



Bible  
Society



CODEC  
Research Centre

# Digital Millennials *and the Bible*

produced in partnership with Barna Group

Research commissioned by  
Bible Society  
Designed by CODEC at University of Durham  
Conducted by ComRes  
Analysis by Barna Global

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# INTRODUCTION

Bible Society's mandate is to help people engage with the Bible, because we believe that when people do so, lives can change, for good. In the many parts of the world where Bible Society works, the primary barrier is availability. Here in the UK, the Bible is readily accessible, but its perceived irrelevance is a common hindrance to engagement. Millions of British young people have grown up without much exposure to Christianity or the Bible.

In this context, Bible Society desired to conduct a landmark study of Bible perceptions and engagement among Millennials—adults ages 18–35. We partnered with CODEC at the University of Durham to design the research and with Barna Global to produce this report. Some of the findings you will encounter in the following pages may surprise you.

For example, given the societal context, we expected to find widespread scepticism or even hostility towards Christianity and the Bible among those unconnected with the Church. Yet this study uncovered that attitudes are more likely to be neutral than negative among young people, affirming Bible Society's mission to help society find relevance and see the value in the Bible.

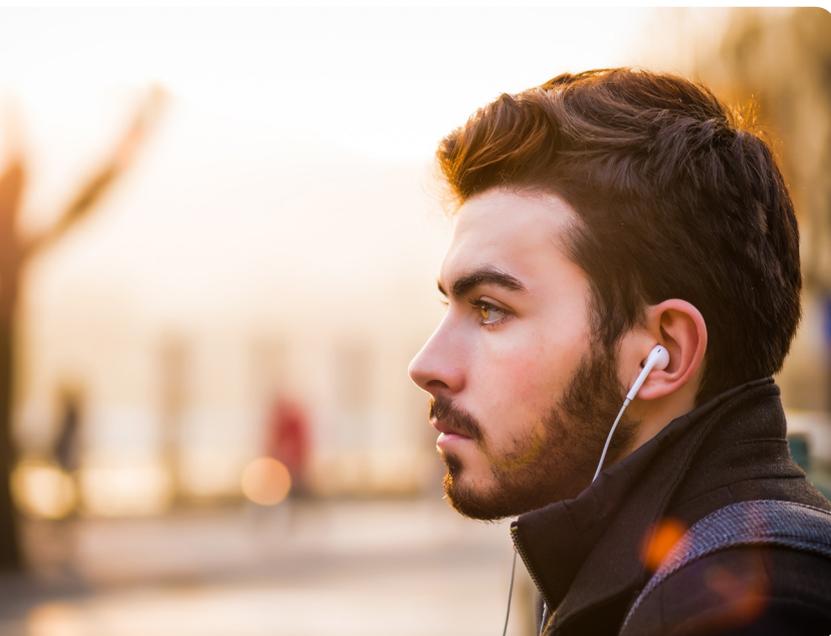
We also learned that familiarity with the Bible does not predict application of Scripture to one's life. Plenty of young adults label the Bible 'God's Word' and claim some familiarity with its contents, but only a fraction, even of self-described Christians, consider it an authoritative truth for their lives—most commonly those who attend church regularly.

So how do Millennials engage with the Bible, when they *do* engage? This was a very important component of our research, as we expected this highly tech-savvy generation (96% of whom own an electronic device and use social media regularly) to eschew a historically print book. In fact, we found that print is not dead—at least not yet. Despite a surge in electronic media, over half of 'digital Millennials' mainly read books in print. Further, more young-adult Bible users prefer a print copy of the Bible to a digital version, though plenty do use a phone-based app or search for Scripture online.

These are some of the surprises we found in this study of Digital Millennials and the Bible. Many more insights about digital engagement and opinions about faith and religion are contained in this report. We invite you to consider these findings in light of your own experiences with young people. Some may see these results as a

bit rosy (our analysts note that Millennials generally do tend to rate things more positively than older adults), yet attitudes toward the Bible seem rather clear and unsceptical.

Where do you see opportunities to share the hope and truth of the Bible based on these results? What might you do differently to better connect with Millennials? How might these insights change your approach to evangelism? Our hope is that this information will assist those who interact with young adults inside and outside the Church to engage with them in a way that is relatable and life-changing.



# METHODOLOGY

This report contains research conducted with Millennials (adults aged 18 to 35) in the UK, who qualify as 'Digital Millennials' – those who own at least one electronic device (tablet or mobile) and who use social media at least weekly – for which 96% of this age cohort qualify.\* Given the prevalence of young adults who own devices and log into social media on a weekly basis, in this report, 'Digital Millennials' are referred to simply as 'Millennials.'

The survey was designed by CODEC at University of Durham and conducted online via a consumer panel by ComRes [16-30 Nov 2016]. A total of 1,942 Millennials completed the survey, and minimal weighting was applied to ensure the data are nationally representative. At a 95% confidence interval, data for this sample size have a 2.2% margin of error.

In several of the sections on ranked options, this report presents not only the top choice but the top three choices. While the top-ranked options show primary choices, the top three ranked often gives a better idea of overall popularity.

## Groups

To show the relationship between Millennials and the Bible in detail, this report will refer to several faith groups that have distinct responses.

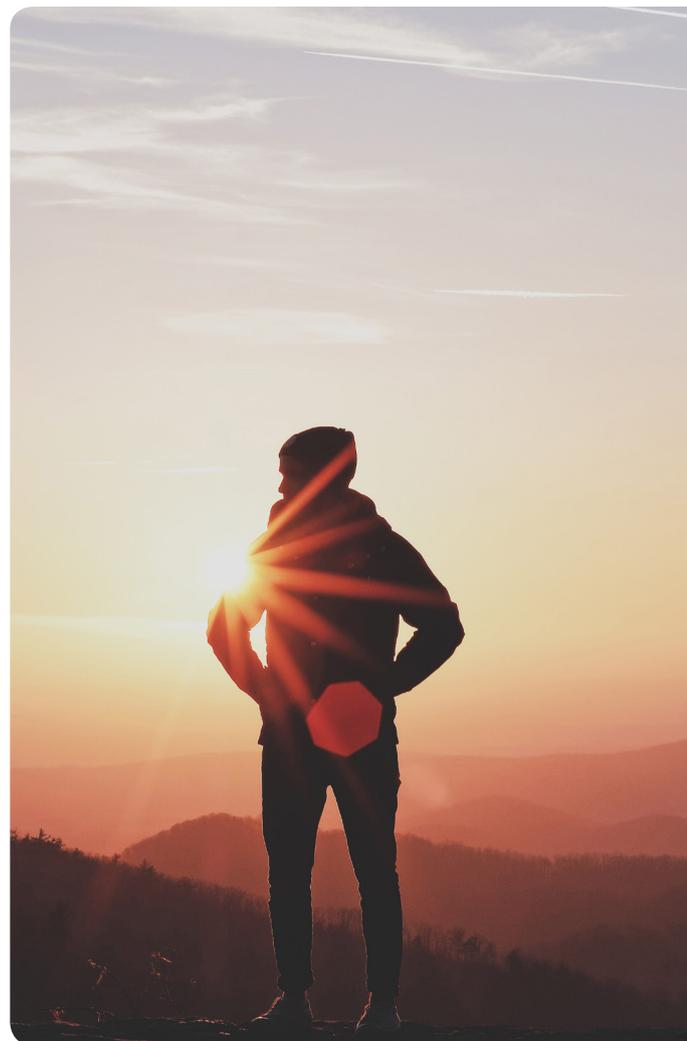
**Christians** include all Millennials who responded to, 'Which of the following religious groups, if any, do you consider yourself to be a member of?' by selecting, 'Christian.' This group make up 35% of the sample of Digital Millennials.

**Nones** include all Millennials who responded to, 'Which of the following religious groups, if any, do you consider yourself to be a member of?' by selecting, 'No religion.' This group make up 48% of the sample of Digital Millennials.

**Others** include all Millennials who responded to, 'Which of the following religious groups, if any, do you consider yourself to be a member of?' by selecting, 'Muslim,' 'Hindu,' 'Buddhist,' 'Sikh,' 'Jewish,' and 'Other.' Others include 14% of the sample of Millennials.

**Practising Christians** are Christians who say they attend church at least monthly. Approximately half (47%) of Christians and 17% of the total sample are practising Christians.

**Non-practising Christians** are Christians who attend church less frequently than once a month or not at all. About half (53%) of Christians and 19% of the sample are non-practising Christians.



\*Of 2,015 Millennials surveyed by ComRes, 1,942 owned at least one digital device and used social media at least weekly. This study reports the data of those 1,942 'Digital Millennials.'

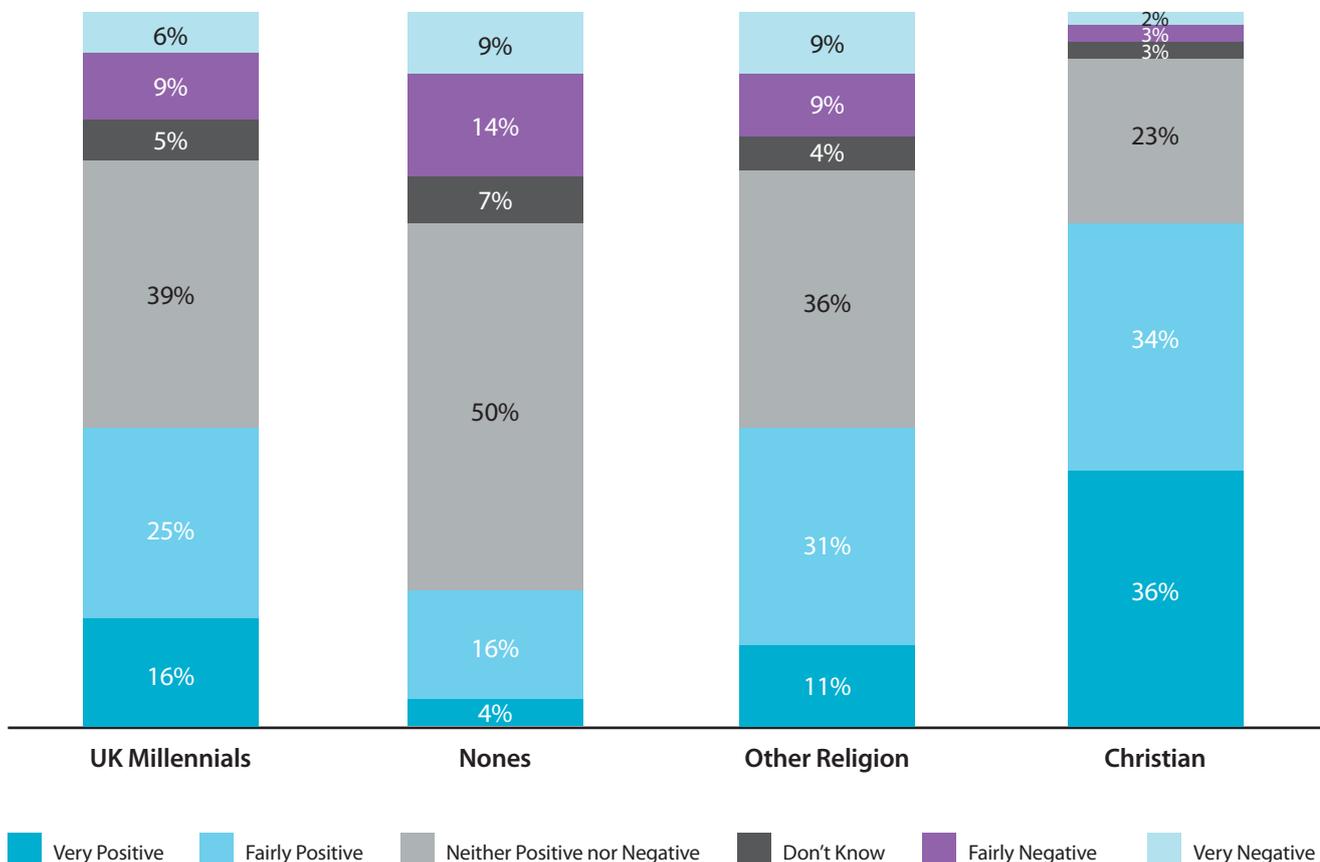
# MILLENNIALS ‘IN THE MIDDLE’ ON CHRISTIANITY AND THE BIBLE

## More neutral than negative feelings about Christianity among Millennials

The most common Millennial response to religion in general and Christianity in particular is a neutral response or none at all. Fewer than half of UK Millennials (41%) have a net positive view of Christianity and of the Bible, yet only one in seven has a negative view (15%).

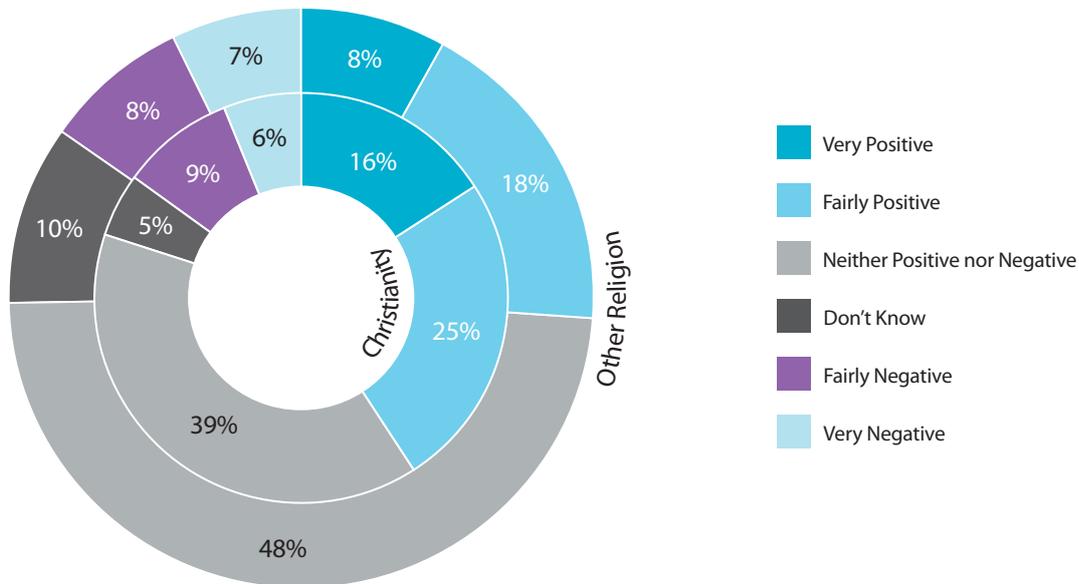
Perhaps unsurprisingly, Christians are most likely to look favourably upon Christianity, 70 percent doing so. The group least likely to see Christianity favourably are the Nones, 20 percent of whom have a positive view and 23 percent of whom have a negative view of Christianity; the majority are somewhere between the two, saying either they don't know what their feelings are toward Christianity (7%) or that they have a neutral view (50%).

### How would you describe your feelings towards Christianity?



This is not a ringing endorsement of Christianity, but compared with other religions, Christianity is still perceived as positively as any other. Christianity (at 41%) is statistically tied with Buddhism (38%) for positive feelings. Other religions lag behind in perceptions, although few have more negative responses from Millennials.

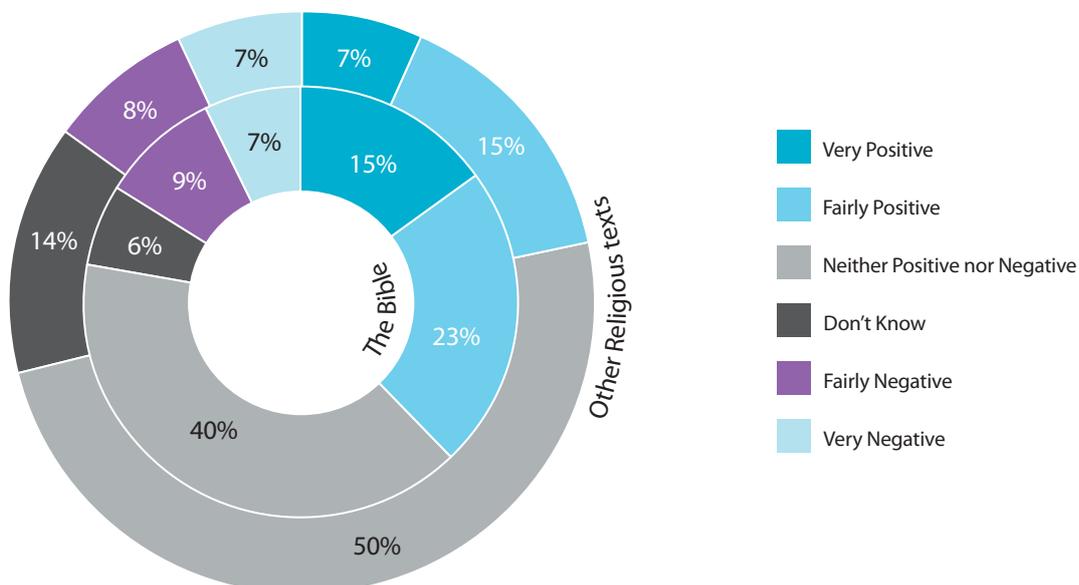
### How would you describe your feelings towards each of the following religions?



n = 1,942 Digital Millennials

Sacred texts elicit similar responses as religions in general, with the Bible eliciting the most positive feelings. Millennials have the most negative feelings towards the Qur'an (28%), followed by the Bible (16%). They are half as likely (6%) to say they don't know the Bible as to say they don't know other sacred texts, except the Qur'an. This suggests most Millennials believe themselves to be familiar with the Bible, and their feelings about it are based on a belief that they know its content—at least in general.

### How would you describe your feelings towards each of the following sacred texts?



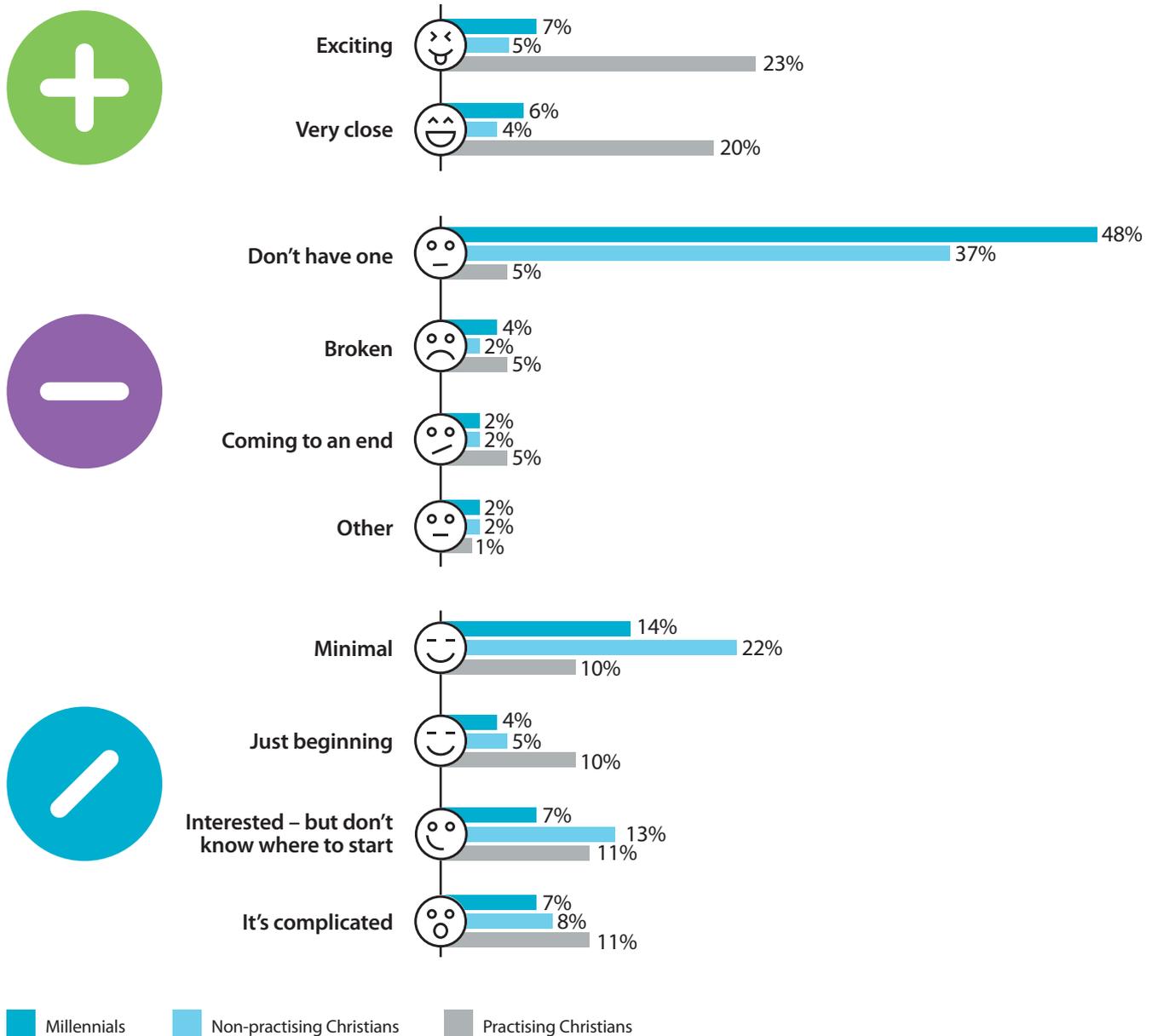
n = 1,942 Digital Millennials

MILLENNIALS ‘IN THE MIDDLE’ ON CHRISTIANITY AND THE BIBLE //

# Relationship with the Bible next to non-existent for most

Despite positive or neutral feelings, about half of young UK Millennials (48%) say they don’t have a ‘relationship with the Bible’ – including 22 percent of Christians and 71 percent of Nones. In addition, 14 percent say their relationship with the Bible is ‘minimal,’ including 17 percent of Christians and 11 percent of Nones.

Which of the following statements, if any, best describes your relationship with the Bible?



n = 1,942 Digital Millennials

One in eight Millennials (13%) has a clearly positive relationship with the Bible; they characterise it as ‘exciting’ or ‘very close.’ A smaller group choose negative characteristics for their relationship with the Bible, with 8 percent saying it is either ‘broken,’ ‘coming to an end’ or some other negative descriptor.

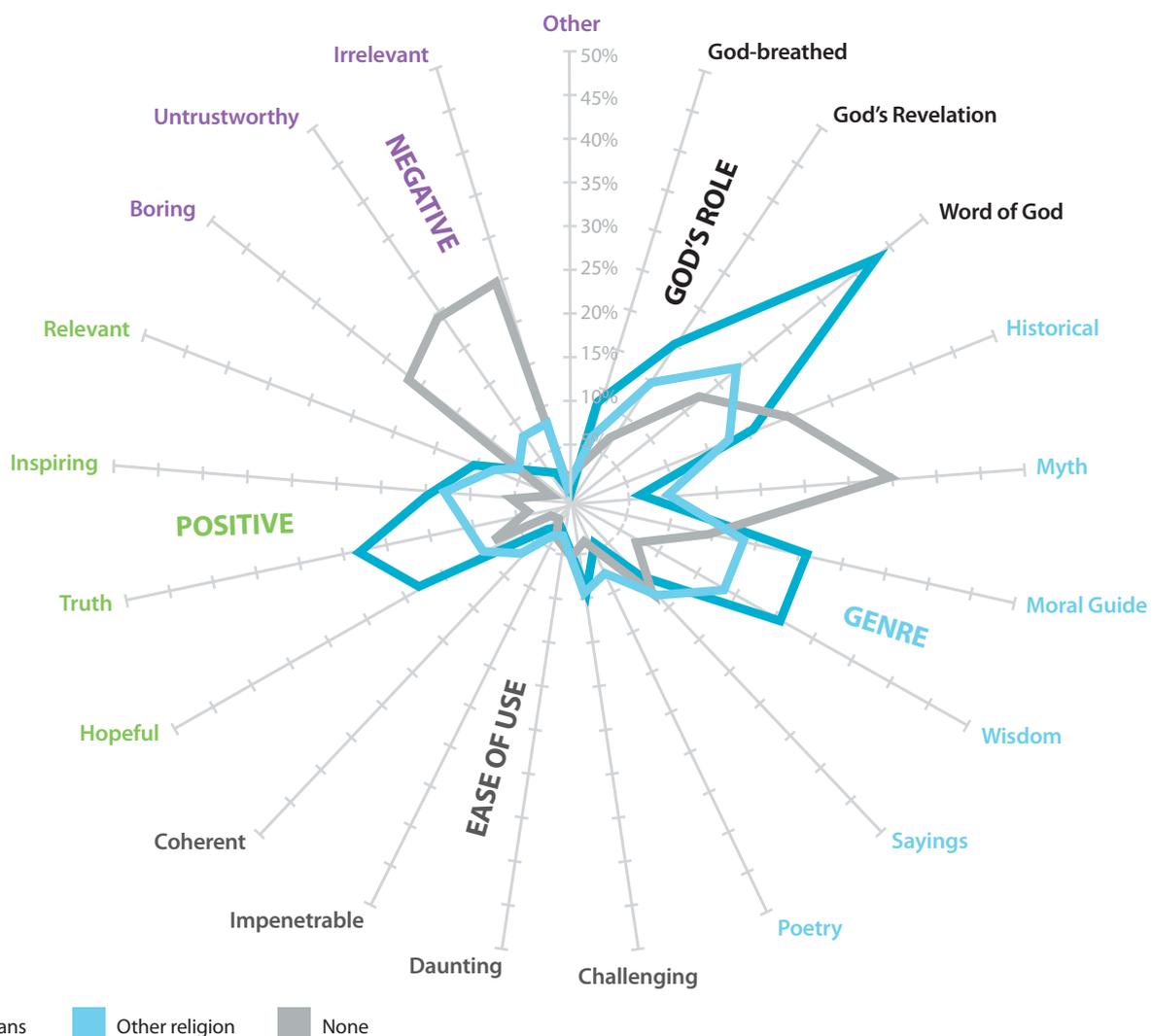
MILLENNIALS ‘IN THE MIDDLE’ ON CHRISTIANITY AND THE BIBLE //

# To many, the Bible is ‘God’s Word’ but not necessarily authoritative truth

Perceived characteristics of the Bible vary greatly, with the most commonly chosen being ‘Word of God,’ selected by 29 percent of all Millennials.

At least one in five chooses ‘historical’ (24%) ‘myth’ (22%), and ‘moral guide’ (21%) as one of three words to describe the Bible.

## Which of the following words or phrases do you most associate with the Bible?



n = 1,942 Digital Millennials

Nearly half (44%) of Christians chose ‘Word of God’ as one of the top three words to describe the Bible. This is followed, at a distance, by ‘moral guide’ and ‘wisdom,’ each with 27 percent. A quarter of Christians (24%) describe the Bible as ‘Truth.’

Nones’ responses are often the inverse of Christians’ responses. For example, among Nones, the most common response, at 36 percent is, ‘myth.’ Eight percent of Christians chose this characteristic.

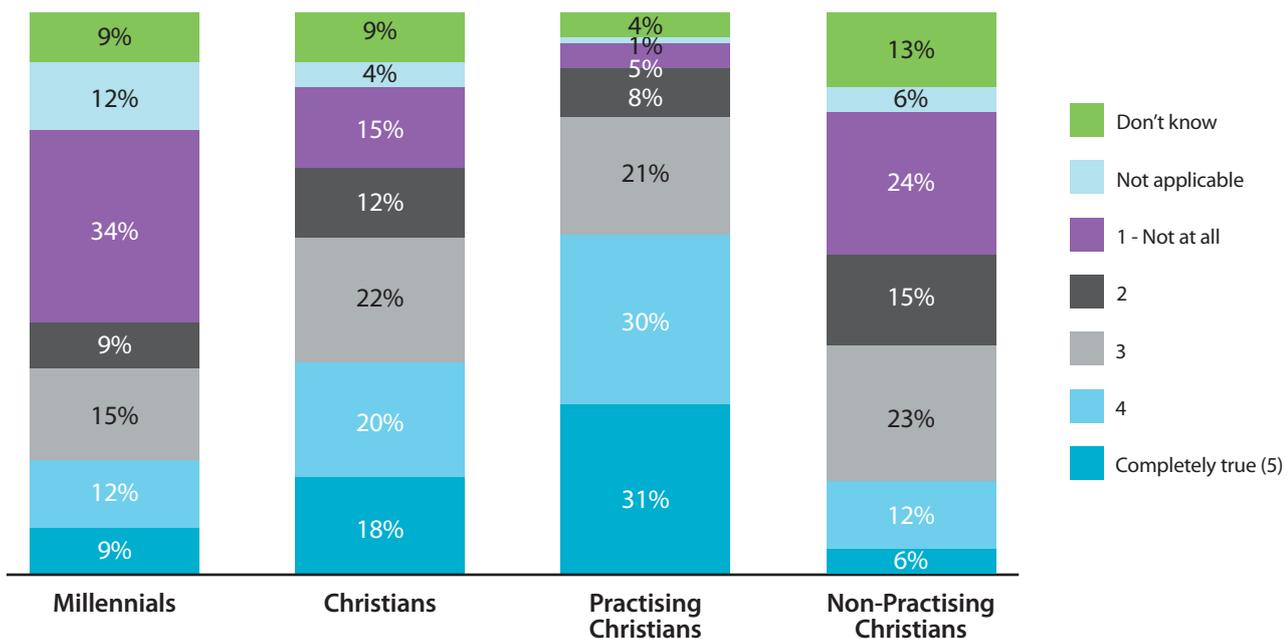
These choices, combined with the majority of Millennials who say the Bible does not have supreme authority in their lives, indicates that ‘Word of God’ is more of an epithet than an indication of faith or belief in the authority of Scripture.

MILLENNIALS ‘IN THE MIDDLE’ ON CHRISTIANITY AND THE BIBLE //

# Most practising Christians say the Bible is supreme authority

Over a third (38%) of all Christian Millennials agree, ‘The Bible should have supreme authority in guiding my beliefs, views and behaviour.’ Practising Christian Millennials agree at a much higher rate, 61 percent.

## The Bible should have supreme authority in guiding my beliefs, views and behaviour



n = 1,942 Digital Millennials

Non-practising Christians are unlikely to agree (19%) and are more likely to disagree (39%) than to choose a neutral response (23%). In other words, Christians who aren't attending church also don't see the Bible as a supreme authority in their lives.

## Non-Christians' and nones' receptivity

Those with no religion, rather than a non-Christian religion, are more likely to have a negative view of the Bible and Christianity. While 42 percent of non-Christian religious people have a positive view of Christianity, only 20 percent of Nones do. Furthermore, while 23 percent of Nones have a negative view of Christianity, only 18 percent of non-Christian religious do.

This pattern holds throughout the study. It should not be taken to mean that religious people who are not Christians have loosely held religious beliefs; rather, they are more comfortable with the idea of religion in general compared to those without a religion, or their faith may incorporate some of the teachings of the Bible itself.

Nones, in addition to having fewer positive and more negative responses to Christianity and the Bible, also have more neutral responses; half say their view of Christianity (50%) and the Bible (51%) is neither positive nor negative. This may indicate a 'policy' toward religion or Christianity, mixed positive and negative feelings, or a lack of context and familiarity.

MILLENNIALS ‘IN THE MIDDLE’ ON CHRISTIANITY AND THE BIBLE //

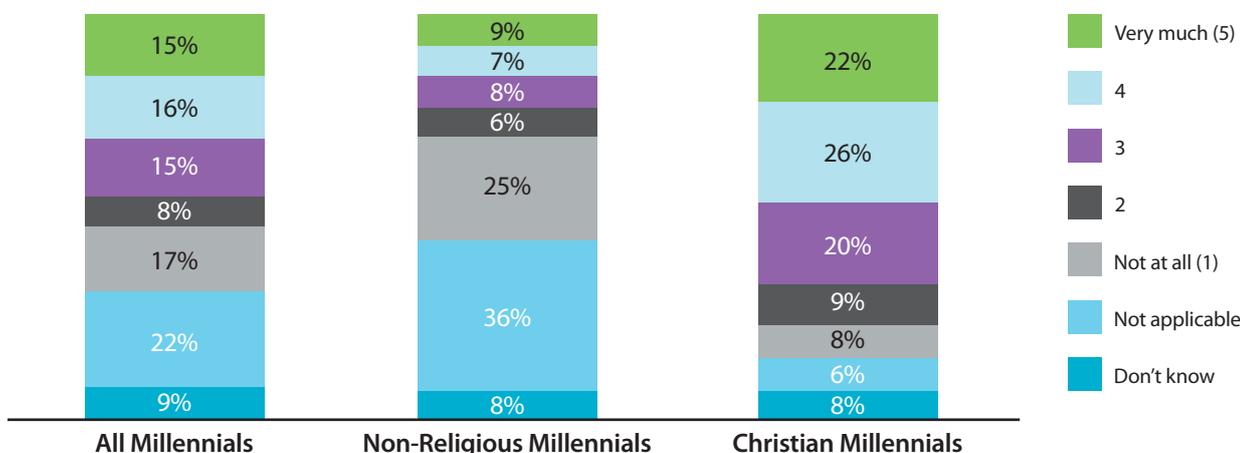
# Spiritual-but-not-religious has limited appeal for Millennials

Millennials who are not religious tend not to be interested in spirituality (defined as ‘connecting to the Divine,’ a question shared with the 2008 European Values Study) at all. Meanwhile, a large group of Christian Millennials also seem not to have a spiritual life apart from church services.

In the European Values Study, the same question with similar response options (though lacking the ‘don’t know’ option) shows that young people aged 15 to 34, at 34 percent, are less likely than older UK adults, at 45 percent, to say that it’s somewhat or very true (selecting a 4 or 5 / ‘very much’) that they connect to the Divine without churches or religious services. The proportion that select a neutral response is similar for both age groups, at about a quarter (27 and 23 percent). Younger adults are more likely to disagree that they have a way of connecting to the Divine without churches or religious services, at 40 percent, compared to older adults’ 32 percent.

Taken together, these trends could mean that ‘connecting to the Divine,’ outside of religious practises, does not hold the respect or interest of Millennials. Alternatively, it could mean that their idea of spiritual life does not have much to do with God or the Divine. Popular writer Brene Brown defines spirituality as ‘recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to each other by a power greater than all of us,’ explaining the idea that spirituality may be more about connections to other beings than a Divine being.

## ‘I have my own way of connecting with the Divine without churches or religious services’



n = 1,942 Digital Millennials

In this survey, the 16 percent of non-religious Millennials who agree strongly or somewhat that they have a way of connecting with the Divine apart from churches or religious services may be said to be ‘spiritual but not religious’ – a total of just eight percent of the generation.

Both the 36 percent of Nones who say the question does not apply and the 25 percent who strongly disagree could be both non-religious and non-spiritual, making the composition of the non-religious group mostly (63%) Millennials who do not believe connecting with the Divine is part of their lives.

Notably, many Christians (23%) affirm they do connect with the Divine apart from church or religious services. In their case, they are both religious and spiritual, possibly praying, reading the Bible, or doing other activities to connect with God on their own, outside of church services.

The 15 percent of Christians who either say the question doesn’t apply or who strongly disagree may be said to be religious but not spiritual—a group larger in size than the spiritual-but-not-religious Nones.

## MILLENNIALS 'IN THE MIDDLE' ON CHRISTIANITY AND THE BIBLE //

# Concluding thoughts on perceptions of Christianity and the Bible

In this survey, results showed a pattern of neutral responses to religion, spirituality and sacred texts, especially among non-religious Millennials. In particular, Christianity and the Bible are not generally loved or hated.

This is not to say that UK Millennials will be unwilling to criticise Christianity or the Bible. The quarter (23%) of Nones with a negative perception of Christianity may indeed make themselves heard.

However, to this generation in this era, Christianity is no more reviled than other religions. This may be because religion is playing a smaller role in this generation's upbringing and behaviour than in previous generations. In the next section, we will examine behaviours more closely.

In other studies that include older generations, Christian practice has dropped overall. According to the 2015 British Social Attitudes Survey, reported on by British Religion in Numbers (BRIN<sup>1</sup>), while a majority of Millennials say they had a religious upbringing (37% of young Millennials and 31% of older Millennials say they did not have a religious upbringing), the number who were raised Anglican has nearly halved since the previous generation (55% to 29%), implying far less familiarity with the Church of England and its teachings. Those raised in other Christian denominations have not seen the same dramatic decline.

Again looking at the 2015 British Social Attitudes Survey, reported on by BRIN<sup>1</sup>, 18 percent of Anglicans, 40 percent of Catholics and 34 percent of other Christians attended church once a month or more, meaning a minority even of those who affiliate with Christianity connect with a congregation on a regular basis.

In this study, a majority (53%) have not attended church in the past year, and about as many (47%) say they have not engaged with the Bible at all in the past year.

While these three indicators—upbringing, attendance and Bible engagement—are not the whole story of Millennials' engagement with Christianity, the content of Christianity and the Bible likely feel increasingly unfamiliar to this generation. At the same time, Millennials, who have less exposure to Christianity and the Bible, may be ready for a fresh encounter with the Bible.



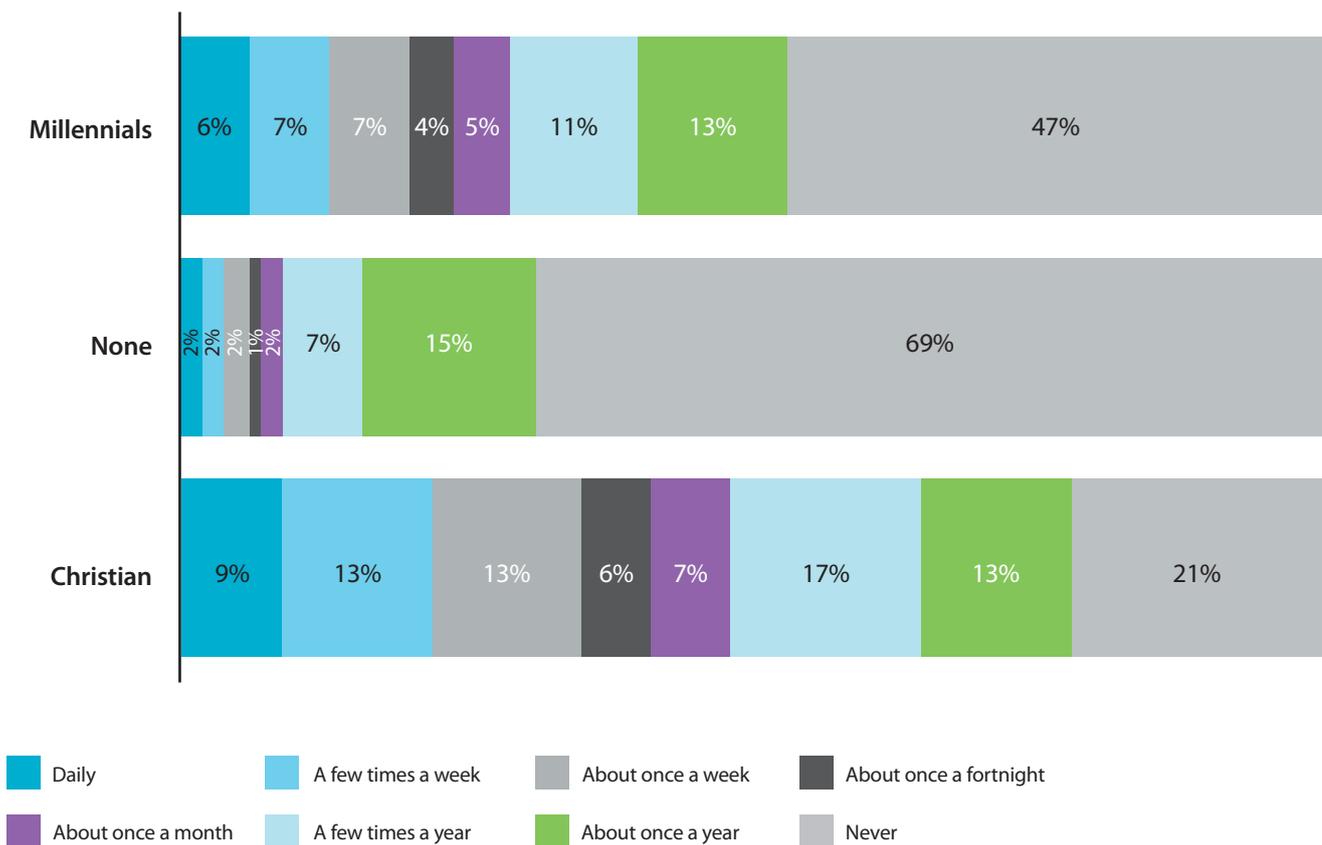
1. Religion and the British Social Attitudes 2015 Survey, as posted January 9, 2017 by Ben Clements, [www.brin.ac.uk](http://www.brin.ac.uk).

# BEHAVIOURS: ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BIBLE

## Frequency of engaging with the Bible

About half of UK Millennials (47%) say they never engage with the Bible. This leaves a majority of Millennials who interact with the Bible at least annually.

**Over the past year, how often have you read, listened to or engaged with the Bible?**



n = 1,942 Digital Millennials

Unsurprisingly, Millennial Nones engage with the Bible even less frequently than their peers. Seven in 10 of them never engage with the Bible. Fewer than one in 10 (9%) interact with the Bible more than a few times a year. However, for about a third of Nones (31%), there are touchpoints with the Bible once a year or more.

**BEHAVIOURS: ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BIBLE //**

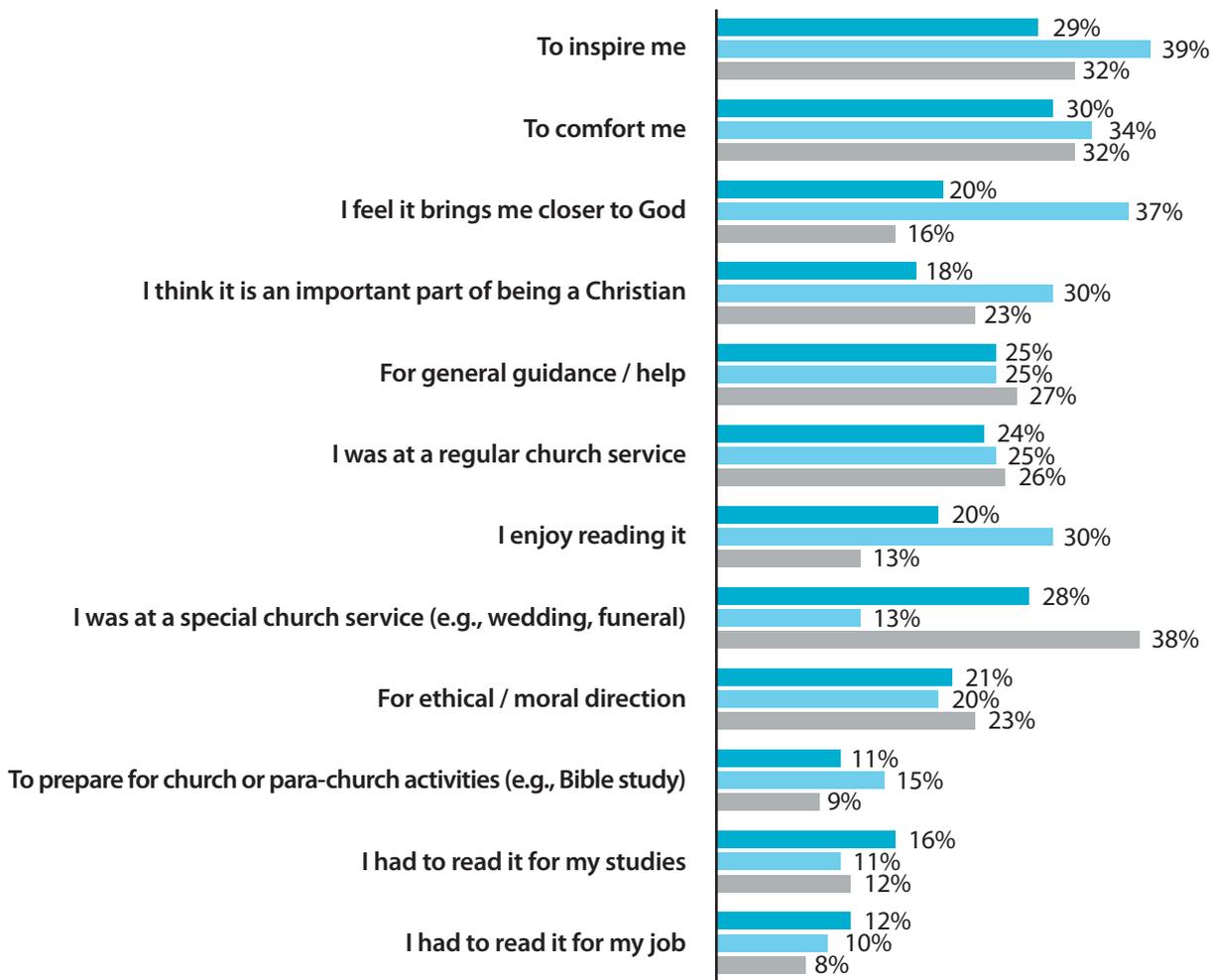
# The Bible is primarily used for comfort or inspiration

All Millennials who engaged with the Bible in the past year are most likely to say that getting comfort and inspiration are why they sought it out.

Practising Christian Millennials engage with the Bible for a variety of reasons different than non-practising Christian Millennials. They say they mainly engage with the Bible for inspiration (39%), because it brings them closer to God (37%), for comfort (34%), because they enjoy reading it (30%), and because they are Christians (30%). These reasons indicate that practising Christians are more likely to read the Bible from internal motivations, rather than from duty or ritual.

For non-practising Christians, the most common reason to engage with the Bible is a special church service. A third (38%) rank it among their top three reasons. Another third say they engage with it for comfort (32%) or inspiration (32%).

**Which of the following reasons, if any, explain your reasons for engaging with the Bible in the last year?**



■ Millennials   
 ■ Practising Christians   
 ■ Non-Practising Christians

n = 1,021 Digital Millennials

To nearly three-quarters of UK Christian Millennials (73%), being a Christian is not the main reason to read the Bible. Only 27 percent lists this as one of the top three reasons, of all their reasons to engage with the Bible.

**BEHAVIOURS: ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BIBLE //**

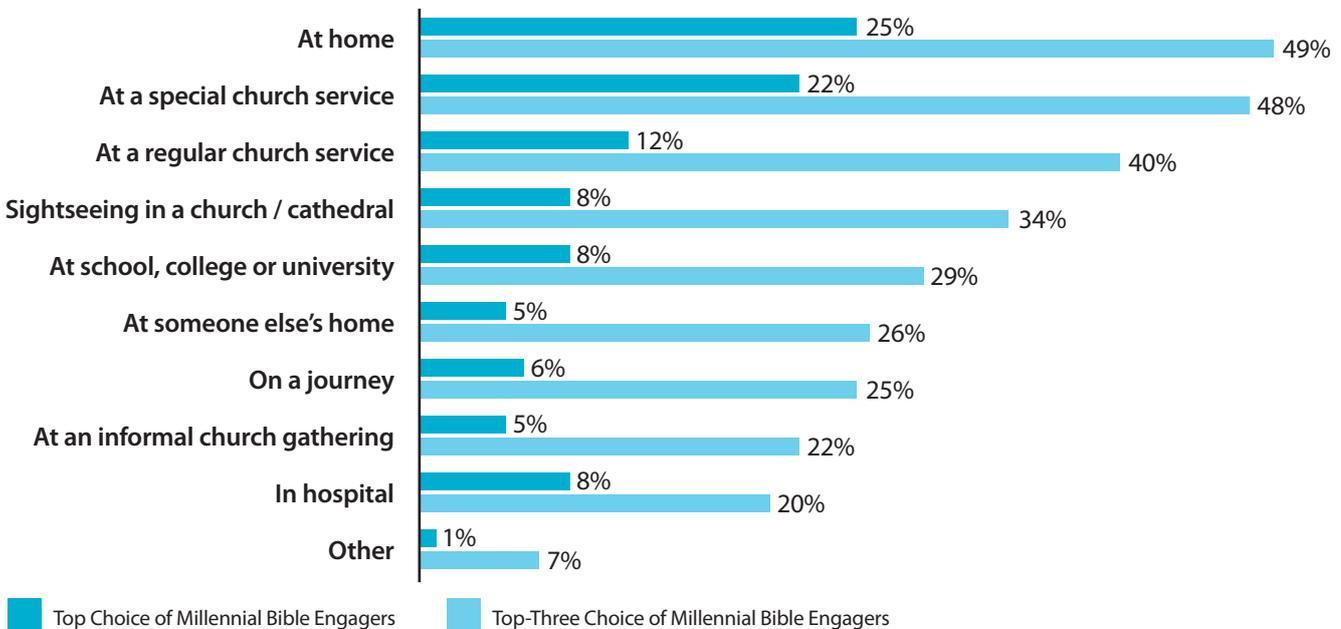
# Context of Bible engagement: home

Home is one of the top two contexts for Bible engagement. A quarter of Millennials who engaged with the Bible in the past year did so primarily at home; 25 percent ranked this first. Looking more broadly, by including the top three contexts where Millennials engage with the Bible, half of those who engage with the Bible do so at home (49%), coming out at about the same rate as engaging with the Bible at a special church service (48%).

The prevalence of Bible engagement at home is stronger among Christians. Christians are more likely than non-Christians to rank reading at home as their primary form of Bible engagement; 31 percent of Christians ranked home first, compared to 21 percent of other religious groups and 18 percent of Nones.

These differences are strikingly larger when looking at the top three contexts for Bible engagement. Almost two-thirds of practicing Christians (63%) and half (54%) of non-practising Christians engage Bible at home.

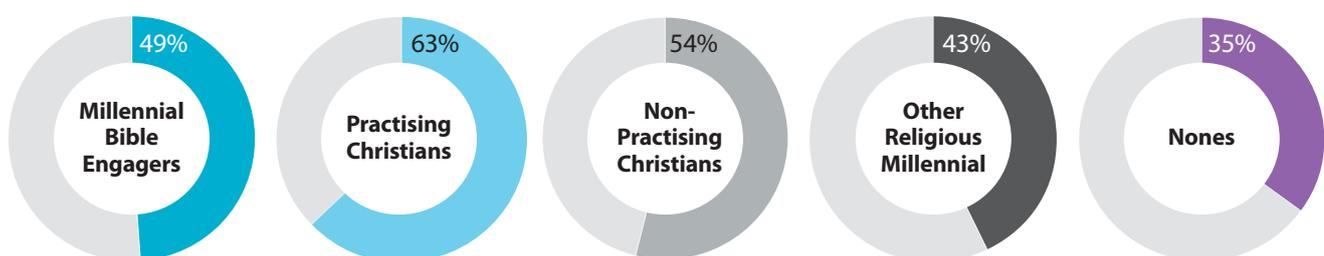
**In which of the following places, if any, have you read, listened to or otherwise engaged with the Bible over the last year?**



n = 1,021 Digital Millennials who engaged with the Bible at least once in the past year

For Nones who have engaged with the Bible, home is a less likely context for encountering the Bible, with a third (35%) engaging with the Bible at home, 29 percent of Nones engaging with it at a regular church service, 42 percent engaging with it while sightseeing at a church and the majority—61 percent—engaging with the Bible at a special church service.

**Among Millennials who have read, listened to, or otherwise engaged with the Bible over the last year, where? At home ranked in top 3**



n = 1,021 Digital Millennials who engaged with the Bible

## BEHAVIOURS: ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BIBLE //

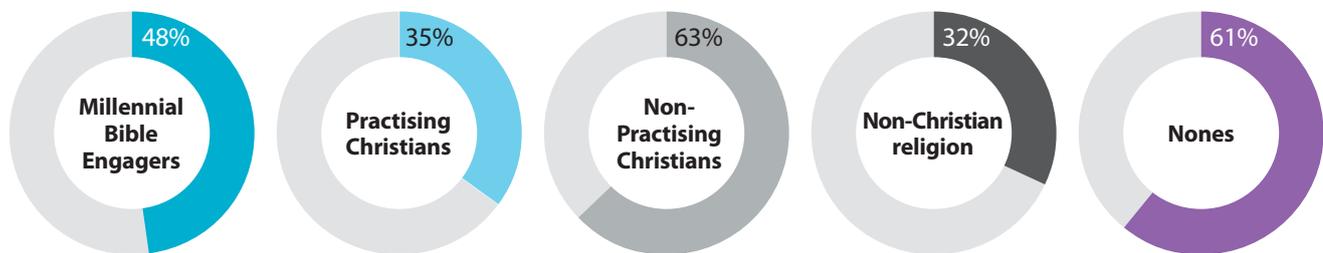
# Context of Bible engagement: special events

The most common primary reason for non-Christians to encounter the Bible is a special occasion such as a wedding or funeral. Twenty-two percent of Millennials said it was their top reason for engaging with the Bible, and 48 percent said it was one of their top reasons.

Of Millennials who are religious but not Christian, a third (32%) who engaged with the Bible did so mainly because of a special occasion. Of Nones, 61 percent encountered the Bible mainly because of a special occasion.

### Engaged with the Bible at a special church service

(e.g. wedding or funeral ranked in top 3 among Millennials who have read, listened to, or otherwise engaged with the Bible over the last year)



n = 1,021 Digital Millennials who engaged with the Bible

Overall, Millennials who engage with the Bible are about as likely to do so at home as at a church event, like a wedding or a funeral (49% at home, compared to 48% at an event). Christians are most likely to engage with it at home (59%). Nones are nearly twice as likely to encounter the Bible at a church event than at home (61% at an event, compared to 35% at home).

## Concluding thoughts on Millennial behaviours and the Bible

While Bible engagement among Millennials is sparse, it also offers some key opportunities. First of all, half of all Digital Millennials do engage with the Bible at least annually, both on their own and in the company of others.

In addition, these encounters are often in churches at special events, where Millennials will also see how officiants apply the Bible's principles and explain what Christianity has to say about major life events—and their greater context.

For the half of Millennials who engage with the Bible at home, there is an opportunity to help them connect with the comfort, inspiration and guidance many of them are looking for.

## Life stage vs. age

When it comes to the number of times people engage with the Bible, having kids at home corresponds with more Bible interaction; aging is generally correlated with less Bible interaction, but has less of an impact than parenthood. Similarly, regarding opinions on Christianity, having children is correlated with higher positivity, though those with children in the Millennial age group skew towards self-identifying as Christian.

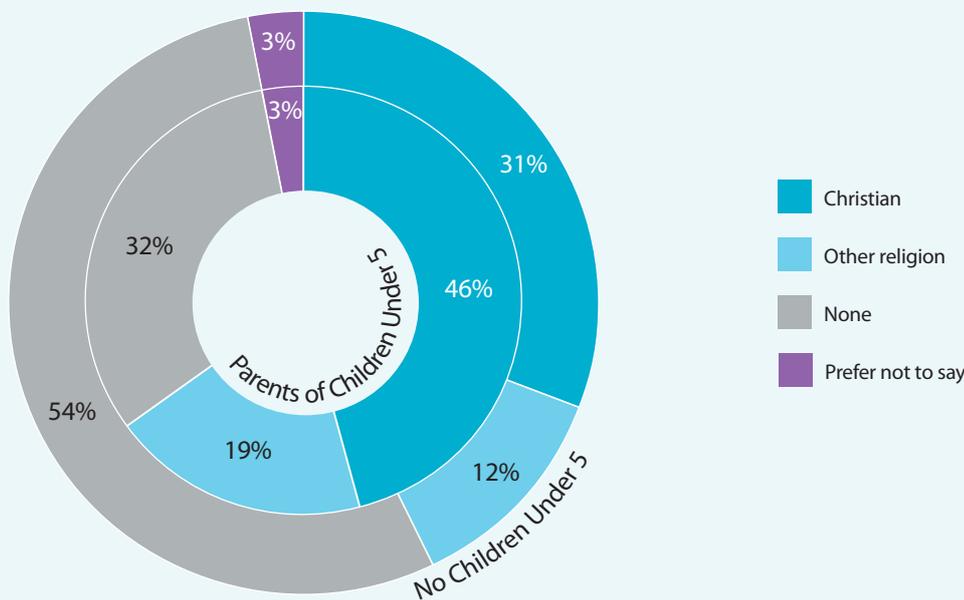
**BEHAVIOURS: ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BIBLE //**

# Parenthood and religious practice

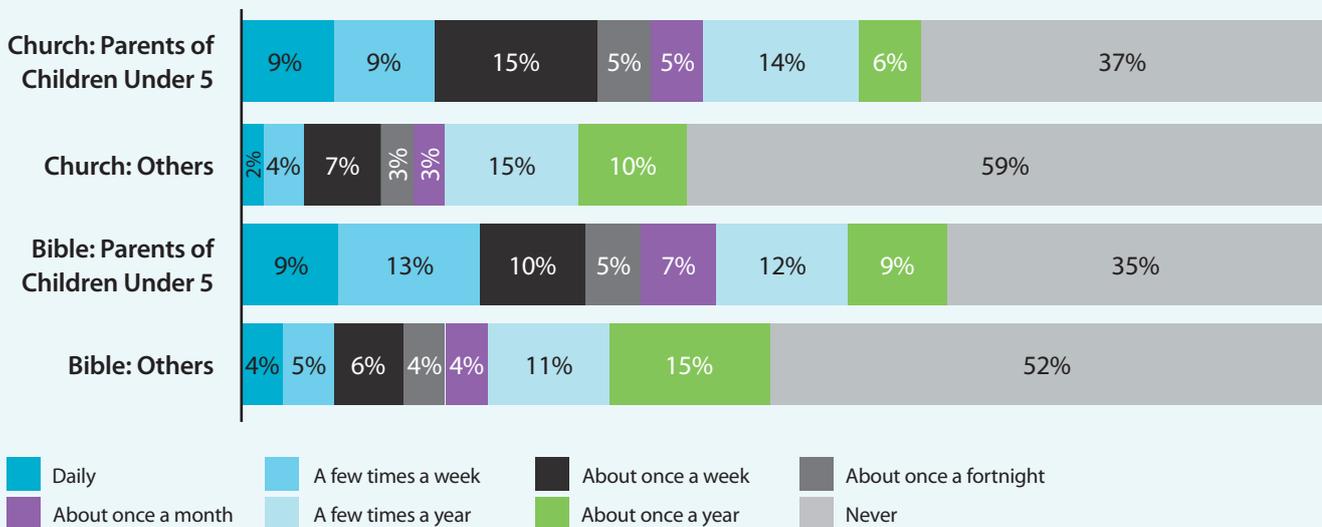
Being a parent of a child aged five or under often makes a difference in how a Millennial answers a question about faith and the Bible.

Just over a quarter (27%) of people in this sample of Millennials has children. Nones are less likely (18%) than religious people (35% of Christians, 37% of other religious people) to have children, as are non-practising Christians (29%, compared to 42% among practising Christians). Parents of children aged five or under are more likely to be religious than non-parents. The presence of young children is linked to religious practice, though it is important not to conclude that having children causes one to be more predisposed to considering Christianity.

## Religious profile of parents of young children



## Engagement among parents of young children



n = 1,942 Digital Millennials

Parents of children aged five and under are also more engaged in both church and the Bible. While a majority of Millennials with no children under five neither attend church (59%) nor engage with the Bible (52%), just over a third of Millennials with children under five do not attend church (37%) or engage with the Bible (35%).

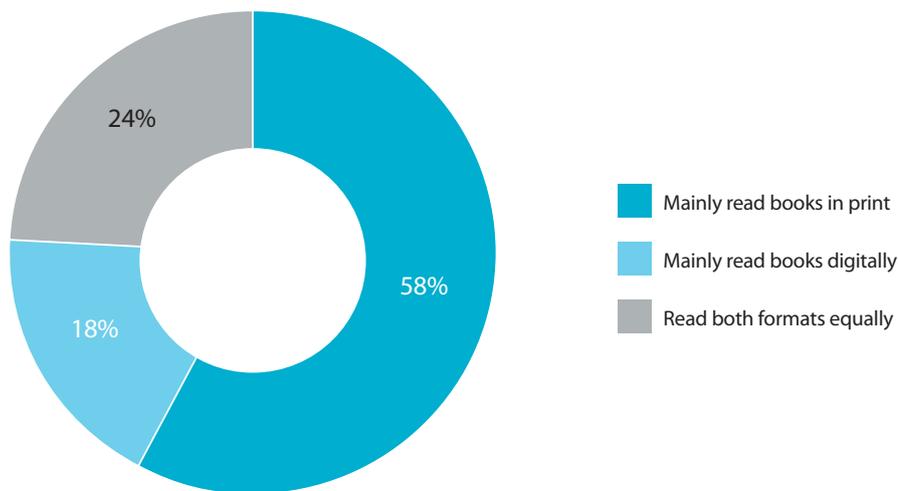
# THE BIBLE IN THE DIGITAL SPACE: PRINT IS NOT DEAD

## Digital Millennials read print books

In what format do Millennials prefer to engage with the Bible? First, a look at general media consumption habits provides some context. Despite the surge in electronic media, print appears to be alive and well, even among Millennials, a tech-savvy generation.

A majority of Millennials (58%) say they mostly read books in print. A quarter say they read print and digital formats equally (24%), leaving a minority of 18 percent who mostly read books in digital formats.

### How UK Millennials usually read books



n = 1,942 Digital Millennials



Millennials who consider themselves Christians, including those who actively practise their faith, are as likely as other religious groups to read any book in print.

THE BIBLE IN THE DIGITAL SPACE: PRINT IS NOT DEAD //

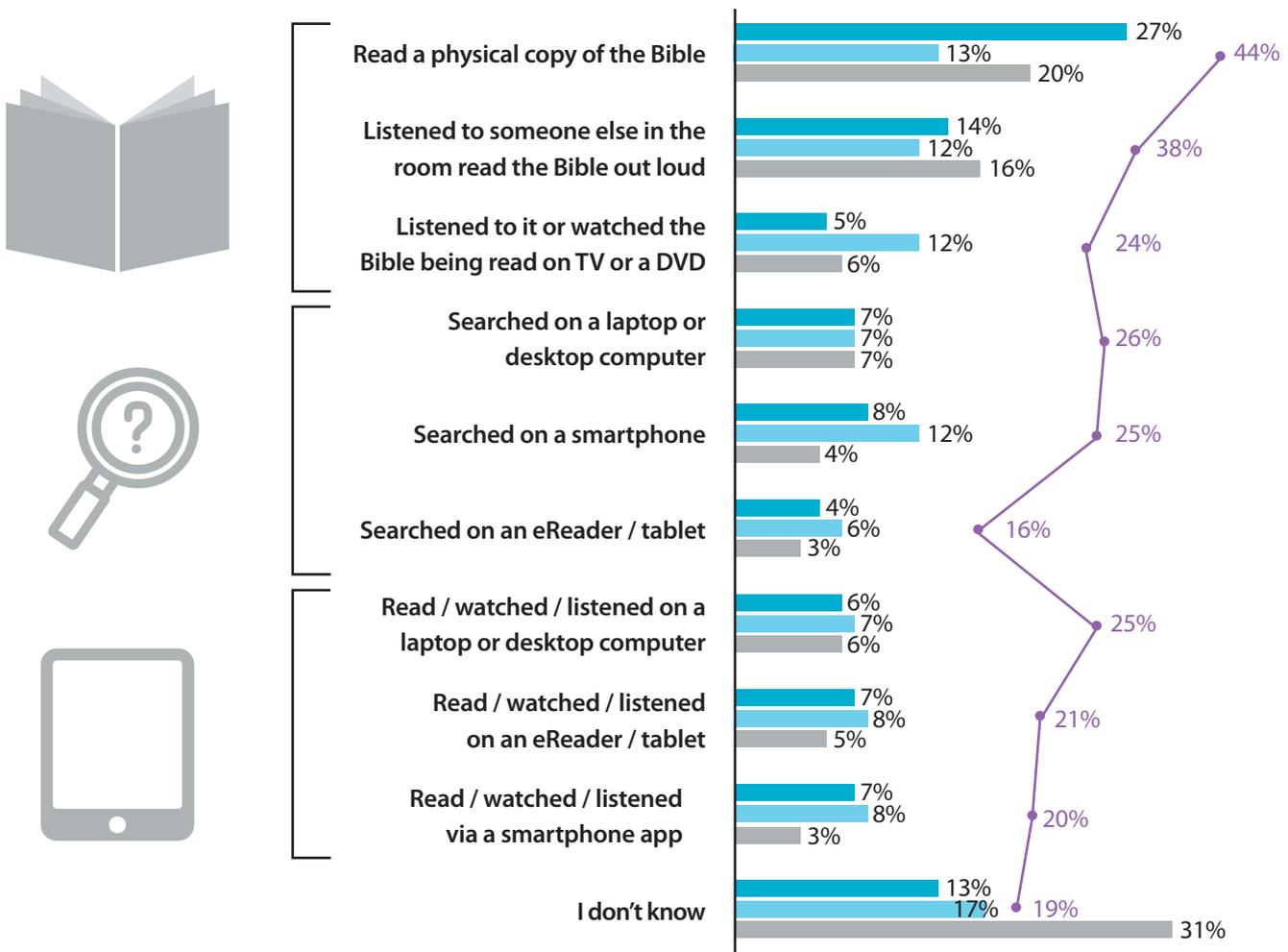
# Millennials favour a print Bible

The Bible, specifically, is more appealing to young people in print than in digital format (47%, vs. 28%, respectively). Women especially prefer print (50%, versus 24% digital), while more men favour a digital Bible (43% print and 31% digital).

Of those who engaged with the Bible in the last year, Millennials were most likely to have picked up a print copy.

## Top way of interacting with the Bible

■ Christian   
 ■ Other   
 ■ None   
 ● All respondents who have engaged with the Bible at least once in the past year – top 3



n = 1,021 Digital Millennials who engaged with the Bible

In this survey, after respondents chose an image of a print or a digital Bible as their favorite, they wrote explanations for their choices. The top reason among Christians for preferring a print Bible is that it is more traditional. Some print-lovers say a paper version is simply a 'proper Bible.' Many Millennials also chose a Bible format because they either prefer print to electronic books or electronic to print books in general.

The reasons Christians and non-Christians give for their preference are often about aesthetics. Design preferences vary by individual, but Millennials highlighted the tactile and visual aspects—particularly fonts and the lighted or unlit background. 'I love books. I like the feel and texture of them,' wrote a Christian. Another wanted to 'feel, smell, see how old it is.' Some non-Christians also said they preferred the print Bible because of aesthetic reasons, including 'a black leather book with gold imprint is iconic imagery,' and it 'looks nicer to read [than a Bible app]; no glare.'

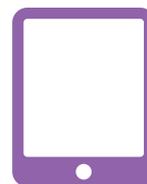
Likewise for digital books, some Millennials preferred the digital Bible because it is 'modern and stylish.' A non-Christian preferred the digital Bible because he liked 'the clean design of the text and the white background.' One Christian wrote, 'I think that the physical text is more authentic,' expressing the same idea as several others, both Christian and not.

Along with authenticity, many Millennials feel the format of a print book is more suitable for a holy text. 'It's disrespectful to use a phone as a Bible,' wrote one Christian. There is also the incorrect but common idea that the Bible as a modern book is in its 'original form.' Some said that it should only be in the form of a modern book.

Nostalgia and sentimentality were also reasons some digital Millennials preferred a print Bible. A Christian wrote, 'It reminds me of the last thing my grandma left me,' and a non-Christian wrote that he liked the print Bible because it 'looks like an old version passed down through generations.' A non-Christian wrote she preferred it 'because I was raised Christian, so this is more familiar to me.'

One Christian wrote, 'I think there's something a little sad about a Bible app.' But others, both Christian and otherwise, found it an exciting idea. 'God in a phone, what next?' wrote a non-Christian. Another wrote he preferred the digital Bible because it was, 'Old world beliefs crossed with modern technology!'

Christians who prefer the Bible in digital form often cite how convenient it is to have the Bible to hand whenever they want. 'I find it easier to read and more discreet to read in public,' wrote one. After all, one Christian wrote, 'The important thing is what is written.'



**'looks nicer to read [than a Bible app]; no glare.'**

**'looks like an old version passed down through generations.'**

**'I think there's something a little sad about a Bible app.'**

**'God in a phone, what next?'**

**PREFER PRINT IMAGE OF BIBLE**

- **Traditional**
- **Feels more:**
  - Authentic
  - Holy / sacred
  - Real
  - Pure
  - Classic
  - Old school
- **Appreciate sensory experience**
- **In its 'original form'**
- **Nostalgia**

**PREFER DIGITAL IMAGE OF BIBLE**

- **Convenient**
- **Its format makes it more**
  - Portable
  - Discreet
  - Contemporary
- **Aesthetic preferences for:**
  - Font
  - Layout
  - Brightness of screen

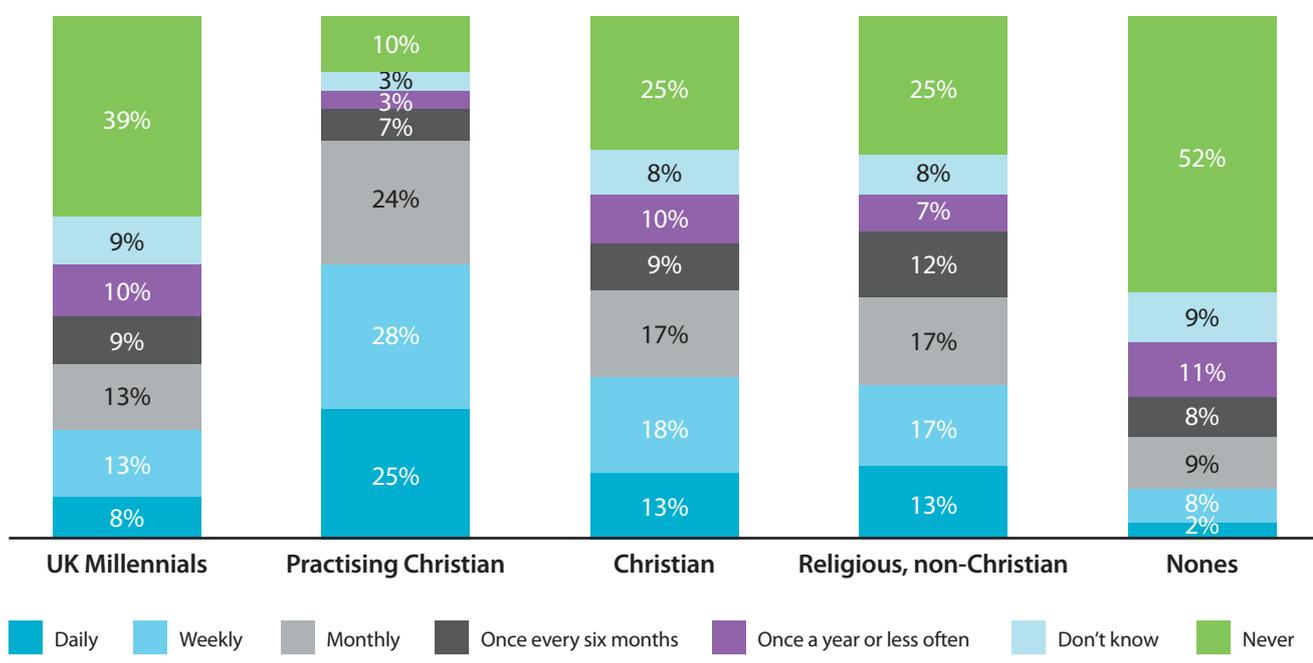
THE BIBLE IN THE DIGITAL SPACE: PRINT IS NOT DEAD //

# Bible verses on social media reach mostly Christians

One-third of UK Millennials (34%) see Bible verses shared on social media at least monthly, while 39% say they never see them.

Christians and people of other, non-Christian religions are more likely than Nones to see a Bible verse on social media every month or more. Half (52%) of Nones never see a Bible verse on social media. In contrast, most practising Christians (77%) see verses at least monthly.

## Who sees Bible verses on social media



n = 1,942 Digital Millennials

Among Millennials who see Bible verses shared on social media at least monthly, Facebook is where they typically see Bible verses (72%), but more than a quarter see verses on Twitter (28%), Instagram (31%) and YouTube (27%).

The most common reaction among UK Millennials, at 28% of all Millennials, is to ignore it. Just under half (46%) of Millennials say they do not pay attention to Bible verses shared on social media.

Nones are most likely to ignore the verse, at 39 percent. They are also likely to have a negative reaction, with 16 percent feeling irritated or uncomfortable. Likewise, one-third (34%) say, 'I think it's a negative thing for people to share Bible verses' on social media. Many ascribe selfish motives to those who share Bible verses on social media; 51 percent of Nones, compared to 34 percent of those of other religions, say that people who share Bible verses on social media are doing it in their own, not others', best interest. Most (72%) of Nones say Bible verses they see online don't want to make them learn more. Only one in 10 (11%) are 'grateful' that Bible verses have been shared, and just eight percent say the verses they see are relevant to them.

However, the opinion of Nones is not typical of the generation as a whole. More Millennials think it's a positive thing to share verses on social media (41%) than a negative thing (24%). A quarter of Millennials who see Bible verses shared on social media (26%) believe the verses are relevant to them.

About one in ten young adults, no matter what their religion, say they feel inspired (11%), encouraged (10%), or comforted (10%). About one-quarter say the Bible verses people share online make Christianity more appealing to them, including 26 percent from among non-Christian religious Millennials.

## THE BIBLE IN THE DIGITAL SPACE: PRINT IS NOT DEAD //

# Concluding thoughts on the Bible in the digital space

Although all of the respondents in this sample use social media regularly and have internet-enabled devices, they have not abandoned books. In fact, they prefer a print Bible to a digital Bible.

For many Millennials, a sense of tradition in a print Bible is a desirable trait. It is possible that enhancing the aesthetic experience by offering print Bibles with classic and sophisticated design, steeped in history, would make the book—and possibly its content—attractive to young people who have seldom encountered it.

As for the content of the Bible online, a quarter of Millennials who interact with the Bible do so on a computer, either searching (25%) or reading, watching or listening to it (25%). A fifth read the Bible on their smartphones (20%).



Given that Millennials are more likely to think well than ill of sharing Bible verses on social media and that nearly half encounter Bible verses in this way, there seems to be a fair amount of social acceptance of expressing one's beliefs through sharing the Bible's content online. Nevertheless, the group most removed from Christianity—Nones—find this least appealing. Personal engagement may be more effective than digital engagement in most cases.

# CONCLUSION

The implications of the findings from *Digital Millennials and the Bible* on the way the Church approaches evangelism and discipleship with this generation of young people are significant.

For example, if attitudes towards Christianity and the Bible are more neutral than negative, and the greatest barrier is apathy, might a different strategy for evangelism be needed? Whereas previous generations who harbored more questions and scepticism may have responded best to apologetics, the strategy for reaching an apathetic generation might be more about relationships than reason—non-Christians getting to know more Christians, on their own terms, and in their own context, outside of a church.

Then, helping to connect the rich wisdom, hope, and comfort of the Bible to experiences and events in the lives of individuals may overcome the perception of irrelevance—shared by non-Christians and Christians alike—about the Bible. For the half of Millennials who do engage with the Bible already, especially at home or on their own, can tools or even virtual platforms be developed to help these readers dig deeper and make more everyday-life connections with Scripture? For the significant proportion of non-Christians who encounter the Bible in a special church service, such as a wedding or funeral, are pastors taking full advantage of this opportunity to help visitors relate to Scripture beyond the occasion itself?

Even though print is not dead, digital is very much alive for today's young adults. Part of meeting them on their terms and in their own context surely means engaging them virtually, which many Christians and ministries are actively doing. But these efforts – such as posting a Bible verse on one's Facebook page – sometimes fall flat, or worse, offend, among religious Nones. In the absence of a personal connection, context or conversation, non-Christians may be more likely to see Scripture as judgmental than encouraging. This again suggests that personal engagement is necessary to help non-Christians as well as Christians draw the connections between the Bible and their own lives.

A primary purpose of Bible Society is responding to Christ's Great Commission and taking the Bible to the nations of the world. In so doing, missionaries first do a deep study of a culture, learning how to translate the Bible's message both in language and in context to those who have not yet encountered it. Engaging UK Millennials, Christian or non-, should rightly be preceded by a similar cultural study, rather than simply inviting them to fit into a church's preset culture. What are the rhythms of their lives, and in what ways are they struggling? What's important to them? Do they rally around certain issues? Seeking to understand young adults and their digital world is essential to helping them bridge the gap of relevance between the timelessness of Scripture and their constantly changing modern lives. We believe with this comprehension, a generation can be transformed by the power of God's Word.

