

## **Back To Basics Part 1**

Today we begin our month long emphasis on getting back to the basics. If something is basic we are talking about the fundamental, essential thing on which all else is built. In all aspects of our life we have to start with the basics, the fundamentals. If you have a newborn son or daughter and you decide you want them to be an Olympic pole-vaulter when they grow up, you don't start by teaching them to pole-vault, you start by teaching them to walk. You start with the basics. If you want your child to write the great American novel when they grow up, you don't start by giving them a computer keyboard to bang on, hoping random strikes will produce a masterpiece, you start with the basics. You teach them the alphabet. You want to be a classical pianist you don't start with Chopin's Revolutionary Etude, you start with "this is middle C and this is called a scale." Everyone, in every discipline must start with the basics. The same thing applies to our spiritual walk with the Lord, what we call Christian discipleship. The basics.

I want to be a Christian. It starts with salvation. I acknowledge that all have sinned and I am included in that "all." I acknowledge that before God I can't save myself. Morally, ethically, spiritually, I am broken and my sins separate me from a holy and righteous God. The bible says the soul that sins must die. Because of my sin I am subject to the wrath of God. Because God is holy and righteous and just, my sin had to be punished, but because God is merciful and gracious he provided a substitute to take my place and bear my punishment. God came in flesh in Jesus, lived a sinless life which qualified him as the sinless, perfect substitute for my sins. He died on the cross in my place, bearing my sin and God's judgment against my sin. He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven where he is able to grant forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who will trust in him for salvation. Confess your sins to God. Turn from your sin to Jesus and believe in your heart that Jesus took your place and died for you and rose again and you will be saved by his grace. That is the basics of salvation. I'm saved through my faith and trust in Jesus and his saving grace, but now what? I want to grow in that grace. I want to grow in my relationship with Christ. How do I do that? We call that discipleship. **Discipleship means we embrace the basic disciplines of the faith that assist us in becoming mature followers of Christ.** What are those basic disciplines? That's what this series is about. Here is the first. **Back to Basics: Read The Bible!**

Let's get real basic. The word "bible" means "book." It is one book made of a collection of sixty-six books. We call it the bible, the word of God, the Scripture. Our bible consists of two

divisions: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word testament means treaty or covenant. The Old Testament focuses on God's dealings with Israel with whom he entered into a covenant. The New Testament was written much later and focuses on Jesus and his followers and the new covenant God makes with anyone who will receive Jesus as their Savior and commit to living for him.

The Old Testament consists of 39 books. Some are named for their author, like the book of Daniel. Some are named for the main character, like the book of Joshua or the book of Esther. Some are named for the story they tell. Exodus tells the story of the Israelite's exit ("exodus") from Egypt after 400 years. The book of Kings and Chronicles tells the story of Israel's kings. Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew with some parts written in a language related to Hebrew known as Aramaic.

The New Testament consists of 27 books. Some are also named for their author like the gospels. Some are named for their content like the Acts of the apostles. Many of the New Testament books are letters addressed to believers in certain cities and are named for the group who first read the letter like Ephesians (Ephesus), Corinthians (Corinth), etc. The New Testament was originally written in Greek in a form or vernacular that was considered the "common" Greek, the everyday language spoken on the street.

There are no original copies of the manuscripts penned by the biblical authors but there are several thousand different copies of the ancient manuscripts. We have fragments and pieces of the New Testament that can be dated to within 150 years of the writing of the New Testament. Just for the sake of comparison, "the earliest surviving copies of the dialogues of Plato date from 1,300 years after their original writing." (*The Bible For Blockheads*). Among all those handwritten copies there are very few differences or discrepancies and none of the teachings of the bible or doctrines are affected by any variation in the text.

When bibles began to be printed on a printing press around 1550, chapters and verses were added to make it easier to find a particular scripture passage. Prior to that, it was just unbroken text. So if I say, turn to **Luke 6:6**, you know to turn to the New Testament book called Luke, chapter 6 and verse 6. If I say look at **Luke 6:6-11**, you know we are looking at verses 6 through verse 11.

Why do we make such a big deal about the bible and about reading the bible. We believe the bible to be the Word of God. The Assemblies of God in our statement of fundamental truths

declares, **“The Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, are verbally inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man. They are the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct for the believer.”**

The bible, this collection of sixty-six books, written by some forty different authors over a 1600 year time span miraculously weaves together the story of man’s fall and God’s redemption in the world. It consists of various types of writing from history to poetry, to letters to prophecy. But understand, it is not just a book written by men, it is a book written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Proof of that includes hundreds of prophecies that have been exactly, precisely fulfilled and millions of lives changed as people read and received the word of God.

We define inspiration as the power the Holy Spirit brought on the authors of the bible, guiding them in what to say and how to say it, even to the very words they used and to preserve their words from all error and omission. Inspiration is a miracle so we can’t understand it all. We know the writers of the Scripture weren’t like secretaries taking dictation. The Holy Spirit used the individual personalities and experiences of the writers, but the writers wrote exactly and precisely what God wanted them to write. **We believe the bible not only contains the word of God but it is the word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit.** “This book is alive.”

The bible says **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16** Not all of the bible is of equal importance to our soul (for instance the genealogy) but each part has the same inspiration and is useful.

**Why should we read the bible and why should we trust the bible?** We just read a really good answer to the first part of the question. The word of God, the bible, teaches us, rebukes and corrects and trains us in righteousness so we can be mature followers of Christ. Remember, that is our goal in discipleship. In fact, Jesus said, **“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” John 8:31-32.** By reading, studying and obeying the word of God (that’s what holding to his teaching is all about) we will truly be disciples of the Lord - mature followers of Christ. We will know the truth because God’s word is truth and it will set us free. We will be more like Christ.

Why should we read the bible and why should we trust it? Jesus did! Jesus read and trusted the Old Testament which was of course the Scripture he had. As a Jewish boy he studied the Scripture from the time he could first read the word or even hear it being read to him. **Jesus**

**accepted the Old Testament Scriptures as being the word of his Father and the ultimate authority.** He obeyed the word. He quoted the word of God in response to the devil's temptation. He quoted the Scripture in response to the questions of the people and the elders of Israel. Jesus resolved questions of doctrine and ethics on the basis of the Scripture. "The word of God says...Moses says...etc." Jesus read, studied, memorized, lived and obeyed the word of God. If he trusted the Old Testament Scripture as being the Word of God, so should we.

But what about the New Testament? Why should we read the New Testament and why should we trust it? Because **Jesus made provision for the writing of the New Testament.** Jesus called, equipped, empowered and inspired the New Testament writers. In Jesus' prayer in John 17 he prays not only for his disciples but, **"I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message..." John 17:20** How could we believe in him through the message of the disciples now in 2015 if it hadn't been written down? Jesus made provision for the New Testament.

Can we trust the reliability of the New Testament? Certainly. The same Holy Spirit oversaw and inspired the writing of the New Testament. The Gospel writers themselves were either eye-witnesses or they depended upon eye-witnesses in telling the story, the miracles and the teachings of Jesus. The consensus of the church from the beginning has been the New Testament as well as the Old Testament are in fact the written word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Why should we read the Bible? Because it is the revelation of God to man and the authoritative rule of faith and conduct for the believer. Because by reading God's word and meditating on it we learn what God desires and expects from us. We learn how to live as God calls us to live. As we read and study God's word, we realize the importance of submitting our lives to the authority of Christ and the Scripture. Our conscience is formed and informed by the word of God. We learn right and wrong, what to do and not to do from reading God's word. J. I. Packer wrote, **"The one who trusts the Bible knows what God did, does, and will do, what God commands and what God promises."** **J. I. Packer**

Psalms 119 says, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word....I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Strengthen me according to your word...Your commands make me wiser than my enemies for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers for I meditate on your statutes.... I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path. Your word is a lamp to my

feet and a light for my path.” Psalm 119 The list of reasons for reading and studying God’s word can go on and on. His word keeps us from error, from compromise, it guards our mind, our conscience, our choices. We need to read God’s word.

**How do we read the bible?** Let me wrap this up by talking about how to read and study the bible. It’s a big book. Mine has 1094 pages so it can be a little intimidating to pick it up. Where do I start reading? We think of reading a book from cover to cover and that is a fine idea. However, it may not be the best way to tackle the bible if you haven’t read any of it before. If you haven’t been a bible reader, start with one of the gospels in the New Testament. Mark is the shortest one so start there if you like. Get a translation of the bible you can understand. King James is beautiful but it might be difficult to understand the language. The NIV is the most popular around but there are plenty of other translations.

I know, you think reading the bible is boring. Well, don’t try to tackle a big chunk. Don’t just read to check off the bible reading list. Read to learn. Study the passage so you can gain insight and hear from God. Dig a little and ask questions as you read. **What? Who? Where? When? Why? How?** Ask yourself:

What is happening here? What is happening in this portion of Scripture? What is the author writing about? Who? Who is involved in this passage? Where? Where is this taking place? Understanding the geographical location can help you understand the passage of Scripture. You probably have maps in the back of your bible to help you. When? When is this happening? At what time in history, or in the life of the person in the passage? Bear in mind that the bible is not written in a chronological order. It doesn’t necessarily run from first to last, particularly in the Old Testament. Why? Why is this in the Scripture? Why does the writer, why does the Lord want us to know this? Finally, ask how? How do I apply this to my life?

Find time every day to read and study the bible, even if that’s five minutes or 15 minutes or whatever you can manage. Get into the habit of reading and studying God’s word. Read with a notepad. Take notes. Write down questions, insights, thoughts to meditate on.

**Read prayerfully.** Pray and ask the Lord to guide your study, to give you insight, direction and guidance. Remember the disciples on the road to Emmaus after Jesus’ resurrection? Jesus walked with them and explained the Scriptures to them concerning the Messiah. They said, **“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” Luke 24:32.** Pray that the Lord will open the Scriptures to you and give you

understanding.

**Read thoughtfully.** As we said, read and study the Scripture. Take time to really think and meditate on God's word. Ask the questions we mentioned. Do your own research. There are plenty of good bible study resources available. Buy a good study bible with built in helps. Take time to look up some of the verses I reference in the messages or that Pastor Brian shares in New Community on Wednesday. Do a deeper study. Paul said to Timothy, **"Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this."** 2 Timothy 2:7

I know a lot of us just use the "open and hunt" method of bible reading. Open the bible and hope something stands out. That might be okay on a busy morning, but you need to read and give some thought to the word of God. What does this mean? What did it mean to the first century folks that heard or read it? What does it mean in the broader context of the Scripture? What does it mean to me personally today? Pray, think, ponder, meditate, reflect on God's word.

**Read obediently.** In other words, read with the intent to obey what God says in his word. There is not much point in reading the bible if you plan to ignore what it says or refuse to put it into practice. The bible tells us to be doers of the word and not just hearers of the word. Jesus said, **"Therefore anyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against that house yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock."** Matthew 7:24-25. The storms of life are going to come, but if you read and study God's word, if you hide God's word in your heart and put God's word into practice, those storms cannot and will not defeat you!

If I told you there was a book you could purchase that showed you the way to heaven, that offered you the gift of eternal life, wouldn't you want to buy it? Wouldn't you want to read it? If I said this one book provides the steps to a successful, meaningful life, wouldn't you want to own it. This is the book. It is alive. Read it, obey it and you will never be the same.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church said, **"I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air...just hovering over the great gulf till...I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing, the way to heaven...God himself has ...written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me...Lord, let me know thy will."**  
...John Wesley

This book is not just idle words. This is the word of God, the way to heaven, written down for us. He has given us the book. **Let's get back to the basics. The bible. Read it. Obey it. Live it!**