



The Open Generation

A Global Teens Study

Australia

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A Preface from the Partners

Listening is a posture that is deeply embedded in the Christian tradition and originally modelled for us by Jesus himself. When we dig deep into the communication style of Jesus in the gospels, we find that he listened more than he talked. Jesus was interested to know what people thought and how they felt. He listened to people who agreed with him, and people who didn't. He listened to people who seemed to have things together, and to people whose lives were in pieces.

In your work with teenagers and young people today, how are you following Jesus' lead?

In 2021, Alpha, Biblica and World Vision came alongside Barna Group—as well as a collective of other organisational partners including the Association of Christian Schools International, Bible Study Fellowship, Christ In Youth and Christian Vision—to *listen* to the perspectives of young people in the emerging generation. Our desire is to help local churches, schools and youth ministries around the world love and lead young people well. Specifically, in a digital, questioning, experiential age, we want to hear how teens perceive Jesus, the Bible and social action.

This global research on teenagers shows that, overall, this generation is open and inclusive, seeking truth, authenticity and change. Interconnected and optimistic, today's teens represent and welcome different perspectives, different faiths and different cultures. They are deeply passionate about addressing injustice in our world. Given all of this,

there is a current of curiosity about both Jesus and the Bible, and how they connect to the purpose and pain of everyday people.

What does this mean for the Church, youth groups and Christian leaders?

What does this mean for *your* work?

As you know well, there are local nuances to the contexts, cultures, opportunities and obstacles that surround today's teens. Our organisations work all over the world, and we are grateful that this research is able to reach into 26 countries. This allows the voice of the open generation to be heard on a national level. We hope reports like this one, focused on the findings specific to Australia, produce personal and practical next steps for you and your ministry.

Together, we have contributed to this study in order to serve teens and love them well. We hope *The Open Generation* equips and empowers Christian leaders to better understand teens and to facilitate deeper connections with young people. The study supports leaders across the world who want to create something not just *for* teenagers but *with* teenagers: to come alongside this generation, collaborate with them, guide and learn from them.



Meet the Open Generation

An Introduction to Barna's Global Study of Teenagers

Thanks to two major global studies in recent years, Barna Group has a compelling impression of the trajectory of young people today. We'll open this report about *The Open Generation* in Australia with a quick overview.

In 2018 and 2019, in partnership with World Vision, we worked on a study of young adults (ages 18 to 35) in 25 countries. At the time, it was Barna's largest study and a unique international effort to understand emerging adults. It revealed that young adults in this age range (which our U.S. research typically refers to as Millennials and the leading edge of Gen Z) contend with strong currents of anxiety, loneliness and skepticism. We highlighted areas of need and opportunities for churches to better lead and support young adults.

Fast-forward to 2021 and 2022. Amid a pandemic and with the partnership of a collective of organisations including Alpha, Biblica and World Vision (as well as the support of partners at the Association of Christian Schools International, Bible Study Fellowship, Christ In Youth and Christian Vision), we have broadened the scope of our research again, this time to 25,000+ interviews, 26 countries and a slightly younger cohort: teenagers ages 13 to 17. This report presents a

summary of the findings specific to Australia. The goal is to advance the understanding of teens globally—their identity, values and views—and to offer a picture of the global Church's relationship to a rising generation.

Along the way, we have ended up observing some remarkable differences between teenagers today and the young adults we heard from just a few years ago. Chief among these differences is teens' openness. As we have explored the profile that emerges from the aggregated data, we have used words like "optimistic," "engaged," "malleable," "curious," "authentic," "inclusive" and "collaborative." From a global vantage point, there is a lightness of being among today's teens that is less common among young adults even just a few years ahead of them. This is just one reason we're referring to them as "the open generation."

Granted, no matter what context a teen lives in, they are still in early stages of the development of their ideas and character. Their appealing openness is, on some level, a reflection of youth. But that fact does not diminish the reality of their overall optimism, and these qualities emerge despite this study having been conducted during a time when teens were living through a global pandemic.

What might come of their hope, their desire to make a difference and their leaning into goodness?

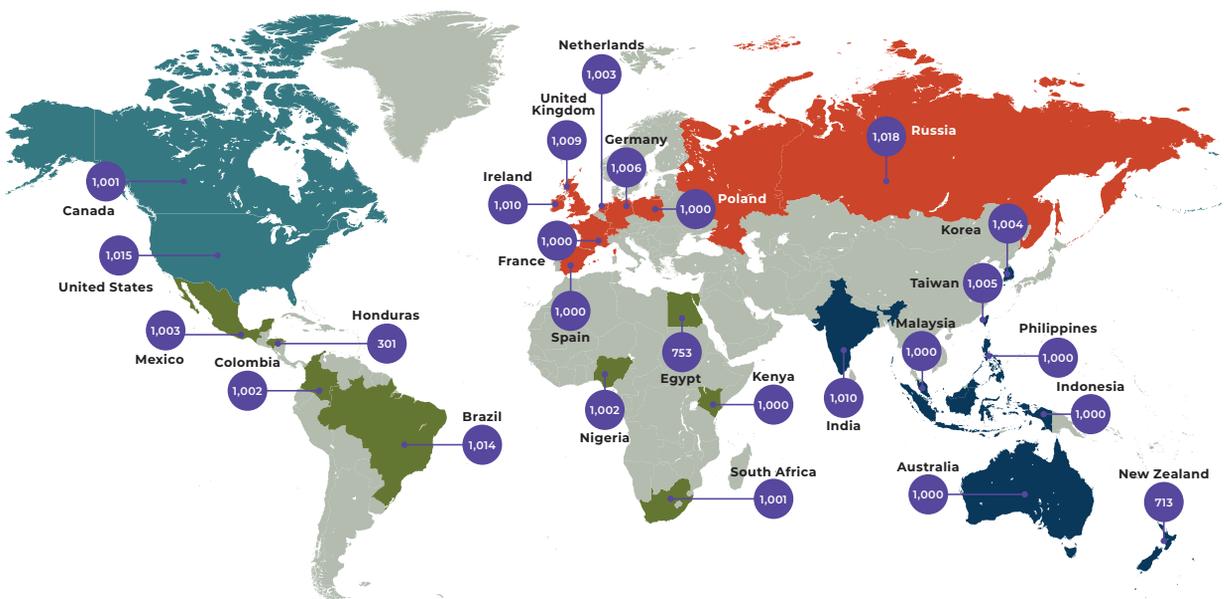
Will certain milestones, influences or experiences soon dampen their enthusiasm—presenting some of the challenges that face their not-so-much older peers?

This research offers an emotional portrait of a connected, digitally enabled generation—especially as it relates to the sacred text, central character and expression of the Christian faith. We see that teens are open to **Jesus**, the **Bible**

and **justice**. Further, their commitments to these three things are interwoven and increase together. Regardless of how “churched” a nation or region may be, there is much to learn from these key elements of the Christian faith.

In more ways than one, teenagers are on the cusp. *The Open Generation* project urges that Christians around the world come alongside teenagers to help them make the most of these formative years.

This report represents a summary of the findings specific to Australia



Sample sizes for each country included in the study.

Teens in Australia: A Local Snapshot

Many young people now have the shared experience of a fast-paced, more-connected-than-ever, always-changing world. Despite these common threads, teens around the world also face issues that are unique to their place and position in the world.

Though *The Open Generation* does not offer a comprehensive view of teenage life in any one country—including Australia—it points to local forces and cultural climates that influence how teens identify and interact.

Faith

As Barna Group is experienced in studying the intersection of faith and culture, and as this project aims to help leaders and educators understand the faith of teens in their context, we'll often look at the data through the lens of affiliation or practice.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 43 percent of the nation reports being Christian, with 20 percent of the country being Catholic.¹ According to Barna's data, around three in 10 Australian teens (31%) is Christian. Over half of teens (54%), however, are atheist, agnostic or of

Faith Profile of Teens in Australia

● Christian ● Other faith ● No faith



n=1,000 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

no faith. And, as you will see in the following pages, most Christian teens in Australia are only culturally or nominally engaged in their faith.

Emotions

In matters of emotional health and security, teens in Australia stand out against their global peers, in both positive and negative respects. They are less likely to say they experience anxiety, fears and pressure to be successful or perfect. They are also more likely to report feeling deeply cared for by those around them. At the same time, teens in Australia are less likely to feel optimistic and confident. Their emotional profile is generally more muted than the global average.

Community

On matters of their relationship to their communities, Australia's young people are about as likely as global teens to report community satisfaction. They could use a boost when it comes to feeling they have positive influence or a sense of knowing many people in their community. Teens in Australia also don't seem to be as embedded in or comfortable with their communities. They may be looking for deeper connections and greater confidence to know their presence and influence matters.

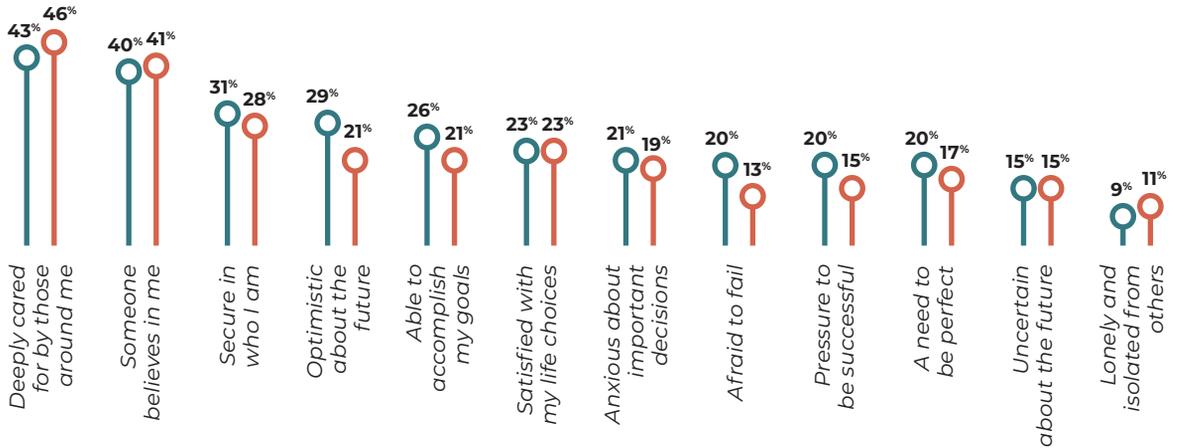
1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, "2021 Census shows changes in Australia's religious diversity," June 28, 2022, <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/2021-census-shows-changes-australias-religious-diversity>.

The Emotional Climate of Teens in Australia

How often do you feel each of the following?

% "always"

● Global ● Australia



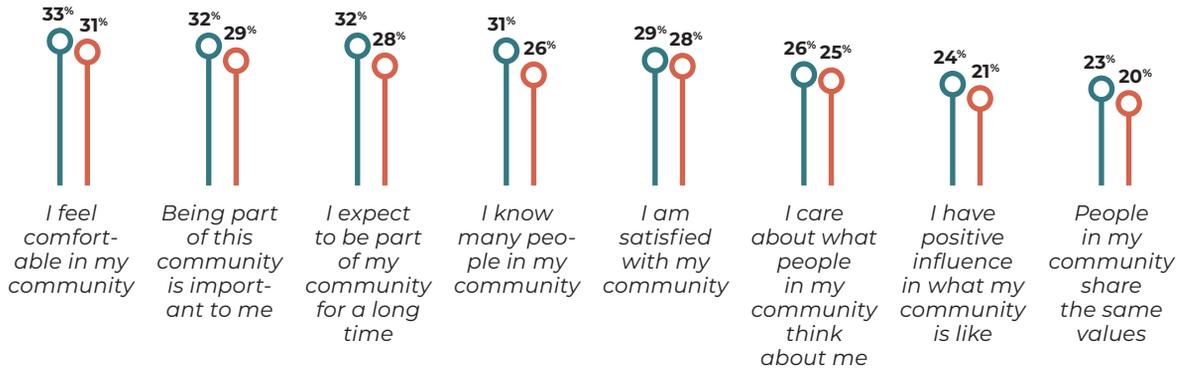
n=1,000 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021; n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

Community Among Teens in Australia

Thinking about your community, how true are the following statements?

Base: teens who are part of a community; % "very true"

● Global ● Australia



n=983 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021; n=24,449 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

1. How Teens in Australia Relate to Jesus

“Who Do Teens Say That I Am?”

Beliefs about Jesus vary among teens, on a global scale and at the national level.

Globally, teens believe Christ represents love, hope, care, generosity and trustworthiness. Christian teens in Australia tend to align with these views and describe him in agreeable and comforting terms, although in lower proportion. Interestingly, Australia’s teens aren’t as emphatic about Jesus’ trustworthiness, with Australian Christian teens (46%) falling 9 points behind Christian teens globally (55%) in saying he is trustworthy. Australian Christian teens also don’t as often associate Jesus with generosity, care and hope, when compared to Christian teens globally.

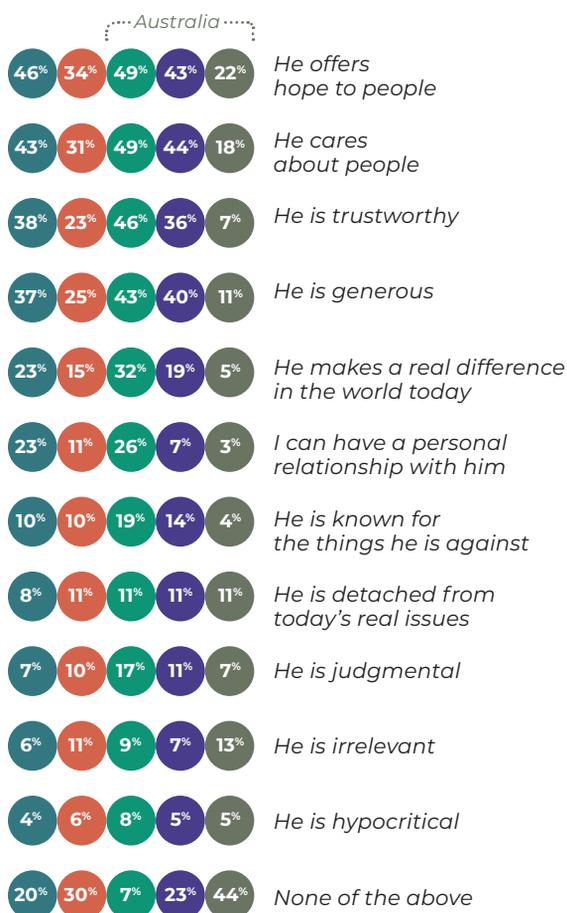
Additionally, Christian teens in Australia are less likely than Christian teens worldwide to say Jesus was raised from the dead and wants to have a personal relationship with people, or to see him as communicative and active in the world today. This hints at a “partial gospel” that is commonplace among teens, even Christian ones, globally.

Notably, Christians in Australia are also more likely to describe Jesus as judgmental, hypocritical and known for the things he is against. These opinions about Jesus could be linked to this open generation’s general skepticism about the Church’s reputation. Looking at the bigger picture, however, negative ideas about Jesus are rare, and he

Which of the following do you, personally, believe about Jesus?

Select all that apply.

● Global ● Australia ● Christian
● Other faith ● No faith



n=1,000 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021;

n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

emerges as a positive figure, even among teens of other faiths in Australia.

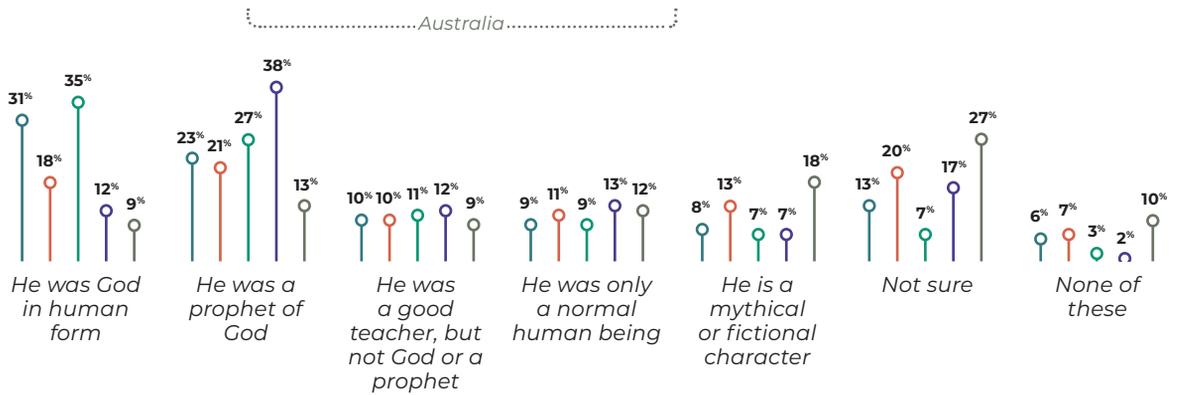
Perhaps unsurprisingly, Australian teens of no faith tend to select “none of the above” or “not sure” when asked what they believe about Jesus, pointing

to an indifference or uncertainty toward him. Jesus is a “mythical or fictional character” to about one in five of these teens (18%). Whatever religious teens think of Jesus, teens of no faith likely are not thinking about him at all.

Which of the following best describes your understanding of who Jesus Christ is?

Select one.

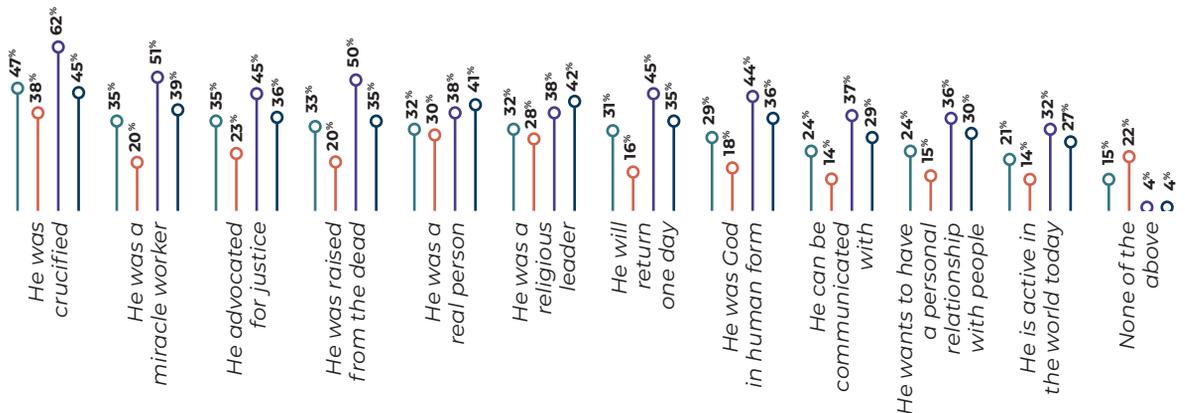
- Global
- Australia
- Christian
- Other faith
- No faith



Thinking about Jesus Christ, which of the following are true?

Select the statements you believe are true.

- Global
- Australia
- Global Christians
- Australian Christians



n=1,000 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021; n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

Knowing & Growing with Jesus

Having looked at teens' perceptions of Jesus, we'll now focus on their connections to him.

When teens identify as Christian, that doesn't mean they have made a personal commitment to follow Jesus. Barna has long made the distinction between nominal Christians and practicing Christians in its research, which is especially important in areas that may be culturally Christian. We can also assume that some teens are young enough that they identify with the religion of their community or upbringing without having yet made deeply personal decisions around that faith.

To sharpen our analysis of Christianity among teens, Barna developed a segmentation based on a personal commitment to follow Jesus.

Commitment to Jesus

- Committed Christians
- Nominal Christians
- All others

Global



Australia



n=1,000 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021;

n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

- **COMMITTED CHRISTIAN** teens self-identify as Christian and say they have made a personal commitment to follow Jesus Christ
- **NOMINAL CHRISTIAN** teens self-identify as Christian but have not made a personal commitment to follow Jesus Christ
- **ALL OTHER** teens do not identify as Christian and / or are unsure about who Jesus is

By this definition, just over one in five teens (22%) worldwide is a committed Christian. In Australia, this number falls to 12 percent. One-fifth is nominally Christian (19%). The majority of Australian teens (69%) does not identify as Christian or is unsure about who Jesus is.

Committed Christian teens are a minority who often have meaningful experiences of faith. In Australia, however, the reported benefits of this rare relationship with Jesus are not quite as pronounced.

Globally, three-quarters of committed Christian teens strongly agree their connection to Jesus brings them joy and satisfaction. In Australia, those teens don't experience this joy as often. There is a 15-point drop in the percentage of committed Christian teens who agree strongly. Nominal Christian teens in Australia, however, are about as likely as nominal Christian teens globally to say the relationship they have with Jesus is satisfying.

This disparity emerges again among the committed Christian teens who find relevance in what Jesus has to say, with a 12-percentage-point gap between global and Australian teens who strongly agree. Once again, nominal Christian teens in Australia are as likely as their global counterparts

to strongly agree Jesus speaks to them in a way that is relevant to their life.

Globally and within the borders of Australia, nominal Christian teens are more likely than their committed peers to say they aren't sure whether Jesus offers them joy or relevant wisdom.

A number of discipleship opportunities present themselves in this data. Australian teens of varying levels of commitment to Jesus may be lacking instruction on how to follow Jesus or find meaning in the words of Christ and in scripture.

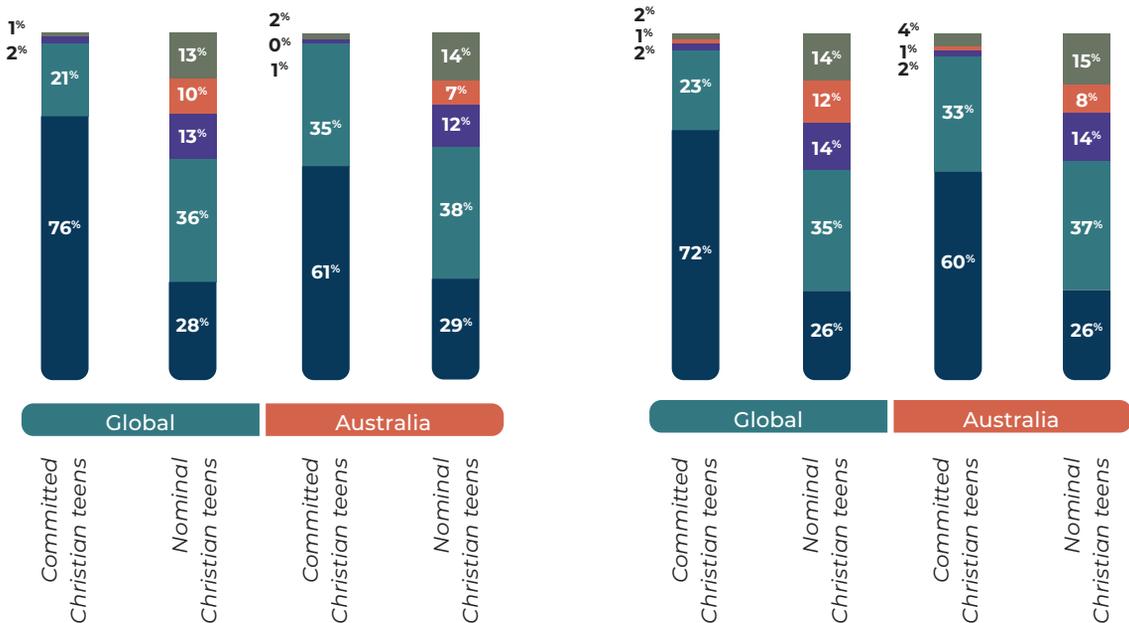
To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Base: Christians

"My relationship with Jesus brings me deep joy and satisfaction"

"Jesus speaks to me in a way that is relevant to my life"

● Agree strongly ● Agree somewhat ● Disagree somewhat ● Disagree strongly ● I am not sure



n=552 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021; n=13,282 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

A Learning Journey with Jesus

Curiosity about Jesus is widespread in the open generation. Teens in Australia, however, are less intrigued than their global peers, with 42 percent being at least somewhat motivated to keep learning about Jesus throughout their lives.

Teens' personal commitment to follow Jesus aligns with a motivation to study him. Globally, 85 percent of committed Christian teens are very motivated to continue learning about Jesus, compared to about one-third of nominal Christian teens. In Australia, this gap between committed and nominal Christian teens' motivation narrows somewhat.

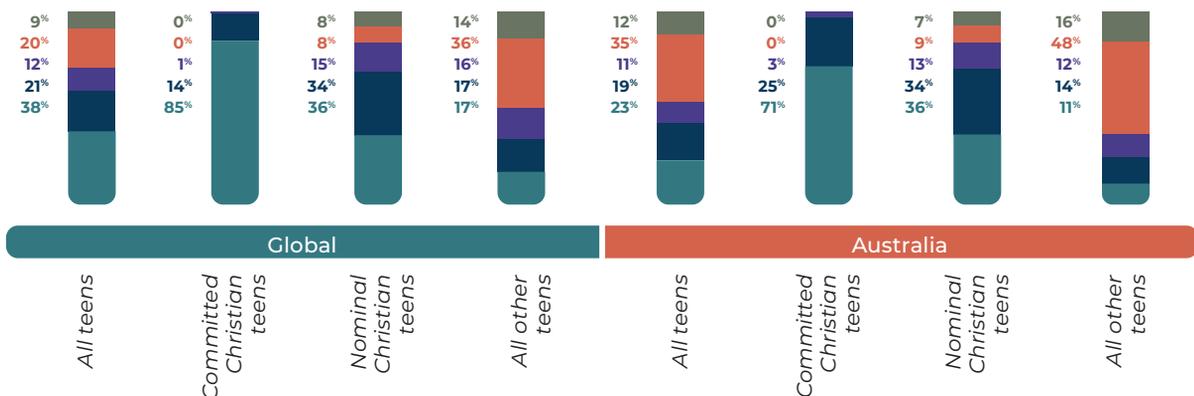
Regardless of their level of commitment to follow Jesus, Australian teens seem to place a significant amount of trust in their households and in themselves to learn about Jesus. On average, teens

are more likely to report looking to these sources above clergy, the Bible or other church leaders.

Digging into teens' top trusted sources based on their commitment to Jesus, we learn more about their expectations for instruction about him. Beyond the Bible, committed Christian teens in Australia prefer to go to clergy, other church leaders or a family member with their curiosity about Jesus. Similarly, nominal Christian teens regard family, scripture, clergy, church leadership and other Christians as their top sources. It seems any member of a nominal Christian teen's community has a chance of speaking into their perspectives about Jesus. While some church leaders who work with youth may need to earn teens' trust, there are relational opportunities for discipleship to be found.

Throughout the rest of your life, how motivated are you to continue learning more about Jesus Christ?

- Very motivated
- Somewhat motivated
- Somewhat unmotivated
- Not at all motivated
- Not sure



n=1,000 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021; n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

Open-Ended: Takeaways & Questions to Help You Think Through the Research

Australian teens tend to place a significant amount of trust in their households and in themselves to learn about Jesus. What might partnership among local churches, households and Christian community members look like when it comes to discipling young people?

BEN STEPHENSON: If churches are not partnering with parents in the discipleship of young people, churches are missing out on activating the most impactful and important relationship the teenager will ever encounter. Churches will do well to inform parents of the weight of their influence [and] helping to educate parents on having open-ended, discovery-focused conversations about Jesus.

Even Christian teens have some misconceptions or gaps in their knowledge of Jesus. How can teens be encouraged that this is normal, especially early in life or faith? How can Christian teens be strengthened in their understanding of who Jesus is?

STEPHENSON: Teenage years are marked by the development of a worldview [which often] means having an in-process and incomplete understanding. ... Modelling a facade of an “arrived” believer causes young people to want to fast-forward past the journey to get to the destination. The humility of a believer who spends time daily in the presence of Jesus

will not lead to a generation that wants to bypass the process and arrive at the end, but rather, to enter a lifelong, dynamic relationship with Jesus.

This report features insights from:



Ben Stephenson

Youth pastor at Crossway Baptist Church Australia



Noddy Sharma

Head of church, schools and youth engagement for World Vision Australia



Janice Smith*

Youth worker in Melbourne, Australia

**Name changed to protect identity*

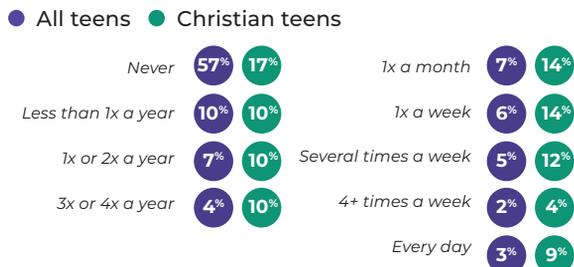
2. How Teens in Australia View the Bible

The Presence of the Bible

Overall, 43 percent of teens in Australia—including 81 percent of Christian teens—say their household owns a Christian Bible. Though a majority of all teens in Australia (57%) never uses a Bible (which the survey defined as reading, listening, watching, praying with or using Bible text or content in any form), 39 percent of Christian teens interact with scripture at least weekly.

Teens in Australia who are Bible users or Christians split their Bible usage between the internet and print (36% and 34% in the past year, respectively). Among Christian teens only, these numbers rise (45% print, 38% online). Listening to an audio version of the Bible is the next most common usage (32%). Roughly three in 10 Christian teens have interacted with the Bible in a small group or Bible study (29%), listened to a teaching about the Bible or Bible readings on a podcast (28%) or used a Bible application on a smartphone or tablet (28%).

Bible Use Among Teens in Australia



n=1,000 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021;

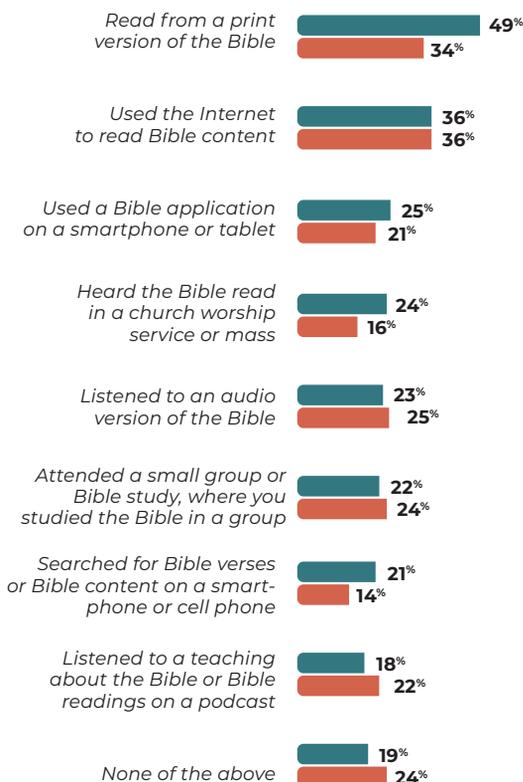
n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

These days, the Christian Bible is available and used in different formats. Have you used any of these versions in the past year?

Select all that apply.

Base: Bible users / owners or Christians

● Global ● Australia



n=709 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021;

n=18,118 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

What *Is* the Bible?

The Bible is seen as significant and sacred to roughly one-third of Australian teens. Teens in Australia express more skepticism toward the Bible than do teens globally. Overall, they are 14 percentage points less likely than teens worldwide to say the Bible is the word of God. In a similar disparity, Christian teens in Australia are less likely than Christian teens worldwide to affirm this view of the Bible.

While their global peers are open to both literal and symbolic interpretations of the text, Australian

teens who use a Bible or are Christian decisively lean away from a literal understanding of scripture.

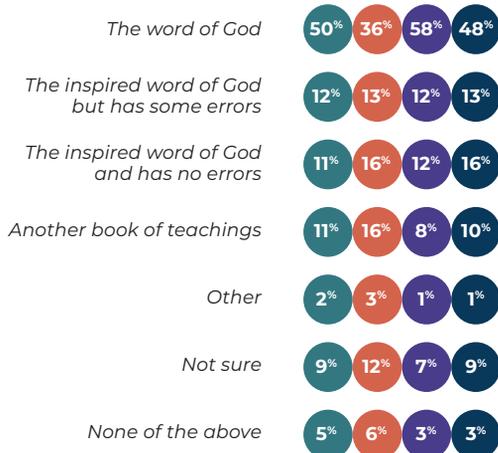
Australian teens are also more likely to be indecisive about what, exactly, the Bible is. Twelve percent of Australian teens report not being sure what to believe about the Bible, a pattern of uncertainty that emerges in several other areas of this report and may reflect the openness that defines teens today.

“The Christian Bible is ...”

Which of the following statements comes closest to describing what you believe about the Christian Bible?

Base: Bible users / owners or Christians

- Global ● Australia
- Global Christians ● Australian Christians



To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Base: Bible users / owners or Christians

- Agree strongly ● Agree somewhat
- Disagree somewhat ● Disagree strongly

“The Christian Bible should be understood symbolically, interpreting the text when needed”



“The Christian Bible should be understood literally, word for word”



Bible Engagement Among Teens

To better gauge the relationship today's teens have with the Bible, we categorised their thoughts and behaviors surrounding the Bible into three categories of engagement:

- **BIBLE-ENGAGED** teens hold a “high” view of the Bible and read the Bible several times a week.
 - * *A high view of the Bible refers to believing the Bible is “the word of God,” “the inspired word of God with no errors” or “the inspired word of God but with some errors.”*
- **BIBLE-OPEN** teens either (1) hold a high view of the Bible and read the Bible less often than Bible-engaged teens (but more than three or four times a year) or (2) have a neutral view toward the Bible, meaning they don't have a high or negative view of the Bible.
- **BIBLE UNENGAGED**—All other teens

Across religious and demographic spectrums, teens are largely open to Christian scripture, with over half of all respondents, globally and in Australia, falling into this category of engagement. While this openness could be celebrated for its curiosity or potential, the marginal percentage of Bible-engaged teens shouldn't be overlooked. The truth is Bible-unengaged teens far outnumber Bible-engaged teens, globally and in Australia.

Teens' Engagement with the Bible

- Bible engaged
- Bible open
- Bible unengaged

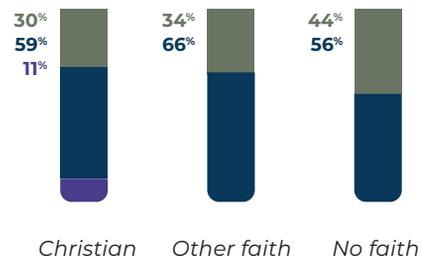
Global



Australia



Teens' Bible Engagement Across Faith Groups in Australia



n=1,000 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021;

n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

How Teens Read the Bible

For the most part, teens’ Bible reading is an individualised experience. Their habits especially vary across different faith segments.

Globally, about three in 10 teens who are Bible users and / or Christians report finding enjoyment in reading the Bible by themselves and reflecting on what they’ve read. In Australia, this proportion falls to roughly one in five. In fact, only marginal percentages of teens in Australia report enjoying any of the other possible Bible-reading practices Barna asked about, when compared to teens globally. The habits of Bible-engaged teens in Australia, however, are well rounded. These teens are searching and processing scripture, both alone and with help from others.

About one in four Bible users and / or Christians in Australia—including a striking 35 percent of Bible-unengaged teens—tends to not enjoy any of the Bible reading habits Barna presented in the survey. Though teens are usually reluctant to precisely name barriers to their Bible reading (the plurality selects “none”), Bible users and Christians in Australia seem to struggle to care much about the Bible. Sometimes far exceeding percentages of their global peers, teens in Australia point to barriers like lacking understanding, focus and, especially, interest when reading the Bible.

These findings illustrate a need for community and older adults to come alongside teens and coach them in the joy, relevance and practice of engaging the Bible—an endeavor that, as we’ll see next, many teens in Australia may be curious to undertake.

When you read the Bible, which of the following do you enjoy? Select all that apply.

Base: Bible users / owners or Christians

- Global ● Australia ● Bible engaged
- Bible open ● Bible unengaged



n=709 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021;

n=18,118 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

Mentoring Teens in Bible Engagement

When it comes to learning more about the Bible throughout their lives, more than three-quarters of Christian teens in Australia report feeling very (46%) or somewhat motivated (31%) to do so. This sets them apart from their peers of other faith identities, though roughly two in five Australian teens (39%) report some level of motivation to learn more about Christian scripture.

Where might this instruction come from? Typically, the home. In Australia, 27 percent of teens who are Bible users and / or Christians—including 48 percent of the Bible engaged—report having been taught to study the Bible by a parent or guardian. Teens worldwide offer the same top response (36%).

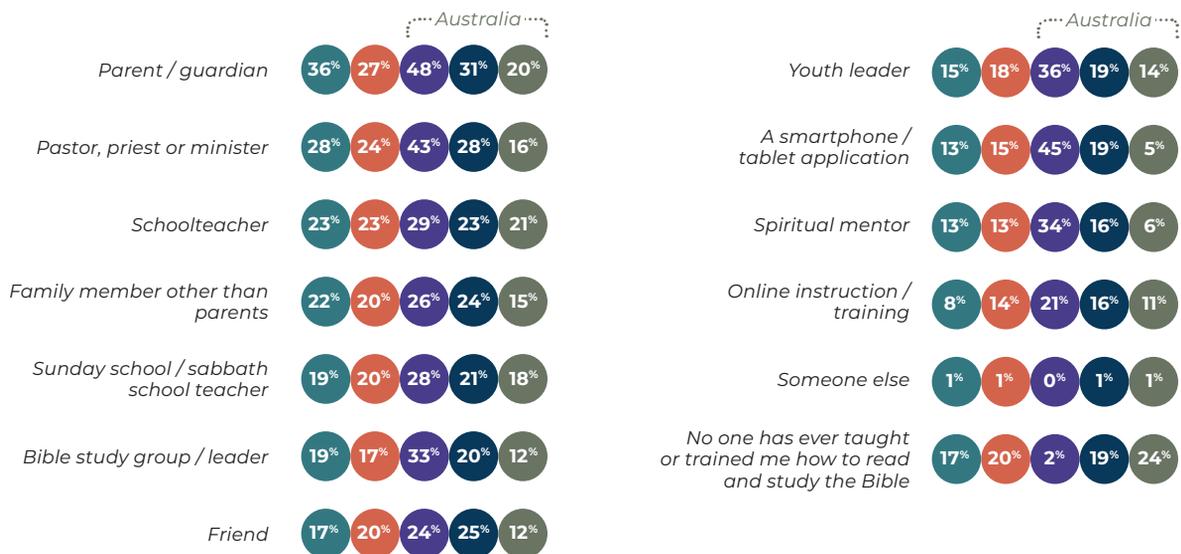
The only other response where Australian

Have any of the following ever taught or trained you how to read and study the Christian Bible?

Select all that apply.

Base: Bible users / owners or Christians

● Global ● Australia ● Bible engaged ● Bible open ● Bible unengaged



n=709 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021; n=18,118 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

teens align with global percentages is in saying they were taught about the Bible by a school teacher, Sunday school teacher or spiritual mentor.

Ministry is, naturally, another source of biblical instruction, though clergy doesn't have quite as much influence in Australia compared to global numbers. One in four Australian teens who are Christian or use a Bible says they were taught by a pastor, priest or minister. Roughly twice as many Bible-engaged Australian teens have received instruction from these figures.

Bible-engaged teens in Australia stand out from their peers in being significantly more likely to report having been taught about the Bible

by a smartphone or tablet app, a youth leader, or spiritual mentor.

From another angle, Bible-engaged teens are far less likely to say "no one" has taught them how to read the Bible—something one in five Bible-open and one in four Bible-unengaged teens says. This dramatically underscores the role of relationships in nurturing Bible reading.

Globally and in Australia, sources and outcomes of Bible mentorship are similar. Christian teens in Australia are about as likely as their Christian peers around the world to say that in their church they regularly receive wisdom for how the Bible applies to their lives (37% and 42%, respectively).

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

"In my church I regularly receive wisdom for how the Bible applies to my life"

Base: Christians

● Agree strongly ● Agree somewhat ● Disagree somewhat ● Disagree strongly ● Not sure



n=552 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021; n=13,282 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

Open-Ended: Takeaways & Questions to Help You Think Through the Research

What are some hallmarks of Bible teaching in churches or Christian institutions in Australia? What's working? What isn't?

BEN STEPHENSON: To hold shortening attention spans, biblical teaching has trended toward topical teaching and not expository teaching. ... Rather than teaching through a book, a preacher will offer the systematic theology, the counsel of the whole Bible as it pertains to a topic (e.g., mental health, identity, sin or holiness). Teaching will usually feature stories or chapters that speak to the topic at hand. The hope is that teaching feels relevant and addresses felt needs, while undoubtedly contributing to a decrease in biblical literacy and an unfamiliarity with the metanarrative of scripture existing between the topics.

What role does the Bible play in spiritual formation in the young people you have encountered? How can a teen engage with the Bible in a consistent, contextual way as they grow spiritually?

JANICE SMITH*: For several years, I participated in and witnessed young people who were very good at learning and intellectualising the Bible through the

provision of Bible studies and Sunday church services. They could explain what everything meant and the metaphors and learnings from the stories. [But what was even more meaningful] were the times when young people had the opportunity to experience the Bible (e.g., served a community dinner, advocated for justice in their context, forgave a family member or participated in mission). They were able to reflect and deeply understand where the scripture was coming from. I think it's about opportunities to live the Bible for young people.

What steps can we take to help young people stay in God's word as they mature?

SMITH: The more we truly respect young people's dignity as part of God's family, and that there is no "junior" Holy Spirit, the more we can listen and learn from them. Then, we will find young people actively engaging in God's word because they've been empowered to do so, rather than told to do so.

**Name changed to protect identity*

3. How Teens in Australia Can Make an Impact

Teens' Global Concerns & Convictions

Barna asked teens which global problems are of greatest concern to them and received a broad distribution of responses. Cultural, political, economic and even geographic differences cause distinct sets of concerns to rise to the top, depending on where teens live.

Globally, extreme poverty (38%), global climate change (35%), sexual abuse (33%), unemployment (33%) and political corruption (31%) are front of mind for the majority of teens. In Australia, the list looks different, as teens feel that mental health issues are the greatest concern (48%), followed by global climate change (39%) and unemployment (32%). More than one-quarter of Australian teens (29%) also points to extreme poverty as a concern.

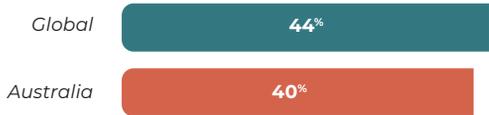
Whatever issues they are concerned about, young people in Australia may feel unable or even uninterested to affect them. Australian teens,

including Christians, trend behind their global peers in their reported motivation to address injustices in society. This pattern varies somewhat by faith group. Australian teens who are Christian and who have no faith actually align in largely being “somewhat motivated” to address injustice. Australian teens of other faiths are slightly more likely to report being “very motivated.”

It's important for adults and mentors who work with teens to discern whether teens lack motivation at large or whether teens personally lack what they feel is enough context or information to understand their own capacity to act against injustice. In Australia, it may be either: Teens in Australia are slightly less likely than teens globally to strongly agree that their generation has the ability to make a positive impact on the world.

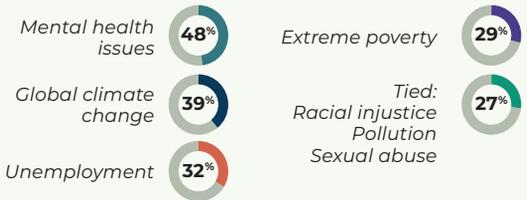
“My generation has the ability to make a positive and meaningful impact on the world.”

% agree strongly



n=1,000 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021;
n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

5 Greatest Concerns of Teens in Australia



Teens' Motivation Toward Justice

Teens may often lack agency or ability to take personal action against injustices on their own or without the involvement, resources and leadership of a parent or guardian. However, the research does allow us to distinguish them by their motivation or potential for promoting justice. The resulting spectrum of justice motivation is based on a combination of teens' Conviction + Confidence + Commitment (see chart for definitions).

As you'll see, there is a drop-off after conviction, highlighting the need to develop confidence and commitment in teens who are interested in justice.

- **JUSTICE-MOTIVATED** teens meet all three categories (Conviction + Confidence + Commitment)
- **JUSTICE-ORIENTED** teens meet one or two of the three categories
- **JUSTICE-NEUTRAL** teens meet none of the three categories

Roughly three in 10 Australian teens, and a quarter of Christian teens specifically, are justice neutral, meaning they do not express strong conviction, confidence or commitment to address injustice. A much higher percentage falls in the middle ground, qualifying as justice oriented, matching the motivation of their global peers. The number of justice-motivated Australian teens, meanwhile, sits at 15 percent overall and 22 percent among Christians.

n=1,000 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021; n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.



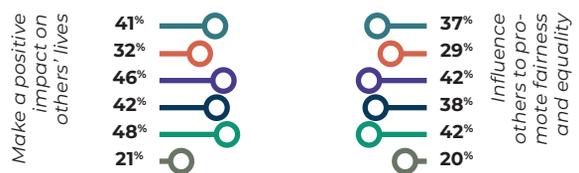
Conviction: "I believe it is important to ..."

% agree strongly



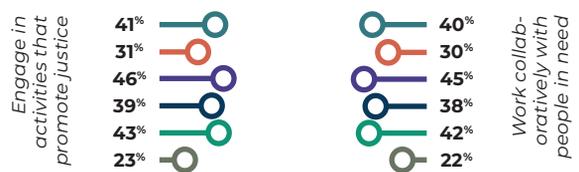
Confidence: "I am confident that I can ..."

% agree strongly



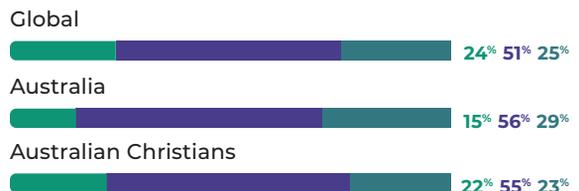
Commitment: "In the future, I will ..."

% agree strongly



Teens' Motivation Toward Justice

Motivated (Green), Oriented (Purple), Neutral (Blue)



Looking for Leaders

Who do teens feel should play a role in addressing injustices? Generally, everyone, teens worldwide and in Australia agree.

The majority of teens, especially those who are justice motivated, has high expectations across society, major institutions and government leaders, believing all of these should play not just some role but a major one in addressing injustice.

Specifically, along with the government, schools and educational institutions come out at the top of teens' responses, with over four in five justice-motivated teens in Australia (83%) saying they should play a major role. This could be a product of the season of life teens are in, with school being central in their routines and development.

Concerningly for Christians, the Church and its leaders aren't seen as having major roles in matters of justice, which we'll continue to explore. Just over one in five Australian teens (22%) says Christian

churches as well as Christian leaders should have “no role at all” in addressing injustice. Still, justice-motivated teens are more inclined than their oriented and neutral peers to look to these groups to champion justice.

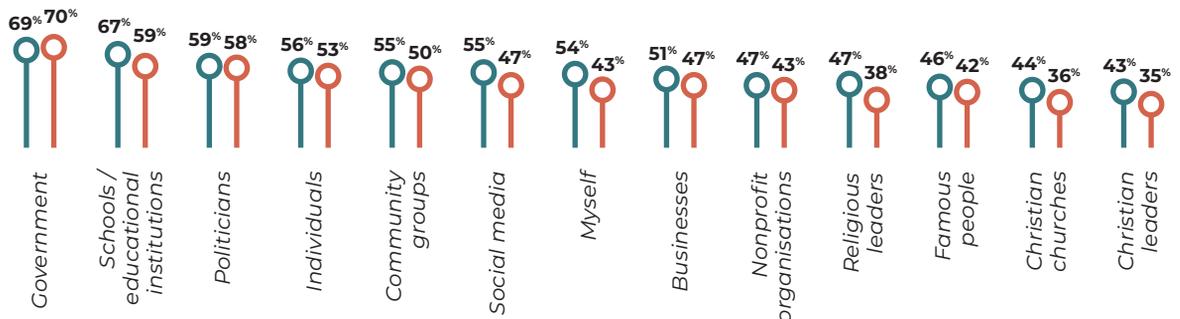
Australian teens who are justice neutral don't assign as much responsibility to any of the options Barna asked about, though half (52%) say the government should be at the helm of addressing injustice.

Teens' high and wide expectations may reflect their deep concerns about injustice, not their confidence in these groups; as it stands, nearly half of teens globally and in Australia, are neutral when asked whether they trust leaders today. Communities that lean into a generational longing to address injustice may, in the process, gain greater trust from today's teens.

How much of a role, if any, do you think of each of the following should play in addressing injustices?

% “major role”

● Global ● Australia



n=1,000 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021; n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

The Role of the Church

Overall, teens globally and in Australia aren't convinced the Christian Church is making an impact on issues of poverty and injustice. Just one in four teens worldwide and 22 percent in Australia say this is "definitely" the case. Christian teens in Australia are actually more likely than Christian teens globally to affirm the Church's impact (47% vs. 30%), but the majority of Australian teens of no faith (59%) does not even "probably" recognise the Church's impact.

As justice motivation increases, so does the certainty that Christian churches are making a difference. What might that impact look like?

Justice-motivated and -oriented Australian teens who feel churches and church leaders should play a role in addressing injustice agree on a critical activity as most important: advocating for meaningful change. Many groups of teens—including teens of no faith—want to see advocacy, encouragement and teaching through churches and Christian leaders.

Remember, mental health is of greatest concern to teens in Australia—so, unsurprisingly, teens want to attend churches that prioritise this issue. Teens in Australia would also prefer to attend churches that support ending extreme poverty, ending hunger and famines and providing refugee aid.

Top Ways the Church Can Address Injustice

Which of the following are ways that Christian churches or leaders can address injustice in the world? Select your three most important.

Base: said Christian churches / leaders should play a role in addressing injustice

● Global ● Australia ● Justice motivated ● Justice oriented ● Justice neutral

.....Australia.....



n=767 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021; n=19,135 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021,

Supporting Teens to Make an Impact

What can one person do to address injustice?

Among teens who say individuals should play a role in addressing injustice, the plurality points to some general categories of possible participation. Teens in Australia find consensus in agreeing that individuals should be advocating for meaningful change and encouraging others to address injustice.

An interesting standout among the possible roles that individuals can play: Justice-oriented teens place high importance on advocating for meaningful change, even more so than encouraging other to address injustice (the highest selection among teens globally).

As it stands, the majority of Australian teens of all justice motivation levels agrees at least somewhat that they want to keep learning more about injustices in society throughout their lives.

When asked what they need in order to be a part of global change themselves, the average teen, worldwide and in Australia, most needs encouragement from family and friends. Australian teens differ somewhat from their global peers, however, in the order of their other top selections. Notably, they are more likely to say they'd be helped by their generation stepping up as leaders (32% Australia vs. 26% global). Additionally, Australian teens—especially justice-oriented teens—are looking for opportunities to act under the encouragement and guidance of others.

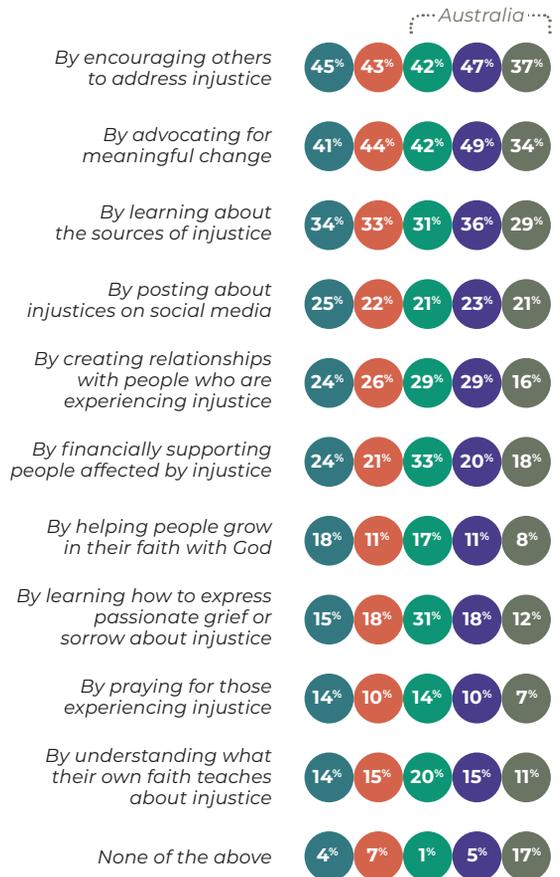
Authentic investment of peers, family members, leaders and other members of a teens' community may be a catalyst to empower teens to grow their hopes of making change in society.

Which of the following are ways that individuals can address injustice in the world?

Select your three most important.

Base: said individuals should play a role in addressing injustice

- Global ● Australia ● Justice motivated
- Justice oriented ● Justice neutral



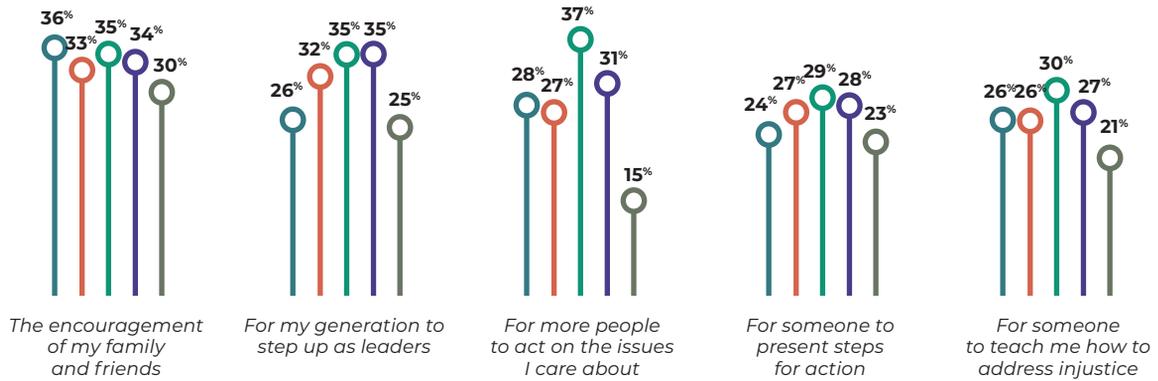
n=937 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021;
n=23,488 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

Top Things Teens Need to Make an Impact

As an individual, would any of the following be helpful to you in addressing injustice?
 Select your three most important.

● Global ● Australia ● Justice motivated ● Justice oriented ● Justice neutral

----- Australia -----



n=1,000 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021; n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

Open-Ended: Takeaways & Questions to Help You Think Through the Research

In our research, we found that teens' strong convictions to care for others and make an impact currently exceed their confidence and commitment to make a difference. What do you feel are necessary components for turning one's conviction into action? How can the Church be equipped to help teens in this way?

NODDY SHARMA: Our thoughts can and do lead to actions, but interestingly, our actions can also change the way in which our thoughts are formed. For example, someone thinks to themselves, "I need to get fit," but never really acts on it. If the same person, without thought, decided to start running every day, soon the running would produce a wide range of benefits and a habit would be established. The by-product would be fitness, among other things. If we use this same principle, the encouragement is to start doing something good for someone else without thinking about it. The result of that action will inform our thinking and build confidence in our ability to act.

What role should Christian leaders and the Church play in addressing injustices today?

SHARMA: During the pandemic, I saw a great example of a local church meeting the needs of people. In the heart of the city there were international students who were not eligible to receive government funding

or to work, and they could not get home due to closures. As a result, they had no money to pay for food. A local church gathered their people and turned their entire church into a grocery store where everything was free. Over the course of the year, they gave away more than a million bags of groceries.

What are teens open to learning about justice that might get overlooked? In what areas have you seen teens wanting more insight or guidance?

SHARMA: As we think of the health of the communities we are a part of, [we must ask], What are teens saying? How are they feeling? What are they wanting to solve? ... Impact of climate, food shortages, famine, conflict, first nations, gender gaps, identity and mental health to name a few. There seems to be a genuine interest in wanting to understand more about the issue and what can be done to bring about solutions.

The Way, the Truth, the Life

As Barna Group and our partners have set out to learn about how teens view Jesus, the Bible and justice, the data has consistently shown that these aspects of the Christian faith are interwoven and increase together. Using the custom categories introduced through this study, **here's how teens in Australia experience an overlap in their commitment to follow Jesus, their engagement with scripture and their motivation to make an impact.**

In Australia



of committed Christian teens are Bible engaged



of committed Christian teens are justice motivated



of Bible-engaged teens are committed Christians



of Bible-engaged teens are justice motivated



of justice-motivated teens are committed Christians

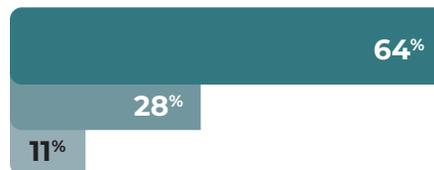


of justice-motivated teens are Bible engaged

The Bible draws teens to Jesus ...

"I believe that the Christian Bible provides a way for people to know Jesus personally"
% "very true"

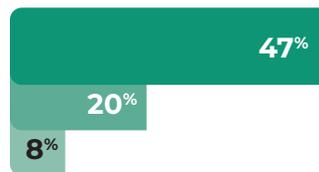
● Committed Christians ● Nominal Christians ● All others



● Bible engaged ● Bible open ● Bible unengaged



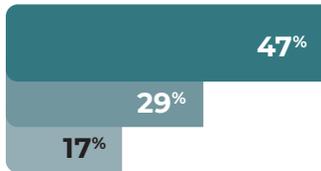
● Justice motivated ● Justice oriented ● Justice neutral



Jesus offers a model for justice ...

“Jesus advocated for justice”

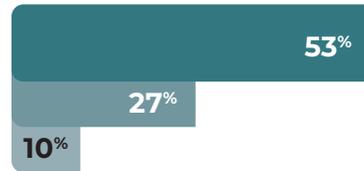
- Committed Christians
- Nominal Christians
- All others



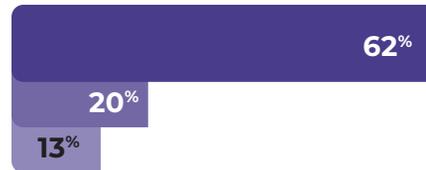
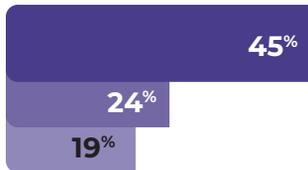
Justice is a biblical matter ...

“I believe that the Christian Bible addresses injustice”

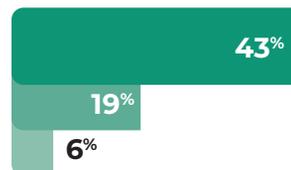
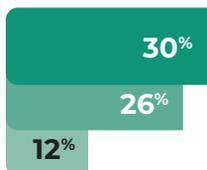
% “very true”



- Bible engaged
- Bible open
- Bible unengaged

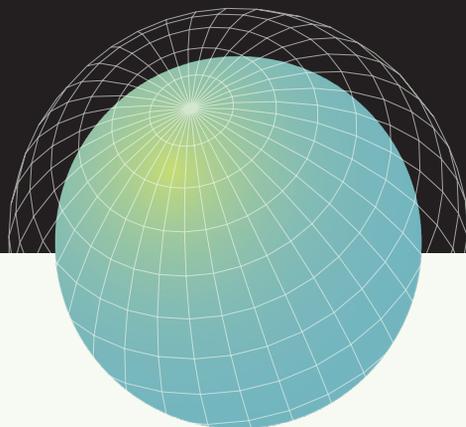


- Justice motivated
- Justice oriented
- Justice neutral



n=1,000 teens in Australia ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

An Open Door to *The Open Generation*



There is more to learn about teens around the world—and more insights and tools to help you make use of this research in your context.

Find information about resources, get content from the research partners and sign up for updates at barna.com/the-open-generation.

- Vol. 1—*How Teens Around the World Relate to Jesus*
- Vol. 2—*How Teens Around the World View the Bible*
- Vol. 3—*How Teens Around the World Can Make an Impact*
- Regional & Country Reports Featuring Local Data
- Webcasts & Interviews
- E-course

The Open Generation *project continues through 2022 and 2023.*

Methodology

This study is based on online, representative public opinion surveys conducted by Barna Group. Teens were recruited to participate in the quantitative survey through their parents. Parents answered seven screening questions about their teens, which included demographics such as age, gender and ethnicity. A total of 24,557 respondents ages 13 to 17 across 26 countries were surveyed between July 21, 2021, and August 24, 2021. An additional 313 responses were collected in February of 2022 in New Zealand. (See page 7 for sample distribution by country.) The margin of error for each individual country is assumed to be +/- 2.1%.

Acknowledgments

Barna Group is incredibly grateful to the all-star collective of partners who have made this project possible.

Our findings about the open generation have been strengthened by the grounded recommendations of ministers, activists, scholars and other experts spanning the globe. For this volume, we want to especially thank: Noddy Sharma and Ben Stephenson.

The Barna research team for this project included Daniel Copeland, Ashley Ekmay, Pam Jacob, David Kinnaman and Chanté Smith. The editorial team included Lisa Cooper, Cicely Corry, Karen Huber, Jessica Morris, Verónica Thames and Alyce Youngblood. Douglas Brown proofread the manuscript. With creative direction from Joe Jensen, Chaz Russo designed the cover. Annette Allen designed internal layout. Brenda Usery produced cover iterations for country reports and managed production. The team at Way Forth Collective, including Jennifer Bourland, Sarah Dolan, Caitlin Emas and Jenn Hamel, provided expert project management, with support from T'nea Rolle. The project team wishes to thank our Barna colleagues—Juli Cooper, Jonathan Fawcett, Mel Grabendike, Savannah Kimberlin, Lauren Petersen, Dr. Charlotte Marshall Powell, Matthew Randerson, Layla Shahmohammadi, Morgan Shride and Todd White—for their support as we've completed our largest study to date.

About the Partners



Barna

Barna Group is a research firm helping Christian leaders understand the times and know what to do. In its 38-year history, Barna Group has conducted more than two million interviews over the course of thousands of studies.



Biblica produces relevant and reliable scripture translations and innovative resources that power the Bible ministry of hundreds of global mission organisations and invite millions to discover the love of Jesus Christ.



World Vision

World Vision is an international partnership of Christians whose mission is to follow our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human transformation, seek justice and bear witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God.



Alpha supports the Church with resources and tools that help create a space where people are excited to bring their friends for a conversation about Jesus.



Christian Vision works in partnership with local churches across the globe to introduce people to Jesus, mobilise Christians to evangelise and resource the Church with free digital content and knowledge.



Bible Study Fellowship provides global, in-depth Bible studies producing passionate commitment to Christ, his word and his Church, magnifying God and maturing his people.



The Association of Christian Schools International is an international organisation that promotes Christian education and provides training and resources to Christian schools and Christian educators.



Christ In Youth partners with the local church to create moments and conversations that call young people to follow Jesus and into lives of Kingdom work.