



**Finding
Jesus**

Finding Jesus

**Supplemental findings
for those with lower
incomes**

evangelical alliance
together making Jesus known



Introduction

Given the need to share the gospel right across UK society, we were interested to explore the experiences of those who had come to faith from lower income backgrounds. We were pleased that 42 individuals aged 25–64 whose household income was under £20,000 completed the *Finding Jesus* survey. This included a diverse group of 26 women and 15 men from across the UK. 71% identified as White British and 26% as Black, Asian, or other ethnic groups.

This document is a supplement to the main *Finding Jesus* report. It won't repeat everything in that. Instead, it contains some of the variations that emerged from responses given by these 42 individuals. It highlights some interesting patterns that those ministering to people from lower incomes might like to consider.

Initial reflections

This group of people is diverse but showed higher levels of general spirituality. Asked to describe their beliefs before they decided to follow Jesus, the most common responses were:

- Cultural Christian – 33%
- Spiritual but not religious – 26%
- Follower of another religion – 14%
- Atheist – 12%

It's worth paying attention to the fact that 40% of these participants were open to spiritual matters before exploring Christianity, although they didn't specify what that might mean. It seems likely that some were refugees or asylum seekers or from other countries, but the current resurgence in spiritualism, mediums and online spirituality (eg 'manifesting', 'WitchTok' etc) may also play a part in their responses. Only four individuals said they struggled with the existence of God.

They also tended to have less historic contact with Christianity than other groups. Only a fifth had Christian parents (compared to a third of the wider sample) and a third said they had no Christian background of any sort.

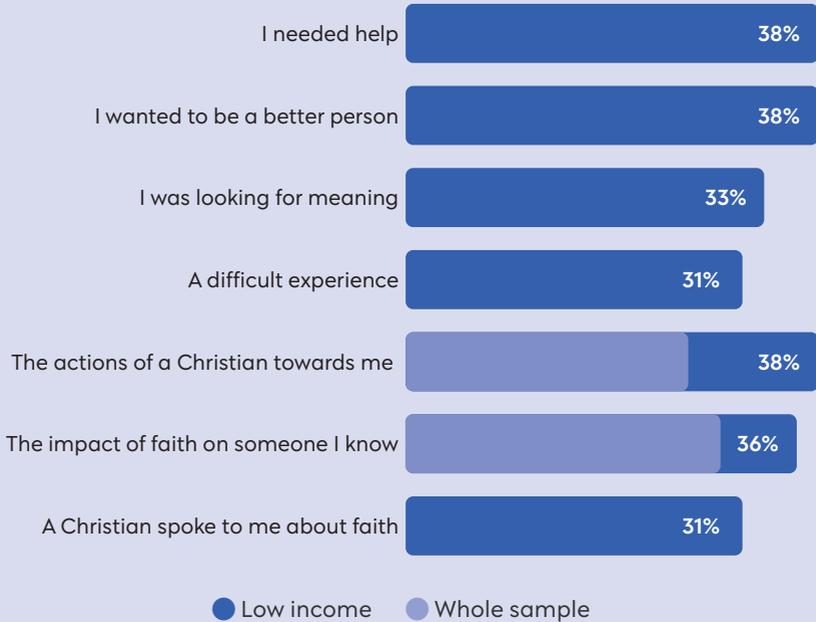
For most, this was a different starting point for their faith journey than staunch atheism, or even secular liberalism. Many seem to have had a sense of the existence of spiritual realities, either based in other cultures or even just vague notions of there being something 'other'. Their questions and journey to find Jesus will obviously be informed by those beliefs and potentially different from other socio-economic groups.

What prompted their interest in Jesus?

Given their diversity, it is perhaps no surprise that the most common responses to this question were wide ranging.

What prompted you to begin exploring Christian faith?

(Select any that apply)



These fall into two main categories: personal and existential challenges and the behaviour of Christians. The first group are similar to the wider sample but the second more unusual. They were significantly more likely to cite “the actions of a Christian towards me” (38%) than the sample as a whole (26%), and seeing a tangible “impact of faith on someone I know” (36% compared to 29% overall). The gospel in action had clearly been a powerful witness to those looking for something to help with the challenges they were facing.

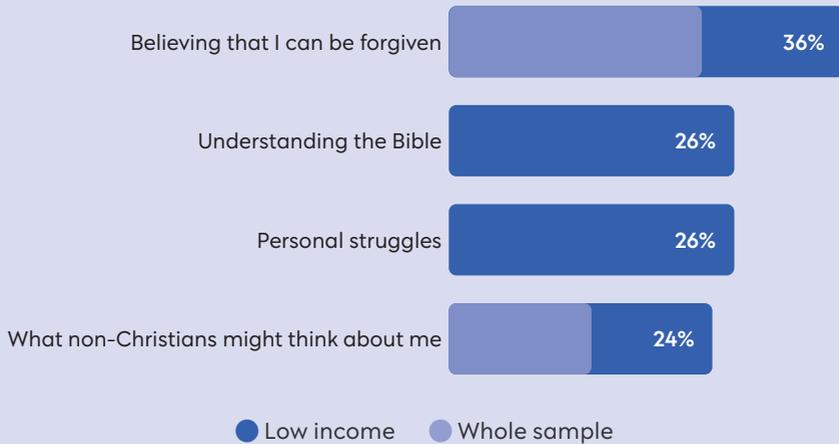
What was challenging about the journey to finding faith in Jesus?

A large majority of these individuals came to faith very quickly; 76% reported it took less than a year from beginning to explore who Jesus was. They typically also spoke in positive terms about that process. “Comforting” (48%), “hopeful” (48%), and “life-giving” (48%) were the most frequently chosen descriptions. However, like everyone, the process was “challenging” (43%).

As with other groups, “understanding the Bible” (55%), “believing I can be forgiven” (52%), “personal struggles” (40%), and “difficult aspects of Christian belief” (36%) were selected frequently. However, when asked to select just two challenges, they responded as shown below.

What was most challenging for you as you explored Christian faith?

(Select a maximum of two)



Accepting the possibility of being forgiven was highly significant, with more than a third citing this as one of the most difficult aspects of the gospel to grasp. We can only speculate as to why that is the case, but it seems that many of these participants were living with regret and shame before meeting Jesus, and for a quarter their “personal struggles” made the journey difficult. The significance of anxiety about “what others might think of me” was also high (24%). Given that having a lower income makes people more vulnerable in general, the risk of alienation from family, friends and community clearly played strongly in the minds of a quarter as they explored Christian faith.

It’s also noteworthy that only four individuals identified the “poor behaviour of Christians” as a challenge, and only one chose the “lack of help/support from Christians”. Of course, these are people who have had positive experiences and come to faith – not those who didn’t. But it does suggest that when people from lower income backgrounds are met with supportive, encouraging, practical faith in action, the gospel becomes relevant to their lives in a meaningful way.

What helped as they explored Christian faith?

The things and people that had helped in their faith journey were consistent with other demographic groups.

When invited to share what had been helpful during their journey to faith, 63% said “attending church in person”, 51% “reading the Bible” and 41% “attending a course or small group”. The things that had been most helpful are shown below.

What was most helpful as you explored Christian faith?

(Select a maximum of two)



Finally, their responses to “Who helped most and what did they do?”

- **A small group of Christians – 36%**
- **A close friend – 29%**
- **A person/people from church – 21%**

They described people patiently listening and helping them understand things that were difficult, several speaking about the theme of forgiveness. However, it was clear that both the words and actions of people made an impact. Evidently, tangible faith in action is powerful for those with fewer resources. Three such examples were:

- “Purdil took me to the church and believes in Jesus a lot. By seeing him and his faith it made me believe in Jesus. I can’t thank him enough for this.”
- “Sasha helped me when I really needed help. I saw God from her. She showed me the path to become a Christian.”
- “Caroline would meet up with temporary accommodation tenants in lockdown to take them for a walk, hear their stories and share stories about Jesus and how she lives for Jesus and why. She’d offer to pray for me occasionally and I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit and wanted her to pray for me more. She would drop activity packs around for my children and the turning point moment was when she told me about how she gets into work an hour early to pray for each colleague standing behind her desk. I asked her if anyone knew that about her, and she said no. I was so moved that I broke down, and just knew in my heart that Jesus was real.”

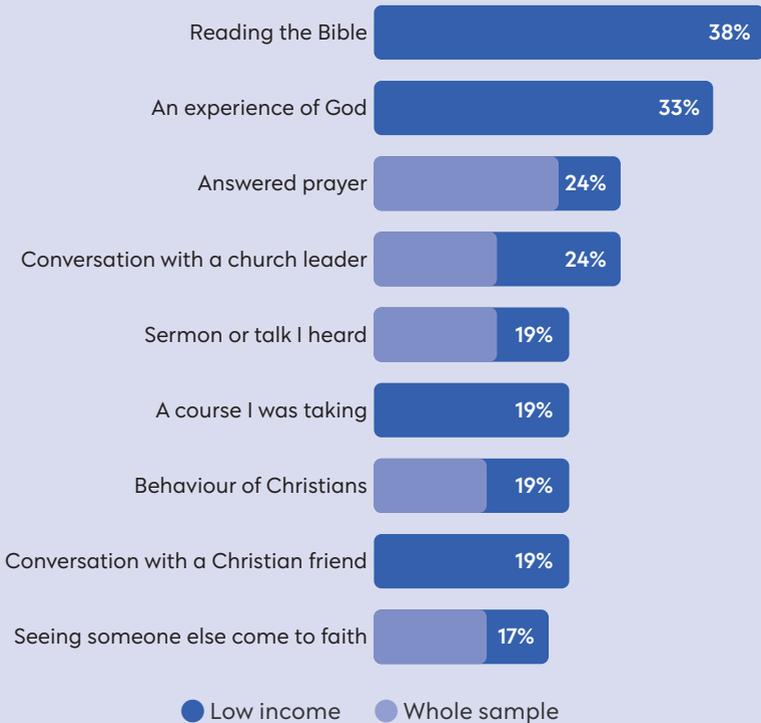
Words need to be backed up with practical action for those who are financially vulnerable. Faith is not just a comforting idea or existential dilemma resolved. Given the challenges they face, it makes sense that what matters is whether the gospel impacts life, including whether Jesus’ followers demonstrate that.

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

As we might expect, with such a diverse range of people, the factors that helped them finally decide to follow Jesus were varied.

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

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





Whilst “reading the Bible” (38%) and “an experience of God” (33%) were most significant, it’s worth noting that for a quarter “answered prayer” was important evidence that Jesus could be trusted. Once again, the “behaviour of Christians” and “seeing someone else come to faith” were key factors for a fifth, as were courses and conversations with friends. But uniquely, a quarter cited “conversation with a church leader”, twice the rate of the whole sample. Similarly, a “sermon or talk I heard” (19%) was significantly higher than average. It may be that there is residual respect for authority, particularly among those from non-western cultures. Even if that is not the case, it’s an encouragement to leaders that the time and energy they give is valued by many people with lower incomes. For example:

- “The vicar was so kind and used heartwarming words in her sermons and our courses. She helped me to understand [the] gospel and apply the word of [the] Lord in my daily life.”
- “Our church leader was relatable and non-judgemental and was able to listen and help me understand anything I didn’t understand.”
- “The minister of my wife’s church was so helpful. He went through the Gospel of John with me, answering any questions I had.”

Finally, when asked, “What one or two things most drew you to Jesus?” the most common responses were similar to other groups, but more pronounced.

- “That I could have hope and a purpose in this life and beyond” – 60%
- “That Jesus loves me” – 57%

A desire for things to be different, for life to have meaning, and to know that God cares for them – particularly in challenging circumstances – is completely understandable, and explains why “comforting”, “life-giving” and “hopeful” were the words they chose to describe their journey to faith.

Since coming to faith in Jesus

In terms of their experiences since making a commitment to follow Jesus, as with other groups, “making sense of the Bible” (57%) and “learning to pray” (48%) were challenging for many. But the most challenging things they had experienced were as shown below.

What has been most challenging since coming to faith in Jesus?

(Select up to two)

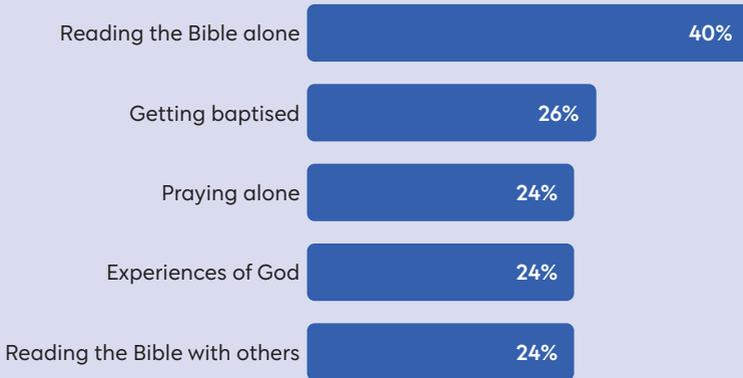


Many had been anxious before they came to faith about how others around them would respond to their following Jesus. They seem to have been correct. “Negative responses from other people” (35%) and “responding to questions from non-Christians” (23%) had been really challenging. Churches must be ready to support people as they face challenge from friends, family and community over their decision to become a disciple of Jesus. It’s important to help people think through authentic ways to respond to difficult questions that are thrown at them. How can they respond truthfully and graciously when they don’t know the answer? How can they hold tight to Jesus if the questioning of others undermines their fledgling faith? These are things that even established believers from privileged backgrounds can struggle with, so we need to be proactive and intentional about addressing this with new Christians, particularly those most likely to face hostility.

What most helped them to grow in their faith?

Finally, in terms of what had most helped since coming to faith in Jesus their responses were as shown below.

What one or two things have been most helpful in enabling you to keep following Jesus?



Although the actions of others had been so powerful in drawing them to Jesus, encounters with God had been significant in their actual decision to become a disciple of Jesus, and since coming to faith a personal relationship with Him was crucial. Individual Bible reading (40%), prayer (24%) and experiences of God (24%) had clearly sustained many. Of course, a faith community continued to play a part, particularly in terms of learning to read the Bible. However, we should pay attention to the significance of baptism. For a quarter, this public declaration of their faith had been highly significant. One described it like this:

“Now I consider what Jesus would do in a given situation; I weigh up my options before making a decision. I think back to my baptism and the commitment I made on that day, keeping it in the forefront of my mind. It means I pray almost daily and attend services and I’m now more open about talking about my faith in small situations.”

Particularly if faced with negativity and criticism, baptism is an act of courage as well as a covenant. Preparing and celebrating well with people as they take this step is important. We should recognise that it can become a touchstone for people (particularly from non-Christian backgrounds) that sustains their faith into the future. Baptisms are always wonderful, but for many in this group it appears to have had an especially powerful resonance.

Final reflections

It makes sense that for those who live with significant financial limitations, part of the good news of Jesus is that it will improve their daily circumstances. This is entirely biblical. Jesus pointed out how difficult it is for the self-reliant rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven, and scripture is full of stories of God's provision for the vulnerable. To ask, "Will this help?" is a legitimate question, and it would seem that when the body of Christ demonstrates that in real terms it has a powerful impact on those from lower-income backgrounds who are seeking to change their lives.

Subsequent encounters with God, answered prayer, scripture and developing a personal relationship with the God who loves them are transforming people's lives and futures. However, given that they appear more likely to be open to spiritual realities and more likely to face opposition than many, we need to carefully listen and really hear the realities of people's beliefs and circumstances. Some of their responses to the difference faith in Jesus has made illustrate both that diversity and the impact of finding Jesus.

- "Jesus made me happier and less afraid."
- "I can't say all of my experiences have been good as my husband is against Christianity. I have had a lot of anger, berating and upset to deal with from him. I have also met a lot of amazing Christians who help me and answer questions I have and I also feel the love God has for all of us whenever I read the Bible and that gives me so much strength and positivity. I feel like a completely different person."
- "I've gone from a criminal background, involving organised crime and drug dealing and misuse, to being away from my old life for over a year now and I am now a Christian who is giving back and trying to help others who are still struggling in the life I used to be a part of."
- "Faith has made all the difference in the world! I am no longer alone. I am loved, forgiven and the world is in God's hands. Hallelujah!"

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 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.

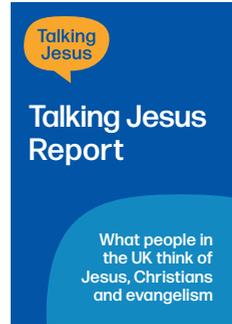
To find out more about this initiative, get hold of the book, listen to the podcast and access the resources, visit goodnewspeople.church

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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