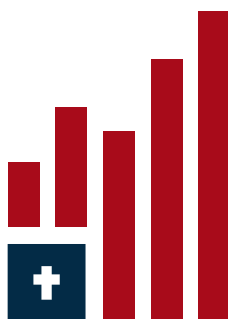


State of the Bible

USA 2024

RESEARCH FROM AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY



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STATE OF THE BIBLE 2024

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April 2024 edition

ISBN 978-1-58516-579-7

ABS item 125690

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PREFACE

BY JENNIFER HOLLORAN, DSL

American Bible Society

The annual *State of the Bible* report always takes place within a context. As we think about the last four years in the United States, perhaps it no longer surprises us when we hear that people continue to feel more distant from one another or that the experiences of grief and loss have been part of this past year's story for the majority. We may be more technologically connected than ever before, but somehow those digital interactions leave us more dissatisfied and disconnected. And the accessibility of entertainment and distractions may ease pain for the moment but cannot bring long-term relief.

At American Bible Society, we conduct our *State of the Bible* research because we want to know the hard data about these issues, as well as understand how Americans use the incredible wealth of Scripture available to them to shape and guide their lives. More importantly, we believe that the Bible can transform people and communities through its incredible message of hope and healing. When people choose *not* to use a resource with such power to change their lives

for the better, we want to understand why. Does it not seem relevant to them? Do they have trouble accessing it? Or do they just find it difficult to make it a priority in their increasingly busy lives?

American Bible Society is passionate about Bible advocacy, access, and engagement. We know that having data-driven knowledge about the current state of Scripture engagement and cultural health takes us only partway down the road to achieving our mission. The data allow us to know the current state of being. But by themselves data do not provide the answers to shifting minds and hearts so that people can see the gift of God’s Word already within their reach. We can reflect on the data all day, but it is pointless if it does not lead us collectively toward action.

This is where we must look to the church to respond. In Acts 2, we see an invitation to Scripture engagement in Peter’s very first sermon. This early engagement through instruction became a foundation of the early church as “they spent their time in learning from the apostles” (Acts 2:42). Today, encouraging and promoting Scripture use as a core purpose of the church’s outreach seems an obvious out-working of those early practices. Why then do we find our efforts to increase corporate Scripture engagement so stagnant, even among the Christ-following population?

One of the greatest barriers to effective Scripture engagement—inside and outside the church—is our lack of unity. Not uniformity in traditions or approach, but our unity in our love for the gospel and our belief that the message of Jesus transforms lives. James C. Wilhoit, in *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, puts it well: “Protecting, maintaining, and treasuring our unity is both a means

and a fruit of formation. And our desire for unity flows out of our marveling at the gospel.” Perhaps we need more time together contemplating the truth and beauty of the gospel, giving us less time to focus on the aspects of life that might divide us if we elevate them above the importance of the gospel.

More than ever, we need a united church to come together around changing the trajectory of Scripture engagement in the United States. Across the scope of Christianity in the U.S., we have churches and organizations using creative methods to help people experience the power of God’s Word applied to their lives. We need to keep reaching across traditional barriers to learn from one another so that these practices can be expanded, contextualized, and innovated further upon as we think about the future of Scripture engagement in our country.

The level of Scripture engagement in the United States remains lower than it could be with the right attention. It is no time for the church to become complacent. We should see this moment of declining Scripture engagement as the time to grow in our ability to work together as the body of Christ. It’s not just the health of the church that depends on it. It’s millions of individual lives that will otherwise miss out on the transforming power of Christ. ■



JENNIFER HOLLORAN, DSL

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



OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE GOSPEL

BY JOHN FARQUHAR PLAKE, PH.D.

American Bible Society

This year marks the fourteenth consecutive year for American Bible Society's *State of the Bible: USA* study. Over that period (2011–2024), our research team has chronicled the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic; has shown how Scripture Engagement is strongly associated with overall well-being; and has discussed the impact of the Bible on behaviors including generosity, neighborliness, and evangelism, among other important topics.

OPPORTUNITY IN THE MOVABLE MIDDLE

After 35,000 interviews with typical Americans, we have learned about the **Movable Middle**, a group of 65 million American adults who are open to the message of the Bible, curious to know more about what it says, and interested in learning more about Jesus

Christ. I often think of the Movable Middle as “Bible test drivers” because they are willing to give the Bible a chance. Consequently, they represent a tremendous opportunity for the church precisely because they’re leaning in.

The Movable Middle has five basic characteristics that we have enumerated in previous editions of our *State of the Bible* research:

1. **They are interested in the Bible on their own terms.** In other words, they have questions, and they’re open to considering the Bible’s wisdom for their lives.
2. **They struggle with the language and culture of the Bible.** Their cultural and historical distance from the Ancient Near East makes it challenging for them to understand the Bible’s wisdom and apply it to a modern context.
3. **They prefer modern-language translations of the Bible** because these are more accessible to them.
4. **They need a guide and welcome the church to help them** find what they’re looking for in Scripture and apply it to their situation.
5. **They want to emulate a heritage of faith.** Often, they are related to or acquainted with someone they see as a “Bible person” in a way that they admire. They long to become more like that Bible person, but they don’t know where to start.

While these five characteristics of the Movable Middle might be sufficient to spark your creativity, many of our readers still wonder where to find and how to serve this audience. So let’s dig a bit deeper into where you can find the Movable Middle. Here are a few facts . . .

The Movable Middle is . . .

50% Male & 50% Female (though only 4 in 10 Scripture Engaged Americans are men).

More likely to be Gen Z or Boomers. Millennials are more likely to be Bible Disengaged, while Gen X is more likely to be Scripture Engaged.

More likely to be Black or Hispanic.

Self-identified as Christian, usually a Non-Practicing Christian from the Evangelical, Mainline Protestant, or Historically Black Protestant traditions.

More likely to be living in the South.

Churched and unchurched. While a whopping 42 percent (27.2M) of the Movable Middle are currently unchurched, that leaves **more than half who have a church connection**. Many say they've attended a church service (in person or online) in the past week (31%), month (16%), or the past six months (11%).

The Movable Middle is everywhere, representing one in four American adults, and we have an opportunity to help them take their next step with God through deeper engagement with the Bible. We have identified several key opportunities to minister to those people who are more likely than average to be in the Movable Middle. As researchers, we would say that these groups “over-index” for being open to the gospel message. In short, *people are more open to God’s Word when facing disruptions, whether positive or negative*. Here are just a few:

1. **People dealing with anxiety and other emotional needs.** Approximately 45 million American adults have an anxiety disorder, and we estimate that nearly 12 million of them are also in the Movable Middle.
2. **People struggling with uncontrolled anger.** Approximately 1 in 12 American adults struggles with anger that can harm their relationships with spouses, children, co-workers, and even strangers. Many turn to God for help with their temper, and the Bible can provide wisdom and strength in their distress.
3. **People dealing with loss and grief.** When one person dies, a much larger family and community typically faces grief and loss. Each year over 450,000 American adults die, and many of them leave family and friends who are grieving without hope. The gospel speaks to their pain.
4. **People building romantic relationships.** Each year nearly 2 million adults in America get married. Based on an analysis of data from Bible reading plans on the popular YouVersion Bible app, we’ve learned that many of them are in the

Movable Middle and turn to the Bible for wisdom to help their relationships thrive.

5. **People graduating and starting something new.** Between high school and college graduations, each year nearly 8 million young adults celebrate a milestone and look to a promising but uncertain future. At times of transition, many look to God for blessing and to God’s Word for wisdom.
6. **People facing major decisions.** Though we don’t have precise numbers, we know that people in the Movable Middle face key decisions all the time. “Do I take this job offer or look for something else?” “How can I become a better parent?” “Am I on the right path?” God’s Word offers time-tested wisdom for decision-making.

Perhaps in a bygone era it was possible simply to hand a Bible to a person facing disruptions like these. But it has always been more effective to help people hear from God through his Word (the Bible), his Spirit (in prayer), and his people (in Christian community). The Bible plays a critical role in helping people hear God’s voice and enjoy the benefits of life in relationship with him.

The challenge facing all of us in the church is to be the guides that these Bible test drivers are seeking. We must work to understand the needs of each person and carefully present them with the hope that is found in God’s Word.

STATE OF THE BIBLE: USA 2024

Throughout 2024, the *State of the Bible* research team will be presenting a new set of findings from our January 2024 national survey. Each month from April through December we will release a new chapter focusing on key aspects of America's relationship with the Bible, faith, and the church. Here are some of the stories we will be releasing in the coming months:

2024

APR

The Bible in America Today. Our first chapter tracks key metrics about Scripture engagement, Bible use, perceptions of the Bible, and overall spiritual vitality in America. We'll also examine the social impact of the Bible and motivations for Bible use today.

2024

MAY

Faith and Technology. In May, we'll be bringing you a new look at how Americans think about the advent of generative artificial intelligence (AI), specifically as it touches the church and the Bible. Additionally, we'll take a close look at how church attendance patterns and Bible reading practices are changing in the post-COVID world.

2024

JUN

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

2024

JUL

The Bible and Neighboring. The influence of the Bible extends beyond what people think about God or where they choose to worship. It also guides readers' interactions with others. In this chapter we look at how the Bible informs neighboring in America.

2024

AUG

The Church in America. In recent years, researchers have documented major shifts in Americans' church attendance and attitudes toward the church as an institution in society. We'll examine positive and negative perceptions of the church and will provide a profile of the religiously unaffiliated—the Nones.

2024

SEP

Restoring Hope. America is facing a rise in emotional distress, including anxiety, depression, and suicidality, especially among young adults. In September, we'll prepare for the back-to-school season by profiling Generation Z and discussing how appropriate Bible engagement can restore hope for those who are struggling.

2024

OCT

Dealing with Disappointment. When hardships come, some people believe God is punishing them, while others see God as helping them through their difficulties. In October, we will explore the ways that the Bible helps people cope with hardship, and we'll look at societal and cultural pressures on faith, Bible engagement, and the church.

2024

NOV

Loneliness and the Bible. As the holidays approach, many people will feel a profound sense of loneliness. In November, we will look at loneliness in America and will see how the Bible and the church invite people to belong in God's family.

2024

DEC

The Bible and Philanthropy. December is the season of giving in America. Here we will examine the Bible's influence on generosity. We'll provide a year-in-review summary of our most important stories of 2024, and we'll look ahead to our research agenda for 2025.

Finally, throughout this year's ebook, you'll notice that we're including **extended content** that links outside the report itself. We'll be interviewing experts on subjects like the Bible and artificial intelligence, loneliness, best practices for healthy churches, and more. We'll kick off that extended content next month, and we hope you'll engage with *State of the Bible* through our traditional report, blogs, and even video interviews. There's much more to come!

CONCLUSION

As you read our 2024 report, I invite you to prayerfully consider how this research presents opportunities for the gospel in America. What is God challenging you, your church, or your organization to do in response to the needs of our nation? If we meet the opportunities that are presented by the Movable Middle, we can see a new generation connected to God through his Word. We can see a steady erosion of Bible engagement reversed with God's help.

Fundamentally, the *State of the Bible: USA* research project is more than an objective description of America's spiritual state. It is an invitation and a challenge for all of us who care about the Bible to ensure that it is understandable and meaningful to our neighbors. ■



JOHN FARQUHAR PLAKE, PH.D.

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

Dr. Plake serves as Chief Program Officer at American Bible Society and is the editor-in-chief of the *State of the Bible* series. Over 34 years of full-time ministry, John has served as a pastor, missionary, professor, and researcher.

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

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THE BIBLE IN AMERICA TODAY

According to a recent poll by YouGov, well over half of adult Americans (56%) say 2023 was a “bad” or “terrible” year for the country. About two in five (41%) call it “one of the worst years in American history.” You might already be weighing all the international, political, and social issues that might cause so many people to say that.

As bad as that sounds, however, a much smaller portion (27%) had a “bad” or “terrible” year *personally*. A substantial majority (71%) considered *their* year at least “OK,” with one in nine (11%) saying it was “great.”¹

This is always the challenge faced by pollsters: getting both the big story and the small story. With *State of the Bible*, we follow the big trends—how many millions are reading the Bible, going to church,

¹ Journalist, J. B. (2023, December 21). *What Americans thought of 2023, both for the country and for themselves*. YouGov. <https://today.yougov.com/politics/articles/48237-what-americans-thought-of-2023-expect-from-2024-poll>



More Christians
are thriving in their
spiritual growth.

or donating—but also the personal implications. Is the Bible changing people’s lives? Are they meeting God there?

Our survey is conducted each January, so responses generally reflect the reality of the previous year. And the big headlines from the 2024 poll are not good, though not terrible. People are interacting with the Bible a bit less than the previous year. While about the same number of people meet our criteria to be Scripture Engaged, there’s migration from the Movable Middle category to the Bible Disengaged. Even the scores on the Spiritual Vitality Gauge are slightly down.

But people are still interacting with Scripture and discovering its hope, comfort, and power. More Christians are thriving in their spiritual growth. More young adults report being transformed by the Bible’s message. We find joys as well as challenges in the data.

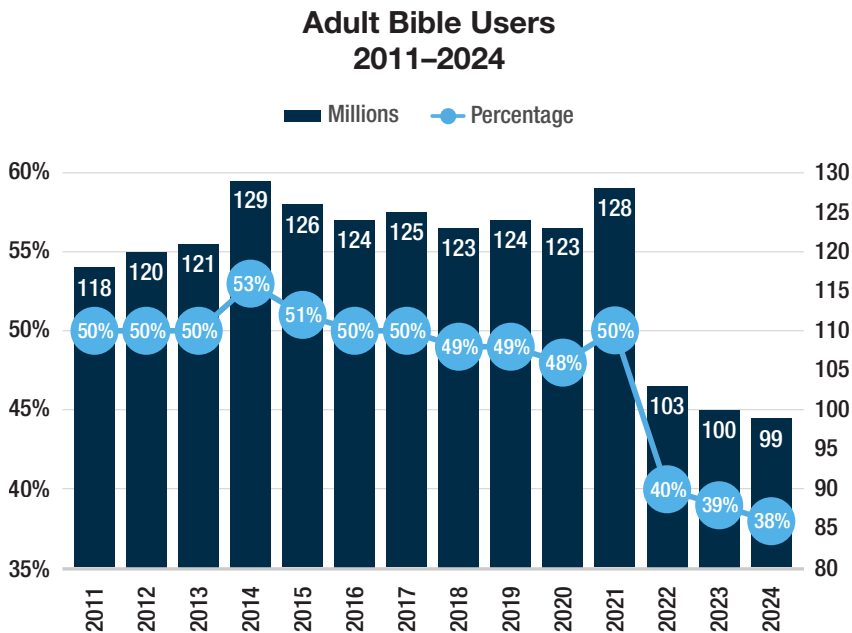
BIBLE USE

Bible Use—whether daily, weekly, or three to four times a year—is slightly down from last year.

We designate those who interact with Scripture at least three or four times a year (apart from services at church) as Bible Users. “Using” the Bible might seem like strange terminology, but people connect with the Bible in different ways these days. Some listen to Bible recordings or Scripture songs, while others do online searches or use app-based devotionals. There are also formats for those with

impairments of sight or hearing. We ask about *using* the Bible so we don't miss any of those interactions.

A few years ago, half of Americans were Bible Users (50%) and three in ten “never” used the Bible (29%). We reported a rather drastic shift in our 2022 survey—Bible Use tumbling by ten points (down to 40%) with non-users increasing by that same amount (up to 40%). Surveys in these last two years have seen minor variations in those numbers, with Bible Use inching downward.

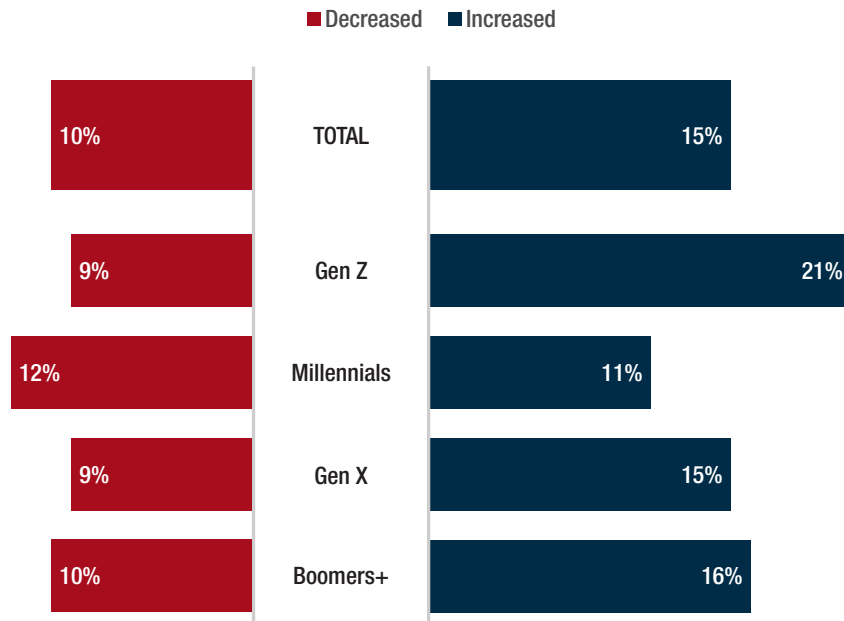


Perhaps you hoped that the drop in Bible Use reported in 2022 was a temporary blip, possibly a result of the pandemic, and that we would soon bounce back. Two years later, we see that a course correction has not yet occurred.

Still, when people are asked whether their Bible use has increased or decreased in the past year, they are substantially more likely to say it has *increased*. The vast majority report no change, but self-reported increasers (15%) outnumber decreaseers (10%). This happens every year, even when the overall Bible Use numbers go down. (Even in our 2022 survey, when Bible Use dropped precipitously, 13% said they read it more, and 10% less.) This probably indicates that people *want to think* they've been reading the Bible more, whether or not they really have been.

Increase/Decrease in Bible Reading²

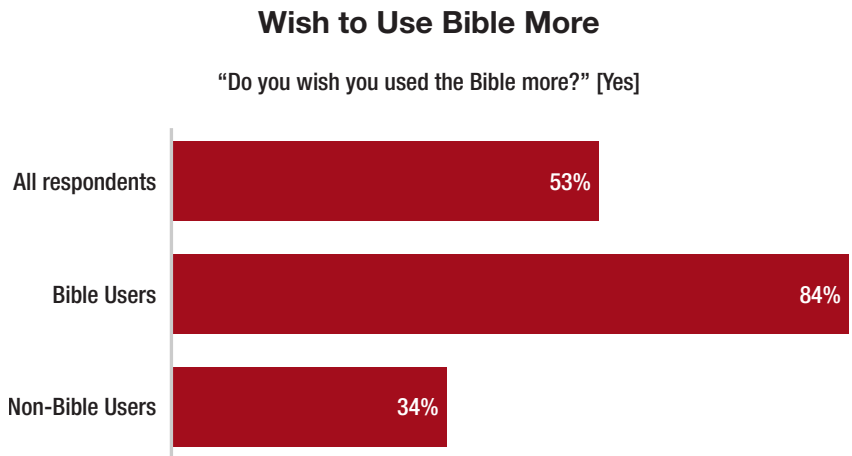
Compared to last year, my personal use of the Bible has



² On some questions, like this one, the Elders (age 79+) have such a small sample size that the statistics are unreliable. In these cases, we are grouping them with the Boomer generation.

It's notable that more than a fifth of Gen Z adults (21%) say they've increased their Bible use, more than twice the number of those claiming a decrease (9%). On the other hand, Millennials were the only age group in which more said they had decreased (12%) than increased (11%).

Some people turn against the Bible. They don't read it, and they don't feel bad about not reading it; they have no desire for it, and some even resent the place it has in public life. But that's not what we see in these responses. The self-reporting of increased Bible reading, even if it is overly optimistic, suggests that the Bible still has a positive place in many people's minds. We also see this in another survey question: "Do you wish you used the Bible more?"



More than half of American adults (53%) say yes, they do wish they read the Bible more. Even among those who don't qualify as Bible Users, people who don't interact with the Bible even three times a year, more than a third of them *wish they did*.

Our findings about people's wish to read the Bible more hint that all is not lost. In a majority of Americans there is still the desire for the Bible.

This provides some helpful context to the general story of decline in the standing of America's faith. Author Aaron M. Renn, for instance, examines the status of American Christianity in recent decades and suggests that we've lived through a "positive world" (1964–1994) and a "neutral world" (1994–2014), and have now entered a "negative world," in which the dominant culture opposes the church.³ *State of the Bible* data confirm a recent decline in Bible use, Scripture engagement, and church attendance. But our findings about people's wish to read the Bible more hint that all is not lost. In a majority of Americans there is still the desire for the Bible.

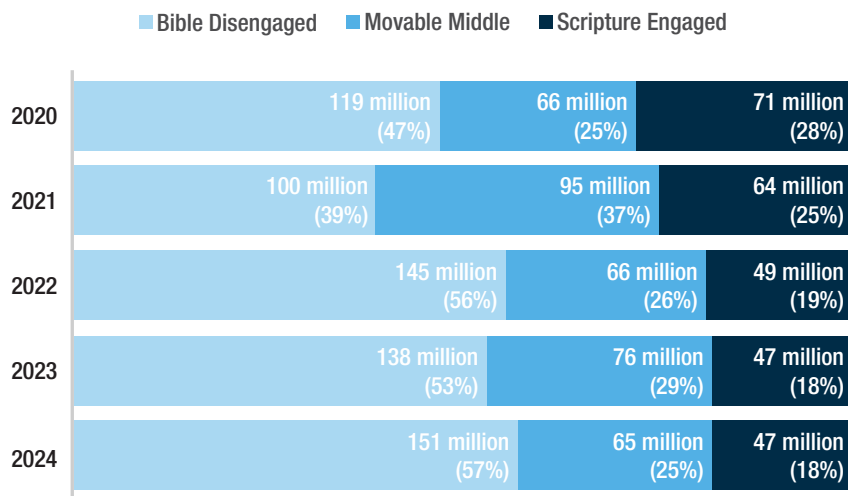
SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

The number of American adults who are Scripture Engaged has held steady in the past year at about 47 million (18%), but there is movement in the Movable Middle. This in-between group lost four percentage points in the last year (29% to 25%). This represents more than 10 million people who dropped into the lowest category, the Bible Disengaged.

Last year it seemed the Movable Middle was surging, perhaps moving toward greater engagement, but the 2024 statistics go back the other way. The percentage of Bible Disengaged is now at its highest point ever.

³ Renn, A. M. (2022, February 1). *The three worlds of evangelicalism*. First Things. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2022/02/the-three-worlds-of-evangelicalism>

U.S. Scripture Engagement, 2020–2024



The Scripture Engagement formula weighs responses to fifteen questions in three areas: *Frequency* of Bible reading; *Impact* on one’s relationship with God and others; and *Centrality* of the Bible in decision-making. The drop in the past year comes from the Impact questions. These include matters of generosity, loving behavior, and one’s sense of connection with God. There was a major drop in these scores among the Bible Disengaged, suggesting that the Impact responses knocked many from the Movable Middle into the bottom category.

Frequency of Bible reading, as we’ve seen, has decreased only slightly. Centrality of the Bible in decision-making has remained steady—so apparently people are using the Bible as a guidebook for life at about the same level as they did last year. Yet, for millions of people, the Bible is not leading to a greater connection with God or more loving behavior toward others, at least as much as it did a year ago.

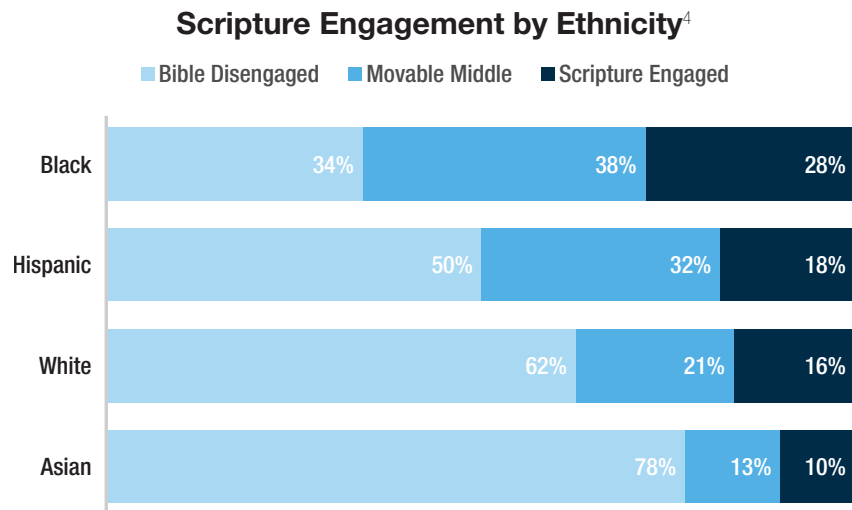
Taking a deeper dive into the **demographics** of Scripture Engagement, we find . . .

. . . Black Americans leading again in Scripture Engagement

. . . Evangelicals most likely to be Scripture Engaged

. . . the South as the strongest region by far for Scripture Engagement

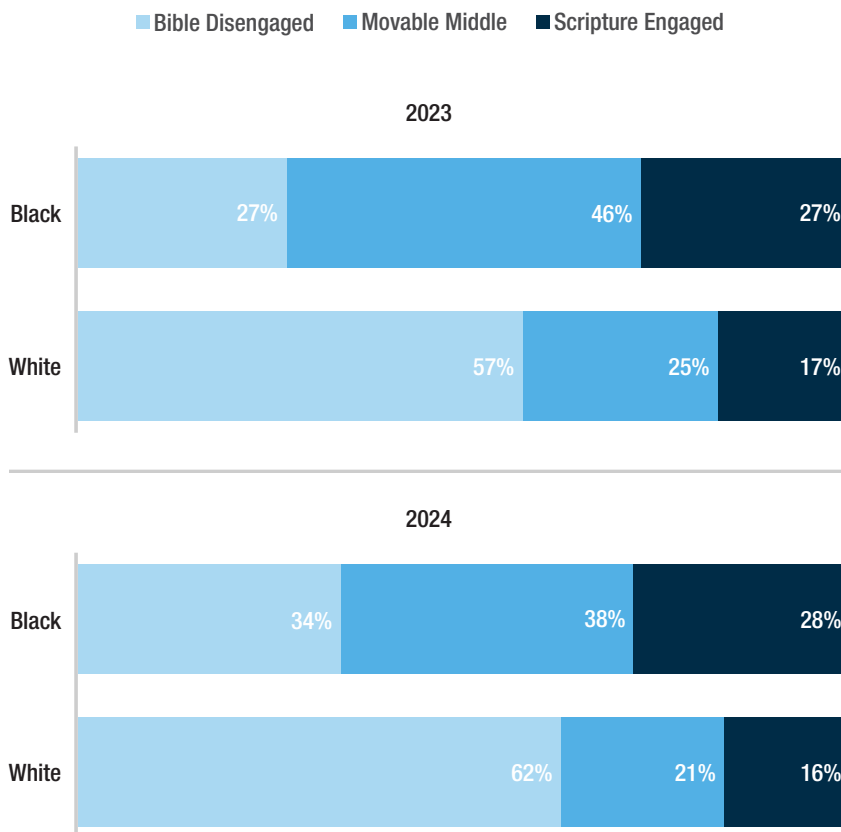
. . . Boomers as the generation most likely to be Scripture Engaged



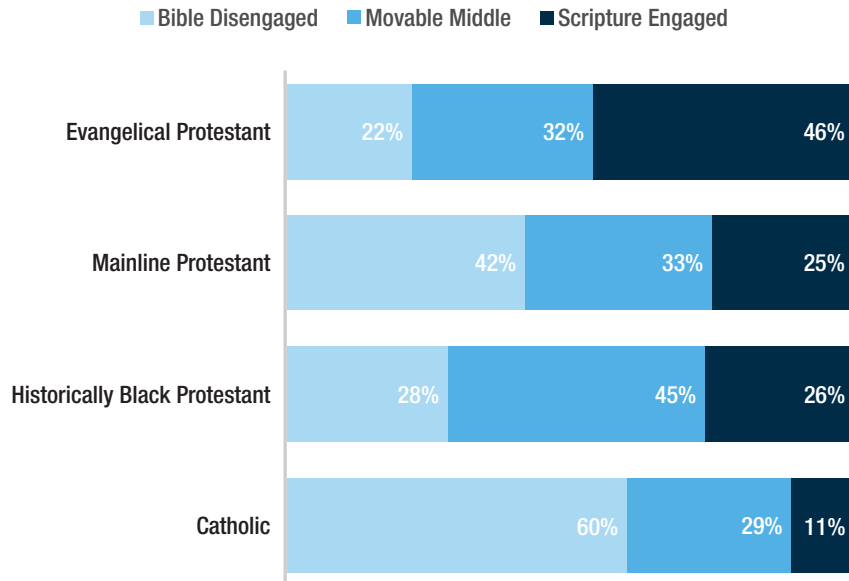
⁴ The Black, White, and Asian categories include only non-Hispanics. The Asian category includes Pacific Islanders. Other groups are included in the survey, but the sample sizes are too small to be reported here.

More than a quarter of Black Americans (28%) are Scripture Engaged, far outpacing any other ethnic group. They also have a much larger percentage in the Movable Middle (38%). This population also had a slight uptick in Scripture Engagement from last year (from 27%), while White Americans had a slight downturn. Both those groups had a substantial slide from the Movable Middle to the Bible Disengaged.

Black and White Americans' Scripture Engagement, 2023–24



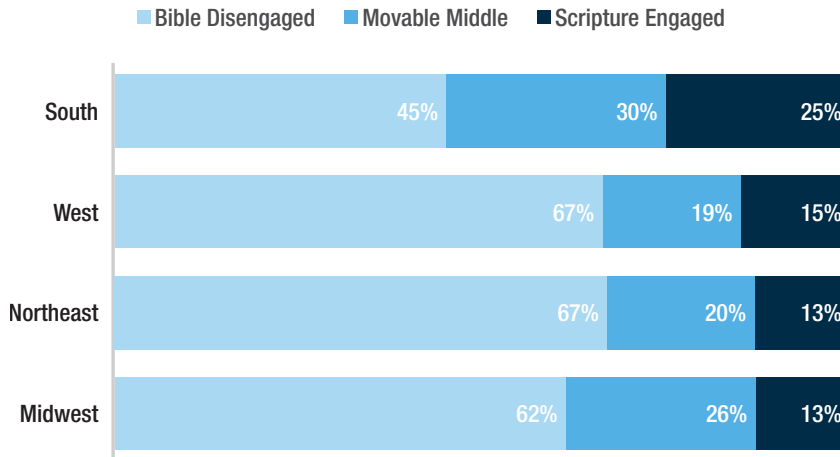
Scripture Engagement by Religious Identity



Just under half of Evangelicals (46%) are Scripture Engaged, leading other religious groups by far. Among Mainline Protestants and those in Historically Black denominations, about a quarter are Scripture Engaged. Comparing with last year’s statistics, we see a familiar pattern—migration from the Movable Middle to the Bible Disengaged—*except for the Mainline Protestants*. This group had a major increase in Scripture Engagement (19% to 25%) and a decrease in Bible Disengagement (44% to 42%).

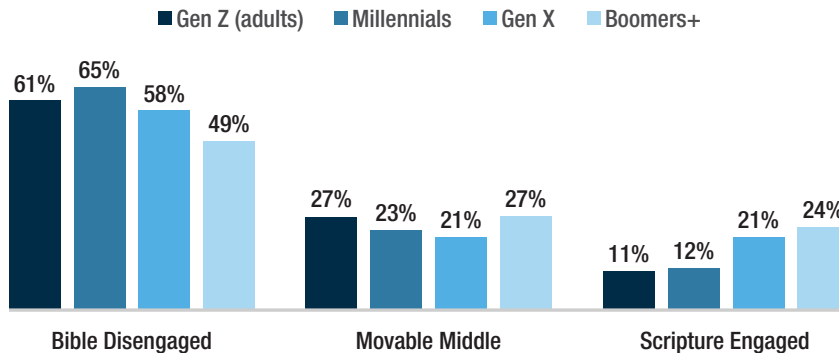
One-quarter of those in the South are Scripture Engaged (25%), nearly doubling the percentage of those in the Northeast or Midwest (13%). In the Northeast and West, two-thirds (67%) are Bible Disengaged.

Scripture Engagement by Region



About a quarter of Boomers (now including those we previously had in the “Elder” category) are Scripture Engaged (24%), leading the way among generations. Nearly two-thirds of Millennials (65%) are Bible Disengaged. Generation Z adults, 18–27 years old, are the least Scripture Engaged (11%), but have many in the Movable Middle (27%).

Scripture Engagement by Generation

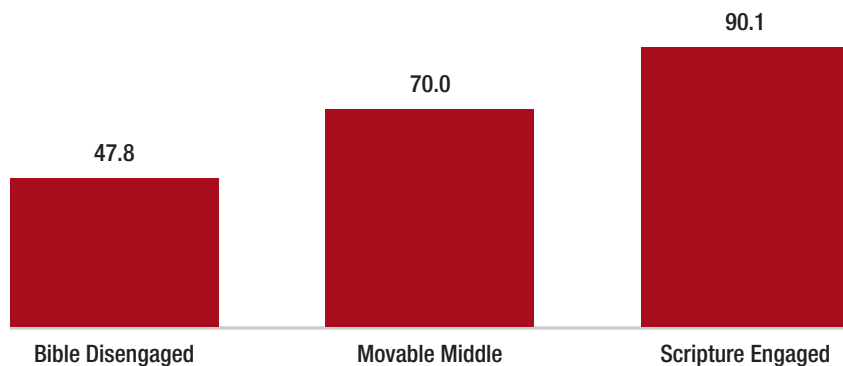


SPIRITUAL VITALITY

Jesus said, “A healthy tree bears good fruit” (Matthew 7:17), and he told his closest followers, “My Father’s glory is shown by your bearing much fruit; and in this way you become my disciples” (John 15:8). Church leaders have often wondered how to know if they’re succeeding. How can we measure the “fruit” in the lives of people being transformed by the Spirit, whose work is often unseen?

The Spiritual Vitality Gauge (svg) is an attempt to do that with nine simple questions about people’s beliefs, spiritual practices, and faith in action. The resulting score (0 to 100) offers a sense of how a Christian is growing spiritually.⁵

SVG Scores by Scripture Engagement



We at American Bible Society are happy to use the svg in *State of the Bible* because we see vital spiritual growth as the proper result of Scripture Engagement. (James 1:22 challenges us to be doers of the Word and not just hearers.) So, with permission from the svg

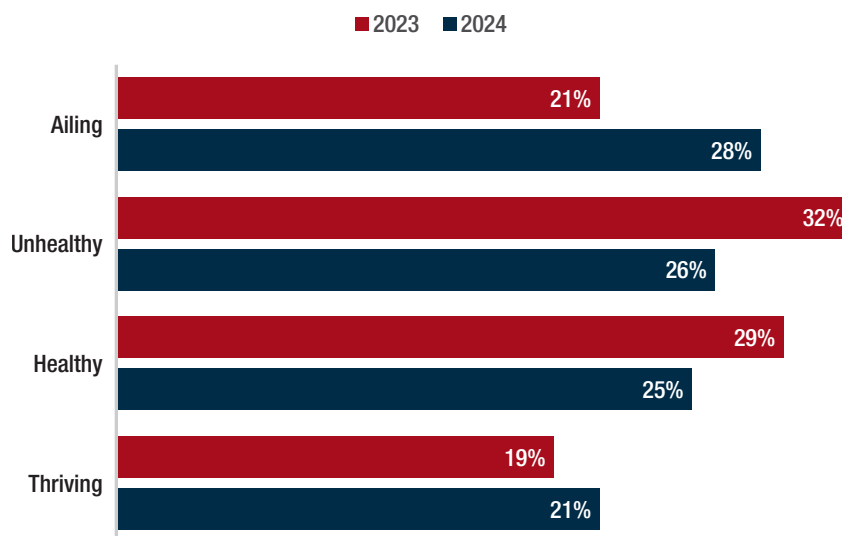
⁵ The Spiritual Vitality Gauge is used by permission of Renovo. All rights reserved. renovo.services

creators, we have included these nine questions, asking them only of self-identified Christians.

It's not surprising that the survey shows a strong correlation between Scripture Engagement and Spiritual Vitality. The Bible has a powerful effect in people's spiritual lives.

Based on the SVG scores, respondents are put in four groups: Ailing, Unhealthy, Healthy, and Thriving. As we compare year-to-year scores, we see some intriguing differences.

Percentages for 4 SVG Categories

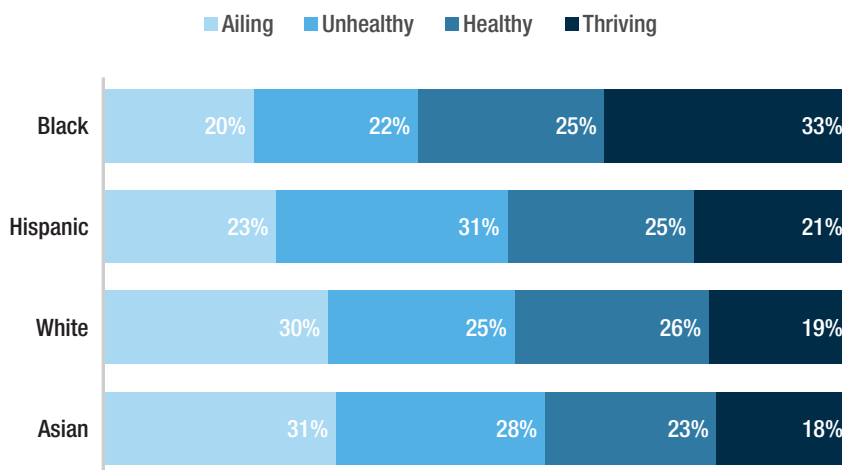


Base: Self-identified Christians

Spiritually speaking, you might say the rich have gotten richer and the poor poorer. The percentage of Christians who are “Thriving” in their SVG scores has gone up by about a tenth (19% to 21%). This

suggests that more than 3 million American Christians took whatever the previous year threw at them and emerged spiritually stronger. But the percentage of “Ailing” Christians has had an even greater jump (21% to 28%), suggesting that even more millions who call themselves Christians slipped backward in their spiritual health.

Spiritual Vitality Category by Race/Ethnicity



One third of Black Christians in the U.S. are spiritually thriving, according to the survey. This is a much greater portion than we see in any other ethnic group. Among every other group, more than half of self-identified Christians rate as “Unhealthy” or “Ailing.” At the very least, this suggests that Christians (and church leaders) in other groups should study *how* Black Christians are growing in their faith and learn from them.

IMPORTANCE OF THE BIBLE

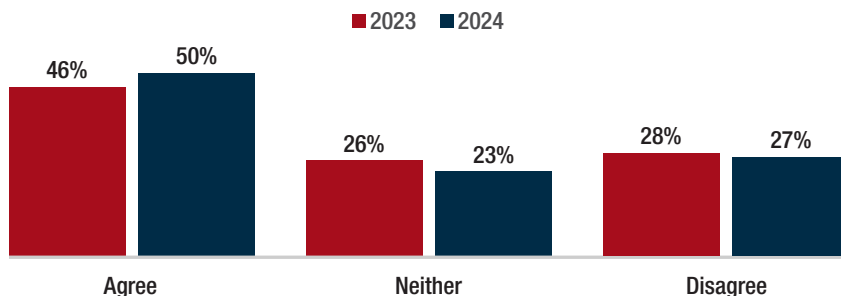
SOCIAL IMPACT

For years we have asked baseline questions about the impact of the Bible on society. Generally, we find only subtle variations in those responses from year to year. For instance, in the past year there was no change in *“If the people of our country were to not read the Bible, do you think our country would be worse off, better off, or about the same?”* One in seven Americans (14%) rather consistently say the country would be better off, but four in nine (44%) say a Bible-less America would be worse.

Yet one question showed a significant change this year. Half of Americans now agree that Bible reading is an important component of a child’s character development (50%, up from 46%). School issues were in the news in 2023, with parents, teachers, administrators, and school boards debating the best ways to educate children. This may have sparked some to pay more attention to the effect of Scripture in character development.

Bible Reading and Children

“Bible reading is an important component of a child’s character development.”

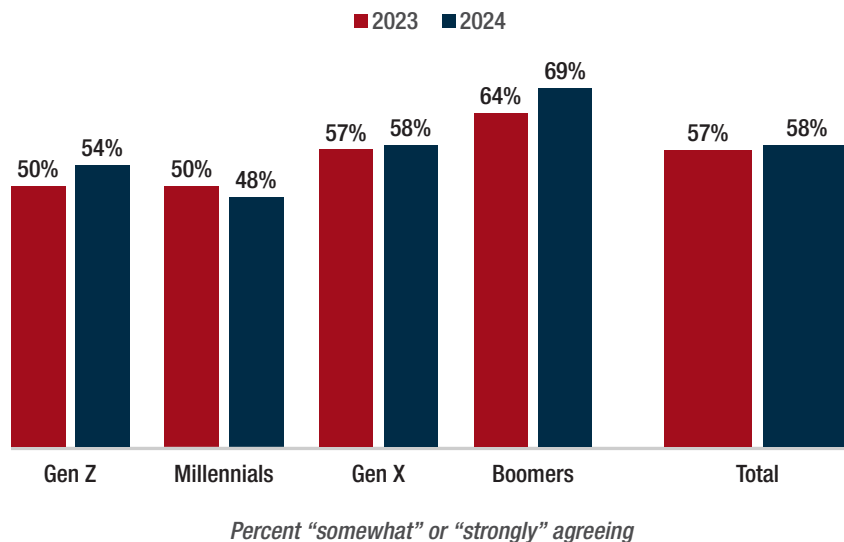


TRANSFORMATION

Slightly more people than last year say the message of the Bible has transformed their lives (58%, up from 57%). Especially notable is the increase among Gen Z adults (a 4% rise to 54%). It would be great to imagine nearly 2 million 18–27-year-olds newly transformed by the Bible’s message in the past year, but we suspect there’s another reason for this uptick. We don’t include Gen Z-ers in our survey until they’re adults, at age 18. So these numbers may show an influx of 18-year-olds who have been transformed at some point in their youth and are being counted for the first time. Still, it’s good news, offering some hope for this generation going forward.

Life Transformation by Generation⁶

“The message of the Bible has transformed my life.”



⁶ Elders had a substantial decrease, but the small sample size makes it unreliable.

MOTIVATION

Why do people read the Bible? Our survey offers a number of good reasons. “It brings me closer to God” is consistently the leading response. But when we cross-tabulate these answers with the SVG, we find some curious differences.

Motivations for Bible Reading by SVG Categories

<i>I use the Bible because:</i>	<i>All Bible Users</i>	<i>Ailing</i>	<i>Unhealthy</i>	<i>Healthy</i>	<i>Thriving</i>
It brings me closer to God	42%	18%	31%	46%	52%
It helps me discern God's will for my life	18%	5%	16%	20%	21%
I need wisdom for making life decisions	13%	15%	10%	12%	14%
I need comfort	10%	22%	17%	7%	5%
It tells me about the nature of God	9%	11%	12%	10%	5%
It shows me how to treat others	4%	13%	8%	2%	1%
I know I'm supposed to	3%	11%	5%	3%	1%

Base: Bible Users and (for SVG categories) self-identified Christians

Healthier Christians (“Thriving” and “Healthy”) are far more likely to give that top answer, coming to Scripture because “It brings me closer to God.” The *unhealthiest* Christians are the most likely to come to the Bible for comfort or wisdom in decision-making.

We don't need to judge good and bad reasons for interacting with Scripture, but we might be seeing a developmental process here. Early in Christian development, many do read the Bible because they're “supposed to.” Maybe they move on to moral guidelines

(“how to treat others”) or basic theology (“nature of God”). Comfort is always available in Scripture, and at certain points in one’s spiritual journey, it might be the main attraction. But as people grow spiritually, they are more likely to seek wisdom, discernment, and eventually communion with God.

This provides some direction for those who teach the Bible and seek to draw people into a deeper involvement with it. Remember their level. For a spiritually “ailing” Christian in crisis, a message of comfort will most likely be more compelling than guidance in discerning God’s will for their life. That’s what these numbers suggest. ■

THE BIBLE HAS A LOT OF INFLUENCE ON ...

How I **interact**
with people

159 MILLION
AMERICANS AGREE



How I **treat** people who are
of a different race than I am

146 MILLION
AMERICANS AGREE



My **support** for refugees and people
displaced by wars and conflicts

130 MILLION
AMERICANS AGREE





METHODOLOGY

In 2024, the *State of the Bible* research team at American Bible Society collaborated with NORC at the University of Chicago to design and field a nationally representative survey of American adults on topics related to the Bible, faith, and the church. The study was conducted in English and was presented both online and via telephone to NORC’s AmeriSpeak® Panel, using a 23-minute questionnaire. The study produced 2,506 responses from a representative sample of adults 18 and older within all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data were collected from January 4–23, 2024. The margin of error for a sample of this size is ± 2.73 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

QUALITY AT A GLANCE

Following are key survey quality indicators, excerpted from a report card prepared by NORC at the University of Chicago in compliance with the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Transparency Initiative. The full report is available upon request by emailing pr@americanbible.org.

SURVEY OVERVIEW

- **Study Population:** General Population Age 18+
- **Sample Units:** 9,997
- **Completed Units:** 2,506
- **Margin of Error:** $\pm 2.73\%$
- **Average Design Effect:** 1.95
- **Survey Field Period:** January 4–23, 2024
- **Median Duration:** 23 minutes

PANEL OUTCOMES

- **Weighted Household Recruitment Rate:**¹ 22.1%
- **Weighted Household Retention Rate:** 78.8%

SURVEY OUTCOMES

- **Survey Completion Rate:**² 25.1%
- **Weighted Cumulative Response Rate:**³ 4.4%

THE AMERISPEAK® PANEL

Funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago, AmeriSpeak® is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. Randomly selected U.S. households are sampled using area probability and address-based sampling, with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the

- 1 The weighted AAPOR RR III for the AmeriSpeak panel recruitment corresponding to the recruitment cohorts sampled for the study. A recruited household is a household where at least one adult successfully completed the recruitment survey and joined the panel.
- 2 The percent of eligible sample members who completed the survey interview.
- 3 The overall survey response rate that accounts for survey outcomes in all response stages including panel recruitment rate, panel retention rate, and survey completion rate. It is weighted to account for the sample design and differential inclusion probabilities of sample members.

NORC National Sample Frame. These sampled households are then contacted by U.S. mail, telephone, and field interviewers (face to face).

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

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

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

NORC at the University of Chicago is an independent research institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions. Since 1941, NORC has conducted groundbreaking studies, created and applied innovative methods and tools, and advanced principles of scientific integrity and collaboration. Today, government, corporate, and nonprofit clients around the world partner with NORC to transform increasingly complex information into useful knowledge. Please visit www.norc.org for more information. ■



DEFINITIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Generations:

- **Generation Z (1997–2012):** Ages 11 to 27 in 2024. This study includes adults (18–27) in Generation Z.
- **Millennials (1981–1996):** Ages 28 to 43 in 2024.
- **Generation X (1965–1980):** Ages 44 to 59 in 2024.
- **Baby Boomers (1946–1964):** Ages 60 to 78 in 2024.
- **Elders (1928–1945):** Ages 79 to 99 in 2023. This study considers any respondent 79 years old or older to be in the Elders generation. Due to sampling limitations for people of this age, this small group is combined with the Baby Boomer group and listed in the report as Boomers+.

Loneliness: It is most often found among adolescents and younger adults and may be described as the difference between the interpersonal affection one would like to have and what one has. We measure it using 5 items from the UCLA Loneliness Scale. Scores range from 5–20. We have grouped them into 4 segments for interpreting them.¹

- Low: 5–8
- Moderate: 9–12
- Moderately high: 13–16
- High: 17–20

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

Non-Christian: Individuals who consider themselves to be anything other than Christians.

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

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

- Identify as either Protestant or Catholic
- Attend a religious service at least once a month
- Say their faith is very important in their lives

¹ Russell, D. (1996). UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3): Reliability, validity, and factor structure. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 66, 20-40

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- You personally experienced a trauma
- You witnessed a trauma involving an immediate family member
- You witnessed a trauma involving someone other than a family member
- None of these apply to me

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

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

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

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



PATHWAY OF SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

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

PURPOSE OF THE PATHWAY

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

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

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

The Pathway of Scripture Engagement



What is Scripture Engagement?

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

- **External Milestone**
- **Internal Milestone**

PROGRESS ALONG THE PATHWAY

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

The PSE shows the landscape and key waypoints, but it doesn't do two important things. First, it doesn't have a YOU ARE HERE marker. Second, it doesn't measure progress toward spiritual vitality. For those tasks, we use the Scripture Engagement Survey to locate an individual on the Scripture Engagement Scale (SES).

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

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

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



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

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

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

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

Angel Mann serves as Research and Evaluation Manager. Angel performs countless statistical tests and prepares reams of data for our writing and data visualization specialists as well as helping to keep the reporting organized. She will be taking the lead in securing subject-matter experts on many of the topics this year.

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

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

Peter Edman is our quality assurance lead, helping all of us produce a more consistent, high-quality report. We also have regular input from Elisabeth Trefsgar and Bran Van Deinse in assuring sensitivity to the many SOTB audiences. Finally, Eric Elinow works behind the scenes, helping ensure that our website connects you to the most recent version of our report. ■

STATE OF THE BIBLE USA 2024

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

In the 2024 report, the *State of the Bible* research team is tracking America's relationship with the Bible, faith, and the church and demonstrating the integration of spiritual foundations to the well-being of individuals and communities. Here are a few highlights:

1. Year after year we have learned when people engage deeply with the Bible, their lives are better, their relationships are better, and they flourish.
2. Bible Use—whether daily, weekly, or 3–4 times a year—is down slightly from last year. But we call out reasons for hope for church leaders.
3. The proportion of people attending church in-person has increased remarkably each of the last three years and is now at 75 percent. Those who attend primarily online are now at 21 percent. We will profile those changes and highlight some surprising trends.
4. Almost half of U.S. adults have experienced grief or loss in the past year, which often result in anxiety and trauma. The groups most at risk are the Gen Z adults and Millennials. We will be devoting a special chapter to the challenges of younger adults and explore how the Bible helps us heal from the effects of loss and trauma.

You'll discover more about the Bible in America as we release a new chapter each month from April through December.



Insights