

Foundations: What Are You Building On?

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A friend of mine by the name of Stuart Tulley once said that preaching a sermon is like flying an airplane: a good flight will be ruined by a bad landing. If we apply this thought to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, it would seem that He gave His disciples a terrible, disorienting landing. After uttering probably the most inspiring words to fall from the lips of a teacher, Jesus ends with this story:

Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 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. 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. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. (Matthew 7:24-27)



As I read this troubling passage, I wonder why Jesus chose to astound His followers like this. His sermon goes from *Don't worry* to *Build well or suffer the consequences*. It seems as if He's trying to prepare us for something. The stakes are higher than we could have imagined—and that's why Jesus' tone is so serious. Here, at the end of such a beautiful sermon, is a challenge to prepare for the unpredictable.

WHEN THE RAIN COMES DOWN

Nowhere in Scripture are we promised exemption from storms. There's no get-out-of-jail-free pass waiting for us as the sky grows dark. What we are promised is that we will contend with storms. In Jesus' parable, the rains came down on both the foolish and the wise person. It's where and how we've built that dictates whether or not we'll endure. God often uses storms of hardship to test how we're building our lives. These storms show where we've cut corners—and consequently, where we need to make changes. The man who built his house on the sand saw a sunny, comfortable place to live with an incredible view. It was convenient. And it looked good. Had he been more concerned with the long-term, he might have cut back up into woods to find a more solid place for his home—but that would have taken more work. Instead, he paid a great price for his laziness. And, as Jesus said, great was the crash.

SOMETHING THAT WON'T WAIT FOR TOMORROW

We have a tendency to read Jesus' words and either romanticize them or strip them of their weight. We think, "Oh, that's awesome—let's be poor in spirit!" Yet Jesus never spoke in platitudes; rather, His words imply more: Digest what I'm telling you, apply it, pray through it, own it and your life will change—you will be transformed. We can't afford to avoid the transformation the Holy Spirit continually wants to work in us, because the wind and the rain storms will come—often without letting up—and we'll need more than shallow faith.

We often think we'd be able to follow God if only He would calm the storms. We say, "Lord, if you would just stop this bad stuff, I would be so much better a friend to You! You know I can't begin to build yet; it hasn't stopped pouring, and my life is in shambles." I remember my youth pastor saying, "If someone is talking to you and they say 'but,' forget everything they said before that!" With that in mind: I don't want to scare you—but life is a test. Every day, you're in the middle of one—and this doesn't have to be a bad thing, if you've already decided to let God prepare you. If you put off assessing your life and your heart, as well as what the Lord is saying to you about them—if you wait until your relationships get better, your job situation changes, or your spiritual life improves—transformation may never come. If you wait for optimal conditions to seek the revolution that God wants to bring about in your life, you won't ever get around to it.

THE SOLID ROCK

I often talk with people who are in the middle of a circumstantial hurricane and think their houses are about to fall. They panic: Everything is shaking, cracking and creaking—it's coming apart at the seams! Maybe that's you, feeling as though you're bending and breaking in the wind. But if you build everything in your life on Jesus, He will see you through the storms, no matter how tumultuous that journey may be. I'm not talking about building on principles, rules, or ideas. I'm talking about staking everything you have and are on a living person—Jesus Christ—who will never leave you to fend for yourself.

(Deuteronomy 31:8)

He is the Rock, the **"chosen and precious cornerstone; and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame"** (1 Peter 2:6).

But in **Luke 20:17-18**, Jesus also called Himself **"the stone rejected by the builders [which] has now become the cornerstone,"** adding that **"all who stumble over that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone on whom it falls"** (NLT). Jesus was basically saying, **"If you don't build on Me, you will fail."** If your life is built merely on religion, friends, what your family believes, or what you try to accomplish for God in your own strength, you will fail. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but your house will eventually come down with a great crash.

If someone told you that following Jesus was solely about adhering to moral or even doctrinal principles, they sold you short. If they told you that immersing yourself in Christian subculture makes you a man or woman of God, they didn't tell you the whole story. You must dig down deeper to a foundation that is nothing less than unshakable rock ([Luke 6:47-48](#)); you must cultivate friendship with Jesus and discover what He's asking of you.

MORE THAN THE EYE CAN SEE

For seasoned Christians, the temptation is to default to external indicators of spiritual vitality—saying and doing all the “right” things. It's possible to follow every rule and miss the essence of relationship with God in the process. I remember about 23 years ago on Stock Road a new development of condos was built. Expensive, fancy condos—the nicest on the west side. Finally, the builders finished their impressive-looking work. And then, an awful discovery was made by the building inspector: the foundation didn't go deep enough to stand against potential storms or earthquakes. He posted a sign on those elaborate condos that read **“KEEP OUT.”** Over the years, I saw the paint gradually crack and fade. No one ever occupied the building. It was the most beautiful failure on the west side.

If we don't build well, that's exactly what our lives are like. If you don't listen to God's voice and speak to Him from your heart—if you haven't built your life on relationship with Him—your life may look impressive from the outside, but like the condos at Stock Road, it won't stand the test of time. Jesus' words ring true: Consider how you're building; you will be tested.

The challenges we face as Christians are many. Things ranging from everyday stress to life-altering crises confront us at nearly each turn. How we deal with these challenges is where the test lies, and often, the big tests are the most subtle. How can we be prepared to endure testing? [Ephesians 6:14-17](#) tells us how to get dressed each day:

“Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

We might think this spiritual armor's main purpose is to protect us in times of distress. But it's not meant to be thrown on in a hurry when trouble arises; each component must be exercised regularly to be effective. For instance, it's difficult to be truthful when stakes are high if you aren't truthful in more run-of-the-mill situations. Each piece of armor speaks of character developed over time, within the context of friendship with Christ. Prefacing the parable of the two builders, Jesus asks this poignant question, **“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”** ([Luke 6:46](#)) Faith and belief in God is more than saying you know Him; it means putting His Words into practice. ([James 1:22-25](#))

Our understanding of Christianity shouldn't be a matter of simply thinking the "right" way or being able to defend "correct" theology. It should awaken us to a completely new way of living on a day-to-day basis. The bottom line is this: Jesus Himself—not doctrine alone—is our only firm foundation that enables us to **"take hold of the life that is truly life" (1 Timothy 6:19 NLT).**

As we journey with Christ, He prepares us for what's ahead; the road isn't always easy, but it's never without purpose. That's why Jesus concludes His most famous sermon with this strong challenge. We must know Him intimately and walk with Him daily, doing what He says. When we give ourselves completely to this pursuit, we can rest assured that the Almighty will see us through to the end. The strongest Foundation has never failed. And the amazing, beautiful truth is that He never will.