



The Open Generation

A Global Teens Study

Canada

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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 organizational 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 organizations 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 Canada, 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 Canada 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 organizations 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 represents a

summary of the findings specific to Canada. 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?

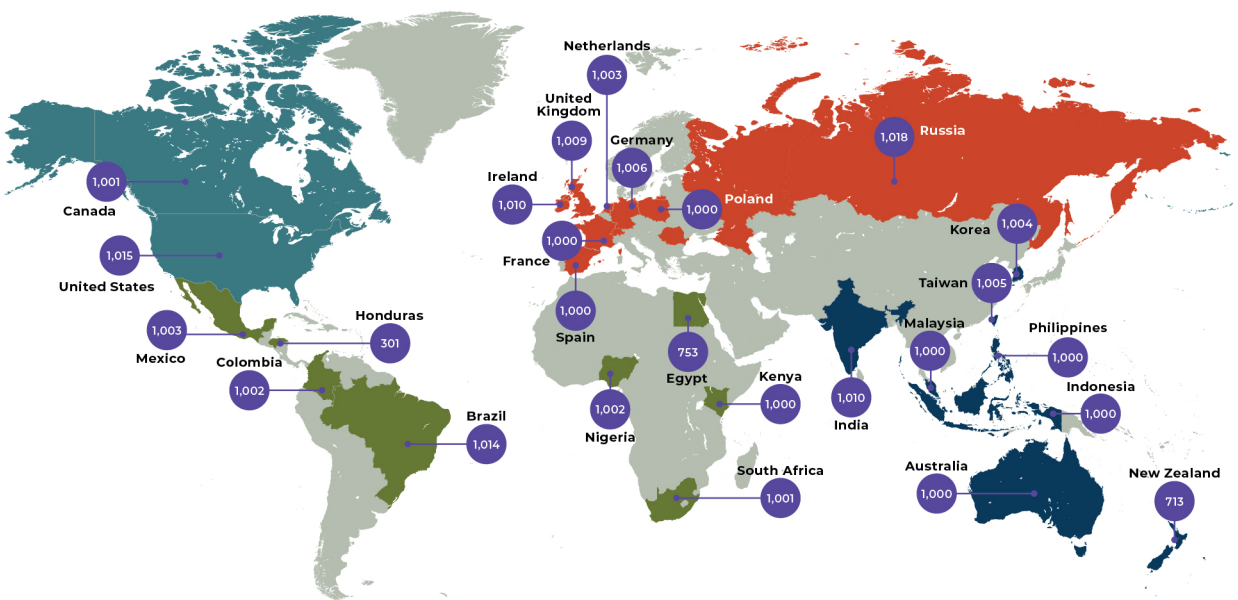
Will certain milestones, influences or experiences soon dampen their enthusiasm—presenting some of the challenges that face their not-so-much older peers?

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 Canada



Teens in Canada: 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 Canada—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.

Canada is primarily a Christian country. According to Statistics Canada, 63 percent of the Canadian population aged 15 and older report being Christian, with 32 percent being Catholic. According to Barna's data, a plurality of

Faith Profile of Teens in Canada

● Christian ● Other faith ● No faith



n=1,001 teens in Canada ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

Canadian teens (47%) is Christian; one in four (26%) is specifically Catholic. A substantial 42 percent of teens, however, are atheist, agnostic or of no faith. And, as you'll see in the following pages, most Christian teens in Canada are only culturally or nominally engaged in their faith.

Emotions

In matters of emotional health and security, teens in Canada 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

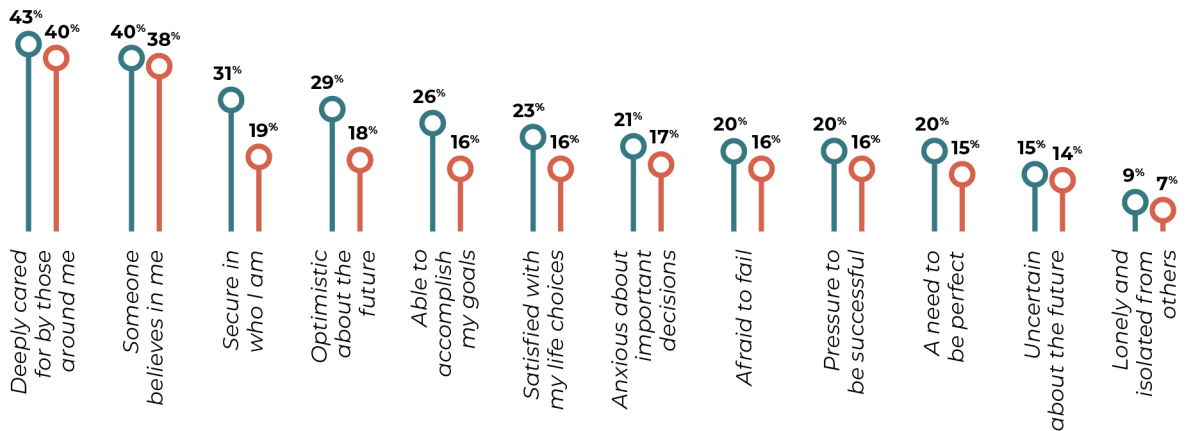
Similarly, on matters of their relationship to their communities, teens in Canada are less likely than global teens on average to report community satisfaction. They could use a boost in feeling they have a positive influence or their values are shared within their community. Teens in Canada don't seem 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 Canada

How often do you feel each of the following?

% “always”

● Global ● Canada

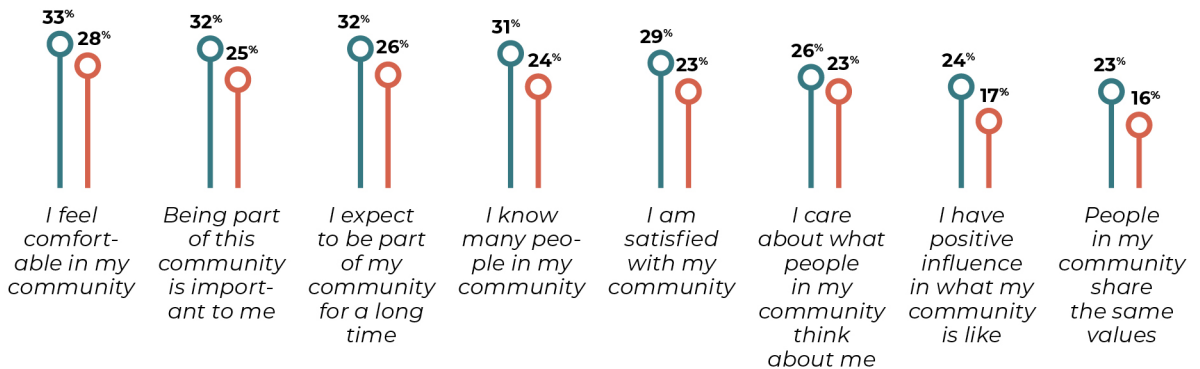


Community Among Teens in Canada

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

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

● Global ● Canada



n=1,001 teens in Canada ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021; n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

1. How Teens in Canada 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 Canada tend to align with these views and describe him in agreeable and comforting terms. Interestingly, they don't as often find him trustworthy, with Canadian Christian teens (44%) falling 11 points behind Christian teens globally (55%) on this point. Christian teens in Canada 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.

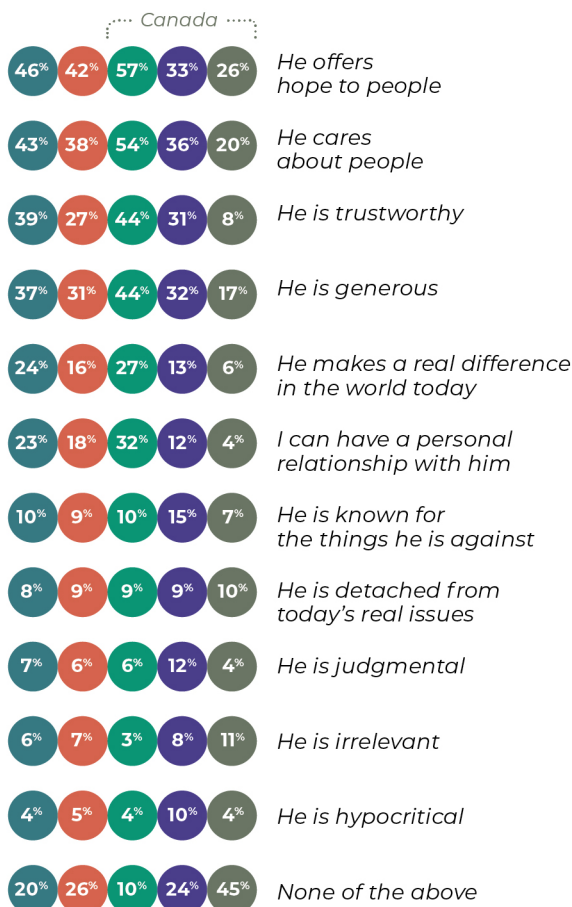
Canadian Catholic teens' views on Jesus stand in significant contrast to Protestant views, particularly about Christ's deity. Catholic teens, the majority of Christian teens in Canada, are more likely than Protestant teens to regard Jesus as a prophet of God (35% vs. 18%). Protestant teens, on the other hand, are more likely to believe Jesus was God in human form, with about half (48% vs. 32%) reporting this view.

Teens of other faiths are somewhat more likely to describe Jesus as hypocritical, judgmental and known for the things he is against. Still, these negative ideas about Jesus are rare, and Jesus emerges as a positive figure among teens of other faiths in Canada.

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

Select all that apply.

● Global ● Canada ● Christian
● Other faith ● No faith



n=1,001 teens in Canada ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021;

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

Perhaps most notable: The plurality of Canadian 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 toward

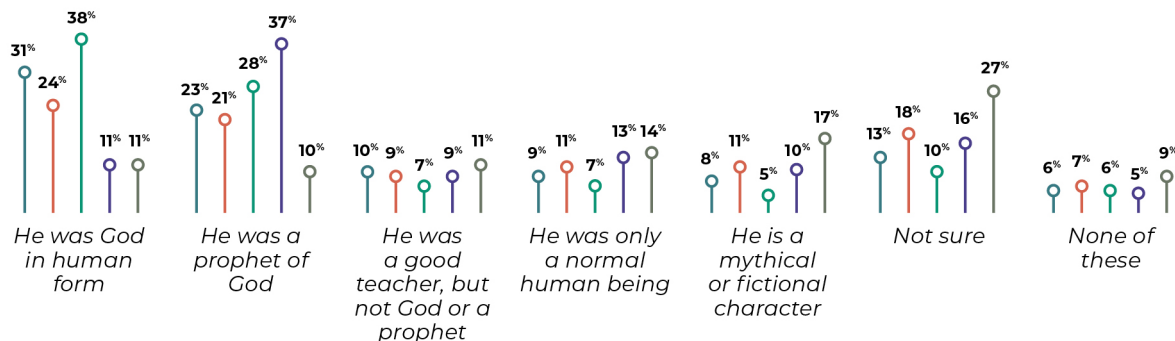
him. To 17 percent of these teens, Jesus is a mythical or fictional character. Whatever religious teens think of Jesus, teens of no faith likely are not thinking about him at all.

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

Select one.

- Global
- Canada
- Christian
- Other faith
- No faith

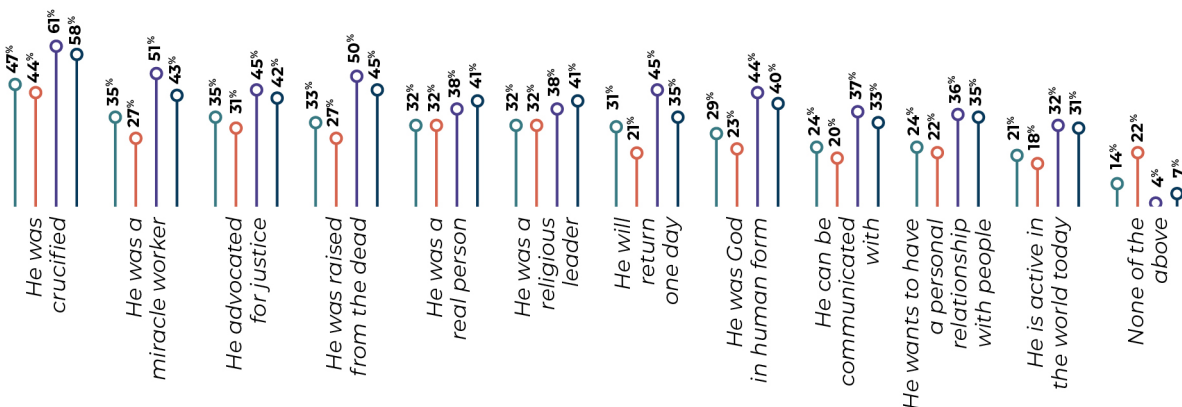
..... Canada



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

Select the statements you believe are true.

- Global
- Canada
- Global Christians
- Canadian Christians



n=1,001 teens in Canada 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 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 Canada, Barna developed a segmentation based on a personal commitment to follow Jesus.

Commitment to Jesus

- Committed Christians
- Nominal Christians
- All others

Global



Canada



n=1,001 teens in Canada 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 shy of one in four teens (22%) worldwide is a committed Christian. In Canada, this number falls to a little over one in seven (16%), with nearly one-third being nominal Christians (31%), on par with the global proportion (30%). Broken down by denomination, 28 percent of Catholic teens in Canada and 44 percent of Protestant teens are categorised as committed Christians.

Committed Christian teens are a minority who often have meaningful experiences of faith. In Canada, 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 Canada isn't experiencing this joy so deeply; there is a 20-point drop in the percentage of committed Christian teens who agree strongly. Similarly, nominal Christian teens in Canada are less likely than 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 22-point gap between the percentage of global and Canadian teens who strongly agree. Nominal Christian teens in Canada, likewise, are half as 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 Canada’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. Canadian teens, 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.

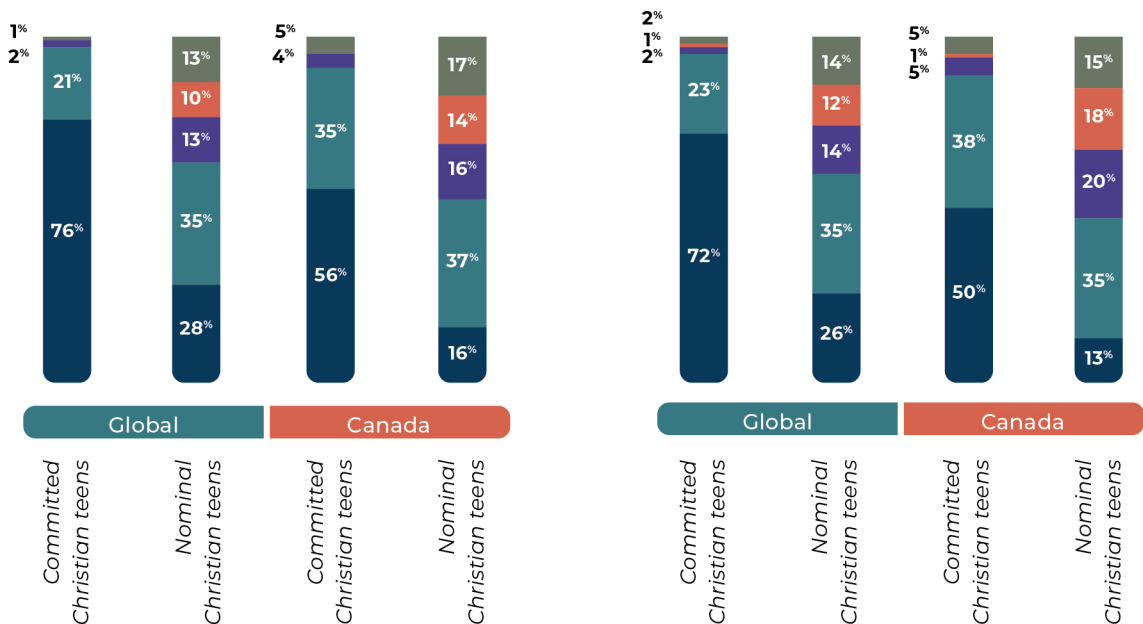
To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

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 ● I am not sure



n=471 teens in Canada ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021; n=13,184 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 Canada, however, are less intrigued than their global peers, with 43 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 Canada, while a gap persists between committed and nominal Christian teens, the numbers drop overall.

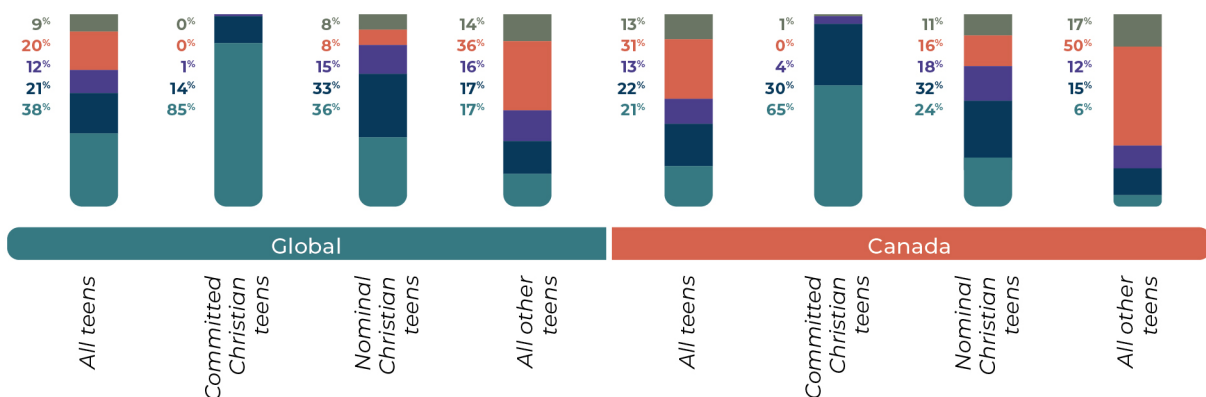
Canadian teens may place a significant amount of trust in religious texts and community and in their households to teach them about Jesus. Teens

are more likely to report looking to these sources than to social media, the Internet, their friends or influencers.

Digging into their top trusted sources, however, we find some challenges to instruction about Jesus. Beyond the Bible, committed Christian teens in Canada turn to a church leader, family member or other clergy with their curiosity about Jesus. Nominal Christian teens, meanwhile, are most likely to turn to a family member first, then to clergy—and then to themselves. In fact, teens without a personal commitment to follow Jesus look to themselves before they go to a youth leader to learn about Jesus. In the absence of trusted guidance, most nominal Christian teens take on the task of discipleship as a solo endeavor.

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=1,001 teens in Canada 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

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

BRENT SELLERS: The less educated and less experienced will feel disempowered if we don't intentionally empower them to grow in education and experience. This isn't best accomplished in peer groups, as the peers of teens are other teens, and generally are at about the same "level" of education and experience. An intergenerational model is most effective here—whether that be youth leaders to students, older to younger students, a wholly intergenerational church approach or all of the above and more.

Teens admire Jesus for his compassion, forgiveness and care of others. What does this say about how teens view themselves, the world or those who lead?

SELLERS: I think teens admire Jesus for his compassion and forgiveness because it's relatively rare among others who hold power and authority in our society, and, if they're being honest, it's rare within their own hearts. There is something compelling about seeing something lived out the way you wish you could live it out.

DANIELLE STRICKLAND: We're in a new world, and it has a different operating system. [Adults] have to figure it out, even though it's discombobulating for us, because we're not used to such possibilities and such openness. How teenagers view Jesus is beautiful. I think it's amazing that this generation has been able to differentiate between what religious people do and say and who Jesus is.

How can teens' empathetic tendencies be harnessed and aligned with Jesus' heart for people and creation?

SELLERS: We can harness emerging generations by empowering them to lead our compassion initiatives, releasing tangible resources into their hands, providing practical training and creating meaningful avenues for engagement in initiatives in our church communities, our neighborhoods, our cities and around the globe.

STRICKLAND: [Leaders] need to lose the classroom ideology of discipleship, and we need to immerse ourselves in the practice of the way of Jesus. Then, we need to invite people to join us. That is going to be the way to capture a generation's heart: through their hands.



Danielle Strickland

Author, speaker, global social justice advocate



Brent Sellers

Next gen ministry pastor at Rock Point Calgary Alberta

2. How Teens in Canada View the Bible

The Presence of the Bible

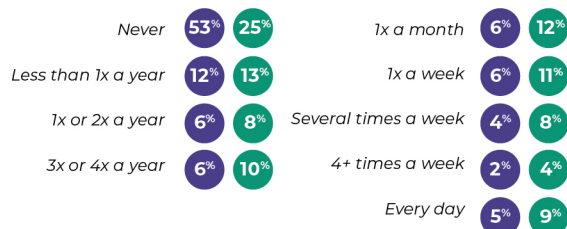
Overall, 52 percent of teens in Canada—including 85 percent of Christian teens—say their household owns a Christian Bible. Though more than half of all teens in Canada (53%) never use a Bible (which the survey defined as reading, listening, watching, praying with or using Bible text or content in any form), one in three Christian teens interacts with scripture weekly.

For the most part, Bible users and Christian teens in Canada use the Bible by reading it in print (39% in the past year). Reading Bible content on the Internet is the next most-common usage, with 23 percent saying they've done so this year. Smaller percentages listened to an audio version of the Bible (15%), studied the Bible in a small group or study (16%) or used a Bible app on a smartphone or tablet (13%) during that period.

For now, despite being in a digitally native generation, Canadian Christian teens prefer to use the Bible in print (48%), far ahead of other mediums (17% smartphone or tablet app, 9% online).

Bible Use Among Teens in Canada

● All teens ● Christian teens



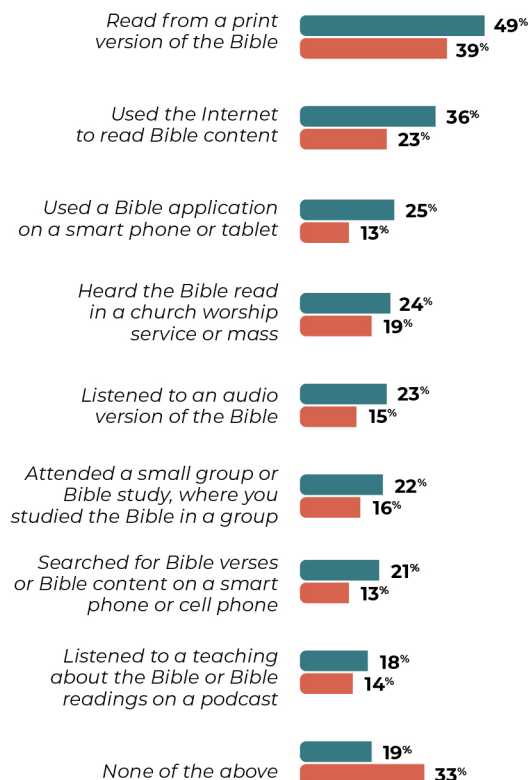
n=1,001 teens in Canada ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

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 ● Canada



n=672 teens in Canada 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 the plurality of Canadian teens. This is typical of majority-Christian countries and reflects a fundamental understanding of the Bible.

Yet teens in Canada express more skepticism toward 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, Canadian Christian teens are less likely than Christian teens worldwide to affirm this view of the Bible. Meanwhile, Canadian teens, including

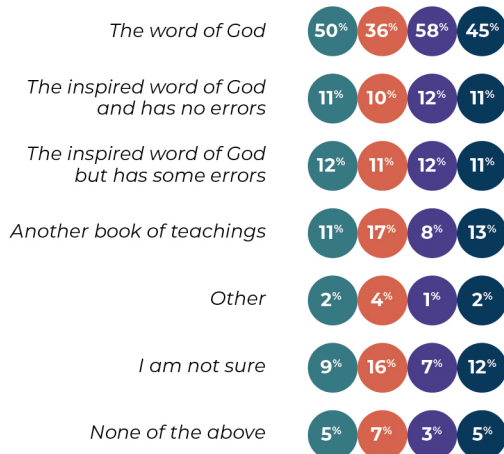
Christians, are more likely than their global peers to consider Christian scripture to be “just another book of teachings.” Their approach to interpreting the text leans symbolic rather than literal.

Canadian teens are also more likely to be apprehensive about deciding on what, exactly, the Bible is. Sixteen percent of Canadian 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 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?

- Global ● Canada
- Global Christians ● Canadian Christians

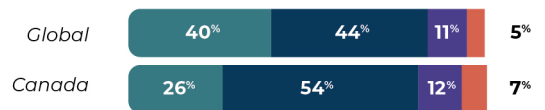


To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

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

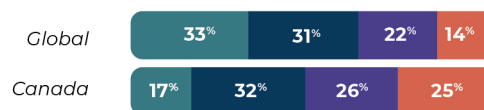
“The Christian Bible should be understood symbolically, interpreting the text when needed”

Base: Bible users / owners or Christians



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

Base: Bible users / owners or Christians



n=1,001 teens in Canada ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021; n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

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 Canada, 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 that Bible-unengaged teens far outnumber Bible-engaged teens, globally and in Canada. Additionally, in Canada, Christian teens are less engaged with the Bible than their global counterparts—in fact, they

are slightly more likely to be Bible unengaged than Canadian teens of *other* faiths.

Teens' Engagement with the Bible

- Bible engaged
- Bible open
- Bible unengaged

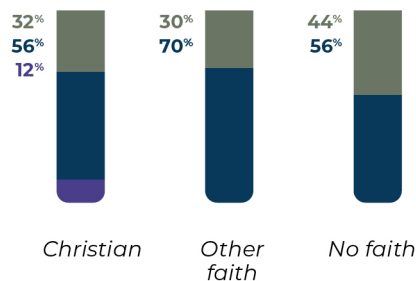
Global



Canada



Teens' Bible Engagement Across Faith Groups in Canada



n=1,001 teens in Canada 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. Teens’ Bible habits especially vary across different faith segments.

Teens who are Bible users and / or Christians, both globally and in Canada, most 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 Canada who report enjoying any of the other possible Bible-reading practices Barna asked about, when compared to teens globally.

Still, the habits of the Bible-engaged teens in Canada are holistic. These teens are searching and processing the scriptures, both alone and with help from others.

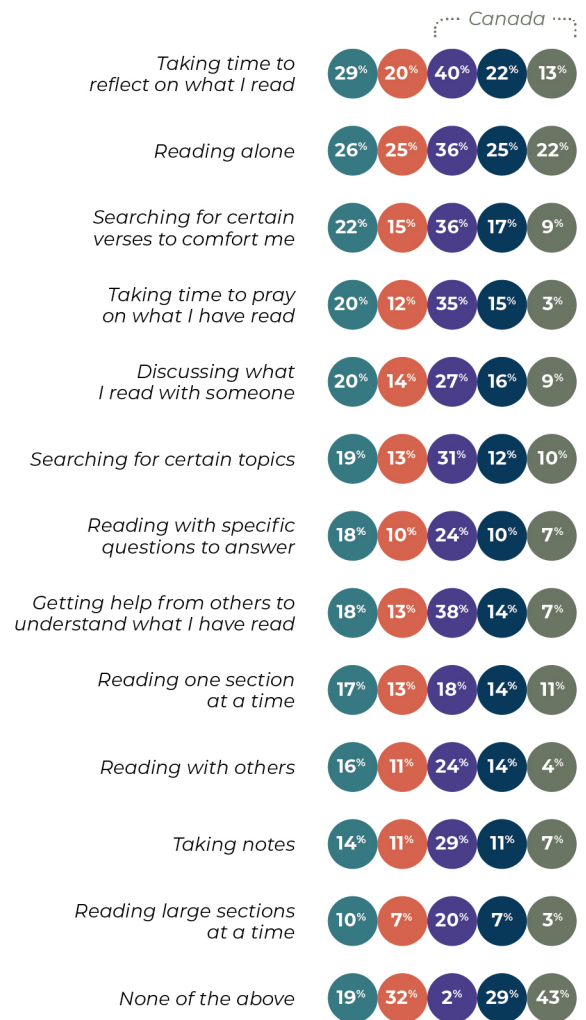
Meanwhile, one in three Bible users and / or Christians in Canada—including a striking 43 percent of the Bible unengaged—tends to not enjoy any of the Bible-reading habits Barna presented to survey-takers. Though teens are usually reluctant to precisely name barriers to their Bible-reading (the plurality selects none), Bible users and / or Christians in Canada seem to struggle to care much about the Bible. Sometimes far more than their global peers, teens in Canada point to barriers like lacking understanding, interest, focus or enjoyment in their Bible-reading.

These findings illustrate a dire 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 Canada 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 ● Canada ● Bible engaged
- Bible open ● Bible unengaged



n=672 teens in Canada 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 two-thirds of Christian teens in Canada report feeling very (34%) or somewhat motivated (35%) to do so. This sets them apart from their peers of other faith identities, though more than two in five Canadian teens (43%), report some level of motivation to learn more about Christian scripture.

Where might this instruction come from? Typically, the home. In Canada, 29 percent of teens who are Bible users and / or Christians—including half of the Bible engaged—report having been taught to study the Bible by a parent or guardian. Teens worldwide offer the same top selection (36%).

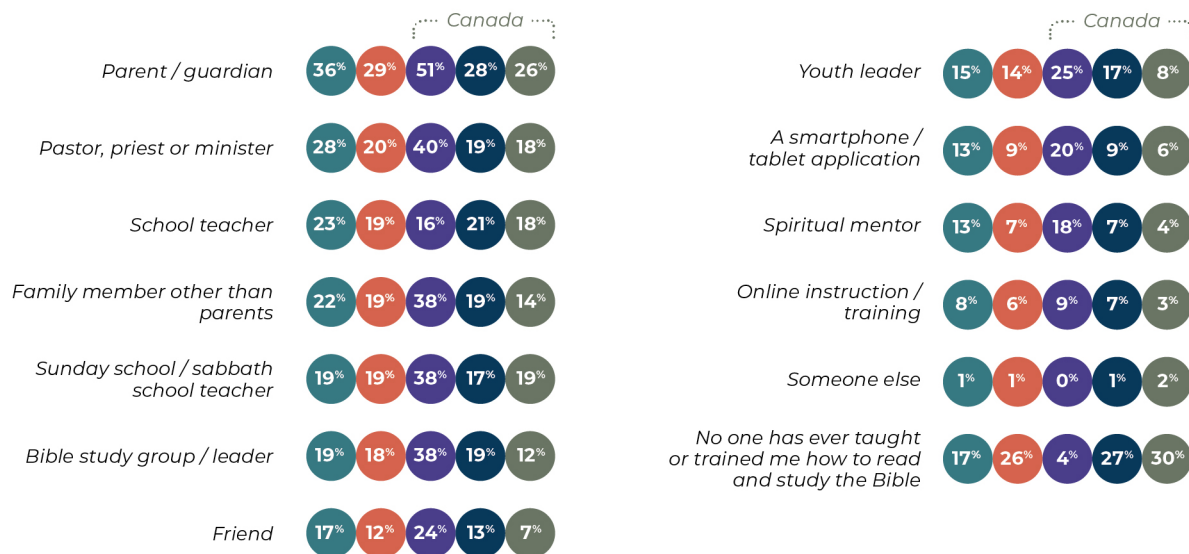
Ministry is, naturally, another source of instruction. One in five Canadian teens who are Christian or

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 ● Canada ● Bible engaged ● Bible open ● Bible unengaged



n=672 teens in Canada ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021; n=18,118 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

use a Bible says they were taught by a pastor, priest, minister, Sunday school teacher or Bible study leader. Twice as many Bible-engaged teens have received instruction from these figures. From another angle, Bible-engaged teens are far less likely to say “no one” has taught them how to read the Bible—something three in 10 Bible-open and Bible-unengaged teens say. This dramatically underscores the role of

relationships in nurturing Bible reading.

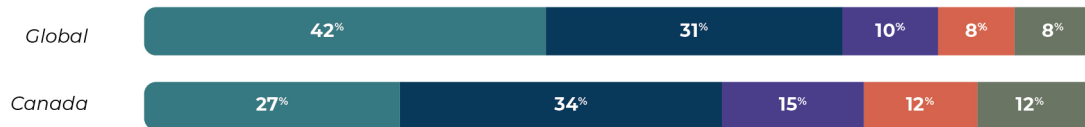
Globally and in Canada, sources of Bible mentorship are similar—but the outcomes are not. Christian teens in Canada are not as likely as their Christian peers around the world to report that in their church they regularly receive wisdom for how the Bible applies to their lives (27% and 42%, respectively).

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 ● I am not sure



n=471 teens in Canada 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

Teens prefer to read the Bible alone and mostly view Bible-reading as personal and reflective. Yet data also show community is essential to vibrant, ongoing Bible engagement. *How can teens be nudged toward a balance of personal reflection and community participation in their approach to scripture?*

SELLERS: There is a difference between the consumption of teaching and devoting oneself to it, and it seems important that the early Church practiced “devoting themselves” as a corporate response. COVID has brought sharp focus to the reality that content is nothing without connection, and the local church would do well to nest content within the context of connection in community. If we hope to encourage the emerging generations to engage in the Bible in community, we need to model it across the board.

STRICKLAND: I think small intimate connection—encounter—is what will meet the deepest needs of this generation. We’re wasting a lot of time on the stuff that doesn’t matter, especially to this next generation. They need [things to] be real and authentic and shared, and they also [have a] deep social need of connection and peace and community. This is something the Church can really speak to, and that Jesus really invites people into.

Christian teens in Canada are less likely than their global peers to receive relevant biblical instruction through their churches. *What are hallmarks of Bible teaching in churches or Christian institutions in Canada? What’s working? What isn’t?*

SELLERS: In terms of hallmarks (negative, though they may be), I would say that biblical teaching in Canada has often not figured out how to speak in a timely and effective manner toward societal shifts that are on the conscience of Canadians, and how to communicate the timelessness of the truth of the scriptures in a way that is compelling and easily understood by emerging generations.

3. How Teens in Canada 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%) and unemployment (33%) are front of mind for the majority of teens. In Canada—and in much of the West—that list looks different, as teens feel that mental health issues are of greatest concern (42%), followed closely by global climate change (39%) and racial injustice (37%). However, extreme poverty still surfaces as a great concern for Canadian teens, with just under one in three selecting this.

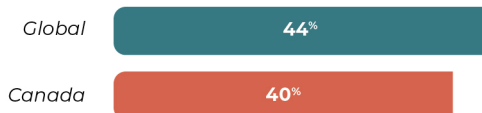
Whatever issues they are concerned about, Canadian teens may feel unable or even uninterested

to affect them. Canadian teens, including Christians, trend behind their global peers in their reported motivation to address injustices in society. This pattern varies somewhat by faith group. Canadian teens who are Christian and who have no faith actually fall in line with each other in largely being “somewhat motivated” to address injustice. Canadian teens of other faiths are much more likely to report being “very motivated”—in numbers more equivalent to those of Christian teens globally.

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 Canada, it may be the latter, as a plurality of teens in Canada 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.”

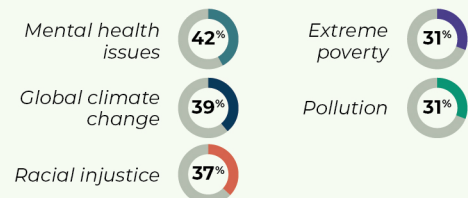
% agree strongly



n=1,001 teens in Canada 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 Canada



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. 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 Canada, 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=1,001 teens in Canada 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



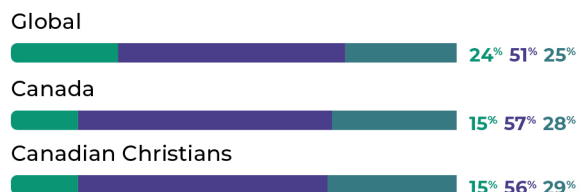
Commitment: "In the future, I will ..."

% agree strongly



Teens' Motivation Toward Justice

● Motivated ● Oriented ● Neutral



Looking for Leaders

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

The majority of teens, especially those who are justice motivated, has 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, schools and educational institutions come out at the top of teens’ responses, with 82 percent of justice-motivated teens and two-thirds of justice-oriented teens in Canada (63%) 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

justice, which we’ll continue to explore. Still, justice-motivated Canadian teens are predictably more inclined to look to them, too, to champion justice.

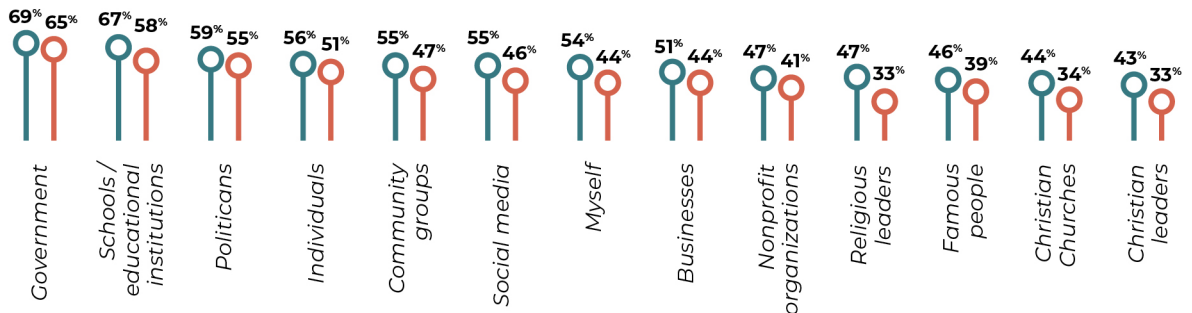
Teens who are justice neutral don’t assign as much responsibility to any of the options Barna asked about, though nearly half (47%) say the government should be at the helm in addressing justice.

Teens’ high and wide expectations may reflect their deep concern about injustice, not their confidence in these groups; as it stands, nearly half of teens, globally and in Canada, are neutral when asked whether they trust leaders today. Communities that lean into this 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 justice?

% “major role”

● Global ● Canada



n=1,001 teens in Canada 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 Canada aren't convinced the Christian Church is making an impact on issues of poverty and injustice. One-quarter worldwide and just 14 percent in Canada say this is “definitely” the case. Christian teens in Canada fall slightly behind the global average, while the majority of teens of no faith 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 justice-oriented Canadian teens who feel churches and church leaders should play a role in addressing injustice agree on a critical, if broad activity that is most important: encouraging

people to address injustice. Beyond that, teens don't agree on their expectations for churches and church leaders. Justice-oriented teens stand out in hoping the Church advocates for meaningful change. In fact, though fewer justice-motivated teens select this option, many groups of teens—including teens of other faiths or no faith—want to see advocacy through churches and Christian leaders.

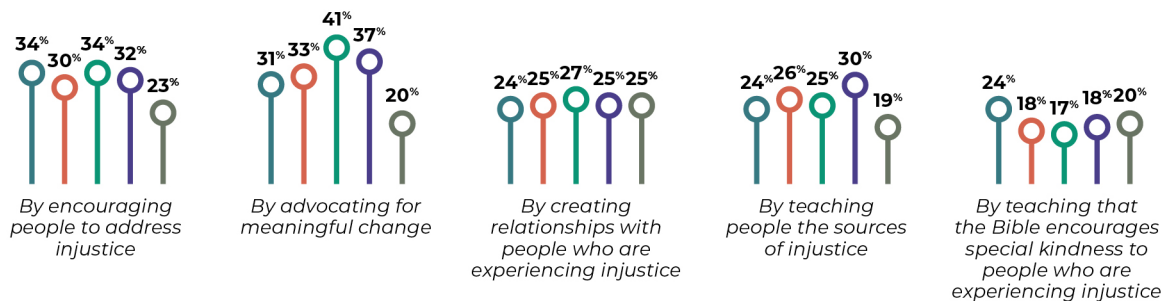
Remember, mental health is of greatest concern to teens in Canada—so, unsurprisingly, teens want to attend churches that prioritise this issue. This is especially true of justice-motivated and justice-oriented teens. Teens of all justice motivation levels also want to be in churches focused on ending hunger and famines.

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 ● Canada ● Justice motivated ● Justice oriented ● Justice neutral



n=674 teens in Canada 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. Justice-motivated, justice-oriented and justice-neutral teens in Canada agree that individuals should be encouraging others and advocating toward meaningful change.

An interesting standout among the possible roles that individuals can play: Justice-oriented teens, even more so than justice-motivated teens, 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 toward gaining confidence to address injustice. As it stands, the majority of Canadian 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, teens have high expectations for their peers. Worldwide and in Canada, the average teen most needs encouragement from family and friends. Importantly, though, justice-motivated and justice-oriented teens are unique in first wanting their generation to step up as leaders. One in four justice-neutral teens reports this as being something they would need as well.

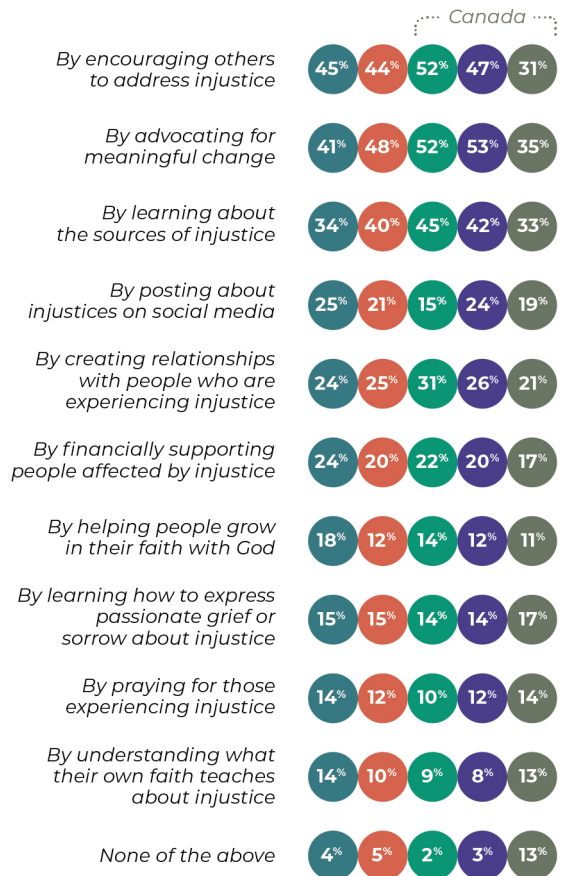
Authentic investment of peers, family members, leaders and the other members of a teens’ circle may be a catalyst to empower teens to realise their hopes of making change in society.

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 ● Canada ● Justice motivated
- Justice oriented ● Justice neutral



n=935 teens in Canada ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021;

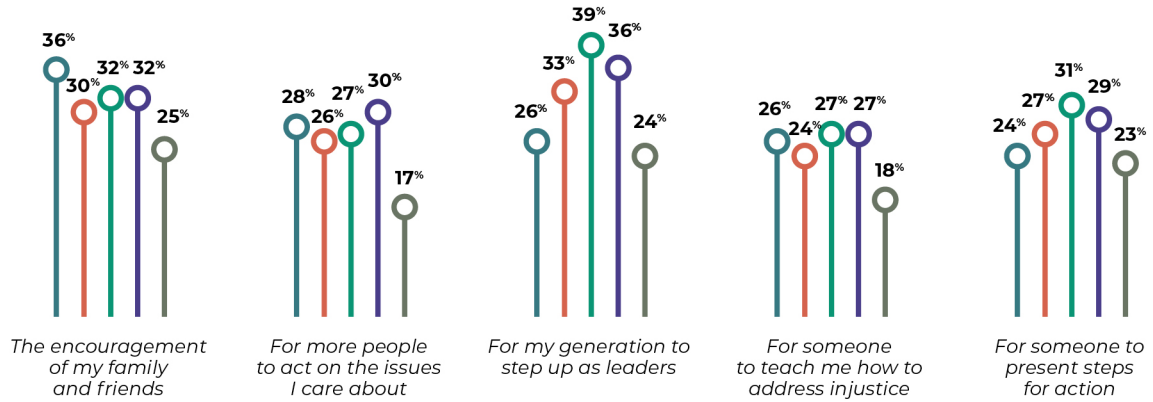
n=23,488 teens ages 13 to 17, July 21–August 24, 2021.

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 ● Canada ● Justice motivated ● Justice oriented ● Justice neutral

..... Canada



n=1,001 teens in Canada 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

Teens steadily report a motivation to address injustice and a belief that their generation can make an impact. This is a rare point on which teens in Canada match the global average. *Where do you think this optimism comes from? How can it be shaped into empowerment, confidence and equipping?*

BRENT SELLERS: Young people can easily connect with thousands, even millions, of likeminded people on just about any societal issue, and easily organize more than ever before. The Church can develop a robust online missiology, talk to teens about what's important to them, empower them with tangible resources to lead and facilitate connection of people based on social issues, geographic proximity and giftedness.

DANIELLE STRICKLAND: Young people are longing for an embodied faith, something that matters, something they can participate in, something they can do. All of this—justice, ministry to the poor, the idea of solidarity, truth-telling—all of this is wrapped up in that. If you want to capture this generation, then creating capacity, energy and space for that [longing], is going to be one of the main ways to do it.

Teens in Canada are greatly concerned about mental health and hope to be in churches that prioritize this issue. *What are the factors that cause this topic to be so central to teens in your context? How is your local Christian community engaging with these mental health concerns and needs?*

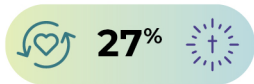
SELLERS: This issue is on the conscience of our emerging generations because a) they are literally watching their friends suffer, and even die; b) they feel the weight of trying to be the triage mental healthcare for their friends and need support; c) they are tracking with the societal shifts in this area that are raising awareness and immersed in education about it, and d) they desire to be a force for change.

Our church needs to grow in this area, but our objectives include providing a robust network of professional supports, providing financial support through our compassion ministers so that people can access affordable support, discussing this from the pulpit without taboo and engaging with partners who are leading the way in producing excellent educational and support content that is easily accessed and distributed.

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

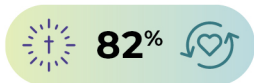
In Canada



of committed Christian teens are Bible engaged



of committed Christian teens are justice motivated



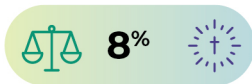
of Bible-engaged teens are committed Christians



of Bible-engaged teens are justice motivated



of justice-motivated teens are committed Christians

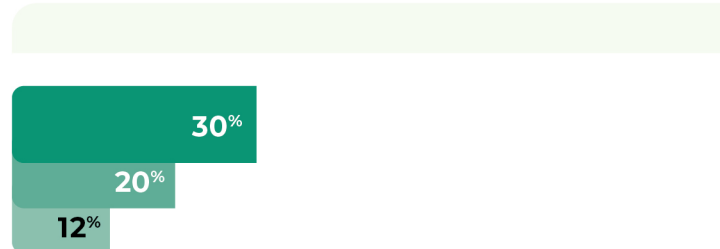
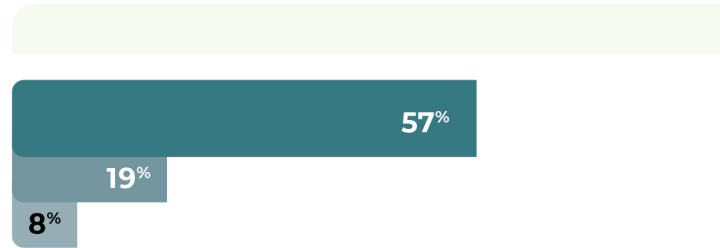


of justice-motivated teens are Bible engaged

The Bible draws teens to Jesus ...

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

% "very true"



Jesus offers a model for justice ...

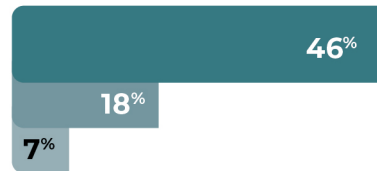
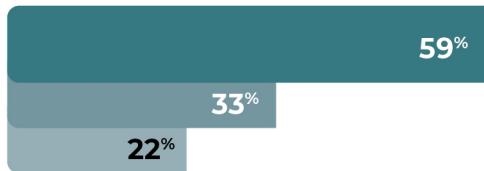
Justice is a biblical matter ...

“Jesus advocated for justice”

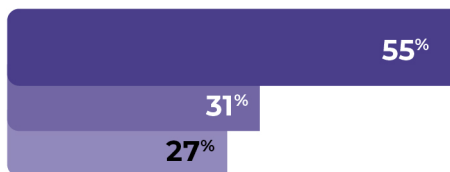
“I believe that the Christian Bible addresses injustice”

% “very true”

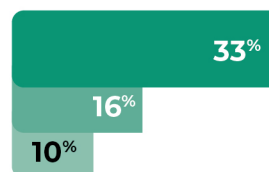
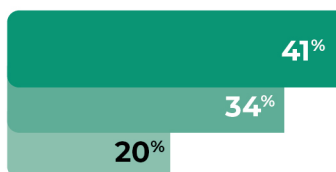
● Committed Christians ● Nominal Christians ● All others



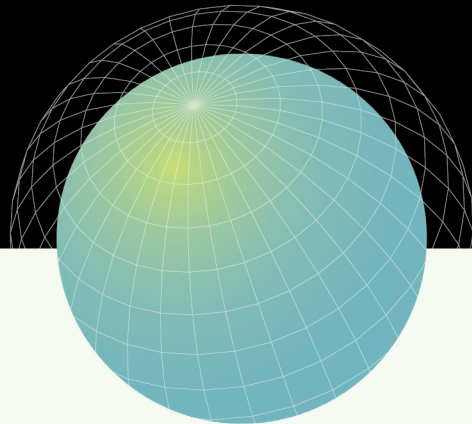
● Bible engaged ● Bible open ● Bible unengaged



● Justice motivated ● Justice oriented ● Justice neutral



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: Krista Ewert, Tim Gonsalves, Brent Sellers and Danielle Strickland.

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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 organizations 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 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 organization 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.

