



**Finding  
Jesus**

# **Finding Jesus**

**Supplemental findings  
for those with no  
Christian background**

**evangelical alliance**  
together making Jesus known



# Introduction

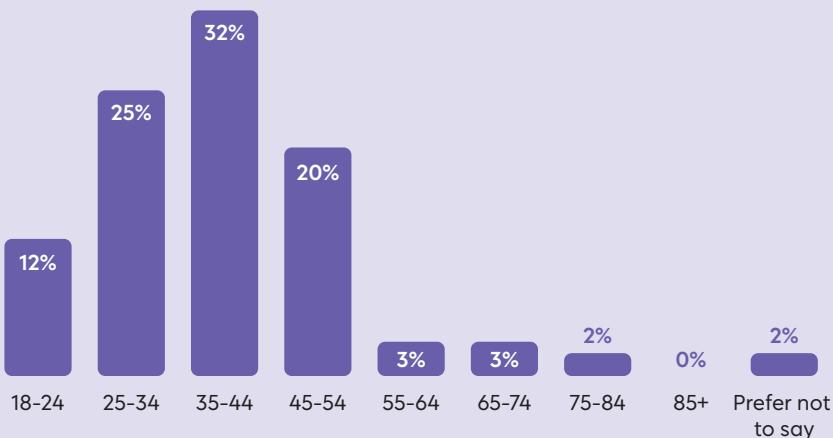
Given the cultural trend towards people identifying as 'nones', we were particularly interested to understand the faith journeys of those who had no Christian heritage at all (ie no Christian family members, Sunday school attendance, Christian friends etc). This applied to a fifth of those who took part – 59 individuals. A third were from ethnic minorities and eight had come to faith in Jesus from other religions, but these 31 women and 26 men had no history of contact with Christians, Christianity, or the church.

This document is a supplement to the main *Finding Jesus* report. It won't repeat everything in that. Instead, it contains some of the variations that emerged from their responses. It highlights some interesting patterns that might be pertinent as we minister to an increasingly secular nation.

## Initial reflections

1. The age of those with no Christian background was striking. It included very few of those over 55. However, significant numbers from younger generations had no exposure to Christianity. This has the advantage of no preconceptions or negative experiences on their part, but also illustrates that we should make no assumptions that they know anything at all about Jesus and the gospel.

### Age of participants with no Christian background



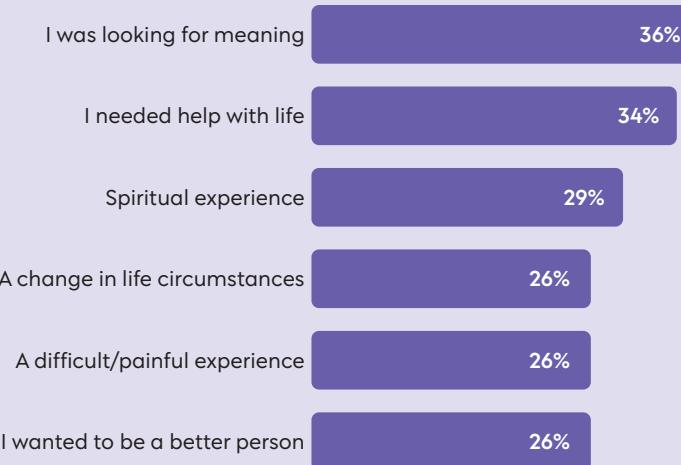
2. This is not true for everyone, but the majority came to faith quickly, 74% reporting it had taken them a year or less to make a decision to follow Jesus once they started exploring Christian faith. It seems likely that rather than having to unpick a lot – as older participants had to – they were coming to the gospel with fresh eyes and quite quickly decided they believed in the claims of Jesus.

## What prompted their interest in Jesus?

Given their age, the initial impetus to explore Christian faith bears similar patterns to other younger groups. In addition to direct experiences of God, these were largely around personal difficulties and existential or identity questions. The three most significant were “I was looking for meaning” (36%), “I needed help with life” (34%) and “a spiritual experience” (29%).

### What prompted you to begin exploring Christian faith?

(Select any that apply)



# How did they experience the journey to finding faith in Jesus?

In describing their faith journey, these new believers with no Christian background were often more positive than other groups. “Hopeful” (51%), “comforting” (47%) and “life-giving” (47%) were selected more often than average, as were “encouraging” (36%) and “positive” (36%). Of course there were things that were “challenging” (37%) but the trend appeared to be that this ‘new news’ was good news to them. Of course, these are people who have decided to follow Jesus, and undoubtedly there are those for whom the gospel did not feel like good news and who have not done so. But, in our familiarity with it, we should not forget to express the hope, comfort and life Jesus offers, particularly in challenging times and circumstances.

## What was challenging during that journey?

When invited to select anything that had been challenging, the top issues were similar to the overall pattern.

### What were the challenges in your faith journey?

(Select any that apply)



● No faith background

● Whole sample

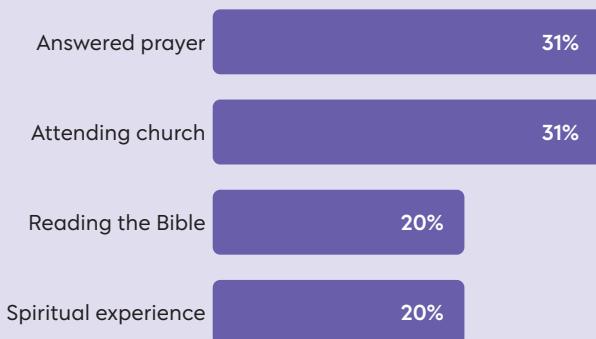
Unsurprisingly, given it was entirely new to them, “understanding the Bible” was challenging (50%) with a fifth saying it was the most challenging thing for them. Believing it was possible for them to be forgiven (45%) was also most challenging for a fifth. Personal struggles (40%), difficult aspects of Christian belief (38%) and lifestyle changes (38%) were similar to other demographic groups. However, accepting the historical truth of Jesus was more of a challenge than on average (34% compared to 26% overall). Obviously, with no Christian background, the person of Jesus is entirely new, something we need to recognise as we teach, preach and disciple people.

## What helped as they explored Christian faith?

When asked what had helped most in the period before they made a decision to follow Jesus, the answers of this group were similar to the overall sample.

### What was most significant as you explored Christian faith?

(Select a maximum of two)

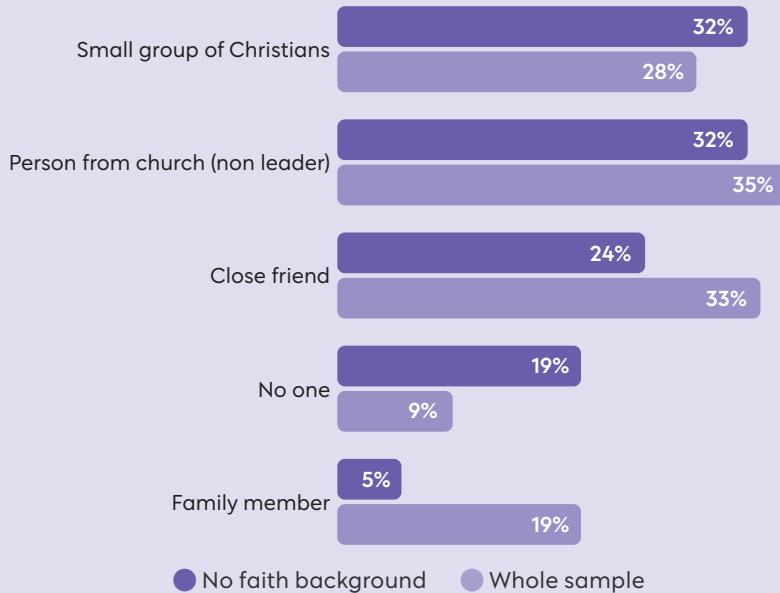


“Reading the Bible” was important to 50% and, as shown, one of the two most important factors for a fifth. “Answered prayer” (31%) and “spiritual experience” (20%) were two of the four most common encouragements, reiterating the significance of direct interaction with God. That is not to say church wasn’t important; “attending church” was significant for half, and most significant for a third. One interview participant expressed particular incredulity that people had not just been on their phones, but had been genuinely interested in speaking to her!

# Who helped most and what did they do?

## Who helped in your journey to follow Jesus?

(Select any that apply)



In terms of who had helped them most in their faith journey, those with no Christian background largely gave the same three types of people as everyone else – with noteworthy variations. People from church, either in a small group (32%) or as an individual (32%) were highest. For example, “They showed me how Jesus was relevant to my life and how faith could help me make sense of my personal struggles. They showed me how Christians were warm, welcoming and loving.” Or, “I was very fortunate in meeting Ben (a mature Christian) at the start of my faith journey. He was very patient and helped answer many questions I had.”

Although a “close friend” was third most frequent, this was lower than average. Only a quarter cited this as opposed to a third overall. It’s also significant that a fifth reported that “no one” had helped in their journey to faith, and just 5% had a “family member” to turn to about it. Clearly, some people find their way to a church community who welcome and encourage them, some have a Christian friend, but a significant number of those with no Christian history at all make the journey towards Jesus alone.

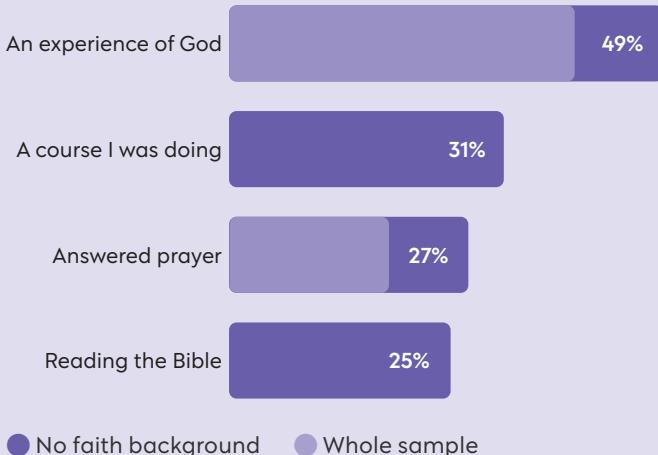
It seems to us that individual Christians being equipped to be public about their faith and available to those who have no one else to talk to about these things is crucial. We also need to show active hospitality towards those who are brave enough to walk through the doors of a church – potentially never having done so before in their life. And we need to take faith out into the community to those who are seeking but don't know where to turn for help.

## What finally prompted them to make the decision to follow Jesus?

Participants with no Christian background answered this question in similar ways to the sample as a whole, with the same top four responses including “a course I was doing” (31%) and “reading the Bible” (25%).

### What finally prompted you to make a decision to follow Jesus?

(Select up to three factors)





However, both “an experiences of God” (49%) and “answered prayer” (27%) were higher than other groups. Just as direct interaction with God helped people on the journey to faith, so it also helped them to make a decision to follow Jesus. Like other participants, they tended to make that decision alone (44%) or at a course (22%) but were less likely to do so after a conversation with a friend.

When asked what one or two things most drew them to the gospel, the most common responses were:

- **Jesus loves me – 49%**
- **I can have a hope and a purpose for my life and beyond – 47%**

Once again, the universal desire to be loved came out. However, hope and purpose were a close second, which, given the existential questioning and life stage many were at, makes sense. It also explains why “hopeful”, “comforting” and “life-giving” were how they experienced the message of the gospel. It is easy to underestimate how anxious young people, young adults and young parents feel when they consider the future for themselves and their children. The comfort of being known by a loving, sovereign God should not be underestimated by those of us fortunate enough to know, or even to have grown up knowing, that reality.

## Since coming to faith

It was striking that although, like others, “learning to pray” (27%), “making sense of the Bible” (29%) and “changing aspects of my lifestyle” (24%) were among the greatest challenges for this group, they were among those who received the most “negative responses from non-Christians” (31%). About a third had found this really difficult.

### What has been most challenging since you decided to follow Jesus?

(Select up to two)

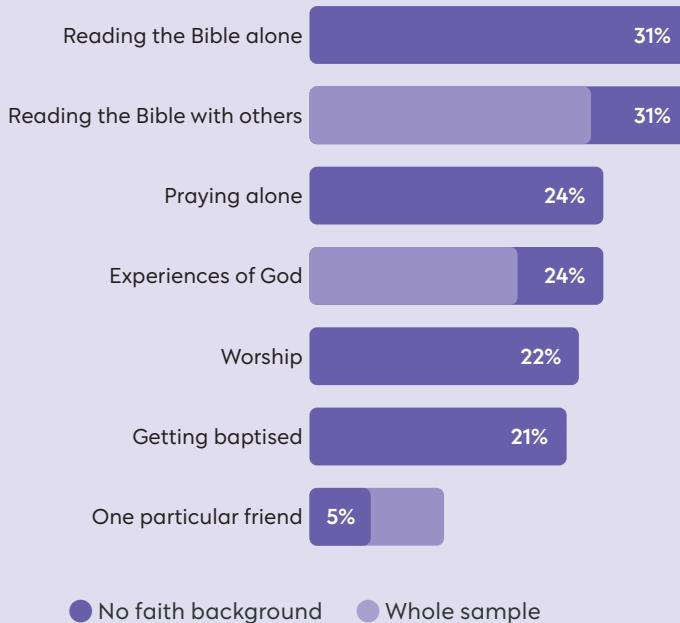


Coming from a secular background or another religion and converting to Christianity – as discussed in the main report – can be an isolating experience. It is absolutely vital that we support those whose family and friends are now viewing them with suspicion or even hostility, and help people understand how Jesus addressed that.

In terms of what had helped, their responses were similar to other people's, but there were a couple of differences.

## What has been most helpful in enabling you to keep following Jesus?

(Select up to two)



Like the wider sample, reading the Bible was the most helpful thing for these participants, both alone and also with others, which was significant for 31% (compared to 23%). With no faith background, learning to read the Bible in community is clearly very important. The percentages of participants selecting “prayer” (24%), “worship” (22%) and “baptism” (21%) were all similar to other people. However, continuing “experiences of God” were reported as most helpful by a quarter of this group compared to 17% overall, and they were half as likely to say “one particular friend” had been most helpful (5% compared to 11% overall).

All this points to those without any Christian background being less likely to have existing social networks or relationships that help with their faith journey. Those relationships appear more likely to develop within churches than to be pre-existing. Helping people to read and understand the Bible is crucial. Likewise, we have the opportunity to encourage their testimony of experiencing God, who, in His mercy, appears to be making Himself tangible to those who have grown up without knowing anything of Him.

## Final reflections

It is wonderful that people are finding their way to Jesus both from other religions and completely secular backgrounds. The evidence appears to be that, faced with anxiety and difficulties, people are both having experiences of God and seeking Him out. In His grace He is making Jesus known to them. God is on the move! Some find a welcoming individual to help them, others are fortunate to find a church that embraces them, and sometimes they make this journey with minimal support. This should encourage Christians of all ages and backgrounds to be open about their faith – they might just be the person that makes the difference to that seeking individual who knows no Christians at all.

Those of us who have been raised in church, or been a follower of Jesus for a long time, can be unaware of the strangeness of the gospel. We can take who Jesus is for granted, or make assumptions about scripture, prayer, and the security and hope the gospel provides. The experiences of these women and men should remind us to be kind, generous, open, hospitable and patient. It is a brave thing when you have no Christian heritage at all to begin a faith journey, never mind cross the threshold of a church. They should also remind us to celebrate the hope, peace and joy we have in Christ and may take for granted. Some of the short testimonies people gave in their questionnaires show this beautifully.

- “My life has changed in every possible way. It has changed the way I see things, the way I think, the way I feel about myself, the way I talk, the way I behave. I feel secure to know my Father looks after me even if I have to walk through the shadow of the valley of death... I'll never be alone again!”
- “I found God when I saw the miracle of my son being born, but I worried about how to lead him through life. I now realise that Jesus Christ is the way and has all the answers to being a father and living a good life.”
- “Jesus is my life. He redeemed me and saved me. I love my church community and the way God has transformed my life.”

# Next steps

## Join the Evangelical Alliance

**The Evangelical Alliance is made up of hundreds of organisations, thousands of churches and tens of thousands of individuals, joined together for the sake of the gospel. Representing our members since 1846, the Evangelical Alliance is the oldest and largest evangelical unity movement in the UK.**

United in mission and voice, we exist to serve and strengthen the work of the church in our communities and throughout society. Highlighting the significant opportunities and challenges facing the church today, we work together to resource Christians so that they are able to act upon their faith in Jesus and to speak up for the gospel, justice and freedom in their areas of influence.

Working across the UK, with offices in London, Cardiff, Stockport, Glasgow and Belfast, our members come together from across denominations, locations, age groups and ethnicities, all sharing a passion to know Jesus and make Him known.



As a membership organisation, the strength of our voice in government depends on how many individual members we have. Join us today and help us speak up on the issues that matter.

[eauk.org/joinus](http://eauk.org/joinus)

## Good News People

**Good News People is a project from the Evangelical Alliance to help us live as people of hope and stand firm on biblical truth.**

Packed with astonishing and encouraging stories of God on the move, this suite of resources aims to encourage us with what God is doing and ask how we live in light of the rapidly changing world around us.

The cultural sands are shifting faster than ever before. What are the postures we need to hold as Christians in the days ahead? What will a thriving, growing church look like in the years to come?

We are good news people in a bad news world.

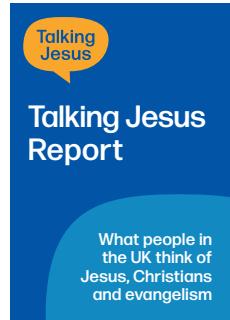
To find out more about this initiative, get hold of the book, listen to the podcast and access the resources, visit [goodnewspeople.church](http://goodnewspeople.church)

## More research from the Evangelical Alliance

We believe good research gives us helpful insight into where God is at work and informs and inspires best practice in His church. *Finding Jesus* is one of a number of studies that we are engaged in to better understand the ever-changing landscape. For further insight see:

### **Talking Jesus**

A research piece born out of a six-way partnership mapping the state of faith across the UK. Studies of thousands of UK adults, which ask them about their perceptions of Jesus, the church and Christians, as well as practising Christians' experiences of sharing their faith. [talkingjesus.org](http://talkingjesus.org)



### **Changing Church**

A regular survey of the membership of evangelical churches that studies discipleship, evangelism, attendance and giving habits amongst leaders and everyday Christians. [eauk.org/changing-church](http://eauk.org/changing-church)

**To keep up to date with these regular research pieces and more visit [eauk.org/great-commission](http://eauk.org/great-commission)**

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