

The Christian Life Survey 2014-2015 Administration at 22 Christian Colleges



TAYLOR UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR
**SCRIPTURE
ENGAGEMENT**

tucse.taylor.edu

The Scripture engagement of students at Christian colleges in the United States

The Bible plays a central role in the Christian life. The Center for Scripture Engagement exists to promote content, training, and research to help Christians engage the Scriptures so that they can engage God. In the 2014-2015 school year, data was collected from over 6,000 students at Christian colleges in the United States to learn about these students' spiritual formation, spiritual orientations, and Scripture engagement. (See Box One for more about the students studied in this research.)

This report covers these topics:

Students' views of the Bible

Students' direct reports on their relationships to the Bible

Scripture interaction summary index values

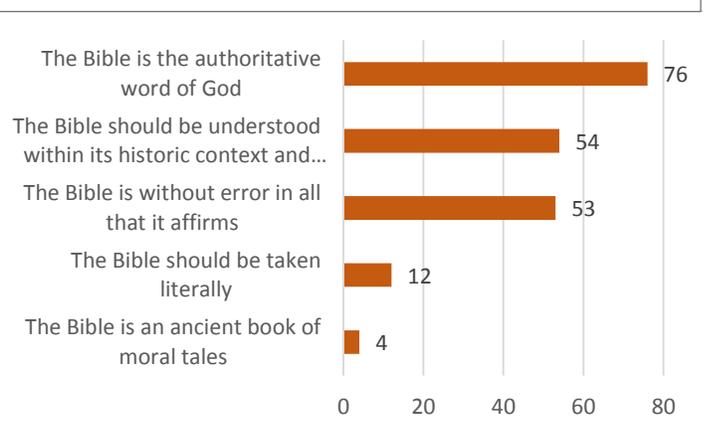
How Scripture interaction relates to other aspects of the Christian life

Students' views of the Bible

In the Christian Life Survey a set of twelve questions was asked concerning the students' views of the Bible. The responses on five of those questions are shown at right (Chart One). The rest of the findings on these questions can be found in a summary brief located at <http://tucse.taylor.edu/research>.

Overall, these 6,000-plus students indicated that the Bible is authoritative and should be understood within cultural context. They have a nuanced but devout understanding of the Bible.

Chart One: Percent of students strongly agreeing with selected statements about the Bible.



Students' direct reports on their relationships to the Bible

The survey had 19 questions related to interaction with the Bible. Most of them are included as parts of indexes that provide a more comprehensive view into Scripture engagement. The distributions of answers for the students on the 19 questions is presented in Charts Two through Four.

In Chart Two it can be seen that high percentages of these students agree or strongly agree with the authority of the Bible (82 percent), that it is an important part of their lives (74 percent), and that they talk about Bible passages with their friends (75 percent). A majority also agree to some extent that they see relevant applications of Bible passages as they go through a normal day (51 percent). Only 26 percent indicated that they sometimes wonder how much to believe the Bible.

Box One: Who are the students in this study?

In the 2014-2015 school year, the Christian Life Survey was administered to students at 25 Christian colleges in the United States. The results shown in this summary brief, however, are only for the traditional-age, traditional-program freshmen through seniors from the 22 colleges that provided population proportions that allowed representative weighting to be used. Students are weighted to be proportionately representative for sex and year in school for their colleges.

These results are for 6,074 students from 22 Christian colleges in the United States.

The students are overwhelmingly Protestant Christians who are serious about their spiritual life (they chose to attend a Christian college and they agreed to participate in a half-hour survey about their spiritual life).

The students represented here, then, are traditional-age, devout Christians attending 22 Christian colleges in the USA. Great care should be employed when generalizing these results to any other groups.

Chart Two: Students' responses to questions about the Bible. (percents)

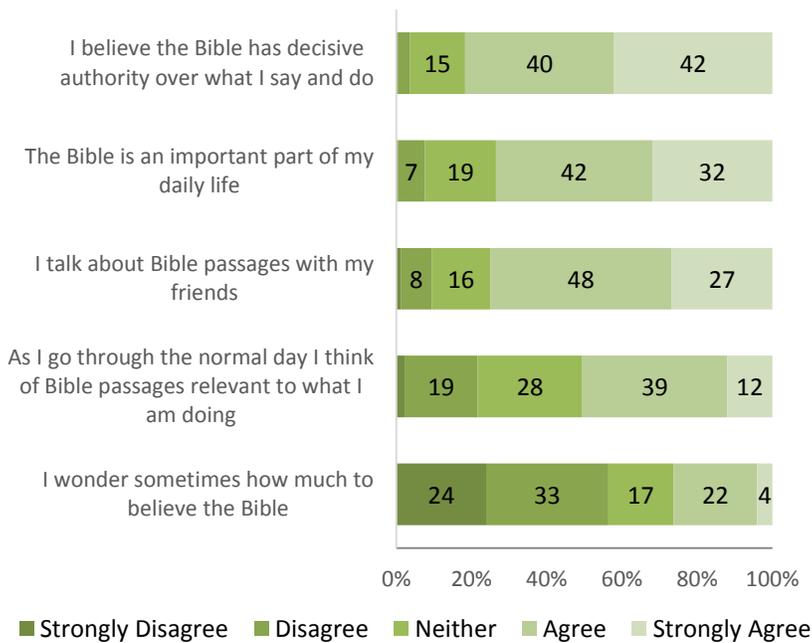


Chart Three provides the distributions for the questions that asked students to report the frequency with which they interact with the Bible. Six of the questions asked how often they read or heard the Bible read in different contexts. The other two questions asked about frequency of Bible interaction more generally.

In general, 77 percent indicated that they read the Bible weekly or more often, and 75 percent indicated that they reflect on the meaning of Scripture in their life weekly or more often. The context where students had Bible interaction most often was in their religious services (92 percent experienced this weekly or more), their classes (75 percent), and their private times (74 percent).

Chart Three: Students' frequency of interacting with the Bible. (percents)

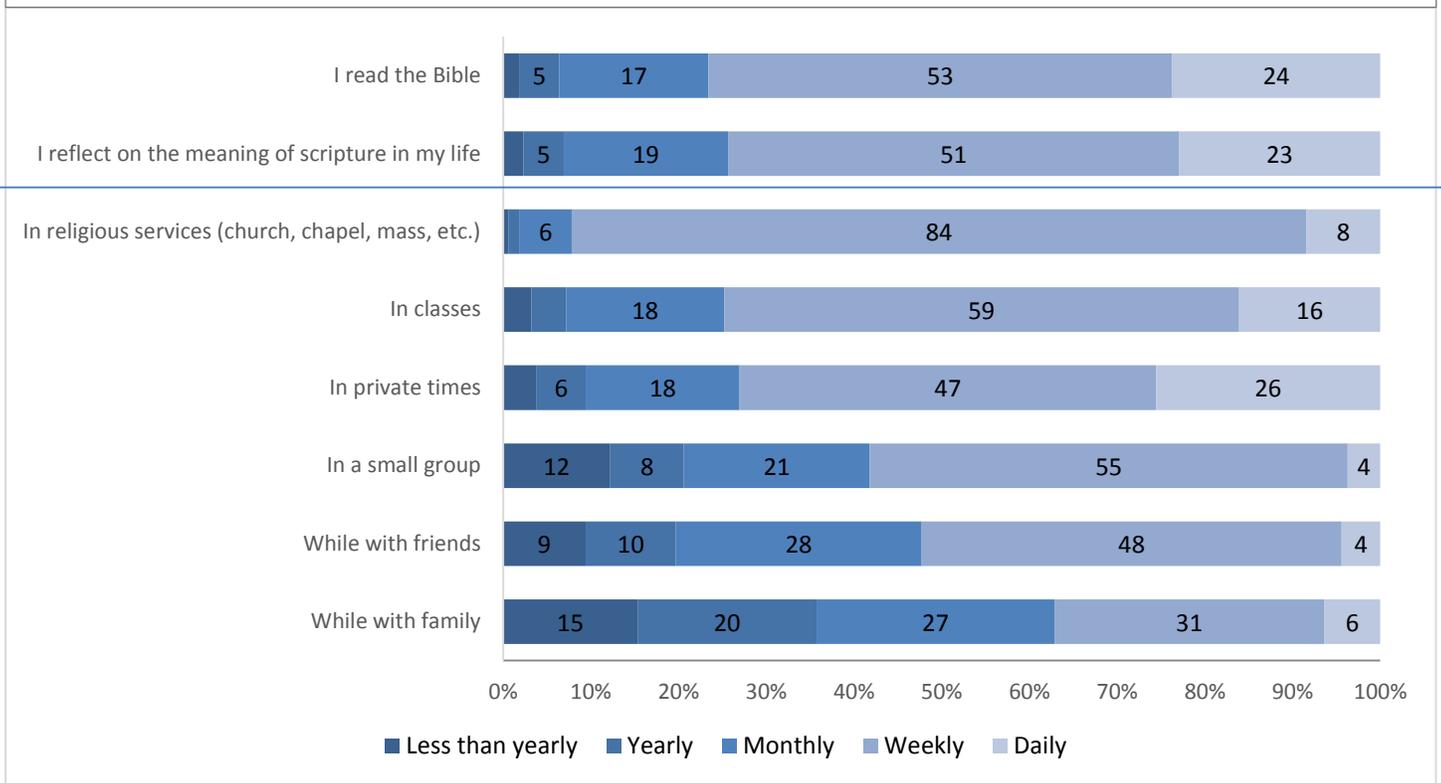
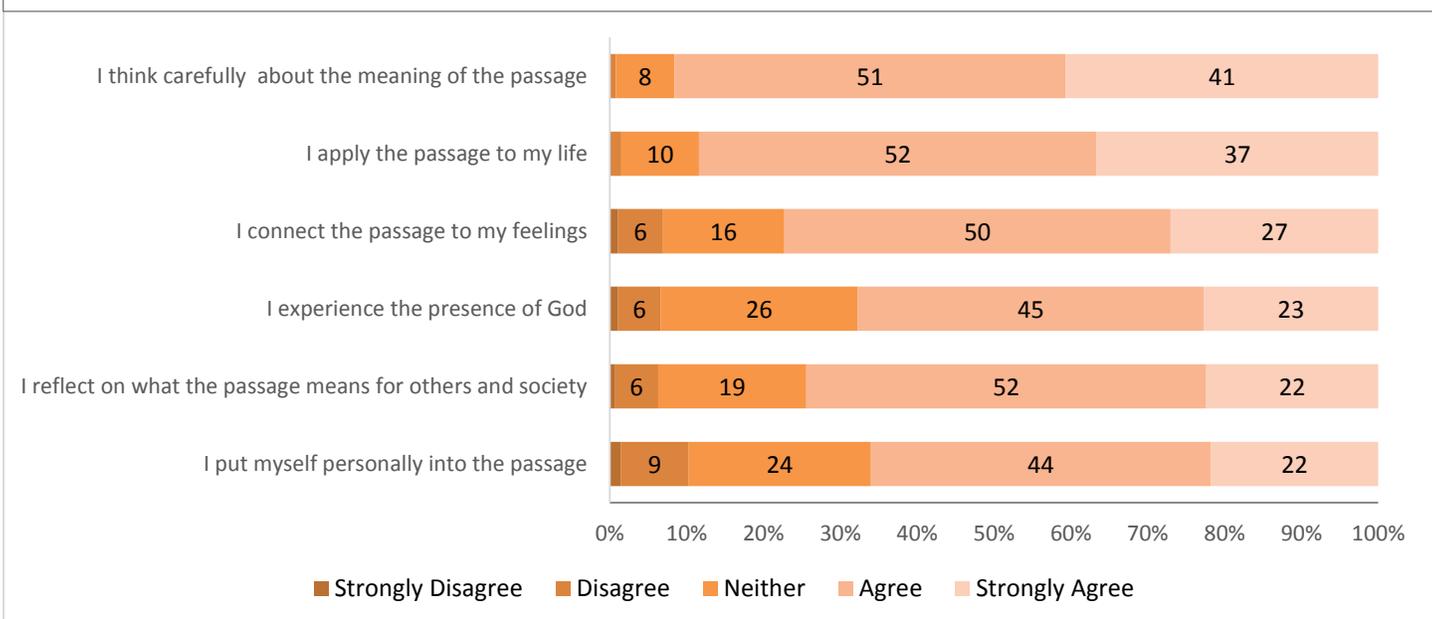


Chart Four provides the distributions of students' responses about the kinds of Scripture interaction they engage in. They were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed that they did each of the six things listed when they read or heard the Bible. Clear majorities agreed or strongly agreed with each of the statements, but students were more likely to agree that they think about the meaning of the passage (92 percent) or apply the passage (89 percent) than do the other kinds of Scripture interaction.

Chart Four: Students' kinds of interaction with the Bible. (percents)



Scripture interaction summary index values

Almost all of the 19 questions described in section two contribute to summary indexes. Fifteen of them contribute to comprehensive indexes related to Scripture engagement. Three of the questions comprise the focus on the Bible index that measures the degree to which a person has the Bible as a focal point in his or her spiritual life, six items combine together to measure the breadth of the kinds of Scripture engagement a person employs, and six combine to measure the breadth of the contexts in which a person interacts with the Bible.

Box Two: the Scripture engagement indexes

Focus on the Bible index
As I go through the normal day I think of Bible passages relevant to what I am doing.
I talk about Bible passages with my friends.
I believe the Bible has decisive authority over what I say and do.
Contexts of Scripture interaction index
How often do you read the Bible or hear it read...
While with friends
In private times
In a small group
In religious services (church, chapel, mass, etc.)
While with family
In classes
Kinds of Scripture interaction index
When you read or hear the Bible, which of the following do you tend to do?
I apply the passage to my life.
I put myself personally into the passage.
I experience the presence of God.
I connect the passage to my feelings.
I think carefully about the meaning of the passage.
I reflect on what the passage means for others and society.

The combinations of questions in each index are shown in Box Two. The spread of students' values on the indexes are shown in Chart Five. The focus on the Bible index and the kinds of Scripture interaction index are on a five-point scale, while the contexts of Scripture interaction index is on a nine-point scale.

The students, on average, were moderately high on the focus on the Bible index. An average value of 3 would be neutral, and a value of 5 (the highest possible) would indicate a very strong focus on the Bible. The average value for

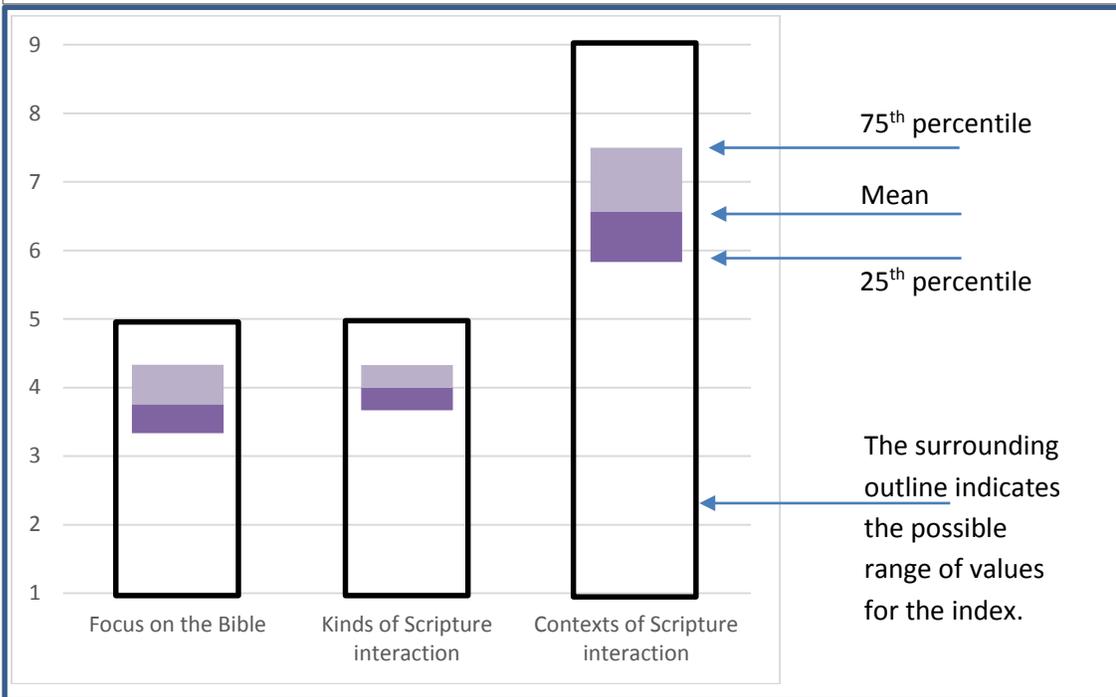
the 6,000-plus students was 3.8. Most students' values were fairly close to that average with greater dispersion above the mean than below it. The students generally have a clear focus on the Bible.

	25 th percentile	Mean	75 th percentile
Focus on the Bible	3.3333	3.7577	4.3333
Kinds of Scripture interaction	3.67	4	4.33
Contexts of Scripture interaction	5.83	6.57	7.5

The students had a slightly higher average value on the diversity of kinds of interaction they had with the Bible. They tended, on average, to agree that they employed the six kinds of interaction they were asked about, and most students were pretty close to that average. There is a clear trend that the students employ a variety of kinds of interaction with the Bible.

The students tended, on average, to engage a bit less than weekly across the breadth of contexts of Scripture interaction. To have a high score on this index (which is on a larger nine-point scale), the students would need to practice more Scripture interaction in a greater diversity of contexts. The average score was 6.6 on the nine-point scale, just a bit over three-fourths of the way up the scale. There was substantial spread in the students' values.

Chart Five: Distribution of Bible-related index scores.



To see if there are demographic differences in any of the three Scripture interaction indexes, each index was paired with the following demographic variables: sex, race, parents' degree attainment, political view, income, year in school, and GPA.

Focus on the Bible is only affected by two demographic variables, and for both it is a very small effect. Students who are more conservative politically are slightly more likely to have a focus on the Bible ($\eta^2 = .029$; $p < .001$), and students in a Bible-related major have a very slight increase in their focus on the Bible ($\eta^2 = .019$; $p < .001$).

Kind of Scripture interaction was only affected by sex and the effect was quite small. Women had a slightly higher engagement with diverse kinds of Scripture interaction ($\eta^2 = .012$; $p < .001$).

Contexts of Scripture interaction was affected by father's degree attainment, political view, major, and GPA, but most of the effects were quite small (see Chart Six; all effects are significant at $p < .001$). Only political view had a noteworthy effect and, as can be seen in Chart Seven, politically conservative students are just a little more involved in more contexts of Scripture interaction.

Chart Six: Contexts of Scripture interaction relation to demographic variables. (η^2 values)

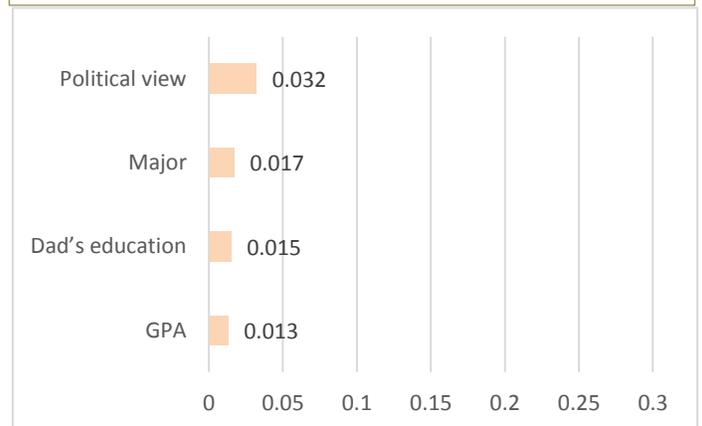
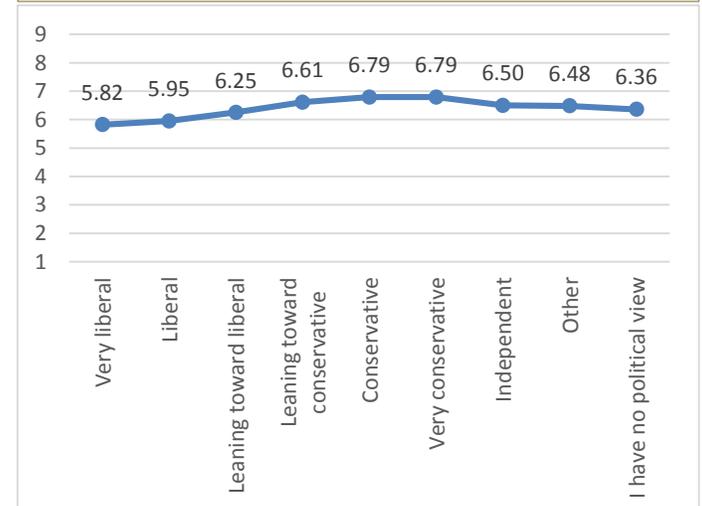


Chart Seven: Contexts SI index by political view

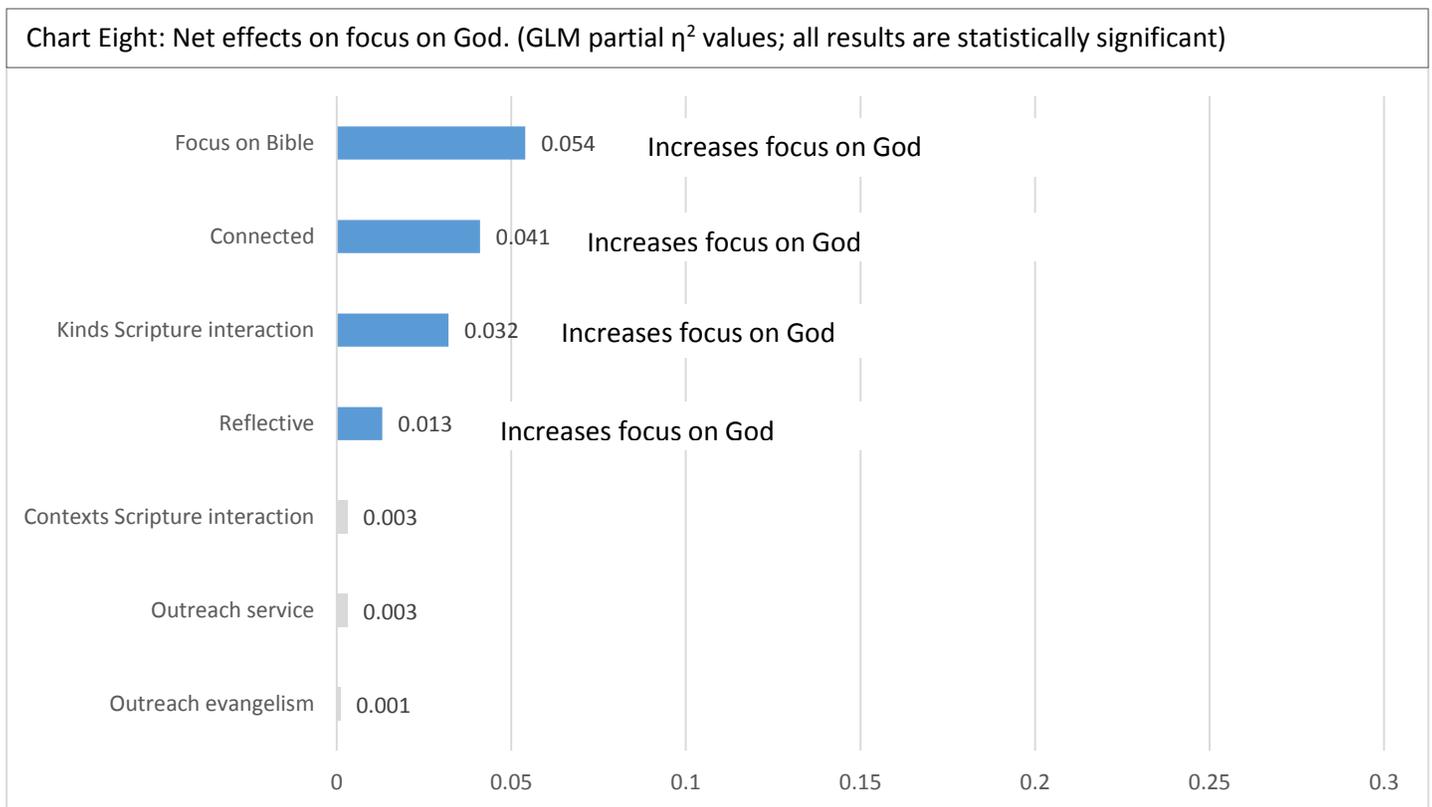


How Scripture interaction relates to other aspects of the Christian life

Jesus said that the greatest commandments were to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors like we love ourselves (Mark 12:28-31; Matthew 22:34-40). When asked who are our neighbors, Christ told the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). In the Christian Life Survey, indexes are used to measure a focus on God and a focus on others (reports on those topics can be found at tucse.taylor.edu/research). We consider these to be the identifiers of spiritual formation. Our mission at the Center for Scripture Engagement is to promote engagement with the Bible (see, for example, the Center’s materials located at Bible Gateway) so that people might grow spiritually—so that their spiritual life might be built around God and others.

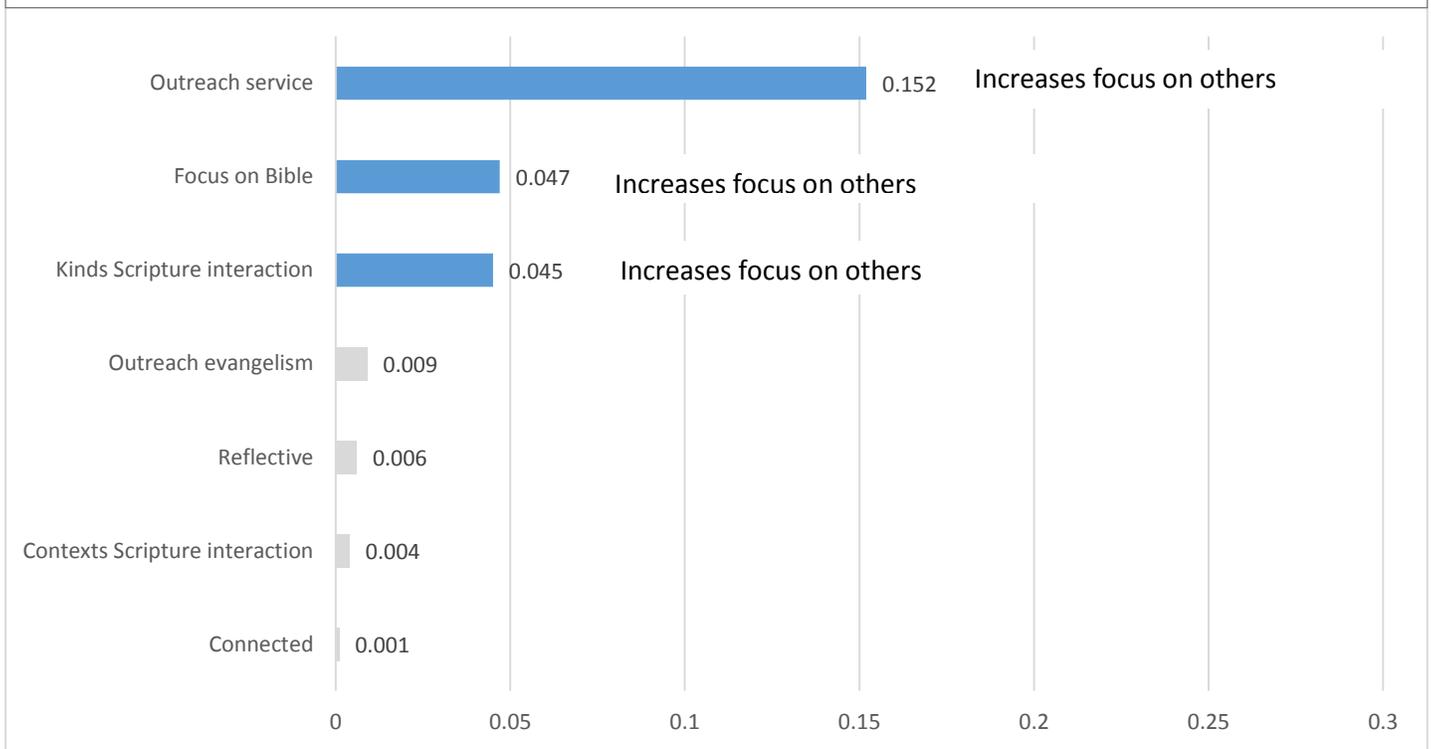
Which leads to the question, “Which kinds of spiritual orientation and/or Scripture engagement are most consequential in promoting a focus on God and/or a focus on others?”

The aspects of spiritual life that are most consequential for an increased focus on God are a focus on the Bible, a connected spiritual orientation, and an increase in kinds of Scripture interaction employed. A reflective spiritual orientation also has a very small effect on focus on God. Students who build their spirituality around the Bible, are plugged in to traditional religious involvements, and who practice a greater variety of kinds of Scripture interaction have a greater focus on God. Chart Eight summarizes these results and the full GLM results are provided in the appendix.



The aspects of spiritual life that have the greatest effect on an increased focus on others are outreach through service, a focus on the Bible, and an increase in kinds of Scripture interaction employed. Students who are actively helping those in need, have built their spiritual lives around the Bible, and who practice a greater variety of kinds of Scripture interaction have a greater focus on others. Chart Nine summarizes these results and the full GLM results are provided in the appendix.

Chart Nine: Net effects on focus on others. (GLM partial η^2 values; all results are statistically significant)



The greatest commandments for Christians are to love God and love others as themselves. To the extent that making God and others focal points of spiritual life are indicators of loving God and loving others, the practices that most encourage living out these commandments are shown in Charts Eight and Nine. They are also summarized in Table One below. What is most fascinating is the clear role of the Bible in spiritual growth. Focus on God and focus on others each have one spiritual orientation that has a direct effect, but both are affected by a greater focus on the Bible and an increase in the ways the students interact with the Bible.

Table One: The factors that increase spiritual formation

Increase focus on God	Increase focus on others
Focus on the Bible	Outreach through service
Connected spiritual orientation	Focus on the Bible
Increased kinds of Scripture interaction	Increased kinds of Scripture interaction

Appendix

The Christian Life Survey (CLS) is an online, half-hour survey on Spiritual Formation, Spiritual Orientation (lifestyle), and Scripture Engagement and was conducted in the 2014-2015 school year at the following Christian colleges: Bethel; Biola; California Baptist; Charleston Southern; Corban; Cornerstone; Crown; Fresno Pacific; George Fox; Gordon; Houghton; Judson; The Kings; LeTourneau; Northwest Nazarene; Nyack; Patrick Henry College; Spring Arbor; Tabor; Taylor; Union; Wheaton.

Parameter Estimates

Dependent variable: Focus on God index value

Parameter	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		Partial Eta Squared
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Intercept	3.011	.036	83.823	.000	2.941	3.081	.552
Focus on Bible	.129	.007	18.088	.000	.115	.143	.054
Connected	.091	.006	15.643	.000	.080	.103	.041
Kinds Scripture interaction	.121	.009	13.724	.000	.103	.138	.032
Reflective	.041	.005	8.664	.000	.031	.050	.013
Outreach service	-.015	.004	-4.095	.000	-.022	-.008	.003
Contexts Scripture interaction	-.018	.005	-3.847	.000	-.028	-.009	.003
Outreach evangelism	-.006	.003	-2.215	.027	-.012	-.001	.001

Parameter Estimates

Dependent variable: Focus on others index value

Parameter	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		Partial Eta Squared
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Intercept	1.548	.055	28.336	.000	1.440	1.655	.123
Outreach service	.177	.006	31.965	.000	.166	.188	.152
Focus on Bible	.182	.011	16.765	.000	.161	.203	.047
Kinds Scripture interaction	.220	.013	16.430	.000	.193	.246	.045
Outreach evangelism	.031	.004	7.120	.000	.022	.040	.009
Reflective	-.042	.007	-5.869	.000	-.056	-.028	.006
Contexts Scripture interaction	-.034	.007	-4.732	.000	-.048	-.020	.004
Connected	-.020	.009	-2.253	.024	-.037	-.003	.001