

# Foundations for Faith

Basic Christianity

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# How to use “Foundations for Faith”

This material is primarily the work of Lorraine Fleischman and Virginia Bowen, under the original title of “Seisho O Yomu Kai.” It was originally geared as a study for Japanese students. We have adjusted some of the ideas and removed the references to Japanese thought in order to reach Mainland Chinese students with the Gospel.

This section is for the leader of these studies.

## **Introduction**

The way from darkness to light and a living relationship with God is unique to every individual. Yet there are some things which are basic and necessary for all of us. These four studies are designed to give knowledge of those fundamentals.

Two reasons for the “darkness” of not knowing God are lack of knowledge about God and the stubbornness of our hearts toward Him. These studies seek to provide biblical knowledge about God and encourage a turning toward Him with the will. There are suggestions in each lesson to help people respond to God at their level of understanding at that time, rather than proposing as a first response the gigantic step of total commitment at the end of the series. The responses suggested are related and appropriate to each lesson: The first time, simply to ask God to lead to the truth about Himself; the second time, to acknowledge to Him one’s guilt and need for forgiveness; and the third, after seeing that Jesus is both God and Lord, to open one’s heart toward Him and ask Him to reveal Himself further. With this background, people can grasp the significance of the Cross (the fourth study), and that final commitment of genuine faith seems to follow more easily when there has been some previous response to the Lord.

## **To Begin With**

It seems to be the most effective and most comfortable for new people when:

1. The invitation is to a “four-part series” rather than to an unending Bible study or to “church.”
2. The place is where they will feel more at ease, such as at the home of a friend or their own home; perhaps over coffee or lunch.
3. The atmosphere is informal, not like a “meeting.”

### With a Group or One-to-One

These studies can be used either by a group or by a Christian studying with one other person.

When used with a group	When used one-on-one
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A small group is most effective (4 to 8 people for best group dynamics)</li> <li>• It is helpful to find another believer for support and prayer, as well as to share the leading, answering of questions from group members, and talking with individuals</li> <li>• Plan to invite so the majority present will be non-Christians. In this way those not believing yet will not feel intimidated or pressured.</li> <li>• Sometimes people want to join the studies when they are already in progress. Because it is difficult to understand the later lessons without the background knowledge from the previous ones, it is wise to suggest that they wait until the series is offered again.</li> <li>• If any of the group misses a lesson along the way, try to study it with them before next time so they will be able to understand the following ones.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have it be a “study-together” atmosphere, not a teacher/pupil relationship. It helps to take turns reading the Bible passages.</li> <li>• For the most part let the other person answer the questions first, but add your own findings sometimes, being careful to keep to simple basics.</li> <li>• In studying the Word, be careful to avoid trying to prove a theological point with your friend at the expense of them learning the Scripture and seeing what it says. Feel free to add to their enrichment and their time studying the Bible and covering the questions, but do not inundate your friend with an amazing amount of material. Let him or her wrestle with the truths found in the Word.</li> <li>• If you have a friend who pursues a lot of rabbit trails and tangents, be sure to either address their concerns immediately or promise to get back to it soon.</li> </ul>

### How to get started

Become acquainted with the four studies yourself. Read and think through them as if you were hearing it all for the first time. Ask yourself, “If I were not a Christian or a new Christian, what things from what I am reading here would make me ask difficult questions?” See if you can field your own questions effectively; talk to others, and ask them questions to make yourself more relevant to where they are.

If studying with a group, decide which one of you will be the “Question Asker,” for the study. Although this is a cooperative effort, one person should be in charge, should keep the flow and order of the time going smoothly. Taking turns is a good idea, and planning things together will make your interaction with the Chinese smoother.

Be praying that the Holy Spirit will lead you to people whose hearts He has prepared (John 6:44-45; John 16:13; Acts 2:37). Some possible things to look for are remarks or attitudes that show they are thinking about spiritual matters, are having problems or are sensing a need, or simply that they are open-minded in conversation.

Simply explain to your friend, “I am an American Christian, and I believe that God is not just the God of America, but of people all over the world. Could I share some things with you about what I think Christianity is about?” or something along those lines. Most Chinese students only know about Christianity from the Three-Self Patriotic Movement churches, or from what they have learned about in classrooms, much of which they do not believe anyway. You have an opportunity to clarify the essentials of faith in Christ with your friend, who is probably curious and interested in learning new things about America.

Set a specific date and time when those who are interested will be able to come for each of the four Bible studies. A good suggested pace might be covering one study every week, or

every 10 days, depending on your schedules or their mastery of English, for example. This amount of time would allow for proper digestion of the Biblical content without allowing the material to be forgotten. Along those lines, it may be a good idea to do a quick review of the previous meeting's material to ensure continuity of the topical content of the Bible studies.

## **The Studies**

These study guides are in loose-leaf form so you can give a copy each time to each person. (In order to make this more available to people the authors hold the copyright to this 4-lesson version of *Foundations for Faith*, but have allowed copies to be made for ministry use.) Some people like to follow along in it as you study; others prefer just to hear the questions and look at the Bible. But giving them copies means they will not have to try to take notes as you study, and all of them can take the guide home to look through again if they want to. Please note that it is best not to give copies of all four of the lessons from the start of the series, particularly so that they will not read the fourth lesson without the background of having studied the previous material. This means, simply put, that the material is sequential, and since the audience is people who are receptive to the Gospel, or new Christians (meaning people who are not self-feeders of the Word), they should be *led* through the material.

### Why Questions?

These studies are in question format to make it possible for any Christian to study them with friends or with family, with one person or with a small group. It is not essential to have the gift of teaching or even any formal training to cover this material.

Questions help us to look for and discover information for ourselves. We become involved actively in the study rather than just listening passively. These specific questions are designed to help a person observe and discover what the Bible says, for themselves. It may be necessary to remind people to look for what the Bible says rather than just giving their own ideas and forcing that theological grid onto the truths of the Word of God. Also emphasize that these questions want simple, obvious answers, not deep, complicated ones. As much as possible let them have the stimulation and pleasure of finding things for themselves.

### Reading the Bible

If your friend has no Bible, arrange to loan one during the four-time series. In many cases, response to the Lord is in direct proportion to the person's own reading of the Bible between studies. Suggestions of what to read (see the end of each lesson) and an interested query about what they are noticing can encourage them to read. Even if the person's English is quite good, it is helpful for comprehension and internalization to have them read the passage in Chinese, and to follow that with reading it in English.

Comprehension is also better if Bible passages are read by paragraphs or large thought units rather than by taking turns verse by verse. Belief in the inspiration and authority of the Bible need not be made a prerequisite for studying it. If often follows naturally as people study it for themselves. If insisted on before they have adequate information, it can arouse antipathy unnecessarily.

### Other Points to Keep In Mind

Try to keep new listeners in mind and help them see the big, basic, simple points each time. Detailed explanations can be confusing to someone hearing these things for the first time. Be unshockable, open to hearing any opinion.

If anyone is argumentative, gently repeat that, “We’re studying to see what the Bible says, so let’s honestly try to discover that, whether or not we agree with that now.”

During this study time, try not to get sidetracked with arguments, such as about “science” in Genesis 1 or miracles. You can suggest that those interested talk about it after the lesson is finished.

Each study can be covered in about 1 1/2 hours if you keep moving right along. Most people tire and cannot concentrate well for longer than that. When less than 1 1/2 hours is available, the lessons can be divided in half. If time permits, however, there is a big advantage in getting the overall picture in four sessions. (Note: Though there are four lessons, at the Univ. of MD, we have found that each lesson normally takes at least two meeting times of 1-1.5 hours each.)

## **Responding to God**

At the end of each study there is a suggestion for an appropriate response to God as a result of what was seen in the Bible. This is an important moment, frightening to some, but eagerly used by others. It can be handled either with silent prayer or by praying aloud. In either case, encourage them to speak to God simply and honestly about what they are thinking -- doubts or questions as well as requests or confessions. Praying aloud makes us put things into definite words instead of just having vague feelings. (Feel free to encourage them to pray in Chinese.) However, in a group it is better to suggest praying silently lest anyone feel coerced into praying when not ready to do so. In a One-to-One situation you can encourage (but not insist on) praying aloud. At the end each time let your own prayer, but of a short, sincere talk with a loving Father.

Unless a person spontaneously shares how he is responding to God during the times for silent prayer (or prayer in a language you do not understand), it is usually best not to ask. But when chatting before or after the study times, a general question such as, “Are there any points which you can’t understand or accept?” will help them to ask questions and bring up problems they have been thinking about. Avoid pushing or hurrying people toward a positive response to God, no matter how much you long for it. Let God move them. (Your prayers for them when they aren’t listening can be as fervent as you feel!) However, by the close of the series there should be enough rapport with each person to find out how far he has come and to let him know your loving concern that he will come to know this living Lord.

At the close of the fourth study be sure to give an opportunity to believe, and afterward to say they have done so. If they are not ready yet, assure them that they can settle things with the Lord by themselves as soon as they are ready, and encourage them to go on reading the Bible.

Don’t panic if people go home after the fourth time without making a clear-cut decision. The Lord will continue to work in them, and they will continue to think. They know enough to turn to him when they are ready, and a decision made when alone is more genuine and lasting than a half-hearted or pretended one made under pressure. You will probably find there are many ways of coming to God as there are people who come.

## **What Next?**

Most people who study this series become so interested in the Bible that they request further study. When such interest is expressed, it is possible to introduce the MARK study guide of the Neighborhood Bible Studies series. For further help in starting discussion Bible studies, see the N.B.S. guide, How to Start a Neighborhood Bible Study, and the introductory pages of the MARK guide.