



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on October 17, 2023

Good News From American Bible Society: People Engaging More With the Scriptures

The three authors of the massive nearly [200-page edition](#) of the American Bible Society's (ABS) annual "State of the Bible" released last week were unabashedly optimistic:

The survey results verify what the Bible leads us to expect. Those who practice their faith, engaging fully with God and God's Word, transformed by that message—these people flourish like trees on a riverbank, they find delight in God's presence, and they live their lives driven by God's eternal purpose.



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The question they attempted to answer was this: How many of those surveyed in January this year fall into that category? And where do the rest fall?

One of the three authors — John Plake, Ph.D., the chief ministry officer at the ABS and an ordained minister — wrote:

The evidence suggests three things.

1. When people engage deeply with the Bible, their lives and relationships are better. In other words, they flourish.
2. Fewer people in America are engaging with the Bible. Scripture engagement is not rising yet; it continues on a downward trajectory.
3. There are signs of hope. The Movable Middle has rebounded, and Bible disengagement has fallen in the past year.

That "Movable Middle" is defined as that cohort ranked as "Bible Friendly" and "Bible Neutral" in their behaviors. They score, in ABS parlance, above a 70 on its "Scripture Engagement" scale. "Bible Centered" score 115 or higher; "Bible Engaged" score between 100 and 114; and "Bible Friendly" and "Bible Neutral" score between 70 and 99.

In other words, the higher people score the happier they are. That includes the 100 million Americans who said they "use" — not just "read" — their Bibles three or more times a year.

The 76 million who make up the "Movable Middle" include those who are at least a little curious about the Bible, along with those who are very or extremely curious.

The researchers started with "hope" — the "desire for a goal with uncertainty about its outcome."

From the survey:



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The 2023 *State of the Bible* survey included the four questions connected to the Persevering Hope metric. People were asked to rate each response on a 1 (not at all) to 5 (very) scale of agreement.

“When an outcome I desire seems unlikely or even impossible, I . . .

- Am determined to see things through to the end.
- Will keep trying.
- Won’t give up.
- Am motivated to wait for a successful outcome.”

Responses are averaged to yield a Persevering Hope Scale (PHS) score from 1 to 5.

In the *State of the Bible* data, the overall average score was 3.8.

Among most of those surveyed, there was very little variance:

Remarkably, in most people-groups, the average score varied very little, maybe a tenth of a point higher or lower.

Male and female respondents had equal 3.8 scores.

Generational differences were minuscule—Boomers up a tenth (3.9) and Elders down a tenth (3.7).... No great variances to report on.

But “Scripture Engaged people ... outscored everyone else, with a PHS [score] of 4.1.” Said the authors:

In a field with little variation, these are significant effects. No other demographic group scored that high.

Apparently, those who read the Bible regularly, who live and think according to its teaching, find resources that keep them going, even in tough times.

Which group, then, reads their Bibles regularly, according to the survey? The Elders (age 78 to 95), and those who called themselves Evangelicals and Black Protestants.

What about those who don’t read their Bibles? The authors asked, “Do you wish you used the Bible more?” More than half of all those who were surveyed said “yes.”

Why don’t they? Most said, “not enough time,” while others said they “don’t know where to start.” Some said the Bible lacks “excitement,” while others said they had difficulty with the language, the layout was “difficult to navigate,” or the “stories were confusing.”

There were other bright spots in the survey. When they asked, “If people of our country were to not read the Bible, do you think our country would be worse off, better off, or about the same?” the authors said:

While some observers assume there’s a growing animosity toward the Bible, we don’t see that on this question.

Only about one in seven (14%) say a Bible-less America would be better. Three times that



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many (44%) take the opposite view, that America would be *worse* off without Bible-reading.
[Emphasis in original.]

When those surveyed were asked about America's moral decline, nearly nine out of 10 agreed it was serious, but were divided about who or what was to blame. One-quarter blamed parents, while another quarter blamed "the media, movies, or music." One in six blamed an "unhealthy reliance on social media for information on current events," while one in eight blamed the "negative influence of government leaders."

The authors concluded:

Pause a moment to take this in. A huge proportion of Americans (86%) see the country in moral decline. These are people of all religions or none at all. They see the downslide, but they can't agree on what the problem is.

Parents, music, social media—all of these may contribute to the problem, but there's one diagnosis recognized only by a select group. Those who know and love the Bible understand its power as "a guide for moral development."

They see that the moral decline of America parallels the decline of Scripture engagement in America.

Could the nation's moral decline be slowed or even reversed by greater attention to Scripture? That thesis might find greater agreement than we expect.

Additional surveys, on generosity and "A Year in Review," will be published before the end of the year.



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