

Young Bible readers more likely to be faithful adults

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NASHVILLE (BP)—The biggest factor to predict the spiritual health of children when they grow to become young adults is whether they read the Bible as kids, a LifeWay Research survey revealed.

For the study, researchers surveyed 2,000 Protestant and nondenominational churchgoers about parenting and spirituality. All attend services at least once a month and have adult children ages 18-30.

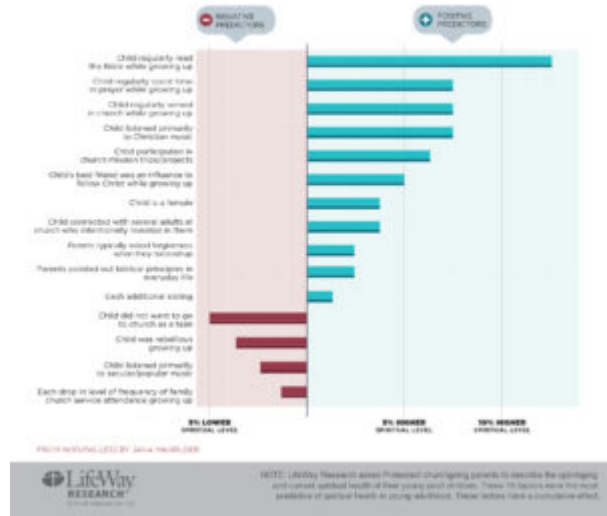
Researchers wanted to know what parenting practices pay off over the long haul when it comes to spiritual health, said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research.

“Churchgoing parents want to pass on their faith to their kids—and to see their children make that faith their own,” McConnell said. “But they don’t always know how best to make that happen.”

LifeWay Research took a twofold approach to the study.

First, researchers asked parents about 40 factors that could affect a child’s moral and spiritual development. Among them—whether the child’s parents had been divorced, whether the family prayed or ate meals together, what kind of school the child attended, how often the child went to church or youth group, and even what kind of music the child listened to growing up.

Best predictors of spiritual health among young adults



LifeWay Research then asked parents to describe their adult children’s spiritual health, using eight observable factors.

Each child received one point if he or she:

- Identifies as a Christian.
- Shares his or her faith with unbelievers.
- Is involved in church.
- Reads the Bible regularly.
- Serves in a church.
- Teaches others at church.
- Serves in the community.
- Supports local or foreign missions.

Parents gave observations for a total of 3,472 adult children. Eighty-five percent identify as Christians, according to their parents, giving them at least 1 point on the 8-point spiritual health scale. But only 3 percent had a score of 8, the highest possible. Two-thirds had a score of 2 or less.

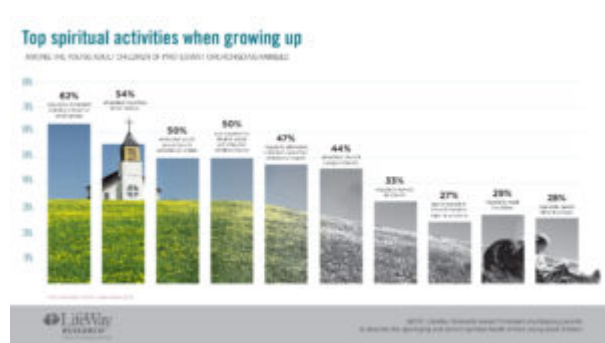
Half had a score of 0 or 1, meaning they either don't identify as Christians (11 percent) or they identify as Christians but have none of the other spiritual practices (39 percent).

LifeWay Research then compared the results of all these young adults to find out which factors predict the highest spiritual condition.

The top factor: Bible reading. Twenty-nine percent of the young adults regularly read the Bible while growing up, according to their parents. On average, that group has 12.5 percent higher spiritual health than otherwise comparable individuals who didn't, LifeWay Research found.

In addition, spiritual health levels are 7.5 percent higher on average for young adults who regularly spent time praying while growing up (28 percent), regularly served in church (33 percent) or listened primarily to Christian music (22 percent) than for comparable individuals who didn't.

Scores average 6.25 percent higher for young adults who participated in a church mission trip while growing up (27 percent) than for comparable individuals who didn't.



Doing all five of these practices in childhood could boost a young adult's spiritual health score 41 percent, putting the young adult above the 90th percentile, McConnell said.

Researchers identified a few factors that point to lower spiritual health for young adults. Those whose parents say they did not want to go to church as teens (22 percent) score 5 percent lower on spiritual health as young adults. Those whose parents say they were rebellious (16 percent) had scores 3.75 percent lower than others, and those who listened primarily to

secular music (58 percent) had scores 2.5 percent lower.

Attending popular church activities such as youth groups and Vacation Bible School predicts spiritual health for young adults—but only when linked to core practices such as reading the Bible and serving, McConnell noted. Other activities, such as family meals, did not show up as key predictors in this study.

Parents' behavior is also related to their adult children's spiritual health, LifeWay Research found.

Young adults had higher spiritual health scores if they grew up with parents who spent time:

- Reading the Bible several times a week.
- Taking part in a service project or church mission trip as a family.
- Sharing their faith with unbelievers.
- Encouraging teenagers to serve in church.
- Asking forgiveness when they messed up as parents.
- Encouraging their children's unique talents and interests.
- Taking annual family vacations.
- Attending churches with teaching that emphasized what the Bible says.
- Teaching their children to tithe.

All these little things can pay off by showing kids what practicing faith looks like, McConnell said.

“In the end, parents hope the light will go on and their children will want to follow God on their own,” he said. “At any age the Holy Spirit can flip the light switch, and these habits can help kids grow in their faith.”

LifeWay sponsored the survey for use in the book *Nothing Less: Engaging Kids in a Lifetime of Faith*.

Researchers used a demographically balanced online panel for interviewing American adults. The survey was conducted Sept. 22-Oct. 5, 2016.

Analysts screened the sample to include only Protestant and nondenominational Christians who have a child between the ages of 18 and 30 and who attend religious services at least once a month. They used maximum quotas and slight weights for gender, region, age, ethnicity and education to reflect the population more accurately.

The completed sample is 2,000 surveys, which provides 95 percent confidence the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 2.3 percent. Margins of error are higher in subgroups.