

| back to basics



A SEVEN-WEEK COURSE
IN BASIC CHRISTIAN
BELIEF AND LIVING

Back to Basics is a seven-part course for teaching and reminding Christians about basic biblical belief and living.

Built around the well-known *Just for Starters* Bible studies, *Back to Basics* adds stories and illustrations both from Christian history and our day, songs, discussion ideas and skills training material.

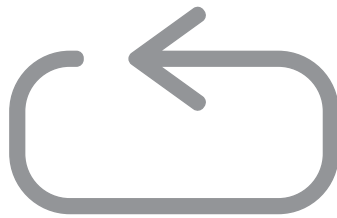
The overall result is an engaging and effective course for reinvigorating Christians in their understanding of God, and their love and service of others.

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BELIEF AND LIVING

STEVE CREE AND DAVE THURSTON

 **matthiasmedia**
SYDNEY • YOUNGSTOWN

Back to Basics

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Preface

No-one has been a Christian so long that they don't need to get back to basics from time to time. *Back to Basics* is a seven-week course for teaching and reminding Christians about basic biblical belief and living.

Back to Basics is built around the well-known *Just for Starters* set of Bible studies. For many years, *Just for Starters* has served as a useful tool for personal follow-up. Countless young or new believers around the world have been nurtured and established in the Christian faith through these seven foundational Bible studies.

Back to Basics starts with the framework of *Just for Starters* and supplements it with extra material:

- illustrations
- testimonies old and new
- songs
- book reviews
- ideas for discussion
- skills to learn
- a 'Your story' section at the end of each session, which calls on participants to put together and respond to what they've learned.

For example—in session 5 on prayer ('Talking to God'), after learning what God says in the Bible about prayer, there are examples of how people's lives have been shaped by prayer, a song

that reflects the importance of prayer, a book to read about prayer to build on what has been learned, and a range of skills relating to how this applies to your personal life, the group's life, and the life of the church.

By using *Back to Basics* in small groups, or even in a larger weekly congregational meeting, your church or fellowship group can re-establish basic beliefs and priorities and lay the foundation for continuing spiritual growth together. In churches where this material has already been used, it has certainly done this job. We hope that it can prove useful in your context as well.

1 Saved by God

Message from the world

The Proclaimers sang that they'd walk a thousand miles for love. Many people today assume it's possible to earn God's love, but the Bible tells us a very different story.

Message from God

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! (Romans 5:8-9)

Stop and think

Read the verses again. What do they mean?
Are there any words you're not sure about?*

Find the verses in your Bible

Read Romans 5:6-11 so that you can see the section we are studying in its context.

Try to write out Romans 5:8-9 in your own words

* justified—to be declared right with God, to be found not guilty

* save—to rescue, deliver from danger, help

* wrath—anger

Illustration

Wildfires were one of the many dangers that confronted the American pioneers as they crossed the rolling plains of the mid-west in search of new land. The prairie grass could grow as high as a man, and when summer came it became dry and dangerous. Summer also brought storms, including 'dry' storms with no rain, just lightning and thunder. When the lightning struck the ground, and the dry grass ignited, the fires could streak across the prairie faster than a man could run and much faster than the pioneers with their heavy wagons could move.

Yet the pioneers faced this threat to life with confidence. How?

When a fire was spotted they would stand with their backs to the wind. Then they would light a series of fires that would take off before them. In a few minutes, they had a large burnt area in which they could stand with their families and wagons to confidently wait the oncoming fire. The fire would not burn in the same place twice. Where the fire had already burnt it would not burn again.

God's judgement is coming on us all. No-one can outpace it; even our best efforts are futile. We cannot save ourselves. Yet there is one place where the fire has already burnt, where God's fierce judgement has already taken place—the cross of Jesus. At the cross, Jesus takes our place and our punishment. If we trust in him, we needn't fear the judgement to come. If we take shelter anywhere else, we have no hope.

Investigate

1. What did God show us?

2. What did Christ do for us?

3. When did Christ die for us?

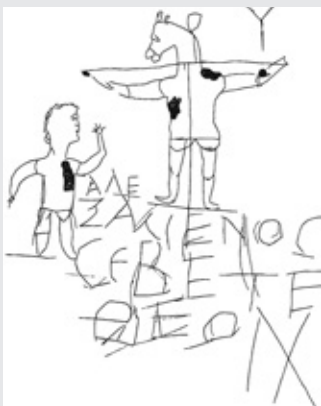
Think and apply

a. What does it mean to be a "sinner"?

b. How would you describe God's love?

c. What does the phrase "Christ died for us" mean?

d. What did you do to deserve Jesus' death for you?



Alexamenos worships his god...

Christians were ridiculed right from the start. This is a piece of graffiti from first-century Rome. It shows the figure of a man with the head of a donkey, hanging on a cross. Another man (a Christian) is shown worshipping this figure, with the inscription, "Alexamenos worships his god". People thought it was stupid to worship a crucified Lord. After all, what kind of 'god' dies on a cross? Answer: the God who is love—"while we were still sinners, Christ died for us".



John Wesley 1703-1791

Old story: John Wesley

I was... beating the air. Being ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, which, by a living faith in him, brings salvation to "everyone that believes", I sought to establish my own righteousness. In this vile abject state of bondage to sin, I was indeed fighting continually, but not conquering...

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

 **Investigate**

4. Jesus' sacrificial death ("his blood") means that we are **now**...

5. Since we are **now** right with God, what does our future hold?

6. What will happen to us concerning God's wrath?

7. How can we be sure that we will be saved?

 **Think and apply**

e. Are you right with God?

f. On what basis can you be right with God?

g. On what basis can you be saved from God's anger?

h. How can you be sure that you will be saved?

New story: Rosalind

When I became a Christian, I had in my mind a picture of Jesus on the cross. I told God that I knew Jesus had died for me, and I wanted to give my life to him forever. Since then, the cross has been a place I have come back to many times—the bottom line of many questions and struggles.

If I ever doubt God’s love for me, I’m reminded by the cross of the absolute depths to which he was willing to go for me. The physical and spiritual pain of Jesus and the anguish of his Father were for my sake—to earn my forgiveness. That’s how much my relationship with God means to him. It gives me a glimpse also of what it means to love others.

If I ever doubt my status as God’s child (“I’m not good enough”) the cross reminds me that I did nothing to earn my relationship with him. I am totally unworthy of God’s love, but he reached out to me in the depths of my sinfulness, loved me there and lifted me from it.

If I ever doubt whether I’ll be with God forever, the cross and resurrection remind me that death has been conquered and I don’t need to be afraid.

Other parts of the Bible to look at:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

Note: As in Romans 5, God’s love is shown in giving his Son, so that those who once were perishing might have eternal life.

Also see: 1 Peter 2:22-25, 3:18; Romans 3:21-26



Think and apply

i. How do you know that God loves you?

j. When you stand before God, why would God accept you?

k. What have you learned about God’s offer of salvation?

Classic song: And Can It Be

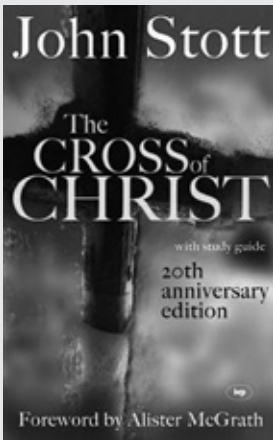
And can it be, that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain;
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That thou, my God,
should die for me?

He left his Father's throne above—
So free, so infinite his grace—
Emptied himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God,
it found out me.

Long my imprisoned Spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night:
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light.
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth,
and followed thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne
And claim the crown,
through Christ my own.

(Charles Wesley 1707-1788)



Book review: The Cross of Christ

What does the cross of Christ really mean? What did it achieve? How should we live in light of it? And why is it so central to Christian faith and life?

In this masterly book, John Stott answers these questions (and others like them) in his usual well-argued and warm-hearted manner. He not only explains in detail what the Bible says about the cross, but shows with great clarity how this teaching should pervade and shape every aspect of the Christian life.

This is a deeply profound book worthy of careful reading and thought.

The Cross of Christ
by John Stott
20th anniversary edition,
IVP, Leicester, 2006



Ideas for discussion

The cross and the Christian life

The cross of Jesus is not only the means by which God saves us; it also serves as the pattern and example of our Christian lives. Perhaps the most well-known statement of this is by Jesus himself in Mark 8:34-35: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it."

1. What do you think Jesus means by this?

2. Look up these other verses about the cross and Christian living. How do they apply to your life?

Philippians 2:3-11

Ephesians 5:22-33

1 Peter 2:18-25

1 John 3:16-18



Skills #1

Memorizing Scripture

Over the next seven weeks we'll be memorizing some key verses of the Bible. Here's why memorizing Scripture is worth the trouble and effort:

1. It's useful as a tool for evangelism and edification.
2. It helps us to think God's way.
3. It fills our head with "what is true, noble and pure" (see Philippians 4:8).
4. It's invaluable to have Scripture close at hand when we face temptation and testing.

How to memorize Scripture

1. The most important part of any memory work is to understand what you're learning. This means looking at the verse in context. To misapply a verse is worse than not knowing it, so always read the verse in the context of its surrounding passage. Don't move on until you understand what the verse means.
2. Write the verse out on a card. For example:
Romans 5:8-9
But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!
3. Say the reference first (Romans 5 verses 8 to 9) then the verse itself.
4. Break the verse into smaller sections.
5. Learn the reference; then learn the verse one section at a time, gradually adding sections until you know the whole verse.
6. Commit yourself to being word perfect.
7. Review frequently. Carry the cards with you so you can use a spare five minutes for review.
8. Constantly apply the verse to your life. What does it mean for you?



Memorize

Romans 5:8-9

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

Your story

How will you respond to God's offer of salvation?

Leader's notes

Ideas for making the most of *Back to Basics*

Simply used on its own in a small group context, *Back to Basics* is an effective tool. With a little forethought and planning, however, there are many ways in which you can enhance the impact of the course in your congregation. Here are just some ideas:

- The main Bible passage for each study can be used as the basis for a seven-week preaching program, with small groups studying the material in the following week.
- Material from the studies can be integrated with what happens on Sunday—the songs can be sung, people can do their own book reviews, and people can give their own testimonies.
- One of the aims of *Back to Basics* is to prepare people for further training and involvement in the church's life. Make the most of this by having further training courses and/or opportunities for service ready to roll once the course is finished.
- Start a bookstall, with copies available of all seven books reviewed through the course. (Matthias Media can help you with this.)
- In some groups it would be appropriate to sing the songs.
- Don't be afraid to tailor some sections of the course to your own church pattern. For example, when covering giving (in session 3), you may choose to provide an additional handout that provides specific information about giving at your church.

General notes for leaders

To maximize time, encourage participants to prepare the Bible study section beforehand. This will help ensure that all the material in each study can be covered in the time available (each study requires 1.5 hours).

There is a basic pattern for each session, as you will see from the suggested outlines below. However, the outlines suggest appropriate ways to link the material together in each session. This will help you to introduce this material in a way that reinforces what is being learned from the Bible. But please note that these are only suggested outlines. Once you are familiar with the material you can try your own pattern.

Sessions 3-7 begin with sharing testimonies—so after you have completed the skill in session 2 (on giving a testimony), you will need to divide the number of participants in the group by five and allocate who does their testimony when.

Study components: what they are and how they can be used

Illustration:	Can be referred to in the course of the session.
Message from the world:	Sets up the study as an interaction between the mind of the world and the mind of God.
Message from God:	The key verse of the Bible study (people will need NIV Bibles).
Stop and think:	Looks at the context and difficult words—must not be rushed over because it makes the Bible study effective.
Investigate:	Comprehension questions on the passage (numbered 1, 2, 3, etc.). These keep directing people back to the verse. This is important.
Think and apply:	Questions that bring God's word into your life (lettered a, b, c, etc.).
Ideas for discussion:	Ideas that provoke thought and lead to developing new skills.
Skills:	Putting into practice what you've learned in your life, your group's life, and your church's life.
Old story/New story:	Stories that show how this topic has affected Christians through the centuries and right up to today.
Classic song:	Demonstrates that we don't sing a song because it has a good tune but because it reflects God's truth—the essentials we believe are essential to what we sing.
Book review:	Encourages people to keep thinking it through. It's not expected that participants will read all seven books reviewed, but they could be encouraged to choose one to start with—perhaps from a study in the course that has raised further questions for them. If someone has read the book, they can give their own review in the group or church.
Memorize:	Putting into practice the skill of memorizing Scripture.
Your story:	Encourages each member to consider how their own life should be changed.

Suggested outlines for each study

Study 1

1. Read out message from the world and message from God.
2. Stop and think.
3. Illustration.
4. Bible study: investigate, think and apply.
5. After question d read Wesley's story.
6. After question h read Rosalind's story.
7. After question k look at the song. Ask people to observe links between the study and the song.
8. Pray as a group. Encourage people to pray about what they have learned from God's word.
9. Break.
10. Book review.
11. Work through the ideas for discussion on the cross, and the skills for memorizing Scripture.
12. Homework: memory verse and your story.

Study 2

1. Discussion of memory verse learning.
2. Read out message from the world and message from God.
3. Stop and think.
4. Illustration.
5. Bible study: investigate, think and apply.
6. After question d read Luther's story.
7. After question g read Marian's story.
8. After question h look at the song. Ask the group to observe links between the study and the song.
9. Pray as a group. Encourage them to pray about what they have learned from God's word.
10. Break.
11. Book review.
12. Work through ideas for discussion and skills. Hints for testimony jargon chart:
 - Sin: living my way and not God's way; rebellion
 - Faith: trusting what God says
 - Justification: God declaring us not guilty
 - Christian: a person who trusts Jesus' death and follows him as Lord
 - Grace: God's generous offer of salvation
 - Saved: rescued from the results of our rebellion