

# American Bible Society

State of the Bible 2017

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Research conducted among U.S. adults  
February 2017

*Research commissioned by  
American Bible Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

*Research conducted by  
Barna Group, Ventura, California*

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# Report Contents

**Introduction** ..... 3

**Data Analysis**

1. Bible Engagement..... 6  
2. Bible Perceptions .....20  
3. Bible Penetration .....26  
4. Bible Literacy.....28  
5. Moral Decline.....37  
6. Trauma.....39  
7. Giving to Non-Profit Organizations.....40

**Appendix I | Data Tables**

1. Bible Engagement.....41  
2. Bible Perceptions .....66  
3. Bible Penetration .....71  
4. Bible Literacy.....74  
5. Moral Decline.....87  
6. Trauma.....89  
7. Giving to Non-Profit Organizations.....90

**Appendix II | About the Study**

A. Methodology.....91  
B. Guide to Survey Data.....93

# Introduction

This report contains the findings from a nationwide study commissioned by the American Bible Society and conducted by Barna Group. Two research methodologies were used for the study; one included 1,002 telephone interviews with adults 18 and older in the continental U.S., while the other was an online survey conducted with 1,028 adults using a nationally representative panel.

A subset of the questions was asked in the telephone survey, while all of the questions were included online. The use of two methodologies provides a larger sample size and ensures greater representation among all age groups, ethnicities and socioeconomic groups. The telephone interviews were conducted from January 20 to January 30, 2017, and the online surveys were conducted January 23 to February 2, 2017. The objectives of this research were to determine:

- Bible engagement
- perceptions of the Bible
- Bible penetration
- Bible literacy
- moral perceptions and social impact
- charitable giving

This report contains key findings from the telephone and online interviews completed for this study. Following the Introduction is the Data Analysis section, which is a written explanation of the results that also includes an analysis of the data's implications. The Appendices contain data tables, a more detailed description of the research methodology and definitions of terminology used in this report. Copies of the questionnaire and more detailed, cross-tabulated data tables are provided separately.

## Survey Definitions

Segmentation of the findings is as follows:

**Bible Engagement** (see next page)

**Practicing Protestant, practicing Catholic:** Practicing Christians are those who identify as either Protestant or Catholic, who attend a religious service at least once a month and who say their faith is very important in their lives.

**Non-Practicing Christian:** Self-identified Christians who are non-practicing as defined above

**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.

Other definitions used in the survey include:

**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.

**Unchurched:** adults who have not attended a Christian church service in the past six months.

**Generations:**

Millennials: those currently ages 18 to 32

Gen-Xers: those currently ages 33 to 51

Boomers: those currently ages 52 to 70

Elders: those currently ages 71 or older

## Bible Engagement Definitions

Category	Definition	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Bible Engaged</b>	actual word of God or inspired word with no errors, read Bible at least 4 times each week OR inspired word, some factual errors, read Bible daily	20%	21%	21%	19%	17%	17%	20%
<b>Bible friendly</b>	actual word of God or inspired word with no errors  do not read Bible at least 4 times a week	45%	37%	38%	37%	38%	37%	38%
<b>Bible neutral</b>	inspired word with factual errors or not inspired but tells how writers understood ways of God  not dependent on how often they read the Bible	25%	26%	24%	26%	23%	24%	23%
<b>Bible skeptic, 2017 definition*</b>	just another book of teachings written by men with stories and advice, <b>do not</b> believe the Bible was written to control or manipulate people  not dependent on how often they read the Bible	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	6%
<b>Bible Antagonistic</b>	just another book of teachings written by men with stories and advice, <b>do</b> believe the Bible was written to control or manipulate people  not dependent on how often they read the Bible	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	13%

Category	Definition	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Bible skeptic (combining Skeptic and Antagonistic, for tracking purposes)</b>	just another book of teachings written by men with stories and advice  not dependent on how often they read the Bible	10%	14%	17%	19%	21%	22%	19%

*\*In 2017, the previous Bible skeptic group was split into two groups: those who are simply skeptical of the Bible's authenticity or authority and those who question the writers' motives.*

# Data Analysis

## 1. Bible Engagement

### Bible Engagement Profile

[Table 1.1, pages 41-42]

The first two Bible engagement segments take into consideration people's beliefs about the Bible and their readership habits. What separates the two top Bible engagement categories from the rest is the level of Bible reading. Bible Engaged adults read the Bible at least four times a week. Bible Friendly adults believe the same things Bible Engaged adults believe but do not read the Bible with such frequency. The remaining three segments – Bible Neutral, Skeptic and Antagonistic – are strictly based on people's view of the Bible and not their reading habits.

**Bible Engaged** (20% of the population) believe the Bible is the actual word of God or inspired word of God. They engage with the Bible at least four times each week. More often than not, Bible Engaged adults are married females from the Baby Boomer generation, are 53 years of age on average, have not been to college, are weekly church attenders, attend Protestant churches, and reside in the South or Midwest. Three-quarters of Bible Engaged adults read the Bible every day. More African-Americans can be found in this category than the four other Bible engagement segments.

**Bible Friendly** (38% of the population) includes the most US adults. They believe that the Bible is the actual word of God or the inspired word of God, without errors, but read the Bible less often than four or more times a week. On average, Bible Friendly adults are 5 years younger than those who are Engaged, at 47 years old. Like Bible Engaged adults, nearly half have never attended college, are more likely to be married, have children under 18 at home, and reside in the South and Midwest. Half of Bible Friendly adults are Christians who do not have a practicing faith. While two in five attend church weekly, nearly one-third (32%) are unchurched. About half of them are notional Christians (49%), that is, they call themselves Christian but do not believe Jesus died for their sins. About one-third of Bible Friendly adults are Catholics. Three out of five (60%) report reading the Bible at least three or four times a year.

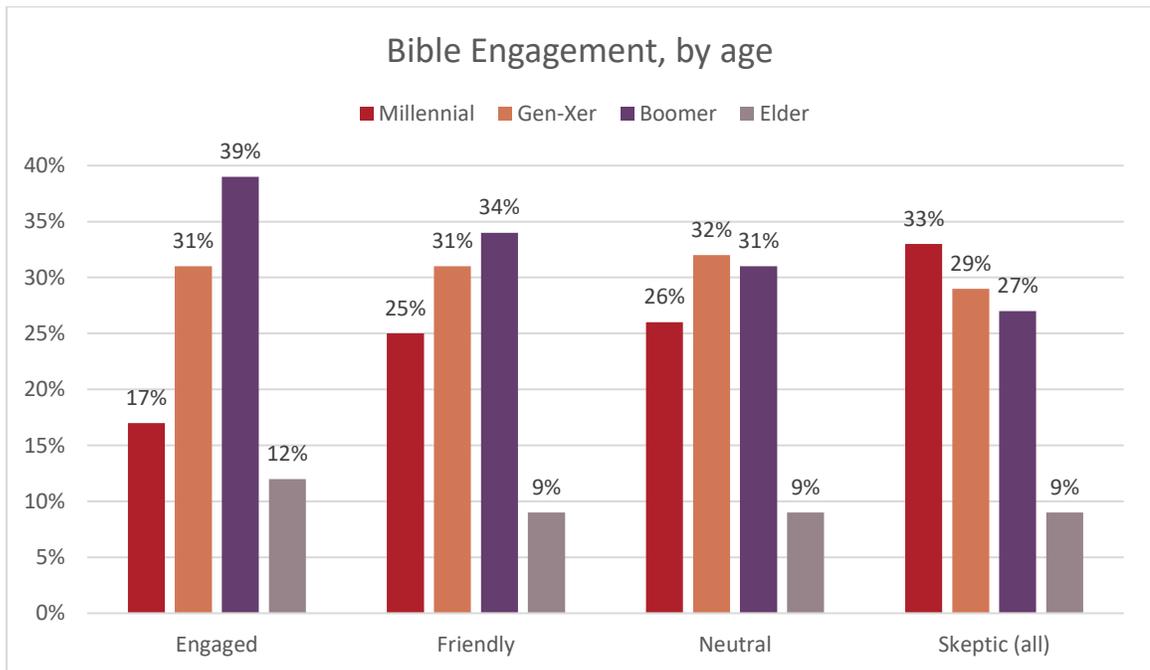
**Bible Neutral** (23% of adults) believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God but contains factual errors or that it is not inspired but tells how the writers understood the

ways of God. Adults in this category average 45 years of age. Similar to Bible Friendly adults, many in the Bible Neutral category are notional Christians or Catholics. Just over one-third (35%) do not consider themselves to be Christian and over half are (58%) are unchurched. Roughly one in four (27%) say they read the Bible at least three or four times a year.

**Bible Skeptics, Total**, (19% of adults) do not hold a very high view of scripture. They believe it is just another book of teachings written by men that contain stories and advice. For the first time in 2017, a follow-up question was asked to determine if people hold an antagonistic view of the Bible. Thus, Bible skeptics are broken into two *distinct* categories:

**Bible Antagonistic** (13% of the adult population): 78% of Bible Skeptics believe strongly or somewhat that the Bible was written to manipulate or control other people. Antagonistics' average age is 41. He is more likely to be an unmarried male from the Gen-X or Millennial generation. Antagonistics are largely non-Christian, do not attend church, and a small 5% report reading the Bible at least three to four times a year.

**Non-Antagonistic Skeptics** (6% of adults) believe the Bible is just a book of teachings but do not believe it was written to manipulate or control people. Non-Antagonistic Skeptics, on average, are slightly older than those who are Antagonistic (43 years old). More college graduates fall into this category than any other category. Like their Antagonistic counterpart, they are largely single and not Christian, and most are unchurched.



*Please note that many of the questions in this section were asked only of the “Bible users” segment. “Bible users” are those who report reading, listening to or praying with the Bible on their own at least three to four times a year.*

## **Bible Users**

[Table 1.2, page 43]

Half of Americans are ‘Bible users’ – that is, they engage with the Bible by reading, listening to or praying with the Bible on their own at least three to four times a year (50%). This proportion has remained relatively consistent since 2011. The addition of language to include those who listen to or pray with the Bible to “Bible readership” had no effect on the number of people who engage with the Bible.

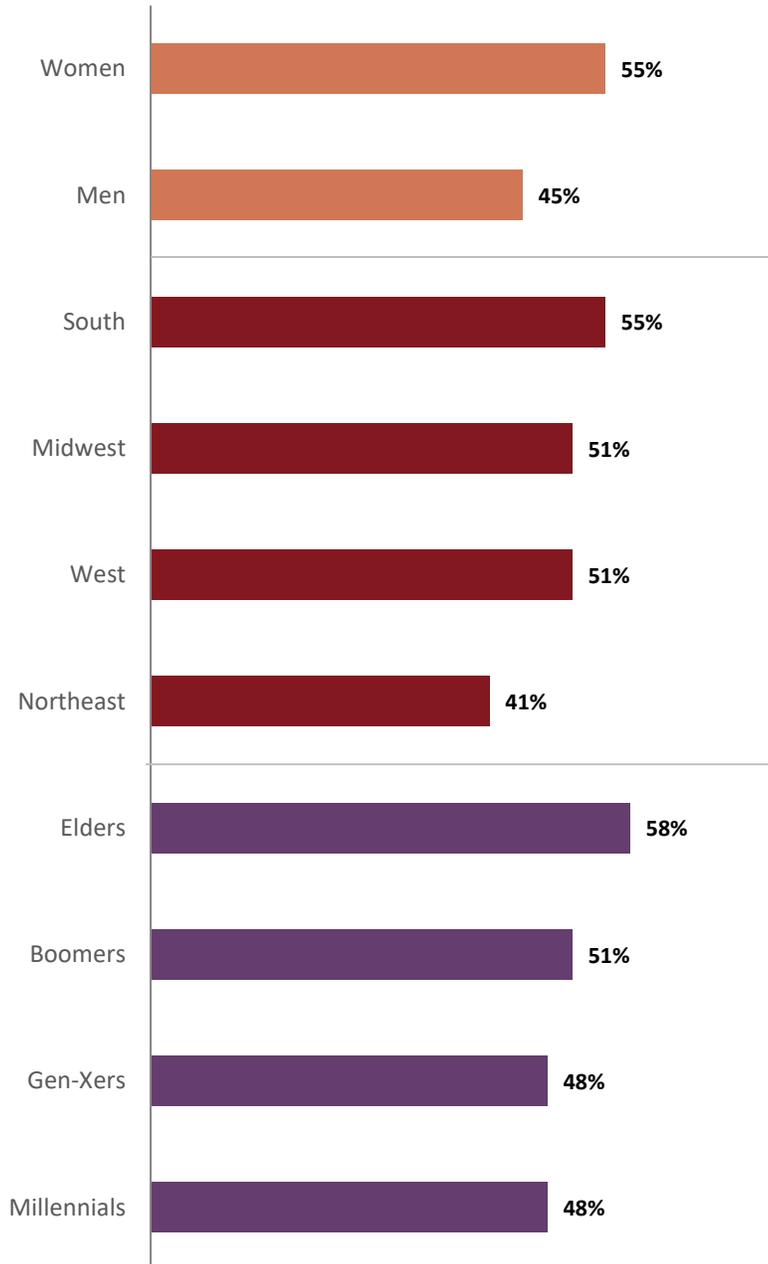
Adults who read the Bible daily account for 16% of the total adult population, followed by 14% who read several times a week, 7% do so once a week, 7% about once a month, and 6% read it three to four times a year.

**Nearly one-third of adults say they never read, listen to or pray with the Bible (32%), a five-percentage point increase over 2016.** One in ten adults (10%) read the Bible less than once a year and 8% read it once or twice a year. Millennials and Gen-Xers are less likely to use the Bible than Boomers and Elders.

Of course, Bible use among Skeptics and Antagonistics is uncommon, yet one in five (20%) of Skeptics qualify as Bible users. Just 5% of Antagonistics qualify as Bible users, compared to 27% of Bible Neutrals, and 59% of those who are Bible Friendly.

Bible usage is high among Black, non-Hispanics. Two-thirds are Bible users (67%), compared to about half (49%) of White, non-Hispanics. High levels of Bible usage are common among practicing Protestants (93%) but less common among practicing Catholics (64%), and non-practicing Christians (44%). Above average usage can also be found among residents of the South, women, married adults and households with children under 18.

Bible Use More Likely Among Women,  
Older Americans and in the South



## Overall Bible Exposure

[Tables 1.3, page 44]

To determine total exposure to the Bible, adults were asked how often they hear the Bible read aloud at a church service or Mass. About three in five Americans say they hear the Bible read in this setting at least three or four times a year (58%), including 42% who hear it at least weekly. About one in four never hear the Bible read aloud (25%). These numbers are on par with the previous year.

Of those who do not use the Bible at least three to four times a year, roughly one in seven (15%) report hearing it read aloud at a church service or Mass at least three or four times a year. These “hearers” are more often Catholic (29%) or non-practicing Christians (19%).

When combined with the previous question about personal Bible use, total Bible exposure is right at 65% of all adults, which is consistent with the previous year’s findings.

## Time Spent Reading the Bible

[Table 1.4, page 45]

On average, Bible users typically read the Bible 30 minutes during each sitting. One in four (25%) spends 15-29 minutes reading the Bible at each sitting compared to a slightly higher number who read for 30-44 minutes per sitting (29%). Just 6% read the Bible for 45-59 minutes at each sitting. An additional 23% spend an hour or more reading the Bible per sitting. On the opposite end of the spectrum, one in six (17%) spend less than 15 minutes per sitting. These proportions have remained statistically unchanged since tracking began in 2013.

Households earning less than \$50,000 annually are more likely to spend an hour or more reading the Bible at each sitting than are high earning households of \$100,000 or more (27% vs. 18% respectively). African-Americans also are more likely to spend at least an hour reading it at any one time (29%), compared to both Whites and Hispanics (21% each). Interestingly, there is no variation between those who are Bible Engaged, Friendly or Neutral in the amount of time they spend reading the Bible at each sitting.

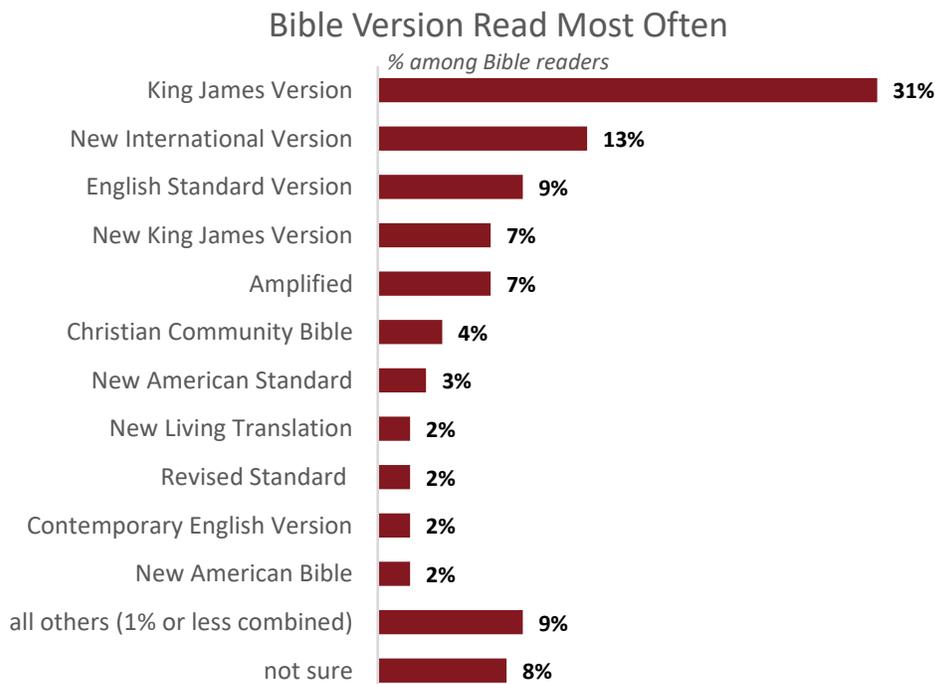
## Preferred Bible Version

[Table 1.5, pages 46-47]

The King James Version continues to be the version Bible users prefer most often, with 31% using this translation. However, the King James has seen a nine-percentage point decrease in usage since 2016 and 14% decrease since Barna first measured this in 2011. Use of the King James Version (KJV) is directly related to age. Nearly half of all Elders use the KJV most often (49%), compared to 40% of Boomers, 34% of Gen-Xers and 14% of Millennials. There has also been a slight drop in the percent of Bible users who prefer the New King James version (12% in 2016 to 7%).

The New International Version (NIV) (13%) is the second most-read version, behind the KJV. Practicing Protestants are much more likely than average to use NIV (21%). Boomers also have an above average preference for this translation (21%). Third in usage is the English Standard Version (ESV), with nine percent of Bible readers using this version most often. ESV use is up slightly from the previous year, but is on par with the 2015 findings.

The New King James Version and the Amplified Bible are both tied for the fourth most commonly read Bible version at 7% each. Practicing Catholics show a higher than average usage of the Amplified Bible (21%) as well as and the Christian Community Bible (14%).



## Motivations for Reading the Bible

[Table 1.6, page 48]

When presented with five possible motivations for reading the Bible, **more than two-thirds of Bible readers read it because it brings them closer to God (68%). This is a statistically significant increase of 11 percentage points from the previous year.** Most (87%) practicing Protestants say reading the Bible to become closer to God is their top motivation compared to 69% of Practicing Catholics and 59% of non-practicing Christians.

Other reasons for reading the Bible include the need for comfort, chosen by 14% of Bible readers, needing direction or having a problem they need to solve (9%), knowing they're supposed to (6%) or for part of their studies at school (3%). **Significantly less adults in 2017 say they turn the Bible for direction or problem solving than the previous year (9% in 2016).**

Bible Neutrals are more likely to read the Bible for comfort (22%) or for a problem they need to solve or for direction (18%) than those who are Bible Engaged or Bible Friendly

## Level of Bible Use and Desire for Reading

[Tables 1.7 and 1.8, pages 49-50]

More than half of all adults wish they read the Bible more often (58%), down slightly from 2016 (61%). What is surprising is that **one in five Skeptics (22%) and nearly the same number of those who ascribe to non-Christian faith groups and no faith desire to read the Bible more.**

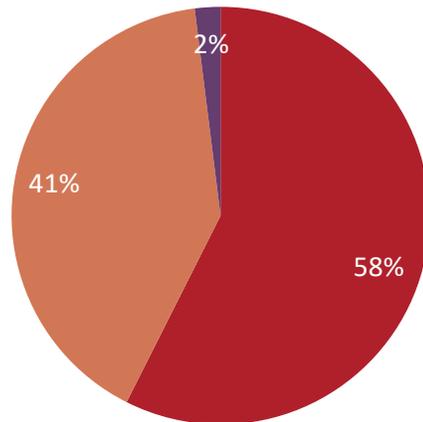
Men are more likely than women to say they are *not* interested in spending more time with the Bible (47% vs. women 34%) as are high income earners, whites, single adults, residents of the Northeast, non-practicing Christians and adults of other and no faith groups. Most Antagonistics (91%) and Skeptics (74%) have no desire for greater Bible reading. Three in five Neutrals (58%) do not want more time with the Bible compared to one in five Bible Friendlies (21%) and Bible Engaged (15%).

Despite most Americans' desire to read the Bible more, two-thirds of them (67%) say their level of Bible reading is about the same as it was one year ago. One in five (21%) report an increase in Bible use this year compared to one in ten (10%) who believe their use is down this year compared to a year ago.

African-Americans, practicing Protestants, Bible Engaged and residents of the South are more likely than average to report an increase in Bible readership over the past year. Millennials and non-practicing Christians are more likely to report a decrease in readership.

### Desire to read the Bible More

■ Desire more ■ Desire less ■ Unsure



## Reasons for Bible Engagement / Disengagement

[Tables 1.9 and 1.10, page 50-51]

A follow-up question was asked among adults who say they had either increased or decreased their Bible reading: *Why* had such an increase or decrease occurred?

**More than one half (56%) of those who report an increase in Bible readership attribute it to their understanding that Bible reading is an important part of their faith journey.** Although this number is lower than last year, it is on track with 2014 and 2015 findings.

A difficult life experience that led people to search the Bible for direction or answers came in second (39%), at an increase of 13 percentage points from the previous year.

Seeing how the Bible changed someone they knew for the better was an important motivating factor for 30% of adults, as was being asked by someone they know to read the Bible (20%). Both of these factors were cited by double the number of respondents. Going to church where the Bible is more accessible (23%) and a significant life change (marriage, birth of child, etc., 22%) round out the list of motivating factors for positive changes in Bible readership.

The top reason for decreased Bible reading continues to be being too busy with life's responsibilities. More than half (54%) of those who saw a decrease in Bible readership over the previous year list this as a top reason.

The second-tier reasons for decreased readership are a difficult experience that caused them to doubt their faith (25%) and having a significant change in life such as a job loss or death of a loved one (22%). Nearly as many (18%) said they didn't read the Bible as often as the previous year because they decided to leave the church all together – one in ten (11%) of whom became atheist or agnostic and 4% who converted to another faith.

## Frustrations with Bible Reading

[Table 1.11, pages 52-54]

When asked what their most significant frustrations are when it comes to reading the Bible, the largest share of all adults surveyed said they don't have enough time to read it (30%). Additionally, this reason was cited by one in four (23%) as their *number-one* frustration. Bible Engaged Christians (42%), Bible Friendly (40%) and practicing Protestants (47%) are especially likely to list this as their most significant frustration.

Interestingly, the next most common answer respondents gave to this question is that they don't have *any* frustrations when reading the Bible. This is particularly true among the Bible Engaged (37%), Practicing Catholics (30%), Elders (35%), Africa-Americans (28%) and Practicing Protestants (26%). The number of people who said they didn't have any frustrations rose by five percentage points this year.

Language that is difficult to relate to (16%), not feeling excited about reading the Bible (16%), and not knowing where to start (14%) round out the next tier of frustrations. Other, less mentioned frustrations include not understanding the Bible's background or history (11%), confusing stories (9%), layout that is difficult to navigate (8%), and not being able to find certain stories or verses (6%). One in seven (15%) simply stated that they don't read the Bible.

In addition to an increase in the number of people who said they didn't have any frustrations when reading the Bible, those who said they don't feel excited about reading it also rose slightly from 2016 (12% to 16%).

## Favorable and Unfavorable Emotions When Reading or Hearing the Bible

[Tables 1.12 and 1.13, pages 55-58]

All adults who have ever read the Bible or who have heard the Bible read in a church service or Mass were presented with possible *favorable* and *unfavorable* emotions they could have experienced in reading the Bible. Respondents were asked to choose from a list of descriptions any emotions they had experienced.

Looking first at *favorable emotions*, about half of all adults said reading the Bible gave them a feeling of peace (49%). Slightly fewer adults said they felt peaceful, after reading or hearing the Bible read, than in 2016.

Fewer also said the Bible made them feel hopeful (45%), compared to two out of five (41%) who felt encouraged. Another one in three adults said that reading the Bible gave them a sense of direction (32%), and nearly as many said it made them happy (29%). One in five said they felt intrigued after reading the Bible (19%).

The more engaged in the Bible, the more people identified with five out of the six phrases presented. Only “intrigued” showed little difference between the Bible engaged segments.

Presented with six *unfavorable emotions*, two out of three adults (65%) who have ever read the Bible or who have heard it read say that none of the words describes their experience. Practicing Protestants and Bible Engaged adults are most likely to say they do not experience any unfavorable emotions, while Millennials and non-Christians are least likely to say so.

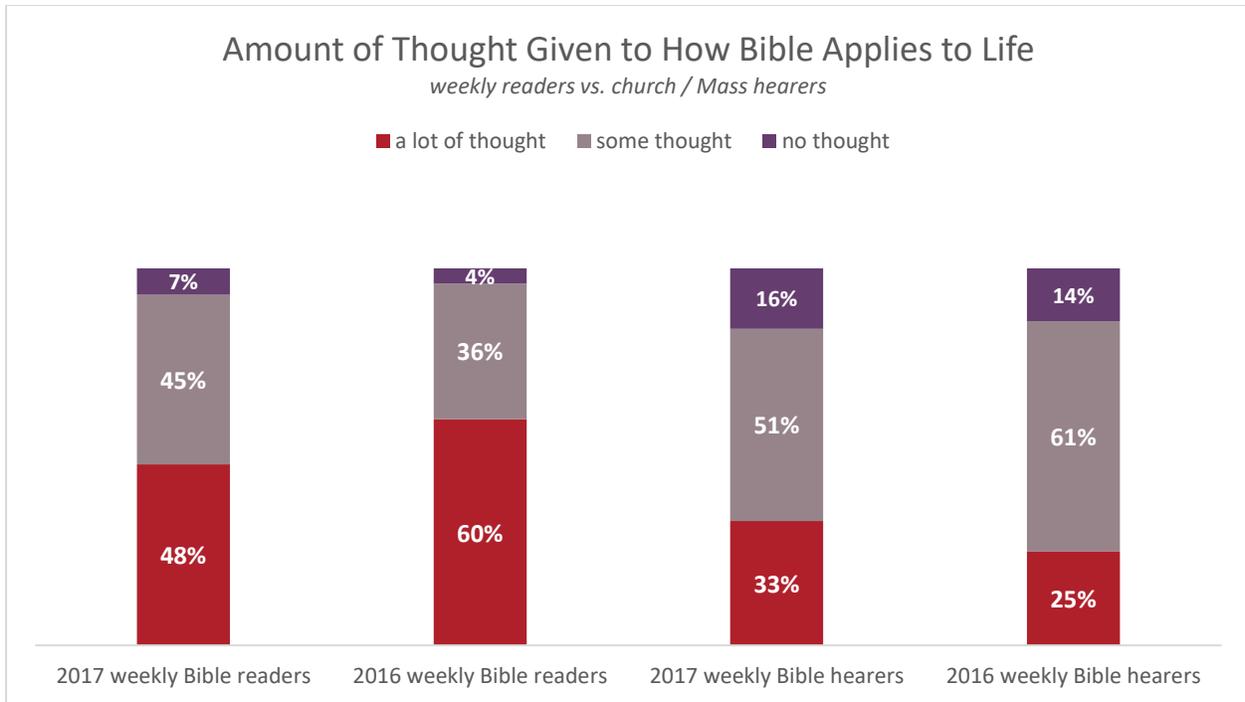
The top unfavorable emotions are being overwhelmed (13%) and confusion (12%). The remaining unfavorable emotions resonated with less than one in fourteen adults. All six negative emotions tested highest among Millennials. Likewise, non-Christians rated five of the six negative emotions higher than average.

## Applying the Bible to Life

[Tables 1.14 and 1.15, pages 58-59]

Adults who read the Bible in the past week are nearly evenly split on the amount of thought given to how it might apply to their lives. Just under half (48%) said they gave *a lot* of thought to how it might apply compared to 45% who gave it *some* thought. Only one in 14 said they didn't give any thought to how it might apply (7%). This year the number of those who gave it a lot of thought slipped 12-percentage points since 2016 to the lowest number since 2011 (61%). Additionally, this is the first year that those who gave it *a lot* of thought and *some* thought on par with each other.

Those who heard the Bible in a church service or Mass but did not read within the past week are much more likely to have given *some* thought to application (51%), compared to one in three (33%) who gave it *a lot* of thought. The hearers are also twice as likely than those who engage with scripture on their own to have given no thought to how the Scripture applies to their lives (16% vs. 7%). Bible hearers who said they gave *some* thought to the application of the Bible to their lives is also up this year from the previous year (51% vs. 61%).



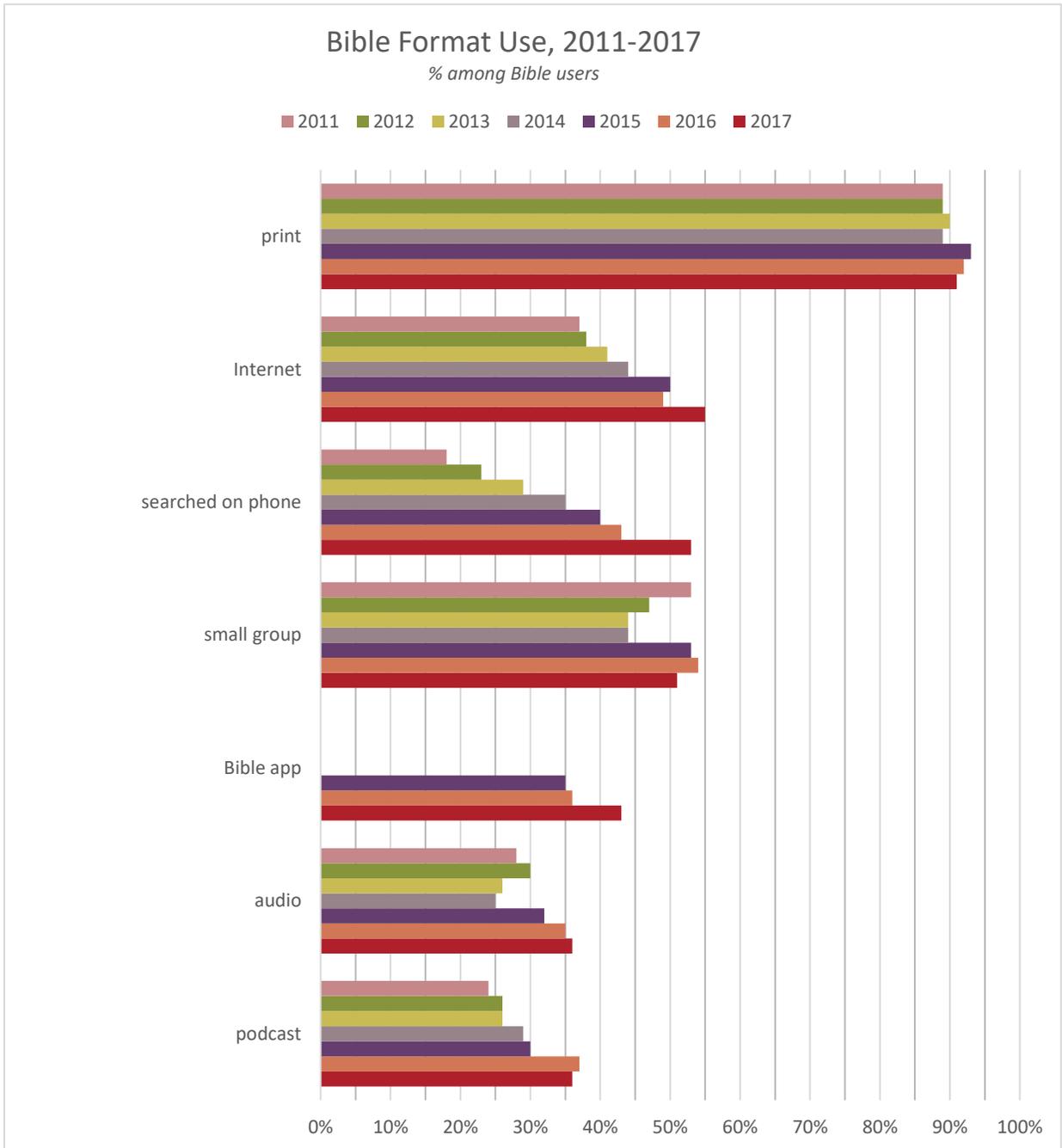
## Use of Bible Formats

[Tables 1.16 and 1.17, pages 60-62]

**Most Bible users (91%) still prefer to use a print version of the Bible when engaging with scripture, yet an equal number (92%) report using another Bible format than print in the past year.** Use of technology-related formats are all of the rise. More than half of users now search for Bible content on the internet (55%) or smart phone (53%), and another 43% use a Bible app on their phones. Bible use at a small group (51%), listening to a teaching via podcast (36%) or audio version of the Bible (36%) remained unchanged from the previous year. Those who are Bible Engaged are more likely than average to have used *all* formats in the past year.

Although a physical copy of the Bible is still preferred among all age groups (76%), more Millennial Bible users use the Internet to read Bible content (69%) than do Gen-Xers (58%), Boomers (52%) and Elders (24%). They are also more likely to use a Bible app. Millennials and Gen-Xers are both more likely view Bible content on their cellphones, listen to an audio version, or listen to a podcast than are older generations.

When asked how often they read or interact with the Bible specifically through a Bible app, through an audio version, or internet search, 44% of those who have used a format other than print use a digital or audio format at least once a week, including 9% who do so every day. Slightly fewer use it less frequently (39%) and 18% say that while they have used other Bible formats in the past year, they never really use it.



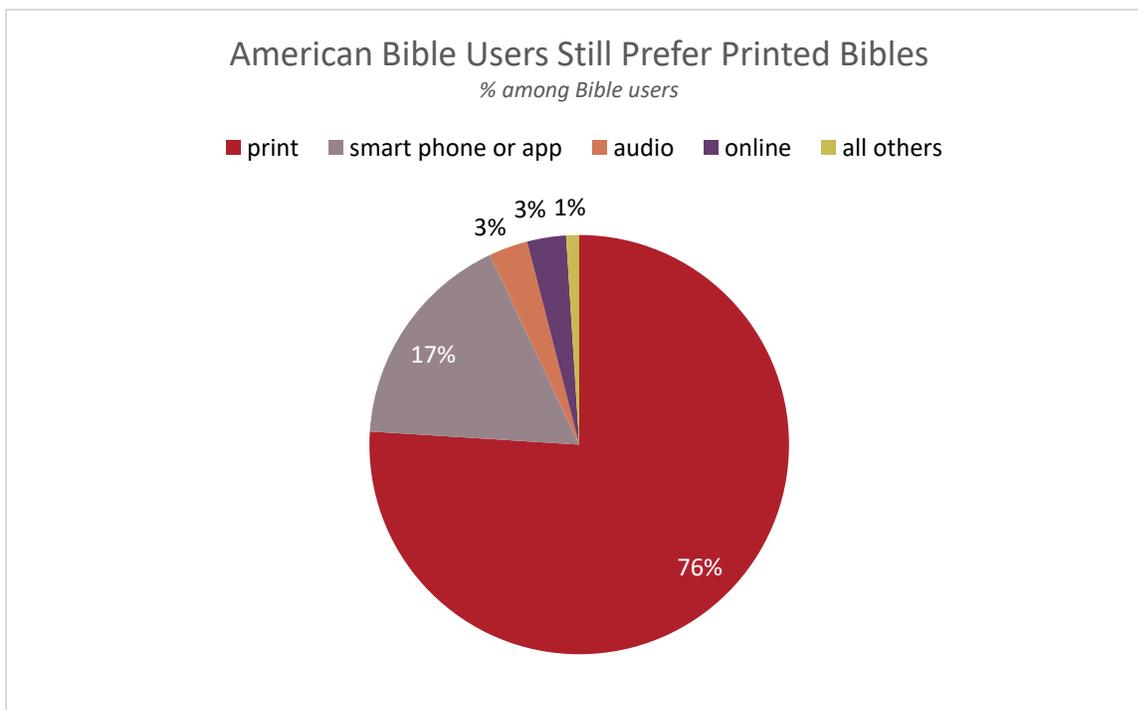
*Note: Bible app was added as an option in 2015*

## Preferred Bible Format

[Table 1.18, pages 63-64]

When asked to choose a single format the most prefer, three out of four (76%) Bible users still prefer a print version of the Bible. Yet with the rise in smartphone use, 17% now prefer to engage with scripture on their smartphone or app compared with 11% in 2016.

As expected, younger generations prefer to use their smartphones to access the Bible more than other generations. More than one in four Millennials (27%) prefer their phone compared to one in five (20%) Gen-Xers, 7% of Boomers and just 3% of Elders. African-Americans and Hispanics (23% each) prefer their smartphones for Bible content compared to half as many whites (12%).



## Readership of Liturgical Texts

[Table 1.19, pages 64-65]

Scripture reading in a liturgical text such as the Book of Common Prayer, Liturgy of the Hours, or a Lectio Divina resource is less common, with use by just one in seven adults in the past week (14%). Readership is down four-percentage points compared to 2016 but is on par with 2015. Four in ten practicing Catholics report reading a liturgical text (40%) compared to nearly half as many practicing Protestants (22%). One in four (25%) Engaged Bible users also report reading a liturgical text compared to 16% adults who are Bible Friendly (16%).

## 2. Bible Perceptions

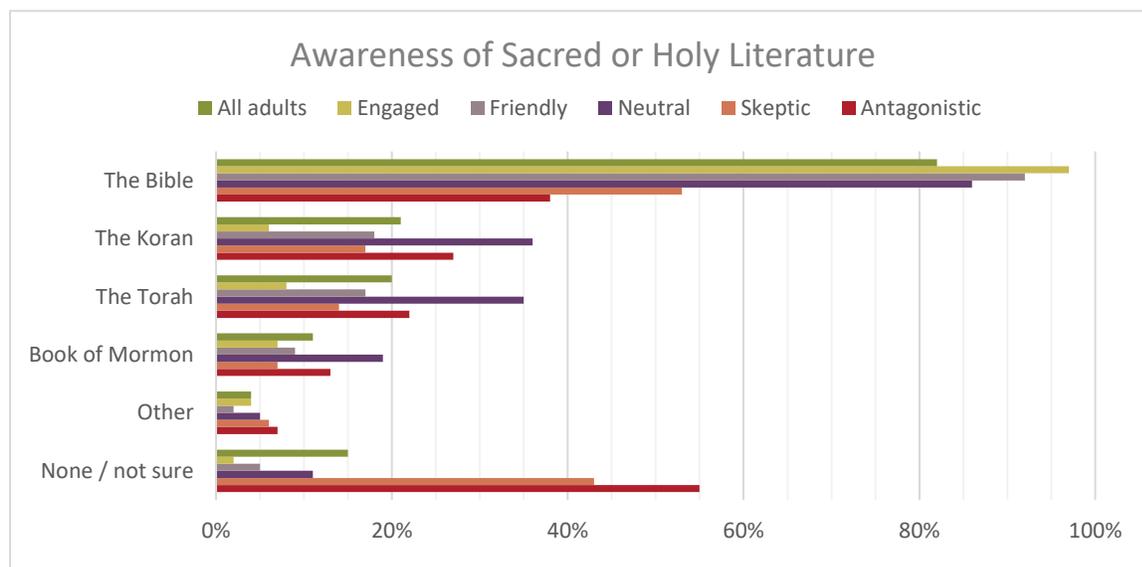
### Sacred Literature

[Table 2.1 and 2.2, page 66]

As in previous years, Americans overwhelmingly name the Bible as literature they consider sacred or holy, which has remained statistically unchanged since tracking began in 2011. However, this year, awareness of the Koran (21%), the Torah (20%) and the Book of Mormon (11%) are all on the rise. While awareness of the Bible is still four times greater than these other sacred texts, awareness of these non-Christian texts has doubled since 2016.

One in seven adults (13%) say that none of the four texts are sacred or holy, including 2% who said don't know. More than one in three Bible Skeptics (37%) and half of Antagonistic (53%) are more likely to say none are holy or sacred. Bible Neutrals tend to have the highest recall of these alternative texts in addition to the Bible than those in other Bible engaged segments.

The percent of adults who agree strongly that the Bible, the Koran, and the book of Mormon are all different expressions of the same spiritual truths has remained statistically unchanged since 2011 at 17%. Nearly two in five adults (39%) agree somewhat with this statement, which is 10-percentage points higher than the previous year. Strong disagreement with this statement is also down eight-percentage points from 2016. Practicing Catholics are most likely to agree strongly with this statement (33%), even more so than non-Practicing Christians (16%) and those of other or no faith (19%).



## Beliefs about the Bible

[Table 2.2, page 67]

When it comes to beliefs about the Bible, 44% of adults agree strongly that the Bible contains everything a person needs to know to live a meaningful life. While statistically on par with the previous year's data, it does continue the downward trend from its high at 53% in 2011. The percent of those who agree somewhat has risen slightly from 21% to 25% in 2017.

Strong agreement with this statement increases with age. Three out of five Elders (59%) agree strongly compared to 47% of Boomers, 42% of Gen-Xers, and just 36% of Millennials. One in five Millennials and 18% of Gen-Xers disagree strongly with this notion.

Other segments with above average agreement include regular church attenders, practicing Protestants, residents of the South and Midwest, African-Americans, and households earning less than \$50K annually.

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of Bible Engaged adults believe this to be true (82%), while 60% of Bible Friendly adults agree strongly. Just 14% of Bible Neutrals and 14% of Bible Skeptics agree strongly. Nearly two-thirds of Antagonistics (62%) disagree strongly with this statement.

## The Bible's Role in U.S. Society

[Table 2.3, page 68]

Nearly one-half of all adults (48%) believe the Bible has too little influence in U.S. society today, compared to 27% who believe it has the right amount of influence and 22% who believe it has too much influence. There has been a slight increase in the number of adults who say the Bible has too much influence, particularly when compared to 2011 (13%).

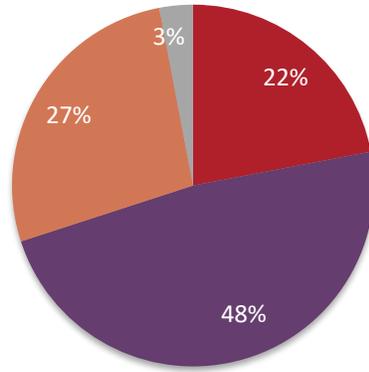
Boomers and Elders are the most likely generations to believe the Bible has too little influence. One-third of Millennials (33%) believe the Bible has too much influence on society today. One in four Gen-Xers (24%) also believe it has too much influence. All generations are statistically on par when it comes to the belief that the Bible has just the right amount of influence.

A majority of Practicing Protestants (80%) and Catholics (63%) feel the Bible has too little influence, compared to about half of Christians without a practicing faith (48%). The amount of influence Americans are comfortable with also correlates with Bible engagement. More than three-quarters of Bible Engaged adults (78%) believe the Bible has *too little* influence. Nearly the same number of Antagonistics (72%) feel it has *too much* influence.

### Influence of the Bible on U.S. Society

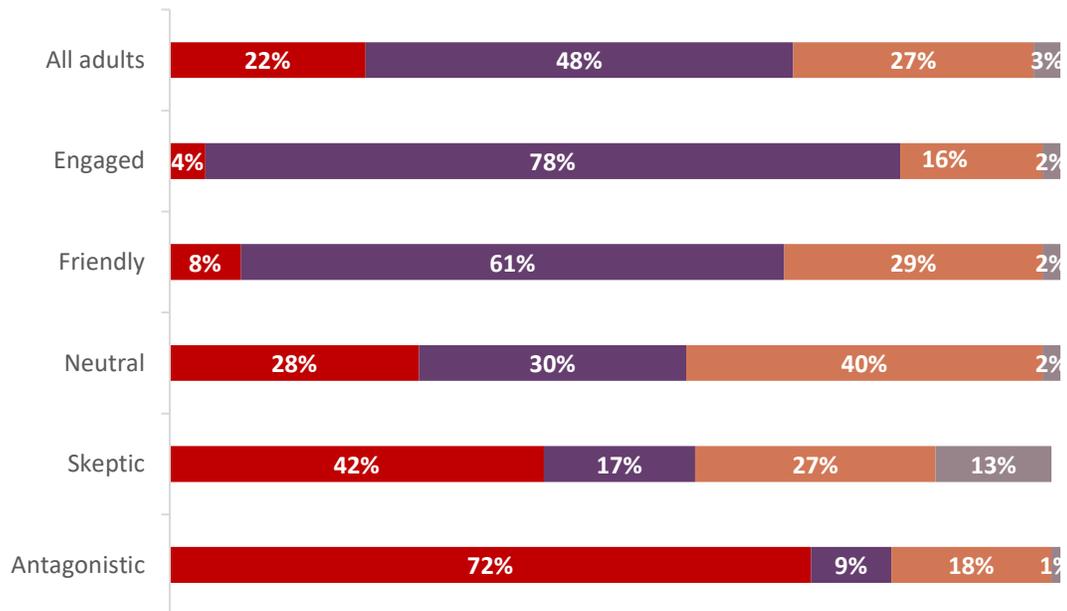
% among all adults

■ too much influence ■ too little influence ■ just right ■ not sure



### Influence of the Bible on U.S. Society, by Bible Engagement

■ too much ■ too little ■ just right ■ not sure



## The Bible as the Moral Fabric of Our Country

[Table 2.4, page 68]

Despite the notion that our country was founded on Christian values, today a slight majority (53%) believe the U.S. Constitution itself is more important for the moral fabric of our country. Slightly less than half (47%) believe the Bible is more important for the moral fabric of our country. This is more true among those who hold a high view of scripture. Bible Engaged adults (84%) and those who are Bible Friendly (63%) are more likely to believe the Bible is more important, morally, than are Neutrals (30%). Relatively few Skeptics (9%) and Antagonistics (3%) see the Bible as important to the country's moral fabric.

Age is directly correlated with the belief that the Bible is the moral fabric of the country. Three out of five Millennials (62%) believe the Constitution is the moral fabric of our country compared to the same number (62%) of Elders who believe it is the Bible. Gen-Xers and Boomers are nearly divided between the two terms.

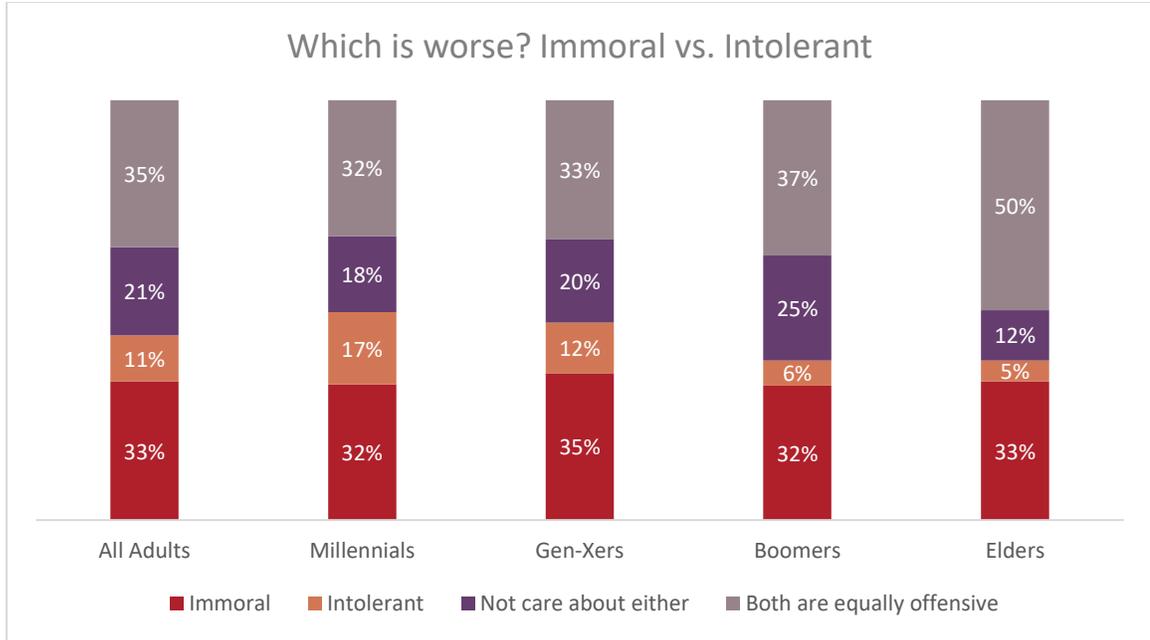
## Which is Worse: Being Called Immoral or Intolerant?

[Table 2.5, page 69]

When asked if it would be more offensive to be called immoral or intolerant, one in three adults (33%) said that being called "immoral" is the most offensive. Just 11% of adults felt that being called "intolerant" is more offensive. Slightly more than one-third of adults (35%) feel that both terms were equally offensive. One in five (21%) asserts that they wouldn't care about being called either. Overall, these numbers are consistent with the findings in 2013.

Millennials are the most likely generation take offense to being called intolerant (17%) which isn't surprising, given the politically correct environment in which many were raised. Elders are more likely to find both terms equally offensive (50%). More Boomers tend to not be bothered by either term (25%).

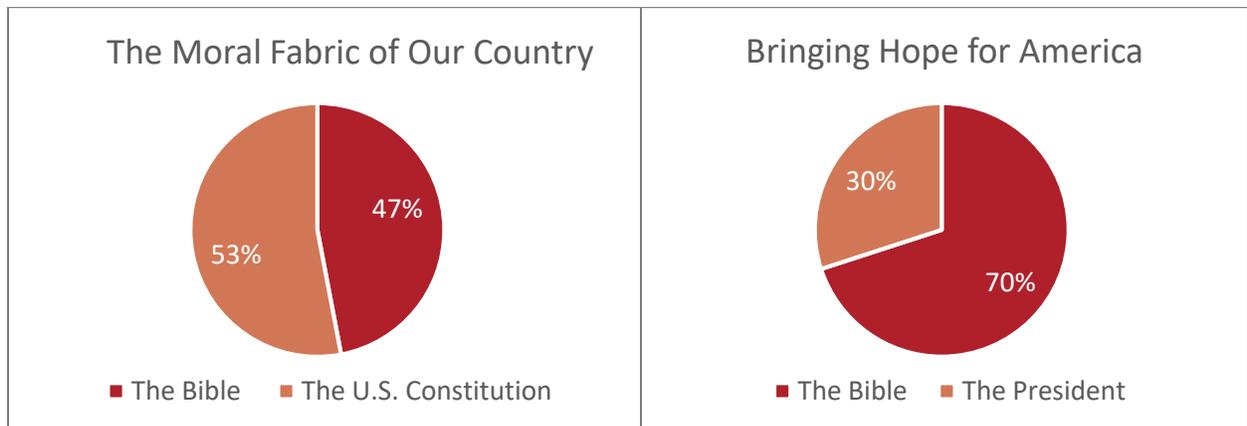
When it comes to Bible engagement, Antagonistics are least bothered in being called immoral (21%) compared to Skeptics (41%), Neutrals (32%), Bible Friendly (36%) or Engaged (36%). Being called "intolerant" is particularly bothersome to Antagonistics (25%). Bible Engaged, Bible Friendly and Bible Neutrals are all more likely to agree that both terms are equally offensive, while Skeptics are more likely to report that they wouldn't care about being called either term.



## Bringing Hope to America

[Table 2.6, page 69]

Despite their beliefs about our moral foundation, overall, **people are more confident that the Bible can bring hope to America than the President of the United States (70% vs. 30%).** This is highest among Bible Engaged adults, but also, surprisingly, a fair number of Skeptics (45%) and Antagonistics (36%) chose the Bible as bringing more hope to America than the President of the United States. Whether or not the election of Donald Trump as President has any effect on this perception was not tested, but could account for more confidence in the Bible among these groups who do not view the Bible in higher regard.



## Impressions of Daily Bible Readers

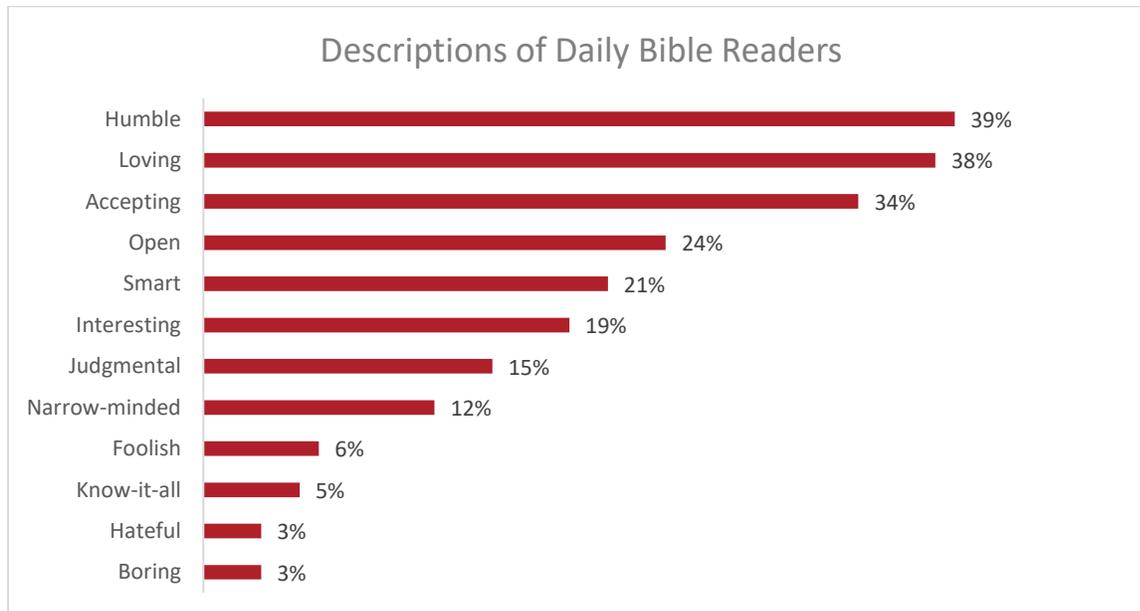
[Table 2.7, page 70]

How do people see daily Bible readers? Are their opinions generally positive or more negative? When presented with a list of 12 items, both positive and negative, all five positive comments came out on top. Humble (39%), loving (38%) and accepting (34%) rounded out the top tier descriptions. Another 24% describe daily Bible readers as open, followed by 21% who describe them as smart.

None of the six negative comments were chosen by more than one in five adults. The top two negative comments people chose to describe daily Bible readers are judgmental (15%) and narrow-minded (12%). The remaining descriptions were chosen by less than one out of 15 adults. Overall, 19% of adults describe daily Bible readers as “interesting,” a term that is really neither negative nor positive.

It comes as no surprise that the more engaged a person is in the Bible, the higher their impression is of daily Bible readers. Antagonistics are more likely to rate daily Bible readers negatively than positively. Two out of five Antagonistics feel “judgmental” and narrow-minded” describe daily Bible readers. They’re also more likely to see them as foolish, know-it-alls, hateful and boring.

Interestingly, the two groups with the least amount of Bible engagement, the Skeptics and Antagonistics are most likely to say that none of these terms describe daily Bible readers, indicating either little interaction with daily Bible readers or apathy towards this group.



### 3. Bible Penetration

#### Bible Ownership

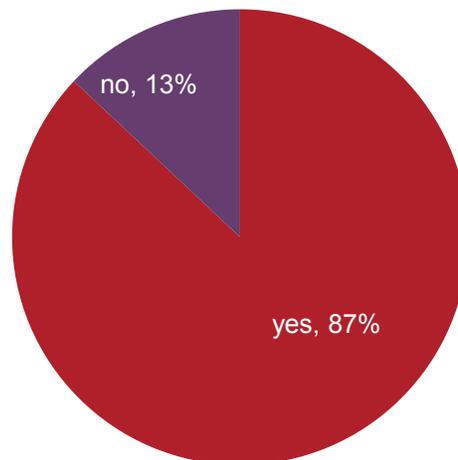
[Tables 3.1 and 3.2, pages 71-72]

The vast majority of households own at least one Bible (87%), a proportion that has stayed relatively consistent since 2011.

**Even the majority (62%) of Antagonistic and Skeptic (67%) households owns a Bible.** Ownership of a Bible is universal among Bible Engaged and nearly so among those who are Bible Friendly (93%) compared to Bible Neutrals, at 86%.

Millennials (82%) and Gen-Xers (86%) continue to be the generations least likely to live in a home with a Bible compared to Boomers (90%) and Elders (93%). African-Americans (95%) are significantly more likely than Whites (87%) and Hispanics (88%) to own a Bible.

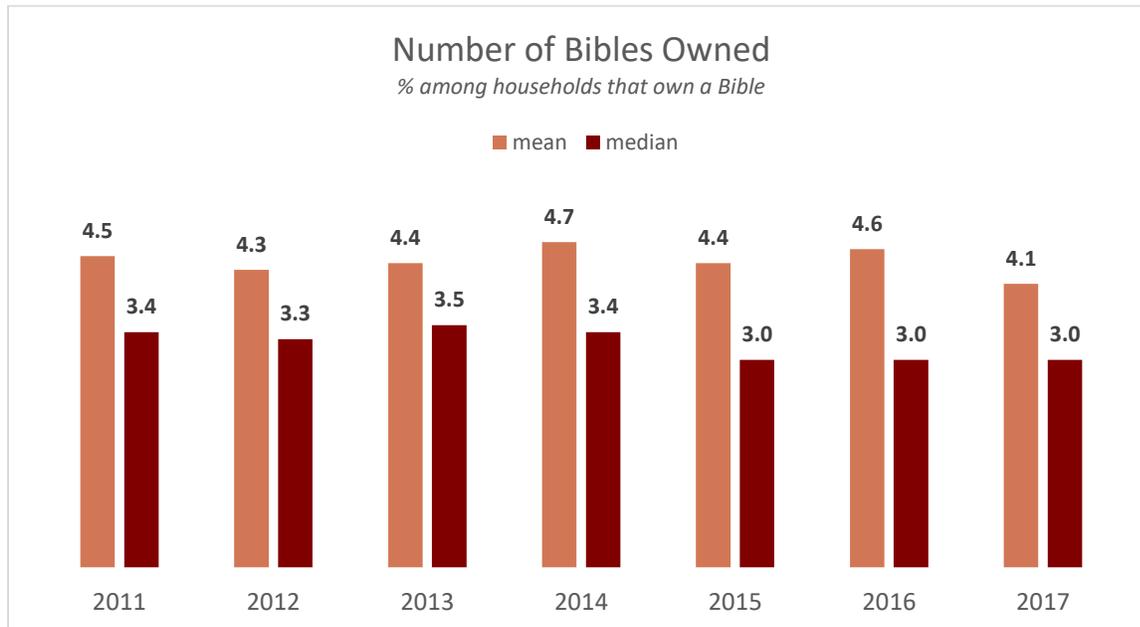
Does your household own a Bible?



## Number of Bibles Owned

[Table 3.3, page 73]

Among households that own a Bible, the median number owned is three. One-quarter of Bible owners own one Bible; one-third (34%) own two to three; 21% have four to five; and 20% own more than five. More Bibles (six or more) can be found in the homes of practicing Protestants (44%) and Bible Engaged adults (41%), whereas just 11% of practicing Catholics own that many. Bible Skeptics are likely to have an average of two Bibles in their household compared to a single Bible in Antagonistic homes. The number of Bibles owned has stayed relatively consistent since 2011.



## Bible Purchases

[Table 3.4, page 73]

Just one out of ten adults purchased a Bible in 2016, which is down six percentage points since 2016. Two in five Bible Engaged adults (20%) purchased a Bible in the previous year, compared to those who are Bible Friendly (11%), Bible Neutrals (5%), Skeptics (3%) and Antagonistics (2%) report very few purchases in the previous year.

Millennials (12%) and Gen-Xers (12%) are more likely to have purchased a Bible than are Boomers (8%) or Elders (5%). Other groups more likely to purchase a Bible include practicing Protestants (18%), households with minor children (17%) and households earning \$100K or more annually (14%).

## 4. Bible Literacy

To determine actual Bible knowledge, several questions were asked to distinguish those who say they know the Bible from those who actually do.

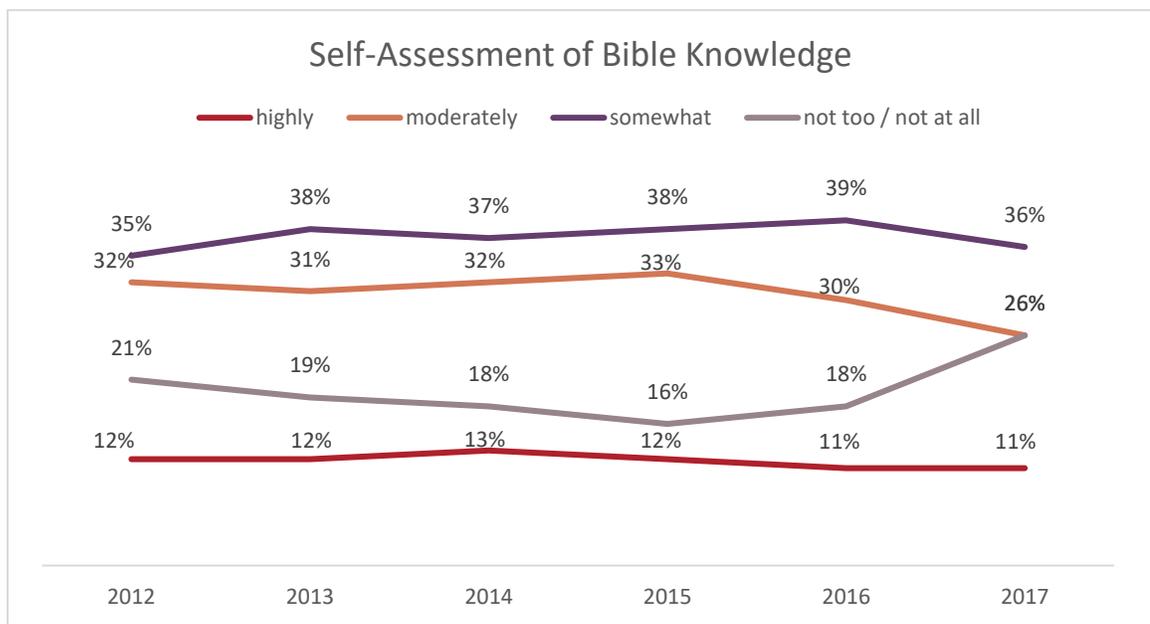
### Self-Assessment of Bible Knowledge

[Table 4.1, page 74]

Three out of four adults (74%) believe they are at least somewhat knowledgeable about the Bible, including 11% who feel *highly* knowledgeable, 26% who feel *moderately* knowledgeable, and 36% who are *somewhat* knowledgeable. Fewer adults rated themselves as *moderately* knowledgeable or *somewhat* knowledgeable in 2017 and slightly more adults admitted they were not too or not at all knowledgeable.

Nearly all Bible Engaged adults rate themselves as at least somewhat knowledgeable (95%), with 22% who believe they are highly knowledgeable. Three out of four (74%) Bible Friendly adults feel at least somewhat knowledgeable. **Roughly three out of five (61% to 63%) Bible Neutrals, Skeptics and Antagonistics rate themselves as at least somewhat knowledgeable about the Bible.**

Despite the fact that Millennials and Gen-Xers are less likely to use the Bible than are Boomers and Elders, they are more likely to say they feel *highly* knowledgeable compared to older generations.



## Knowledge of the Disciple Who Denied Jesus

[Table 4.2, page 75]

When given a list of four possible names to choose from, a majority of adults (56%) know that Peter was the Disciple who denied Jesus. The correct answer, Peter, was identified most often by all Bible engagement segments and ages. The remaining names (Paul, John and James) were all chosen by fewer than one out of 14 adults. More than one in four (28%) admitted that they did not know which disciple denied Jesus.

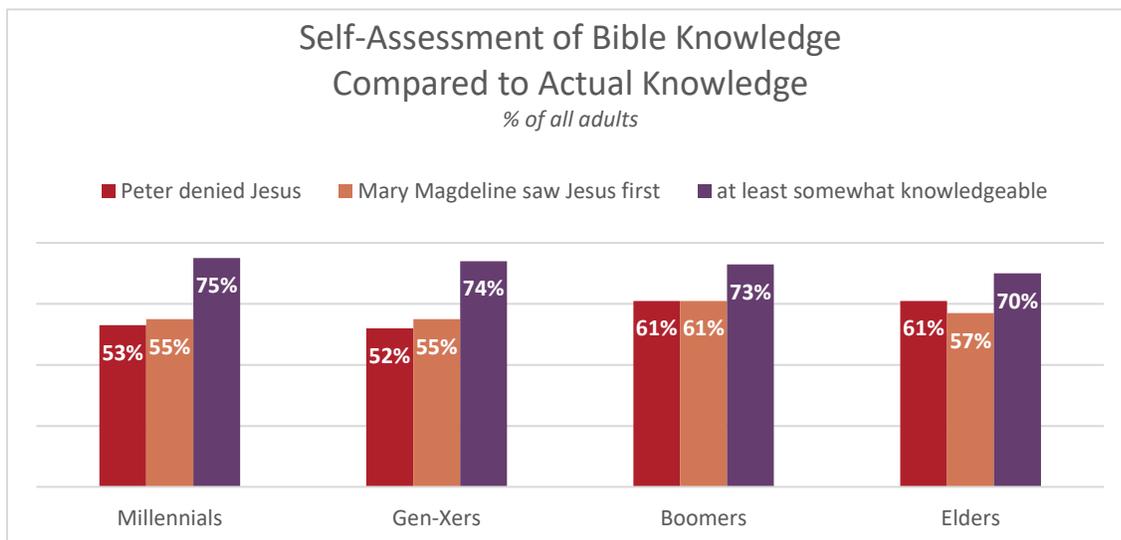
While Bible Antagonistics and Skeptics are more likely to say they didn't know, more than three in ten correctly identified Peter as the disciple who betrayed Jesus. Millennials and Gen-Xers chose Peter less frequently than did Boomers and Elders.

## Knowledge of the First Person to See Jesus after the Resurrection

[Table 4.3, page 75]

The majority of adults (57%) also know that Mary Magdalene was the first person to see Jesus after the resurrection. Far fewer believe it was Peter (9%), Paul (5%) or Thomas (5%) who saw Jesus first. Overall, 23% said they weren't sure who saw Jesus first. Bible Skeptics and Antagonistics are slightly more familiar with who saw Jesus first than they are with the name of the disciple who denied Jesus. Millennials and Gen-Xers are slightly less familiar with this passage than Boomers.

The largest gap in self-perceived knowledge and actual knowledge can be seen among Millennials and GenXers. Boomers and Elders tend to have a greater awareness of actual knowledge and self-awareness of their knowledge.



## Knowledge of the Bible's Teachings

[Table 4.4, pages 76-78]

Americans were asked whether they feel the Bible encourages, discourages or is silent about 10 specific attitudes or behaviors. The most common behaviors Americans feel the Bible strongly encourages are patience (94%), generosity (93%), and serving the poor (93%). Each of these three behaviors saw a significant rise in those who feel the Bible strongly or somewhat encourages them over the previous year.

Practicing Protestants and Bible Engaged adults are more likely than practicing Catholics and all adults on average to strongly agree that the Bible encourages each of these three behaviors.

Three out of four adults (76%) also believe that the Bible discourages prostitution, down five points from 2016. Overall, those who believe the Bible discourages pornography (63%), slavery (59%) and war (58%) has also declined from the previous year. Non-Christians are also more likely to say the Bible either strongly or somewhat encourages war (37%) and slavery (33%) than the general population at large.

Of the seven issues offered, more adults said the Bible is silent on pornography than any other issue (31%), including 17% of Bible Engaged adults and more than half of Skeptics (55%) and Antagonistics (51%). Lacking familiarity with the Bible, non-Christians, in general, are more likely to say the Bible is silent on all seven issues presented.

## Bible as Literal or Inspired Word of God

[Tables 4.5 and 4.6, pages 78-79]

Presented with five different descriptions of the Bible, more adults believe the Bible is *inspired* (with some symbolism) than *literal*. Most commonly, Americans believe the Bible is the inspired word of God and has no errors, though some verses are meant to be symbolic (35%). The view that the Bible is *inspired* with no errors is up by five-percentage points this year.

One in five believe it to be the actual word of God and should be taken literally, word for word (22%), and one in six says it is the inspired word of God but has some factual or historical errors (16%). One in ten believe it is not inspired but rather tells how writers understood the ways and principles of God (10%), and an additional 18% say it is just another book of teachings written by men that contains stories and advice.

Millennials are more likely than average to believe it is just another book of teachings (23%) and less likely than average to believe it is the actual word of God to be

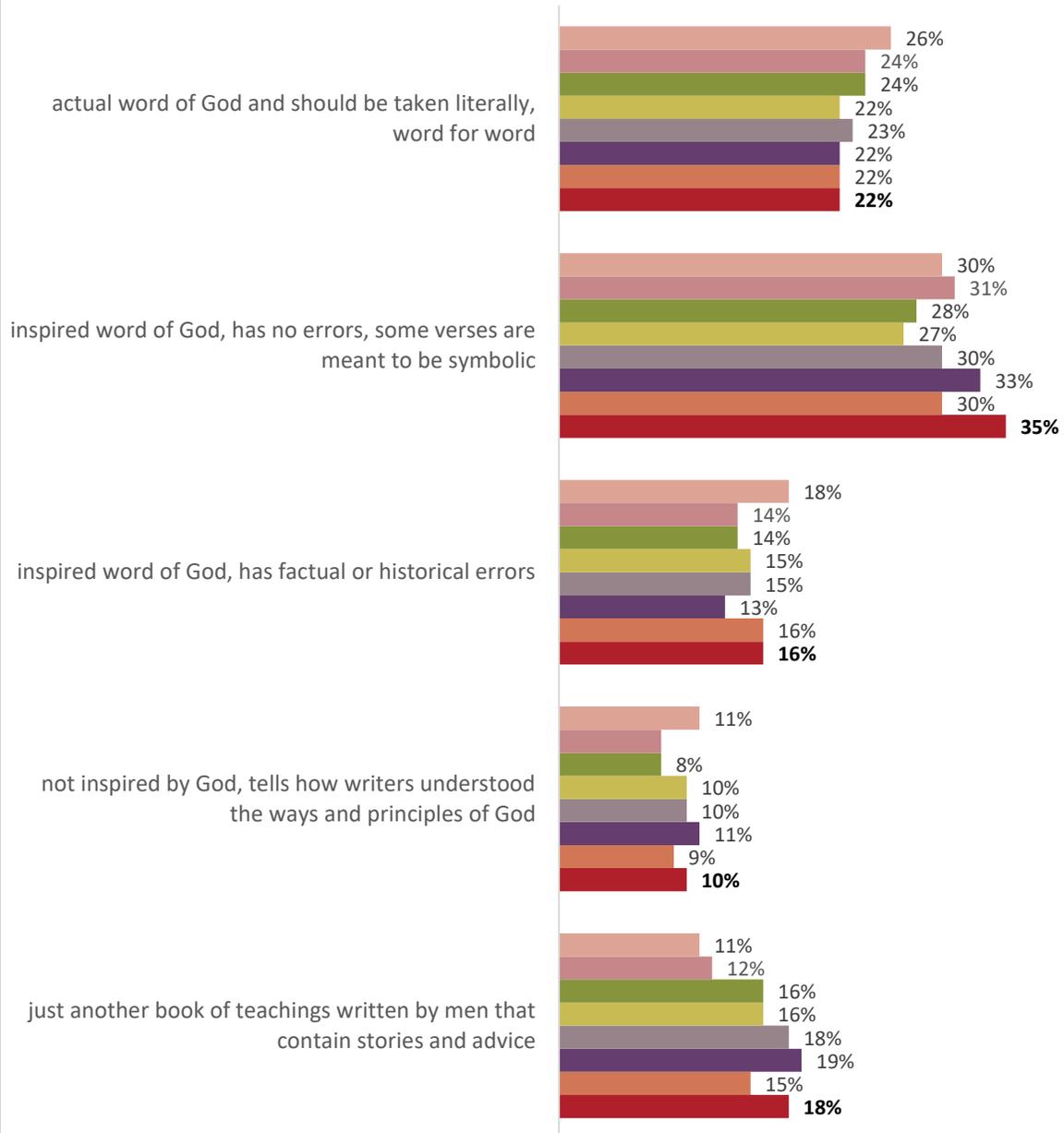
taken literally (14%). Isolating just the Bible Engaged group, adults with high reverence and readership of the Bible are evenly split between actual versus literal (with some symbolism) compared to Bible Friendly adults, who are twice as likely to view the Bible as symbolic (67%) rather than literal (33%). More than four in ten practicing Protestants believe in a literal interpretation of Scripture (41%), while one-quarter (25%) of practicing Catholics believe this.

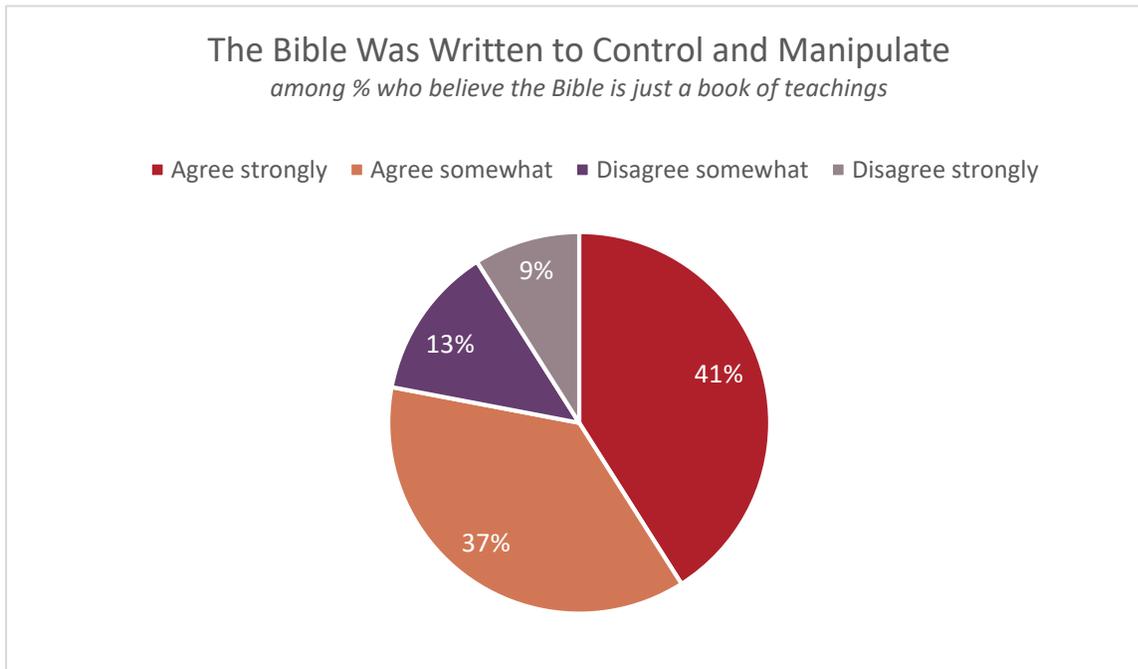
Adults who said the Bible is just another book of teachings written by men with stories and advice were asked a follow-up question to determine if they are skeptical about the Bible or if they have a more opposing perspective. More than three out of four (78%) agree that the Bible was written to control or manipulate other people, including 41% who agree strongly. Gen-Xers (54%) are more likely than Millennials (32%) and Boomers (35%) to agree strongly that the Bible was written to be manipulative. Just 22% of adults who believe the Bible is just another book of teachings believes it was *not* written to control others.

### Beliefs about the Bible as the Literal or Inspired Word of God, 2007-2015

% among all adults

2007 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017





## Influence of the Bible

[Table 4.7, pages 80-82]

The majority of Americans don't believe the Bible has much influence on social issues and the decisions they make about money. Out of seven issues presented, people's perspective on abortion are most commonly influenced by the Bible, with 43% who believe it influences their views at least somewhat.

Roughly two out of five say the Bible has some or a lot of influence on their support for Israel and the city of Jerusalem (41%), and their support for refugees and people displaced by wars and conflicts (41%). How they feel about LGBT issues (37%) and the decisions they make about finances and money (36%) are on the second-tier of issues that the Bible influences. Three in ten adults say the Bible influences how they feel about immigration (30%) and their support for wars our country fights (31%).

Over the past year, there has been a shift in the belief that the Bible impacts their views at least somewhat on their support for Israel and the city of Jerusalem (36% in 2016 and 41% in 2017), support for refugees and people displaced by wars and conflicts (35% vs. 41%), and feelings toward immigration (25% vs 30%).

Bible Engaged adults are more likely than average to say the Bible has a lot of influence on all seven issues in their lives. Practicing Protestants are also more likely than practicing Catholics to believe the Bible has a lot of influence in their lives on five of the seven issues, with the exception of support for refugees and people displaced by wars and

conflicts and how they feel about immigration. On these two issues, practicing Protestants and practicing Catholics are just as likely to feel the Bible has a lot of influence on their beliefs.

Residents of the South are also more likely to be influenced strongly by the Bible on abortion (35%), support for Israel (31%), LGBT issues (26%) and how they spend their money (23%). Residents of the Northeast are least likely to say the Bible has a lot of influence on their views about abortion (24%), LGBT issues (17%), support for Israel (16%) and wars our country fights (6%). This is consistent with the fact that residents of the South are more likely to use the Bible weekly than the national average (42% vs 37%).

## **Familiarity with the Bible's Teaching**

[Table 4.8, page 83]

Americans were asked to indicate the degree to which they are familiar with the Bible's teaching on four different topics. Morality emerged as the topic with which adults say they are most familiar, with seven in ten (70%) adults asserting that they are very or somewhat familiar. The Bible's teachings on women is a topic that 64% of adults say they are familiar with, compared to 61% of those familiar with teachings on homosexuality, and 40% who are aware of teachings on race relations.

It should be noted that slightly less than one in five (17% to 19%) of adults do not know what the Bible teaches on each of these subjects when it comes to morality, homosexuality and women. A greater number of adults (30%) state a lack of familiarity with the Bible's teachings on race relations.

One in three men (29%) maintain that they are very familiar with what the Bible has to say about women compared to 23% of women who affirm strong familiarity. Fewer whites (13%) than African-Americans (22%) and Hispanics (21%) rate themselves as very familiar with teachings on race relations. Bible Engaged Christians and practicing Protestants are more familiar than average with each of the four topics.

## The Bible's Effect on Racial Tension and Gender Inequality

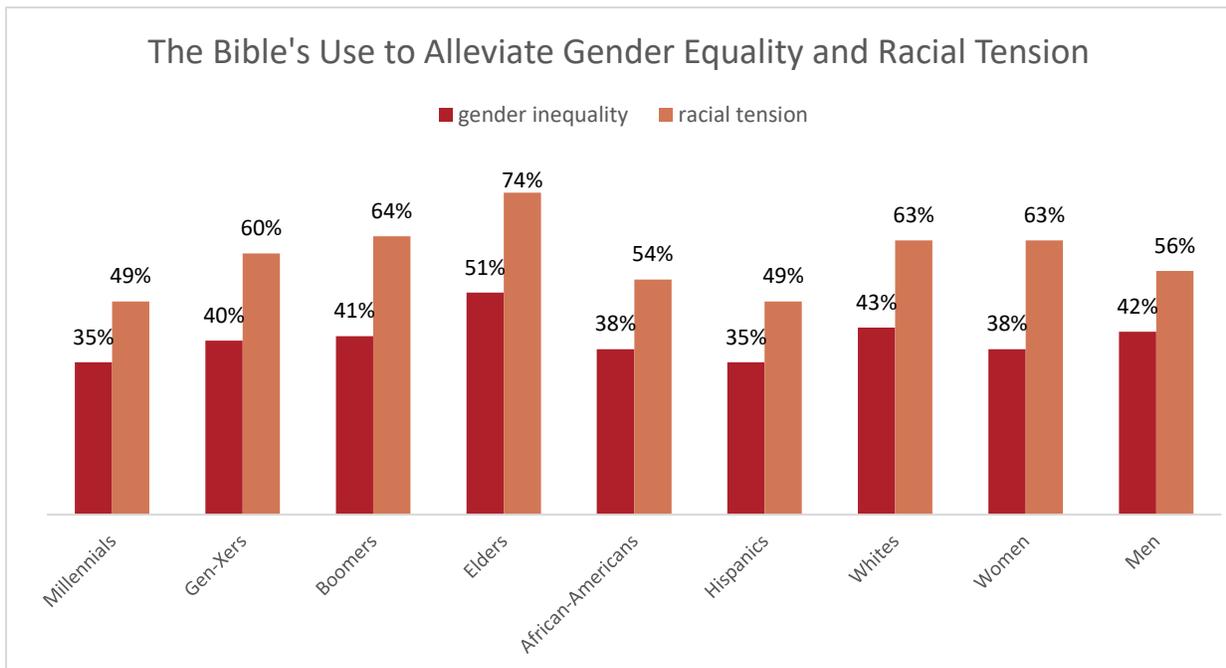
[Tables 4.9 and 4.10, page 84]

Overall, more adults believe that the Bible has been used to *alleviate* racial tension than it has been used to *exacerbate* racial tension, with three out of five adults who say it *alleviates* it rather than *exacerbates* it (59% vs. 41%). However, when it comes to the Bible's effect on gender inequality, the opposite is true. Three in five adults believe the Bible has been used to *exacerbate* gender inequality (60%) compared to two out of five (40%) who say it is used to *alleviate* it.

Age plays a role in whether or not people believe the Bible has been used to relieve racial tension and gender inequality issues. Millennials are more likely to be skeptical of the Bible's effect on these issues than are older generations.

Whites (63%) are more likely to believe that the Bible has been used to make race relations better than are African-Americans (54%) and Hispanics (49%). Whites also have a more positive view of how the Bible has been used to ease gender inequality than are non-whites (43%, 35% respectively).

Women have a more affirmative outlook on the Bible's effect on race relations than do men (63% vs. 56%), but both genders are comparable when it comes to the Bible's effect on gender inequality.



## Oppressiveness Towards Certain People Groups

[Table 4.11, page 85]

Just over one-half of Americans believe strongly or somewhat that the Bible is oppressive towards the LGBT community (53%), including three in ten (30%) who agree strongly in the Bible's oppressiveness towards LGBTs. A much smaller percent of adults believe the Bible is very or somewhat oppressive to women (37%) or towards different races (26%).

Millennials are more likely to agree that the Bible is oppressive towards all three groups. Hispanics are more likely to view the Bible as oppressive to women (47%) and different races (33%). Men are more likely to believe the Bible is oppressive towards women than are women themselves (41% vs. 34%). Engaged Christians and practicing Protestants are more likely than average to disagree strongly that the Bible is oppressive to each of these three people groups.

It should be noted that a sizable number of adults concede that they aren't sure whether the Bible is oppressive to women (20%), the LGBT community (22%), or different races (25%). Much of the same can be found when it comes to the percent of adults who are unfamiliar with the Bible's teachings on these matters.

## Beliefs About Bible's Teachings Affect Readership

[Table 4.12, page 86]

Asked whether or not their personal beliefs about women's equality, racial equality, morality and LGBT issues would prevent them from reading the Bible, more than half of adults felt strongly that it would *not* prevent them from reading the Bible. Less than one in five adults agreed strongly or somewhat that their opinions on any of these topics would inhibit their desire to read the Bible. For the population, at large, the results were the same across all four topics presented.

However, **Millennials, practicing Catholics and non-Christians are more likely to agree strongly that their beliefs on these issues would hinder Bible reading.** Bible Antagonistics and Skeptics also are more likely than average to report feeling deterred from reading the Bible because of their beliefs on women's and LGBT equality. **Bible Neutrals and Friendlies are less deterred by these issues.**

## 5. Moral Decline

### Belief that Morality Is on the Decline

[Table 5.1, page 87]

Four out of five adults (81%) believe the morals and values of American are declining. This is five percentage points higher than the previous year but on par with the 2015 findings.

Even though the majority of younger generations, non-Christians and adults who have little to no interaction with the Bible believe morality is declining, they are less likely to see this as a problem. Seven in ten (72%) of Millennials believe morality is declining compared to 83% of Gen-Xers, 86% of Boomers, and 93% of Elders. Nearly all Bible Engaged adults (95%) agree that morality is on the decline, while the majority of Skeptics (59%) and Antagonistics (63%) see it declining.

### Cause of Moral Decline

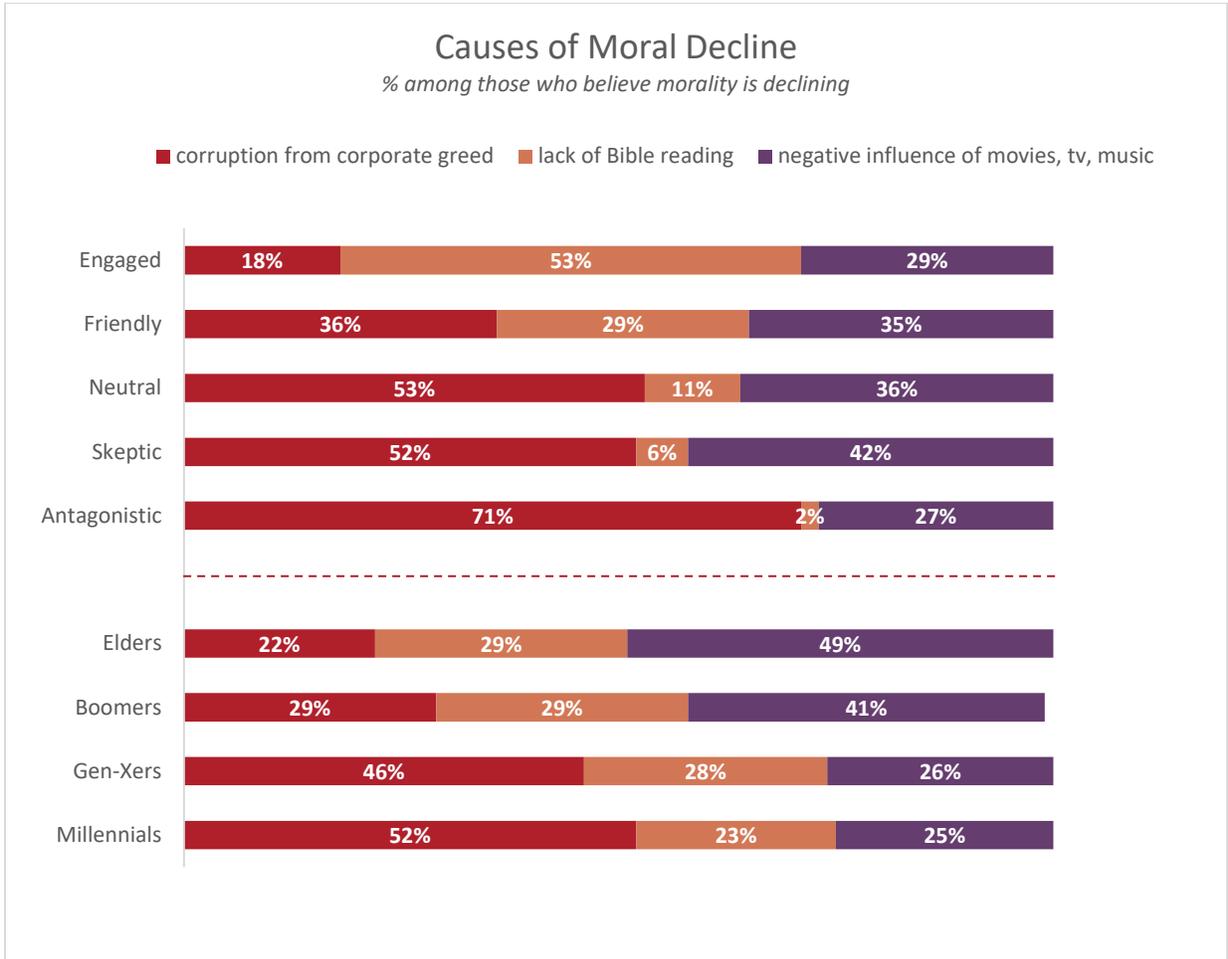
[Table 5.2, pages 87-88]

Presented with three possible causes of moral decline, adults who believe that morality is on the decline are most likely to believe that corruption from corporate greed is the culprit (39%). One in three adults (33%) cite the negative influence of movies, television and music. Slightly more than one in four adults (27%) feel lack of Bible reading is responsible for the decline in morality.

More than one-half of Bible Engaged adults (53%) believe morality is caused by a lack of Bible reading, while almost half as many (29%) Bible Friendly adults blame lack of Bible reading. Practicing Protestants are also more likely than practicing Catholics to believe the decline in morality is impacted by lack of Bible reading (55% vs. 21%).

Those with less confidence in the Bible are more likely to view corruption from corporate greed as the cause of moral decline. Seven in ten Antagonistics (71%) and slightly more than half of Skeptics and Bible Neutrals (52% and 53%) fault corporate greed. The number of adults who believe Bible reading is the cause has been declining steadily over the last five years (37% to 27% currently), while the number of adults who blame corruption from corporate greed has risen ten-percentage points since 2013.

Belief in the responsibility for the cause of moral decline is also related to age. More than half of Millennials (52%) are most likely to blame corporate greed compared to half the number of Elders (22%). Elders are more likely to blame the negative influence of movies, television and music. The youngest generation is also less likely to blame lack of Bible reading compared to Gen-Xers, Boomers and Elders.



## 6. Trauma

### Experience with Trauma

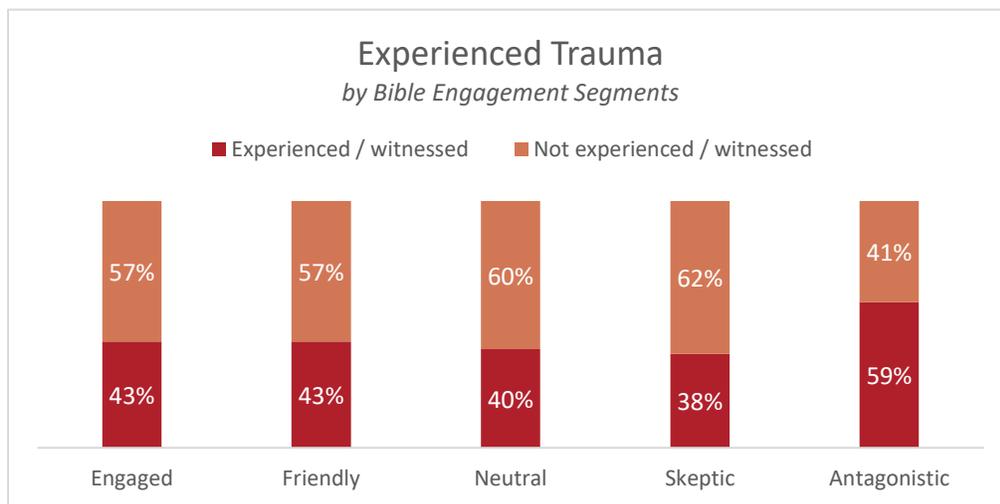
[Table 6.1, page 89]

Just less than half of adults (45%) have experienced some kind of physical, psychological or emotional trauma. Unexpectedly, younger generations are more likely to say they've experienced or witnessed some type of trauma compared to older generations. One-quarter of those over 70 (24%) have experienced trauma, followed by Boomers (40%), Gen-Xers (46%) and 54% of Millennials.

Nearly one-third (32%) of all adults have *personally* experienced a trauma, and another one in five (20%) have witnessed a trauma involving an immediate family member. Another 15% report having witnessed a trauma involving someone other than a family member. All three types of trauma are more common among Millennials and Gen-Xers than they are Boomers and Elders.

African-Americans are also more likely to say they personally experienced a trauma (41%), compared to a smaller proportion of whites (32%) and Hispanics (31%). They're also more likely to have witnessed a trauma involving a family member (21%) compared to whites (14%).

Although a follow-up question was not asked to determine the specific nature of the trauma, faith practices are correlated with whether or not adults have experienced trauma. **The majority of Antagonistics (59%) indicate that they have experienced or witnessed a trauma. Half (50%) have personally experienced one.** They report witnessing a trauma with immediate family or someone other than immediate family with greater frequency as well. Having experienced a trauma, whether personal or as a witness to trauma, is lower in all other categories of Bible engagement.



## 7. Giving to Non-Profit Organizations

### Donations to Non-Profit Organizations

[Table 7.1, page 90]

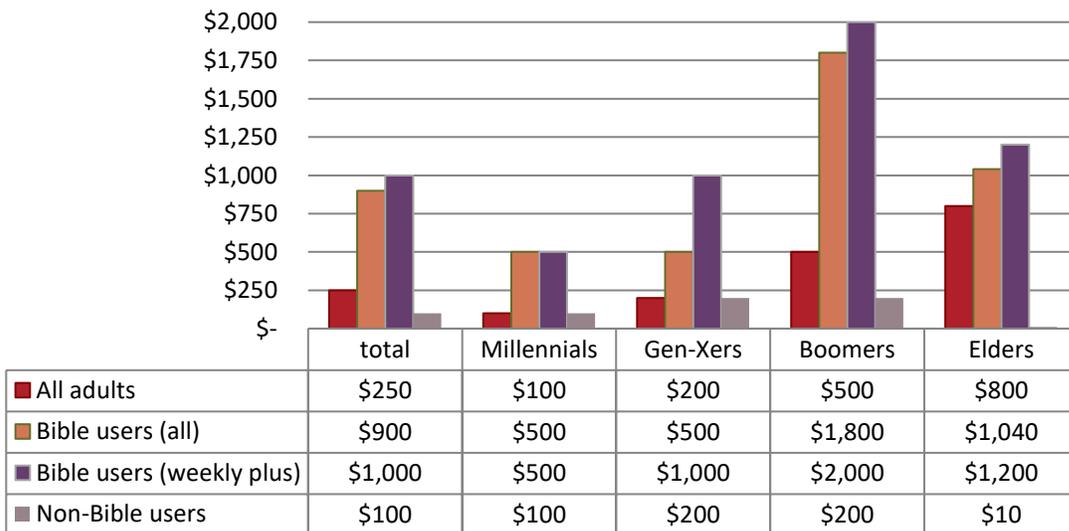
More than three out of four Americans say they donated to a charity, including a church or religious organization, during 2016 (77%). This proportion has steadily increased since 2013 when 71% reported having donated.

About one-third of Millennials have *not* donated (32%) and an additional one in six donated less than \$100 (17%). Just over one in ten Elders did not donate last year (11%). Nearly all Bible Engaged adults donated to a church or charity (95%), and more than half donated \$1,000 or more (57%).

The typical (median) amount adults donated was \$250. Adults give increasingly more with age, with Millennials having a median of just \$100 and Elders having a median of \$800. **Bible Engaged adults (\$1,200) give substantially more than Bible Friendly adults (\$300), Bible Neutral (\$200), Skeptics (\$50) and Antagonistics (\$50).** Practicing Protestants (\$1,500) also donate more than practicing Catholics (\$1000).

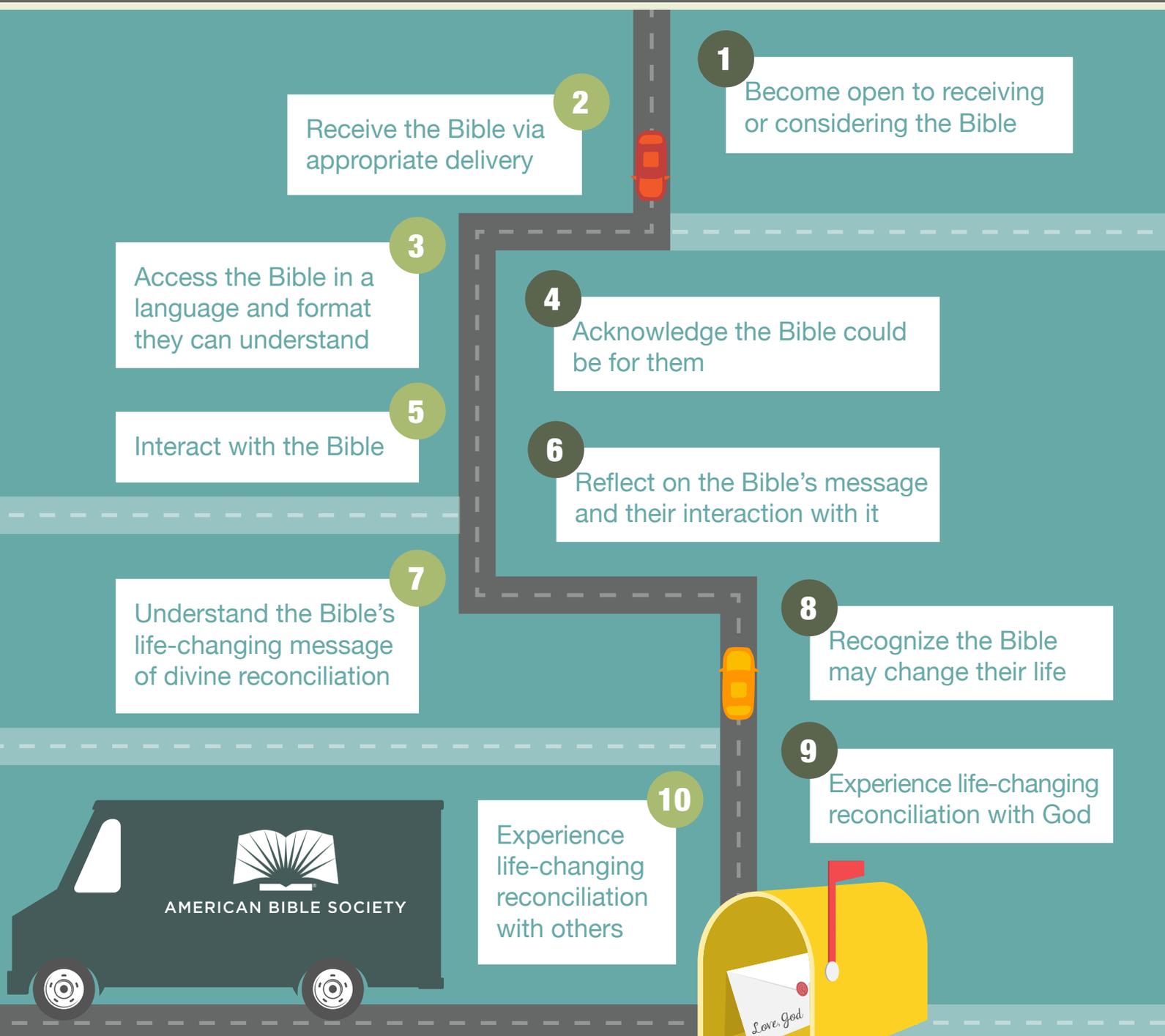
Bible users are much more likely to donate more money to organizations than non-Bible users. The typical non-Bible reader gave \$100 last year, while Bible users gave \$600 and the weekly Bible reader gave \$1,000. The amount donated is directly correlated (but not necessarily causally related) to the frequency with which Americans read the Bible.

Non-Profit Giving by Age  
*median annual dollar amount*





# THE PATHWAY FOR SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT



- Internal movements
- External movements

Scripture engagement is interaction with the Bible that enables people to discover its life-changing message.