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CONFIRMATION BOOK FOR ADULTS



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*This book is dedicated to the Revd Peter Streatfeild,
with thanks for his work in the parishes*

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Introduction



The *Confirmation Book for Adults* is intended to be a handbook for all adults who are either considering Confirmation or who are members of a Confirmation group. It can also be used to help those who are seeking to learn more about their faith, either as individuals or within a group, but who may already be confirmed. It is written from an Anglican perspective, and covers most subjects that new Christians need to learn or to discover for themselves.

This book can be used by individuals on their own, or by the group as a whole. In the latter case each individual will need a copy of the *Confirmation Book for Adults*. There is material that can be used for personal worship and study at home, as well as together with the group. Some of the suggestions under 'Further work' are contemplative, some creative, and individuals may like to carry out *some* of the tasks on their own. Group leaders may also find it useful to look at some of the 'Further work' with the whole group. No individual is expected to carry out all the tasks under 'Further work'.

The course is intended for adults, but selective material could easily be used by teenagers, or with a group of adults and teenagers. The 'Research' work is for those who would like to dig deeper, who may already have done some Christian study or academic work before, and who would benefit from something more challenging! This will not be suitable for everyone.

It is not necessary for the individual or the group to cover every subject in the book before the Confirmation. Some would be better looked at after the actual Confirmation service, e.g. Chapter 11, 'Living as a Christian'. Material could also be given to group members to look at between sessions.

Introduction

Each session in the book offers some Bible study, to allow those using the book to find out more about the Bible and how it can help them in their new life. As well as this there are a few suggestions for worship, which could be used alone or as the basis of some closing worship for the group.

In the Appendix are some suggestions for books that might be used to help while using the *Confirmation Book for Adults*.

Part 1

BEGINNINGS



BEGINNINGS

1

God calls us



Becoming a Christian is a personal decision for each individual to make, and everyone will have a different story to relate about what led up to the decision and how it was made. Some will have been 'Christened' as a baby and taken to church each week. They will have been encouraged by parents and godparents, and brought up in the faith throughout their childhood. Others may have chosen to reject God at an early stage and only begun to think about him during a difficult time in life, perhaps because of an illness or the death of a loved one. Some may have decided to keep their options open, perhaps because their parents believed that they should make their own life choices, but turned to God at a happy time in life, at their marriage or at the birth of a child. Others can identify the exact moment when they accepted God into their lives. The one thing all these have in common is that each individual was *called by God*.

For many people the process of becoming a Christian actually takes place slowly, almost unnoticed, over many years. God continues to call them again and again in very many different ways, throughout their life. Sometimes the call is not recognized, while at other times it can be deliberately ignored. Whatever our response, though, God continues to call us, hoping that we will turn to him. In the Bible we see God continually calling his people.

Bible work

Notice how many different ways God finds to get people's attention, and the way that individuals respond to him:

- Genesis 12.1–4: Abram.
- 1 Samuel 3.1–10: Samuel.
- Isaiah 6.1–8: Isaiah.
- Matthew 1.20–23 and 2.13: Joseph.
- Luke 1.26–38: Mary.
- Matthew 9.9: Matthew.
- John 1.43–51: Philip and Nathanael.

In the past men and women have heard God's voice in their dreams or through the visitation of a messenger. Others have heard an actual voice. Like us, some have questioned the authenticity of the call, while others have ignored the message. Some, however, did respond to God's call and went on to become patriarchs (those earliest Fathers of the Church in the Old Testament), prophets (who sought to keep the Jewish nation true to their call from God) and disciples (who followed Jesus' command to take the good news of the gospel to the whole world).

Hearing God's call today

Today, God still calls his people. It can be hard to recognize his call, however, and sometimes we can only see the touch of his hand in retrospect when we look back at the events in our lives. Perhaps we can see it in the time we chose an unexpected path, or when a disaster ultimately turned into a triumph. Whether or not we actually recognize God's call, he continues to call us in many different ways. Just as in the past, God may call us through the influence of others, through his word in the Bible as we read it or hear it preached in church, through our conscience, through the

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grandeur or beauty of the natural world, and of course he may call us through prayer.

Over the centuries millions of Christians have heard the call from God, each in their own unique way. Two who spoke about their experience of being called are St John of the Cross in the sixteenth century, and C. S. Lewis in the twentieth century. Each responded differently.

- St John of the Cross noted that God met us halfway, reminding us of the way the Prodigal or Lost Son (Luke 15.11–24) is welcomed back by his father, who comes out to greet him before his son has arrived home and even before he has asked for his forgiveness: ‘O Lord, my God, who will seek you with simple and pure love, and not find that you are all one can desire, for you show yourself first and go out to meet those who seek you?’ (*The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, Washington, DC, ICS Publications, 1991, p. 85)
- C. S. Lewis, on the other hand, decided that he believed in God because of his own powers of deduction. He simply could not explain the creation of the world in any other way: ‘I arrived where I now am, not by reflection alone, but by reflection on a particular current experience. I am an empirical theist. I have arrived at God by induction.’ (William Griffin, *C. S. Lewis: The authentic voice*, Oxford, Lion, 1986, p. 72)

The call is always tailored to us. For C. S. Lewis, the way to God came through intellectual argument!

What God’s call brings

In ordinary life when someone calls us there is often a task associated with the call. Whether it is a friend ringing to ask whether

Beginnings

we can drive him to the garage to pick up his car, or a member of the family wanting us to help celebrate her birthday, the call frequently requires a response from us. So it is when God calls us. When he calls, he usually has a job for us to do. The call rarely comes in isolation. For example, the disciples were called to take the good news of the gospel to the world. In the twenty-first century, Christians too are called to be God's people in order to share with the world the good news of Jesus Christ.

In many instances, the call will also bring with it a more specific job. Very often we may feel we are not capable of carrying out the task, but God knows when we are ready to do his work and we need to learn to trust his judgement. Moses was called to lead the Israelites, even though he was a poor speaker and felt totally unable to do the job. He explains this to God, only for God to find a solution to his problem:

What of your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently . . . You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do.

(Exodus 4.14–15)

In the New Testament, similarly, the disciples are given a job. Jesus sends them out to take the good news to the people:

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal . . . They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

(Luke 9.1–2, 6)

Jesus appears to give the disciples this task early in their ministry, not long after their call to follow him. They too would surely have lacked confidence in their ability to carry out the task, yet they

God calls us

obey Jesus' command and proclaim the Kingdom of God to the people. The lesson we should learn from these two stories is that those who are called by God will be given the necessary gifts to carry out the task.

The Confirmation group

Although we are personally called, and we make an individual decision to become a Christian, Christianity is essentially a corporate faith. It is simply not possible to be a Christian alone, for we must travel with others on our journey of life, and we need the companionship of others to continue to grow spiritually. We need to 'rub off our sharp edges' against other people. We must learn to help others as well as learn from them, in order that we ourselves and the whole Christian community may continue to grow more God-like.

Those who come for Confirmation usually explore their faith together in a Confirmation group. The group may meet for a few weeks, or may spend months together. Sometimes those who are preparing for Confirmation will stay together as a 'home' or 'cell' group after the Confirmation. The group may include adults and teenagers, and there may be a wide age range, as well as an even wider range of experience. It must be noted that those with the most life experience may not necessarily be the most spiritually mature! The child looking at a caterpillar will see the insect in a way that an adult, rushing to do the next piece of work that day, will fail to see. She will notice the colours, the shape, the articulated body of the caterpillar, and find awe in the small. Age does not necessarily mean we are closer to God: we may have been ignoring God's call for a long time!

Take the opportunity to learn from one another, as well as to encourage and pray for other members of the group. Explore your own beliefs and doubts, and share them with other group members, remembering always to keep confidences within the group!

Beginnings

Practical things

It will be useful to have a notebook, not least to jot down the names and phone or e-mail addresses of those in the group, and also a modern translation of the Bible. Different translations of the Bible can be used for different things. Sometimes we want the beauty of the King James edition, say at Christmas time when we want to hear the traditional words, but it will be easier to use a more modern translation to do some Bible study. Check with the group leader in case he or she would prefer the whole group to use a specific translation.

At the beginning of the course do some thinking and ask yourself:

- Why have I joined this group?
- What do I want out of the course?
- What would I like to ask?
- What weaknesses do I bring to the group?
- What strengths do I bring to the group?

Set yourself a task for the first meeting of the Confirmation group – to remember everyone’s name and something about them. Christians endeavour to live for others rather than themselves, and to put selfish desires on one side. Being concerned for others, and praying for them, will become second nature in time. Praying for others must start with getting to know them.

Further work

Look at some of the tasks below, either on your own or as a group. It is not necessary to carry out all the tasks.

God calls us

- Create a 'lifeline' – a line from left to right on a piece of paper, showing the highs and lows of events in your life from birth to the present time as peaks and troughs.
- Go back over the lifeline identifying times when God was felt to be present, or absent. Draw a new line to create fresh peaks and troughs. Do the two coincide, or are they different? What can you learn from the result?
- Do you think God has been calling you over the years? Can you identify any specific times or occasions when you believe he has called you? What was your response?
- Was there an 'important adult' in your early life, from whom you learnt about God? What did you learn from him or her?
- When did you first go to a church? Can you remember the occasion, how it felt, and what happened?
- Has anything happened recently to make you turn towards God?
- Wordsworth says:

. . . I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns . . .
(from 'Lines Composed a Few Miles
above Tintern Abbey')

Have you had an experience of God's presence in the natural world? What effect did it have on you? Where do you feel closest to God?

- Look at Matthew 7.7–8. How hard have you 'knocked at the door' or searched for God? Be honest!

Research

This section is for those who have perhaps already attended other courses, and who would benefit from 'digging deeper' and who might enjoy some more academic work.

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