



# MAKING DISCIPLES

JOINT RESEARCH PROJECT  
LICC/ELIM

 **ADVANCE**

 **Elim**

# INTRODUCTION

## Why the research proposal was developed:

Elim has four strategic priorities that form the core DNA of our movement:

- Making Disciples
- Developing Leaders
- Growing Churches
- Reaching Nations

These four priorities interconnect with one another and none can be seen in isolation, but it could be argued that the central priority here is **Making Disciples**:

Leaders need to be developed so that they can nurture and lead churches that become disciple-making communities;

Churches grow by reaching out to those who do not yet know Jesus so that these people grow as fully mature followers of Jesus;

Regardless of where we minister, our eyes must not only be on our own churches but alert to the fact that we need a vision for the whole world.

In Elim, our desire is that we see the power of the gospel transform society and individuals through the actions and prayers of fully mature, fully committed, fully confident disciples of Jesus.

## What we believed as we began our research:

1. We do not know enough about which good practices really help disciples to be formed most effectively.
2. We do have examples of good practice in some of our churches, though they may not be widely known about at the moment.
3. The quality of disciple-making can only be judged by seeing the differences that people make in their own situations. In other words, disciple-making cannot be solely judged on the quality of the input resource, only on the outcomes.
4. Discipleship is about whole-life. It is not only about private piety, nor simply about involvement in church activities. It is the way we live in the midst of all our responsibilities: in families, in workplaces, in neighbourhoods, in friendships etc. Disciplemaking that does not include this dimensional is not a fully-orbed expression of Christian maturity.
5. Every church situation is unique: formed and shaped by a distinct set of gifts, circumstances and history but there will be principles at work in each model of good practice that can help people in other situations benefit.
6. Most of our churches contain people who are eager to be disciples. We do not need to persuade people about the significance of this. Most want to grow.
7. Churches that make disciples will be healthy churches and these churches are the ones that are most likely to see sustained growth over years.

## What we expected to discover:

- Models of good practice that at present may not be widely known;
- Core principles of disciplemaking that are particular to Elim's ethos, theology and spirituality;
- Ways to disseminate these principles to leaders so that they can feel confident in being equipped to engage with this central plank of the four-fold priorities that are central to the thrust of the movement at this time.

## How the research was conducted

LICC used a professional research company, 9 Dot Research, to help design the survey and shape the focus group discussions in light of the original proposal.

9 Dot Research's Director is Benita Hewitt who worked on this project. Benita is a Christian.

### The project worked with 16 churches across the UK

The project involved:

- Interviews with Senior Pastors;
- A quantitative survey (see appendix 1) that was completed by 828 individuals in the churches. The total adult attendance in these churches was approximately 4500, so the total responses represented approximately 20% of these congregations.
- A focus group in each church which offered qualitative responses – there was one group per church and the group was made up of between 8-12 people. The group did not include the senior leader.

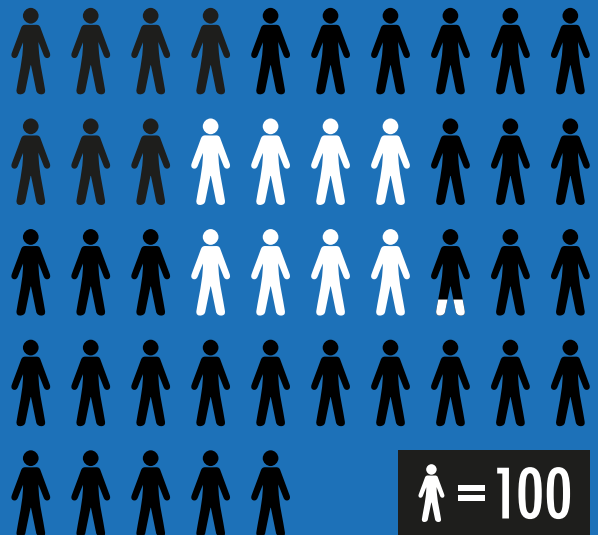
Reflections on a Sunday morning service.

The research took place between October 2019-February 2020.

### SENIOR PASTORS 16



### QUANTITATIVE 823/4500



### QUALITATIVE 8-12 X16



## Which churches were involved and why were they suggested?

Each RS was asked to suggest churches that they believed would have lessons to teach the wider movement. The leaders of the churches were approached to see if they would be willing to be part of the project. Some declined because they felt it would not be helpful to their church community to be part of the project at this time. The churches that accepted the invitation to be part of the project would be recognised in the Elim family as being well-led, growing and convinced of the significance of making disciples.

### The churches were:

**Ballymena Elim; Bridge Community Church, Leeds; Christian Life Centre, St Helens; City Gates Church, London; Elim Chinese Church, London; Elim Connect Centre, Wells; Halifax Elim; Holy Trinity Church, Weston-Super-Mare; Huddersfield Elim; Kilsyth Church of God; Kings Church, Warrington; Living Waters Church Chorley; Paisley Elim; Portadown Elim; Silverdale Elim; Spirit and Truth Church, Leighton Buzzard.**

What needs to be emphasised is that the majority of those who completed the survey are the most committed people in these churches. Most of them said they attend at least once a week or more. It's not a random 20%, or a representative 20%, but a self-selected 20%.

Therefore, it would not be right to suggest that any of these findings are true of Elim as a whole. A much bigger piece of work would need to happen for that to be true. It may not even be the case that these findings would be true of the whole of their own church – the response rates were low in some cases, particularly in the largest churches. (See below.)

However, it is fair to say that if these responses are true of the most committed attenders in churches that would be recognized as well-led, growing churches their comments need to be taken into account. They are major stakeholders in these church communities.

Church	Response	Analysed	Size	Rate
Ballymena	58	57	175	33%
Bridge Community Church Leeds	56	56	800	7%
Christian Life Centre St Helens	38	38	150	25%
Church of God Kilsyth	29	27	100	29%
City Gates Ilford	83	83	1200	7%
Connect Elim Wells	8	7	100	8%
Elim Christian Fellowship Paisley	68	67	150	45%
Elim full Gospel Chinese Church London	53	52	70	76%
Elim Halifax	24	23	70	34%
Elim Huddersfield	70	70	250	28%
Elim Silverdale	62	60	160	39%
Holy Trinity Weston-super-Mare	62	62	200	31%
Kings Church Warrington	49	46	300	16%
Living Waters Church Chorley	65	64	200	33%
Portadown	62	59	450	14%
Spirit and Truth Church Leighton Buzzard	41	40	100	41%
<b>Total</b>	<b>828</b>	<b>811</b>	<b>4475</b>	<b>19%</b>

# MAIN FINDINGS

## Findings from interviews with Senior Leaders

**1** Almost without exception every senior leader expressed their church's limitations in discipling people. Few felt they were able to present themselves confidently. In one case they thought they had been chosen because they were not doing it well!

**2** All the leaders were aware that what was needed in their church were practices that constantly reminded the congregation that the church's culture was about making disciples. Linked to that was how they used their time. Leaders of the larger churches recognised that they needed to spend time with the wider leadership teams to ensure that discipling was part of the church's core DNA. In smaller churches, the ministers prioritised time in 1-1 discipling conversations with people. The temptation is always that these relationships become about issues in the church, or training to lead groups in church, rather than concentrating on their personal growth.

**3** It's unsurprising that in Elim our Sunday gatherings are central to our life together. In general preparation for this Sunday ministry dominates a lot of the time for ministers. Our gathered life is important. But there is an awareness of the tension between the different indicators of the impact of the church's ministry: 'hard' indicators would include attendance, giving, service through the ministries of the church; 'soft' indicators would include people being engaged in spiritual disciplines and seeing the impact of their faith at work.

### One person from Weston-Super-Mare commented:

*"I've definitely noticed with the teaching that they are really earthed in real life, and the examples that are brought I can relate to. And I'm sure other people can relate to different ones. So that's real life. And I know that the people who preach- I know them- so I know that they are living what they're saying. And for me that's really important, to have that congruence, if you like. That what you see is what you get."*

In different ways, generally, the senior leaders emphasised that they would expect to see the impact of the church's ministry in three areas:

**Home:** Linked to the fruit of the Spirit in marriages and family life

**Work:** Expressed in witnessing and by the quality of work offered

**Church:** Committed to serving the church community

Steve Derbyshire in Ilford was the most explicit about this: his expectation of disciples would be that they are people who are desirous to grow; people who feel equipped and inspired in the workplace for success, as a witness and as a worker; part of marriages that are being repaired; and people who are regular in their commitment to church.

## What did people value in their leaders

These leadership qualities were valued by people:

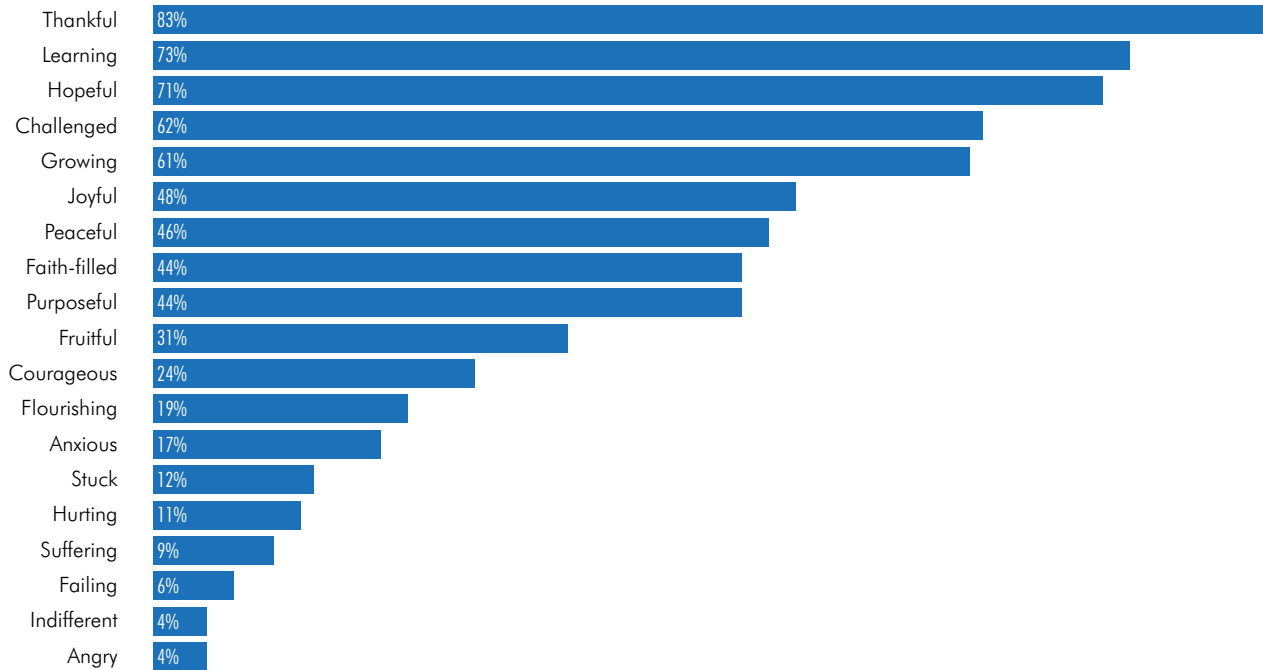
- Gracious
- Accessible
- Supportive, caring, empathetic
- Interested in knowing me
- Humble
- Strong
- Good communicator
- Authentic
- Connected to God

# What was Noteworthy from the Survey

## Who we are:

We are a positive people. We asked people to tick any of the words that applied to them:

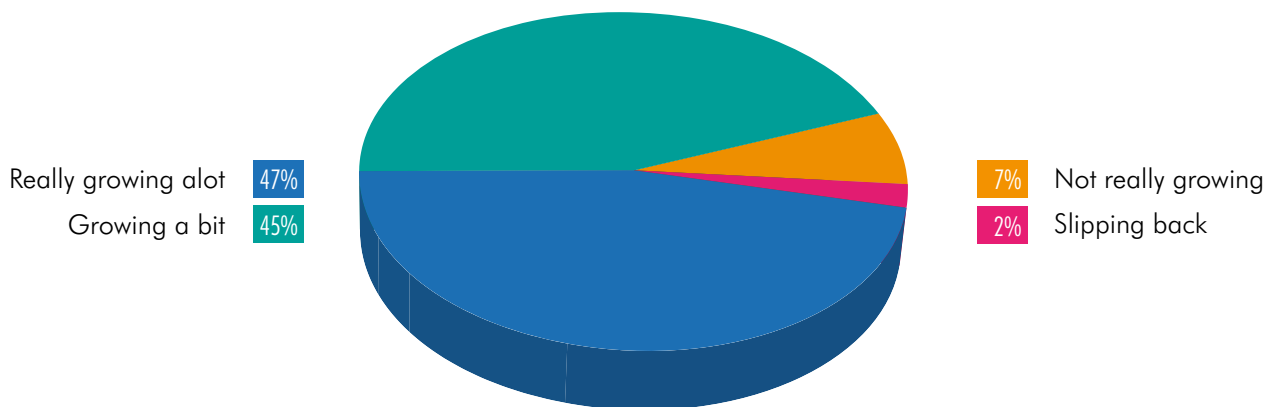
## Describe yourself as a Christian:



And when we limited people to responding with just three words, the first five characteristics stayed the same. How wonderful to report that Elim people self-designate as being thankful! What a great response to the gospel.



## We feel that we are growing as Christians: As a follower of Jesus...



### What we emphasise as churches

For each answer, a numerical value of 0-3 was assigned:

A lot = 3; A fair bit = 2; A little = 1; Not at all = 0.

The mean score was the mean of all the responses to the statement:

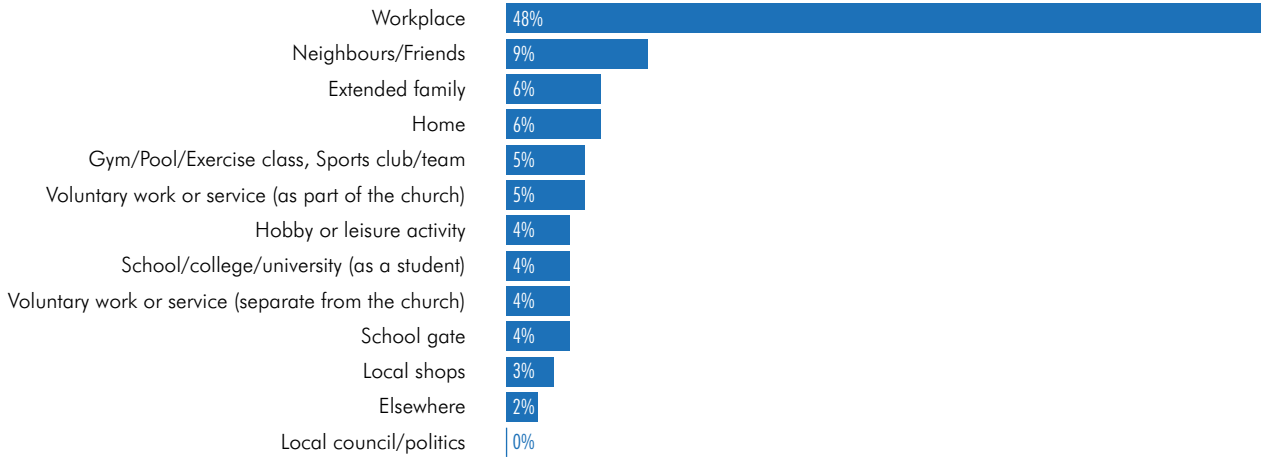
#### My Church...



## Where we are outside church

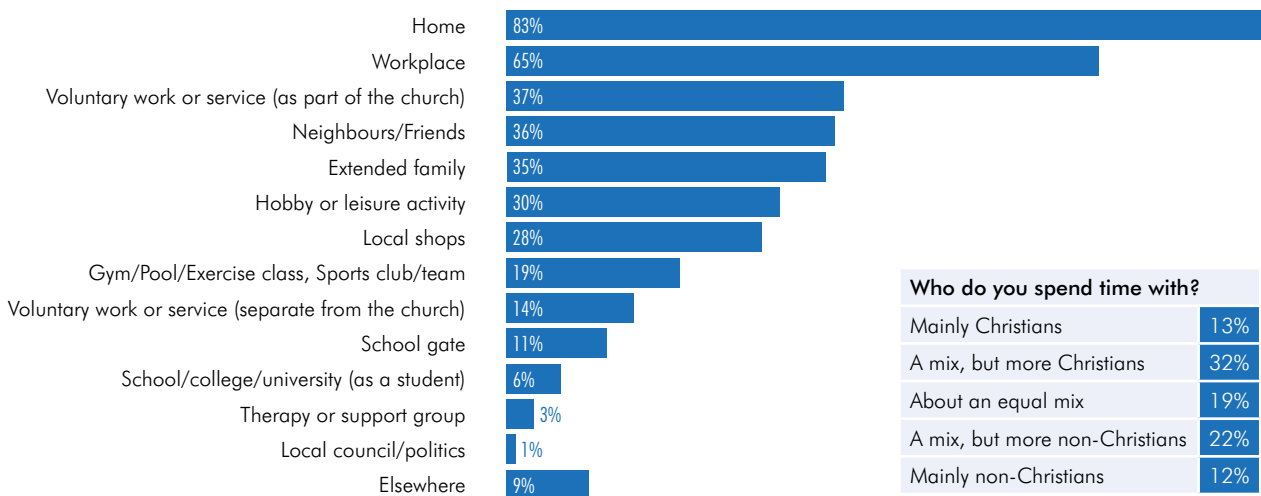
Our workplaces are the contexts where we are most likely to be alongside non-Christians.

## Where the most time is spent with non-Christians (choose 1)



However, we are more likely to spend most of our time with other Christians:

## Where time is spent in a typical week (choose multiple)



Who do you spend time with?	
Mainly Christians	13%
A mix, but more Christians	32%
About an equal mix	19%
A mix, but more non-Christians	22%
Mainly non-Christians	12%





# What was emphasised that we know is true

Groups matter! They will be called different names, they can be Life groups, Connect groups, Missional Community groups, Huddles ... and though it may be a struggle to connect people to them, when people engage in them, they benefit hugely from them.

## Someone from Ballymena:

*"It's too big a church to just come on a Sunday. You couldn't possibly get to know people or know what's going on, by coming once a week. Where I'd say I grew most in discipleship, is... not in general fellowship, but having conversations with others, and I think that holds you accountable to others, as well, when you're talking about where you are and your faith, or the struggles you're going through. That prompts you, then, to examine yourself sometimes as well. I think, yes, you learn on a Sunday. But for me, in terms of developing my faith and my discipleship, it's about developing relationships with others."*

## A comment from Warrington:

*"you've got people who are walking it with you being real. Doing life together. A common purpose, a balance of support but also a challenge because I would stay quite 'cushiony' wherever I was or wherever I find myself unless I have the sort of people around me that would kind of encourage me. So yeah. Just a lot of stretching things a little bit, and challenging."*

## Another from Warrington:

*"I work in a high school, and we've been 'Ofsted' this week. It's been an enormous struggle. When we found out Monday that we would be 'Ofsted' on Tuesday, I asked my mission community to pray for me. And also for the school at large. So it was good having them to back us up in prayer. I've found that's one of the main things about going to King's. The missional community is awesome, having the best support ever because I have a very complex work life, and I feel really confident that they do support me and ask after how I'm coping."*

## Benefits of the small groups things that were highlighted include:

Getting to know each other to a greater extent;

Building trust as people opened up to one another;

Sharing everyday life, joys, struggles;

Helping people discern their strengths/gifts;

Discipling each other, helping each other grow;

Being accountable to each other and challenging one another;

Encouraging each other to BE disciples;

Being Christlike to each other, together;

Supporting each other in everyday life, giving confidence to one another;

Keeping in touch with one another during the week;

Getting intimate with God together.

## Structurally, the research would suggest that best practice would include:

- Encouraging everyone to be in a group, including newcomers;
- Providing guidance but not rigid prescription, allowing for flexibility;
- Not making the studies too difficult for members;
- Developing a good mix of people.

# What was unexpected

## The relationship between purpose and spiritual growth.

This was a significant highlight of the survey because it was unexpected. When we compared people's self-reporting concerning their spiritual growth and their sense of purpose in life, the differences were remarkable.

### One man reported how this felt for him in these words:

"I've been retired six-and-a-half years and I still wonder where my place is. It's a kind of reassessment because I lived a very structured life. And then all of a sudden that's cut adrift. And I suppose I could go back in a way to it. But I don't want to. I feel I need to move on. I've talked with some people here about the difficulty of actually finding a place. And I'm still searching for that. Your network isn't there in the same way. There have been a few times in my life when I'd be a nine or a ten (out of ten) with discipleship. But at the moment. I feel I'm down here."



VERY CLEAR

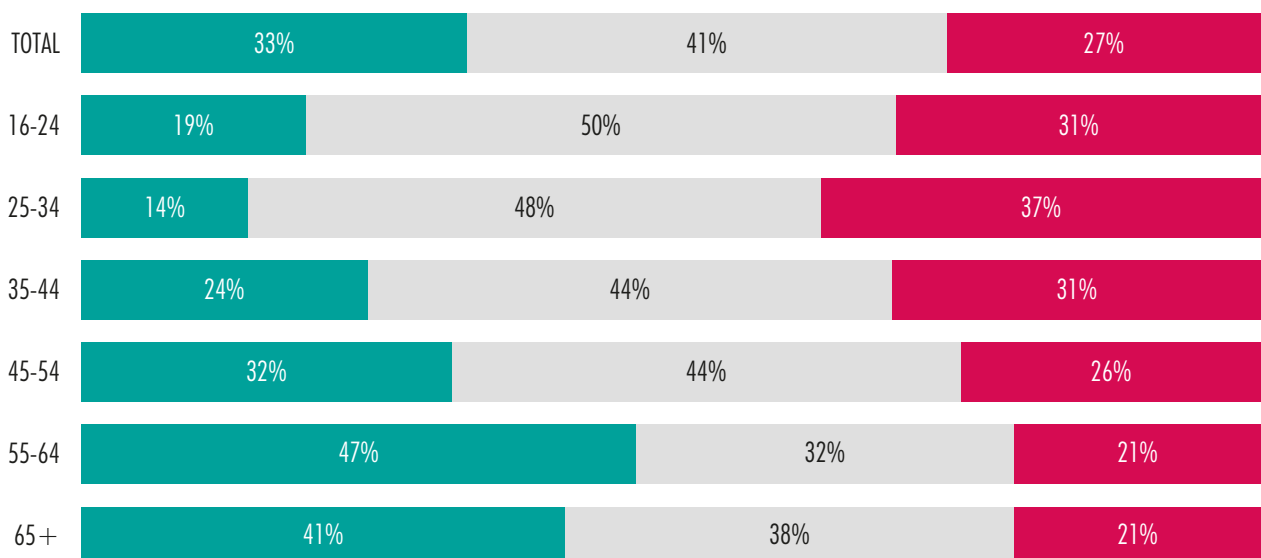


QUITE CLEAR



NOT SURE

### Clarity of God's purposes where you are



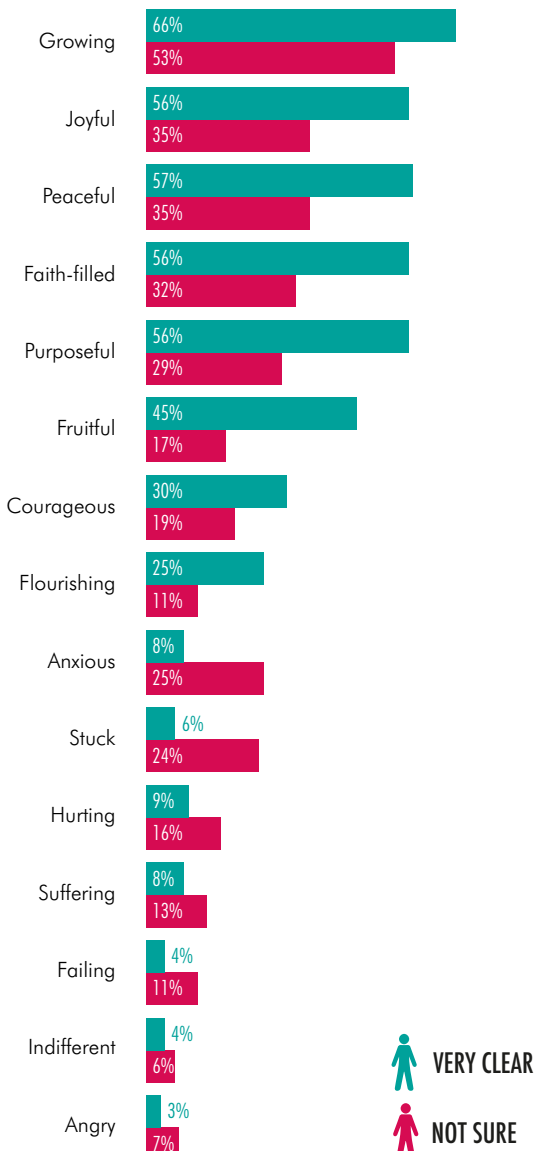
We will look at differences between the 33% who say they are 'very clear' and the 27% who say they are not clear.

## Describe yourself as a Christian

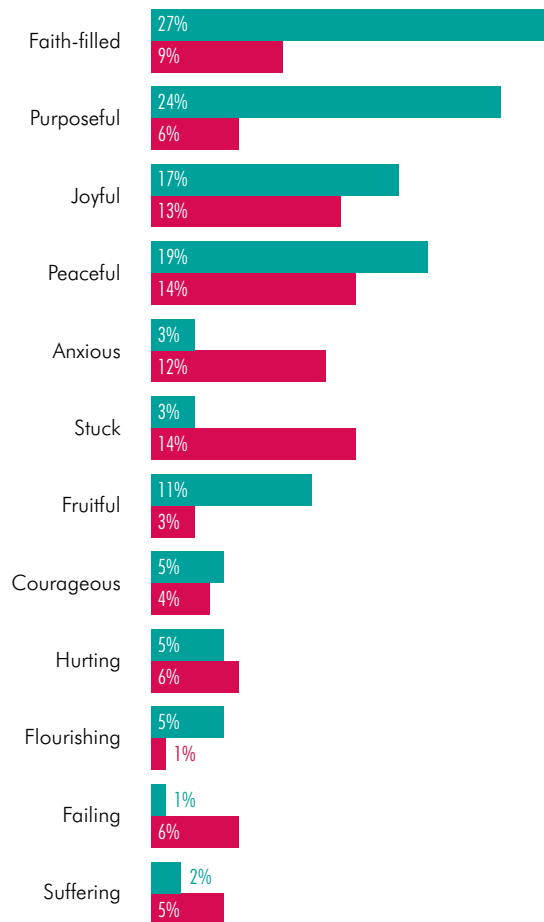
There is no difference in the top descriptive characteristics between those who are very clear about God's purpose and those who are not.



But the differences do become more marked when the other characteristics are reported on:



## 3 words to describe yourself



Those with a clear view of God's purpose are more Faith-filled, Purposeful, Fruitful.

Those not clear about God's purpose are more Anxious, Stuck.



There was little difference in their awareness of their church's ministry in these categories:

### My Church...



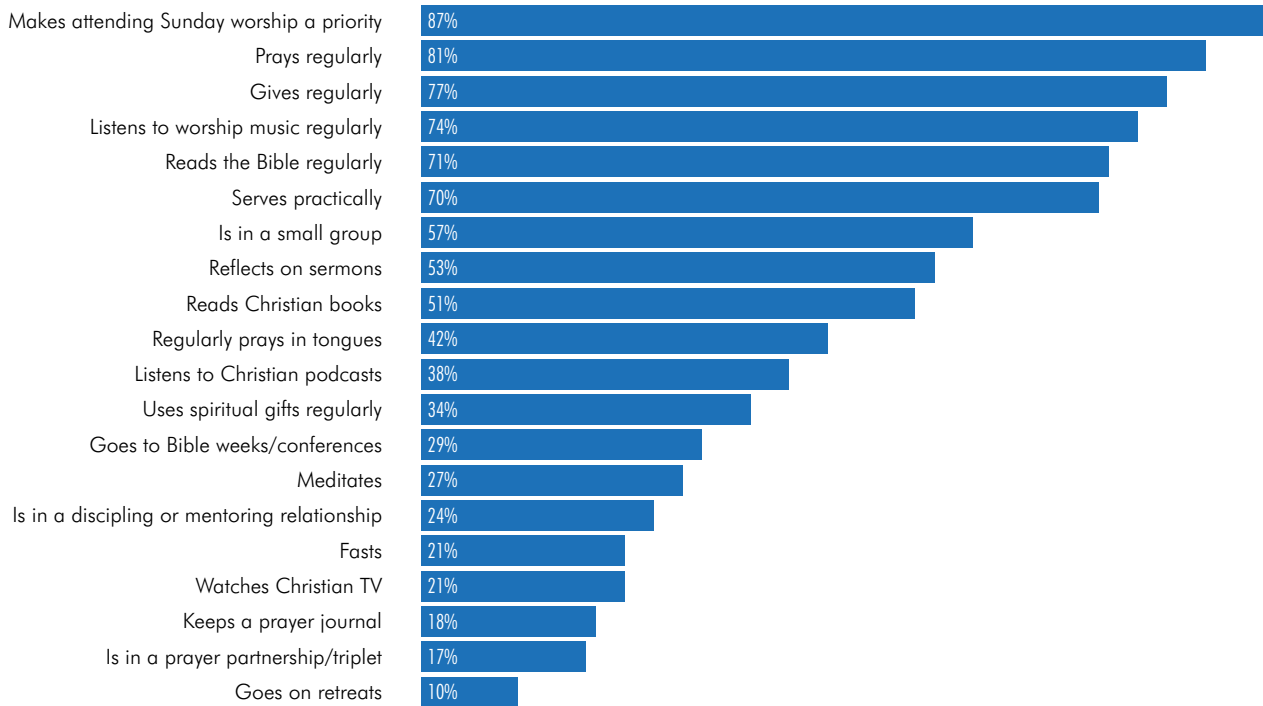
However, the differences became more marked in their impression of how their church was helping them grapple with the purpose question:



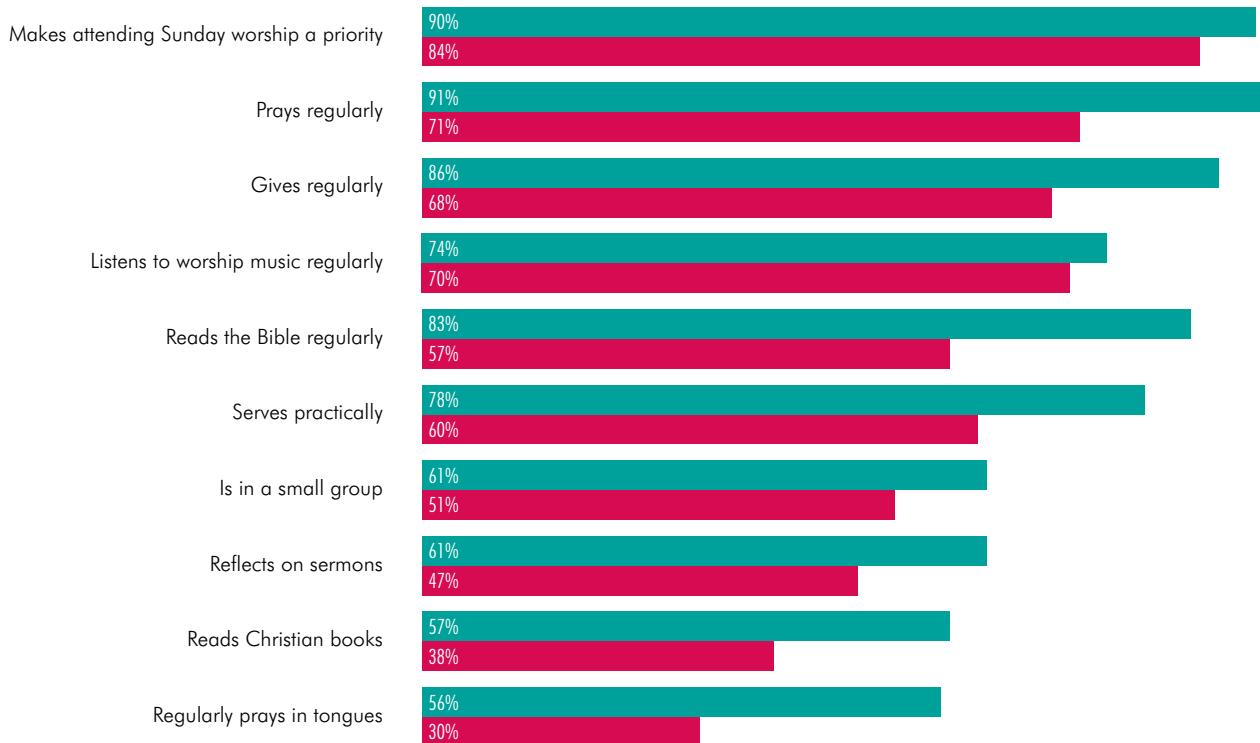
What this suggests is that when we help people find their purpose in life, they grow more confident in their discipleship, are more aware of how their spiritual gifts connect with the wider world and sense that the church really does value their world beyond the church walls.

It also affects their spiritual disciplines. We asked people to indicate which spiritual disciplines they were engaged in:

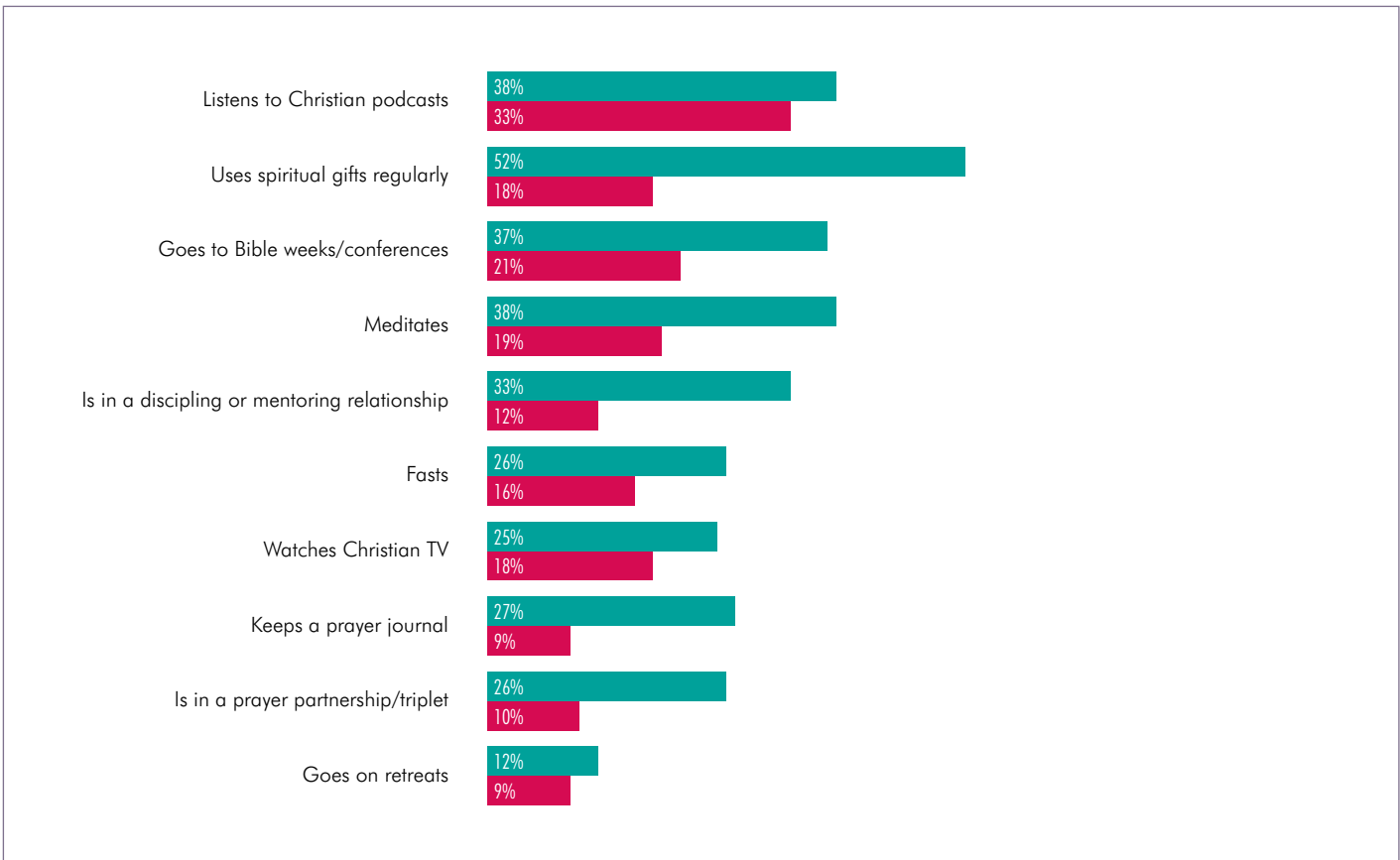
### I'm a person who...



What is interesting is when you see what those who struggled with their purpose said:



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There are questions about cause and effect here – in other words, for example, if you use spiritual gifts regularly are you more likely to discover your purpose in life, or if you know your purpose are you more likely to use spiritual gifts? What is clear is the connection with having a clearer view of God’s purpose for one’s own life.

**With it you:**

- Are more confident in your faith
- Are more likely to engage in spiritual disciplines, particularly with prayer
- Know how to be a disciple in your daily context
- Are supported and accountable

**Those who are not clear on their purpose are:**

- Less confident in their faith
- Less disciplined as Christians
- Less likely to know how to be a disciple in their context
- More likely to feel anxious and stuck as Christians

However you interpret this, it seems clear that there is a clear link. One of the implications of this is that there is no point in, for example, just trying to encourage people to read the Bible regularly. This needs to be linked with an encouragement to discover their life’s purpose.

# WHAT CHALLENGES ARE SUGGESTED BY THE FINDINGS?

## Encourage people to understand that the church community is a place for wisdom-sharing about issues that arise in the whole of life

We need to ensure that our ministry is focussed on wider horizons than merely the gathered church activities. This will need to be explicitly stated, because people may have come to expect that guidance is more likely to be directed to personal or family issues.

### One person expressed it like this:

"I think on Sunday we do get some teaching that does help us face issues. It isn't always on a Sunday. But I suppose there are the issues that just... Like homosexuality and things that people don't really talk about that much. There is some teaching but it tends to be geared towards the youth. And so they get the teaching but not necessarily the whole church. I do feel if I want to say, "Come on I've got this situation what should I do?" I could go sit in with the pastor and he would listen. So I feel that the church does help me but it isn't always in a public, communal kind of sense. I might have to go and look for it."

This is most likely to be shared in small groups. Ballymena has recently introduced small groups. This is the result of that change:

"Prior to life groups, apart from your immediate circle of family and friends, I wouldn't have known what's going on in everybody else's life... I'm not sure how much of an impact that had on a day-to-day, weekly basis."

When asked how the church connects with their everyday lives, this was shared:

"It connects quite a bit for us, more because we went through the last five weeks of small groups. So, prior to that, I would've said, "Maybe not so much." We felt that maybe it didn't connect as much as it does, through life groups. Sharing our experiences together, day-to-day life and the challenges it has."

One challenge is to ensure people know that these are the places where the intersection between faith and real-life will most easily take place IF the group leaders recognise that the significance of studying the Bible and praying together lies in connecting this with discipleship in the context of everyone's day to day lives.

Another challenge is a determination to keep emphasising the significance of small groups when people might feel time-poor. It's easy to allow a congregation to revert to a group of individuals, when we know that people need the experiences of small groups to develop and grow as disciples.

## Recognise the significance and limitations of Sunday gatherings

Sundays are significant to people but the limitations of what can be done in such a general gathering is widely accepted. The value of Sunday gatherings is summarised here:

### Importance of Sunday

#### Sunday is not primarily about discipleship

- Celebration - Enjoyment, Inspiration
- Oasis - Refreshment, Peace, Strength, Anchor
- Fellowship - Encouragement, Supporting, Empowering
- Learning

#### Preaching is the most relevant to discipleship

- Prompting to act
- Equipping
- Giving confidence
- Earthed in everyday, examples of practical application



People see the sermons as valuable as they seek to live their lives for God's glory:

#### One person from Kilsyth said:

'I think the word can sometimes be very specific to you. And quite often we'll come on Sunday morning and it's fitting you, and you go away feeling that was wonderful. Like this morning, some of what was said this morning was very specific to a situation I've got to deal with at work. It was just like that's amazing. It's like God was telling me something I needed to hear this morning. So it can be very specific the word at times for your daily life.'

#### In Portadown, this was shared:

'On numerous occasions where I have come in on a Sunday morning, there's something happening, whether in my personal life, or whether in my work life, that the word that has been preached has been so direct, and so Spirit filled towards that, that I've gone away strengthened to then be able to deal with that in my work situation, or in my personal situation. It happens time and time again.'



But there is also, perhaps, a realistic expectation of the limitations of the sermon:

**Someone from Weston-Super-Mare said:**

"If you miss it, something is missing from the week. So I guess it's one of those things you can easily take for granted, perhaps, because one is not fully understanding what benefit it's giving you until it's not there. I don't actually walk out of church and think, "Wow, that message has really helped me to be a disciple." That never happens. I walk out of church and I feel, "That was great." It encourages you. But to try and take that out and put it alongside discipleship and say, "Well that's helping me with my discipleship." No. I can't do that."

**In Warrington, this was said:**

"I think you get an awful lot from a Sunday celebration. But I wouldn't say that's the strength of discipleship. The teaching's great. But that's more a personal thing, isn't it? And I suppose it feeds into everything. But I don't think that's the focal point for equipping for discipleship. It's not Sunday that gets me through the week. It's just the rhythm of church, and the people that I connect with, right? Through the week that help support me. Yeah, Sundays are great too. But they're not like, the be-all and end-all."

The relationship between preaching and the prospect of it being helpful in discipling one another was discussed.

**In Weston-Super-Mare, one person said:**

"Well you get encouragement, Of course you do. But to me that's a slightly separate issue from being a disciple. I love the worship, I enjoy it. I love the preaching, it's great. And that's all something that you can take with you. But it's not necessarily that that is focused on discipleship."

**In Ballymena this comment was made:**

"We're definitely of the opinion that Sunday services are pivotally important in our lives, but they're not enough for discipleship, which is the concern is for the vast majority of people ... And we're saying relationship is critical, pastoral care is critical. Small groups mentoring are really the effective ways of learning and putting things into practice."

What was noticeable in the services that were visited was that they often provided good times of celebration, but the connections with Monday-Saturday life were not made explicit. Those attending were filtering the preaching and worship through their everyday experiences, but there were few references from the stages that made this very clear.



## Help people think about evangelistic strategies for a workplace context.

The workplace is the primary place where people are in contact with non-Christians. Therefore, training needs to take these contexts into account – with the specific opportunities and limitations that are involved in the workplace. For many pastors, they will need to grow more attuned to these mission fields by asking questions before solutions are proposed. It is when people are in these contexts that people can be least confident.



## Help people find their purpose

This seems to be central to people feeling that they have a vibrant spiritual life. For some this will mean that they will need help to discover a new purpose in their work contexts, especially when these are places of stress and strain. For others, it will mean that we need to help people at the change points of their lives. It will be difficult to do this work except in the context of personal conversations. Maybe pastors need to allow more time for these conversations. People in larger congregations could be trained to help people discover their own sense of vocation.



## Keep finding the local stories that inspire

Tell stories of what is happening in the lives of people in the congregation. Testimonies still matter, time and again the value of hearing from others was stressed. They not only encourage people, they also allow others to see the particular contexts that people are living as disciples.

### As one person said:

"It brings a reality to things, doesn't it? To what's going on in people's lives and to the way God works. And it's just really encouraging. It also helped you to get to know people.

Because when people share at the front. It's like when people become members. Like when you guys became members that's probably the most I've ever found out about you. Because you have an opportunity to stand up there and if you're not in a life group with people you don't necessarily know anything about who they are or what they do. So I think there's the God bit, and there's also that personal bit as well. And I also think that other people's stories have got to share with other people. So sometimes if you turn to me as a Christian and you talk about a situation you can say, "well this happened to somebody at my church." It brings a reality to it. That God can do something "

### In Halifax one person said:

"We don't often think about how it affects us in our daily lives, do we? Making disciples is not making Church workers, it's making people to go out and share the love of God and Jesus with people outside of the building."

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