness, a decrease in authentic spiritual experiences, a lack of teaching on evangelism in our churches? Are our methods to train and send Christians into the world faulty or dated? Our drive to understand *why* is what inspired Alpha USA to commission this project.

Once we understand the *why*, then we can get to the *what*. What needs to change so we can buck the trend and meaningfully share the love and truth of Jesus in a country where he is desperately needed? Because Romans 10:14 remains as true as it has ever been: "How can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?"

What will it take to revive evangelism across the United States? We long for the day when every Christian of every generation is empowered to share Jesus, when every church is growing in its impact in their community and millions more say yes to Christ. Although the statistics are startling, the opportunity is now and the generation who can lead the charge is right here in our midst. We are part of the larger story of what God is doing to bring renewal to our communities and revitalization to his Church.

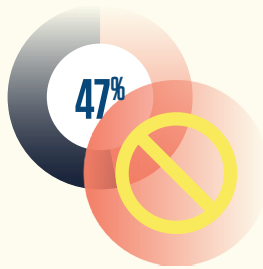
Let's learn together what it will take to see an awakening in our day.

Craig Springer
Executive Director
Alpha USA

KEY FINDINGS

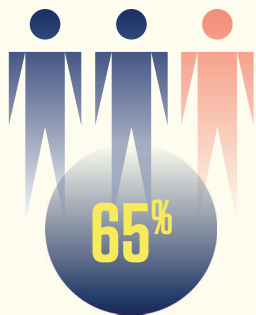
● Among practicing Christians

● Among non-Christians and lapsed Christians



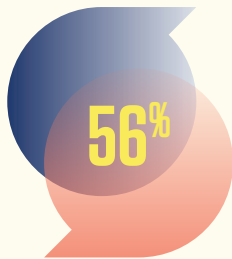
Nearly half of Millennial practicing Christians say it is wrong to evangelize (47%).

In fact, they are more likely than non-Christians (20%) and lapsed Christians (17%) to strongly agree that “it is wrong to share one’s personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith” (28%).



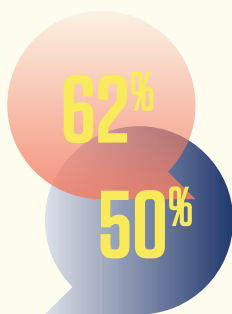
At the same time, two out of three Millennials believe being a witness about Jesus is part of their faith (65%)

and strongly agree that “the best thing that could ever happen to someone is for them to come to know Jesus” (68%)—a strong majority, but a smaller proportion than among older adults (82%).



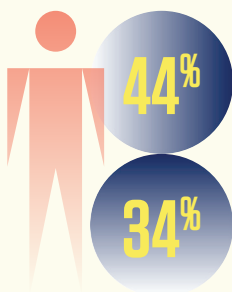
More than half report having two or fewer conversations about faith with a non-Christian during the past year (56%).

Not surprisingly, those with at least seven non-Christian friends or family members are more likely than those with none to have talked about faith 10 or more times (27% vs. 9%).



The top qualities they would look for in a person with whom to talk about faith are “listens without judgment” (62%) and “does not force a conclusion” (50%).

However, only a minority would say the Christians they know personally possess these qualities (34% listens without judgment; 26% does not force a conclusion).



Some non-Christians say they might be more interested in Christianity if they had more evidence (44%) and the faith had a better reputation (34%).

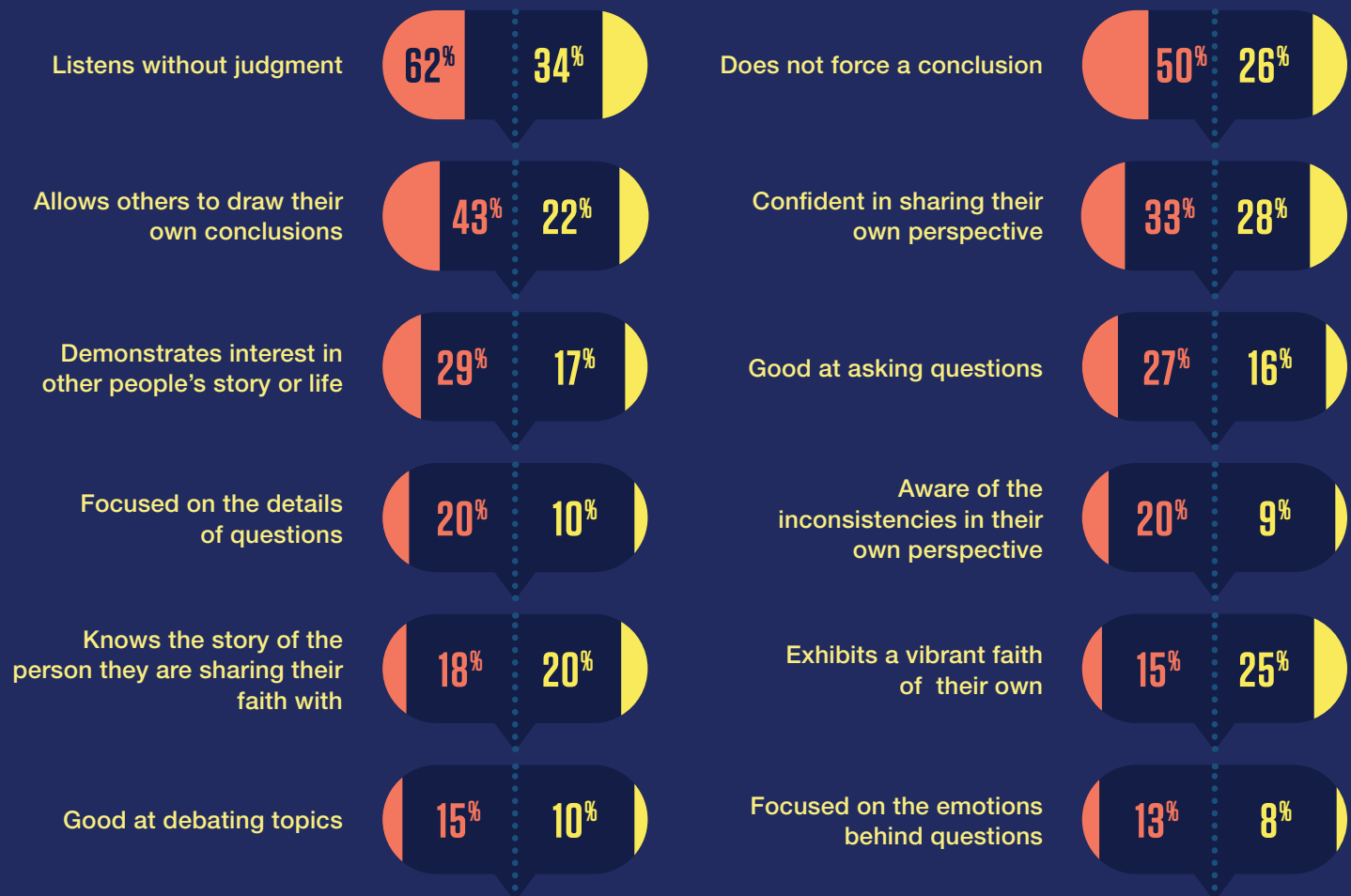
Practicing Christians, however, tend to underestimate the importance of evidence (14%) and reputation (23%) to non-Christians’ interest.

LET'S ASK THE EVANGELIZED ABOUT EVANGELISM

What they say about Christians and conversations

Nearly all non-Christians and lapsed Christians have a friend or family member who practices and prioritizes Christianity—but these believers are not always ideal conversation partners when it comes to faith. Here are the qualities people say they value in a person with whom they would talk about spiritual matters, alongside descriptions they would apply to their Christian friends and family.

● Someone I would talk to about faith ● Christians I know personally



n=1,001 US adults 18 and older who are not practicing Christians; May 2018

“Listening is an act of love. Sharing faith is a gift offered from a place of humility and generosity.” -Michelle Jones

LET'S ASK THE EVANGELIZED ABOUT EVANGELISM

I'D BE MORE INTERESTED IN LEARNING ABOUT CHRISTIANITY IF...

Lapsed Christians

With more experience in the church, lapsed Christians may have more baggage—expressed in a desire to see Christians acting differently. They also seem to have missed out on having a personal spiritual experience—something that possibly led them to leaving the church or the faith in the first place.

Most important

31%

I saw various churches in my community working together more

32%

I had an eye-opening spiritual experience myself

31%

The Christians I knew were more humble and aware of their shortcomings

Least important

13%

The Christians I know were more articulate about their faith

Religious Non-Christians

As part of other religious traditions, this group is already willing to believe in the supernatural, but they see Christianity as lacking in evidence. They also point toward the church's reputation and its ability to work with others.

Most important

31%

Christianity had better evidence to support it

31%

Christianity had a better reputation

29%

I saw various churches in my community working together more

Least important

10%

The Christians I know demonstrated a more vibrant personal faith

Atheists / Agnostics / Nones

Unsurprisingly, this group is most concerned with evidence. Relatedly, they might believe if they could personally experience it for themselves. And, once again, the reputation of Christianity gets in their way.

Most important

44%

Christianity had better evidence to support it

35%

Christianity had a better reputation

29%

I had an eye-opening spiritual experience myself

Least important

10%

The Christians I know were more articulate about their faith

n=1,001 US adults 18 and older who are not practicing Christians; May 2018

“The gospel never changes, but because culture and history do, the way we communicate it changes.” -Tim Keller

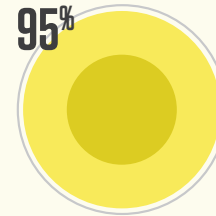
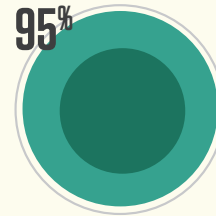
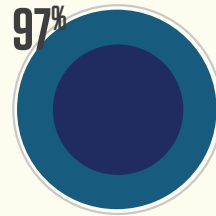
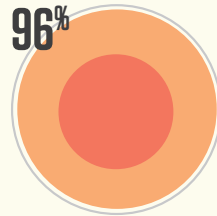
Generational Differences on Faith-Sharing

% strongly + somewhat agree among US practicing Christians

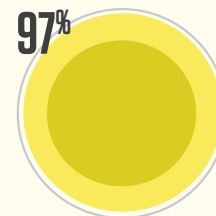
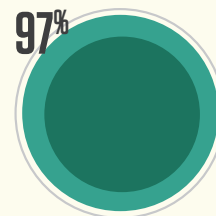
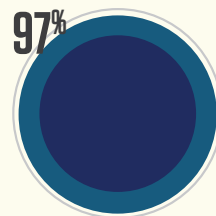
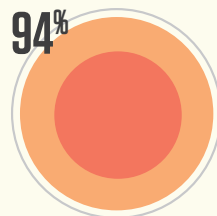
●● Millennials ●● Gen X ●● Boomers ●● Elders

● Dark = Strongly agree
● Light = Somewhat agree

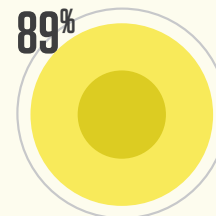
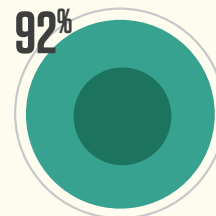
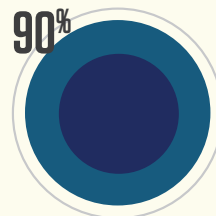
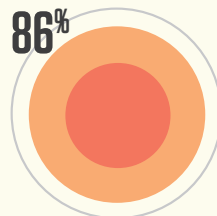
Part of my faith means being a witness about Jesus



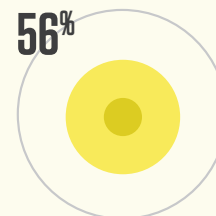
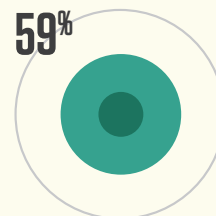
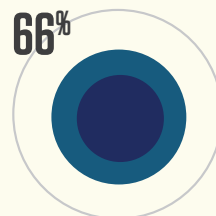
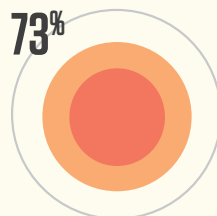
The best thing that could ever happen to someone is for them to come to know Jesus



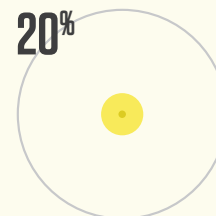
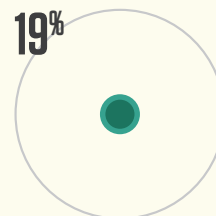
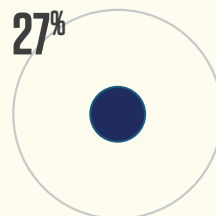
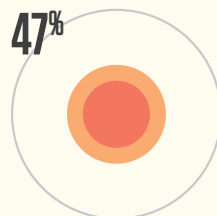
When someone raises questions about faith, I know how to respond



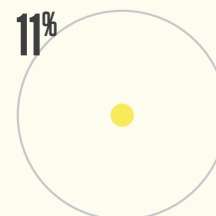
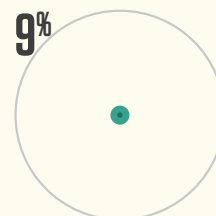
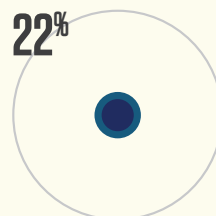
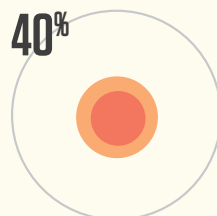
I am gifted at sharing my faith with other people



It is wrong to share one's personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith



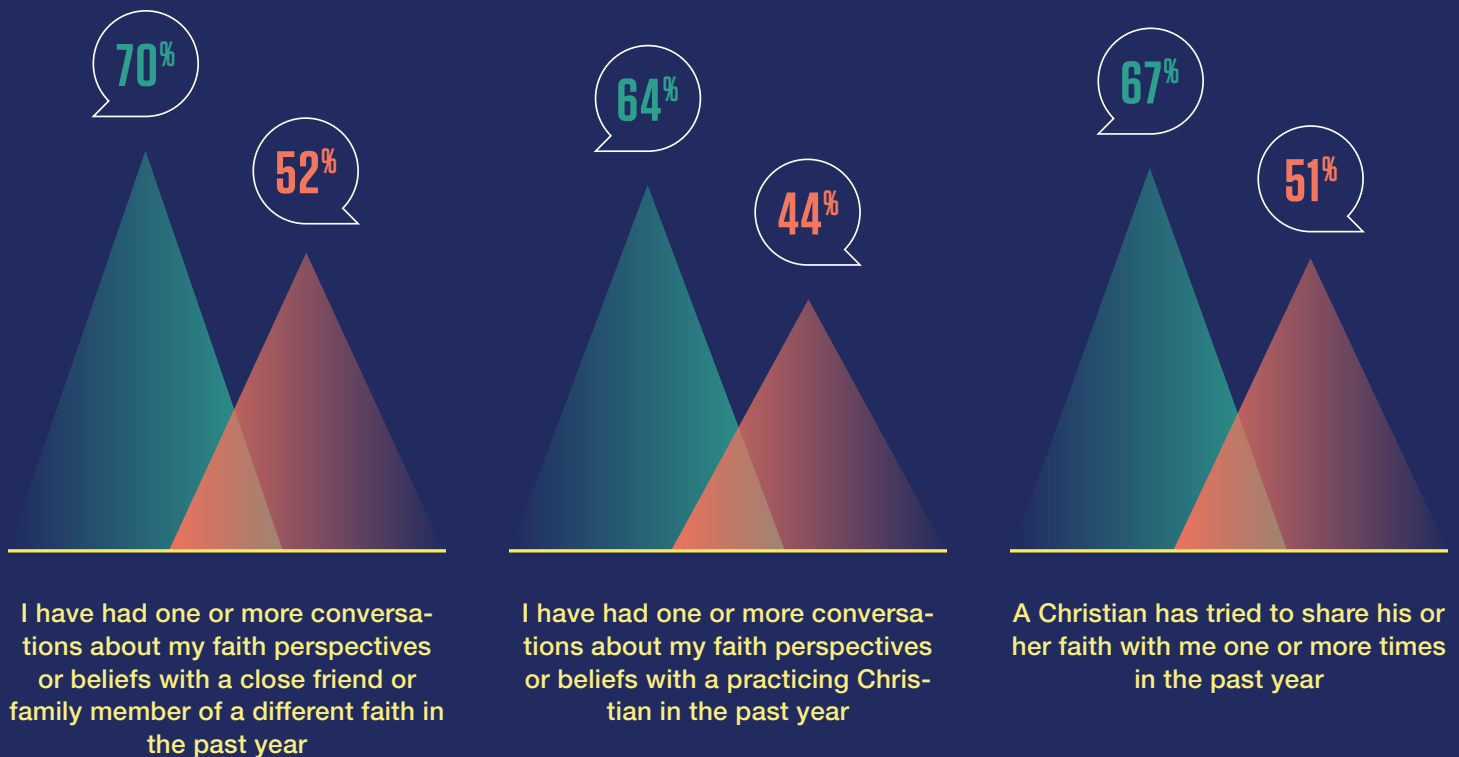
If someone disagrees with you, it means that they're judging you



YOUNG NON-CHRISTIANS TALK ABOUT SPIRITUAL MATTERS A LOT MORE THAN OLDER ADULTS

Millennials report many more faith conversations and evangelistic encounters than older non-Christians. This is partly due to greater religious diversity among their family and friends—but that’s not the whole story. For at least some young adults, there appears to be greater curiosity about spirituality and, specifically, deeper interest in Christianity.

● Millennial non-Christians ● All older non-Christians



... AND ARE TWICE AS LIKELY TO EXPRESS PERSONAL INTEREST IN CHRISTIANITY

I am interested in learning more about Christianity and what it could mean for my life



n=620 US non-Christians 18 and older; May 2018

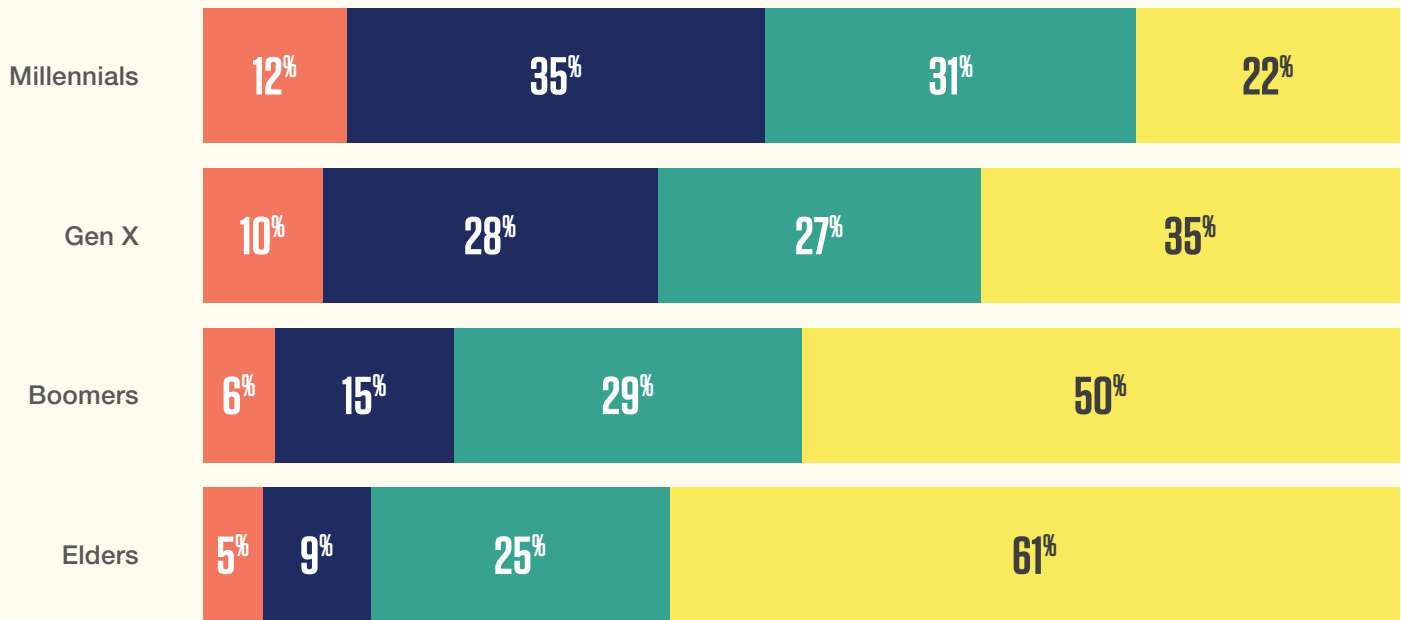
“The relational skill of conversation, as modeled by Jesus, encourages openness and connection.” -Rufus Smith

Feelings of Emptiness and Rejection, by Generation

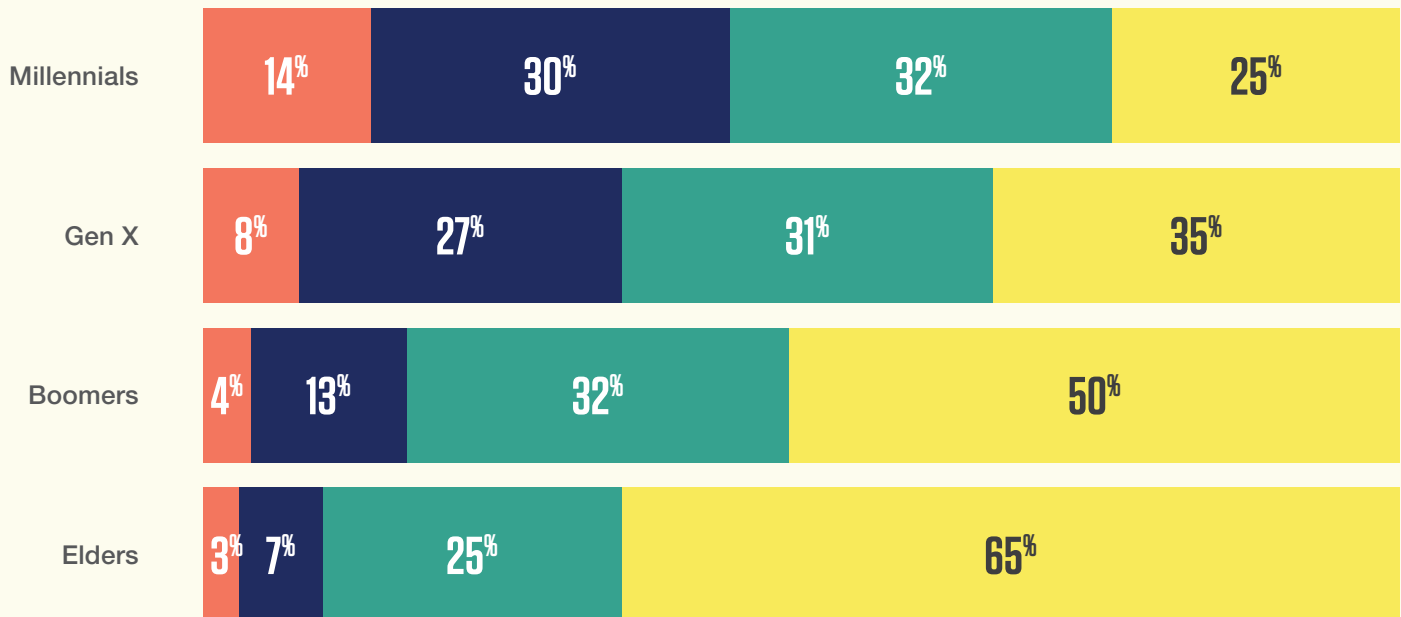
% among US non-Christians and lapsed Christians

● Agree strongly ● Agree somewhat ● Disagree somewhat ● Disagree strongly

I experience a general sense of emptiness



I often feel rejected



n=1,001 US adults 18 and older who are not practicing Christians; May 2018.

“People with unanswered spiritual questions tend to be more open to exploring faith.”

People's need for Jesus hasn't changed



Many today are missing a sense of *purpose* and *meaning*. They're asking deep questions of identity. *Who am I? What does it mean to be human?* Reviving evangelism will require a gospel response to these kinds of questions.

In evaluating the findings from this study, here are four realities to consider—four realities that, if we want to work toward a new gospel movement in our day, we must honestly grapple with:

We Need Deeper Convictions

We're Evangelizing in the Age of Algorithms

We Must Get Better at Conversation

Christianity Is True and Good

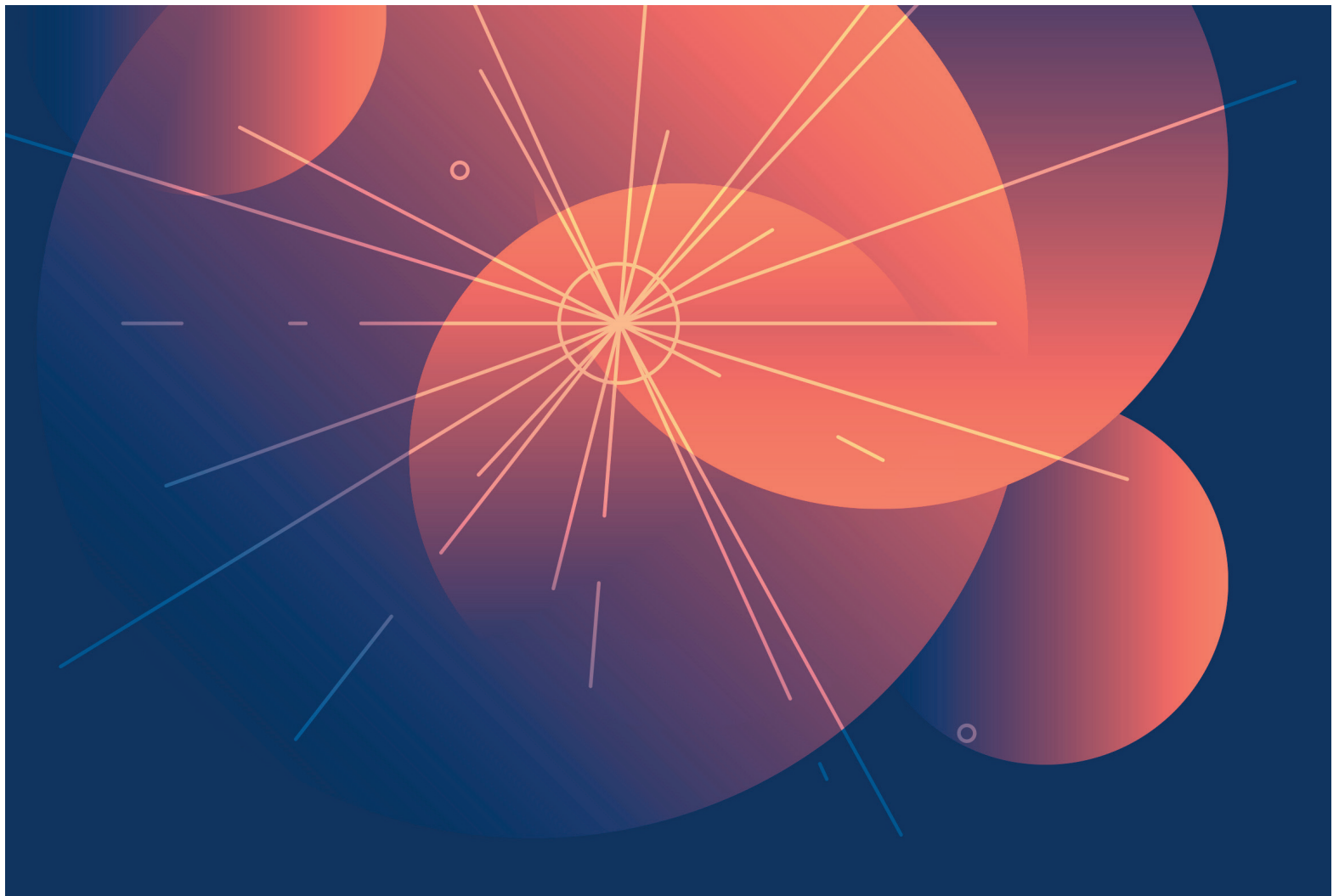
If we took time to listen, to get clear on the unanswered spiritual questions that our neighbors, friends and colleagues are carrying around—how would

our evangelism efforts change? At the very least, we'd become better listeners and more convinced that talking about Jesus is worthy of inclusion in our everyday conversations with others.

Ask God to show you his heart for the world and for those who do not yet know him. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, keep living Christ's kingdom where you are—and inviting others to join you.

By David Kinnaman

With contributions from Aly Hawkins,
Paul Pastor and Brooke Hempell



HOW CAN THEY HEAR UNLESS SOMEONE TELLS THEM?

The apostle's question to the Christians in Rome is just as relevant for Christ-followers today, who are heirs of Jesus' Great Commission: "Go and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 26:19). But a number of factors are curbing many Christians' enthusiasm for faith-sharing, including the decline of religion in America, a spreading apathy toward spiritual matters and a growing cultural suspicion of people of faith. Where does that leave evangelism?

Based on all-new Barna research commissioned by Alpha USA, *Reviving Evangelism* compares the faith-sharing experiences and expectations of Christians and non-Christians. Inside you'll find:

- New data on how Americans express spiritual openness and hunger and how they think about their spiritual lives
- Comparative analysis of non-Christians' expectations of faith conversations and Christians' understanding of their expectations and priorities
- Insights from Josh Chen, Mary Healy, Michelle Jones, Tim Keller, Kevin Palau, Rufus Smith and other ministry practitioners that shed clear light on what the data means for Christians and their churches
- Infographics, charts and other data visualizations
- And much more!

This new report is a clear-eyed assessment of Christian evangelism in America today: what's working, what's not and what must change for Christians to carry on the legacy of gospel-sharing inherited from the apostles.



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