

Barna Group

Knowledge to navigate a changing world

Perceptions of Jesus, Christians & Evangelism in England

Executive Report 2015

Research conducted among English adults ages 18 and older
July 2015

Commissioned through a partnership between



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND



in our villages, towns & cities

evangelical alliance 
better together

Conducted by Barna Group.

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Foreword

This piece of research has been conducted with the hope and prayer that it will be a major catalyst for effective and focused evangelism in the decades to come. The challenge before the Church is profound. Can we raise the bar of the English population's understanding of who Jesus is? Are we prepared to commit ourselves to sharing our life and faith with those who don't know him?

In March 2015 more than 40 leaders of denominations and networks, and key influencers from across the spectrum of the UK Church, gathered in the Lake District for 24 hours of prayer and dialogue. The event was hosted by Steve Clifford, General Director of the Evangelical Alliance; Roy Crowne, Executive Director of HOPE; Dr Rachel Jordan, National Advisor for Mission and Evangelism for the Church of England; and Reverend Yemi Adedeji, Associate Director of HOPE and Director of the 'One People Commission'.

Gareth Russell, Vice President for Barna Global for the UK and Europe, presented the initial findings of 'Perceptions of Jesus, Christians and Evangelism' drawing on a survey of 1,000 people in England. 'Shocking', 'surprising' and 'life-changing' were among the reactions to the presentation.

Dr Patrick Dixon, Chairman of Global Change, Ltd, warned the gathering of the danger of institutional blindness. The power of the Holy Spirit was needed alongside the hard work of contextualising the gospel, he said; not an institutional response but a people movement; something simple that enabled Christians to have millions more sensitive, positive, culturally-relevant conversations about Jesus that could be deeply effective in evangelism.

The delegates also sought to prioritise themes in response to the question: 'What is the Lord saying to the churches?' Pastor Agu Irukwu, of the Redeemed Christian Church of God UK, said, 'We mustn't institutionalise what comes out of this—the early Church was a dynamic, expressive movement. The Holy Spirit must have the central role'.

The Summit concluded by agreeing that together, working toward 2050, the churches would join the mission of God to 1) raise the bar in the population's understanding of who Jesus is; 2) increase the percentage of people who know a follower of Jesus who has positively shared life and faith with them; 3) and see an increase year by year in the number of people who become followers of Jesus.

The denominational leaders also agreed to fund further, more comprehensive, research, which has led to this jointly funded report on 'Perceptions of Jesus, Christians and Evangelism in England'.

Introduction

What do English adults know and believe about Jesus Christ? What do they really think of his followers? How often—if ever—do Christians talk about their faith in Jesus? How do both Christians and non-Christians feel about those conversations?

The Church of England, Evangelical Alliance and HOPE commissioned Barna Group to find the answers to these and related questions. The researchers designed an online survey to administer among a carefully screened sample of 2,545 English adults ages 18 and older who are nationally representative by age, gender, region and socioeconomic grade. The sample error on this survey is plus or minus 1.9 per cent points at the 95-per cent confidence level.

Additional data were collected through an online survey among an oversample of 1,592 English practising Christians. The sample error on the oversample data is plus or minus 2.5 per cent points at the 95-per cent confidence level.

Definitions

Self-identified Christians select ‘Christian’ when asked to identify from a list of options which religion, if any, best describes their religious faith. Self-identified Christians make up just over half of the English population (57%).

Non-Christians select any other option than ‘Christian’ when asked to identify which religion, if any, best describes their religious faith. Non-Christians account for two in five adults among the English population (43%).

Practising Christians identify as ‘Christian’ but also report praying, reading the Bible and attending a church service at least monthly (and often more frequently). About one in six self-identified Christians are *practising* (16%), about 9 per cent of the total adult population.

Non-practising Christians identify as ‘Christian’ but do not qualify as ‘practising’ under the criteria above.

Six primary age groups were used to identify English adults: *age 18-24, age 25-34, age 35-44, age 45-54, age 55-64, and age 65+*. However, the bulk of the reporting focuses on comparing adults **18 to 34** with those who are **35 and older**.

Religious Identity of English Adults

Christian	57%
Atheist	12
Agnostic	9
Muslim	3
Hindu	2
Jewish	2
Buddhist	1
Sikh	*
Other	3
None of the above	11

*Indicates less than one-half of one percent.

Industry/Career Sector of English Adults

Sector	all English adults	English practising Christians
Retired/not employed	32%	18%
Retail	8	3
Education	7	19
Health	7	10
Production	5	2
Construction	5	3
Transport & storage (inc. post)	4	1
Arts, entertainment, recreation	4	5
Information & communication	4	7
Public admin & defence	3	4
Finance & insurance	3	1
Business admin & support	3	4
Accommodation/food service	2	1
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	1	1
Motor trades	1	*
Wholesale	1	*
Property	1	1
Don't know	3	13

*Indicates less than one-half of one percent.

Education Level of English Adults

Level of Education	all English adults	English practising Christians
Secondary school, high school, NVQ levels 1 to 3, etc.	51%	17%
University degree or equivalent professional qualification, NVQ level 4, etc.	44	81
Still in full-time education	3	1
Don't know	1	1
Prefer not to say	1	*

*Indicates less than one-half of one percent.

Major Findings

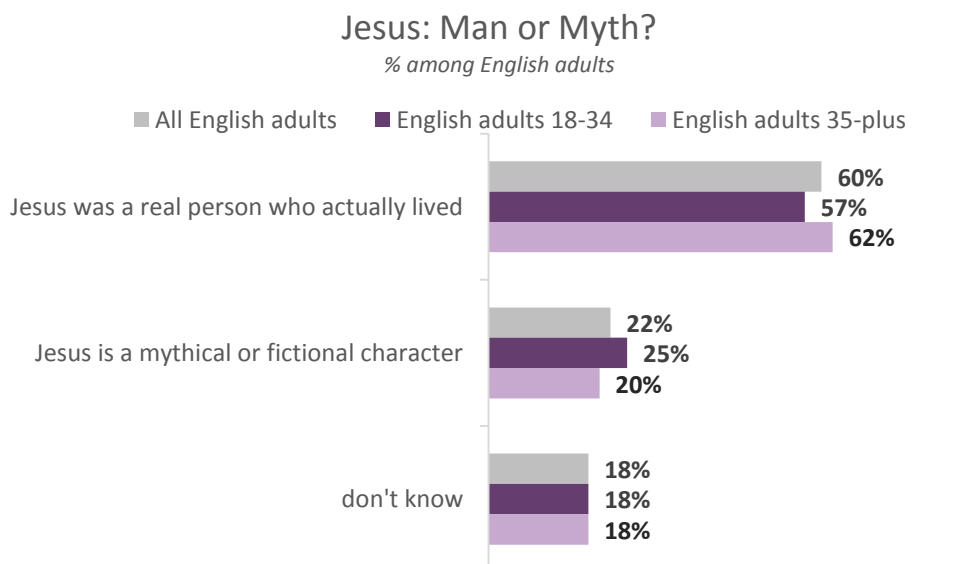
Beliefs about the Bible

- **Most English adults do not believe the Bible is God's word.** These respondents believe that the Bible is best described as 'how people of the time understood the ways and principles of God' (15%), or as 'simply another book written by people that contains stories and advice' (28%). Only about two in five (39%) believe the Bible is God's actual or inspired word.

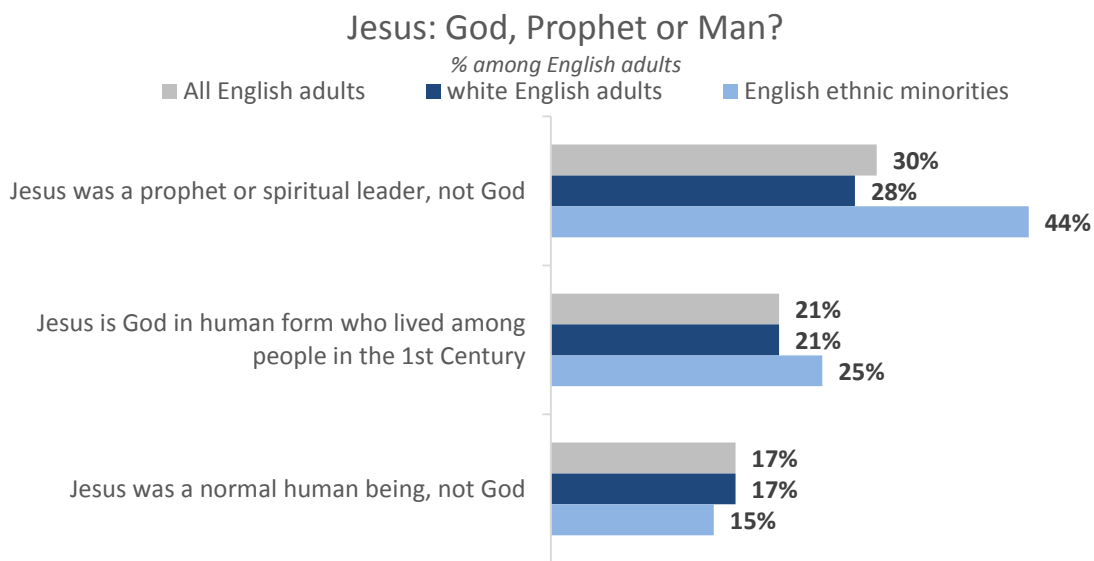
Beliefs about Jesus

- **Six in 10 English adults believe Jesus was a real person (60%).** Adults 35 and older (62%) are more likely than those 18 to 34 (57%) to believe Jesus actually lived. Conversely, younger adults (25%) are more likely than those over 35 (20%) to believe Jesus was a 'fictional character from a book and not a real, historical person'.

More than two out of every five English adults who are not practising Christians (40%) either do not believe Jesus was a real person who actually lived or they are unsure if he was real or not.



- **Belief in Jesus’ divinity is not common.** Only about one in five English adults holds the orthodox belief that Jesus was ‘God in human form who lived among people in the 1st Century’ (21%). The most common belief about Jesus is that he was ‘a prophet or spiritual leader, not God’ (30%).
- **Most ethnic minorities believe Jesus was a real person but are divided on whether or not he is God.** Four out of five believe ‘Jesus was a real person who actually lived’ (79%), but only 25 per cent believe Jesus was ‘God in human form’—only slightly more than among whites (among Blacks, however, the proportion who believe in Jesus’ divinity is 52 per cent). Most ethnic minorities in England may adhere to non-Christian religions, such as Islam, which says Jesus was a prophet but not God.



- **Just under half of English adults believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (43%).** One in six believe ‘the resurrection happened word-for-word as described in the Bible’ (17%) while one-quarter believe the biblical story ‘contains some content which should not be taken literally’ (26%).
- **Black adults are much more likely to believe Jesus was raised from the dead (73%).** A majority believes in a literal interpretation of Christ’s resurrection (53%) while one in five believes the resurrection happened but ‘the story in the Bible contains some content which should not be taken literally’ (21%).

Most Popular Descriptions of Jesus *% among English adults*

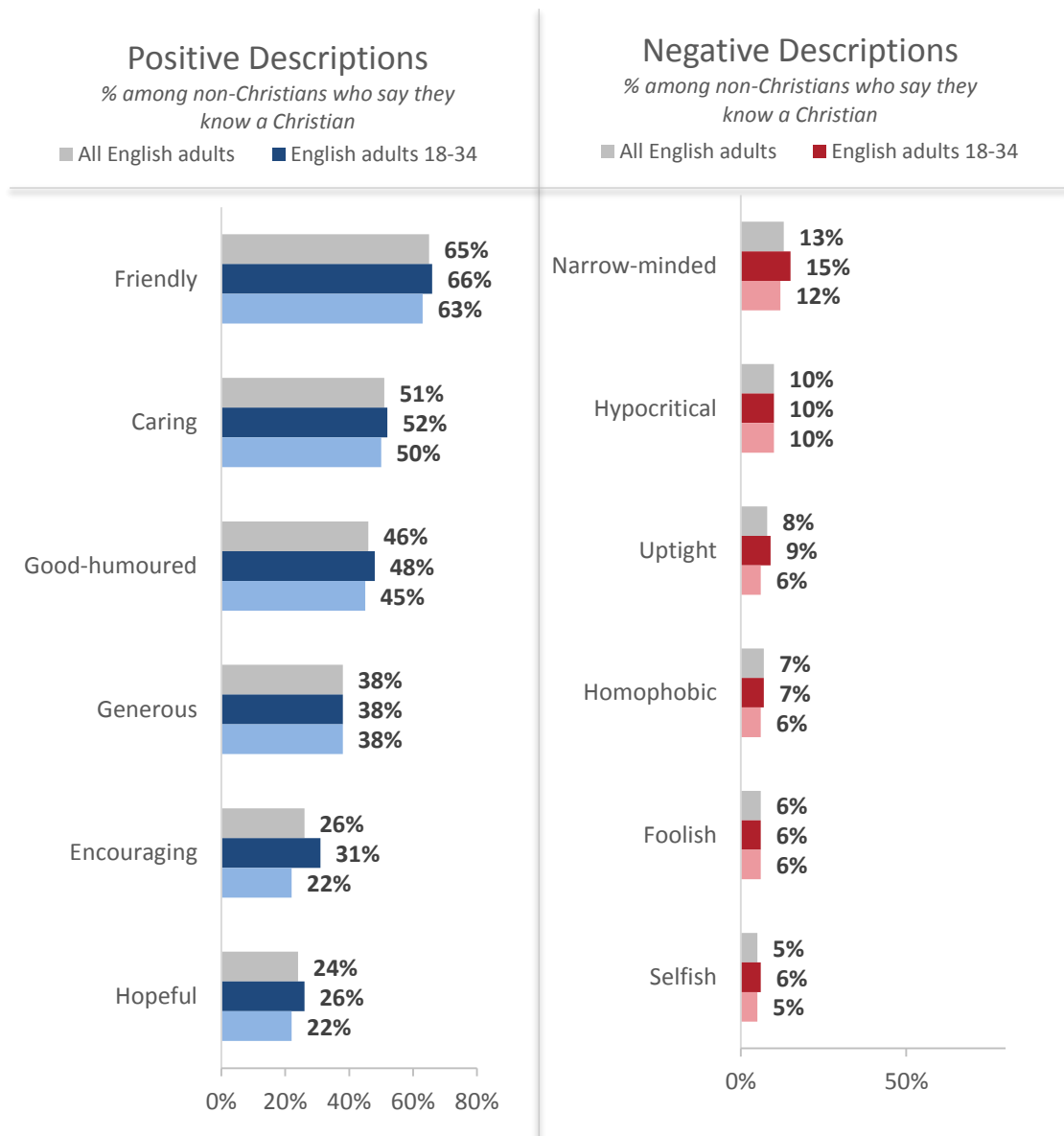
All English adults	English adults 18-34	Practising Christians	Non-practising Christians
Spiritual 48%	Spiritual 42%	Loving 93%	Loving 58%
Loving 47%	Loving 42%	Wise 88%	Spiritual 57%
Peaceful 46%	Leader 41%	Inspirational 88%	Peaceful 54%

Non-Christians' Perceptions of Christians

- **A majority of English non-Christians know a Christian.** Approximately two in three non-Christians report that they personally know someone who is a follower of Jesus—that is, someone they perceive to be a 'practising Christian' (67%). Most of these Christians are either family members (34%) or friends (40%).
- **One in three English adults do not know a practising Christian (33%).** These individuals are more likely than average to be ages 35-44 (24%), Asian or Asian British (9%)—specifically Pakistani (4%), or live in East of England (14%) or London (16%).

These individuals are less likely than average to be ages 55+ (19%), or Black or Black British (0%).

- **Most non-Christians enjoy the company of the Christian they know (60%).** Three out of five say they enjoy being around their Christian friend or family member *always* (28%) or *most of the time* (32%).
- **Non-Christians attribute more positive than negative qualities to the Christian they know.**



Non-Christians' Experiences of Evangelism

- More than half of English non-Christians who know a Christian (58%) have had a conversation with them about Jesus.** Younger adults 18 to 34 (61%) are somewhat more likely than adults over 35 (54%) to report having had such a conversation. Two out of every five non-Christians say evangelism made them glad not to be a Christian (42%). Another two in five don't know how they felt about it (42%), while only 16 per cent felt sad, after the conversation about Jesus, that they did not share the Christian's faith.
- When Christians talk about Jesus, the response is mixed.** One in five non-Christians say they, after such a conversation, felt open to an experience or encounter with Jesus. But almost half say they were not open to such an experience (49%) and six in 10 didn't want to know more about Jesus (59%). One in five did want to know more (19%); 16 per cent felt sad that they did not share the Christian's faith; nearly one-quarter felt more positive about Jesus (23%) or felt closer to the Christian with whom they had the conversation (26%).

Table 1 - Among Non-Christians

Positive Experiences	Negative Experiences
Wanted to know more about Jesus Christ, 19%	59%, Did not want to know more about Jesus Christ
Open to an experience or encounter with Jesus, 20%	49%, Not open to an experience or encounter with Jesus
Felt sad that I did not share their faith, 16%	42%, Felt glad that I did not share their faith
Felt more positive towards Jesus Christ, 23%	30%, Felt more negative towards Jesus Christ
Felt closer to the person in question, 26%	29%, Felt less close to the person in question
Felt comfortable, 53%	32%, Felt uncomfortable

Table 2 - Among Practising Christians (full analysis provided on page 18)

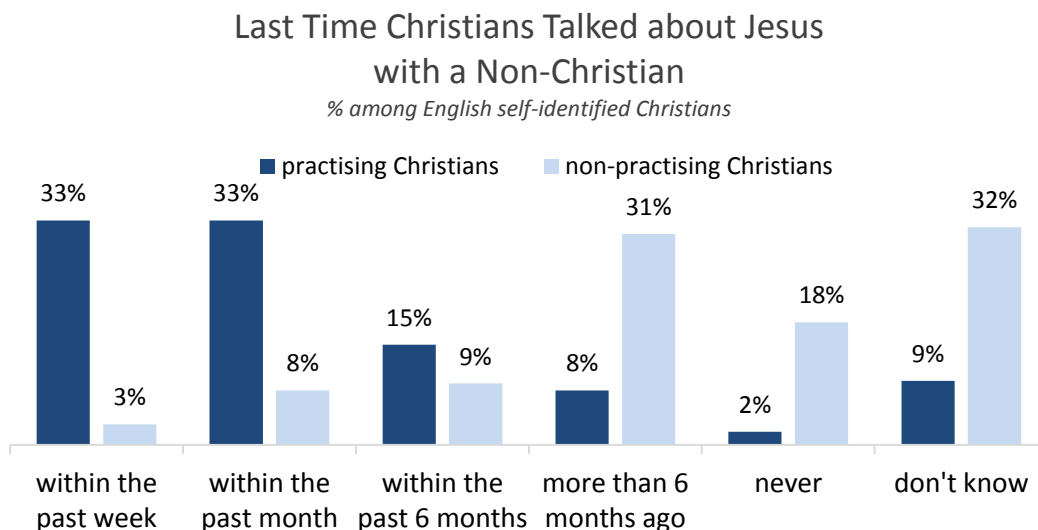
Positive Experiences	Negative Experiences
Felt more positive towards Jesus Christ, 90%	2%, Felt more negative towards Jesus Christ
Wanted to know more about Jesus Christ, 85%	2%, Did not want to know more about Jesus Christ
Open to an experience or encounter with Jesus, 82%	3%, Not open to an experience or encounter with Jesus
Felt comfortable, 80%	11%, Felt uncomfortable
Felt closer to the person in question, 80%	2%, Felt less close to the person in question
Felt sad that I did not share their faith, 46%	2%, Felt glad that I did not share their faith

Christians' Experiences of Evangelism

- English practising Christians feel a responsibility to evangelise (85%).** Nearly half *strongly agree* that 'it is every Christian's responsibility to talk to non-Christians about Jesus Christ' (45%), and another two in five *tend to agree* (40%). About one out of ten say they *tend to disagree* with the statement (10%). English practising Christians are consistent with UK practising Christians.
- Practising Christians believe talking to non-Christians about Jesus is evangelism (76%).** More than two in five *strongly agree* (41%) that 'talking to non-Christians about Jesus Christ is an act of evangelism', and more than one-third *tends to agree* (35%). One out of six practising Christians disagrees (13% tend to, 4% strongly).
- Non-practising Christians do not believe evangelism is their responsibility.** Two-thirds of non-practising Christians disagree that they have a responsibility to evangelise (63%) while just 19 per cent agree—about the same proportion as those who don't know (18%).

Only one quarter of non-practising Christians believe that talking to non-Christians about Jesus is considered evangelism; 39 per cent think it is not, and 37 per cent do not know.

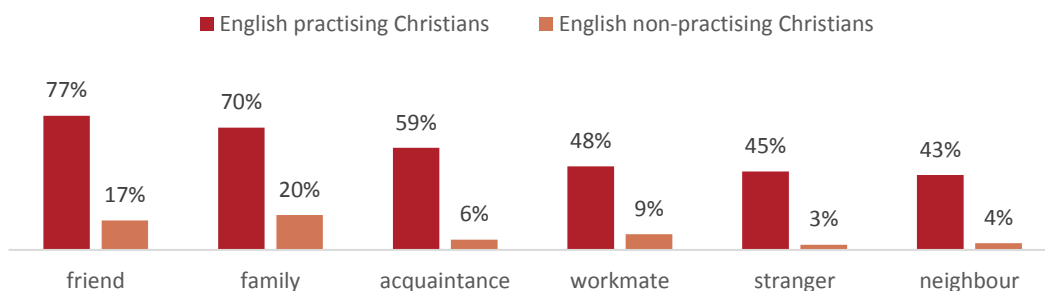
- Most practising Christians have recently talked about Jesus with a non-Christian.** Two-thirds have talked about their faith in Jesus within the past month (66%). Eight in 10 have talked with a non-Christian about Jesus in the past six months (81%).



- **Over half of practising Christians look for opportunities to talk to non-Christians about Jesus** (53%) and seven in 10 are comfortable sharing their faith (72%). Only about one-quarter of practising Christians say they feel unable to take up opportunities to talk about Jesus (26%).
- **Most practising Christians feel confident to talk with non-Christians about Jesus** (72%). A significant minority are 'afraid of causing offence when talking to non-Christians' (33%); think others are better suited to talking with non-Christians about Jesus (35%); or 'do not know how to talk to non-Christians about Jesus' (23%).
- **Younger Christians talk about Jesus with non-Christians more often than do older Christians.** Nearly twice as many adults 18 to 34 (practising and non-practising Christians) say they talked about their relationship with Jesus in the past month (31%) compared to adults 35 and older (17%). Younger adults most often talked about Jesus with friends (45%) and family (21%).
- **Practising Christians are optimistic about the impact of their evangelism efforts.** More than half say the impact of their faith-sharing conversation on the other person's opinion of Jesus was very or fairly positive (56%).
- **Practising Christians share about their faith most often with friends and family.** Over the past five years practising Christians have been the most active in sharing about their faith compared to non-practising Christians.

Relationship with a Non-Christian

% among Christians who shared about Jesus in the past five years



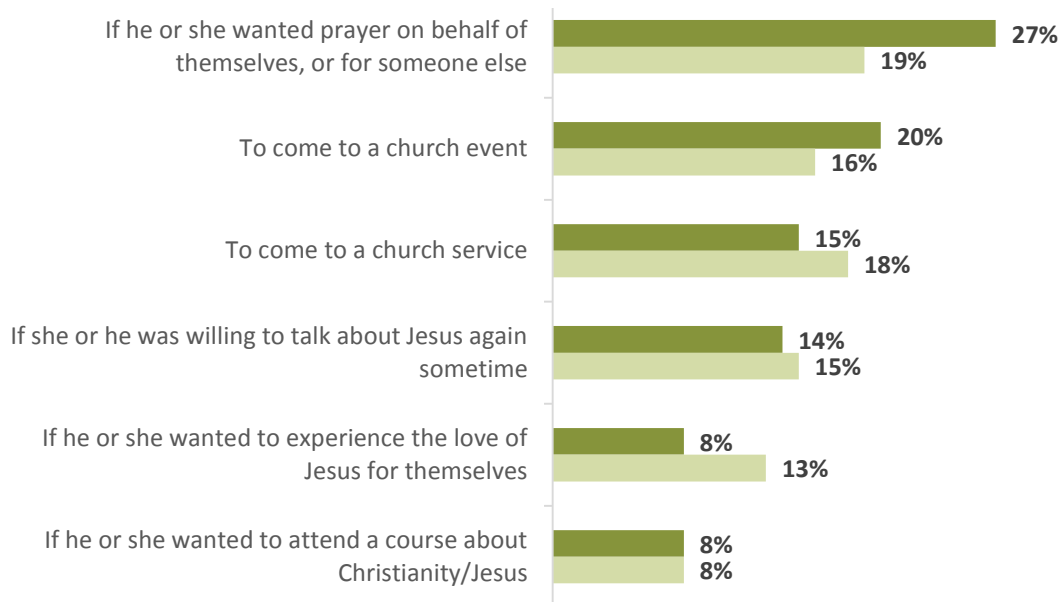
- Both non-Christians and practising Christians were asked to describe what happened after having a conversation about Jesus.** After talking to a non-Christian about Jesus, one in four Practising Christians recall asking if they could pray for the non-Christian. Slightly fewer non-Christians remember being asked this (19% compared to 27%). A similar proportion of non-Christians remember being invited to a church service (18%), although, fewer practising Christians actually recall doing this (15%).

What Happened After the Conversation about Jesus

% among practising Christians and non-Christians who have had a conversation about Jesus

■ How practising Christians remember it ■ How non-Christians remember it

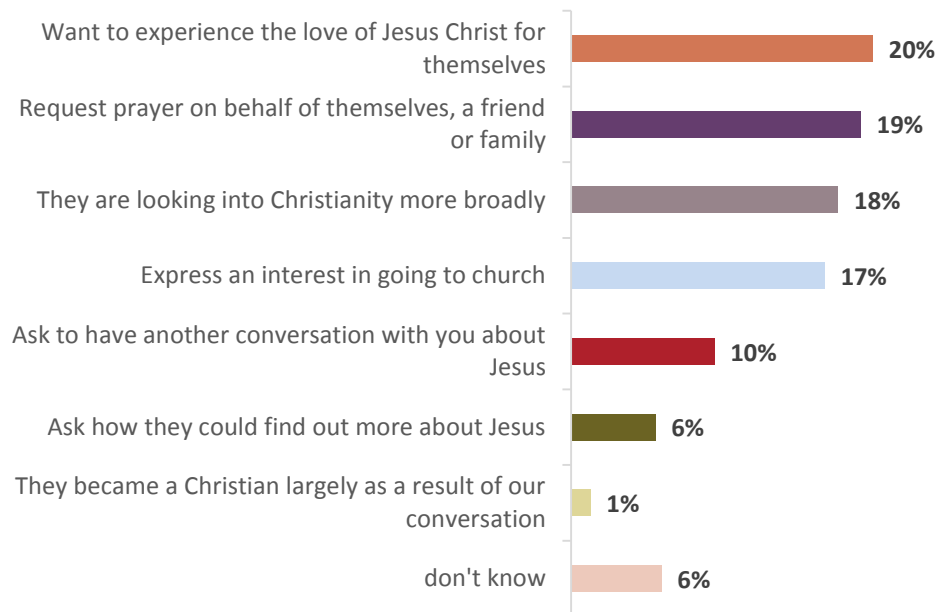
The Christian asked the non-Christian...



- **Practising Christians perceive varied responses from non-Christians.** Top answers include want to ‘experience the love of Jesus Christ for themselves’ (20%); ‘request prayer on behalf of themselves, or a friend or family member’ (19%); ‘they are looking into Christianity more broadly’ (18%); ‘express an interest in going to church’ (17%); ‘ask to have another conversation’ about Jesus (10%); and ask how they could ‘find out more about Jesus’ (6%).

How Practising Christians Remember it

% among practising Christians who have spoken with a non-Christian about Jesus

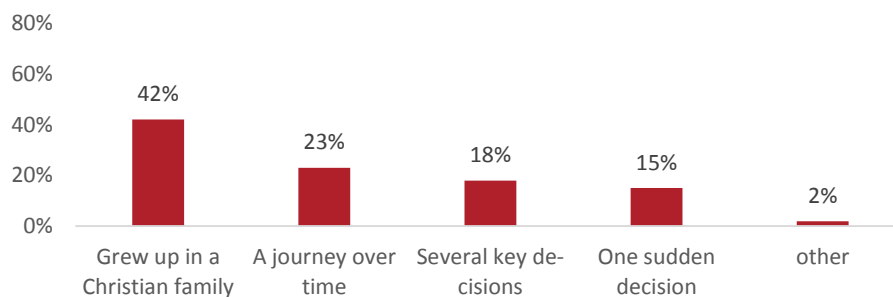


Christians' Faith Journeys

- **Nine out of 10 practising Christians have been a Christian for 11 or more years.**
- **Nearly half of practising Christians grew up in a Christian home.** The other half came later to faith, and is about evenly split between their adult faith being 'a journey over time' (23%); 'several key decisions' (18%); and 'one sudden decision' (15%).

Personal Faith Journey Descriptions

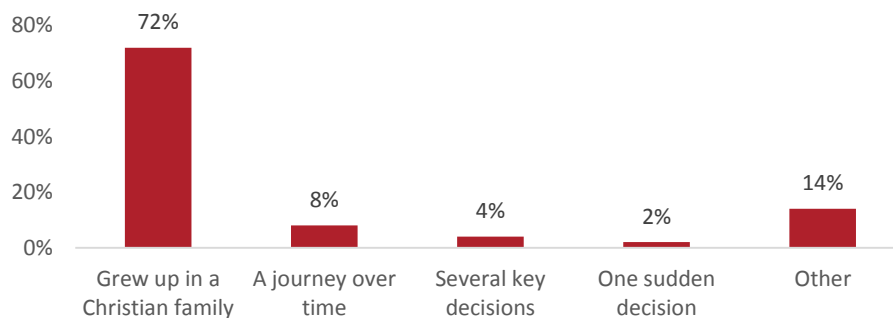
% among practising Christians



- **Three-quarters of non-practising Christians grew up in a Christian home (73% v. 42% of practising Christians).** By comparison, later avenues to faith are uncommon: 'a journey or process' (8%); 'several key decisions' (4%); and 'one sudden decision' (2%).

Personal Faith Journey Descriptions

% among non-practising Christians



- **A variety of influences led practising Christians to make their faith commitment.** Top influences include growing up in a Christian family (41%); attending church services (28%); reading the Bible (27%); conversations with a Christian they knew well (27%); an experience of the love of Jesus (24%); an unexplainable spiritual experience (17%); and a particular life event, whether positive or negative (16%).

Influences that Led to Conversion Among Practising Christians

% among English practising Christians

<i>Growing up in a Christian family</i>	41%
<i>Attending a church service(s), other than a wedding or funeral</i>	28%
<i>Reading the Bible</i>	27%
<i>Conversation(s) with Christian(s) you knew well</i>	27%
<i>An experience of the love of Jesus Christ</i>	24%
<i>A spiritual experience you could not explain</i>	17%
<i>A particular life event, whether positive or negative</i>	16%
<i>Conversation(s) with Christian(s) you did not know well</i>	9%
<i>Christian Union or other university programme</i>	6%
<i>An individual church's outreach programme (e.g., parent and toddler group, food bank)</i>	5%
<i>Going to an introduction to Christianity course like Alpha or Christianity Explored</i>	5%
<i>Christian media (TV, radio, books, websites, etc.)</i>	4%
<i>Visiting/praying in open churches (i.e., not during a service)</i>	4%
<i>Dreams or visions</i>	3%
<i>Newer forms of church such as messy church or café church</i>	1%
<i>A church wedding or funeral</i>	1%
<i>Specific Christians on social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, etc.)</i>	*%
<i>Other</i>	9%
<i>none of the above</i>	*%
<i>don't know</i>	*%

- **Many practising Christians credit friends for the conversation that led them to become a Christian (44%).** Other practising Christians credit a family member (18%); an acquaintance (15%); a stranger (7%); a workmate (7%); or a neighbour (3%).
- **A significant proportion of non-practising Christians attribute their faith to the influence of friends (38%).**

- Practising Christians recall their introductory conversation to faith in a very positive light.** A majority felt more positive towards Jesus Christ after the conversation (90%); wanted to know more about Jesus Christ (85%); were more open to an experience or encounter with Jesus (82%); felt comfortable (80%); and felt closer to the person in question (80%). (Compare to non-Christians' experiences on page 8.)

Positive Experiences	Negative Experiences
Felt more positive towards Jesus Christ, 90%	2%, Felt more negative towards Jesus Christ
Wanted to know more about Jesus Christ, 85%	2%, Did not want to know more about Jesus Christ
Open to an experience or encounter with Jesus, 82%	3%, Not open to an experience or encounter with Jesus
Felt comfortable, 80%	11%, Felt uncomfortable
Felt closer to the person in question, 80%	2%, Felt less close to the person in question
Felt sad that I did not share their faith, 46%	2%, Felt glad that I did not share their faith

About Barna

Barna Group is a research firm dedicated to providing actionable insights on faith and culture with a particular focus on the Christian church. In its 30-year history, Barna Group has conducted more than one million interviews in the course of hundreds of studies, and has become a go-to source for organizations that want to better understand a complex and changing world.

Our clients include a broad range of academic institutions, churches, non-profits, and businesses, such as Alpha, the Templeton Foundation, Pepperdine University, Fuller Seminary, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Maclellan Foundation, DreamWorks Animation, Focus Features, Habitat for Humanity, NBC-Universal, the ONE Campaign, Paramount Pictures, the Salvation Army, Walden Media, Sony and World Vision.

The firm's studies are frequently quoted by major media outlets such as *The Economist*, BBC, CNN, *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*, Fox News, Huffington Post, *The New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

Barna Group's work reaches around the world through the efforts of Barna Global. Current Barna Global projects include engagements in Scotland, England, Australia and South Africa.

Learn more about Barna Group at www.barna.org.