

CHAPTER 1

THE BIBLE IN AMERICA TODAY



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StateoftheBible.org



THE BIBLE IN AMERICA TODAY

Revival is big news in America. It always has been. Nearly three centuries ago, a dramatic British preacher named George Whitefield crisscrossed the colonies, drawing thousands to his open-air meetings. He got support from an inventive media mogul named Benjamin Franklin. As one historian put it, “Franklin was a newspaperman and Whitefield was news.”¹

Yet the Great Awakening was not just hype. The preaching of Whitefield and others in the mid-1700s changed many lives. Franklin himself mused about how nice it was to walk the streets of Philadelphia and hear people singing psalms in their homes.² The widespread revival shaped the spiritual character of this nation-in-the-making.³

¹ John R. Williams, “The Strange Case of Dr. Franklin and Mr. Whitefield,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 102, no. 4 (October 1978): 403.

² From Part Three of Franklin’s autobiography: “it seem’d as if all the World were growing Religious.”

³ For more of the Whitefield–Franklin friendship and its historical impact, see the new offering from Sight & Sound Films, *A Great Awakening*. agreatawakening.com

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Early in 2025, we reported an increase in Bible reading among Americans. When we factored in the actions and attitudes that define Scripture Engagement, that too was up, after several weak years. We weren't the only researchers to see such signs of growth. Others noted increased attendance at religious events. Bible sales were up. Many

Christian culture-watchers declared that a revival had begun. As the year went on, this notion was debated in the press and on social media.

The *State of the Bible* team was cautiously optimistic. After noting the "slight uptick" in our numbers, we asked, "Is this the reversal of a previous trend? Time will tell."⁴

One year later, we see a relapse. The numbers for Bible Use, Scripture Engagement, and other faith factors have come back down in the 2026 survey, generally returning to 2024 levels.

What happened? While we always consider the margin of error in statistical samples, we don't think this is just a numbers glitch. There was a genuine moment of increased interest in the Bible that showed up in the survey we took in January 2025, but it seems to have run its course before the January 2026 poll.

⁴ *State of the Bible: USA 2025*, p. 2

How can we explain this rise and fall? Is 2026 a return to normal after the false hope of the 2025 numbers? Or was 2025 a first step toward renewed interest in the Bible, with the 2026 numbers being a temporary setback? Once again, time will tell.

Meanwhile, we'll drill into this year's numbers, exploring how people are engaging with the Bible in 2026. A closer look reveals that this national "regression to the mean" is not uniformly affecting regions, generations, and genders. The statistical contour is rather lumpy, and there are interesting trends hiding beneath the surface.

Later in this chapter, we'll also explore Bible reading habits. *How* people interact with Scripture can influence how deeply it impacts their lives.

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

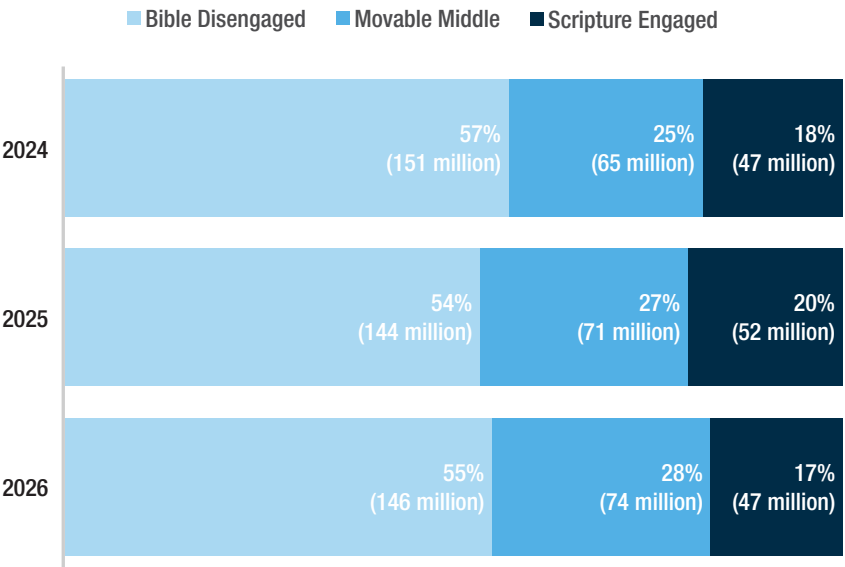
Our Scripture Engagement metric considers how often people interact with the Bible, but it also includes several ways the Bible affects their lives. **Frequency** is good, but casual readers can walk away from Scripture and forget what it says—a scenario James uses in exhorting believers to be “doers” of the Word and not just hearers (James 1:22–25). Thus the *State of the Bible* survey includes questions about the **impact** of Scripture on relationships with God and other people, as well as the **centrality** of Scripture in everyday decision-making.

Those with high scores in frequency, impact, and centrality are designated “Scripture Engaged.” Those with the lowest scores are the “Bible Disengaged.” In between are the “Movable Middle,” a group

with high levels of curiosity about the Bible, but limited frequency of Bible reading and low impact from it.

When we began using this Scripture Engagement model (in 2018), about a quarter of Americans qualified as Scripture Engaged, but our 2022 survey saw a sharp decline, and we’ve wallowed at 20 percent or less since then. While the current figure (17%) is the lowest we’ve seen, the portion of Americans in the Movable Middle has risen in the last two surveys (now 28%). The outlook brightens a bit when we consider the change in millions of people over the last two years—virtually no change in the 47 million who were Scripture Engaged in 2024 and a 9 million rise since then in the Movable Middle. Many of those in the Movable Middle are clearly coming from the ranks of the Bible Disengaged, which has shrunk by 5 million adults over the past two years.

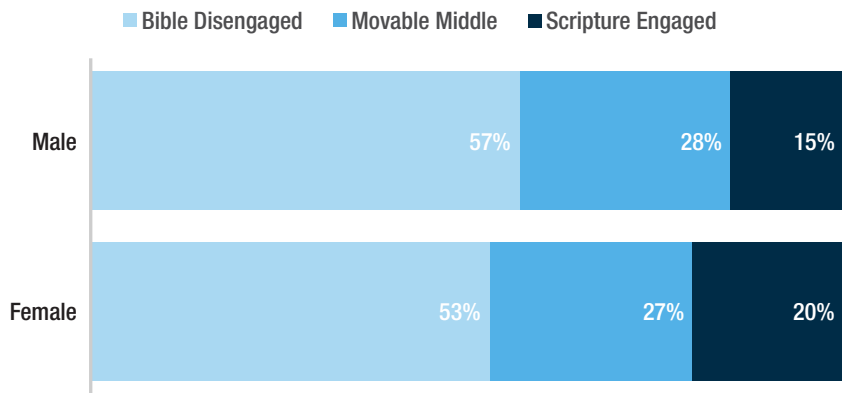
Scripture Engagement, 2024–2026



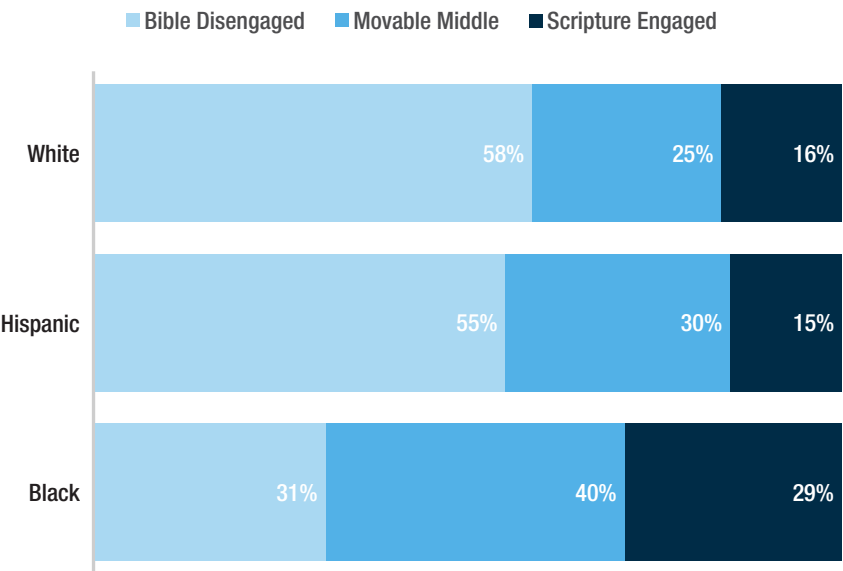
GENDER AND RACE

As seen in previous years, women (20%) are far more likely than men to be Scripture Engaged, and Black Americans lead the way among major racial/ethnic groups.

Scripture Engagement by Gender



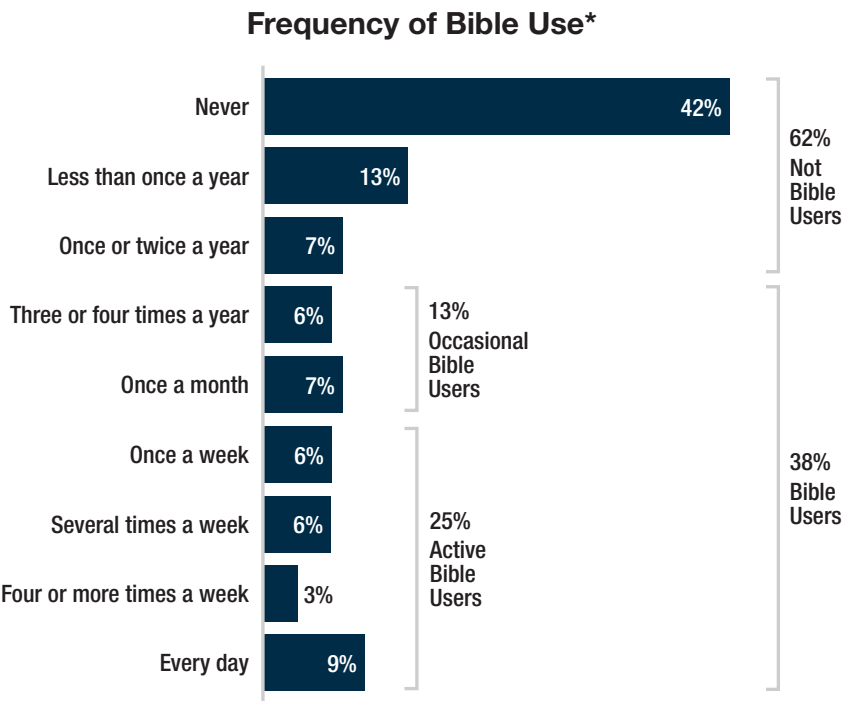
Scripture Engagement by Race



BIBLE USE

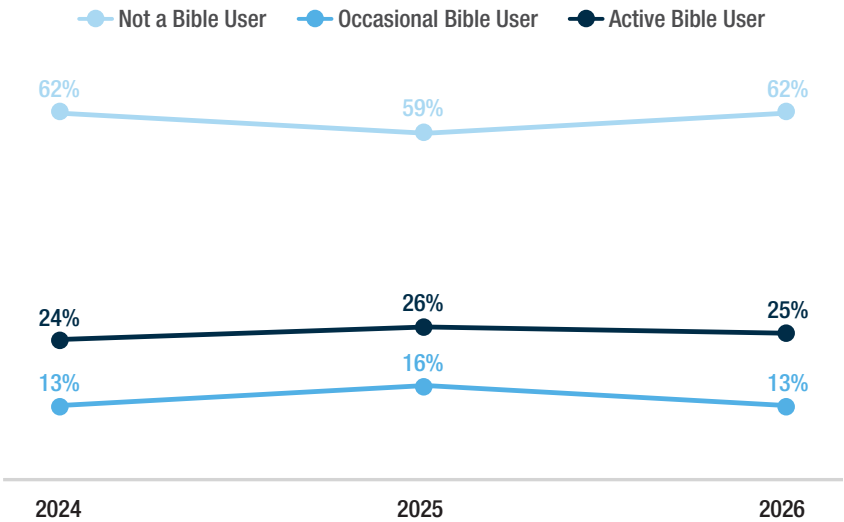
We turn our attention now to a basic metric we call Bible Use. This involves just the frequency aspect of Scripture Engagement. How often do people use the Bible? We must note that nowadays “use” often means listening, not just reading. The question also specifies that this is “on your own” and not part of a religious service.

In past years, when defining Bible Users, we set a rather low bar—three or four times a year or more. This year we’ve made an additional distinction. We now designate those who use Scripture at least once a week as Active Bible Users. All others in the Bible User camp are Occasional Bible Users.



**These are the options offered in the survey*

Bible Users, 2024–2026



Looking at the survey results from the last three years, we see the same 2025 spike we had with Scripture Engagement—but Active Bible Users seemed rather unaffected. The Non-Bible User group shrank by a few points in 2025, corresponding to a swell in Occasional Bible Users for that year, but both those groups settled back to 2024 levels in our latest poll.

GENDER

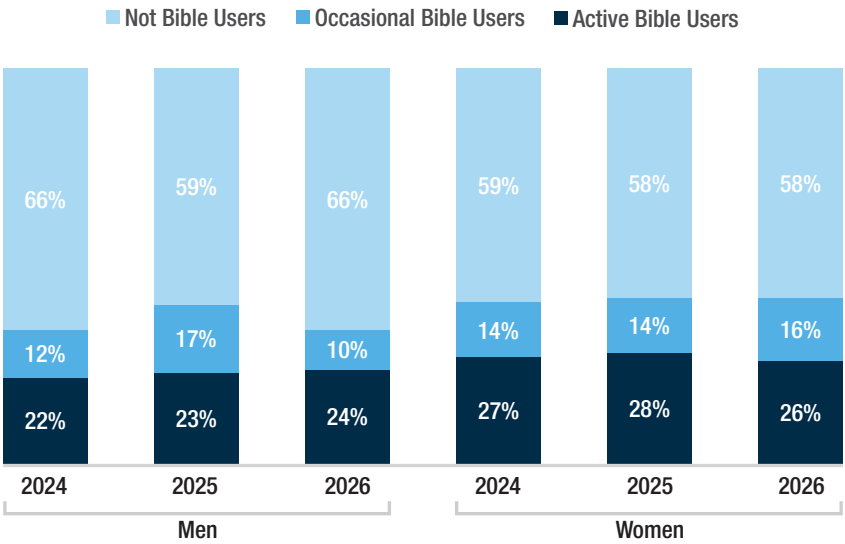
When we compare the genders in Bible Use, women outpace men, just as we saw with Scripture Engagement—but the three-year details give us an interesting picture.

Last year, we reported an overall increase in Bible Use, fueled largely by men. We might credit spiritual revivals, cultural forces, even political trends, but 2025 had a significant surge in men interacting

with the Bible at least three or four times annually. Those gains were not sustained in the 2026 survey. Now, with our Active Bible User designation, we can see that the 2025 surge was almost all in the Occasional Bible User group. These men had connected with the Bible a few times in the previous year, but not even once a week. Any interaction with God’s Word is valuable, but this reminds us of Jesus’s teaching about seed falling on rocky soil. It sprouts quickly but soon withers (Matthew 13:5–6).

Except for one detail. While women have long outpaced men in Bible Use, over these three years men narrowed the gap. *Most* of the men’s 2025 increase was lost, but not all. Active Bible Use by men has increased from 22 percent in 2024 to 24 percent in 2026. Meanwhile, the women’s statistics were mostly untouched by the 2025 spike, and in 2026 a few of these Bible Users slid from Active to Occasional.

Bible Use by Gender, 2024–2026



EDUCATION

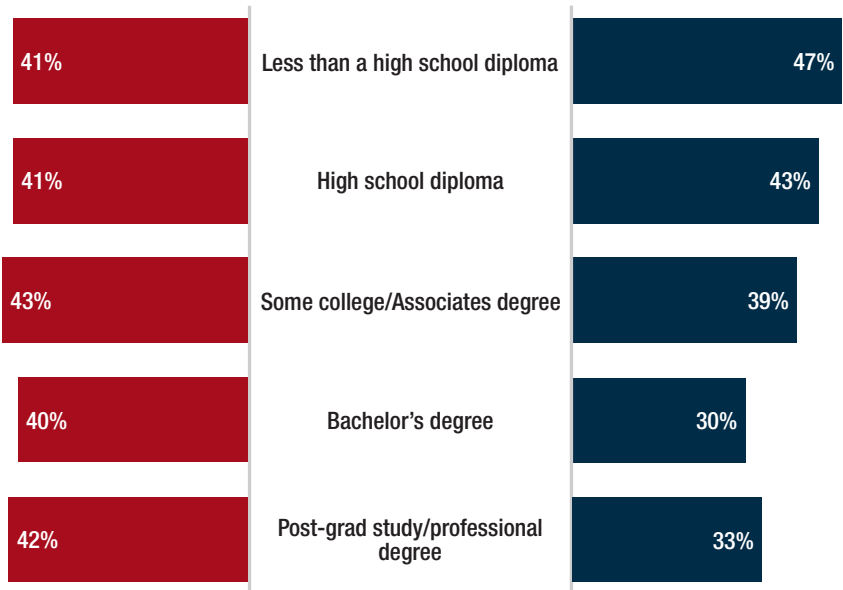
Through 2025, there wasn't much difference in Bible Use by education level. From those lacking a high school diploma to those boasting graduate degrees, about two-fifths of each group were Bible Users and about three-fifths were not. That seems right, doesn't it? The Bible rewards deep study, and it also has a clear message for beginners.

But this year we saw a dramatic division. Among those with college education there are significantly fewer Bible Users. We find significantly more Bible Users among those with less education. Do we need to make a stronger case for the wisdom of Scripture?

Bible Use by Education Level

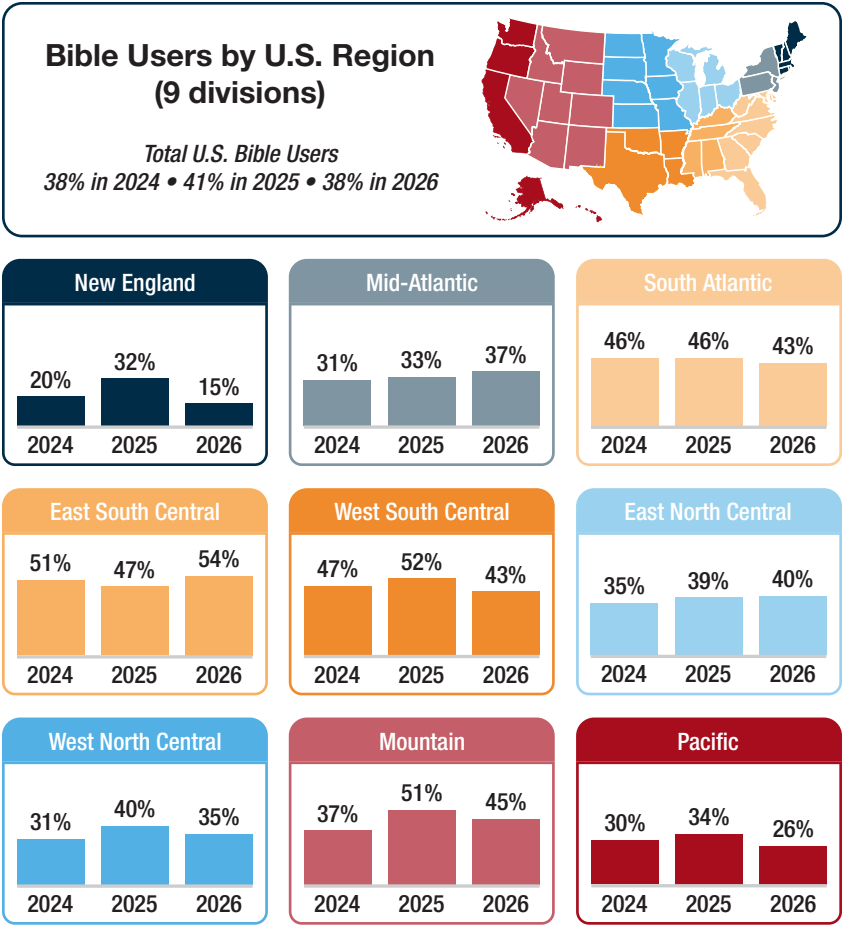
Percentage who are Bible Users

2025 2026



REGION

We often report differences among four major regions of the U.S. The South and Midwest routinely lead the way in most Bible-related and religious metrics, with the West and New England trailing. That’s the case again this year with Bible Use (the South is highest at 45%). But using the Census Bureau’s nine geographical divisions, we find a few surprises, especially when we view a three-year spread.



Though Bible Use decreased overall from 2025 to 2026, two regions bucked that trend. The East South Central region (Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Kentucky) increased this year by seven percentage points. The resulting figure of 54 percent Bible Users is highest among all nine subregions. But the second rising region was the Mid-Atlantic (New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania), which climbed four points to a modest 37 percent, close to the national average.

FAITH IDENTITY AND THE NONES

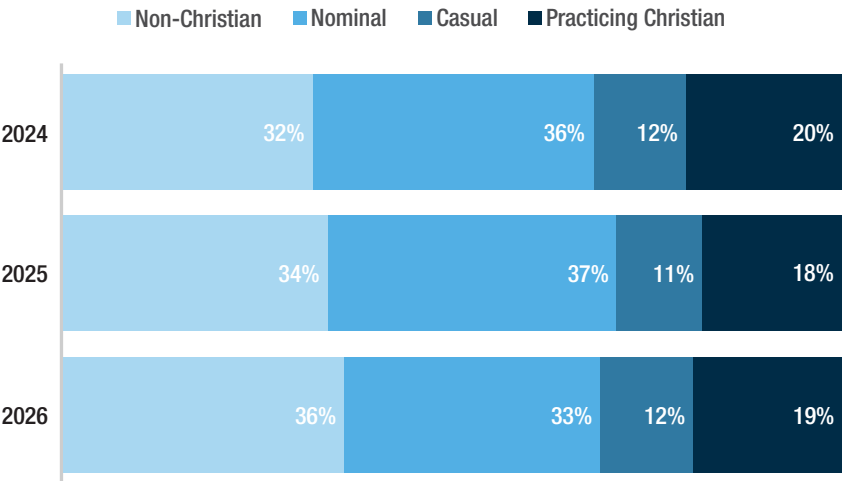
As we try to get a statistical grasp on the “state of the Bible” in America, we know we can’t measure everything, but we can ask a lot of questions about how people see themselves and what groups they identify with. For instance, we ask if people identify as “Christian,” yet we know that this label has a wide range of meanings. For some it’s a deep faith commitment; for others a cultural designation.

For years, then, we have differentiated between Practicing Christians and Non-practicing Christians, based on church attendance and another question about the importance of faith in their lives. We refined this further a couple of years ago, breaking the Non-practicing group into Casual Christians and Nominal Christians. They all call themselves Christians, but the Nominals seldom attend church; the Casuals attend church regularly but don’t consider their faith “very important.”

In the previous section, we noted the “spike” in 2025, when Bible Use and Scripture Engagement increased, only to come back down in 2026. We might expect to see a similar rise and fall in the numbers of Practicing Christians, but we don’t. Instead, we see a drop among

those who call themselves Christians. In two years, the percentage of those identifying as Christian has fallen (68% to 64%). Most of this decrease comes from those who were previously Nominal Christians.

Faith Participation, 2024–2026

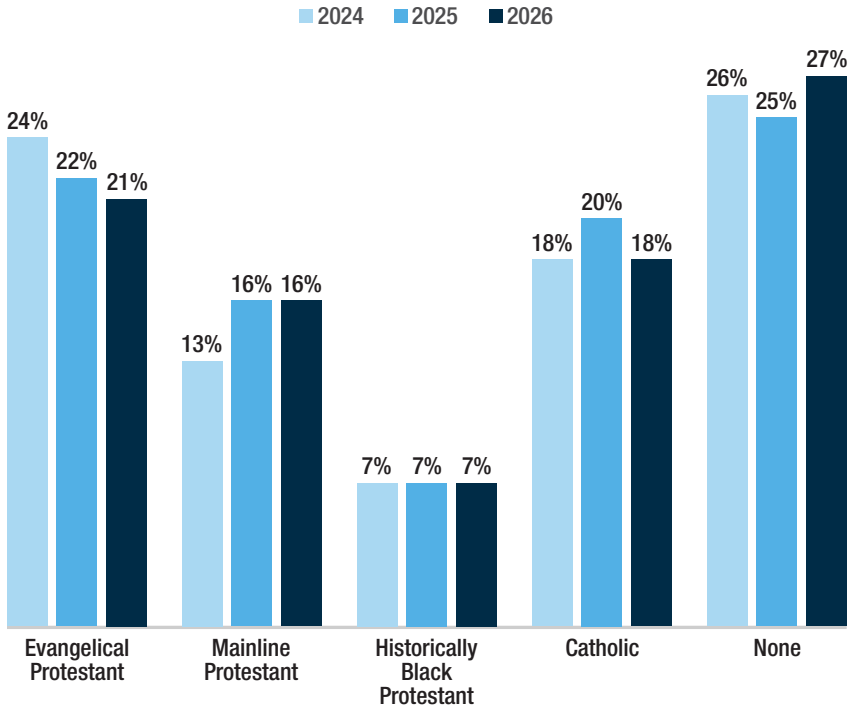


Can we learn more about this three-year progression by looking at denominational groups?

- Evangelicals saw a steady decrease. There was no upward spike in 2025.
- The Evangelical decrease is all among men (23% – 19% – 18%), while women remained steady (24% all three years).
- Mainline Protestants seem to have grown as the Evangelicals have lost, rising three points in these two years.
- Catholics did experience a 2025 spike, but 2026 returned to the 2024 level.
- The Nones—who say they follow no religion in particular—have been largely stable, with a slight rise this year.

Denominational Groups, 2024–2026

Percentage of the American population in each group*

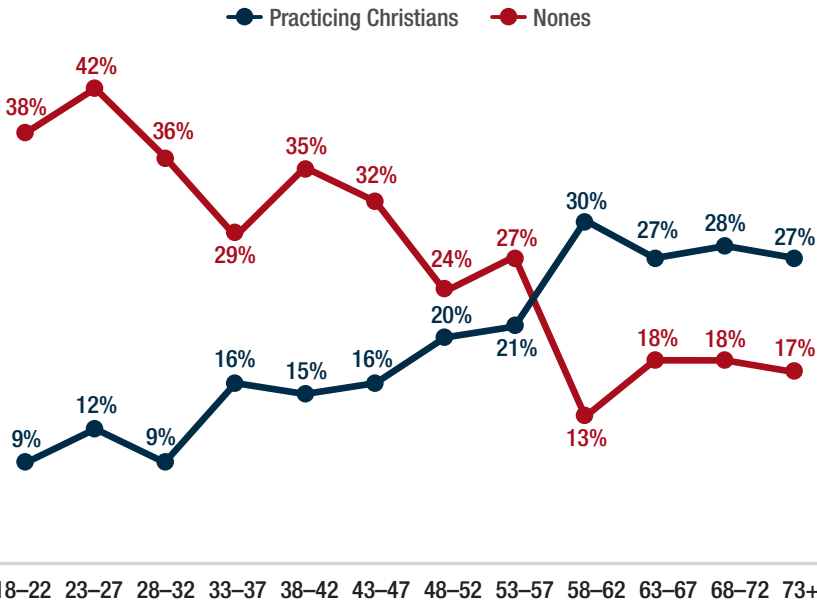


**Respondents indicated specific denominations they belonged to. We assigned them to these categories. About a tenth of respondents indicated other religions.*

Are older people more likely to be Practicing Christians? Are younger people more likely to be Nones? Yes and yes.

For years now, we've segmented the population into generations. You're probably familiar with Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, and Boomers. Each of those generations represents about a 15-year age span. But we're trying something different this year. What if we broke things down into five-year spans? What would that show us about the faith of age groups in America?

Practicing Christians and Nones by Age Subgroups



Up through age 32, about a tenth of Americans are Practicing Christians. In that mid-30s group, there’s a strong upward tick. There’s a mild rise around age 50 and a major one around age 60—the high point where more than a quarter (30%) are Practicing Christians.

The downward track belongs to the Nones. Through age 32, nearly four in ten Americans declare no religious affiliation. We see here a mirror-image of the Practicing Christian graph, with a dip in the mid-30s, a mild drop around age 50 and a major one around age 60—the low point where only about one in seven Americans (13%) are Nones.

Certainly there are generational trends that follow each group as they grow older. In ten or twenty years, we may see the same contour,

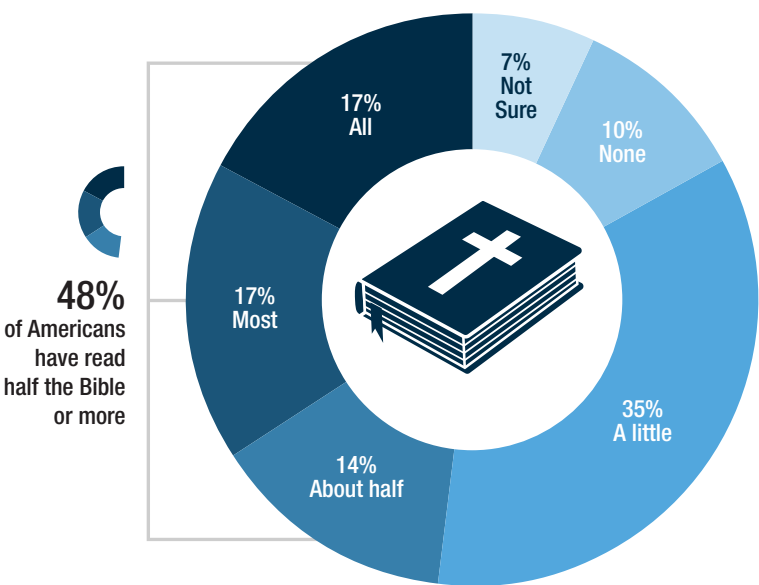
just farther along on the chart. But might we also be seeing a few moments of spiritual development—particular ages when people commonly decide to commit to certain beliefs, practices, or groups?

BIBLE READING PRACTICES

The salt of the earth. The apple of my eye. My brother’s keeper. These phrases all come from the Bible, though many English-speakers don’t realize it. For a couple of centuries, American culture was steeped in a knowledge of Scripture. That’s not the case anymore.

It’s easy for Christians to assume the worst. Is our culture completely ignorant about the Bible? Does anybody read it anymore? We know that 62 percent of Americans are not Bible Users, not even reading it 3–4 times a year. But how much of the Bible have people read?

How Much of the Bible Have You Read?



We asked that very question of a cross-section of the public. When self-reporting, people try to make themselves look good, so we assume these numbers are inflated, but it's still interesting to see how much of the Bible people say they've read.

- About one in six Americans (17%) say they've read the whole Bible.
- About a third (34%) say they've read all or most of it.
- About half (48%) say they've read "about half" or more.
- Only one in ten (10%) say they've read none of it.

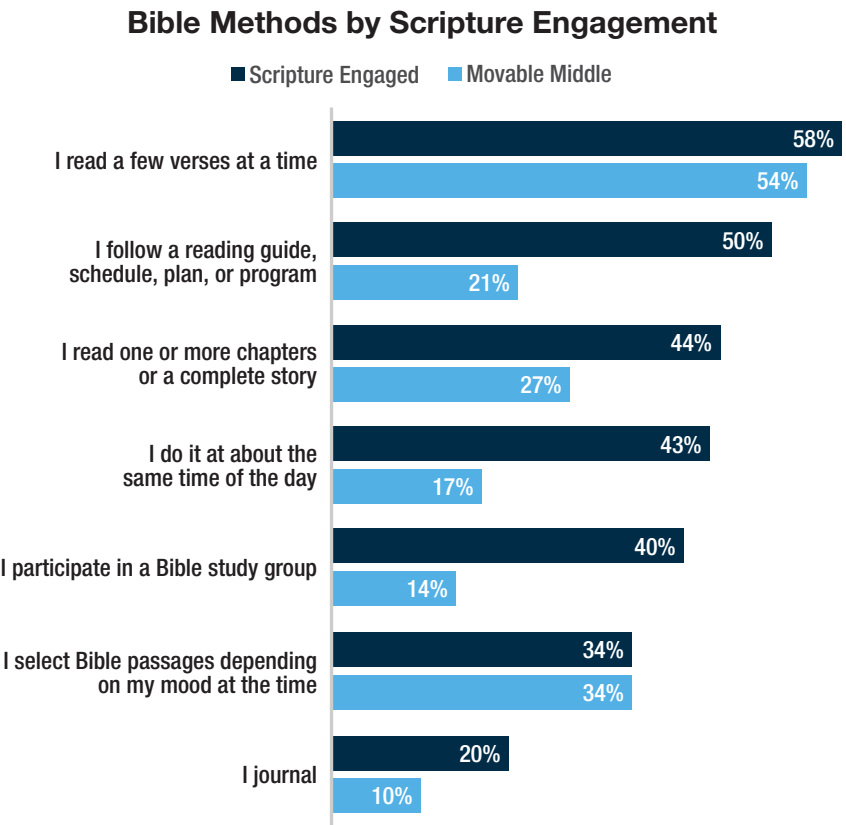
We also find some interesting variations as we cross-reference several other questions about attitudes and practices related to the Bible.

- *When I interact with the Bible, I follow a reading guide, schedule, plan, or program.* Of those who say this, nearly three-quarters (74%) say they've read most or all of the Bible.
- *The message of the Bible has transformed my life.* Of those who strongly agree, nearly two-thirds (64%) say they've read most or all of the Bible.
- *The Bible was written to control or manipulate other people.* Of those who agree, 3 of 5 (60%) say they've read little or none of it.

Clearly, if you set about the task of reading most or all of the Bible, it's good to have a plan. It also helps to be motivated by the life change you're experiencing. And most of those who say the Bible is designed to harm people seem to be judging the book without reading much of it.

BIBLE HABITS

People read the Bible in different ways. Some follow schedules or guides, while others approach Scripture as it fits their mood. We encourage all who interact with the Bible, whatever their method, yet we have observed what might be a *developmental* difference in various Bible-reading methods.



Reading “a few verses at a time” and selecting Bible passages “depending on my mood at the time” are the methods chosen by the greatest portion of the Movable Middle (54% and 34%). Note that these

methods are also chosen by many of the Scripture Engaged (58% and 34%). There's nothing necessarily wrong with these practices. Maybe you only have time for a few verses, or maybe you find such value in those few verses that you dwell on them for a while. Or maybe God guides you to a particular passage that's just what you need in your current mood or situation.

But these practices can also be a bit like living on snacks—a temporary satisfaction, but not a balanced and sustainable diet.

Take a look at the other methods listed. The Scripture Engaged practice these far more than the Movable Middle, and we think that's no accident. Reading complete chapters or stories, following a reading guide or plan, putting the Bible into your regular schedule, and joining a Bible study group—all of these methods help the casual readers of the Movable Middle become more engaged with God's Word. Spiritually, these are healthy, full-course meals.

Many are curious about the Bible, and our respondents often say they wish they read the Bible more, but this evidence is striking: People who follow plans and carve out time tend to succeed in making that wish a reality.

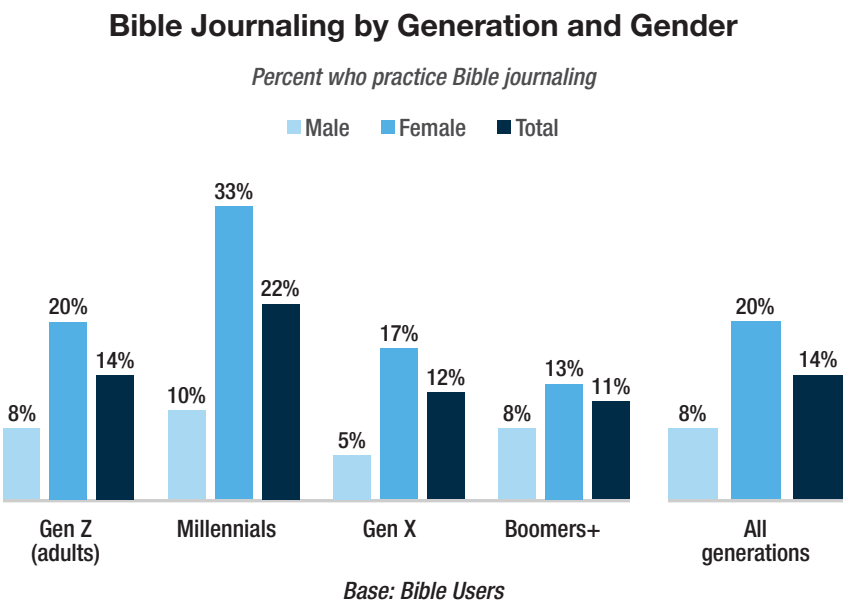
SPOTLIGHT ON JOURNALING

This year we introduced a new Bible study method to this question—journaling. This is simply having a pen and paper (or note-taking app) with you in your Bible time. You can jot down your reactions, questions, prayers, or problems. It's a way of interacting with God as you read. Some critics contend that it could make your Bible

reading more about you than about God, but (with that valuable caution) we see all sorts of ways journaling can promote engagement with Scripture.

The Scripture Engaged are twice as likely to journal as the Movable Middle (20% to 10%), another indication of its value for engagement. While journaling hasn't yet caught on in a big way (practiced by only 15% of Bible Users overall), it might be a wave of the future. One of the current trends in Bible publishing is wider margins for journaling (especially in women's Bibles).

Millennials (22%) are the generation most likely to practice Bible journaling (Gen Z is at 14%). But it's really the Millennial women (33%) who make that happen (joined by 20% of Gen Z women). Across all generations, one out of five Bible-using women (20%) practice Bible journaling, and only one in twelve men (8%).

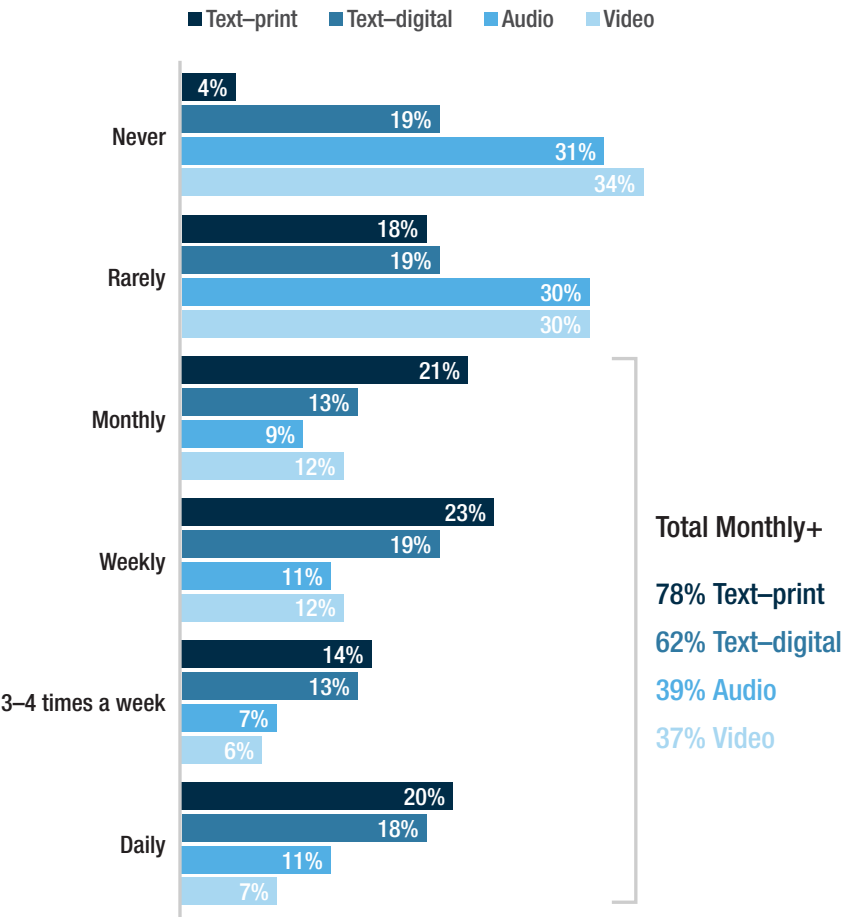


BIBLE TECH

In many churches these days, the pastor or Scripture reader will begin by saying, “Please turn your Bible *or Bible app* to today’s text.” Technology has provided many new options for our interaction with the Bible, and these are being woven into our lives.

Bible Formats by Frequency

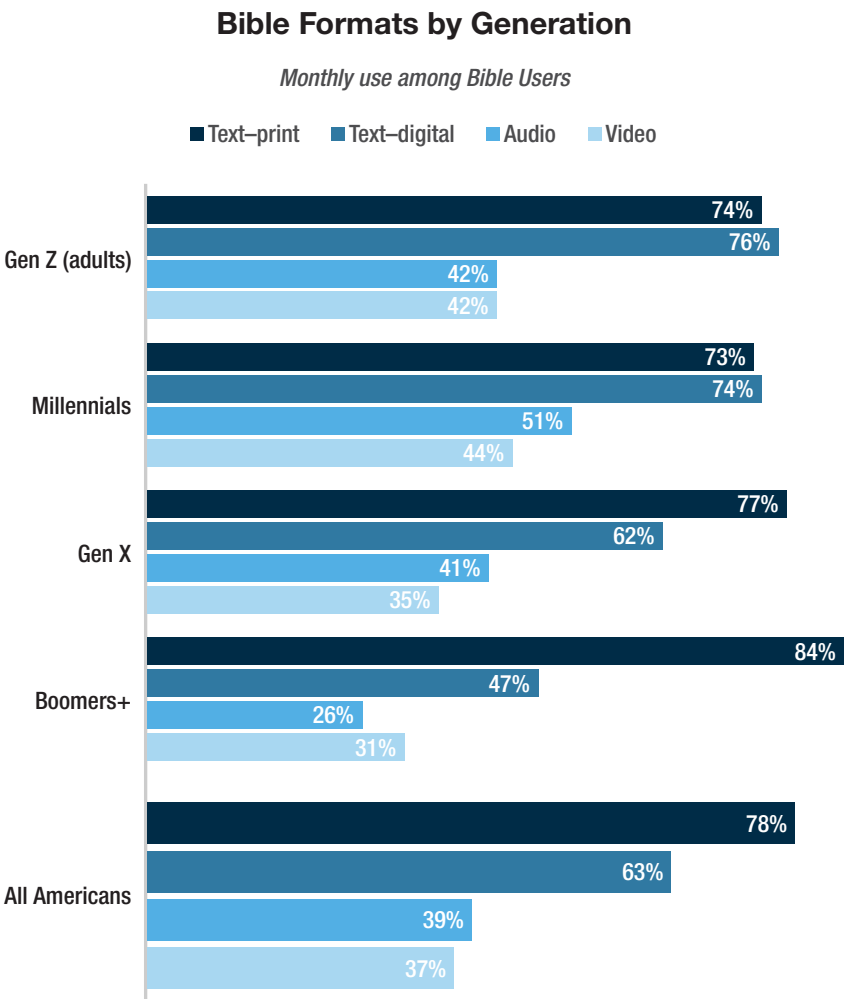
“How often do you interact with Bible content in the following formats?”



Base: Bible Users

That said, the most-used medium for Bible Users is . . . still the printed Bible. More than three-quarters of Bible Users report reading the Bible in printed text at least once a month. For one-fifth of them (20%) it's a daily practice.

But digital text takes a strong second place, with more than three in five (62%) using it at least monthly (and 18% daily).



The generational breakdown is of special interest. Gen Z adults and Millennials report using digital Bible text more than printed Bibles. About three-quarters of Bible Users in those two youngest generations say they read print and digital Scripture text at least once a month, but digital formats have now taken a slim lead over print, which they probably won't lose.

With this milestone in mind, we think back to the long train of Bible translators—Jerome, Wycliffe, Tyndale, Luther, Coverdale, and many others. Missionaries have worked to put the Scriptures into new languages. In the last century, a number of scholars (including our own Eugene Nida) have sought to create new versions that communicate effectively within the modern world.

Yet we expect that the challenge of promoting Scripture engagement in the future will not be so much in finding the right language. Instead, it might be a matter of format. How will Scripture intersect with people's daily lives? In the next ten or twenty years, how will readers choose to access the Bible? What formats will they deeply connect with? And how can we make God's message available to them in the most effective way? ■

2026 PODCAST SERIES

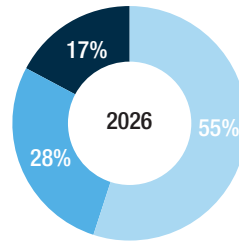
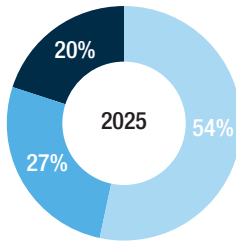
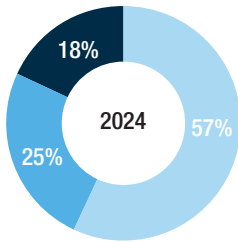
We kicked off this year's podcast series with a studio episode filmed at American Bible Society's Philadelphia headquarters. Meet the *State of the Bible* research team as the group discusses this year's findings with **ABS President and CEO Dr. Jennifer Holloran**.





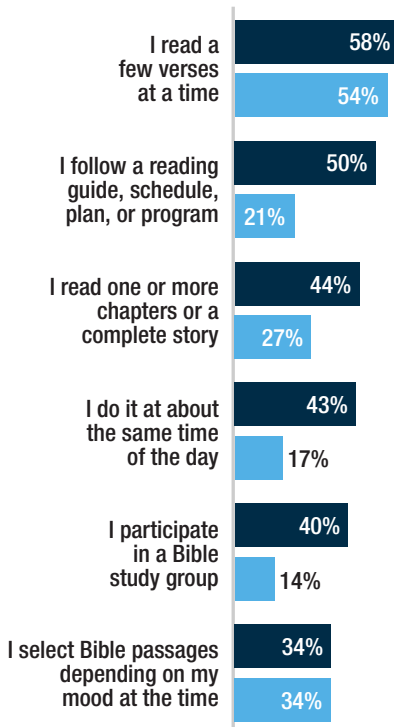
Scripture Engagement in America

■ Bible Disengaged ■ Movable Middle ■ Scripture Engaged



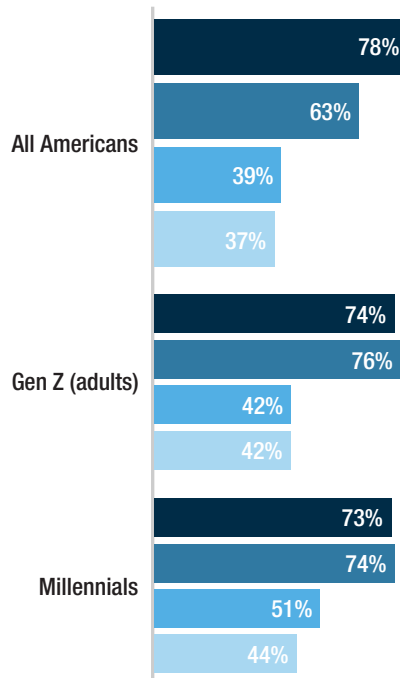
Engagement Practices

■ Scripture Engaged ■ Movable Middle



Engagement Formats

■ Text—print ■ Text—digital ■ Audio ■ Video



Monthly use among Bible Users