

Make the Basics Beautiful

2 Timothy 4:3–4 “Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”

Isaiah 30:9–11 ⁹ For these are rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the Lord's instruction. ¹⁰ They say to the seers, "See no more visions!" and to the prophets, "Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions. ¹¹ Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!"

Hebrews 5:12–14. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³ Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

These verses connect maturity with *constant practice*. In life and in sport what makes certain teams successful? In the USA some years ago there was a women's soccer team that would keep winning game after game after game. People thought this was because of two stars that played in the particular team, but the coaches denied this. On one occasion these two stars had to play in a tournament away in the Orient, yet their team went on to win in that season. Of course, people were intrigued by this and they asked what the key to their success was; they answered by saying “the key to our success is self-discipline self-belief and desire. There are specific things in the science of success that we need to study. Very often the key to greatness is hidden in our daily routine. It's not in the flashy and flamboyant. I see this when I watch my kids playing basketball. So many points come from the simply plays that have been practised over and over again. It's when the team gets the basics right and play hard with great spirit.

I will show you an example of this in the context of a particular match. **Bradford City beating Chelsea 4–2 in the FA Cup on 24 January 2015.** Bradford were in League One, England's third tier, while Chelsea led the Premier League. Bradford came back from 2–0 down at Stamford Bridge. [Watch the official FA Cup highlights on YouTube](#). Focus especially on Bradford's third and fourth goals—scored in the 82nd minute and stoppage time. In both, Jon Stead provides a simple layoff for a teammate to finish. These give you a clear illustration of teamwork, supporting the player with the ball, and executing the final pass and finish well. **“A simple pass, made well, can accomplish more than an impressive move that achieves nothing. Never become too sophisticated to do the basics faithfully.”** A controlled first touch, a simple pass and an intelligent run can create a beautiful goal. The beauty comes from doing ordinary things exceptionally well, together. **“We often admire the spectacular goal and overlook the simple actions that made it possible.”**

It's interesting how in sport they talk about how a team can lose due to “schoolboy errors”. Think of the recent way in which the Springboks lost to the Wallabies. They didn't get the basics right and there were a lot of unforced errors. In the 42–38 loss to Australia in Perth on 27 September 2026, the Springboks' main failures in the basics were handling, securing the high ball, discipline and decision-making. They trailed 42–17 before their late comeback. **“Even world champions cannot afford to neglect the basics.”** I have seen that in life many of us are scoring own goals because we are not getting the basics right.

“Domino's (Pizza) had to listen to something painful: customers were unhappy with its pizza. So it went back to the ingredients—crust, sauce and cheese—and improved them. The following year,

sales at its existing American stores grew by 9.9%. There is a lesson here for us: give careful attention to the things that are central to your purpose. In December 2009, Domino's announced a new core pizza recipe. It improved three basic components:

- **The crust:** a new garlic-seasoned crust.
- **The sauce:** a more robust, flavourful sauce.
- **The cheese:** more flavourful shredded cheese.

Today we will explore what this looks like in our Christian walk. If your Christian life was Pizza. What is the crust, sauce and cheese in your walk with the Lord?

1. Keep Jesus and the Gospel central

Stay connected to Christ

John 15:4–5⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Fruitfulness flows from remaining in Jesus. Dependence on Him is essential to everything else.

1 Corinthians 15:1–4 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance^[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Paul identifies what is of first importance: Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again. We must never outgrow the gospel.

2. Love God

Matthew 22:37–40³⁷ Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”^[a]³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

Rev 2:4-5⁴ Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. ⁵ Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place

People who love God, seek fellowship with God through prayer and worship, beyond asking Him for things.

Ps 63:1-8 You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.

Mt 10:37 Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

3. Love People

Matthew 22:39-40

³⁹*And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[b] ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

Spiritual activity must lead to love.

Forgive as you have been forgiven

Colossians 3:12–14 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Compassion, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness and love make faith visible in relationships.

We demonstrate love for God and people when we practise justice, mercy and humility.

Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Galatians 5:13–14 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh^[a]; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”^[b]

Live by the **“one another” commands**. These show how Christians are called to treat each other. Here is a broad list, with closely related commands grouped together. The wording below is summarised; some translations use “each other” instead of “one another.”

“One another” instruction	Scripture references
Love one another	John 13:34–35; John 15:12, 17; Romans 13:8; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11–12
Be devoted to one another	Romans 12:10
Honour one another above yourselves	Romans 12:10
Live in harmony with one another	Romans 12:16; 1 Peter 3:8
Accept one another	Romans 15:7
Greet one another with a holy kiss or a kiss of love	Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14
Serve one another humbly in love	Galatians 5:13
Carry one another’s burdens	Galatians 6:2
Bear with one another in love	Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13
Be kind and compassionate to one another	Ephesians 4:32
Forgive one another	Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13
Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ	Ephesians 5:21

“One another” instruction	Scripture references
Consider others more significant than yourselves	Philippians 2:3
Teach and admonish one another	Colossians 3:16; Romans 15:14
Encourage one another	1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11; Hebrews 3:13; 10:25
Build one another up	1 Thessalonians 5:11
Strive to do good to one another	1 Thessalonians 5:15
Spur one another on toward love and good deeds	Hebrews 10:24
Confess your sins to one another	James 5:16
Pray for one another	James 5:16
Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling	1 Peter 4:9
Use your gifts to serve one another	1 Peter 4:10
Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another	1 Peter 5:5
Be at peace with one another	Mark 9:50; 1 Thessalonians 5:13
Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs	Ephesians 5:19

Scripture also gives **“one another” instructions about behaviours to avoid:**

What to avoid	Scripture references
Do not judge one another	Romans 14:13
Do not bite and devour one another	Galatians 5:15
Do not provoke or envy one another	Galatians 5:26
Do not lie to one another	Colossians 3:9
Do not slander one another	James 4:11
Do not grumble against one another	James 5:9
Do not deprive one another of marital intimacy, except by mutual agreement for a time	1 Corinthians 7:5

You can group these into five themes: **love, unity, service, spiritual growth, and integrity.**

4. Do the Word

*Matthew 7:24–27*²⁴ “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”²⁵ *The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.*
²⁶ *But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.*²⁷ *The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”*

The wise builder hears Jesus’ words and puts them into practice. A strong foundation comes through obedience.

James 1:22–27 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

²⁶ Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Hearing the Word must become action—including disciplined speech and care for vulnerable people.

5. Remain devoted to the fellowship

What does this look like? Let's examine the early church. Scripture, fellowship, communion and corporate prayer. The early church's shared life grew around these foundational practices, expressed through generosity and worship.

*Acts 2:42–47 ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ **Every day** they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

We want the church to operate in the power of the early church but how many of us are willing to to embrace the lifestyle of the early church?

6. Pray

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

These brief instructions describe everyday habits that keep our hearts turned towards God. PRAY is a great acronym for what to include in our prayers.

Letter	Focus	What to pray
P — Praise	Honour God for who He is and thank Him for what He has done.	“Father, You are faithful. Thank You for Your goodness and provision.”
R — Repent	Confess sin and invite God to search your heart.	“Forgive my pride and impatience. Help me to walk in love and obedience.”
A — Ask	Bring your needs and the needs of others to God.	“Give me wisdom today. Strengthen my family and help those who are struggling.”
Y — Yield	Surrender your plans, listen, and commit to obeying Him.	“Your will be done. Guide my decisions and help me follow Your leading.”