

WHAT DO TODAY'S STUDENTS THINK ABOUT THE BIBLE?



INTRODUCTION

As Fusion, we have seen an increasing number of students encountering Jesus through scripture over recent years, often for the first time and miraculously or unexpectedly. In response to this increased interest in the Bible amongst an unchurched and religiously disaffiliated generation, we want to better understand the attitudes of today's students towards the Bible. To develop this understanding, we commissioned the polling company Savanta to research students and the Bible. This report highlights some of the key findings and trends from the research.

SAVANTA

Savanta is an award-winning data and market research company that undertakes a wide variety of polls and surveys, including exit polls for general elections and the Talking Jesus report on behalf of the Evangelical Alliance. They take a scientific and well-tested approach to ensuring they deliver data that is accessible, reliable and understandable for its intended context and audience.

METHODOLOGY

Savanta delivered the survey online to undergraduates studying at 186 different universities all across the United Kingdom, and they recruited a total of 2,030 respondents, with fieldwork dates from August 20, 2024, to September 13, 2024. Respondents were weighted to be representative of the UK university undergraduate population by gender, age, full-time/part-time status and whether or not they were in their first year of studies. 39% of these respondents self-identified as

“Christian” and 36% self-identified as “No Religion”. The data set generated by this questionnaire included questions themed around topics such as students’ opinions on the Bible’s contents, their ability to access a Bible and their interest in reading the Bible. Other questions also centred on whether or not they had access to a Bible growing up and also who and what have been and remain the primary shapers of their views on the Bible.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Read on for a few of the key insights generated from this research and the responses that students gave. There is even more information that sits behind this, and if you want to discuss any of this further, please do get in touch. It is fair to say we have been somewhat surprised by some of these findings in terms of student engagement with the Bible and accessibility of the Bible, and as you read on, we are sure you, too, will be stunned by some of what the data says! >>



In our digital age of conflicting viewpoints, perhaps the historic text of the Bible still carries weight as a book of significance and truth for young people at university during a pivotal time of development and transition in their lives. So as you explore these findings, we challenge you to weigh up what the implications are for student ministry and mission in your context and to reflect on just what this might be telling us about students and scripture today.

FREQUENCY OF BIBLE ENGAGEMENT

A significant portion of all students, **29%**, report reading the Bible at least weekly, with this figure at 12% for non-Christian students who stated that they read the Bible weekly. This was a higher-than-expected number and definitely surprised us! This could be students interacting with scripture on social media and could be more aspirational than actual in their self-identified response. But what this does say is that students want to engage with scripture and we need to dig deeper into understanding what they mean by engaging with the Bible and what we can do to help them in this

STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

While 35% of students participate in religious services weekly, this figure drops to 10% for students with "No Religion." On the topic of prayer, 13% of students with "No Religion" said they prayed weekly, and only 3% do so daily. This indicates that for some students, spiritual practices persist even without a formal religious identity.

BIBLE OWNERSHIP AND EXPOSURE

Bible ownership and childhood exposure are relatively common, even among those outside the Christian faith. **For example, 33% of non-Christian students and 37% of students with "No Religion" stated that they owned a copy of the Bible.** Additionally, 42% of non-Christian students and 49% of students with "No Religion" grew up in households with a Bible, indicating the Bible's cultural pervasiveness.

WHY DO STUDENTS READ THE BIBLE?

When it comes to reading the Bible, **in general, practicing Christian students are more inclined to group settings (32%) compared to non-Christian students (13%).** Among non-Christian students, there were two primary motivations for reading the Bible. The first of these was that 29% said their desire to deepen their understanding of faith was why they read the Bible, which increased to 68% amongst practicing Christian students. A further 29% of non-Christian students stated they were seeking comfort and reassurance through reading the Bible, whilst this applied to 55% of practicing Christian students.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is viewed as relevant to today's world by 50% of all students. However, this agreement drops to 32% among non-Christian students and 27% among students with "No Religion." Only 26% of >>

33%

of non-Christian students and

37%

of students with "No Religion" stated that they owned a copy of the Bible

29%

29% of all students said that they read the Bible weekly



In general, practicing Christian students are more inclined to group settings (32%) compared to non-Christian students (13%)

50%

The Bible is viewed as relevant to today's world by 50% of all students



The most commonly cited barrier to Bible reading among students is a lack of time, with 27% of all students identifying this as the primary reason

33%

of non-Christian students are interested in reading the Bible with a friend

10%

of all students would be interested in reading the Bible in their spare time but do not own a copy of the Bible



For non-Christian students, education (35%), personal study (26%), and social media (23%) were the three most important factors in shaping their views on the Bible

non-Christian students and 22% of students with "No Religion" find the Bible personally helpful. Furthermore, a majority of students with "No Religion" (55%) see the Bible as outdated, although 18% disagree.

On reliability, opinions are mixed: while 44% of students find the Bible reliable, only 19% of students with "No Religion" agree. Views on contradictions are similarly divided, with 52% of non-Christian students believing the Bible contradicts itself. Despite these critiques, most students find the Bible neither offensive nor difficult to understand.

BARRIERS TO BIBLE ENGAGEMENT

The most commonly cited barrier to Bible reading among students is a lack of time, with 27% of all students identifying this as the primary reason for not reading the Bible. The three primary factors for not reading the Bible practicing Christian students identified are that they are too busy (50%), that the text is hard to understand (21%) and that they think friends or family would make fun of them (10% - interestingly the same score for this statement for non-Christian students).

The three primary reasons that non-Christian students gave for not reading the Bible are that they are not religious/spiritual (43%), they are too busy (34%) and that they follow a different religious/spiritual tradition (28%). Other factors for non-Christian students include difficulty understanding the text (18%), and **interestingly, whilst 20% of non-Christian students also cite concerns about the Bible being misogynistic or homophobic,**

a third of this group remains interested in reading the text.

INTEREST IN THE BIBLE

There is a notable openness to engaging with the Bible, even among non-Christian students. Of all surveyed respondents, 50% of all students said they are interested in reading the Bible in their spare time. This figure is 31% for non-Christian students. **33% of non-Christian students are interested in reading the Bible with a friend. 10% of all students would be interested in reading the Bible in their spare time but do not own a copy of the Bible.**

SHARING FAITH WITH OTHERS

Sharing faith is highly influenced by religious identity. **Practicing Christian students are far more likely to share their faith, with 95% willing to do so with family, 73% with new friends and 70% with their coursemates.** Non-Christian students are less inclined to share their faith with others, with this figure at 46% with new friends and 45% with their coursemates.

INFLUENCES ON PERCEPTIONS OF THE BIBLE

For non-Christian students, **education (35%), personal study (26%), and social media (23%) were the three most important factors in shaping their views on the Bible.** In contrast, practising Christians cite church involvement (53%), parental influence (42%), and personal study (38%) as their main influences. >>

SUMMARY

The research paints a complex picture of student interaction with the Bible. **While the Bible remains a cultural and spiritual touchstone amongst the student generation, its perceived relevance, accessibility, and role in personal and communal life vary widely among different groups.** However, non-religious and non-Christian students exhibit surprisingly high levels of engagement and interest, albeit often for different reasons than practicing Christians. At the same time, barriers like time constraints, difficulty in understanding the Bible, and social stigma pose challenges to deeper engagement.




NEXT STEPS

As Fusion, we believe every student should have an opportunity to find hope in Jesus and home in a local church. **We believe that this research shows that for today's generation of students, the potential opportunity for spiritual transformation offered by greater engagement with the Bible is huge.** We want to get a physical copy of the Bible in the hands of every non-Christian student who wants one and have been running a campaign doing just that since September 2024. However, it doesn't stop there once they have a Bible.

These hungry students will have questions about what they are reading as they encounter the living word, and therefore, how the church is equipped to welcome, love and disciple these students is of vital importance. They will need to find home and family in the church, and they will need a safe space to work out what faith can look like in their time at university and beyond. How are we, as the church on the front foot, to unpack the Bible with non-Christian students? Are we willing to spend time reading it with them? Will we welcome their courageous questions and inquisitive opinions? There are results here that show Christian and non-Christian students engage with the Bible in a different way and with different desires and influences. How can we better interact with students at all stages of their faith journey? What do we need to start or stop to better disciple and support them?

Here at Fusion, we are equipping the local church to do just that, and we want to spend time unpacking this research with churches at a deeper level in coaching cohorts, training sessions and even in discussing how results vary according to your specific context. We want to continue to be able to provide students with their very own copy of the Bible should they want one.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN FINDING OUT MORE AND WORKING WITH US ON THIS VITAL MISSION, PLEASE GET IN TOUCH WITH US.

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