
***HELLO HURRICANE
SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM***

HIGHLAND PARK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
& MUNGER PLACE CHURCH

WEEK 1: WHAT'S MY FOUNDATION?

“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. 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. 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. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.” - Matthew 7:24-29

A college pastor, years ago, told a story of he, his wife, and another couple getting into a car accident. They all saw it coming and it looked to be a bad one. He explained that while he and his friends all screamed, his wife cried out to God a prayer for safety. That's just a tiny example of what it means to have a firm foundation.

- What do you turn to when things get hard, stressful, or scary?
- What do you consider your safety net?

They often say you can know your priorities by where you spend your time and money. This is true of our foundation too. Where we run for help reveals where our foundation lies. So where do you run for help?

Whether food, substances, television, social media, or spending money, many of us turn to a distraction when we're stressed, worried, or concerned. These things temporarily fill our void. They feel good in the moment. They offer instant comfort. But as we all know, these comforts fade quickly and, in order to meet that need again, we often have to increase the dosage. Eventually, we find the foundation we've built is crumbling because it's made of sand.

People are another popular foundation. For some of us, it's our parents. They always seem to know the right answer, and because they're more established, they often have the means to bail us out. Others of us rely on friendships, counselors, or significant others to meet all our needs. And while relationships can be wonderful, healthy, and life-giving, they cannot be our foundation. They fail. They hurt us. They walk away. If your foundation is a “they,” it too will wash away.

For others of us, our foundation is ourselves. We're strong. We've been through a lot. We are the only ones we can trust. If life gets hard, we pull ourselves up by *our own* bootstraps. You can't rely on anyone else, but you can rely on yourself. But we weren't meant to be our own foundation. We're meant to stand on one. And when we are our own foundation, we find we're standing on nothing at all.

Christ is referred to as a cornerstone or a capstone. He is solid. He does not shift or change. He does not leave or desert us. Jesus says, in Matthew 7, everyone who hears his words and puts them into practice is like a man who builds his house on solid rock. If Christ, the solid rock, is our foundation – when we fully trust in him – we know when we turn to him, he will be there. We can know he won't crumble, wash away, or turn out to be nothing at all. When we trust fully in Christ, offer our troubles to him, and allow him to work through them for our good, we can be assured he will do exactly that.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

- When facing difficulty, where do you most naturally turn? What can you trace that reaction back to?
- When you've turned to things/people other than Christ, how have they worked for you? Do you see how they could fail you in the future?
- What is your biggest hindrance from trusting fully in Christ?
- When are times you've trusted in Christ in a tough situation? What was the result?
- Trying your best not to simply give the "Sunday School Answer," what do you think it would practically look like to trust in Christ in a situation you're currently facing?

WEEK 2: WHO WAS DAVID?

“What have you done?” asked Samuel. Saul replied, “When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Mikmash, I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord’s favor.’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.” “You have done a foolish thing,” Samuel said. “You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the Lord’s command.” - 1 Samuel 13:11-14

There are numerous people in the Bible who don’t even get mentioned by name. They are just a “woman at a well” or a “Roman centurion.” Seriously, what was Mrs. Noah’s name? They get a line or two and then disappear. David, on the other hand, fought Goliath, tended sheep, was anointed, had a best friend, worked for Saul, opposed Saul, was king, was mentioned over and over posthumously, and the list goes on and on. So why did he get so much press?

As Saul began to fail as God’s appointed king, God knew he needed a new leader. God sent Samuel, the judge who anointed the first two kings of Israel, to inform Saul he was on his way out. As Samuel spoke to Saul he described God’s replacement in this way: “the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people” (1 Samuel 13:14). A man after God’s own heart. No one else in all of Scripture is described in this way. Though David was certainly not perfect and had some notable flaws, the overarching theme of his life was seeking to continually align his heart with God’s.

Though David’s story of seeking God and trying to live according to his plan is told in 1 & 2 Samuel, he poetically tells of his own experiences through the Psalms. David is listed as the author of half of the Psalms and these Psalms chronicle the extreme highs and lows of David’s life.

- Are you familiar with any of the Psalms?
- Choose a Psalm that was attributed to David (it will list his name at the top) and read it. Was there ever a situation in your life that this Psalm could speak to? What was it and why?

David’s Psalms cover a wide range of emotions and experiences. He frequently calls out to a God who he feels may have abandoned him. He speaks of enemies devouring him and closing in on all sides. He frequently reminds God of God’s promises when he’s concerned that he isn’t going to fulfill them. He begs for forgiveness and confesses his shortcomings. He shouts and sings with joy and commits to entering God’s courts with thanksgiving. He thanks God and speaks of all the ways he will praise him.

There is one thing that’s important to note, and this may be where we see David’s heart for God shining through. Regardless of whether David’s Psalm is from his lowest valley or his highest peak, if he’s overjoyed by a victory or battling towards defeat, he always ends his Psalm with an assurance to himself and to God that God’s goodness remains. Endings include: “you are my help and my deliverer,” “and I will hope in your name, for your name is good,” and “but as for me, I trust in you.”

A man who is, to the best of his ability, following after God and seeking to be more like him. A man who faced a variety of storms. A man who throughout these storms cried out but remained confident that God was good despite the circumstances. This is the kind of man we should learn how to face storms from, right? One of the greatest things we can learn from David is how to make it through a storm still convinced that God’s goodness remains.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

- What did you know about David before today?
- What is something new you learned?
- In what ways can you relate with David?
- Other than not being a king, in what ways do you differ from David? In particular, how does your relationship with God differ from David's?
- If you were to write a Psalm right now, what would be the overall theme?
- Regardless of your Psalm's theme, what would be your ending line to reassure yourself and God that his goodness remains?
- Have group members read Psalm 22, 27, 51, and 100. Though you don't have to share which one you choose, have each group member choose which of these Psalms best fit where they are right now. Commit to writing it down and reading it daily until you meet again.

WEEK 3: HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE STORM

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. - Psalm 23

Preparation, by definition, has to happen before the event. If you wait for the event, then you will simply not be prepared. Most often, when we're not prepared, we default to whatever comes most naturally to us.

As we've now read and heard, our best hope in preparing for the storms of life comes through first, shoring up our foundation. We, instead of building our lives on ourselves, our comforts, or others, begin to build on our faith and salvation in Christ.

- So what, do you think, are practical steps you can take to prepare for the storms of life?
- Do you know of anyone who seems to be able to handle any curveball life throws?

Do you remember as you suffered through practicing the piano or going to batting practice or writing lines and lines of the same sentences in cursive, hearing the phrase, "practice makes perfect"? While that phrase isn't 100% accurate (let's be honest, most of us never became concert pianists, major leaguers, or calligraphy artists), the phrase "practice makes better" *is* accurate. So, in order to prepare for the storms life will throw us, we need to practice what we will do in the face of a storm. Think of it like a tornado drill.

The ultimate goal is to, like a reflex, turn to God when troubles come your way. So why not practice ahead of time? What if, in your normal day-to-day life, you created a routine of prayer? In other words, when life is pretty ordinary, you began to pray for your small decisions, your ho-hum annoyances, and your various relationships. "Dear Lord, please allow my spouse to be a blessing to those he/she encounters at work today. Help him make honest decisions that glorify you and draw others to you." "Dear Lord, I'm frustrated that the mechanic always tries to over-sell me during my oil change. Please give me patience and kindness." "Dear Lord, should we go on this weekend away or is it just one more excuse to miss church and spend money?" Though these aren't major life traumas, they are opportunities to get in the habit of seeking God in all circumstances.

What if you also, in order to prepare for difficulties, began to fill your heart and mind with helpful Scripture? Wouldn't it be great if you, instead of panicking when you receive a diagnosis, were automatically reminded, "Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals your diseases" (Psalm 103:3-4). Or what if, when you feel that everyone and everything is against you, you were reminded, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Scripture can guide and comfort us, but possibly even more beneficial, it reminds us that God still speaks to us. He still has a good word for us even in the midst of our most difficult circumstances.

What if we began to prepare now? What if instead of waiting until we "need" God's intervention, we began to ask him to intervene now? What if we began to practice seeking him while life is fairly docile so it became our natural reaction when the storms actually hit?

GROUP DISCUSSION:

- In other areas of your life (i.e., finances, work load, etc.) do you tend to be a preparer or procrastinator? Do you think this translates into your spiritual life as well? Why or why not?
- When you see life difficulties coming (i.e. a relationship becomes tense, job security seems shaky, test results are “concerning”), how do you normally prepare?
- What might stand in the way of your beginning to prepare for life storms through prayer and Scripture memorization?
- Do you have an example of someone who handled a life storm faithfully? How did they prepare?
- What life storm would you like to prepare for? How will you begin?

WEEK 4: HOW TO WEATHER THE STORM

*The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. **Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.** You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. - Psalm 23*

Lamaze classes teach soon-to-be parents what to expect during childbirth. New moms are taught to breathe properly. New dads are taught how to support and coach their belabored wives. They prepare and practice and get ready for the big event. And then, labor comes and the contractions hit and the baby has to be born.

Last week we focused on preparing for storms. We stressed the importance of practicing prayer and beginning to memorize Scripture so we could fall back on these practices when the storm hits and we need to rely on our firm foundation. While our prep work and solid foundation are strong and ready for us, when the storm hits, we have to choose to employ them in order for them to make a difference. What if, during childbirth, you decided to forego the skills you'd learned and allowed yourself to freak out? What if after months of golf lessons you decided to use whatever club you wanted and just started swinging away? And what if, after investing in spiritual practices, when your life storm hit, you simply reverted to old tendencies?

In order to faithfully weather the storm, we *have* to fall back on Christ as our foundation.

- What's the most likely scenario that would cause you to turn to something other than Christ during a life storm?

To weather a storm successfully is to weather a storm faithfully. When we are placed under heavy duress and pushed to our limit we often revert to survival mode. This tends to tempt us to take the easy way out or push others down to assure we rise to the top. But what would happen if we relied on our prep work? As we prepared and solidified our foundations we began to trust God with our small decisions. We made it a habit to seek him in prayer for guidance. We began to put his word on our hearts for encouragement and understanding. Those habits are formed. So use them.

The best and most faithful way to weather whatever storm you're facing is to fully rely on God and his faithfulness in this difficult time. Use those Scriptures you've stored up. Repeat them to yourself as a reminder that God will never leave or forsake us. God is the giver of all good gifts. God does not change like shifting shadows. God's love endures forever. God is Jehovah Jireh – the Lord Provides. (All of these promises and encouragements are directly based off Scripture.)

In addition to the Scriptures, fall back on your habit of prayer. Ask God for the things you need – hope, healing, friendship, a job, etc. Ask him for those things and then take time to recall the smaller times when God was faithful. This will give you hope and assurance that he was faithful before and he'll be faithful again. After all, you memorized a Scripture during your prep work that reminds you God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

To weather the storm, you must actually use the preparation you've worked so hard on. This is the big leagues. Step up to the plate.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

- What methods of survival have you used in the past during your life storms?
- Have you ever had a Bible verse give you great encouragement or hope during a difficult time?
- When is a time prayer has led you in the right direction or even out of a storm?
- Think of your current or most recent storm. What would faithfulness look like in the midst of it?
- Weathering storms is not easy. And, in the moment, weathering a storm faithfully may seem even harder. What are steps you can take now to ensure you will seek Christ in your next storm?

WEEEK 5: HOW TO RECOVER FROM THE STORM

*The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. **You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.** - Psalm 23*

The damage has been done. You survived. Now what?

In December, 2015 a large tornado hit the Dallas area and caused a great deal of damage to homes and businesses. When was the last time you thought about that storm? It's probably been a while.

Often, when you're not the victim of a storm, the aftermath, in your mind, is very short-lived – even minimal. But what about when you are the victim? You are left with the rubble, the trauma, and left to figure out what a full recovery looks like.

- What are you recovering from?
- What is your plan to assure that you heal completely?

There are practical parts of recovery: medical bills, asking for forgiveness, dealing with estates, etc. And then there are the more internal parts: grieving, regaining trust, learning new skills, and probably most importantly and most difficult to say out loud, rebuilding the parts of your hope and faith in God that were damaged.

It is not unreasonable that you might have questions of why God allowed you to face this storm. It's not unusual to be angry with or saddened by God because of what you endured. Part of recovery, though, is working through those difficult emotions and moving on to discover God's faithfulness in the midst of the storm and in leading you out of it.

As we recover, we can slowly discover that God's faithfulness in the little things during our preparation truly did reveal how he would be faithful in the big things too. He sustained you through your storm. He met you in your weakness. His word offered encouragement. His Spirit met you as you prayed for guidance, healing, forgiveness,

GROUP DISCUSSION:

- Now that you've weathered a storm and some of your weaknesses may have been exposed, what part of your foundation could use some work? What's your plan to address that weakness?
- Now that you've seen God's faithfulness through both the big and small trials of life, how will this effect how you handle your next storm?
- As you recover and take inventory of where you are, are there places you need to ask God to heal you or your relationship with him?
- Are there places where you still feel hurt by God? How will you deal with those places? How can God prove himself faithful to you?
- Though it won't take long for others to forget that you're recovering, God won't forget. How can you capitalize on connecting with God, as he is your constant in this time?
- Once you feel healed from this storm, it's important to enter back into preparation mode. What types of Scripture would be helpful to focus on memorizing, based on your most recent experience?