

With this book you can

offer a short course on the basic Christian story to:

- families bringing children for baptism;
- people who have just started coming to church;
- people preparing for adult baptism or confirmation
- church members as a refresher course, e.g during Lent;
- any small group of enquirers.

What this book does

- It uses film clips as a visual introduction to each topic, which makes it accessible to young and old alike.
- It identifies two or three learning outcomes to encourage a mature and sensitive faith.
- It uses two Bible passages to explore each topic, so that the discussion has something of weight to refer to, and that people have something in their hands to reflect on afterwards.
- It uses questions, not ready-made answers, to bring about learning.
- It introduces the participants to a range of different styles of praying which they can use in their everyday lives.

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Introduction

THE FIVE STEPS

The Christian world is awash with excellent courses to introduce newcomers to the Christian faith. The most famous is the Alpha Course, but there are also the Y course, Christianity Explored, Pilgrim etc. Why have another one?

'Five Steps to Faith ' is different in 5 ways.

- It is ideal for couples bringing babies for baptism or getting married. Just two couples, plus children, with one or two church members bringing the Five Steps is enough for a great little group.
- It tells the Christian story as a story, using the actual words of the original source material, i.e. the Bible. The five steps are:

God	Creator and Mystery
Jesus	Healer and Teacher
the Cross	Tragedy and Salvation
Resurrection	both Jesus' resurrection and ours.
Holy Spirit	power at Pentecost, and presence in our lives.

The Bible passages are provided as handouts. Each step has two contrasting passages to open up a breadth of understanding.

- It uses cringe-free film clips which introduce the topic and do not try to explain it. They are child and adult-friendly.
- The learning outcomes provide a bridge between how people in our society understand the world and how the Christian story adds a new dimension, without people feeling they have to put their brains into mothballs.
- Each session ends with an appropriate form of prayer, which can be used on a daily basis thereafter.

OTHER FEATURES

- Each step is prefaced with five comments taken at random from members of the general public about the topic, mostly people encountered in the tea rooms of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The reason is to remind ourselves of what people in Britain generally think about the Christian faith, not what we would like them to think.
- Each step has extra resources for the person leading the session, a joke or a story and some basic Bible background. The aim is to make the CCC (Card Carrying Christian) or session leader more confident in responding to questions.
- Each page has wide margins for your own comments and a page at the end of each session for your notes.

AFTER SALES SERVICE

The After Sales Service is made up of four follow-on sessions which can be used according to pastoral needs and opportunities. These are Bible Ethics, Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion.

Bible Ethics This is a general session, exploring the Ten Commandments, prophetic insight in Isaiah and New Testament ethics in Paul. It can stand alone, or be an opportunity for the original Five Step group to meet again after an interval.

Baptism This step explores the ministry of John the Baptist and baptism of Jesus, followed by what baptism might mean for us in John 3.1-16.

Confirmation There is more talking in this one, because it goes through the history of confirmation. Discussion is centred round a passage in Acts. A key component is a time of meditation centring on the teaching about the Spirit in John 14.

The Five Steps Philosophy

1. OWNERSHIP

Five Steps should be offered in the home of enquirers. Not in church, not in the vicarage, not in the community centre, not in a churchwarden's home. (I tried it once in a pub and it did not work). This means that both wife and the ("I'm not religious") husband can take part, while the children can watch the film clip at the beginning. And there is no need for a babysitter.

It can also be offered to wedding couples if their interest is sparked off through the preparation for a church wedding.

The hosting couple will naturally offer tea and coffee (one hopes), thereby taking on one aspect of leading the evening. If there is another couple with children, they might take it in turns to host it, so effectively sharing the childcare.

2. STARTING WITH A SHARED EXPERIENCE

The evening starts with a 10-minute film clip, e.g. a clip from "The Miracle Maker". This is an animated film about the life of Jesus, with a grown-up script. It is appreciated by adults and children alike. It means that everyone, the host couple, other visitors, the course leaders, all start off with a common experience.

3. USING THE BIBLE

Each session has a handout with two longish Bible passages printed out. (These can be downloaded from the website bibleinbrief.org to create a double-sided A4 document). Again, the purpose is to provide a common basis for discussion for everyone in the room. The CCC (Card-Carrying Christian) will take the lead, but it is open to anyone to say "But what about this?"

The Bible passage is read aloud by people in the group. Half the passages are set out in a dramatised form, so different people take different parts. The passages have much greater impact if read like this, and even the most agnostic husband will enjoy being God! The other passages should be read round the group; bullet points mark the paragraphs. No one should be pressured into reading aloud; you do not know if anyone may be dyslexic or simply shy. But the act of reading aloud does bolster a sense of ownership.

This way of accessing the Bible can begin to take away the fear of it. If and when they come to a church service, hearing the Bible read will not appear strange.

4. QUESTIONS NOT ANSWERS

My grandfather Thomas Osborne was headmaster of Aylesbury grammar school from 1900 to 1927, and he made it one of the best schools in the country. At his interview in 1900 he was asked what his philosophy of education was. He replied that it derived from the word "education" itself. This comes from the Latin e-ducare, or ex-ducare, which meant to lead out from, not to push into. In other words, learning comes from what we work out for ourselves, rather than what we are told, from discussion rather than lectures.

When I started doing the Five Step course, I used to give a very good little talk on who God was. (At least that's what I thought). Over time, that talk got shorter and shorter, until I simply asked, "What do you think about God?" The replies gave plenty of material for the ensuing discussion. And if you do not try to pre-empt the discussion, you never know what may turn up. I remember asking a family with whom I was talking about baptism what they thought the Holy Spirit was. The dad, who never went to church, replied "the presence and power of God". I have not been able to improve on that since.

5. LEARNING OUTCOMES

Five Steps to Faith is not a purposeless free-for-all. There are specific learning outcomes to each session which are meant to build up a faith which is reasonable and in tune with the central message of the Bible. The learning mode is one of guided exploration. For example, in one Bible study group we had someone who believed that God was physical, that somewhere there was an actual very large body of God, with hands, feet etc. Open discussion had brought out this person's belief, and it was then possible to bring them to a better understanding of "the Love that moves the sun and other stars." (Dante, last line of Paradiso).

6. PRAYER

A step towards faith is useless unless it includes some training in prayer. Prayer is what we do when we want to open our lives more to God. Otherwise everything we do and discuss in relation to the Bible, the Church and even helping those in need, simply stops at the level of head knowledge. So each session ends with a prayer practice, which is rooted in the step of faith we have been exploring and which people can take with them into their daily lives. For instance, after the session on the Cross, the prayer practice is Jesus' own prayer at Gethsemane: "Not my will but yours be done."

Step 1

Who or what is God?



WHAT PEOPLE THINK... about God

From the Victoria and Albert Museum's Tea Room:

"That's a huge question."

"Still waiting for the evidence."

"The Creator of everything, however you imagine it."

"I think God doesn't exist."

"I don't personally believe in God, but sometimes I'd like to."

WHAT'S THIS STEP ABOUT?

Step 1 starts with dealing with a major misconception in many people's minds about the Bible, specially about Genesis 1, namely you can't believe in the theory of evolution and still be a Christian. You can and you should!

We then explore what we mean by the idea of "God", through God's encounter with Moses in Exodus 3. Don't start with a clear view that you want others to agree to. Give space for a God-shaped question mark to arise.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1 Evolution and the Bible

The first aim is to prove that the Bible does not contradict the theory of evolution. Genesis 1 is not meant to be a scientific statement, and that can be shown clearly. So when children learn about evolution at Primary School, they don't come to relegate the idea of God to the realm of fairy tales a bit like Father Christmas.



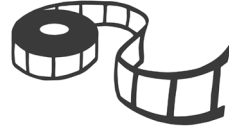
2 The nature of God

The second aim is to show how the being of God is fundamentally mysterious and yet a relationship is possible.

GOD

THE SESSION

FIRST FILM CLIP



I use the start of the BBC film Planet Earth, beginning with a view of the earth from space, leading to the emergence of a polar bear and her two cubs from their winter hibernation, and on to the great caribou migration across northern Canada, ending with the unsuccessful attempt of a caribou calf to escape from a wolf. It shows the beauty of the planet, and the fact that death is always intermingled with life. It takes 12.5 minutes.

If you do not have the DVD, two clips are available on my website bibleinbrief.org of the polar bear cubs and of two young goats escaping from an Arctic fox. These can also be sourced on youtube.

FIRST DISCUSSION



This is simply to get people's reaction from the film. If there are children there, their input is just as valuable as anyone else's.

Note 1: You do not need to start by asking people, "What do you think about God?" though that is a possibility. The film clip about the natural world serves to start off the evening.

Note 2: Genesis 1 proclaims that the world God made was "very good". I do not find that easy to say. There is amazing goodness and beauty in the world; but there are also tragedy and human-led deterioration of the planet. If you have difficulties, do not be afraid to say them. I believe that faith grows by facing doubts, not by trying to disown them).

FIVE STEPS TO FAITH

FIRST BIBLE BIT

Genesis 1.1- 2.3

The story of how God made the world in six days.



SECOND DISCUSSION

As a discussion starter you could ask: "Do you think you can take the Bible seriously and also believe in the theory of evolution?"



That should create a lively discussion. Hopefully some will say science has all the answers, and others will say the Bible does.

Teaching Point: To prove that the Bible does not intend to tell us about science.

Using the grid on p. 33, you ask people what was created on:

- Day 1 Light and Dark
- Day 2 Air and Water (In the ancient understanding of the world air being the gap between the upper and lower waters).
- Day 3 Land and plants
- Day 4 Sun, moon and stars (How do they relate to day 1?)
- Day 5 This is the killer! Birds and fishes - they live in the air and water.
- Day 6 Animals and humans.

Key question: If this was a stand-alone in a public library, which section should it come under: science, literature, history, poetry, theatre?

What you have is a series of stage sets, which are then populated by actors, e.g. on day 4 the sun, moon and stars come on stage to act in the light and the darkness. It is only scientific in that it gives an organised, ordered view of creation.