



The Open Generation

World Vision Canada Report Summary

Letter from the President

Conversations with young people are a rewarding part of my work, whether overseas on a field visit, at a Canadian school discussing the work of World Vision, or with young leaders I have been privileged to help mentor as they make career choices.

When I listen to youth discuss their vision for the future, I am always encouraged. Listening is at the heart of this study zeroing in on the thoughts, wisdom, and experiences of Canadian youth. Specifically, you will learn how teens perceive Jesus, the Bible and social action in a digital, questioning, and experiential age.

In 2021, World Vision Canada partnered with Barna Group, an independent research firm that specializes in insights on faith and culture, to gather the perspectives of young people in the emerging generation of 13-17 years old. This was Barna's largest study in its history. Now, along with a collective of other partners around the globe, our goal is to learn from this brand-new study of teenagers and try to help you walk even more effectively alongside the young people you serve. Enjoy this deep dive into the Open Generation; an authentic, inclusive, cohort with optimism and ability to be the change-makers the world needs, given the opportunity.

You may remember the Connected Generation report from 2021, which surveyed 18–35-year-olds in Canada and around the world and told a slightly different and more sobering story than this one. One of the most significant differences we see is the openness of this younger group compared to

the anxiety and isolation expressed by their older peers. That is good news.

The Open Generation have grown up deeply digital, with a world of beliefs, customs, and lifestyles at their fingertips. They are aware of their interconnectedness with others, and they welcome the perspectives, faiths and cultures that are different from their own or those of the prevailing culture in which they live. Their awareness of how others live has helped nurture a passion for addressing injustice in the world. They want things to be fair. They also want to know their lives matter and that they can make a difference.

As leaders who work with children and youth and want to serve them well (and are also deeply aware of how much we can learn from young people), these insights are so valuable. They are also actionable. Engaging and empowering young people who want to change their world has always been at the heart of World Vision. Young people who are heard and affirmed as powerful change-makers—today as well as in the future—can make the world better. World Vision has seen this repeatedly, all over the world. Let us consider together what next steps we can take in our lives and ministry on behalf of and because of the Open Generation.



MICHAEL MESSENGER

President, World Vision Canada



Who are the Open Generation?

The world is evolving with every generation. We can see new trends, new technology, new interests and new opportunities. The Open Generation is made up of young people, born roughly between 1997 and 2012. Our researchers found “a lightness of being” among today’s teens that sets them apart from even their slightly older peers. They are inclined toward hope and a belief that the world can change for the better. Here are some highlights from this generation:

- The Open Generation expressed optimism about the future, even though the surveys happened during the global pandemic.
- Canadian youth were less likely to say they experience fear and pressure to be successful or perfect. At the same time, they were also less likely to feel optimistic and confident. Their emotional profile was more “muted” overall than the global average. Their highs were not as high, and their lows were not as low as their international peers.
- Nearly half of Canadian teens identify as Christian but only culturally or nominally engaged in their faith.
- Teens in Canada do not seem as embedded in or as comfortable with their communities as

their global peers. Canadian teens appear to feel they stand in the margins of their faith and home communities.

- A substantial 42% of teens are atheist, agnostic or of no faith.
- Even though their engagement may be nominal, Canadian teens of the Open Generation are incredibly open to thinking and talking about justice, Jesus, and the Bible.

METHODOLOGY

The Barna Group conducted online, representative public opinion surveys for this research. Parents helped recruit the teens to participate in the quantitative survey. The parents of the teens first answered seven screening questions, which included demographics such as age, gender, and ethnicity. Between July 21, 2019, and Aug. 24, 2021, 24,557 respondents ages 13 to 17 across 26 countries were surveyed. One thousand and one Canadian teens from coast to coast participated in the survey.

 **24,557**
Responses

 **26**
Countries

 **1,001**
Canadian teens

How do teens in Canada relate to Jesus?

Globally, Jesus has a very good reputation.

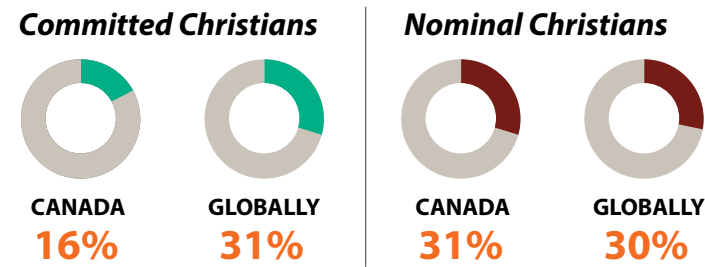
Overall, teens believe Jesus represents love, hope, care, generosity, and trustworthiness. However, that does not mean they believe all the things about Jesus they may have been taught in church or youth group. For example, Christian teens in Canada are less likely than their Christian peers around the world to say that Jesus was a miracle worker, that he was raised from the dead or that Jesus will return one day.

Christian teens in Canada do, however, describe Jesus in positive and comforting terms. But when it comes to Jesus being trustworthy, only 44% of Canadian teens agree that he is, compared to 55% of Christian teens from other countries.

Does a connection to Jesus bring joy and satisfaction? Globally, three-quarters of committed Christian teens say so. In Canada, not so much. Here, we discover a 20-point drop in the percentage of committed Christian teens who agree. This disparity between Canada and the rest of the world pops up again in whether teens find relevance in what Jesus has to say.

Curiosity about Jesus is alive and well globally. In Canada, 43% of teens describe themselves as “somewhat motivated” to keep learning about Jesus throughout their lives.

Teen Stages of Faith Comparison



Where do they go to learn? In Canada, teens may place a significant amount of trust in religious texts, community and in their own households to teach them about Jesus, more so than from social media, the Internet, their friends or influencers. Beyond the Bible, committed Christian teens in Canada access a church leader, family member or other clergy with their curiosity about Jesus. Nominal Christian teens, meanwhile, are most likely to turn to a family member first, then to clergy—and then rely on themselves.

CONSIDER

How can teens’ empathetic tendencies be harnessed and aligned with Jesus’ heart for people and creation?

“Jesus speaks to me in a way that is relevant to my life” say committed Christian teens globally (72%) but fewer in Canada (50%).

“My relationship with Jesus brings me deep joy and satisfaction” say committed Christian teens globally (76%) but fewer in Canada (56%).

How do teens in Canada view the Bible?

Teen Bible Engagement Categories:

Bible-engaged teens: Believe the Bible is God’s Word and read it several times a week.

Bible-open teens: Hold a high view of the Bible but read less often; or have a neutral view.

Bible-unengaged teens: Includes all other teens in Canada.

The Bible can be found in Canadian households, with 52% of teens in Canada—including 85% of Christian teens—reporting their household owns one. Although most Canadian teens view the Bible as important and sacred, they don’t dip in very often. More than half of Canadian teens (53%), never use a Bible, but one in three Christian teens interacts with scripture weekly.

Overall, Canadian teens are more skeptical than their global peers, weighing in at 14% less likely to say the Bible is the Word of God.

Even though the Open Generation are digital experts, Canadian teens still engage with their Bibles in print (48%), far ahead of other mediums (17% smartphone or tablet, 9% online).

Those who do read the Bible, here and elsewhere around the world, report finding enjoyment in reading and reflecting. But for Canadian respondents, there was a clear struggle to care about the Bible. Sometimes far more than their global peers, teens in Canada note barriers like a lack of understanding, lack of interest, lack of focus and a lack of enjoyment in Bible-reading.

Where do Canadian teens go for help learning to read and understand the Bible? Typically, the home. Parents or guardians taught 29% of teens who are Bible users to study the Bible. One in five Canadian teens who read the Bible say they were taught by



a pastor, priest, minister, Sunday school teacher or Bible study leader, with twice as many Bible-engaged teens receiving instruction from these sources. Relationships are key to teens continuing to interact meaningfully with the Bible.

Canadian Christian teens aren’t as likely as their global peers to report that they receive wisdom on how the Bible applies to their lives within their church (27% and 42%, respectively).

16% of Canadian teens report uncertainty about what to believe about the Bible.

34% of Christian teens in Canada report feeling very or somewhat motivated to learning more about the Bible throughout their lives.

53% of Canadian teens never use a Bible.

CONSIDER

Teens prefer to read the Bible alone and mostly view Bible-reading as personal and reflective. Yet data also shows community is essential to vibrant, ongoing Bible engagement. How can teens be nudged toward a balance of personal reflection and community participation in their approach to scripture?

How Teens in Canada Can Make an Impact

We know that teens can be some of the most passionate and courageous spokespersons for change in the world. However, the actual motivation to make measurable changes in the world might lag behind their passion. We delved into what teens around the world care most about, and what might be influencing their perceived ability to change the world for the better.

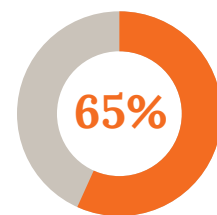
When asked to list global problems, teens answered differently depending on where they lived. Globally, most teens listed extreme poverty (38%), global climate change (35%), sexual abuse (33%) and unemployment (33%) as the most pressing issues. In Canada—and much of the West—teens listed mental health issues as greatest concern (42%), then global climate change (39%) and racial injustice (37%). Just under 1/3 of Canadian teens listed extreme poverty.

Our research suggests it's important that adults who work with teens discern whether teens lack motivation in general, or whether teens don't understand or appreciate their capacity to act against injustice. **We explored justice motivation based on a combination of categories: conviction, confidence and commitment of teens.** Justice-motivated teens display all three. Justice-oriented teens meet two categories. Justice-neutral teens meet none of the categories.

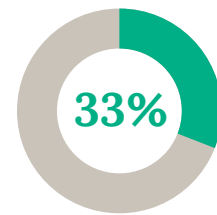
Wherever teens in Canada fell in those categories, they all agree that individuals should be encouraging others and advocating toward meaningful change. Teens who are justice-oriented, even more than justice-motivated, believe "learning about the sources of in-justice" is an important step.

Teens don't generally view the Church or its leaders as having major roles in justice, but justice-motivated Canadian teens do look to the Church

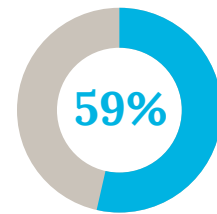
to try to champion justice. Teens want to see advocacy through churches and Christian leaders and Canadian teens, having listed mental health as a major issue of concern, want to attend churches that prioritize this issue.



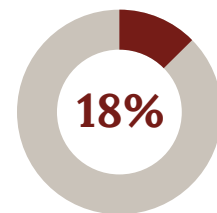
65% of Canadian teens believe the government should play a major role in addressing justice.



33% believe religious leaders should also play a major role.



59% of committed Canadian teen Christians recognize that Jesus advocated for justice.



18% of Canadian teens believe teaching that the Bible encourages special kindness to people who are experiencing injustice is an important way the Church can fight injustice.

CONSIDER

Teens steadily report a motivation to address injustice and a belief that their generation can make an impact. This is a rare point on which teens in Canada match the global average. Where do you think this optimism comes from? How can it be shaped into empowerment, confidence and equipping?

An Open Door to the Next Generation

We set out to learn how teens view Jesus, the Bible and justice, and we discovered a clear picture of how they view themselves, their families, their communities and the Church. There is optimism, confidence, and a sense of community in the responses of teens globally, with, although still present, a more subdued level expressed by Canadian youth.

- Canadian teens of the Open Generation are open to thinking and talking about justice, Jesus, and the Bible. They are open to faith.
- In Canada, 27% of committed Christian teens are Bible-engaged, and 21% of Christian teens are justice-oriented.
- 82% of Bible-engaged teens are committed Christians, and 24% of Bible-engaged teens are justice-motivated.
- Canadian teens view Jesus positively and are motivated and curious to keep learning about him. They view the Church and its leaders, after family, as a source of education about Jesus.
- Although teens don't view the Church or its leaders as having major roles in justice, justice-motivated Canadian teens do look to the Church to champion justice.

Christian teens in Canada experience a meaningful overlap in their commitment to follow Jesus, their engagement with scripture, and their motivation to make an impact in the world; but it's also clear there is room to grow. Churches and other organizations might ask themselves why youth do not already perceive them as advocates for justice in their communities and in the world.

Working for justice is central to the work of World Vision, as is engaging the next generation to step more fully into their roles as change-makers around the world and in Canada. We know that although the Open Generation is open-hearted and optimistic, they seem to experience a disconnect between their causes, perceived priorities of the Church and its leaders, and their belief in their own abilities to affect the change they want to see.

The Open Generation is open to participation in something that matters and to changing the world for the better. They like Jesus. Some of them love Jesus. They are open to guidance and learning from the Church and its leaders. They want community in their lives. The door is open.

World Vision Resources to help equip your next steps.

- Download the full Canadian report after the October 26th event, at
- As you help youth make connections between the issues they care about, the Bible and what it teaches about justice, and the role of the Church, consider partnering with Canadian organizations that already work for justice nationally and globally.

Motivate your youth to step out of their comfort zones during this one week digital challenge. Visit the link above.



World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organization working to create lasting change in the lives of children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian values, World Vision is dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.