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Getting Started
Hi!

Suppose you want to run a marathon—in New York, say, or in London. You won’t succeed without training. You have to start running at least half a year in advance. Then you’re going to have to start upping the tempo and the distance. And if you’re really going to be serious about it, then maybe you’ll even need to change your diet, to give up those yummy French fries and those irresistible chocolate bars. The reward you get for your effort is the feeling of how, week by week, your body starts to feel finer and fitter. Then finally the day of the race arrives. Others are soon gasping for breath, but you seem to have all the energy you need and find yourself well to the front of the field.

It’s a little bit like that with this Confirmation course that you have started on. Here, too, you need to start at least half a year beforehand in order to be really geared up for a very big event. Maybe you’re saying to yourself now: “What, run a marathon—that would be crazy! But Confirmation—I’ll get that anyway, so why make more effort than I have to? Okay, so let’s make the comparison:

**Marathon and Confirmation**

With a marathon it’s your physical strength that is being tested

In a marathon you draw on your own reserves of strength

A marathon increases your self-confidence as a person

In Confirmation it’s important to prepare your soul, your inner self

In Confirmation you take divine power into yourself (on which you can later draw)

In Confirmation God himself affirms your identity as his beloved child and co-worker
Obviously, you can’t really compare running a marathon with receiving Confirmation. You can choose to run a marathon, or you can choose not to. And the truth is, it doesn’t matter in the least whether you ran in London or New York, whether you came in 1st or 577th or last of all—or, in fact, whether you even ever ran a marathon in the first place.

But not to seek God even though you know that he exists—that is simply crazy! Completely wrong! And that’s the point of Confirmation: You have a unique opportunity to discover God, to open your heart to him, and to let him come right up close to you.

Fully wired for power

Have you heard of Mother Teresa? She was a great holy woman who gave her life to the poorest of the poor and did not shrink from tenderly nursing beggars and outcasts, even the infectious, diseased, and dying ones. Whenever she had a spare moment of time, on a train or a plane maybe, she would snatch up a scrap of paper and, in her wobbly handwriting, scribble down a few important things about God, things from which we can learn a lot.

This is the note she once made (she didn’t write “Confirmation” at the top, but that’s exactly what she meant):

Often you can see power lines running alongside the street. Unless current is flowing through them, there is no light. The power line is you and I! The current is God! We have the power either to allow the current to flow through us and thus to generate the light of the world: JESUS—or to refuse to be used and thus to allow the darkness to spread.
Five powerful sentences. All you need to know ... Read them over three times! Or five times! Or ten times! If you have completely understood them, then you can ring up your bishop this very moment and say, “Please confirm me! Immediately! I have understood everything!” But maybe that would be a bit like ringing up your trainer and telling him, “I’ve figured out the secret of the marathon. Put my name down for New York right away!” Your trainer would probably turn around and laugh and then ask: “So how many races have you actually run? How many miles have you run so far?” And you would have to answer, “Well, none, actually ...” You would feel a fool; in fact, you might even lose heart and give up on your great dream. In reality, of course, every big journey begins with the first step. If you want to become a professional marathon runner, then you’d better get your running shoes out of the basement tonight and set your alarm for early tomorrow morning. Otherwise it will never happen.

Do you want to feel the power of God within you?
It’s the same with Confirmation. Is the current flowing within you? Do you have an intense connection with God? Or do you believe it isn’t possible? Do you maybe feel at the moment more like a length of dead cable, lying there with no current passing through it? Do you long to be a channel through which divine Love can flow? Do you want to feel the power of God within you? Do you want to live a strong and worthwhile life? Did you ever have the feeling of being very close to God, of being very near, very loved, protected, carried, led? Or maybe you have to admit to yourself, in all honesty: I feel a great emptiness inside; right now I can’t really say I’ve got that much power running through me ...
Okay, we can all be like religious couch potatoes sometimes; we can hang around aimlessly, sit there complaining, chill out endlessly. We can sit there at our laptop and kid ourselves that we don’t feel that inner emptiness. We can let ourselves be willingly enslaved, stay up till the wee small hours with our noses stuck to the screen, watch bad films, get hooked on computer games, drag like an addict at a cigarette, or spend our lives like some sort of outgrowth of Facebook.

But that is not what God has made us for.

God—as your Coach

God wants us to be strong, proud, and free, no one’s slave, but God’s alone, glowing with an inner light, loving, warmhearted, attentive, and creative; fighters for good and resistance fighters against the whisperings of Satan, watchful guardians of an endangered creation, faithful friends to the poor and persecuted, and more, and more, and more ... 

Does that take your breath away?

If you really want to have a life of strength like that, if you want this for yourself, if you want it with God’s help, then all I can say is:
What a training schedule! You are ready to start on the road to your Confirmation. But you need to be aware that a marathon is child’s play in comparison.

The aim of this book is to be your coach and go with you right up to the big day of your Confirmation. You’ll find many tips in it for leading an exciting life with God, but above all you’ll find lots of sidebars pointing you to two books you’ll be constantly using during this course—the BIBLE and YOUCAT.

1.5 The Bible and YOUCAT

Of the two books, the Bible is by far the more important, for it is “God’s Word”. Sure, the Bible, too, was written by men, but these were men filled with the Holy Spirit. “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ,” says St. Jerome, and St. Francis of Assisi adds, “Reading the Holy Scriptures is seeking advice from Christ.”

YOUCAT is the youth catechism of the Catholic Church—basically something like a down-to-earth handbook of our faith. Take a moment to read the challenging foreword to this book, by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, in which he speaks directly to young people like you. He tells you there:

You need to know what you believe. You need to know your faith with that same precision with which an IT specialist knows the inner workings of a computer. You need to understand it like a good musician knows the piece he is playing.

The great thing about YOUCAT is that this youth catechism was written in collaboration with a group of around 50 young people aged between 15 and 25. They were able to introduce their own questions; they also contributed the best of their own photos and wanted to have cartoon characters in the book. It was these young people who also came up with the crazy flipbook idea. Try it out some time! Or read up on what
Confirmation has to do with a football match, and faith with parachute jumping.

1.6 Four steps—the training plan

Right, then, now for the training program! It’s a demanding one, but then, as you know: no pain, no gain ... Just stick to the “four steps” below, which will help you immensely to advance in your training for a life with God.

1 Stay with the course

Don’t miss a single session of your Confirmation course! After all, you wouldn’t miss a training session if you wanted to run the New York Marathon, would you?

2 Try to stay close to God

Go to Holy Mass every Sunday! Don’t miss. Ever. Come rain, come shine. Whether you had a party the night before, or need your brunch on Sunday morning. Holy Mass is a date with God. Unless you are very sick, that’s something you don’t miss.

3 Talk to God

The bedside rule. That is: in the morning don’t go beyond the bedside without saying morning prayers; and at night time don’t go beyond the bedside without saying your night-time prayers. No one can build a relationship with God without talking to him—and prayer is nothing else than this. Most important of all is the OUR FATHER, but the HAIL MARY is important, too. And look in the Bible sometime for the Psalms—they are some of the most beautiful prayers ever written. Take time for your own prayers, too; talk to God straight from the heart.
Listen to God’s Word

See to it that you get hold of a Bible! Perhaps you can ask for a nice copy as a present. The Bible is a bit like a rather long letter from God to you. Try and read a little of it regularly, perhaps during your vacation. It’s best to start with the New Testament, with the Gospels. Try and understand what God is saying to you through his Word.

Phew, that’s enough to start with. And now, all the best with your YOUCAT Confirmation course!

On behalf of the YOUCAT team,

Nils Baer and Bernhard Meuser

In the margin you will find numerous references to the numbered questions in YOUCAT. Have a copy at hand and look up the references if you find anything not quite clear. You’ll also find references to important Bible verses, which you can likewise look up in the Bible. Usually it’s very important to check the context, what comes before and after.
HE EXISTS? HE DOESN’T EXIST?…

What We Can Know about God
2.1 Why many people don’t want to know about God
No doubt some people have already told you:

GOD doesn’t exist! God is merely an invention.

Many people have a strange interest in saying that God does not exist. Why are they so aggressive toward God, wanting everything that reminds us of him to disappear from the world? Surely, it should be a matter of total indifference to them? Perhaps they don’t want to know about God because then they would have to change their lives completely. If God does exist, if God is absolute goodness and desires nothing else but goodness, then it is absolutely impossible to lie, to commit adultery, take drugs, cheat others, and regard ourselves as the center of the universe. That is, it is impossible to do these things without ultimately having to face the consequences of such actions.

Again, many people call themselves atheists simply because they think it is more cool to be, so to speak, their own “god” and to decide for themselves what is good and bad. But someone who puts his own ego at the center of everything is simply an egotist.

We have all met such egotists from time to time, and they tend to be rather unpleasant people. Such people are implicitly atheists, for it is clear that in their world view there can be no one bigger, better, cleverer, more beautiful, or more deserving than they are themselves.
And what if I can’t find God?

But there are also people who are by no means egotistical and yet still do not believe in God. They often say, I can’t find God; he is nowhere to be found. Perhaps it would help them to stop and think very carefully. It is a matter of logic—and for this we need to engage our little gray brain cells, and engage them 100% (hence the following page is only for people who can really think straight):

1. Everything we see in the universe has a cause, a reason it exists. I exist because my parents gave life to me. The rocky cliffs on the coast exist because of movements in the earth’s crust over millions of years that caused the land to be raised higher than the sea. For each thing we see around us, there must be something else that gave rise to it.

2. The universe (the totality of things and beings existing in space and time) also exists.

3. Hence there must necessarily be something that is the cause/the reason for the existence of the universe. It would be totally illogical to assume that the mouse, the ocean, and the stars all have a cause for their existence but that the universe does not have such a cause. Even the universe as a whole cannot exist “without cause”.

4. The cause or reason for the universe as a whole must, however, be greater than, and above all entirely different from,
the universe itself and everything within it. What has brought forth both space and time cannot itself be a part of space and time.

5. This “something” that is greater than everything in the world and that must necessarily exist, since otherwise the universe itself would be without cause, we call **GOD.**

2.3 **The miracle of the little grain of sand**

**TEST IT** for yourself: Try for a moment to imagine “nothing”—in other words, absolute nothingness, not even a kind of darkness or a great emptiness—no: really, absolutely, nothing. Nothing, nothing, nothing! Not even thinking. Simply nothing.

Bet you don’t succeed! The philosopher Leibniz once said that there is only one great question in the world:

**Why is there anything at all, and not simply nothing?**

- The fact is, the one thing we actually simply cannot imagine—namely, nothing—is the one thing that should be self-evident. The normal thing to assume would be that there is simply nothing, and there’s an end to it!
- But in fact there is something. We know this with absolute certainty. And even if there were only a single tiny grain of sand and nothing else—even that would be an incredible miracle. For one single tiny grain of sand alone would destroy “nothingness”.
- There must be someone there who has uttered his great “Yes” to everything that exists, who has willed that “something” should exist and not “nothing” instead.
- We Christians call this “Someone”, who has created the universe out of nothing, God.
- And we say that God is the **CREATOR** of the world.
However, we must not imagine the Creator as someone who in the beginning made all things with a snap of his fingers and then sat back and rested. It was not only in the beginning that God spoke his great “Yes” to the world. He does so still, in every millisecond. Forever, until the end of the world, he continues to speak his great yes-world-I-will-that-you-exist.

Without God’s “Yes”, which he speaks in this very second while you are reading these words, the universe with all its Milky Ways and solar systems would instantly sink into nothingness—just as though someone had switched off the projector and the film was over.

— Pope Benedict XVI
April 24, 2005
The end of the little gray brain cells  
How can we actually know anything at all about God?

In order to know the fact of God’s existence, our little gray brain cells are enough. To know that God must exist, one does not need much more than a logical mind. The idea of a world in which everything has a reason except for the world itself must strike any reasonable person as nonsense.

But of course we would like to know more about this mysterious being without whom EVERYTHING would be NOTHING.

Who is this God, then? What is his relationship toward what he has created? What is God himself like? Is God perhaps cold and cruel? Is he without feelings, like a machine? Or is he perhaps full of love?

Of himself, man can give no answer to these questions. Not even the greatest philosophers and thinkers can do so. Not Aristotle, not Plato, not Kant, not Hegel. And anyone who claims to be able to know what God himself is like is either nuts or a fraud.

What? So do we humans have no chance of knowing whether the ultimate cause of the universe is good or evil? Whether we can trust in the Creator of the world because he is good? Or whether we have been thrust into this world by a cruel tyrant, who simply toys with us, only to utterly annihilate us tomorrow or the day after?

But there is such a possibility. God could decide to communicate with us. We call this REVELATION. In what way could he do this? Perhaps like this:

🔥 He might write in giant letters of flame along the horizon: “I do exist. And actually I am nice. God.”
He might announce divine news bulletins, ringing out over the world in a voice of thunder: “Today I have decided ... etc.,” or: “The next news bulletin from me will be on Wednesday. God.”

Think for a moment about the word **REVELATION**. It’s a bit like when you fall in love. You know nothing about the boy or girl of your dreams until you suddenly click and one of you says to the other, “Do you know, I’ve fallen totally in love with you!” You may have watched each other and had your eye on each other—or you may even have read books about men and women and the meaning of love. But you know nothing! What counts is the moment when the other person REVEALS himself to you. He has to open his heart and say those amazing words: “All this time I have longed for nothing else but your love!”

Actually, God has revealed (or shown) himself to mankind in many different ways—sometimes as mighty and powerful (in natural events or in the fate of entire nations), and sometimes as quiet and gentle, in the way God touches an individual human heart. The amazing thing is that God really wants to talk to you and to me as though we were the only people in the world—and the most important.

If we have understood this and choose to listen to God’s voice, then that is **what we call faith**.

God shows himself to me. I hear God’s voice—and I respond:

“There you are, my Lord and my God. Thank you for seeing me and speaking within me. I **BELIEVE** in you. Lead me and guide me. Bless my life and the life of every person.”

When a person recognizes the God who reveals himself, when he believes in him and responds to him in his heart, then that is what we call **PRAYER**.

**A God who reveals himself, and a book like no other**

God has to reveal himself so that we can understand...
more about him. And that is exactly what HE does. The eternal, Almighty God, who is unfathomable to us men, actually did (and does) emerge from his silence. HE reveals himself. God even lays bare something of his innermost thoughts. He allows us to look into his very Heart—if one can speak of God in such terms. That is what happens in your life and in the lives of all those who listen in prayer to the voice of God and who seek and have sought for the footsteps of God in their lives. And we aren’t starting from scratch in this.

The **BIBLE** is the book where you can read how God first showed himself in the history of the people of Israel, how he revealed himself little by little to mankind, until in Jesus he gave expression to the most profound truth about himself—that is to say, how immense his divine love is.

For long ages men had only vague notions about God or the gods. Entire nations imagined God to be a being to whom they even had to offer human sacrifices in order to gain his favor. Only in the life of the people of Israel does it become clear that God is no many-headed monster of whom they must live permanently in fear. The truth that there is only one God, that he is good and faithful to those who trust in him, has been revealed in the lives of many individual men and women—mothers, fathers, children, prophets, kings, and saints. Abraham encounters God beneath the starry sky, while Moses encounters him in the burning thorn bush. You know the stories.

All these experiences of God’s presence were written down—in an unbelievably colorful and rich book. Pope Benedict XVI once compared the **BIBLE** to a garden, a bright and wonderfully beautiful garden in which the most profound insights about God appear like exquisite flowers. If we read the **BIBLE** and stay in touch with God as we do so, then “it is as if we were to find ourselves strolling in the garden of the Holy Spirit”, the Pope said. “We talk to him and he talks to us.”