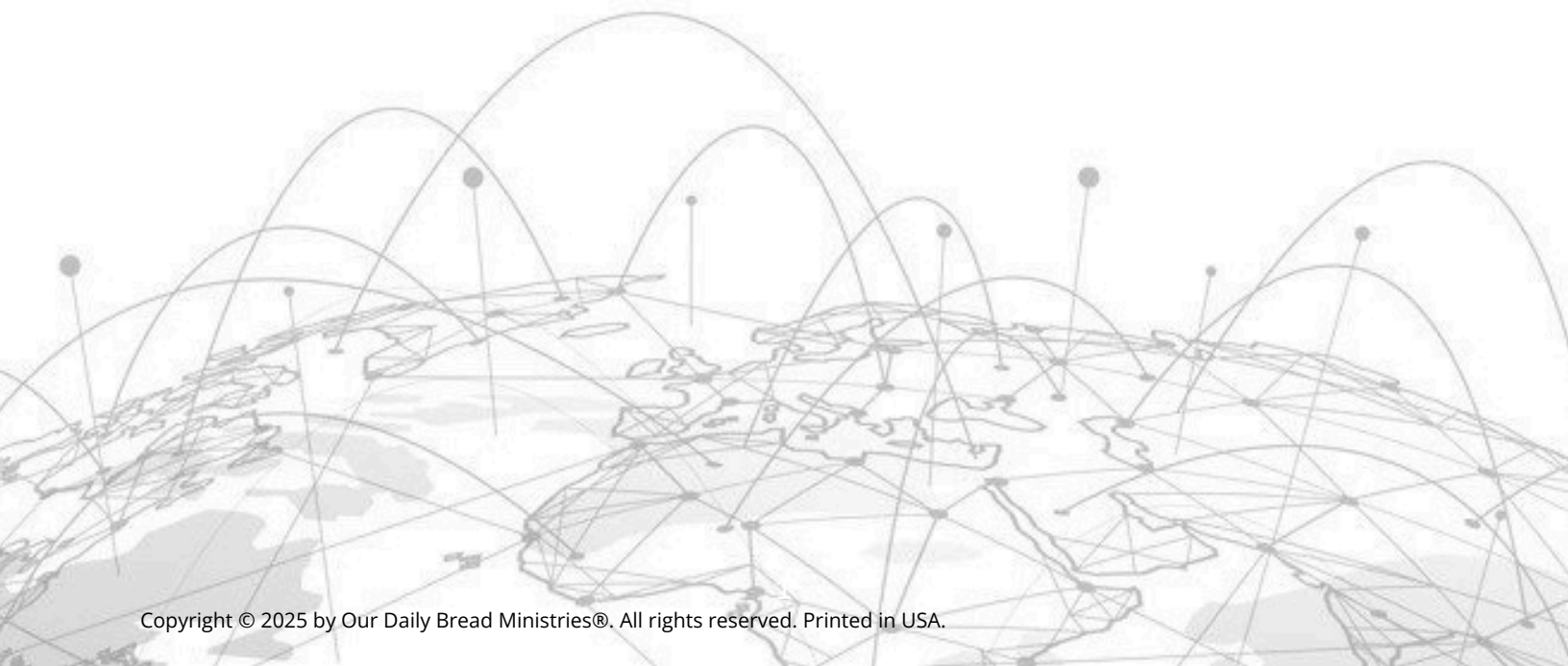


SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT MODEL:

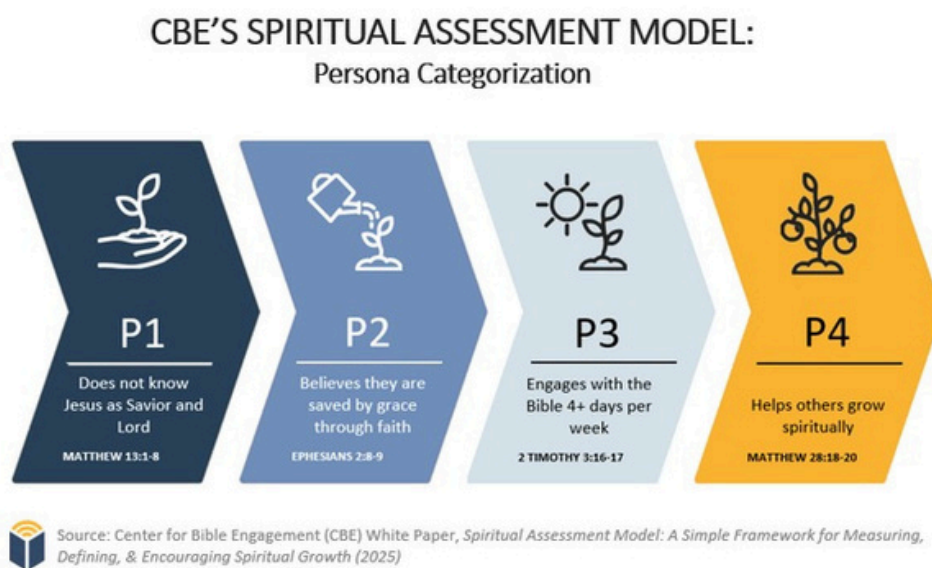
A Simple Framework for Defining, Measuring,
& Encouraging Spiritual Growth

2025 White Paper



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Christians, we are called to grow in our faith and understanding so that we can teach others about Jesus (Hebrews 5:11-6:3). Although people *want* to grow spiritually, many pastors and believers have trouble articulating what spiritual maturity means . . . or how to actually “grow” (Barna, 2009). The Center for Bible Engagement (CBE) developed a Spiritual Assessment Model—grounded in Scripture and our former research—to help people see where they are on their spiritual journey. Are people without any faith in Jesus, do they believe in Jesus, are they active disciples of Jesus, or are they fulfilling His Great Commission by discipling others? Our simple model helps pastors, congregants, teachers, researchers, and other individuals visualize at a basic level what “spiritual growth” looks like and to establish goals. Based on self-reported beliefs and spiritual practices, CBE’s Spiritual Assessment Model categorizes individuals, communities, or populations into four broad Personas. The model incorporates three key measures: belief in salvation through Jesus Christ, Bible engagement (a widely accepted *predictor* of spiritual growth) (CBE, 2012), and discipleship.



This simple model can be used as a starting point to identify, understand, and support people at different stages in their spiritual journey. The model also provides a baseline for longitudinal studies to assess spiritual growth of a given individual or population over time.

For example, we recently used our Spiritual Assessment Model to examine the spiritual health of Our Daily Bread Ministries’ (ODBM) audiences. ODBM is a global, non-denominational ministry that distributes over 60 million Bible-based resources worldwide every year. At 85 years strong, the ministry has well-established and devoted audiences. CBE found that although ODBM has a loyal following of mature believers, 41% of the ministry’s US audience are P3s who struggle with discipling (CBE, 2022). ODBM seriously considered the implications of the finding and made deep changes within their organization to help their US readers become disciplers (P4s) through new Bible Engagement Journeys. The ministry then expanded the assessment globally to guide further improvements and is planning future evaluations to measure the effectiveness of their initiatives. This simple model is equipping ministries to make a bigger impact for God’s kingdom.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
METHOD	2
PREDICTIVE VALIDITY	10
LIMITATIONS	11
ODBM CASE STUDY	12
CONCLUSION	18
CONTRIBUTORS	20
REFERENCES	21

INTRODUCTION

Biblically, we are called to go from “glory to glory” in our walk with Christ, to be transformed by the Holy Spirit into His likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18, KJV). Many people, however, need clearly stated definitions and goals to know *how* to grow as believers. According to researcher George Barna (2009), “People aspire to be spiritually mature, but they do not know what it means. Pastors want to guide others on the path to spiritual wholeness, but they are often not clearly defining the goals or the outcomes of that process.” The Center for Bible Engagement (CBE) found this to be true, as well. In a previous study, four out of five church attenders reported a strong desire to grow spiritually. When asked to define *spiritual maturity*, nearly 30% replied that they did not know how to define it or did not answer at all (CBE, 2009). Most believers want to improve their spiritual life, but many have trouble visualizing what “spiritual growth” looks like.

While there is little agreement among the Christian community on a definition of spiritual growth, the Bible clearly indicates that spiritual growth is the work of the Holy Spirit nurturing in us key qualities such as *knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness, and love*. Based on the foundational elements and guiding principles of Galatians 5:22-26 and 2 Peter 1:3-11, CBE has adopted this definition of spiritual growth: **“Spiritual growth is the transformative process of the Holy Spirit that aligns believers with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.”** Simply said, spiritual growth means becoming more like Jesus. The behavioral outcome is: *Becoming less of the person I was before I surrendered my life to Jesus and more like Christ in my thoughts, words and deeds.*

To measure spiritual growth, then, we translated our conceptual definitions of spiritual growth into concrete, observable behaviors, and then developed a simple Spiritual Assessment Model (SAM)—grounded in Scripture and our former research—to help people see where they are on their spiritual journey and provide goals for growth. The model can be used as a starting point to examine the spiritual health of an individual or population based on key, research-based measures, which provide clues about people’s spiritual lives. Since CBE’s Spiritual Assessment Model is based on a reliable predictor of spiritual growth, which is, those who are engaged in the Bible at least four times per week (CBE, 2012), our model can be used to establish a baseline with a given individual, community, or population to assess spiritual growth over time.

The following sections describe CBE’s Spiritual Assessment Model in more detail. We have also included a formal case study, using Our Daily Bread Ministries (ODBM) as an example, to demonstrate how the model was initially implemented in a ministry setting. The goal was to examine the spiritual health of ODBM’s global audience to see how the ministry could support spiritual growth at any stage and help people reach spiritual maturity. We have provided findings from the case study, the implications, and the systematic changes ODBM has implemented as a result to serve as a guide (and a caution in some respects). ODBM hopes to help others learn from their experience with the model—the challenges and successes alike.



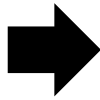
METHOD

CBE's Spiritual Assessment Model has three basic components: key measures based on Scripture and our former research, an online survey, and our categorization framework to sort responses by Persona (P1 to P4).



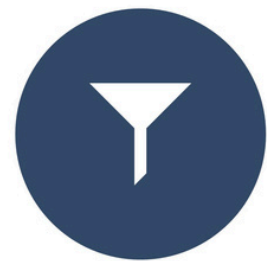
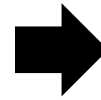
KEY MEASURES

Our basic model captures three key measures that represent major milestones on a Christian's spiritual journey: belief in salvation through Jesus Christ alone, regular Bible engagement, and a commitment to discipleship. In essence, the three "milestones" in our model are a natural progression to loving God with all our heart and soul, with our mind, and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37).



SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT SURVEY

We converted key measures into survey questions to assess the spiritual maturity level of a community. The basic purpose of the CBE Spiritual Assessment Survey is to measure where an individual is spiritually and to assess when an individual is struggling in terms of attitudes and spiritual practices. Based on their answers, survey participants are then sorted into CBE's four broad-scoped Personas.

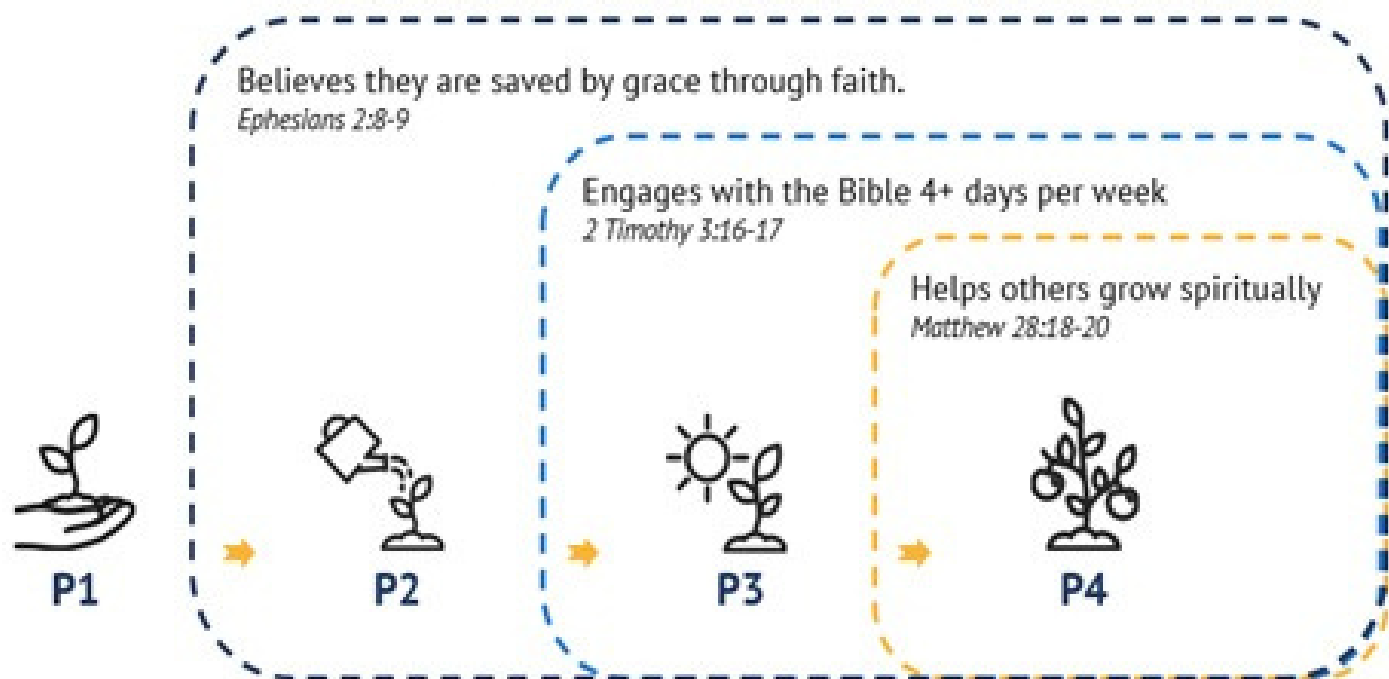


PERSONA CATEGORIZATION

The Personas, (also known as P-Levels), are organized in such a way to highlight a person's faith, fruitfulness, and engagement in building the faith of others. Each Persona (P1-P4) encompasses a cluster of *sub-types*. Analysis can range from cursory psychographic segmentation to an in-depth exploration of each sub-type.

Spiritual Assessment Survey

Individuals in each Persona (P2 to P4) exhibit noticeable behavioral differences that relate to spiritual growth. Jesus pointed to fruit-bearing (both good and bad) as a behavioral test of a person's inner faith (Matthew 7:15-20). Behavioral outcomes of spiritual growth include noticeable increases in positive behaviors ("good fruit") and fewer negative behaviors ("bad fruit"). We know through our "Power of 4" research, for example, that engaging with the Bible four or more days per week is related to *measurable* behavioral changes (CBE, 2012). The chart below shows our Spiritual Assessment Survey questions in more detail and how they correlate to our Persona Categorization. The survey is simply a means to an end. The primary purpose of our questionnaire is to gather information to help churches and organizations identify the spiritual needs of their people by Persona, which they can then use to develop a support plan.



P1: Needs Evangelism

What do you think happens after death?

Any response other than "I will experience heaven because I am saved by grace through faith in Jesus."

OR

Selected "Other" and had a response that was not consistent with grace through faith

P2: Needs Discipleship

What do you think happens after death?

Response: "I will experience heaven because I am saved by grace through faith in Jesus."

OR

Selected "Other" and had a response that was consistent with grace through faith

AND

How many times do you read or listen to the Bible in a week?
Response: Less than 4

P3: Needs Activation

What do you think happens after death?

Response: "I will experience heaven because I am saved by grace through faith in Jesus."

OR

Selected "Other" and had a response that was consistent with grace through faith

AND

How many times do you read or listen to the Bible in a week?
Response: 4 to 7 days

AND

"I Intentionally interact with someone I am discipling (helping grow spiritually)..."
Response: Never or a few times a year or less

P4: Needs Connections

What do you think happens after death?

Response: "I will experience heaven because I am saved by grace through faith in Jesus."

OR

Selected "Other" and had a response that was consistent with grace through faith

AND

How many times do you read or listen to the Bible in a week?
Response: 4 to 7 days

AND

"I Intentionally interact with someone I am discipling (helping grow spiritually)..."
Response: Monthly, Weekly, or Daily

Persona Categorization (P1-P4)


As mentioned, CBE's Personas describe four stages in a person's spiritual journey based on a set of beliefs and behaviors. Are people **without any faith** in Jesus, do they **believe** in Jesus, are they active **disciples** of Jesus, or are they fulfilling His Great Commission by **discipling** others? We use these Personas to help measure spiritual maturity and spiritual growth over time. Characteristics of each Persona (P1-P4) are described in more detail in the next section.



P1: Needs Evangelism

(John 1:37-38)

These are people who do *not* believe they will go to heaven because of faith in Jesus Christ. This broad category includes everyone from the antagonistic atheist to neutral agnostic, to the spiritually curious to those committed to other faiths. It also includes practicing Christians who doubt their salvation and people who have walked away from their faith entirely. People in this category are questioners and seekers. They might ask questions like: "Is there more to life? Is God real? If so, is there more than one way to reach Him? Is the Bible true? Is Jesus really the Son of God? Is faith really enough to cover the depth of my sins?" How these questions are answered can change everything for them. Among this broad group, we believe the greatest need is evangelism. Some want answers. Many are looking for a sense of purpose and meaningful relationships, but they also need news of the gospel in appropriate and contextual ways. Others believe in Jesus, but do not personally believe they are saved (John 3:1-21; Titus 3:3-7). This group needs to be shown how and why Jesus matters in everyday life (John 1:37-38). Because Jesus is the way the truth and the life, there can be no significant spiritual growth without knowing Him (John 14:6).



JESUS

P2: Needs Discipleship (John 4:28-30)

Belief in Jesus as our Messiah is a critical milestone. While 'belief' may not always be the starting point of someone's spiritual journey (Acts 17:11-12), *salvation* begins with the belief that Jesus died on the cross for each of us to save us from our sins (John 3:18). Within this group, individuals believe they will go to heaven because of faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). However, they're not reading the Bible most days of the week. Those who are new to the faith, or who are not growing spiritually, tend to lack core disciplines, such as regular church attendance, prayer, and Scripture reading. Many are intimidated by the Bible and find it difficult to understand, without any connection to real life (CBE, 2024). They need to be equipped to read the Bible well and regularly in their daily lives. They also need help discovering the Bible's truths so that they can connect meaningfully with God and others (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

P3: Needs Activation

(John 6:67-69)

These are followers of Jesus who believe they are “saved by grace through faith in Jesus” and read the Bible four or more days a week. They are likely to connect with God through a variety of means, from regular church attendance to individual prayer and worship. Although they are pursuing transformation into the likeness of Jesus, they are not in the habit of discipling or sharing their faith with others. Growing Christians can lack confidence. They need to be encouraged and equipped to actively disciple.

CBE's research indicates that frequent Bible engagement is a key differentiator in the early stages of spiritual growth, specifically between P2 and P3. The primary distinction between P3 and the more spiritually mature P4 is not necessarily the frequency of Bible engagement, as people in both groups engage with the Bible frequently. Instead, the transition from P3 to P4 signifies a move from an inward focus on personal growth to an outward focus on fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20).



P4: Needs Connections

(Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8)

This group consists of people who say they are “saved by grace through faith in Jesus” and engage the Bible four or more days a week on a regular basis. They also talk with someone about their faith or about Scripture most days of the week. These active disciple-makers are intentional about discipling: they often seek opportunities to interact with others and help believers grow to spiritual maturity. They talk with people about Scripture, their faith, and spiritual struggles (Luke 10:25-37; Matthew 25:31-40; Galatians 6:22; 1 Thessalonians 5:11). Many also actively evangelize. Most disciple-makers connect frequently with God through a variety of means, from church attendance to individual prayer and worship. They need resources that equip them to engage with the world around them and that actively aid in their discipling (such as Bible studies and small group resources). They also need content that helps them better understand Scripture, theology, and spiritual life.

Discipleship comes with a cost. Disciple-makers need to continually seek spiritual renewal and refreshment to effectively pour into the lives of others. By continuously investing in their own spiritual development, disciple-makers are better equipped to guide others on their own faith journeys. This commitment to ongoing learning and growth not only benefits the individual but also strengthens the community of believers as a whole.



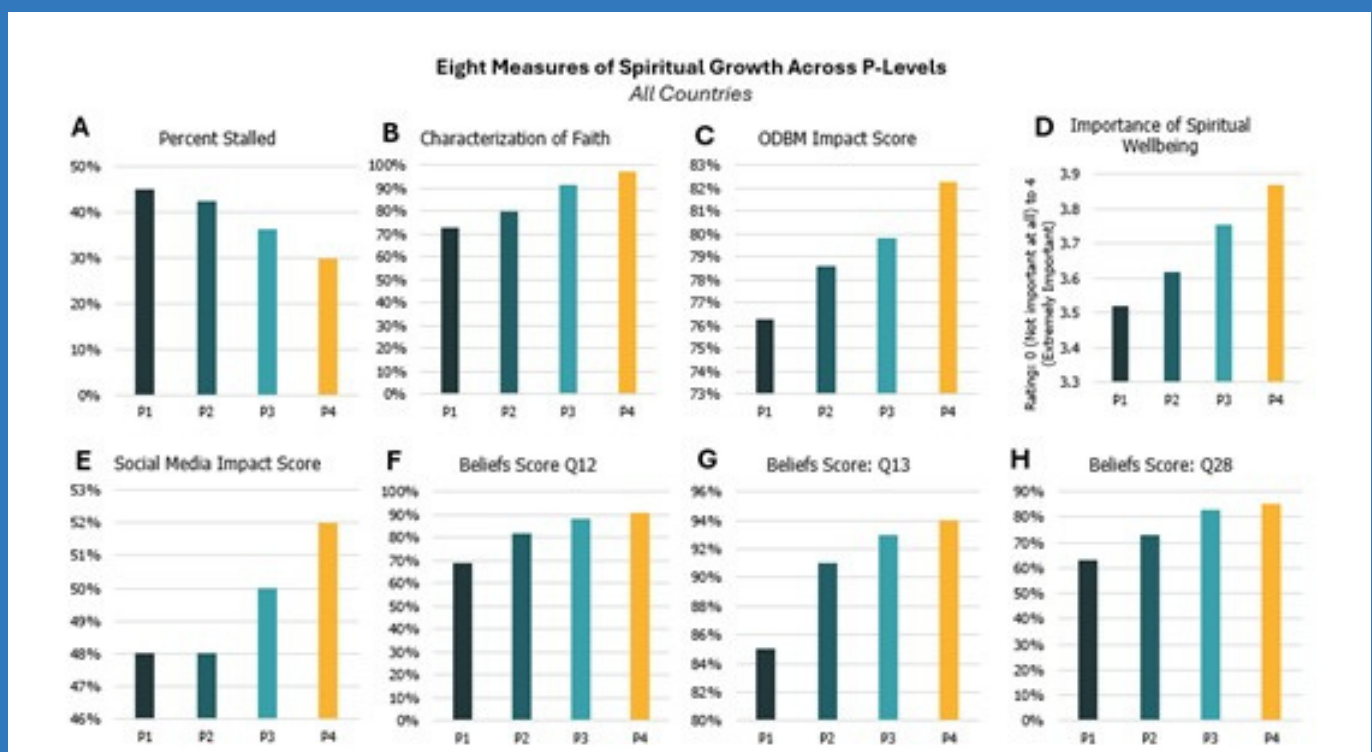
As evidenced in CBE's Personas, people's spiritual needs are diverse. In many ways, our Spiritual Assessment Model parallels the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:1-8. The focus of the parable is not on the Sower or the seed, but on the four *soils*. It considers our responsibility as Christ-followers to be fertile soil . . . and *fruit-full* (Laniak, 2024). The supernatural result comes from the divine Word and the work of the Holy Spirit.



PREDICTIVE VALIDITY

We tested the predictive validity of our four-level Spiritual Assessment Model (P1 to P4). *Predictive validity* is the ability of a test or measurement to predict a future outcome, such as behavior, or in this case, spiritual growth. We already had support from our Power of 4 research that frequent Bible engagement is a predictor of spiritual growth (CBE, 2012). Our Power of 4 finding has been consistent across multiple samples, regardless of gender, age, and nationality. Similar findings, identifying Bible engagement as the key driver of spiritual growth, have also been reported by Willow Creek Association (Hawkins et al., 2007) and Lifeway Research (Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, 2012).

A question of debate is whether it made sense to include discipleship as the final step in our model. An ideal discipler is connected to Jesus, is well-versed in Scripture, and has a strong faith. The predictive validity test supports discipleship's importance as the culminating stage. In sum, our Spiritual Assessment Model effectively integrates biblical principles with empirical evidence. (For more information, contact research@odb.org.)



LIMITATIONS

CBE's Spiritual Assessment Model is not intended to be comprehensive. Spiritual growth is not always linear. It is often elliptical, with some regression along with progress. We might say that we are like *all* four types of soil in the Parable of the Sower throughout our lives. The four categories (P1 to P4) in our model simply help people understand where they are (or where someone else is) on their spiritual journey at a given time and how best to move forward. It might help to think of these categories like developmental stages of growth. Rather than treating people as a "problem" to "fix," we are "nudging" them toward a closer relationship with God.

This model is also limited by the measures we selected to identify Personas. There are multiple ways to identify Christian believers such as asking if they are born again, asking if they are Christian, or asking if they have been baptized. Additionally, we could identify who engages in their faith via church attendance and prayer, or who shares their faith through evangelism or small groups. However, it is important to note that we have gained additional certainty of the measures we have selected through our validity analysis (belief in salvation through Jesus alone, Bible engagement, and discipleship).

In other words, CBE's Spiritual Assessment Model is a starting point, which can be used to identify, understand, and support people at different stages in their spiritual journey. For measurement purposes, we focused on the behavioral outcomes of the spiritual growth process. CBE does not, however, promote a mechanistic view of Scripture. This model is not a "formula" that provides automatic and guaranteed results, nor are we promoting "works-righteousness." We are simply pointing to the best predictive practices we can leverage to bring people closer to God for true spiritual fruit (cf Matthew 7:20).

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding an open book. The person is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt. The book is open to a page with dense text, and the person's left hand is visible on the left page. The background is blurred, showing a wooden surface.

Case Study

Our Daily Bread Ministries (ODBM)

ODBM CASE STUDY

This case study explores how CBE's Spiritual Assessment Model was strategically employed at Our Daily Bread Ministries (ODBM) to ascertain future direction. The goal was to examine Our Daily Bread Ministries' audience, assess the spiritual health of their followers (by Persona), and understand how the ministry could help individuals regularly engage with Scripture. In this case study, we share what the Spiritual Assessment Model revealed, how the data helped to develop ODBM's Bible engagement strategies, and the deep changes the ministry implemented based on the data.

Background

Our Daily Bread Ministries (ODBM) is a global, non-denominational Bible engagement ministry that distributes over 60 million resources in 58 languages throughout 150 countries each year. For more than 85 years, their mission has been “to make the life-changing wisdom understandable and accessible to all.” Best known for their devotional content, they also create books, videos, and podcasts. The ministry offers theological courses through The Artos Academy (AA), and among other global initiatives, is involved in prison ministry work around the world, chaplaincy work with the police and military in Brazil, and a solar light and biblical content project in Indonesia and Myanmar. The vision of ODBM is to see people of all nations experience a personal relationship with Christ, grow to be more like Him, and serve in a local body of His family.

Our Daily Bread Ministries is unique because of its long history. At 85 years strong, ODBM has a well-established audience and devoted following across the globe. With such a long history, the ministry has cultivated a loyal following. Many of their devotional readers have been receiving the *Our Daily Bread* booklet from ODBM for over fifty years. To stay true to their mission to make the wisdom of the Bible accessible to “all,” ODBM began to diversify its offerings to reach new and younger audiences while continuing to support their existing followers. In addition, ODBM leaders began serious discussions within the ministry about Bible engagement and spiritual growth, due in part to the “Power of 4” research conducted by CBE. Specifically, to what extent was the *Our Daily Bread*

devotional supporting Scripture engagement, and was it helping people move from one Persona to the next? Was it helping their followers to engage with the Bible, or was their long-standing audience simply using the devotional *in place* of the Bible? Most importantly, was it helping their audience to mature spiritually?

Due to the biblical nature of devotional content, ODBM expected a high percentage of their audience to be *biblically literate*, individuals who read the Bible weekly and who strongly assert the Bible is accurate (Barna Group, 2017). In addition, the ministry's hope was that the majority of their audience used the *Our Daily Bread* devotional as a supplement or “springboard” to frequent Bible-reading.

CBE knew that data gained from an end-user study would be somewhat limited, and that it would reveal nothing about the needs and circumstances of those outside of the ministry—the very people ODBM hoped to reach through its diversification and global outreach initiatives.

For the ODBM study, then, CBE's objective was twofold: 1) to use our Spiritual Assessment Model to examine the spiritual health of the ministry's audience around the globe, and 2) to assess the spiritual landscape of the general population to provide needed comparisons and uncover potential ministry opportunities.

Sample

The initial ODBM study was conducted in 2022 in the United States, with follow-up studies conducted in 2023 and 2024 around the world. For our follow-on research, nine countries were selected from three regions: the Americas, Asia Pacific, and Europe. The countries chosen were Brazil, Canada, India, Australia, Indonesia, Japan, the United Kingdom, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Studies across all countries included both ODBM-specific audiences and samples within the general population. Survey 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.

Initial Study

The initial study in 2022 focused on the United States, surveying 12,578 ODBM followers via app, email, and web surveys. This phase also included a survey of 3,986 individuals in the US general population for comparison.

Follow-Up Studies

Follow-up studies in 2023 and 2024 expanded globally to nine countries across the Americas, Asia Pacific, and Europe, surveying 8,148 ODBM followers and 14,228 individuals from the general population in eight of these countries. These later surveys explored personal spiritual beliefs and practices, perceptions of ODBM, and potential areas for improvement. The data collection in these international studies involved email, banner, and social media invitations for ODBM followers and Dynata© survey panels for the general population.

The sample sizes for each country in the follow-up studies are listed below:

- Brazil: 508
- Canada: 3,372
- India: 418
- Australia: 2,049
- Indonesia: 695
- Japan: 623
- The UK: 514
- Hong Kong: 390
- Taiwan: 612

For the general population survey portion of this study, we surveyed a total of 14,228 in the countries below through Dynata© survey panels.

- Brazil: 1,976
- Canada: 1,973
- India: 2,110
- Australia: 1,845
- Indonesia: 1,985
- Japan: 2,333
- The UK: 2,006



Results

CBE addressed two specific research questions for ODBM:

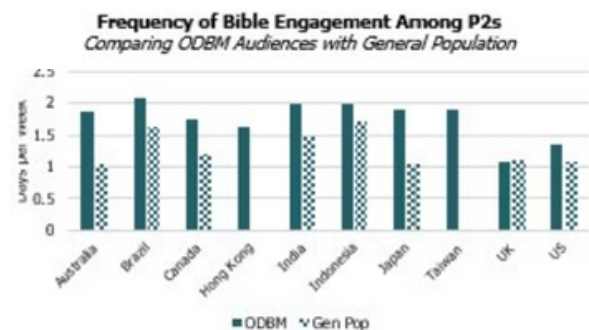
1. Is the *Our Daily Bread* devotional helping people to engage with the Bible, or is their long-standing audience simply using the devotional in place of the Bible? The ministry's hope (or research hypothesis) was that the majority of their audience was using the *Our Daily Bread* devotional as a supplement or "springboard" to frequent Bible reading.
2. Is ODBM helping people to progress on their spiritual journey?

Key Findings

The ODBM Impact studies revealed several critical insights:

Key Insight #1: Positive Impact on Bible Engagement

The study consistently found a positive impact of ODBM on Bible engagement, directly addressing the first research question. Approximately 85% of the global ODBM audience engages with the Bible 4+ times a week. Furthermore, many respondents indicated that the ODBM devotional has positively influenced their Bible reading habits by helping them develop a routine, follow Bible reading plans, and gain a better understanding of the Bible. ODBM audiences, particularly P2 individuals, demonstrate higher Bible engagement rates than the general population.



The devotional seems to act as a supplement and a "springboard" to Bible reading rather than a replacement.

Key Insight #2: Correlation Between ODBM and Spiritual Development

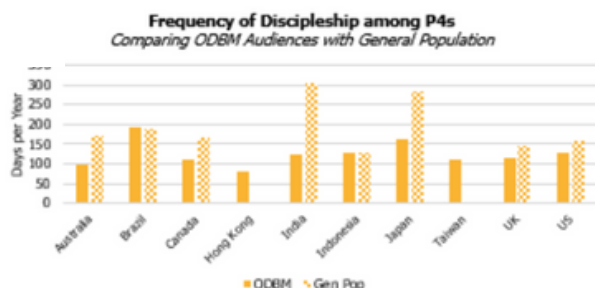
Survey results showed a strong positive correlation between the use of the *Our Daily Bread* devotional and its impact on spiritual development. Many followers from all Personas reported feeling spiritual growth benefits from *Our Daily Bread*. Respondents also appreciate ODBM content for being biblically encouraging, relevant, and filled with true stories. However, research indicates that it does not sufficiently challenge followers, especially P3s, to mature in their faith. To address this, ODBM could incorporate content that presents guidance for navigating complex ethical and spiritual challenges. This would prompt critical reflection or deeper theological engagement.

Key Insight #3: Long-Term Engagement and Spiritual Maturity

The study identified a significant correlation between an individual's tenure with ODBM and their progression through the Personas. This suggests that prolonged engagement with ODBM is associated with increased spiritual maturity, possibly due to the daily routine fostered by the devotional and its connection to Scripture. A significant majority of respondents have been connected to ODBM for over five years, with a third being followers for more than 25 years.

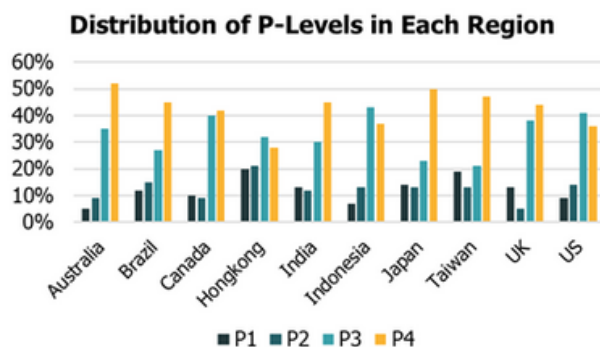
Key Insight #4: Challenges in Discipleship and Outward Focus, Particularly for P1-P3 Individuals

While ODBM has a large base of loyal followers, a key finding indicates that many passively consume content and are not actively discipling others or sharing their faith. Audiences from P1 to P3 rated lower the statement "ODBM motivates me to go out of my way to help others." Open-ended responses reveal that P3 individuals often lack the confidence and knowledge necessary for spiritual growth and active discipleship. Furthermore, ODBM P4s appear to be less engaged in discipleship activities compared to the general population.



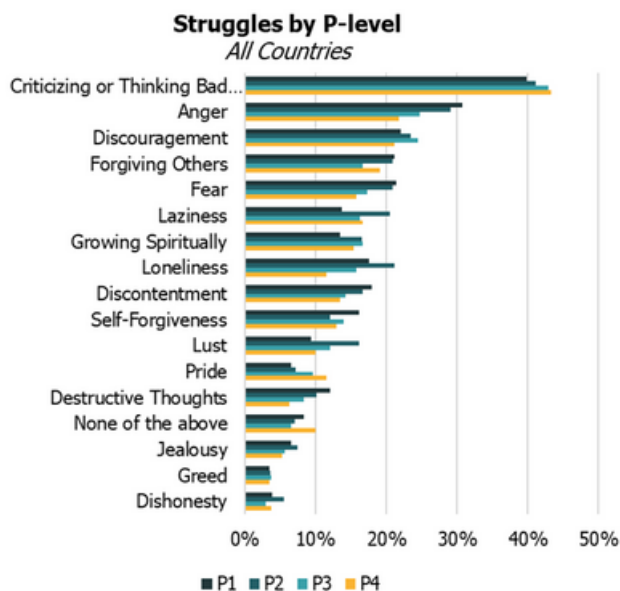
Key Insight #5: Regional Variations in Persona Levels Necessitate Tailored Approaches

Significant variations in Persona distributions exist across different regions. For instance, the US and Indonesia have more P3s than P4s, while other regions show the opposite trend. Hong Kong and Taiwan require a focused effort to reach P1 individuals, whereas Australia and Japan have large P4 populations. These regional differences highlight that the impact of ODBM and the distribution of individuals across different Persona levels is not uniform globally, necessitating tailored strategies to effectively engage and support different populations.



Key Insight #6: Common Spiritual Struggles

CBE also asked ODBM audiences about their top spiritual struggles and categorized responses by Persona. Criticizing others emerged as the most prevalent struggle globally, except in India and Indonesia where it placed second. Anger, discouragement, and fear also surfaced as widespread challenges among participants, demonstrating a shared experience regardless of their Persona.



Implications

The ODBM Impact studies revealed several key implications. While ODBM's content is widely appreciated for its biblical themes, inspirational nature, and relevance, it was found to be less effective in challenging followers to mature in their faith, particularly in the US, Indonesia, and Hong Kong. A significant portion of ODBM's long-term audience appeared to be experiencing spiritual stagnation, not consistently engaging with deeper biblical truths. Furthermore, many loyal followers (P3s) were not actively involved in discipleship or sharing their faith, indicating a need to equip them for the Great Commission.

After reviewing the findings, a central question for ODBM was how to help their followers become disciple-makers, recognizing that while many showed evidence of spiritual productivity, they lacked spiritual reproduction. With a large global following, ODBM decided to evolve from primarily offering encouragement to actively encouraging spiritual growth, discipleship, and disciple-making among its followers. This required a shift in their traditional content creation model to incorporate dynamic content recommendations, which would better meet the needs of individuals at different Personas.

Application and Challenges

Our Daily Bread Ministries applied learnings from CBE's Impact studies to inform the future direction of the ministry. Although ODBM had a historic interest in inspiring Christians of all types, the primary objective now is to motivate and equip all audiences to move forward on their journey from P1-P4. More specifically, the ministry wanted to provide their individual followers personalized guidance to encourage spiritual growth through frequent Bible engagement. This raised difficult questions:

- How could ODBM content be adapted to challenge and inspire spiritual growth (through Bible engagement) while retaining its encouraging and accessible nature?

- What specific strategies and resources could effectively guide users through different stages of spiritual development, leading them towards active discipleship?
- How could ODBM better understand the “spiritual heart language” of its diverse audience and personalize communication to resonate with their individual needs and motivations?

Addressing these challenges would help ODBM fulfill its mission “to make the life-giving wisdom of the Bible accessible to all” to an even greater extent. In addition, tackling these challenges would empower their audience to become active participants in the Great Commission.

In response to the research, ODBM has launched several initiatives to promote greater Bible engagement within their organization and in the wider Christian community. The initiatives include:

- **Strategic Planning** - Using a grid system to evaluate content based on spiritual growth potential, to assign Persona (P1-P4) ratings, and to provide a rationale for catalyzing spiritual growth.
- **Bible Engagement Practices** - Encouraging staff's regular engagement with Scripture.
- **Public Reading of Scripture** - Offering weekly gatherings for communal Bible engagement, prayer, and reflection.
- **Bible Engagement HR Training** - Incorporating this training into new employee onboarding.
- **Persona Categorization and Content Journeys** - Designing personalized Bible engagement journeys (P1 to P4) for global audience progression.
- **Translation and Global Reach** - Translating these journeys into multiple languages.
- **Online Learning** - Realigning the Artos Academy (formerly Our Daily Bread University) courses with P1 to P4 Bible engagement categories to better align courses with learner Personas.

The ministry is currently testing other Bible engagement initiatives to ensure they can be rolled out effectively on a global scale. The road, however, has not always been easy. ODBM encountered several obstacles and challenges along the way.

Key Challenges

CBE's Spiritual Assessment Model provides a snapshot of an individual's spiritual state at a given time. While longitudinal studies can indicate growth, the model itself does not offer guidance on engaging with the Bible. Furthermore, spiritual development is complex and depends on various factors beyond the model itself, including church attendance, prayer, and the work of the Holy Spirit, sometimes through life's trials.

One specific difficulty for ODBM was labeling spiritual journeys based on Persona categorization. Attempts to use alternative labels like "The Curious" or "Believers" for P1 to P4 were abandoned because they were often inaccurate or could cause confusion depending on the audience. Consequently, ODBM returned to the more generic "P1 to P4" naming convention for most communications.

A significant ongoing challenge is developing strategies to personalize the spiritual journey for individuals. CBE is conducting research to understand the specific obstacles hindering spiritual progression for those at P1 to P3 levels. Additionally, ODBM is collaborating with other organizations and ministries, such as the Bible Coalition, to create strategies that encourage Bible engagement at each Persona level.

The most critical difficulty lies in overcoming technological hurdles to efficiently address the diverse needs of individuals at each Persona. Personalization and targeted content delivery are essential, but current technology systems need streamlining to effectively share data and provide the right information at the right time.

Overall, these challenges underscore the necessity of a more individualized and nuanced approach to engaging audiences based on their Persona, requiring a deeper understanding of their specific needs at different stages of their spiritual journeys.

Looking Ahead

In response to the research, Our Daily Bread Ministries is developing long-term strategies to broaden its endeavors and fuel global Bible engagement inside and outside of the ministry's ecosystem.

- **Measuring Long-Term Impact** - ODBM plans to implement longitudinal studies, using our Spiritual Assessment Model and other tools, to see if the adjustments made within the ministry are helping audiences grow into disciplers and evangelists.
- **Research and Collaboration** - In partnership with regional ODBM offices, CBE has launched follow-up research to identify specific barriers to Bible engagement at each Persona and is developing strategies to overcome them. Our Daily Bread Ministries intends to publish this research in the coming months and openly share findings with churches, parachurch ministries, and other organizations to further God's Kingdom.
- **2033 Vision and Global Reach** - In 2033, Christians around the world will celebrate the 2,000-year anniversary of Jesus's resurrection (JC2033, 2024). In anticipation of the Church's celebration, ODBM intends to scale and advance its Bible engagement strategies worldwide. By 2033, and in alignment with a renewed focus on Jesus's Second Coming, the ministry hopes to lead people in every nation into personalized Bible engagement journeys in the major gateway languages.

In sum, this case study provides an overview of the ministry's use of CBE's Spiritual Assessment Model and how it informed (and continues to inform) the ministry's strategic direction. As a result, Our Daily Bread Ministries has implemented initiatives to help their followers strengthen their faith, progress through the Personas, and become more active participants in the Great Commission.



CONCLUSION

Previous research shows that while many Christians want to grow spiritually, they struggle to understand what “spiritual growth” or “spiritual maturity” actually means. Without specific goals, it’s difficult for them to know how to draw closer to God and strengthen their faith. We believe that spiritual growth, simply defined, is becoming more like Jesus through the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. Drawing on biblical principles and previous research, we developed a Spiritual Assessment Model to help people visualize spiritual growth and provide fundamental growth goals. The model can be used to measure progress over time through longitudinal studies.

CBE’s Spiritual Assessment Model has three basic components: key measures based on Scripture and our prior Power of 4 research, a survey instrument for gathering data, and a Persona Categorization framework that sorts individuals, communities, or populations into Personas (P1 to P4) based on survey responses. This model helps us to understand where people are on their spiritual journey using three key metrics: belief in salvation through faith, frequency of Bible engagement, and commitment to discipling others. In essence, these measures represent key milestones on a believer’s spiritual journey—and a natural progression towards loving God and loving others.

Our Spiritual Assessment Survey can help churches and organizations identify the spiritual needs of their members. We use an online questionnaire to gather self-reported data from participants and categorize individuals into four distinct Personas (P1 to P4). These levels range from those needing evangelism to those who are biblically engaged and active disciple-makers. In some respects, CBE’s Spiritual Assessment Model draws parallels with the four soils in the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-8), which emphasizes the importance of individual receptivity to the gospel. It considers our responsibility to be fertile soil. The supernatural result comes from the divine Word and the work of the Holy Spirit. As mentioned, spiritual growth is complex; it’s not always linear and can involve regressions along the way. Our model is simply a starting point, which can be used to understand and support people at different stages in their spiritual journey. For measurement purposes, we focused on the behavioral outcomes of the spiritual growth process. However, CBE does not promote a mechanistic view of Scripture. This model is not a “formula” that provides automatic and guaranteed results, nor are we promoting “works-righteousness.” We are simply pointing to the best predictive practices we can leverage for true spiritual fruit. “Just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions” (Matthew 7:20, NLT).



“

Just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions (Matthew 7:20, NLT)

To help illustrate CBE's Spiritual Assessment Model in a ministry setting, we provided a case study with Our Daily Bread Ministries, a global non-profit non-denominational organization that distributes more than 60 million resources in 150 countries. Through our research (using the model), ODBM found that a significant portion of their audience, particularly in the United States, was biblically engaged and using their devotional materials as a supplement to Bible reading. However, a large portion of their audience was not responding to what they read through discipleship. This led ODBM to pivot their content strategy from simply providing encouragement and inspiration to actively fostering spiritual growth and discipleship. The study also details initiatives ODBM implemented based on our Persona Categorization—like personalized Bible Engagement Journeys—to help audiences progress to spiritual maturity. In addition, we highlighted challenges the ministry faced while implementing these initiatives, such as finding alternate naming conventions for Personas, knowing how to help people engage with the Bible at each level, and finding technological solutions to deliver personalized content by Persona. Despite these issues, ODBM remains committed to fueling global Bible engagement through research, collaboration with churches and other organizations, and personalized content journeys translated in major world languages.

In summary, this case study and the information we provided about our Spiritual Assessment Model can empower ministries, churches, and other organizations to define spiritual growth, establish fundamental growth goals, and offer guidance for individuals and communities seeking to cultivate a deeper connection with Christ. Even a simple model can make a significant impact for God's Kingdom.



CONTRIBUTORS

CBE Collaborators:

Abigail C. Doolen, PhD, Researcher, ORCID: 0000-0002-9621-7233

Marianne Davis, Research Copywriter Specialist

Darryl Meekins, PhD, Senior Director of Learning Innovation, ORCID: 0000-0002-3282-5459

Tim Laniak, ThD, Senior Vice President of Global Content

J.R. Hudberg, Senior Director of Bible Engagement

Affiliate Researchers:

Arnold Cole, EdD

Pamela Caudill Ovwigho, PhD

CBE Contact Information:

research@odb.org

Our Daily Bread Ministries

3000 Kraft Avenue, SE

Grand Rapids, MI 49512

Images:

Our Daily Bread Ministries, "Our Daily Bread" Photo

Edward Cisneros on Unsplash, "Jesus" Photo

Rod Long on Unsplash, "You Are Loved" Photo

Aaron Burden on Unsplash, "Open Book" Photo

Marinela Malcheva/Getty Images, "Bible Passage" Photo

Alexander Ramsey on Unsplash, "Looking Forward" Photo

REFERENCES

Barna, George. 2022. "American Worldview Inventory 2022 Release #6: Only Half of Evangelical Pastors Possess a Biblical Worldview; Incidence Even Lower for Most Denominations." https://www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/AWVI2022_Release_06_Digital.pdf.

"2017 Bible-Minded Cities - Barna Group." 2023. Barna Group. October 7, 2023. <https://www.barna.com/research/2017>.

"Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity." n.d. Barna Group. <https://www.barna.com/research/many-churchgoers-and-faith-leaders-struggle-to-define-spiritual-maturity/>.

"Bible Engagement: A Key to Spiritual Growth." CBE. May 31, 2024. <https://www.centerforbibleengagement.org/post/bible-engagement-a-key-to-spiritual-growth>.

"How Do Frequent Church Attenders Define Spiritual Maturity?" 2009. https://www.centerforbibleengagement.org/_files/ugd/c59c7d_aa0a63a30dd14427bea7d02297954b07.pdf.

"JC2033, Celebrate 2000 Years since the Resurrection of Jesus Christ." 2024. JC2033. 2024. <https://www.jc2033.world/en/>

Cole, Arnie, and Pamela Ovwigho. 2022. Review of Our Daily Bread Spiritual Impact Assessment. Center for Bible Engagement (CBE).

"Research: Factors That Help and Hinder Bible Reading." CBE. June 3, 2024. <https://www.centerforbibleengagement.org/post/research-factors-that-help-and-hinder-bible-reading>.

"Who Really Uses Christian Media?" n.d. Accessed December 19, 2024. https://www.centerforbibleengagement.org/_files/ugd/c59c7d_e8d27536fd054ba8a8dcc296846f83a6.pdf.

Cole, Arnold, and Pamela Ovwigho. 2012. "Bible Engagement as the Key to Spiritual Growth a Research Synthesis." https://www.centerforbibleengagement.org/_files/ugd/c59c7d_28c00fc7279a44e8832f15503914c426.pdf.

Cole, Arnold, Ed and Pamela Caudill Ovwigho. 2009. "Research Findings on Scriptural Engagement, Communication with God, & Behavior among Young Believers: Implications for Discipleship." https://www.centerforbibleengagement.org/_files/ugd/c59c7d_5d3f70fc633a4c80a379c07d2705b51a.pdf.

Geiger, Eric, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation. 2012. Transformational Discipleship : How People Really Grow. Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Publishing Group.

Hawkins, Greg L, Cally Parkinson, Eric Arnson, and Bill Hybels. 2007. Reveal : Where Are You? Barrington, Ill.: Willow Creek Resources.

Laniak, Timothy S. 2024. The Good Shepherd. Our Daily Bread Publishing.

"Bringing Light to the Children of Buru Island." 2024. Odbm.org. 2024. <https://www.odbm.org/our-impact/stories-of-impact/bringing-light-to-the-children-of-buru-island>.

Ovwigho, Pamela Caudill. 2022. "Internal Document."

Tyndale. 2021. Immerse: Messiah (Softcover). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

ABOUT CBE

The Center for Bible Engagement (CBE) began in 2003 at Back to the Bible, and over the last 20 years, has grown into a global research center addressing Bible engagement and spiritual growth. CBE has studied the spiritual lives of more than 650,000 people across 19 languages and 23 countries. We go beyond usage statistics to consider attitudes and behaviors that significantly impact spiritual growth and a person's relationship with God. Our Daily Bread Ministries (ODBM) acquired CBE in 2023, and the center now plays a significant role in the ministries' commitment to provide the global Church with research-informed biblical content and practices. As a part of ODBM, CBE's new mission is to provide research that fuels global Bible engagement.

