The Quiet Revival

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is made possible thanks to the work and encouragement of many family, friends and colleagues. In particular we would like to express our deep appreciation to our colleague Dr Yinxuan Huang, who provided statistical insight and the advanced modelling to help us understand the data better and to Mark Woods for his invaluable guidance and contribution. We thank our friends and families for all their support, and above all, we wish to thank the supporters of Bible Society, without whom none of this would have been possible.

About Bible Society

Around the world, Bible Society works to translate, produce and distribute Scripture, helps people learn to read it, and equips pastors and teachers. In England and Wales we resource churches and individual believers to increase their confidence in the Bible, and we invite change in how people see the Bible in wider culture. We invest in research aimed at informing the Church and wider society about the Bible and faith.

This report has been funded thanks to donations from supporters of Bible Society.

Design by Emily Gorham.

ISBN: 978-0-56-403981-4

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Foreword

The word 'revival' is freighted, particularly among Christians from the evangelical tradition, with folk memories of full-to-bursting congregations and dramatically emotional congregational experiences. This is not necessarily that. Our 'Quiet Revival' is low key, but it is widespread. It doesn't draw attention to a particular leadership style, or way of doing church, or political influence. Instead, the story told in this report is revolutionary in terms of the public assumptions about Christianity in England and Wales, and transformational in terms of how Christians think about themselves.

For decades, Church attendance and nominal adherence to Christianity has been declining, and it has been assumed that this decline would continue and was in some sense an inevitable product of modernity. While the decline has certainly been real, we now know that the trend has been reversed. The tide of faith, whose 'melancholy, long-withdrawing roar' was described by Matthew Arnold, has now turned.

The results of this thorough and robust study demonstrate that over the space of only six years, there has been a significant growth in the numbers of people going to church; Christians are practising their religion more intentionally; more young people are finding faith; more people are reading the Bible.

An attentive reader will at this point be asking themselves many questions: is the methodology robust? Is this an immigration effect? Are people simply attending church but not really believing or practising faith? All these and more possibilities have been considered and evaluated by the research teams at YouGov and Bible Society. We have indeed found churchgoing is increasingly ethnically diverse and community does factor as an attractive element in church-going; but none of these or other posited factors come close to fully explaining the findings.

Large numbers of young adults, male and female, have started going to church, reading the Bible regularly, practising prayer and worshipping Jesus Christ as God. A new generation is finding hope in the Christian message and in established Christian communities. This hope is both personal and social. It appears to meet a hunger for connection, belonging and purpose but it also helps frame meaningful engagement in the world to address some of the intractable problems that we all face – injustice, inequality, climate change – and to form an alternative to the individualistic, competitive, materialistic worldview that has come to dominate western societies in recent decades.

There will be an instinct to use these results to support one or other of the various narratives that mark our contested cultural moment. But I urge the reader to pay attention to the detail of this study to understand what is happening. A remarkable new and life-giving phenomenon seems to be under way in Britain.

The past few decades have witnessed a widespread empirical falsification of the secularisation thesis, mainly because in all parts of the world except Western Europe the world has become more, not less religious. This report suggests that even this outlier may not remain so for much longer.

P S Williams

Paul Williams
Chief Executive Officer, Bible Society

THE QUIET REVIVAL

Report in 30 seconds

In churches across society something amazing is happening, challenging long-held predictions about the future of Christianity in the twenty-first century. Where once we saw aging congregations and a steady decline in attendance, we see dramatic growth, led by the young. Where once we saw apathy or even hostility to Christianity and the Bible we see increased openness, again among the young. You may have heard the rumblings and rumours emerging over the past few years, you may even have noticed it in your own community, or it might have passed you by entirely – but this data shows that it is real. This is the Quiet Revival. For the first time, this is not just anecdote, but is demonstrated in the latest results of a large, robust and nationally representative population study that has tracked the religious attitudes and behaviours of England and Wales since 2018.

We found that the Church is in a period of rapid growth, driven by young adults and in particular young men. Along with this, the Church demonstrates greater ethnic diversity than ever before. Both within and outside the Church, young adults are more spiritually engaged than any other living generation, with Bible reading and belief in God on the rise. But we also see that active engagement with a church has a significant impact on the lives of attenders, with a high increase in mental and general life wellbeing – again particularly among young adults, a generation in the midst of a mental health crisis. It is also changing communities, with churchgoers more likely to feel a connection to their local area and get involved in social engagement activities. Challenges remain for the Church and civic society in responding to this Quiet Revival, but its reality can no longer be denied.

Key findings

1

KEY QUOTE:

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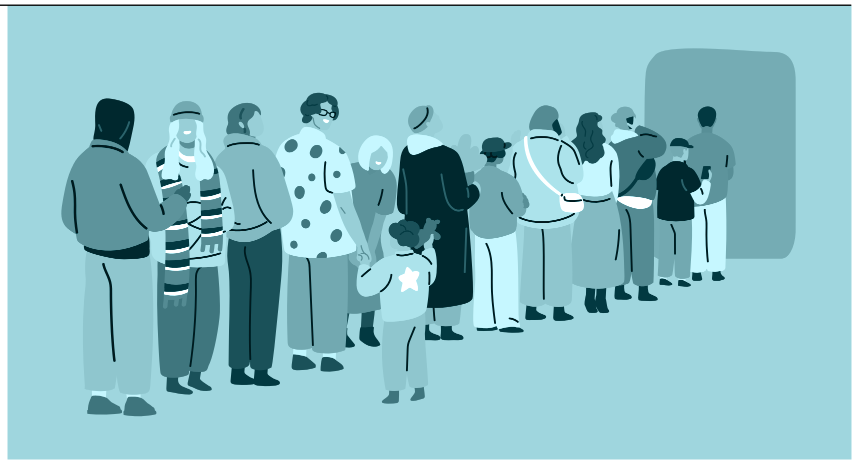
Having a Christian faith is again being normalised and is arguably even culturally attractive

KEY STAT:

12%

of adults in England and Wales are attending church monthly



The growing Church

Church attendance in England and Wales is on the rise. This represents a startling change to decades-long trends and presumptions, with the most dramatic increase seen among young people, particularly young men. In 2018, just 4% of 18–24-year-olds said they attended church at least monthly. Today this has risen to 16%, with young men increasing from 4% to 21%, and young women from 3% to 12%. This is now the second most likely age group to attend church regularly. Overall, churchgoing Christians now make up 12% of the population, up from 8% in 2018. In numerical terms, that’s growth from 3.7m in 2018 to 5.8m in 2024 – an increase of 56%.

2

KEY QUOTE:

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Young adults are finding their way into church in remarkable numbers

KEY STAT:

32%

of churchgoers aged 18–54 are from an ethnic minority

The changing Church

In addition to absolute growth in churchgoing, including among the white population, the Church in England and Wales is also becoming more diverse. Just under 1 in 5 churchgoers (19%) are from an ethnic minority, but among 18–54-year-olds this rises to 1 in 3 (32%). At the same time Catholicism has risen sharply and Pentecostalism has become the third biggest Christian tradition, with the share of churchgoers identifying as Anglicans dropping steadily.

3

KEY QUOTE:

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This is a growing Church interested in belonging, believing and practising

KEY STAT:

67%

of churchgoing Christians read the Bible at least weekly outside of church

Vibrant faith

Alongside this significant demographic change within churches, we see evidence of an active and vibrant Church. Rates of belief in God remain high, while both Bible reading and rates of confidence in the Bible have increased among churchgoers compared to 2018, indicating that new attenders are just as engaged in Christian belief and practice.

4

KEY QUOTE:

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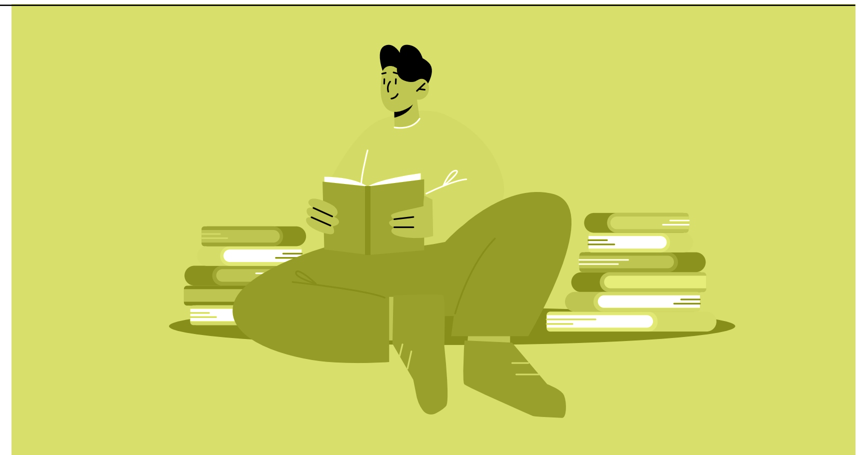
The idea that Britons are to some extent Christian ‘by default’ is rapidly diminishing

KEY STAT:

27%

of adults say they are Christian but don’t regularly go to church, compared to 32% in 2018



Practice matters

At the same time, those who don’t engage in practices such as churchgoing or Bible reading are less likely than ever to identify themselves as Christian. Christianity increasingly involves an active commitment rather than a passive cultural label, and there is a clear difference between churchgoing and non-churchgoing Christians.

5

KEY QUOTE:

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Our youngest group is showing above-average engagement in spiritual practice

KEY STAT:

35% of 18–24-year-olds say there is ‘definitely a God/gods or higher power’

The spiritual generation

The young people in our sample don’t just go to church more, they show above-average levels of warmth to spirituality, the Church and spiritual practice. This group of 18–24-year-olds are the most likely to pray regularly, with 40% saying they pray at least monthly. More than half of them (51%) have engaged with a spiritual practice over the past six months, compared to 42% of those older than them. They are also the group most interested in learning more about the Bible, with 37% of 18–24s saying they are curious to discover more about it.

6

KEY QUOTE:

“

Churchgoers show the lowest reports of feeling frequently anxious and depressed

KEY STAT:

63% of 18–34-year-old churchgoers say they feel close to people in their local area, compared to 25% of non-churchgoers their age

Churchgoing and wellbeing

With much of the population, in particular young people, struggling with mental health, loneliness and a loss of meaning in life, Church appears to be offering an answer. We found that churchgoers are more likely than non-churchgoers to report higher life satisfaction and a greater feeling of connection to their community than non-churchgoers. They are also less likely to report frequently feeling anxious or depressed – particularly young women.

7

KEY QUOTE:

“

Churchgoers are more likely to desire social change and to engage in social activism activities

KEY STAT:

79% of churchgoers agree it’s important to them to try to make a difference in the world

Socially engaged congregations

This is not solely about personal development, however, and we also see that churchgoers are more likely to actively participate in activities aimed at benefitting the community around them. Churchgoers are more likely to volunteer, donate to foodbanks and give to charitable causes, demonstrating the positive effect of Christian faith on their lives – and the impact that a rise in churchgoing can have on society as a whole.

8

KEY QUOTE:

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Young Christians report finding the Bible more challenging than older Christians

KEY STAT:

35% of 18–34-year-old churchgoers agree that their faith is undermined when they think/read about some parts of the Bible

The need for discipleship

There is clear need for more discipleship around Scripture. Approximately one-third of churchgoers say they lack confidence in navigating or understanding the Bible and speaking about it with others. Among young Christians, rates of Bible reading, Bible confidence, and interest in learning more are high. However, we also see that compared to older churchgoers, they are more likely to say the media and British culture often shake their faith in the Bible and report they have less confidence in the Bible than they used to. They are also the age group to report they find learning about the Bible to be challenging. This poses a challenge to the Church but also an opportunity to tap into and learn from their energy and enthusiasm while enabling them to go deeper into Scripture.

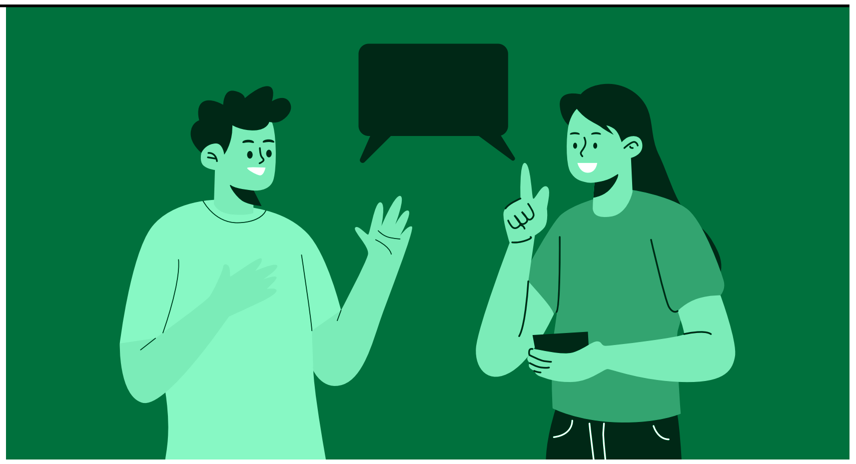
9

KEY QUOTE:

"We see openness even among non-churchgoers towards Christianity and the Bible

KEY STAT:

34% of 18–24-year-old non-churchgoers would attend church if invited by a friend



Openness and opportunity

The astonishing growth in churchgoing is matched by an openness to Christianity and the Bible: 31% of non-churchgoers say they would attend church if invited by a friend or family member, rising to 34% among 18–24-year-olds. Over half of non-churchgoers (56%) would be happy for a Christian friend to pray for them, while 18% say they would be interested in learning more about the Bible. Relationships are key here: over a fifth (22%) of non-churchgoing 18–34s say they would read the Bible if recommended by a family member or friend they trust, compared to 13% who would if a trusted celebrity or public thinker recommended it.

10

KEY QUOTE:

"The tide of faith is coming in again, and the Church needs to adjust to a new and strangely hopeful reality

Steps for action

We have four recommendations in response to this data. First, we urge policy-makers and opinion-formers to take more account of the existence of churchgoing Christians in society. Second, the Church should work on increasing Bible discipleship to grow Bible confidence and through this tap into the increased openness and cultural opportunity. Third, the Church should engage in intergenerational conversations within congregations and more widely, to enable churchgoers to learn from one another's wisdom. Finally, it should recognise the importance and impact of authentic personal relationships.

About the research

The report references two data sets commissioned by Bible Society to track attitudes to the Bible and Christianity and related religious behaviours in the adult population of England and Wales. Both surveys were conducted by YouGov on large, nationally representative samples.

The 2018 sample surveyed 19,101 adults in England and Wales, while the 2024 sample surveyed 13,146 adults. Both samples therefore give a 1% margin of error at a 99% confidence level, meaning they are highly reliable. The surveys were conducted through YouGov's online panel to population targets, and further refined with post stratification weighting. It is worth noting that because we surveyed adults, we are not able to comment in depth on the portion of the population, or the Church, which is under 18.

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. In 2018: total sample size was 19,101 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 11 October and 13 November 2018. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all England/Wales adults (aged 18+). Ethnicity targets are based on 2011 census data.

In 2024: total sample size was 13,146 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 4 November and 2 December 2024. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all England/Wales adults (aged 18+). Ethnicity targets are based on 2021 census data.

Throughout the report, we refer to 'churchgoers'. By this we mean people who both describe themselves as Christian and go to church at least once a month – around 30% of all those who identify as Christian. At times we also mention trends seen among other faiths. As the primary focus of this report is on exploring Christians (both practising and non-churchgoers) and those with no religion, we have not explored non-Christian faiths by religion; rather, they are grouped together. There are obvious limits to this approach, and therefore all our observations on non-Christian faiths could be nuanced further in future studies.

Due to GDPR sensitivities, questions pertaining to religious practice like church attendance and Bible reading were optional. On these questions a small percentage of the sample refused to answer – c3%. This is in line with the standard dropout rate. Where we make population claims, such as the number of adults who say they go to church regularly, we have recoded refusals as 'prefer not to say' to keep the full base in the sample. However, as we do not know the churchgoing status of these participants, when we compare churchgoers to non-churchgoers in Chapters 2–4, participants who did not answer have been removed from analysis, rather than categorised as non-churchgoers. Including or removing them has little or no effect on the overall figures.

We know the results of this report will be surprising to some and will naturally raise further questions about the methodology behind it. To help answer some of these we've included an FAQ section at the end of the report.

THE QUIET REVIVAL

Background

For many decades now, the general assumption has been that Christianity, and in particular churchgoing, in England and Wales is in a state of permanent decline. Survey data, media headlines and prominent thinkers all seemed to point in one direction, with published attendance and membership figures from major denominations appearing to confirm this. From the sociological insistence in the 1960s that secularisation was inevitable and the new atheism of the 2000s, through to the more recent findings from the 2021 census showing the perilous collapse of Christian identity and headlines from last year proclaiming we were entering Britain's first 'atheist age', the story seems clear – Christianity, particularly active Christianity, is on the way out.

Yet over the past few years, a different story has been emerging from the peripheries. In the United States, young men are heading to church in remarkable numbers,[1] transforming the landscape of the Church. Recent data even shows that young adults in the UK are more spiritual and less atheistic than older generations.[2] Prominent public atheists have been questioning their beliefs, while key public figures – from intellectuals such as Jordan Peterson and Tom Holland through to popular culture figures and athletes – have been open about their engagement with Christianity. More significantly, stories are emerging from the ground, including those collected by people such as Justin Brierley and Lamorna Ash, showing that young people in particular are exploring Christianity in a new way, suggesting that the previous assumptions may need to be shifted. But firm numbers have been hard to come by – until now.

Using nationally representative data through a prestigious polling agency, The Quiet Revival demonstrates that far from declining, the Church has grown. In particular we see that 'Gen Z' young adults are more likely to attend church regularly than any generation ahead of them bar the over-65s, and in particular we see that young men are attending in remarkable numbers. The Church is transforming before our eyes, and the figures presented in this report show the proof. As outlined throughout, this fact has implications both for civil society and for Christian denominations, networks and congregations. It is hard to overstate its importance both for our national self-understanding and for the Church's understanding of itself.

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1 'In a First Among Christians, Young Men Are More Religious Than Young Women', Ruth Graham: https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/23/us/young-men-religion-gen-z.html

2 'Gen Z half as likely as their parents to identify as atheists', Kaya Burgess in The Times: https://www.thetimes.com/uk/religion/article/gen-z-half-as-likely-as-their-parents-to-identify-as-atheists-wp2vl0l29

THE QUIET REVIVAL

1

What's happening?

Our results present a radical challenge to long-established predictions around the future of religion – and in particular Christianity – in twenty-first century Britain. Instead of a continuing decline we see explosive growth; instead of a Church populated predominantly by older women, we see a rising number of men and younger generations joining. As a result, the Church is not just growing but transforming, with young adults leading the way.

12% of the adults in England and Wales are attending church monthly

21% of men aged 18–24 are regular churchgoers

33% of adult churchgoers are 18–34

The state of the Church – growing and changing

In 2018, our data showed a picture of the Church which reflected much of what was expected at the time. We saw a slim minority of the adult population attending monthly – 8% – with older people far more likely to attend than younger generations[1]. Of those aged over 65, 14% were attending church, but there was a steady rate of decline as age groups lowered, with 7% of those aged 35–64 and only 4% of under-35s in church each month. Again as expected, this was particularly stark with regards to men – overall, only 6% of men were churchgoing Christians, compared to 9% of women. Only 3.7m adults attended church in England and Wales. This appeared to confirm predictions that the Church would continue to shrink, with inevitable generational decline.

[1] All references to attendance are those who attend at least monthly and describe themselves as Christian

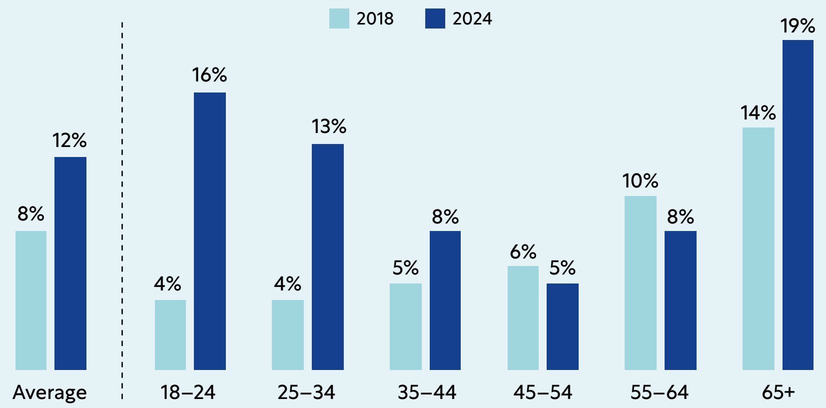
> Churchgoing has risen substantially

Churchgoing has risen

Our latest data, however, radically challenges this presumption. Overall, we see that churchgoing has risen by more than half, and is now up to 12% overall, or 5.8m adults. Most remarkable is where this growth has come from. What we see is that our youngest groups are now the second most likely to attend church monthly behind our oldest groups, with 16% of 18–24-year-olds saying they are monthly churchgoers compared to 19% of those aged over 65. Instead of a straightforward association between age and attendance, we instead see a curve, with those in middle age – 45–54 – the least likely to attend at only 5%.

The rise in regular churchgoing

Percentage of age group population who describe themselves as Christian and go to church at least once a month



Question: Apart from weddings, baptisms/christenings, and funerals how often, if at all, did you go to a church service in the last year?

Base: Whole population

> Male attendance – at 13% on average – now outstrips female

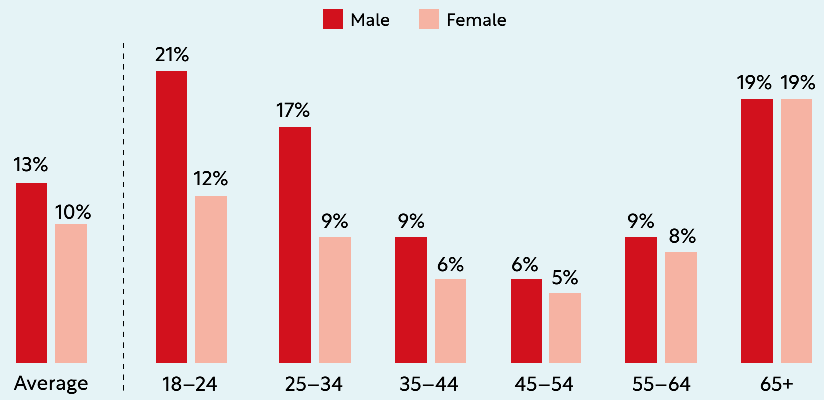
More men than women

Alongside age we see another reversal with gender. While both men and women saw a rise, male attendance – at 13% on average – now outstrips female, which is at 10%. This rise is particularly significant among younger men. Over a fifth of men aged 18–24 (21%) now say they are attending church each month, far higher than their female peers at 12% – though in both cases this is a substantial rise in comparison to 2018. This is not a case of young men joining while young women are leaving, as has been observed in the United States[2]. Instead, both men and women are attending at far higher rates than before.

[2] See for example Ruth Graham's article in the New York Times from September 2024, 'In a First Among Christians, Young Men Are More Religious Than Young Women': https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/23/us/young-men-religion-gen-z.html

Men are now more likely to attend church than women

Percentage of whole population who describe themselves as Christian and attend church at least once a month, by gender



Question: Apart from weddings, baptisms/christenings, and funerals how often, if at all, did you go to a church service in the last year?

Base: Whole population

As a result of this, while previously only 14% of the Church was aged 18–34 (and 61% were over 55), now one-third of churchgoers fit within this younger bracket. While we cannot get specific numbers for under-18s, we can see that those with children under the age of 18 are more likely to be in church (13% – up from 7% in 2018) than those without children (11%). This suggests firstly that something is drawing parents to church, and secondly that we may also be seeing greater numbers of children in churches. The story is clear – the Church is both growing and changing in front of our eyes.

> The Church is both growing and changing in front of our eyes

A diverse Church

Along with age and gender, the other key demographic story is that of ethnicity. Overall, the Church is looking increasingly ethnically diverse, in particular outside of the oldest groups. Among under-55s, around one-third of churchgoers (32%) come from ethnic minorities, compared to just 6% of churchgoers over the age of 55. Among this younger group, therefore, the Church is actually more diverse than the country as a whole, with the 2021 census reporting that 18% of the population considered themselves non-White. When we look at ethnic groups we see that close to half of young Black people aged 18–34 (47%) are now attending church at least monthly, while a third of 18–34-year-olds from mixed ethnic backgrounds (33%) are likewise regular churchgoers.

However, it is also clear that the growth in churchgoing is not solely attributable to the rise in attenders from minority ethnic groups – we are also seeing a rise in White attendance. Among 18–34-year-old men in this group, for example, 18% are now attending church monthly, compared to 3% in 2018, and it is a similar story (albeit not so dramatic)

39%
of the population describe themselves as Christian

43%
of the population believe there is definitely or probably a God/ gods or 'higher power'

19%
of 18–24-year-olds read the Bible weekly outside of church

among young White women. We are therefore seeing an absolute growth in churchgoing among young adults – including substantial growth from the White population – but also greater diversity among younger churchgoers than among older groups.

A higher proportion are Catholics and Pentecostals

Finally, we are also seeing this transformation in terms of denominational affiliation. Whereas in 2018 Anglicans made up 41% of churchgoers, this has dropped to 34% in 2024, with Roman Catholics now close behind them with 31% (up from 23%) and Pentecostals up from 4% to 10% of the Church. Again we see a strong age effect here – among 18–34s, only 20% of churchgoers are Anglican (down from 30% in 2018), with 41% Catholic and 18% Pentecostal.

Identity, belief and belonging

There are two issues to explore at this point. **The first question** is, how can this be happening when recent headlines have assured us that Christianity is still on the decline? Fundamentally, these headlines have largely focused on Christian *identity*, rather than Christian *practice*. Most significantly, they arose from the 2021 census which showed that the proportion of the population identifying as Christian continues to decline rapidly. This isn't in doubt – indeed, our own question on religious identity found an even lower proportion of Christian identity, at 39%[3]. Among 18–34-year-olds this drops further, to 29%.

The key here is to understand the shift that is occurring between nominal and active religious identity, with the latter being one which is intentionally adopted and reflected in distinctive beliefs and actions. Across society, and particularly among younger people, the idea that they are to some extent Christian 'by default' is rapidly diminishing, with 'No religion' instead moving into this space for non-practising people. This shows the importance of recognising the difference between churchgoing and non-churchgoing Christians. These differences will show repeatedly throughout the report – and this is why we have specifically focused on churchgoing Christians.

The second question is, how 'religious' are these new churchgoers? It could be argued that this data primarily signifies a desire for community in a society (and particularly a generation) who often feel isolated and lost, and does not necessarily suggest an enormous rise in belief. As we will discuss in the next section, the longing for community is likely to be a factor that draws young adults to churches, and is a need which appears to be met in these spaces. However, we are not only seeing a rise in church attendance, but also a rise in wider beliefs and practices among churchgoers.

[3] This is an optional question. 4% of the sample chose not to answer and are recoded as 'prefer not to say' here.

When asked about their beliefs, 85% of churchgoers agreed that there was 'definitely a God/gods or some "higher power"' – a small rise from 2018 (81%). When those who said they believed were asked to describe this belief, 84% said that it was 'A God or divine being who is involved in the world and human lives' – again, a small rise. Beyond belief statements, we also see that 93% say that they pray at least weekly, while two-thirds (66%) say they read the Bible at least weekly, up significantly from 54% in 2018. Clearly this is a growing Church not only interested in belonging, but also in believing and practising.

The emerging spiritual generation

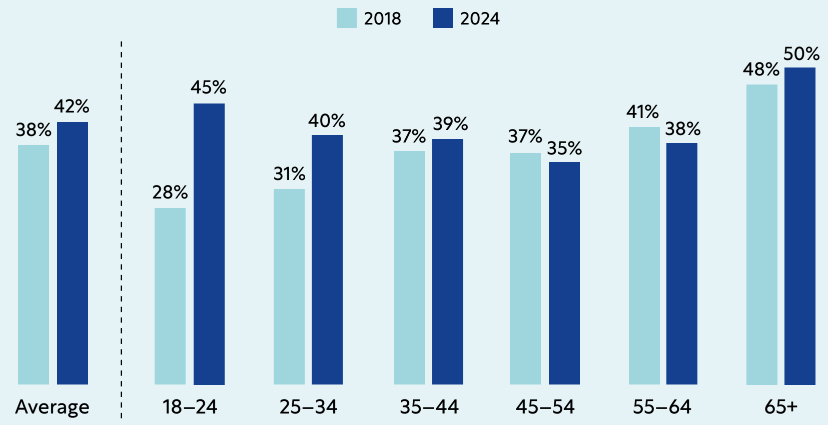
As discussed above, young adults (and particularly young men) are finding their way into church in remarkable numbers. But churchgoing is not the only change occurring and as we dig into the data we see wider shifts taking place across the generation showing openness to and engagement with spirituality.

Openness with nuance

We are seeing that in a wide range of areas our youngest group is showing above-average engagement in spiritual practice and warmth towards spirituality and the Church. 18–24-year-olds are the most likely to believe there is 'definitely a God/gods or higher power', at 33%, and also the most likely to pray regularly, with 23% saying they pray at least daily (compared to 17% of the rest of the population), and a total of 37% saying they pray at least monthly (compared to 30% of the rest of the population).

More young adults are believing in God

Percentage of whole population who agree there is 'probably' or 'definitely' a God/ gods or some 'higher power', by age group



Question: Which of the following best describes your belief? Base: Whole population

> “Young adults (and particularly young men) are finding their way into church in remarkable numbers

When presented with a selection of different spiritual practices beyond prayer, 46% of 18–24-year-olds say they have engaged in at least one of these outside of formal services over the previous six months – compared to 41% of those older than them – with meditation the most selected at 19%. They are also curious about religion, with 18% saying they have been learning more about religion or spirituality (compared to 10% of those over 55) and 37% saying they are interested in learning more about the Bible.

Their attitude to religion is not straightforward, however, and there are nuances across the dataset. They are the age group most likely to agree that Christianity plays a positive role in modern Britain (35%, compared to a national average of 32%), but also among the lowest to agree that society is better when it's shaped by Christian values (32%, compared to a national average of 38%). One-third agree that the Bible is a source of harm in the world – with 31% disagreeing – and they are the group least likely to agree that it is good for children to know at least some Bible stories, though even here this still stands at 50%. While there is significant spiritual and religious vibrancy among this generation, therefore, the story is complex.

Why is this happening?

The most intriguing question which follows from all of this data is *why* this generation are more engaged. This will require further research and reflection, and in particular hearing from the young adults themselves. However, we preliminarily suggest there may be two interlinking factors here.

A change of climate

Firstly, there has been a notable shift in the cultural attitudes towards Christianity in the public eye. While the perception of Christianity among older generations may be defined or significantly influenced by the active hostility of 'new atheism' in the 2000s, this is no longer the dominant cultural narrative. Instead it has shifted away from hostility to apathy and, eventually, to openness. Over the past decade we have seen not only intellectual figures advocating for the value of Christianity and scripture but also influential people across wider culture – from sport to music and social media – feeling comfortable talking about their faith to wider audiences.

Whether a cause or a consequence, this points towards a shift whereby having a Christian faith is again being normalised and is arguably even culturally attractive. Christianity no longer feels bizarre, nonsensical or embarrassing, as evidenced by the fact that 18–24-year-olds are second only to over-65s in agreeing that they would be 'happy to be seen reading a Bible in public' (at 32%, with 33% disagreeing).

> **"Having a Christian faith is again being normalised and is arguably even culturally attractive**

Alongside this, as we will see in Chapter 3, has been the rise in young Christians feeling confident and comfortable talking about their faith, and the openness among non-Christians to hear from Christians. We are seeing the mutually supportive relationship between wider cultural conversation and personal faith confidence leading to an openness not only to respecting Christian ideas but to participating in Christian communities and practices and, ultimately, experiencing God and thereby being transformed both in belief and behaviour.

The quest for belonging

The second element, we believe, is a deep search for meaning, order and belonging. It has been well documented that the emerging generations are more prone to (and aware of) poor mental health[4], with 58% of 18–24-year-olds in our sample saying they 'frequently feel anxious or depressed', compared to 29% of those aged over 55. There is also research emerging showing them to be less likely to socialise in person than previous generations at the same life stage, and more likely to feel isolated.[5] With the normalisation of Christianity in culture, and the confidence and comfort of Christian friends to share their own faith experience, a large number of young adults now appear to be looking towards the Church as a space for finding healing and community as well as a deeper sense of meaning in their life. As we have already seen this is not purely a case of seeing church as a social club, but as a space of much deeper impact.

As we will see in the Chapter 2, our data suggests that not only are young adults finding personal transformation in the Church, but they are also being inspired to transform their society around them for the better.

> **"A large number of young adults now appear to be looking towards the Church as a space for finding healing and community**

[4] See for example James Tapper's report in the Guardian from March 2024: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/mar/03/whats-up-with-generation-z

[5] See John Burn-Murdoch's analysis of a range of data trends impacting young people and young adults in the Financial Times in January 2025: https://www.ft.com/content/23053544-fede-4c0d-8cda-174e9bdce348

THE QUIET REVIVAL

2

What's the impact of this?

In this chapter, we explore what impact the remarkable rise in churchgoing might have on individuals and communities through outlining the difference churchgoing makes to wellbeing, community connection and social activism. In a time of crisis in mental health, we see churchgoers reporting higher levels of life satisfaction and wellbeing. In a time where people increasingly feel disconnected and lacking in community, church appears to be a space in which people still find a sense of connection. We also see the positive impact churches have in wider communities, with churchgoers significantly more likely to donate to a foodbank, give financially and volunteer their time.

75%
of churchgoers agree their life feels meaningful compared to 49% of non-churchgoers

69%
of churchgoers agree they feel hopeful about their future compared to 46% of non-churchgoers

55%
of churchgoers agree they feel close to the people in their local area compared to 28% of non-churchgoers

Life satisfaction, wellbeing and connection

In the previous chapter, we suggested that one explanation for increased rates of churchgoing, particularly for young people, could lie in the search for meaning, purpose and community. In this chapter we see indications that through Christian faith and church attendance, these things might be found.

We asked our participants a series of questions exploring life satisfaction, wellbeing and connection. Throughout, we see that churchgoers respond significantly more positively across these themes than non-churchgoers.

Life satisfaction

Churchgoers are significantly more likely than non-churchgoers to demonstrate contentment with life – 71% agree 'I'm happy with my life right now', compared to 53% of non-churchgoers. Churchgoers are also notably more likely to consider their lives to be meaningful. Here, the gap between churchgoers and non-churchgoers is even greater, with three-quarters (75%) of churchgoers agreeing 'my life feels meaningful' compared to 49% of non-churchgoers. Curiously, when we explore how people from different religions respond, we do not see anywhere near the levels of agreement we see among active Christians, indicating this high life satisfaction is not a product merely of nominal Christian identity or adherence to another faith. Indeed, there is little difference in responses between non-churchgoing Christians, people with other faiths and people with no religion, with only churchgoers standing out as particularly distinctive.[1]

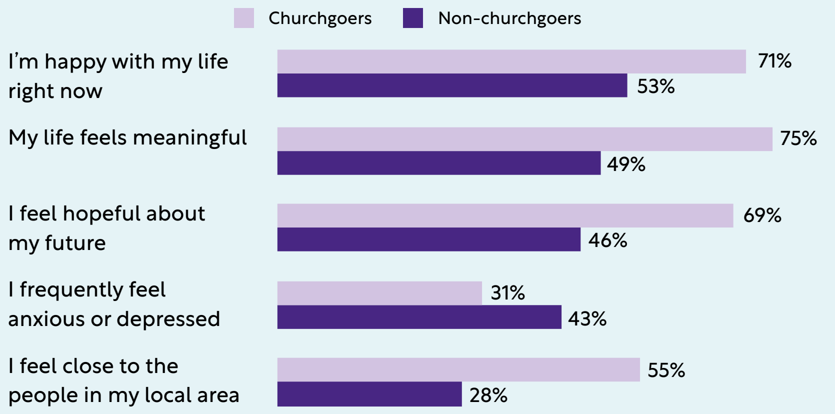
Churchgoers show both the highest levels of hope for their future, and lowest reports of feeling frequently anxious and depressed

Wellbeing

Churchgoers show both the highest levels of hope for their future, and lowest reports of feeling frequently anxious and depressed. Our findings are particularly striking regarding mental health, where we see that churchgoers are notably less likely to agree that they 'frequently feel anxious or depressed' (31%) than non-churchgoers, where agreement is at 43%. Similarly, when it comes to hope, we also see churchgoers are much more likely to agree that they feel hopeful about their future (69%) than the wider population – here, just under half (46%) of non-churchgoers agree.

Churchgoers show higher rates of wellbeing and life-satisfaction than non-churchgoers

Percentage of whole population who agree with the following statements, by churchgoing status



Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: Whole population

Connection

The results we've described for both life satisfaction and wellbeing naturally raise questions about why this should be the case. While at the end of this chapter we briefly outline why we believe it is churchgoing that is significant, and not another factor like educational attainment, definitive answers are beyond the scope of this report. One interesting dimension to explore, however, is the role of community and connection.

Human beings yearn for meaningful connection, and wider research consistently suggests that strong community connection reduces loneliness and improves wellbeing, as well as providing a sense of purpose and belonging.[2] Churches can provide this community through the congregation, but our research indicates they also facilitate a sense of connection to the local community at large.

The fragmentation and atomisation of society is well documented; much has been written on the impact changes in employment patterns, frequent change of place and the loss of community or 'third' spaces such as pubs, libraries and local members' clubs have had on both individuals and communities.[3] In our data we potentially see something of this reflected, as only a minority of adults feel a connection to their local community: just under a third – 31% – agree 'I feel close to the people in my local area', dropping to 24% among those with no religion. Indeed, 44% of adults with no religion actively disagree. In sharp contrast, churchgoers are far more likely to say they feel a community connection, with over half of churchgoers (55%) agreeing they feel close to people in their local area and just 16% disagreeing. Importantly, later in this chapter we will see that churchgoers don't just feel close to local communities, but shape them through tangible social action.

Strong community connection reduces loneliness and improves wellbeing, as well as providing a sense of purpose and belonging

[1] It is important to note we didn't ask about regular religious practice for people of non-Christian faiths. The difference in levels of agreement and disagreement between churchgoers and people of other faiths is usually large, and therefore potentially indicative we would not see the same results. However, given this and all the other compounding factors that shape life satisfaction that we have not been able to control for, conclusions on the difference between churchgoers and people who actively practise another faith must remain open.

[2] 'Social connections' in 'What makes us healthy', People's Health Trust: https://www.peopleshealthtrust.org.uk/health-inequalities/what-makes-us-healthy/social-connections

[3] See for example 'Closure of "third places"? Exploring potential consequences for collective health and wellbeing', National Library of Medicine: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31622919/ ;
'"Third places": The ways losing our local haunts hurts us', BBC Worklife: https://www.bbc.co.uk/worklife/article/20210428-third-places-how-losing-responsibility-free-zones-hurts-us

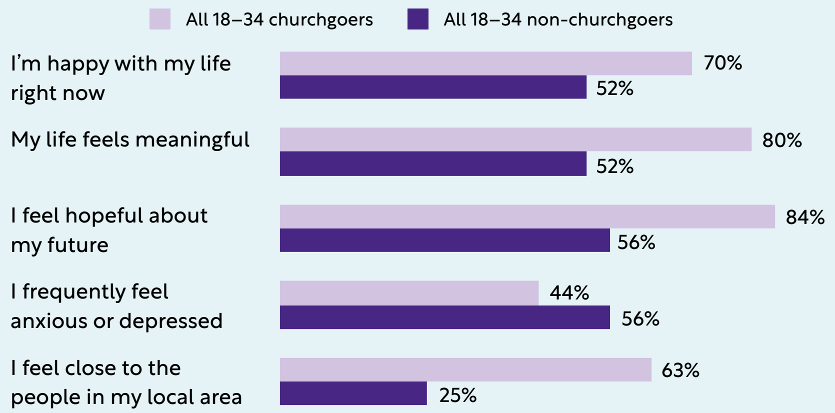
> Young churchgoers are significantly more likely to agree that life feels meaningful

Young adults

From improved wellbeing to greater life satisfaction and community connection, we can see there are likely to be many benefits from actively engaging with Christianity. Here we need to return to young adults. While they are a generation thought to be at risk of loneliness and isolation, multiple data sources suggest they are also often proactive in cultivating self-improvement, holistic wellbeing (including the spiritual), and community.[4] In what would have seemed unthinkable for the older millennial generation at the same age, many are finding these within the Church. Indeed, young churchgoers follow the pattern noted above – they are significantly more likely to agree they are happy with life, that life feels meaningful and they feel close to their local community than non-churchgoing peers.

Young churchgoers have higher rates of life satisfaction and wellbeing than their non-churchgoing peers

Percentage of 18–34-year-olds who agree with the following statements, by churchgoing status



Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: 18–34-year-olds

Gender

Given the significance of gender on churchgoing we observed in the first chapter, it's worth now considering whether gender nuances this picture further, and whether the impact of churchgoing varies between young men and women. For the most part, both sexes agree or disagree across these statements at similar rates, depending on whether they

[4] See for example: 'What is the future of wellness?' McKinsey & Company: https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-the-future-of-wellness ; 'The top wellness trends in 2024', McKinsey & Company: https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/the-trends-defining-the-1-point-8-trillion-dollar-global-wellness-market-in-2024 ; 'Self-care and Gen Z: How are young people protecting their mental health in 2024?', Pion: https://www.wearepion.com/blog-posts/self-care-gen-z-mental-health

are churchgoers or not. However, in two areas, gender appears to be significant: mental health and connection to community.

Mirroring wider data sets that generally report worse mental health rates among young women, women aged 18–34 in our survey are more likely than male peers to agree that they frequently feel anxious or depressed, with 61% agreeing, compared to 48% of men. These figures are shockingly high and far above reported statistics for mental health diagnosis.

For both men and women, churchgoing appears to reduce agreement compared to non-churchgoers, but the difference is most striking among women: here we see a 21 point difference between young female churchgoers (42%) and non-churchgoers (63%). Indeed, this is so significant that churchgoing appears to close the mental health gap between men and women, with young churchgoing women less like to agree they frequently feel anxious or depressed than non-churchgoing men (49%). It must be noted, however, that 42% of young churchgoing women (and indeed 45% of young churchgoing men) is still high and something the Church must take note of.[5]

Given the wider picture of positive impact that churches appear to be having, we can reflect on this finding in two ways. Firstly, churches can listen to and learn from their young congregants to understand both what has worked and what is still needed to improve mental health. Secondly, wider society and decision makers must consider the significance of this relationship, and begin to work with churches and faith groups in their response to the mental health crisis. We will return to this in Chapter 4.

While church attendance is particularly notable for its impact on the mental health of young women, for young men the most striking difference it makes is in connection to community. As we saw above, churchgoers are notably more likely than non-churchgoers to say that 'I feel close to the people in my local area', agreeing at 63% and 25% respectively. Remarkably, when it comes to young men, the difference between churchgoers and non-churchgoers is even larger, driven by particularly high agreement among churchgoers: here, 68% agree compared to just 27% of young non-churchgoing men. Young churchgoing women are in line with the churchgoing average. This is intriguing, and within our data there is no obvious answer as to why this should be the case.

> **68%**
> **of male churchgoers aged 18–34 say they feel closer to the people in their local area, compared to 27% of non-churchgoing young men**

Social activism

From all we've outlined above, it seems church has a significant positive impact on individuals. Given the wider societal challenges of loneliness and poor mental health, this alone is notable, particularly in light of the church growth we observed in the previous chapter. In this section, however, we see that Christianity also has an impact on communities,

[5] While this is higher than young churchgoing women, it is the difference between churchgoers and non-churchgoers we wish to draw attention to. Among non-churchgoing 18–34-year-old men, agreement is 49%.

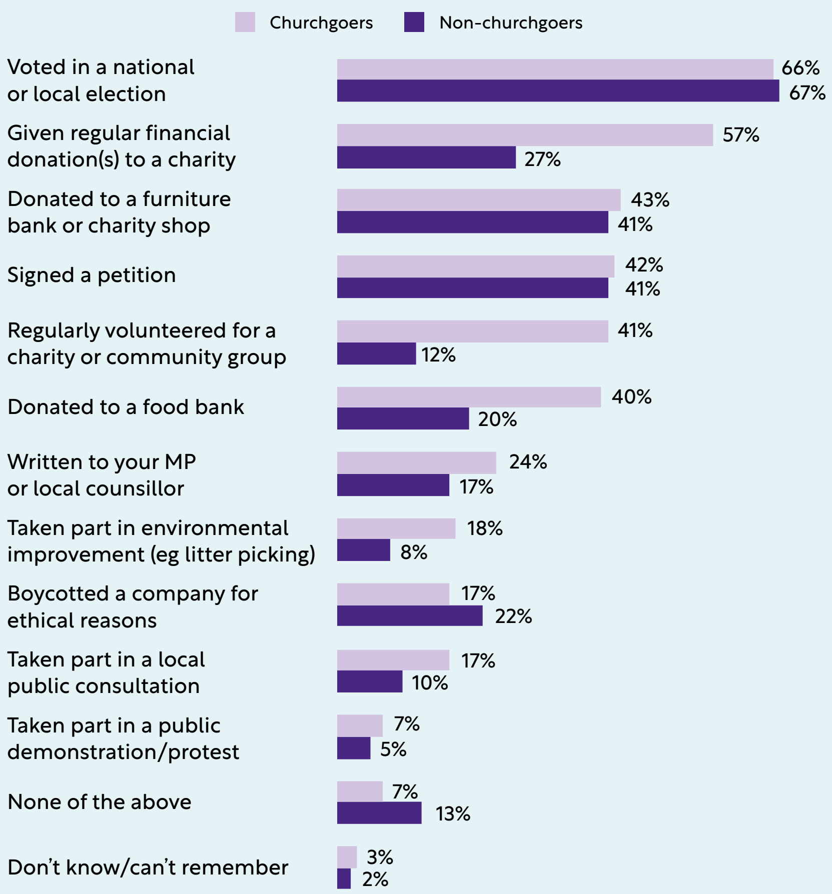
with churchgoers as a cohort both more likely than non-churchgoers to desire social change and more likely to engage in social activism activities.

Beginning with desire for change, we see over half of adults (57%) agree 'it's important to me to try to make a difference in the world', with agreement highest among 18–24-year-olds and gradually decreasing as age increases. Churchgoers again show agreement far above average, with 79% agreeing to some extent, compared to 53% of those with no religion.

To understand how desire for change, life satisfaction, and wellbeing might impact on behaviour, we asked our participants whether they had undertaken any social activism style activities in the past year from a predefined list. Overall, 85% said they had done at least one activity, with the most common activities being voting, signing a petition, or donating to a furniture bank or charity shop. Churchgoers show similarly high engagement across the list, but they are significantly more likely to say they have given regular financial donations to a charity organisation, volunteered their time, donated to a foodbank, or taken part in environmental improvements like a litter pick.

How do churchgoers undertake social activism?

Percentage of whole population who have done the following in the past 12 months, by churchgoing status



Question: Which, if any, of the following have you done in the last 12 months? Please select all that apply

Base: Whole population

Importantly, social engagement rates are also high among young churchgoers, who are more likely than non-churchgoing peers to have volunteered, financially given to charity, donated to a food bank or taken part in environmental improvements. Church growth is not just something of statistical interest, or a good news story for Christianity. Rather, the Church impacts and shapes communities, and is likely to continue to do so. Churches of all denominations must therefore continue to be consulted as actors in local communities. In the following chapter, we ask how the Bible is faring in this period of change, but before this, we can dive a little deeper into what more advanced statistical modelling shows of the relationship between wellbeing, life satisfaction, connection and active Christianity.

A brief deeper dive

Measuring wellbeing and life satisfaction is complex and influenced by many factors such as health, relationships, employment (and related poverty), and experiences of discrimination, as well as cultural influences on how these kinds of questions are answered (i.e. whether some groups feel more pressure, even anonymously, to answer these kinds of questions positively). It's not possible in our survey to explore all the possible factors that could be influence these results, but we were able to undertake linear and logistic regressions that controlled for age, gender, education and ethnicity. Even after taking into account these factors, the patterns remained consistent. This modelling approach gives us the confidence to more accurately identify the role of churchgoing in shaping these outcomes, independent of factors like education.

One of the most interesting things we saw was that when all other factors are accounted for, non-churchgoing Christians have significantly worse outcomes on life satisfaction and wellbeing compared to not only churchgoers but also to people with no religion – who as we've already said have worse outcomes than churchgoers. Throughout this report we see there are notable differences in attitudes, beliefs and behaviours between active and non-practising Christians. When we add in life satisfaction and wellbeing, we add depth to this picture.

Non-practising Christians are people who hold a Christian identity without a significant church connection. For many, this will be because being Christian is part of a package of beliefs, a part of being British, or because of their family has always identified in that way. Our survey can't answer why non-practising Christians are more likely to be struggling with life satisfaction and wellbeing, but given that the decline of Christian identity as a default is one of the most notable changes of the past 50 years, it may indicate feelings of dissatisfaction with social changes more generally, or feeling out of step, a loss of place and loss of certainty more widely. Either way, those who study society, identity, and belonging, must consider the role of nominal religious identity, as well as practising communities.

> **"There are notable differences in attitudes, beliefs and behaviours between active and non-practising Christians**

THE QUIET REVIVAL

3

How's the Bible faring?

Reflecting the rise in church attendance, the 2024 data shows a rise in rates of Bible reading in England and Wales, while among the general population attitudes to its place in life remain steady. Overall, for most in our survey, the Bible retains some importance for public and cultural life, but is largely lacking in personal relevance. Among churchgoers, we see increased Bible engagement, but significant discipleship needs remain in deepening Bible confidence, particularly among young Christians.

79%

of adults in England and Wales hardly ever or never read the Bible

44%

of adults in England and Wales own a Bible

The most common words to describe the Bible:

Outdated (32%)

Contradictory (27%)

Guidance (25%)

The Bible in England and Wales today

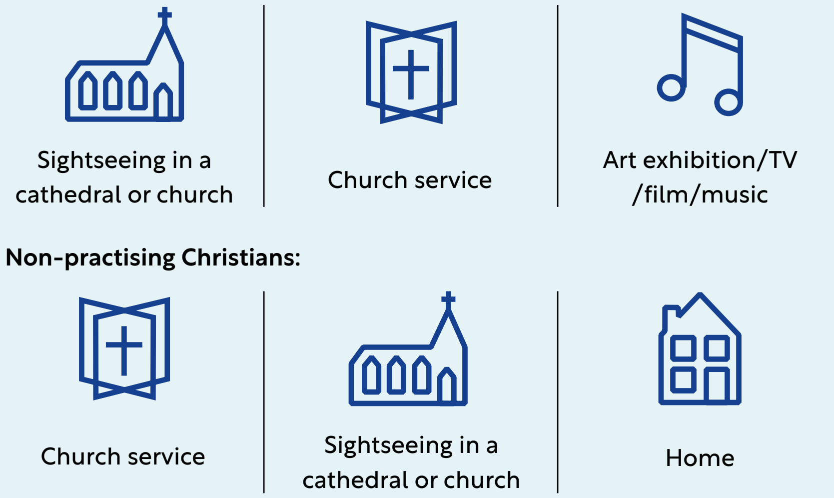
It's clear from the previous chapters that the Church is undergoing dramatic change, experiencing growth in both attendance and diversity. For those interested in Christian practice and formation, this will naturally raise questions as to what this means for how churchgoers relate to the Bible. The second half of this chapter examines this, noting both positive change and the continued need for discipleship, but first we explore how the Bible is faring in society as a whole.

Overall, regular Bible reading is uncommon outside of the active Church community. Of adults in England and Wales, 79% say they hardly ever or never read the Bible, rising to 96% of those who say they have no religion.[1] Among Christians, Bible reading is highly associated with other active Christian behaviour – just 8% of non-churchgoing Christians say they read the Bible weekly, compared to 67% of churchgoers.

Adults in England and Wales are also unlikely to encounter the Bible in everyday life unless they are practising Christians. While a majority of adults (60%) say they've encountered the Bible during school or university, for non-churchgoers the likelihood of encountering the Bible frequently in adulthood is much lower. When the Bible is engaged with by non-churchgoers, it is most likely to be at church services (including special occasions such as weddings) or when sightseeing at churches or cathedrals.

> “
> **Adults in England and Wales are unlikely to encounter the Bible in everyday life unless they are practising Christians**

Top three places to encounter the Bible



The relevance crisis

Despite low levels of Bible reading, most adults are not neutral toward the Bible. One of the most significant themes tracked by our survey is whether people believe the Bible to be relevant. We do this through tracking three dimensions of relevance:

- whether the Bible has relevance as a *cultural artefact*, given its influence on art, historical events and past generations
- whether the Bible has some more *general relevance* to life or society today in a way which extends beyond its cultural value alone
- whether it is seen as *personally* relevant

Through tracking these dimensions we see that the Bible is not seen by the population as something only relevant to practising Christians.

[1] Bible reading questions were optional in the survey. Approximately 3% of the sample refused the questions. Figures shown are calculated with refusals removed.

Instead, we see signs of appreciation for its cultural value, and even that it has something to offer society at large. Importantly, results are largely the same in 2024 as 2018, suggesting attitudes to the Bible are not getting cooler but rather appear to be steady.

Cultural value

The majority of adults in England and Wales (60%) believe it's good for children to know at least some stories from the Bible, while just 15% disagree, consistent with results in 2018. While younger adults are more likely to disagree than the population average, still just over half of 18–34s agree, suggesting some continued recognition that there is something of value in knowing the Bible. On who should teach children, people don't expect this to be solely churches or even parents; 41% of adults agree the Bible should be taught in schools, while 28% disagree.

> **60%**
> **of adults in England and Wales believe it's good for children to know at least some stories from the Bible**

General relevance

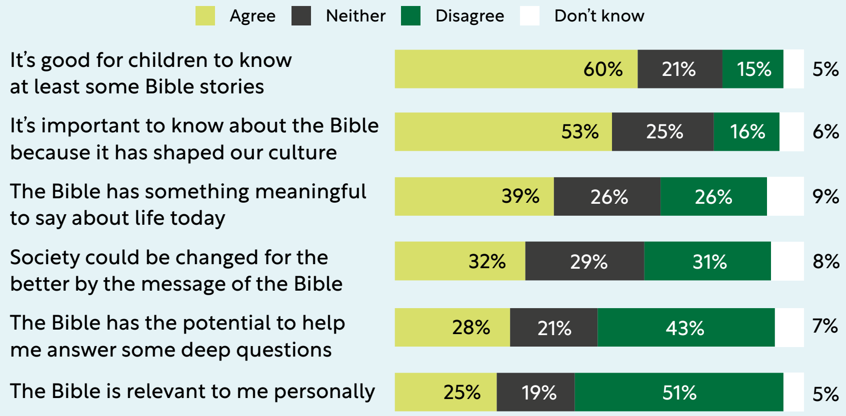
A considerable minority of the population also believe the Bible has some general relevance. 39% agree 'the Bible has something meaningful to say about life today' while 26% disagree, and nearly a third agree 'society could be changed for the better by the message of the Bible'. On both of these statements, agreement is marginally up from 2018.

Personal relevance

If the Bible is seen as having some cultural and social relevance, when it comes to personal relevance agreement is notably lower. Only 28% of the population agree the Bible has 'the potential to help me answer some deep questions', with 43% disagreeing. More alarmingly still, more than half of the population (51%) disagree that 'the Bible is relevant to me personally', with only 25% agreeing. While one in four adults claiming the Bible is personally relevant is not an inconsiderable number – and is twice as many as are in church each month – for those who wish to see more people encounter the Bible, the challenge of personal relevance must be a priority.

A sliding scale of relevance

Percentage of the whole population who agree or disagree with the following statements



Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: Whole population

67%

of churchgoing Christians read the Bible at least weekly, up from 54% in 2018

22%

of churchgoing Christians read the Bible less than monthly

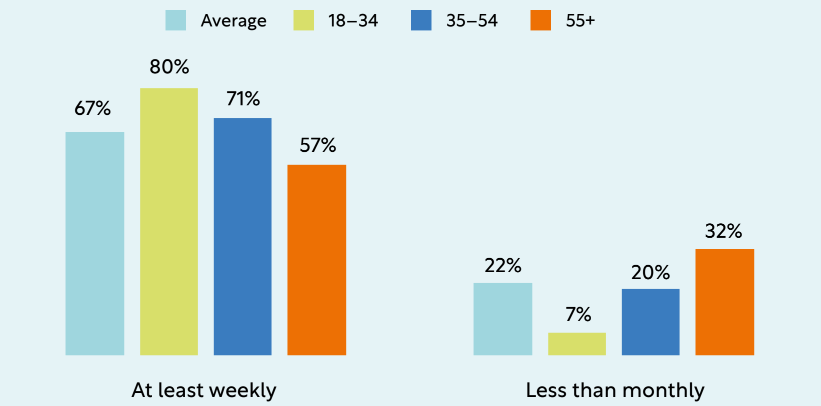
The Bible in church

Bible reading among adults in England and Wales has doubled since 2018, with 12% of the population now saying they read the Bible outside of church services weekly or more, compared to 6% six years earlier.[2] This rise is largely accounted for through the rise in churchgoing. However, it is not just down to an increase in attendance, as Bible reading rates have also increased among churchgoers. In 2018, 54% of churchgoers said they read the Bible at least weekly. In 2024, this had risen to 67%. This rise is reflected across denominations, suggesting again a more religiously active Church than in previous years. Rates of Bible reading among non-churchgoers remain largely unchanged.

Within the Church, the highest rates of Bible reading are within Baptist, Independent Evangelical, New Churches, and Pentecostal expressions, all of which show weekly Bible reading at around 90%. The lowest weekly Bible reading rates are among Anglicans and Catholics, at 61% and 56% respectively. Overall, 22% of churchgoing Christians say they read the Bible less than monthly outside of church services. Again, we see indications of a generational change within the Church, as weekly Bible reading is far more common among young churchgoers.

Younger churchgoers read the Bible more often than older churchgoers

How often churchgoers read or listen to the Bible outside of a church service, by age group



Question: How often do you normally read or listen to/hear the Bible outside of a church service (e.g. at home or elsewhere)?

Base: Churchgoing Christians

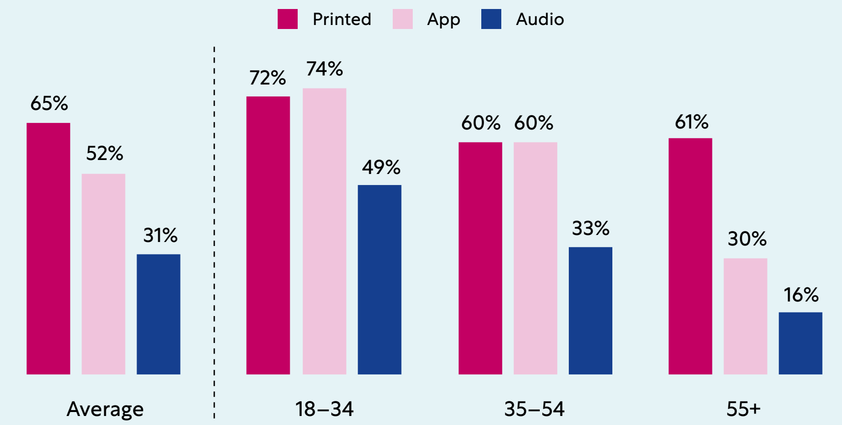
Printed Bibles vs apps

When it comes to how churchgoers read the Bible, we might expect to see Bible apps displace traditional printed Bibles, particularly among younger generations. However, our data suggests there is still a place for printed as well as digital Bibles. Overall, printed Bibles remain the most frequently used medium used to access the Bible, with around two-thirds of churchgoers who read the Bible saying they use a printed Bible at least weekly. Churchgoers aged 18–34 are the age group most likely to use an app to read the Bible, but like 35–54-year-olds, they use printed Bibles almost as often. Fascinatingly, young Christians are the group most likely to engage with the Bible regularly through audio recordings, perhaps mirroring wider social trends of younger people engaging with content on the move.

[2] Unless otherwise stated, Bible reading refers to weekly or more reading (or listening) outside of church services.

Most churchgoers still use a printed version of the Bible as well as an app

Percentage of churchgoing Bible readers who read/listen to the Bible in the following formats at least weekly, by age group



Question: How often do you read/listen to the Bible in the following formats? (e.g. at home or elsewhere)?

Base: Churchgoing Christians who read the Bible

Discipleship and the Bible

Bible reading is one indicator of its positive place in the church community, but on its own this only tells a limited story. In addition, we can explore Bible confidence through three dimensions: Heart (the place of the Bible in spiritual emotional life), Hands (the impact the Bible has on how people act), and Head (the ability to navigate, understand and interpret the Bible. When seen through these dimensions it's clear that for a significant proportion of the Church – approximately a third – there are real challenges around the Head confidence of handling the Bible, and the Hands confidence of applying it to life and speaking about it with others.

Heart confidence

Churchgoers as a whole demonstrate a strong emotional connection to the Bible. The words they are most likely to use about it are wisdom (57%), guidance (53%), hope (52%) and truth (52%), and 9 out of 10 (89%) agree 'the Bible is relevant to me personally'. For the majority of churchgoers, the Bible also has impact on their spiritual life: 78% agree 'I feel closer to God when I read the Bible', rising to 87% of churchgoers aged 18–34.

> **"Young Christians are most likely to engage with the Bible regularly through audio recordings**

32%

of churchgoers say they find understanding the language or meaning of the Bible fairly or very challenging

34%

of churchgoers agree 'I worry about being wrong when I talk about the Bible'

32%

of churchgoers are not confident they could find relevant passages in the Bible

Hands confidence

When it comes to bringing the Bible outside the personal-spiritual realm many Christians demonstrate greater uncertainty. Applying what they've read or heard in the Bible to everyday life is fairly or very challenging, say 38%, while around a fifth say they are not confident they could apply the Bible to their personal life (21%) or situations and challenges in work life (20%).

Head confidence

Just under a third of churchgoers (32%) report low confidence that they can find relevant passages, while 29% say they find it fairly or very challenging knowing where to begin. A similar proportion (32%) likewise say they find understanding the language or meaning of the Bible fairly or very challenging. Low confidence in this dimension also impacts on how missionally confident Christians are. While churchgoers are not embarrassed about the Bible – the vast majority (82%) of churchgoers would be happy to be seen reading a Bible in public – their confidence to speak about the Bible from a place of informed knowledge is notably lower. Indeed, just over a third (34%) of churchgoers agree that 'I worry about being wrong when I talk about the Bible', while 29% say they are not confident they could answer questions about the Bible from someone who isn't a Christian.

The confidence of youth

In general, Bible confidence across Heart, Head and Hands is higher among young Christians, particularly those aged 25–34, supporting observations of religious vibrancy within this emerging generation. In the previous chapter we suggested the religious atmosphere young Christians are being formed in has changed, with faith being somewhat culturally normalised, if still something practised by a minority. While we can't infer simple cause and effect, it is particularly interesting that the 18–34-year-old Christians in our sample are more confident to talk about their faith: a huge 80% of them say they are confident they could answer questions about the Bible from a non-Christian, with just 13% saying they're not confident. Among over-55s, 55% are confident they could answer questions, while 40% are not confident. Again, we see indications that this is a generation confident in their faith, and if this translates to action, this confidence is likely to impact those around them. Yet this confidence does not mean a ceiling has been reached. Young churchgoers show significant desire for the Bible: 90% of 18–34-year-old churchgoers are interested in discovering more about it.

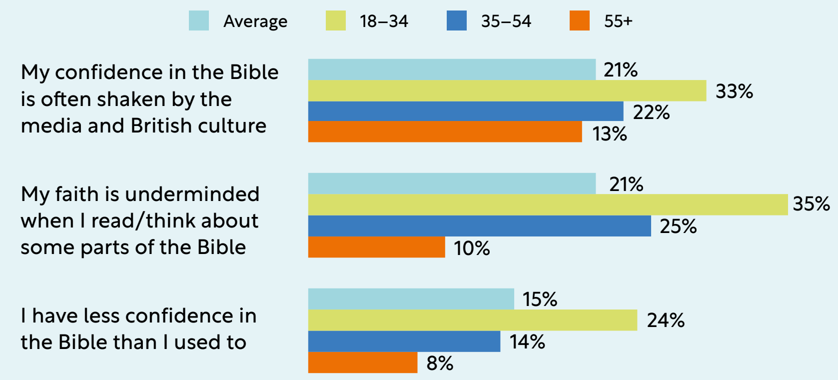
The need for discipleship

However, our data also reveals a discipleship need. Despite their Bible confidence and high Bible engagement rates, the young Christians in our sample report finding the Bible challenging at higher rates than older Christians, particularly in the dimension of Head confidence: 42% of 18–34s say they find understanding the language or meaning fairly or very challenging (compared to 24% of over-55s), while 42% say they find knowing where to begin similarly challenging (compared to 19% of over-55s).

This difference could be interpreted as a lack of experience, but we do see a warning that the need could be deeper: 35% of 18–34s agree that 'my faith is undermined when I read/think about some parts of the Bible' compared to 14% of churchgoers over 35. Equally, 33% of 18–34s say their confidence in the Bible is often shaken by the media and British culture, compared to 16% of over-35s. Perhaps most concerningly, just under a quarter (24%) of younger people say they have less confidence in the Bible than they used to (10% in over-35s). Our survey does not explain why this is the case, but we do see that compared to older age groups, younger Christians seem to find learning about the Bible more challenging. Among those aged 18–34, 39% say they find it fairly or very challenging 'finding appropriate Bible resources and guides' (compared to 22% of over-35s), while 44% say they find it challenging 'finding people to learn from/with', compared to 25% of older churchgoers.

How does Bible confidence vary by age?

Percentage of churchgoers who agree or disagree with the following statements



Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: Churchgoing Christians

Why does any of this matter?

These results are deeply significant for Christians. The Bible is the foundational text of the Christian faith, a place of spiritual encounter, of history and inspiration. When Christians lack the ability to access, navigate and understand it, both individuals and the Church as a whole are weakened. When they lack the confidence to speak about it, the Bible flourishes less in churches; but also, opportunities for positive Bible encounter diminish for those outside the practising Christian community and the Bible remains perceived as remote and irrelevant to everyday life.

As a result, the appetite for the Bible demonstrated here, along with the astonishing growth in churchgoing we described in the previous chapter, should be a great encouragement to the Christian community. In the following chapter we will see how there is further scope for expanding the Bible's reach within the population at large. Growing Bible confidence for all generations must now be a discipleship priority, so that the possibilities of this cultural moment can be fully realised.

24%

of younger people say they have less confidence in the Bible than they used to

THE QUIET REVIVAL

4

What next?

Alongside an increase in churchgoing, we are seeing warmth to Christianity and the Bible across the population. This data shows interest and openness towards engagement with Church, the Bible, and faith more generally – once again, particularly among young adults. This creates an enormous opportunity for churches and Christian organisations, and our research shows that relationships must be at the heart of this.

31%

of non-churchgoers say they would attend if invited by a friend or family member – including 34% of 18–24 year olds

18%

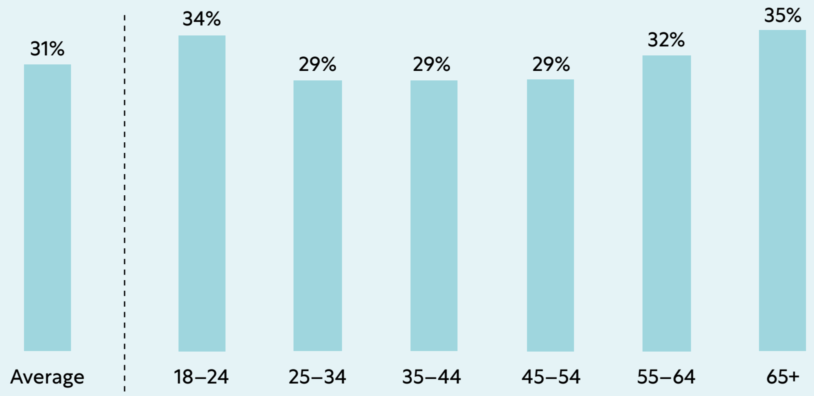
of non-churchgoers are interested in finding out more about the Bible

Openness to church

In Chapter 1 we showed the remarkable rise not only in church attendance but also Christian beliefs and practices among these new attenders, particularly among the youngest group we heard from. Yet the spiritual shift does not stop at the church doors. Rather, we see openness even among non-churchgoers towards Christianity and the Bible. This suggests that the shift in the spiritual climate that's helped to bring new people into church is not limited to those who have crossed the threshold, but is being felt across society.

More than a third of young non-churchgoers would attend if invited

Percentage of non-churchgoers who would attend a church service if invited by a friend, by age group



Question: Apart from weddings, baptisms/christenings, and funerals, would you attend a church service if you were invited by a friend?

Base: non-churchgoers

When we asked non-churchgoers whether they would be open to attending a church service if they were invited by a friend or family member, close to a third (31%) said that they would be – and once again, 18–24-year-olds were more open (34%) than any group other than the over-65s (35%). This presents the remarkable possibility that our data does not yet show the peak of church attendance among young adults, and with a bit more intentionality from existing Christians we may yet see an even greater growth.

Openness to the Bible

When we look at the Bible we see similar trends, with 26% of the population saying they would be interested in discovering more about the Bible, including 18% of non-churchgoers. This equates to around 6.8 million adults across England and Wales, who aren't already in church regularly, being open to learning more about the Bible. Again, it is striking to see that the youngest group are the warmest here, with 37% of 18–24s and 32% of 25–34-year-olds saying they would be interested. Both these figures put younger people far ahead of any other group and are significant increases on their 2018 figures, both of which stood at 23%. There is therefore not only a spiritual openness but also a curiosity that exists among young adults to engage further.

When we dig into the reasoning behind this openness to the Bible, among 18–24-year-olds who were interested but aren't currently churchgoers we see that while the most frequent reason was being 'curious about what it says' (36%), over a quarter (26%) say that learning more about the Bible would 'help [them] grow spiritually'.

36%

of 18–24-year-olds say they're interested in discovering more about the Bible

THE QUIET REVIVAL

Finally, we asked those who were interested how they would best like to find out about the Bible. Highest among 18-34-year-old non-churchgoers was good resources, with 29% saying they would appreciate 'something that breaks the Bible down into manageable pieces' and 23% saying they would want 'something that helps relate the Bible to everyday life'. Beyond resources, however, relationship and conversations were key, with 'talking with people who hold similar spiritual beliefs and perspectives to me' being chosen by 23%.

Openness to experience

This openness is not limited to personal engagement but extends out to experience and dialogue with others. Just under two-thirds (63%) of 18–24-year-old non-churchgoers say they would be happy for a Christian friend to pray for them compared to 52% of those aged over 55. Likewise, 47% of 18–24-year-old non-churchgoers agree that it's a positive thing for Christians to talk about their faith with non-Christians, again comfortably the warmest age group. We see here again that even among those young adults who aren't currently attending church, there is a remarkable level of spiritual openness and comfort with Christian practice and conversation. It's clear there is an enormous opportunity here for Christian organisations, churches and individuals to further engage younger generations.

The importance of relationships

In previous chapters, we outlined how openness to and engagement with Christianity is connected to a warmer cultural atmosphere to faith. We've outlined how Christians seem to feel increasingly confident to talk about their faith, and we have seen how non-Christians believe this to be a good thing. This is significant, as our data shows that it is personal relationships, not media influencers, which appear to have the greater potential for impact among non-churchgoers.

We have already seen that many non-churchgoers are open to Christian friends praying for them and inviting them to church services, but we also see that 19% of non-churchgoers say that they would read the Bible if family and friends they trusted recommended it. This drops notably, however, when this is shifted towards recommendations from 'celebrities and thinkers' they trusted, with only 9% of non-Christians saying they would try reading the Bible.

When we look at young people we interestingly see the same trend, albeit again with greater warmth. Of non-churchgoers aged 18–24, 23% say they would read the Bible if recommended by family and friends, while 15% say they would if a celebrity or thinker recommended it. Even among the generation typically seen as most heavily affected by social media influencers, therefore, it is in conversations and personal relationships that people seek to deepen their understanding of Scripture and faith.

47%

of 18–24-year-old non-churchgoers agree that it's a positive thing for Christians to talk about their faith with non-Christians

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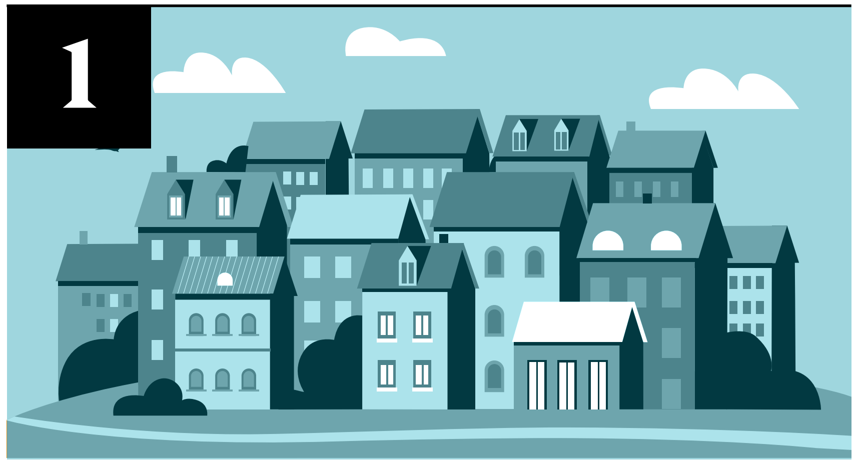
There is a fresh openness from non-churchgoers – and in particular young people

Recommendations

When we combine these findings with those presented earlier in the report we see great cause for optimism across the Church. For decades the assumption has been that while it may not die out completely, churchgoing is on a long, steady and unavoidable trajectory of decline, with each generation gradually less engaged than their predecessors. Christianity in turn would continue to recede from the public space, becoming increasingly irrelevant.

However, this data turns these presumptions on their heads. Not only is churchgoing and religious engagement on the rise, but there is a fresh openness from non-churchgoers – and in particular young people – to encountering Christianity, the Church, and the Bible. At the same time these churchgoers are not detached from wider society but are actively seeking to make a positive difference in their communities, both locally and more widely. While many had sensed that there was something different about this generation of young adults, and stories of new believers have not been uncommon over the past few years, this is the first time that this movement of God across England and Wales has been evidenced.

In the light of these findings, we have four major recommendations. Three of them are specifically addressed to the Church and Christian organisations, but first, this data also needs to serve as a clear wake-up call to wider society – in particular to those who make decisions and shape policy.



Recognise the scale and impact of churchgoing

This data proves the continuing and growing presence of active Christians across England and Wales. One in eight adults – a high proportion of these young adults – are now attending church monthly. At comfortably over five million people even without counting children and young people, this is a sizeable proportion of the population. This group is also disproportionately ethnically diverse, with churchgoers present across not just generations but communities.

THE QUIET REVIVAL

This fact alone should encourage leaders across politics, business, culture, education and all other areas of society to be to be more conscious of the existence of churchgoers as a distinct presence in society, and importantly to recognise the complex and deep distinctions between churchgoing and nominal Christians. There is much focus today on what is needed to build healthy communities, particularly in the planning of new towns. It is essential that places of worship including churches have a place within these conversations, and that faith communities form a core part of the consultation processes.

However, this is not just about policymakers being aware of the presence of churchgoers. The report also demonstrates the positive impact church attendance has on their mental wellbeing, and the positive impact churchgoers are having on their wider communities. Those involved in community cohesion and mental health support should seek to work closely with churches and explore how they could involve churches within their work – for example through the route of social prescribing [1] – to the benefit of all of society.

Within the Church, these findings should trigger excitement – but they also need to be a springboard for action. There are three areas to focus on here: discipleship and Bible engagement; intergenerational listening; and the importance of relationships.

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The report demonstrates the positive impact church attendance has on mental wellbeing

Prioritise discipleship and growing Bible confidence

All Christians are on a lifelong journey and are in need of spiritual development, companionship, and discipleship, but this can be particularly valuable for those who are new to faith or returning after a long absence. While age is not an indicator of spiritual maturity, the specific rise in attendance among young adults combined with their lower view of the credibility of Scripture suggests that there is a particular need for discipleship work with this age group.

[1] 'Creating a Neighbourhood Health Service', Theos: https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/Report---Creating-a-Neigbourhood-Health-Service.pdf

At the heart of this is confidence in engaging with, experiencing, and applying the Bible across their lives. As shown in Chapter 3, there are opportunities for growth across all the identified areas of Bible confidence – Head, Heart and Hands. As Christians grow in their confidence with the Bible, it will equip them not only to experience change in their own lives but to begin to speak into and act within their local and wider culture in new ways. They will bring a fresh conversation about and experience of the Bible across society and will further impact this open generation. This is how Scripture-inspired change can sweep across society. But in order to do this, churches, Christian organisations and more experienced Christians will need to come alongside these new churchgoers to help grow their understanding of, experience with, and confidence in the Bible.

Make space for intentional intergenerational conversation

For this to be effective, this must be a mutual and intergenerational conversation to learn from and alongside those who are new to churchgoing. Each new churchgoer will have their own story and will be able to contribute towards building a better understanding not only of what is causing these phenomena but also what the church can learn from them in continuing to engage new people. This in turn enables them to grow within the church community, and empowers them to positively impact the Church and society. Churches are arguably the strongest truly intergenerational spaces in society, and they will be strengthened by fostering cultures of mutual listening and learning. Through these conversations churches will grow in size and in wisdom, to the benefit not only of those already within the community, but also those who are outside looking in with interest and longing and – in turn – society as a whole.

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Each new churchgoer will have their own story

Build on interpersonal relationships

Finally, connected to this is the importance in any response and action emerging from this data of authentic interpersonal relationships. As this chapter has shown, across the board we see that recommendations from loved ones are perceived as more impactful in leading non-churchgoers to engage with the Bible than those coming from figures in wider culture. Openness from high-profile Christians has contributed to a confidence and comfort among Christians to talk about their faith and an openness from non-Christians to hear about this faith. We cannot, though, lose sight of the power of deep, personal relationships. It might be that invitation, recommendation or conversation about faith which shifts someone from being curious and open to being engaged in Scripture, Church and a life of faith. The Church can be bolder in equipping their congregations to identify and respond to opportunities to extend invitations to and start conversations with non-Christians friends, confident not in knowing the 'correct' answer to every possible question but in the strength of the relationship. This will look different in each situation, and there will be no set script, but conversations should be driven by a heart of compassion and authentic connection. This report should provide encouragement that the culture is shifting, and hearts are softening again towards the power of Christianity and the Bible.

In this report we have purposely avoided making predictions for the future. It is clearly impossible to say whether this 'Quiet Revival' will continue for years or even generations, or whether it will fade into insignificance. However, it is indisputable that right now – after decades of reported decline – the Church in England and Wales is growing in numbers, more people are reading the Bible and the climate is warmer towards faith than it has been for many years. The tide of faith is coming in again, and the Church needs to adjust, with vision, prayer, and action, to a new and strangely hopeful reality.

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We cannot lose sight of the power of deep, personal relationships

FAQs

Is this just down to immigration?

In short, no. The Church in England and Wales in undeniably changing shape and becoming more diverse, just as Britain as a whole is becoming more diverse. However, the growth in churchgoing among young people is seen at scale among young White people. While these could all be migrants, at the scale we're seeing it seems highly unlikely.

It is worth noting that in between the surveys new census data was made available, which means the sampling targets were changed between the waves to ensure the sample reflects the most up-to-date view of what England and Wales looks like. This has primarily impacted how many people of Black, Asian, and other Minority Ethnicities are in the sample. As people in these ethnic groups are more likely to be Christian, this has naturally had an effect on the shape of the data, particularly when it comes to averages, and some of the trends we observe reflect this. This is not problematic, and indeed, gives us a better picture of the Church today, but we have exercised caution in drawing comparisons between the 2018 and 2024 waves when it comes to ethnicity trends outside of the white population.

Is the methodology sound?

Yes, both surveys we draw from are based on large, representative samples from one of the country's leading research companies. Both sample sizes give a 1% margin of error at a 99% confidence level, meaning they are highly reliable. While minor changes were made to the questionnaire between the 2018 and 2024 waves, all questions used for comparison have remained the same, and the surveys were conducted under the same conditions at the same time of year.

For more information see https://yougov.co.uk/about/panel-methodology

Could there be something about the sample?

In polling research we are always reliant on trusting that what participants say is a true reflection of what they think and how they act. While it is possible participants may not be answering truthfully, or have misunderstood our questions, we would need to question in turn why these effects have only become observed in 2024, and not previous survey waves. All research panels have bias, and non-probability sampling is always at risk of producing a non-representative sample. It is also theoretically possible the sample has polled a disproportionate number of young Christians. At this sample size, and the way the YouGov panel is built and maintained, this is again highly unlikely.

THE QUIET REVIVAL

For many decades now, the general assumption has been that Christianity in England and Wales, and in particular churchgoing, is in irreversible decline.

From the sociological insistence in the 1960s that secularisation was inevitable and the new atheism of the 2000s, through to the more recent findings from the 2021 census showing the evident collapse of Christian identity, the story seems clear – Christianity, particularly active Christianity, is on the way out.

There has, however, been a growing body of evidence over the last few years telling a different story. This story is one of a change in the spiritual weather. More public figures have warmed to Christianity. Young people are exploring faith. There is less hostility to religion. Firm numbers, though, have been hard to come by – until now.

Using nationally representative data from a prestigious polling agency, *The Quiet Revival* demonstrates that far from declining, the Church has been growing since at least 2018. In particular we see that 'Gen Z' young adults are more likely to attend church regularly than any generation ahead of them bar the over-65s, and in particular we see that young men are attending in remarkable numbers. The Church is transforming before our eyes, and the figures presented in this report show the proof.

This fact has implications both for civil society and for Christian denominations, networks and congregations. It is hard to overstate its importance both for our national self-understanding and for the Church's understanding of itself.

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