

## The Seven Pillars of Christian Growth

### Part 1 – A Firm Foundation

ILLUS – A colleague of mine who was a pastor, had lived a fairly wild life pre-Christ, and one day a bit of it caught up with him. His doctor confirmed that he had Hepatitis C. When he found this out, he really lost the plot. His faith fell apart, and his walk with God became weaker and weaker. To my knowledge, he has never recovered.

ILLUS – Contrast that with the day my mother was told that she had terminal lung cancer. She called me up and told me. I said I'd come over right away. She and my wife and I held hands and prayed. And I was amazed at how my mother began her prayer. She began to thank God that He had given her such a good life, for His blessings, and for His salvation.

Why do tough times cause the faith of some to crumble, but with others their faith shines ever brighter?

Mat 7:24-27 Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: (25) and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. (26) But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: (27) and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.

Jesus is talking here about foundations.

The wise man built on a rock foundation, but the foolish man built on a sand foundation.

Notice some things about what Jesus said here.

1. Rain and floods – represent the pressures of life.

When the pressures of life come, that's when the quality of the foundation is exposed.

2. The house – the structure you build – that's your life.

These men both built a house.

And they both experienced the same rain and wind and floods.

Jesus didn't say **if** the rain and wind and floods come – He just assumed they would come – it's a given.

You can't escape them, no matter what people tell you, no matter who you are.

But what makes the difference to the outcome is the foundation.

The final destiny of the house is determined, not by the house itself, but by the quality of the foundation.

### Important Facts About Foundations

1. It's the most important part of the building.

You can't just build without planning what it is you're building on.

ILLUS – I've seen stories on TV about people who have bought houses built on reclaimed land, but the foundations weren't good enough. So sometimes only a few months later already cracks begin to appear in the walls of their homes.

If you build a house on the beach your house is going to disappear with the next incoming tide.

Something has to hold the structure of the building up.

If you read through all of Matt 5-7, you'll notice that the foundation Jesus talked about was that of a godly character – Christ-like attitudes.

That's the most important factor in our lives – our integrity.

Being famous or wealthy or successful as the world sees success isn't worth a peanut in God's sight.

What's important is the kind of people we are.

**2. The foundation is the first part to go in.**

We can't build the structure until the foundation is in, or we're asking for trouble.

ILLUS – Imagine building your house without a foundation. The council inspector inspects and says, "You've got to pull this house down and start again! This time with a foundation." How many of you believe that he says that because he knows that without the foundation your house will fall down anyway? It could even be dangerous. How many of you believe he's saying that just to be a big meanie?

Why doesn't God just fulfil everything He's promised in our lives immediately? Dreams, visions, the desires of our hearts?

Is it because He's being mean?

He's laying the foundation – making sure it will stand the pressure – the weight of the whole building.

He wants to make sure it doesn't destroy us.

That's why God's never in a hurry.

The foundation must go in first.

**3. The foundation takes the weight of the house / building – if it's not done properly the house will eventually come crashing down.**

ILLUS – Ever wonder why some of the most talented people have such spectacular failures? Because of the bad foundation. Talent is a part of the house, but what they do is build the house on a shoddy foundation. For example, Bill Clinton, O.J. Simpson, Richard Nixon, Kurt Cobain (Nirvana). In Australia – Christopher Skase, Terry White (police commissioner), Russ Hinze (politician), Keith Wright (politician).

These people have suffered disgrace, jail, even death, largely because of the kind of foundation that was built into their lives.

So remember – the foundation takes the weight of the house – if it's not done properly the house will eventually come crashing down.

**4. The foundation (the most important part) is hidden from sight.**

It's true to say that we concentrate on externals.

ILLUS – Prophet Samuel is sent to choose the next king of Israel. When he saw Eliab, Jesse's eldest son, he was impressed, and thought, "Wow, this must be the guy." 1 Sam 16:7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

We have this tendency to look at externals with houses too.

ILLUS – Nobody says, "What a lovely foundation. I love it! I just love the colour – grey. That's just the most beautiful slab. And how thick is that concrete! I wish I'd seen those little barstools going in, and the mesh."

Imagine having slab-laying parties, instead of house warming parties. "Now that's a great right angle you've got on that corner."

What would really happen if you said to someone, "Hey, want to come and see my slab?" They'd probably think you're crazy.

Aren't they more interested in the structure that goes up on the slab, so they can say, "What lovely big rooms. I love the bathroom. That panelling looks great."

And when you buy a block of land, the question is, "When's the house going up?"

Not: "Call me when the slab goes down."

We do the same with our lives.

Often, what we fail to take into consideration when planning our own lives, or assessing others, is the quality of the foundation.

I've got a cartoon of a man laying the foundation for the Tower of Pisa. He's not doing a great job, and says to his friend: "Don't worry too much – no-one will ever know."

But the quality of the foundation will always show up in the building.

ILLUS – According to a website called Big-Builders.com, "For large buildings, foundations are often set as deeply into the earth as is possible."

Why? The same website says that flowing water can seriously damage the foundation and cause major problems – even collapse of the building.

Interestingly, Jesus is talking about a flood – flowing water.

This is why God is so interested in the foundations of our lives.

If you don't believe me, ask yourself this question: Why didn't Jesus' public ministry begin when He was 12? He was already easily holding His own with the scholars.

But even with Jesus, God had to set a foundation in His life so that He was ready for what was to come – and that took 30 years.

And if He needed a foundation, how much more do we?

Unfortunately, we look at externals – you may be dazzled by my gorgeous blue eyes, my dashing good looks and Herculean muscles.

Or you can admire someone's gifts and talents and their bubbly personality, or be envious of their possessions.

But that's not the important part of you.

The important part of you is your character – the kind of person you are – your level of personal integrity.

This is the inner core around which all these other things are wrapped in layers like a blanket.

All these other things are like tools you can use in Christ's service.

But your character is the foundation upon which you build the house of your life.

So how do you build a foundation? Hearing the Word of God? Memorising the Word of God? Listening to tapes?

No – it's by doing God's Word.

ILLUS – David had a son named Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived. There's something about him that's always bothered me; for such a wise guy, he was a real nitwit.

Solomon had the most incredible wisdom, yet in the end, he failed.

Basically for a very simple reason; he failed to take his own advice.

There's a saying: Knowing is nothing, doing is everything.

Here are some of the dumb things Solomon did, despite the fact that he knew better.

**1. The pattern in Proverbs (which Solomon wrote) is one wife**

- Prov 5:18 Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. [Remember he wrote this stuff]
- But Solomon had 1000 – 1 Ki 11:3 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart.
- I worked out that in 40 yrs (1 Kings 11:42) Solomon acquired a new wife on average almost every 2 weeks.

Apart from greedy, that's just stupid – it's hard enough to handle one.

But we see here that it's not enough to know what to do.

If you want a good foundation, you've actually got to do it.

2. Prov 13:20 He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed.

1 Cor 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."

Solomon knew that.

1 Ki 11:1-3 But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites; (2) from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love.

Solomon ignored God's specific command not to hang around with these women and marry them.

You'd think that if he was really unable to contain himself, he could have chosen more wives from among his own people – I'm sure there were some godly women available in Israel.

But Solomon was disobedient.

And his wives turned away his heart.

3. Solomon's prayer of dedication. (1 Ki 8:23) "LORD God of Israel, there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like You, who keep Your covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts."

Solomon's blessing of the people. (1 Ki 8:60) "that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no other."

Solomon recognised that there was only one God, but he still turned away to other gods.

Building a foundation in your life means getting past the point where you read about what God wants you to do, beyond thinking about what God wants you to do, and actually doing it.

House building is like life planning – it's based on choices.

If you fail to set a good foundation in your life, you may get away with it for a while.

But sooner or later, when there's external pressure, what you've built can come crashing down around you.

I went through the Sermon on the Mount, and apart from the Beatitudes, I tried to find a word or phrase which would encapsulate each of the paragraphs there.

Because this is the kind of foundation Jesus was referring to.

These are the important foundations that Jesus talked about in Matt 5-7:

1. Exemplary living – 5:13-16
2. The righteousness of grace – 5:17-20
3. Not angry – 5:21-26
4. Pure in heart – 5:27-30
5. Faithful in marriage – 5:31-32
6. Truthful – 5:33-37
7. Going the second mile – 5:38-40
8. Excelling in love – 5:43-48
9. Secret good deeds – 6:1-4
10. Prayerful – 6:5-13
11. Forgiving – 6:14-15
12. Private piety – 6:16-18
13. Spiritual motives – 6:19-21
14. Pure in judgment – 6:22-23
15. Unfettered to riches – 6:24
16. Trusting God – 6:25-34
17. Non-judgmental – 7:1-6
18. Persistent in prayer – 7:7-12
19. Careful to do it God's way – 7:13-14
20. Fruitful – 7:15-20
21. Obedient – 7:21-2

How's your foundation going?