

3. Encountering Jesus

‘Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God’ (Acts 9:17-20).

We asked: How do non-Christians encounter Jesus, engage with his followers and make a decision to follow him themselves?

The research showed most non-Christians (67%) in England know a practising Christian – and that person is most likely to be a friend (40%) or family member (34%). For 15% of non-Christians, the Christian they know is an acquaintance, for 7% a colleague and for 4%, a neighbour. And they don’t just know us; they like us too, with non-Christians more likely to describe us positively than negatively.

More than half (58%) of non-Christians who know a practising Christian have had a conversation with them about their faith in Jesus. And people have cited conversations with Christians they know as an important part of their coming to faith.

Pray

We give thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit who gives us all we need to follow Jesus and share him with others.

Risen Jesus, we ask:

- you to fill us afresh with your Holy Spirit and guide us in how we talk and share about you
- you to help us identify those to pray for this year – for example a friend, a family member, an acquaintance, a colleague, a neighbour – and so to help them encounter Jesus
- that every Christian and every church across our nation will become more active in evangelism

Lord, give me the confidence and love to share my story, to offer the gift of prayer and be salt and light in the places where you have put me.

www.talkingjesus.org

New Year Prayer Call

Praying for more people to meet, love and follow Jesus

New Year’s Eve - Thursday 31st December 2015 to Sunday 3rd January 2016

‘Jesus told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”’ Luke 10:2 (NIV).

24 hours of prayer

In March 2015 more than 40 key leaders of denominations and networks from across the spectrum of the English Church, gathered in the Lake District. For 24 hours, we prayed and we talked. We shared our heart for mission; our collective longing to see God move in this nation. We reflected on an initial piece of research into People’s Perceptions of Jesus, Christians and Evangelism -- we had commissioned the Barna research group to survey 1,000 people in England. The results of this first piece of research were shocking.

We agreed that this research had the potential to equip every Christian to have millions more sensitive, positive, culturally-relevant conversations about Jesus that could be deeply effective in evangelism. But we wanted to make sure. So denominational leaders agreed to fund further, more comprehensive, research – the results of which have been published in Talking Jesus – www.talkingjesus.org.

Leaders unite

There are rare moments in Church history where the unity of God’s people is tangible. This was one of those moments. The leaders that initially gathered for those 24 hours at Windermere agreed to work together toward 2050 on some key benchmarks: the number of people that know who Jesus is; the number of non-Christians in England who know a Christian; the number who have had a positive conversation with a Christian; and the percentage of the population who are practising Christians.

Now the real work begins, and it begins with prayer. We need the Holy Spirit to be at work in our country. We need the Holy Spirit to use our words and actions to show people what Jesus is like. We need the Holy Spirit to give Christians the right words to say in every situation, and we need the Holy Spirit to draw people to Jesus.

Glimmers of hope

This piece of research should provoke us to prayer as our hearts are heavy with the reality of how little our friends and neighbours understand about who Jesus is. But there are glimmers of hope; we are excited about this unique opportunity to understand the landscape we are in. This is not a quick-fix strategy, but a long-term commitment to changing the story in our nation, so that people might meet Jesus, love him and follow him.

Call to prayer

At Watchnight services and on Sunday 3rd January 2016, let’s bring the Church together to pray for our country in villages, towns and cities throughout the UK.

Talking and listening to our Father in prayer helps us to prepare the way for him to use us. As he changes us and fills us with his love and compassion, we find confidence to pray for others and share the good news with those who have not yet encountered Jesus.

‘May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations’ Psalm 67:1.

Focus for prayer

1. Knowing about Jesus

‘Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered: “You are the Messiah.” Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him’ (Mark 8:27-30).

In the Talking Jesus survey we asked people ‘Which of the following best describes your understanding of Jesus Christ?’ They replied:

- He was a real person who actually lived – 60%
- He is a mythical or fictional character – 22%
- Don’t know – 18%

Pray

- For schools, that the truth about Jesus will be taught clearly
- That the 60% who believe Jesus lived, might come to know him personally
- For the 18% of people who haven’t made up their mind – may they discover who Jesus is for themselves

We asked English adults which, if any, of the following statements reflect your beliefs about Jesus Christ? They replied:

- A normal human being – 17%
- God in human form who lived among people in the first century – 21%
- A prophet or spiritual leader, not God – 30%
- Don’t know – 9%
- Other – 2%

Pray

Thank God that one in five of the population knows that Jesus is God in human form – ask God to help these people to put their faith into words relevantly.

What does the English population believe about the resurrection?

Belief in the resurrection is more common than you might think. The research showed that just under half of English adults (43%) believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. One in six of them (17%) believes the resurrection account happened ‘word-for-word’ as described in the Bible, while a quarter believe that the biblical account has some content which ‘should not be taken literally’ (26%).

Pray

We give thanks for all that Jesus has done for every person through the cross and resurrection.

Loving Lord Jesus, we ask for:

- forgiveness for the times when we have not reached out with your compassion
- your love to direct all of our relationships and conversations so that many will understand the implications of the resurrection for their lives
- our church(es) to become more and more (a) place(s) where people of all ages discover your love

Loving Jesus, we thank you that millions in this country are open to you and have Christian friends and family members. We pray that these relationships will be fruitful and that many will come to know you through the lives of your people.

2. Talking about Jesus

‘Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”’ (Matthew 28:16-20).

We wanted to know: Are practising Christians evangelising? And, if they are, who are they talking to and what happens after these conversations?

The survey found that, on the whole, we are confident in the gospel. Over half of practising Christians say they are always on the look-out for opportunities to talk about Jesus to those who don’t know him. The vast majority (72%) feel comfortable about doing so, while some (26%) for some reason feel unable to take up these opportunities to share their faith in Jesus. However, 35% feel that others are better equipped to talk to others about Jesus and 33% are afraid of causing offence to non-Christians by speaking about him.

Pray

We give thanks for all who have helped us on our own journey of faith. Jesus, Lord of life, we ask for:

- a new confidence to offer to pray, bringing light, life and healing to those we meet
- a new boldness to talk about the difference Jesus has made in our lives
- help so we will make time to stop and create space for conversations to happen

Jesus - you are Lord of every part of our lives. Our friends and family need your deep love, grace and forgiveness. We pray that we will be effective instruments for you and that the good news of Jesus will be revealed to tens of thousands of people across every age-group and background.