

Foundation-1: An Orientation

Session 1

Our Family, History, & Salvation

Welcome to **Foundation-1: An Orientation**, the first of a series of **4 Foundations Groups** that are to help lay a firm foundation of faith in your life! This is the basic introduction or orientation to the Upper Room Fellowship (URF) family and its connection to the universal church. From each session's material and small group meeting, you will get to know the folks in our church family and understand why we do what we do.

As you will come to discover, this is just the beginning of an exciting journey. It's an orientation for the purpose of laying a good foundation for your life. We have designed three other small groups and supportive material to assist you on this adventure of walking with God, living in community, and serving others. The other groups, in which we hope you will participate and be transformed:

Foundation-2: Walking with God

Foundation-3: Strengthened by Community

Foundation-4: Blessing Others

As in a building, a firm foundation in our faith is extremely important. The Bible talks about it this way, referring to the one who builds on a firm foundation: *"He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the **foundation** on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built"* (Luke 6:48 NIV). The Bible talks about two builders, one who builds on a foundation of sand and the other on solid rock. It's not a question of building. We are all building some kind of life. The question is, "What is the foundation?" 1 Corinthians 3:11 (NIV) says, *"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."* The Lord Himself is the most solid foundation anyone can have so we're going to be talking a lot about getting to really know Him and how to strengthen your relationship and daily walk with Him.

The Upper Room Fellowship (URF) has identified 3 key elements that will carry us forward in our journey of faith: **INTIMACY, COMMUNITY, and MISSION**. As our logo depicts, one way to visualize this is to picture a sailing vessel with 3 sails: a Mainsail, Mizzen Sail, and Head Sail. (After all, the Fellowship is a Ship of Fellows, of sorts.) Just as the ship is empowered by the sails, we are propelled forward through **INTIMACY, COMMUNITY, and MISSION**. These elements are the essence of our vision statement: **KNOW GOD – SHARE LIFE – SERVE OTHERS**. All this will be explained in much greater



detail and depth as you continue in these Foundation Groups.

Until then and for starters, let's begin with this basic assumption for **Foundation-1**. It is found in Ephesians 2:19, "***You are a member of God's very own family and you belong in God's household with every other Christian.***" This scripture contains three key truths. Out of this verse we gather three very important keys about what the Bible says about the church.

3 KEY TRUTHS ABOUT CHURCH:

1. THE CHURCH IS A FAMILY. It says "God's household". It doesn't say the church is like a family. It says the church is a family, God's household. It's a spiritual family. In fact, your spiritual family is going to outlast your physical family. The Bible says there isn't marriage in heaven but there are Christians in heaven. So we're all going to be related in heaven—together—through our Heavenly Father and this family will actually outlast the blood family that you have here on earth.

Some families are sick, some are strong, some are weak, some are small, some are big, and all are different. The same is true with church families. We're going to look at what makes a healthy church family, what make the Upper Room Fellowship unique, and how you can be a part.

2. GOD WANTS ME TO BE A MEMBER OF A FAMILY. Notice he says, "*You are a member of God's very own family.*" That indicates it's God's will. It's not optional. Every Christian needs a church family. A follower of Christ without a church family is like a person who says "I want to play NFL football but I don't want to be a part of any team" or "I want to be in the army but not serve in any platoon" or "I want to be a bee but I don't want to be a part of the hive" or "I want to play first chair violin but not be in an orchestra." The fact is we need each other to be strong in our Christian faith and to fulfill our destinies.

You need to understand when the word *church* is used in the Bible, it's used two different ways. First, it's used to refer to every follower of Jesus who has ever lived throughout history. That's called the universal church. Every believer all around the world regardless of their denominational label, regardless of whether they're in a church building or out, or in a tent or a little hut or wherever around the world—everyone who has put their trust in Jesus—is part of the universal church.

But the other way the word *church* is used is to refer to a local congregation, a specific group of believers, like the church at Corinth, the church that met in Lydia's home, the church that was on the hill, or like the church here at the Fellowship. It's used in a local sense. In fact, most of the time you see the word *church* in the Bible, it's used to refer to a specific group of believers.

Once you became a believer, you are automatically a part of the universal church of God. Automatically. The moment you gave your life to Christ. But you don't become a

part of a local church until you make that choice. When you were born physically you were automatically entered into the human race. You didn't have a choice. You became a part of the human race the moment you were born. But you didn't become a part of any local family until somebody chose to take you home from the hospital. A decision was made and acted on.

That's what we're talking about here. You need to be a part of a local church family. Some may say, "I don't need to be a part of any local church. I'm a part of the invisible church." So, when you get sick, in the hospital, who visits you? The invisible members? When you have a need, who stands with you? You need somebody in the flesh. There are over thirty "one another" commands in the Bible you cannot follow or benefit from unless you're part of a local church and say, "That's my church family."

A few of these "one another commandments" include: love – honor – live in harmony with – stop passing judgment on – accept – be kind and compassionate toward – forgive – etc...one another. These and others like them can only be fulfilled in a local church.

3. A CHRISTIAN WITHOUT A CHURCH FAMILY IS LIKE A HOMELESS PERSON. It says, *"You belong in God's household with every other member of the church."* Unfortunately, some people believe they can be a "floating believer". These are people who, every week, pop around to a different church. They might say, "This week let's go to New Life. Next week we'll go to Real Life. Next week we'll go to Abundant Life. Then the next week, let's go over to the URF." They float all around in different places. They never become planted.

The Bible says if you're a Christian, you are a part of the body of Christ. You could be the hand, the ear, the eyes, the nose, the liver. What would you say if the liver said, "I think for one week I'll be a part of this body over here and the next week I'll be a part of that body over there and the week after that I'll be a part of this body over here"? Pretty soon, what's going to happen is an unconnected liver shrivels up and dies. You need to be a part of a local church family.

How are being a Christian and being a member of a church family the same? It's in the word *commitment*. I become a Christian by committing my life to Christ. I become connected with the local church by committing myself to other Christians. It's the two Great Commandments—love God and love others—being lived out. I say, "I am going to walk with God," and, "They are going to be my church family where I'm going to give and be given to, where I'm going to serve and be served, where I'll love and be loved."

To put it briefly, every believer belongs to the universal body of Christ. Yet it is important for the believer to belong to a local expression of the body of Christ. There are at least four important reasons why a believer should be connected with a local church family:

Identification – By doing so, you are identifying with a specific group of Christ's

followers and are becoming part of that family. As you are connected with other brothers and sisters in Christ, you are also identifying yourself as a child of our heavenly Father. Jesus said, *"I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God"* (Luke 12:8).

Commitment – In an age of little commitments, being committed to a church family is more than just visiting or attending. It is becoming connected with other specific believers and contributing to their lives. The Bible teaches us, *"Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen"* (1 John 4:20 NIV).

Service – A committed member belongs not only to get but to give. As Jesus said, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35 NIV). There is life that comes out of giving of oneself. Just as members of a family should serve one another, so members of a local church also serve each other and participate with God in what He is doing in our midst.

Belonging – When a log is rolled away from a fire, it soon goes out. Likewise when a believer is not connected with other Christians, his fire soon goes out. Psalm 68:6 tells us, *"God sets the solitary in families."* We were made for relationship.

WHAT MAKES THE URF A FAMILY? On Sunday morning we have many people that attend The Café, Sunday Classes/Groups, and The Celebration. They come from all different kinds of backgrounds. We're different in so many ways. But the Fellowship is so much more than what happens on a Sunday morning. We are a family that does life together. We can look at it in four categories:

1. Our **Salvation**. What God has done for us
2. Our **Statement**. Why we exist as a part of the universal Church
3. Our **Strategy**. How we fulfill our vision
4. Our **Structure**. When and where we fulfill that vision

One of the goals for **Foundation-1: An Orientation** is that you would commit yourself to Christ and His Body, His Church—perhaps the Upper Room Fellowship—and make it your family. If it is not the URF, then we encourage you to be connected to the Church, that expression of the Body, that God is calling you to.

Taking each of the above four categories and explaining them in detail will help you understand what the URF family is and help you decide if you want to be a part of this family.

However, let's begin with a brief history of the Upper Room. A little background on how the Fellowship got started and its history would be interesting and good to understand.

A HISTORY OF THE UPPER ROOM FELLOWSHIP:

The Upper Room began as coffeehouse ministry in Oct. of 1971 as several teenagers came together out of a desire to reach their peers with the good news of Jesus Christ. The coffeehouse was located in a room above Dr. Russ Stryffeler's veterinary clinic, hence the name, "Upper Room". Many who came gave their lives to the Lord and a Bible study was started to encourage these new Christians in their relationship with God. Due to the excitement and interest in the Bible study/fellowship time, the coffeehouse gatherings were soon discontinued.

Meetings were held on Mondays. Soon a Wednesday evening worship and prayer meeting was added. In July of 1974, The Upper Room Ministry was incorporated as a non-profit organization. The first annual business meeting was conducted on Nov. 1, 1974 with 35 members present.

Through the ministry, many youth were finding renewed meaning and interest in their own church families. However, many also began to view the Upper Room as their church home. Due to growth, the URF moved their gathering place in the summer of 1977 and began to meet at the former VFW hall on North Main Street in Columbiana, known as the Kreidler Building (currently occupied by H&R Block).

As the fellowship meetings continued, it was apparent the Lord was developing the UR into an expression of His Church. There was a need for pastoral care and leadership for the people who were calling the Upper Room their church home. Relationships were being formed. Marriages were taking place. Ministries began to be developed and sent out. Recognizing what God was doing, the vision was expanded and, in the spring of 1978, the Upper Room began meeting as a church body on Sundays. On April 26th of that year, David Stryffeler, with whom the coffeehouse idea originated, was ordained as a pastor.

As God began to build us together, we came to more fully understand his plan for church government and authority. In July of 1979, Jim Cook, Bruce Stryffeler, and Phil Steiner were ordained to co-pastor along with David. They all labored equally as a team in providing spiritual and governmental oversight to our church fellowship through the various gifts and abilities God had given them. (In a legal sense, these elders also function as the Board of Trustees for the corporation.) We are grateful to apostolic men such as Charles Brown, Chris Johnson, Ron King, Ted Evans, and others who, in our early years, have helped father and establish our growth as a church body. In January of 1980, the URF became a member of the Columbiana Ministerial Association.

Our church family grew rapidly as we began to meet on Sunday mornings and also became more diversified in age groups. In July of 1981, we began holding our Sunday gathering at Joshua Dixon Elementary School. Since that time, we began to experience steady growth particularly in the number of children who comprised our fellowship.

On July 24, 1984, Chuck Hamilton was ordained as one of the elders. In that same year, we established the Upper Room Children's Home in Eluru, India, partnering with

Jacob Beera and Hope Ministries International.

Because of our desire to better minister to and strengthen families and children it became quite apparent that our own facility would be essential in helping to accomplish this. In the fall of 1986, a building fund was established and on Dec. 8 1986 we purchased 5.375 acres at the location on the edge of Columbiana where we currently meet.

Construction on this facility began in October of 1987. The contemporary design and multipurpose meeting area reflect our desire to continue to reach out particularly to youth, singles and families and to provide an environment where inspiring worship and meaningful fellowship can take place. The dedication of that facility was Aug. 28, 1988 after nearly 17 years of rented or borrowed facilities.

In the spring of 1989 Dave Perkins and John Ferrante were set in as elders. Ron Myers were ordained as an elder in 1991, and Greg Aker in 2002.

Ground breaking for our current sanctuary was in April of 2007. A year later on April 27, 2008, we moved over from the old sanctuary into the new facility. Prior to this move, we had a week of reading the entire Bible in the new sanctuary as a preparation for its dedication.

While a sense of **Mission** is what triggered the beginning of the URF, God quickly brought other elements to the surface. From the very beginning, worship played a major part in our lives and in our gatherings. We developed worship teams—before such things existed—which we called *minstrels*. There was a strong emphasis on **Intimacy** with God, walking with Him, hearing and heeding His voice.

Another element that was a part of our nature was **Community**: sharing life together, encouraging one another, helping one another, serving one another, building each other up. There was such an atmosphere of family that many stated they felt closer to their Upper Room friends than to their own blood relatives.

These three things—**Intimacy**, **Community**, and **Mission**—marked the URF in its early stages. They are a part of our DNA—who God designed us to be. Out of this Divine design flows our vision statement: **Know God, Share Life, Serve Others.**

Now, knowing some the history of the URF, let's go back to considering **WHAT MAKES THE URF A FAMILY**. As stated above, there are 4 categories. In the rest of this session, we are only going to consider one...

#1. OUR SALVATION:

All who are part of the URF have this in common -- **Our Salvation.**

Galatians 3:26-28 *"For now we are all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ [notice it's not through the church, not through baptism, not through good works; it says*

through faith in Jesus Christ we become children of God] *and we who have been baptized into union with Christ are enveloped by Him. We are no longer Jews or Gentiles or slaves or free men or even merely men or women. But we are all the same. We are Christians. We are one in Jesus Christ.*"

This says that when you become a believer and you become a part of God's family, in God's eyes all of the distinctions are wiped out, and that the church is a united family. There is no place for discrimination. There is no place for racism. There is no place for even gender prejudices. It says we're all the same in God's eyes. We're all equally valuable to Him in the family of God.

What does it mean to be a follower of Christ?

Everybody wants to be happy. People try, primarily, three different ways. Some people look for happiness through acquiring possessions. It's the philosophy of many people who believe they'll be happy if they just get more things.

Some people look for happiness by experiencing pleasure. They'll try this relationship or that drug or this experience or that trip—looking for pleasure to be the meaning of life.

Some people look for happiness by gaining prestige or power. They think, "If I'm just liked, if I'm just famous, if I'm popular, if I'm the head of my department or company then I'll be happy in life."

But the fact is real happiness comes from understanding that it's not pleasure, possessions or power, but from understanding your identity and destiny. That's where real happiness in life comes, from understanding your true identity and fulfilling your destiny. Why are you here? How has God designed you? What does He want you to become? These are all very good and important questions.

Let's look at and provide some answers to these questions: Why am I here? Where does the problem come in? What's the solution? What purpose does God want me to fulfill?

1. Why am I here?

The Bible teaches very clearly that you were put on this earth for two reasons:

a. God made me to love me. God says, "*I have loved you with an everlasting love*" (Jeremiah 31:3). Ephesians 1:4-5 tells us, "*Even before the world was made, God had already chosen us to be His through our union with Christ because of His love. God had already decided that through Jesus Christ He would make us His children. This was God's pleasure and purpose.*"

You were created to be loved by God. Wow! What an awesome truth to consider.

b. We were created to enjoy a personal relationship with God and to manage all of the rest of God's creation with Him. Being made in His image makes us special. *"So God created human beings, making them in His image. He blessed them and said 'Live over the earth and bring it under control. I am putting you in charge'"* (Genesis 1:27,28). The Bible says *"God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment"* (1 Timothy 6:17). God said, I am putting human beings over all the rest of creation and you are to manage the rest of the world. He gave that responsibility to Adam and Eve and then on to us. The benefit is that when we manage it as God's representative, we get to enjoy it.

Jesus said (John 10:10), *"I have come in order that you might have life, life in all its fullness."* If Jesus came to give us life, it means we're not really living until we know Jesus. In fact, you're not really living. You're just existing until you know Christ because you were made to love God and be loved by Him, to know him and be known by Him.

When we know and love God, that relationship produces all kinds of positive benefits in our lives. It provides a clear conscience. It provides purpose in life, power, and strength, confidence, fulfillment, life and peace. He gives us help with our weaknesses. He gives us security. He brings us freedom. These are all benefits of having a relationship with Christ. We're not talking about a religion. We're talking about a personal relationship with Jesus.

This is the kind of lifestyle that God intends for us to live. Why then aren't most people really happy?

What's the problem?

Here's the problem: Man has a natural desire to be boss and to ignore God's principles for living. You can see this all the time in our society around us. You hear phrases like "Look out for number one... Do your own thing... If it feels good, do it..." regardless of what God says. In other words, "It's my life and I'll do what I please" or as the great theologian Frank Sinatra sang, "I did it my way." We want to be our own boss. We don't want God to be our boss. We want to be our own boss. The Bible calls this attitude sin.

In the word "sin", notice the middle letter. The center of sin is "I". **I** want to do my own thing. **I** want to be my own boss. **I** want to live my own life the way **I** want to regardless of God. **I** want to be the center and have things revolve around me. The Bible says we've all had this problem.

"All of us like sheep have gone astray and each of us have turned to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). Today we'd say, "All of us have gone astray and everybody's done their own thing."

"If we say we never sin we're only fooling ourselves and we refuse to accept the truth" (1John 1:8).

Sin is the opposite of love. The saddest part is that sin breaks our close relationship with God and causes us to miss out on God's best. We end up being afraid of God and therefore we try to live our lives outside His will.

It's amazing how most people are afraid of God. If you're standing around talking with a bunch of friends at work and you bring up God, all of a sudden they freeze up. They get nervous. It's because people are afraid of God. Why? Because they don't understand love and they want to do things their own way. They know that the relationship between them and God is broken. They may not understand it, but they feel it.

Isaiah 59 says *"The trouble is that your sins have cut you off from God."* Romans 3:23 says *"All have sinned and fall short of God's glorious ideal."* When it says "all", does that include Billy Graham? Yes. The Pope? Yes. Everybody, everywhere? Yes. We have all sinned. There's no perfect person in the world. When people have problems they often try many different ways of coping before turning to God. When we have this relationship that we were meant to have with God and it's broken, when we feel this emptiness inside, we don't always know that what we're yearning for is God. So instead of turning to God to fill this emptiness, we try all kinds of things: alcohol, drugs, an affair, therapy, success, thrills... People are trying to fill the emptiness in their heart when really what they're longing for and they don't know it is a relationship with God. That's why you were made and nothing will ever satisfy that except a relationship with God.

Even when we discover our deepest need is God, we often try wrong approaches to get to know Him. We rely on things like...

"My mother was a Christian so I must be a Christian." That's called salvation by heritage. That's not very logical. For instance, what if I said, "My mother was married therefore I'm married." I'm not automatically married just because my mother was married. I'm only married if I make the choice to get married, whether my mother ever married or not. So you're not saved by heritage.

"It doesn't matter what you believe, just be sincere." The problem with that is you can be sincerely wrong. I could sincerely think something is water, but if it is arsenic and I drink it, I'd be sincerely dead. There's a story of a pilot of an airplane who sincerely flew into a mountain and killed himself. He was sincere. He thought he was higher but he wasn't. You can be sincerely wrong. It takes more than sincerity to get to heaven.

"I'll just give up all my bad habits." That's called salvation by subtraction. I don't do this and I don't do that. "I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't cuss, I don't chew, I don't run around with girls that do." I figure if being a Christian is a matter of just "don't that", then everybody who's dead qualifies as a Christian, because they don't do anything. No, the Christian life involves far more than just a bunch of don'ts.

"I'll work real hard and earn it." That's salvation by service, an impossibility.

"I'll be religious and go to church." Religion does not get us close to God.

Here is the myth that most people have. They think in their mind that God has a scale and on one side are my bad works, all the bad things I've done, and all the other side are all the good things. If somehow I manage to do more good in my life than bad then God's going to let me into heaven.

That's just not true. In the first place, the Bible says heaven is a perfect place. Only perfect people get to go there. If God let imperfect people into heaven, then it wouldn't be perfect any more. You say, "If only perfect people get to go to heaven, then I don't stand a chance." You're right. You don't and neither do I. But from the very beginning God had a plan whereby we could get in on somebody else's ticket who was perfect. His name is Jesus Christ.

God says that in order to come to My perfect place you need to be perfect. (Otherwise the sheer glory of it would kill you.) So if you could live a perfect life and if you were to never sin and you were to come to God and He said, "Why should I let you into My perfect place?" You'd say, "Because I've never blown it." He'd say, "You deserve it. Come on in." But you missed that chance a long time ago. And so did I. So we need a better plan. The perfect plan is God saying, "I'll come to earth in the form of a human being named Jesus Christ. I will live a perfect life and I'll let people see what God the Father is really like in human form. Then I'll die on the cross and pay for their sins so, if you trust in and rely on Me, you can enter into heaven on My ticket. And as a foretaste, you can experience freedom and fullness of life right now through our union." It sounds like a good deal.

What is the solution?

Look at what Jesus said: *"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through Me"* (John 14:6). Notice Jesus didn't say, "I might be the way ... I point the way ... I teach the way ... I'm looking for the way." He said, "I'm it!" Then He said, "I'm the Truth." All the major religions point to truth. Buddhism says truth is found through an eight-fold path and if you strive all your life, you may eventually discover the truth. But Buddha at the end of his life in a famous statement said, "I'm still searching for the truth." The Hindu scripture says truth is very illusive and you'll probably never find it. It's like a butterfly and just about the time you grab it, it'll fly off. Others say truth must be searched for by purifying yourself by chanting and maybe you just might get to the truth. Mohammed said, I'm a prophet and I point toward the truth.

But Jesus came along and said, *"I am the Truth."* Not, "I point to it... I teach it ... " But *"I am the Truth."* He's either who He says He is or He's the biggest liar who ever lived. He said, "I am the Truth. I am the Way. I am the only way to heaven." God, Himself, came to earth as a human being to bring us back to Himself. If any other way would have

worked, Jesus Christ would not have had to come. The Way is not a religion, the Way is not a path, the Way is a person. God wants you to know Him personally.

Jesus has already taken care of your sin problem. *"The wages of sin is death, (That's the bad news); (And the good news is) the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Romans 6:23).

What does it mean to be a follower of Christ? It begins with putting your faith in Christ. There are so many myths about what it means to be a Christian.

Some may say, "I'm an American, therefore I'm a Christian. America's a Christian nation."

Another may say, "I joined the church, so I'm a Christian." If you join the Lion's Club, does that make you a lion?

People say, "I was born in the church." If you were born in a car, does that make you a spare tire?

People say, "I got baptized." You could be baptized in the ocean till every fish knows you by your first name but that's not going to get you to heaven.

It takes more than just knowing about God and Jesus.

People say, "I believe there is a God." So does the devil. He knows there's a God but you're not going to find the devil in heaven.

People say, "I prayed the sinner's prayer at one time." Does reciting the Declaration of Independence make you an American? So what's the difference? It's about understanding the great depths of God's love and having an ongoing and growing relationship with Him.

We are able to experience His love for us—He first loved us. God did this for us because He **is love** and wants us to **know Him**. *"God demonstrated His love for us in that while we were still separated from God by sin, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). God is on the one side and all the people are on the other side and Christ Jesus is between them to bring them together by giving His life for all mankind. God has already done His part to restore our relationship to Him. He took the initiative. He came to earth. Now He waits for each of us to individually receive what He's done.

An overview: Each of our lives has experienced the effects of sin. We've been battered and bruised, broken and scarred. Not to mention, we've each done our own share of bruising and scarring! Jesus came to heal those wounds, fill us with life, and restore our relationship with God the Father. There's not a chance in a zillion we could ever accomplish that in our own efforts—No matter how good we tried to be.

Out of love, God came to earth in the form of Jesus Christ. (That's why we celebrate Christmas and Easter.) He died in my place—on the cross—to pay the penalty for my sins. He conquered sin and its power, which He demonstrated by even defeating death, rising again triumphantly. He says, "If you'll trust and rely on Me, you can begin to experience real life here on earth right now on My ticket. Not only that, you can come into heaven for all of eternity where you'll continue to experience all My fullness."

How can I begin? Four things:

1. **ADMIT.** Here's how one begins to get to know God and experience His life. You may be a murderer or you may be a church member. You may have known about God all your life or this may be the first you've really heard of Him. Some may have wondered, "Am I really a Christian?" Maybe you've had doubts about it. You can know for sure without a doubt. You can settle the issue. For everyone, the starting place is surrender. First you admit. I admit that I need a Savior. I admit God has not been first place in my life and I ask Him to forgive my sins. *"If we confess our sins He's faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from every wrong"* (1 John 1:9).

2. **BELIEVE.** I believe that Jesus Christ died to pay for my sins and that He rose and is alive today. *"If you confess that Jesus is your Lord, and you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved"* (Romans 10:9). It doesn't say you might be. It doesn't say you can hope to be. It says you will.

Many Christians go through all their life wondering, "Have I really given my life to Christ? Am I really going to go to heaven?" They doubt their salvation over and over. You need to settle it once and for all. If you call on the name of the Lord, He says, "You will be saved". God will not lie. It doesn't matter how you feel. Feelings come and go. There are some days you may not feel saved. That happens to most of us. What matters is God says, "I will save you if you trust and follow Me."

3. **RECEIVE God's free gift of salvation.** Don't try to earn it. *"It is by grace you are saved through faith and it is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, so no one could boast"* (Ephesians 2:8,9). Can you imagine if you could earn your way to heaven, what a cruddy place heaven would be? If you could earn your way to heaven, everybody up there would be bragging about how they got there. "I got here because I helped a little old lady across the street!" "I got here because I was like Mother Teresa." No, you don't get there on your own effort. You get there just by receiving God's free gift.

Our relationship to Christ is not restored by anything we do, but on the basis of what Jesus Christ already did for us on the cross.

4. **INVITE Jesus Christ to come into my life and be the director or Lord of my life.** Have you seen these stores that say, "Under new management"? I think every new Christian should wear that sign for a month. That's what it means to be a Christian. I'm under new management. No longer am I calling the shots in my life. Jesus Christ is

the manager of my life. He's the CEO. He's the President, the boss-man. He's the director of my life.

*"To all who **receive** Him, He gives the right to become the children of God. All we need to do is to trust Him to save us. All those who **believe** this are reborn, not a physical rebirth but from the will of God" (John 1:12,13). How does one begin to walk with God? You must **believe** and **receive**.*

Let's say you're without Jesus Christ, headed for hell. Over here you're a child of God headed to heaven. How do you get from one to the other? You walk across a bridge. And who's the bridge over troubled waters? Jesus Christ. And how do you get across the bridge? You must believe and receive.

If I were to ask you, "How far are you along that bridge?" some of you would say, "I believe in Jesus Christ. I just don't know if I've ever received Him into my life." I'd say, Congratulations. You're halfway there! What you need to do is invite Him into your life. How do you do that? Jesus says, *"Listen! I stand at the door [of your heart] and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in"* (Revelation 3:20).

You can take these steps by praying a simple, but heart-felt prayer of commitment to God. If you've never settled this issue or if you've always had doubts, ask "Am I really a Christian? Do I know for sure I'm going to heaven?" You can know for sure today by doing what Christ has said to do, by praying this prayer and meaning it in your heart:

"Dear Jesus, Thank you for making me and loving me even when I've ignored You and gone my own way. I realize I need You in my life and I'm sorry for my sins. I ask You to forgive me. Thank You for dying on the cross for me. Please help me to understand your love and all you did and are doing for me. As much as I know how, I want to follow You from now on. Please come into my life and make me a new person inside. I receive Your gift of salvation. Please help me to grow in my relationship with You. Amen."

"Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13

If you prayed this for the first time or as a renewal, please share this with your group leader. This is a very important step in walking with Jesus.

The Bible says, *"Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."* Did you call on the name of the Lord? God says if you call on the name of the Lord, you'll be saved. Will God lie? NO! Then are you saved? Yes, if you meant that in your heart. It's not how you feel; it's what is real. And what is real is a commitment to Christ and His commitment to you. You don't understand it all. The day you were born, did you understand everything about the world? When you are "spiritually reborn" you don't understand all about the Christian life. You can't expect a baby Christian to get up and

be running a marathon or be a Billy Graham. You have to grow as a Christian. That's what this church family is all about. We're here to help you grow. You will continue in this orientation group called Foundation-1: An Orientation. There is much more to talk about as we take this journey with Christ and with others. But, we have other **Foundation Groups** to help you grow:

Foundation-2: Walking with God

Foundation-3: Strengthened by Community

Foundation-4: Blessing Others.

We have other groups that you may want to participate in after the Foundation Groups. These other groups are SHINE, BLAZE, Life Groups and more. We'll discuss all this in more detail later.

But the starting point is the **commitment** you've just made or re-made. There's a lot more to explore, but let's stop here and review, by way of some questions, so this material becomes more about transformation rather than just information.

FOUNDATION-1/1: LIFE APPLICATION

This "Life Application" part of the Foundation Group material is designed so that you can process the content as a review on your own and as a guide when you are with your group so that it becomes more relevant and applicable.

1. What 3 Key Truths are found in this scripture, "...You are a member of God's very own family...and you belong in God's household with every other Christian" (Ephesians 2:19 LB)?

1. The church is a _____.
2. God wants you to be a _____ of a specific church family.
3. A Christian without a church family is _____.
4. What is your response to these three key points?

2. What is one of the main goals of Foundation-1: An Orientation?

3. What four things unite us and make the URF a family?

1. **Our** _____ (What God has done for us)
2. **Our** _____ (Why we exist as a part of the universal Church)

3. **Our** _____ (How we fulfill our purpose)

4. **Our** _____ (When and where we fulfill our purpose)

4. Do you have any questions or response after reading the brief history of the URF?

5. Let us consider Our Salvation. In your own words, how does one begin a walk with God?

6. Why are you here? Why did God make you?

a. God made me to _____. What does that mean to you?

b. We were created to enjoy _____ and to _____.

What is your response to this truth?

7. Though the above is true, there's a problem. What's the problem?

8. Even when we know our deepest need is God we often try wrong approaches to get to know Him. This material gives some common ways of thinking many rely on. Do or did you relate to any of these ideas?

9. So if separation by sin is the problem, then what's the solution?

10. Do you now or did you at one time relate to any of the myths about what it means to be a follower of Christ?

11. In regards to beginning a relationship with Jesus Christ, what does God want you to do?

1.

2.

3.

4.

12. How do you respond to the above? Where is your relationship with Jesus Christ? Where are you “on the bridge”?

13. Did you pray the prayer on page 10 for the first time, as a renewal, or have prayed so with a similar one in the past? How about sharing your story with others in your group?

Supplemental Resources:

If you are a new believer and would like to know more about living this Christian life, please continue with the foundation groups and we also recommend these good supplemental books:

Where Do I Go From Here?, Understanding & Living Your Christian Faith – A Handbook for New Believers, by Dave Branon.

Foundational Truths for Christian Living, by Derek Prince