

An Introduction

Our Journey

Welcome to our Foundation Series and thank you for inquiring of God's truth. You may not understand now but it probably wasn't your idea. God has to lead you. Like you, most of us here have come from other churches and forms of religion and worship. We were as confused and uneasy with their teachings as many of you.

We grew up believing what our pastors, priests, nuns, parents and grandparents told us. We never questioned them. Why would we? Unfortunately for us, that's probably the way our parents and grandparents learned also.

We always knew we were Christians. We believed in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ but were uncomfortable in the way and manner these churches worshipped God. Some would claim to be Bible believing and Bible-based churches but when asked why they did certain things contrary to the Bible, we received what seemed a stock, non-biblical answer. "Well, we choose to honor Jesus this way" or "That's from the Old Testament which is no longer relevant" or the best untruth of all, "The law was done away with. It was nailed to the cross with Jesus." All are wrong answers, as you will see.

Our founding group members were initially introduced to the truth of God by a man who had been with a Worldwide Church of God group in south Florida. Most of us had never heard of the Worldwide Church of God, but as we prayed and listened to the teachings we noticed our eyes being opened to God's truth more and more each week.

We learned and grew in God's truth, grace and knowledge. We studied the entire Holy Bible, not just the New Testament. You cannot learn or know God's truth with only part of the Bible. As

you will see, you cannot fully understand the New Testament without the Old Testament.

Our growth for the first three or four years was tremendous. We found the value of honoring God's Sabbaths, and we honored God's Holy Days and learned of their importance. We were baptized into God's family and we all understood the significance and responsibilities associated with it.

Because of this and knowledge we had received we began to notice a slowdown in our spiritual growth. We didn't speak of it at first but, as we later discussed, we all felt it. A few months went on and it was becoming obvious our group leader was falling away. He made several poor decisions and when questioned, he would not address it or would belittle the person who asked.

Other events happened that led to nine of us leaving the group. We met the next Sabbath knowing only it was Sabbath and we needed to be together. We prayed earnestly asking for God's guidance. We talked of what we had learned and now believed with all our heart and how important it was for us to stay in God's truth. All of us realized because of what we had learned to this point we could never go back to "mainstream" religion.

We prayed for God's guidance and He certainly has done just that. Each week on Sabbath, we would assemble for a Bible study. Individually, during the week we would look into other Church of God groups on the internet. None of us felt competent to lead a group. We felt we needed a leader. As we'll see, God seemed to have a different plan.

To give us an identity, we needed a name. One thing was sure, we wanted to be a Church of God. Part of our original study was to get back to the beginning. How did the apostle's teach Christianity? The pure, undefiled truth that was given to them by Jesus and God's Holy Spirit. How did we end up, 2000 years later, with so many "Christian religions? They all cannot be right. We prayed about it and within a couple of weeks at Sabbath study,

we all had been led to the same name, *First Century Fellowship Ministry, A Biblical Church of God.*

First Century is obvious, the beginning. Fellowship because many of the gentile congregations were fellowship meetings in private homes. Fellowshiping, as you will see when continuing on, is very important.

Because of our former leaders prior affiliation with Worldwide Church of God (WCG), we began to look there. We found it broke up and there were "splinter groups" around the country. We began to search these groups and discovered there were quite a few.

One of the things we did was research the history of WCG. We wanted to know how it came about, the core beliefs and why it broke up. From our limited experience, it seemed odd God would let a group that had and taught so much of His truth fail.

Through our research, we were able to learn so much about this church. This is a short summary of WCG to better understand our situation. For a long time it was totally dedicated to God's truth. Its founder, Herbert Armstrong, was blessed to be able to reveal God's truth and lead this group. As with most human-led endeavors, pride entered into the picture. Mr. Armstrong put people in charge he thought he could trust to lead this church. Internal politics, different agenda's and a very rigid hierarchical leadership style, coupled with the segregation of Mr. Armstrong and his influence in the church, led to its failure.

Each Sabbath, we would have Bible Study and pray for God's guidance for our group. We researched the doctrines of more than a dozen WCG splinter groups. Most had the basic core beliefs intact from WCG. A couple appeared to have been absorbed into mainstream beliefs and strayed from the truth once revealed and a couple adopted the rigid hierarchical structure of WCG, along with its related problems.

As we continued to meet we began to use sermons from some of these groups. We prayed continually for God's guidance and discernment. When we first got together no one saw things developing the way they did, and have.

Two members were led to present sermons from these other groups. They would pray and research individually and present the studies on Sabbath. Each week these studies would complement one another. Topic, direction and spiritual guidance blended almost seamlessly. They have become the defacto group leaders. We all continue to pray for guidance from God and He has been leading us each week since we've been together.

One message received by all members, and we have spoken of this often, is we are to remain separate and apart, but we are to continue searching for God's truth and take the best these other groups have to offer. Again, through prayer and God's guidance, we have gone through, so to speak, a number of these splinter groups and continue to follow as God leads us.

God definitely has THE plan. We began to wonder about our place in the Body of Christ. Scripture tells us how the entire body has to fit together with all parts working together. We were not really seeing or understanding our place in it. After all, we have only been in God's truth for a relatively short time. What could we have to offer? Again, God has the plan.

One of our founding members has a doctoral degree in education and has an educational consulting business. She had done some Bible Studies for the kids in our group. On Sabbath, we try to clarify things in our search for truth. We discussed how, no matter what church you attend or see, the members are all older people. Why don't we see pre-teens and teens? It would seem we have a similar problem that many in industry have had; we do not properly address and train our replacements. Today's kids are our replacements.

As a result, we have been able to develop and with the help of others, continue to develop ways to teach the kids God's word. It has been reviewed and accepted by the Christian Biblical Church of God (CBCG) group and can be accessed through their website. We are now doing studies based on CBCG sermons that are being made into studies and worksheets for pre-teen and teens. Pam has had positive feedback from a number of homeschooling parents about these resources. She is now developing Study Packs for God's Holy Days.

It appears God still has more for us to do. A couple of us have experience as law enforcement trainers. One thing we learned is, To Teach Is To Learn Twice. We had an opportunity to share truth with a Haitian church in a neighboring city. Initially it was thought we were getting ourselves in over our heads. After praying about it, a lot, God lead us to where we felt confident doing it. He led us to numerous Church of God sites where we could research and compare their information and from there, discern His truth. The study you have here is part of the result of that experience. God led us to this information and guided us through the process of reading, understanding and discerning His truth from all of this.

Sometimes we will get a call or speak to someone about our group and our beliefs. We try our best to enlighten them but have found they think they know God's truth but it seems to fall back to mainstream church teachings every time. When we would invite them to our Bible study, many times you could see how uncomfortable they were.

We have started directing people to our website to review what you have in your hands, *The Foundation Series*. It has made a difference. Now when we speak to them it is more for further clarification of a point, rather than total confusion from sitting in on a Bible study that is beyond their current level of understanding.

Our prayer for you is that you are finally able to find the truth of God as a result of God's effort through us. He has certainly led us and guided us for nearly nine years. He has been the God we were all searching for all these years. He's been here all the time.

These gifts He has given us, first His truth, then the Kidz Korner teachings from Him through us, and these Foundation Studies. He has guided us in producing these things so others being called now to search for truth may have an easier path and understanding.

All of us here are from different parts of the country and world. All of us have been searching for truth for a long time, uncomfortable in the mainstream religions.

We haven't always been in a Church of God. Tragically, some of us have had years with little or no thoughts of God. We have also learned that is part of His plan for us. He has called us. He will lead us. He loves us and knows what it takes to bring His plan to fruition. It would seem He has called us now because now He knows we are ready to receive it.

All of the material in this study and on our website is from God, not any one of us. He has led us to it. He has given us discernment and ability to assemble it so that others like us can begin to grow in His grace and knowledge. We are truly grateful for this task and humbled by it.

First Century Fellowship Ministry

A Biblical Church of God

Naples, Florida

Firstcenturyfellowship.org