



FOUNDATIONS

of Spiritual Life

Week 1 – Finding Direction

A Place to Begin

1. What kind of church background do you have?
2. In what ways do you think your church background has helped or hindered you in developing genuine spiritual life?
3. What sources do you look to for guidance as you make decisions?

Thoughts to Consider

Have you ever purchased something that needed assembly, but didn't come with any instructions? Just when you think you're about finished you inevitably realize that there's some crucial part that you've left out. Many of us have gone through life without any clear direction and guidance, but doesn't it make sense that our Creator would give us something to go on.

The Bible is God's revelation to us, but it's not laid out in the form of an owner's manual. The Bible is a collection of writings from at least 40 different human authors who lived over a span of about 1,500 years. Some of the writing is historical; some is poetic. Much of the New Testament even consists of letters written to local churches and Christian leaders. There are a total of 39 books in the Old Testament written before Jesus Christ lived and 27 books in the New Testament all written within 70 years of Jesus' death and resurrection. When we cite sections from the Bible we do so by indicating the book name followed by the chapter and then the verse.

What unites these various writings is that God worked through the various authors so that their words are what God Himself wanted to communicate. The Apostle Paul expressed this conviction when he said, "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 3:16-17 NIV). In other words, God has given us the Bible to be the guidance that we so desperately need to fit our lives together.

A Scripture Passage to Read: Psalm 19

One of the ways we develop our understanding of the Bible is to see what the Bible has to say about itself. The words from 2 Timothy 3:16-17 quoted above are a good example of this. Another helpful section of Scripture is the 19th Psalm. The Psalms found in the Old Testament are prayers that were originally sung to God. Many of them date back to the time of King David of Israel around 1,000 B.C. In this particular psalm David speaks of how God reveals Himself to us. Take some time to read through it and reflect on it before moving on to the questions that follow.

Questions to Ponder

1. Psalm 19:1-6 speaks of how God is revealed in His creation. What observations can you make about God as you consider the world that He has created?

2. What do you think are some weaknesses of drawing our understanding of God from what we see in nature?

3. In Psalm 19:7-9 David used six different words to refer to the Bible. They are listed below along with variations that are used in various Bible translations. Each word gives us a slightly different perspective on the Bible. What do you think of when you read each of these words?

Law –

Testimony or Statutes –

Precepts or Statutes –

Commandment or Commands –

Fear –

Judgments, Ordinances, or Rules –

4. In these same verses David lists six different ways that the Bible helps us. Which one of these do you most need in your own life right now? Why?

5. In Psalm 19:10-14, David expressed his desire to follow God's instruction in the Bible. On a scale of 0 to 10, where would you place your own desire to follow biblical teaching?

6. What are some practical ways that we can develop our understanding of the Bible?

**Read the introduction and section on the Scriptures in the Calvary East Statement of Faith



FOUNDATIONS *of Spiritual Life*

Week 2 – Living by Faith

A Place to Begin

1. What circumstances have you faced in your life that have caused you to become anxious or worried?

2. What are some ways that you try to cope when you feel worried?

Thoughts to Consider

Have you ever noticed that when things are going wrong in people's lives they often blame God? Even those who aren't religious ask how God could allow such bad things to happen. On the other hand, when things are going well, we tend to take the credit ourselves. Doesn't this strike you as being inconsistent?

Last week we saw that the existence of God can be observed as we consider the world around us. We even get some sense of His power and beauty. Nature, however, doesn't tell us whether God is concerned or involved in the affairs of our lives. To understand God we must look to the Bible.

The Apostle Paul answered this question well on one occasion when he was speaking to a group of philosophers in the city of Athens. He said, "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring'" (Acts 17:24-28 NIV).

This week we want to explore more about who God is and how we can relate to Him. He didn't just start the universe and retire. He is actively involved and He invites us to believe and to seek after Him.

A Scripture Passage to Read: Isaiah 40

The Bible tells us that the nation of Israel was given a special purpose in God's plans. To keep Israel on track with that purpose, God gave them prophets who spoke His messages to the nation and its leaders. This week we look to a section of Scripture from the Old Testament that was written around 722 B.C. by an Israelite prophet named Isaiah. In chapters 36-39 of the book of Isaiah, the prophet recounts a time when Judah, the southern part of Israel, was attacked by the powerful Assyrian Empire. The northern part of the nation had already been conquered. In chapter 40, Isaiah records the prophecy God gave him to encourage the people in Jerusalem, the capitol city of Judah. Isaiah 40 is a rich chapter that describes God with vivid imagery, so take time to read it and reflect upon it.

Questions to Ponder

1. In Isaiah 40:1-11 the prophet looks ahead to a time when God will come and bring peace. What character qualities of God can you identify in these verses?
2. Isaiah 40:12-17 presents God in very powerful, almost frightening terms. Nevertheless, the point of the prophecy is to comfort and encourage. What encouragement can we draw from this description of God?
3. In Isaiah 40:18-26 the prophet confronts our tendency to think that God is just like us, or even worse like a man-made statue. Based on the description of God in these verses, how is God like us and how does He differ from us?
4. Isaiah 40:27-31 speaks directly to God's involvement with people. Based upon these verses, how can we relate to God?
5. In Isaiah 37:14-20, Isaiah tells us how Hezekiah, king of Judah, responded to a threatening letter from the Assyrian commander. Take a moment to read these verses. How did Hezekiah's faith in God help him when he was faced with trouble?
6. How has prayer been a part of your life thus far? In what other ways might you incorporate prayer into your life moving forward?

**Read section 2 of the Calvary East Statement of Faith



FOUNDATIONS *of Spiritual Life*

Week 3 – Looking in the Mirror

A Place to Begin

We were all taught standards of right and wrong as we were growing up. What standards were emphasized in your upbringing?

Thoughts to Consider

There is a unique satisfaction we experience when we create something. Some of us build. Others bake. Some do crafts or make works of art, while others write. Our ability to create is a gift from God that helps us understand Him better. Think about how you feel when something you have made is ruined or damaged.

In Genesis 1:27 we are told that, “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” Human beings hold a unique position in God’s creation. He gave us the ability to think and make decisions. We can make choices that reflect a love for God and a desire to follow His directions. On the other hand, we can also choose to reject God’s biblical direction for our lives.

The story of the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, is recorded in Genesis 2 and 3. God only gave them one restriction, yet they chose to violate it. Up until that point they lived in a perfect relationship with God, but their sin damaged that relationship. Sin introduced a barrier between human beings and God that both grieves and offends our Creator. As a result of that first sin, Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Sin spoils us.

The Bible unfolds for us God’s amazing plan to restore us to a right relationship with Him. We will not truly appreciate the incredible kindness of this salvation plan, however, until we see how far short we individually fall.

A Scripture Passage to Read: Exodus 20:1-17

One of the most concise and memorable statements of God’s standards for His creatures is found in the Ten Commandments. As we said last week, the nation of Israel played a special role in God’s purposes. At one point early in their history, the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt. When God rescued them, he gave them laws to guide them as a nation. By obeying these laws the Israelites were supposed to show others what it would look like for a whole nation to follow God. The Ten Commandments were the summary of these laws. They were not just a random list to check off. They formed a picture of how God intended for people to relate to Him and to one another. Sadly, the Israelites failed time and time again. As we reflect on the commandments, they act like a mirror in which we see ourselves from God’s perspective.

Questions to Ponder

1. We live in a society that is generally secular. Most of us are not tempted to worship other deities as the Israelites were. So how do you think people today violate the spirit of the first two commandments (vv. 3-6)?
2. The Third Commandment (v. 7) addressed the practice of using God as a witness while taking an oath or making a vow. This seems to have been a common part of every day life for the Israelites, but today we only speak this way on rare occasions. When do we “take the Lord’s name” whether rightly or wrongly? Why do you think it is so important to God that we not do this lightly?
3. The commandment regarding the Sabbath (vv. 8-11) seems to be easy enough. Why do you think God included this?
4. In Matthew 5:21-30, Jesus explained the Sixth and Seventh Commandments. Take time to read Jesus’ explanation. How does Jesus look at God’s commands?
5. Take some time to evaluate your own life in light of the commandments. How many have you kept? How many have you kept when you take into account Jesus’ way of looking at the commandments?
6. 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Perhaps God has brought to your mind sins that you need to confess to Him. Why do you think people resist admitting their sins? How can we incorporate confession into our life on a regular basis?

** Read Section 5 in the Calvary East Statement of Faith



FOUNDATIONS *of Spiritual Life*

Week 4 – Receiving the Gift

A Place to Begin

Some of us easily trust people. Others of us like to know all the facts and do everything ourselves. How would you describe your own personality? Can you think of any examples of how this comes out in your life?

Thoughts to Consider

One of the big stresses most of us face today is the burden of carrying financial debt. When we're in a store looking at something we want, it's so easy to make a purchase without thinking through how long we will end up paying for it. The same is true with the moral choices that we make.

When we sin, we incur spiritual debt. Exodus 34:6 tells us that God "forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished." How can God forgive, yet still remain totally just? Someone has to take the punishment for our sins.

God's solution to this dilemma was to send his own Son to become a man and take the punishment that we deserve. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "He [God] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf." Jesus suffered and died so that the debt for all of our sins, past and future, could be paid in full.

Jesus is the only person who could pay for our sins. All other people have been sinful, but Hebrews 4:15 tells us that though Jesus faced temptation, he never sinned. He was a perfectly righteous man. At the same time, he was more than a man. In some mysterious way, the one God of the Bible exists as three separate persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Philippians 2:6-8 tells us that Jesus existed in the form of God, yet became a man so that he could bear the punishment for our sins.

Jesus' payment for our sins is an infinitely valuable gift. It is the only way for us to have a relationship with God. It is the only way for us to escape God's punishment. Yet like any other gift, it is not ours until we accept it. To receive the gift of salvation and eternal life, we must confess our sin to God and believe in Jesus Christ.

A Scripture Passage to Read: Ephesians 2

Scholars date the birth of Jesus to around 4 B.C. Most of his life was lived in obscurity, but his public ministry lasted from A.D. 27 to 30 when he was crucified. At first the followers of Jesus passed down accounts of his life and teaching by word of mouth. In time, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote their accounts of Jesus' life and teaching. While this was going on, more and more people were coming to believe in Jesus—many of them through the teaching of Paul, a Jewish man who had initially rejected Jesus and persecuted Christians. Paul began to believe in Jesus through a dramatic encounter in which Jesus appeared to him (Acts 9:1-30). Paul became a passionate follower of Jesus who worked to establish new churches throughout the Roman Empire. Ephesians is a letter that Paul wrote to churches in and around the city of Ephesus. It contains very clear teaching about the Christian life. Chapter 2 will help us understand more about the concept of salvation described above.

Questions to Ponder

1. Make a list of the different ways Paul describes life apart from Christ in Ephesians 2:1-3. How do these compare with your own experience?
2. In Ephesians 2:4-7, Paul uses several words to speak of God's character. Make a list of those words. Which of these is most meaningful to you? Why?
3. Ephesians 2:8-9 makes a strong distinction between having faith and doing works. Why do you think this idea is important?
4. In light of Ephesians 2:10, how should we think of good works?
5. The Old Testament Law required Jews to keep away from Gentiles (non-Jews). In light of Ephesians 2:11-22, how did the death of Jesus change this?
6. Is your faith in Jesus Christ for your salvation or in your good works? How can we maintain the right perspective on good works?

**Read sections 3, 6, & 7 from the Statement of Faith



FOUNDATIONS *of Spiritual Life*

Week 5 – Power to Live

A Place to Begin

When do you feel closest to God? Why do you think we sometimes feel close to God at sometimes but not others?

Thoughts to Consider

Mobile phones make it possible for us to contact people instantly anywhere at anytime, but most people in history haven't enjoyed that privilege. For centuries, the only way to have instant communication was to follow someone around. And that is exactly what disciples did in ancient times to learn from a teacher—they followed him from place to place.

This explains why Jesus' disciples were so disturbed when he announced that he was going away. They wanted to be able to maintain constant contact with him. Jesus responded by telling them that he was going to send them a Helper who would be with them forever (John 14:16). This Helper is the Holy Spirit. When we believe in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit mysteriously enters into our lives to help us understand and live out God's Word.

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As we read through Scripture it is clear that there is only one God (Deut 6:4). Yet God somehow exists in three distinct persons (Matt 28:19).

Regardless of how we feel, the reality is that God is always present with Christians through the Holy Spirit. Paul says, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (1 Cor 6:19) The reality of this connection with God unites all Christians together and compels us to live holy lives.

A Scripture Passage to Read: Romans 8:1-27

The fullest biblical description of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christians is found in Romans 8:1-27. Paul's letter to the Romans is a thorough presentation of salvation. The first three chapters establish the sinfulness of all human beings. The fourth and fifth chapters explain how God makes sinful people righteous through faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Chapters six through eight describe the struggle Christians face as they try to live an obedient life. Chapter 8 encourages us that in the Holy Spirit we have the ultimate resource to live obediently.



FOUNDATIONS *of Spiritual Life*

Week 6 – Growing Together

A Place to Begin

What efforts have you made to be involved with people in a local church? Describe your experience.

Thoughts to Consider

One of the greatest challenges people face in our society today is a growing sense of isolation. Even though modern technology makes communication so easy (as we considered last week), our communication is increasingly shallow. Many of us are not developing deep, transparent relationships with other people.

God never intended for us to live out our spiritual lives alone. When you enter into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, you become a part of a group of people. We are portrayed as a temple where the Spirit of God dwells (Ephesians 2:21-22; 1 Corinthians 3:16). We are likened to a family, brothers and sisters in God's household (Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15). In 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 Paul even described us as depending upon one another like the various parts of a human body. As you can see, God designed the church to be much more than a weekly meeting for an hour or two.

The New Testament is full of instructions describing how we should relate to one another. One such passage is Hebrews 10:24-25 which says, "And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." This week's lesson challenges us to understand what it means and to take steps to be an active part of a local church.

A Scripture Passage to Read: Ephesians 4:1-16

Just two weeks ago we learned about the Apostle Paul and his letter to the Christians in Ephesus. This week we come back to Ephesians to examine part of the fourth chapter. Many of Paul's letters follow a certain pattern. He begins by talking about having right beliefs. Believing the right things is so important to Paul that he even points out wrong beliefs. Paul considered this an essential part of church leadership (see Titus 1:9). It wasn't enough, however, to just believe the right things. So after explaining what to believe, Paul takes time to describe how we should live in light of our beliefs. This is what Paul is doing in Ephesians 4. He is telling us how we should live if we believe what he taught earlier in Ephesians. Take a few moments to review at your thoughts from our previous study of Ephesians 2. Then read these verses in Ephesians 4.



FOUNDATIONS *of Spiritual Life*

Week 7 – Living like Jesus

A Place to Begin

People often seem to have more respect for Jesus Christ, than for His church. Why do you think this is?

Thoughts to Consider

We all have a hunger to know about the future. Just think of all the stories written in modern times about people traveling through time. Knowing the future would give us so much more insight into what we should do today. When we study the Bible, we find that Jesus and his followers really did have insight into the future.

Jesus often spoke about the end times when the Son of Man (His way of referring to Himself) will return to earth to reign. In Matthew 25:31-46, He explained that He will judge all people to determine who will be allowed to enter His kingdom and who will not. Those excluded from the kingdom will be sentenced to suffer eternal punishment. Those welcomed into the kingdom will enjoy eternal life in the presence of God.

This understanding of the future has some very practical implications. First, it encourages us to obey God. Peter said, “Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless” (2 Peter 3:14). On the other hand, believing in the return of Jesus Christ also teaches us to be concerned about other people’s eternal destiny. After speaking about Christ’s judgment, Paul said, “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Corinthians 5:11a). When we enter into a relationship with God, He gives us the responsibility to draw other into a relationship with him (see 2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

A Scripture Passage to Read: Matthew 9:35-10:42

Last week we learned in Ephesians 4:13 that the measure of spiritual maturity is how much our lives conform “to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” Jesus is both our Savior and our Example. Certainly, no one knew His life better than His apostles. Matthew 10 tells us how Jesus chose and trained His apostles. In that chapter we see the driving passion behind all that Jesus did. He wanted to prepare people for eternity. If we are going to live like Christ today, we must have that same passion. Jesus’ instructions to the apostles show us how we can boldly communicate His message of eternal life today.

