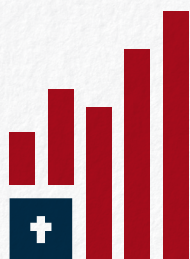




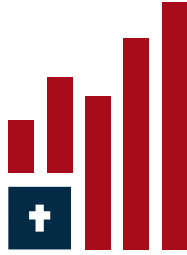
AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY



State of the Bible

USA 2025





State of the Bible

USA 2025

RESEARCH FROM AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

Prepared by

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STATE OF THE BIBLE: USA 2025

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PREFACE

JENNIFER HOLLORAN, DSL

American Bible Society

Welcome to the 2025 *State of the Bible* report! Each year, we explore U.S. Bible engagement trends and cultural perceptions across a wide range of demographics. Our goal is not simply to report findings, but to inform, inspire, and encourage the Church to thoughtfully respond to the spiritual realities of our time.

This year, we're excited to include a new global dimension. In partnership with the British and Foreign Bible Society and their recent PATMOS global survey, we share insights into worldwide Bible engagement, broadening our understanding of the opportunity for Bible access and engagement worldwide.

Over the past few years, our research has revealed a concerning decline in U.S. Bible engagement. Yet in 2024, the U.S. saw a resurgence in Bible sales, a signal of renewed interest. The 2025 data suggest that this potential rebound may be taking root, especially

among Millennials and men. Meanwhile, engagement among other groups—including Baby Boomers and women—remains steady.

Why this renewed curiosity about the Bible? One possible reason is the Bible's growing presence in public discourse. With such wide access to Scripture in the U.S., many are choosing to look past others' portrayals of the Bible and discover what the Bible actually says for themselves. The Church has a unique opportunity in this moment—to invite seekers into genuine encounters with the living Word of God. As Psalm 34:8 encourages, “Find out for yourself how good the LORD is.”

But perhaps there is another factor at work. The 2025 *World Happiness Report*, a study conducted by the University of Oxford, Gallup, and the United Nations, revealed that U.S. happiness has dropped to a record low. In a world where many feel weary, anxious, or unsatisfied, Scripture offers an enduring message of hope. As Isaiah 40:31 reminds us, “But those who trust in the LORD for help will find their strength renewed ...”

This year's *State of the Bible* report also explores themes of trust, identity, and church engagement—critical questions in a time when many are asking, *Who am I? Whom can I trust? Where do I belong?* These questions create an opening for Scripture to shape not just individual lives but our relationships and communities.

At American Bible Society, we believe every person is on a journey with God's Word. We want to do our part to equip the Church to respond to cultural shifts with wisdom and compassion, helping people take the next right step with the transforming power of the

Word of God. Together as the body of Christ, we can welcome those who are searching and point them toward the abundant life that comes from loving God and loving others (Matthew 22:37–38).

We hope the 2025 *State of the Bible* serves as a meaningful resource for you, your church, and your ministry as we join in that God-honoring work. ■



JENNIFER HOLLORAN, DSL

Jennifer Holloran serves as President and CEO at American Bible Society, sharing decades of experience in the global movement to expand Bible access and engagement. Before joining ABS, she served Wycliffe Bible Translators USA for more than 22 years, most recently as Chief Operating Officer. She holds a doctorate in strategic leadership from Regent University as well as a Master of Business Administration with a specialization in human resources from the University of Central Florida. Jennifer and her husband, Tim, live in Philadelphia, PA, with their daughters, Katherine and Penelope.



TIME FOR INNOVATION

JOHN FARQUHAR PLAKE, PH.D.

American Bible Society

S *tate of the Bible: USA 2025* is the fifteenth edition of our annual study about Americans' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors toward the Bible, faith, and the church. Year after year, we've focused on the tremendously positive impact of Bible engagement and on critical opportunities for the gospel in America. Over this decade-and-a-half, our diligent inquiry has helped us better understand and love our neighbors.

In 2025, we document a new moment of opportunity, as more of our neighbors—especially among younger adults and men—are reaching for the Bible, searching its pages, and experiencing God's voice through it. As we look around, we see signs of hope, and we hope for spiritual renewal in our nation.

God is clearly at work in America, and we rejoice in this, but we also recognize the ongoing need for innovation in Bible ministry.

Thankfully, the church has always been innovative, leveraging new technologies to communicate the gospel, exploring language development through Bible translation, and even pioneering the discipline of cultural anthropology to ensure that the Bible isn't merely delivered everywhere but that God's Word has an opportunity to transform all people.

Christians innovate because *culture is always changing*. Our task is to meet the ever-changing challenges of each new generation with the unchanging Word of God. Second, we innovate because *we care deeply about our neighbors*. We know the life-changing power of the Scriptures. Evidence shows that engagement with the Bible and participation in a vibrant Christian community bring health, well-being, and purpose to millions of our neighbors. Because we care for all Americans—indeed for all people—we want all to be transformed by God's Word.

BEYOND THE BOOK

The *State of the Bible* research team has spent 14 years describing opportunities and obstacles to the Bible in America. Now, in our fifteenth year, we are offering more to help ministry leaders put these insights into practice.

State of the Bible: USA 2025 includes several new features. First, we're going multi-modal by adding audio and video components to each chapter. In 2024, we experimented with podcast-style interviews that accompanied some of our key chapters. This year, we plan to release at least one major ***State of the Bible Podcast*** episode per month, in both audio and video formats.

Second, we know that reading long-form reports like this digital and printed book can be daunting for church leaders with busy schedules. This year, we're launching *Insights from State of the Bible*, a series of short videos, focusing on one important finding each week. With an investment of less than two minutes per week, you'll be able to zoom in on a single insight and start a discussion about how to take action in your church or community. This isn't just a way to make our research findings bite-sized, it's an invitation to join us in both conversation and innovation.

Third, we will be preparing a **Church Leader's Toolkit** for each chapter, featuring presentation slides including our key data visualizations and talking points in the notes. These visual resources can be used as sermon illustrations, conversation starters, and even prayer reminders for pastors and church leaders at all levels.

One more way we're innovating is through a growing partnership with faculty and staff at Christian colleges and universities. This year, we are offering **Innovation Grants** to educators who care about catalyzing Bible engagement in the next generation of American adults. These small grants—ranging from \$5,000 to \$15,000—will be directed to Christian scholars from across the church who are willing to test innovative approaches to Bible ministry that benefit young adults on their campuses and in their broader communities. You can learn more about them at stateofthebible.org/facultygrants.

These research grants, videos, podcasts, slide decks, and other resources are an invitation for you to join us in innovative Bible ministry and find the most effective ways to care for our neighbors.

STATE OF THE BIBLE: USA 2025

Throughout 2025, the *State of the Bible* research team will be presenting a new set of findings from our January 2025 national survey. We will release new chapters from April through December 2025, each focusing on key aspects of America's relationship with the Bible, faith, and the church. Here are a few of the stories we will be releasing in the coming months:

2025

APR

The Bible in America. Our first chapter tracks key metrics about Bible use and Scripture engagement in the United States. We also explore the preferences for formats and digital platforms of Bible users and examine changes in the perception of the Bible.

2025

MAY

The Bible Around the World. We compare perspectives about the Bible in the U.S. with global ones to identify similarities and differences in Bible access and engagement across cultures. We see how Americans' views and practices regarding the Bible differ or align with people in other countries.

2025

JUN

Human Flourishing. In partnership with Human Flourishing researchers at Harvard University, we continue our ongoing investigation of how the Bible, faith, and the church are connected to holistic well-being.

2025

JUL

Self-Care and Well-Being. This chapter will focus on challenges to well-being and the role of the Bible in pastoral care—and self-care. Topics include loneliness, trauma and suffering, forgiveness, and the role of faith and hope. We'll also see how Bible users manage stress differently than other Americans.

2025

AUG

Church Engagement. In recent years, researchers have observed significant changes in Americans' church attendance and views on the church as an institution in society. We will explore both the positive and negative perceptions of the church.

2025

SEP

Identity. In this chapter, we'll look at how engaging with the Bible shapes the identity development of Gen Z as they navigate challenges and opportunities. We'll look at how individuals from Gen Z who actively engage with the Bible search for and discover their identity.

2025

OCT

Faith and Trust. This month we will assess how much trust Americans place in other people and institutions. We'll explore the difference in the way Bible users place their trust compared to those who do not actively engage with the Bible.

2025

NOV

Loving God and Loving Our Neighbors. In previous years, our research on neighboring focused on people's intentions. This month, we will dig deeper and explore actual behaviors and actions. We'll look at how people are actually interacting with and caring for their friends and neighbors.

2025

DEC

Love in Action. Our final chapter looks at how Bible engagement goes beyond shaping religious beliefs and practices and extends into everyday actions, particularly when it comes to how individuals interact with others. We will examine how the Bible guides people in their relationships with others and how those interactions reflect biblical values of love and generosity.

Throughout this year's digital book, watch for the linked **extended content**. Our new podcast will feature interviews on subject-matter experts for every chapter. We are glad to serve you with ongoing innovative *State of the Bible* material at our website, StateoftheBible.org, as well as this traditional report. There's much more to come!

CONCLUSION

As you read our 2025 report, I pray that you are encouraged by the good news that Bible use is increasing across America, particularly among demographic groups that have traditionally been the least engaged. I invite you to prayerfully consider how God may use you during this time of growing openness to the Gospel. Do you have family, friends, co-workers or neighbors who may be more willing than ever to hear the Good News found in the pages of Scripture?

Ultimately, *The State of the Bible: USA* research project is more than just a snapshot of America’s spiritual state in 2025. It is an invitation and a challenge to all of us who have been impacted by the good news of the Bible to share its treasures with those around us. ■



**JOHN FARQUHAR
PLAKE, PH.D.**

Dr. John Plake is a researcher with a pastor’s heart. He bridges the worlds of social science, business intelligence, and spiritual formation, helping Christian leaders understand how people grow in Christ.

Dr. Plake serves as Chief Innovation Officer at American Bible Society and is the editor-in-chief of the *State of the Bible* series. Over 35 years of full-time ministry, John has served as a pastor, missionary, professor, and researcher.

He is an ordained minister with a Ph.D. in intercultural studies. He lives with his family in Wilmington, Delaware.

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THE BIBLE IN AMERICA TODAY

After the success of “The Chosen,” Amazon and Netflix are converting Bible stories into films and TV shows with “Game of Thrones”-style intrigue and romantic comedy elements.

*The New York Times*¹

The story of Jesus, presented in the multi-season serial *The Chosen*, has become a smash hit in recent years. Now there are other Bible-based dramas in the works, covering the stories of Ruth, David, and Mary the mother of Jesus, with even more on the horizon. The *Times* article notes that “other studios are eager to adapt material that has zero copyright protection and billions of adherents.”²

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/02/arts/television/house-of-david-the-chosen-amazon-prime-netflix.html>

² Ibid.

For decades, religious companies have produced faith-based films that found churchgoing audiences. But *The Chosen* has pushed far beyond that. Its producing team “estimates that the show has been watched by more than 280 million unique viewers worldwide, *a third of whom it says are not religious*.”³

This “not religious” audience intrigues us. That’s 90 million-plus, in the U.S. and elsewhere, who presumably are not Bible readers, yet have tuned in to a creative, Bible-based account of the life and teachings of Jesus.

Whatever your opinion of *The Chosen*, its popularity raises a question for anyone interested in how Americans connect with the Bible. Could *The Chosen*—or other similar presentations in the future—have a significant effect on the people we call Bible Disengaged or non-Bible Users or Non-Practicing Christians?

America’s relationship with the Bible took a serious downturn a few years ago, and it has wallowed in a statistical trough ever since. This year we see a slight uptick. Is this a reversal of a previous trend? Time will tell. Significantly, we see the greatest increases among Millennials and men, populations that have previously scored low in Bible Use and Scripture Engagement. There’s also been a Bible boost in formerly resistant regions—the Northeast and West. Even adherents of non-Christian religions are turning to the Bible more often.

Can we credit a particular TV show or ad campaign with these increases? Our research does not directly address motivations, but it is clear that people are looking for answers . . . increasingly in visual

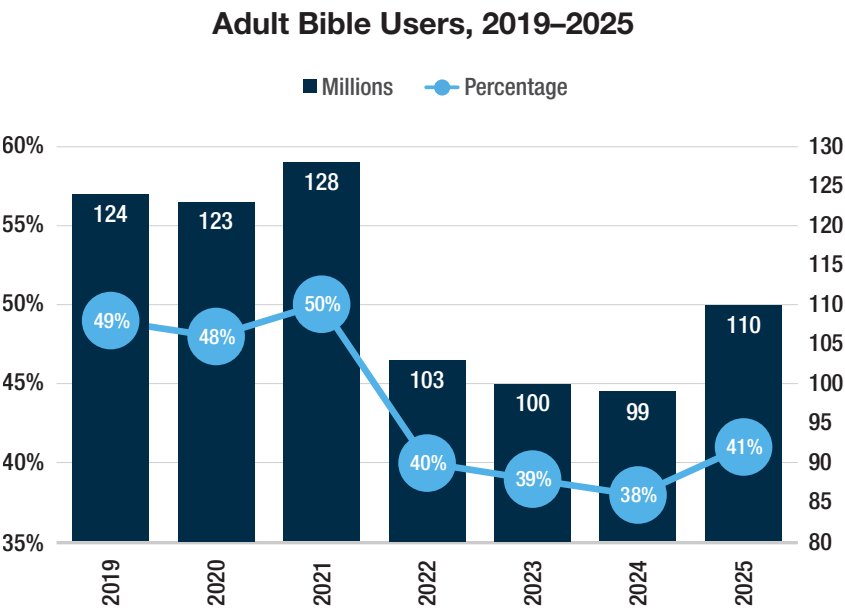
3 Ibid. Italics ours.

media. These sorts of public presentations reinforce the quietly faithful lives and creative outreach of millions of Christians eager to share with their neighbors the “greatest story ever told.”

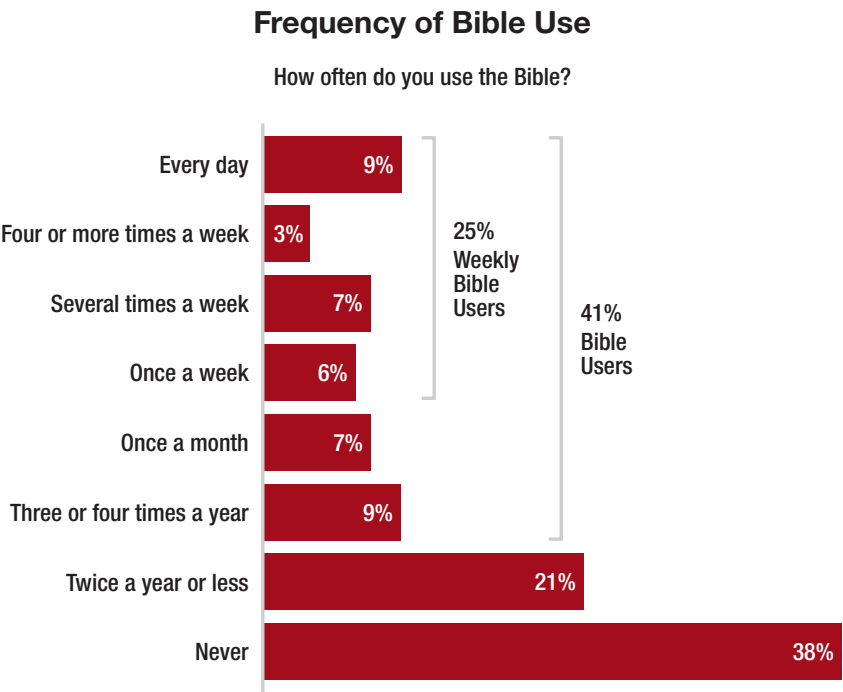
BIBLE USE

We define Bible Users as those who connect with Scripture on their own at least three times a year, “not including times when you are at a large church service or Mass.” This is a low bar, but it does reflect a personal decision to interact, at least occasionally, with the Bible.

From 2011 to 2021, nearly half of all Americans qualified as Bible Users, with little change from year to year. In 2022, Bible Use fell dramatically (from 50% to 40%), and it kept sliding. Our 2024 survey found only 38 percent of American adults were Bible Users, falling below even those who said they “never use the Bible” (40%).



But this year there's better news: 10 million *more* American adults are Bible Users. The total amount of 110 million represents 41 percent of the adult population. This is the highest total since our 2021 report.⁴



GENERATION AND GENDER

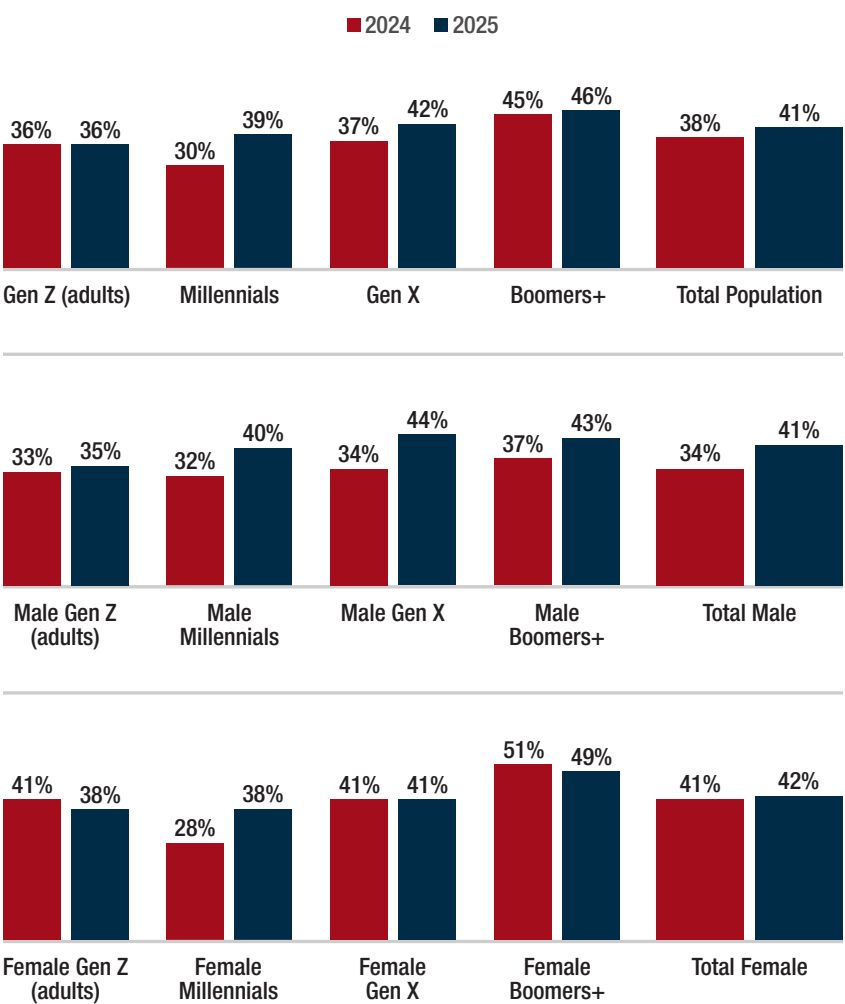
This might surprise you. **Millennials** are leading the way in this move toward greater Bible Use, and in every generation **men** are using the Bible more.

In the 2024 report, Millennials trailed all other generations, with only three in ten (30%) qualifying as Bible Users. This year they've

⁴ The *State of the Bible* survey is conducted in January, so many of its findings reflect situations from the previous year.

jumped to nearly four in ten (39%), surpassing their younger siblings in Generation Z. Both male and female Millennials have seen a substantial year-to-year increase.

Bible Users 2024–2025 by Generation⁵ and Gender

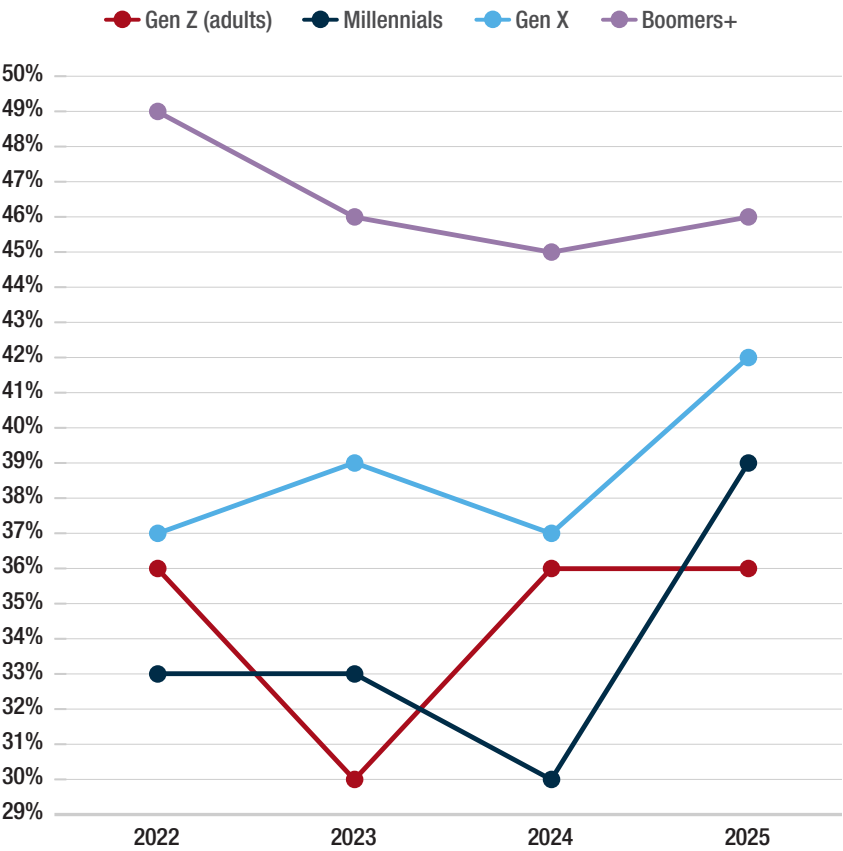


⁵ See the Definitions section for the current ages of each generation. Note that the Boomers+ now also includes the group previously known as Elders.

In all other generations, women have held steady or decreased slightly in their Bible Use, while men had substantial gains. In Gen X, men had a ten-point rise in percentage of Bible Users, while women in that generation saw no increase at all. In that age group, men forged ahead of women in Bible Use (now 44% to 41%).

Overall, in the past year, men have nearly closed the gender gap in Bible Use, turning a seven-point gulf (41% to 34% in 2024) to a slim one-point deficit (42% to 41%).

Bible Users by Generation, 2022–2025

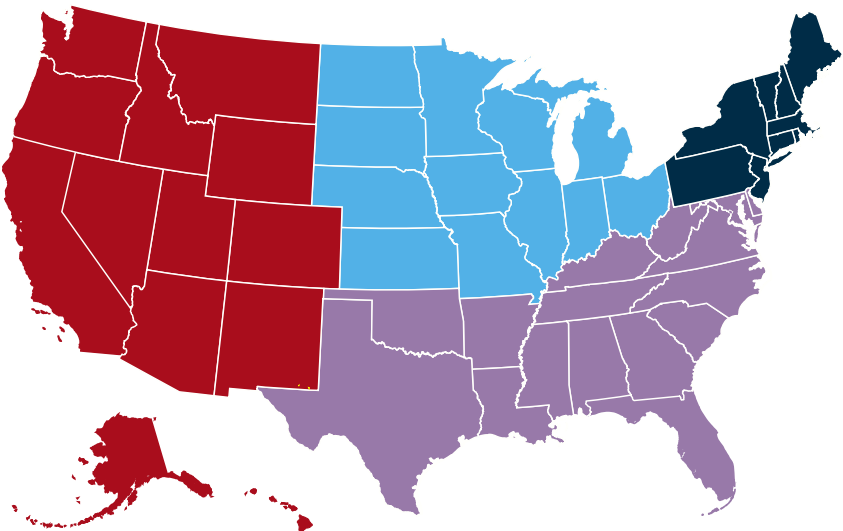


REGION, RACE, RELIGION

The Southern U.S. consistently leads the way in measures of Bible Use and Scripture Engagement. In 2025 the South once again boasts the highest percentage of Bible Users (48%), with a very slight increase over 2024, but its lead is shrinking. *Every other region in the U.S. has increased its share of Bible Users by five or six points in the last year*, even the often-resistant Northeast.

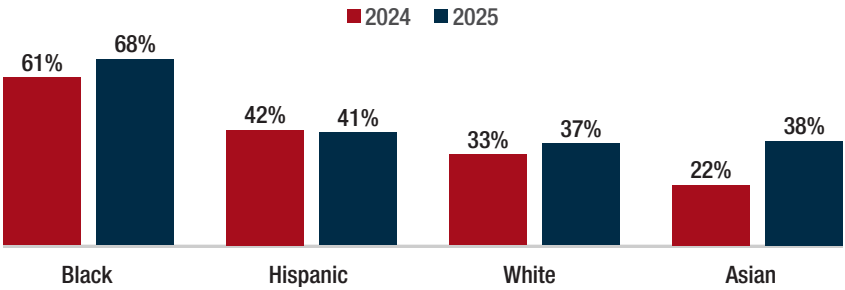
Bible Users by Region, 2024–2025

West		Midwest		South		Northeast	
2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025
33%	39%	34%	39%	47%	48%	28%	33%



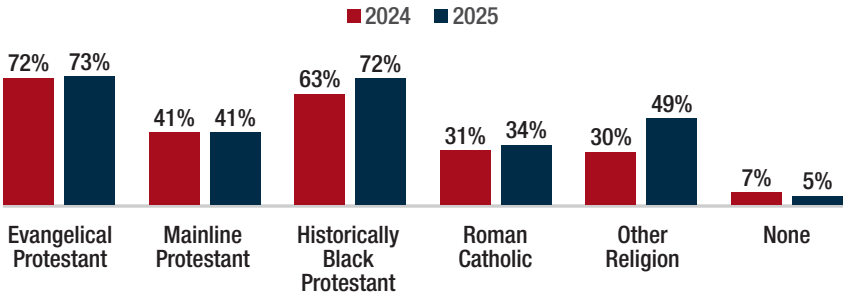
Two out of three Black Americans (68%) are Bible Users, by far the highest proportion of any ethnic group in our survey. Every group except Hispanics shows a substantial increase in Bible Users in the past year.

Bible Users by Race/Ethnicity,⁶ 2024–2025



Nearly three-quarters of those attending Evangelical Protestant (73%) or Historically Black Protestant churches (72%) are Bible Users. Every denominational group has an increase in Bible Users over 2024, most notably the Historically Black Protestants moving up nine points from 63 percent in 2024. The most surprising finding is that nearly half of those in “other religions” (that is, non-Christian religions) qualify as Bible Users, interacting with the Bible at least three times in the previous year.

Bible Users by Religion,⁷ 2024–2025



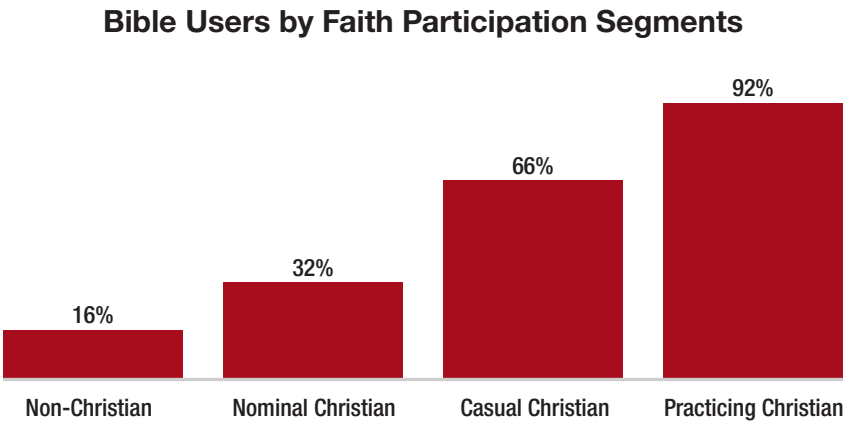
6 A number of ethnic designations are excluded in this analysis because the sample sizes are too small to provide reliable data.

7 An additional category, “Other Christian and Orthodox Christian,” had too few respondents to assemble reliable data. “Other Religion” includes non-Christian religions like Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism.

In addition to denominational connection, we look at how deeply people interact with their churches. For several years, we have used the designation Practicing Christians for those who (1) say they’re Christian, (2) attend church (in person or online) at least once a month, and (3) consider their faith “very important” to them. About a fifth of Americans are Practicing Christians.

Last year we used these same factors to identify two other groups of people. Nominal Christians call themselves Christian but don’t attend church even monthly. Casual Christians attend, but they don’t consider their faith “very important.” And a substantial group of Non-Christians (34% of the population) does not claim to be Christian and generally doesn’t participate in a church. These categories combine within a measure we call Faith Participation.

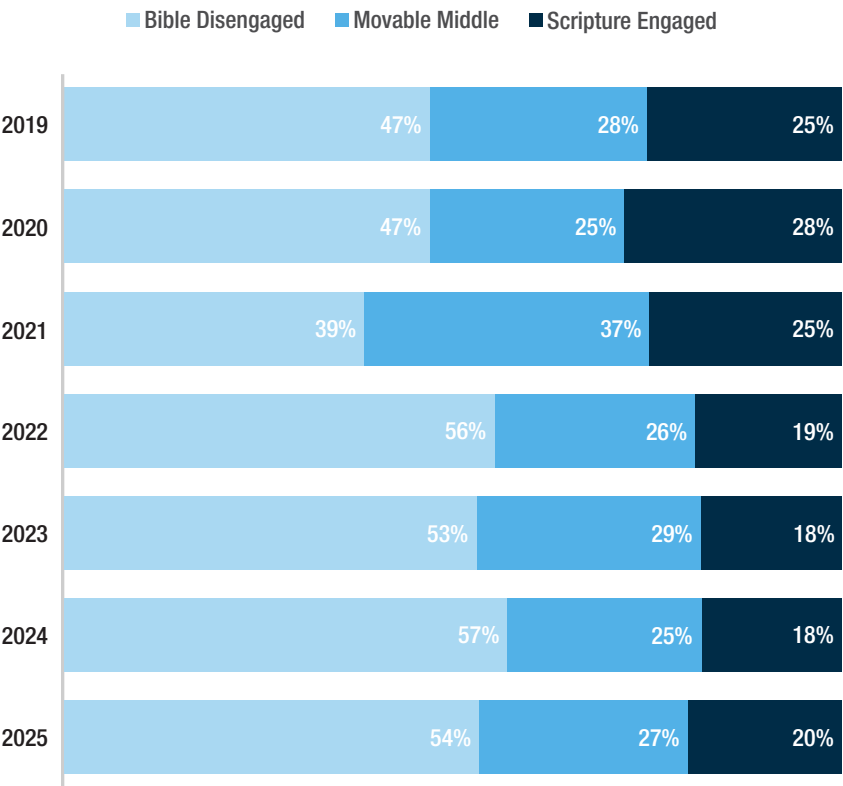
How many at each of these levels qualify as Bible Users? The percentages are starkly different. One in six (16%) Non-Christians are Bible Users, as well as nearly a third of Nominal Christians (32%). About two-thirds of Casual Christians (66%) are Bible Users, along with nearly all (92%) Practicing Christians.



SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

Where Bible Use represents a rather low commitment, as little as three readings a year, Scripture Engagement is a far more robust category. It merges frequency of Bible reading with other measures of the Bible’s role in people’s lives. We look at the *centrality* of the Bible in people’s decision-making and its *impact* on people’s relationships with God and others. Responses to fourteen questions on these matters create a score, which then qualifies a respondent as Scripture Engaged, Movable Middle, or Bible Disengaged.

Scripture Engagement, 2019–2025



In recent years, Scripture Engagement has been in the same statistical trough as Bible Use. The survey taken in January 2022 showed a major spike in the number of Bible Disengaged, and both the Movable Middle and Scripture Engaged suffered big losses. The next two surveys showed no improvement.

This year, however, there's a glimmer of good news. The percentage of Scripture Engaged has edged upward (to 20%)—still not back to 2021 levels, but moving in the right direction. Last year, 47 million Americans qualified as Scripture Engaged; this year there are more than 52 million.

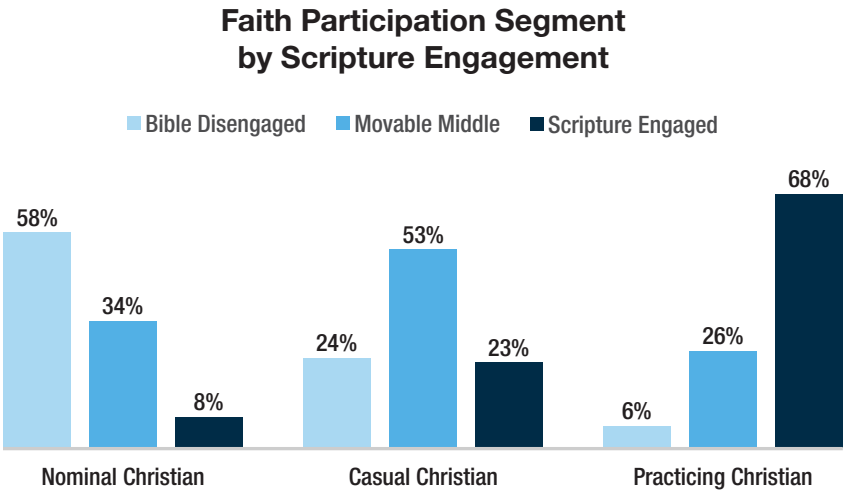
SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT AND THE CHURCH

The Bible repeatedly touts the value of the community of faith, urging us not to “give up the habit of meeting together” (Hebrews 10:25). While it's possible for someone to be Scripture Engaged and not go to church, it's rather rare. Only one in eight of the Scripture Engaged (12%) are unchurched.

Earlier in this chapter, we reviewed Faith Participation segments, including the categories of Nominal Christians (the 57% of self-identified Christians who seldom attend church) and Casual Christians (the 16% of Christians who attend but don't consider their faith “very important”). The connection between Scripture Engagement and church involvement becomes even clearer when we examine these categories.

More than two of three (68%) Practicing Christians are also Scripture Engaged, with about a quarter (26%) in the Movable Middle and

very few (6%) Disengaged. Nominal Christians show the reverse, with the great majority Bible Disengaged. What’s most fascinating is how the Movable Middle (53%) owns the Casual Christian category, and that makes sense. These people are in church, but their faith is not very important to them. In the same way, they may read the Bible occasionally, but they seem to hold its teachings at arm’s length, not fully committing.



EXAMINING KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Where does the 2025 rise in Scripture Engagement come from? The two youngest generations. While they are still the least-engaged age groups, both have increased by about a third over last year (11% to 15% for Gen Z and 12% to 17% for Millennials).

While Generation X shows a minor decrease in Scripture Engagement (21% to 20%), there seems to be a major relocation in that group from the Disengaged to the Movable Middle.

Black Americans were already leading the way in Scripture Engagement by a large margin, yet they had a major rise in that category (from 27% to 36%). Their percentage of Scripture Engaged is now twice that of any other major ethnic group (36% to 18% for Whites and Hispanics). Asian-Americans had a major shift from the Bible Disengaged up to the Movable Middle, and a substantial rise in the Scripture Engaged. White Americans also had gains in the Scripture Engaged and Movable Middle, with a corresponding drop in the Bible Disengaged.

ACCESS, APPROACHES, AND ATTITUDES

How do people interact with Scripture, and why? The *State of the Bible* survey includes questions about technology, reading habits, and beliefs about the Bible.

More than three in four Americans say they own a Bible (77%, up from 74% last year), and virtually all of these people say it's "in a language and format they understand." For most of its history, American Bible Society has focused on making sure people had Bibles, but the digital revolution has changed that playing field.⁸ Now, if you have a smartphone or computer, you essentially own a Bible.

But are people using that technology? Increasingly, yes. Two thirds of Bible Users (66%) say they access the Bible digitally at least some of the time, with higher numbers among younger generations.

⁸ American Bible Society is now at the heart of digital Bible use around the world through its stewardship of the Digital Bible Library.

These days people have three broad choices when accessing information or entertainment . . . or the Bible. We can read it as text, we can listen to audio content, or we can watch video. Our survey asked how often people access the Bible in these three general formats.

We're especially interested in the Movable Middle, because this is where future growth in Scripture Engagement will come from. We're also curious about the media preferences of different generations.

You won't be surprised that Gen Z, our youngest group, shows the greatest preference for video content, with nearly three of five (59%) in the Movable Middle accessing such content at least monthly. Guess which generation leads in the monthly reading of Bible text. Millennials, at 70 percent.

As we seek to draw more of the Movable Middle into Scripture Engagement, especially in these low-engaging age groups, Bible communicators might consider two courses of action. First, provide more Bible content on video to meet the clear preferences of Gen Z. Second, let Millennials know that quality Bible content also exists in video and audio formats.

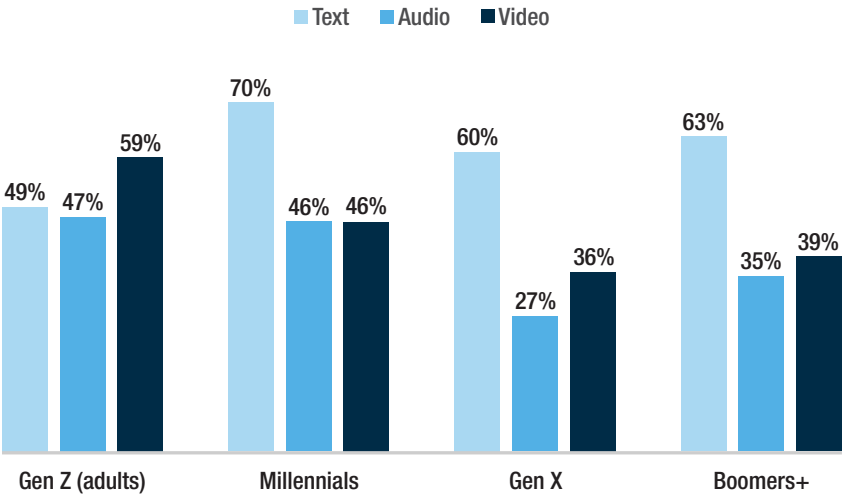
When people of all these generations access Bible content online, what platforms do they use? (We're not just including those in the Movable Middle now, but all those who say they use the Bible online at least some of the time.) Three out of five digital Bible Users (62%) say they click on "Bible apps" (such as YouVersion). The next most popular options, a "Bible-based website" and YouTube, get about half that traffic (30% and 27% respectively).

Generations have distinctive platform preferences. While every age group seems to like Bible apps, those in our oldest generation, Boomers+, specialize in what we might consider classic technology—not only TV and radio, but websites and Facebook. Those in Gen X often find their Bible content on YouTube; Millennials on Instagram. While it’s no surprise that TikTok reaches our youngest generation far more than our oldest (24% to 1%), Gen Z also enjoys Bible content on podcasts—in fact it’s their second most favored option (at 33%, with 59% using Bible apps).

It’s worth remembering that our survey only includes adults over 18 years of age, so a third of Gen Z is not included here . . . yet. In the coming years we expect their preferred media to rise in these rankings.

Bible Access by Media Format and Generation

“How often do you interact with Bible content in the following formats?”



Base = Movable Middle digital Bible Users reporting using one of these formats at least monthly

Digital Bible Platform Preferences

On which of the following platforms do you most often interact with Bible content?

	Overall Percentage	Leading generation	Lowest generation
Bible app	62%	Millennials (67%)	Gen Z (59%)
Bible-based website	30%	Boomers (40%)	Millennials (25%)
YouTube	27%	Gen X (31%)	Boomers+ (20%)
Podcast/Webcast	21%	Gen Z (33%)	Boomers+ (14%)
Facebook	16%	Gen X (19%)	Gen Z (8%)
TV/Radio	14%	Boomers+ (22%)	Gen Z (8%)
Instagram	8%	Millennials (15%)	Boomers+ (3%)
TikTok	8%	Gen Z (24%)	Boomers+ (1%)

Note: Respondents could choose multiple options

Base: Bible Users who use digital platforms

METHODS OF BIBLE READING

For a few years now, we have asked people about their Bible reading practices—not just frequency but details of how they conduct their time with Scripture.

- I do it at about the same time of the day.
- I participate in a Bible study group.
- I read one or more chapters or a complete story.
- I follow a reading guide, schedule, plan, or program.
- *I read a few verses at a time.*
- *I select Bible passages based on my mood at the time.*

Those who are less Scripture engaged choose the last two statements more than the first four. We characterize the first four as “disciplined” Bible reading—requiring commitment to a group, a schedule, a plan,

or a longer text. We call the last two options “casual” Bible reading. While the Bible benefits committed and casual readers alike, those who are most transformed by Scripture tend to go beyond grabbing a few mood-appropriate verses.

The 2025 survey has confirmed this pattern, with Scripture Engaged people generally doubling up on the Movable Middle on those first four statements.

For years we’ve noticed a recurring anomaly. When we ask whether people’s Bible reading increased or decreased in the previous year, more people say they’ve increased (usually 15% claiming increase with 10% admitting decrease). This has occurred consistently, even in years when Bible reading was dropping. But this year it’s not just wishful thinking: Bible Use has actually increased.

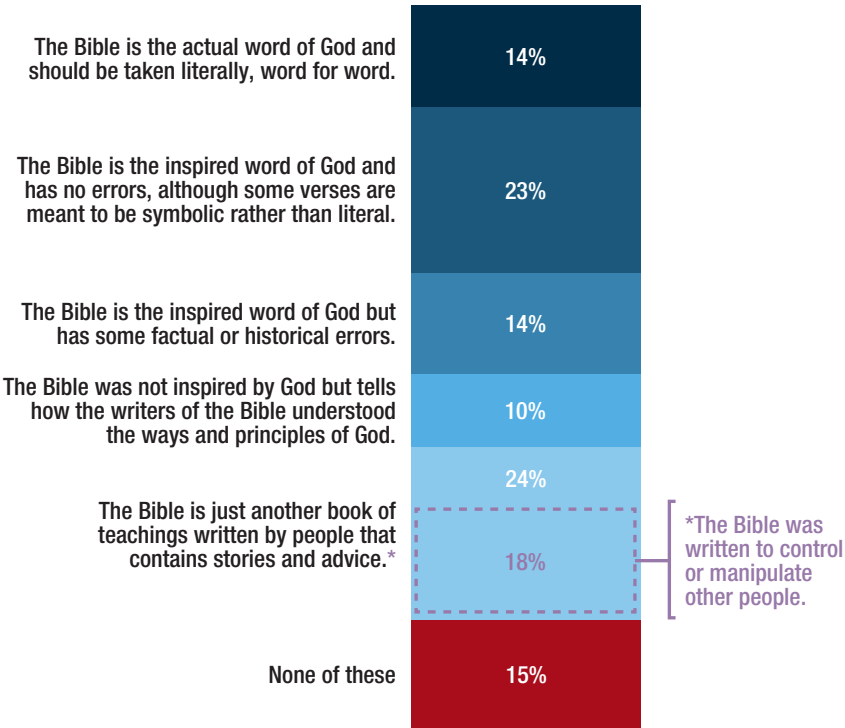
Speaking of wishful thinking, we also ask respondents, “Do you wish you read the Bible more?” Just over half of all Americans (51%) say yes (a couple of ticks down from last year’s 53%). As you might expect, the Scripture Engaged can’t get enough of God’s Word. Seven of eight (88%) say they wish they read it more. Only a quarter of the Bible Disengaged (26%) have this wish; it’s just not that important to most of them. But that Movable Middle group (80%) comes close to the Engaged in their desire for more Bible reading. To be sure, there can be many obstacles between wish and reality, but this is a positive factor. It’s what makes this group movable.

ABOUT THE BIBLE

Besides all the data on formats and practices in Bible use, we also want to know what people believe *about* the Bible. We present five statements in random order and ask participants which comes closest to their view. For those who say the Bible is “just another book of teachings,” we ask if they agree with another, more negative, statement: *The Bible was written to control or manipulate other people.*

Taken together, these responses give us a sense of the terrain of American attitudes toward the Bible, from traditional to modernist and even antagonistic.

Attitudes about the Bible, 2025



CONCLUSION

More than half of Americans (56%) say they are curious about the Bible and/or Jesus. Even among the youngest generations, Gen Z and Millennials, half of them say they're curious. Among the Movable Middle, that neutral group brimming with possibility, more than four out of five (82%) confess curiosity about the Bible or Jesus or both.

What can we do about that?

You might be afraid that people don't want to hear the good news. You might assume that everyone in your community is part of that 18 percent who are sure that the Bible was written to control and manipulate. It's a shame that those people think that, and maybe someday we can convince them otherwise, but three times as many people are longing to know more. How will we satisfy that desire? We see in this year's data a move toward Scripture, especially in previously resistant groups. For Christian leaders, communicators, artists, and servants, this is a time to talk about the deep wonder we find in the Bible, to live out its teachings with compassion and wholeness, and to welcome others into its rich wisdom. ■

ARE MORE PEOPLE USING THE BIBLE?

Our first interview of 2025 is with **Jennifer Holloran**, President and CEO of American Bible Society, talking about why Bible use might be on the rise. Click on or follow the QR code to listen now, and subscribe to this new podcast series to hear future conversations about the State of the Bible in America.





State of the Bible USA 2025

CHAPTER 1 HIGHLIGHTS

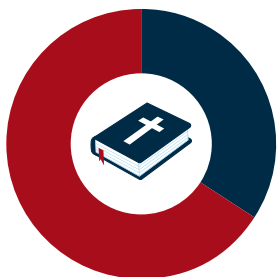
Bible Use

29% 

increase in Bible use
among Millennials

19% 

increase in Bible
use among Men



66%

of Bible
users access
the Bible
digitally

34%

of Bible
users access
the Bible
only in print

TOP 3

Platforms of Digital Bible Users

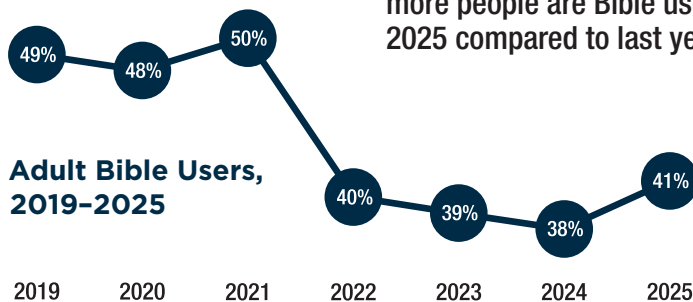
62% Bible App

30% Bible Website

27% YouTube

10 MILLION

more people are Bible users in
2025 compared to last year



Adult Bible Users, 2019-2025

DEFINITION

Bible Users are individuals who
interact with the Bible on their
own at least three times a year.



THE BIBLE AROUND THE WORLD

*“We must be global Christians with a global vision
because our God is a global God.”*

*John Stott*¹

At various moments in history, Christians have pushed harder toward a global vision. You might look to the Moravian outreach beginning in the 1720s or William Carey’s challenge to the British church in the 1790s or the 1806 Haystack Prayer Meeting that launched an American missionary movement.

Half a century ago, the Lausanne Conference of 1974 brought together 2,700 Christian leaders from 150 different nations to discuss world evangelization. Billy Graham used his worldwide fame to convene the crowd, and British pastor and theologian John Stott also emerged as a leader. Yet the groundbreaking feature of the event was

¹ Stott (1921–2011), an Anglican priest, reportedly said this often. Cited in Christopher J. H. Wright, “John Stott’s Global God,” *Christianity Today*, January/February 2022.

the active involvement of hundreds of international church leaders. The Lausanne Conference didn't just inspire Western Christians to carry the gospel to unreached peoples; it affirmed the work that local churches and evangelists were already doing all over the world. It was a vision-changer then, and the movement continues to shape a global vision for the church today.

This *State of the Bible* report usually focuses on statistics from the U.S. After all, we work for the American Bible Society, with a mission to promote Scripture engagement in our own country. But we also belong to the United Bible Societies (UBS), a fellowship that is active in more than 240 nations of the world. This past year, we had the opportunity to participate with our colleagues from the British and Foreign Bible Society in a global project called the Patmos Initiative. In partnership with UBS, and with the expertise of the Gallup organization, the *Patmos World Bible Attitudes Survey* polled 91,000 people in 85 countries on Bible attitudes and practices. In this chapter, we compare Bible use, attitudes, and interest in the U.S. to the rest of the world, with a focus on other countries in “the Secular West,” to gain a better picture of how God is working around the world, as well as continuing needs and opportunities for Bible access and engagement.²

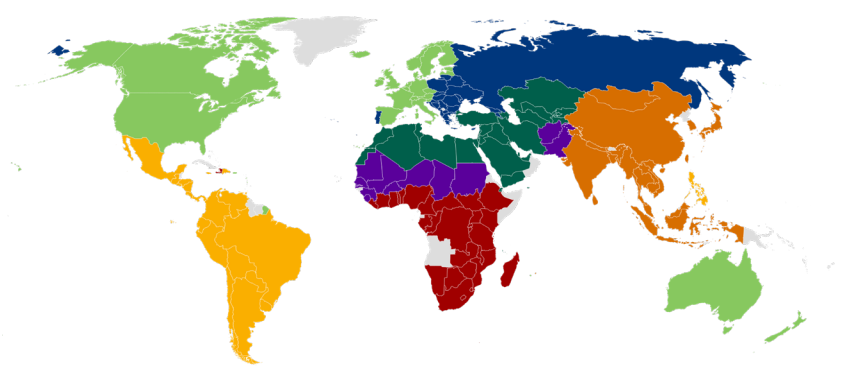
CLUSTERS

In the last book of the Bible, John writes from exile on the isle of Patmos (Revelation 1:9) to seven churches of Asia Minor, each with a distinct profile and unique challenges (Revelation 2—3). Drawing

² Data in this chapter are taken by permission from *The Patmos World Bible Attitudes Survey* (2025). Gallup is the source research agency for *The Patmos World Bible Attitudes Survey*. Fieldwork details for all countries can be read in the methodology chapter of *The Patmos Survey* report: patmos.bfbs.org.

inspiration from this, the Patmos Initiative identifies seven “clusters” of countries. Each cluster shares a distinct profile and unique challenges with regard to the Bible and Christian faith.

Seven Clusters of the Patmos Initiative



	Geography	Religion
Cluster 1	West Africa, Chad, Sudan, Pakistan, Afghanistan	Majority Muslim
Cluster 2	Russia, Eastern Europe, Portugal	Majority Christian
Cluster 3	North Africa, Middle East, Turkey, Central Asia	Majority Muslim
Cluster 4	Latin America, Caribbean, Philippines	Majority Christian
Cluster 5	USA, Canada, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand	“The Secular West”
Cluster 6	India, China, Indonesia, Japan	Religiously diverse
Cluster 7	Sub-Saharan Africa	Majority Christian

Map Credit: The Patmos Initiative

Clusters 1 and 3 spread across the Sahel, North Africa, and the Middle East, up into Central Asia. The Muslim faith dominates these areas, with strong commitment to that religion and, generally, resistance to Christianity. Countries in Cluster 1 face significant poverty. Cluster 3 is marked by political authoritarianism. The Patmos pollsters couldn't even ask about the Bible in many of these countries, yet they found openness to explore new ideas among two groups: secular Muslims (especially in central Asia) and Muslims practicing their own faith but curious about other religions.

Cluster 2 (Russia, Eastern Europe, and Portugal) has a strong historical connection to Orthodox Christianity, but this doesn't always mean active personal commitment.

Cluster 5, including the U.S., Western Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, earns the moniker “the Secular West.” Growing secularization has eroded the region's historical commitment to Christianity. Young people are less likely to identify as Christian, but when they do, they tend to practice it faithfully—more than most older adults who identify with Christianity more but practice it less. (Later in this chapter, we'll compare the U.S. with other countries in Cluster 5.)

Cluster 6, in eastern Asia, groups together the most populous nations on earth. Several of the world's large religions are prevalent here—including Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. Only 6 percent say they are interested in learning about the Christian Bible. This might be because three quarters of those in this cluster (76%) say they know nothing about the Bible and more than half (56%) have never even heard of it.

Cluster 4 (mostly Latin America) with its strong Roman Catholic heritage, shows high appreciation for and interaction with the Bible, though we see growing secularism among the younger generations. Cluster 7, most of sub-Saharan Africa, shows high interest in the Bible. Nine of ten are interested in learning more about it, and Bible use is high.

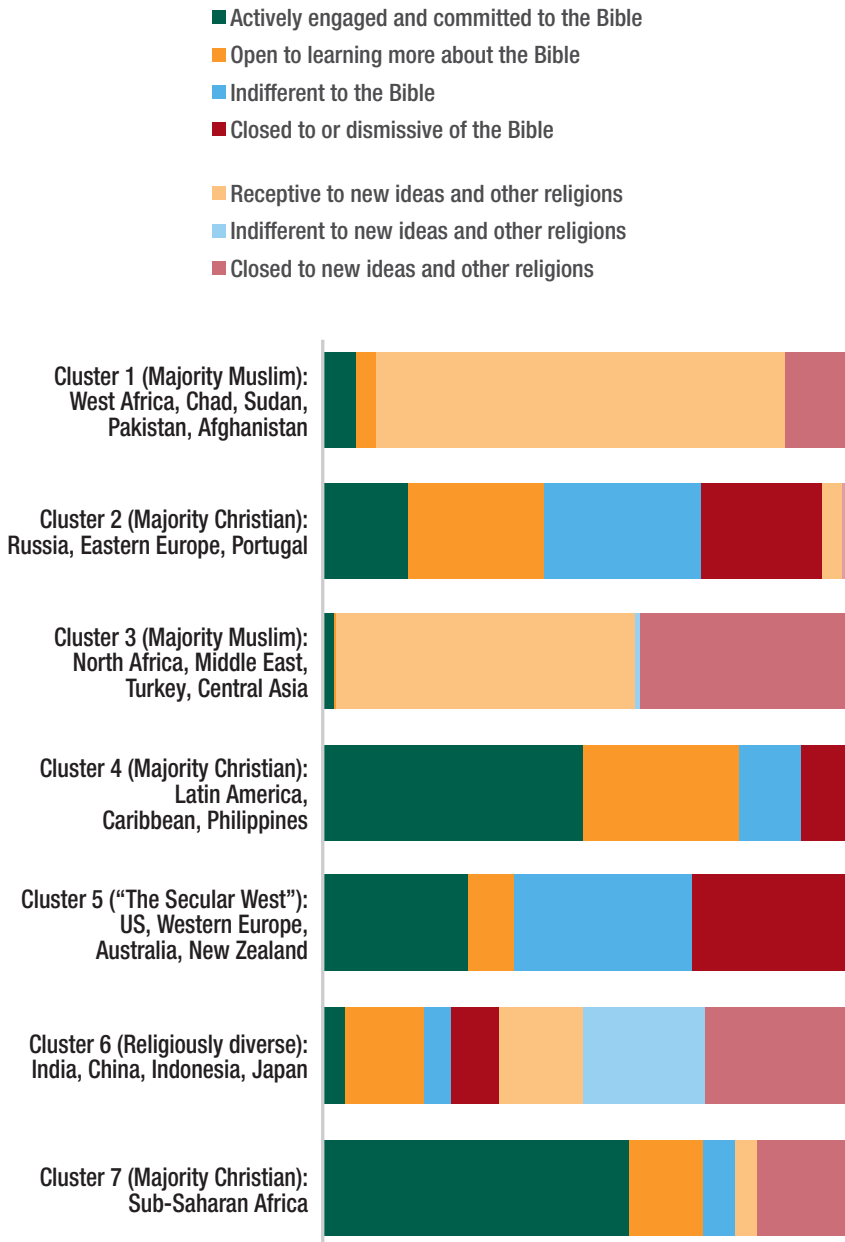
AUDIENCE GROUPS IN ALL CLUSTERS

Besides identifying clusters of countries with similar profiles, the Patmos Initiative also evaluates the populations of those clusters in terms of their openness to the Bible or to new religious ideas (other than the dominant religion). Based on survey responses, seven “audience groups” emerge.

- Actively engaged and committed to the Bible
- Open to learning more about the Bible
- Indifferent to the Bible
- Closed to the Bible
- Receptive to new ideas or other religions
- Indifferent to new ideas or other religions
- Closed to new ideas or other religions

Each cluster has a unique configuration of these seven audience groups. Appreciating the contexts in which they work can allow church leaders and Bible organizations to tailor their ministry more effectively. For instance, in areas where nearly everyone follows a religion other than Christianity, many know nothing about the Bible. This makes “openness to the Bible” a moot point. But even in those cultures there might be openness to new religious ideas, such as Christianity.

Audience Groups by Cluster

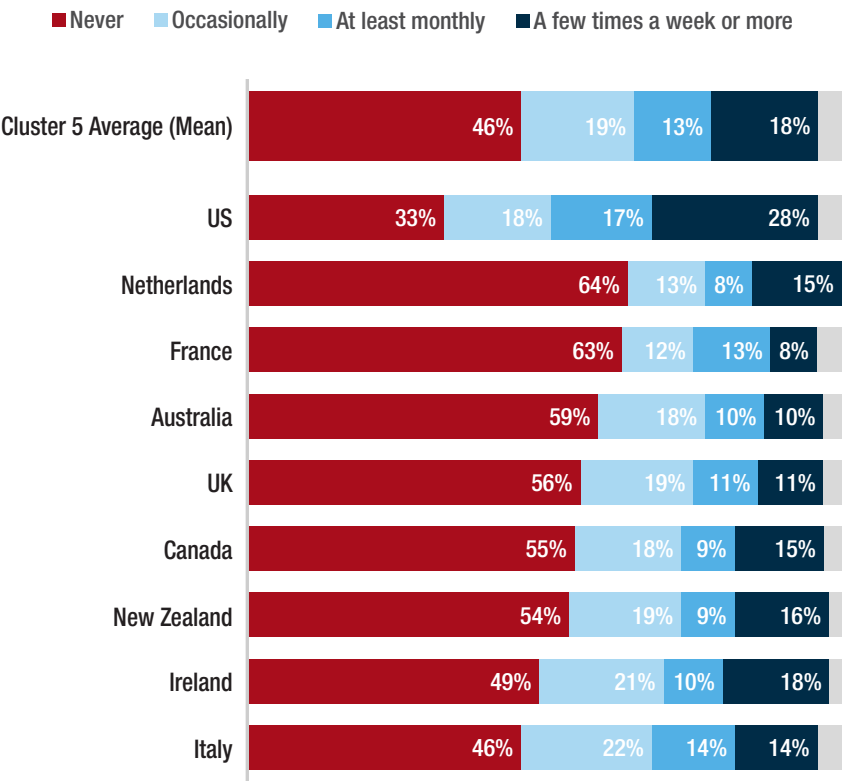


BIBLE AND CHURCH IN THE SECULAR WEST

We now focus on Cluster 5, the Secular West, which includes the U.S. and Western Europe, as well as other English-speaking nations (Canada, Australia, New Zealand). How do all these countries stack up in their Bible Use and church attendance? What Bible formats do they prefer? Later we'll also examine a range of attitudes about the Bible.

Bible Use by Country (selected countries in Cluster 5)³

“How often do you use the Bible?”



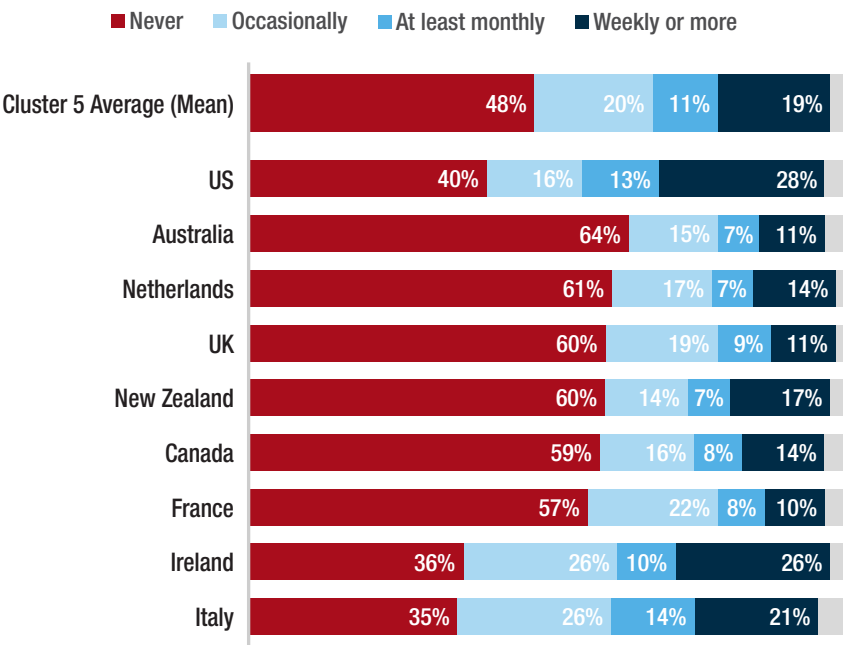
³ Does not include the 1–4% who replied, “Prefer not to say.”

Bible Use is far more prevalent in the U.S. than in any other nation in the Secular West. More than half of those in every other Cluster 5 country say they never use the Bible (except for Italy and Ireland, with 46% and 49%). But only one in three Americans say they never use the Bible (33%), with more than a quarter (28%) interacting with it at least a few times a week.

France (only 8% turning to the Bible weekly) and the Netherlands (64% with no Bible use) are among the least Bible-connected countries. Sweden (63% “never”) and Norway (only 5% a few times a week or more) also score low on this question.

Church Attendance by Country
(selected countries in Cluster 5)

“Apart from weddings, baptisms/christenings and funerals, how often did you go to a Christian church service either online or in person, in the past 12 months?”



It's no surprise that Bible Use tracks closely with church attendance. People who make a point of gathering with people of faith in the worship of God also tend to connect with God in Scripture on a regular basis. Our statistics confirm that.

Once again, church attendance in the U.S. (28% weekly, a total of 41% attending at least monthly) far exceeds the average for the Secular West nations (19% weekly, 30% total monthly). But notice that Italy and Ireland, two nations with a strong Roman Catholic heritage, have strong numbers in church attendance, far greater than their Bible Use. In fact, those two countries have the lowest percentage of people saying they “never” attend church.

BIBLE FORMATS

Some might expect that the general cultural shift to digital media and audiovisual content would be seen first in the developed nations of the Secular West, but throughout this cluster, people who use the Bible at least once or twice a year still prefer to read the Bible on paper or screens (68%) rather than listening to it (17%) or watching videos (12%). The Netherlands (75%) and New Zealand (74%) are most likely to prefer text, with Sweden (55%) least likely. Belgium has the highest percentage in this cluster who prefer to interact with the Bible in an audio format (28%). The lowest percentage belongs to Italy, where only one in ten (10%) prefer audio. When it comes to video, those in the United Kingdom are most likely to prefer that format (22%), with Belgium and Ireland the least likely (9%).

Preferences do not always match up with actions. The Patmos Survey also asked about the frequency of use among specific formats. How

often do people consult Bible material on a phone, tablet, or computer? How many Bible readers make this a regular habit? How many watch video content about the Bible at least a few times a week?

Once again, the U.S. is slightly ahead of the average for Cluster 5 in both these media formats, but there are a number of countries ahead and behind. Ireland leads the way with digital Bible reading plans (40%), just ahead of Sweden and Belgium (37%). Italy (15%) lags behind.

Preferred Bible Formats

“How do you most prefer to access the Bible?”

	Cluster 5 Average (Mean)	US	Highest	Second	Lowest
Text	68%	70%	Netherlands, 75%	New Zealand, 74%	Sweden, 55%
Audio	17%	18%	Belgium, 28%	Sweden, 25%	Italy, 10%
Video	12%	11%	UK, 22%	Norway, 20%	Belgium, Ireland, 9%

Base: Those who use the Bible at least once or twice a year

With regard to video watching, Belgium (39%) leads the way in regular viewing of Bible content. And even though Norwegians expressed the second highest level of *preference* for video content (see above), their regular *use* of such content was the lowest in the cluster (13%).

Actual Digital Bible Use by Format

“How often have you read from a Bible reading plan on a phone, tablet, or computer?”

*“How often have you watched a Bible-oriented program
on a television, phone, tablet, or computer?”*

Responding “a few times a week” or more

	Cluster 5 Average (Mean)	US	Highest	Second	Lowest
Read from a plan	28%	30%	Ireland, 41%	Sweden, Belgium, 37%	Italy, 14%
Watched a program	26%	28%	Belgium, 39%	Ireland, 36%	Norway, 13%

Base: Those who use the Bible at least once or twice a year

ATTITUDES

One of the reasons we can define our cluster as the *Secular West* is a steady erosion of appreciation for the Bible and Christian tradition over the last century. Historically, this is the territory of Francis of Assisi, of Luther, Calvin, and Wesley. Christianity grew and thrived on these acres, but lately there’s a different story being played out.

Has the church lost the hearts and minds of the people? Or is there still some appreciation for the old Scriptures, perhaps some curiosity? To find out, the Patmos Survey included various questions about people’s attitudes toward the Bible and faith, both positive and negative.

What are the two major reasons why you use the Bible? This was asked of those who indicated some level of Bible use. Respondents could choose two answers from thirteen listed, or they could say “other” or opt out entirely. The top three answers from the U.S. matched those from all of Cluster 5:

- *To deepen my relationship with God* (U.S. 24%; Cluster 21%)
- *To guide me with everyday issues* (U.S. 15%; Cluster 12%)
- *To develop my spiritual life* (U.S. 14%; Cluster 13%)

American respondents were the most likely to choose the first two answers, with Norwegians being the least likely (9% and 6%). Canadians were the most likely to choose the “spiritual life” response (17%), with Switzerland least likely (4%).

Another option was: *To understand ancient cultures*. The U.S. and Canada were the least likely to choose this (4%), under the Cluster average (6%). Slovenians (15%) and Norwegians (12%) were the most likely to select this reason to read the Bible.

Is religion an important part of your daily life? Across Cluster 5, four out of ten (40%) said yes. Americans seem to be most religious (53% saying yes, with Italians close behind at 50%). The least religious country appears to be Norway (17%).

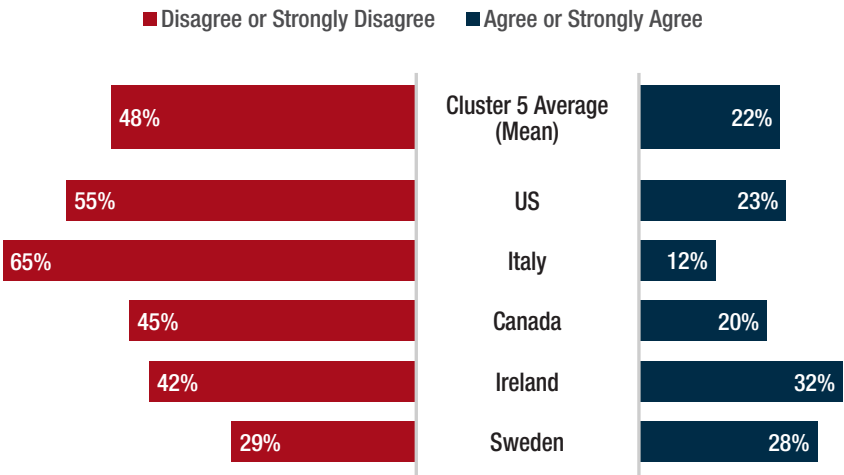
Those who answered no on the religion question received a follow-up: *Why not?* Across the board, nearly a third (31%) said they didn’t believe in “any divine beings/higher powers.” A fifth (20%) of the non-religionists in Cluster 5 chose as their reason “I do not think religion can be relevant to my life.” Among the less popular answers

was: *I have had a bad experience with religion* (6% overall, but 9% in the U.S.).

Agree or Disagree: The Bible is a source of harm in the world. Less than a quarter of the Secular West cluster (22%) agrees or strongly agrees with this, almost matching the U.S. results. But Americans seem more eager to resist this notion, far exceeding the cluster average “strongly disagreeing” (37% U.S. to 28% in the cluster). Nearly two of three Italians disagree or strongly disagree on the Bible doing harm (65%). Notably, Ireland—a very religious nation that has experienced some religion-based troubles—showed more agreement (ten points over the mean) and less disagreement (six points under the mean) regarding the harm the Bible could cause.

The Bible as a “Source of Harm,”
Selected Countries

“The Bible is a source of harm in the world.”

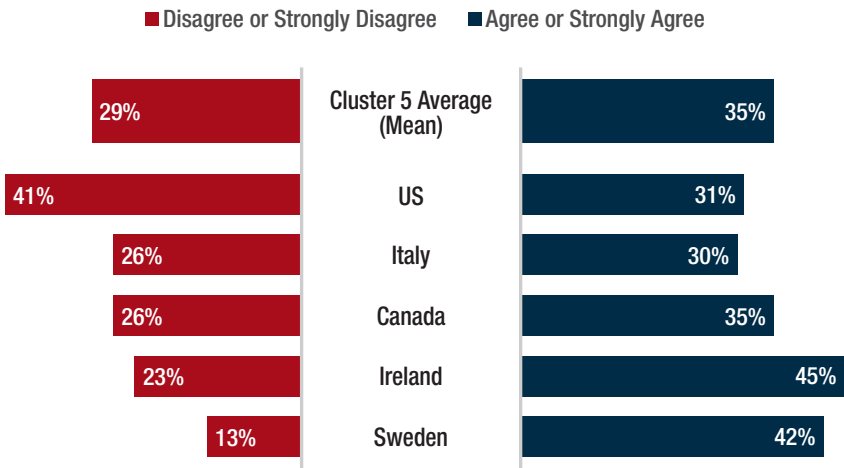


Agree or Disagree: It’s difficult to trust the Bible because it clashes with the scientific worldview. Consider this statement for yourself. It has several components, doesn’t it? In order to agree, you need to acknowledge that there is a “scientific worldview” inconsistent with the Bible’s teaching. This makes it “difficult” to trust the Bible. If you disagree, are you saying the Bible is consistent with science or that there’s no difficulty because each has its own domain? Or do you trust the Bible as a corrective to an overly scientific outlook? This question is especially important in the context of Western Europe with its rich history in scientific discovery and centuries of interaction between faith and science.

The U.S. is the only nation in this group with more disagreement (41%) than agreement (31%)—more who say it’s *not* difficult to trust the Bible. The level of “strong” disagreement in the U.S. (23%) more than doubles that of nearly every other nation in the cluster.

The Bible and Science, Selected Countries

“It’s difficult to trust the Bible because it clashes with the scientific worldview.”



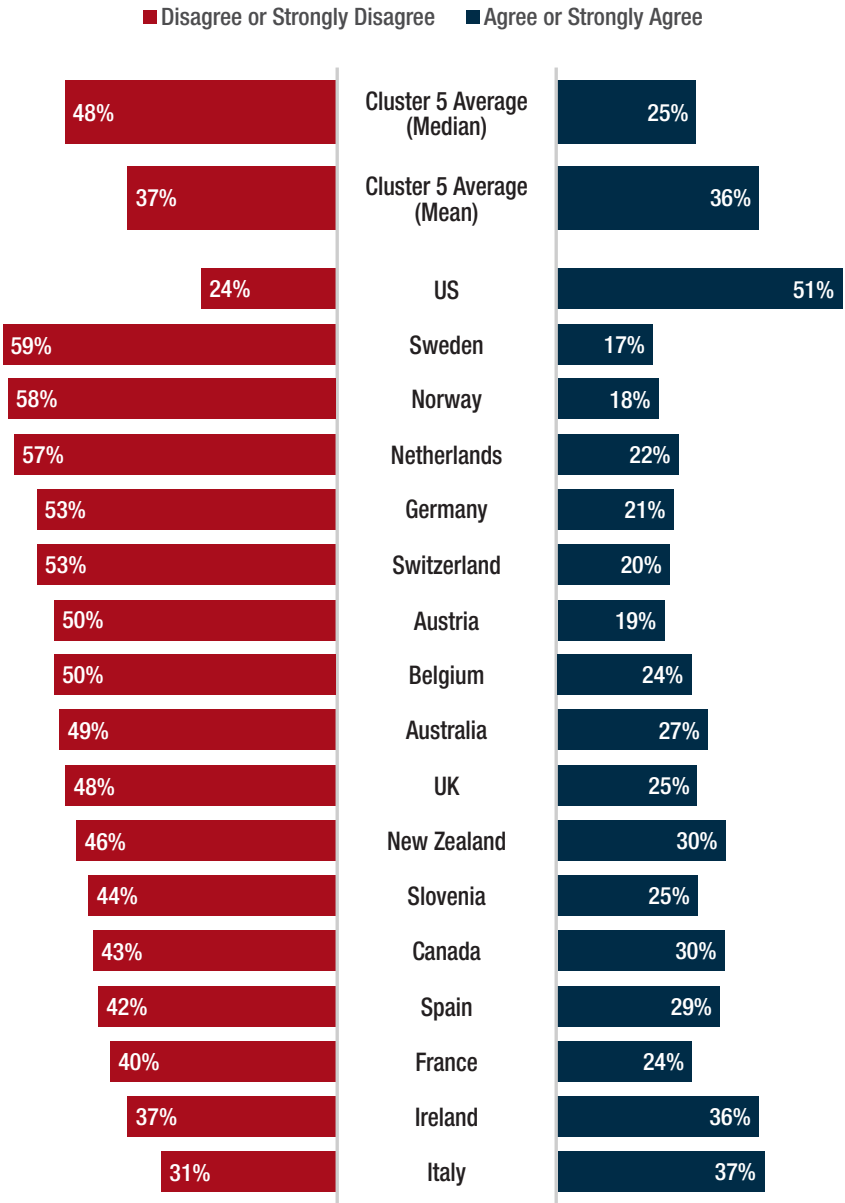
Agree or Disagree: The Bible is relevant to me personally. Seldom do we find such a basic question with such devastating results. This is the crux of Bible ministry, is it not? We offer the Bible, not merely as a historical artifact, but as the wisdom of our Maker, deeply connected to the situations of our lives.

At first glance, the numbers don't look too bad. Across the cluster, a nearly equal number agree and disagree (36% and 37% mean), but those numbers are heavily influenced by strong figures from the U.S., where more than half (51%) affirm the relevance of Scripture and less than a quarter (24%) disagree. The median average for the cluster tilts strongly toward disagreement.

Clearly, Americans are outliers on this question. Italy is the only other country with more agreement (37%) than disagreement (31%). Every other country is more likely to disagree on the Bible's relevance, most by a wide margin. Sweden (59%) and Norway (58%) have the highest levels of disagreement, but we find similar numbers from the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Belgium. In all those countries, at least half of the people say the Bible is irrelevant to their lives, and less than a quarter say it's relevant.

The Bible’s Relevance, Selected Countries

“The Bible is relevant to me personally.”



LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP

Are people in the Secular West interested in learning more about the Bible? If so, how do they prefer to learn, and how can church leaders help?

Overall, the survey respondents form four rather equal quadrants: very interested in learning more, somewhat interested, not very interested, and not at all interested. Each group includes between 22 and 27 percent of the population. The highest levels of interest appear in the U.S., the lowest in Sweden and Norway. (Italians also show more interest in the Bible.)

Interest in Learning About the Bible

“How interested, if at all, are you in learning more about the Bible?”

	Cluster 5 Average (Mean)	Highest	Second	Lowest
Not at all interested	27%	Sweden, 43%	Australia, 41%	Italy, 16%
Somewhat OR Very interested	45%	US, 59%	Italy, 49%	Sweden, 24%
Very interested	22%	US, 34%	Ireland, 19%	Sweden, Norway, 8%

The Patmos Survey followed up with questions about why people were or weren’t interested in learning more. The top reasons for a lack of interest were: “I’m not religious” (23%) and “It’s not relevant to me” (22%).

Why did others want to learn more? The top reason was “To help me grow spiritually” (19%). This was followed by “To help me know God better” (16%) and “To help me answer life’s big questions” (15%). The fourth most-chosen response was especially interesting in this region of changing cultures: “To help me understand what Christians believe” (13%). This was the top answer selected in France (22%).

All who said they were “very” or “somewhat” interested in learning more about the Bible got two more questions, zeroing in on methods of learning that are desirable and effective.

Methods of Learning About the Bible

“How would you most prefer to learn about the Bible?” (top responses)

	Cluster 5 Average (Mean)	US	Highest	Second	Lowest
Online materials I can read on my own	27%	27%	Ireland, 41%	Australia, Canada, Belgium, UK, 30%	France, Germany, 21%
Attending a Christian church service	17%	21%	US, 21%	Switzerland, 19%	Belgium, 6%
Meeting in person with a group of people	15%	13%	Italy, 21%	France, 20%	Switzerland, 10%
Watching videos about the Bible, either online or in some other way	11%	10%	Italy, 17%	Sweden, Norway, Slovenia, 13%	Ireland, 6%

Respondents showed a strong preference (27%) for “Online materials I can read on my own,” especially in Ireland (41%). That was the

most-selected method in every country. Americans were the most likely people to choose “Attending a Christian church service” as a method of learning about the Bible.

The survey also asked this group, “What would most help you learn more about the Bible?” Eleven options were offered, and we saw fairly even distribution among the responses. The top six were:

- Something that helps relate the Bible to everyday life (14%)
- Talking with Christians (13%)
- Short reflections about the Bible (11%)
- Talking to Bible experts (10%)
- Something that breaks the Bible down into manageable pieces (10%)
- Talking with like-minded people (10%)

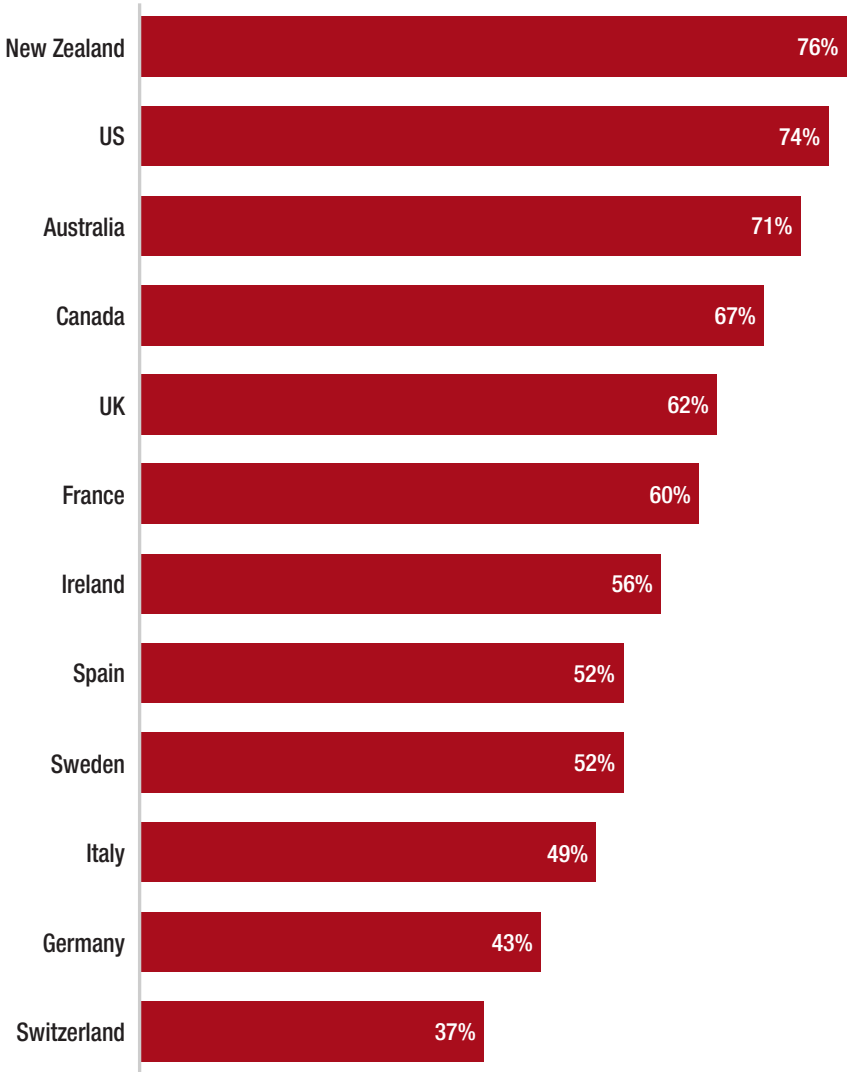
Of course there are many helpful ways a person can learn about the Bible. Leadership is an important part of that process. Are church leaders throughout the Secular West helping people connect with the Bible? Are leaders helping people “relate the Bible to everyday life”? The Patmos Survey asked those questions and found the majority of church attenders throughout this cluster feel that their church leaders are both making the Bible relevant and encouraging people to read it for themselves.

That same group of church attenders was asked whether they agreed that “Church leaders often make the Bible relevant to my life.” In most countries, the percentages of those agreeing run a few ticks higher. The average (mean) level of agreement is 67 percent.

Church Leaders Encouraging Bible Reading

“Church leaders encourage me to read the Bible”

Percent agreeing or strongly agreeing



Base: Those attending church at least a few times a year.

GAPS AND GLIMPSES

There are many possible takeaways from a wide-ranging survey like this. Here are a few.

In many countries of the world, people have little or no familiarity with the Bible. This is especially true in places dominated, socially and/or politically, by non-Christian religions. Yet even in these areas, we see curiosity bubbling up. This report has focused on the Secular West, where the U.S. resides, historically and culturally. Here we find many people who have access to the Bible without any understanding of its value for their modern lives. Though the U.S. remains remarkably curious about both the Bible and Jesus, other Western nations seem to have lost the cultural ability and personal interest in discovering the timeless value of God's Word.

We're seeing a relevance gap. Yes, we know that sounds like a theme from a twentieth-century youth group, but the reality is crying out to us from these statistics. Outside of the U.S., when asked if the Bible is relevant to their lives, people are twice as likely to say no than yes. Those who want to learn about the Bible want help in relating the Bible to everyday life. A significant number said, "I do not think religion can be relevant to my life." Some church leaders "make the Bible relevant," but far from all. The relevance of Scripture will be established not with trendy buzzwords but by showing how God speaks into the issues of people's lives.

Americans are more committed to the Bible and Christian faith than others in the Secular West. To be sure, secularism is doing the same eroding in the U.S. as elsewhere, but that process seems further

along in the other countries of Cluster 5. Here's a crucial question: Are the statistics from the rest of the Secular West a glimpse of America's future or a cautionary tale of decline that can be avoided? Also, how can American Christians advocate for the Bible at home and around the world, particularly helping others in our cluster of nations to re-engage with Scripture?

If we aspire to be “global Christians,” spreading the message of Jesus to “the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8), these data points will fuel our prayers and our ministry. The Patmos Initiative has given the world-wide church a great gift of information. We gain a greater understanding of the people we share this planet with—and in particular how open or closed they are to God's invitation in Scripture. ■

PODCAST IN MAY: THE REBIRTH OF BELIEF

To better understand the state of the Bible around the world, we interviewed two guests for the *State of the Bible Podcast*.

First, **Justin Brierley**, based in the United Kingdom and author of *The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God*, shares his perspective on what is happening in the Secular West.

Second, **Rhiannon McAleer**, Director of Research and Impact at the British and Foreign Bible Society, shares key takeaways from the *Patmos World Bible Attitudes Survey*.





The Bible Around the World

5 BILLION+

copies of the Bible have been distributed worldwide



translated into
2,000
languages

35%



of people around the world are interested in learning more about the Bible

7 in 10 ●●●●●

(71%) agree it's good for children to know stories from the Bible

Opportunity



76%

of people in Asia say they know nothing about the Bible and

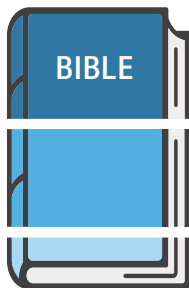
56%

have never even heard of it

Fewer than

4 in 10 ●●●●●●●●

residents (37%) in the "Secular West" countries believe the Bible is personally relevant to them



42% of Christians use the Bible weekly or more

37% use it less regularly

21% of Christians never use it

In partnership with the British and Foreign Bible Society and United Bible Societies, and with the expertise of the Gallup organization, the *Patmos World Bible Attitudes Survey* polled 91,000 people in 85 countries on Bible attitudes and practices.



HUMAN FLOURISHING

What does it mean to flourish? Not just to survive, but to thrive. The word suggests the blooming of a flower. Perhaps you’ve known times when you were trudging through life, one foot in front of the other, just existing—and other times when you have blossomed. At times you might flourish in one area of life and not in others. If you are a parent, or a teacher, or a church leader, you probably recognize flourishing when you see it in others. What can you do to encourage more of that?

Scholars at Harvard University have been studying human flourishing for nearly a decade. They define it as “the relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person’s life are good, including the contexts in which that person lives.”¹ Since 2017 they have collected data on six distinct ways in which people flourish.

¹ VanderWeele, T.J., Johnson, B.R., Bialowolski, P.T. et al. The Global Flourishing Study: Study Profile and Initial Results on Flourishing. *Nat. Mental Health* (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44220-025-00423-5>

- Happiness & Life Satisfaction
- Mental & Physical Health
- Meaning & Purpose
- Character & Virtue
- Close Social Relationships
- Financial & Material Stability

The Human Flourishing Index gathers scores of 0 to 10 in each of these six domains and combines them into an overall flourishing score. (Actually, there are two overall scores. The Human Flourishing Index leaves out the financial domain, while the Secure Flourishing Index includes it.)

Since 2020, the *State of the Bible* survey has, with permission, included these Human Flourishing questions. Responses have consistently revealed a dramatic connection between flourishing and faith—especially Bible engagement and church involvement. We will unpack our most recent findings later in this chapter.

Meanwhile, the creators of the Human Flourishing Index have been working on a larger, more ambitious project—taking the survey international. This spring they announced the initial results of their Global Flourishing Study (GFS), with data from 22 nations of the world. In an event celebrating the GFS release, Tyler VanderWeele, an architect of the project, made a surprising connection. “One of the most consistent results across countries . . . is that participation in religious community is strongly associated with flourishing. Those who are attending services more than weekly report higher levels of flourishing.” He listed additional data points about the value of “participation in a religious community”—lower rates of depression

and suicide; greater social connection, marital stability, civic participation, charitable giving.

His question rang through this room of researchers, social work executives, and leaders in international development: *“Have we perhaps been neglecting important spiritual pathways to flourishing?”*²

FLOURISHING IN AMERICA AND THE WORLD

Before we get into the details of our own survey results on Human Flourishing in the U.S., let’s see what Harvard’s GFS says about how America stacks up globally.

The U.S. is not in the top half of the 22 nations in the Global Flourishing Study—either in the Human Flourishing metric or the Secure Flourishing metric, which includes a question on financial stability. Americans come in fifteenth in Human Flourishing; financial stability raises our Secure Flourishing position to twelfth.

The top four countries in both of those measures are Indonesia (by far the highest-scoring in both), Mexico, the Philippines, and Israel. Japan holds the lowest position, by far, in both, with the United Kingdom and Turkey also in the bottom three.

2 Tyler J. VanderWeele, remarks at the conference “The Global Flourishing Study: Exploring the Science and Meaning of Human Flourishing,” April 30, 2025, Washington, DC (recorded at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFolbJceY7E>).

Rankings of Nations in Human Flourishing and Secure Flourishing

Source: Global Flourishing Study

Human Flourishing			Secure Flourishing		
1	Indonesia	8.47	1	Indonesia	8.10
2	Mexico	8.19	2	Israel	7.87
3	Philippines	8.11	3	Philippines	7.71
4	Israel	8.00	4	Mexico	7.64
5	Nigeria	7.83	5	Poland	7.55
6	Argentina	7.79	6	Nigeria	7.37
7	Kenya	7.77	7	Egypt	7.32
8	Egypt	7.63	8	Kenya	7.28
9	Poland	7.63	9	Tanzania	7.19
10	Brazil	7.63	10	Argentina	7.14
11	Tanzania	7.48	11	Hong Kong	7.12
12	India	7.43	12	United States	7.11
13	South Africa	7.41	13	Sweden	7.10
14	Spain	7.31	14	South Africa	7.07
15	United States	7.18	15	Brazil	7.02
16	Hong Kong	7.17	16	Australia	7.01
17	Germany	7.11	17	Germany	7.01
18	Sweden	7.04	18	Spain	6.89
19	Australia	7.02	19	India	6.87
20	United Kingdom	6.88	20	United Kingdom	6.79
21	Turkey	6.59	21	Turkey	6.32
22	Japan	5.91	22	Japan	5.87

Mean scores, based on self-reporting on a scale of 1 to 10 in response to ten questions, which cover five domains (for Human Flourishing) and adding two more questions on financial & material stability for the Secure Flourishing score.³

3 For further information, see the entry for “Human Flourishing Index” in the Definitions section of this report, page 136.

Readers should not confuse the Global Flourishing Study with the *Patmos Survey* from the previous chapter. While the Gallup Organization conducted both surveys, they were commissioned by two different entities, with different purposes and subject matter. The *Patmos Survey* focuses on attitudes about the Bible; the GFS on a broader assessment of human life.

With that in mind, you might still be wondering how the U.S. fares on flourishing in comparison to other “Secular West” nations. On the Patmos questions relating to the Bible, Americans outpaced others in Western Europe and other English-speaking nations in most measures. How do we compare in this entirely different survey on flourishing?

While the overall U.S. ranking is unimpressive (at #15 of 22), most other “Secular West” countries are worse. Spain ranks just ahead of the U.S. in Human Flourishing, but Germany, Sweden, Australia, and the United Kingdom trail behind. When financial stability is added to the results, the U.S. leads this whole cluster, slightly edging out Sweden.

A quick glance through this parade of nations reveals that the richest are not the most flourishing. As VanderWeele reported, “Wealthier nations seem not to be doing as well on relationships, meaning, and character. These are important aspects of flourishing. Flourishing is not just reducible to health, life satisfaction, and financial security. The other more humanistic aspects of flourishing are important individually . . . and they are also important for societal flourishing. . . . If we are to take flourishing seriously—if we are to become truly capable of promoting it—we must acknowledge its multi-faceted

nature and we must pursue together those things that lie at the deepest core of our human nature.”⁴

Students of Scripture will be happy to see how this academic study confirms biblical teaching, which warns against putting our hope in material wealth (1 Timothy 6:17). In Proverbs we read, “Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf” (Proverbs 11:28 ESV).

Now, we turn to our own *State of the Bible* survey, specifically looking for connections between flourishing and faith.

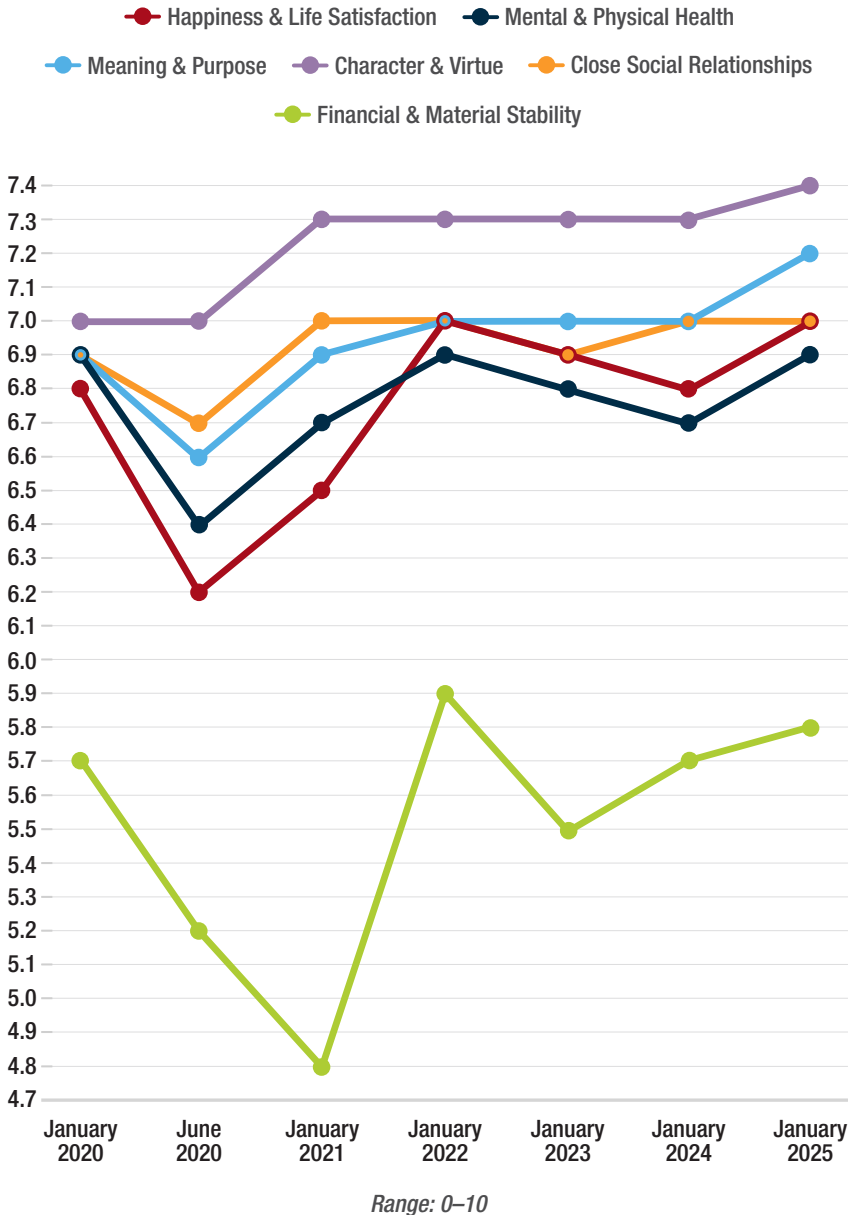
FLOURISHING YEAR OVER YEAR

Where were you when the world stopped? The COVID shutdown of 2020 will take its place in the American collection of life-changing moments—certainly not the sudden terror of 9/11, but a rolling realization that life was going to be different for a while.

The State of the Bible report took a statistical snapshot of that time. The Human Flourishing Index was still quite new when we arranged to use it in our 2020 survey, conducted that January, less than two months before the pandemic hit. That served as a helpful baseline as events unfolded. We decided to do an extra survey that June, as COVID shutdowns continued. As expected, flourishing scores were down—with the exception of the “Character & Virtue” domain, which held steady that June and shot upward in the next poll.

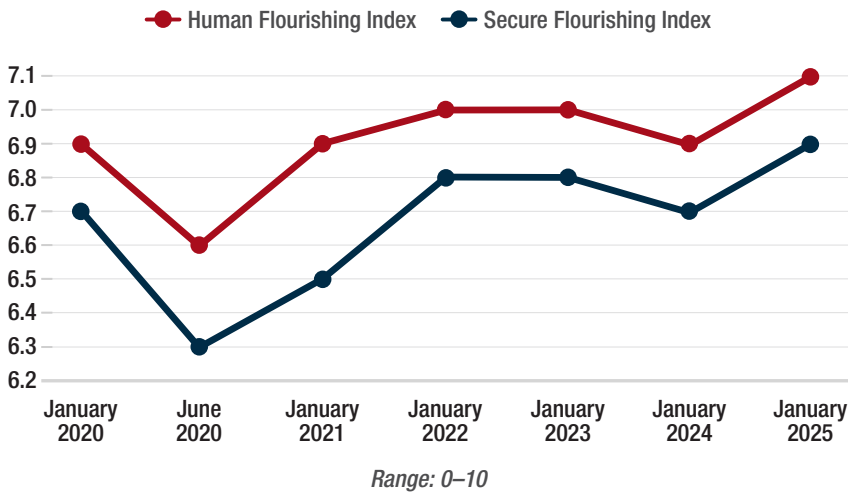
4 Tyler J. VanderWeele, email followup from the GFS announcement, May 6, 2025.

Human Flourishing Domains and Secure Flourishing Domains, 2020–25



It took two years to return to the 2020 baseline, and we’ve seen slight dips and rises since. But this year’s report shows a solid increase over last year across the board—up a tenth or two in every domain except “Close Social Relationships,” which held steady. (That category has seen almost no vacillation since 2020.)

Human Flourishing and Secure Flourishing, 2020–25



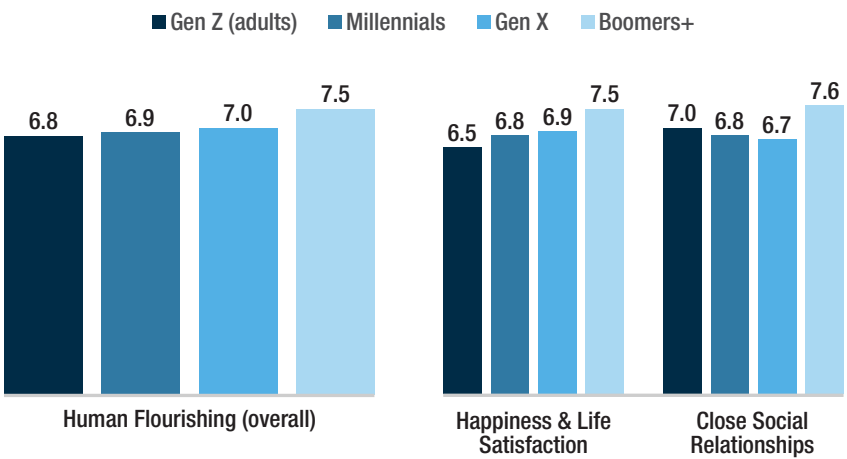
DEMOGRAPHICS OF HUMAN FLOURISHING

The Boomer+ generation continues to have much higher flourishing scores than all younger **generations**. Generation Z has the lowest flourishing scores, but in most categories they’re within a decimal or two of Millennials. “Happiness & Life Satisfaction” has the widest gap (Gen Z at 6.5, Millennials 6.8, Gen X 6.9). Surprisingly, the youngest group flourishes more in “Close Social Relationships,” exceeding the scores of both middle generations. This is a reversal from previous years, when Gen Z trailed in the relationships category.

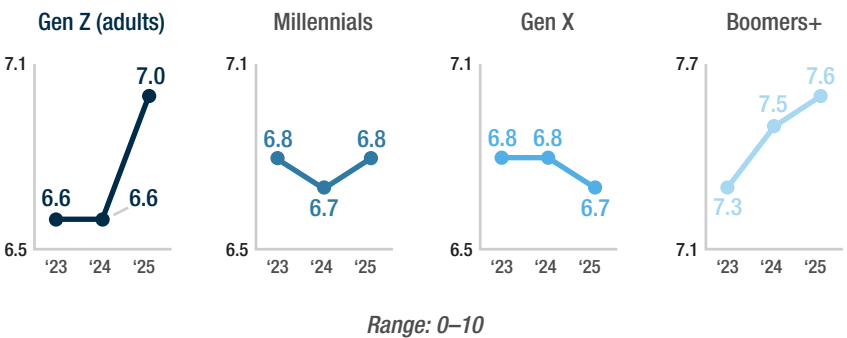
The two questions that make up the “Close Social Relationships” score are:

- *I am content with my friendships and relationships.*
- *My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be.*

Generations and Flourishing, Selected Categories



Close Social Relationships
by Generation, 2023–25

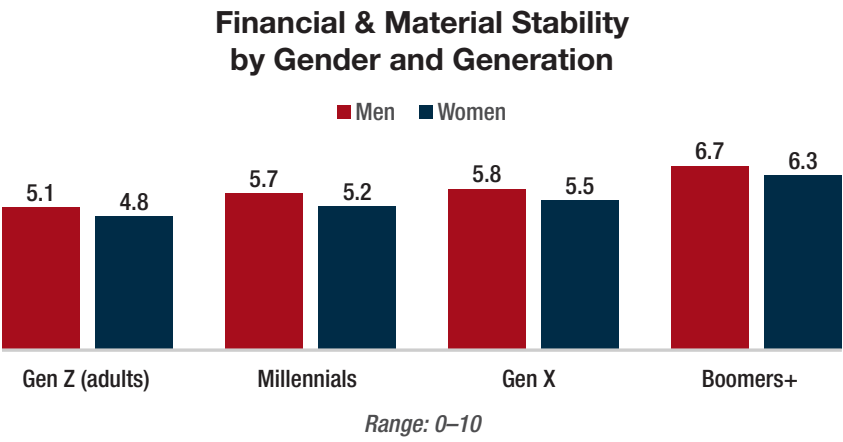


Most of the generational difference occurs in that second statement (“satisfying”). What has happened in the last year to make Gen Z relationships substantially more satisfying? In the last decade, scholars have highlighted the isolation and loneliness of Gen Z, often blaming the prevalence of smartphones. But here we find a blip of hope to counteract that assumption. Maybe some members of Gen Z are finding a “satisfying” balance in their connections within the real and virtual worlds. And here’s another surprising detail. When we broke out the data for “Younger Gen Z” (ages 18–22) and Older Gen Z (23–28), the *younger* group scored significantly higher on Close Social Relationships (7.1 to 6.8). Does this simply reflect the difference between involvement in a college community (for many younger ones) and entry into an often-lonely workaday world (for many older ones), or is there a trend developing?

Education plays a major role in Human Flourishing. We know it generally leads to higher incomes, but even without the “Financial & Material Stability” category, people with Bachelor’s degrees report significantly higher flourishing levels in all domains. Those with graduate degrees score even higher (Grad, 7.6 overall; Bachelor’s, 7.3; lower levels, 6.9 and 7.0). There is little difference among those at lower educational levels, with or without a high school diploma, or even with some college.

Marital status clearly affects Human Flourishing, with married people scoring higher in every category than the never married. Those divorced, separated, or widowed have scores strewn in between.

Gender differences are minimal in most domains, but in every generation, men report significantly greater Financial & Material Stability than women (male 5.9; female 5.6).



FAITH AND HUMAN FLOURISHING

Personal practices of devotion are strongly associated with Human Flourishing.

Our survey asked people about various activities they had done “in the last seven days.” Those who had *prayed to God, meditated, or volunteered in their community* reported much higher levels of Human Flourishing than those who had not.⁵

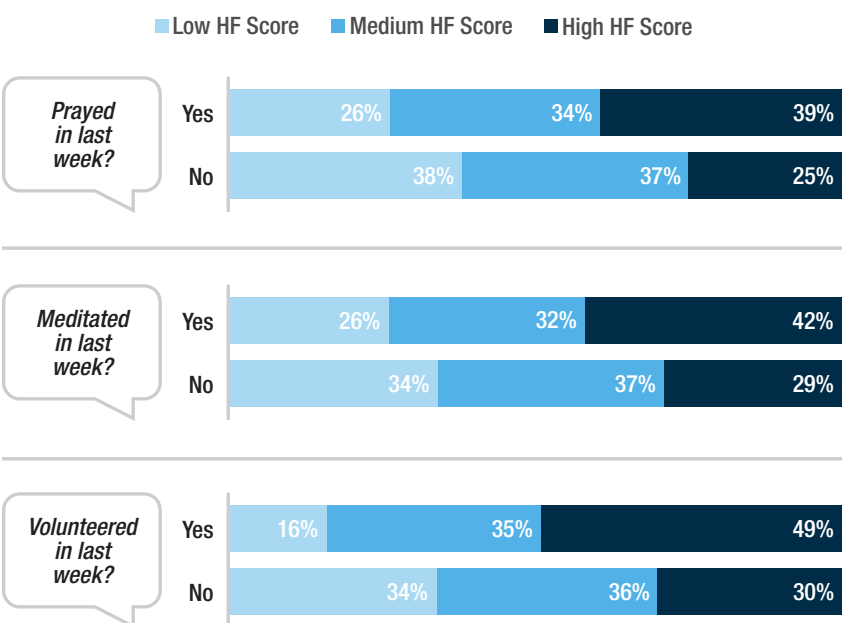
- People who have prayed in the past week are far more likely to flourish (39% reporting high Human Flourishing scores, compared with only 25% of those who haven’t prayed).

⁵ On the self-reported scale of 1 to 10, High levels of Human Flourishing are scores of 8–10; Moderate levels are greater than 6 and less than 8; Low levels are 6 and under.

- People who have meditated in the past week are also far more likely to flourish (42% reporting high Human Flourishing scores, compared with only 29% of those who haven't meditated).
- People who have volunteered in their community are also far more likely to flourish (49% reporting high Human Flourishing scores, compared with only 30% of those who haven't volunteered).

Our readers will quickly observe that these practices are not necessarily Christian. Many Christians do these things as expressions of their faith, but many others do them as well. These findings suggest that there is something healthy about reaching outward, inward, or upward.

Levels of Human Flourishing by Practices

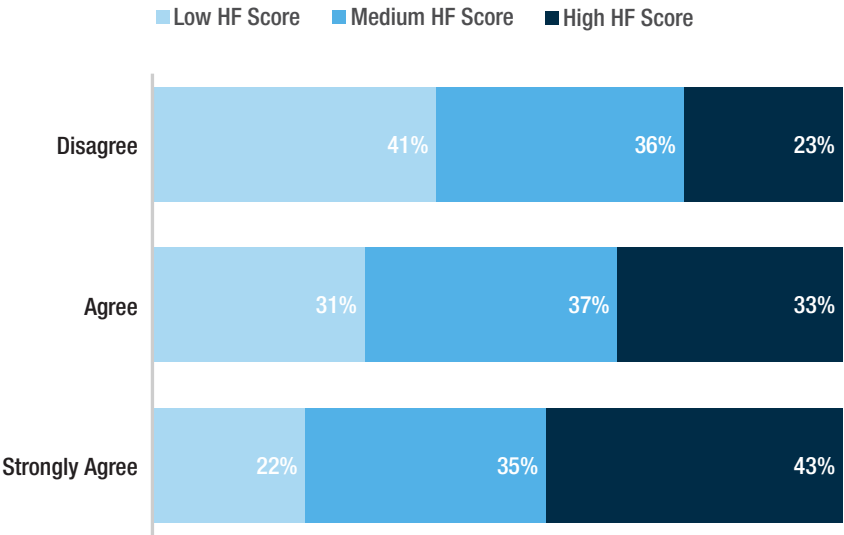


But let’s dig deeper into that matter of “reaching upward.” Elsewhere in our survey, we ask self-identified Christians if they agree with the statement “God is active in my life.” Consider what this statement is saying, and think about the Christians you know who might have trouble with it. They might recognize the *existence* of a God and even launch an occasional prayer, but this statement marks a move toward *involvement*, perhaps even a personal relationship.

In that light, it’s no surprise to see the same pattern emerging. Those who agree with the statement are more likely to have high flourishing scores. And the more strongly they agree, the higher their flourishing levels.

**Levels of Human Flourishing
by Belief in God’s Activity**

“I believe God is actively involved in my life.”

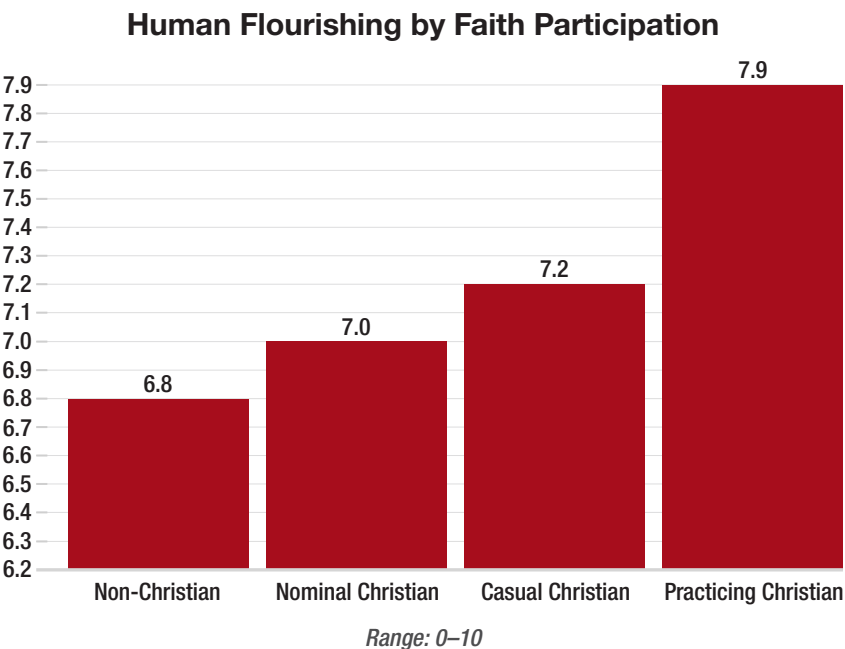


Base: Self-identified Christians

How much does a person’s church experience affect their flourishing? Considerably.

Last year we introduced the Faith Participation category, dividing people into four groups. **Practicing Christians** attend services at least once a month and say their faith is very important to them. **Casual Christians** attend at least monthly but don’t say their faith is very important. **Nominal Christians** do not attend that often. **Non-Christians** do not call themselves Christians.

In Human Flourishing scores, we see a slight increase from Non-Christians to Nominal Christians (6.8 to 7.0), and another slight rise for Casual Christians (7.2). Then there’s a huge jump to the Practicing Christian score (7.9). Church attendance, together with faith importance, is associated with greater flourishing.



BIBLE USE

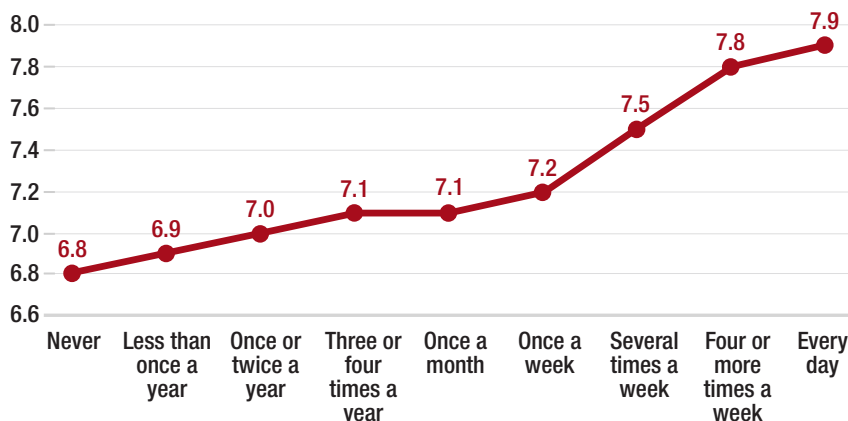
Now we come to the main focus of the *State of the Bible* report: the Bible. Do people who regularly and meaningfully interact with Scripture report greater human flourishing?

Yes, clearly yes, and there are some fascinating details.

Every year, we ask not only *whether* people use the Bible, but *how often*. We know that God meets people in Scripture whenever they turn to it, whether daily or weekly or just on special occasions. But over the years we've observed that the frequency of people's Bible use says something about their connection with God. Those who come to Scripture just a few times a year have a certain place in their lives for the Bible—maybe as a blessing for the holidays. Those who read once a week may have a different pattern, perhaps a Sabbath blessing or other weekly ritual. But more frequent Bible use—several times a week or more—nurtures spiritual growth and intimacy with God in a day-to-day way. As people grow, they want to dig into the Bible more, and as they meet God in those pages, they keep growing.

The Human Flourishing data give us statistical confirmation of the biblical idea that God's Word is good for you. We clearly see that greater levels of personal Bible Use are associated with higher Human Flourishing scores. But there's not much difference between using the Bible once a week (7.2) and "three or four times a year" (7.1). The major impact on flourishing begins when you get beyond the "once a week" level of Bible use. A jump to "several times a week" raises the flourishing level by three decimal points (to 7.5), and daily use has an even higher jump (to 7.9).

Human Flourishing Scores by Bible Use Frequency



Personal Bible Use; Range: 0–10

We want to be careful about assuming causality. That is, the numbers themselves just give us *association*. Greater flourishing goes together with more frequent Bible use. Perhaps those who flourish in character, relationships, and mental and physical health have the personal discipline and drive to develop a Bible-reading habit. Maybe such discipline leads to both Bible use and aspects of flourishing.

But we're also very aware of how God changes lives through the Bible. And the Bible tells us this again and again. As the Psalmist sings:

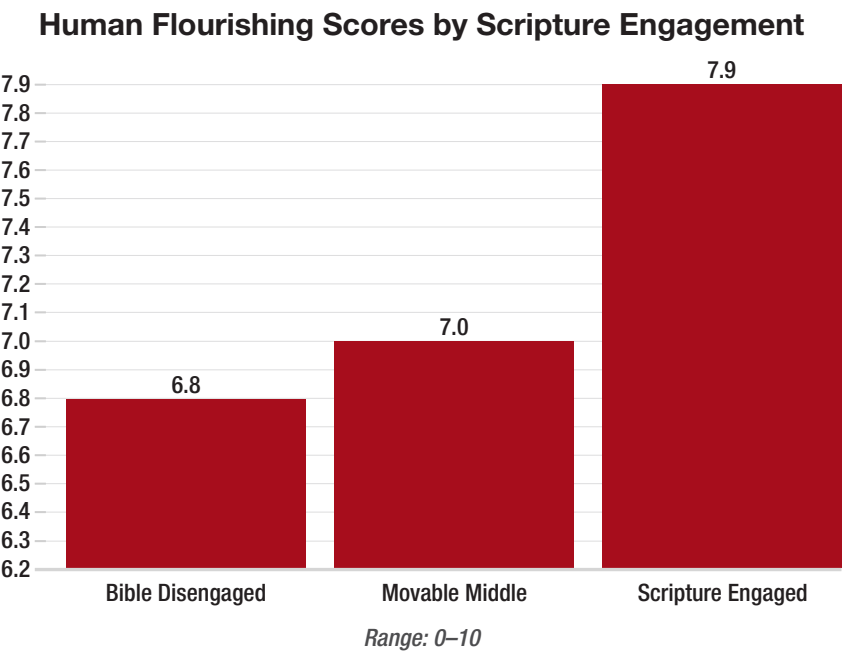
The Law of the LORD is perfect;
it gives us new life.
His teachings last forever,
and they give wisdom
to ordinary people.

The LORD's instruction is right;
it makes our hearts glad.
His commands shine brightly,
and they give us light.

Psalm 19:7–8 CEV

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

Frequency of Bible Use is one piece of our definition of measurable Scripture Engagement, which also includes responses to questions about the impact of Scripture on our relationship with God and others and the centrality of Scripture in our decision-making. As we reported in chapter 1, only one in five Americans (20%) are Scripture Engaged. As a group, these people flourish more (7.9) than those who don't share that connection with the Bible (7.0 for Movable Middle and 6.8 for Bible Disengaged).



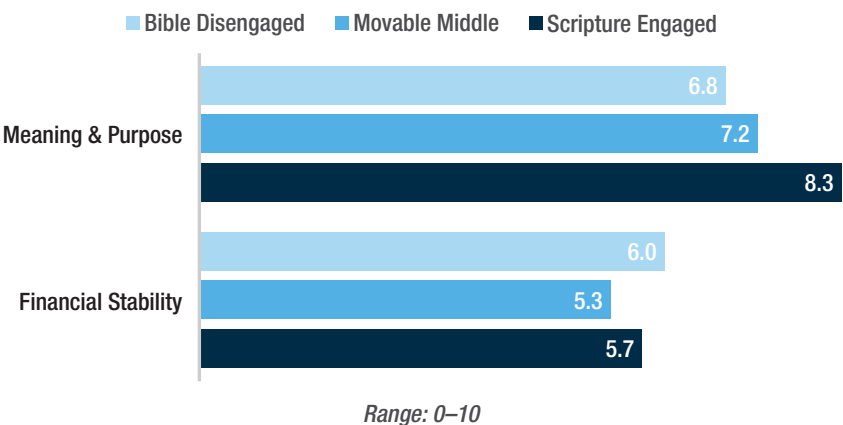
The Scripture Engaged have higher scores in every one of the five Human Flourishing domains, but the greatest difference occurs in Meaning & Purpose, where they have an increase of 22 percent over the Bible Disengaged. It's easy to see how the call of Scripture to a

deeper relationship with God and service to others would create a powerful sense of purpose in those who regularly peruse those pages.

Earlier we saw that the two youngest generations have the lowest levels of flourishing, but when we add Scripture engagement into the equation, we see something different. Both Gen Zers and Millennials who are Scripture engaged have an average Human Flourishing score of 8.1! We’ve seen this generational effect in past years, too. Young people who are Scripture engaged appear to be truly thriving.

The only domain where the Bible Disengaged excel is the sixth one, which is added to create the Secure Flourishing Index. In that Financial & Material Stability domain, the Bible Disengaged have a score of 6.0, significantly above the Scripture Engaged (5.7) and the Movable Middle (5.3) . The questions for this domain are not about income or wealth, but about how much people *worry* about meeting monthly expenses, or about safety, food, or housing. Still, we can see how greater wealth might lead to less worry, and in fact the Bible Disengaged report higher income levels than the Scripture Engaged.

Selected Flourishing Domains by Scripture Engagement



OTHER SPIRITUAL KEYS TO FLOURISHING

Imagine that someone in your church comes to you for advice. “I pray and read the Bible a lot,” they say, “but I still don’t feel that I’m *flourishing*.” (They might not use that exact word, but you get the idea.) What do you tell them?

There are many reasons that Christians might not be flourishing, including some very serious matters. And there are many ways Christians might flourish more. But our survey discovered two practices that are statistically associated—clearly and strongly—with greater levels of flourishing.

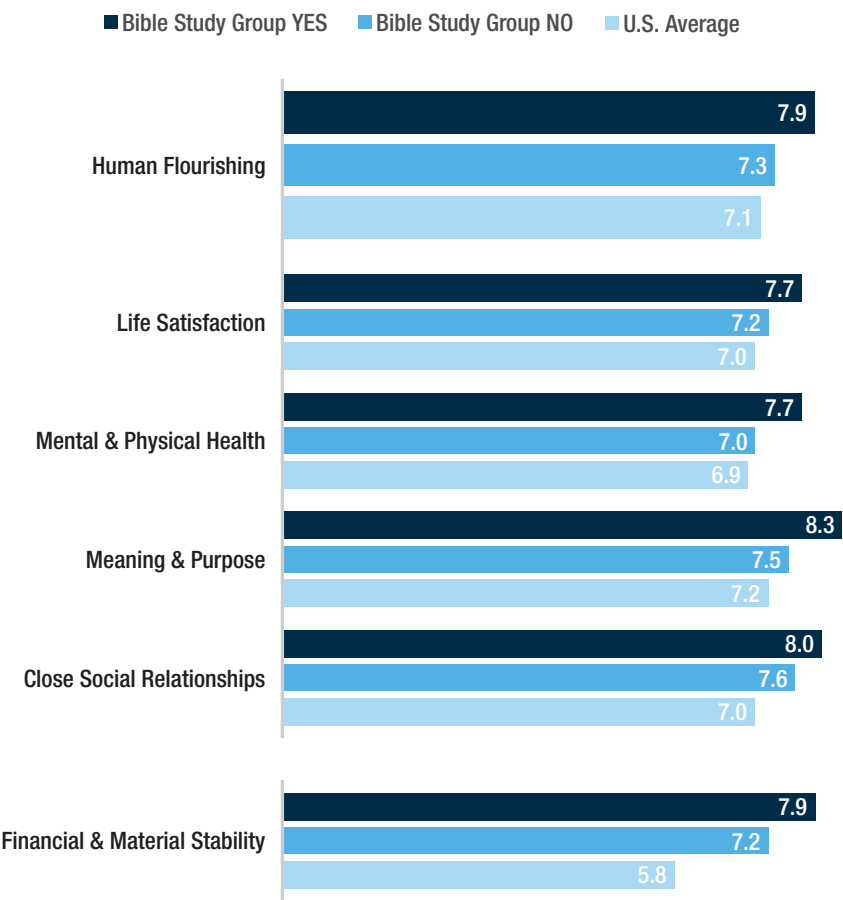
Are they in a Bible study group? In one section of our survey, we asked Bible Users about methods of Bible reading—a few verses at a time or whole chapters, same time of day, and so on (see page 16). One yes/no option was “I participate in a Bible study group.” About 22 percent said yes (which, by the way, is nearly one-tenth of the American population).

Those who participate in a Bible study group had an average Human Flourishing score of 7.9, far exceeding the national average in every domain. People who participate in a Bible study group also saw higher flourishing levels across every domain than those using any other Bible reading method.

If you want to start flourishing, you might tell your advisee, join a Bible study group. While that might sound simplistic, think about it. In a group, people can develop close social relationships. They share moments of joy and challenge, spiritual growth and learning opportunities, as the Spirit guides them through Scripture. They

receive and offer important feedback on their life—including mental and physical health—based on biblical principles. They see what the Bible says about God’s purposes, which might bolster their own sense of meaning and purpose. The group Bible study might even help them worry less about financial and material security, as they help each other and encourage one another to put their trust in God.

The Effect of a Bible Study Group on Flourishing



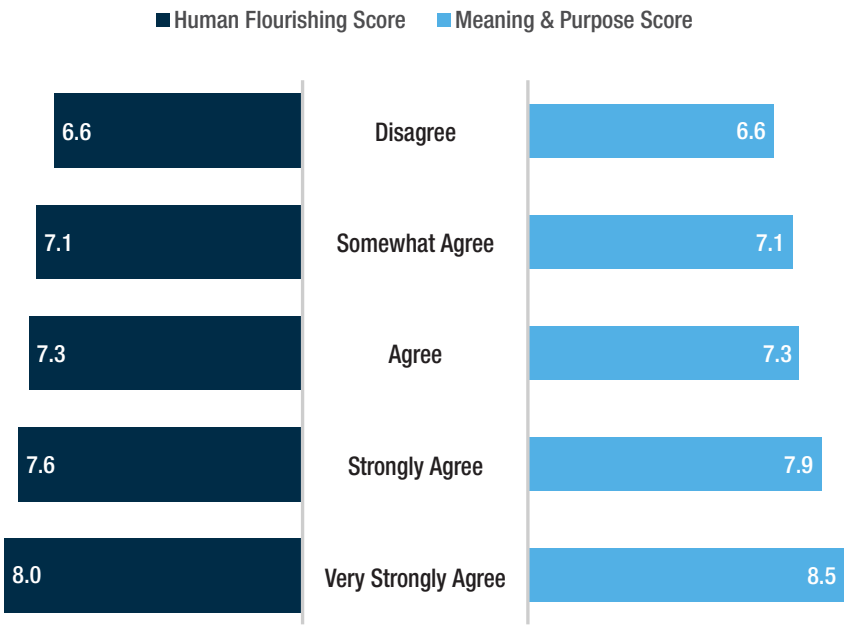
Base: Bible Users; Range: 0–10

Are they using their spiritual gifts? In another portion of our survey we asked self-identified Christians if they agreed with this statement: *I know and use my spiritual gifts to fulfill God’s purposes.* The more they agreed with this statement, the higher their Flourishing score. This was true across all domains, but the most dramatic results were in Meaning & Purpose.

This might, then, involve more than mere advice to this non-flourishing friend. You might need to make sure your church is identifying spiritual gifts and using them in ministry, helping members join with God’s purposes for the church and community.

Human Flourishing and Spiritual Gifts

“I know and use my spiritual gifts to fulfill God’s purposes.”

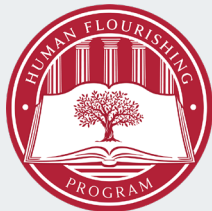


Base: Self-identified Christians

Knowing God, loving God, letting God's love flow through us to others—these are our goals. We use our spiritual gifts, not to attain some level of success or happiness, but simply because the Lord wants us to. We study the Bible with others because Jesus said he'd be there when we gather in his name—and what a privilege it is to talk together about what the Lord reveals in Scripture!

Even flourishing is not an end in itself. It is a blessing God provides when we trust him and walk with him. Scripture often reminds us that our connection with God brings about abundant life, great joy, peace that passes understanding, rich blessing, and even *flourishing*. It's nice to see survey data confirming that. ■

CHAPTER 3 PODCAST: THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN FLOURISHING



For this chapter, we interviewed **Dr. Kate Long**, a research associate with the Human

Flourishing Program at Harvard University. She studies the intersection of faith and flourishing and brings a wealth of knowledge to the conversation. We hope you'll listen in!



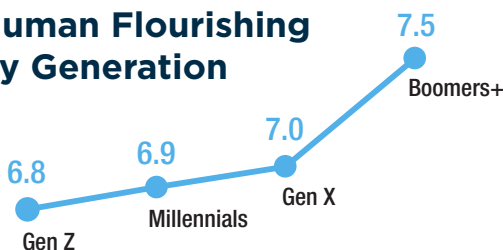


Human Flourishing

Average American
Human Flourishing Score **7.1**



Human Flourishing by Generation



U.S. Human
Flourishing
Ranking:

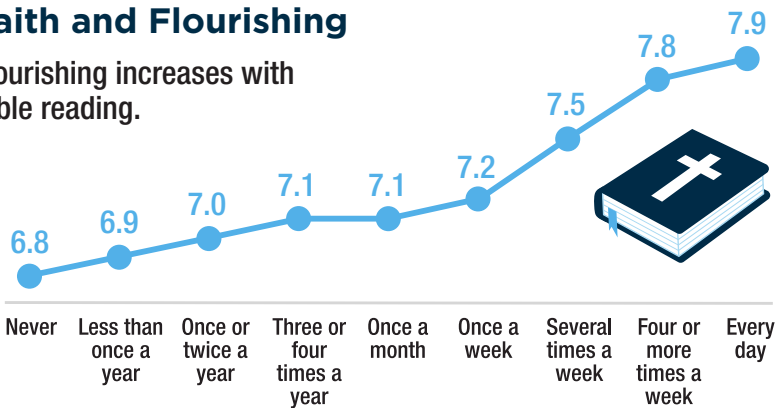
#15

out of 22
countries
studied*

*Global Flourishing Study (Harvard/Gallup 2025) | globalflourishingstudy.com

Faith and Flourishing

Flourishing increases with
Bible reading.



And Scripture-engaged Gen Z
& Millennials are flourishing:

8.1 Scripture
Engaged

6.7 Unengaged
6.9 All

DEFINITION

Human flourishing: A state of thriving and well-being where all aspects of a person's life are good.



SELF-CARE AND WELL-BEING

For years, Lester Holt signed off the NBC Nightly News by saying, “Please take care of yourself . . . and each other.” Perhaps you have used “Take care of yourself” as a farewell to friends. Yet this is now more than a catchphrase. Self-care has become a hot topic in the health industry.

While researchers gather different behaviors under the self-care umbrella, there’s a growing awareness that people can substantially improve their own mental, physical, and spiritual health with certain beneficial actions.

The *State of the Bible* survey includes questions on five specific self-care activities: **physical exercise, spending time with a friend, volunteering, meditation, and prayer.** We want to see whether these

behaviors help people flourish and what effect they might have on people's stress, anxiety, or loneliness. Also, do Scripture Engaged people or Practicing Christians practice self-care more or less than others?

Even the academic studies on this subject are quick to point out that self-care does not mean selfishness or self-absorption, though some people could go to that extreme. We anchor this line of questioning in the biblical command to “love your neighbor *as yourself*” (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39)—and its assumption that we can care for both ourselves and others.

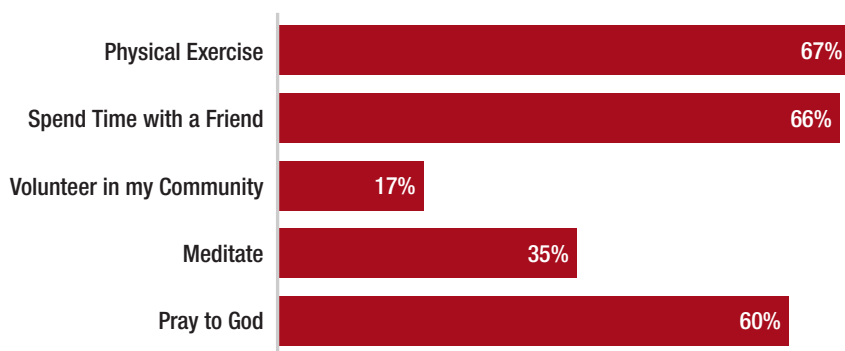
FIVE ACTIVITIES FOR SELF-CARE

Our question asks whether people have done these activities in the past week. Not whether they think it's a good idea, or if they'll get around to it when they get a chance, but simply . . .

Have you engaged in any of the following activities in the last seven days?

- Engaged in physical exercise
- Spent time with a friend (not a family member)
- Volunteered in my community
- Meditated
- Prayed to God

Self-Care Activities, U.S. Adults



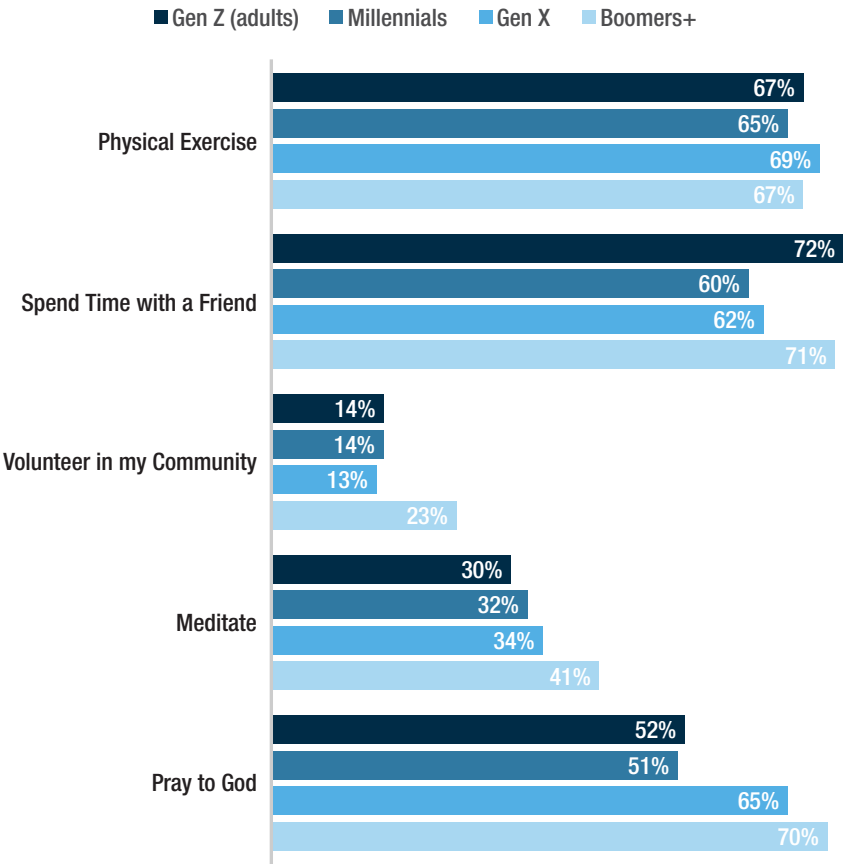
About two of three people say they've exercised (67%) or spent time with a friend (66%) in the previous week. Volunteering seems more difficult, with only about one in six (17%) doing this. Praying to God (60%) is more common than meditating (35%).

Note that most of these activities are not necessarily Christian or even spiritual, but they could be. Someone might volunteer for a Christian ministry or for a Little League team. Someone might meditate on the goodness of God or on the height of their blood pressure. Keep that in mind as we look at the numbers for different subgroups.

GENERATION AND GENDER

You might be surprised at the lack of variation in physical exercise, with all four generations clustered around that two-thirds mark. It's also interesting that the oldest and youngest spend the most time with friends (about 10 percentage points higher than the middle generation groups). Volunteering is tough for everybody, it seems, and it looks like the retirees in our oldest generation are pushing that number up (to 23%, nine points higher than any other group).

Self-Care Activities by Generation



In the two spiritual, or at least quasi-spiritual, activities—prayer and meditation—we see the oldest generation (70%) outpacing the others again, though about two-thirds of Gen X (65%) had prayed in the previous week. It’s possible that older people relate more to the term *meditate* than younger ones (the concept had a heyday back in the Seventies). Other studies show that younger generations especially appreciate God’s presence in nature, but they might not call it meditation.

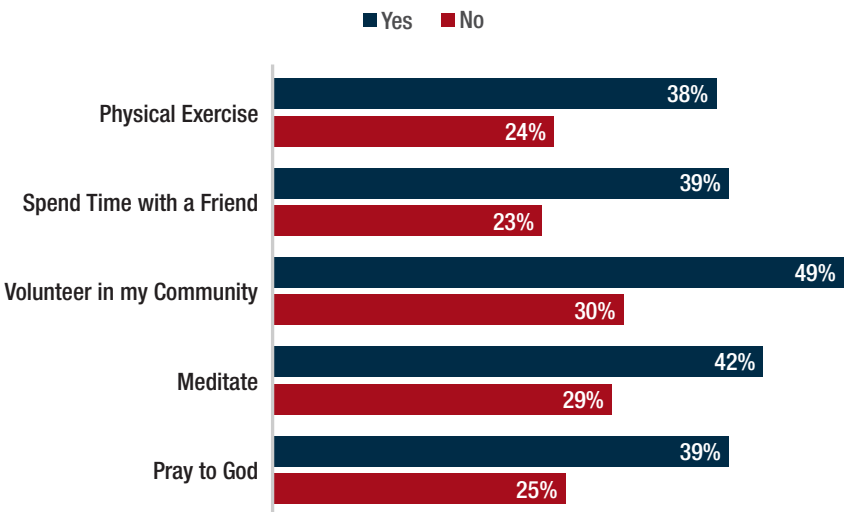
We also looked at gender differences with these Self-Care items. Women were slightly more likely to spend time with a friend (67% to 64%) or to volunteer in the community (18% to 15%). But the biggest shift occurred in the prayer numbers, with women far more likely than men to report praying to God in the previous seven days (65% to 57%).

FLOURISHING AND SELF-CARE

In Chapter 3, we discussed the Human Flourishing Index, with its six domains, examining various factors associated with greater flourishing. Now, as we turn to self-care and other issues, we wonder about their connection with flourishing. If people are truly “taking care of themselves” in these physical, social, emotional, and spiritual ways, shouldn’t they have higher flourishing numbers?

High Flourishing by Self-Care Activities

Percent of those doing (or not doing) these activities who have high Human Flourishing levels



We designate index scores of 8.0 and above as “high flourishing.” So we hypothesized that those who engaged in our five Self-Care activities would have significantly more “high flourishers” than those who did not engage in those activities. That’s exactly what we found.

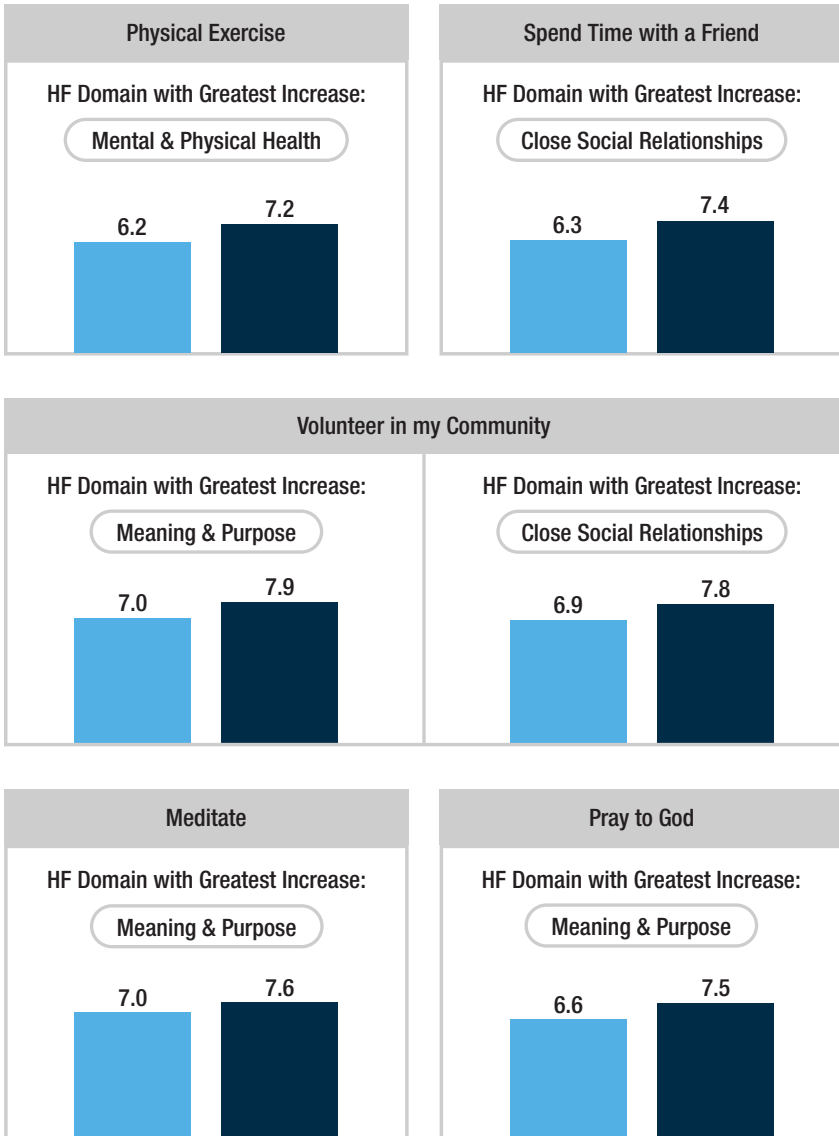
With each of the five Self-Care activities, participation makes for a difference of at least 13 percentage points in the number of high-flourishing people. We find the greatest difference (49% to 30%) in the Volunteering numbers. This is likely because volunteers are far more likely to be Scripture Engaged, Practicing Christians, and in the Boomer+ generation—all factors associated with higher levels of flourishing.

Breaking out the different domains in the Human Flourishing Index that reflect various parts of our lives, it is clear that some domains match up well with Self-Care activities we asked about. For instance, we figured that those who had exercised physically in the previous week might feel better about their Physical & Mental Health. Those who have spent time with a friend might be flourishing more in their Close Social Relationships. Once again, that’s exactly what we found.

You might intuitively expect that those who pray to God regularly would have a greater sense of Meaning & Purpose, and they do. Same with those who meditate. Those who volunteer in the community had the greatest difference over non-volunteers in two domains—Meaning & Purpose and Close Social Relationships—which makes make sense in both cases. Volunteers often enjoy making a difference in the world, and they might make friends among those who volunteer alongside them.

Increase in Flourishing Domains for Self-Care Activities

■ Human Flourishing Score for “No” ■ Human Flourishing Score for “Yes”

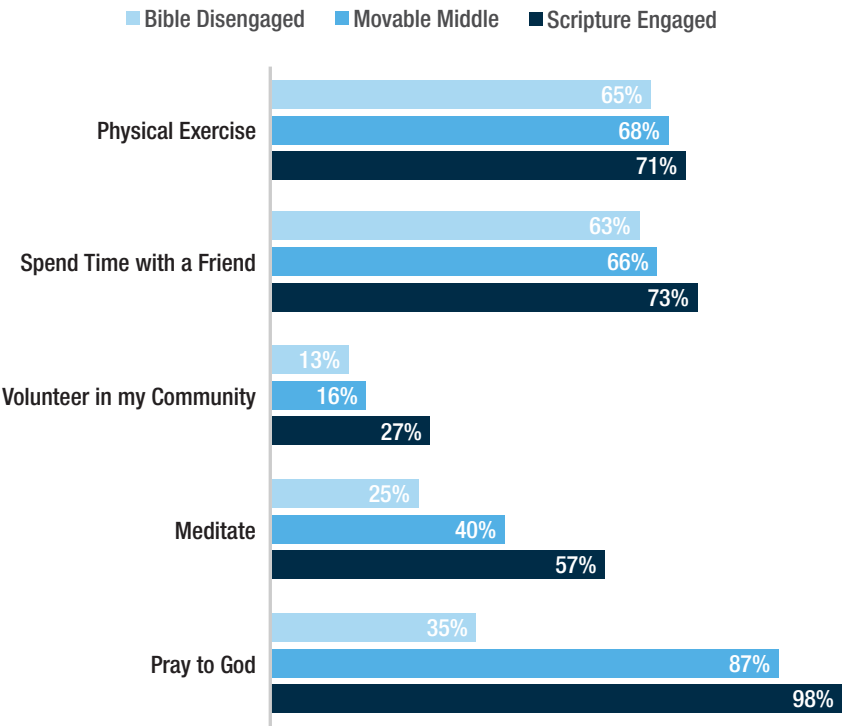


SELF-CARE AND FAITH

As we’ve noted, most of these Self-Care activities could be considered expressions of a believer’s spiritual life. Even if not explicitly spiritual, these behaviors might be considered “faith-adjacent.” So how do the most seriously committed Christians fare? Are they more likely to engage in these practices?

Self-Care Activities by Scripture Engagement

Percent reporting that they've done this in the previous seven days



Scripture Engaged people practice *all* these activities at a higher rate, though their margin is slim in the Physical Exercise category (71%, compared to 68% and 65%). There, we wonder if the greater

discipline necessary for regular engagement with Scripture carries over into physical fitness, providing a slight edge. Similarly, the Scripture Engaged are more likely to spend time with a friend (73% to 66% and 63%). Many people spend time with friends, regardless of their relationship with Scripture, but these numbers suggest that the Bible might provide an extra push. (Scripture Engaged people also tend to be churchgoing people, which may enhance their relational options.)

We see that “extra push” most clearly in the volunteering category, where the Scripture Engaged far exceed others (27% to 16% and 13%). Keep in mind that this is volunteering “in my community” and includes people who volunteer in their local church.

You could predict that the Scripture Engaged would far exceed the others in Meditation and Prayer, but keep your eye on the Movable Middle. They’re *moving*. In other activities they’ve been only a few percentage points away from the Bible Disengaged. They begin to create some space in Meditation (40% Movable Middle to 25% Disengaged), and when it comes to Praying to God, they’re nearly at the level of the Scripture Engaged (87% to 98%).

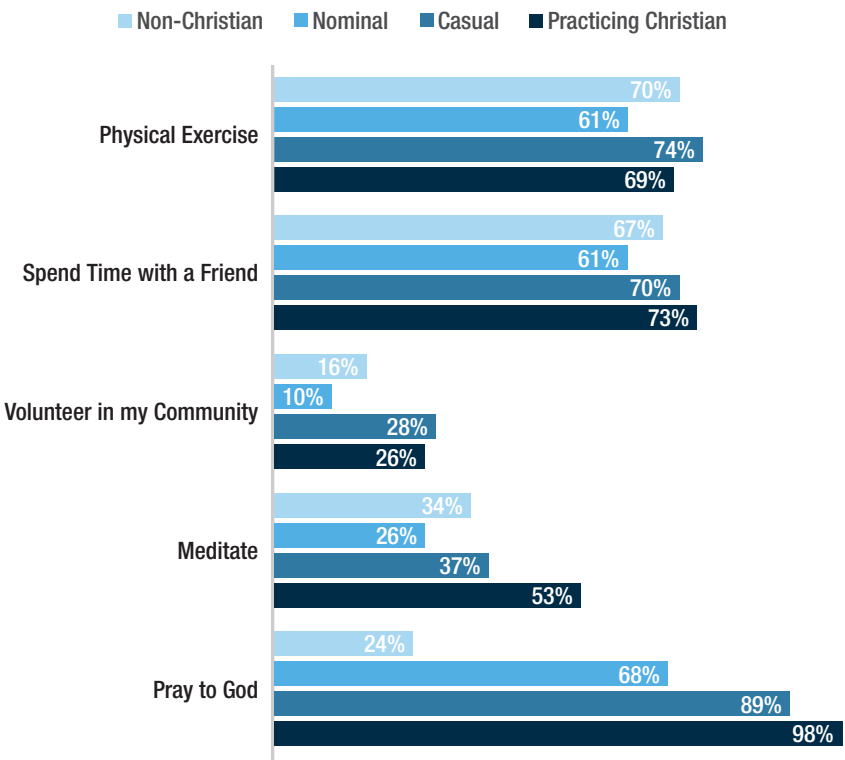
We have long presented the Movable Middle as a “sleeping giant” of Christian ministry. They are less committed in many ways, but they have some mustard seed of faith, and we see it in these numbers. In any given week, nearly nine of ten of them are “praying to God.” We don’t know why, or what they’re saying, but we know that’s a relationship we want to encourage.

Many of the Movable Middle are also part of a group we used to call Non-Practicing Christians. Last year we sliced this group into two

very different subgroups. **Nominal Christians** say they’re Christians but rarely attend church. **Casual Christians** attend church but do not say their faith is “very important” to them.

The difference between Nominals and Casuals becomes apparent as we view their Self-Care activities. Casual Christians are very close the Practicing Christians in most points, sometimes exceeding them. Nominal Christians lag behind Non-Christians in everything except prayer.

Self-Care Activities by Faith Participation



FOUR FACTORS RELATING TO WELL-BEING

Despite our best efforts in self-care, we can face obstacles to well-being. We feel **stress** from work demands, family concerns, financial challenges, or national issues. Occasionally this stress overflows into a general feeling of **anxiety**. Sometimes we find that the comfort of friends eases our concerns, but at other times we experience **loneliness**, convinced that no one truly understands us or cares.

Our researchers recognize that stress, anxiety, or loneliness can become serious issues, requiring medical attention and professional counseling. We also know that there are lower levels of these ailments that can still affect our health, attitudes, and quality of life. We're not doing any diagnoses here, just asking how people feel. A bank of questions on these subjects yields scores that we can compare from group to group. We also include a few questions gauging the **hope** level of our respondents. Well-being isn't just the reduction of negative feelings, but also a positive attitude toward the future.

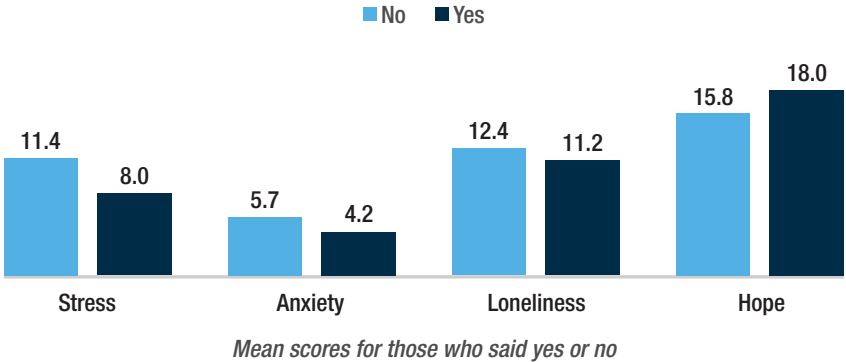
That brings us to the Self-Care activities we just discussed. Do they actually help with stress and these other issues? While there may be other factors involved, these activities are consistently associated with lower stress and anxiety, less loneliness, and more hope.¹

The stress-reducing power of physical exercise is well-established, and our data confirm it. Yet it's also associated with less loneliness and more hope. The most important element on that chart might be the dismal numbers for those who *don't* exercise.

¹ These Well-Being items use different scales based on self-reporting in answer to questions on our survey. Stress has a scale of 0–40; Anxiety is 0–20; Loneliness is 5–20 (lower is better for all three). Hope is 3–24 (higher is better).

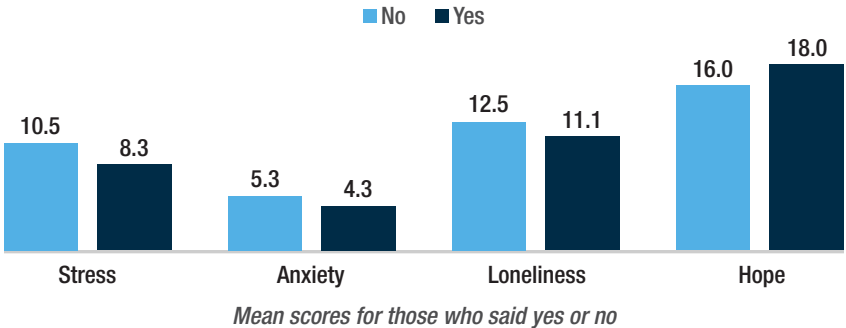
The Effect of Physical Exercise on Well-Being Issues

Have you engaged in physical exercise in the last seven days?



The Effect of Time Spent with a Friend on Well-Being Issues

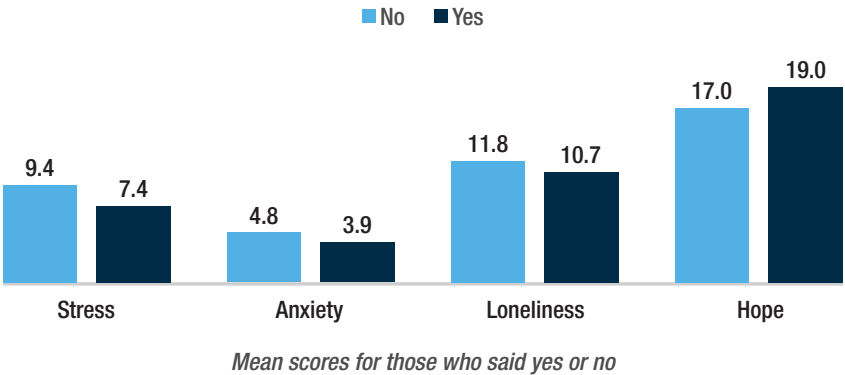
Have you spent time with a friend (not family) in the last seven days?



The relatively few (17%) who volunteer in their communities put up the most positive numbers. They are the least stressed, least anxious, least lonely, and most hopeful of everyone represented on these charts. (Again, volunteers are also far more likely to come from the Boomer+ generation, which shows better scores in the Well-Being categories, so this may skew the data somewhat.)

The Effect of Volunteering on Well-Being Issues

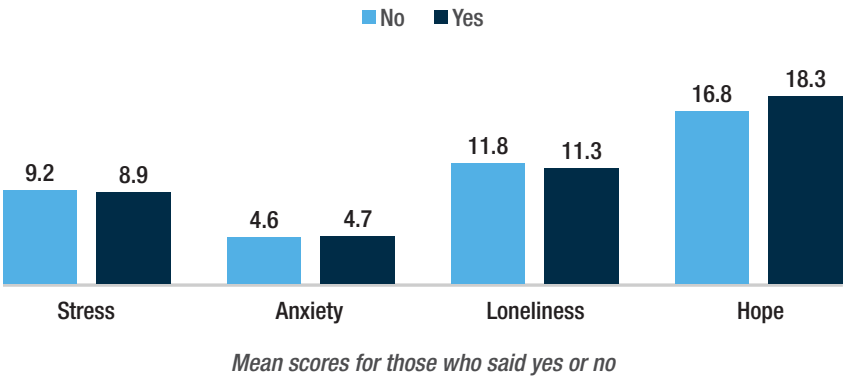
Have you volunteered in your community in the last seven days?



The spiritual act of prayer and the social act of spending time with a friend are also associated with greater well-being across the board. On the other hand, meditation showed minimal difference. Those who meditated in the previous week actually reported slightly *more* anxiety. We should note here that these questions don’t determine causation. Perhaps anxiety causes people to meditate.

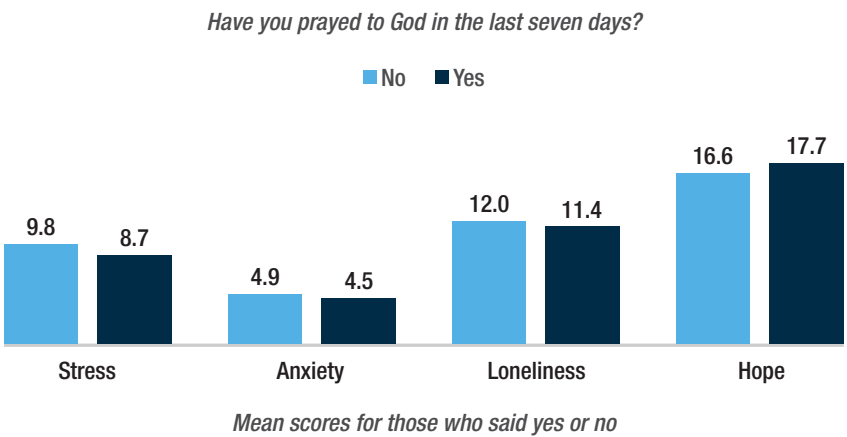
The Effect of Meditation on Well-Being Issues

Have you meditated in the last seven days?



This may be true of prayer as well, which shows less of a Yes/No difference than exercising, volunteering, or time with a friend. While we believe that prayer can reduce stress, anxiety, and loneliness, we also understand that people in those situations often turn to God in prayer. Prayer eases stress; but many people pray more in high-stress situations than they normally do.

The Effect of Prayer on Well-Being Issues



WELL-BEING AND FAITH

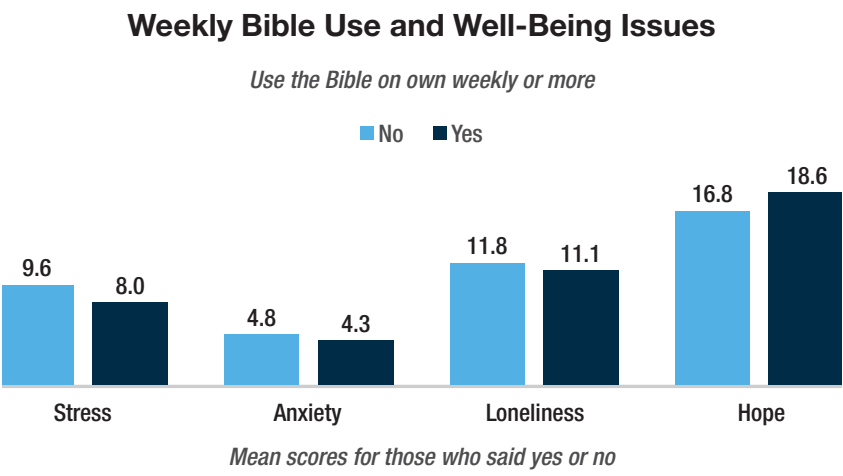
We read in Philippians 4:6, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (NIV). In this and multiple other passages, the Bible urges us to avoid anxiety.

You might be sighing, “Oh, if it were only that easy!” To be sure, there’s a learning curve. The Bible shows us an impressive collection of people through the centuries who learned to trust God. But it wasn’t easy. Moses struck a rock, Elijah ran to a desert cave, Peter

sank into the sea. And yet it's clear that those who move through this learning process—in a dynamic relationship with God—find resources to deal with the stress and anxiety of life.

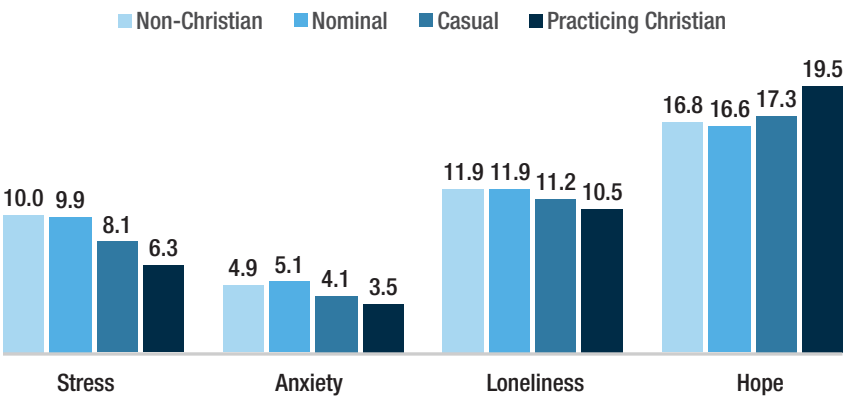
On that basis, we theorize that regular interaction with God—not only in prayer but in meaningful Bible interaction and worship—should result in less stress and anxiety. We also believe that God's regular reminders that *he is with us* may ease feelings of loneliness and *the biblical vision of a glorious future* may bolster hope.

While the Self-Care section of our survey focused on five specific actions, asking if people had done them the previous seven days, we also have a lot of data on Bible reading. Could we compare, say, the stress levels of those who report using the Bible at least weekly with those doing Self-Care activities within the past week? The results are strong.



How does church involvement figure into this equation? For this, we employ our Faith Participation breakdown.

Faith Participation and Well-Being Issues



Nominal Christians (who say they’re Christians but rarely attend church) have nearly the same levels as Non-Christians. They report slightly *more* anxiety and *less* hope.

Casual Christians show significantly better numbers across the board, and Practicing Christians (who attend church and also consider their faith very important) display even better scores in every category. In fact, these are better numbers than any of the Self-Care activities have.

So, if you want to ward off stress, anxiety, or loneliness, or if you want to nourish your sense of hope, you could go out for a jog or chat with a friend. Those Self-Care activities are indeed associated with better scores in all those areas. But according to these numbers, it would be even *more* beneficial to gather regularly with a church that reminds you how important your faith is. And this has eternal benefits as well.

COMFORT AND CARE

Did you know that the word comfort, in one form or another, appears nine times in the first seven verses of 2 Corinthians? The Bible is full of comfort—not always at that frequency, but it’s a regular feature. In various places, Scripture affirms that we will face problems, but we will also be helped and consoled by a loving Lord. Stress, anxiety, and loneliness are but a few of the things that drag us down, but he will lift us up.

This is one of the repeated patterns of Scripture. Challenge, opposition, sometimes failure, sometimes sin, leading to humbling, repentance, comfort, and restoration. Those who grab a few verses here and there might miss this. But those who *engage*—learning, questioning, applying God’s truth to their own circumstances—know this story by heart.

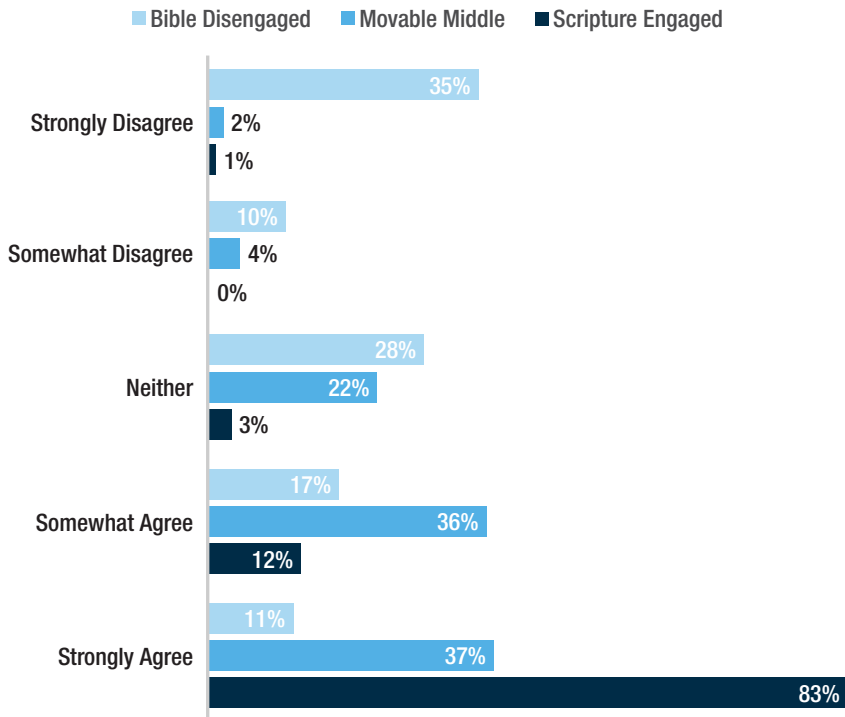
So once again we offer a theory: In difficult times, those who are Scripture Engaged will embrace a God of comfort in ways that others don’t. Once again, our expectations are confirmed.

It’s great to see that nearly three-quarters of the Movable Middle (73%) find comfort in their faith in God, at least “somewhat.” But the Scripture Engaged seem *sure* of this, nearly everyone agreeing and five of six “strongly.”

In difficult times, those who are Scripture Engaged will embrace a God of comfort in ways that others don’t.

The Comfort of Faith, by Scripture Engagement

"I consider my faith to be a great source of comfort when I am struggling with life issues."

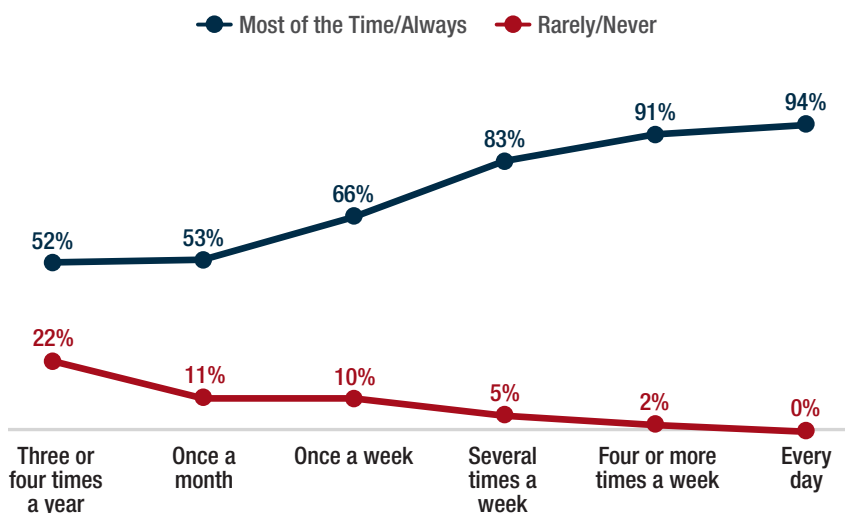


We see the importance of regular Bible interaction even more vividly as we put together the responses to two different survey questions regarding frequency of Bible use and awareness of God's comfort.

The progression is clear: The more people turn to Scripture, the greater their awareness of God's care for them. They will get stressed. They will face loneliness and anxiety. They will suffer trauma and loss and confusion and sickness. But they also know that the Lord's mercies are new every morning. They can cast their cares upon him, because he cares deeply for them.

Awareness that God Cares, by Frequency of Bible Use

*When you use the Bible, how often do you experience . . .
Awareness that God cares deeply about your suffering?*



BODY AND SOUL

“Take care of yourself.” Not a bad idea, and as we’ve seen, there are proven benefits to such Self-Care activities as exercising, seeing friends, and praying. God made us, body and soul, and caring for one part strengthens our whole self. But the Bible reminds us that our greatest strength comes from a trusting relationship with God—“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37; Deuteronomy 6:5).

Any of the five Self-Care activities might enhance that relationship, but God cares where we place our focus. Is the goal to take care of ourselves, or to open ourselves to God?

It makes sense to invest in our own health, relationships, and peace of mind, but there is a longer-term horizon to keep in view. In the New Testament we read, “Physical exercise has some value, but spiritual exercise is valuable in every way, because it promises life both for the present and for the future” (1 Timothy 4:8).

Weekly Self-Care and Well-Being Issues

Scores of those who have done this within the previous week

	Stress (lower is better)	Anxiety (lower is better)	Loneliness (lower is better)	Hope (higher is better)
Physical Exercise	8.0	4.2	11.2	18.0
Spend Time with a Friend	8.3	4.3	11.1	18.0
Volunteer in my Community	7.4	3.9	10.7	19.0
Meditate	8.9	4.7	11.3	18.3
Pray to God	8.7	4.5	11.4	17.7
Read the Bible	8.0	4.3	11.1	18.6

Through the centuries, believers have conducted such “spiritual exercise” in many ways, some of which resemble our Self-Care activities. These are sometimes called “soul care.” Meditation, for example, has long been part of caring for the soul—not to empty the mind, but to focus it on God. Similarly with prayer, it’s not just a crying out in times of need (though that’s important too), but a communion *with* God, listening as well as speaking. Soul care might also include service, community, fasting, and Sabbath-keeping. And of course the

key soul care element is the reading (and contemplation and living out) of Scripture, both in a community of believers and personally.

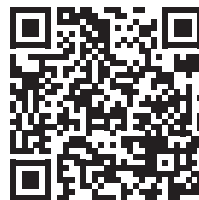
We've already seen how weekly Bible interaction is associated with lower stress and anxiety, less loneliness, and greater hope. As a Self-Care activity, Bible Reading compares well with the five we've already presented, but, as we've noted, its value goes far beyond that. As the anchoring element of soul care, the Bible opens us up to a transformative interaction—a relationship—with God. ■

WELL-BEING AND SOUL CARE

Alongside this chapter, we interviewed two guests on the *State of the Bible Podcast*.

Dr. Christine Arnzen is a licensed professional counselor and professor of counseling at Concordia University's Townsend Institute and speaks on self-care and well-being.

Mindy Caliguire is co-founder and president of Soul Care, an organization that supports pastors and leaders in their demanding ministry callings.

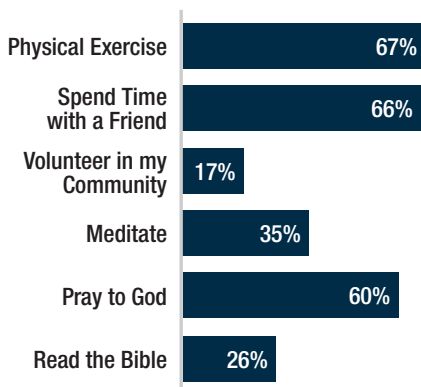




Self-Care and Well-Being

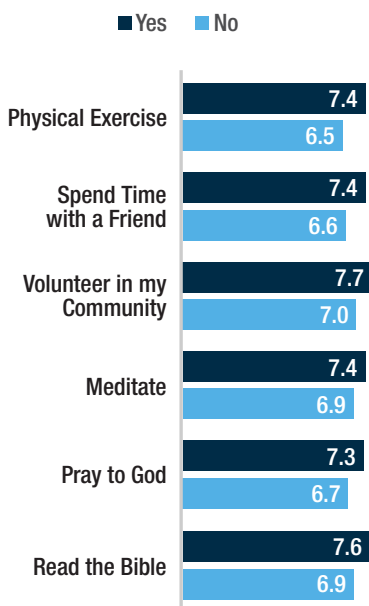
Self-Care Activities, U.S. Adults

*Percent of those doing these activities
in the last seven days*



Self-Care and Human Flourishing

*Human Flourishing scores of
those doing (or not doing) these
activities in the last seven days*



Faith as Comfort

*I consider my faith to be a great source
of comfort when I am struggling with
life issues . . . strongly agree*

11%

Bible
Disengaged

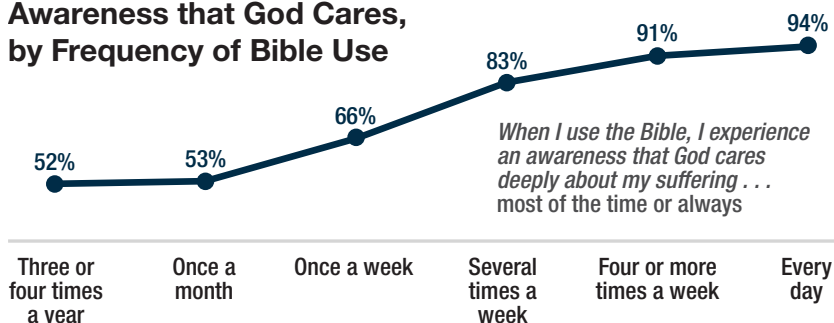
37%

Movable
Middle

83%

Scripture
Engaged

Awareness that God Cares, by Frequency of Bible Use

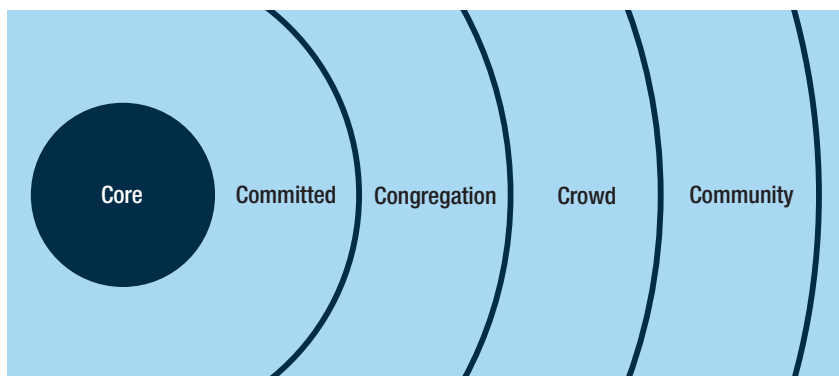




CHURCH ENGAGEMENT

It looks like a target: concentric circles with “Core” in the bull’s eye, progressing outward through Committed, Congregation, Crowd, and Community. If you’re a church leader, you’ve probably seen it—and perhaps even used it in a strategy session. While many have created versions of this diagram, it’s generally credited to Rick Warren in *The Purpose-Driven Church* (1995).

What does this diagram show us?



Every church has multiple groups of people connected with it. These groups may have different opinions of God, the Bible, and the church. They may live in different ways, with different habits, struggles, and priorities. Most pertinent to this chapter is the fact that these groups engage with the church at different levels.

Every church leader makes choices about which group or groups to “target.” Warren was in the vanguard of those who focused on the outer circles. Many leaders work at drawing a lackadaisical congregation into greater commitment. Others try to strengthen the core.

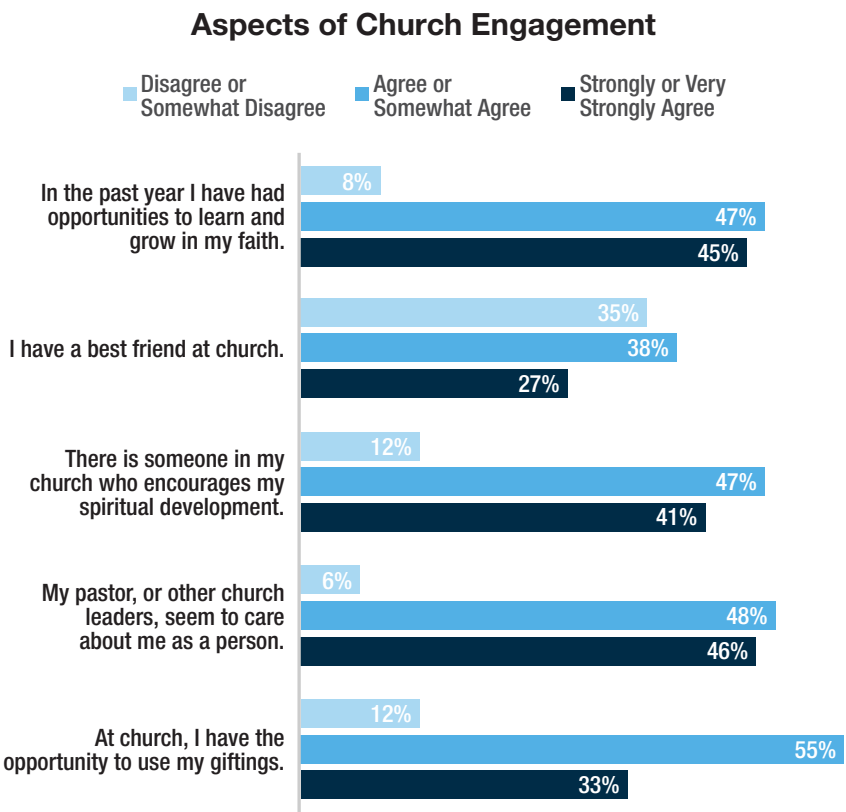
We focus on the Bible, not church-growth strategy. Yet we routinely see strong statistical connections between engagement with Scripture and engagement with church. People learn *from their church* how to read, understand, and live out the Bible. So we’ve gathered some insights on how people connect with their local church—in any of the circles—in the hope that we might find fresh ways to draw them into a Bible-driven relationship with God. We also recognize that Scripture consistently calls us into a deeper relationship with God, *and with the people of God*.

FINDING A NEW MEASURE

Some business consulting models evaluate “employee engagement.” Do workers believe in the value of their work—and therefore give it their best effort? Do they feel respected in their teams? Do they respect the company and share its goals? Various surveys identify aspects of workplace engagement, and experts are quick to point out ways a company can enhance its productivity by becoming a better place to work.

Are there similar dynamics at church? We believe there are, and that we can measure certain aspects of it. We define **Church Engagement** as “the level of an individual’s involvement in the life, mission, and community of a local church. It includes learning and growing in one’s faith, meaningful relationships with people in the church, and active use of one’s gifts in the work of the church.”

Studying aspects of workplace engagement, we found quite a few that transferred neatly to church life, with some adaptation and development. This gives us five new items for our 2025 survey.



Base: Christians who have attended church in the past six months

Nearly half of Christian church attenders (46%) feel “strongly” that their pastor, or another church leader, cares for them as a person, and even more (48%) agree with that sentiment, though not as strongly. Only one in twenty (6%) say that’s not true. That’s a huge affirmation for church leaders.

The numbers are similar when it comes to growth opportunities, with nine of ten (92%) agreeing (to some degree) that church gives them a way “to learn and grow in my faith.” Only one in twelve (8%) disagree.

Results are nearly as high with the statement “There is someone in my church who encourages my spiritual development,” with only about one in eight (12%) disagreeing.

If there’s room for growth here, it’s probably in the “opportunity to use my giftings.”¹ The number agreeing strongly or very strongly (33%) is much lower than most other questions.

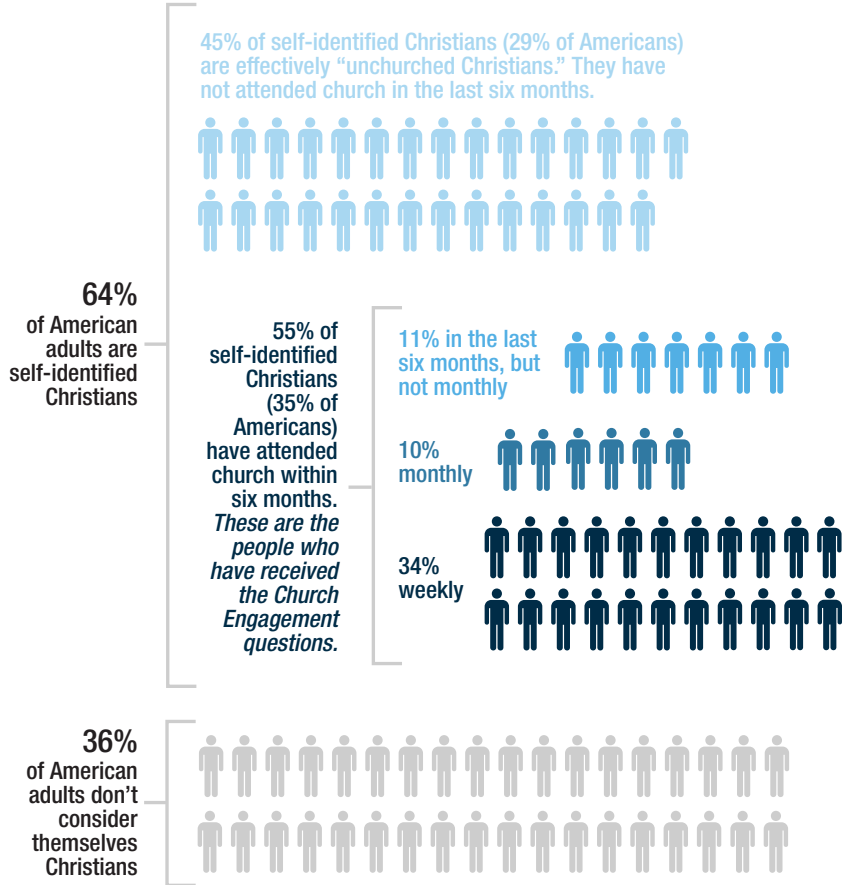
If someone has a “best friend” at church, that would likely support greater engagement, but it doesn’t seem terribly alarming that more than a third don’t. They might merely have such friends in other spheres of their life.

Please note: While many of the questions in our survey go to a full group that represents all of America, these Church Engagement questions were offered only to 35 percent of that group. Only those who identified as Christians *and* said they had attended a Christian

¹ “Giftings” might seem like an overly religious term, but we actually borrowed it from a secular study of workplace engagement.

church within the last six months received this section. Keep this in mind as we report on subgroups in the rest of this chapter—the Church Engagement questions only went to churchgoing Christians.

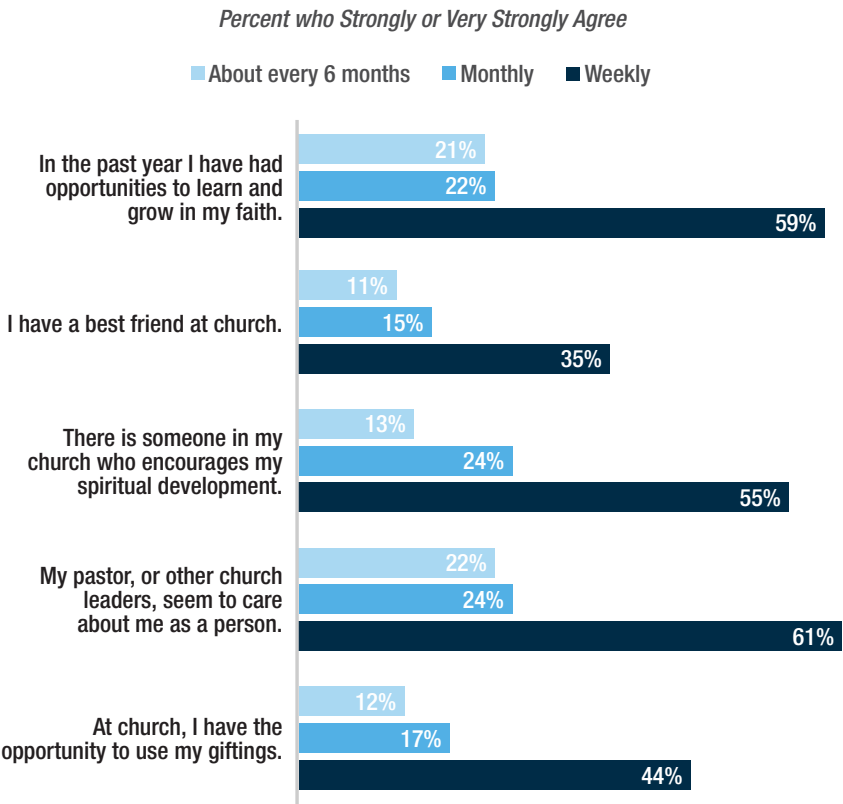
Christian Identity and Church Attendance



The five Church Engagement questions focus on various interactions in the church, but they don’t include *frequency of church attendance*. Do we see differences between those who attend twice a year (the minimum for being asked the Church Engagement questions) and

others attending weekly, or even monthly? Yes. There is a tight correlation between engagement and attendance.

Church Engagement Aspects by Attendance



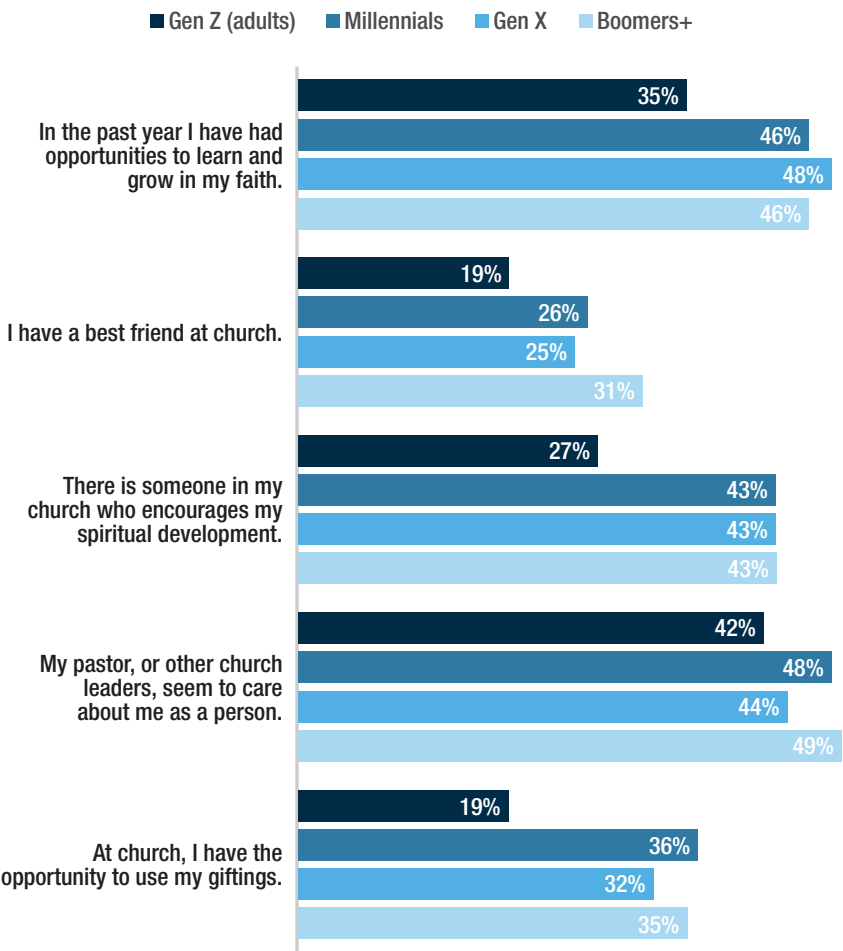
We expect those who attend weekly to be the most engaged at church, but the striking detail here is the relatively small difference between monthly attenders and those who attend maybe twice a year. Some churches consider people “regular” attenders if they show up once a month, but here we see data to dispute that. Whether we’re talking about pastoral care, the use of gifts, or growth opportunities, weekly attenders are more than twice as likely to respond enthusiastically.

CHURCH ENGAGEMENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Generation Z scores lowest in Church Engagement. On every point, they are less likely to agree strongly or very strongly than any other generation. Surprisingly, **Millennials** outscore **Gen X** on several of these questions.

Church Engagement Scores by Generation

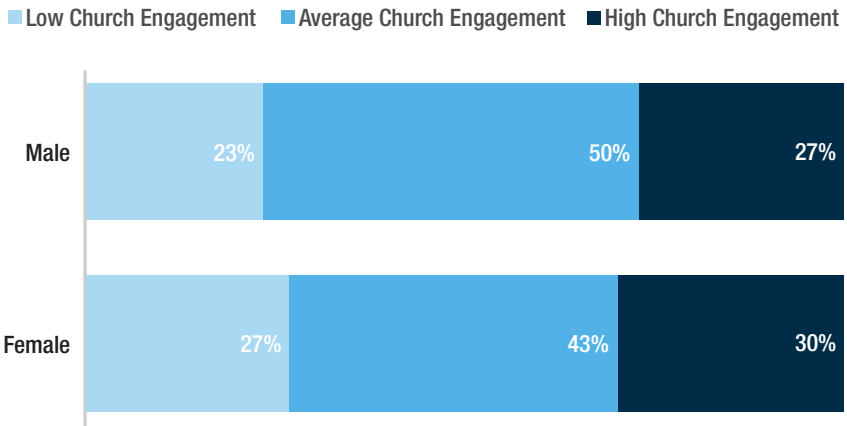
Percent who Strongly or Very Strongly Agree



The greatest disparity for Gen Z appears with “I have the opportunity to use my giftings.” It may be that these young people don’t yet know their spiritual gifts or how to use them (along with their physical and intellectual gifts) in the church. But we also know that some churches make it difficult to break into meaningful ministry roles. The older edge of Generation Z turns 28 this year; perhaps we could do more to help them recognize and use their God-given abilities.

When we separate high, average, and low Church Engagement scores,² we get an interesting perspective on gender differences. While men were more likely to demonstrate *average* church engagement (50% to 43%), women were better represented at the *high* and *low* ends of this spectrum. This difference comes entirely from the giftings question. We recognize that churches differ in theology and practice related to the gifts women may use, and this might contribute to these responses.

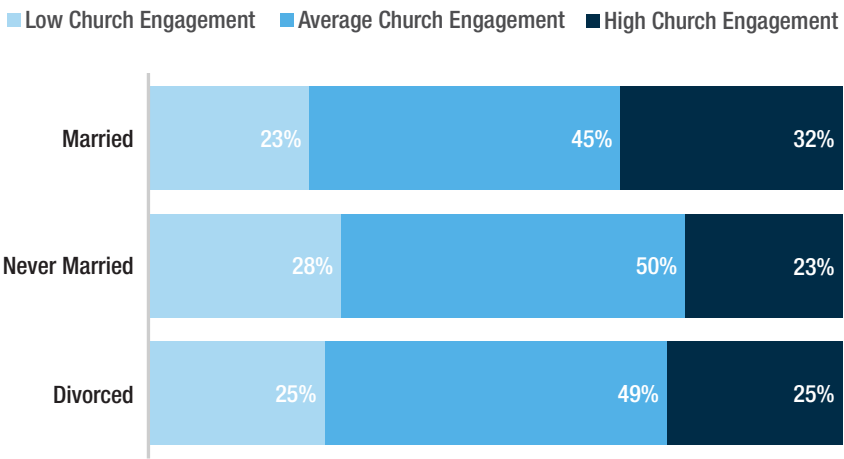
Levels of Church Engagement by Gender



² Responses get a point value of 1 (Disagree) to 6 (Very Strongly Agree). The five questions are totaled for a range of 5–30. We designate full scores of 24–30 “high,” 17–23 “average,” and 5–16 “low.”

Married people are significantly more likely than **never-married people** to be highly engaged with church (32% to 23%). Some of this may be generational, as many in the low-engaged Generation Z are not married yet, but it shouldn't surprise us that those who have never engaged themselves in a marriage are also shying away from engagement with a church. Divorced people register in between the married and never married.³

Levels of Church Engagement by Marital Status



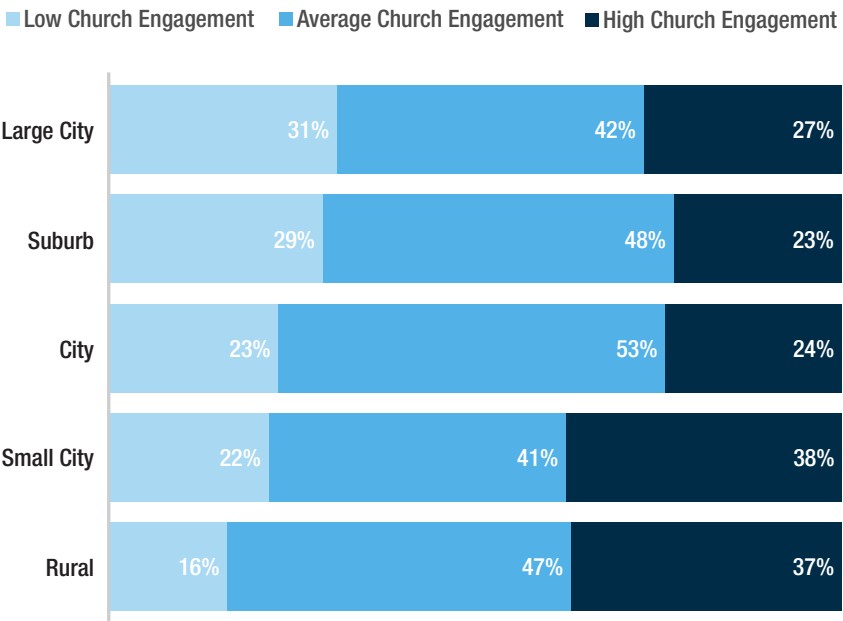
Another demographic factor of note is **community size**. The survey asks people where they live.

- Urban (area of 250,000 people or more)
- Suburb (city or town near a large city)
- City (30,000 to 250,000 people)
- Small city (5,000 to 30,000 people)
- Rural (less than 5,000 people)

3 Small sample sizes for the Separated and Widowed make those results unreliable.

People living in smaller communities and rural areas have significantly higher Church Engagement. Rural and small-town residents boast Church Engagement at a level half-again higher than those living in suburbs or medium-level cities.

Levels of Church Engagement by Community Size

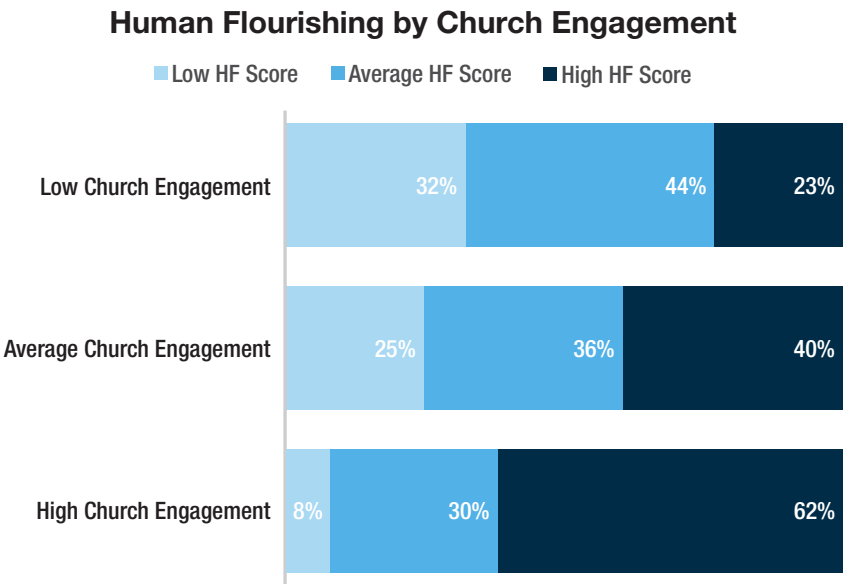


CHURCH ENGAGEMENT,
FLOURISHING, AND WELL-BEING

In the last two chapters, we’ve explored a variety of conditions under the titles of Human Flourishing and Well-Being. Our data show that Scripture Engaged people tend to be highly flourishing as well. And those who read the Bible regularly report lower stress and anxiety, less loneliness, and greater hope.

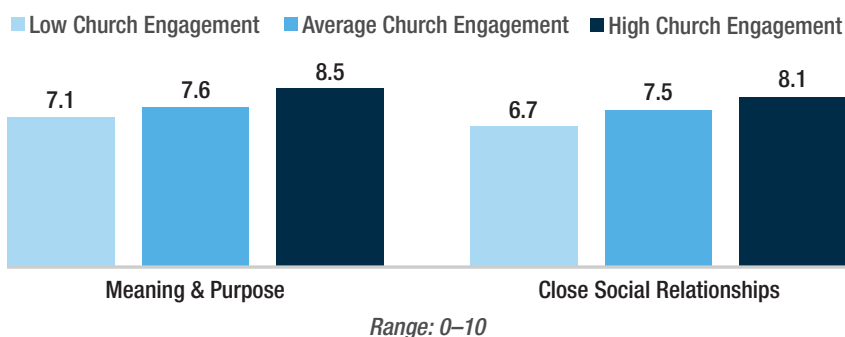
Now we turn our analysis to Church Engagement. Do Church Engaged people have better lives—as measured by the elements of Human Flourishing and factors of stress, loneliness, and hope?

A strong majority (62%) of people with high Church Engagement are also at the highest level of Human Flourishing. Only one in twelve of them (8%) are at the lowest Human Flourishing level. The strong association continues through the average and low levels of Church Engagement. With less Church Engagement comes less flourishing.



As you may recall, the Human Flourishing Index includes questions on five different domains of life. People with high Church Engagement score higher on all five of these domains, but the difference is especially great in two of them—Meaning & Purpose and Close Social Relationships.

Selected Flourishing Domains by Church Engagement



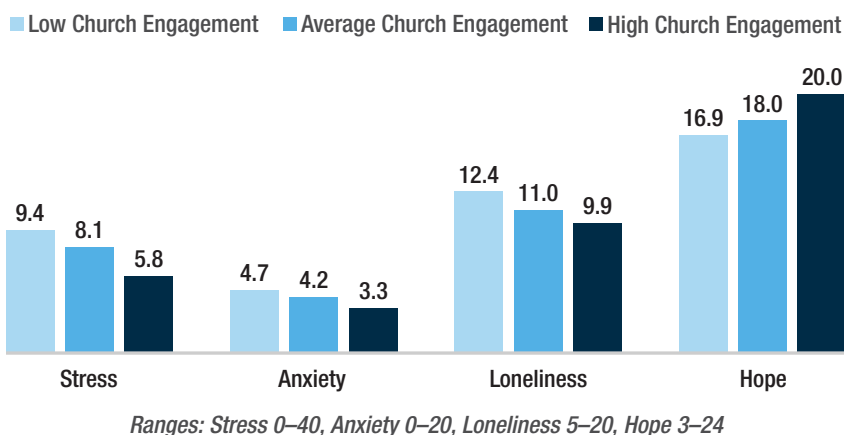
This makes sense. While church involvement might help with Mental & Physical Health, Life Satisfaction, and Character & Virtue (and we do see some increase in these domains for the Church Engaged), it clearly provides opportunities in matters of purpose and relationship.⁴

WELL-BEING

If you are involved enough at church to direct the children’s Christmas program, you might argue that church engagement leads to *more* stress and anxiety. Yet our survey finds that, in general, high Church Engagement is associated with lower stress and anxiety, as well as less loneliness and greater hope. The connection is not as strong as we see with Scripture Engagement, but it’s substantial—a drop of about 40 percent in stress scores, 20 percent less loneliness, and nearly a 20 percent jump in the hope score. Church Engagement is good for us.

⁴ The Secure Flourishing Index takes the five Human Flourishing domains and adds one—Financial & Material Stability. Even this domain has a substantial increase among the High Church Engaged, though the jump is not as great as we see in the Purpose or Relationship domains.

Selected Well-Being Factors by Church Engagement



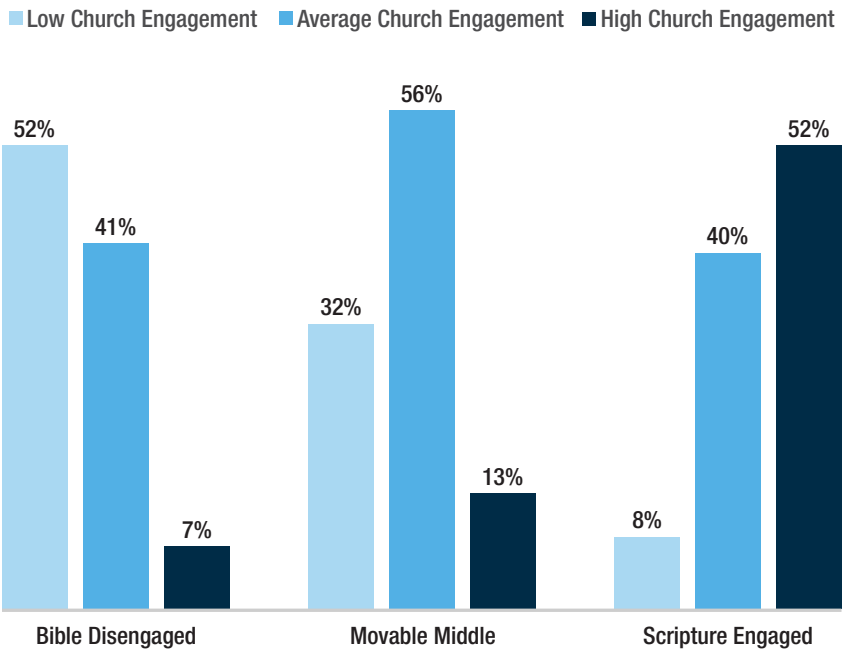
CHURCH, FAITH, AND BIBLE

Church Engagement is not the same as Scripture Engagement, though they overlap. Scripture Engagement is about frequency of Bible interaction but also the Bible’s centrality in our decision-making and its impact on our relationships with God and others. Our newly created category of Church Engagement gathers several aspects of church relationships, service, and spiritual development. It’s a different measure, but we would still expect many Scripture Engaged people to be Church Engaged as well. And vice versa.

Statistically, that’s what we find—considerable overlap, but not absolute unity. In the three Scripture Engagement groups, we find just over half of each group also in the corresponding Church Engagement group. A majority (56%) of the Movable Middle are in the Average Church Engagement group, and the Bible Disengaged have a similar overlap (52%) with Low Church Engagement. Yet two out

of five Scripture Engaged people (40%) are only at a level of Average Church Engagement. They have a strong relationship with the Bible, but apparently not as strong a relationship with their church.

Church Engagement by Scripture Engagement



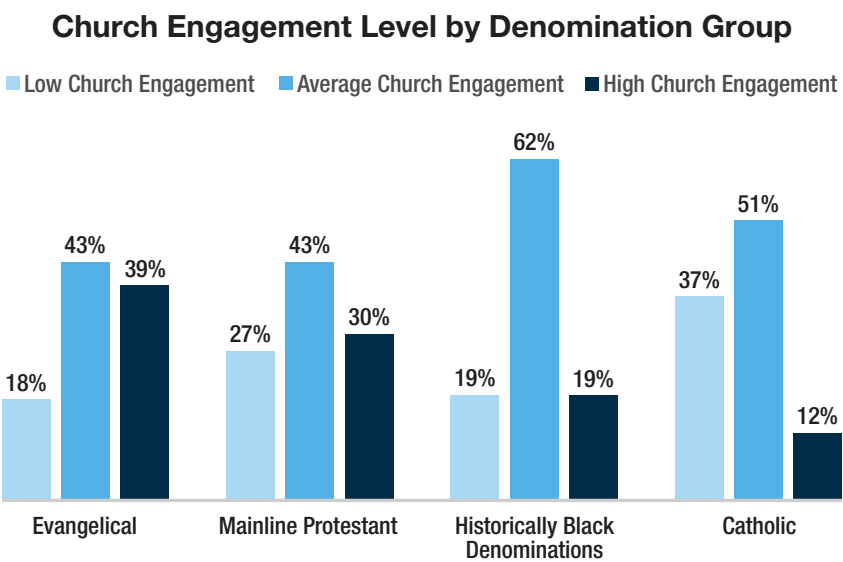
DENOMINATIONS

Do certain kinds of churches foster greater Church Engagement? Yes, among four major denominational groups, we see significant differences in the percentage of those with high Church Engagement: Evangelical Protestant (39%); Mainline Protestant (30%); Historically Black Protestant (19%); and Roman Catholic (12%).⁵ We

⁵ The sample size for Orthodox Christian was too small to yield reliable results.

recognize that our selection of the Church Engagement items may reflect an evangelical bias, and that other groups may have different beliefs about what a church should be or do, so we're careful in evaluating these numbers.

The item that gave the greatest edge to Evangelicals was “There is someone in my church who encourages my spiritual development,” with more than half (54%) agreeing strongly or very strongly (Mainline had 38%; Historically Black 29%; Catholic 24%).



HOW PEOPLE ATTEND

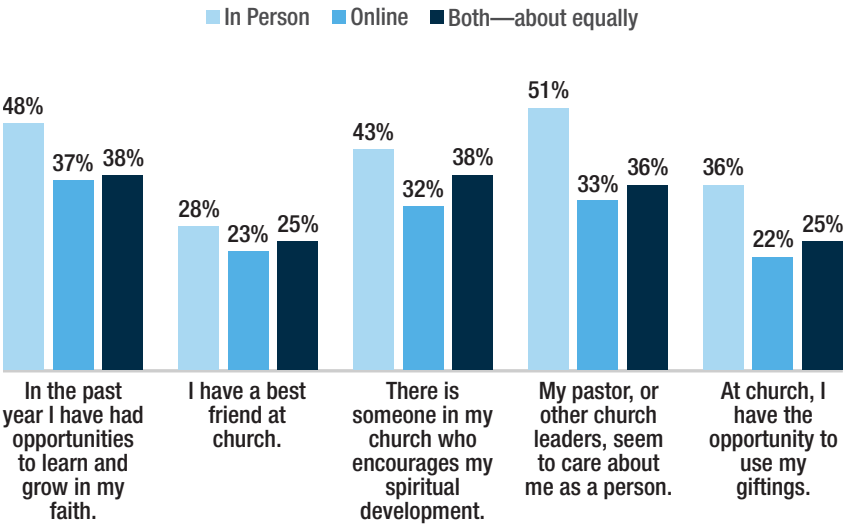
Most church attenders (72%) do so primarily in person. About one-eighth (12%) attend primarily online, and about one-sixth (16%) say they attend both ways “about equally.” So, which group has the greatest Church Engagement?

In-person attenders have the highest percentage of highly Church Engaged (31%), compared to only 19 percent of those who attend primarily online and 23 percent of those who attend both ways. One contributing factor may be that in-person attenders do so more frequently. Nearly two-thirds of them (66%) come to church weekly, compared to just 46 percent of those who tune in online.

When we examine “strong” and “very strong” agreement on each of the five items of church engagement, we see those who physically come to services outpacing the others on every point. The smallest difference, oddly, is for “I have a best friend at church” (28% in person; 23% online; 25% both). The widest spread occurs with “My pastor, or other church leaders, seem to care about me as a person” (51% in person; 33% online; 36% both).

Church Engagement Level by How People Attend

Percent agreeing strongly or very strongly with each statement



CHURCH ENGAGEMENT AND RELEVANCE

This year, in our participation in the worldwide Patmos Survey (see chapter 2), we introduced a few new items in our poll.

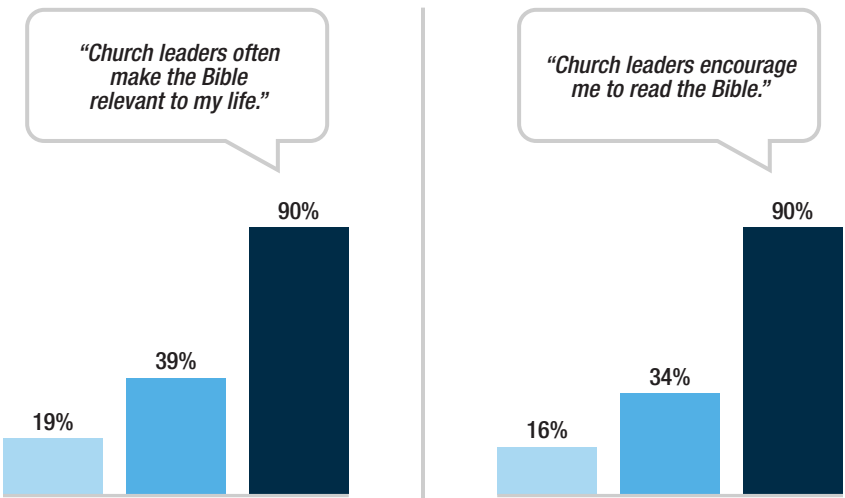
- “Church leaders often make the Bible relevant to my life.”
- “Church leaders encourage me to read the Bible.”

These are not part of our Church Engagement metric, but they provide validation for it. With both statements, 90 percent of those at the highest level of Church Engagement agree strongly or very strongly. That’s more than twice the percentage seen from those at the “average” level.

Relevance and Encouragement by Level of Church Engagement

Percent agreeing strongly or very strongly with each statement

■ Low Church Engagement ■ Average Church Engagement ■ High Church Engagement



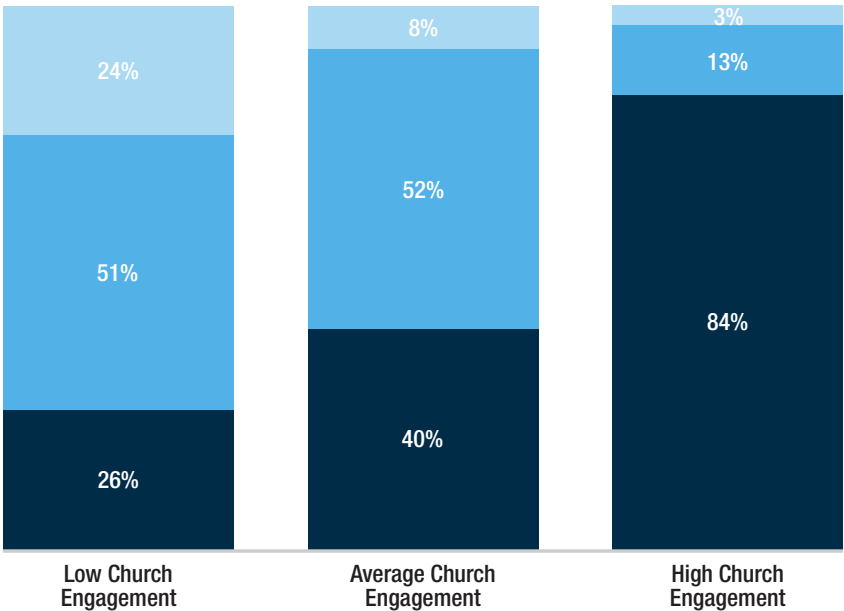
If you're a church leader seeking to improve Church Engagement in your congregation, you could try any number of things. Encourage people's spiritual development and give them opportunities to learn and grow and use their gifts. But also urge them to read the Bible on their own, even as you keep showing how important the Bible can be in the details of their lives.

The Bible is more than a book, and church-going is more than an appointment. Both of them build our relationship with God and others. Both change our lives. And, as we've seen throughout this chapter, the two are statistically connected. Scripture Engagement and Church Engagement operate in tandem.

Transformation by Level of Church Engagement

"The message of the Bible has transformed my life."

Disagree Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly



In closing, we offer one more overlap between these two powerful forces: Bible and church. One question in our survey asks whether people can agree that “The message of the Bible has transformed my life.” We wanted to see how people at different levels of church engagement responded. These are all self-identified Christians, and yet when people are ho-hum about church, they also seem to be unsure about biblical transformation. But those who engage with the church, growing in faith and knowledge, using their gifts and making friends—the vast majority of these people agree “strongly” that the Word of God has changed them. ■

WHAT DOES CHURCH ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE?

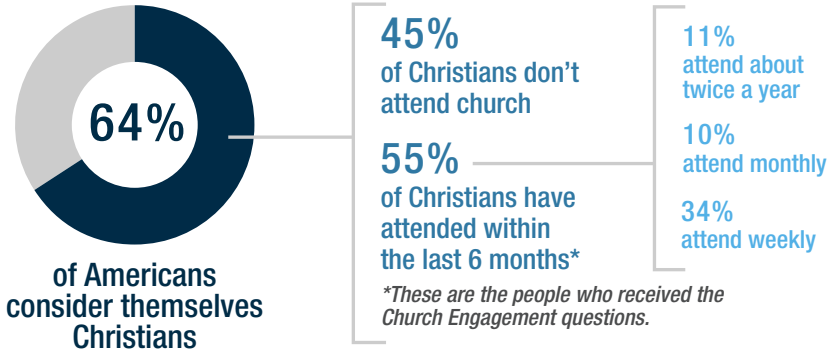
Peter Englert is the Adult Ministries Director at Browncroft Community Church in Rochester, New York. He shares how his church is working to encourage the spiritual growth of individuals and foster a healthy and supportive church community in their city.





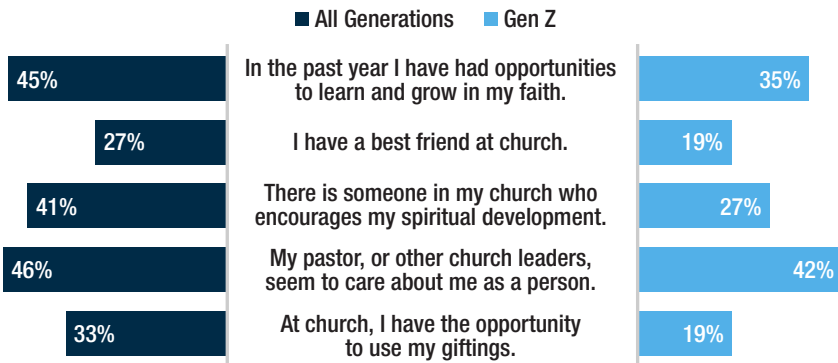
Church Engagement

Church Commitment

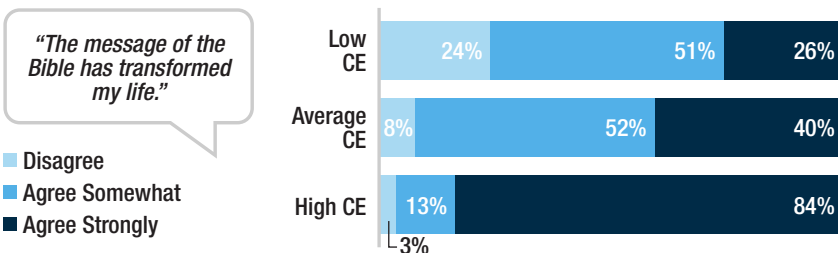


Church Engagement Items

Percent who Strongly or Very Strongly Agree



The Bible and Church Engagement (CE)





IDENTITY

Who are you? Perhaps you've had to describe yourself in a job application or a LinkedIn blurb. Once you get past name, age, home, family, job . . . what do you say then? Some companies make their employees complete personality tests, emerging with detailed profiles. Are you a Thinker or Feeler? Do you exert Openness or Conscientiousness? Are you a driven "3" or an easygoing "9"?

Yet somehow we know our identity can't be defined by a number or a string of letters. We are also shaped by priorities and core beliefs, not to mention family, culture, community, and personal experience. As Christians we find our true selves in Jesus—and yet one believer's sense of identity might be quite different from another's.

So . . . who are you?

All these factors make it a challenge to survey identity on a large scale, yet we've found that people's sense of identity often affects their

spiritual development, especially among younger adults (many of whom are separating their identity from that of their parents, choosing to maintain some values while challenging others and embracing new priorities).

So we took up that challenge, setting up a triad of Identity statements and asking people how much they agreed.

- I know who I am.
- I always have a good sense about what is important to me.
- I know what I believe or value.¹

In a very simple form, these statements address self-image, beliefs, and priorities. The strength of people's responses provides insight into the strength of their sense of identity. We can then compare this with other aspects of demography, well-being, and faith development.²

GENERATIONS AND GENDER

According to these numbers, the subgroup with the greatest “identity crisis” is **young men**. (Note that we only survey adults, so these Gen Z males are 18–28 years old. Others have found similar results among younger teens.) Gen Z men have the lowest percentage of

1 These statements are derived from the Consolidated sub-scale of the Self-Concept and Identity Measure (SCIM). Kaufman, E. A., Cundiff, J. M., & Crowell, S. E. (2015). The development, factor structure, and validation of the Self-Concept and Identity Measure (SCIM): A self-report assessment of clinical identity disturbance. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 37, 122–133. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10862-014-9441-2>

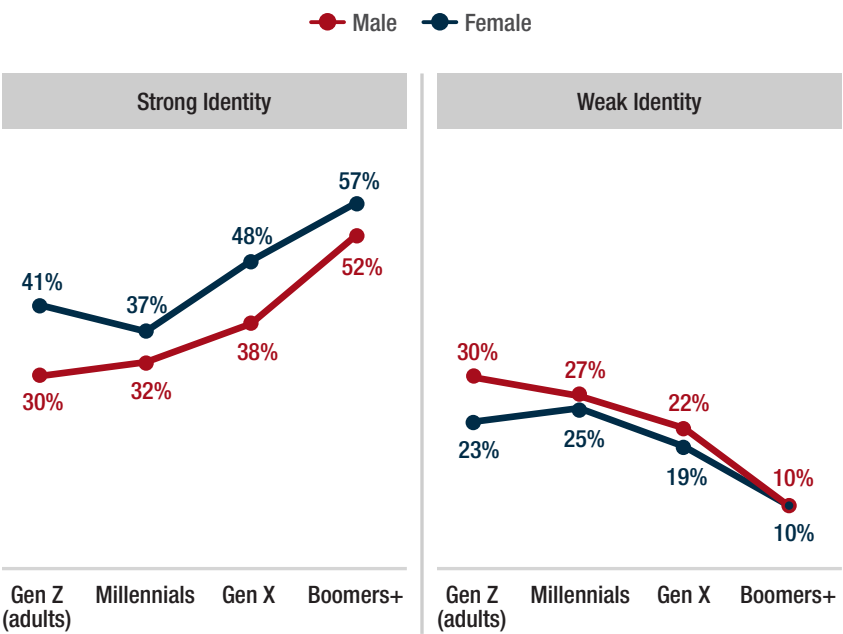
2 People were asked to indicate the extent to which each statement was “true of me,” from 0 to 10. Most responded with 8, 9, or 10, giving an overall mean score of 24.5 for the three statements combined. We have grouped the scores into Weak (0–19), Moderate (19–28), and Strong (28–30) Identity levels.

people who are in the Strong Identity group (30%) and the highest percentage who are in the Weak Identity group (also 30%).

At this age we also see the greatest division between genders with regard to identity. **Gen Z females** show much stronger Identity (41% Strong and only 23% Weak) than males in this group (30% Strong; 30% Weak). Surprisingly, they also boast a stronger sense of identity than their “older sisters” in the Millennial generation (37% Strong and 25% Weak).

Apart from the strong showing of Gen Z females, it seems that a sense of identity **tends to strengthen with age**, as we might expect. Well more than half of the Boomer+ generation, women and men alike, are in the Strong Identity group.

Identity Levels by Generation and Gender



As we age,
we learn more
about who
we are, what
we believe,
and what
we consider
important.

It can be argued that young people have permission to be less confident in their identity, since they're still young. As we age, we learn more about who we are, what we believe, and what we consider important. In his foundational work on psychosocial development, James Marcia posited four stages of exploration and commitment. In Stage 2—Identity Foreclosure—someone commits to a certain life-course without much exploration of their own identity. This situation is seen as less healthy than Stage 3—Iden-

tity Moratorium—in which someone puts off a decision while they explore the options (think of a “gap year” a student might take before or after college). Our survey may indicate that most older adults are in Stage 4—Identity Achievement—where they've explored who they are and made life commitments accordingly.³

Yet others might challenge that assessment, suggesting that our culture discourages parents from teaching children the moral truths that would provide a sturdy foundation on which to build their identity.

MARITAL STATUS

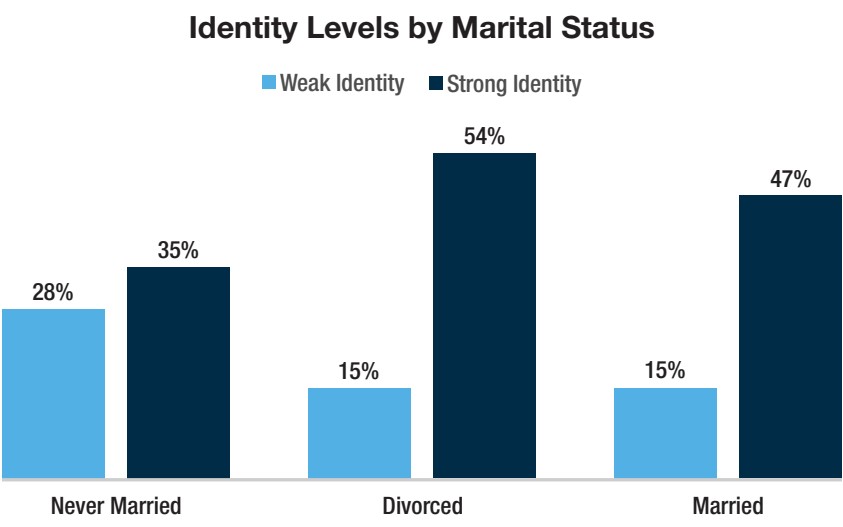
Marriage seems to be an identity builder, or at least an identity *marker*, with nearly half (47%) of married people scoring high. People might

³ Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego-identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 3(5), 551–558. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0023281>

strengthen their sense of identity by becoming a spouse, and perhaps a parent. It might also be true that people with a low sense of identity are less willing to commit to a marriage.

In fact, we see that the never-married have a much lower percentage (35%) at the Strong Identity level and many more at the lowest level (28%, compared to 15% for married people). Of course Gen Z is the source of many in the never-married camp, and we’ve already seen their low Identity scores, but they only move the needle one percentage point. Even without the youngest generation, never-married people have far more with low Identity scores (27%) and far fewer with high scores (36%).

It might surprise some readers that we see the greatest percentage of high Identity scores among divorced people. Divorce is often an identity-shattering process, but these numbers suggest that many people emerge from the pain of divorce (and the required rebuilding) with a greater sense of their individual selves, beliefs, and values.

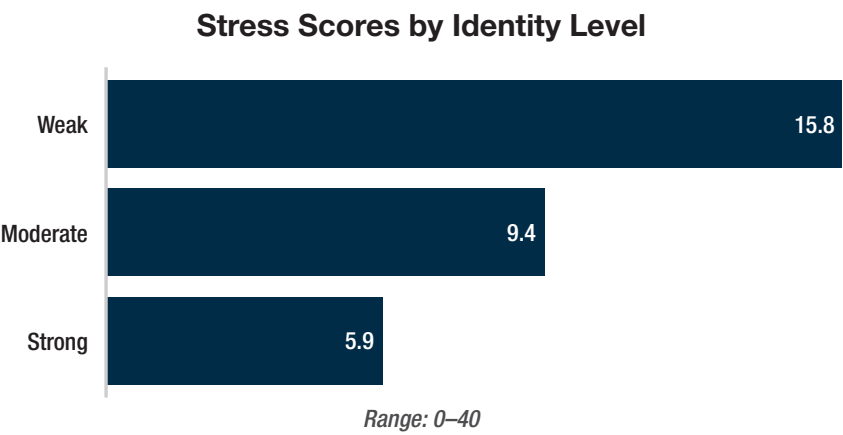


IDENTITY AND WELL-BEING

STRESS

Is it stressful to be unsure of who you are, what you believe, or what’s important to you? In a word, yes. Stress scores are much higher for those who have low Identity scores. According to our metrics, those with the strongest sense of identity report 63 percent less stress than those with the weakest identity.

The arrow of causality may sometimes go the other way. Stressful situations may sap a person’s sense of identity. If you get fired from your job, for instance, you might experience both an identity crisis and considerable stress. But in many cases, a low sense of self makes the stresses of life worse, and we might be able to ease those stresses with a recommitment to identity—our core purpose and priorities.



LONELINESS

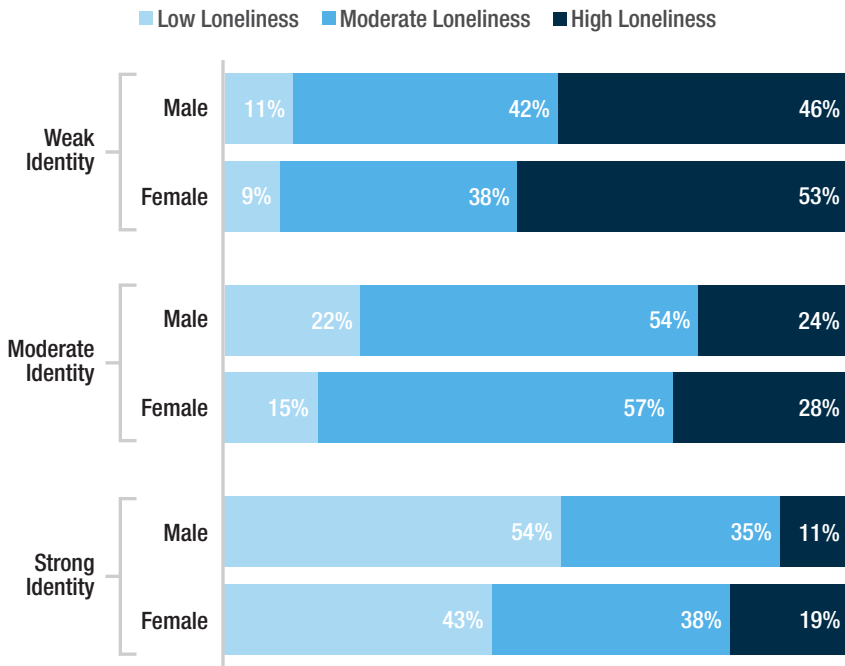
We sometimes assume that identity is all about the individual. In popular discourse, the Identity statement “I know who I am” is often taken to mean, “I don’t care what anyone else says.” At least since the Sixties, the rebellious loner has been a pop-culture hero.

But for most of us, our sense of identity is woven into our interactions with others. We might define ourselves as a spouse, parent, friend, or teacher. Our beliefs and values have been crafted in part by family, friends, and church. Even our idea of “what is important” generally has to do with the people around us or how we contribute to the well-being of others.

So it’s helpful to compare Identity levels to levels of loneliness, one of the “well-being issues” we examined in our discussion of self-care in Chapter 4 (see page 79). Our findings on both identity and loneliness rely on responses to a set of statements. The Loneliness statements have to do with feeling left out, distant from others, not understood. As we put these two factors together, will we find the “lonely leader,” self-confident but isolated? Or will we find that a strong sense of identity pairs well with social connection?

We don’t find many “lonely leaders.” In fact, there’s a clear parallel between a strong sense of identity and *low* loneliness. Only one in nine strong-identity men (11%) and one in five strong-identity women (19%) report high loneliness. Conversely, about half of those with a weak sense of identity (53% of women; 46% of men) report high levels of loneliness.

Identity Levels by Levels of Loneliness



IDENTITY AND SPIRITUAL FACTORS

The Bible has a great deal to say about human identity. We are created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27), “a little lower than the angels, ... crowned ... with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:5 NIV), part of a world God loves (John 3:16). None of this negates the reality that all of us are sinners in need of God’s grace (Romans 3:23–24). Yet, in Christ, we are “a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17), God’s artistic masterpiece (Ephesians 2:10). The Spirit whispers that we are God’s children (Romans 8:16).

Scripture says all this, and so we would expect those who engage with Scripture to demonstrate a strong sense of identity. We'd expect the same of people who participate meaningfully in a church, practicing and reinforcing this God-given identity with others. And that's exactly what the numbers show.

Yet we also find another factor. Religious practice in general, whether Christian or not, is associated with strong identity.

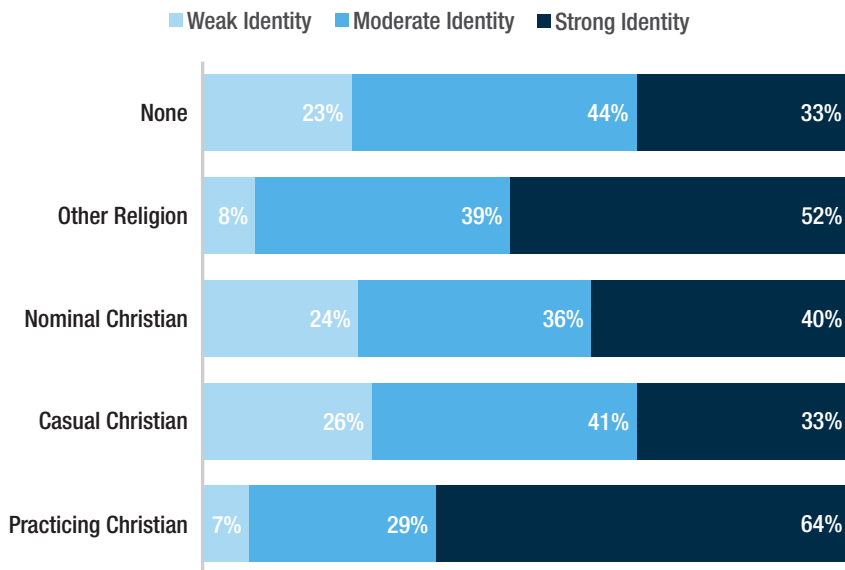
Apart from the *content* of any religion's beliefs, scholars have long noted the value of the social identity that comes with *participation* in a religious group. Beyond that, the required rituals or disciplines of any religious group (including Christianity) can give adherents a sense of mastery, enhancing their self-esteem.⁴ Note also that our identity score is based partly on a broad question about beliefs and values, elements of virtually every world religion.

Two in five (40%) of those in our survey who follow "Other Religions" (not Christian) agree that "my religious faith is very important to me." This subgroup has 67 percent at the Strong Identity level, suggesting that it's not merely identification with a religion that bolsters identity, but how important they consider it.

That, of course is what we see among Christians as well. Practicing Christians have vastly more representation in the Strong Identity crowd, compared with Casual or Nominal Christians (who have barely more than the Nones).

4 Greenfield, E. A., & Marks, N. F. (2007). Religious Social Identity as an Explanatory Factor for Associations between More Frequent Formal Religious Participation and Psychological Well-Being. *The International journal for the psychology of religion*, 17(3), 245–259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508610701402309>

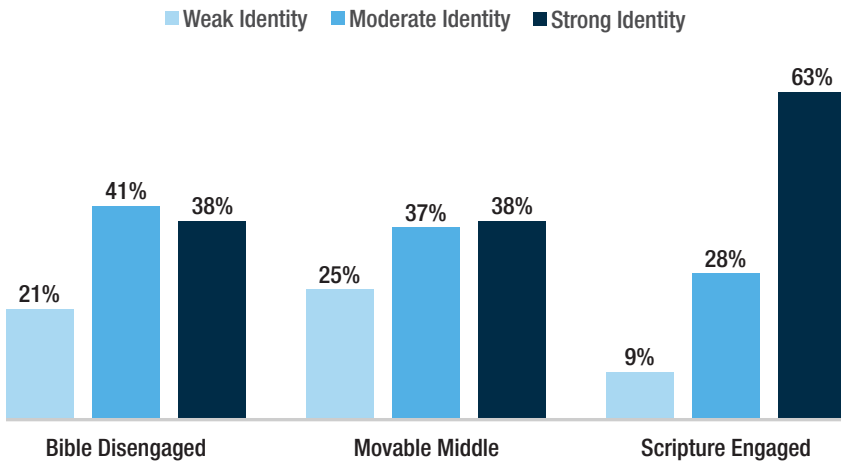
Identity Levels by Religious Participation



SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

As we just saw with Practicing Christians, the Scripture Engaged are far ahead of the pack in strength of identity. Nearly two-thirds of them (63%) are at the highest level. Less than a tenth (9%) are at the weakest level. The sheer discipline of regular Bible reading is likely an identity booster for this group, but remember also that the Scripture Engagement formula includes questions on decision-making. The Scripture Engaged generally indicate that the Bible has a substantial influence on what they buy or watch. Those simple choices can be important identity markers. A person says, “I am a Bible believer, so I will make these everyday decisions with scriptural teaching in mind.”

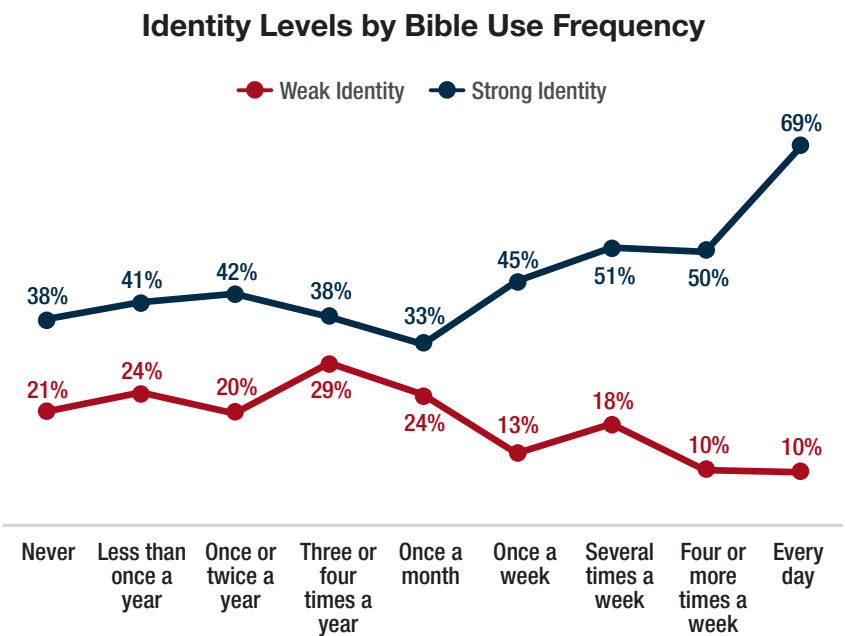
Identity Levels by Scripture Engagement



More intriguing here is the struggle of the Movable Middle. These are “sort of” Bible believers. They tend to read Scripture occasionally. It plays some part in their lives, but it’s not central. They are heavily represented in those middle groups of church involvement—the Nominals and the Casuals. Some call themselves Christians but rarely attend church. Others show up, but they’re not too excited about it. From a faith-and-religion standpoint, they’re not sure who they are—which makes it no surprise that their Identity scores are actually a tad weaker than those of the Bible Disengaged.

The simple statistic of Bible Use has a remarkable connection to identity. People who read the Bible at least once a week are more likely to have strong Identity scores. Nearly seven of ten (69%) *daily* Bible readers are in the Strong Identity group. Yet here again we see apparent confusion in the middle. Strong Identity scores dip a bit with the once-a-month Bible readers, below all those who read the Bible more—but also below those who read it *less*. We wonder

if these people want to read more often but don't get around to it, which makes them feel less confident in their faith.



IDENTITY FACTORS IN SPIRITUAL VITALITY

Sometimes it's not *what* you say, but *how enthusiastically* you say it. This is especially true in a set of statements we presented to self-identified Christians about different aspects of spiritual growth and vitality. These include a number of “right answer” questions—where Christians know they're *supposed* to say yes—so we give them several ways to agree, from “somewhat” to “very strongly.” These levels of agreement become very important as we cross-tabulate them with Identity levels.

The statement “I exist to know, love, and serve God” garners overwhelming agreement (88%), when all levels of agreement are counted. This is an identity statement, so it’s no surprise that more than nine in ten Christians with Strong Identity scores agree at some level (91%). Yet even Christians at Moderate and Weak Identity levels agree at some level with this statement (84% and 86%, respectively).

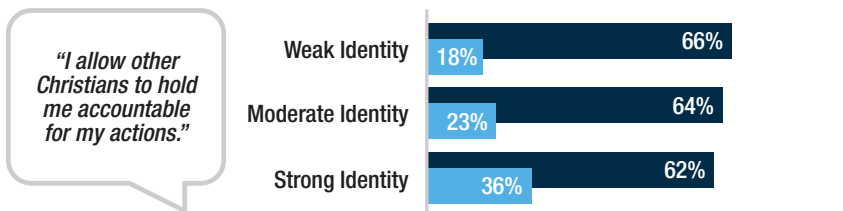
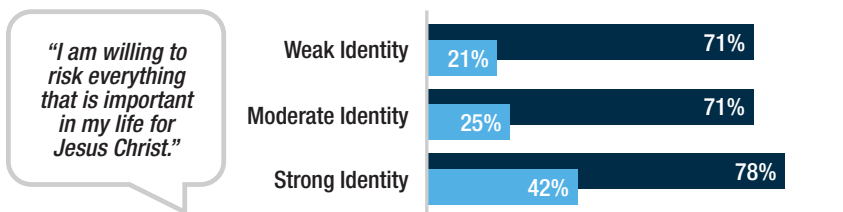
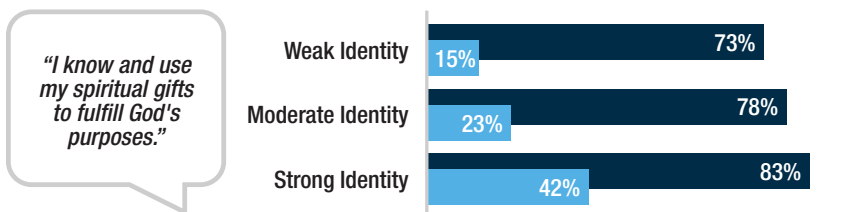
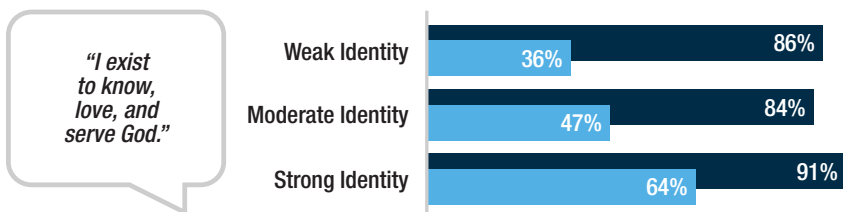
The difference comes among those who agree “strongly” or “very strongly.” Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Strong Identity Christians agree at this level, while far fewer of the Christians with Moderate and Weak Identity do (47% and 36%).

A similar division is seen with “I know and use my spiritual gifts to fulfill God’s purposes.” This could also be seen as an identity statement. In overall agreement, there’s little difference among the Identity levels (83%, 78%, and 73%, high to low). But when we limit it to “strong” or “very strong” agreement, the gaps widen (42%, 23%, and 15%).

The statement “I am willing to risk everything that is important in my life for Jesus Christ” shows the same effect once again. Most Christians would see this as something they *should* agree with, and about three-quarters do. But only about a third of them give strong or very strong assent to this radical statement, and they’re mostly the ones with a Strong Identity score.

Statements of Spiritual Vitality by Identity Level (and Levels of Agreement)

■ Agree Strongly or Very Strongly ■ Agree at Any Level



Base: Self-identified Christians

We present another statement that might seem at odds with a strong sense of identity: “I allow other Christians to hold me accountable for my actions.” If you know who you are, if you know what’s important, what you believe and value, why should you let anyone else tell you what to do? In fact, those with low Identity scores—those who *don’t* know who they are or what’s important—are more likely to agree at some level with this statement. They may benefit greatly from the input of wiser believers. But when we look at the strongest levels of agreement, those at the strongest levels of Identity seem to recognize that they need the spiritual care of other Christians.

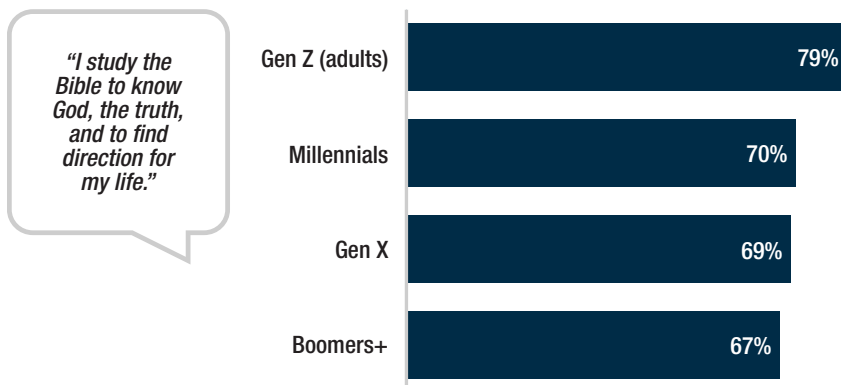
GOING FORWARD

In recent years, the *State of the Bible* report has regularly included chapters on generations, and sometimes specifically Generation Z, because that’s the group everyone was worried about. One of the key issues for that group is *identity*.

This year, we have sharpened our focus to that very issue, examining how a sense of identity affects people in every generation and how it is affected by various spiritual factors. As we looked through the spiritual vitality statements, one of them caught our attention, bringing together identity with one of our favorite subjects, Bible study: “I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my life.”

Bible Study Statement by Generation

Percent agreeing at any level



Base: Self-identified Christians

The generation of Christians that agrees most with this statement is the youngest in our survey. That makes sense, doesn't it? Most of Gen Z is at a place in life where they have big choices to make. Where will life take them? Career, education, relationships, community, development of gifts and skills—many of these 18-to-28-year-olds need direction in these matters. It's good to know they're looking into the Bible for that.

Surely there's a chorus of older Christian readers saying, "What about us? We need God's direction too!" Granted, we all need divine guidance, and we regularly find it in Scripture. Yet we hope you share our joy that nearly eight of ten Gen Z Christians are seeking direction in the Scriptures, especially at this critical time in their development.

People of every generation hear a steady thrum from our culture about who we are and who we should be. It's the core of the advertising industry—"This product is what you need to become the person you want to be." It seems we can't go thirty seconds without encountering some sort of ad hawking a car, a weight-loss drug, or a gambling site that promises to give us a new identity.

The Bible tells a different story. Let's keep listening to that. Let's keep becoming the people God wants us to be. ■

IDENTITY AND FAITH FORMATION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

For this chapter, we interview **Dr. Arthur L. Satterwhite**, Vice President of Strategy at Young Life. He shares his on the ground ministry experience working with young people wrestling with questions of identity, faith, and coming of age.

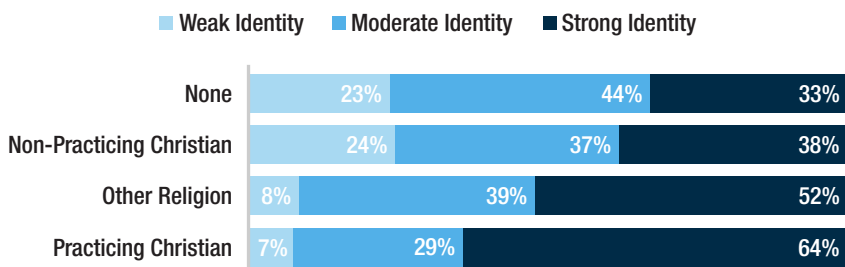


**COMING
SOON**

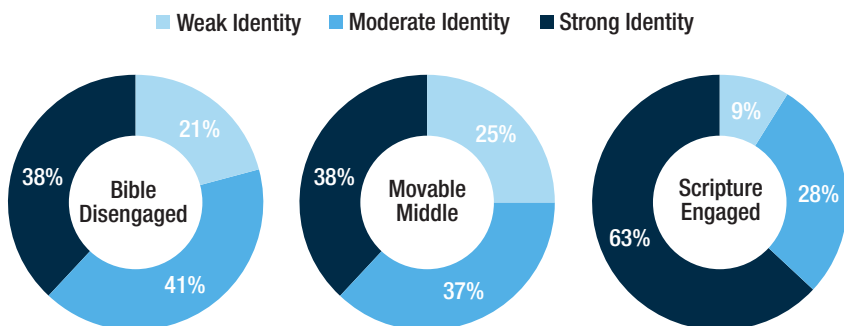


Identity and Faith Formation

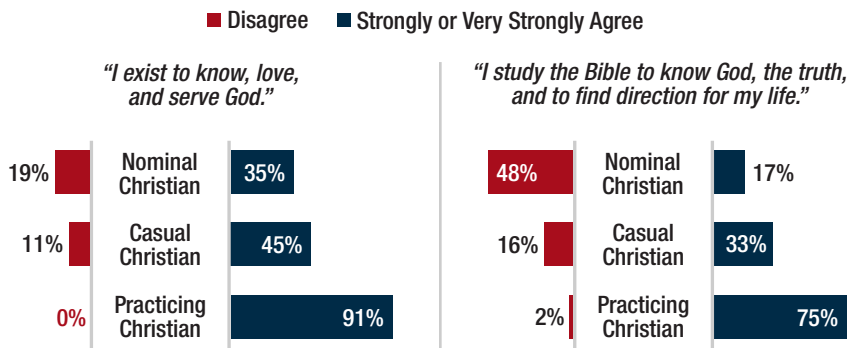
Religious Identity vs. Practice



Bible Engagement: Identity Shaping



Purpose and Identity





METHODOLOGY

In 2025, the *State of the Bible* research team at American Bible Society collaborated with NORC at the University of Chicago to design and field a nationally representative survey of American adults on topics related to the Bible, faith, and the church. The study was conducted in English and was presented both online and via telephone to NORC's AmeriSpeak® Panel, using a 19-minute questionnaire. The study produced 2,656 responses from a representative sample of adults 18 and older within all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data were collected from January 2–21, 2025. The margin of error for a sample of this size is ± 2.47 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

QUALITY AT A GLANCE

Following are key survey quality indicators, excerpted from a report card prepared by NORC at the University of Chicago in compliance with the American Association for Public Opinion Research

(AAPOR) Transparency Initiative. The full report is available upon request by emailing pr@americanbible.org.

SURVEY OVERVIEW

- **Study Population:** General Population Age 18+
- **Sample Units:** 13,156
- **Completed Units:** 2,656
- **Margin of Error:** $\pm 2.47\%$
- **Average Design Effect:** 1.69
- **Survey Field Period:** January 2–21, 2025
- **Median Duration:** 19 minutes

PANEL OUTCOMES

- **Weighted Household Recruitment Rate:**¹ 27.4%
- **Weighted Household Retention Rate:** 77.2%

SURVEY OUTCOMES

- **Survey Completion Rate:**² 20.2%
- **Weighted Cumulative Response Rate:**³ 4.3%

1 The weighted AAPOR RR III for the AmeriSpeak panel recruitment corresponding to the recruitment cohorts sampled for the study. A recruited household is a household where at least one adult successfully completed the recruitment survey and joined the panel.

2 The percent of eligible sample members who completed the survey interview.

3 The overall survey response rate that accounts for survey outcomes in all response stages including panel recruitment rate, panel retention rate, and survey completion rate. It is weighted to account for the sample design and differential inclusion probabilities of sample members.

THE AMERISPEAK® PANEL

Funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago, AmeriSpeak® is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. Randomly selected U.S. households are sampled using area probability and address-based sampling, with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame. These sampled households are then contacted by U.S. mail, telephone, and field interviewers (face to face).

The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97 percent of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with PO Box addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings.

While most AmeriSpeak households participate in surveys by web, non-internet households can participate in AmeriSpeak surveys by telephone. Households without conventional internet access but having web access via smartphones are allowed to participate in AmeriSpeak surveys by web. AmeriSpeak panelists participate in NORC studies or studies conducted by NORC on behalf of governmental agencies, academic researchers, and media and commercial organizations.

For more information, email AmeriSpeak-BD@norc.org or visit AmeriSpeak.norc.org.

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DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are used in this and other *State of the Bible* reports to group respondents by demographics, beliefs, and practices.

Bible Skeptic: Individuals who believe the Bible is just another book written by people that contains stories and advice.

Bible User: Individuals who read, listen to, or pray with the Bible on their own at least 3–4 times a year, outside of a church service or church event.

Church Engagement: We measure the level of commitment and connection a person might experience in their church using five items inspired by the Gallup Q12® questions for employee engagement.¹

1. At church. I have the opportunity to use my giftings.
2. My pastor, or other church leaders, seem to care about me as a person.
3. There is someone in my church who encourages my spiritual development.

¹ Buckingham, M., & Harter, J. (1999). *First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*. Gallup Press.

4. I have a best friend at church.
5. In the past year I have had opportunities to learn and grow in my faith.

Churched: Individuals who have attended a Christian church service in the past six months for any reason other than a special occasion, such as a wedding or funeral.

Consolidated Identity: The extent to which an individual has developed a coherent, grounded, and positive sense of self. We measure it using three items from the Consolidated Identity scale of the Self-Concept and Identity Measure.²

1. I know who I am.
2. I always have a good sense about what is important to me.
3. I know what I believe or value.

Correlation: In statistics, the strength of a linear relationship between two variables is often expressed as a numerical value preceded by the italicized letter *r*. We report correlations only when they are statistically significant ($p < .05$) and when the correlation coefficient (r) is 0.2 or greater. We use these rules of thumb for interpreting the qualitative magnitude of a correlation:

- Very Weak ($r = 0.00—0.19$)
- Weak ($r = 0.20—0.39$)
- Moderate ($r = 0.40—0.59$)
- Strong ($r = 0.60—0.79$)
- Very Strong ($r = 0.80—1.00$)

² Kaufman, E. A., Puzia, M. E., Crowell, S. E., & Price, C. J. (2019). Replication of the Self-Concept and Identity Measure (SCIM) Among a Treatment-Seeking Sample. *Identity, 19*(1), 18–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2019.1566068>

Division: The U.S. Census Bureau divides the United States into nine geographic divisions, which are groupings of multiple states. These divisions and their population characteristics are used to ensure that survey responses are demographically representative of the United States as a whole.

Generations:

- **Generation Z (1997–2012):** Ages 13 to 28 in 2025. This study includes adults (18–28) in Generation Z.
- **Millennials (1981–1996):** Ages 29 to 44 in 2025.
- **Generation X (1965–1980):** Ages 45 to 60 in 2025.
- **Baby Boomers (1946–1964):** Ages 61 to 79 in 2025.
- **Elders (1928–1945):** This study places considers any respondent 80 years old or older to be in the Elders generation. Due to sampling limitations for people of this age, this small group is combined with the Baby Boomer group and listed in the report as **Boomers+**.

Hope Agency: This is a measure of an individual’s perceived capacity for initiating and maintaining the actions necessary to reach a goal. It is measured with three items. Scores range from 3–24.³

1. At the present, I am energetically pursuing my life plan.
2. Right now, I can see myself as being pretty successful in navigating life.
3. At this time, I am meeting the life goals that I have set for myself.

3 Snyder, C. R., Harris, C., Anderson, J. R., Holleran, S. A., Irving, L. M., Sigmon, S. T, Yoshinobu, L., Gibb, J., Langelle, C., & Hamey, P. (1991). The will and the ways: Development and validation of an individual-differences measure of hope. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60, 570–585.

Human Flourishing Index: While healthcare often focuses on pathology—what’s wrong—this is an effort to see health in a positive way. The Human Flourishing Index emerged at Harvard University’s T. H. Chan School of Public Health in 2017.⁴ It has been used (with permission) in the *State of the Bible* since 2020. Researchers focus on six areas of the human experience (“domains”), asking two questions about each.

1. Happiness & Life Satisfaction
2. Mental & Physical Health
3. Meaning & Purpose
4. Character & Virtue
5. Close Social Relationships
6. Financial & Material Stability

The results yield two composite scores on a 0 to 10 scale: the *Human Flourishing Index* (which leaves out the financial domain) and the *Secure Flourishing Index* (which includes it).

Loneliness: We measure loneliness using five items from the UCLA Loneliness Scale.⁵

- How often do you feel alone?
- How often do you feel that you are no longer close to anyone?
- How often do you feel left out?
- How often do you feel that no one really knows you well?
- How often do you feel that people are around you but not with you?

4 VanderWeele, T. J. (2017). On the promotion of human flourishing. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(31), 8148–56.

5 Russell, D. (1996). UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3): Reliability, validity, and factor structure. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 66, 20–40.

Loneliness scores range from 5–20. We have grouped them into three levels.

- Low: 5–9
- Moderate: 10–15
- High: 16–20

No faith/Other faith: Individuals who do not consider themselves Christian (including atheists, agnostics, and other faiths). Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses are also included, even if they describe themselves as Christian.

Non-Christian: Individuals who consider themselves to be anything other than Christians. This includes those of other faiths (see above) as well as the **Nones**, who do not identify with any religion at all.

Non-Practicing Christian: Self-identified Christians who are not Practicing Christians as defined below. Two subsets of this group are **Nominals**, who identify as Christians but do not attend church at least monthly, and **Casuals**, who identify and attend but do not “strongly agree” that their faith is very important in their lives.

Practicing Christian: Individuals who meet all three of the following criteria:

- Self-identify as Christian, adhering to a historically biblical tradition
- Attend a religious service at least once a month
- Say their faith is very important in their lives

Pathway of Scripture Engagement: American Bible Society's theory of change: a ten-step logic model describing how individuals with access to the Bible receive it, interact with it, and ultimately are changed by it. See *Appendix 3: Pathway of Scripture Engagement* for further detail.

Region: The U.S. Census Bureau divides the United States into four geographic regions, which are groupings of multiple divisions. These regions and their population characteristics are used to ensure that survey responses are demographically representative of the United States as a whole.

Scripture engaged: Anyone who scores 100 or higher on the Scripture Engagement Scale.

Scripture unengaged: Anyone who scores below 100 on the Scripture Engagement Scale.

Scripture Engagement Scale: Based on responses to 14 survey items about the frequency of Bible use and the impact and centrality of its message, this scale provides a high-fidelity, numerical measure of holistic Scripture engagement among U.S. Bible Users. The Scripture Engagement Scale is centered on 100, meaning that approximately one half of U.S. Bible Users score above 100, and the other half score below 100. The scale's standard deviation is 15.

Scripture Engagement Segments (Full): The Scripture engagement of individuals and groups can be described using the following five segments based on Scripture Engagement Scale scores.

1. **Bible Centered** Score = 115 or higher.
2. **Bible Engaged** Score = 100–114.
3. **Bible Friendly** Score = 85–99.
4. **Bible Neutral** Score = 70–84.
5. **Bible Disengaged** Score = Less than 70.

Scripture Engagement Segments (Simplified): The Scripture engagement of individuals and groups can also be described using the following three segments based on Scripture Engagement Scale scores.

1. **Scripture Engaged:** Score = 100 or higher. Includes both the Bible Centered and the Bible Engaged.
2. **Movable Middle:** Score = 70–99. Includes both the Bible Friendly and Bible Neutral categories.
3. **Bible Disengaged:** Score = Less than 70. Same as Bible Disengaged in the Full Scripture Engagement segmentation.

Self-Identified Religion: Respondents are asked, “do you consider yourself any of the following religious faiths?” Their response is their self-identified religion, regardless of their current involvement with any religious organization.

Spiritual Vitality Gauge (svg): From answers to nine concise questions focusing on beliefs, spiritual practices, and faith in action, the svg yields a score between 0 and 100 as a reliable measure of spiritual health. The questions are asked only of self-identifying Christians. The svg is used by permission of Renovo.

Spiritual Vitality Segments: We place self-identifying Christian respondents into one of four descriptive groups based on their SVG scores:

1. **Ailing** Score = 0–50
2. **Unhealthy** Score = 51–70
3. **Healthy** Score = 71–90
4. **Thriving** Score = 91–100

Trauma Impact: Respondents who have experienced at least one traumatic event are asked, “Does the trauma you experienced or witnessed still affect you today? *Select one.*” Response options are:

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

Trauma Incidence: Respondents are asked, “Have you ever experienced physical, psychological, or emotional trauma? That is, extreme violence, abuse, or a near-death experience that produces a response of intense fear, helplessness, or horror? *Check all that apply.*” Response options are:

- You personally experienced a trauma
- You witnessed a trauma
- None of these apply to me

Respondents who select *any option except* “none of these apply to me” are counted as having experienced trauma.

Trauma Severity: Respondents who experience the impact of trauma at least “sometimes” are asked, “Please rate the **severity** of the trauma effects you are experiencing on the scale below.” The numerical response scale has a range of 1–10 with the following qualitative anchors:

- 0 = None
- 5 = Moderate
- 10 = Overwhelming

Trust: We measure interpersonal trust using five items from the General Trust Scale.⁶

1. Most people are basically honest.
2. Most people are trustworthy.
3. I am trusting of others.
4. Most people are sincere and well-intentioned.
5. People will usually keep their promises if they make them.

Unchurched: Individuals who have not attended a Christian church service in the past six months for any reason other than a special occasion, such as a wedding or funeral. ■

6 Yamagishi, T. & Yamagishi, M. (1994). Trust and commitment in the United States and Japan. *Motivation and Emotion*, 18 (2), 129–166.



PATHWAY OF SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

The Pathway of Scripture Engagement (PSE) is American Bible Society's theory of change: a ten-step logic model describing how individuals with access to the Bible receive it, interact with it, and ultimately are changed by it. The PSE is the foundation of our empirical research, which shows that consistent interaction with the Bible shapes people's choices and transforms their relationships with God, self, and others.

PURPOSE OF THE PATHWAY

The PSE marks out a set of waypoints along a journey of spiritual formation. When the Bible is made available through translation and distribution, pilgrims may enter the Pathway and begin their journey toward reconciliation with God and others.

The journey along the Pathway brings its own benefits, including wisdom for daily living, increased awareness of God's presence and voice, and generosity of spirit and action. However, what makes the Pathway uniquely valuable is its destination: spiritual health and vitality marked by deeply rooted love for God and healthy relationships with others, particularly those in the community of faith.

The PSE is like a ladder with ten rungs. Users might climb one rung at a time or even skip a rung. They may climb slowly or quickly. It's even possible to climb part of the way up the ladder and then retreat a few steps. As users climb the ladder, their perspective changes with altitude and as distant objects draw nearer. Still, the most important thing about a ladder is that it's leaning against the right building. Similarly, the most important thing about Scripture Engagement is that it is leaning against the building of holistic spiritual vitality marked by love for God and others. According to Jesus, loving God and others are the two great commandments for all his followers (Matthew 22:37–39).

PROGRESS ALONG THE PATHWAY

The Pathway of Scripture Engagement is also like an old-school map that marks out a journey from beginning to end. The PSE is for anyone who has access to the Bible in their own language because the Bible is the primary vehicle that carries people toward spiritual health.

The PSE shows the landscape and key waypoints, but it doesn't do two important things. First, it doesn't have a YOU ARE HERE marker. Second, it doesn't measure progress toward spiritual vitality. For

The Pathway of Scripture Engagement



What is Scripture Engagement?

Scripture engagement is consistent interaction with the Bible that shapes people's choices and transforms their relationships with God, self, and others.

- External Milestone
- Internal Milestone

those tasks, we use the Scripture Engagement Survey to locate an individual on the Scripture Engagement Scale (SES).

The SES is designed to plot an individual's current location on the Pathway and—with repeated measurement—their progress (growth) toward spiritual health. Using a brief survey, individuals and groups can be located on the Pathway¹ and matched to transformative, Bible-based ministry interventions that catalyze movement toward spiritual health.

By translating the Pathway's basic map into an accurate GPS, the Scripture Engagement Scale can guide individuals to the next step in their spiritual journey. It can also help ministry leaders design and deploy discipleship tools that are appropriate to people at every stage of the spiritual formation journey. ■

¹ Based on our research, a score of 100 on the Scripture Engagement Scale corresponds approximately to step 6 on the Pathway of Scripture Engagement.



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Since 2011, American Bible Society has sponsored the annual *State of the Bible* research study in an effort to listen carefully to America's voice regarding the Bible, faith, and the church. Today, the science of listening is a main focus of the Insights & Innovation team at American Bible Society.

This book is the effort of a small army of gifted individuals who combine their skills and perspectives to produce what you hold in your hand or view on your screen. In this fifteenth consecutive year of the *State of the Bible*, we pause to express our gratitude to those who have contributed most to this work.

The *State of the Bible* research team is led by American Bible Society's Chief Innovation Officer, Dr. John Plake, who joined the team for the 2018 study. Since that time, Dr. Plake has helped to expand American Bible Society's research capabilities, making it possible for us to lead the *State of the Bible* research and produce this report. Dr. Plake serves as the editor-in-chief of this report and oversees the ongoing *State of the Bible* series.

Dr. Jeff Fulks serves as Senior Research Fellow, where he brings deep insight from the world of behavioral science research and serves as the lead analyst for the *State of the Bible* research. He skillfully incorporates research-proven measures into our work, and leverages years of research experience to uncover the story behind the numbers.

Sandra Siggins serves as Research and Evaluation Manager, performing countless statistical tests and preparing reams of data for our writing and data visualization specialists. She coordinates interviews with our subject matter experts and helps keep the reporting organized and on schedule.

Randy Petersen of Petersen Creative Enterprises serves as *State of the Bible's* managing editor and lead writer. Randy served for nearly four years as American Bible Society's Director of Scripture Engagement Content. During his tenure at ABS, Randy helped the team write about research and data. He has a gift for parsimony: bringing clarity to complexity without sacrificing truth.

Josh Thomassen of Thomassen Collective handles data visualizations, graphic design, and typesetting. He joined the *State of the Bible* team in 2023 and is bringing a fresh look to our data visualizations and graphics.

Peter Edman is our editorial and quality assurance lead, helping all of us produce a more consistent, high-quality report. We also have regular input from Elisabeth Trefsgar and Bran Van Deinse in assuring sensitivity to the many SOTB audiences. ■

STATE OF THE BIBLE: USA 2025

In 2011, American Bible Society launched a landmark annual study of the State of the Bible in America. This is our fifteenth consecutive year of listening and learning how *consistent interaction with the Bible shapes people's choices and transforms their relationships*.

In 2025 we've found reasons for hope! More people opened the Bible last year than in any of the previous three years, with 110 million Americans now qualifying as Bible users and new interest from unexpected audiences.

We measure Bible use and Scripture engagement along with other topics related to the Bible, several of them new to this year's report:

- Digital Bible Use
- The Bible Around the World
- Bible Engagement and Human Flourishing
- Trust, Faith, and the Bible
- Identity Formation and Emerging Adulthood
- Church Engagement
- Bible Engagement and Self-Care
- Loving God and Loving our Neighbor
- Purpose, Calling, and Giving

People are reconsidering the Bible and their faith. How can your church or ministry prepare to invite, welcome, and walk alongside them? New chapters released each month from April through December dig deeper with actionable insights for your ministry.



Insights