

INTRODUCING JESUS

AIM:

To introduce people to Jesus Christ as Saviour, Lord and Friend.
To equip people to make the choice of saying 'Yes' or 'No' to Jesus.

1. GOD

Aim: To consider what we think about God and to consider

1. that Jesus is believed to be God in human form
2. why God might have become a human being

It might be helpful to have: pictures of 4 famous people, copies of gospel

INTRODUCE THE COURSE: Designed as an introduction for people who are considering baptism for their children, for people making enquiries about the Christian faith, for people considering the Alpha or Christianity Explored course.

Our aim is to introduce Jesus Christ, the person who is at the centre of the Christian faith. It is also an opportunity for people to respond to Jesus, if they feel that it is right for them to do so.

Explain that we will be using 3 questions that are asked at baptism as a basis for finding out how we can meet Jesus.

- Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?
- Do you submit to Christ as Lord?
- Do you come to Christ, the way, the truth and the life?

INTRODUCE EACH OTHER: Invite people to tell each other a bit about themselves: Name. Where they come from? Children? Alternatively suggest that people tell the group two true things about themselves and one false thing. The group have to guess which is the false thing.

Either as a whole group, or in smaller groups, get people to talk about what their church background (if any) is. What is their worst experience in a church (if they have been in one)? What has been their best experience? Why they have come along to this?



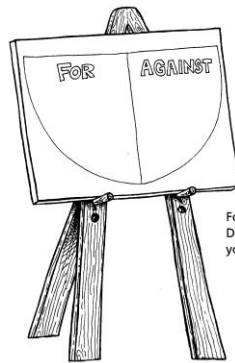
If beginning with God is like setting out on a train journey, where would you say you are on this picture? Members can choose one of the characters on the picture or put themselves somewhere else.

Invite people to say where they are.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN GOD?

The existence of God: Ask people where they would be on the swingometer. You could ask people whether they used to believe more or less in the past. What made them change their views?

FOR OR AGAINST?



For or against God's existence?
Draw a pointer to show where
you stand at the moment.

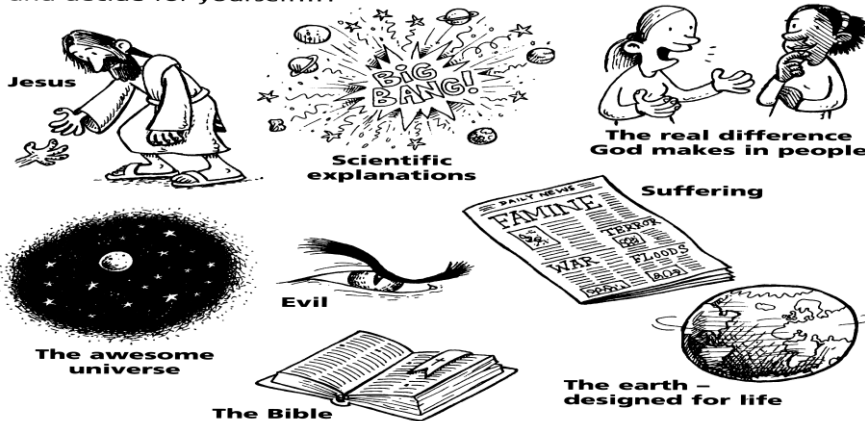
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What reasons do people have for believing that God exists? What reasons do people have for not believing that God exists? In your opinion, what are the most convincing arguments for/against God? The following picture might give some ideas.



Most people have some sort of belief in a God. Can we find out more about whether God actually does exist or what he is really like?

No one can prove that God exists, that's for sure. But then again, you can't disprove it either. You've just got to look at the evidence and decide for yourself....



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Note: quite often people will mention experience as one of the biggest reasons for believing in God (something happened to them), and experience (especially suffering) as the biggest reason for not believing in God.

If God exists, what is he like?

[Find pictures of four contemporary famous people (use a magazine or web). Ask people to tell you who they are and to describe what they are like.]

Now ask people to describe God. If you wish, you could write up what people say on a sheet of paper.

Point out that it is difficult to describe people who we know about, but don't actually personally know. It is much harder to describe God who nobody has seen. There are probably as many different views of what God is like as there are people in your group.

Illustration: The little boy who came home with a picture that he had drawn. Mum: 'What is it?' Boy: 'It is a picture of God?'. Mum: 'But nobody knows what God looks like'. Boy: 'They do now!'

The unknowability of God:

1. Intellectual problem. God is beyond our understanding, and beyond all concepts (beyond space and time and language). The bible talks of "*God – the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.*" (1 Timothy 6:15)

Dr Seuss, Beyond Zebra

"I'm telling you this 'cause you're one of my friends.
My alphabet starts where your alphabet ends!
My alphabet starts with this letter called YUZZ.
It's the letter I use to spell Yuzz-a-ma-Tuzz.
You'll be sort of surprised what there is to be found
Once you go beyond Z and start poking around!

So, on beyond Zebra! Explore! Like Columbus!
Discover new letters!
Like WUM is for Wumbus,
My high-spouting whale who lives high on a hill
And who never comes down 'til it's time to refill.
So, on beyond Z! It's high time you were shown
That you really *don't* know all there is to be known".

2. Moral problem. "*Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear*" (Isaiah 59:2)

BUT ..

The bible tells us that Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God

"No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is the same as God and is at the Father's side, he has made him known". John 1:18

"Jesus is the image of the invisible God". Colossians 1:15

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being .."

Hebrews 1:3

So if we wish to know what God is like, we look at Jesus
'Everything Jesus was saying, doing, thinking, being on earth was what God was saying, thinking, doing, being in heaven'.

Why did God become a human being?

1. So that we might be forgiven

John 3:16 "For God so love the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"

Romans 5:8 "But God shows his love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us"

2. So that we might know him.

"Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well." John 14:6f

Have used Simone Weil's quote about George Herbert's poem, Love.

In 1938 .. I was suffering from splitting headaches; each sound hurt me like a blow .. I discovered the poem .. called 'Love' which I learnt by heart. Often, at the culminating point of a violent headache, I made myself say it over, concentrating all my attention upon it and clinging with all my soul the tenderness it enshrines. I used to think I was merely reciting it as a beautiful poem, but without my knowing it the recitation had the virtue of a prayer. It was during one of these recitations that Christ himself came down and took possession of me. In my arguments about the insolubility of the problem of God I had never foreseen the possibility of that, of a real contact, person to person, here below, between a human being and God. Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*.

Love bade me welcome, yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
 If I lack'd anything.

"A guest," I answer'd, "worthy to be here";
 Love said, "You shall be he."
"I, the unkind, the ungrateful? ah my dear,
 I cannot look on thee."
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
 "Who made the eyes but I?"

"Truth, Lord, but I have marr'd them; let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve."
"And know you not," says Love, "who bore the blame?"
 "My dear, then I will serve."
"You must sit down," says Love, "and taste my meat."
 So I did sit and eat.

George Herbert

3. So that we might become like him.

"But we know that when Christ appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2)

At the end of the session, give people a copy of a gospel (ideally, Mark or Luke). Invite them to take it away and read it.

The three illustrations are ©CPAS, the Start! course.

Additional material:

The following passage powerfully demonstrates how Jesus identified with us in our suffering. However it could leave people feeling that God somehow 'deserved' to suffer because sin and suffering are God's fault.

The Long Silence

At the end of time, billions of people were seated on a great plain before God's throne. Most shrank back from the brilliant light before them. But some groups near the front talked heatedly, not cringing with cringing shame - but with belligerence.

"Can God judge us? How can He know about suffering?", snapped a pert young brunette. She ripped open a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. "We endured terror ... beatings ... torture ... death!"

In another group a Negro boy lowered his collar. "What about this?" he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn. "Lynched, for no crime but being black !"

In another crowd there was a pregnant schoolgirl with sullen eyes: "Why should I suffer?" she murmured. "It wasn't my fault." Far out across the plain were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering He had permitted in His world.

How lucky God was to live in Heaven, where all was sweetness and light. Where there was no weeping or fear, no hunger or hatred. What did God know of all that man had been forced to endure in this world? For God leads a pretty sheltered life, they said.

So each of these groups sent forth their leader, chosen because he had suffered the most. A Jew, a negro, a person from Hiroshima, a horribly deformed arthritic, a thalidomide child. In the centre of the vast plain, they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather clever.

Before God could be qualified to be their judge, He must endure what they had endured. Their decision was that God should be sentenced to live on earth as a man.

Let him be born a Jew. Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted. Give him a work so difficult that even his family will think him out of his mind.

Let him be betrayed by his closest friends. Let him face false charges, be tried by a prejudiced jury and convicted by a cowardly judge. Let him be tortured.

At the last, let him see what it means to be terribly alone. Then let him die so there can be no doubt he died. Let there be a great host of witnesses to verify it.

As each leader announced his portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the throng of people assembled. When the last had finished pronouncing sentence, there was a long silence. No one uttered a word. No one moved.

For suddenly, all knew that God had already served His sentence.

2. JESUS CHRIST

Aim: To consider Jesus Christ, basing the session on Christmas and Easter

Welcome and pray a simple prayer asking that God will help us to understand more about ourselves and more about Jesus

1. CHRISTMAS

Discuss the Christmas story!

Read Matthew 1:18-25

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

*But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and **you are to give him the name Jesus**, because he will save his people from their sins."*

*All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and **they will call him Immanuel**" (which means "God with us").*

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

The two names given to the baby

a. Immanuel

= God with us

If Jesus is God become a human being, what does it tell us about the value/significance of human beings? What does it tell us about your own value?

b. Jesus

= Saviour. Why do you think we might need a saviour?

In the film, *Titanic*, Rose says of Jack, "He saved me in every possible way that a person can be saved". What do you think she meant?

and/or

Make a list of some of the things that people would like to be saved from (eg. Phobias, Poverty, Failure, Meaninglessness, Inadequacy, Defeat, Sickness, Enemies, Death)

Jesus came to save us from the one thing that is at the root of all of the above: sin. This is the barrier that separates us from God.

2. THE LIFE OF JESUS

Ask what they know about Jesus – and then what they think about Jesus

Either tell one of the stories about Jesus in John's gospel, (eg. water into wine; healing of man born blind, feeding of 5000, raising of Lazarus) and explore why John tells us this particular story. eg. Water into wine – Jesus has come to turn that which is ordinary into that which is extraordinary; feeding 5000 – he

is the true bread that satisfies; opening eyes of man born blind – he is the one who helps us to see God; raising of Lazarus – he is one who brings life to the dead.

or

see if they know any stories about Jesus (or that Jesus told), eg. good Samaritan, prodigal son
Ask – what is going on here?

Encourage them to read a gospel

3. GOOD FRIDAY AND EASTER

At Easter we remember the story of Jesus' death and resurrection

Christians believe that Jesus' death was not a tragedy, but that, out of love for us, he freely chose to give up his life.

Can you think of someone who has made a great sacrifice for you?

Christians believe that Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sins

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve”. (1 Corinthians 15:3-5)

What do you think this means?

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins”. 1 John 4:10

If Jesus did rise from the dead, what difference would it make to how you live?

Quote: Wolfhart Pannenberg, a Christian theologian writes, “The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: first, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live.”

What Christians say about Jesus

In church we say the creed. The word 'creed' comes from the Latin 'credo' meaning 'I believe'. The creeds that we say in church date back to the earliest Christians. Of Jesus we say:

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

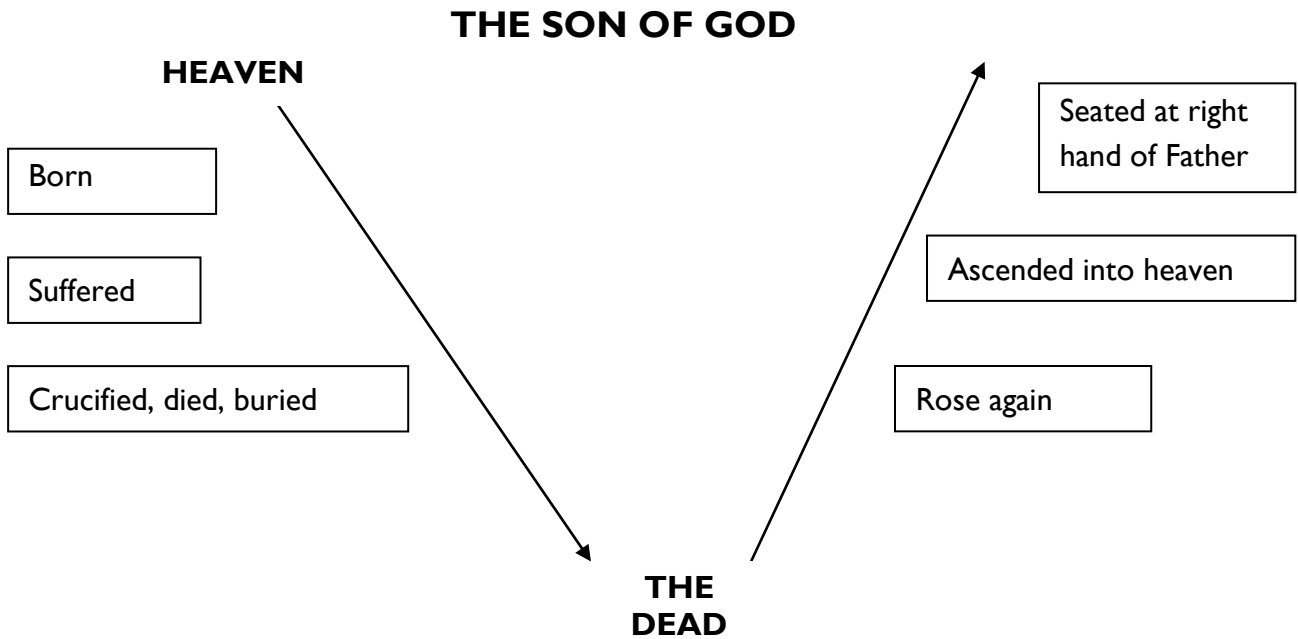
Focus that what is really important for Christians about Jesus is

1. who he is: the Son of God
2. his relationship to us: he is our Lord
3. his birth, suffering, death and resurrection

4. where he is now and what he will do.

Notice the V shape: It is the picture of how Jesus comes down into the world and then goes up again to heaven.

[Notice parallels in other passages - Mark 8:31, Philippians 2:6-11, and of our baptism (Romans 6:3-5)]



Athanasius (293-373) stated very dramatically, “The Son of God became man so that we might become God” [‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Peter 1:4)].

The key: Jesus shares in our brokenness/suffering. He comes into our pit, into the abyss of death. He identifies himself with us totally, so that he might raise us out of death and bring us to his Father in heaven. There is no pit or suffering that is out of his reach and that he cannot transform.

If you can get hold of a CD of ‘Meekness and Majesty’, play it at this point. Invite people to consider the words.

Meekness and Majesty
Manhood and Deity,
In perfect harmony,
The Man who is God.
Lord of eternity
Dwells in humanity,
Kneels in humility
And washes our feet.

*O what a mystery,
Meekness and majesty.
Bow down and worship
For this is your God,
This is your God.*

Father’s pure radiance,
Perfect in innocence,
Yet learns obedience
To death on a cross.
Suffering to give us life,
Conquering through sacrifice,
And as they crucify
Prays: ‘Father forgive.’

Wisdom unsearchable,
God the invisible,
Love indestructible
In frailty appears.
Lord of infinity,
Stooping so tenderly,
Lifts our humanity
To the heights of His throne.

Graham Kendrick © 1986 Kingsway’s Thankyou Music

3. FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

THE BAPTISM QUESTIONS

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?
Do you submit to Christ as Lord?
Do you come to Christ, the way, the truth and the life?

Discuss what they might mean

I. Putting our trust in Christ as Saviour

BONO ON GRACE, KARMA AND JESUS CHRIST, 2005

Assayas: I think I am beginning to understand religion because I have started acting and thinking like a father. What do you make of that?

Bono: Yes, I think that's normal. It's a mind-blowing concept that the God who created the universe might be looking for company, a real relationship with people, but the thing that keeps me on my knees is the difference between Grace and Karma.

Assayas: I haven't heard you talk about that.

Bono I really believe we've moved out of the realm of Karma into one of Grace

Assayas: Well, that doesn't make it clearer for me.

Bono You see, at the center of all religions is the idea of Karma. You know, what you put out comes back to you: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or in physics; in physical laws; every action is met by an equal or an opposite one. It's clear to me that Karma is at the very heart of the universe. I'm absolutely sure of it. And yet, along comes this idea called Grace to upend all that "as you reap, so you will sow" stuff. Grace defies reason and logic. Love interrupts, if you like, the consequences of your actions, which in my case is very good news indeed, because I've done a lot of stupid stuff.

Assayas: I'd be interested to hear that.

Bono That's between me and God. But I'd be in big trouble if Karma was going to finally be my judge. I'd be in deep s---. It doesn't excuse my mistakes, but I'm holding out for Grace. I'm holding out that Jesus took my sins onto the Cross, because I know who I am, and I hope I don't have to depend on my own religiosity.

Assayas: The Son of God who takes away the sins of the world. I wish I could believe in that.

Bono But I love the idea of the Sacrificial Lamb. I love the idea that God says: *Look, you cretins, there are certain results to the way we are, to selfishness, and there's a mortality as part of your very sinful nature, and, let's face it, you're not living a very good life, are you? There are consequences to actions.* The point of the death of Christ is that Christ took on the sins of the world, so that what we put out did not come back to us, and that our sinful nature does not reap the obvious death. That's the point. It should keep us humbled; . It's not our own good works that get us through the gates of heaven.

Assayas: That's a great idea, no denying it. Such great hope is wonderful, even though it's close to lunacy, in my view. Christ has his rank among the world's great thinkers. But Son of God, isn't that farfetched?

Bono No, it's not farfetched to me. Look, the secular response to the Christ story always goes like this: he was a great prophet, obviously a very interesting guy, had a lot to say along the lines of other great prophets, be they Elijah, Muhammad, Buddha, or Confucius. But actually Christ doesn't allow you that. He doesn't let you off that hook. Christ says: *No. I'm not saying I'm a teacher, don't call me teacher. I'm not saying I'm a prophet. I'm saying: "I'm the Messiah." I'm saying: "I am God incarnate."* And people say: *No, no, please, just be a prophet. A prophet, we can take. You're a bit eccentric. We've had John the Baptist eating locusts and wild honey, we can handle that. But don't mention the "M" word! Because, you know, we're gonna have to crucify you.* And he goes: *No, no. I know you're expecting me to come back with an army, and set you free from these creeps, but actually I am the Messiah.* At this point, everyone starts staring at their shoes, and says: *Oh, my God, he's gonna keep saying this.* So what you're left with is: either Christ was who He said He was the Messiah; or a complete nutcase. I mean, we're talking nutcase on the level of Charles

Manson. This man was like some of the people we've been talking about earlier. This man was strapping himself to a bomb, and had "King of the Jews" on his head, and, as they were putting him up on the Cross, was going: *OK, martyrdom, here we go. Bring on the pain! I can take it. I'm not joking here.* The idea that the entire course of civilization for over half of the globe could have its fate changed and turned upside-down by a nutcase, for me, *that's farfetched* ;

Bono later says it all comes down to how we regard Jesus:

Bono: [I]f only we could be a bit more like Him, the world would be transformed. When I look at the Cross of Christ, what I see up there is all my s--- and everybody else's. So I ask myself a question a lot of people have asked: Who is this man? And was He who He said He was, or was He just a religious nut? And there it is, and that's the question. And no one can talk you into it or out of it.

From Bono: In Conversation with Michka Assayas, by Michka Assayas, © 2005 by Michka Assayas.

Do you think that you need to be forgiven?

How are you going to persuade God to forgive you?

What difference would it make to your life if you didn't have to earn your forgiveness, but all you had to do was turn to Jesus and believe that he took all your s---?

2. Putting our trust in Christ as Lord

a. OBEDIENCE TO JESUS' TEACHING

Jesus answered, *"My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own". John 7:16-17*

It's hard to cram everything that the greatest religious teacher in history ever said into a few soundbites, but here goes...

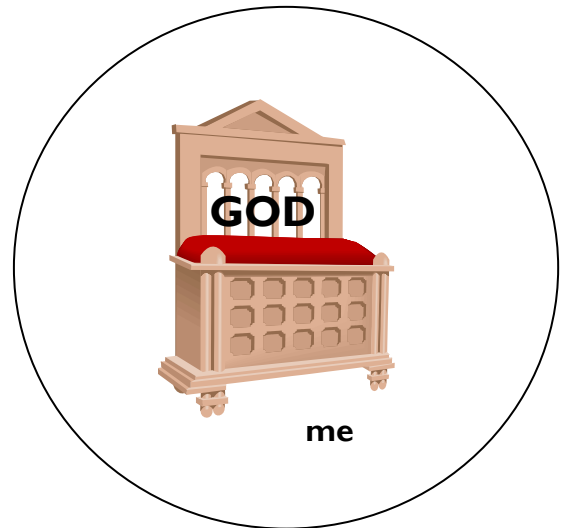
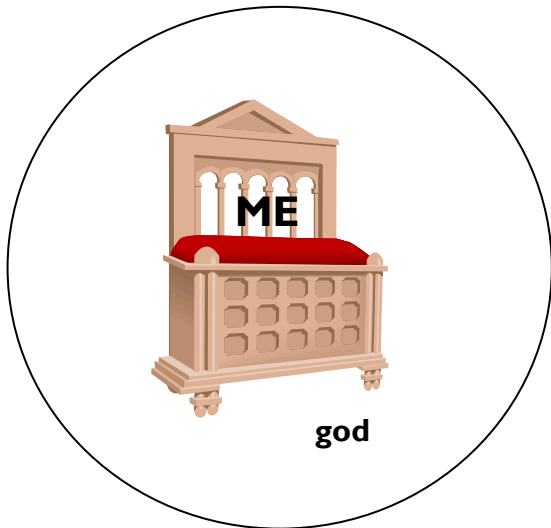
God would be 'our Father in heaven' – God created us, loves us and provides for us. He invites us to become his children, and though he is angered by our injustice and immorality, he calls sinners to return to him and promises forgiveness and power to change the way we live.

The kingdom of God – the long-awaited rule of God is breaking into the world, through Jesus. He called people to become part of it by turning from their sins back to God, however holy or unholy they might have been. The kingdom of God would be a counter-culture where the poor are blessed and the first will be last.

Love each other – we are called to love each other as God loves us – to forgive those who let us down and repay hatred with love – to do good not only to friends and family, not only to fellow believers, but to those who wrong and hurt us.

adapted from www.rejesus.co.uk

Most of us accept authority in particular settings. At work I accept the authority of my boss – it means I have to do things I don't particularly like; When I drive I accept the authority of the law - it means I keep within the speed limits. Why should I accept the authority of Jesus? Would it make any difference to how you lived if you accepted his authority?



b. TRUSTING JESUS' PROMISES

Look through the following promises. If they were true what difference would it make to how you live?

Holy Spirit: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (john 7:38)

Eternal Life: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (john 11:25-26)

Forgiveness: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins he [Jesus] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 john 1:8)

Jesus presence: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"

Prayer: "I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name" (john 16:23)

Peace: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you." (john 14:27)

Rest: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (matthew 11:28)

Fruitfulness: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing" (john 15:5)

Life direction: "Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [food, drink, clothing] will be given to you as well" (matthew 6:33)

3. Putting our trust in Jesus, 'the way, the truth, the life'

Jesus does not say 'I teach the way and the truth', and 'I *am* the way, the truth and the life'. Illustration of taxi driver at station. He could tell you how to get to a certain destination, or he could take you himself. Illustration of tandem parachuting. Instructor can explain to you how the parachute will work, or he can invite you to grasp onto him (and he will grasp onto you) and jump.

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:11-12

So how can I receive Jesus?

Peter replied, "**Repent** and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. **And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call." Acts 2:38-39

1. TURN TO JESUS AS SAVIOUR: ADMIT that I need a saviour. That I have sinned and I need forgiveness. Be willing to say sorry and to turn from everything that I know is wrong.
[look at the first three questions of the baptism service]

2. SUBMIT TO JESUS AS LORD: BELIEVE that Jesus is the Son of God, and that it is right to obey him and serve him, even when it means doing something I would rather not do.

3. COME TO JESUS:

A PRAYER TO PRAY

Lord Jesus Christ,
I know that I have sinned in my thoughts, words and actions.
There are so many good things I have not done.
There are so many sinful things I have done.
I am sorry for my sins and turn from everything I know to be wrong.

You gave your life upon the cross for me.
Gratefully I give my life back to you.
Now I ask you to come into my life.

Come in as my Saviour to cleanse me.
Come in as my Lord to control me.
Come in as my friend to be with me.
And I will follow you all the remaining days of my life. Amen.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

"With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

*They devoted themselves to the **apostles' teaching**, to the **fellowship**, to the **breaking of bread**, to **prayer.**" (Acts 2:40f)*

Use this as a starter for a discussion about what might happen next.