

# Changing Religious Affiliations from Childhood to Young Adulthood

As we have seen in [previous blogs](#), the percentage of young adults who identify as Nones has been increasing rapidly over the last two decades. During the same time, Christian groups have seen a decline in the percentage of young adults who identify with them. But looking back at their childhood affiliations, we want to know 1) Where did these Nones come from and 2) Did any who grew up in a None household become Christians.

Looking at the Pew Research, [U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2014{1}](#), we can answer these questions and others about the transition from childhood faith to adult faith.

In the first part of this post, we will consider Americans who were 25 to 34 years old in 2014. This age group is of interest because they represent those from post-college through the beginning of child rearing and because we can compare them with 18 to 24-year-olds from the 2007 Pew Research survey.

The two tables below look at the change from two different perspectives. The first looks at where young adults with a particular religious affiliation came from as children. The second looks at where children of a particular religious affiliation ended up as young adults.

Let's consider a simple example to understand the difference between these two tables. Assume that there were 200 Evangelicals and 200 Nones in 2014 and there were 100 Evangelicals and 300 Nones among the same group as children. Finally, assume that there were 25 people who were Nones as children who became Evangelical as an adult. That tells us that 125 Evangelical children became Nones as an adult.

Given this data, the first table would be:

	Evangelical Adult	None Adult
Evangelical as Children	75%(75/100)	41.7% (125/300)
None as Children	25% (25/100)	58.3% (175/300)
Total	100%	100%

And the second table would be:

*Example 2: Religion Children Became as Adults*

	Evangelical Adult	None Adult	Total
Evangelical as Children	37.5% (75/200)	62.5% (125/200)	100%
None as Children	12.5% (25/200)	87.5% (175/200)	100%

With that as background, let's look at our two tables.

**Table 1: Religion 25 to 34-year-old Adults Came From as Children**

Religion as a Child	Evangelical	Mainline	Black	Catholic	Other	None	Change	% Leaving
Evangelical-C	62.7%	19.2%	6.2%	1.5%	5.4%	16.0%	98.1%	38.4%
Mainline-C	10.5%	53.0%	2.4%	1.9%	8.2%	17.7%	69.1%	63.4%
Black-C	3.8%	2.1%	73.5%	1.0%	3.4%	5.4%	77.3%	43.2%
Catholic-C	13.5%	13.7%	6.5%	92.6%	10.3%	27.1%	54.6%	49.4%
Other-C	1.7%	2.9%	3.1%	0.5%	65.4%	11.1%	91.3%	40.3%
None-C	7.7%	9.1%	8.4%	2.5%	7.4%	22.7%	280.8%	36.3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%		

Evangelical-C stands for "Evangelical as a child" and so on

**Table 2: Religion Children Ended Up Affiliating with as 25 to 34-year-old Adults**

Religion as a child	Evangelical	Mainline	Black	Catholic	Other	None	Total
Evangelical-C	61.6%	9.0%	1.7%	1.1%	2.6%	24.1%	100%
Mainline-C	15.2%	36.6%	0.9%	2.2%	5.7%	39.4%	100%
Black-C	10.6%	2.8%	56.8%	2.1%	4.5%	23.2%	100%
Catholic-C	9.8%	4.7%	1.3%	50.6%	3.6%	30.1%	100%
Other-C	3.2%	2.6%	1.6%	0.7%	59.7%	32.3%	100%
None-C	14.2%	8.0%	4.2%	3.5%	6.5%	63.7%	100%
Evangelical-C stands for "Evangelical as a child" and so on							

**First, let's consider the Nones.**

Looking at Table 1, we see that the greatest percentage of Nones were affiliated with the Catholic church as children (27.1%) while a smaller percentage were actually Nones as children (22.7%). But lest we think this is only a Catholic issue, we find almost 34% (16.0% + 17.7%) of them were affiliated with a Protestant church as children.

From Table 2, we see that almost 40% of Mainline Protestant children became Nones by the time they were 25 to 34-year-olds. Shockingly, more Mainline Protestant children became Nones than stayed affiliated with a Mainline denomination (39.4% to 36.6%). Strikingly, every other religious grouping lost at least one in four of their childhood affiliates to the Nones; with Catholics and Other Religions losing about one out of three. It is important to highlight that one out of four children raised as Evangelicals chose to be characterized as a None as young adults. Even though that percentage is smaller than other religious groups, one of four is still a significant percentage.

Now let's look at the columns in Table 1 labeled Change and % Leaving. For this age group, there are almost three times as many Nones as adults as there were as children (i.e. 280.8%). Comparing it with other religious groups, we see that all

other groups fell in size. Interestingly, over one third of those who were Nones as children are now affiliated with another religious group. But that group is overwhelmed by the number becoming Nones from other groups.

### **What about Evangelicals, Mainlines and Catholics?**

From Table 1, we see that two-thirds of adult evangelicals age 25 to 34 were evangelical as children. Most of the remaining one third came from either Catholic (13.5%) or Mainline (10.5%) backgrounds. However, looking at Table 2, we note that 14% of those who selected None as children were affiliated with an Evangelical church as young adults. This group makes up only 8% of the Evangelical young adults because the Evangelicals are a larger group than the Nones were as children.

The group that **lost almost two-thirds of childhood affiliates is Mainline** Christian churches. From Table 2, we see that almost 40% of them became Nones and another 15% became Evangelical. Looking at the Change column for Table 1, we note that the number of Mainlines is down to less than two-thirds of the number who affiliated with Mainline churches as children.

However, the Catholics do even worse. The Change column shows that the **number of young adult Catholics is barely one half** of the number who said they were affiliated with a Catholic church as children. The Mainlines do a little better because they picked up a significant number of Evangelical and Catholic children while the Catholic faith picks up very few from any other religion (compare Table 1 the column labeled Mainline with the column labeled Catholic to see this difference).

### **Conclusion**

The vast majority of young adult Nones are not raised in households directly promoting that viewpoint. In fact, only

23% of young adult Nones said they were Nones as children. Clearly, the teaching of the culture at large and the lack of a compelling argument from their families is causing the other 77% of young adult Nones to leave their childhood faith to embrace nothing at all.

Relative to their childhood affiliation, the number of Nones is exploding among American young adults. If we, as Evangelicals in America, want to change this trend we need to be equipping our teenagers and emerging adults with a deep understanding of why we know the gospel of Jesus Christ is true and worth giving your life in service to. I encourage you to check out Probe's Periscope material at [upPeriscope.com](http://upPeriscope.com) as a good place to start the process

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### Note

1. **The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2014**, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, [www.TheARDA.com](http://www.TheARDA.com), and were collected by the Pew Research Center.

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## Why Every Christian Student Needs Mind Games

You've probably heard or read that the vast majority of young Christians are leaving the church after they graduate from high school. But they don't have to "graduate from God" after

they get their diploma.

There are several reasons young adults leave the church, and many of them jettison their faith as well. The biggest reason is that their questions and doubts—which started in junior high school—were not answered by their parents or youth leaders.

Another reason is that they don't believe Christianity is true. Immersed in a cultural brine of religious lies and deceptions, they don't know what the truth is and why biblical Christianity blows the false ideas and religions away.

A third reason is that they caught their unbiblical beliefs and practices from their parents and other adults in the church. It turns out that Mom and Dad were almost as pickled in the cultural brine as their kids!

But Probe offers a great way to push back on these reasons.

Our summer [Mind Games](#) camp is a total-immersion, life-changing week of instruction in worldview and apologetics designed to build students' confidence that Christianity is true, and why Christianity is true. We lay the foundation of three major worldviews to give them understanding of how other people think and why Christianity is better because it matches reality. Then we teach them why they can be sure that God exists, why the Bible can be trusted, and how we can know that Jesus is God and the only way to heaven.

After these basics, campers learn how biblical principles apply to issues they need to grapple with: truth and grace about LGBT, how faith and science work together, why a good God allows pain and evil, the value of suffering, how to watch a movie with their brains turned on, genetic engineering, understanding Islam, and more.

But it's not just lectures. Plenty of free time is built into the schedule for processing what they've learned and

developing friendships with other campers. The relationships that students form at Mind Games is one of their biggest takeaways. With a max of 40 participants, everyone can enjoy connecting to other campers, and many of the friendships endure year after year.

The biggest reason for leaving the church is unanswered questions and doubts. Probe staffers assure students that Mind Games is a safe place to ask any question—anonously—and address any doubt. Many of the questions campers come with, are answered during the week in our lectures and discussion times. Whether in large group or the many opportunities for one-on-one conversations with Probe teachers, campers have many ways to get help wrestling with obstacles to their faith.

For over twenty years, Mind Games alumni have grown into leaders on campus, in public service, in the military, and in the church. The fruit of their time with us is “fruit that lasts” (John 15:16).

Mind Games Camp 2021 is June 13-19 at Camp Copass in Denton, Texas, in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area. Some scholarships are available. Check out videos and much more information at [Probe.org/mindgames](https://probe.org/mindgames).

Can you think of a high school student who doesn't need Mind Games?

We can't either.

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# “What About Believers Who Stop Believing in Christ?”

I saw [your response to a question](#) regarding Hebrews and the warning of falling away. The thing is, I've known people who stopped believing in Christ, and then were restored to faith. How does this go together with these verses? Even missionaries like Adoniram Judson, Isobel Kuhn and John Newton all had times of rebellion in their younger years. And so did I; even though I grew up in a Christian home, I denied my faith in Christ at age 17—I sort of lived as a “Secret Christian” because of my Muslim fiancée at the time. At that time I didn't even know how bad it was. Because I wasn't born again or knew of repentance I never felt convicted of sins before. It's now been three years later, and I recently experienced a hatred for sin and a true faith in the sacrifice of Jesus (a faith beyond just mental acknowledgement). Does that mean I'm beyond hope?

I'm a little confused also because the verses you say refer to not true believers. My question also is, would a Jew really leave Judaism to become a nominal Christian at that time? I doubt one could say that they were nominal Christians who were in danger of falling away, when I know how much it means to leave one religion for Christianity in a country with mostly people who belong to false religion. To leave their faith to convert to Christ meant to sacrifice all—it would be like a Muslim converting and losing his family just by some superficial faith . . . that's why I feel like it didn't make sense to say the Jews who fell away were just superficial believers?

These are some very important (but also difficult) questions. We must honestly admit the difficulty, I think, as we nonetheless strive to understand (and believe and obey) what the Bible teaches. My own view is basically this:

First you ask: "I've known people who stopped believing in Christ, and then were restored to faith. How does this go together with these verses?"

If these people were true believers, and have been restored to genuine faith in Christ, then they are saved. If "[eternal security](#)" of the believer is true (i.e. once saved, always saved), then they were always saved (since first trusting Christ for salvation). If this doctrine is false, then it appears that they have been graciously restored to faith (and salvation). Either way, if they are trusting Christ for salvation (and their faith is genuine), then they are saved.

Of course, it's also possible that they weren't initially true believers at all. Sometimes people think they are Christians because they go to church, or believe in God, or because they have been baptized, or something else. But they may never have truly trusted Christ for salvation. One cannot lose what one never had. In this case, such people are not really saved at all until they truly trust Christ for salvation. And this may not actually happen until after some period of rebellion.

Indeed, you say of yourself, "Because I wasn't born again or knew of repentance I never felt convicted of sins before. It's now been three years later, and I recently experienced a hatred for sin and a true faith in the sacrifice of Jesus (a faith beyond just mental acknowledgement). Does that mean I'm beyond hope?"

Of course you're not beyond hope! You have trusted in Christ for salvation and you are saved! But it doesn't sound like you were saved before this (even though you may have grown up in a Christian home). In other words, it doesn't sound like you ever really left the faith, because it doesn't sound to me like you were saved until recently. And the same would almost certainly be true of Adoniram Judson and John Newton. By the way, Christians continue to struggle with sin after salvation, but that is a different matter from completely abandoning the

faith.

Finally, no, I do not think that a Jew would abandon Judaism to become a nominal Christian (except possibly under extreme duress). But people may become lax in their faith over time. And such people could potentially abandon their faith to return to Judaism. Note: I'm not saying this actually happens. But it could. And if it were to happen, then such a person might indeed forfeit salvation (if "eternal security" is false, which is debatable).

This is how I see the matter. I tend to think that eternal security is true, and that a believer cannot lose salvation. But other disagree with this view and it is always possible that they are right and that I am wrong. Regardless, however, it is God's intention to save those who come to Him through His Son. And we are definitely secure in Christ. The only way a believer could lose salvation (if such a thing is even possible) is by committing apostasy and rejecting Christ, and then persisting in this rejection until overtaken by physical death.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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