

A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with
Biblica, World Vision and Alpha

Barna



The Open Generation

A Global Teens Study

United Kingdom

Copyright © 2023 by Barna Group

ISBN: 978-1-956730-41-8

All information contained in this document is copyrighted by Barna Group and shall remain the property of Barna Group. U.S. and international copyright laws protect the contents of this document in their entirety. Any reproduction, modification, distribution, transmission, publication, translation, display, hosting or sale of all or any portion of the contents of this document is strictly prohibited without written permission of an authorised representative of Barna Group.

The information contained in this report is true and accurate to the best knowledge of the copyright holder. It is provided without warranty of any kind: express, implied or otherwise. In no event shall Barna Group or its respective officers or employees be liable for any special, incidental, indirect or consequential damages of any kind, or any damages whatsoever resulting from the use of this information, whether or not users have been advised of the possibility of damage, or on any theory of liability, arising out of or in connection with the use of this information.

Funding for this research was made possible by the generous support of Biblica, World Vision, Alpha, Christian Vision, Bible Study Fellowship, the Association of Christian Schools International and Christ In Youth. Barna Group was solely responsible for data collection, analysis and writing of the report.

Table of Contents

5	A Preface from the Partners
6	Meet the Open Generation
8	Teens in the United Kingdom: A Local Snapshot
10	1. How Teens in the United Kingdom Relate to Jesus
16	2. How Teens in the United Kingdom View the Bible
23	3. How Teens in the United Kingdom Can Make an Impact
30	The Way, the Truth, the Life
33	Methodology
34	Acknowledgements
35	About the Partners



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 the United Kingdom, 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.



World Vision



Bible Study Fellowship



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 the United Kingdom 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 the United Kingdom. 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?

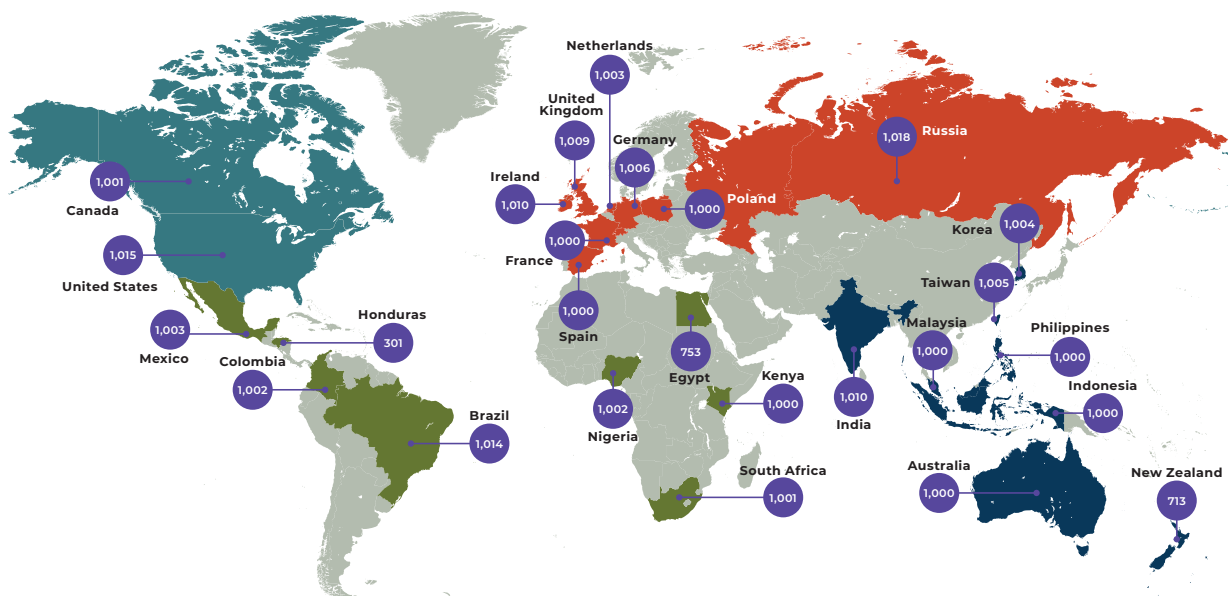
Will certain milestones, influences or experiences soon dampen their enthusiasm—presenting some of the challenges that face their not-so-much older peers?

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 the United Kingdom



Sample sizes for each country included in the study.

Teens in the United Kingdom: 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 the United Kingdom—it points to local forces and cultural climates that influence how teens identify and interact.

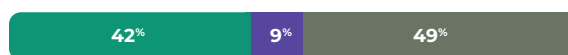
Faith

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 faith affiliation or practice.

Current estimates based on census data show that, overall, nearly half of the population of the United Kingdom is Christian. This percentage is consistent in England, Wales and Scotland whilst Northern Ireland is majority Christian.

Faith Profile of Teens in the United Kingdom

● Christian ● Other faith ● No faith



n=1,009 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

According to Barna's data, a sizable number of teens in the United Kingdom (42%) are Christian; Protestant Christian teens (58%) are more represented than Catholics (42%). Half of teens (49%), however, are atheist, agnostic or of no faith. And, as you'll see in the following pages, most Christian teens in the United Kingdom are only culturally or nominally engaged in their faith.

Emotions

In matters of emotional health and security, teens in the United Kingdom stand out against their global peers in both positive and negative respects. They are less likely to say they experience fear and pressure to be successful or perfect. At the same time, they are less likely to feel optimistic and confident. Their emotional profile is generally more muted than the global average.

Community

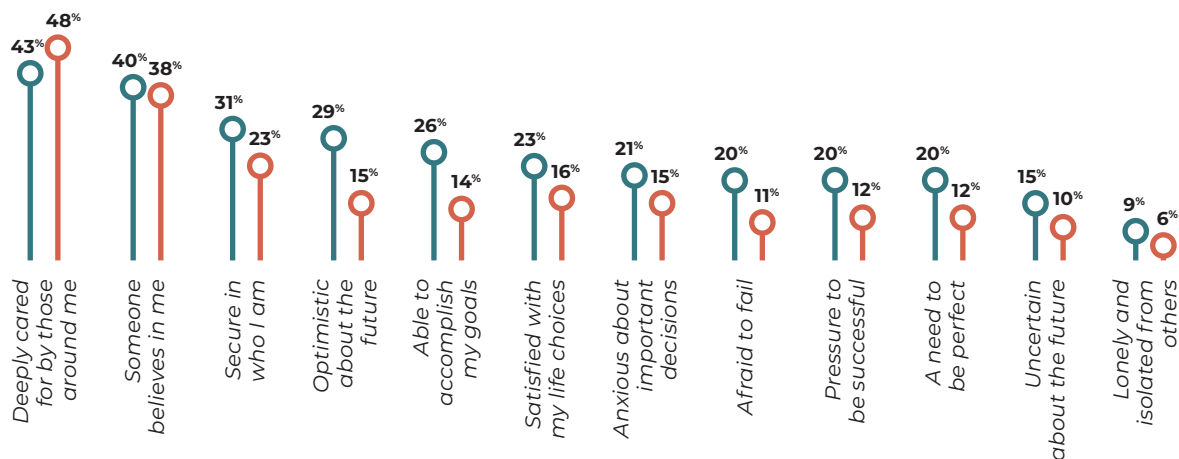
Similarly, on matters of their relationship to their communities, teens in the United Kingdom are less likely than global teens on average to report community satisfaction. They could use a boost in feeling that they have a positive influence or that their values are shared within their community. Teens in the United Kingdom don't seem to be as embedded in or comfortable with their communities. They may be looking for deeper connections and greater confidence that their presence and influence matters.

The Emotional Climate of Teens in the United Kingdom

How often do you feel each of the following?

% 'always'

● Global ● United Kingdom



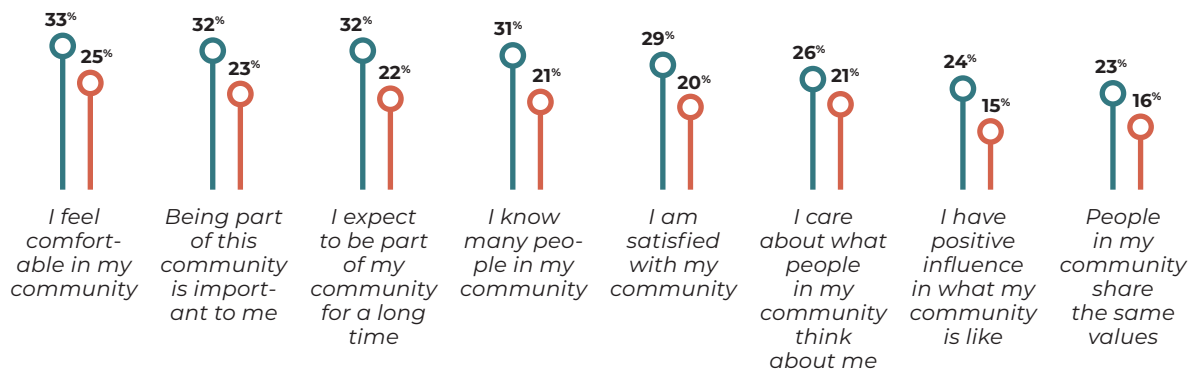
n=1,009 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; *n*=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

Community Among Teens in the United Kingdom

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

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

● Global ● United Kingdom



n=982 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; *n*=24,449 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

1. How Teens in the United Kingdom 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 the United Kingdom tend to align with these views and describe him in agreeable and comforting terms. Christian teens in the United Kingdom are also less likely than Christian teens worldwide to say Jesus was a miracle worker, that he was raised from the dead or that he will return one day. This hints at a ‘partial gospel’ that is commonplace among teens, even Christian ones, globally.

At times, Catholic teens in the United Kingdom stand in significant contrast to Protestant teens when it comes to their views on Jesus. Catholic teens are less likely to say Jesus is a miracle worker (28% vs. 39%) and was a real person (32% vs. 45%).

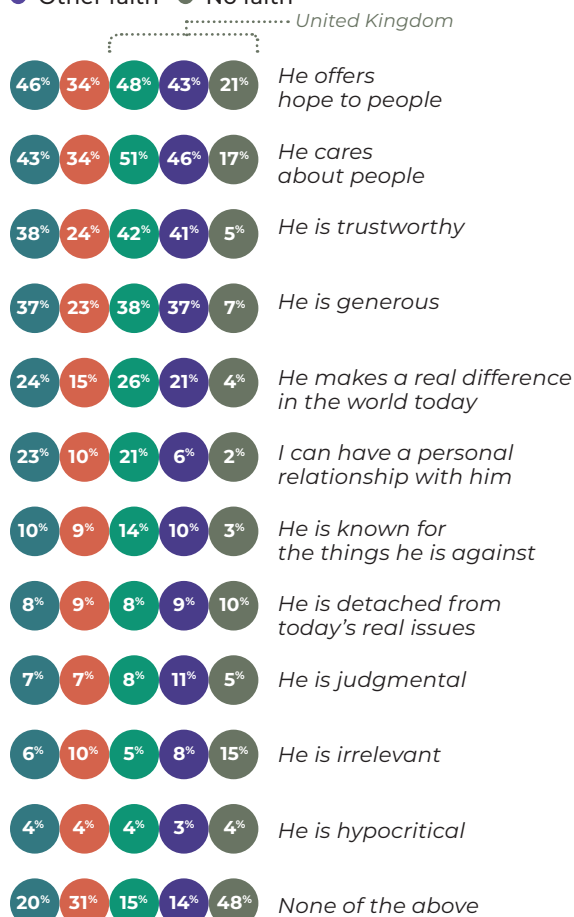
Teens of other faiths are somewhat more likely to describe Jesus as judgmental. Still, negative ideas about Jesus are rare, and Jesus emerges as a positive figure among teens of other faiths in the United Kingdom.

Perhaps most notable: The plurality of UK teens of no faith selects ‘none of the above’ or ‘not sure’ when asked what they believe about Jesus, pointing to an indifference or uncertainty towards him. To 20 percent of these teens, Jesus is a mythical or fictional character. Whatever religious teens think of Jesus, teens of no faith likely are not thinking about him at all.

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

Select all that apply.

● Global ● United Kingdom ● Christian
● Other faith ● No faith



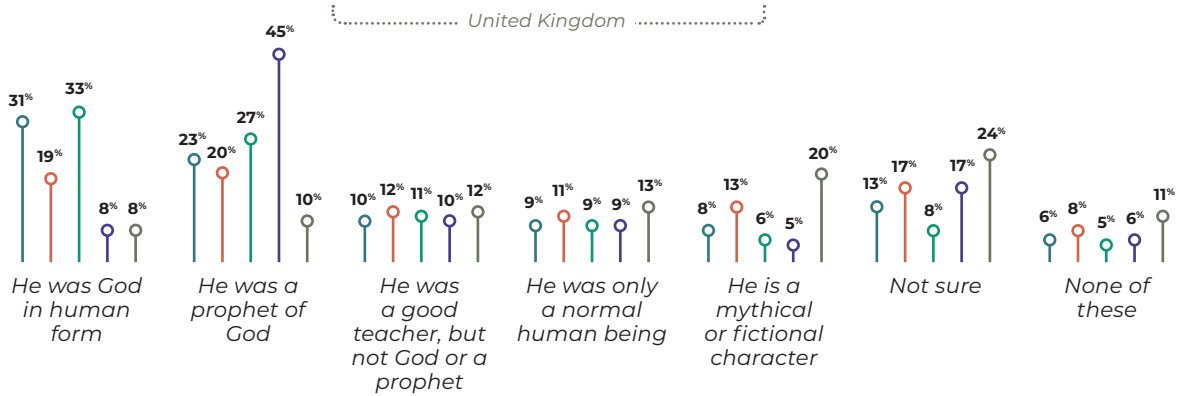
n=1,009 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24

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

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

Select one.

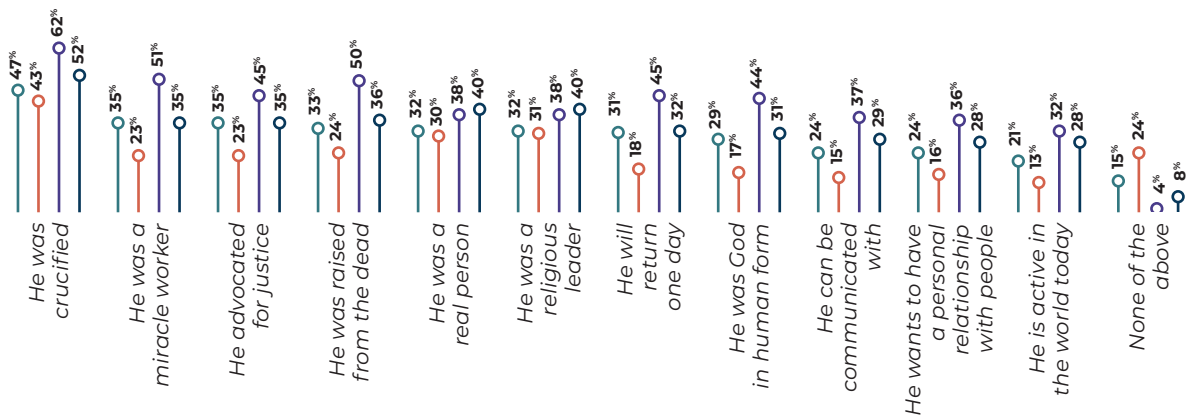
● Global ● United Kingdom ● Christian ● Other faith ● No faith



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

Select the statements you believe are true.

● Global ● United Kingdom ● Global Christians ● United Kingdom Christians



n=1,009 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; *n*=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 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 a 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 in the United Kingdom, Barna developed a segmentation based on a personal commitment to follow Jesus.

Commitment to Jesus

- Committed Christians
- Nominal Christians
- All others

Global



United Kingdom



- **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 shy of one in four teens (22%) worldwide is a committed Christian. In the United Kingdom, this number falls to a little over one in 10 (12%), with nearly one-third being nominal Christians (30%), on par with the global proportion (30%). Broken down by denomination, 33 percent of Catholic teens in the United Kingdom and 27 percent of Protestant teens are categorised as committed Christians.

Committed Christian teens are a minority who often have meaningful experiences of faith. In the United Kingdom, 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. However, the same group in the United Kingdom isn't experiencing this joy so deeply; there is a 16-point drop in the percentage of committed Christian teens who agree strongly. Similarly, nominal Christian teens in the United Kingdom are less than half as likely as nominal Christian teens globally to say that 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 16-point drop in the percentage of committed Christian teens in the United Kingdom who strongly agree. Nominal Christian teens in the United Kingdom, likewise, are 10 points less likely as their global counterparts to agree strongly that Jesus speaks to them in a way that is relevant to their life.

Globally and within the United Kingdom's

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

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

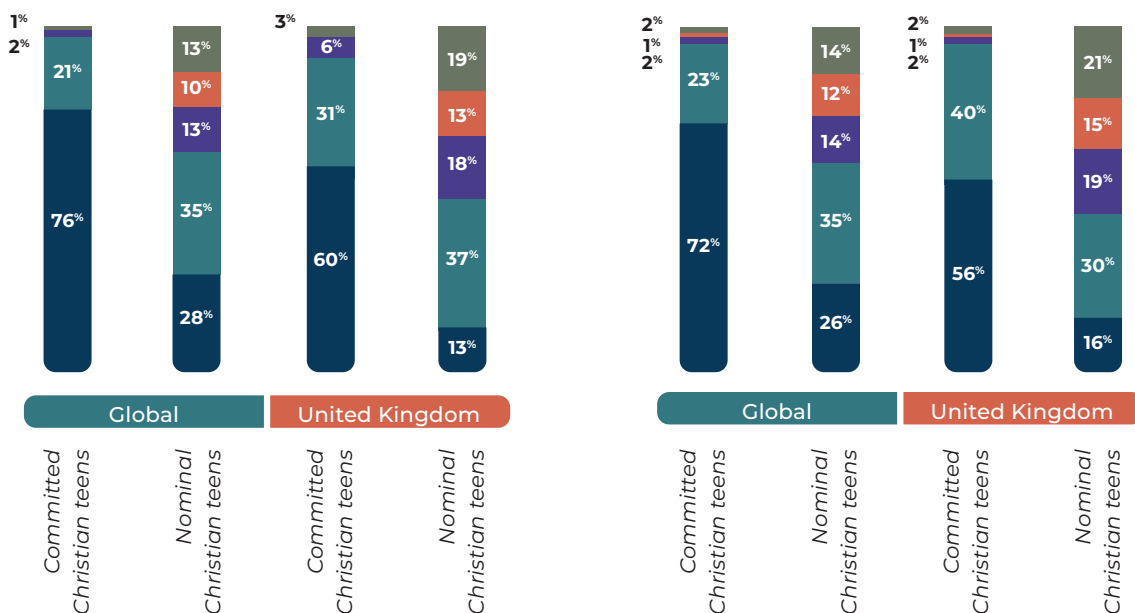
To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

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 ● Not sure



n=431 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; *n*=13,184 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

A Learning Journey with Jesus

Curiosity about Jesus is widespread in the open generation. Teens in the United Kingdom, however, are less intrigued than their global peers, with 38 percent being at least somewhat motivated to keep learning about Jesus throughout their lives.

Teens' personal commitment to follow Jesus goes hand in hand with their motivation to study him. Globally, 85 percent of committed Christian teens are very motivated to continue learning about him, compared to about one-third of nominal Christian teens. In the United Kingdom, whilst a gap persists between committed and nominal Christian teens, the numbers drop overall.

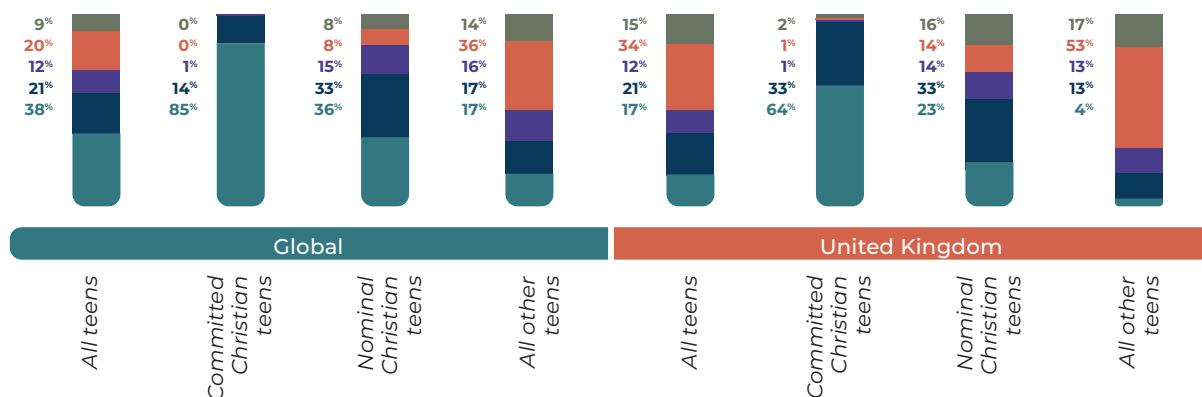
Teens in the United Kingdom may place a significant amount of trust in their family members

and the Bible. Teens are more likely to report looking to these sources than to church leaders, the Internet, their friends or influencers.

Digging into their top trusted sources, however, we find some challenges to instruction about Jesus. Beyond the Bible, a range of church and youth leaders and community members are seen as trustworthy sources for learning about Jesus. Interestingly, however, both committed and nominal Christian teens in the United Kingdom don't place as much trust in formal members of clergy—pastors, priests and ministers. In fact, they are more likely to see 'myself' as a trustworthy source. More personal connections seem to have more influence than those in a pulpit.

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=1,009 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

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

Among teens in the UK, common perceptions of Jesus are that he offers hope and cares for people. *How can the Church embody the Jesus teens are drawn to? How could this help teens grow in their spiritual life and practice?*

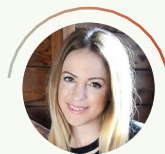
RACHEL GARDNER: I think [this finding] is an indicator that, as every generation should, teens are experiencing an aspect of the mystery of God that maybe the previous generation has slightly lost sight of. I would say that probably is a regular pattern of Church history. That tells us something exciting about young people's spirituality and about how the gospel is moving into the neighborhood for young people. The gospel will always be countercultural. Jesus will always be a different voice, a different face. So, I wonder if [this data] is telling us that teens are not experiencing merciful, loving compassion in their world, either online or in the world around them. They are drawn to how Jesus is markedly different to that.

What we see here in the North of England is that when young people are invited into deep encounters with a merciful Jesus, that opens the possibility for curiosity about the kind of apologetic questions that traditionally we've always asked: Who is Jesus? What are his claims? Is there life after death? Those questions are not being asked at first for many young people until they encounter him.

Few teens in the UK, even among self-identified Christian teens, have also made a personal commitment to follow Jesus. *As these numbers dwindle, how can Christian teens develop the community they need?*

NEIL O'BOYLE: We must give them a voice and the opportunity to shape how things could look, as well as provide them with appropriate responsibilities. In order to empower, the church has to invest and take risks, allowing young people to make mistakes which they can bounce back from. An integrated approach to youth ministry must include an orientation for young people to feel like a central part of the church, rather than on the fringes. Ownership increases when people feel invested in and like a valued member who is listened to and can participate in the leading of the ministry.

This report features insights from:



Rachel Gardner

Director of partnerships
for Youthscape



Dr. Krish Kandiah OBE

Director of the Sanctuary
Foundation



Neil O'Boyle

National director of British
Youth for Christ

2. How Teens in the United Kingdom View the Bible

The Presence of the Bible

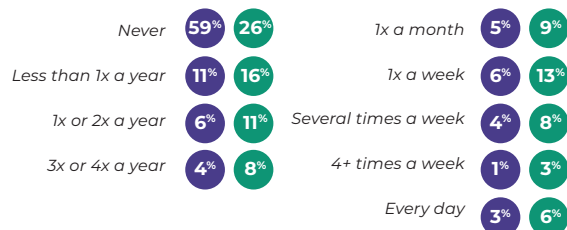
Overall, 46 percent of teens in the United Kingdom—including 78 percent of Christian teens—say their household owns a Christian Bible. Three in five UK teens (59%) never use a Bible (defined as reading, listening, watching, praying with or using Bible text or content in any form), and 30 percent of Christian teens interact with scripture weekly.

For the most part, Bible users and Christian teens in the United Kingdom use the Bible by reading it in print (37% in the past year). Reading Bible content on the Internet is the next most-common usage, with 26 percent saying they've done so this year. Smaller percentages listened to an audio version of the Bible (14%), studied the Bible in a small group or study (15%) or used a Bible app on a smartphone or tablet (15%) during that period.

For now, despite being in a digitally native generation, Christian teens in the United Kingdom prefer to use the Bible in print.

Bible Use Among Teens in the United Kingdom

● All teens ● Christian teens



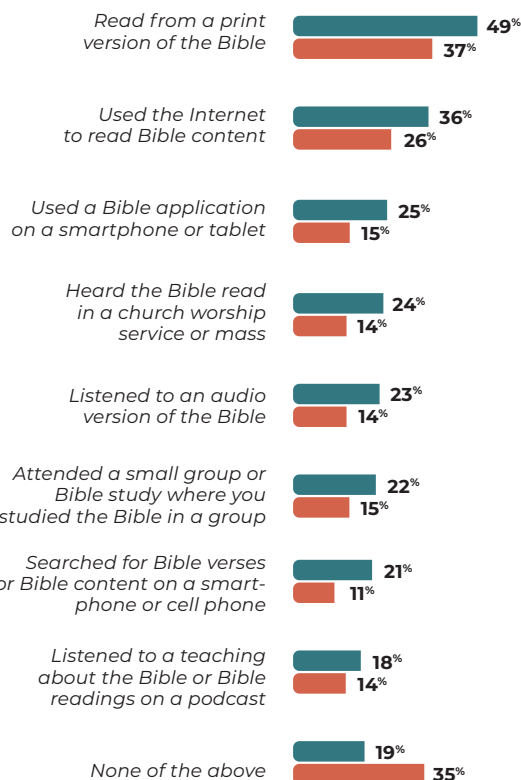
n=1,009 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

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 ● United Kingdom



n=607 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; *n*=18,118 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

What Is the Bible?

The Bible is seen as significant and sacred to the plurality of teens in the United Kingdom. This is typical of countries with Christian heritage and reflects a foundational understanding of the Bible.

Yet teens in the United Kingdom express more skepticism towards the Bible than do teens globally; 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 the United Kingdom are less likely than Christian teens

worldwide to affirm this view of the Bible. Their approach to interpreting the text is less decisive than that of their global peers.

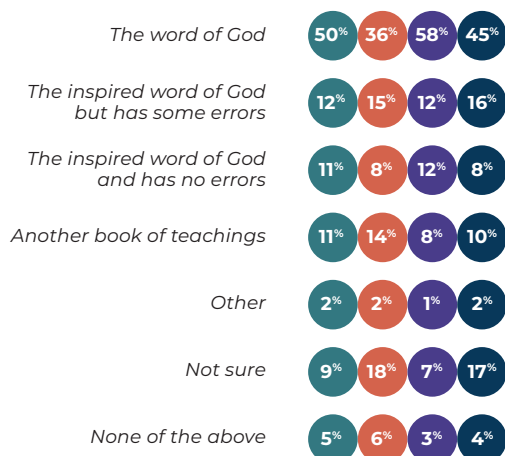
Teens in the United Kingdom are also more likely to be apprehensive about deciding on what, exactly, the Bible is. Eighteen percent of teens in the United Kingdom report not being sure what to believe about the Bible, a pattern of uncertainty that emerges in several other areas of this report and goes along with 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 ● United Kingdom
- Global Christians ● United Kingdom Christians

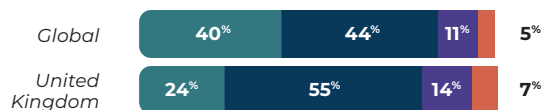


To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

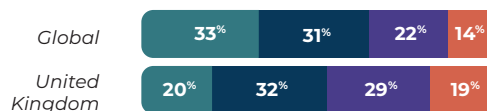
Base: Bible users / owners or Christians

- 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 behaviours 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 towards 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 the United Kingdom, falling into this category of engagement. Whilst this openness could be celebrated for its curiosity or potential, the marginal percentage of Bible-engaged teens shouldn't be overlooked. The truth is that Bible-unengaged teens far outnumber Bible-engaged teens, globally and in the United Kingdom. Additionally, in the United Kingdom, Christian teens are less engaged with the

Bible than their global counterparts—in fact, they are more Bible unengaged than teens of *other* faiths in the United Kingdom.

Teens' Engagement with the Bible

- Bible engaged ● Bible open
- Bible unengaged

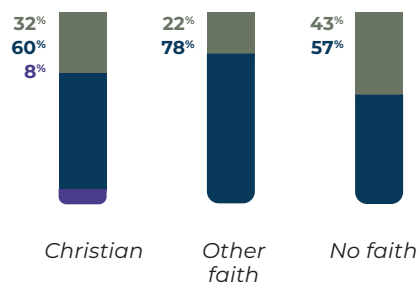
Global



United Kingdom



Teens' Bible Engagement Across Faith Groups in the United Kingdom



n=1,009 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; *n*=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

How Teens Read the Bible

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

Teens who are Bible users or Christians, both globally and in the United Kingdom, mostly report finding enjoyment in reading the Bible by themselves and reflecting on what they've read. Beyond that, there is a noticeable dip in the percentage of teens in the United Kingdom who report enjoying any of the other possible Bible-reading practices Barna asked about, when compared to teens globally. Instead, teens in the United Kingdom tend to select 'none of the above' options for Bible use. Even among Bible-open teens in the United Kingdom, engaging with and deriving enjoyment from the Bible is rare. This is notable considering teens with higher levels of openness or engagement tend to have holistic Bible-reading practices that involve searching and processing the scriptures, both alone and with others.

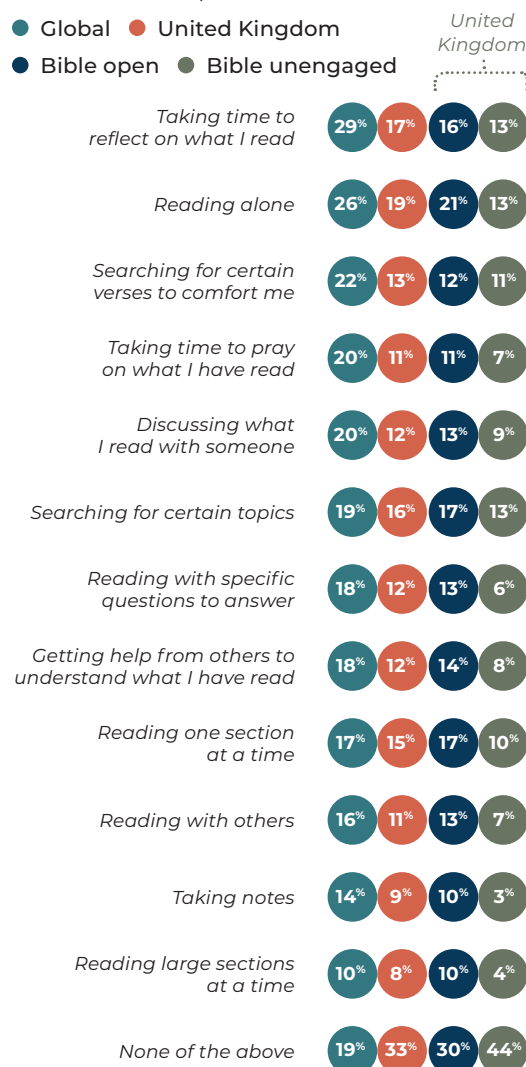
Though teens are usually reluctant to precisely name barriers to their Bible-reading (the plurality selects none), Bible users or Christians in the United Kingdom seem to struggle to care much about the Bible. More than their global peers, teens in the United Kingdom point to barriers like lacking interest or enjoyment in their Bible-reading.

These findings illustrate a dire need for the 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, some teens in the United Kingdom 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 ● United Kingdom
● Bible open ● Bible unengaged



n=607 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; n=18,118 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021. Due to small sample size, Bible-engaged teens are not shown for comparison.

Mentoring Teens in Bible Engagement

When it comes to learning more about the Bible throughout their lives, nearly two-thirds of Christian teens in the United Kingdom report feeling very (32%) or somewhat motivated (33%) to do so. This sets them apart from their peers of other faith identities, though more than one in three teens in the United Kingdom (37%) reports some level of motivation to learn more about Christian scripture.

Where might this instruction come from? Typically, school. In the United Kingdom, 27 percent of teens who are Bible users or Christians report having been taught to study the Bible by a schoolteacher. In contrast, teens worldwide say parents or guardians are their primary Bible teachers (36%).

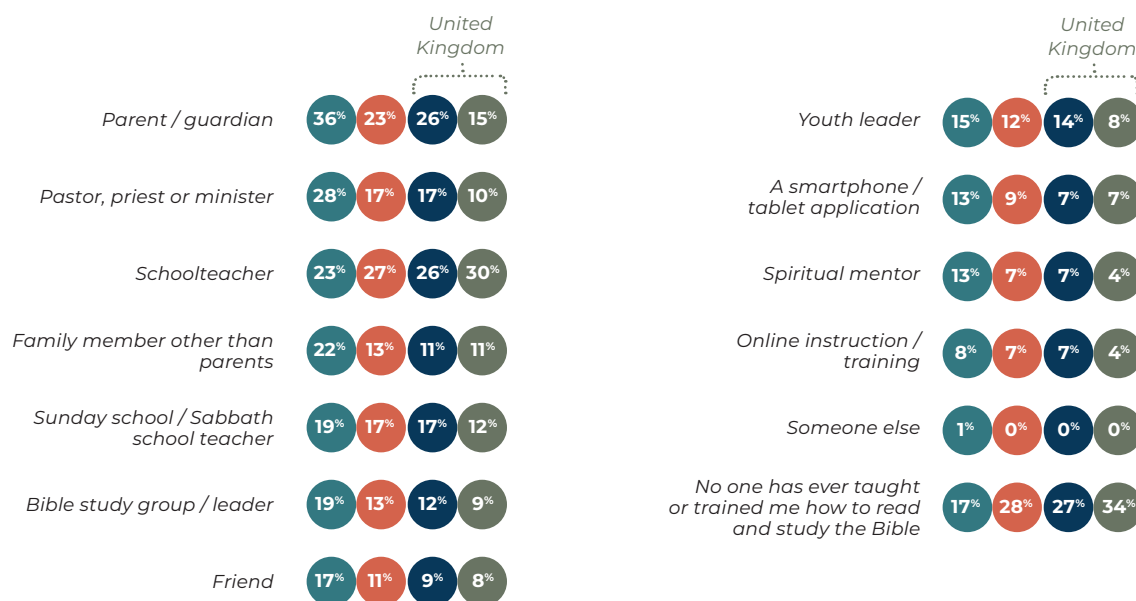
Ministry is, naturally, another source of instruction. However, clergy appear to have a less significant

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 ● United Kingdom ● Bible open ● Bible unengaged



n=607 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; n=18,118 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

Due to small sample size, Bible-engaged teens are not shown for comparison.

role in Bible instruction for teens in the United Kingdom. Only 17 percent of teens in the United Kingdom who are Christian or use a Bible say they were taught by a pastor, priest, minister or Sunday school teacher. Instead, in the United Kingdom, more than one in four Bible-open teens and one in three Bible-unengaged teens say ‘no one’ has taught them how to read the Bible. This dramatically underscores the need for relationships in nurturing Bible reading.

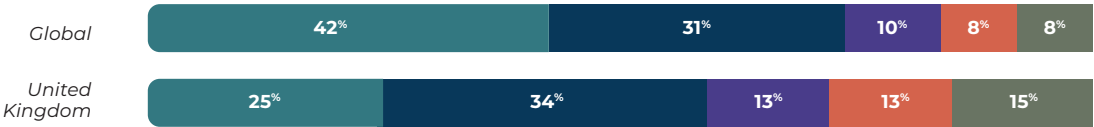
Both the sources and the outcomes of Bible mentorship seem to leave teens in the United Kingdom wanting. Christian teens in the United Kingdom are not as likely as their Christian peers around the world to report that in their church they regularly receive wisdom for how the Bible applies to their lives (25% 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=431 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; n=13,282 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

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

Teens in the UK rarely point to clergy or other church leaders as sources of Bible instruction. *If attending church is not a cultural norm, how can churches and those who work with teens strengthen networks for Bible teaching?*

O'BOYLE: Since God is not on the agenda for the vast majority of young people, it is highly unlikely they are going to wander into church and become Christians out of curiosity or desire. They need a reason, and it needs to start through relevant engagement that meets a valid need. Working in partnerships with the local churches and not in isolation is key for the Christian community. Many churches may not have the resources to create an accessible environment for young people which allows for proximity to church. The integration of outreach and church-based youth ministry is the next key step, which will then allow young people to experience Christian teaching and worship in an environment they are comfortable in (because they have relationships with the leaders and their friends attend), leading to positive church engagement.

How can pastors and priests present the gospel in a way that connects with young people and validates their concerns and experiences?

O'BOYLE: Young people aren't interested in truth claims or arguments about science; they are interested in whether you are credible and genuine and whether you are relatable. Ultimately, they want to know whether faith actually works and what impact it has on your life.

When we journey with young people and involve them in our own faith walk with a genuine outworking of everyday living, then they are curious and learning. You are in effect discipling them through your actions. Ultimately, we need to listen and involve [teenagers] in the conversation as we live out our lives. It's not a lesson, and it's not an argument, but an interactive journey.

GARDNER: It's so important, as church leaders, that we absolutely embrace the wonder of adolescence and puberty. That we gear ourselves for sitting in the rocky boat of adolescence with these precious teenagers and say, 'Great! Let's chuck everything up in the air. Let's ask the biggest questions'. Because we don't do that yet, how would a young person know that we are ready for them, for that?

3. How Teens in the United Kingdom Can Make an Impact

Teens' Global Concerns & Convictions

Barna asked teens which global problems are of a greatest concern to them and received a broad distribution of responses. Cultural, political, economical and even geographical 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 the United Kingdom that list looks different. Global climate change emerges as the top concern for teens in the United Kingdom (44%), and mental health follows close behind (42%). One in three expresses great concern over extreme poverty.

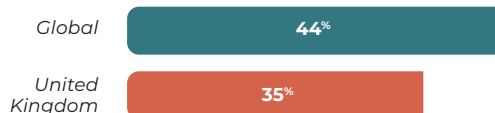
Whatever issues they are concerned about, teens in the United Kingdom may feel unable or even uninterested to affect them. Teens in the United

Kingdom, including Christians, trend behind their global peers in their reported motivation to address injustices in society. Religious teens in the United Kingdom, whether Christian or otherwise, show similar levels of motivation, whilst their peers of no faith are less inclined to be either 'very' or 'somewhat' motivated to address injustice. Fifteen per cent of the latter say they are not sure how they feel on the matter.

It's important for adults and mentors who work with teens to discern whether teens lack motivation in general or whether teens personally lack what they feel is enough context or information to understand their own capacity to act against injustice. In the United Kingdom, just over one-third strongly agrees that, collectively, their generation has the ability to make a positive impact in the world.

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

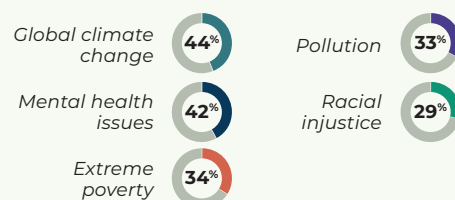
% agree strongly



n=1,009 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24

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

5 Greatest Concerns of Teens in the United Kingdom



Teens' Motivation Towards Justice

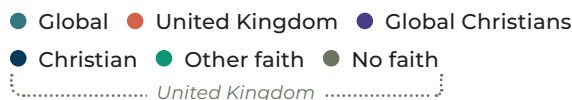
Teens may often lack the agency or ability to take personal action against injustices on their own or without the involvement, resources and leadership of a parent or guardian. However, the research does allow us to distinguish them by their motivation or potential for promoting justice. The resulting 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. Teens of other faiths see a boost in confidence in their potential impact and influence.

- **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

Teens in the United Kingdom, both in aggregate and in Christianity specifically, are less likely to be categorised as justice motivated compared to their peers worldwide. They are slightly more likely to be justice oriented or justice neutral, which is a trend consistent in other Western countries.

n=1,009 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; *n*=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.



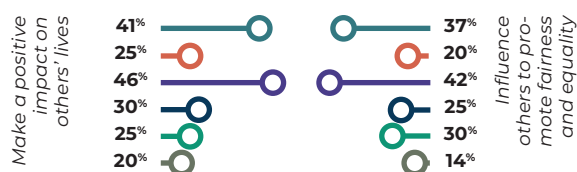
Conviction: 'I believe it is important to ...'

% agree strongly



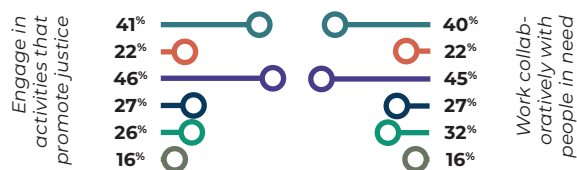
Confidence: 'I am confident that I can ...'

% agree strongly



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

% agree strongly



Teens' Motivation Toward Justice

● Motivated ● Oriented ● Neutral

Global



United Kingdom



United Kingdom Christians



Looking for Leaders

Who do teens feel should play a role in addressing injustices? Generally, everyone, teens worldwide and in the United Kingdom tell Barna.

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

Specifically, along with the government and its politicians, schools and educational institutions come out at the top of teens' responses, with 81 percent of justice-motivated teens and two-thirds of justice-oriented teens in the United Kingdom (65%) 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 jus-

tice, which we'll continue to explore. Still, justice-motivated teens in the United Kingdom are predictably more inclined to look to the Church and its leaders to champion justice.

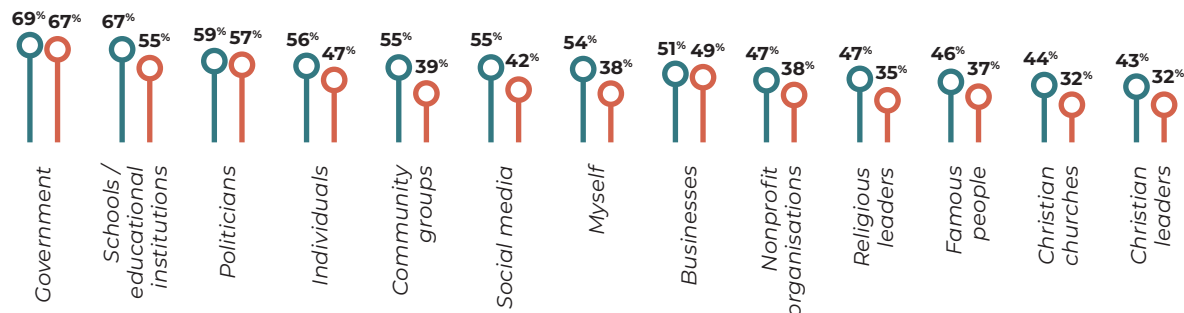
Teens who are justice neutral don't assign as much responsibility to any of the options Barna asked about, though half (50%) say the government should be at the helm in addressing justice.

Teens' wide expectations may reflect their deep concern about injustice, not their confidence in these groups; as it stands, 41 percent of teens in the United Kingdom say they do not trust leaders today, with another two in five being neutral on this point. Communities that lean into generational longings to address injustice may, in the process, gain greater trust from today's teens.

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

% 'major role'

● Global ● United Kingdom



n=1,009 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; *n*=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

The Role of the Church

Overall, teens globally and in the United Kingdom aren't convinced the Christian Church is making an impact on issues of poverty and injustice. One-quarter worldwide and just 14 percent in the United Kingdom say this is 'definitely' the case. Christian teens in the United Kingdom slightly exceed the global average, whilst the majority of teens of no faith do 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 justice-oriented teens in the United Kingdom who feel churches and church leaders

should play a role in addressing injustice agree on two critical, if broad activities that are most important: encouraging people to address injustice and advocating for meaningful change. Interestingly, justice-oriented teens in the United Kingdom seem to be most emphatic about some of the ways Christian churches and leaders can take action, often exceeding the proportion of justice-motivated teens in their response.

Although global climate change is of greatest concern to teens in the United Kingdom, teens say that they want to attend churches that prioritise ending extreme poverty. This is especially true of justice-motivated and justice-oriented teens.

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 ● United Kingdom ● Justice motivated ● Justice oriented ● Justice neutral



n=696 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; *n*=19,135 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 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 the United Kingdom agree that individuals should be encouraging others and advocating towards meaningful change. Justice-oriented teens are most enthusiastic about these attitudes. There is also sizable agreement in the United Kingdom that individuals can make a difference by posting about injustices on social media or creating relationship with those experiencing injustice.

Justice-motivated teens in the United Kingdom gravitate toward 'learning about the sources of injustice' as an important step. This may underscore the critical role that listening and learning presently play in their own journey towards gaining confidence to address injustice. As it stands, the majority of teens in the United Kingdom want to keep learning more about injustices throughout their lives.

When asked what they need in order to be a part of global change themselves, teens have high expectations for their peers. The average UK teen mostly needs their generation to step up as leaders. An even higher percentage of justice-motivated and justice-oriented teens want to see this generational leadership. Additionally, more than one in four UK teens (28%) feels it would help if more people acted on the issues they care about.

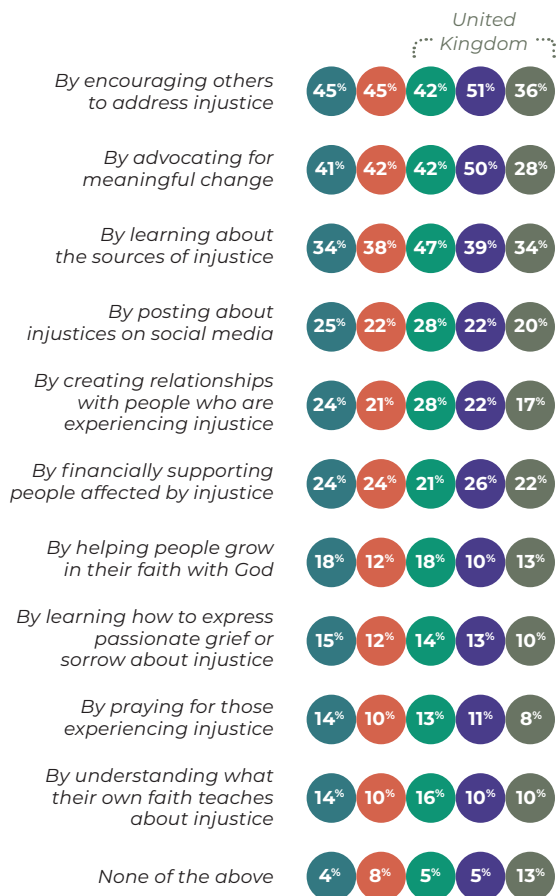
Authentic investment of peers, family members, leaders and the other members of a teens' circle may be a catalyst to empower teens to realise their hopes of making change in society.

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 ● United Kingdom ● Justice motivated
● Justice oriented ● Justice neutral



n=920 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24

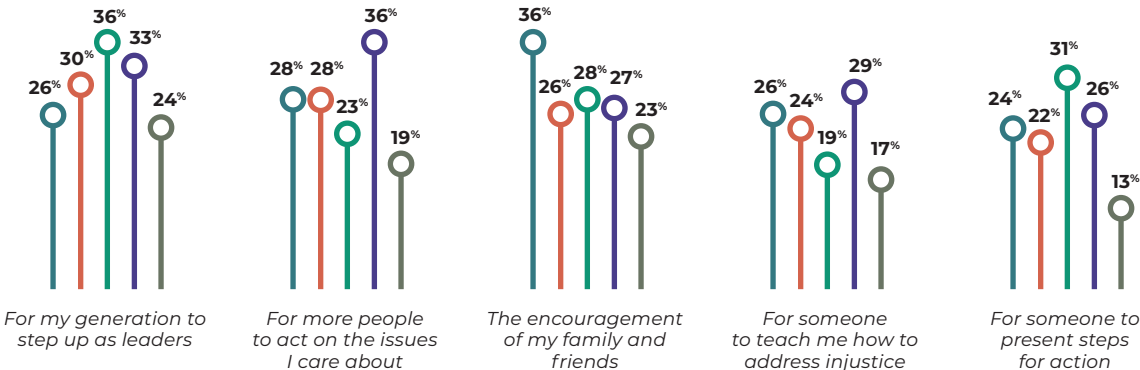
August 2021; n=23,488 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

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 ● United Kingdom ● Justice motivated ● Justice oriented ● Justice neutral

United Kingdom



n=1,009 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

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

Teens in the UK are less likely than the global average to feel like their generation can make a difference. *Why do you think they lack this optimism? How can they be empowered, encouraged and equipped to address injustices in society?*

KRISH KANDIAH: I believe young people in Britain have huge potential to make a positive difference in the world, but *The Open Generation* survey shows us that many young people have lost confidence that change is possible. Many of the leaders that young people might have looked to for inspiration have let them down. Reasons for this lack of optimism might include scandals both in our political leadership and in our Church leadership, the cost-of-living crisis or predictions that the next generation is likely to be poorer than their parents.

For me, this presents a challenge to us who have leadership responsibility to model something different. An unshakeable confidence in the power of God and a wholehearted commitment to the compassion of God are the only means by which we can pursue our calling from Christ to be salt and light in the world and model what is needed for the rising generation.

How ready do you feel teens in the UK truly are to address injustice? What obstacles still exist? What support do they need from the Church?

KANDIAH: I have personally witnessed the passion and enthusiasm of teenagers to pursue justice. I have spoken at school assemblies organised by pupils because they wanted to make a difference for children in the care system.

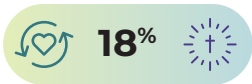
I think one of the main obstacles is that too many churches have reduced the gospel to a 'get-out-of-hell-free-card' which promises only otherworldly salvation but does not teach Christians to follow in the footsteps of Christ. I think some churches have reduced teenagers to consumers; we provide programmes for children and young people to attend, rather than opportunities for them to use their creativity, vision, skills, talents and leadership to make a difference.

I look back on my own life and I am so grateful for the adults that took a risk on giving me opportunities to lead when I was a teenager. I want to be one of those who will equip and release younger people to do the same in this generation.

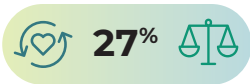
The Way, the Truth, the Life

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 the United Kingdom experience an overlap in their commitment to follow Jesus, their engagement with scripture and their motivation to make an impact.**

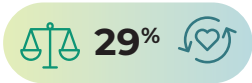
In the United Kingdom



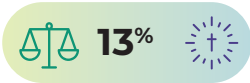
of committed Christian teens are Bible engaged



of committed Christian teens are justice motivated



of justice-motivated teens are committed Christians



of justice-motivated teens are Bible engaged

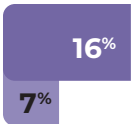
The Bible draws teens to Jesus ...

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

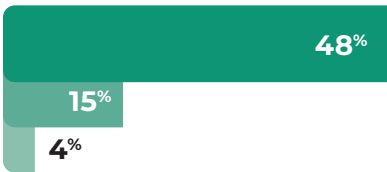
Committed Christians Nominal Christians All others



Bible open Bible unengaged



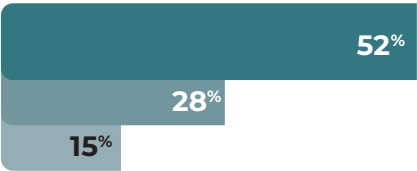
Justice motivated Justice oriented Justice neutral



Jesus offers a model for justice ...

'Jesus advocated for justice'

● Committed Christians ● Nominal Christians ● All others



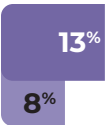
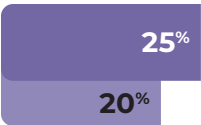
Justice is a biblical matter ...

'I believe that the Christian Bible addresses injustice'

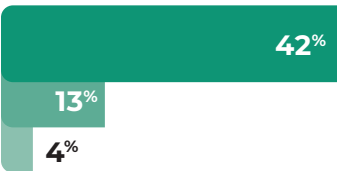
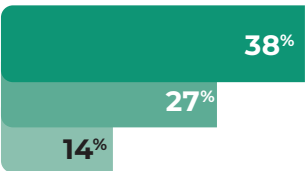
% 'very true'



● Bible open ● Bible unengaged



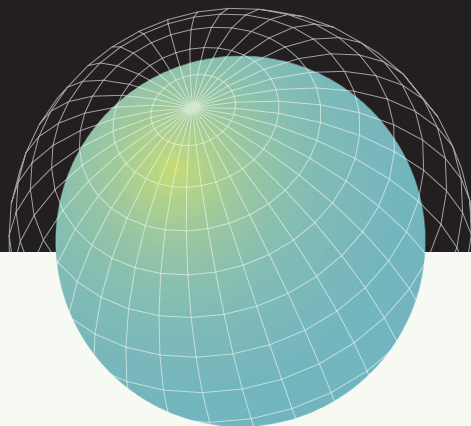
● Justice motivated ● Justice oriented ● Justice neutral



n=1,009 teens in the United Kingdom ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

Due to small sample size, Bible-engaged teens are not shown for comparison.

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 21 July 2021, and 24 August 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%.

Acknowledgements

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: Rachel Gardner, Krish Kandiah and Neil O’Boyle.

The Barna research team for this project included Daniel Copeland, Ashley Ekmay, Pam Jacob, David Kinnaman and Chanté Smith. The editorial team included Joan Chen-Main, Timothy Cho, Lisa Cooper, Cicely Corry, Karen Huber, Jessica Morris, Verónica Thames and Alyce Youngblood. Laura Skiba 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, Kristine Hampton, 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 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 is an international partnership of Christians whose mission is to follow our Lord and Saviour 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.