

Foundations

What am I building?

Read

Matthew 7:24-27

Watch

Video 1 of Foundations with Ryan, Charlotte and Carl asking the question, “what am I building?”

Reflect

Does anyone feel a song coming on? “The wise man built his house upon the rock...” This is one of my son’s favourite songs to sing before bed; he loves it, actions, and all. Yet as I read these words of Jesus as an adult, I realise this is not just a fun kid’s song. This has profound meaning for our lives and is how Jesus chooses to close off his Sermon on the Mount.

There are two builders who both hear the words of Jesus. Both hear the same thing. The words they hear are the same words we read from Matthew 5-7 which we call the sermon on the mount, and this is the embodiment of the life of Christ which he now invites us into.

One of the builders chooses to put into practice what he has heard.

The other chooses not to.

For the one who chooses to put into practice what he has heard, Jesus says he is like a wise man building his house on rock. For the one who chooses not to, Jesus says he is like a foolish man building his house on sand.

Both houses look the same, structurally, aesthetically, and no one could tell the difference. Let’s repeat that – both houses look the same. However, if you were to dig a little deeper, you would see the foundations are radically different – one on rock and one on sand.

One might be tempted to say, “who cares?! They both look the same and feel the same. No one can see foundations; it does not matter.” But what Jesus seems to reveal is foundations are tested and exposed during storms. The house built on rock stands the test of the storm, while the house on sand falls with a great crash. Storms seem to reveal the heart of every builder and storms will reveal the heart of you and I. All of us are guaranteed storms in our life and will often be the place we will realise whether we have been putting into practice the words of Jesus or if we have not. Jesus’ invitation is for us to build lives on His life which can sustain us and guide us to live lives of beauty, integrity, service and love no matter what comes our way.

Explore

What stops someone from doing the things they hear Jesus say?

Why do “storms” often reveal what our life is built on?

Has there been or is there something Jesus speaks about that you find difficult to agree with, or put into practice?

What kind of foundations do you want to build on?

Who would you hope to be when the storms of life come?

Pray

Foundations

What is worry stealing?

Read

Matthew 6:24-34

Watch

Video 2 of Foundations with Ryan, Charlotte and Zara asking the question, “what is worry stealing?”

Reflect

Jesus’ words often pierce our hearts, don’t they? “You cannot serve both God and money” (v24). We are confronted with ourselves when He challenges us on the time we spend consumed with worry about provision, reputation or anything else that steals our hearts more than our allegiance and trust in Him, which is why He concludes this section with the words “seek first his kingdom” (v33).

It is not often that you realise the very things that consume you have now become your master. It is confrontational language that reveals a power dynamic we never thought we were in. And to be honest, really honest, when we realise we have been enslaved or mastered by things we thought we could handle, we feel powerless to ever be set free. Jesus reveals the root of worry is enslavement. When we become mastered by something other than Him it will result in our hearts being consumed with worry.

As always, Jesus meets us with hope – that a life of seeking first His Kingdom can result in a life of less worry. That is not to say it is a life of no trouble (v34), but it is a simpler, more peaceful life. To those consumed by worry, or those enslaved to things that lead to death this is a hope filled message that brings power and freedom.

Explore

Why does Jesus mean by revealing the root of worry is enslavement?

How do the things we worry about, master us?

How can we recognise whether something is mastering us?

From your experience, how have you been set free from enslavement or being mastered by things that were not God?

Pray

Foundations

Who is my neighbour?

Read

Matthew 5:43-48

Watch

Video 3 of Foundations with Ryan, Charlotte and Garath asking the question, “who is my neighbour?”

Reflect

Jesus shared these words more than 2000 years ago correcting a blatant misinterpreted teaching by the Pharisees – but these words could not be more relevant today. If we were to carry out a cultural analysis on our society today, the word “love your neighbour and hate your enemy” would be an excellent synopsis. It could also read:

- Love those who agree with you and hate those who don't
- Love those who love you and hate those who don't
- Love those who do what you do but hate anyone who does things differently

Jesus is widening the narrow standard of love that was set. The life of Christ is embodied in a love for those against you. Oh, how often we have heard this but how often we do not put it into practice. There is nothing more dangerous than someone who is fueled with a sense of justice that enables their hatred.

Your neighbour, it seems, is the person who is most detestable to you. Or someone who disagrees with you entirely. This is what Jesus models and invites us to love with and through Him.

“But that is impossible!” Yes – we are talking about living the Christ life, the Christ way – it seems impossible. But isn't it good news that when Jesus says, “with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:26) When we come to the incarnate God and ask Him to change us and shape our love and hatred – He makes the impossible task possible.

Explore

Pay attention to your inner life or your body as you read this passage – how do you feel? Some people feel anxious or annoyed, others feel free. Share why you think it makes you feel the way it does.

Why is it easier to love those who agree with you?

Is only loving those who love you in return love at all? How does Jesus define love by what He says?

Why is it dangerous when we feel justified in our hatred and how do Jesus' words challenge this?

Have you ever asked the Lord to reveal to you the shadow of your heart – where you are justifying hatred, or bitterness or even distance with someone or a people group? If He shows you, ask Him to change you and give you the strength to be formed into His image.

Pray

Foundations

Who made you judge?

Read

Matthew 7:1-5

Watch

Video 4 of Foundations with Ryan, Charlotte and Donna asking the question, “who made you judge?”

Reflect

One of my favourite shows as a child was about two men named The Chuckle Brothers (Paul and Barry Elliot). It followed these handyman as they fumbled their way through tasks often clumsily making small children across the UK chuckle endlessly (hence the name chuckle brothers). One of the main issues was when one of them would pick up a ladder, unaware of the damage they were doing as they would swing it around looking for something on the floor.

Interestingly, I can't help but notice that Jesus paints a similar picture when we are tending to one another. He gives almost a comical illustration as one seeks to remove the speck of sawdust, or splinter from a brother's eye (the word used conveys something so small it is almost irrelevant) whilst unaware of the damage the plank in their own eye is doing.

Firstly, Jesus is not suggesting we neglect discerning hearts or make ourselves blind to injustice around us (in verse 6 he warns not to give what is holy to dogs and in verse 15 he warns of false prophets); rather he warns that those who take the judgement seat assigned to God will be judged by the same measure we use. He then goes on to reveal our own brokenness and naivety in how we approach the faults, sin, brokenness and pain of others. He links sight with judgement – for those of us who are blinded by our own ‘stuff’, we will be unable to gently and delicately love those around us to wholeness. We are to ensure our own hearts are healthy, so our sight is clear in order to see people as God sees them.

Explore

Why is it sometimes easier to recognise the shortcomings of those around us than our own?

How do we honour people even when we recognise their faults?

Jesus reveals a delicate way to deal with one another – how do we cultivate gentleness in our relationships and what does this look like?

Jesus never describes what it is to “see clearly” but it enables us to remove the speck from the eye of the one we love – what do you think it means to see others clearly?

Pray

Foundations

Ignatian Contemplative Questions

What am I thankful for today?

Where did I notice goodness, grace, joy, love or help?

Where did I feel most alive — and where did I feel unsettled?

Notice what gave life, and what stirred anger, fear, defensiveness, envy or heaviness.

What was going on in me?

Why did I react as I did? What might my reactions reveal about my desires, wounds, assumptions or need to protect myself?

Where did I respond well — and where do I need grace and repentance?

Think about words spoken or withheld, things done or left undone, and people you may have judged, dismissed or failed to love.

How is God inviting me to live differently tomorrow?

Is there someone to understand better, something to put right, a conversation to have, or one small act of love or courage to take?