

FOCUS ON FAITH

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STRONG FOUNDATIONS

Many years ago now – it almost seems in a different lifetime – I trained to be a Chartered Surveyor. I still have the qualification but to be honest because my working career took me in an entirely different direction I would probably be a liability now if I actually had to survey a property.

Of course the basics never leave you but changes in building techniques and technology would render some of the construction methods I learned about obsolete. The history of construction is one thing, the current building practices and regulations are another. Yes I know about King and Queen post trusses and I can even remember some aspects of brick bonding but unless you were restoring an architecturally significant property and had to reinstate it using traditional methods and materials you wouldn't need to know what little I can remember. Mind you being the pastor of a church with a Grade 2 listed building one day I might need my previous expertise!

One aspect of building construction though that was impressed upon me by my lecturers was in relation to foundations. All buildings, but especially tall ones, need to have adequately deep and appropriately reinforced bases on which the structure is built. The two primary considerations are the bearing capacity and settlement. If the foundations aren't deep enough or strong enough for the weight that is placed upon them, there will be trouble – witness the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

On the other hand, the type of soil – and especially its water retention capacity – also has a bearing (no pun intended) on the type, depth and strength of the foundations used. This is especially important when the proximity of trees could have an impact. Many people have been victims when tree roots (and they can go very deep) have undermined their home during a season of drought.

You've probably spotted by now where I'm going with this – we need strong foundations in our lives.

Often that which is unseen has more impact than what is seen. No-one I know really raves over building foundations. They aren't especially beautiful – concrete isn't the most attractive of materials and concrete with steel running through it is unlikely to win a beauty contest.

But the visible is often a reflection of the invisible. When what we are underneath is strong, dependable and solid what is seen on the outside normally replicates it. After all what self-respecting architect or builder would make the unseen foundations attractive and fit for purpose and then put up a shoddy fascia?

Of course the opposite can be true. Many buildings and motorway bridges in the UK have suffered from 'concrete cancer' due to poor construction detailing. To the inexperienced naked eye, it all seemed okay –after all who takes much notice of a bridge at 70mph – but underneath it was a different story. Our outsides may be attractive, bright and sparkling but below the surface everything could be deteriorating, rotting and disintegrating. Outer appearances can be a façade, concealing or disguising inner turmoil.

Jesus told the story of two property owners who decided to build houses for themselves. One built his house on a foundation of rock; the other on sandy soil. When the storms hit them both, it was the one on the solid base that was able to withstand the buffeting whilst the other fell like a pack of cards. The recent tragic earthquake in China highlighted the issue of insufficient protection against natural disaster – the properties that collapsed weren't sufficiently strong enough to withstand the forces against them.

And we all face disasters from time to time in our lives. Health, financial, career, marriage and family issues test the strength and depth of our inner foundations. How we react when confronted with external forces depends on what we have previously built into ourselves.

Jesus told his story to expose the difference between what is on the surface and what's underneath. We can all be persuaded by charisma and impressed by charm and flattery. But what really counts are those inner character traits that define us and are demonstrated through our integrity and reputation.

The question we all have to ask is, '**On what are my foundations built?**' The qualities that Jesus displayed were defined by His inner assurance and poise. They were proved in His life through His faithfulness, sacrificial love and willingness to forgive even those who betrayed and murdered Him. Life's storms don't come much more violent than that.

Establishing firm character foundations that are built on faith in God rather than our own abilities and self-made reputations will both protect us and help us withstand the challenges life throws at us.

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If you would like to find out more about what Christians believe, log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk where you'll find information on local Churches together with contact details, plus information on activities and other resources.