

# State of the Bible

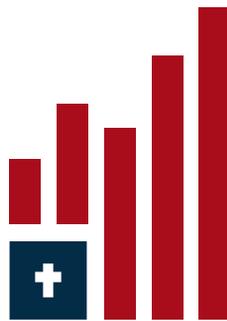
## USA 2022

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RESEARCH FROM AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

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*Prepared by*

JEFFERY FULKS, PH.D.

RANDY PETERSEN

JOHN FARQUHAR PLAKE, PH.D.

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# PREFACE

BY ROBERT L. BRIGGS

*American Bible Society*

*The first job of a leader is to define reality.*

Max De Pree, *Leadership Is an Art*

**F**or more than a decade now, American Bible Society has sponsored this annual survey of how Americans interact with Scripture. Year by year, we've reported on good news, bad news, and puzzling news.

Sometimes reality looks just the way we want it to, but often it doesn't. Even when we wish it were different, we need to know what reality is, so we can figure out how to respond. That's why we do this.

I think back to the first year of the *State of the Bible*. I was troubled by the finding that 10 percent of Americans had an unfavorable view of the Bible. Speaking at a major inter-church conference about the survey, I must have sounded rather alarmist. My message went along

the lines of “the sky is falling!” I’m not sure I used those words, but I might have.

“God is not surprised by the data, and God already knows what he’s going to do with it.”

The next speaker, a Dominican monk, gently corrected me. “I hear what you’re saying,” he began, “but let’s remember two things: God is not surprised by the data, and God already knows what he’s going to do with it.”

That profound wisdom has stayed with me ever since. God knows, and God is working on it.

Every year the *State of the Bible* brings a fresh perspective on the reality God already knows. Our purpose is not merely to satisfy curiosity, or to cause either panic or celebration. It’s a starting point. Where do we go from here? What is God calling us to do in response to this reality, to advance toward the future point God has in mind?

And what is that future point? We have a favorite verse painted on a wall at our American Bible Society headquarters in Philadelphia: “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14 KJV).

If the annual *State of the Bible* report is Point A on our journey, Habakkuk 2:14 is Point B. This vision propels us forward. How is God going to get from point A to point B? How can we help?

By we, I mean Christians in general, and especially churches. God’s chosen instrument to impact the world is the church. American Bible Society stands as a servant to the church. *State of the Bible* is our effort to equip the church with the data necessary to do what God calls it to do.

## LOOKING FOR INDICATORS

You might be discouraged by some things you see in this report, as I was years ago in my “sky is falling” speech, but I urge you to look closely for indicators of what God is doing.

I love the story at the end of Elijah’s Mount Carmel showdown in 1 Kings 18 (GNT). In his characteristically brash fashion, the prophet has announced to the king that the three-year drought will soon break—“I hear the roar of rain approaching.”

Then Elijah asks his servant to look for clouds on the horizon. There is nothing.

Bowed low in prayer, “his head between his knees,” Elijah asks his servant to look again. Still nothing. Seven times he asks, with no sign of rain.

Until the seventh, when the servant reports, “I saw a little cloud no bigger than a man’s hand, coming up from the sea.”



## ROBERT L. BRIGGS

Robert L. Briggs is the former President and CEO of American Bible Society (2019–2022). Before taking this role, he served for more than 20 years in high-level positions within the organization, including as the Senior Vice President of the U.S. Ministry team, Vice President of the Mission Advancement team, and Vice President of Global Ministries.

Previously, Robert held leadership roles with the American Diabetes Association and co-founded Cityhill, a Christian publishing company. Internationally, he has served on multiple committees working to increase Bible access, including United Bible Societies, Forum of Bible Agencies, and Every Tribe Every Nation. Robert and his wife Susan live in Philadelphia. They have five adult children and three grandchildren.

That's what we're looking for. A tiny cloud. Some point of indication—however small—that the work of God is gaining traction, that the Bible is growing in influence and impact.

Elijah's tiny cloud turned into a torrent. The drought broke. The earth was nourished with water from above. This is the progression we as Christians hope for, the knowledge of God's glory gathering, sprinkling, raining, pouring over the earth.

Meanwhile we look for indicators, the tiny clouds taking shape. Maybe it's a younger generation that seems curious about God. Maybe it's the way people turn to Scripture when times get tough. Maybe it's the prying open of the hearts of people who aren't fully engaged with Scripture but don't reject it either. Any of these might be a trend that bends the arc of history toward the new reality of Habakkuk 2:14.

We invite you to scan the horizon with us. Let's embrace the challenges we see here and plan our responses, but let's also celebrate the indicators of hope on the horizon.



# RUMBLING WITH REALITY IN 2022

BY JOHN FARQUHAR PLAKE, PH.D.

*American Bible Society*

*Vulnerability is not winning or losing.  
It's having the courage to show up  
when you can't control the outcome.<sup>1</sup>*

Brené Brown, Ph.D.

**L**et's be honest, we didn't want it to be this way. We hoped that COVID-19 would be a distant memory by now. We hoped nations like Ukraine, Ethiopia, and Syria would know peace and justice instead of fear and war. We hoped.

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, B. (2018) *Dare to lead: Brave work, tough conversations, whole hearts*. New York: Random House, pp. 19–20. Additional thanks to Dr. Brown for her use of the term “rumbling” as in wrestling or an honest confrontation: a rumble.

In January 2022, as we conducted our *State of the Bible* interviews, the COVID-19 omicron variant was surging through the South and the Midwest, again straining the capacity of healthcare systems and isolating neighbors from one another. But in the midst of the pandemic upheaval, many in the church rose to the occasion and found ways to serve others, despite the challenges.

“We are trying to help. God has put us here, so we try to do what we can do.”

In the USA, local churches and national organizations are re-imagining what it means to connect a timeless gospel with our ever-changing world. In November, *The Wall Street Journal* profiled a few of the church’s creative efforts and its struggles to balance the relational nature of Christian faith with advancing technology and challenging regulations.<sup>2</sup>

On February 24, Russian forces entered Ukraine, launching what has been called the largest ground war in Europe since World War II. From the midst of bombing, shelling, and a chaotic refugee crisis, American Bible Society received updates from our partner Bible Societies in Ukraine and the surrounding nations. Staff and volunteers were busy serving their neighbors with Bibles, biblical resources for children and other trauma victims, and other basic necessities of life. One first-person update read in part, “We all are still safe. We are trying to help. To be God’s hands, where we are. God has put us here—so we try to do what we can do.”

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2 Janet Adamy, “Churches Changed During the Pandemic and Many Aren’t Going Back” *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 Nov 2021. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/church-pandemic-covid-online-11636728162>

Whenever Christians face disruptions and difficulties from warfare, pandemic, heartache, and grief, we look to the Bible for wisdom, guidance, and perspective. Recently, I watched the first episode of the second season (“Thunder”) of the popular independent television series, *The Chosen*. In that episode, Jesus paraphrases to his followers the words of John 16:33 (GNT): “The world will make you suffer.” He speaks of the coming Kingdom of heaven. The Kingdom we hope for. Then he says, “in this world, bones will still break. Hearts will still break. But in the end, the light will overcome darkness.”<sup>3</sup> As John’s Gospel puts it, “[B]e brave! I have defeated the world!”

When we face trouble, Christians recognize the truth of those words from Ukraine. “God has put us here, so we try to do what we can do.” We also realize that our efforts are not wasted—even though our strength may be small and the forces we battle may seem overwhelming—because God is at work in ways that transcend what we can see.

So how do we respond when the world is broken and tragic? We just keep showing up and trusting God with the outcome because we know that God’s Word brings freedom, healing, and help to those who seek it.

## LISTENING TO AMERICA

In January 2022, the *State of the Bible* research team launched our most robust study ever,<sup>4</sup> focusing again on America’s relationship

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3 See [TheChosen.tv](https://TheChosen.tv) (37:43) for more.

4 For details, see “Appendix 1: Methodology” on page 215.

with the Bible, faith, and the church. In the coming chapters, we will focus our attention on eight key themes that collectively tell the story of the Bible in America. We will release a new chapter each month, so we can give readers time to dig into the details and consider how to respond with grace and compassion. After all, God has put us here, in this moment, so let's do what we can to connect our fellow Americans with the life-changing message of the Bible.

Here's what you can expect in the coming months:

1. **The Bible in America.** In our first release, we turn our attention to key measures of Scripture Engagement in America. We'll see that COVID-19 is still influencing America's relationship with the Bible, and we'll consider how to respond to our changing cultural context.
2. **The Faith of our Mothers.** Next, we will focus on faith identity in America, and we'll see how our mothers' faith continues to influence the trajectory of our faith today.
3. **Hope and Flourishing in America.** We plan to continue our annual review of the Bible's extraordinary influence on hope and human flourishing. We'll see how Scripture engagement provides resilience in the presence of unavoidable stresses.
4. **The Bible and Society.** We plan to focus on the Bible's influence on the prosocial behaviors that make good neighbors and form the backbone of thriving societies.
5. **Faith Across the Generations.** As America's youth prepare to head back to school, we'll turn our attention to faith and the Bible across the generations, giving special focus to the nation's youngest adults: Generation Z.

6. **Speaking of Faith in America.** In September, we'll report on a special focus for the 2022 study: how people talk about their faith with others and even invite their neighbors to join them in their faith.
7. **Digging In.** October will feature a deep dive into how people use the Bible, including their Bible reading habits, tools, and technologies.
8. **A Generous Life.** In November, we will explore some new questions about generosity. We'll look at the kinds of charities that Americans support, and we'll explore the role of the Bible and the church in catalyzing philanthropy in America.

Finally in December, we'll wrap up *State of the Bible: USA 2022* with a look back at our top stories and a preview of our research agenda for 2023.

## 2022 IS NOT 'THE NEW NORMAL'

Before we move on to our first chapter, I'd like to take a few pages to explain why 2022 is not a normal year for *State of the Bible*. Despite our hopes for the new year, 2022 continues to be headlined by disruptions that are impacting America's relationship with the Bible in profound ways. Let me explain ...

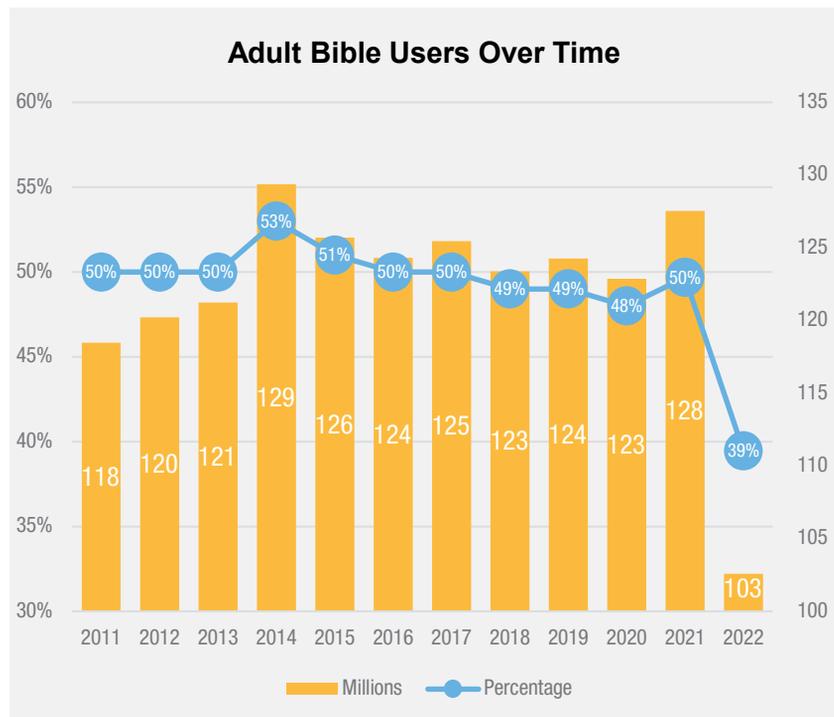
On Valentine's Day 2022, our research team received the final results from the *State of the Bible: USA 2022* national survey. One of our first tasks was to compute the Scripture Engagement scores for this new year, and what we discovered was startling, disheartening, and disruptive.

## FEWER BIBLE USERS IN 2022

First, we noticed an unprecedented drop in the percentage of Bible Users<sup>5</sup> in the United States. In every study since 2018, Bible Users have accounted for between 47 and 49 percent of American adults; however, the 2022 data showed a 10-percent decrease from the same time in 2021. That means **nearly 26 million Americans reduced or stopped their interaction with Scripture in the past year.**

## SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT DOWN 21 PERCENT

Second, our concern deepened when we looked at the Scripture engagement numbers for the United States. One in five Americans left



5 Bible Users are defined as those who use the Bible at least 3–4 times each year on their own, outside of a church setting. See “Appendix 2: Definitions” on page 219 for additional terms.

the Scripture Engaged category in the past year (–21% or 14.7 million adults), and two in five left the Movable Middle (–44% or 28.7 million adults).<sup>6</sup> Only the Bible Disengaged category grew, and at an alarming rate, up by 38 percent (45.2 million adults) in a single year.

## SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT SCORES DOWN AMONG BIBLE USERS

Finally, when we looked at the average Scripture Engagement score for Bible Users, we noticed something we hadn't seen before: the Scripture Engagement Scale score for Bible Users was down to  $M = 96.7$ , and the variability was up to  $SD = 17.1$ .<sup>7</sup> By design, the average Scripture Engagement score for Bible Users should be near  $M = 100$  with  $SD = 15$  points. Typically, we have found that Bible Users score very near those marks.<sup>8</sup> In 2022, though, even Bible Users saw a decrease in their overall Scripture engagement.

## DIGGING DEEPER

After discovering these three unusual patterns in the data, our team began asking a lot of questions:

- Is there something wrong with our sample?
- Did we do something wrong in our calculations?
- What is causing this volatility?

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6 Scripture Engagement segments are fully described in “Journey of Scripture Engagement” on page 30 and in “Appendix 2: Definitions” on page 219.

7 Throughout this ebook,  $M$  refers to the mean or average of a group of scores, and  $SD$  refers to the standard deviation, which is a measure of variability in a group of scores.

8 From 2019–2021, the average Scripture Engagement Scale score for Bible Users was 99.6, and the average standard deviation was 13.95.

**We started with considering our sample.** It is certainly true that we used a different methodology to conduct our interviews in 2022. In an effort to provide the most robust and reliable data possible, we partnered with NORC at the University of Chicago to present the *State of the Bible* questions to their AmeriSpeak® panel. You can read more about that methodology in Appendix 1. Furthermore, we conducted a second, independent survey, using our traditional methods of data collection and analysis. Overall, both samples indicated that something real had changed. We were detecting a clear signal, not just noise.

**Next we reviewed our calculations.** We double-checked our math and ran the numbers again . . . and again. We were satisfied that the math was right, but we still couldn't explain the change.

Finally, we dug in **behind the Scripture Engagement Scale scores** to the factors and items that drive it. For more on how Scripture Engagement works, see “The Journey of Scripture Engagement” on page 225.

Scripture Engagement is a composite score, comprised of three factors:

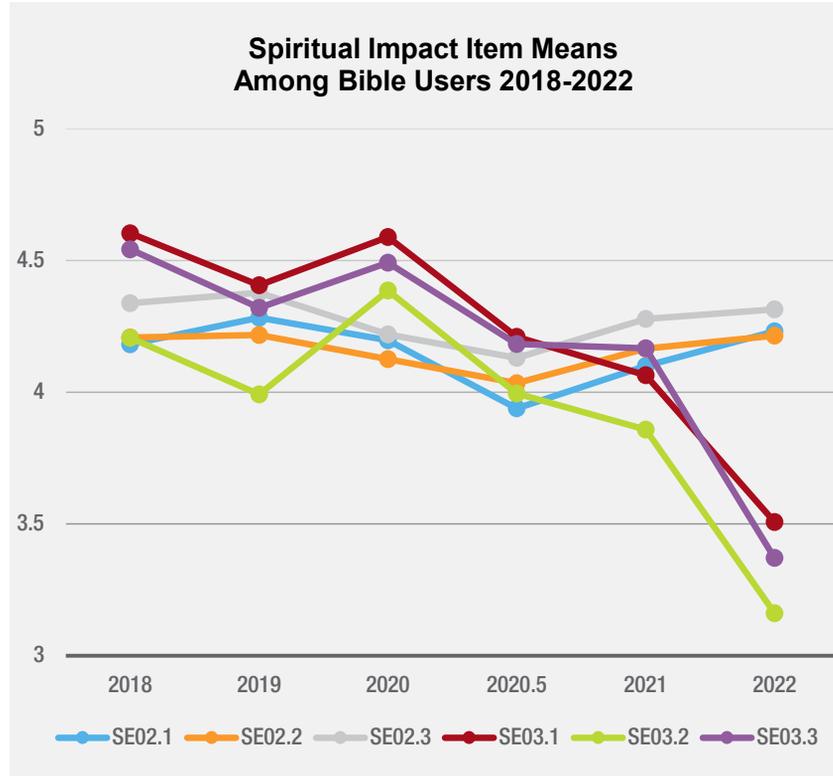
1. **Frequency:** how often people interact with the Bible.
2. **Spiritual Impact:** how the Bible influences people's relationships with God and others.
3. **Moral Centrality:** how the Bible influences people's day-to-day choices and decisions.

When we examined the relationship between each of these factors over time, we noticed something striking. **Beginning in 2020 and accelerating since then, Bible Users have indicated a decreased level of Spiritual Impact from the Bible.** A certain amount of variance is normal from year-to-year, but what we were seeing in the numbers was beyond the level of normal variation. So we dug deeper.

## **ZOOMING IN ON SPIRITUAL IMPACT**

The Spiritual Impact factor is comprised of answers to six questions that fall broadly into two categories. First, we ask how using the Bible makes readers **feel connected to God** (see items SE02.1, SE02.2, and SE02.3 in the following chart). Second, we ask respondents how reading the Bible *in the past month* has **influenced their feelings and behaviors toward others.** (for example, their willingness to engage in their faith and behave generously and lovingly toward others; see items SE03.1, SE03.2, and SE03.3 in the following chart).

Our investigation centered on this second set of questions in the Spiritual Impact domain. While response patterns were similar in other parts of the Scripture Engagement Scale, in this particular arena average scores had fallen to record lows, and the variability of responses had greatly increased. In fact, **the change in feelings and behaviors was over six times larger than the change in connection to God.** These three items were driving most of the change in Scripture Engagement among Bible Users. Why is that?



## PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

I'd like to suggest two reasons that have one underlying cause.

**1. Time-sensitive measurement.** The first reason for the variance we're seeing in these questions is that they are designed to be sensitive to time. The preamble to the questions asks respondents to “Think about your Bible experience in the past month . . .” before responding to these questions. This design helps researchers understand how the Bible has been influencing people's spiritual lives *recently*. This time sensitivity provides a fidelity to the Scripture Engagement Scale that isn't always present in other measures. It is an important feature

of the Scripture Engagement Scale because it focuses on the Bible’s impact *today*, rather than asking respondents to recall an ideal time when the Bible was especially impactful.

Because these questions are particularly sensitive to time, they are also affected by changes and events that impact the nation in a particular time frame. No matter how sincerely we wish they would go away, the COVID-19 pandemic, political polarization, and other disruptions are still affecting the nation. Furthermore, the omicron variant surge was hitting the Southern and Midwestern United States just as we were collecting data in mid-to-late January.<sup>9</sup> These regions of the United States tend to be more Scripture engaged, as a population, than the rest of the nation.

**2. Behavioral impact of the Bible.** Second, these three questions ask respondents to consider how the Bible is influencing them to engage in their faith, show love to others, and live generously. There can be little doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has seriously disrupted Americans’ behaviors, including their relationships with church communities, which are the epicenter of these behaviors for most American Christians. The very idea of “church” is about relationships, not isolation; however, the notion of the church as a vibrant Christian community is being reimagined and rebuilt in light of social distancing and online services. These shifts are in addition to the normal, cyclical process of contextualizing the gospel to meet the changing cultural contexts formed by each new generation and technological development.

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9 See <https://www.mayoclinic.org/coronavirus-covid-19/map>.  
See also [https://www.npr.org/2022/01/24/1075264829/  
with-many-areas-of-the-country-past-the-peak-of-omicron-what-comes-next](https://www.npr.org/2022/01/24/1075264829/with-many-areas-of-the-country-past-the-peak-of-omicron-what-comes-next).

The scores on these three behavioral questions have been falling steadily since the pandemic began. Before the pandemic, scores on these questions averaged 4.39. In June 2020, still early in the pandemic, nationwide averages fell slightly to 4.13. By January 2021, the average was down to 4.03, and in January 2022, American adults averaged only 3.35 out of six possible points.

In 2022, Americans are less likely than ever before to say that the Bible is influencing the way they live out their faith in relationship to others.

## **ADVOCATING FOR A LIVING FAITH**

In conclusion, I'd like to move beyond analysis of the data to proposing a way the church can thoughtfully and faithfully respond. That response has three parts: recognize, respond, and relate.

**Recognize.** First, all of us who are leaders in the church must **recognize that we are facing a unique moment.** The data (and our personal experiences as leaders) tell us that American adults—particularly Christian adults—are struggling to live out their faith in a social context that has been upended by the pandemic. They do not see a way to connect their faith to meaningful action through generosity, community, and relationships.

**Respond.** Second, we must pray for divine insight and courage to **respond with focus and creativity.** Unique moments in our culture require unique responses from the church. Ministry-as-usual is poorly fitted to turn the tide. Instead, we must lean in and show the way. This is a time for innovation, energy, and deep compassion.

**Relate.** Finally, we must work to **reconnect people to Christ-centered relationships and service.** The Christian faith was never designed to be lived in our heads or sequestered in our hearts. Instead, we are intended to live in vibrant Christian communities that share a missional focus. The apostle James forcefully argues that our faith must be lived out in relationship and in service to others:

[Do you] want proof that faith without deeds is useless? ... [W]e please God by what we do and not only by what we believe... Anyone who doesn't breathe is dead, and faith that doesn't do anything is just as dead! (James 2:20, 24, 26).

God has put us here—in this moment—so we must do what we can do.

The data show us that many Americans are struggling to connect the *teaching* of the Bible to the ways they *live out their faith* in community. Wherever American Christians have become disconnected from their communities of faith, we must help them find their way back into *meaningful relationships* and *generous service* to others.



### **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 director of Ministry Intelligence at American Bible Society and is the editor-in-chief of the *State of the Bible* series. Over 32 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.

Contact him at  
[\*\*jplake@americanbible.org\*\*](mailto:jplake@americanbible.org)





# THE BIBLE IN AMERICA

It seems everyone is talking these days. On TV news and social media. In supermarket lines and church lobbies. People express their opinions freely on all sorts of subjects. But is anyone listening?

We are.

*State of the Bible* is an exercise in listening at scale. This is our twelfth year of conducting a professional survey of the American people, asking them their opinions and practices relating to the Bible. We are tallying the combined responses to dozens of questions and analyzing the results. We're listening to what America is telling us.

- Do people consider the Bible God's Word? If so, what does that mean to them?
- Does the Bible shape their daily decisions? In what ways?
- How does Scripture impact their relationship with God or their spiritual growth?

- How often do they read the Bible? And how do they choose what to read?
- Do they use a printed Bible, or do they access an app or website or audio Bible?
- Why do they read the Bible, when they do?
- What frustrations or roadblocks keep them away from the Bible?
- How do people of different ages, genders, races, education, or religions respond to all these questions? Are there regional differences?
- How do those who engage with the Bible differ from those who don't?
- And what's the trend line? We ask a number of the same questions year by year, so we can track the ups and downs.

One-third of non-Bible users said they were curious about the Bible and/or Jesus.

If you're in ministry of any kind—a church, a nonprofit, even a communications company—you already know the importance of listening. We all need to answer the questions people are asking. We need to respond to the needs they actually have, and not what we think they ought to need. Effective ministry is built on paying attention.

In that light, we hope *State of the Bible* will provide some direction for your biblical ministry. Though some of the results here are disappointing, all the findings—positive and negative—can shape our work in the future.

For instance, the survey has been tracking the use of **digital** Bible formats. Overall, people still prefer Bibles in print, but younger generations are leading the way into apps, websites, computer programs, and other digital options. These formats can potentially make it easier to interact with the Bible more frequently, and the data is beginning to show that. (A later chapter in *State of the Bible: USA 2022* will explore this more fully.)

The issue of **curiosity** also provided positive news for those in Bible ministry. The survey asked people if they were “curious about the Bible and/or Jesus.” Nearly two-thirds of people who seldom or never read the Bible (non-Bible Users) indicated some curiosity. One-third of non-Bible Users said they were “very” or “extremely” curious. How will churches and ministries respond to that curiosity?

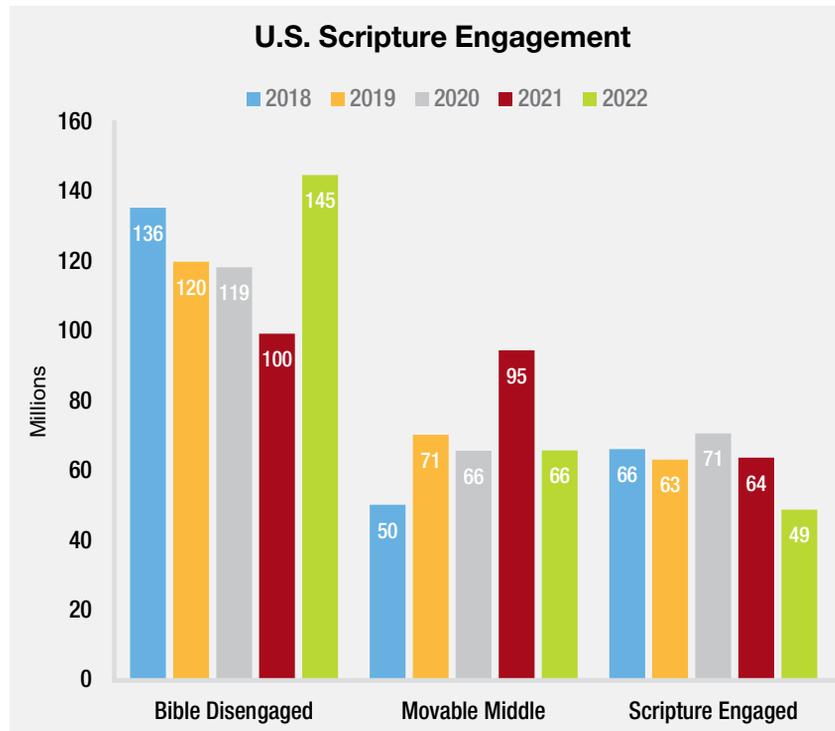
Despite those glimmers of hope, the big story of *State of the Bible: USA 2022* is a **major decrease in Scripture Engagement**.

## SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

Since 2018, we’ve employed a definition of Scripture Engagement that includes not only the frequency of Bible reading, but also measures of the spiritual impact of the Bible on the user and the moral centrality of the Bible in the user’s life. Altogether, we define Scripture Engagement as **consistent interaction with the Bible that shapes people’s choices and transforms their relationships with God, self, and others**.

Combining these factors, we identify some people as Scripture Engaged, and others as Bible Disengaged. There's also a large group in between, which we have dubbed the Movable Middle. As people come to the Bible for the first time, they start in the Movable Middle before continuing into the Scripture Engaged category as they connect more deeply with God in the Bible. But they could also move the other way, their commitment lapsing to the point of disengagement.

In 2021 we saw continued movement *into* that middle group. We discussed extensively that 2021 was the continuation of a four-year trend toward Bible exploration. What we see now is an abrupt end to that trend. In this year's report, the Scripture Engaged category



has shrunk by one in five, and the Movable Middle has contracted by two in five. The Bible Disengaged group has seen immense growth. It's now more than twice the size of the Movable Middle.

## PROFILE OF THE SCRIPTURE ENGAGED

What do we know about those who still qualify as Scripture Engaged—19 percent of American adults? Which demographic categories are the most engaged with the Bible?

- **Women** (21%) are more Scripture Engaged than men (16%). Looking at it another way, 58 percent of Scripture Engaged adults are female.
- **Elders** (77 years and older) are most likely to be Scripture Engaged (31%). Engagement drops with each younger generation.
- **African Americans** (29%) are the ethnic group most likely to be Scripture Engaged.
- **Widowed** (25%) and **Married** (24%) people are more likely to be Scripture Engaged.
- People living in **small cities** (5,000–30,000 population) are most likely to be Scripture Engaged, at 25 percent.
- Regionally, the **South** (25%) has the highest Scripture Engagement numbers.

In other notes, we found minimal differences in engagement at different **education levels**, except at the extremes. Those who have gone past college were both the most Scripture Engaged (23%) and the most Bible Disengaged (62%). Those without a high school education scored the lowest in Scripture Engagement, at 16 percent.

**Income level** had little effect on Scripture Engagement, except at the top. In households earning more than \$100,000 a year, Engagement was low (14%) and Disengagement high (66%).

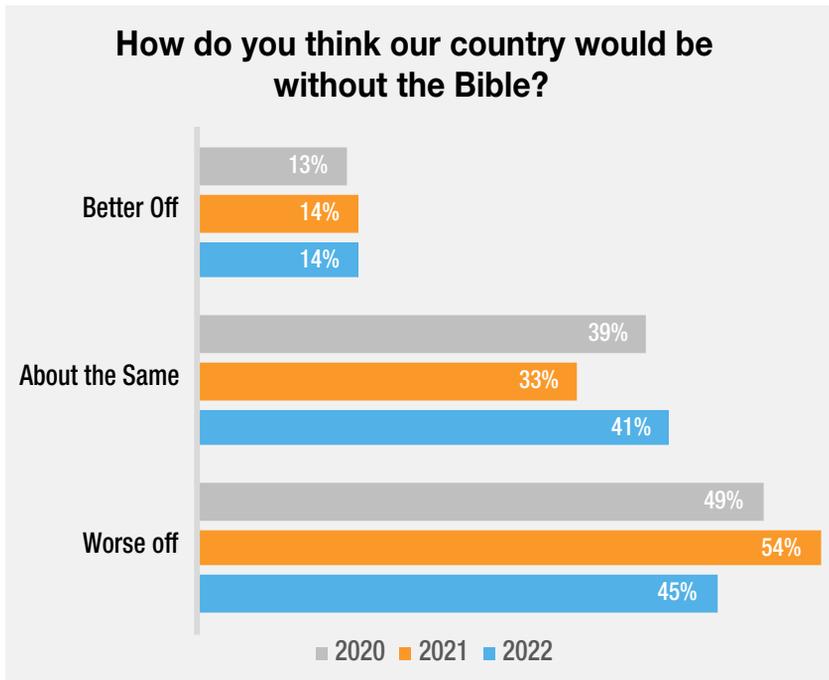
**Are there children in the household?** If not, Scripture Engagement was higher (20%, compared to 17% for households with kids). Those with children in the home were more likely to be in the Movable Middle (30%). One possible explanation is that parents want to read the Bible more but don't have time. (In fact, when asked, "Do you wish you used the Bible more?" those with children under 18 in the household were much more likely to say yes.)

## WHAT DO AMERICANS THINK ABOUT THE BIBLE?

### THE BIBLE'S INFLUENCE IN THE U.S.

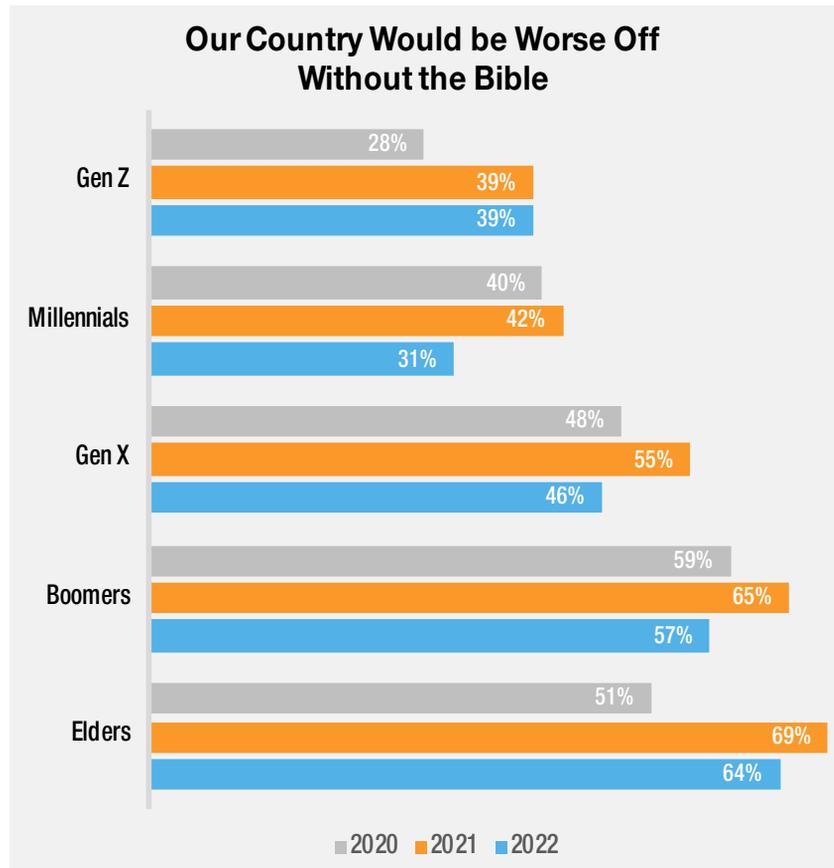
What if nobody read the Bible at all? Would the country be better off or worse off? The survey offers a mix of good and bad news. Some would find it encouraging that only one person in seven (14%) thinks the country would be better off without Bible reading. That number has held rather steady through the years.

But, while 45 percent say America would be worse off without Bible reading, that's a nine-point drop from last year. There's a corresponding increase in the number who said the country would be "about the same" (33% in 2021, but up to 41% in 2022).



In general, belief in the Bible’s positive influence rises with age. Elders (age 77 and up) are most supportive of the Bible’s influence (64%), while Millennials (ages 26–41) are least likely to say the country would be worse off without Bible-reading (31%). An exception occurs with the youngest group, Gen Z (ages 18–25), which is more positive about the Bible’s influence than Millennials.

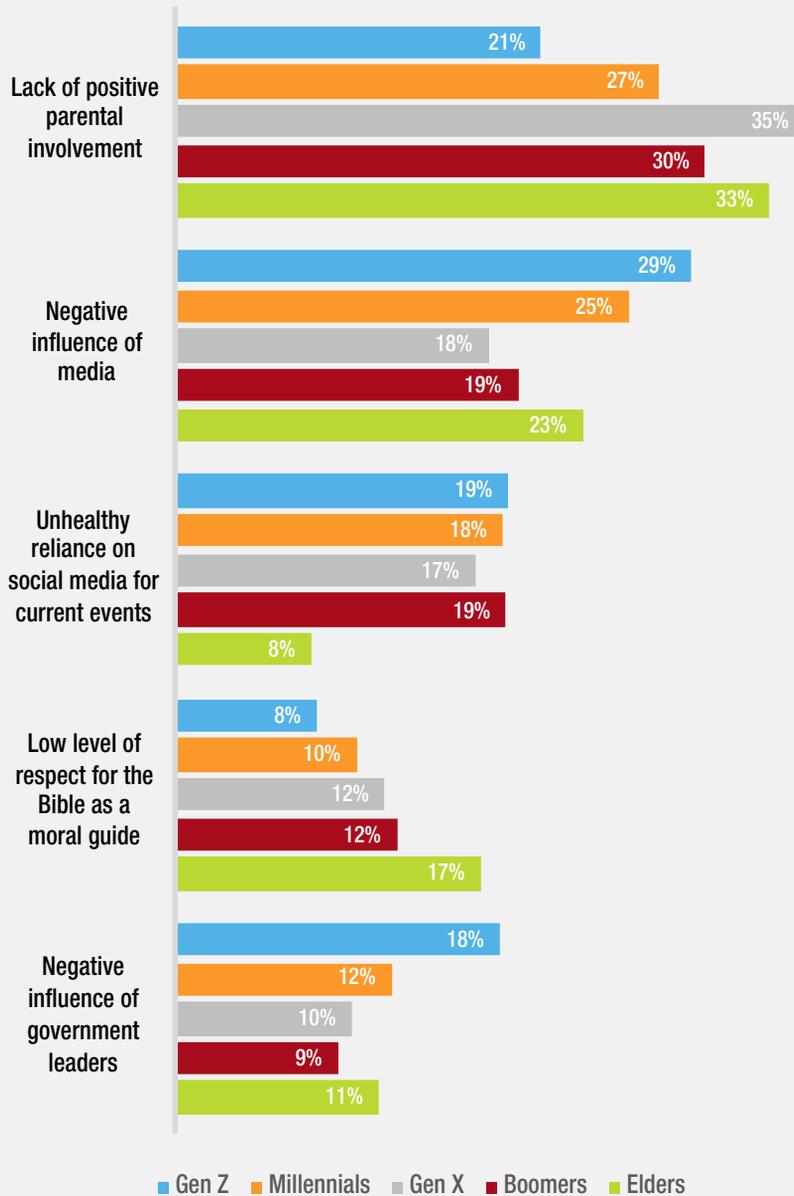
Six out of seven people (86%) agreed that the moral values of America are declining. Though younger respondents were a bit less likely to say so (Gen Z at 79%, Millennials at 80%), there was strong agreement across all generations.



But how would they explain this decline? Across all age groups, 30 percent blamed it on “lack of positive parental involvement.” It may come as no surprise that the youngest group, Gen Z, was least likely to wish for more parental involvement (21%). Their most common answer (29%) was “Negative influence of media, movies, or music.”

The main Bible-related option offered—“Low level of respect for the Bible as a guide for moral development”—showed a clear

## The Cause for America's Moral Decline



“generational slide,” with 17 percent of Elders making that their top reason for America’s moral decline, sliding down to only 8 percent for Gen Z.

## **MEANING AND CHARACTER**

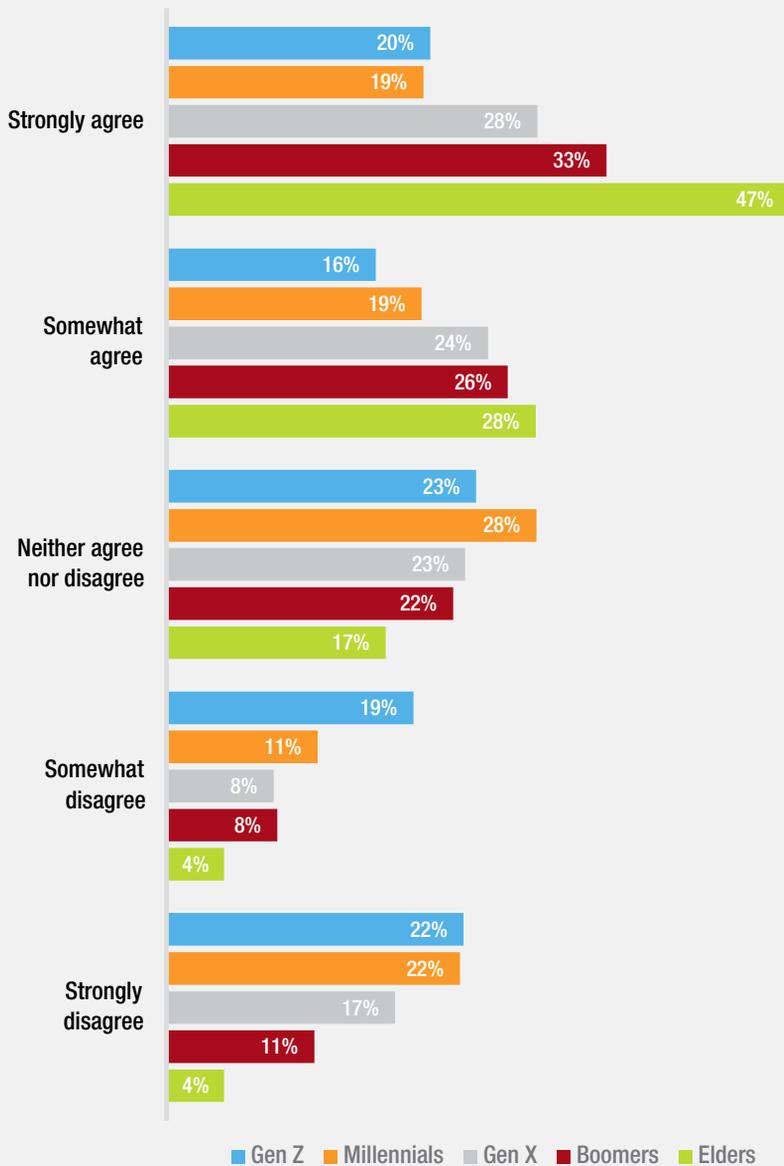
*Bible reading is an important component of a child’s character development.* The survey asked people their level of agreement or disagreement with that statement.

Nearly half (49%) agreed, “strongly” or “somewhat.” More than a quarter (27%) disagreed, strongly or somewhat. The rest were noncommittal.

There was a sharp generational slide from 75 percent agreement among Elders to only 36 percent agreement among Gen Z. The disagreement is even more telling. In Generation Z, at ages 18–25 the closest to childhood themselves, this statement found more disagreement (41%) than agreement (36%). Are they saying that Bible reading was not a meaningful part of their own character development?

There was no significant difference between respondents with children in the home and those without.

### Bible reading is an important component of a child's character development



## WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

### BELIEFS

For years now, *State of the Bible* has explored people's root beliefs about what the Bible is: its origins, inspiration, and uniqueness.

Of five response options, the most popular (27%) was: *The Bible is the inspired word of God and has no errors, although some verses are meant to be symbolic rather than literal*. Last year, this answer was chosen by 29 percent. This was the most popular choice of every age group except Millennials.

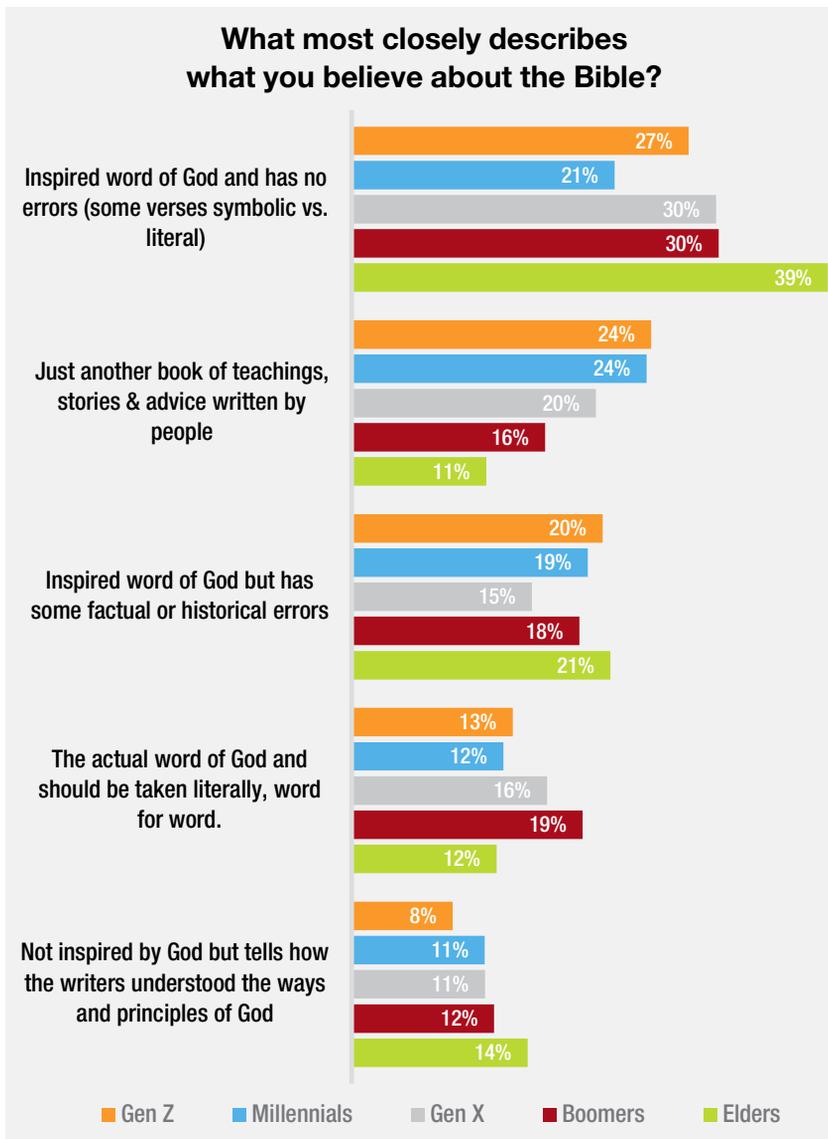
The second most chosen statement was: *The Bible is just another book of teachings written by people that contains stories and advice*. One in five people chose this (20%), up sharply from 13 percent last year. It is the favorite choice of Millennials (24%).

We saw the steepest drop in the fourth-place answer: *The Bible is the actual word of God and should be taken literally, word for word*. This had 15 percent agreement in this year's poll, down from 26 percent last year. The highest support for this view came not from Elders, but from Boomers (19%).

We also asked whether they agreed with this statement: *The Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon are all different expressions of the same spiritual truths*.

About a third (33%) strongly or somewhat disagreed, apparently holding to the Bible's uniqueness. But there were more who

agreed with the statement (40%). These numbers are similar to last year's findings.



## MEANING

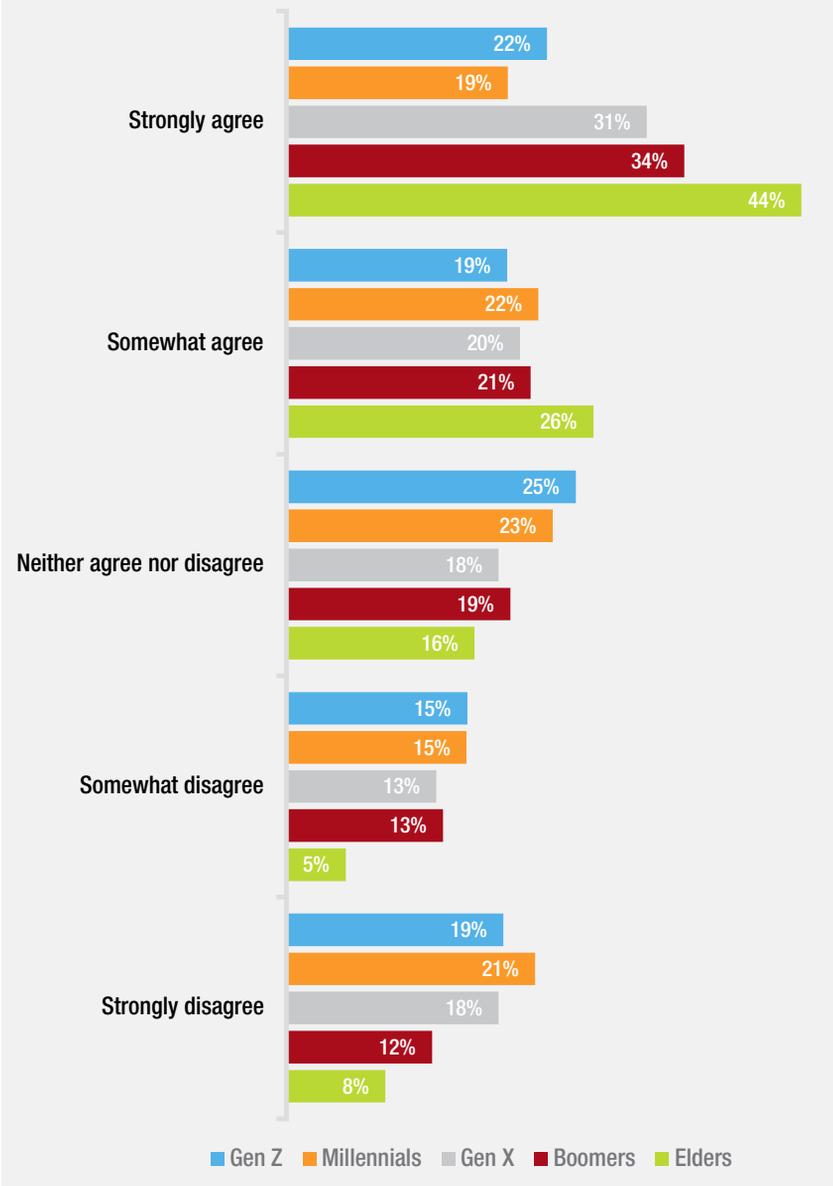
Nearly half of American adults (49%) agree with this statement: *The Bible contains everything a person needs to know to live a meaningful life.* Fewer than one-third (31%) disagree.

The now-familiar generational slide appears again on this question, from 70 percent agreement among Elders to only 41 percent among Gen Z and Millennials. Those younger groups were also more apt to “neither agree nor disagree.”

The overall numbers show significant slippage from 2021—down five points (54% to 49%) on agreement and up six points (25% to 31%) on disagreement. The pre-pandemic 2020 poll showed 68 percent agreeing on the importance of the Bible for a meaningful life, compared to 49 percent this year—a major two-year drop-off.

The question is broad enough to spark some pondering. *What is needed for a meaningful life?* It was a tough two years, from January 2020 to January 2022. Many of the things that gave meaning to people’s lives were threatened—health, jobs, finances, patriotism, dreams for the future, even family. While many turned to the Bible to get them through, others may have become skeptical that anything, including the Bible, can anchor their search for meaning.

**The Bible contains everything a person needs to know to live a meaningful life**



## HOW DO PEOPLE INTERACT WITH THE BIBLE?

### OWNERSHIP

American Bible Society was founded in 1816, a time when many Americans didn't have Bibles of their own. As people moved westward, and away from existing publishers, Bible distribution was an important mission.

Two centuries later, things have changed, at least within the United States. This year's *State of the Bible* indicates that more than three in four Americans (77%) are Bible owners.

But that leaves nearly one in four who don't own a Bible. Some just aren't readers. Some follow other religions. Some hold negative feelings about the Bible. But are there some who would accept a Bible if we gave them one? Are there some who would use a Bible app if we gave them a recommendation or a link?

Drilling down into the numbers, we find Bible ownership is lightest among the younger groups (Gen Z, 66%, Millennials, 67%). Bible ownership is only 65 percent among those who live in the Northeast U.S. Among residents of large cities, it's 68 percent.

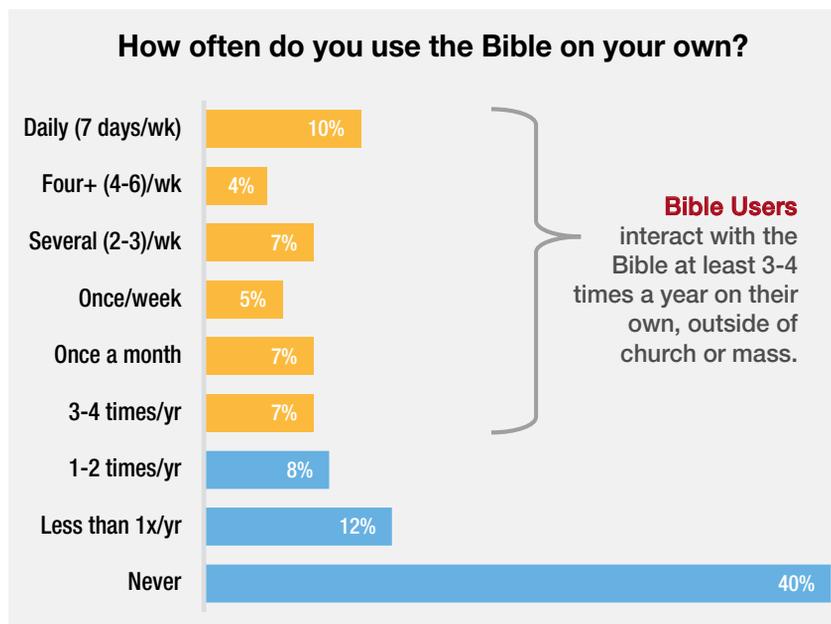
It's tempting to say that every American who wants a Bible has one, but the survey shows that, among certain groups, one in three don't. And there are other sub-populations often missed in surveys: the homeless, recent immigrants, those with limited literacy or hearing difficulties. The work of Bible distribution is not completed.

Many people still need God’s Word in languages and formats they can access.

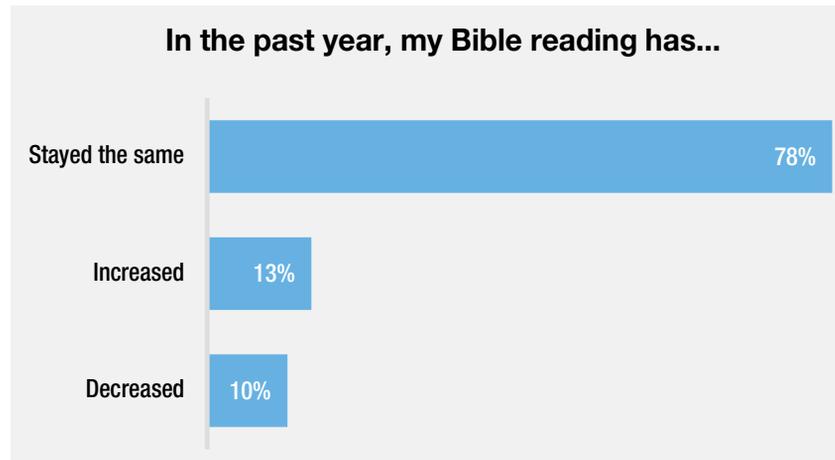
## BIBLE READING

Nearly four in 10 Americans say they never read the Bible outside of church services or Mass. Another two in 10 say they read it on their own no more than twice a year. That leaves another four in 10 reading on their own at least three times a year (Bible Users). Those who read daily amount to 10 percent of all Americans.

This year’s numbers show a major shift away from personal Bible reading. In the 2021 *State of the Bible*, there were 29 percent in the “Never” group (now 40%) and 50 percent in the Bible Users collection (now 40%).



Yet when asked whether their personal Bible reading increased or decreased over the last year, more people reported an increase than a decrease. This suggests more of a drift than a protest. Across the board, people are reading the Bible less frequently than before, but apparently most of them haven't been aware of it.



How do people approach the Bible? What practices do they use in their Bible reading? The survey revealed very different patterns among the Scripture Engaged, the Bible Disengaged, and those in between, in the Movable Middle. (Read more about these categories under “Scripture Engagement Measurement” on page 33.)

When people interact with the Bible, do they do so at the same time each day? Do people follow a schedule, plan, or program when they read the Bible? Or do they follow some other practice or routine? We'll unpack this subject in more detail in chapter seven, slated for release in October.

For now, here's a preview. The Bible *Disengaged* were most likely to say they “select Bible passages depending on [their] mood at the time” (44%), compared to other Bible reading practices.

Some might argue that it's better to read through a whole book of the Bible or to follow a reading plan that covers a range of subjects. But listen to what the Bible *Disengaged* are saying. They don't read the Bible much, but when they do, they're looking for something that speaks to their mood at the time.

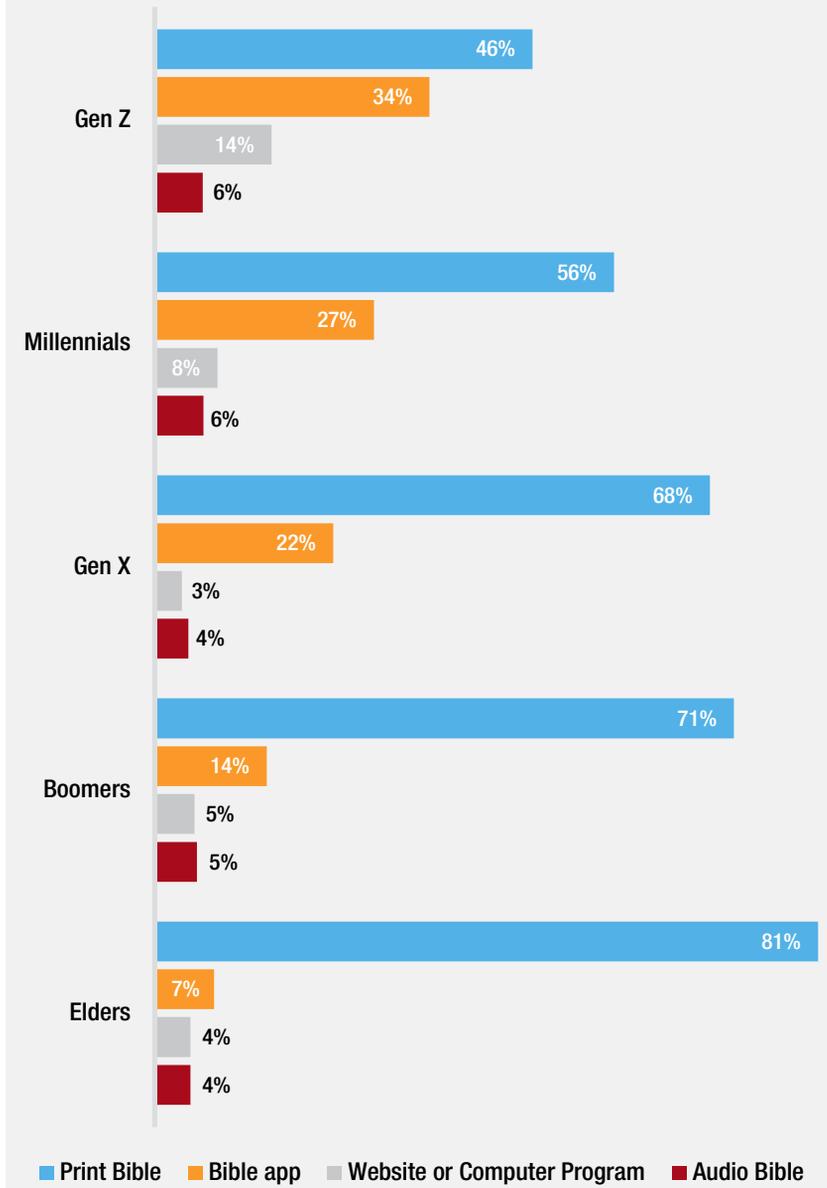
With that in mind, could churches, ministries, and publishers do more with those guides that say, “When you feel like *this*, read *this*”—and not only for the Bible readers in our churches, but for the non-Bible readers as well?

## **BIBLE FORMATS**

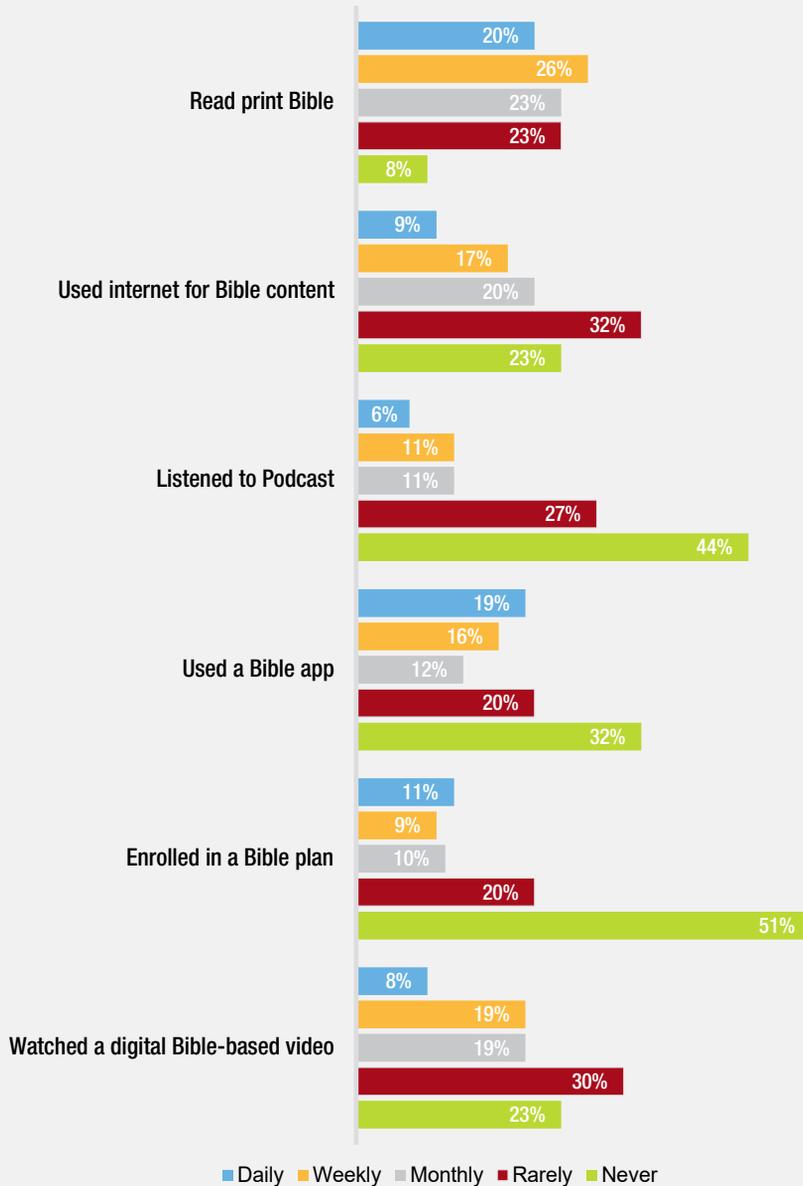
The youngest Bible Users in this poll, ages 18 to 25, would rather interact with the Bible digitally (apps, websites, computer programs, and audio recordings combining for 54% preference) than in print (46%). All other age groups prefer to use a printed Bible—even Millennials (56% for print). Overall, nearly two-thirds of Bible Users prefer print formats.

Of course, many use both print and digital resources. Only 23 percent of Bible Users said they *never* use a computer Bible program and 32 percent never use a Bible app. So these digital formats are becoming significant parts of the Bible-reading terrain, taking a place alongside printed Bibles. In addition, digital formats may actually increase the

## Preferred Bible Format by Generation



## Frequency of Bible Use by Medium



frequency of Bible interaction. Of those who do use Bible apps, about 30 percent do so *daily*. As people—and especially young people—rely on their phones throughout each day, could Bible apps lead the way to more consistent Scripture engagement?

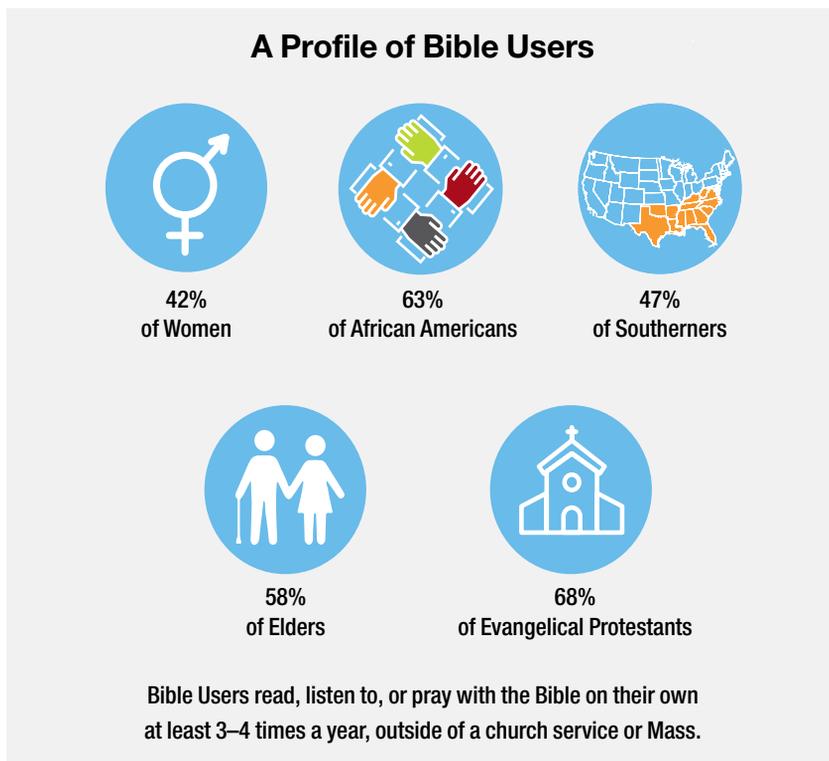
## BIBLE USERS

*State of the Bible* defines Bible Users as people who read the Bible at least three or four times a year, apart from church services. This is different from Scripture Engagement, which we profiled earlier in this chapter. In the previous eleven years of the survey, the proportion of Americans who were Bible Users ran from 48 percent to 53 percent, with most years showing 50 percent. This year saw a precipitous decline, to 40 percent. We're scrambling to investigate the causes of this decrease, but we also want to learn what we can about these people. As always, we want to understand them—not just how often they turn to Scripture, but why and how.

## WHO READS THE BIBLE?

- **Women** (42%) are slightly more likely to be Bible Users than men (37%).
- **African Americans** (63%) far more likely to be Bible Users than other ethnic groups.
- **The South** (47%) and Midwest (44%) have a greater percentage of Bible Users than other regions of the U.S.
- **Elders** (those 77 and older) are most likely to be Bible Users (58%) of any generation. **Boomers** (ages 57–76) are next, at 47 percent.

- Those who identify as **Evangelical Protestants** far exceed the national average in Bible use (68%), as do those in **Historically Black Protestant** denominations (66%). **Main-line Protestants** follow with 57 percent Bible Users.



## MOTIVATIONS AND FRUSTRATIONS

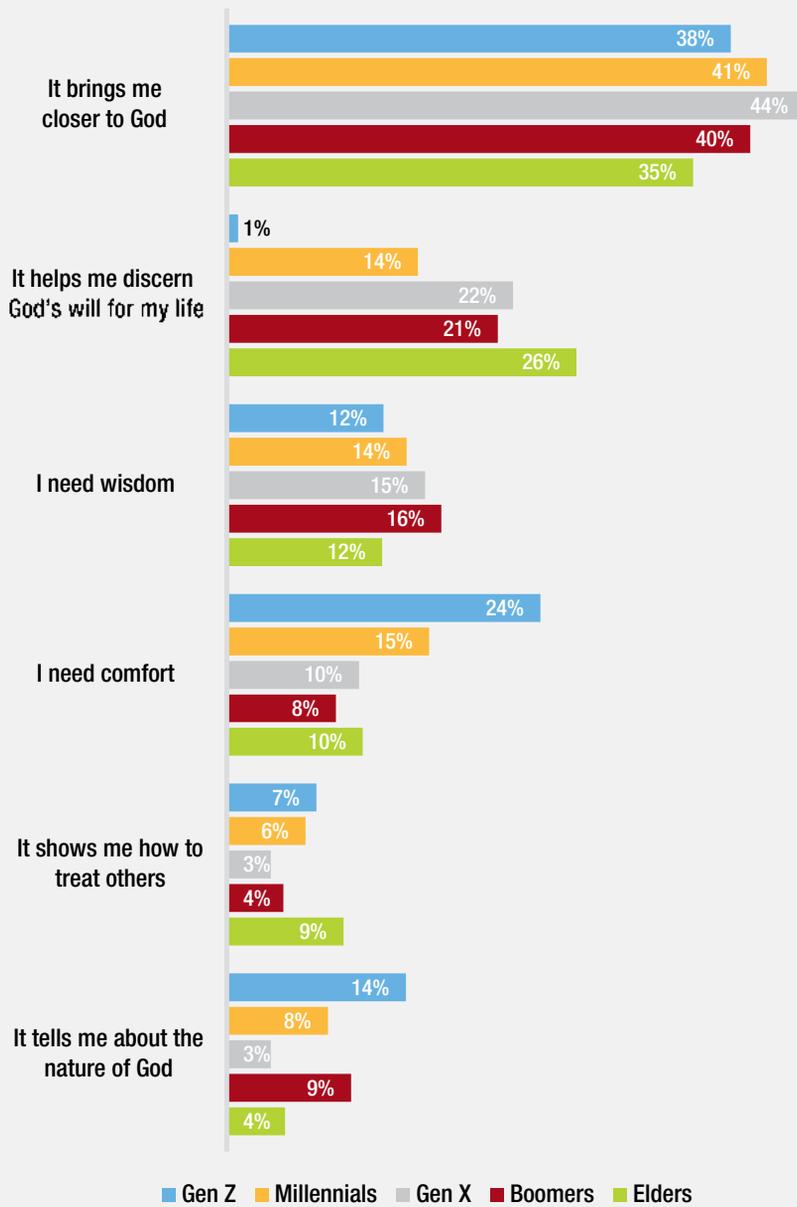
Why do people read the Bible? When Bible Users identified their main motivation, across all generations and ethnicities the same answer came up: “*It brings me closer to God.*” Four in ten of the respondents (41%) chose this.

Last year the second-place motivation was comfort, but that response dropped a few points this year. *Discerning God’s will* was most important for 18 percent of Bible Users—but decidedly not for the youngest ones. Only 1 percent of Gen Z Bible Users gave that reason. In that age group, the second most chosen reason was “*I need comfort.*”

Consider the timing. When this survey was taken, in January 2022, we were nearing the end of the pandemic’s second year. In the thick of it, a year earlier, people needed comfort and assurance that God still cared. But as people attempted to rebuild their lives after nearly two years of struggle, perhaps it became more important to know God’s leading and tap into divine wisdom. People will always draw close to God in the Scriptures, but maybe this is a time for direction more than comfort.

Except for Gen Z. Are they still reeling from the massive disruption of education and career-launching? Is that why they need comfort from the Bible right now, more than older Bible Users do? (Chapter 3, scheduled for release in June, will explore even more issues of well-being and flourishing.)

## Reasons for Bible Use by Generation



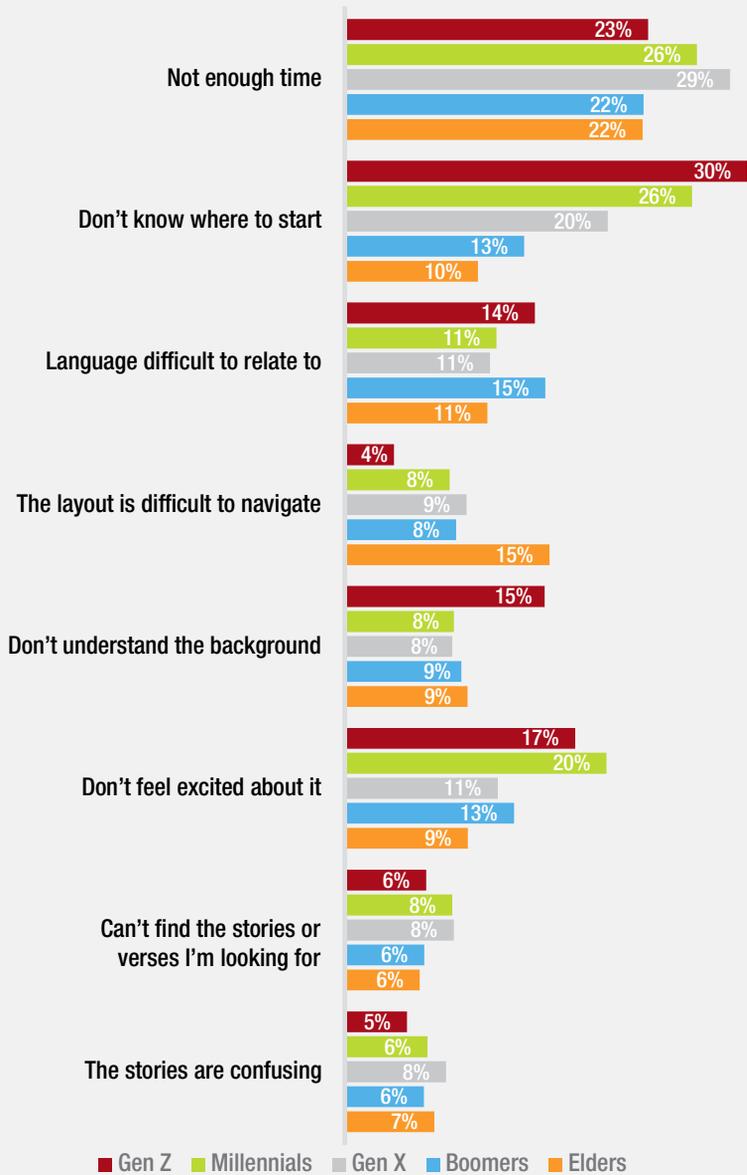
While the Bible Motivation question examines what drives people *to* the Scriptures, the next question gives insight on what keeps them away. When Bible Users were asked to choose their two greatest frustrations with regard to Bible reading, more than one-fourth of them indicated no frustrations, but nearly the same number said, “I never seem to have enough time.” This complaint was common among all age groups (22 to 29%). But a top answer for Gen Z (30%) and Millennials (26%) was “I don’t know where to start.”

Not knowing where to start is also a significant hurdle for the Movable Middle (23%) and the Bible Disengaged (22%), with 24 percent of the latter group admitting, “I don’t feel excited about using [the Bible].”

Other answers were available: difficulty with the language; not understanding Bible history; and finding the layout difficult to navigate. Some chose these responses, but not nearly at the level of “I don’t know where to start.”

Might this provide a strategy for Bible ministry, especially with young adults—Bible reading plans and simple formats to get started in regular Bible reading?

## What most closely describes what you believe about the Bible?



## WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE BIBLE IN 2022?

In a word, the current *State of the Bible* is “under-engaged.” Perhaps the Bible has been neglected or simply taken for granted as people dealt with the challenges of reassembling their lives after a disruptive pandemic. A significant number of people say they “never seem to have enough time” to read the Bible. But we also find that attitudes are changing. This year, more people say that America would stay “about the same” if no one read the Bible.

This news provides a challenge for everyone involved in Bible ministry. There is a great deal of curiosity about the Bible. Will we answer it? Perhaps digital formats will spur greater engagement. Will we create and promote effective resources? Will we be able to communicate the value of the Scriptures to a population that has been disrupted and distracted?

# NOW THIS

## TIPS, HIGHLIGHTS, INSIGHTS, AND SUGGESTIONS

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- **Listening has never been more important.**  
Consider ways to ask your congregation and community about their own practices, motivations, and frustrations regarding the Bible—and see what you can do to help.
- **Is the Bible an important component of a child’s character development?**  
Churches have long operated on the assumption that people believed it was. Young adults might drift away from the church, but they’d come back when they had kids. These data question that assumption. We will need to make a strong case for the positive ways the Bible shapes character.
- **Show people—especially those under age 25—how to start reading Scripture.**  
Consider the *Start Here* resource from American Bible Society.
- **Create or curate mood-based resources**  
to meet non-Bible Users at their point of need. (But get beyond proof-texts; offer pertinent stories and chapters.)

# THE JOURNEY OF SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

**A**ccording to data from *State of the Bible: USA 2022*, over half of U. S. adults (56%) have no meaningful relationship with the Bible, while 44 percent have started a journey of Scripture engagement.

Twelve years of research have uncovered some important milestones that mark a journey with God's Word. From the data, let's consider why many Americans have such different experiences with the Bible.

## **The Journey of Scripture Engagement ...**

### **1. ... OFTEN STARTS AT HOME**

For Americans who use the Bible, at least 73 percent were introduced to it as children. Of those who don't use the Bible, more than half (55%) come from homes with little or no Bible engagement.

### **2. ... IS A CHOICE**

Regardless of their family traditions, though, adults must *choose* to begin or continue a journey of Scripture engagement by interacting with the Bible—by reading it, listening to it, or even watching it.<sup>1</sup> More than one in four Americans (27%) who have started a journey with the Bible have chosen a new faith tradition in adulthood.

A proliferation of Bible technologies is expanding how Americans access Scripture, but the journey begins with the *choice* to pick up a printed Bible, open a Bible app, play an audio Bible, or search for the Bible's perspective on an issue.

### **3. ... IS SPARKED BY DISRUPTION**

For most people who choose to (re)engage with the Bible in adulthood, their exploration of the Bible begins with disruptions they're facing in their own lives. Some disruptions

<sup>1</sup> See [this article](#) in *Christianity Today* on the completion of the American Sign Language Bible.

are positive: a new relationship, new child, or new opportunity. And some disruptions are negative: a broken relationship, grief, trauma, or addiction.

#### 4. ... FOCUSES ON A QUESTION

Whatever the disruption is, it creates a question in the potential Bible user's mind, "Does the Bible have help for my issue?" So they dig in.

Initial Bible exploration among adults is almost never about knowing the Bible as literature, as history, or as theology. Instead, Bible users begin their journey on their own terms, seeking answers to their own questions. It's all about "me."

#### 5. ... AWAKENS THE SPIRIT

Once an individual or group chooses to interact with the Bible, several things begin to change. Interacting with the Bible lights something up on the *inside* of people.

First, many Bible users find timeless wisdom that addresses the issue they are facing. They find the answers they were looking for.

Next, they often wonder, "Does the Bible have more to offer than I had imagined before?" And their curious exploration of Scripture broadens.

Then, users begin to discover that using the Bible brings them a sense of connection to God, curiosity to know God better, and an awareness of how much they need God in their life. They feel God's care for their own suffering, and that encourages them to engage more deeply in their faith journey.

**This spiritual impact of the Bible is the fuel that propels seekers on their journey with God.** In fact, if Bible explorers don't sense a connection with God through Scripture, they will not sustain their journey. They'll quit. It's just that simple.

The good news is that millions of Americans don't quit. They keep engaging, more consistently and more deeply with God's Word. They find themselves becoming more generous with their time, energy, and resources, and their behavior toward others becomes more loving and selfless.

#### 6. ... LEADS TO JESUS

At some point in this journey—earlier for some and later for others—Bible users realize that the story of Scripture is more than just wisdom for their day, it is God's Story. The Bible confronts people with Jesus and provokes a decision. What will you do with Jesus?

More than eight out of ten Bible explorers<sup>2</sup> (82%) say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their lives today. By the time they are consistently engaging with God’s Word, that number jumps to over 96 percent.

## 7. ... GUIDES DAILY CHOICES

For those who continue their journey, we find more frequent Bible reading, longer periods of exploring Scripture, and an increased interest in the Bible *on its own terms*. But one of the most striking characteristics of individuals on this part of the journey is that they begin to allow the Bible to guide their choices in daily life.

To be sure, Americans value independence and freedom. We hold tightly to our freedom of choice, freedom of conscience, freedom of practically everything. The most Scripture-engaged Americans, however, are more willing than others to freely choose to be guided by biblical principles, even when that might be countercultural or inconvenient. They allow the Bible to exert a great deal of influence on how they spend their money, the entertainment they choose, the

decisions they make at work or school, and the choices they make at the ballot box.

What some may see as limiting, Bible engagers find freeing, liberating, and empowering.

## 8. ... LEADS TO FLOURISHING

And these Bible engagers may have a point. According to Harvard University’s Human Flourishing Index, those who have progressed furthest on their journey of Scripture engagement are also the most holistically healthy and hopeful. They have a sense of purpose, are satisfied with their life, have close relationships, solid mental and physical health, and have a sense of character and virtue. The journey of Scripture engagement leads to flourishing.

In summary, the journey of Scripture engagement ...

1. Often starts at home
2. Is a choice
3. Is sparked by disruption
4. Focuses on a question
5. Awakens the spirit
6. Leads to Jesus
7. Guides daily choices
8. Leads to flourishing

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2 Here “Bible explorers” refers to individuals in the Movable Middle. See “Scripture Engagement Measurement” on page 33 or “Appendix 2: Definitions” on page 219 for details.

## SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT MEASUREMENT

This journey is grounded on a carefully operationalized definition of Scripture engagement:

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

In order to pinpoint an individual's current position on the journey of Scripture Engagement, the *State of the Bible* research team has developed a 14-item questionnaire called the **Scripture Engagement Scale**. It considers three domains or factors:

1. **Frequency:** how often a respondent uses the Bible on their own and as a part of a large church service.
2. **Impact:** the Bible's influence on a user's relationships with God and others.
3. **Centrality:** the Bible's influence on a user's choices and decisions.

## SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT SEGMENTS

In 2022, most of our reporting is based on a simplified, three-part Scripture Engagement segmentation that uses the following categories:

1. **Scripture Engaged:** Scripture Engaged people are those who have a score of 100 or higher according to their results of this survey. The Bible impacts their daily lives, helps guide their relationships with God and others, and they regularly read/listen to/engage with the Bible.
2. **Movable Middle:** Formerly the Bible Friendly and Bible Neutral categories, these individuals score between 70 and 99. These people range from those who sporadically interact with the Bible on the low end, to those who periodically open the Bible as a source of spiritual insight and wisdom. This group of people can easily shift to being more Bible-engaged, or they can give up and become less Bible-engaged because the Bible's influence has not taken root in their lives.
3. **Bible Disengaged:** Anyone who scores less than 70 is considered Bible Disengaged. Those who fit this category interact infrequently with the Bible, and it has minimal influence in their lives. Bible Disengaged people rarely seek out the Bible, and tend to encounter it through others, rather than by choice.





# CHANGING FAITH

“I am not a Christian,” a former pastor posted on Instagram. “I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus.” He called this change “deconstruction.”<sup>1</sup>

That man is not alone. The Pew Research Center reports that, over the last decade, the percentage of Americans who call themselves Christians has dropped from 75 to 63 percent. Those who claim no religious affiliation (the “nones”) have grown to nearly 30 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Christians have long celebrated conversions—from the woman at the well to Augustine to Wesley, to the monthly accounts in *Christianity Today*. We rejoice with the angels in heaven when someone ditches their skepticism and claims faith. Yet we also acknowledge that some people drift away from God. The New Testament refers to

1 Quoted by Ted Olsen, “Defining Deconstruction,” *Christianity Today*, March 2022, p. 7.

2 <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/>

those who have “suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith” (1 Timothy 1:19 NIV). We see that all too often today.

Some people adopt a faith in childhood and never stray. Others find a more vital faith as they grow. Some wander for a season and return to a previous commitment. Others give up their faith for something entirely different. In a 2011 piece titled “Faith in Flux,” Pew reported that “about half of American adults have changed religious affiliation at least once during their lives. Most people who change their religion leave their childhood faith before age 24, and many of those who change religion do so more than once.”<sup>3</sup> The turbulence of the past decade—including two-plus years of a worldwide pandemic—has done nothing to ease that faith fluctuation.

*The State of the Bible* research team wanted to learn more about the “changing faith” of Americans—more specifically, how people’s religious identity had changed since their childhood. We asked: *Is your religious faith the same as your mother’s when you were 10 years old?* The data received forms a baseline for further exploration of the topic in future surveys.

## FAITH OF OUR MOTHERS

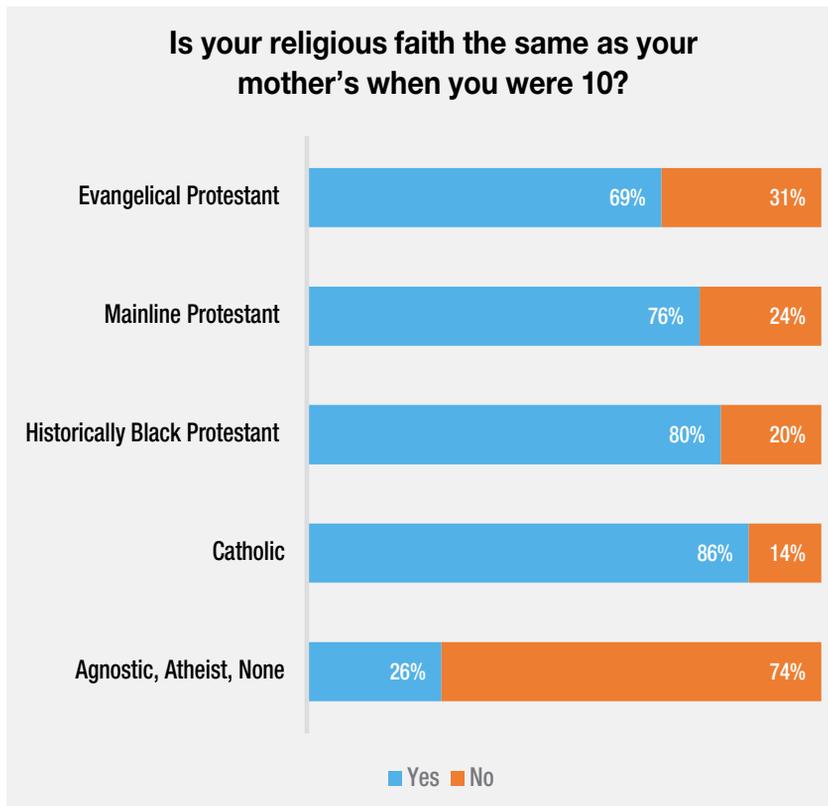
Five in eight Americans (63%) say their religious faith is the same as their mother’s was when they were ten years old. Much can be said about the groups that showed more change or less, but the major finding is that a clear majority of Americans still follow “the faith of their mothers.” The data verify the importance of parental guidance

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3 Ibid.

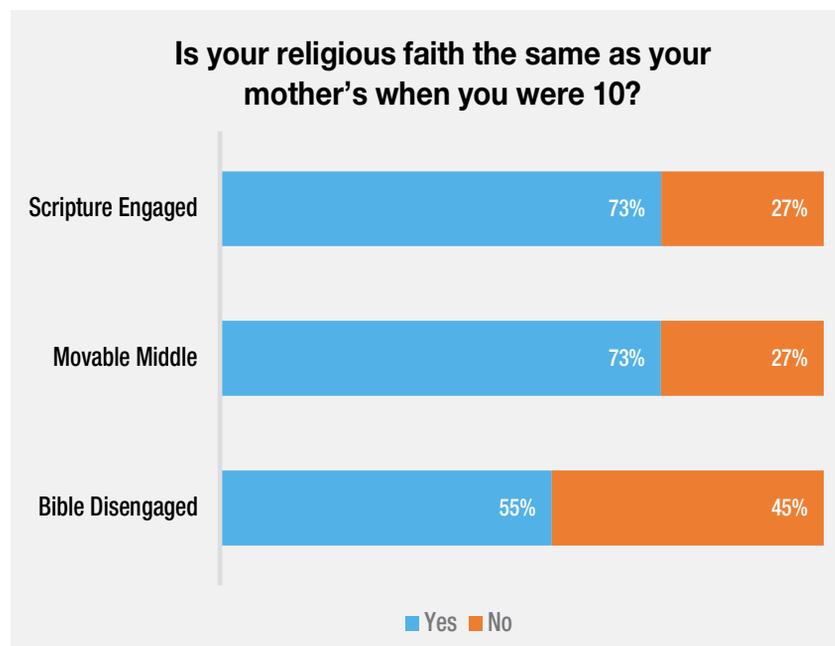
in spiritual development. “Teach children how they should live, and they will remember it all their life” (Proverbs 22:6 GNT).

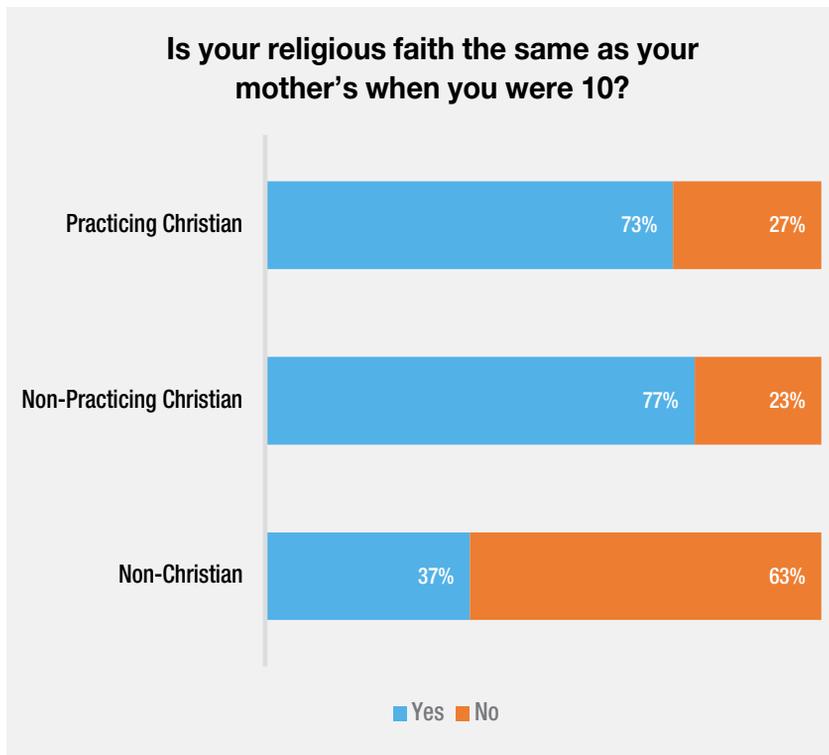
A look at the *current* religious identity of the respondents reveals further details about whose faith has changed from their childhood influences. Those who are now Catholic (14%) or in Historically Black Protestant denominations (20%) showed the least amount of change. Evangelical Protestants are the Christian group with the highest level of change (31%). Yet the non-religious group, those who are now Agnostic-Atheist-None (40%), exceeded all other groups in changing from the faith of their mothers.



Note that the survey did not ask what the mother’s faith was. The survey identifies the current religious identity of respondents, but not their starting point. Four in ten who are currently in the Agnostic-Atheist-None group changed from *something* else. Since they’re now non-religious, it might be assumed that they came from religious homes. The three in ten Evangelical Protestants who indicated change from their mother’s faith may have come from any other religious tradition, or none at all.

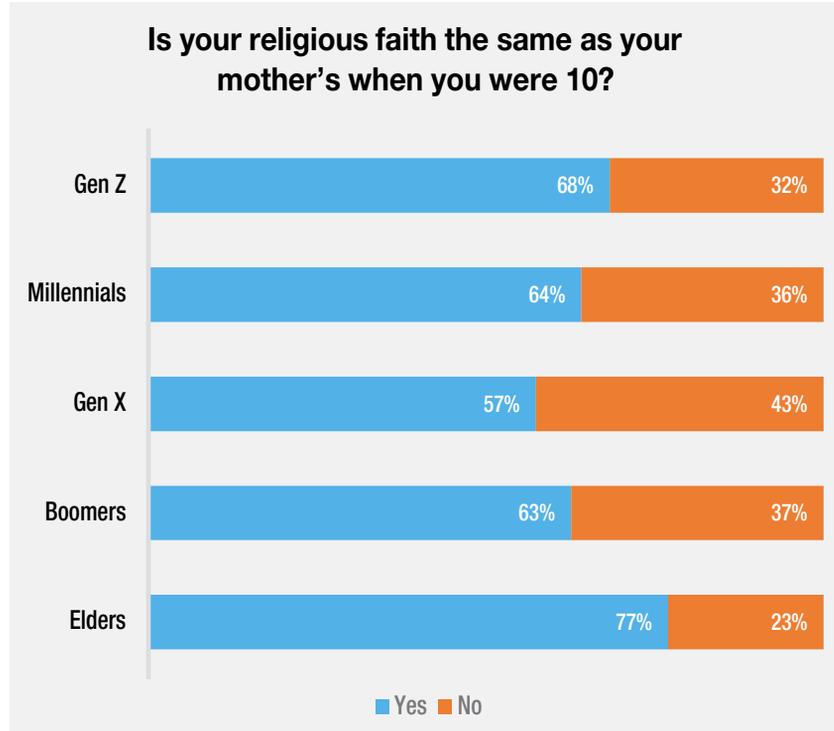
This question, debuting in 2022, provided a sliver of helpful information about the changing faith of Americans, but we plan to build on it in future polls. What *was* the faith of the mother, or the father? How deep was this faith? When did the person make a change from that faith, if they did? We feel this is just the beginning of a compelling story.





Cross-referencing the “faith of your mother” question with Scripture Engagement suggests that more people have moved out of Bible-based religion than into it. The same is true with Practicing Christian status. Nearly half of the Bible Disengaged (45%) and well over half of Non-Christians (63%) say their faith has changed, while the numbers for the Scripture Engaged and Practicing Christians are roughly one in four (both 27%).

The two middle groups—Movable Middle and Non-Practicing Christian—show a very low amount of change from the mother’s faith. This might reflect a continuing commitment to a cultural faith, in which they identify as Christians but seldom attend church



and respect the Bible but seldom read it. They have maintained a religious *identity* from their upbringing, but have not adopted the *practices* of their faith.

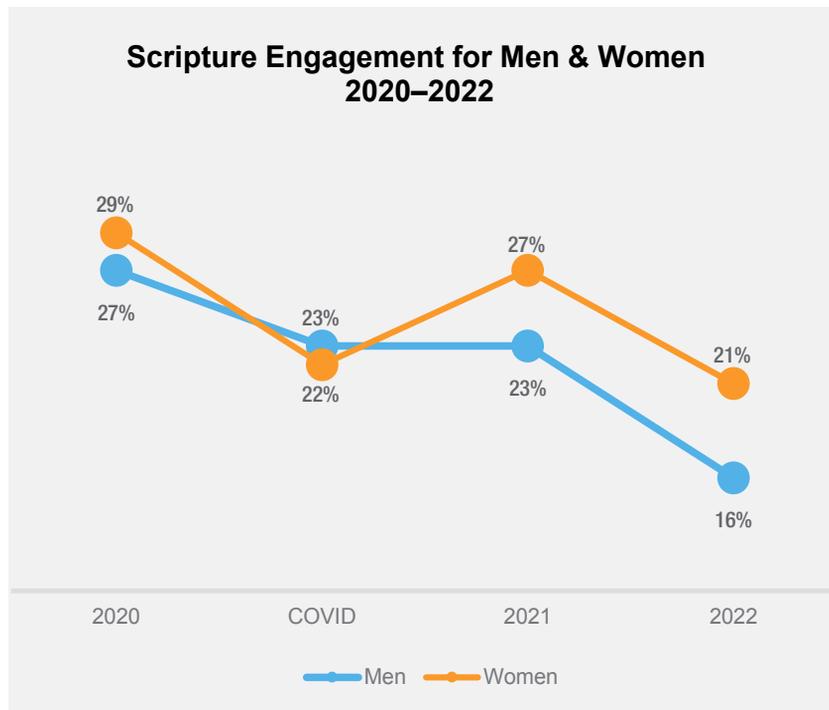
The age group most likely to indicate change from their mother's faith was Generation X (43%), those born 1965–1980. Keep in mind that this could mean a change *into* religious faith or *out of* it, or a switch from one religion to another. Also, since the question references “when you were ten years old,” it might be helpful to consider the church landscape of 1975–1990.

That period saw great change in religion, social morality, and family life. The “do your own thing” philosophy of the late 1960s had found

its way into child-rearing by that time, and feminism was changing the way many people saw vocation and motherhood. Many churches were becoming politicized, and megachurches were beginning to develop. These and other factors may have created a fluctuating family faith that later led the Gen Xers in our survey to choose their own way.

## SPEAKING OF MOMS

*State of the Bible* results show different levels of Scripture engagement for men and women, with further differences when dependent children are in the home. What's more, as we examine trends from the last four surveys, very different stories emerge for these groups.

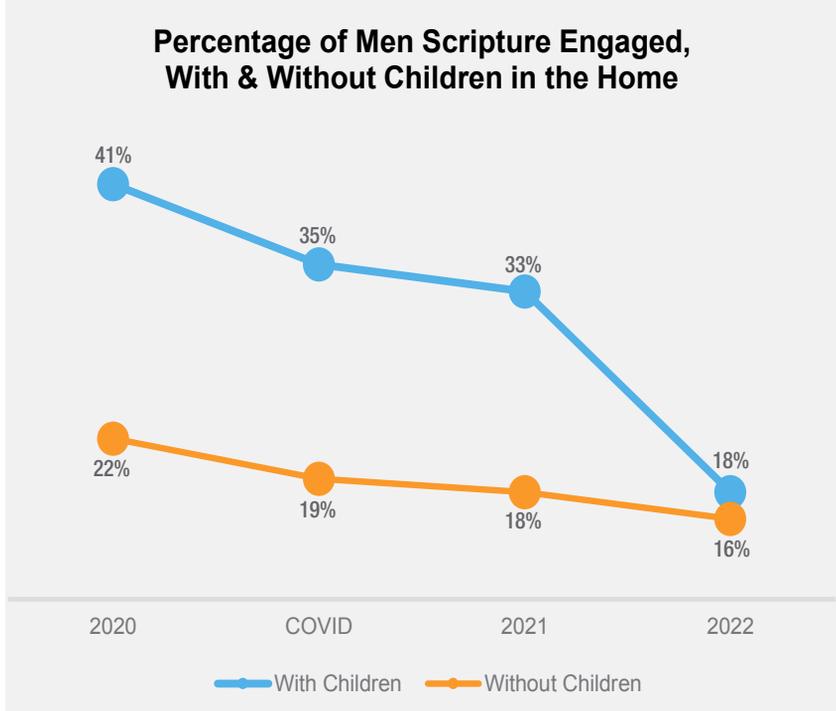


Currently, women (21%) are more Scripture Engaged than men (16%). This has been the case in the annual survey for the last few years, and the gap has widened slightly. An exception occurred with the extra survey conducted in June 2020, after the pandemic had started to change the lives of Americans. *State of the Bible 2020* presented data from a January survey, taken before COVID was an issue in the U.S., and augmented it with a special COVID-edition survey conducted in June. This comparison provided important insight on how the pandemic affected the religious lives of Americans.

The June (COVID) data showed men (23%) slightly ahead of women (22%) in Scripture engagement, but the next two surveys, in 2021 and 2022, returned to the previous pattern, with women outpacing men by a few points. As a whole the three surveys from January 2020, 2021, and 2022 reveal a steady decline. The mid-2020 “COVID poll” was an outlier.

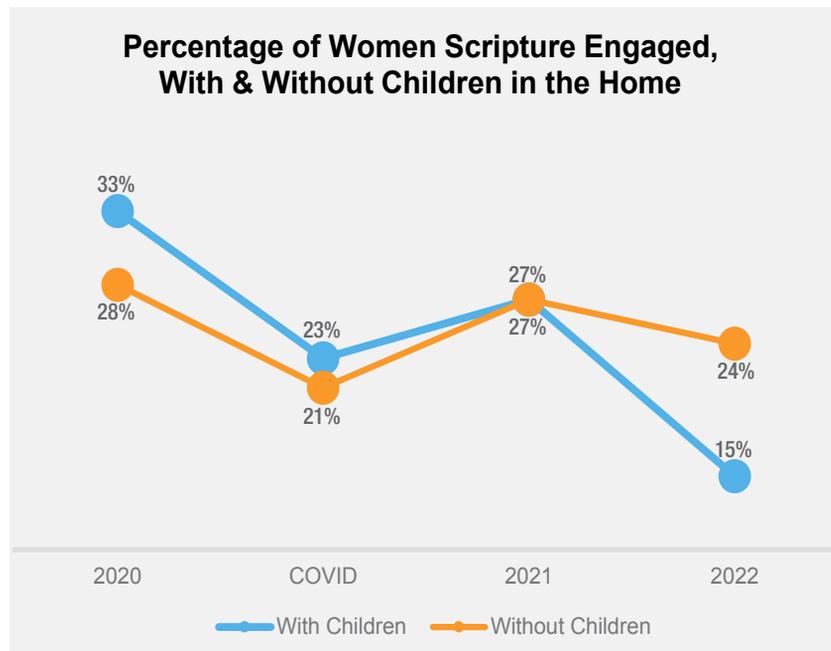
The reasons for this temporary shift are unclear. The pandemic disrupted many lives, affecting men and women alike, but at the outset, the Scripture engagement of women plummeted to three-quarters of what it was before, while men experienced a very mild decline. Did COVID create more challenges for women than for men? Did the burdens of teaching children at home or caring for other loved ones fall unequally on women?

While the survey did not specifically identify parents, it did ask whether there were “dependent children under 18 in the home.” This allowed a deeper look at moms and dads. How did the data change for men and women when there were children in the household?



Before the pandemic, children made a huge difference in men’s Scripture engagement. Among men with children in the household, 44 percent were Scripture Engaged, compared to only 15 percent of men who had no children at home. Once COVID hit, the Scripture engagement level for men with children dropped drastically, to a point nearly matching the low level of men without children. What could have caused this drop? Were there disruptions in men’s schedules or in family Bible reading patterns that men did not make up for?

The corresponding story for women is more complex, but just as intriguing. Pre-pandemic numbers show, once again, that Scripture engagement blossoms when there are children in the home. Women



with children (33%) were more likely to be Scripture Engaged than those without (28%). When COVID hit, both numbers decreased (to 23% and 21%). By January, 2021, both groups had bounced back (both to 27%), perhaps adapting to what we were all calling “the new normal.” But this past year, as the pandemic dragged on, both groups saw another decline in Scripture engagement. For women without children, the drop was minor (three points down, to 24%), but it seems that Scripture Engagement among moms with children in the home fell off a cliff. At one point, women with children in the home were highly engaged with the Bible, but after nearly two years of coping with COVID, their engagement has plummeted to 15 percent.

In the introduction to this report, we mentioned the disruption caused by the pandemic. Perhaps those with children in the home

# A CLOSER LOOK AT MOMS

**15%** Scripture Engaged

**34%** Movable Middle

**41%** Read at least 3x/year

**23%** Read at least once/week

**19%** Practicing Christians

**Stress: HIGH**

**Human Flourishing: AVERAGE**

Data for women with children under 18 in the household

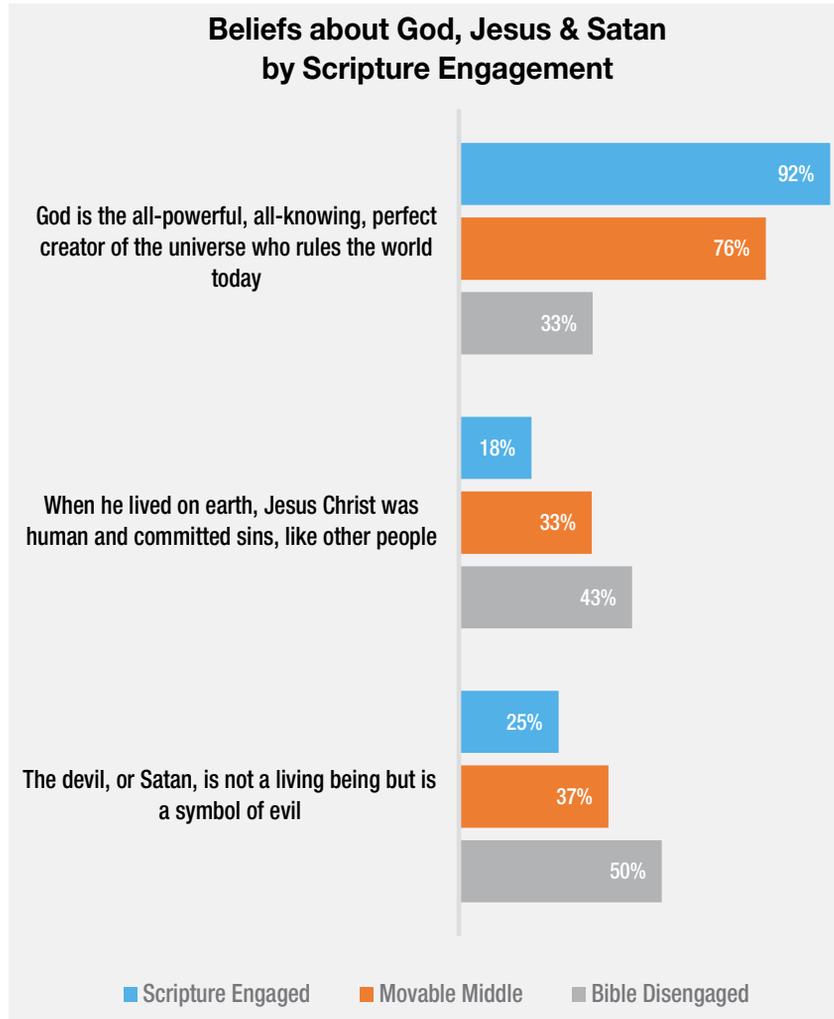


got hit the hardest. Schedules shifted. Expectations changed. Play dates were canceled. Many parents were suddenly working from home. Many children were “going to school” online. Churches closed. Through it all, parents have had to become teachers, playmates, nurses, and pastors. Massive adjustments had to be made in many areas of life, including Bible reading and spiritual discussion. But it takes time and energy to rebuild family traditions.

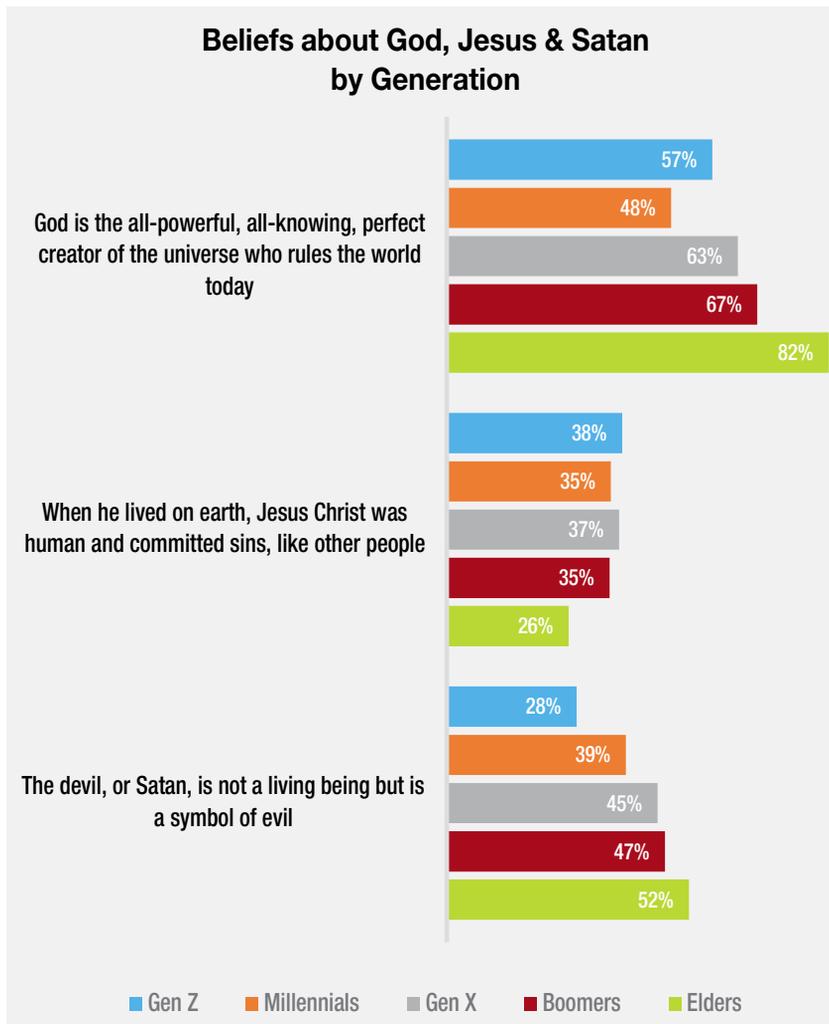
Perhaps this is the ongoing legacy of a devastating disease.

## CHANGING BELIEFS

For several years, *State of the Bible* has asked people about certain points of basic biblical theology. Apart from practices of Bible reading or church attendance, this indicates something about their thinking. To what extent does the Bible shape their ideas about spiritual things?



As one might guess, Scripture Engaged people answer these questions in traditionally biblical ways. More than nine in ten (92%) agree that “God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today.” Three-quarters (76%) of those in the Movable Middle affirm this, along with only one-third (33%) of the Bible Disengaged.



On the chart we can see a similar pattern of (dis)agreement with statements about Jesus and the devil that diverge from traditional biblical teaching.

Given the overall drop in Scripture Engagement, it's surprising that these questions show an increase in support of biblical teaching. On the question about God, six in ten now agree, the highest level of the past four years. There is also a major decrease in agreement with the *non*-biblical statements about Jesus and the devil.

## NON-PRACTICING CHRISTIANS

In the *State of the Bible* report, Practicing Christians are defined as those who identify as Protestants or Catholics, consider their faith very important to them, and attend religious services at least once a month. Non-Practicing Christians identify as Christians but fall short in at least one of those other areas, the importance of faith or church attendance.<sup>4</sup>

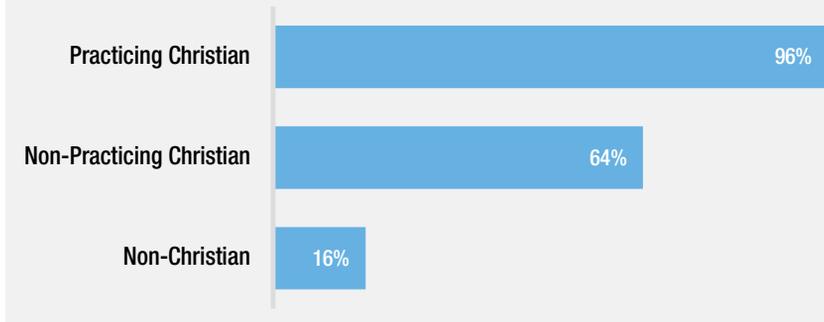
By this definition, nearly half of all American adults (46%)—120 million of them—qualify as Non-Practicing Christians. You might consider them the “sleeping giant” of the church. If only they would get excited about their faith, engage with Scripture, and make connections with other believers, we might see phenomenal growth.

What do we know about this group?

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<sup>4</sup> See “Appendix 2: Definitions” on page 219.

**I have made a personal commitment to Christ that is still important today.**



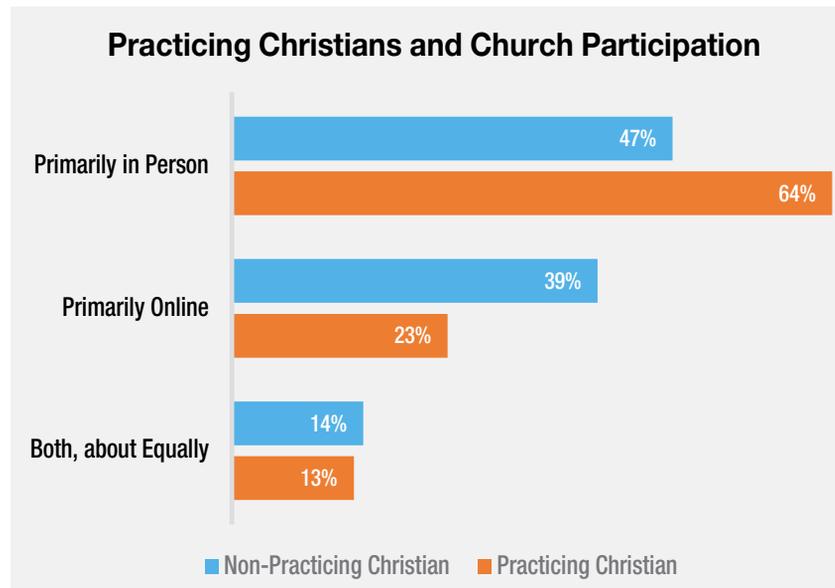
- Nearly two-thirds of them (64%) say they have “made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important” in their lives.
- Every major Christian group has them. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of those who identify as Catholics are Non-Practicing. But the numbers for Mainline Protestants (69%), Historically Black Protestants (67%), and Evangelicals (60%) aren’t much lower.
- While most are not Bible Users (63%), three-eighths of them are (37%), meaning that they read the Bible on their own at least three times a year.
- While a majority (54%) are Bible Disengaged, three-eighths of them (38%) are in the Movable Middle. A small portion (8%) are Scripture Engaged, actively connected with their faith, but not with a church.
- Since it’s part of the definition, there’s no surprise that seven in ten of them consider themselves “unchurched,” but the rest (30%) say they’ve attended in the last six months.

Here's a statistic that may prove significant in the next few years. When Non-Practicing Christians do attend church, they are far more likely than Practicing Christians to attend an online service. Practicing Christians show more than a 2-to-1 preference for in-person services, but Non-Practicing Christians are nearly as likely to attend online as in person.

Some have debated the relative merits of online and in-person church services. This data won't settle anything, but it does raise the idea that online services might prove an effective outreach to Non-Practicing Christians who have been strangers to the church.

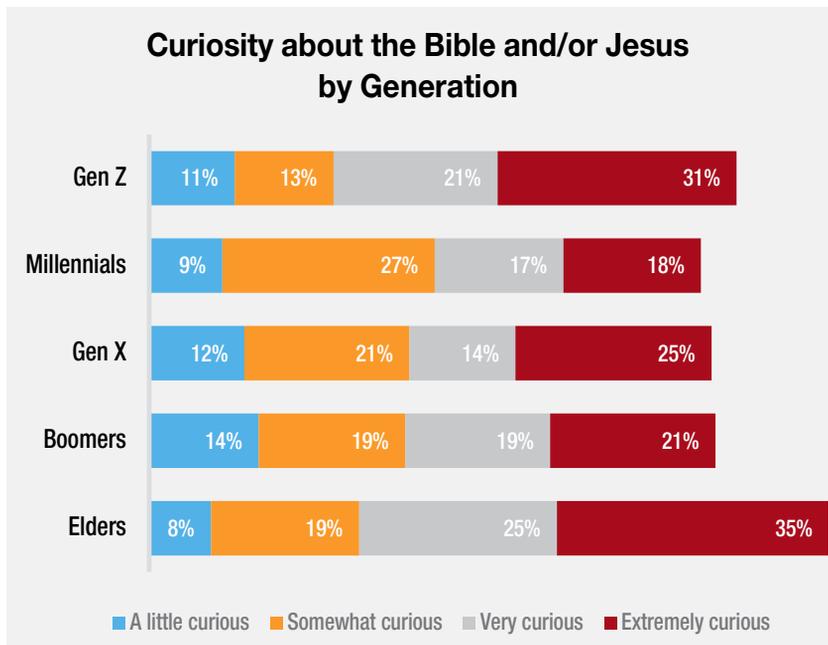
## CURIOSITY

Curiosity has been called “the most underrated tool of persuasion.” If that's true, then Christians are well-positioned to share God's message with their neighbors, because curiosity is trending higher.



- *Are you curious to know more about who Jesus Christ is?*
- *Are you curious about what the Bible says?*

*State of the Bible* has asked these questions for several years. Increasingly, people are saying yes. This curiosity is not confined to the Scripture Engaged or to Practicing Christians. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the Bible Disengaged are curious, a substantial rise from last year. Even Non-Christians (52%) are curious.



It cuts across all generations, with Gen Z (75%) exceeding the next few older generations. The Elder generation leads all age groups at 87 percent curiosity. About a third of the oldest and youngest generations say they're "extremely curious" about Jesus and/or the Bible (35% for Elders; 31% for Gen Z).

Perhaps most exciting is that those middle groups, those “sleeping giants”—the Movable Middle (97%) and Non-Practicing Christians (90%)—show such high levels of curiosity. They have some contact with the Bible and the church. They know some things about Jesus. Yet they’re saying they long to know more.

How will churches respond? How will publishers, charities, schools, and creative artists step up to this curiosity?

## CONCLUSION

The landscape of faith in America is changing. While more than sixty percent of Americans essentially say their religious faith is the same as what their mothers modeled for them at age ten, we know that fewer people are engaging with Scripture and fewer are practicing their faith.

The pandemic turned out to be a major change agent, and we’re still experiencing the fallout. Many spiritual practices—in homes and in churches—were disrupted. Can faith-filled traditions be rebuilt? Can new practices emerge to celebrate and deepen faith?

There’s some irony in the fact that people express their curiosity about the Bible and/or Jesus in overwhelming numbers when they’re reading the Bible less and less. It’s crucial for churches, ministries, and practicing Christians to understand the questions that non-practicing Christians have and help them find answers in the Bible. We need to invite them into life-giving relationships centered on biblical faith and vibrant Christian community.

It's easy to assume they can easily satisfy their curiosity with a tap on a cell phone or the turn of a page, if they really wanted to, but maybe they could use our humble, winsome guidance. Perhaps their question for us is the same as the Ethiopian's to Philip: "How can I understand unless someone explains it to me?" (Acts 8:31 GNT).



# NOW THIS

## TIPS, HIGHLIGHTS, INSIGHTS, AND SUGGESTIONS

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- The drop in Scripture Engagement among those with dependent children in the household is alarming. What can the community of faith do to help? Bible materials for personal and family growth might help, but so would free babysitting.
- What would happen if everyone in your church would interview someone they know who's a Non-Practicing Christian and ask about what prevents them from going to church? No scolding or arguing, just listening. Pool your data and see what you can learn about this curious group of outsiders. It might change the church in good ways.
- Christians often convince themselves that no one wants to hear about Jesus. This report says otherwise. But perhaps there's still resistance to the way Jesus is presented. Can we learn to meet the curiosity of our neighbors in a way that's "full of grace, seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6 NIV), pleasant and interesting?
- Pay special attention to the curiosity in Gen Z. In many other areas of *State of the Bible*, the youngest generation is proving to be less connected to Jesus, the Bible, and church. Can their curiosity be met in winsome ways?





# BETTER LIVING THROUGH BIBLE READING

In 1935, DuPont coined the advertising slogan “Better Living Through Chemistry.” The pitch became a prophecy. Over the following decades, chemicals changed many lives for the better, though others were damaged. Another toxic idea kept growing as well: that some product or system could make everything all right.

Now, if you want to live a better life, Google will show you how. Cut carbs from your diet. Or fats. Wake up earlier. Drink more coffee, or less. Take up a hobby. Stop using social media, or use it to get famous. Exercise for twenty minutes a day. Recycle. Get a cat.

Yet there’s a deeper wisdom going back much further than 1935 that shows how our hearts and minds can be transformed. You might pitch it as “Better Living Through Bible Reading,” but it’s far more. Not just words scanned from a page, but truth embedded in the

heart. Not a quick fix, but a steady commitment. We have come to call it Scripture engagement. Those who interact on a regular basis with the God of the Bible see their lives change for the better. Usually not overnight, but over time.

## TAKING THE DARE

Every Sunday, Derek<sup>1</sup> sat beside his girlfriend in church, mentally arguing with the sermon. One week, the pastor issued a challenge: *If you don't know what you believe about Jesus, read the Gospels for yourself.* Behind him, a screen showed the link to a Bible app.

It seemed like a dare, and Derek took it.

He began a journey of Scripture engagement that transformed his life, reading not only the four Gospels but the whole Bible over the next year. “The Bible brought me to salvation,” he says now. “It defined my life. It showed me what my purpose is, what humanity’s purpose is, what sin is.”

Because of the Bible, Derek says, he gained the motivation to kick a drug habit. He pursued healthier relationships. He joined several Bible study groups, and now leads some of them. “I’m finding a whole new world through the Word.”

Is this an isolated case? Hardly. You may know someone like Derek, a troubled soul who met Jesus through the Bible and experienced dramatic life change. For many others it’s not so dramatic, yet the

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<sup>1</sup> The name has been changed to protect his privacy.

Bible provides a groundwork on which they build healthy, productive lives. The Bible stimulates spiritual growth, often leads to positive social interaction with a church community, and promotes personal disciplines of prayer and acts of kindness. All of this helps people live better.

We have abundant anecdotal evidence of this in the many Dereks we have encountered. But are there data to support this idea? Does Scripture engagement lead to better living, and can we prove it?

## HUMAN FLOURISHING

Health professionals generally focus on people's problems—a sickness, a syndrome, a disorder. Doctors have developed great skill in understanding our ills. But how much do the experts know about our well-being?

That was the logic behind the Human Flourishing Index developed at Harvard University's T. H. Chan School of Public Health beginning in 2017. Researchers focused on six areas of human life:

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

The first five categories—excluding the financial—are combined to attain the Human Flourishing Index score on a scale of 1 to 10. When

financial stability is added to the mix, a separate Secure Flourishing score is created.

In the last few years, *State of the Bible* surveys have incorporated Harvard's Human Flourishing questions. The resulting scores tell a fascinating story.

The first bar in each cluster reflects the January 2020 survey, before the pandemic hit the U.S. The second comes from the extra survey taken that June, amid lockdowns and hospitalizations, as the pandemic raged. As you might expect, in that turbulent time Flourishing scores tumbled in every domain.

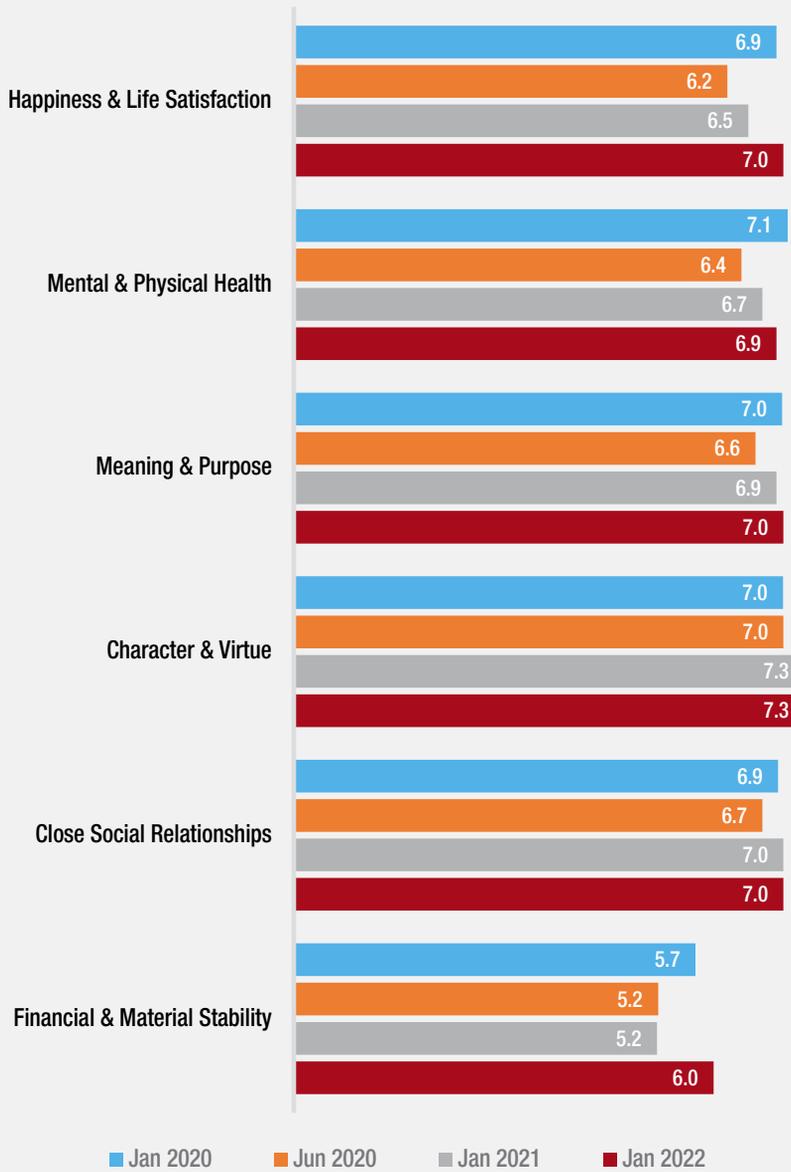
Things began to bounce back by January 2021. Treatments and vaccines were becoming available; there was light at the end of the tunnel. Perhaps people were also adapting to what we were calling "the new normal."

The bounce-back continued in the latest poll, taken in January 2022. In every category, scores have returned to pre-pandemic levels or exceeded them.

Financial and Material Stability had the greatest drop in the mid-2020 (pandemic) survey, and it was a slow climb out of that hole, but the latest numbers actually show a slight increase from the pre-pandemic poll. The questions asked in this domain relate to worrying about meeting expenses or about "safety, food, or housing." It's not a measure of household income but of confidence. Do people feel

When people engage with Scripture, they flourish at a higher level.

### Flourishing Index by Domains 2020-2022



Note: Human Flourishing scale ranges from 0–10.

they have what they need? It seems that the challenges of the past two years made Americans worry for a time but then convinced them that they could manage.

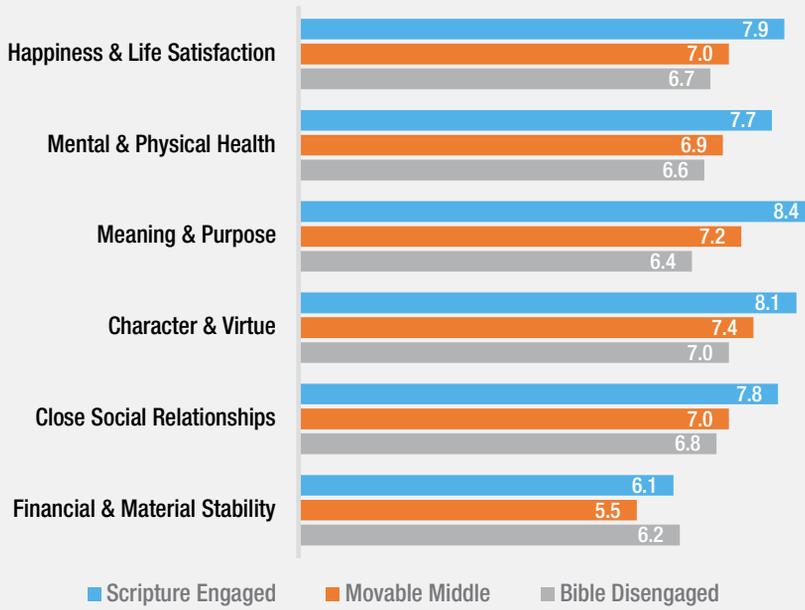
The Character and Virtue domain saw no drop in the June 2020 pandemic poll, but climbed in 2021 and remained strong this year. One of the questions here concerned the ability “to give up some happiness now for greater happiness later.” The events of the last two years have put that ability to the test, and these data suggest that some people have a sense that their character has grown.

## BIBLE ENGAGEMENT AND FLOURISHING

Students of the Bible shouldn't be surprised by these findings. The principle of character growth through hardship resounds through Scripture. “For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow” (James 1:3 NLT). Jesus also promoted a particular sense of material stability when he said, “Do not be worried about the food and drink you need in order to stay alive, or about clothes for your body. After all, isn't life worth more than food?” (Matthew 6:25 GNT). In fact, biblical principles connect well with a number of the Human Flourishing domains.

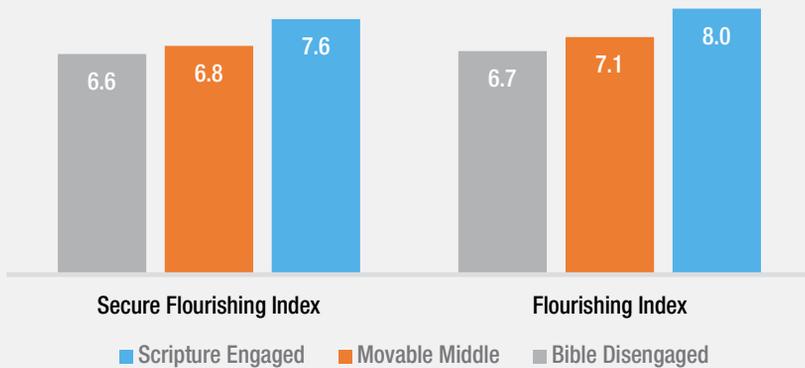
That raises a question: *Does Bible engagement make any difference in Human Flourishing?* Are there higher scores among those who read Scripture regularly and let it deeply affect their lives? Yes. Substantially higher.

### Human Flourishing Domains by Scripture Engagement



Note: Human Flourishing scale ranges from 0–10.

### Human Flourishing Indexes by Scripture Engagement



Note: Human Flourishing scale ranges from 0–10.

Scripture Engaged people scored 19 percent higher than the Bible Disengaged on the five-domain Human Flourishing Index. In every one of those five areas, the scores of the Scripture Engaged significantly exceeded those of the Bible Disengaged and the Movable Middle.

The margin was greatest in the Meaning and Purpose domain. The only area where the Scripture Engaged did not score highest was in Financial and Material Stability. This suggests that they have the same money problems as everyone else, but their interaction with the Bible helps them develop satisfying relationships, a growing character, general happiness, healthy habits, and above all a sense of meaning and purpose.

The first Psalm describes the life of a person who finds delight in the teachings of Scripture, meditating on the Scriptures day and night. “That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers” (Psalm 1:2–3 NIV).

For centuries, Christian leaders have been challenging people to claim this as a promise. Engagement with God’s Word leads to a better life—fruitful, prosperous, flourishing. The findings of *State of the Bible 2022* support that.

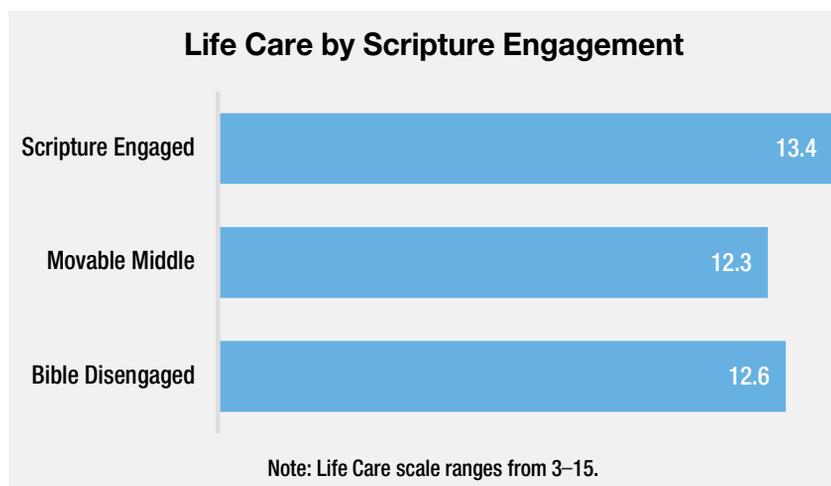
## LIFE CARE

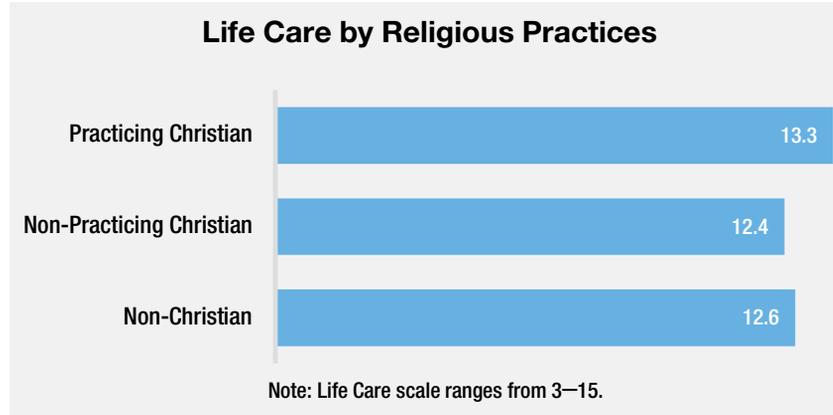
This year’s survey introduced a new question about how people choose to live. The results provide more insight into the effect of the Bible on well-being.

*How important is it for you to practice the following life disciplines?*

- Living a healthy lifestyle
- Caring for my mental and emotional health.
- Practicing wise money management

Respondents rated each item on a scale of 1 to 5. Combining these three ratings, we develop a “Life Care” score from 3 to 15. Since none of the responses are controversial, it’s no surprise that the average Life Care score was above 12. Pretty much everyone seems to approve of these three items. But a significantly higher score could indicate a greater level of commitment to practicing these life disciplines. That’s just what we found when we examined the scores of the Scripture Engaged and Practicing Christians.





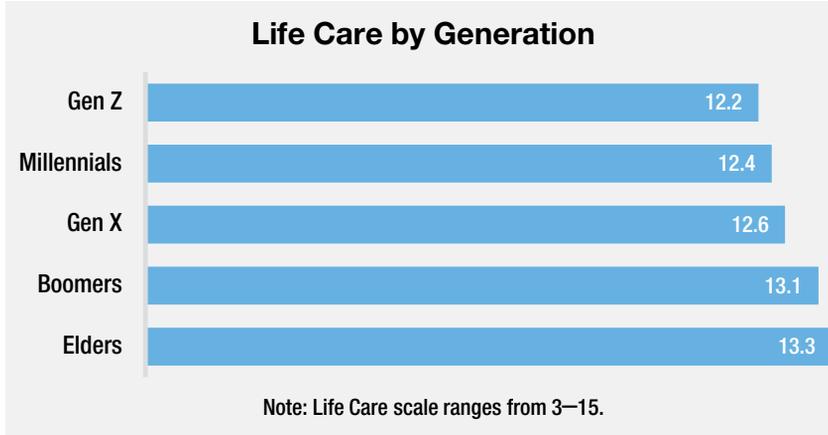
Keep in mind that all these groups averaged a score of at least 12—equivalent to rating each item 4 out of 5. We see a pattern emerging. The middle groups—Movable Middle and Non-Practicing Christian—score lowest, even lower than those who are Disengaged or Non-Christian.

## GENERATIONS AND LIFE CARE

The Life Care rating also revealed clear variations when the respondents' age came into play.

Scripture Engaged people consider it important to develop healthy habits.

As people age, do they commit themselves more to healthy choices, physically, emotionally, mentally, and financially? Do older folks rue the choices made in their misspent youth, or are they just more focused on their health in the years they have left? Do younger folks have any finances to plan? Do they take their physical health for granted?



Certainly, each case is different, but the data show a clear progression: each older generation considers these Life Care issues more important.

## STRESS

“Americans remain in limbo between lives once lived and whatever the post-pandemic future holds,” reported the American Psychological Association last October. Despite some growing optimism about the future, “day-to-day struggles are overwhelming many. Prolonged effects of stress and unhealthy behavior changes are common. Daily tasks and decision-making have become more difficult during the pandemic, particularly for younger adults and parents. As each day can bring a new set of decisions about safety, security, growth, travel, work and other life requirements, people in the U.S. seem to be increasingly wracked with uncertainty.”<sup>2</sup>

2 Stress in America 2021 - apa.org. (n.d.). Retrieved May 12, 2022, from <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2021/decision-making-october-2021.pdf>

That was published three months before the latest *State of the Bible* survey was conducted, one month before the Omicron variant surfaced, about the time that economic inflation in the U.S. began to rise. Our stressors may have changed, but Americans are still experiencing significant levels of stress.

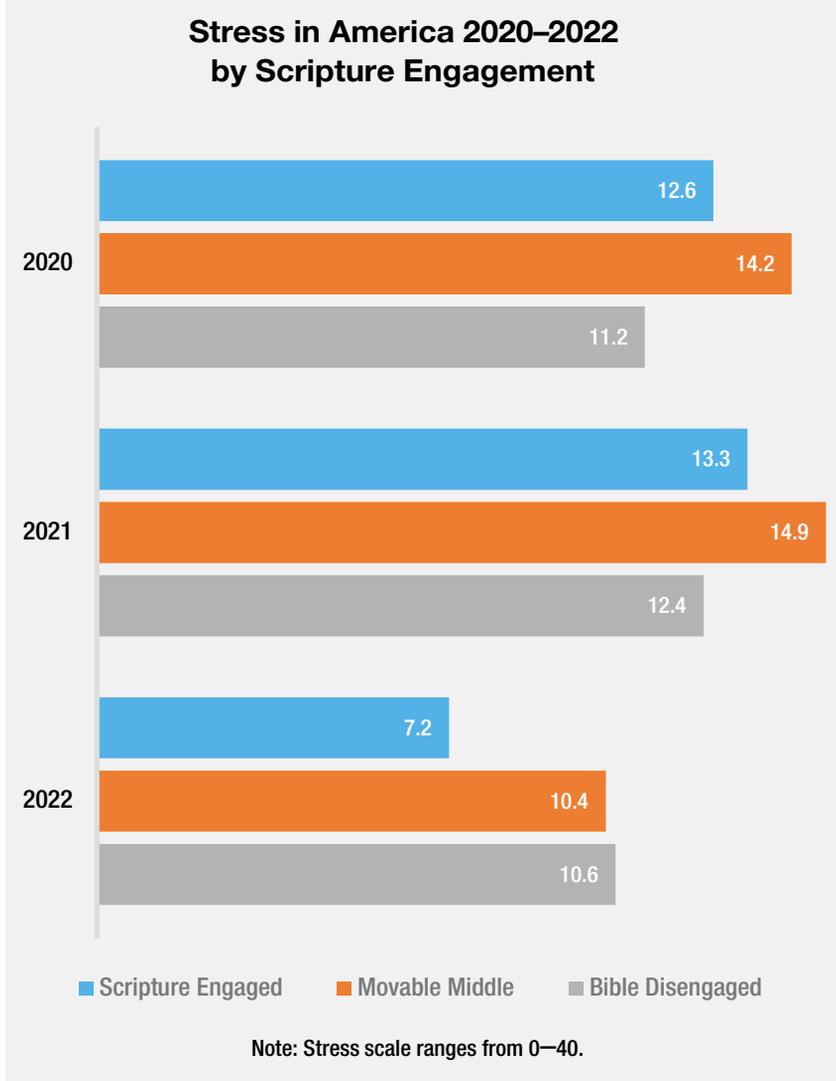
As we reported in *State of the Bible 2021*, at that time Scripture Engaged people were *more* stressed than others, especially if they were infected with COVID or feared they might be. The 2022 data tell a different story.

Scripture Engaged people are now feeling less stress than others do.

Stress scores increased for all three groups between June 2020 and January 2021, and went down in 2022 for all groups. But in those first two surveys of the COVID era, the Scripture Engaged scored *higher* in stress than the Bible Disengaged. Yet the figures for 2022 show a major decrease in stress for the Scripture Engaged, far beyond the decrease seen in the other groups.

The Scripture Engaged now report 30 percent *less* stress than the Bible Disengaged or those in the Movable Middle.

“Do not be anxious about anything,” the Bible says, “but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6 NIV). Based on that and a hundred other verses that tell us to reject fear and worry and to put our trust in God, we might expect lower stress levels from people who spend a lot of time with Scripture. This year’s statistics fall in line with expectations. But why were the Scripture Engaged so stressed in the last two years?



Here’s one possibility. Scripture Engaged people attend church frequently (82% at least monthly, 69% weekly), but many churches were closed during that first year of COVID. This deprived churchgoers of a major support system, causing them extra stress. Even if they

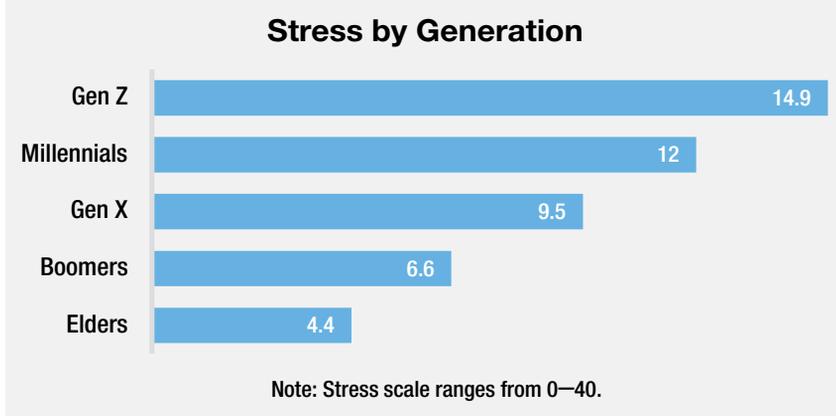
viewed a church service online, they would likely be missing out on activities and relationships that would normally help them deal with their stress. We believe this may have jolted some out of their previous Scripture engagement habits (see page xv). But even for those who remained Scripture Engaged, it would have heightened stress, as seen in the June 2020 and January 2021 surveys. When churches reopened, many of them later in 2021, Christians could regather with the community of faith and “carry each other’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2 NIV). This may explain some of the decrease in stress among the Scripture Engaged in the January 2022 survey.

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF STRESS

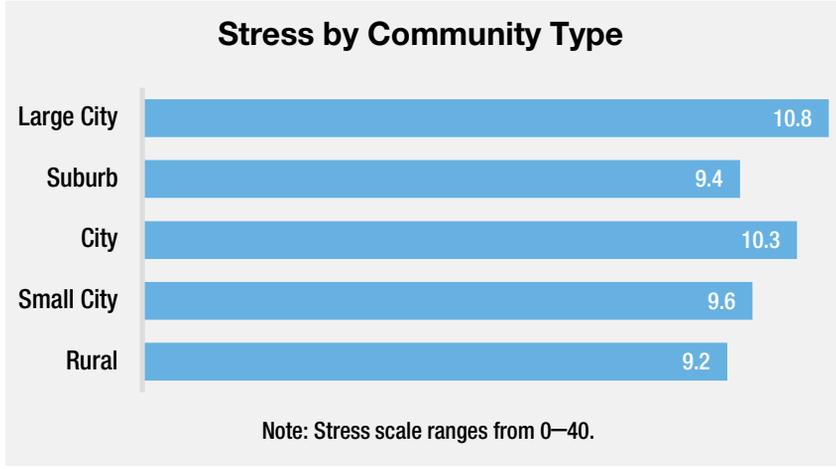
For any church or ministry leader, or anyone interested in carrying the burdens of those in your communities who have experienced the most stress, a few demographics may point to a game plan.

Note the stairstep pattern of this chart—every older generation rates 2–3 points lower on the Stress Scale. Who has the most stress? **Generation Z.**

Emerging adults have always experienced the stress of education, transition, and the initiation of careers and/or families. COVID amplified those stresses—and extended them. While older generations are getting back to work, back to family routines, back to personal disciplines, the youngest group still struggles to make up for two lost years of schooling and/or career-building.

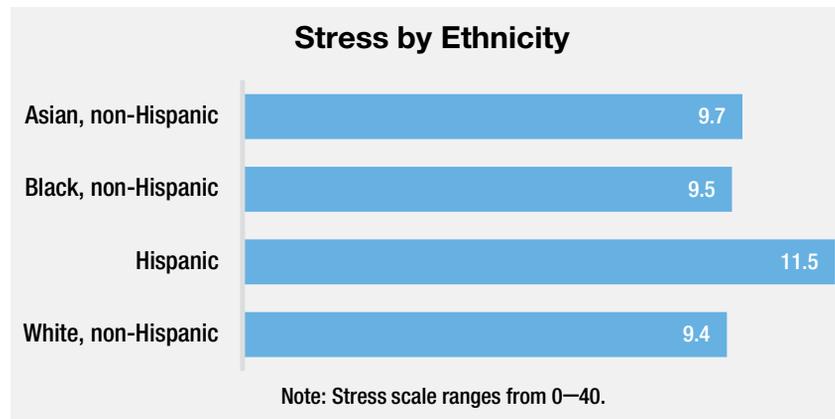


COVID did its worst work in crowds. That is the nature of any contagion, exerting its greatest impact in areas of high population density. But the response to COVID—lockdowns, business shutdowns, avoidance of gatherings—had an immense social impact as well. In the highly connected life of **big cities**, people felt this loss deeply. When normal life revolves around the restaurant, the theater, the market, the office—and all of them close down—stress levels will soar.



People in smaller cities, suburbs, and rural areas had to make similar adjustments, but not at the same level. COVID-related stress clearly followed population density.

Despite the racial tensions of recent years, the stress levels of Asians, Blacks, and non-Hispanic whites are nearly the same. The anomaly is in **the Hispanic community**, with stress scores about 20 percent higher. Public health professionals have been concerned about this for years, well before COVID.



“In addition to exposure to stressors common across ethnicities such as family, finances, work, and health, Latinos in the United States are more likely to experience fear of deportation and ethnic discrimination, which has independently been linked to higher stress levels and worse health,” reports an article posted by the National Institutes of Health.<sup>3</sup>

3 Stryker, S. D., Andrew Yockey, R., Rabin, J., Vaughn, L. M., & Jacquez, F. (2021, May 19). How do we measure stress in Latinos in the United States? A systematic review. *Health equity*. Retrieved May 12, 2022, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8140353/>

Taken together, the various statistics on stress offer a challenge. Scripture engagement is associated with lower stress levels. Particular groups of people—Generation Z, city-dwellers, and Hispanics—have significantly higher stress levels. How can Christian churches, ministries, publishers, and individuals promote Scripture engagement to those groups in a way that acknowledges their stress and points them to the hope and healing found in God’s Word?

## TRAUMA

*Have you ever experienced or witnessed 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?*

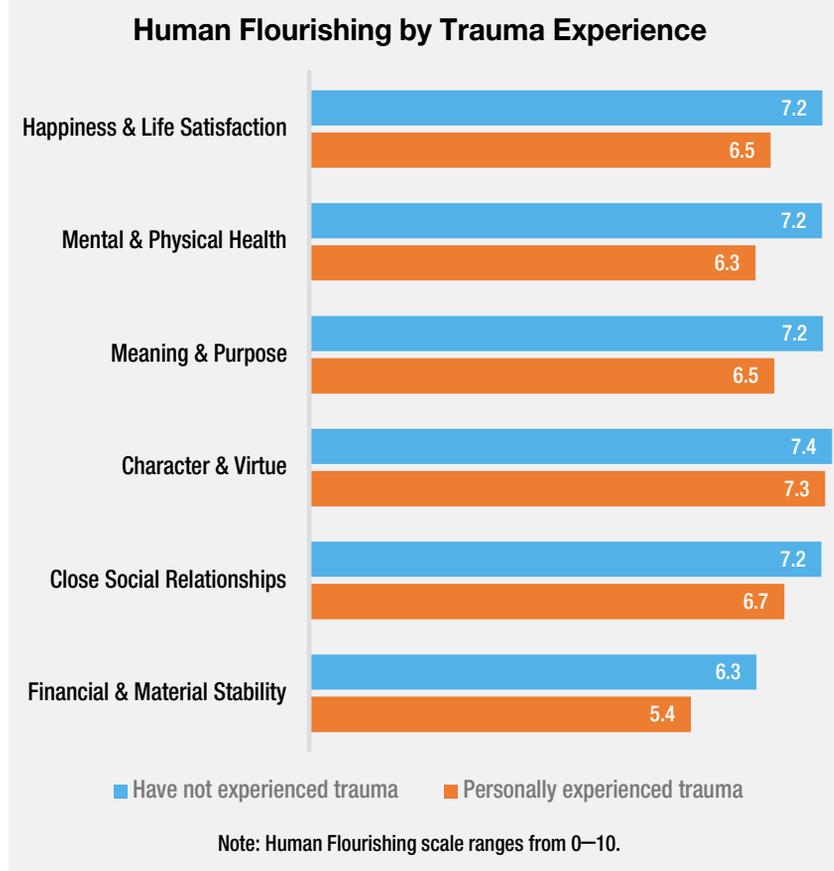
*State of the Bible* has asked that question for the last several years. Follow-up questions specify whether someone witnessed an event that happened to a family member or someone else, or whether they personally experienced trauma themselves.<sup>4</sup>

One out of three people (33%) report experiencing trauma themselves.

When trauma sufferers are Scripture Engaged, they flourish more than trauma-free people who are not Scripture Engaged.

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<sup>4</sup> See the groundbreaking report *Trauma in America* from 2019 at [TraumaInAmerica.Bible](https://traumainAmerica.Bible).



How would that affect their well-being? In those Flourishing domains, would trauma-sufferers score lower because of residual effects of their painful experience? Sadly, yes.

In each of the six domains, those who have experienced trauma score lower than those who haven't. The greatest disparity (a 16% decrease) shows up in the Financial and Material Stability category. The Mental and Physical Health domain also shows a substantial drop (13%) for those who have experienced trauma. The smallest

decrease (1%) occurred with Character and Virtue. Clearly, the experience of trauma has a damaging effect on people's lives, in every aspect of Human Flourishing. Those who have ever suffered trauma and those who have helped others through trauma recognize how serious it is and how long the road of recovery can be.

## CAN THE BIBLE HELP?

The Bible reflects a profound understanding of human suffering. Biblical characters go through painful events, react honestly, and find various degrees of healing. The tradition of lament—seen most often in the Psalms—allows sufferers to express their complaints to God freely. Often a community of faith helps to bring a sufferer through a healing process.

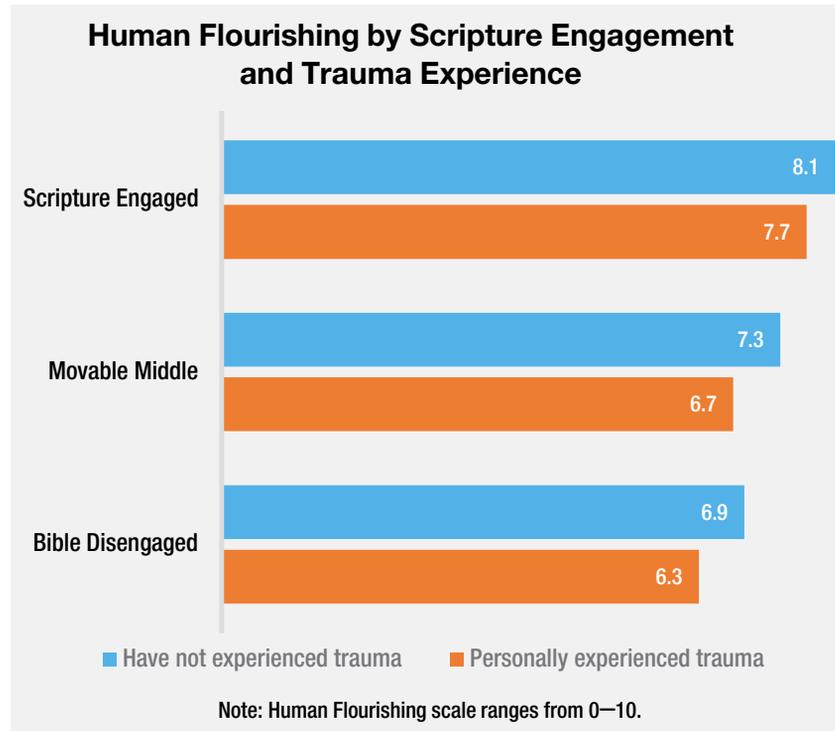
With all of this in mind, we might expect Bible engagement to help people cope with their trauma. That is exactly what the data show.

We've already seen that those who have experienced trauma score lower on the Human Flourishing Scale. We also know that the Scripture Engaged score higher in Human Flourishing. But with those two factors combined, a truly stunning conclusion emerges.

*When trauma sufferers are Scripture Engaged, they flourish more than trauma-free people who are not Scripture Engaged.*

In other words, Scripture Engagement helps Human Flourishing more than trauma hurts it. This finding does not diminish the terrible impact of trauma. Traumatic experiences do great damage in

people's lives, often haunting them for years and hindering their ability to be healthy and happy.



But for all the damage done by trauma, there is restoration and healing to be found as people interact regularly with God by reading his Word and living it out. That's what these numbers show us. There is life beyond the trauma. That's the message of the Bible. As Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33 NIV).

## HOPE

“Hope is the belief that the future will be better and you have the power to make it so.”<sup>5</sup>

So says Chan Hellman of the University of Oklahoma, one of the leading architects of “hope theory,” a field of research emerging in the last three decades or so. *State of the Bible* has employed the research of Hellman and others in its polling.

Hope research goes beyond mere optimism. It includes people’s belief that they can be agents of positive change, as well as their ability to make a plan and apply themselves to it.

The good news is that America’s hope has bounced back after a difficult year. Hope scores dropped in January 2021, but now they are higher than in January of 2020. The country seems ready to move forward.

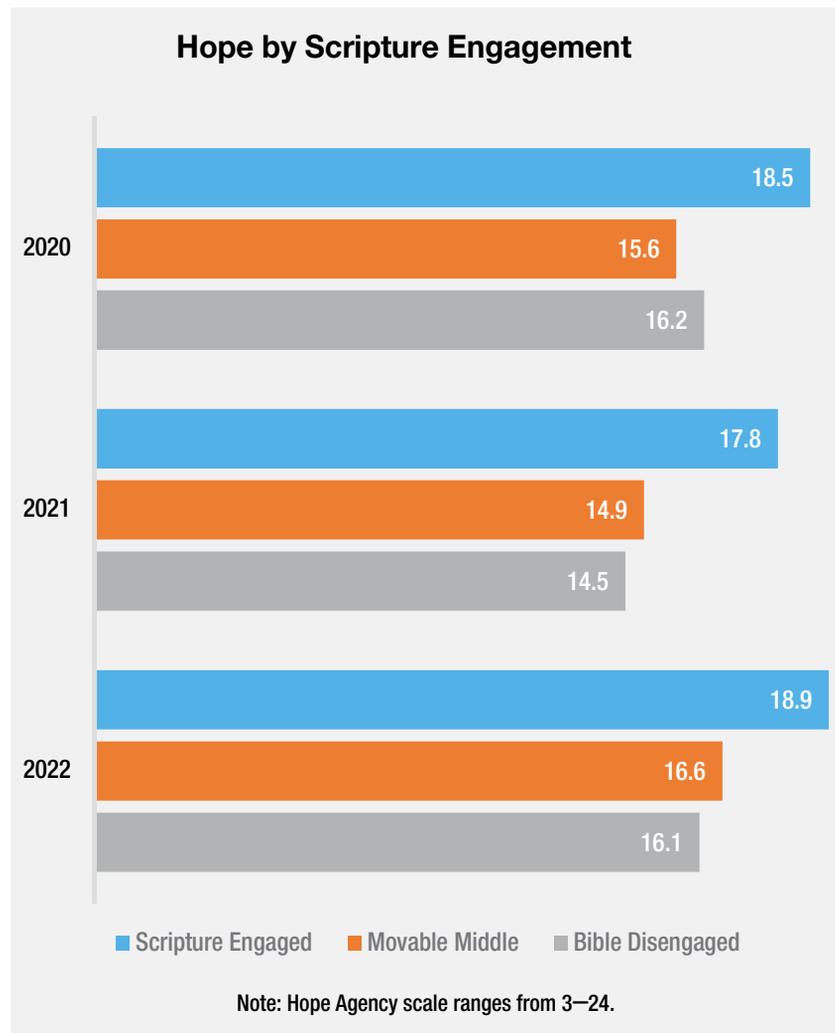
Americans are more hopeful this year, even more so if they’re Scripture Engaged.

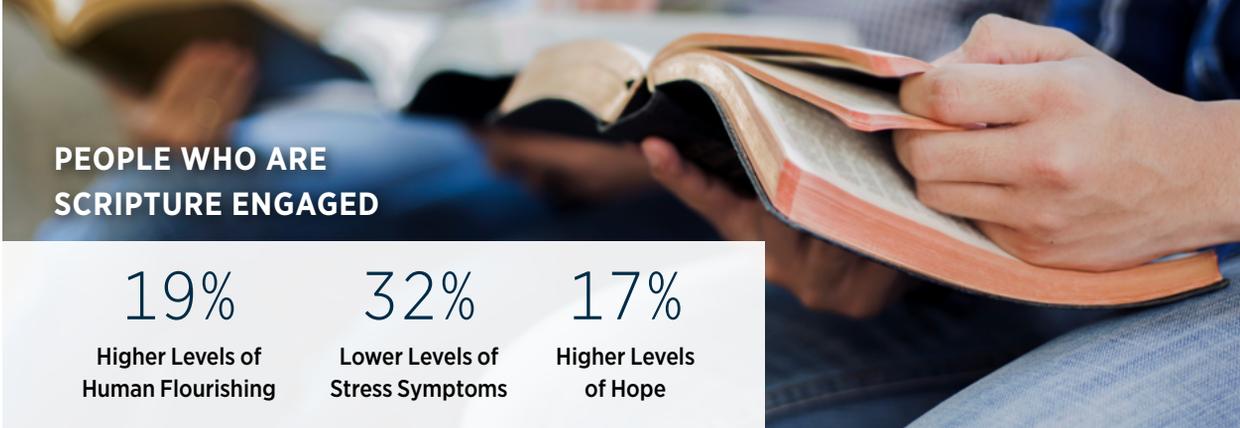
What effect does Scripture Engagement have on Hope?

Over these last three years, Scripture Engaged Americans have been at least 14 to 19 percent higher on the Hope Scale than the Movable Middle or Bible Disengaged. Scores for all three groups dropped in 2021 and surged in 2022. It might be worth noting that the Bible Disengaged lost *more* hope in the mid-pandemic poll than the more engaged groups and haven’t yet regained their 2020 level.

5 Media, S. W. S. (n.d.). Chan Hellman. The University of Oklahoma. Retrieved May 12, 2022, from <https://www.ou.edu/cas/socialwork/faculty-staff/chan-hellman>

The 2021 survey was conducted in the midst of a difficult time, for many a crisis of faith, but it seems those who turned to Scripture were more apt to find hope. The book of Romans mentions how “suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:4 NIV). Perhaps this has played out in the last few years.





**PEOPLE WHO ARE  
SCRIPTURE ENGAGED**

19%

Higher Levels of  
Human Flourishing

32%

Lower Levels of  
Stress Symptoms

17%

Higher Levels  
of Hope



**PEOPLE WHO HAVE ATTENDED CHURCH  
WITHIN THE PAST MONTH**

14%

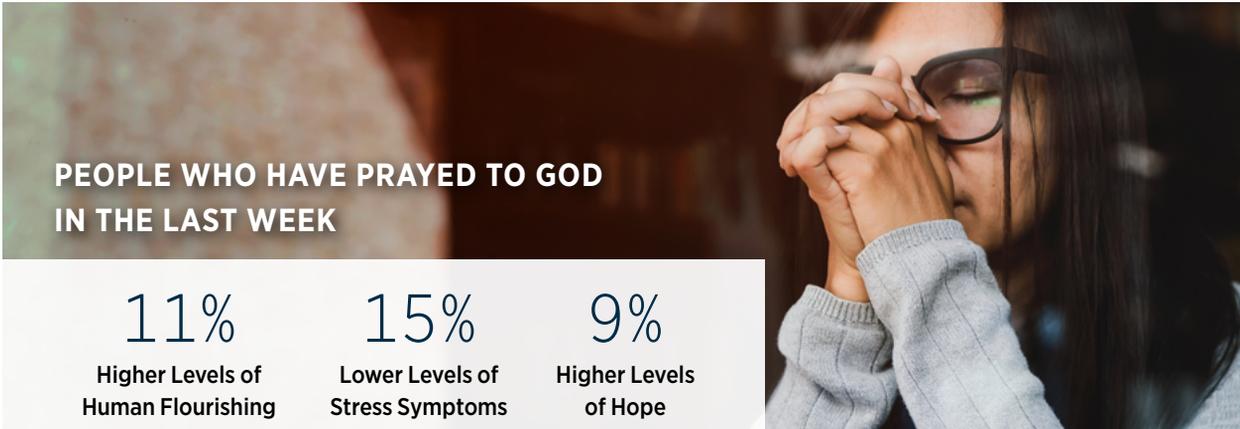
Higher Levels of  
Human Flourishing

26%

Lower Levels of  
Stress Symptoms

13%

Higher Levels  
of Hope



**PEOPLE WHO HAVE PRAYED TO GOD  
IN THE LAST WEEK**

11%

Higher Levels of  
Human Flourishing

15%

Lower Levels of  
Stress Symptoms

9%

Higher Levels  
of Hope

## CONCLUSION

### ABUNDANT LIFE BY THE NUMBERS

In various social sciences, researchers have developed tools to gauge the quality of people's lives. The Human Flourishing Index, the Stress Scale, and Hope Agency are among these tools. The *State of the Bible* team has used these assessment tools in our own study of Scripture Engagement and its effects. The results are clear and consistent.

Scripture Engagement correlates with greater hope, less stress, and more of the five domains of Human Flourishing. It doesn't solve people's financial concerns, but in all these other quality-of-life metrics, the Bible makes a difference.

We saw similar results when we looked at those who attend church or pray to God regularly. By the same scientific measures, people who nurture their relationship with God in these ways are living better lives.

# NOW THIS

## TIPS, HIGHLIGHTS, INSIGHTS, AND SUGGESTIONS

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- Preachers have often promised the “abundant life” for those who get serious about following Jesus. We see some proof of that in the various metrics included in this chapter.
- Creative solutions may be required to minister to highly stressed members of Gen Z, big city populations, and the Hispanic community (see pages 70–73).  
Can we promote Scripture Engagement without creating more stress? Maybe a text message twice a week with a Bible verse and supportive thought?
- The value of Scripture Engagement is clearly seen when cross-tabulated with trauma and Human Flourishing (see pages 75–76). Can we make it part of a long-term restorative plan?
- One essential element in the Hope research: the importance of making a plan and committing to it. For many, that’s also a key element in Scripture engagement.





# A NATION OF NEIGHBORS

“**W**e all came together, neighbors helping neighbors, people providing food, our neighbor Marty providing dinner for everyone, cars driving around to see if we need water, food, money—neighbors, and just everyone coming out.”<sup>1</sup>

In March 2022, a tornado swept through the town of Round Rock, Texas, just north of Austin. Afterward the community rushed to help. The same story has played out in hundreds of towns over the years, “neighbors helping neighbors.” Those who are spared gladly come to the aid of those in need.

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1 Ragas, L. (2022, March 23). Community comes together to pick up the pieces after tornado sweeps through Round Rock. KEYE. Retrieved June 14, 2022, from <https://cbsaustin.com/news/local/community-comes-together-to-pick-up-the-pieces-after-tornado-destroys-city-of-round-rock>. Quote from Rebecca Pena.

If these were the only stories in the news, we'd all feel good about how neighborly our nation is. But other headlines challenge that notion. A disgruntled employee storms his workplace with a weapon. An avowed racist turns a supermarket into a slaughterhouse. Even a casual surf through social media reveals a sharply divided populace, with passions running high.

So how neighborly is our nation? Do we rush to help victims of a natural disaster? Or do we spew hatred against those who disagree with us? Or both? In this moment many are wondering, *What kind of America will we choose to be?*

“Love your neighbor as you love yourself,” said Jesus, taking a law from the Hebrew Scriptures and giving it high priority (Matthew 22:39; Leviticus 19:18 GNT). In his stories and teachings, he defined and refined what it meant to be a neighbor. At one point he took issue with those who assumed that loving your neighbor meant hating your enemy. “Love your enemies,” he said; “do good to those who hate you” (Luke 6:27 GNT). As a model of neighborly behavior, Jesus chose not a Temple priest but a Samaritan, from an often despised ethnic group (Luke 10:29–37).

This *State of the Bible* report examines a wide range of attitudes and actions relating to our life together as a nation. How do we treat one another? Further, how does our faith inform our interaction with our neighbors? More specifically, do Americans who follow Jesus, who engage with the Scriptures, actually put his teaching into practice?

## PROSOCIAL PRIORITIES

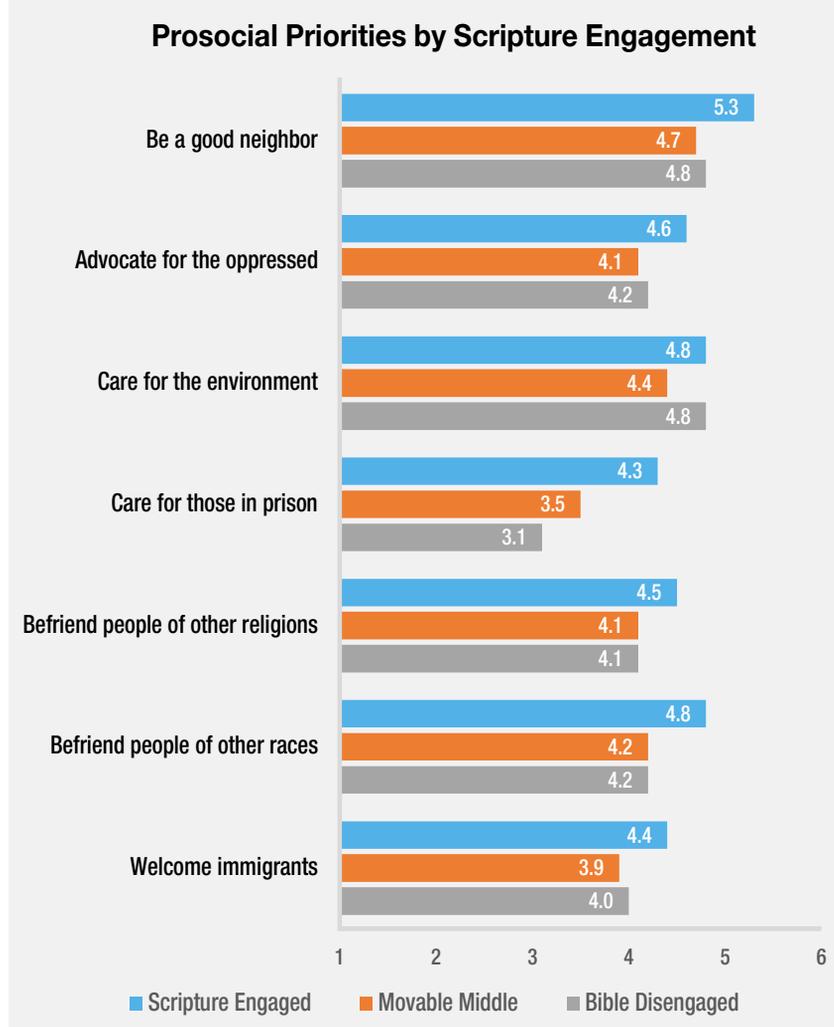
What kind of neighborly behavior do people aspire to? This year's *State of the Bible* survey asked people about the importance of specific “prosocial” actions in their lives. On a six-point scale, they could indicate the level of their agreement or disagreement.

*It is important for me to . . .*

- Welcome immigrants into my community
- Befriend people of other races
- Befriend people of other religions
- Care for those who are in prison
- Care for the environment
- Advocate for those who are oppressed by society
- Be a good neighbor

For a representative cross-section of American adults, being a good neighbor and caring for the environment are the highest rated priorities overall. The questions on prisoners and immigrants have the lowest ratings.

Across the board, the Scripture Engaged assign more importance to these actions than the Movable Middle and the Bible Disengaged do. Only on one question—care for the environment—do the Bible Disengaged pull even with the Scripture Engaged. The difference is greatest on the importance of caring for those in prison.



Controversy swirls around a number of these issues. Some might be considered more political than religious. Yet, though they might disagree on specifics, students of Scripture apparently recognize a biblical call to act on these matters—to welcome, befriend, care, and advocate.

## SIFTING THE DEMOGRAPHICS

The youngest generation in the survey gives higher ratings to caring for those in prison than older respondents do. This is also true on the question of welcoming immigrants.

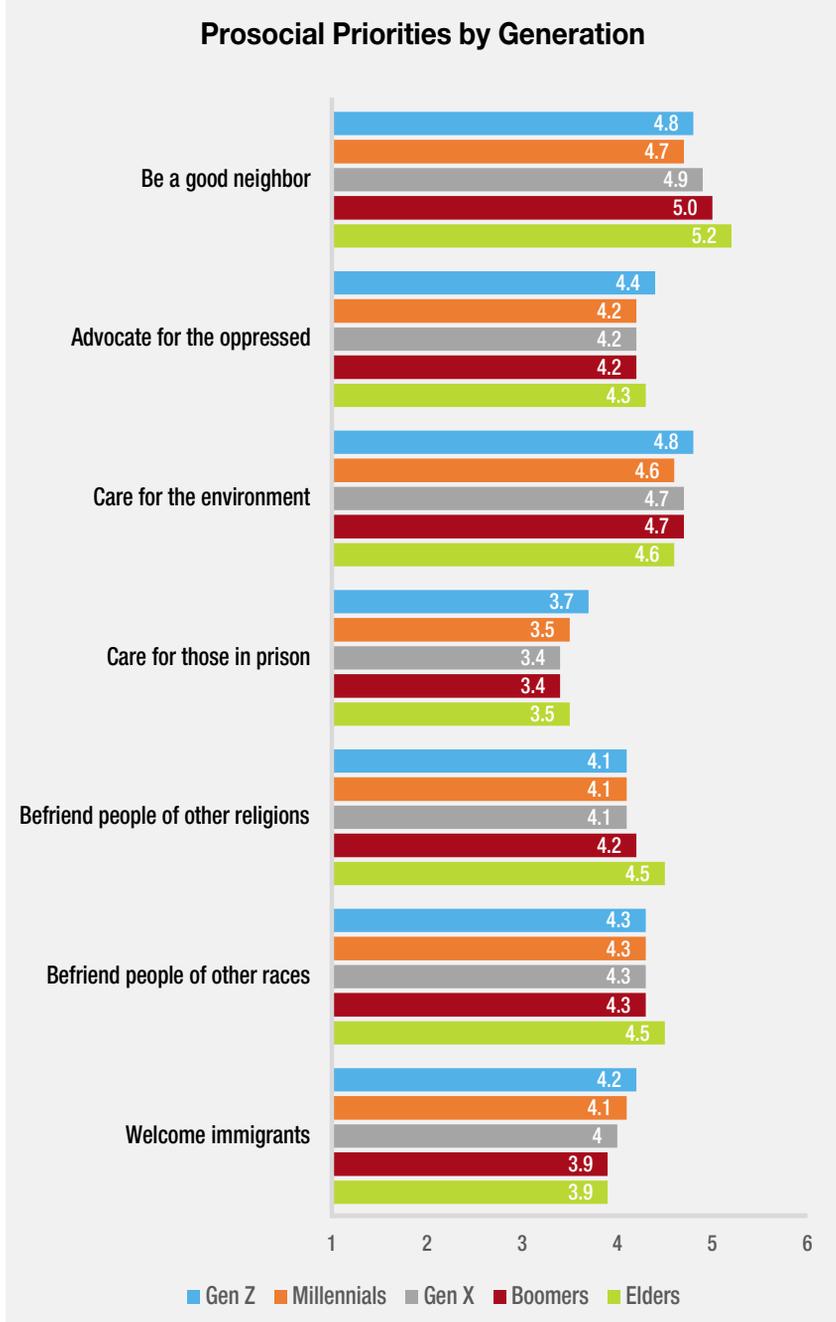
The oldest generation is far more likely to affirm the importance of being “a good neighbor.” It’s possible that many of these seniors (age 77+) are defining *neighbor* very specifically, if they have developed deep relationships with those who have lived near them for years. In the digital world of younger respondents, when people routinely interact with others on the other side of the globe, the concept of *neighbor* becomes more abstract.

The educational breakdown on this question gives us a clear distinction. The more education people have, the more likely they are to consider these prosocial actions important. Those with advanced schooling beyond college give the highest ratings on all seven issues. The only exception comes among the least educated. On four issues—immigrants, environment, prisoners, and other races—high school graduates slip below those without high school diplomas.

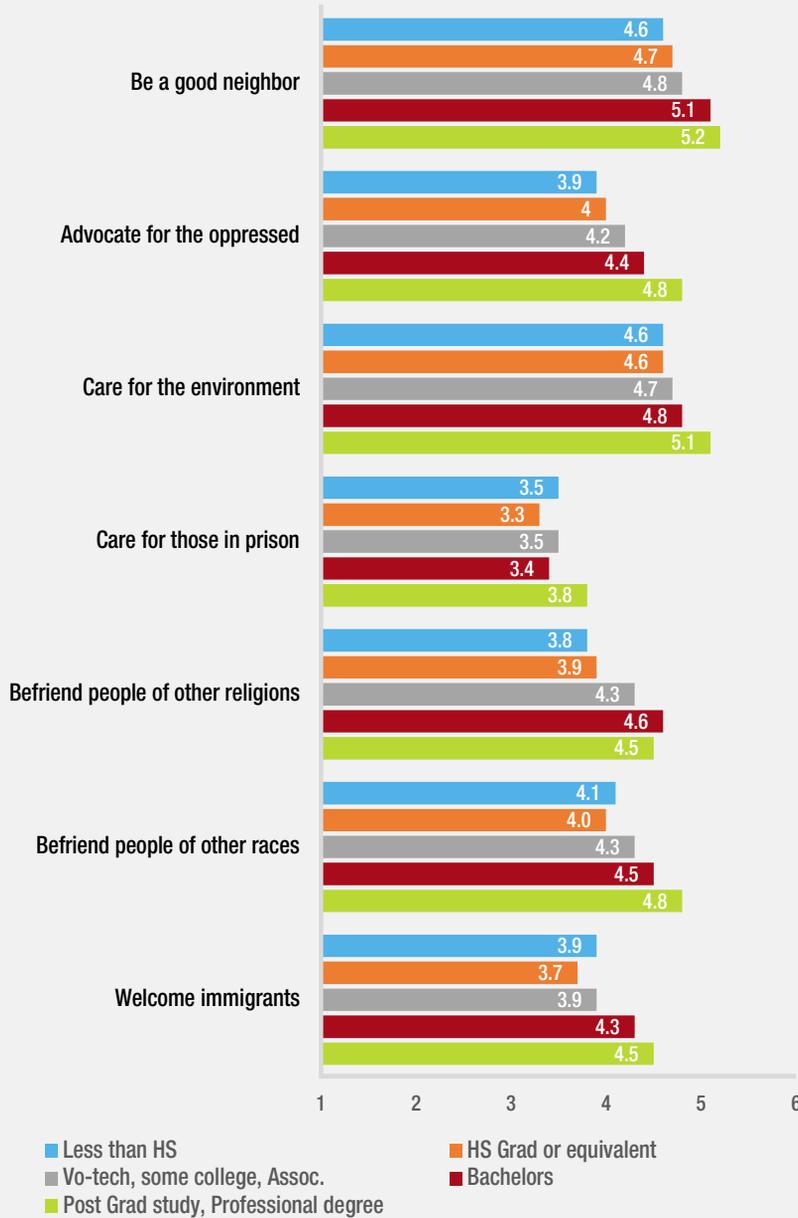
People living in large and small cities give the highest ratings on all seven prosocial priorities. On most issues, those living in rural communities give the lowest ratings. Suburbanites lag far behind on the importance of visiting prisoners.

Scripture Engaged people consider it important to ‘advocate for those who are oppressed by society’—significantly more than the Bible Disengaged.

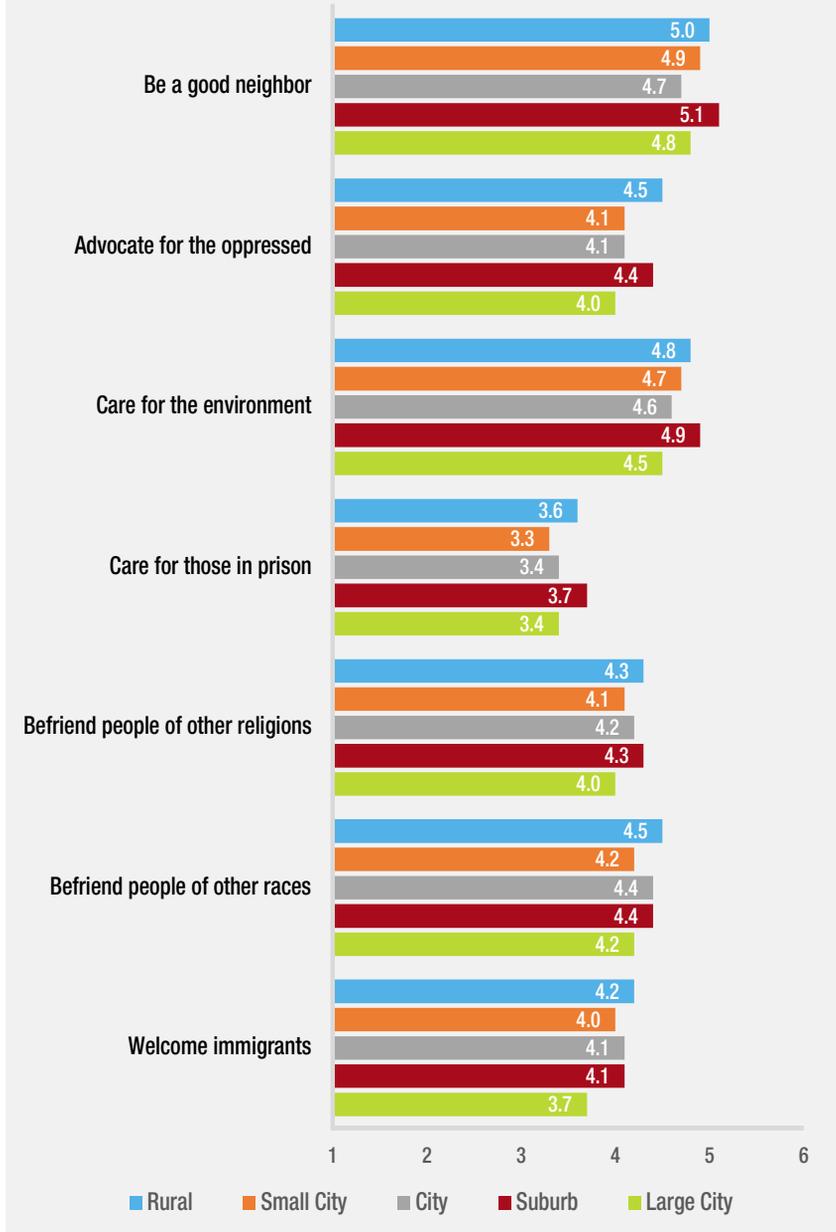
## Prosocial Priorities by Generation



## Prosocial Priorities by Education



### Prosocial Priorities by Community Type



## RELATION TO GOVERNMENT

In his famous Gettysburg Address, President Abraham Lincoln invited Americans to join him in resolving that “government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

As we consider our “nation of neighbors,” exploring how neighborly we are, it makes sense to look at the people’s interaction with the government. If we really have a government of, by, and for the people, how do the people relate to it?

Avoiding political partisanship, we asked a broad question about three items that some might consider civic duties.

*How important are the following practices in your life?*

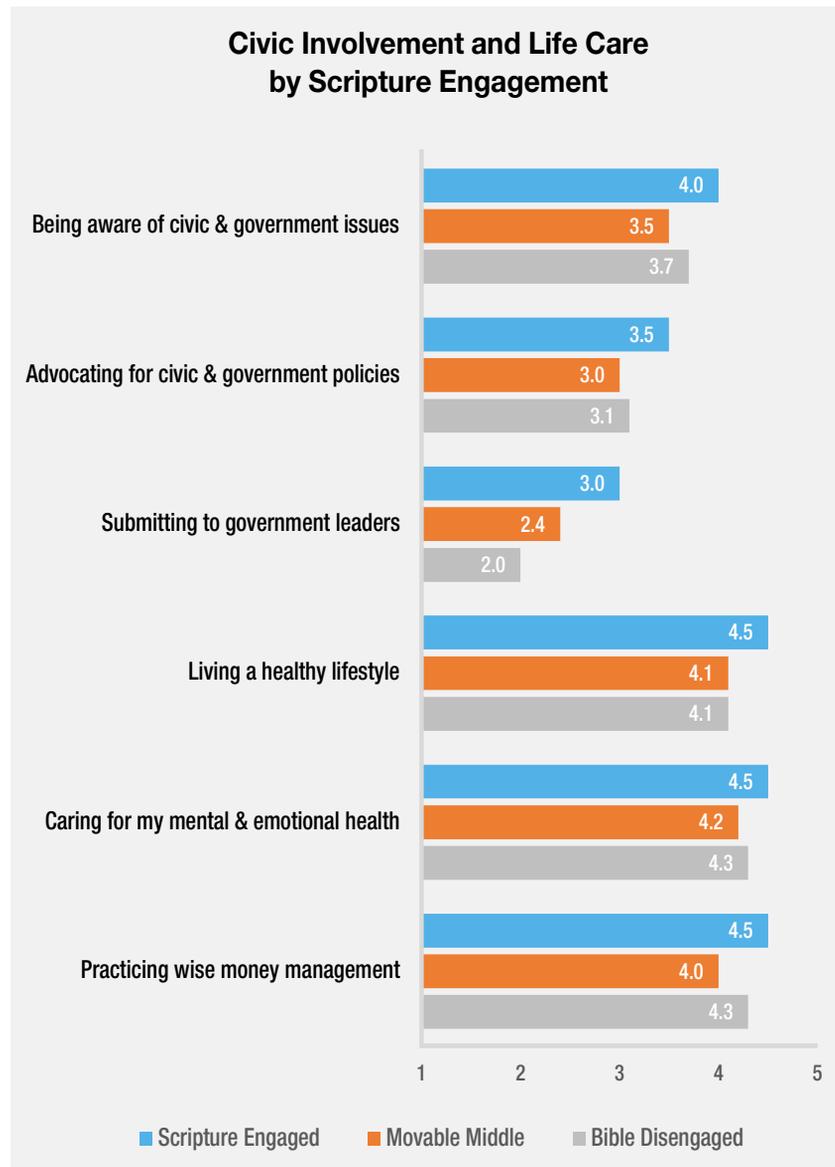
- Being aware of civic and government issues
- Advocating for civic and government policies
- Submitting to government leaders

These civic actions were accompanied by three other concerns we labeled as Life Care.

- Living a healthy lifestyle
- Caring for my mental and emotional health
- Practicing wise money management

While Chapter 3 of this report covered the Life Care issues in more detail, it’s worth noting that all three of those personal issues ranked higher than the civic issues. On the whole, people consider their own well-being more important than their civic responsibility. As one

might expect in this skeptical environment, “Submitting to government leaders” ranked lowest.



While the Bible often shows people of faith struggling against governmental authority, it also promotes submission to leaders (“Respect everyone, love other believers, honor God, and respect the Emperor,” 1 Peter 2:17 GNT).<sup>2</sup> So how would Scripture engagement affect these responses?

All three civic actions in the survey saw higher ratings from the Scripture Engaged, with small but significant increases on the questions of awareness and advocacy—and a huge (50%) increase over the Bible Disengaged in the matter of submission to government leaders.

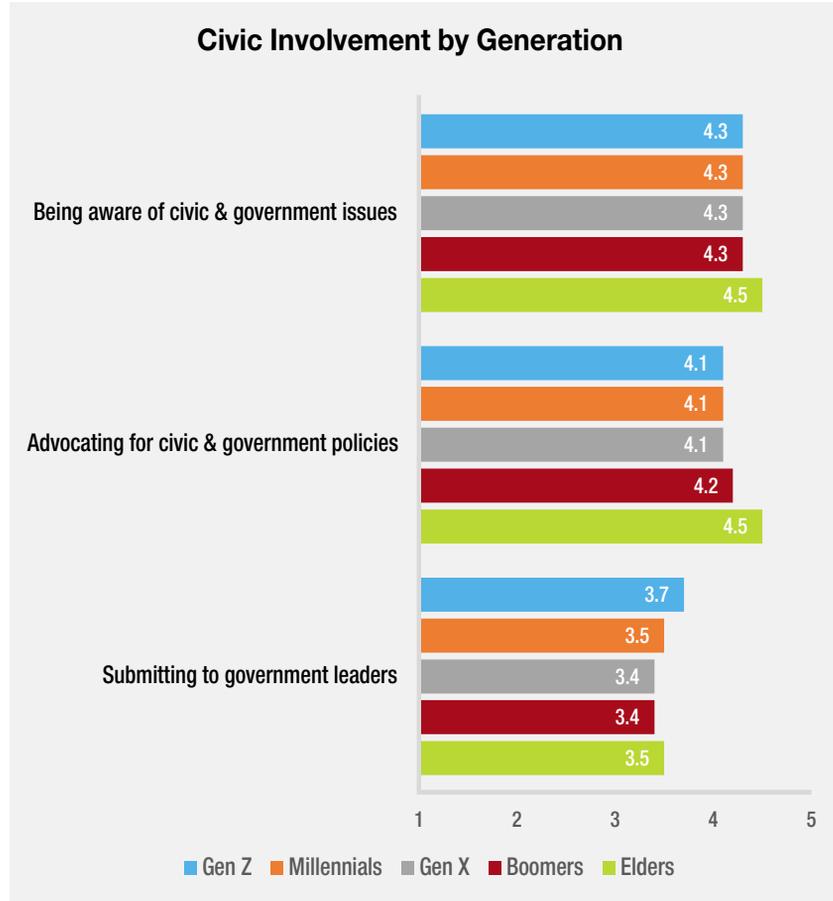
Recent years have seen debate about Christians’ involvement in politics. While we’ve seen examples of self-avowed Christians behaving badly in that arena, these findings suggest that those who are truly engaging with God’s Word put *greater* importance than others on being good citizens—aware, involved, and even submitting to government leaders.

In the generational breakdown, Elders place more importance on these three civic duties than younger groups. Classified as those born in 1945 and earlier, this cohort includes those who were alive during World War II and the patriotic wave that followed. It’s no surprise that a sense of civic responsibility was instilled in them early and remains today.

On the whole, people consider their own well-being more important than their civic responsibility.

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2 See also Matthew 22:21, Acts 5:29, Romans 13:1–6, and Titus 3:1.



## INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

Over the last decade or so, social scientists have investigated a new virtue: Intellectual Humility. An article from the John Templeton Foundation defines it as “a mindset that guides our intellectual conduct. In particular, it involves recognizing and owning our intellectual limitations in the service of pursuing deeper knowledge, truth, and understanding. Such a mindset appears to be valuable in many domains of life—from education to interreligious dialogue to public

discourse. It promises to help us avoid headstrong decisions and erroneous opinions, and allows us to engage more constructively with our fellow citizens.”<sup>3</sup>

Bible scholars might suggest, humbly, that this quality is nothing new. Scripture urges us, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you should. Instead, be modest in your thinking” (Romans 12:3 GNT). “Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19 GNT). There’s even a caution about those who “say they are wise, but they are fools” (Romans 1:22 GNT).

Yet there is wide agreement that Intellectual Humility is much needed these days. With opinions of all sorts being broadcast, loud and certain, on an ever-increasing array of media channels, our culture is growing desperate for the simple words, “I could be wrong.”

Our *State of the Bible* team wanted to see how Scripture Engagement affected Intellectual Humility, so a new bank of questions was added to the survey.

*How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement:*

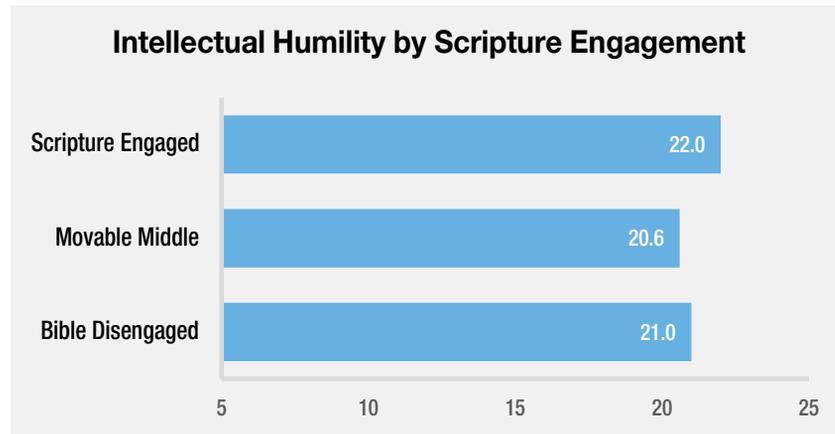
- I can respect others, even if I disagree with them in important ways.

Scripture Engaged people score higher on both Intellectual Humility and Neighborliness than those who are less engaged.

3 Intellectual humility. John Templeton Foundation. (n.d.). Retrieved June 14, 2022, from <https://www.templeton.org/discoveries/intellectual-humility>

- I can have great respect for someone, even when we don't see eye-to-eye on important topics.
- Even when I disagree with others, I can recognize they may have sound points.
- I am willing to hear others out, even if I disagree with them.
- I welcome different ways of thinking about important topics.

Each question called for a 1–5 response, indicating agreement or disagreement. Together, the five responses yielded an Intellectual Humility score of 5 to 25.



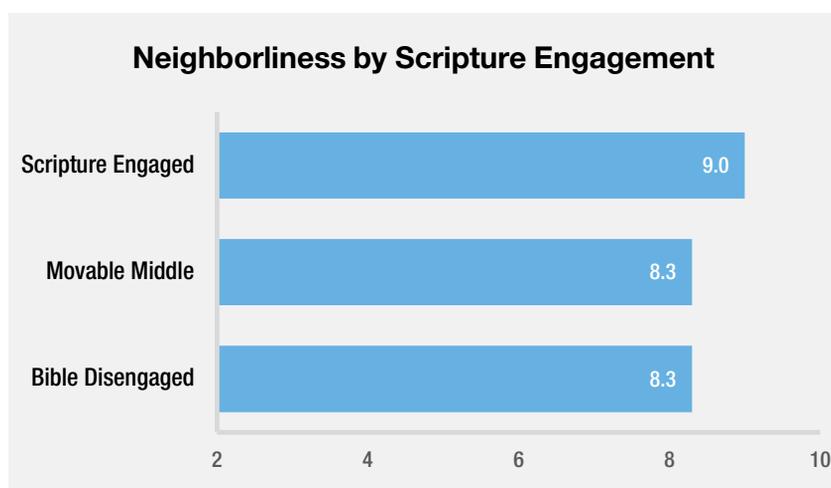
Scripture Engaged people score higher on Intellectual Humility than those in the Movable Middle or the Bible Disengaged. Given the Bible's teaching on humility, that might be expected, except that Bible-believers have sometimes been criticized as dogmatic, intolerant, and bad listeners. These findings suggest that those who seek to live out the Scriptures have more winsome qualities.

## NEIGHBORLINESS

Another quality explored in the *State of the Bible* survey is neighborliness. In the survey, this took the form of two questions.

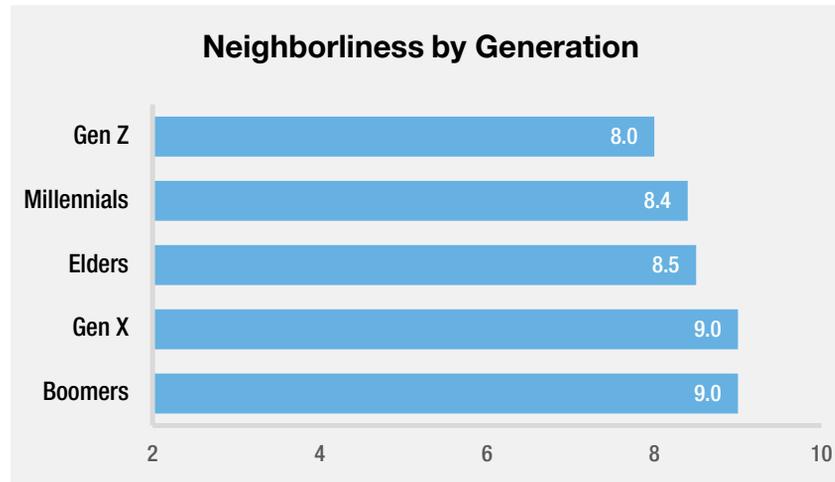
*How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement:*

- I show compassion to others in little and big ways.
- I speak kindly to others even when I disagree.



In 2021, *The State of the Bible* reported on “Neighboring,” which included behaviors like helping strangers and donating to charity. Those behaviors show up in the next section of this chapter, but these “Neighborliness” questions aimed for something else—attitude as well as action. While the Intellectual Humility section focused on conversation and debate, this simple two-part query dug into a person’s sense of compassion and kindness, as well as the actions that result.

Scripture Engaged people self-reported a score of 9.0 on a scale of 2 to 10—substantially higher than the 8.3 score for the Movable Middle and the Bible Disengaged. In the generational breakdown, we see a jarring decrease among Gen Z. While the older generations are rather even at around 8.5, the youngest respondents dip to 8.0.



While this shift is statistically significant, an 8.0 score is the equivalent of everyone saying they “somewhat agreed” with the statements on showing compassion and speaking kindly. In older generations there were more who “strongly agreed.” Might this reflect less confidence among younger respondents in self-reporting their levels of kindness? Or is there a significant difference in civility between the two generation groups?

Keep in mind also that the survey was conducted in January 2022, after nearly two years of life upheaval that unduly affected this younger generation. In that light, it might be understandable if they were focused on their own losses rather than the needs of others.

## LOVING GOD AND OTHERS

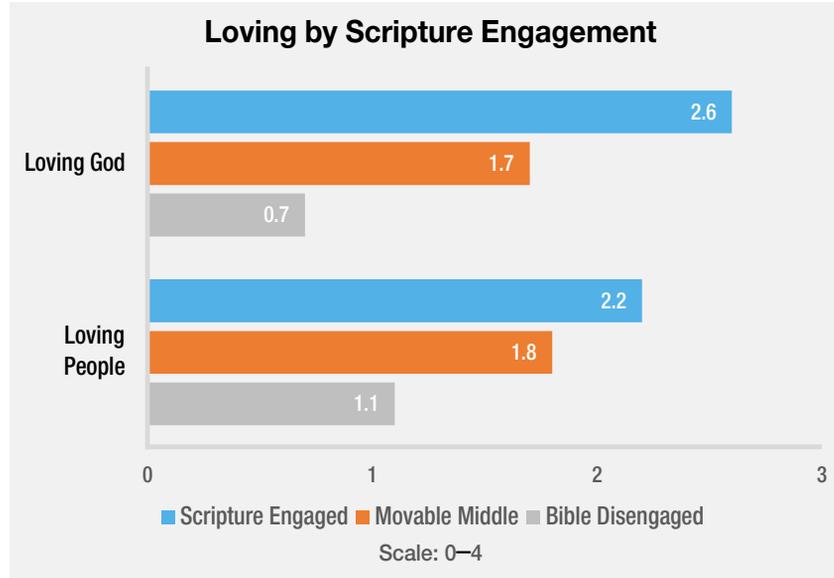
When asked to name the most important commandment in the Law of Moses, Jesus chose two: Love God completely and Love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37–40). This biblical account served as the inspiration for an eight-part set of questions in this year's survey.

What specific behaviors in today's world would demonstrate love for God? Similarly, what actions display love for other people? Our team selected four of each and asked . . .

*Which of these activities have you done in the last 7 days?*

- Prayed to God
- Meditated
- Volunteered in my place of worship
- Donated money to a place of worship or other religious entity
- Helped a stranger
- Volunteered in my community (not including a place of worship)
- Donated money to a charity (not a place of worship)
- Prayed for someone who was not a member of my family

The answers were simply yes or no for each action, so the results could be 0 to 4 for the Loving God questions (the top four on this list) and 0 to 4 for the Loving Others questions (the bottom four).

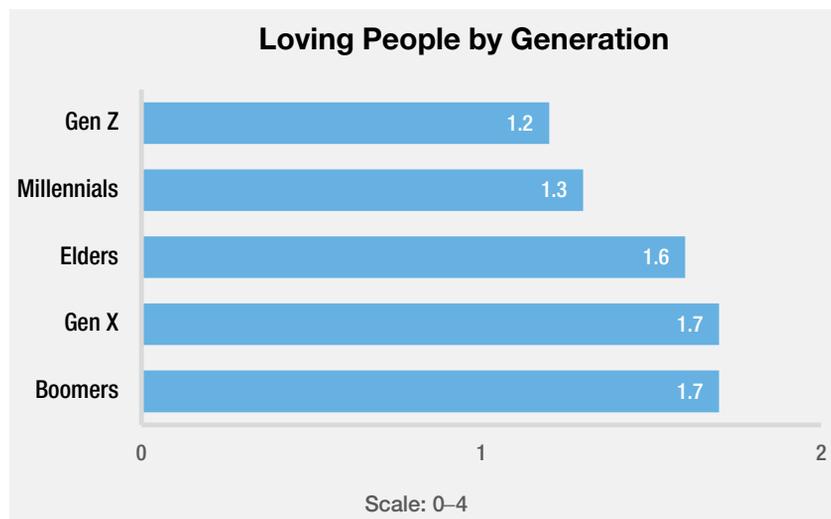


As expected, Scripture Engaged people reported more “Loving God” behavior than the less engaged, but also more “Loving Others” behavior.

The Scripture Engaged (2.6) far outpaced the Movable Middle (1.7) and the Bible Disengaged (0.7) on the Loving God items. But the Scripture Engaged also scored higher on the Loving Others questions, doubling up the Bible Disengaged (2.2 to 1.1). The Movable Middle was in the middle at 1.7.

Even without the “Prayed for someone” question, which might tilt toward more religious respondents, the Scripture Engaged scored higher on the remaining Loving Others questions with 1.2 (out of 3) compared to 1.0 for the Movable Middle and 0.8 for the Bible Disengaged.

How did the different generations fare on the Loving People questions? There was a clear difference between the three older groups and the two younger groups. Elders, Boomers, and Gen X scored 1.7 and 1.6 on the four-point scale. Millennials (1.3) and Gen Z (1.2) were significantly lower.



While this might reflect a greater amount of time and/or money among older generations, allowing them to donate or volunteer more frequently, it might also indicate a spirit of service embedded in the culture of adults above 40, and less prevalent among younger adults.

We recently heard business leader Cheryl Bachelder discussing generational research she had conducted for her company. She applauded the “change the world” passion of Millennials and Gen Z, but also noted that they’re often “very self-absorbed.” These groups gave the terms *love* and *respect* their highest rating in her survey, but the lowest was *servicing others*.

## CONCLUSION

These days every newsfeed seems to remind us that our “nation of neighbors” is not as neighborly as we’d like. Some would say “Christians” are a big part of the problem.

For many years now our *State of the Bible* surveys have distinguished between a large group of self-identified Christians and a smaller subset—those who consistently read the Bible and allow it to shape their daily choices. This year’s report shows clearly that Scripture Engaged people make better neighbors. They care for people in need. They take civic duty seriously. They realize they don’t know everything, and they admit that in conversation. They serve others in a variety of ways.

In his first letter, John writes, “My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action” (1 John 3:18 GNT). Those who engage with Scripture are living this out.

In our contentious culture, many people long for a return to neighborliness. They hope for kindness and compassion to fill our communities, neighbor helping neighbor. Can we assume our civic responsibility? Can we care for those in need? Can we give of ourselves sacrificially?

When Americans think about the kind of neighbors they want to have, they might not realize that they’re describing the kind of neighbors the Bible calls us to be.



**“I AM WILLING TO HEAR OTHERS OUT, EVEN WHEN I DISAGREE WITH THEM.”**

Scripture Engaged people are  
**30%**  
more likely than others to strongly agree.



**“I SHOW COMPASSION TO OTHERS IN LITTLE AND BIG WAYS.”**

Scripture Engaged people are  
**44%**  
more likely than others to strongly agree.



**“IT’S IMPORTANT TO ME TO ADVOCATE FOR THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED BY SOCIETY.”**

Scripture Engaged people are  
**35%**  
more likely than others to very strongly agree.



## NOW THIS

### TIPS, HIGHLIGHTS, INSIGHTS, AND SUGGESTIONS

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- The various findings in chapter 3 combined to send a clear message: Scripture Engagement is good for you. Greater well-being, less stress, more hope. This chapter shifts the focus outward. Scripture Engagement makes us better for others.
- When the Bible mentions conversations “seasoned with salt” (Colossians 4:6 NIV), maybe it’s talking about Intellectual Humility.
- Discussing her research on Millennials and Gen Z, CEO Cheryl Bachelder also noted their desire to learn. She says to Boomers, “Find a way to make your experience and wisdom relevant to these people. You know how they want it to happen? They want you to spend time with them one on one. They don’t want any more podcasts or speeches. They want relational mentoring. That’s what they ask for.”





# GENERATIONS

“**W**hat’s the matter with kids today?”

The question arose in the musical comedy *Bye Bye Birdie*, debuting on Broadway in 1960. These “kids,” further described as “noisy, crazy, sloppy, lazy, loafers,”<sup>1</sup> were teenagers at the time, belonging to the end of what we now call the Elder generation and the beginning of the Boomers.

Yet the generation gap did not start there. Describing the beginnings of the Great Awakening, historic preacher Jonathan Edwards first noted the misbehavior of the young people in his Massachusetts church. “It was their manner very frequently to get together, in conventions of both sexes, in mirth and jollity, which they called frolicks.” But things began to change in 1733, as “the young people showed more of a disposition to hearken to counsel, and by degrees left off their frolicking, and grew observedly more decent in their attendance on the public worship, and there were more that manifested

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1 Adams, L., lyricist (1960). “Kids,” from *Bye Bye Birdie*. Warner Chappell Music, Inc.

a religious concern than there used to be.”<sup>2</sup> In the following months and years, a revival swept through the American colonies.

*The State of the Bible*, from its inception a dozen years ago, has examined data from different generational groups. Seven years ago, we co-published a special report on Millennials, who were mostly in their twenties at the time, noting how they veered significantly from older generations in their beliefs and practices regarding the Bible. Now our focus shifts a bit to a new cohort that has come of age—Generation Z.

Our challenge is always to see what’s in the data, independent of our hopes, fears, and assumptions. We remain wary of the myopia displayed by the adults in *Bye Bye Birdie*: “Why can’t they be like we were / Perfect in every way?” If our churches and ministries are led by older people who criticize younger people for being youthful, they’re in trouble. *Different* is not necessarily *bad*. God uses old and young alike. Even now we see many Millennials using their distinctly Millennial traits to serve the church effectively, and we anticipate similar contributions from Generation Z in the decades to come.

In an insightful piece for the website [encore.org](http://encore.org), Sasha Johfre noted how longer life spans have created “an era of age diversity.” In 1900, nearly half (44%) of Americans were under 20 years old, while only 6 percent were over 60. The current situation, with population distributed more evenly across multiple generations, “offers us an

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2 Edwards, J. (1737). *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*. <https://www.jonathan-edwards.org/Narrative.html>

unprecedented opportunity to foster relationships between people of very different ages at a scale never seen before.”<sup>3</sup>

## GENERATIONS XYZ

The “Baby Boom” has been part of American awareness for more than half a century. With World War II over and the economy growing, American families grew too. The high birth rates from 1946 to 1964 created the huge group of Americans we call **Boomers**. This year, they are turning 58 to 76.

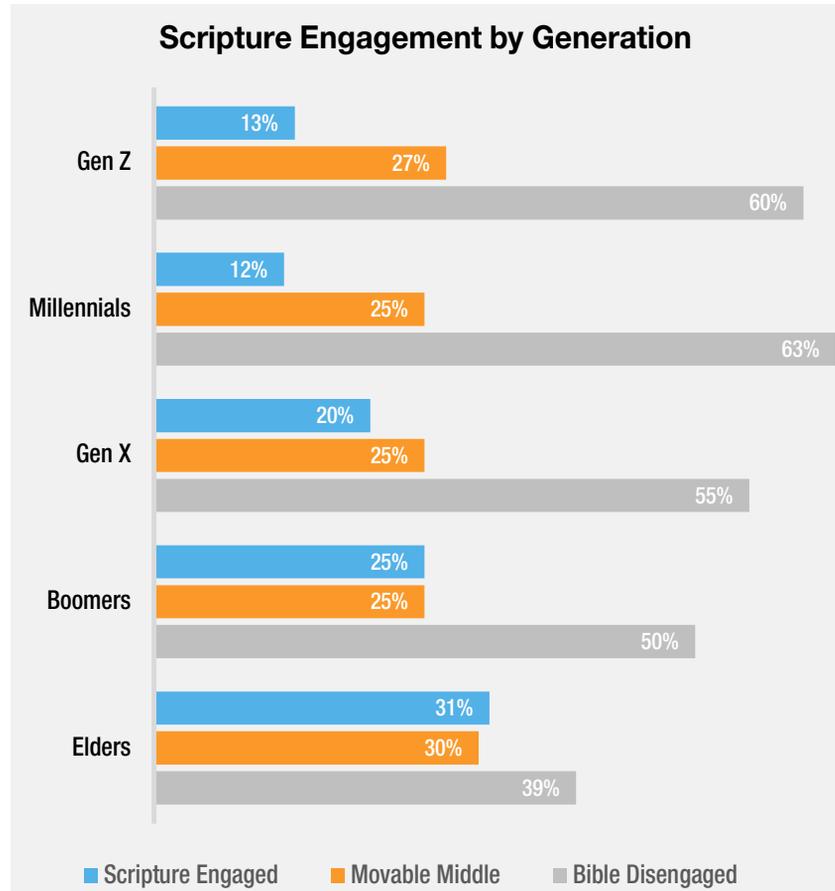
The following generation, born 1965–1980, grew up in the shadow of the Boomers. At first they were called Busters, because a boom is followed by a bust, and the birth rates did drop some. But in the 1990s pundits began calling them **Generation X**, adopting some recent pop-culture references to that term. The group was described as unknown, mysterious even to themselves, an X factor. Whether the name was well-founded or not, it stuck. Generation X turns 42 to 57 this year.

At first, the following age group was designated Generation Y, just because it followed X, and we still see that term in some of the scholarly literature. The babies of the next group were quickly tagged as Generation Z. The name **Millennials** soon supplanted Gen Y for those born 1981–1996, because they would come of age in the new Millennium. This year they turn 26 to 41.

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3 Johfre, S. (2022, February). <https://encore.org/in-a-world-experiencing-unprecedented-age-diversity-how-should-we-think-about-age/amp/>. Retrieved July 14, 2022.

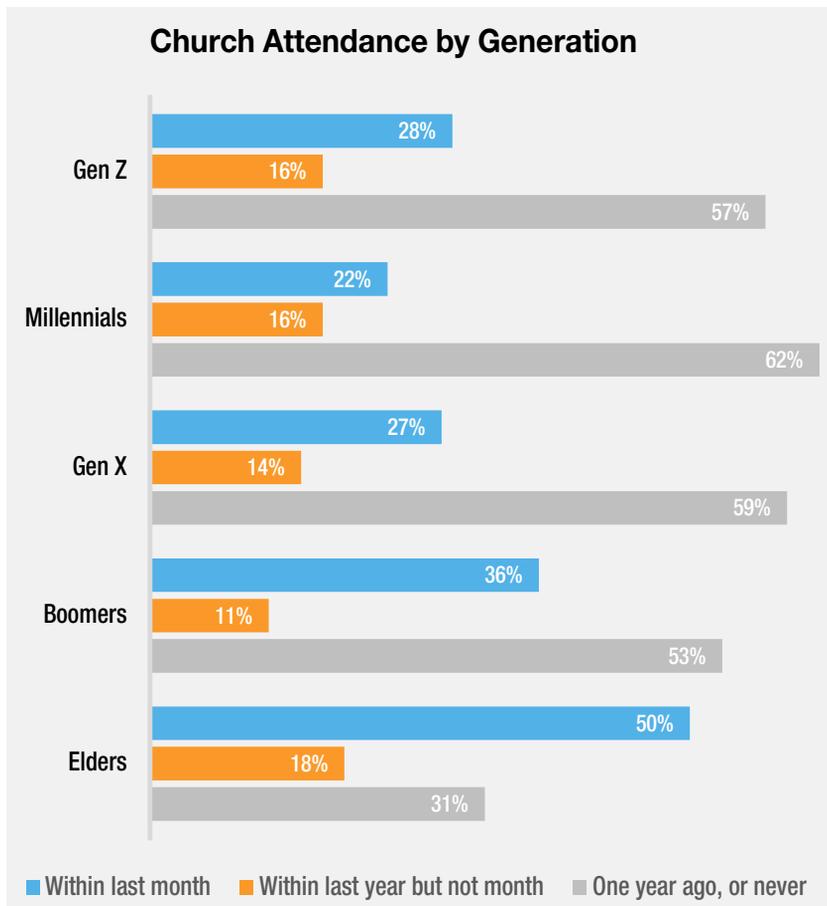
But **Generation Z** has kept its name (and, as schools turned to online platforms in the height of COVID, some of them took the tag “Zoom-ers”). Born 1997–2012, they turn 10 to 25 this year. It should be noted that *State of the Bible* only surveys adults 18 and older, so about half of Gen Z is not included.



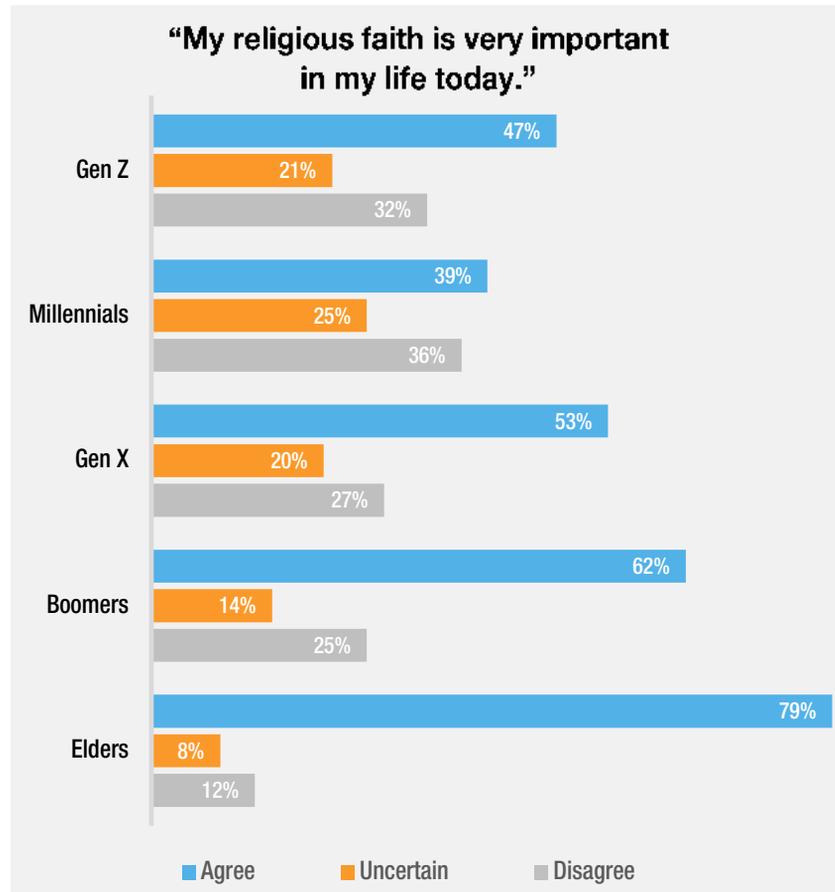
Our survey also designates as **Elders** all who precede the Boomers, people turning 77 and older this year. This group has the highest

percentage of Scripture engagement and church attendance. They're also far more likely to agree that their faith is important to them.

On Scripture engagement, church attendance, and the importance of faith, Boomers are the second highest generation, clearly outpacing the three younger groups, but falling short of the Elders. While nearly one-third of Elders are Scripture Engaged, one-fourth of Boomers are, one-fifth of Gen X, and about one-eighth of the two youngest generations.



This might make us expect a steady slide downward on most questions of faith, with each new generation scoring lower. But that's not exactly what we find. While Generations X, Y, and Z all show a decrease from the two oldest groups, it's usually the Millennials who score lowest.



The numbers on church attendance, for instance, show Gen Z (28% attending within the last month) slightly ahead of Gen X (27%), with Millennials (22%) lagging behind. Is this a resurgence? Is this

youngest generation stopping the long decline? Maybe, but we need to consider the status of Gen Z. Many members of this generation still live with their parents, and thus their churchgoing might be strongly influenced by their living situation. Many parents of Gen Z-ers are Gen X-ers, so we might be seeing parental influence there and on other questions.

The survey also asked people if they agreed with the statement “My religious faith is very important in my life today.” Once again, the results showed Elders most likely to say yes, with four in five (79%) saying they “strongly” or “somewhat” agreed. More than three in five (62%) of Boomers agreed. And again we see the youngest generations scoring lower. Only two in five Millennials (39%) agree that their faith is important to them today. Gen Z seems caught between Gen X and Millennials.

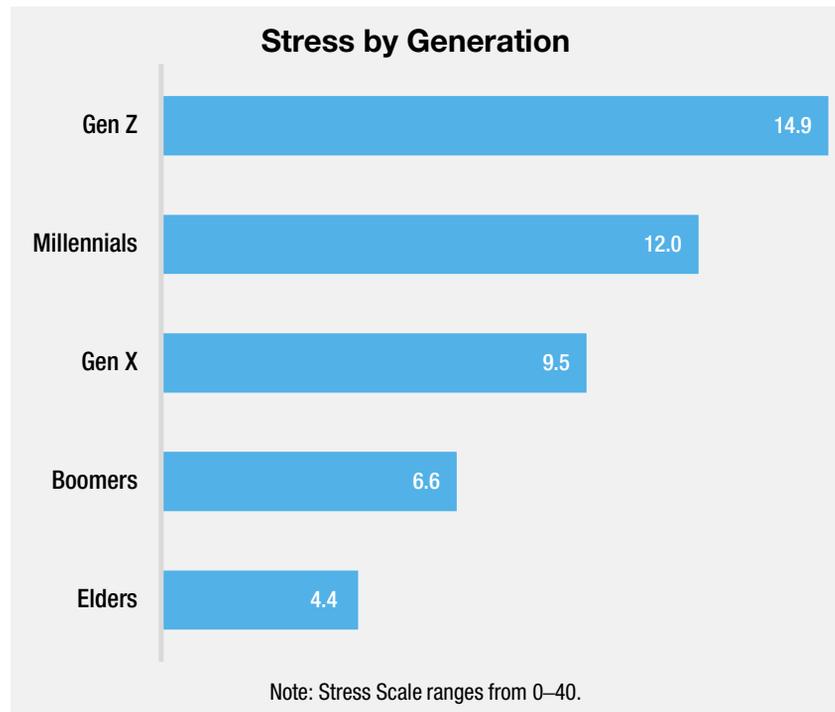
Strikingly, one-quarter of Millennials (25%) said they “Neither agree nor disagree” with the statement. Could this be a conversation starter? Are they questioning what “religious faith” is, or whether they have it, or what would make it “very important”?

## FOCUS ON GEN Z

Generation Z faces higher levels of stress than older generations. In fact, the stress score drops significantly with each older group. The same pattern emerged in last year’s survey.

The findings come from a set of ten questions about the most common stress symptoms, including sleeplessness, a sense of hopelessness, loneliness, and other negative stress-related feelings. While

this is not a clinical study, the symptom-based self-reporting mirrors the screening methods used in mental health contexts.

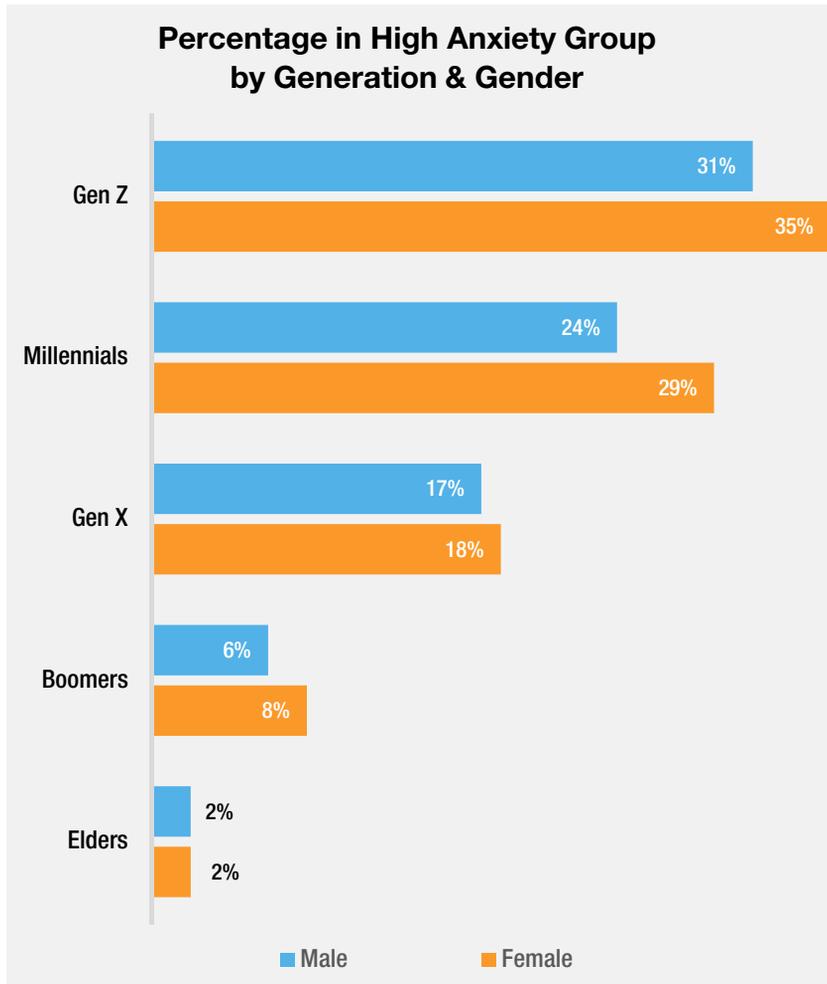


Some of the questions also dealt with anxiety-related issues, so we broke that out as a separate score. Deeming those above a certain level as having “high anxiety,” we found 18 percent of our respondents exceeding that score, matching the percentage of national anxiety studies.<sup>4</sup>

We saw the most stunning results when we compared generations *and genders*. Across the board, females were more likely to report

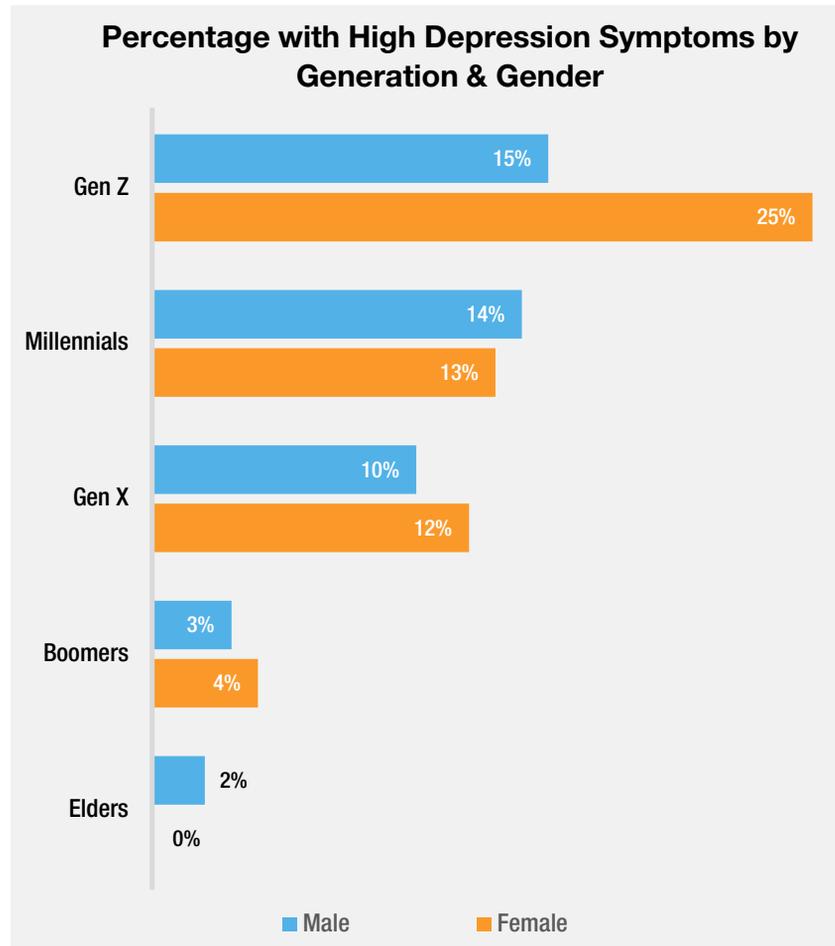
<sup>4</sup> “Anxiety Disorders,” <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/sites/default/files/documents/health/statistics/prevalence/file.pdf>

high anxiety than were males, and the youngest females—Gen Z women at 35 percent—nearly doubled the national average.



Similarly, Gen Z women were far more likely to report a high incidence of depression symptoms. While 10 percent was the overall average, 25 percent of the youngest females in the survey reported high depression symptoms, a full ten points higher than Gen Z males.

Much has been written about the social and emotional pressures in modern society on young people in general—and especially young women. Social media makes constant demands. There’s competition for grades and jobs. Sexual permissiveness raises issues of personal worth. The planet may be falling apart.



“Current events are clearly stressful for everyone in the country, but young people are really feeling the impact of issues in the news,

particularly those issues that may feel beyond their control,” according to Arthur C. Evans Jr., CEO of the American Psychological Association. He said this in 2019, before the pandemic. Since then, that sense of things spiraling “beyond their control” has gone exponential.<sup>5</sup>

“During the pandemic, children, adolescents, and young adults have faced unprecedented challenges,” says the U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory *Protecting Youth Mental Health*. “The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed their world, including how they attend school, interact with friends, and receive health care. . . . They and their family may have lost access to mental health care, social services, income, food, or housing. They may have had COVID-19 themselves, suffered from long COVID symptoms, or lost a loved one to the disease.”<sup>6</sup>

Generation Z faces higher levels of stress than older generations.

The *State of the Bible* research shows that this particular age group is facing a mental health crisis, with stress, anxiety, and depression far beyond the norm. *State of the Bible* researchers have collaborated with human flourishing scholars from Harvard University’s T. H. Chan School of Public Health to report on this data in a forthcoming article in the American Medical Association’s *JAMA Psychiatry* journal. They write, “The findings here corroborate recent evidence of a

5 Cited in Bethune, S. (2019, January). Gen Z more likely to report mental health concerns. *Monitor on Psychology*. Retrieved July 14, 2022, from <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/01/gen-z>

6 Murthy, V. (2021). *Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory*. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>

mental health crisis and rise in loneliness in the U.S. that disproportionately affects young adults. . . . It seems clear that young people are not doing as well as they were. Protecting the mental health of young people is regarded as a national emergency; and this study suggests other facets of their wellbeing likewise need attention. Comprehensive strategies for expanding mental health services, supporting education and meaningful employment, and strengthening social fabric for young people are urgently needed to enhance the wellbeing of this population.”<sup>7</sup>

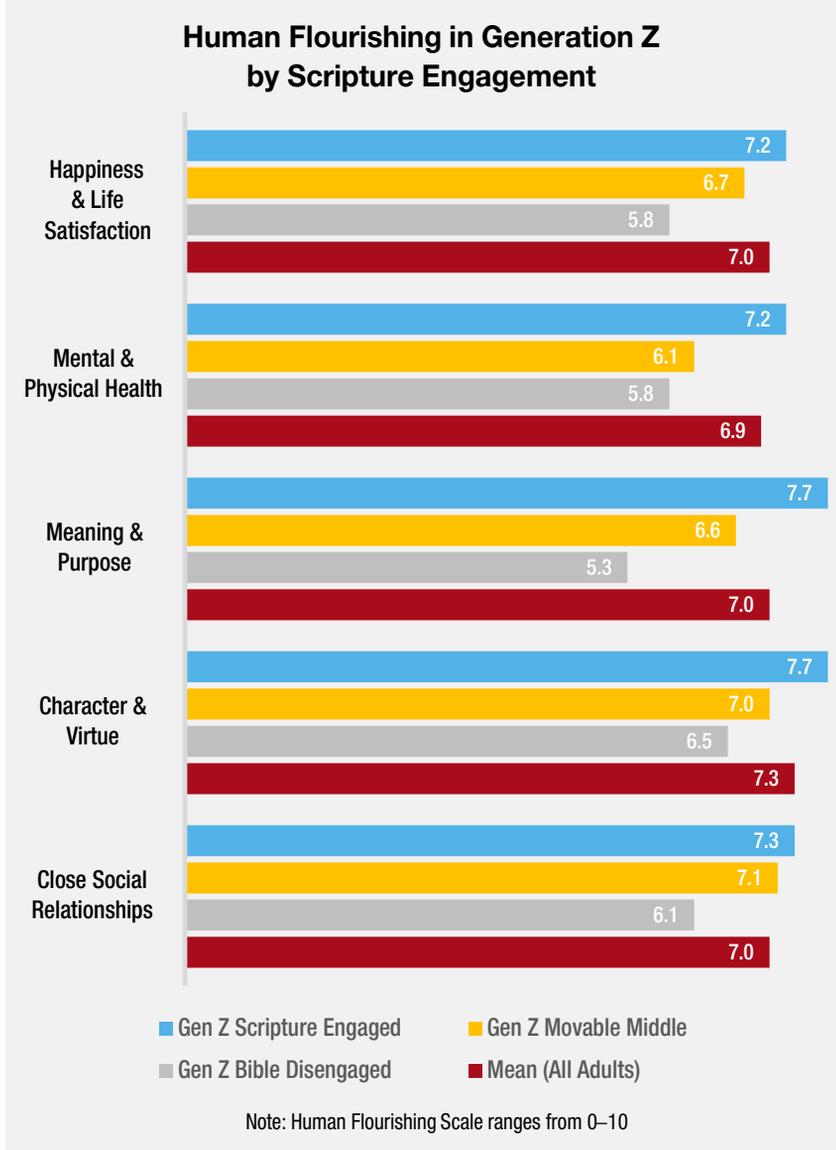
## Scripture engagement helps . . . especially among Gen Z women.

This mental health crisis can be viewed as a ministry mandate for churches and Christian ministries, for individual believers and families of everyone in Gen Z, but especially for Gen Z women. What can we do to alleviate these alarming levels of stress, anxiety, and depression?

There’s one key positive finding from the *State of the Bible* research: *Scripture engagement helps*. People who read the Bible regularly and apply it to their lives report fewer symptoms of stress, anxiety, or depression. This is true throughout the survey data, and especially among Gen Z women.

As high as the anxiety and depression levels are for Gen Z women, they’re even higher when these women are Bible Disengaged. The stats for Scripture Engaged men and women in Generation Z show normal levels of anxiety and depression symptoms.

<sup>7</sup> Chen, Y., Cowden, R.G., Fulks, J., Plake, J.F., and VanderWeele, T.J. (in press). National Data on Age Gradients in Wellbeing among U.S. Adults. *JAMA Psychiatry*.



We see the effect of Scripture engagement even more clearly as we examine the Human Flourishing Index introduced in Chapter 3. In each of the six domains, Gen Z scores lower than any other

generation, 7–15 percent below the overall average. But when we look at Scripture engagement, a different picture emerges.

When Gen Z adults are Scripture Engaged, they overcome the downward trend of their generation. In every domain, their Human Flourishing scores are better than the overall average.

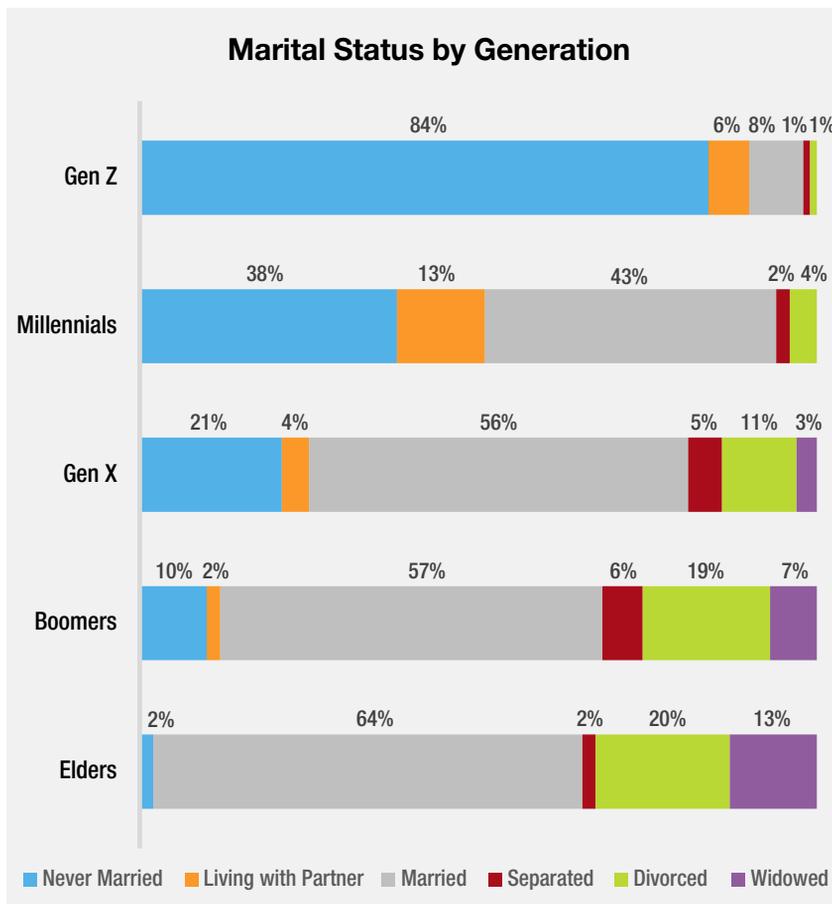
We do not want to imply that picking up a Bible will instantly cure a person’s mental health issues and make them thrive in every aspect of existence. Scripture engagement is a way of life, in which people meet with God regularly and recast their thoughts and activities in response to God’s guidance. According to our data, this ongoing interaction is associated with mental health and human flourishing.

## MARITAL STATUS

You might correctly guess that Generation Z is mostly “never married” (84%) and the oldest generations are mostly married. It makes sense that Elders would have the greatest percentage of widowed people (13%) and that “living with partner” would be more prevalent among Millennials (13%) than other generations.

But it might surprise you that more than one in five Elders (22%) are divorced or separated, along with one in four Boomers (25%). Millennials, now ages 26–41, show the greatest diversity in marital status, with just over two-fifths married and just under two-fifths never married, as well as that substantial portion “living with.” This may be a glimpse of the future.

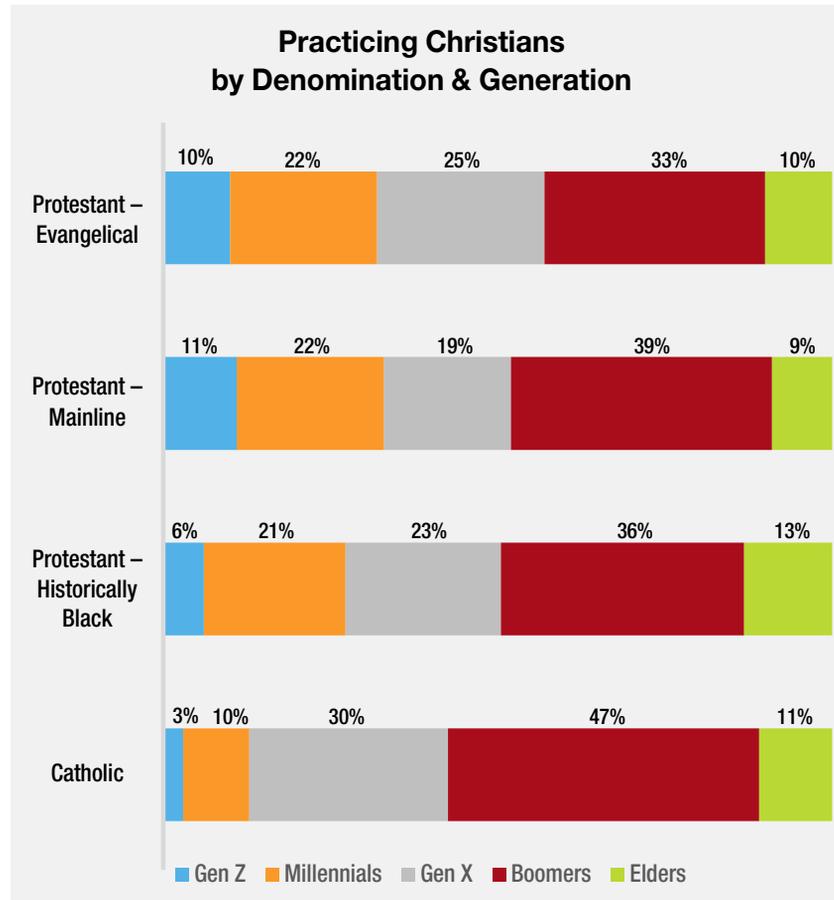
Overall, fewer than half of American adults are married (47%). Many churches have developed ministries to strengthen marriages. Do we have adequate ways of serving the other half of the population?



## RELIGIOUS DENOMINATION

As we explore the denominational affiliation of the various generations, we're not looking at the American population as a whole, but just at Practicing Christians—those who identify as Christian,

consider faith important to them, and attend church at least once a month. Our question is this: For each denominational group, which generations are most and least prevalent?



Of the Practicing Christians who attend a Catholic Church, nearly half (47%) are Boomers. No other denominational group has that high a representation of Boomers. But the other side of the graph shows a very small representation among Gen Z (3%), lowest of any

denomination. Among all denominations, there's a decline from Boomers to Gen Z, but the drop is especially steep among Catholics.

There's a similar issue with Historically Black Protestant denominations. Compared to other church groups, they excel among the Elders, but not Gen Z, though there seems to be a surge among Millennials. This surge occurs among Mainline Protestants as well.

Churches need to reach all age groups, of course, but their long-term health may depend on how well they balance their ministry among the different generations. Denominations with a strong cultural heritage (including Catholics and Historically Black Protestants) enjoy the loyalty of older members, but may need to be intentional about cultivating relationships in younger generations.

Denominations with a strong cultural heritage enjoy the loyalty of older members, but may need to cultivate relationships in younger generations.

## CURIOSITY AND COMMITMENT

Graph after graph has shown us the same pattern. Each new generation, from Elders to Millennials, shows a decline in religious commitment and Scripture engagement. We're waiting to see whether Gen Z will continue the trend.

But one factor continues to create hope: Curiosity. As we saw in the graph on page 51, apart from the Elder generation, Gen Z leads the way in curiosity. Three of four indicate some level of curiosity about the Bible or Jesus. How will we respond?

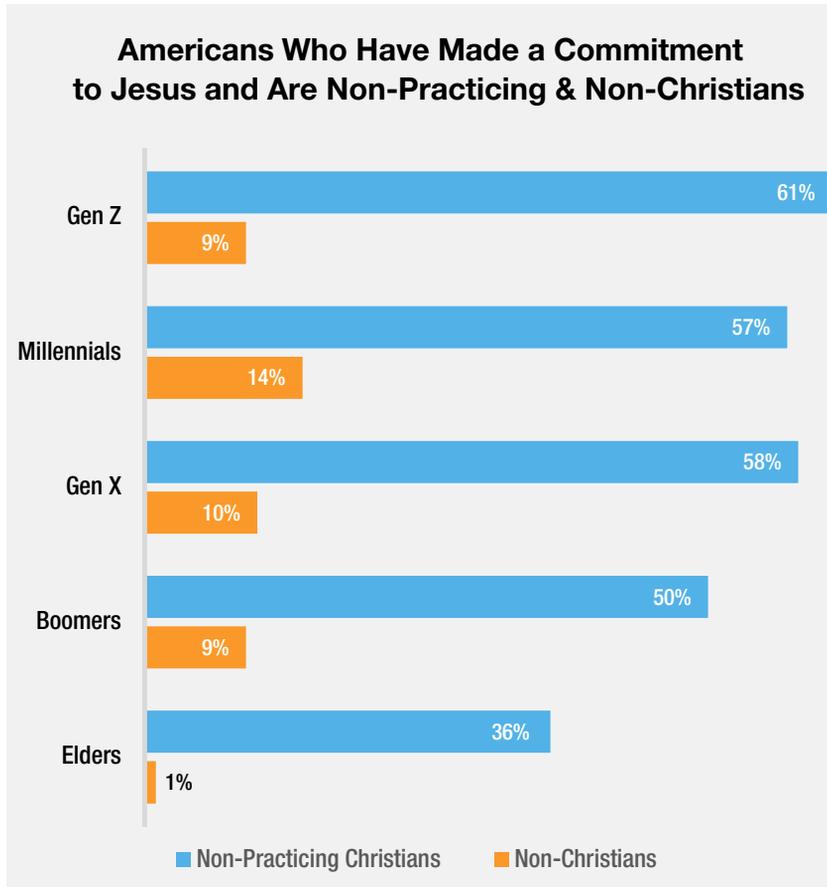
There's another finding in this survey that's rather sobering. We asked, "Have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today?" More than half of all adults (54%) said yes. Great news, but it turns out that's only Act I of this drama.

Of the people in the three youngest generations who have made that commitment, *fewer than a third are now Practicing Christians*. These are adults up to age 57 who at some point have made a commitment to Christ that's still important to them. It's likely that more than two-thirds are not attending church even once a month.

What happened here? Are we seeing a division between a private faith and a public church connection? Are people saying yes to Jesus but no to the church?

Of those in the three youngest generations who have made a commitment to Christ, more than two-thirds are not attending church even once a month.

If Act I is a decision for Christ and Act II is a separation from the church, will there be an Act III? Can they be wooed back into a vital church connection, in which they are engaging with Scripture, sharing their faith, and growing in the company of other flawed believers? And how can we set the stage for that?



Early in this chapter we cited an article by Sasha Johfre about the unprecedented “age diversity” in society today. In language that could inspire church planners, Johfre suggests that “bringing people

together across generational divides can introduce new ideas and encourage new levels of empathy in interpersonal relationships and groups. The very fact that we see young and old people as different is part of why it can mean so much to bring them together.”<sup>8</sup>

Our exploration of generational data in this chapter is not meant to divide or demean, but to promote understanding and, in Johfre’s terms, to “bring people together.” We long for each generation to connect meaningfully with God’s Word and God’s people.

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8 Johfre, S. (2022, February). <https://encore.org/in-a-world-experiencing-unprecedented-age-diversity-how-should-we-think-about-age/amp/>. Retrieved July 14, 2022.

THE FAITH OF GENERATION



46%  
of Gen Z say they've made a commitment to Jesus that's still important in their lives today.



At 40% Gen Z is more likely than other generations to attend church primarily online.



50%  
of Gen Z say they wish they read the Bible more.

58%  
of Gen Z say they're curious about what the Bible says.

55%  
of Gen Z say they're curious to know more about Jesus.



# NOW THIS

## TIPS, HIGHLIGHTS, INSIGHTS, AND SUGGESTIONS

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- Who's attending church "primarily online"?  
The digital natives of Gen Z lead the way (40%). Surprisingly, Elders are close behind (37%). In all generations, a majority of Christians attend church "primarily in person," when they attend.
- Among Non-Practicing Christians, Gen Z has the highest percentage of people saying they've increased their Bible reading in the past year (17%) . . . and also the highest percentage who say they've decreased their Bible reading (20%). This may indicate a certain volatility as they make choices about their spirituality and reading habits.
- Among Practicing Christians, Gen X (75%) is the most Scripture Engaged generation.





# SHARING THE FAITH

**G**od's truth radiates. This is a repeated theme of Scripture. His Word goes out and accomplishes its purpose. “Let your light shine,” Jesus told his disciples. Later Jesus commissioned them to make disciples in all nations, to be witnesses for him. The apostle Paul describes the “ministry of reconciliation” given to him and other believers. He calls Christians to engage in conversations “full of grace, seasoned with salt.” Peter urges us to “be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you about the hope you have.”<sup>1</sup>

The public perception of evangelism—inside and outside the church—has always been mixed. Over the centuries, famous evangelists have gained fame in popular culture—Whitefield, Finney, Moody, Sunday, Graham, and others—holding mega-events to draw

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<sup>1</sup> See Isaiah 55:11; Matthew 5:16 ESV; Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Colossians 4:6 NIV; 1 Peter 3:15 NIRV.

seekers to their powerful preaching, but also garnering criticism for their methods. Half a century ago, a small-town church might hold a week of evangelistic services or train members to go door to door with the gospel message. Publishers produced tracts for Christians to hand to friends or strangers—often distilling the biblical story into a few key concepts.

At its best, evangelism is driven by an authentic Christian love, a concern for people’s eternal destiny. As comedian/magician Penn Jillette, an atheist, quipped, “How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?”<sup>2</sup>

But at its worst, evangelism has been perfunctory, sometimes rude, marked by manipulation and even greed. Christian humorist Adrian Plass referred to a rest-room hand dryer as the Evangelist Machine: “hot air that takes a long time to produce a rather unsatisfactory result.”<sup>3</sup>

While some Elders and Boomers have been evangelized more than they wanted, for many younger people the Good News of Jesus is genuinely new. As American culture has become less overtly Christianized, new generations have arisen who are freshly receptive to the compelling story of Jesus. As the culture has changed, methods of evangelism have adjusted. In recent times, Christian music, films, novels, streaming TV, and internet memes have been delivering the message.

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2 Jillette, P. Not proselytize (2009). YouTube. Retrieved August 17, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owZc3Xq8obk&t=38s>

3 Plass, A. (2005). *The Sacred Diary of Adrian Plass, Christian Speaker, Aged 45½*. Zondervan [HarperCollins, 1996], p. 56. To be fair, a character in Plass’s story said this.

What hasn't changed is the call to Christians to radiate God's truth, to move outward into our world, to share it.

In this *State of the Bible* survey, we asked questions about evangelism from several different angles to get the full story. *To what extent are Christians talking about their faith? Do they have a desire to do so? What obstacles do they face? Do they feel adequately prepared? Does their church inspire and support them in sharing their faith?*

The results are encouraging in some respects and challenging in others.

## WHO WANTS TO SHARE THEIR FAITH?

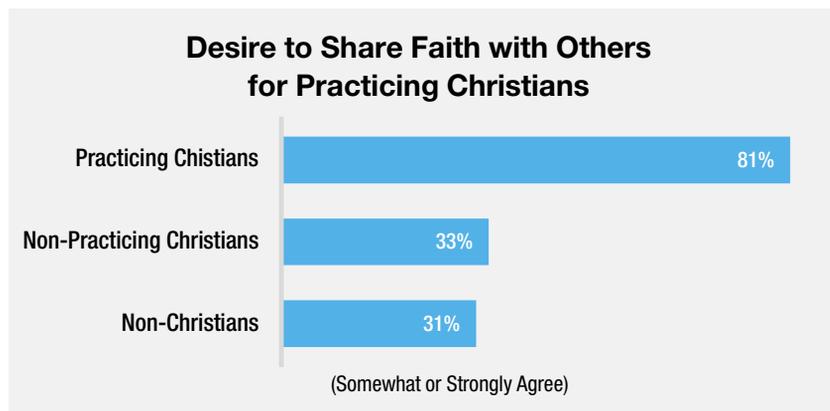
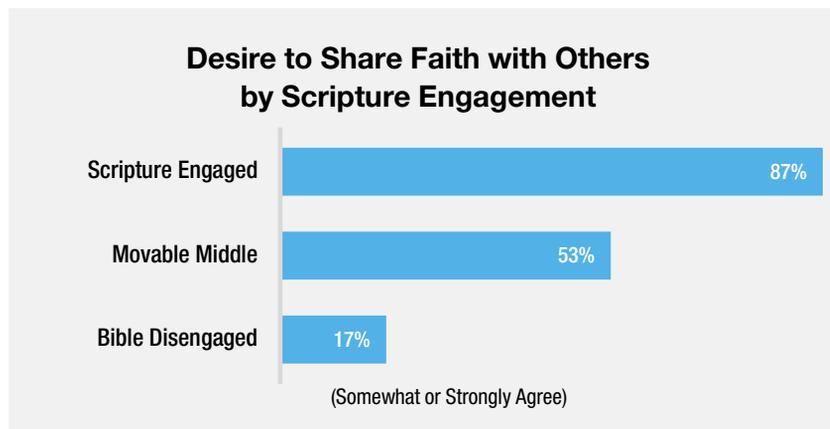
“I want to share my religious faith with others, in hopes that they will one day join me in my faith.”

Scripture Engaged people (87%) are far more likely to agree with that statement than the Bible Disengaged (17%). Just over half (53%) of the Movable Middle agree.

Note that the question reflects *desire* to share faith, not necessarily any actual sharing. Still, Scripture engagement propels evangelism. We might conclude that it's hard to interact deeply with the Bible and not recognize its outward drive.

Practicing Christians (81%) far outpace Non-Practicing Christians (33%) in the desire to share faith. It's no surprise that Non-Christians (31%) are the least-agreeing group, but they nearly match the level of Non-Practicing Christians—a reminder that some non-Christian religions also seek to spread their faith.

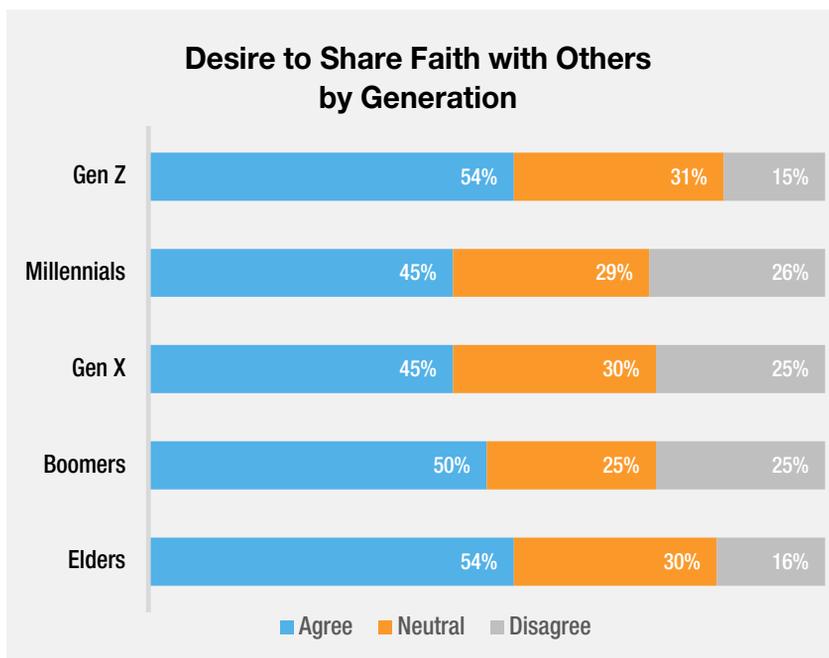
Since church attendance is one defining difference between Practicing and Non-Practicing Christians, these figures introduce a theme we'll be tracking throughout this chapter—the importance of the church in evangelism. The more often people go to church, the more likely they are to want to share their faith with others.



Another surprise: the youngest generation matches the oldest on this question, ahead of all other age groups. Gen Z and Elders showed the

most agreement with the desire to share their faith (54%). Taking a deeper look, among those in Gen Z who are Scripture Engaged we find nearly complete agreement (95%). *Young believers who engage with Scripture want to share their faith with others.*

Our last chapter showed concern about Gen Z with regard to declining religious commitment. But these numbers suggest they are more interested than many older Christians in talking with others about their faith. Could this reflect a shift in public discourse? Some in previous generations considered it rude to discuss religion—that was a private matter. Have we entered an era where people feel free to converse about spiritual matters?



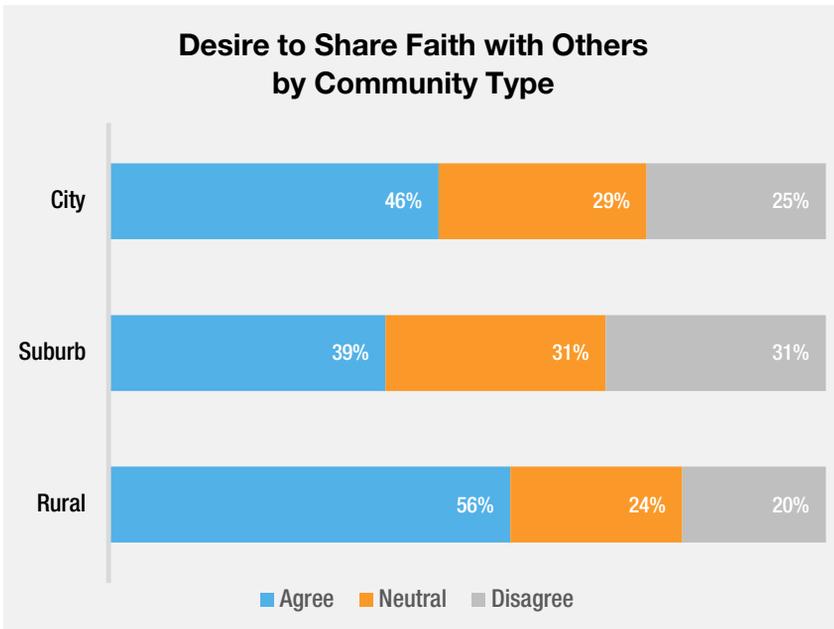
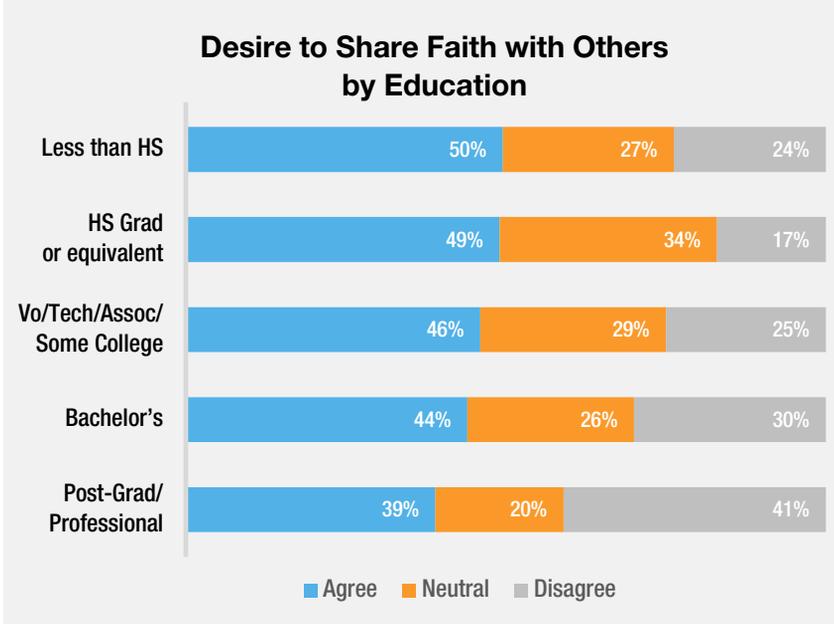
Continuing to break down the demographics of the desire to share faith, we find some clear distinctions. As **education** increases, the desire to share faith decreases. Those with professional degrees or post-graduate study are more than twice as likely to *disagree* with the “I want to share” statement as those who hold only a high school diploma.

The more often people go to church, the more likely they are to want to share their faith with others.

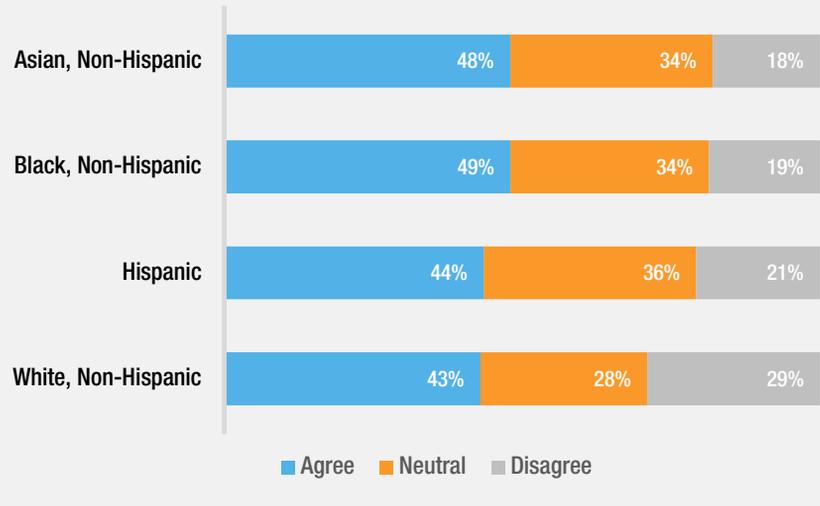
Those in rural **communities** are most likely to want to share their faith (56%). Suburbanites are least likely (39%).

In terms of **race and ethnicity**, we find greatest numbers among Black (non-Hispanic) respondents, with three in five (60%) saying they want to share their faith. The White (non-Hispanic group) is least likely to agree (43%).

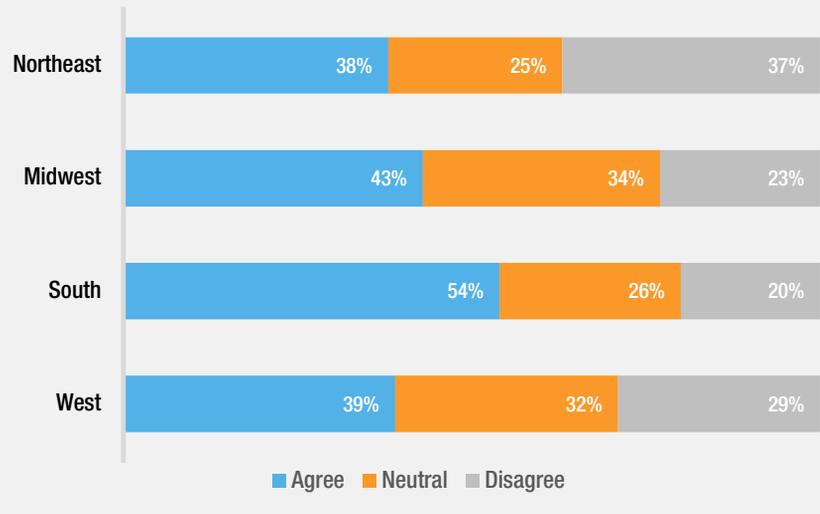
The **regional** analysis of these results reveals more distinctions. Well over half of Southerners (54%) agree that they want to share their faith, the most of any U.S. region. The West (39%) and the Northeast (38%) are the most reluctant regions.



### Desire to Share Faith with Others by Race/Ethnicity



### Desire to Share Faith with Others by Region



## ARE WE HAVING SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS?

While the previous question focused on the *desire* to share one's faith, we also wanted to see what people were actually doing. So we asked, "In the past year, how many people who do not regularly attend your place of worship did you engage in meaningful spiritual conversations?" More than half of Practicing Christians (52%) report having at least three such conversation partners.

Granted, this is not necessarily evangelism, but it could be. Someone might be asking for prayer from a Christian friend at work. Still, this question intentionally challenged the assumption that spiritual conversations happen only in the church. Even among Non-Practicing Christians, nearly one-quarter (24%) reported spiritual conversations with three or more people in the previous year. People *are* talking about faith with their friends, family, and colleagues, not just with those who worship with them on Sundays.

Of special note is the emergence of Gen Z, the age group most likely to have had spiritual conversations with three or more non-church connections in the past year (58%). These are the numbers for Practicing Christians, but Gen Z also leads the way among Non-Practicing Christians, with more than three in ten (31%) reporting three or more spiritual conversation partners.

People are talking about faith with their friends, family, and colleagues, not just with those who worship with them on Sundays.



A colleague recently told us about an interaction his daughter had with other teenagers at a summer school driver’s education class. The students didn’t know one another well, but during a break they began to chat. It started with one of the girls asking the others about their astrological sign, but then it got deeper, as the girls shared their struggles to find a faith that was relevant to their everyday lives.

One girl was from a Hindu home, but questioned Hinduism’s ability to do more than provide a cultural identity to her Indian family.

Another’s mother was Wiccan, but the girl thought Wiccan beliefs were creepy.

Another was from a Catholic family, but they weren't practicing their faith ... or even sure what it meant.

Eventually they asked our colleague's daughter if she knew what *she* believed.

"I'm a Christian," she said.

"Oh, cool! Do you believe that?"

"Yes, I do."

Another girl looked over and said, "It's cool that you know that. I don't know what I believe."

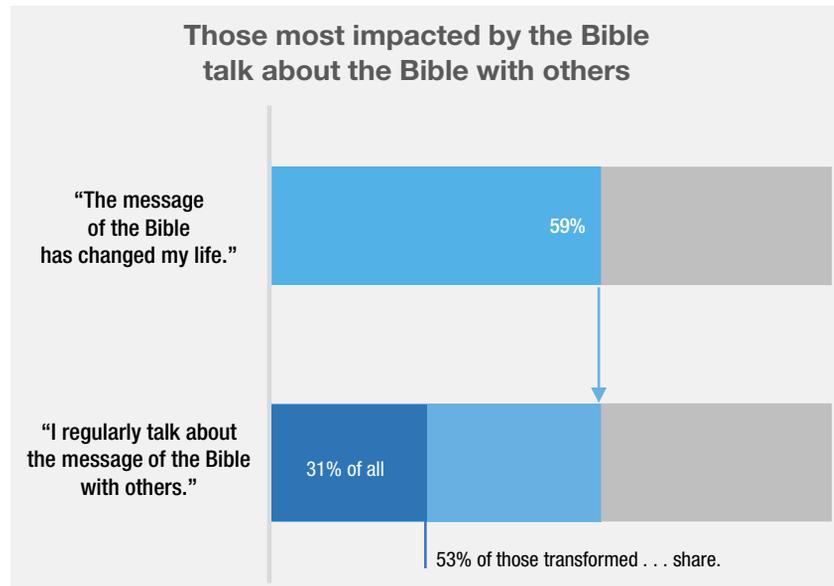
This was a casual conversation on a summer day—not initiated by a Christian in order to evangelize, but simply arising from the mutual interest of people from different faith backgrounds. It was a spiritual conversation held by members of Generation Z.

Are we seeing a generational shift in openness to spiritual matters? Where previous generations learned to avoid religious talk, our findings suggest that Gen Z is breaking those barriers.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE

The survey also asked people whether they agreed that: *The message of the Bible has transformed my life*. Nearly three in five (59%) said yes.

This group—those who said they had been transformed by the Bible—got a follow-up: *I regularly talk about the message of the Bible with others.* More than half (53%) agreed.



The New Testament provides a picture of this transformation and the outreach that results. God reconciles with us and then entrusts us with “the message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:17–19 GNT). We see that playing out statistically in this question. Six in ten Americans say they’ve been transformed by the Bible’s message. More than half of those (31% of all Americans) are going the next step and *talking about* that message.

Many would hope for a hundred percent on these questions, but don’t miss the impact of these numbers. Nearly a third of Americans say they regularly talk about the transforming message of the Bible.

## WHAT'S HOLDING US BACK?

In 1978, linguists Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson published a seminal work on Politeness Theory,<sup>4</sup> adapting the Eastern concept of “face” to interactions across cultures. Politeness, they posited, involves honoring the face of those we speak with. Their theory recognizes “positive face”—personal connection and being liked—as well as “negative face,” which has to do with personal control and autonomy.

This academic exploration has developed over several decades now, with scholars applying Politeness principles to various cultures, and it's fascinating to think about the connection with evangelism in today's world. How could it shape our conversations? Do we need to say something like, “It's great that you have these spiritual questions—I've had them too [positive face, support and connection]. Here are some ideas from the Bible you might want to add to your investigation [negative face, affirming their autonomy]”?

Scripture calls us to answer people's questions with “gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15–16), which seems like a distillation of Politeness Theory. Yet many Christians feel caught between their desire to be polite and also to persuade others.

A year after Politeness Theory emerged, Rebecca Manley Pippert wrote a book that became a modern Christian classic, *Out of the Saltshaker and Into the World*. “Christians and non-Christians have something in common: we're both uptight about evangelism,” she

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4 Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1978). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge UP.

began. “Our fear as Christians seems to be *How many people did I offend this week?* We think that we must be a little obnoxious in order to be good evangelists. A tension builds inside: *Should I be sensitive to people and forget about evangelism, or should I blast them with the gospel and forget about their dignity as human beings?*”<sup>5</sup>

Our survey verifies that “fear of what people will think of me” is one of the leading obstacles to faith-sharing among the Scripture Engaged. Among all respondents, a leading hindrance was “I think it is inappropriate to talk about my faith.”

Respondents were given eight possible obstacles, of which they could choose up to three. They could also say, “Nothing prevents me from talking about my faith” (which 39% chose, more than any individual obstacle). While issues of inappropriateness were mentioned fairly often, these weren’t the only factors holding people back.

Various issues of self-doubt are the hindrances most reported— insecurity with social interactions and lack of knowledge regarding the faith. It’s especially interesting that the fear of being inappropriate is *not* in the top three of our Gen Z respondents. (Once again, we see evidence that our youngest generation is more comfortable with spiritual conversations in general.) They were more concerned about their lack of faith knowledge, their own inconsistencies in life, and being “unsure of my own faith.”

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5 Pippert, R. M. (1979). *Out of the saltshaker and into the world: Evangelism as a way of life*. InterVarsity Press, p. 15

## **TOP 3 OBSTACLES TO EVANGELISM**

### **... for All Respondents:**

1. *Lack of knowledge regarding faith issues (21%)*
2. *Feeling inadequate in social interactions with others (16%)*
3. *I think it is inappropriate to talk about my faith (13%)*

### **... for Scripture Engaged:**

1. *Feeling inadequate in social interactions with others (19%)*
2. *Lack of knowledge regarding faith issues (15%)*
3. *Fear of what people will think of me (12%)*

### **... for Gen Z:**

1. *Lack of knowledge regarding faith issues (31%)*
2. *Guilt about inconsistencies in my own life (22%)*
3. *I am unsure about my own faith (19%)*

## ARE WE ADEQUATELY PREPARED?

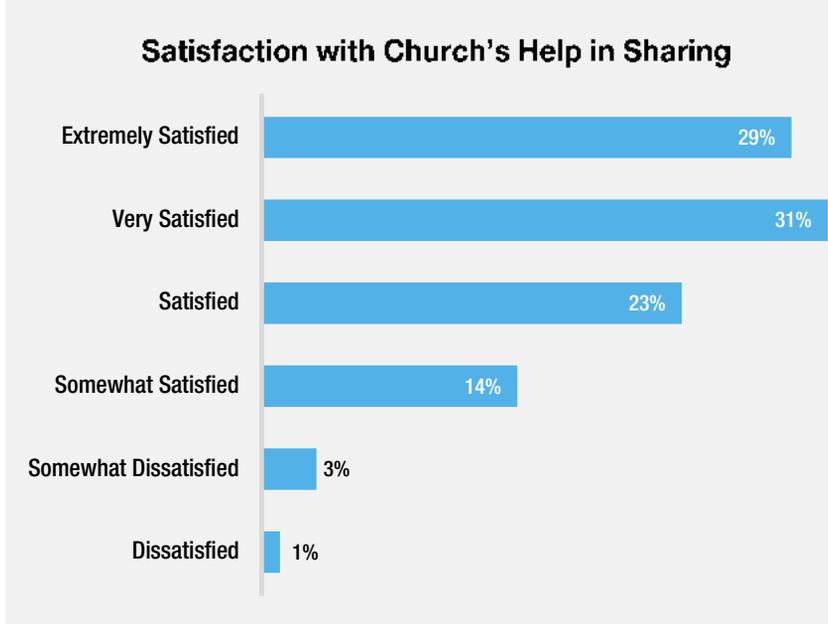
Are churches adequately training their people in evangelism? It depends whom you ask.

In general, those who want to evangelize feel prepared to do so.

We just saw that “Lack of knowledge regarding faith issues” was a frequently mentioned obstacle to faith-sharing (21%), which suggests that one in five feel they need more education to share their faith effectively. But we also asked specifically whether people felt prepared to talk about their faith with people who did not attend their place of worship. This time we asked only those who had said they *wanted* to share their faith. Nine in ten agreed, strongly or somewhat.

In general, those who want to evangelize feel prepared to do so. Even in Gen Z, where we saw a number of self-doubt obstacles, a strong majority (82%) of those who wanted to share their faith felt prepared.

On a separate question, we asked Practicing Christians whether they felt satisfied with their church’s role in helping them learn how to share their faith. We found overwhelming satisfaction (96%).

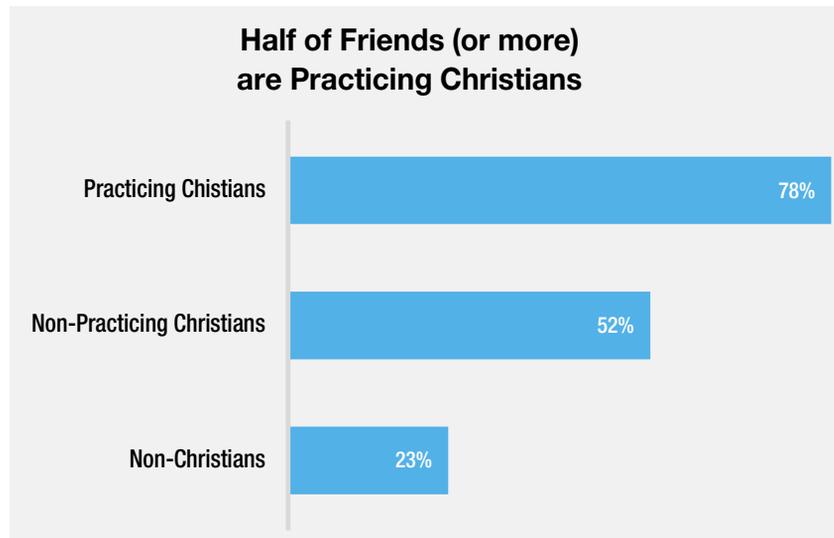


Is there a need for training in evangelism? Perhaps among Gen Z. The obstacles they mentioned suggest that many of them are still figuring out their own faith. Yet, as we've seen, they're having spiritual conversations. Can we find creative methods to shore up their knowledge and confidence as they engage their curious culture with the winsome message of Christ? Can we give them tools for addressing doubts about their faith? Can we help them understand how biblical faith provides valuable resources for their life today?

## THE SHARING COMMUNITY

The church has sometimes received criticism for being a closed community where believers fellowship with other believers instead of forging relationships outside the church.

But is this true? Is the church a *haven* where we avoid outside connections or a *charging station* where we receive education, guidance, and motivation that sends us outward? To get some perspective on this question, we asked people how many of their friends are Practicing Christians.



Nearly four in five Practicing Christians (78%) say that half or more of their friends are also Practicing Christians. Birds of a feather flock together. It's no surprise that people would forge friendships in church. But does this indicate a closed community? Not really. Only one in fourteen Practicing Christians (7%) say that "all" their friends are also Practicing Christians.

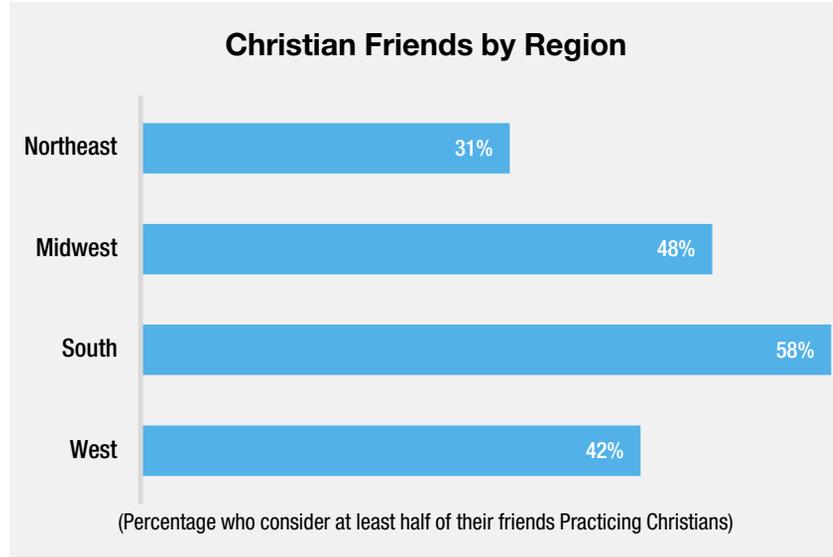
For Non-Practicing Christians, more than half (52%) say that half or more of their friends are Practicing Christians. These are people who don't attend church even monthly, and yet they continue to have a significant number of friendships with church people.

Even a glance at the Non-Christian results reveals a curious reality. Nearly a quarter of them (23%) say half or more of their friends are Practicing Christians. Where do they hang out with these friends? Not at church. How do they know they're Christians? Maybe they're having spiritual conversations. In a previous chapter, we noted how Practicing Christians (and the Scripture Engaged) excel in "neighboring." Maybe this neighborly behavior creates friendships even among Non-Christians.

Digging deeper into the data, we find that, *when Practicing Christians have more Practicing Christian friends, they are more likely to have spiritual conversations with those who do not attend their church.*

From these data, we begin to assemble a picture of the church. It's not closed, but full of friendship. Christians find encouragement, knowledge, and growth as they gather with one another, and then they move outward to talk about spiritual matters with anyone else in their world. Non-Practicing Christians and even Non-Christians count them as friends. This is not an exclusive community, but a sharing community. Perhaps we are not sharing as much as we could—we always wish the numbers were higher—but there are good signs here.

Christians find encouragement, knowledge, and growth as they gather with one another, and then they move outward . . .



Regional differences in the U.S. show up starkly on this question. In the South, nearly three in five people (58%) say half or more of their friends are Practicing Christians. That’s nearly twice the figure from the Northeast (31%).

We’ve known church planters in the Northeast who grew frustrated when their results didn’t match what they were expecting—using resources from Illinois, Colorado, or Tennessee. These statistics show that each region has a unique social makeup.

## CONCLUSION

What’s the state of evangelism in America today?

We asked a range of questions with different phrasing—sharing faith, having spiritual conversations, talking about the message of

the Bible. The Bible itself expresses the work of evangelism in various ways (preaching, reconciling, conversing, answering), so we felt comfortable approaching the subject in different ways.

We wish more people wanted to share their faith, but many do. And this sharing is happening in spiritual conversations outside the church, where transformed people talk about the message of the Bible. While some feel their lack of knowledge is an obstacle, most church-going Christians feel satisfied with the way their church has prepared them to share their faith.

As with many other factors in *State of the Bible*, evangelism is strongly associated with Scripture Engagement and church attendance. Those who are committed to the Bible and the church are far more likely to be committed to sharing their faith.

We're especially encouraged by Gen Z. Our last chapter included some causes for worry, but here we see a desire for faith-sharing among Scripture-engaged young people. We also see signs of a greater openness to spiritual conversations in the Gen Z culture.

What's the state of evangelism in America today? As always, it's a work in progress.

# INVITATIONS

Would you agree to participate in this activity if asked by a Christian friend?

(Asked of those who “never” attend church)

Watch a dramatic TV  
program or movie  
about Jesus?

“Yes.”

17%

Watch a church  
service streaming  
online or on TV?

13%

Attend a Christian  
music concert or  
event?

10%

# NOW THIS

## TIPS, HIGHLIGHTS, INSIGHTS, AND SUGGESTIONS

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- We're going to need a new kind of evangelism training, one that addresses the kind of spiritual conversations that Gen Z is having. Start with 1 Peter 3:15–16.
- Nearly half (47%) of all Americans say half or more of their friends are Christian—which is a statistical anomaly when only 20 percent of Americans are Practicing Christians, by our definition. Perhaps the common definition is looser than ours. Or maybe Christians are just very friendly.
- On the whole, Christians are not clamoring for more evangelism training from the church. But perhaps the church could create or promote events that Christians could invite their friends to. Watch parties for *The Chosen*? A Family Improv Night? How about a service project we can invite neighbors to join in?





# BIBLE USE

**T**he young church leader Timothy was urged to handle the Scriptures with care (2 Timothy 2:15). Actually, the Old English rendering, “rightly dividing the word of truth,” is quite accurate. The Greek text uses a surgical verb to describe a precise incision.

A related term appears in Hebrews 4:12, describing God’s Word as “*sharper* than any double-edged sword.”<sup>1</sup> But in this surgery we are the patients, not the surgeon. The Word “penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (NIV).

Many people who consistently interact with the Bible recognize this double experience. The more we dig into Scripture, the more it digs into us. We may scrub up for surgery, but ultimately we are the ones on the operating table.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2 Timothy 2:15, the participle *orthotomounta* is a compound of words for “correct” and “cut.” In Hebrews 4:12, the adjective for “sharper” is *tomoteros*, built on the same root for “to cut.”

In popular American culture, the Bible is often treated as a sort of good-luck charm. A family has on a shelf a huge Bible that’s never opened, except to record a marriage or birth. A politician waves a Bible at a town meeting to rally support. And there are stories of bullets stopped by New Testaments in soldiers’ pockets.

In the *State of the Bible* research, we look for interaction with Scripture, not just venerating the Bible, but digging into it—and letting it do its transforming work. This chapter focuses on how people interact with the Bible. Years ago, we began talking about “Bible Users,” and not just Bible readers, to accommodate those with impaired sight or hearing. Now, with audio recordings of the Scriptures and videos of Bible stories, the term is even more necessary. Many of our statistics so far have revealed *who* uses the Bible and *how often*.<sup>2</sup> Here we explore *how*.

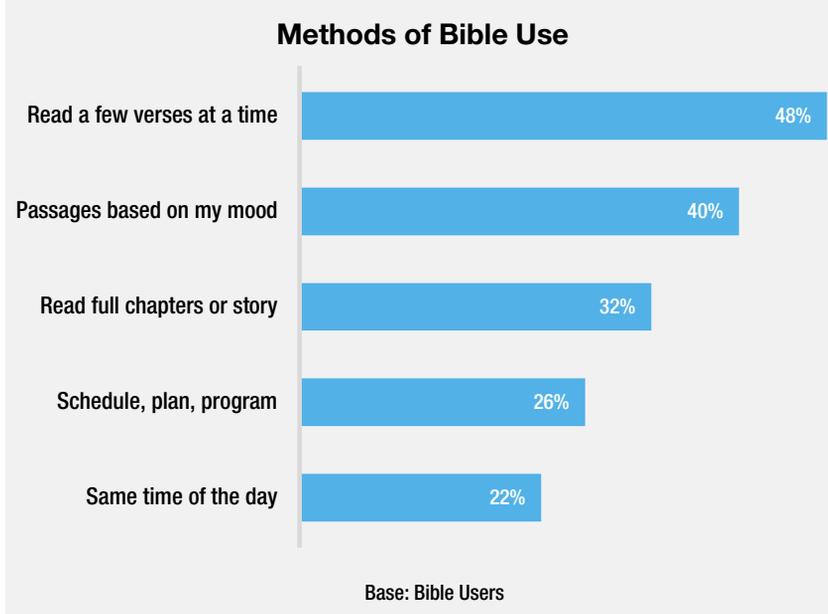
## CASUAL AND DISCIPLINED BIBLE USE

In the survey, when people said they interacted with the Bible three to four times a year, or more, we designated them as Bible Users. (This is much different from the Scripture Engaged designation, which generally requires greater frequency of Bible use, as well as indicators of the centrality and impact of the Bible’s message.<sup>3</sup>) We then asked Bible Users follow-up questions about their practices. What methods did they use in their Bible interaction?

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2 The chart on page 17 shows the frequency of Bible use in this year’s survey. In the introductory material, page x, we show the proportion of Bible Users over the last decade.

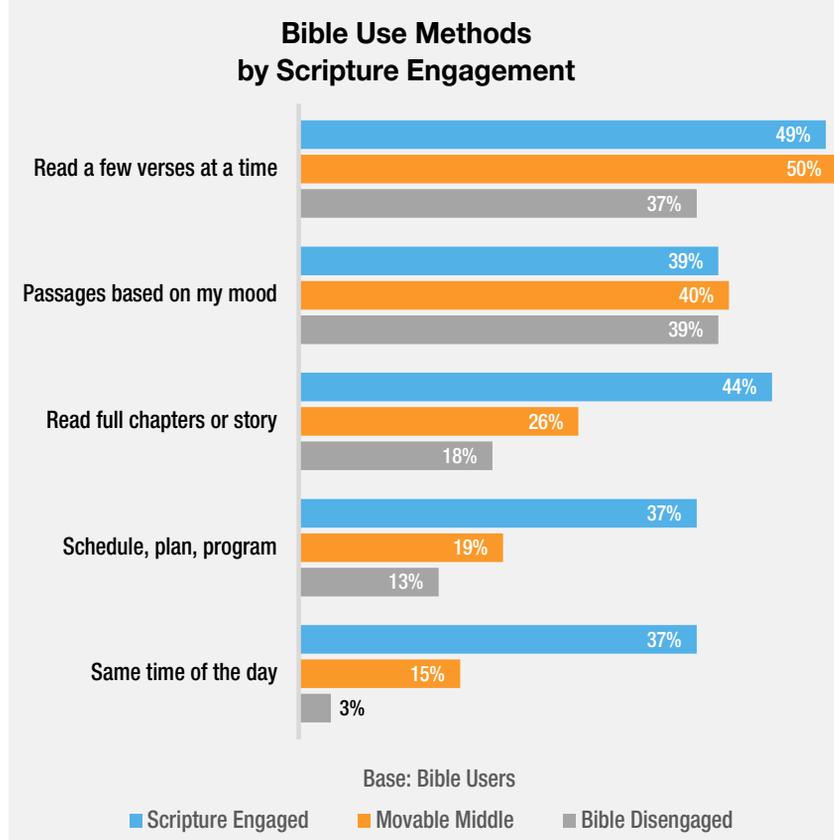
3 For a fuller definition of Scripture Engagement and how we measure it, see pages 30–33.



The two most commonly selected methods also appear to be the easiest. Nearly half of Bible Users (48%) reported reading “a few verses at a time.” Two of five said they selected Scriptures according to their mood.

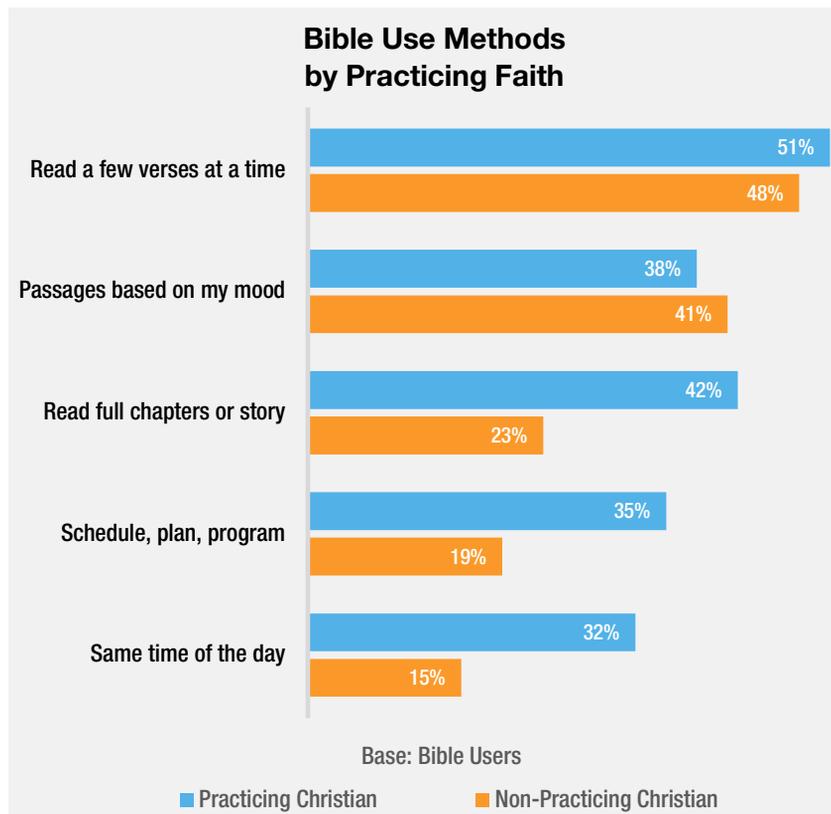
The other three methods listed (and respondents could choose as many as they liked) might be considered more disciplined in nature. Smaller groups of Bible Users reported reading complete chapters or stories (32%) or following a “schedule, plan, or program” (26%). Of the five methods offered, the least chosen (22%) was “I read the Bible about the same time of the day.”

The distinction between what we call Casual and Disciplined methods becomes clearer when we examine responses according to Scripture Engagement level.



Among Bible Users, those who are Scripture Engaged and those in the Movable Middle practice the Casual methods of Bible Use—a few verses, according to mood—at nearly the same rate. The difference emerges on the Disciplined methods—chapters, plan, and same time—which the Scripture Engaged use about twice as much. (Because the question was only asked of Bible Users, the Bible Disengaged have a much smaller sample size. Still, that group reported using the two Casual methods much more than the more Disciplined methods.)

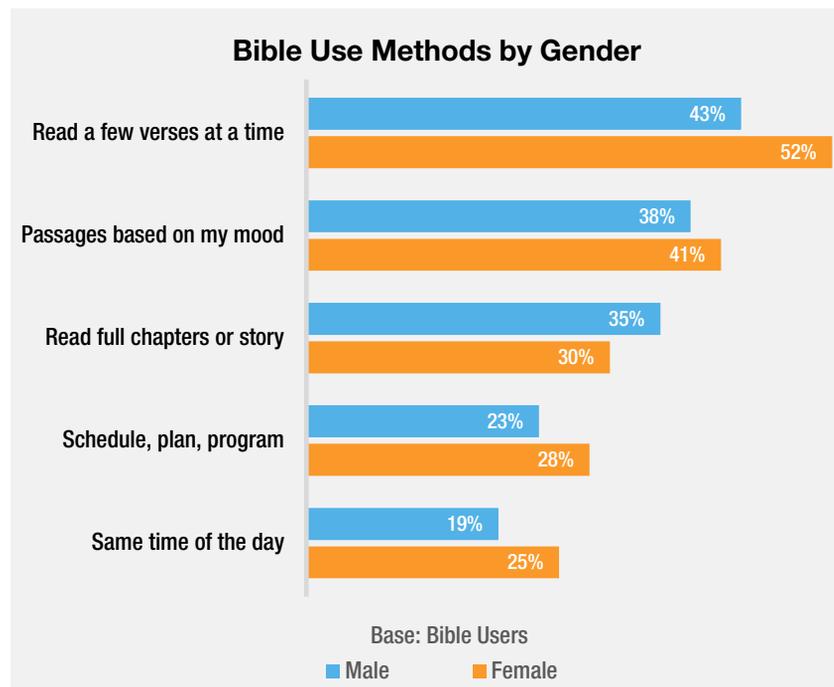
The pattern continues as we examine responses according to Practicing Christian status.



Among those who self-identify as Christians, Practicing Christians are those who attend a church service (in person or online) at least once a month and strongly agree that their faith is important to them. This designation indicates a commitment to the church and the Christian faith in much the same way as Scripture Engagement indicates commitment to the Bible. The Non-Practicing Christian category often corresponds to the Movable Middle—less committed to the church, to faith, or (for the Movable Middle) the Bible.

With methods of Bible use, we see the same pattern. One's level of commitment doesn't seem to affect the Casual methods, but the more committed group practices the Disciplined methods at nearly twice the rate.

It's worth noting that there is no substantial difference among the generational groups. When genders are compared, men trail women slightly on four of the five methods; men have a slight lead only when it comes to reading full chapters or stories. Perhaps women are somewhat more likely to “snack” on Scripture, while men prefer dining on larger portions.



Overall, we see a broad group of Bible Users, both the highly committed and the less committed, interacting with the Bible a few verses

at a time, or according to their mood. Perhaps church leaders could encourage this behavior by texting or emailing short Bible passages (“a few verses at a time”) or recommending certain Scriptures for certain moods.

We also see a clear connection between Scripture Engagement and three methods of Bible use relating to habit-forming, following a plan, and reading larger portions of Scripture. Does self-discipline lead people to become more Scripture Engaged? Or does an awareness of the centrality and impact of Scripture motivate people to be more disciplined in their Bible interaction?

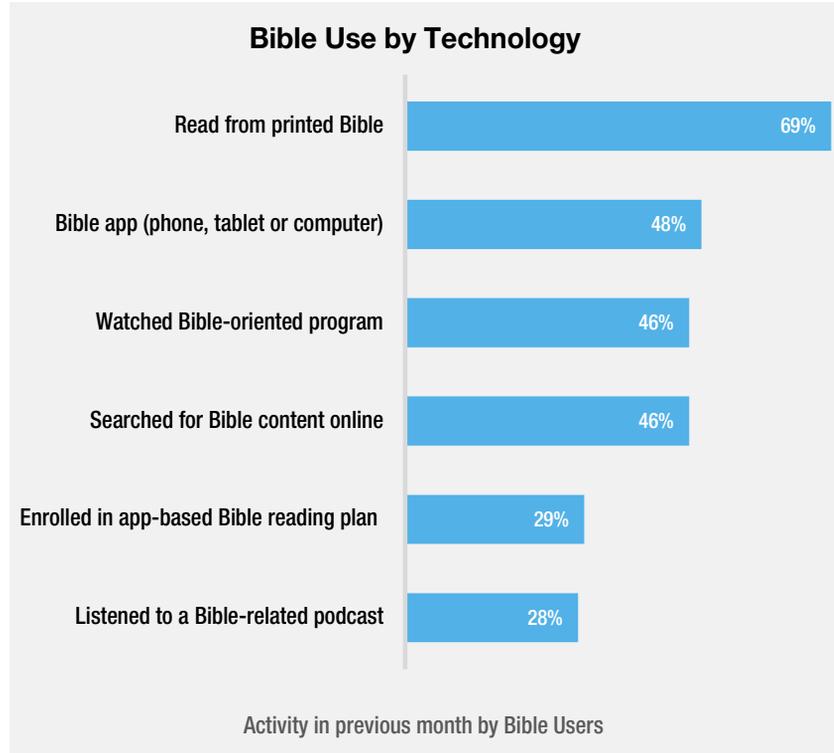
In any case, churches might encourage Scripture Engagement by offering reading plans, by promoting the value of a Bible reading habit at the same time each day, and by identifying the stories or chapters in Scripture (not just a few verses) that are especially compelling or especially applicable to their situations.

## BIBLE TECH

You might think no one is reading printed Bibles anymore. Actually, print is still the Bible format used most often. Nearly seven of ten Bible Users say they have read on their own in the past month from a printed version of the Bible, but several tech options are vying for second place, chosen by nearly half of Bible Users.<sup>4</sup>

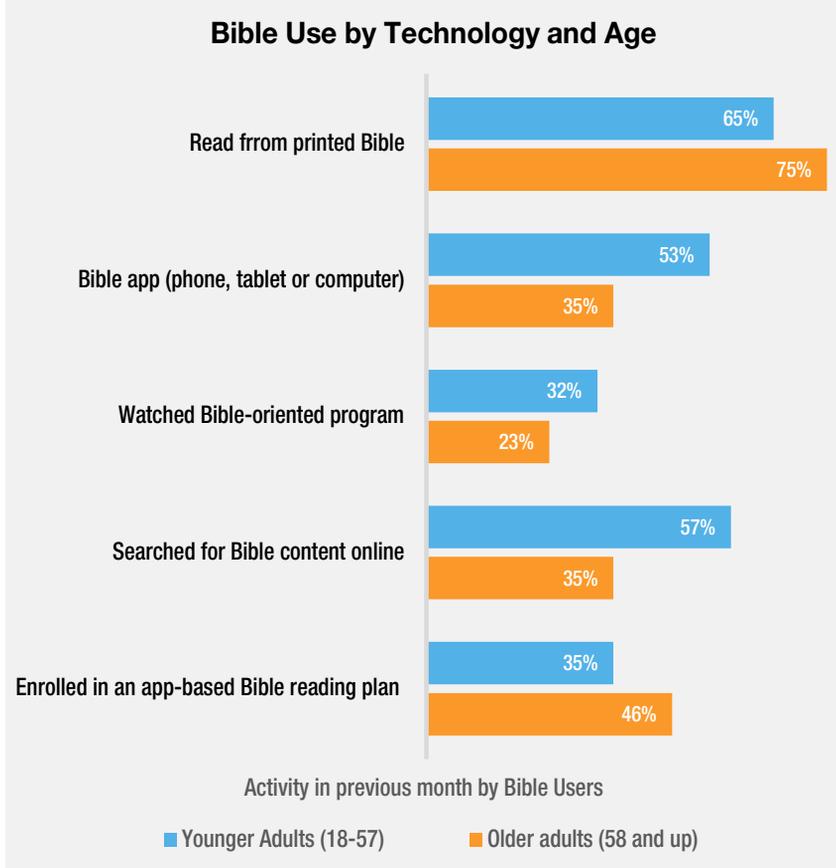
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<sup>4</sup> Pages 19–22 contain some additional reporting on Bible formats.

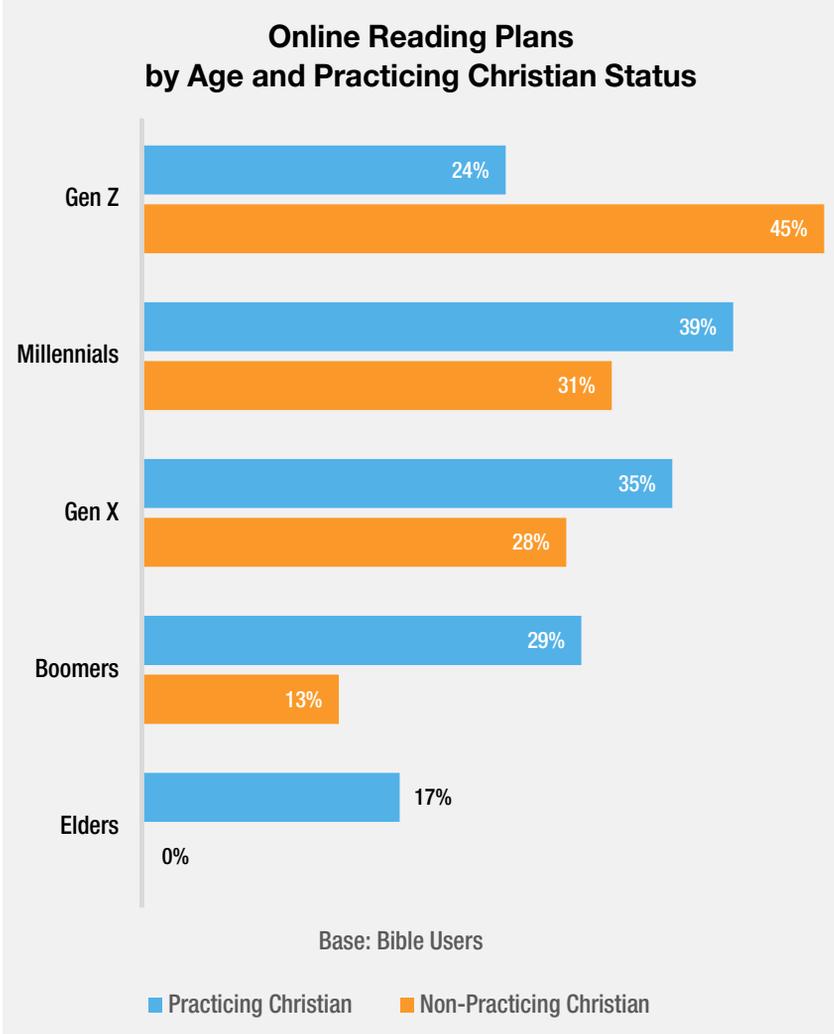


Print is still the Bible format used most often . . . but several tech options are vying for second place.

General analysis reveals a stark contrast. Gen Z, Millennials, and Gen X are already embracing new Bible technology. Boomers and Elders are generally staying with print—but they’re not the only ones. Nearly two-thirds of younger adult Bible Users still use printed Bibles. Even the youngest cohort, Gen Z, has more than half (55%) reporting the use of a printed Bible in the previous month.



When we look more closely at specific media formats, some curious details emerge. For instance, in younger generations, a surprising number of Non-Practicing Christians report that they “enrolled in a Bible reading plan with my phone, tablet or computer” in the previous month. In Gen Z, the Non-Practicing Christians far outpace the Practicing Christians on this question (45% to 24%). Among Millennial and Gen X Bible Users, results are similar, though not as dramatic.



What does this tell us? As Bible Users, these people are reading the Bible at least three times a year—perhaps in this online reading plan. But as Non-Practicing Christians, they’re not attending church even monthly—or they have questions about the importance of their

faith. Still, they reach for a regular connection with the Bible, and in these younger generations, they're reaching online.

It must be acknowledged that enrolling in an online plan doesn't necessarily mean using it, but it does signal a desire.

## WISHFUL THINKING

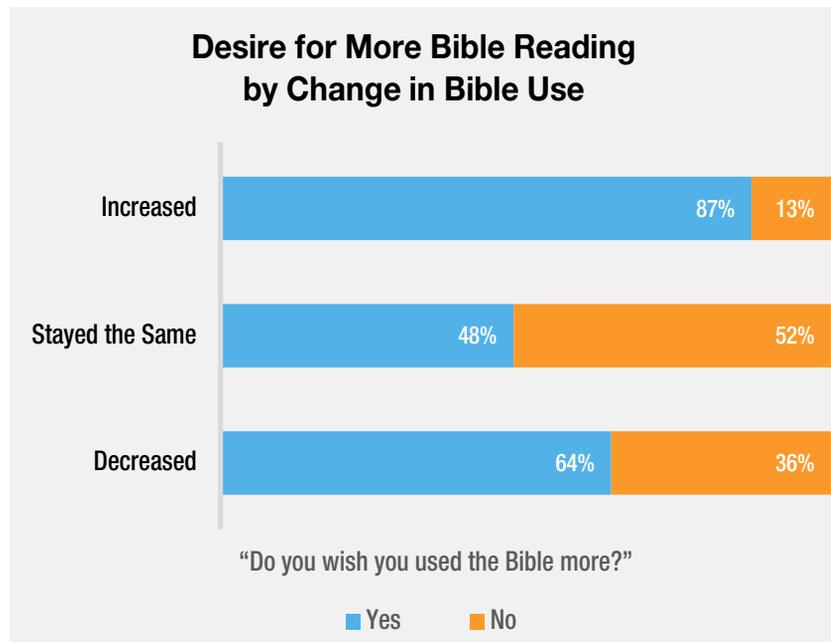
As reported earlier (page 17), Bible Use has gone down substantially between 2021 and 2022. For most of the past decade, half of Americans were interacting with the Bible at least three times a year, but this year that figure suddenly dropped to four in ten. So when people were asked whether their Bible reading had increased or decreased in the last year, you might expect a lot of "decrease" responses. Not so.

About one in ten Americans (10%) say their Bible use decreased in the past year. But a few *more* (13%) say it increased. The vast majority (77%) say it stayed the same.<sup>5</sup> This is one of the features of self-reporting. People like to think they're doing better.

In a follow-up question, we asked whether people wished they read the Bible more. A substantial majority (54%) said yes. This response was fueled by both the increasers and decreasers. Most of those whose Bible reading stayed the same seemed content to stay the same.

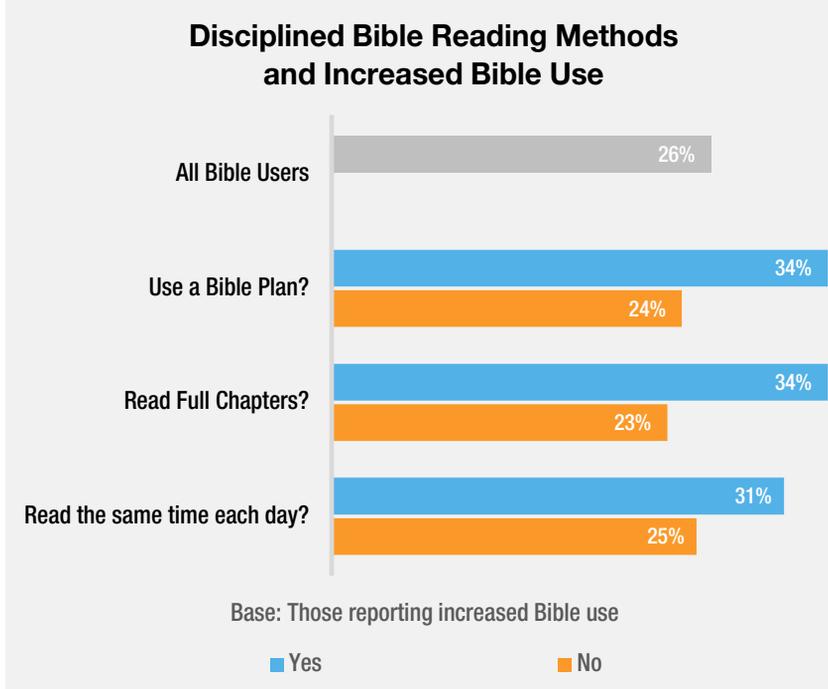
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5 See chart on page 18.



If those people really want to make Bible reading a more important part of their life, they might go back to the methods we described earlier as Disciplined. Those who used a reading plan or read full chapters were more likely to increase their Bible reading than those who didn't.

While the general population reported a 13 percent increase in Bible reading, that figure doubled when we counted only Bible Users (26%). But more than a third (34%) of those who used a “schedule, plan, or program” increased their Bible reading. The same number (34%) applied to those who read full chapters or complete stories.



## CHANGED LIVES

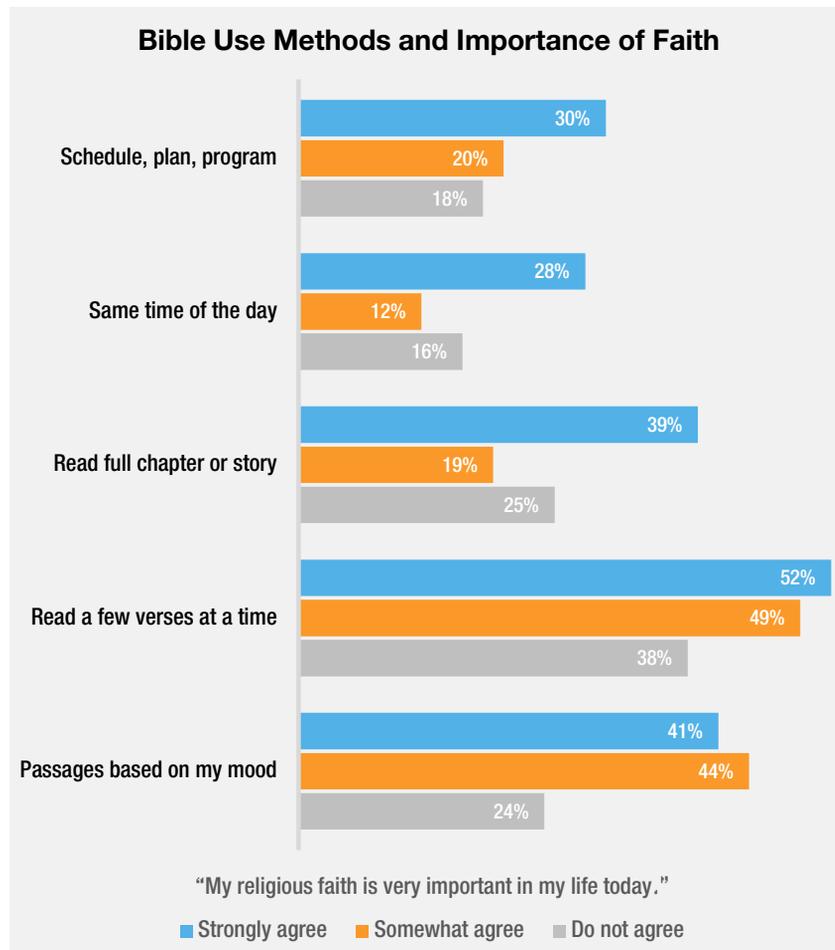
Ultimately, Bible Use isn't only about opening a book or an app. It's about interacting with God. And when people connect with God in Scripture, their lives change, their attitudes change, their values change. Let's examine several "attitude and values" factors to see how the Bible transforms people.

## FAITH IMPORTANCE

We asked people about the importance of religious faith in their lives. Those who "strongly agreed" that faith was important were far more likely to read the Bible in the Disciplined ways we've described

above. On the other hand, those who used the Casual methods (a few verses, according to mood) ran the gamut from agreement or disagreement on the importance of faith.

This suggests that the difference in Bible reading methods goes beyond how disciplined a person naturally is. The issue of motivation comes into play. People are motivated to practice discipline in Bible reading when they strongly value their faith.

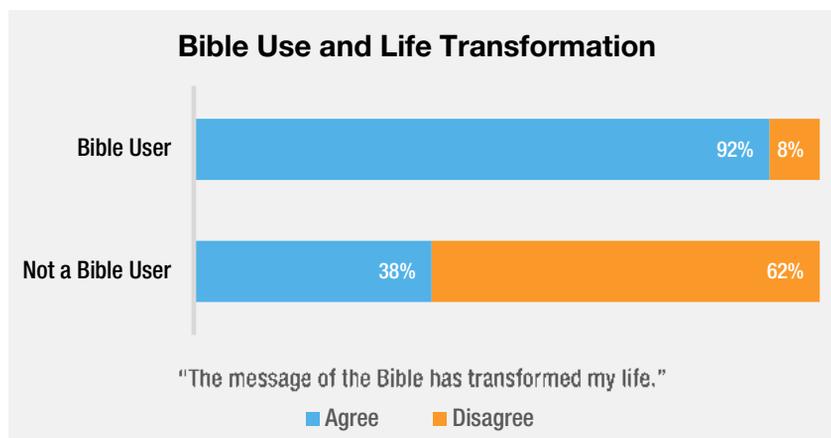


## TRANSFORMATION

Among non-Bible Users—those who don't use the Bible on their own even three times a year—more than a third (38%) say that “the message of the Bible has transformed my life.” Some of these people attend church occasionally and might receive the transforming message there. Others may have been transformed by the Bible in past experiences, though they apparently have discontinued their personal Bible reading. Perhaps some have a friend or family member speaking biblical truth to them. In any case, it's remarkable that such a sizable portion of those who aren't reading the Bible much say they've been transformed by it.

This is not just a glass-half-full observation. Of course we wish more Americans would interact with Scripture on a regular basis, but this is a noteworthy statistic. Of the 155 million *non*-Bible Users in America, nearly 60 million would say the Bible's message has transformed them.

Of the 155 million non-Bible Users in America, nearly 60 million would say the Bible's message has transformed them.



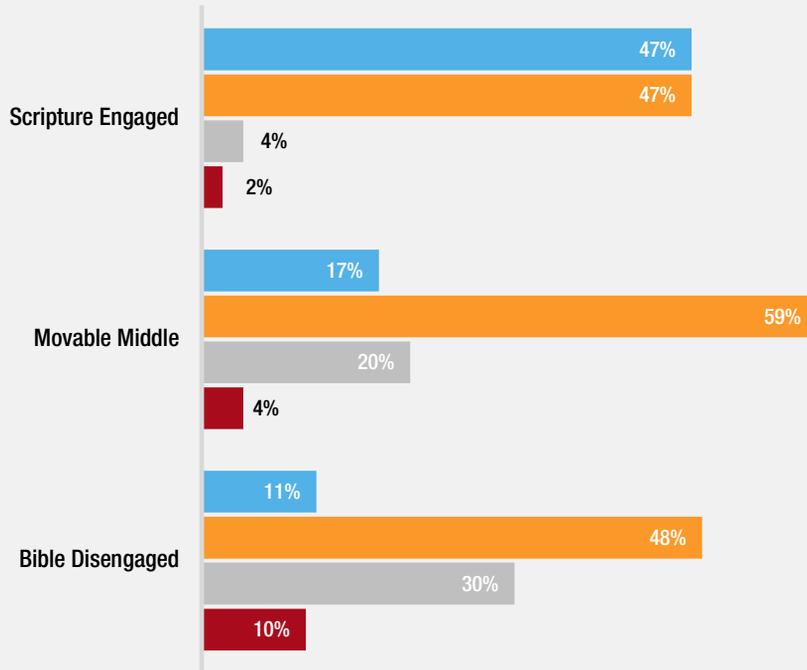
## FORGIVENESS

We experience a Bible-driven transformation in various areas of life—and perhaps none is as challenging as forgiveness. So our survey asked people whether they agreed with this statement: *I am able to sincerely forgive whatever someone else has done to me, regardless of whether they ever ask for forgiveness or not.*

The results were intriguing, almost as if we're watching transformation take place within these numbers. The Scripture Engaged are nearly unanimous in their agreement, with equal numbers (47%) agreeing “strongly” and “somewhat.” Those who engage with Scripture certainly know how much it urges us to forgive others. It's even part of the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:12). Still, forgiving is a difficult business. Those who “strongly agree” that they're able to forgive may have experienced a God-powered transformation. Those who “somewhat” agree might be saying they're still working on it. You might think of Simon Peter, fully engaged with Jesus, but still assuming that seven pardons were plenty (Matthew 18:21).

We see this honest ambivalence even more clearly in the response of the Movable Middle, with nearly six in ten (59%) “somewhat” agreeing, and another 20 percent “somewhat” disagreeing. *Are you able to forgive? Maybe. Sort of. Somewhat.* The path of forgiveness is all the harder when we're not engaging with the Scripture that nudges us forward. Let's appreciate the honesty of those “somewhat” responses, even as we pray that God will continue his transforming work in all of us.

## Scripture Engagement and Forgiveness



"I am able to sincerely forgive whatever someone else has done to me, regardless of whether they ever ask for forgiveness or not."

■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree

↑ EXPLORING WAYS TO  
**INCREASE**  
BIBLE READING

Those who follow a schedule, plan, or program

**42%** more likely  
to increase



Those who read one or more chapters, or a complete story

**48%** more likely  
to increase



Those who read about  
the same time of the day

**24%** more likely  
to increase

# NOW THIS

## TIPS, HIGHLIGHTS, INSIGHTS, AND SUGGESTIONS

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Our team has worked with YouVersion, the online Bible resource center, to analyze data on who's downloading what Bible content. Here's one pattern we've discovered:

- Scripture Engaged people tend to “start from the Bible.” That is, they’ll study a book of the Bible or explore a theological issue. They want to know more about the Bible.
- Those in the Movable Middle also come to YouVersion for resources, but they tend to start from their own lives. Divorce. Depression. Decision-making. Even forgiveness. They need help on the issues of their lives, and they wonder what the Bible says.
- In our churches and ministries, we need to keep meeting people wherever they are. Show them how to make the Bible a part of everyday life. Show them how it addresses their issues. And always recognize the transforming work God is doing in each of them.





# GENEROSITY

**F**ourteen-year-old Carlos was thrilled with the gift he had just received. He was already imagining the joy it would bring him, how it would improve his life and help others, a gift that would truly keep giving.

What was this awesome gift? A tomato plant.

This was the first year of the COVID pandemic, and Carlos was concerned about its possible effect on the food supply. In Camden, NJ, named “New Jersey’s largest food desert community,”<sup>1</sup> hunger is a real threat. “Access to healthy fruits and vegetables can be challenging in inner-city communities,” explains Toni, a local volunteer, “so every year I grow a bunch of heirloom tomato plants. Getting them in the hands of our high school students, so they can grow their own food, gives them a sense of agency.” By being generous with her gift of expertise in horticulture, Toni brought a smile to Carlos’s face. He was excited that he could now “grow my own fruits.”

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1 Dougherty, M. (2022, January 8). “New Jersey identifies food deserts, Camden tops list,” *KYW Newsradio*. <https://www.audacy.com/kywnewsradio/news/local/new-jersey-food-deserts-camden-tops-list>

Scripture Engaged  
Americans gave \$145  
billion to charitable  
causes in 2021.

This chapter of *State of the Bible 2022* focuses on giving. When we think about charity, donations, philanthropy, and the like, we tend to assume it's all about money. While this report will present financial statistics, Carlos and Toni remind us that there's much more

involved. Touched by the amazing grace of God, people of faith respond with amazing generosity. Toni brings a plant, a skill. And Carlos has food to share with his friends.

“When God's people offer their gifts to the world, they bring more than just a skill or service for hire,” says Bruce Main, executive director of Urban Promise, a Christian ministry that works with youth and children in cities around

the world. He's talking about the hundreds of volunteers he works with, but he could also be talking about the thousands who donate to his ministry and others. “They bring something near and dear to their hearts. They bring something that flows from the deeper parts of their being. They bring something, I believe, God has ignited and nurtured over time. I guess what they actually bring is love.”<sup>2</sup>

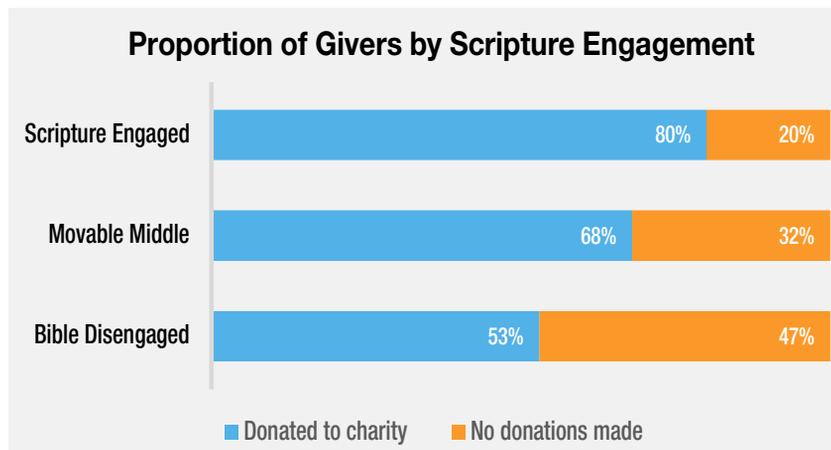
## THE EFFECT OF SCRIPTURE

**Scripture Engaged people are far more likely than others to donate to charity.** Four out of five of them report giving, compared to just over half of the Bible Disengaged. Slightly more than two of three in the Movable Middle reported charitable contributions.

<sup>2</sup> Main, B. (2021). *God Writes a Better Story*. Unpublished manuscript. Used by permission.

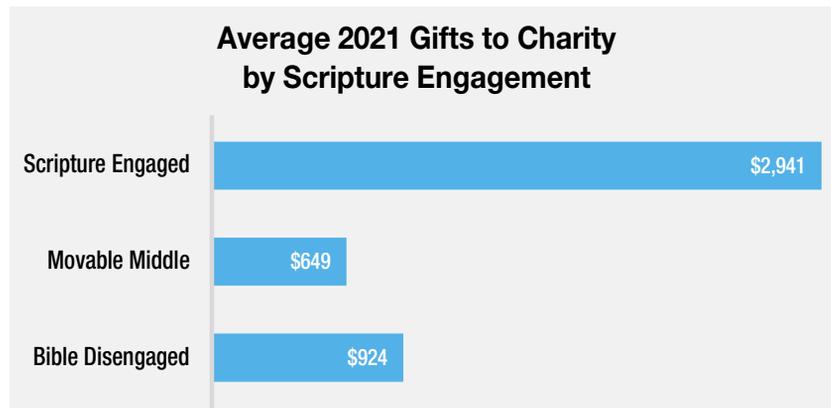
As we've explained throughout this report, the Scripture Engaged designation involves not only frequency of Bible reading, but also the centrality and impact of Scripture in one's life. These people seem to follow the guidance of James 1:22 (NIV): "Do not merely listen to the word... Do what it says." And of course the Bible promotes generosity in all aspects of life, including finances (1 Timothy 6:17–19; Acts 20:32–35).

**Scripture Engaged people also give far more money than others.** Their estimated amount given in 2021 to all charities, not just churches, was \$2,907 per household—more than three times the average of the Bible Disengaged and more than four times that of the Movable Middle.



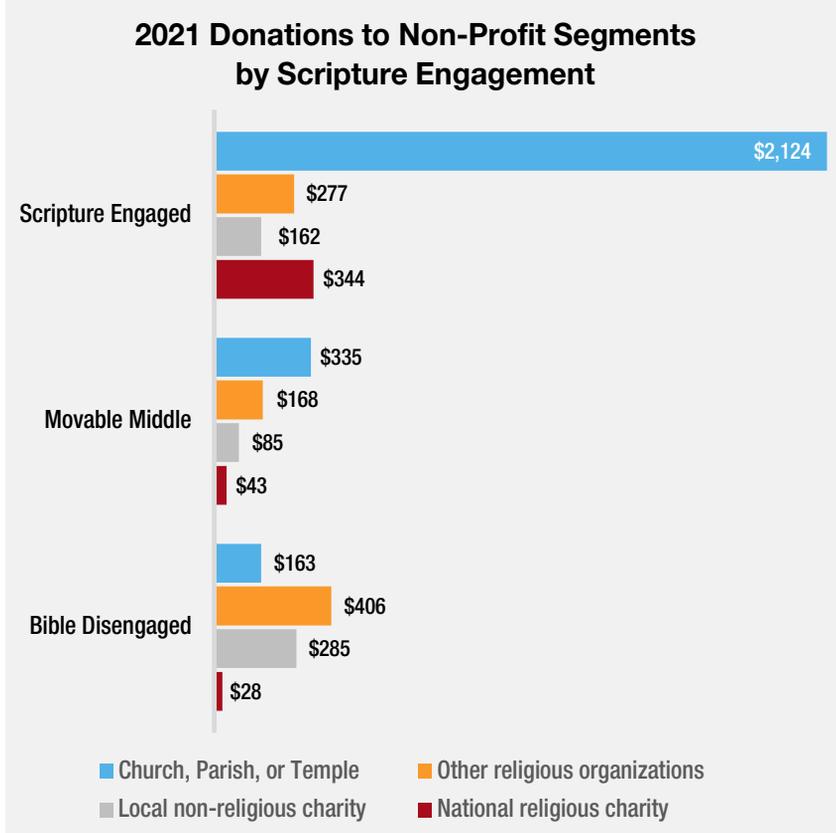
*We estimate that Scripture Engaged Americans gave \$145 billion to charitable causes in 2021.* In other words, just 19 percent of U.S. adults are responsible for giving 44 percent of every dollar donated by individuals nationwide. Another way to think about it is that 44 cents of

every dollar donated by individuals in America comes from someone who is consistently interacting with the Bible.



**Scripture Engaged people also give more than others to non-church charities.** Since Scripture engagement generally correlates with church engagement, we would expect them to outpace others in donations to “church, parish, or temple.” They did, giving six times as much as the Movable Middle and 13 times as much as the Bible Disengaged. Remember that COVID closed many churches for at least part of 2021, but it seems that the Scripture Engaged continued their financial support.

But even if we take church giving out of the picture, the Scripture Engaged out-gave all others by a healthy margin (9% over the Bible Disengaged and 165% over the Movable Middle). If we only count donations to non-religious organizations, the difference grows. The Scripture Engaged gave 62 percent more than the Bible Disengaged and nearly four times the amount given by the Movable Middle.

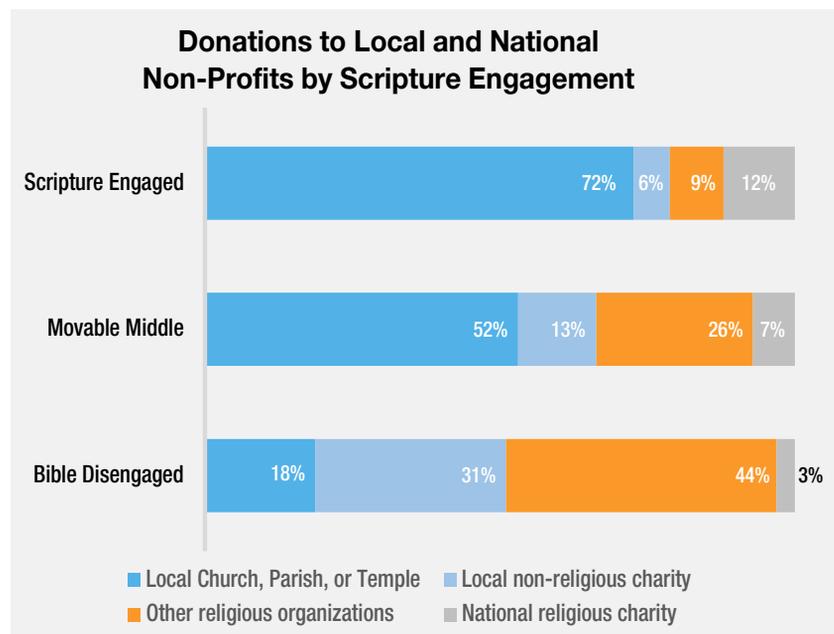


## THE POWER OF LOCAL

Americans give substantially to their “churches, parishes, and temples,” and they receive a variety of spiritual benefits from them. Additionally, many of these local religious congregations also carry on effective helping ministries in their communities. As the apostle Paul reminded the Ephesian elders, “We must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35 NIV).

We're familiar with one church that, during the pandemic, saw its community food distribution program grow tenfold. For years, it had faithfully provided food for a few dozen local families, but suddenly the need was immense. Church people rose to the challenge with financial and in-kind contributions. Though closed for health concerns, the church put a cart outside where people could drive up and leave their food donations. This cart filled up several times a day.

Many churches could share similar stories. Yet churches are not the only nonprofit groups doing local ministry. Our survey shows that Americans support local charities more than larger, nationally known organizations. While megacharities like World Vision can jump into action for an international crisis, most givers prefer to support smaller operations in their area—where they can see the results of their giving first hand, and might even volunteer to help.



In fact, most of those who give something, give locally. This is true in all three Scripture engagement segments. Driven mostly by their support of the local church, the Scripture Engaged keep 81 percent of their donations close to home. Surprisingly, the Movable Middle (78%) comes close to the same percentage, with local charities making up for a lower level of church support, compared to the Scripture Engaged. The Bible Disengaged give the highest percentage to “local, non-religious charity” and (as expected) the lowest to “church, parish, or temple.” Combining the two, we see five of eight of their charity dollars (62%) going to local groups.

What is the appeal of local giving? One study from Australia reported, “Participants in the focus groups agreed that donations to local charities would have more direct local benefit and potentially benefit themselves in the future if they ever faced hardship. This is consistent with [previous] findings that one of the major factors motivating people to a local charity is being able to contribute to the community that you live in and, perhaps, grew up in. Further, donating to a local charity increases the opportunity of seeing, first hand, the positive impacts of the charity.”<sup>3</sup>

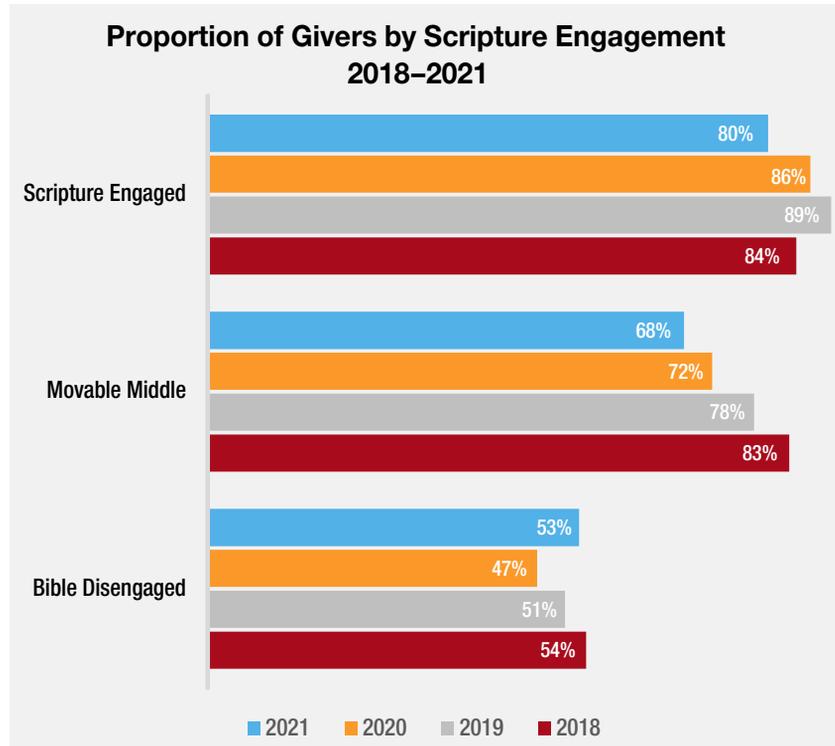
Most givers prefer to support smaller operations in their area—where they can see the results of their giving first hand, and might even volunteer to help.

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3 Hall, D., Cridland, L., Andrews, K., & Jones, S. C. (2013). *Community Perceptions of and Suggested Fundraising Strategies for Local Charities*. Retrieved from [https://acuresearchbank.acu.edu.au/download/d9b5f2fcaab4f3de32432929989c57d2189acc183486cde0e4d03a688182f877/128177/Hall\\_2013\\_Community\\_perceptions\\_of\\_and\\_suggested\\_fundraising.pdf](https://acuresearchbank.acu.edu.au/download/d9b5f2fcaab4f3de32432929989c57d2189acc183486cde0e4d03a688182f877/128177/Hall_2013_Community_perceptions_of_and_suggested_fundraising.pdf)

## YEAR OVER YEAR

Our society has gone through tremendous upheaval in the last three years—socially, spiritually, and economically. We might expect to see effects of this upheaval in people’s charitable giving, and we do. We’ve compared the percentage of givers in our three Scripture Engagement categories over the past four years—covering the charitable giving of pre-pandemic 2018–19 and COVID-addled 2020–21.<sup>4</sup> Note that this does not reflect the *amount* of money given, just the percentage of Americans who say they have donated something.



4 Since we conduct the survey in January of each year, each report covers giving that occurred in the previous calendar year.

In every segment, the proportion of givers decreased in the first year of the pandemic (2020). In that year, many people lost jobs, had to cut back working hours to stay home with children, or curtailed their business operations. It's not a shock that some would stop their charitable giving. It's somewhat surprising that so many *kept* giving.

The dropoff continued in 2021—except for the Bible Disengaged, who returned to pre-pandemic levels, though still only two-thirds of the rate of the Scripture Engaged. Some have suggested that a number of social, health, and climatic issues arose in 2020–21, sparking new donations unrelated to Christian ministries.

The Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, tracking charitable giving in the U.S., reports a steady increase in *amounts* given over this period. Total giving in 2021 was \$484.85 billion, a 3 percent rise from 2020, after 5 percent increases the previous two years. A rebounding economy led to a 23.8 percent increase in corporate giving. “Yet these economic indicators may differ from what most people experience in daily life,” says Amir Pasic, Dean of the Lilly Family School. “The broader effects of the pandemic may have shifted individual jobs, incomes, lifestyles, and family and financial priorities, potentially affecting their giving habits.”<sup>5</sup>

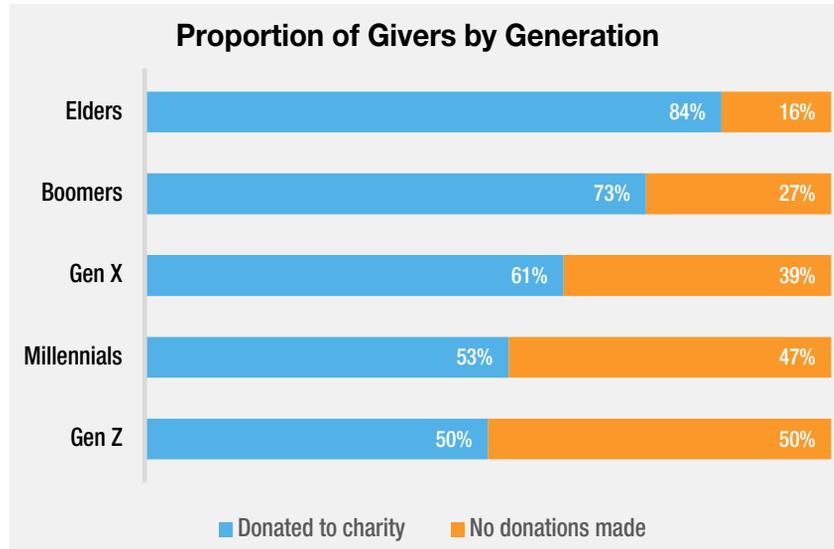
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5 IU Lilly Family School of Philanthropy News. Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. (2022, June 21). Retrieved October 17, 2022, from [https://philanthropy.iupui.edu/news-events/news-item/giving-usa--total-u.s.-charitable-giving-remained-strong-in-2021,-reaching-\\$484.85-billion.html?id=392](https://philanthropy.iupui.edu/news-events/news-item/giving-usa--total-u.s.-charitable-giving-remained-strong-in-2021,-reaching-$484.85-billion.html?id=392)

## PROFILES IN GENEROSITY

Who gives, who doesn't, and who gives a lot? We gain insight by looking at some specific groups.

**Older people are more likely to give.** Half the members of Generation Z (50%) contribute something to charity. Five out of six (84%) in the Elder generation do. There's a stairstep effect in between, with each older generation increasing its proportion of givers



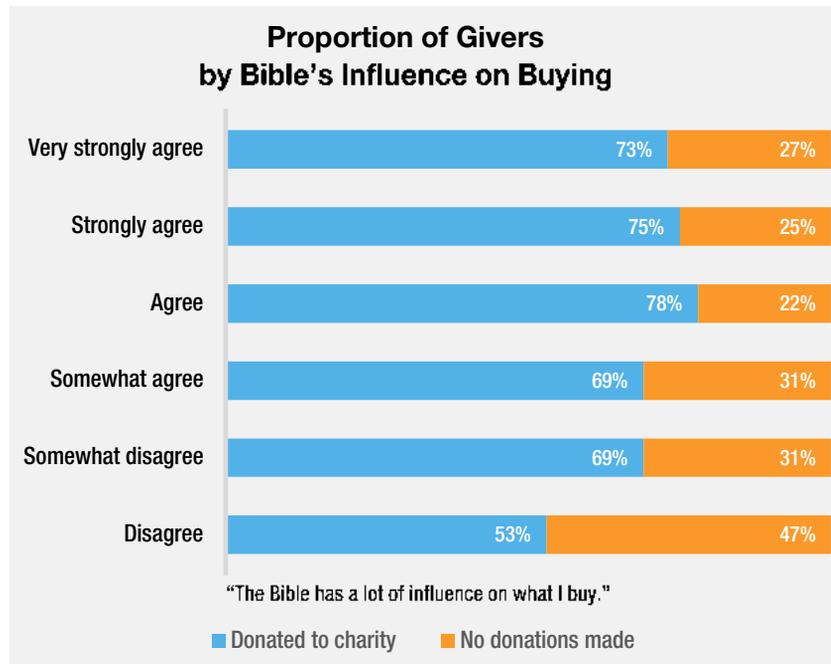
We can attribute this pattern partly to economics. Many Gen Z adults aren't earning their own money yet, or they're at the bottom of the pay scale. But Gen X currently has the highest income of any group, and yet they are less likely to give than the two older generations. Is this a matter of *disposable* income, or is there a cultural commitment to philanthropy that's stronger in the older groups?

**Practicing Christians are far more likely to give.** Among Christians who attend church regularly and consider their faith very important, four out of five (81%) contributed money to some charity—often, but not only, the church. Three of five Non-Practicing Christians (61%) and about half of Non-Christians (52%) are givers. (The survey found high proportions of givers among Buddhists, Jews, and Muslims, but the sample sizes for each group were too small to report with confidence.)



In its Scripture engagement questions, the *State of the Bible* survey asks people if Scripture influences their decisions about what to buy. We wondered whether the connection between the Bible and the billfold would make people more likely to give to charity. It does.

**Of those who agree with the statement “The Bible has a lot of influence on what I buy,” nearly three of four are givers (73%).** This far exceeds the proportion of givers among those who “disagree” (53%).



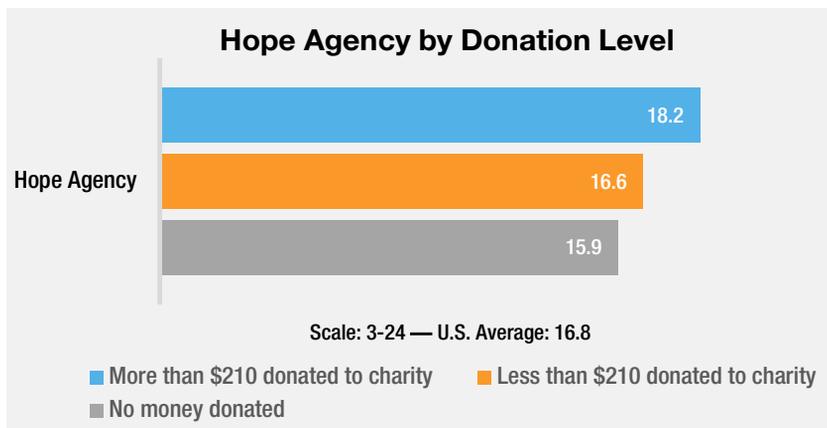
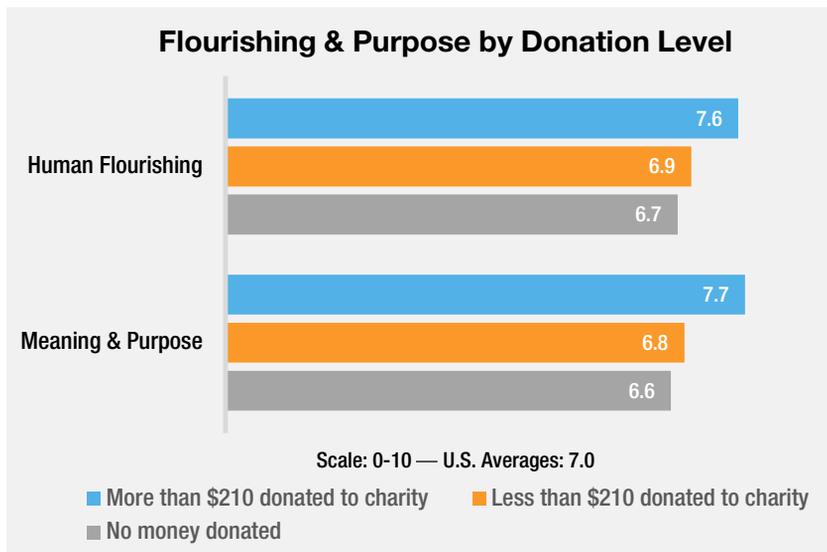
**People who give the most to charity flourish more and have more hope and purpose.** Our data reveal a substantial correlation between charitable giving and our measures of human flourishing and hope. One of the six aspects of the Human Flourishing Index, “Meaning and Purpose,” has an especially strong connection.<sup>6</sup>

So far, we’ve merely been analyzing who gives and who doesn’t. But what if we made a further distinction between low-level givers and high-level givers? Since about a third of Americans are non-givers, we created two more “thirds” to complete the picture, setting the mark at \$210 a year. That’s not a high bar—only \$4 a week—but

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 3 (starting on page 57). Note that Human Flourishing does *not* include a financial component (as Secure Flourishing does).

roughly a third of Americans give more than that, roughly a third give less, and roughly a third don't give at all.

We then assembled the Flourishing, Hope, and Meaning/Purpose scores for those in each “third” of givers—and found a clear distinction.





People live well  
when they give well,  
and vice versa.

Donors who give more than \$4 a week show a 10 percent rise in Human Flourishing and Hope scores over donors who give less.

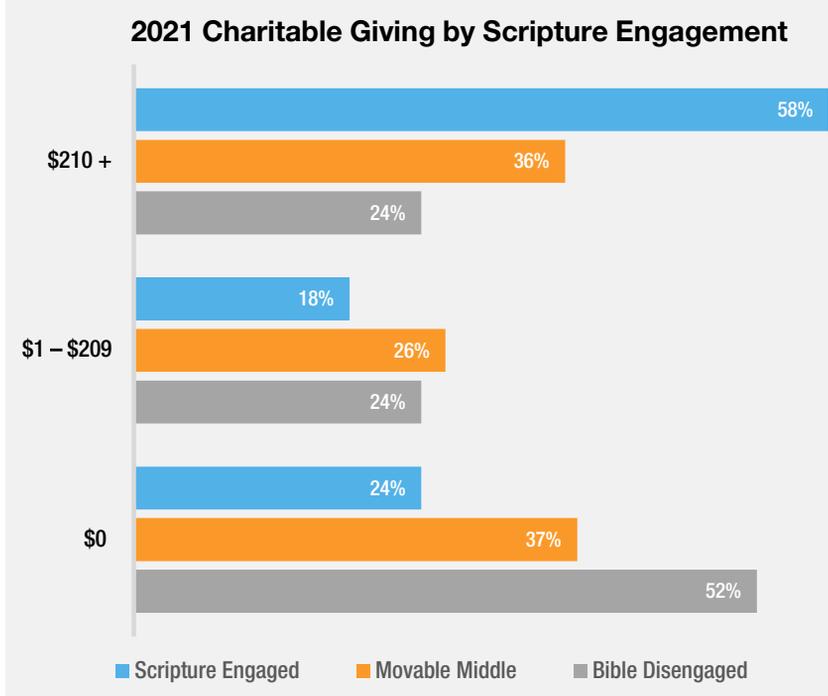
Their scores in Meaning and Purpose have a 13 percent increase. The difference is even greater over those who don't give at all.

We must note that correlation doesn't necessarily reflect causation,<sup>7</sup> yet it is an invitation to dig more deeply into the relationship between two variables. Does charity create feelings of flourishing, hope, and purpose? Or do people who are flourishing, hopeful, and purposeful want to share their good feeling with others? Perhaps both are true.

These findings might suggest that people find a sense of meaning by giving to a worthy cause. Or perhaps people give to support causes that fit the purpose they already have. Taken together, these correlations indicate that people live well when they give well, and vice versa.

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7 The balancing truth is also relevant: "There is no causation without correlation."



**Scripture Engaged people are far more likely to be in the top tier of givers.** Using this view of giving by “thirds,” we find further confirmation of the generosity of Scripture Engaged people.

Nearly three of five Scripture Engaged Americans (58%) report giving at the higher level. If the Bible made no difference, that figure would be in the low thirties, about a third of the total, but the Scripture Engaged group far exceeds the norm.

## CONCLUSION

The Bible teaches us to give, so it's no surprise to find high levels of giving among people who read and follow Scripture. But there's more to it than simple obedience. Transformation is at the heart of the biblical message. We receive grace, and so we show grace. We love because God first loved us.

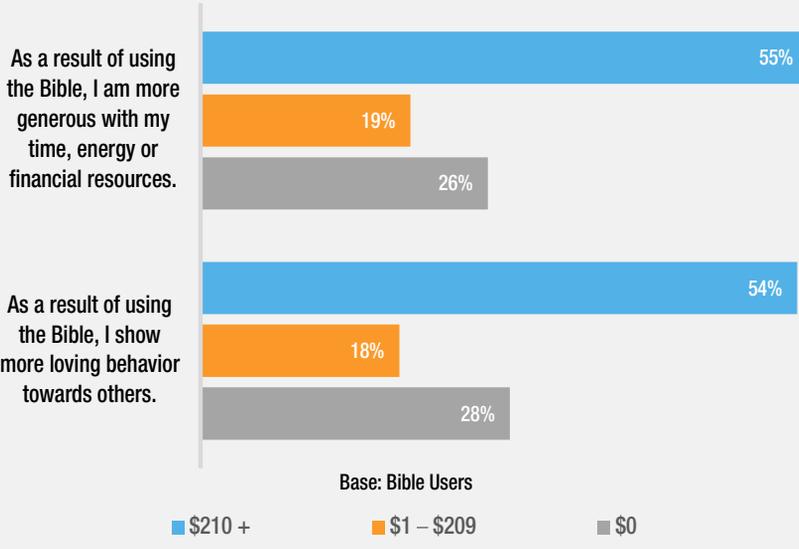
The *State of the Bible* survey asked Bible Users whether they agreed with these statements:

- *As a result of using the Bible, I am more generous with my time, energy or financial resources.*
- *As a result of using the Bible, I show more loving behavior towards others.*

We're asking about transformation. In those pages, have they met the God who loves and gives and inspires them to love and give? Of those who agreed with those statements, well over half were in the top third of givers. They see the connection between the Bible and generosity, and it plays out in their finances. Yet generosity goes far beyond finances. It involves gifts of time, energy, and loving behavior as well.

When we encounter a loving and giving God in the Bible on a regular basis, it only makes sense that we become more loving and giving in response. Freely we have received, so we freely give (Matthew 10:8).

### Levels of Giving for Those Who Agree

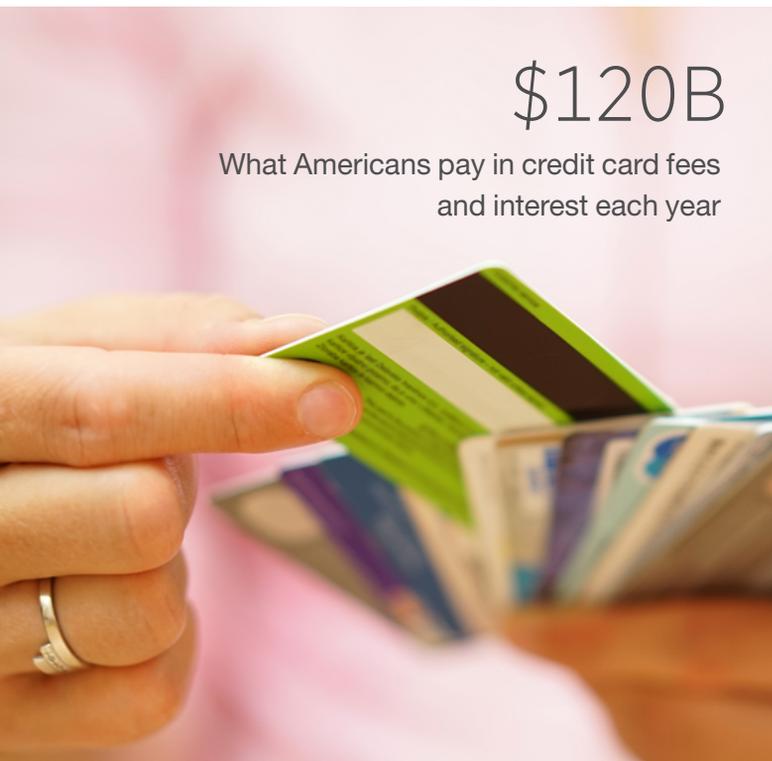


# BILLIONS



\$103B

What American spent on their pets in 2020



\$120B

What Americans pay in credit card fees  
and interest each year



\$93B

Estimated cost  
for NASA's  
moon program  
(2012-2025)

**\$145B**

Charitable donations last year  
by Scripture Engaged people

## NOW THIS

### TIPS, HIGHLIGHTS, INSIGHTS, AND SUGGESTIONS

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- Based on the findings in this chapter, it's possible that the best thing a church could do to improve its financial situation is to promote Scripture Engagement. Of course the Bible has many other benefits, but it's hard to ignore the high levels of giving among the Scripture Engaged.
- Keep an eye on the generational differences in giving. Gen Z gets a pass, but Millennials, not so much. How can we build a culture of generosity?
- People like to give to local charities. Could this inspire national ministries to "shorten" their vision, to develop local projects or local chapters and make stronger connections at a local level?
- There's a substantial, though smaller, group of charitable givers who are not connected with the Bible or the church, and yet their hearts are open enough to support good causes. Could we find a point of connection here? Not to get their money, but to touch their hearts with the love of Jesus?





# WHAT WE'VE LEARNED, WHERE IT LEADS

**T** *here are so many problems in our world today, why do you keep pushing this ancient book?* Perhaps you've heard that protest. Perhaps, in some dark night of the soul, you've wrestled with that question yourself. We know the transforming power of a relationship with God, a connection that is found and nurtured in the Scriptures, but how can we communicate that in a world looking for tangible evidence?

Here's some tangible evidence.

People live better lives when they engage with the Bible—reading it frequently, applying its teachings to their decisions, and making it central to their faith. Personally, they experience less stress, less anxiety, and more hope. They also make better neighbors, striving

to love others in significant ways. They give abundantly to charity, and not only to their churches.

This is not just wishful thinking. We have data to support it, right here in this publication.

In this closing chapter, we review the key findings of *State of the Bible 2022*—not just those that build a case for Bible engagement, but also some that suggest strategies for effective ministry or spotlight needs that require our attention.

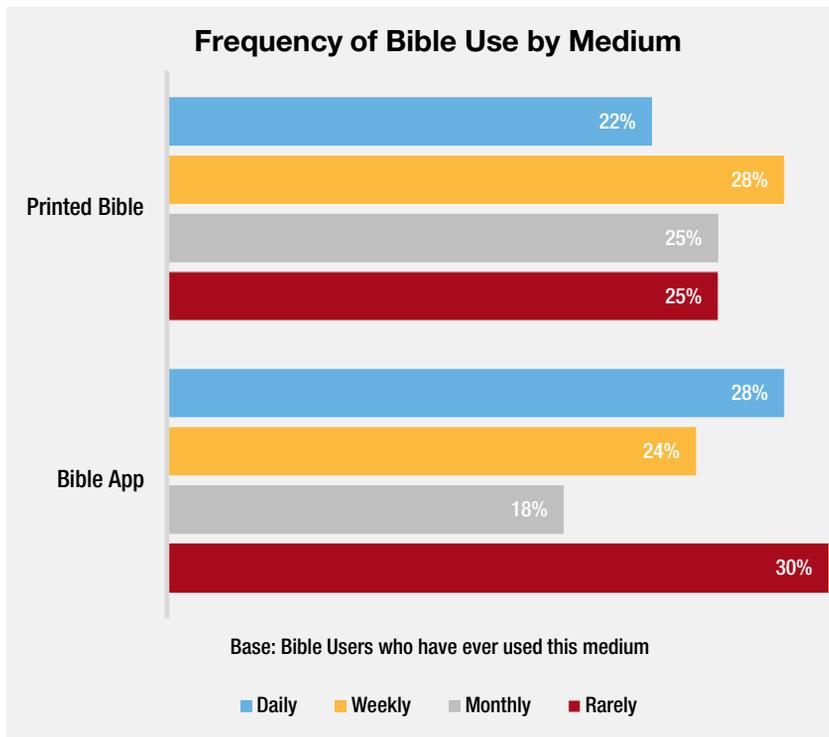
## TEN KEY FINDINGS

### 1. APPS INCREASE DAILY BIBLE USE.

People still prefer to read printed Bibles, despite the rise of digital formats. But those who use a Bible app are more likely to use it *daily* (28% compared to 22% among users of printed Bibles). If we want to promote a habit of daily Bible reading, an app might be our best tool.

This is especially true among Generation Z, the one age group where Bible users now prefer digital forms (apps, Internet, audio Bible) over print (combined 54% to 46%).

*See also charts on pages 20–21.*



## 2. COVID IS STILL HURTING FAMILIES, WITH REGARD TO SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT.

The pandemic hit families hard. Beyond the obvious health concerns, many families saw their schedules shredded. Schools were shuttered, playdates canceled. Many parents had to balance work and parenting with little outside help.

In January, 2020, parents showed much greater Scripture engagement than those without children in the home.<sup>1</sup> COVID changed that.

<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the survey asks if there are children in the home. We recognize that anyone sharing the home—grandparents, adult children—might be included, but we'll characterize this group as “parents.”

Parents have seen their Scripture Engagement drop precipitously since January, 2020—fathers from 41 to 18 percent, mothers from 33 to 15 percent. While Scripture Engagement numbers have also dropped for men and women without children, those declines are far less drastic. In fact, before the pandemic, women with children in the home were more Scripture Engaged than those without (33% to 28%), but now that relationship is reversed (15% to 24%).

Apparently time is a factor. Elsewhere in the survey, we asked if people wished they had more time for Bible reading. Unsurprisingly, those with children were more apt to say yes. We also suspect that, in some homes, rituals of family prayer and Bible reading were disrupted in the height of the pandemic and have not been restored.

*See graphs on pages 43 and 44.*

### **3. THE BIBLE IMPROVES PEOPLE’S LIVES.**

Chapter 3 of this report examines the effect of Scripture Engagement on people’s lives using several measures accepted in the academic world. Among these is the Human Flourishing Index, developed at Harvard, which includes questions relating to six areas of life.

In every area of this scale (except one), those who are Scripture Engaged score higher than those who are not. The outlier is Financial and Material Stability. The Bible doesn’t make people rich, but it improves their lives in many other respects. (*See chart on page 63.*)

*State of the Bible 2022* included other questions relating to healthy habits, stress, hope, and the experience of trauma. In every respect,

Scripture Engaged people came out ahead of others with less connection to the Bible. (In 2020 and 2021, the Scripture Engaged reported slightly more stress than the Bible Disengaged, but their score in 2022 was significantly lower. *See page 69.*)

This survey also confirmed that the experience of trauma has a lasting effect on people's lives. We see it on the Human Flourishing Index, where those who have ever experienced trauma score significantly lower than those who haven't. However, when a trauma sufferer is Scripture Engaged, the benefit of that engagement more than offsets the deficit caused by trauma. That is, Scripture Engaged people who have suffered trauma score higher on Human Flourishing than those who have never suffered trauma but are not Scripture Engaged.

We never want to minimize the impact of trauma in people's lives, but here we see powerful evidence of the restorative power of Scripture. (*See charts on pages 74 and 76.*)

#### **4. SCRIPTURE ENGAGED PEOPLE WANT TO BE GOOD NEIGHBORS.**

We asked people about “neighborly” behaviors toward immigrants, prisoners, the “oppressed,” and those of other races or religions. We asked about caring for the environment and a general goal of being “a good neighbor.” On all seven questions, those who were Scripture Engaged had the top scores. (They scored very high on “Care for the environment,” but the Bible Disengaged matched them there.)

The question was framed in an interesting way, asking whether they agreed that “It is important for me” to do these things. People

weren't asked which things they had actually done. There may still be a gap between hearing and doing (see James 1:22). But at least the Bible's message about loving neighbors is getting through. More than others, the Scripture Engaged affirm the importance of these neighborly behaviors.

*See chart on page 86.*

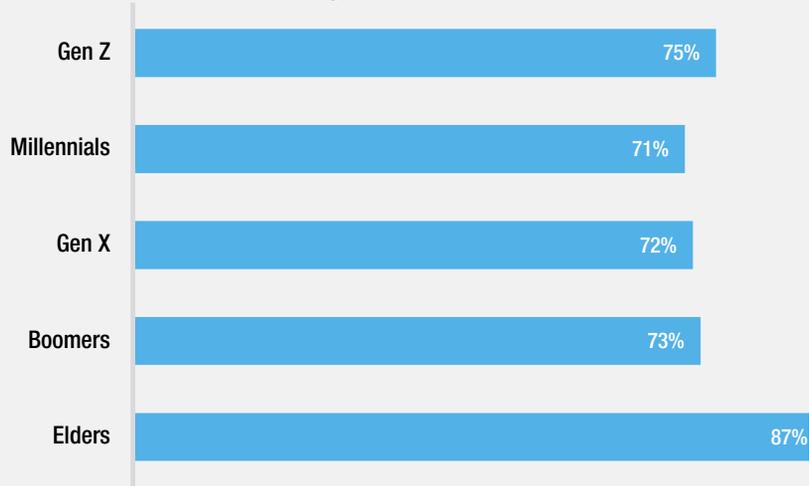
## **5. CURIOSITY AND COMFORT: BRINGING GENERATION Z TO SCRIPTURE**

Curiosity about the Bible and/or Jesus has risen in the last two years, even among the Bible Disengaged (46% to 64%) and the Movable Middle (86% to 97%). The Elders, often the most spiritually minded generation, show the most curiosity, but the second highest age group is the youngest, Gen Z, at 75 percent.

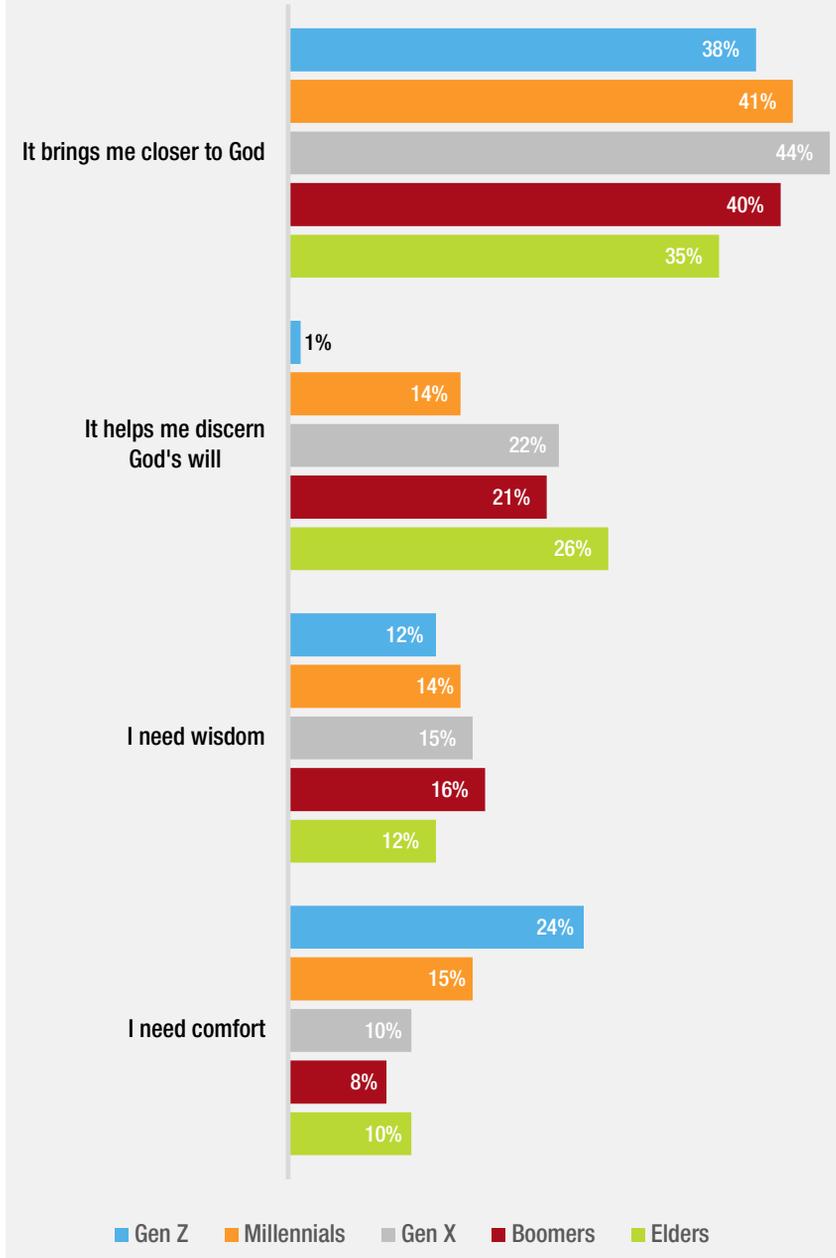
When asked why they turn to Scripture, Bible Users in Gen Z are far more likely than other age groups to say “I need comfort.” Is this another indication that the last two years have been especially tough on this generation?

Many Christians might expect that the young adults of Generation Z would be looking “to discern God’s will for my life.” Yet only 1 percent of them chose that as a motivation for Bible reading.

### Curiosity about the Bible and/or Jesus by Generation



### Motivation for Bible Reading by Generation



## **6. GENERATION Z SHOWS ALARMING LEVELS OF STRESS, ANXIETY, AND DEPRESSION.**

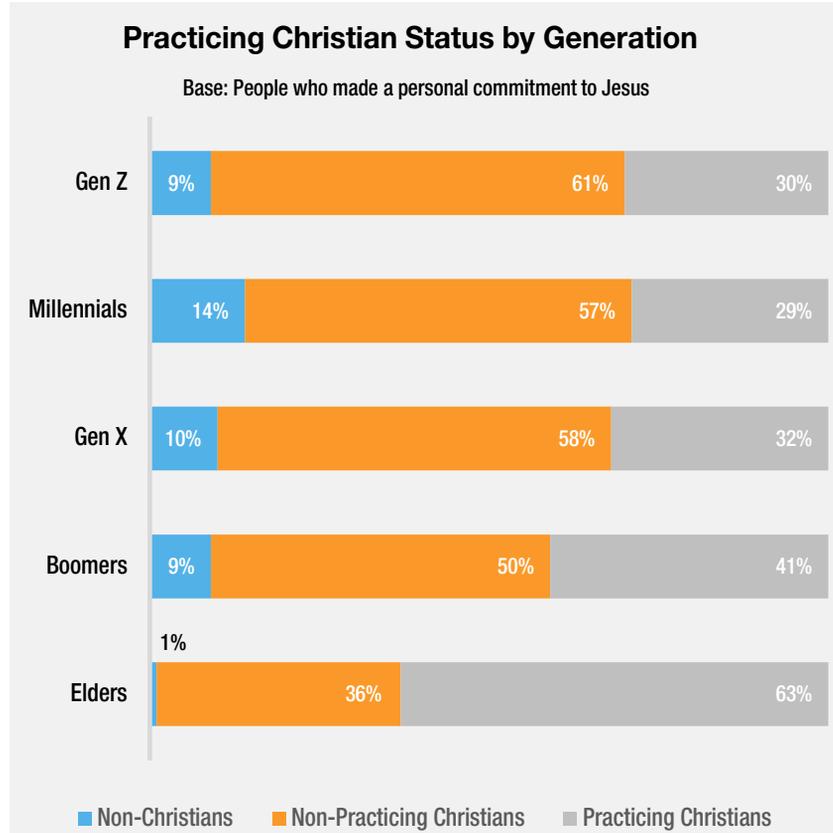
Our youngest adults report symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression at high levels. This is especially true among Gen Z women. The pandemic surely has something to do with this, but not everything. A number of social factors may be involved, including the uncharted world of social media. Mental health professionals have begun to take notice. Our data show that young adults who are Scripture Engaged report fewer symptoms, though the sample sizes are too small to report any specific numbers.

*See charts on pages 114–119.*

## **7. MANY WHO HAVE COME TO JESUS DON'T GO TO CHURCH.**

More than half of all adult Americans (54%) say they've made a personal commitment to Jesus that is still important to them today. But in the three youngest generations (adults 57 and younger), more than two-thirds of those who have made this commitment are not Practicing Christians. This may mean they aren't attending church even once a month. Or, despite their commitment to Jesus, they don't consider their faith "very important in their life."

The tendency of young adults to claim a personal commitment to Christ while rejecting the church is nothing new. It's been widely attested and studied. What's notable here is that it appears in Gen X as well as the younger generations. This is not just "waiting until we settle down." This may signal more of a protest against the church than we've seen before.



## 8. EIGHTY MILLION AMERICAN ADULTS TALK WITH OTHERS ABOUT THE TRANSFORMING MESSAGE OF SCRIPTURE.

Nearly three in five Americans (59%) say the message of the Bible has transformed them. More than half of these (53%) say they “regularly” talk about the message of the Bible with others. That means nearly a third (31%) of American adults—80 million people—are talking about the scriptural message that brought about their own transformation. (See chart on page 142.)

Along with Elders, Gen Z adults are most likely to say they want to share their faith with others (both 54%). Among Practicing Christians, those in Gen Z are also most likely (58%) to have had meaningful spiritual conversations with three or more people who do not regularly attend their place of worship. (See chart on page 140.)

## **9. TWO KINDS OF BIBLE USE: MOOD AND METHOD.**

How do people read the Bible? Many choose passages based on their mood and read a few verses at a time—whether they're Scripture Engaged or not. But there is a clear distinction between the Scripture Engaged and others on three more disciplined methods: *reading entire chapters or stories*; *reading at the same time each day*; and *following a schedule, plan, or program*. Bible reading is valuable in any form, but these more disciplined methods may expedite higher levels of engagement.

*See chart on page 158.*

## **10. SCRIPTURE ENGAGED PEOPLE GAVE AN ESTIMATED \$145 BILLION TO CHARITY IN 2021.**

That's more than NASA's current moon project. This means that 44 cents of every dollar donated by individuals in America comes from someone who is consistently interacting with the Bible.

While the bulk of their donations went to their local churches, they also gave substantially to other charities, religious or not.

*See charts on pages 178 and 179.*

## FIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR MINISTRY

The middle chapters of the book of Acts hold treasure for any strategist in Christian ministry. The apostle Paul, with Barnabas and later Silas, moves deeper and deeper into the Gentile world, adjusting to each new environment.

Chapter 13 finds Paul in familiar territory, a synagogue. Addressing his “fellow children of Abraham and God-fearing Gentiles” (verse 26), he freely quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures, explaining Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy.

In the next chapter, he encounters an uneducated Hellenistic crowd who think he and Barnabas are the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes. For this superstitious group of farmers, Paul looks to the skies and the earth—to everyday, visible things—to explain how the God who made it all was reaching out to them with love.

Then there’s a contentious church council (Acts 15) and a visit to the Roman colony of Philippi (Acts 16), where there weren’t enough Jewish men for a synagogue but there was an active prayer ministry among women. Before Paul and Silas can do much, they’re thrown in prison—a major disruption for their ministry, except it’s not. (More about disruptions later.)

Paul moves on to Athens (Acts 17), where he is invited to present his pitch to the council of philosophers. Though they’re highly educated, Paul does not presume they know anything about the Hebrew Scriptures. He mirrors their philosophy and quotes their poets and makes his case in a way they could connect with.

From Antioch to Athens, Paul seems to be asking, “What kind of a world have I entered? And what does Jesus mean to this world?”

*State of the Bible* asks those same questions about our world.

As we wrap up this volume, we point out five opportunities for ministry—ways that we might meet the unique characteristics of the people around us with the kind of flexibility and creativity Paul showed.



We bemoan the major drop in Scripture Engagement this year, but we're buoyed a bit by this fact: *people are increasingly curious about Jesus and the Bible*. This is the flip side of the de-Christianization of our culture. Decades ago, Americans were well-versed in the biblical story, whether they believed it or not. Now, for generations who have never heard it, our content is new and fresh.

So let's present the Jesus of the Bible with all his surprises. Allow the fresh-from-the-oven aroma of the Bread of Life to waft through our lives and our churches.

We applaud the creative efforts of those producing *The Chosen* series and the "He Gets Us" campaign, as well as Word on Fire's "Liturgy of the Hours" and dozens of other cutting-edge expressions. Let's equip the next generation of communicators to add to this collection, telling the biblical story with wit and wonder.



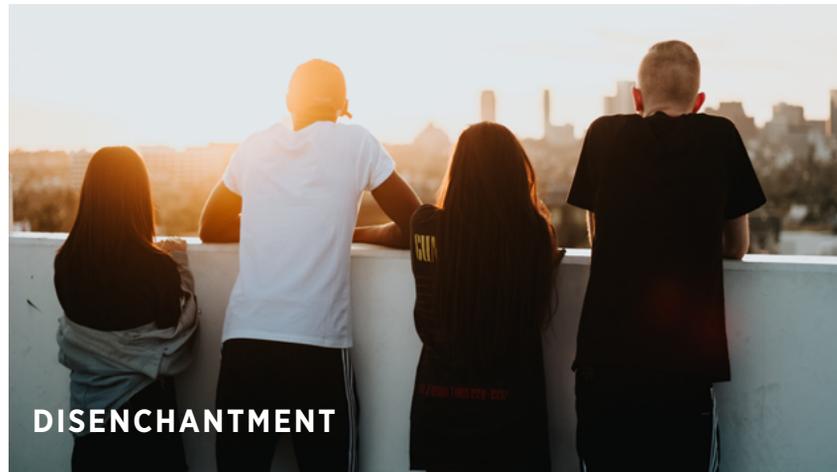
If you had to sum up in one word the American experience since January of 2020, *disruption* would be a good choice. As you crafted your resolutions for the new decade, you could not know what lay ahead. The pandemic disrupted everything.

That wasn't the only disruption. At national, community, and personal levels, we have all faced sudden change. In some ways, as we evaluate data, we feel like the assessment team sifting through the rubble after a bomb blast. What's the damage? Who's hurting the most? How can we rebuild?

In this 2022 survey analysis, we are especially concerned about Gen Z—the youngest adults and the teenagers growing up behind them, too young to be included in this poll. We recognize that the social disruptions of the last few years have led to dangerous levels of anxiety and depression within this group. We know the Bible bears a message of hope and comfort. In its pages, people meet a God of healing. We long for these younger adults to make this connection.

We also remember that God uses disruptions to do his work. A Samaritan woman did not expect a life-changing conversation with the rabbi perched at her well. Saul probably had his day of heretic-hunting well mapped out as he rode toward Damascus and had a life-disrupting vision of Jesus.

Disruptions prevent life-as-usual. In our ministries, we can provide healing and comfort for the damage done, but also a message of challenge and change for a better life ahead.



There has been great concern on the part of Christian leaders about the “nones”—people who claim no particular religion. The Pew Research Center estimates that, since 2007, the percentage of Americans who are religiously unaffiliated has nearly doubled from 16 percent to nearly 30 percent.

These aren't just figures, they're feelings.

Three out of four of the religiously unaffiliated (74%) have come from homes with some heritage of faith. But in their adult years, they have become disenchanted with or disinterested in their religious background.

In *State of the Bible*, we've also been tracking a much larger group of people, Non-Practicing Christians, now comprising 46 percent of American adults. In this group people claim allegiance to Christ, but often struggle to connect with a vibrant Christian community.

Non-Practicing Christians present a growth area for the church and Christian ministry. It's easy for us to write them off as undisciplined or backsliding, but there may be more of a story behind the distance they're keeping.

Sometimes they're still in church, but essentially facing the door. Many have left the church—some storming off, others fading away. Perhaps the church didn't adequately help them through the disruptions of their life. Some think back wistfully to a time when the church meant something to them. Some imagine it could be that way again.

Let's listen to them. Reach out to them. Hear their stories. Woo them back. Trust God's Spirit to heal this plague of disenchantment.



The disruption of COVID, including shutdowns and social isolation, has led many churches to explore digital outreach. Some now offer streaming services alongside their in-person gatherings. Pastors create podcasts. Small groups meet online. For a few years now, *State of the Bible* has been following the development of digital technology in Bible engagement and church ministry. We'll continue to do so.

Here's a thought that might help in your exploration of new media.

Digital technology is more than a tool to employ in the same ministry we've done forever. For many people it can be a world, with its own citizens or dual citizens, its own customs and assumptions and laws of gravity. It's a unique mission field, and we need to do the same sort of cross-cultural study we would do when entering a new country. Everything we've learned in Bible translation over the past century should be adapted to determine the "dynamic equivalence" of the biblical message in this new context.



Skeptics must think we're stacking the data, but the numbers don't lie. When people engage with Scripture, disciplining themselves to read it regularly and also being transformed by its truth, their lives are full of good things. They flourish more, with less stress and more hope. They're good neighbors, or at least they want to be. And they give an amazing amount to charity.

You don't need to apologize for urging people to read the Bible more often and more deeply. It's the best gift you could give them.

## COMING IN 2023

### **FAITH IN MOTION**

Building on our questions this year about whether people have changed from their childhood faith, we'll learn more about what beliefs they have moved away from and toward.

### **SPIRITUAL VITALITY**

A new set of questions will dig deeper into the spiritual lives of believers—including the use of spiritual gifts, accountability to other Christians, and the “why” of Bible study.

### **SPIRITUAL STYLES**

People interact with God in different ways—through nature, worship experiences, or curling up with a good book. We'll get a reading on how people (whether they're Christians or not) prefer to connect with the divine.

### **PERSEVERING HOPE**

We'll employ a new measure of hope developed by academic colleagues at a number of top universities. It looks at how we maintain hope even in the face of a hopeless situation or insurmountable obstacle.

Hope is something we cling to in these turbulent times. Our survey doesn't always tell the story we want, but we trust that the truth about the way things are will spark a vision about the way things could be, in the good grace of our God.



# METHODOLOGY

In 2022, 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 15-minute questionnaire. The study produced 2,598 responses from a representative sample of adults 18 and older within all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data were collected from January 10–28, 2022. The margin of error for a sample of this size is  $\pm 2.51$  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](mailto:pr@americanbible.org).

## SURVEY OVERVIEW

- **Study Population:** General Population Age 18+
- **Sample Units:** 8,618
- **Completed Units:** 2,598
- **Margin of Error:**  $\pm 2.51\%$
- **Average Design Effect:** 1.71
- **Survey Field Period:** January 10–28, 2022
- **Median Duration:** 15 minutes

## PANEL OUTCOMES

- **Weighted Household Recruitment Rate:**<sup>1</sup> 17.1%
- **Weighted Household Retention Rate:** 75.6%

## SURVEY OUTCOMES

- **Survey Completion Rate:**<sup>2</sup> 30.1%
- **Weighted Cumulative Response Rate:**<sup>3</sup> 3.9%

## 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.

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- 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.

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](mailto:AmeriSpeak-BD@norc.org) or visit [AmeriSpeak.norc.org](http://AmeriSpeak.norc.org).

**NORC at the University of Chicago** is an independent research institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions. Since 1941, NORC has conducted groundbreaking studies, created and applied innovative methods and tools, and advanced principles of scientific integrity and collaboration. Today, government, corporate, and

nonprofit clients around the world partner with NORC to transform increasingly complex information into useful knowledge. Please visit [www.norc.org](http://www.norc.org) for more information.

## INDEPENDENT VALIDATION

Due to recent societal disruptions, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the *State of the Bible* research team conducted an identical and independent survey of the U.S. population in January 2022, using the non-probability sampling and post hoc weighting techniques detailed in previous *State of the Bible* research projects. Upon comparison, the research team determined that both methodologies resulted in substantially equivalent results. We chose to report only on the AmeriSpeak® survey, due to its probability-based sampling methodology and compliance with AAPOR standards of practice.



# DEFINITIONS

**T**he 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.

**Correlation:** In statistics, the strength of a linear relationship between two variables is often expressed in terms of a numerical value preceded by the italicized letter *r*. In this volume, correlations are only reported when they are statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) and when the correlation coefficient (*r*) is 0.2 or greater. Following are general 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: ( $r = 0.80 - 1.00$ )

**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.

**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 10 to 25 in 2021. This study includes adults (18–25) in Generation Z.
- **Millennials (1981–1996):** Ages 26 to 41 in 2021.
- **Generation X (1965–1980):** Ages 42 to 57 in 2021.
- **Baby Boomers (1946–1964):** Ages 58 to 76 in 2021.
- **Elders (1928–1945):** Ages 77 to 94 in 2021. This study considers any respondent 76 years old or older to be in the Elders generation.

**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.

**Non-Practicing Christian:** Self-identified Christians who are not Practicing Christians as defined below.

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

- Identify as either Protestant or Catholic
- 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 *Pathway of Scripture Engagement* on page 225 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 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 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.

**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 involving an immediate family member
- You witnessed a trauma involving someone other than a family member
- 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

**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.



# PATHWAY OF SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

**T**he 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).

# 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

## 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 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 Pathway<sup>1</sup> 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.

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



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**S**ince 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 Ministry Intelligence team at American Bible Society.

This ebook 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 twelfth consecutive year of the *State of the Bible*, we pause to express our gratitude to those who have contributed most to this work.

Robert Briggs, as president and CEO of American Bible Society, has been a consistent champion of *State of the Bible* and of data-informed ministry, overall. He understands that the future of America is connected to our nation's access to and engagement with the Bible, and he regularly urges all of us at American Bible Society to serve the

church with the highest quality data and insights we can mine. We are especially grateful for his contribution to this year's Preface.

American Bible Society's Ministry Intelligence Team is led by Dr. John Plake, who joined the *State of the Bible* research 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 manager of research and evaluation on the Ministry Intelligence Team, where he brings deep insight into 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 he performs countless statistical tests to uncover the story behind the numbers.

This year we are (re)joined by Randy Petersen, a writer and proprietor of Petersen Creative Enterprises. 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. Randy serves as *State of the Bible's* managing editor and lead writer.

Matt Steinruck of Big Picture Studio handles data visualizations, graphic design, and typesetting. He is also a former member of the American Bible Society team, and we are grateful for his ability to bring data to life through informative charts and attractive designs.

Laura Chan is American Bible Society's senior manager of advocacy and engagement. She has the twin gifts of curiosity and intellect that make her an invaluable member of the *State of the Bible* team. Laura pushes the team to ask relevant questions that can serve the church with actionable insights.

Peter Edman is our quality assurance lead, helping all of us produce a more consistent, high-quality report. Hannah Plake has volunteered her services again this year to provide copy and style editing, resulting in a more readable, consistent product for everyone.

Finally, Heather Douglass and our gifted partners at Pinkston help us connect this research with the broader stories in America and the interests of key media outlets.





## STATE OF THE BIBLE USA 2022

In 2011, American Bible Society launched a landmark annual study of the state of the Bible in America. This year's report marks twelve years of listening and learning how *consistent interaction with the Bible shapes people's choices and transforms their relationships*.

As 2022 began, Americans hoped for an end to the turmoil that has disrupted our lives since 2020. This report tells the story of ongoing struggles and new opportunities for the Bible. Here are a few highlights:

1. Scripture engagement among American adults fell by 21 percent from 64 million to only 49 million.
2. COVID-19 continues to influence the way Americans practice their faith and connect with others.
3. Scripture engagement brings strength and flourishing to Americans of all ages and generations.
4. Millions of Americans want to talk about their faith with friends, coworkers, and family.

This is the story of millions of Americans and their experiences, beliefs, and perspectives on the Bible, faith, and the church.



# Insights