



**Finding
Jesus**

Finding Jesus







**Identifying pathways
to faith in adulthood**

evangelical alliance
together making Jesus known





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Introduction

Much has been written about the decline of the church in the West. However, over the last few years, a different story has started to bubble up amongst non-believers, a surprising interest in Christian faith in all sorts of unlikely places. From celebrities and students to those in prison and on the margins of society, many people are discovering and choosing to follow Jesus.

This research was commissioned to try to understand what was going on in the stories we were hearing of adults in the UK finding Jesus: Who were they? What prompted them to search? What was their journey to Christian faith like? What helped them along the way and what's happened since?

The aim was to understand what was causing people to buck the cultural trend and to help the UK church in its mission to reach people with the good news of Jesus Christ. This report is a summary of those findings. We have found them fascinating, encouraging and inspiring, and we are confident that you will too!

The report is in five parts:

1. **Those who took part**
2. **The journey towards Jesus**
3. **The decision to follow Jesus**
4. **The consequences of conversion**
5. **Recommendations**

How the research was undertaken

Experienced researchers, Dr Ruth Perrin and Joe Warton, conducted a mixed-mode project; a combination of digital survey and online interviews during 2024. Adults over 18, who lived in the UK and had come to faith in Jesus in the past five years, were invited to participate. They were recruited through Evangelical Alliance networks and social media.

The project, led by Rachael Heffer and Phil Knox of the Evangelical Alliance, was intended to be a small-scale 'deep dive' to understand why and how adults in Britain are coming to faith today. Between July and September 2024, 280 individuals completed the digital survey. In the autumn of 2024, in-depth interviews were conducted with a representative sample of 20 of those, exploring their experiences more fully.

Clearly, a project of this size can't claim to be representative of how everyone, everywhere comes to faith in Jesus. Nor can it comment on those who explored and rejected Christian faith. Most of the participants were recruited through Evangelical Alliance networks and so represent those attending evangelical churches. However, a sample of this size and interviews of this depth can helpfully indicate some patterns and illustrate the range of experiences individuals and different demographic groups may have and help us think about how to share the gospel in our time.

Participants are sometimes referred to as interviewees or explorers throughout this report. Names have been changed to respect privacy.

Our many thanks from the outset to both Dr Ruth Perrin and Joe Warton for their wisdom and insights in conducting this research. Thank you to all those who participated both in the survey and the subsequent interviews, sharing their stories with us. Thanks too to our transcribers, Beth Hoskins and Ruth Gabe. We would also like to extend our huge appreciation to the kind donor who made this timely research possible for the Evangelical Alliance to conduct.

An overview of findings

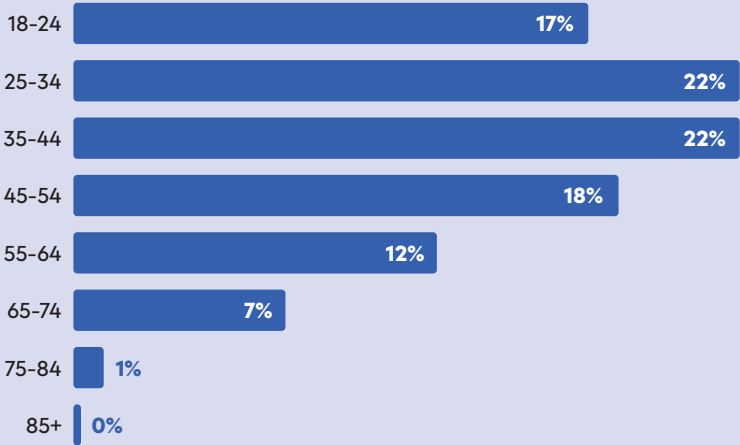
- **God is at work:** drawing all kinds of people to Himself, changing people's hearts, and often making Himself known in quite spectacular ways.
- Very often, people's journeys towards Jesus start with a deep sense of dissatisfaction with how life is. They are looking for something **true and deeply satisfying**.
- Those exploring faith have so **many questions**. There's lots they don't know, or things they are confused about – even those who have some kind of Christian background.
- The **welcome, kindness, and patience** of church communities and individual Christians play a huge part in people's journeys to faith. We all have a part to play in helping others find Jesus.
- **The Bible is very important** in people coming to faith and then growing in faith. Though they often have challenges and questions, seekers are amazed by the truth, beauty and wisdom they discover when reading the Bible.
- **Becoming a Christian is a huge thing!** New Christians have great opportunities to show and share their faith with friends, family and colleagues. At the same time, they face challenges like people not responding well to this change, and changing old habits and patterns is a messy process.

Part 1: Those who took part

Sex and age

We are enormously grateful to everyone who took part, generously sharing their experiences, and are really pleased with the diverse range of people who participated. Of the 280 who completed the online survey, 55% were women and 45% were men. Given the usual trend for women to be more religious, this is encouraging evidence that a significant number of men are coming to faith in Jesus. Similarly, much research over recent decades has shown that people predominantly come to faith when they are young, so we were really interested that the age range of participants (shown in the next graph) was so broad. It seems that increasing numbers of those over 30, including middle age and even older, are exploring faith. Nearly 40% were over 45.

Age range of participants



Geography, ethnicity and income

We were keen to be as representative of the UK population as possible, and to make sure that all ethnicities, economic demographics and regions were represented. 45% of participants had an annual household income of less than £35,000, and 42 individuals aged over 25 (so probably not students) said they had a household income of less than £20,000 a year. 33 people (12%) reported a household income over £75,000 per annum.

In line with the wider population (of whom 81.7% are white), 79% of those who completed the survey described themselves as 'White British'. The other 21% were very diverse, including internationals and British minority ethnic groups.

When asked, where do you live? participants broadly represented the national population spread.

Church denomination

Finally, we also asked participants what sort of church they were attending. Although 16% didn't know the denomination of their church, the rest were:

Anglican
27%

Baptist
16%

Independent
evangelical
12%

Pentecostal
12%

New
charismatic
churches
6%

Other
denominations
11%

(incl. Methodist,
Presbyterian, URC,
Catholic)

Part 2: The journey towards Jesus

What sparked the journey?

Spiritual background

To start with, we wanted to understand where people's journeys had begun, so we asked them to describe their previous beliefs. (Some participants selected more than one category.)

How would you have previously described your beliefs?



According to the 2021 census, 46% of people in the UK identify as Christian, so it's no surprise that 38% classified themselves as 'cultural Christians' (defined as 'I'd tick Christian on a survey but wasn't committed to following Jesus'). This was highest among older participants (60% of those were 65 or over). Although those under 35 were most likely to be atheist, agnostic or disinterested, 35% still identified as 'cultural Christian'.

72% of the overall sample had some sort of historic connection with Christianity. This included family members, friends, Sunday school, church school or youth/student groups etc. Although those associations weren't always positive, for a good number, residual Christianity played a part in their journey. In the interviews, when participants talked about their historical Christian background, they tended to describe their past experiences somewhat negatively, for example, being bored

in church, or Christianity as something that wasn't of interest or relevant to their lives. Most of them did not have a living and active faith when they were younger. However, for some, Christianity seemed to leave some kind of imprint, which they returned to later in life. Be it the faith of grandparents, conversations with teenage friends, or events in the community, we definitely should not dismiss the long-term significance of Christian children's, youth and schools work.

One fifth of survey respondents had no religious background or contacts at all (rising to one third among those with lower incomes). Those with no religious background had very little idea what Christianity was about and had tended to see it as something marginal and irrelevant. It's particularly important to pay attention to their accounts because as the 'residue' of cultural Christianity continues to decrease across society, their experiences will become more common.

What prompted them to begin exploring Christianity?

For most, a combination of factors prompted their faith journey. (They could select multiple options.)

What prompted you to begin exploring Christian faith? (Select any that apply)



**The most frequent
were internal,
personal and
existential issues
like:**

**I needed help
with life**

37%

**I was looking for
meaning**

34%

**A difficult or painful
experience**

32%

**I wanted to be a
better person**

26%

In the interviews, **the vast majority said they felt some kind of dissatisfaction with their life before they started to explore Christian faith.** They described this using language such as “emptiness”, “something missing” and “a hole I couldn’t fill”.

Overall, one fifth cited intellectual or philosophical curiosity, and similar numbers said attending a church service or other Christian event had kick-started their curiosity, but three sets of factors were most common: internal, personal or existential problems; actions or words of Christians they knew; and some sort of supernatural experience.

For some, their experience of brokenness was clear: fractured relationships, substance misuse and mental health challenges. For others, things looked great from the outside. They had everything they thought would make them happy: family, money, career and friends. Yet despite this, they still felt like something was missing.

“

On the outside, and on paper, you would have thought I would be the happiest. I had everything I ever wanted. My partner had a successful business, which meant I didn’t have to work. We had two children, which is all I have wanted. We lived in a nice little village. And I just thought, *Wow, why am I not happy?* Because I had what I’d always thought I wanted and thought that I had everything that I wanted in life. But actually, I was quite miserable.”



Carly loved her life in the city she'd grown up in. She enjoyed her work, her family life, and her friendships. Then, an amazing job opportunity came up for her husband, which involved them moving to the other side of the country. Carly found herself struggling to raise young children in a city where she knew no one and had no support. One day, she plucked up the courage to walk into a parent and toddler group, run by a local church. The volunteers who ran the group made her feel so welcome and introduced her to other parents. After a couple of months, Carly felt so at home with this group of people, she wanted to take her whole family to that church's Sunday service. This is where her journey to faith began.

Second most significant were the actions or words of Christians they knew:

A Christian spoke to me about their faith

29%

Seeing the impact of Christian faith on someone I know

29%

The actions of a Christian

26%

Those from low-income backgrounds were most likely to comment on the positive actions of Christians towards them. They, and under-25's, were also most likely to say they had seen faith in Jesus change someone they knew. At a time when many said they were struggling, sincere generosity, kindness and the visible effects of conversion in friends and family made the gospel a tangible lifeline for them.

The third most significant factor was a spiritual experience.

28% of survey respondents said a spiritual experience had prompted them to start exploring faith. It became clear from the interviews that people had experiences they could not explain. These caused them to search for answers in places they had not considered before. Having had these encounters, they often approached a Christian they knew, searched the internet, or sometimes just wandered into a church looking for understanding on what had happened to them.

Donny's life had been spiralling downwards. The heavy drinking that started in his mid-teens was still happening in his mid-30s. Separated from his long-term partner and their two children, Donny described himself as having an intense "hatred towards myself", which no amount of alcohol or drugs was able to heal. One night, Donny decided he would end his life. Just before he was about to do it, he cried out to God in desperation. Immediately, Donny felt an overwhelming sense of peace... and this is where his journey to Jesus began.



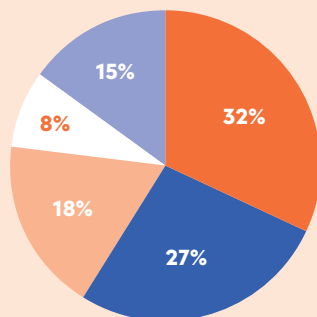


How long was the journey to faith?

Of course, every person's faith journey is unique. Some participants had grown up in Christian homes and attended church as children, while others had no religious background at all. Particularly for those who were older, the process tended to take several years, but for 59% of participants, conversion had taken less than a year. This number jumped to 76% of those with a low income, and 74% of those with no faith background. Traditionally, the expectation has been that people need to hear the gospel multiple times before they accept Jesus. Our findings suggest that although that's still true for some, many people have supernatural experiences that 'fast-track' the process of faith in Jesus. We also noticed lots of people make professions of faith before they understand much of the gospel at all.

How long it took people to come to faith

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1–2 years
- 3–5 years
- I've been curious for longer than 5 years



What words best described participants' journeys of exploring Christian faith?

'challenging'
41%

'hopeful'
40%

'life-giving'
37%

'comforting'
36%

'encouraging'
31%

How exploration felt

In the survey, participants were asked to select up to three words that best described their journey of exploring Christian faith. Some of the top words they selected were 'hopeful' (40%), 'life-giving' (37%), 'comforting' (36%) and 'encouraging' (31%). But most common was 'challenging' (41%). This was particularly the case for those with no faith background (49%) and those under 25 (55%). The bigger the cultural gap between a historic Christian worldview and their own cultural context, the more disconcerting and challenging understanding the gospel is. Christian 'basics' are completely alien for many people and we mustn't make assumptions about their knowledge. The gospel is a whole new world for many!

It's also important to know that for some people, 'frightening' (5%), 'painful' (5%) and 'unsettling' (5%) were the words they used. Attending church or telling friends they were exploring faith were really difficult.



What helped during their faith journey?

Everyone's faith journey is unique, but we wondered if there were common threads or patterns that encouraged people as they explored Christianity. Initially, they could select from a wide range of factors (below). We then asked them which one or two were most helpful.

Which of these helped as you explored Christian faith? (Select any that apply)



Firstly, attending church was cited by 59% as a significant part of their journey, and 27% said it was one of the two most significant factors. The importance of the church community came up frequently in the interviews as a very significant factor in their journeys towards Jesus. While several participants told us how much they had been impacted by times of sung worship and by sermons, the most significant aspect of church they talked about was the people they encountered. Of course, there will be those who came to church and never returned, but for many of these participants, attending a church service and being welcomed there was hugely impactful.

“

It was absolutely terrifying. I think I remember my first Sunday. So I'd taken my mum with me the first few times, but then she didn't really want to come anymore, so I said I would start going by myself. But I remember the first Sunday... during the sermon I was getting so panicky and it was just such an overwhelming situation. Not only socially, but also just knowing that I was in a room full of people who believed that Jesus was God was wild.”

Linked to this was the hospitality, generosity and service of Christians (38%). Be it toddler groups, invitations into people's homes, or simply people remembering their name from week to week, those actions matter. The youngest adults (who were among the most sceptical of Christians) tended to be particularly impacted by authentic faith in action. One woman was struck that people had looked at her rather than their phones! It's clear that genuine interest and sincere kindness go a long way.



What churches are doing well

Taking a genuine interest – Participants described how the people they met in church spaces really cared about them and listened attentively to them. They weren't hurried, distracted or coming with an agenda. They asked questions and listened well. Participants commented that this is different from how people generally relate to them in other spaces.

Supporting them through life's challenges – During the exploring phase, some were wrestling with challenges, such as job loss, grief, substance misuse issues and health problems. They described how people within the church community supported them through these challenges, both emotionally and practically.

Modelling faith in action – By being part of a Christian community, those exploring faith could see what following Jesus looked like in the lives of others. This helped them see that Jesus really does change lives.

“

I remember coming home one day and saying to my husband, “I don’t know what it is about that place. I love being there to the point where I will stay and help them clear up at the end, because there’s just something there; I just love it” ... I think initially, the factor that was most significant was the people at the church. I noticed there was something about these people that made me want to know, *Why are you like this?* ... They just seemed to all be loving of one another, and they were so welcoming, they were so kind, they were interested in you. They’d remember things. So, if you’d happen to mention at the toddler group, “Oh, I’ve got this going on this week,” I’d go back the week after, and they’d say, “Oh, how was it?” And I’d think, *Oh, my gosh! My husband didn’t even remember I was doing that, and you have!*”





Donny described how he read the entire Bible, starting with Genesis: “By the time I was at Exodus, I’m a full believer, and by the time I got to the New Testament, it just broke my heart. When I got to the true story of Jesus, I was a broken man. Just an absolute love for what He’s done.”

Secondly, although they often struggled to understand it, nearly half (47%) found the Bible significant in their journey. For one fifth, it was one of the two most important things. For those who were older, it was twice as likely to be so, but people of all ages and demographics described feeling the urge to pick up a Bible and read it. Whether they had a Christian background or not, most participants had very little knowledge about the Bible in the early days of their journeys. They weren't quite sure what it was, or how to read or apply it. They didn't know that there were different versions of the Bible, or what the differences were between the Old and New Testaments.

Despite this, and often with some pointers from a Christian or study tool, they became avid Bible readers. They talked about the amazing impact it had on them, and how they wanted to keep reading. Many described experiencing feelings of peace and joy as they read.

The main things that helped them get the most out of the Bible were:

- Knowing where to start. (For most, this meant starting by reading one or more of the Gospels.)
- Getting a sense of the big story the Bible tells.
- Finding a modern translation they could understand.
- Understanding a little bit about the context of the writers and who they were writing to.
- Learning how they could make connections between the Bible and their everyday lives.

Zoë started reading the Bible by herself after she had come across some Christian content on TikTok. She found herself particularly moved as she read about God's grace in Paul's letter to the Romans. After reading this, she wanted to find a church to see what this looked like in real life.



Thirdly, spiritual experiences (39%) and answered prayer (37%) were important factors. They were one of the two most important factors to nearly one third of survey respondents. It was clear that people are frequently having experiences of God, and this was particularly true among those with no faith background. Sometimes these happened in church settings, but we were told many stories that people understood as being divine activity. *(For more spiritual experience accounts, see part 3.)*

The final two most significant categories involved talking things through. Firstly, attending courses was significant for 42% of people, and it was one of the two most important factors for a fifth of participants. Of the 20 new Christians we interviewed, eight had attended an Alpha course, and three had attended Christianity Explored. Participants spoke positively about both, saying that they were helpful for providing the foundational building blocks of Christian faith and life. However, the two most significant aspects were:

- **The people around the table with them.**
They talked positively about the Christians hosting sessions, as well as those who were exploring faith. They liked being on a journey with others, hearing their stories, and seeing the quality of character in those already following Jesus.
- **The opportunity to ask questions.**
Whether they were exploring faith or had recently made a commitment to follow Jesus, people had lots of questions. Having a safe space to share those and grapple with difficult issues was very significant in helping them take steps towards making a commitment, or in cementing the commitment they had already made.

Who had been most helpful?

Help in talking things through included individual Christians who journeyed with them. We asked people to be specific about who had been most helpful. (They could choose more than one.)

- For the 18-25s, friendship was most important, which makes sense given the influence of peers in that life stage.
- Those from lower incomes were more likely to report talking to Christians they had met at church rather than friends or family, emphasising the importance of inclusion for those who may have no close Christian relationships.
- Older participants and those from lower incomes were more likely to cite church leaders.

Many spoke about grandparents, siblings and even their children as conversation partners. However, one in ten overall, and one fifth of those with no faith background, made the journey alone, with no one to talk to. These people typically relied on the internet, especially YouTube and podcasts, for information.

What did they do?

What new Christians told us repeatedly about the individuals who helped them was:

- **Time, space and patience.**

They regularly described the Christians who journeyed with them as “patient” and “not pushy”. They gave time in two senses: making themselves available to spend time together and giving the explorer time to think and work through issues. There was no sense of hurriedness. In a busy, driven society, time was seen as a generous gift.

- **Answering questions.**

These explorers had so many questions, and though they did find answers in books and YouTube videos, they loved having a real Christian to talk with. They appreciated it when the Christian could answer their questions, but didn’t mind if they weren’t able to. Just having someone to share the question with was helpful. “I think all of them had this common thing where they never made me feel stupid for asking the question, whatever the question was.”

- **Role modelling.**

Participants were impressed by the character of the Christians who were journeying with them. One was moved when he turned up to the morning service early and found the pastor sweeping the floor. Another talked about how kind her boyfriend’s Christian stepbrother was. Even though she would mock him for his faith, he was always so calm and kind. “I knew I could trust him,” she said.

- **Support.**

Several participants shared moving stories about how individual Christians had helped them – through both the challenges of exploring faith and also life struggles they were experiencing – with emotional and practical support.

- **Inviting.**

One of the things that helped explorers was being invited to something by a Christian. Some attended Alpha courses because they were invited by a dental hygienist, Uber driver or holiday club volunteer. Others attended church after invitations from a friend, neighbour, mother or tutor.

“

She was just awesome. She would come round and we would meet regularly, and we did Christianity Explored. Then we'd do Bible study, or we'd just meet for coffee and a catch-up. She'd message me regularly. I just felt like she was there for me if I needed her, and likewise, I hope she felt the same about me.”



- **Advice and signposting.**

The world of Christian faith was totally new to many, so having somebody who could point them in the right direction was very helpful. Getting hold of a Bible and explaining how to read it, pointers on finding a church, podcasts, TV shows, and helping them understand spiritual experiences were just some ways Christians were helpful.



Social media

Social media is inevitably playing a role in people's journey to faith, but to varying degrees at different stages. In the interviews, digital media came up frequently. At least half the participants mentioned some form of digital resource. YouTube came up most frequently, and other examples included the YouVersion Bible App, the BibleProject, and podcasts.

However, digital media seems to play more of a supporting role, rather than initiating our interviewees' journeys to Jesus. As participants explored the Christian faith, 15% found online resources helped them and 10% cited social media posts. Instances were higher among younger people (23% for online resources and 17% citing social media).



A journey that includes head and heart

As we reflected on what these new Christians said in interviews, it was clear that both rational thinking and emotions played their part in guiding many people towards Jesus. It was not the case that some people relied solely on thoughts, while others relied on feelings. Most people were influenced by both.

- **Thinking their way to faith.** Whether it was listening to a sermon on YouTube, reading an apologetics book or having a conversation with a friend, participants talked about how the points and arguments they were hearing just made sense. Whether it was the historical reliability of the Bible, the closing of the supposed gap between science and faith, or the treatment of women throughout the centuries, in all kinds of areas, explorers were impressed and convinced by what they were reading and hearing.
- **Feeling their way to faith.** Feelings played a key role for the majority of those we interviewed. Some described emotional responses in church services, such as an overwhelming sense of peace, deep joy or moments where they started crying and didn't know why. Several felt a sense of peace when they were reading the Bible. Alongside what we might call 'positive emotions', some described a strong sense of conviction, which led to them wanting to get right with God.

The challenges of a faith journey

Faith journeys are rarely straightforward, and just as the things people found encouraging were varied, so were their challenges. Half had problems understanding the Bible and 43% identified difficult aspects of Christian belief, eg suffering, hell, other religions, sexual ethics, etc as barriers. When asked what two factors were most challenging, the results were:

What was most challenging as you explored Christian faith? (Select any two that apply)



Aspects of Christian belief

Overall, 43% said this was a challenge and 25% that it was one of the two most significant challenges for them. As well as philosophical and ethical questions, when they started encountering what the Bible teaches (both reading it by themselves and in church), they had lots of queries such as, 'Did this really happen?' Most frequent in the interviews were questions around creation and the relationship between science and the Bible. Participants wondered about the historical reliability of the Bible, especially the miracles it reports, like the feeding of the 5,000.

Believing they could be forgiven

38% of participants reported this as challenging, and 23% said it was one of the two biggest challenges. It seems that even in a permissive, liberal society, people are carrying guilt and shame. In interviews, participants explained that they didn't struggle with the concept of God being loving and merciful. They believed this to be true and had no problem believing other people could be forgiven. The struggle is personal: could I be forgiven? One participant explained: "I could see in principle that God is forgiving and God is loving. And I'm going to church, and totally believe that He's forgiven all these people, and that He loves all these people, and they're His. But would He do that for me? Because I knew my own heart, and I could see that I wasn't the standard of holiness that we as humans should be."

What was most challenging as you explored Christian faith?

Difficult aspects of Christian belief

25%

Believing I can be forgiven

23%

Understanding the Bible

20%

Personal struggles

18%

Lifestyle changes

18%



Understanding the Bible

As we have already seen, the Bible plays a significant part in helping people move forward in their faith journeys. However, nearly half talked about their challenges with the Bible and as shown previously, for 20%, it was one of the two most difficult factors. One participant put it like this: “I knew absolutely nothing about the Bible, to the point where I had to have someone explain to me that there was an Old Testament and a New Testament, and that the New Testament was about Jesus.” Even those with some Christian background didn’t know things that long-term Christians might take for granted, such as modern translations being available, and that the Bible tells a big story, from creation to new creation.

Lifestyle challenges

For many, the challenge wasn’t so much believing that what the Bible says is true, but the implications of it being true. As one participant shared, “It wasn’t that I found the teachings themselves difficult; it was putting them into practice or beginning to put them into practice.” Particular areas of challenge were around sex, relationships and alcohol. These tensions also played out in what others might think of them if they converted. It’s no small thing to become a disciple of Jesus as an adult and face a change in values and behaviours. A significant part of the journey for people is weighing the cost, including the potential risk to relationships.

Demographic variation

People's challenges also varied depending on their background.

Among participants with lower incomes, no one struggled with the existence of God, and only one reported no support from Christians. However, the concept of being forgiven, combined with personal struggles, lifestyle changes they felt they would need to make, and what others would think of them, were most difficult. In communities where people often face significant disadvantages, personal and relational challenges were the hardest thing.

The challenges facing those with no faith background were more theological, including the existence of God and person of Jesus. This isn't surprising, but again, it's important to realise just what a shift in worldview people are having to make when they accept the gospel as adults. They also reported being most impacted by the poor behaviour of Christians and least likely to have support in their faith journey. It seems probable, given that many didn't know any Christians, that their perception was a stereotype, but it was still a hurdle to navigate. Some described not knowing anyone to talk to about their questions or if they were allowed to go into a church at all.

By contrast, while also sceptical of the behaviour of Christians, the youngest adults (aged 18-24) seemed to have found the help or support they needed. All of them had found people to talk to about Jesus one way or another, suggesting that although there aren't many of them numerically, young Christians tend to be public about their faith and willing to support their friends' exploration. However, the cultural gap between Christian beliefs or ethics and their own is clear given how many were wrestling with lifestyle changes they felt they would need to make as well as difficult aspects of faith.



Why did they keep going?

Given how challenging the journey could be, we asked interviewees why they kept going. Participants described a 'coming and going' pattern of erratic attendance at church or a course over a period of time as they processed things. However, they often shared having seen or experienced something that they knew was true, beautiful or life-changing. Even though they had unanswered questions or difficulties, they knew there was something in Christian faith they wanted and couldn't find elsewhere. Many also talked about the invisible activity of God. They recognised there was something beyond themselves that was drawing them.



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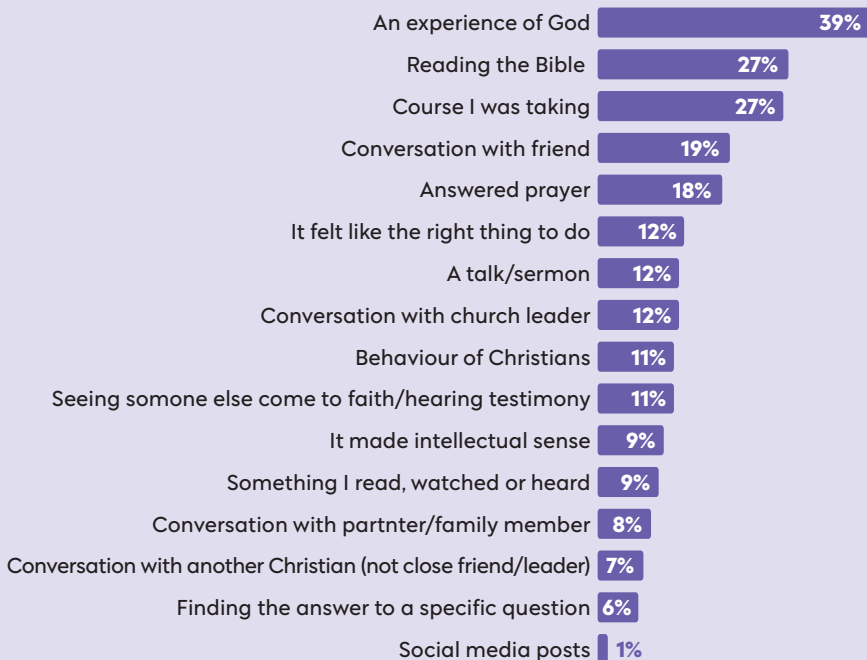
But I kept coming [to church] because, despite the fear... something was pulling me and I had to keep doing it... It's so hard to explain. It was just like, there's something here that is really, not only beautiful, but it just feels right. And it's like, I need to see if this is true and I need to know if this is true, because I've not experienced anything like this before, and I struggle to put it into words because it was probably the Holy Spirit. But yeah, I could only really describe it as a pull towards the church.”

Part 3: Making the decision to follow Jesus

What finally prompted the decision?

At some point, all 280 people had chosen to become disciples of Jesus Christ. We wanted to understand how that happened after a period of searching. That decision often involves multiple things, and so we invited people to choose up to three options that most influenced them to finally make that choice.

What finally prompted you to make the decision to follow Jesus? (Select up to three if it was a combination of factors)



Factors that prompted people to make the decision to follow Jesus

Conversations with individuals

46%

An experience of God

39%

Reading the Bible

27%

Answered prayer

18%

People's experiences are diverse. For some, it was an intellectual choice, being convinced by an argument or answer to a specific question. For others, it was a gut feeling or response to a testimony or sermon. But conversations with individuals (46% if you combine the categories) or at a course (27%) were important across the board. Although they may start the journey alone, most people don't come to faith in isolation but in relationship.

However, the most significant factors involved direct engagement with God. Nearly 40% reported an experience of God, 27% said reading the Bible, and 18% said answered prayer.



- Those from lower income backgrounds were more likely to report the impact of a conversation with a church leader (24%), sermon (19%) or testimony (17%) than other groups.
- Older participants (aged 65 and over) reported reading the Bible (46%) and talking to a friend about it (29%) at well above the sample average.
- Those with no faith background were strongly impacted by experiences of God (49%) and answered prayer (27%).
- Very young adults (aged 18–24) similarly reported high levels of spiritual experience (45%) but were also twice as likely to just trust their gut (it felt like the right thing to do – 23%) or logic (it made intellectual sense – 19%). As already described, they were using both head and heart to make a decision to follow Jesus.

Spiritual experiences

As we've seen in earlier sections of the report, spiritual experiences play an important part in many people's journeys towards Jesus. Sometimes they spark the process or are significant milestones along the way. But there seems to be a particular clustering of these experiences very close to or at the time of conversion.

People's experiences vary. They include physical healing, physical sensations, intense emotional experiences, hearing God and/or a tangible sense of God's presence. Around two fifths of those who completed the survey, and the same proportion of those we interviewed, said that it was a spiritual experience that finally 'sealed the deal' for them.

God is involved throughout the whole journey in people finding Jesus; spiritual experiences are not the only marker of God's divine intervention in people's lives. However, they do remind and encourage us that, as we seek to play our part in helping others discover Jesus, God is directly involved. It's not all down to us! It's also helpful for us to be aware that spiritual experiences are common, and that those who have them often find it helpful to speak to a Christian about them.

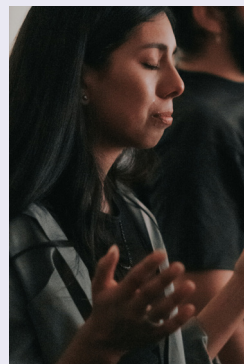
Annie was something of a rising star in the world of witchcraft and spiritualism. She had a successful YouTube channel, wrote for magazines, and was a key figure in her local spiritualist church. Her sister, however, had recently become a Christian and was getting baptised. As Annie was putting on her jewellery the morning of the baptism service, she found that her crystal bracelets “felt like shackles” on her wrists, so she took them off. When she went to put her pentagram on, she heard a voice that said, “You won’t need that today.” Before she entered the church, she prayed that the Archangel Michael would protect her from being around these Christians! In the service, after her sister had been baptised, the pastor asked if there was anyone else who wanted to be baptised. Immediately, Annie started shaking and convulsing. Then she heard the voice she’d heard earlier that morning: “I am the Way, I am the Truth, I am the Life.” Within minutes, she was baptised and had committed her life to Jesus!



Nabeel had been exploring faith for some time. One evening, his Christian friend suggested that perhaps he was ready to “open the door to Jesus”. That night, Nabeel prayed, “Oh Lord, I give my heart to you and I open my door to let you in.” Despite the fact that his flat was freezing cold, Nabeel describes how he “felt a sense of warmth flowing through me... It felt really supernatural”. He always went to bed feeling cold, but that night he didn’t even need a duvet.



Kez, a university student, had been pretty hostile to Christians and Christian faith. Now, she’d been attending a church for a few months and was doing Alpha. On the Friday night of a church weekend away, she fell asleep and had what she described as “an out of body experience and I thought I was dead... I was like, “God, this is really not cool killing me off on the weekend away; it will really traumatised these people when they wake up!” And from behind, I heard this voice just say to me, “You’re not dead. You’re fine... But all the time you’re resisting, I can’t come in.”” Later the next day, Kez was in a worship session, when a lady said to her, “I really feel as if you need to stop resisting.” They agreed to pray together, and as they did, Kez “literally felt all this grief and anger and upset and guilt fade off me, and that’s when I realised that God was real”.



When did they decide to follow Jesus?

Trying to gain a richer understanding of their conversion experiences, we asked people about the circumstances when they made the decision to follow Jesus.

For many people, just as their faith journey began internally and alone, making a decision to follow Jesus was something that took place privately.

This makes sense if an experience of God or reading the Bible are the things that impacted them most powerfully. However, we shouldn't underestimate communal opportunities, be they at a course, in conversation, or in a worship setting.



Committing with limited knowledge

Listening to people describe how they came to faith, we noticed that a significant number of them were making some kind of commitment with only a very limited understanding of the gospel. Some participants had a long journey of reading, thinking, and asking questions. **But many made some kind of commitment before they had fully understood exactly what they were committing to.** This tended to be in response either to the overwhelming love they had received within the Christian community, or to some kind of encounter with God. For these people, they did a lot of what we might consider exploring Christian faith after they had already committed to it, illustrating the need for intentional discipleship of new believers.

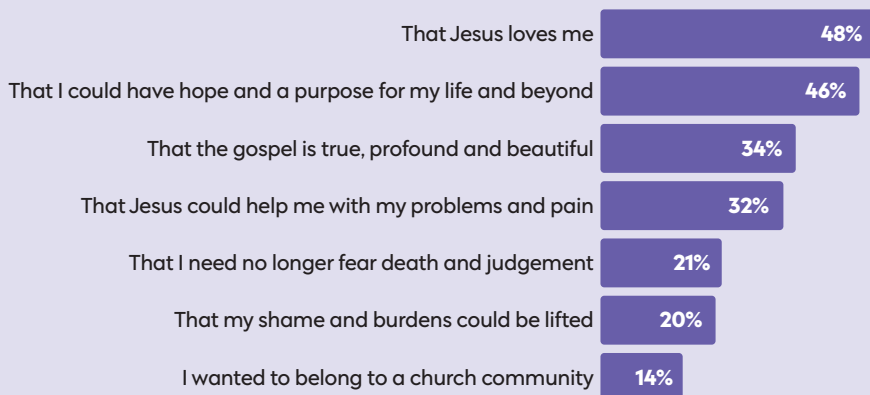
Here are a few snippets of how some people took the step to start following Jesus. Some were dramatic, others less so – all of them significant.

- **Ming** had bought himself a Bible in Hong Kong, before moving to the UK. A college tutor invited him to church, and he loved being part of the community. After lots of reading the Bible, asking questions and spending time with Christians, Ming stayed up one night, thinking hard about his life. At around 3am, he made the decision to follow Jesus.
- **Harpreet** is in her 20s and travelled alone to the UK from India. She'd been having conversations with a Christian who worked in the same shop as her. She was curious and went along to some church services. She was struck by "the purity of the people there", and found herself drawn to Christian faith, though she was scared of what her Sikh family would think. One Sunday, she saw people being baptised and felt very strongly that she also should get baptised.
- **Luke's** parents and sister were Christians, but he'd never believed. In his 40s, his job enabled him to travel, experiment with drugs, and, in his words, "I was sort of my own sort of God." He wasn't happy though, and had been watching Christian content on YouTube, listening to worship music and having conversations with his mum. One day, while smoking weed in his shed, he began confessing his sins to God. As he did this, he experienced what he described as "a warm electrical feeling". After this he threw his weed in the bin!
- **Rupert**, a retired academic, started having conversations about Christian faith with his regular Uber driver, who invited him to do Alpha. He loved it, and being part of a church community. He regularly attended a mid-week session put on by the church's evangelist. After some time, the evangelist suggested Rupert was ready for reconfirmation. This resonated with Rupert, and he was delighted that someone in Christian leadership could see he'd reached this point.
- **Zoë's** journey started with a TikTok video, which led to more videos, and then to reading the Bible for herself. She then joined a local church, while also reading Christian apologetics books. The big decision for her was deciding whether or not to get baptised. It was while she was in the process of making that decision that she committed her life to Jesus.

What most drew them to the gospel?

Timothy Keller, in his book *Center Church*, describes six 'appeals of the gospel', which he argues appeal to different people. We asked people which one or two most powerfully drew them to faith. (We also added in an option about church community.) The results were striking.

What most drew you to the gospel?



In a society of broken relationships and an 'epidemic of loneliness', people's desire to be loved was very clear (48%). So too was a longing for hope and wanting their lives to have meaning (46%). While those were chosen most commonly across the board, again there were important nuances which might impact the way we communicate the gospel in different contexts.

The promise of hope was particularly powerful for those from lower incomes (60% chose it). Often facing personal challenges and bleak prospects, the idea that things can and will change is deeply appealing.

There were two groups for whom the truth, beauty and profundity of the gospel was most significant: those 65+ (46%) and, strikingly, those under 25. Half of those under 25 (49%) chose these aspects of the gospel as equally important to the promise of hope for the future (49%), followed by being loved. This suggests that in an anxious world of disinformation, fake news, subjectivity and huge uncertainty, rather than wanting to 'create their own truth', young adults are increasingly looking for facts and certainty and want to know whether the gospel is credible and can be trusted. This is a significant cultural shift and one we should pay attention to. Apologetics, history and the credibility of scripture are all crucial. Young adults want to both know and feel the truth of the gospel.



**What most drew
you to the gospel?**

Jesus loves me

48%

I could have hope
and a purpose for
my life and beyond

46%

The gospel is true,
profound and
beautiful

34%

Jesus could help me
with my problems
and pain

32%

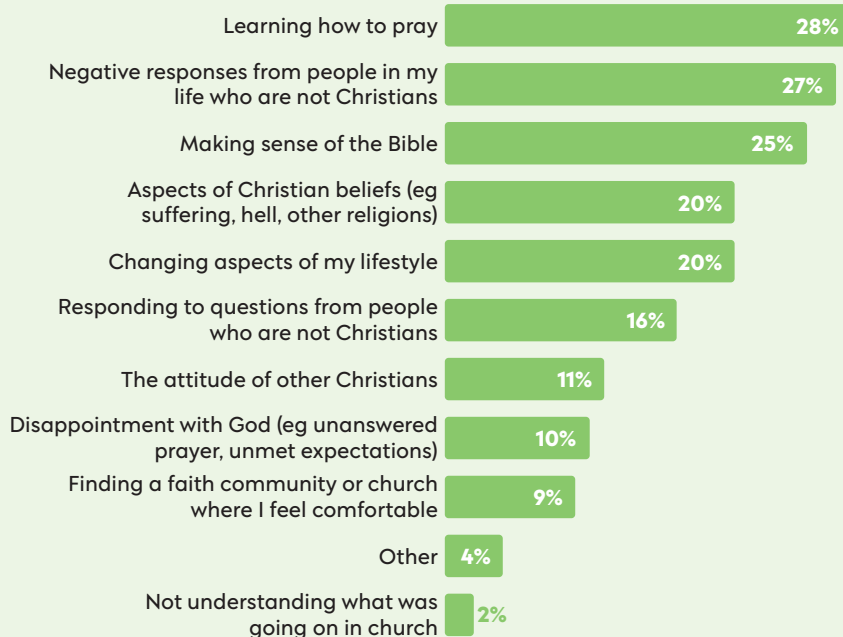
Part 4: The consequences of conversion

People were overwhelmingly positive about the difference choosing to follow Jesus had made. Dozens made comments like, “My life feels like it’s in colour now”, “I can feel that sense of peace I’ve been searching for for years”, “I now have hope in my future”. But some also recognised the cost of that choice: “It’s utterly changed the direction of my life. It’s been the hardest experience – but also the most joyous.”

What have the challenges been?

Given 11 options, participants selected one or two things they found hardest overall.

Which one or two have been most challenging since you decided to follow Jesus? (Select up to two)



Spiritual practices

It's easy to assume that people simply know basic spiritual practices, but especially for those who have not grown up with a faith background (and even for some that have), learning to pray and make sense of the Bible are new skills which they need support with. Half (49%) said learning to pray was a challenge, and (as shown above) for 28% it was one of the two most challenging things. Similarly, 49% reported difficulty reading the Bible and 25% indicated that it was one of the most difficult things. We need to not make assumptions and to help people develop their spiritual practices from the outset.

Messy transitional period

Similarly, people's questions and uncertainties don't vanish overnight, and the process of making lifestyle changes can be a bumpy road that people need patience and support with as they begin a journey of discipleship. People told us that the change from not following Jesus to doing so is huge; it affects so many aspects of life. They shared a wide range of areas they had battled, or continued to battle with. Examples included their relationships with drugs and alcohol, swearing, sexual relationships and conversations that come up with friends (eg gossip, talking behind people's backs, etc). Some were very specific, such as a former professional medium, who still had people contacting her for spiritual readings and for whom the loss of income was a real sacrifice.

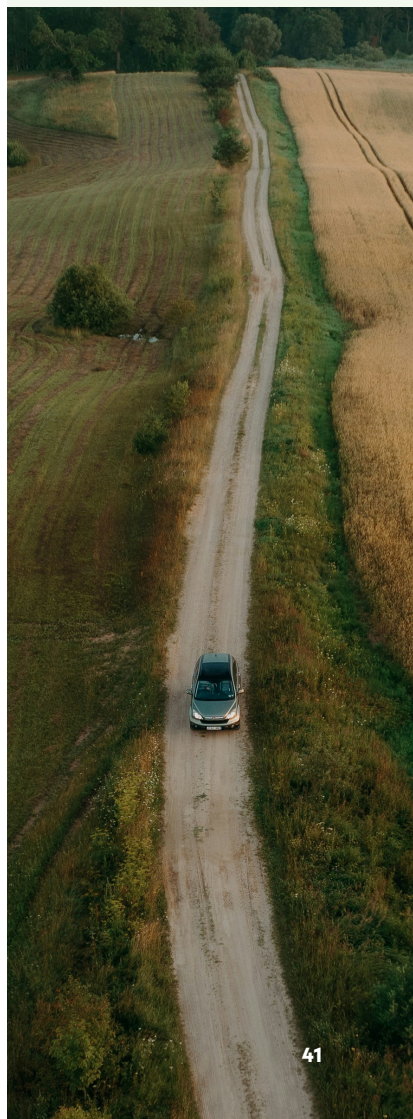
The challenges of conversion

Learning to pray

49%

Reading the Bible

49%





Losing friends

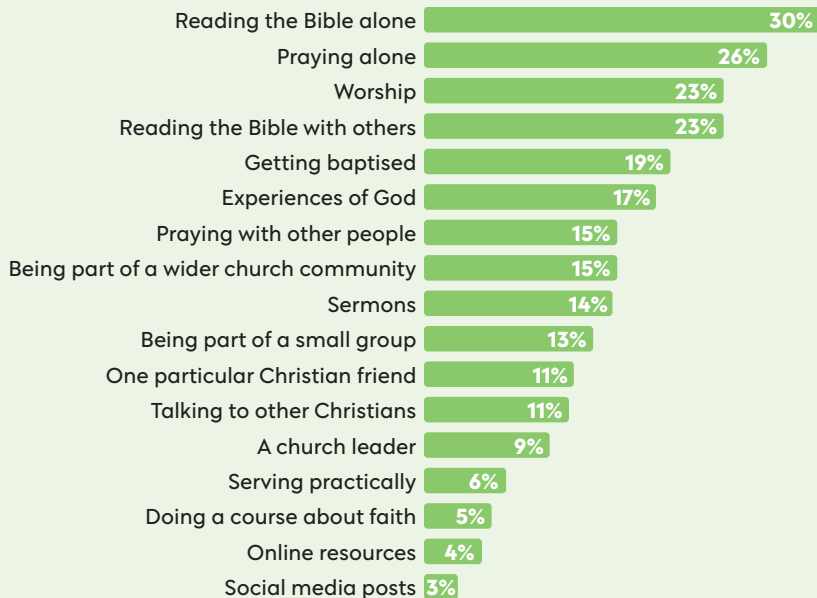
It's important to recognise that it really does cost people to become Christians, even in a pluralistic, liberal society like the UK. Various recent studies have revealed that for most Christians, non-Christian friends and colleagues respond to their faith with 'positive indifference' or 'warm apathy'. While this was the case for some participants, many reported negative responses to their newfound faith, and shared examples of ruptures in relationships. For some, this was the result of lifestyle changes. Because they were no longer drinking heavily, or their values and priorities had changed, it created distance with existing friends. This led to a mutual distancing and then a drifting apart. For others, it was more drastic. A few shared how friends or family members had reacted badly to the news of their conversion, and some had been totally dropped or excluded by them.

It's clear from these patterns of experience that as people come to faith, they need considerable support from Christian friends and faith communities, and we heard repeatedly how valuable it was when it was received. This might be support to help them develop spiritual practices of their own, ongoing support as they wrestle with questions, grace and patience for the sometimes bumpy early days of discipleship, and a community that will embrace them, particularly if they experience hostility and rejection.

What has helped them to keep following Jesus?

Finally, we asked what had helped people in the early days of following Jesus, and then which one or two things had been most important.

Which one or two things have been most helpful since you came to faith?



Whilst being challenging, the spiritual practices of Bible reading and prayer are hugely important for new believers. For both, 60% said they had been important and at least a quarter of respondents said they were one of the most important factors. Typically, people learn those in a community, which is also reflected in these results.

Connection to God through worship was similarly important for 61% overall and most important for a quarter of people. Overall, half reported ongoing experiences of God, with 17% seeing them as crucial in the early days of faith.

Baptism came up frequently as an important factor. Overall, 58% said it was important and one fifth identified it as one of the two most helpful things in their journey. It was made clear by the participants that getting baptised was a powerful declaration to others and to themselves, that this was a

“

Six weeks ago, my daughter walked into the house crying, and was like, “Mum, I want to be like you.” I said, “What?” She went, “Mum, I just want Jesus in my life. I want to be a Christian. How do I do it?”... She said she’s watched me and seen the change in me and my sister, even in my mum.”

serious, lifelong commitment. It is worth paying attention to the importance of this sacrament and thinking through how we celebrate that well with and for new believers and their families and friends.

This mosaic of factors that people reported as helpful also typically included opportunities for ongoing discussion in various contexts, illustrating that while church leaders and sermons have a role to play, just talking with other believers and having a sense of belonging to a faith community carry considerable weight.

Sharing faith

Although we didn’t ask about this in the survey, in the interviews we asked participants about their experiences of sharing their faith as new believers: the extent they had or hadn’t done so; how they felt about doing that; and how people had responded.

Levels of openness

The vast majority said they had been open about their faith. Some say they “tell everyone”, whereas others have been more selective about who they speak to. Many have been proactive: intentionally telling their friends and family, sharing on social media, and engaging in evangelism on campuses, in shops and at work. One participant said, “I’m even talking to someone in the supermarket; I’m talking to the fishmonger! I mean it. I am. I told them to start praying.”

A few participants said that in some situations they have been less open in talking about their faith. This has mostly been down to fear of how others might react to them, and also because they are not quite sure how to answer questions that might come up.



The response they've had

The responses have been mixed. The majority have had some really positive responses, yet most have also had negative ones. On the positive side, some of their friends, family and colleagues are really happy for them, affirming them and asking questions. Several shared that people they thought would respond badly have actually been very positive. Amazingly, five of the 20 we interviewed said they had seen at least one of their previously non-Christian contacts become Christians!

At the same time, most participants shared examples of people who haven't been positive. Sometimes they made it clear that they weren't too enthusiastic about their friend or family member finding faith but were respectful. Others shared that the disapproval they received was expressed much less kindly. Some have had friends or family try to change their minds, or see their conversion as "just a phase" that they were expected to abandon. Several described being mocked, experiencing antagonism and even exclusion from friendship groups.

Seeing the change

As well as sharing their faith, these new Christians are also showing it through lifestyle and character change. Many described how those around them had seen a dramatic change take place. Examples include staying calm during conflict, overcoming bad habits, and generally being happier and more at peace.

There is scope for the church not just to support but to actively help and encourage new adult Christians to share their faith. These are adults who probably have a wide network of non-Christian relationships. Their reach for the gospel is likely to be far greater than those who are established and embedded in church communities.



Everybody around me is starting to see that difference... I'm working with people I've worked with since I was 19, and I'm 37 now. And they're like, 'You're the last person I would have seen coming to Christ.' But the fact that they're seeing changes in me, and every second word that comes out of my mouth, and I used to swear a lot as well... They've seen that I was unhinged before, and now I'm calm and collected."

Part 5: Recommendations

1. Be encouraged: God is at work.

When it comes to helping people find faith in Jesus, we can feel overwhelmed and powerless. The good news is it's not all down to us. Yes, we have a part to play, but God is moving in people's hearts and lives in all kinds of ways: helping people recognise their discontentment, speaking to them through the Bible, arranging 'coincidences' in their lives, answering prayers and making Himself known through supernatural encounters.

2. Remember the gospel is relevant to everyone.

All kinds of people are becoming Christians: people of different ages, ethnicities, faith backgrounds, education levels and geographical locations. There is no 'type' of person who will or won't find Jesus.

3. Don't make assumptions.

Most people who are not actively following Jesus know very little about the Bible, church and Christian living – even those who have some kind of Christian background. People appreciate having things explained to them.

4. Create space for questions.

These participants had so many questions. While they found it helpful to read books, listen to podcasts and watch videos, the thing they found most helpful was being able to ask a real, human Christian. Making time in conversations and running explorer courses like Alpha or Christianity Explored are two ways we can create space for questions.

5. Make it clear that the gospel is both true and good.

One of the main things that drew people to the gospel, and one of the main reasons why they kept exploring Christian faith, was because they could see there was something good and true at the heart of it. In a world where people aren't sure who or what to trust, they are looking for truth and goodness. We should not shy away from communicating rational reasons to believe, as well as being creative in communicating the beauty of the gospel.

6. Encourage ‘ordinary’ Christians they can make a difference.

Lots of people are becoming Christians with the help of friends, family members, colleagues and volunteers. By being known as a Christian, showing their faith through their character and being willing to journey with people, they help people move closer to knowing Jesus.

7. Give people time.

Taking the step to follow Jesus is massive! People often wrestle with the changes they know this will involve. They really value Christians spending time with them and helping them in the journey, and they appreciate being given time to question and wrestle without feeling hurried or pressured.

8. Help people learn how to read the Bible.

Most explorers don’t know what the Bible actually is, how to read it, or how to connect it to their lives. Yet it’s such a powerful way God draws people to Himself. Explorers value people and resources that help them get into God’s word.

9. Equip new Christians for mission.

Most new Christians want to show and share their faith effectively with those around them. As they tell people about the journey they’ve been on, and as others see the big change in them, they can be very effective evangelists. They need support in knowing how to respond to negative reactions and answering difficult questions, as well as encouragement to keep going.

10. Support new Christians in the messy transitional phase.

Exploring faith and coming to faith is a messy process. It involves big lifestyle changes, and they might experience strain or fractures in their existing relationships. All of this is hard, so they need lots of patience, lots of understanding, and a healthy, hospitable community around them as they navigate this season of change.

As the Evangelical Alliance, we are committed to making Jesus known. We believe God has given us a unique perspective to listen to and speak into the UK church, especially into the missional and evangelistic landscape. We commissioned this research for two reasons:

1. To better understand the pathways by which adults were becoming Christians and study the themes that are emerging in the stories of new believers. By highlighting these, we can speak with insight and wisdom into church practice so that leaders and everyday Christians can steward their resources well and invest in fruitful activity.
2. To celebrate where God is at work in drawing people to Himself. Each percentage and graph in this report is more than just a statistic; it is a life that has been transformed by the Saviour. These are men and women who have been ransomed, healed, restored and forgiven. Heaven rejoices over each one. The fact that we initially sought 100 respondents and almost three times that many came forward to offer their perspective is a good news story in its own right.

We hope that you have been encouraged by these findings. We pray that whatever your role in the church, this report has inspired you with the fact that God is on the move in these nations and has better equipped you to make Jesus known. May we “make the most of every opportunity” (Colossians 4:5) and play our part in the lives of those around us to the glory of God.

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, 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

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 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.

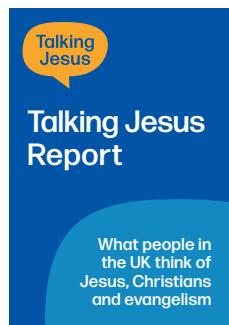
To find out more about this initiative, get hold of the book, listen to the podcast and access the resources, visit **goodnewspeople.church**

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 borne 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



Changing Church

A regular survey of the membership of evangelicals that studies discipleship, evangelism, attendance and giving habits amongst leaders and everyday Christians. eauk.org/changing-church

To keep up to date with these regular research pieces and more visit eauk.org/great-commission

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