

**TUTORIAL**  
**8.19**

# Bible resources for the church

This tutorial gives an introduction to the area of providing Bible resources for the church. It introduces *Firm Foundations* - a series of foundational Bible teaching materials for both English-speaking settings and cross-cultural church planting and development.

## Having access to His Word

We see overwhelming evidence all the way through God's Narrative that He desires people to have full access to His Word, and that because of His grace He takes it on Himself to provide a way for them to have that access. This also intersects with another essential part of God's character; He draws human beings into real partnerships with Himself in His purposes. As well as being the God who communicates, and the God of grace, He is also the God who *equips* and *sends*.

God's commitment to providing access to His revelation means that individuals, churches and communities should have access to the Bible in their language and also be able to read it. Along with a faithful, heart-language translation, the church needs to have access to a body of Bible teaching and study resources that will help them to correctly interpret and apply God's Word within their own cultural context; so they are equipped to encourage, to teach, to correct and to stand against error.

When God's Word is doing what He intends it to do among His people, we can expect to see people who know they are sent... a group who desires to reach out and who knows how to. We should see them sharing God's Word clearly and faithfully so that it is understood; presenting Truth so it engages with people's hearts at a worldview level; teaching so that God's Word is given its proper place and authority and sharing in such a way that people understand God's complete Narrative with Jesus Christ as its center. But in order for them to do that, they need to be equipped with the basic tools - reading and writing skills, a faithful Bible translation, and culturally relevant Bible teaching and study materials in their language.

## Having the ability to use His Word

God's Truth - when it is communicated clearly and effectively - first establishes its own authority, then cultivates faith, develops correct understanding, and leads to valid applications. The Word itself equips God's people to engage with Truth and also to use it productively. Having understood it, believed it, submitted to it and begun to relate it more widely to their lives, they begin to learn how to ably use it as God's servants.

If they are accessing Truth at a worldview level, if the authority of God's Word has been established in their lives and if they're learning to make sense of each new part in light of the whole, then they are in a position of being able to find nourishment from the Word. They are able to make use of God's Word to feed themselves and to pass Truth on to others.

When Paul, under the Spirit's guidance, was encouraging Timothy in his ministry among the believers in Ephesus, he chose a term, which in modern English is often translated as "useful".

*<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.<sup>17</sup> God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16,17)*

He was telling his young friend to view God's Word as something that has very real, practical benefits. It works! It's not just theoretical truth, not just religious dogma, certainly not a set of confining rules. God's Word is a wonderful resource, a functioning toolbox that was available to Timothy and all believers - to parents, disciplers, teachers and church leaders.

## **A team approach to resource development**

Encouraging other believers to be involved in Bible Resource development is often an important foundation for a healthy future leadership team. Other believers who are involved in resource development and are committed to the clear communication of God's Word to His people, will be more likely to feel a responsibility for ensuring that clear teaching continues into the future.

Care should be taken that the church perceives the initial resource development 'team' to be open, and not an exclusive in-group of the better informed. Eventually the idea of engiftment will be described from God's Word and will provide the rationale for a group with authority to lead the church. But for now the basis of engagement in developing Bible teaching and study materials should be a shared burden for ensuring that the things God wants to be communicated are indeed being passed on clearly to his children, and to their particular community as a group. This should be seen as not something borne exclusively by the church planters, but a common burden placed on those with the heart and ability to help and the deep local cultural and linguistic understanding to ensure clear communication.

Cross-cultural workers should make serious commitments to the believers about their intentions to help to equip them to reach out to others. The point cannot be made strongly enough - in word, attitude and action - that church planters truly see their new brothers and sisters in Christ as the co-workers and partners in ministry that they actually are. Providing them with adequate Bible resources and equipping speaks volumes about the fact that the 'team' really does include all those who have heard and accepted the Gospel.

One of the church planting team's goals should be that the church will eventually possess a 'Bible curriculum' that they embrace as their own, consisting of well-developed lesson notes for a systematic foundational teaching program beginning with evangelism, continuing on for the fledgling church and eventually for the mature church. It should also be a goal that the local Body will include members who have the desire - and growing ability - to further contribute to the development of a Bible teaching and study materials for the church.

## **Foundational or Narrative Bible Teaching**

Any Bible teaching that establishes the authority of the written Word must not only present it as logical, factual and historical but, above all, must portray the centrality of the person of Christ. This is done effectively by presenting a panoramic picture of God acting consistently at different stages of human history, with the purpose of ultimately revealing Himself to man through His incarnate Son.

A Foundational or Narrative approach to teaching the Bible, systematically dismantles a person's existing worldview and cultural assumptions and fills in the gaps of their understanding about who God is, what He has done, and what He is doing today. They will know what the basic message of the Bible is and how it all ties together, and they will understand the character of God from what God says about Himself and how He has related to people through history.

Before people can interpret isolated pieces of Truth and apply them to their lives, they first need to know who God is, how He has worked through history, why He sent His Son to earth, why Jesus had to die, on what basis we live in freedom, who the Church is and what God is doing today. The simple message of the Bible told as He has told it – through the history, events, and thoughts that are recorded in His Word - is the foundation on which a local church can be built, grow and reach out and then be able to confidently build a deeper understanding based on that solid foundation.

If you have engaged with Modules 1, 2 and 3 of the *AccessTruth* resources, you will already know that we are committed to Bible teaching that presents the Narrative foundations as a basis for a cohesive view of Biblical Truth.

The material presented in those three Modules is culturally contextualized Narrative Bible teaching. The material was written with the audience's culture, context and preferred methods of communication in mind. Decisions were made to provide access to the material in a variety of formats (digital, video, audio and text) to give people flexibility. The language used, length of the sessions, the questions asked, and the possible ways people would interact with the material (personal study, as group studies, classroom, etc.) were all considered carefully as a part of communication. The goal, as it is in any cultural setting, was to do everything possible when preparing the material and presenting it, so that the Truth has the best possible chance to engage people at a worldview level. In any context in which Bible teaching or church planting is done, the teachers or church planters will need to give serious thought and time into developing a culturally relevant and contextualized message that truly communicates to and engages their listeners.

The *Building on Firm Foundations* series of Bible teaching materials provides a comprehensive resource for teachers or church planters to use to develop a culturally relevant foundational teaching and study series for any cultural setting. It should not be considered as the only Bible resource that the church will ever have in a community, but it is helpful as a resource for church planters to provide a solid initial foundation of Truth for the church to use for outreach and to build on later as they develop resources for themselves.

## **Introducing the *Firm Foundations* materials**

Foundational, chronological Bible teaching has been used successfully all over the world in many different cultural settings. God, in His Word, has progressively revealed Himself and His plan of redemption within the context of human history. Foundational, chronological Bible teaching follows this same pattern - *Firm Foundations* lessons start "in the beginning" to reveal truth, systematically and panoramically through the Old and New Testaments.

- Key Biblical themes that are crucial to a clear understanding of God's Word are highlighted.
- The Bible is seen as a whole - the panorama of God's working.
- Each lesson builds on the foundational truths laid in previous lessons.

It is a practical and proven approach for:

- Evangelism
- Grounding new believers
- Teaching maturing believers
- Planting churches.

Trevor McIlwain developed Chronological Bible Teaching lessons as he worked cross-culturally with a people group in the Philippines. He saw the need to establish proper foundations, and that these foundations be Biblically

laid. As he states, “...*the Scriptures were progressively revealed by God within the context and framework of history. Therefore, the best way to teach divine truth in any culture is God's way, within the chronological and historical framework of the Scriptures.*”

Trevor shared the basic outline that he had used with other missionaries who were also teaching cross-culturally. This outline eventually developed into detailed Bible lessons for evangelism and church planting. After effectively teaching the *Firm Foundations* Bible lessons, missionaries returned home with glowing testimonies. So enthusiastic were they about this method of teaching that pastors and other Bible teachers began to adapt the lessons originally written for cross-cultural evangelism and discipleship for use in churches and home Bible studies. Adaptations of the *Firm Foundations* materials have since been developed for many specific languages, cultural contexts, and age groups.

The original materials - called *Building on Firm Foundations* - have been used in many church and church planting contexts around the world, beginning in tribal church planting contexts. *Building on Firm Foundations* is the best version to use for developing materials for cross-cultural, church planting situations. The *Firm Foundations* material is a revision that has been designed for a modern, English-speaking context.

## **Building on Firm Foundations**

These are the materials used by cross-cultural church planters as their guide for developing Bible lesson curriculums in local languages, and for equipping local Bible teachers.

This latest revised edition has been updated based on the lessons learned by using the original material in more than 200 different people groups. The following outlines the contents of the nine volumes of materials,

### *Building on Firm Foundations Vol. 1 - Guidelines for Evangelism and Teaching Believers*

- Biblical and practical reasons for laying scriptural foundations for evangelism and church planting.
- Pre-Evangelism.
- Guidelines for Evangelism.
- Developing Lessons and Teaching.

### *Building on Firm Foundations Vol. 2 - Evangelism: Genesis to the Ascension*

- The chronological Bible lessons for evangelism.

### *Building on Firm Foundations Vol. 3 - Teaching New Believers: Genesis to the*

*Ascension*

- The chronological Bible lessons for new believers in Christ.

*Building on Firm Foundations Vol. 4 - Teaching New Believers: Acts*

- The chronological Bible lessons for teaching new believers about the pattern and development of the church in Acts.

*Building on Firm Foundations Vol. 5 - Teaching New Believers: Romans and Ephesians*

- The chronological Bible lessons for new believers in Christ, exploring the books of Romans and Ephesians.

*Building on Firm Foundations Vols. 6 - 9*

- These volumes contain further chronological Bible lessons following on from Volume 5 and covering teaching for New Believers through to Revelation.
- They also contain teaching for Maturing Believers through Genesis to the Ascension, Acts and Romans to Revelation.

## **Firm Foundations materials**

*Firm Foundations: Creation to Christ*

- Purpose: Evangelism - bringing people to repentance before God and faith in the Lord Jesus as their Savior.
- Lessons cover: Genesis to the Ascension

*Firm Foundations: Secure in Christ*

- Purpose: Teaching new believers. Emphasizing the new believer's position of security in Christ and laying foundations for teaching.
- Lessons cover: Genesis to the Ascension

*Firm Foundations: Growing in Christ, Acts*

- Purpose: Teaching new believers. Focus is the pattern and development of the church in Acts.
- Lessons cover: Acts

*Firm Foundations: Growing in Christ, Romans*

- Purpose: Teaching new believers. This course is an overview of the book of Romans - the basic body of theology that the Apostle Paul taught.
- Lessons cover: Romans

*Firm Foundations: Growing in Christ, Ephesians*

- Purpose: Teaching new believers. This course is an overview of the book of Ephesians.
- Lessons cover: Ephesians

*Building on Firm Foundations* and *Firm Foundations* materials can be purchased online in digital or print versions from [acesstruth.com](http://acesstruth.com)



## DISCUSSION POINTS

*Bible resources for the church*

1. Imagine that suddenly you have no translation of God's Word in your heart language and that you only have access to 25 short audio recordings of major Bible stories. In what specific ways do you think your spiritual life, activities, and thought life would be affected?
2. Think about the typical experience for a new believer in your cultural context:
  - Would most new believers understand clearly how the Old Testament relates to the New, and how key Biblical themes are established there? (E.g., would they understand that God's character has not changed?)
  - By what process would they eventually come to understand the 'big picture' themes of the Bible and see it as one integrated message with Christ at its center? (E.g., through personal study or reading, piecing together truth from messages they have heard, strategic teaching for new believers?)



## ACTIVITIES

*Bible resources for the church*

1. Read *Firm Foundations Creation to Christ, Book 1 - Part 1: Why the Bible Should Be Taught Chronologically - Chapters 1 - 2*. (This reading assignment is available for download on [AccessTruth.com](http://AccessTruth.com)).