

21st Century Evangelicals

A snapshot of the beliefs and habits of
evangelical Christians in the UK - Spring 2014

Time for discipleship?



Research by the Evangelical Alliance

Introduction

What is a typical evangelical Christian? What contributions do they make to society? What do they believe? What is distinctive about their lifestyle? What opinions do they hold about the most pressing issues of the day?

These are just some of the questions that the Evangelical Alliance is exploring as part of an ongoing study into the beliefs, habits and practices of evangelical Christians in the UK. The answers will help Christian leaders and the Church at large to understand their social context, and to make more effective plans for mission and ministry in the world today.

In January 2011 our groundbreaking *21st Century Evangelicals* research reported on our survey of more than 17,000 people. Since then more than 3,000 have agreed to join our panel. In partnership with eight other Christian organisations, we ask this panel questions on different themes to produce regular reports, and usually have more than 1,500 responses each time.

These are our reports so far, containing fascinating information on evangelicals' beliefs, opinions and experiences. We hope that you will find the reports interesting and that they will spark conversations and ideas.

- *Working faithfully?* (Oct 2013)
- *Life in the church?* (May 2013)
- *Do we value education?* (February 2013)
- *Confidently sharing the gospel?* (November 2012)
- *Does money matter?* (September 2012)
- *The world on our doorstep?* (May 2012)
- *How's the family?* (February 2012)
- *Are we communicating?* (December 2011)
- *Does belief touch society?* (September 2011)
- *21st Century Evangelicals* (January 2011)

At eauk.org/snapshot you can:

- download all the reports and order paper copies
- access free downloadable Powerpoint presentations and discussion questions to further explore the issues raised
- get involved by joining the research panel.

"Once again, through precise analysis and helpful insight, the Evangelical Alliance has provided us with a reliable lens which we can better understand the context in which we seek to serve – and so enabling us to focus with clarity on issues we should prioritise."

John Glass, general superintendent,
Elim Pentecostal Churches

"These are such fantastic little booklets, jam-packed with fascinating and thought-provoking information. We plan to encourage our cell groups to use them for prayer and discussion in the 'witness' section of their meetings, and to that end we are making a copy available for each church member, along with some discussion-starter questions and suggestions for prayer."

Louise Chick, Network Church
St Albans



Top 10 key statistics



98%

agree or strongly agree that they can see God at work in their life over the long term



90%

study the Bible every day or several times a week



31%

Less than a third set aside a substantial period of time for prayer each day



63%

get easily distracted when spending time with God



26%

Only 26% feel they have been well-equipped to witness and share their faith with others



40%

Only 40% agree their church does very well at disciplining new Christians



90%

say regularly attending church and/or a small fellowship group is helpful to their growth (and 60% say it is very helpful)



33%

A third use Bible apps on their mobile device



70%

Over 70% find attending large Christian conferences, festivals or conventions a help with their walk with God



60%

have been inspired and influenced by a church leader or minister they knew

Icons used in this booklet



Younger people



Church leaders

Where you see these icons it will highlight a higher or lower than average response from those listed. 'Younger people' signifies a group born after 1980, with 'Older people' signifying those born before 1960.

This online survey was carried out in November 2013 and a total of 1,744 took part. Among these 1,529 self-defined as evangelicals and the statistics presented in this report are based on this group. More detailed information about the sample is available from g.smith@eauk.org

What have we found?

Faith through hard times

Almost all evangelicals (98%) can see God at work in their lives over the long term, and many of the quotes speak of God's faithfulness in people's lives (**pages 10-11**).

While 83% have experienced a major period of difficulty in their life, God has carried people through, with only 3% saying the crisis has damaged their faith in the long term (**page 20**).

Time to consider: How have your life experiences impacted your faith?



Quality time with God

This research shows evidence of 'mobile discipleship', with 60% praying on the move and a third using Bible apps (**pages 12 & 17**).

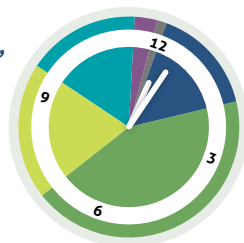
A whopping 90% of evangelicals read the Bible at least several times a week (**pages 12-13**).

While only 3% say they struggle to pray at all, less than a third set aside a substantial period each day to pray (**page 16**).

A third say they pray in private for between 30 minutes and one hour per week, 32 per cent for one to three hours and 11 per cent for more than three hours (**page 16**).

Busyness is making a disciplined spiritual life more difficult. Many admit to being easily distracted when spending time with God (63%) and the biblical character that the most people identify with is busy Martha (see Luke 10: 38-42).

Time to consider: Do you set aside time to focus on God? When you do, are you easily distracted? If you are, what steps can you take to help you concentrate on God?



Time with others

Our findings show that the Christian life cannot be lived alone.

The vast majority (90%) have found regularly attending church or home groups helpful, and 70% find large Christian gatherings a help in their walk with God (**page 21**).

Hearing others' testimonies also really inspires people. Younger people in particular find mentoring helpful, and many say their church leaders have been a significant influence (**pages 15 & 21**).

Time to consider: Are you spending time with other Christians, talking about your faith and building each other up? Who might God be calling you to get alongside and support?

Times are changing

There are differences in how each generation approaches their spiritual lives. Older Christians report more disciplined and structured prayer lives and longer periods spent in private prayer and Bible study (**pages 16-18**).

Younger people are more likely to have come to faith before the age of 12 and grown up in a Christian family (**page 7**). They are also more likely to report regular feelings of despair and anxiety, and to find having a spiritual mentor helpful (**pages 20- 21**).

Time to consider: Do you take time to get to know and learn from Christians of a different age from you?

Time to share our faith

Disciples make disciples – or that should be the case. But, as our previous *21st Century Evangelicals* report *Confidently sharing the gospel?* also found, people don't feel confident or equipped to share their faith with others (**pages 9 & 11**).

While it's great that so many become Christians before adulthood (**page 7**), why are so few coming to faith as adults, and what does the Church need to do to address this?

Time to consider: Do you feel equipped to share your faith? If not, how can you intentionally develop in this? If you do, how can you encourage others to be more confident in evangelising?

How can the Church respond?

There are things to celebrate, including high Bible-reading rates and the value of fellowship (**pages 12 & 21**). But challenges remain:

- Only 40% feel their church does well at discipling new Christians and most say they do not feel equipped to share their faith (**page 22**).
- There is awareness of the need to personally develop in a number of areas, with 26% saying they often ignore global injustices and 26% admitting they are often self-centred (**page 20**).

We explore points of encouragement and challenge for churches on **page 22** of the report.

Time to consider: Would you say your church is intentionally discipling people, both new Christians and 'older' ones? How can discipleship be developed in your church?

Video resources

We've filmed some key leaders and Alliance council members reflecting on the *Time for discipleship?* findings. The short video clips are available at www.eauk.org/discipleship and perfect to show in your small group or church service to stimulate discussion. The clips include:

- **Krish Kandiah** (Evangelical Alliance) on the need for churches to intentionally focus on discipleship
- **Roger Forster** (Ichthus Christian Fellowship) on the importance of listening to God
- **Jonathan Oloyede** (National Day of Prayer) on the benefits of a disciplined prayer life
- **Lucy Peppiatt** (Westminster Theological Centre) on why church leaders are so influential
- **John Risbridger** (Keswick Ministries) on the centrality of church fellowship
- **Ann Holt** (Bible Society) on the importance of the Bible
- **Rachel Gardner** (Romance Academy) on the need to disciple young people
- **Pastor Siew Huat Ong** (Chinese Church in London) on their church's model of discipleship
- **Yemi Adedeji** (One People Commission) on the benefits of the research series

**DOES ONE MORE CHILD
LIVING IN POVERTY
REALLY MATTER?**

I AM NICOLE, & I MATTER

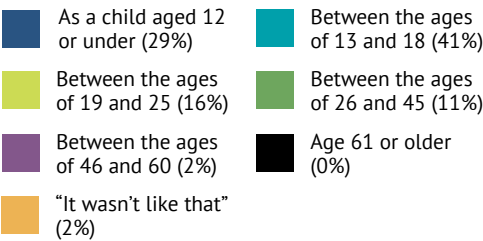
Compassion believes that every child matters. By working through the local church in 26 developing countries, our holistic child development programme creates a safe environment where each child is known by name and can fulfil their God-given potential. Today, more than 1.5 million children are being released from poverty – in Jesus' name.

You can bring hope to a child living in poverty.

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Follow me - the first response

The age our panel first made a personal response to Christ



The majority of our panel (68%) came to faith before the age of 18.

We have detected a trend that the younger generation were more likely than the older generation to have come to faith before the age of 12.

People's circumstances when they first responded to Christ

Most evangelical Christians have been brought up in a secure Christian family and church community, and are familiar with the Bible and Christian belief.

Although 8% had rejected faith or rebelled before returning to Christ, the majority seem to have come to a point in their childhood or youth where they realised they needed to make a personal commitment and take on what they had been taught for themselves.

God first revealed Himself to me through nature, which still speaks to me of His joy in creation.



First steps...

Acts of public commitment after coming to faith

73% had a believer's baptism

It seems that believer's baptism is now very common for evangelicals across all denominations. Figures for believer's baptism were:



of
Baptists and
Pentecostals



of
Charismatics



of
"other evangelicals"



of
Anglicans and Free
church members



of
Church of Scotland
Presbyterians

28%

took part in a
confirmation service

only 53%

of Anglicans had
been confirmed

43%

publicly recognised
as becoming a
member of a church



35%

No formal teaching
or discipling

I wish I'd had a mentor
during the first two years
of my walk with God

Early learning

Around two thirds (65%) received
some formal teaching or discipling
soon after becoming a Christian.



26%

Confirmation/
membership classes



20%

Baptism
preparation class

Younger people



14%

One-to-one mentoring
or personal discipling
from a mature Christian

Younger people



10%

Other structured
group course



9%

Alpha course

Women & younger people



8%

Self-study course
(eg study books,
online learning)



7%

Structured course
aimed at new
Christians



2%

Christianity
Explored course

Younger people

How successful do people think their early experience of being taught or disciplined about the Christian faith was?

I've found that the best discipleship has come about through genuine friendship rather than by a programme put on by the church.

For most of these aspects of the Christian faith the respondents felt they had been taught or disciplined successfully early on, especially in terms of strengthening their faith and understanding Christian beliefs through Bible study.

However, people were more likely to agree that their church had prepared them to use their gifts and talents *within* the church than in work, public life and the wider community. Does this mean the Church needs to work on equipping people to be whole-life disciples, not just in church?

Interestingly, later in the survey only 40% agreed that their church does very well at discipling new Christians.

I am very thankful for the solid, in-depth Bible teaching that I had in my youth and subsequently. This helped to prepare me for life's tragedies.

Worryingly only 26% felt that they had been very successfully equipped for witnessing and sharing their faith with others.

Equipping me for witnessing and sharing my faith with others 26%

Anglicans Females and Older people Shaping good habits and disciplines in my prayer life 31%

Encouraging me to use my talents and gifts in work and service in the wider community 32%

Inspiring me to live for Christ in the spheres of work and public life 38%

Equipping me to live as a Christian in my relationships and family life 45%

Helping me to behave well and develop a lifestyle appropriate for a Christian 46%

Church leaders Encouraging me to use my talents and gifts in the life of the church 48%

Older people Giving me enthusiasm for reading and studying the Bible 49%

Confirming or increasing my faith in God 57%

Helping me understand the basics of Christian belief 67%

I've not regretted becoming a Christian for a moment

I think more churches need to take responsibility for discipling their members.

I am very grateful for the fact that in my early Christian walk the importance of reading the Word was emphasised. So was worship, a quiet time with God and seeking Him with all of my heart.

I did not feel well disciplined after conversion, though the evangelical church I joined was very supportive.

Impacted lives



5%

There has been at least one period of serious backsliding or falling away, but at the moment I am going on with God.



8%

I've been a Christian for a long time but at the moment I fear I'm stagnating, in a rut or 'losing my first love'.



12%

I've been growing and learning as a Christian, though there are a number of things which don't seem as certain or important as when I was a new Christian.



27%

It's been a relatively smooth path of learning and growth towards becoming a mature Christian with a strong, clearly-understood faith.



Church leaders



48%

There have been a number of ups and downs, periods of struggle or doubt, but overall I believe I am growing spiritually.

When invited to give comments about what helps them in their discipleship, many people mentioned the benefit of:

- *attending large conferences and festivals*
- *taking up leadership responsibilities, such as preparing materials to share with others*
- *being involved actively in mission or social action*
- *personally studying through books or the internet*

I found that God delivered me from depression and anger, but many other aspects of my life did not change over night... Slowly but surely I have seen God's grace changing my heart and attitudes and reforming me in the image of His Son through the Holy Spirit.

How people describe the course of their Christian life so far

It is encouraging that none of our panel say they are on the point of giving up their faith, although 8% fear their faith is currently stagnating or in a rut.

While almost half (48%) have experienced periods of struggle or doubt they do believe they are growing spiritually overall.

My faith appeared to be lost during a period of severe depression.

The steep learning curves have happened during times when the rest of my life has been in chaos.

It's a completely different life. I used to be consumed with going out, meeting guys, drinking etc and partying. Now my life is filled with Christians - I feel part of God's family, it's wonderful. I just want everyone to join my new family. God is so good.

I lost one of my children to suicide when he was 15. This brought me closer to God but away from the church.

What helps growth?

Following Jesus Christ transformed my life as a teenager and continues to transform my life now (30+ years later)

Our panel's opinions and experiences:

- Most Christians today are not very disciplined in their spiritual lives and walk with God
- I can see God at work over the longer-term in my life
- I can see God at work in my life on a daily basis
- I am encouraged by seeing evidence of God working in the lives of other people around me
- I have seen a big change for the better in my life since I started following Jesus

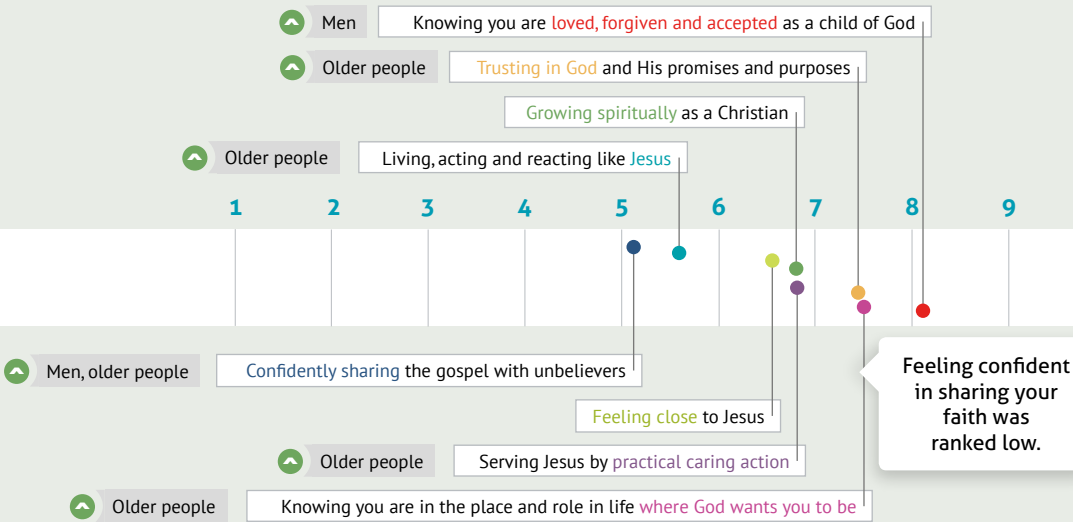
Strongly Agree	Agree
12%	42%
68%	29%
29%	47%
46%	48%
53%	31%

We asked people to assess themselves on the state of their own discipleship:

It is interesting that while a massive 98% can see God at work in their life in the long-term, a lesser number (88%) say they can see him at work daily.

These are the average ratings across the entire panel:

Legend: 1: Doing very badly – 10: Doing very well



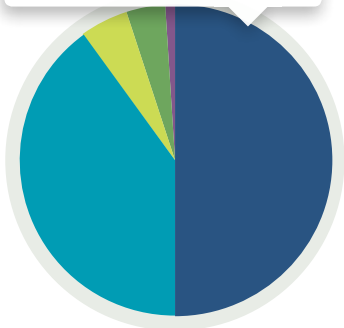
We also asked respondents to assess themselves on how they were doing on the **fruits of the spirit**. The findings came out as surprisingly positive, with none of the 'fruit' having an average score below 6 out of 10. The highest scores were for **faithfulness** and **love**, the lowest for **self-control** and **humility**.

Men feel they are doing better at **humility**, while older people rate themselves as doing better at **peace**, **patience** and **self-control**.

Feeding on God's word



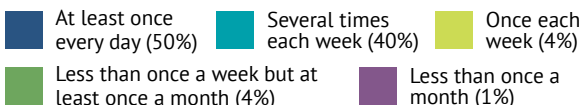
Those born before 1960 are twice as likely to read their Bible daily (60%) than younger people (31%).



How often people personally read, study or otherwise engage with the Bible

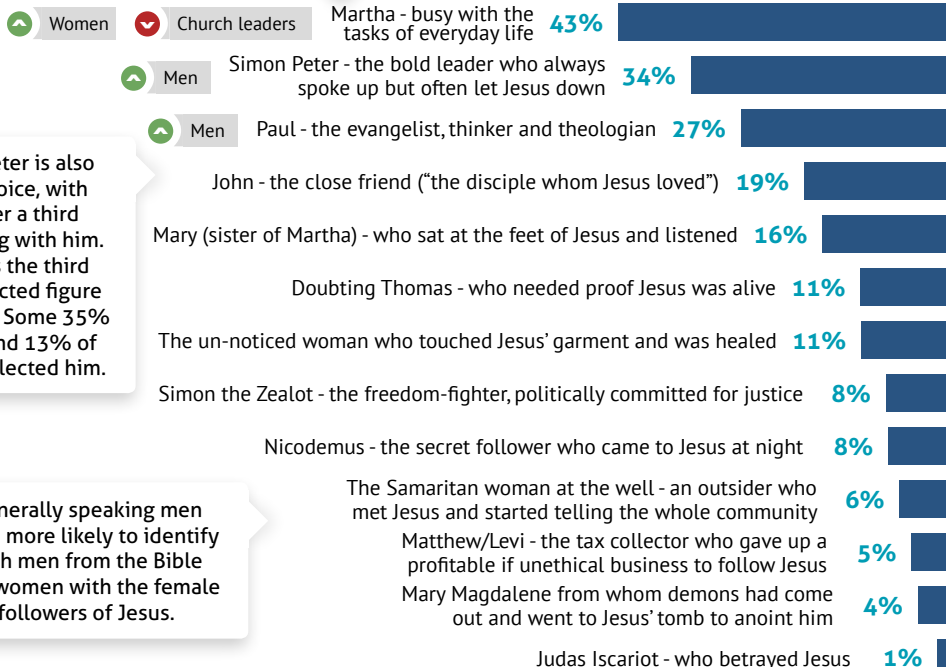
88% agree it is important for every Christian to read or study the Bible on a daily basis (of these 50% strongly agree).

In practice, just over half (50.5%) say they engage with the Bible daily and a further 40% at least several times a week.



Martha was the Biblical character most often identified with, with 58% of women identifying with her. She was selected almost three times more than her contemplative sister Mary, indicating that busy lifestyles are a widespread feature of contemporary discipleship.

Bible figures we identify with



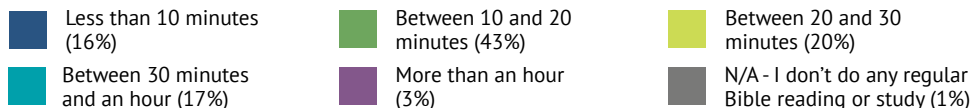
Simon Peter is also a top choice, with just over a third identifying with him. Paul was the third most selected figure with 27%. Some 35% of men and 13% of women selected him.

Generally speaking men were more likely to identify with men from the Bible and women with the female followers of Jesus.

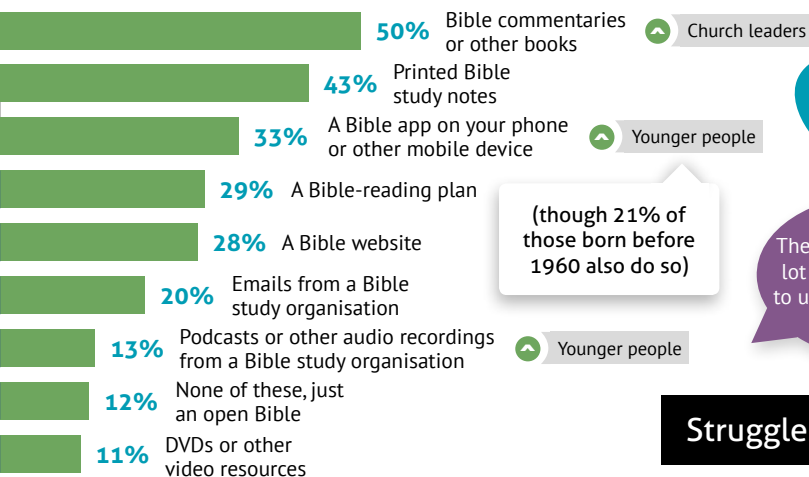
How much time people spend on the Bible, per session

Ten to 20 minutes is the most common length of time people claim to spend studying their Bible.

More than half (57%) say that after church most weeks they spend some time reflecting on or thinking about what the speakers/preachers have said. Church leaders are more likely to spend longer periods in studying the Bible.



Things people find helpful when reading the Bible



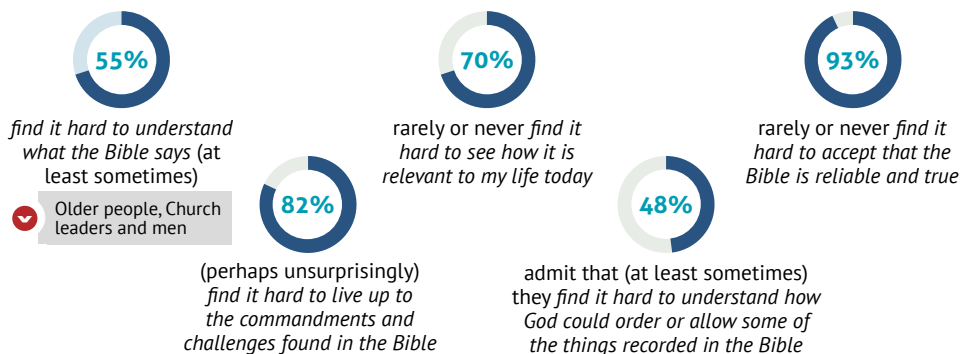
I'm very keen to study the Bible with my wife, but often find we're both very tired in the evenings, so it's tricky.


I have found Bible study apps/emails and a daily audio Bible really helpful

(though 21% of those born before 1960 also do so)

The New Testament is a lot easier than the Old to understand and apply to my life today.

Struggles with the Bible





**"God has called me to stay here
and be his witness. I cannot leave
the other Christians behind."**

**For North Korean refugee, Eun Hee, following Jesus
meant no turning back – even though it cost her life.**

After she became a Christian in China, she chose to return to her country to share the gospel. Despite the dangers, she regularly made the perilous journey to an Open Doors safe house in China, to collect clothes, food and medicine to take back for others

One day the police came to Eun Hee's house and took her away. Later, she died in prison.

Though our secret networks, **Open Doors** supports many brave Christians like Eun Hee, who are giving their lives to help the church in North Korea survive.

But time is short, and the need is desperate.

IT'S TIME

WAKE UP TO EXTREME PERSECUTION

Join us in a year of prayer and action for Christians in North Korea and where faith costs the most. **Order your FREE copy of** our new prayer resource, ***Live Like a North Korean*** at:

www.opendoorsuk.org/itstime

Today, millions of Christians around the world experience discrimination, imprisonment, torture and even martyrdom – simply because they believe in Jesus. Working with Christians on the frontline, **Open Doors** provides Bibles, leadership training, literacy programmes, livelihood support and advocacy services for believers who suffer for their faith.



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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#ITSTIME

Inspiration and influences

Inspirational personal figures

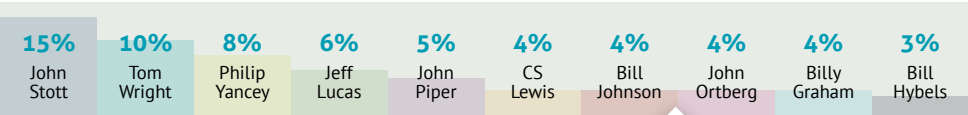
Among those who evangelicals know personally, who are the most inspiring and influential figures for them?

We asked people to select up to four from the following categories. Here's what they chose:



Inspirational public figures

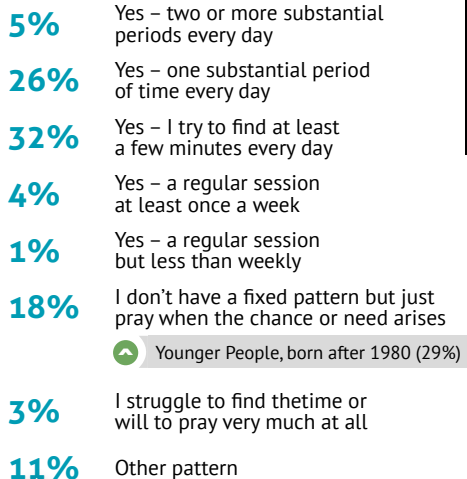
We asked people to list which recent Christian authors, speakers or leaders have influenced them the most - here are the top 10 names that were listed:



Inspirational historical figures



How do we pray?



The 11% who specify "other pattern" have a variety of practices, with many aspiring to "pray without ceasing" or to constantly "practise the presence of God".

Knowledge of biblical truths and the need to be in communion with God doesn't readily translate into practical prioritisation of spiritual activity

My own discipline is poor, always has been, but God has kept me for 40 years, and keeps drawing me to Him.



Keeping a journal

Older People & Women



Regularly taking communion, (Eucharist, Lord's Supper)

Older People Charismatics

Do you set aside regular times for personal prayer, contemplation or being alone with God?

Around two thirds say they try to have a regular daily pattern to their prayer life. Less than a third (31%) set aside a substantial period of time for prayer every day, but another 32% try to find at least a few minutes every day.

18% say they pray when the chance or need arises rather than in a disciplined way.

Older people (those born before 1960) are significantly more disciplined and structured in their prayer patterns.

Practices that have helped in their personal walk with God

These are examples that our respondents have used over the last few years to help them with their walk with God.

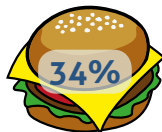


Attending conventions, festivals or other large gatherings of Christians

Church leaders and Anglicans



Going on retreats



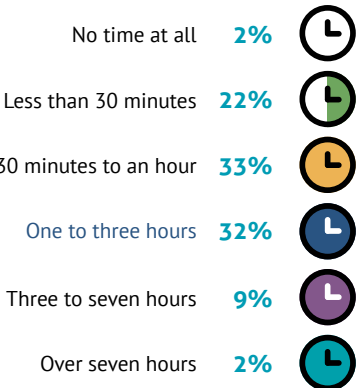
Fasting

Charismatics & Pentecostals

How much time do people set aside for private prayer each week?

More than half (57%) pray privately for less than an hour each week.

Although 87% agree every Christian needs to spend time alone with God on a daily basis, and that without that their faith will suffer, 42% said that they find it difficult to find time on a regular disciplined basis to pray and read the Bible.



Church leaders and older people report praying for longer than the average.

What do people find helpful as a way of strengthening their prayer and devotions?

63% agree they are easily distracted when they try to spend time alone with God (15% strongly agree).

“Praying on the move”
The most popular and helpful mode of prayer



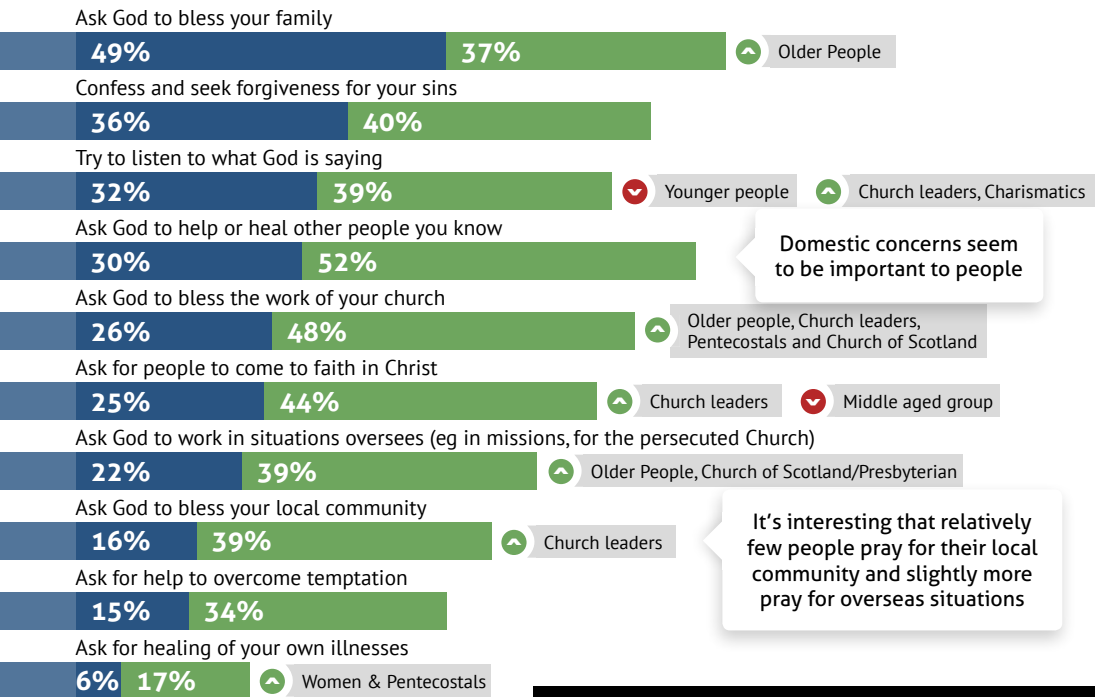
The more traditional forms and disciplines are cited by less than one in four as helpful

Though I don't often experience supernatural answers to prayer I'm pressing in to see them.

What do we pray?

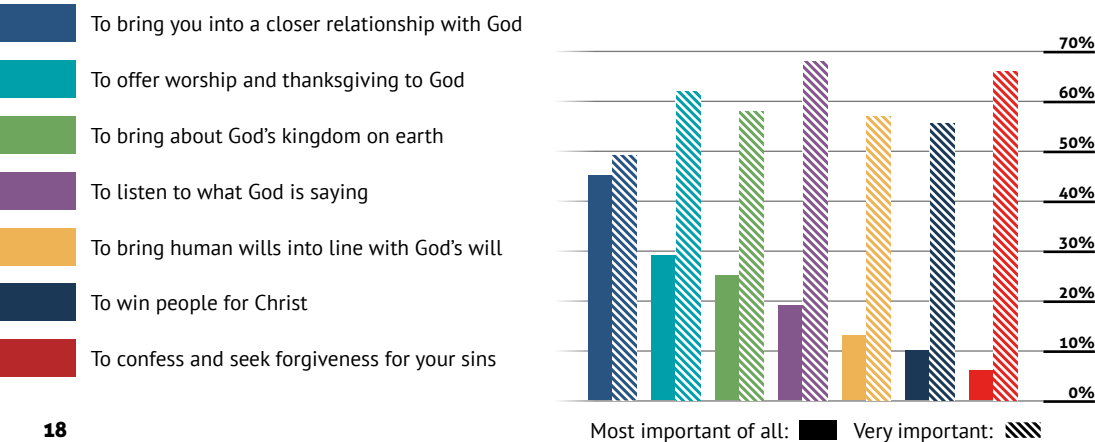
Always or almost always Often

We asked people how often they prayed the following:



What do people think are the most important purposes of prayer?

(Based loosely on the Lord's prayer)



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What are our struggles?









- While 83% have experienced a major period of difficulty in their life, God has carried people through, with only 3% saying the crisis has left them with a fragile faith.
- Just over a quarter (27%) said the crisis they experienced had really shaken their faith, but on the whole they emerged as a stronger Christian.  Women
- Just over half (54%) said their faith remained secure or was strengthened through the trial.  Older people

It is worth considering that those who lost their faith or left church following a crisis probably would not have taken this survey.

God has NEVER let me go, through mental health issues, physical ill health, bowel cancer, bereavements.

We asked people to rate themselves in relation to certain temptations and struggles

I'm often guilty of this / I still struggle with this but usually overcome the temptation

26%	Ignoring global exploitation or injustice (eg human trafficking)  Younger people	21%
21%	Self-centredness  Younger people & Women	31%
20%	Judgemental attitudes  Men & Church leaders	36%
20%	Despair, worry or anxiety  Younger people & Women  Church leaders	28%
9%	Hypocrisy	25%
8%	Looking at pornography  Younger people & Men	13%
6%	Unforgiveness  Older people, Men & Church leaders	25%
4%	Being one person in church and a different one at work	12%
3%	Lying or dishonesty  Older people	16%
1%	Addiction to alcohol, tobacco or drugs	3%
0%	Gambling	1%

The seven deadly sins

We asked people to rate themselves on the seven deadly sins on a scale of 1 to 10, but the statistical results were disappointing as most people tended to opt for mid-range scores.

The lowest average scores (indicating the greatest perceived failure) were for **pride** and **gluttony**, and the highest ones (indicating less of a problem) were for **envy** and **greed**, with **sloth**, **wrath** and **lust** placed in the middle.

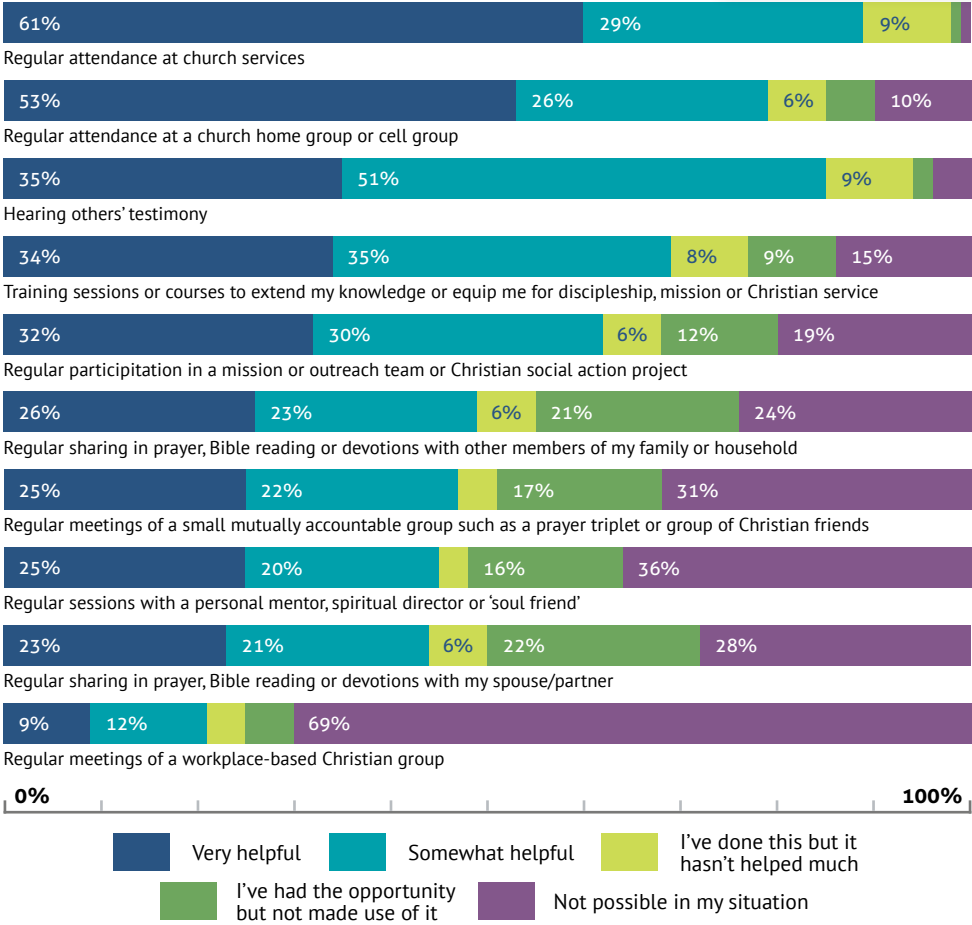
We are not alone

I cannot stress the importance of older mature Christians in my life.

Without house group I'd be a quivering wreck.

Over the last year or two, how helpful have the following kinds of interaction been to your growth as a Christian?

A relatively high proportion of people have the opportunity to share in prayer or bible study with a spouse or other family members but have not regularly made use of this opportunity.



The great thing about Christianity is that we are not alone. This graph illustrates that fellowship with others is really important in our discipleship. We've also found that more than 70% find attending large Christian conferences, festivals or conventions a help with their walk with God.

A massive 99% of our respondents attend church regularly. Of these, 61% find attending church very helpful and a further 29% somewhat helpful. However there were 9% who said going to church hasn't helped them much. This was more commonly felt by men and by Anglicans and Free Church members, in contrast with Charismatics and Pentecostals who were more likely to find attending church very helpful.

Discipleship and the Church

Although high proportions of people feel they have benefitted from attending church or small group activities (page 21), it seems people can see room for improvement in the intentional discipling and teaching of their churches.

What people think about their church...

	Strongly agree	Agree
My church succeeds in helping people become transformed so they are more like Jesus Christ	14%	49%
My church does very well at discipling new Christians	8%	32%
The teaching, sermons or talks at my church have helped me grow and mature as a Christian	29%	45%

I am so thankful for a church who have turned my life around

Burnout, burnout, burnout. I love the church but it hasn't so much disciplined us as squeezed us for all it could get... Sometimes it feels a little "every man for himself" which isn't supposed to be the culture of church at all!

I struggle to find comfort and fellowship in evangelical churches... I find that the focus is entirely on 'inward' spirituality, or evangelism based purely around talking to other people.

Reasons to be encouraged

- **Teaching** - Almost three quarters say the teaching in their church has helped them grow and mature as a Christian.
- **Influence** - 60% said that a church leader had influenced them, making church leaders by far the most frequently mentioned influence – far exceeding other categories such as spouses, friends and parents (page 15).

I find sermons at church really unhelpful - they are pitched to Bible students rather than people living real lives in the real world.

I'm grateful to those who've walked closely with me. Christian community is very important. Our faith is not just between us and God but is corporate.

Challenges for the UK Church

- **Discipling new Christians** - As seen in the table, only 40% agree that their church does well at discipling new Christians, with a very low 8% in strong agreement. This is a concern and can encourage all churches to take time to consider how well they are doing at discipling new believers and helping them grow.
- **Whole-life disciples** - God wants us to be whole-life disciples, but people were more likely to agree that their church encourages them to use their gifts and talents *within* the church than in work, public life and the wider community (pages 8-9).
- **Equipped to share** - Worryingly only 26% felt that in their early discipleship they had been very successfully equipped for witnessing and sharing their faith with others (pages 8-9).

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Afterword

As disciples of Christ we are all learners, seeking to grow in our knowledge of God and pursuing lives of faith that honour Him in today's busy world. Churches across the UK are helping Christians to do this, and I hope that these findings will help with this important work.

It's so encouraging to see from this report that evangelicals really know God is at work in their lives, and it's great to hear the stories of God's faithfulness to people in good times and bad. It's also exciting to hear that Christians are using innovative ways to spend time with God, embracing new smartphone technology to help them read the Bible and pray on the go.

Yet, challenges remain, and this research is designed to spark conversations and ideas in your church. It raises some important questions for us all, such as: how can we make sure that our churches are effectively discipling Christians at all stages of their faith? How can churches equip people to share their faith with others? What can help us avoid life's distractions and set aside time to be with God?

My prayer is that this research will inspire and provoke you to continue to live the life of a disciple, walking with other believers and sharing your faith with those around you.

Steve Clifford, general director,
Evangelical Alliance

Discussion questions and a Powerpoint presentation of key findings can be downloaded free on our website.

For more detailed information about the research, and to join our research panel, visit eauk.org/snapshot

For more on discipleship visit eauk.org/discipleship

A fuller data report is also available on request from g.smith@eauk.org

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