



A Sweet Summer
5- Building Your Life on a Strong Foundation
Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today, we're talking about *Building Your Life on a Strong Foundation*. I really want us to spend a lot of time just talking about the foundation. Because people will be here today from around the country and here in our community, and maybe they are experiencing a great crash. The storms of life have hit them, their life is falling apart. They just want to get through this storm and when they get through this storm, they'll begin rebuilding back their life. But we've seen, time and time again, too many people rebuild their life on the exact same foundation that got them in the mess in the first place.

Today, we want to talk about no longer allowing your life to be built on a weak foundation, or as the scripture is going to call it, sand, but that we would build it upon the rock.

If you have your bibles, I want you to turn to Matthew 7. We're going to be at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. We're going to look at this great parable that Jesus ends the sermon with. He ends by talking about a wise builder and foolish builder. Our desire for every single one in here, across the campus and online, would be wise builders, thinking about our foundation.

One of the reasons we focus on marriage and family so much at this church is because we want marriages and families to have strong foundations, not just for your family but for the children you're sending out of your home one day to build their own life and start their own life. We want to send our kids out with a strong foundation, a solid foundation. That's why we put so much into children ministries and family ministries here. We want our kids going off to college... When they go to college, they're going to begin building a life. As they hit all these milestones, we want them to have a solid, strong foundation.

One of the reason Earl and Sherry pour so much into Ready to Wed here at this church is because when a young couple meet, and they have that young, budding love... Does anybody know what I'm talking about? And they begin thinking about building a life together, all Ready to Wed is doing is making sure *hey before you walk down the aisle, we want you to have a solid, strong foundation*. Know what you're building your marriage and your life on.

I love to tell the young guys, "Before you just check out her foundation." Before you check him out, check out his foundation. That's what we call dating and engagement. You want to know the foundation.

Here are three things true as we jump into this great text. Everyone here, every single person watching here on campus, you're building your life on something. So, I just want to start by asking the question: "What am I building my life on?" "I've been working hard my whole life, Ted, and I want to make money." "I've made a lot of money, I've lost a lot of money." Well, hopefully, you're not building on the foundation of your possessions or your stuff. Some of you like to make a name for yourself and you're building your life on the foundation of your name. We read in Ecclesiastes that after you're dead, your name will soon be forgotten. It's not a good foundation.

Some of you are going to build on the power you get or the prestige you get from a job or a career. All of the career stuff and earning money, all of that's part of life, but we don't want it to be the foundation. So, what are you building your life on?

Here's what we also know to be true. Everyone goes through storms in life. Have you ever been around someone experiencing a great crash and they look at other people and they say these words: "No one understands what I'm going through."? The Hebrew for that is "HAH!" It's not true. They may not be going through the storm you're going through right now, but you don't know that they haven't been through that. Sickness has hit their family like it's hitting your family. Difficult financial times has hit their family like it's hitting your family. Marriage struggles have hit their family like it's hitting your family. When life begins to get a little shaky for you, be very careful that you don't look around and be like, *I'm the only one that's ever been through this.*

That's why we believe in groups here, we believe in biblical community. Biblical community is good. You want to go be with other believers because you think your life is falling apart and you go to a small group, and then you get out in the car afterwards and you're like, *Wow! At least we're not as jacked up as all those other people going on in the there.* That's called biblical community. Why? Because they're going through storms and if they are not, they've been through a storm. And if they're not, they're getting ready to head into one. Everybody goes through storms.

Here's the last part. I don't get to choose everything that happens to me in life. I get to choose a lot, but not everything. The good news about the text we're going to see today is I do get to 100% choose my foundation and what I'm going to build my life on.

Let's jump into this great text in Matthew 7. This is the end of the Sermon on the Mount. It's a great parable, a great story. It's a short story and you're going to see three things true about each builder and one thing that separates them. So just get this one thing down today – that's the difference between a wise builder and a foolish builder.

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 (the right foundation). 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice... There's the difference. But three things are true about each builder. Both are building, both are going to go through the exact same storms, and then this is key – both hear the Word of God. Both build, both going through storms, and both hear the Word of God.

What's the difference? One puts them into practice, and one does not. One follows the teachings of Jesus and makes it part of their life, and one does not. One experiences a great crash, the other stands strong. Again, we're all building a life. The question for us today is what are we building it on? ***...is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down (the same storm), the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.***"

I think that's the hardest part about watching someone's life crash. Once it crashes and they begin to make it level out emotionally and they begin to move on in life. They begin rebuilding and then they're rebuilding on the exact same foundation that caused the great crash. It's not about the storm that's hitting you, it's about what your house is built on. What is your life built on?

I got to thinking about wise and foolish builders this week. First of all, I thought about the seasoned believers in our church. Most of them go to the 8:30. That's our senior adult service. They watch Fox News for three hours and then they're here by 8:30. Most of them are here by 8:00. We have to remind them we don't start until 8:30 but they are here and packed into the place.

Have you been around a seasoned believer, someone whose life is built upon a rock when the storms hit, the health scare, the diagnosis, the crash in the market, this thing called a pandemic? Isn't that interesting. The pandemic was a storm that hit all of us. Same storm hit all of us. Why did some stand strong and others not?

I talk to pastors all the time now. I've been talking to a lot of people who are just done. There are pastors thinking about leaving ministry because of the last year. I'm just grateful... and we saw it. I'm grateful for a church with a strong foundation, and that we're not built on committees.... I never want this church to be built upon a personality. Listen, a church built on a personality is heading for a great crash. It is. We see it all the time in churches around the country. I don't understand churches that build on a personality and then something happens to the personality. You had the wrong foundation. We all went through the same storm. Why did some churches stay strong and some crashed? When the storm hits, you have seasoned believers who are steady and secure. But then the new believer... When the storm hits, they are surprised, there are shaken.

Katie and I changed this slide today because when I read it again last night... You know, you're putting those together and you have a heart behind what you're putting together and then you read it again on Saturday night and you're like, *Well that was very condescending the way I was going to say that.* I had up here: Immature Believers and I had the word *soft*. And I'm like... I was getting ready to put *backbone, spine*, and all that stuff. Then I thought I needed to bring it down a notch and try to encourage people in their walk with the Lord. *I was really going after you weaklings.* That's not the heart behind this message at all.

You've been around new believers that when the same storm... It's the same storm. Steady secure. New believers surprise you. I came up with it in the 8:30 because I was singing it while we were singing another song. You can sing it with me if you want. "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand."

We could spend all morning talking about the different types of sinking sand, but we don't need to get into all that because there is only one rock and that is Jesus. Everything else... anything else you can come up with... "Is this a good thing to build my life on?" No, sinking sand. "Well, what about this?" Nope. Bad foundation. You will crash. It will take you toward a terrible crash.

Here's what we know about storms. Storms reveal our foundations. I've seen the pictures. I Googled bad foundations this week. We have a little bit of a foundation issue. My daughter's door on her bedroom works about a couple of seasons a year. And there's a big crack up her door, it goes all the way up. I don't need foundations repair experts coming up to me after this service because we've decided to live with it. We have trimmed that door so much there's a gap at the top and a gap at the bottom. It's becoming one of those swinging bar doors. Right now, her door works, so it works in the summer. But come winter, something happens, the limestone changes and we're not doing nothing with that door.

How many of you have doors and windows that don't work? Am I the only one in the Ozarks that...? You all are the least supportive church people I've been around in a long time. I know you have doors and windows. Listen, it's crazy to think about how much time I have spent fixing that crack. I don't know where all the mud has gone. I have bought those little patch things. I have ten of those on her wall and it's not any thicker. I have no idea where it goes. It's not going back in the crack and down the wall.

If I don't want to patch anymore, I could fix the foundation. If I wanted my doors and windows to work all four seasons, I could go to work on my foundation. If you Google this, you'll see pictures of houses built on the beach and a storm comes in and there's the foundations. You see the foundation and you see one side of it broken off. Those people would be crazy to go back and build on that foundation. They have foundation work to do. I'm convinced that, over the last year, all the storms did... all this pandemic did was cause us to take a serious look at the foundation. There were marriages that had strong foundations. Churches that had strong foundations.

You can take the same into the community. Business that had strong foundations, schools that had strong foundations, but then you saw this other side. People are like well look what happened. It was a weak foundation. You didn't crash... If you've experienced a crash or you are experiencing a crash right now, you didn't crash because of the storms that hit you. That's not what Jesus is teaching. The storms hit both the wise and the foolish. You crashed because you had a weak foundation. And if I can just encourage you, don't wait for a storm to work on your foundation. Now is the time. Start right now.

If you've recently experienced a great crash, work on your foundation before rebuilding your life. How do you do that? I think what Jesus is saying here is put into practice the words that you have heard. And that's where all of us are at today. Every single person in here, across the campus and online, has heard the words of Jesus. Now, you are required to respond. And the response is your decision. You choose. You decide what you're going to do with Jesus. You decide what you are going to do with his words and with his teaching.

I think there are like five things... There could be more. But there are five things people do after they hear the Word of God. We see it all the time. I know there are a lot of churches that know it because they've learned it. They can regurgitate the words of Jesus, but are they doing something with it? Are they putting into practice what Jesus taught?

There is another group that hear the Word of God and they debate it. We call that seminary. And it's honestly why seminary wore me out. It really did because we want to debate, debate, debate. You probably get this for twenty years if you've been here for any length of time. Let's just find out what it says and do this crazy thing called do it. Just do it. "Well, what did he really mean?" Do it; do your original language search and do the study and do all that, but when he says, "Love your enemies," just do it. Just find someone you hate and go love them. Is it that difficult? Why do we make it so painfully difficult? Love your neighbor. Go love your neighbor. "Well, what does that mean?" Love... Neighbor. Find someone close to you, in proximity to you that doesn't look like you, talk like you... Just find somebody. A random stranger on the street and then love them. "Well, what does love mean?" Just love them and shut up. I'm like a parent mad at his kids right now. "Just do what you're told."

Let's take the words of Jesus... When you read the Sermon on the Mount alone. Don't have hate in your heart. You've heard you shouldn't and you're patting yourself on the back. But if you hate your brother, stop hating your brother. Love your brother.

Then we have another one. Change it. People want to read it and are like, "Well that's not really what it means." I love the pastor that I came to ministry under, James Merrick out of Atlanta. I love what he says. "God is not going to change his Word to fit your generations wants and needs." He's not going to do it. So, we need to stop reading it and go "Yeah, but I haven't experienced it that way." "I'm not feeling it." Listen and do it.

Deny it. Now we know that. But again, these are all decisions we make because Jesus said what? Both heard. Both heard the words, and now they have to choose what they are going to do with it. Remember when Paul stood before the men of Athens? He preached the gospel. He stood in this city that was full of idols. They even had an idol that was to an unknown god. And he stands up and declares Jesus Christ risen from the dead and says, "In him we live and move and have our being." He had three responses to that gospel presentation. People sneered at him, mocked him like, "Oh we're not buying this resurrection from the dead thing." Others listened and said we want to hear more. We would call them a seeker. But there was a third group that followed that day.

When you think about those three responses, it's kind of the same what we learn in this text today. They all heard and had a decision to make. Some of you will hear the Word of God today, Jesus was proclaimed to you today and you will deny it. But what is Jesus saying? Jesus is saying live it. You get to choose your foundation. You get to choose what you build your life upon. Here's the key for the text because it's the difference between the wise and the foolish builders. Put them into practice. Do something with it. **Your foundation is determined by what you do with the Word of God, not by what you know about the Word of God.** Are you living it out in your life?

I've been very blessed the last month or so with our speakers that have been coming in. Alex Himaya ministered deeply to this congregation last week. As he was preaching... If you haven't gone back, go back and watch Alex's message. He has an entire series in one message. As he was preaching, the sacred echo for me was *be ready, be ready, be ready*. There is a war, there is a battle that's raging. We have to be ready for this battle. My mind kept going back to Ephesians. After Paul's central teaching in the New Testament on marriage and family, we are told to put on the armor of God. Why? That's because when you take a stand for God, when you begin to live your life putting into practice the words and teachings of Jesus, you are on Satan's radar, and he is going to attack. And by the way, if you're doing this from a generational perspective that *I don't want to just live my life for Jesus, I want my kids to live their lives for Jesus and so I want them to leave my home with a foundation that is built upon the rock*. When you start getting serious about your marriage and your family, watch out. That's why Paul says put on the full armor of God.

Watch what we read in Ephesians 6: 10 – 13. I don't have time this morning to go through all of the pieces of the armor. **10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.** Meaning we're not going into battle on our strength. We're going in on his mighty power. **11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.** **12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.** Now watch this. It's very important that we don't mix this passage up. **13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes...** Did you get that? It didn't say when the day of evil comes, get your armor on. No. You kept getting this from Alex's message last week. Be ready. This armor should be on now. This armor should be on now because the day of evil is coming. And that's a terrible to wait. That's what we're saying about foundation. Don't wait for the storms. Work on your foundation now.

One of the things we're really ramping up with discipleship moving into the fall is our foundational classes that you can go through to make sure your foundation is solid, strong, and ready, that when the storms hit you, you can be that seasoned believer who weathers it. You're secure and your steady in the storm. Be ready, the day of evil is coming. You may be able to stand your ground and after you have done everything to stand.

This September marks 20 years since 9/11 and I've spent a lot of time over the years talking to my kids about this day. Amy and I remember everything about that day – where we were, who we ministered to, all that was taking place. The bottom line is this as a nation we were not ready for that. We weren't prepared. If you get a chance to watch... I don't know what channel it's on but I've watched it I don't know how many times. It's very emotional for me to watch. They do an interview with George W. Bush. They just walk through the day from his perspective, and he walks through all of the events of that day. You'll see how our country was not prepared. It drove President Bush nuts because they were in and out. Here's the president of the United States needing to make decision not having the information that he needed.

In the 9/11 Commission Report, I read through that years ago. I'll share some of it with you. It says, *We learned about an enemy who is sophisticated, patient, disciplined, and lethal.*

When I read that, I thought Satan is sophisticated, patient, disciplined, and lethal. That's why the armor needs to be on at all times.

The enemy rallies broad support in an Arab and Muslim world by demanding to address political grievances but it's hostility toward us and our values is limitless. Its purpose is to rid the world of religious and political pluralism and equal rights for women. It makes no distinction between military and civilian target. Collateral is not in its lexicon. We learned that the institution's charge with protecting our borders civil aviation and national security did not understand how great this threat could be, and did not adjust their policies, plans, and practices to deter or defeat it. We are dealing with a new type of enemy.

Alex talked about it last week. Different face, same enemy.

The test before us is to sustain the unity of purpose and meet the challenges now confronting us. We need to design a balanced strategy for the long haul to attack terrorist to prevent their ranks from swelling, while at the same time, protecting our country against future attacks.

When I think about readiness in our families and I think about readiness in our church... I think about it often when I go to the airport. You've been to an airport in the last 20 years, and you know we deal with this thing called the TSA. A lot of times, yeah, I get impatient with long lines like anybody does, but I just don't see the attitude toward it because yes, sometimes it looks like overkill to have five people checking through the gates with 12 TSA agents, but I could tell you this, even from our little airport in Springfield, SGF, we're ready. It's not overkill it's just we're prepared to not let something like 9/11 happen again.

I joked about it a couple of weeks ago, but it's serious. You know, the whole being on a plane ready for action at any moment. Then that pilot called able-bodied men forward to take out a threat and I said I've been waiting for that moment my whole life. I got an opportunity coming back from LaGuardia this week. We were sitting up front and I heard the flight attendant say, "There's a fight in the back." I looked at Amy and I go, "This is it. I love you and I'm going to take care of business. They pulled the plane back in, opened the gate, and security came on. It's pretty rough out there these days. And then I found out it was two moms fighting. I thought the congregation really wouldn't respect that if I go breaking up two moms fighting. Or let alone they take me out. That would really be embarrassing.

But when I think about foundations, I think about that readiness Alex talked about last week. Are we ready? Are you prepared? Some of you just got out of the storm and your life crashed. This just comes from the heart of a pastor who loves you. You're headed for another crash. I know you're headed for another storm. The reason I know you're headed for another crash is because you're building your life on the same foundation that brought the last crash.

I've been to a lot of churches that built the church on the foundation of tradition. Tradition can be part of the church, but it's not our foundation. Jesus was very clear about that in the scripture. Don't let that be your foundation. Let emotions be a part of your life, but don't let your emotions be part of the foundation.

As Ryan Pannell says, emotions are like our children. We listen to them, we care for them, but we do not allow them to make major decisions for our family. Terrible foundation. Don't let your emotions be your foundation. Also, don't let your experiences be your foundation. I see it all the time. "I've read this in God's Word, but that's not what happened in my life so I'm not going to..." "I have a family member who's choosing to live life a different way and to validate and support that family member, I can't listen to God's Word on this particular..."

No, no, no, experiences are what make up life. We all have experiences, but I am not going to build my life on my experiences or your experiences. Your experiences are not my authority. I can learn from your experiences, I can grow from your experiences, I can build pieces of my life off of your experiences, but they'll never be my foundation.

And since it's 4th of July, let's go where angels dare to tread. Be passionate about your political party's platform, but don't build your life on it. Be involved in government, get passionate about elections, that's great, but I'm just telling you, as your pastor, do not build your life on a political party... please! Don't do it. Do you know why? If you build your life on a political party, you're headed for a great crash. "Can my foundation be God and country?" No. Your country can be part of your life, but it's not part of your foundation. Why? Because if it's not Jesus, everything else is sinking sand... everything! Jesus Christ and then my emotions, my experience, what I'm passionate about in this country. That's all part of life, but some of you have been experiencing an emotional, spiritual, crash over the last six months because you added to your foundation that that doesn't belong there. Jesus Christ is the foundation. Everything else is sinking sand.

If you've recently been through a divorce, work on your foundation before building a life with someone new. The Lord has been working on me in this area. Because my passion is for marriage, I spend a lot of time thinking about marriage and how to help people in their marriages. One of the areas that I've struggled with over the last 20 years, and I know that God is doing something in my life and in the life of this church. I talked to many people after the first service about this. There's this tension we live with in this church and the tension is we want to help couples in crisis. R.G. and Karen Yallaly and then dozens of Marriage 911 mentors are constantly helping people in crisis and couples in crises wanting to save their marriage.

So that's our passion and we want to keep fighting for marriage, but we also realize that some marriages end in divorce and the problem is that tension is we don't want to help someone go through a divorce because it looks like we're not honoring marriage. And we have to live with that tension. I don't think that tension is going anywhere, but I will tell you what does need to change. What needs to change is this church, starting with me. We need to be there for people during the darkest seasons of their lives. We need to be there when someone is going through a difficult season. Again, I have friends all over the country and all they do is marriage and family. I was texting them this week going, "You know what? We have marriage crisis counseling. We have that going on in the church. We have Divorce care at our church. What do we have in between? What do we have in the gap?" Because what we say is, Okay, if your marriage can't be saved and you're getting a divorce, we have Divorce Care that can help you heal from that." And then the church... It's not intentional. It is not intentional at all.

The church is absent between the two. And I think, if I can just speak for myself. it's ignorance and I think its not knowing the next step to take. Yet, I do know that I want to be there, this church wants to be there through these very dark and painful seasons. I don't know what that looks like, but we can't abandon people even it's out of an ignorance when they go through difficult seasons.

I will tell you, and I say it often to a couple when I've been in the room, when I see the marriage end and the marriage dissolved and they are now moving forward, there's going to be no reconciliation. I usually lead out with, Will you both promise me that neither one of you will start dating anyone any time soon? We have foundation work that needs to be done. And don't go rebuilding your life with someone new until we take a look at that foundation and begin building back that foundation."

If I could just say that if you found your way back to church during a storm, would you stay put and work on your foundation? If you leaned into seasoned believers during a difficult storm in your life... I mean the rain is coming down, the water is rising into your house, beating into your house and you found your way back and you leaned into seasoned believers, here's what's going to happen. After the storm passes... I see it happen too many times. You go back to people who are not good voices. You go back to people who want you to build your life on all these other sinking sand foundations. Stay put. The reason you need to stay put is there's another storm coming. You're not done with storms.

If you cried out to God during a storm, keep praying long after the storm passes. If you're leaning into biblical community, you're leaning into the Lord, keep praying, keep pressing. If you reach for your Bible during a storm to find answers for what you're going through right now and the storm that is gone, keep looking for answers that you'll need later, that you need now. His Word is alive and it's active. Press into this because there's another storm coming.

The only difference between the wise and foolish builders is what they did with what they heard. And today, you have heard and now you have to make a choice. Will you obey, will you live, will you practice it, will you deny it, will you walk away from it? Will you just debate and want to change it into something that fits your bias or your worldview? Or will you say, "Jesus, you are mine. I receive you. I receive your life. I receive your words. I want to know what you say and what you teach, and I want to live it." After he washed feet, Jesus said this in John 13; 17: ***"Now that you know these things you will be blessed if you do them."*** Build your life on that.

Sing this song with me. "When he shall come with trumpet sound oh may I then in Him be found. Dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne. On Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.

Father, in the name of Jesus, I pray for the one right now who is experiencing that great crash that today they would realize it's not the issue of the storm; it's the issue of the foundation. And that today they would go to work on building a foundation – learning your word, putting into practice the teachings and making it their life and quit running from you because they are running from one crash to another. That today would be the day that their life is built upon the solid rock of Christ Jesus.

For the one that has just come out of a storm and maybe they are leveling off emotionally and feeling like getting back to a new way of life that they wouldn't discredit this because of what they are feeling, but that they would still see the need for their foundation and the work on their foundation.

I pray for the seasoned believers in here that they will lean into and help those who are growing in their faith and not make church all about them or what they want or what they need or their preferences, but understand the importance of teaching the next generation, raising up leaders with strong foundations.

We are grateful for the country that we live in, we're grateful for this day where we get to celebrate with our families and with our friends the freedom that we have, and we not take it for granted at all. May this nation... instead of wanting to be a foundation, may this nation turn to Jesus as the foundation.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus. And everyone agreed and said... Amen