

21st Century Evangelicals

A snapshot of the beliefs and habits of
evangelical Christians in the UK - Winter 2012

Confidently sharing the gospel?



Research by the Evangelical Alliance

Imagine a day..

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When we pray, work and speak as one body - full of hope, living to change the world.

*Together we can make that vision a reality.
So come with us.*

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Snapshot

JESUS --> GOD

97%

agree that Jesus is the only way to God.



81%

have seen friendship evangelism work effectively.



19%

had in the last month played an active part in an activity, event or meeting aimed at attracting seekers or 'fringe' people.



60%

said they felt they had missed a chance to speak to others about God in the past four months.



57%

at least to some extent feel "I can share the gospel well enough without needing to use words"

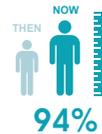


72%

had come to faith in Christ before they were 20 years old.

29%

had in the last week become involved in a conversation about some aspect of Christian belief with non-Christians.



94%

agree nurturing disciples and getting new Christians established in church life is just as important as getting them to make a commitment.



48%

at least to some extent feel "I am just too scared to talk about my faith with non-Christians"

75%



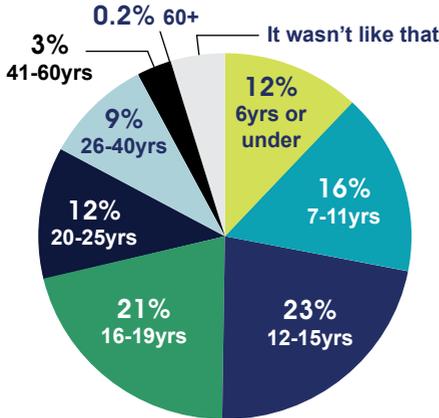
say "I've seen small group work - with sharing food - as in the Alpha or Christianity Explored courses - work effectively in the last couple of years"

About the survey: This survey was conducted in August 2012. 1,242 people took part. For more detailed information about this research please contact: g.smith@eauk.org or visit eauk.org/snapshot Here you can also download discussion questions on our research themes.

Time to decide?



Age when people come to faith



72% made a decision to follow Christ before they had reached 20 years of age.

32% of **girls** were believers by the age of 11.

24% of **boys** were believers by the age of 11.

Girls are more likely to come to faith at a younger age than boys.

The trend for commitment at an early age is particularly marked among the younger generations of women, with 32% of female under-35s saying that they committed their lives to Christ before the age of six (compared to only 12% among the women over-55).

How people came to faith

6%	A programme such as Alpha, Christianity Explored, or other discovery groups.
8%	A film, book, song etc. that made you think very deeply about life.
9%	A Christian group for students.
10%	A direct revelation, dream or miracle from God.
15%	Seeing God at work in my life.
23%	Seeing God at work in other people's lives.
25%	Privately searching for God, reading the Bible etc.
30%	A youth club, camp or similar activity.
37%	Making a decision in response to a specific church event, mission or sermon.
43%	The influence of Christian friends who shared their faith.
54%	Growing up in a Christian family or church environment.

Although gender differences were slight, in terms of denominations it is clear that Pentecostals and Charismatics are far more likely than others to attribute their conversion to a direct revelation from God.

Age was a significant factor in that younger respondents (under-35s) were more likely to mention growing up in a Christian family or church environment as a key factor. Some of the other common routes to faith involved journeys of despair through bereavement, serious family illness, or imprisonment.

Some routes to belief:

An invitation to join a prayer group at work.

A cancer patient's faith, combined with a direct encounter with God.

Radio ministry.

A Christian coffee bar.

Christian friends who talked about their lives in a normal way. Just saying what went on in their lives.

Church Bible class.

The Word for Today by UCB came into my life at a time I was in a real mess. Some nuns had visited and prayed for me when I was sectioned in a hospital and I believe this is when God put His hand on my life. My mother's prayers, Christian upbringing and influence were key to this spark finding a place to fire up.

Attending a women's toddler group run by the church.

A sermon on judgement!

My Christian family praying for me to return to Jesus.

God made Himself real to me when my son had meningitis.

He was there when I needed Him as a child, like an imaginary friend but I knew He wasn't, when I was hurt I turned to Him and then as I grew I began to know more about Him and then became fully committed.

How often do we meet non-Christians?

Almost half of us say that most of our friends are Christian, indicating that many of us stick to our Christian comfort zones. But the other half of us have mixed friendship groups, offering a great chance to share our faith relationally.

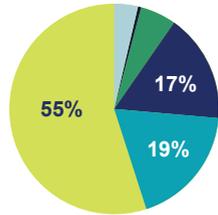
At work or in education many of us relate with non-Christians, although some of us fear that it is unacceptable to share our faith in the workplace.

Relating to our neighbours is another great opportunity. However, 16% of us don't know whether our neighbours are Christian, indicating that we can do more to get to know those living near us.

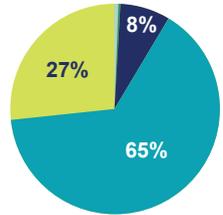
Online networks offer new opportunities, and leisure and voluntary activities seem to show great potential for sharing the gospel. Here there is a high level of interaction with non-Christians, and a real possibility of relationship-building.

Proportion of Christians in different personal networks

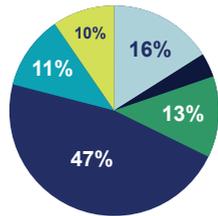
- They are all Christians
- Most of them are Christians
- Some of them are Christians
- None of them are Christians
- I don't know whether any are Christian
- I don't have any such contacts



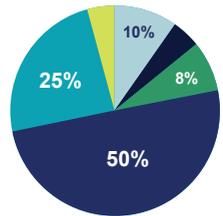
My family or household.



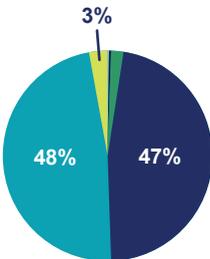
People I talk with at church.



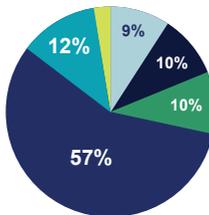
Colleagues, workmates or fellow students.



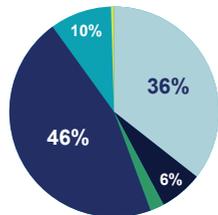
People who do leisure activities or voluntary work with me.



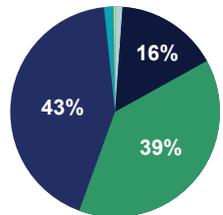
My circle of friends.



People I serve through my work or volunteering.



People I only interact with online.



Neighbours.

Opportunities to share with others

Our respondents have taken the following opportunities in encounters with non-Christians:

- Within the last week
- In the last four months
- ▲ More than average

Listened to someone's worries or concerns



Done a practical act of service or kindness for them which you hoped was a witness to Christ's love



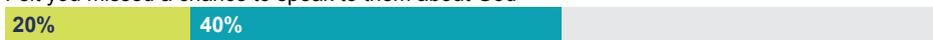
Taken part in a social or cultural activity with them



Became involved in a conversation about some aspect of Christian belief



Felt you missed a chance to speak to them about God



Recognised that God was already doing something in their life



Shared something of your testimony or explained what your faith means to you personally



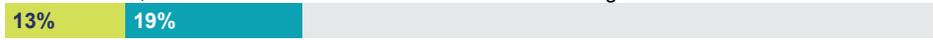
Felt it was appropriate to offer to pray with or for them



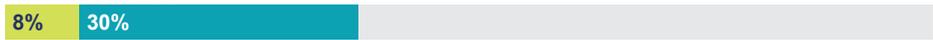
Tried to answer a question about faith which they asked you



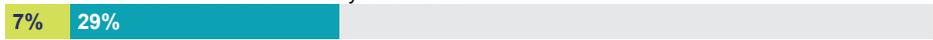
Used the Web, Facebook or email to share or discuss something about Christian faith with them



Invited them to an event or activity (other than a church service) which was clearly a form of Christian outreach



Invited them to come to a service at your church



Age has an effect upon evangelism

Over-55s

were more likely to have felt it appropriate to offer to pray with, or for, someone.

Under-35s

were more likely to have shared a social activity with non-Christians.

The spiritual realm usually comes up in conversation with regards to friends maybe wanting to venture into occult practices, i.e. fortune telling, tarot cards and asking opinions on it.

I am currently in dialogue via Facebook with my cousin who is not a Christian and probably as far away from faith as one can be.

What is the gospel?

There are very firm convictions about what defines Christian faith

JESUS --> GOD

97%

agree that Jesus is the only way to God.

Sorry

94%

agree that everyone needs to be born again in order to become a Christian and be saved.

(i.e. repent of their sins and trust in Christ)



94%

agree that people who come to Christ will see their lives transformed.



89%

agree that the central message of the gospel is that on the cross Jesus bore the punishment for my sins.

(Under-35s are less convinced of this than older people)

Evangelicals are also clear that just making a decision is not enough

94%

agree that nurturing disciples and getting new Christians established in church life is just as important as getting them to make a commitment.

89%

agree that becoming a Christian is not easy - you should expect to face opposition.

75%

agree that if a person becomes a Christian they will have to give up things or make sacrifices.

Differences exist about what should be emphasised in the gospel

73%

agree that the central message of the gospel is the Kingdom of God (strongest among over-55s and men).

68%

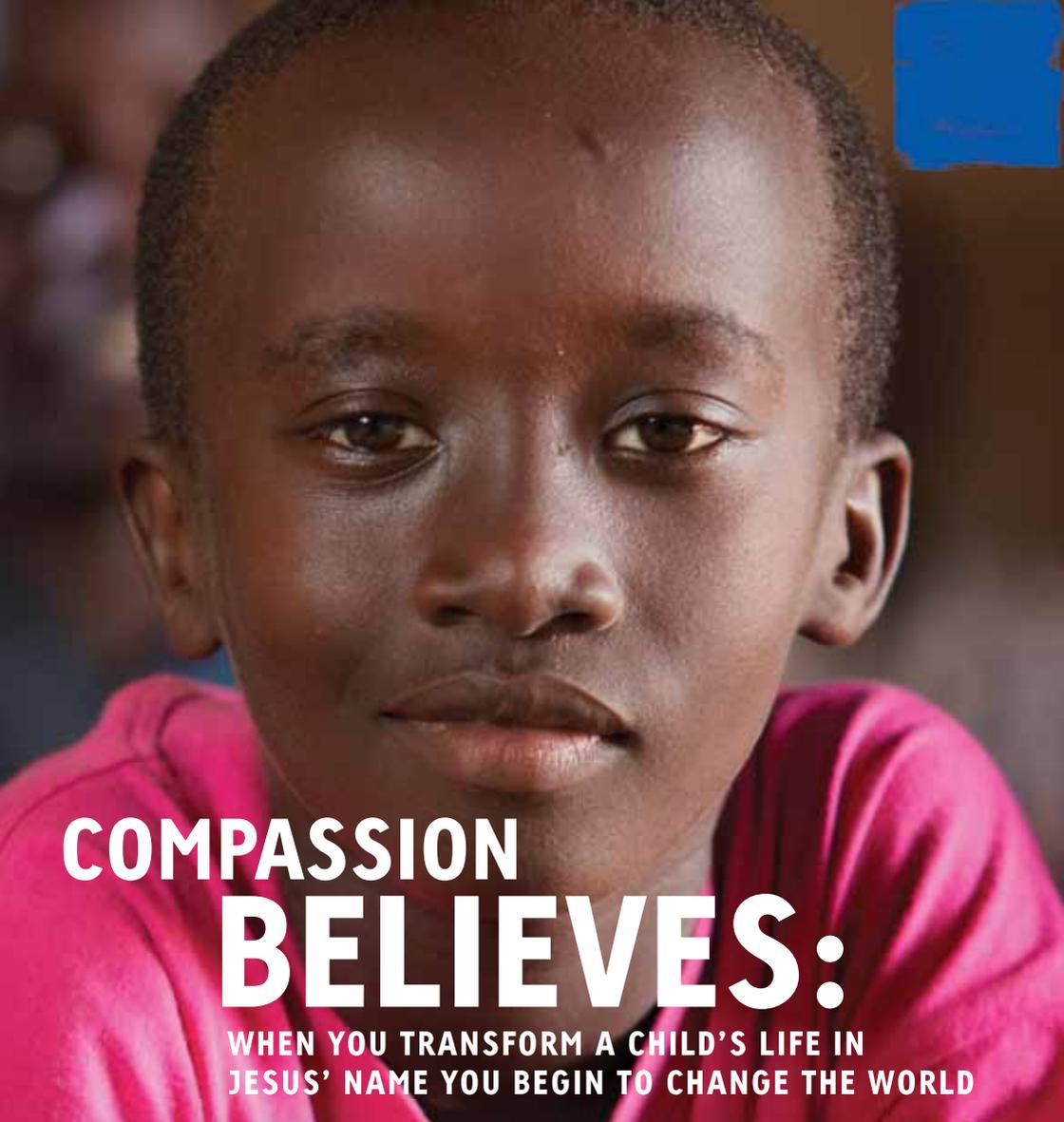
agree that God accepts people from every background who fear Him and do what is right (Acts 10:35) (stronger among women and under-35s).

43%

endorse the statement that God's love is so wide and unconditional that He will welcome everyone into His Kingdom. Women were much more likely to agree. This could be interpreted as an expression of universalism.

35%

agree that the best reason for sharing the gospel is to offer unbelievers the chance to escape hell (over-55s are significantly more likely than under-35s to believe this, and Pentecostals more likely than other denominations to do so).



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Releasing children from poverty
Compassion
in Jesus' name

How does the Church evangelise?



Over the last eight months:

77%

had been involved in talking to or befriending a 'new' visitor at church.

(older people were significantly more likely to have done this)

47%

had been involved in an outreach event for seekers or 'fringe' people.

(19% in the last month) (under-35s were more likely never to have participated)

42%

had been involved in some outreach aimed at children or young people.

(over-55s were significantly less likely to be involved, and a high proportion of under-35s had never done so)

32%

had preached or spoken in public with an evangelistic intent.

(men and the over-55s were more likely to have done this)

30%

had been involved in some small group evangelistic activity.

(under-35s were significantly less likely to have engaged in this)

28%

had been involved in evangelism through Christian literature.

(men and over-55s were more likely to have done this)

9%

had been involved in some form of media outreach.

7%

had done door-to-door visits.

The Church should not rely on souls coming into a church building, but rather 'go' into the streets to gossip the gospel.

I'm a Gideon and regularly give Personal Worker Testaments to tradesmen and others that I encounter.

I run a Zumba class as a way of reaching my friends and those on the fringes of church. Here I ask people if they have concerns we can pray for etc. But also I think the social fun element is important.

The church I attend has had an emphasis on outreach and evangelism through events, social action, evangelism into our city. We do pray with people on the streets and have seen people coming to faith through these activities.

Monthly men's group meeting in local pub called 'Pints of View' attended by Christians and non-Christians.

I believe that it is time that we started taking Jesus to the people instead of expecting them to come to us.

Encounters and responses

● Within the last week ● In the last eight months ● Less recently

You were talking with a group of people (for example at work, at the gym or in the pub) when the conversation turned to spiritual or religious questions



Someone you had invited attended an activity, group, special event or service to explore or hear about Christianity



Someone you had prayed for or talked to about faith became a committed Christian



Someone criticised, mocked or treated you badly because you are a Christian



Someone you had talked to about your church started attending on a fairly regular basis



Someone was surprised to find out that you are a Christian



25%

had never seen someone who they had talked to about their church become a regular attendee.

16%

had never known someone they had prayed for or talked to about faith become a committed Christian.

Almost 90%

have experienced a conversation during leisure or work activities turn to spiritual or religious questions.

Because so few 'church' events are really suited to the un-churched I very, very rarely invite any non-Christian to a church event.

The people who sowed the seeds often never see the fruit of that themselves; we have to do these things in faith, and not look too hard for results (or we can get discouraged and give up mission and outreach altogether).

97% agree that Jesus is the only way to God and 72% had come to faith in Christ before they were 20 years old. Demonstrating the love of Christ, sharing the gospel and praying for each of the 1.3 million children we support worldwide is an integral part of Compassion's ministry. In the last year, 138,879 children gave their lives to Christ.

**Minette Koekemoer,
Compassion UK**

The Church needs to read and believe the Holy Bible and not be ashamed of what the gospel and the Old Testament say about the character of God, faith and salvation.

I don't find time to interact with non-Christians.

I believe that it is time that we started taking Jesus to the people instead of expecting them to come to us.

Evangelism should be what we live, not what we "do"... As far as I can see we're called to make disciples not converts and called to build the Kingdom, not just our little bit of it.

When people know I am involved in social action (like the homeless outreach and missions in Africa) they want to know why and it allows me to talk about my faith.

Interestingly some of the 'deepest' conversations have been at parties when alcohol seems to lower people's resistance and they ask questions that have bothered them for years.

Relational evangelism, one by one, is the most authentic means of winning people for Christ.

The most successful way (in terms of numbers) amongst dozens of activities of attracting non-believers has been Messy Church but the barrier from 'attending' to 'committing' for these folks is very high.

Our church is growing all the time, we've lost count of the converts, most weeks we see salvation happening.

Hospitality is such a key part of our evangelism.

We run a foodbank which has proved a fantastic way of showing people the love of God and brought several to faith because they wanted to find out why our volunteers loved Jesus and them so much. Our neighbourhood is in a non-affluent area and our mums and toddlers group is regarded as the best for miles around and has a waiting list. It largely helps with integrating young unmarried mothers who have come to faith via the church loving them and members witnessing to them as well as giving opportunities to talk about the Lord to non-Christians.

I have on a number of occasions shared my faith with Muslim taxi drivers.

I get fed up when I meet someone who does not yet follow Christ and the last believer they met built a wall instead of a bridge by demonstrating bigotry and prejudice.

I can both strongly agree and disagree about churches concentrating on social action! Done right it's brilliant evangelism, done wrong (i.e. thinking it replaces the need for talking to people) it can be really detrimental and become just another form of social work, with no God needed or included.

I believe the keys to evangelism today are not complex or mysterious: build relationships, build community, share our lives and share our stories. We are fighting on other people's terms too often e.g. the new atheists' agenda, which leads us to irrelevant battles.

Materialist society means people feel they don't need God.

Different methods are needed in different areas and cultures. It is a mistake to assume that Britain has only one culture. Different methods are all able to work. It depends what God uses. We should not write any off.

We need to rethink evangelism in this culture. It's about relationship. None of my friends and colleagues will come to church or go near it.

Relationships are key, live a different, attractive lifestyle, love people. However, all a waste of time without prayer.

Who needs Satan to put people off Christianity? Some Christians are doing a fine job already!

I'm happy to talk to anybody who will listen to my beliefs in Jesus, I just find that most people 'glaze over' when he is mentioned, or they change the subject.

I feel if the prayer life of the church was more active these other aspects would be more transparent and successful.

I do think evangelism is hugely important but I'm too scared or lazy to do anything about it.

It's really hard to know what is appropriate when talking to people - so really I just have to wait for general moral issues or open questions and then share my beliefs, as I don't want to cross the line of appropriate behaviour in work.

If I'm not convinced of the gospel how can I effectively and pro-actively share it with others?

I feel my contact with individual non-Christians apart from my work is very limited, and my witness to them is poor.

Personally, I need to articulate the gospel in daily conversations, and have more non-Christian friends. I also feel personal struggles stop me from witnessing effectively.

Faith and the fear factor



What's stopping us from sharing the gospel?

I think I know the theory, and do recognise the importance of evangelism, the difficulty is finding time and energy - or prioritising it ahead of other things.

We must play the long game. It is being undermined by a frenetic desire to assail any poor unsuspecting visitor (victim) with the gospel on arrival at church.

I am very rarely in the presence of people who are not Christians.

I find it difficult to know where to start the conversation.

I lack confidence to witness to my faith outside of the church environment. This is particularly true at work where the atmosphere and ethos is not receptive to issues of faith.

I generally find talking about church and the social activities associated with it, and about 'religion', much easier than about Jesus/God/the Holy Spirit and my personal relationship/encounters with them.

I find it difficult with friends with whom I have already shared my faith. They aren't interested anymore and don't ask about it often.

Almost three quarters of us feel that non-Christians we know are not interested in talking about spiritual things, and almost half of us admit to feeling too scared to talk about our faith.

Believing that we can share the gospel without words is another big reason why we don't tell people about Jesus. Other factors include the devil's interference, a lack of contact with non-Christians, training, motivation, gifting, and church encouragement.

 To at least some extent

None of my non-Christian contacts seem interested in talking about spiritual things

74%

I feel I can share the gospel well enough without needing to use words

57%

I am just too scared to talk about my faith with non-Christians

48%

The devil always seems to prevent me from sharing the gospel

47%

I don't come into contact with many non-Christians

43%

I don't feel very well equipped or trained to share my faith, so don't know what to say

42%

I'm not really very motivated to share my faith

39%

I feel evangelism is a special gift which God has given to some people but not to me

37%

My church doesn't support or encourage me to evangelise

21%

What are the key issues that make effective evangelism difficult in Britain today?

Factors that

Pull non-Christians away:

89% recognised that with all the leisure (and work) alternatives on offer, most people don't want to be in church on a Sunday.

59% think that it is hard to convince people about Christianity because of what they have learned about science.

51% think that evangelism has been made more difficult by the attacks of atheists like Richard Dawkins.

Push non-Christians away:

87% think that the unattractive public image of the Church and its leaders is a factor.

77% agree that it is very hard for a church with a middle class ethos to communicate the gospel effectively to working class and less affluent people.

76% believe some of the ways preachers and evangelists talk about Jesus make them cringe.

68% recognised that people don't want to join formal organisations such as churches.

62% believed people reject Jesus because the Church has such narrow condemnatory views on sex.

61% identified the issue that Christians aren't able to give easy answers to the problem of suffering.

24% felt that evangelism is being made more difficult because many churches and organisations are placing too much emphasis on social action.

Prevent Christians from sharing:

87% recognise that most Christians in Britain lack confidence in talking about their personal testimony.

85% believe that the multi-faith environment means that people are uneasy about saying that Jesus is the only way.

76% think that Christians don't pray enough for revival.

61% think it's becoming more difficult for Christians to speak freely about what they believe.

Commitment to anything, let alone Jesus, seems to be lacking in our society today.

One key concern is I think Christians have lost confidence in sharing the gospel. Also, we have become side-tracked by issues of women in leadership and homosexuality, which are not pressing issues for non-Christians.

Things that hinder

- A very important factor
- A significant factor
- ▲ More than average
- ▼ Less than average

With all the leisure (and work) alternatives on offer, most people don't want to be in church on a Sunday



The unattractive public image of the Church and its leaders



Christians don't pray enough for revival



The multi-faith environment means that people are uneasy about saying that Jesus is the only way



Most Christians in Britain lack confidence in talking about their personal testimony



Some of the ways preachers and evangelists talk about Jesus make people cringe



It is very hard for a church with a middle class ethos to communicate the gospel effectively to working class and less affluent people



It's becoming more difficult for Christians to speak freely about what they believe



People don't want to join formal organisations such as churches



People reject Jesus because the Church has such narrow condemnatory views on sex



Christians aren't able to give easy answers to the problem of suffering



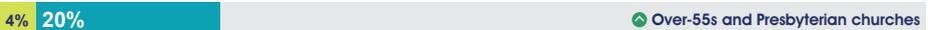
It is hard to convince people about Christianity because of what they have learned about science



The attacks of atheists like Richard Dawkins



Many churches and organisations are placing too much emphasis on social action



What works?

● I've seen it work effectively in the last couple of years.

⬆ More than average ⬇ Less than average

Building friendship

81%

⬇ Over-55s

Small group work - sharing food - as in the Alpha or Christianity Explored courses

75%

⬆ Church of Scotland members

⬇ Pentecostal and Free Church members

Youth clubs, cafes, camps etc.

64%

⬆ Women and younger age groups

Faithful biblical preaching in church

58%

Social action and community involvement (such as foodbanks and drop-ins for homeless people)

55%

⬆ Women and younger people

⬆ Pentecostals and Charismatics

Work in schools

48%

Street Pastor teams

46%

Church-run events at Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter

45%

Healings, miracles, signs and wonders

41%

⬆ Women

⬆ Pentecostals and Charismatics

Services for baptisms, weddings, funerals etc.

35%

CAP Money courses and debt advice work

34%

Messy Church sessions

29%

Local church-based mission weeks

26%

TV, radio and the mass-media

18%

Mass meeting evangelism

17%

⬆ Pentecostals

Taking part in current public debates about religion, different faiths, and atheism

17%

Social networking online

16%

57% think it might be effective these days

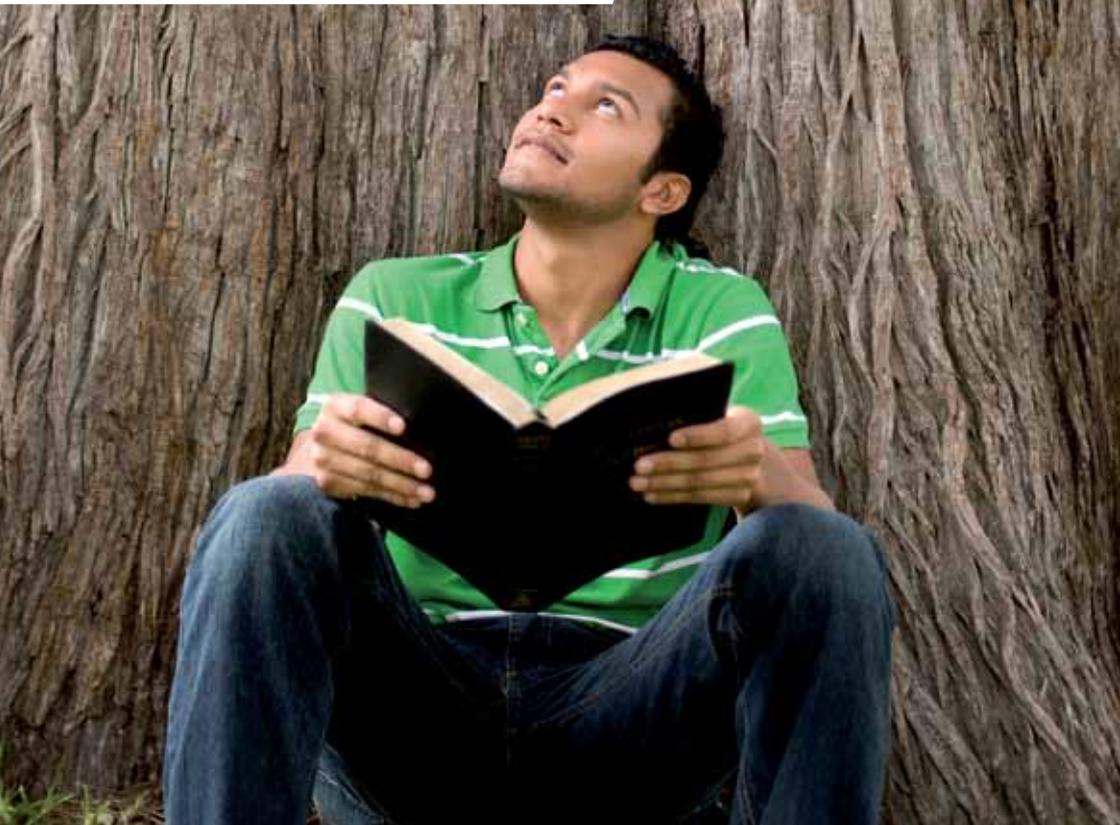
Open-air preaching

9%

Millions of people are longing for God's story, as told in the Bible. A man asked a Bible translator in Asia, 'How long have you had this book? Did your father have it? Your grandfather? Why has it taken so long for you to share it with us?' It can be tough to break through language and culture barriers for God's story to be clearly understood. Nevertheless, this survey highlights the many ways in which God's love is effectively reaching hearts and minds in the UK, and how he is transforming lives!

**Eddie Arthur, director of
Wycliffe Bible Translators**

The Bible: The story everybody needs



Worldwide there are over 300 million people speaking over 2,000 languages, who do not have access to the Bible in the language that they understand the best.

Wycliffe Bible Translators believe that the Bible is the best way for people to come to know and understand who God is. Our vision is that by working with churches, organisations and individuals around the world, all people will have access to God's word in a language that they truly understand.

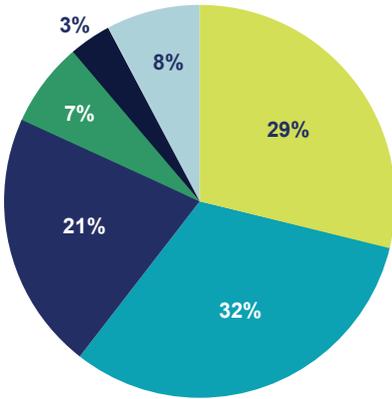


Could you play a part in impacting God's world with his word? Find out more on our website about how you can **pray**, **give** or **go**:

wycliffe.org.uk

Opening the church doors

Which of the the following best describes the relationship of your church, and its building(s) with the local community?



21% of respondents attend churches which are rarely used other than for Sunday worship. (These under-used buildings are most likely to be found in rural villages or small towns and have congregations of under 50 people).

4.3% go to churches which “don't do evangelism”.

11% attend churches where evangelism is seen as the responsibility of the church leader.

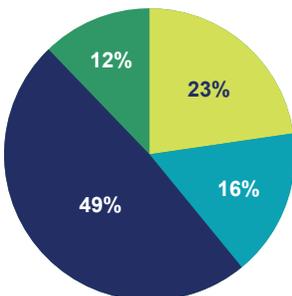
29% go to churches where paid staff are employed to do evangelism.

- Our church buildings are a busy community centre used by a wide range of local people and community groups for activities not directly managed by the church
- Our church runs a full programme of Christian or missional activities so the buildings are well used throughout the week
- Our church buildings are only used for Sunday worship and maybe just a few times in the week
- Our church doesn't have a building of its own to worship in, but many of our members are very involved in community life in our neighbourhood
- Our church doesn't have a building and our members are gathered from many different localities and don't relate too much to the immediate neighbourhood
- None of the above

31% go to churches where a group of volunteers have been given specific responsibility for evangelism.

50% attend churches where they see evangelism as being something that “We all just get on with it as part of our lifestyle”.

Has your church in the last two years put on a training course or session to help people gain confidence and skill in communicating the gospel?



- Yes - and I attended
- Yes - but I didn't take part
- No
- I don't know

In the last two years, less than half (49%) attended churches that have put on training events to equip people better for evangelism. Around 23% of respondents had attended such a course.

Such courses were least likely to take place in smaller, rural and suburban settings and most likely if the church was in a multi-cultural inner city neighbourhood.

Evangelism in churches within the last five years:

I've heard a sermon or talk about the need to evangelise

88%

We've held a service of believers' baptism, confirmation, or commitment to church membership where people have affirmed and celebrated their new-found faith

87%

We've put on an outreach event that I was willing and able to invite my non-Christian friends or colleagues to attend

74%

Someone has had a dramatic and life-transforming conversion

70%

We've run a mission or outreach activity which brought more than three people to faith and church involvement

59%

We've run a mission or outreach activity but this had no great positive impact on our attendance or membership

58%

We've received a new convert but we haven't known how to nurture and retain them successfully

29%

We've had so many conversions that you could say a revival has taken place

12%

73% said they had never had so many conversions that you could say a revival has taken place.

88% had heard at least one sermon or talk on the need to evangelise

(Those in Pentecostal churches, or churches where there is a full programme of mission activities in their building are most likely to have heard this many times)

70% are in churches where at least once someone had had a dramatic and life-transforming conversion

(Pentecostals and Charismatics were most likely to report many such events, and Free Church members least likely)

So what?

Points for prayer and action:



Building confidence

Faith and fear

We have seen that people are coming to faith in the UK, particularly through methods such as friendship evangelism and small group work. But half our respondents feel they have missed opportunities to share about God, and many admitted to feeling scared about talking about their faith with non-Christians. There is also a high perception that non-Christians are not interested in talking about spiritual things, despite almost 90% having experience of conversations during work or leisure which turn to spiritual or religious questions. This all indicates a clear lack of confidence.

Our challenge is to consider how we can develop gospel-confident cultures in our own lives and our churches, so that we communicate our faith as naturally as we talk about other good news in our lives. Churches have a role in training and equipping Christians, particularly in how to share their faith in accessible ways.

The gospel

It's great to see that the overwhelming majority of us are clear that Jesus is the only way to God, and that everyone needs to be born again. There is also agreement that new Christians need to be disciplined and established in church life. However, less than half attend churches that have run a course or session in the last two years helping people to gain confidence and skill in communicating the gospel.

Our challenge is to know how to translate the passion we have for the gospel to stories and language that non-Christians can easily understand. Churches can encourage people to tell positive stories of sharing their faith. This helps to normalise the idea that people do still become Christians today. Churches should also be encouraged to continue discipling and supporting new believers, welcoming them into the church family and giving them opportunities to serve.

Finding the words

Evangelicals seem more comfortable with the relational approach to evangelism than inviting people to church events. Generally good at building relationships with non-Christians, we seem to prefer to be Christ (listening to concerns, serving and being kind) rather than talk about him from the outset.

It's great to see churches engaging with their communities and showing God's love through actions, but when does silence become denial? Our challenge is to make sure that we share the gospel with words as well as without them. Sharing the reason for the hope we have helps us to grow in confidence, enabling us to share our faith with boldness. Churches can also ask whether there is too much focus on church-related activities, which can limit the time that Christians have to build relationships with non-Christians.

Building relationships

The workplace

Work colleagues are often non-Christians, representing a great opportunity to build relationships. But a number of respondents report that their workplaces make it inappropriate to discuss faith.

There are some situations where discretion is required. However, we need to identify when we are feeling unnecessarily intimidated, recognising that we have the rights and freedoms to express our faith publicly. Our challenge is to make the most of opportunities to talk about faith in everyday conversations at work; 'gossiping the gospel'. Churches can help Christians develop accessible ways to talk about 'spiritual things', and also offer training in communicating the Christian faith in a world with many competing worldviews.

Moving out of the Christian ghetto

For many of us, our friendship circles tend to be mostly Christian. Taking part in leisure and volunteering activities with non-Christians, and living alongside non-Christian neighbours, present great opportunities for sharing about Jesus.

Our challenge is to make the most of opportunities to share our faith in leisure and voluntary circles, and with our neighbours. This will mean being more intentional about developing friendships with non-Christians, including those who live near us. We can be challenged to move out of our Christian comfort zones and be bold in sharing our faith with our friends.

Building up the Church

How the Church is seen

Churches are doing many great things, however, as our survey indicates, the public image of the Church and its leaders is often quite poor. Portrayed in the media as divided, petty and judgemental, many see the Church as the barrier to people coming to faith, rather than Jesus. Much of the Church is affluent and middle class, while much of the British population is not. Groups such as working class men can therefore feel unwelcome or out of place in the average church congregation.

Our challenge is to make sure that our churches are welcoming to all and that Christians are known for loving the community rather than being stereotypically judgemental. Considering how we can be more inclusive and diverse in the ways we share and present the gospel is important. This may include changing elements of our church services and events which can put people off.

How the Church shares the good news

Most people in our survey became Christians before age 20, and lots of churches are doing effective outreach to children and young people. Small group work such as Alpha and Christianity Explored is also seen as working effectively. Most of our panel, however, have little confidence in the more traditional methods of open-air preaching, mass meetings and giving out literature.

Churches must continually remind themselves to look beyond the needs of their own congregations, fulfilling Jesus' call to "go and make disciples". While developing and continuing good quality and effective evangelism for young people, we also need to share our faith with the many adult non-believers. Does youth work have some lessons to teach us for adult outreach? We can also be challenged to pray for revival, relying on God to help our evangelism, whatever the method.

Evangelism is crucial - it is the core business of the Church

Afterword

Evangelicals are the good news people, and this research shows that we have much to celebrate in our understanding of and communication of the saving message of Jesus Christ.

Even so, despite there being signs of church growth in the UK, for many decades church membership was declining and ageing. This means that, in order to move beyond mere survival, in the 21st century the Church needs to rediscover a passion to share the gospel. We need a renewed love for the lost. That's why the Alliance has developed our 'Confidence in the Gospel' initiative which is all about helping churches to create a more gospel confident culture among believers.

There are some bright spots highlighted in the research for this report. Many Christians do share their faith effectively. As a consequence

people are becoming Christians by various means and many churches are growing. To build on this growth the report indicates that two things are key: building relationships and having confidence in the gospel. More of us need to foster friendships with people who are not yet Christians rather than staying within the safety of church circles. More of us need to be positive about our faith. This means sharing it verbally, attractively and persuasively, and backing it up with lives of love and integrity.

In all of this we need to be constantly relying on prayer and the Holy Spirit. Because in the end it is God Himself who brings people to saving faith. This truth should be a liberating motivation for our evangelism.

Steve Clifford, general director,
Evangelical Alliance.

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