

# B BIBLE SOCIETY

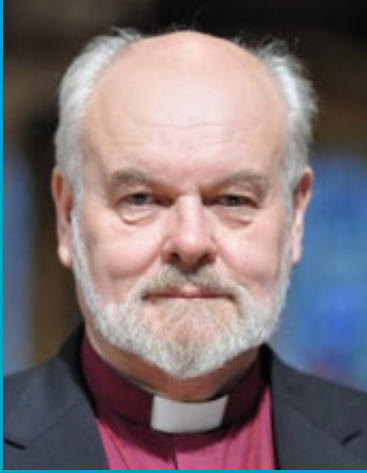


***Pass It On***



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*A message from the Bishop of London,  
Dr Richard Chartres*

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*A top-selling novelist should be able to spot a good story. So when Sebastian Faulks commented that 'of the 100 greatest stories ever told, 99 are probably in the Old Testament and the other is in Homer', it's an opinion to be taken seriously.*

I disagree with the implied judgement on the New Testament – Jesus told some very good stories – but Sebastian Faulks' observation would not surprise anyone who has read the Bible to a child. The stories it contains spark their interest and their imagination.

Like many a parent, I remember introducing my children to characters that not only thrilled but also intrigued them. Share the story of Adam or Noah, Esther or Ruth, Peter or Paul or retell the parables that Jesus told and you risk a full scale interrogation.

Children quiz you on every aspect, wanting to know why this happened and whether you think it was right. They get to the heart of the matter as well, keen to discuss the lessons and values that underpin these stories – universal values which help all of us chart our way successfully through life. It is why it is a concern that fewer than one in ten people engage with the Bible regularly.

So I am delighted that Bible Society has launched the 'Pass it On' campaign to encourage parents to read Bible stories with their children. Sharing these stories – and helping parents respond to the questions children may have – is as vital now as it has ever been.

Too few children have the opportunity to hear and reflect on what this life-changing book contains. Even those that do when they are young, often take its awesome stories for granted when they become adults. There is work to be done.

The contemporary Bible Society not only publishes conventional books in various formats but has also embraced new technology as a way of delivering Bible stories to a new audience. The society is following in a rich tradition. Down the ages, those who care about the Bible have used every method they could to convey its messages to the widest possible audience.

It is my fervent hope and prayer that the project achieves its goals. We need to open up to a new generation, together with their parents, stories that are as inspiring and provocative as they were when first told thousands of years ago.

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<sup>1</sup> Theos, Post-religious Britain? The faith of the faithless (2012)



# Foreword

*James Catford, Group Chief Executive,  
Bible Society*

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*We are launching the 'Pass It On' campaign because we strongly believe that every child should have the opportunity to experience the Bible and are concerned that too few today actually get this chance.*

We have produced this report to examine the current reading habits and preferences of parents and children and whether they shared our view of the importance of the Bible and its stories. The findings give plenty of food for thought and we hope will stimulate debate about the value of reading Bible stories with children.

They show, for example, that more than 43% of parents surveyed feel it is important for children to have read, heard or seen Bible stories because they provide values for a good life – and almost as many see the Bible as part of our history and culture (40%). But it also revealed that three in ten secondary school pupils, aged 12 to 15, did not realise the Nativity was from the Bible. It is why the 'Pass It On' campaign comes at a good time.

In many ways, 'Pass It On' sums up Bible Society's *raison d'être*. The charity was established in 1804 by, among others, William Wilberforce and Revd Thomas Charles to promote 'the wider circulation and use of Scripture'.

From the beginning, it was never an exercise in conversion or pushing a narrow interpretation of beliefs. It was about opening up the text, its enduring stories and values to all to enhance and enrich lives. For more than 200 years and in partnership with 146 partner Societies across the globe, we have continued offering the Bible to the world.

Partly thanks to these efforts, it is easy to access a Bible. Previous research has found that over half of households in England and Wales own a copy. It is also freely available online in many different versions.

And yet nine out of ten adults have no regular engagement with its contents<sup>2</sup>. Scarcely more than one in three children (36%) has a Bible story read to them by their parents once a month or more. The Bible may be all around us, but, like any literature, it lives on only through use.

That's why we now run initiatives like 'Open The Book', with local volunteers sharing Bible storytelling in primary school assemblies, and helping students understand biblical references in literature.

It's why we have a publishing division, making hundreds of different Bibles and Bible resources available in all sorts of translations and formats. It's why we work in media, education, the arts and politics, demonstrating and inspiring the Bible's continued contribution to the cultural conversation.

This campaign is an important extension of our work. 'Pass It On' is about the people that count in children's lives helping to keep the Bible's stories alive for many generations to come.

Please join with us to 'Pass It On' in 2014.

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<sup>2</sup>Theos, Post-religious Britain? The faith of the faithless (2012)



# **Bible literacy in the UK**





## Bible literacy in the UK

### A STARTLING TRUTH

*One book outstrips any other as the world's all-time bestseller.*

*It remains so popular today, thousands of years after it was first written, that it is excluded from bestseller lists the world over so that it doesn't skew the charts.*

And yet, while it can be found in millions of homes across the UK, for an increasing number of people, its contents are a mystery.

In this report, we consider the findings of a study conducted by YouGov for Bible Society among British parents of children aged 3 to 16 and children aged 8 to 15 (January 2014).

Findings that suggest Bible literacy is falling through the generations. And that, while many of us place great value in this classic book, little is being done that will halt the decline.

It's why we are launching a campaign to encourage parents and other family members to 'pass on' a Bible story to our children.

Because for those who believe in the importance of the Bible, whatever their reason may be, we must act now before its value is all but forgotten.



# 23%

**8-15 yr olds surveyed indicated that they have never read, seen or heard Noah's Ark**

## A growing problem<sup>3</sup>

Three Bible stories top the charts as the nation's clear favourites.

Despite being asked independently, children and parents alike name the same three stories as their top choices - Noah's Ark, The Nativity and Joseph and his coat of many colours<sup>4</sup>.

And yet, 1 in 5 children (20%) did not choose Noah's Ark when asked to select from a list the stories they think are from the Bible. A similar proportion (19%) did not choose Adam & Eve.

Almost one in three (29%) did not select The Nativity as a part of the Bible, rising to 36% for The Good Samaritan, 41% for David & Goliath and well over half, 59%, for Samson & Delilah and Jonah & The Whale.

By contrast, around 1 in 10 (9%) believe that King Midas and Icarus appear in the Bible, while 6% think that Hercules does.

In fact, asked to select stories that appear in the Bible from a list of popular children's books, Greek myths and fairytales, just 14% answered all correctly.

While these statistics may appear surprising at first glance, they are symptomatic of the fact that many children indicate they have never read, seen or even heard these stories.

Even for those stories that appear to be 'favourites', around a quarter of children indicated that they have never read, seen or heard Noah's Ark (23%), with a similar proportion for The Nativity (25%), rising to more than half (54%) for Joseph and his coat of many colours.

The picture for other classic Bible stories is worse. 38% of children indicated that they have never seen, read or heard Adam & Eve, while for the Crucifixion it is 43%. More than half of children have not engaged in any of these ways with Moses parting the Red Sea (56%) or David & Goliath (57%).

Over 60% of children indicated they had not read, seen or heard the Feeding of the 5,000 (61%), the Good Samaritan (61%) and the Creation story (63%). While for Daniel in the lion's den it is around three quarters (72%) and for the story of Solomon a massive 85%.

<sup>3</sup> Please see editor's notes for the full question wording in this section

<sup>4</sup> Nearly a quarter (23%) of children who have read, seen or heard Bible stories selected The Nativity as their favourite, with 15% selecting Noah's Ark and 9% for Joseph and his coat of many colours. Figures for parents (thinking back to when they were a child aged 3 to 16) were 18%, 14% and 9% respectively.

## Bible literacy in the UK

**30%**

Of secondary school children **DIDN'T IDENTIFY** that The Nativity was a Bible story

## And it's not just young children

Having polled children aged from 8 to 15 there could be a tendency to think that these figures are skewed by those at the younger end of the scale. But our findings show that the picture is similar across the ages, with older children perhaps even faring worse, possibly as their engagement wanes and memories falter.

For example, despite our research being undertaken just a few weeks after Christmas, **30%** of secondary school children (those aged 12 to 15) did not choose The Nativity when asked which stories they thought were in the Bible.

Among 15 year olds, the figure rises to more than a third (**35%**). The number of 15 year olds that indicated they had not read, seen or heard The Nativity is similarly around 1 in 3 (**34%**).



**34%**

of 15 year olds indicated that they have **NOT** read, seen or heard The Nativity story

## Bible literacy is little better among adults<sup>5</sup>

Parents themselves find it hard to distinguish the plot lines of well-known Bible stories from the latest Hollywood blockbusters.

- Asked to decide whether a series of plot lines appeared in the Bible almost half of parents (**46%**) failed to recognise the plot of Noah's Ark as a Bible story;
- Around a third were unsure or did not recognise the stories of David & Goliath (**31%**) and Adam & Eve (**30%**) as being from the Bible;
- A quarter (**27%**) failed to identify the Bible with the plot of the Good Samaritan.

By contrast, over a third thought that storylines featured in the Hunger Games (**54%**) and Harry Potter (**34%**) were or might be. More than one in four (**27%**) thought the storyline of Superman was or could be in the Bible; while (**46%**) thought the same for Dan Brown novel The Da Vinci Code.



**30%**

Adam & Eve



**31%**

David and Goliath



**27%**

Good Samaritan

of parents **DID NOT**  
recognise these plots  
as Bible stories



**34%**

Harry Potter



**54%**

Hunger Games



**27%**

Superman

of parents thought  
these plots **were or**  
**might be Bible stories**

<sup>5</sup> Please see editor's notes for the full question wording in this section.

## Bible literacy in the UK

# And there is a noticeable decline across the generations

We appreciate that, to a small degree, these results may be affected by the fact that the plots of many books and films today continue to be influenced by classic Bible stories.

But, even allowing for this, a closer look at the findings suggests an undeniable decline in our Bible literacy across the generations.

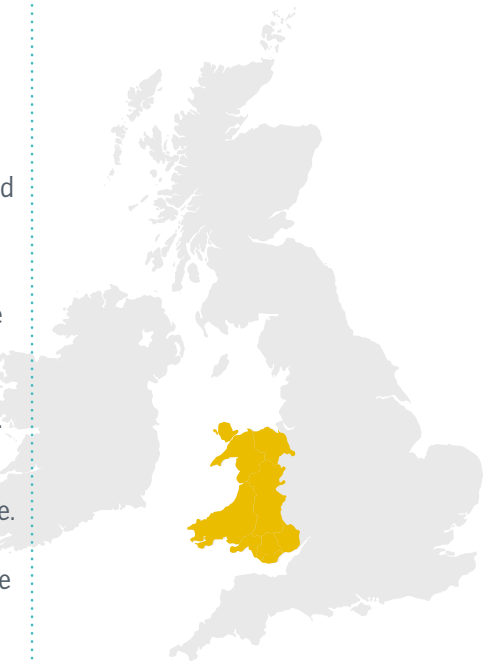
Presented with the same selection of plot lines of Bible stories and Hollywood blockbusters, older parents are invariably better at distinguishing between the two – to a significant degree.

In the case of Noah’s Ark, for example, just over half (**51%**) of parents aged 25 to 34 correctly identified the plot as appearing in the Bible. This rises steadily across the ages, reaching a dramatically higher two thirds (**66%**) of those aged 55 or over.

David and Goliath paints a similar picture, with **41%** of parents aged 25 to 34 failing to recognise it as a plot from the Bible, by comparison to only **14%** of those over 55. Findings for both the Good Samaritan and Adam & Eve follow the same trend.

Younger parents are often also more likely to incorrectly associate Hollywood plots with the Bible. Only **9%** of those over 55 thought the storyline of Superman was in the Bible, compared to one in five (**20%**) of 25 to 34 year olds. For Harry Potter it ranges from **23%** of those aged 25 to 34 to only **18%** of those over 55.

The signs are that future knowledge of these classic stories is unlikely to improve unless something is done, with just **17%** of parents saying they thought their child had read, seen or heard the parable of the Good Samaritan, rising to **22%** for David and Goliath, 31% for Adam & Eve and a better, but still less than half, **47%** for Noah’s Ark.



## Parents in Wales have significantly better recognition of Bible stories than elsewhere in Britain

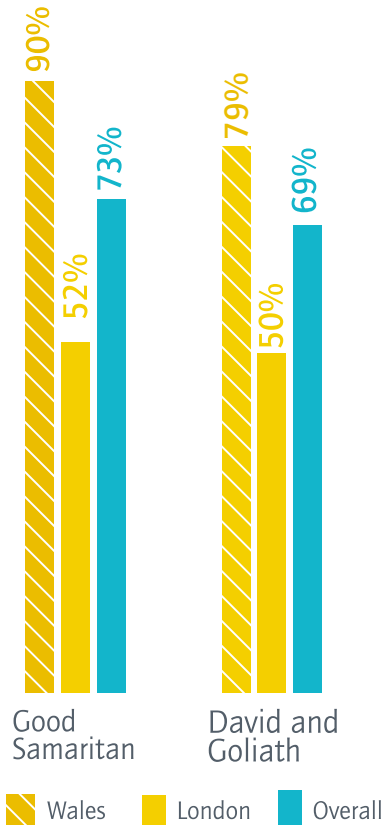
While our research paints a fairly consistent picture of Bible literacy in Britain, there is an interesting distinction in Wales that warrants further exploration.

Parents in Wales are consistently better at identifying the plot lines of Bible stories than those in the rest of Britain.

More parents in Wales correctly identified the plots of Noah's Ark (61%), The Good Samaritan (90%) and David & Goliath (79%) from the Bible than anywhere else. And by a significant amount.

9 in 10 parents in Wales, for example, correctly recognised the plot of the Good Samaritan as appearing in the Bible, by comparison to just 52% of those in London and 73% overall. For David and Goliath, parents in Wales score a similarly high 79%, compared to 50% in London and 69% overall.

Only in the case of Adam & Eve do those in Wales fail to top the charts. Even then, only parents in Yorkshire score higher than those in Wales, and by as little as 2% (79% vs. 77%).



Parents in Wales are consistently better at identifying the plot lines of Bible stories than those in the rest of Britain.







A close-up photograph of a stack of several thick books with dark covers and light-colored pages. The books are stacked vertically, and the pages are slightly blurred. A person's hand is visible on the left side, resting on the books. A large, semi-transparent yellow rectangle is overlaid on the bottom half of the image, containing the text "Why should we care?".

**Why should  
we care?**

## Why should we care?

# WHY WE SHOULD BE PASSING THEM ON

*There are those who will question why a decline in Bible literacy matters. It could be argued that a lack of knowledge is simply symptomatic of a book that is out of touch with modern society.*

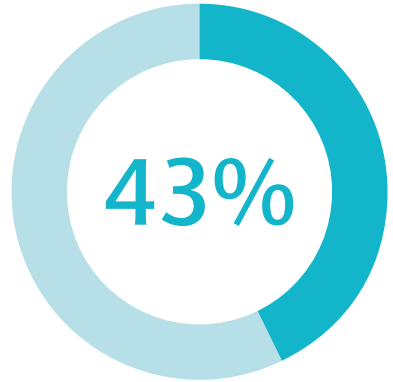
*Our findings would indicate not.*

43% of parents whose child has read, seen or heard a Bible story believe that it is important for a child to have read, seen or heard Bible stories because they provide values for a good life – rising to 59% of Christian parents.

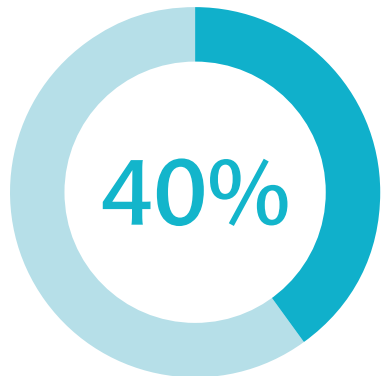
Further, 40% believe they are important to our history and culture, while 36% think they are classic stories that continue to stand the test of time.

Almost 1 in 3 (30%) think it's important that Bible stories are read, seen or heard by children in order to 'pass on' classic stories and books to future generations, with mums more likely than dads to think it is important for their child to have read, seen or heard Bible stories for each of these reasons.

And it's not always about religion. 1 in 10 (10%) non-Christian parents of younger children (aged 3 to 8) read Bible stories to their children daily, rising to 12% for parents that do not associate with any religion.

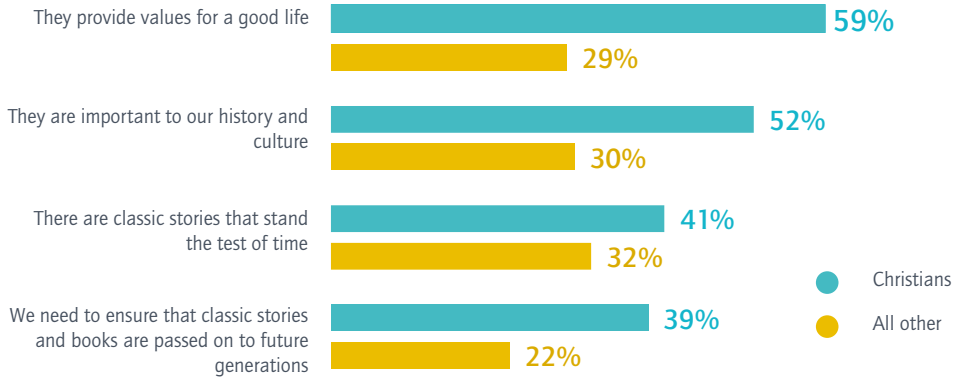


.....  
Of parents whose child has read, seen or heard a Bible story believe they provide values for a good life



.....  
Of 8 and 9 year olds would be keen to read, hear or see more Bible stories

**Question to parents: Why is it important for a child to have read, heard or seen Bible stories?**



## And the appetite is there

It's not only a huge proportion of British parents that believe there are important reasons to pass these stories on. There is an appetite among children to hear them.

Around half (49%) of primary school children, aged 8 to 11, describe Bible stories as interesting, while just under 1 in 3 (31%) older children, those aged 12 to 15, feel the same.

Even at 14 and 15, when interest might perhaps be expected to decline, the proportion who think Bible stories are interesting remains, perhaps unexpectedly, high at 35% and 27% respectively.

Likewise, around a third of all children (31%) describe Bible stories as being important, rising to a high of 39% and 43% for 9 and 10 year olds.

More than a quarter of all children (28%) equally say that they would like to read, hear or see more Bible stories, rising to over a third (35%) in London. Interest peaks at primary school, and more specifically around the ages of 8 and 9, when 40% and 41% respectively would be keen to read, hear or see more.



# Under threat





## Under threat

# SO WHY ISN'T IT HAPPENING?

*Despite the significant proportion of parents that believe Bible stories are important and a proven appetite to hear more from children, the signs are that the number of people 'passing them on' is in decline.*

Only **35%** of children have had a Bible story read to them by their parents and just **16%** by their grandparents.

Just over two in five children never have Bible stories read to them in any location (**41%**) and a similar number do not read them by themselves (**43%**).

Over half of children (**54%**) never, or less than once a year, read Bible stories at school or at home, and **45%** of parents of children aged 3 to 8 say they never read Bible stories to their child, falling to **36%** in London and rising to **52%** in Scotland and **60%** in Wales.

Again, religion isn't always a factor. Almost a third (**30%**) of Christian parents say that they never read Bible stories to their children. Furthermore **7%** do not think that their child, aged over 3, has ever read, seen or heard any Bible stories.

In stark contrast, **86%** of parents read, listened to or watched Bible stories themselves as a child aged 3 to 16.

But the picture isn't all bleak. Today, a significant **16%** of our children are reading Bible stories by themselves once a week or more, with little age variation at **19%** for primary and **13%** for secondary school aged children.

Question to parents: As a child, did you read, listen to or watch Bible stories in school?  
.....

**56%**

Parents aged  
25 to 34



**79%**

Parents aged  
55 or over

**Engaged with Bible stories at school**

# Bible stories in our schools

While around two thirds of parents (63%) say that as a child they read, listened to or watched Bible stories in school, a decline can be seen through the years, potentially reflecting changing attitudes to its role in education.

Only 56% of parents aged 25 to 34 say that they read listened to or watched Bible stories at school, rising steadily across age groups to 79% of those aged 55 or over.

Perhaps driven by this is an area for further exploration. Of those parents who think it's appropriate for children to learn Bible stories, 64%

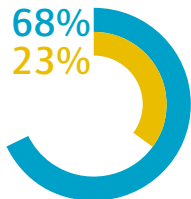
think it's appropriate for teachers to read them to their child. But there is a significant distinction between older and younger parents. Only half (50%) of 25 to 34 year olds think that this is appropriate for teachers to do, by comparison to 61% of 35 to 44 year olds, 79% of 45 to 54 year olds and 83% of those aged 55 or over.

"Who should read Bible stories to children?"

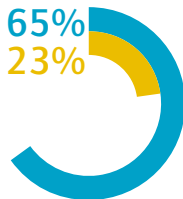
● Question to adults

"Who reads to you?"

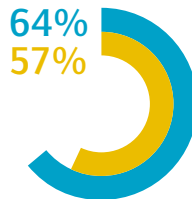
● Question to children



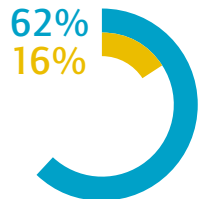
Parents / guardians



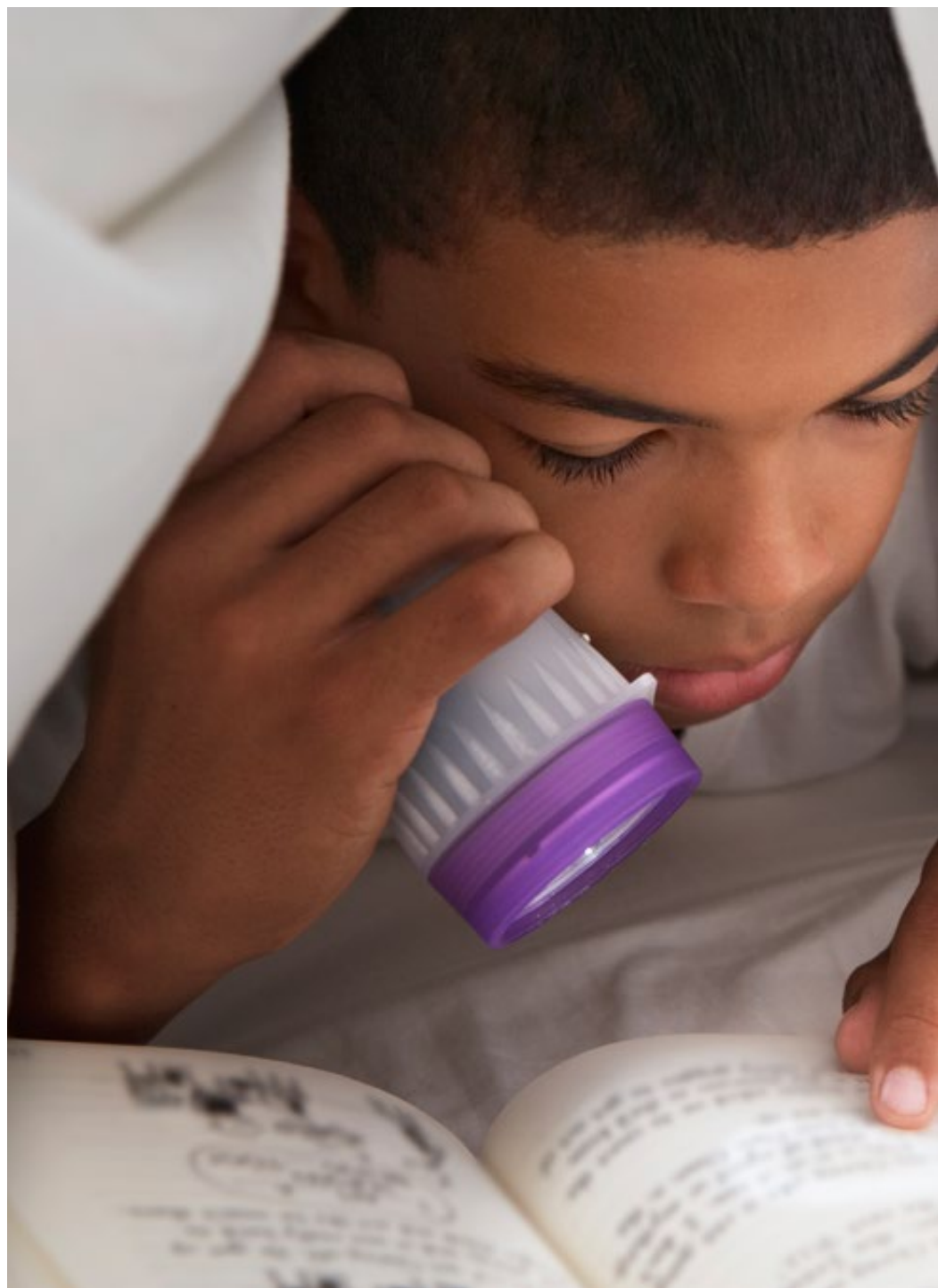
Sunday school teacher / Church leader



Teacher



Grandparents





A person wearing a white lab coat is shown from the side, working in a laboratory. The background is blurred, showing laboratory equipment. A large yellow rectangular overlay is positioned in the lower half of the image, containing white text.

**Just part of  
a bigger  
challenge**

## Just part of a bigger challenge

*A lack of engagement with younger generations is not a challenge specific to the Bible; it forms part of a bigger picture on when, how and where children engage in story-telling and reading across the UK.*

# KEEPING CHILDREN ENGAGED WITH READING

While an encouraging **40%** of parents of children aged 3 to 8 read stories to their child daily, around 1 in 7 (**14%**) say that they never do, whether Bible related or otherwise. Just over a third (**34%**) do so less than once a week.

Significantly 1 in 10 children (**8%**) say that they have never been read a story by their parents, grandparents or other family members, among others, while nearly a third (**31%**) say that they read stories by themselves less than once a month or never.

It is a picture that grows worse with age.

A quarter (**23%**) of primary school children, aged 8 to 11, say that stories are read to them at home or school every few days, falling to **5%** for secondary school children, aged 12 to 15.

The shift in secondary school reading is just as acute in private reading, with **42%** of primary school children reading stories to themselves every day compared to **22%** of those at secondary school.

This is a worrying trend when the majority of academic research points to a strong link between academic performance and the continuation of reading in teenage years.

By age 15, the number of children that read stories to themselves every day falls to just **13%** by comparison to over half of 8 year olds (**52%**) and a third (**32%**) of children overall.

Question to children: Do you read stories by yourself in school or at home



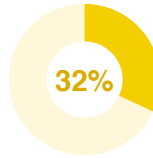
15 year olds



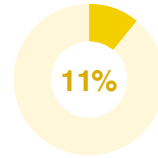
8 year olds



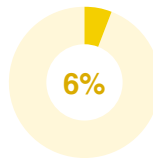
Question to children: How often would you say you read any stories (i.e. Bible stories and/or other general stories) by yourself in school or at home?



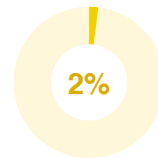
Every day



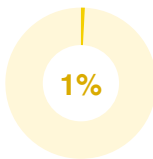
Once a week



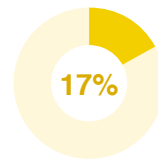
Once a month



Once every 6 months



Once a year



Never

## Just part of a bigger challenge

# Why is this happening?

No two families are the same, but our research indicates some of the reasons that parents are not reading to their children as much as they might like.

For 1 in 5 parents (**22%**) of younger children, aged 3 to 8, a lack of time is a barrier to them reading to their children more often; regional disparity is worth further investigation, with this figure rising to **30%** in the North and **25%** in the Midlands, by contrast to only **12%** in London.

For some parents, an increase in the availability of different types of media is making it difficult to read more often to their children. Around 1 in 10 parents (**11%**) cite their child's preference for learning through other forms of media, such as the television, as a barrier to reading to them more often.

But while technology may be the future, children continue to embrace tradition.

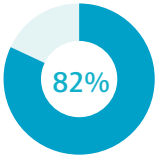
Children have access to a staggering amount of information at the touch of their fingertips. Yet, while digital devices are growing in popularity, **82%** of children still like to read stories more traditionally in a book.

With many tablets and devices still in their comparative infancy, it will be interesting to see how this evolves over time. Today, **37%** of children say that they like to read on a tablet, **26%** on a computer and **14%** on a mobile device.

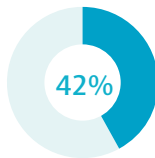
At Bible Society we embrace positive use of technology. That's why as part of the 'Pass It On' campaign we will be launching a dedicated Bible Bedtime App, an interactive app parents can use when reading Bible stories to their children.

Question to children: In which of the following ways do you like to read?

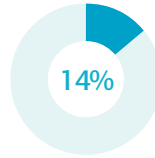
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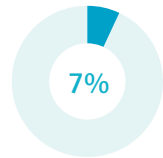
In a book



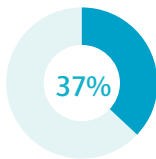
In a magazine



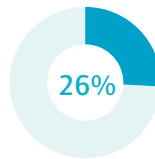
Once on a mobile phone



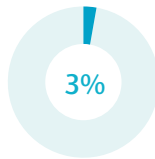
Audio device



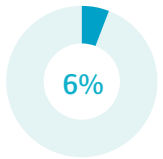
On a tablet



On a computer



Other



I don't like to read

# Conclusion

*Our research highlights a number of worrying trends, among them evidence that Bible literacy – already in serious decline – will become significantly worse in the future.*

*While millions of people in Britain and around the world believe in the value Bible stories bring to society, little is being done in our homes or schools to keep them alive for future generations.*

*There can be but a handful of people in Britain, if any, that have not 'heard' of the Bible. This in many ways exacerbates the problem. We rely on the fact that it will always be there. But, the truth is, like any literature, its value lies in its use.*

*It is time we were all reminded that, to keep this classic book alive for future generations, there is only one solution. We must use it or lose it. That's why we hope you will join with us to protect its future by remembering the need to Pass It On.*



# Editor's notes

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc.

Total sample size for the children's survey was 804 children. Fieldwork was undertaken 10th - 13th January 2014. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB children (aged 8 to 15).

Total sample size for the parents survey was 5,783 adults, of which 1,091 were parents of 3 to 16 year olds. Fieldwork was undertaken 10th - 14th January 2014. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

Children were asked the following questions:

**PPBc\_q9. Which of the following stories do you think appear in the Bible?  
(Please tick all that apply)**

	Unweighted base	804
	Base: All GB children aged 8-15	804
Adam & Eve		81%
Noah's Ark		80%
The Nativity		71%
The Good Samaritan		64%
David and Goliath		59%
Samson and Delilah		41%
Jonah and the Whale		41%
King Midas and the Golden Touch		9%
Icarus		9%
Hercules		6%
The Emperor's New Clothes		2%
The Tortoise and the Hare		2%
Gulliver's Travels		1%
Jack and the Beanstalk		1%
Three Little Pigs		1%
None of these stories appear in the Bible		1%
Don't know/ can't remember		5%



**PPBc\_q4.** Please remember that we are still interested in your views, regardless of whether or not you are religious, or if Christianity is not your main religion.

**Which of the following Bible stories have you ever read, heard and/ or seen? (Please tick all that apply)**

	Unweighted base	804
	<b>Base: All GB children aged 8-15</b>	<b>804</b>
Noah's Ark		77%
The Nativity Story		75%
Adam & Eve		62%
The Crucifixion of Jesus		57%
Joseph and his Coat of Many Colours		46%
Moses Parting the Red Sea		44%
David and Goliath		43%
The Parable of the Good Samaritan		39%
The Feeding of the 5000		39%
The Creation Story		37%
Daniel in the Lion's Den		28%
Other Bible story/ stories		18%
The Story of Solomon		15%
Saul on the Road to Damascus		13%
The Tower of Babel		11%
The Story of Job		7%
Don't know/ can't remember		6%
I have never read, heard and/ or seen a Bible story		5%

**PPBc\_q5.** Which ONE of the following is your favourite Bible story?

	Unweighted base	713
	<b>Base: All GB children aged 8-15 who have read, heard and/ or seen the listed Bible stories</b>	<b>717</b>
The Nativity Story		23%
Noah's Ark		15%
Joseph and his Coat of Many Colours		9%
The Parable of the Good Samaritan		4%
David and Goliath		4%
Adam & Eve		3%
The Feeding of the 5000		3%
The Creation Story		2%
The Crucifixion of Jesus		2%
Daniel in the Lion's Den		2%
Moses Parting the Red Sea		2%
The Tower of Babel		1%
Saul on the Road to Damascus		1%
The Story of Solomon		1%
The Story of Job		0%
Other Bible story		1%
Don't know		2%
I don't have a favourite Bible story		26%

# Editor's notes

Parents were presented with the following plot lines and asked to select which they thought were Bible stories:

- Noah's Ark – "In a world threatened by environmental disaster, one family embarks on a radical plan to survive and start a new life."
- The Da Vinci Code – "An unexplained death triggers a quest to uncover the truth about Jesus' family."
- The Hunger Games – "By winning a game in which players must fight to the death, a teenager inspires a nation to fight back against the cruel tyrants that are trying to control its people."
- Adam & Eve – "A couple's lives are ruined when a talking snake persuades them to eat something they were warned to leave alone."
- Harry Potter – "In an ongoing struggle between good and evil, a young man and his friends use magical powers to defeat an enemy who wants to live forever."
- Superman – "A hero from another planet with super powers on earth saves lives and the world from disaster."
- The Good Samaritan – "A man is mugged, left half-dead on a roadside and ignored by all who pass him. Eventually, his rescue comes from an unlikely source."
- David and Goliath – "When an entire army is too afraid to fight the giant who challenges them, it falls to a young boy, with expert aim and a slingshot, to step up and take him on."





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