

# SPIRITUAL NEEDS & MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES IN CHARLOTTE

CONDUCTED BY



THROUGH THE GENEROSITY OF



And



With special thanks to Mr. & Mrs. William Bantz, Sr.

OCTOBER 2017

## WHY A SPIRITUAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

The Barna research group cites Charlotte, NC as one of the nation's "Bible-minded cities". Compared to other cities, Charlotte has traditionally had a high percentage of people who are "Bible-minded". Barna defines Bible-minded as:

*Individuals considered to be Bible-minded are those who report reading the Bible in the past week and who strongly assert the Bible is accurate in the principles it teaches. (Barna Group, 2017).*

Our experience in conducting church surveys shows that only the most engaged/active congregants participate. Thus, the information gained is limited to strong attenders and reveals little about the needs and circumstances of less frequent attenders. It also tells us nothing about those outside the church – the very people who we hope to reach.

For this study, we took a different approach. We surveyed the ministry "end user" - the people of Charlotte including those who are very involved in the church, those who attend church some though aren't involved much beyond a Sunday service, and those who do not come to church at all.

In essence, we conducted a **spiritual community needs assessment**. We asked 2,000 Charlotte metro area adults and 134 pastors about their personal spiritual beliefs and practices, their perceptions of the church and what churches and ministries can do better. In the following pages, we share what we have learned and how these data can help us develop ministry strategies.

## METHOD

Data for this spiritual portrait of Charlotte are drawn from three main sources:

1. Phone interviews with a random sample of 2,000 Charlotte metro area adults between the ages of 18 and 99 conducted November 11 through 29, 2016. Results are weighted to accurately represent the age distribution of the general population.
2. Online surveys with 134 Charlotte metro area pastors conducted February 16 to May 18, 2017.
3. Spiritual growth assessments and app usage among 3,442 individuals using a Charlotte church Bible engagement smartphone app, conducted January 11, 2016 to May 24, 2017.

### GENERAL POPULATION SURVEY

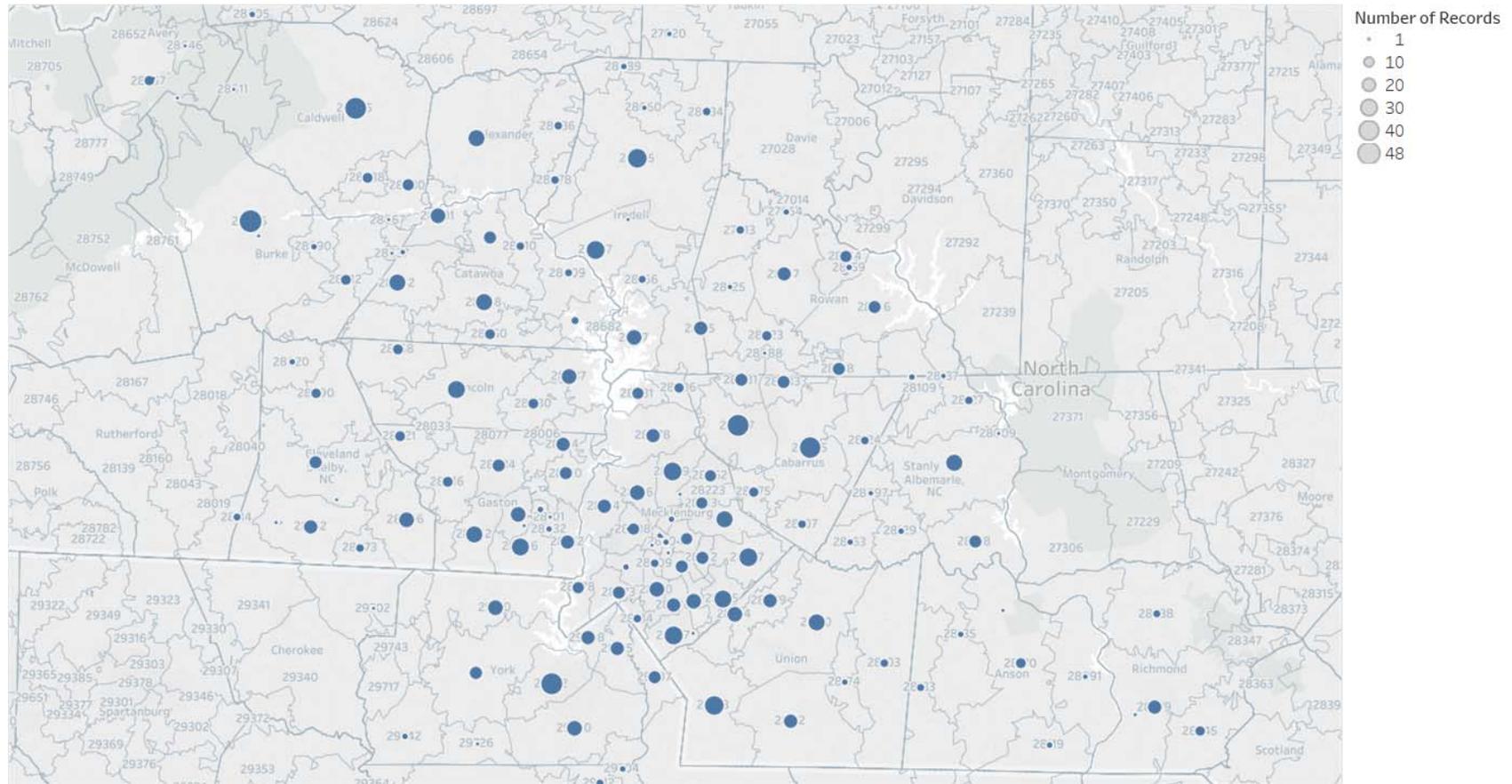
For the general population survey portion of this study, we contracted with Survey Sampling International (SSI), an award-winning global provider of data solutions and technology for consumer and business-to-business survey research. SSI conducted phone interviews (CATI) with a random sample of 2,000 Charlotte area adults in November 2016. Participants were contacted on both cell (n = 816) and landlines (n = 1,184). With an estimated 1.9 million adults in the Charlotte metro area, our total sample of 2,000 respondents yields estimates with a +/-2% error rate.

Our final survey sample was balanced on gender (n = 1000 males and 1000 females). Although participants ranged in age from 18 to 99, the average age was 56 years old. Older adults (55 and older) are over-represented in our sample relative to the Charlotte metro area population. To correct for this, all data are weighted based on the respondents age.

Participants hail from 186 different zip codes in the Charlotte metro area. Figure 1 displays the geographic distribution of survey respondents.

Interview questions covered a wide variety of topics from demographic information to spiritual beliefs and practices to daily struggles. Several open-ended questions were included which allowed participants to share their opinion on what holds them back spiritually, what they believe churches should be doing more of, etc.

Figure 1. Geographic Location of Survey Respondents.



## PASTOR SURVEY

In order to understand the ministry challenges facing churches, we surveyed area pastors. Specifically we sent email invitations to 1,265 Charlotte metro area pastors in the spring of 2017. The invitation list was based on a list of church contacts provided by Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary – Charlotte. A total of 134 pastors responded to the email survey. CBE staff also conducted phone interviews with an additional 13 pastors. With an estimated 1,500 churches in the Charlotte metro area, our total sample of 147 pastors yields estimates with a +/-8% error rate. The denominational distribution of responding pastors is representative of the distribution among all invited pastors. Pastor survey questions focused on their church characteristics and their perceptions of the greatest ministry needs in the community.

## DIGITAL BIBLE ENGAGEMENT CASE STUDY

For the third component of the study, we wanted to provide a case study of a Bible engagement. Our goal was to examine if Back to the Bible's app, which delivers customized biblical content at the times the user chooses, could get people to engage with scripture regularly. Our analyses focus on 3,442 Charlotte metro residents who have downloaded and created an account through one of four local church apps. When they first come in to the app, users tell us how often they are engaging the Bible. We then examine how that changes over time as they read scripture content through the app.

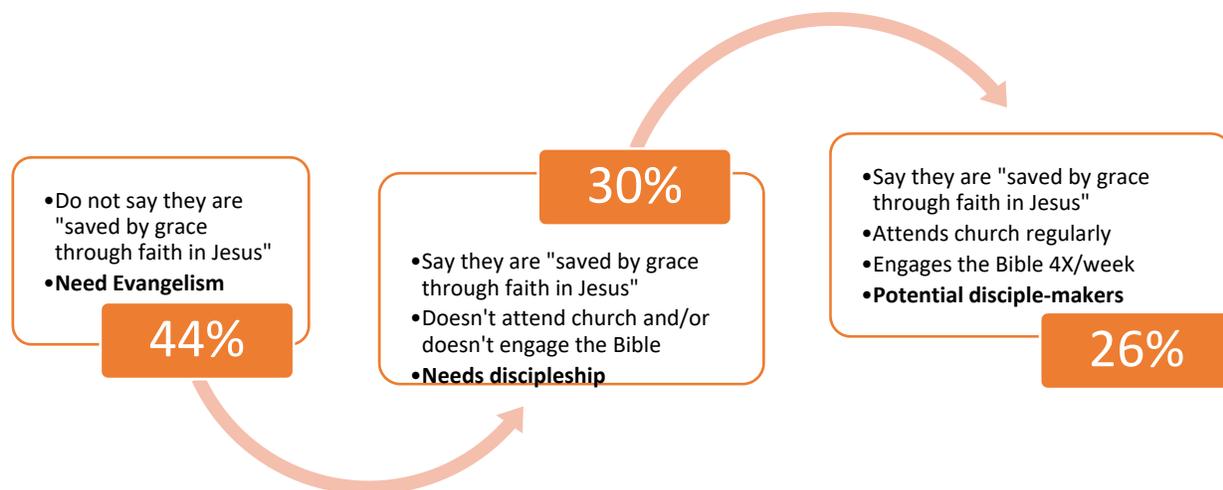
## SPIRITUAL STATE OF CHARLOTTE AREA ADULTS

From a ministry perspective, it's important to consider where people are spiritually in terms of how they view Christianity, if they have come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and how they are practicing that faith. The CBE has developed a simple model to provide a general overview of a community. Based on their own answers to key questions, we divide the population into three broad categories:

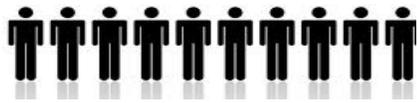
1. Needs Evangelism – These are people who, regardless of whether they say they are Christian or not, do not say that they are “saved by grace through faith in Jesus” when we ask what will happen when they die. Among this group, we believe the greatest need is evangelism.
2. Needs Discipleship – This group consists of people who do say that they are “saved by grace through faith in Jesus.” However, they are not actively practicing their faith, measured as attending church regularly (defined as at least monthly) and/or engaging the Bible four or more days a week.
3. Potential Disciple Makers – These are people who say they are “saved by grace through faith in Jesus”, regularly attend church and engage the Bible four or more days a week. From a ministry perspective, this group is best positioned to evangelize and disciple others.

Figure 2 shows that a little under half of Charlotte adults need evangelism. Another 30% have a saving relationship with Christ, but need discipleship. About one-fourth of adults (26%) are poised to provide discipleship.

**Figure 2. Spiritual State of Charlotte Adults.**



From a population perspective, this means that among the approximately 1.9 million adults in the Charlotte metro area:



836,000 need to know Christ



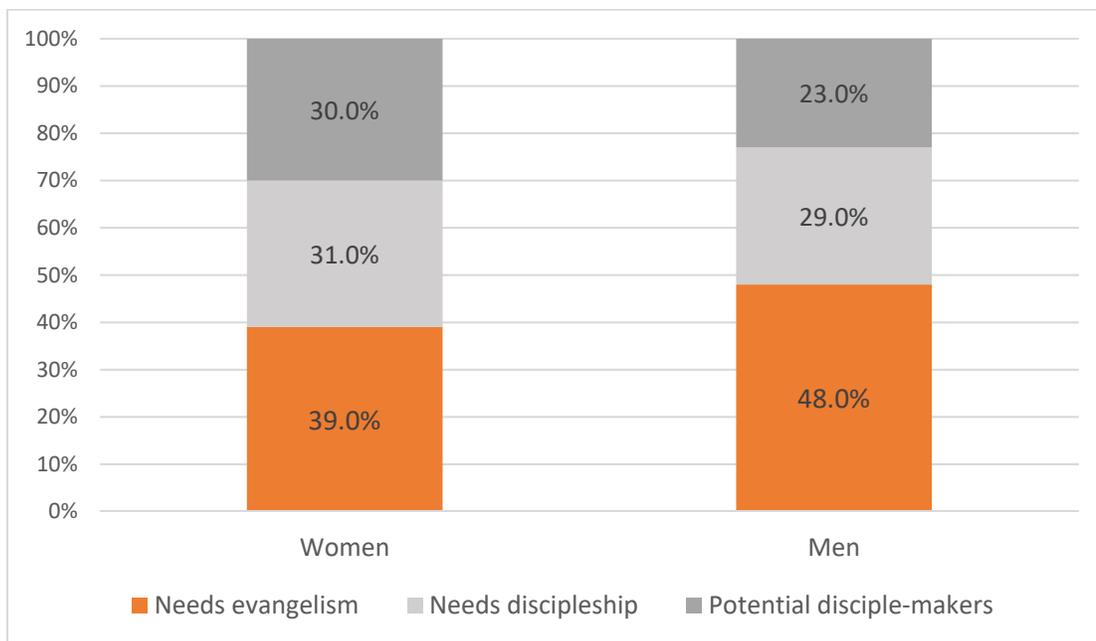
570,000 need discipleship



494,000 are potential disciple-makers

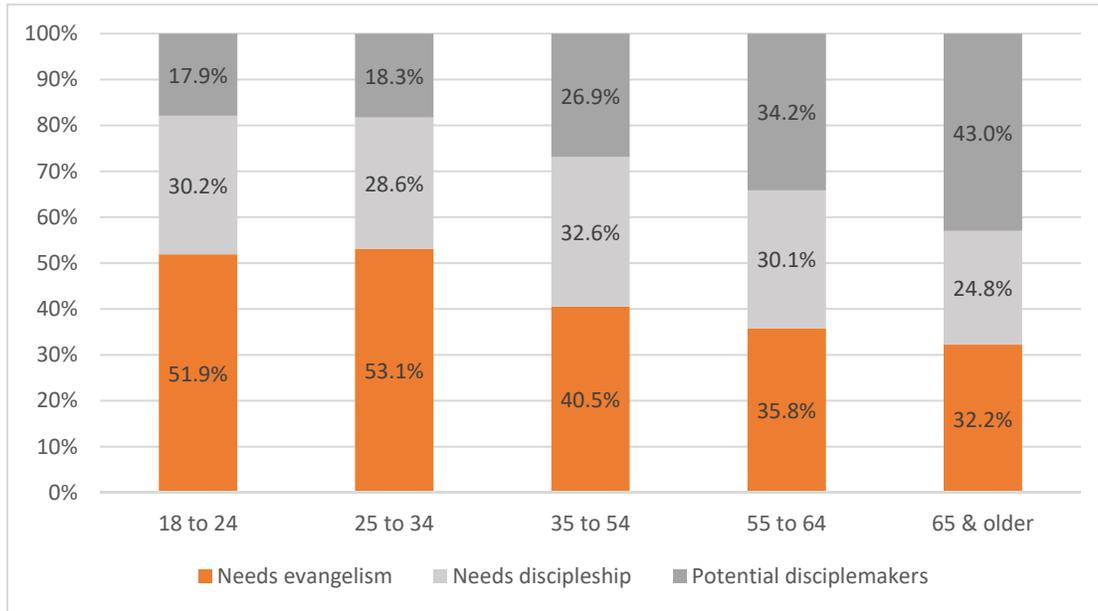
We find statistically significant differences ( $\chi^2 = 17.84$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .001$ ) between men and women in these three ministry groups. As Figure 3 illustrates, women are significantly more likely to need discipleship or to be potential disciple-makers. Forty-eight percent of Charlotte men need evangelism, compared to 39% of women. Three-tenths of women are potential disciple-makers; only 23% of men are poised to disciple others.

**Figure 3. Spiritual State of Charlotte Women and Men.**



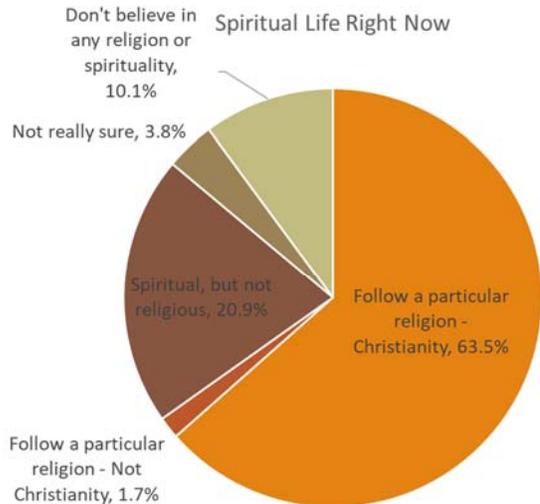
Not surprisingly we find a higher portion of potential disciple-makers among older adults and these differences are statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 79.14$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Figure 4 shows that only about one-fifth those under age 35 have an active faith compared to at least 34% of those over 54.

**Figure 4. Spiritual State by Age.**



The previous analyses focused on how we would group people based on their beliefs. It’s also important to consider how they identify themselves in terms of religion and spirituality. Our data reveal that 9 out of 10 Charlotte area adults were raised as Christians. However, today only 64% say they follow Christianity.<sup>1</sup> One-fifth describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious”, while 11% don’t believe in any religion or spirituality.

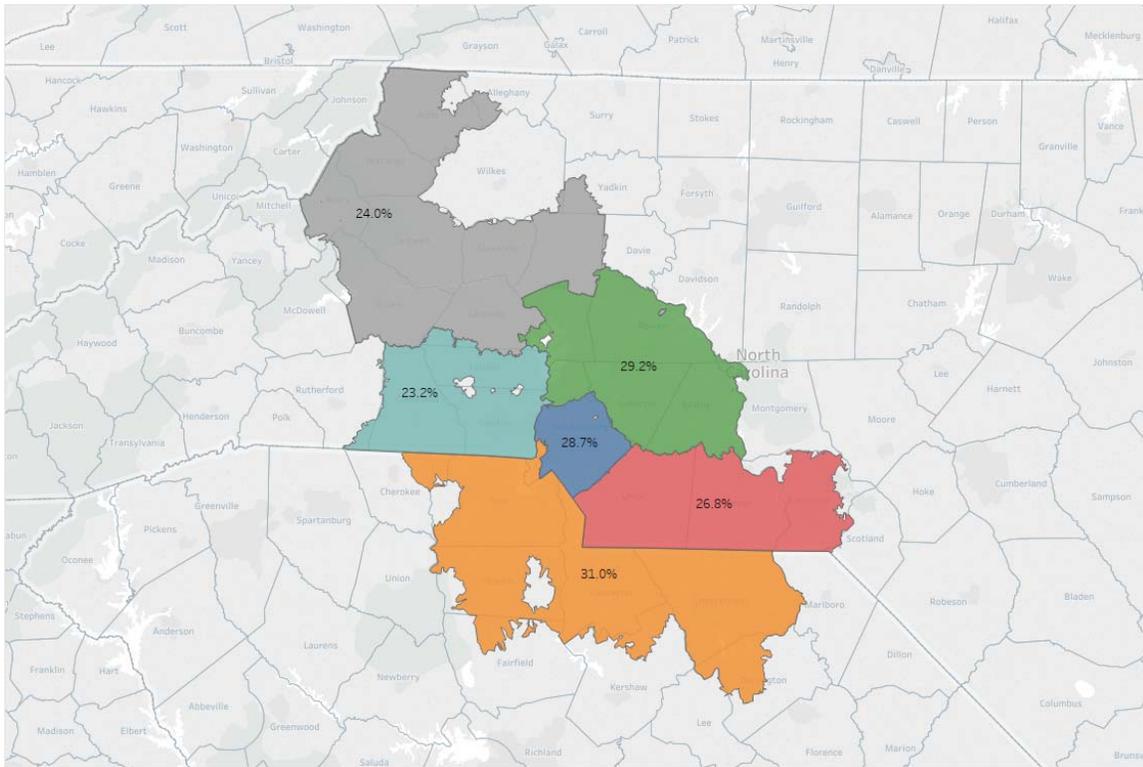
**Figure 5. How would you describe your spiritual life right now?**



<sup>1</sup> Appendix B details the denominational affiliation of those who identify themselves as Christian.

Depending on the region, 24% to 31% of adults raised as Christian no longer identify with the faith.

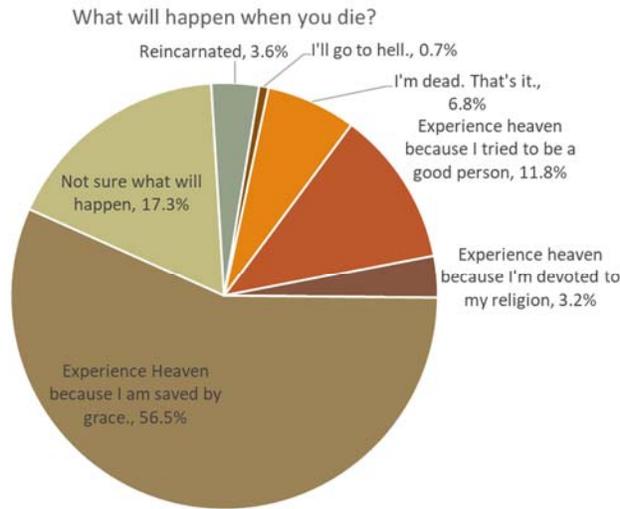
**Figure 6. Percentage of Charlotte adults raised Christian, but no longer identify with the faith.**



Map based on Longitude (generated) and Latitude (generated). Color shows details about ZIP (group). The marks are labeled by average of walkedaway. The data is filtered on qSR1, which ranges from 2 to 2.

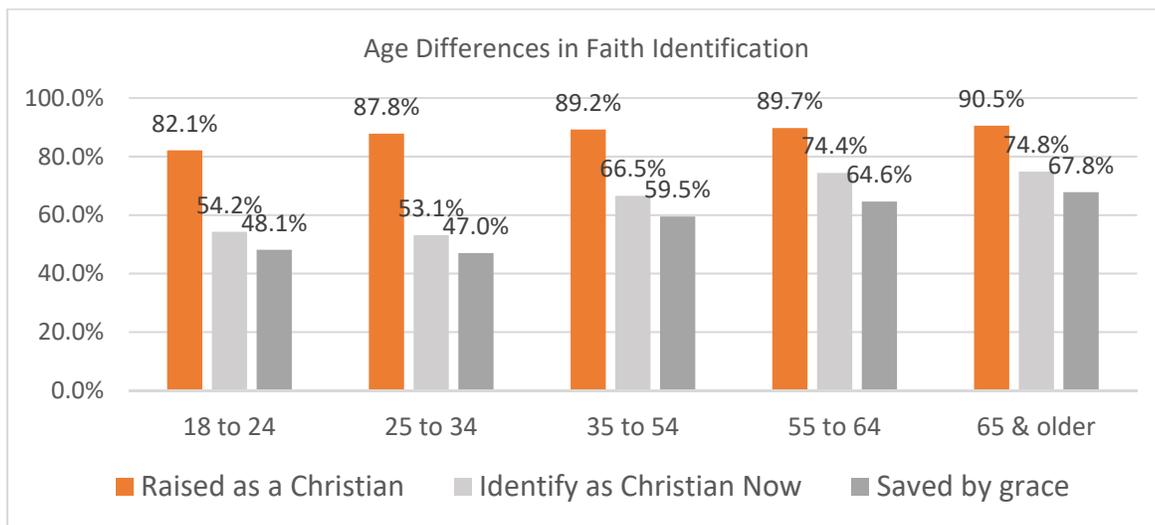
Participants also reveal an important aspect of their spiritual life when they tell us what they think will happen when they die. Figure 7 shows that more than half of Charlotte adults say they are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. The next largest group, 17%, aren't sure what will happen when they die. Relatively few believe they will go to heaven because they tried to be a good person or followed their religion.

**Figure 7. What do you think will happen when you die?**



Many researchers and authors have sounded alarms about the high rate of young adults who walk away from Christianity. Consistent with these studies, the following figure shows that faith seems to be “sticking” less with younger adults in Charlotte. Similar to what we have seen in other areas of the United States, we find that a significant proportion of young adults raised in the faith do not continue to follow Christ. For example, nearly the same percentage of 25 to 34 year olds and 55 to 64 year olds were raised as a Christian. However, less than half of the younger group say they are saved by grace, compared to 65% of the older group. This points to the great need for discipleship among youth so that they will come to know Christ and grow in their faith so that it “sticks” when they reach adulthood.

**Figure 8. Faith Identification by Age Group.**

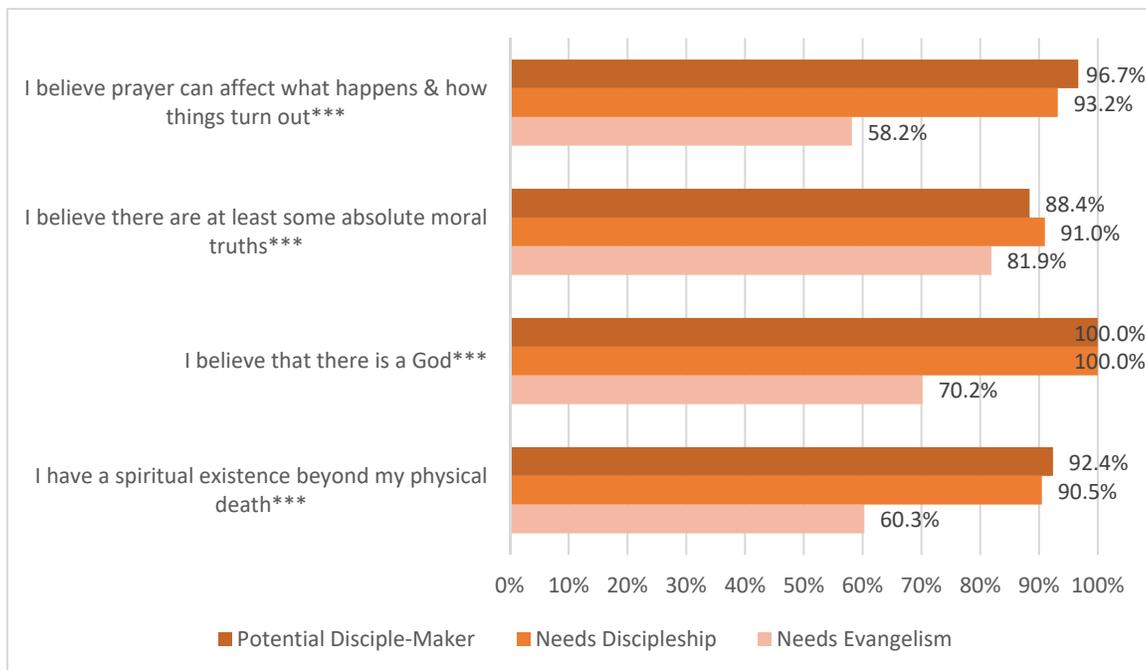


## SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

The most effective ministry strategies begin with understanding where people are starting in terms of their beliefs, practices, and struggles. Knowing whether someone believes in God or a spiritual existence that extends beyond physical death lets you provide the most appropriate resources and conversations.

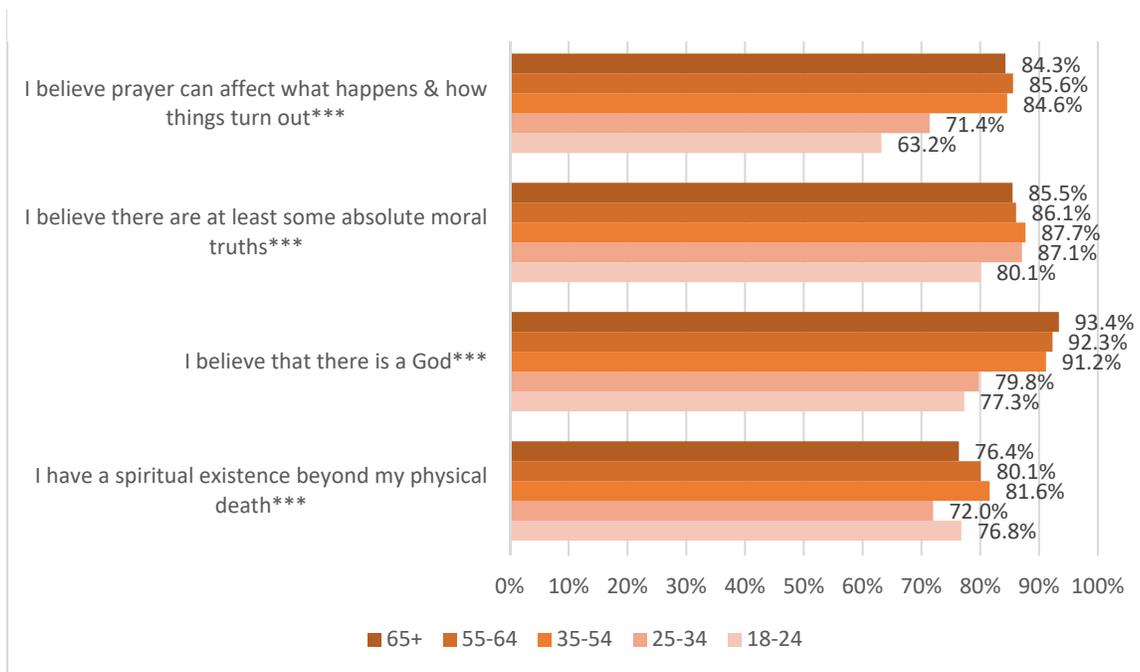
Figure 9 shows the extent to which Charlotte adults agree or strongly agree with four belief statements. The majority believe that they have a spiritual existence that extends beyond physical death, that there is a God, that there are at least some moral absolutes, and that prayer can affect what happens. Notably, there's less agreement among those who do not profess a belief in Jesus.

**Figure 9. Basic Spiritual Beliefs.**



We also find differences by age group. Although the majority of young adults believe in God, a spiritual existence, prayer, and the existence of moral truths, they are notably less likely to than their counterparts over the age of 34.

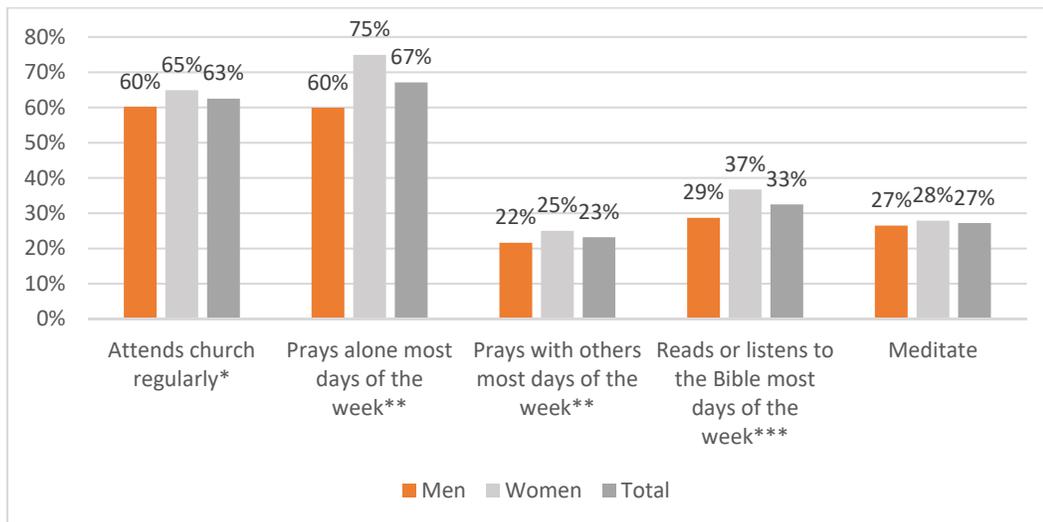
**Figure 10. Basic Spiritual Beliefs by Age Group.**



Beliefs tell only one part of a person’s faith story. Spiritual practices provide a measure of how involved people are in living their faith. As Figure 11 shows, most Charlotte adults attend church at least monthly (63%) and pray by themselves most days of the week (67%).

Engaging the Bible through reading or listening to it is a less common private spiritual practice. Overall one-third of Charlotte adults engage the Bible four or more days a week, the level needed to produce life change (Ovwigho, Cole, & Myatt, 2016). Notably this percentage is only slightly greater than the 27% of residents who meditate most days of the week.

**Figure 11. Charlotte Adults' Spiritual Practices.**



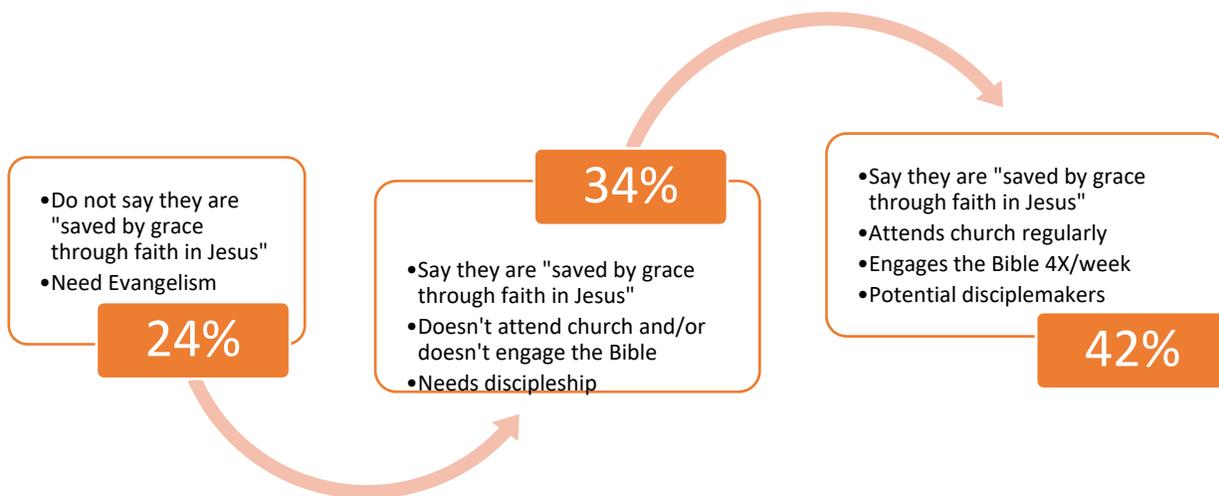
## THE CHARLOTTE METRO CHURCH

In this section, we consider the spiritual state of the Charlotte metro Church. We intentionally use a capital C in Church because our analyses focus on those adults who said that they attend church regularly (at least once a month), regardless of where they attend.

Figure 12 shows that, within the church, the need for evangelism and discipleship remains. Almost one-fourth of church attenders do not believe they are going to heaven because of God's grace. An additional 34% are saved by grace but are not engaging the Bible at a level that produces spiritual growth.

The good news for pastors and ministry leaders is the large portion of potential disciple-makers among regular attenders. Fully 42% have a saving relationship with Christ and are engaging with God's Word most days of the week.<sup>2</sup> Pastors and ministry leaders should look to activating and mobilizing this group to help evangelize and disciple the other two groups, both in the Church and the larger community.

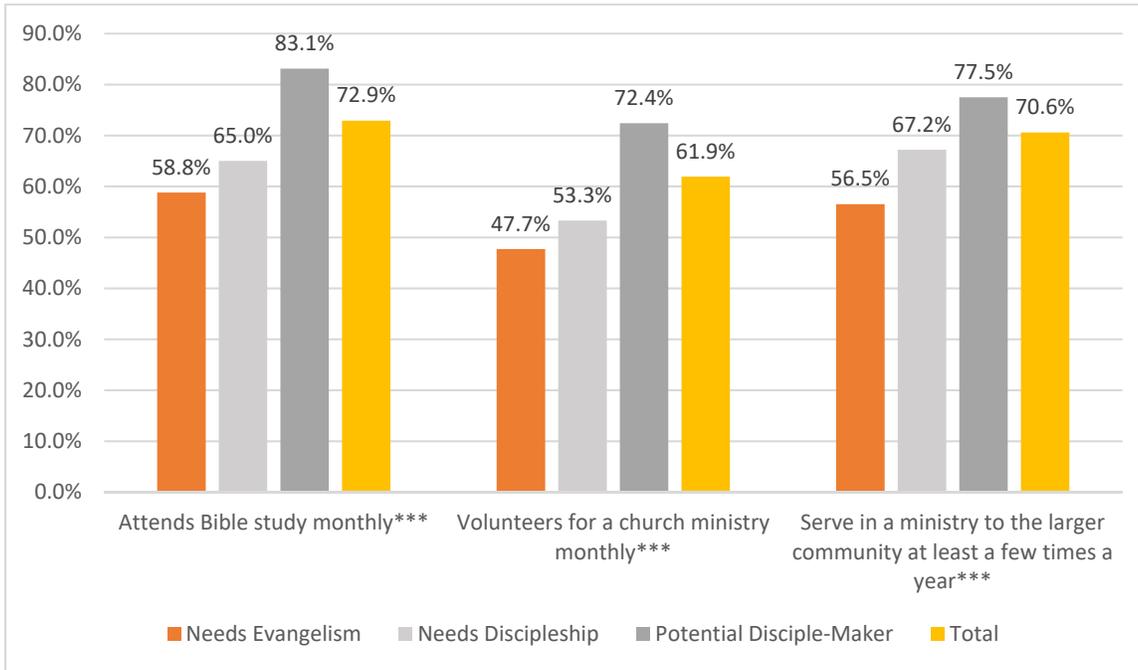
**Figure 12. Spiritual State of the Charlotte Metro Area Church.**



Charlotte church attenders indicate that they are quite active in other aspects of the church. For example, 73% attend Bible study at least once or twice a month. Three-fifths serve in a church ministry and seven out of ten participate in a ministry to the larger community at least a few times a year. Not surprisingly, activity levels vary among the three ministry groups with potential disciple-makers being the most involved.

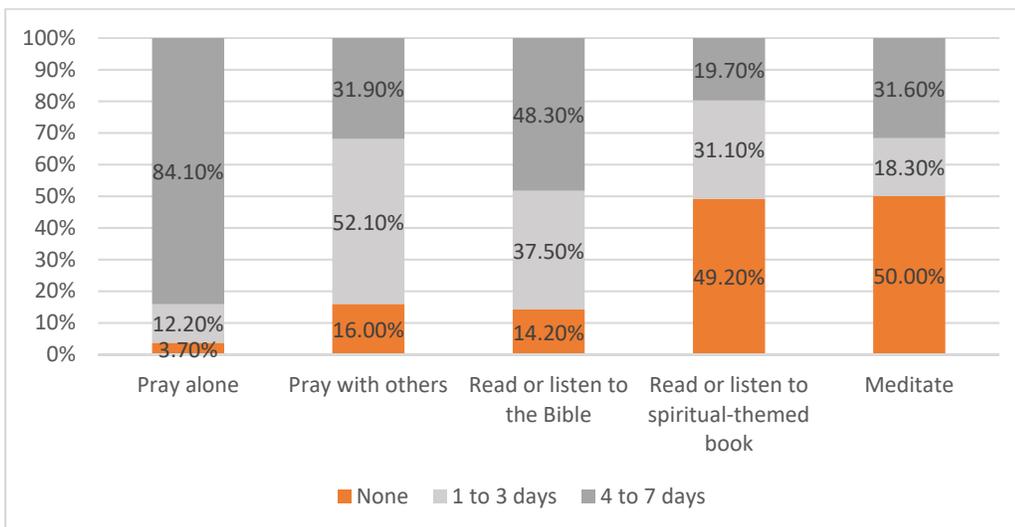
<sup>2</sup> Appendix C displays ministry group percentages for different demographic groups.

**Figure 13. Charlotte Church Attenders' Involvement.**



The vast majority of church attenders spend time praying alone most days of the week. As Figure 14 illustrates, solitary prayer is by far the most common private spiritual practice. Slightly less than half (48%) engage with the Bible at the level needed for life transformation.

**Figure 14. Days Per Week Engaging In Private Spiritual Practices - Regular Church Attenders.**

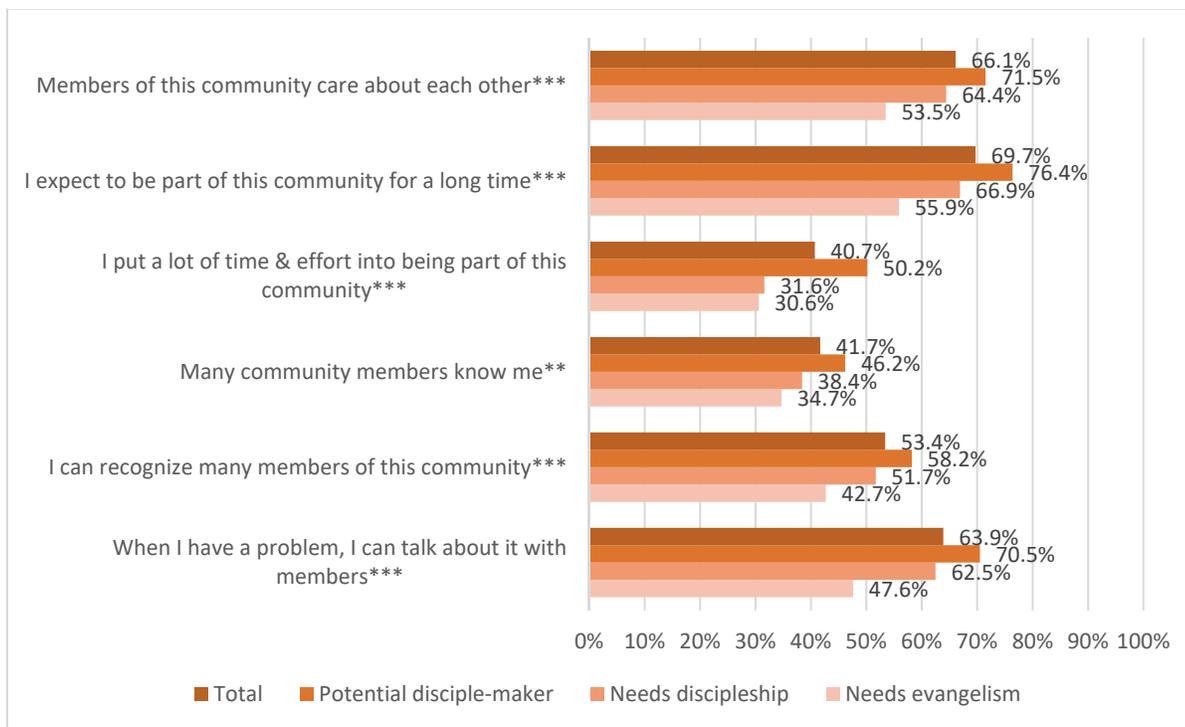


Generally, attenders have a positive view of their church, seeing it as a community where people love and support each other (66.1%). Most (63.9%) also completely agree that they could talk to someone in their church if they had a problem.

It’s interesting to note that participants report lower rates of familiarity in their church communities than you might expect given the high rates of emotional attachment. Two-fifths of attenders say many community members know them, while a little more than half recognize many of their fellow worshippers.

Again we find differences among the three ministry groups. Those who need evangelism have less attachment to their church, have less familiarity, and report putting in less effort to be part of the church community.

**Figure 15. Charlotte Church Attenders' Sense of Community – Percent who “completely” agree with this statement.**



Seven out of ten Charlotte church attenders expect to be part of their church community for a long time. Similarly, 70% would be considered “promoters” by marketing standards in that they are “extremely likely” (rating of 10 on the 10-point scale) to recommend their church to a friend or neighbor. However, 13% are “detractors”. Thus the net promoter score for Charlotte area churches in general is 57%.

Potential disciple-makers are nearly twice as likely to be promoters as those who need evangelism. Eighty-eight percent of potential disciple-makers would highly recommend their church, compared to only 48% of those who need evangelism.

What do Charlotte residents see as the strengths of their churches? Church members believe the best things about their churches are:

**THE PEOPLE** – Seven out of ten church attenders identified the people they worship with as the greatest strength of their church. For example:

*They are nice and good people. They mean well.*

*Those are the willingness to help others in the community and the concern for all people.*

*They are the good people.*

*The church family, the people and the congregation are best things.*

*The best thing about my church is there is love. The people love each other. They help each other and they care. The people are real.*

**THE PASTOR OR LEADERSHIP** – One-fifth of Charlotte church attenders regard their pastor or the church leadership as a strength:

*The pastor lives what he preaches, and teaches directly from the Bible.*

*That is my pastor. She is very open-minded and personable.*

*It is the service, and the minister is a very introductory speaker.*

*It is the preacher because he is friendly and known by everybody.*

*We have a good preacher.*

**BELIEVING AND TEACHING THE Bible** – A third strength, identified by 17% of attenders, is the church's focus on the Bible:

*It preaches the word of God from the Bible and nowhere else.*

*I like their teachings from the Bible.*

*They preach from the Bible the exact word and preach the King James version of the Bible.*

*Those are teaching people and helping them on what the Bible says, because we make decisions and cope with every decision with the guide of the Bible.*

When asked what their church should change, 62% of participants said "Nothing." Responses among those who did want to see change were quite diverse. For example, 11% commented that they would like to see their church grow in size:

*I would like more members.*

*I really wish that we could expand so that we could have more members.*

*I want more members.*

*I would like to basically increase the attendants in the church.*

**Other commented on their church's location or facilities:**

*It is the location. I would like it to be closer to my house so that I could attend more often.*

*That would be the location. They are building a separate church this year.*

*We need a new church. We need a bigger church. We need a bigger location.*

*It is the location. We should be building our own church because we are renting now.*

*I wish there were more location across town.*

*I would like to have a new location. They could minister to more people.*

Other desired changes, mentioned by small numbers of people, included serving the community more, the church's leadership, becoming more racially diverse, and something about the worship service or music.

The pattern of responses differed when we asked what Charlotte metro residents thought other churches should be doing more. Most commonly participants felt area churches should be serving the community more. For example:

*They should serve the community more.*

*They could help the less fortunate, and do more in the community.*

*That would be caring for and helping each other in the whole community.*

*There should be more visits to get to know each other. They should help the needy in the community more often.*

*They should serve the community more.*

*They could help the less fortunate, and do more in the community.*

*That would be caring for and helping each other in the whole community.*

*There should be more visits to get to know each other. They should help the needy in the community more often.*

**Others saw a need for local churches to be more open and less judgmental:**

*It is being a little more accepting and a little less judgmental.*

*It is to be more open-minded, more accepting and less judgmental.*

*They need to get rid of the hellfire-and-brimstone kind of judgmental mentality.*

*They should not be judgmental and discriminate the gays. They should not discriminate others. They should respect the women's right and stay out of politics.*

Some respondents felt that churches should take an active role in bringing the community together:

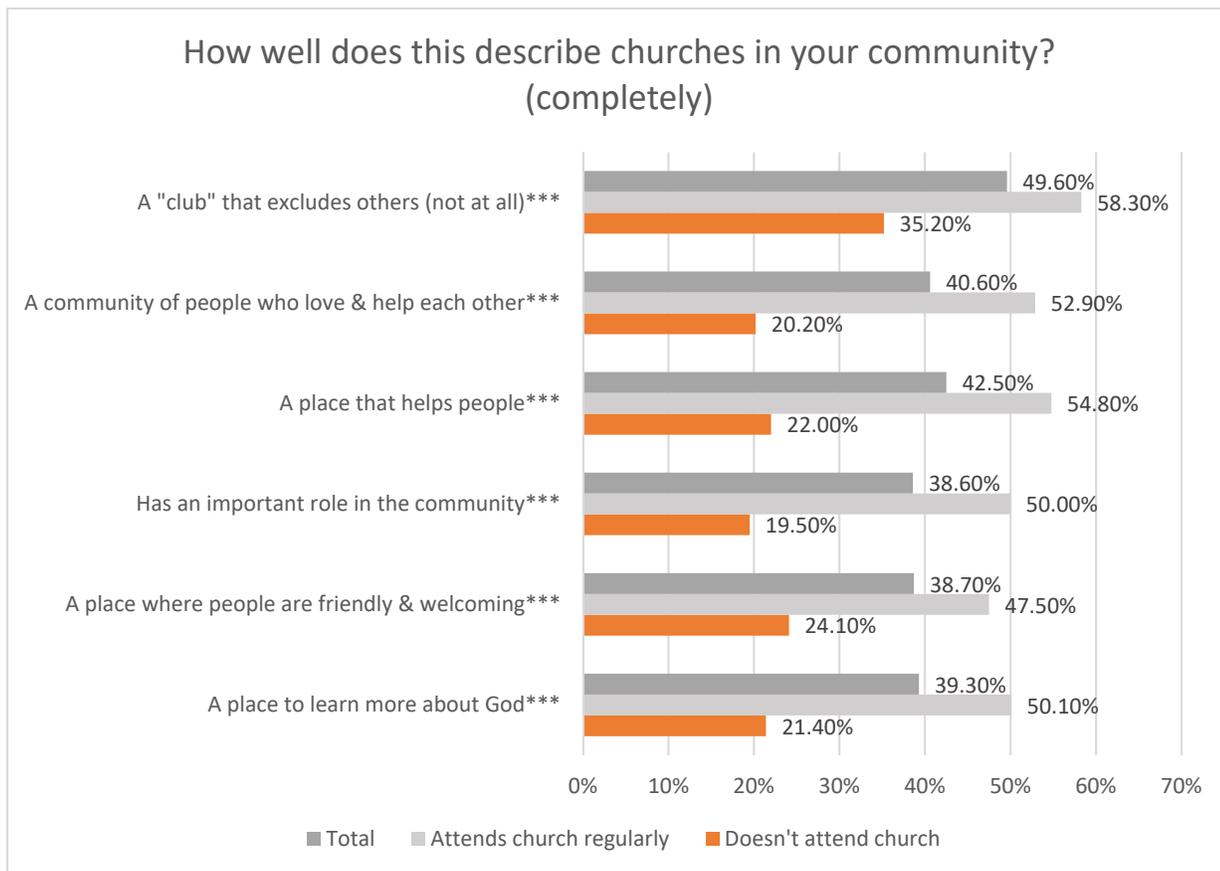
*All churches in the community should really be, at this point, trying to cross lines and bring everybody and the community together. Right now, our country is torn, so I feel like there should be a step taken by all sorts of churches to come together for a certain purpose through God. At the same time, we need to help better our country and start the healing process between all religions and races. That should be something to work on.*

*All of the churches in the community should come together instead of having all these different color churches. All people should just come together because when we die, all of us go to the same place, which is heaven. There really is no point in having all these different kinds of churches.*

*Creating justice and equity within our minority populations (Af-Am, Hispanic, Immigrants, LGBTQ)*

A spiritual needs assessment provides the perfect opportunity to ask people outside the church about their spiritual struggles and how they feel about the Christian faith. We asked Charlotte residents who do not attend church how well they believe a series of descriptive statements fit the churches in their community. As Figure 16 shows, only about one-fifth completely agree that local churches are places that help people, that have a community that loves and helps each other, and that have an important role in the community.

**Figure 16. Church Descriptors.**



One important goal of the Spiritual Needs Assessment was to identify factors that keep people from coming to church, from engaging with the Bible, and from growing spiritually. The previous section suggests that few non-attenders hold a very positive view of the Church. Most, in fact, hold fairly neutral views, seeing the Church as mostly irrelevant at least to their lives.

When we asked Charlotte residents what keeps them from growing spiritually and having hope for the future, more than a third said they didn't know. Another 24% said that nothing hinders their spiritual growth.

Having a life that’s “too busy” presents a significant hindrance for Charlotte residents. Many spoke specifically about working long hours that keeps them from practicing their faith. Others simply stated they were not engaging in spiritual practices, including attending church, praying and engaging the Bible, as they should to grow spiritually.

The state of society hindered other Charlotte residents. Responses in this category spoke of violence, riots, and racial and political tensions.

**CHARLOTTE AND THE BIBLE**

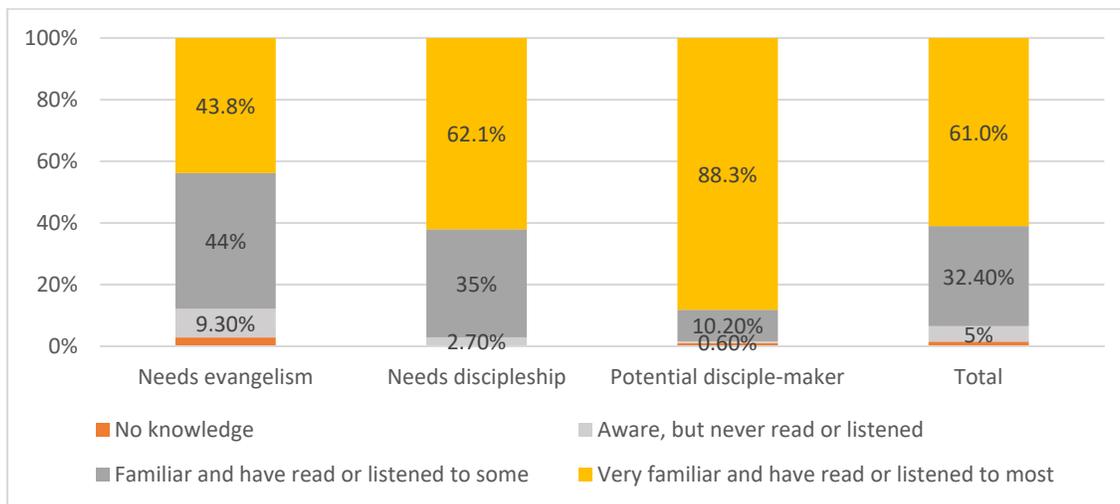
CBE and the American Bible Society exist to help people all over the world connect with God through His Word. In fact, CBE research demonstrates that regularly Bible engagement (four or more days a week) is the most reliable technique for growing spiritually and experiencing true life transformation.

For these reasons, exploring Charlotte metro residents’ attitudes and behaviors towards the Bible was a central focus of the Spiritual Needs Assessment. We begin by considering participants’ familiarity with the Bible.

Figure 17 shows that most Charlotte metro adults (61%) consider themselves very familiar with the Bible and have read or listened to most of it. An additional one-third have read or listened to some of the Bible and consider themselves familiar with it.

Differences among the ministry groups are statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 293.5$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Those who need evangelism have less experience with the Bible. However, the majority in all three groups consider themselves familiar with scripture and have engaged with it at some point.

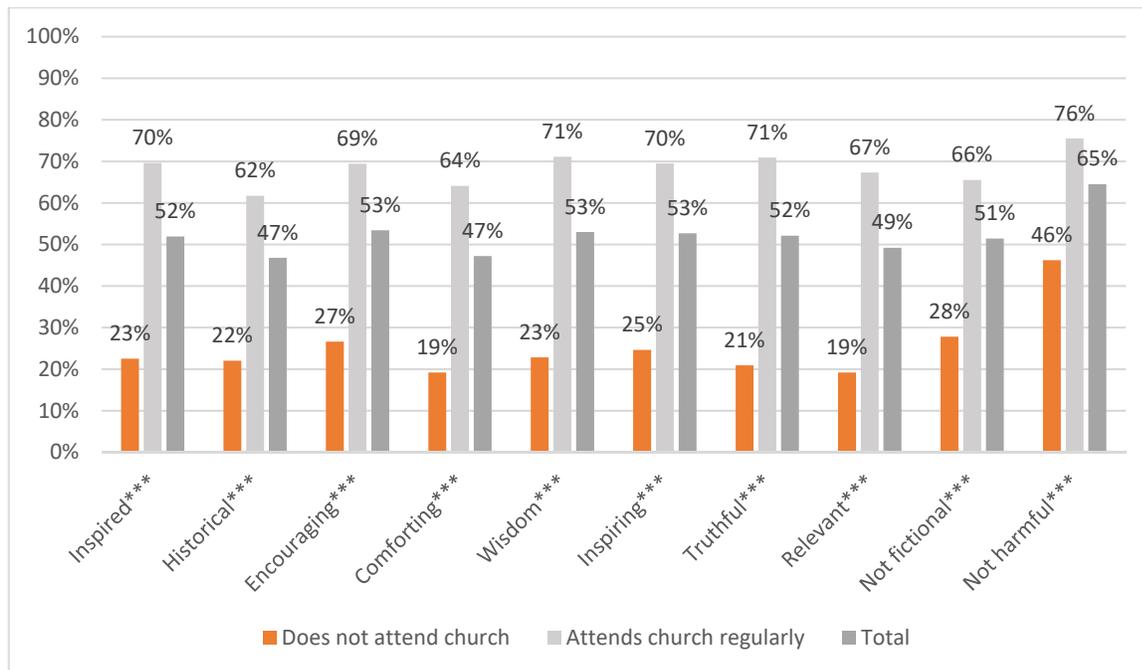
**Figure 17. How familiar are you with the Christian Bible?**



Despite similar levels of familiarity with the Bible, Charlotte adults who do not attend church view it in a markedly different way compared to church attenders. For example, Figure 18 shows that 71% of church attenders believe that “wisdom” accurately describes the Bible. In contrast, less than a quarter of non-attenders view the Bible this way.

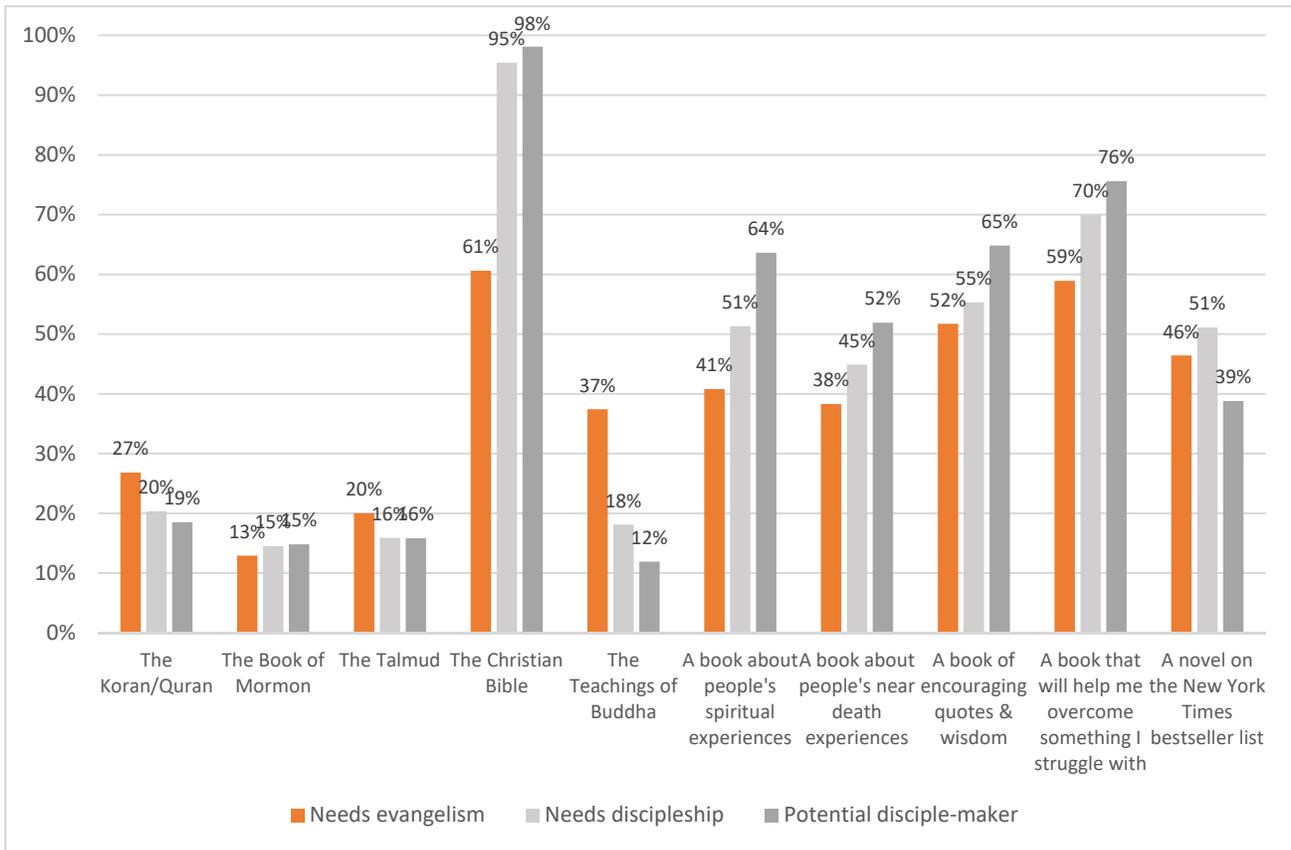
Previous CBE analyses have shown that people’s views of the Bible help predict how open they will be to engaging with it (Ovwigbo, 2016). In particular, perceptions of the Bible as inspiring, truthful and comforting increase the odds that someone will be open to reading or listening to scripture.

**Figure 18. Percent who say this word completely describes the Christian Bible.**



ABS utilizes a variety of creative resources and strategies to help people connect with God through the Bible. Figuring out which ministry strategies fit which people presents a significant challenge to the ministry. To understand what exactly this challenge looks like in Charlotte, we asked survey respondents how likely they are to read or listen to different types of resources, if given the opportunity. Figure 19 shows that, across ministry groups, Charlotte area adults display a strong openness to the Bible over other religious texts and types of books. Nearly all adults in need of discipleship and potential disciple-makers express a willingness to engage the Bible. Even among those in need of evangelism, 61% say they are likely to read or listen to the Bible if given the opportunity. This group’s openness to the Bible is quite similar to their openness to books that help them overcome something they struggle with and notably higher than their openness to other types of books.

**Figure 19. Percentage of Charlotte adults who are "likely" to read this content if given the opportunity.**



### CUSTOMIZING BIBLE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

In sum, our survey of Charlotte metro area adults reveals that most were raised Christian and are familiar with the Bible. Overall the population holds positive views of the Bible and an openness to reading or listening to it.

Yet only one out of three engages the Bible most days of the week. As ministries consider how to increase Bible engagement in the Charlotte metro area, it's helpful to consider a range of approaches for the different subgroups within the population.

Figure 20 shows the diversity among Charlotte adults in their experience with and attitude about the Bible. This classification is based on previous analyses which revealed that both of these factors are strong predictors of openness to engaging the Bible. For those who are Willing and Trusting, ministry approaches that encourage and equip people to directly explore the Bible hold the most potential. In contrast, those who are Wary and Jaded (a significant minority of the Charlotte population) are more open to "encouraging quotes & wisdom" and resources that help them overcome something with

which they struggle such as worry or grief. Ministry approaches utilizing these as bridges to Bible engagement are more apt to reach these groups, than those emphasizing just scripture or the spiritual experiences of others.

**Figure 20. Bible Engagement Target Groups.**

**Likelihood of engaging (1 = very unlikely, 5 = very likely)**

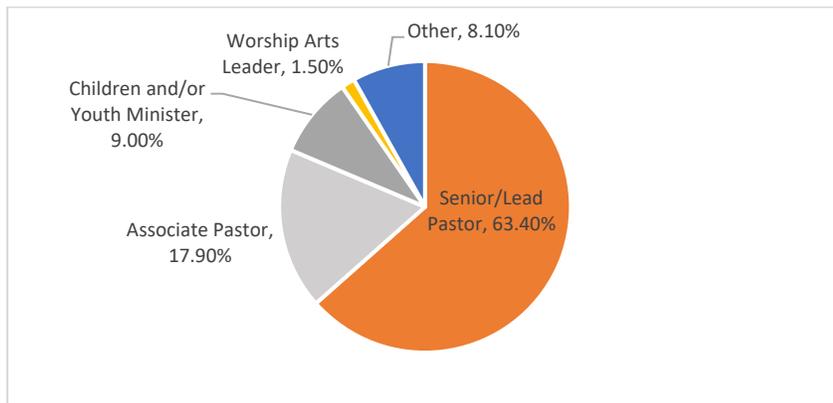
<b>Group</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Percentage of the population</b>	<b>The Bible</b>	<b>Encouraging Quotes &amp; Wisdom</b>	<b>People’s spiritual experiences</b>	<b>Helps me with something I struggle with</b>
<b>Wary</b>	Unfamiliar with the Bible & don’t believe it contains truth	2%	2.64	3.12	2.10	3.44
<b>Trusting</b>	Unfamiliar with the Bible, yet believe it contains truth	5%	3.09	2.69	2.70	2.92
<b>Jaded</b>	Familiar with the Bible, but doesn’t believe it contains truth	12%	2.77	2.92	2.54	3.13
<b>Willing</b>	Familiar with the Bible & believe it contains truth, yet doesn’t engage with it most days of the week	50%	4.19	3.34	3.16	3.62
<b>Engaged</b>	Engages most days of the week	32%	4.80	3.58	3.52	3.84

## CHARLOTTE AREA PASTORS

A survey of pastors comprised the second piece of the Charlotte Spiritual Needs Assessment. Email invitations to local pastors resulted in 134 completing an online survey about their ministries and what they feel are the areas of greatest need. Three-fourths (76%) of respondents are male. Responding pastors range in age from 25 to 76, with an average age of 48.

Those who participated in the survey serve primarily as Senior/Lead (63%) and Associate (18%) pastors.

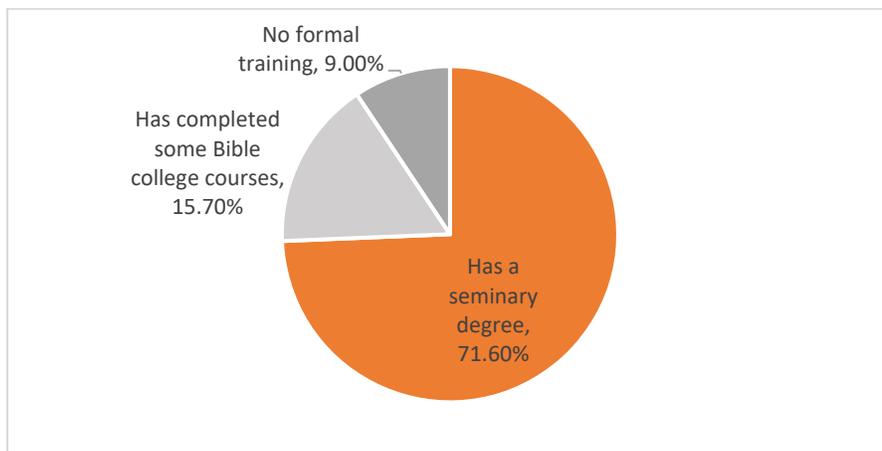
**Figure 21. What is your current ministerial position?**



Responding pastors represent more than 18 different denominations (see Appendix B for a complete list). More than a quarter (26.7%) are Southern Baptist. Non-denominational (19.1%), Methodist (13.0%) and Presbyterian (12.2%) represent the other common denominations among pastors.

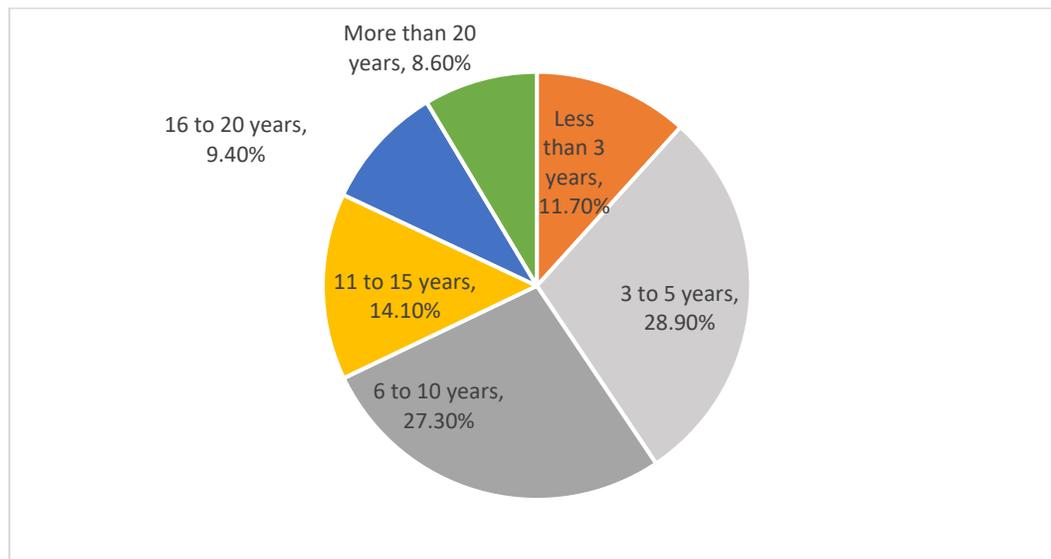
Respondents have served in ministry for an average of 19 years. Most (72%) have a seminary degree. An additional 16% do not have a seminary degree, but have completed some Bible college courses.

**Figure 22. Do you have any formal training as a pastor?**



Although pastors have been in ministry for nearly two decades on average, most have been at their current church for fewer than 11 years. As Figure 23 shows, most have served at their current church for 3 to 5 years (29%) or 6 to 10 years (27%).

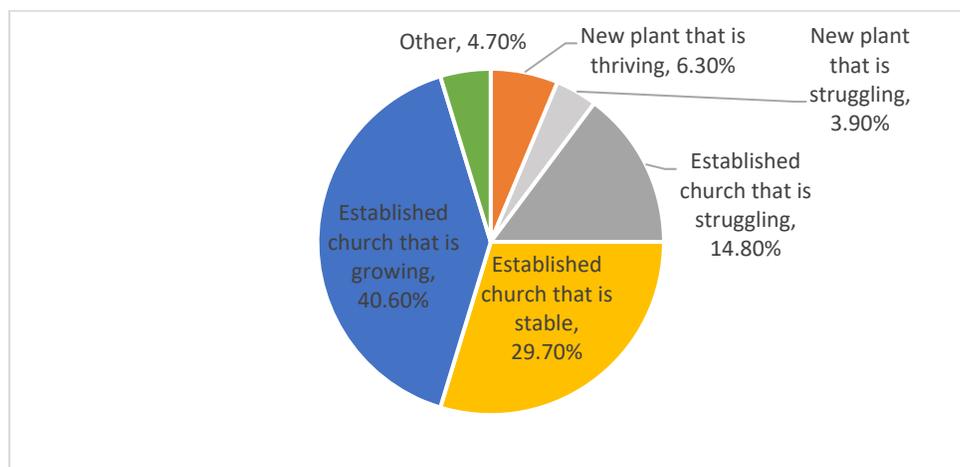
**Figure 23. How long have you served at your current church?**



**PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR CHURCH**

We asked pastors a series of questions about their church in order to understand their ministry context. Figure 24 illustrates that 40% of pastors describe their churches as established and growing. An additional 30% are serving in established churches that are stable.

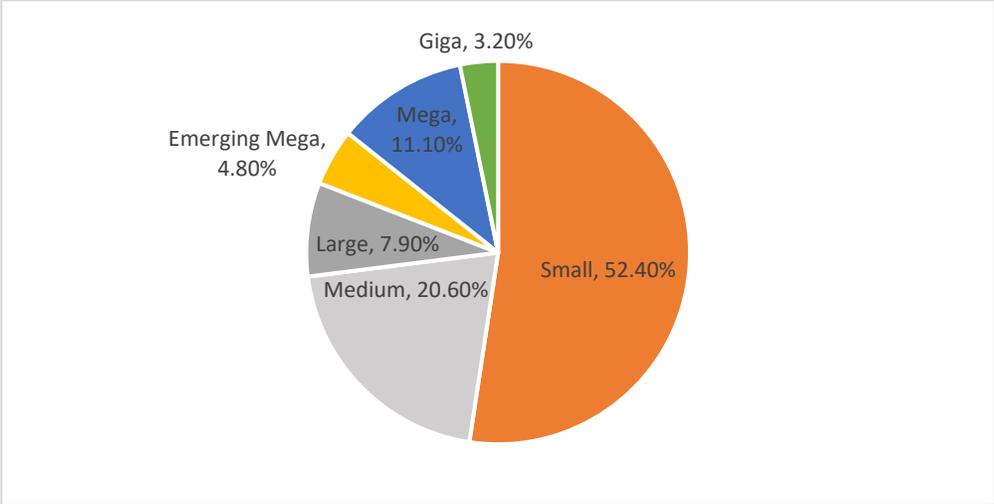
**Figure 24. Which description best fits your church?**



We measured church size by asking respondents to tell us how many adults typically attend weekend services at their church. Churches range from less than 10 to more than 26,000. The median across all churches is 215 attendees. Utilizing the size matrix developed by Kent Fillinger (2011), we see that 52% are small churches with less than 250 attendees. Another 21% are considered medium with 250 to 499 adult attendees. One out of ten churches meets the criteria for a megachurch, welcoming 2,000 to 9,999 adult congregants on a typical weekend.

Compared to national averages, the Charlotte metro area has a greater concentration of large and very large churches. For example, data from the National Congregations Study (2015) show that the median church size in the United States is 75 congregants. Nationally 0.4% of churches are classified as “mega”, in contrast to 11.1% of Charlotte churches.

**Figure 25. Church Size for Churches Responding to the Pastors' Survey.**



Not surprisingly, we also find that staff sizes vary quite a bit among pastor survey respondents. Staff sizes range from 1 to 209. Although the mean is 20, this is largely affected by a few very large churches. In fact, the median is 7 indicating that half of the churches have 7 or fewer paid staff.

When asked about the strengths of their church, 37% of pastors identified the people that make up their congregation. Similar to what congregants typically say in church surveys, pastors highly value the relationships among the people at their churches:

*Church that loves and supports one another; sincere desire to live a life of Jesus discipleship*

*The genuine of love of our families, authenticity of services & the life changing presence of the Holy Spirit.*

*Relationships, Love for God and one another, Concern for others' well-being*

An emphasis on missions was the second most common strength identified by pastors. Examples of responses in this category include:

*missions, ministers to hurting people*

*Strong passion for mission engagement in the community*

*Mission minded, compassionate, flexible with music and worship style*

*warmth, mission-minded, compassion, excellent staff*

**Twenty-two percent of pastors mentioned being Bible-based as a strength of their church:**

*Biblical teaching. Authentic Worship. Global Missions.*

*Biblical literacy, many engaged in serving, mutual member care*

*Strong Bible based, clear vision, mission and discipline ship focused, strong family ministry, healthy*

*Very relational, biblically committed, very mission-minded.*

**A similar percentage (21%) identified worship as a church strength:**

*Ethnic focused ministries that draw ethnic minorities. Engaging worship with sound theology.*

*Weekend worship services that are engaging and attract people while also giving strong Bible teaching, Strong small group participation (about 70% of the church) and a focus attention on being outwardly focused towards the community and serving the least and the lost*

*Worship experience, sound doctrine, friendliness of the people*

*Contemporary worship solid teaching heart for lost*

**In terms of the greatest spiritual challenges for the people in their church, 37% of pastors identified a lack of discipleship and/or not living as a Christ follower:**

*Moving past spiritual infancy*

*Daily spiritual disciplines Learning to disciple others Finding God in suffering*

*Discipleship in general*

*Knowledge and instruction of the Bible, with Bible based foundation for discernment and ministry planning*

**Similarly, one-fifth (19%) see navigating the culture or cultural Christianity as a challenge for their congregants:**

*navigating a changing culture and the impetus to be open to diversity*

*Learning how to help their families navigate the challenges of changing social norms in our world when those social norms go against their Christian beliefs.*

*Choosing their primary identity as a Christian rather than an American; knowing the difference between knowing God and having a relationship with God; articulating why church is relevant in the 21st century*

*Living an authentic life of discipleship in the current culture. We are a very affluent congregation that often relies on financial strength instead of God.*

A lack of time or busyness in general represents the third most common challenge pastors identify. Responses in this category spoke of how other commitments often interfere with living for Christ:

*Living in a culture that thrives on busyness*

*Overloaded schedules that do not leave them time to enter into deep community or spend focused time on their relationship with Christ*

*Balancing spiritual needs of their children with academic, athletic pursuits Not nearly enough time for the soul*

*Too busy with modern life and its distractions. Leaves little time and motivation for prayer and serving others on a regular basis.*

## BIBLE ENGAGEMENT

Anecdotally some have expressed concerns that pastors and churches are moving away from the Bible, in an effort to be more “seeker friendly”. Through our pastors’ survey we explored pastors’ views, use and interaction with the Bible.

Responding pastors indicated that scripture plays a key role in their sermons. For example, half (52%) said that their sermons typically include 6 or more Bible verses. Another 26% say they usually reference 4 to 5 verses.

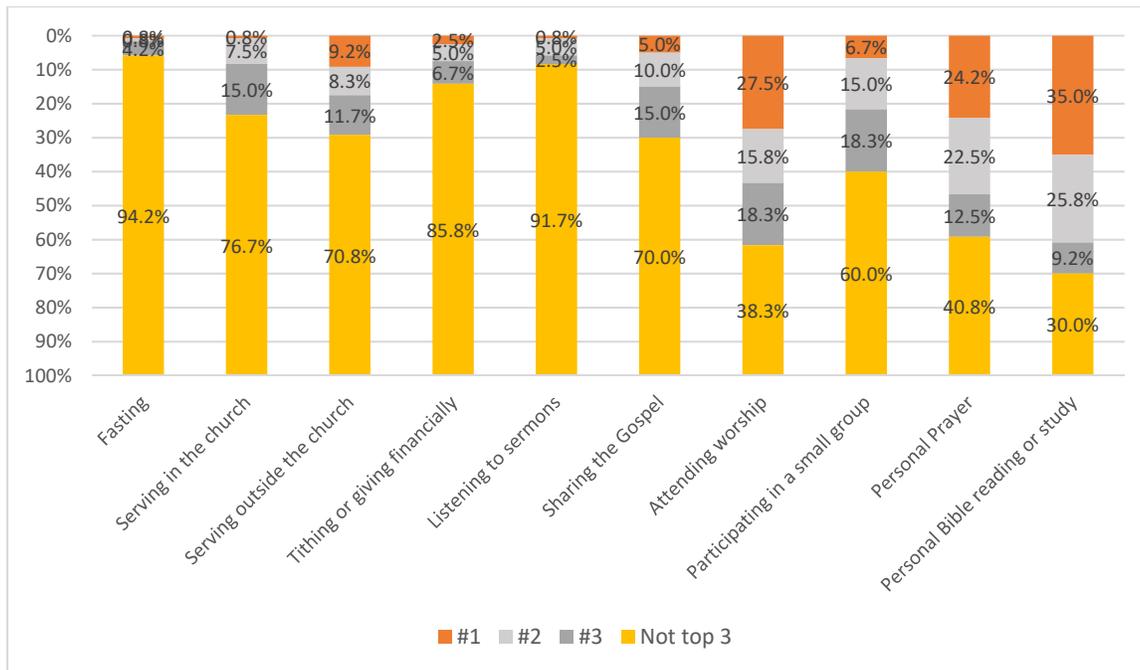
In terms of their own personal experience with the Bible, 15% of pastors said that they have not read the entire Bible. Four out of five engage the Bible for their own spiritual nourishment most days of the week.

**Figure 26. How many days do you engage in these activities in a typical week?**



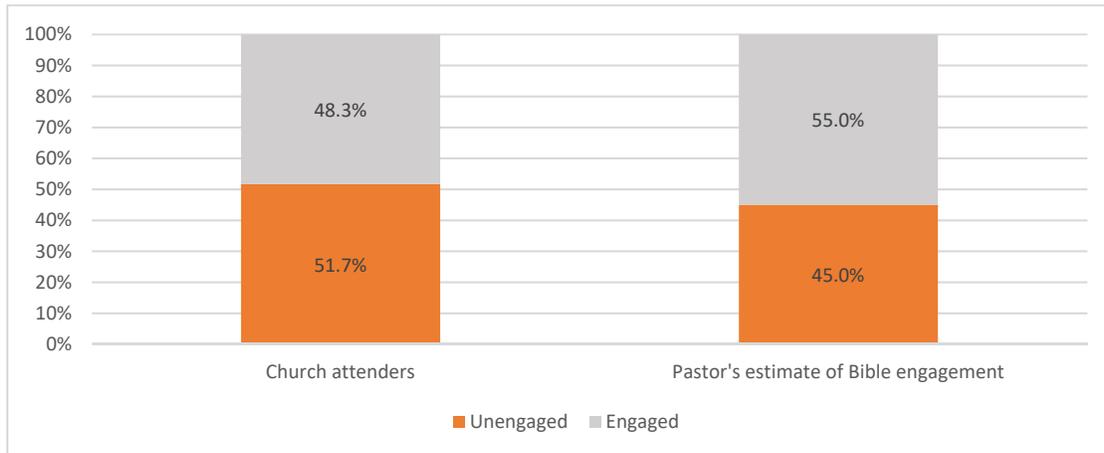
We also asked pastors about Bible engagement among their congregants. The first question focused on the importance pastors place on different spiritual practices. Given a list of 10 activities, pastors indicated which they ranked as the three most important. Figure 27 shows relatively little agreement among Charlotte area pastors. The majority indicated attending worship, personal prayer and personal Bible reading or study in the top three. A little more than one-third (35%) rate personal Bible reading or study as the number one most important spiritual practice for their congregants. However, three out of ten did not include Bible reading at all in their top three.

**Figure 27. Which of these spiritual practices do you consider to be the three most important ones for congregants?**



Regarding their congregations, pastors estimate that one out of five congregants (22%) are not engaging the Bible and have no interest in doing so. They believe that most attendees (58%) are engaging scripture on their own most days of the week. Figure 28 compares pastors' estimates with data from the church attenders in the Charlotte general population survey. We find that pastors only slightly overestimate congregants' Bible engagement.

**Figure 28. Percentage of Regular Church Attenders Engaging the Bible 4 or More Days a Week vs. Pastors' Estimates.**



## SPIRITUAL CHALLENGES

The last section of our pastors’ survey focuses on the spiritual challenges pastors see among the Charlotte metro community and in their own lives. As mentioned previously, responding pastors identified discipleship, living as a Christ follower in today’s culture, and busyness as the biggest spiritual challenges among their congregants. Regarding the general Charlotte metro area, divisions among churches and across race and class lines is the most pressing spiritual need. Three out of ten pastors gave responses with this theme:

*The churches' apparent definition of success. The Non-Christian's definition of Jesus and his church. Lack of visible unity in the body of Christ. Especially across lines of ethnic and socio-economic distinction.*

*Racial tension, distrust*

*classism & racism; fear; distraction; consumerism*

*Lack of unity and cooperation among the churches. Lack of vision for the whole city. Lack of heart to pay the price for spiritual breakthrough.*

One-fifth identified a lack of discipleship or believers living out the Gospel as the greatest spiritual challenge for the city:

*Aging congregations unwilling to reach a growing base of young adults. A lack of personal discipleship which has caused an inability to reach a lost world. The inability for churches to successfully partner with one another to reach a shared community*

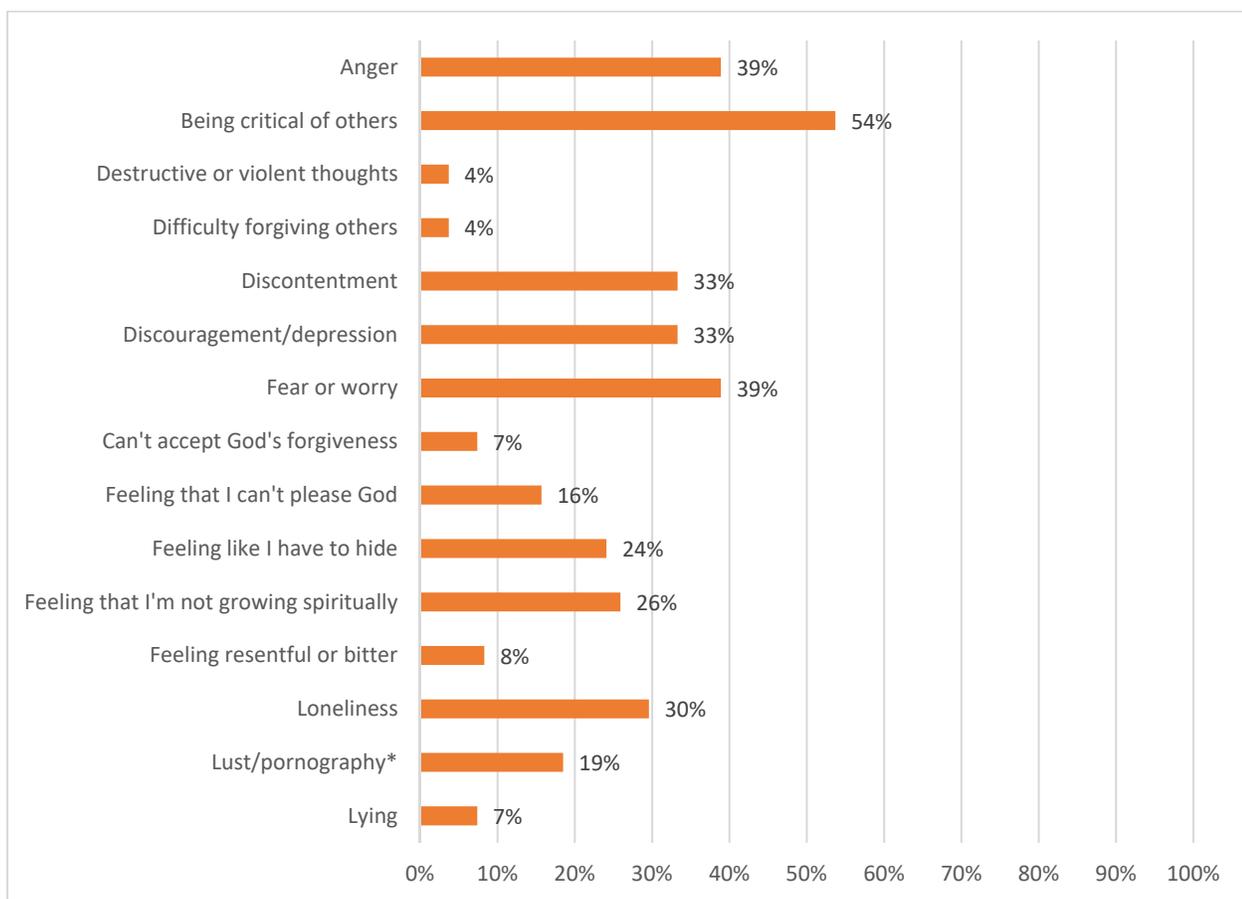
*Identity crisis - forgetting who we are in Christ. Lack of urgency for fate of lost souls. Lack of urgency for growing in Christ-likeness*

*People who go through the motions of religion but don't have an active and alive relationship with Jesus that can change their family, workplace and communities. - Not enough Christ followers in key decision making positions within our government*

In terms of their own spiritual growth, pastors feel stalled 25% of the time, on average. They estimate that 46% of their own congregants are stalled in their spiritual growth right now.

Nine out of ten pastors acknowledge that they face at least some temptation each day. Most say that the amount of temptation they encounter is a little (49.5%) or some (30.6%). Pastors also indicated how often they struggle with 15 common issues or temptations. Figure 29 shows that more than half (54%) of Charlotte area pastors struggle with being critical of others at least monthly. Anger and fear/worry are also common, affecting 39% of pastors.

**Figure 29. Percent of Pastors Experiencing This Struggle at Least Monthly.**



\*Males only

As the people God has called to serve the people of Charlotte, how do metro area pastors believe the church should respond to the spiritual challenges? Raising the profile of the Bible as a guide to living tops their list. In fact, three out of ten pastors believe they should help their people engage with the Bible more:

*1. Better connect the Word & personal study to their 'regular' lives --such as work, parenting, dating, etc.--so that they are drawn to read & pray on their own more regularly 2. Continue to help them step out of their usual routines and comfortable places to serve in our community 3. Give them opportunities for authentic community where they can know and be known by others and God*

*Engage them in worship/Bible study, relationships inside the church, and service in the community.*

*Encourage them to hear and encounter God through His Word. Challenge them with great things God has done through others in the past and to imagine what God could do through them. Teach them to pray: by themselves, in small groups, and out in the streets.*

*Encourage more scripture reading, joining with others in Bible study, attending worship on a regular basis*

Nearly the same percentage (29%) identified providing excellent worship opportunities as the church's best response. These responses seemed to imply that worship is the key to bringing more of the community into the church:

*Worship, word and serving*

*leading engaging and inspiring worship, inspiring and equipping people for spiritual practices including service, praying for our mission and for the world*

*Make worship relevant and excellent, offering a variety of small groups, offering opportunities for service inside and outside the church*

About one-fourth (23%) of pastors see discipling specifically as a need that the church can fill. This strategy would specifically address the spiritual challenges related to divisions, navigating the culture, and providing Christ-like examples:

*By providing the undefiled Word of God through true love, compassion, understanding and forgiveness. True discipleship and mentoring; Genuine love for the people.*

*Intentional discipleship, training to properly discern Gods word, helping congregants to take an honest (assessment) of the life they are living against what we are called to live*

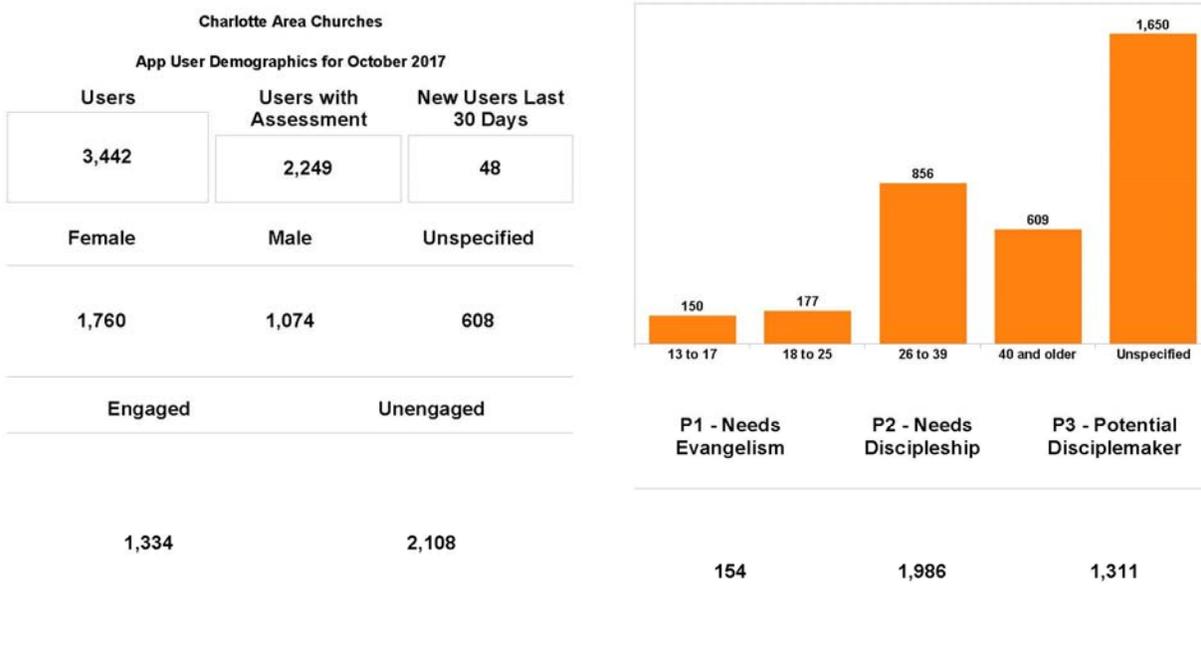
*Provide a discipleship structure and process Provide solid biblical teaching Provide a missional call/charge to live out a life devoted to Jesus*

## DIGITAL BIBLE ENGAGEMENT CASE STUDY

The last component of the Charlotte Spiritual Needs assessment considers the potential of using a digital tool to increase Bible engagement. Our case study focuses on use of a digital daily discipleship app provided by Back to the Bible to churches and para-church ministries. Designed based on 10 years of Bible engagement research, the app intentionally interrupts someone’s day with scripture that speaks directly to his/her spiritual needs. The app is available for free for iOS and Android devices with the church’s unique branding. Churches also have the option of adding their own content.

To date, we have created custom daily discipleship apps for more than 600 churches, including six in the Charlotte metro area. Four of these churches have launched the app with their congregations. Figure 30 shows that 3,442 individuals have downloaded and created an account for one of the Charlotte church apps. Notably 61% of app users were not engaging the Bible (i.e. reading or listening to the Bible four or more days a week) when they downloaded the app.

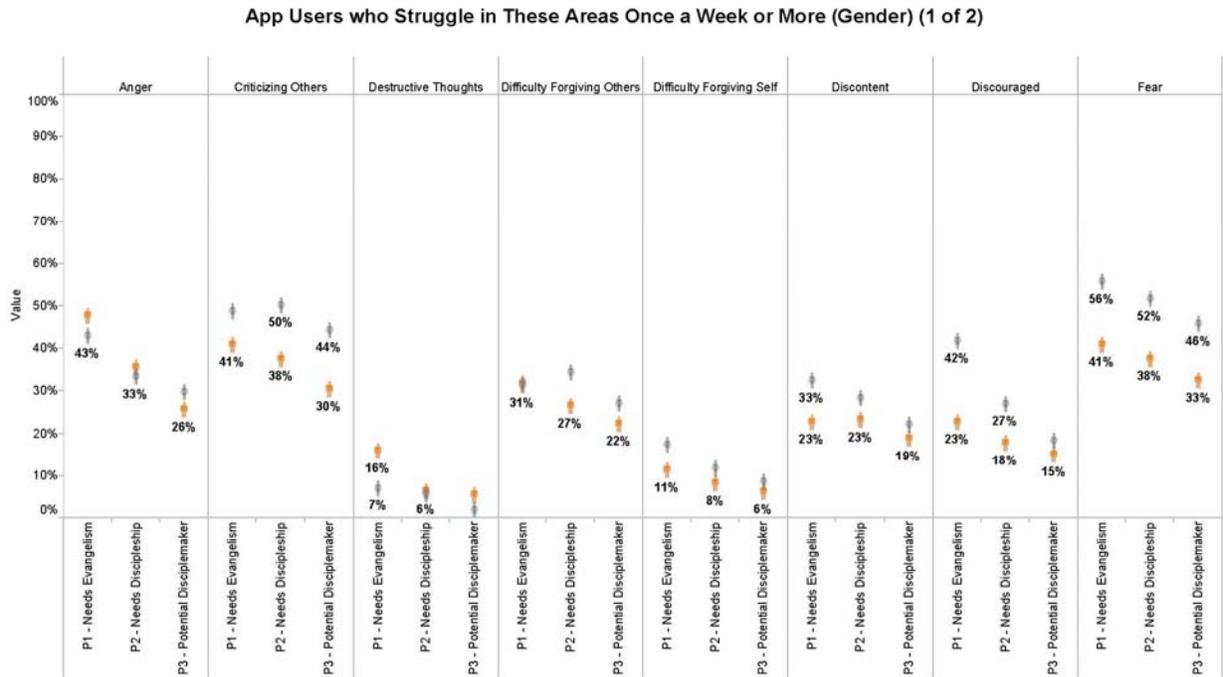
**Figure 30. Demographics for Charlotte Church App Users.**



App users may choose to complete a CBE Spiritual Growth Assessment in order to customize their biblical content. The series of questions assess 25 different dimensions of spiritual growth including 16 common struggles and 9 Fruits of the Spirit. Among Charlotte church app users, 65% choose to complete the assessment. This includes 154 people who need evangelism, 1986 who need discipleship and 1311 potential disciplers.

Figure 31 shows the percentage of Charlotte daily discipleship users who struggle with specific issues at least weekly. Fear/worry and criticizing others represent the most common struggles. Notably Potential Disciplemakers (i.e. those engaging scripture four or more days a week) report struggling less with these common spiritual challenges than those who need evangelism or discipleship.

**Figure 31. Charlotte Church App Users' Struggles.**



App Users who Struggle in These Areas Once a Week or More (Gender) (2 of 2)

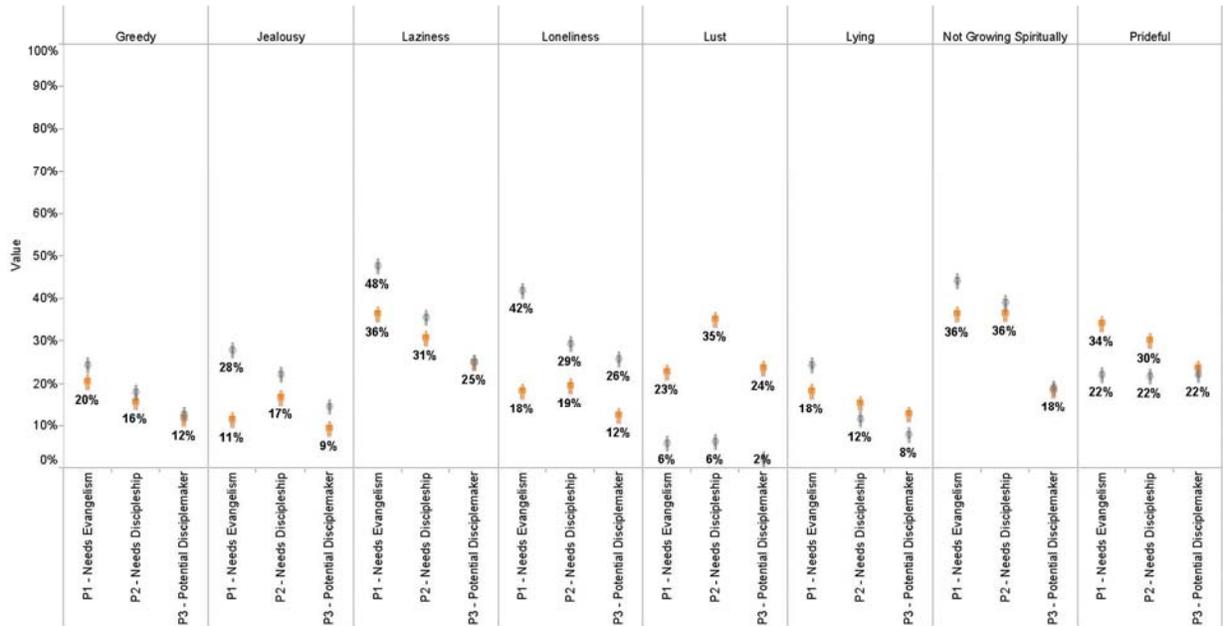
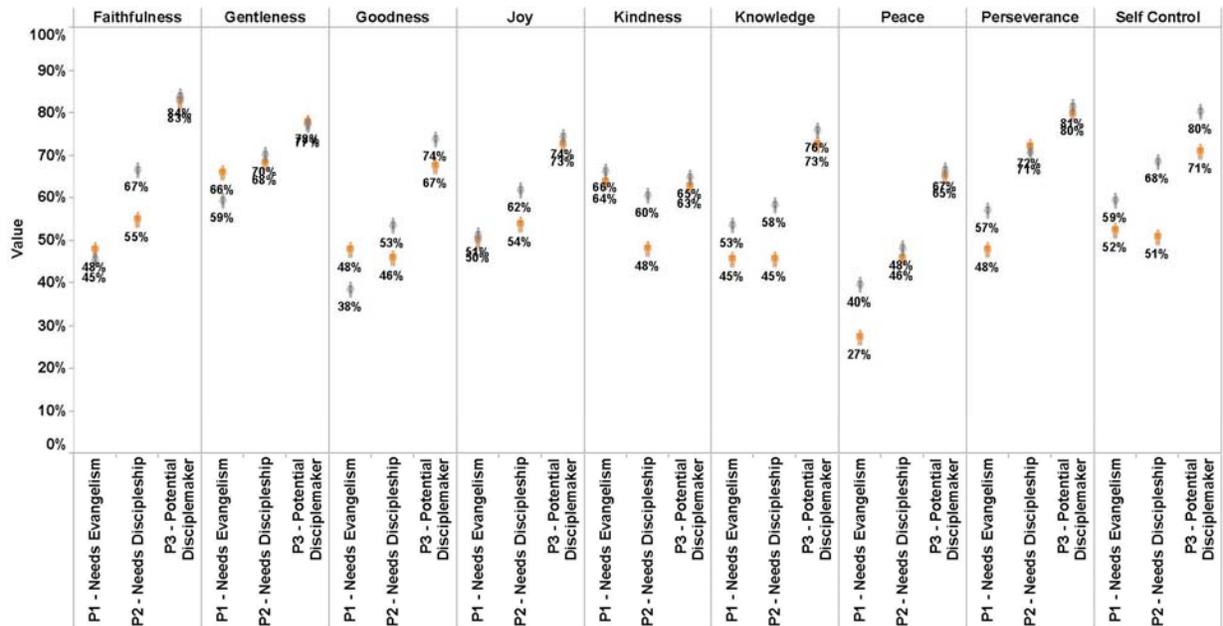


Figure 32 shows the percentage of Charlotte church app users who “usually” or “always” experience these Fruits of the Spirit in their lives. Consistent with previous Power of 4 findings (Cole & Ovwigho, 2012), engaged users (Potential Disciplemakers) have higher rates than unengaged users.

Figure 32. Fruit of the Spirit Among Charlotte App Users.

App Users who Usually or Always Experience this Spiritual Growth Dimension (Gender)



The daily discipleship app aims to get users to engage with biblical content every day. In a climate where 75% of apps are only opened once (Griffith, 2016), creating one that people will return to daily presents a huge challenge.

Figure 33 shows the percentage of Charlotte app users who read their biblical content during their first 21 days in the app. We find high read rates among daily discipleship app users. Moreover users who were originally not engaging the Bible read biblical content through the app at the same rate as those who came into the app already engaged in scripture.

**Figure 33. Daily Read Rates Among Charlotte App Users.**

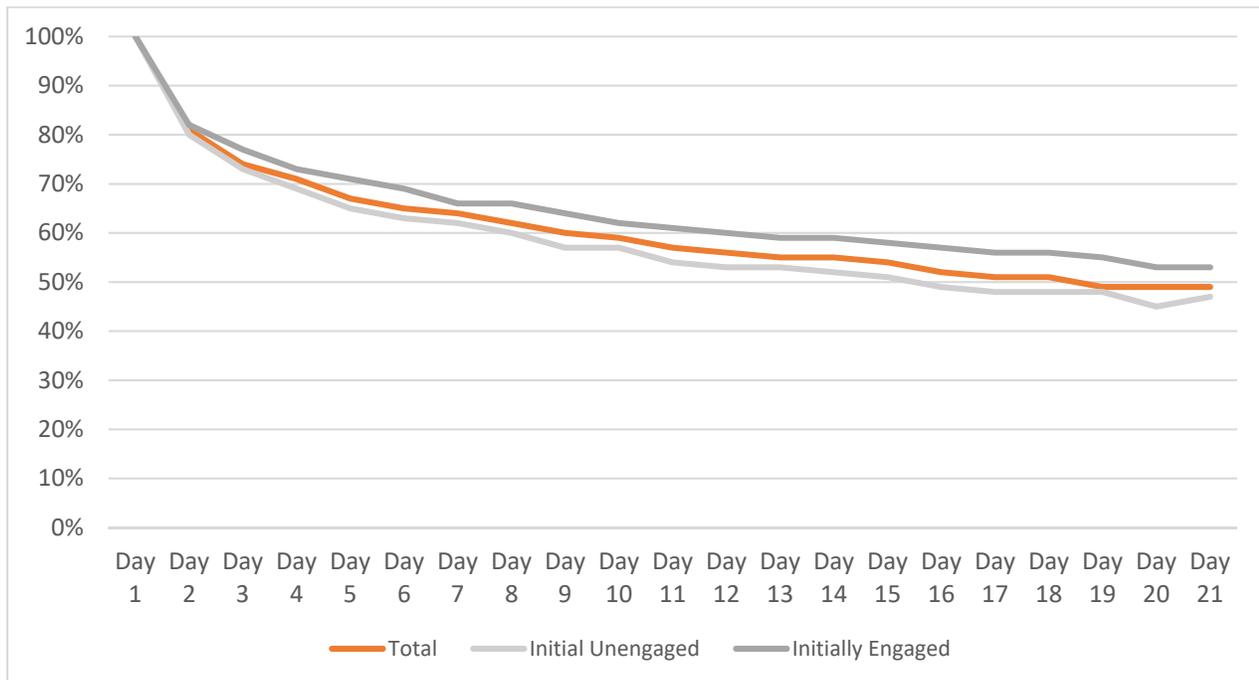
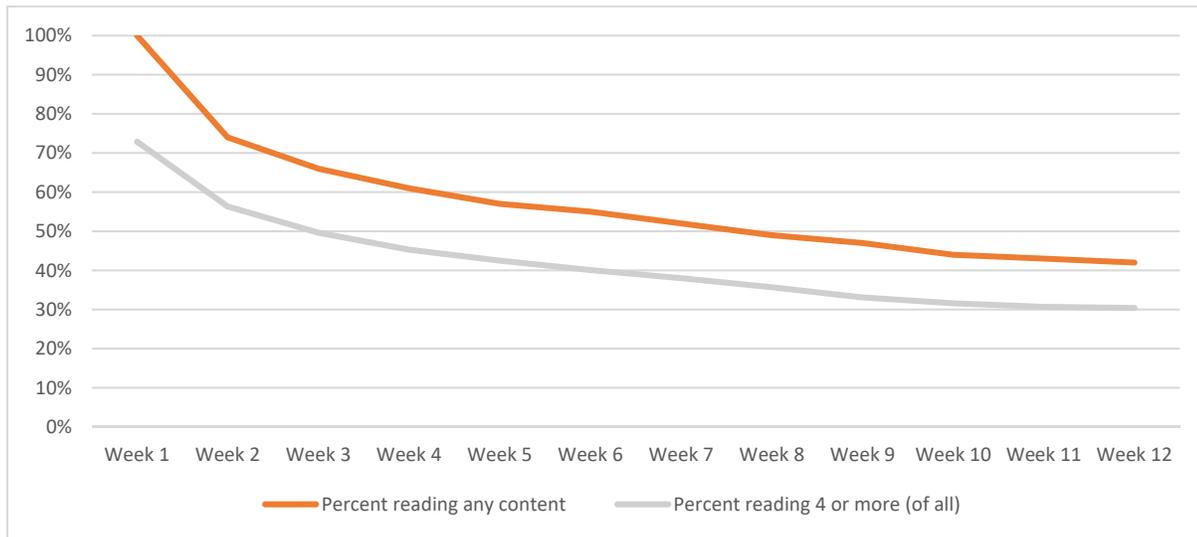


Figure 34 displays weekly app usage rates for Charlotte church app users. These data show that most users who stick with the app in the first two weeks continue to use it after that. The challenge for churches is to keep users engaged in those first two weeks, perhaps through the use of church-specific content.

Consistent with the goals of the app, we find that 80% of church app users experience the Power of 4 in their first 12 weeks. Seven out of ten engage with content most days in their first week.

**Figure 34. Weekly Read Rate Among Charlotte App Users.**



## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This Spiritual Needs Assessment of the Charlotte metro area provides a deep understanding of the spiritual beliefs, practices, and needs among adults both inside and outside the church. The data show that, even in a Bible-minded city, there remains much ministry work to be done. The following paragraphs outline the implications of our findings for churches and parachurch ministries serving Charlotte.

**To reach Charlotte adults for Christ, ministries need to adopt multiple strategies that focus on evangelism, discipleship and activating potential disciple-makers.**

Nearly half of Charlotte adults – and a quarter of regular church attenders – do not believe God’s grace through faith in Jesus will lead them to heaven when they die. Clearly churches and ministries are called to share a saving knowledge of Christ with these people. Ministries should consider carefully how they go about this. Most of these adults were raised in the Christian faith and likely already know that the Bible documents Jesus’ death and resurrection. The challenge for ministries is to help these individuals make the leap from head knowledge to heart knowledge.

Discipleship represents the next greatest need among Charlotte adults, affecting 30% of all adults and one-third of regular church attenders. This group attests to a saving knowledge of Christ. However, their lifestyles don’t necessarily reflect the life of a Christ-follower. While they may pray and attend church occasionally, this group is not hearing from God by engaging the Bible most days of the week. Churches and ministries can best minister to these adults by providing effective resources and strategies for developing a Bible engagement habit. As they engage with God’s Word, they will begin to experience true life transformation through Christ.

A third strategy, to activate potential disciplemakers, provides a powerful way to amplify evangelism and discipleship efforts. Fully two-fifths of Charlotte church attenders, representing a fourth of all metro area adults, say they are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and engage with the Bible four or more days a week. This group already knows the life transforming power of God’s grace and scripture. They are primed to share this knowledge with their neighbors. Churches and ministries need to help these believers put their faith into action by reaching out and truly connecting with others in a way that facilitates true discipleship.

**To increase Bible engagement in the Queen City, churches and ministries should concentrate on approaches that meet their constituents’ unique spiritual needs and challenges.**

Building on previous studies, we present in this report five Bible Engagement Target Groups:

- 1) Wary – Unfamiliar with the Bible and don’t believe that it contains truth
- 2) Trusting – Unfamiliar with the Bible, yet believe it contains truth
- 3) Jaded – Familiar with the Bible, but don’t believe that it contains truth
- 4) Willing – Familiar with the Bible and believe it contains truth, yet doesn’t engage with it most days of the week
- 5) Engaged – Engages with the Bible most days of the week

Each of these faces different Bible engagement barriers. Both the Wary and the Jaded distrust scripture. However, they are open to something that helps them overcome the things they struggle with and encouraging quotes and wisdom.

In contrast, the Trusting do not know much about the Bible but do trust it. Approaches that provide easy access to basic scriptural truths would work best with this group.

Finally, the Willing – fully 50% of Charlotte metro adults – have some familiarity with the Bible and trust it. Busyness and not understanding how it relates to their life keeps them from engaging with it outside of church. Strategies such as the digital daily discipleship app presented in our Bible engagement case study are very effective with this group by providing short, relevant scripture content throughout the day.

**Churches should carefully consider how to respond to the communities’ desire for them to promote healing of divisions and racial tensions. This challenge is amplified by church members’ perceptions that their church doesn’t need to change, but other churches need to be more active in the community.**

Typically, church surveys ask congregants what areas their church can improve. Charlotte adults generally could not identify areas of improvement for their own church. However, when asked about other churches, they saw a need for churches to serve more and to bring the community together.

Pastors recognize community needs and see the solution as more Bible engagement and believers truly living as disciples of Christ. To the extent that Bible engagement and discipleship also includes activating believers to serve their community, these strategies have the potential to meet the metro area's most pressing needs.

**Parachurch ministries seeking to support churches' evangelism, discipleship and activation efforts should carefully consider the unique context of metro churches.**

In many ways, Charlotte has many strengths from a ministry perspective including a fairly large proportion of potential disciplemakers, a majority of adults are open to the Bible, and most pastors recognize the challenges of busyness and cultural Christianity. However, there are some unique challenges as well. First, the average pastor leads a church that is significantly bigger than U.S. churches in general. For these churches, it's critical that ministry strategies are scalable.

Pastors' attitudes toward Bible engagement as a regular, private spiritual practice presents a second challenge. One-third rate Bible reading as the most important spiritual practice for their congregants. Yet three out of ten do not place scripture engagement in the top three spiritual practices at all. Raising awareness of the life transforming power of regular Bible engagement is key for reaching these pastors and their churches.

As mentioned previously, pastors generally see the need for discipleship among their congregants. Curiously they tend to overestimate how many church attenders engage the Bible between Sundays and underestimate people's willingness to do so. A challenge for parachurch ministries is to show pastors how to increase Bible engagement levels and how this will lead to life transformation for their congregation. The digital daily discipleship case study included here provides just one example of a practical, scalable and effective approach.

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APPENDIX A. RACE/ETHNICITY OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS.

<b>Alaska Native or American Indian</b>	<b>2.5%</b>
<b>Asian or Asian American</b>	<b>1.7%</b>
<b>Black or African American</b>	<b>16.0%</b>
<b>Hispanic or Latino</b>	<b>3.4%</b>
<b>White or Caucasian</b>	<b>72.8%</b>
<b>Prefer not to answer</b>	<b>3.1%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>0.5%</b>

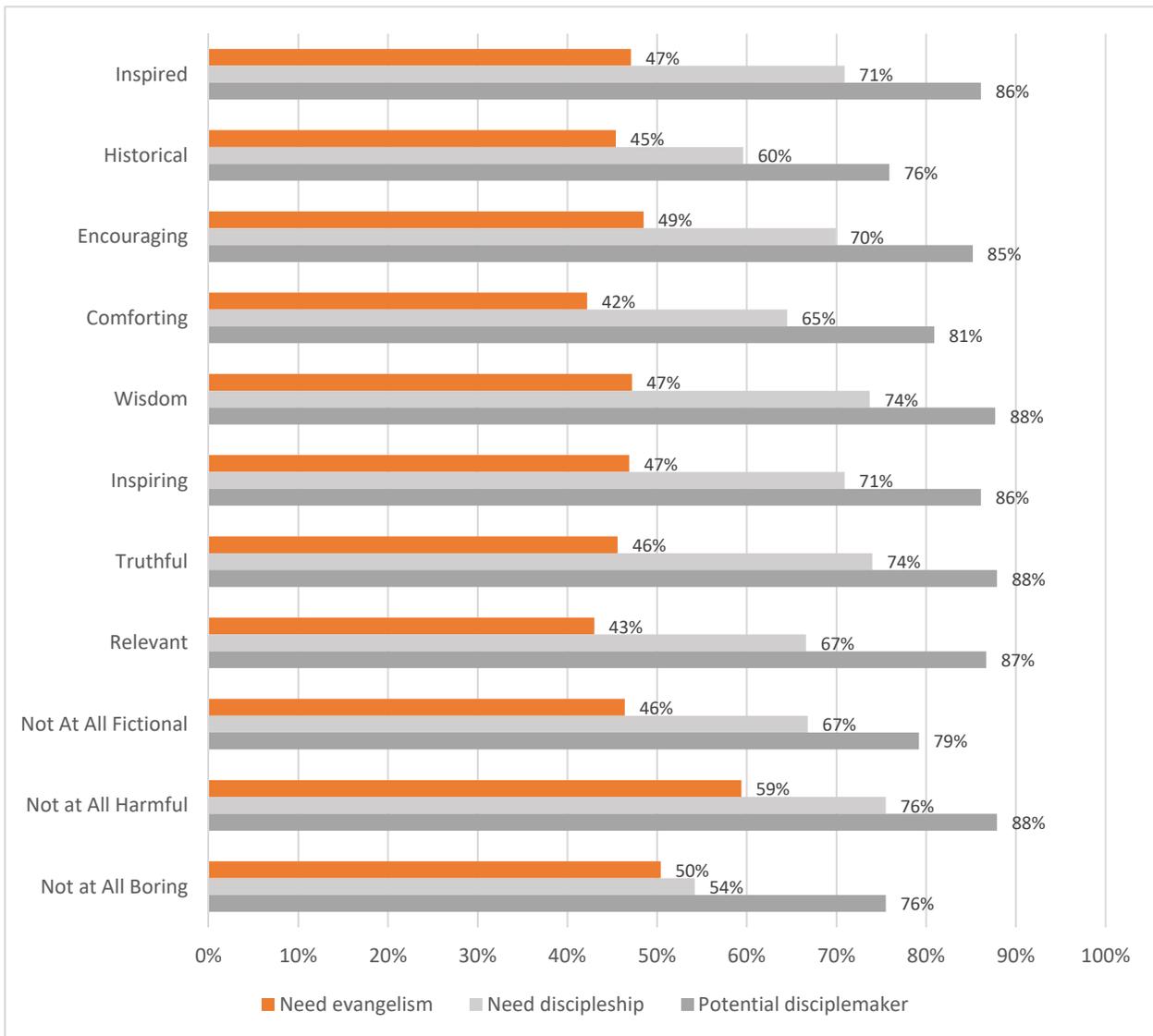
APPENDIX B. DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION OF CHARLOTTE METRO ADULTS WHO IDENTIFY AS CHRISTIAN.

<b>Denomination</b>	<b>% of Christians</b>	<b>% of Pastors</b>
<b>Southern Baptist</b>	25.10%	26.7%
<b>Non-denominational</b>	19.50%	19.1%
<b>Independent Baptist</b>	11.00%	3.1%
<b>Methodist</b>	10.20%	13.0%
<b>Other</b>	7.40%	3.8%
<b>Catholic</b>	6.60%	1.5%
<b>Presbyterian</b>	5.80%	12.2%
<b>Lutheran</b>	3.60%	3.1%
<b>Pentecostal</b>	2.90%	4.6%
<b>Church of God</b>	2.50%	0.8%
<b>African Methodist Episcopal</b>	1.40%	0.0%
<b>Episcopal</b>	1.20%	3.1%
<b>Assemblies of God</b>	0.90%	3.1%
<b>Seventh Day Adventist</b>	0.90%	0.0%
<b>Nazarene</b>	0.40%	3.8%
<b>Wesleyan</b>	0.40%	0.8%
<b>Brethren</b>	0.30%	0.8%
<b>Anglican</b>	0.10%	0.8%

APPENDIX C. DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES AMONG MINISTRY GROUPS.

	Needs evangelism	Needs discipleship	Potential disciplemakers	Chi Square
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	26.40%	35.20%	38.40%	$\chi^2 = 9.113, df = 2, p = .01$
Female	20.70%	33.20%	46.10%	
<b>Age</b>				
18 to 24	24.20%	45.20%	30.60%	$\chi^2 = 34.407, df = 8, p < .001$
25 to 34	28.60%	35.70%	35.70%	
35 to 54	22.40%	36.10%	41.50%	
55 to 64	21.50%	29.60%	48.90%	
65 & older	20.20%	23.00%	56.80%	
<b>Denomination</b>				
Catholic	60.00%	26.70%	13.30%	$\chi^2 = 109.113, df = 8, p < .001$
Independent Baptist	13.70%	33.30%	53.00%	
Methodist	25.50%	41.80%	32.70%	
Non-denominational	15.20%	39.90%	44.80%	
Southern Baptist	9.40%	32.50%	58.10%	
<b>Church attendance</b>				
More than once a week	12.40%	20.20%	67.30%	$\chi^2 = 224.439, df = 4, p < .001$
Once a week	21.90%	40.80%	37.20%	
Once or twice a month	45.60%	41.60%	12.80%	

APPENDIX D. VIEWS OF THE BIBLE AMONG REGULAR CHURCH ATTENDERS.



APPENDIX E. AGE GROUPS AND BIBLE ENGAGEMENT SUBGROUPS.

<b>Group</b>	<b>18 to 24</b>	<b>25 to 34</b>	<b>35 to 54</b>	<b>55 to 64</b>	<b>65 &amp; older</b>
<b>Wary</b>	5.3%	3.1%	1.0%	0.5%	0.8%
<b>Trusting</b>	6.2%	5.0%	4.3%	2.6%	4.2%
<b>Jaded</b>	15.3%	17.9%	9.8%	8.4%	5.5%
<b>Willing</b>	52.6%	54.3%	51.4%	47.4%	36.7%
<b>Engaged</b>	20.6%	19.7%	33.6%	41.1%	52.7%