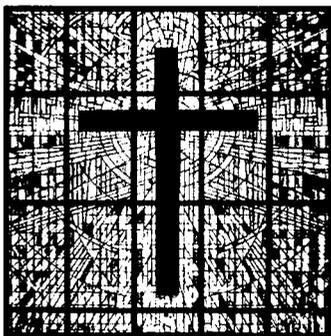


Note: This Work has been made available by the authority of the copyright owner solely for the purpose of private study and research and may not be copied or reproduced except as permitted by the copyright laws of Canada without the written authority from the copyright owner.

Sherbino, David. *The Essentials: Exploring and Understanding the Essential Beliefs of the Christian Faith*. Burlington, Ont. : Castle Quay Books, 2021.

DR. DAVID SHERBINO



**THE
ESSENTIALS**

**EXPLORING AND UNDERSTANDING THE
ESSENTIAL BELIEFS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**

The Essentials: Exploring and Understanding the Essential Beliefs of the Christian Faith
Copyright ©2021 David Sherbino

Published by Castle Quay Books
Burlington, Ontario, Canada and Jupiter, Florida, U.S.A.
416-573-3249 | info@castlequaybooks.com | www.castlequaybooks.com

Edited by Marina Hofman Willard
Cover design and book interior by Burst Impressions

Printed in Canada

All rights reserved. This book or parts thereof may not be reproduced in any form without prior written permission of the publishers.

Scriptures taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™
Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

978-1-988928-57-9 Soft Cover
978-1-988928-58-6 E-book

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: The essentials : exploring and understanding the essential beliefs of the Christian faith /
by Dr David Sherbino.

Names: Sherbino, David, author.

Identifiers: Canadiana 20210358939 | ISBN 9781988928579 (softcover)

Subjects: LCSH: Christianity.

Classification: LCC BR121.3 .S54 2021 | DDC 230—dc23



CASTLE QUAY BOOKS

USING THIS WORKBOOK

As a minister with years of experience in a congregational setting, I have discovered that many people are seeking a better understanding of the basic teachings of the Christian faith. Some have been in the church for many years, some are quite young in their faith journey, and others may be considering the Christian faith for the first time. Regardless of where you are in your faith journey, this material is designed to help you explore and understand some of the foundational teachings of the Christian faith and discover its relevance for daily life.

Some might use this material in classes that prepare individuals for membership in a local congregation, others might use it as a study guide for small groups, and there may be others who simply have a lot of questions about Christianity and want some insight and answers to their questions.

Each chapter is not intended to be a definitive statement; rather, it is a guide to explore the various topics. There is so much more that can be explored about each topic that I would encourage those who are teaching the course or leading a discussion on the various topics in a small group setting to be creative in their approach and to feel free to add to or omit material from this text.

At the end of each chapter, there are questions that relate to the topic. This is an integral part of the material that encourages participants to explore each topic further by studying applicable Scripture passages and discussing the questions. This helps the one who is leading the course see if the participants understand the material that has been taught, and it will allow for greater conversation and learning among the participants.

There are many who are interested in exploring the teachings of the Christian faith at an introductory level. Consequently, I have written at a popular level and have tried to avoid some of the more controversial theological

Dr. David Sherbino

issues. I am convinced that the material in this book is grounded in biblical orthodoxy and that most Christians would agree that these are essential issues to be considered.

The topic of baptism includes the practice of infant baptism as well as infant dedication. This is one issue that has caused some controversy in the church. Since there are churches that practice infant baptism and others that practice infant dedication, I felt it necessary to include both. Hopefully, by examining these issues, we will better understand each position.

My desire is that this material will benefit all the people of God and ultimately enable us to grow in our relationship with Jesus, the Lord of the church.

—David Sherbino

David Sherbino is Professor of Pastoral Ministries and Spiritual Formation at Tyndale University (Seminary), Toronto, Canada, and a congregational minister with the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Professionally, he is a certified spiritual director supervisor, a certified clinical thanatologist, and a fellow in thanatology. David serves as visiting professor at several seminaries in North America and overseas and speaks at numerous conferences.

He has written several books, including the award-winning books, *Re-Connect: Exercises to Develop Intimacy with God*; *Living, Dying, Living Forever: Spiritual Reflections on the Journey of Life*; and *Renew: A Basic Guide for a Personal Retreat*. All are published by Castle Quay Books.

David is an avid hockey player, an enthusiastic motorcyclist, and an out-of-control skier.

CONTENTS

1. THE BIBLE	7
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BIBLE	19
2. THE NATURE OF GOD	23
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE THE NATURE OF GOD	30
3. JESUS CHRIST	33
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST	41
4. THE HOLY SPIRIT	45
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT	54
5. THE CROSS	59
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF THE CROSS	64
6. THE CHURCH	71
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH	77
7. BAPTISM	81
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT THE MEANING AND PRACTICE OF BAPTISM	89

8. THE LORD'S SUPPER	93
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER	97
9. LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE	101
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PRACTICE OF LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE	108
10. LEADERSHIP	113
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT THE EMERGING LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH	120

1. THE BIBLE

Introduction

One of the most important truths of the Christian faith is that God, the creator of heaven and earth, has chosen not only to communicate with us but also to live in our hearts by faith. One of the ways that he has chosen to communicate with us is through the Bible. New Testament scholar Scott McKnight writes, “The Bible has a purpose: to help you hear God speak to you. But the paper becomes the voice of the Person only when we are open to the Holy Spirit. Our God is a God who speaks, and God speaks to us through our reading of the Bible.”¹

As we begin this study we start with a brief understanding of the Bible and how to understand what God is saying to us through his word. The word *Bible* comes from the Greek word meaning “book.” Therefore, the Holy Bible means the “Holy Book.” The New Testament refers to the Old Testament as the Scriptures, which means “writings.” Thus, one could also use the term “Holy Writings.”

The Divisions of the Bible

In the Bible there are 66 books written over a period of approximately 1500 years. The books are divided into two main sections called the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament can be divided into the following categories:

1. Scott McKnight, *Open to the Spirit* (New York: WaterBrook, 2010), 29.

The Law

The first five books of the Old Testament contain the law of God for the nation of Israel and these five books are often referred to as the Pentateuch.

The Books of the Law (5) are:

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

Historical Books

The historical books describe the initial occupation and eventual resettlement of the nation of Israel in the promised land, the transition from the rule of the judges to a monarchy, the division of the nation and the subsequent captivities of the northern and southern kingdoms, and finally the return of the remnant.

The Historical Books (12) are:

Joshua
Judges
Ruth
1 & 2 Samuel
1 & 2 Kings
1 & 2 Chronicles
Ezra
Nehemiah
Esther

Poetry and Wisdom Literature

The poetic and wisdom literature reflect the human response to all the events of life. The feelings of joy, love, despair, anguish, despondency, and hope are all captured in the pages of this literature. It is through the reality of life experiences, captured in these books that one realizes God is working out his purpose.

The books of poetic and wisdom literature (5) are:

- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Songs

Prophecy

A prophet is one who speaks God's word to the people. In the Old Testament, the prophets were to explain God's law and his promises to the people. They challenged the people to holy living and foretold of the future acts of God. In particular, the prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah, the one who was the hope of the nations. The prophetic books are divided into two categories: Major (4) and Minor (12). Some might think that a major prophet had something of greater significance to say than a minor prophet. However, that is not the case. The major prophets, though fewer in number than the minor prophets, are designated as major simply because their content is more extensive. The major prophets' work is comprised of 183 chapters, while the minor prophets is comprised of 67 chapters.

The Major Prophets (5 books) are:

- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Lamentations
- Ezekiel
- Daniel

Dr. David Sherbino

The Minor Prophets (12 books) are:

Hosea

Joel

Amos

Obadiah

Jonah

Micah

Nahum

Habakkuk

Zephaniah

Haggai

Zechariah

Malachi

The New Testament

The New Testament is divided into the following categories:

History

The first four books of the New Testament are called the Gospels because they refer to the good news (gospel) about Jesus. The Gospels are accounts of the life of Jesus and reveal him to be the Messiah. The fifth book, Acts of the Apostles, gives an account of the development of the early church.

The Historical books (5) are:

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John

Acts of the Apostles

Epistles or Letters

The epistles, or letters, are a series of messages written to individuals, churches, or clusters of churches. Their primary purpose was to address issues that arose in the early church and to provide instruction and correction in living the Christian life.

The Epistles (21 books) are:

- Romans
- 1 & 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1 & 2 Thessalonians
- 1 & 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon
- Hebrews
- James
- 1 & 2 Peter
- 1, 2, & 3 John
- Jude

Prophecy

The last book of the New Testament contains a series of visions given by God to the apostle John. The language is filled with symbolism, but throughout the ages this book has given great hope to Christians, as the message reveals that God is ultimately in control of history and that the powers of darkness will ultimately be defeated.

The book of Prophecy (1) is:

The Revelation of John

God Speaks Through Revelation

A basic claim of the Bible is that God wants to make himself known to us. Therefore, we need to realize that Christianity is a revealed religion. God speaks to us. He speaks to us because he desires to be in a relationship with us. There are different ways that God reveals himself, some of which are described here.

General Revelation

General revelation, sometimes referred to as natural revelation, is one of the ways God makes himself known to all people through creation, through the natural law, or through reasoning. Three things we discover about God through general revelation are the following:

We discover God's eternity, power, and divinity.

The *heavens* declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. (Psalm 19:1, emphasis added)

For *since* the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. (Romans 1:20, emphasis added)

We discover God's kindness.

He has *shown* you kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy. (Acts 14:17, emphasis added)

We discover God's moral law.

All who *sin* apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. (Romans 2:12, emphasis added)

Special Revelation

God has chosen to speak to all people through creation to make himself known as Creator. However, it is through special revelation that he makes himself known as Saviour. This act of special revelation comes through prophets, through the Scriptures, and ultimately through Jesus Christ.

A major factor of special revelation is that God spoke. "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe" (Hebrews 1:1–2).

In the Old Testament, the prophets who spoke often prefaced their statement with the words "This is what the LORD says," which implied that the words spoken by them were not simply their words but were to be received as God's words (2 Peter 1:21).

The ultimate expression of God's revelation is in his Son, Jesus.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared and we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:1–5)

The Inspiration of the Bible

Although written over a period of about 1500 years, the Bible maintains that God is the ultimate author speaking through various writers. Thus, it is customary to use the term *inspiration* when one refers to the origin of the Bible.

All Scripture is God breathed [inspired] and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
(2 Timothy 3:16–17)

Inspiration is not the same as the idea conveyed when one declares “that was an inspiring lecture or that was an inspiring song.” Theologian J. I. Packer states, “Inspiration means ‘God breathed’ and is defined as a supernatural, providential influence of God’s Holy Spirit upon the human authors which caused them to write what He wished to be written for the communication of revealed truth to others.”²

The Jewish people and the New Testament writers accepted that the Old Testament Scriptures were inspired by God. Jesus upheld that view, and when he quoted from the Old Testament Scriptures, he regarded them as being the words of God: “Above all you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20–21).

At the same time, it is recognized that the writers of the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testament, came from a variety of backgrounds. They came from different cultures, from different time periods, and with different intellectual abilities. They were not robots that simply recorded words given to them by God; rather, God spoke through the uniqueness of their personalities and circumstances to communicate his message to people.

When we read the Bible, it is important to realize that it is the word of God speaking to us. The psalmist wrote these words thousands of years ago, but it is still God speaking to us today.

The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of

2. J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 77.

the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. (Psalm 19:7–11)

We need to realize the Bible is a book that we can trust and that it will impact our life in many ways. Try the following exercise, and discover how God's word talks about God's word.

Exercise: Read the following passages, and write down what each one says about how your life could be affected by God's word.

Joshua 1:8

Psalm 119:28

John 17:17

2 Timothy 2:15

1 Timothy 4:13, 15

Basic Principles of Interpretation

The science of biblical interpretation is called hermeneutics. This implies there are certain guidelines that need to be followed when interpreting the Bible.

The Analogy of Faith

The most basic principle of interpretation is the analogy of faith. Theologian R. C. Sproul contends that this means Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture. In other words, passages of Scripture are to be interpreted in the light of the whole of the Bible. Passages of Scripture that are difficult to understand or seem to present a conflicting point of view are to be interpreted in the light of that which is known.³

Literal Interpretation

Some have misunderstood the meaning of literal interpretation. For example, when Jesus said he was the Good Shepherd, it is clear that this was not to be taken literally in the sense that he was referring to his occupation. Jesus was not a shepherd; he was a carpenter. To interpret the Bible literally means that the passage is to be understood in the normal sense according to the rules of grammar and context. Much of the time, grammatical structure tells us whether the words are in the form of a command, question, or declaration. The historical context helps us have a better understanding of the original meaning to the first readers. Consequently, the more modern readers know about the times and customs of the biblical era, the clearer the meaning of the text becomes for them.

3. R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 47.

The Holy Spirit as Interpreter

Since the Scriptures reveal spiritual truths, to understand these truths there must be a spiritual awareness and receptivity. The apostle Paul writes, “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them, because they are discerned only through the Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Thus, without spiritual enlightenment by the Holy Spirit, we will not comprehend spiritual truth. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to open our minds to biblical truth (John 14:26; 16:13–14).

Theologian and author J. I. Packer states that in our study of Scripture we “must approach . . . in humble dependence on the Holy Spirit, sure that we can learn nothing of spiritual significance unless we are taught of God. Confidence in one’s own powers of discernment is an effective barrier to spiritual understanding.”⁴

Practical Applications

Step One: Preparation

Approach the study of Scripture prayerfully. The Scriptures deal with issues that involve every aspect of our life. To approach the study prayerfully implies we are willing to act obediently to God’s Word (Psalm 119:33–40).

Step Two: Observation

Observe what is taking place in the passage. Don’t read too quickly. Take time to note the various details. What is the general tone of the passage? How does the writer address the readers? Look at the literary form of the passage. Is it discourse, narrative, poetic, dramatic, parabolic, or apocalyptic? Be alert for admonitions that the writer gives. Are there promises or words of encouragement? Watch for imperative words.

Finally, watch for the use of questions. Is the question used to introduce an idea, summarize a series of ideas, or just to challenge your thinking?

4. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, 112.

Step Three: Interpretation

An interpretation asks the question “What does it mean?” Recognize the style of writing the author is using. It may be poetry, wisdom literature, allegory, parable, or historical narrative. Each style brings new insight to the context. Consider the historical context of the passage. Be careful not to draw conclusions the author did not intend to convey.

Ask interpretive questions.

What is the importance of

a key word?

a key phrase?

names and titles?

Why did the author say this?

What is the context before and after the passage you are studying?

Step Four: Application

Application asks the question “How does this affect or relate to my life?” This part of the Bible study process takes the truths that have been discovered/observed and incorporates them into our daily lives. Jesus said it is not enough just to hear his words; we must do what they say (James 1:22–25), as this is wisdom (Matthew 7:24–27).

Step Five: Read All the Bible

There is a tendency to read only favourite passages or to rely on verses we have learned in the past. Spiritual maturity depends upon knowing the whole counsel of God. We need to have a broad understanding of all that the Bible teaches on a given subject (Colossians 3:16).

Bible Study Tools

There are many helpful and practical study tools to assist you in your study of the Bible.

- A Bible commentary—single volume or set
- Bible dictionary
- Bible handbook

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BIBLE

The following questions are designed to help you understand the significance of the Bible in your daily life. Take time to read the different passages and reflect on the questions. Be prepared to explore these questions further when your group meets.

Read Psalm 119:97–114.

This passage will give you some insights into the importance of the Bible for daily living.

1-1 List some of the benefits that will result from meditating on the Scriptures. Expand on one that is of particular interest to you.

1-2 In verse 105 God's word is described as a lamp for your feet and a light on your path. What does that mean? How have you experienced this reality in your life?

1-3 In verse 114 the writer states he has put his hope in God's word. What hope would one receive from God's word? Has this been your experience in any situation?

Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17.

1-4 What does this passage tell you about the reliability and significance of the Bible?

1-5 Note the origin and purpose.

Read Mark 4:1–20.

1-6 Describe the four types of soil on which the seeds fell. What was the growth on the different types of ground?

1-7 Jesus was speaking in a parable. A parable was a method used by Jesus whereby he told a story to illustrate a spiritual lesson. The soil in this parable represents different types of lifestyles. How do the different people respond to the word of God? What seems to be the reason for the different responses?

1-8 Take a moment to think about your life. What type of soil would best describe you when you heard the gospel for the first time? What type of soil do you think your life represents now? Can you describe what that is like?

1-9 In the light of this study, what is one thing you would like to ask of God as you continue your journey of life?