

FOUNDATIONS PART 1
LEADER'S NOTES

Week One

THE ONLY TRUE GOD (LEARN THE TRUTH)

Teaching objective: that there is only one true God and that we can only know him because he has chosen to reveal himself to us.

How many 'gods' are there?

How many do people say there are?

We are living in a multi-faith society – people have many different ideas about God. Some don't even believe there is a God.

This week we will be looking at the God that the Bible talks about.

John 17:3 Jesus says there is only one true God.

1. The only God

There are 2 options over how this universe came into existence - either God created it or he didn't (it came into existence in some other way – lots of options here, none of them very likely). If he didn't create it, it is very difficult to imagine how this amazing world created itself with all its order, beauty and intricate nature. It has been likened to the probability of a monkey sitting at a typewriter, hitting the keys and producing the complete works of Shakespeare just by chance. The probability is virtually nil.

Be prepared for a discussion on creation.

The Bible starts with a creator – Genesis 1:1 – He created and controls everything.

Acts 17:24-26 – He gives life and breath to everything.

2. The true God

All religions (except Christianity) try to make or find a way to God.

What are some of the ways?

- Religious observance
- Going to place of worship
- Being good
- Meditation
- Fasting

Be prepared for a discussion on other religions.

None of these things in themselves will get you to God.

Christianity is different because it claims that the only way we can know God is because he has already reached down to us and revealed himself to us.

We can only know God because he has chosen to reveal himself to us. It works the same way between people. When you become friends with someone, it is only possible because they

have chosen to open themselves up to you and reveal a part of their personality to you. No conversation - no friendship.

All the things we see of God are just a fraction of his whole self but it is enough for us to understand some of what God is like.

There are 3 main ways in which God reveals himself:

- Nature - Romans 1:20 - eternal power and divine nature
What else can we learn about God from looking at nature? (Variation, order, complete design, beauty, majesty, etc.)
- Bible - 2 Peter 1:19-21 - Writers didn't just write their own ideas down. God chose certain people and inspired by the Holy Spirit they wrote as they were led.

Be prepared for a discussion on whether the Bible is authentic.

- Jesus - he came and lived here. Hebrews 1:1,2
John 10:30 - Jesus says he is the same as the Father.
If we want to know what God is like we only need to look at the Jesus of the Bible.
This is the most complete way of seeing what the true God is like.

Recap over the last 3 points - how we can know what God is like.

Finish by stating that there is only one true God and that we can only know him because he has chosen to reveal himself to us.

Ask for any questions.

Tell the group that next week we will be looking at the relationship between God and people.

Week One BIBLE READING (LEARN TO LIVE)

Why do we need to read it?
How is the Bible divided up?
How to read it?

Why we need to read it

- It is God's revelation to us – 2 Peter 1:20, 21. We mentioned it earlier talking about how God reveals himself to us
- God speaks to us through it – if we want to follow God and do what he wants we need to read it
- It shows us how to live – 2 Timothy 3:16.
 - Teaches us – shows us what to believe
 - Rebukes us – shows us where we are going wrong
 - Corrects us – guides us back to the right path
 - Trains us in righteousness – shows us how to live as Christians
- It keeps us from sinning – Psalm 119:11

How is the Bible divided up?

Consists of 66 books written by about 40 authors writing at different times over a period of about 1,500 years.

Spread large list of books of Bible on floor and ask group to make divisions as follows:

- 2 testaments – old and new
- old is divided into 5 sections –
 - books of Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy)
 - historical books (Joshua to Esther)
 - poetic books (Job to Lamentations)
 - major prophets (Isaiah to Daniel)
 - minor prophets (Hosea to Malachi)
- new is divided into 3 sections
 - gospels (Matthew to Acts)
 - letters (Romans to Jude)
 - revelation

“The scriptures were not given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives.” D.L.Moody

“It is not the parts of the Bible that I don’t understand that bothers me, it’s the parts that I do understand.” Oscar Wilde

How to read it

- Sensibly – use a modern translation which is easy to read and understand
- Systematically – start in gospels, go on to Acts and other books of new testament
- Prayerfully – ask God to help you understand it
- Thoughtfully – choose a quiet spot in the day without distractions. Take phone off hook, turn off tv, concentrate
Read through passage once and then go over it again
Ask yourself what it means
Think about it
- Daily – when Jesus was tempted in desert by Satan he used Deut 8:3. We need bread and daily food to survive physically so also we need daily spiritual food
- Obediently – think about what passage is saying and what changed you need to make in response Proverbs 8:32. You may need to pray and ask God to help you change a particular area of your life.

Introduce learn from Luke

During 8 weeks of course will read whole of Luke’s gospel

Broken down into bite sized chunks read a bit each day

Don’t read it all on last day – there is no point

Come prepared each week with a highlight from your week’s Bible readings

Week Two GOD AND PEOPLE (LEARN THE TRUTH)

Teaching objective: that although people are very special to God he cannot tolerate their sin because he is holy and pure. Therefore people are separated from God.

Start by recapping from last week.

People are special

When God created the world he made people last – there are the finale of his creation Genesis 1:26 we are created in his image – What does this mean?

It doesn't mean we look like him or sound like him, it means we are created with the ability to communicate with God and to love him, we have a spirit. No animal can do this. (Some members of the group may disagree about the animals here – it has been known). Luke 10:27

We also have free will. This means we are free to choose not to love God.

He could have made us in such a way that we had no choice but to love him, a bit like a robot. He could have done this but he didn't and it is quite easy to understand why. Those that are parents only need to think about what it would be like if your child had no choice but to love you. You may think it would be very nice, but would it? Your child did not have the choice, therefore is it really love. How much better it is when given a completely free choice your child then turns to you and says he loves you. That is real love when it is free to walk away but chooses to stay.

When God did this he knew that some of his created beings would choose not to love him. In fact what happened was that the very first man and woman choose to disobey God and sin entered the world. Ever since then there is not or man or woman alive that has not sinned, except for one (more about that in week 4) Genesis 3:6, John 3:19.

Sin shows itself in different way depending on the culture we live in. Some sins are very obvious (murder, stealing, etc) some are more subtle (hatred, envy, greed, etc) they are all sin in God's eyes.

God is holy, righteous and just

God cannot tolerate sin and yet his prize of all creation is now absolutely riddled with it.

People are sinners

We are all going our own way Isaiah 53:6

Sin means doing what we want to do – not what God wants us to do.

Romans 3:23. We all set ourselves standards for various things. We may think we have very high standards compared to some other people. God also sets a standard – no sin. We often don't achieve even our own standards and the Bible says that every one of us has fallen way short of God's standards.

Genesis 3:8. What happened when Adam and Eve sinned? They knew they had done wrong and they were ashamed. Instead of running to meet God they hid themselves away. God threw them out of the garden and out of fellowship with him. It was the end of a beautiful relationship.

BUT GOD STILL LOVES PEOPLE SO WHAT CAN HE DO?

He loves people but can't tolerate sin

He is holy and righteous and just so he can't just forget about the sin

Do the bridge illustration here.

Ask for questions

Finish by saying that next week we will be looking at the person of Jesus and the fact that he was both truly God and truly man.

Week Two PRAYER (LEARN TO LIVE)

Talking to God

Be honest - you cannot pretend with God. Be simple and direct - no special words

- Worship - good to concentrate our minds on God. Thank God for who he is, acknowledge his power and sovereignty
- Praise - thank him for what he has done for sending Jesus, for working in our lives and for specific things that have happened. Can use Psalms for help on this
- Confession - say sorry and ask for forgiveness. Be honest and don't make excuses (give illustration). Trust God to forgive you 1 John 1:9
- Requests - Ask God for things. Leave problem with God, don't hang onto it. Philippians 4:6

Alone with God

- Special time and place - set aside a regular time every day as Jesus did. Luke 5:16. Start small with just a few minutes and as relationship with God grows will want to spend longer. If difficult to concentrate can try speaking out loud. Keep a notebook handy to write down distracting thoughts.
- Anytime and place - answer prayers when in trouble or needy situation suddenly arises Matthew 14:30

Together with God

Group praying - believers coming together to pray

Can be very special times as seek God's will and he can direct prayers through Holy Spirit Matthew 18:19

Don't have to use fancy language, remember still talking to God even though others are listening.

1 John 5:14 - God hears us

1 John 3:22 - obey and please God and he will grant our prayers

Prayer time

Pray now.

Sentence prayers

Something we have learnt today

Pass book round if wanted

Clear finish at end

Week Three

JESUS, GOD AND MAN

(LEARN THE TRUTH)

Teaching objective: that Jesus is truly God and truly man.

Recap from last week.

Christianity is totally dependent on the person of Jesus. So who is he? Jesus is fully God and fully man. Look at the easy bit first.

Man

There are many documents other than the Bible to support the existence of a man named Jesus of Nazareth at the correct time in history. Josephus (Jewish historian) is one.

We know that he was born in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth. We know that he had normal human experiences: he was hungry (Luke 4:2), tired (Mark 4:38) and sad (John 11:35).

We know that he was the son of a woman (not a man). He was not the son of a man but he did refer to himself as the son of man. What does this mean?

He used this term to show that he had the characteristics of a man, that he was the son of mankind.

He also said it because he knew that the Jews would have recognised the deliberate reference to himself as being divine. The term is used in Daniel 7:13, 14 and is referring to the coming of the Messiah.

God

While he was alive on earth Jesus not only lived a normal human existence, but also showed some divine characteristics which set him apart from any other person that has ever lived.

He showed divine power Mark 4:41 - he was able to control the weather. Even his disciples were in no doubt that they had witnessed something miraculous.

He claimed to be the answer to all human need John 8:12 - he is saying he can meet the needs of anybody. Any mere man who said this would be completely mad!

He claimed to be the giver of life John 5:21

He claimed to be the judge of all John 5:22

He claimed to be eternal John 8:58 - the words "I am" are the same ones that God used to describe himself when he appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). They refer to God's eternal nature. The Jews recognised this, which is the reason they tried to stone him in v59 because they believed him to be committing blasphemy.

He claimed to be able to forgive sin Luke 5:20-26. In this story when the Pharisees make the statement that only God can forgive sins they are of course correct. They knew that Jesus' statement about forgiving the man's sin was undeniably blasphemous unless of course he really was God!

He claimed that to know him is to know God John 14:7-9.

There is no doubt from these examples and there are many others that Jesus claimed to be God. Either his claims were true and he was God or he was claiming something that was not true. Someone akin to David Ike.

C.S. Lewis puts it very plainly in this extract from "Mere Christianity":

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool; you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon: or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human Teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

The choices are: He was telling the truth
 He was deluded
 He was a liar

The evidence points to Him telling the truth and the reality is that Jesus is truly God and truly man.

Ask for questions.

Next week we will be looking at the life and work of Jesus.

Week Three TEMPTATION (LEARN TO LIVE)

What is temptation?

Dictionary definition – “a trial; an act to try to persuade esp. to evil; act of enticement.

Everyone has temptations and when you become a Christian you can seem to face more of them!

Temptation itself is not a sin but it can lead to sin.

Satan was always trying to tempt Jesus e.g. in desert Luke 4:1-13

Jesus was tempted in every way yet was without sin Hebrews 4:15 so temptation itself cannot be sin.

Source of temptation

- Spiritual enemy – there is a person against us – Satan. 1 Peter 5:8
We don't have to go looking for him, he will find us.
Will probably not be obvious – Genesis 3:1 he was disguised as a serpent. We need to be on our guard.
- Corrupted world – sin entered the world at the beginning of the Bible and ever since man has struggled with living in a fallen world. There are tempting sights and sounds all around us eg books, magazines, films, materialism, personal fulfilment.
People we come into contact with can lead us away from God. 1 John 2:15, 16
- Sinful nature – there is a tendency within us to do the wrong thing Romans 7:15, 18, 19
there is a constant battle within us.

Dealing with temptation

Jesus can help us – temptation didn't defeat him and need not defeat us.

- Use the Bible – we need to spend time reading and thinking about the Bible Psalm 119:11.
Example of Jesus when he was tempted in Luke 4.
- Pray for help – Jesus taught us to pray – Lord's prayer Matthew 6:13. Also Psalm 70:5
- Be careful – it is easy to give the devil a chance to trap us. We need to be on our guard 1 Peter 5:8. We need to be sensible about the places we go to, the things we let our minds dwell on, the people we mix with, what we spend our money on, the thing we read, what we watch on tv.

Will a temptation ever be too strong to resist?

1 Corinthians 10:13 The answer is no God will always provide a way out.

Week Four

JESUS, HIS LIFE AND WORK (LEARN THE TRUTH)

Teaching objective: to explain the fundamental aspects of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Recap from last week re-emphasising the main points.

Going to look this week at the basic facts concerning Jesus' life and work.

Birth

He was born of a human mother but not a human father. God was his father. Important also to realise that Jesus did not begin to exist when he was born. He has always existed along with God. (Genesis 1:26 – let us make man)

Of the gospel writers Luke gives the most detailed account of Jesus' birth. He was a doctor and a historian and probably spoke directly to the people involved to get a precise record.

After his miraculous birth Jesus grew in a normal and natural way. Joseph was a carpenter so they probably did not have a lot of money. Jesus would have grown up in a normal family along with his brothers and sisters. We know he had 4 brothers and at least 3 sisters. He was the eldest. He would have gone to school, which included learning large chunks of scripture.

We can assume Joseph died at some point as he is not mentioned at all after Jesus starts his ministry and Jesus is referred to as the village carpenter, a position he would have inherited only when his father died.

We don't know much else about his early life until he starts his ministry at the age of 30.

Life

Jesus had no wealth or possessions and lived an itinerant life during his ministry.

- His miracles. One remarkable feature of his time was the miracles he performed. Some people have a problem accepting his miracles, but once you believe he is the son of God it is only a small step to then accept the ability to perform miracles. Miracles always had a purpose. They were not just great manifestations of his power. Often they were to help others and always to convince people that he was who he said he was. (John 20:30, 31)
- His teaching. His teaching was special. Mark 1:27. People were surprised by his authority in teaching. Matthew 5:21, 22; 27,28; 31,32. "You have heard it said..." and "but I tell you..." He is putting himself at least on the same level as the Old Testament teaching. He never contradicts the Old Testament, but he gives it a deeper, fuller meaning.
- His sinlessness. This was an outstanding characteristic of his life. Hebrews 4:15 states that he was without sin. It is incredible to think that he grew up in a family and his

brother and sisters did not initially believe in him. They would have known him behind closed doors and seen his sinless nature and still they did not see what was under their noses.

Death

His death was voluntary and purposeful. John 10:17,18. He gave up his life voluntarily. No man could take the life of the son of God.

John 18:4-6 shows this very clearly. When the soldiers came to capture him he replied with the words "I am" and they all fell back to the ground. In that moment he showed them just a glimpse of his power, then he let them take him. On the cross he died. Publicly and certainly he died.

Resurrection

The resurrection was real and significant. It is one of the most proven events in history. It places Jesus on a different plane to every other religious leader in history, which could be why it is so often rejected.

There are various arguments against it - Jesus didn't die, the disciples stole the body, the Jews stole the body, he came back as a ghost, people who saw him were hallucinating. Evidence all these theories is outstanding. The only sensible conclusion is that Jesus died and was resurrected. He was around for 40 days and at one time 500 people saw him together.

Ascension

This was a clear indication that, after all those sightings of him, he would not be around in his physical body any more. That time had ended.

Coming again

Acts 1:11 He is going to return. We don't know when, but we do know he will return.

Finish but repeating the main points and concluding that the whole of Christianity depends on the person of Jesus - it is not just another religion. One way or another we have to make a choice about who Jesus was and that choice will impact the rest of our life.

Ask for questions.

Next week we will be looking at how Jesus' life and death affect our relationship with God.

Week Four THE COST (LEARN TO LIVE)

Who finds living as a Christian easy?

Not trying to fool anyone – the reality is that it is difficult

1. It wasn't easy for Jesus

- As his followers we can expect to experience similar situations John 15:18-20
- World hated him
- World persecuted him; despised him; rejected him; crucified him
- Opposed by religious leaders and Romans
- Difficult nature of his ministry – garden of Gethsemane Mark 14:36

2. He never promised it would be easy for us

- Take up your cross Matthew 16:24 meaningful picture – Roman method of execution – following Jesus requires a lifelong commitment with no turning back
- Deny ourselves – put our own interests second to his will
- Put him before everything, even our family Matthew 10:37 (God then enables us to love our families even more) Not encouraging disobedience to parents or conflict at home but explaining the result of conflict with those who reject Jesus. Don't neglect family, love them even more but remember your commitment to God is even more important than them.

3. But it's worth it!

- Greatest achievements – difficult or easy things?
- Achievers are remembered for their perseverance
- Relationship with Jesus is more important than anything else
- Philippians 3:7,8a – to know Christ should be our goal
- Are we putting anything in front of our relationship with him?
- Matthew 5:11,12 – reward is in heaven when we suffer persecution and God regards us as blessed – we should be honoured and rejoice
- He knows what it is like Hebrews 4:15 he shares our insults
- He is with us Matthew 28:20

“If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him” C.T. Studd

Week Five FORGIVENESS [JUSTIFICATION] (LEARN THE TRUTH)

Teaching objective: to understand that because of what Jesus did we can now have a loving relationship with God.

Our salvation rests fully on what Jesus did for us when he died and rose again. This week we are going to look at this in more detail.

Salvation can be thought of in three different aspects. In reality they cannot be separated and are all part of the same thing, but for discussion they can be thought of as: Justification, Sanctification and Glorification.

Explain these terms:

Justification – one off event which deals with our sin. We become a new creation in Christ when we decide to repent and start following Jesus.

Sanctification – Ongoing change in our life by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Glorification – what happens when we reach heaven and we will be perfect?

This week we will concentrate on justification. Next week we will look at sanctification. We will not really be looking at glorification in any detail.

Illustrated in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament an animal was sacrificed to save a life. Example of this is the Passover where the blood of a slaughtered lamb meant the eldest sons of the Israelites were not killed when the angel of death passed over. (Exodus 12:1-13) It required faith to follow through the instructions they were given and if some of the Israelites had not placed the blood on the doorframe their eldest son would have died along with the Egyptians. Conversely if an Egyptian had listened to what was happening and out of faith had slaughtered a lamb and placed the blood on the doorframe his family would probably have been spared. This actually was a foreshadow of what Jesus was to do when he died to take the sins of the world.

Hundreds of years later when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming he referred to him as the “Lamb of God”. The people of the time would have understood the comparison to the lamb that was killed for the Passover.

Prophesied in the Old Testament

Isaiah was written about 800 years B.C. and yet it contains one of the most detailed and accurate accounts of Jesus’ death recorded.

Isaiah 53:3-9 talks about the punishment falling on Jesus. Written in past tense, which was usual for the prophets of the time as it showed they were so certain it was going to happen that it was as if it already had.

Taught by Jesus in the Old Testament

Jesus himself clearly states that he had come to give his life for others. Matthew 20:28

Explained in the New Testament

There is a deeper explanation of the meaning of his death in the letters of the New Testament.

2 Corinthians 5:2 Jesus became the personification of sin itself in order that we might receive his righteousness.

Illustrate this by doing the three crosses diagram.

Finish by giving out the challenge that everyone here is either like one thief or the other. We are either still carrying all our own sin around or we have given it to Jesus to take for us.

Ephesians 2:8, 9 states that we are saved because of the grace of God in Jesus, by simply believing it to be true, not by being able to earn it ourselves.

Ask for questions.

Give a few minutes for silent prayer and ask people to think about which side of the picture they are on. If they have already asked Jesus to take their sins they can quietly thank him again for his gift. If they have not it is an opportunity to do so and cross over.

Suggest that if anyone has become a Christian for the first time they speak to you about it or at least tell somebody they know.

Next week we will be looking at sanctification and how this decision to follow Jesus will continue to affect and change our lives.

Week Five GUIDANCE (LEARN TO LIVE)

Am I doing God's will?
What is God's will for my life?

Peace and satisfaction depend on knowing we are doing his will – very important and fundamental aspect of Christian life.

How can we know what God wants us to do?
God has promised to guide us – doesn't just leave us to get on with it on our own and then stand back and laugh at our mistakes. Psalm 32:8
God has an individual plan and purpose for each life.

How does God guide?

1. God uses the Bible – Bible contains majority of God's will for our lives. There are many commands both positive and negative (never seek God's will on something that he has already forbidden!) 2 Timothy 3:16. Having read the Bible we need also to obey it John 13:17 – if obey God's word then we know we are in centre of his will.
Mainly basic principles of life but also need more specific guidance for specific circumstances – Bible doesn't give this type of detail so need to back up Bible reading with other guidance.
2. Prayer – ask God for help in specific decision making. As we pray God will often give a conviction by the Holy Spirit, which deepens to a greater sense of rightness. Don't confuse this with emotions, which change with our circumstances.
3. Counsel of Christian leaders – other mature Christians can often give us helpful advice Acts 13:2-4
4. Use your mind – Romans 12:2. Make sure your mind is subject to God's rule. As we allow God to change our thoughts and attitudes this enables us to understand God's ways and those things he wants us to do.
5. Don't be silly – a few dangers to watch out for
 - Don't think that just because you want to do something it can't possibly be God's will – distorted view of God's character.
 - Don't think God's will is necessarily wild or bizarre.
 - Understand there are often logical implications involved in following through ie you need to fill out the application form to go for the job you feel God is guiding you into- the job won't just drop into your lap.
 - Don't take verses of the Bible out of context – God can speak to you from whatever part of the Bible you happen to be reading that day.
6. Leave room for surprises – the will of God is like a scroll that unrolls piece by piece. It is something to be discovered and lived out every day of our lives.

Week Six MADE NEW [SANCTIFICATION] (LEARN THE TRUTH)

Teaching Objective: that once we have given our lives to Jesus we will grow in our faith as we allow the Holy Spirit to change us and make us more like Jesus.

Last week we mentioned the 3 aspects of salvation and looked more closely at justification. (Once for all - one action - being declared not guilty because of what Jesus has done) This week we are going to look at sanctification, which is ongoing. We are not made holy in an instant.

New birth

John 3:3-6 talk about a person being born again. We are given a new start in life. 2 Corinthians 5:17 states we are a new creation when we become a Christian. We are made new, we are different.

- We have a new motivation to please Jesus 2 Corinthians 5:14,15.
- We have a new set of values. We no longer seek to do our own pleasures but we seek God's righteousness. Philippians 3:7,8 - Paul's values had been turned upside down. Compared to knowing Jesus everything else became as rubbish. Although we continue to do the wrong things we don't want to do God gently nudges us towards doing the right thing.
- We have a new power. The Holy Spirit comes to live in us. We will be looking at this in more detail next week.

Growth

- From infancy to maturity. A new born baby is very sweet to look at but if he remained like that and never grew or developed speech, mobility or dexterity it would not be very sweet but very sad and tragic. We expect a new baby to grow up into a child and then an adult and if he doesn't it is because there is something wrong. In the same way we should expect a new Christian to grow and develop and if they don't it is because there is something wrong. 1 Peter 2:2, 3 Peter encourages these Christians to grow up!
- From needing help to being helpers. As we grow we will be able to offer help and encouragement to others. Hebrews 5:12 rebukes these Christians because they are still needing help instead having grown up sufficiently to help others.
- Transformed to be more and more like Jesus. 2 Corinthians 3:18 we are being transformed to Jesus' likeness. NIV footnote suggests an alternative translation for "reflect" could be "contemplate", the suggestion being that as we contemplate Jesus we will become more like him.

Means of growth

We can't force the growth ourselves. We don't stretch babies to make them grow. We make sure they have the right conditions by ensuring they have enough sleep, food, fresh air, love and exercise and then they grow.

We need to do the same as Christians. We can't make our faith grow, but we can provide the right conditions for growth.

- Keep in touch with God through the Bible and prayer. Just as we need food for our bodies every day so we also need spiritual food daily.
- Keep in touch with God's people. If we isolate ourselves we make it very difficult to grow. Illustration of hot coals in a fire. If one falls out of the fire it will not continue to glow for very long. Soon it will become black and cold.
- We need to be prepared to share God with others.
- We need to obey what God is telling or the relationship with him will be spoiled until we put it right again.

Discuss the wheel on the sheet. Jesus is at the centre of our faith. The vertical spokes are the things, which keep us in touch with God. The horizontal spokes keep us in touch with each other. The wheel is held together by obedience.

If all these things are a part of our life we will grow.

Finish by stating that as Christians we need to become more and more like Jesus. If we are not growing it is because there is something wrong and it needs to be sorted out as quickly as possible.

Ask for questions

Next week we will be looking at the Holy Spirit.

Week Six FELLOWSHIP (LEARN TO LIVE)

Should I go to church regularly?

When you become a Christian you become part of the family of God, the Church.
The Church is not the building – it is the group of people
Brighton and Hove Albion is not the football ground – it is the team of players

'Go to church'

- Acts 2:42-42 early believers met together. Picture of true love and care for each other, sharing and worshipping together which attracted others and numbers grew.
- Hebrews 10:25 we need to meet together as part of God's family.
What are some of the reasons why people may stop attending church?

Bored
Fallen out with someone
Something else more attractive is on at same time
Offended by someone
Lack of commitment
And many more

NB if you find the perfect church don't join it, you'll ruin it! Remember no church is going to be perfect.

Receive from the church

- Join in the worship – there is something within us that needs to worship and if don't worship God our creator we will find ourselves directing our worship onto something else. Only when we worship God will we find fulfilment, other things or people will only bring disappointment.
- Learn from the teaching – without correct teaching we will not grow.
- Receive love and friendship from each other.

Give to the church

Be committed to each other – more about this next week.

Characteristics of a Baptist church

- The Bible is more important than tradition – we try not to do things just because they have always been done that way.

- Baptism of believers – Acts 2:38 baptism is the symbol of a change that has already taken place not the action that leads to change.
- Free form of worship – not restricted by use of prayer book or rigid orders of service.
- Responsibility of membership to seek God’s guidance over corporate issues. Although led by elders and deacons, decisions are made by the whole church and all the members are responsible to seek God’s mind and will.

Within reason the denomination is not as important as finding a group of people who love and serve the Lord and who seek to live out the great commission.

Week Seven THE HOLY SPIRIT (LEARN THE TRUTH)

Teaching Objective: that the Holy Spirit is God living in us.

The Holy Spirit is the third personality of the Holy Trinity. Trinity is not a word found in the Bible but its existence is certainly implied. It is a very difficult concept to understand. One illustration could be to think of your hand, which has five fingers. All fingers are part of the same hand and are equal in importance and yet all have a different function.

Promised by Jesus

John 14:16, 17 – Jesus is saying he will ask the father to send another helper, counsellor, comforter. The Greek word does not have a direct English translation to explain it fully so all sorts of meanings can be used. None completely cover what these word means. It is a combination of “one who stands by you always to help and comfort”

John 16:7 – Jesus is saying it is better that he goes because then he can send the Holy Spirit who can be everywhere and not be limited to one body as Jesus was.

Sent after the Ascension

Acts 2:1-4 – Visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit so the disciples would know for sure that something wonderful had happened.

Given to all believers

If you are a Christian then you have the Holy Spirit. We do not teach that you need to have a second experience to receive him. Romans 8:9 makes this very clear.

Ephesians 1:13 talks about having a seal. Ephesus was a port, which received logs for transportation overseas. These logs were marked with a seal to show ownership and the recipients of this letter would have understood the reference that Paul was making.

He teaches us

He tells us what God wants us to do. In Acts 13:2 he told the believers to set Paul and Barnabus apart. He also tells us what to do in little situations. We may feel a gentle nudging in one direction. Coincidences will often turn out to be the work of the Holy Spirit. He never makes us do anything but he shows the right thing and allows us to have the choice. We have freewill and we can choose to disobey. When we do this we grieve him and we will have no peace until we do what he wants us to.

He helps us to understand the Bible better. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says that the things of God are spiritually discerned. Understanding the Bible is not dependent on intelligence. The Bible can be learnt and understood in historical terms by very learned people, but even those with little intelligence can understand spiritual truths with the help of the Holy Spirit.

He helps us to know Jesus better. He does not glorify himself but always points us towards Jesus. John 16:13-15

He changes us

As we grow as a Christian the Holy Spirit will begin to change the way we think and act. We will start to develop the fruit of the Spirit, which are characteristics of Jesus. Galatians 5:22, 23 lists them. Notice it is not fruits so we can pick and choose which one we want, but fruit singular meaning they all grow together. You cannot say you would like a bit more love and joy, but don't want self-control or patience. It doesn't work like that.

He equips us

He gives us spiritual gifts so that we can serve God and each other. Ephesians 4:11, 12. The gifts are given to build up the body of Christ not for personal profit or gain. A good church is not dependent on one leader, but rather everyone must work together.

God decides who has which gifts and he alone attributes them. We don't all have all the gifts and we don't all have the same gifts, but we do all have at least one gift. Some are up front and spectacular, some are quite unobtrusive. All are equal in importance and value.

Not to be confused with natural talents (although of course these also come from God) spiritual gifts will always build up the body of believers.

Finish by recapping and summarising.

Ask for questions

Next week we will be looking at the Church.

Week Seven
SERVICE
(LEARN TO LIVE)

How can I serve God?

Use your gifts

God has equipped us with gifts and abilities. God has distributed these gifts amongst the church to enable it to function.

Everybody has at least one gift but not everybody has the same gifts.

It is our duty to God and to one another to find out what these gifts are and to use them in serving God.

Romans 12:4-8 As a human body has many parts so also the spiritual body of the church has many parts and each part needs to do its bit!

Not for self gain but for building others up.

Witness

Tell others about Jesus

1 Thessalonians 1:7-10 - our actions count

Acts 4:20 - we must speak about what we know and have experienced in Christ

Give what you can financially

No rules but there are guidelines laid down in Bible.

Malachi 3:10 - Old Testament system of tithing remains a good yardstick for today

1 Corinthians 16:1,2 - plan how much to give, put it aside so we are not just giving the dregs of what we have left in our purse on a Sunday.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 - not just give as little as we can get away with but give as much as we can.

Week Eight THE CHURCH (LEARN THE TRUTH)

Teaching Objective: that every believer is a part of God's Church.

What the Church is:

The Church is not a building. The building has become known as a church in modern language, but in the Bible it refers to the group of believers. In the same way Brighton and Hove Albion refers to the team of players not the football ground itself.

The church can be considered in two ways:

1. The Church universal – all believers throughout the world and history.
2. The local church – a local community of believers.

What the New Testament church was like

Read Acts 2:41, 42. The following main characteristics are evident:

- Fellowship – being together as Christians because we need each other. We have been designed to function best in communities. Paul used the example of the church being like a body with hands, feet, ears, eyes, etc. 1 Corinthians 12:12,21
- Teaching – they devoted themselves to the teaching. The early church had them there with them in person, teaching them from day to day. These apostles were those who had lived with Jesus and learnt directly from him. We do not have these apostles alive today but we do have their teaching in the Bible.
- Prayer – we can pray alone or together. When a speaker prays aloud in church we all need to echo the prayer in our hearts and by saying “Amen” at the end we signify that we agree with the speaker.
- Breaking of bread – also known as communion, the Lord's Supper, Eucharist, and other names as well. Name is not important. It does not matter what type of bread we use. Neither does the Bible lay down strict guidelines on how or how often it should be done. It just says do it. It needs no great ceremony, but is a simple and heartfelt act of remembrance on behalf of Jesus' followers. It brings us back to the centre of our faith and reminds again the price that was paid for our salvation. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. During communion we need to focus our thoughts on Jesus. We are warned about taking communion in an unworthy manner with unforgiveness in our hearts. 1 Corinthians 11:27-29.

The bread is simply bread and the wine is simply wine. Jesus said “it is finished”. Nothing more needs to be done and communion is a remembrance not a repetition.

- Baptism – an act of public declaration of faith. In New Testament believers were baptised on coming to faith. Acts 2:41.

Some denominations baptise infants today but this was not done in the New Testament. At Holland Road we dedicate infants and ask God that one day they may believe in him for themselves and then choose to get baptised.

The Greek word used for baptism in the New Testament means an intense dipping. We baptise by full immersion because this seems to be the historical method practiced by the early church in Acts and also does justice to what the word means. E.g. a sprinkling on the forehead does not seem to equate with an 'intense dipping'.

Those that get baptised are at the start of their Christian life not the end. You don't need to be good enough, you never will be. It is the custom at Holland Road to give a testimony but you don't have to unless you want to.

Baptism is symbolic of the Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. As we go down into the water, under it and back up again we are signifying dying to ourselves and being raised again into a new life with Jesus.

- Church membership - these words in themselves are not mentioned in the Bible, but the concept of being committed to a local fellowship certainly is. Look again Acts 2:42 - 47 "they devoted themselves", "all the believers were together", every day they continued to meet together", they "ate together with glad and sincere hearts".

It is a public declaration of commitment to a local church. You can become involved without being a member and you can become a member and not get very involved, but the best way is to offer your gifts and abilities to God and the church and receive from others in the fellowship.

There may be some steps forward that need to be taken amongst the group. Ask them to consider where they are in their relationship to God and his church. Do any need to be baptised or come into church membership? Is God calling any to take the next step? Suggest that they speak to you about it.

Ask for questions.

Finish by reminding the group when Foundations 2 will start.

Week Eight ASSURANCE (LEARN TO LIVE)

How can I be sure I am a Christian?

May seem like a strange question, but all doubt sometimes. If asked if we are married or single we know for sure that it is one or the other – we do not doubt it. If asked if we are definitely a Christian sometimes we doubt whether we are or not. Why is this?

Causes of doubt

- Satan is our enemy who seeks to trip us up whenever he can. If he can get us to doubt our salvation he can make us ineffective in serving God. He tempted Jesus to doubt who he really was Luke 4:3,9 (uses “if you are the son of God”)
- Our own sin can make us doubt. When we keep falling into same old sin we can doubt that really are saved, but see Romans 7:15-20. Paul also had this problem!

How do we deal with doubts?

Look to Jesus for assurance and the truths affecting your salvation.

- You became a Christian because of what God has done through Jesus. It does not depend on your effort or ability to please God. Ephesians 2:8, 9. Just because you keep on sinning it does not mean you are not a Christian any more.
Grace - being given something we do not deserve
Mercy - not being given something we do deserve
- Jesus never changes Hebrews 13:8 If he forgave us yesterday he will forgive us today and tomorrow and the next day.
- You belong to the family of God John 1:12 God calls us his children. You cannot stop being somebody's child – even if you decide to stop talking to them your parents are still your parents!
- All sin can be forgiven. There is nothing you have done that cannot be forgiven 1 John 1:7, 9. There is nothing you have done that God doesn't know about.

Some further passages which you may find helpful in times of doubt Isaiah 54:10, Romans 8:38, 39, John 10:28-30.