

Scripture, forgiveness, spiritual gifts aid flourishing

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PHILADELPHIA, Pa. (BP)—Engaging with Scripture, forgiving others and using spiritual gifts help people flourish and lead hopeful lives, the latest release from the [American Bible Society's 2023 State of the Bible](#) shows.

People who rank highest in Scripture engagement report the highest levels of human flourishing when considering six factors including happiness/life satisfaction, character/virtue, and meaning/purpose, the American Bible Society said in releasing in the third chapter of the annual study, now in its 13th year.

“Our research confirms something millions of Christians know through personal experience—that the Bible has the power to transform our lives and make us happier, healthier and whole,” said John Farquhar Plake, chief ministry insights and innovation officer at the American Bible Society and editor-in-chief of the State of the Bible series.

“We find that Christians who are committed to their faith, fully engaged in the Bible and transformed by its message, flourish in every domain of human experience.

“While these Scripture-engaged Christians go through the same hardships as everyone else, the difference is they experience life’s ups and downs through a worldview shaped by the Bible’s message of hope,” Plake said in releasing the findings.

“No matter the circumstances, those who trust in God and connect with him through Scripture are happier than those who haven’t yet sought God in his word.”

Practicing forgiveness

Forgiving others results in higher levels of human flourishing, the American Bible Society said. People who said they can forgive others, even when the offending party doesn't seek forgiveness, proportionately rank higher in human flourishing at 7.7, compared to 6.0 for those who described themselves as least able to forgive.

The American Bible Society queried only Christians when considering how using one's spiritual gifts impacts flourishing. Christians who most strongly felt that they used their spiritual gifts to fulfill God's purposes scored highest on the human flourishing index at 8.4, compared to a 6.3 ranking among those who felt less strongly that they used their gifts for God's purposes.

Christians who know and use their spiritual gifts score 19 percent higher on the human flourishing scale, including an average score that is 28 percent higher in the area of meaning and purpose, and 17 percent higher when measuring "persevering hope," the study found.

In other findings released in the third chapter, the American Bible Society found physical exercise, meditation and prayer also positively impacted human flourishing.

"Note that these were exercises of three different types: completely physical, spiritual but not necessarily religious (meditating), and most likely religious (prayer)," the American Bible Society wrote of its findings.

"All three showed substantial increases (six-tenths of a point) on the Human Flourishing scale and similar increases on the component categories." Physical exercise impacted mental and physical health the most, the American Bible Society said.

Additionally, those who allowed others to hold them accountable scored 10 percent higher on the flourishing index when compared to those who did not allow human accountability.

Index measures human flourishing

Harvey University's T.H. Chan School of Public Health developed the index by which the American Bible Society measures human flourishing, with Scripture-engaged people averaging highest on the scale at 7.9, with a particularly high result in "meaning and purpose," 8.3.

In addition to happiness/life satisfaction, character/virtue, and meaning/purpose, other factors considered when assessing human flourishing are social relationships, financial and material stability, and mental and physical health, all based on self-reporting attitudes.

The American Bible Society plans to release monthly findings from the report, with upcoming releases focusing on the faith and perspectives of Generation Z, and how emerging technology impacts Bible engagement.

The State of the Bible annually looks at the Bible, faith and the church in America. The American Bible Society collaborated with the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center in designing the study conducted online and via telephone to the center's AmeriSpeak Panel.

The 18-minute survey, conducted Jan. 5-30, produced 2,761 responses from a representative sample of adults 18 and older within the 50 states and D.C.