

This booklet is organised into a week of daily studies, each of which include:

- a short reading,
- one main Scripture to memorise and revise,
- bible verses/passages to look up,
- study questions.

It's Week 1 in an 8-week series on the foundational teachings of Christianity called, *The Basics*.

In writing these studies, I've attempted to provide people with something that can be used both in personal devotions and group Bible study. I have also tried to cater to new Christians as well as the Christian who has many years of faithful Christian living under their belts.

I'll let the reader decide how well I've succeeded.

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The Basics.

An 8 week devotional-cum-bible study-cum-"read-y thing".



OF
FIRST
IMPORTANCE!!!!
.....

And we will be looking at...

News That Will Change Your World!

Of First Importance. Week 1, Day 1.

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

Earth-shattering! There is news that comes along once or twice in a generation that reaches into every part of a nation, a culture or the globe, and changes the way people understand the world. Years later you can ask, “How did you hear about the death of Princess Di, the attack on the Twin Towers, the fall of the Berlin Wall?” and they will tell you where they were, who they were with and a thousand other details, unimportant except that they made up the last moment of a world that suddenly changed. They think differently, they act differently, they live differently than they did before – all because of that earth-shattering news.

It’s one of those kind of events that Paul, the writer of the above verses, is talking about:

“Christ died for our sins...he was buried...he was raised on the third day...”

Paul was not there. This is news that he himself heard and is passing on. It’s news that has happened in our world independent of both him and us. He’s a reporter, a news desk reader, a guy leaving a message on your Facebook wall. He couldn’t change it. We can’t change it. It happened and our world will never be the same.

When Princess Di was killed in a car crash, swathes of people suffered a phenomenal amount of grief. Some people even took time off work to deal with her death. Others were not personally affected at all. Everyone, however, understood the immensity of the news.

When the Berlin Wall came down a huge number of lives were changed. Western companies, commodities and culture flooded East Germany and the Communist Bloc. Others, living in the West, felt far less personal and dramatic change, if any change at all. Yet all recognised the shift in the

balance of world power.

When the Twin Towers came down in New York on September 11, 2001, people the world over felt shocked and fearful and violated by the successful attack on the most powerful country in the world. Others rejoiced. Everyone recognised that an epoch making event had occurred.

Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried and was raised on the third day. Millions of people have taken hold of that victory over sin and death and lived changed lives in light of it. Others have rejected it. Everyone realises the immense change that has followed it. Whatever you do, that event remains of first importance.

Christianity is based on a true event that calls for our continual response. Ask God to help you recognise that, whatever your experience and feelings, our relationship with Him is based on an unchanging act outside of ourselves. Praise Him for that good news and for everything else that flows from that.

Memorise: 1 Corinthians 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,...

Read also: Romans 1:2-4, 1 Corinthians 2:1-2, Galatians 1:3-5, Colossians 1:21-23, 2 Timothy 2:8.

Questions:

1. What’s the difference between basing your life on an idea and basing your life on an historical event? How does it change the way you see the world? How does it change the way you live?
2. “[Paul] couldn’t change it. We can’t change it. It happened and our world will never be the same.” If Jesus’ death and resurrection is something we can’t change, what sort of security does that give us if we are followers of Jesus?

More Than Spectators.

Of First Importance. Week 1, Day 2.

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

I was never interested in crochet (pronounced “CROW-SHAY). Ever. I didn’t even know what it was until I met my crocheting wife-to-be Paula. She likes it and she’s good at it and even crocheted her own wedding dress. And so I’m interested now – in Paula’s crochet.

One year Paula decided to put a few of her crochet pieces in the Show. She wasn’t expecting much, but I assumed she would win first place with at least one piece despite the fact Paula said it wasn’t her best work and could point out some fairly big flaws. So when she got a high commendation she was really happy. Me? I was disappointed in the judges’ obvious bias against my wife, but proud that, despite a rigged result, her work had still been given some recognition. Who got first place? I don’t know. I can’t remember and to be honest, I’m not that interested. But I’d remember if Paula had won.

In the same way the Bible tells us angels long to look into this good news that Paul says is of first importance (1 Peter 1:12), but their interest will only ever be that of an observer or a support person. Don’t get me wrong, they are fascinated by what God has done, but in the same way I only had a second-hand interest in the Arts and Craft competition at the Show, the angels will never be the main players in this event called the gospel.

But *we* are. Christ died for *our* sins. It is for *us* that Jesus changed the course of the world. And without this realisation Jesus’ death and his resurrection are, to quote Homer Simpson, “just a bunch of stuff that happened.”

Do you remember that thing you did that makes you feel ashamed whenever you think of it, even today? Or what about those words you said that you wish you could take back? You lost your temper over something minor? You lied about your work? You may have stolen,

hurt, even killed. Those sins, your sins, were dealt with when Jesus died. Even those sins we don’t realise are sins are part of what Jesus died for. He died for the sin in us that makes us sin! Truth be told, he even died for the parts of us that still love sin.

Jesus’ death is a shower that washes people completely clean; his resurrection provides us with a new life to clothe ourselves in. If you accept that his death applies to you, your sins that have been washed completely away. It is then you understand what Paul meant: Christ died for *our* sins.

Knowing that you are the beneficiary of Christ’s death and resurrection changes it from being merely a true story into being your story. Ask God to make that story more and more real in your life.

Memorise: 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,...

Read also: Romans 4:25, Colossians 2:11-13, 1 Peter 2:24, 1 John 3:5.

Questions:

1. Our Christian walk is only as deep as the reality of Jesus’ death and resurrection applied to our lives. What are some ways that you can ensure a deeper application of the gospel in to your heart?
2. In all of our lives we slip into just knowing the gospel instead of participating in it. Where are you just observing and where are you seeing the gospel transform you? Pray for help to get involved, and praise God for where he is transforming your life.

Planned From Day One.

Of First Importance. Week 1, Day 3.

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

I don't know about you, but I used to keep journals. It's interesting going through them years later and finding out what used to be on your mind. One of the most common sentences I wrote went something like: "I really need to get disciplined!"

Yeah, I'm that guy. Maybe you can relate. It'll happen when it happens, unless there's a deadline. Then it'll happen the night before. In fact, while I was studying it got to the point where it happened a day or two later. I still don't know how I got away with it.

God, of course, is not like that. Can you imagine the Father sitting in heaven looking down at the earth and saying, "Wow, we really should have done something by now. Look how out of hand everything's got! I know, Son, why don't you go down there and sort of wing it for a while until we figure something out?"

No, right from the beginning God had decided to send Jesus into the world to die and rise from death three days later and there are indications of this all through the Bible. The funny thing was that before it happened, people didn't see it. It was only after Jesus fulfilled God's plan that people began to see God's plan laid out in the Scriptures, and that only because Jesus showed them! Like someone who was thrown a surprise birthday party, they looked back and saw pointers to what was going to happen that at the time just didn't click. "*And [Jesus] said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27)*

So God planned the worst of events for the best of results. Literally from Day One Jesus' death and resurrection was carved in stone. It was no accident.

If God can plan the worst event in history for the best of results, surely nothing in our lives can be without good purpose if we belong to him. God's plan to completely save people has been in motion since the beginning of time. Praise Jesus that his death and resurrection and your part in it is no accident or temporary solution. Thank God for his faithfulness in the past, present and our future.

Memorise: 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Read also: Matt 21:42, 26:54, 56, Luke 24:45-48, Acts 18:28, Romans 1:1-2.

Questions:

1. Why do you think it was important for Paul to say that Jesus died and rose again *according to the Scriptures*? What do we miss if we leave it out?
2. In light of all this, what attitude should we have to the Scriptures (the Bible)? What should we be looking for in them?

Examples of the Gospel in the Old Testament.

The Bible is an exciting ancient document that continuously reveals Jesus. The clearest example is Isaiah 53:4-6, but God himself explains that his words were not always that direct (Numbers 12:6-8, see Hebrews 1:1). In fact, some Old Testament passages the New Testament says speak of Jesus can seem really strange especially to 21st Century Westerners. Remember, however, that the Bible was not written to our culture and generation alone.

For more examples, look at Genesis 3:12-16, Psalm 22, Isaiah 52-53, Matthew 12:40 and Acts 2:14-36.

Bypassing Our Plans.

Of First Importance. Week 1, Day 4.

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

Scientifically, you cannot survive being buried alive for longer than a couple of minutes. Perhaps when you are put in a tomb you may last longer, but having been beaten, nailed to a cross, left to hang and asphyxiate and then speared to ensure you really were dead, it's not very likely at all that you'd emerge alive from a grave three days later.

That was Jesus. He was literally dead and buried, and even his disciples thought that was pretty final. "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." (Luke 24:21)

Had hoped? Had they forgotten what Jesus had said? Jesus' enemies hadn't. (Matthew 27:63) Or maybe the disciples remembered, but just didn't believe it. Or even understand it. I mean, Jesus was always talking in riddles - who knew what he really meant most of the time?

But whatever else was going on in their hearts and minds at the time, the main reason the disciples gave up hope was that Jesus hadn't followed *their* plan (Acts 1:6). He was meant to get to Jerusalem and hold a rally, convince people with miraculous signs that he was the promised Saviour of Israel, then overthrow the Romans with the power of his might and set up government...and, of course, reward his loyal supporters in the process. But instead he died.

What must that have been like for those disciples? They had invested their lives in Jesus, they had believed, they had seen the miracles and heard the teaching. They KNEW that Jesus was the Messiah. They had watched him being arrested and tortured and mocked, and those who had not completely given up hope were thinking, "He's going to act and save himself...now! Ok...now!" But the moment never came. Jesus was in the grave and their hope was dead and buried with him.

How often are we like the disciples? We forget that God's ways are not our ways. We forget that he will often bring about death in order to bring about life - not the life *we* have decided on, but the right kind of life. God's plan for Jesus was so much better, reaching so much further, and far more powerful than the plan the disciples had in mind.

The same is true in our lives. So, whenever things are falling down around you and you, like the disciples, cannot see what's going on, remember this principle, proven time and again:

God does his very best work in the dark.

We automatically think God will accommodate himself to our idols, but he does not. The Jews valued powerful and miraculous signs; Jesus became a sign of weakness. The Greeks valued wisdom; Jesus foolishly died. Australians value their lifestyle; Jesus demands daily death. Pray for God to reveal the idols in your heart that you expect him to accommodate to. Think on Jesus' death and resurrection and ask him for faith in him alone, that whatever happens you know he is working for your good, even if not in the way you expected.

Revise: 1 Corinthians 15:3-6 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

Read also: Mark 9:30-32, John 20:1-9, Acts 13:26-30, 1 Corinthians 1:18-24.

Questions:

1. What other reasons were there for the disciples lack of faith and resulting hopelessness? How might you have felt if you were a disciple during the days between Jesus' death and burial and his resurrection?
2. Life has periods of darkness where it feels like Jesus has died and there is no resurrection in sight. Can you recall any in your life? What can you learn about yourself from them in light of Jesus' death and resurrection? How can you prepare for future dark times?

World Peace.

Of First Importance. Week 1, Day 5.

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

World Peace. Who doesn't want it – except for weapon manufacturers? One lady wrote on the internet, “All I want for Christmas is world peace. Failing that, I want an iPod, a bottle of wine, a trip to the Bahamas...”

Well, good news! Jesus is going to bring it about. No, not the trip to the Bahamas! World Peace!

But how on earth is world peace ever going to be achieved when normal everyday men, women and children envy, hate, fight, ignore and hurt each other? What makes people think world peace is even possible when we can't get rid of the same failings in us that drive warring nations? We criticise world leaders for war-mongering or weakness and yet if we were in their shoes, what makes us think we'd act any differently? We wouldn't.

So this is what Jesus has done. He came and lived a life perfectly in line with the Creator's original design. Of course, nobody else is in sync with the Creator's original place for them in creation, so Jesus got caught up in the carnage of a world where people operate like cars that ignore the road rules. He was killed.

But that wasn't the end. Jesus' death paid the penalty every renegade human deserves for their wrong living. Then three days later he was raised to life again by the Creator as the first and greatest of a new and improved humanity. He was raised to life to prove the gospel is true *and* to give us a new nature and inner peace that will eventually spread to the whole world.

You see, he is in the process of completely changing us from the inside out. We, too, if we trust in him, are becoming new and improved humans. And we will, in the future, live in a new and improved creation where

everything will work like it was meant to and there will be no more clashes. When that happens, there will be world peace. Forever.

Jesus' resurrection was the first of many transformations from mortality into immortality. A new humanity made up of believers will be completed, the world will be made new for us and everything will be incorruptible. All the parts of our lives that we groan about and grieve over will be made right and we will not suffer imperfection any more! Praise God for his future plans for us and for the world.

Revise: 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

Read also: Romans 8:16-18, Hebrews 12:1-13, 2 Timothy 3:10-12.

Questions:

1. If we are Christians, Jesus' resurrection means our whole life is heading toward an incredible future. How does our everyday life change as we think on Jesus' resurrection and its truth becomes real to our heart? How does it affect your life today?
2. In Mark 14:36 Jesus asks for his Father to “remove this cup from me” indicating that he dreaded the death he was going to suffer, and yet he went through his suffering because he valued the joy that would follow. What does this tell us about how we can approach areas of our

The Gospel According To Graeme Butler.

Of First Importance. Week 1, Day 6.

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“Name?”

“Cephas, also known as Peter.”

“Not anymore. From now on you will be known as Graeme Butler. You’re a shepherd looking after sheep in Hebron. Your wife will be called Mildred, your sons will be Harold, Mike and Julian. Remember those names. Your life could depend on it.”

“But...”

“We don’t have time, Mr. Butler. There are people who will try to kill you because of what you have seen. Now, pay attention. You will be escorted outside of Jerusalem and taken to a safe place where you will meet up with the rest of your family. From there you will carry on to Hebron where you will be given further instructions. Now, is that clear?”

“Yes, but...”

“We really don’t have time for chit-chat, Mr. Butler. What I need to know from you is how many others have seen what you have seen?”

“Well, there is the Twelve, that group of maybe 500 hundred, James the brother of Jesus, a number of other apostles and a guy called Paul. So...”

“Five hundred? There’s no way we’re going to keep a lid on this!”

“Yeah, well that’s kind of the idea...”

Jesus never intended his resurrection to be shrouded in secrecy or shared with only a few. He appeared to over 500 people after he was resurrected and commanded them to tell people what they had seen! Not only that, he has left us with historical eyewitness accounts of His life, death and resurrection in the Bible, extra-biblical testimony to his life and death

and a history forever changed by those facts. This is not a made up story! Millions of people through the years since that event can tell you that Jesus is alive – they have transformed lives to prove it!

It is important to be open and honest about our non-negotiable gospel story and what we have experienced of it – and that can include all the doubts and ugly bits, and the great and beautiful bits. Ask Jesus for his Spirit and for opportunities to be open about him with others.

Revise: 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Read also: Matthew 10:27, Luke 1:1-4, Acts 26:25-26, 2 Corinthians 4:1-6.

Questions:

1. Why do you think Paul mentioned the resurrected Jesus appearing to people as part of what is “of first importance”?
2. How does an honest telling of your Christian experience – the good, the bad and the ugly – benefit others, both those who are Christian and those who are not? How does the gospel apply to all of those situations?
3. We are all capable of putting ourselves in our own personal witness protection programme. How do you think we might do this and why is it a problem for us? For others?
4. People often feel pressured to speak about Jesus because they “have to”. That usually results in a very ineffective and forced conversation. What is a better motivation? How can you become motivated yourself?

There's Knowing And There's Knowing.

Of First Importance. Week 1, Day 7.

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, **4** that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, **5** and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. **6** Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. **7** Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. **8** Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

The longer I call myself a Christian, the more I am convinced that this Christianity thing is not just knowing truth, it's *knowing* truth that leads to heart-felt godliness (Titus 1:1). And it's not just about believing the gospel, it is *believing* the gospel. And it's not just about forgiveness of sins, it's about knowing the one who forgives sins. You see, it's only when we encounter the *resurrected* Jesus that suddenly we know the rest of the gospel is true. So often we talk about Jesus like he's a celebrity that we have read about in some magazine or website or heard about on TV but whom we have never met. Yes, we've got the answers and yes, we can parrot the gospel message, but if Jesus has not appeared to us our Christianity is a shadow of what it's meant to be.

I have a friend who made a commitment to Jesus when he was very young. He grew up in Church circles and thought through his beliefs so they were his own, not just something he took for granted. He prayed and read his Bible regularly and trusted that God would bless him if he followed God's will. And yet one day he said, "I don't believe in Jesus. Deep down I don't think I ever did." And I think he was right. He had never had an encounter with Jesus.

Have you? I know that there are genuine Christians who just cannot remember when they first believed. Like John the Baptist who was filled with the Spirit in his mother's womb, some people tell us that, as far as they are aware, they have always followed Jesus. And I'm not suggesting that you need to have a face to face encounter like Paul and others in these verses did. The Bible is clear that most of us will not see him in that way (John 20:29). But if you cannot tell of an encounter where you knew deep down that Jesus Christ is alive then you will always be something of an observer of the gospel, a theoretician, and you will never feel the depths of joy that are available to a participant.

We can't witness to what we have not seen and we cannot display what is not in our lives. I don't want to cause unnecessary fear and worry, but I also want you to make sure of your standing in Christ instead of taking the risk that you just think you belong to him when in reality you do not. Paul said elsewhere, "Examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith" (2 Cor 13:5). Throughout history since that time, Christians have done exactly that asking themselves the hard questions. Ask this of yourself: Have I encountered Jesus? Has he appeared to me?

Any encounter with Jesus is a gift from God. Even the desire to know him comes from him. That means the most we can do is ask him to reveal himself to us. Read the Bible, think on what you learn, pray, talk to other Christians. Keep on knocking until he answers (Matt 7:7-8).

Revise: 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

Read also: Matthew 7:21-23, 2 Corinthians 13:5, Philippians 3:8-11, 2 Corinthians 4:6.

Questions:

1. "It's only when we encounter the *resurrected* Jesus that suddenly we know the rest of the gospel is true." How so?
2. The cross of Jesus shows that he takes sin seriously enough to die to defeat it, and loves people enough to die to win them. How does this give us confidence as we test ourselves to find where we truly stand with him?
3. Our confidence is not based on our experiences, but an experience is usually the kick-start for inner attitudes that show we belong to Jesus. Ask yourself: Are you drawn to Jesus, not only pushed by fear? Is pleasing Jesus a desire of your heart, not just a decision of your will? Do you enjoy seeing Jesus get glory even when you don't? Is your heart becoming more Jesus-centred?