

## Back to Basics

During the almost two years...I know! can you believe it? Anyway, during that time I found myself thinking about learning more than just a few phrases in Chinese. I considered the possibility of taking a class, finding a tutor, etc. At one point in my thought a memory from my seminary days surfaced.

The seminary I attended required all students to take either Hebrew or Greek. Intrigued by the idea of studying the Old Testament in its original language I decided to study Hebrew. As you may know, learning a foreign language is not easy particularly for adults.

As best I can recall, about six weeks into the class I was so frustrated I wanted to quit. In fact, one night I got so upset that I threw my flashcards down on the table, slammed my book shut and said something like "That's it! I'm done! I'm too stupid to get this! I'm too old to be in school anyway! I'm too tired...blah, blah, blah.

While I may not have been excelling at Hebrew I certainly had the moaning, groaning and whining thing down pat (still do if I am entirely honest!) So there I sat, flashcards all over the place, tears of frustration in my eyes, convinced I would never ever learn this stuff.

So what do you do when you are in a state like this? I don't know about you but my solution to that kind of frustration is to go to bed, pull the covers up over my head and stay there as long as possible. Of course, life being what it is staying in bed forever is a somewhat unrealistic goal so when the alarm went off the next morning I got up and went to class like I was supposed to.

That day my Hebrew professor spent some time talking about what it takes to learn a new language. He said it requires commitment and discipline as well as time and effort. He went on to say that building a solid foundation for language depended on learning the basics and then reviewing them over and over again. "If you don't review the basics and keep the foundation strong," he continued, "you will find it impossible to add vocabulary and the details of grammar that you will need."

As I remembered his words about learning a language I began to wonder if what he said about learning a language could also be true of other things like being a follower of Jesus. If reviewing the basics and keeping the foundation strong is important in learning a language, how much more important is it to our faith?

As I continued to think about what makes up the basics of our faith I found myself gathering so much material that I could probably do an old-fashioned Baptist sermon that lasted for a minimum of two hours! Fortunately for all of us I realized the wisdom of the adage “keep it simple.”

One of the pieces I came across was a very simple prayer. And when I realized I could apply at least one and often more than one Scripture to each stanza in the prayer I knew I was on to something. Before we get to the prayer there is one, call it basic basic, which is that the people who use this prayer are people who believe in God and accept Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The prayer goes like this, “Open my mind, God, so I can learn about you. Take away all my sin and forgive me for the wrong things I do. Open my eyes so your love I will see. I’m sorry for not appreciating all you have given me. Open my ears so your word I will hear, open my mouth so I can tell others you are near. Let your light shine in all I say and do! Amen.”

**Open my mind, God, so I can learn about you...**the scripture that immediately came to mind was Mt. 22.37 where Jesus responds to a question about the greatest command saying, “Love the Lord you God with all you heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” I think one of the reasons that verse came so readily to mind is because I recently heard someone say that one of the problems with Christianity is that you have to check your brain at the door of the church.

And trust me, the way the statement was issued was not complimentary; in fact, it implied that if you were an intelligent human being who thought things through and asked questions you couldn’t possibly be a Christian. How sad is that? Maybe one of the reasons we need to keep

coming back to basics is so that we can “add vocabulary and details” to our knowledge of the Lord in order to better represent him to people.

I don't know where that notion came from because there are verses in both the Old and New Testaments that indicate the exact opposite. For example, in 1 Kings 3:9 we find part of Solomon's reply when God asked him what he wanted. “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?”

And this in 1 Chronicles 22:19 where King David who is dying, addresses the leaders of Israel. “Now set your **mind** and heart to seek the Lord your God. Arise and build the sanctuary of the Lord God, so that the ark of the covenant of the Lord and the holy vessels of God may be brought into a house built for the name of the Lord.”

A New Testament example is found in Luke 24.45 where it is reported that Jesus opened the minds of the disciples so they could understand the scriptures. I could go on and on but you get the idea. Nowhere in scripture are we told to not use the minds that God gave us.

It is important that we know what we believe and why we believe it. I love the way Brent Peterson, author of a blog site turns that negative sounding “check your brain at the door” phrase around. He says he always checks his brain at the door of the church – to make sure it is on.

**Take away all my sin and forgive me for the wrong things I do.**

The Apostle John must have been aware that some believers had forgotten about the need for confession and forgiveness because in one of his letters he wrote: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

So, if you feel dirty...confess. If you feel worn out...confess. If you feel like you're on the verge of a meltdown...confess. If you want to experience the blessing and hand of God on your life, confess. Repentance and forgiveness are absolutely basic to our faith. Recognizing our sin, confessing, and asking for forgiveness is something

that continues long after we have come into relationship with Jesus. It is an ongoing practice that allows us to experience the grace of God throughout our lives and helps us stay in right relationship with Him.

**Open my eyes so your love I will see.** The scripture that immediately came to mind was Mt. 13.16-17 where Jesus is explaining the purpose of his parables to the disciples. “But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.” This verse is about the disciple’s eyes being open, to their being able to see Jesus in the flesh, seeing his miracles, and knowing that he is the Messiah.

We don’t have the privilege of seeing Jesus in person, however, we can see and understand who he is by thoroughly studying the Bible. Our vision of him can expand as we grow in our faith and realize more deeply who he is and what he has done for us.

I believe this second stanza is also about looking around and seeing how God’s love is expressed in our lives. Each time we recognize God’s love we become more tuned in to that love and are able to see it in all circumstances.

**I’m sorry for not appreciating all you have given me.** A pure and simple apology for ingratitude. We have all been there, so focused on what we think we don’t have that we forget to give thanks for what we do have. The apostle Paul express this concept in Phil. 4.11b-13 when he says: “...for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

I have a note on my computer that puts it a little more simply. Quit complaining! Be grateful you are where you are and you have what you have. The key to being grateful is found at the end of verse three – I can do all things through him who strengthens me. That includes being able to stop

complaining! If we rely on Jesus' strength rather than our own, we can do it.

**Open my ears so your word I will hear...**In Mt. 4.4 Jesus answers a taunt from Satan to turn stones into bread by saying, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" I don't know how it is with you but I seldom if ever have actually heard the voice of God. Our best source for "hearing" God's word is the Bible.

The Bible contains the salvation history of humankind, the words of God as reported by the prophets and glimpses of the character of God. In a very real way when we read the words of Jesus we are hearing the words of God. That is why ongoing study of the Word is so important.

**Open my mouth so I can tell others you are near...** And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

This one is pretty much self-explanatory – the mission of the believer and the church is to tell others about God's love. To share our faith. To be bold and courageous in telling the people we meet about the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

**Let your light shine in all I say and do!** The previous stanza said to use words to tell the Good News. This stanza adds action. Everything we do should be done in a Christ-like way; with compassion, gentleness, and love. In other words, to walk the walk, not just talk it. God's love should shine through us and out to others just as a single candle can light up a dark room.

Which reminds me of a song whose tune we all know which we are going to sing right now with a few verse variations. We will begin and end with the chorus – This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, Let it shine, shine, shine, Let it shine!

So, start with the chorus...

First stanza "Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine..."

Second, "All up in my house..."

Third, "Out there in the dark..."

End with the chorus...

Ready? Let's sing...

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, Let it shine, shine, shine, Let it shine!

Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine, Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine, Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine, Let it shine, shine, shine, Let it shine!

All up in my house, I'm gonna let it shine, All up in my house, I'm gonna let it shine, All up in my house, I'm gonna let it shine, Let it shine, shine, shine, Let it shine!

Out there in the dark I'm gonna let it shine Out there in the dark I'm gonna let it shine, Out there in the dark, I'm gonna let it shine, Let it shine, shine, shine, Let it shine!

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, Let it shine, shine, shine, Let it shine!

If you like a more formal statement of the concept you can find it in Mt. 5.14-15. "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

Casual or formal, whichever way you put it, we are called to be the light of God's love in a dark and needy world.

To wrap this all up, let's go back to the beginning and pray this simple prayer together. Please stand as you are able. Let's pray.

"Open my mind, God, so I can learn about you. Take away all my sin and forgive me for the wrong things I do. Open my eyes so your love I will see. I'm sorry for not appreciating all you have given me. Open my ears so your

word I will hear, open my mouth so I can tell others you are near. Let your light shine in all I say and do! Amen.”

Please remain standing as we sing our closing hymn, #719 Go My Children, With My Blessing (vs. 1-3). Please stand.

Benediction: “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Amen.” (Col. 3.15-17)