

Prayer: Alive and well in Canada

Only 15% say they never pray

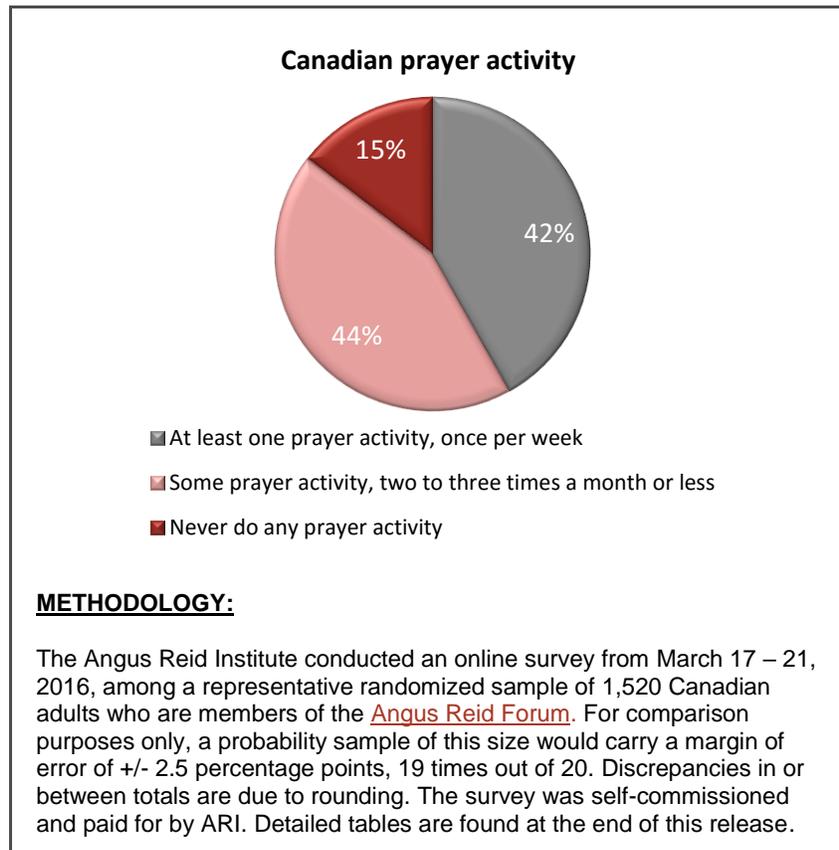
May 8, 2015 - While public religious expression has arguably been [relegated from public space](#) in Canada, prayer, whether personal, with family, or at a house of worship, appears to remain a prominent part of the lives of many Canadians.

A new survey, self-commissioned and funded by the Angus Reid Institute (ARI), finds a large number of Canadians do, in fact, engage in various forms of prayer on a regular basis.

Moreover, even those who don't pray do see some value in this religious expression at the individual level.

Key Findings:

- 42 per cent of Canadians are involved in at least one prayer related activity, once each week. An additional 44 per cent say they engage in some prayer activity each month.
- Most Canadians (86%) – even those who are inclined to reject religion themselves (57%) – view prayer as enriching for the person who prays
- Those who pray are more likely to do so at home or in informal settings, rather than at a place of worship
- Canadians pray for a variety of reasons, but the most common ones are to thank God (71%) and to ask for help (70%)



Most Canadians choose to pray privately

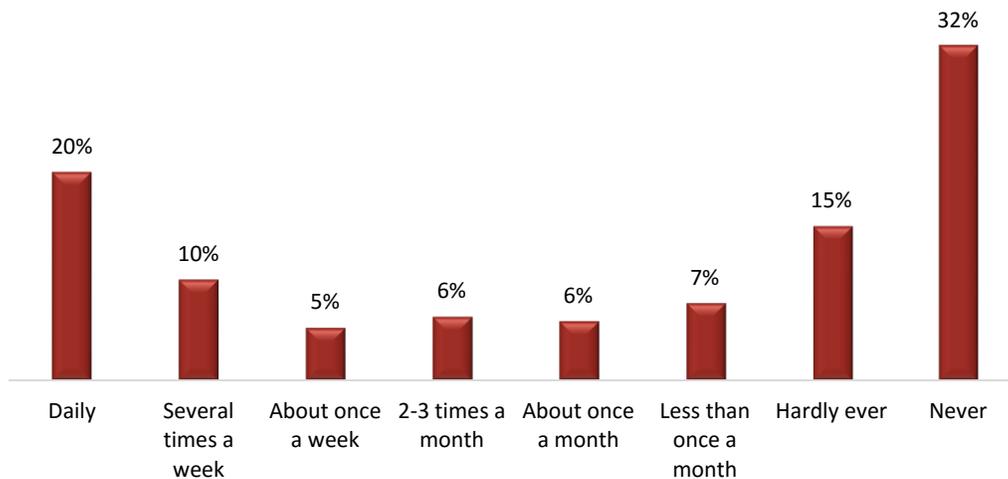
As the many faiths Canadians embrace across this country are diverse, so too are prayer patterns. Despite some [anxieties in religious communities](#) about the fall of faith, it would appear that many Canadians continue to embrace prayer, however personal and individual it may be - and it is often personal.

Canadians are much more likely to have prayed privately, individually, at least once each week over the last year, compared to other prayer activities that they may engage in. One-third (34%) say they partake in personal prayer with this frequency, while, for example, just 14 per cent say they attended a religious service weekly.

In fact, more than half of Canadians (54%) say they've prayed privately in the last year, though the regularity with which they do is the subject of much variation. A much smaller group of 15 per cent say they "hardly ever" pray, though they aren't necessarily dead-set against doing so.

The remaining one-third (32%) say they are disinclined to pray privately at all – asked how often they have over the past year, they say "never".

Thinking back over the last year, how often, if at all, have you prayed privately, individually?



One-in-five (20%) Canadians say they take time to pray daily, and an additional 10 per cent say, though they don't pray every day, they still manage to do so several times each week.

The remaining quarter of the praying population is divided into smaller groups of roughly five-to-seven per cent, all of whom pray between once a week to less than once a month.

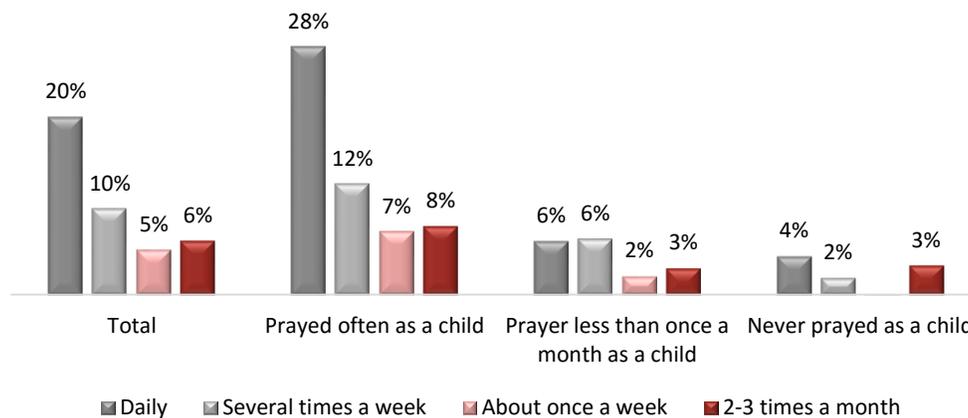
Older Canadians are much more likely to pray regularly. More than four-in-ten (43%) of those 55 and older say they've prayed once a week or more over the past year. This level drops with age – one-third (34%) of those in the 35-54 age group say the same, while just under one-quarter (23%) of the youngest group, 18-34, have prayed with this level of frequency.

The link between childhood and adult prayer

Prayer habits tend to be strongest in this country during childhood. In fact, nearly six-in-ten (58%) Canadians say they prayed once a week or more during this period of their life, significantly more than those who say they prayed as often during adolescence (41%), or as an adult. In fact, among adults in Canada, just one-third (34%) say they still pray at least once each week.

Interestingly, childhood prayer habits are strongly correlated with both the likelihood and frequency of prayer as an adult. Among those who prayed often as a child – that is, at least once a month – more than one-quarter (28%) report that they prayed daily over the course of the last year. Compare this with those who prayed less than once a month as a child, or those who did not pray at all. Among these two groups, just six per cent and four per cent, respectively, say they prayed daily this past year.

Thinking back over the last year, how often, if at all, have you, prayed privately, individually:



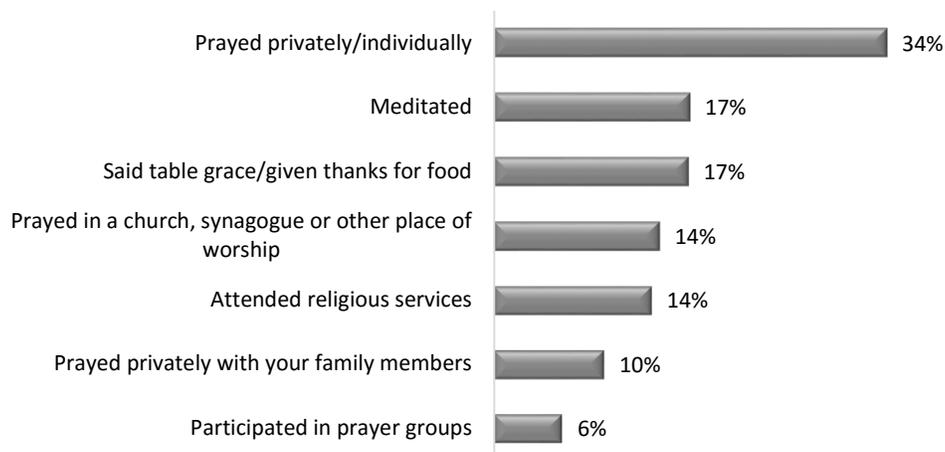
The inverse of this relationship also appears to hold. If a person did not pray during childhood, the chances they are going to pick it up in adulthood are slim. Of those who say they “never” prayed as a child, 86 per cent say they still don’t as an adult ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

Additional prayer activities in Canada

There are a number of additional ways that Canadians engage in prayer, which help to paint a more fulsome portrait of religious expression in Canada. Respondents were presented with a number of “prayer activities” and asked which of these they have engaged in within the past year.

Though individual prayer is the most common activity - 34% do this once a week or more – almost one-in-five Canadians say they meditate (17%) or say grace at the table (17%). The graph below shows the propensity of Canadians to engage in prayer activity each week:

Thinking back over the last year, how often, if at all, have you:



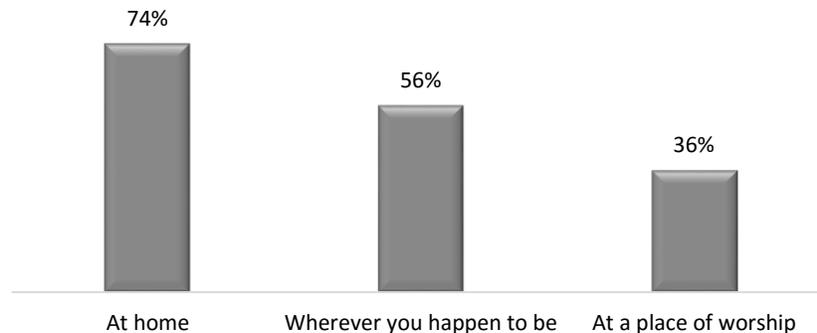
When each of these instances are considered together, a total of emerges of 42 per cent of Canadians who engage in at least one prayer activity each week. Additionally, a similar number report that they participate in “some prayer activity”, that is, at least one of these activities each month, but no more than two-to-three times. This leaves a relatively small portion of the population (15%) who do not engage in any religious or spiritual activity.

What does prayer look like?

When Canadians pray, they’re most likely to do so at home. Roughly three-in-four (74%) of those who have said a prayer in the last year say they “often” or “sometimes” pray at home. This compares to fewer than two-in-five (36%) who say they regularly prayed at a place of worship in the last year.

Canadians are much more likely to say they prayed “wherever they happened to be” than to say they prayed in a church, temple, or mosque:

**When you pray privately, how often do you pray
(those saying "often" or "sometimes" shown):**

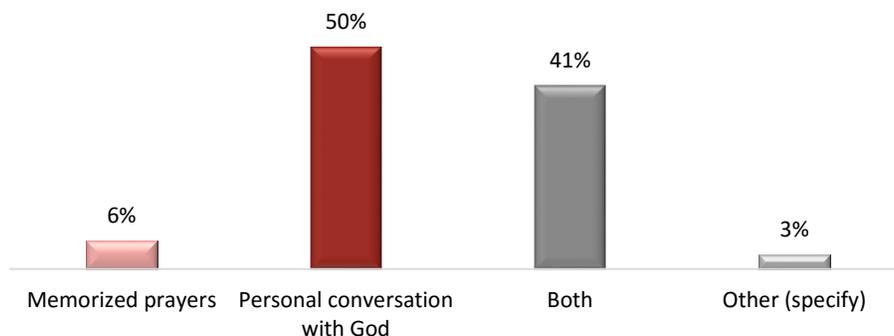


This finding fits with the sort of informal approach taken by most Canadians who pray. Fully two-thirds (66%) of those who have prayed in the last year say they “often” or “sometimes” pray lying down. That’s three times as many as say they habitually pray while kneeling or sitting cross-legged (22% each).

Moreover, it’s not just in their location or their physical position that Canadians take a less formal approach to prayer. Roughly half (50%) of all Canadians who pray say their prayers consist of a personal conversation with God, rather than recitation of specific, memorized words.

Indeed, if Canadians recite specific prayers, they’re most likely to do so in the form of a personal conversation:

**When you pray, do you mainly say prayers you have
memorized, or mainly have a personal conversation with God
or an object of worship?**



On another question, nearly nine-in-ten Canadians who pray (88%) say the sentence “I often pray silently” describes them accurately (59% say “very accurately”).

Why do people pray?

So what motivates Canadians reach out to a higher power? Respondents were asked to choose the top three reasons that drive them to pray. Two motivations rise significantly above the other options given – “to thank God” (52% chose this) and “to ask for help” (49%).

Interestingly, there is a substantial contrast between those who engage in prayer activities on a regular basis and those who do so sparingly. Those who pray regularly are much more likely to say that they pray to offer gratitude to God – nearly two-thirds (64%) do so. Conversely, among those who engage in prayer activities less than two-to-three times a month, only one-in-three (36%) say this is an important purpose of their personal prayer.

For Canadians who pray infrequently, the most-cited motivation for doing so might be seen as more self-interested. Six-in-ten (59%) supplicants from this group say they pray “to ask for help.” Significantly fewer individuals who pray regularly (42%) say this is one of their motives.

Other off-cited purposes for prayer include attempting to help others (35%), seeking guidance from God (34%), and to find peace (30%). See the following graph for a full summary of responses and comparisons between these prayer groups. [See comprehensive tables for a full list of purposes.](#)

Which of the following are the three most important purposes of prayer in your life:



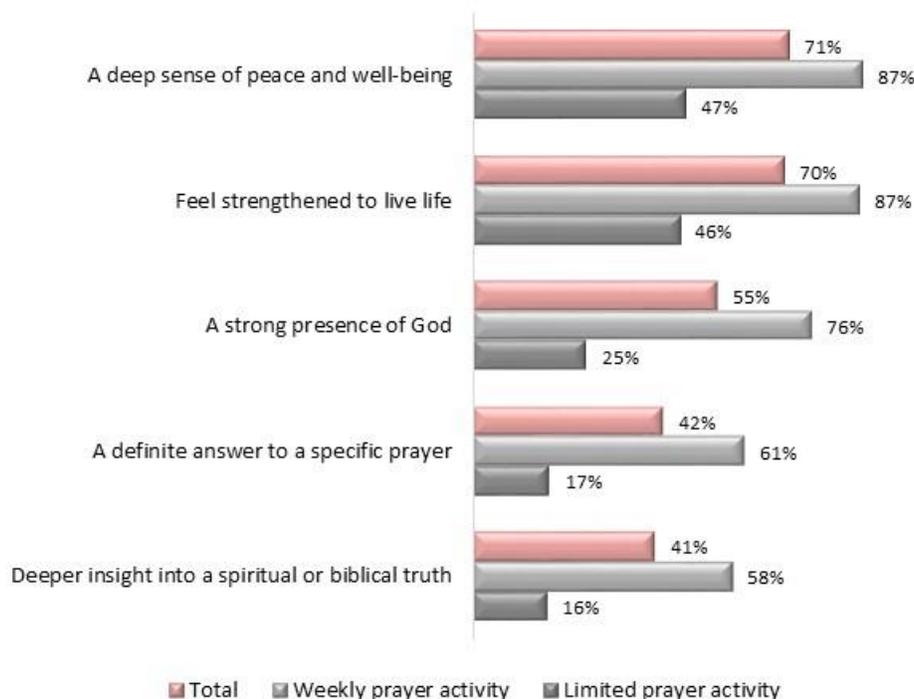
What do Canadians experience when they pray?

Praying can be something deeply personal and difficult to describe, but this data suggests there are certain commonalities that Canadians experience when they attempt to communicate with a higher power. For example, 71 per cent of Canadians who pray say they feel a deep sense of peace and well-being during prayer. 70 per cent also say they feel strengthened by the practice.

Again, those who pray more often are more bullish about the depth of their experience. Nearly nine-in-ten (87%) say they feel both of these sensations, peace and strength, while just less than half among the group who pray infrequently report the same (47% and 46% respectively).

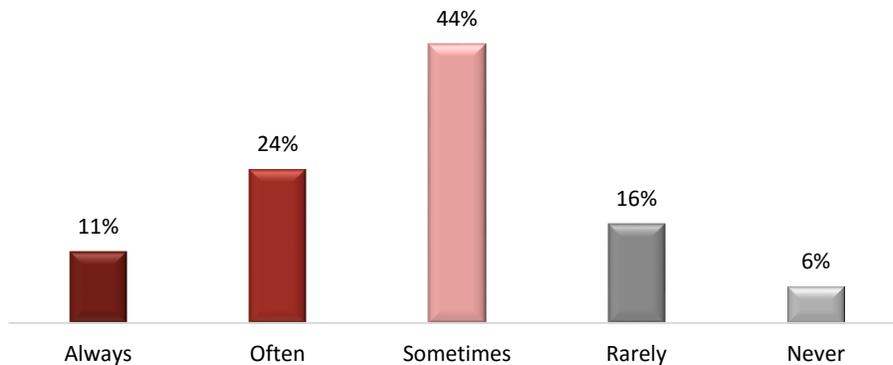
Those with limited prayer activity express considerably more doubt than Canadians who pray frequently that they are, in fact, being heard by a higher power. Roughly four-in-ten (38%) say they experience “doubts about whether or not there is a God who hears” their prayers while praying, compared to just 22 per cent among the group who pray more actively. [See comprehensive tables for a full list of experiences.](#)

When you pray, how often do you experience the following:



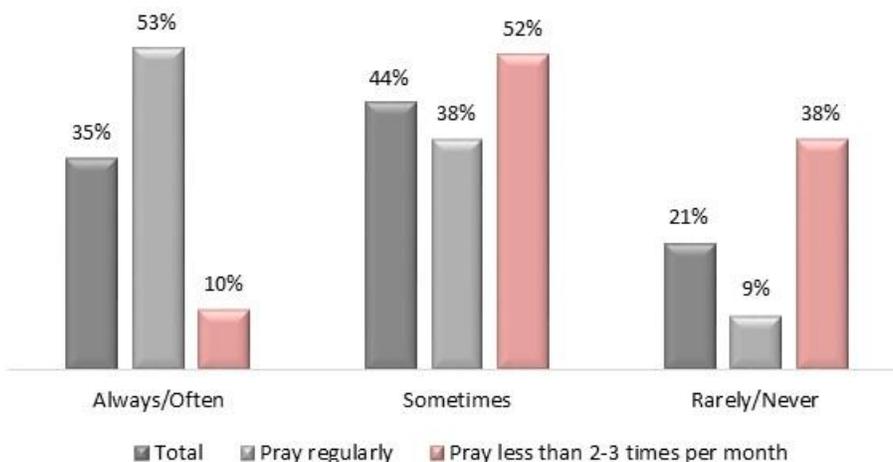
However they pray, and whatever they experience, most Canadians believe their prayers are answered at least some of the time, though just one-in-ten (11%) think God always responds to them.

Do you feel your prayers are answered?



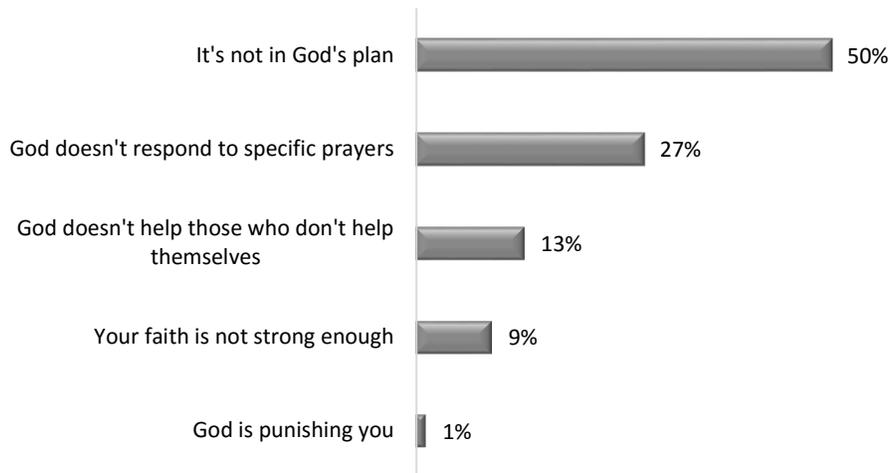
The largest number of Canadians (44%) say they can count on a response to their prayers “sometimes”. However, within the group most likely to pray, more than half (53%) say their prayers are either always or often answered, five times the rate reported by those who pray less frequently.

Do you feel your prayers are answered?



For those who say their prayers aren’t always answered, the most common reason cited is that it’s “not in God’s plan.” Nearly twice as many choose this option as any other one, as seen in the following graph:

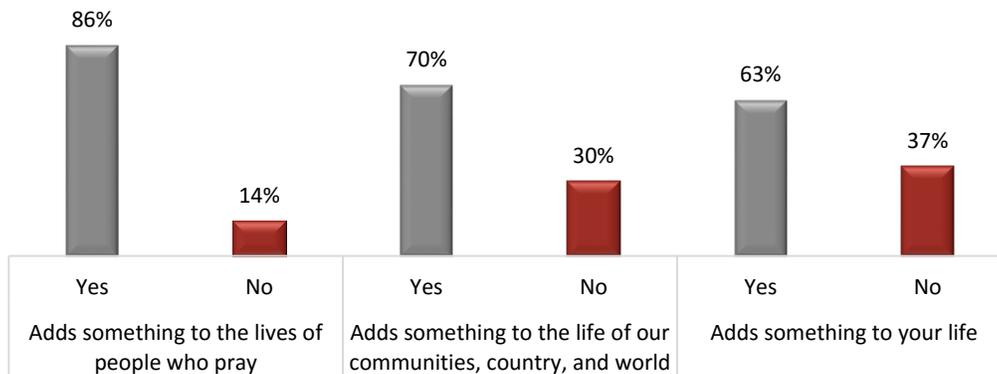
**When your prayers aren't answered, which do you feel is the most important reason?
(Among all who pray)**



Does prayer add something to our lives?

In general, Canadians see prayer as something that enriches the lives of those who do it – as well as the broader community. Asked to consider whether prayer “adds something” to their own lives and to those of others, a majority of Canadians say it does:

**When all's said and done, do you think prayer ...
(All respondents, those who pray and those who do not)**

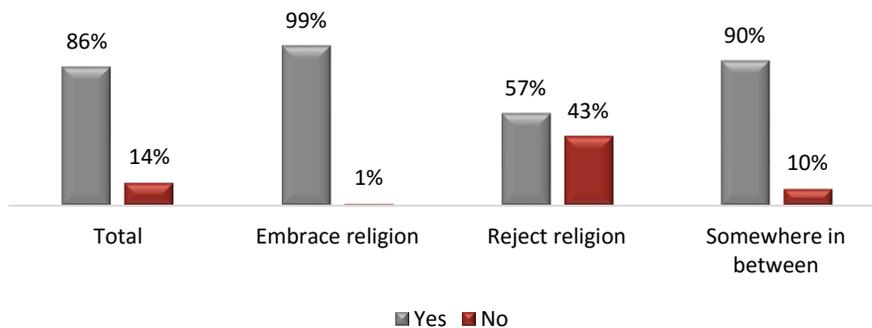


This strong overall belief that prayer is beneficial to people’s lives and communities indicates that Canada is still very much a country that values people’s expressions of faith.

Looking at the data more closely, however, it becomes clear that Canadians’ perspectives on the value of prayer are far from uniform. Rather, they vary significantly depending on whether one is inclined to embrace or reject religious belief.

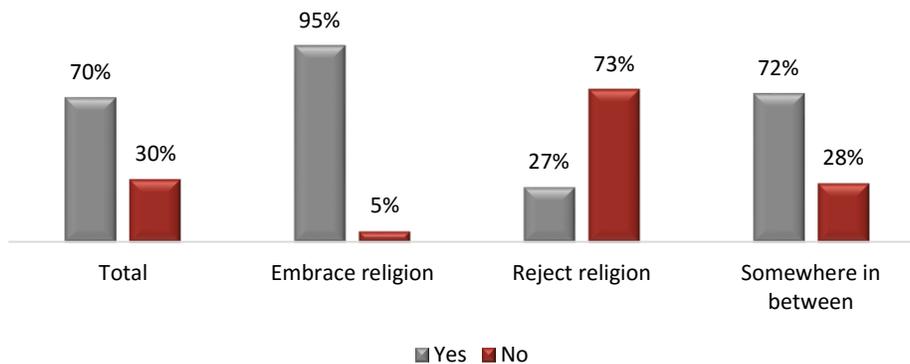
The least controversial perspective – that prayer adds something to the lives of those who pray – is shared by majorities of each group, but those who are inclined to reject religion are much less likely to say this is the case, as seen in the graph that follows.

When all's said and done, do you think prayer adds something to the lives of people who pray?



Canadians are considerably more divided on whether prayer adds something to society more broadly. Though fully seven-in-ten (70%) believe this is the case, those who reject religion are not on board:

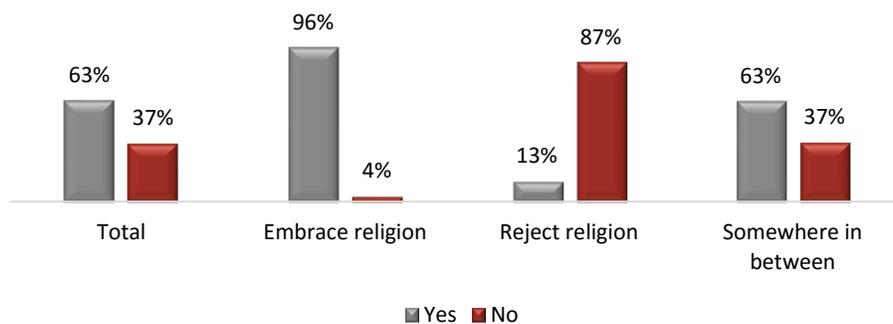
When all's said and done, do you think prayer adds something to the life of our communities, country, and world?



In a similar vein, when asked whether prayer adds something to their own lives, most Canadians say it does, but those who are inclined to reject religion are convinced it doesn't.

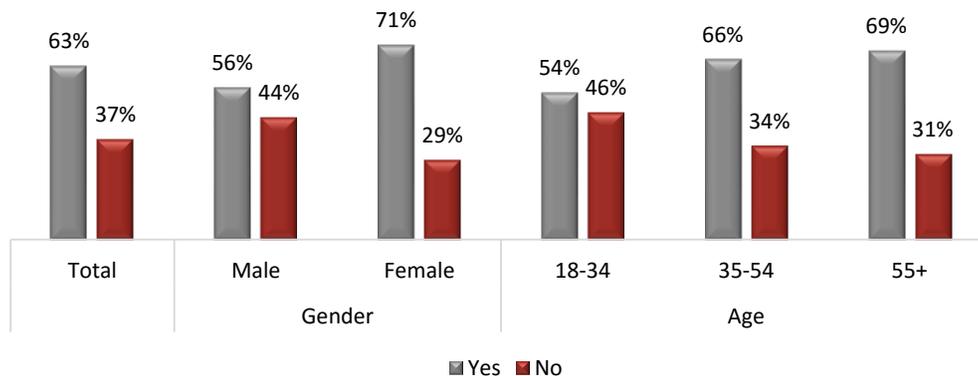
Those who locate themselves somewhere in between embracing and rejecting religion are more likely to say prayer enriches their lives than to say it doesn't, but they're more divided on this personal question than they are on the other two:

When all's said and done, do you think prayer adds something to your life?



Responses to each of these questions also break down along age and gender lines, with women and older people more likely to see prayer as a net positive in each case ([see comprehensive tables](#)):

When all's said and done, do you think that prayer adds something to your life?



Summary tables follow. For detailed results by region, age, gender, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

**Regional sample sizes are unweighted numbers – everything else is weighted sample sizes*

Thinking back over the last year, how often, if at all, have you: Prayed privately, individually				
	Total (1037)	Prayed often as a child (821)	Rarely prayed as a child (187)	Never prayed as a child (29)
Daily	20%	28%	6%	4%
Several times a week	10%	12%	6%	2%
About once a week	5%	7%	2%	0%
2-3 times a month	6%	8%	3%	3%
About once a month	6%	7%	4%	1%
Less than once a month	7%	9%	7%	2%
Hardly ever	15%	13%	29%	2%
Never	32%	17%	43%	86%

Which of the following are the three most important purposes of prayer in your life:			
	Total (1037)	Regular prayer activity (605)	Limited prayer activity (432)
To thank God	52%	64%	36%
To ask for help	49%	42%	59%
To help others	35%	35%	35%
To seek God's guidance	34%	40%	27%
To find peace	30%	28%	32%
To improve your own life	23%	17%	30%
To ask for forgiveness	21%	25%	15%
To praise God	12%	17%	4%
To express intentions	9%	7%	11%
To seek intimacy with God	8%	13%	1%

When you pray, how often do you experience the following: (Summary of Usually/Sometimes)			
	Total (1037)	Regular prayer activity (605)	Limited prayer activity (432)
A strong presence of God	55%	76%	25%
A deep sense of peace and well-being	71%	87%	47%
A definite answer to a specific prayer	42%	61%	17%
Deeper insight into a spiritual or biblical truth	41%	58%	16%
Feel led by God to perform some specific action	40%	56%	18%
Feel strengthened to live life	70%	87%	46%
A feeling that God is not listening to me	26%	23%	32%
A feeling of despair and desolation	23%	23%	23%
Doubts about whether or not there is a God who hears your prayers	28%	22%	38%

Do you feel your prayers are answered?			
	Total (1037)	Regular prayer activity (605)	Limited prayer activity (432)
Always	11%	17%	3%
Often	24%	36%	8%
Sometimes	44%	38%	52%
Rarely	16%	7%	27%
Never	6%	2%	10%

When all's said and done, do you think that prayer...				
	Total (1520)	Inclined to embrace religion (522)	Inclined to reject religion (333)	Somewhere in between (665)
Adds something to the lives of people who pray				
Yes	86%	99%	57%	90%
No	14%	1%	43%	10%
Adds something to the life of our communities, country, and world				
Yes	70%	95%	27%	72%
No	30%	5%	73%	28%
Adds something to your life				
Yes	63%	96%	13%	63%
No	37%	4%	87%	37%

Which of the following are the three most important purposes of prayer in your life:			
	Total (1037)	Regular prayer activity (605)	Limited prayer activity (432)
