

Millennials May Be Skeptical About Bible, But They Still Do This

Historical. Symbolic. Story. Sacred. Testimony. These are the top five words millennials use to describe the Bible. The new study *Millennials and the Bible*, co-commissioned by American Bible Society and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, dives deeper into the perceptions millennials have about the Bible and their engagement with the best-selling book of all time.

The study, conducted by Barna Group, found most millennials (ages 18-30) believe the Bible to be the actual (21 percent) or inspired word of God (44 percent), while only 18 percent state the Bible is another book of teachings written by men. And while the split of opinions on the Bible between Christian millennials and non-Christian millennials is not surprising (45 percent of non-Christians believe the Bible is just another book of teachings written by men), it may surprise many to learn that non-Christian millennials may still turn to the Bible for comfort. For example, when non-Christian millennials do read the Bible, many do so to feel closer to God (21 percent).

“The good news is that, while more millennials are turning skeptical toward the Bible, we still see them reaching out to God during times of difficulty and to feel closer to God. For Christian ministries like American Bible Society, this means there is still an opportunity to encourage more millennials to engage with the Bible and experience its life-changing message,” said Drew Hood, managing director of communications at American Bible Society.

Earlier this year, American Bible Society’s annual *State of the Bible* research found that, among all American adults, the

percentage of Bible skeptics equaled the percentage of Bible engaged for the first time. Millennials continue to drive the shift toward Bible indifference or skepticism. Of all millennials surveyed, 10 percent are considered Bible engaged, while 25 percent are considered Bible skeptics. While approximately a third of all millennials have positive feelings when they see someone reading the Bible in public (29 percent are happy, 29 percent feel encouraged, 27 percent feel joyful and 26 percent are grateful to see the Bible is still important to people), the division between Christians and non-Christians is clear. Many non-Christians have a negative view those who engage with the Bible.

When non-Christians see someone reading the Bible in public they:

- Assume that person is politically conservative (22 percent)
- Figure they don't have anything in common with the person (21 percent)
- Think the person is old-fashioned (17 percent)
- Think that person is trying to make a statement or be provocative (15 percent)
- Think the person is naïve and feel uncomfortable (both answers at 14 percent)
- Yet for all the negative perceptions of the Bible and Christians, non-Christian millennials believe that the Bible teaches forgiveness (70 percent), patience (62 percent), generosity (64 percent) and social justice (41 percent).

“There is a tremendous opportunity to engage non-Christian millennials with the Bible. Despite their misgivings about it, they still believe that the Bible

promotes things they care about such as forgiveness, patience, generosity and social justice. We need to figure out what will motivate and enable them to read the Bible for themselves,” said Lindsay Olesberg, Scripture engagement director at InterVarsity.

But the reality remains that more millennials are leaving the Bible on bookshelves, with 32 percent never reading the Bible, compared to 26 percent of all U.S. adults. And only 26 percent of all millennials are reading the Bible at least once a week, compared to 38 percent of all U.S. adults. Still more millennials, 26 percent, said they have increased their personal use of the Bible in the past year than did the average U.S. adult (18 percent). The reason for the increase is in part due to seeing how the Bible changed someone they knew for the better. Even non-Christian millennials recognized this change in someone they knew (27 percent of non-Christians who increased their Bible reading in the past year said it was as a result of seeing how the Bible changed someone they knew, while 31 percent of all millennials said this and only 15 percent of all U.S. adults).

At the same time, more millennials have also decreased their personal use of the Bible in the past year compared with all U.S. adults—15 percent decreasing Bible use compared to 9 percent of all U.S. adults. And 46 percent of non-Christian millennials said the reason they decreased their Bible use in the past year is because they became agnostic or atheist, while 21 percent of all millennials surveyed said this is why they decreased their Bible use, compared to just 15 percent of all U.S. adults.

The survey also found:

- The average amount of time millennials spend reading the

Bible is 30 minutes, keeping pace with all U.S. adults.

- 27 percent of non-Christian millennials hold very negative views of the Bible, stating that they believe the Bible is a dangerous book of religious dogma used for centuries to oppress people.
- Only 32 percent of all millennials agree strongly that the Bible contains everything a person needs to know to live a meaningful life, compared to 50 percent of all U.S. adults.

Survey Methodology

The *Millennials and the Bible* report contains the findings from a nationwide study commissioned by American Bible Society and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and conducted by Barna Research (a division of Barna Group). The research methodology included 1,000 online surveys conducted among a representative sample of young adults ages 18 to 30 in the continental U.S. The survey was conducted from Aug. 18-22, 2014.

For full survey information, please contact Christine Cape or Katie Rouse.