

# The Task

*Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. (Colossians 2:6-7, NASB)*

Those of us who received Christ Jesus the Lord are now called to walk in Him and with Him. He is the Way, and he is our Companion on the Way. According to this passage, there are two essentials: we have to be firmly rooted, and we have to grow; we need a strong foundation, and we have to be built up from that foundation. We have to start, and we have to continue.

## *Walking with Jesus*

Just ‘getting saved’ as a one-off event is not enough: you cannot choose to receive Jesus but not walk with Him, just as you cannot – with integrity – get married and then live as a single person. Your life changed, you made a commitment.

Walking with Jesus is not a nice Sunday afternoon stroll, something we can squeeze into an otherwise unchanged life. Walking with Jesus means hitting the road with Him, going where He goes, sleeping where He sleeps, sharing our meals with Him and with his people, taking part in His mission and ministry. The walk is our life of love and work and service.

We are ‘in Him’ as we walk: the whole Christian life is a process of discovering what it means to be in Christ; discovering who we really are, discovering how to live as Christ where we are, with our own individual gifts and calling.

The work and the service, while they may be hard, are not the price we pay for the blessings we receive: the challenges we face along the way are part of God's blessing, part of His gracious provision for us. So we walk, motivated by love, not duty; we are not grimly holding on but overflowing with gratitude for His provision of both the challenges and the means to overcome them.

To put it another way, Jesus confronts us with a choice, and offers us a strategy.

**We have a choice.** Jesus had a mission to change the world, and calls us to join Him. We have a choice: we can follow Jesus and be a part of His world-changing mission, or we can turn our back on Him and choose some other path.

**We have a strategy.** Jesus had a simple strategy: to love people. If we want to follow Jesus, we have to adopt His strategy. Love – it’s easy to say but very hard to do, and when we try to do it, we discover that, all too often, we don’t even know what love looks like. In the middle of our mess and confusion, what passes for love often looks like need or control or compromise – but this is very different from the love we encounter in Jesus.

## *A Strategy*

One simple summary Jesus gave us was this: to love God with everything we have and love our neighbour as we love ourselves. We have often failed to understand what this entails, to communicate it and to live it. One approach is to begin at the end.

**Love ourselves.** How do we love ourselves? Assurance of salvation, eternal security and a place in Heaven are all clearly a part of this, but so too are physical health, good food, a loving family, a secure home, a fulfilling job, the respect of the local community, and contributing to the creation of something significant. We cannot gain these things on our own: in order to love ourselves, we have to be a part of a healthy community.

**Love our neighbour.** I cannot have a secure home and a fulfilling job unless the people alongside whom I live also enjoy these things; I cannot fully enjoy a healthy, loving family if we live in a broken and dysfunctional society. If I want to love myself, I have to love my neighbour; I have to want for my neighbour the good that I want for myself. I cannot be healthy if I live a selfish life, only caring about myself and the people around me, and the society I live in cannot be healthy if it ignores healthy values and fails to address issues of justice and compassion.

**Love God.** A healthy society must be built on healthy values, and healthy values trace their way back, sooner or later to a healthy understanding of God. If we love God and seek first His Kingdom, we will embrace His ways: this is the only way to live a healthy life and live in a healthy and sustainable community. Kingdom values are not only the right way to live, they are also the only way for a society to thrive in the long term: they work. Our Heavenly Father knows what we need.

The strong foundation we need is Jesus, and Jesus alone. But, while this may be theologically true, on its own it generally fails to communicate to people what we need. The New Testament spells out in many ways what it means to build a life on Jesus as the foundation, and we need to spell out in a bit more detail what it means for us in the modern world.

## *Personal and Corporate*

One key issue we need to address is the assumption that religious faith is a private matter. Faith is deeply personal, but it cannot be private: any faith worth the name has to be lived out, it has to be lived out in ways which affect other people.

More than that, the love we find in Jesus embraces not just compassion but also truth, justice and freedom. It means that we have to care not only about individuals, but also about the systems and structures which control and shape their lives.

Following Jesus means that we have to express our faith in both the personal and the corporate spheres. If I am to love disadvantaged people in the Third World, I cannot simply donate money to famine relief – I also need to care about things like unjust international trade agreements, and the way rich countries facilitate conflict in the poorer countries then fail to follow up military intervention with genuine long term support.

## *Politics and Economics*

Theology is the study of God, but if it is to mean anything, it has to make a difference in the real world.

One way to understand Theology is to see it as a human activity which cannot be understood without reference to politics and economics, without addressing the basic questions:

- **Who has the power?**
- **How are they using it?**
- **What is their agenda?**

These questions are applicable in almost all contexts: when choosing how to use the power and influence of a major denomination or a local congregation, through to when small, informal groups of Christians are deciding how to act; they are applicable to those who benefit from the status quo and also to those who challenge it.

## *Putting it into Practice*

*Strong Foundations* is built on a conviction that we are being called to integrate faith and life into a coherent whole; to combine prophetic teaching from a Biblical, Trinitarian and Jesus-centred perspective with prophetic action arising from a Spirit-filled place of resting and peace.

**Prophetic teaching:** the Bible says we have to get the big things right; but in practice we often teach people to strain out gnats and swallow camels. The mainstream Church is essentially right about most of the things it teaches, but is significantly mistaken in aspects of what it communicates (sometimes through what it fails to say) about Heaven, Hell, the gospel, salvation and evangelism.

**Prophetic action:** the Bible says we have to put our faith into practice; but much of our attention is directed at telling people to attend church, pray and lead moral lives. This is a good starting point, but wholly inadequate for building a community of disciples which is seeking first the Kingdom of God. One important way in which we love our neighbour is through developing faith based social action.

**Spirit-filled rest:** the Bible says that though Jesus' death and the Spirit's indwelling presence, we already have everything we need for life and godliness; our activity is a joyful expression of the life we have received; motivated by gratitude, not guilt; freely offering what we have freely received.

We cannot do this on our, acting only as individuals. The task is given to each one of us, but to carry it out we need a community. An important question, then, is what kind of community?

The aim of *Strong Foundations* is to support the building of a community of people who share these concerns and a vision for building a strong foundations: on Jesus, on a Biblical understanding of His message and ministry, responding to His call to follow Him and share His work, both as individuals and as his people in community.

## **Next steps**

This was written by Paul Hazelden as a contribution to the *Strong Foundations* exploration. You are welcome to use it and distribute it how you like, but feedback would be appreciated.

- Is it helpful?
- Would you change anything?
- Would you like to talk about how we can learn from each other about how best to follow Jesus where we are?

You can contact me through the web form at mad-bristol or join the conversation on the *Strong Foundations* site.

- Web form: <http://mad-bristol.org.uk/contact/>
- Strong Foundations: <http://strongfoundations.pbworks.com>

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Last updated: 15:48 on 8 April 2019, revision: 15  
Location: /home/paul/C/SF/main/SF\_The\_Task.odt