



AMERICAN  
BIBLE  
SOCIETY

# The Changemakers Project



C A S E   S T A T E M E N T

2021-2024

# DO IT AGAIN. IN OUR TIME.

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Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

In 1816, the United States Constitution was not yet 30 years old. Already, this experiment in government grounded in biblical principles had experienced four presidents, three peaceful transitions of power, two westward expansions, and one final war with the British.

As the size and scale of the young nation exploded, a small group of business, civic, and church leaders began meeting that year to discuss a central challenge for the nation, one posed by national leaders as diverse as Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson—that “only a virtuous people are capable of freedom.”

Informed by the research of a young Samuel Mills who brought back reports of a virtue-less frontier, and their own experiences of turning a Constitution’s ideals into a Nation’s practices, they evaluated their times, took stock of their positions in society, identified key obstacles, developed innovative strategies, prayed diligently, and then wove all those strands together in a bold vision declared to the nation on May 11 of 1816:

There is nothing more magnificent to behold, or more moving to the human heart, than an entire nation unified in pouring forth its devotion, its talent, and its treasure for God’s Kingdom of peace and love.

American Bible Society was formed by many of America’s founders on that vision of “an entire nation unified ... for God’s Kingdom of peace and love.” A virtuous nation, these founders knew, would produce more of God’s Kingdom in their time.

More than 205 years later, as the nation approaches its 250th birthday, it is time for America’s business, civic, and church leaders to again meet to discuss the challenges of our times.

Are we a nation doomed to despair by the currents of discord, distrust, division, and disease? Or can we be part of healing a nation’s bitter demons in order to summon its better angels?

American Bible Society’s founding vision is unchanged. We have no choice, no option, no say in the matter. We are committed to doing our part to see a nation, and a world, deeply rooted in God’s Word and vibrant Christian community. A unified nation pouring forth its devotion, talent, and treasure.

ABS has no choice in this matter. But you do. You have to decide how much expertise and attention and energy you invest in this journey of helping our nation rediscover its lost roots, reconnect with its guiding documents, and realize more of its founding ideals.

Will you join us as we evaluate our times, take stock of our positions in society, identify key obstacles, develop innovations for these days, pray diligently, and connect it all with a bold vision to be a nation deeply rooted in God’s Word and in vibrant, flourishing, and virtuous Christian community? As our founders declared, this is a transformed America, one “pouring forth its devotion, its talent, and its treasure for God’s Kingdom.”

Will you join us in prayer and action that calls out to heaven in the words of Habakkuk: “Come Lord, and do it again. In our time.”

Sincerely,



**Robert L. Briggs**  
*President and CEO*  
*American Bible Society*

# A MORE PERFECT UNION NEEDS THE BIBLE

Throughout America’s history, the men and women whose lives most boldly declared the nation’s ideal of “liberty and justice for all” have drawn inspiration from Scripture. These Changemakers were empowered and emboldened by the Word of God. In its pages, they discovered eternal truths and guidance for how to live right with God and thus with one another. Changemakers then—and now—live the Word.

In 1787, these eternal truths were embedded in a new American Constitution that envisioned a “more perfect union” where faith undergirds liberty and guides a virtuous nation toward “the Blessings of Liberty.”

John Adams stated that “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

In 1816, our founders launched American Bible Society to undergird a young nation with the Bible’s truths and Christ’s message. Through this ministry, the Bible was made more readily available so Americans could explore and experience for themselves its life-changing message. In an era soaked in biblical language and context, ABS’s core work of translation, contextualization, and low-cost provision was the right strategy for the time.



Today, however, we stand at a crossroads. Our culture is no longer soaked in biblical language and context. Bibles are abundant and accessible, but spiritual formation and virtuous lives come from digging into AND living out the Bible. Lacking context and a supportive culture, that journey of discovery and transformation is simply too much for too many people.

Like our founders, we must understand our times. They hired Samuel Mills and others; today, we employ a tight team of top-tier researchers to explore and understand our time.

Our own State of the Bible research projects that only 1 in 5 U.S. adults will be engaged with Scripture in the next decade, down from 1 in 4

just a few years ago; this key indicator of spiritual formation is at risk.

And we don’t just rely on our own studies. Gallup finds membership in houses of worship continuing a 20-year, 20-point decline to 47 percent; Pew Research Center tracks the rise of the “nones” to nearly 1 in 4 in the U.S.

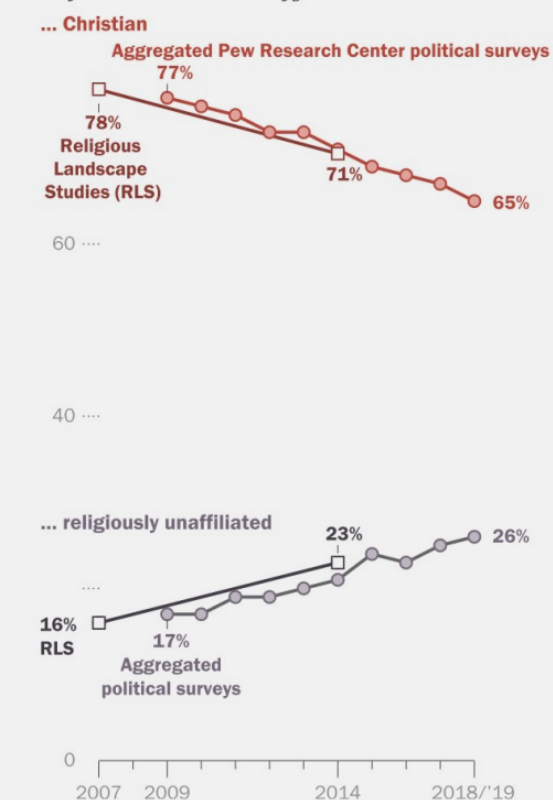
Today’s questions are the same ones asked 200 years ago: Will our children inherit a country shaped by people whose choices and relationships are unformed by eternal truth? Or will God once again raise up a generation of Changemakers inspired and guided by the promises of his Word, relentlessly seeking a vibrant, virtuous nation?

**America needs a national effort to see more people deeply rooted in God’s Word, with the Bible “shaping their choices and transforming their relationships with God, self and others.”**

**People need an invitation for this time that helps them discover the Bible’s message, and experience the life-change that it offers, growing the number of Kingdom-minded changemakers in communities across America.**

## In U.S., smaller share of adults identify as Christians, while religious ‘nones’ have grown

% of U.S. adults who identify as ...



Source: Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Studies (2007 and 2014). Aggregated Pew Research Center political surveys conducted 2009-July 2019 on the telephone.

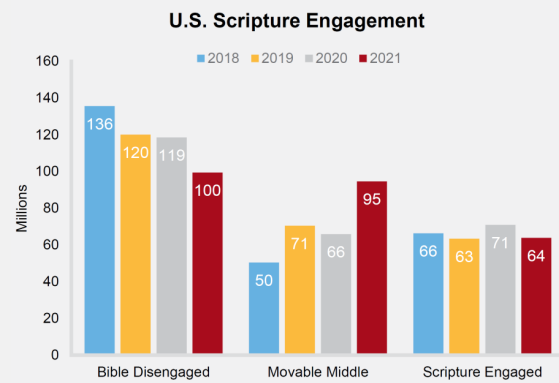
“In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

# Room for Hope

Despite the challenges, we have good reasons to be optimistic about the future of Bible engagement in America, and in a future union made more perfect by the power and promises of the Bible. There are two compelling reasons for this hope:

1. More Americans are OPEN to the Bible than ever before. While Scripture engagement has remained steady over the past three years, the pandemic, social and political unrest, and other factors have nearly doubled the number of people open to engaging with the Bible. They just need an invitation and simple first steps to begin. 95 million Americans are open to experience the fulfilling message of God’s Word. Many of these people are not in church.



*A “Spiritual DNA” system will help the Movable Middle take the next step that’s right for them.*

2. We now KNOW many of the reasons why Americans are not engaging with the Bible. These can be summed up as the “Product Problem”—it is hard to understand or know where to get started—and the “People Problem”—a lack of good examples in an individual’s life of someone filled with grace, mercy, and all biblical virtues. As Jesus said, “If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples” (John 13:35 GNT).

*Changemakers are all who live the Word; this effort will encourage, organize, motivate, and equip those who commit their service as part of this national effort.*



# THE CHANGEMAKERS PROJECT— AN IDEA FOR OUR TIME

What are we doing to invite the next generation of Changemakers to engage in and demonstrate the life-changing message of God?

This year—2021—ABS opened the Faith and Liberty Discovery Center, an immersive experience on Philadelphia’s Independence Mall and online, inviting the nation to engage with American history through Changemakers. These Bible-inspired lives shaped the moral aspirations of our nation; from them we derived the Discovery Center’s central premise: “Faith guides liberty toward justice.” And as people of faith, we know that the only way to realize just and moral aspirations is through God’s Word. As John Adams said:

**“Public virtue cannot exist in a nation without private virtue, and public virtue is the only foundation of republics.”**

In 2022, American Bible Society will launch the Changemakers Project. This history-shaping initiative will invite people to discover how the Bible makes a difference: in life, in the life of your family, in neighborhoods and cities, in our nation, in Christ’s Church. Now. And for eternity.

Like our founders, our job is to discern the right idea for our time. The right idea for our founders’ time was to make the Bible available, accessible, affordable. And they succeeded. At any price point, in any format, in any of hundreds of languages ... anyone in the United States who wants a Bible can have one.

But 2021 is not 1816. Many Americans have experienced physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual tumult from a pandemic, from unrest, from division. A lack of rootedness leaves many wandering, searching for purpose and community.

This is our challenge and opportunity, to find ways to get people to experience the reality of the gospel message for themselves. We commit to the cause our research, experience, partnerships, and hundreds of thousands of relationships. A national platform allows us to find more effective Scripture engagement methods and amplify the witness of local church Changemakers—the gospel living in thousands of places and millions of lives.

In 2020, American Bible Society explicitly clarified that the Bible’s message calls us to promote justice for all people, for all races. God is just, and He has called us to pursue justice for all. (Micah 6:8)

**For millions, life’s traumatic events can be the primary barrier to engaging with the Bible.**

For ten years, American Bible Society has steadily deepened its expertise in trauma healing; what began in central Africa has become a central component of our work around the world, and now right here at home.

Our trauma healing program infuses the Bible with best practices from clinical psychology to help the suffering grapple with life’s big questions. It introduces them to a God who cares, who cries, who comforts; a God who is ever present in times filled with trouble.

This critical engine of hope - trauma healing - has proven to be the most effective Scripture engagement approach we’ve seen to date. It is also equally effective at reducing trauma symptoms (for more background, ask us about the Baylor University study or our longitudinal research from central Africa).

Trauma Healing is an excellent example of the type of Scripture engagement practices we seek to spread across the nation, enabling volunteers to truly be agents of life-change.

Cohorts of Changemakers are already in place in churches, prisons, and military communities across the country; it is from this base we begin.

With the Church, we carry the Bible’s message that God’s promises are indeed directed to “all people” (Psalm 33:5, Jeremiah 9:24). We commit to applying God’s Word to bring healing to the hearts of those affected by trauma. We now know that trauma’s effects cross generations; for too many Americans, slavery’s legacy of indignity lives on and must be named and healed. (Lamentations 3:19-26) We acknowledge both the benefits of the Bible’s influence in our history, and the painful times in history when the Bible was used or understood improperly. Our past is not a perfect one, brokenness is part of the human

condition. Humbly embracing the pain of the past will open the door to healing across our divides; the Bible and Church are essential for this Kingdom work.

**The right idea for our time is an alliance of churches and ministries helping all people take the next step towards God and others. We will relentlessly research what works, deliver a “library” of targeted biblical experiences and next steps, including trauma healing, and create a national showcase to amplify the work of the local church.**

# A VISION FOR OUR TIME: TWO GREAT OBJECTS

The English reformer William Wilberforce—who launched the Bible Society movement—described his life’s purpose as his “two great objects.” Our vision is that we would be a nation deeply rooted in

1. God’s Word, and
2. Transformative, vibrant Christian community.

Every year, we study how America is doing on these two measures to inform our strategies and influence next steps for the Movable Middle, the 95 million adults in America who are open to the Bible.

## DEEPLY ROOTED

Our State of the Bible research tracks the trends of U.S. adults and their relationship to the Bible, to one another, to material things, to suffering, to joy. We regularly inform other ministries and are cited by leading Christian media. And in a first, ABS produced a peer-reviewed 2021 journal article in collaboration with researchers at Harvard University’s T. H. Chan School of Public Health. This is what we know: people who engage with the Bible in community are transformed. Transformation lags or stalls for people who read the Bible on their own. Observations like these will be central to shaping biblical experiences.

## VIBRANT COMMUNITY

As measured by Harvard University’s Human Flourishing Index, the more Bible-centered people are, the more they, and in turn our country, flourish or experience a life marked by:

- More happiness and life satisfaction
- Improved mental and physical health
- Deep meaning and purpose in life
- Strengthened character and virtue
- Satisfying personal relationships

### IMPACT | BIBLE & SOCIETY

**64M people** described as “centered”

**Generous:** give 10x more to charity than others

**Forgiving:** more able to forgive others for hurts

**Involved:** 3x more likely to participate in Church

**Service:** volunteer to serve in their communities\*

**Flourishing:** living healthy lives of meaning and purpose

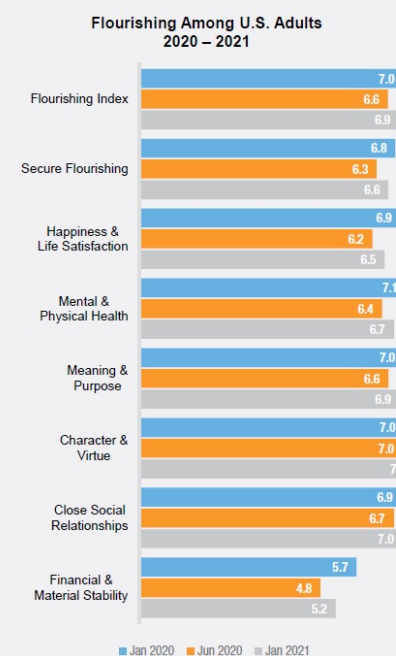


## Vibrant Christian Community

For America and its people to experience “vibrant Christian community” (i.e., a flourishing one), being deeply rooted in God’s Word is critical. And the relationship heads the other direction as well. People deeply rooted in God’s Word cannot but help spread “flourishing.”

*A “more perfect union” isn’t about government; it is about living well with one another. A vibrant Christian community of people, deeply rooted in God’s Word, is how that “union” is realized, how God’s Kingdom comes closer.*

This year’s State of the Bible included the first national study over time of flourishing among U.S. adults (pp. 92–98). Some of the key insights that frame this strategy are:



*“Holistic well-being is not determined by one’s financial status. Except among America’s lowest-income households, there is no relationship between flourishing and income. Conversely, Scripture engagement and church engagement are significant predictors of holistic well-being.”*

*“Hope and human flourishing vary across demographics, but it is consistently true that involvement in church community and engagement with the Bible are central components of the good life for many Americans. Likewise, those who practice the Christian faith on a regular basis move into the future with an overall better outlook on life. Their future is bright and hopeful.”*

*“For many Americans, hope and even flourishing are hard-won and have occurred alongside trauma or a lack of stability. There is a sense that their lived experience—not naivete or a desire for a ‘feel-good’ gospel—anchors them in Scripture, faith, and church, and vice versa.”*

# THREE STRAND STRATEGY

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**The right strategy for our time is to organize around today’s two great objects, and—with partners—articulate a great cause to accelerate a national effort.**

How we do this has three inter-woven strands:



- 1. ADVOCATE | Shape cultural narratives** by framing a transcendent cause in language for today, using story to influence perceptions of the church through research and the impact of local Changemakers. We’ll start by linking to church networks, and with them convene a national coalition of the motivated.

## **Starting Points**

People are motivated by stories. We inspire people through stories delivered in multiple media and forms that are both innovative and experiential. Mobilize new generations to understand and reproduce the biblical influence on the lives of heroes like Sojourner Truth, William Penn, John Jay, and other Changemakers highlighted in the Faith and Liberty Discovery Center.

Use the Faith and Liberty Institute to leverage the location, content, and platform of the Center, and use media to promote national thought leadership on the role of the Bible in American society through research, commentary, and educational events targeted to networks of influencers.

Utilize earned and social media channels available to the entire network to elevate stories of the local and national impact of today’s Changemakers, making compassion accessible and visible.



- 2. EXPERIENCE | Engage and involve** hands-on experiences, providing tested tools and approaches for local and national church networks to quickly identify their unique “Spiritual DNA” and the right “next steps” to take, either as a church or an individual. Incorporate our trauma healing and prayer networks as first users.

## **Starting Points**

Today’s generations crave experiences, even as that pursuit leaves them empty. The Changemakers Project, through its church and local networks, can offer focused, tailored next-step experiences.

Both Bible and Involvement Experiences will be guided by a Spiritual DNA assessment—a foundational part of an envisioned digital ecosystem—to discover each person’s unique wiring for connecting with God (e.g., music, nature, art, relationships, service, etc. in addition to Scripture and prayer). Then, experiences are tailored to resonate with their unique interests. The Project’s experience-centric strategy builds on these elements:

- More than a decade of our own research findings, millions of interactions with ABS online translations, and research from potential partners (e.g., Barna, Gloom, YouVersion, OneHope)
- Physical place: “The Ground Floor for America”—The Changemakers Center and Faith and Liberty Discovery Center
- Digital ecosystem (to reach beyond Philadelphia)
- Spiritual DNA assessment and experiences
- Habit and ritual formation research and resources
- Service opportunities for practical engagement/involvement including trauma healing and prayer



- 3. INNOVATE | Inform and Innovate** using research to spot obstacles and opportunities for Scripture engagement. Possible actions include convening solution providers and “hackathons,” speeding time to market with a focused “Innovation Fund,” and showcasing new approaches in ABS’s innovation center.

## **Starting Points**

Find and support the best of what is already happening in discipleship and spiritual formation through innovation grants and bringing promising ideas to scale. We will embrace cross-disciplinary learning from the fields of behavioral design and interpersonal neurobiology to inform how motivation happens and how habits are strengthened.

Building on research, invest in ministries and ideas that bring creative and effective methods to engage people in Scripture. Analyze replicable principles from other ministries and scale the most promising of these for the greatest impact. Make grants in three areas (Technology, Media, and Experiences), evaluate against a control, and scale funding for promising approaches.

Learn to fail fast, testing in a controlled dedicated environment (The Changemakers Center), and distribute proven models throughout the church, through our sponsorship of and relationships in the National Church Advisory Council.

# A PLAN FOR OUR TIME

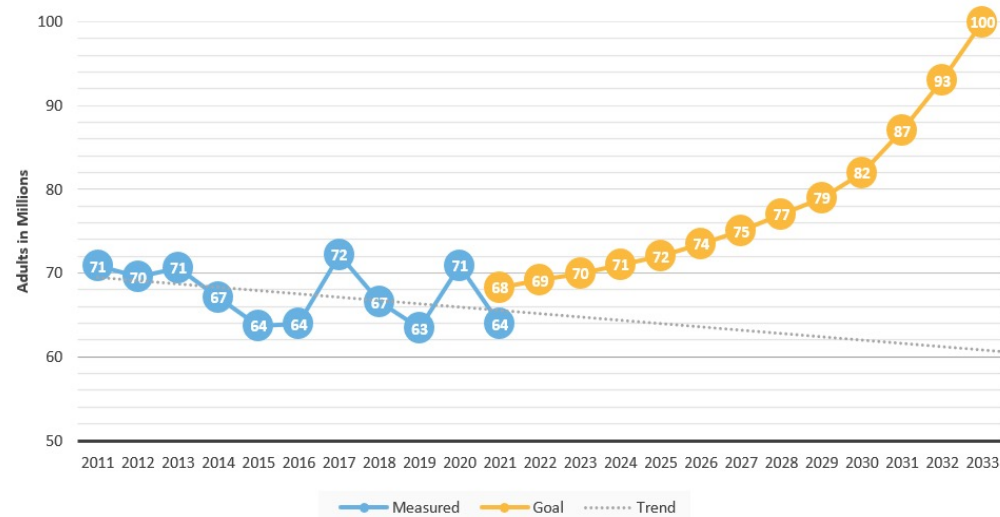
## PAIRING URGENCY AND PATIENCE

Great change does not happen overnight. It often takes two generations, although that pace is increasing due to changes in media, technology, and the cultural disconnection of new generations. We want to be honest with ourselves and with our partners that this effort will take time, dedication, endurance, grace. As best we know now, we'll need two project phases between now and 2033, the year when all the world's ~8 billion people can access God's Word.

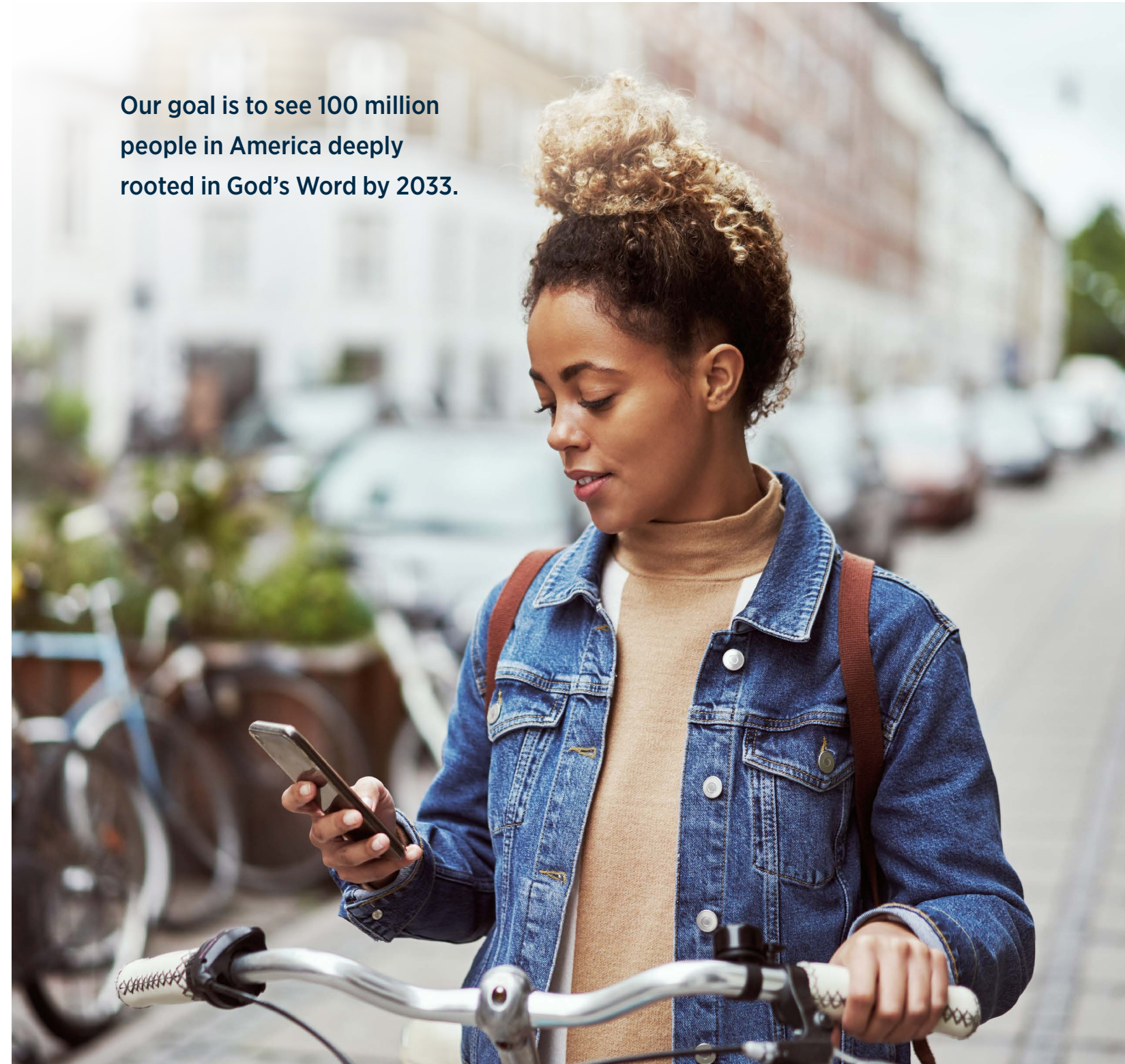
**Phase I** of The Changers Project is a five-year campaign between now and the nation's 250th birthday. In this phase, we'll identify, invest in, test, and learn about the most promising approaches to arrest the trendlines.

**Phase II** will scale the successful approaches with transformational philanthropic investments between 2026 and 2033. In this phase, we scale up to achieve the goal of 100 million Bible-centered (i.e., deeply rooted) adults in America, equipping those who already are rooted in God's Word with tailored means of connecting with those who are not yet, and also connecting Bible-engaged people with service opportunities so their faith has tangible, and visible, expressions and outlets in society.

U.S. Scripture Engagement Over Time



Changing this trendline's direction is a key challenge for a time such as this. Will we again see a day when 1 in 3 adults in America are bringing life and flourishing to their people and places? Or will the slide continue to a point where just 1 in 5 are left holding back the tide?



Our goal is to see 100 million people in America deeply rooted in God's Word by 2033.



# BUILDING FROM WHO WE ARE

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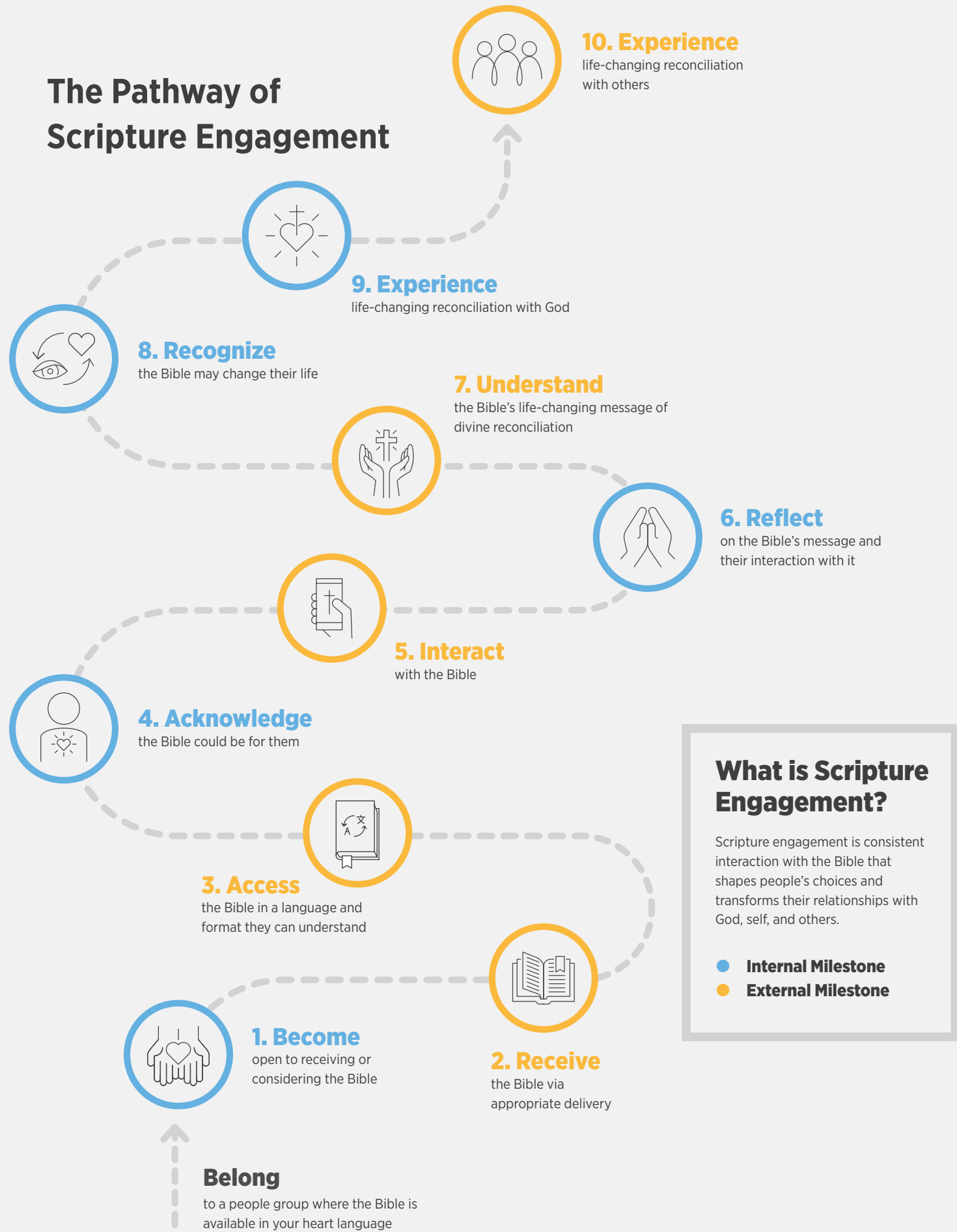
Like the business, civic, and church leaders who convened the first meetings of what would become the American Bible Society, we must make an honest assessment of our capacity to take on the challenges of our time. This is work we can and must do together, but we are clear-eyed about what ABS must bring to this table.

We will invest our reputation, build around what works, draw on our interconfessionalism and history, seek insight through research, lean on our 20,000-person prayer network, and leverage our Opportunity Fund to match new investments of supporters of the cause. All this to accelerate our mission: that all people would experience the Bible's life-changing message—and share it.

For 205 years, American Bible Society has come alongside the church and enabled collective action to do what local churches could not do on their own. We supported and empowered the local church through large-scale translation, production, and distribution of Bibles. We used our platform to convene diverse organizations and to provide some of the most insightful research on the state of the Bible in America. Now we are using this vast experience to identify and connect Changemakers in America so that together we can see 100 million people discover the power of Scripture for life.



# The Pathway of Scripture Engagement



## START WITH MINISTRY INSIGHTS

Any significant effort needs insight and visibility into what's working, what's not, and why. We start with our core Theory of Change—the Pathway of Scripture Engagement. We connect Leading Indicators to the Pathway, and then link those to the Lagging Indicators revealed in State of the Bible, our annual national survey. A key outcome in Phase I is the development of a robust insight system.

## THEORY OF CHANGE

Research and experience have led us to organize all our work around this central premise:

*Consistent interaction with the Bible shapes people's decisions and transforms their relationships.*

This is the definition of Scripture engagement:

*Research and experience have identified a consistent pathway towards hope and transformation.*

This is the Pathway of Scripture Engagement.

## LEADING INDICATORS (REPRESENTATIVE SET)

- People beginning an encounter with a person deeply rooted in the Bible (i.e., a Changemaker)
- People moving along the Pathway of Scripture engagement
- People engaging with "Spiritual DNA"
- Participating churches, networks, and cities
- Number of Changemakers (includes prayer and trauma healing volunteers)

## LAGGING INDICATORS

In Phase I, our goal is to establish predictability factors, learning what accelerates interest and movement along the Pathway of Scripture Engagement. We acknowledge the complexity and inherent unpredictability of people. But by early understanding of people's unique spiritual styles or "DNA," we can then observe over time what different cohorts do, and when. This is how we will connect Leading to Lagging indicators captured by ABS's State of the Bible and Harvard's Flourishing Index.

# THE CHANGEMAKERS COMMUNITY

This is not an American Bible Society project. It is an American Church project, and there's room for everyone to find a front-row seat. Some of the expected roles are:

## SHAPERS

- Provide expertise
- Connect to key influencers
- Join a SHAPERS Team—
  - » Changemakers Advocacy & Experiences Investors
    - \$500,000 investment over 5 years
  - » Innovation Investors
    - \$500,000 investment over 5 years
  - » National Church Advisory Council
  - » This Generation Council

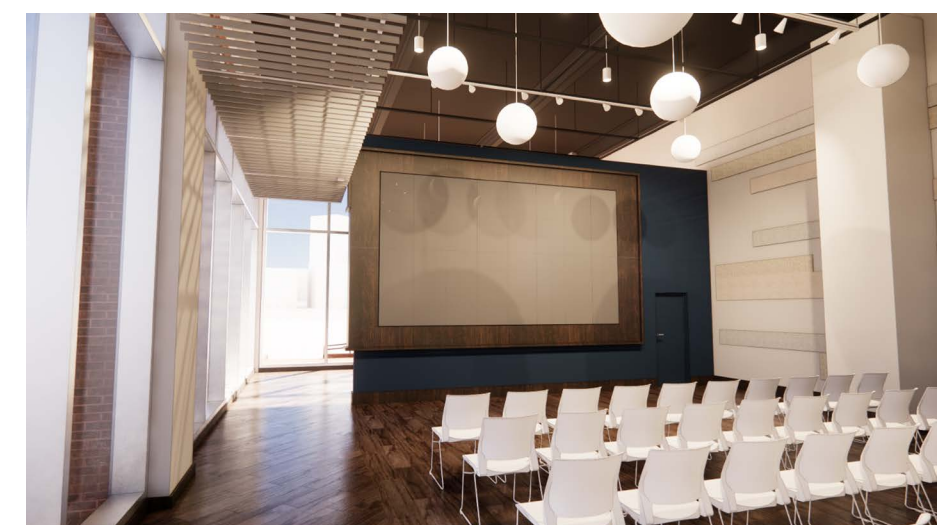
## INFLUENCERS

- Invite others to join the Changemakers Community
- Share with others (church, peers, social media)
- Identify potential partners & innovations
- Prayer network—20,000 strong and growing

## FINANCIAL PARTNERS

- **Advocacy**—\$10 million  
Finish the Faith and Liberty Discovery Center; launch nationwide programming through the Faith and Liberty Institute
- **Experiences**—\$10 million  
Create the digital ecosystem and tools, and pilot engagement experiences for the Changemakers digital hub
- **Innovation**—\$10 million  
Seed funding for innovation grants and State of the Bible research on best ministry practices

- **Changemakers Lab**—\$10 million  
Complete the space to showcase innovations, test experiences, convene thought and practice leaders, and equip the grassroots movement built around Changemakers
- **Changemakers Endowment**—\$100 million to sustain ongoing efforts for generations



# VISION AND PRINCIPLES

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## VISION

We envision a country deeply rooted in God's Word and vibrant Christian community.

We aim for 100 million Bible-centered people in America by 2033, increasing 56% from 64 million in 2021.

## PRINCIPLES

People deeply rooted in God's Word experience its life-changing message.

We commit to being research-informed and experience-driven.

We are audience-focused, serving distinct target demographics, to intersect their interests, hopes, pain points, and dreams so they can discover all that God's Word uniquely offers them.

We embed disciplined new innovations leveraging technology, media, partnerships, and catalytic movements to accelerate impact.

We activate today's generations by experiencing the Bible in fresh expressions and living it through service.

Instead of explaining why a person should read the Bible, our approach helps those in the Movable Middle discover for themselves why Scripture matters (Matthew 7:7).

Not "one size fits all"; we'll do easy on-ramps and customized next steps.

Instead of going it alone, our approach is to partner with churches, para-church ministries, collective impact alliances, and any organization or network committed to an ever more perfect union, or in the words of our founders "God's Kingdom of peace and love".

Instead of starting a new ministry, we'll build on the 205-year history of ABS' national presence, partnership base and interconfessional posture.





**AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY**

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