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# *Why People Are Reluctant to Discuss Faith*

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**S**ocial media and mobile devices have fundamentally changed the way we communicate—**particularly about faith**. Substantive spiritual conversations have become harder not only because of 280-character limits but also because of shifts in the way the public perceives or subscribes to religion in the first place. For his most recent book, ***Learning to Speak God from Scratch***, Barna worked with religion columnist **Jonathan Merritt** to interview U.S. adults for whom spiritual conversations are rare or nonexistent to find out why they don't talk more often about faith. This research can also be seen in ***Spiritual Conversations in a Digital Age***, a new report in partnership with **Lutheran Hour Ministries**. The infographic excerpt below outlines the most common reasons for the reluctance of American adults to engage in spiritual conversations.

People who don't talk very often about faith offer different reasons, but most of these fall into two broad categories: avoidance and ambivalence.

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People who don't talk very often about faith offer different reasons, but most of these fall into two broad categories: *avoidance* and *ambivalence*. For instance, the two *avoidant* responses (among the top four) given for not engaging in conversations are: "Religious conversations always seem to create tension or arguments" (28%) and "I'm put off by how religion has been politicized" (17%). The other two responses indicate *ambivalence*: "I'm not religious and don't care about these kinds of topics" (23%) and "I don't feel like I know enough to talk about religious or spiritual topics" (17%). Here's the full list of options:

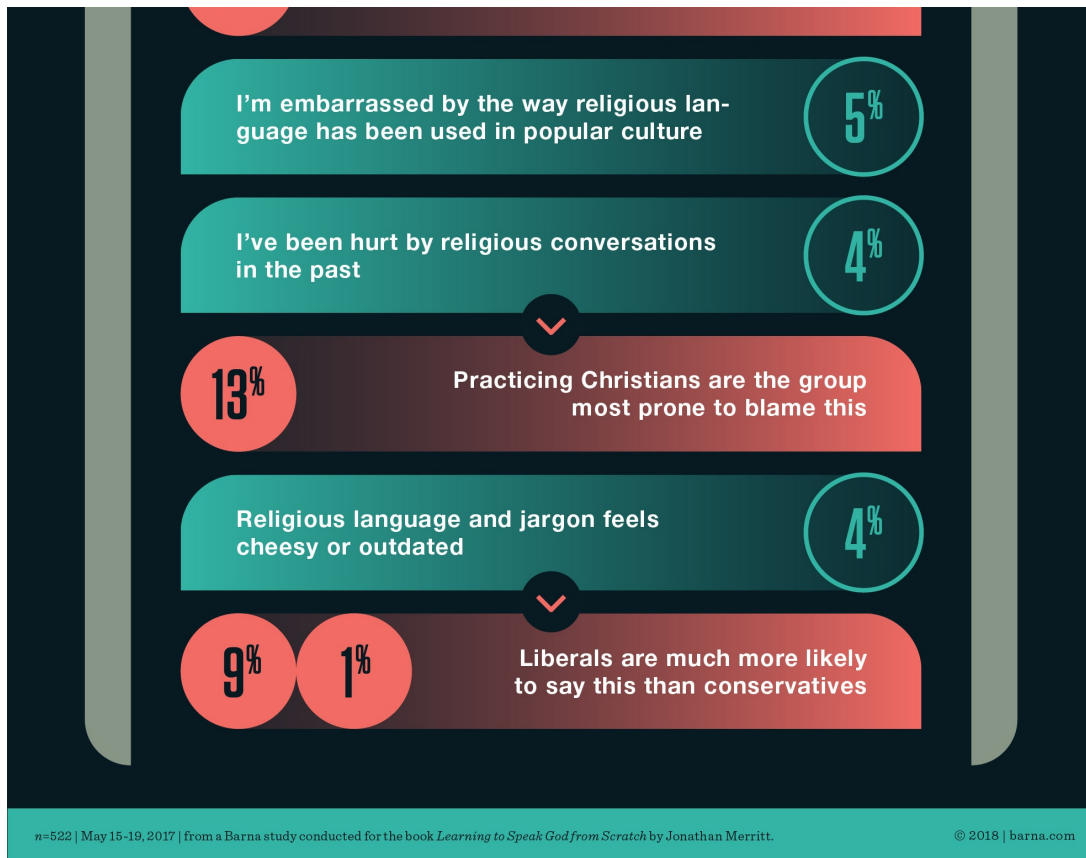
- Religious conversations always seem to create tension or arguments: 28%
- I'm not religious and don't care about these kinds of topics: 23%

- I'm put off by how religion has been politicized: 17%
- I don't feel like I know enough to talk about religious or spiritual topics: 17%
- I don't want to be known as a religious person: 7%
- I don't know how to talk about religious or spiritual topics without sounding weird: 6%
- I'm afraid people will see me as a fanatic or extremist: 5%
- I'm embarrassed by the way religious language has been used in popular culture: 5%
- I've been hurt by religious conversations in the past: 4%
- Religious language and jargon feels cheesy or outdated: 4%

Among all adults who rarely engage, Boomers are significantly more likely to say they are not religious and don't care about these kinds of topics (32% vs. 17% Millennials and Gen X, 22% Elders). Likewise, political liberals are more likely than conservatives to choose this option (28% vs. 15%). These groups tend more toward ambivalence or indifference than to frustration or fear.

Millennials, however, are much more likely to feel afraid that people will see them as a fanatic or extremist (10% vs. 3% Gen X, 4% Boomers, 1% Elders). This generation has grown up in a culture that values tolerance and freeing people to make their own decisions. One of the great evils is to be perceived as bigoted. It makes sense that a fear of coming across as intolerant (often associated, as Millennials came of age, with religiosity) could turn them away from the topic altogether. Additionally, as we know from other research, young adults are more likely than any other age group to have friends who are different from them: different ethnicities, different religions, different social and political beliefs. They tend, therefore, to be more sensitive to offending other groups. They expect to live in a pluralistic society and so fear association with a group—fundamentalist Christians—that is often represented as opposed to ways of thinking or believing other than their own.





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### About the Research

The primary source of data in this report is a survey of 1,714 U.S. adults, comprised of an over-sample of 535 Millennials and 689 Practicing Christians, conducted online June 22–July 13, 2017. Respondents were recruited from a national consumer panel, and minimal weighting was applied to ensure representation of certain demographic factors, such as age, gender, ethnicity and region. The sample error for this data is plus or minus 2.2% at the 95% confidence level for the total sample. A subgroup of participants had either: “shared my views on faith or religion in the last 5 years” OR “someone has shared their views on faith or religion with me in the last 5 years.”

**Self-identified Christians** select “Christian” from a list of religious affiliations.

**Non-Christians** do not self-identify as Christian.

**Practicing Christians** identify as Christian, have attended church within the past month and strongly agree that their faith is very important in their life today.

**Non-practicing Christians** identify as Christian, but do not qualify as practicing under the definition above.

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### **About Barna Group**

Barna Group is a private, non-partisan, for-profit organization under the umbrella of the Issachar Companies. Located in Ventura, California, Barna Group has been conducting and analyzing primary research to understand cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors since 1984.

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