



# Pass It On:

## *The Good Samaritan in Modern Britain*

The power of the parable in the 21st century



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**Photo credits:** Bible Society on the streets of Reading testing the 'Good Samaritan' in modern Britain.



*A message from Paul Woolley, Interim Chief Executive, Bible Society*

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***'On the parable of the Good Samaritan,  
I imagine that the first question the priest  
and Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this  
man, what will happen to me?' But by the very  
nature of his concern, the Good Samaritan  
reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help  
this man, what will happen to him?'***

*Martin Luther King*

It is nearly two years to the day since we published the first *Pass it On* report. We again find ourselves encouraged by the fact that for many people, regardless of their personal faith, the Bible's engaging and timeless stories have meaning and significance today.

Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan is certainly one of those stories. The phrase itself is a common metaphor, used with the assumption that its meaning is understood by all. The story has been depicted in the work of artists such as Rembrandt and Vincent Van Gogh.

The Good Samaritan has been held up by politicians, from Margaret Thatcher<sup>1</sup> to Jeremy Corbyn<sup>2</sup>, as an example of, and call to, selfless action and helping those in need. It is striking that many countries across the globe now operate 'Good Samaritan' laws to protect the public and emergency workers from any legal consequences if, with good faith, they intervene and help someone in difficulty.

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1 'If you allow people to hand over to the State all their personal responsibility, the time will come—in-  
deed it is close at hand—when what the taxpayer is willing to provide for the good of humanity will be  
seen to be far less than what the individual used to be willing to give from love of his neighbour. So do  
not be tempted to identify virtue with collectivism. I wonder whether the State services would have  
done as much for the man who fell among thieves as the Good Samaritan did for him?' (St Lawrence  
Jewry, 1978)

2 'I want us as a movement to be proud, strong and able to stand up and say 'we want to live in a society  
where we don't pass by on the other side of those people rejected by an unfair welfare system'. Instead  
we reach out to end the scourge of homelessness and desperation that so many people face in our  
society. We are strong enough and big enough and able to do that – that is what we are about.' (Victory  
Speech, 2015)

However, despite the enduring resonance of the Good Samaritan parable, we are in danger of forgetting how radical it would have been to Jesus' audience. The picture of a Samaritan helping a man from Jerusalem would have, quite simply, been incomprehensible – as these two 'neighbours' were anything but – a long history of enmity existed between the two communities.

In the parable, 'Good Samaritans' are not simply those who do a kind deed for another – as we tend to believe today – but they are people who show mercy to others outside their own community.

The parable itself set out to answer the question: 'Who is my neighbour?' and showed that they are not just a friend or family member but those who are 'other' to us and our own communities.

The parable operates on two levels. It is a spectacular invitation to a life of self-giving that insists we roll up our sleeves and help no matter what it takes. It also challenges us to recognise that there are no limits to our neighbourhood or neighbourliness. It demands that even those who are hated and feared are to be seen as our neighbours. This implications of this parable, ancient and modern, are radical indeed.

Cultures are shaped by the stories we tell. Stories like the Good Samaritan can help us build a more compassionate society.

Our *Pass it On* campaign is about encouraging people to pass the Bible on to future generations.





# ***The Good Samaritan in Britain today***

# The Good Samaritan in Britain today

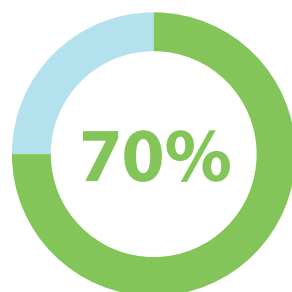
Most of us have some knowledge of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

**70%** of the British public say that they have read/heard the story\*. You have only to turn on the TV or open a newspaper to find a reference to the concept.

But what does the term 'Good Samaritan' mean in modern Britain, and how relevant is the parable of old in helping to shape society today?

These are questions that we seek to address in this report.

According to a study conducted by YouGov for Bible Society among British adults and children aged 8 to 15\*\*, nearly **2 in 3** adults (**64%**) are worried Britain is becoming a less kind society. **57%** of children feel the same.



**of the British public have read or heard the story of the Good Samaritan**



\* Total sample size was 2,052 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 4th - 7th December 2015. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

\*\* Total sample size was 745 children. Fieldwork was undertaken between 4th - 9th December 2015. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted by age, gender and region and are representative of all GB children (aged 8 to 15).



## *The manifestation of this?*

If we saw an elderly lady crying in the street, would we stop? Only half of us would (55%).

1 in 4 of us wouldn't lend a stranger money for a train ticket home. Only 37% would lend their mobile phone to an elderly gentleman to make an urgent call.

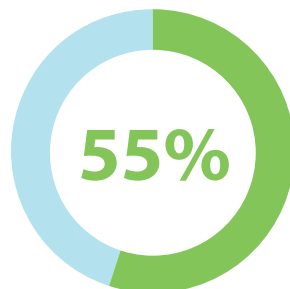
But there is desire for change. Nearly 9 in 10 kids (89%), and a similar proportion of adults (86%), think Britain would benefit if people were more willing to help each other.

So there is a strong foundation to build upon.

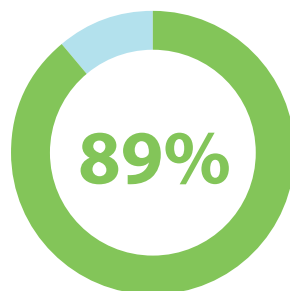
Just over a quarter of us (26%) have helped a stranger in the last week, and nearly half (44 %) of us in the last month.

For 40% of adults and one third (32%) of children being educated about the parable of the Good Samaritan in schools will help create a kinder Britain.

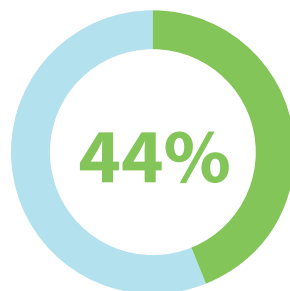
That is why for the next iteration of the 'Pass it On' campaign, we are encouraging people to 'pass on' the story of the Good Samaritan. We want people to open the Bible, to contemplate the content and to create a kinder Britain.



Would stop to comfort  
an elderly lady crying



of Kids think Britain would  
benefit if people were more  
willing to help each other



Have helped a stranger  
in the last month



***What is the cost of  
helping someone?***

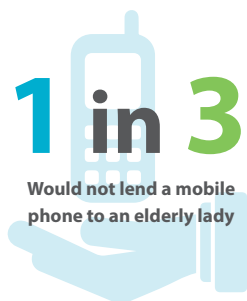
# What is the cost of helping someone?



*5 minutes + No money + A safe environment = A Good Samaritan today?*

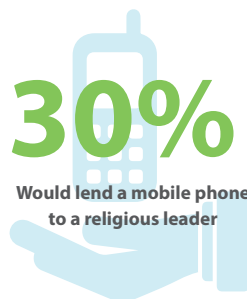
Adults in Great Britain are prepared to give up 5 minutes (36%) to help a stranger, but would not spend a single penny (25%).

And the profile of that stranger? An elderly lady in a safe environment is most likely – but by no means guaranteed – to receive help.

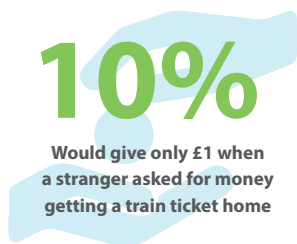


In fact, over 1 in 3 (35%) of us would not lend her our mobile phone, or indeed anyone else that we did not know. Just 30% would lend our phone to a religious leader, 25% to a professional in a suit (man or woman) and 1 in 5 to a teenage girl. A teenage boy and rough sleeper fare worst in this list, with only around 15% prepared to loan either their phone.\*

More generally, two thirds of us wouldn't stop to support a religious leader, the homeless or a professional man in need in the street.



Confronted with an elderly man or woman crying, just over half say they would stop to help, with the remainder indicating they would not.



In fact, more than **1 in 10** wouldn't stop to help someone in need – regardless of circumstance.

It is perhaps unsurprising then that **1 in 5** of us can recall a time that we have needed help in a public place and no-one has come to our aid.

Where we are prepared to help, we are more willing to offer our time than our money.

**1 in 4** of us wouldn't lend any money at all to a stranger who needed help getting a train ticket home, rising to nearly **1 in 3** men (**30%**).

A further **1 in 10** would give only £1 in this circumstance, albeit **1 in 5** would stretch to as much as £5 (**21%**).

Of the remainder, nearly **1 in 4** (**24%**) say they do not know what they would do, indicating the conflict people may feel when it comes to offering help.

This is again indicated by the majority of us who say there are a number of factors which would prevent us from helping someone in need.

**1 in 10** (**9%**) cite embarrassment, **40%** of us would worry for our own safety and nearly the same would doubt the person in need was trustworthy (**38%**).

For many, time dictates whether or not they are prepared to help (**16%** would be prevented from helping if they were in a rush).

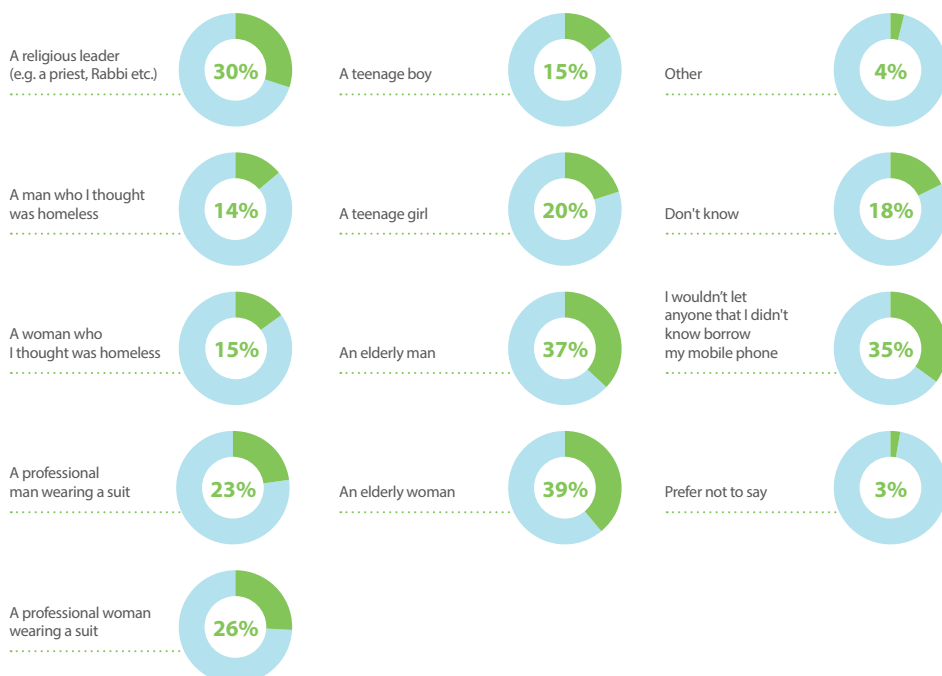


And while women may be more generous with their money, it is men who are more generous with their time.

**1 in 10** women (**9%**) would spend 20 minutes or more helping someone by providing directions, while nearly **1 in 5** men would do the same (**14%**).

Interestingly, a number of the factors that prevent us from giving help also limit our willingness to accept it. Nearly half of us have needed help from a stranger but turned it down because we were embarrassed, didn't trust them or didn't want to be a nuisance.

## Which, if any, of the following people do you think you would lend your mobile phone to?





***And who is my neighbour?  
Who is 'other'?***



# And who is my neighbour? Who is 'other'?

The parable of the Good Samaritan is told in answer to a question.

## 'And who is my neighbour?'

The premise:

There is a wounded man in need on the side of the road.

He is seen twice – acknowledged once.

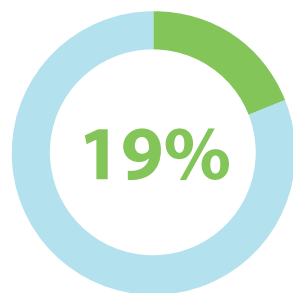
It is only when he is seen a third time that an individual stops to help.

Interestingly, the helper is from a different community to the man in need – communities which in fact hated each other. Yet, he stopped to help anyway.

For him, cultural and social barriers did not prevent his good will. And it is this act of mercy towards someone so markedly 'other' which renders them a neighbour.

## *Is the same true today?*

For nearly **1 in 5** of us (**19%**), to be a Good Samaritan today is to help someone who is entirely different from ourselves (e.g. someone you either don't like or would usually not associate with).



**Believe that to be a Good Samaritan is to help someone entirely different from themselves**

3% of us have never helped a stranger, and 26% don't know or can't remember the last time we did.

For 76% of us there are factors which would dictate whether we helped someone.

### *Other: Football Derbies*

#### **North London Derby:**

**Arsenal vs Tottenham Hotspur**

#### **Manchester Derby:**

**Manchester United vs Manchester City**

#### **South Wales Derby:**

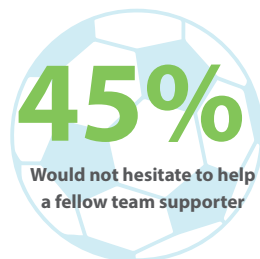
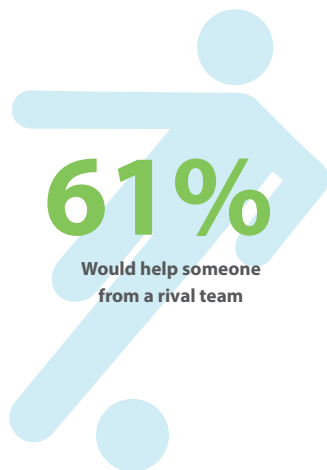
**Cardiff City vs Swansea City**

These are just a few of the Football Derbies which cause much contention in the beautiful game.

It is at times like this we see a modern day illustration of community rivalry. This is not to trivialise the rivalry at play in the Good Samaritan but to provide a comparator that most of us will have seen in our daily lives.

Despite this deep-seated rivalry, our good nature is not compromised. Nearly two thirds (61%) would help someone from a rival team – although women may have a slightly less biased nature than men. Nearly half, 45%, of us wouldn't hesitate to help a fellow team supporter.\*\*\*

Beyond social divides, ethnicity does not dictate whether we accept help and very few of us let this prevent us from offering the same.



\*\*\* Total sample size was 2,116 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 7th - 8th December 2015. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

## What can our kids teach us?

For **1 in 10** kids, nothing would stop them from helping someone in need – relatively consistent across the sexes (**11% for boys, 9% for girls**). The most impactful reason preventing them from helping is feeling they can't trust the person seemingly in need (**60%**) – a fact that is likely to be influenced by the importance of teaching our children to be wary of strangers.

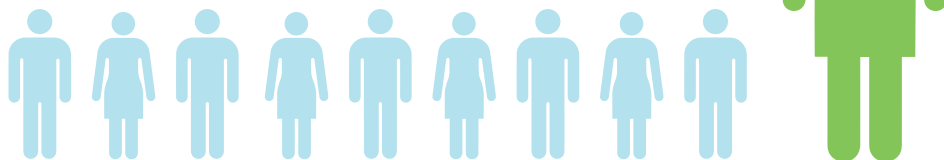
Personal safety (**55%**) and not knowing how to help (**43%**) are the next most influential reasons why children would question offering help.

Ethnicity, age, gender or time aren't major concerns for children.



## 1/10 Children

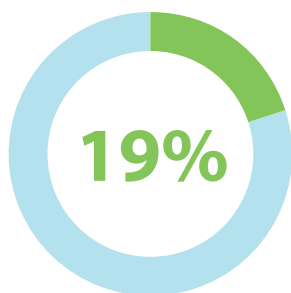
Would not let anything stop them from helping someone in need.





***A simple act of kindness?***

# A simple act of kindness?



Say a simple act of kindness,  
is to be a modern day  
'Good Samaritan'

*'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in...'*

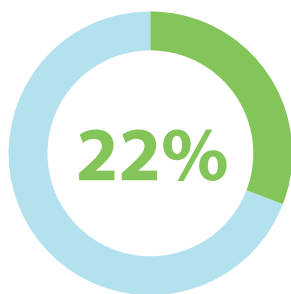
*Matthew, 25.35*

The act of kindness in the parable of the Good Samaritan is essentially limitless:

*'Look after him' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'*

But elsewhere in the Bible, acts of kindness aren't about magnitude but about intent.

It would seem that the same is true of our modern day interpretation of a good deed.



of Women agree a simple  
act of kindness can  
make you a modern day  
'Good Samaritan'

For nearly **1 in 5** of us (**19%**), undertaking a simple act of kindness, like giving up a seat on public transport, is to be a modern day 'Good Samaritan'. More so for women than men. **22%** of women compared with only **16%** of men agree with this description.

Differences continue to be seen between the sexes when it comes to the magnitude of kindness needed to warrant the title.



**1 in 3**

Agree a little act of kindness  
can warrant the title of being  
a 'Good Samaritan'



**16%**

of Women would put  
themselves at risk to help  
another person



**34%**

Recognise a simple act  
of kindness is what being  
a Good Samaritan means  
in modern Britain

Nearly **1 in 3 (31%)** say something of relatively little cost is sufficient demonstration of kindness. This is true for a higher proportion of women than men (**33% vs 28%**).

Similarly, for nearly a quarter of men, (**24%**), it is doing something at a potentially significant cost, like jeopardising ones safety, which describes the modern day 'Good Samaritan'. This suggests men are more likely to take a bigger personal risk than women, with only **16%** of women likely to put themselves at risk to help another.

### *What do our kids think?*

**1 in 3** kids (**34%**) recognise a simple act of kindness as what being a Good Samaritan means in modern Britain.

This declines to **29%** when considering a small cost, and drops to just **1 in 10** when considering a significant cost to yourself.





## ***A kinder Britain?***

# A kinder Britain?

## 'No act of kindness, however small, is ever wasted' Aesop

*Just over 2 in 3 adults are worried that Britain is becoming a less kind society, and almost 6 in 10 children feel the same. Around 9 in 10 kids, and a similar proportion of adults, think Britain would benefit if people were more willing to help each other.*

Possible solutions to these concerns are varied, but some are clear leaders among the public in terms of how we can create a kinder Britain.

For nearly half of us, the answer includes more positive events and stories in the media and getting to know our neighbours better (**both 49%**). Neighbourliness is slightly more impactful for women than men (**53% vs 45%**), while **42%** of children think getting to know our neighbours is important for a kinder Britain.



**2 in 3**

Adults are worried  
that Britain is becoming  
a less kind society



**9 in 10**

Children and adults think  
Britain would benefit from  
people more willing to help



**42%**

of Children think  
getting to know our  
neighbours is important  
for a kinder Britain

## Media

The media floods us with information every day and for kids and adults more positive stories on the radio, news and television would encourage kindness. Again, this resonates with women slightly more than men (52% vs 45%). For 14 and 15 year olds (48% and 49% respectively) this is more important than for younger children, while the media is considered most influential by 18-24 year olds (55%) - more than any other age group.

However, not everyone has an answer. A significant proportion (16% of adults and 18%) of kids aren't sure what we could do to make Britain kinder. For others, the Good Samaritan parable may have a job to do.



18%

Children  
Unsure

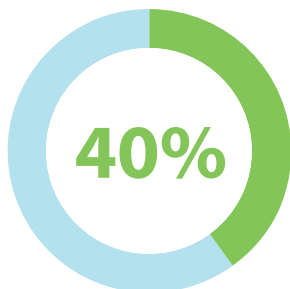


16%

Adults  
Unsure

Unsure of what  
we could do  
to make Britain  
kinder

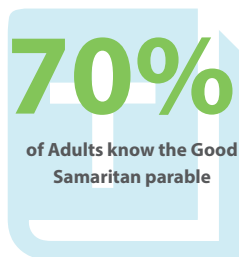
# Go, and do thou likewise



of Adults believe education in schools about the Good Samaritan parable is important to know



Kids think communities must teach the relevance of the Good Samaritan



of Adults know the Good Samaritan parable

For **40%** of adults, education in schools about the Good Samaritan parable and its relevance has a fundamental role to play.

This represents **1 in 3** men and nearly half of women (**46%**) who believe this could help to build a kinder society.

For **1 in 3** children (**32%**), the same is true.

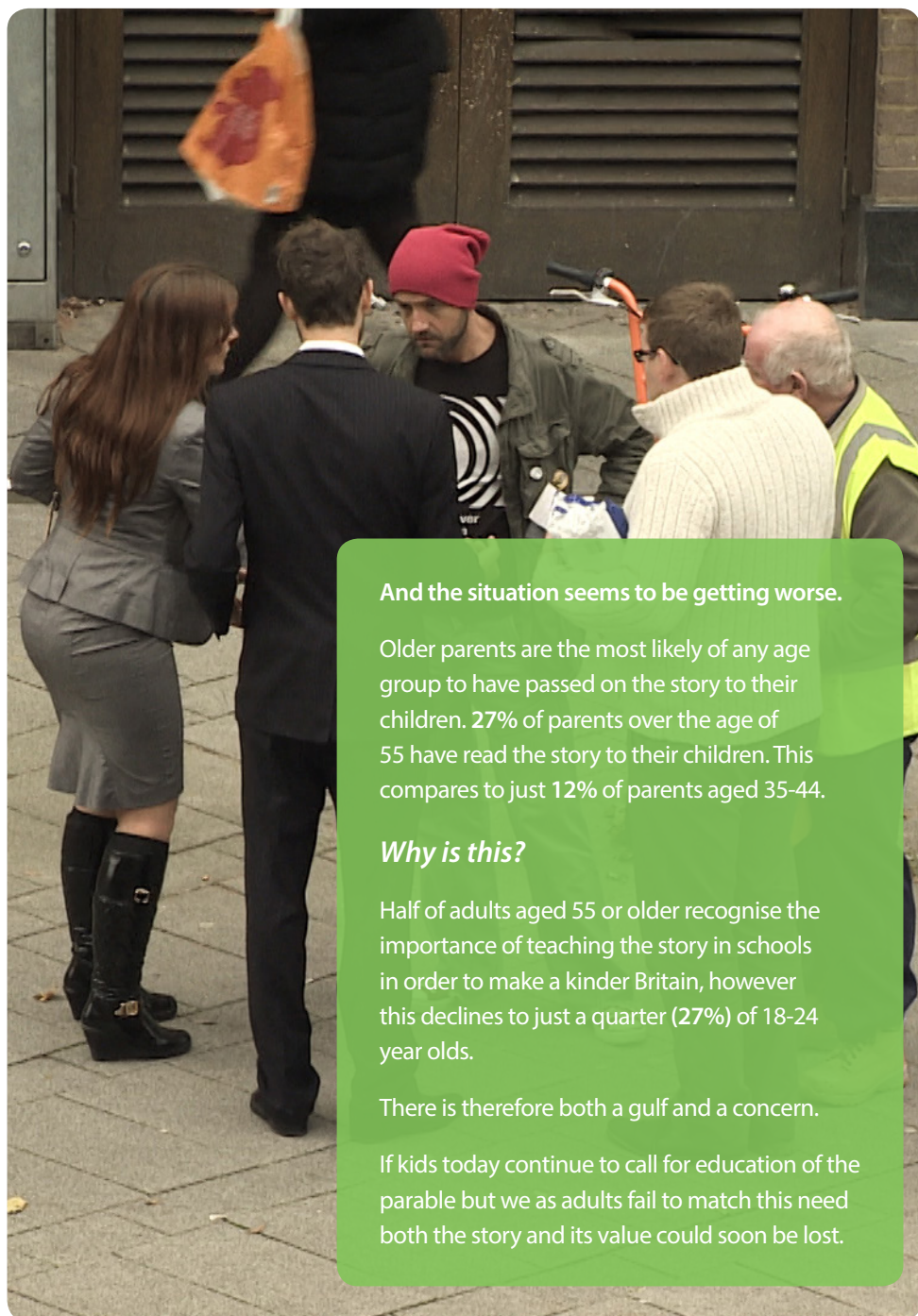
Far from laying the responsibility solely with teachers, for many, communities have a role to play too.

**30%** of adults and **1 in 5** kids (**19%**) think communities must teach the relevance of the Good Samaritan to encourage kindness in Britain.

## *But are we doing it?*

The majority of us, (**70% of adults**), know the story of the Good Samaritan; however, only **13 %** have actively passed it on to their children.

In a context which sees communities having a role to play, is it concerning that so few of us are actually passing down these valuable stories?



**And the situation seems to be getting worse.**

Older parents are the most likely of any age group to have passed on the story to their children. **27%** of parents over the age of 55 have read the story to their children. This compares to just **12%** of parents aged 35-44.

### ***Why is this?***

Half of adults aged 55 or older recognise the importance of teaching the story in schools in order to make a kinder Britain, however this declines to just a quarter (**27%**) of 18-24 year olds.

There is therefore both a gulf and a concern.

If kids today continue to call for education of the parable but we as adults fail to match this need both the story and its value could soon be lost.

## Does our 'Good Samaritan law' go far enough?



*Examples of countries with a Good Samaritan Law:*





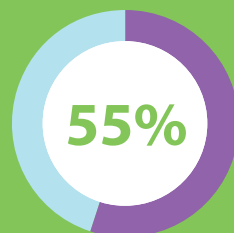
## Imagine this.

You are confronted by a group of teenagers taunting a homeless man on the street. What would you do?

Only **1 in 5** of us would approach them regardless of our personal safety.

In general, for over half of kids, **(55%)** and **40%** of adults, safety is a factor which would prevent us from helping someone in need.

However, what if we were obligated to help someone by law and could face consequences if we didn't?



of Kids believe safety would be the main reason for not wanting to intervene and help a homeless man being taunted by teenagers

## The Status Quo

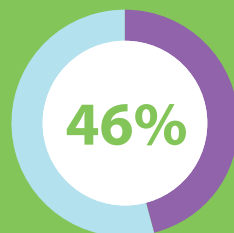
In England and Wales there is now an act which, among other elements, protects those who help from legal action when acting with good intentions or in an emergency. This is called the Social Action, Responsibility and Heroism Act 2015.

Almost half of all adults, **46%**, think this will help us to build a kinder society. Nearly **1 in 3** kids feel the same **(31%)**.

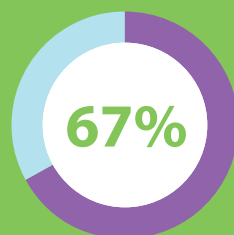
In general, **67%** support this act. But other countries have gone further.

In France there is a Duty of Rescue drafted into their criminal code. This means individuals have both a civil and criminal liability to provide assistance to any person in danger or need.

Whether such a law benefit Britain is unclear. But what is clear is that across the generations we see a value in the legal system supporting and encouraging good deeds.



of Adults think that the Social Action Responsibility and Heroism Act 2015 will help build a kinder society



People support the Social Action Responsibility and Heroism Act 2015

# It's time to Pass it On

We are confronted by a reality where our children believe that kindness is lacking in society, and most adults agree.

**But there is appetite for change.**

Among the factors identified by the public as a way to help create a kinder society was a desire for education about the Good Samaritan parable and its relevance.

As Bible Society, we agree. Stories such as the Good Samaritan have had a positive influence on our lives, our culture and our values for centuries, and can continue to do so.

That's why in February 2014, we launched 'Pass it On' – a campaign to ensure that the valued and valuable stories of the Bible stay alive for future generations.

Our work to understand modern attitudes to the Good Samaritan is a continuation of this.

With one third of kids (32%) and 40% of adults seeing teaching the Good Samaritan story in schools as pivotal to ensuring a kinder Britain, it is time we are all reminded that to keep this classic book alive for future generations, there is only one solution.

***We must use it or lose it.***



Bible  
Society

Watch us test the parable of the Good Samaritan [here](#).