

CREED

CONNECT TO THE BASIC ESSENTIALS
OF HISTORIC CHRISTIAN FAITH

WINFIELD
BEVINS



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“In an attempt to be edgy and culturally savvy, many in the church today have forgotten the ancient creeds that shaped the thinking of Christians for centuries. Winfield Bevins has provided us with a useful tool for rediscovering our historic foundations as Christians. I look forward to using this road map to guide new believers — young and old — on a journey of a lifetime.”

— SCOTT THOMAS, president, Acts 29 Network; author of *Theological Clarity and Application* and *Gospel Coach*

“I pastor a church that has tons of new believers. I always struggle to find theologically rich but life-practical resources to suggest to them. Winfield Bevins has done it! I highly recommend this book to those who want to know and grow in their faith.”

— DARRIN PATRICK, pastor, The Journey, St. Louis, Missouri; author; church planter

“*Creed* is a well-written book with the goal of helping Christians connect to the historic, orthodox faith. It accomplished that goal in a superb fashion. You will be edified and encouraged by this work on the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer. You will rejoice in the ‘faith once delivered to the saints’ that is embodied in these classics of Christianity.”

— Dr. DANIEL AKIN, president, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina

“We live in a culture marked by increasing biblical illiteracy in and out of the church. Winfield Bevins has taken timeless truth and shown how it can be used in disciple-making in a fresh and significant manner. I commend this book to you as a fantastic tool for church leaders to assist in the most basic of Christ’s commands, His commission to make disciples.”

— ALVIN L. REID, professor of evangelism and student ministry, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“As I read through *Creed*, I continued to say to myself, *We need to use this book in our church*. Winfield Bevins has put together an eminently helpful guide to the basics of Christian faith. But there’s more: *Creed* soaks each teaching in vintage Christianity through the use of historic vignettes and an accessible use of creeds. This approach connects twenty-first-century disciples to their vintage faith. Use it, especially for new disciples!”

— JONATHAN DODSON, lead pastor, Austin City Life

“Winfield says there is nothing new in his book. Good! That is exactly the point he wants us to get. What he correctly calls the ‘historic tools of discipleship’ have been with us and stood the test of time for good reasons. Of course they can just become

words and ceremony, but if we follow Winfield’s guidance and let them go deep into our souls as individuals and churches, they form the foundation on which to build a healthy spiritual life. This is a welcome refresher course from a pastor whose passion is the discipleship of God’s people.”

— STEPHEN SMALLMAN, instructor, CityNet Ministries of Philadelphia; author of *The Walk-Steps for New and Renewed Followers of Jesus*

“Winfield Bevins has written a book that helps readers of any level find out more about who God is, what He cares about, and the plans He has in store for His people. The connection between discovering the roots of Christianity and living a Christian life today makes this a great tool for helping people move from seeing God as a rule maker to seeing him as the Great Storyteller.”

— MIKE ANDERSON, director, The Resurgence

“In a time of spiritual homelessness, *Creed* opens the door to the historic Christian faith. If you’re tired of your own designer religion and open to something new but also old, tested, and enduring, *Creed* is the book for you.”

— RAY ORTLUND, lead pastor, Immanuel Church, Nashville

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BOOKS ARE NEVER written in isolation. They are often the direct result of the encouragement and assistance of others. This book would not have been possible without the combined effort of many different people who have helped along the way. I am grateful for all who have had a part in making this book what it has become.

First, I am grateful to my family for their encouragement, support, and flexibility throughout this process. My wife, Kay, and daughters, Elizabeth and Anna Belle, have sacrificed precious time with their husband/father to make this writing project possible.

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MY JOURNEY THROUGH THE PAGES OF CHURCH HISTORY

Early Christian teaching is simple and uncluttered; it cuts through the complexities of culturized Christianity and allows what is primary and essential to surface.

ROBERT WEBBER

I AM NOT the typical guy that you might think would write a book like the one you have in your hands. I was not raised in a traditional church. Actually, you could say I was not even raised in any church. I only attended church for an occasional Easter or Christmas service. Usually this was kicking and screaming. I felt that church was a cold and boring place for people who looked like they were attending a funeral.

Today I am a Christian. In fact, I am one of those culturally relevant, tech-savvy, artistic-type Christians who is addicted to using the iPhone and drinking way too much coffee. I love rock bands like Coldplay, Switchfoot, and U2. I am also a surfer. I live at the beach and keep a surfboard strapped to the top of my car just in case there is a good wave. Yes, that means on occasion I use words such as *dude* and *gnarly*.

I am also the founding pastor of Church of the Outer Banks in North Carolina. At our church we play loud music, use stage lighting, and serve coffee. In 2005 we began meeting in a home with only five people. Within a short time, the church outgrew the home and eventually grew to several hundred people; the growth brought many new challenges and opportunities. Many of the new people who began coming had little to no church background, and knew nothing about Christianity. It was a bit messy at the beginning.

One of our biggest challenges was helping new believers quickly understand the basics of the faith. We soon discovered that discipleship is particularly essential for the health and survival of new Christians and a new church. Consequently, we began to focus on growing from the inside by developing disciples instead of just growing our church numerically from the outside.

What was I going to teach these new believers? Like most young pastors, I looked to the latest books, programs, and curricula to teach the essentials of the faith, but they either lacked substance or were so academic that no normal person could understand them. It was discouraging trying to find a discipleship tool that helped real people connect with real doctrine in a way that was simple, yet profound.

Then it happened. I stopped looking for the next big thing and began to look to the pages of church history for answers. As I read books, biographies, and devotionals, I kept coming across the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten

Commandments. At first I did not understand their contemporary relevance because they seemed so ordinary and basic. However, many times it's the ordinary things in life that we overlook and take for granted. Think about the basic essentials that we need for everyday life. Imagine if you didn't have a roof over your head, eyes to see, hands to touch, or legs to stand on. How often do we overlook or underappreciate these things? We do something similar with the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. Slowly, I began to see their relevance for today's believers. Let me tell you why.

ARE THEY RELEVANT?

You may be asking yourself, *What is the importance of the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments?* or *Aren't they outdated in the postmodern world?* A few years ago I would have said the same thing. However, my tune has changed as of late.

Christianity wasn't invented yesterday and the church is much larger than one denomination or nationality. These three standards — the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments — have been used as a sturdy foundation for discipleship and doctrine for nearly two thousand years. If they were essential for the early generation of believers, shouldn't they be important for us as well? Why should we reinvent the wheel?

I suspect we do because of our obsession with the new. We live in a culture of change where we value everything new. We tend to focus on the "now" or the "moment" at the expense of the "eternal." But just because something is new doesn't mean it is better. Likewise, just because something is old doesn't mean it is useless and outdated.

Many contemporary Christians have historical amnesia and are missing vital aspects of the faith that are necessary for spiritual growth and maturity. Our lack of historic awareness can be remedied by revisiting the roots of the faith that have nourished believers since the time of Christ. Christians, such as you and me, are beginning to rediscover that church history has much to teach us about discipleship.

These three standards provide a simple and clear outline of the essentials of the faith that are universal for all Christians, regardless of denomination or affiliation. Sadly, most Christians get sidetracked over secondary issues rather than focusing on essentials. This is what C. S. Lewis had in mind when he wrote *Mere Christianity*: "To explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times."¹ Similarly, G. K. Chesterton referred to the Apostles' Creed as "understood by everybody calling himself Christian until a very short time ago and the general historic conduct of those who held such a creed."²

The Christian faith has multiple dimensions. Each of these historic standards addresses important dimensions of the Christian life that are profoundly interrelated. The Apostles' Creed addresses the doctrinal foundation, the Ten Commandments address the ethical foundation, and the Lord's Prayer addresses the spiritual foundation. When the doctrinal, ethical, and spiritual dimensions are woven together, they offer us a balanced model for the Christian life. These three summarize the heart of Christianity and offer us a glimpse of the Christian faith as a whole.

Many people have a small view of God because they have never taken the time to study His marvelous ways. The more you know about God and His redemptive plan for the world, the more you will fall in love with Him. The more you know about God, the larger your vision of Him becomes and the deeper your love for Him grows. This has certainly been true for me. By helping me understand the grand themes and doctrines of my faith, these three historic standards have enriched my walk with Christ and given me a newfound appreciation and love for Jesus.

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

Before you read any further, I must confess that you will not find anything new in these pages. The Bible says, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9), and there is nothing original about this book. Rather than offering something new, *Creed* is about rediscovering historic tools for discipleship that can help you grow in your faith by learning the essentials of the Christian faith.

This book grew out of the process of wrestling with the need to help new and existing believers learn the essentials of the Christian faith. It is the result of trial and error and countless hours of prayer and study. It is my humble attempt at sharing some of the insights and golden nuggets I have found along the way.

Creed is written as a pocket guide to help the contemporary Christian in the twenty-first century connect to the historic faith of the church by focusing on the essentials. Rather than discussing every doctrine of the Christian faith, I have taken broad strokes to help you grasp the primary doctrines of the Christian church in one small book. It is not exhaustive, nor is it meant to be; rather, it is a summary of the essentials of the faith. Outside of these, we follow the motto of Saint Augustine: “In essentials, unity; in matters of opinions, liberty; in all things, love.”

Creed is an ideal discipleship tool for believers, both old and new. New believers will find answers to basic questions about the Christian faith while mature believers will find renewal by revisiting these foundations. The first six chapters focus on the Apostles’ Creed and explore the vital doctrines of the Creed and their relevance for today. The final two chapters discuss the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer. I have written one chapter for each of them, not because they are less important, but to bring them into balance with the other doctrines we will examine in earlier chapters. Some of the chapters contain highlighted notes on various topics and significant Christians related to the chapter. You’ll also find questions at the end of each chapter that can be used for individual reflection or group discussion.

I invite you on a journey to rediscover the grand themes and doctrines of the Christian faith as revealed in these three historical standards. Come and see what millions of Christians throughout the history of the church have known, loved, lived, and died for. Taste and see these truths for yourself. My prayer is that this book will deepen your devotion to Christ by helping you learn the essentials of the Christian faith and their relevance for today. Let’s begin the journey.

PART 1

THE APOSTLES' CREED

The Doctrinal Foundation of the Christian Faith

THE APOSTLES' CREED, the most ancient and universally received of the creeds, succinctly summarizes the basic Bible doctrines. It begins with these simple words: "I believe." The English word *creed* is derived from the Latin word *credo*, which also means "I believe." The earliest form of the Apostles' Creed appeared around the second century, and it seems to have assumed its final form in the eighth century. Even though there is no historical justification for this belief, the creed is traditionally attributed to the apostles.

The early church used the Apostles' Creed to teach and disciple new believers in the faith. When someone became a Christian, that person was expected to be baptized as a public sign of the believer's death to the world, and born to new life in Jesus Christ. Before new believers could be baptized, they had to undergo an extended period of instruction in Christian beliefs that included memorizing the Apostles' Creed.

The Apostles' Creed is not a substitute for reading the Bible; however, it complements and summarizes the Bible's major themes in a beautiful and timeless fashion. It will help you better understand the doctrines of the Bible and develop a closer walk with God. Here, then, is the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.¹
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,²
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.³

I BELIEVE: Finding Faith in the Story

The Bible becomes even more beautiful the more one understands it.

J. W. VON GOETHE

I GREW UP being very skeptical of organized religion, especially Christianity. This changed when I became a believer at the age of nineteen and Jesus Christ radically changed my life. At the time I didn't know much about Christianity, but I knew I believed in Jesus. I soon realized that I didn't know much else about my faith.

Not that Jesus ever gets old. He is all you or I will ever need. It's still all about Jesus, it's always been about Jesus, and it'll always be about Jesus. But, eventually, we need to know more about the faith because it helps us understand more about Him.

Once we put our faith in Jesus, it's common to have a lot of questions. For instance: Does everyone go to heaven? Is there even a heaven or a hell? Is there more than one God? What about evolution and science? What is the Bible? Or, one of my personal favorites, Are aliens real? (Believe it or not, people really do ask me this!) The truth is, questions are a legitimate way for people to find faith. You and I ought to be able to answer tough questions for ourselves and for others as well. The apostle Peter says, "Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15, NKJV).

Where do we find answers to our questions about the Christian faith? We find them in the Bible. Time and time again, I have gone to God's Word to find personal strength and encouragement for life's greatest challenges. Although the Bible isn't a question-and-answer book, it is the place where we learn about God's plan and purpose for our lives. The Bible offers us foundations of faith so that we can find answers to many of life's toughest questions.

Reading the Bible can be a little overwhelming at first because it is so absolutely massive and contains many different doctrines, characters, stories, and themes. The good news is we don't have to be systematic theologians to read and understand God's Word. Reading the Bible is more like a marathon than a sprint, so I recommend that you start small and finish big. It will take a lifetime to study the entire Bible, and even then, you and I will never know all there is to know about it.

THE BIBLE STORY

I recently watched a movie starring Denzel Washington called *The Book of Eli*. It is a futuristic flick about a man who has the last Bible on earth. The story revolves around Denzel's character, Eli, a nomad in a postapocalyptic world who is called to take the

last remaining Bible to a safe location on the West Coast of the United States. His travels take him across the country and down bandit-infested roads. He risks his life so that the Bible doesn't fall into the hands of the wrong people. In the end, the Bible is placed on a shelf between the Torah and the Koran.

The movie raises the question, Is the Bible just one of many other religious books? Some people think so. According to one survey, nearly 50 percent of American Christian adults believe that the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon all contain the same spiritual truths.¹ Others simply believe that the Bible is an ancient book with little value and relevance today.

Many people today are obsessed with facts and statistics. If we don't know what something is, all we have to do is go online and Google it or read about it on Wikipedia. We want information at our fingertips without having to do any reading to get it.

The Bible is not a newspaper or fact sheet. It was not the primary concern of the biblical writers to give us a set of statistics and details. Rather than focusing on every minute detail, they focused more on telling the story. They simply wanted to tell the Story of God.

So what is the Bible? It is best to understand it as the great Story. There is something about a good story, and all great stories echo the one great Story, the Story of God's redemptive plan for humankind throughout the ages. Children's author Sally Lloyd-Jones observes:

The Bible isn't a book of rules, or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a Story.... You see, the best thing about this Story is — it's true. There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling the one Big Story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them.²

Over half of the Bible is story or narrative that tells God is the great Storyteller, and the Bible is His grand Story of redemption. It is full of amazing tales about great men and women of faith whom God used to change the course of history and who influenced the world with the Word of God.

Story helps us understand the true nature of the Bible by focusing on the message and meaning rather than on just historical facts. Story relates truths through painting a picture, drawing the reader into its pages. While the Bible is historically significant, the authors were not primarily interested in recording history. They were more concerned about telling the Story of God's involvement in changing people's lives. Don't get me wrong; I believe the Bible is factual and true. But we cannot cram the Bible into our modern, historical, critical mind-set because it was written in an ancient Near Eastern world to inspire faith.

The Story is one grand narrative of God's redemptive love for lost humanity, and it is made up of three major events: Creation, the Fall, and redemption. These three events resonate in the imagination and have been depicted in art and song throughout history. The Story begins with Creation and climaxes with God's sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins.

1. Creation. The Story begins with God. The Bible says, "In the beginning, God

created ...” (Genesis 1:1). Genesis tells how God created everything, including the sun, moon, stars, and the animals. Everything that God created was good. God also created man and woman in His own image to love one another and take care of the earth. God and humankind walked in unity and intimacy together.

2. The Fall. Then something terribly wrong happened. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and fell into sin by eating the forbidden fruit. They will forever be known as the guys who blew it. Their act of rebellion and disobedience is known as the original sin that brought a curse upon the earth. All humanity has tragically been affected by the Fall. Whether we realize it or not, we all share in the sin nature of Adam and desperately need the grace of God. The Bible says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23, NKJV).

3. Redemption. The Story doesn’t end with the Fall. God became the hero of the Story and rescued and redeemed His people from their sin. The scarlet thread of the Bible is commonly called the *gospel*, which literally means “good news.” The gospel is the underlying story of God’s redemption that runs throughout the Bible and points to Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. Jerry Bridges tells us the gospel is “not only the most important message in all of history, it is the only essential message in all of history.”³ The gospel is the key that unlocks the meaning of the Old and New Testaments. The great stories of the Bible testify to God’s grace and love for His people. The gospel is the thread that helps you read through the Bible and apply it to your life.

THE STORYTELLER

Every story has a storyteller, and the Storyteller of the Bible is God, the Bible’s author. The apostle Paul says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16, NKJV). God’s Word was written by great men of faith who were directly influenced and inspired by the Holy Spirit. *Inspiration* literally means “God breathed.” This means that the authors were vessels used by God to collectively write the greatest book ever written, the Holy Bible. God used these ordinary people to do an extraordinary thing — write the great Story.

The Lord still speaks through the great Story. I can remember the first time He spoke to me through His Word. I was a new Christian reading my Bible, but I had no idea what I was doing. One night, I was sitting on my bed, reading through the book of Psalms. When I read Psalm 51, the words on the page came to life and spoke to me about the very situation I was facing at that moment. The prayer of David became my prayer. The words of the psalmist in verse 10 (NKJV), “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me,” touched me deep within, and I felt God begin to melt my cold heart. Since that night, I’ve continued the discipline of reading the Bible. I want to encourage you to begin to read God’s Word for yourself and see how the Lord will speak to you from it.

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

The Bible is a collection of many different books with a unified theme. As a whole, it is a massive work made up of sixty-six books, divided into the Old Testament and New Testament, and spans thousands of years. Together, the books paint a picture of God's redemptive plan for the world. They are ancient documents that have been preserved over time and were eventually translated into our language. To give you a better grasp of the story these books tell, I want to share what they are, and where they came from.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament is made up of thirty-nine books, covering a two-thousand-year period beginning with the creation of the world, and closely recording the origins and history of the nation of Israel. It is old, and, I mean, very old. However, it's not called the Old Testament because it's old, but because that section reveals God's first covenant to humankind. A covenant is a special agreement between two parties that establishes a relationship based on mutual obligations and responsibilities. The Old Covenant refers to God's special relationship with the nation of Israel, which was based upon their obedience to God's law (see Genesis 17:1-19; Exodus 19–24).

The Old Testament includes history, poetry, and prophetic writings. It also contains some of the greatest stories ever told, such as the story of Moses and the Ten Commandments, Jonah in the belly of a whale, and Daniel in the lions' den — and let's not forget the story of Samson and Delilah.

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew for the Jewish people. During the time of Alexander the Great the Old Testament was translated into Greek by seventy-two Jewish scholars. The work was named the Septuagint, which means "seventy." It is usually abbreviated LXX, which is seventy in Roman numerals. By the time of Jesus, the Greek version of the Old Testament was widely used among Jewish communities everywhere because Greek was the predominant language of the Greco-Roman world. Early Christians also used this version of the Old Testament, including Jesus and Paul.

The New Testament

The New Testament is all about Jesus Christ and is considerably smaller than the Old Testament; it has twenty-seven books. If you've never read God's Word, the New Testament is the place to start. Begin by reading the Gospels — the first four books of the New Testament — which tell about the life, ministry, message, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Here you can find out more about Jesus' life and message for today. The Epistles are letters written to churches throughout the ancient Near Eastern world to address a variety of topics about the Christian life. The New Testament closes with the book of Revelation, which discusses futuristic events and the return of Christ.

The New Testament authors wrote down what Jesus said and did, sharing His teachings with others in the form of the Gospels. Early scribes made copies of the completed Gospels and other New Testament writings in many different languages, including Greek, Aramaic, and Egyptian. Most of these writings were written on papyrus, which was made from a reed plant. Other writers used parchment from the skin of animals. Eventually Christians began to use a more convenient book form

known as the *codex*. This form contained stacked sheets of papyrus or parchment that were fastened together at one edge like a book. Basically, this was the earliest form of the modern book. These early copies were sent out to churches and Christians throughout the ancient Middle East.

The early church did not accept a book to be included in the Bible without significant evaluation and debate. Over time the early church began to recognize and endorse the authoritative books of the Bible out of necessity. Due to the spread of persecution and false writings, Christians had to decide which books they were willing to die for. The approved books were then called the canon of Scripture. *Canon* means “a straight rod” or “measuring stick.” The formation of the Canon was an important step for the early church in distinguishing which writings were authoritative, and ensuring that future generations would know the true message of Jesus Christ.

Several points were used to determine and validate the canon of the Bible. First, a book had to be written by a prophet or an apostle, such as Mark, Luke, James, and Jude, or someone associated with them. Second, the book had to be in doctrinal agreement with the entire Bible and could not contradict or disagree with any previous Scripture. Third, it had to already be accepted by the church as an inspired book.

PROFILES: Meet William Tyndale (1494–1536)

William Tyndale is called the father of the English Bible. He attended Oxford and Cambridge and eventually left the university world to translate the English Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek. Unfortunately, the church was opposed to his attempts at translating the Bible into the language of the English people and he was forced to go into hiding. He became known as “God’s outlaw.”

Despite persecution and attempts on his life, Tyndale eventually succeeded in translating the entire New Testament and some of the Old Testament into English. In 1535, he was betrayed by a friend and arrested. He paid for his work with his life and was strangled and burned at the stake near Brussels. However, in the end, Tyndale was victorious because his translation became the basis for English translations of the Bible since that time.

HOW IT CAME TO US

Most people don’t have a clue as to how we got the modern Bible. I certainly didn’t when I first became a Christian. While it’s not necessary to understand the origins of the Bible to become a believer, it’s important to understand how it all came together so that you can explain it to others. Many people today are skeptical about the Bible, especially when it comes to translations. Popular novels like *The Da Vinci Code* and *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* challenge the credibility of the Bible, and ultimately the Christian faith.

Here’s an overview of how we got the modern Bible we read from today. As the

Christian faith spread throughout the world, the need for translations increased. Over time the biblical documents were translated into other languages so that people from other nations could read the Bible for themselves. At first, these Bibles were translated by hand. It took up to three hundred working days to produce a single copy of the Bible. This means that it took one scribe roughly an entire year to produce a single copy of the Bible. This made the widespread distribution of the Bible virtually impossible.

Everything changed when a German goldsmith named Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. In August 1456, the first published Bible was printed from the press. Gutenberg's press opened the door for others to begin to translate the Bible into various languages.

Not everyone was happy about this advancement. Many translators, including William Tyndale, were persecuted for translating the Bible into the language of common people, yet they persevered because they wanted everyone to have the Bible in his or her own language. In the 1380s, John Wycliffe produced the first English translation of the New Testament from the Latin Vulgate. During 1525–1526, William Tyndale wrote a translation of the New Testament from the original Greek. In 1522, Martin Luther published the New Testament in German; in 1534, he published the Old Testament. Later, in 1611, King James commissioned the popular King James Version of the Bible in English, which is still used today by many churches.

I am thankful for the blood, sweat, and tears of faithful men like Martin Luther, William Tyndale, and John Wycliffe, who risked their lives so that we could have modern translations of the Bible. Our modern English translations of the Bible, such as the English Standard Version, New International Version, and New American Standard Version, have been given with a price, and we should have great respect for the heritage of Bible translators who made these possible.

GOING DEEPER: Reading Your Bible

Here are several suggestions for getting the most from studying your Bible.

1. Choose a good translation that is easy for you to read, such as the New International Version, the New American Standard Version, or *The Message*.
2. Study your Bible daily. There is no substitute for a regular and systematic study of Scripture. You will be surprised how much you gain from reading your Bible daily.
3. Find a time that works for you. Every one of us has a different rhythm or time of the day that is best for us to study the Bible. For example, my wife is a morning person and likes to read the Bible in the morning, while I am a night person and the evenings work best for me.
4. Take notes and underline in your Bible. This will help you remember what you have learned and help you go back and find important places you have marked in your Bible.
5. Allow yourself time to think about what the Bible is saying. People try to read the Bible like a novel, without allowing time to take it to heart. It doesn't have to

- be long; try to take twenty to thirty minutes to study each day.
6. Memorize Scripture. Make some note cards and memorize several Scriptures every week.
 7. Share what you learn in the Bible with others. Teaching is one of the best ways to reinforce what you have learned.
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REFLECT AND RESPOND

The fact that you are reading this book means you want to know more about God and His Word. Learning about the doctrines of the Bible can help you do just that, as well as help you better understand the Bible as a whole. The more we learn about God and His Word, the more we are able to know Him personally. A. W. Tozer reminds us, “The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into Him, that they may delight in His Presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God Himself in the core and center of their hearts.”⁴

Before you read any further, I recommend that you do a couple of things. Take some time to explore your Bible. If you don’t have one already, go out and buy one. Begin to familiarize yourself with your Bible by reading the table of contents and flipping through the pages to see how God’s Word is organized and put together. It is God’s Story written for you, so take time to get to know it.

I would like you to reflect on the following thoughts. Think about how old the Bible actually is and how amazing it is that you and I have a Bible in our own language. What a great privilege and honor it is to actually own a Bible. Also, consider the men and women who gave their lives so that you and I could have a Bible in our own language.

As you begin to read the Bible every day, it will cause you to grow and mature spiritually. As you study, it will strengthen your faith, speak to your heart, and guide you in all of life’s tough decisions. As you continue to read it, God will reveal His plans and purposes for your life. Take some time to seek and find out what He is telling you from His Word.

1. What are some of the different ideas that people have about the Bible? Why do you think there are so many different views? Where do you think these different ideas originated?
2. The Bible is the Story of God. What is the overarching theme of the Story and how do the individual stories make it unique?
3. Most people don’t understand how we got the Bible. Do your best to recount the process of how we got the Bible. How does understanding that process make the Bible more credible?
4. Do you believe the Bible is still relevant? Why or why not? If you believe it is