

Foundations Week 1: Taking Stock: What's In Your Heart? Psalm 11 **David Bawks - Pathway Community Church (Jan 3, 2021)**

Good morning Pathway! Welcome to the first Sunday of 2021. I don't think I have ever felt this much anticipation for a new year, or this much uncertainty. I do not know what this year holds, but I am more optimistic about the future than I have been in a while. A new year is often a season of hope and in the past I've enjoyed thinking through what I wanted to accomplish in a new year or things we wanted to do as a family. I love to write up annual goals and see how I did in accomplishing the goals for the previous year. Before we had kids, BG and I would actually do an overnight retreat at the end of each year, and we would take time to pray and reflect, and we would each write out what we'd like to do over the next year. Since we've had kids, we haven't done it the same way, but I still set goals each year and have found that to be a helpful process.

Earlier this year I shared a pushup challenge I was doing this year, and invited people to join me in aiming for 15,000 pushups by the end of the year. I'm glad to say that I met the target, I know Steve did as well, and hopefully others were also encouraged to stay healthy and exercise this year. I'm still finalizing my goals for 2021, but I'm thinking of aiming for 20,000 pushups for next year if you'd like to join me.

But I've found it more difficult to set goals for this coming year, there is just so much that's up in the air and it's been hard to see a clear path forward. And I know that a lot of people feel the same way; many people are carrying a lot of fear and uncertainty into 2021.

Today we're starting a new series called Foundations. As I've been reflecting on 2020, and looking ahead to 2021, this image of Foundations has kept coming to mind, as I've desired stability and certainty. If you're building something, your foundation will determine the strength of your structure. And I've been thinking about what we want to build spiritually this year and reading and thinking about different Bible passages that talk about foundations. Turn with me to our first passage of this series, to Psalm 11.

Psalm 11 For the director of music. Of David.

¹ In the LORD I take refuge. How then can you say to me: "Flee like a bird to your mountain.

² For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. ³ When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

⁴ The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes everyone on earth; his eyes examine them. ⁵ The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked, those who love violence, he hates with a passion.

⁶ On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot.

⁷ For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; the upright will see his face.

Most of the time when we look at David, we either look at when he fought Goliath or when he was a king, so we are most familiar with his times of triumph. But much of his life was spent in suffering.

Much of his life was spent waiting. Even after he was anointed as the next king of Israel, it was more than 10 years before he became king. He lived in the wilderness and had to stay on the run from King Saul he kept trying to hunt him down and kill him. For a while, he had to leave Israel completely and live among the Philistines.

We don't know the exact situation that sparked this situation. Some people have thought it was while he was running away from King Saul, who was consumed with jealousy and dedicated his reign to taking down David. Or it may have been while he was running away from his own son Absalom who tried to take the kingdom away from David. Or I think it is more likely it wasn't either of these times, but another time when David was struggling and facing opposition. We don't know, but he certainly had a lot of challenging and difficult situations to draw from.

In this psalm, David has two options competing for his attention. One option is to continue trusting in God. He begins by affirming that **"In the Lord I take refuge."** But the other competing idea is to flee to the mountain. He takes issue with either his enemies or maybe even his friends who have given him advice, saying "How can you say to me, Flee like a bird to your mountain?" In this context, to flee is to abandon his faith and reliance on God's protection and care. There were times in David's life when he did flee, when that was the right course of action and it saved his life, but this time he resisted that advice and stayed put.

The reason for fleeing is given in verse 2. "For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart." David lived a dangerous and violent life and regularly had the threat of battle and war hanging over him. Then he raises a very interesting question, one that has been asked again many times since he wrote it: **"When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"**

How would you answer this question? What do you think the righteous can do when the foundations are being destroyed? If you look back personally over this past year, what foundations were destroyed this past year? What aspects of your faith were shaken?

This can be a difficult question to answer. Big challenges can leave us feeling hopeless and out of control. They can make us feel weak and afraid. But we can learn something from David's example in this Psalm. Here's my summary for today.

❖ **Remember that God's foundation is unshaken, even when ours is destroyed.**

Notice how David answers the question in verse 3. He doesn't give any kind of answer really. Instead, he talks about the reality of God. He writes, "The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne." This is such an important perspective when we face trials and challenges in our lives! When our world has been thrown into chaos, it is important to remember that God has not moved, or been moved; His foundations have not been shaken even when ours have been destroyed.

Remind yourself that God is still in his temple, and God is still on his throne. David goes on to say that "The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked, those who love violence, he hates with a passion."

God wants us to live a righteous and holy life and to avoid violence. He will punish the wicked and those who continue to do evil, because he is righteous and holy and perfect himself.

Like I mentioned earlier, I've found it difficult to plan for this year. I've been tempted to just wait out the storm. But we don't need to retreat, we can move ahead in God's power. To do that well, I'd like to guide us in a spiritual exercise to consider this past year. The Examen is a method of prayer that Ignatius of Loyola taught in his Spiritual Exercises. It is often done at the end of each day, but I've adapted it to review the last year and help us to see how we are doing spiritually and emotionally.

- 1) **First, prepare your heart and mind.** Center yourself by taking a few deep breaths. Allow yourself to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit and become aware of God's presence.

One way of doing this is to ask the Holy Spirit to help you review the year with a holy perspective—with wisdom, grace, and faith. Ask for the grace to tear yourself away from your own patterns of thinking and seeing so that you can see your life more as God sees it. Of course you will see your failings—but God sees you as a beloved daughter or son who has a future and a hope. Of course you will also see your accomplishments—but God sees your deeper self, the person behind all the activity, a person made in God's image.

- 2) **Review the year with gratitude.**

We spent the month of November looking at gratitude, and this is a great time to apply those lessons. Think back through the events of the year, noting the joys and delights. Think about the people you did interact with and what you shared with each other. Don't forget the little pleasures! As you use this holy perspective to review the year, pay attention to the good gifts from the year ending. Name specifically those that come to memory now, and thank God for them. Then, thank God for these experiences.

- 3) **Pay attention to your emotions.**

Think over the year again, and notice your emotional reactions. What memories speak most loudly to you? What events, conversations, relationships, or activities bring up the most emotion now, as you remember them? Ask God to help you linger with these emotions, whether they are pleasant or disturbing. Notice how your body is, if there is a particular tension or heaviness you feel somewhere as you think about a particular time or situation.

Ask for help in understanding why you feel as you do. What can you learn about yourself or about your situation as you dwell in your emotional responses? What is God telling you through your feelings? Feelings of frustration may indicate that you need to change course on a certain project. Feelings of worry about a friend's situation might later prompt you to send a comforting note.

- 4) **Choose one feature of the year and pray from it.**

While you are lingering with your memories and emotions, settle on one feature. Perhaps it is a single event, or maybe it's a pattern of your own behavior that has come to mind as you reviewed the year.

Whatever it is that has emerged, allow it to fuel your prayer. Don't worry about the many other aspects of the year that you could think about right now; stay with and focus on the one thing that has come to you with the most power and pray from those thoughts and emotions. It can be positive or negative. Lift up a prayer of gratitude, intercession, repentance, whatever the case may be.

5) Look toward the new year.

Imagine what challenges and blessings might await you in the coming year. Think of important relationships, major (and minor) decisions to be made, skills to learn, habits to build, healing to seek, good work to accomplish. Make a simple list of highlights—matters that you expect to take prominence in your life in the new year. Bring them to God now, and ask for the graces you will need.

What are the things you'd like to leave behind in 2020? What are some of the negative habits, some of the fears and anxieties that you'd like to let go of?

Ask God to guide you through tomorrow's challenges. Turn your anxieties over to God and pray for hope. (adapted from <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/examen-prayer-for-the-year/>)

I did this exercise myself with my spiritual director a few weeks ago, and it was very helpful to see how God was present throughout the year, even in the most difficult moments. It was helpful to see what had triggered some of the difficult emotions, and to prepare for the year ahead. I'm continuing to reflect and process on the year that was, to help anticipate where I may struggle in 2021, and how I'd like to adjust course.

Over the next few weeks, I'll share some plans and goals for this coming year. Our annual meeting is coming up, and I'll give an update on the goals we made one year ago. Please pray for me and for the board as we put together our budget and our plans for the coming year. Pray for God's wisdom and insight, and for us to focus on the most important and significant priorities in this coming year.

Reflection Questions

- **What have you learned about yourself and about God in 2020?**
- **What do you hear God telling you about 2021?**

Before I close, I'd like to give a few announcements.

- 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting starting on January 18 – Daniel fast
- Church movie night on Friday, January 22

Let me ask again, "When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

- ❖ **Remember that God's foundation is unshaken, even when ours is destroyed.**

Sometimes we don't necessary need to do anything, but to remember that God is control and we can still trust and rely on him. Psalm 11 closes with a note of hope: "7 For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; the upright will see his face." We will see God. That is the promise we have.