Sunday, February 13, 1994
BUILDING THE FOUNDATION (No. 2 in a Series: Living a God Directed Life)
Luke 12:13-21

A year ago this past fall, Sampson Construction Company, through one of its subcontractors, began the excavation work for our new building addition. Following the removal of large amounts of topsoil and subsoil, the next step was the drilling of large, deep cylindrical holes that extended down to bedrock. Twenty-four holes, each three feet in diameter and about 25 feet deep, were made. Each hole was then filled with reinforced concrete, and these became the pillars upon which the concrete footings were poured. Once the footings were in, the foundation was begun. In effect, all of this work together formed the basic foundation for our new building addition. This took some time to construct, but in many ways, it was the most important part of our new building addition. If you want a building to last, it must be built upon a strong and solid foundation.

The same is true of each human life. If your life is to be strong enough to withstand the many trials, troubles, and temptations that affect you, then your life has to be built upon a strong and solid foundation. And like laying the foundation of a new building, that takes time and effort. Yet that's what a God-directed life is — one that is built on a solid and enduring foundation.

So today, in this second sermon in our series on "Living a God-Directed Life," we're going to be looking at how to build a strong foundation for a God-directed, purposeful life.

Just as reinforced concrete is the basic material for the footings and foundation of a modern building, the basic material for the foundation of a God-directed life is integrity. Integrity is living by a standard of values wherein your words and actions are the same, where your walk matches your talk. You can be trusted to do what you say. You act on your values, and your values are those which are based on the life and teachings of Jesus.

The first step in building a solid foundation for a God-directed life is to discover what your values are and whether or not they are Christian values. Then the next step is to determine whether or not you are actually living your life according to those values.

We hear a lot of talk about values these days, but too often we do not talk about the content of those values. We assume all values are good or equal. But of course, they're not. Some values are bad, and living by them can lead you in the wrong direction.

Why are values important? Because your values control your destiny. What your values are and whether or not you live by them determines the direction and quality of your life.

First of all, your values determine your stress. In the book of James in the New Testament, there's a verse I've always liked: "A double-minded person is unstable in all that he or she does." (James 1:8)

The Gallup Poll did a survey not too long ago among so-called "baby boomers," and the survey showed that the number one cause of stress in this age group was "incongruent values." In other words, too many people say they believe one thing but act in a different way. The gap between what people say is important in their lives and how they actually live is a major cause of stress.

For example, many parents say family is important, yet the survey showed that the average father spends less than five minutes a day in conversation, one-on-one, with each of his children. We say family is important, but we put work and everything else ahead of it. We're gone all the time.

Maybe you say health is important. If so, do you watch your weight? No! Do you eat right? No! Do you exercise? No! But health is important to you.

People say, "God is first in my life." Then you have to ask, is God first in your finances? No! Is God first in your schedule? No! But God is first in my life. When you have two competing values, that's a conflict. The movie Indecent Proposal presents a conflict: A happily married couple is desperately in need of money, and the wife is offered a million dollars to spend the night with a man who is not her husband. Here we have competing values at work.

When you discover what's truly important in your life, when you clarify your values and discover whether or not they are values based on the teachings of Jesus — and if they are, and you then act according to those values — your stress will go down dramatically, and your peace of mind will go up dramatically.

Secondly, not only do good Christian values and living by them control your stress, but they also influence your success. Tell me what you value, and I can predict the direction of your life. Every time you make a decision, you rely on your values, and your values determine what's important to you. Your values control your destiny, and they control your success. In this sermon series, we're defining success not by how much money or prestige you have. According to Jesus, you are successful if you live a God-directed life, a life that increases among people the love of God and neighbor.

When you figure out why you're living and are open to God's direction, then God will begin to show you the what and the how.

Thirdly, not only do your values affect your stress and your success, but they affect your salvation. In the New Testament, the word salvation means much more than being with God once you die; salvation means more than life after death. It means "health," "wholeness," living a life of significance in the here and now.

Listen to what Jesus said as reported in Mark 8:36-37: "For what does it profit a person to gain the whole world and lose his or her own soul?"

It's possible to be outwardly successful and spiritually bankrupt.

There are at least two major sources for the values by which you live. One major source is from the culture, and a second major source is from your religious faith.

What are some of the values that our culture emphasizes and teaches — the values that our world says are important? One of them is pleasure. The culture says, "If it feels good, do it." Our culture values pleasure. It's no accident that one of the top industries in the United States today is entertainment.

Note that Jesus was not opposed to pleasure; however, pleasure is not to be a goal of life in and of itself. Pleasure, joy, and happiness are all the natural by-products of living a God-directed life.

A second value of our culture is possessions. “The one with the most toys wins.” Many people are consumed with consuming. They believe in life, liberty, and the purchase of happiness. We’re taught that your self-worth is based on your net worth. On the other hand, Jesus taught that your net worth and your self-worth have nothing in common.

Acquisition is not the measurement of success as far as God is concerned.

Listen to the words of Jesus from Luke’s gospel:

“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” (Luke 12:15) Then Jesus told this story: “The land of a rich man produced an abundance, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool, this night your soul is required of you; and the things you own, whose will they be?’ So it is with those who lay up treasure for themselves and are not rich toward God.”

Someone once asked Howard Hughes, “How much does it take to make a person happy?” He answered, “Just a little bit more.”

Isn’t it amazing that many people today are struggling on an income which ten years ago they thought would be phenomenal?

A third value in our culture is prestige or power or popularity or position. What I’m talking about here is what the sociologists call “status.” In our culture, image is everything. A popular slogan goes this way: “Dress to impress.” We are also told that we are judged by the cars we drive.

But these are not “God-directed” values. In the first letter of John in the New Testament, we find these words: “For all that is in the world — the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches — comes not from God, but from the world.” (1 John 2:16)

The problem is that most of the values you have, you did not consciously choose — you absorbed them. You picked them up from your peers, from the society around you, and many times without questioning them, you accepted them.

Today, then, I want to suggest three steps you can take to help build a foundation for a God-directed life.

The first step is to evaluate what’s important in your life. Make an inventory of your present values. Then ask yourself where those values came from. Did they come from God or from the culture? Are they the kind of values upon which you want to base your life?

Then also ask yourself, “What kind of person do I want to be in life?” Many people can describe what they want to have or possess, but they never determine what they want to be.

Ask yourself, “What adjectives do I want to describe me? What would I like to have written on my tombstone? What would I like the minister to be able to say about me at my funeral?” If you were to write a letter to your children about what’s most important in life, what would you tell them? Do you live your life according to those principles?

If you have built your life on pleasure as a value, will that last? How many people do you know who have gone out for a moment of pleasure and destroyed their family?

How about possessions? Are they eternal? In the parable, God said to the rich fool, “Fool, tonight you are going to die, and who will then have all your possessions?” We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

How about prestige and power? Will they last? Jesus said that one day God will reverse things, “the first will be last and the last first.” You can be a hero one minute, and the next minute, you’re nobody. God doesn’t judge us by the same standards as the culture judges us. God doesn’t judge you by the value of your wealth but rather by the wealth of your values.

The problem is that when things are going along smoothly, you rarely stop to examine your values. When things are going great, you don’t think about the tough questions of life.

But when a crisis enters your life, then you sometimes begin to look at your values. A loved one suddenly and unexpectedly dies, or a child becomes so ill that death is near, or you personally face a life-threatening situation, or you lose your job, or your spouse threatens to leave you, or one of your children gets into serious trouble — then you start asking questions about what’s truly important in life.

So the first step is to evaluate and examine your values, and the second step is to eliminate what’s not important. We would all agree that everything in our schedules is not of equal value.

Frequently, a God-directed life begins with a shift in values. That’s the foundation.

The third step in building a foundation for a God-directed life is to concentrate on the values that are eternal, values which come from the life and teachings of Jesus.

Here’s a very practical step you can take to begin. Sometime this week, make a list of the values which are the most important to you. Then ask yourself: Do these values come from the culture or from God? Are these eternal values, or will they pass away? Assuming they are from God and are therefore eternal, the follow-up question is: Are you living your life day by day in accordance with those values?

Above all else, remember God created you for a purpose. God’s overall purpose for each one of us is to live a life of loving one another. Therefore, a God-directed life values love as the essential energy and power that permeates the universe. The essential nature of God is love, and you were created because of that love.

You begin to live a God-directed life and to experience health and wholeness when you come to understand that everything in creation is interrelated and connected and ultimately held together by God’s love.

Dr. Bernie Siegel puts it this way: “I feel that all disease is ultimately related to a lack of love, or to love that is only conditional. This can lead to the exhaustion and depression of the immune system, which in turn leads to physical vulnerability. Therefore, all healing is related to the ability to give and accept unconditional love.”

You are living a God-directed life of purpose when you give and accept unconditional love. Amen.