

Foundational Guidance (Part 2)

Psalm 50:7-15

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Last week I spoke from Micah 6:8 “*He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?*”¹ We entitled that message “Foundational Guidance” because in that verse God tells us what to do “come what may.” This is His direction for you in any and every circumstance: do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. It always works! And when that revelation gets settled in our hearts, it gives perspective to every decision we make. It undergirds our lives in such a way that we are not disturbed by shifting circumstances. Being the seaman that I am, last week I confused the rudder on a ship with the keel on a ship. The rudder is the blade usually on the stern of a ship that is used to steer the ship. The keel is the ridge structure on the bottom of the ship running from front to back that projects down into the water and keeps the boat from bobbing side to side or capsizing. So when the ship is in a storm and the waves are hitting the sides of the boat, the keel extends down in the water and keeps the boat right side up and stabilized. Micah 6:8 serves like a keel in our lives. It enables us to endure the storms of life without being tossed to and fro by the winds and waves. Getting established in what God requires of you, brings stability in your life and enables you to make other decisions based on that foundation.

God is keeping me on that theme this morning. This message is entitled “Foundational Guidance, Part 2.” Our text is found in Psalm 50:7-17.

"Hear, O My people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you; I am God, your God! 8 I will not rebuke you for your sacrifices Or your burnt offerings, Which are continually before Me. 9 I will not take a bull from your house, Nor goats out of your folds. 10 For every beast of the forest is Mine, And the cattle on a thousand hills. 11 I know all the birds of the mountains, And the wild beasts of the field are Mine. 12 "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all its fullness. 13 Will I eat the flesh of bulls, Or drink the blood of goats? 14 Offer to God thanksgiving, And pay your vows to the Most High. 15 Call on Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall honor and glorify Me."

In verse 7 we learn who God is addressing in this message. In verses 8-13 we hear what they were doing plenty of. And in verses 14-15 God tells them what He wants them to do. This is a companion text to Micah 6:8.

I. Who is God speaking to in our text?

He is speaking to His own people. “*Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you: I am God, your God!*” That is reinforced in verses 4-5 “*He shall call to the heavens from above, And to the earth, that He may judge His people: 5 ‘Gather My saints together to Me, Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.’”* God wants no mistake about who He is talking to here.

In contrast He speaks to a different group beginning in verse 16. Look at that transition.

Ps 50:16 “*But to the wicked God says....*” I would much rather be receiving the message in our text today than the one that begins in verse 16. God always makes a distinction between sheep

¹ All Scripture quotes are from the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

and goats. He always distinguishes between people who are in covenant with Him and unbelievers who do not know Him. He deals with the two groups in very different ways.

Notice the terminology back in verse 7, "*O Israel, I will testify against you....*" As it was in Micah 6, this is similar to a courtroom setting. God is acting as both petitioner and judge. As it was last week, God is clarifying what He wants from them. Somehow God is trying to let you and me understand what is supremely important and what is secondary. He wants us, as His people, to understand what pleases Him. We do not want to get to the end of our journey and find out we had expended all our strength on the wrong thing. Amen?

II. What were they doing! What were they thinking that God wanted?

We find that in verses 8-13. In verse 8 God says, "*I will not rebuke you for your sacrifices Or your burnt offerings, Which are continually before Me.*" My complaint against you is not that you failed to bring sacrifices to the temple. You have been very active in the externals of religion. You have brought me plenty of sacrifices and offerings. That is not the problem.

God is not even saying that was wrong. Actually Scripture directed them to do that. But their understanding of God and His expectations of them was way off.

They thought they were doing God a favor by bringing these sacrifices. In reality all they were doing was giving to God what was already His. So God says to them in verses 9, "*I will not take a bull from your house, Nor goats out of your folds.*" I don't need to do that. I don't need your stuff. Verse 10 "*For every beast of the forest is Mine, And the cattle on a thousand hills. 11 I know all the birds of the mountains, And the wild beasts of the field are Mine.*" All the wild animals are mine. I know where they are. And I can make them do anything I want them to do. Verse 12 "*If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all its fullness.*"

Some people give financially with the same mentality Israel had while offering these sacrifices. They give because they think God needs the money. God can create worlds by His word. He is not begging you and me for an offering. We give because we need to give. We give because we want to give. Anybody that gets a true touch from God wants to give to God. And God loves a cheerful giver.² God delights in people who give because they delight in Him. The person most helped by my giving is me. Giving serves as a check on my covetousness. Every time I write out that tithe check, I am saying to my selfish nature, you're not in control here! You're not running my life. You're not managing my money. I turn all that over to God. By writing this check, I am placing my faith in God's faithfulness. I am believing that God can take care of my needs with the 90% better than I can do it with the 100%.

The absurdity of Israel's thinking is recorded in Verse 13. God asks the rhetorical question, "*Will I eat the flesh of bulls, Or drink the blood of goats?*" Many of the pagan religions actually thought the gods consumed their sacrifices for their own enjoyment.³ But "*God is a Spirit (John 4:24) and those who that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth*" (must worship in reality from the heart, rather than mere form and ritual).⁴

The Jews had 613 laws to live by.⁵ The Pharisees were zealous to do the mechanical rules of religion. They tithed to the penny. They cleaned the outside of the cup carefully; but neglected

² II Corinthians 9:7

³ Ps 50:13 (from Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft)

⁴ Isaiah 1:10-20

⁵ Mendy Hecht, "The 613 Commandments," accessed 3-12-16 at http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/756399/jewish/The-613-Commandments.htm.

the really important, weightier matters of love, justice, and mercy. In Luke 11:42 Jesus said to them, “*For though you are careful to tithe even the smallest part of your income, you completely forget about justice and the love of God. You should tithe, yes, but you should not leave these other things undone*” (TLB).

The external religion was not an acceptable substitute for giving God what He really wants from His people. We dealt with that principle last week and we are faced with again here in our text. In Isaiah 58 Israel was saying to God, “*Why have we fasted... 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?*” It was a legitimate question. That’s pretty spiritual stuff. Doing some of the best religious activities; yet, getting no results. Wondering why it wasn’t working. God says to them in that chapter. You have given Me your sacrifices. You have even sacrificed meals. But way down deep you haven’t given Me your heart.⁶ That’s what I am after. Deut. 6:4 “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.*” The issue was the condition of the heart, even under the Old Covenant.⁷ So, in Isaiah 58, God talks to them about living an unselfish life and promises blessings if they do.

Empty religion is a product of superficially coming close to God while continuing to reserve self for self, never really surrendering to the lordship of God, still living for one’s own pleasure rather than the pleasure of God. God was not asking His people for more religious activity.

II. What did God want them to do!

(1) Verse 14, “Offer to God thanksgiving...”

The word “offer” implies a sacrifice.⁸ The word translated “thanksgiving” comes from a root word meaning an extension of the hand.⁹ TLB translates verse 14 with God saying, “*What I want from you is your true thanks; I want your promises fulfilled.*”

I am honestly amazed at how important thankfulness is in Scripture. This is the area God dealt with me most as I was getting this message. Practice thankfulness. Nurture a grateful heart. “Count your blessings; name them one by one; and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.”¹⁰ I like the way Matthew Henry (the Bible commentator) responded when he was robbed. He wrote this in his diary that evening. “Let me be thankful—first, because I was never robbed before—second, because although they took my wallet they did not take my life—third, because although they took my all, it was not much—and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.”¹¹

The Bible says, “*It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord....*” (Ps 92:1 KJV). This is the kind of sacrifice God is looking for in us. Listen to the command given to God’s people in Ps 105:1-6 “*Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples! 2 Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; Talk of all His wondrous works! 3 Glory in His holy name; Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD! 4 Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face evermore! 5 Remember His marvelous works which He has done, His*

⁶ Ps 51:6, 16-17; Jerm. 31:33; Lk 11:39

⁷ The eternal God is the same in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. He does not change (Mal. 3:6). While the covenant provisions did change, God has always sought relationship out of a sincere heart of love, not mere adherence to rules and regulations.

⁸ Ps 50:14 (from Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft)

⁹ OT:8426 towdah (BibleSoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, BibleSoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.).

¹⁰ Johnson Oatman, Jr. “Count Your Blessings,” *Hymns of Glorious Praise* (Gospel Publishing House, 1969) p. 309.

¹¹ Matthew Henry, “Thankful in Everything?” *Stories for the Heart* (Sisters Oregon: Multnomah, 1996) p. 86.

wonders, and the judgments of His mouth, 6 O seed of Abraham His servant, You children of Jacob, His chosen ones!” With such sacrifices, God is well-pleased.

A young man’s wife became very ill and died, leaving him alone with his four-year old daughter. The funeral service was simple and heavy with grief. After the burial, his neighbors gathered around him and invited them to bring his little girl and stay at one of their homes this first night. They wanted to spare him the pain going home to an empty house. He thanked them but said that he and his baby girl needed to face it now. When they got home the father brought his daughter’s little bed into his room, so they could face the dark night together.

As the minutes slipped by that night, the little girl was having a hard time sleeping; and so was the dad. Nothing could pierce his heart more than hearing his little girl sobbing for a mother who would never come back. Long in the night the daughter continued to weep. The father comforted her the best he could. Finally the little girl managed to stop crying and the father thought she had fallen asleep. The father looked up toward heaven and said, “Father, I trust you, but...it’s as dark as midnight.”

Hearing her dad’s prayer, the little girl began to cry again. “I thought you were asleep, baby,” said her father. “Papa,” the girl said, “I did try—but I couldn’t go to sleep. Papa, did you ever know it could be so dark? Papa, I can’t even see you, it’s so dark. Then she drew close and whispered “But, you love me even if it’s dark—don’t you Papa? You love me even if I don’t see you—don’t you, Papa?”

As an answer, the father lifted his little girl out of her bed; brought her up to his chest; and held her until she went to sleep. That’s when he took his little daughter’s words and offered them up to God. “Father, it’s dark as midnight. I can’t see you at all. But you love me even when it’s dark and I can’t see you, don’t You?”¹²

I don’t know what you’re going through in your life. It might be dark. It might be hard. But one thing you can know. Your Heavenly Father loves you and has not forsaken you, even if you can’t see Him. In His love and wisdom, He is working all things together for your good.¹³ That’s a powerful reason to be thankful.

1 Thess 5:18 says, “*in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*” What does the Lord want from you and me? Gratitude! We can’t be too grateful. Every breath we take is a gift from God. It needs to be in our hearts; and it needs to proceed from our lips. Heb 13:15 “*Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.*” Thankfulness is something that is expressed through the lips!

We can understand the importance of thankfulness when we see how God ranks it with other sins in the Bible. Romans 1 lists the decline of people into the sin of idolatry, sexual immorality, homosexuality, and includes this comment: “*neither were thankful*” TLB says they wouldn’t “*even thank him for all his daily care*” (Rom 1:21).

God delivered Israel out of their oppressive bondage in Egypt. He parted the Red Sea and destroyed Pharaoh’s army. He brought water out of the Rock for them. He provided manna from heaven. Yet their lips were filled with complaints; not thanksgiving. The complaining was a manifestation of the unbelief in their hearts.¹⁴ 1 Cor. 10 tells us that they are an example

¹² Ron Mehl, “Even If It’s Dark,” *Stories for the Heart* pp. 164-165.

¹³ Rom. 8:28

¹⁴ Psalm 106:24-25

for us to observe and learn from. Their ingratitude and complaining cost them dearly! *“in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”*¹⁵

The first thing God want us to do is *“offer thanksgiving”* to Him.

Ps 50:14 *“Offer to God thanksgiving, And pay your vows to the Most High.”*

(2) Pay Your Vows!

What is a vow? It is a promise made.

In Genesis 28 Jacob made a vow to God. He was running from his brother, Esau, when he came to a place he named Bethel. There he had an encounter with God that profoundly affected him. Gen 28:20-22 *“Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, 21 so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. 22 And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.”* So here Jacob vows to tithe.

Samson was under a Nazarite vow that required him to not shave his hair, not defile himself by coming in contact with a dead body, and not drink alcohol. Samson seems to have broken all three provisions of his vow. His life did not go well after that. The significance of cutting his hair was related to the strength found in relationship with God while living in fidelity to that vow.¹⁶

In the Old Covenant there were offerings that were required. Above that an Israelite might vow to give an additional offering.¹⁷ If he did so it was very important that he follow through with his commitment. Deut 23:21 *“When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you.”*

Remember your wedding vows? You entered into a marriage covenant when you said your vows to your wife. Some people do not see the difference between living together verses being married. A vow, a covenant is a big deal with God. God thinks in terms of covenant. You can't understand the Bible without an understanding of covenant.

When you accepted Jesus as your Savior and Lord, you entered into His covenant. You said that you would not only receive His free gift of salvation but that you would follow Him all the days of your life. Everything changed with that one prayer. A lot more happened than being forgiven of your sins. You were brought into covenant with God under Jesus as your covenant head.¹⁸ It's a vow you want to keep.

¹⁵ In 1970 Merlin Carothers wrote *Prison to Praise*. Although he seemed to make praise a panacea solution for every problem, he text is a good reminder of the importance of remaining thankful at all times.

¹⁶ Num. 6:1-21; Judges 13:2-7; 16:17-21.

¹⁷ Deut. 12:11. For more information see “VOW” (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by BibleSoft). One gets the sense in Psalm 50 that Israelites were making vows to God in their religious fervor, but then failing to follow through on the promise.

¹⁸ The covenant is between the Father and the Son and will therefore never be broken. It is indeed an everlasting covenant (Heb. 13:20). When we surrender to Jesus as our Lord and covenant head (Col. 1:18; Heb. 7:22) we are then participating in that covenant. Commenting on Heb. 9:15, Arthur Pink wrote, “The ‘covenant’ was made by God with Christ. By His death that which God pledged Himself to do unto the heirs of promise in return for the work which Christ was to perform, is now *bequeathed* to us as a free gift: what was a legal stipulation between the Father and the Mediator, comes to us purely as a matter of grace” (*An Exposition of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954) p. 500).

Remember how TLB translates Ps 50:14? *“What I want from you is your true thanks; I want your promises fulfilled.”* In simple terms God is saying, “Do what you said you would do!”

Verse 15 *“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.”*

That’s the third thing God wants from us. He wants us to:

(3) Call upon the Lord!

Specifically *“in day of trouble....”*

Into every life some rain must fall. Everybody (at some time or another) encounters a *“day of trouble....”* For Jonah, the day of trouble arrived when a storm blew in and he was thrown off a ship into the sea. It got even worse when a fish swallowed him. Jonah had been headed in the wrong direction and God used trouble to turn him around. Down there in that dark, slimy fish belly, Jonah did something very right. In his day of trouble, he called on the Lord. And the Lord delivered him. He records his testimony in Jonah 2.

“...I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, And He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, And You heard my voice. 3 For You cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the floods surrounded me; All Your billows and Your waves passed over me. 4 Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight; Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.' 5 The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; The deep closed around me; Weeds were wrapped around my head. 6 I went down to the moorings of the mountains; The earth with its bars closed behind me forever; Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God.”

Do we have any Jonah’s in the house today? In my late teens and early 20’s I was a Jonah. I had consecrated myself to the Lord in my early teens. But later I turned back on that commitment. I followed my own desires and fell into a lot of sin. I am so glad that God sent a storm and a fish waiting for me! He sent enough trouble to get my attention. The psalmist recognized the value in this kind of experience and testified, *“Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word”* (Ps 119:67); and in verse Ps 119:71 says, *“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.”*

I said earlier, God deals with His covenant children different from the way He deals with unbelievers. Chastening is a provision of the covenant. Prov. 3:11-12 *“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor detest His correction; 12 For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights.”* Hebrews 12 quotes that verse and cautions us about how we respond to the Lord’s correction in our lives. Don’t take it lightly because it won’t go away just because you ignore it. In fact, it will probably intensify. Don’t despise it; don’t rebel when it happens. Instead, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God¹⁹ and call out on Him for deliverance. Our response to the father’s correction is crucial. Be thankful that He does correct you. Correction from God is an indication that we are truly His (Heb. 12:8).

Two things will happen if you humbly call out on the Lord during a time of trouble. (1) He will deliver you.²⁰ It may not happen the way you tell Him to do it. It may not happen when you tell Him to do it. But in His time and in His way He will deliver you. The criteria He uses to determine the when and how is what is best for you. He is always working all things together for your good if you belong to Him. (2) You will bring glory to God. It will glorify God for people to see His intervention in your behalf. When God delivered Israel out of

¹⁹ James 4:10. Most of us can recall the value of humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of a parent’s correction.

²⁰ Ps 46:1

slavery, it brought honor to His name. Additionally, the deliverance should produce praise in your life toward God. This Psalm ends with this statement in verse 23, “*Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; And to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God.*”

So our text in Psalm 50 embellishes our understanding of “Foundational Guidance.” This is something God wants us to do regardless of the circumstances we may find ourselves in. (1) Offer thanksgiving to Him. Nurture a heart of gratitude and verbally express that gratitude on an ongoing basis. Thank Him for the big things and thank Him for the little things. Just be thankful! (2) Pay your vows. Do what you said you would do. Keep your promises. (3) Call upon the Lord in the day of trouble. Life is short (according to James) and full of trouble (according to Job). So we have plenty of reason to stay in prayer. When trouble comes, we pray; we call on the Lord for help.²¹ When He answers our prayer, we glorify Him with praise and thanksgiving.

²¹ James 5:13 (NIV) “Is anyone in trouble? He should pray...”