

Like a Fire Burning in Us

*Scripture, Discernment, and Leadership
in a Time of Disorientation*

For the
Association of
Biblical Higher
Education



American Bible Society

Access, Experience, Advance

The Movable Moment for Leaders



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Access, Experience, Advance

We lead in a time of great tension, but incredible opportunities.

- Cultural fragmentation
- Institutional fatigue
- Shifting student educational patterns
- Anxiety about relevance, authority, and trust

Average Confidence in Major U.S. Institutions, 1979-2023

Figures are the average percentage of U.S. adults who have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in nine institutions measured consistently by Gallup



The average includes only those institutions rated consistently by Gallup since 1979. These are the church/organized religion, the military, the Supreme Court, banks, public schools, newspapers, Congress, organized labor and big business.

GALLUP



Leadership as Sensemaking

In periods of disruption, leaders:

- Help communities understand the times
- Shape how people locate themselves in the larger narrative
- Determine which sources are authoritative for meaning-making



Disorientation is not Failure

- The disciples were *insiders*.
- Knowledge without integration
- Jesus ' approach:
 - “Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things?”
 - A coherent interpretive framework



Jesus' Methodology in Luke 24



- No new evidence...yet
- Reinterpreted existing evidence through Scripture
- Reframed meaning

Scripture as the meta-narrative, not proof-text.



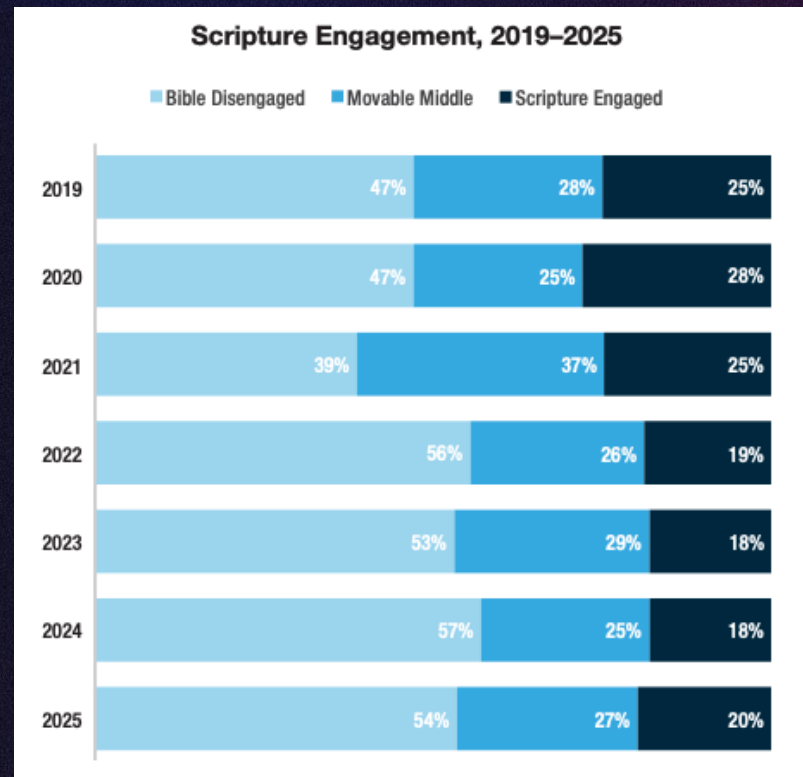
A Gap in Integration

- Students aren't lacking access to information.
- They need help integrating across three domains:
 - Intellectual credibility
 - Theological faithfulness
 - Formation that transforms



A Brief Look into the *State of the Bible 2025*

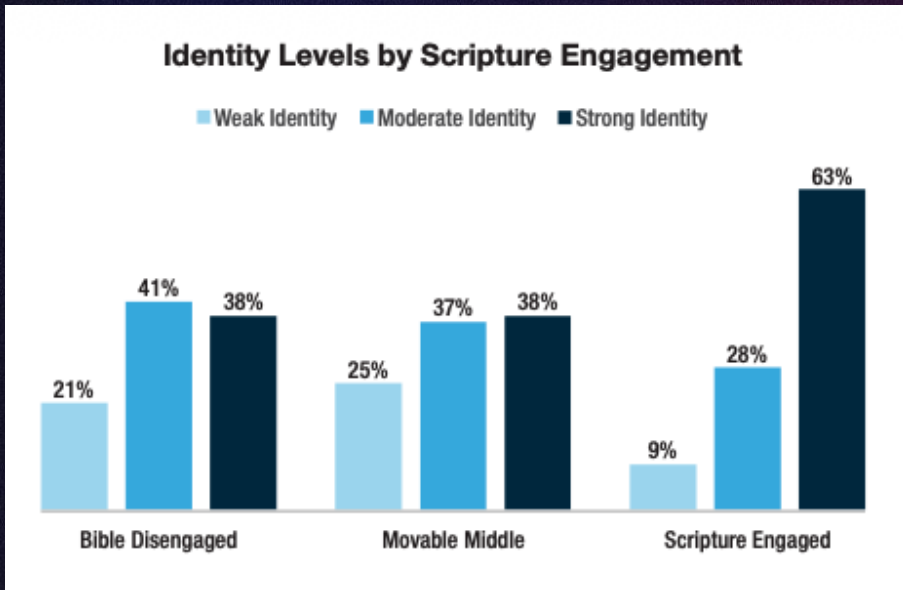
- 77% of Americans say they own a Bible.
- 41% of Americans use the Bible at least 3-4 times per year.
- Only 20% would consider Scripture as central in their decision-making or impacting their relationships.



Houston, We Have a Problem!

Respondents were asked how much they agreed with the following statements:

- I know who I am.
- I always have a good sense about what is important to me.
- I know what I believe or value.



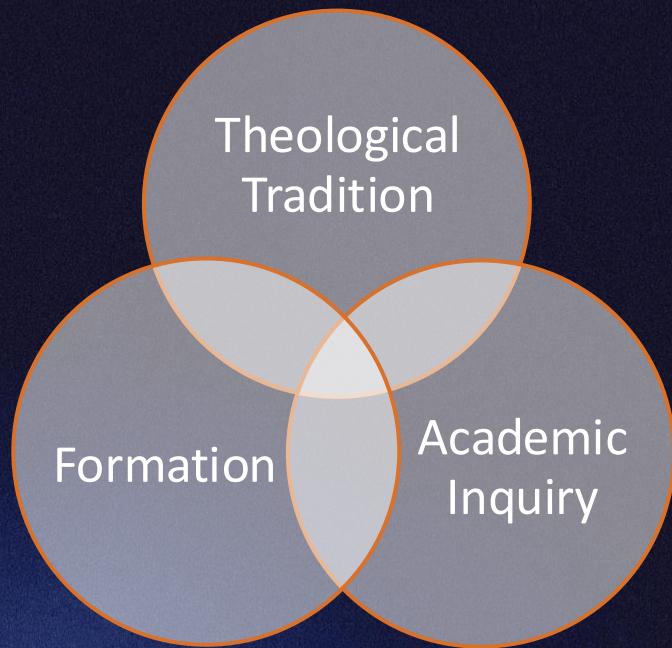
Is This an Integration Issue?

If Scripture has been re-contextualized as a resource **among**, rather than **prioritizing**, other meaning-making systems, we might see...

- Christians with affirmed beliefs but unaligned practices
- Spiritual language detached from communal or ecclesial life
- Moral reasoning shaped by cultural narratives more than biblical ones



Persistent Tensions in Biblical Integration



- Tradition sets boundaries; inquiry tests them.
- Inquiry complicates formation; formation resists reduction to cognition.
- Formation demands coherence; inquiry thrives on openness.



Common Institutional Separations

- Seminaries may privilege tradition and formation, sometimes at the expense of critical inquiry.
- Secular research universities may privilege inquiry while remaining detached from formative responsibility.
- Churches may focus on formation without sustained academic rigor.

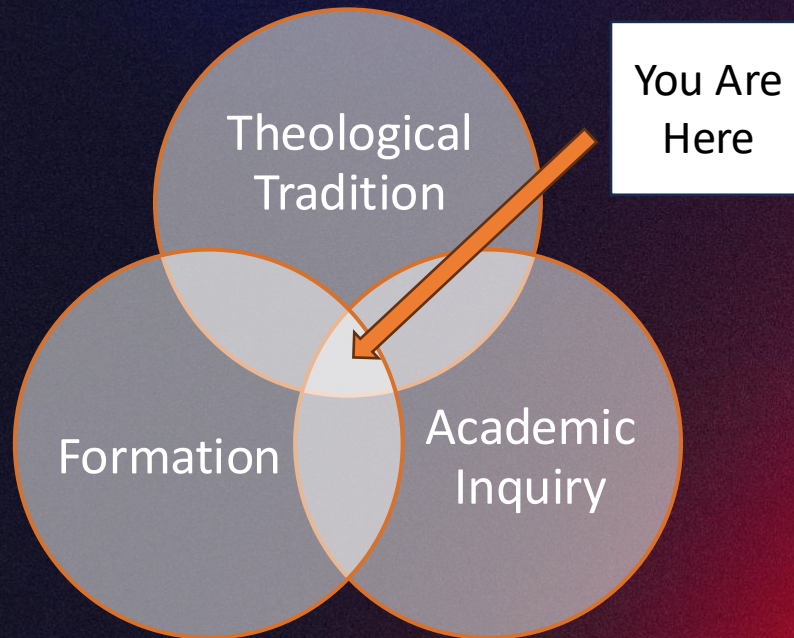


Biblical Higher Education's Unique Position

A Rare Convergence Point

Biblical higher education can demonstrate that Scripture can simultaneously be:

- Intellectually credible,
- Morally formative, and
- Existentially meaningful.



Five Governing Questions for Biblical Sensemaking



1. Scripture's Operative Authority

How does Scripture function as an interpretive authority in our institution, beyond as a statement of belief or curricular requirement?

If Scripture disappeared from our daily decision logic, how long would it take us to notice?



2. Integration vs. Exposure

Are we forming students to integrate Scripture into moral reasoning and meaning-making, or primarily exposing them to biblical content?

Is our question “How much Bible?” or “What kind of thinkers and interpreters are we forming?”



3. Institutional Architecture for Interpretation

Where in our institutional design do students learn *how* to interpret their lives through Scripture amid complexity and pluralism?

If a student asked, “How does Scripture make sense of this?,” where would we intentionally send them?



4. Modeling Interpretive Leadership

Do our leaders and faculty visibly model biblical sensemaking in moments of disagreement, ambiguity, and institutional pressure?

What do students see us doing when Scripture does not provide easy answers?



5. Durability of Formation

How do we know, beyond participation metrics, that our graduates can sustain Scripture as a formative framework once they leave us?

What would count as real evidence that our students leave us with integrated biblical sensemaking capacity?



Biblical higher education can
design institutions where
Scripture can once again function
as an integrative framework for
meaning.



THANK YOU



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