



**C·B·E**  
CENTER FOR BIBLE ENGAGEMENT

**Christian Media Consumers:  
Motives & Opportunities**

October 2011

**Christian Media Consumers: Motives and Opportunities**  
**Table of Contents**

Executive Summary

Media Consumption ..... 6

*Most Americans Use Christian Media* ..... 8

*Christian Media Reaches A Significant Number of Non-Christians*..... 8

Motivations ..... 10

Motivations ..... 10

Outcomes & Actions..... 13

Future Christian Media Consumption ..... 15

*Christian Media Users Are Likely to Continue Viewing or Listening.* ..... 16

What Do People Want From Christian Media?..... 18

Conclusions..... 19

Appendix: Description of Survey Sample..... 21

## Executive Summary

Each year the Christian media industry in the United States, including over 3,000 radio stations, 100 television broadcast stations, and more than 130 film production companies, produces and distributes a wealth of content. Even mainstream Hollywood studios have seen the potential, with all major studios now having marketing arms specifically targeted for faith audiences.

Christian media comes in various forms and serves different purposes. Some emphasize instruction or persuasion, while others focus more on entertainment. In general though, most Christian media aims to reach both Christian and mainstream audiences. This is no small feat, requiring content and format that appeals to both audiences without alienating either.

The limited published research available suggests that Christian media does indeed reach a wide audience in the United States. For some Christian media supplements other spiritual activities, while for others media is their primary connection with the Christian faith.

A recent survey by the Center for Bible Engagement (CBE) at Back to the Bible provides new insights into who Christian media reaches, what motivates their media choices, and what they would like to see in the future. The findings, summarized here, can help those working in the Christian media industry improve their reach and effectiveness.

### ***Most Americans, Including Many Non-Christians, Use Christian Media***

Six out of ten American teens and adults use some form of Christian media at least a few times a year. Media use is highly correlated with religion, church attendance, and private spiritual practices. Three out of four Christians view or listen to Christian media.

A significant minority of non-Christians, 36%, also use Christian media. In total, non-Christians represent one-fifth of the Christian media audience.

Among Christian media, TV and music are the most common types of media used. Talk radio/podcasts and video games are the least common.

### ***Spiritual Growth, Inspiration, and Encouragement are Main Motivators***

For media in general, a desire to be entertained drives most media decisions. A desire to learn more about a topic is the next most common motivation. Few are motivated by a desire for inspiration, the need for encouragement, or another's recommendation.

For Christian media, these three motivations are strongest:

- Wanting to grow spiritually
- Looking for inspiration
- Looking for encouragement

Motivations vary by type of media. For example, a desire to learn more about the Christian faith or about the Bible are stronger motivators for Christian non-fiction books than for TV and music. In contrast, people are more likely to see entertainment through Christian music or fiction, than from TV or non-fiction books.

## ***Outcomes & Actions***

The majority of people indicated some type of outcome or action from their most recent media experience. That is, most changed their thinking or feelings about an issue or took some sort of action as a result of viewing or listening to the media.

Nearly nine out of ten reported a change or action following their most recent Christian media use. This compares to 78% for all types of media.

There is a great deal of diversity in which outcomes or actions people report. For any type of media, discussing it with someone else is the most common action, but it only accounts for 31% of consumers.

Feeling more strongly about the Christian faith is the most common outcome of Christian media use, reported by two-fifths of consumers. Similar to motivations, outcomes also vary by media type. "Feeling more strongly about my faith" is the most common outcome for TV, non-fiction books, music, and short-videos or movies. In contrast, people are more likely to discuss a Christian fiction book with someone, than to feel more strongly about their own faith.

## ***Opportunities***

Those who have used Christian media in the past say they are likely to continue watching and listening. This is particularly true for Christian music.

Expanding the audience for Christian media is a challenge. Most Americans who have never used Christian media in the past have never considered doing so and show very little interest in future opportunities. This is true of both Christian and non-Christians who have never used Christian media in the past, although Christians express slightly more willingness.

When asked about different factors that might motivate them to view or listen to Christian media, non-users rated all equally low. In other words, it doesn't matter if the media offered inspiration, encouragement, or entertainment or even if someone recommended it.

Several themes emerged in consumers' responses about what they want to see in Christian media. The most common suggestion was to have more of it available, particularly in movies, music and television shows.

Respondents also want more youth-focused programming. They seek media designed for children and teens, addressing topics that matter most to them and in formats that they prefer.

Expanded content and better quality was a third theme in what people want from Christian media. In particular, they want more entertaining movies, content that is more relevant to today's world and that share positive stories. Variety and quality is most important to those who have not used Christian media in the past and to young adults.

Consumers desire some changes in the overall tone of Christian media. They want more authenticity, openness, and less emphasis on persuasion.

## Christian Media Consumers: Motives & Opportunities

In recent years, the Christian media industry has experienced tremendous growth. Today over 3,000 radio stations and about 100 television stations broadcast around the United States. All major Hollywood studios now have marketing arms specifically targeted for faith audiences.<sup>1</sup> In 2006, nearly 50 Christian-faith films were produced. Sherwood Pictures' latest offering in this genre, *Courageous*, opened in October 2011 as the number four top money-grossing film in the country.<sup>2</sup> Today more than 130 film production companies<sup>3</sup> define themselves as Christian businesses. Religious books are also a sizable industry with sales topping \$1.35 billion in 2010.<sup>4</sup>

Just as Christian media takes many forms, it also serves different purposes. Some emphasize instruction and persuasion, teaching audiences about Jesus or promoting Christian values. Others focus more on entertaining audiences with a good story.<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of purpose, most Christian media producers strive on some level to reach both Christian and mainstream audiences. For example, the Christian Alliance Media Group describes the audience for its television programming as "viewers unsatisfied with mainstream television...seeking programming more suitable for the entire family." Similarly, the promotional material for the movie *Facing the Giants* stated its intent as "to evangelize non-believers and encourage believers."

### Christian Television as a Safe Haven?

Christian Alliance Media Group  
Camgroupinc.com

*When Christian television first began broadcasting it had one main purpose. This purpose was to lead people to a deeper faith in Christ. But with the demoralization of American society, Christian television has had to change.*

*Today Christian television has become a safe-haven for viewers unsatisfied with mainstream television. Its focus has broadened to reach a more general viewer seeking programming more suitable for the entire family.*

Producing media that reaches both audiences, without alienating either, is challenging. Recent media reports about the debates on the *Soul Surfer* set over scripture, prayer and the name of Jesus attest to this challenge.<sup>6</sup>

So who then is consuming Christian media? In the United States, most people. In fact, some researchers have argued that more Americans now connect with the Christian faith through media than through church attendance.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hollywood Makes Room for Holiness, *The Dallas Morning News*, March 8, 2007

<sup>2</sup> <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/10/04/church-produced-film-courageous-lights-up-box-office-on-opening-weekend/>

<sup>3</sup> [www.christian-movies.com](http://www.christian-movies.com)

<sup>4</sup> Association of American Publishers. (2011). *Bookstats 2011*. New York: Author.

<sup>5</sup> Schultze, Q.J. & Woods, R.H. (2008). *Understanding evangelical media: The changing face of Christian communication*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>6</sup> Marapodi, E. (April 12, 2011). 'Soul Surfer' opens after fights over depicting faith. Available online: <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/04/12/soul-surfer-opens-after-fights-over-depicting-faith/>

<sup>7</sup> The Barna Group (2005). *More people use Christian media than attend church*. Available online: <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/183-more-people-use-christian-media-than-attend-church>

Of course, there is considerable overlap between the two groups, with most Christian media consumers involved in a church. However, a significant minority does not attend church and may in fact not even identify with the Christian faith. As Barna notes, "Although these religious media are a supplement to a church experience for most people, millions of individuals rely upon one or more of these media as their primary source of spiritual input."

To improve their reach and effectiveness, the Christian media industry must first understand who their consumers are and what motivates them in their media choices. A new Center for Bible Engagement (CBE) survey of over 1,000 American teens and adults<sup>8</sup> provides important insights into these questions. The data reveal why people choose Christian media, how they are affected by their media choices, and what they would like see in the future.

## Media Consumption

### Evangelizing & Encouraging

Facing the Giants promo  
[www.christian-movie.net](http://www.christian-movie.net)

*Created by a church in Georgia to evangelize non-believers and encourage believers, this inspiring story about a losing high school football coach with a new game plan will have your whole town talking about trusting God for the impossible!*

Considering all types of media, most Americans watch TV and listen to music daily. Nearly two-thirds read a magazine or newspaper & over half watch short videos or movies at least weekly.

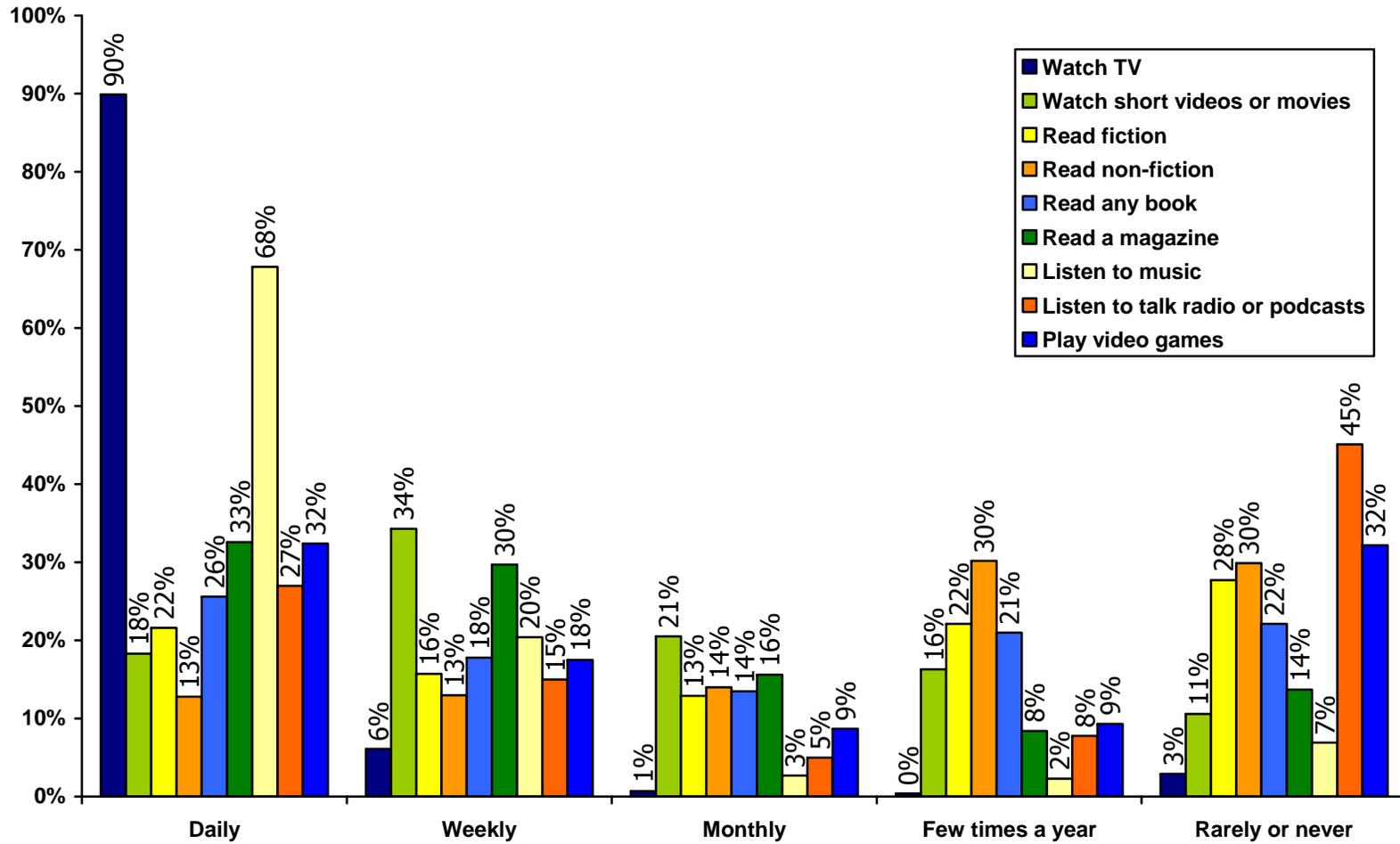
Talk radio and podcasts are the least common media types used. In fact, 46.2% rarely or never listen to these media types.

Teens and adults do not differ statistically in their frequency of watching TV or watching short videos or movies. There are, however, other age differences. Teens read books more frequently than adults, while adults read more magazines than younger people. Those over 50 listen to music less frequently and teens rarely listen to talk radio or podcasts. Teens and young adults play video games much more frequently than those over 30. Half of those over 50 do not play video games at all.

---

<sup>8</sup> The original sample was stratified by ages. Findings reported here are based on weighting the sample based on age and gender to be representative of the U.S. population of teens and adults.

Figure 1. Frequency of Media Use, Regardless of Delivery Format



## ***Most Americans Use Christian Media***

The majority of American teens and adults have experience with Christian media. Six out of ten respondents reported using some form of Christian media in the past. Similar to general media consumption, TV and music are the most common types of Christian media used. Talk radio/podcasts and video games are the least common.

Of all people who have used Christian media in the past, most (75.1%) have done so in the past month. More than half (55.5%) have viewed or listened in the past week.

## ***Christian Media Reaches A Significant Number of Non-Christians***

Who uses Christian media most? We find no statistically significant differences across age groups or between men and women. Not surprisingly, there is a strong correlation with religion, church attendance, and private spiritual practices such as prayer and reading or listening to the Bible.

Nearly three-fourths of Christian teens and adults use Christian media. However, Christian media also reaches many folks who do not identify with the Christian faith. In fact, 36% of non-Christians say they view or listen at least a few times a year.<sup>9</sup>

### **Promoting a Message or Creating Art?**

Emily Lutrell, Why are Christian movies bad?

<http://www.discoverycheese.com/2011/08/why-are-christian-movies-bad/>

*The purpose of the contemporary Christian movie is to promote an idea, not necessarily to entertain or create art. ...Media and art become tools to spread a message rather than a means of expression. In most cases, media as an evangelism tool does not work. While many Christian productions attempt to draw in non-believers, the result is usually the opposite. These movies tend to be very engaging to evangelicals, but mostly garbled and corny to non-Christians.*

### **Crossover Appeal**

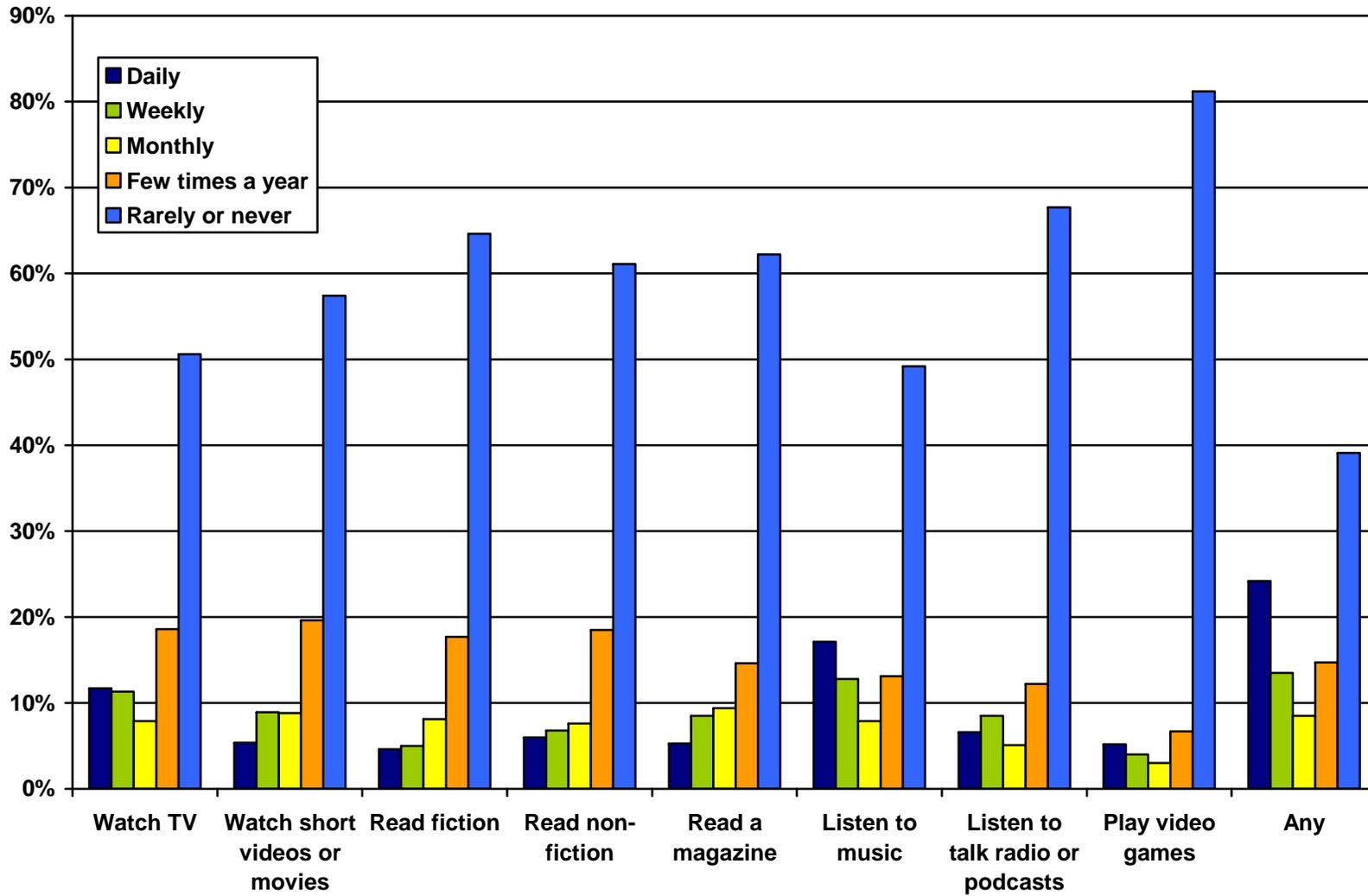
Jonathan Kim, The Huffington Post  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ionathan-kim/soul-surfer-b\\_848463.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ionathan-kim/soul-surfer-b_848463.html)

*For years, filmmakers and studios have been experimenting with ways to cater to Christian audiences without alienating non-Christian moviegoers, and Soul Surfer might be proof that a family-friendly Christian film can achieve crossover appeal on a modest budget.*

---

<sup>9</sup> The CBE research brief *Who really uses Christian media? And who doesn't?* further explores differences among Christians and non-Christians in their media use.

Figure 2. Frequency of Christian Media Use.

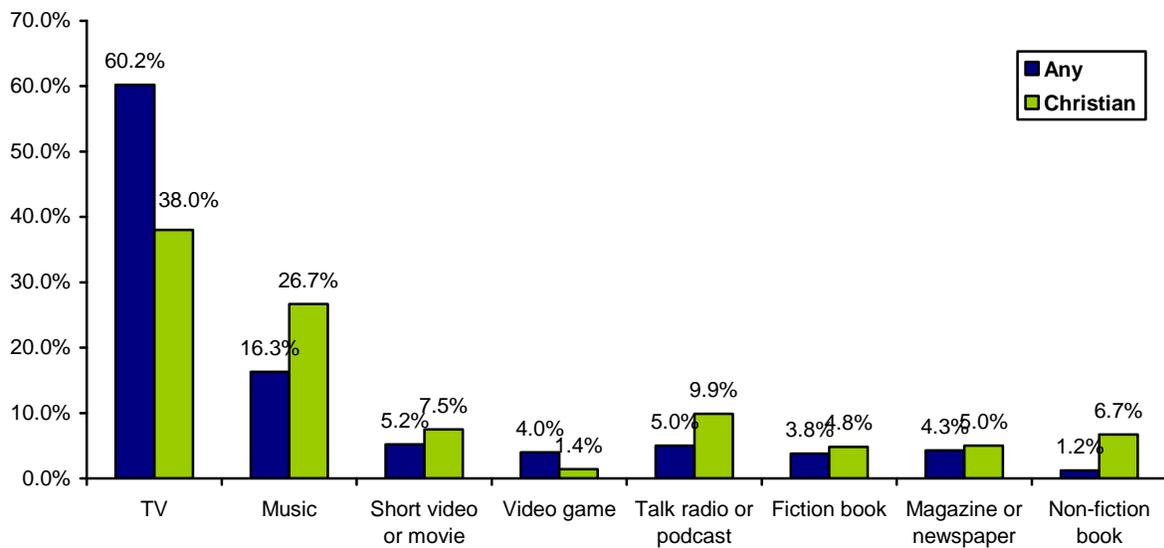


## Motivations

To help us understand what motivates people's media choices, we asked respondents to consider the most recent media they used. TV and music were the most common answers. Considering all media types, three-fifths had most recently viewed TV, while 16% had listened to music.

We see more diversity in the most recent type of Christian media. One out of three consumers recently used a form of Christian media other than TV or music.

**Figure 3. What was the most recent media you viewed or listened to?**

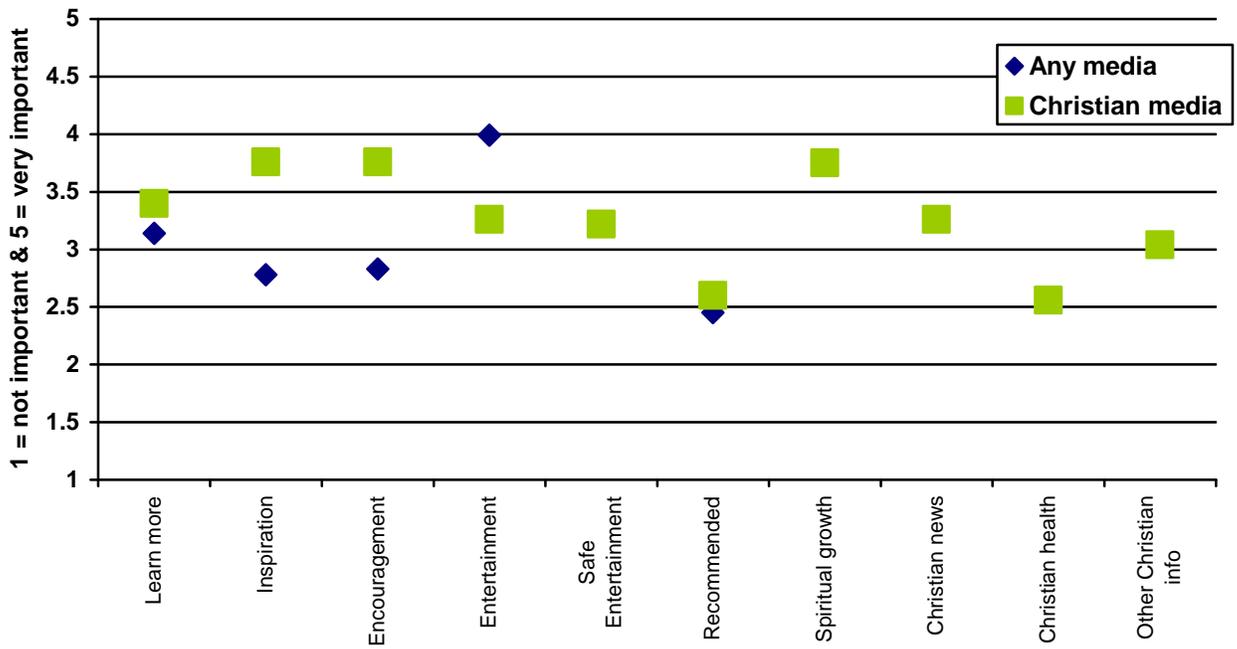


For any media, entertainment is the highest motivation, followed by learning more about a topic. Few are motivated by a desire for inspiration, wanting encouragement, or the recommendation of another.

For Christian media, these three motivations are strongest:

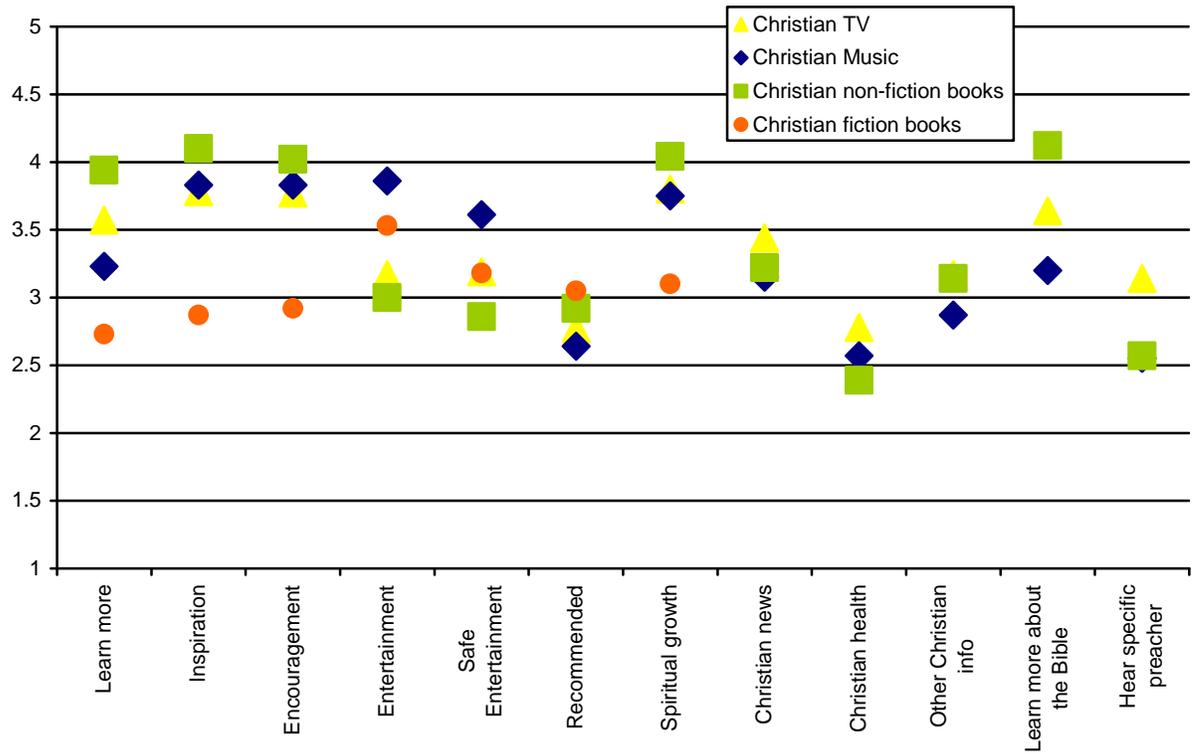
- Wanting to grow spiritually
- Looking for inspiration
- Looking for encouragement

Figure 4. How important are each of these factors in your decision to view or listen to a particular media?



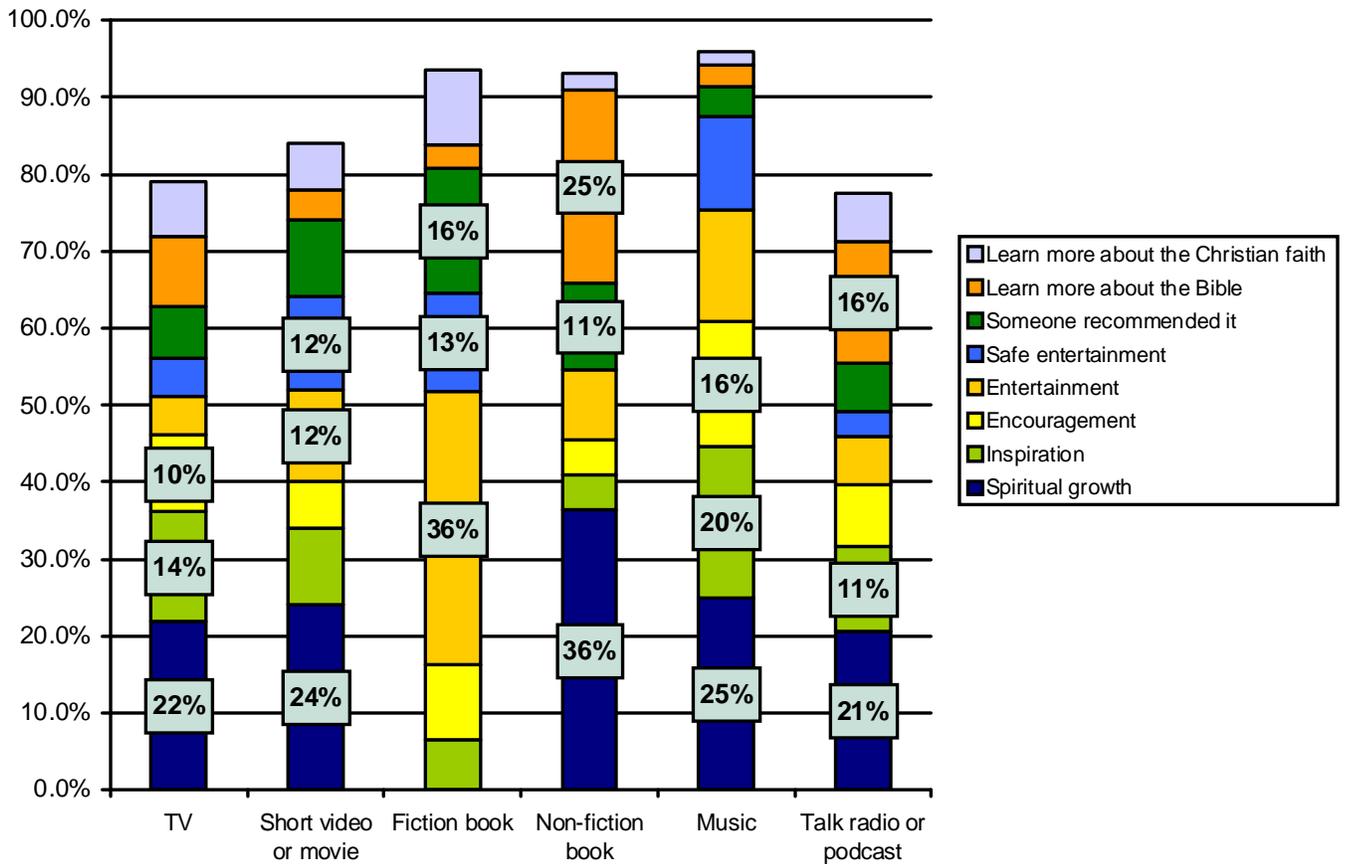
Motivations vary depending on the type of media. For example, a desire to learn more about the Christian faith or about the Bible are stronger motivators for Christian non-fiction books than for TV and music. In contrast, people are more likely to seek entertainment through Christian music or fiction, than from TV or non-fiction books.

**Figure 5. Motivations by Type of Christian Media.**



When asked about the main motivation for their last Christian media consumption, teens and adults most commonly identified spiritual growth. The exception was those whose last Christian media was a fiction book. For these respondents, entertainment was the strongest motivator.

**Figure 6. Main Motivation for Christian Media Use.**



## Outcomes & Actions

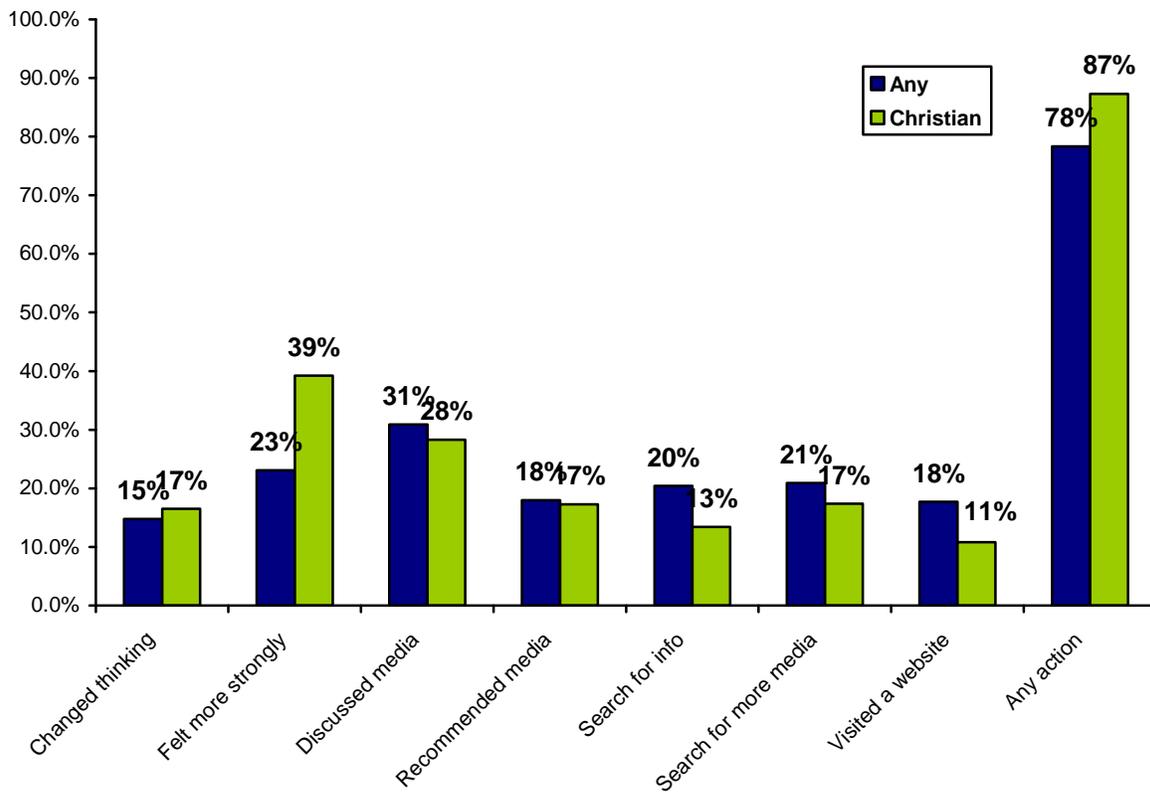
We also asked respondents about the outcome of their media use. That is, we wanted to know if their thinking or feelings changed, or if they had taken certain actions (e.g., discussing it with someone, searching for more information).

Figure 7 shows that the majority of people indicated some outcome from their most recent media experience. Nearly nine out of ten reported a change or action following their most recent Christian media use. This compares to 78% for media in general.

There is a great deal of diversity in which outcomes or actions people report. For any type of media, discussing it with someone else is the most common action, but it only accounts for 31% of consumers.

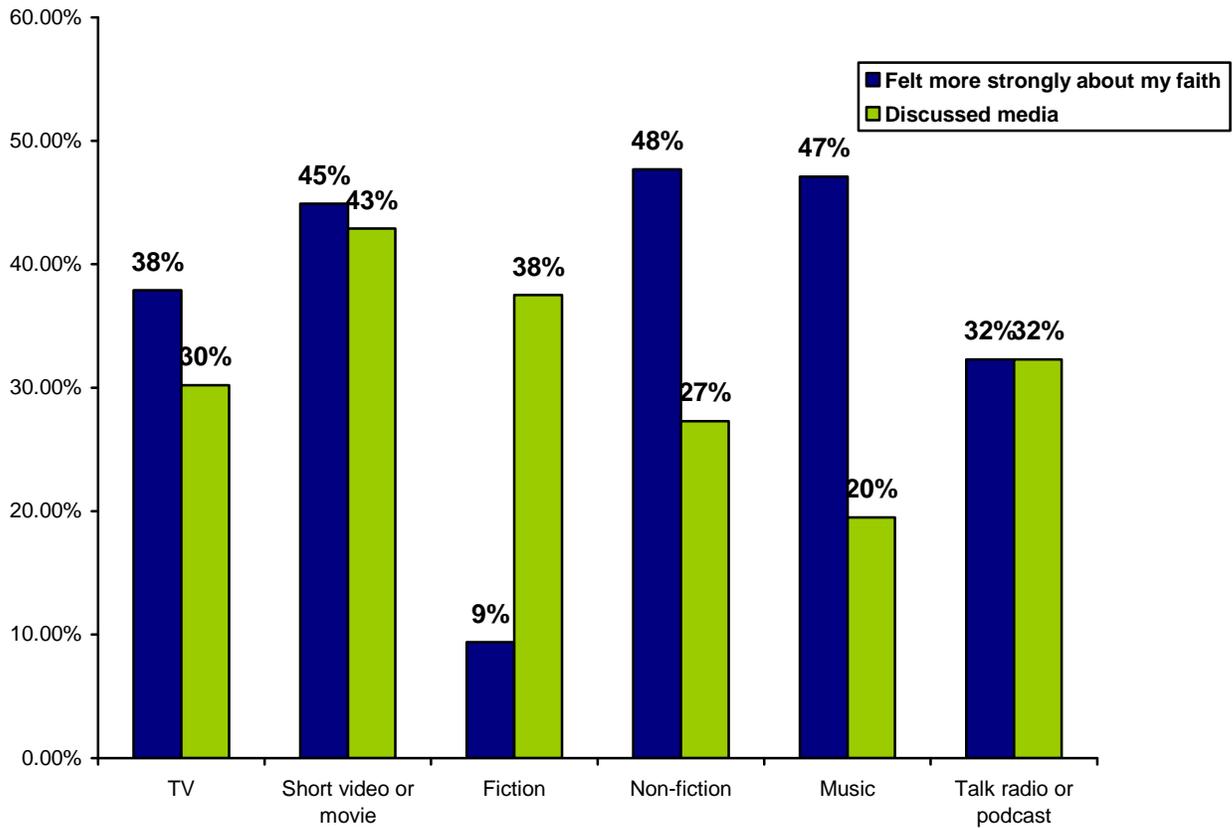
Feeling more strongly about the Christian faith is the most common outcome of Christian media, reported by two-fifths of consumers. More than a quarter discussed the media with someone.

**Figure 7. Outcomes or actions after viewing or listening to media.**



Outcomes or actions vary by the type of Christian media as well. “Feeling more strongly about my faith” is the most common outcome for TV, non-fiction books, music, and short-videos or movies. In contrast, people are more likely to discuss a Christian fiction book with someone, than to feel more strongly about their own faith.

Figure 8. Outcome of Christian Media Consumption by Media Type.

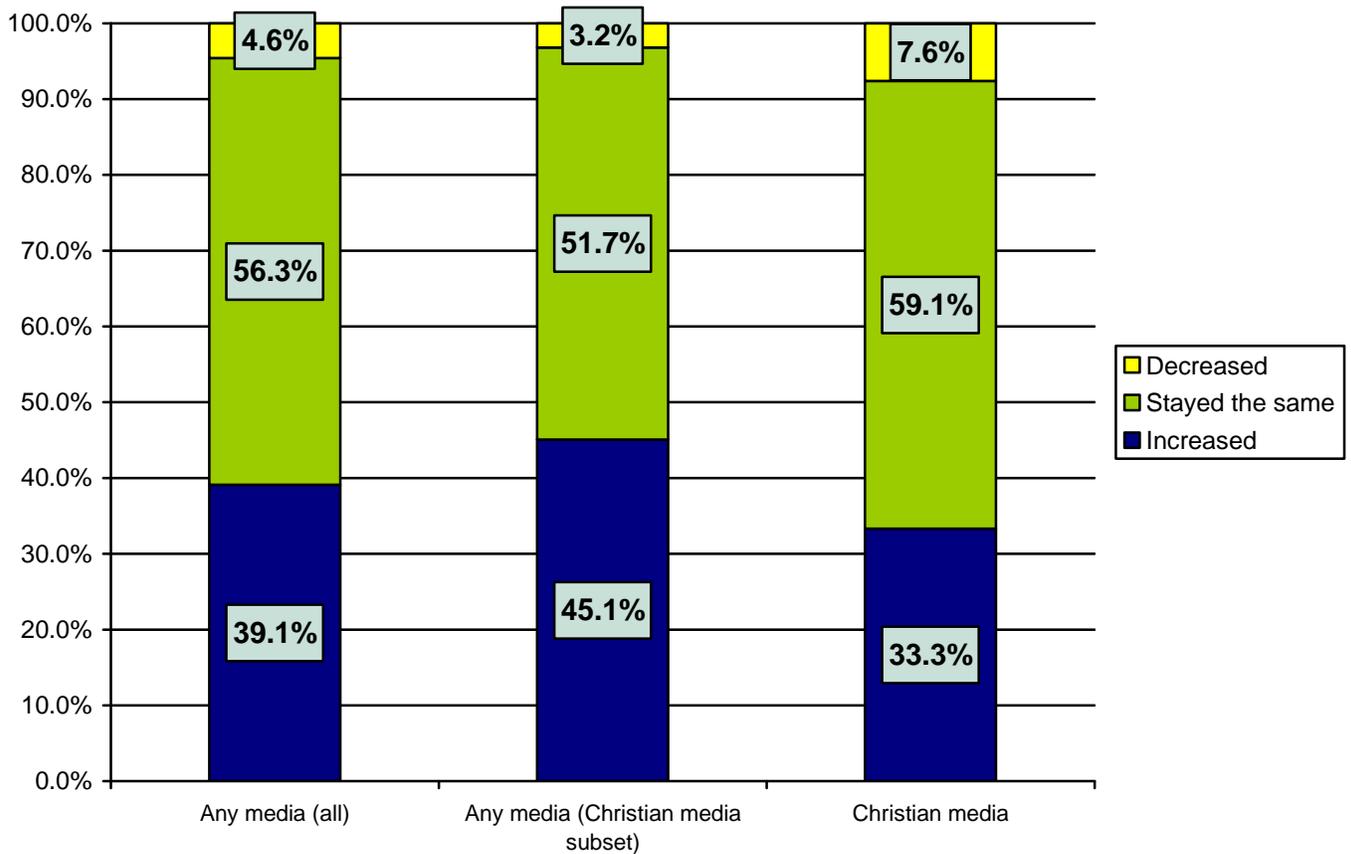


### Future Christian Media Consumption

More than half of American teens and adults say their use of media in general has remained the same over the past five years. Two-fifths report an increase in media consumption.

An interesting difference between general media use and Christian media use is revealed in the last two bars of Figure 9. Among Christian media users, their consumption of Christian media has shown less increase than their media use in general.

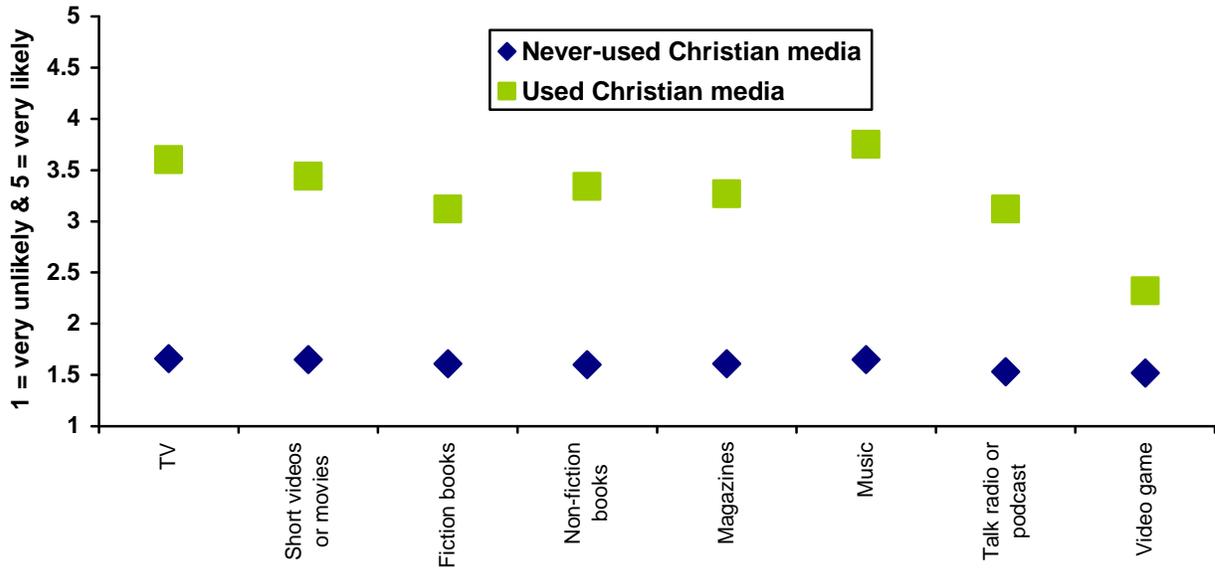
**Figure 9. How has your media consumption changed over the past five years?**



***Christian Media Users Are Likely to Continue Viewing or Listening. Gaining New Users Is A Challenge.***

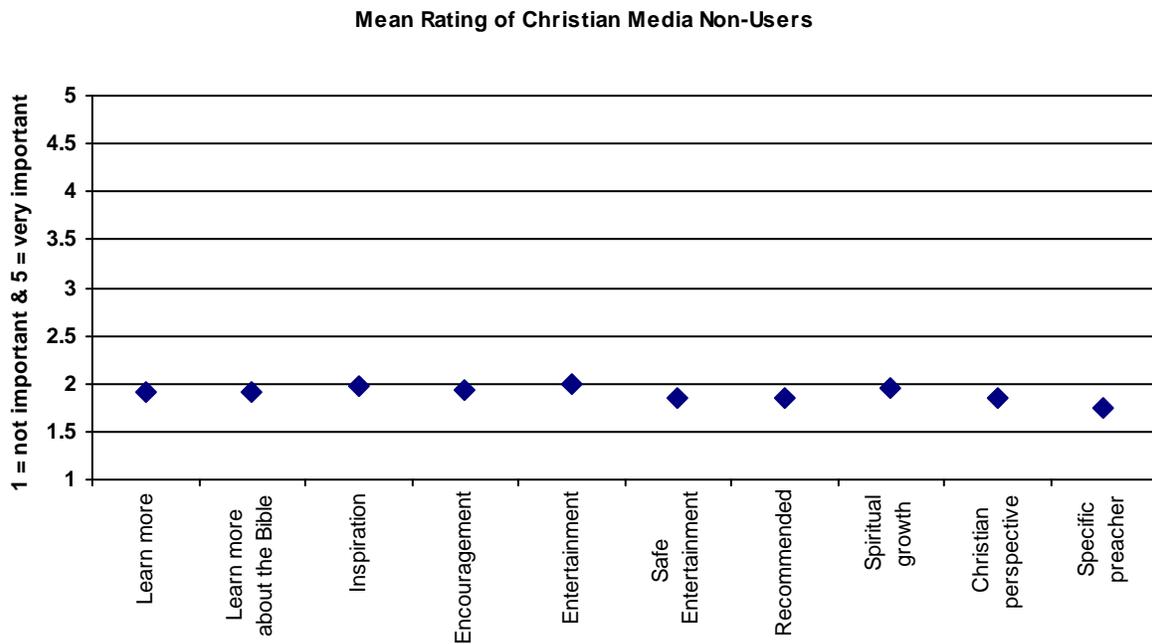
As mentioned previously, the majority of Christian teens and adults and a significant minority of non-Christians (36%) have used Christian media. As Figure 10 shows, those who have used Christian media in the past indicate they are likely to continue viewing or listening. This is particularly true for Christian music.

Figure 10. Likelihood of Using Christian Media in the Future.



Most (79.7%) who have never used Christian media in the past have also never considered viewing or listening to it. When asked about different factors that might motivate them to view or listen to Christian media, non-users rated all equally low. In other words, it doesn't matter to them if the media offered inspiration, encouragement, or entertainment or even if someone recommended it.

Figure 11. How important would these factors be in your decision to view Christian media?







A desire for entertainment drives media use in general. However, consumers choose Christian media for different reasons. Typically, teens and adults seek out Christian media for inspiration, encouragement, and spiritual growth. Half identify one of these three as their main motivation.

Motivations do vary quite a bit by media type. Although spiritual growth drives media choices for a significant minority, entertainment is the main motivation for reading Christian fiction.

The opportunities to expand who Christian media reaches, at least in its present form, appear limited. American teens and adults who do not already use Christian media show little interest in doing so in the future. This is true of both non-Christians and Christians.

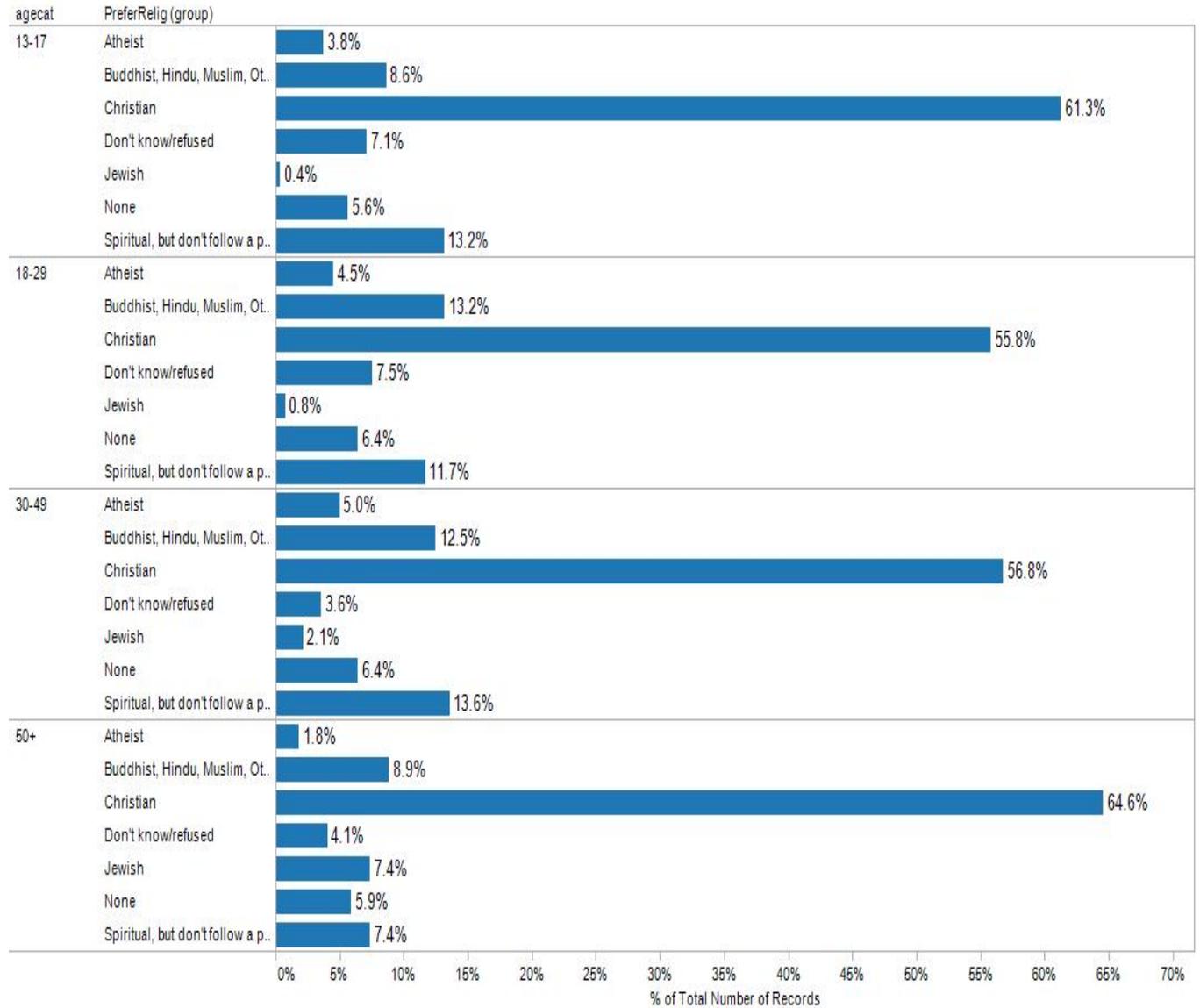
What do consumers want to see in Christian media? They would like to have more of it available, especially movies and television programming. More content tailored to youth and children appeals to consumers. They also desire more variety in terms of genres, better quality, and relevance to today's world. Finally, people want Christian media that is more authentic and open and that does not focus on persuasion.

## Appendix: Description of Survey Sample

A total of 1,082 people completed the Christian media study. The sample was evenly distributed by gender (51.5% female) and stratified across four age categories: teens (13 to 17 year olds); young adults (18 to 29 year olds), older adults (30 to 49 year olds) and seniors (50 and older). Findings reported here are weighted to represent the United States population in terms of age and gender.

Most (59.6%) identify “Christian” as their religious preference. One-tenth say that they are “Spiritual, but do not follow a particular religion”.

**Figure 12. Religious Preference by Age Group.**



More than two-fifths (43.9%) attend church at least monthly. Church attendance varies by age, with teens having the highest rates of frequent church attendance.

**Figure 13. Church Attendance by Age Group.**

AttChurch (group)	agecat				Grand T..
	13-17	18-29	30-49	50+	
At least monthly	53.76%	38.11%	42.14%	41.70%	43.90%
Less than once a month	6.77%	11.70%	8.21%	7.75%	8.60%
Only on special occasions (e..	16.17%	20.00%	21.43%	20.30%	19.50%
Do not attend	23.31%	30.19%	28.21%	30.26%	28.00%

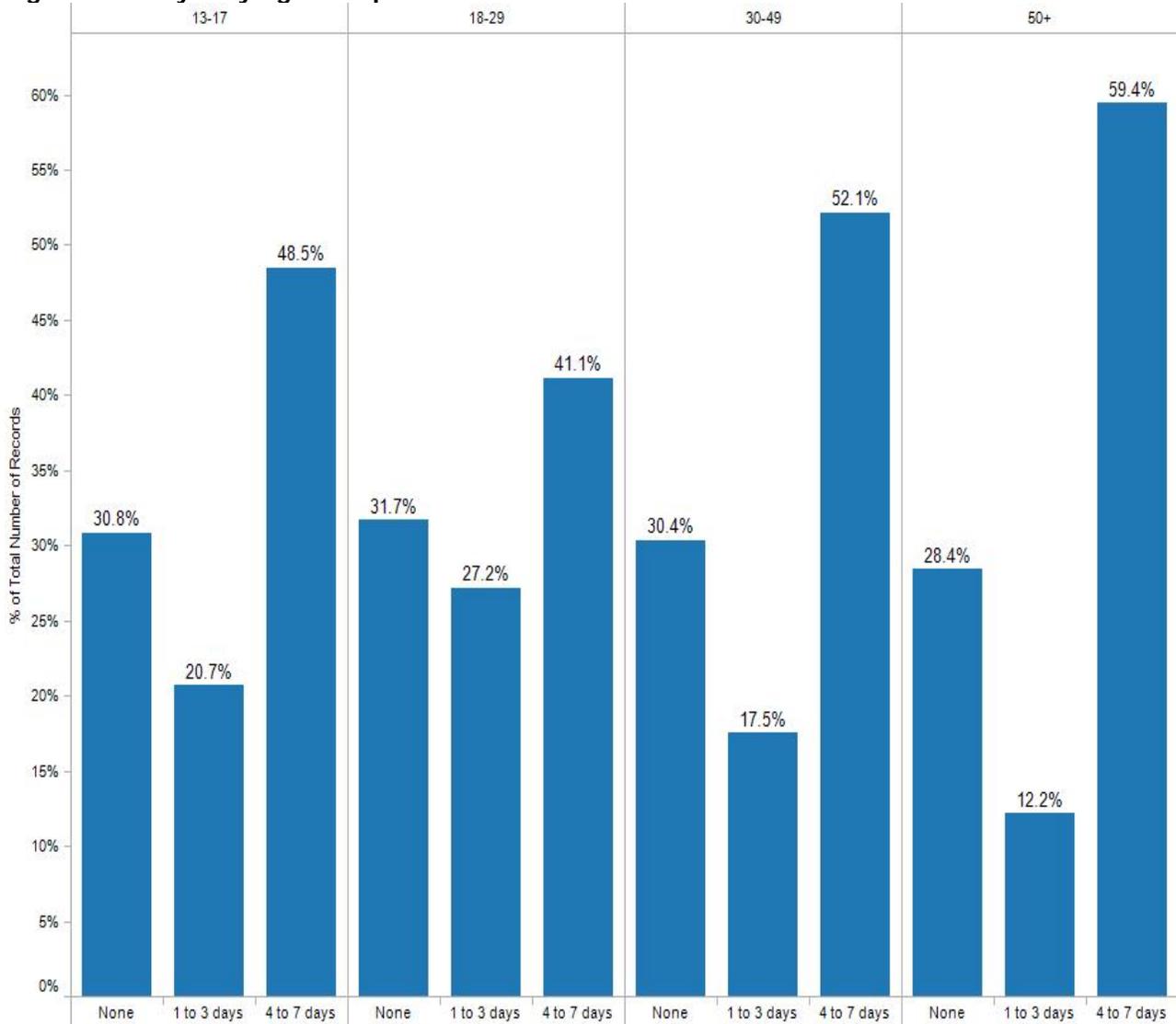
About one-third says that he or she is saved by grace through faith in Jesus. The next most common answer is "I don't know what happens when we die".

**Figure 14. What will happen when you die?**

Death	agecat				Grand..
	13-17	18-29	30-49	50+	
When I die, I will go to heaven because I am saved by grace through faith in Jesus.	36.84%	27.92%	37.14%	38.01%	35.03%
I don't know what happens when we die.	18.80%	24.91%	20.36%	22.51%	21.63%
When I die, I will go to heaven because I have tried my best to be a good person and to live a good life.	25.19%	18.87%	18.57%	15.87%	19.59%
When I die, I will go to heaven because I tried to be involved in my religion, pray, and live the way I think God wants	9.77%	11.32%	7.14%	5.54%	8.41%
There is no life after death.	4.51%	5.28%	9.29%	7.75%	6.75%
Other	2.26%	6.79%	5.71%	7.38%	5.55%
When I die, I will be reincarnated.	2.63%	4.91%	1.79%	2.95%	3.05%

Across age groups, seven out of ten people say that they pray in a typical week. In fact, a significant minority prays most days of the week.

**Figure 15. Prayer by Age Group.**



In contrast, most Americans do not read or listen to the Bible at all in a given week.

**Figure 16. Bible Engagement by Age Group.**

