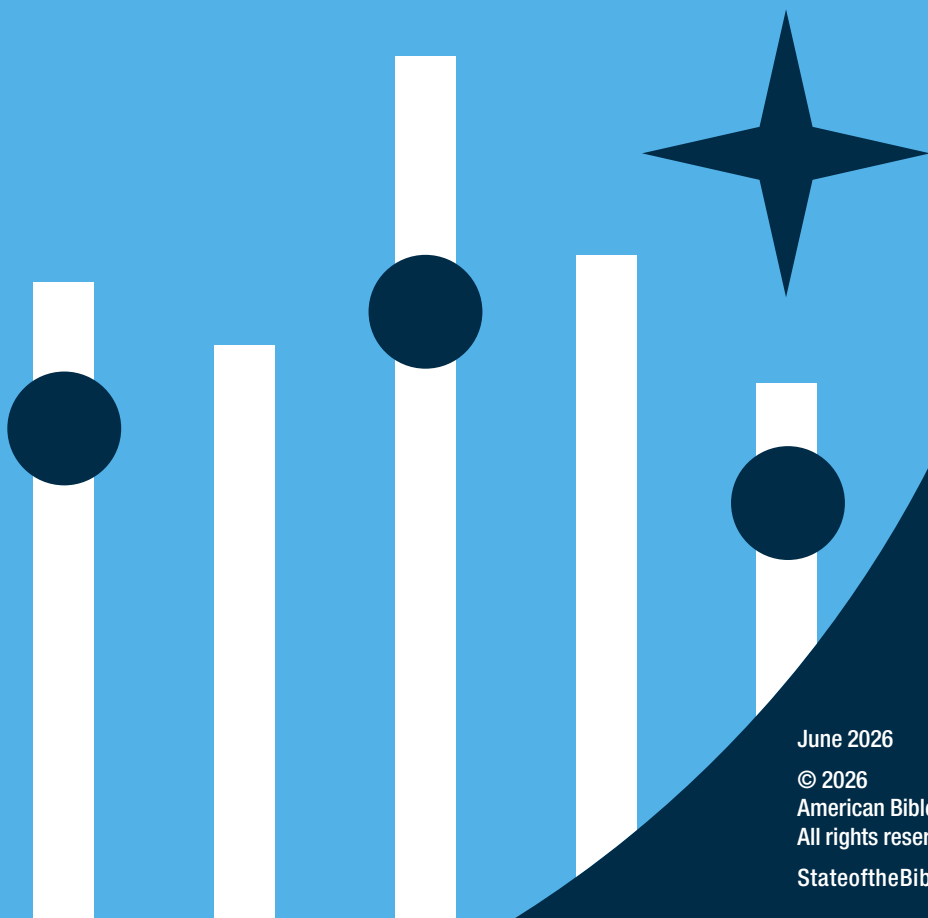


CHAPTER 3

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Artificial Intelligence. Is it a toy, a tool, a terror? All over America, people are playing with it, working with it, or railing against it. It's becoming clear that AI will change our lives, but how, and how much?

There are specific issues about AI in Christian practice and church ministry. Will it help you read the Bible more often or more effectively? Can a church use it to coordinate a community food drive or to plan a preaching series? It's already doing all this, and much more.

But *should* it? Aren't we losing something important when we turn to AI for guidance rather than, say, prayer? Will large language models edge the Holy Spirit out of our lives? How might these tools shape us? How will AI become another instrument that God will use for his glory?

Is AI just
the next
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be feared and
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or is something
more at stake?

Going back to Gutenberg, some Christians have resisted new technologies. Some authorities considered it dangerous to have literature easily copied and distributed—and they weren’t entirely wrong. The printing press sped the Protestant Reformation along at a pace that surprised even Martin Luther.

When Christians started experimenting with radio broadcasts in the 1920s, they got flak too. One of Moody Bible Institute’s early engineers, H. Coleman Crowell, said, “In the early days, much

opposition was experienced to the thought of broadcasting the Gospel message, with some even going so far as to claim that radio was the work of the devil, because of the known fact that it works better after dark.”¹

Similar things were said about the use of TV and film and electric guitars and computers and the Internet. With each new technology, there have been new concerns, some of them quite valid. Is AI just the next tech thing to be feared and then adopted, or is something more at stake?

This chapter will not answer all those questions for you, but it will reveal how Americans are thinking about AI—and particularly how Christian Americans are approaching this technology.

¹ Mungons, K. and Shappard, P. (2026, March 13). The Inventors of Christian Radio. Moody Bible Institute. <https://www.moodybible.org/news/2026/the-inventors-of-christian-radio/>

ATTITUDE SHIFT 2024–2026

Attitudes about AI have shifted somewhat in the last two years. People are more optimistic about its future benefits and less critical of preachers who use AI to craft their sermons. Some seem to be considering the possibility that AI might help them understand the Bible.

We repeated two questions from our 2024 survey and found clear movement on both.² While this doesn't signal a wholehearted embrace of AI, overall we see some migration from uncertainty to acceptance. Yet the anti-AI group seems to be holding strong.

AI OPTIMISM

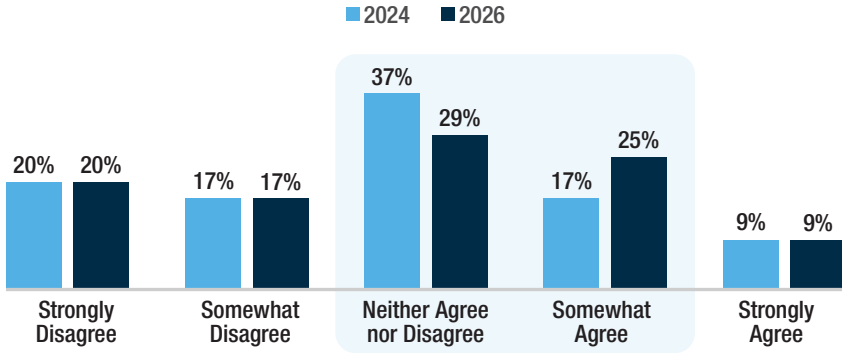
On the question of optimism about the future of AI, only two responses changed from 2024 to 2026, with “Neither Agree nor Disagree” losing ground (8%) while “Somewhat Agree” gained. It's interesting that the ranks of those who disagree, either strongly or somewhat, did not change at all.

Let's take note of the basic terrain on this subject. Roughly speaking, we can still say that “about a third” of Americans are optimistic about AI at some level, about another third are not optimistic, and the remaining third are undecided—but there's a trend toward more optimism. We see this arrangement on other questions as well—“about a third” in each group, with some movement in the direction of acceptance.

² These questions did not appear on the 2025 survey, so the 2026 results reflect a two-year progression.

Optimism about AI

"I am optimistic about the future benefits of using Artificial Intelligence."

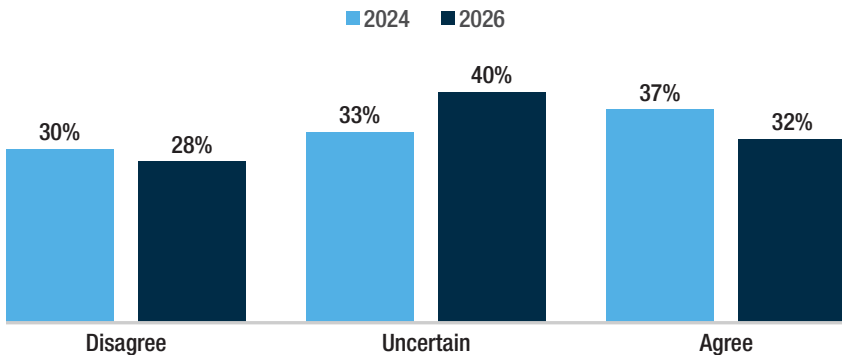


AI PREACHING

Preachers generally do substantial research in developing their messages. Many have shelves of biblical commentaries and reference books. Increasingly, many do online research, with access to even greater collections of resources. At some level, Artificial Intelligence may be brought into the process, gathering and processing information on key subjects and perhaps outlining or even drafting sermons.

Pastors Who Use AI

"I would look unfavorably at a pastor or priest using AI to develop sermons or homilies."



Is this cheating? Is it something like the high school kid copying a term paper from Wikipedia? Or is it just a busy minister using new tools to prepare a coherent message before Sunday morning rolls around?

Two years ago, AI offerings were less common; now they're everywhere. In 2024, we thought (correctly) that some would "look unfavorably" at pastors who used AI models, perhaps considering them cheaters, not doing their own work. Now, for many workers, the use of AI is standard procedure—even required. We thought this familiarity might lessen the critical glares from the public—and it did, but just a bit.

We saw a moderate drop in the portion of those who agree that they would "look unfavorably" at an AI-using preacher (37% to 32%). Note that agreement in this case signals *opposition* to AI. However, this drop was not replaced by people having *no* problem with a pastor or priest getting help from AI in sermon development. Instead we see notably greater uncertainty (33% to 40%). Even with the proliferation of AI assistants in everyday life, we still don't see a rush toward acceptance in a church context.

By the way, we asked everybody this question, not just Christians, not just churchgoers. Results were remarkably similar across our Faith Participation categories—Practicing Christian, Casual Christian, Nominal Christian, and Non-Christian. Surprisingly, *Non-Christians* had the greatest portion of those *strongly* agreeing that they "look unfavorably" on AI-assisted preaching. Presumably they're not hearing those homilies, but they have a big problem with

them. (We also note that members of Gen Z are most likely to disapprove of AI-aided preaching.)

Back in 2024, half of Scripture Engaged people (52%) took an “unfavorable” view of preachers using AI, but apparently they have softened that stance, with only 36 percent now holding that perspective.

BIBLE UNDERSTANDING

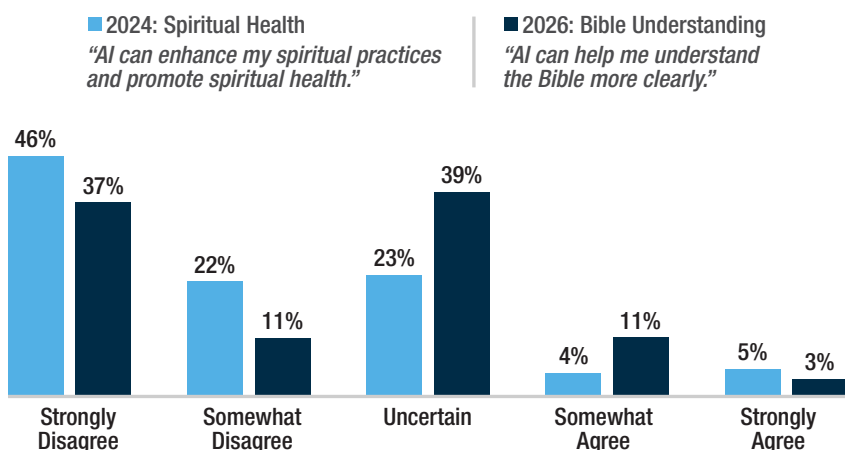
Can AI promote spiritual health? We asked about that in 2024, and found two-thirds of the public (68%) saying no. Fewer than one in ten (9%) agreed that AI “can enhance my spiritual practices and promote spiritual health.”

What does this tell us? Perhaps that most Americans see a difference between intelligence and spirituality. We could frame these as two different types of knowledge. AI can process information at speeds and magnitudes we’ve never seen before, but to know God spiritually—that remains a uniquely human experience, beyond the realm of informational programs.

Bible study might be seen as a crossroads of intelligence and spirituality. While we can process information about the biblical writings—history, language, culture, themes—we also commune spiritually with God as we contemplate what we read and apply it to our own lives and circumstances.

So this year we asked a different question, not about “spiritual health,” but more specifically about Scripture. *Can AI help us understand the Bible more clearly?*

AI and Spiritual Health/Bible Understanding

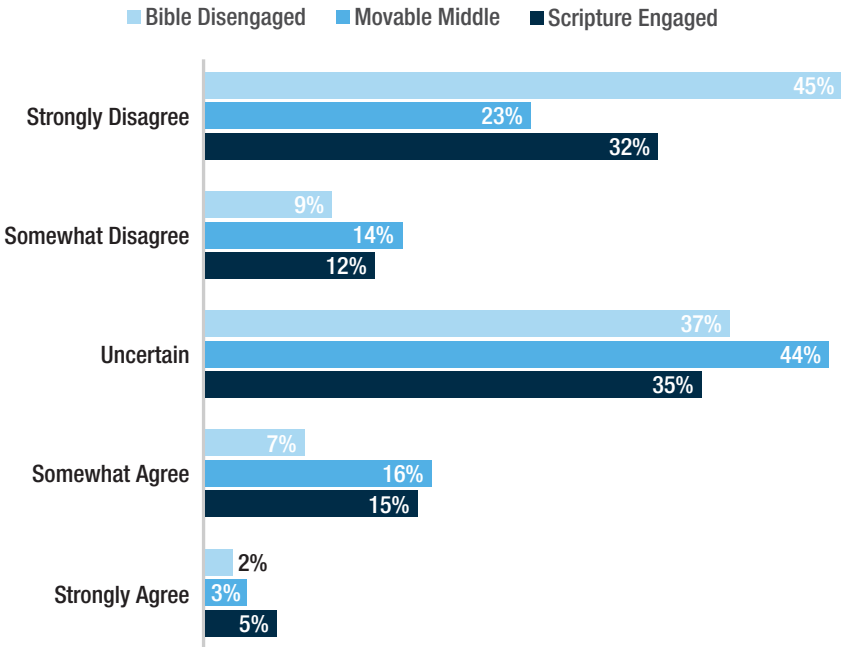


About one in seven Americans (14%) agree that AI can help them understand the Bible (with only 3% agreeing strongly). Nearly half (48%) disagree at some level.

Compared to the “spiritual health” question from 2024, we see fewer disagreeing with the ability of AI to assist in these matters of spiritual growth. These are two very different questions, so we can’t identify a trend. But it still shows us something. Bible understanding has an informational aspect, but it’s also a matter of connecting with God and responding in faith. We read Scripture with both heart and mind. While our survey still shows great resistance to AI’s value in both Bible understanding and spiritual health, some people may be considering the informational assistance AI might offer. While it can’t do discipleship for us, AI can synthesize the biblical data, organize its subjects, and collect and quote comments from pastors and scholars over the years. Perhaps that’s what the “early adopters” (the 14% agreeing in 2026) had in mind.

AI and Bible Understanding by Scripture Engagement

“AI can help me understand the Bible more clearly.” (2026)



We might expect Scripture Engaged people to be more open to the use of AI in Bible study, since they might seek every opportunity to learn more. Actually, the difference between the Scripture Engaged and the Movable Middle is slight, with about one in five of each group agreeing that AI could help them.

More than half (54%) of the Bible Disengaged disagree with the statement (and 45% disagree *strongly*). We assume this is merely their opt-out response. Many of them don’t interact with the Bible at all, so how could AI help them understand it? (We’re more intrigued by the 9 percent of the Disengaged who agree that maybe AI could help them understand, if they tried it.)

USE OF AI

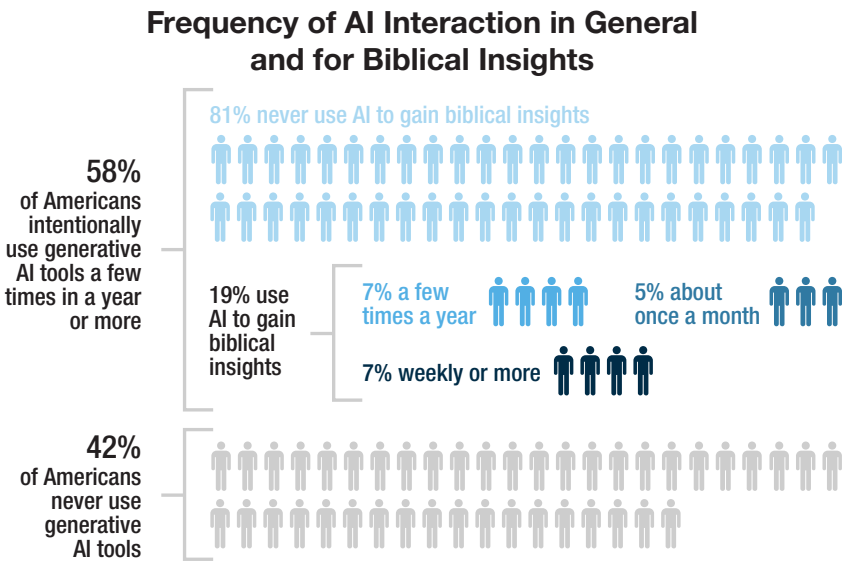
How much do people use AI?

We sometimes speak of Artificial Intelligence as if it were a single, monolithic technology. It's actually a broad family of computer capabilities developed over more than seventy years. The earliest systems followed handwritten rules; later generations learned patterns from data, producing tools you've used for years without necessarily naming them AI—search engines, spam filters, voice assistants, navigation apps, photo tagging, and the recommendations behind services like Netflix and Amazon. Recent years have brought a sharper shift, often called *generative AI*: programs that don't just sort or recommend but produce something new—reports, stories, images, audio, video, and yes, sermons, devotional readings, and Bible study prompts. A handful of major companies now offer their own versions, each with different strengths. The frontier is moving quickly—toward AI that can carry out multi-step tasks on a person's behalf and, some researchers speculate, toward the broader, more flexible reasoning often called *artificial general intelligence*.

Our survey asks specifically about the use of “generative AI tools”—in general and specifically in Bible study. More than a quarter of Americans (30%) “intentionally use” generative AI at least once a week, with nearly half of those (13%) using it daily. Those who “never” use it (42%) are outnumbered by those who use it “a few times in a year” or more (58%).

How often do people use generative AI tools “to gain biblical insight”? Not many. Four in five of the 58 percent who use AI said they never

use it to gain biblical insights (81%). Still, that leaves nearly a fifth (19%) of AI users for whom it is a part of their Bible study—including 7 percent who seek biblical insights from AI *at least once a week*.

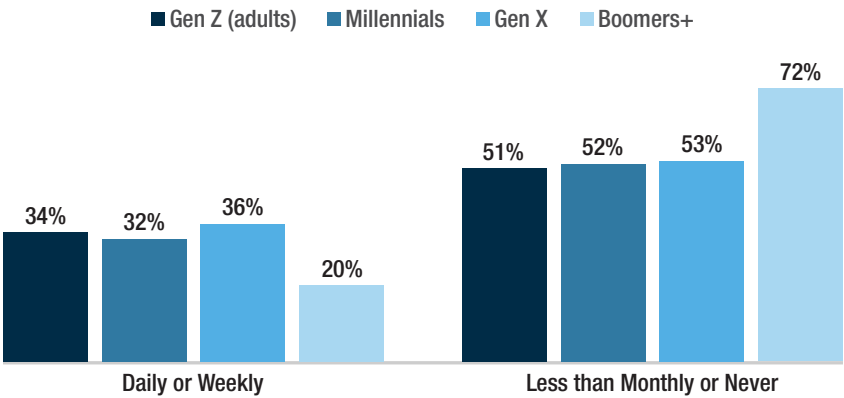


GENERATIONS

It’s an old joke by now: If your church needs a tech expert, look to the youth group. Millennials and now Gen Z have grown up in this high-tech culture, so we might expect them to be the most comfortable with AI, and its most frequent users.

But that isn’t the case with AI. According to our survey, *Generation X* is the most optimistic about AI, and most likely to use it daily or weekly. Born 1965–1980, they’re mostly in their forties and fifties now, definitely *not* digital natives, and yet they’re connecting with this new technology a bit better than the two generations coming up after them.

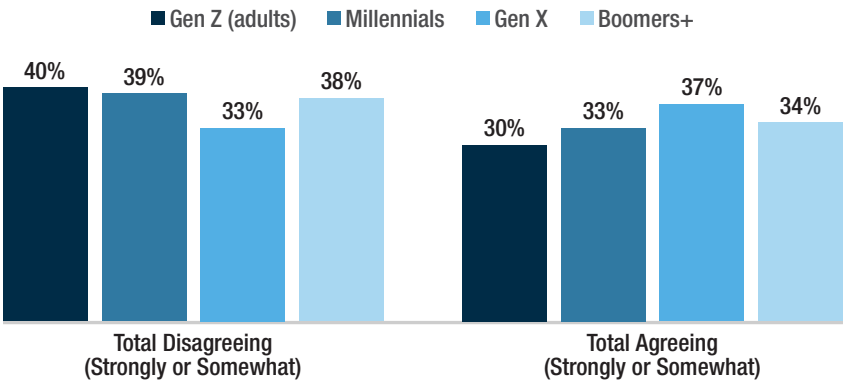
Frequency of Intentional Use of Generative AI by Generation



This may have to do with employment, in several ways. First, more experienced Gen X workers may be in jobs that require frequent use of generative AI tools. They may also have the experience and wisdom to use AI more effectively. In the younger generations, optimism may be hindered by fears that AI will eliminate their jobs.

Optimism about AI by Generation

“I am optimistic about the benefits of using AI.”



OTHER GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS

The most educated Americans are most likely to use generative AI at least weekly. Men are somewhat more friendly to AI than women are. And Asian Americans are far more likely than others to use generative AI regularly.

With regard to **education**, each higher level of schooling corresponds with greater use of AI, with one exception (those *without* a high school diploma use generative AI a bit more than those with *only* a high school education). This pattern occurs again with optimism, where each step in the education process yields greater optimism about the future benefits of AI.

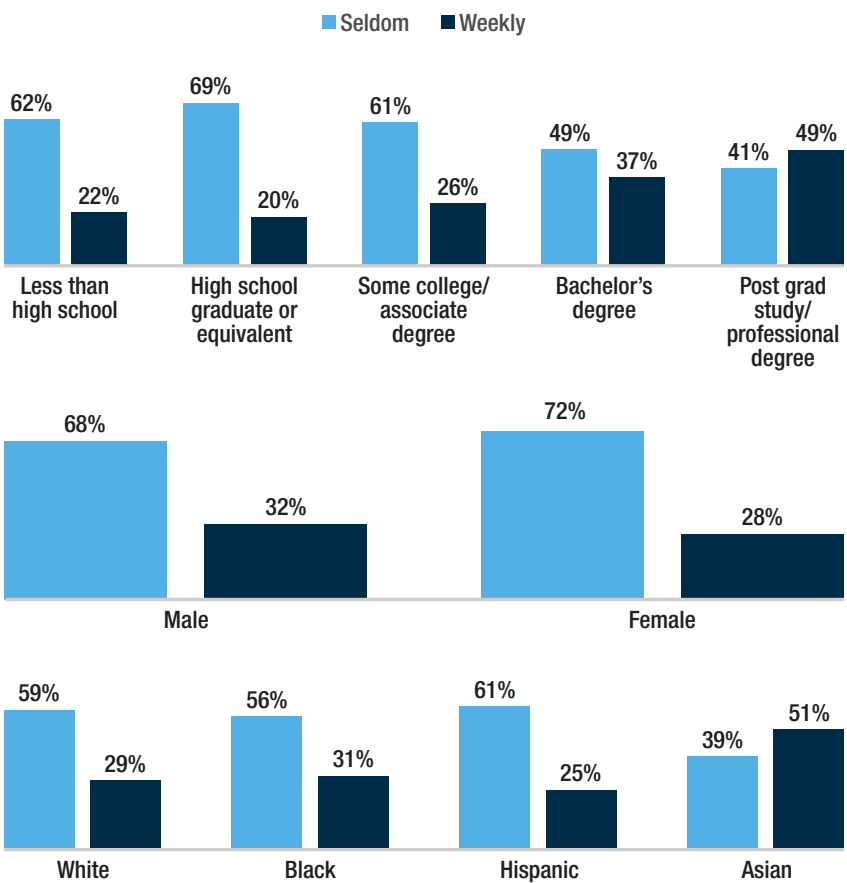
But here's a fascinating detail. Though those with only high school diplomas are the least frequent users of AI, those who do use it seek biblical insights from AI at the *most* frequent pace (17% at least monthly, compared to a combined 10% for everyone else).

With regard to **gender**, not only do men use AI more than women (32% to 28% weekly), they are also somewhat more optimistic than women about the future benefits of AI (37% agreeing, compared to 30%).

With regard to **race/ethnicity**, we see some of the greatest divergence. More than half of Asian Americans (51%) report using generative AI at least weekly, doubling up the level of Hispanic Americans (25%). There's a similar gap in optimism about AI, with well more than half (56%) of Asian Americans (and only 27% of Hispanic Americans) agreeing about the benefits of AI.

Yet on the question of gaining biblical insights through AI, Black Americans lead the way, with nearly a quarter (23%) saying they seek such insights monthly or more often (compared to just 10% for everyone else).

Frequency of AI Use by Selected Groups



“Seldom” includes responses of “Never” and “A few times in a year”

“Weekly” includes the “Daily” response

Note: The “White” and “Black” categories do not include Hispanics. The “Asian” category includes Pacific Islanders. Other groups lack a reliable sample size.

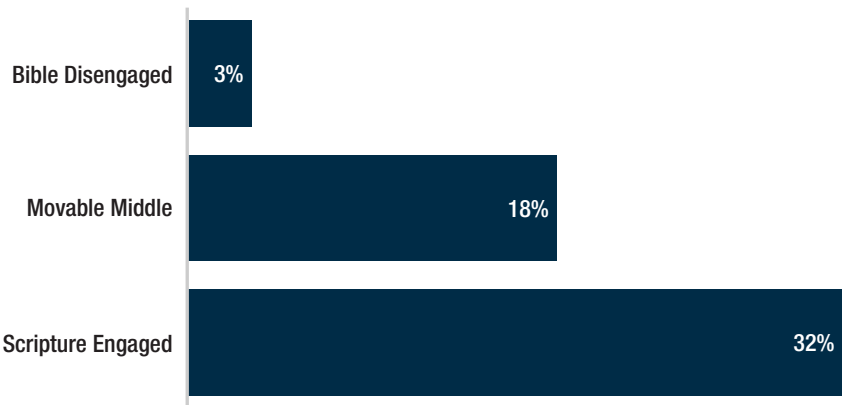
SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT AND AI

Many people who are Scripture Engaged are already using AI in search of biblical insights. One fifth of them (19%) say they do this at least weekly, if not every day. Nearly a third (30%) do this at least monthly. When believers spend time with the Bible, seeking to follow its teachings, they will embrace all sorts of new methods to interact with it.

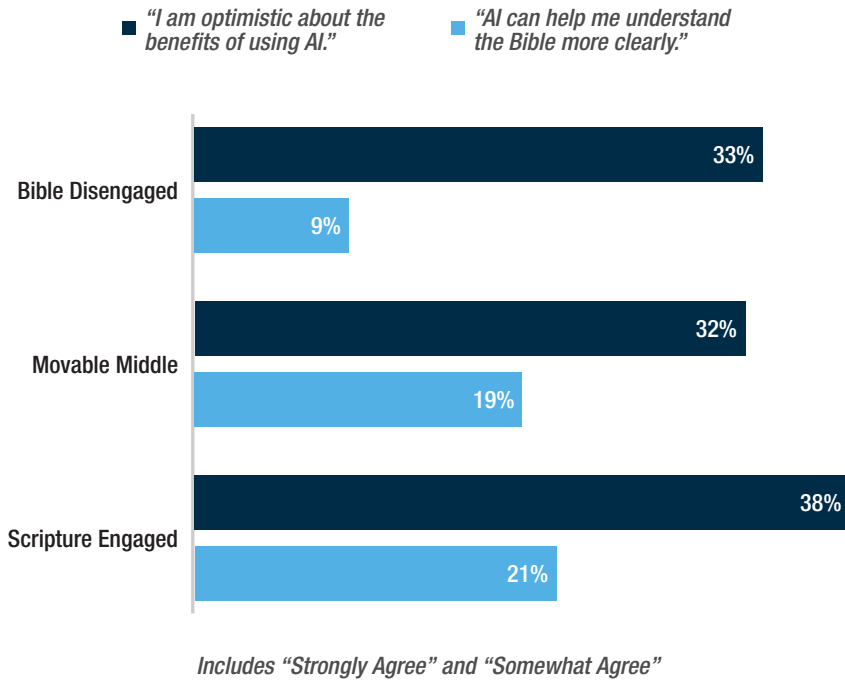
That makes us wonder whether one reason the Scripture Engaged seem so optimistic about AI is its potential to help them understand the Bible better. The definition of Scripture Engagement includes various aspects of life-change, spiritual growth, and decision-making—things outside the realm of Artificial Intelligence. But as we noted, Bible study also involves information about the text, the culture of Bible times, the interpretations of commentators through the centuries, and more. AI can help with that.

Frequency of AI Use for Biblical Insights
by Scripture Engagement

At least monthly



Agreement on AI Questions by Scripture Engagement



But let's not ignore the Movable Middle. These people don't read the Bible as often, and perhaps they don't follow it as closely as they'd like to, but one sixth of them (17%) are using this new technology to seek biblical insights at least once a month. While, as a group, they don't express great optimism about AI, a significant portion of them (19%) recognize its value in helping them understand the Bible.

We can't speak for all of them, of course, but maybe there's a novelty factor here. Maybe the newness of AI generates an excitement they don't normally associate with Bible study. Or maybe the personalization of generative AI helps them feel that the Bible has something

important to say *to them*. Bible experts often forget how intimidating this book can be to the casual reader. Those in the Movable Middle might benefit from some “information management,” perhaps with a computer’s help, in order to develop spiritual discernment, guided by human pastors and teachers.

As we crunch the numbers, we often see distinct groups of people—cohorts that seem to share certain attitudes or behaviors. Here we see a big group of Americans, a third or more, who seem worried about AI. They disagree, often strongly, on all statements about the value of AI.

We see another group, another third of the public, who seem baffled by AI. They “neither agree nor disagree” on most of the statements. AI services have sprung up so quickly that they don’t yet know what to think of them.

We’re not arguing with either of those positions. Clearly there are ethical issues around AI as well as unexpected cultural effects to come. Yet in our passion for Scripture Engagement, we want to focus on two other groups, much smaller but growing, that are experimenting with the possibilities of these new tools to enhance their relationship with the Bible.

One of these groups is the Scripture Engaged, ready to try anything that will help them better understand the Book they love. The other group we might call the Strugglers. They’re in the Movable Middle, curious about Jesus and the Bible, but not investing as they could, and they know it. Could AI turn out to be a catalyst or connector to bring these people together with God’s Word?

CASE IN POINT

“Is there a way we could use AI to help people pay closer attention, learn how to do some closer reading of the text, slow down, and reflect on what it means for their own life?” That’s the question voiced by Brant Himes, Bible professor at Los Angeles Pacific University and an architect of a new program called BibleReflect that uses AI to help people study the Bible on their own.

If you think that question sounds a lot like what we’ve long known as “inductive Bible study,” you’re on the right track. Himes and his team concluded that the best way to use AI to increase Scripture Engagement would not be in spewing information but in asking questions—questions based on the user’s own responses, drawing them to make connections between the Bible and their own situation.

“We don’t want an echo chamber, something that just echoes back their own personality,” Himes says. “We want them to hear God’s Word alive for them today. That’s the ultimate goal: to help people approach the Bible, whatever their background is—if they’ve never read it, if they don’t know where to start, or even if they’re a scholar and they want to recall some things they’ve learned.”³

This is the sort of thing a good Bible study leader or Sunday school teacher does. Those gifted humans can never be replaced. But can we teach AI to do that same sort of thing, at scale, perhaps reaching many who wouldn’t otherwise engage with Scripture?

³ Brant Himes, conversation, May 11, 2026.

There are many uncertainties regarding Artificial Intelligence in our world today, as this chapter has explored. It is a tool for managing information, and we certainly have a lot of information to manage. But AI is more than that, in its power, its speed, and its potential influence in people's lives. Many people have valid concerns about its reach.

Yet we always cheer on those creative Christians who find new ways to help people hear God's voice in Scripture. Can AI can be a valuable tool in that process, not only dispensing information about the Bible, but working with individual Bible readers to provide the knowledge they're looking for? That could be life-changing. ■

A TIME TO SPEAK

Dr. K calls the church to be a voice of wisdom in the development of AI and AI policy. She is a theologian and ethicist who studied under Dallas Willard at the University of Southern California—and also an AI expert who has worked in the Intelligence community and briefed Congress on AI policy—so she has a unique perspective on how the church needs to be involved and speak into this AI moment.

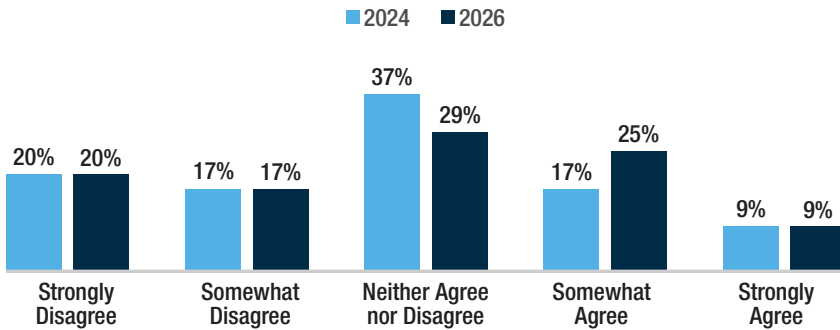




Artificial Intelligence and the Bible

What do Americans Think About AI?

"I am optimistic about the future benefits of using artificial Intelligence."



Do Americans Trust AI with the Bible?

AI users who use AI to gain biblical insights.

81%

Never

7%

A few times a year

12%

Monthly or more

How do Americans feel about AI-Assisted Preaching?

"I would look unfavorably at a pastor or priest using AI to develop sermons or homilies."

