

# Mentor's Handbook

This Mentor's Handbook aims to help you to lead someone (called a learner) through the First Steps course. It will give you some helpful guidance on what to say and do to make the course a success. It will also help you to prepare for each session with the learner.

This course is meant for new followers of Jesus Christ. It will help them to understand, and to take, the first steps into their new life as a believer.

We realise that they may have already looked at some of the topics in this course (e.g. if they have been on an Alpha Course). But now they have decided to follow Jesus, they will understand things in new ways.

## What does the course cover?

The course is split into three booklets, each with four sessions, as follows:

### Starting your life with Jesus

- What following Jesus means (*repentance and faith*)
- Baptism in water (*why; what happens; implications for the future life*)
- Being Spirit-filled (*the need for spiritual power; speaking in tongues*)
- The importance of belonging (*small groups; Sunday celebrations; friendships*)

### Growing in your faith

- Making sense of the Bible (*how to get started and get fed*)
- Talking to God (*prayer and worship*)
- Changing your lifestyle (*fruits of the Spirit; overcoming habits*)
- Handling your resources (*time; money; friendship*)

### Going the distance

- Staying on course (*perseverance; overcoming*)
- Getting involved (*serving others; finding your place*)
- Sharing about Jesus with others (*evangelism*)
- Helping others to grow (*how to use First Steps to help new believers*)

# Structure of the course

Each session of the course has five parts:

- Connect** At the start of each session, you will talk with the learner about how life has gone since the last session. It's good to share any success stories, as this shows that their life is changing. It's also helpful for them to share any problems, so you or the small group can help them.
- Learn** Each session, the learner will look at what following Jesus means. You will read verses from the Bible together, and there are questions to discuss. The idea is not to 'preach' to the learner, but to talk through the subject, making the learner think about what God wants for their life.
- Express** This is the learner's chance to think deeply about what they have learned and to express their thoughts to you and to God. As you pray together, God will help the learner to know him more closely.
- Ask** The learner may have questions about what they are learning or feeling. We include some questions we think may help. But encourage them to ask their own questions, and do your best to answer honestly and positively.
- Respond** At the end of each session, you should agree with the learner about practical steps they can take to grow in their life with Jesus.

The five parts spell the word '**CLEAR**' – a good way to remember what to cover!

## Does this sound familiar?

In some ways, these five parts are similar to the 'Four-Ws' that many church groups use in small group meetings.

- 'Connect' is like 'Welcome'. It's a chance to catch up with each other.
- 'Learn' is like 'Word'. We focus on what the Bible says about the topic.
- 'Express' and 'Ask' are like 'Worship'. We reflect on what the topic means and express our thanks to God.
- 'Respond' is like 'Witness', in that we agree on practical steps to take.

So, if you have had to do any of these parts (or all of them!) in a small group meeting, you should find leading a First Steps session easy to grasp.

# Guidance on your role as mentor

## What we expect you to do

As a mentor your role is to:

- **Meet together regularly with the learner** and go through each session with them. You may find that one session a week is about right. But you can go through the course more quickly or slowly if you both agree to this. You will need to commit yourself to this – do your best to make sure you can get together when you're supposed to.
- **Prepare for the meeting** by reading through the session in this handbook and in the course book. Read the Bible passages and think about how you would answer the questions.
- **Pray for the learner** regularly. Ask God to keep them secure and to help them grow into mature believers.
- **Be a friend to the learner** and be like Jesus in the way you treat them. When discussing each session, be honest and open with the learner. But remember to be faith-filled in your discussions.
- **Be a learner yourself.** You need to read the Bible, pray, meet with the small group, live to follow God and reject sin. If you don't, nothing you say to the learner will make up for it. People are not easily fooled; they will see what you're really like.

## What we don't expect you to do

- **Take on responsibility for the learner's life.** Learners should be part of a small group, and it is the small group members' job to look after each other, with help from the group leader. Whilst you will have an important role in helping the learner grow, it isn't all down to you. Make sure there are leaders you can turn to for help.
- **Be the only contact with the learner.** In the same way, you must make sure that the learner is making other friendships with those in the small group or other believers in the congregation. Some learners attach themselves to the mentor and are less keen to be friends with others. This will be harmful to them and to you.

- **Know all the answers.** You don't need to be a Bible expert or a small group leader to mentor someone. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so! But it's then your job to find the answer by talking to others.

## How to lead a session

### Deciding when and where to meet

You can meet at your house or the learner's house, or somewhere else (e.g. at work). You need to pick somewhere where you won't be distracted. You also want somewhere where both of you can share honestly and pray together. So avoid places that are too public or noisy.

### Make the learner comfortable

Do your best to make the learner feel relaxed and ready to talk. Sometimes having some quiet background music can help this.

Chatting before the session starts can help the learner relax. But it can also take up too much time if you do not control this. Make sure you start the session on time. TIP: Eating and drinking together is a great way to break down barriers and get people talking!

### Going through the session

You can do a session in around 45 – 60 minutes. If the learner wants to talk beyond this time and you can do so, that's fine. But this can lead to both of you losing enthusiasm for later sessions. It's better to finish at a good point than keep going until you're both worn out!

As a guide, you should spend the following length of time on each part:

|                |               |
|----------------|---------------|
| <b>Connect</b> | 5 minutes     |
| <b>Learn</b>   | 25-30 minutes |
| <b>Express</b> | 5-10 minutes  |
| <b>Ask</b>     | 5 minutes     |
| <b>Respond</b> | 5 minutes     |

## Dealing with discussions and questions

- Make sure the reader has a Bible and gets used to looking up the reference. Tell them they can use the index page in their Bible to help.
- Read the verses aloud. Get the learner to read them if they are able and happy to do so.
- Ask open-ended questions (e.g. beginning with what? who? how? why?) rather than ones that only need a 'yes' or 'no' answer.
- Respond kindly to their questions, even if they seem silly to you.
- Avoid using jargon or clichés, but don't patronise people. They may be new to life with Jesus, but they are not new to life. Be interested and respectful.

## If problems happen...

### "I don't think the learner is a believer"

In session 1, you will cover repentance and faith with the learner. If it becomes clear that they haven't yet responded to God in this way, encourage them to do so.

If they feel they aren't ready, suggest that they think about going on an Alpha Course. This is there to help them think about becoming a believer along with others at the same stage.

### "The learner is still sinning and does not seem to repent"

We must be aware that believers do not change straight away. Some sinful habits can be hard to break. If it is clear to you that the learner is sinning but is trying to get things right, you should:

- Encourage them that God lives in them and will help them to change.
- Pray with them (and get them to pray). Pray for them during the week.
- Remind them that their old life has gone forever. They have power to change!

If the learner does not seem to want to change, this is more serious. You should:

- Remind them that they need to repent if they want to follow Jesus. You could show them Romans 6 and help them to see what happens if they deliberately sin.
- Talk to their small group leader or church leader about the problem (but don't discuss it more widely).

## **“The learner has difficult issues that pull them away from God”**

For some learners, following Jesus can be very hard. They may have friends or relatives who don't want them to be a believer. They may also be mentally or physically ill or in debt. These things can stop learners from growing in their life with Jesus.

Some points to help you:

- As we said earlier, don't take on all the burden of helping the learner. Get help from the small group, even if this is just prayer.
- Encourage the learner to stick with Jesus. It may help to talk about other believers (in the Bible or in history) who have gone through the same things.
- Be positive and faith-building. God gives us power to overcome or to endure the most difficult situations and is expert at helping those in trouble.
- Don't assume that you understand how the learner feels, even if you have been through something similar. Ask God to help you understand the learner's situation.

## **“I am (or the learner is) too busy to meet up”**

As we made clear, you need to commit to this course. It will not help the learner if you need to give up halfway through. Make this a priority. If there is a problem you could not plan for, and that you cannot avoid, talk to your small group leader or church leader about this.

If the learner says they are too busy, this can be a sign that they are losing interest in the message about Jesus. Talk to the small group leader about this, and encourage the learner to keep going with the course. But it is not your job to force the issue.

## **“The learner has too many difficult questions for me”**

Some learners accept new ideas easily; others feel they need to question everything. This is not a problem – we are all different in the way we learn.

If you think the questions are real, get answers by using a good book (see below) or talking to someone in the congregation who can help. It's best if you and the learner can do this together.

But you may feel that the learner is asking lots of questions to avoid responding to the truth about what God wants for them. If so, here are some responses you can use to get past this:

- “That’s a difficult question to answer. But what really matters is how we deal with [the topic you’re talking about] in our life with Jesus.”
- “Although it’s a good question, it mustn’t stop us from [being baptised / responding to God / changing our lifestyle etc]”
- “If you knew the answer to that question, how would it change the way you relate to God?” The honest answer is often – “it wouldn’t really change this”.

If you think the learner is still avoiding the issue, be ready to challenge this more directly. But remember to be kind in all cases.

## Feedback and resources

We want to help you to make this course a success for you and the learner. If you think that we can make it better, please let us know by writing or emailing to:

First Steps Course  
King’s Church  
The Schofield Centre  
Greenclose Lane  
Loughborough  
LE11 5AS  
United Kingdom  
[feedback@first-steps.org.uk](mailto:feedback@first-steps.org.uk)

There are lots of great books that focus on growing as a believer. If the learner likes reading, you could suggest they read one of these. They may also help you to think in new ways about helping believers grow.

Here are some books you may find useful:

**Searching Issues** by Nicky Gumbel, Kingsway, ISBN 0-85476-739-8

**Live a New Life** by David Watson, InterVarsity Press, ISBN 0-85111-240-4

**Freedom In Christ Discipleship Course** by Neil T Anderson and Steve Goss, Monarch, ISBN 1-85424-654-2

# Session 1: What following Jesus means

## About this session

This first session looks at what followers of Jesus must believe and how they respond to God. These are the first steps into a relationship with Jesus.

## Learning aims

In this session, the learner should:

- Get to know the mentor and start to build a friendship;
- Understand the good news about what Jesus has done;
- Know about repentance and faith (and do them!);
- Start to thank God and pray to him; and
- Take steps to join a small group.

## Advice for this session

At this stage, the learner may not know much about life with Jesus, and may have lots of questions. Make sure you focus on the learning aims. Don't get distracted by long discussions.

If you think that the learner does not really understand repentance and faith, or does not seem to be sincere, don't rush on to Session 2. There is no point in moving forward without these steps. It's like building a house without foundations - sooner or later the house will fall down.

As always, make sure you've read the Bible passages and the questions beforehand, and have thought about the answers. Look at our points below, but feel free to put things your own way. **DON'T** just read out the points!

Help the learner to express their thanks to God in a natural way. Don't pray long, complicated prayers or they may feel inadequate. As they grow, they will become more confident about this.

# Discussions

## What we believe

Why did Adam and Eve disobey God?

They were being asked to question God's love for them and to stop turning to God for their help to know what good and evil means. They tried to take control of their own lives.

God told them they would die as soon as they disobeyed. What did he mean?

They didn't die physically, but died spiritually by being separated from God. But they eventually died physically, too.

Lots of people think that 'sin' is all about murder, theft, war etc. and doesn't apply to them. Do you think this is true?

No – every selfish act, where we reject God, is sinful and leads to our or others' misery. Even small sins push us away from God and make us guilty. Sins also form habits that can make us worse and worse.

Would you be ready to die for a close friend? What about for someone who had made you their enemy?

That's what Jesus did for us! He gave his life so we could be free from sin and live even after we die. He did this even when we were his enemies. This shows us how much he loves us.

## How we respond to God

Have you agreed to do these things? Are there areas in your life where you need to repent or trust God more than you are already doing? If so, make a decision to put things right with God straight away.

If the learner admits that they need to repent or trust God more, that's fine. If not, don't push them into it. Make sure you focus on God's love and forgiveness, not the learner's mistakes.

# Session 3: Being Spirit-filled

## About this session

This session focuses on being filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues.

### Learning aims

In this session, the learner should:

- know who the Holy Spirit is;
- understand why they need to be Spirit-filled;
- begin to understand spiritual gifts, especially speaking in tongues; and
- get the chance to be prayed for to receive the Holy Spirit.

### Advice for this session

This is a key session, as we expect the learner to encounter the Spirit's power and not just learn about it!

Learners who have been through the Alpha Course will have been on a 'Holy Spirit day/weekend' and so much of this will not be new. Be sensitive to this – don't ever go through the session just because it is there! But do not assume they know more than they do.

As in session 2, share your personal experience of being filled with the Spirit, but don't give the idea that it must be the same for them. Be ready to pray with the learner to be filled with the Spirit.

Some people find it easy to receive the Spirit, others do not. Don't pressure them or get frustrated if things are not happening easily. Encourage them to pray when they are alone if they do not seem to respond during the session.

As always, make sure you've read the Bible passages and the questions beforehand, and have thought about the answers. Look at our points below, but feel free to put things your own way. DON'T just read out the points!

# Discussions

## Who is the Holy Spirit?

How do we know from these verses that the Holy Spirit is God and a real person?

The Holy Spirit is mentioned in the same way as the Father and the Son (Mt 28:19) and is called 'God' in Acts 5:4. This shows that he is treated as God. We can lie to (Acts 5:1-4) and grieve (bring sorrow to) the Spirit (Eph 4:30) – you cannot upset a force! He is personal.

## What does “being Spirit-filled” mean?

We need to be a holy temple. What does 'holy' mean? How would you know that someone is a holy temple?

'Holy' means 'set apart and dedicated to God'. A temple is not like any other building – it is built for God. You would know someone is holy if they commit themselves (their time, money, friendships, actions) to God.

## The Holy Spirit 'baptises' people with power to be witnesses

Do you think that these people were already believers when they were 'filled with the Spirit' in this way? If so, what does this mean for our life with Jesus?

It seems that these people were already believers. Something separate happened to them. So it may not be enough to say 'I am a believer' – you may still be missing out on God's power.

But sometimes people were filled with the Spirit when they became believers – even before they were baptised (see Acts 10:44-48). So there is no definite way this must happen. The key is – is the believer living in God's power or not?

Why do we call this 'baptism in the Spirit'? How is this like baptism in water?

Baptism means to soak and dip. When we are filled by the Spirit, he soaks us and should overflow to others.

What happened when these people were 'filled with the Spirit'?

Various things. They spoke in tongues. The believers in Acts 2 acted as if they were drunk. They became brave and ready to tell others about Jesus.

## People who are Spirit-filled have other supernatural 'gifts'

Why do these verses say (several times) that only one God gives these gifts?

It is easy to focus on the gifts and forget the giver. This can make us jealous of people with 'better gifts'. We must remember that all these gifts come from God and are to be used to do what he wants.

# Session 5: Making sense of the Bible

## About this session

This session focuses on what the Bible is and how to get started in reading it.

### Learning aims

In this session, the learner should:

- understand what the Bible is all about and where it came from;
- expect God to speak to them through the Bible; and
- know how to get started in reading it and understanding it.

### Advice for this session

We have already been using the Bible throughout the earlier sessions, so this session is not entirely new. But we haven't yet looked at the overall message of the Bible or the types of writing in it.

The learner may have questions about the Bible's authority. For instance, how do we know that it is God's word? How could human authors write exactly what God wanted them to? These are excellent questions, but there are no easy answers and it's very easy to get sidetracked. Believers have different ideas as to how God was involved in the writing process. Make sure you are honest, but stick to the main points.

If you have examples of verses that have 'jumped off the page', it would be good to share these. But if you do so, keep on track and don't dominate the conversation. If you give too many personal examples, the learner can feel intimidated or left out.

As always, make sure you've read the Bible passages and the questions beforehand, and have thought about the answers. Look at our points below, but feel free to put things your own way. DON'T just read out the points!

# Discussions

## What is the Bible?

What does the word ‘inspired’ (or ‘God-breathed’) mean? What does 2 Peter 3:16 tell us about Paul’s letters?

The word ‘inspired’ doesn’t just mean that God gave people inspiring ideas to write about. It literally means he ‘breathed’ or spoke the Scripture. In 2 Peter, Paul’s letters (New Testament) are compared to ‘the other Scriptures’ – so the letters are Scripture, too.

## The Bible is all about Jesus

What do these verses (Luke 24:25-27, John 5:39) say the Bible is about?

The verses make it clear that the Bible is all about Jesus. He is its central message.

John 5:40 should act as a warning to us. How should this verse affect the way we read the Bible?

The warning is that it is useless to study the Bible unless we come to Jesus as the source for life. Many people study the Bible as an academic subject but are not followers of Jesus. We must not read in this way, but should expect Jesus to give us his life as we live for him.