Steps of Faith

A Bible Study
by Linda Koch

Leader Guide
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This study may be completed as a one-day, two-session activity, or as a two-part study over time. If there are eight or more participating, plan to gather in smaller groups for discussions.

(Please provide attendees with hymnals, Bibles, and a copy of the Bible study.)

Introduction: In this study, we are going to look more closely at this journey of faith we are all traveling. We will search the Scriptures and spend time reflecting on our individual and collective experiences and the journey ahead. Consider that, while it will be different for each of us, we approach this as starting a new trip each day while we explore our “Steps of Faith.”

Session 1

Prayer: We thank You, Heavenly Father, for this opportunity to gather in Your name to study Your Word and learn to follow You in our daily lives. We invite You to be our teacher, opening our eyes, our hearts, and our minds to Your lessons for each of us. We ask You to guide our thoughts and our discussions, so that we honor You throughout our time together. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Discussion: Have you heard this saying, or something similar — “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”? What thoughts or feelings does it bring to mind?

If we think about our faith life as a journey, most will acknowledge we don’t know how long the trip might be or what might happen along the way. We do know we can be confident of our final destination because of the promises of our loving Heavenly Father.
Part I - WHAT ARE FAITH STEPS?
How do we, as Christians, manage to handle some of the difficult situations or choices we often face? Share about a time when you were challenged by something unfamiliar, scary, or even something really good that required you to move forward without knowing the outcome.

(The leader might start with a personal example.)

In your small groups, allow each person three to four minutes to talk about such a challenge. Clearly identify with your group, any part of their story a participant does not want shared with the larger group.

Part II
Discussion: Share the challenges discussed in your group session. Remember, we are focusing on a challenge, an unknown outcome, and how it turned out.

Allow approximately 10 minutes for sharing.

NOTES:

FAITH STEPS IN THE SCRIPTURES
Return to small groups and have each person choose one of the following passages to read. Ask your small group to summarize the challenge and answer the questions below. After the time allotted, or the discussion has ended, call the groups together to share what they discovered in the Bible passages.

Choose one of the following passages and answer questions 1-5 below.
1. Abraham (Abram) — Genesis 12:1-9
2. Miriam — Exodus 2:1-10
3. Israelites — Exodus 14
4. Israelites — Joshua 3
7. Peter — John 21:15-19
8. Philip (and the Ethiopian) — Acts 8:26-40
Questions:
1. What was the challenge faced by the person or people in this Scripture passage?

Abraham (Abram)
   Challenge: at the age of 75, to obey God and step out, leaving his home for an unknown destination

Miriam
   Challenge: to step up, risking punishment by offering to help Pharaoh’s daughter save her brother, Moses, against Pharaoh’s orders

Israelites (Exodus)
   Challenge: to trust God and step into the parted waters, leaving Egypt through danger, or stay in slavery

Israelites (Joshua)
   Challenge: to step forward, trusting God to keep waters stopped to cross Jordan River to the Promised Land

Mary
   Challenge: to step out in faith, accepting the honor and the difficulties of being the mother of God

Samaritan woman
   Challenge: to accept the truth of her sin and the forgiveness from Jesus, and then to step quickly to tell her community about her Savior — including all who scorned her

Peter
   Challenge: to acknowledge his shortcomings, receive Jesus’ love and forgiveness, and continue taking steps to serve and obey Him in spite of the difficulties he would face

Philip (and the Ethiopian)
   Challenge (Philip): to obey the Spirit and run to meet and teach the Ethiopian about God’s Son, and then to baptize him

   Challenge (Ethiopian): to receive the truth of Philip’s teaching and then, in response to that truth, to request being baptized
2. How did the individual respond initially?

Abraham (Abram)  
He gathered his family and household and left his home, trusting God.

Miriam  
She bravely spoke up to offer help for Moses, and cleverly chose their mother to be his nurse.

Israelites (Exodus)  
Although frightened, they all crossed through the water, leaving Egypt behind.

Israelites (Joshua)  
They followed the priests and the Ark of the Covenant across the (dry) river.

Mary  
She asked a very logical question, then submitted willingly to the angel’s message.

Samaritan woman  
She was led to believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah and, in response, boldly and joyfully shared the discovery with her community.

Peter  
Somewhat hesitant, he questioned his fate as compared to that of other disciples.

Philip (and the Ethiopian)  
Philip immediately ran to the Ethiopian, gave him the message, and willingly baptized him. The Ethiopian heard the explanation of the Scripture, asked to know more, then asked to be baptized.
3. Did the response change?
   Encourage answers beyond yes or no.

Abraham (Abram)
   Although he did not always obey God perfectly, he did not waver from that call.

Miriam
   In seeing that Moses was cared for, no, she did not change. See Numbers 12 for her resistance.

Israelites (Exodus)
   Frequently! Rebellion, complaining, resistance — and repentance — for the journey.

Israelites (Joshua)
   The people followed Joshua faithfully for a long time.

Mary
   No, she never wavered from believing the message from God.

Samaritan woman
   Once she knew who Jesus was, she did not change her response.

Peter
   Having received Jesus’ forgiveness, he continued “feeding the sheep” his whole life.

Philip (and the Ethiopian)
   Little more is said in Scripture about either; participants may share opinions.
4. What difference did their response make in their life? Did they affect the life of anyone else at that time?

Abraham (Abram)

By trusting God, he grew in faith and was blessed with family; his response also impacted Sarah, Lot, and their households.

Miriam

Scripture does not show her life immediately following this choice, except that she was able to involve, and therefore bless, her mother, Moses, and the rest of their family.

Israelites (Exodus)

Obvious result — they survived the Egyptian army’s attack; their response also affected Pharaoh and all remaining Egyptians.

Israelites (Joshua)

They received all the blessings that God had promised — land, prosperity, victory. Those living there were also affected — often defeated, enslaved, or killed.

Mary

Accepting God’s plan led her on a difficult journey, but one filled with many blessings. This also affected Joseph, both their families, and their neighbors.

Samaritan woman

She was freed from her guilt and shame, then by sharing her discovery, blessed her whole village, who came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, also.

Peter

In stating his love for Jesus, Peter was strengthened in his faith and was enabled to serve, lead, and teach. As the disciples witnessed this exchange between Peter and Jesus and saw that Peter was restored through Jesus’ forgiveness, they were likely also strengthened in their faith in Christ.

Philip (and the Ethiopian)

Although Scripture does not tell of any further specific results of this meeting, Philip was likely encouraged to continue his mission of sharing Jesus’ Word; the Ethiopian is said to have returned to his country; some credit the start of Christianity there to his witness.
5. What effect did their response to the challenge have on the people of God who followed later (including us and now)?

Abraham (Abram)

In his obedience to God, Abraham was used by God to start and bless the nation of Israel, and through his faith, is known as the father of all who trust in God — including us! (See Romans 4:16).

Miriam

Her watching over her brother allowed for Moses to be educated in the Egyptian ways and prepared for leading the Israelites to God’s promised freedom. She is an example to us of faith.

Israelites (Exodus)

Because they obeyed God through Moses, they finally settled in Canaan. Through them, God showed His power to their offspring, other countries, and leaders. They also were the people through whom God fulfilled His promise of a Savior for all people.

Israelites (Joshua)

Although they prospered in this land, they also made enemies, leading to wars; some rebelled and created further dissent and disobedience, followed by God’s discipline. As we follow the ups and downs in their relationship with God, we can learn much about His faithfulness to us.

Mary

There are so many examples of those impacted by witnessing God’s plan for her! All of Bethlehem, the Magi, Herod, disciples (esp. John) — all who were touched by Jesus. We, too, give thanks for her example of faith through many challenges.

Samaritan woman

Scriptures don’t reveal further direct impacts of her response, but all who read of this encounter learn more about the grace and forgiveness given to all through Jesus.

Peter

His teaching, healing, and preaching blessed many individuals and families; his passion to serve his Lord without regard for himself continues as an example of faith and devotion.

Philip (and the Ethiopian)

There is no further mention of this in Scripture. Allow for some speculation about the growth of Christianity and what impact that may have on people today — both in Ethiopia and in our midst.
Prayer: Dear God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we have been richly blessed by the Word You have given us to guide our steps. Please help us to hold fast to what we have learned, that we may be prepared to apply it to our own lives, and then to share Your Good News with others we encounter on our journey. Keep us in Your care until we gather together for the rest of Your teaching. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.
Prayer: Dear Lord, as we resume our study of walking with You, we give You thanks and praise for today, for Your loving gifts of grace and mercy, and for drawing us back into Your Word. We ask You to be our guide, directing our discussions and opening our hearts and minds to Your truth. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Discussion:

1. When we initially discussed challenges (going places we never expected to go and doing things we never thought we would do), what were some emotions connected with those challenges?
   Answers will vary but may include fear, shyness, lack of control, excitement, anticipation, or a sense of independence.

2. How do you think we overcome emotions like fear, shyness, or lack of a sense of control?
   Answers may include prayer, practice, follow another’s example, taking a first step, or a little at a time.

3. How do other emotions, such as excitement, anticipation, or a sense of independence, affect our choices or responses to challenges?
   Answers may focus on how our response to challenges could be easier if they might lead to a positive impact on life, or that our emotions could prevent us from seeking God’s leading to follow our own preferences.

Read these words from Paul: For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).

4. Did you know God not only created you, but did so with a plan for your life, including “good works” prepared ahead of time for you to do? How does such knowledge make you feel?
   Answers could include being nervous, fearful, honored, excited.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8–9).
5. How does verse 10 relate to the more well-known verses 8 and 9?

*Because of the truths in verses 9–10, we can remain humble and confident, knowing that we are safe in God’s plan, which will be accomplished.*

6. How do the following verses address the stated challenges?

**A. When you are afraid.**

“Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:32, 33).

*Fear can be overcome with the promise that Jesus is stronger than any problems or challenges we have in this world. He Himself found strength in the presence of His Father, who is also our Father.*

**B. When you are alone, weak, or feeling inadequate.**

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

“And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

*He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:7, 8).* 

*Each of these promises of Jesus assures us of His presence, His power, and His help in fulfilling our purpose as we face our fears, limitations, and the challenges of this world.*

**C. When you are speechless (don’t know what to say).**

“And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say” (Luke 12:11, 12).

*As we fully rely on the leading and instruction of God through the Holy Spirit, we will be given both the words and the strength to speak His truths.*
D. When you are unsure of where to go, how to find your way, or what to do.
Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105).

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father … But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:12, 26).

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak and he will declare to you the things that are to come” (John 16:13).

Throughout the Scriptures, God assures us of His guidance, direction, and teaching according to our need.

Consider this list of verses and how they pertain to our walk with God. Choose three verses that have the most meaning for you. Consider committing them to memory so they will always be available to strengthen you in your Faith Steps.

Psalm 86:11  Isaiah 30:21  Isaiah 40:31
Isaiah 50:10  Jeremiah 6:16  Jeremiah 7:23
Micah 6:8     Matthew 14:29  Romans 6:4
Galatians 5:16 Ephesians 4:1 Ephesians 5:2
Colossians 2:6–7 1 John 1:7  2 John 6

All people face challenges of the unknown. We will experience fear, excitement, uncertainty, or a host of other emotions, but we can be certain:

† God has a plan for each of us.

† He will always be with us.

† He will provide strength, wisdom, courage, and the right words at the right time.

7. How do we learn to trust our Heavenly Father as we walk through life?
Certainly, experience is a good teacher. We are also encouraged, as we step up to the challenges in our lives, by the community of faith — those people of God who walk with us, holding us up, sharing our burdens, encouraging and teaching us along the way. But it is most vital that we spend time each day in His Word, which tells us of His faithfulness to His people throughout time, guides us in our daily living, and helps us to more fully abide in Him. We can be sure that wherever our Faith Steps take us, we will never be alone; we can truly step out in faith.
Prayer: Father God, we thank You for this precious time together in Your Word. You have led us to new insights and understanding about how we are to walk through life, trusting in Your plans and Your promises. Now we ask You to help each of us to keep what we have learned fresh in our minds, that we be daily reminded of Your great love for us, shown in the life, death, and resurrection of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. May that knowledge move us to have compassion for all people, and to warmly invite those we meet into Your family, that they would also know You and Your promises of forgiveness, peace, and eternal joy with You. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Bible verses are taken from the ESV translation unless otherwise noted.

The images on the next two pages may be copied, made into bookmarks, and given to participants.
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God’s Word—
A lamp to my feet, a light to my path
(Psalm 119:105)
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