

What are you building?

Building blocks

I have many different types of relationships – today we celebrate Mother’s Day & I am Mom to Jenny and Liam. But I’ll let you into a secret – although my kids may disagree with you being Mum is not all I am! I’m wife to Ramos, I’m also daughter to Sam and Jenny, sister to Sam (you see we like to recycle names in our family!). I’m granddaughter, I’m aunty, niece, and sister-in-law. I’m friend, co-worker, employee, neighbour (extra blocks for neighbourhood watch groups!). I’m also a member of the Grade 2 parent group, grade 5 parent group, a Living Hope Trustee, church member here and have a home church in Ireland – so many relationships that define us. It can be hard to manage them all and at different times and seasons, each relationship takes more energy and focus.

We have been looking at relationships over these past few weeks, but the question is with so many different relationships to manage how to do you ‘Built them to last’ – how do you manage healthy relationships that are purposeful and meaningful?

When you are building anything, your foundation is important – the same for relationships. When Jesus was wrapping up the Sermon on the Mount, He said this:

Matthew 7. 24 “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. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Jesus told this simple story at the end of the Sermon on the Mount – there are only two characters involved and they are doing the exact same, each building a house. When Jesus tells a story we are invited to put ourselves in the shoes of the character – we often tend of course to put ourselves in the shoes of the ‘good guy’ but this morning I want to encourage you to try on both sets of shoes- it is the best way to learn by seeing and understanding from both sides.

1. Be Wise in how you are building your life

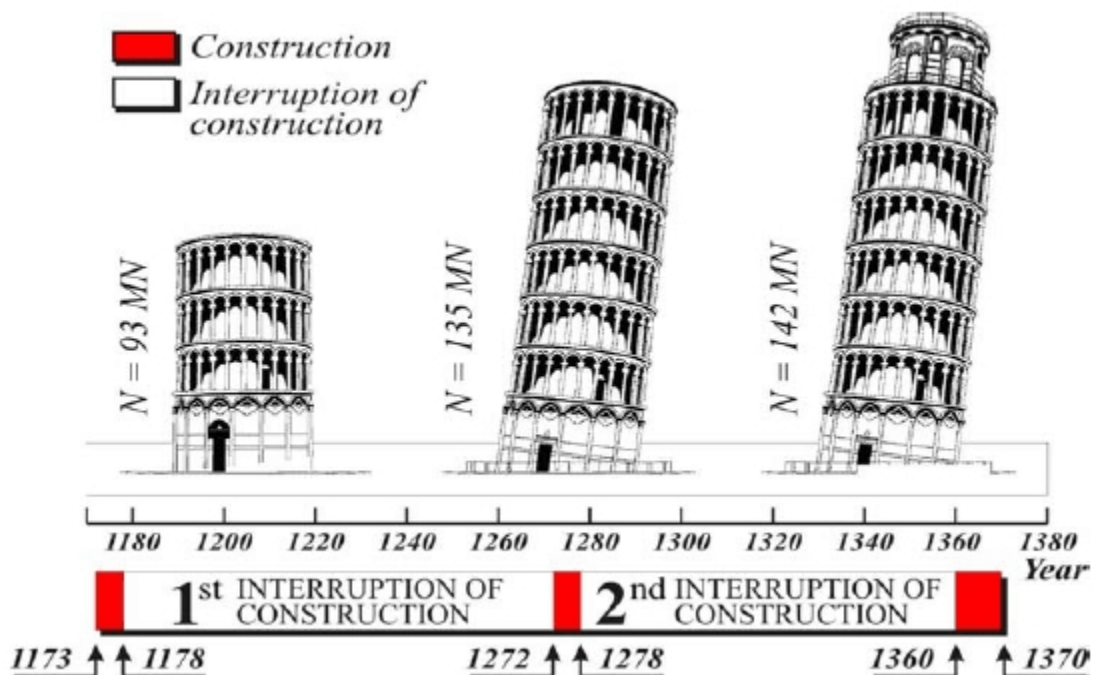
There were two people in this story, both of them doing the same activity – both needing to build a house. But one of them is called wise and the one foolish. The word for wise here is ‘Phronimos’ which is practically wise, sensible. This builder built his house on the rock – when Jesus told this story again in the Sermon on the Plain, recorded in Luke’s Gospel we are told that the man dug down deep for his foundation.

Luke 6.48 They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock.

Both builders have the same task – to build a house. It is not that one is lazy and decided just to prop up a few leaves and make a shelter – both are building houses and from the outside they both look the same. They are making an effort to build something to live in, probably to raise their family in, but the wise builder makes more of an effort in preparing the ground before building. Why?

- **Foundations matter!**

One of the most famous buildings for poor foundations is the Tower of Pisa. When construction began on the Tower of Pisa 1172, workers immediately ran into soil-related foundation issues. Work stopped for nearly a century due to political unrest in Italy, but construction continued in 1272 despite the fact the tower was already leaning. Attempts to compensate for poor soil quality failed numerous times. Today, the tower continues to its downward descent but at a much slower pace due to foundation repair and a complicated structure of counterweights – the cost of saving the Tower is about R511 million!! The Tower was built as a bell tower – today they don't ring the massive bells as they believe the bells will make the tower lean even more!



The landscape that Jesus was sharing this message in was known for its hills and mountains, but it was also subject to violent rains and sudden floods. There was Alluvial sand which was deposited by rivers and streams but hardened during the

summer heat. If you wanted to build a firm foundation you would need to dig down deep until you hit bed rock. Houses erected within reach of such sudden deluges — especially those founded on sand or other unreliable foundation types — couldn't withstand such forces. Because mountainous rocks are common there, it wouldn't have been difficult to find a reliable location with a solid foundation on which to erect a structure.

In our story **Both of the builders hear the words of Jesus** but only the one who builds the house on the strong foundation is the one putting those words into practise. To the outside both houses look great – no difference – it is only in the preparation and the inside construction that you can see there is a difference.

Both builders also faced the same storm.

There is this idea amongst some Christians that having tough times, storms are a result of disobeying God – that is simply not true. Jesus warned us that there are tough times ahead.

John 16: 33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

- **We must prepare for bad weather.**

Both builders had to face the storms. We all face storms in our lives and relationships, whether it be from outside interference, simple misunderstandings, conflict, differing goals.

There is a song that Ramos used to like to play by Don Williams – I think it was Johnny Cash who first sang it – Fair Weather Friends:

Fairweather friends, fairweather sailors,
Will leave you stranded on life's shore.
One good friend who truly loves you
Is worth the pain your heart endures.

We never know which way the wind will blow,
Nor when or where the next turmoil will be.
But he's a solid rock when troubles grow,
And he's holding out a saving hand for me.

We can build now in the good times, but it is only when the storms hit that we see if what we built is durable and will survive the storm. As a mom it could be a storm of your child struggling at school, or bullying. I think for those parenting through the trenches of the teen years it can feel like you are living with a whirlwind inside your house! For others, health diagnosis bring new storms and dynamics to relationships – when you become your partners carer, or your parent's guardian, a bereavement.

Other storms could be financial challenges which tend to put us under pressure and perhaps a bit on edge with one another? Misunderstandings and conflict can bring pain in long existing relationships as well as the storms of infidelity and betrayal. Some storms are of our own making – by choices we have made which have consequences we either did not think would come or did not expect. Some storms are made by other people's decisions and actions. If we follow Jesus and obey Him there are some storms we may have to face because people do not like our choices – we live in a cancel culture and strong views about Jesus are not always welcomed, and certainly not welcomed by Satan who is another source of some storms. Yet other storms are simply because we live in a broken world – economic climate, wars, climate change, loadshedding. There are so many things that can impact our lives and therefore impact all the relationship dynamics in our lives.

- **We need to future proof our relationships.**

How do we do that? We need to learn how best to deal with conflict – not at the time of the conflict when people are too heated to figure it out. We need to be setting healthy boundaries in relationships as well as healthy habits of communication, forgiveness and grace. If you have ever had a leaky roof, you know the worst time to have to try and fix it is in the middle of a storm! By building a good foundation as we build, we have more ability to weather the storms. We cannot avoid all the storms, but we can minimize the impact the storms have on us.

How do you build a firm foundation?

I'm not a builder at all but I do understand that foundations must be able to carry the weight of whatever is built on top of them – they are there to undergird and strengthen a structure. So how do we make sure we are building good foundations? It is not something that happens by accident – it is intentional. The wise builder in the Sermon on the Mount version sought out a good location – he built on Rock, not sand – something that was of substance and was strong in itself, that would lend strength to the house. In the Sermon on the Plain the wise builder dug down to build good foundations – it was work, it was intentional, it took time and energy.

As both the wise and the foolish builders got on with their building, a casual observer would not have noticed any difference between them. For the difference was in the foundations, and foundations are not seen.

It was no mistake that Jesus shared this story at the end of His Sermon on the Mount – He was directly referring to those things that He had just taught the disciples and the crowd of listeners. It is like a plea at the end of the message – have you guys been listening!

While we cannot go through the whole Sermon on the Mount this morning, I think the Beatitudes at the start of Jesus' sermon is a good summary to start laying out strong foundations.

Matthew 5.1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. ² He said: ³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Beatitudes contain so many values that are helpful for building strong relationships:

- **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

The poor in Spirit are those who have humble dependence on God – those who know they cannot do everything themselves and need to rely on God. In our relationships understanding that each of us need God and His help is a great leveller – no one is better than the next person and we all need God.

- **Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**

It is not sorrow of bereavement to which Christ refers, but the sorrow of repentance (J Stott). This is sorrow over our sin and repentance – acknowledging that we are not perfect. Jesus went on in the Sermon on the Mount to teach us to pray-

Matthew 6.12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

This Beatitude reminds us in our relationships to be forgiving just as God has forgiven us.

- **Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**

The meek are not doormat people! The meek are people who are gentle, kind, have self-control – all of these qualities that go far in building stronger relationships.

- **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**

These are people who long to see God at work and God glorified. As believers, Jesus and our love of Him is to underlies all our relationships – not that we just have relationships with Christians – no we are not to cut ourselves off, but that we have a motive of wanting to see God lifted up in all we do.

- **Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.**

Mercy is compassion for people in need. In our world with so much cancel culture and hatred mercy are beautiful things!

- **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

Pure in heart is to do with our motives – the pure in heart don't have hidden agendas, there is no scheming or manipulation involved.

- **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**

What do you bring to the relationships in your life? Some people seem to have a gift of stirring up drama wherever they go. Jesus calls us to a foundation of peace-making. That is not avoiding conflict but instead instigating resolution of conflict and restoration – it is not a call to be ostriches and ignore issues.

- **Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.**

We said earlier that storms will come and for those who follow Jesus sometimes the boundaries we set because of loving Jesus will bring us into conflict with people around us and this can impact our relationships. Sometimes in our relationships we must make hard decisions based up on our faith in Jesus that would bring us into conflict.

There is so much more if you take time to read through the Sermon on the Mount yourself – it deals with money, forgiveness, anger issues, worry, judging others, prayer, generosity, dealing with conflict – so many values that if we build our lives upon, we can impact all of our relationships positively.

Ultimately our firm foundations are to be built on Jesus Himself – the Rock of our salvation.

Psalm 18. 1 I love you, LORD, my strength. 2 The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

So, what kind of a house are you building? Will you be able to weather the storms of life? What are you doing to make sure that your foundations are strong.

The Apostle James, who was an ear witness to the Sermon on the Mount said this:

James 1. 22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

- **Its never too late to repair your foundations.**

Although the leaning Tower of Pisa is a warning to us about bad foundations, it also gives us some hope – because of intervention the tower is still standing today, 851 years later – it is not too late to do some repair work on your foundations! Some of us do need to do some repairs or even extensive renovations, but with God's grace and the help of the Holy Spirit it is never too late to begin a rebuilding programme.

The Apostle Paul talked about his life works serving Jesus as a builder & about building things that will endure and last – stand the test of time.

1 Corinthians 3.10-15 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ their 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 person's work. ¹⁴ If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

What are you building in the relationships in your life? What foundation are you building your life and relationships upon? What will happen when the storms come?

To end this message as Jesus did His:

Matthew 7. 24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine (Jesus) and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine (Jesus) and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Small Group Questions:

- **Think through the different relationships you have – which are the most important ones right now? Why is that? Are there relationships that you feel you have neglected?**

- **Jesus compared people who listen to his words and put them into practise to the wise builder. What made the builder wise? Why are foundations important? Have you seen the impact of wise or foolish foundations in your relationships?**
- **How do you build a strong foundation? What elements are critical to making sure you are able to endure the storms?**
- **What storms have you faced and how was your faith able to help you?**