



**Finding
Jesus**

Finding Jesus

**A comparison of the
responses of male and
female participants**

evangelical alliance
together making Jesus known



Introduction

Every journey to faith in Jesus is unique. People's backgrounds, life experiences and myriad other factors shape the ways in which they and God interact. As the full report makes clear, there is no silver bullet or simple answer to why, how, or when people come to faith in Jesus. Biological sex is one component of identity, and we were interested to see if men and women's experiences were significantly different. Our intention is not to reduce people to their gender, but for the sake of those specifically ministering to either men or women, we wanted to explore some of the similarities and differences in the responses of the 151 women and 124 men who took part in the research.

Initial reflections

As will become evident, the faith journeys of women and men have high levels of similarity. For example, there were minimal differences in women's and men's responses about their experiences prior to coming to faith. Men were slightly more inclined to describe themselves as atheist or agnostic but not significantly so. Similarly, their historic exposure to Christianity showed no meaningful difference.

What prompted you to begin exploring Christian faith?

These charts show the six most commonly selected factors by each group.

What prompted women to begin exploring Christian faith?

(Participants could select any that applied)



What prompted men to begin exploring Christian faith?

(Participants could select any that applied)



Four of the six were the same, although prioritised differently. “I needed help with life”, “a spiritual experience”, “I was looking for meaning” and “a Christian spoke to me about their faith” were selected by at least a quarter of each group.

It’s interesting that women were significantly more likely to identify the need for help than men (44% compared to 28%) and nearly 40% also cited “a difficult or painful experience”. It is possible that this is the result of a wider culture which gives women permission to express weakness and distress but discourages men from doing so. Alternatively, it may be that they frame similar internal needs in different language, for example, men selecting “I wanted to be a better person” (28%) instead. Either way, significant numbers of both began exploring Christian faith as a result of some sort of difficulty and were looking for personal development or situational change.

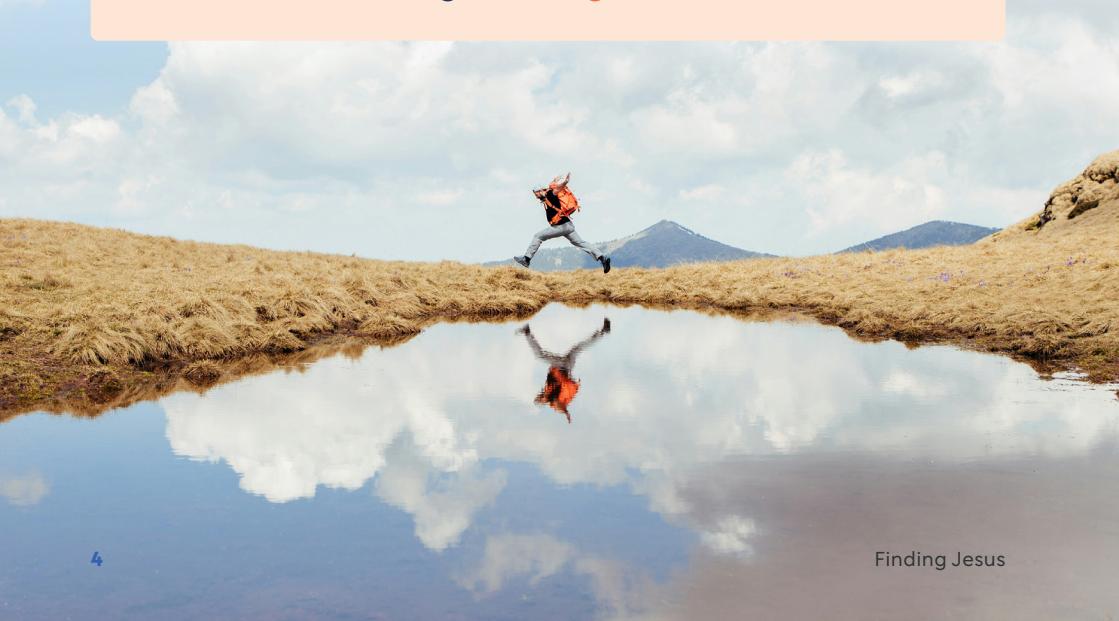
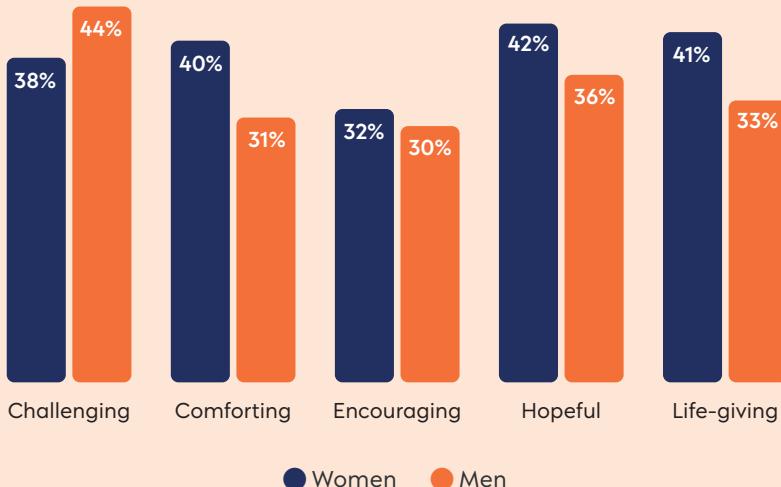
Similarly, both sexes cited “experiences of God”, but women were significantly more likely to do so (32% compared to 23%). Combined with “seeing the impact of faith on someone I know”, this might indicate their prioritising of experience, whereas a quarter of men prioritised logic, citing “intellectual curiosity”.

Overall, men appear slightly more likely to describe the start of their faith journey in philosophical terms, whereas women are significantly more likely to select emotional or relational factors. However, as described in the main report, personal and existential challenges, combined with spiritual experiences and the faith of others, are all significant across the board.

How did you experience the journey of exploring Christian faith?

Again, women and men had similar experiences and chose the same five words most frequently. Men appeared to find it slightly more “challenging” but a third or more of both sexes selected “comforting”, “encouraging”, “hopeful” and “life-giving”.

Select up to three words that best describe your journey of exploring Christian faith.

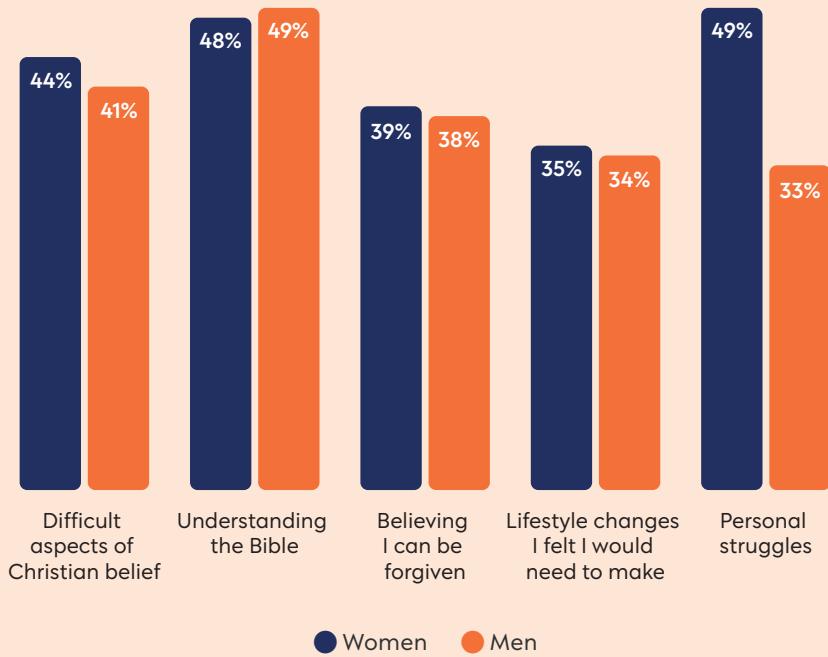


What were the challenges for you as you explored Christian faith?

As before, both men and women most commonly selected the same five challenges. Although “personal struggles” were cited by significantly more women than men, all the others were comparable.

What were the challenges for you as you explored Christian faith?

(Select any that apply)



There were some other variations though.

- Men were more likely to say they struggled with the “existence of God” (27%) and “the historical truth of who Jesus is and what He did” (30%).
- Women were more likely to cite concerns about “what non-Christians might think about me” (37%).

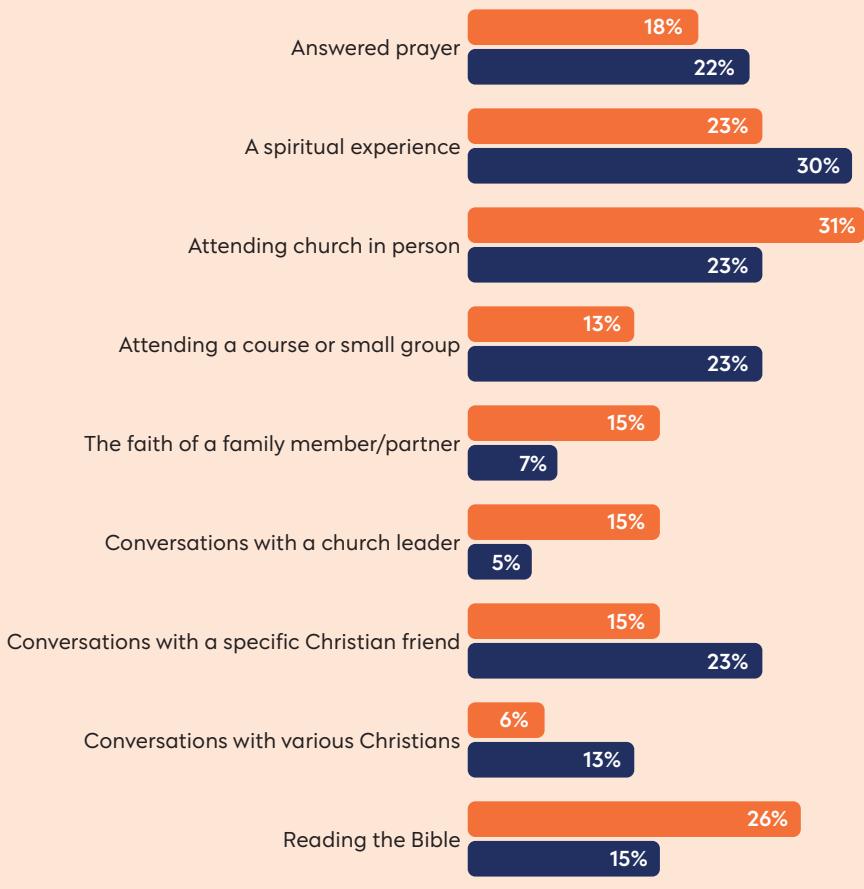
Again we see a slight tendency towards philosophical and theological struggles from men and relational concerns from women.

What was most significant as you explored Christian faith?

Despite the similarities between men and women's responses thus far, there were some noticeable variations when it came to things they had found most helpful while exploring faith. The following chart illustrates this by comparing their answers.

What factors were most significant as you explored Christian faith?

(select any that apply)



Women were more likely to cite “a spiritual experience”, “attending a small group”, “conversations with a specific Christian friend” and “conversations with various Christians”. In addition to direct encounter with God, the relational aspect of talking things through was clearly very important, whether with existing friends, new Christian contacts or small groups of believers.

Men were more likely to cite “attending church in person”, “reading the Bible”, “the faith of a family member/partner” and “conversations with a church leader”. A number made comments about the encouragement of their believing wives or partners during their faith journey. Several commented that the leader of their wife’s church had been generous with time in discussing their questions, but conversations with leaders were particularly significant more widely. Although these weren’t the most frequently given answers they stood out because they were two or three times as commonly cited by men as by women. This provides food for thought about how churches might be proactive in engaging the non-Christian husbands and partners of believing women. It is not clear why attending church and reading the Bible were more significant for men. “Sermons, reading Christian material and online resources” were equally useful to both sexes, but encouraging men into church may break down some of their preconceptions, and getting the Bible into the hands of interested men seems particularly pertinent.



Who was most helpful as you explored Christian faith?

The above findings were confirmed by the answer to this question. Invited to select any number of people that had been particularly helpful, women were most likely to cite:

- A person or people from church (not a leader) – 40%
- A close friend – 33%
- A small group of Christians – 28%

Men answered:

- A close friend – 34%
- A church leader – 31%
- A person or people from church (not a leader) – 28%
- A small group of Christians – 27%
- My partner/spouse – 23%

Clearly, close friends, people they had met at church and small groups were significant across the board. But men also cited church leaders and partners/spouses. Statistically men are more likely to have a Christian spouse than vice versa, explaining the latter response. It may also be that male church leaders are more comfortable – and therefore proactive – in engaging one-to-one with men who are seeking faith than women. Alternatively, perhaps men want 'official' answers to their questions and see church leaders as more credible sources. Either way, it is a significant variation.

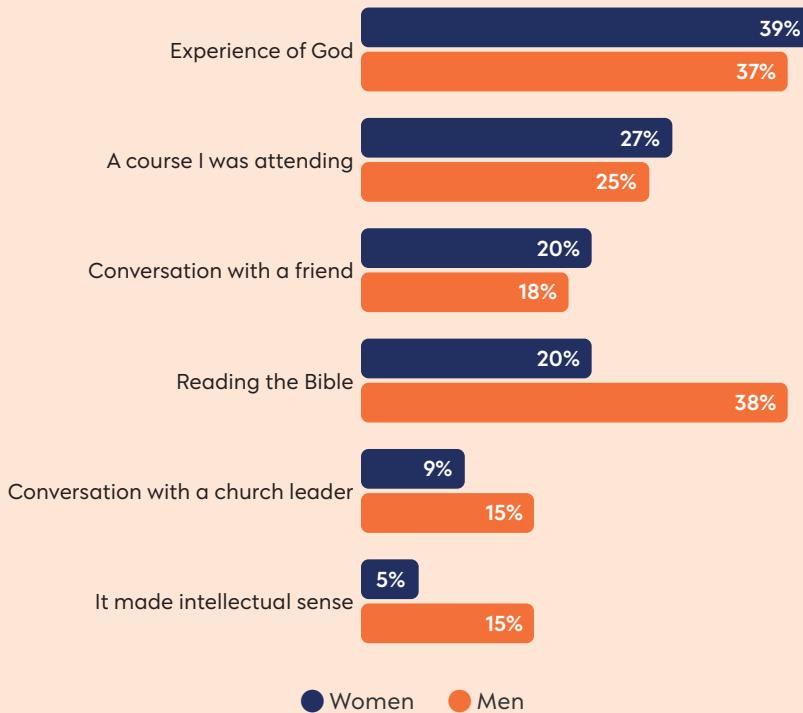
Providing community is clearly crucial for men and women, but intentionally supporting Christian women with non-Christian partners is something churches could consider. Church leaders might also like to reflect on who they are investing time in and what structures are in place for the sorts of questioning and discussion adults of both sexes exploring faith have.

What prompted you to finally make the decision to follow Jesus?

Once again, the reasons women and men gave for finally making the decision to become a follower of Jesus were similar but with a couple of anomalies.

What finally prompted you to make the decision to follow Jesus?

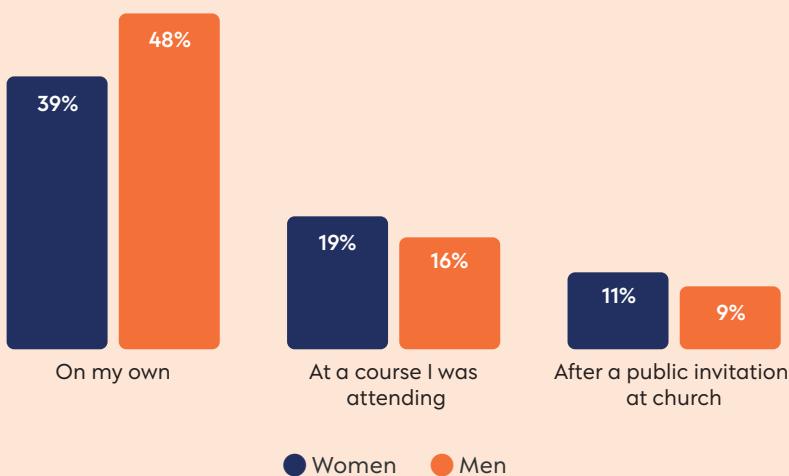
(Select up to three if it was a combination of factors)



“Experiences of God” were by far the highest response for women. For men they were equal with “reading the Bible”. “A course” and “conversation with a friend” were comparable for both. The only anomalies were, once again, a “conversation with a church leader”, which although not hugely significant, was more so for men, and the gospel making “intellectual sense” being three times as high for men. Although conversations with leaders might well be pastoral, not just theological, in combination with their emphasis on the Bible and intellectual conviction this does again suggest a tendency towards cognitive factors for some men and relational or experiential ones for women. However, experience of God is a key factor regardless of sex.

In terms of where that decision took place, women were slightly more likely to do so in a communal setting and men alone. However, they followed a similar overall pattern, with a significant majority making the decision to follow Jesus alone, slightly less than a fifth citing a course they were taking, and one in ten after a public invitation at church.

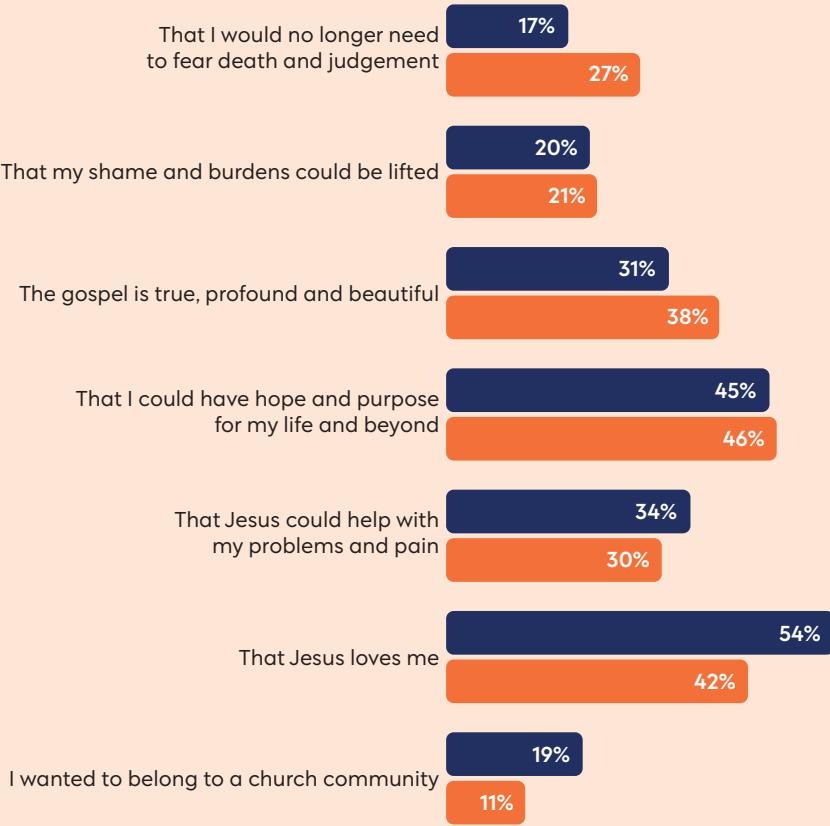
When did you make the decision to follow Jesus?



What most drew you to the gospel?

Which of these aspects of the gospel most drew you to Jesus?

(Select a maximum of two)



● Women ● Men



Of Keller's six "attractions of the gospel" (plus our own question about church community) more than half of the women selected "that Jesus loves me", followed by 45% choosing "hope and purpose". Given that for so many, it was seeking "help with life" that both started their faith journey and was challenging throughout it, it also makes sense that "Jesus could help" was so significant for a third.

Men responded slightly differently. For 46% of them "hope and purpose" was highly significant, and 42% selected "Jesus loves me". But their third most common choice was "the gospel is true, profound and beautiful". Given that "intellectual curiosity" was a motivation to begin exploring Christian faith for a quarter, and that wrestling with both "the existence of God" and "historical truth of Jesus" were more of a challenge during that journey, it is logical that discovering truth would be significant.

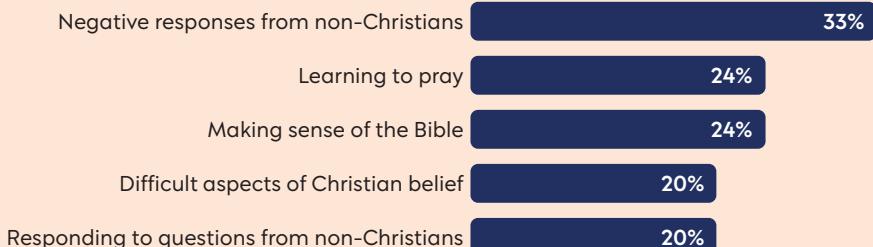
We would, however, like to point out that the variation in both these answers was not huge. The truth of the gospel was vital for a third of the women, and a similar proportion of the men were drawn to Jesus' ability to help them. The biggest variations were not in the most commonly chosen responses but in those that were less popular. Men were significantly more concerned about death and judgement than women, and women were nearly twice as likely to be seeking community.

Since coming to faith in Jesus

Asked how things had been since they came to faith, we saw the familiar trend of women and men selecting the same factors but with slightly different priorities and one or two anomalies.

What was most challenging for women since coming to faith in Jesus?

(Participants could select up to two)



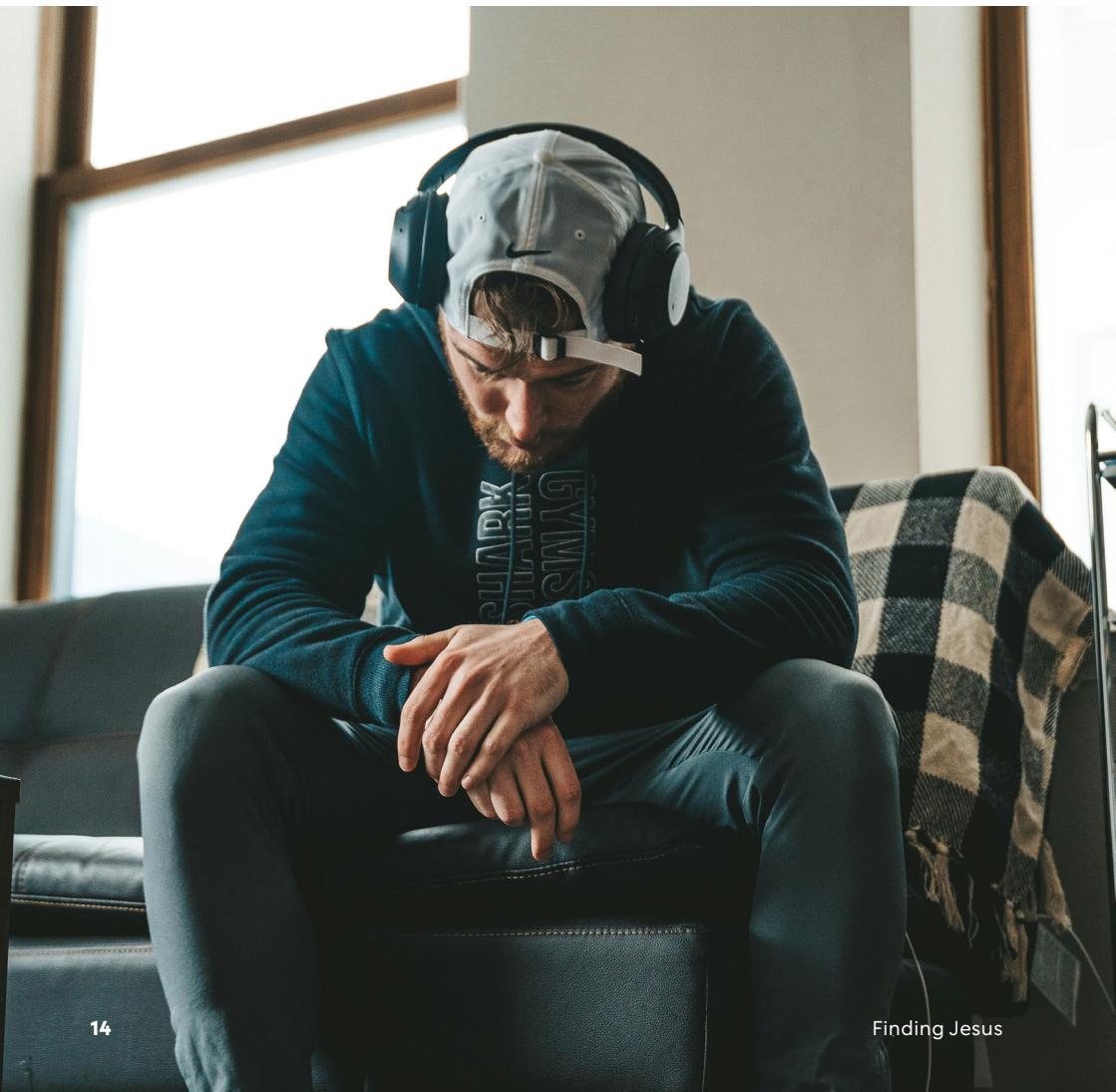
What was most challenging for men since coming to faith in Jesus?

(Participants could select up to two)



“Learning to pray”, “making sense of the Bible” and “difficult aspects of Christian belief” were most challenging across the board. Men seemed to struggle more with “changing aspects of my lifestyle”. Of course, we don’t know which aspects, but this suggests a particular need for support with discipleship around lifestyle issues for men who come to faith.

Although both sexes reported “negative responses” from those around them to their conversion, it appears to impact women more. A third had found this one of their hardest challenges, and this combines with 20% reporting the challenge of “responding to questions” – perhaps from the same people. We have seen the significance of community and relationship throughout women’s faith journeys, and these responses confirm that. The potential for criticism, tension or even breakdown in relationship, which was significant for a fifth of men, was problematic for at least a third of women. It is therefore important to recognise that while all new believers will need help with this, women may particularly need the support of their new faith community as they navigate this challenge.

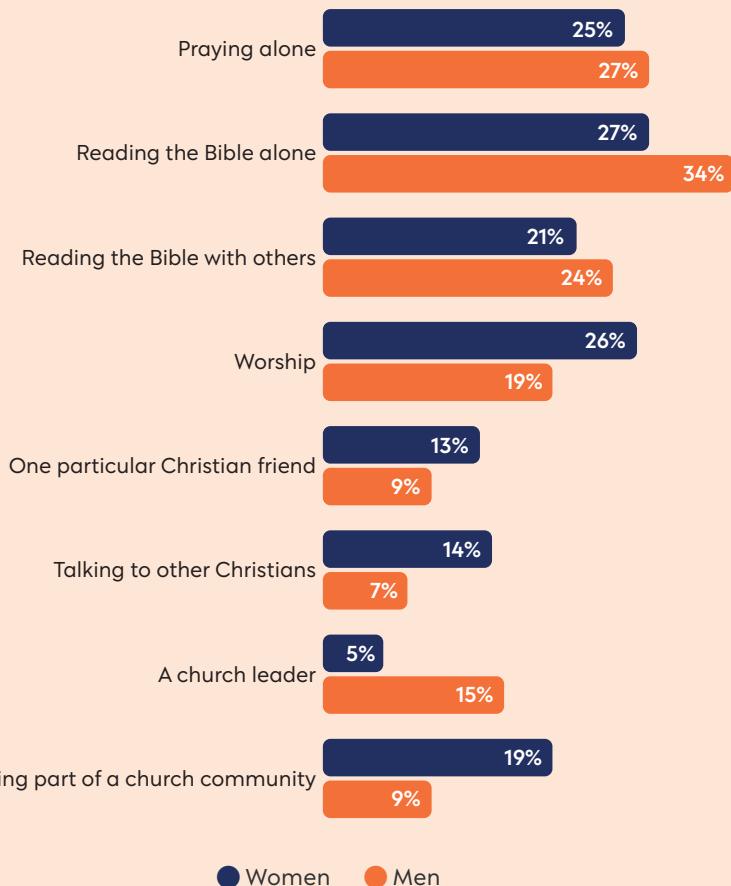


What has been most helpful in enabling you to keep following Jesus?

Finally, the things men and women reported as being most helpful in their faith journey once again showed similarity. The chart below illustrates those answers and highlights some interesting anomalies.

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

(Select up to two)





Personal spiritual practices of “praying alone” and “reading the Bible alone” were cited by both sexes, with more men again demonstrating an emphasis on Scripture. “Reading the Bible with others” clearly helped with the challenge of making sense of it for both, and “worship” was powerful for a quarter of women.

The variations again came in things that fewer participants selected overall. Women cited different aspects of a faith community as helpful more than men did, be it “one particular Christian friend”, “other Christians” in general, or “being part of a church community”.

In contrast, and continuing a theme, men were three times as likely to say “a church leader” had been most helpful in their ongoing faith journey.



Final reflections

We are cautious of reinforcing unhelpful stereotypes when it comes to the faith journeys of men and women. As is clear, people of both sexes have many of the same concerns, experiences and encouragements. What does seem clear though is the importance of relationship and community for women. This agrees with much of the research into women's faith, which repeatedly notes the social dimensions of their wellbeing and spirituality. This does not negate women's need to intellectually understand or wrestle with difficult and counter-cultural aspects of Christianity. However, it seems clear that where women find a warm welcome, a hospitable community and support in developing a relationship with Jesus, they are most likely to flourish.

That is not to say that men do not need companionship and community. It is clear that they do. However, they appear somewhat more likely to engage cognitively with matters of faith. Exploring truth, making sense of historical, theological and existential questions were given priority. Of course, experiences of God, worship, friends and small groups all play a part, but there is a particular emphasis on the Bible in their responses, in addition to the support of church leaders.

We need to be careful about reducing these findings to "women feel faith" and "men think faith". Or "women want community" and "men make the journey alone". These are simply not true. Nor should we shape single sex ministries around such clichés. However, it is worth reflecting on where the emphasis in our ministry tends to lie, and who might be included or excluded by that.

Who do we tend to focus our outreach efforts towards and who do we tend to ignore? It is well documented that women are more likely to have religious faith than men, but anecdotally and statistically the interest of men in the gospel is increasing. If that is the case, then how are those (often young) men to be discipled? And do (often male) church leaders overlook women's faith journeys and give their attention to men?

Undoubtedly there is food for thought and discussion in these findings, but we hope they will provide help for encouraging the journey to find and follow Jesus for both women and men of all ages and backgrounds.

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

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.

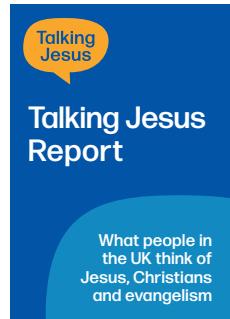
To find out more about this initiative, get hold of the book, listen to the podcast and access the resources, visit goodnewspeople.church

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



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

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