



TODD LEVIN MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

A monthly teaching publication to our partners and friends

HOW TO WEATHER THE STORM

Dear Friends and Partners,

If you're like most people, even those who consider themselves Christians, then going to church from time to time, owning a bible, believing in God and putting something in the offering plate every now and then should pretty much have you covered. Meaning if others are getting into heaven then you stand a reasonably good chance on the basis of your spiritual contribution to the local church. After all no one is perfect, we'll all human – we make mistakes and have our shortcomings. If we feel the need to pray then we pray. When we see others in need and contribute to their cause we feel good about ourselves. But as noble as we might think we are, we still must review our actions today in light of eternity. To put it plainly, Jesus said,

“Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name and in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

Matthew 7:21-23 (KJV)

There is something about obeying God and doing His will that changes the destiny of man. For this reason I would like to look together with you at the foundation of which your life, your core values and your convictions stem from. As we continue reading from Matthew's gospel, Jesus sheds some light on this very subject.

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

Matthew 7:24-27 (KJV)

George Barna, who's been conducting national public surveys for more than 25 years made some very alarming statements in his ***“most significant religious findings from 2006.”*** Here are just a few of them.

- Only **15%** of those who regularly attend a Christian church ranked their relationship with God as the top priority in their life.
- American Christians are not as devoted to their faith as they like to believe. They have positive feelings about the importance of faith, but their faith is **rarely** the *focal point* of their life or a *critical factor* in their decision making.
- Very limited effort is devoted to spiritual growth. There is generally no plan or process other than showing up at church and absorbing a few ideas here and there.

Before we look closer at what Jesus is teaching us in Matthew 7, really consider these facts. If only **15%** of those who regularly attend a Christian church ranked their relationship with God as the top priority in their life then that leaves **85%** of those who attend church weekly who do NOT consider their relationship with God all that important. Keep in mind that we're not referring to Joe Heathen who wants nothing to do with God and hardly believes if He even exists. We're talking about weekly church goers all across our nation.

The word of God teaches us that Christ is our life and reason for living. Jesus said that, "*eternal life is knowing God.*" (**John 17:3**) So what's wrong with this picture? Why bother to even get up on Sunday morning if you take your relationship with the Lord so casual, nonchalant; almost as a side thought or a notion. When something or someone has priority in your life over the Lord, then guess what? He is no longer your Lord. Jesus doesn't much like sitting in the back seat of a car but rather is wanting you to move over and let Him take the wheel. Remember He's not the one who was lost, we were! And for sure He'll get us to where we need to go. I think that many Christians are guilty of idolatry and do not even realize it.

It's one thing to have core values – that which convicts you to the bone where you dare not cross the line. But it's something entirely different simply to have only "positive *feelings about the importance of faith.*" What good are positive feelings if you do not respond to them? Mr. Barna noted that with American Christians, "*their faith is rarely the focal point of their life or a critical factor in their decision making.*" Think about this for just a moment. Doesn't Paul state in **Romans 1:17** that the just shall live by faith? Paul also declared that the word of faith is what he preached. (**Romans 10:8**) If faith is rarely the focal point in the life of a believer or a critical factor in their decision making, then what is governing their actions? What rule of standard are they looking to when making decisions in life? It's sad to say but this is one reason why many Christians get off course. They are no longer looking to God's word for direction but to their "feelings" instead. Jesus instructed us to continue in His Word if we are His disciple. (**John 8:31**) If our faith is not based solely upon the word of God; if we have not made a quality decision that God's word is final authority then friend, we have no sure foundation to stand upon. We're just coasting through life as everyone else that lives down the street from us.

I'm certain that lukewarmness is a product of poor planning and lack of discipline in our life. If our desire is to stay full of faith and full of the Spirit, then we must stay full of the word of God. It will not happen accidentally. You have to purpose in your heart to pray; to spend time with the Lord and to read the bible. Nobody will do it for you. When we're hungry we go to the refrigerator so when we truly want God, then we need to be turning to His word and listen to His voice. To be quite honest with you it seems that our Sunday morning services continue to get

shorter and shorter year after year. This is why we must feed on God's word at home throughout the week. Now let's get back to our theme for today... How to weather the storm!

Jesus stated in Matthew 7:24 that, "***whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them (or puts them into practice), I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.***" Evidently just hearing God's word is not enough. We must obey it; apply it; practice it and walk in the light of it if indeed we are to be considered wise. Think of how much word that some of us have invested into our hearts over the years. Are we actually walking in that light? If we were, we'd all be spiritual giants. Let the truth be made known, we all have quite a lot of growing up to do don't we? When the apostle Paul addressed the Corinthian believers he mentioned the fact that they hadn't grown much but were still spiritual babies.

"And as for myself, brethren, I found it impossible to speak to you as spiritual men. It had to be as to worldlings--mere babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food, since for this you were not yet strong enough. And even now you are not strong enough: you are still unspiritual. For so long as jealousy and strife continue among you, can it be denied that you are unspiritual and are living and acting like mere men of the world?"

I Corinthians 3:1-3 (WNT)

The Corinthian church was up till now unspiritual and mere babes in Christ. Why do you think that was? For starters they apparently were not feeding on God's word. If they had been as diligent as a newborn baby who simply drinks the mother's milk they would have grown. But Paul called them unspiritual; weak, living and acting as the men of the world. You see this is what happens when we casually from time to time pick up our bibles and read them. Listen to Matthew 7:24 from the Message translation:

"These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on."

Matthew 7:24 (Message)

Notice the word "***incidental.***" It means, minor, secondary, insignificant, or unimportant. God's word is not to be second place. His words are foundational words which bring stability and strength to us. We CAN trust in God's word. He's invited you to do so and is pleased each time that you do. (**Proverbs 3:5,6; Hebrews 11:6**) Jesus said that to hear and obey His word is like a wise man who built his house upon a rock! Not only does this speak of stability but also longevity too. When the storms of life have come and gone, you will still be standing.

Jesus continued, "***And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it FELL NOT; for it was founded upon a rock.***" (Matthew 7:25) Is a foundation important in building a home? Sure it is! Without a proper foundation the storms would blow you right off the map! So is it any different from a spiritual standpoint? Clearly not, for if there is little or no word of God in your life then when the storms come, when adversity comes, when sickness is wanting to lay hold of you and fear is right by its side, what will you do? What do most people do? They give up; they succumb to the circumstances. The storm

was too much for them to weather and they begin to sink. Jesus talked about this in the very next verse.

“And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

Matthew 7:26,27 (KJV)

I don't know if you've ever made a sand castle on the beach before, but all of your work can be swept away in a matter of moments! In the blink of an eye it can all be over. Can you see how important your foundation is? Here was a man who heard God's word but never did apply it in his life. Oh what a mistake that was! He had knowledge but did nothing with what He knew. He was not ignorant or blind as we say, just simply lazy, careless, lacking discipline and decided to take a chance. “Maybe the storm will pass me by. Maybe the winds won't be that strong today. Perhaps I can weather the storm, we'll just have to see.” The message translations says, ***“When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards.”*** What was the problem? There was NO FOUNDATION. He was like that sand castle on the beach which had no chance against a forceful wave coming in. Most likely he could identify with lots of folks who attend church on Sunday – coast through the service hearing what is being said but never allowing it to register in their hearts. *“Good word; I'll consider it; I'll think it over; No definitely doesn't apply to me.”* And by the time they hit the parking lot, the enemy is out there to meet them and to collect what little convictions if any which were cast to the ground.

I have a question for you. Has your life been falling apart? Has your health been deteriorating? Are you so far in debt that you've simply given up the idea of ever being free again? Here's the thing – storms will come and go; there's very little we can do to prevent this. But we CAN learn to weather the storm if our foundation is solid. ***“Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.”*** (Isaiah 28:16) Jesus is your sure foundation! He's given you His Spirit and left you with His word.

As you purpose in your heart to spend time in His presence and allow the Holy Spirit to work in you what needs to be worked in and to work out of you what needs to go; if you'll diligently study God's word and hide it in your heart, believe it and walk in the light thereof, then know right now when the storms come and the winds begin to blow, you will NOT be moved! David said in Psalms 119:89, ***“Forever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.”*** That word, “settled” means erect, upright, to establish, and to stand. With God's word as your sure foundation you can weather ANY storm!

Your Friends and Partners,

Todd + Eva

