

All You Need is Love – Part 3

by Rev. Robert Griffith

Some years ago, a ministry colleague of mine told me a story about a builder he knew when he lived in Canada, and this story serves as a brilliant illustration of our lives. This builder was constructing a large, luxurious two-storey house overlooking a golf course. It was towards the end of winter and the temperature had been below freezing for many weeks. The builders over there are used to the cold weather and this builder couldn't afford any down-time so his team put on their woollen beanies and their working gloves and pushed on through the freezing temperatures.

Now in that part of the world, to build such a house they usually dig this massive hole which they can finish into a basement if they like or just a storage area. They then construct some reinforced concrete piers deep enough below the ground to find some bedrock. Then they pour a reinforced concrete floor and walls to form the basement and the foundation of the two levels of house above. They put centre pier supports on top of the basement floor and then pour a reinforced concrete sub-floor on top. Only then, when that strong foundation is complete, can they commence building the main house.

So this builder and his team laid the foundations as they had done so many times before with projects like this one. Then they began building this very impressive house. After a couple of months of hard work, they were actually running a little ahead of schedule and were now constructing the roof. The weather was warmer too. The gloves and beanies were off and the whole team were up on the roof in the glorious spring sunshine nailing down the last sheets of plywood, upon which the shingles would be laid.

Then it happened ... everything changed in the blink of an eye. As they had all climbed to the top of the house and began to work that morning, something happened which had never happened before to this builder or his team in their whole careers and it was frightening, to say the least. As the combined weight of these four tradesmen shifted to one side of the roof, the entire house lurched forward and off to one side. Just imagine it. You're on top of this huge two storey house, working away, when in a matter of seconds, the whole structure decides to become the next Leaning Tower of Pisa! The crew went flying, ladders toppled over, tools fell to the floor below or the ground and the builder just hung on and laid there on the piece of plywood he had been nailing. As he looked around at his now broken masterpiece, this incredibly astute builder said to himself, *"Something is very wrong here."* As he clung to the only rafter left exposed, this discerning tradesman thought: *"I doubt this is what the owners had in mind when they contracted me to build their dream home. This house has got to be fixed. But first of all, I need to find out what the real problem is here."*

So he pulled up one of the pieces of plywood and carefully dropped down to the top floor bedroom. He looked up and saw that every rafter was now twisted - some of them were actually splintered and broken. He said to himself: *"That's got to be fixed - but that is not the problem."* So he went to his wonderful spiral staircase connecting the two floors and noticed it had totally torn away from the top floor. He said to himself: *"Well that's obviously got to be fixed - but that is not the problem."* Then he shimmied over and hung and let himself down onto the ground floor and he looked at the windows on the east side and they had all popped out of their frames and one of them had shattered in the process and the door jam was now a parallelogram instead of a rectangle. Once again he said to himself: *"That's got to be fixed - but that is not the problem."*

So he went into the kitchen and opened the now twisted door that led down into the basement. He sat down on the top stair and looked into the basement, over to the far eastern corner of the house, which was now lowest point of this tilted, twisted mess and he saw this massive crack in the concrete slab at the very base of the whole structure. Then he said to himself, “Now *that* is the problem, and *that* is where we have to start.

They had laid the concrete foundation in sub-zero temperatures which is not a problem – as long as you leave more time than normal for the concrete to cure. Even though concrete generates its own heat - it needs more time in cold temperatures to cure properly. So the builder concluded that he had started to build too soon and the concrete eventually cracked and gave way under the weight of the building. However, as they discovered some weeks later, the concrete foundation was not the problem. The real problem was deeper. The real problem was invisible. It was the foundation beneath the foundation which was the problem. One of the piers below the bottom slab was not resting on bedrock, but clay. They did not go down far enough on the east side. The bedrock was another three feet below and some lazy tradesman had stopped short. He believed the design of the house, with this massive all concrete basement, was more than enough support. So when he hit some pretty hard clay, he decided to pour the concrete pier on that side and that clay turned out to be pretty soft after a bit of rain, combined with the weight of a concrete basement and a two story house. It doesn't matter how great the building is, a weak foundation will eventually bring it down.

They had to demolish everything and start with the a rock-solid foundation. The second house they built looked exactly like the first one, but the difference was massive, you just couldn't see it. The strength, stability and long-term viability of that home was now very high, thanks to its really strong, appropriately supported foundation - which would last a lifetime.

Well friends, that story basically sums up this sermon and this whole teaching series! Many, many people inside and outside the Church experience what that house did at some point in their life. Just as it took months of building before the weight of the house was sufficient to challenge the weakness in the foundation, it can take years, even decades, before our foundations are challenged and found wanting. When that happens - the result can be just as devastating, as our outwardly-strong house; our carefully constructed life, starts to tumble. At such a time, we need a qualified Master Builder, Jesus, to take us on a tour down through the various levels of our life until we find our foundational problem.

Now from my experience over many years now, having been called in as a 'building consultant' as people's lives lurch to one side and threaten to collapse entirely, I have found that in the vast majority of cases the foundational flaw in all those people's lives is exactly the same. **The bedrock beneath every secure, stable, strong, enduring Christian life, must be God's love.** The starting point, the foundation beneath this complex and magnificent life we have spent years constructing, must be God's love, first and foremost. The unconditional, never-ending love of God has to be our point of reference; the cornerstone; the bedrock we drill into and upon which we build the piers, the basement, the floor and walls and the entire 'dwelling' of our life.

Christian counsellors will testify to this. A good counsellor is like a building inspector on the construction site of a house that's about to collapse, or has already collapsed. As they talk with the person they will discover various symptomatic problems. For example, the person might struggle with anger or depression or fear or resentment and there are ways of coping with each of those things - but none of those issues are the *real* problem. So, like a building inspector, a good counsellor moves further down to the heart of the building. On the way they may discover all kinds of fears, doubts, destructive habits and many things which need to be fixed for the person to be healthy again. But those things are not the main problem, they are merely the symptoms or the by-products of a deeper problem.

The *real* problem always lies at the foundation level and, for many of us, those emotional, relational, psychological and theological foundations were never laid and cured correctly and so we have not grounded our house on the bedrock of God's revelation of love in Christ. It may take years for that to be noticed in some of us.

I believe this modern parable of a poorly constructed house applies to every single one of us, regardless of how loved we may have been as a child, because every one of us was born into a sinful, fallen, broken world. As such, we were born with a huge flaw in our foundation already. That flaw is called sin and from the very beginning sin created a barrier to us receiving God's love personally, directly and intimately. We may have been blessed to have God's love flowing through our parents and others but many people didn't even have that. But even if we did, in our sinful condition we were all born outside of the full *experience* of God's love.

Now God has always loved us. He loves His whole creation. But we were cut off from knowing or experiencing God's love personally from the day we were born until that barrier of sin is removed in our minds and our hearts. That is exactly what God did in and through Jesus Christ. That's why they call the Gospel good news! Praise the Lord! God sent His own precious Son to take your sin and mine upon Himself so that anyone who embraces His free gift of love and salvation will have that barrier to God's love permanently removed as our spirit is regenerated and we are born again into a new relationship of love and intimacy with God.

Jesus, the man, may have been a carpenter, but Jesus the Christ was the Master Builder (Creator) Himself in human flesh and He came to totally re-create, rebuild, renew and re-construct the very foundation of our lives – every last one of us! So now, from God's point of view, there is no longer any barrier, no longer any obstacle to His overwhelming love flooding into our lives and transforming us from the foundation of our being and impacting every part of our life.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son. God gave His Son for the world - every last human being ever to have lived. The barrier between all of humanity and God's love has been removed, once and for all time - in Christ, through Christ and for Christ!

So if there is no longer any barrier, from God's perspective, to His life-changing, nation-transforming love flooding our very being and flowing through us into the community around us; if our sin no longer separates us from God, because all sin has been atoned for by Christ and in Christ, then we need to face some hard questions today:

- > Why are there just as many Christian believers seeing counsellors and therapists as there are unbelievers?
- > Why are there just as many Christian marriages ending in divorce as non-Christian marriages?
- > Why is the joy of the Lord not oozing out of all believers and inspiring all those around them?
- > Why can we pack 80,000 screaming, excited, joyful fans into a football stadium to watch a bunch of grown men play with a piece of leather for 80 mins, while at the same time, the people of God, the ones who are supposed know the secret of life and are supposedly filled with the fullness of God Himself, gather in decreasing numbers in funny shaped buildings to meet with their like-minded brethren to worship and encounter this God, and most of them leave the same way they arrived: no happier, no more empowered or transformed or impacted in any significant way?

There can be only one answer and we won't like it. Far too many of the people sitting in Church buildings today are yet to fully understand and fully encounter the awesome power of God's unconditional, overwhelming, life-changing love and presence.

The outrageous and mind-blowing love of God has not fully penetrated our experience in a tangible, observable, foundational way. The full reality of what God has already done in eternity for us through Jesus Christ has not burst forth into the experience of so many people in Churches across this nation. The dynamic, powerful, heart-wrenching truth of God's love and grace still needs to take that 40cm journey from our heads to our hearts. Or perhaps it once did and we have allowed the pressures of life in this world to rob us of that experience as we lost our first love.

Millions of Christians across the world have spent years, decades even, building this great big house - their life. They have worked hard and become successful as a husband or wife or father or mother; as a business person or employee; as a disciple in the Church; they have erected this enormous, impressive, outwardly beautiful house - this human house if you like - but deep down below the floor, below the basement even, in that hidden place, there is a flaw in the foundations of their life, their thoughts, their theology, their understanding of themselves and God and the world. The most serious flaw and the most common foundational deficiency is the same for many: they never really learned how to receive the fullness of God's overwhelming love – from which flows His amazing grace, His abundant mercy and His unconditional forgiveness. It is entirely possible for us to be heavily involved in the life of the Church all our lives and still not fully embrace the radical fullness of the Gospel of Christ.

This can happen to any of us. You see, in our head we can understand the love of God. We can read about it, talk about it, sing songs about it, write songs about it, be moved by it, teach it, even share it and lead people to Christ - but none of that means we are really experiencing the fullness of the love of God personally. Living, day by day in the power of God's love - experiencing it, knowing it, letting it bomb-proof our life and understanding how central, how permeating, how foundational God's love is to every part of our life - *that* is not the experience of many Christians.

Some of you are relating to this right now and you know without a doubt that I'm talking about you - that's great - stick around for the next couple of months - God has a treat for you beyond your wildest imagination! Some others might be thinking you do know God's love experientially - and if that's really true then your life will be showing that in so many ways and you will be saying 'amen' to all this and you will be really encouraged because the Holy Spirit will be affirming God's truth in your experience. But there will also be some who think they know God's love but have actually settled for second-best or third-best and are yet to really taste the sweetness of God's love; yet to really experience the transformative power of a love that is literally out of this world!

All I ask is that you stay tuned over the coming weeks. I am not going to do anything amazing, I am just going to read some Scriptures which we have had in our possession all our lives, and tell some stories and expound some clear truths of the Gospel. I am just a messenger God has sent – and all I can do is be faithful to that message. But *God* is going to do a lot in and through those who embrace that message. I firmly believe that God is going to refresh and renew and revive many of His people as He confronts the barriers to His love and pours out His very essence and presence into our lives and His Church like never before.

Regardless of where we are now in our pilgrimage, we can all grow into a person who has been overwhelmed by the love of God and who knows how to receive that love and in that process, the Holy Spirit is going to renew the very foundation of our lives and with that solid foundation of love - there is no danger of our house ever moving off its foundations again. And friends that is what I want for all of you. That is what God wants for all of you and for me and that is why I am praying with the Apostle Paul, that each of you will be rooted and grounded in love, so you may have the power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - **that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**

Are you hearing this? Do you even believe that it is possible for you to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God? It's mind-blowing. It's incredible. It's beyond comprehension. But it's not unbelievable – in fact, it is God's plan and purpose for you and for me and the whole reason we live and breathe.

It's also God's plan and purpose for all those people who are not here – those who are not part of the life of the Church yet. So what better time to connect them with the liberating good news - the love of God - the gospel of Jesus Christ? Don't be selfish and keep all the blessings for yourself - spread them around! If you are online, why not email a friend or family member and send them a link to our website and these sermons, encouraging them to connect to the truth which will set them free forever. Then pray for them every day, that God will draw them to Himself? Better still, how about you call someone you know who used to be part of our Church family here but wandered off for whatever reason and ask them if they would like to come back for a visit and connect with some really great teaching? You could offer to pick them up and bring them?

Brothers and sisters, God is speaking to us all at this critical time in the life of the Church in Australia, the Uniting Church in particular and right here in our Church family. A fresh wind of the Holy Spirit is blowing across our Church. The Spirit of God has been working behind the scenes for months and years, preparing hearts, positioning people, releasing gifts and laying the foundation for a whole new chapter in our journey as the people of God.

I plead with you all to open your minds, open your hearts, cultivate a teachable spirit, and I promise you, God will bring you a revelation of Himself and His plan and purpose which is beyond your wildest imagination, because we belong to the God Who is able to do exceedingly, abundantly more than all we ask or even imagine, according to His power that is at work within us; we belong to the God Who has promised to bring to completion that which He began in each of us; we belong to the God in Whom there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set us free from sin, from guilt, from shame, from every barrier and obstacle and doubt and fear which can hold us back from being right in the middle of the next great move of God in our nation, in our city and in our Church family.

Lord, we believe ... now help us in our unbelief! Come, Holy Spirit, come, renew our heart, firm up our foundations, overwhelm us with Your Love, revive Your Church, Lord. Amen.