

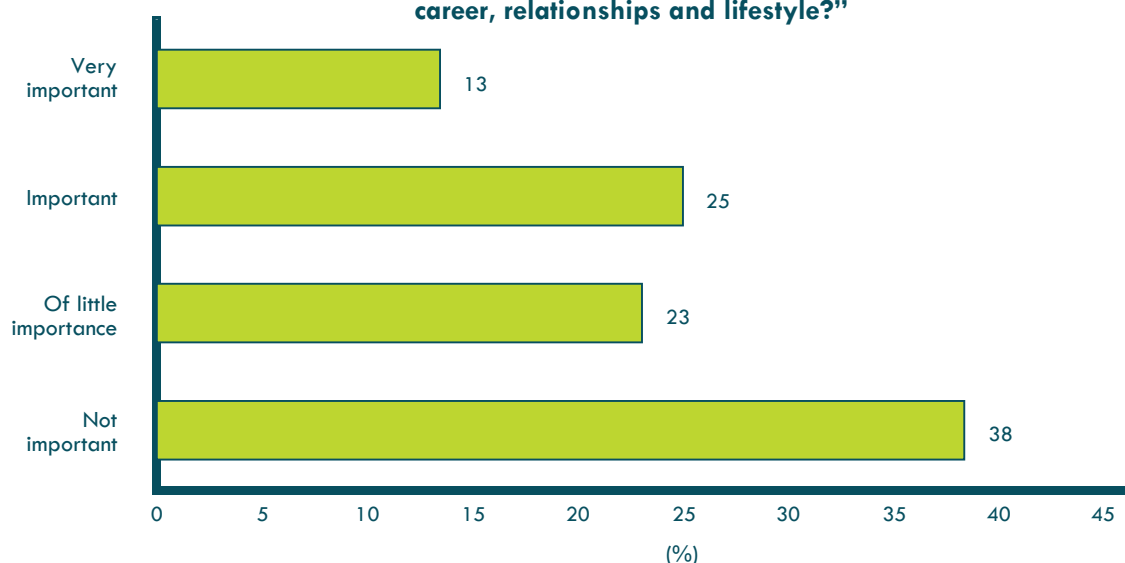
# Guided by faith?

## Australian Spirituality Fact Sheet 4

### Four in ten Australians say religious faith is important to shape life's decisions.

Do Australians recognise religious faith or spirituality as influential in their lives? As part of the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes in 2009, some 1718 people across Australian communities were asked how important their religious faith or spirituality is in shaping their life's decisions, such as career, relationships and lifestyle choices. The results indicate that while religious faith or spirituality is important for four in ten Australians, a greater proportion claim it has little to no importance in shaping their life's decisions.

**"How important is religious faith or spirituality in shaping your life's decisions, such as career, relationships and lifestyle?"**



Source: 2009 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes.

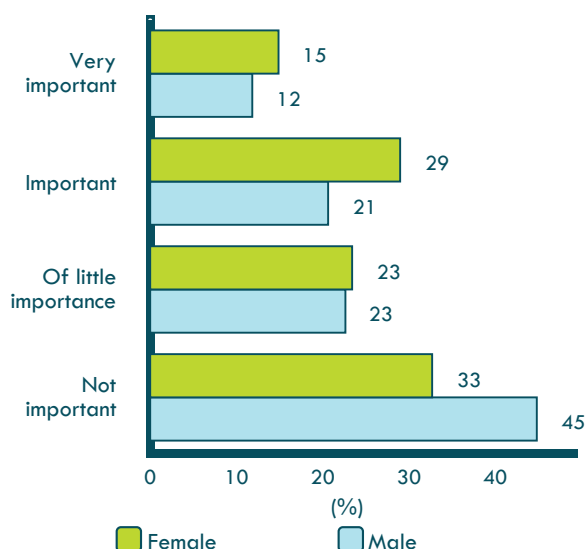
About four in ten people surveyed (38.5%) hold their faith or spirituality as important or very important in shaping their life's decisions. Among this group, 13.5% of Australians identify it as very important. However, around two in ten find that religious faith and spirituality of little importance to their process of decision making (23.1%). The remaining four in ten (38.4%) of Australians claim it has no importance whatsoever in shaping their career, relationships and lifestyle choices.

#### INSIDE...

- One in three men say it matters
- Young and old extremes
- Education not a barrier to valuing spirituality
- Ethnicity makes a big difference
- Religion that affects life

# “How important is your religious faith or spirituality in shaping your life's decisions?”

Australian Spirituality  
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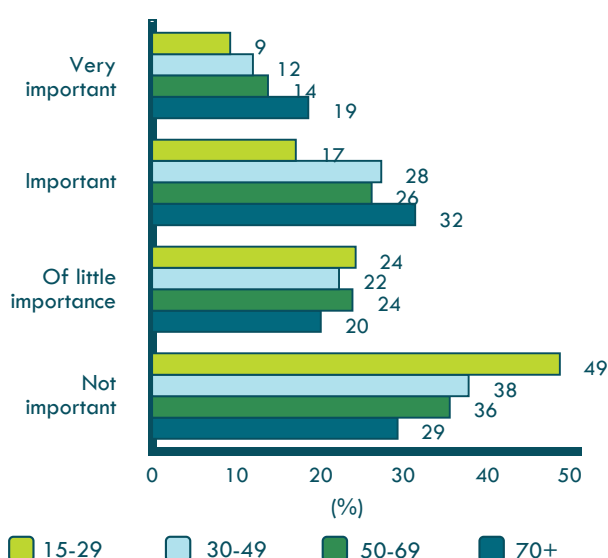


**Sex:** Men are much more likely than women to say that religious faith or spirituality has no importance to their life decisions.

Both men and women have a majority who state that faith or spirituality is of little or no importance in shaping their life decisions.

Among men, most hold that faith or spirituality is of little or no importance (68%) compared with 32% who hold it as important or very important.

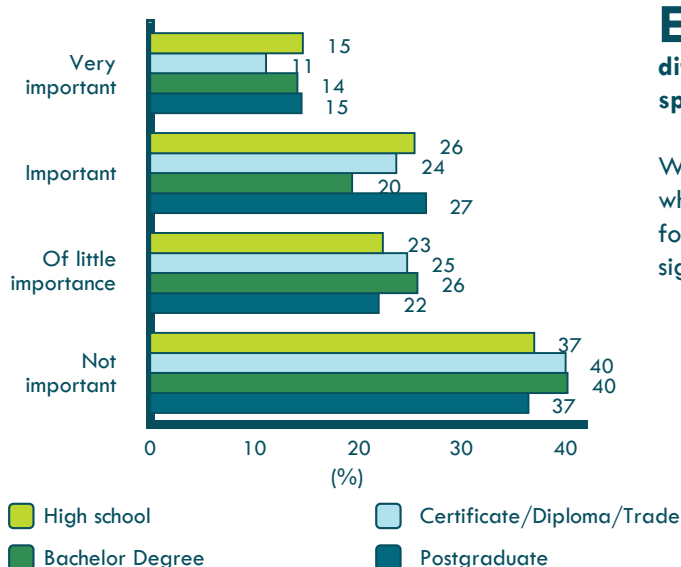
Amongst women the gap is less pronounced. Some 56% find religion and spirituality of little or no importance, compared with 44% who recognise their faith as a relevant factor in decision



**Age:** Younger people find their faith and spirituality much less salient in shaping their life choices.

Most say it is of little or no importance (73% of 15-29 year olds). This compares to 60% of 30-69 year olds. However, those aged 70+ are evenly split. Half say it is of little or no importance and half say faith or spirituality is important or very important to guiding their life choices.

The strongest opinions on the role of faith or spirituality in shaping decisions come from either end of the age spectrum. The oldest group of Australians are most likely of any age group to say it is very important. The youngest age group (aged 15 to 29) have the largest proportion who state that faith is not important in shaping their decisions.

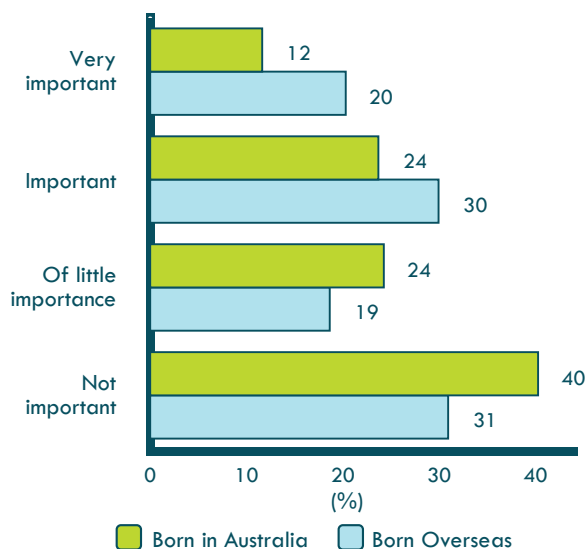


**Education:** A person's level of education makes no difference to their view on whether or not their faith or spirituality shapes their life decisions.

While the percentages in the survey sample do vary for groups who have achieved different levels of education, further tests found no evidence that these differences would be statistically significant in the Australian population.

# “How important is your religious faith or spirituality in shaping your life's decisions?”

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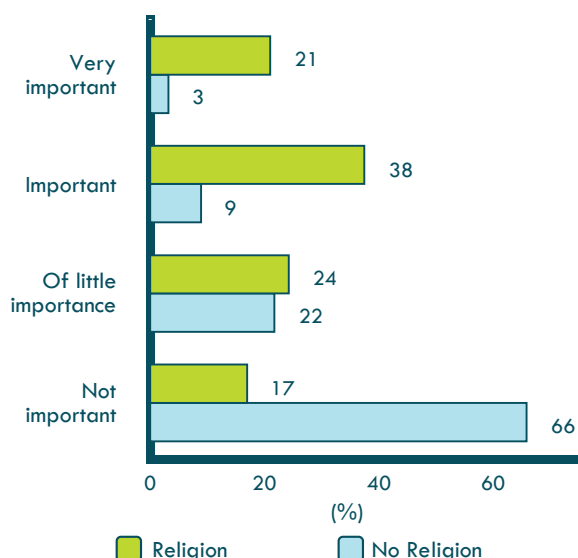


**Ethnicity:** People born overseas tend to hold faith and spirituality as more important in shaping their life decisions than Australian-born people.

Half of overseas-born people claim it is important or very important, compared with a third of Australian-born persons.

In fact nearly twice as many of people born overseas hold it as very important as those born in Australia (20% vs 12%).

## Ethnicity



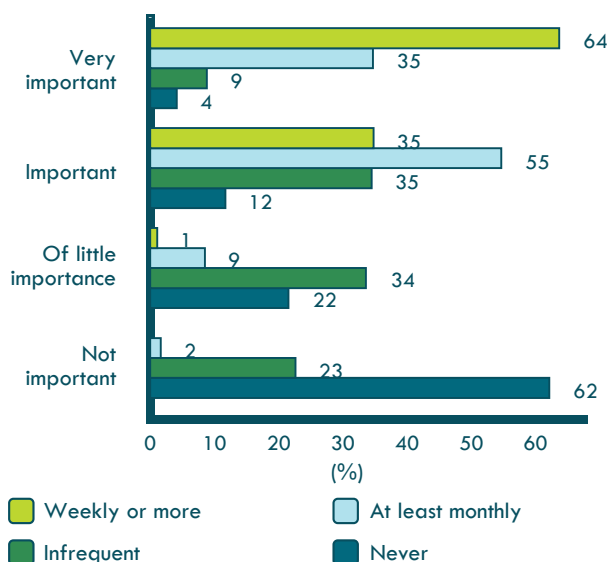
**Religion:** When asked ‘do you have a religion’, most of those who said ‘yes’ also recognise that faith or spirituality is important in shaping life’s decisions.

Some 38% of religious people find it important and 21% find it very important. Interestingly, almost one in five people who claim to ‘have a religion’ state that their faith is not important in guiding their decisions.

Those who state they do not ‘have a religion’ also claim that religion or spirituality has limited impact in their decision-making processes (88% little or no importance).

Of those with no religion, some 12% hold faith or spirituality as very important or important in shaping decisions. This also deserves further reflection about how Australians understand the concepts of spirituality and religion.

## Religion



**Attendance:** The importance of one’s religious faith or spirituality in life decisions is highly related to attending church.

In fact virtually all people who attend church weekly or more often say their faith is important or very important to their life choices (99%), followed by 90% of those who attend at least monthly.

Of those who attend church infrequently (less than monthly), most state that faith or spirituality is important to their decisions (44%).

In contrast, the majority of non-attenders find faith or spirituality of little or no importance in their decision-making (84%).

## Attendance

## AUSTRALIAN SPIRITUALITY RESOURCES from NCLS Research

Available online  
[www.ncls.org.au/spirituality](http://www.ncls.org.au/spirituality)

### Fact Sheets:

- **Something beyond this life**  
explores whether Australians believe in a spiritual dimension to life
- **Just believe or question**  
examines the degree of critical reflection in religious faith and spiritual beliefs of Australians
- **Philosophies of life**  
identifies which philosophies of life have most influence on how Australians live today
- **Guided by faith**  
examines the saliency of religious faith or spirituality in shaping life's decisions, such as career, relationships and lifestyle
- **Jesus' resurrection**  
reviews Australian beliefs about whether Jesus resurrection was an actual historical event

Each Fact Sheet presents the overall results for Australia and then compares different groups including: sex, age, education, ethnicity, 'having religion' and church attendance.

### Data source:

The International Social Survey Program (ISSP) is an ongoing survey designed to monitor changes in society across a range of countries. In 2009 the ISSP was undertaken in Australia by the Australian National University via the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA).

The survey included a standard component on religion, as well as customised questions regarding religion and spirituality which were commissioned by a consortium that included NCLS Research.

The sample comprised 1718 adults across Australia.

Evans, A. (2009) [computer file], The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, Australian Social Science Data Archives, The Australian National University, Canberra.

## COMMUNITY SPIRITUALITY link to the 2011 NATIONAL CHURCH LIFE SURVEY

**Find out about the spiritual beliefs of people who connect with your church but don't attend regularly.**

A new addition to the 2011 NCLS and beyond is a survey of local church contacts. Churches can survey people they have contact with, whether through a play group, soup kitchen, or someone they are related to.

It's an effective way to find out about the beliefs, faith practices and spirituality of those connected with your church, as well as what they think of your activities. This will help your church build stronger connections and serve the community more effectively.

For more details  
see [www.2011ncls.org.au](http://www.2011ncls.org.au).



**NEW**

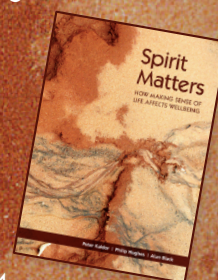
NEW BOOK

## Spirit Matters

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[www.ncls.org.au/spiritmatters](http://www.ncls.org.au/spiritmatters)