

# “Firm Foundations”

Luke 6:46-49 <sup>1</sup>

When a group of elementary school students were asked several questions about mothers, there were some interesting answers . . . .

1. Why did God make mothers?
  - She’s the only one who knows where the Scotch tape is.
  - To help us out of there when we were getting born.
2. How did God make mothers?
  - He used dirt, just like for the rest of us.
  - Magic, plus superpowers and a lot of stirring.
  - God made my mom just the same like he made me.  
He just used bigger parts.
3. What ingredients are mothers made of?
  - God makes mothers out of clouds and angel hair  
and everything nice in the world . . . and one dab of mean.
  - They had to get their start from men’s bones.  
Then they mostly use string, I think.
4. Why did God give you your mother and not some other mom?
  - Because we’re related.
  - God knew she likes me a lot more than other people’s moms like me.<sup>2</sup>

A group of tourists who were visiting a picturesque village walked by an old man sitting in his yard. In a patronizing way, one of the tourists asked him, “Were any great men born in this village?”

The quick-witted old man replied, “Nope. Only babies.”<sup>3</sup>

To state the obvious, it is babies that transform women into mothers, and afterward mothers play an essential role in turning babies into great men and women. Babies and children are mentioned 846 times in the Bible, and Jesus told us that we must come to Him as children do if we are to enter the Kingdom of God (Mark 10:15).

While I’m obviously not a mother myself, I did have a mother, I’m married to a mother, and my daughter and daughter-in-law are mothers. And like nearly every grandparent before me, I find myself lost in wonder as I look into the eyes of my grandchildren. The youngest of the bunch is Barrett, now about 18 months old. I find myself wondering what he is able to see and hear and recognize. I wonder what his thought processes are like as billions and billions of neurons make their initial—and often life-long—connections even as I watch.

Craig Anderson, a researcher from Iowa State University, observed that “Kids are basically little learning machines. Whatever the content is in front of them, they’re going to pick it up.”<sup>4</sup> Knowing this as I know it now makes every moment precious in ways I wish I had seen more clearly the first time around. And insofar as I can help, I want the minds, bodies, and lives of our

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on May 8, 2016, Mothers’ Day.

<sup>2</sup> Peg Beukema, Nyack, New York.

<sup>3</sup> Leonard Ravenhill, *The Last Days Newsletter*.

<sup>4</sup> Craig Anderson, “Little Pitchers Have Big Ears,” *The Week*, November 4, 2005, 26.

grandchildren to have “firm foundations”—just like you desire these things for your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Ponderings such as these cause me to experience the daily news differently. The parents whose children are dying of disease and starvation in the war-torn areas of our world, the parents whose grown children come home from war in caskets, and even the parents whose children commit horrific acts of violence, pretty much all started out the same way with their kids.

All of this has set me to thinking about the foundations that are necessary in order to raise successful kids in a world such as this. If we’re not in the construction trades, it’s hard for most of us to have an adequate appreciation for the importance of a proper foundation.

The website of a global company that specializes in difficult foundations points out that “The foundations are the most heavily-loaded structural element in a building. They are constructed in largely unseen conditions and their integrity is reliant on the quality of workmanship in construction. . . . Foundations do not typically contribute to the architectural aesthetics of a building. Yet, without suitable foundations, a building will not function effectively. It will be unsafe, and its architectural merits will rapidly fade.”<sup>5</sup>

One of the principles for firm foundations for buildings is that the footers need to rest, if possible, on solid rock. And that’s exactly what Jesus was talking about in our text this morning: *“I will show you what it’s like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then obeys me. It is like a person who builds a house on a strong foundation laid upon the underlying rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against the house, it stands firm because it is well built. But anyone who listens and doesn’t obey is like a person who builds a house without a foundation.<sup>6</sup> When the floods sweep down against that house, it will crumble into a heap of ruins (Luke 6:46-49, NLT).*

It’s interesting to note the similarities between these two builders. Both builders were apparently equally impressed with the need to build a house. Both were committed to actually building a house. Both may even have built their houses in the same ravine. Both builders persevered until a house was built. To a casual observer, the most obvious difference between the two houses was probably that one of them was built more quickly than the other. The main difference lay underground, out of sight.

Later, both houses faced the same terrible storm, but the results were very different, and that, of course, is the point. Firm foundations for life, which is what Jesus was really talking about, have to do with hearing Jesus’ instructions for life, and then obeying Him—following those instructions as carefully as we can.

David Gibson, of Idaho Falls, Idaho, had an experience that makes this point pretty well. Here’s his story: “My friend bought a 19-foot jet boat and invited me along for her maiden voyage. The boat is made of steel and fitted with a V-8 engine. We put the boat in the North Fork of the Snake River, where the water was quite low because of a drought and heavy irrigation. We eased the throttle up until we were going 35 miles per hour. We grinned at each other as we raced across the water’s surface. Suddenly we hit a hidden sandbar, and the boat came to an abrupt stop. We stepped onto the sandbar, barely covered with one inch of water.

“Another boater came along, and after three hours of digging and pushing, we once again had my friend’s boat floating in the open channel. The boater who rescued us knew the river well

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.arup.com/geotechnics/skill.cfm?pageid=5355>

<sup>6</sup> In Matthew, Jesus said this house was built on sand (7:24-27).

and kindly offered to lead us back to the landing. He told us that if we followed him exactly, we would avoid hidden bars of sand and gravel.

“Our guide pushed his boat up to 35 miles per hour, and we fell in behind him, once again enjoying the power of the machine as it skimmed over the water. After a couple of minutes, my friend steered our boat just a few feet to the right of where the lead boat had gone. Within seconds, we hit a gravel bar, and I was thrown into the windshield, injuring me and breaking the windshield.

When the lead boat came back, the driver reminded us, ‘I told you to follow me.’” When Jesus spoke about lives with firm foundations, He was telling us the same thing: “Follow me. I know what I’m doing. If you don’t follow me, you’re going to run your life aground.”

To continue with Jesus’ image, in the world in which you and I live today, the rain is coming down in torrents and the floodwaters are rising and the winds are beating against the houses of our lives. More importantly, these forces are pressing against the foundations of our children’s lives. Are we showing them how to build good foundations?

There are, of course, many foundations on which we can build our lives. It was my privilege some years ago to perform the marriage ceremony for Rohit Bhuvania and Heather Davis, two college students who attended our church. In one conversation, Rohit spoke about the idolatry that is the chief religion in India, which is his home. I responded that my own country has many idols, but perhaps chief among them all is the idol of self-centered materialism. America is known the world over for idols crafted . . . in the color of money.

It should not be surprising to you for me to observe that we live in a selfish, self-centered, and hedonistic culture, a culture whose mottos include such things as “You only go around once in life, so grab all the gusto you can get”; “It feels so right that it can’t be wrong”; “If it feels good, do it”; “You earned it”; “You deserve it”; “Reward yourself.”

Many lives and many families crumble these days because we put possessions, fame, and the trappings of “success” in front of our relationships with God, with our families, and with our friends. Often, both parents work, and sometimes at more than one job, not in order to provide essential shelter and food and clothing, but in order to have every gadget, widget and amusement that Madison Avenue tells us we should want.

We want, not just a car, but a new car. We want not just a new car, but a status car. We want not just clothes, but designer clothes. We want not just a house, but a very nice house, in the very best neighborhood.

We try to *appear* successful, believing that success is measured in houses, properties, automobiles, and watercraft. Let me hasten to say that these things are not evil in themselves, but neither do they bring with them the satisfaction and inner peace that they promise. The world tells us to “get all you can, can all you get, and sit on the can.” But do you know where that can always sits? It sits on sand. It has no foundation.

Our children and grandchildren, our “little learning machines,” know what our *real* priorities are, and it might be unnerving to ask them what they see. In 2005, researchers at Dartmouth Medical School set up a pretend grocery store in order to learn more about how children view alcohol and other restricted products. They sent 120 kids, ages 2 to 6, through the aisles and instructed them to get ready for a grown-up party where Ken and Barbie would be the hosts.

According to the results, 28 percent of the children purchased cigarettes. “I need this for my man,” explained a 4-year-old girl, “A man needs cigarettes.” Girls and boys whose parents

smoked “were nearly four times as likely to buy cigarettes.” Beer or wine was purchased by 61 percent of the children. Children whose dads and moms drank alcohol at least once a month were three times more likely to purchase alcohol. Kids who watched PG-13 and R-rated movies regularly “were five times more likely to buy alcohol than kids limited to children’s programming.”<sup>7</sup> So what kind of foundations are we really building?

It worries me that athletic, aesthetic, and pleasurable activities often seem to be higher priorities in the lives of our families than nurturing the relationships that our children have with us and with God. Make no mistake about it. Our children know where our priorities are, and if our central priority is not establishing their relationship with God on a firm foundation, then we, their own parents and grandparents, are leading them away from God.

Many of the activities in which we involve our kids seem rooted in the perception that everyone else is doing these things or because we think such activities will reflect well on us, or because we hope these activities will result in college scholarships, all of which have to do with our own well-being, not with our children’s well-being. I’m afraid that what we often teach our children these days is that materialism and fame are the only things that matter very much. If they look at our lives, they understandably conclude that nurturing a vital and growing personal relationship with God as a passionate daily enterprise doesn’t count for much.

So when the floods of life sweep down on these young lives, as they will surely do, and when those lives crumble into heaps of ruins, as they increasingly do, we need not point our fingers at God, because God will respond as the driver of the lead boat did to David Gibson and his friend, “*I told you to follow me.*”

Moses told us that “*God punishes the children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations*” (Numbers 14:18). Such punishment does not represent God’s active judgment so much as it describes the predictable disasters that fall upon young lives that have been taught to build on sand. Far more often than not, **our children’s lives and our grandchildren’s lives will be built on the same kind of foundation we ourselves have used.**

So where do we find a rock on which to build our lives? Well, we start by getting a copy of the Architect’s Construction Plan—it’s called the Bible—and that Construction Plan will tell us where to find the Rock. Isaiah told us, “*Trust in the Lord always, for the Lord God is the eternal Rock*” (Isaiah 26:4). An old spiritual says it well: “My God, he is a rock in a weary land, a weary land, a weary land; My God, he is a rock in a weary land, a shelter in a time of storm.”

Let me close with one more story. A few years ago, Jennifer Tatum of Romeoville, Illinois, found her mother at the kitchen table, reading something with obvious frustration. “I asked her what she was looking at,” Jennifer wrote, “and she told me that she’d been studying Proverbs for her devotions, and she’d just read chapter 31—the passage that offers a list of what makes a virtuous wife. She was frustrated, because she believed that she could never be the woman God describes in the passage.

“We talked about it some more, and my mom finally arrived at a decision that still inspires me today. While it may not be easy to be a virtuous woman, my mother decided to just take it one verse at a time. She said, ‘I’ll work on the first item in the list. When I’ve got that one mastered, I’ll move to the next one—hopefully I’ll be a virtuous woman before I die.’

“I recently checked with her to see how she was progressing,” Jennifer wrote. “She laughed and told me she was still only seven or eight items into the list, but was currently stuck

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<sup>7</sup> Craig Anderson, “Little Pitchers Have Big Ears,” *The Week*, November 4, 2005, 26.

on, 'Her children call her blessed.' 'I might have to wait for all of them to grow out of their teens before I can accomplish that one,' she said.

"Last year," Jennifer said, "my sisters and I got together and made a certificate of completion in 'Proverbs 31 Training.' We took every verse from the passage, and we came up with an example of when she had fulfilled that requirement. It ended up looking like a real diploma, and it had her many accomplishments listed one after the other. We all signed it, including my dad. I read it aloud to her, and when we got to the last verse—'*Her children call her blessed*'—one by one, we all said, 'Mom, you are blessed.'

"She cried and cried. I honestly think she never thought she would fulfill all the descriptions of 'the Proverbs 31 woman.' When we were able to point out an instance when she had done each, it was too much to contain. She'd finally reached her whole life's goal! What she's going to do with her time now is anyone's guess!"

I submit to you that this mother was a wise woman who had built her life on the Rock, as her children will do after her. May we go and do likewise!