

Who Really Uses Christian Media?



Research Update October 2011

Recently the Christian film *Courageous* opened as the number four top-grossing movie in the country. The film brought in more than \$9 million in gross sales its first weekend, with many theaters hosting busloads of moviegoers from local churches. The success of *Courageous* attests to the appeal of Christian media and the willingness of faith audiences to support it. As the Los Angeles-based Movie to Movement organization states:

“When you make a film that moves us, we will rent out buses to get all the people who’ve given up on modern movies back into the theater to see it. When you tell our stories, we are thankful.”¹

In addition to reaching faith audiences, Christian media producers often also want their content to have cross-over appeal to non-Christian audiences. This is not an easy task as what appeals to one audience may alienate the other. The movie *Soul Surfer* is a recent example of the challenge Christian media faces, with debates on the set about references to prayer, Jesus and scripture and criticisms for showing too many bikini-clad young women.²

Surprisingly, there is little published research available about Christian media consumers – who they are, what drives their media choices, and what they would like to see. A recent study by the Center for Bible Engagement (CBE) explores these questions. Based on data from 1,000 American teens and adults, the CBE study reveals who really uses Christian media and who doesn’t.

Two out of Five Non-Christians³ Use Christian Media

Most Americans (61%) have used some form of Christian media in the past. Not surprisingly, those who identify with the Christian faith are significantly more likely to use Christian media than those who follow other religions or none at all. However, Christian media is not exclusively the purview of believers.

As Figure 1 shows, three-fourths of Christians and 36% of non-Christians use Christian media at least a few times a year. Of all Christian media users in the sample, one-fifth (22%) do not identify with the Christian faith.

¹ Movie to Movement. (2011). Hollywood Statement of Support. Available online:

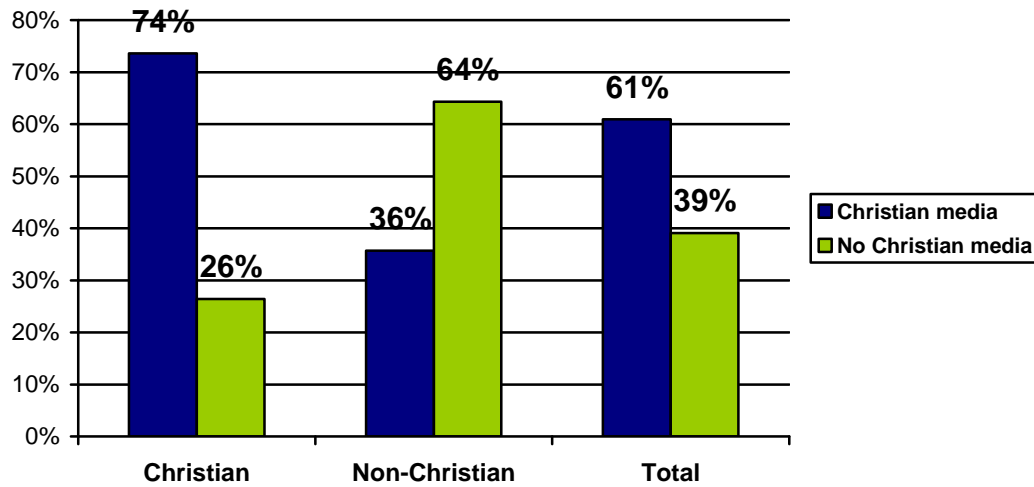
<http://www.hmmagazine.com/2011/10/movie-to-movement-sends-message-to-hollywood/>

² 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/>

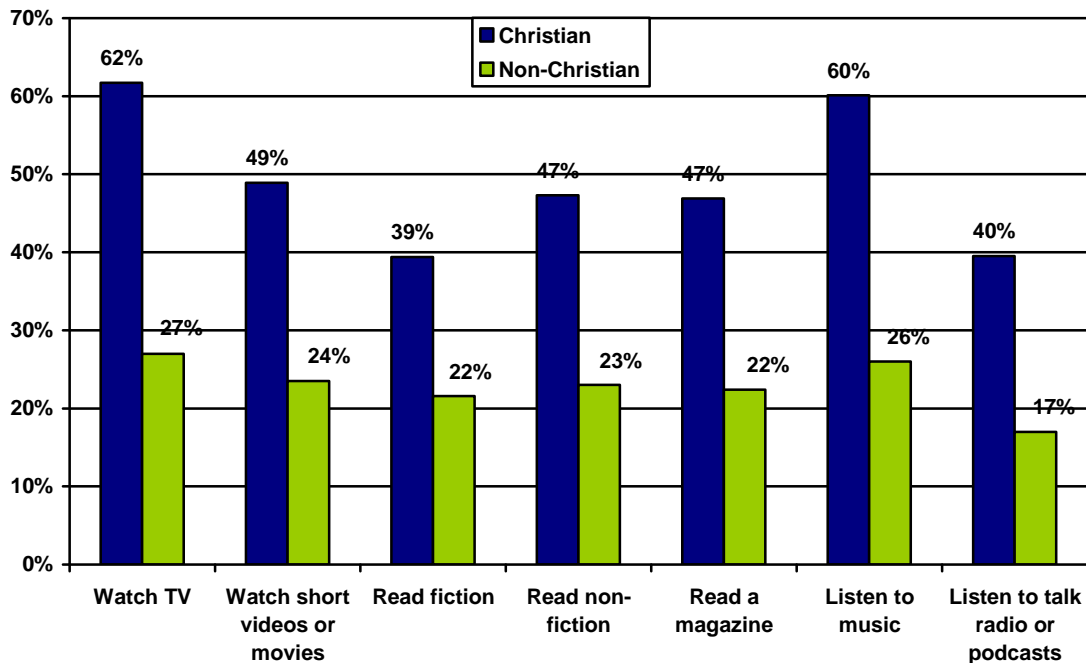
³ In this paper, “non-Christian” refers to anyone who did not choose Christianity as their religion. The non-Christians in our sample primarily identified themselves as “spiritual, but not religious” or having no religion.

Figure 1. Uses Christian Media At Least A Few Times A Year.



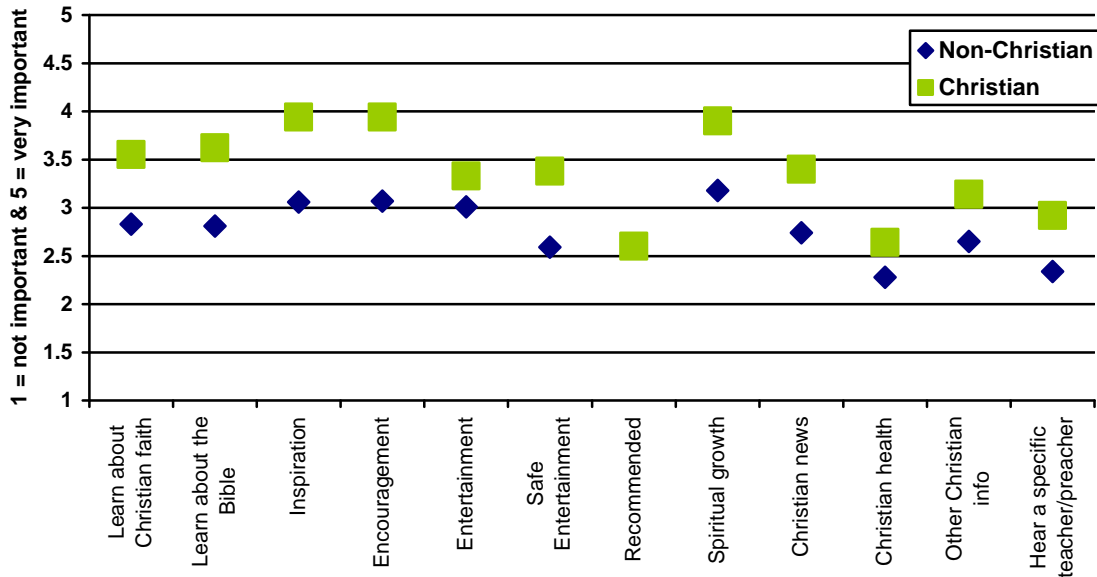
Among Christians, TV and music are the media used most frequently. The same is true among non-Christians, although there are only small differences in the percent using each type of Christian media.

Figure 2. Types of Christian Media Used.



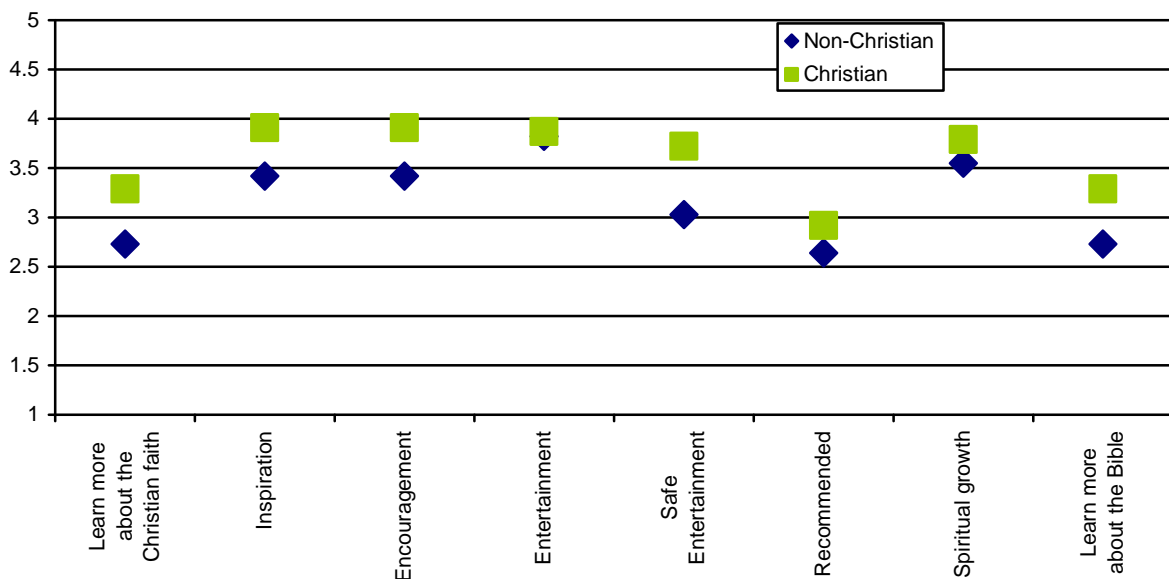
In general, Christians and non-Christians have similar motivations for using Christian media. Seeking inspiration, encouragement and spiritual growth are the strongest motivators among Christians. Although these are the top three among non-Christians as well, non-Christians do not rate them as strongly.

Figure 3. Motivations for using Christian Media.



When considering whether to view a Christian television program or listen to Christian music, entertainment is an equally important motivator for both Christians and non-Christians. The latter group in particular seeks Christian music for its entertainment value above all other motivations.

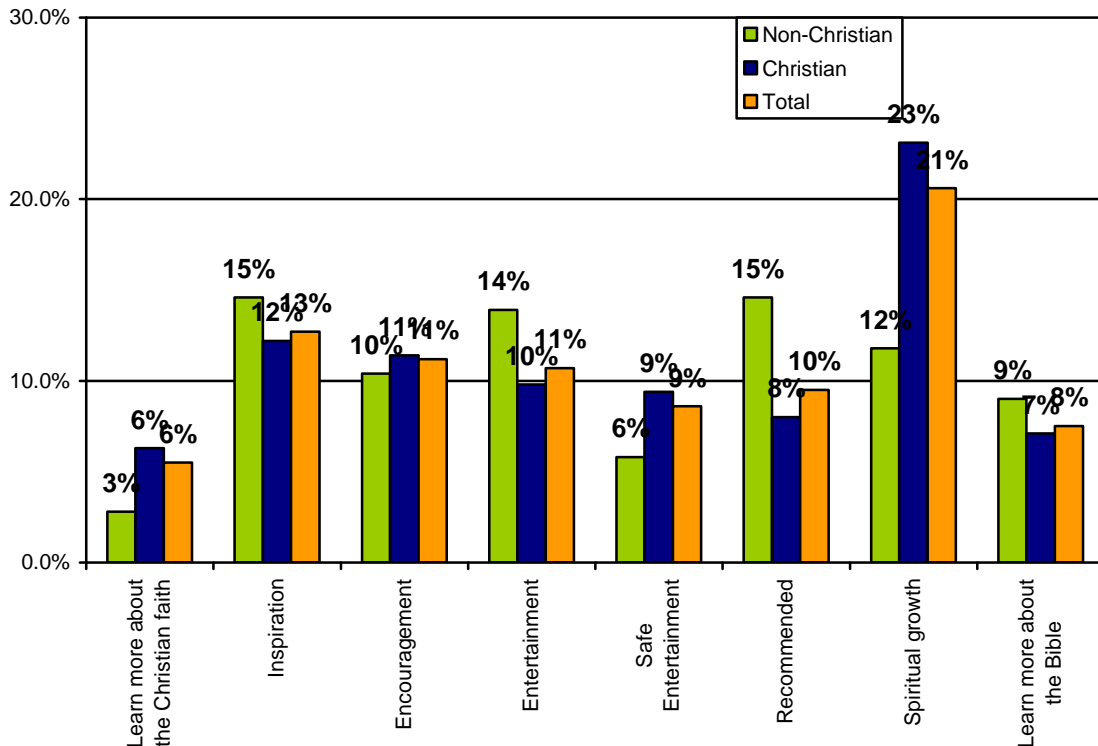
Figure 4. Motivations for Christian music.



Non-Christians mainly seek out Christian media for inspiration, entertainment, or because someone recommended it.

What are the main reasons people use Christian media? Among Christians, spiritual growth is the main driver, followed by inspiration and encouragement. Those who do not identify with the Christian faith seek inspiration and entertainment. Many non-Christians also use Christian media based on another’s recommendation.

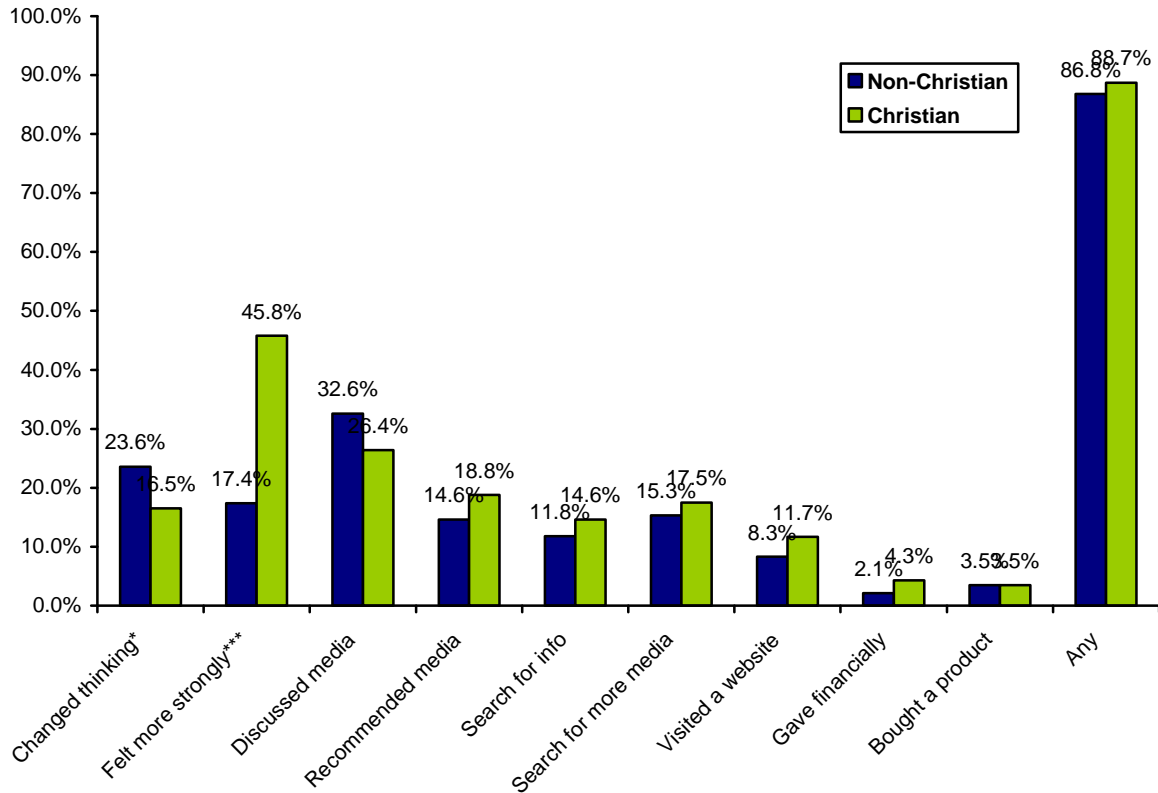
Figure 5. Main Motivation for Using Christian Media.



Both Christians and non-Christians say Christian media changes their thinking or moves them to do something.

After their most recent Christian media experience, nine out of ten consumers experienced a change in their thinking or did something such as discuss the media with someone or visited a website. Figure 6 shows a few differences between Christians and non-Christians, as well as remarkable similarities. Christians are significantly more likely than non-Christians to feel more strongly about their faith after viewing or listening to Christian media. Among non-Christians, a change in thinking is significantly more common than among those who identify with the Christian faith. The two groups are equally likely to experience all other outcomes from using Christian media.

Figure 6. Outcomes or Actions after Using Christian Media.



About the Center for Bible Engagement

The Center for Bible Engagement (CBE), a research and development division of Back to the Bible, seeks to answer the question: Why do so many people own Bibles but so few read them? The center goes beyond simply usage statistics to consider attitudes and behaviors that significantly impact spiritual growth and a person's relationship with God. The primary goal of the CBE is to develop tools and resources that will engage people with God's Word. Since its inception in 2003, CBE has become the major world center addressing Bible engagement and spiritual growth.