

State of the

B I B L E

2020

RESEARCH FROM AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY AND BARNABAS GROUP

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Prepared by
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INTRODUCTION

BY JOHN FARQUHAR PLAKE, PH.D.

American Bible Society

In 2011, the leaders of American Bible Society began an ongoing research project, examining how adults in the United States related to the Bible, what questions they had about God's Word, and what difference it was making in their lives. This report marks ten years of listening and learning about the state of the Bible in America.

A REMARKABLE YEAR

The year 2020 began with anticipation for those engaged in Bible ministry and advocacy both in the United States and around the world. Hundreds of organizations and thousands of enthusiastic leaders declared 2020 the Year of the Bible and planned large-scale meetings, encouraging Bible users to renew their commitment to deep, consistent interactions with God through Scripture. They

also wanted to advocate for the Bible as a source of timeless wisdom and as a remarkable story that tells of God's pursuit of humankind.

In January, with the capable assistance of the research professionals at Barna, we again reached out to a representative sample of American adults to learn about their experiences with the Bible in their daily lives. We conducted 2,010 interviews with Americans in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Half of the respondents connected with us through an online survey, while the other half talked to us on the telephone.¹

“The Bible is the greatest influence on an individual’s spiritual health. Period. Nothing else comes close.”

By the time we finished our interviews in early February, the World Health Organization had declared COVID-19 a Public Health Emergency of International

Concern, but it wasn’t officially a pandemic until March. By the end of March, New York City was facing a lockdown, and people across America quickly moved to shelter in place to “flatten the curve” of COVID-19. American Bible Society, located in the historic Old City neighborhood of Philadelphia, instructed its headquarters staff to work from home, starting on Friday, March 13. With few exceptions, we continue our remote work arrangements today.

As researchers at Barna and American Bible Society examined the data from our January study, we faced two challenges. First, the data

¹ See Appendix 1: Methodology.

we had so carefully collected were representative of a reality that no longer existed. COVID-19 was reshaping the lived experience of billions around the world in ways that we had never seen before, could not predict, and desperately needed to understand. Second, the data from our January interviews were troubling from a statistical perspective. We couldn't be certain, but we were concerned that some of our responses were less representative of America than normal.

STATE OF THE BIBLE: COVID EDITION

Considering these issues, the research team sought approval to conduct an unprecedented half-year *State of the Bible* survey that we dubbed *State of the Bible: COVID Edition*. This second research project collected data from a larger-than-normal, representative sample of American adults. From May 28 through June 10, 2020, 3,020 adults from across the United States responded to our core questions about the Bible, faith, and the Church. Additionally, they responded to questions about how COVID-19 had reshaped their health, relationships, finances, religious worship and service, mental and emotional health, and holistic wellbeing.

COMPARING THE TWO STUDIES

Once we had gathered all the data—2,010 responses from January and 3,020 responses from June—we realized that some of our January data were suffering from a problem known to researchers as a mode effect.

The January research was conducted using two survey modes: online and telephone. This mixed-mode research has long been preferred by survey researchers to ensure that everyone in the sample frame (in this case, every American adult) has an equal opportunity to participate in the survey. As Americans have transitioned from having landline telephones in every residence to relying on cellular phones, *State of the Bible* researchers have gradually added more mobile phones into our annual samples. In January, the service provider conducting our telephone interviews made a small, possibly inconsequential mistake by conducting all telephone interviews via cellular phones. The study was designed to have 70% of telephone respondents participate by cellular phone and 30% by landline. In every other respect, the telephone interviews were conducted according to design.

Unfortunately, when we compared the responses from telephone participants to responses from online participants, there were significant differences in the groups. It was nothing obvious. The mix of geographies, genders, generations, and races were the same across both groups. We made sure of that. What caught our attention is that the telephone group was significantly more Scripture engaged and more likely to be Bible Users than the online group. It seemed like the respondents who had to tell their answers to a real person—even one on the other end of a telephone line—might have been presenting a slightly *improved* version of themselves.

Researchers call this kind of problem a *social desirability effect*. It happens more when the respondent believes, even unconsciously, that the interviewer would think better of them if they responded in a particular way. For instance, if they say they read the Bible a little bit more than they really do, perhaps the interviewer will perceive them as a better person. After all, 3 out of five American adults *wish* they used the Bible more than they do.

Once the Barna team noticed the difference in the two groups of responses, researchers at Barna and ABS looked for ways to statistically adjust or *weight* the telephone responses so they would more closely match reality. We were hoping to find a mathematical tool to remove the error caused by social desirability. Unfortunately, we couldn't fix it.

WHEN IN DOUBT, COLLECT MORE DATA

We conducted the June *COVID Edition* study partly because we strongly suspected that the COVID-19 pandemic had changed the state of the Bible in America. We were also interested in double-checking our data from January. If the January data were supported by the June study, that would be great, but if the June study corrected the January data, that would also be an important finding. In either case, we were after the truth, and the additional study helped us discover it.

Once we had all the data from both studies, it was apparent to everyone on the research team that the January telephone data were unusable. We simply couldn't rely on those responses to tell us

how many Scripture engaged adults there are in the United States, so we threw them out. When we report the numbers of Scripture engaged adults, Bible Users, Practicing Christians, or any other *point estimate* from the January *State of the Bible* study, we are using only the online responses. That means our margin of error is larger (+/- 3.1% at the 95% confidence level), but our confidence in the reliability of the data is much higher. Furthermore, the June study has remarkably small margins of error (+/- 1.8% at the 95% confidence level) and does not suffer from social desirability effects in the same way because all interviews were conducted online.

Conducting two *State of the Bible* studies in 2020 has allowed us to demonstrate our commitment to presenting the true state of the Bible, by using the best available data and the most rigorous scientific methods available to us. It has also allowed us to better understand how unprecedented events like the COVID-19 pandemic impact Americans' practice of their faith, engagement with the Bible, and holistic wellbeing.

UNDERSTANDING THE STATE OF THE BIBLE

For nine years, American Bible Society has released its annual *State of the Bible* report around Easter, when Americans tend to be thinking about the Bible and Christian faith. This year, we are releasing the *State of the Bible* findings differently than in previous years. Rather than issuing a single report, we are beginning by releasing this ebook in July. Additional chapters will be released throughout the year.

This ebook contains four major chapters:

1. **The Bible in America** examines Scripture engagement and key trends around the Bible since our last study in 2019.
2. **The Bible in a COVID-19 World** looks at how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed people's relationship with the Bible and examines the role of the Church in helping people progress down the Pathway of Scripture Engagement.
3. **The Impact of Scripture Engagement** explains how Scripture engagement influences people's lives, shapes their choices, and transforms their relationships.
4. **Scripture Engagement and Wellbeing** shows the connection between the Bible and holistic health, using some wonderful research from the Harvard School of Public Health, Oklahoma University, and Kansas University.

Each chapter contains data and analysis from both the January and the June *State of the Bible* research studies. Furthermore, each chapter contains **next steps** for pastors, church leaders, families and individuals who want to grow in their relationship with God through scripture.

FUTURE INSTALLMENTS

Between August and December, we will be emailing new chapters in the *State of the Bible* 2020 story. That way you'll have time to

think about how the Bible is shaping your choices and helping you grow in your relationships with God and others. Look for these chapters to drop between now and the end of 2020:

5. August—**Scripture Engagement and Technology** examines how technology is helping Bible Users understand and apply biblical themes and principles to their 21st Century lives.
6. September—**Scripture Engagement and Discipleship Activities** looks at the key activities that help Americans move down the Pathway of Scripture Engagement and experience a transformed life.
7. October—**Scripture Engagement, Social Justice & Political Identity** discusses how the Bible informs Americans' ideas about social justice and participation in the political process.
8. November—**Scripture Engagement and the Military** examines how the Bible is perceived by U.S. military personnel, veterans, and their families.
9. December—**State of the Bible 2020: A Year in Review** recaps the major stories from 2020 and offers an updated *State of the Bible* ebook with all the chapters included.

Our research tells us clearly that an individual's relationship with the Bible is the single greatest influence on her or his overall spiritual health. Period. Nothing else comes close.

As you read the 2020 *State of the Bible*, you'll encounter statistics about America, the Church, the Bible. You'll learn about how gender, race, faith tradition, relationships, and access to technology influence Americans' experience with God. You will feel the sting of COVID-19 as it has shattered families, emptied bank accounts, taken jobs, and distanced relationships.

All of that is statistics.

You're not a statistic. You're a person. Whether you are a member of the media, a church leader, a fellow Christian, an adherent of another faith, or someone who claims no faith at all, these pages invite you to consider the Bible's influence on your own life.

If you wish you used the Bible more frequently, you're not alone. We will give you suggestions about how your dream can be realized.

If you have tried the Bible and just don't understand it, let this research point you to the tools being used by others to explore and understand the Bible better.

I invite you to consider the state of the Bible in your life and start or continue your journey with God's word today.

Turn the page, and let's get started.



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 lead author of the *State of the Bible 2020* ebook. Over 30 years of full-time ministry, John has served as a pastor, missionary, professor, and researcher.

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

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THE BIBLE IN AMERICA

In 2011, American Bible Society and our research partners at Barna Group began an annual, nationwide research project known as *State of the Bible*. Every January the research team has asked typical American adults about the place of the Bible in their lives.

- How much do they use the Bible, if at all?
- What influence does the Bible have on their choices and decisions?
- What do they believe about the Bible, its origins, and its teachings?
- Why do they use—or not use—the Bible.
- How, where, and with whom do they interact with the Bible?

- What difference does the Bible make in the lives of those who engage with it?
- What place does the Bible have in American social and political ideals?
- How does the Bible help those who have been emotionally wounded?

In this tenth *State of the Bible* report, we examine these questions for *typical* American adults, and we challenge the notion of what it means to be *typical*. The truth is that Americans offer a mosaic of perspectives on issues related to the Bible, faith, and the Church. We differ from one another by gender, race and ethnicity, generation, faith tradition, and a dizzying array of other characteristics. While each of these variables gives texture and depth to our understanding of the state of the Bible in America, one overarching theme has emerged in ten years of research:

 Bible engagement transforms people's lives.

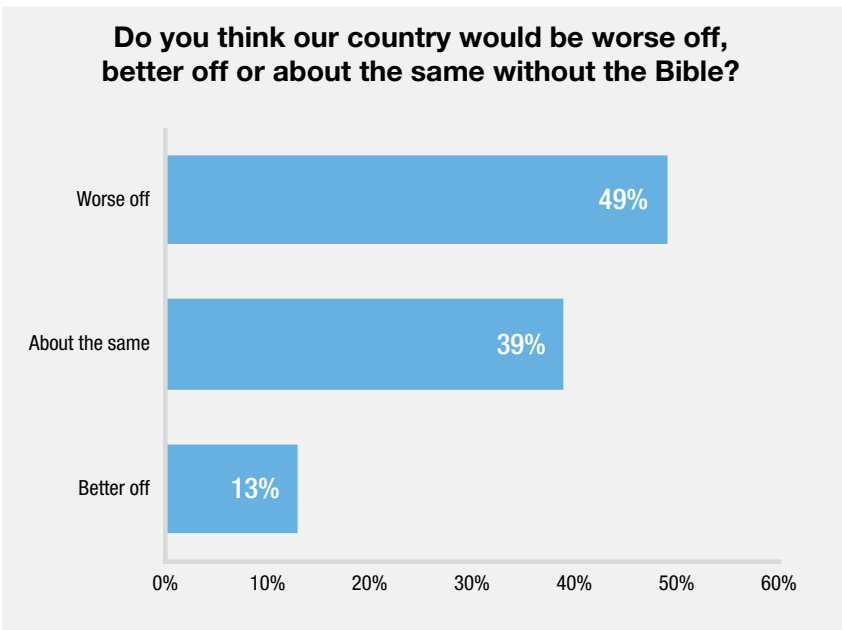
Two millennia ago, the Apostle Paul told the first-century Church the characteristics that divide people (like socio-cultural heritage, gender, social class, and others) are subsumed in the work of Jesus Christ. He wrote, “Christ has made peace between [us], and he has united us by breaking down the wall of hatred that separated us” (Ephesians 2:14, CEV).

Today, Americans often find ourselves divided from one another. Even in our nation's churches, cultural conflicts have made it

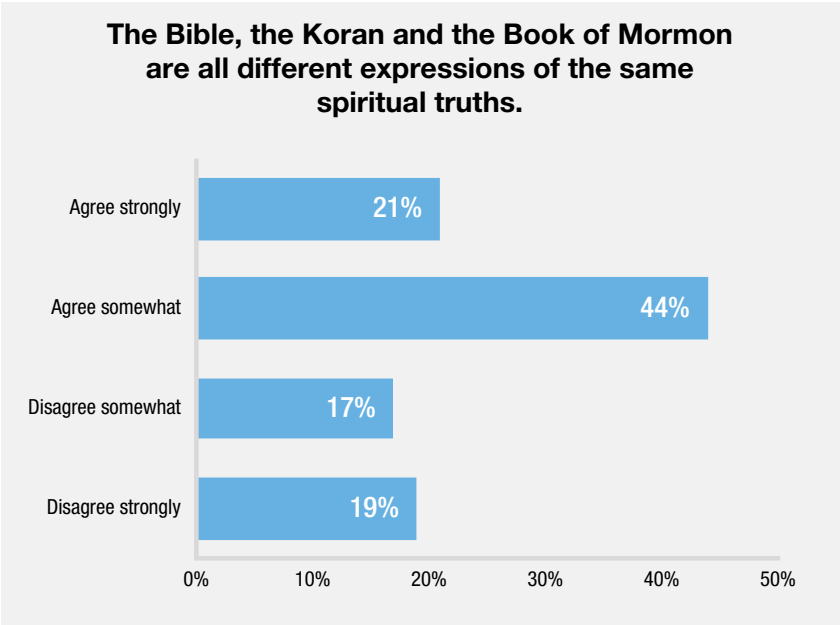
difficult for people of common faith to find common ground. Our hope is that the timeless wisdom of the Bible will help all of us see ourselves, our neighbors, and our society through a *common lens* and will provide that *common ground* where we can meet to face the challenges of the 21st century.

AMERICA’S PERCEPTION OF THE BIBLE

To begin, let’s look at Americans’ views of the Bible’s influence on our nation. Nearly half of U.S. adults say that America would be worse off without the Bible (49%), representing a decline of 6 percent, compared to 2019. Just over one in ten (13%) believe it would be better, similar to 15 percent who held the same opinion last year.

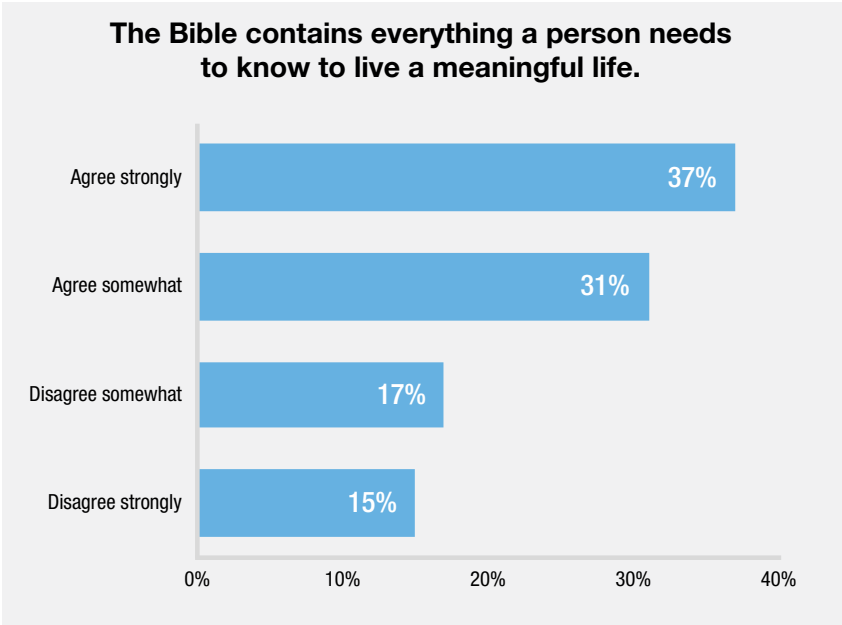


This year, two thirds of U.S. adults say that different religious texts, the Bible, Koran, and Book of Mormon, are all expressions of the same truths (65%). Self-identified Christians match the rest of America on this question; however, over half of Practicing Christians disagree (52% disagree somewhat + disagree strongly).¹



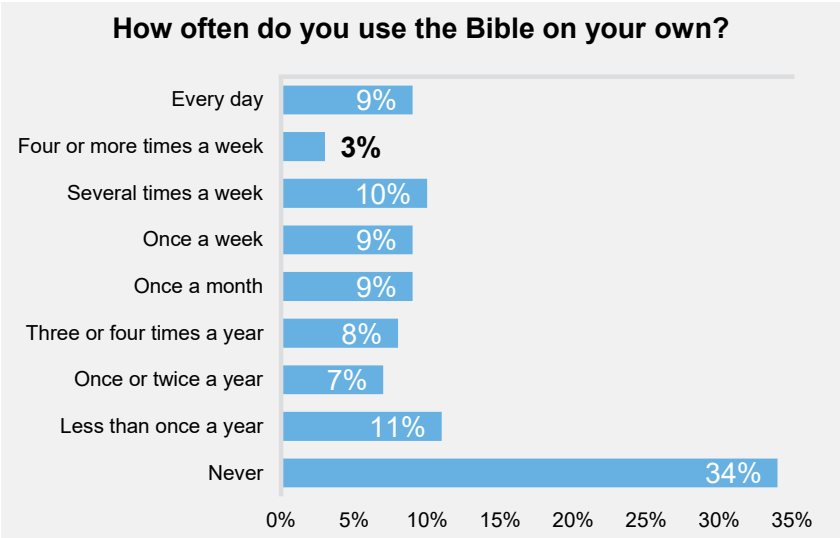
1 See Appendix 2 for definitions of Self-identified Christians and Practicing Christians.

Though most Americans reject the Bible as a unique or exclusive source of spiritual truth, almost seven out of ten adults agree that the Bible contains everything one needs to know to live a meaningful life (68%).

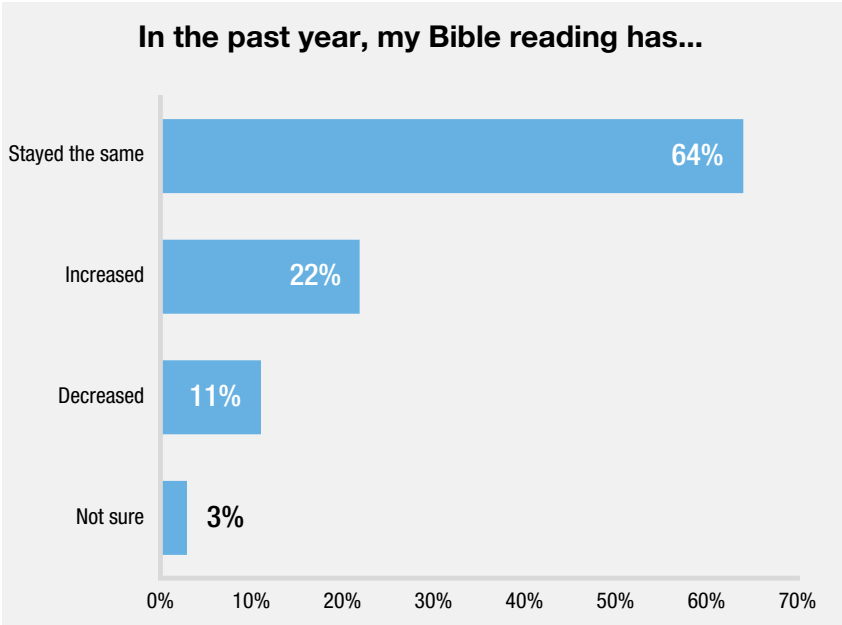


Indeed, three out of five U.S. adults say they wish they used their Bible more (59%), and nearly seven in ten agree (32% strongly, 37% somewhat) they are curious about what the Bible says.

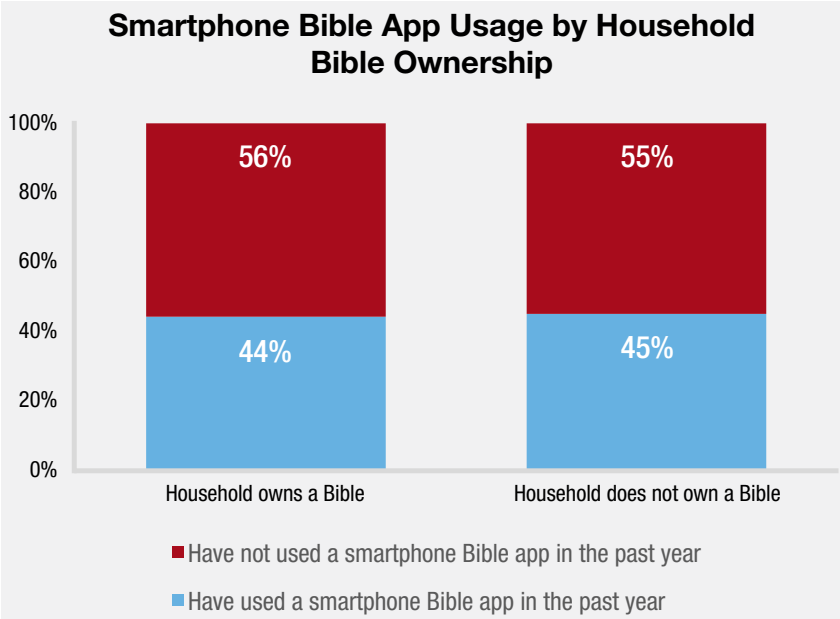
In 2020, more than one fifth of US adults (22%) interact with the Bible multiple times a week on their own, not counting use of the Bible while at a church service or mass. Over one third (34%) never read the Bible. Altogether, three of five American adults say they either never read the Bible or read it rarely (60%, three or four times a year + once or twice a year + less than once a year + never).



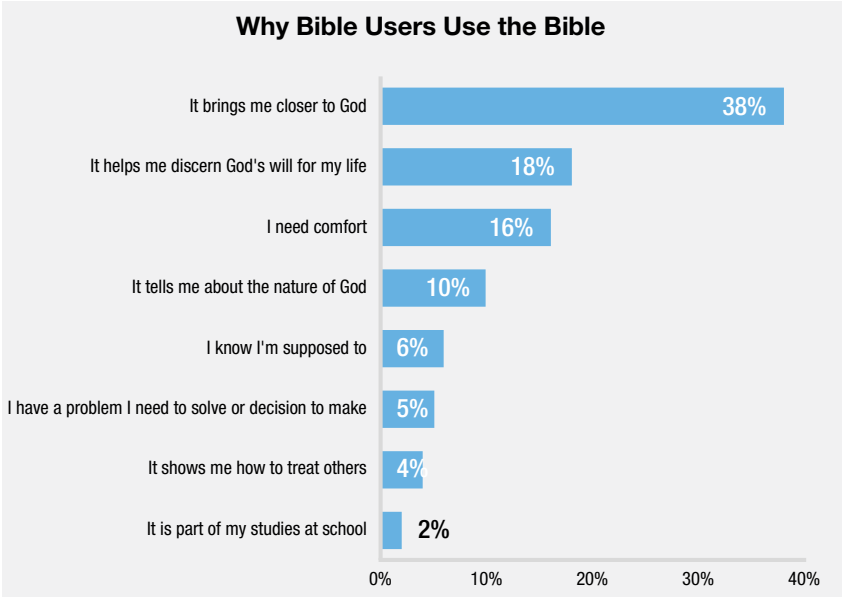
Two thirds of U.S. adults (64%) say their Bible reading has stayed the same in the past year, while over one fifth (22%) say their Bible reading has **increased**. Those who use the Bible at least weekly are 3.8 times more likely to report their Bible reading has increased over the past year than to report it has stayed the same. Those who read the Bible infrequently (once a month to less than once a year) are most likely to report their reading has **decreased** in the past 12 months. Of those who say their Bible reading has **stayed the same**, two in five respondents (42%) never read the Bible, and 13% read it less than once a year.



Three fourths of U.S. adults (77%) live in a household with a Bible and virtually all of those adults (99%) have it in a language they can read. Of the one quarter (23%) who do not own a Bible, nearly half (46%) say they have used the Bible on a smart phone app in the past year, and a third agree (5% strongly, 28% somewhat) that they are curious about what the Bible says.



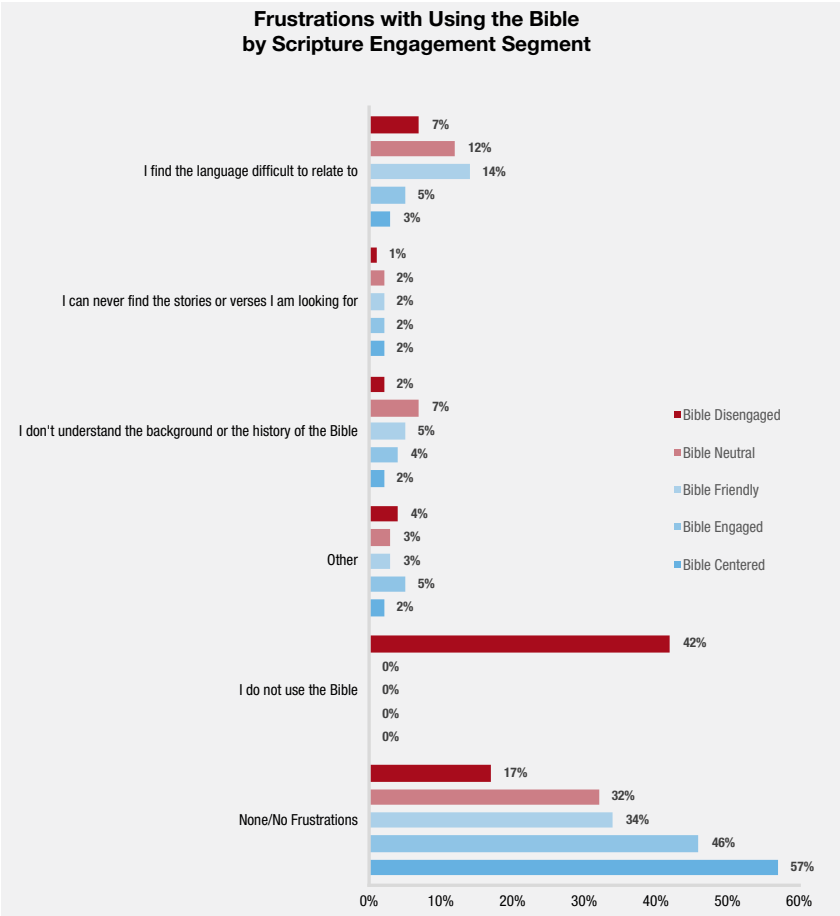
“It brings me closer to God” is the most selected reason why Bible Users interact with scripture. “It helps me discern God’s will for my life,” selected by nearly one in five Bible Users (18%) overall, is more common among older Bible Users, having been selected by 24% of Boomers compared to 13% of Millennials. Millennials, however, are more likely than Boomers to say they read because they know they are supposed to (9% vs. 2% Boomers).

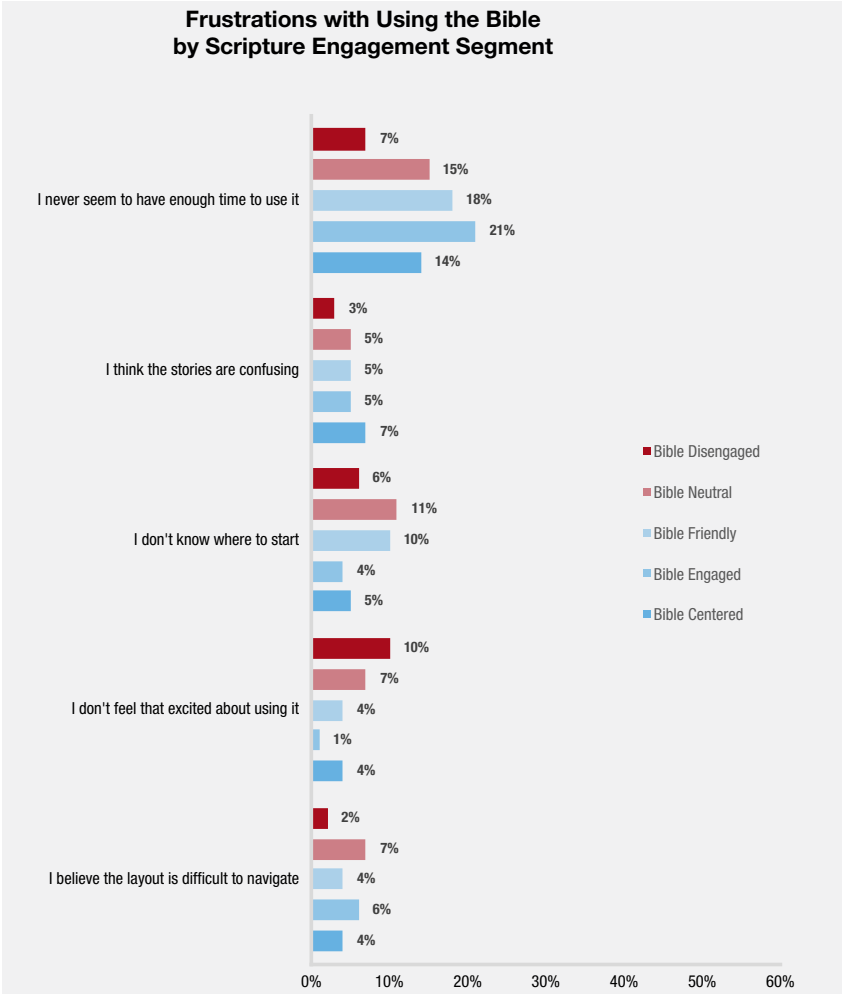


When describing their most significant frustration when it comes to reading the Bible on their own, respondents express different issues, depending on their level of Scripture engagement and, presumably, their familiarity with the Bible overall.² Bible Engaged and Bible Centered respondents, are most likely to say they have

² See the supplement on “Measuring Scripture Engagement “ for category definitions.

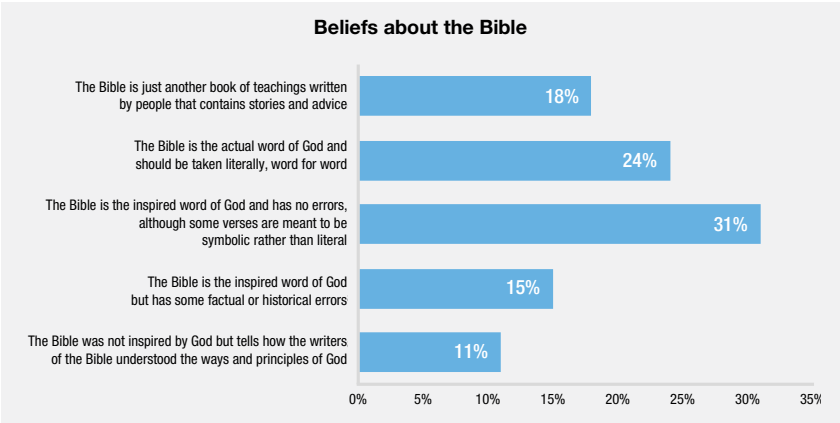
no frustrations (39% Engaged, 49% Centered) or that they never seem to have enough time to interact with scripture (18% Engaged, 10% Centered). On the other end of the Scripture engagement continuum, those in unengaged categories are more likely to express frustration at finding the language difficult to understand (15% Neutral, 13% Friendly) or simply not knowing where to start (15% Neutral, 12% Friendly). Among Bible Disengaged respondents, half indicated they simply do not use the Bible (48%).





Among U.S. adults, there is fairly high variance as to what individuals believe about the Bible’s nature. A quarter say that it is the actual word of God, meant for literal interpretation (24%). Nearly a third say the Bible is inspired and some parts are symbolic rather than literal (31%). Three in twenty (15%) say that while the

Bible is inspired, it contains errors. One in ten believes that the Bible is not inspired and is primarily the authors’ interpretations of God. Finally, about one in five (18%) of U.S. adults believe the Bible is just another book of teachings.

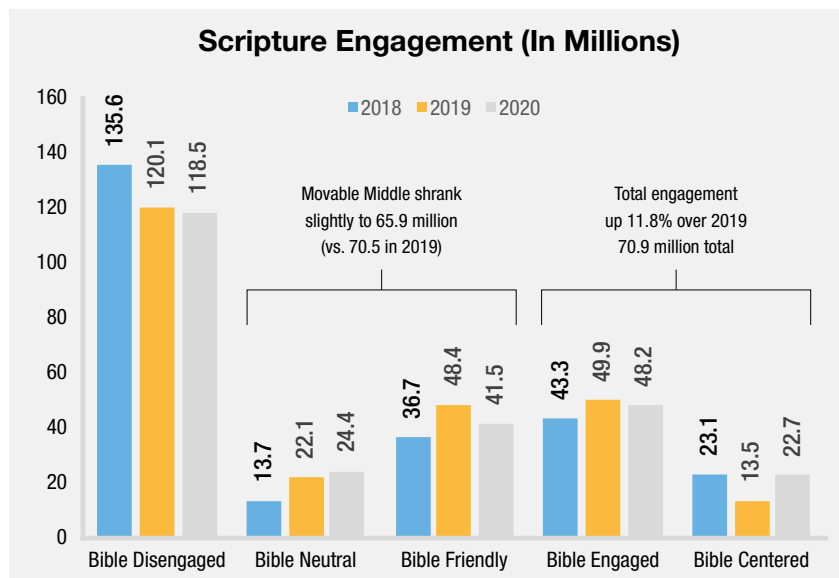


Among those who believe the Bible is “just another book of teachings written by people that contains stories and advice (18%), three fourths agree (31% strongly, 43% somewhat) “the Bible was written to control, dominate, or manipulate other people.” Altogether, approximately 33.4 million American adults (13%) hold this view.

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT TRENDS

Year over year, **overall Scripture engagement** has risen by 11.8% or 7.5 million adults. Yet when compared to 2018, the proportions are similar. The Movable Middle of Bible Friendly and Bible Neutral adults shrank slightly from 70.5 to 65.9 million in the past year. The Bible Disengaged also decreased slightly from 120.1 to 118.5 million. As of January 2020, the following percentages of American adults are in each scripture engagement category (*see the article on page 30 for more on how Scripture engagement is scored*):

- **Bible Centered** (9%): 22.7 million adults
- **Bible Engaged** (19%): 48.3 million adults
- **Bible Friendly** (16%): 41.5 million adults
- **Bible Neutral** (10%): 24.4 million adults
- **Bible Disengaged** (46%): 118.5 million adults



MEASURING SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

On the face of it, scripture engagement appears to be a simple idea; however, when researchers ask experts and Bible users what it means, they receive remarkably varied answers. For example, some people equate scripture engagement simply with reading the Bible. Others object that simply reading the Bible doesn't account for scripture engagement among those who lack literacy or whose language has never been reduced to writing. For these populations, oral translations of the Bible are critical, and scripture engagement is about *listening* to the Bible,¹ not reading it.

In 2017, American Bible Society and Barna Group collaborated on a multi-phase national research project to better understand scripture engagement among

American adults. The research was conducted among people who use the Bible, either in English or Spanish, and it represented Bible users from across the spectrum of religious traditions.

The fundamental question researchers sought to answer was *what kind of interaction with the Bible results in transformed relationship with God and others?*

Researchers examined five core issues that might contribute to scripture engagement:²

1. **Frequency:** Does it matter how frequently people interact with the Bible, whether that interaction is through reading, listening, singing, or some other medium?

1 Or in the case of sign language translations, seeing someone sign the Bible.

2 Each of these areas of investigation was related to a theory of scripture engagement discovered in either literature review or expert interviews.

2. **Duration:** Does it matter the length of time someone spends interacting with the Bible at any single instance?
3. **Modality:** How do the social setting and/or physical setting of Bible interactions influence scripture engagement?
4. **Impact:** In what ways are Bible users emotionally, spiritually, and volitionally impacted by their interactions with the Bible?
5. **Centrality:** How does the Bible influence a person's choices and decisions?

Two separate research teams—one at Barna and another at ABS—analyzed survey data independently, using different analytic techniques.³ Remarkably, both teams discovered the same thing:

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

The result of this research was a 14-item scale that results in a **Scripture Engagement Score**. That score is comprised of three factors:

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

3 The Barna research team relied predominantly on logistic regression, while the ABS team used exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis.

Among Bible Users,⁴ the Scripture Engagement Scale is centered on 100, meaning that approximately one half of Bible Users in the United States score above 100, and the other half score below 100.⁵ The Scripture Engagement Scale is also divided into segments, based on its standard deviation, which is set at 15 points. The five **Scripture Engagement Segments** are:

1. **Bible Centered:** Score = 115 or higher. Bible Centered people interact with the Bible frequently. The values and principles of scripture are central to their life choices and relationships. More than eight in ten [83%] use the Bible on their own at least four times a week.
2. **Bible Engaged:** Score = 100—114. Bible Engaged people interact with the Bible regularly. The values and principles of Scripture mostly influence their relationships with God and others. To a lesser degree, the Bible also influences their life choices. Bible Engaged people normally interact with

the Bible somewhat less frequently than the Bible Centered. Nearly half [46%] read the Bible once a week or several times a week on their own, whereas four in ten [38%] read the Bible at least most days of the week.

3. **Bible Friendly:** Score = 85—99. Bible Friendly people interact with the Bible periodically and are open to the Bible as a source of spiritual insight and wisdom. They are almost evenly split between those who read the Bible once a week [21.5%] and those who read it only once a month [23.6%] on their own.
4. **Bible Neutral:** Score = 70—84. Bible Neutral people interact with the Bible sporadically with little influence from the Bible. Nine of ten read the Bible either once a month [36.2%], three or four times a year [22.8%], or once or twice a year [31.6%]. It is also the most troubled category of respondents, showing high levels of stress, low levels of hope and flourishing.

4 Bible Users are individuals who have interacted with the Bible in the past six months, regardless of their religious self-identification.

5 In *State of the Bible* research since 2019, Bible Users are determined to be those who say they use the Bible on their own at least once or twice a year, apart from a large church service or mass. In June 2020, Bible Users averaged a Scripture Engagement Scale score of $M = 95.66$, $SD = 14.8$. In January 2020, Bible Users averaged $M = 98.8$, $SD = 15.23$. In January 2019, Bible Users averaged $M = 96.3$, $SD = 15.24$ on the Scripture Engagement Scale.

5. **Bible Disengaged:** Score = Less than 70. Bible Disengaged people interact with the Bible infrequently, if at all, and it has a minimal impact on their lives. Two thirds [66.3%] never read the Bible on their own, and three in ten [30.1%] read it only once or twice a year. As a group, Bible Disengaged people rarely seek out the Bible, tending to encounter it through others, rather than by choice.

Both the **Scripture Engagement Score** and these **Scripture Engagement Segments** are a useful means of comparing groups, based on their relationship with the Bible, instead of other characteristics, like gender, race, ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, religious self-identification, etc. For instance, by comparing the flourishing levels, hope levels, or stress levels of groups with different **Scripture Engagement Scale** scores but similar demographic characteristics, researchers can better understand the Bible's impact on people's lives and how individuals come to understand the Bible's life-changing message.

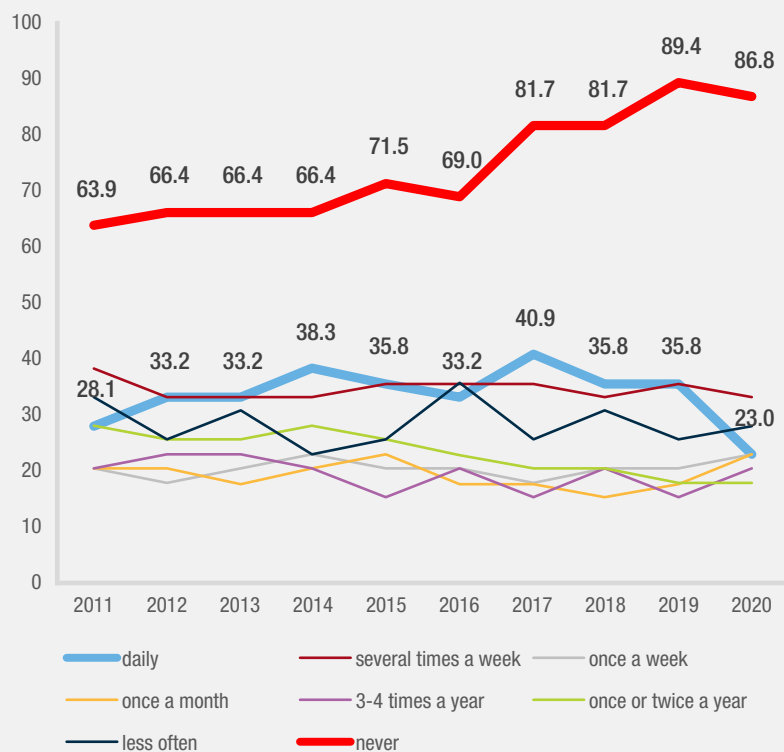
Respondents have a Scripture Engagement Score of 100 or higher are sometimes considered "Scripture engaged," though they may be in either the Bible Engaged or Bible Centered segment. Those who score less than 100 are sometimes called "Scripture unengaged" or "unengaged in Scripture," though they may be in the Bible Friendly, Bible Neutral, or Bible Disengaged segment.

As of January, 86.8 million adults (34%) report they **never** use the Bible on their own, outside of a large church service or mass. That figure is statistically unchanged since 2019, when 35% of respondents selected the same option. In 2011, when *State of the Bible* began, 63.9 million adults (25%) said they never use the Bible on their own.

On the other end of the spectrum, respondents who say they use the Bible **daily** dropped sharply from 14% in 2019 to only 9% in 2020. From 2011 through 2019, the percentage of respondents who claim to read the Bible daily has remained fairly steady, averaging 13.7%. A decrease of 5% in a single year is unprecedented. The slide had not reversed as of June, when the *State of the Bible COVID Edition* study was conducted. In that larger study, only 8.5% of respondents indicated that they read the Bible every day on their own.

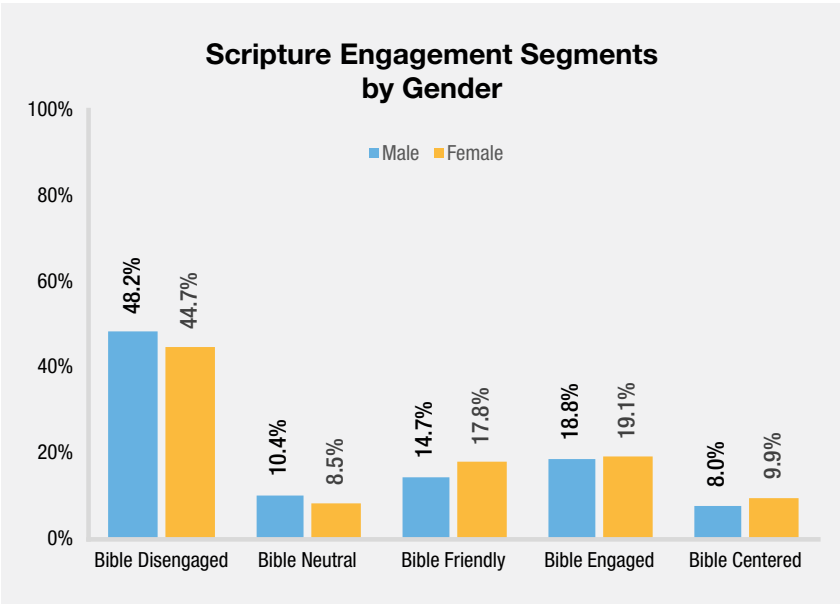
Looking more broadly at frequency of Bible use, the January data showed that 31% of Americans use the Bible on their own **at least once a week**, down 5% from 2019 and down 4% from the 2011-2019 average. Once again, data collected in June show no correction in this data point. Instead, the proportion of American adults who use the Bible at least once a week on their own continued to be depressed, registering only 29.7%.

Trends in Bible use (In Millions)



SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The Scripture engagement distribution varies with demographic variables such as gender, race, ethnicity, geographic region and age. In the ten years of *State of the Bible* surveys, women generally exhibit higher levels of Scripture engagement than men. Women are about 2% more likely than men to be Bible Centered, and men are 3.5% more likely to be Bible Disengaged than women. The breakdown in Scripture engagement by gender is presented below.

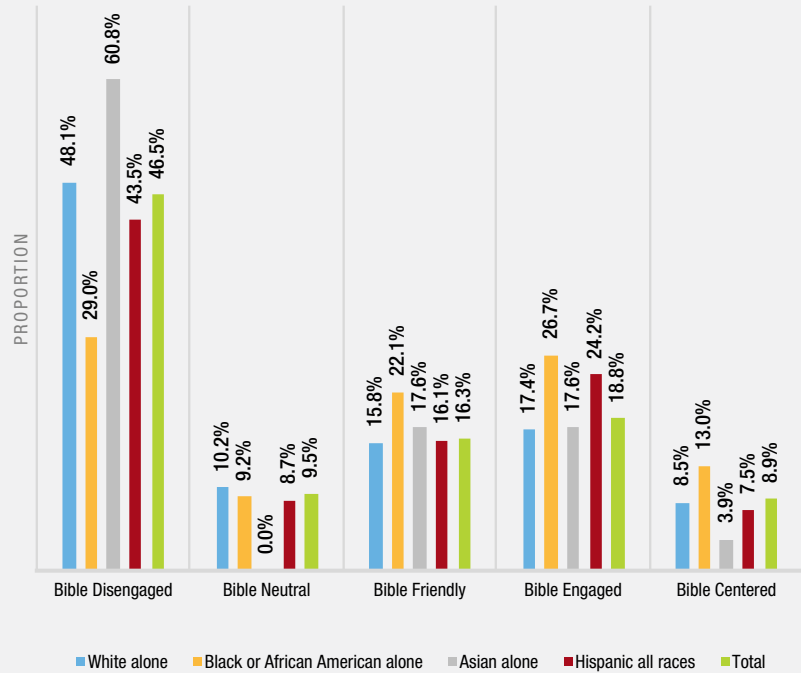


SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT, RACE, AND ETHNICITY

Scripture engagement also differs by race and ethnicity. Black or African Americans exhibit the highest levels of Scripture engagement by race. As a group, they are more likely to be Bible Centered and less likely to be Bible Disengaged than all others. When comparing Scripture Engagement Scale scores, African Americans average 12 points higher than American adults, in general. White Americans score below the national average on Scripture engagement ($M = 70.5$ compared to $M = 71.9$). Hispanics of any race score above the national average ($M = 73.6$). Asian Americans have the lowest levels of Scripture engagement for any race or ethnicity measured ($M = 63.8$).

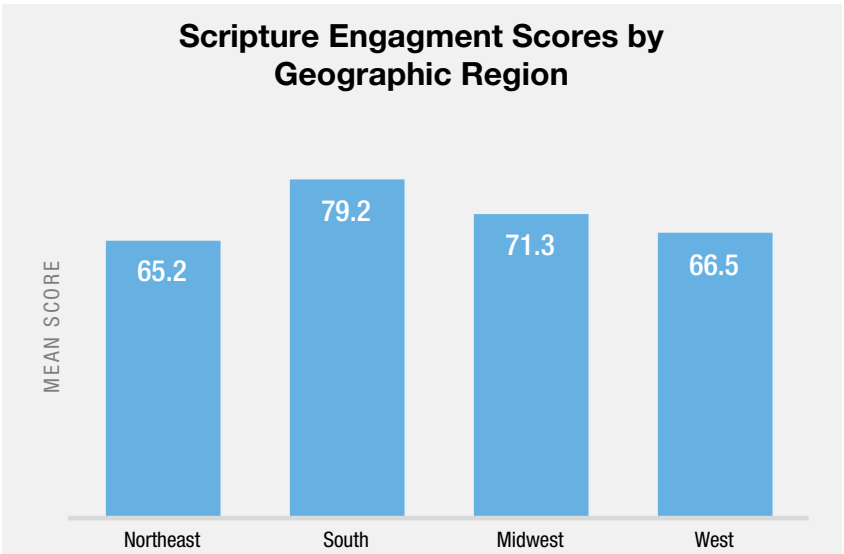
Asian Americans are more than twice as likely as other Americans not to self-identify as followers of any Christian religious group. Six in ten Asian Americans (60%) are followers of a non-Christian religion or of no religion at all. By comparison, all other racial and ethnic groups combined contain just over one quarter non-Christians (27%). The figure below provides the distribution of Scripture Engagement Segments based on race/ethnicity.

Scripture Engagement by Race and Ethnicity



SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT AND GEOGRAPHIC REGION

A third way of segmenting Scripture engagement is by the region of the country in which a person resides. People who live in the South ($M = 79.2$) are generally more scripture engaged than those in other parts of the country. Those who live in the Northeast ($M = 65.2$) and West ($M = 66.5$) have the lowest levels of Scripture engagement.

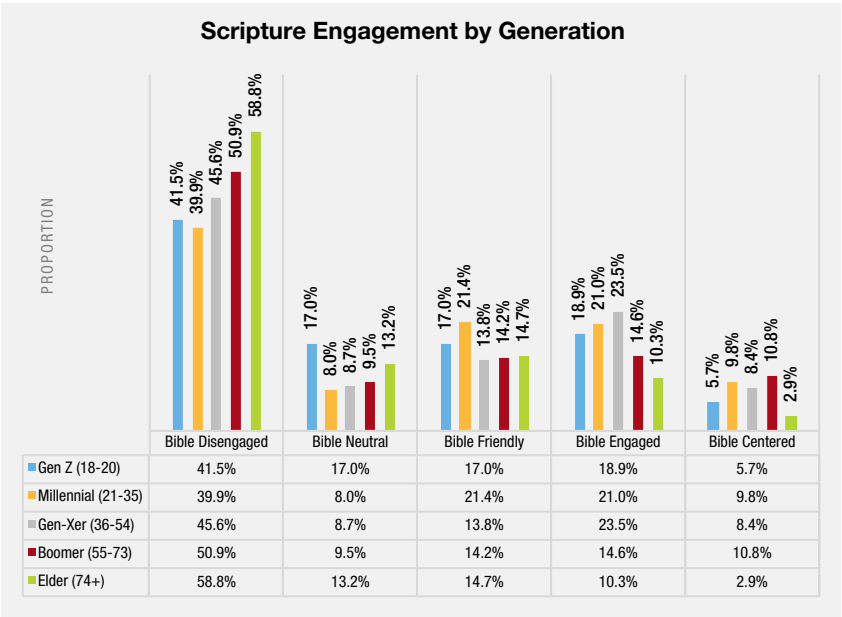


SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT AND GENERATIONS

State of the Bible data also suggest Scripture engagement varies significantly by generational group. The group with the highest level of Scripture engagement is the Millennial generation (ages 21-35, $M = 76.2$). The Elder generation (ages 74 and higher) scores the lowest ($M = 62.4$) overall. Average Scripture engagement

scores tend to decrease as age increases. Scripture engagement is significantly higher on average for Millennials than for any other generation. Comparison to Generation Z is difficult because not all members of that youngest generation are adults. Elders, Boomers, and Generation Z (adults only) do not score significantly different from one another on average Scripture engagement.

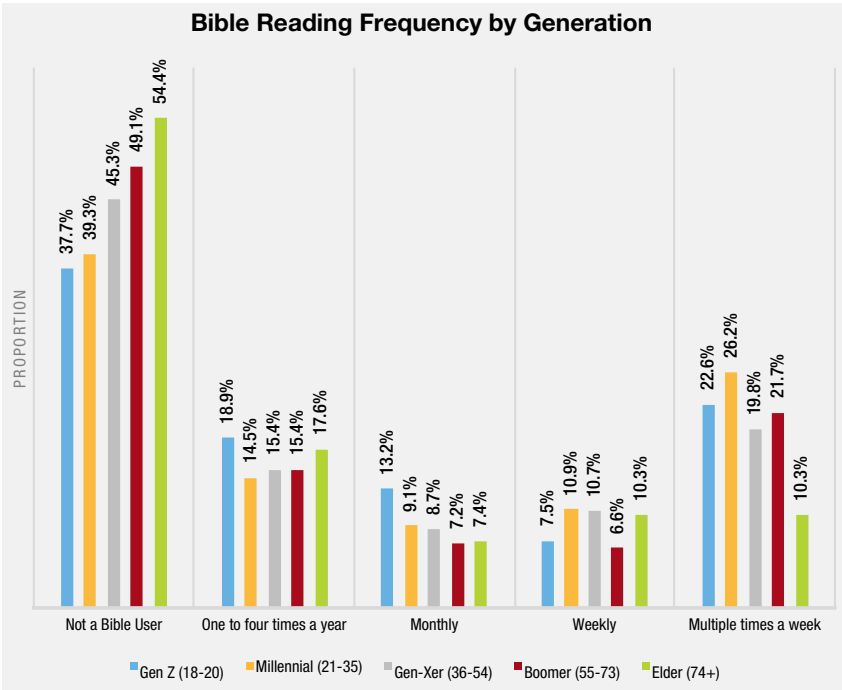
When comparing generational groups by Scripture Engagement Segments, Boomers (10.8%) are most represented in the Bible Centered segment followed by the Millennials (9.8%). The Bible Disengaged group has its highest proportion among Elders (58.8%), followed by Baby Boomers (50.9%). The lowest proportion of Bible Disengaged Americans is in the Millennial generation (39.9%). The table below provides the distribution of Scripture Engagement Segments by generational grouping.



BIBLE USE, BIBLE FORMATS, AND PERCEIVED BIBLE KNOWLEDGE

Over half of American adults (55%) use the Bible at least occasionally.³ Three in ten (31%) use the Bible at least weekly, and one in five (22%) use the Bible multiple times a week.

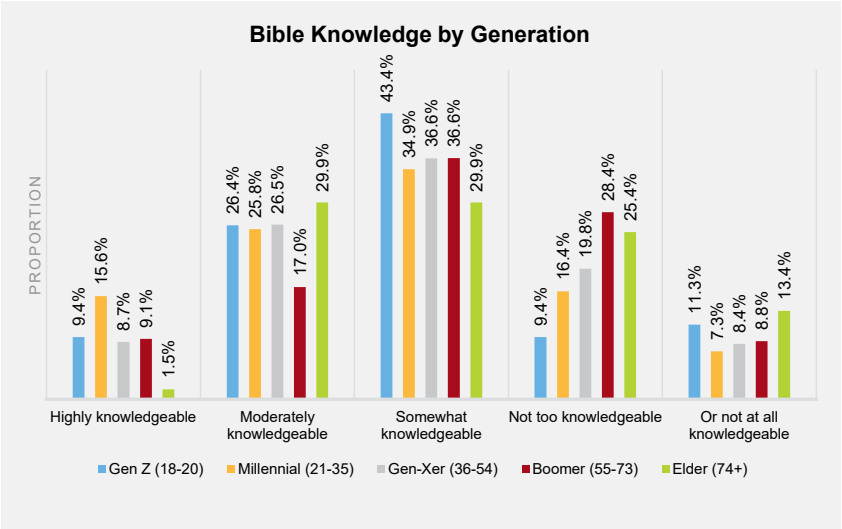
Millennials tend to read the Bible more frequently than other generations with one quarter (26%) reading the Bible multiple times each week. As Bible use increases, the Bible reader is more likely to be a Millennial and least likely to be an Elder. The figure below has a breakdown of Bible reading frequency by generational group.



3 Occasionally is defined here as at least one or two times per year or more often. [See graph on page 24 for a detailed breakdown.](#)

BIBLE KNOWLEDGE

Most American adults report being somewhat knowledgeable about the Bible. Those in the Millennial generation are most likely to say they are highly knowledgeable (16%) and least likely to say they are not at all knowledgeable (7%). Elders are most likely to admit they are not at all knowledgeable (13%) while being least likely to claim they are highly knowledgeable (2%). This pattern mirrors the Scripture Engagement Scale score pattern, indicating that Scripture engagement and Bible knowledge grow together. A breakdown of knowledge of the Bible by generation is in the figure below.



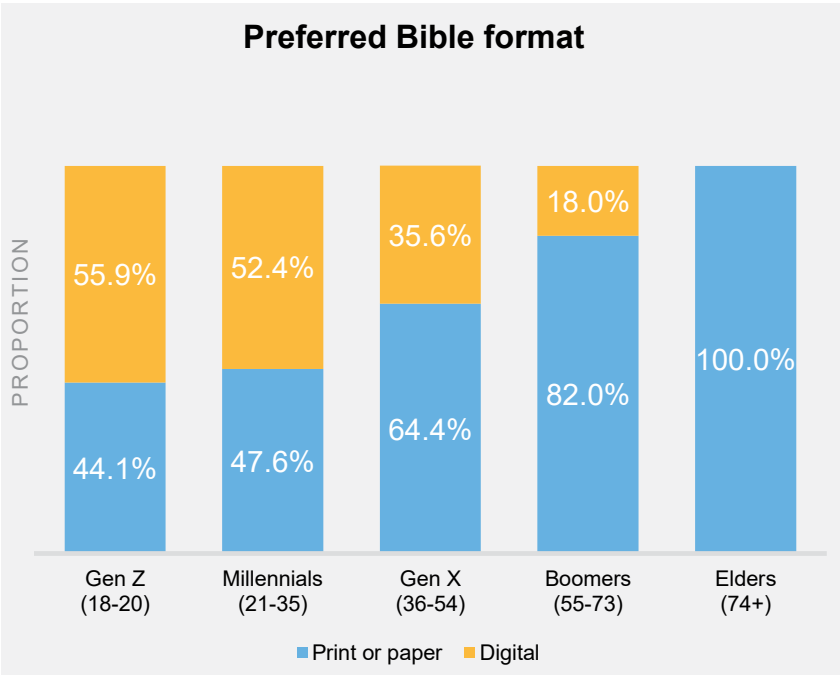
DIGITAL BIBLE PENETRATION

The format of the Bible people read has changed over the past ten years. Previously there were few options and most chose to read the Bible as a printed document. Today, two thirds (65%) of Bible readers prefer a print version of the Bible. This proportion varies by age group. Younger age groups are indicating a greater preference for digital versions either on their smartphones or on a computer.

Millennials are about as likely to read the Bible digitally (52%) as in print (48%). They are also more likely to engage with other digital Bible resources than other generations. When asked whether they used any or all of six electronic media⁴ to interact with the Bible, Millennials were most likely to indicate they had used one or more of these electronic resources. As Bible Users get older, they are more likely to prefer a print Bible. There was no one in this sample classified as an elder who preferred a digital version of the Bible over print.

4 Bible Users were asked, “Have you done this in the past year?” and were presented with the following options. They could select any, all, or none of these:

- Read from a print version of the Bible on your own.
- Used the internet to read Bible content.
- Listened to an audio version of the Bible.
- Listened to a teaching about the Bible or Bible readings via podcast.
- Used a Bible app on a smart phone.
- Searched for Bible verses or Bible content on a smart phone or cell phone.



NEXT STEPS

For Pastors. A lot has changed in Scripture engagement across the United States in the past several years. How has Scripture engagement changed in your congregation? If you'd like to know how your church's relationship to the Bible is affecting the spiritual vitality of your church, check out the [Look Inside Church Assessment](#).

For Church Leaders. Digital interaction with the Bible is especially popular among younger generations and among those who are relatively new to the Bible. Have you considered using a [YouVersion](#) reading plan with your small group or class, so you can grow together? Try using the *with friends* feature.

For Families. Talk about your frustrations with reading the Bible and how you feel when it goes well. Consider watching some of [The Bible Project's](#) amazing videos to add variety to your family Bible engagement.

For Individuals. Talk to a friend about your experiences with the Bible and ask them to begin reading the Bible with you. Start by searching [YouVersion](#) or [The Bible Project](#) for a topic that interests you. The Bible offers wisdom for life, even life in the 21st century.



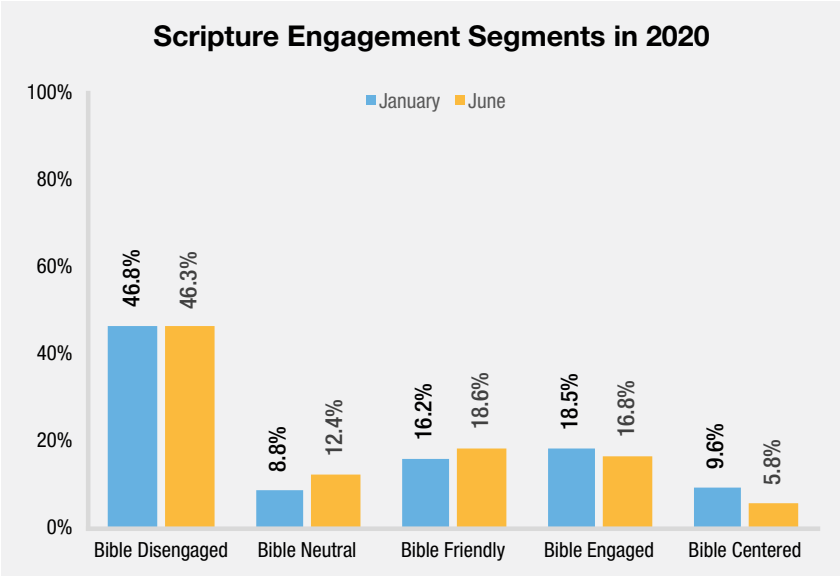
THE BIBLE IN A COVID-19 WORLD

When COVID-19 struck the United States, it disrupted every aspect of life, including participation in church or other religious events and engagement with the Bible. Google Trends recorded a spike in internet searches around the Bible in the spring of 2020. When COVID-19 hit in the first week of April, Bible-related searches hit a five-year high. The increased search activity may have indicated curiosity about what the Bible says about suffering, and sickness.

In most cases, however, curiosity about the Bible didn't deepen into Scripture engagement.¹ While *State of the Bible* data show that Scripture engagement was up significantly in January, compared to

¹ Scripture engagement is consistent interaction with the Bible that shapes people's choices and transforms their relationships.

the same time in 2019, by June Scripture engagement had fallen to below 2019 levels.



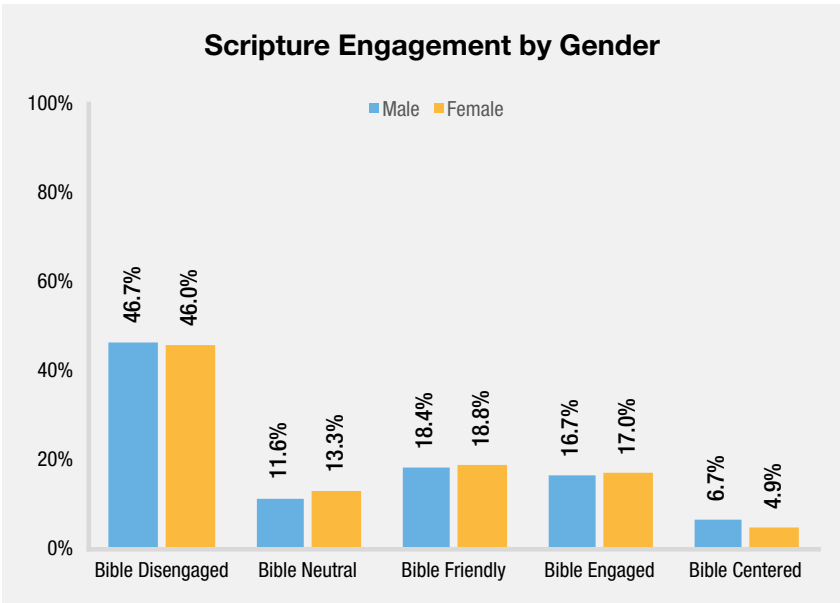
In January, *State of the Bible* polling indicated that adult Scripture engagement had risen to 70.9 million, its highest level since measurement began in 2011. However, the COVID-19 crisis put significant pressure on Americans' engagement with the Bible. As of the first week of June, Scripture engagement among adults had fallen from 27.8% to only 22.6%, representing some 13.1 million Americans who were no longer consistently interacting with the Bible in a way that shaped their choices and transformed their relationships with God and others.

The largest changes were in the Bible Centered segment, which shrank by 3.8% or 9.7 million American adults. Similarly, the Bible Engaged category shrank by 1.7% or 4.3 million adults.

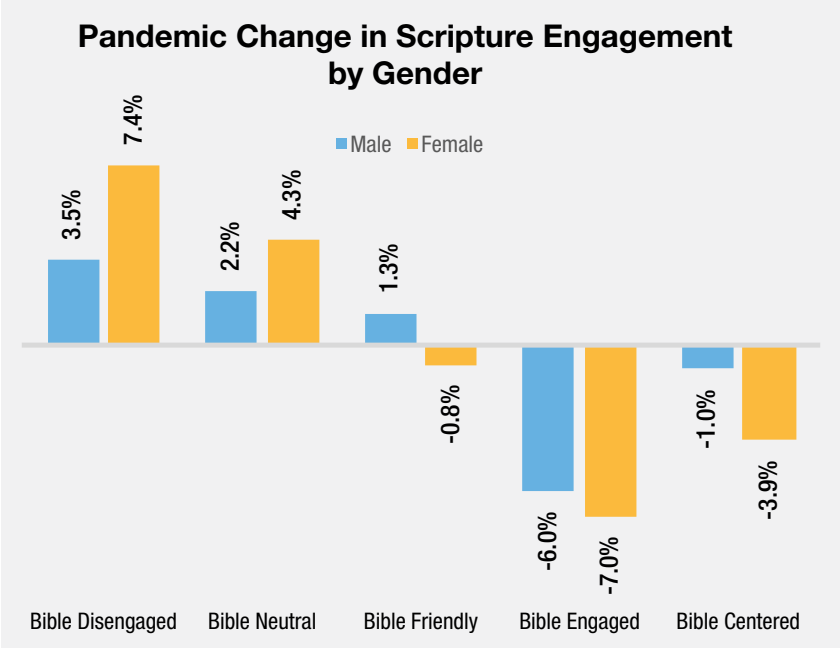
Additionally, *State of the Bible* data show a slight decrease in the size of the Bible Disengaged category along with a surge in Bible Neutrals and Bible Friendlies. These two middle categories, sometimes called the Movable Middle, grew by a combined 6% or 15.3 million American adults.

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT AND GENDER

Normally, Scripture engagement among women outpaces men. For the first time, June *State of the Bible* data revealed that women and men had approximately the same levels of Scripture engagement across the country. Men were slightly more likely to be Bible Centered, whereas women were a bit more likely than men to score Bible Neutral. In both categories, the differences were within the margin of error (+/- 1.8% at the 95% confidence level).



Women who were Bible Engaged or Bible Centered in January lost significantly more ground than their male counterparts by June.



Scripture engagement is comprised of three components:

- Frequency of interaction with the Bible
- Spiritual impact of the Bible on the user
- Moral centrality of the Bible in the user’s life

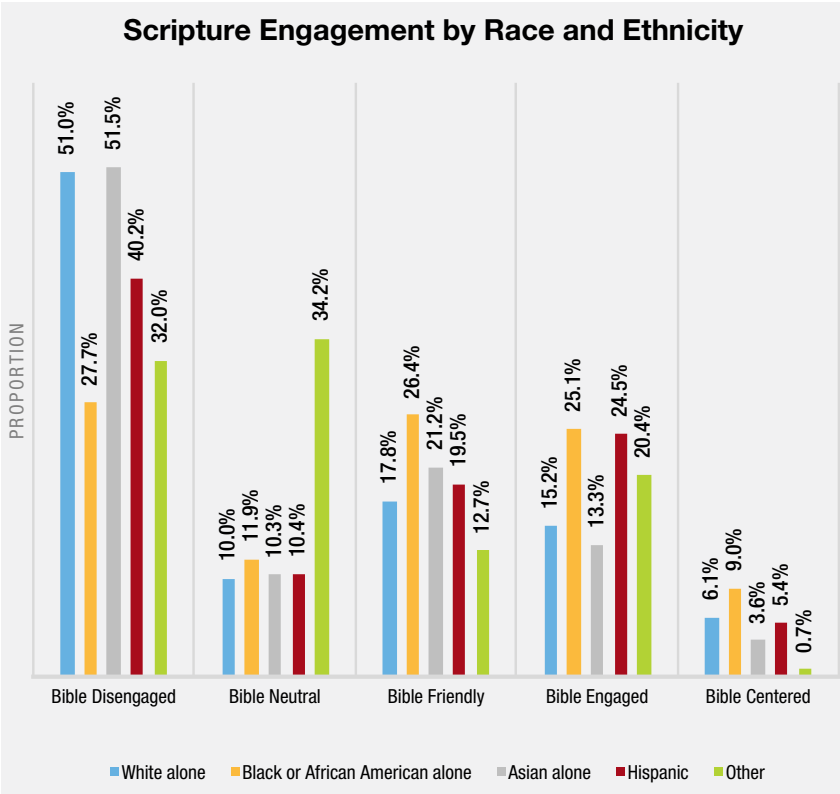
Frequency of interaction with the Bible showed the most significant decline for all Bible users between January and June, followed by Spiritual impact. Moral centrality remained fairly steady between the two samples.

Two key forces have exerted pressure predominantly on women during the COVID-19 pandemic. First, women with children at home were often expected to adjust both to employment changes—ranging from increased demand for their work to working from home and even unemployment—while also taking increased responsibility for their children’s care and education during the workday. Second, many Bible Engaged and Bible Centered women were disconnected from their church gatherings, small group meetings, and less formal connections with friends who share and encourage their faith. The combined effect of increased demands on their time and decreased opportunities for social interactions around the Bible may have disrupted women’s Bible engagement routines and contributed to their decreased Scripture engagement as a population.

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT, RACE AND ETHNICITY

While differences in Scripture engagement were seen across time and between genders, they were also evident between race and ethnicity categories. Consistent with previous studies, African Americans scored higher on Scripture engagement than other races with more than one third (34%) scoring Bible Engaged or Bible Centered. Hispanics of all races also scored high with 3 in 10 adults (30%) above the Bible Engagement threshold. White Americans followed with 21% Bible Engaged, and Asian Americans registered 17% Bible Engaged. Other races, including those who claim two or more races scored third highest in the Bible Engaged category but

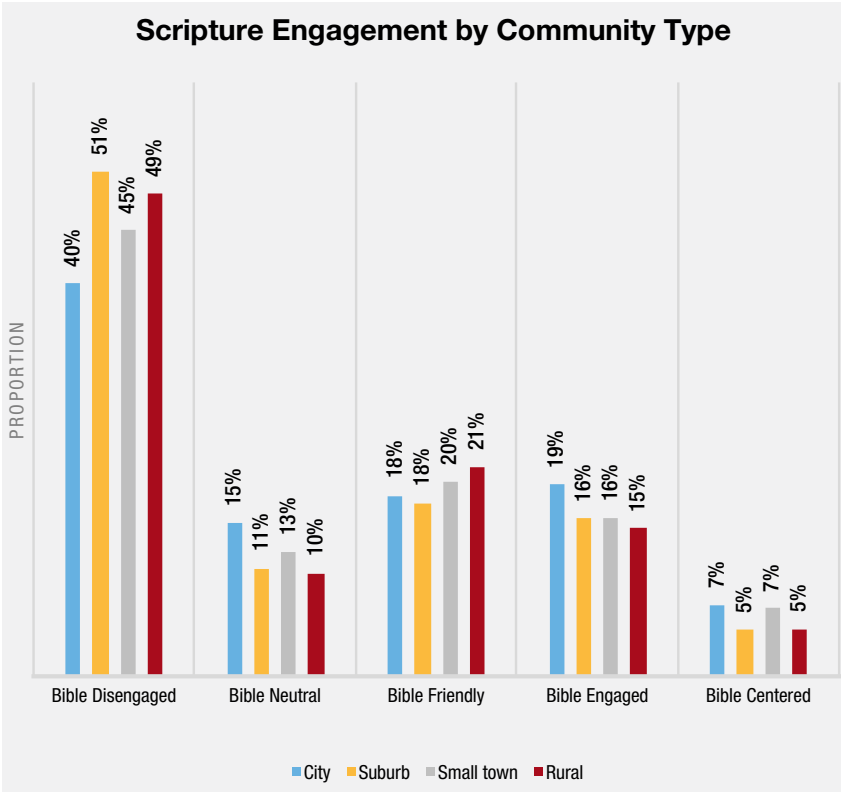
were at the bottom of the Bible Centered group. Altogether, 21% of other races were Bible Engaged or Bible Centered.



SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY TYPE

One in four (26%) city dwellers score Bible Engaged or higher. Suburbs see one in five (21%) who are Bible Engaged or Centered. Small towns have a similar proportion of residents who are Bible Engaged (23%). Rural Americans are the least likely to be Bible Engaged or higher with one in five (20%) consistently interacting

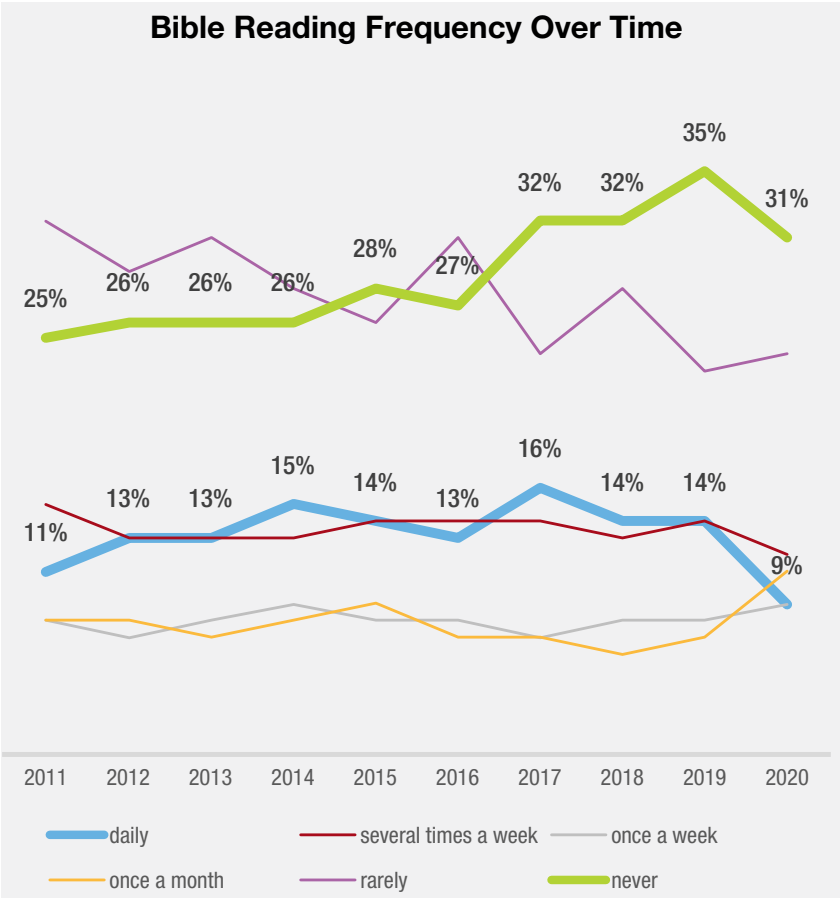
with the Bible in ways that shape their choices and transform their relationships with God and others.



NON-BIBLE USERS IN AMERICA

In 2019, over one-third of American adults (35%) said that *realistically* they never use the Bible on their own, apart from a church service or mass. In January, that proportion was statistically unchanged (34%), but by June it had fallen significantly to nearly three in ten (31%). In all, nearly 79 million American adults say

they never use the Bible at all.² In fact, one of every five Americans (22%) now say they live in a household without a Bible in it.

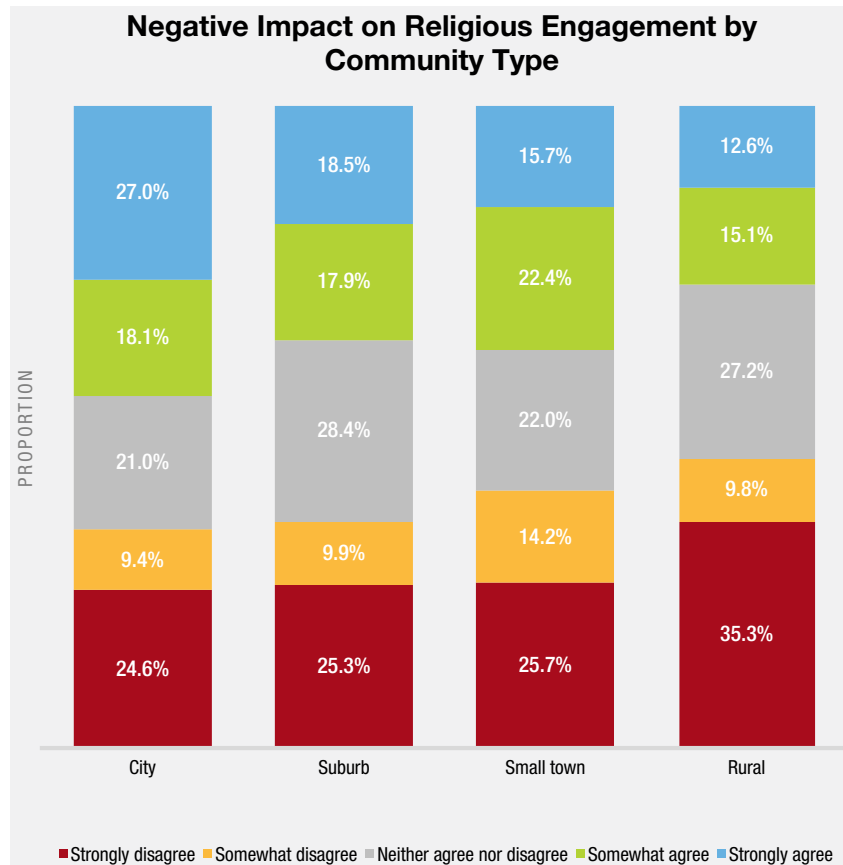


² In the following visualization, the response options for “four or more times a week” and “several times a week” have been combined into a single category. Additionally, the response options for “three or four times a year,” “once or twice a year,” and “less than once a year” have been combined into a single category, labeled “rarely.”

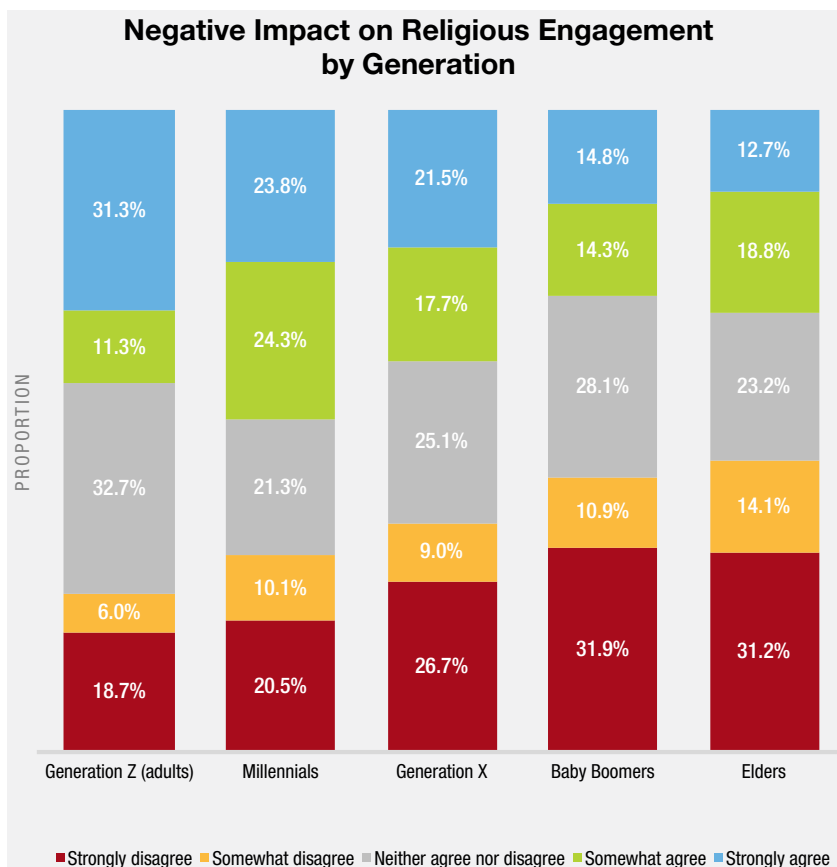
COVID-19 AND RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT

Besides putting pressure on Scripture engagement in America, the COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult for people of many faiths to worship and serve God. Two of every five Americans (38%) strongly or somewhat agree that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on their ability to worship and serve God.

In cities, nearly half (45%) of all respondents who are adherents of monotheistic religions (Christians, Jews & Muslims) either strongly or somewhat agree that the pandemic has had a negative impact on their ability to worship and serve God. In small towns, 38% agreed, in suburbs, 36% agreed, and in rural communities, 28% felt the pandemic interfered with their worship and service.



Generations also showed significant differences in this area. Millennials led the way with nearly half (48%) strongly or somewhat agreeing that the pandemic was negatively impacting their ability to worship and serve God. They were followed by adults in Generation Z (43%), Generation X (39%), Elders (32%), and Baby Boomers (29%).

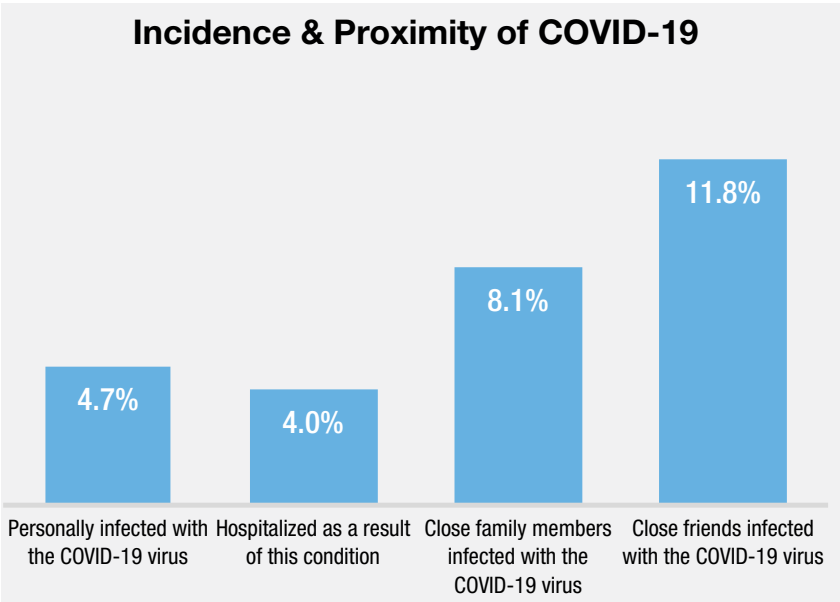


INCIDENCE AND IMPACT OF COVID-19

Respondents were asked several questions related to the health impacts of COVID-19 on them, their family, and their friends. Five percent of respondents indicated they were medically diagnosed with the SARS-CoV-2 virus. An additional 8% of respondents indicated that they developed symptoms of COVID-19 but were

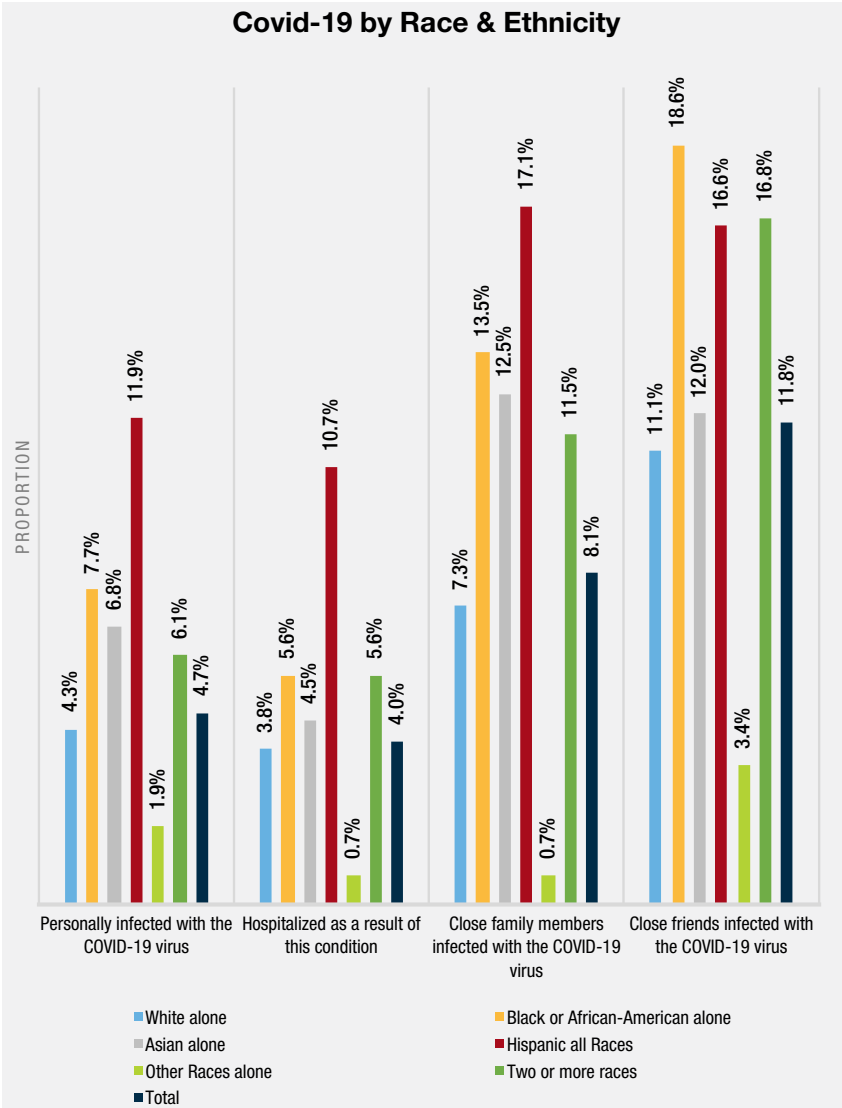
never diagnosed with the disease by a physician. Four percent of all respondents were hospitalized, due to their illness.

Approximately one in twelve respondents (8%) had a close family member who was diagnosed with COVID-19. An additional 6% indicated a close family member showed symptoms of the disease without being diagnosed. When asked about close friends, one in eight (12%) had a close friend diagnosed with COVID-19, and an additional 5% had a close friend who showed symptoms of the disease without being diagnosed.

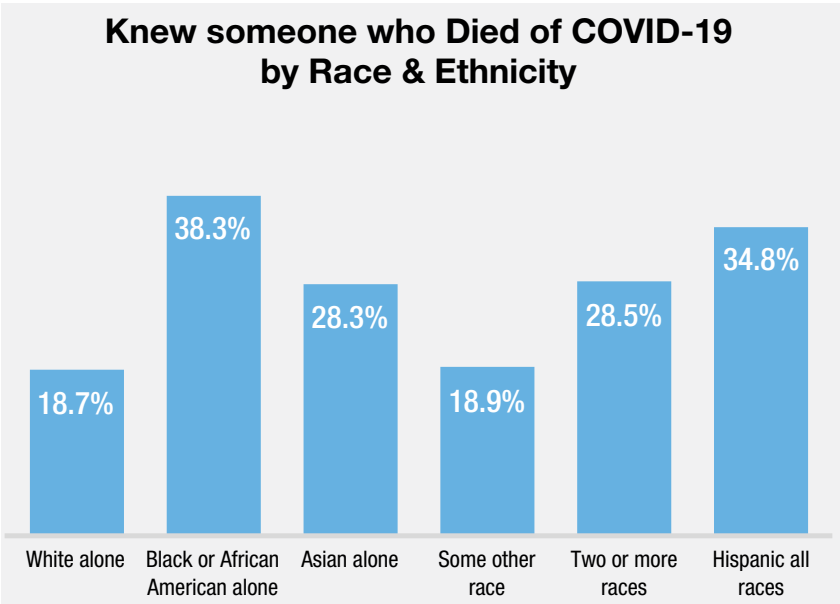


Hispanics of all races were most likely to be diagnosed with COVID-19 (12%) and to be hospitalized due to the illness (11%). They also had the highest rate of close family members being diagnosed with the disease (17%). African Americans were most

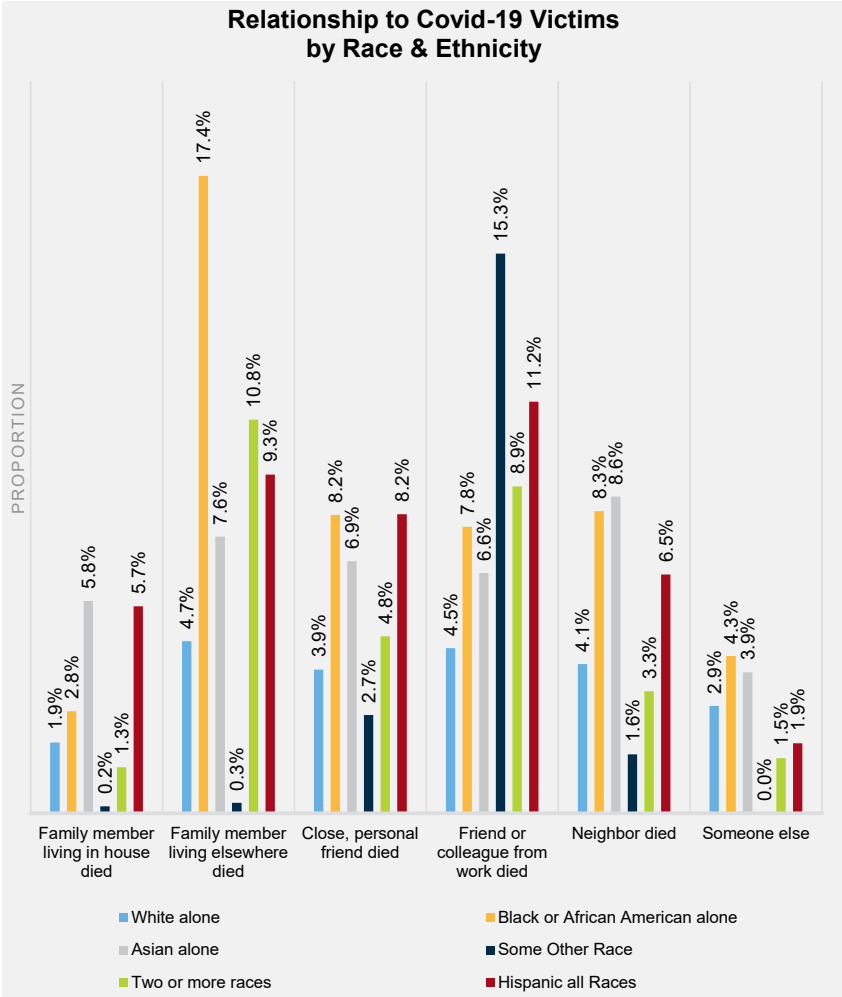
likely to have a close friend diagnosed with COVID-19, and they also experienced higher-than-average rates of infection (8%), hospitalization (6%), and infection by close family members (14%).



When asked if they personally knew someone who died, due to COVID-19, two in five African Americans said they did (38%), followed by more than one in three Hispanics of all races (35%). More than one in four Asian Americans (28%) and 29% of those who claim two or more races said they knew someone who died from COVID-19. One in five white Americans (19%) know a victim of COVID-19.



African American respondents were most likely (17.4%) to say a family member living outside their home had succumbed to COVID-19. Respondents who identified as another race were most likely (15.3%) to say they had a friend or colleague at work who died as a result of COVID-19. Asian (5.8%) and Hispanic (5.7%) were most likely to indicate that a family member living in their own home had died.



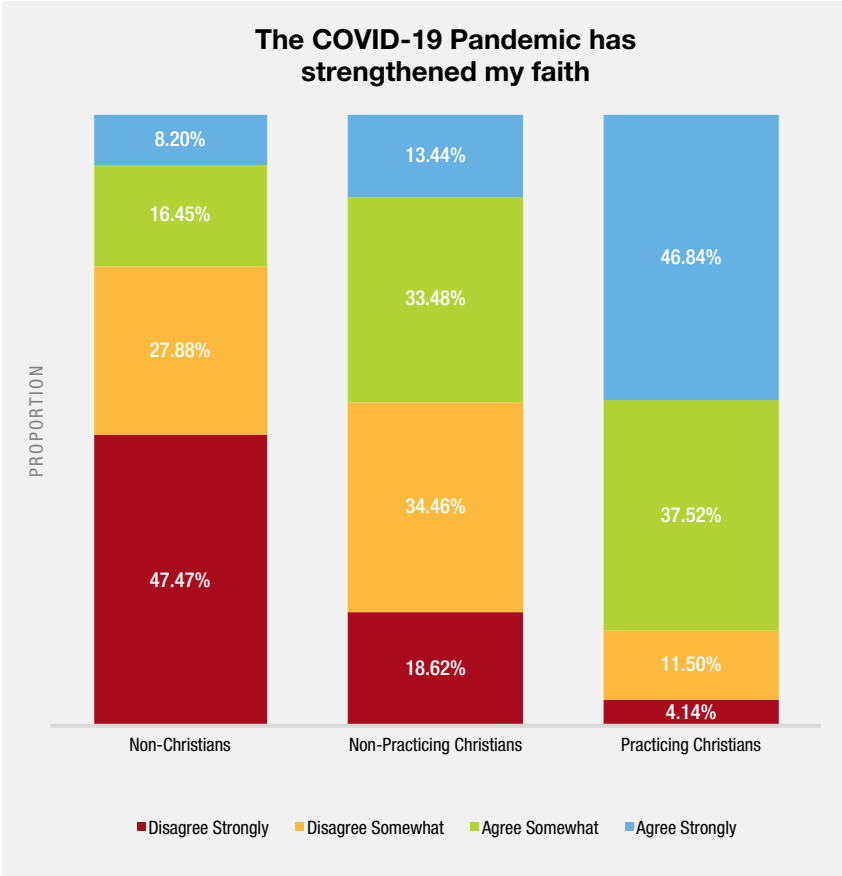
COVID-19, FAITH AND THE CHURCH

The COVID-19 pandemic brought social distancing to religious communities across America. Among Practicing Christians, going to church took on a different meaning for almost everyone:

- 48% met virtually, using a streaming service (like YouTube or Facebook) that allowed them to watch but not be seen or heard.
- 23% met virtually, using a video conferencing tool like Zoom that allowed them to be both seen and heard.
- 15% met virtually by listening to streaming audio or an audio-only recording.
- 14% did not participate in any Christian church services.
- 12% continued to meet physically with social distancing restrictions, such as a drive-in church.
- 11% continued to meet physically in their normal location or building.
- 3% started or re-started participating in Christian church services.

For those who were diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus, three of five (62%) say their faith community was a support to them during their illness. That number jumps to nearly three in four (72%) of those who were hospitalized due to COVID-19. For those who have **not** had symptoms of COVID-19, half (49%) have felt supported by their faith community during the pandemic.

Respondents were asked if they believed the COVID-19 pandemic has strengthened their faith. Nearly half (47%) of Practicing Christians strongly agreed, while an additional 38% agreed somewhat. Non-Practicing Christians were less likely to agree strongly (13%) or somewhat (33%). Understandably, Non-Christians, a category with an abundance of people who profess no faith at all, were more likely to disagree strongly (47%) or somewhat (27.88%) with this assertion.

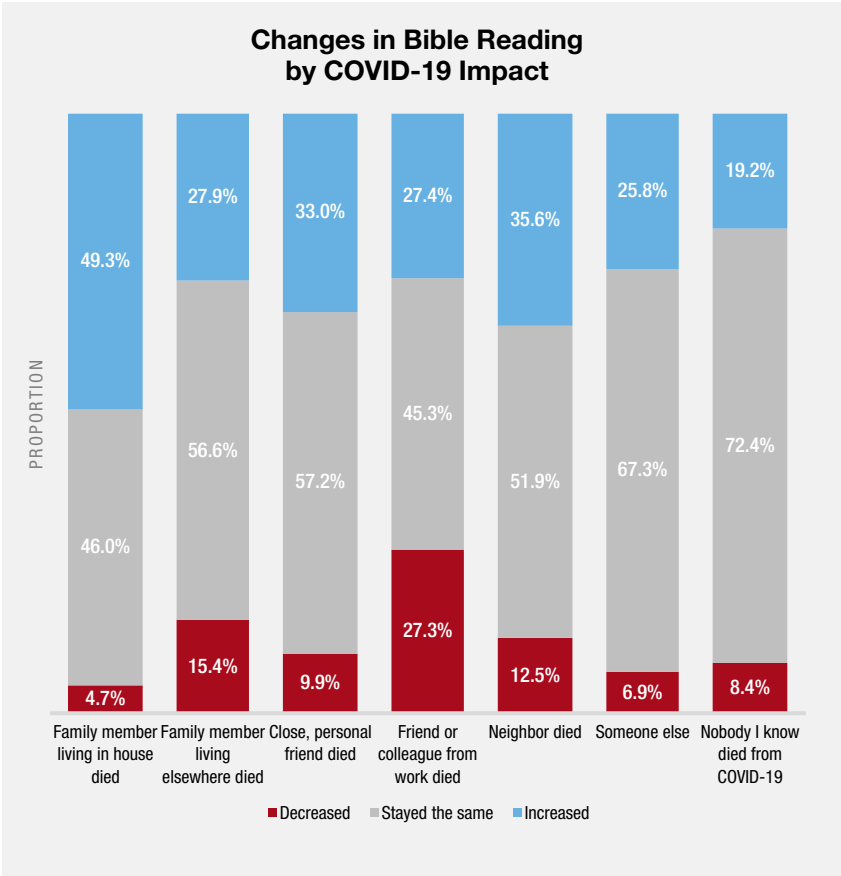


COVID-19 AND BIBLE USE

While nearly four out of five American households (78%) own at least one Bible, and 69% of American adults use the Bible at least occasionally, *State of the Bible* researchers regularly ask respondents to evaluate their own use of the Bible over the past year, considering whether it has increased, decreased, or stayed the same. In June, most respondents (65%) indicated their use of the Bible had “stayed the same”, while one in five (21%) said it had increased and only one in ten (10%) said it had decreased. Compared to January, the proportion showing change in their use of the Bible decreased slightly from a combined total of 33% to 31%.

While nationwide changes in Bible reading habits were negligible, people who were personally impacted by COVID-19 were more likely than average to increase their use of the Bible. If a family member living in their own household died, respondents were 2.3 times more likely than average to increase their use of the Bible. If a neighbor died, respondents were 1.7 times more likely than average to increase their use of the Bible, and if a close personal friend died, respondents were 1.6 times more likely to increase their use of the Bible.

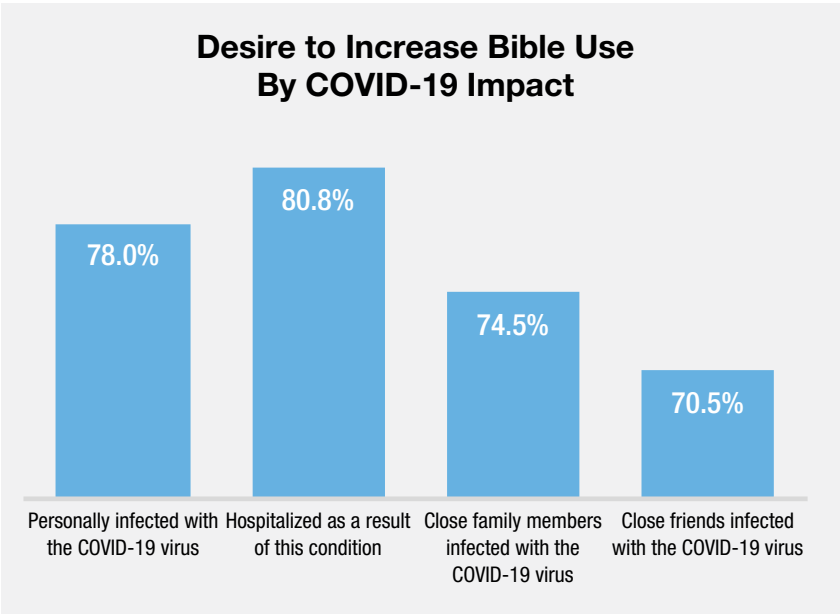
Those who did not know anyone who died from COVID-19, were slightly more likely than average to say their Bible use has stayed the same over the past year.



Most American adults say they wish they used the Bible more than they do. Previous *State of the Bible* research has shown the main reason people don't use the Bible more is a perceived lack of time. In June, three out of five respondents (63%) said they wished they

used the Bible more often. The closer the COVID-19 virus came to the respondent, their family or friends, the more they said they wished to increase their use of the Bible.

Those who were hospitalized with COVID-19 were 29% more likely than average to desire more Bible use. Those infected with COVID-19 were 24% more likely to desire increased Bible use. If a close family member was infected with COVID-19, respondents were 19% more likely to desire increased Bible use, and if a close friend was infected, respondents were 13% more likely to want more of the Bible.

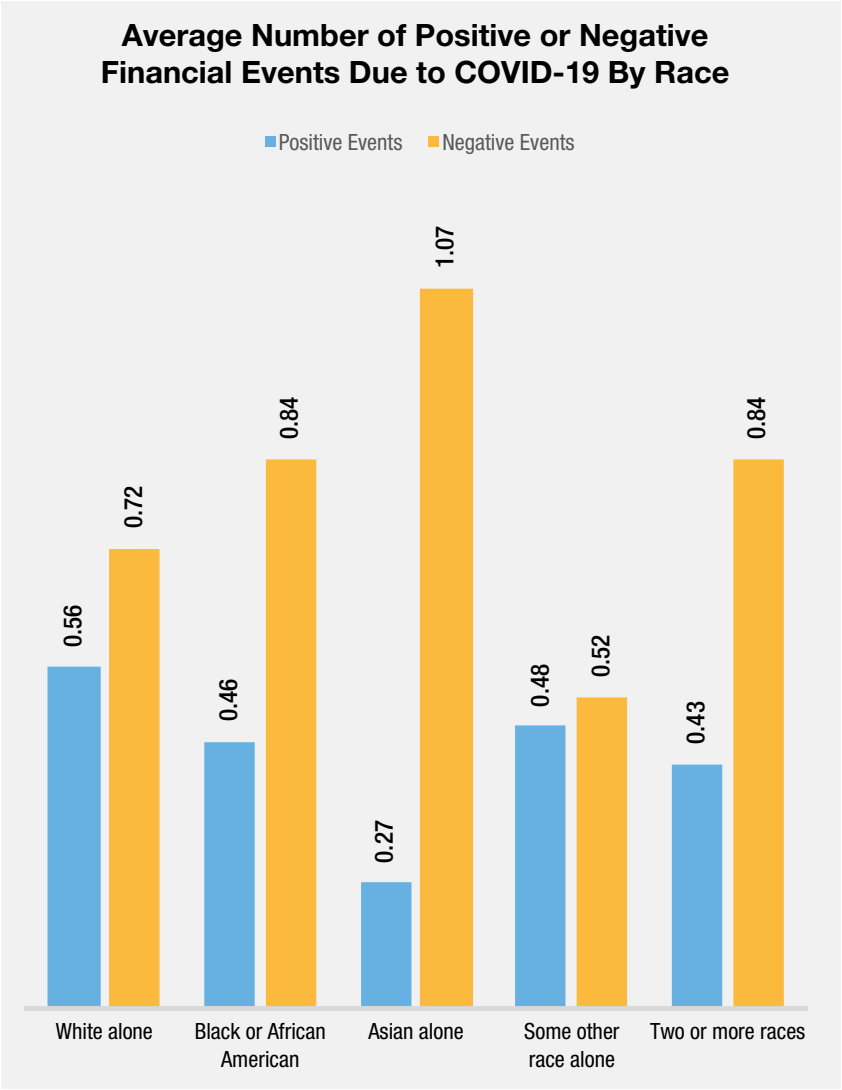


FINANCIAL IMPACTS OF COVID-19

The financial impacts of COVID-19 have been widely reported. In the three months from March through May 2020, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the U.S. economy has shed 19.5 million non-farm jobs. The official U.S. unemployment rate has settled back from its high of 14.7% and stands at 13.3% as of the end of May. *Forbes* predicts that 42% of all COVID-19 related job losses will be permanent.

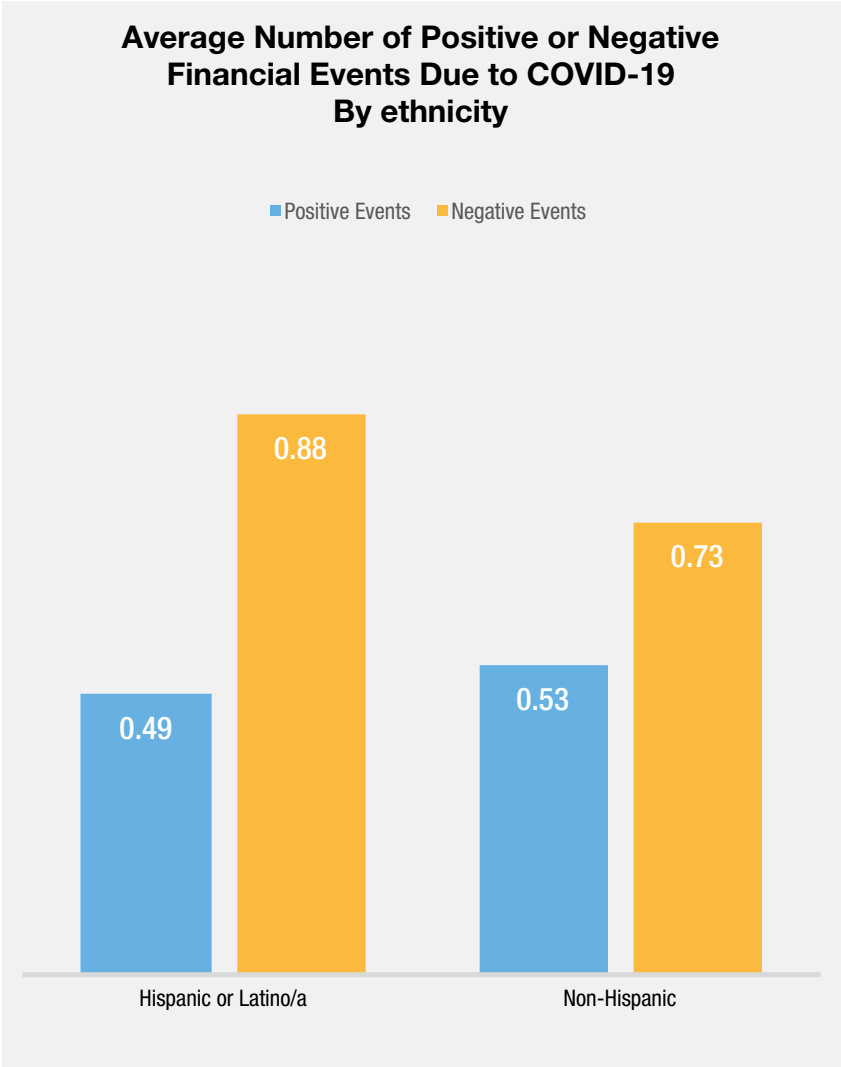
While the economic and vocational impacts of COVID-19 have been widespread, they have not been evenly distributed. One question in the *State of the Bible* survey asked respondents how many **negative** financial or vocational events they have experienced, due to COVID-19. These events include temporary or permanent job loss, decreased hours or salary, decreased household income, remote work, closing a business, etc. We also asked about **positive** financial or vocational events such as increased demand for their work or services, business growth, etc.

While all groups experienced more negative than positive events, Asian Americans experienced more negative financial and vocational events, on average, than any other racial group, and they experienced fewer positive events than any other race. African Americans and people of mixed race also experienced more negative events and fewer positive events than white Americans. White Americans were most likely to experience positive financial or vocational events due to COVID-19 and were least likely among large racial groups to experience negative events.



Similarly, people with Hispanic origins were significantly more likely than non-Hispanics to experience negative financial and vocational events due to COVID-19 and were significantly less

likely to experience positive events. Hispanics experienced financial and vocational events similarly to non-Hispanic African Americans, but still had a slightly more positive experience than Asian Americans.



Asian Americans were most likely to say that they had to shift to remote work or work from home (41%), were temporarily laid off or furloughed (19%), and that their hours or pay were reduced (19%), due to COVID-19. Hispanic Americans were most likely to indicate that they permanently lost a job (15%) and conversely that their salary or hourly pay was increased (5%) due to the pandemic. African Americans were most likely to say they had to close a business that they owned (5%), due to COVID-19. White Americans were most likely to say that they experienced no financial or vocational impact (46%) from COVID-19.

Beyond these impacts, COVID-19 has shed light on the important role the Church in America plays in maintaining Americans' relationship with the Bible. In September, we will release a new chapter highlighting the Church's influence on Scripture engagement. That report will feature the kinds of spiritual formation activities that help people weather difficulties and deepen their engagement with God through scripture.

Work and Financial Impact of Pandemic	White alone	Black or African American alone	Asian alone	Some other race alone	Two or more races	Hispanic any race	Total
Shifted to remote work or work from home	16.8%	20.3%	41.0%	1.1%	23.4%	23.7%	654
Temporarily laid off or furloughed	12.8%	17.0%	18.6%	2.2%	13.2%	14.3%	461
Permanently lost my job	5.5%	10.9%	9.8%	5.1%	9.7%	14.5%	267
Hours or pay reduced	15.1%	14.6%	19.4%	2.8%	20.1%	17.4%	527
Closed business I own	2.3%	4.6%	0.7%	1.1%	3.1%	2.8%	87
Household income went down	19.1%	16.8%	17.6%	47.8%	14.7%	15.7%	686
Increased demand for my labor or expertise	3.4%	5.5%	3.8%	0.6%	6.8%	5.7%	137
Increase in my salary or hourly pay	3.0%	3.6%	2.0%	1.1%	4.5%	5.0%	113
Expanded the business I own	1.1%	1.1%	0.0%	16.9%	2.2%	7.3%	97
Other	2.8%	3.5%	0.0%	0.6%	1.9%	0.8%	83
Savings, investments, retirement account impacted	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	17
None of these	45.8%	32.7%	21.0%	28.1%	27.4%	29.9%	1383
Total <i>n</i>	2809	381	220	191	124	489	3497

NEXT STEPS

For Pastors. The Church plays a central role in helping Christians and seekers find hope in the midst of struggles. Consider learning more about how you can minister to the heart wounds of your congregation by visiting the **Trauma in America** website, where you can download a free research monograph that may help you.

For Church Leaders. Your class or small group may be facing some of the COVID-19 related struggles outlined in this chapter. American Bible Society provides a free resource and small group guide that is being used around the world. You can download or order *Beyond Disaster* at disasterrelief.bible.

For Families. The *Beyond Disaster* materials, described above, include a guide for families, titled *Peace, Be Still: A Family Guide to Living in Crazy Days*. Visit disasterrelief.bible to find resources for you and your family.

For Individuals. Many of us are wondering how to care for our neighbors in an era of COVID-19 social distancing and significant social unrest. Visit disasterrelief.bible and check out *Loving the Neighbor Who Doesn't Look Like You*. It's a group resource that you can use to help you connect with others.



THE IMPACT OF SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

The *State of the Bible* research team has considered the impact of Scripture engagement for several years. Since 2018, studies¹ have uncovered six key characteristics of Bible Engaged and Bible Centered Americans:

1. **Generosity:** Scripture engaged people give approximately ten times more to charity than those who are unengaged in the Bible.
2. **Forgiveness:** Scripture engaged people are significantly more likely to say they are “able to unconditionally forgive

¹ Including previous years' *State of the Bible* surveys and a 2017 national study of Scripture Engagement, conducted by American Bible Society and the Barna Group.

whatever someone else has done to me, regardless of whether they ever ask for forgiveness or not.”

3. **Service:** Scripture engaged people put their faith into action by serving others more frequently than unengaged people, whether they volunteer in the community or serve in their church.
4. **Personal Faith:** Scripture engaged people are nearly four times more likely than the Bible Disengaged to say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today.
5. **Prayer:** Scripture engaged people are more than twice as likely as others to have prayed to God in the past seven days.
6. **Church:** Scripture engaged people are nearly three times more likely to have attended a church service in the past month than others.

While each of these benefits of Scripture engagement continues to be supported by data collected in 2020, in this chapter we explore the impact of Scripture engagement on behavior in three new areas:

1. Emotional Health
2. Social Media
3. Pro-social Behavior

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans have struggled to maintain emotional health and stability. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that during the pandemic, clinical levels of anxiety and depression have surged across the nation. The Washington Post writes, “For every 100 American adults, 34 show symptoms of anxiety, depression, or both.”

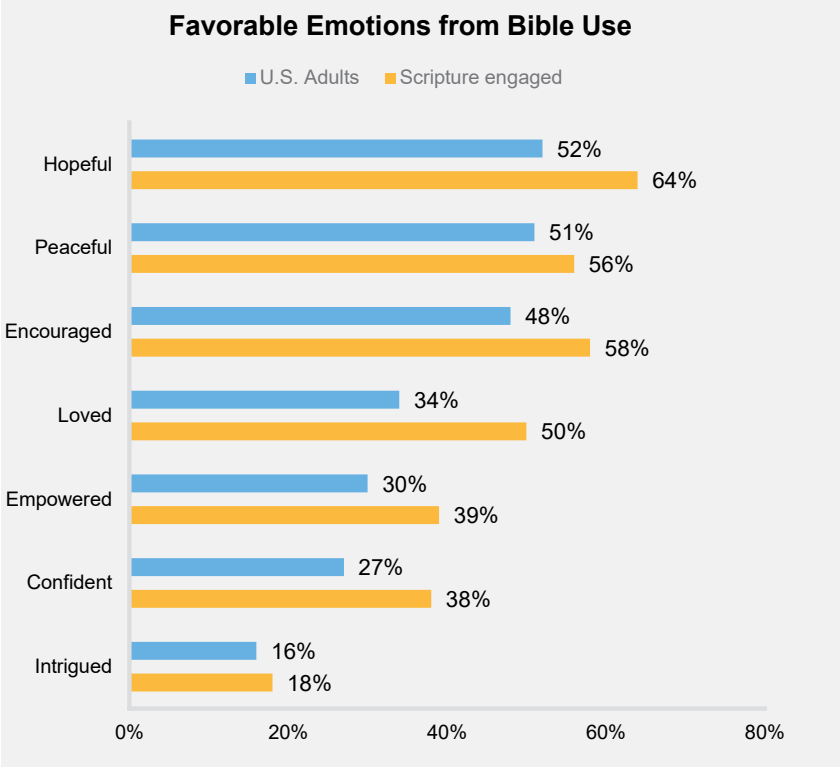
Even during more normal times, managing one’s emotions requires a certain level of so-called *self-care*. Indeed, Bible Users state that their most common reasons for reading the Bible include (see chapter 1 for the full list):

- It brings me closer to God (38%).
- It helps me discern God’s will for my life (18%).
- I need comfort (16%).

Each of these reasons contains an emotional component, such as a need to feel connected, purposeful, and peaceful.

State of the Bible respondents were asked, “The last time you used the Bible, what was the primary favorable emotion you experienced, if any?” Their responses show that a majority felt hopeful (54%), peaceful (52%), or encouraged (51%). Other favorable emotions experienced by Bible users include loved (37%), empowered (31%), confident (29%), and intrigued (16%).

In every case, as Scripture engagement increased, so did the experience of positive emotions. Two thirds of Scripture engaged readers felt hopeful (64%). Three out of five Scripture engaged readers felt encouraged (58%) or peaceful (56%). Half felt loved (50%).



Beyond these emotional responses to the Bible, Scripture engagement is also associated with important measures of holistic wellbeing. Chapter four examines the connection between Scripture engagement and both Flourishing and Hope.

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA

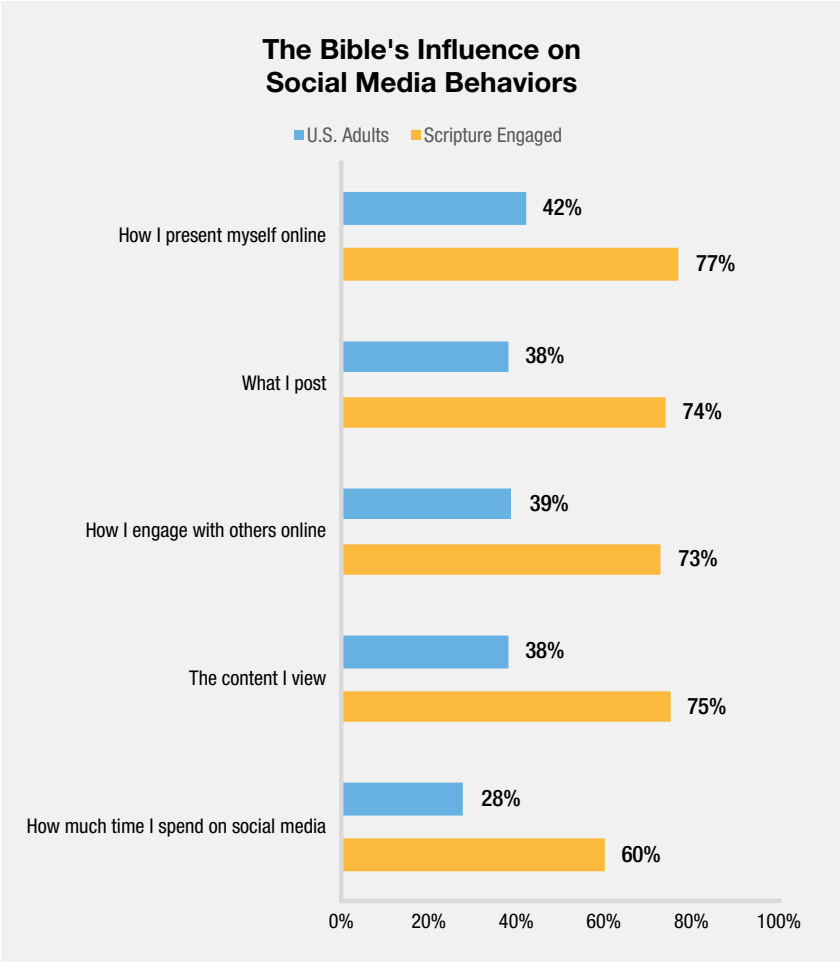
The *State of the Bible* research project began only 3 ½ years after the introduction of the iPhone. Since that time, social media have taken an increasing share of Americans' time and these digital interactions have necessitated the development of new-and-different social rules. Today, some estimates indicate that the average user spends 2 hours and 24 minutes on social media daily. The National Institutes of Health and researchers in public health, social and political science are investigating the relationship between social media and phenomena as varied as cyber-bullying, suicidality, anxiety, depression, election interference, and the increasing fragmentation of society.

State of the Bible respondents were asked a series of questions on whether their use of the Bible affects their social media activity. One third of respondents (33%) answered this series "I do not use the Bible."

Approximately two in five Americans who use the Bible say it influences how they present themselves online (42%), how they engage with others online (39%), what they post (38%), and the content they view (38%). Nearly three in ten (28%) say the Bible influences the amount of time they spend online.

In contrast, Scripture engaged respondents are nearly twice as likely to say the Bible influences their social media behaviors in every category. Three fourths of Bible engagers say the Bible influences

how they present themselves online (77%), the content they view (75%), what they post (74%), and how they engage with others online (73%). Three out of five Scripture engaged respondents say the Bible influences how much time they spend on social media.



SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT AND PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Pro-social behavior in its simplest form is “behavior that benefits others.” The concept is universal and is embedded in the teachings of all major religions. It is a part of the message of the Bible and is often aligned with the Golden Rule in which Jesus summarized the message of the Bible this way, “Treat others as you want them to treat you. This is what the Law and the Prophets are all about” (Matthew 7:12, CEV).

If Scripture engagement results in transformed relationships with God and others, one might expect to see higher levels of pro-social behaviors from Americans who have the strongest relationship with the Bible. At the same time there is a prevailing sentiment that Bible users are judgmental, bigoted, and unwelcoming of strangers (Brint & Abrutyn, 2010).

State of the Bible respondents were asked to rate the Bible’s influence on eight items indicative of their pro-social behaviors. The items completed the statement, “The Bible leads me to . . . “

- Welcome immigrants into my community
- Befriend people of other races
- Befriend people of other religions
- Befriend people who identify as LGBTQ
- Care for the environment
- Advocate for those who are oppressed by society

For each item, participants could respond with strongly disagree (1) through very strongly agree (6). The average of these six responses formed a reliable measure of Pro-social Behavior.²

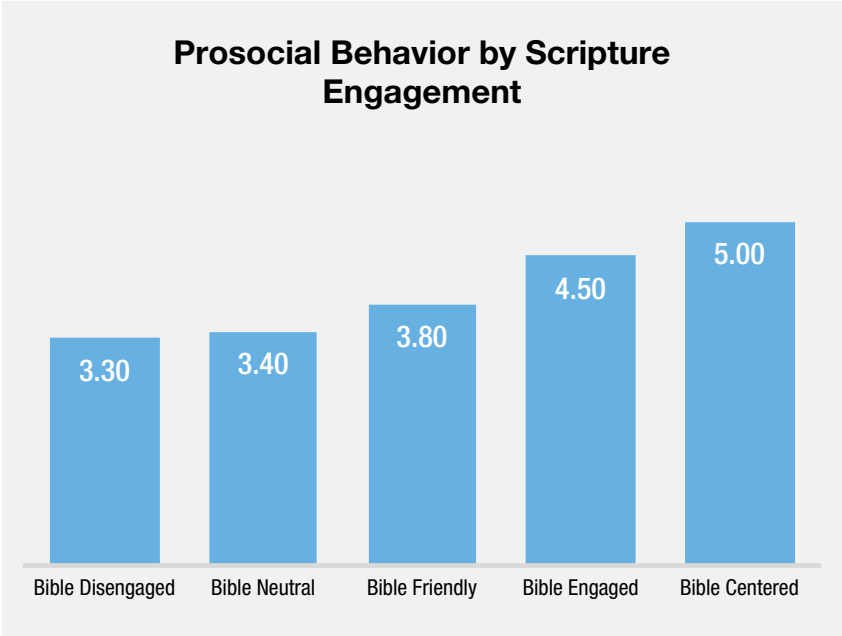
For each increase in Scripture Engagement Segment, the Bible's influence on respondents' pro-social behavior also increases. Scripture unengaged respondents (those in the Bible Disengaged, Bible Neutral, and Bible Friendly categories) are not significantly different from one another; however, Scripture engaged respondents (those in the Bible Engaged and Bible Centered categories) are significantly more influenced by the Bible in the way they relate to others.³

Taken together, these results suggest that Bible engaged Americans are more likely than their neighbors to welcome immigrants to their communities; befriend people of other races, religions, and gender identities; care for the environment; and advocate for those who may be oppressed by society. Bible Centered respondents would typically respond that they strongly agree with each of these

2 Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.870$). All items contributed to the scale.

3 A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of Scripture engagement on Pro-social Behavior for the five Scripture Engagement Segments shown above. There was a statistically significant effect of Scripture engagement on Pro-social Behavior at the $p < .05$ level [$F(4,550) = 37.624, p < .001$]. Post hoc comparisons using Scheffe's test indicated that the mean scores for the Bible Neutral, Bible Disengaged, and Bible Friendly groups were not significantly different from one another. However, each was significantly different from both the Bible Engaged and Bible Centered groups. The Bible Engaged and Bible Centered groups were not significantly different from each other.

statements. In other words, the data suggest that Bible engaged Americans really do practice the Golden Rule.



In summary, Scripture engagement is associated with positive emotions in Bible users. They tend to feel hopeful, peaceful, encouraged, and loved when they interact with the Bible. Furthermore, Bible engaged Americans exercise care in their use of social media by allowing the Bible to influence the content they post, how they interact with others, and even the time they spend online. Finally, Bible engagement is a significant predictor of neighborly behavior that welcomes others, cares for the environment, and seeks the good of the oppressed.

NEXT STEPS

For Pastors. In what ways does the Bible challenge Christians to work for the good of others? How can you lead your church in serving others both within the congregation and in the wider community?

For Church Leaders. Think about sharing this chapter with your small group or class and discussing how the Bible influences your lives. Does the Bible guide you in your day-to-day decisions? In what areas do you need biblical wisdom to guide your life?

For Families. Talk about your use of social media. How long do you spend online each day? Is the culture shaping you more than God's word is? If so, pray and ask God to guide you in your thinking. Consider taking up a daily devotional practice. You can find many good Bible reading plans on the [YouVersion Bible app](#).

For Individuals. If you want to grow in emotional health, responsible social media use, pro-social behavior, and the list of six characteristics at the beginning of this chapter, how do you plan to get there? If you haven't started a daily Bible reading plan, you can find one at [YouVersion](#) or consider the videos at [The Bible Project](#).



THE BIBLE, COVID-19 AND WELLBEING

C OVID-19 has produced significant mental and emotional health impacts on Americans. The U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey, conducted from May 7-12, 2020, indicates that one third of Americans (34%) are suffering from anxiety, depression, or both. The Washington Post reported on May 26, "When asked questions normally used to screen patients for mental health problems, 24 percent showed clinically significant symptoms of major depressive disorder and 30 percent showed symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder."

In the first week of June, *State of the Bible* respondents were asked to rate themselves on ten items related to their mental and emotional health. These items gauged anxiety, loneliness, intense emotions, lack of emotion, hypervigilance, and other symptoms

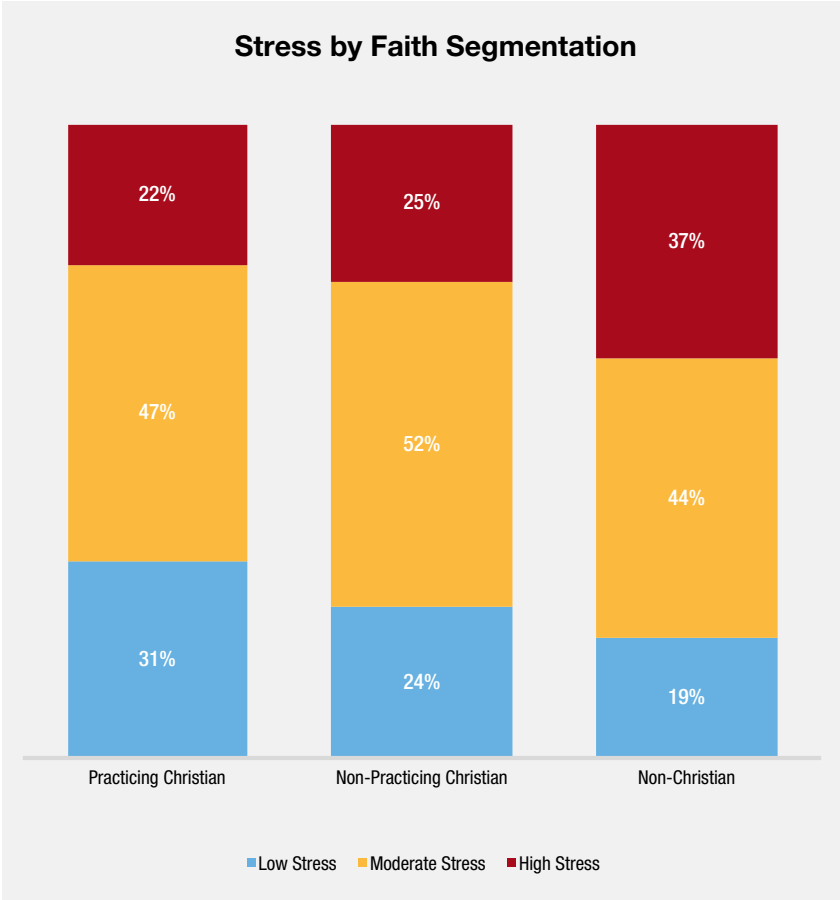
associated with stress. The stress scale was tested and showed excellent reliability.¹ The scores were divided into three categories: low, moderate, and high stress.²

EXPERIENCING STRESS

While Practicing Christians showed the lowest levels of overall stress, still, one in five (22%) experiencing high stress and nearly one half (47%) experiencing moderate stress. Non-Practicing Christians experienced slightly higher levels of stress with one in four (25%) in the high stress category and over half (52%) in the moderate stress category. Non-Christians experienced the highest levels of stress with over one third (37%) in the high stress category and nearly half (44%) in the moderate stress category. Only one in five (19%) non-Christians experienced low stress, according to the survey.

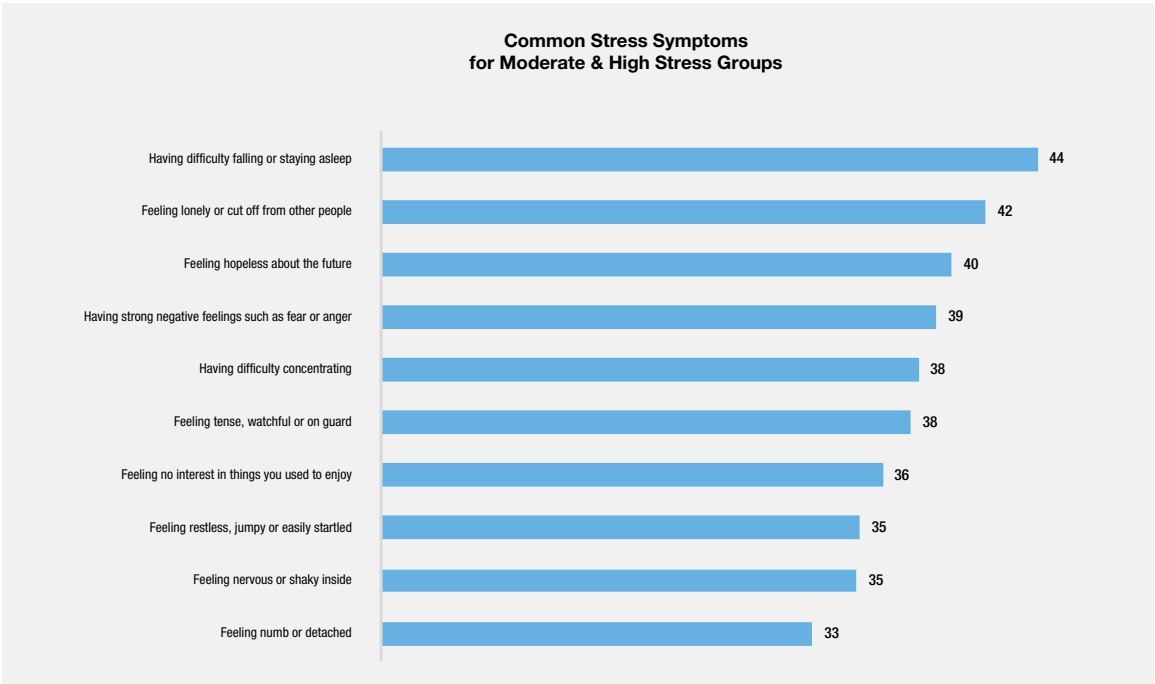
1 Reliability evaluated as internal consistency. Cronbach's $\alpha = .950$. All ten items contributed to the scale's reliability.

2 Low stress includes the bottom 25% of scores. Moderate stress includes the 26th through the 75th percentile. High stress includes the 76th percentile and above.



The most frequent symptoms experienced by respondents in the moderate or high stress categories are:

- Having difficulty falling or staying asleep (44%).
- Feeling lonely or cut off from other people (42%).
- Feeling hopeless about the future (40%).



FINDING COMFORT

When seeking comfort during the COVID-19 pandemic, one in five American adults (41%) reached for food, according to the survey. A similar proportion (38%) were comforted by family, and more than one third (34%) turned to prayer and/or meditation. One in five Americans (18%) found comfort in reading the Bible. Smaller percentages turned to alcohol (13%), marijuana (10%) or prescription drugs (9%).

Bible Centered people listed the Bible as their leading source of comfort (70%) followed by prayer (65%) and family (45%). Bible

Engaged respondents listed prayer first (60%) followed by the Bible (53%) and then family (42%). Bible Friendly people turned first to family (45%) followed by prayer and the Bible (each at 40%). Bible Neutral respondents looked to food first (54%) followed by prayer (43%) and then prescription drugs (25%). Bible Disengaged Americans sought comfort in television and streaming services first (41%) followed by food (39%) and finally family (36%).

Segment	First Choice	Second Choice	Third Choice
Centered	Reading the Bible 70%	Prayer and/or Meditation 65%	Family member 45%
Engaged	Prayer and/or Meditation 60%	Reading the Bible 53%	Family member 42%
Friendly	Family member 45%	Prayer and/or Meditation 40%	Reading the Bible 40%
Neutral	Food 54%	Prayer and/or Mediation 43%	Prescription drugs 25%
Disengaged	TV or Streaming services 41%	Food 9%	Family member 36%

HUMAN FLOURISHING

Dr. Tyler J. VanderWeele³ and the team at the Harvard University Human Flourishing Program have developed empirical measures of human flourishing, which were used by the *State of the Bible* research team to gauge the holistic health of American adults. *State of the Bible* respondents were scored on six dimensions of human flourishing:

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

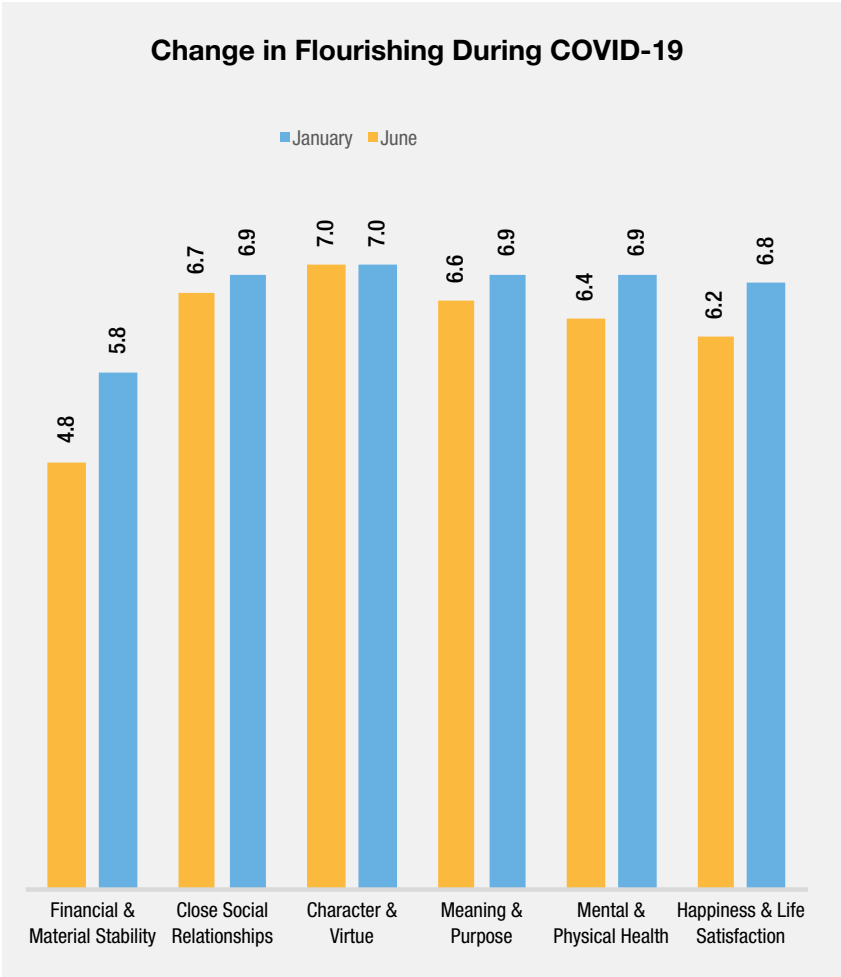
Based on a comparison of the January and June *State of the Bible* surveys, Americans are facing significant⁴ struggles in at least three dimensions of human flourishing:

- Financial and Material Stability fell 16.7%.
- Happiness and Life Satisfaction dropped by 9.6%.
- Mental and Physical Health decreased 7.3%.

3 Tyler J. VanderWeele, Ph.D., is the John L. Loeb and Frances Lehman Loeb Professor of Epidemiology in the Departments of Epidemiology and Biostatistics at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Director of the **Human Flourishing Program**, and Co-Director of the **Initiative on Health, Religion and Spirituality** at Harvard University.

4 Statistical significance is evaluated at the $p < .05$ level. Each of the reported changes also had a moderate effect size, meaning Cohen's $d > 0.2$.

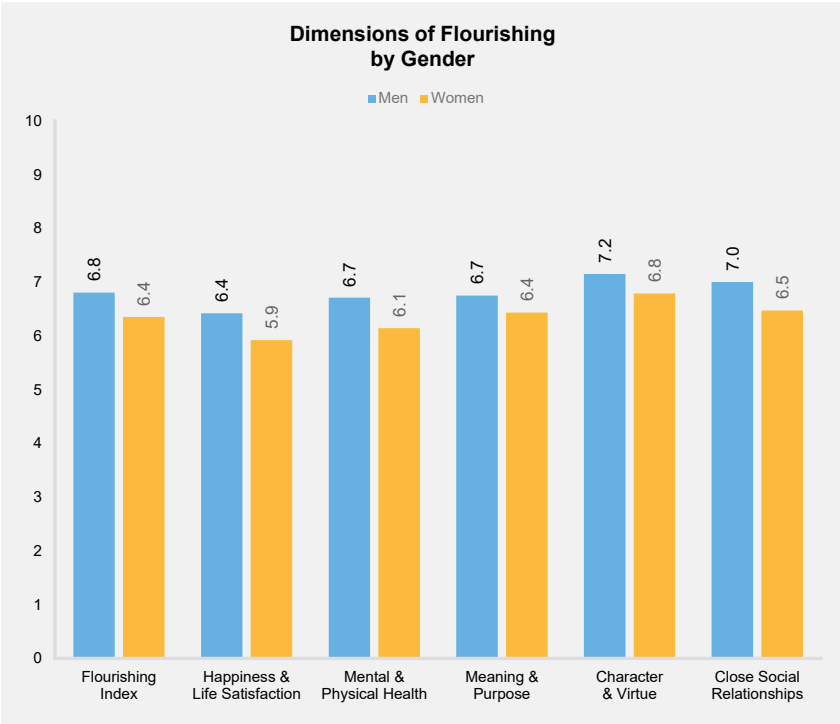
Only Character and Virtue remained unchanged from January’s *State of the Bible* survey.



HUMAN FLOURISHING AND GENDER

Across every category of human flourishing, women scored lower than men with the greatest differences in two domains:

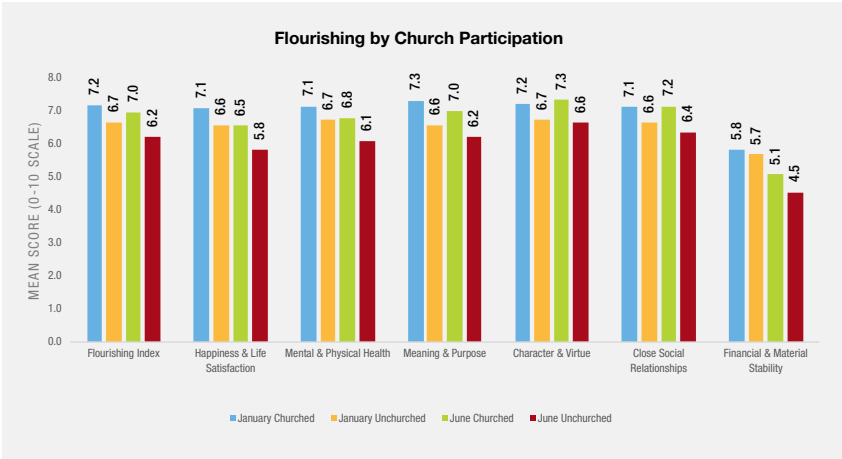
- Mental and Physical Health: Women scored 8.4% lower than men.
- Happiness and Life Satisfaction: Women scored 7.7% lower than men.



HUMAN FLOURISHING AND CHURCH PARTICIPATION

Churched respondents score higher than unchurched respondents in every category of human flourishing in both January and in June. On the composite flourishing index, churched respondents scored 7.2 out of 10 in January compared to 6.7 for unchurched respondents. In June, churched respondents scored 7.0, a decrease of 2.7% since January. Unchurched respondents scored 6.2 in June, a decrease of 7.5% since January.

Unchurched respondents score lowest on Financial and Material Stability, scoring only 4.5 in that dimension, a 21% decline compared to 5.7 in January. Churched respondents also saw their lowest score in the domain Financial and Material Stability, scoring 5.1 in June, which was a 12% decline since January.



HOPE AND WELLBEING

Dr. Chan Hellman⁵ of the University of Oklahoma is a leading expert on the psychology of hope, pioneered by Dr. C. R. Snyder,⁶ formerly at Kansas University. The *State of the Bible* research team relied on the work of Drs. Hellman and Snyder to ask respondents several questions about their levels of hope.

State of the Bible respondents were asked a series of six questions about how they see themselves in relation to hope. Three questions form the Hope Pathways subscale, which measures a person's

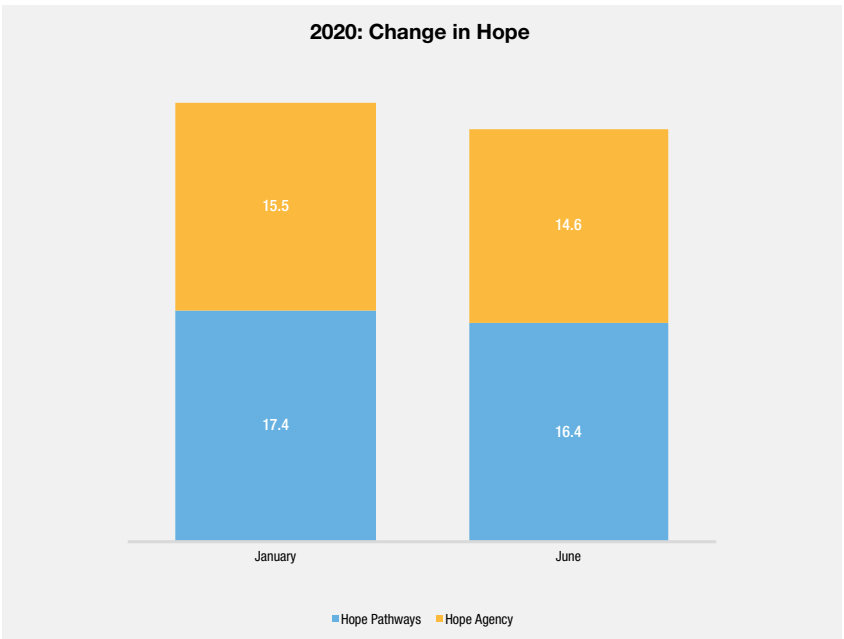
5 Dr. Hellman joined the University of Oklahoma in 2002. He is a professor in the Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work and Founding Director of the Hope Research Center. He is also an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Internal Medicine and Department of Pediatrics for the OU College of Medicine and the Department of Health Promotion Science for the OU College of Public Health.

Hellman's current research is focused on the application of hope theory to predict adaptive behaviors, and hope as a psychological strength that buffer stress and adversity among those impacted by family violence. In this context, he is also interested in the impact of prevention and intervention services on improving client hope and wellbeing.

6 Dr. C. R. Snyder died in 2005. Professor Rick Snyder is internationally known for his work at the interface of clinical, social, personality and health psychology. His theories pertain to how people react to personal feedback, the human need for uniqueness, the ubiquitous drive to excuse transgressions and, most recently, the hope motive. He received 27 teaching awards at the university, state, and national level, and 31 research awards, including the 2002 Balfour Jeffrey Award for Research Achievement in Humanities and Social Science and the 2001 Guilford Press Award for Pioneering Scholarly Contributions in Clinical/Social/Personality Psychology. In 2005, he received an honorary doctorate from Indiana Wesleyan University. Professor Snyder's research focused on the ideas of hope and forgiveness. As a pioneer in the positive psychology movement, he wrote or edited 23 books, including six books he wrote on the theory of hope. His books and 262 articles describe hope's impact on various aspects of life, including health, children, spirituality and work.

ability to imagine a path forward, toward their desired future (e.g., “I can think of many ways to reach my current goals.”). Three more questions form the Hope Agency subscale, which measures a person’s confidence that they are able to move themselves along a path toward their goals (e.g., “At the present, I am energetically pursuing my goals.”) These two scales are added together to form the State Hope Scale. Scores for Hope Pathways and Hope Agency can range from 3 to 24. The composite State Hope Scale can range from 6 to 48.

On average, hope has decreased significantly among American adults since January, according to *State of the Bible* research. Both Hope Pathways and Hope Agency fell by 6% from January to June for a combined decrease of 13% in overall hope.

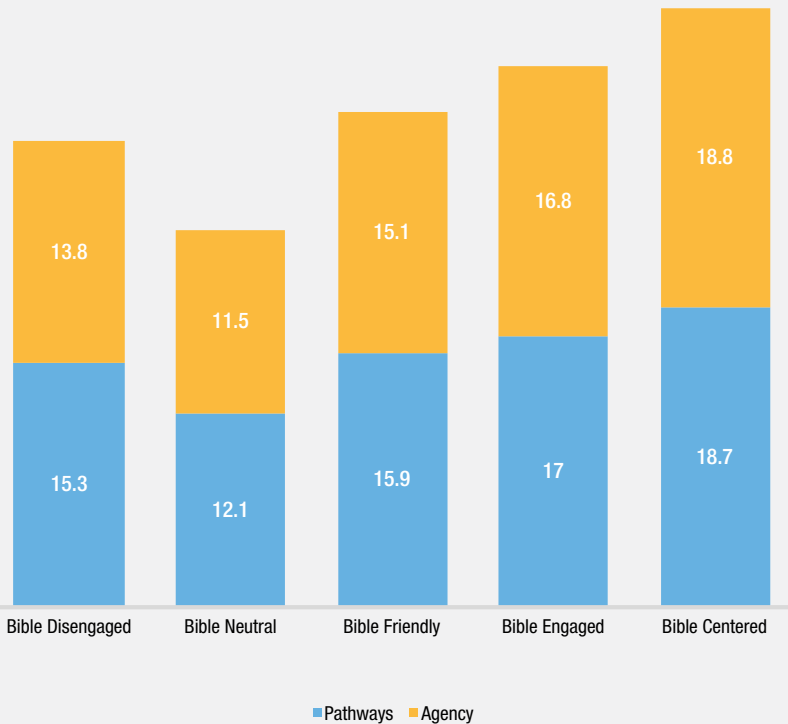


One of the challenges when working with national-level data is that readers may think all people are about the same as the average score. On closer examination, researchers find there are significant differences based upon how they group or segment the numbers. It is this process that allows the data to become more interesting and helps readers to see the unique differences among the people in our communities. In this next section we present a few ways we can think about hope by different demographic groupings.

HOPE AND SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

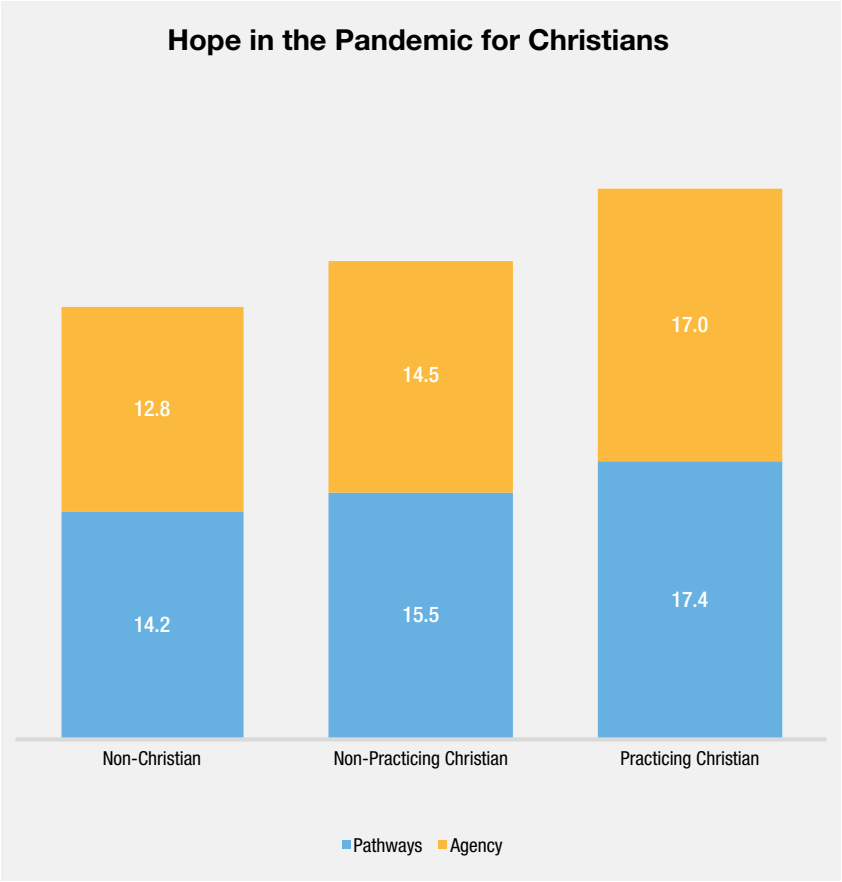
June *State of the Bible* data show that there are significant differences in hope related to respondents' relationship with the Bible. Bible Centered Americans scored the highest (37.5) on overall hope. Bible Engaged respondents followed with a score of 33.8. Bible Friendly Americans averaged 31, and Bible Disengaged Americans followed with an average hope score of 29.1. Bible Neutral respondents scored lowest of all at 23.6, which is 37% lower than Bible Centered Americans.

Hope in the Pandemic by Scripture Engagement



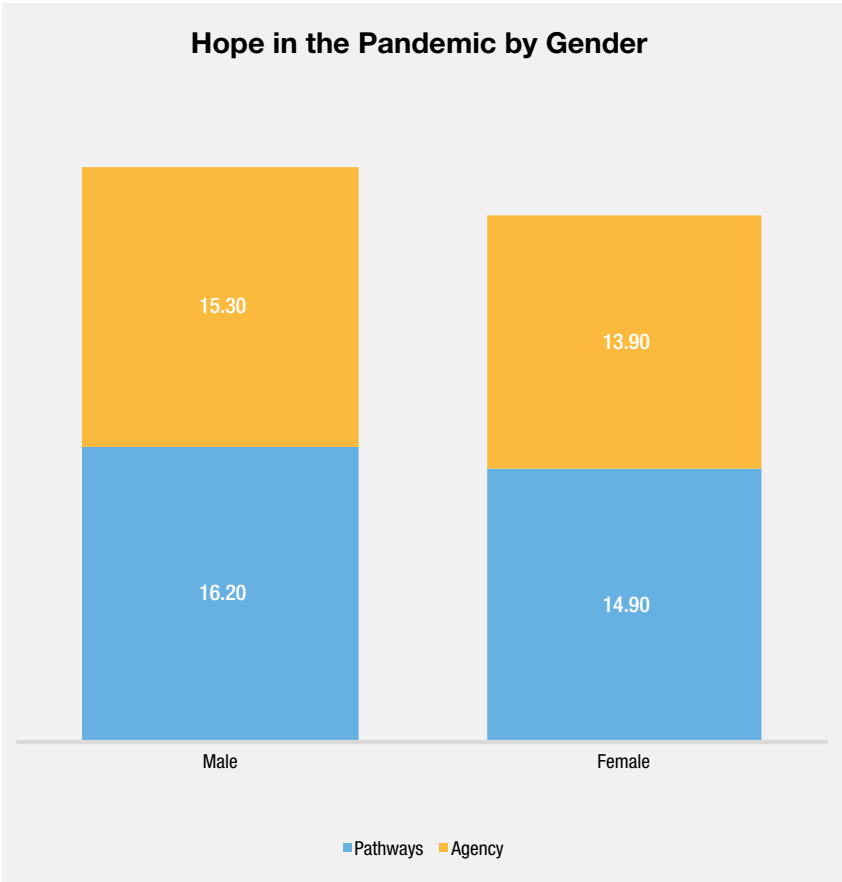
HOPE AND CHURCH PARTICIPATION

Americans also showed increased hope when they had stronger connections to the Church. Non-Christian Americans averaged 27 on the State Hope Scale. By comparison, non-practicing Christians averaged 30, and practicing Christians average 34.4.



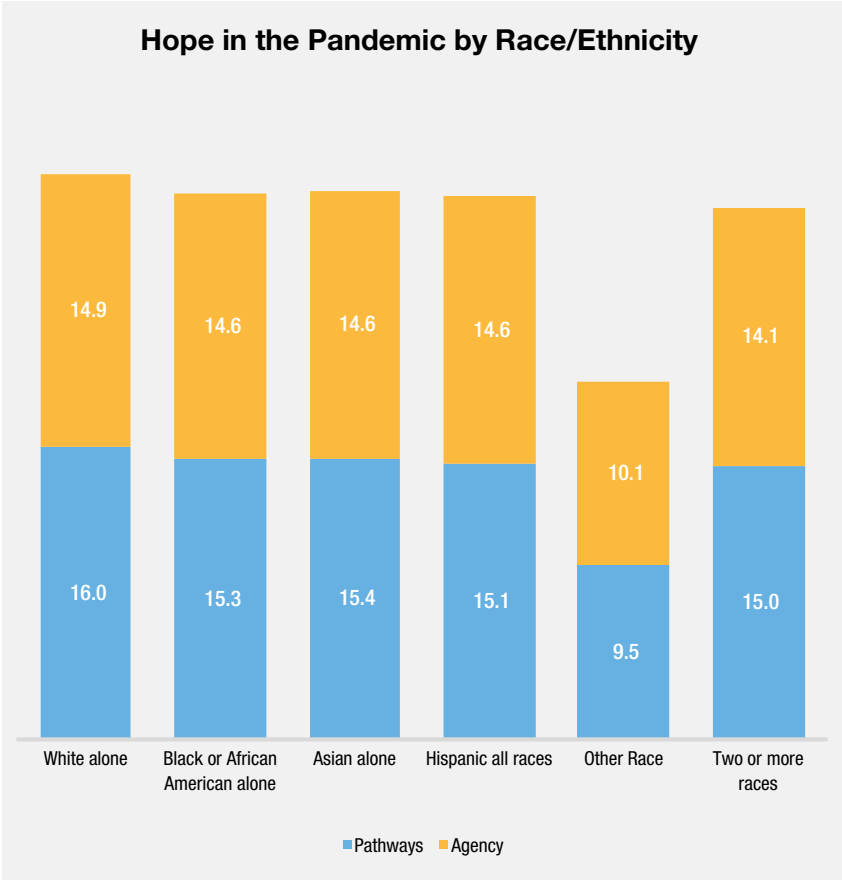
HOPE AND GENDER

Levels of hope in American adults also vary by gender. Overall, men score higher with a composite Hope Scale Score of 31.5. Women trail men by almost 9% with a composite score of 28.8.



HOPE, RACE AND ETHNICITY

Most racial and ethnic groups in the United States share similar levels of hope, ranging from scores of 30.9 for white Americans to 29.1 for those who claim two or more races. The one significant outlier is respondents who select “Other” as their race. In the following visualization, these 147 respondents are combined with 25 who identify as Native American or Alaska Natives and five who identify as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders. Together this group of 177 respondents (5.9% of the sample) scores significantly below all other racial or ethnic groups, averaging only 19.6 on the composite State Hope Scale.



HOPE AND COMMUNITY TYPE

Finally, rural (30.9) and suburban (30.7) Americans show significantly higher levels of hope than residents of cities (29.2) and small towns (18.7), overall.

NEXT STEPS

For Pastors. Our research partners at Gloo have developed a Flourishing assessment that you can deploy at your church. Check it out at [Gloo.us](https://gloo.us). You can also check out Barna's **State of the Church** project, which incorporates measures of Human Flourishing.

For Church Leaders. [YouVersion](https://www.youversion.com) offers Bible reading plans that you can pursue together with your class or group. Consider finding a reading plan that focuses on Hope and spend a week or two discussing how God brings hope into our lives. To get started, check out **Discover Hope Through Faith** or search reading plans for the word "hope."

For Families. As the COVID-19 pandemic forced social distancing, our friends at The Bible Project developed a series of **Church at Home** Bible studies, and one of them is on **Hope**. Check it out and explore the Bible with your family.

For Individuals or Groups. If you're struggling to deal with strong emotions because of what's happening to you, your family, and others close to you. American Bible Society has created a series of resources to help you get beyond the disaster and find hope again. Check out *Beyond Disaster* and other resources at [DisasterRelief.Bible](https://www.disasterrelief.bible).



SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT & TECHNOLOGY

When Johannes Gutenberg pioneered the use of movable type in 1454, he sparked a technological revolution that ignited a mass movement toward the Bible. The Bible was the first book printed on a modern printing press. In the 150 years following Gutenberg's innovation, literacy soared. A new hunger for learning transformed Europe and eventually shaped the American experiment.

Technology has been a key driver of Bible engagement for over 500 years. In addition to printed books, digital distribution, audio-first translation, and even immersive video experiences are being used today to advance the goal of universal access to the Bible. Bible

reading guides, plans, commentaries, concordances, and stories are now available in digital formats.

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT GOES DIGITAL

In April, as the COVID-19 pandemic began to impact the United States, the *New York Times* reported significant increases in digital traffic to websites and online services such as Zoom, Netflix, and Facebook. While many people sheltered in place, Americans sought new ways to gather information, connect, and collaborate with others. In chapter two, we report on an increase in Bible-related internet search activity that corresponded with the onset of the pandemic, and in chapter three, we present data on the Bible's influence on social media behaviors. In this chapter, we focus on how Bible Users¹ are increasingly turning to digital technologies to engage with scripture.

Scripture unengaged Americans seem to be exploring it more frequently (see p. 56), and Scripture engaged adults may be accelerating their adoption of digital tools that help them connect with the Bible. In fact, the use of digital Bible technologies may actually increase Scripture engagement, especially for men.

In the first six months of 2020, YouVersion reported a 32% increase in unique daily users, compared to the same period in 2019. At the same time, they saw a 183% increase in Bible searches, and a 121%

1 Bible Users interact with the Bible at least 3-4 times per year on their own. For additional definitions, see Appendix 2.

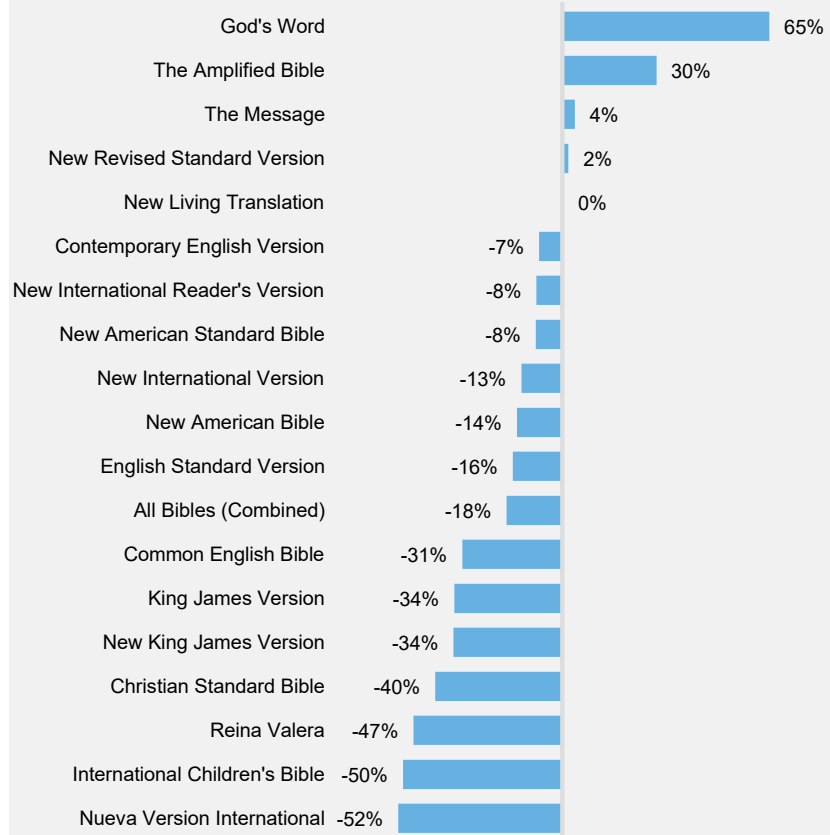
increase in Bible Reading Plan days completed, year-over-year, according to Jeff Moore, Director of Global Impact for YouVersion. HarperCollins Christian Publishing, which owns and operates the popular BibleGateway website and app, saw a 150% increase in unique users of their direct-to-customer sites in March and April. Since April, unique user visits have settled back to approximately 125% of their pre-COVID-19 levels, according to Doug Lockhart, Senior Vice President for Marketing and New Initiatives at HCCP.

Though digital interactions with the Bible have increased during the pandemic, purchases of printed Bibles and other Christian books have experienced a marked downturn, according to Kristen McLean, Executive Director of Business Development at NPD.² In the first two months of 2020, print Bible sales kept pace with the same period in 2019; however, the period from March 1 through May 2, 2020 saw a 35.9% drop in the category. Since May 2, sales of print Bibles have rebounded, but still lag behind 2019 by 17.6% overall.

The deepest weakness in U.S. print Bible sales was seen in Spanish versions, which were off from 47% to 52%, depending on the version, compared to 2019. Modern language Bibles, including paraphrased versions, experienced smaller drops in sales than traditional English translations, and a few have returned to positive year-over-year sales.

2 NPD BookScan™ tracks point-of-sale transactions for the publishing market. It covers approximately 85% of trade print books sold in the United States.

Change in Print Bible Sales by Version 2020 Compared to 2019



Source: NPD BookScan™
Compares Jan. 6 - Aug. 5, 2019 to Jan. 5 - Aug. 1, 2020

Taken together, these data suggest that Bible Users may be accelerating their adoption of digital scripture engagement tools, including smartphone apps, websites, and audio Bibles. To better understand how digital Bible technologies are being adopted, the *State of the Bible* survey asked Bible Users to reflect on whether they had done any of the following activities in the past year:

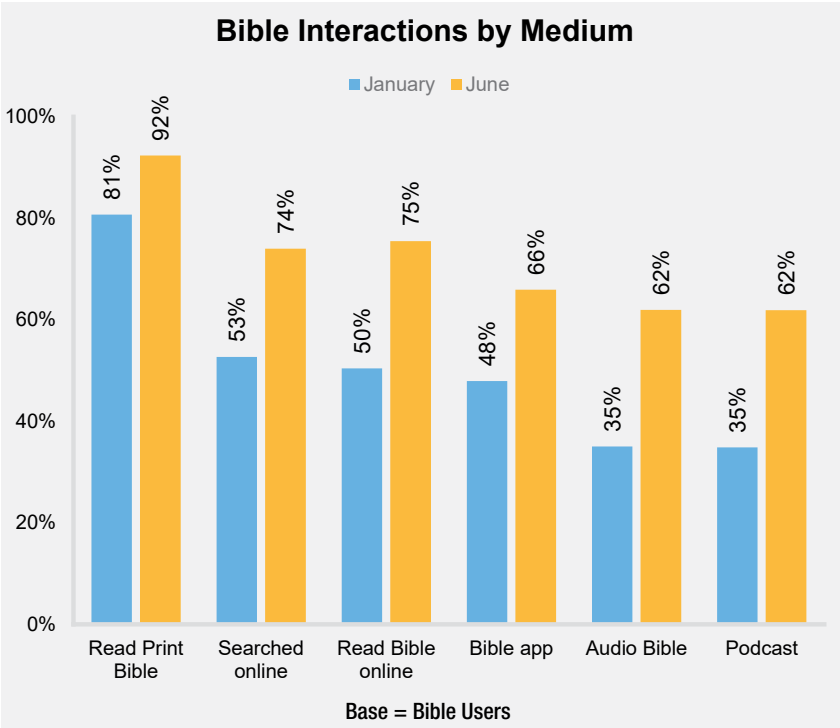
- Read from a print version of the Bible on your own.
- Used the internet to read Bible content.
- Listened to an audio version of the Bible.
- Listened to a teaching about the Bible or Bible readings via podcast.
- Used a Bible app on a smartphone.
- Searched for Bible verses or Bible content on a smart phone or cell phone.

In January, Bible Users ($n = 482$) were permitted to respond with “yes” or “no.” In June, Bible Users ($n = 1,431$) were asked how *frequently* they had interacted with the Bible in these ways over the past year. June respondents selected from five options (i.e., never, rarely, monthly, weekly, daily).³

Comparing January to June, respondents indicated statistically significant increases in their interactions with the Bible across all media. Reading from a print Bible showed the smallest increase from January (81%) to June (92%), a gain of 14.5%. Though this

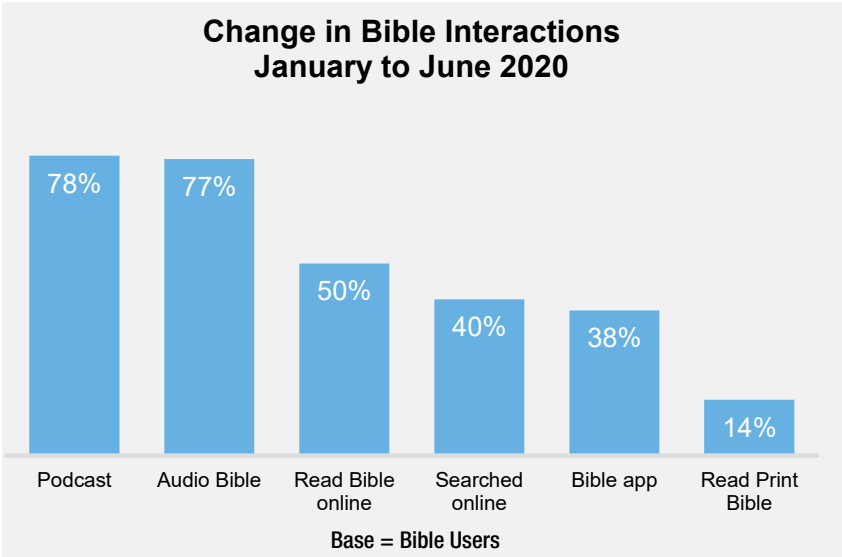
3 For purposes of comparison, January responses of “no” are considered equivalent to June responses of “never.”

category showed the smallest increase, print Bibles continue to be the most widely used Bible media in 2020.



The largest gains came in the digital audio categories. More than one third of January respondents (35%) recalled listening to an audio version of the Bible or listening to an audio teaching about the Bible via podcast. By June, that proportion had climbed by 77% for audio Bibles and 78% for podcasts. More than three out of five June respondents (62%) had either listened to an audio Bible or to a Bible-related podcast in the past year.

By June, three quarters of Bible Users (76%) said they had recently used the internet to read the Bible, up 50% from January. Nearly the same proportion (74%) said they had searched for Bible verses online, an increase of 40% over January. Use of smartphone apps to interact with the Bible was also up significantly (38%) in the first half of 2020. By June, two thirds of Bible Users (66%) said they had used a smartphone Bible app in the past year.



TECHNOLOGY AND GENERATIONS

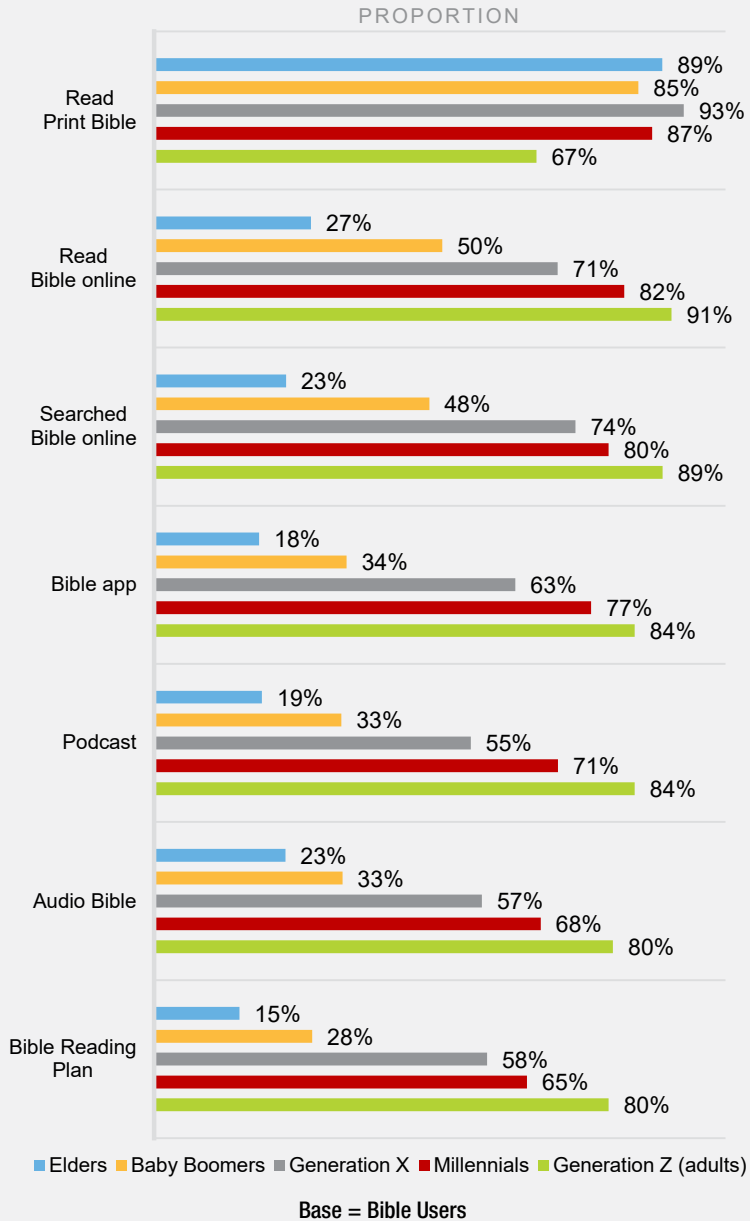
Use of Bible technologies varies by generation. Generation X⁴ is the most likely group to read a print Bible (93%) followed closely by Elders (89%), Millennials (87%), and Baby Boomers (85%). Though Generation Z has only a few years of adults to respond, this youngest generation is least likely to use a print Bible (67%), preferring all digital forms of Bible interaction over a printed book.

Reading or searching the Bible online is the second most popular Bible interaction technology for U.S. adults, and preferences for these technologies follow the generational pattern. Nine out of ten GenZ Bible Users say they have read (91%) or searched (89%) the Bible online in the past year. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Elders are the least likely generation to use either of these technologies, Approximately one in four Elders say they have read (28%) or searched (23%) the Bible online in the past year.

Online Bible interactions are the second most popular medium for all generations except GenZ adults, after reading a print Bible.

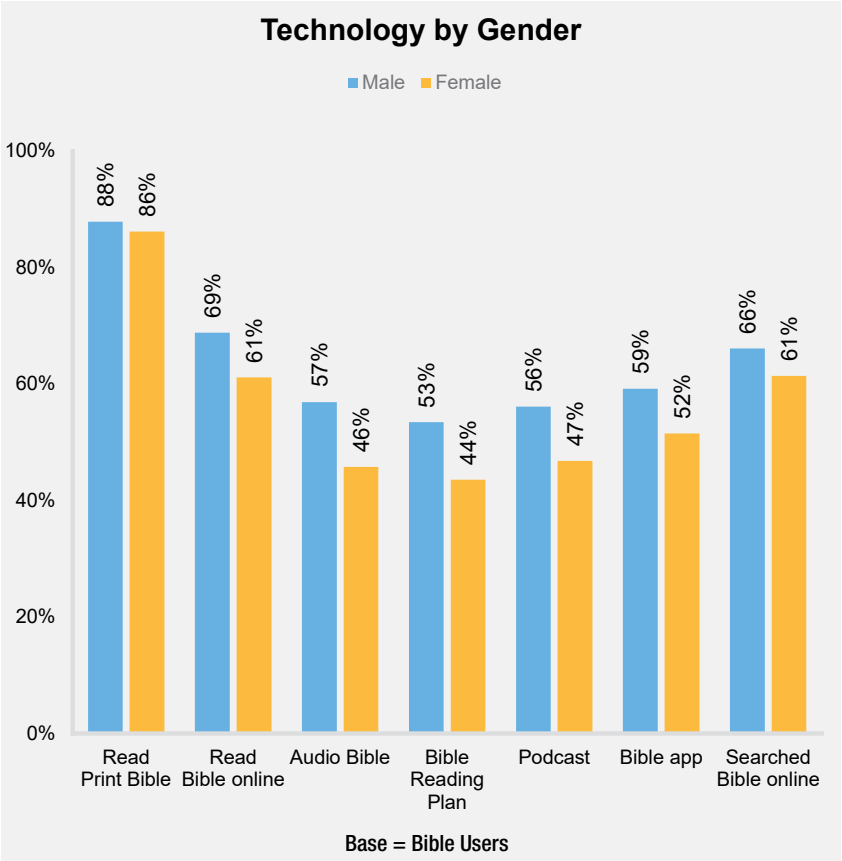
4 See Appendix 2 for definitions of the generations studied.

Technology Use by Generation



TECHNOLOGY AND GENDER

Use of Bible interaction technologies also varies by gender. Overall, women are less likely than men to use digital technologies. Men’s and women’s use of print Bibles in the past year is statistically equivalent. The largest difference between the sexes was seen in the use of audio Bible versions. Three out of five male Bible Users (60%) recalled listening to an audio version of the Bible in the past year, compared to less than half of women (46%).



TECHNOLOGY AND SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT SEGMENTS

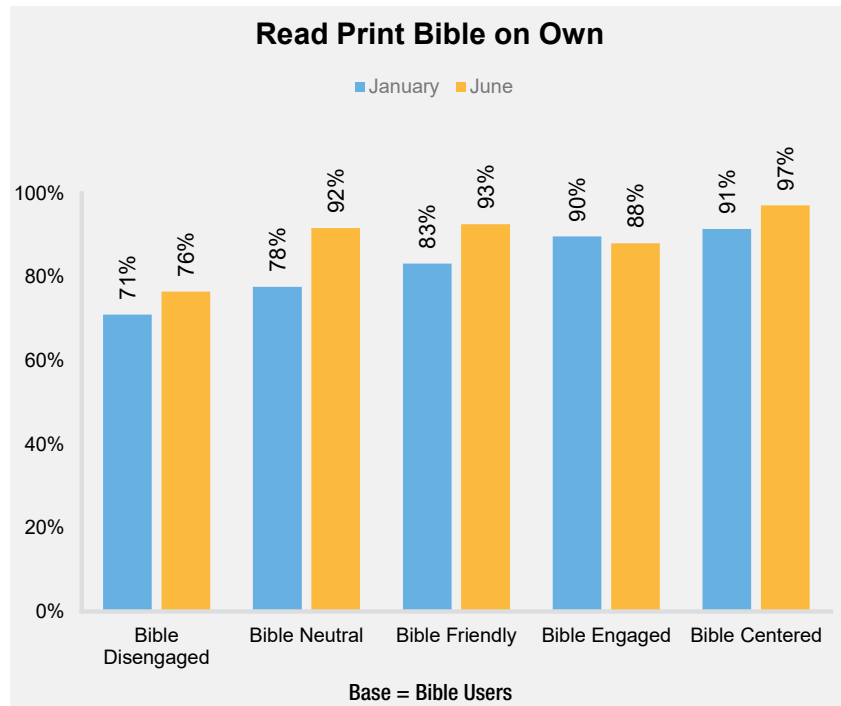
U.S. adults, led by younger men, are increasingly reaching for digital technologies to interact with the Bible. At the same time, Scripture engaged Bible Users are more likely to go digital than unengaged users.

Bible Neutral and Bible Friendly users showed the greatest increases in Print Bible use between January and June. In June, nine out of ten Bible Neutral users (92%) said they had read a printed Bible in the past

year, compared to only 78% in January – an increase of 14%. Bible Friendly users showed a similar trend, increasing print Bible use 10% in the same period.

By comparison, Bible Centered users increased use of print Bibles by only 6% between January and June. Among the Bible Engaged, use of print Bibles actually fell slightly from 90% in January to 88% in June.

“If new users of mobile Bible apps all lived in the same city, it would be the fourth largest city in the world.”

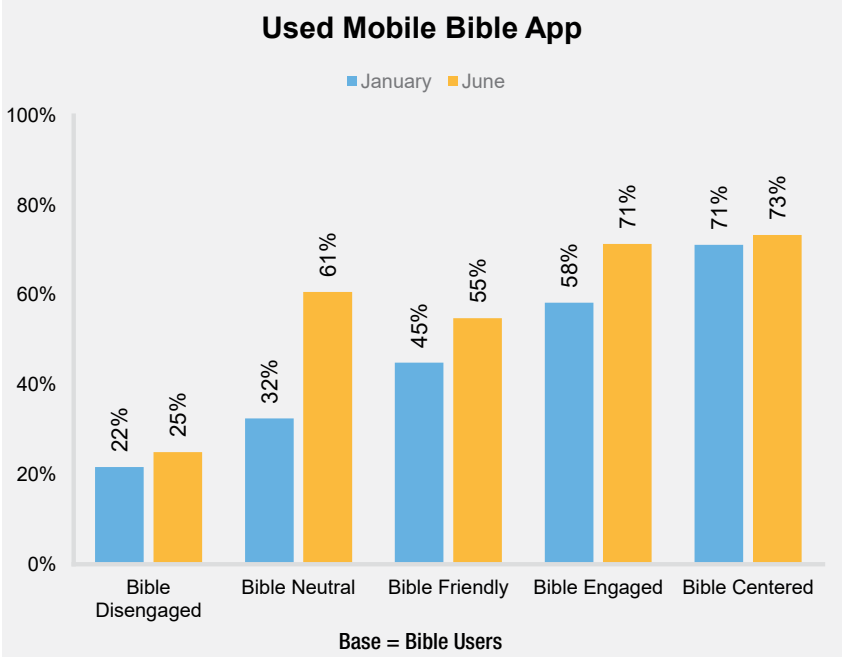


By contrast, use of mobile Bible apps was up across all Scripture Engagement segments. Bible Neutrals led the way, nearly doubling the proportion of this group that used Bible apps from a third (32%) in January to three out of five (61%) in June – an increase of nearly 29%. Considering the population of Bible Neutral adults in the U.S., this change represents nearly 9 million new users of mobile Bible apps.

Whereas Bible Engaged users decreased their interaction with printed Bibles, they significantly increased their use of mobile

Bible apps, growing by 13% or 5.6 million users between January and June.

Other Scripture Engagement segments showed smaller growth in use of mobile Bible apps. Bible Friendly users grew by 10%. Bible Centered users were up by 2%, and Bible Disengaged users were up by 3%. Across all Scripture Engagement categories, use of mobile Bible apps grew by an estimated 23.6 million American adults between January and June. If new users of mobile Bible apps all lived in the same city, it would be the fourth largest city in the world behind Tokyo, Delhi, and Shanghai, according to United Nations population estimates.⁵



5 See <https://population.un.org/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2018-Highlights.pdf> for more.

TECHNOLOGY, SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT AND GENDER

While Scripture engagement and gender are independently related to Bible technology use, they also interact to produce a more nuanced view of the Bible technology landscape. For example, men and women who are not Scripture engaged use technology at similar levels.

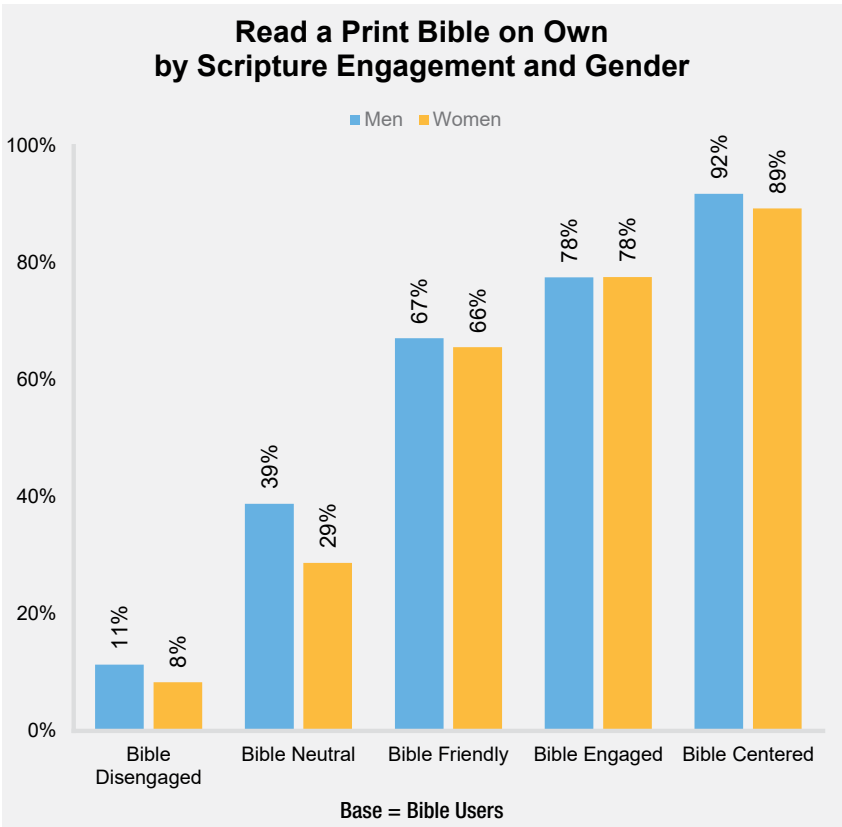
Bible Neutral women are more likely to use every digital Bible technology than men in that category. The largest differences between Bible Neutral women and men are in online Bible searches (women lead by 17%), digital Bible reading plans, and mobile Bible apps (women lead by 12% in each). By comparison, Bible Neutral men are 10% more likely than women to read from a print Bible.

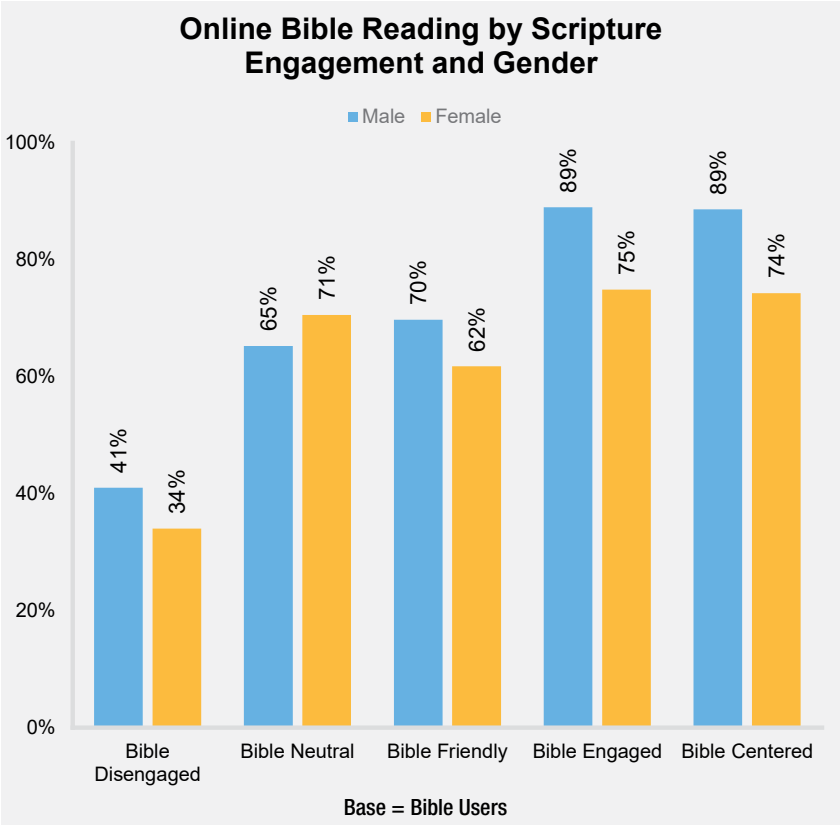
Among users who are Bible Friendly, Bible Engaged, or Bible Centered, the men are more likely to use digital technology than women. The following graphs present these comparisons in detail. In each of these higher levels of Scripture engagement, men are 15% to 20% more likely than women to use Bible podcasts, to listen to audio versions of the Bible, to use the internet for searches of Bible verses and content, and to use mobile Bible apps.

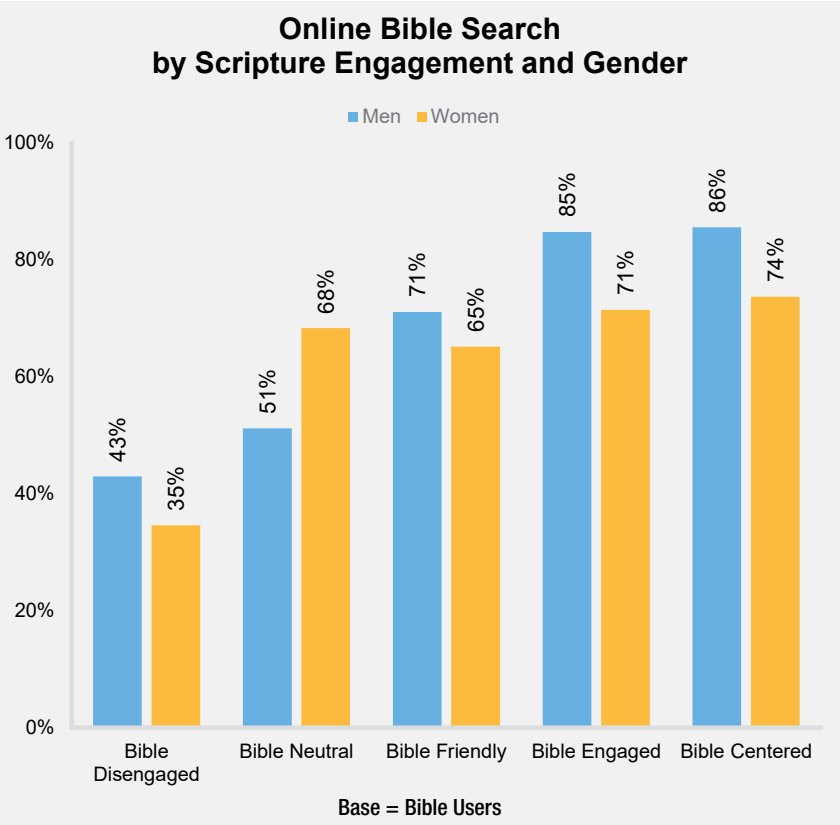
In summary, COVID-19 has disrupted Americans' relationship with the Bible. While print Bible sales have fallen sharply in the U.S., digital platforms have recorded surges in adoption and interaction. Bible users have increased their use of digital technologies to deepen their Scripture engagement. This shift to digital tools has

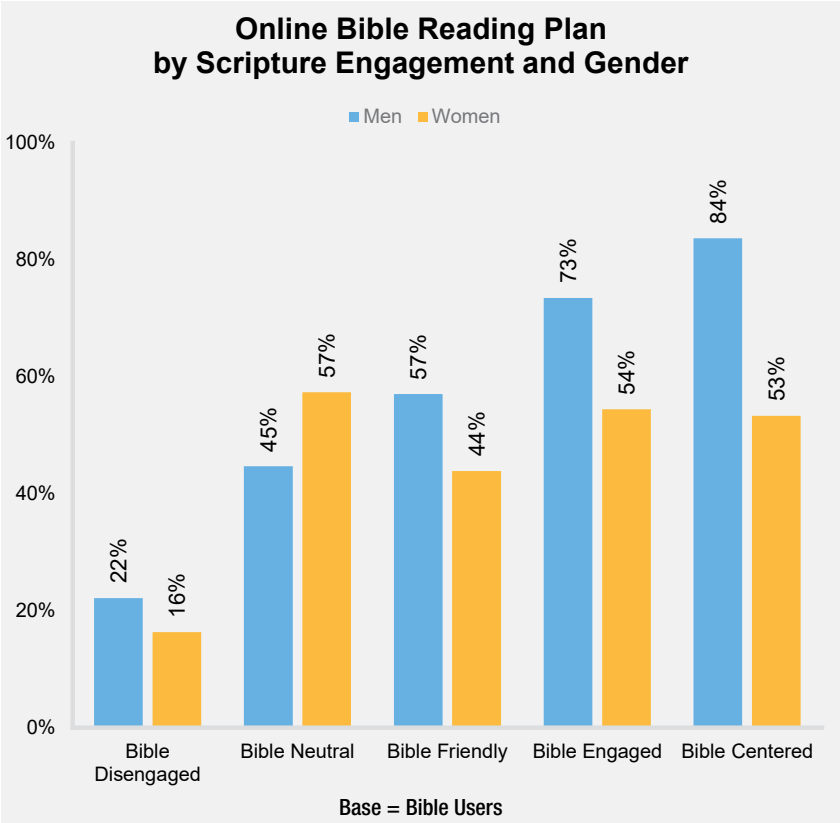
been particularly evident among younger adults and among Bible Friendly, Bible Engaged, and Bible Centered men. Furthermore, Bible Neutral women have increasingly reached for digital Bible tools to help them explore scripture.

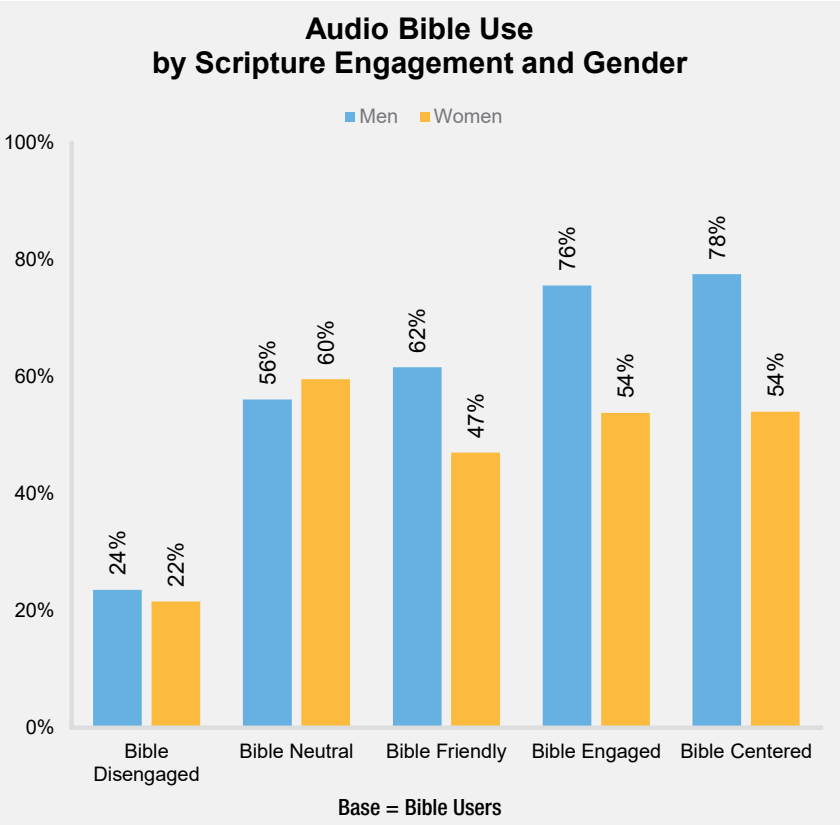
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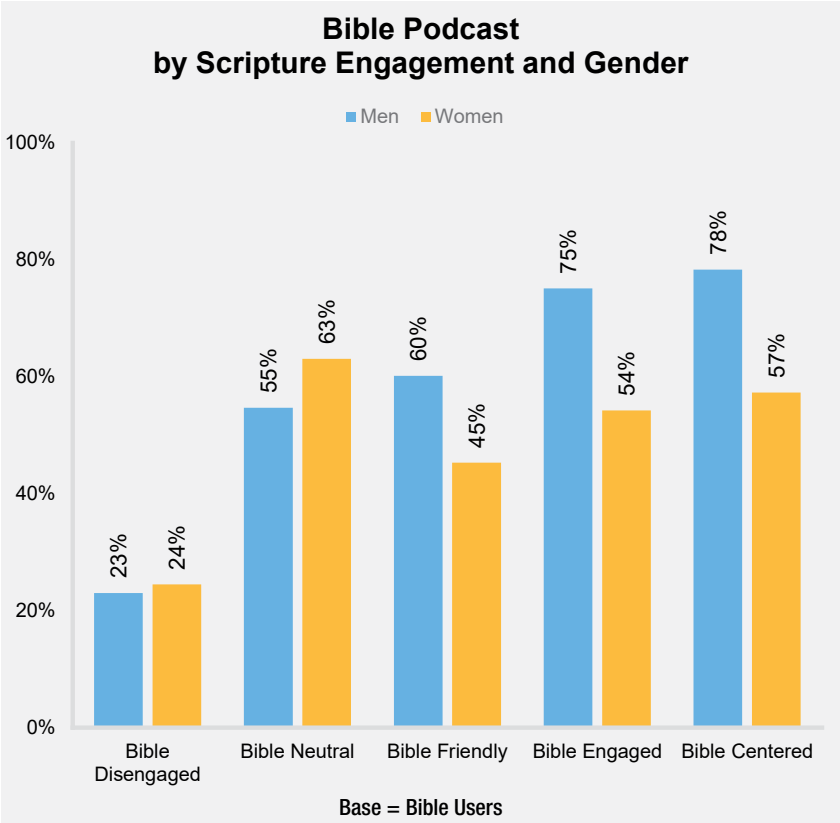


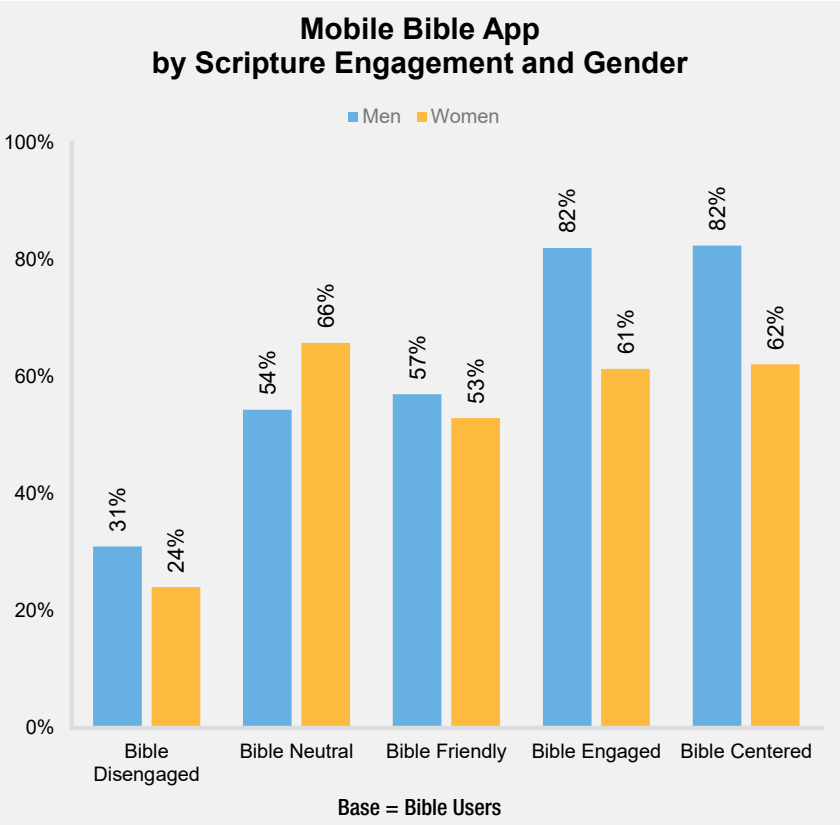












NEXT STEPS

For Pastors & Church Leaders. Consider how technology has impacted your engagement with Scripture and the discipleship or spiritual formation methods you use with your congregation. What digital tools have been most valuable to you? How do you explain the increased use of digital Bible tools for adults, especially for men? How can you encourage both longtime believers and new believers to incorporate technology into their private and small group Bible studies?

For Families. When you use the Bible as a family, is your only method to use a print Bible? Consider how adding digital tools like mobile or online Bible apps, videos, audio Bibles, and podcasts might enrich your family's engagement with Scripture. If you're still thinking that a paper Bible is your best choice, consider trying a version that is new to you.

For Individuals. Think about how technology has changed your everyday life. What do you do online or on a mobile phone that you used to do the "old fashioned way." Have you also changed the way you interact with the Bible? If so, think about how technology may have deepened your Scripture engagement. Also think about what you might be losing through the use of digital Bible tools.



SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT & DISCIPLESHIP

For many people in the United States, scripture engagement is understood as a private spiritual discipline, practiced by devout individuals in solitude. In reality, American adults interact with the Bible in a wide variety of both physical and social contexts.

A 2017 study¹ showed that four out of five U.S. Bible Users (80%) interact with scripture on their own at least once a month. Three fourths (76%) use the Bible at least monthly in church. While these are the dominant settings for scripture engagement, they are hardly monolithic. Half of U.S. Bible Users (49%) interact with the Bible

¹ A national study of scripture engagement among U.S. Bible Users, conducted by Barna and American Bible Society.

with their family at least monthly. A similar proportion (50%) use the Bible together with a small group from church, work, or school, and more than a third (38%) use the Bible with one or two friends at least monthly.

Individual use of the Bible outside of church is the strongest predictor of overall scripture engagement;² however, using the Bible in relationship with others is also important. Controlling for the influence of individual Bible reading, Scripture Engagement Scale scores are positively influenced by relational interactions, including using the Bible with family, friends, and small groups from church, work, or school.

Based on this research, the *State of the Bible 2020* asked January respondents to indicate whether or not they had participated in any of the following relational discipleship activities *within the past year*:

1. Met with someone who is mentoring or coaching you spiritually.
2. Been a mentor or discipler of someone else to help them mature in their religious faith.
3. Been a part of a faith community with whom you can discuss spiritual topics.
4. Participated in a small group to increase Bible understanding.

2 As measured by the Scripture Engagement Scale. See the article on [Measuring Scripture Engagement](#) (p. 32) for more.

Similarly, in June, participants were asked whether or not they had participated in any of the listed activities *during the pandemic*.

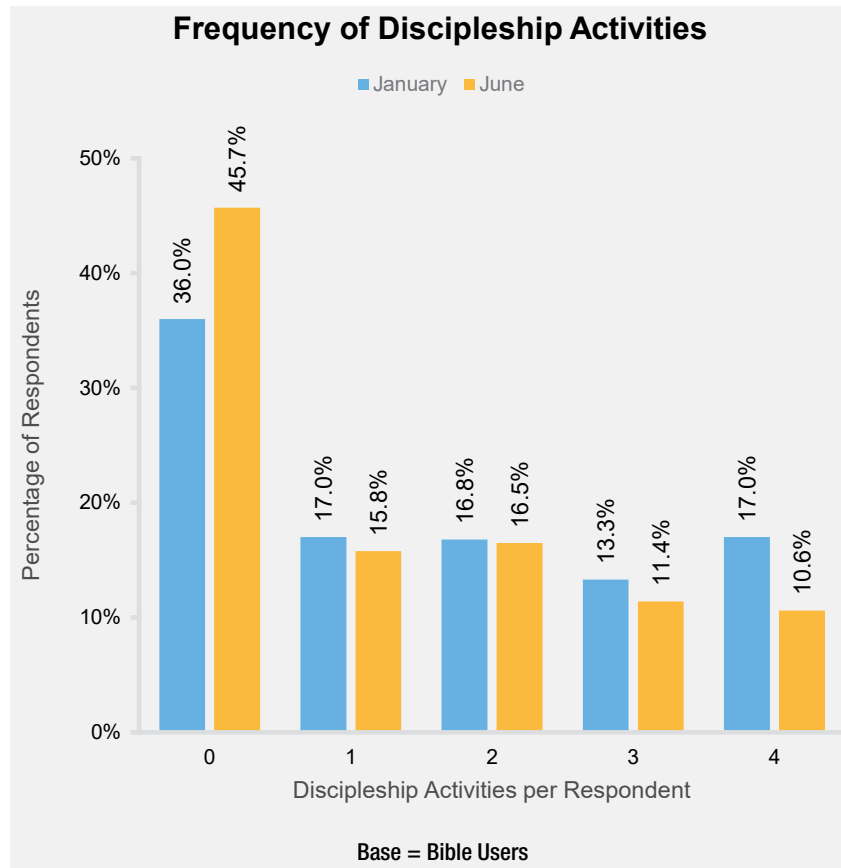
Taken together, we refer to these four activities as *discipleship activities*.³ In this chapter, we examine the influence of discipleship activities on scripture engagement and wellbeing. We also examine how gender, generation, and the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted discipleship activities for many Americans.

DISCIPLESHIP ACTIVITIES AND COVID-19

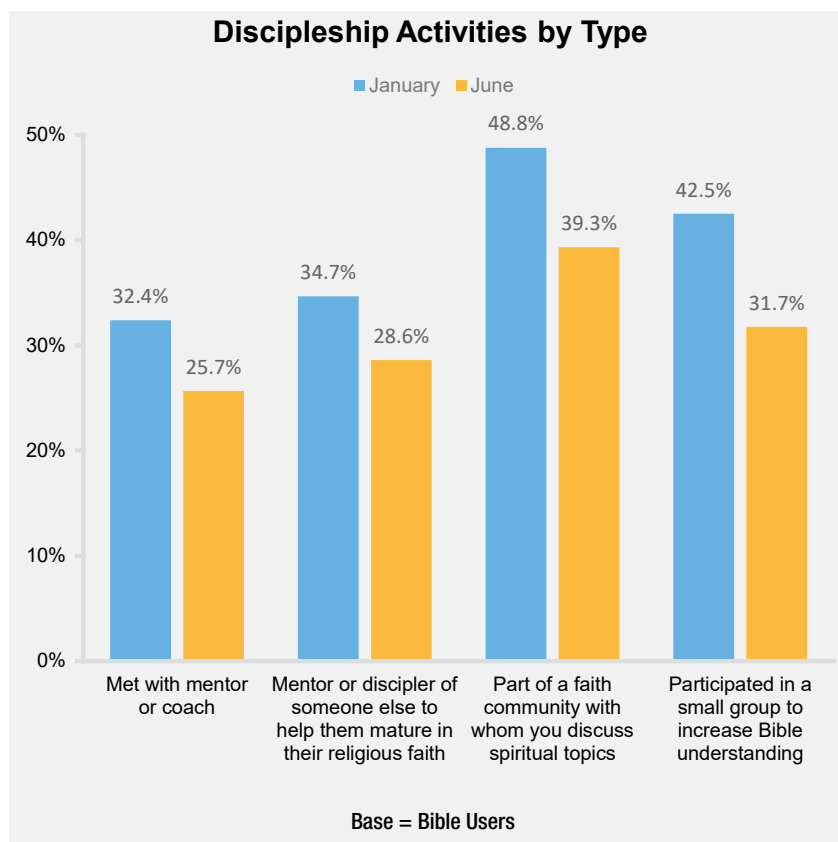
Average U.S. Bible Users recall participating in one or two of the listed discipleship activities within the past year, based on responses from participants in *State of the Bible 2020*. The number of such activities dropped slightly from a mean of 1.58 in January to 1.25 in June. For each time period, the median⁴ number of discipleship activities was one.

3 Discipleship (or spiritual formation) is a much broader topic than these four activities can encompass. For the purposes of this research, we apply this label to indicate that these activities are intended to help individuals grow and mature as followers of Jesus Christ.

4 Median refers to the response category with an equal number of responses above and below it. In this case, as many respondents chose zero activities as chose two, three, or four.



In January, half of Bible Users (49%) indicated they were part of a faith community with whom they could discuss spiritual topics. By June, however, only two of five Bible Users (39%) said they had participated in a faith community during the pandemic. Similarly, in January, more than two of five Bible Users (43%) said they had participated in a Bible-focused small group within the past year. Fewer than one third of Bible Users (32%) could say the same thing by June.



Serving as a mentor or engaging in a mentoring relationship as a mentee were equally likely. In January, just over one third of Bible Users (35%) indicated that they were mentoring someone to help them grow in their religious faith. At the same time, a statistically equal proportion (32%) of Bible Users said they had met with a spiritual coach or mentor within the past year.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on these mentorship activities, similar to the impact on faith community and small group participation. In June, fewer than three in ten Bible Users (29%) said they had mentored someone else during the pandemic, and only one fourth (26%) said they had met with a mentor or coach who was helping them grow spiritually during the same time frame.

DISCIPLESHIP GOES ONLINE

Several Christian organizations in the United States focus their ministry on discipleship activities, and we reached out to two of them to better understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their ministry efforts. First, Alpha USA is known for creating faith communities where it is safe for individuals of all backgrounds to discuss spiritual topics and ask questions about Christianity and the Bible. Since 1990, their groups have served millions of people in 169 countries and 112 languages. Similarly, Bible Study Fellowship (BSF) is well-known for their in-depth Bible study groups which serve over 400,000 members annually in 120 nations. Both Alpha and BSF have built their ministry models on gathering people for face-to-face small group discussions. Though both had developed online groups prior to COVID-19, the pandemic accelerated their adoption of digital discipleship activities.

Alpha USA. In the U.S., Alpha has seen a significant shift from in-person to online group meetings, according to Craig Springer, Executive Director of Alpha USA. Through August 15, 2020, the ministry reports that 1,573 churches and organizations in the U.S.

have registered 2,508 online Alpha courses. Overall, 41% of the churches and organizations with registered Alpha USA courses were offering online options. Additionally, 42% of the churches running online groups are new to the Alpha program.

Bible Study Fellowship. BSF also saw a rapid transition to digital groups. COVID-19 began to impact their Bible study groups in Asia first. By March, the organization was transitioning in-person classes to online meetings worldwide, including the United States. Overall, 91% of the organization's 1,241 physical classes successfully transitioned to online meetings by the end of March, according to Dr. Emily Cox, Director of Ministry Intelligence for BSF.

The transition from in-person to virtual discipleship activities has brought challenges for Christian ministries. Worldwide, 115 BSF classes did not successfully make the jump to online meetings, and 80% of these groups were in Africa. "Classes in Africa were not able to make the transition due to lack of consistent internet services and the bandwidth needed to play and upload video content," Cox reported. Additionally, some participants disengaged from their groups when they moved to an online format. Among the BSF classes that switched to online, one in five group members (20%) dropped out. "Two demographic groups in particular were challenged to continue their participation: young families and older members. Young families found it difficult to juggle the increasing demands in the home, shortage of devices and sometimes bandwidth to participate. With more people in the home, some found it difficult to find a quiet or confidential space

to participate in their discussion groups. Older members were often less confident with or challenged by the technology needed to engage digitally,” Cox said.

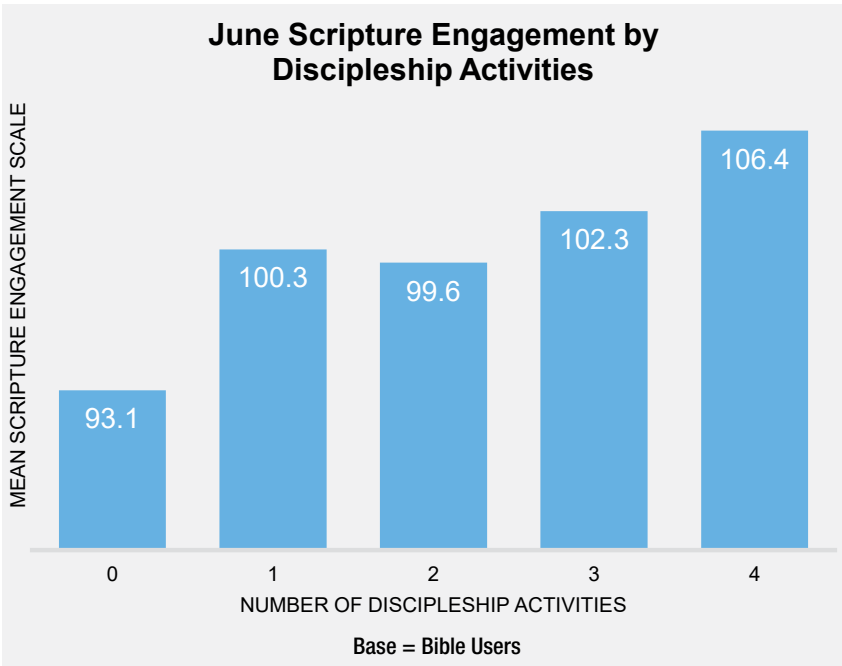
As fall classes start up, BSF is seeing signs of recovery and new opportunities. Some members, who dropped out when their seated classes moved online in the spring, are joining virtual classes in the fall. Online classes in urban areas are experiencing growth, especially among men. In Africa, BSF members are adapting to life after the COVID-19 pandemic and are finding ways to meet safely in person or online.

While many Christian ministries had been experimenting with digital discipleship options prior to 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced the Church to innovate, shifting discipleship activities online whenever possible. In the U.S., digital discipleship programs offer access to new audiences who might be unable or unwilling to gather physically with others. However, digital discipleship activities also present barriers for those who lack either online tools or the skills needed to use them. Perhaps the Church will emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic with more options for discipleship activities, providing both face-to-face and screen-to-screen options for those who want to gather with others to discuss faith and the Bible.

DISCIPLESHIP ACTIVITIES AND SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

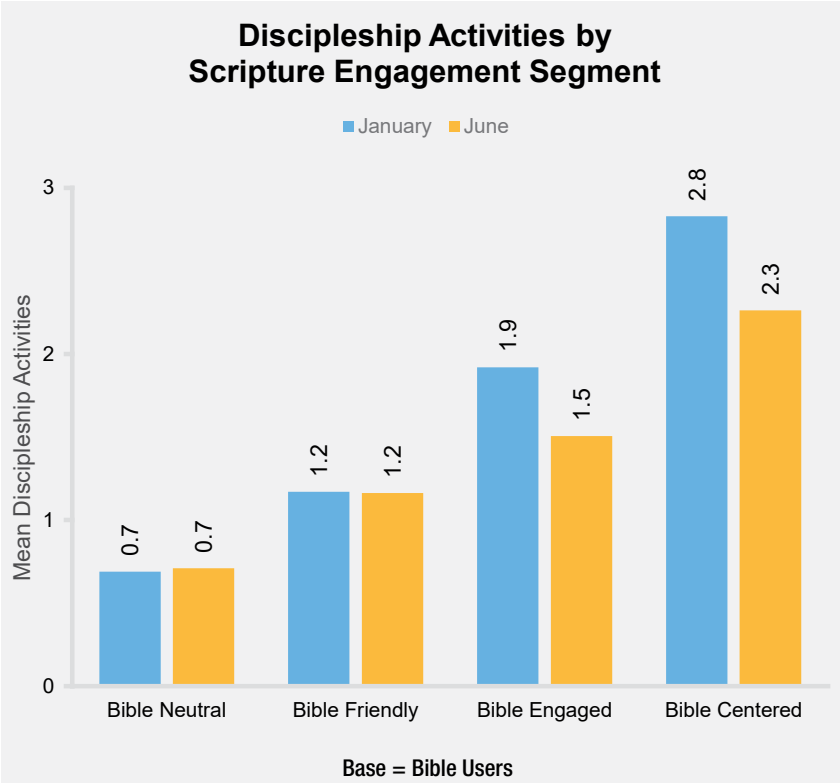
Relational discipleship activities are worth close consideration precisely because they are positively related to Scripture Engagement Scale scores. June *State of the Bible* data show that 42% of adult Bible Users have not participated in any discipleship activities since the COVID-19 pandemic began. This group scores significantly lower on Scripture Engagement ($M = 93$) than those who participated in at least one such activity.

The 46% of Bible Users who had participated in one, two, or three discipleship activities during the pandemic averaged Scripture



Engagement Scores of 101, moving these groups into the Bible Engaged category. Bible Users who participated in four discipleship activities (12%) scored highest on the Scripture Engagement Scale ($M = 106$).

Another way to look at this relationship is to examine participation in discipleship activities through the lens of Scripture Engagement Segment. In both January and June, Bible Users who scored Bible Neutral (18%) averaged less than one discipleship activity. Similarly, Bible Friendly respondents (34%) averaged 1.2 activities in both reporting periods.



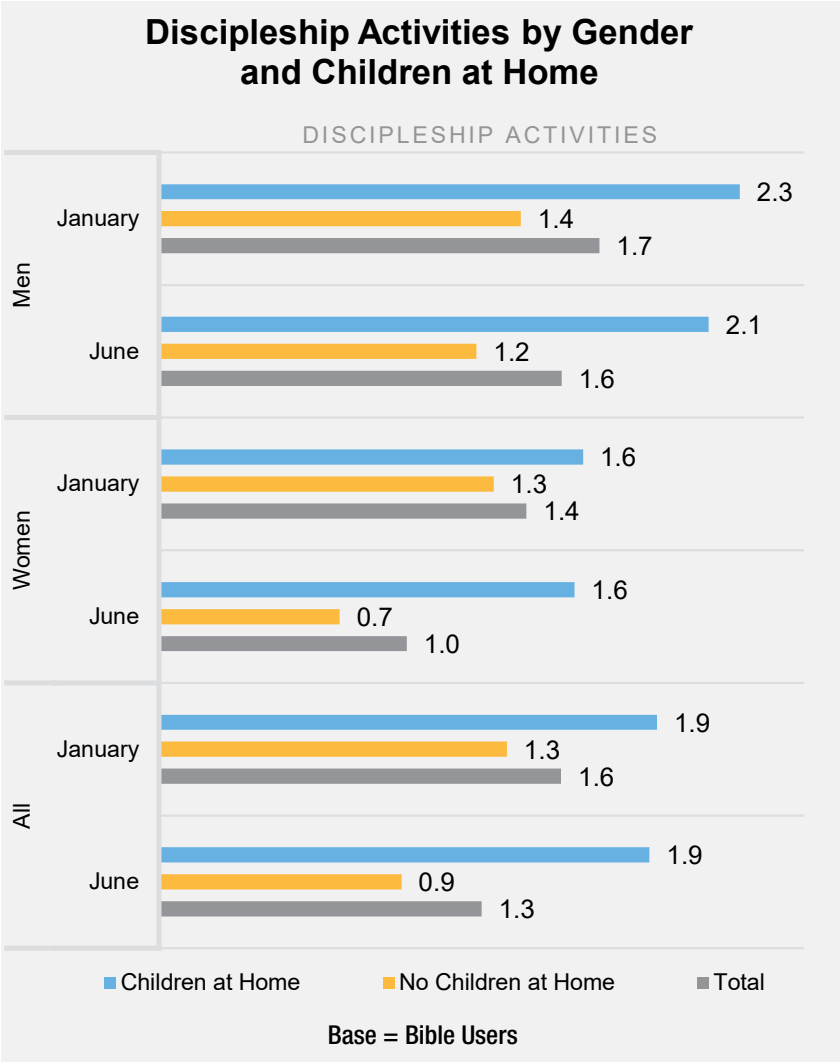
The COVID-19 pandemic exerted pressure on both the Bible Engaged and Bible Centered segments. Discipleship activities for Bible Engaged respondents (35%) fell from an average of 1.9 to 1.5 between January and June. Bible Centered respondents (12%) reported a similar drop, falling from 2.8 to 2.3 activities on average.

Overall, the relationship between discipleship activities and scripture engagement is strong. As Bible Users deepen their interactions with scripture, they tend to do so in relationship with others.

DISCIPLESHIP ACTIVITIES, GENDER, AND FAMILY COMPOSITION

While relational discipleship activities contribute to scripture engagement, participation in these activities is uneven across genders and by stage of life. Overall, men participate in discipleship activities more frequently than women do, and that difference has widened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In January, male Bible Users recalled participating in 1.7 discipleship activities over the past year. By comparison, women participated in 1.4 activities in the same period. For both groups, having children at home increased parents' participation in discipleship activities, compared to others of the same gender without children at home. Fathers with children at home participated in 0.9 more activities than other men. Mothers with children at home participated in 0.4 more activities than other women, on average.



June data showed pressure on both genders, decreasing average participation in discipleship activities to 1.6 for men (down 0.2 from January) and 1.0 for women (down 0.5 from January).

The data do not specify why parents participate in more discipleship activities than those without children at home. One possibility is that parents seek out church participation more frequently than non-parents of the same age in order to provide their children with a foundation of faith. Research indicates that emerging adults⁵ tend to decrease religious participation compared to their earlier teenage years or their later adult years. Another possibility is that older adults — whose children may live on their own — may find it more difficult to connect with others, using technology. Regardless of why parents participate more frequently than others in discipleship activities, their participation deepens scripture engagement and in other important benefits.

DISCIPLESHIP ACTIVITIES BY GENERATION

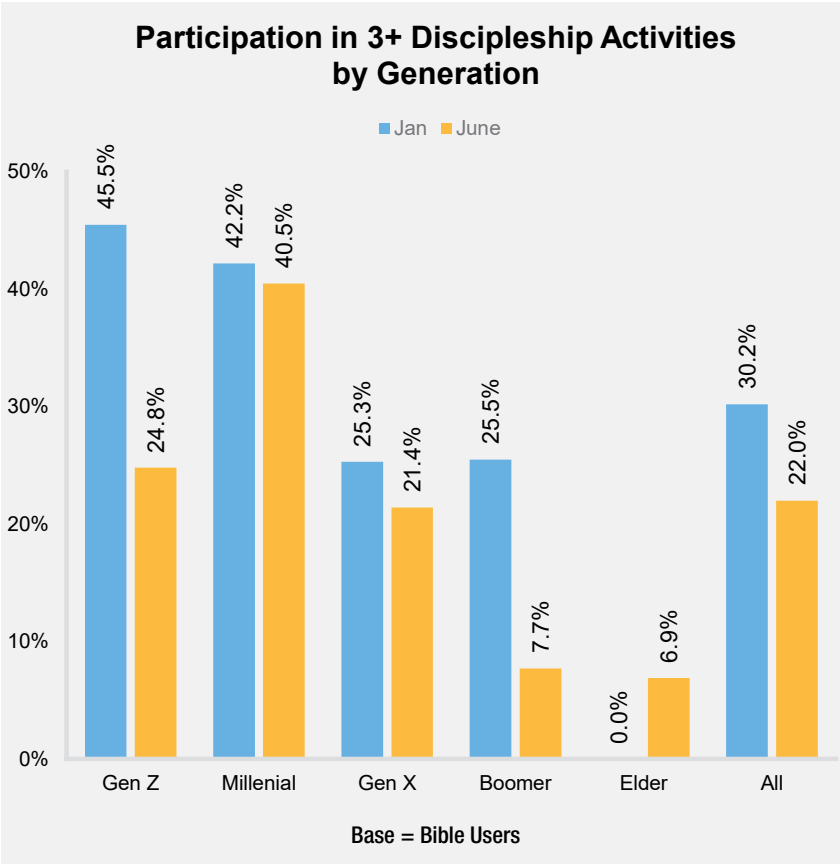
Participation in discipleship activities appears to peak early in adulthood and decrease thereafter. In January, across all generations, three in ten Bible Users (30%) recalled participating in three or more discipleship activities in the past year. By June, that proportion had fallen to nearly one in five (22%).

Prior to COVID-19, these higher levels of participation in discipleship activities varied with age. Adult Bible Users among Generation Z were most likely to participate in three or more discipleship activities (46%). Millennial Bible Users followed with more than two in five (42%) participating at this high level.

5 Emerging adults are typically defined as between 18 and 30 years old and not parents, whether married or unmarried.

Next, Generation X (25.3%) and Baby Boomers (25.5%) recorded a statistically equivalent one in four. In January, no Elders indicated participation in three or more discipleship activities, but that statistic may be due to a small sample size.⁶

In June, COVID-19 took a significant toll on Gen Z’s participation in discipleship activities. Their percentage of highly involved adults fell from 46% in January to only 25% in June — a drop of 45%.



⁶ See [Methodology in Appendix A](#).

Millennials maintained their levels of participation better than any other generation, falling from 42% to only 41%, a statistical dead heat. Generation X also experienced a minor drop from 25% in January to 21% in June. However, Baby Boomers dropped precipitously from 26% in January to only 8% in June — down 70% from January levels. In June, better sample data showed that 7% of Elders participated in three or more discipleship activities during the pandemic, putting this oldest generation on par with Baby Boomers.

The COVID-19 pandemic had its greatest discipleship impact on both the youngest and the oldest adult Bible Users in the U.S. When it comes to discipleship activities, Gen Z is traditionally the most active generation. Church-based discipleship programs for youth and young adults are typically group-oriented, and stay-at-home orders affected these programs across the nation. Older adults, particularly those in the Baby Boomer and Elder generations were both most vulnerable to the health effects of COVID-19 and least comfortable with digital alternatives to in-person discipleship activities. These two facts led to sharp declines in discipleship participation among older Bible Users.

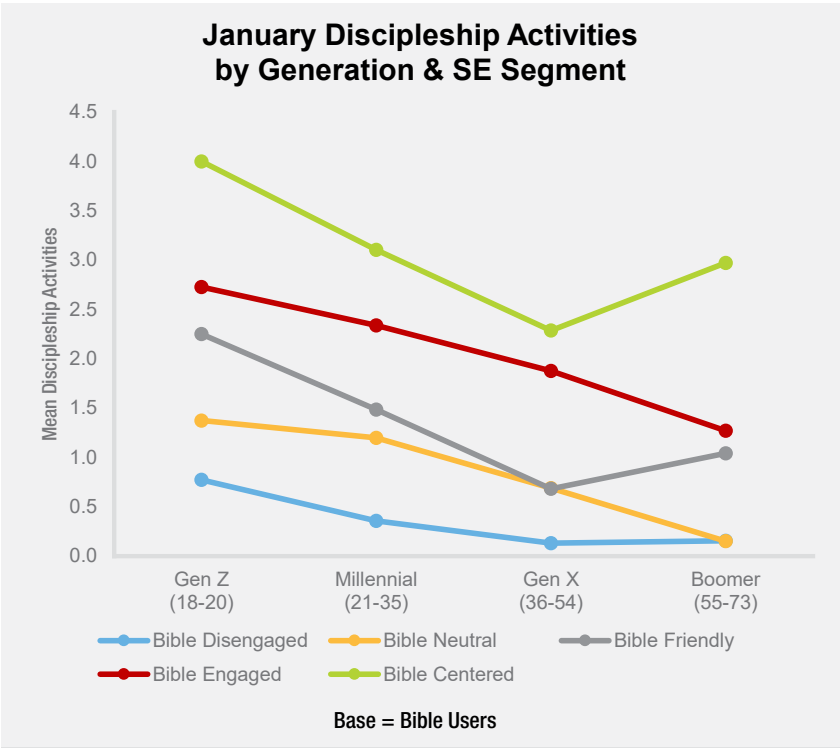
DISCIPLESHIP ACTIVITIES BY GENERATION AND SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

Though scripture engagement is positively correlated with discipleship activities, the tendency for participation in discipleship activities to decrease with age persists, even when controlling for scripture engagement.

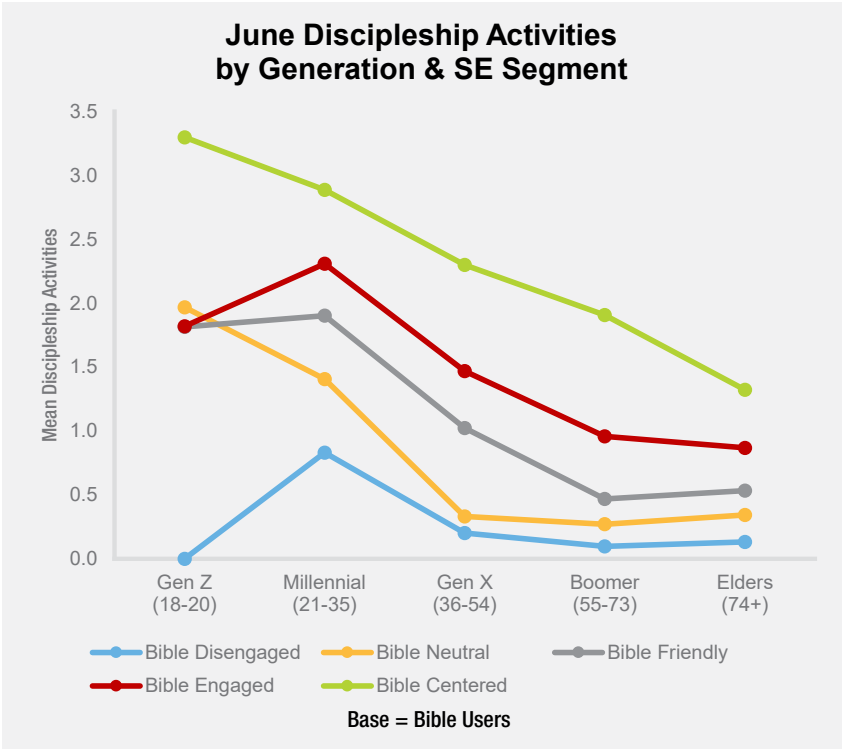
As each Scripture Engagement Segment ages, discipleship activities tend to decrease.

In January, this tendency is clear. Each Scripture Engagement Segment decreases its participation in discipleship activities, as the segment ages, with very few exceptions. Within the Bible Centered and the Bible Friendly segments, Baby Boomers maintain higher levels of discipleship activities than Millennials.

In June, the general trend of decreased participation in discipleship activities with age was clear again. The main exception to the rule in June was in the Gen Z group, where there was very little difference



in discipleship activities for the Bible Neutral, Bible Friendly, and Bible Engaged segments. Additionally, mean discipleship activities for Bible Disengaged young adults registered near zero — lower than for any other group. The disruption to group-oriented discipleship activities for youth and young adults was discussed in the preceding section and is likely influencing the results for Gen Z in June.



DISCIPLESHIP ACTIVITIES AND HUMAN FLOURISHING

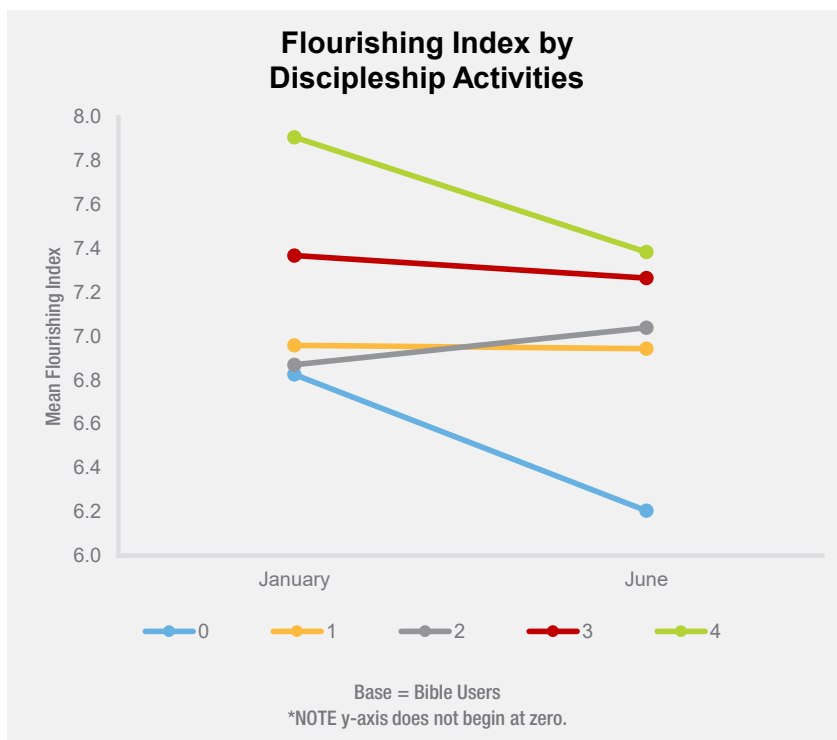
Finally, discipleship activities were associated with overall human flourishing, as described in more detail in chapter four. *State of the Bible* respondents were scored on six dimensions of human flourishing:

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

The first five measures combine to form the Flourishing Index, and all six dimensions combine to form the Secure Flourishing Index, which includes measures of financial and material stability.

In both January and June, Bible Users who did not participate in any discipleship activities scored lowest on the Flourishing Index. Conversely, those who participated in three or four discipleship activities experienced significantly higher levels of flourishing.

Each type of discipleship activity was considered independently as a potential predictor of Secure Flourishing, and three activities showed a significant relationship with this kind of holistic human flourishing.



1. Being part of “a faith community with whom you can discuss spiritual topics”⁷ was the strongest predictor of holistic flourishing, adding .49 points to the typical respondent’s Secure Flourishing score.
2. Serving as “a mentor or discipler of someone else to help them mature in their religious faith” also contributed to holistic flourishing, increasing Secure Flourishing by .48 points on average.

⁷ Wording in this list shown in quotation marks is taken directly from the survey items listed on p. 134.

3. Participating in “a small group to increase Bible understanding” contributed .39 points to a typical Secure Flourishing score.

Altogether, these three discipleship activities increased the average Bible User’s Secure Flourishing Score from 5.97 to 7.33, equivalent to more than three quarters of a standard deviation.

In summary, Christians grow spiritually through scripture engagement and through relationships with other Christ followers. Whether in a small group or in one-on-one mentoring, when Bible Users engage in discipleship activities, their relationship with God through the scripture is deepened, and their holistic wellbeing is supported.

COVID-19 has significantly impacted scripture engagement among U.S. adults. One way the pandemic has put downward pressure on Christians has been by disrupting small group discipleship activities, such as those discussed in this chapter. A key opportunity for the Church to support women and men in their spiritual formation, is to develop engaging online discipleship programs as alternatives to face-to-face meetings. Even as shelter-in-place orders are lifted, many older adults and people with health issues remain socially distanced from their friends at church. As Bible Study Fellowship and Alpha USA have illustrated, developing and maintaining digital platforms for meaningful discipleship activities could have a positive impact for many audiences, even after the world returns to normal.

NEXT STEPS

For Pastors & Church Leaders. Think about the effort you have put into making your worship service, preaching, and giving available online over the past six months. Now consider whether similar efforts are needed to make small group discipleship available to your entire congregation and community. Tools like those offered by [Alpha USA](#) and [Bible Study Fellowship](#) might be useful to your congregation. For more great disciple making resources and organizations, see [Discipleship.org](#).

For Families. Consider the oldest and youngest members of your family. If you have any members of GenZ, older Baby Boomers, or Elders in your extended family, their ability to connect with others around the Bible and their faith may have been disrupted by COVID-19. Can you help them get online and stay connected to others around the Bible?

For Individuals. By now you can see how valuable it is to engage in discipleship activities, rather than simply attending a church service either in person or online. If you're a YouVersion user, consider [starting a Bible reading plan "with friends."](#) If you're looking for a great Bible class, check out [Bible Study Fellowship](#). Their new class on Genesis has just started. Click the "Find an Online Group" button to learn how you can join.



SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POLITICAL IDENTITY

N*ew York Times* op-ed columnist David Brooks argues from his personal experience that “coming to faith changed everything and yet didn’t alter my political opinions all that much. That’s because assenting to a religion is not like choosing to be a Republican or a Democrat. It happens on a different level of consciousness.” His column was headlined, “How Faith Shapes My Politics: Not as much as you’d think.” Brooks was raised on biblical stories, which informed his moral worldview, despite the fact that in his earlier years, he chose not to believe

in God. He writes, “during my decades as an atheist, I thought the [biblical] stories were false but the values they implied were true. These values — welcome the stranger, humility against pride — became the moral framework I applied to think through my opinions, to support various causes.” He concludes his article with this striking summary:

In a society that is growing radically more secular every day, I'd say we have more to fear from political dogmatism than religious dogmatism. We have more to fear from those who let their politics determine their faith practices and who turn their religious communities into political armies. We have more to fear from people who look to politics as a substitute for faith.

And we have most to fear from the possibility that the biblical metaphysic, which has been a coherent value system for believers and nonbelievers for centuries, will fade from our culture, the stories will go untold, and young people will grow up in a society without any coherent moral ecology at all.

Brooks is not the first commentator to wrestle with the influence of the Bible on the American experiment. Os Guinness,¹ in a recent lecture for the Colson Center for Christian Worldview, suggests

¹ Os Guinness is an author, social critic, and great-great-great grandson of Arthur Guinness, the Dublin brewer. Os has written or edited more than 30 books that offer valuable insight into the cultural, political, and social contexts in which we all live. He completed his undergraduate degree at the University of London and his D. Phil in the social sciences from Oriel College, Oxford.

that America's current social and political discord are exacerbated by the country's rejection of its biblical roots. He argues that the English Revolution (1642) and the American Revolution of 1776 were based, however imperfectly, upon biblical ideals. By contrast, the French Revolution (1789), the Russian Revolution (1917), and the Chinese Revolution (1949) explicitly rejected biblical ideals and religious freedom. In his lecture, titled, "The Roots of the Present Crisis," Guinness opines "we have people talking today, as you well know, 'make America great again,' but no one talking about what made America great in the first place," including, he argues, a republic founded on freely chosen reciprocal responsibility, a realistic understanding of sinful humanity, and repentance and forgiveness as the means for righting wrongs. He calls Americans to reconsider the biblical roots of our 18th century revolution in order to bring healing to our increasingly fragmented 21st century society.

This presidential election year of 2020 has highlighted Americans' deeply held — and often conflicting — convictions about social issues, including racial and gender equality, the value of human life, sexuality and marriage, immigration, and more. Pollsters and political pundits have also shown interest in how the Bible influences American voters on these issues. In March, the Pew Research Center published an intriguing study of "the relationship between religion and politics" headlined "White Evangelicals See Trump as Fighting for Their Beliefs, Though Many Have Mixed Feelings About His Personal Conduct." The study explored the desire of many American Christians for biblical morality to be

reflected both in their nation's laws and in its leaders. A separate poll revealed that nearly half of Americans “say the Bible should have at least ‘some’ influence on U.S. laws.”

The Rev. Dr. David Platt, author and lead pastor of McLean Bible Church in Washington, D.C., recognizes the tension that many Americans feel as they attempt to navigate political turmoil and social upheaval with biblical wisdom. At the end of September, he released a new book, entitled, *Before You Vote: Seven Questions Every Christian Should Ask*. Platt claims that in many cases, even Christians often fail to think biblically about all of the issues facing the American electorate. Furthermore, Christians often struggle to be charitable to their fellow Christians who may vote differently than they do.

Much as David Brooks suggests, people in the United States and abroad bring their own history and culture with them, as they engage with the Bible. Culture tends to amplify certain parts of the Bible, while obscuring others. Boston University's Stephen Prothero devoted *American Jesus* (2003) to the myriad ways that Americans have attempted to fit Jesus Christ into their own cultural frameworks. Similarly, David Platt's 2010 book *Radical* was subtitled, *Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*, hinting that the Bible calls Christ followers to different and greater horizons than some Americans ever consider. The biblical gospel

has been said to be *at home* in every culture while simultaneously *confronting* the sins and shortcomings that are tolerated in each.²

INSIGHTS FROM STATE OF THE BIBLE 2020

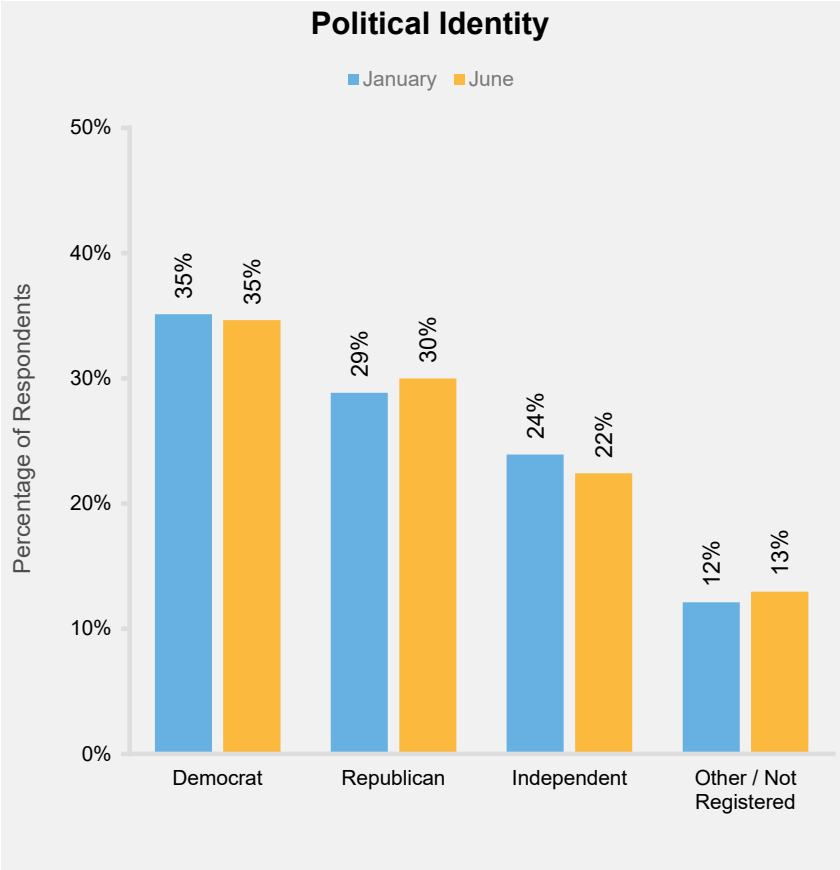
In January and June, the *State of the Bible* research team posed several questions to respondents, probing for how Scripture engagement tends to shape their views on social justice and political identity. In the coming pages, we will examine the proportion of respondents who identified with major political parties in both the January and the June study. Second, we will look at Scripture engagement levels through the lens of political identity, looking closely at how the Bible influences — or doesn't influence — the decision to choose a political party for American Bible Users. Third, we will see how the Bible influences Americans' thinking on key social justice issues. Finally, we will consider both the value and the potential challenges that come with allowing the Bible to inform choices in contemporary life.

POLITICAL IDENTITY IN 2020

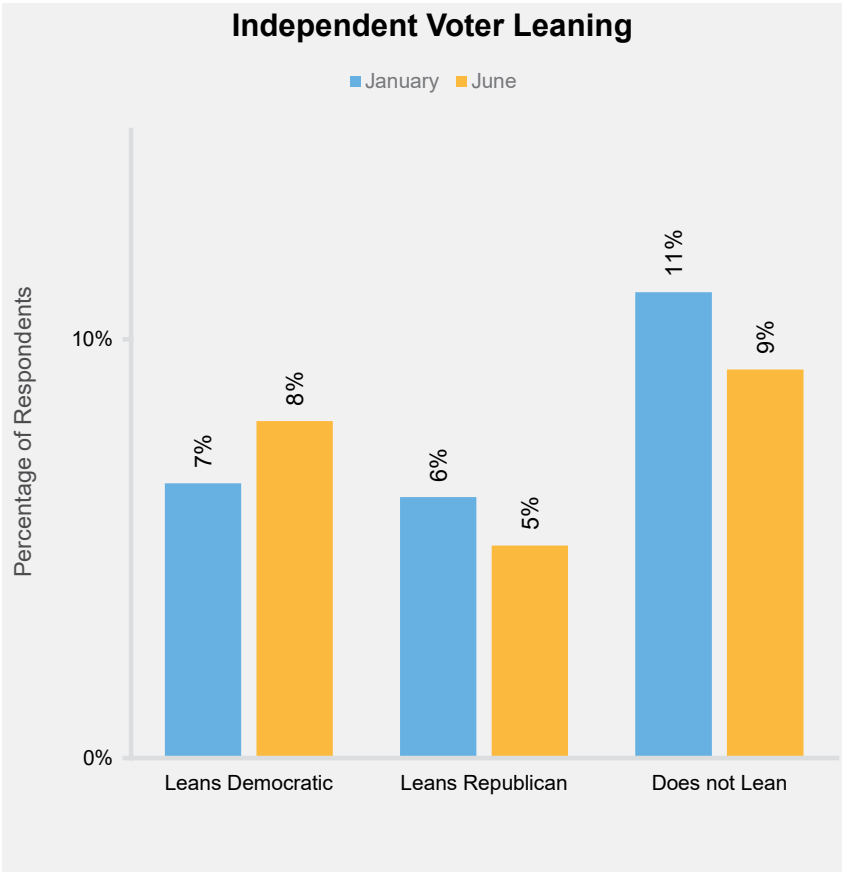
The *State of the Bible* research studies have not been designed to accurately measure political identity (party), and our data are not weighted to ensure that respondents are representative of party (non)affiliation across the nation. Still, our respondents come from

2 For a thorough treatment of this issue, see Andrew F. Walls (1996). *The missionary movement in Christian history: Studies in the transmission of faith*. Orbis Books: Maryknoll, NY. pp. 7-9, 53-57. Walls discusses the “twin forces of Christian history,” which he identifies as the “indigenizing principle” and the “pilgrim principle.”

all political perspectives. Over one in three respondents identified as registered Democrats in both January (35%) and June (35%). Three in ten respondents identified as registered Republicans in January (29%) and June (30%). Independents made up just under one of every four respondents with 24% claiming party independence in January and 22% in June. One in eight respondents (12% January, 13% June) identify with another party or are not registered to vote.



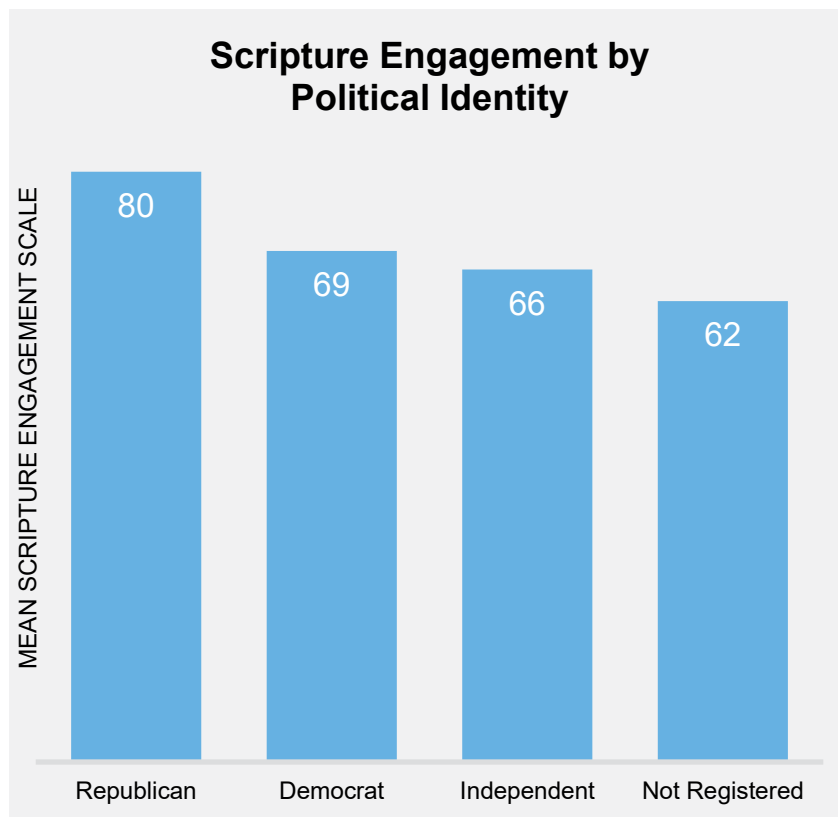
Independent voters were asked about their political leanings. Between January and June, the overall proportion of respondents who identified as Independent did not change significantly. Within the Independent category, voters were somewhat more likely to change their leaning away from Republican or neutral and toward Democratic.



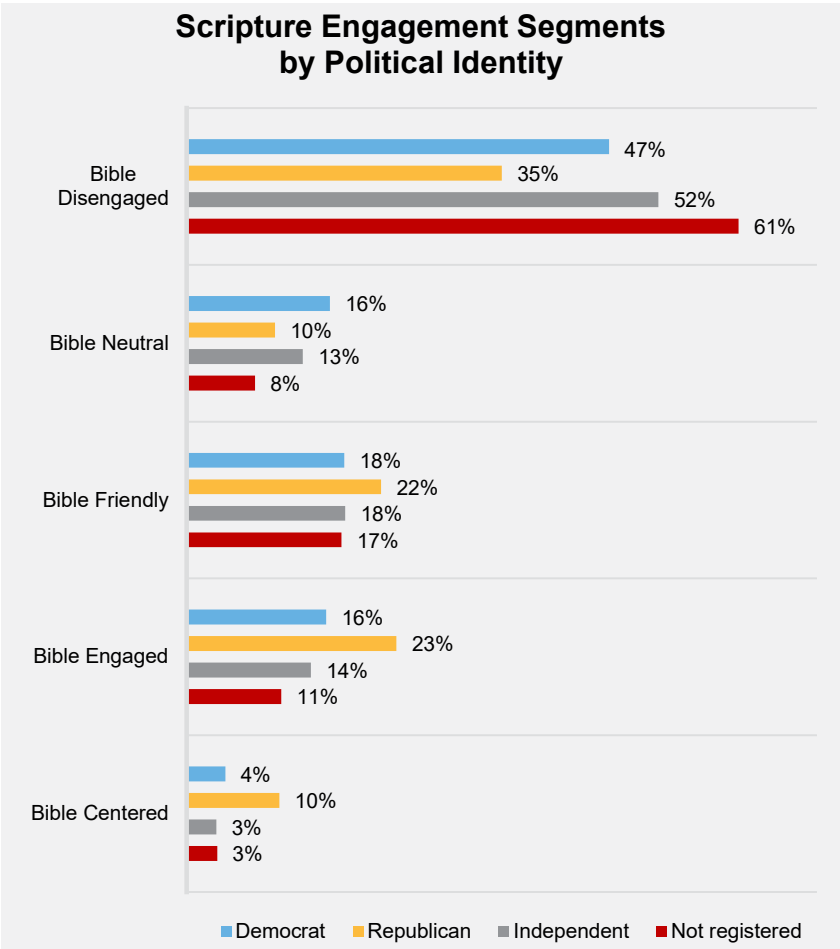
According to a Pew Research Center study released in June, 34% of *registered voters* identify as Independents, 33% identify as Democrats, and 29% identify as Republicans. Compared to these benchmarks, our June study has 8% fewer Independents, 6% more Democrats, and 5% more Republicans. It is likely that Americans' political leanings have continued to shift throughout the summer and early fall. Nevertheless, our data include sizable samples of the major political groupings in America. These groups of respondents allow us to examine how the Bible influences Americans of all political identities.

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT AND POLITICAL IDENTITY

It is perhaps unsurprising that Scripture Engagement varies with political identity. Overall, registered Republicans score significantly higher on the Scripture Engagement scale than other voters, averaging 80, which places typical Republicans in the Bible Neutral category. Democrats (69), Independents (66), and those not registered to vote (62) are Bible Disengaged on average.



Across the spectrum, Bible Disengaged is the most common category for American adults from all political party affiliations. Nearly two thirds of those not registered to vote (61%) are Bible Disengaged. More than half of Independents (52%) and Democrats (47%) score Bible Disengaged. Among political conservatives, Bible Disengaged is also the largest category, claiming more than a third (35%) of registered Republican voters.



When considering political affiliation in light of Scripture engagement, no group of American voters has a preponderance of adherents who are Scripture engaged, meaning that they fall

into the Bible Engaged or Bible Centered categories.³ One third of Republicans (33%) score Scripture engaged, followed by one fifth of Democrats (20%), one in six Independents (17%), and one in seven adults who are not registered to vote (14%).

THE BIBLE'S INFLUENCE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

Each major category of American (non)voters contains individuals who are consistently interacting with the Bible and are finding that the Bible helps to guide their choices and transform their relationships. Within those varied political identities, the Bible is a key source of wisdom for those who seek its guidance on the social issues of our day.

The *State of the Bible* research team asked Bible Users⁴ to indicate how Scripture influences their views on several issues being discussed in American society today. The statements included the following, all of which began, “The Bible leads me to...”:

1. Welcome immigrants to my community.
2. Befriend people of other races.
3. Befriend people of other religions.
4. Care for the environment.
5. Advocate for those who are oppressed by society.

³ For more, see *Measuring Scripture Engagement* (p. 32). Other technical terms for this report are defined in *Appendix 2*.

⁴ Bible Users are 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.

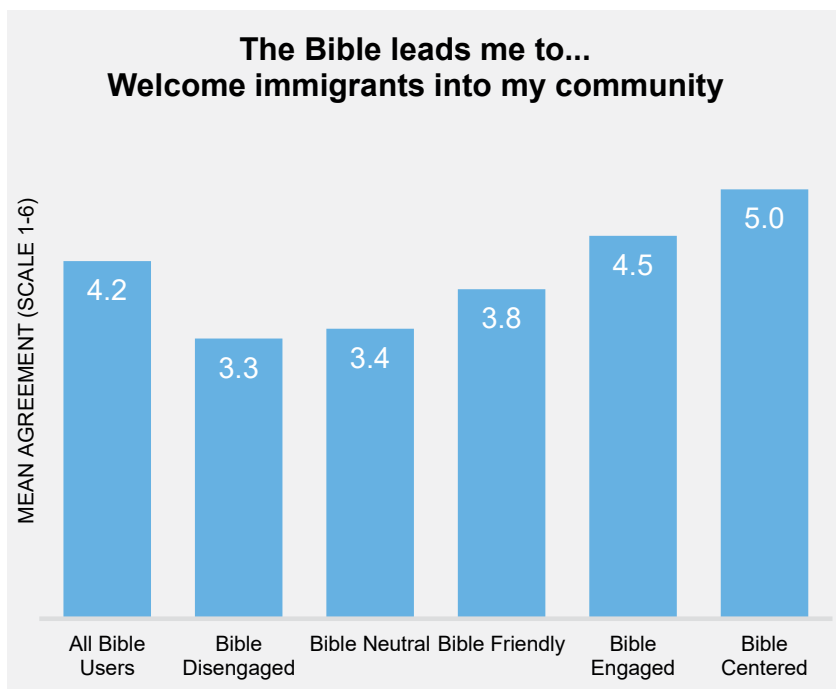
Response options were designed not to allow a neutral midpoint and were skewed toward agreement to adjust for any potential ceiling effect. They were coded as follows:

1. Disagree
2. Somewhat Disagree
3. Somewhat Agree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree
6. Very Strongly Agree

1. WELCOMING IMMIGRANTS

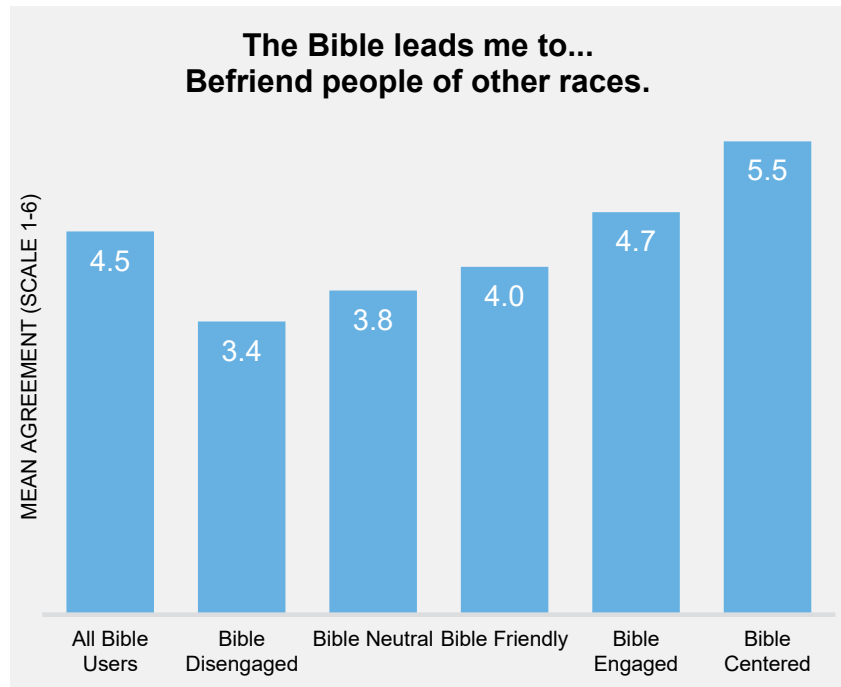
In January, 55% of all respondents were categorized as Bible Users, most of whom scored Bible Neutral or higher. Only six Bible Users also scored Bible Disengaged. We have elected to report their responses as a category below, despite the small group size.

Bible Users tend to agree that the Bible leads them to welcome immigrants into their communities. As the level of Scripture Engagement increases, respondents are more likely to agree that the Bible leads them to welcome immigrants. Bible Centered respondents tend to strongly agree ($M = 5.0$), while Bible Engaged respondents ($M = 4.5$) were split between strongly agree and agree, on average.



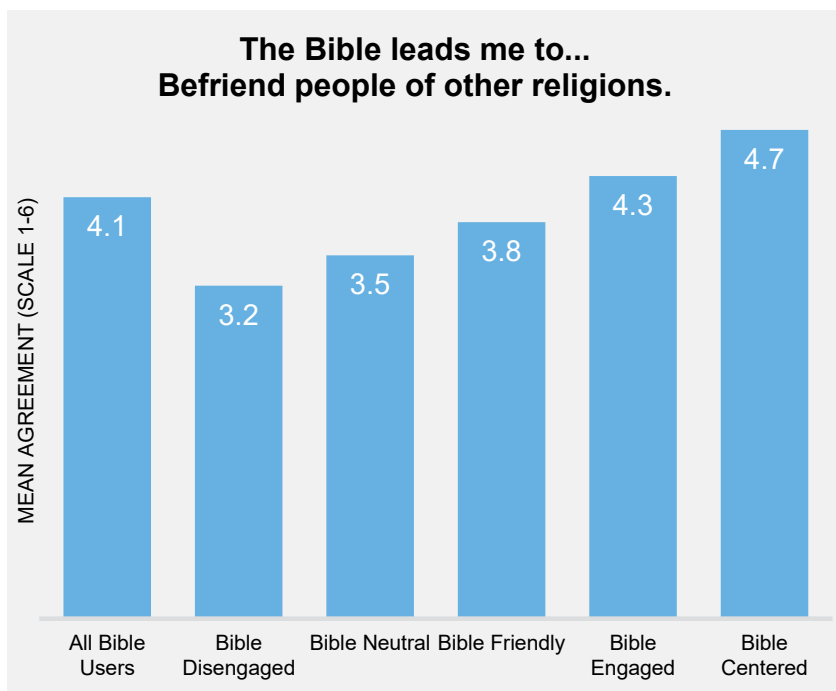
2. BEFRIENDING PEOPLE OF OTHER RACES

Similarly, Bible Users overall agree or strongly agree ($M = 4.5$) that the Bible leads them to befriend people of other races. Bible Disengaged ($M = 3.4$) and Bible Neutral ($M = 3.8$) respondents tend to agree somewhat or simply agree, while Bible Engaged ($M = 4.7$) and Bible Centered ($M = 5.5$) respondents tend to strongly agree or very strongly agree that the Bible guides them to befriend others from a different racial background.



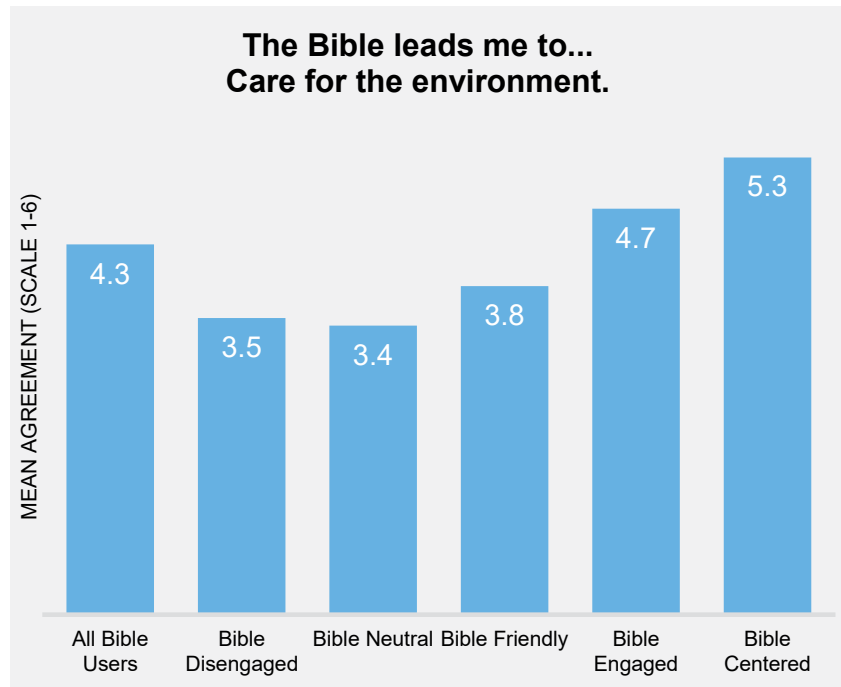
3. BEFRIENDING PEOPLE FROM OTHER RELIGIONS

When asked about relating to those who do not share their religious beliefs, Bible Users overall agree ($M = 4.1$) that Scripture instructs them to befriend adherents of other religions. As with other social issues, agreement increases as Scripture Engagement increases. Bible Disengaged ($M = 3.2$) and Bible Neutral ($M = 3.5$) respondents tend to agree less enthusiastically than Bible Engaged ($M = 4.3$) and Bible Centered ($M = 4.7$) respondents on this topic.



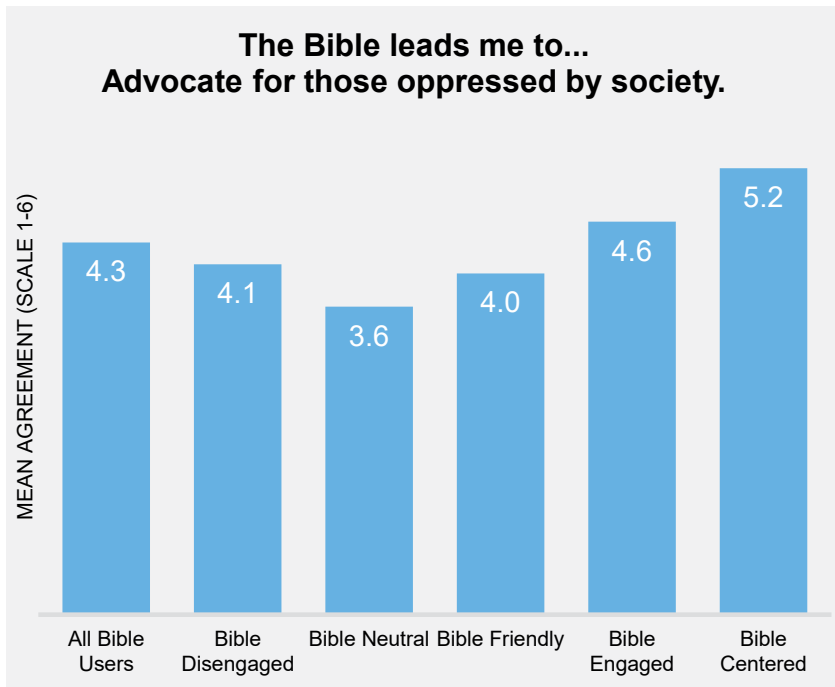
4. CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Bible Users tend to agree ($M = 4.3$) that the Bible leads them to care for the environment. Consistent with other issues in this series, agreement increases in tandem with Scripture engagement. Bible Disengaged ($M = 3.5$) and Bible Neutral ($M = 3.4$) respondents tend to agree less enthusiastically than Bible Engaged ($M = 4.7$) and Bible Centered ($M = 5.3$) respondents on this topic.



5. ADVOCATE FOR THE OPPRESSED

Finally, on average Bible Users agree ($M = 4.3$) that the Scripture leads them to advocate for those who are oppressed by society. Once more, agreement increases along with Scripture engagement. Bible Disengaged ($M = 4.1$) and Bible Neutral ($M = 3.6$) respondents tend to agree or agree somewhat, whereas Bible Engaged ($M = 4.6$) and Bible Centered ($M = 5.2$) respondents tend to strongly agree on the Bible's direction to care for the oppressed.



ENGAGEMENT IN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT

Beyond this list of five issues, Bible Users who responded to the *State of the Bible* survey in both January and June demonstrate a consistent trend. As Scripture Engagement increases, pro-social orientation and behaviors also increase. Pro-social orientation and behaviors are simply attitudes that someone might hold and actions in which someone might engage *on behalf of others* or *on behalf of society*.

Three such pro-social behaviors are engaging in the democratic process through:

1. Being aware of civic and government issues
2. Personally participating in civic and government issues
3. Submitting to government leaders

All respondents to the January *State of the Bible* survey were asked whether the Bible encouraged, discouraged, or was silent on each of these issues. Once more, overwhelming majorities of Bible Engaged and Bible Centered participants responded that the Bible encourages or strongly encourages these types of pro-social engagement in democratic government.

“Across the political spectrum..., Americans who look to the Bible for timeless wisdom are finding it.”

Almost three quarters of Bible Centered (74.4%) and Bible Engaged (71.2%) respondents indicated that the teachings of the Bible somewhat encourage or strongly encourage awareness of civic and government issues. More than two-thirds of Scripture engaged respondents affirmed the Bible’s encouragement to personally participate in civic and government issues (71.8% Bible Centered, 65.7% Bible Engaged). Nearly three-quarters of Bible Centered (73.5%) and three-fifths of Bible Engaged (63.1%) respondents also believe the Bible encourages submitting to government leaders.

POLITICAL PARTY AFFILIATION

Finally, Bible Users look to the pages of Scripture to inform their political party affiliation. Nearly nine out of ten Bible Centered respondents (88%) agree (15.7% agree, 21.3% strongly agree, 50.6% very strongly agree) that the Bible has *a lot* of influence on their political party affiliation. Two out of three Bible Engaged respondents (62% total) agreed to the same statement.

Fascinatingly, these results do not vary significantly by political identity. Bible Engaged and Bible Centered Republicans, Democrats, and Independents agree with this statement approximately equally.

Across the political spectrum and the myriad of social challenges facing the United States today, Americans who look to the Bible for timeless wisdom are finding it. Certainly, Americans come from a variety of backgrounds and face different challenges. David Brooks suggested that his transition from non-faith to faith had little impact on his worldview and political perspectives. However, the evidence suggests that when people of faith consistently interact with the Bible, it comes to inform their choices — even their political and social choices — and transform the way they relate to others.

NEXT STEPS

For Pastors & Church Leaders. Think about the social and political issues that are clearly addressed in the pages of the Bible. How are you helping your congregation understand these principles and apply them to their choices? Consider how you might empower your congregation to seek wisdom from the Bible when they face challenging choices today.

For Families & Individuals. Have you ever discussed how the Bible guides your social and political choices or how you might interact with others who do not share your opinions? These are difficult conversations, but they're worthwhile. If you need a guide, consider reading David Platt's newest book, *Before You Vote: Seven Questions Every Christian Should Ask.*

Regardless of the decisions you make, think about how your choices might be guided by Scripture in ways that benefit society and show care for others.



SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT AND THE MILITARY

Since the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in New York, the U.S. Military has seen over 52,800 Service members wounded and nearly 7,000 killed in the Global War on Terrorism. Stress from multiple deployments to combat zones has been implicated in rising levels of depression and suicidality among both Service members and Veterans. Suicide among active duty Service members has increased by 35% in 20 years, accounting for 498 deaths in 2019, according to USA Today. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention reports, “According to the Department of Veterans Affairs’ National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report (2019), the suicide rate among

Veterans is 1.5 times greater than the non-Veteran population ages 18+, with over 6,000 Veterans dying by suicide each year.”

Trauma in America, a research monograph produced by American Bible Society and Barna Group in 2020, reports that “conflicts such as wars, bombings, or other types of attacks” were a significant source traumatic stress, particularly for men. The finding suggests that Military service can cause lasting spiritual and psychological wounds for many Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, Airmen, and Coast Guardsmen.¹

America’s Veterans and Service members face daunting challenges on behalf of our nation. Research indicates that many members of the Military community turn to the Bible, their church, and their pastor or chaplain for spiritual and emotional support.

THE STATE OF THE BIBLE IN THE U.S. MILITARY COMMUNITY

Over the years, *State of the Bible* research studies have hinted at unique issues for U.S. Service members, Veterans, and their families. However, our annual *State of the Bible* surveys are designed to obtain a representative sample of *all American adults*. The U.S. Military, including all branches of service, numbers approximately 2.1 million, including National Guard and Reserve units.² Altogether, they represent only 0.82% of American adults. Veterans number

1 All branches of the U.S. Military admit men and women. These imperfect terms should be considered inclusive of all Service members, regardless of gender.

2 According to the Council on Foreign Relations, there are 1.3 million active duty service .

17.4 million, accounting for 6.8% of American adults. When we extend those proportions to our surveys, a normal *State of the Bible* project might contain responses from 40-50 active duty Service members and an additional 175-190 Veterans, one-third of whom are considered retirees after completing a career with the Military in either the senior enlisted ranks or the officer corps.³ If Service members, retirees and other Veterans were all similar to one another, that would be a minimally sufficient sample size to use in understanding their relationship to the Bible, the Church, faith, and more. In reality, though, these three groups are quite different. They vary significantly by generation, education, and even by their jobs for the Military.

80

Percent of U.S. Service members did not have a Bible when they entered the Military

To address this gap in the research, American Bible Society's Armed Services Ministry™ commissioned an in-depth 2019 study of Service members, Veterans, and their families, living within 15 miles of several large U.S. Military bases.⁴ The results of that

3 If you're careful with your math, you would expect a random sample of 2,000 American adults to include only 16-17 active duty Service members and 136 Veterans. It is not uncommon for *State of the Bible* surveys to over-represent the perspectives and experiences of Service members and Veterans by chance, rather than by design.

4 In all, 1,009 respondents completed a 15-minute online survey from June 7- July 12, 2019. Service members on active duty, National Guard, or Reserves in any of the five branches of the U.S. Military were all admitted into the survey. Veterans & retirees qualified if they displayed some level of connection to either a U.S. Military base or Veterans Affairs medical facility.

study provide key insights into the needs of Service members and Veterans.

BIBLE AVAILABILITY AND USE IN THE U.S. MILITARY

Percent of U.S. Service members were given a Bible while in the Military

83

Since its founding, American Bible Society has provided Bibles to U.S. Military Service members. In 1817, ABS presented 65 Bibles to the crew of the *USS John Adams*. Since then, ABS has supplied more than 60,000,000 free Bible resources to

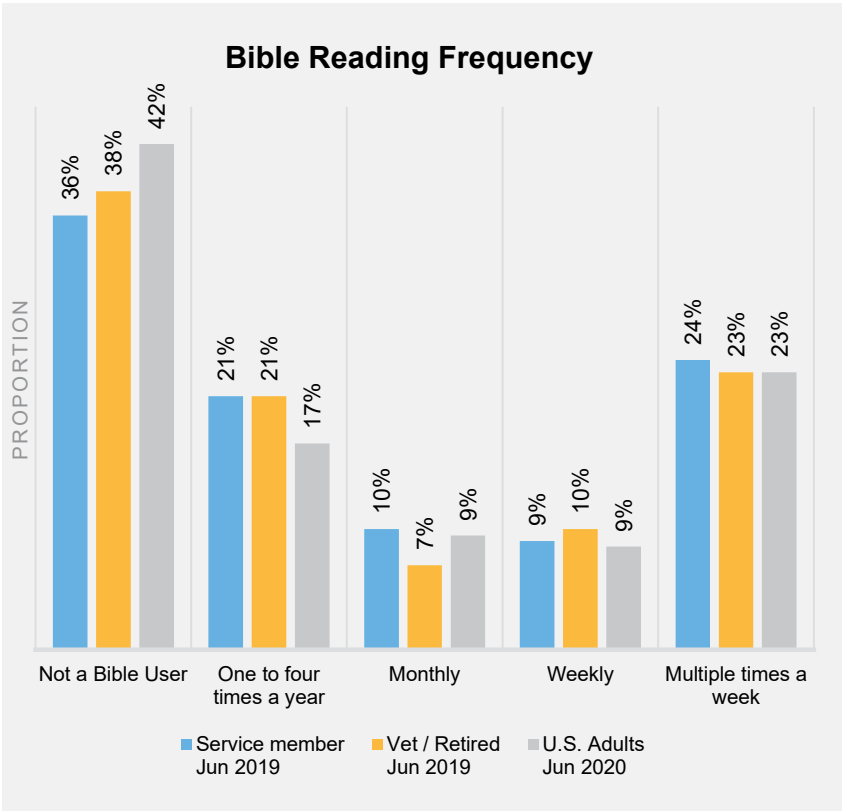
Service members, Veterans, and their families, through the Armed Services Ministry™.

Today, though nearly seven in ten Service members self-identify as Christians, only one in five (20%) say they had a Bible when they entered Military service. Probably young recruits who own a Bible often leave it behind as they head off to basic training.⁵ Still, Service members seem to desire interaction with the Bible. One-third of Service members (33%) read the Bible at least once a week. Compared to U.S. adults, Service members and Veterans

⁵ Basic training is known by various names, depending on the branch of service. For instance, the U.S. Army uses the term Basic Combat Training (BCT), while the Air Force calls it Basic Military Training (BMT), and the Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard simply call it Recruit Training. Common parlance for all of these training rotations is “boot camp.”

are significantly less likely to be say they realistically never use the Bible or that they use it less than once a year.⁶

Four out of five Service members and Veterans (83%) say they were given a Bible while they were in the Military Nine out of ten Service members (89%) who received a Bible kept it, and three out of five say they read it (13% read it a little, 19% occasionally, 19% quite often).



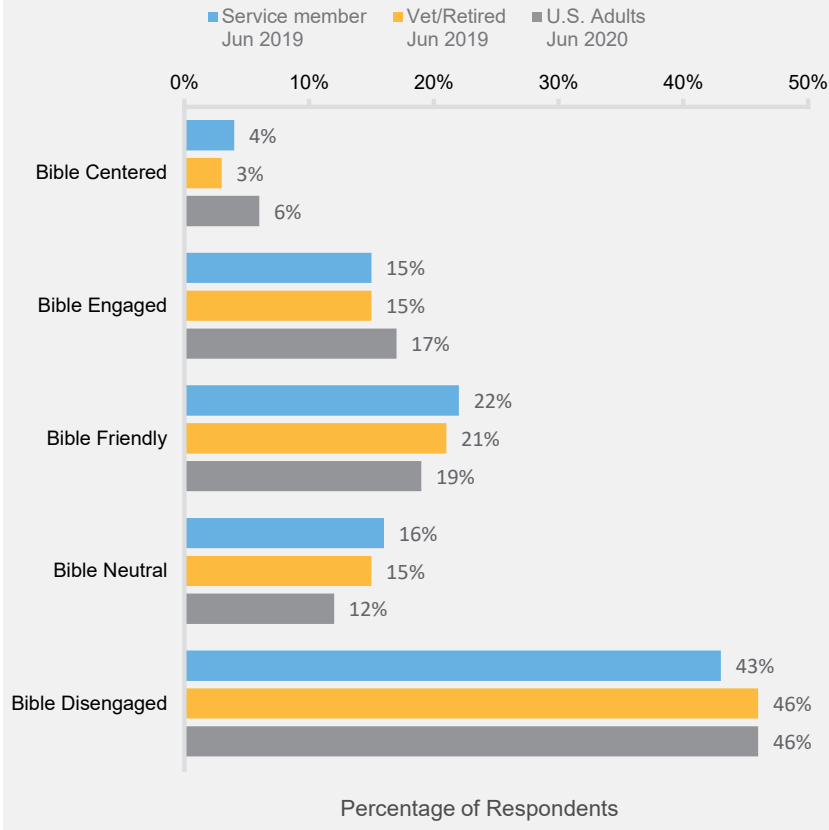
6 The following chart combines these two response options into “Not a Bible User.”

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT IN THE U.S. MILITARY COMMUNITY

At first glance, Service members and Veterans closely resemble the broader population of American adults in the domain of Scripture engagement. Generally, the U.S. Military is marginally less likely to be Bible Engaged (17% U.S. adults, 15% Service members & Veterans) or Bible Centered (6% U.S. adults, 4% Service members, 3% Veterans) and are somewhat more likely to fall into the so-called Movable Middle, with higher proportions of Bible Friendly (19% U.S. adults, 22% Service members, 21% Veterans) and Bible Neutral (12% U.S. adults, 16% Service members, 15% Veterans) respondents.

Interestingly, deployment to a combat zone seems to be related to increased Scripture engagement. Over half of Service members and Veteran respondents who have never been deployed to a combat zone score Bible Disengaged (53%), compared to 43% of Service members and 46% of Veterans overall. On the other end of the spectrum, one out of ten combat Veterans are Bible Centered (10%), compared to only 4% among all Service members and 3% among all Veterans. The likelihood of being Bible Engaged or Bible Centered increases with the number of deployments.

Scripture Engagement Segments by U.S. Military Affiliation



TRAUMA AND MILITARY SERVICE

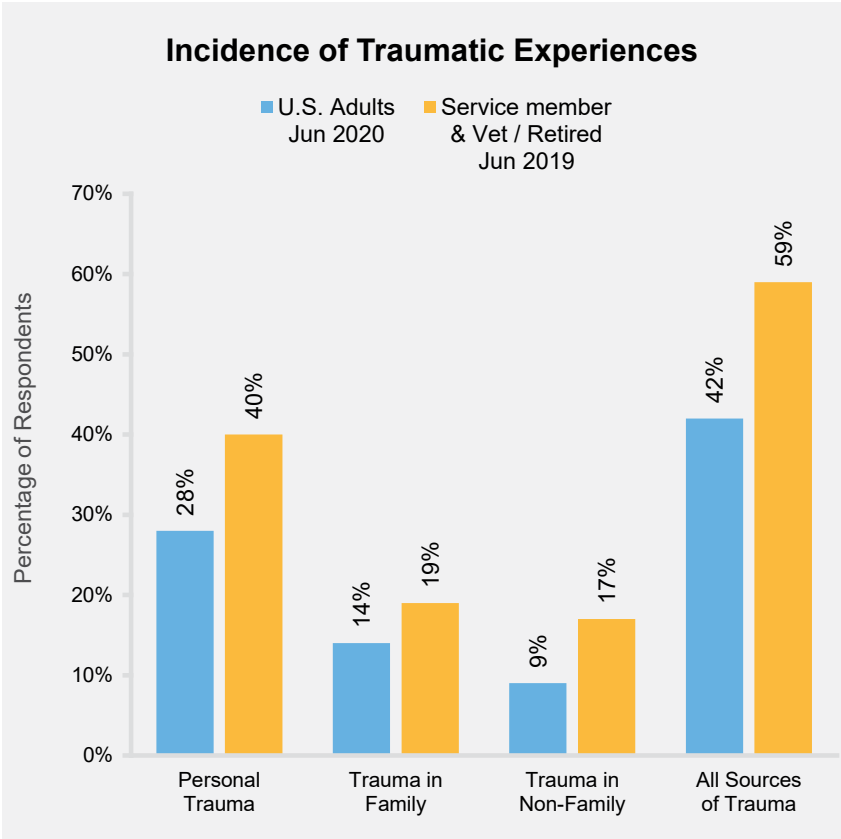
While combat deployments bring unique stresses to Service members, including family separation, decreased economic opportunities, and often spartan living conditions, they also bring with them an increased probability of physical harm and psychological trauma. Approximately 38% of the Service members in our June 2019 study described their Military job as a “combat role,” while the remaining 62% occupied non-combat or support roles. Regardless of role, though, 60% of respondents had been deployed to a combat zone at least once.

Respondents were asked whether they had “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.” In response, they could select any of the following options:

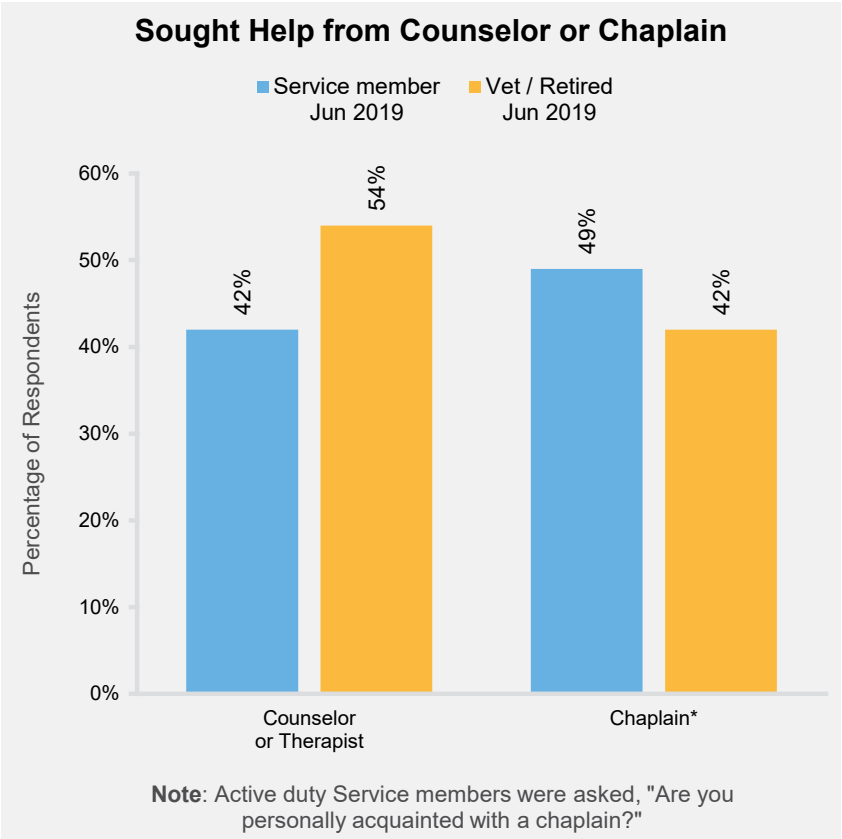
1. You personally experienced a trauma.
2. You witnessed a trauma involving an immediate family member.
3. You witnessed a trauma involving someone other than a family member.
4. None of these apply to me.

In June, the *State of the Bible* research team asked this same set of questions to a representative sample of American adults. Comparing the Military and Veteran sample to the general population is striking.

First, Service members and Veterans are 42% more likely than other Americans to have personally experienced a traumatic event. Second, they are 36% more likely to have witnessed a traumatic event involving an immediate family member. Third, they are nearly twice as likely (+89%) to have witnessed a traumatic event involving a non-family member, such as a comrade-in-arms. Overall, Service members and Veterans are 40% more likely than the general public to experience trauma from all sources.



When faced with traumatic events and other stressors, Service members and Veterans often seek help from chaplains and counselors. Over half of Veterans indicate they have sought help from a counselor or therapist (54%), while two in five Service members (42%) have similarly sought help from a mental health professional. Additionally, two in five Veterans and retirees say they have sought help from a Military chaplain. Active duty Service members were not asked if they had sought help from a chaplain; however, they were asked if they are personally acquainted with a



chaplain. Overall, half of Service members (49%) know a chaplain personally.

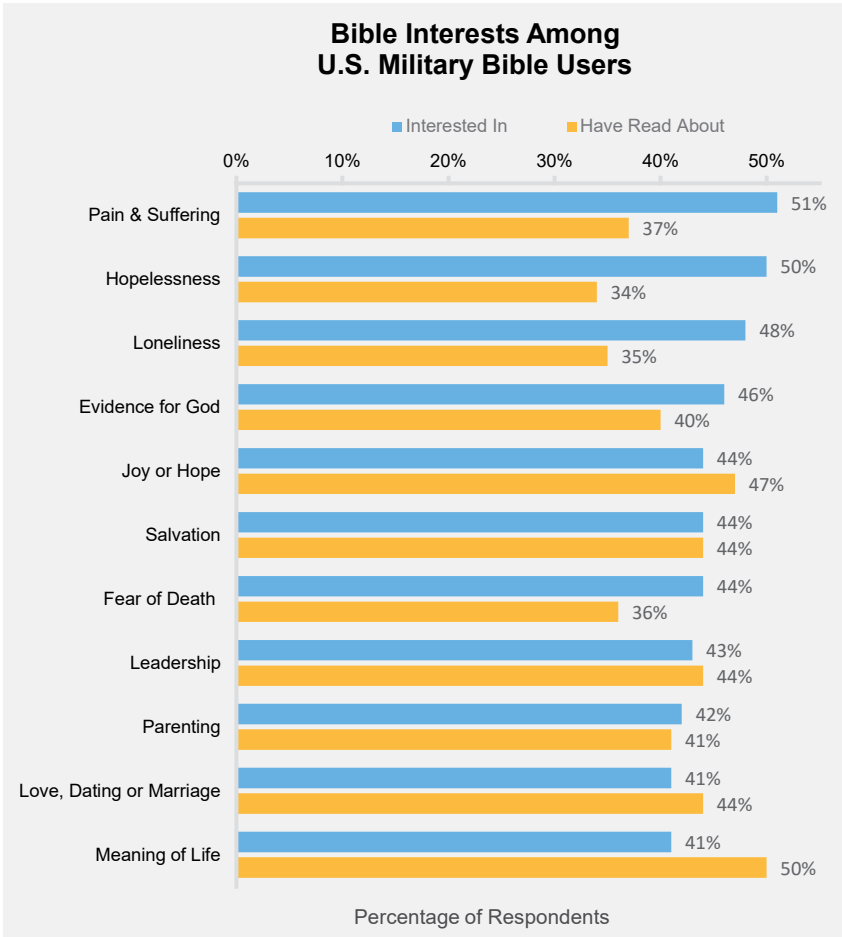
Both counselors and chaplains were seen as generally helpful by both Service members and Veterans who sought their help. Nine out of ten Veterans (89%) found their chaplains to be very helpful (53%) or somewhat helpful (36%). Similarly, four out of five Veterans (81%) found clinical counselors to be very helpful (36%) or somewhat helpful (45%), while nine out of ten Service members (89%) found clinical counselors to be very helpful (53%) or somewhat helpful (36%).

2/3

of U.S. Service members and Veterans regularly read the Bible

BIBLE INTERESTS AND EXPERIENCES

As Service members and Veterans manage the stresses of their experiences, two out of three reach for the Bible with some regularity. We asked Military and Veteran Bible Users which Bible topics they are interested in and which they have already read about. Half showed interest in pain & suffering (51%), hopelessness (50%), and loneliness (48%). Interestingly, these are also the subjects with the largest gaps between what they are interested in reading and topics they have actually explored in the Bible. Hopelessness showed a 16% gap between interest and familiarity. Pain & suffering followed with a 14% gap, and 13% of Bible Users were interested in the topic of loneliness but had not read about it from a biblical perspective.

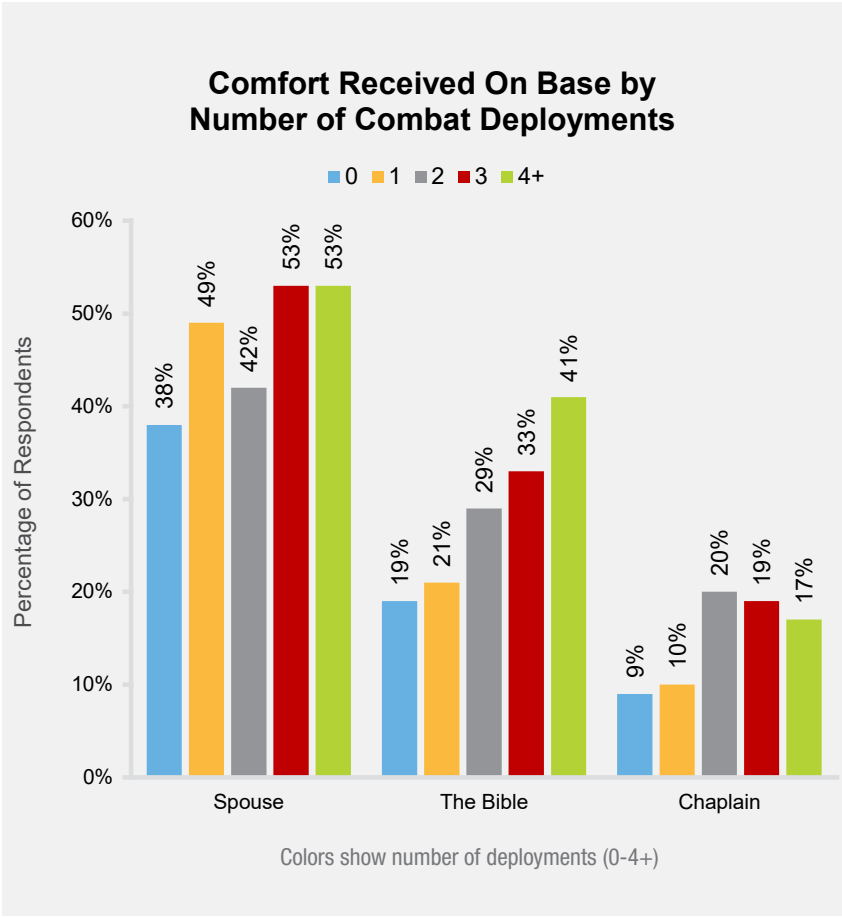


COMFORT FOR COMBAT STRESS

Service members were asked about the support they received from their community on and off base.⁷ When on base, strong majorities

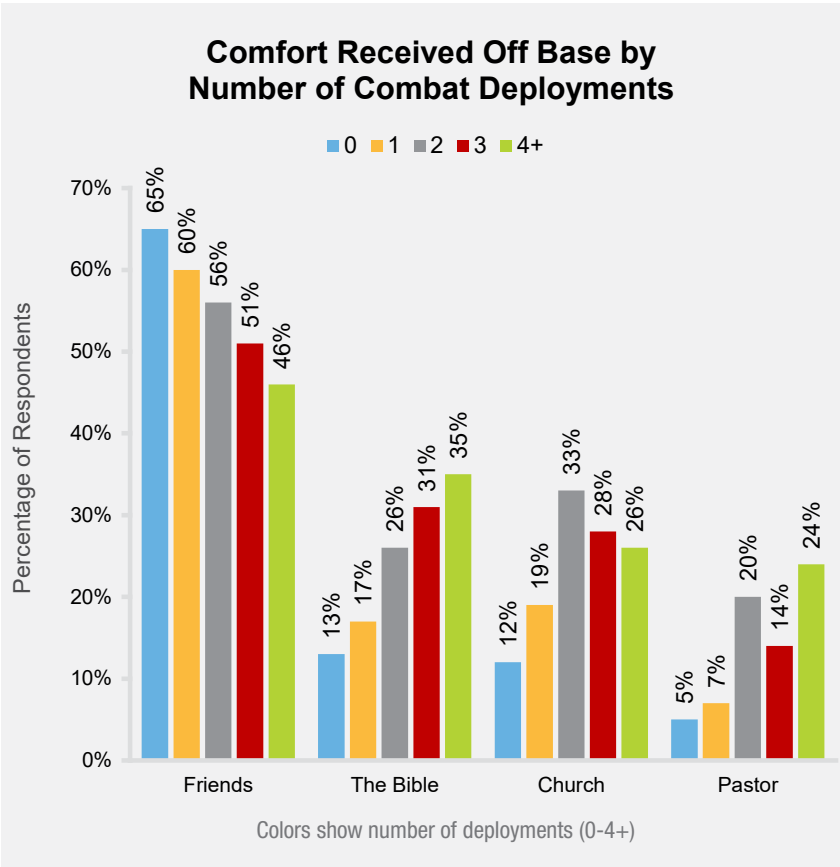
⁷ U.S. Army nomenclature would refer to being “off post” while the Navy and Air Force use the term “off base.” When Military installations from different branches are combined, they are normally called “bases” as in the case of Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state, formed by combining the

indicated they received comfort from key relationships, including friends (68%) and family (60%). Physical comfort came from exercise (50%) and food (42%). Spiritual comfort came from the Bible (26%), a chaplain (16%), and chapel services (13%).



Army's Fort Lewis and McChord Air Force Base. Throughout, we use the term "base" to refer to a base, post, fort, camp, or other Military installation.

Three of these sources of comfort increased in importance as combat deployments increased. For those who had never been deployed to a combat zone, 38% found comfort in their relationship with their spouse, 19% in the Bible, and 9% from a chaplain. However, when combat deployments increased to four or more, each of these percentages increased significantly: 53% for spouses, 41% for the Bible, and 17% for chaplains.



When Service members were asked the same question about sources of comfort when off base, their responses included the Church and their pastors. The pattern of importance related to combat deployment stress was similar. Their chief sources of comfort overall when off base included friends (58%), family (55%), spouse/partner (47%), and food (42%). Spiritual support when off base came from the Bible (21%), Church (21%), and a pastor (12%).

Four of these sources of comfort were correlated with the number of combat deployments. First, as combat deployments increased, the comfort received from friends *decreased*, ranging from 65% for those with zero combat deployments to only 46% for those with four or more combat deployments. Second, as combat deployments increased, so did comfort received from the Bible, the Church, and a pastor. Comfort received off base from spouses, family, food, alcohol, and exercise were not affected by the number of combat deployments.

HUMAN FLOURISHING, THE MILITARY, AND MILITARY FAMILIES

State of the Bible research in January provided the team with additional topics of interest. Initial data seem to indicate that Service members, Veterans, and retirees may exhibit higher levels of human flourishing across all domains than the national averages.⁸ The highest levels of flourishing were seen among retirees. Veterans came next, followed by Service members.

8 See Chapter 4: Scripture Engagement and Wellbeing, beginning on page 89 for more.

Due to limited sample size among Service members and Veterans, these topics will require further research, but several possibilities are present. It is possible that retired Veterans are financially, relationally, and personally more secure than others, in part because of their Military accomplishments and maturity.

In contrast to Service members and Veterans, the families of Service members score lower on the flourishing index than the national average. Frequent geographic relocation, family separation, and the stress of having a loved one in harm's way may contribute to significant needs in the families of Service members. It is also possible that due to separation, the trailing spouse has primary responsibility for the household and parenting. These duties may create additional stress.

CONCLUSION

U.S. Service members and Veterans face challenges that other American adults can hardly imagine. When Service members deploy to combat zones, both their Bible and their chaplains go with them, providing spiritual and emotional support where families and churches cannot go. When active duty Service members return from their deployments or leave the Military to become Veterans, the Church plays a key role in creating a caring, biblical community of hope and healing. The Church also plays an important role in supporting the families of Service members, as they face unique stresses without the resources available to their loved ones serving on active duty.

NEXT STEPS

For Pastors & Church Leaders. As you think about the members of the military, veterans, and their families in your church and community, consider how you can support them through the ministries of your church. **Armed Services Ministry™** has tools and resources that can help you make a difference. Here are two key ideas:

1. Create a veterans Bible study group.
2. Support trauma healing for veterans.

For Families & Individuals. Loneliness is an issue faced by many veterans and by members of the military who may be far from family and friends. Consider inviting a veteran or a local member of the military to join your family for Thanksgiving

For Active Military and Veterans. **Armed Services Ministry™** has crafted resources just for you and your family. Here are three ways you can find support from people who understand:

1. Take the *Military Bible Challenge*.
2. View the *God Understands* video series.
3. Start the *Journey of a Military Wife*.

All of these great military resources are available at <https://armedservicesministry.org/service-member/>



THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Let's just say it again, 2020 has been a crazy year! Most of us have faced so many challenges and difficulties that it's difficult to remember them all.

Recently, Google released the top internet searches of 2020. They were headlined by tragedies. George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery weren't widely known until the heartbreaking details of their deaths made them household names. This year we also lost Kobe Bryant, Naya Rivera, Chadwick Boseman, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who were among the most famous people in America.

Millions of us turned to our favorite news sources, searching for updates on one of the strangest elections in living memory. We obsessively followed the COVID-19 pandemic, and we collaborated, celebrated, connected, and mourned in the strange,

two-dimensional world called Zoom, when all we really wanted to do was embrace those we love.

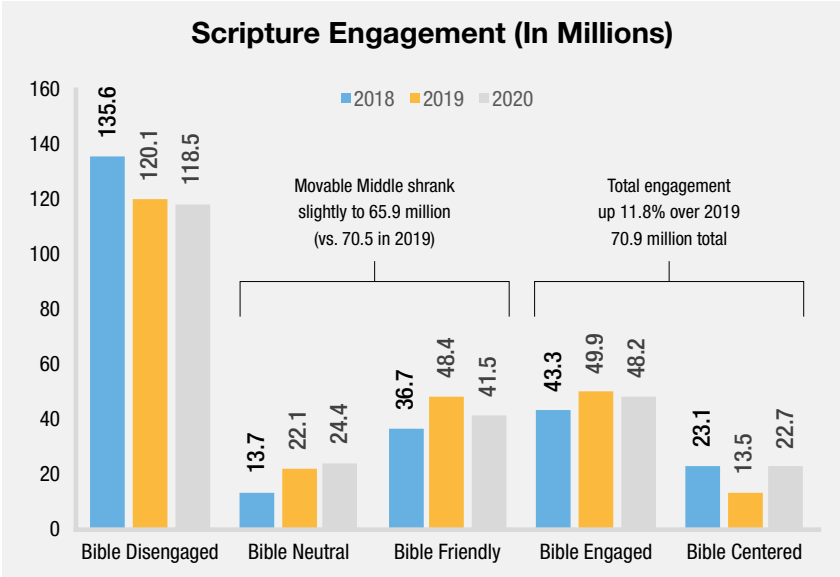
In a world marked by unrest and unbelief, many Americans turned to the Bible in 2020 and found that its message brought us closer to God and to one another. As we prepare for 2021, let's take a look back at the *State of the Bible 2020* research. First, we'll review the top findings of 2020. Second, we'll take a sneak peek at the *State of the Bible 2021*, which will launch in January.

THE TOP TEN STORIES OF 2020

With the benefit of hindsight, we now take a look back at the top ten *State of the Bible* stories from 2020. In each section, we summarize the story, present one quick visualization, and provide a link back to the original reporting, presented earlier in this ebook.

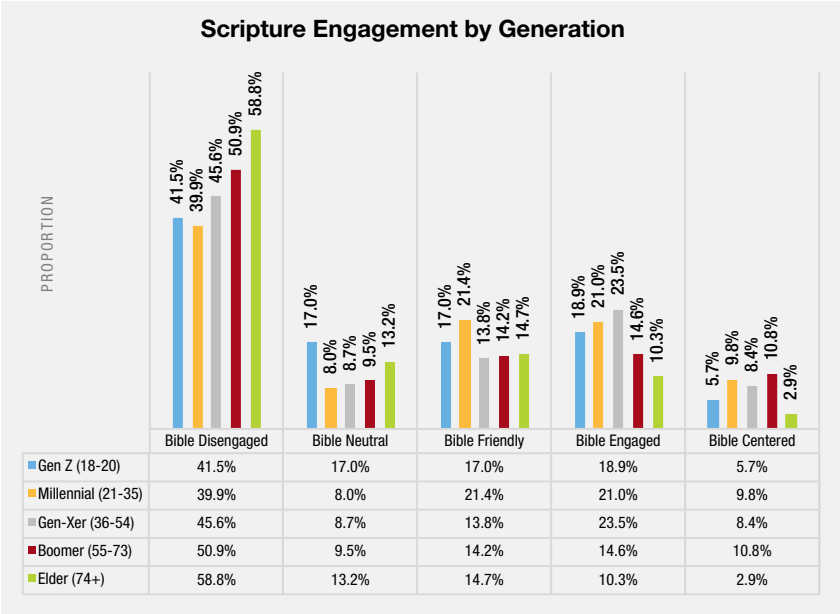
#1 — 71 MILLION SCRIPTURE ENGAGED ADULTS

At the end of a difficult year, it's easy to forget where we began. In January, we estimated that 70.9 million American adults were consistently interacting with the Bible and allowing its message to shape their choices and even transform their relationships. That number is equivalent to the combined adult populations of California, Texas, Florida, and Nebraska, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2019 population estimates. Never in the ten-year history of *State of the Bible* have we found such a large population of American adults deeply engaging with God's Word. You can read more on [page 31](#).



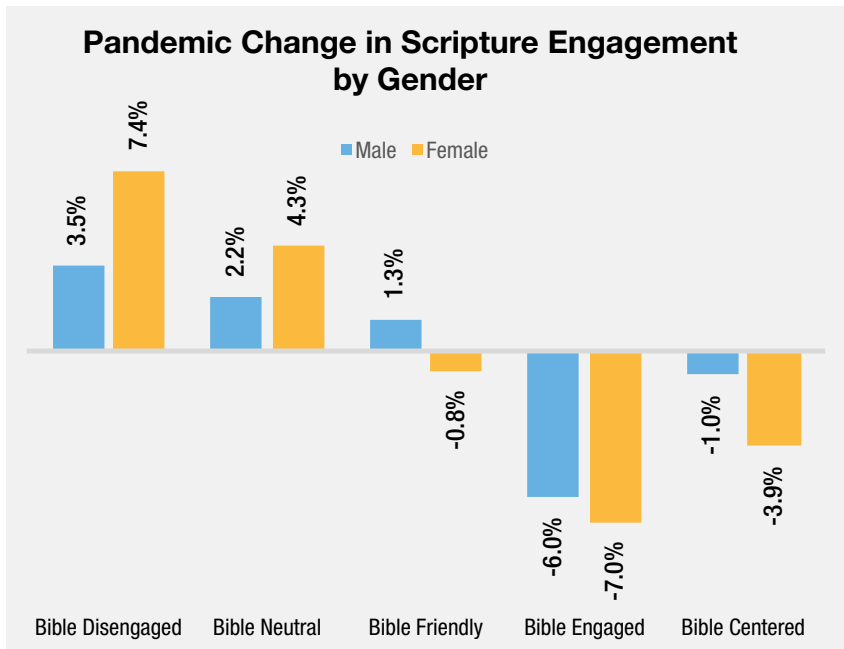
#2 — MILLENNIALS LEAD THE WAY

Next, we found that the Millennial generation (aged 21-35) is leading all other generational groups in Scripture engagement. The Millennial generation is the largest grouping of American adults, numbering 72.12 million in 2019. These young adults are the emerging leaders in America. You can read more about their relationship with the Bible, starting on [page 41](#).



#3 — COVID-19 HURT SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

Third, COVID-19 had a significant negative impact on Scripture engagement in America, especially early in the pandemic. When we compared total Scripture engagement in January to June, we saw a decrease of 13.1 million adults (5.2%; see [p. 50](#)). The data also showed that COVID-19 was particularly hard on women’s engagement with the Bible ([p. 52](#)). What we still don’t know is how Americans adjusted to their “new normal” in the second half of the year, but data being collected in January 2021 should make that picture a bit clearer.

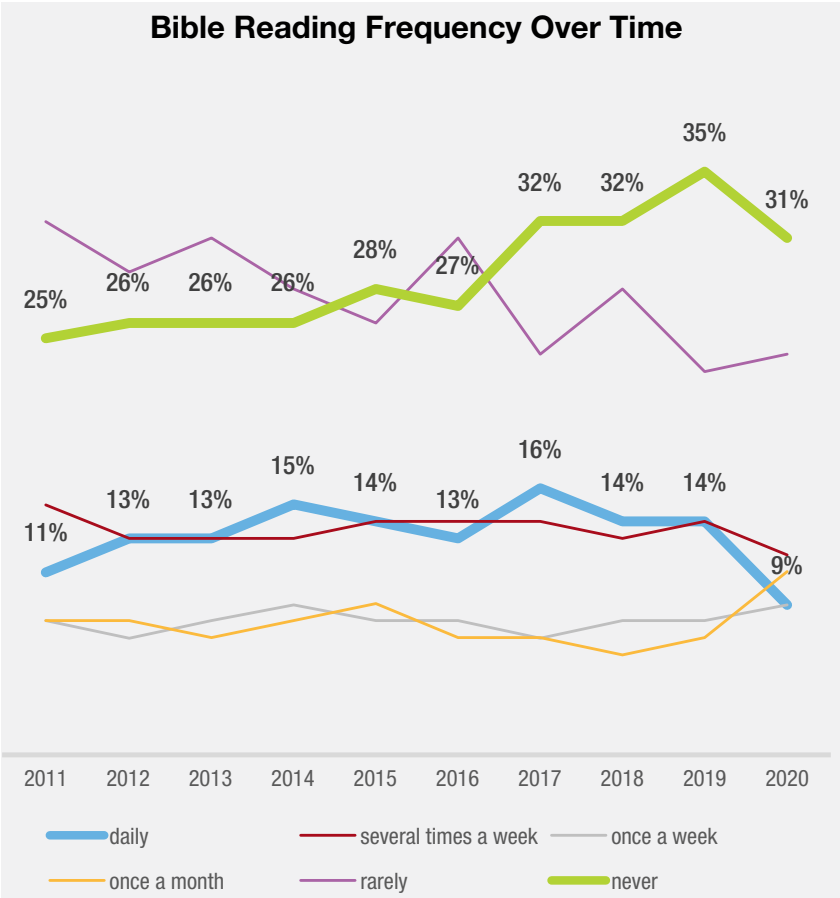


#4 — TWO BIG DOWNTURNS

The fourth big story of 2020 was seen in two big downturns. First, we saw a troubling decrease in the percentage of American adults who read the Bible daily, dropping from 14% in 2019 to only 9% in 2020. A similar, though less dramatic, downturn was seen among weekly Bible readers.

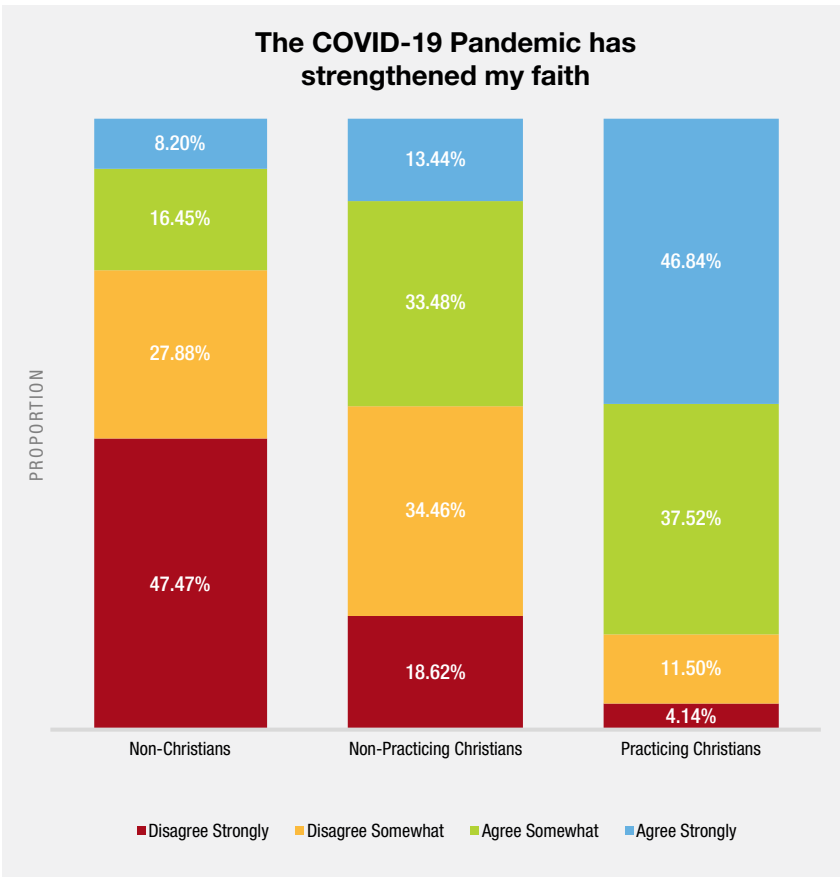
On the other end of the spectrum, the proportion of respondents who say they never read the Bible also dropped from 35% in 2019 to 31% in June of 2020. It is possible that COVID-19 accounts for both changes by disrupting the Bible interaction patterns of America’s most Scripture engaged people, and at the same time,

driving exploration of the Bible by those who might not find time for Scripture in less stressful circumstances. You can read more about these shifts beginning on [page 55](#).



#5 — THE BIBLE, FAITH, AND COVID-19

There is no doubt that COVID-19 has been hard on America — and the world — in 2020. Still, there is significant evidence that many Americans found both comfort and strength in the Bible and their connection to the Church. Nearly half of Practicing Christians (47%) strongly agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic had strengthened their faith, compared to only 13% of Non-Practicing Christians (see p. 65).



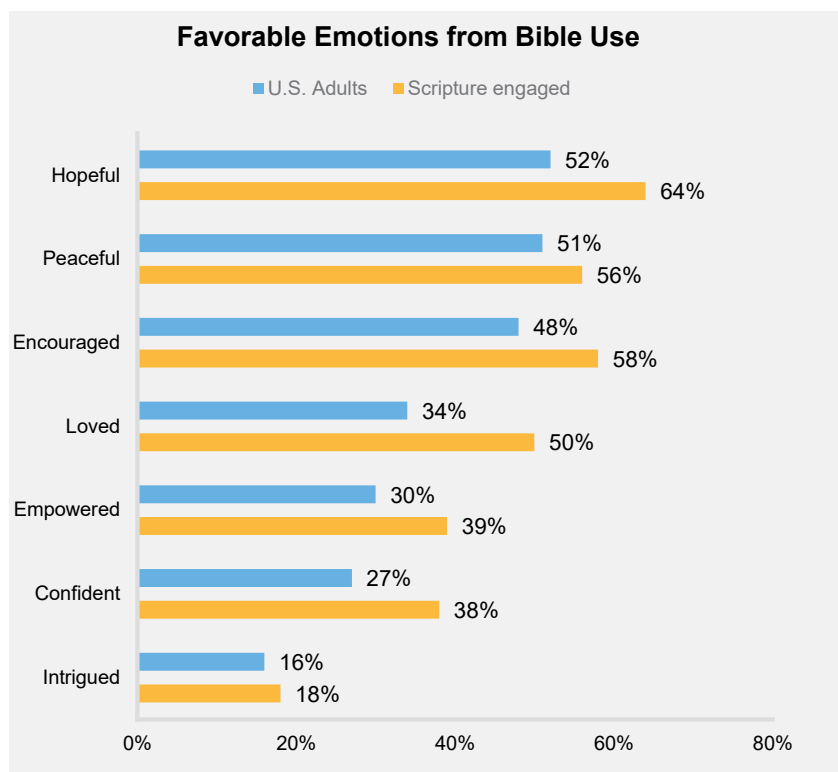
Additionally, those most affected by COVID-19 were also most likely to *increase* their use of the Bible (p. 67) and to express an increased desire for the Bible's message (p. 68).

Finally, churches provided much-needed care to those who were personally impacted by the virus. Three out of five (62%) people diagnosed with COVID-19 said their faith community was an important support to them during their illness (p. 64).

#6 — THE BIBLE AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

When the normal routines of life are disrupted, as they have been for everyone in 2020, some people might wonder why anyone would take time for the Bible. *State of the Bible* data give us at least part of the answer: the Bible helps readers take care of themselves and maintain emotional health.

The majority of Scripture engaged Bible Users say that when they read the Bible, they feel hopeful (64%), encouraged (58%), peaceful (56%), and loved (50%). You can read more beginning on page 80.

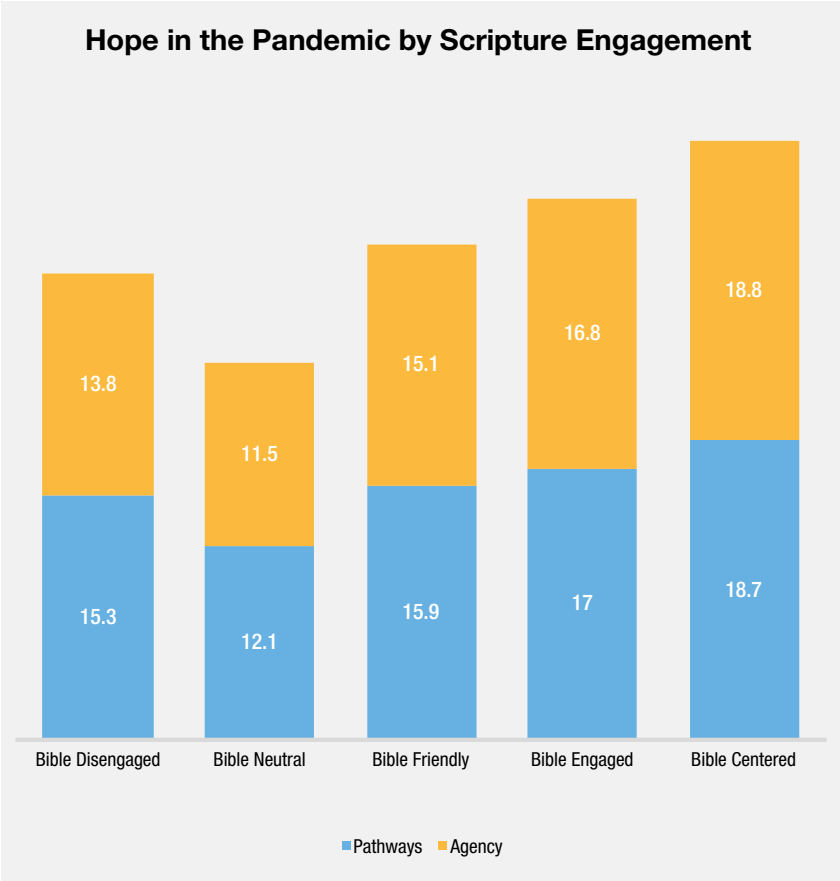


#7 — THE BIBLE AND HOPE

Beyond simply experiencing positive emotions, Scripture engaged people also experience higher-than-average levels of hope. On page 98, we discuss why researchers believe hope is an important measure of wellbeing.

In 2020, overall levels of hope among American adults fell significantly from January to June (p. 99). However, as Scripture engagement increased, hope also increased. Respondents who

scored Bible Engaged or Bible Centered had significantly higher hope scores than the rest of America (p. 101). Similarly, Practicing Christians experienced more hope than either Non-Practicing Christians or Non-Christians (p. 102).

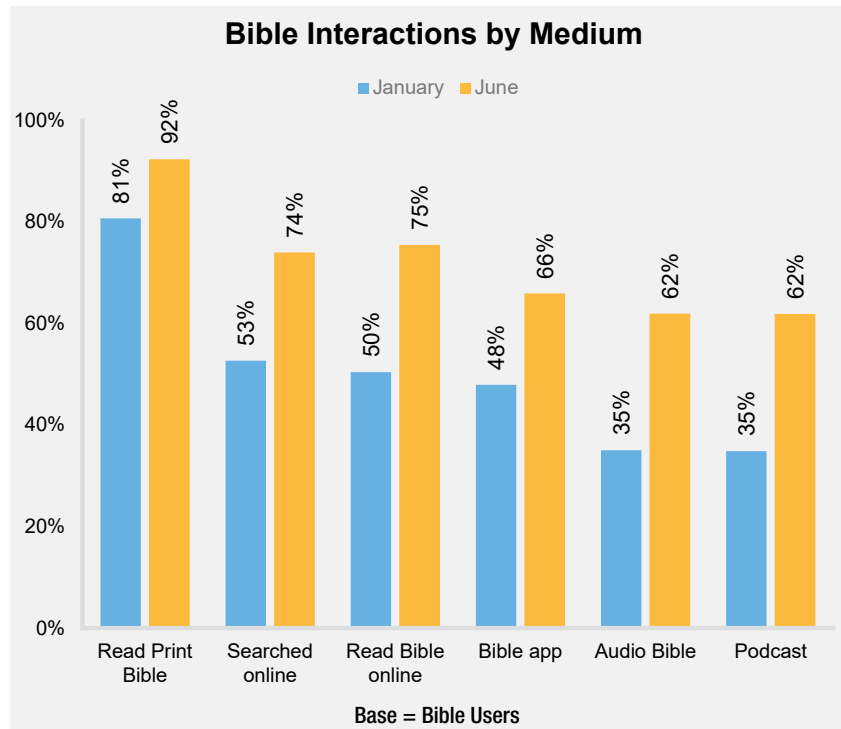


#8 — THE BIBLE AND TECHNOLOGY

In 2020, Americans continued their steady shift toward digital Bible interactions. While printed Bibles remain the most popular Scripture medium overall, audio Bibles and mobile Bible apps have become increasingly popular as supplements to printed Bibles. Most notably, among Generation Z adults, print Bibles are the least popular medium, lagging behind online Bible reading, online Bible searches, mobile Bible apps, podcasts, audio Bibles, and digital Bible reading plans (p. 116, ff.).

Between January and June, the *State of the Bible* research team estimates that 23.6 million American adults started using digital Bible apps for the first time. If all of those new Bible app users lived in a single city, it would be the fourth largest city in the world. If they all lived in the same state, it would surpass Texas as the second most populous state in the U.S.¹

¹ Based on the adult population of Texas, only.



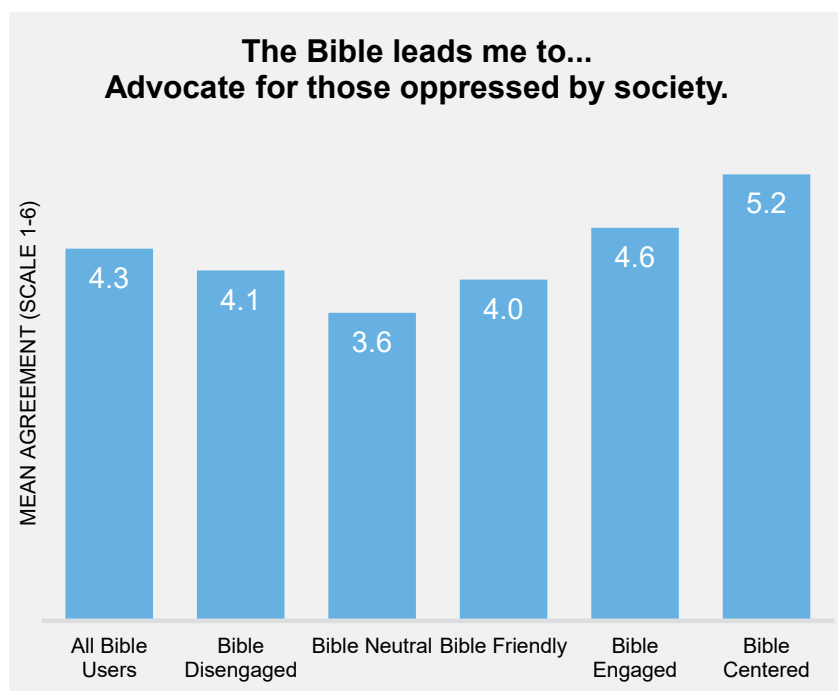
#9 — THE BIBLE HELPS MAKE GOOD NEIGHBORS

Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, the events of 2020 have highlighted significant challenges to America's social cohesion and our understanding of what it means to be a good neighbor. For Scripture engaged Americans, though, the Bible provides key guidance for how to live with others, even in the 21st century.

As Bible Users increased their engagement with Scripture, they were increasingly sensitive to the Bible's direction, encouraging them to:

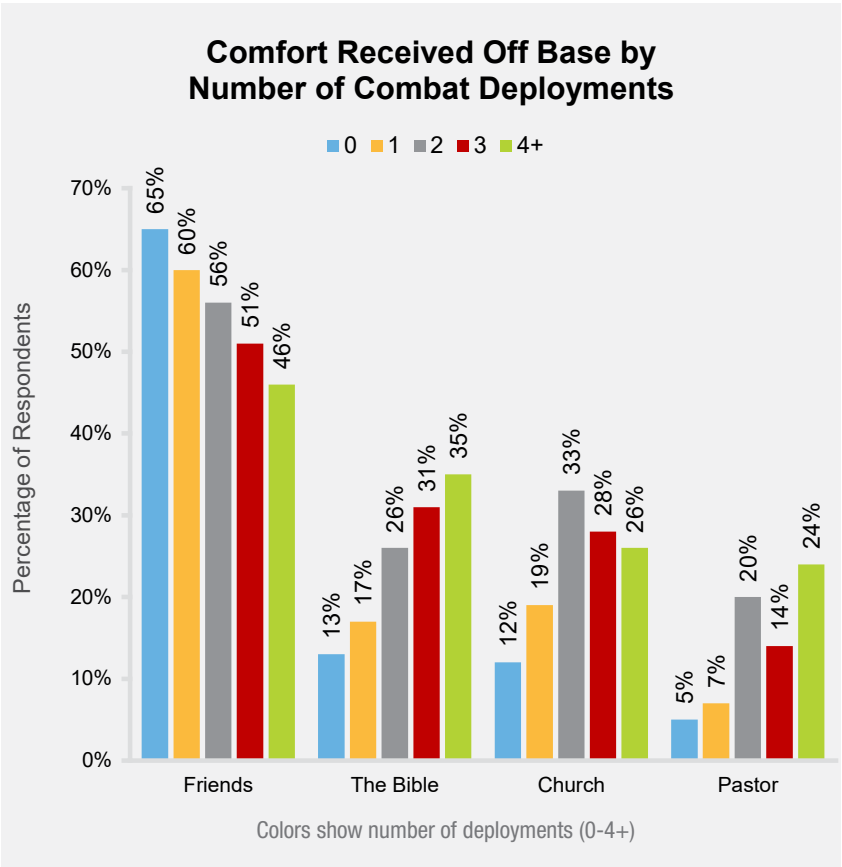
1. Welcome immigrants to their communities.
2. Befriend people of other races.
3. Befriend people of other religions.
4. Care for the environment.
5. Advocate for those who are oppressed by society.

The story of the Bible's influence on social issues begins on page 165.



#10 — THE BIBLE STRENGTHENS THE MILITARY

Finally, a special *State of the Bible* research project focused on the need for the Bible in the U.S. Military. Service members experience significantly higher levels of traumatic stress than other Americans, due to their difficult and hazardous jobs (p. 185). As combat deployments increase, active duty Service members increasingly turn to the Bible and the Church to find comfort and strength to endure (pp. 189-190).



American Bible Society's Armed Services Ministry has launched several new initiatives, focused on helping Service members, Veterans, and their families connect with God through Scripture. You can learn more at ArmedServicesMinistry.org.

PREVIEW - STATE OF THE BIBLE 2021

As 2020 comes to a close, the *State of the Bible* research team is hard at work, preparing to collect data for the *State of the Bible 2021*. Here are a few highlights of our research plan for the coming year.

#1 — A CLOSER LOOK AT GENERATION Z

Since 2011, *State of the Bible* has focused exclusively on American adults, ages 18 and older. In 2021, however, we've decided to take a closer look at Generation Z by expanding our research sample to include respondents as young as 15 years old. In June, we included responses from 204 members of Generation Z (6.8%), but in January 2021, we plan to interview 429 Generation Z respondents (14.3%). The additional 225 respondents will help us better understand the next generation of American adults and their relationship with the Bible, faith, and the Church.

#2 — FAITH AND LIBERTY IN AMERICA

In 2021, the **Faith and Liberty Discovery Center** (FLDC) will be opening to the public in historic Old City Philadelphia. It will be located on Independence Mall, within sight of the National Constitution Center, the Liberty Bell, and Independence Hall, on

land that has been described as “the most historic square mile in America.”

Timed to coincide with the FLDC’s opening, we will be asking Americans about their views on important topics like faith, liberty, justice, love, unity, hope, and democracy.

#3 — BIBLE ACCESS

In September, *Christianity Today* reported on the publication of the American Sign Language Bible, which is the product of nearly 40 years of continuous work. The release of the ASL Bible prompted the *State of the Bible* research team to question whether or not the Bible is available to everyone who wants it. So we’ll be asking about the availability of the Bible to people in the U.S., and we’ll be asking respondents where they think the Bible is needed most in the world.

#4 — TRACKING IMPORTANT TRENDS

While we will be looking for new insights, we’ll continue tracking key metrics and important trends.

Scripture Engagement will continue to be our primary focus, as we track the number of Americans who are consistently interacting with the Bible in ways that shape their choices and transform their relationships with God, self, and others.

Bible Interactions are of ongoing interest. We'll look at how frequently people are interacting with the Bible, the technology they're using to do it, and their barriers and motivations related to Bible use.

Trauma can be a serious barrier to Scripture engagement, particularly for people who believe that their worst experiences may have been a kind of divine punishment. We'll look at traumatic experiences in America and see how the Bible influences those who are dealing with the impacts of trauma in their lives.

Hope and Human Flourishing are fascinating new areas of research for the *State of the Bible* research team. Working in an informal collaboration with researchers at Harvard University's T. H. Chan School of Public Health, we will once again measure Human Flourishing and how the Bible and the Church influence the holistic wellbeing of Americans who engage with them.



METHODOLOGY

In 2020, the *State of the Bible* research teams at American Bible Society and Barna collaborated to conduct two separate but related surveys. Data for *State of the Bible 2020* were collected in the opening days of the year. The *State of the Bible: COVID Edition* research was conducted in the middle of the year. Both surveys are presented as part of the same study.

STATE OF THE BIBLE 2020

Two methods of data collection, online surveys and telephone interviews, were used for this study.

ONLINE

The online portion of the study covered the full survey questionnaire, including some items that were omitted from the telephone survey, due to length. This study included 1,010 surveys collected from a representative random sample of adults 18 and older within all

50 states and the District of Columbia. Data were collected from January 2 through 13, 2020. The sampling error for a sample of this size is ± 3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

TELEPHONE

The telephone survey, using a subset of the items from the online survey, included 1,000 interviews conducted among a representative sample of adults 18 and older from 47 of the United States and the District of Columbia.¹ The survey was conducted from January 8 through February 11, 2020. The sampling error for this study is ± 3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. All 1,000 telephone interviews conducted by contacting respondents on their cell phone.

AGGREGATED DATA

Data for core questions included in both the telephone and online studies were aggregated. The sampling error for the combined data ($n=2,010$) is ± 2.0 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, considering a U.S. population of 255,408,825 adults, as estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau on January 1, 2020.

Participants were recruited and surveyed through national consumer panels. Based on U.S. Census data, quotas were designed to ensure that the final group of adults interviewed – online and

¹ Alaska, Delaware, and Hawaii were not represented in the telephone sample but were represented in the online version of the survey.

by telephone – reflected the distribution of adults nationwide and adequately represented the three primary ethnic groups within the U.S. (those groups which comprise at least 10% of the population: white, black and Hispanic). Quotas limited responses by geographic region, gender, generation, race & ethnicity, and socioeconomic level. No other screening criteria were applied.

Post hoc analysis was employed to test whether statistical weighting of the responses to conform with the religious self-identification of Americans as described in detail by the Pew Religious Landscape Study and subsequent religious composition studies by the Pew Research Center would significantly alter the study's results with regard to religious variables, including computations of Scripture engagement, Practicing Christians, Bible Users, etc. Ultimately post hoc weighting on religious self-identification was not employed in this study.

STATE OF THE BIBLE: COVID EDITION

This study was conducted online, using a 15-minute questionnaire. The study produced 3,020 complete responses from a representative sample of adults 18 and older within all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data were collected from May 28 through June 10, 2020. The sampling error for a sample of this size is +/-1.78% at the 95% confidence level, considering a U.S. population of 255,867,605 adults, as estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau on June 1, 2020.

Participants were recruited and surveyed through national consumer panels. Based on U.S. Census data, quotas were

designed to ensure that the final group of respondents reflected the distribution of adults nationwide and adequately represented the racial and ethnic diversity of the United States. Quotas limited responses by geographic region, gender, generation, race, and Hispanic origin. No other screening criteria were applied. Post hoc weighting ensured that the sample was representative of U.S. adults in each quota area plus educational attainment and religious self-identification. The religious self-identification of Americans is described in detail by the Pew Religious Landscape Study and subsequent religious composition studies by the Pew Research Center.

INTERPRETING SURVEY DATA

The range of sampling error indicates the accuracy of the results, and it is dependent on two factors: 1) the sample size and 2) the degree to which the result under examination is close to 50 percent or to the extremes, 0 percent and 100 percent.

Readers can estimate the accuracy of survey results using the table below. First, find the column heading that is closest to the study's sample size. Next, find the row whose label is closest to the response percentages for a particular question from the survey. The intersection of the row and column displays the number of percentage points that need to be added to, and subtracted from, the result to obtain the range of error. There is a 95 percent chance that the true percentage of the group being sampled is in that range.

Note that the above statistics only relate to the sampling accuracy of survey results. When comparing the results of two subgroups (e.g., men versus women), a different procedure is followed and usually requires a greater sample size. Further, there is a range of other errors that may influence survey results (e.g., biased question wording, inaccurate data tabulation) — errors whose influence cannot be statistically estimated.

Result	100	200	300	400	500	600	800	1,000	1,200	1,500	2,000	2,500
05% or 95%	4.4	3.1	2.5	2.2	2.0	1.8	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.1	.96	.87
10% or 90%	6.0	4.3	3.5	3.0	2.7	2.5	2.1	2.0	1.7	1.6	1.3	1.2
15% or 85%	7.1	5.1	4.1	3.6	3.2	2.9	2.5	2.3	2.1	1.9	1.6	1.4
20% or 80%	8.0	5.7	4.6	4.0	3.6	3.3	2.6	2.5	2.3	2.1	1.8	1.6
25% or 75%	8.7	6.1	5.0	4.3	3.9	3.6	3.0	2.8	2.5	2.3	1.9	1.7
30% or 70%	9.2	6.5	5.3	4.6	4.1	3.8	3.2	2.8	2.7	2.4	2.0	1.8
35% or 65%	9.5	6.8	5.5	4.8	4.3	3.9	3.3	3.1	2.8	2.5	2.1	1.9
40% or 60%	9.8	7.0	5.7	4.9	4.4	4.0	3.4	3.1	2.8	2.5	2.2	2.0
45% or 55%	9.9	7.0	5.8	5.0	4.5	4.1	3.5	3.2	2.9	2.6	2.2	2.0



DEFINITIONS

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

Bible Skeptic: Individuals who believe the Bible is just another book written by men 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.

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 8 to 23 in 2020. This study includes only the adults in Generation Z: those 18 and older.
- **Millennials (1981 – 1996):** Ages 24 to 39 in 2020.
- **Generation X (1965 – 1980):** Ages 40 to 55 in 2020.
- **Baby Boomers (1946 – 1964):** Ages 56 to 74 in 2020.
- **Elders (1928 – 1945):** Ages 75 to 92 in 2020. This study considers any respondent 75 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.

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

1. identify as either Protestant or Catholic
2. attend a religious service at least once a month
3. say their faith is very important in their lives

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 above.

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. See the article on page 30 for a more thorough explanation.

Scripture unengaged: Anyone who scores below 100 on the Scripture Engagement Scale. See the article on page 30 for a more thorough explanation.

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.

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.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

State of the Bible 2020 stands on the shoulders of nine years of capable work by the team at the Barna Group. Over the years, David Kinnaman has shown deep curiosity about how the Bible influences America, and he has engaged the expertise of his all-star team of researchers in our annual investigations. This year's ebook is our homage to the Barna team's research monograph, based on the first five years of *State of the Bible* surveys. That book, entitled *The Bible in America: The Changing Landscape of Bible Perceptions and Engagement*, was released in 2016.

This year, the Barna Group research team managed survey design, supervised data collection, and performed all the data cleaning and weighting procedures for the January study. Special thanks to Brooke Hempell, Pam Jacob, and Daniel Copeland who led the Barna team's efforts and produced key reports on the January data.

Robert Briggs, president and CEO at 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 ABS to serve the Church with the highest quality data and insights we can mine.

American Bible Society's Ministry Intelligence Team was 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 ABS to lead the June *State of the Bible* study and produce this ebook report. Dr. Plake serves as the co-author of this ebook and oversees the ongoing *State of the Bible* series.

In 2019, the ABS team was blessed by the addition of Dr. Jeff Fulks, who serves as Research Manager on the Ministry Intelligence Team. Dr. Fulks brought deep insight into the world of behavioral science research and served as the lead analyst for both the January and June *State of the Bible* surveys and co-author of this ebook. He skillfully incorporated research-proven measures of flourishing, hope, and stress, and he performed countless statistical tests to uncover the story behind the numbers.

Thanks to the other members of the Ministry Intelligence Team – Carolyn Wildermuth, James McGowan, and Sandra Siggins – whose combined Tableau skills ensured that our research quotas matched U.S. Census Bureau data on the demographic characteristics of American adults. Additionally, Sandra proofread both the June questionnaire and the code that makes it work.

None of this work would have come into readers' hands without the gifted design work of Rob Giorgio and the assistance of Brian Maloney. Jefferson Lee helped redesign the stateofthebible.org webpage, based on Rob's designs and the architectural wizardry of Jeremy Proffitt. Rebecca Richman and our partners at Pinkston, led by D.J. Jordan and Knox Botsford, helped us connect the research with the broader stories in America and the interests of key media outlets.

