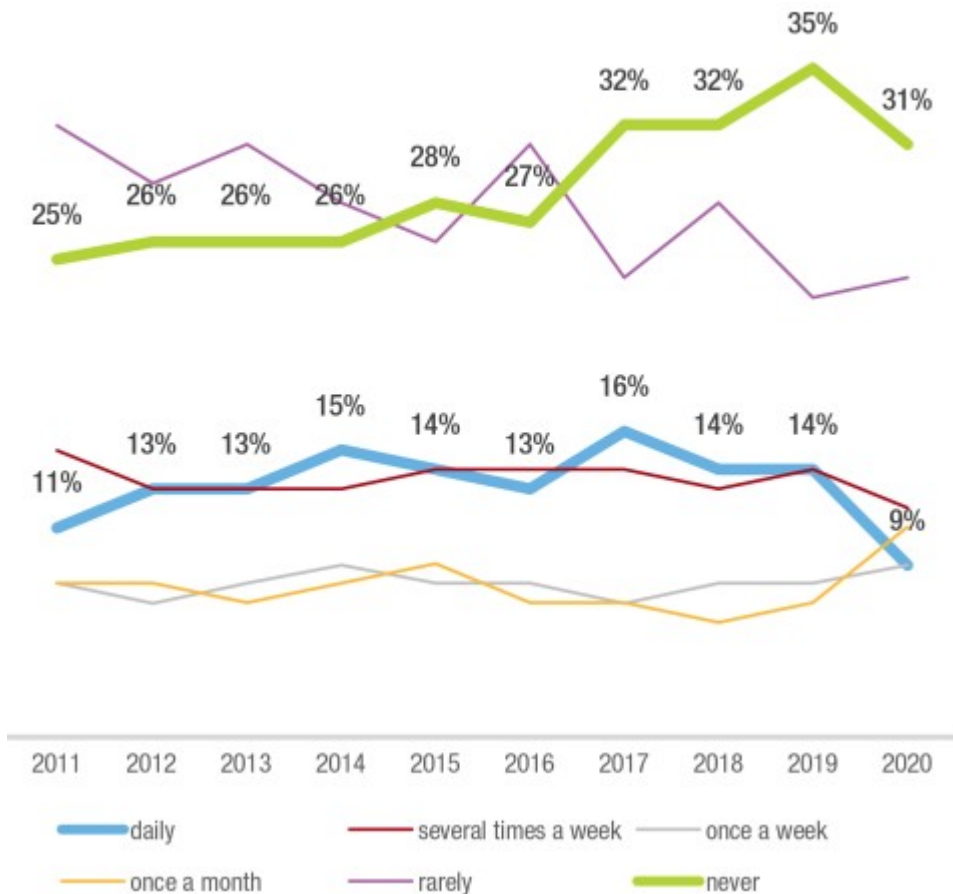


New survey: people are reading the Bible less during the pandemic

by [Emily McFarlan Miller](#) in the [August 26, 2020](#) issue

Bible Reading Frequency Over Time



People may be reading the news and “doomscrolling” through social media during the coronavirus pandemic.

But what they don’t appear to be reading is the Bible.

That’s according to the tenth annual State of the Bible survey, released July 22 by the American Bible Society.

The number of American adults the American Bible Society considers “Bible engaged,” based on how frequently they read scripture and its impact on their relationships and choices, dropped from 28 percent to 22.7 percent between January

and June, according to additional data collected by the organization in June.

“What we saw between January and June was that 13 million people in America who were previously really engaging meaningfully with scripture no longer were and that was a serious drop-off,” said John Plake, director of ministry intelligence for the American Bible Society.

Frequency of Bible reading also dropped over the last year, with daily readers dropping from 14 percent to 9 percent and those who read the Bible several times a week from 14 percent to 12 percent, the lowest number on record, according to the survey, conducted in January with the Barna Group.

The decrease in Bible use tracks with what the American Bible Society has seen over the past decade of research, according to Plake. In 2011, about 64 million people said they never used the Bible, compared with 87 to 90 million today, he said.

“Frankly, there’s just a much larger percentage of the American population over the last ten years that says they never use the Bible,” Plake said.

Most of that change has come in what the American Bible Society calls occasional Bible users or the “movable middle.” Those people are less likely than they were ten years ago to open a Bible in search of answers to their questions, according to the research.

The number of people who regularly use the Bible—at least once a week—had held “fairly steady right up to COVID-19, and then COVID-19 has messed everyone up,” Plake said.

Women, who have led men in Bible engagement every year of the survey, now slightly trail behind men, he pointed out. He said that may be because of the extra demands that mothers in particular have faced during the pandemic, juggling working from home and helping children with virtual learning as workplaces and schools closed to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Many churches have also moved online, he said, and that means people “can’t get together with their friends and study the Bible” the way they have in the past.

Plake urged church leaders to focus on the women in their congregations and communities who are “struggling in ways that might not make the headlines.” He emphasized the importance of mentoring or meeting with church members in small

groups to talk, pray, and study the Bible together.

“I think the first thing is be assured that your role is critical in helping people maintain their faith and their deep connection to God,” he said.

“It’s easy to think, ‘Well, hey, they can stream a service anywhere,’ and many, many people have done that, but the reality is without our pastors helping us, without leaders in our churches helping us to stay connected, people struggle.” —Religion News Service