



NEW ZEALANDERS AND THE BIBLE

2017 Bible Engagement Survey



INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

New Zealand's religious landscape is changing rapidly. With the reduction in the percentage of the population identifying as Christian, the growth of other religions and the increasing number of those specifying 'no religion', New Zealand has become far more religiously diverse in recent decades.

Considering this significant change, we can assume that the place of the Bible in the lives of New Zealanders has changed also.

To test this assumption, Bible Society, through this and previous surveys, is seeking to discover how many New Zealanders today engage with the world's best-selling book of all time.

The first time Bible Society conducted this type of survey was in 2008. Since then the survey has been repeated several times, with the 2017 survey including some expanded answers to achieve a more in-depth understanding of responses. For this reason, not all responses can be compared easily with previous years.

The data from this survey assists Bible Society in achieving our mission of helping make the Bible accessible to

everyone and encouraging interaction with it. But it also has significance for the whole Christian Church in New Zealand. The survey measures levels of Bible ownership and use, as well as how much the Bible influences the lives of New Zealanders.

The survey was conducted by Nielsen in February 2017 through the SSI online survey panel and was answered by 1,208 people over 13 years of age. The results are weighted by age, gender and region to be representative of the New Zealand population. The most recent previous edition of this survey was completed in May of 2013.

Notes: The predicted margin of error at the 95% confidence interval is $\pm 2.8\%$

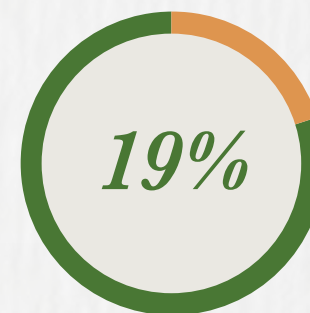
The 2013 survey was only answered by those aged 15 and over.

The population of New Zealand as at the end of April 2017 was approximately 4.8 million, according to Statistics New Zealand's population clock.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS



30% of New Zealanders aged 13 or over identify themselves as Christian



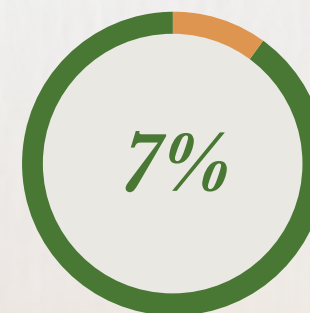
19% said they're not religious but believe in God



Nearly 3 in 5 own a Bible



18% attend church at least once a month



7% read the Bible everyday



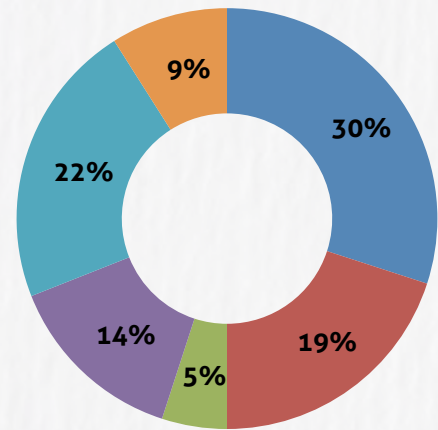
1 in 5 Christians said they used to attend church but no longer do so

Those aged 13–18 are more likely than those aged 19–64 to read the Bible and attend church regularly



CHRISTIAN STATUS

Would you consider yourself a Christian?*



To understand more about how people answer this question, we expanded the choice of answers in 2017. We noticed a decrease in the number who identified as Christian compared to previous research and to the census. It is possible that, faced with other choices, people concluded that 'Christian' didn't best describe their faith or beliefs.

Those over 65 are more likely to describe themselves as Christian (46%). Māori (33%) are more likely to say they're not religious but believe in God than the general population (20%) and those who identified as Asian were significantly more likely to describe themselves as following another religion compared to the general population (17% vs 5% overall).

- Yes, I am a Christian
- No, I am not religious but I believe in God
- No, I follow another religion
- No, I'm not sure about God / I haven't thought about it
- No, I am sure there is no God
- I'd prefer not to say

In total, 61% indicated they would not consider themselves a Christian. Males (27%) are more likely to be sure there is no God than females (18%), as are New Zealand Europeans (26%). Females (17%) are more likely to be unsure or have not thought about God than males (12%).

The expanded choice of answers in the 2017 survey gives a deeper insight into how many people are not religious but still believe in God. When those who are not religious but believe in God and those who identify with another faith are added to 'Christian', 54% of the population aged 13 or over appear to believe in God or a supreme being.



MALE VS. FEMALE

Males (27%) are more likely to be sure there is no God than females (18%).



MĀORI

Māori (33%) are more likely to say they're not religious but believe in God than the general population (20%).



ASIAN

Those who identified as Asian were significantly more likely to describe themselves as following another religion (17%).

4 *Due to rounding, chart does not add to 100%.

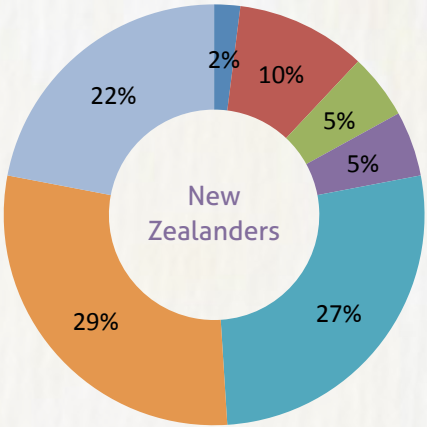
CHURCH ATTENDANCE

How often do you typically attend a Christian church service?

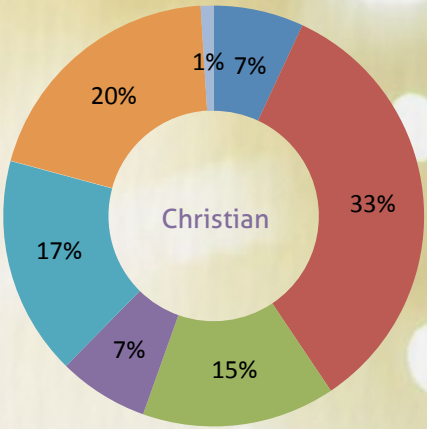
12% of New Zealanders attend a church service once or more frequently every week.

We wanted to find out how many people used to attend church but no longer do so. Nearly a third (29%) of the population aged 13 or over indicated so. One in five Christians said they used to attend church but no longer do.

40% of Christians attend church at least weekly. A further 15% attend once or twice a month (7% indicated they attend once a month in 2013). 38% of all Christians attend church only on special occasions or don't attend at all.



- More than once a week
- Every week
- Once or twice a month
- Less than 5 times a year
- Only on special occasions
- I used to attend church but don't anymore
- I have never attended church



BIBLE OWNERSHIP AND USE

Do you own a Bible?

In a 1986 survey conducted by Bible Society, 85% of New Zealanders owned a Bible. 22 years later, in our 2008 survey, Bible ownership had declined to 67%.

Today, 57% of New Zealanders own a Bible, the same percentage as in 2013. Bible ownership by age shows a reverse bell curve, with those aged 19–44 the least likely to own a Bible, while ownership among 13 to 18 year olds is comparatively stronger.

7% of the population aged 13 or over read the Bible every day. A further 5% read the Bible weekly. These percentages have remained relatively unchanged since 2013 (13% reading the Bible at least weekly). Younger age groups are more likely to read the Bible, with 10% of 13–14 year olds reading

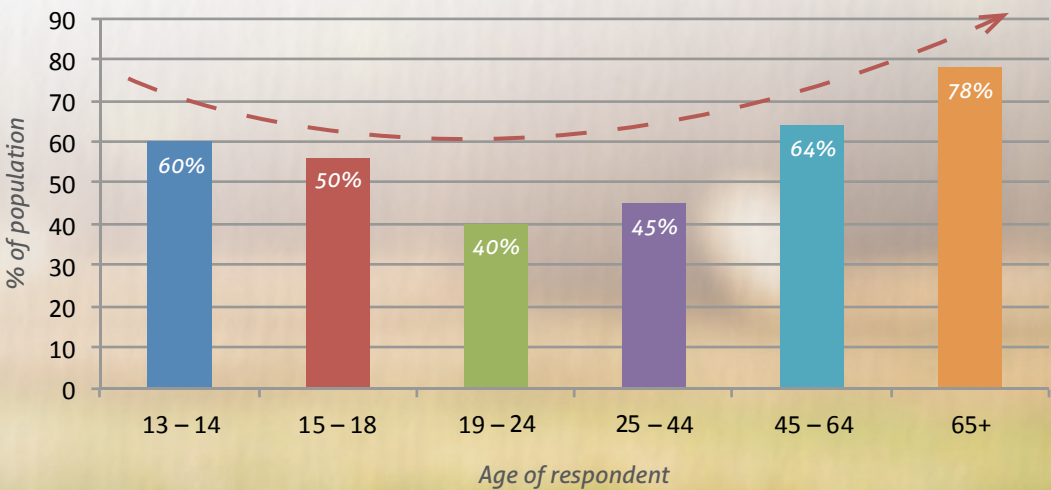
it weekly (compared to the population average of 5%) and 7% of 15–18 year olds reading it once a month (compared to the population average of 2%).

37% of Christians read the Bible at least weekly, while 43% own a Bible but rarely or never read it. 13% of Christians don't own a Bible; 36% of whom are however interested in the Bible. It is possible that some of those who don't own a Bible are reading it online, however this was not measured in the research.

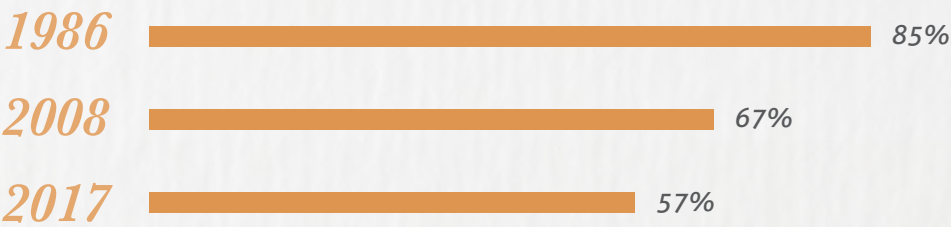
Overall, 20% of people who own a Bible said they never read it.

Interestingly, 7% of Bible owners have never attended church and a further 28% of Bible owners said they used to attend church but no longer do so.

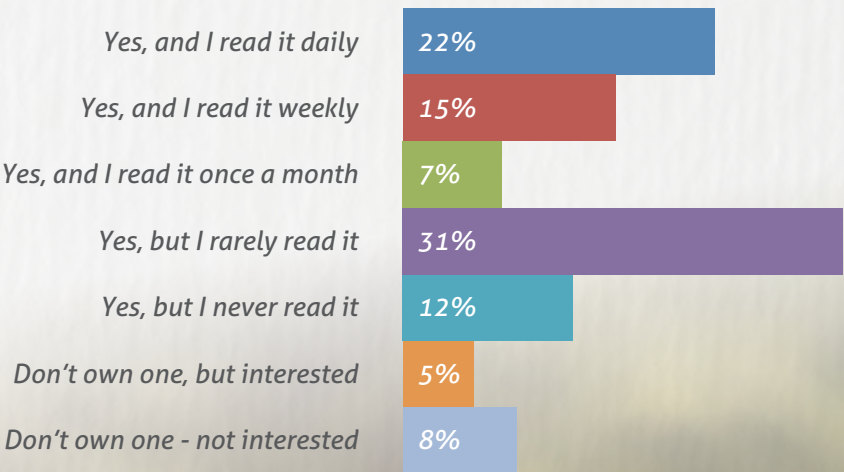
Yes, I own a Bible



Bible ownership in New Zealand

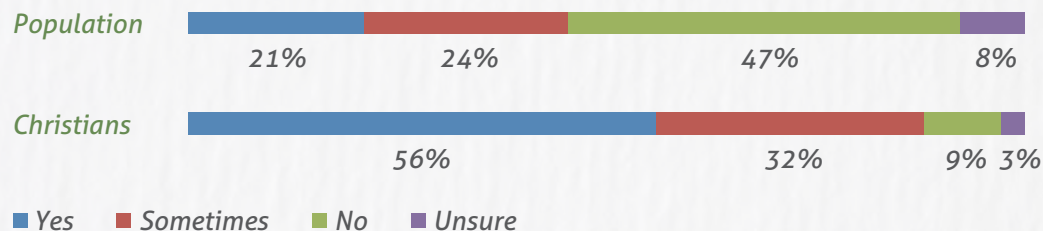


Christians and Bible ownership



THE BIBLE'S INFLUENCE

Do the teachings of the Bible influence your life?



Consistent with results from 2013, 21% of the population aged 13 or over said the Bible influences their life (23% in 2013). Another 24% said it sometimes influences their life (25% in 2013).

5% of non-Christians and 56% of Christians said the Bible influences their life. A further 22% of non-Christians and 32% of Christians said the Bible sometimes influences their life, meaning

more than a quarter of non-Christians recognise that the Bible has influence. 9% of Christians said the Bible does not influence their life.

What is not known is the degree to which influence is direct ("I read the Bible and am influenced by it") or indirect ("I live in a society which is influenced by the Bible and it therefore influences my life").

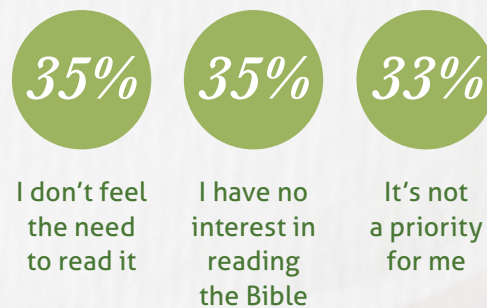
How often do you typically discuss the teachings of the Bible with others?

20% of the population aged 13 or over regularly discuss the Bible's teachings with others (at least monthly), while 40% never discuss the Bible (rising to 47% of 19–24 year olds). 7% of non-Christians and half (52%) of

Christians discuss the teachings of the Bible at least monthly. The other half (48% of Christians) rarely or never discuss the Bible.

BIBLE READING BARRIERS

*What are the main barriers to reading/interacting with the Bible more often?**



**respondents could choose multiple barriers so numbers may add up to more than 100%.*

The top three barriers to reading or interacting with the Bible (above) all indicate the lack of desire to read the Bible. However, only about one in ten think its teachings are inappropriate for today or think the Bible is irrelevant (both at 11%).

Understandably for most Christians, the top barriers are quite different. The key barrier is a lack of discipline (26%) followed by being distracted by other things (24%) and being too busy (22%).

Nearly one in five Christians (18%) feel they're already reading the Bible as much as they can with a similar number (17%) stating they don't feel the need to read it. 10% of Christians say they have no interest in reading it at all.

TOP 3 BARRIERS FOR CHRISTIANS TO READING / INTERACTING WITH THE BIBLE MORE OFTEN¹



¹Note that some of these sample sizes have small bases. Photos of models for illustrative purposes only.

What do you think is the main message of the Bible?

RESPONSE FROM THE GENERAL POPULATION

RESPONSE FROM THOSE THAT ARE NOT RELIGIOUS BUT BELIEVE IN GOD (20% OF THE POPULATION)

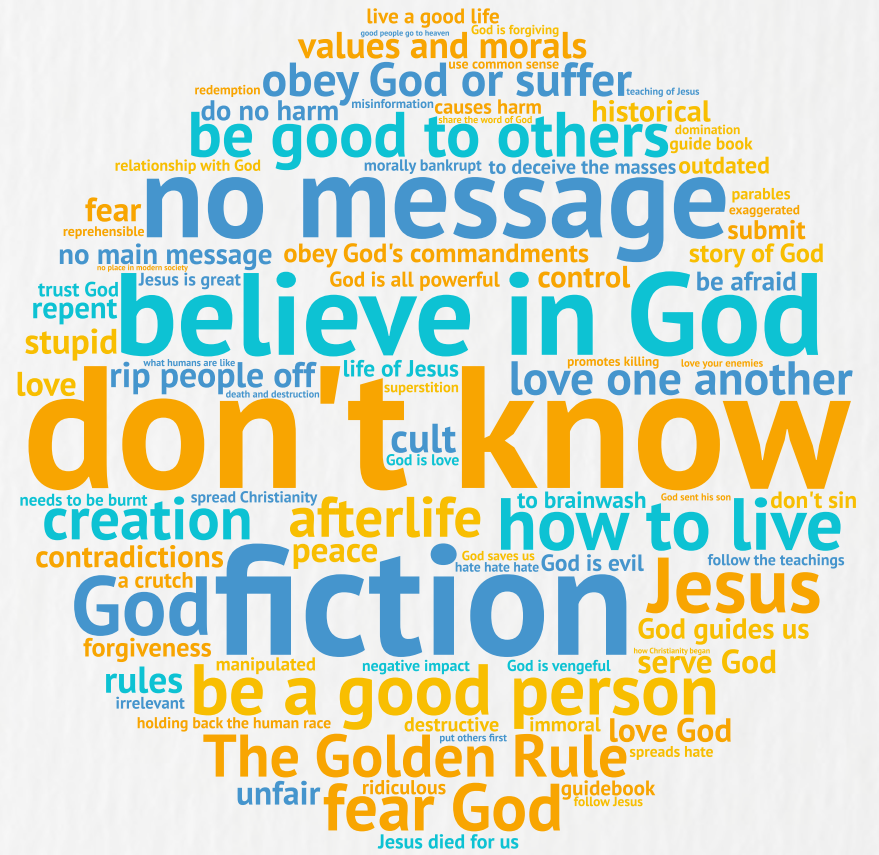
RESPONSE FROM CHRISTIANS

Not surprisingly, those who identified as Christian are more likely than the rest of the population to choose words that describe the main message of the Bible as being about God and Jesus, and about Christian doctrine. Christians also chose a narrower range of words to describe the Bible's main message, suggesting that Christians may have a narrower view of the Bible's message, perhaps reflecting the emphasis of Church teaching and preaching.



RESPONSE FROM THOSE WHO ARE “SURE THERE IS NO GOD”

Those who claim to be sure there is no God were the most likely to see the Bible's main message as negative, fictional and irrelevant, with some responses even vitriolic. However there were also those who also saw the Bible as positive for those for whom it is an important book. The negative responses were notable for their similarity with each other, and with negative comments about Christianity often found on the internet and in social media commentary, suggesting that perceptions of the Bible among this group are perhaps often formed in such forums rather than through personal experience of the Bible.



THE 19-24 YEAR DROP OFF

Responses to the first question (Christian status) begin to reveal a trend seen throughout the rest of the survey – results for the 19–24 year age group are often significantly different to their younger contemporaries.

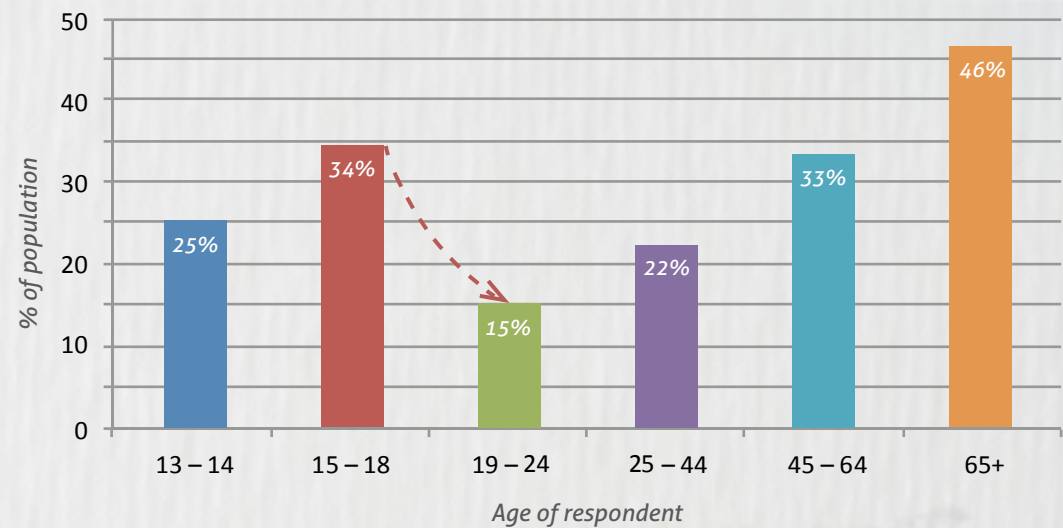
Those aged between 19 and 24 are much less likely to consider themselves Christian than those aged between 13 and 14, or 15 to 18. Those 19 to 24 are also less likely to own a Bible and less likely to read the Bible than the younger age groups.

The 19–24 age group are also much less likely to attend church monthly.

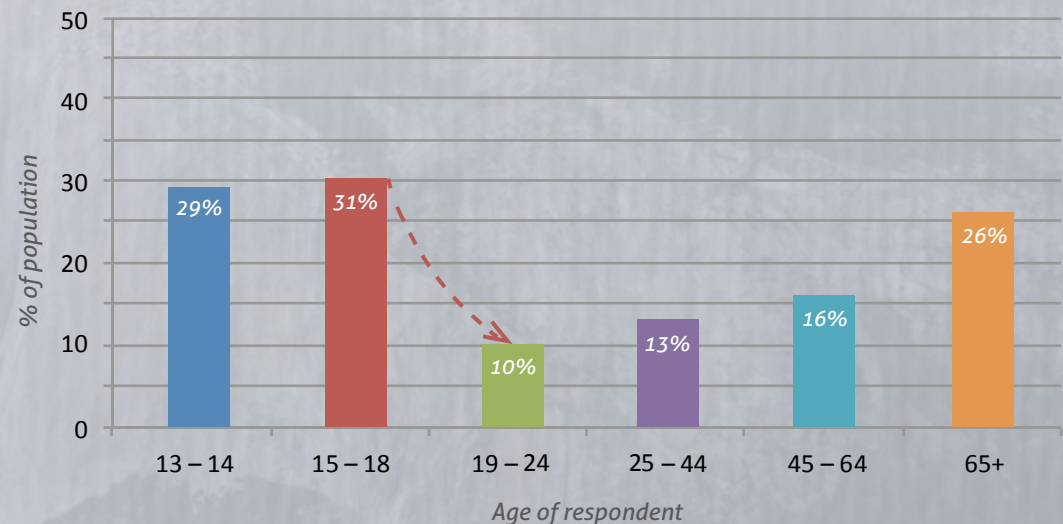
The drop off among 19 to 24 year olds is also evident in the influence of the Bible on life. Just 29% of 19 to 24 year olds said the Bible does or sometimes does influence their life, compared to 49% of 15 to 18 year olds and 46% of all respondents.

There may be a number of reasons for this that could be revealed through further research.

Yes, I am a Christian



Attending church at least monthly





www.biblesociety.org.nz

Bible Society has undertaken other research into the relationship New Zealanders have with the Bible. To access this free research, you can request it on our website.

Visit www.biblesociety.org.nz/bible-research/ for more information.



Freephone: 0800 424 253 | Email: bibles@biblesociety.org.nz

Publication or reproduction of these results must be acknowledged as being from the “Bible Society New Zealand 2017 survey; New Zealanders and the Bible”.