

Good News people

Study 3: Good News For 21st Century People



Introduction:

Today in the UK, change is taking place all around us. As people who are called to show and share good news within a changing 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
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)?

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.

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%). And it appears that church attendance has fallen to 5% in the UK in 2015
- 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)

For source details please see Leader's notes.

- 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.
- One in four 18-30 year olds thinks Jesus was a mythical or fictional character

But do you know, on the other hand?

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

For source details please see Leader's notes.