

Good News people

Study 3: Good News For 21st Century People

Leaders' Notes



Introduction:

Today in the UK, change is taking place all around us. For many, moral values have changed, 'normal' Sunday activities are different today than thirty years ago, church attendance and the average person's understanding of what takes place in church is minimal now. And this is to say nothing of the fast-paced technological development, the need (for many) to work increased hours to pay increasing bills, and not least of

all Brexit –related uncertainty about the future. Deep-rooted changes at the “gut-level” of individuals are also taking place: the way people make decisions, the way authorities and authority figures are regarded (or not) and the way people view matters of faith, all these and more are in a state of flux.

As people who are called to show and share good news within this culture (or more accurately, the various subcultures within UK culture), this presents us with a significant challenge. This challenge is not unlike the challenge faced by the apostle Paul, as he began, for the first time, to share the gospel message with Gentiles in the 1st Century AD.

Bible reading:	Get a volunteer in the group to read Acts 17:1-4
Group discussion:	What do you notice about where and how Paul is sharing the message of the gospel in Thessalonica in v. 1-3?
Bible reading:	Get a volunteer in the group to read Acts 17:16- 34 (<i>Before reading, note that in between v.4 and v. 16, Paul is thrown out of Thessalonica, he was sent away to Berea, and then on to Athens for his safety</i>).
Group discussion:	How does Paul's approach to sharing the gospel in Athens (v.16-34) differ from his approach in Thessalonica (v. 1-3)?

[Leader alert: In Thessalonica - he's in synagogues speaking to Jews from the Scriptures. Contrast this with Athens – where he's with Gentiles and (apparently) not using the Scriptures (which they'd

be unfamiliar with) instead he uses their gods and poets as points of connection and a way of introducing the essence of the gospel].

What Paul, (the first Christian missionary) does here, and what cross-cultural missionaries have been doing ever since, is contextualise the gospel. In other words, he looks at the context he is in and seeks to express the gospel message in ways that his 'hearers' will understand and relate to. Notice that the message doesn't change (he was still preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection, v. 18), but the way he leads into this message and creates some common ground with his hearers [referring to their idols (important to the Athenians) and to their poets] enables a connection to be made.

*Lesslie Newbigin, a Presbyterian minister, was ordained in July 1936, he married his wife the following month, and in September of that same year set off to minister in India. He experienced 35 years of cross-cultural mission, and when he returned to England after almost four decades, he found it to be a very different country from the one he left in 1936. **He described it not as a secular society without gods, but rather as a pagan society with false gods.** This he said, was the new 'missionary' context we face throughout the UK – and that was in the 1970s!*

So what is our missionary context, nationally?

- The Independent reported (16th May 2017) that more British people identify as nonreligious (48.6%) than Christian (43%)ⁱ. And it appears that church attendance has fallen to 5% in the UK in 2015ⁱⁱ
- Clergy were once the most trusted of professions, but trust in clergy has fallen to its lowest level, ie. 20% lower than in 1983 (2017 poll)ⁱⁱⁱ
- Social isolation is increasing. Between 2005-2015, the number of 45-64 year olds and 65-74 year olds living on their own has increased by 23% and 22% respectively. In the same period lone parents with dependant children increased by 81,000. ^{iv}
- One in four 18-30 year olds thinks Jesus was a mythical or fictional character^v

But do you know, on the other hand?

- 44% of practicing Christians credit their friends for introducing them to Jesus^{vi}
- 36% of practicing Christians say talking to a Christian about Jesus was important in their coming to faith^{vii}
- 31% of 18-34 year olds felt more positive about Jesus having spoken to a Christian about Jesus^{viii}

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe the spiritual 'status' of your family, friends and colleagues?
2. How might you and your church best develop relationships and spiritual connections with them – helping them on a spiritual journey (moving closer to Jesus)?
3. The Engels' Scale (below) is a helpful way of describing what someone's spiritual journey

might look like. Pair up with someone in your group and each think of 2 people you know and try to gauge where on this scale they currently might fit.

4. Think about the not-yet Christians your church currently connects with (e.g Toddler group, Lunch Club...). Rather than obsessing about getting those people to attend Sunday worship, can you think of anything (a resource, a conversation group?) you might offer in parallel to what they already engage in, that might help them to understand a little more of Jesus and as a result move closer to him? Look at the Engel's scale and consider what (different things for different people) might help them move one or two steps closer to Jesus.

simplified

Engel Scale

- 10 No God framework
- 9 Experience of emptiness
- 8 Vague awareness of Christianity
- 7 Interest in Christianity
- 6 Awareness of the Gospel
- 5 Positive attitudes to the Gospel
- 4 Experience of Christian love
- 3 Aware of personal need
- 2 Grasp of implications of the Gospel
- 1 Challenge to respond personally
- 0 Repentance and faith
- +1 Evaluation of the decision
- +2 Learning the basics of the Christian life
- +3 Functioning member of local Church
- +4 Continuing growth in character, lifestyle and service
- +5 Effective sharing of faith and life

WEBA can help guide you to suitable resources – please contact the WEBA office for further information.



Suggestion: Watch the video animation Week 2 and prayerfully engage in that disciple-challenge. All the videos are available to download via the WEBA website - <https://www.webassoc.org.uk/resources/good-news-people/>

ⁱ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/british-people-christian-more-non-religious-faith-agnostic-atheism-report-a7737856.html>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.brin.ac.uk/figures/church-attendance-in-britain-1980-2015/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/politicians-remain-least-trusted-profession-britain>

^{iv} <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2015-11-05#living-alone>

^v <http://www.talkingjesus.org>

^{vi} <http://www.talkingjesus.org>

^{vii} <http://www.talkingjesus.org>

^{viii} <http://www.talkingjesus.org>