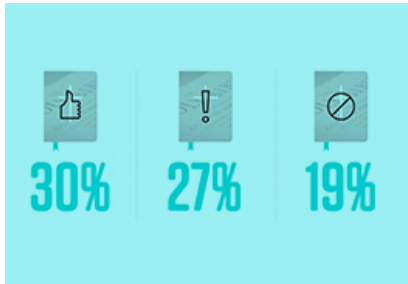


# Millennials and the Bible: 3 Surprising Insights



October 23, 2014—Much has been made of the growing post-Christian sentiment among America's youngest generation of adults. But how has this well-documented turn away from religion affected Millennials' views of Christianity's most sacred text?

Has the "brand" of the Bible suffered or significantly shifted among young adults?

In a recent study among Millennials, conducted in partnership with [American Bible Society](#) and [InterVarsity Christian Fellowship](#), Barna Group sought to discover how changing ideas about Christianity might be affecting perceptions of the Bible. This study—the largest Barna Group has ever done on a single generation's view of the Bible—looked at Millennials' beliefs, perceptions and practices surrounding Scripture. Three significant—and surprising—insights emerged. 1) Practicing Christian young adults maintain a

traditional, high view of Scripture. 2) In contrast, non-Christian Millennials hold ambivalent and sometimes extremely negative perceptions of the Bible and of those who read it. 3) And while the screen age has impacted Bible engagement, print remains Millennials' favored format for Bible reading.

## 1. Practicing Christian Millennials Maintain a High View of Scripture

When it comes to Scripture, practicing Christian Millennials—self-identified Christians who attend church at least once a month and who describe their religious faith as very important to their life—are quite orthodox and continue to hold the Bible in very high regard. In fact, nearly all of them believe the Bible contains everything a person needs to know to live a meaningful life (96%). The same proportion claim the Bible is the actual or inspired word of God (96%). Among these young adults, a plurality say, "The Bible is the actual word of God and should be taken literally, word for word" (46%); an additional four in 10 agree it is divinely inspired and has no errors, though "some verses are meant to be symbolic rather than literal" (39%); and 11% say the Bible is the inspired word of God, "but has some factual or historical errors."

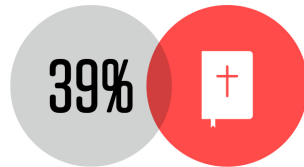
Additionally, practicing Christian Millennials cite the Bible as their greatest source for moral truth. Of the practicing Christian Millennials who believe in absolute moral truth (71%), four in 10 point to the Bible as the main source from which they have learned or discovered absolute moral truths and standards (39%). This far outpaces any other source, with church coming in second at only 16%, followed by parents at 14%.

The survey also sought to discover how Millennials prioritize Bible reading among their faith practices. Respondents were asked whether Bible reading is more important, less important or of equal importance to a variety of other spiritual disciplines. While Millennials as a whole say reading the Bible is of equal importance to the other spiritual disciplines assessed by the survey, practicing Christian Millennials consistently rank Bible reading as *more* important than other disciplines. For example, practicing Christian Millennials rank Bible reading as more important than church attendance (55% say Bible reading is more important), silence/solitude (50%), prayer (49%), worship (51%), acts of service (48%), communion (44%) and evangelism (42%).

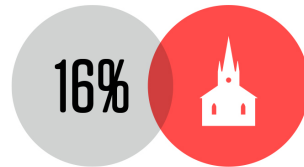
Among practicing Christian Millennials, the Bible still holds a high—if not the highest—priority in their faith life.

# PRACTICING CHRISTIAN MILLENNIALS MAINTAIN A HIGH VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

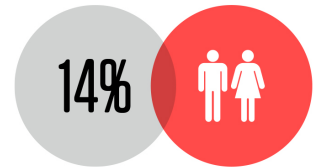
IT IS THEIR  
**TOP SOURCE**  
FOR MORAL  
TRUTH



BIBLE



CHURCH



PARENTS

THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO BELIEVE  
IT IS THE **WORD OF GOD**



CHRISTIANS



NON-CHRISTIANS



**96%**

BELIEVE THE  
BIBLE **CONTAINS**  
**EVERYTHING**  
A PERSON NEEDS  
TO KNOW TO LIVE A  
MEANINGFUL LIFE



Barna Group

**INTERVARSITY**  
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MillennialPoll<sup>SM</sup> | 2014 | N=1,000

## 2. Non-Christian Millennials Hold Ambivalent and Sometimes Extremely Negative Views about the Bible

Non-Christian Millennials, unlike their Christian counterparts, are much more likely to believe the Bible is just another book of teachings written by men that contains stories and advice (45%). Only a combined 27% of non-Christians say the Bible is the inspired or actual word of God. A significant disparity between Christian and non-Christian beliefs about the Bible is to be expected, of course; however, non-Christian views of the Bible often tip from benign indifference toward strong skepticism. While a plurality of non-Christian Millennials relegate the Bible to merely a "useful book of moral teachings" (30%), nearly half agree with more negative characterizations: About one in five say the Bible is "an outdated book with no relevance for today" (19%) and more than one-quarter go so far as to say the Bible is "a dangerous book of religious dogma used for centuries to oppress people" (27%).

When asked to identify words they associate with the Bible, non-Christian Millennials are most likely to place the Bible within cultural mythology than to describe it in terms of the sacred or divine. Their top five word choices are "story" (50%), "mythology" (38%), "symbolic" (36%), "fairy tale" (30%) and "historical" (30%). Very few choose words that reflect divine origins: Just 12% of non-Christian Millennials picked the word "sacred" to describe the Bible, one in 10 chose "fact" and even fewer selected "revelation" (8%), "infallible" (3%) or "inerrant" (2%).

More than six in 10 non-Christian Millennials have never read the Bible (62%), but what do they think about those who do read it? For most, it seems to evoke feelings of alienation and distance. When they see someone reading the Bible in public, non-Christian Millennials say they assume the Bible reader is politically conservative (22%); that they don't have anything in common with the person (21%); that the Bible reader is old fashioned (17%); or that they are trying to make a statement or be provocative (15%). Fewer than one in 10 non-Christian young adults indicate any kind of positive response, such as encouragement (7%) or joy (7%). Only 9% of non-Christians say they feel curious about what's in the Bible when they see someone reading it—a disappointing statistic for those who hope their Bible reading could spark spiritual conversation with non-Christians.

On the other hand, for non-Christians whose Bible reading has increased in the past year (11%), the second most-cited reason for that increase is seeing how the Bible changed someone they knew for the better (27%). So, while seeing strangers reading the Bible in public may not be a positive catalyst, personal interactions with those who are affected for the better by the Bible are a strong recommendation for the Bible itself.

# NON-CHRISTIAN MILLENNIALS HOLD AMBIVALENT AND SOMETIMES NEGATIVE VIEWS TOWARD THE BIBLE

THE TOP 5 WORDS  
NON-CHRISTIAN  
MILLENNIALS  
CHOOSE TO  
DESCRIBE THE  
BIBLE:



STORY



MYTHOLOGY



SYMBOLIC



FAIRY TALE



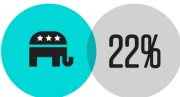
> 6 IN 10



THE PROPORTION OF  
NON-CHRISTIAN  
MILLENNIALS WHO  
HAVE NEVER READ  
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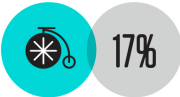
WHEN THEY SEE SOMEONE  
READING THE BIBLE IN PUBLIC,  
NON-CHRISTIAN MILLENNIALS ...



ASSUME THE PERSON IS  
POLITICALLY CONSERVATIVE



FIGURE THEY DON'T HAVE  
ANYTHING IN COMMON WITH  
THE PERSON



THINK THE PERSON IS  
OLD-FASHIONED

PRACTICAL / DANGEROUS / IRRELEVANT



30%

THE BIBLE IS  
A USEFUL



27%

THE BIBLE IS A  
DANGEROUS BOOK



19%

THE BIBLE IS  
AN OUTDATED

 HISTORICAL	BOOK OF MORAL TEACHINGS	OF RELIGIOUS DOGMA USED FOR CENTURIES TO OPPRESS PEOPLE	BOOK WITH NO RELEVANCE FOR TODAY
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### 3. Millennials Still Prefer to Engage the Bible in Print

Screens have affected almost every part of modern life, and that includes religious practices. While all Millennials—significantly more than all adults—have, by and large, incorporated other mediums for engaging with the Bible, none of these trump reading a print version of the Bible (81%), or even hearing it read aloud at church (78%). In comparison, two-thirds of Millennials say they use the Internet on a computer to read Bible content (66%) and a little more than half read the Bible on an e-reader (51%).

What do Millennials think when the Bible comes to the big screen, little screen or whatever screen is currently in front of them? When it comes to the Bible as Hollywood entertainment, Millennials have mixed feelings. While nearly half appreciate the Bible being incorporated into entertainment today (49%), a sizable percentage sees it as Hollywood trying to make money (36%). Non-Christians, in particular, express this skepticism (58%).

When Bible-themed content does come to Hollywood, practicing Christians are the group most likely to view it. For all the shows surveyed (*Noah*, *The Bible* miniseries, *Son of God*, *God's Not Dead* and *Heaven Is for Real*), practicing Christians were far and away the largest audience. In fact, only 14% of practicing Christian Millennials had not seen any of the movies, compared to 42% of all Millennials and a full 62% of non-Christian Millennials. Stated differently, a majority of Millennials has seen at least one biblical depiction on the small or large screen in the last year. Exposure to televised or movie versions of Christian content has penetrated to more than four out of five Christian Millennials and to more than one-third of non-Christian young adults.

One common way Millennials have taken to engaging with the Bible in a digital age is to post Scripture passages on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Unsurprisingly, practicing Christian Millennials are most likely to engage in this practice. A combined 81% have posted Scripture online in the past year: 30% do so a few times a year, 25% a few times a month, 13% a few times a week and 13% do so daily.

This practice evokes primarily positive emotions among practicing Christian Millennials and ambivalent or negative emotions among non-Christian Millennials. The most common responses from Christians when someone posts Scripture to social media are to feel encouraged (56%) and inspired (53%). Just over one-third find it bold in a good way (35%).

Non-Christians' most common response is to say it bothers them if the verses are used naively or out of context (35%), which is interesting since most admit never having read the Bible themselves. Slightly fewer non-Christians say it's "okay sometimes if you are religious" (33%). About the same number say they find it irritating and one-quarter assume the person posting it is judgmental (24%). About one-fifth believes the person is trying to evangelize (21%) or that the practice will push others away (18%). Of all the responses, non-Christians were least likely to feel inspired (9%) or encouraged (7%) when they see Scripture posted on social media.



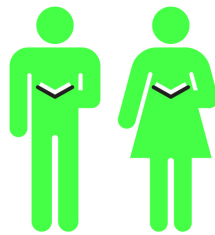
# WHILE MILLENNIALS PREFER TO READ THE BIBLE IN PRINT, THEY ARE WILLING TO ENGAGE SCRIPTURE ON THE SCREEN

## MILLENNIALS MOST OFTEN READ THE BIBLE...



81%

IN PRINT



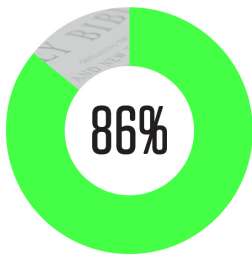
78%

ALoud IN CHURCH

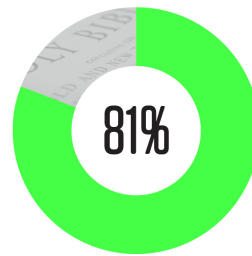


66%

ON THE INTERNET



THE PERCENT OF PRACTICING CHRISTIAN MILLENNIALS WHO HAVE SEEN AT LEAST ONE BIBLE-BASED MOVIE OR TV SHOW RELEASED IN THE PAST YEAR



THE PERCENT OF PRACTICING CHRISTIAN MILLENNIALS WHO HAVE POSTED SCRIPTURE ON SOCIAL MEDIA AT LEAST ONCE IN THE PAST YEAR

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INTERVARSITY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP/USA



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MillennialPoll<sup>SM</sup> | 2014 | N=1,000

### What the Research Means

"Many Christians and Christian leaders are concerned about the next generation of Christians," says David Kinnaman, president of Barna Group. "And for good reason. There is certainly a well-documented trend of Millennials leaving church or turning away from their faith. However, this current study on perceptions of the Bible gives church leaders some very good news about the Good Book: Active young Christians are holding true to historical and orthodox views on the Bible. In many ways, their commitment to the Bible stands in stark contrast to typical stereotypes of younger Christians.

"For the most part, the Bible is flourishing in the screen age, particularly among the faithful. Practicing Christian Millennials, in particular, are eager to see Bible-based content on the big screen and to engage with the Bible on the little screen by reading Scripture online and posting it to social media.

"However, these practices aren't always appreciated by others in their generation. While many Christians might hope that Bible-based films or sharing Scripture online would reach non-Christians, our research suggests the opposite. Non-Christians tend to be more skeptical of biblical films and often feel

turned off or alienated by seeing Scripture shared via social media. On the other hand, in the rare cases when non-Christians have increased their Bible reading in the past year, they often did so as a result of seeing how Scripture changed someone they knew. Such responses emphasize the importance of meaningful relationships and evidence of life transformation.

"Finally, for non-Christian Millennials, the 'brand' of the Bible is a negative one," Kinnaman continues. "The depth and range of these perceptions signal difficult challenges for younger adults who still believe in the Bible. As Bible skepticism increases in their generation, Christian Millennials will have to face those criticisms head on and wrestle with the implications for their own beliefs. Yet when it comes to the Bible—more than many other areas of their faith—Millennial Christians are starting off on comparatively solid ground."

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### About the Research

MillennialPoll<sup>SM</sup> included 1,000 online surveys conducted among a representative sample of young adults, ages 18 through 30 in the United States. The survey was conducted from August 18, 2014 through August 22, 2014. The margin of error for a sample of this size is +/-3.1 percentage points, at the 95% confidence level. Minimal statistical weighting was used to calibrate the sample to known population percentages in relation to demographic variables.

Practicing Christians describe themselves as Christians who attend church at least once a month and believe their religious faith is very important in their life today.

Millennials (or Mosaics) are the generation born between 1984 and 2002; Gen-Xers (or Busters), between 1965 and 1983; Boomers, between 1946 and 1964; and Elders, in 1945 or earlier.

The research was jointly commissioned by the [American Bible Society](#), [InterVarsity Christian Fellowship](#), and Barna Group.

### About Barna Group

Barna Group (which includes its research division, Barna Research Group) is a private, non-partisan, for-profit organization under the umbrella of the Issachar Companies. Located in Ventura, California, Barna Group has been conducting and analyzing primary research to understand cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors since 1984.

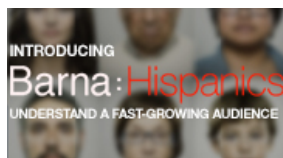
If you would like to receive free e-mail notification of the release of each update on the latest research findings from Barna Group, you may subscribe to this free service at the Barna website ([www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)). Additional research-based resources are also available through this website.

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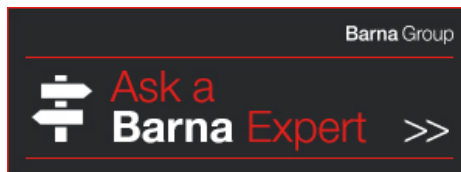
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