

FOCUS^{ON} THE FAMILY[®]

REPORTS

MARRIAGE
HEALTH IN
America

A STATE OF THE FAMILY STUDY



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A Message from Jim Daly

PRESIDENT AND CEO, FOCUS ON THE FAMILY

As a nonprofit ministry dedicated to helping families thrive in Christ, Focus on the Family has a vested interest in the institution of marriage. When the relationship between a husband and wife operates as it should, it is one of God's greatest blessings to mankind, making a positive impact not only on the couple involved but rippling out to their children, their community, and the nation.

Unfortunately, the opposite is also true. When marriages disintegrate, couples suffer, children suffer, communities suffer, and the nation suffers. The challenges facing our country, and the factors contributing to them, are myriad and complex, but there's no denying that the decline of the traditional two-parent family has played a significant role. U.S. Census data reveals that since 1950, married households have decreased dramatically while single-parent and nonfamily households have steadily increased. In addition, in 2022, only 47% of households were headed by married couples, down from 71% in 1970; and less than two-thirds of all family groups with children under age 18 were maintained by married parents.

Since 1970, the median marriage age for women has increased from 21 to 29, and for men from 23 to 30.¹ As marriage diminishes and is no longer prioritized in the culture, the nuclear family's place as the fundamental unit of society will inevitably diminish as well. We can see this in the Census data revealing that the percentage of single-person households has more than doubled, from around 15% in 1960 to 36% in 2024.² It's difficult to read this statistic and not be immediately reminded of our nation's much-publicized **epidemic of loneliness**.

Because Focus on the Family believes that stronger marriages and families result in a stronger society, we partnered with the global research firm Ipsos to survey households and gauge the general health of marriage in America. Some of our findings were troubling but not surprising in light of the Census data. But there were some pleasant surprises as well, most notably that **74% of respondents described their marriage as *healthy***. That's welcome news!

Even more significant, **the percentage of healthy marriages increases to an amazing 82% when we narrowed down our findings to those who are deeply committed to the Christian faith**. Without question, living by one's Christian convictions makes a difference. We'll explore this further in the pages that follow.

We believe these findings will help us better understand the 74% of people who consider their marriages healthy, and also better support the significant 21% of those who would describe their marriage as troubled or *in-crisis*. I believe this national survey, conducted in partnership with Ipsos, offers valuable insights for those who, like Focus on the Family, want to see the institution of marriage strengthened and restored as an indispensable contributor to the future health of our nation and its families.

Why Marriage Health?

Why another research project on marriage? There are a number of studies that reveal information about the state of marriage in America. Between U.S. Census data and the General Social Survey (GSS2024), along with solid findings from Pew Research and Gallup, the topic of marriage has been widely included in the national conversation in recent years.

Even so, as an organization for which marriage—and specifically, the health of marriage—is a primary concern, Focus on the Family (FOTF) believes there is more that might be said. FOTF has conducted family-related research for more than 30 years. Historically, the purpose of that research has primarily been to measure the effectiveness of our marriage programs and make them more effective. In contrast, this new research effort is intended to broaden our understanding of key marriage trends nationwide and the underlying influences that contribute to successful marriage relationships for the long term.

Our survey was designed to capture a broad national snapshot of marriage “quality” and satisfaction, and then to drill down and discover whether religious faith—and more specifically, living as a committed, practicing Christian—might impact marriage health.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO LEARN?

- ✓ *How are Christians doing with marriage?*
- ✓ *How many couples consider their marriage relationship healthy?*
- ✓ *How many consider their relationships in crisis, and how many are somewhere in between?*
- ✓ *If someone considers themselves flourishing as an individual, will that positively impact their marriage?*
- ✓ *Are divorce rates lower among certain segments of the population? Which ones?*
- ✓ *What influences a healthy marriage?*
- ✓ *What problems are most marriages facing?*
- ✓ *In what areas of marriage are most couples doing well? In what areas are most doing poorly?*
- ✓ *How many seek outside help when dealing with marriage challenges?*
- ✓ *What are current cultural attitudes toward the institution of marriage?*

The term “health,” in this study, is focused on relationships that were characterized by respondents in terms of longevity, commitment, and flourishing, rather than simply by *satisfaction* or *happiness*. While FOTF is an unapologetically Christian organization, there was no agenda behind this research other than to learn and then follow the results wherever they might lead. Among the broad range of marriage studies undertaken nationwide over the years, relatively few have investigated the impact of faith—and specifically, Christian faith—on marriage quality and outcomes.

With this in mind, our research was tailored to answer some specific questions (highlighted in the center).

We believe our survey methodology, outlined on the following page, captures some unique and noteworthy insights on marriage health in the U.S. Some of them reflect expected outcomes in light of other current research, but some are quite surprising. Our hope is that the findings presented in Focus on the Family’s *Marriage Health in America* will add both substance and nuance to the national conversation about marriage.



U.S. CENSUS & OTHER RESEARCH

To better understand the findings of the *Marriage Health in America* survey, it's important to consider **secondary data** from the U.S. Census Bureau and other sources. Here are some noteworthy national trends.

People are getting married less. According to USA Facts,

“ In 2024, U.S. adults were less likely to be married than at almost any point since the Census Bureau began tracking marital status in 1940.³

In an interview with the *Christian Science Monitor*, Brad Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, noted,

“ Since 1970, the marriage rate has fallen by more than 60%. For young adults, we're projecting that 1 in 3 adults will never marry, heading into record demographic territory. About 1 in 2 adults currently are not married, and that's also a record.⁴

The divorce rate is down ... but still not in a great place. In that same interview with the *Christian Science Monitor*, Dr. Wilcox says:

“ Marriage has become more selective along educational, financial, and religious lines. We're seeing that divorce has come down in America by about 40% since 1980.⁵

A decreasing majority of Americans describe their marriage as “very happy.” Findings from the General Social Survey indicate that the number of Americans who describe their marriage as “very happy” has decreased from around 68% in 1973 to around 61% in 2024.⁶

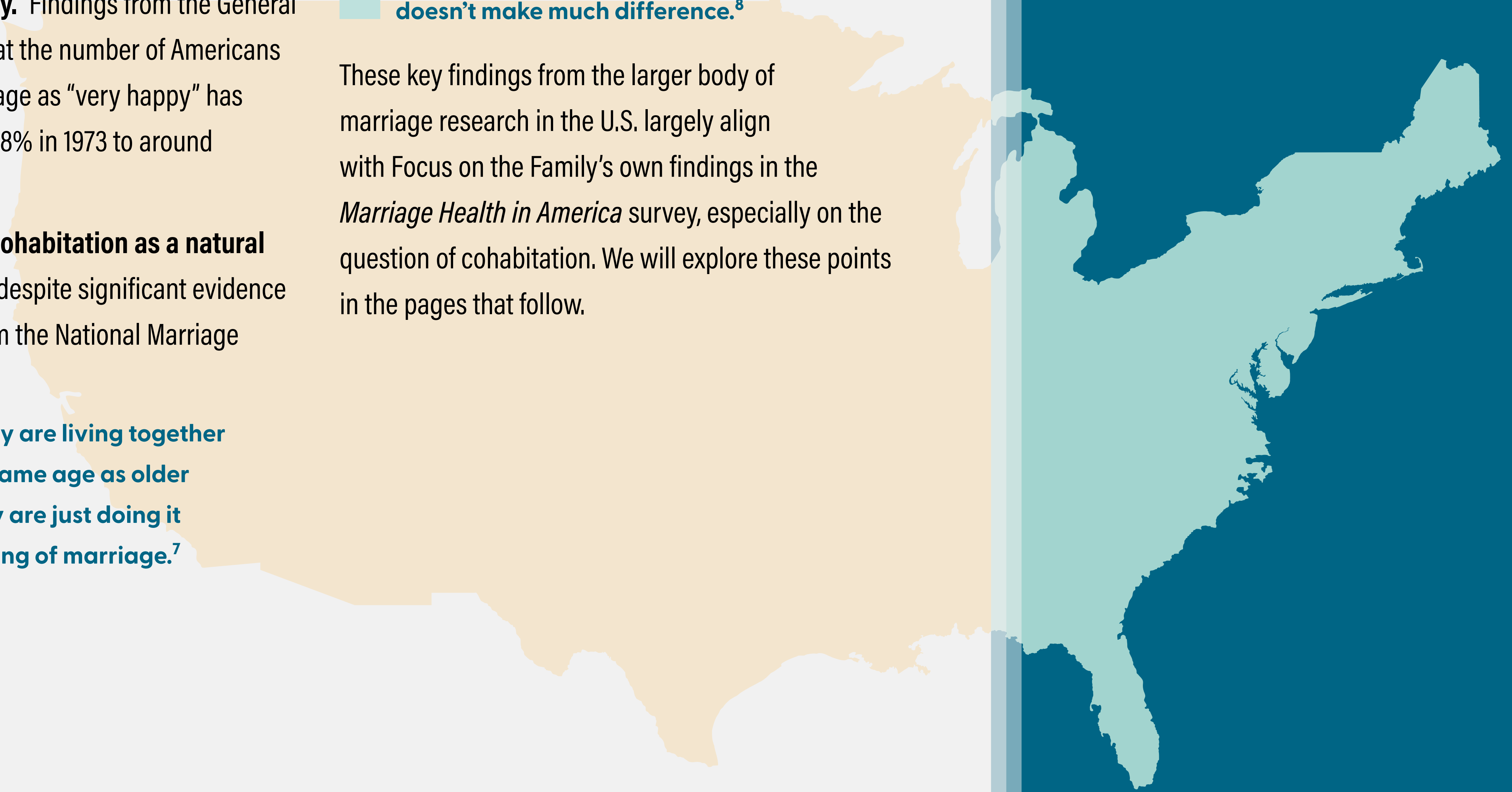
Younger couples view cohabitation as a natural precursor to marriage, despite significant evidence that it is not. A report from the National Marriage Project states,

“ Young people today are living together as couples at the same age as older generations – they are just doing it outside of the setting of marriage.⁷

Similarly, the *Marriage and Cohabitation in the U.S.* report from Pew Research states:

“ About half of U.S. adults (48%) say couples who live together before marriage have a better chance of having a successful marriage than those who don't live together before marriage; 13% say couples who live together before marriage have a worse chance of having a successful marriage and 38% say it doesn't make much difference.⁸

These key findings from the larger body of marriage research in the U.S. largely align with Focus on the Family's own findings in the *Marriage Health in America* survey, especially on the question of cohabitation. We will explore these points in the pages that follow.



MARRIAGE HEALTH IN *America*

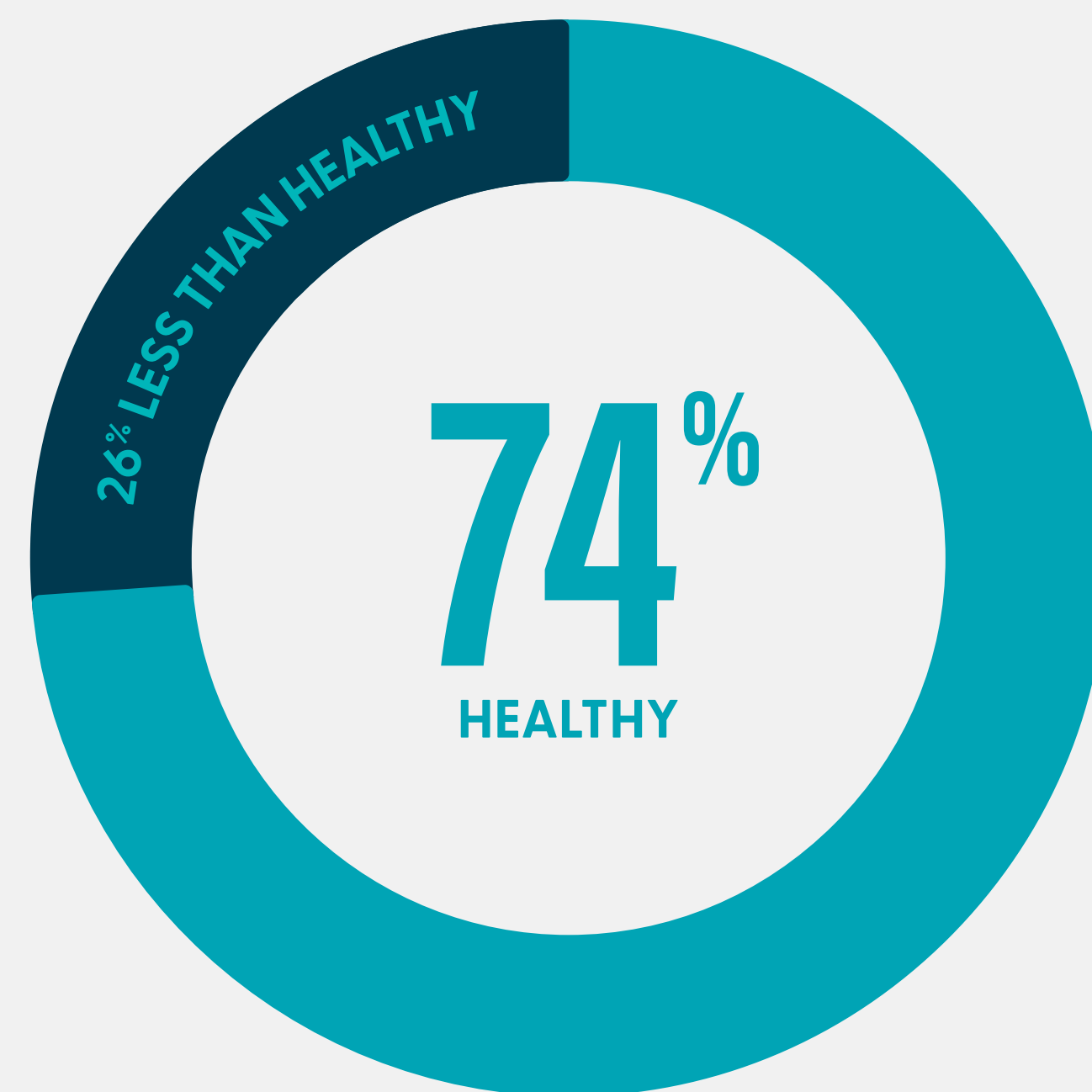
KEY INSIGHTS

While this study revealed a broad range of findings across different marriage areas, a handful of survey results offered particularly meaningful insights. It's important to note that this was a national poll conducted with one spouse in a marriage relationship, so the main findings are considered **self-reported** evaluations of marital health, and from only one spouse's point of view.

So, before diving into the full report, we want to highlight a few of the findings that stood out...

STATE OF MARRIAGE HEALTH

74% of marital relationships in the U.S. may be considered as *healthy*. Christians—particularly those practicing their faith—were found by the survey to be the healthiest.



STATE OF CRISIS

21% of marriages may be considered in a state of *crisis*—where the couple is pursuing divorce or considering divorce or just have no hope for the marriage. *Convictional Christians* were found to experience the lowest rate of a crisis state.



INFLUENCES ON MARRIAGE HEALTH

Respondents suggested that marital areas including *trust; love for each other; respect for each other; sexual intimacy; and listening to each other* are the top five drivers affecting a healthy marriage. Statistical modeling techniques further revealed that *feeling close to each other* and having an *emotionally healthy* spouse were also strong drivers of relationship health.

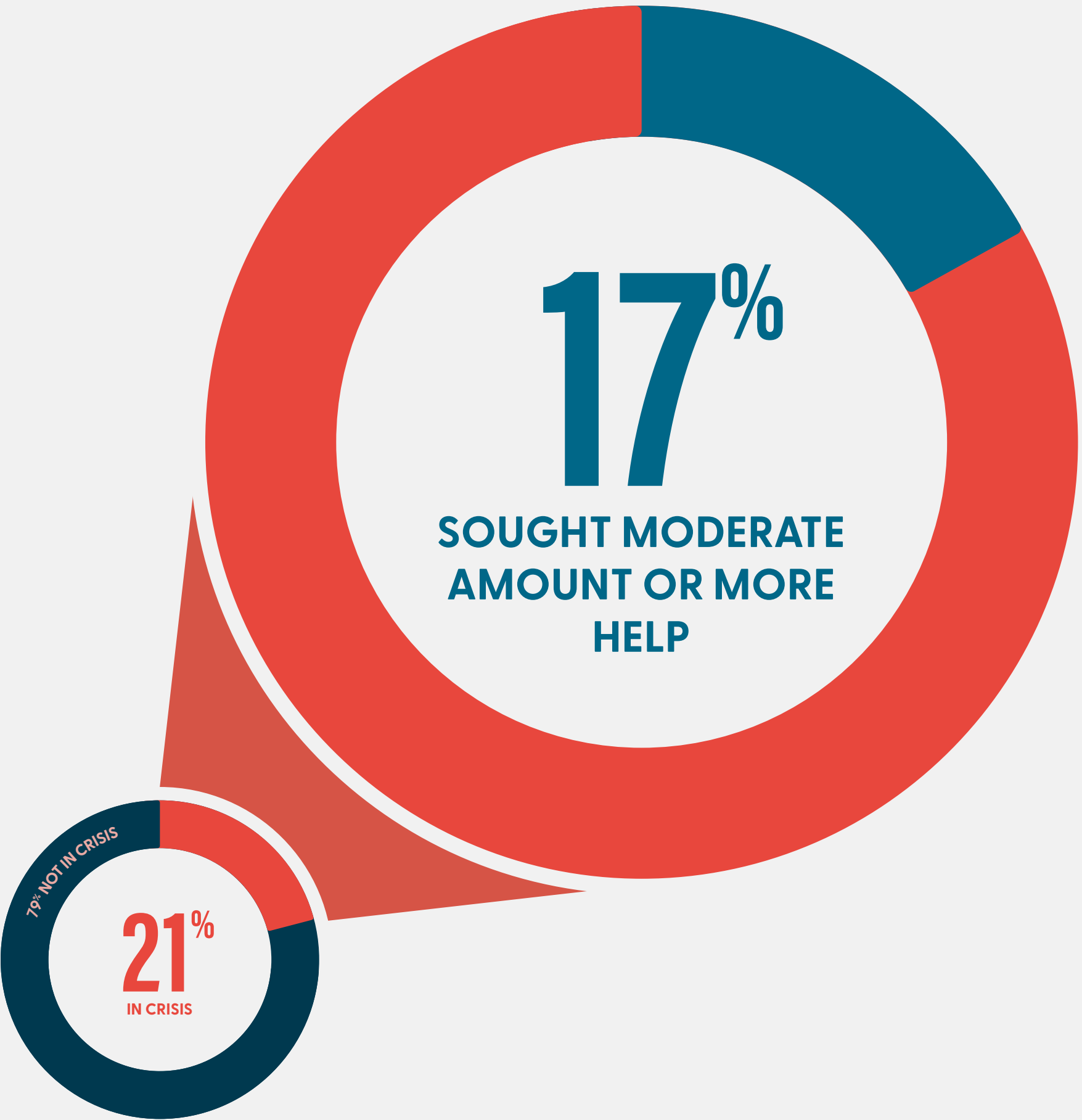


PRIMARY MARRIAGE PROBLEMS

The five most common marriage problems that couples generally face are: *sexual issues; stress; busy schedules; health/medical issues; and financial struggles*. Among *unhealthy* marriages, the top five are: *sexual issues; stress; lack of emotional intimacy; loneliness/loveless marriage; and communication problems*. Regardless of being healthy or unhealthy, *sexual issues or lack of sexual intimacy* is the biggest challenge facing couples.

SEEKING MARRIAGE HELP

Only 21% of married couples in the U.S. have sought help for their marriage in the past 12 months. Among those in *unhealthy marriage* relationships, only 14% sought a moderate amount of help or more, while among those in a marriage crisis state, only 17% sought a moderate amount of help or more.



MARRIAGE AREAS DOING WELL / NOT WELL

Rating the health of different areas of marriage, respondents suggested these five areas as the healthiest: *feeling safe with each other; family and friends are not undermining their marriage; having a lifelong commitment to the marriage; trust; and love for each other.*

The data also suggest these five areas are the unhealthiest: *sexual intimacy; managing conflict well; expressing feelings; listening to each other; and making time for each other.*



DIVORCE

34% of respondents who have ever been married have experienced divorce, with *Convictional Christian* respondents having the lowest risk.



FLOURISHING AND MARRIAGE HEALTH

Respondents who are considered flourishing in life **as individuals** seem to be in healthier marriages.



ATTITUDES TOWARD MARRIAGE

For singles, marriage may be losing its appeal, with just over half of single, never-married respondents (56%) stating *I want to get married someday.*

In the following we will unpack these findings in greater detail and compare results across a range of respondent characteristics (demographics, psychographics, behaviors, etc.).



SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Survey Design and Administration

This study utilized a cross-sectional survey design to collect a random sample of U.S. adults (age 18 or older) as well as targeted subgroups under investigation. Partnering with global research firm Ipsos, the survey was administered by Ipsos Public Affairs using their probability-based online panel KnowledgePanel.

Sample

The sample was comprised of an initial national general population sample of 3,301 U.S. adults (age 18 or older), along with an augment sample of 507 married, heterosexual U.S. adults (age 18 or older). The sampling design yielded a sufficient sample size for data analysis for multiple populations

under examination, including more than 1,000 married respondents and 1,000 respondents identifying as a Christian (specifically, a Born-Again Christian—as classified by Focus on the Family; see definitions on [p.10](#)). Only one spouse within each household was asked to complete the survey.

To ensure accurate demographic representation in this study, a probability-proportional-to-size (PPS) procedure was used to ensure that both samples were demographically balanced and representative of their respective populations. The data were weighted to adjust for gender, age, race/ethnicity, Census region, metropolitan status, education, household income, and marital status using demographic benchmarks from the 2024 March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS), as well as language proficiency using benchmarks from the 2022 American

Community Survey. These weights ensured accurate representation of both U.S. adults (age 18 or older) and married, heterosexual U.S. adults (18 or older).

Data Collection Period and Participation

Data collection was conducted from October 2 to October 15, 2024. During this period, a total of 3,808 respondents participated in the survey (MOE ± 1.78%). The length of the survey was approximately 16 minutes.

Key Sample Statistics

Key demographics of the 3,808 who participated in the survey include (unweighted):

GENDER		
Female	1835	48%
Male	1973	52%
GENERATION		
Gen Z	377	10%
Millennial	863	23%
Gen X	1038	27%
Baby Boom	1300	34%
Silent	230	6%
REGION		
Midwest	801	21%
Northeast	669	18%
South	1457	38%
West	881	23%

YEARS MARRIED		
5 or less	358	12%
6-10	358	12%
11-15	321	11%
16-20	285	10%
21-25	296	10%
26-30	269	9%
31+	1044	36%
MARITAL STATUS		
Married	2362	62%
Never Married	859	23%
Divorced	345	9%
Widowed	195	5%
Separated	47	1%

RACE		
White, Non-Hispanic	2614	69%
Hispanic	510	13%
Black or African-American, Non-Hispanic	375	10%
Other, Non-Hispanic	184	5%
2+ Races, Non-Hispanic	125	3%
INCOME		
Under 10,000	76	2%
10,000-24,999	192	5%
25,000-49,999	473	12%
50,000-74,999	574	15%
75,000-99,999	513	13%
100,000-149,999	807	21%
150,000 or more	1173	31%

POLITICAL BELIEF		
Strongly Liberal	289	8%
Moderately Liberal	484	13%
Slightly Liberal	342	9%
Neither Liberal nor Conservative	898	24%
Slightly Conservative	422	11%
Moderately Conservative	806	21%
Strongly Conservative	521	14%
FAITH SEGMENTS		
Non-Christian	1177	31%
Nominal Christian	1143	30%
Born-Again	829	22%
Convictional Christian	659	17%

Couples Satisfaction Index

CSI-4

1. PLEASE INDICATE THE DEGREE OF HAPPINESS, ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP.
2. I HAVE A WARM AND COMFORTABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH MY PARTNER.
3. HOW REWARDING IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PARTNER?
4. IN GENERAL, HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

Marriage Health Scale

7-POINT, FOTF SCALE

QUESTION:

Overall, how would you rate the *health* of your marriage relationship with your spouse?

1. VERY UNHEALTHY
2. UNHEALTHY
3. SOMEWHAT UNHEALTHY
4. NEITHER HEALTHY NOR UNHEALTHY
5. SOMEWHAT HEALTHY
6. HEALTHY
7. VERY HEALTHY

For this study, we incorporated two different scales to measure relationship **health** among married couples. The first is the *Couple's Satisfaction Index* (CSI), which is a well-established scale in the marriage literature.⁹ The CSI is a highly reliable and valid measurement scale for assessing relationship satisfaction. For efficiency, we used the four-question version (CSI-4).

The second scale is a more straightforward approach, where respondents rated the **health** of their relationship with their spouse. We used a 7-point Likert scale, which ranged from *Very Healthy* to *Very Unhealthy*.

Both scales showed similar results in measuring overall relationship **quality** (71% satisfied vs. 74% healthy), but for this report, we chose to emphasize the 7-point marriage health scale in the reporting and analysis. Recent studies suggest that relationship **satisfaction** may be limited in determining true relationship **quality**. The emphasis in the survey was therefore on health rather than happiness in marriage in keeping with current research on overall marriage quality. For example, the Institute for Family Studies' recent report *Flourishing Marriages Are Made, Not Found* states:

“Arguing that relationship satisfaction is an insufficient indicator of relationship quality, we suggest that an additional construct that we call ‘relational-connectivity’ may provide a more holistic vision of what constitutes true relationship quality. Relational-connectivity focuses on indicators of the strength of a couple's relationship, rather than simply an individual's sense of personal satisfaction from the relationship.”¹⁰

Defining Faith Segments

In order to better understand specifically the role of Christian faith and practice in marriage health, the study identified three faith segments beyond the general population. Around 1/3 of respondents (1,177; 31%) identified as *Non-Christian*. Of the remaining respondents, we identified three segments of Christian participants based on responses to specific questions:

NOMINAL CHRISTIANS (NC)

These respondents identified as Christian in name only but did not respond in the affirmative to any of the questions outlined below in the other two segments.

BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS (BA)

These respondents answered *Yes* to the following questions but not all of the additional questions listed under *Convictional*:

- ✓ *Have you made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important to your life today?*
- ✓ *When I die, I will go to Heaven because I have confessed my sins and have accepted/received Jesus Christ as my Savior.*

CONVICTIONAL CHRISTIANS (CC)

These respondents answered *Yes* to the above questions under *Born-Again* but also indicated:

- ✓ *Attend religious services at least monthly.*
- ✓ *Read, listen to, or pray with the Bible on your own (outside of church) at least weekly.*
- ✓ *Agree with the statement: "If my thoughts or actions do not line up with what the Bible teaches, the Bible is right and I am wrong."*

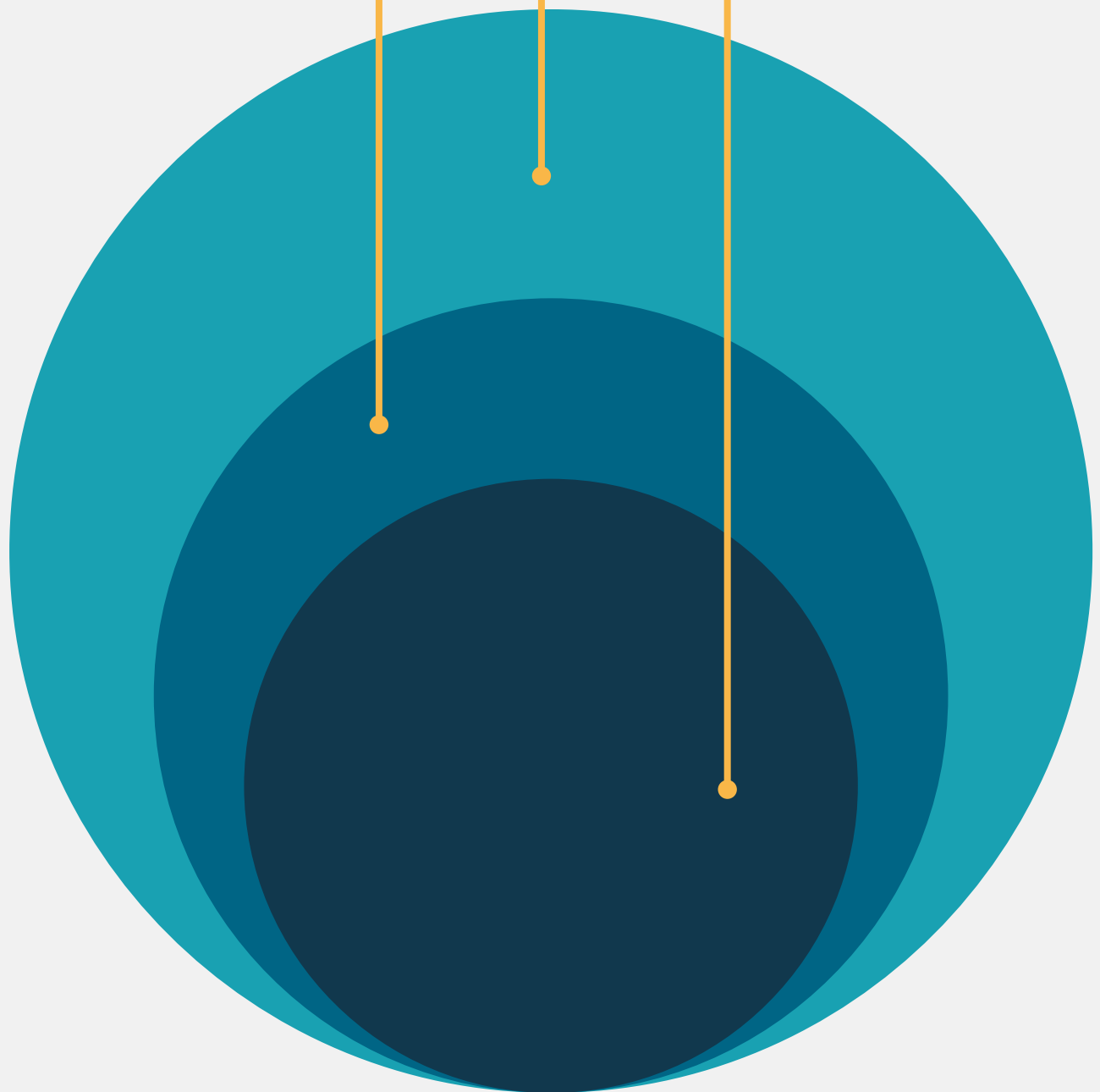
With just under 1/3 of respondents identifying as *Non-Christian* and another 30% falling in the *Nominal* segment, the remaining respondents were split between the *Born-Again* and *Convictional* segments as follows:

- *Born-Again*—829 (22%)
- *Convictional*—659 (17%)

In this study, these faith segments play a critical role in illuminating the role of committed, practicing Christianity when it comes to marriage health.

For context, U.S. household estimates for the faith segments (weighted for demographic accuracy) are:

- *Non-Christian*: 37% of U.S. HHs
- *Nominal Christian*: 34%
- *Born-Again*: 17%
- *Convictional Christian*: 12%

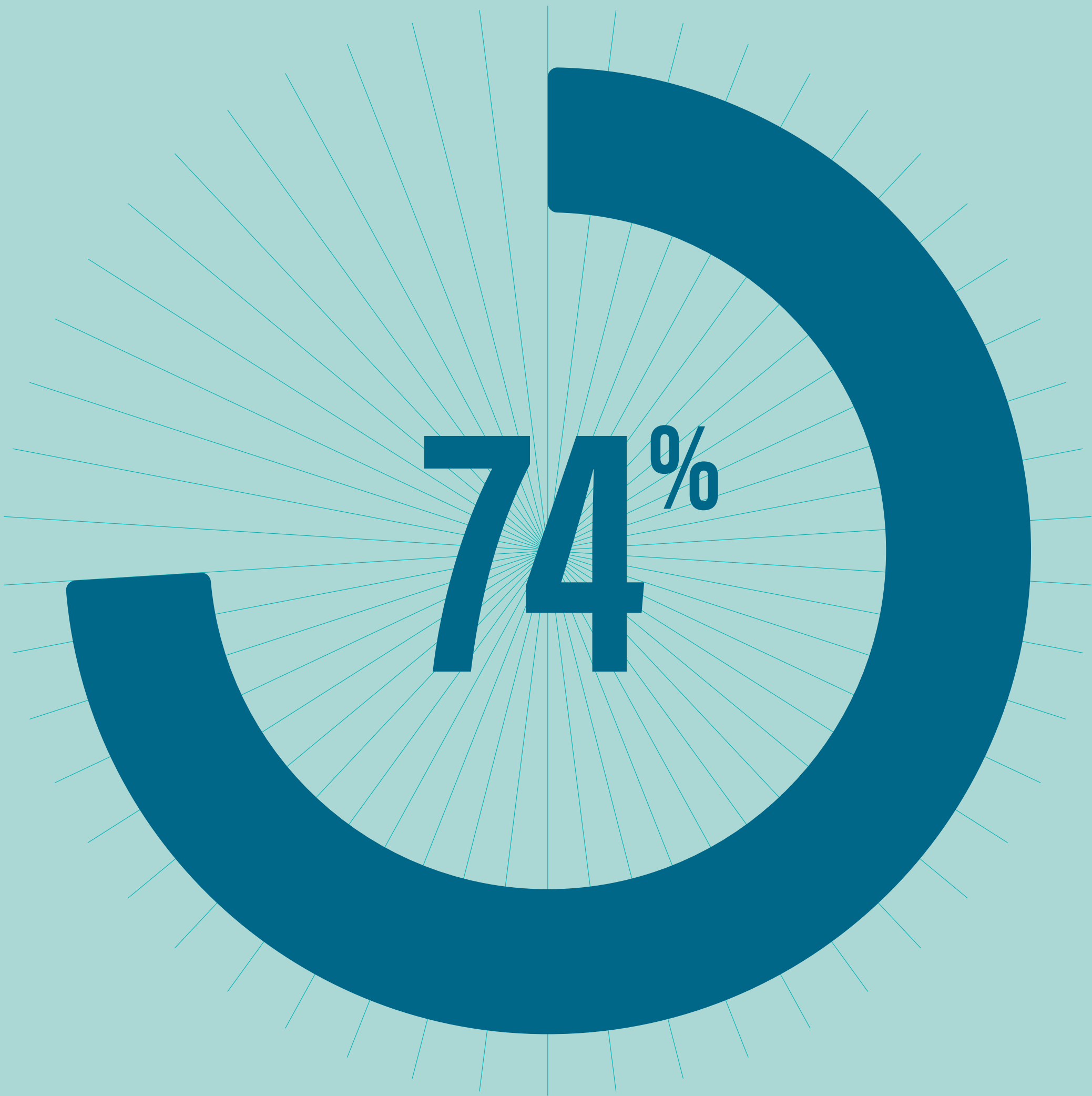


MARRIAGE HEALTH

One of the most encouraging findings of the *Marriage Health in America* survey is that a full 74% of respondents characterized their marriage as “healthy.” This is based on Focus on the Family’s 7-point marriage health scale where respondents rated their marriage as either *healthy* or *very healthy*. (Using the CSI-4 scale, 71% of marriages are *satisfied* while 29% are *less satisfied*.)

THE CONVICTIONAL DIFFERENCE: When accounting for the faith segments, the *Marriage Health in America* survey reveals that *Born-Again* (BA) and *Convictional Christians* (CC) have significantly higher rates of being in a healthy marriage, at 79% and 82%, respectively. Further, when adding risk ratios, the probability of being in an *unhealthy* marriage is 35% lower for *Convictional Christians* compared to *Born-Again, Nominal*, and *Non-Christian* segments (when controlling for income and education). Here we see the critical difference made when both spouses share the same Christian faith **and put those beliefs into practice**, with marriage health being higher for those who attend church regularly and/or pray together. Specifically, 83% of couples who attend church together regularly (at least once a month) characterize their marriage as healthy, and a remarkable 92% of couples who pray together regularly (several times per week or daily) say they have healthy marriages.

INDIVIDUALS REPORTING HEALTHY MARRIAGE



OVERALL MARRIAGE HEALTH NUMBER COMES ONLY FROM THESE LEVELS.	VERY HEALTHY	36%
	HEALTHY	38%
	SOMEWHAT HEALTHY	13%
	NEITHER	6%
	SOMEWHAT UNHEALTHY	3%
	UNHEALTHY	2%
	VERY UNHEALTHY	2%

PERCENT (%) IN A HEALTHY MARRIAGE

RELIGIOUS SEGMENTS

(* sig higher than Just Spiritual)

CHRISTIAN	75*
OTHER RELIGION	71
JUST SPIRITUAL	65
NOT RELIGIOUS	72

FAITH SEGMENTS

(* sig higher than Nominal and Non-Christian)

NON-CHRISTIAN	70
NOMINAL	71
BORN AGAIN	79*
CONVICTIONAL	82*

PRAY TOGETHER

How often do you pray with your spouse?

(asked among married Christians | * sig higher than other groups)

NEVER	63
SELDOM / A FEW TIMES PER YEAR	77
ONCE OR TWICE A MONTH / ONCE A WEEK	75
SEVERAL TIMES PER WEEK / DAILY	92*

ATTEND CHURCH TOGETHER

How often do you attend religious services with your spouse?

(asked among married Christians | * sig higher than other groups)

NEVER	62
SELDOM / A FEW TIMES PER YEAR	74
ONCE A MONTH OR MORE	83*

GENERATIONS

(* sig higher than Millennial, Gen X, and Boomers)

GEN Z	90*
MILLENNIAL	71
GEN X	70
BOOMERS	76
SILENTS	85*

COHABITATION

Live together before marriage

(* sig higher)

YES	71
NO	77*

What Drives a Healthy Marriage?

REPORTED DRIVERS

(Ranked Order)

- TRUST
- LOVE FOR EACH OTHER
- RESPECT FOR EACH OTHER
- SEXUAL INTIMACY
- LISTENING TO EACH OTHER

There is broad agreement across the population. The top five ingredients (out of a list of 32) chosen by respondents to the *Marriage Health in America* survey **were identical** across three of the four segments (but ranked slightly different), including *Non-Christians*, *Nominal Christians*, and *Born-Again Christians*.

MODELED DRIVERS

(Ranked Order)

- FEELING CLOSE TO EACH OTHER
- LISTENING TO EACH OTHER
- BEING EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY
- SEXUAL INTIMACY
- LOVE FOR EACH OTHER

We also conducted predictive modeling¹¹ to see what the 32 areas ratings suggest (see Appendix for [modeling methodology](#)). The top five predicted areas (from the 32 areas rated) were very similar to what respondents suggested, but *feeling close to each other* and *being emotionally healthy* were also strong predictors from the model.

CONVICTIONAL DIFFERENCE

(Ranked Order)

- SHARED SPIRITUAL BELIEFS & PRACTICES
- TRUST
- LOVE FOR EACH OTHER
- LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO THIS MARRIAGE
- LISTENING TO EACH OTHER

The top reported drivers of a healthy marriage looked a bit different for *Convictional Christians*, with two of the top five being unique to that group.



The survey included 32 areas on which respondents could rate their own marriage health as well as choose the characteristics they felt were important to fostering a healthy marriage. As noted on the previous page, the top five areas rated by respondents were identical across the *Non-Christian*, *Nominal Christian*, and *Born-Again Christian* segments. Three of those areas also appeared in the top five for *Convictional Christians* as well.

The full list of 32 areas was developed by Focus on the Family's Research team using data from other published, external marriage studies as well as from Focus on the Family's own marriage materials.

The 32 Marriage Areas

listed alphabetically

BEING ADAPTABLE TO SITUATIONS AND CHALLENGES

BEING EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY

BEING ENCOURAGING AND AFFIRMING TO EACH OTHER

BEING FLEXIBLE

COMMUNICATING REGULARLY AND FREQUENTLY

COMPASSION TOWARD EACH OTHER

EXPRESSING FEELINGS TO EACH OTHER

FEELING CLOSE TO EACH OTHER

FEELING SAFE WITH EACH OTHER

FORGIVING EACH OTHER

GRATITUDE FOR OUR RELATIONSHIP

HAVING A COMMUNITY THAT SUPPORTS MARRIAGE

HAVING A LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO THIS MARRIAGE

HAVING SHARED SPIRITUAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

KINDNESS TOWARD EACH OTHER

LISTENING TO EACH OTHER

LOVE FOR EACH OTHER

MAKING DECISIONS AS EQUAL PARTNERS

MAKING TIME FOR EACH OTHER

MANAGEMENT OF FINANCES

MANAGING CONFLICT WELL

FRIENDS/FAMILY NOT UNDERMINING MARRIAGE

RESPECTING EACH OTHER

RESPECTING EACH OTHER'S DIFFERENCES

SACRIFICING FOR EACH OTHER

SEXUAL INTIMACY

SHARING HOUSEHOLD CHORES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

SPEAKING KINDLY AND RESPECTFULLY TO EACH OTHER

SPENDING ENJOYABLE TIME TOGETHER

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR MISTAKES

TEAMWORK

TRUST

Convictional Christians Outperform Across All 32 Areas

The chart on the following page shows the 32 marriage areas and how they were rated across all segments of the survey:

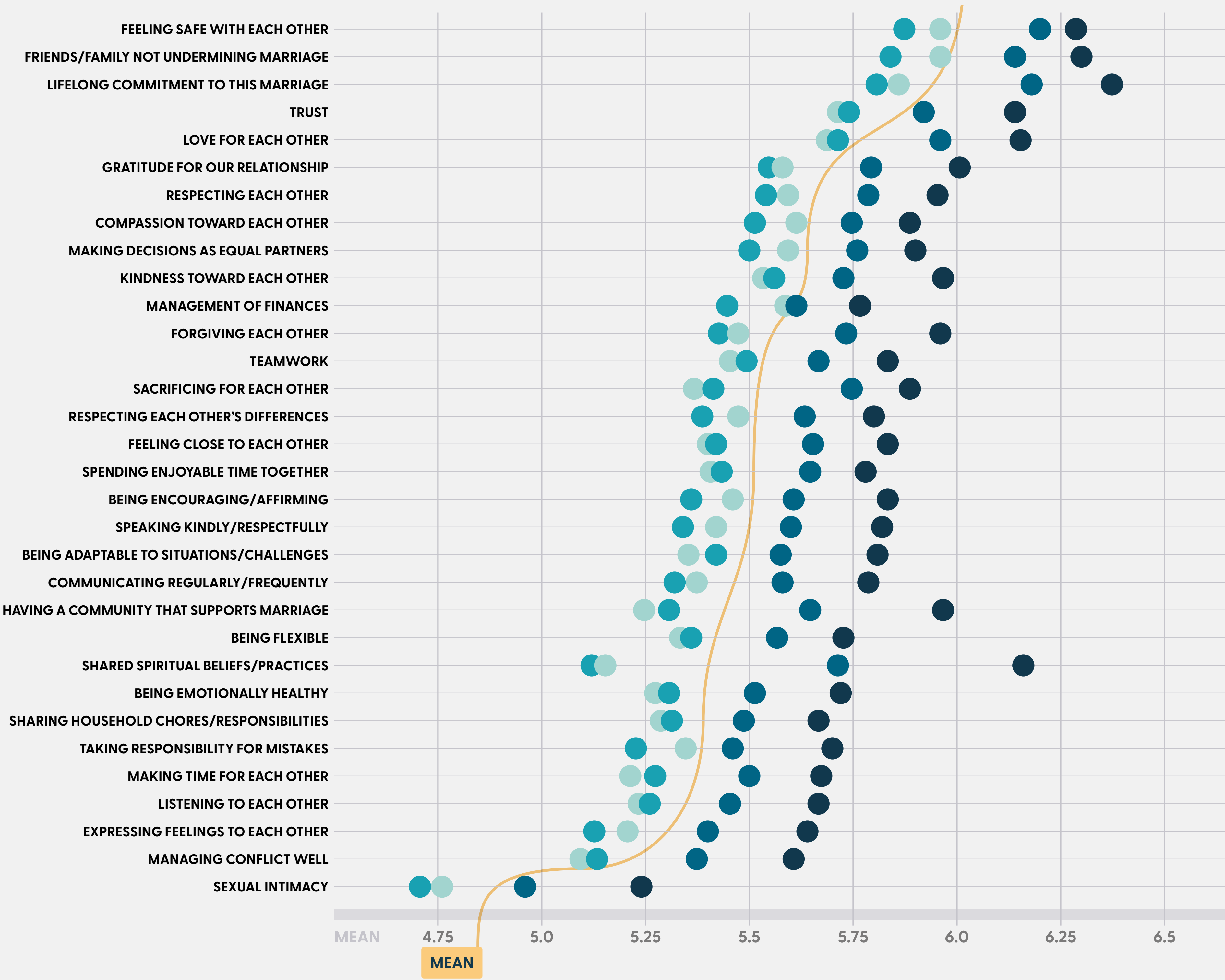
- CONVICTIONAL CHRISTIANS
- BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS
- NOMINAL CHRISTIANS
- NON-CHRISTIANS

Respondents rated their own marriages on a 7-point health scale (ranging from *Very Healthy* to *Very Unhealthy*) and the Mean scores for each area were charted by faith segments. Sorting the overall Mean ratings from high to low, we can evaluate what areas couples are doing well in and what areas may be lacking (charted here).

DOING WELL: Overall, most respondents *feel safe with each other; family and friends are not undermining their marriage; have a lifelong commitment to this marriage; and* feel both *trust* and *love for each other*.

NOT DOING WELL: *Sexual intimacy* seems to be the most challenging for couples, followed by *managing conflict* and *communication issues (expressing feelings and listening to each other); making time for each other; taking responsibility for mistakes; and sharing household chores*.

THE CONVICTIONAL DIFFERENCE: The results here are striking—*Convictional Christians* rank highest in **every single one** of the 32 marriage areas in the study, with *Born-Again Christians* often ranking second. Clearly, a commitment to Christian faith and practice makes a positive contribution to healthy marriage outcomes.



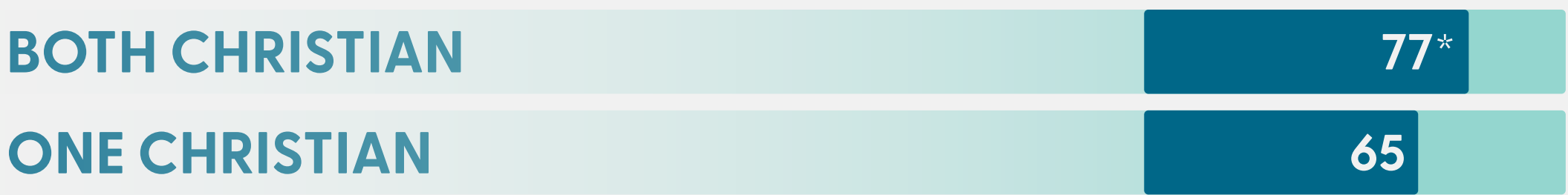


FAITH IN PRACTICE:
Shared Beliefs & Practices Are Essential

PERCENT (%)
MARRIAGE HEALTH LEVELS

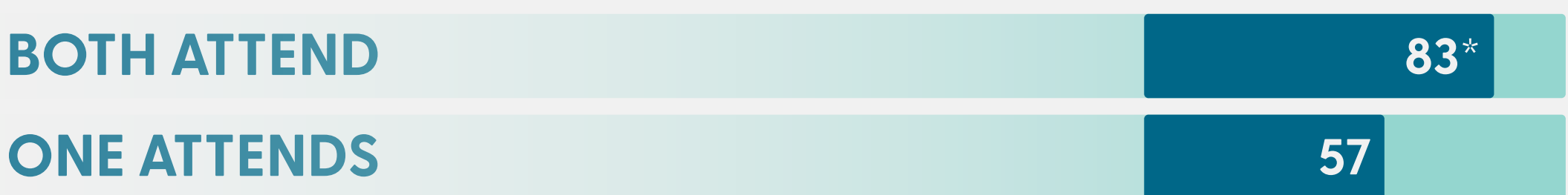
MARRIAGE HEALTH

(* sig higher at 90% or 95% levels)



SPOUSES ATTEND CHURCH TOGETHER

(* sig higher at 95% levels)



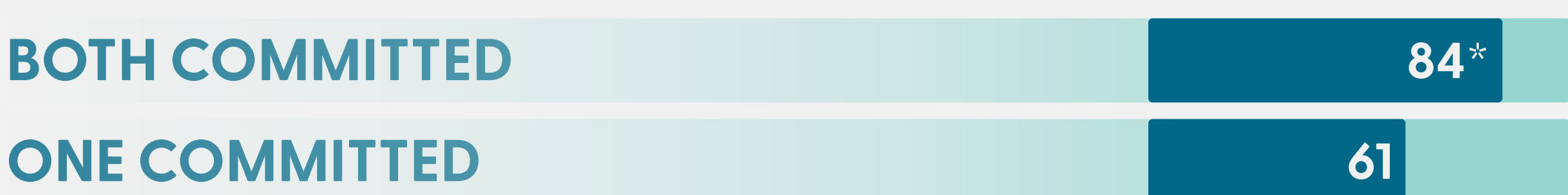
SPOUSES PRAY TOGETHER

(* sig higher at 95% levels)



SPOUSES COMMITTED CHRISTIANS

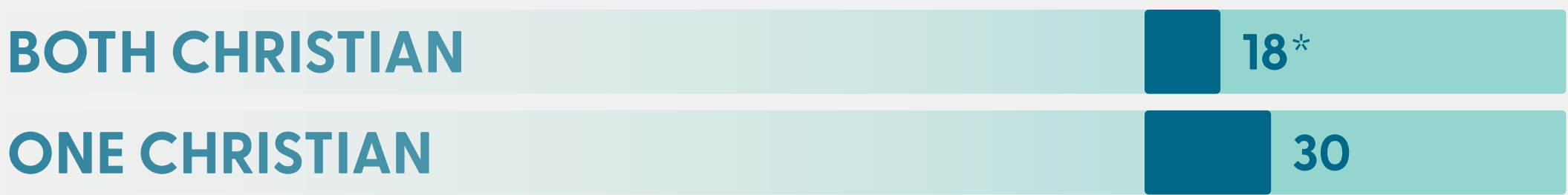
(* sig higher at 95% levels)



PERCENT (%)
MARRIAGE CRISIS LEVELS

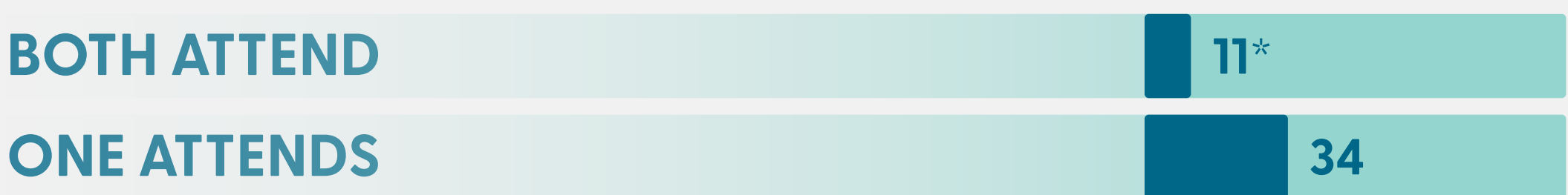
MARRIAGE CRISIS

(* sig lower at 95% levels)



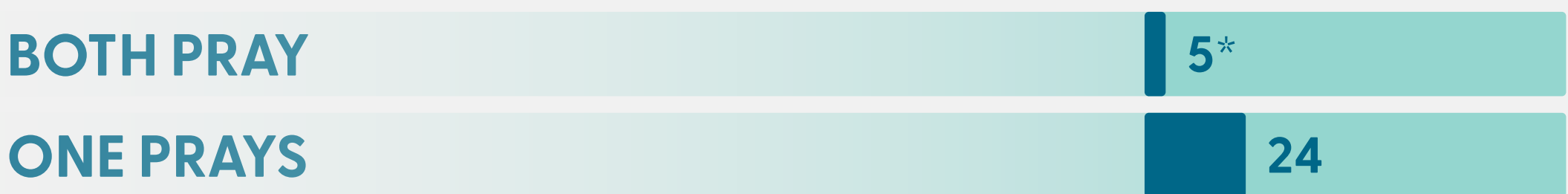
SPOUSES ATTEND CHURCH TOGETHER

(* sig lower at 95% levels)



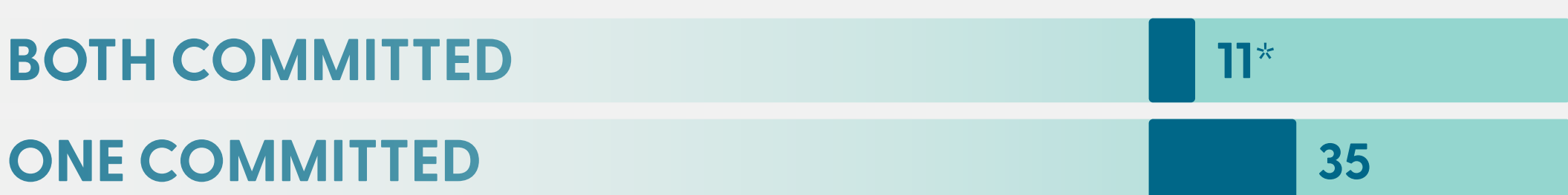
SPOUSES PRAY TOGETHER

(* sig lower at 95% levels)

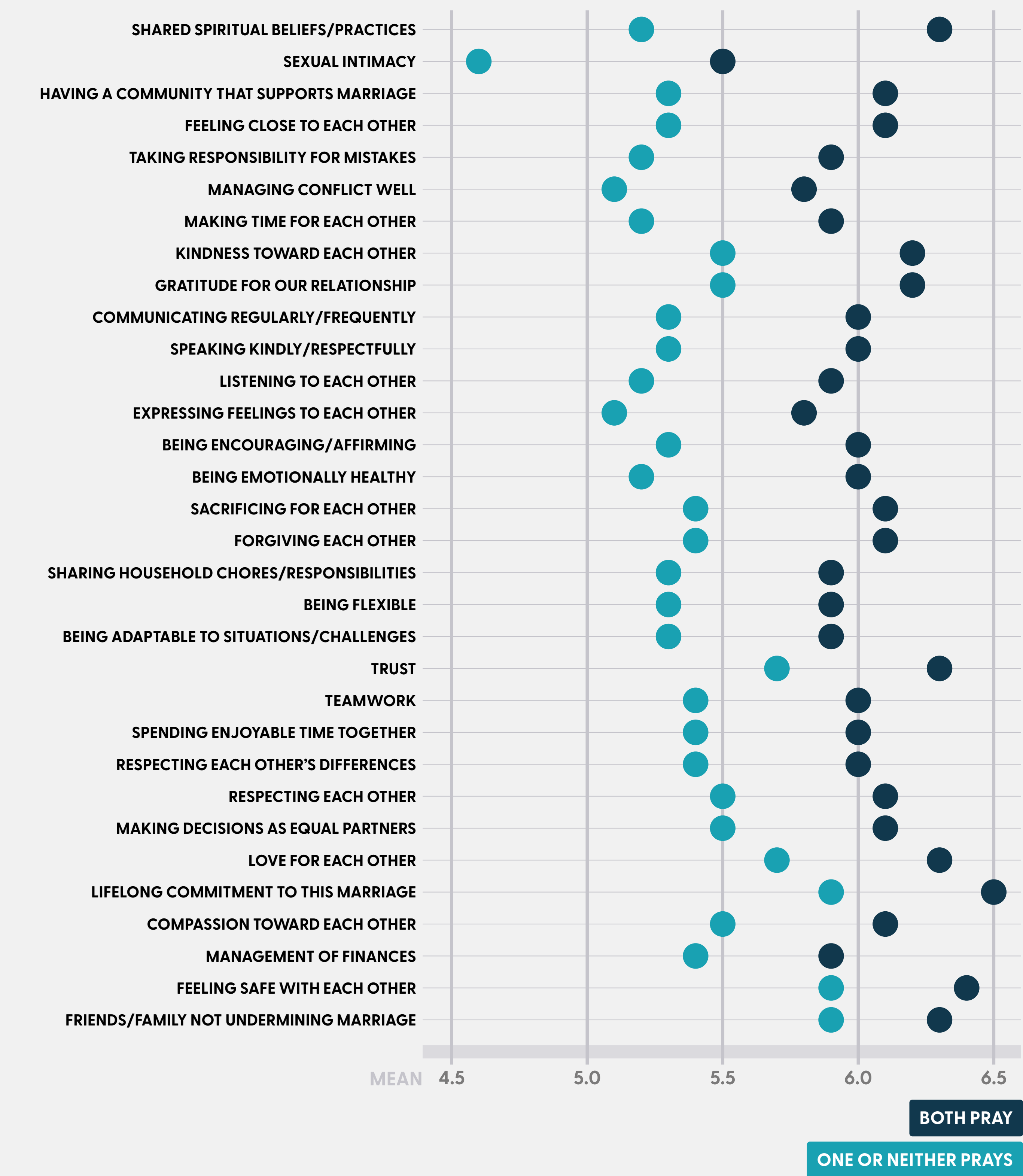


SPOUSES COMMITTED CHRISTIANS

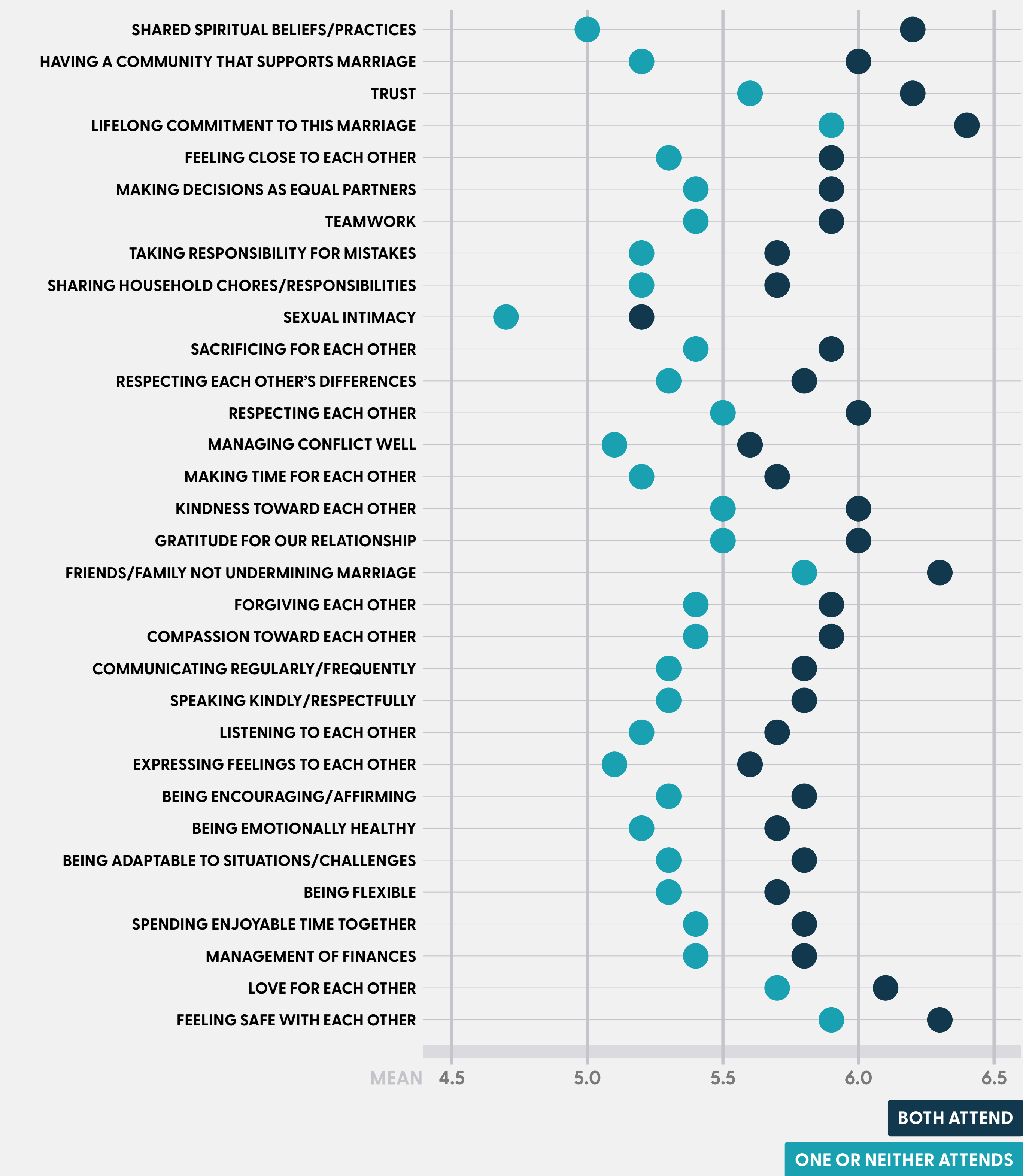
(* sig lower at 95% levels)



FAITH IN PRACTICE:
Praying Together May Make Marriages Stronger



FAITH IN PRACTICE:
Attending Church Together May Make Marriages Stronger





The Problems Marriages Face

What are the top problems facing marriages according to the *Marriage Health in America* study? The findings largely align with other studies of marriage health, including reports from the National Marriage Project, the Gottman Institute, and Pew Research. Across all four segments of the survey, the ten highest reported marriage problems included:

1. *Sexual issues/lack of sexual intimacy*
2. *Stress*
3. *Busy schedules/Not enough 1:1 time*
4. *Health/Medical issues*
5. *Financial issues/Income struggles*
6. *Lack of emotional intimacy/Deep connection*
7. *Mental health/Depression/Anxiety/PTSD*
8. *Communication problems (general)*
9. *Work-life balance/Career*
10. *Loneliness/Loveless marriage/Growing apart*

THE CONVICTIONAL DIFFERENCE:

Identifying the five primary marriage problems by survey segment yielded results that point to the value of practicing Christian faith as a key component of marriage health. Again we see the challenges presented by sexual intimacy, which ranked as the number one problem among *Non-Christians* and number two among the three Christian faith segments.

NON-CHRISTIANS <i>(Ranked Order)</i>	NOMINAL CHRISTIANS <i>(Ranked Order)</i>	BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS <i>(Ranked Order)</i>	CONVICTIONAL CHRISTIANS <i>(Ranked Order)</i>
SEXUAL ISSUES/LACK OF SEXUAL INTIMACY	NOT CURRENTLY FACING PROBLEMS	NOT CURRENTLY FACING PROBLEMS	NOT CURRENTLY FACING PROBLEMS
NOT CURRENTLY FACING PROBLEMS	SEXUAL ISSUES/LACK OF SEXUAL INTIMACY	SEXUAL ISSUES/LACK OF SEXUAL INTIMACY	SEXUAL ISSUES/LACK OF SEXUAL INTIMACY
STRESS	HEALTH/MEDICAL ISSUES	STRESS	HEALTH/MEDICAL ISSUES
BUSY SCHEDULES/NOT ENOUGH 1:1 TIME	STRESS	BUSY SCHEDULES/ NOT ENOUGH 1:1 TIME	STRESS
LONELINESS/LOVELESS MARRIAGE/ GROWING APART	BUSY SCHEDULES/ NOT ENOUGH 1:1 TIME	FINANCIAL ISSUES/INCOME STRUGGLES	BUSY SCHEDULES/ NOT ENOUGH 1:1 TIME

Note | What about pornography? A wide body of research points to the devastating effects of porn on marriage. However, the survey found that it impacts a relatively small number of marriages overall—just 2.7%. But that percentage almost triples to 7.9% for couples married 6-10 years, suggesting that the proverbial “seven-year itch” may be a problem for some relationships.

MARRIAGES IN CRISIS

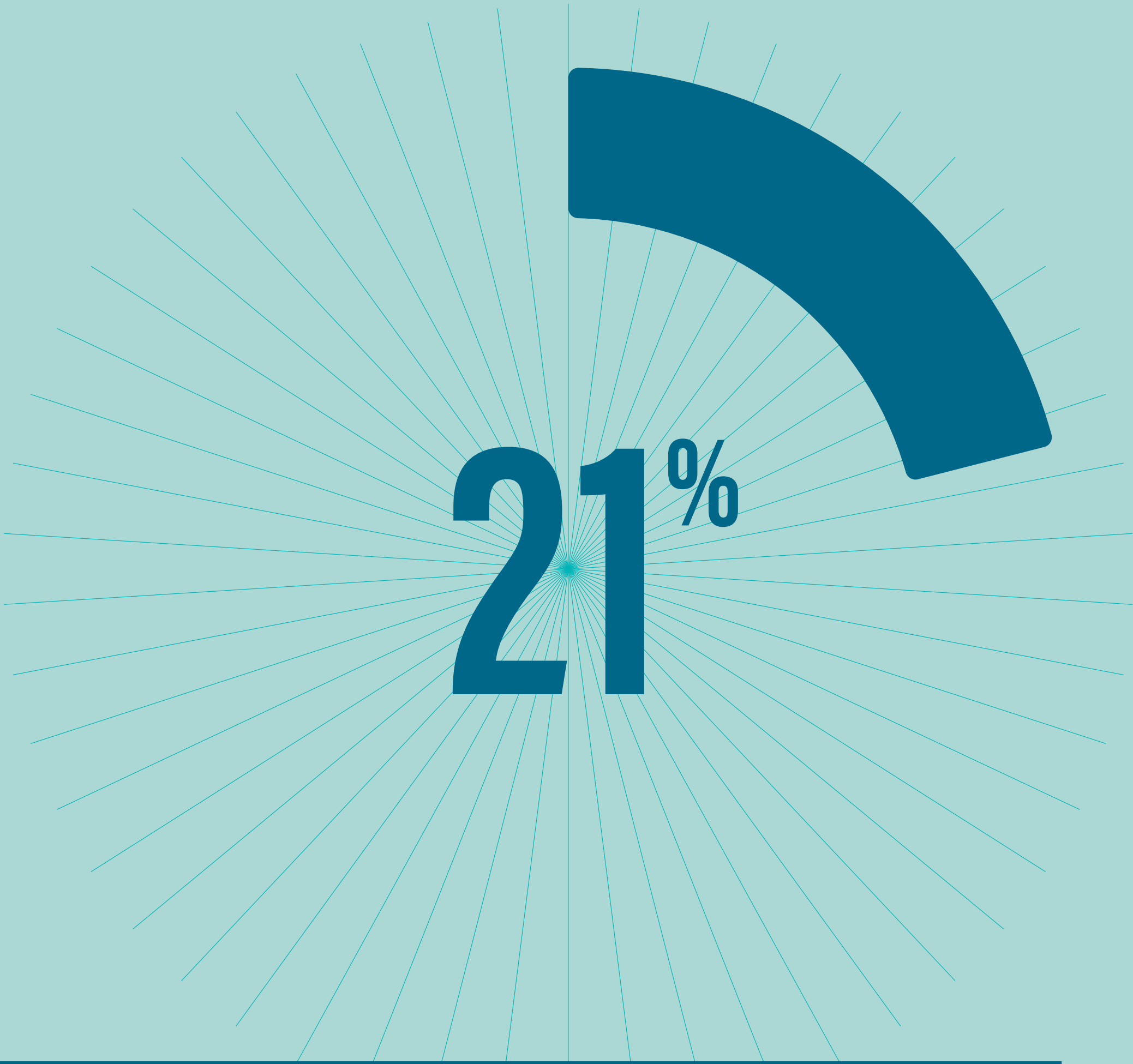
If the 74% of marriages in the U.S. that self-reported as *healthy* are the silver lining, the 21% of U.S. marriages that are *in crisis* are the dark cloud.

THE CONVICTIONAL DIFFERENCE: The survey revealed that *Born-Again* and *Convictional Christians* have a significantly lower rate of being in a marriage crisis, at 17% and 13%, respectively compared to 22% for *Nominal Christians* and 25% for *Non-Christians*. When incorporating risk ratios, *Convictional Christians* have a 39% lower probability of experiencing a marriage crisis than the *Born-Again, Nominal,* and *Non-Christian* segments (when controlling for income and education).



NOTE: Marriages *in crisis* were identified based on answering **Yes** to one or more items on this survey question:

INDIVIDUALS REPORTING MARRIAGE CRISIS



This next question is a bit sensitive, but we want to understand your situation. In the last 12 months, would you say any of the following things happened?

- ☒ *I thought about pursuing a separation or divorce*
- ☒ *I fantasized about being released from my marriage through death or divorce*
- ☒ *My spouse talked (or hinted) about separation or divorce*
- ☒ *My spouse or I took steps toward separation or divorce*
- ☒ *I felt like there was no more love in our marriage*
- ☒ *I felt like there was no more trust in our marriage*
- ☒ *I felt helpless (or hopeless) to change/improve my marriage*
- ☒ *None of these*

PERCENT (%) IN A MARRIAGE CRISIS

RELIGIOUS SEGMENTS

(* sig lower than Just Spiritual and Not Religious)

CHRISTIAN	19*
OTHER RELIGION	18*
JUST SPIRITUAL	28
NOT RELIGIOUS	26

FAITH SEGMENTS

(* sig lower than other groups | ** sig lower than Non-Christian and Nominal)

NON-CHRISTIAN	25
NOMINAL	22
BORN AGAIN	17**
CONVICTIONAL	13*

PRAY TOGETHER

How often do you pray with your spouse?

(asked among married Christians | * sig lower than other groups)

NEVER	28
SELDOM / A FEW TIMES PER YEAR	17
ONCE OR TWICE A MONTH / ONCE A WEEK	16
SEVERAL TIMES PER WEEK / DAILY	6*

ATTEND CHURCH TOGETHER

How often do you attend religious services with your spouse?

(asked among married Christians | * sig lower than other groups)

NEVER	32
SELDOM / A FEW TIMES PER YEAR	20
ONCE A MONTH OR MORE	11*

GENERATIONS

(* sig higher than other groups)

GEN Z	16
MILLENNIAL	27*
GEN X	22
BOOMERS	16
SILENTS	7

COHABITATION

Live together before marriage

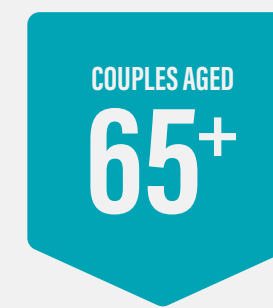
(* sig lower)

YES	25
NO	16*



Who Is in Crisis?

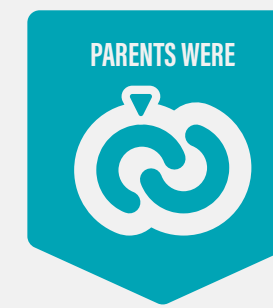
What are the demographic commonalities among marriages that are in crisis? An analysis of the data in the *Marriage Health in America* study reveals the following:



The highest occurrence of marriage crisis occurred among Millennial/Generation X respondents; those aged 65+ had the lowest occurrence.



Those with no children or children aged 18+ had a lower occurrence of marriage crisis than those with kids aged 0-17.



Respondents who were raised with married parents reported lower incidence of crisis in their own marriages.



Respondents who were married 6-10 years had a higher incidence of crisis than those married less than 5 years and more than 26 years.



Those who reported themselves flourishing *as individuals* reported lower rates of marriage crisis.



Those who reported having a high level of satisfaction with their partner prior to marriage had a lower incidence of marriage crisis.



Those who reported not cohabiting prior to marriage reported a lower incidence of marriage crisis than those who lived together prior to getting married.



Those who participated in premarital counseling or therapy reported lower incidence of marital crisis than those who had no premarital counseling.

Couples *in crisis* are struggling the most in these areas:

MARRIAGE AREAS *(Lowest 5 for Marriages in Crisis)*

- 28 BEING EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY
- 29 LISTENING TO EACH OTHER
- 30 EXPRESSING FEELINGS TO EACH OTHER
- 31 MANAGING CONFLICT WELL
- 32 SEXUAL INTIMACY

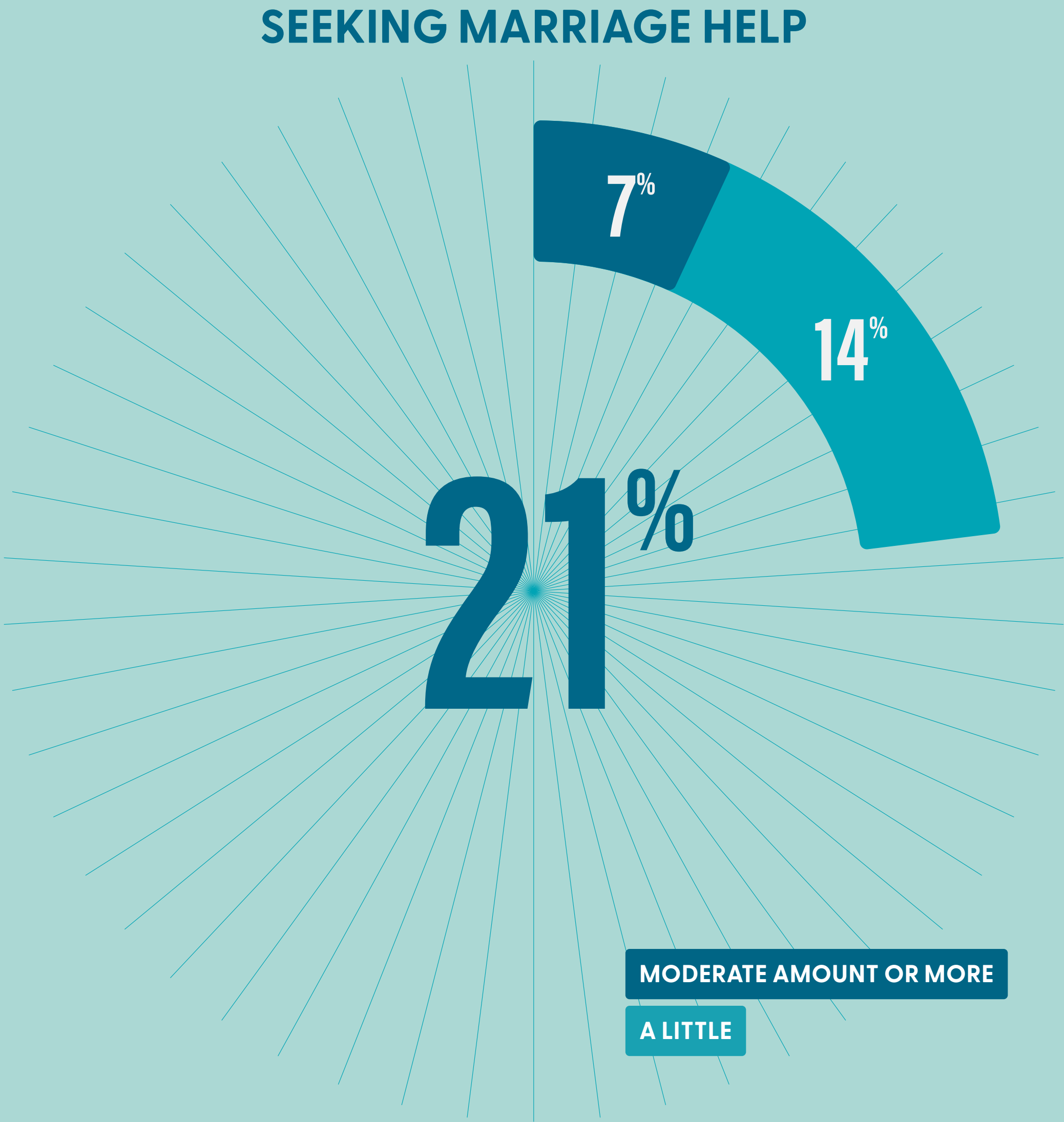
MARRIAGE PROBLEMS *(Highest 5 for Marriages in Crisis)*

- 1 SEXUAL ISSUES/LACK OF SEXUAL INTIMACY
- 2 LONELINESS/LOVELESS MARRIAGE/GROWING APART
- 3 LACK OF EMOTIONAL INTIMACY/DEEP CONNECTION
- 4 STRESS
- 5 COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS IN GENERAL

VERY FEW SEEK SIGNIFICANT HELP

According to the survey, only 21% of all married households sought help in the last 12 months (with most seeking *a little* amount of help). More specifically, only 14% of *unhealthy* marriages and 17% of *in-crisis* marriages sought a *moderate to great deal* of marriage help.

THE CONVICTIONAL DIFFERENCE: Unlike many of the questions in the survey, respondents' Christian faith and commitment, or lack thereof, did not play a significant role in their decision whether to seek outside help for a marriage crisis. There was no significant difference between *Christian, Other Religion, Just Spiritual,* and *Not Religious* on this question.



Less than half of marriages *in crisis* sought help, with even fewer seeking a moderate to great deal of marriage help.



PERCENT (%) SEEKING HELP

MARRIAGE HEALTH	
(* sig higher)	
HEALTHY	16
UNHEALTHY	34*

MARRIAGE CRISIS	
(* sig lower)	
NO CRISIS	16*
CRISIS	41

RELIGIOUS SEGMENTS	
CHRISTIAN	20
OTHER RELIGION	26
JUST SPIRITUAL	21
NOT RELIGIOUS	23

FAITH SEGMENTS	
(* sig higher than other groups ** sig higher than Nominal and Born-Again)	
NON-CHRISTIAN	23**
NOMINAL	17
BORN AGAIN	17
CONVICTIONAL	28*

ATTEND CHURCH TOGETHER	
How often do you attend religious services with your spouse? (asked among married Christians * sig higher than other groups)	
NEVER	17
SELDOM / A FEW TIMES PER YEAR	16
ONCE A MONTH OR MORE	24*

GENDER	
(* sig higher)	
MALE	18
FEMALE	23*

GENERATIONS	
(* sig higher than older generations)	
GEN Z	25
MILLENNIAL	30*
GEN X	23
BOOMERS	11
SILENTS	7

SOURCES FOR MARRIAGE HELP

God / Prayer / the Bible	32%
My spouse <small>(we prefer to keep it between ourselves)</small>	29%
My friends and/or family members	29%
Google search	20%
Counselor/Therapist <small>(not Christian-based or through a church)</small>	19%
Books, magazines/journals, or audio books	17%
Not applicable <small>I don't seek help / I just handle it on my own</small>	14%
Church / Pastor	9%
Other influencers <small>(e.g., blog, podcast, social media)</small>	9%
Counselor/Therapist <small>(Christian-based, with counselor or pastor)</small>	7%
Specific authors or experts	5%
Other <small>(please specify)</small>	5%
Marriage seminars/events/retreats	3%
Specific Christian ministries <small>that help marriages</small>	3%
Marriage Mentor <small>(providing structured help and guidance)</small>	1%
Government <small>(e.g., Police, Family Court, US Military)</small>	0.6%
Other specific organizations / companies <small>that help marriages</small>	0.0

Where Do You Go for Help?

Of the small percentage of U.S. marriages that sought help in the past 12 months, 26% of those pursued help in the form of marriage counseling. Among those who sought help, 19% sought help from a counselor or therapist (not faith-based or church-affiliated); 7% visited a Christian-based therapist or pastor; and 3% sought help from a Christian-based marriage ministry. Counseling or therapy that was not Christian-based did not rank in the top five sources of help solicited by either *Born-Again* or *Convictional Christians*.

The top reasons cited for not seeking marriage counseling included *cost of counseling services* [this was the top reason cited across all segments]; *denial or minimizing the need for help*; and *couldn't agree with spouse on therapy method*.

THE CONVICTIONAL DIFFERENCE:

Convictional Christians are far more likely to seek help from either *God/prayer/the Bible* or *Church/Pastor*. Surprisingly, *Church/Pastor* did not rank among the top five sources of help for *Born-Again* and *Nominal Christians*.



DIVORCE IMPACTS EVERYONE

Divorce is one of life’s most tragic and disruptive events, impacting not only the couples involved but also their children, extended families, and communities. The *Marriage Health in America* survey found that 10% of respondents are **currently** divorced while an additional 23% have been divorced **ever**.

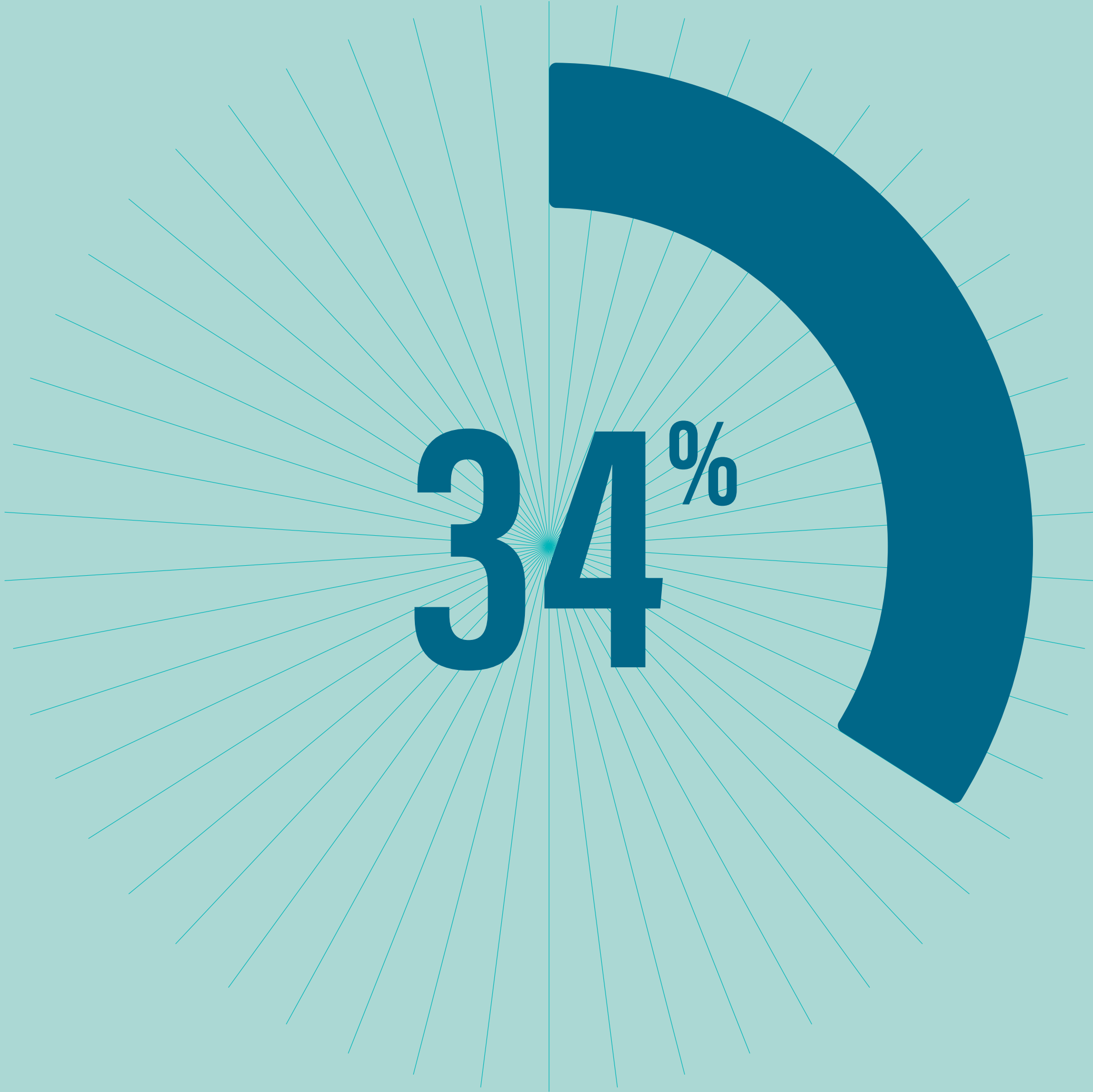
THE CONVICTIONAL DIFFERENCE: The influence of Christian faith and practice is more of a mixed bag here. Of those **currently** divorced, *Convictional Christians* and *Non-Christians* are virtually the same at 8% and 9%, respectively, with 10% of *Nominal Christians* and a significantly higher 15% of *Born-Again Christians* falling into this category. Of those *Ever Divorced*, *Convictional Christians* and *Non-Christians* again remain close at 20% and 22%, with *Nominal Christians* at 23% and *Born-Again Christians* again topping the list at 25%.

With the introduction of risk ratios for the probability of current/ever divorced across all four segments, *Convictional Christians* have a **39% lower probability of current/ever divorced** (when controlling for income and education) than the *Born-Again*, *Nominal*, and *Non-Christian* segments.

CONVICTION MATTERS

On the difficult topic of divorce, we see a stark contrast between those in the *Convictional Christian* and *Born-Again Christian* segments, suggesting that putting one’s **faith into practice** represents a unique safeguard against the likelihood of a marriage ending.

CURRENTLY OR EVER DIVORCED



THE CONVICTIONAL DIFFERENCE

PERCENT (%) EVER EXPERIENCING DIVORCE

RELIGIOUS SEGMENTS

(* sig higher than other groups | ** sig lower than other groups)



FAITH SEGMENTS

(* sig higher than other groups | ** sig lower than Nominal and Born Again)



PERCENT (%) CURRENTLY DIVORCED

RELIGIOUS SEGMENTS

(* sig higher than Other Religion and Not Religious | ** sig lower than other groups)



FAITH SEGMENTS

(* sig higher than other groups)



COHABITATION

Live together before marriage

(* sig lower)





Reasons for Divorce

Why do people resort to divorce? Across the total population, the *Marriage Health in America* survey revealed the top five reasons as:

- WHY DIVORCE?
- INFIDELITY / EXTRAMARITAL AFFAIRS
- TOO MUCH CONFLICT / ARGUING;
NEVER RESOLVING PROBLEMS
- MARRYING TOO YOUNG
- LACK OF COMPATIBILITY
- “I OR MY SPOUSE DO NOT WANT TO BE
MARRIED ANYMORE”

"WISH I KNEW ..."

- ABOUT ADDICTIONS (DRUGS, ALCOHOL,
OTHER)
- MORE ABOUT THEIR PAST / THEY WEREN'T
TRUTHFUL / DIDN'T TRULY KNOW SPOUSE
- SPOUSE HAD DIFFERENT VALUES / GOALS /
BELIEFS (FAMILY, RELIGION, MONEY, ETC.)
- ABOUT SPOUSE'S UNFAITHFULNESS / NOT
TRUSTWORTHY
- PERSONALITY TRAITS / HABITS / BEHAVIORS
(MATURITY, TEMPER, CONTROL ISSUES,
LAZINESS, LYING, ETC.)

When it comes to underlying factors, here are the top five things **divorced** respondents said they wish they'd known about their spouse before getting married.

HEALTHY INDIVIDUALS DRIVE HEALTHY MARRIAGES

The *Marriage Health in America* survey focused not only on the quality of a respondent’s marriage, but also on his or her sense of flourishing **as an individual**. While common views of marriage in America either focus on two individuals becoming one and losing their personal identities altogether, or on two individuals retaining their individuality to such an extent that marital unity suffers, Focus on the Family believes that healthy marriages include three components: “Me, You, and Us.” A marriage is more likely to be healthy if each individual within the relationship is flourishing personally (see Appendix for a [definition of flourishing](#)). The *Marriage Health in America* survey found that only 20% of U.S. adults describe themselves as flourishing (the top quartile of flourishing scores). The survey used The Flourishing Scale from Social Indicators Research¹² to make this determination.



It’s clear in our data that flourishing as an individual leads to a healthier marriage, and a lower likelihood of crisis in the marriage.



PERCENT (%) ALL RESPONDENTS FLOURISHING

RELIGIOUS SEGMENTS

(* sig lower than other groups)

CHRISTIAN	22
OTHER RELIGION	22
JUST SPIRITUAL	21
NOT RELIGIOUS	15*

FAITH SEGMENTS

(* sig higher than Nominal and Non-Christian | **sig higher than Non-Christian)

NON-CHRISTIAN	18
NOMINAL	19
BORN AGAIN	23**
CONVICTIONAL	27*

PERCENT (%) CURRENTLY MARRIED FLOURISHING

RELIGIOUS SEGMENTS

(* sig higher than Not Religious)

CHRISTIAN	25*
OTHER RELIGION	29*
JUST SPIRITUAL	26
NOT RELIGIOUS	20

FAITH SEGMENTS

(* sig higher than Non-Christian and Nominal)

NON-CHRISTIAN	23
NOMINAL	23
BORN AGAIN	25
CONVICTIONAL	31*

MARRIAGE HEALTH & FLOURISHING

Marriage health is higher within those who are flourishing

(* sig higher)

HEALTHY MARRIAGES & FLOURISHING	89*
HEALTHY MARRIAGES not FLOURISHING	69

Marriage crisis is lower within those who are flourishing

(* sig lower)

IN MARRIAGE CRISIS & FLOURISHING	9*
IN MARRIAGE CRISIS not FLOURISHING	25

ATTITUDES TOWARD MARRIAGE

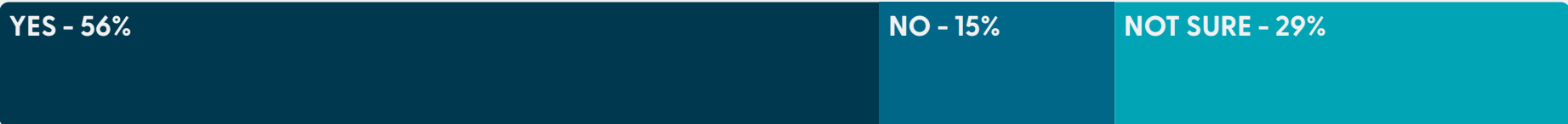
One goal of the *Marriage Health in America* survey was to identify cultural attitudes about marriage, among both unmarried and married respondents. Among single, never-married respondents, just over half responded *Yes* to the question, *Do you want to get married someday?* Among all respondents, 61% answered *No* to the question, *Do you think marriage is becoming old-fashioned or outdated?*

THE CONVICTIONAL DIFFERENCE: In general, *Born-Again* and *Convictional Christians* had more favorable views about marriage compared to the total population.

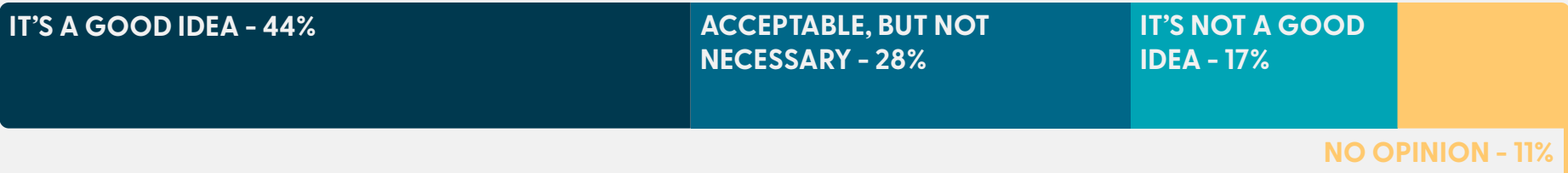
COHABITATION: Interestingly, on the question *How do you view living together before marriage?*, only 8% of *Convictional Christians* said *it's a good idea* while an additional 21% of *Convictional Christians* said *it's acceptable but not necessary*.

GETTING SPECIFIC

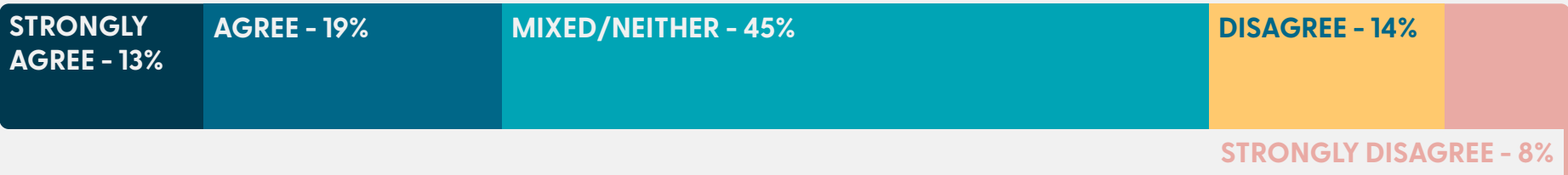
Do you want to get married someday?



How do you view living together before marriage?



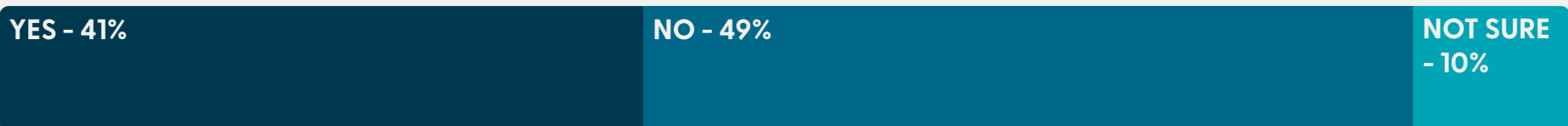
If two people want to live together in a committed relationship, they should get married.



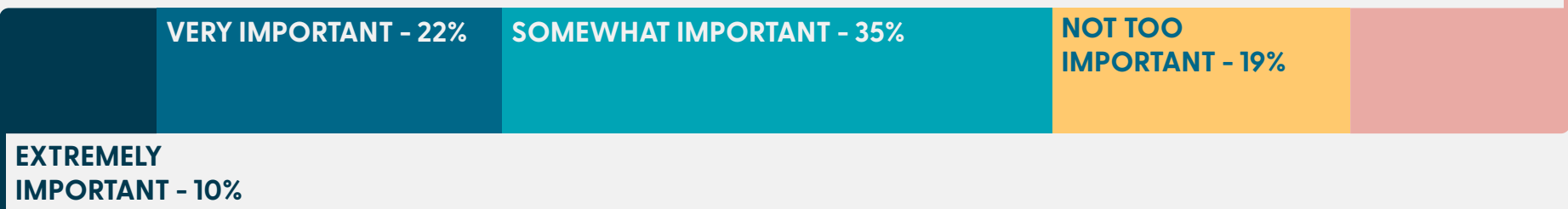
Do you think marriage is becoming old-fashioned or outdated?



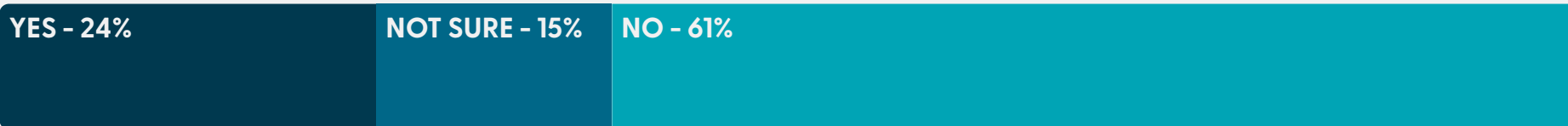
Do you believe marriage is necessary for raising children?



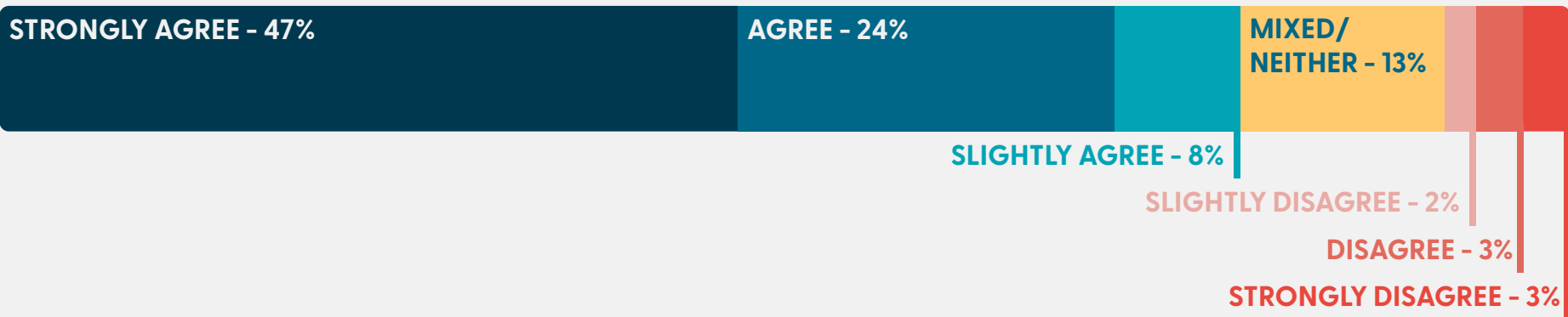
How important do you think marriage is for living a fulfilling life?



Do you believe that married couples have a responsibility to have children to support future generations?



It is beneficial for a child to be raised by both a mother and a father?



Age Differences

Do you want to get married?

- ✓ Gen Z the most, then decreases with older ages.

How do you view living together before marriage?

- ✓ Millennial responded Good Idea significantly higher agreement than all others.
- ✓ Silent responded Not a Good Idea significantly higher than all others.

If two people want to live together in a committed relationship, they should get married.

- ✓ Silent responded Agree significantly higher than all others.

Do you think marriage is becoming old-fashioned?

- ✓ Millennial responded with significantly higher agreement than all others.

How important do you think marriage is for living a fulfilling life?

- ✓ Silent responded Important significantly higher than all others.

Do you believe marriage is necessary for raising children?

- ✓ Silent responded Yes significantly higher than all others.
- ✓ Millennial responded No significantly higher than all others.

It is beneficial for a child to be raised by both a mother and a father.

- ✓ Silent responded significantly higher than all others.

Do you believe that married couples have a responsibility to have children to support future generations?

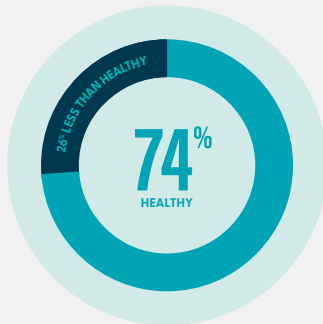
- ✓ Boomers responded No significantly higher than all others.



SUMMARY

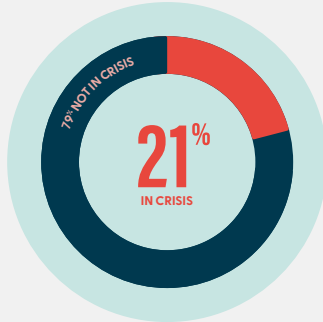
Reviewing Key Insights

The results of this study reinforce prior research while also shedding light on potential new insights—especially how Christian faith may play a critical role in marital quality and positive marital outcomes. Here are some findings from this survey that may impact a healthy marriage...



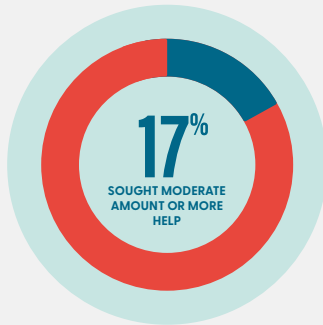
MOST MARRIAGES ARE HEALTHY

74% of marital relationships in the U.S. may be considered as “healthy.” Christians—particularly those practicing their faith—were found by the survey to be the healthiest



SOME MARRIAGES ARE IN SERIOUS CRISIS

The survey defines crisis as either pursuing/considering divorce or as having no hope for the marriage. *Convictional Christians* were found to experience the lowest rate of a crisis state.



ALMOST NO ONE IS LOOKING FOR HELP

Among those in *unhealthy marriage* relationships, only 14% sought a moderate amount of help or more, while among those in a marriage crisis state, **only 17% sought a moderate amount of help** or more.



ONE PARTICULAR PHASE IS CHALLENGING

There's some truth to the proverbial "seven year itch" in marriages. The window from **6-10 years of marriage sees more crisis** and other challenges.



RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION BEFORE MARRIAGE IS TELLING

Those who reported having a high level of satisfaction with their partner prior to marriage had a lower incidence of marriage crisis.



COHABITATION BEFORE MARRIAGE ISN'T GOOD

Those who reported **not cohabiting** prior to marriage reported a **lower incidence of marriage crisis** than those who lived together prior to getting married.

Journey to a Healthy Marriage

Healthy marriages don't just happen. They require effort and attention throughout the journey. Here, several of those key moments are spotlighted with insights from the survey.

PRE-MARRIAGE

Relationship satisfaction prior to marriage seems to be an indicator of satisfaction during marriage. Couples who were **completely** or **almost completely** satisfied:

- ✓ *Rated marriage health significantly higher: 89% and 76%.*
- ✓ *Rated crisis in marriage significantly lower: 9% and 21%.*
- ✓ *Rated currently divorced significantly lower: 8% and 11%.*

PRE-MARITAL COUNSELING

Couples who participated in pre-marital counseling or therapy reported lower incidence of marital crisis than those who had no premarital counseling.

This preparation could include:

- ✓ *Meeting with a mentor couple or pastor*
- ✓ *Completing a relationship/personality questionnaire*

Convictional Christians reported the most pre-marital counseling with a pastor, minister, or other religious leader.

COHABITATION

Living together before marriage might seem like a good idea, but the data suggests that it may increase the likelihood of crisis in marriage and divorce. Couples who did **not** live together before marriage:

- ✓ *Rated marriage health significantly higher: 77% vs 71%.*
- ✓ *Rated crisis in marriage significantly lower: 16% vs 25%.*
- ✓ *Rated currently divorced significantly lower: 13% vs 16%.*

"WISH I KNEW..."

When divorced people were asked what they wished they knew about their partner **before getting married**, these items were at the top of the list:

- ✓ *Addictions - alcohol, drugs, other behaviors.*
- ✓ *More about their past in general.*
- ✓ *Different values, beliefs, goals related to family, religion, money.*
- ✓ *Past infidelity and unfaithfulness.*
- ✓ *Personality traits, habits, behaviors (maturity, laziness, control issues, lying, etc.).*

DURING MARRIAGE

Key areas that stand out from both predictive modeling and individual survey responses indicate...

- ✓ *The five most important components of a healthy marriage include trust; love for each other; respect for each other; sexual intimacy; and listening to each other.*
- For *Convictional Christians*, additional key components include *shared spiritual beliefs/practices*; and *having a lifelong commitment to this marriage*.
- ✓ *Faith is shown to play a key role, but only when it is put into practice.*
 - ✓ *Even among Christians, a mismatch in faith practices between spouses may open the door to increased conflicts.*

6-10 YEARS MARRIED

This phase of marriage seems to be more troubled than others with couples seeing more crisis. Other problems or challenges can be magnified, such as porn addiction tripling to 7.9% in this demographic.

WHEN KIDS COME

Most respondents who have children said that children had a very positive (31%) or positive (37%) impact on their marriage. Those in **healthy** marriages rated very positive more frequently than those in **unhealthy** marriages (37% vs. 14%, respectively).

LIMITATIONS

While we believe this study provides a robust, statistically sound picture of marriage health in the U.S., there are a few factors that are important to keep in mind when reviewing the data:

The results are self-reported: Because this study is survey-based, it is reliant upon the individual responses of each participant. While we believe the questions were extensive and detailed enough to present an accurate picture, it is entirely possible that some answers could have skewed the results. For example, there may be reasons why someone who is in a marriage that would be considered *troubled* or *in-crisis* by external measures would nonetheless categorize their relationship as *healthy* on the survey. They may be unaware of underlying problems, living in denial, and so on.

The results represent the answers of only one spouse, not a couple: The survey was completed by 1,835 women and 1,973 men. While these are statistically sound representations of both sexes, it's also true that each respondent was answering questions not only for himself or herself, but also "on behalf" of their spouse. Other research suggests that

in general, if a husband and wife are asked to rate their marriage on a scale of 1-10, males may rate the relationship slightly higher than females.^{13 14}

With this in mind, it's possible that the results reported for each marriage would differ if the responses of both spouses were taken into account. It is interesting to note that there were no differences in marriage health ratings between men and women in both the 7-point scale and CSI-4 scale. But males did rate 17 of the 32 marriage areas significantly higher than females, and females did not rate any areas higher than males.

The intersection and timing of faith and marriage outcomes: The faith segments (*Non-Christian*, *Nominal Christian*, *Born-Again Christian*, *Convictional Christian*) are based on respondents' **current** self-description, but may not necessarily reflect past marriage events. For example, someone may fit in the *Born-Again* segment and also report being twice divorced. **But were they in the *Born-Again* segment when those divorces occurred?** The study does not fully answer that question. In addition, research on "religious nones" and the Christian "deconstruction" movement shows that some people are moving **away**

from faith rather than toward it. Did someone who identified as *Non-Christian* on the survey experience a divorce during a time when they would have identified as *Born-Again* or *Convictional*? The survey does not answer those questions.

In addition to investigating marriage health, we wanted to specifically understand how Christian marriages compared to others: Our sampling strategy for this project was to accurately represent a cross section of U.S. married households, as well as have a sufficient sample of Christians for deeper analysis by faith segments. However, we did not include sufficient samples (or "over-quotas") for specific faith groups outside of Christianity (and categorized all other faith groups under the category of *Non-Christian*—which also includes those who embrace no religious beliefs).



APPENDIX

Modeling Methodology

Classification models were used to evaluate the potential influences of the 32 marriage areas (independent variables) on overall marriage health (dependent variable). Models were built in R using the glmnet, caret and vip packages, where variable importance scores were extracted from tree-based and neural network models (packages: randomForest, xgboost, nnet and h2o). Additional models were created from other “best model” or “driver” analysis packages, including: glmulti, fastshap, Boruta, RWA and VSURF. Conclusions of variable importance were determined by evaluating results across all model output.

Defining Flourishing

What is flourishing, exactly? This concept has been explored extensively in the research field in recent decades. Harvard University's Human Flourishing Program suggests it encompasses “happiness and life satisfaction, physical and mental health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships.”¹⁵

In a Christian context, Grand Canyon University's 2022 Statement on Human Flourishing defines it as “thriving in all areas of life, encompassing the intellectual, moral, emotional, and spiritual aspects of a person and the communities in which people live.”¹⁶

Other Academic Research Findings

Current research on marriage reinforces many of the findings of the *Marriage Health in America* survey. For example:

COHABITATION: The Institute for Family Studies' report *Cohabitation Doesn't Compare: Marriage, Cohabitation, and Relationship Quality* found that married adults are more likely than cohabiting adults to experience relationship satisfaction; to report higher levels of relationship commitment; and to report higher levels of relationship stability.¹⁷

FAITH: A study by the Barna Group and issued by Marriage Helper found that practicing Christians express significantly more marital satisfaction than non-practicing Christians or those outside of the Christian faith.¹⁸

Future Marriage Studies

The *Marriage Health in America* study will continue. For the next wave in this study, we look forward to fine-tuning our research efforts to build upon what we've learned and go deeper in areas that warrant further investigation. In addition, a similar study focused on parenting in America is planned for 2026.

Endnotes

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About Focus on the Family

Focus on the Family is a global Christian ministry dedicated to helping families thrive in Christ. For more information, visit **family.org**.

Send your questions about *Marriage Health in America*, along with future State of the Family studies, to **stateofthefamily@focusonthefamily.com**.

For marriage help or other family-related questions, don't hesitate to contact us at **family.org/get-help-now/**



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