

QUANTITATIVE KEY TOPLINES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overall, church leaders across all denominations are impressively positive towards the Bible. Non-leaders are positive but noticeably less so across just about every measure.

As might be expected, Liberal, Catholic, Methodist and URC leaders are most sceptical of the Bible's authority. But interestingly some of them are also the groups most likely to express dissatisfaction at their congregation's understanding of the Bible.

The OT is a two-edged sword for many: the blood and killing in the OT is the aspect of the Bible most likely to put leaders off, but equally both groups feel most encouraged by the way it foretells of Christ. Overall, though, the OT is the part of the Bible people are least enthusiastic about teaching.

There are differences between the types of resources that are used individually and also changes within churches, particularly the increased use of PowerPoint. There is greater awareness of Bible Society and Scripture Union amongst leaders than non-leaders but there is a willingness amongst both groups to consider using more resources.

Non-Leaders

- 48% of non-leaders say their church has grown over the past 5 years, 16% say it's declined.
- 'Very important' to spiritual growth for church attendees (in descending order) are – private prayer, collective worship, friendships with other Christians, reading the Bible alone, prayer with others, sermons/talks given at my local church, Bible meditation, giving of financial resources, service on behalf of the community, reading and engaging with the Bible with others, and home/smaller groups.
- Reading the Bible alone is especially important for Evangelicals, while least important (but still pretty highly rated nonetheless) to Low Church, Catholic, Broad and Liberal churchmanship.
- Only 14% of non-leaders are 'very confident' and 51% 'fairly confident' in their knowledge of the Bible. 79% of non-leaders think it is important that they know the Bible well.
- The Bible is 'frequently' used for private devotions (56%), but non-leaders use the Bible less frequently for preaching and teaching and counselling others. The majority, however, do use it 'frequently' or 'sometimes' to shape their decisions (63%).
- 43% of non-leaders use daily Bible reading notes, 35% use commentaries and 26% a concordance. However none of these resources are used by more than 50%. Online resources are used by one in five respondents (21%).
- The favourite Bible version among non-leaders is the NIV (26%), followed by the Jerusalem Bible (12%), read mainly by Roman Catholics. The remainder of Bible versions all score 9% or less. 18% didn't express an opinion. This is similarly reflected in Bible use in church.
- Readability beats accuracy into second place as the driver for choice of version among non-leaders, 53% prioritising readability compared to 25% accuracy.
- 35% of non-leaders claim to read the Bible daily and 25% several times a week.
- The Bible is more significant in influencing the moral decisions and attitudes/behaviour towards others than over how leisure time is spent for example. It also has a strong influence over views of the church and where people place their priorities.
- 57% of non-leaders believe the Bible should shape their daily life 'a great deal'.
- The Bible is seen to 'provide the basic framework for our relationship with God' and 'shows us who God is, what he has done and what he is like' by about three-quarters of the respondents. Over 60% also thought that it

provides moral guidance, sets out God's rescue plan for humanity and shows us God's priorities.

- 66% of non-leaders say the Bible is regularly taught at their churches. However 18% did not give an answer; possibly they do not attend church regularly enough to answer the question.
- 78% of church goers believe the Bible is divinely inspired and 34% that it is free from error.
- The majority feel encouraged when they read the Bible and many are enlightened and motivated.
- 58% of people say that Richard Dawkins, and others similar, make no difference to their confidence in the Bible. Divisions in the church undermine the confidence to some extent of 18% of people. 45% of people say that their Bible confidence is enhanced a lot by the way in which the Old Testament foretells of Christ.
- 73% of people say that the Bible actively challenges them to live in a way which runs counter to the present culture in Britain.
- 39% of non-leaders remember the Bible affecting a decision they made in the past week.
- 68% of church goers think that the church should work towards a society that takes the Bible more seriously and an equal proportion say the church should work harder to promote biblical principles across society.
- 3% have a comprehensive knowledge and 33% have an awareness of the resources and initiatives of Bible Society. Similarly 8% and 36% have respective awareness of the resources and initiatives offered by Scripture Union.
- 64% of people associate Bible poverty with 'our own land where the Bible is no longer at the centre of public and family life'.
- The highest representation for how many languages the Bible has been translated into is 61-80% of languages, with 29% thinking this.

Church Leaders

- 63% of leaders say their church has grown over the past 5 years, 16% say it's declined in numbers attending.
- 'Very important' to spiritual growth for church leaders (in descending order) are – private prayer, collective worship, reading the Bible alone, friendships with other Christians, prayer with others, reading and engaging with the Bible with others, Bible meditation, sermons/talks given at one's local church, giving of financial resources, service on behalf of the community and home/smaller groups.
- More than 80% of Baptist, Independent and Pentecostal leaders say that Bible reading alone is very important for spiritual growth.
- 47% of leaders are 'very confident' and another 47% 'fairly confident' in their knowledge of the Bible. 85% of leaders think it is very important that they know the Bible well.
- The Bible is 'frequently' used for private devotions (83%), and leaders use the Bible frequently in other areas too including preaching and teaching (73%). Approximately 50% use the Bible for counselling others, sharing their faith and shaping their decisions frequently.
- 75% use commentaries, 64% a concordance, 51% a Bible dictionary and 46% of leaders use daily Bible reading notes. Online resources are used by one in two leaders.
- The favourite Bible version among leaders is the NIV (37%), followed by the New RSV (17%). This is similarly reflected in Bible use in church, with 46% of leaders using NIV in their churches.
- Readability is just ahead accuracy as the driver for choice of version among leaders, 64% prioritising readability and 54% accuracy.
- 58% of church leaders read the Bible daily and 33% several times a week.
- The Bible is most significant in influencing the moral decisions and attitudes/behaviour towards others among leaders. It also has a strong influence on their behaviour at work and over views of the church and where people place their priorities.
- The overwhelming majority, 80%, of leaders believe the Bible should shape their daily life 'a great deal'.
- The Bible is seen to provide 'the basic framework for our relationship with God' and 'shows us who God is, what he has done and what he is like' by more than 90% of the church leaders. More than 80% also thought that it sets out God's rescue plan for humanity and shows us God's priorities.
- 87% of leaders say the Bible is regularly taught at their churches; this is presumably generally overseen by them as leaders.

- 98% of church leaders believe the Bible is divinely inspired and 47% that it is free from error.
- Leaders are most likely to say they feel encouraged, enlightened and motivated. With 87% encouraged.
- 72% of leaders say that aggressive secularists like Richard Dawkins make no difference to their confidence in the Scriptures. The 'blood and killing in the Old Testament' undermine 21% of leaders' confidence to some extent. 60% of leaders say that their Bible confidence is enhanced a lot, and 21% a little, by the way in which the Old Testament foretells of Christ.
- Almost all, 91%, of church and group leaders say that the Bible actively challenges them to live in a way which runs counter to the present culture in Britain.
- 67% of leaders recalled the Bible affecting a decision they made in the past week.
- 90% of church leaders think that the church should work towards a society that takes the Bible more seriously and 89% think that the church should work harder to promote biblical principles across society.
- 13% have a comprehensive knowledge and 54% have an awareness of the resources and initiatives of Bible Society. Similarly 15% and 58% have respective awareness of the resources and initiatives offered by Scripture Union.
- 76% of people associate Bible poverty with 'our own land where the Bible is no longer at the centre of public and family life'.
- The highest representation for how many languages the Bible has been translated into is 61-80% with 30% thinking this, and 29% who think that it is 41-60%.
- When thinking about daily pastoral practice, 54% of church leaders say the Bible has a universal role in all their Christian ministry, 28% say it has a dominating but not universal role and around one in ten (8%) says it has an occasional role.
- 64% say the Bible has a universal role in all their Christian ministry when it comes to teaching.
- 58% say the Bible has a universal role in all their Christian ministry when it comes to liturgy and worship.
- The Bible is most used in sermons (76%), followed by small groups (69%), other teaching (61%), public prayer (46%), evangelism (44%), and pastoral care/counselling (36%).
- 57% of church leaders are very or fairly satisfied with general levels of Bible knowledge and application in their church. Very interesting is the finding that among those whose dissatisfaction is higher than the average are Methodists, URCs – in other words, leaders who place least importance themselves on

the Bible are most dissatisfied with the general levels of Bible knowledge in their church.

- Perceived as most important for congregations or groups to know are – the Gospels and Acts (84%), the whole story of the Bible (69%), NT in detail (68%), Paul's NT teaching (68%), and lastly the OT (50%).
- Used most often in services/meetings now compared to 5-10 years ago is PowerPoint (64%) followed by video clips (47%), drama (27%), dance (12%) and other (9%).
- 38% of leaders use an online Bible and 19% use audio recordings. There is wide scope for more to be done as many would consider using these resources.

QUALITATIVE SUMMARY

Non-Leaders

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Christians feel that the Bible and Christian morals are increasingly disappearing from public life and would like the Church to take a more active role in promoting their relevance in society. They feel that outside the Christian community, the Bible is regarded as a difficult, ancient text which is afforded little relevance to modern life.

Respondents feel the Church and Church leaders should take a more active role in making the Church visible in public life. They feel Christian arguments have largely disappeared from public debate, and would like to see strong Church leaders who engage with the issues people are concerned by.

Congregation members also feel that there is scope for improving the role the Bible plays in Church services. Many feel their understanding of the passages read by preachers during sermons would increase if preachers were better at contextualising the material and providing them with examples of how it is relevant to their lives and how they can apply biblical principles to the problems they face.

Respondents define their spiritual growth in terms of how their understanding and ability to live by biblical principles increases. They regard the process as both personal and collective; indeed many said the fellowship of other Christians is very important to their spiritual development. Being held to account by other congregation members is important to many in measuring their progress.

Christians want to learn how to apply the Bible to their daily lives and to better see how it is relevant through the resources they use. There seems to be a thirst for modern, easily accessible resources that do not lose sight of the original text or of God, but that approach the Bible in a way that Christians feel they can relate to themselves. Resources targeted at young people often fail to reach their audience as they can be seen to be 'trying too hard' without actually engaging with Christian youth on their own terms.

There is a great potential to develop online resources. Christians are becoming increasingly IT-literate, and online formats (e.g. podcasts) suit busy modern lifestyles. They would also welcome better guidance on which material available over the internet is suitable for their purposes, as they often feel confused by the plethora of material out there.

Resources targeted at specific denominations would also be welcomed by some, as there can be great variations to the presentational formats each group prefer. Similarly, as the Old Testament is regarded as particularly difficult to engage with, Christians would appreciate resources that help them see more clearly how it is relevant to the New Testament.

TOPIC ONE: THE BIBLE IN TERMS OF SOCIETY AND CHURCHES

Summary

- Overall we had a sense of Christians feeling 'squeezed' by what is at best a sceptical view of the Bible among non-Christians, and at worst is hostility. Word associations with the Bible include labels such as 'boring' and 'old fashioned'.
- Britain's Christian heritage is regarded as both a blessing and a hindrance when it comes to disseminating the Bible's message to society, and the negative side of this heritage is compounded by a perceived lack of Bible literacy generally which is getting worse with each generation.
- There are some concerns about the way the media treats the Christian message, which is not helped by the way some Christian broadcasters take an excessively introspective sub-cultural approach. There is a keenness to see engagement through the media more on the world's terms, using opportunities which at first may seem hostile to the Gospel message but even apologists for aggressive secularism offer an opportunity for Christian response.
- Christians look to the Church and its leaders to spearhead the charge to the non-Christian world. They want leaders to be bolder, less apologetic and more confident in taking the Christian message to society. In preparing the public sphere (the 'air war'), Christians also look to Church leaders to equip believers to discuss their faith with people around them (the 'ground war').
- In order to make this happen Christians would like to be better trained by leaders to have biblical messages ready for use in an updated and modern way. They would also like to use opportunities to build more basic links with people, in order to get alongside non-Christians and engage with them socially and not just intellectually.
- Encouragingly, Christians wish to resist pressure from colleagues, friends and family who unreasonably criticise the Bible's status as God's Word, but they need equipping to do so and to stand up publicly for the Bible's integrity as the impact of secularists like Richard Dawkins is recognised as being harmful to some people's receptiveness to the Gospel message.
- We found a significant mismatch between the wishes of churchgoers for Bible engagement in Church, and the present realities. In particular they want greater flexibility in conveying a faithful message, rather than the rigid, more traditional methods of teaching the Bible. Preaching should be regarded as a spectrum of communications tools rather than just pulpit-based transmission.
- There is a general expectation that their Church leaders should be leading lives that are transparently focused on gaining and communicating to others a good understanding of the Bible.

TOPIC TWO: THE BIBLE AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Summary

- Spiritual growth is broadly perceived as an alignment of individual behaviour with biblical understanding, and awareness of changing priorities. It tends to be measured by personal assessment, comments by others, and a measure against biblical standards.
- The Bible is regarded as an important driver of spiritual growth; however its use in this respect should also be regarded as a corporate as much as an individual pursuit. People also need encouragement and assistance in developing their ability to understand and apply the Bible.
- Other drivers of spiritual growth are important too, such as personal crisis, and it is interesting to note that even in suffering, people report that by God's grace they move closer to him.
- Small groups were cited as a good means of promoting spiritual growth over traditional sermon delivery.
- Spiritual growth is regarded as both individual and collective, reinforcing the view that accountability to others and the opportunity for corporate learning are important.
- The Bible is regarded by many as an objective measure of spiritual growth. It also shapes Christians' views of God, and is seen as a 'constant' description of him in the face of a constantly changing world.
- It should not be surprising therefore to learn that spiritual growth and biblical literacy are seen as going hand-in-hand.

TOPIC THREE: BIBLE RESOURCES

Summary

- The key point is – choice. Christians are prepared to use a wide range of resources, including increasingly online ones.
- Also very important is the professional production and presentation of information; style may not be more important than substance but it's a close second.
- There is a shortage of consumer-friendly resources in some formats. For instance it was noted that CD Bibles are too often only available in the Authorised Version, while the internet is regarded as very risky in terms of quality.
- Corporate means of accessing resources are well received, such as workshops in which people can participate and engage with others.
- The strongest criticisms were reserved for poorly produced materials and material that is perceived as trivialising or mistreating the Bible.
- Lack of available time is the single biggest obstacle to greater use of biblical resources, so people want to be able to have access to resources on their own terms.
- In terms of style, resources should be targeted better to audience which may mean for example updating the covers of Bibles and writing evangelistic resources at the level and in the style of their intended audience. People are aware of the danger of frightening off non-Christians merely because of style.
- The participants in our groups were not particularly price-sensitive but they are not daft in that they want to be treated as consumers rather than sources of voluntary funds.
- Bible reading notes are regarded as good in principle but in practice sometimes as a vehicle for the opinions of their author, rather than an aid to proper engagement with the text.
- The most useful resources, other than Christian fellowship, would be those which compare and help with interpreting the Bible.
- Key to perceptions of the usefulness of resources is how to unlock the applicability of the Bible, and in particular the Old Testament. Useful suggestions included looking at the wider application of the OT to the overall Bible story, and – interestingly - to the development of materials that will help the process of engagement with non-Christians.
- There is a feeling that both older and younger members of churches are often poorly served with resources. Older members are thought of as less comfortable with small groups while children need much more visual stimuli. Also the groups felt that new Christians were sometimes poorly catered for.

- The two key 'nice-to-haves' are firstly a comprehensive online catalogue of resources, and secondly some objective 'kitemark' to enable Christians to ascertain the quality and authority of online resource content.

TOPIC FOUR: BIBLE LITERACY AND APPLICATION

Summary

- Christians are impressively confident in the authority and status of the Bible, even if they do not all believe it is inerrant.
- There are, however, concerns about different translations and the inevitable inaccuracies that will creep in. Informal or modern translations in particular cause concern.
- One of the most persuasive points in support of the Bible's accuracy is its age – which is of course also a source of its perceived opacity to non-Christians, according to earlier analysis. Similarly persuasive is the remarkable contiguity of the Bible in view of its many authors.
- Churchgoers want to be encouraged to read and study the Bible, not coerced or bullied into it. Yet they also realise that along with lack of free time, their own lack of commitment is the single biggest obstacle to engaging more with it.
- Christians struggle with issues such as the blood and gore of the Old Testament – especially if they are new Christians. Similarly obstructive is the lack of understanding about the Bible's bigger picture.
- There is thus a strong and unmet demand for more and better resources to help Christians make the Bible more easily applicable and explainable, especially to non-Christians.
- The Bible is a valued resource to enhance prayer lives, both as a means of appreciating God and as a direct contact with God's word.
- Christians would also like to apply more widely biblical principles to their day-to-day decision making. Many report struggling to apply the Bible in an everyday context and want leaders to help them overcome these challenges.
- Once more in this section we encountered a hunger for gritty, in-depth biblical analysis rather than leaders going through the motions. Explanation rather than repetition was the persistent desire. Alongside this is a wish for a broader understanding of the Bible's main themes rather than learning texts by rote. Church leaders again have a key role to play in making the Bible accessible and should spend the time that non-leaders lack in ensuring their own good grasp of it.

Leaders

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Leaders feel that there is an opportunity for the Church to become more visible in public debate and more clearly illustrate how Christian mores, and the Bible, are relevant to today's society. Many of those we spoke to felt that Christianity has become increasingly sidelined by a post-modern culture, and that the Church has so far not fully succeeded in articulating its views on issues that people care about, which has led to the Bible being seen as increasingly irrelevant.

We were warned that because people no longer encounter the Bible in school, they were much less likely to afford it any relevance to wider society and even among Christians there may be reluctance to use it because of this situation. It was also noted that people outside the active church community seem to regard it as a quite high threshold to cross to become engaged with their local church, perhaps because the Church is not very visible in public life so it does not seem like a familiar place to people.

This sense of dissatisfaction seems to spring from the fact that Church leaders regard the Bible as very much relevant to their own lives and essential to their spiritual development, but are less able to communicate that to others. Leaders regard the Bible as a resource to use personally, for example, and feel that they can influence congregations by setting a good example and living by its rules rather than giving congregation members the means to discern those standards for themselves.

Leaders use a wide variety of tools to assist their own understanding, but also for preparation for services etc and to help others understand the Scriptures. Many say daily Bible reading notes are the best resources for congregation members who do not really comprehend how to use the Bible, but these notes are not as commonly used among congregation members as Leaders might think. New technologies are also adopted by churches, and the use of DVDs, PowerPoint and other forms of illustration is perceived to be widespread by leaders. These tools are considered to be effective for illustrating points and for holding the attention of young churchgoers. There are, however, some issues when it comes to the cost of new resources that leaders admit prevent them from being more widely used.

TOPIC ONE: THE BIBLE IN TERMS OF SOCIETY AND CHURCHES

Summary

- Leaders fear the Bible is seen as largely irrelevant to non-Christians and they echoed the non-leader discussion that this is in part due to the ignorance resulting from a lack of proper biblical education in schools.
- They also feel the media focuses on the sensational or unrepresentative aspects of popular or famous Christians such as President Bush, rather than tackle the actual text itself.
- Alongside this decline in Christian standards and understanding, leaders see a rise in 'spirituality' and suggest that this indicates a desire for meaning – although this also indicates a willingness only to come to God on one's own terms rather than on God's.
- As with non-leaders, this group wants to see a higher profile for the Church in public debate and a less liberal approach to the Bible by senior church leaders in public debate. This is seen as an important means of re-establishing the Bible as relevant to the cultural context and as objectively true – in contrast to the relativist, consumerist direction in which society appears to be heading.
- Leaders feel that a multi-faceted approach is needed, starting in theological colleges and seminaries, but also by meeting non-Christians where they are – such as by embracing youth culture. Indeed young people are a particular concern to leaders, in part because of the cultural divide but also because of the demands made by the Bible for changes in lifestyle which many young people may be reluctant to accept.
- The view of leaders is that the Bible plays an important role in main weekly services, and participants feel that the means of conveying biblical messages is changing. However, the wider permeation of the Bible into Church life is less uniform, with some even complaining of the need for wariness in being too 'up-front' for fear of loss of council funding for certain activities.
- Leaders take a wide variety of views about their own role – ranging from 'helping members find the Bible' through to explaining and helping congregations to apply it. However, judging by their expectations of their own abilities it is clear that some leaders would struggle to deliver the degree of biblical explanation demanded by some of their congregations.
- We uncovered two contrasting approaches to how leaders can help congregations develop better relationships with the Bible. The 'soft' approach was to link the Bible into campaigns or issues that are current. The alternative is methodical Bible study. There was a clear delineation between liberals and others in favouring one approach or another.

TOPIC TWO: THE BIBLE AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Summary

- Although leaders were happy to use the term 'spiritual growth' there was little uniformity in its use. Despite this lack of consistency, the Bible is widely regarded as essential to growth, while other aspects of church life (such as liturgical structure) were sometimes seen as a hindrance. But building a strong church community is also seen as important in encouraging collective growth.
- While many leaders are using commentaries and Bible dictionaries, it is clear that there are a wide variety of influences over the ways in which leaders view the text itself. These can include distinctly non-biblical sources too. However, others would like to see more and better resources provided, such as modular systems for teaching the Bible.

TOPIC THREE: BIBLE RESOURCES

Summary

- As with congregations, time pressures affect the capacity of leaders to engage with the Bible to the extent that many would wish. Moreover leaders often appreciate these same pressures as they affect their congregations.
- There are also clearly cost constraints on leaders, especially in light of the differential recognition among congregations of the value of resources.
- Multimedia resources are considered uppermost in the hierarchy of helpful innovations, although as we found among non-leaders there is a concern about the provenance of some internet-based resources. Leaders would particularly value multimedia templates that are inexpensive, easy to use, copyright-free and likely to save time.
- Leaders often feel daunted by the prospect of teaching the Old Testament, in the same way that congregations are daunted by tackling it too, and more and better resources would again be welcome.
- Resources are used most widely for activities such as Bible studies and home groups, although one particular gap identified by leaders was the teenage market. Care should be taken to target resources more specifically to the audience and to encourage engagement with the Bible 'where people are' – i.e. to try to overcome cultural or generational barriers.

TOPIC FOUR: BIBLE LITERACY AND APPLICATION

Summary

- On the status and authority of the Bible, leaders start from a wide range of different premises. Interestingly, some leaders report a similar division within congregations – with some keen to learn more about the Bible and to understand the wider picture of its message, while many others in the same congregation are much less ambitious to delve into it.
- A further hurdle to overcome is the modern tendency towards short attention spans and multi-media delivery. This is exacerbated by widespread and increasing societal ignorance about the Bible, and lack of time.
- In applying the Bible, some leaders feel it would be inappropriate to turn for a biblical answer to every question but others feel that their congregation accepts it as the Word of God and the final authority. This tends to drive the applicability of the Bible in the minds of leaders, and thus their motivation for expository teaching and encouragement to their congregations.
- Nonetheless, even those leaders whose position on biblical authority is at the more fragile end of the scale would like to be better equipped to explain the Bible to their congregations. They take seriously their role as spiritual guides and wish to be better-placed to support their flocks.