



Have you ever looked at a picture of the Leaning Tower or Pisa and wondered, “*Was it built on a Monday?*” What I am told is that almost from the day it was built the Tower of Pisa began to lean to one side because there were problems with its foundation. Can you imagine being the Engineer who oversaw that project? I bet there were times he just wanted to walk home on some other street so he wouldn’t have to see his handy work on display.

I can relate to that man’s feelings because I was part of a similar embarrassing building project. My first summer working in the coal mine, I was a Carpenter’s Helper and that summer I learned some important lessons when it came to building things. One day, with only a scribbled drawing to guide us we were asked to build a loading dock beside the warehouse. So for over a month a few of us worked at cementing posts into the ground, nailing 4-inch decking across the posts and finally helping as they attached the metal ramp to the deck. When it came time to try the deck out, for some reason one of the bosses came out of the main office with a cheap bottle of champagne and christened the deck. It was then and only then that we saw the size and weight of the forklift that would be working on the deck. As the fork lift drove up the metal ramp, it began to bend (not a good sign). As the forklift topped the ramp and moved onto the deck there was a terrible groaning sound from the posts below. So when the forklift came to a stop in the middle of the deck and the operator stepped off the machine, we all breathed a sigh of relief. Then we heard the cracking sound, which was followed by the whole ramp starting to teeter to the left. Then we heard the noise of posts snapping off below the deck and the 10,000 pound forklift dropped straight through the deck, wedging itself between the broken foundation posts. The silence was deafening as the bosses looked our way. That day I learned that (i) the most important part of any structure or building is the foundation; unless it is strong and built on solid footings. No matter how pretty or good it may look, if the foundation is poor, the building is in trouble. (ii) You only find out if it is a bad foundation is when it is too late to do much about it.

As we continue in our series on the Game of Life, we want to talk about our Spiritual Life, which I believe is foundational for all of our lives. It is from our spiritual foundation that our private life, married life, family life and even our work life needs to flow.

### **Kathy Spate: How this relates to us as people.**

As Dave has mentioned I am a Resident Chaplain at the Rockyview General Hospital. As a Chaplain it is my mandate to provide spiritual care. Now, in the hospital setting there are many different questions patients ask about life in general, but they are not so different than the questions we all have about the meaning in our life.

The reason I believe in the importance of the spiritual side of our being is because we are all unique and beautiful human beings as creations of God with a soul, and life at the best of times can be ‘messy’ causing the soul to be in distress. Yet, I hold to a theory of the resilience of the human spirit. I often tell my patients “I have not come here to poke or prod – start an IV or take blood - but to ask how your spirit within is?”

For this morning the question is in what way is our spiritual side different than the emotional and physical side of our being – and how did Christ in scripture address the significance of the spiritual side of our being for life? That is what Dave will look at. I have a slightly different perspective from the hospital setting as I provide spiritual care to people in crisis and Dave has asked me to bring these thoughts this morning:

My attitude or approach to spiritual care-giving is informed by the way in which I value the patient as a holistic human being. When a patient realizes that his/her body is betraying

them with an illness or sickness that may be long or short term they revert to the physical, emotional and spiritual side for answers. “Why do I physically feel this way” – which may be answered from a medical model, and then “What do I feel emotionally about my health” – this can be answered psychologically - because I am no longer in control and that makes me sad or angry. Then, the next question is as simple as “why is this happening to me”? This touches the spiritual side of their being and is quite often one they cannot answer. It may not even be answerable in the moment, but just talking about it and recognizing this to be a part of their well-being is where the seed to understanding their well-being during my possibly one visit can be planted.

During these significant conversations I have been given the awesome gift of walking alongside the patient during their distress while viewing the spiritual magnitude of their physical predicament– whether it is an injury or a life threatening illness. My patients may tell me their surgery is minor and the diagnosis not life threatening but the spirit tells both what else is going on for them. One man had not worked in months because of a ‘simple infection’; one woman did not have a place to live anymore because she could not keep up the rent from a ‘straightforward gall bladder surgery’. The diagnosis does not tell me what is going on inside the person and I could miss a deeper level of soul care unless the spirit is considered too. It is quite often a time when the pain, mingled in the past, sitting in the present but surely to impact the future has robbed the individual of meaning and purpose for today. Pain that is so great it may not as yet have a voice that is known to them. There may be no better opportunity than this, to sit together and listen to that hidden voice. Taking the time to create an atmosphere for spiritual healing, a sacred space of rest for their soul in which to evaluate beliefs. A time for reconstructing new ones that lead to fresh insights and wisdom giving way to new hope, meaning and purpose.

The physical and emotional side of my patients can be addressed by the medical model but unless the spirit is attended to the intended fullness of life cannot be experienced. Spiritual care-giving assists in the care of the soul – or at least is a part of what it means to return the soul to what it was meant to be, by offering healing from the inside out.

Christ met people where they are living in the present and He met them without pretence. He did not always tell them who He was or what He could be for them. Instead He talked with them about their way of living, asking thought provoking questions about life and life’s meaning for them. Christ desired to meet people on a spiritual plane - and he provided parables to express his thoughts about what was and is important for us, as spiritual beings.

## **I. The Story**

When Jesus, the master communicator was ending his Sermon on the Mount, he decided to end it with a story that would stick in people’s minds and sum up all he had said concerning how to live life. It is a story which the minute you hear it, you will say, “*I know that one!*” As I read it, remember 3 things: (i) when Jesus told it, it was being heard for the first time; (ii) despite how simple it sounds, it has been touching people’s lives for centuries and (iii) that He is speaking about how crucial it is for to build wisely when it comes to our spiritual life. Matthew 7:24-27, “*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. 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.*”

I wonder as Jesus told this parable, if He remembered a story told around his father's carpenter shop of 2 people who had received the same advice about where to build their houses. One followed the advice and one didn't. One saw an old creek bed with its smooth sandy beach and lush trees surrounding it and said, *"I can build a beautiful house in that place and it will take a lot less effort than my neighbour is expending as he chips away at his foundation up there on the rocky knoll."* And when they both finished, the houses looked almost identical, until a flash flood hit and the creek rose and hit the house in the gully. And Jesus could still see that picture of the man, standing waist-deep in water trying to save his house as it disintegrated around him and as pieces were being ripped away by the stream. But the house on the hill stood solid and those inside were safe and dry.

Notice where the 2 builders are identical:

(i) Both had to choose what their house would be built on. While Jesus is painting a picture of 2 house builders, from the context, it is clear that he is not talking about building literal houses. Rather, it has to do with how and on what we will build our lives. What will be the passions, the decisions, the basic beliefs which will be foundational from which our life will flow?

(ii) Both experienced storms in their lives. We need to hear this because we seem to be surprised when troubles hit our lives as Christians. As if we believe that part of the deal God makes with us is if we follow Him we will never have trouble in our lives. If you compare verses 25 and 27, you will see that both experienced storms in their lives and both storms are described using identical words.

Jesus is saying that part of being alive is that some storms will come our way. So Jesus doesn't spend his time telling us how to avoid storms but rather how to prepare for them. How do we prepare for surviving the storms that will inevitably come our way? We make sure that what we have built the foundation of our life that is (i) the right one and ii) that it is strong. Because if we don't, when the storm arrives, we will not survive it. It is crucial that each of us chooses what will be the foundation on which we build our lives. Understand that if we don't get around to choosing what will be our foundation, by our lack of choice, whatever we place as a priority in our life will become that foundation on which we build. I say that because Matthew 6:21 says, *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* If what we are resting our lives on is our wealth, our personal strength, our physical prowess or our belief in our ourselves, then that is what will have to sustain us when the storms of life strike us and when we stand before God and tell Him why we should get into His Heaven.

This past while, we have seen storms hit a number of people who attend here. We have watched as some of you have lost a precious loved one, while others have been going through chemo for Leukemia or other cancers. We have seen others who have trained for years, miss the Olympics by fractions of seconds and we have seen some of you struggle to find jobs. Each of you would agree that the storms do come and some times they hit us with the weight of a Tsunami. As they have experienced and we have watched, their foundation has been shaken and tested. If we are honest when the storms hit, sometimes it is hard to feel God near. But you have experienced and through you, we, as your friends, have observed the truth that as the old Hymn says, *"On Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand."*

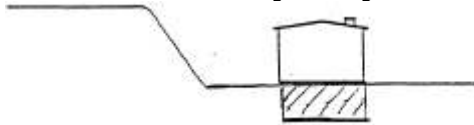
Where Jesus wanted to bring those who were following Him as He spoke that day was to the point that they realized that He needed to be their rock and that our faith in Jesus needs to be the place we park our faith, our hope and our lives. So today, can I encourage you? If you have never considered it before, would you consider asking Jesus to become a part of your life, the foundation on which your life will rest? Once that is decided then He can come

into our lives, where He can influence and guide in all the other areas of our lives. Like Kathy said last week as we spoke about marriage, as Jesus is part of your life it will change how you do marriage, parenting and so many other things. And as she said today concerning what she has seen people are in the hospital, (during those storms of life,) Jesus profoundly is the foundation on which we can stand strong.

## II. Principles to Apply

What Jesus is teaching here is that not only is choosing the right foundation, which is crucial but also continuing to choose Jesus as our foundation is just as crucial in our lives. As I read this passage a number of years ago, I think the Lord gave me 4 pictures which may be helpful as we try and connect with the principles in this passage. So as I attempt to draw them, ask yourself, which picture best describes your life?

### Picture #1 – Sandy Gully



Jesus would say that if you have decided to leave God out of your life then understand it is like building your house or apartment on sand. And He would add one simply comment, *“When it comes to foundations, you only find out that it is inadequate when it is too late to do much about it.”* He would add that it will only be when the ‘storms’ of life hit or we face God after we die that the picture which Jesus paints will be fully grasped by the person who left God out of their lives. Only then will they find themselves standing like the man in Jesus’ story, waist-deep in water as his house floats away a piece at a time. How does that happen? Matthew 6:21 says it happens when you make things other than God your top priority - for *“Where your treasure is, there also is your heart.”* It is saying that if we base our life on things other than God, they will not sustain us eternally.

If it is money, you can’t take it with you. If it is your physical strength your body will get older and no matter how perfect it is it will eventually go south and let you down. If it is sexual experiences as nice as they are, don’t last forever. If it is Personal importance and power while being someone important may get you a by-line in the news it won’t postpone your death by 1 second and won’t mean at thing eternally.

Can I also add that if we don’t get around to choosing what will be our foundation by our neglect or lack of choice, whatever we place as a priority in our life will become that foundation on which your life is built. You see, small decisions can easily lead to larger life changing decisions. For example, getting in the car with someone who has drank to much can end your life (1 decision/one car ride - can change everything) so small decisions can lead us far from God and change the direction your life will take. Proverbs 6:27. Jesus is saying, don’t plant your life on things that can wash away so easily. Make a choice/ act/ move toward Jesus. *Principle: If you don’t plant your life on Jesus, you are not prepared for life’s storms.*

## Picture #2 – Rock Solid Foundation

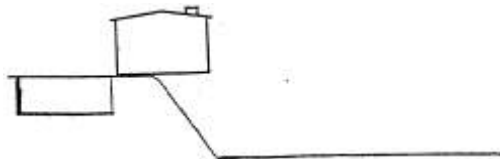


This picture is a life which is built on the solid rock of Jesus. Where faith is not only real but it is a present part of one's life. Jesus' promise is that while the storms may jolt you and there may be a lot of shaking going on, you may even get wet in the rain, your house and your life will stand firm and you will not be crushed.

I was there with Efraim del Rosario and his family as the Dr. told them how close to death their dad was after his massive heart attack. I saw a peace that was profound and strong. I sat with men uptown as they looked at the devastation the recession had taken on their bank accounts and I saw a strength that was amazing. I have stood with people whose dreams have been shattered or put on hold and I saw hope that brought tears to my eyes. I was with Barb and Bob Gebert as they walked through chemo and left amazed at the strength and grace I saw. I could keep on telling stories like these but what I saw was that as the storm struck and bashed against them, their foundation stood strong.

*Principle: If your foundation is sure, no storm will cause your foundation to collapse.*

## Picture #3



Most preachers only focus on the need to establish a proper foundation and they end up only dealing with half the story. If you look at the story, it gives us a command; we are to choose the right foundation for our lives [that being God and His guidelines given in Scripture] and THEN we are to build on that foundation.

*Principle: It is dangerous to build your life on different principles than what we believe in.*

This is a picture of a believer who, as the Scriptures say has, "*begun by faith but is now walking in their own strength.*" The person is definitely a believer but gets caught up in their hobbies, work, career, their own goals or passions. They end up building their life on those things instead of Christ and thus their faith has grown cold. The picture is so simple - but so real. And the question is so obvious, what happens when the storm hits and your house isn't on your foundation? It all will be ripped away.

I can give you all kinds of illustrations of this happening in people's lives. This person who found a faith that was real in the Holy Spirit but then got caught up in other things while at University. He/she still has a faith but God really isn't a part of their life anymore. It is the person, who every time you talk to them speaks like a Christian, but never comes to church. It is the person who began well but got busy, became enamored with things and now far from God. What happens when the storms hit? While they are a believer, they have so lost touch with God, have so often ignored His gentle voice that He has done what they wanted Him to do; He has stepped back, given them room and let them alone. They are Christian but they end up not being able to experience God when they need him the most.

**Picture #4**



*Principle: we are called to build on the foundation God gives.*

As I was reading this passage, I remembered something from my childhood. In Asquith, we had a man who had begun to build his house and either ran out of money or just became too lazy to finish his home. So he just covered his basement in and never built on that foundation. Isn't that a picture of some Christians you know? They become Christians and it is as if, "*once eternity seemed secure,*" they just continued their life as if nothing had happened. They sit back, don't read the Bible, don't get involved in the Lord's work, they just live in their spiritual basement and they ignore what it says in Matthew 7:19,20, "*Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.*" We are called to bear fruit; to grow up in our faith. Faith has a great future behind it.

Look at Matthew 24, 26, "*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. 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.*" It calls us to not only HEAR what the word says but to DO what it says. Here is where this picture may shock some of us a bit. For some of us who have been Christians a long time, who know the scriptures well and been involved in various ministries over the years; while we may picture ourselves as being described by the House on the Hill, in God's eyes, picture #4 is a more accurate picture of our lives.

If we only hear the word and aren't living it out in our lives, if there is no joy in our lives and if we aren't living out; Proverbs 11:25, "*A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.*" where by our lives, we aren't refreshing others' and our faith has become small, our tongue sharp and our grace is lacking then we have misjudged our lives. We may have missed the fact, that we have become basement dwellers not cliff residents. So here is the question. Are you still living in the basement? If you are, remember what Easter is all about, John 1:9 says, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*" He is the one whom David could come to and ask God to '*renew unto me the joy of my salvation.*" Then we are called to hear the words of God and get busy building again on the foundation, which will bless you and please God.

### **III. Put yourself in the Story**

I Corinthians 3:12,13, "*If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.*"

God's desire is to plant us firming on the foundation of Jesus Christ. In such a way that our spiritual life flows into our family life .. our relationships .. our marriages .. our private life .. transforming and directing our life so that Jn. 10:10 comes true in our lives. So, ask which diagram best describes your life?

If you have never asked Jesus to be the one on which your life rests .. do that today. If you see that picture #3 #4 is where your life has been going ask the carpenter from Nazareth to do some Home Renovations in your life. So that you may be solid and safe and growing on the strong foundation of Jesus. And then you will find ... safely planted on the firm foundation of Jesus... and nothing in life ... and beyond this life can shake that strong foundation.

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