



FRESH START

You are beginning life's most satisfying adventure – your walk with God! As you start this adventure, here's what God says to you:

Count yourself lucky, how happy you must be —you get a fresh start, your slate's wiped clean. Psalm 32:11 (MSG)

When you make a commitment of your life to Jesus, not only is your "slate wiped clean", you also get a "fresh start" – a new lease on life. This class is designed to help you have a good start to your fresh start. During these weeks together you'll discover and begin to unwrap ten gifts that God gives you:

F ORGIVENESS	– Accepting God's Grace
R ELATIONSHIP	– Worshipping
E NCOURAGEMENT	– Handling Failure
S CRIPTURE	– Understanding God's Word
H ELP	– Following God's Guidance
S HAPE	– Being You
T OGETHERNESS	– Living in Community
A UTHORITY	– Serving Others
R ECOGNITION	– Being Baptized
T ESTIMONY	– Telling Your Story

This session: SCRIPTURE – Understanding God's Word

Why is the Bible important to my life?

Studying the Bible will help me think right, and when I think right, I have the equipment to live right!

What should I know about the Bible?

1. The Bible is our authority

If some of you were raised in church, you might be thinking, "Don't all churches use the Bible as their authority? Don't churches ask, 'What does the Bible say about this?'" I wish that were true, but I've been in and around churches nearly all my life and I've discovered that there are other sources of authority in some churches.

Other sources of authority:

- Powerful people
- Money
- Tradition

At our church, our first question should be, "What does the Bible say?"

2. The Bible is reliable

The Bible has 66 books written by about 40 authors over a period of 1500 years.

Think about that for a minute. If we were talking about a medical textbook written over a 1500-year span, think of the differences: there would be changes from bloodletting to blood transfusions. Or consider the changes in science: early on the world was considered flat and the center of the universe, of course now we know that the world is round, and the planets revolve around the sun.

Here's what's so amazing about the Bible. With so many different authors over such an expanse of time, one would think the message, or the plan of God would all change, but miraculously we discover that there is an amazing order and unity from the first book of the Bible to the very end – like one unbroken chain or road map.

Have you ever wondered why we have the books in the Bible that we do? There were certain criteria that had to be met for a book to be included in the Bible. Let me just quickly give you an example for the New Testament.

- i. A book was included in the New Testament if:
 - it had a connection with an apostle (Do you know what an apostle is?)
 - it was recognized by Christians in the early church as inspired. (Do you know what is meant by "inspired" – "God-breathed.")?
 - it was consistent with the Old Testament and eyewitness accounts about Jesus
- ii. Reliability tests for the Bible include:
 - manuscript comparisons

Let me simply explain this point. If we could have a bunch of copies of the New Testament, many dating back to around the time when the original documents were first written, and could compare them, that would really help to validate their accuracy.

Here is how it was done with other famous writings. Aristotle wrote his poetics during his life, yet the nearest copy we have to the time he lived is a copy found 1400 years after he died, and only 5 such copies are in existence. Caesar composed his history of the Gaelic Wars between 58 and 50 BC. We only have 9 or 10 copies dating over 1000 years after his death.

Now, by comparison, we have over 20,000 copies of New Testament manuscripts with some dating to within 30 years of the actual events. No one questions the authenticity of what Aristotle or Caesar wrote, so why question the reliability of the Bible, we have much more manuscript support.

- internal tests

The prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled in the New Testament. For example, Psalm 22 describes the crucifixion of Jesus in vivid detail. The amazing deal is that Psalm 22 was written hundreds of years before Roman crucifixion was even established.

In Ezekiel 26, the Bible predicts that the city of Tyre would be destroyed and would be a place where fishermen go to fish. In 333 BC, Alexander the Great destroyed Tyre and now it's a place for fishing.

- historical and archeological verification

I don't want to get bogged down here, but just know that when the Bible speaks of times and dates, other writings and fact of history support the biblical claim. And it seems that with each finding of archeology, there is more support for events as presented in the Bible. Listen to this excerpt from an article titled "New Find Casts Fresh Light on the Bible," that was in US News & World Report:

A wave of archeological discoveries is altering old ideas about the roots of Christianity and Judaism and affirming that the Bible is more historically accurate than many scholars thought. For example, until recently most scholars dismissed the biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as legendary. Now, two highly regarded American Archaeologists believe they may have found the remains of these cities plus the three other settlements referred to in scripture as the Cities of the Plain.

How can I get the most from my Bible?

1. Engage in biblical aerobics

The Bible is basic equipment.

It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do. 2 Timothy 3:17 (NLT)

Physicians and others say to develop and maintain a healthy heart, one must do an aerobic exercise 4-5 days a week a minimum of 20 minutes per session. What if we adopted a similar strategy for our souls – biblical aerobics. Reading the Bible 4-5 days per week for 20 minutes at a time.

Get a modern translation. Here's why. Take a look at a couple of the same verses in three different translations. (Note: Study the difference between a translation and a paraphrase.)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

John 1:1,14 (NIV)

In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and He was God. ...So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us.

John 1:1,14 (NLT)

The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word. ...The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.

John 1:1,14 (MSG)

2. Soak my mind and life with it

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Deuteronomy 11:18-19 (NIV)

We do this by memorizing God's word. Some of you are saying, "I can't remember anything." Yet, that's coming from a man who can remember almost every golf shot from last week's round, or from a woman who can remember what her husband promised to do around the house 3 months ago. All of us can memorize scripture, and the benefit I've found is that when I've needed a word from God the most, the right scripture came to mind. It's worth your time!

3. Live what you learn

What does the term "couch potato" mean? People who just eat a lot and lie around, right? Nothing's so terribly wrong with eating, it's just that a lot of us don't do what we need to do physically. Just like the physical world, we are to be well fed from God's Word,

but then we are to use the energy of that feeding to exercise or live what we have learned.

Remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. If you don't obey, you are only fooling yourself. James 1:22 (NLT)

In our next session:

HELP

– Following God's Guidance

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