

Intro:

I begin with a quote from an old film (1932, 1982) called the scarlet Pimpernel – set in the French revolution in the reign of Terror, it is about how an English aristocrat saved French nobles from the guillotine, working in disguise and secret. In England he was a dandy but in France he was a brave, fearless rescuer of people (perhaps an early Superman type). This ditty is said in one scene by him before the Prince of Wales when in his role as a dandy,

They seek him here,
they seek him there,
those frenchies seek him everywhere,
is he in heaven is he in hell
that damned elusive pimpernel

We read that more people are looking and seeking God. We usually rejoice over this but what is our role? We can reflect on how we might have sought God in the past, the places, the actions, the events that made this possible – but now is a different time, different culture so what can we do? As way of encouragement, I saw a posting on a Baptist face-book page about Baptisms at Easter and going through the comments came up to 67 and that does not include everybody. Let's, reflect a little on Paul's speech in Athens.

Who is looking?

The independent carried an article on 20 April 2025 headed

Make Christianity cool again: Why Gen Z is flocking to church

As a new report suggests that the number of young churchgoers has quadrupled, Helen Coffey investigates this potential UK spiritual revival – and asks why the next generation is more likely to be keeping the faith.

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/research/quiet-revival>

<https://www.eauk.org/news-and-views/young-adults-god-is-on-the-move>

This bible society report tells of a trend that has been happening over the past years. I pick up one point that the largest number are in the Pentecostal and Roman Catholic traditions, and would hypothesise, that it is because they both have strong elements of the mystical/supernatural and structures that are very strong.

In our reading from Acts, Paul on one of his missionary journeys comes to Athens. We know he usually went to the Jewish meeting place first and then to others, which he did here in Athens. It was the philosophers who wanted to know more and invited him to come and speak with his strange ideas'. Just to note when we read the word religion, the sense is the superstitions of the day, not the formal structure we think of today.

The survey by the Bible society found it was the 18 – 25 group, that showed increase. There has been great talk about spirituality over the decades and defining how we approach that as Baptists, is there a particular Baptist Spirituality? We will dip into that later, for the moment we look to see where the Spirit is moving and in hear the voice of God; using the research, stories we hear and other sources.

Yes, has always been those in crisis who come looking for God, as a hospital chaplain with those facing death or loss it became important to seek God and wanting their relative safe in God's hands. Yes, there have been those seeking a higher power, having a belief in God but not sure how to express it or quantify it. Yes, those facing hardships and crisis. Still above this there seems a, to use the title of the report a quiet revival.

How are they looking?

In acts they looked through discourse, it tickled their ears to hear of new things. Paul recognised that and picked it up, even using quotes from Stoic, Greek poets.

However, when I reflect on how people have sought spirituality and because of my age I am reminded of the Beatles and their trip to India, or there is the growth of nature/pagan – summer solstice and Stonehenge. We know people come to the big Christian festivals of the year, and we seek to use that. There is a stream of finding God in the outdoors, in the wilderness in the creation and there are Christian out door purists - Min Y Don in Arthog (<https://minydon.com>) Capernwray Hall (<https://capernwray.org>) all have that emphasis on healthy out doorsey life to encounter God. The book of psalms speaks of the out doors and of course Jesus regularly retreated from the crowd to a space in creation. There is also a stream of holy places – we note the several series there have been on pilgrimages on TV. – that may be ancient Christian places of worship or pilgrimage. Often, they seem to be places where the sense of the presence of God is strong, a thin place between earth and heaven. The Easter edition of songs of praise had a woman from eastern Europe sharing how when she went into the relevant church in England that the frescoes and particular the blue paint reminded her of home and God.

However, with the raise in the internet, most people will do a google search of places, they may look to see what places of worship there are, what's on offer, who are the leaders, where is the parking, if any. Are there any services/events to watch on line? Therefore, it is important to have a good, strong, clear internet presence.

Paul knew where to go and find people who would be interested, first the Jewish place of worship and then going outside. He used the concepts and language, when he spoke of God in v23 he avoided saying male or female and used the neuter, I would suggest to avoid a side discussion on the gender of God and the structure of beliefs at the time in a pantheon of deities. When Paul wrote of the origin of man, v 26, another hook and followed up with off spring of God, v 29 to say yes, we reflect God in our creation but he is not in any statue, there is no longer a need to go and prostrate before a statue, offer sacrifices; but repent in our hearts.

Part of the reason this report is called the quiet revival, is that when we read of revival in our history they appear as great movements, sudden out pourings of the Spirit, new songs/hymns and lives changed; but here across congregations' people are coming to faith, being drawn to God. Therefore, people are looking for God, despite what we as churches do. Although it is an answer to prayer for people to be looking.

What do we offer for those looking?

What baked beans do you buy? the reason for this may be because that is what you were brought up on, or the packaging attracted you, maybe the advertising enticed you, or the sauce, the standard of bean used.

As people come looking for God, are we aware of what we here in DBC offer? We sing our theology and congregational singing is important, (illustration: attending a conference in Northern Ireland, the worship leaders wanted to sing over us and bless us, but it did feel disempowering because of my preference to join in and be with others in that activity of worship) we have pastors no priests as a sign of a belief in levelling before God and in His service, we encourage regular reading of the Word/the Bible and reflecting on it together, we encourage extempore prayer – prayers in our own words (whilst we can treasure the traditional written prayers and creeds they are not formally part of our spirituality). Technically we would say our liturgy is light. We practise believers' baptism by immersion; but we are practical about that and will adjust according to need. Our communion/breaking of bread is about its symbolic act, yes it may be a thin place to meet God, but that is because of the remembrance, the reflection on the sacrifice Of Jesus and the joy of being reconciled – now you belong.

We seek to be a friendly welcoming church and usually that is in a strap line somewhere. We seek to provide good seating, well-kept places of worship, wide programme of events.

Conclusion

There is a musical called Salad Days, written 1952, and a song with the lines. 'We're looking for piano, a piano, yes a piano, not any old piano, the one that rather rare'

We're looking for God... are we here looking to meet with God.

Now, I have mentioned how Paul connected with that group of people in Athens as they looked for God, under the Holy Spirit he used language, images that meant something. Some of our sung worship today may have made connections when we felt close to God in the past and revived our souls, for others it may have been prayers, or the readings,

As we pray for family and friends as we seek to make Jesus known may we follow Paul's example and walk with people, be able to use words, images, music that will connect. May we in our gathering together remember it is not just for us, but for others seeking God, so be gracious in the connections we seek to make with others.

We come to the communion table, to remember, to share, to be renewed in our faith through this act. We come looking to encounter our God.

Acts 17: 22 – 31 and Psalm 27