

BIBLE ENGAGEMENT & “THE POWER OF 4”

A RESEARCH BRIEF FOR PASTORS





ABOUT THE **CENTER FOR BIBLE ENGAGEMENT (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. 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.



INTRODUCTION

What difference does engaging the Bible make in a person’s life? Scientifically, it makes a “profound” difference. Researchers from the Center for Bible Engagement (CBE), now the research arm of Our Daily Bread Ministries, inadvertently discovered that engaging the Bible four or more days a week is the single most powerful predictor of spiritual growth.

Over a span of eight years, CBE asked more than 100,000 people around the world about virtually every spiritual practice common in Christianity. The practices CBE considered included prayer, Bible engagement, meditation, fasting, church attendance, Sunday school, Bible study, small groups, reading non-fiction books, reading fiction books, listening to Christian music, mission trips, and Christian schools. None of these practices predict spiritual growth as consistently as Bible engagement.

This finding from CBE research is now widely known as **“The Power of 4”** (Po4).

ABOUT THE “PO4” RESEARCH

Controlling for age, gender, church attendance, and prayer practices, CBE found that a person who engages with the Bible is much more likely to share their faith and disciple others, give financially to a charity, and memorize Scripture.

Regularly reading and reflecting on God’s Word also produces more peace in life. Per the study, Bible engagement reduces emotional struggles with loneliness, bitterness, or fear. People are also less likely to feel spiritually stagnant or that they can’t please God.

In addition, CBE discovered that engaging with the Bible four or more times a week relates to reduced risks in certain temptations, such as:

- Overeating or mishandling food
- Extramarital sex
- Viewing pornography
- Neglecting family
- Lying
- Lashing out in anger
- Drinking to excess
- Gossiping
- Overspending or mishandling money

THE POWER OF 4

A key CBE discovery is that the life of someone who engages Scripture four or more times a week looks radically different from the life of someone who does not. In fact, the lives of Christians who do not engage with the Bible most days of the week look no different from the lives of non-believers.

Someone who engages with the Bible four or more times a week is:

228%

more likely to share their faith with others

407%

more likely to memorize Scripture

59%

less likely to view pornography

30%

less likely to struggle with loneliness

FAST FACTS: “THE POWER OF 4”

Bible Engagement = Receiving + Reflecting + Responding to God’s Word to create “Holy Spirit opportunities” for spiritual growth



PROACTIVE FAITH

218% TO 416% INCREASE IN:

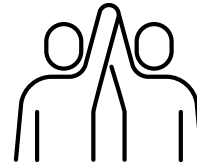
- Sharing faith with others
- Charitable contributions
- Disciplining others
- Memorizing Scripture



REDUCED RISKY BEHAVIORS

20% TO 62% REDUCTION IN:

- Overeating or mishandling food
- Extramarital sex
- Pornography
- Family neglect
- Lying
- Lashing out in anger
- Drinking to excess
- Gossiping
- Overspending or mishandling money



FEWER STRUGGLES

14% TO 60% REDUCTION IN:

- Thinking destructively about self or others
- Thinking unkindly about others
- Feeling spiritually stagnant
- Feeling like one can’t please God
- Loneliness
- Bitterness
- Difficulty forgiving self or others
- Feeling need to hide
- Discouragement
- Fear or anxiety

**Bible Engagement:
A Key to Spiritual Growth**



BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR “P04”

Although we cannot conclude from the research that Bible engagement causes behaviors, we know from the Bible that God’s Word is a primary means for the Holy Spirit to transform His people.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
—2 Timothy 3:16-17

As significant as “The Power of 4” research is in measuring spiritual growth, no one should take a superstitious or “magical” view of the Bible, as if engagement is a formula with automatic and guaranteed results. Neither is the research promoting works-righteousness. Rather, it supports what the Bible says about itself and what millions of followers have discovered in their journey of faith through the centuries. Regularly receiving, reflecting on, and responding to God’s Word has a profound and measurable impact on the lives of individuals.

Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. —
Matthew 7:20



“

All Scripture is God-breathed
and is useful for teaching,
rebuking, correcting and
training in righteousness.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16

BIBLE ENGAGEMENT

We define Bible engagement as receiving (or reading), reflecting, and responding to God’s Word to create “Holy Spirit opportunities” that transform lives.



Humbly receiving God’s Word is based on James 1:21: “... humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.”



Prayerfully reflecting means to “meditate” and consider what God is saying to us personally through Scripture, which is taken from both Psalm 1 and James 1.



Obediently responding aligns with James 1:25: “But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.”

“

Supernatural fruitfulness is the goal. Bible engagement is the means, and it’s the one thing we can measure.

FOR PASTORS: COMMENTARY

Scripture is our primary source for revelation about God and the path to salvation. It is central to the covenants God makes with His people and the framework for our relationship with Him. Scripture answers questions about where we came from, why we exist, and what is expected of us. The Bible is also the primary means for our sanctification.



In some passages, God’s Word is described as a living force: “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

“It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). The supernatural potency of God’s living Word is directed at the life of every believer to bring about transformation.

The “3 Rs” and “The Power of 4” demonstrate predictable transformational results that the Bible itself promises. For example, Psalm 1 figuratively describes a person who delights in God’s Torah and meditates on it “day and night.” This person is like a tree planted by a river, producing fruit in season.

The rhythm and regularity of humbly **receiving** God’s Word is a theme throughout Scripture. It was the parents’ responsibility to make God’s Word an ordinary part of daily life, with oral and visual reinforcement (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

Unlike non-biblical forms of meditation that seek to empty one’s mind, biblical meditation is intimate, prayerful **reflection** on God’s Word. We are “transformed by the renewing of our minds” (Romans 12:2).

We activate the truths of the Christian life by “setting our hearts and minds” on them (Colossians 3:1-2). Paul’s final words to Timothy remind him of the need to stay grounded in what he has learned from God’s Word (2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14-17).

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For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

HEBREWS 4:12

The final, necessary step in the daily Bible engagement journey is obedient **response**. A primary word for obey in the Old Testament (*shema*) literally translates as “to listen responsively.” This nuance was captured in the King James Version with the word “hearken.”

Receiving Scripture draws us into the text where its plain meaning is obvious. **Reflecting** invites God to speak more personally into our context as it resonates with similar situations and feelings. **Response** is the call to action that inevitably follows if we allow God to speak.

Remember that obedient response is not “works-righteousness” generated by human effort; it is what God does in us and through us.

Some may wonder how Bible engagement relates to the spiritual practices of quiet time, devotions, *lectio divina*, meditation, the Public Reading of Scripture, and liturgical readings. CBE research gave people an opportunity to describe the different ways

they engage the Bible. What makes the difference is not the type of practice but the presence of the “3 Rs”—receiving, reflecting, and responding.

This rhythm can be present in virtually any Bible reading or listening, as long as we are intentional, and as long as Scripture is the primary content.

There are many Bible study programs available. The effective ones involve more than just reading. The reflection part may involve answering questions individually or in a group. The response part may be a matter of private decision or lived out with accountability.

In sum, “The Power of 4” reinforces the importance of the biblical norm of daily engagement, with four times per week being the minimum for dramatic transformation over time.



MOVING FORWARD WITH “P04”

As a predictor of spiritual growth, frequent Bible engagement has the potential to help believers grow spiritually into disciple-makers and evangelists. The implications of “The Power of 4,” then, are wide-reaching and profound for Christian pastors and leaders, churches, and evangelistic ministries:

- Increased love for God and neighbor
- Greater understanding and appreciation of diversity
- Seeing the church as part of a global community
- Becoming stronger witnesses for Jesus
- Effectively discipling others and leading them into a personal relationship with Him
- Deeper spiritual formation, evidenced by fruitfulness in God’s Kingdom

In summary, we believe that regularly receiving, reflecting, and responding to God’s Word has the power to change hearts across the world.

In the coming months, CBE plans to provide additional research to help pastors and church leaders better understand the spiritual health of their congregations, remove barriers to Bible engagement, and support people on their discipleship journeys.

We invite you to share research ideas to help fuel global Bible engagement, as well. Contact research@odb.org for more information.



**Build on previous
research**



**Research-based
discipleship journeys**



**Fueling the global
movement**

SERMON OUTLINE

TITLE:

Bible Engagement & “The Power of 4”

MAIN IDEA:

Drawing close to God through His Word makes a measurable difference in a life—theologically and scientifically.

OVERVIEW:

Deeper and frequent engagement in the Bible creates “Holy Spirit opportunities” to transform lives. Supernatural fruitfulness is the goal (Psalm 1 and Galatians 5:13-26).

Bible engagement is the means, and it’s measurable.

INTRODUCTION:

Christianity is unique among religions in its emphasis on a relationship between God and man. For this relationship to mature, it requires regular two-way communication: We hear from God (through Scripture) and talk to Him (through prayer). Hearing from God through His Word helps us grow spiritually so that we can “become more like Jesus.” It’s a proven fact.

BODY:

Nothing predicts spiritual growth like Bible engagement does.

- 1. Bible engagement creates “Holy Spirit opportunities” to transform a life.**
 - a. Receive - James 1:21
 - b. Reflect - Psalm 1 and James 1
 - c. Respond - James 1:25

- 2. The “Power of 4” is a predictable measure of spiritual growth. Relates to:**
 - a. Increases in proactive behaviors (giving, evangelizing, discipling)
 - b. Decreases in emotional struggles (creates more peace in life)
 - c. Decreases in risky behaviors (helps people resist temptations)

- 3. What the Bible has to say (spiritual growth = sanctification)**
 - a. Biblical perspective: Transforming power of God’s Word (verses)
 - b. Historical perspective: Daily devotion in early Church
 - c. Bible engagement connects us with the living Word of God.

CONCLUSION:

If you haven’t listened to God through His Word lately, come back to Him. Meditate on His promises, and allow His healing truth to transform you.

RELATED “P04” RESEARCH

HOW BIBLE ENGAGEMENT IMPACTS CHILDREN’S BEHAVIOR

How does engaging with the Bible correlate with moral behavior among children?

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RESULTS: BIBLE LITERACY & SPIRITUAL GROWTH

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CONFRONTING THE “ELEPHANT IN THE PEW”

Many churches recognize the toll sexual temptation is taking on families and are confronting the “elephant in the pew.”

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