The Contribution of Bible Reading Habits to Finding Meaning in Life: A Study of Young Evangelicals in Norway

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Abstract
Drawing from both quantitative and qualitative data, this mixed-method article investigates how reading the Bible contributes to a meaningful life for young evangelicals in Norway. The analysis shows that three groups emerge from the data. The Coherent group regularly read the Bible and find it important for how they live their lives. Bible reading is an integrated part of their lives; they often read together with their peers and use the Bible as an important source of meaning. Members of the Frustrated group find the Bible important for their lives but read less. They experience a stressful, conflicted relationship with the Bible and a weaker experience of meaning. Those in the third group, the Distanced, do not find the Bible very important, or read it very often; for them, the Bible is neither a source of meaning nor a source of frustration. They do not seek meaning from the Bible.

Keywords
Young people; Bible; meaning; evangelical; Norway; mixed-method research

Introduction

In theories about what brings meaning to life, religion is often among the most important factors.[1] Research from the United States, for example, indicates the significant impact that the Bible can have on readers. This is acknowledged as both positive and negative, where certain research shows that a literal view of the Bible may be harmful both for society as a whole and for individuals,[2] while other scholars

[1] Tatjana Schnell, *The Psychology of Meaning in Life* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2020).
[2] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008).

underline that people who read the Bible are, in general, happier than those who do not.[3] Despite the recognition of religion as a key factor in notions of meaning and purpose, among Scandinavian scholars religion has not received much attention as a resource that holds importance in the lives of young people.[4]

This article thus seeks to take a step forward in contributing to this field by offering an empirical study with a mixed-method research design that focuses on the way a particular group of young people in Norway that I have identified as 'young evangelicals' both relate to the Bible and assess its contribution to what they consider a meaningful life. The specific question posed in this article is, 'In what way and to what extent does the Bible contribute towards meaning in life for young evangelicals in Norway?'

After identifying some important contextual parameters, the article sets out the theoretical framework for the study in terms of what is understood by 'meaning in life' and presents a brief overview of previous research on patterns of Bible reading that has bearing on the investigation at hand. The methodology for the empirical work is then detailed, before turning to an analysis of the data collected. The article ends with a discussion of the results that seeks to draw some conclusions with respect to the question of whether and in what ways the Bible is considered a resource for young evangelicals in Norway.

In terms of the Norwegian context, I suggest that not paying sufficient attention to the issue of religion in relation to meaning in the lives of young people represents a notable lack or gap in research thus far. Most young people in Norway have some kind of relation to the (Lutheran) Church of Norway. Even though its status as a state church ended in 2012, the church still holds a prominent and privileged position in Norwegian society.[5] One of the important connections for young

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[3] Rodney Stark and Jared Maier, 'Faith and Happiness', *Review of Religious Research*, 50, no. 1 (2008), 120–25.

[4] Mia Lövheim and Jonas Bromander, *Religion som resurs?: Existentiella frågor och värderingar i unga svenskars liv* (Skellefteå: Artos & Norma bokförlag, 2012).

[5] Ingunn Folkestad Breistein and Inger Furseth, 'A Coherent Public Policy on Religion in Norway? An Analysis of the 2013 Report "A Society Open to Religious and Worldview

people is the confirmation programme of the Church of Norway and, even though numbers are decreasing, 52 percent of fifteen-year-olds in Norway still participate in it.[6] Certainly, to be part of the confirmation programme does not necessarily indicate a personal faith, and the overall trend seems to be for fewer and fewer young people to be interested in religious questions. However, the church connection remains important, and there is an observable presence of young religious people in other settings in Norway,[7] among whom are those involved in various evangelical movements. It is these young people, aged from 15 to 25, who are part of the free church or the prayer house movement in Norway that are the focus of my research. As the term 'evangelical' is rarely used in Norway, it is important at this point to set out what is meant by evangelical movements in the Norwegian setting, and the bearing the naming of the young people as 'evangelicals' has on the study.

A key aspect of the movements designated evangelical is their relation to the Church of Norway. As a result of a number of revival periods during the mid to late 1800s, various prayer house movements and free churches were established. The majority (the prayer house movement) remained part of the Church of Norway, working with an inner mission strategy and differentiating themselves religiously from the wider Church of Norway, while a minority left the Church of Norway and established various free churches as independent denominations.[8] The young people in my sample affiliate with one of six denominations/organisations, each of which has its own independent youth organisation and all of which associate with the Evangelical Alliance and the Lausanne movement.[9] All are officially recognised by the state and report their work to the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, who hold a register that gives an overview of the

Diversity'", in *Public Commissions on Cultural and Religious Diversity Analysis, Reception and Challenges*, ed. by Solange Lefebvre and Patrice Brodeur (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 217–239.

6 Andreas Østhus, *Antall Konfirmasjoner Synker Jevnt* (Oslo: Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2021).

7 Ida Marie Høeg, *Religion Og Ungdom* (Oslo: Universitetsforl., 2017).

8 Hans Try, "Lekmannsrørsle og 'associationsaand' ca1820–1880, in *Bedehuset: Rørsla, bygda, folket,* ed. by Olaf Aagedal (Oslo: Samlaget, 1986), pp. 7–38.

9 All the organisations are members of The Norwegian Council for Mission and Evangelization <www.norme.no>.

size of the organisations and membership figures.[10] In total there are almost fifty thousand[11] members of these youth organisations. Two organisations, the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM)[12] and Inner Mission Federation (ImF), are part of the Church of Norway but call themselves inner mission organisations. The four free-church denominations represented in the survey are the Lutheran Free Church, the Mission Church, the Pentecostal movement, and the Baptist Union.

In terms of the designation of the young people as 'young evangelicals', the second point to note here is the basis from which the young people who are the focus of my research approach the Bible in contrast to other young people in Norwegian society. There is an ongoing scholarly debate concerning who is evangelical and who is not.[13] According to the Scottish historian David Bebbington,[14] who has provided the most widely used definition of evangelicals, understanding the Bible as the word of God that has authority is one of the key markers of evangelical religion. This is reflected in the survey I have conducted, where most of the young people within the various organisations named above view the Bible as God's direct word or at least inspired by God.[15] In contrast, the majority of young people in Norway are quite secular and see the Bible as an ancient book with legends written by ordinary people.[16] Thus, in examining the link between Bible reading habits and meaning in life, 'evangelical' brings further focus to the issue that might

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10 Fordelingsutvalget, *Medlemsutvikling Enkeltorganisasjoner 1977–2021*, 2022 <https://www.fordelingsutvalget.no/Statistikk/> [accessed 8 August 2022]. All the membership figures used in this study are taken from the 2019 register.

11 ImF: 5530 members; NLM: 12 041 members; Lutheran Free Church: 8123 members; Mission Church: 5983 members; Pentecostal: 17 863 members; and Baptist: 4451 members.

12 NLM does not have a tradition of registering members in their youth organisation, and there is reason to believe that in total they attract more people than the formal membership figures indicate, partly because they own almost 30 schools and more than 40 kindergartens. See Norwegian Lutheran Mission <https://nlm.no/om-oss2/vart-arbeid/> [accessed 14 August 2022].

13 M. Noll, 'What is "Evangelical"?', in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. by Gerald R. McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 19–32.

14 D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

15 See the method section for details.

16 Tore Witsø Rafoss, *Nordmenns Bibelbruk: KIFKO Rapport* 2017:1 (Oslo: KIFO Institutt for kirke-, religions- og livssynsforskning, 2017).

be more specifically phrased as whether and in what ways the Bible is considered a resource for young people who perceive the Bible as holding some authority and reflecting the word of God.

Theoretical Framework

My main theoretical perspective is taken from the Austrian researcher Tatjana Schnell, who works with existential psychology and has done extensive work on what gives meaning in life.[17] While her theories consider the population in general, my aim is to look more specifically at how the Bible and Bible reading contribute to meaning in the lives of young active Christians.[18]

Tatjana Schnell's emphasis is on meaning *in* life, and she defines meaning as 'the direction — or purpose — that someone pursues, and the ensuing subjective and dynamic evaluation of their life as meaningful'.[19] She claims that religion is the third most important source of meaning, after generativity and care. Those who are religious tend to score high on meaning in life. This makes it interesting to look at how this works among young people who are highly involved in religion. Schnell defines meaningfulness as trusting that life is worth living, and operationalises this with the help of four key concepts: *coherence,* that the different aspects of our life fit together and ideally strengthen each other and do not contradict each other; *significance,* an understanding that what we do is important and has an effect; *orientation,* that life is going in a direction, heading somewhere you want to go; and *belonging,* that you are part of something greater, that you have a place in this world. These concepts all involve personal engagement, and they cannot be taken for granted.

Schnell emphasises the philosophical definition of meaning as what is 'attributed to a thing, action or event by a person in a specific situation'.[20] For young Christians, the Bible is both a physical thing, but

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17 Schnell, *The Psychology of Meaning in Life*.
18 'Active' refers to being actively involved as participants in a religious youth event.
19 Schnell, *The Psychology of Meaning in Life*, p. 6.
20 Schnell, *The Psychology of Meaning in Life*, p. 28.

in terms of the process of reading it, it is also a practice in which they are involved in various ways. Schnell has developed a hierarchical model of meaning (Figure 1) with five stages. From the bottom, it starts with *perceptions*, which are the results of the *actions* one performs that are according to the *goals* a person has for their life. These are often meaningful, though they can be meaningless if they are goals that have, for example, been inherited from parents or one's environment without making them one's own. These goals are then connected to *sources of meaning* that end up in *meaning in life*. In this article, I will use Schnell's model to examine how the Bible works as a source of meaning in life. I will do so by analysing the vertical coherence and studying how the different layers relate to each other: for example, how the goals relate to actions and how the assumptions come from actions. If the internal contradiction exceeds a critical level, it will result in a crisis of meaning. A crisis of meaning is often associated with adverse effects such as pessimism, depression, and anxiety. Furthermore, if something lacks meaning for a person, then it is not so essential for that individual, and thus does not have either the positive effect of being meaningful or the adverse effect of a crisis of meaning.

Previous Research: The Role of the Bible and Bible Reading

As already noted, religion is an important source of meaning. Being a frequent reader of Scripture is one of the most significant factors in predicting strong religiousness.[21] Tore Witsø Rafoss has contributed to research on the role of the Bible in a Norwegian setting. He found that young Christians, especially from free churches, read the Bible regularly and that young men read the Bible more than young women and Norwegian people on average.[22] Further, he found that young adults from free churches often read frequently and according to a plan. The

[21] Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[22] The research is based on both existing quantitative data from Tore Witsøe Rafoss, *Nordmenns Bibelbruk, KIFO Rapport 2017:1* and on qualitative research by Rafoss: Tore Witsø Rafoss, *Å tilbringe tid med Gud. En kvalitativ studie av unge voksnes bibelbruk, KIFO Rapport 2018: 3* (Oslo: KIFO, Institutt for kirke-, religions- og livssynsforskning, 2018).

main reason given for reading is to meet God, though some also express reading the Bible as a duty and that it is a tool for spiritual warfare between God and the Devil. Furthermore, they also read the Bible as a source of knowledge and guidance in their daily lives. In contrast, some of Rafoss's respondents who belonged to the Church of Norway saw Bible reading as a minor part of being a Christian and therefore expressed a low degree of guilt about not reading. Even though the findings in Rafoss's research are relevant for this study, they also raise some questions. The qualitative interviews only had six participants from free churches and all the rest were part of the Church of Norway, and in terms of those Church of Norway participants, the researchers did not distinguish between low and high church affiliation. Additional studies from both the United States and Norway indicate that people with a literal and non-literal view of the Bible are among those who read the Bible regularly, but those with a literal view read more often.[23]

According to Bebbington's definition of the evangelical tradition, the Bible has a strong authority for how people should live their lives, yet there is a growing shift in perception:

> Young Americans' assurance that the Bible, or any other alleged authority, contains the truth by which to live has, compared to evangelical convictions, been severely weakened. And in the intervening years, for complicated reasons, final authority has decisively shifted from the Bible to the individual reader.[24]

This shift of view away from the Bible having authority is also seen in Scandinavian research. Maria Zackariasson has studied young people in the Uniting Church in Sweden.[25] She found that the role of the Bible, and the possible authority it has for one's life, is not at the forefront in the stories young people from Sweden tell their friends regarding their engagement in a free church.[26] Ida Marie Høeg found the most

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23 Aaron B. Franzen, 'Reading the Bible in America: The Moral and Political Attitude Effect', *Review of Religious Research*, 55, no. 3 (2013), 393–411; see also both of Tore Witsø Rafoss's reports as detailed above.

24 Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, p. 291.

25 A denomination established in 2011 by the merger of the United Methodist Church, Baptist Union of Sweden, and Mission Covenant Church of Sweden.

26 Maria Zackariasson, 'Being Yourself: Identity and Self-Presentation among Youths in Christian Youth Organizations', *YOUNG*, 22, no. 2 (2014), 153–170.

important reason given by teenagers who continued to be active members of the Church of Norway after their confirmation class was the wish to be part of a cultural community in the church. They were not particularly interested in the Bible and its authority, and they did not adopt many of the church's classical dogmatics.[27] Irene Trysnes and Ronald Synnes noted that when young people from migrant (free) churches in Norway describe their relationship to the Bible, this is done as innocuously as possible, emphasising the positive aspects.[28]

The Protestant idea of reading the Bible by oneself was a key element in the Reformation, and for the following five hundred years, this idea has shaped how Norwegian Protestants (including those in evangelical movements) have used and viewed the Bible,[29] although not without challenge from scholars who advocate for a broader span of Bible reading methods, with a particular emphasis on reading in a community.[30] In terms of the Bible reading under examination in this article, I acknowledge that there are cognitive, social, and emotional factors that are important and relevant to this discussion.[31]

Data and Method

The research underlying this article was conducted using a mixed-method, sequential explanatory design.[32] The mixed method has the

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[27] Ida Marie Høeg, 'Fellesskap og kulturell tilhørighet Kristen identitet hos ungdom i Den norske kirke', *Prismet*, 4 (2012), 199–217. As a counterpoint to this, although from a British context, one might refer to the research carried out by Ruth Perrin who observed that emerging adults argued according to evangelical orthodoxy when she studied how they interpreted biblical texts in evangelical churches in Britain. Ruth Perrin, 'An Observation and Analysis of Ordinary Bible Reading among British, Evangelical, Emerging Adults' (doctoral thesis, Durham University, 2015) <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11271/> [accessed 4 May 2023].

[28] Irene Trysnes and Ronald Mayora Synnes, 'The Role of Religion in Young Muslims' and Christians' Self-Presentation on Social Media', *YOUNG*, 30, no. 3 (2021), 281–296.

[29] Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

[30] Emily K. Ronald, 'More than "Alone with the Bible": Reconceptualizing Religious Reading', *Sociology of Religion*, 73, no. 3 (2012), 323–344.

[31] Erling Birkedal, *Noen Ganger Tror Jeg På Gud, Men-? : En Undersøkelse Av Gudstro Og Erfaring Med Religios Praksis i Tidlig Ungdomsalder* (Trondheim: Tapir Academic Press, 2001).

[32] William Hanson, John W. Cresswell, Vicki L. Plano Clark, Kelly S. Petska, and J. David Cresswell, 'Mixed Methods Research Designs in Counselling Psychology', *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 52 (2005), 224–235.

advantage of enriching the data with different methods. Using a sequential design, the analysis starts with the quantitative data and then uses the qualitative data to explicate the findings. The research began with a survey of 661[33] young people between 15 and 25 years of age who had attended a youth camp or festival held by a free church or prayer house organisation in 2019.[34] One finding from this survey was that young evangelicals considered the Bible to be God's exact word (59 %) or inspired by God (27%). To find out more about what this meant, I arranged six[35] focus group interviews in the spring of 2021. These interviews were conducted online via Zoom, and 25 young people between 17 and 24 years old participated. Groups had between three and five members, and both genders were represented in all groups. The participants in these groups were recruited by the youth organisations in which they were involved.[36] Included among the six groups were two separate focus group interviews with people from the Baptist Union to ensure that I also obtained data from young people with a migrant background since this denomination has a large proportion of migrants in their youth organisation.[37]

In the interviews, the Bible was one of two themes. The interviews had a semi-structured design, and I started by asking what the Bible meant for the informants personally and then added several questions to follow up on the conversations they had amongst themselves. A reduction analysis, whereby I condensed all the

[33] The survey was sent to 2162 participants, and 825 people responded. 164 were excluded because they did not give informed consent (40) or completed less than half of the questionnaire (124). This gives a response rate of 31%. Of the respondents, 37% were male and 63% were females.

[34] The survey was carried out online in 2020; it was planned to be done in person at summer events 2020, but due to the covid-19 pandemic all the events where cancelled. The online survey was sent to those who had participated in events arranged by the six different organisations in 2019.

[35] ImF was not included in the focus group interviews due to lack of capacity in the organisation to recruit participants.

[36] A requirement was that they had been part of the organisation for at least two years. As the survey was anonymous, a possible overlap of participants in the qualitative and quantitative data would be incidental.

[37] Roald Zeiffert, 'Easy Come – Easy Go Om Frafall Og Tilvekst i Det Organiserte Barne- Og Ungdomsarbeidet i Norske Frimenigheter' (master's dissertation, Ansgar Teologiske Høgskole, 2018).

interviews, revealed that every participant across all groups had different experiences of how much they read the Bible, with specific regard to reading the physical book. They also expressed different attitudes regarding how important the Bible was in their lives. With these findings, I went back to the quantitative material and, from the data, created four groups based on how often the participants read the Bible and how important they considered it to be for them. Table 1 shows these four different groups and how the respondents were categorised. I returned to the qualitative material once again to carry out a new reduction analysis of all the participants. Based on how the participants self-expressed their reading habits and the importance of the Bible in their lives, I placed the 25 participants from the group interviews into one of the four categories in the model.

	Bible is very important for how I live my life	Bible has some or little importance
Read the Bible often or very often	(N=217) Eight informants Group A 'The Coherent'	(N=53) 0 informants Group D
Read the Bible seldom	(N=152) Nine informants Group B: "The Frustrated"	(N=239) Eight informants Group C "The Distanced"

Table 1: The four groups showing the distribution of participants by how often they read and how important they find the Bible

Based on Table 1, I analysed the qualitative material using inductive coding and the quantitative material using descriptive analyses, comparing means and bivariate correlation (Pearson's r). In the following analysis section, I will use findings from both the qualitative and quantitative data.[38] The discussion concerns three of the four

[38] I have used the SPSS statistical analysis software for the quantitative data, and NVivo software for the qualitative data. Both the survey and the focus group interviews were conducted in Norwegian.

groups, with less attention on group D because there was no supporting qualitative data and only 8 percent in the quantitative data. In the quantitative material, the vast majority (N=546) identify themselves as part of one of the organisations specified in this article, while 17 percent (N=115) relate to another organisation outside those groupings but attended an event held by one of the evangelical organisations.

The groups are all typologies, where findings are generalised from the quantitative data and then explained by the qualitative data. Furthermore, it must be remembered that even though the data material contributes towards understanding the young evangelicals in Norway, it does not express all there is to say about them. It is not the whole truth about how the young people interviewed relate to the Bible, which is affected by several factors such as, for example, what the church they belong to expects them to say, how their peers in the group interview react, and how their own day has gone at the time of the interview.

Analysis

This section presents an analysis of the three different groups into which the respondents fall, and here, as already noted above, the quantitative and qualitative data are used to inform each other.

The Coherent (group A)

One-third of the young people find the Bible very important for how they live their lives, and they read the physical Bible often or very often (33 percent of the boys and 32 percent of the girls). A bivariate correlation analysis reveals a positive connection between being in this group and age (r .284, p< .000). The older you are, the more likely you are to be part of this group. To see if age has an impact on reading the Bible or its relative importance, I carried out two additional bivariate correlations. There is a r .257 (p<.000) correlation between age and reading the physical Bible; and a r .250 (p< .000) correlation between age and how important the Bible is perceived to be. As we might expect, there is a strong correlation (r .588, p< .000) between reading the Bible often and finding it important for how one lives one's life.

Regarding the interviews, the first observation is that members of this cohort have a structured type of Bible reading. Several of them are part of a programme or a collective agreement with peers to read the Bible together every day. Others read alone. They do so because they have chosen this practice voluntarily, and none of them express a feeling of outside pressure to read. A few commented that earlier in their lives they had felt internal pressure when they read little, but not anymore.

Secondly, they express a low level of frustration. The lack of 'should' in their stories is striking and in contrast to the frustrated group. The Coherent in general read the Bible as it is (a literal way), and do not question the text, as the Frustrated tend to do. The questions they ask are mostly directed toward themselves, as one of the girls demonstrates: 'When I read, I try to think and reflect, what does this mean in my life? What do I have to change in my life?'

Thirdly, several of them lived with peers in a student collective where they had some religious practices as their joint commitment. Reading the Bible together was one of these practices. As one of the respondents frames it, 'We read at the same time every day, and that makes it easier for me.' Another interviewee spoke about the daily experience and said, 'When we all read, it is kind of natural, and you know I also must read what the others read. We kind of all read the same text, and you must read it because we are talking about it. I like that a lot.'

The importance of reading together was also a topic in the quantitative data, showing that those belonging to the Coherent group also read much more frequently than those in other groups (mean 4.2 on a 1–5 scale), while the average mean is 3.6.

The quantitative data also shows a strong correlation between being in this group and a traditional conservative attitude towards living together before marriage (r .385, $p < .000$) and towards same-sex relations (r .339, $p < .000$), and a slightly weaker but still significant trend towards refraining from alcohol (r .237, $p < .000$).

The Frustrated (group B)

The Frustrated are categorised by viewing the Bible as very important for how they live their lives but, at the same time, reading less often. Altogether, 25 percent of the boys and 21 percent of the girls were in this group. A correlation analysis reveals age is not a significant factor to explain this group, as it is for the other two groups.

Members of this group express high expectations of themselves for reading and talk a lot about reading the Bible less than they want to. Here is a short conversation from one of the group interviews to illustrate this:

> Respondent A:
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> […] I kind of feel that I use time with God in other ways, but I feel at least for myself that I wish I would use more time with the Bible.
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> Respondent B:
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> Yes, you are not alone. The Bible is maybe the book I think most about during my day and in my life. I doubt there is any day I don't think about it, and at the same time, it is the book I read the least […], I don't read, or I read very seldom. And it demands more of me than I think it should.

Members in this group express an internal conflict because they think the Bible is important, and they want to read it more, but for some reason, they do not. Later in the same interview, the issue of spare time comes up as a central factor. They express that they do not have enough free time to do the reading.

In all the group interviews, those who fit into the Frustrated group talked a lot about interpretation, and they all struggled with the process of understanding the meaning of the text. Two concrete examples came up concerning homosexuality, how that topic should be understood, and how their attitudes towards questions related to sexuality were misunderstood in society. Another difficult topic was the perceived conflict between science and creation. When they talked about science and the Bible, one person commented, 'It is hard when I don't understand when it doesn't add up kind of. Yes, I find it hard, and it affects my faith.' Earlier in the conversation, this person used the same theme as an example of what the Bible means to them. The Bible is

there to explain *why* something happened (referring to creation) while science shows us *how*, but still, as the later remark shows, they still found themselves conflicted about it.

Another source of frustration was an important topic in one of the free-church interviews. The conversation focused on what they expected would happen when they read the Bible and what this meant for them. However, their reading was a mixed experience. They found verses for guidance and comfort but also lacked what they would see as concrete experiences of God's presence. One boy said, 'I open the Bible and expect that something is going to happen to me, and it doesn't.'

The most common phrase used by people in this group was 'I should,' and most of them expressed frustration and that they were not good Christians. None of them indicate that pressure was coming from the outside. It was their own expectations that they did not manage to fulfil. Reading was also something that they mostly did on their own. One boy stated, 'I try to read some verses in bed right before I go to sleep, but that doesn't work well [and the rest of the group laugh in recognition].' In contrast to the Coherent group, they do not involve peers in their reading routines, and they express fewer routines for their reading. The quantitative data shows they are also less than averagely involved in Bible groups (mean 3.63 on a 1–5 scale).

In the quantitative material, I find there is a much weaker correlation between the Frustrated group and theological attitudes. There is no significant correlation between this group and the question of living together before marriage. There is a moderate to weak correlation between a conservative view on same-sex relations (r .144, $p < .000$), and a weak correlation towards a restrictive view on alcohol (r .104, $p < .008$).

The Distanced (group C)

The Distanced are categorised by finding the Bible of medium or less importance for how they live their lives and by reading the Bible only sometimes or hardly at all. Thirty-seven percent of the boys and 36 percent of the girls were in this group. There is a tendency that the youngest are more likely to be part of this group (r -.215, $p < .000$).

There was some use of 'should' in this group, but they did not dwell on it, and no one mentioned a lack of time to back up a feeling of something they felt they should do but did not. Even though they considered the Bible to be God's word, it was not important for them to read it. They simply found other things more relevant to them, well documented in the conversation between these two participants:

> Respondent C:
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> For me it is like, I have kind of mixed feelings. I know it is the Word of God, and that it is holy, but I don't have a strong connection to it […] So a little mixed feeling about what I know and feel.
>
> Respondent D:
>
> I am also there, kind of, I don't have a very strong connection to the Bible. I don't know why, but it has never been my go-to when it counts […] When I want to spend some time with Jesus, my first choice is worship [music] and fellowship, I understand that the Bible is very important and God's word and all that, but it is not my connection with Jesus.

For a few, there are some signs of frustration, mostly expressed by statements like 'yes, I probably should have read more', but further on in the conversation, they do not experience it as a conflict. They do not have any specific goals or expectations when they read the Bible, and they do not mention missing much value by not reading.

For this group, the Bible is not very important and it does not influence their social life. Bible reading is not something they do together with friends. They also attend Bible groups less often than the two other groups (mean 2.95 on a 1–5 scale).

The quantitative material also reveals a strong correlation between being in the Distanced group and having more liberal attitudes towards living together before marriage (r -.440, $p < .000$) and same-sex relations (r -.435, $p < .000$), and a more liberal attitude towards alcohol (r -.337, $p < .000$).

Conclusive Discussion

This article asks the question of how meaningful the Bible is for young people who are actively involved in evangelical movements in Norway. The majority describe the Bible as the word of God and find the Bible (very) important for how they live their lives. Four out of ten also read the Bible (very) often. Their experience of how important the Bible is to them is, to a large degree, related to how often and in what way they read the Bible. In the analysis section I have shown three different ways young evangelicals in Norway relate to the Bible in daily life.

A: The Coherent	B: The Frustrated	C: The Distanced
Structures around their Bible reading	Not very structured, do not have time for reading	No need for structure, find worship and fellowship more important
Involvement from peers	Low involvement from peers	No involvement from peers
Low or no frustration	High frustration	Low or medium frustration
Low expressed pressure	High expressed pressure	Medium expressed pressure
Read the Bible 'as it is'	Asking questions	Bible is not personal
Correlates with conservative theology	Weak correlations towards either liberal or conservative theology	Correlates with liberal theology

Table 2: Summary table of the three groups and their main characteristics

The summary table (Table 2) presents the main differences between the groups. The three groups have different experiences when it comes to both how they read the Bible and what they get out of it. Group A(Coherent) have a clear structure and involve their peers more than groups B and C. Group B (Frustrated) express both much higher pressure and frustration than groups A and C. Group C (Distanced) do

not find the Bible to be of much importance for their lives and therefore have a more distanced relationship to the Bible than groups A and B.

For group A, the Bible contributes to a meaningful life. They have an understanding that the Bible is very important for how they live, and they read it often. They have a feeling of coherence: what they want to do, is also what they do. Reading the Bible also fits well with their lives in general, and they involve their friends in the reading. They have the desire to read; they describe it as an inner motivation to read often and let the Bible influence their lives. None of them express pressure from outside, though some said they had felt pressure before but now it was their inner motivation that drove them. They describe the Bible as important and that it has *significance* in their life, which is clearly expressed through the focus they give to having solid structures around their reading routines. Since their reading has such an impact on their life, it also gives a deep feeling of *belonging*, both to a godly plan and to a community of peers. All this contributes to the Bible being a source of meaning for them, which also gives a clearer *orientation* and a feeling of *coherence*.

For the second group (B), Bible reading does not contribute to a meaningful life. They also have an understanding that the Bible is very important for how they live, but they do not read that often. This lack of coherence between what they want and what they do leads to frustration. It looks as if they have less inner motivation for reading, and express much more of a sense of pressure to read the Bible more often than they do. None of them mention concrete examples of such external pressure, but it probably arises from a combination of social pressure from the social environment of which they are a part and their own wish to read more than they do. In contrast to the first group (A), in terms of reading, they lack both clear routines and have low involvement with friends in their Bible reading. They do sometimes participate in organised Bible groups, but reading together with friends is not a part

of their daily routine. They experience a *lack of coherence* between what they want to do, and what they are doing. This results in a *lower degree of orientation*, and they struggle with feelings that if they were to read more it would have a *significant* impact on them. All this also gives them a *weaker experience of belonging*. As noted earlier, Schnell[39] describes crises of meaning. This has more severe psychological consequences than I found in the interviews, although the conflict this group experiences has the potential to create a risk of a crisis of meaning.

The third group (C) differs from the first two in several ways. First, they do not find the Bible very important for how they live their lives, and they read it less than the other groups (A and B). They have other ways of participating in religious life. They express some of the same relations to the Bible as the main findings from the study of young adults in the Church of Norway.[40] For them, the more emotional aspect, such as worship and the social experiences of being part of a religious community, are more important to them than reading the Bible. The Bible is not something they need in order to *belong*. This group do not expect to gain much by reading the Bible and therefore do not put pressure on themselves to read. Even though they express that they should read the Bible more, they do not seem troubled about their lack of reading in the way group B is. This indicates that even though there are some signs of lack of *coherence*, they are not very concerned. For this group, the Bible is not part of what gives meaning in their life, nor does it seem to be a risk for creating a crisis of meaning. Since the Bible has less *significance* for them, they are not using it as a *direction* in life.

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39 Schnell. *The Psychology of Meaning in Life*, pp. 105–116.

40 Rafoss and Bangstad, *Å tilbringe tid med gud en kvalitativ studie av unge voksnes bibelbruk* (KIFO, Institutt for kirke-, religions- og livssynsforskning, 2018).

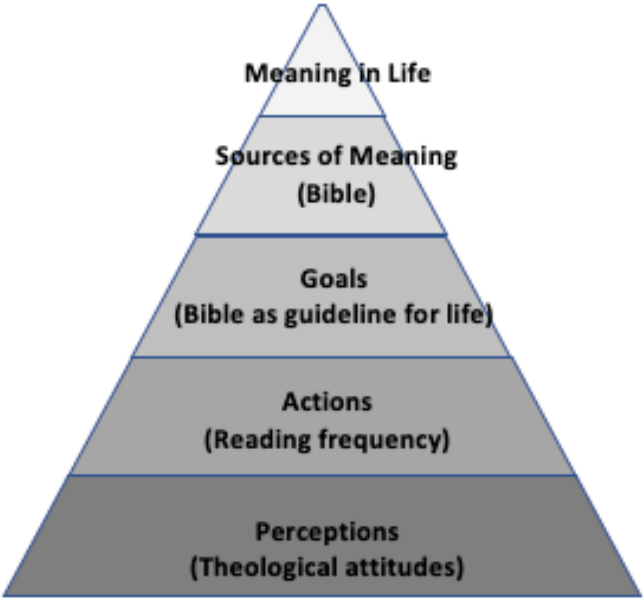

Figure 1: The hierarchic model of meaning, applied to the Bible as a source of meaning, modified from Schnell.

Using a vertical coherence strategy to analyse the relationship between the different layers in the hierarchic model of meaning (Figure 2), we can better understand what is going on in the life of the young people. The model starts with *meaning in life* at the top, then *sources of meaning* is the next layer. In this article, we have examined how the Bible, both as an authority and in terms of practical Bible reading, can be a meaningful resource for religious people. As we see from the discussion above, the three groups relate to the model in different ways. Group C does not seek to use the Bible as a resource for experiencing meaning. The first two groups (A and B) both seek meaning from the Bible but have very different experiences of how this works. The first two groups have the same *goal:* they want the Bible to be very important for how they live their lives. The difference appears in the second-to-last layer, *actions*. Group A have a structure for their Bible reading, they read together with peers, and they express low frustration regarding both the Bible reading and the text. Group B have less structure, are less likely to

involve peers, and express conflicts both towards Bible reading and the text itself. These two groups differ both in their actions and their own emotions about their actions. Group A have a vertical coherence between *actions* and *goals,* while group B do not. This also results in differences in *perception,* where group A subscribes to a conservative theology, while we do not find this in group B. This lack of vertical coherence between goals and action explains why the Bible contributes to a meaningful life for the Coherent but not for the Frustrated. These findings also help us to better understand previous research on young people and Bible reading. It explains why some young people in Norway read the Bible frequently, and demonstrate that it is an integrated and meaningful part of their lives.

This research also highlights that there is a notable group of active young evangelicals in Norway who find the Bible of little importance for their religious life, a finding more in line with previous research on young people in the Church of Norway. Young people who are part of this distanced group (C) do not share the same goal as groups A and B, meaning that the Bible is not very important to them. The Bible is neither a source of meaning in their lives nor is it a source of frustration. Their focus is mainly on social aspects of religious life, such as being part of a community, and emotional and/or spiritual aspects such as worship.