

Evangelism as Answering People's Questions

Scripture teaches us to “[a]lways be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV). We are to be ready to give an answer—and answers imply questions. A good way to do evangelism is to start by understanding the questions that people are asking in culture today.

NAMB's Center for Missional Research recently partnered with Zogby International to learn what questions Americans are asking about spiritual issues. Results are now available from the 1,200 telephone interviews conducted by Zogby in late March, 2006.

The standard evangelistic approach for several decades has begun with the question, “If you were to die today do you know for sure you would go to heaven?” I must confess, I typically do not use this approach because I have assumed that there are few people outside of hospital beds or foxholes actually asking the question. My assumption was that our survey would prove that to be the case. I was wrong.

Many people are wondering about their eternal destiny. **One of every 5 respondents said they wonder daily about the certainty of going to heaven.** Another 13 percent think about this weekly, 12 percent monthly, and 9 percent annually. Only 44 percent, 4 out of 9, said they never wonder about this. Interesting numbers, indeed. But, are there other questions that people are asking?

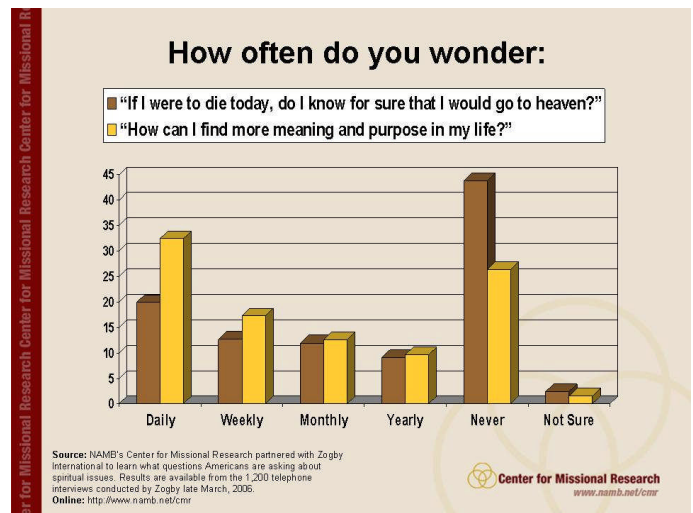
In the interviews, we also asked “How often do you wonder, How can I find more meaning and purpose in my life?” Remarkably, almost **1 of every 3 respondents wonders about this question daily.** Another 17 percent contemplate this weekly, 13 percent monthly, and 10 percent yearly. Half of those interviewed wonder about how to find more meaning in their life at least once a week. Seems that what we have here is a question very relevant to our culture. In fact, only 26 percent, about 1 in 4, said they never wonder how to have more meaning or purpose.

Do subgroups of our American culture contemplate purpose of life and eternal security similarly? Groups that wonder more than the typical American does about making it to heaven include those age 65 and over, those with less than a high school education, republicans, African Americans (33 percent wonder daily about this), Catholics, and those with household income between \$25,000 to \$35,000. Conversely, Americans ages 30 to 49 wonder less often about their final destiny, as do college graduates, democrats, Hispanics, Jews and those with no religious preference, those with income over \$75,000, and those who do not indicate that they are born again.

Do cultural subgroups also vary as to how often they wonder how to add meaning and purpose to their life? Democrats are more concerned about finding purpose than republicans, but less concerned about the security of their eternal destination. Nearly half of African American think daily about how to have purpose and meaning. Hispanics think about this much less; in fact, 1 of 3 said they never think about this.

Income has a large impact on how often Americans wonder about adding meaning and purpose. More than 40 percent of the poorer portion of our culture (income less than \$25,000) think about adding purpose to their life every day, compared to 32 percent of middle income persons (\$25,000 to \$75,000), and only 25 percent of the affluent culture (more than \$75,000). With affluence comes less worry about purpose and meaning.

Presenting the gospel is about telling good news—and that news includes that Christ gives both “meaning and purpose” to life now—and “heaven” for eternity. Both of these matter, but evangelism starts as we present the gospel at a person's point of need—and our efforts should reflect that. It would appear that people are asking different questions and we should love them enough to answer their questions and not just give our presentations.



Ed Stetzer is Missiologist and Senior Director of NAMB's Center for Missional Research. For more information on this and other studies, go to www.namb.net/cmri.