Richard Wurmbrand was a Church minister in Communist Romania, who was regularly arrested, beaten and tortured because he refused to renounce his love of Jesus and God, to either appease his persecutors, or give his family an easier life.

He said, there are ‘**two kinds of Christians: those who sincerely believe in God and those who, just as sincerely, believe that they believe. You can tell them apart by their actions in decisive moments**.’

Wurmbrand’s faith was strong, because it had solid and deep roots, in the type of good soil that Isaiah spoke of in chapter 61.

That is what we as C21st believers living in Romford today need as well – deep roots, that give us a sincerely held belief in God, so we are able to produce the Holy Spirit’s fruit, even in times of great adversity.

Series – looking at Christian basics, to provide or reinforce your roots.

Starting by looking at the Bible, as it should be our primary reference source when looking at God, Jesus and Christ-based teaching upon which to build our own lives and relationships.

The Bible is essential, as Jesus said, we should live on every word that comes from the mouth of God **Matthew 4:4**. It is God’s Word.

There is a dilemma where to start, because all of the Christian faith basics, support each other – God the Father, Jesus the Son, the Holy Spirit and through them, God’s Word the Bible, which is also central as **SLIDE** **John 1:1** says, **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning. 3Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.**

God’s Word has been there from the beginning.

Before sin, God communicated directly with Adam and Eve, but after sin entered the world that changed. Yet, in His mercy, God had His words written down for all people of all time, so that we can hear His voice speaking at any time that we care to open the Bible.

This Book has the ability to lead you to eternal life in Heaven.

But we need to know we can trust the Bible is accurate and God’s Word. How?

Firstly, the Bible is a real document – you can hold it and read it.

Secondly, no matter what your individual perspective is on Jesus is, He is a real historical person who is accepted as having lived and died around 30AD. This fact is corroborated by non-Christian historians of the time, such as Josephus.

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He clearly used the same Scriptures as we have in the OT section of our Bibles – so it shows they were in existence at the time and were accepted as being accurate.

Jesus uses two phrases at least 29 times in the Gospels. They are, ‘**have you not read**’, or, ‘**it is written**’.

*Have you not read Matthew 12:3, 5; 19:4; 22:31*

 *Mark 12:10, 26*

*Luke 6:3.*

*It is written Matthew 4:4, 6, 7, 10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:24, 31*

 *Mark 7:6; 9:13; 14:21, 27*

 *Luke 3:4; 4:4, 8, 10; 7:27; 19:46; 24:46*

 *John 6:31, 45; 12:14.*

It is apparent that Jesus expected the people He was talking to at the time – often the religious observant, teachers and on one occasion Satan – that they should know the Scriptures, both in terms of head knowledge and putting God’s teaching into practice.

Nothing has changed since Jesus’ time in that regard. We are made in God’s image and should be both looking to please Him and worship Him fully, so there is an expectation that we should be Biblically literate - to know fully the teachings of Jesus and His good news.

Reading the Bible also shows us glimpses of our Heavenly Father (**John 5:39**), whom we can come to know (**John 14:7-10**).

As we are looking to this book for our salvation, it needs to be trusted and we need to have confidence that any human criticisms laid against it are unfounded, such as:

* The Bible is full of contradictions and errors.
* It has been copied and translated so many times, can we be sure the Bible is the same now as when it was written.
* Historians and scientists have proved the Bible is inaccurate and unreliable.

These criticisms come mainly from people who have never read the Bible for themselves - rather than doing their own first-hand investigation, they use other sources for their arguments.

So, do not let your faith be damaged by these people.

**SLIDE** What we have is a Book that is:

* **Authentic** (reliable text) – today’s text is a fair representation of what was first written.
* **Accurate** (factual correct) – it is historically true.
* **Authoritative** (doctrinally reliability): It is a good representation of what God wants to communicate to us.

Dealing with authenticity, we can be reassured by the quantity and quality of the texts - In respect of the OT, there are few manuscripts, but only because the Jewish scribes ceremonially buried imperfect or worn manuscripts.

The OT text was painstakingly checked by the Masoretic Jews by the sixth century AD – and all deviations from the original were again destroyed.

Other sources such as the Dead Sea Scrolls (700BC), the Septuagint (3rdC BC Greek OT translation) and the Talmud (teachings and commentaries related to the Hebrew Scriptures), all point to the fact that we now possess a very accurate copy of what was originally written.

In terms of the NT, people question its’ accuracy, partly because it relates to events, some of which happened 2,000 years ago and there are relatively few original manuscripts in existence.

Yet, people do not question secular documents from the same era - Plato’s writing (7 copies remaining), Aristotle (49), but the NT has over 6,000 copies in Greek and 24,000 in other languages. It is unrivalled in terms of volume of an example of an ancient literature source.

Biblical analysts state the NT that we have, can be accepted as 99.5% pure, with the remaining 0.5% being questioned due to the practice of textual criticism – but none of those criticisms call into question any of the doctrines of the New Testament.

Additional evidence for the authenticity is that, the copies of both OT and NT documents that are known to exist today, show they were written relatively soon after the events, which is in contrast to an average gap of over 1,000 years between the composition and the earliest copy of the writings of other ancient authors.

Many authors of the Bible make claim to be writing from first-hand – they were eye-witnesses. **SLIDE**

* **The man who saw it has given testimony and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth and he testifies so that you also may believe John 19:35.**
* **For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty 2 Peter 1:16.**

Even the likes of Luke, who was writing second-hand as he wrote his gospel, investigated and recorded those eye-witness who had been at the events of Jesus life.

The accounts relating to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus were written by people who were intimately acquainted with Him - mainly between AD47 and 70 - but all by the end of the first century.

There was not enough time for myths about Jesus to be created and spread – the multitudes of hostile eyewitnesses who were alive when the New Testament books began to be circulated would have challenged blatant historical fabrications about the life of Christ.

Additionally, the Bible continually refers to verifiable historical events, which can be checked by external evidence. For example, the chronological details in **Jeremiah 1:1-3** (stating exactly which kings were reigning when he wrote) and **Luke 3:1-2** (stating which Roman governor was reigning in Judea), are examples.

The likes of **Ezekiel 1:2**, allows us to date Ezekiel’s first vision of God precisely - down to the day, which would have been 31st July 592 BC in our modern-day calendar.

Jesus was written about often by secular writers – granted their primary reason for mentioning Jesus was not to bring Him praise, rather it was to discuss Him, but it adds to the weight of historical documentation to prove Jesus existed and His claims to be the Messiah can be relied upon.

Also, both the OT and NT make numerous references to nations, kings, battles, cities, mountains, rivers, buildings, treaties, customs, economics, politics, dates etc.

Remember what Jesus said, ‘**have you not read**’ and ‘**it is written**’. It is all checkable, if you care to do so.

Archaeological excavations, whilst not proving Biblical accounts, do confirm Biblical statements, even some that go back to the early chapters of Genesis, such as:

* The servant heir custom(i.e., having your eldest servant inherit your wealth if you were childless), a practice mentioned by Abraham in reference to Eliezer in **Genesis 15:2**.
* The birth-right sales custom, mentioned with Esau and Jacob **Genesis 25:31**.

NT-related discoveries have proved the existence of such previously disputed places, such as:

* The Pool of Siloam
* The Pool of Bethesda
* Jacob’s Well

**SLIDE** We’ve already mentioned **Luke 3:1**. For many years, sceptics disbelieved Luke’s account because of Lysanias, as no record of him being tetrarch existed. But recent archaeological evidence has shown him to be an actual person, who held that title.

We can therefore be assured of authenticity, accuracy and authority of we God has given us in our Bibles.

There is always the danger, as it has always been, that we misuse those Scriptures or pick certain parts out for our own benefit. That is why it is so important to check who and what you are listening to.

God’s Word needs to be treated as a whole – OT and NT together as one.

The Bible may be a collection of 66 Books, with things that appear at first to be ambiguous or hard to understand, but you will find other Scriptures that clarify or explain. By comparing and learning what the entire Bible says about any given topic or theme will keep a good spiritual balance and you will learn all of God’s message to mankind.

Having shown the Bible is accurate, it is still just another book, unless you look to the truths that it contains. A 1995 figure shows the Bible had sold over 5 billion copies, but many of those will be gathering dust on shelves. Jesus said, ‘**have you not read**’ – He expected us to read it.

Many people are sceptical, because God’s truth is so amazing – but it will challenge your lifestyle and choices, as well demanding that we commit to searching the Scriptures, as Jesus told us to do.

It contains truths that a child can understand, when Scripture is read, studied and believed in its proper context.

**SLIDE** Jesus made it very clear that the primary purpose of Scripture was to reveal Himself to us. To help us see, understand, and embrace Him, His mission, and His eternal gospel **Luke 24:25-27**. **25He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ 27And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.**

Jesus said we should live by every word that proceeds from God’s mouth. As believers in the saving power of Jesus, we should especially desire the Bible.

If you think it is too difficult to read, be assured that it is written in a way that even a child can grasp its simple truths, while adults can study for a lifetime, yet never fully cover everything it has to offer **1 Peter 2:2**.

Importantly, the Bible is part of our defence against Satan and a tool to enable our spiritual growth **Ephesians 6:17**.

**SLIDE 2 Timothy 3:15-17** The entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is inspired by God. It is where doctrine should be derived from, it thoroughly instructs us in what is right and what is wrong. **15.…from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

**SLIDE 2 Peter 1:20-21** The Holy Spirit is the real author of the Bible – with the men who wrote it doing so under the Spirit’s inspiration. **Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. 21For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**

Because this Book is written by God, no man should twist or distort the Bible’s true meaning to suit their personal desires or goals. There are severe consequences for doing so.

The Bible is the primary means for the Holy Spirit to guides us into all truth and most importantly, the truth about Jesus. The Bible should not be a book that is opened only occasionally, it should be opened daily and used for study and devotion.

To fully understand God’s Word, start your Bible reading and study with prayer, asking God for the Holy Spirit’s leading.

If something in Scripture isn’t clear to you after some prayer-reading-studying-comparing of passage-prayer, don’t give up.

This Book, God’s Word, has the ability to sustain your daily life – it has the ability to reveal and help you know God intimately as your Creator, Redeemer and friend.

Remember Jesus thought the Word of God was more important than physical bread. **SLIDE Matthew 4:4. ‘It is written: “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”**

Make your challenge this year, with the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit, to delve deeper into God’s Word than you have ever done before.

God will honour that and in bringing Him the Glory, you can gain eternal benefits too.