

Laying a Strong Spiritual Foundation

#1: Repentance from Dead Works

Christian people are suffering loss because they do not have a solid spiritual foundation. After many years they do not have genuine confidence and assurance of faith in Christ, have an inner freedom, or have gained many victories. They are still babies looking for someone to feed them.

Principle: everything needs a strong foundation

In the natural realm we can easily see that everything needs a good foundation for it to prosper. We see this in different aspects of life such as growing trees, building houses, making good marriages, establishing organizations, and starting businesses.

Creating the world

- For the foundations of the earth are the LORD's; upon them he has set the world (1 Samuel 2:8).
- Then the channels of the sea appeared, the foundations of the world were laid bare (2 Samuel 22:16).
- Sets on fire the foundations of the mountains (Deuteronomy 32:22).
- The earth trembled and quaked, the foundations of the heavens shook (2 Samuel 22:8).

Building houses & cities

- The king commanded, and they quarried great stones, costly stones, to lay the foundation of the house with cut stones (I Kings 5:17).
- Joshua made them take an oath, " Cursed before the LORD is the man who rises up and builds this city Jericho; with the loss of his firstborn he shall lay its foundation (Joshua 6:26).

Making good marriages

In 1983, our marriage was in crisis. Jerry was in the middle of a midlife crisis, and not very happy about his life in general or his relationship with me in particular. We had gone through many battles, faced numerous confrontations, disappointments and frustrations. We had despaired of ever getting our relationship back in track. We had essentially given up on our marriage, our relationship was dead, and we couldn't function together.

Then Jerry dreamed: he saw that our house – the one we actually lived in – was undergoing reconstruction, especially the family room. The foundation was in very bad condition in need of major repair.

Houses usually represent our inner self, but if the house is known, it probably has a different meaning, perhaps our relationship with people in it at that time or what we learned or experienced in that house. The bad foundation symbolized that the basis of our relationship was in shambles. The family room symbolized his relationship with family, especially me.

He wrote in his journal, "In part because of the message of this dream, I was able to see our condition and kneel with Judith before God, surrendering our marriage to him: "God, our

marriage is a mess. We've given up, it just doesn't work. We can't seem to get along any more. If there's anything you want to do with our marriage you do it. We give it to you." We told him it was dead, unless he could resurrect it

Slowly, but surely, our marriage began to mend. We started getting along better. Years later, Jerry came to realize that this dream was speaking to him on another level also, the spiritual level – his spiritual foundation needed to be substantially revamped.

Growing psychologically mature

We also see this principle in the psychological development of people. If we do not have a solid psychological foundation we cannot function very well as adults.

Dr. M. Scott Peck wrote that we need to be grounded in three major areas: 1) Love: must come to know that we are loved in the deepest fibers our being. 2) Self-worth, sense of valuableness: must receive a deep internal sense of our own worth and value. 3) Security: must have a deep inner feeling that the world is a safe place in which to live, and if not, we must believe that some kind of protection will be there when it is needed. It is a degree of trust in the safety of our existence, a deep internal sense of security with no fear of abandonment.

Peck found that if this foundation was not laid in childhood, it was almost impossible to lay it in adulthood. But I found that we can look to our Father in Heaven & he will lay this foundation.

Enjoying a relationship with God requires a spiritual foundation

In our spiritual life we also need a strong spiritual foundation. Here are scriptures about the need for a foundation:

- Thus says the Lord, "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation..." (Isaiah 28:16)
- If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Psalms 11:3).
- Those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; you will raise up the age-old foundations; and you will be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which to dwell. (Isaiah 58:12)
- God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his" (II Timothy 2:19).
- According to the grace of God that was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it; for no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 3:10-11).
- Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and He who believes in Him shall not be disappointed (I Peter 2:7).
- Therefore leaving the elemental teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity (*teleos – come to the fullness of what God has in mind for us*), not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings, and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment (Hebrews 6:1-2).

First step, receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior

There is only one foundation that we can lay for our salvation and entry into the kingdom of God: it is a person, Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone. Our first step is receiving Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Why is it that we have to start with Jesus? Because our heart has to be changed and our sins have to be washed away: only Jesus Christ can do this!

- I shall give them one heart, and shall put a new spirit within them. I shall take the heart of stone out of their flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances, and do them. Then they will be My people, and I will be their God (Ezekiel 11:19-20).

We receive a new heart when we go to God, have an authentic conversion experience and are born-again of the Spirit. The church is not the foundation! It is Jesus Christ who is the foundation that the church is built on. There is no foundation that anyone can lay other than Jesus Christ.

Next we must lay six foundational stones

... not laying again a foundation of 1) repentance from dead works and 2) of faith toward God, 3) of instruction about washing – water baptism & the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and 4) laying on of hands, and 5) the resurrection of the dead, and 6) eternal judgment (Hebrews 6:1-2).

1. Repentance from dead works – Jesus brings a change of direction in our life.
2. Faith toward God – Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith.
3. Instructions about washings: baptism of water – we join Jesus in His death; baptism of the Holy Spirit – Jesus is the baptizer.
4. Laying on of hands – the life of Jesus flows through us for blessing, healing, gifts and ministry.
5. Resurrection of the dead – Jesus is the resurrection and the life; we join Him in His resurrection.
6. Eternal judgment – Jesus is the Lamb of God who died for our sins.

In our spiritual walk, our foundation or lack of foundation is referring to what we believe, what it is that we have faith in. If these problems and others always seem to be bothering you, look to your foundation, for this is where the problem lies.

- ✓ Does your faith waver every time it is put to the test?
- ✓ Do you sink into depression with every storm that comes?
- ✓ Do you fall with every temptation?
- ✓ Do you walk in the flesh more than in the spirit?
- ✓ Do you always need others praying for you and encouraging you?
- ✓ Can you stand firm against the spiritual attacks of the enemy?

#1: Repentance from Dead Works

Repentance from dead works is identified in Hebrews as the first foundational stone that needs to be laid.

... a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God... (Hebrews 6:1).

Understanding “repentance”

Repentance is a biblical concept referred to throughout the entire Bible. It means that we turn away from our sin and rebellious ways toward God and learn to walk in His ways.

Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19).

1. Here are a few scriptures on repentance

- The Lord God...has said, “In repentance and rest you shall be saved” (Is 30:15).
- Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).
- That repentance and remission of sins should be proclaimed in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47; Is 30:15).
- God overlooking the times of ignorance, now He strictly commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).
- Solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:21).

2. Defining “repentance”

Repentance (*Metaonia*) literally means *to change, to turn around and go the other way*. It means something more than feeling sorry; it means to literally turn away from behaviors and thoughts that are producing death in us and moving towards God’s way.

3. Repentance is for sinners

Until we come to the place where we recognize that we are sinners, God cannot do very much for us.

Jesus tries to help us understand this

He says “Blessed are for the poor in spirit... those who mourn and weep... those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...” (Matthew 5:3-5). We need to come to the end of ourselves and see our own poverty, that we are indeed sinners.

For the most part, we do not see our own poverty. There are rich people in the world who are poverty stricken, and they are millionaires or billionaires, and they can’t even see their poverty. Yet they are some of the poorest people in the world, because they are not aware at all of spiritual things, or things of God, or spiritual life, the things that are most important in eternal things, they are totally unaware.

Scriptures

- ...go and learn what this is, I will have mercy and not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Mt 9:13).
- They who are strong have no need of a physician, but the ones who have illness. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Mr 2:17).
- Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ to remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ac 2:38).

4. Hindrances to repentance

- ✓ Besetting sin – Failure, shame, hopelessness; joy of temporary victory but fell again to the hated thoughts or behavior: emphasize unqualified nature of God’s promises
- ✓ Sin too great – so heinous & long duration; continually whips himself, because he knew better but chose sin anyway. He feels unworthy to ask God to forgive him: needs a revelation of God’s heart toward him before he can face God, asking for forgiveness.
- ✓ No realization of sin – blind of need to repent: need to be brought to a knowledge of the truth.
- ✓ Disappointment with God – trauma, tragedy, difficult life circumstances & unanswered prayers cause our faces & hearts to be turned away from God. Trust is broken & alienation takes over: Have to reach a place of choosing to trust God’s goodness.

Not all repentance is pleasing or acceptable to God. We can see this in the parable about the two men who went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. One was very proud, the other very humble.

It is very easy for us to look around and think, “I am glad I am not like that person. I know the Lord, I am filled with the Holy Spirit, and I am doing good things for God.” We can do all these things, yet have very little change inside our heart.

5. Repentance is a gift from God

When the soil of our heart is prepared, God will grant us through His grace the ability to repent. We can never force true repentance using our will power. It is God who brings about situations in our lives that causes us to see His kindness. It is God who causes us to see the truth about ourselves, and it is He who grants repentance to us.

- Do you despise the riches of His kindness, and the forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance (Romans 2:4)?
- In meekness instructing those who oppose, if perhaps God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth (2Timothy 2:25).
- The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).
- When they heard these things, they were silent and glorified God, saying, Then God has also granted repentance to life to the nations (Acts 11:18).

6. Is repentance only an initial experience?

Our initial repentance opens the doorway to God. It turns us from the kingdom of Satan toward the Kingdom of God. It is like a door into a whole new world of repentance. But the act of

repentance does not end there. It is only the beginning. It is not just a one moment decision, it is ongoing, day by day, as we allow the Holy Spirit to work within us.

What are dead works?

Repentance from dead works is the repentance of specific sins. It means to change our direction in the aspects of our life that are bringing death to us.

Dead works are things that we do or say that have no life in them. They are those things we do in trying to manipulate God, trying to get His approval, trying to pay our own way into the kingdom of God. It is all the ways we are trying to get our needs met, trying to change someone or our self, trying to prove our self, etc.

Repentance from dead works means to literally turn away from doing these things and applying our faith in God. We change our direction and stop our destructive behaviors, attitudes, or beliefs that are producing and death either within us or around us. We recognize that the fruit of that way of thinking or functioning results in death – not life.

1. Recognizing dead works

As important as it is, recognizing our dead works is difficult. Because our natural self doesn't have the ability to recognize the difference between death and life.

- But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised (1 Corinthians 2:14).

If we want to recognize our dead works are, we must turn to God, receive His Holy Spirit and ask Him to show us what we are blind to. Our conscience isn't much help either, because it has been corrupted and needs to be cleansed.

- How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14).

We might be surprised at what some of our dead works are, especially if it pertains to our what we think of as being spiritual or religious activities. Then we find it really hard to turn away from the things we like and desire. Because they make us feel good, we cannot see that they have no life in them.

Can our good works really be dead works? Is there a difference between them? Yes! If our good works produces self-righteousness and pride, they have become dead works.

Repentance is not just a one decision act, it is ongoing moment by moment, and recognizing what gives life and what is dead works. Much of what we want to do is dead works even thou it seems like good works to us.

Until we come to the place where we recognize that what we are doing is not working or bringing us life, we will be unable to rely upon God. All other religions emphasize our duties toward God whereas Christianity offers a salvation which has already been purchased for us at God's own experience.

2. What is the difference between repentance and remorse?

Remorse is a feeling of deep regret, of hopelessness, and even of despair. It does not lead to constructive change, nor does it help us to believe God. Repentance, on the other hand, causes us to turn away from sin and opens us to receive the next gift of grace from God – faith.

- For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death (2 Corinthians 7:9-10).

3. We need to pray that we can see the dead works

I think most of us are involved in a certain amount of dead works every day. As soon as we can see that there is no fruit in them – that they are simply not effective in any way or manner – then we can finally stop doing them, and begin to walk in a new way.

4. Our marriage is dead – we let our marriage die

For years I tried to make our marriage work. I had read all of the books, but nothing changed. Finally we came to the end of trying, knelt down by our bed, and told God that our marriage was dead. If He wanted it to live he would have to do.

We had tried every avenue we could to make our marriage better but nothing seemed to work. And that was all effort on our own part, and that is the dead work – that's our own efforts.

We'd both tried to make it work, yet no matter what we did, nothing seemed to help. This effort on our part was dead works, because it never made things better. Shortly after surrendering our marriage to God, a stranger came up to us at a hotel, saying he had a word from the Lord for us. It was, "The Lord has heard your prayers; He is going to make you of one heart!"

In the years following, our marriage began to change for the better: The resurrection power of the living Lord was at work in our lives.

The fifth foundational stone in Hebrews 6:2 is "the resurrection of the dead." Was our marriage dead? Yes! In God's economy we need to let things die, so that God's resurrection power can bring them to life again, according to His divine will.

Faith toward God

In the scripture, it says, "repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God." So faith is involved here also. Repentance from dead works and faith towards God are two sides of the same coin. To experience the resurrection power of the living God in our lives, we must *both* repent and believe. In "repentance from dead works" we are *turning away from* something, and in "faith towards God," we are *turning towards* something.

Defining faith

In the New Testament, faith (*Pistis*) means persuasion. It means to be fully persuaded, convinced, and assured in our heart that what God says is true (Romans 4:20-21).

Faith is the state of knowing that we have something before it materializes in the natural world; it does not rely upon our feelings or how it looks to us. Faith is not imagination or the wishing of things into being, but it is the conviction of truth by the inner working of the Holy Spirit, who only persuades us to believe what actually exists.

- Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the substance or evidence or conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).
- Being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform (Romans 4:16-21).

Losing faith in our own efforts

Sometimes I say to people: you have been trying all of these years to (do this or that). Then I ask: are you happy with the results? Is it getting you anywhere with your family, your marriage? And they will say no. Then I say: you need to stop and try something different if it is not working.

We must become fed up with who and what we are and want change. Repentance has to come from the heart.

- Create in me a clean heart, o God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me (Psalm 51:10)
- Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance. (Romans 2:4).
- Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 7:24-25).

"In repentance we are losing faith in ourselves and in our own efforts, and we begin to look to a different source. Instead of relying upon our self, we begin to rely upon someone else. This is repentance. Repentance is I trying so hard myself, and then seeing that I need to look to a different source – to God." (Ralph Nault)

Until we stop relying on our own efforts, we will be unable to rely upon God.

- Stop trusting in yourself (II Corinthians 1:9,10)
- Draw from God as your source (John 15:5)
- Put your faith in the power of God
- Draw near to God and have faith that He will change you.