

APPENDIXES

METHODOLOGY & DEFINITIONS





METHODOLOGY

In 2026, 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 16-minute questionnaire. The study produced 2,649 responses from a representative sample of adults 18 and older within all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data were collected from January 8–27, 2026. The margin of error for a sample of this size is ± 2.50 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. We welcome your questions on our methodology. Please contact the team at pr@americanbible.org.

SURVEY OVERVIEW

- **Study Population:** General Population Age 18+
- **Sample Units:** 6,603
- **Completed Units:** 2,649
- **Margin of Error:** $\pm 2.5\%$
- **Average Design Effect:** 1.73
- **Survey Field Period:** January 8–27, 2026
- **Median Duration:** 16 minutes

PANEL OUTCOMES

- **Weighted Household Recruitment Rate:**¹ 24.9%

SURVEY OUTCOMES

- **Survey Completion Rate:**² 40.1%
- **Weighted Cumulative Response Rate:**³ 10.0%

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. Not all topics are surveyed each year.

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. Bible Users can be divided into two groups: **Occasional Bible Users** engage with the Bible on their own 3–4 times a year or monthly. **Active Bible Users** engage with the Bible on their own at least weekly.

Calling: We use five items to measure respondents' belief that they are called upon (by the needs of society, by a person's own inner potential, by God, by a Higher Power, etc.) to do a particular kind of work. The first four items are from the Brief Calling Scale.¹ These

¹ Dik, B. J., Eldridge, B. M., Steger, M. F., & Duffy, R. D. (2012). Development and validation of the Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ) and Brief Calling Scale (BCS). *Journal of Career Assessment, 20*, 242–263. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072711434410>.

items measure both presence and searching for a calling. A fifth item addresses whether there is an overtly spiritual component to the sense of calling. Responses are gathered using a five-point scale from “Not true at all of me” to “Totally true of me.”

1. I have a calling to a particular kind of work.
2. I have a good understanding of my calling as it applies to my life.
3. I am trying to figure out my life calling.
4. I am searching for my calling.
5. Calling is a spiritual experience.

Church Health: We ask churched respondents five questions drawn from the NextStep Church Assessment.² They are asked to rate their satisfaction with how their church is doing on a ten-point scale. We report the mean of the responses to the five items.

1. My church challenges me to grow and take next steps spiritually.
2. My church provides opportunities to grow spiritually through relationships with others.
3. My church helps me understand the Bible in greater depth.
4. My church promotes a strong serving culture that is widely recognized by the local community.
5. My pastor models and reinforces how to grow spiritually.

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.

² NextStep for Churches is available at church.nextstep.bible.

Consolidated Identity: The extent to which an individual has developed a coherent, grounded, and positive sense of self. We measure it using three items from the Consolidated Identity scale of the Self-Concept and Identity Measure.³

1. I know who I am.
2. I always have a good sense about what is important to me.
3. I know what I believe or value.

Contributory Love: This concept is adapted from work on interpersonal love by VanderWeele and Lee, who define Contributory Love as “a disposition towards desiring good for a person for his or her own sake.”⁴ We use the following items in our survey:

1. I make necessary sacrifices in order to help other people.
2. My own wellbeing depends on meaningfully contributing to the well-being of others.

Correlation: In statistics, the strength of a linear relationship between two variables is often expressed as a numerical value preceded by the italicized letter *r*. We report correlations only when they are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) and when the correlation coefficient (*r*) is 0.2 or greater. We use these 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 ($r = 0.40—0.59$)

3 Kaufman, E. A., Puzia, M. E., Crowell, S. E., & Price, C. J. (2019). Replication of the Self-Concept and Identity Measure (SCIM) Among a Treatment-Seeking Sample. *Identity, 19*(1), 18–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2019.1566068>

4 VanderWeele, T. J. (2023). On an analytic definition of love. *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy, 25*, 105–135. <https://www.templeton.org/grant/the-construct-and-assessment-of-interpersonal-love>

- Strong ($r = 0.60\text{--}0.79$)
- Very Strong ($r = 0.80\text{--}1.00$)

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.

Forgiveness: The Forgiveness data is derived from a self-reporting measure of dispositional forgiveness using four items from the Heartland Forgiveness Scale.⁵ The measure uses a seven-point scale with responses ranging from “Not true of me at all” to “Almost always true of me.” Items address forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, forgiveness of circumstances, and forgiveness from God.

1. It is really hard for me to accept myself once I’ve messed up.
2. If others mistreat me, I continue to think badly of them.
3. With time I am understanding of bad circumstances in my life.
4. I have done things for which there is no divine forgiveness.

Generations:

- **Generation Z (1997–2012):** Ages 13 to 29 in 2026. This study includes adults (18–29) in Generation Z.
- **Millennials (1981–1996):** Ages 30 to 45 in 2026.
- **Generation X (1965–1980):** Ages 46 to 61 in 2026.
- **Baby Boomers (1946–1964):** Ages 62 to 80 in 2026.

⁵ Thompson, L. Y., Snyder, C. R., Hoffman, L., Michael, S. T., Rasmussen, H. N., Billings, L. S., Heinze, L., Neufeld, J. E., Shorey, H. S., Roberts, J. C., & Roberts, D. E. (2005). Dispositional forgiveness of self, others, and situations. *Journal of Personality*, 73, 313–359.

- **Elders (1928–1945):** This study places any respondent 81 years of age or older 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+**.

Hope Agency: This is a measure of an individual’s perceived capacity for initiating and maintaining the actions necessary to reach a goal. It is measured with three items. Scores range from 3–24.⁶

1. At the present, I am energetically pursuing my life plan.
2. Right now, I can see myself as being pretty successful in navigating life.
3. At this time, I am meeting the life goals that I have set for myself.

Human Flourishing Index: While healthcare often focuses on pathology—what’s wrong—this is an effort to see health in a positive way. Do people feel happy, healthy, supported by friends, and so on? The Human Flourishing Index emerged at Harvard University’s T. H. Chan School of Public Health in 2017.⁷ It has been used (with permission) in the *State of the Bible* since 2020. Researchers focus on six areas of the human experience (“domains”), asking two questions about each.

1. Happiness & Life Satisfaction
2. Mental & Physical Health
3. Meaning & Purpose

6 Snyder, C. R., Harris, C., Anderson, J. R., Holleran, S. A., Irving, L. M., Sigmon, S. T., Yoshinobu, L., Gibb, J., Langelle, C., & Hamey, P. (1991). The will and the ways: Development and validation of an individual-differences measure of hope. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60, 570–585.

7 VanderWeele, T. J. (2017). On the promotion of human flourishing. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(31), 8148–56.

4. Character & Virtue
5. Close Social Relationships
6. Financial & Material Stability

The results yield two composite scores on a 0 to 10 scale: the *Human Flourishing Index* (which leaves out the financial domain) and the *Secure Flourishing Index* (which includes it).

Loneliness: We measure loneliness using five items from the UCLA Loneliness Scale.⁸

- How often do you feel alone?
- How often do you feel that you are no longer close to anyone?
- How often do you feel left out?
- How often do you feel that no one really knows you well?
- How often do you feel that people are around you but not with you?

Loneliness scores range from 5–20. We group them into three levels.

- Low: 5–9
- Moderate: 10–15
- High: 16–20

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.

⁸ Russell, D. (1996). UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3): Reliability, validity, and factor structure. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 66, 20–40.

Non-Christian: Individuals who consider themselves to be anything other than Christians. This includes those of other faiths (see above) as well as the **Nones**, who do not identify with any religion.

Non-Practicing Christian: Self-identified Christians who are not Practicing Christians as defined below. Two subsets of this group are **Nominals**, who identify as Christians but do not attend church at least monthly, and **Casuals**, who identify and attend but do not “strongly agree” that their faith is very important in their lives.

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

- Self-identify as Christian, adhering to a historically biblical tradition
- Attend a religious service at least once a month
- Say their faith is very important in their lives

Pathway of Scripture Engagement: American Bible Society’s theory of change: a ten-step logic model describing how individuals with access to the Bible receive it, interact with it, and ultimately are changed by it. See *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 of 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 also 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 questions are asked only of self-identifying Christians. The svg is used by permission of Renovo.

Spiritual Vitality Segments: We place self-identifying Christian respondents into one of four descriptive groups based on their SVG scores:

1. **Ailing** Score = 0–50
2. **Unhealthy** Score = 51–70
3. **Healthy** Score = 71–90
4. **Thriving** Score = 91–100

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 or witnessed physical, psychological, or emotional trauma? That is, extreme violence, abuse, or a near-death experience that produces a response of intense fear, helplessness, or horror? *Check all that apply.*” Response options are:

- You personally experienced a trauma
- You witnessed a trauma
- 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

Trust: We measure interpersonal trust using five items from the General Trust Scale.⁹

1. Most people are basically honest.
2. Most people are trustworthy.
3. I am trusting of others.
4. Most people are sincere and well-intentioned.
5. People will usually keep their promises if they make them.

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. ■

⁹ Yamagishi, T. & Yamagishi, M. (1994). Trust and commitment in the United States and Japan. *Motivation and Emotion*, 18 (2), 129–166.



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).

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

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

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.