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Series: *Truth to Model for our Neighbors*

Title: *Location! Location! Location!*

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Scripture: Matthew 7:24-29

For the first five years of their marriage my daughter Sarah and her husband Joe have lived in a two-bedroom condo they bought down in Springfield. It's small, but it's in a good neighborhood and was a great place for newlyweds to start a home. Well, December 5th of last year, this little bundle of joy arrived, and for a tiny human being she immediately required a great deal of space. In fact, in the past nine months Emma's space requirements have increased substantially.

You parents out there know what I'm talking about. Right? Babies need a stroller, a high-chair, a bouncy chair, a rocking chair, a crib, a pack 'n' play, diapers, wipes, a changing table, a diaper pail, toys, clothes, sippy cups, more toys---you get the idea.

Earlier this summer Joe and Sarah decided it was time to put their little condo on the market and move to a bigger place. After a lot of looking they found a four-bedroom, single-family home that they both loved. It had a great yard, hardwood floors, a nice kitchen. The bathrooms were recently re-done and it was the perfect size for their growing family. Best of all, the price was right. They both were very excited. But that ended when they discovered WHY the price was "right." You see, this "home of their dreams" was built right in the middle of a flood plain. They checked into flood insurance and learned if a flood comes, it wouldn't cover the entire cost of rebuilding, plus the insurance costs \$7,000 a year. Sarah and Joe asked our advice and we quoted them the three rules of real estate: LOCATION! LOCATION! LOCATION!

Well, this rule doesn't just apply to a building a physical home. Location is also the most important thing when it comes to building a life. That's what Jesus says in our text for this morning. Take your Bibles and turn to Matthew 7:24-29. Follow along as I read, either in your own copy of the Bible or on the screen. And if able, I invite you to stand in respect for God's Word as it's read.

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.*

26 - *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.*

27 - *The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."*

Let's look closely at this familiar parable.

(1) First, I want you to note that the two men in Jesus' story had several things in common.

a. For example, they both heard the same MESSAGE.

Remember, Jesus says, ***"EVERYONE who hears these words of Mine..."*** and then He talks about these two builders. So, both of them heard from God. I imagine these guys as being in the same Bible Study group---hearing the same lesson from the same gifted instructor.

b. A second thing they had in common is the fact that they apparently built the same HOUSE.

I mean, Jesus doesn't say the houses were different. In my mind they have the same exact floorplan---like to identical houses built by the same contractor--Ryan homes or someone like that. My point is, the problem here isn't the same as the story of the 3 Little Pigs where the first two pigs built homes of straw and twigs---easily blown down by the big, bad, wolf. No, that's not the issue in this parable. In fact, both homes could have been built of brick like the third little pig! The house is not the issue.

c. The third thing these men had in common is they faced the same STORM.

This tells us these men had homes near each other. Near enough for the same storm to affect both homes at the same time. Maybe they were across the street; they were certainly neighbors. In any case the, same rains fell, the same creeks rose and the same wind blew against each house.

(2) So, these two guys had a lot in common. But they also had some significant differences.

a. First, their intelligence level was not the same.

Jesus calls the first man WISE. But He refers to the second man as a MORON. Before you think, *"That's a mean thing to say! Jesus wouldn't talk like that!"* well, that's what this word means. It's the Greek word for "moron" or "fool." And Jesus used it as a statement of fact, not derision. This second man WAS a moron. He WAS a fool. I mean, the Bible calls us SINNERS and that's hard to hear, but that's what we are.

The second difference tells us why this second guy was a fool.

b. You see, they built their homes on different FOUNDATIONS.

The first builder showed his wisdom by putting his foundation on the rock but not the foolish man. No, like a moron, he put his foundation on sand. The wise man dug deep to get down to the bedrock; that's costly, and time-consuming. The foolish man cut costs and time; probably finishing his home much sooner than his wise neighbor, because his "foundation" was on just sand. No real excavations needed--just a quick build.

I can't help but think of the Millennium Tower in San Francisco. Have you heard about it? Here's a picture. It's 645 feet tall, 60 floors, providing amazing views of the bay area. It is the tallest concrete structure in San Francisco. It is also the tallest residential structure west of the Mississippi costing \$350 million to build. Speaking of residences, its condos cost between 1.6 and 10 million dollars to purchase. Joe Montana is one of the people who bought a condo there.

Well, in 2015 these wealthy residents were told that the building was leaning 17 inches to one side and sinking; which explained why people were falling out of bed so much, and why soup would just not stay in the bowl. Here's a couple shots that help you see the problem. The reason for all this leaning and sinking is because the foundation of the Millennium Tower was not sunk to the bedrock. No, the fools who built it only went down 90 feet to concrete pads they placed on sand and/or mud.

Never fear, the builders have a plan to fix the problem. This isn't it. No, their plan will cost over \$100 million and involves a new foundation---this time sunk to the bedrock as you can see in this image. I can't imagine the engineering skill required; not only to fix the foundation, but to jack that massive building back upright so people no longer fall out of bed and soup stays in the bowl!

Well, the foolish man's house was not as tall, but was built on the same kind of flawed "foundation" and that leads us to another difference between these two builders. They had the same house and were hit by the same storm, but because of their different foundations:

c. These guys experienced different RESULTS.

Jesus said the house built on the rock withstood the storm. But the house built on sand did not. Verse 27 says, ***“The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”***

Sing with me:

*The rains came down and the floods came up
The rains came down and the floods came up*

*The rains came down and the floods came up
And the house on the sand went smash*

I'm hoping a storm or earthquake doesn't do that to the Millennium tower before they get it fixed! Can you imagine the CRASH--the disaster and loss of life if that thing just fell over?! Now of course Jesus' story isn't really about houses. No, it's about LIVES. It's a parable designed to teach us important truth about building a life. So what's the truth we can learn from this parable--truth we can and must model for our neighbors?

(1) First, the storms of life are INEVITABLE.

Remember, both the wise man and the foolish man experienced that same storm. That's the way this world works. Everybody faces tough times of some sort. Wise people and foolish people; loving people and unloving people; giving people and taking people; kind people and mean people; rich people and poor people; ALL people go through storms. As Jesus said earlier in this Sermon on the Mount God, ***“...sends the rain on the just and the unjust.”*** (Matthew 5:45)

The point is all people experience hardship and tragedy in their lives. If you are born with a pulse you will face tough times. No one--not even the faithful, growing Christian--is exempt. Now there are false teachers out there who teach that if you have enough faith; if you think positively, if you do enough good deeds, you will never face the storms of life. You will always experience abundant prosperity, perfect health and endless blessings. And too many believers buy into this moronic teaching. They think the Christian life is supposed to be like a never-ending spiritual high. Just one “Kum-by-yah” moment after another. Well, it's no wonder that people who think this way are devastated when the storms of life come. It's no wonder when bad comes their way, they fall apart with a big “crash” like that foolish man's house.

In this parable, Jesus is saying, the storms of life come to ALL people. You can count on it.

They are inevitable! Now I'm not boasting, but I've been here at Redland nearly 29 years now---all of them WONDERFUL years. And in these three decades:

- I've seen marriages break up.
- I've seen children grow up to rebel and do stupid, sinful things.
- I've seen families endure financial hardship.
- I've seen people get cancer, and die way too soon.
- I've seen families endure the grief of losing grown sons in the prime of life.
- I've buried babies who were still born or who died shortly after birth.
- I've done way too many funerals.

My point is, I've seen the people of this church endure a lot of storms. Now do you know who these storms came to?

EVERYONE!

These “storms” I’ve mentioned came to all kinds of people; people close to the Lord, and people far from Him. Pillar people, people ACTIVE in God’s church at Redland, and people who hardly ever darkened the door. Missionaries serving God in a far away land, and believers who never share their faith. These storms came to young and old, rich and poor. They came to wise people who have literally built their lives on the Bible’s teachings, and also to foolish people--people with no spiritual foundation.

Do you get the point? Storms come to all of us. Let me ask you: who HASN’T had a storm of some kind? It could be a financial storm, a health storm, a relational storm---some BAD thing that rocked your world as much as Hurricane Katrina rocked New Orleans. It could have even been an actual STORM.

Show of hands? Thank you.

I think it’s unanimous---but if any of you did raise your hands---hold on, because a storm is coming.

Now understand, these storms don’t come because God doesn’t love you or because He has decided to abandon you. No these storms come because we are fallen people who live in a fallen world, with several billion other fallen people. I mean, at some point we will all have to endure the rain and the pain of life. Yes, in His Word, Jesus promises us victory---yes, He says we are more than conquerors---but that means we’ll go through battles. Jesus taught us the inevitability of the storms of life and not just in this parable. In John 16:33 He said, ***“In this world you will have trouble.”***

In fact, some of the storms of life come BECAUSE we build our lives on Jesus. In John 15 our Lord said, ***“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own...[you do not]...That is why the world hates you...If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also...They will treat you this way because of My name, for they do not know the One Who sent Me.”***

And speaking of that, did you know that Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world? The Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) says 900,000 Christians have been martyred in the last decade, equating to 90,000 a year and one every six minutes. These fellow brothers and sisters in Christ were not immune to the storms of life, and neither are we.

The rain, the floods, and the wind are inevitable; even for---perhaps ESPECIALLY for---believers like you and me. So as 1st Peter 4:12 puts it, ***“...do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you...as though something strange were happening to you.”***

And, listen. This is where neighboring comes in, because your neighbors will notice how you respond to the inevitable storms of life. In fact, the way you endure may be your most powerful evangelistic tool. You see, they will want to know HOW you endure and then you can tell them. ***“My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”*** In fact, you can SING to them, ***“On Christ the SOLID ROCK I stand! All other ground is sinking sand! All other ground is sinking sand!”***

That leads me to lesson #2 and please tell this to your neighbors:

(2) The storms don’t have to destroy---they don’t have to knock you down with a great “CRASH.”

Remember; same homes, same storm--one fell, but the other did NOT! The wise man’s house withstood the storm--that means our lives can as well. This week I found an article that described the five most indestructible homes in the world.

The first is HURRICANE PROOF. It's called a monolithic dome home and you can see why it gets this name. For some reason it reminds me of my head. It's located on a beach in Pensacola, Florida and is made of a single piece of concrete embedded with five miles of steel. It cost \$7 million to build and is designed to withstand 300 MPH winds. It has lived up to its design because it's still there after Hurricane Ivan whose winds were 168MPH.

This next house is **EARTHQUAKE PROOF.** But it's not a new build. No, it was built by the Chinese 1500 years ago and has survived multiple earthquakes while newer, MODERN buildings, have crumbled. Believe it or not the secret is a super-strong mortar made from sticky rice. That rice is combined with lime; which is limestone that has been heated to a high temperature and then exposed to water. The combination of these two substances is nearly indestructible. Even bulldozers can't knock these houses down.

The next is **FIREPROOF.** It's located on Cusabo Island off the coast of South Carolina. It's elevated a full story off the ground which protects it from flooding. It also uses helical foundations, which means they are shaped like huge springs, giving it further protection from flood tides and storm surges. But it also has a steel frame as well as a steel exterior wall and roof panels. This makes it invulnerable to fire.

The next house is supposed to be completely **FLOOD PROOF.** In fact, it is designed to actually float by the engineers in Brad Pitt's *Make It Right Foundation*. It's a small home built on a chassis of polystyrene foam and covered with glass-reinforced concrete so that when floodwaters come, it is able to rise up to 12 feet on two guideposts. That way, it won't float away, and can even serve as a life raft in an emergency.

My point is, with the right foundation and attention to the right kind of building codes, houses can withstand storms. Well, Jesus tells us our LIVES can as well. Our faith can give us the foundation---the strength we need--to deal with anything life blows or shakes our way. As the writer of Hebrews says, our faith in Jesus, ***"...is an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."*** (Hebrews 6:19) Proverbs 10:25 says, ***"When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever."*** Psalm 18:12 reminds us that God is ***"...our rock in Whom we take refuge, our shield and the horn of our salvation, our stronghold."***

How does our faith help us withstand the storms of life?

- It assures us that God ***"works in all things (good and bad) for our good."*** (Romans 8:28)
- It assures us that we are never alone in the storms of life. ***"God is an ever-present help in time of trouble."*** Psalm 46
- Best of all---our faith tells us that even the worst that could happen, would be the best. I mean, DYING in a storm is not a bad thing for the Christian.

Do you remember how Paul puts it? ***"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*** Or as one paraphrase puts it, ***"why, that's better yet!"*** (Philippians 1:21) I mean, the storms of life are powerful, but they are not all-powerful. Not for the Christian who is rooted in his or her faith in the ALL-POWERFUL God. Because of Jesus death has lost its sting.

How do we become rooted? How do we build our faith like the wise man built his house? How do we embrace this "location, location, location principle?"

First, you must put your faith in Jesus---the WORD made flesh. You must admit that YOU are fallen---that you are a sinner---confessing your belief that Jesus is God's Son and He paid the price for your sin on the cross. When you do that, when you ask Jesus to forgive you and come into your life He does. And with Him WITH US--ALWAYS with us---we can endure ANY storm. As Paul says, we can, ***"do all things through Christ Who strengthens us."*** (Philippians 4)

So, first, put your faith in the WORD. Then READ the Word.

That's how we know verses like the ones I just quoted, verses that keep us grounded. You see reading God's book, the Bible, is how we learn His promises---promises we lean on when the storms of life come. And when I say READ the Bible---I mean really READ it. Learn it, study it, memorize it so its promises come to mind when the storms hit. Have you heard the joke about three friends who decided to go deer hunting together? There was a lawyer, a doctor, and a preacher. As they were walking, along came a big buck. The three of them shot simultaneously. Immediately the buck dropped to the ground and all three rushed up to see how big it actually was. Upon reaching it they couldn't determine whose shot had actually killed the deer. As a heated debate ensued, a few minutes later a game officer came by and asked what the problem was. The doctor told him that they were debating who shot the buck.

The officer took a look at the buck and within a few seconds, he said with much confidence, *"The preacher's shot killed the buck!"* They all wondered how he knew that so quickly. The officer said, *"Easy. The bullet went in one ear and out the other."*

Sadly, the headlines mention too many preachers who do that with God's Word. Their sinful behavior shows that they read it but it goes in one ear and out the other. But it's not just pastors. Too many believers don't READ the Word of God, not really. A 2012 research study commissioned by the American Bible Society and conducted by Barna Research revealed some interesting things about Bible reading in the good ole U.S. of A.

First, there's some good news:

- 85 percent of households own at least one Bible, with a household average of 4.3 Bibles.
- 69 percent of Americans believe the Bible provides answers on how to live a meaningful life.

But there's bad news as well:

- 26 percent of Americans never read the Bible and 10 percent read it less than once a year.
- 79 percent of those surveyed believe they are knowledgeable about the Bible, but 54 percent were unable to identify the first five books of the Bible.
- 46 percent believe the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon are different expressions of the same spiritual truths.

For too many believers the truth that helps us withstand the storms of life---goes in one ear and out the other.

So to endure the storms of life we must KNOW the WORD; we must READ the WORD; and finally we must OBEY the WORD. We have to DO what the Bible says to DO. We have to NOT do what the Bible says NOT to do. This is what Jesus is saying in this parable. We not only HEAR the WORD---we put it into PRACTICE.

How many of you wear seatbelts? Believe it or not, many people don't. It's just too much of a hassle for them to be bothered to obey this law. According to the Associated Press, a New Zealander named Ivan Segedin took it to an extreme. The police ticketed him 32 times over five years for failing to use his seat belt. Even though this was costing him big money, Segedin refused to buckle up. Finally, instead of obeying the law, the man decided to rely on deception.

He made a fake seat belt that would hang over his shoulder and make it appear that he was wearing a seat belt when he was not. His trick worked for a while. Then, he had a head-on collision. He was thrown forward onto the steering wheel and killed.

To fully benefit from the Bible---to endure the storms of life---we have to OBEY its commands. You know, when you build a house in real life, you're pretty much stuck with the land you built it on. If you're foolish enough to get stuck with a house that sits in the flood plain, there's not much you can do. I don't know how those people who own that first house Sarah and Joe looked at are going to sell it. My point is bad land is bad land and it always be band land. You can't change the land your physical house is built on. But the same thing is not true about your SPIRITUAL house. You can fix that foundation with obedience. Every time you say, *"This time I will do it God's way,"* you turn the sand beneath your feet into solid rock. Proverbs 21:20 says, ***"In the House of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has."*** These and other verses in God's book say we must not spend more than we earn. So whenever you put this into practice, every time you say, *"This time I will not spend what I do not have. I will curb my urge to splurge this time,"* then a little more sand turns into a little more rock beneath your feet. In Matthew 5:28 Jesus says, ***"Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*** Whenever you put this into practice, every time you say, *"This time I will not look at that woman that way. This time I will take control of my thoughts,"* then a little more sand turns into a little more rock beneath your feet. In Ephesians 4 it says, ***"In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."*** Whenever you put this into practice, every time you say, *"This time I will not blow up. This time I will bridle my tongue and respond with grace,"* then a little more sand turns into a little more rock beneath your feet.

I could go on, but you get the point. We must not only READ the WORD, we must OBEY it.

Let's pray.