

50 FACTS ABOUT GOD, FAITH, AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Center for Bible Engagement Research Highlights

- 1 Christians grow through *relationship*, not *religion*.
- 2 Relationship with God is two-way.
- 3 We must *engage* the Bible, not just read it.
- 4 Bible engagement is an essential way in which God communicates with Christ followers.
- 5 Almost half of the North American Christians we surveyed did not read or engage the Bible daily.
- 6 Almost half of North American Christians in our survey did not know (1) what the Bible is or (2) what the Bible is for.
- 7 Disengagement from the Bible leaves American believers ignorant of basic Scriptural truths, vulnerable to false teachings, spiritually immature, and reflecting on a “fantasy-based” image of their Creator instead of the one, true God of the Bible.
- 8 Many believers don’t grasp that through the Word, God teaches, rebukes, corrects, and trains us in righteousness.
- 9 Without the Bible, we wouldn’t know (1) what God is like, (2) his plan for us, (3) how much He loves us, (4) the right way to live, or (5) anything about what will happen to us after we die.
- 10 Bible engagement four or more times per week changes behavior.
- 11 Those who have four or more scriptural touches per week described the “feelings” they received after prayer and Bible reading as “impressions from the Holy Spirit.” Question: Does increased Bible engagement allow believers to tune in promptings from the Holy Spirit more clearly and more frequently?
- 12 There were no significant observable differences in behaviors and spiritual growth when CBE compared church attendance to Bible reading. Therefore, we concluded that Scripture engagement is a much more accurate measure of spiritual growth than church attendance.
- 13 There are two types of Christians: *notional Christ followers* (those who believe in “their concept” of Christ and interact with Him in a one-way relationship) and *relational Christ followers* (those who have a two-way relationship with the true Christ of the Bible).

- 14 God wants us to move from being a notional Christ follower to being a relational Christ follower.
- 15 Observable characteristics of relational Christ followers:
 - Engage Scripture four or more times per week
 - Hear from God through (1) the Bible, (2) impressions prompted by the Holy Spirit, (3) people
 - Demonstrate moderate to extensive Bible knowledge
 - Memorize verses
 - Have read the entire Bible at least once
 - Passionate about connecting with God
 - Share their faith with others
 - Less likely to take part in negative and immoral behaviors, specifically viewing pornography, gambling, abusing illegal drugs, pursuing drunkenness, and engaging in sex outside of marriage
- 16 Observable characteristics of notional Christ followers:
 - Occasionally engage Scripture (zero to three times per week)
 - Those who engage Scripture three or more times per week hear from God through (1) feelings, (2) the Bible, (3) people
 - Those who rarely engage Scripture or who do so once a week hear from God through (1) people, (2) feelings, (3) the Bible
 - Demonstrate little Bible knowledge
 - Rarely memorize verses
 - Less likely to have read the entire Bible
 - Less likely to share their faith with others
 - More likely to take part in negative and immoral behaviors, specifically viewing pornography, gambling, abusing illegal drugs, pursuing drunkenness, and engaging in sex outside of marriage
- 17 Those who are notional Christ followers have not genuinely become new creations in Christ, do not exhibit a change in their lifestyles, and often revert to past sins and struggles.
- 18 Those who are notional Christ followers live with a belief system that grounded on a “fantasy-based” image of their Creator. Instead of connecting with the One, true God of the Bible, notional believers fit the Lord into who they believe He is (or want Him to be).
- 19 Very often, the notional Christ follower does not engage in Scripture since the Bible is not relevant to his or her fantasy-based notion of Christ.
- 20 Relational Christ followers are more in tune with God. They have discovered their unique “spiritual rhythms”—ways of connecting with God and growing deeper in their relationship with Him.
- 21 Relational Christ followers are often more in tune with the needs of others.
- 22 Christians often don’t agree on the definition of the word *spiritual*.
- 23 Many Christians don’t know how to grow spiritually.
- 24 Despite differences of opinion about what is and isn’t spiritual, everyone—Christians and nonbelievers alike—want to win the day spiritually. Most don’t know how to accomplish this (or where to begin).
- 25 Mature believers have discovered that spiritual growth happens through (1) prayer, (2) meditation on God’s Word, (3) Bible engagement.

- 26 An ongoing study at CBE is revealing that emotional well-being, hope and the fruit of the spirit (as outlined in Galatians 5:22-23) grows when individuals engage the Holy Bible, not by reading and internalizing other religious works such as the Quran or the Book of Mormon.
- 27 The Bible is the living, transforming Word of God. It is supernatural.
- 28 Scripture is “protective.” In the face of temptation, the Bible tells us to “take up our sword and shield,” which is God’s Living Word.”
- 29 The keys to dealing with a multitude of struggles are prayer coupled with Bible reading. For example, when people wrestle with lust, they must use a “protective verse” (such as 1 Corinthians 6:18-20) as a shield and even repeat it in the face of temptation: “Flee from sexual immorality... You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”
- 30 Temptation can be defeated through Bible engagement.
- 31 Four out of five survey respondents reported being tempted between one and ten times a day.
- 32 Seventy-nine percent of survey respondents admitted that they yield to their temptations “at least some of the time.”
- 33 Not surprisingly, men and women struggle with different kinds of temptations:
 - For women, gossip and overeating ranked as their biggest struggles.
 - For men, sexually related issues ranked as their biggest struggles.
- 34 Giving in to temptation and sinning cripples a believer’s witness and is a hindrance to spiritual growth.
- 35 Sin does not happen in a vacuum. One person’s sin affects others.
- 36 Spiritual growth does not happen in a vacuum. One person’s spiritual victory affects others.
- 37 Getting unstuck from struggles—overcoming temptation, habits, and sinful behaviors—involves a change in the way we think. The “Philippians 4:8 Principle” is a place to start: Meditate on those things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy.
- 38 Running toward God is the solution to winning the day spiritually, especially when we face seemingly insurmountable challenges in our lives.
- 39 Regarding lasting spiritual growth, the mere transference of content (faith-building books and other resources, for example) isn’t the key. In fact, content is often quickly forgotten.
- 40 Training Christ followers in a *process* of spiritual growth is most effective. This involves a methodology that is built around where the individual is spiritually and continues until the believer engages the Bible on a daily basis.
- 41 Teaching someone the “how” and “why” versus only the “what” makes all the difference in the world. Therefore, church leaders, Christian ministries, and spiritual growth resources should teach believers (1) how to engage God and His Word, and (2) how to engage God through His Word.
- 42 A Bible engagement discipleship program equips believers to continually engage and communicate with God even if the leader (a pastor, a teacher, an author) is no longer around. CBE has developed state-of-the-art “touches” (biblically based resources and social media programs) that can help believers to grow spiritually.
- 43 There are four critical elements of spiritual growth: (1) The Knowledge Element: We hear from God and reflect on His Word, (2) The Prayer Element: We prepare our heart through confession and pray in the Word, (3) The Faith Element: We believe God’s Word, trust His direction, and internalize His message, (4) The Action Element: We live out the Word, flourish in it, and grow spiritually.

- 44 We lose the day spiritually when we (1) don't engage God, (2) don't engage Scripture, (3) stay in a notional relationship, (4) follow impersonal "religious practices" instead of engaging in a relationship with God, (5) get stuck in (and comfortable with) wrong thinking and sinful behaviors.
- 45 We can recover from sin and self-defeating behaviors—and ultimately win the day spiritually—if we learn how to "crawl, walk, and run" when we face a battle. In other words, we respond differently depending upon the struggle and the season of our faith. (Sometimes we behave like a mature believer and walk steadfastly or run; at other moments we must respond like a new believer and crawl.)
- 46 It's no secret: life, faith, and spiritual growth are often messy and unpredictable. The truth is, we don't mature and move toward God in a sequential and linear fashion. Spiritual growth moves in multiple directions (toward self and toward Christ) all at once. Understanding this is a key to winning the day.
- 47 CBE research findings indicate that few Americans believe that "religion" or "church attendance" defines spirituality.
- 48 Americans under age 35 are more likely to define spiritual maturity as "knowing what you believe."
- 49 Spiritual maturity is genuine and evident in our lives when (1) we put feet on our faith and "live out the Word" in loving obedience to Christ, and (2) we roll up our sleeves and "share the Word" by serving others and "laying down our lives" for Christ.
- 50 Those around us will notice as we attempt to live our lives in an honest and real connection with God.