

Cracks in Your Brick: When to Worry and When to Leave It Alone

A Mason's Field Guide to Cracks in Brick Wall Repair — Read
the Crack Before You Fix It

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Chapter 1: Every Crack Has a Story — Here's How to Read It

Sooner or later, every Texas homeowner finds one: a crack in the brick. Maybe you spotted it walking the dog, maybe the home inspector flagged it, maybe you've been staring at it for three years wondering whether today's the day it becomes a problem. And the first question is always the same: is this something, or is this nothing?

After fifty years in brick, I can tell you the honest answer is that most cracks are nothing — cosmetic, stable, the wall's way of relieving a little stress. But some cracks are something, and the difference between the two isn't always obvious. A hairline crack can be hiding movement. A scary-looking crack can be twenty years old and done. The crack itself doesn't come with a label. You have to read it.

That's what this book is: a mason's field guide to reading cracks in brick walls. Not a scare book, and not a blow-it-off book. A read-it-right book. You'll learn the four crack families — hairline, vertical, horizontal, and stair-step/diagonal — what each one usually means, the simple tests that sort

cosmetic from structural, what each type costs to fix in 2026, and the repair methods that actually work for each one. By the end, you'll be able to walk around your house, look at any crack in the brick, and know whether to monitor it, fix it, or call someone.

One rule before we start, and it's the most important sentence in this book: **repair starts with understanding**. The fix for a crack depends entirely on what caused it. Filling a crack without knowing why it opened is like taking aspirin for a broken arm — it might dull the symptom, but the problem keeps going underneath. Every chapter in this book follows the same order: identify the crack, understand the cause, then — and only then — talk about the fix. If you take one habit from this book, take that one.

A note on how this book fits with the others in the library. Stair-step cracks get their own full book — they're the most common crack pattern in Texas and they deserve the deep treatment. Here I'll cover them as one member of the crack family, with enough to identify and triage them, and I'll point you to the companion book when you need the full workup. Each book stands on its own. Read them in any order.

Chapter 2: Hairline Cracks — The Ones You Can Mostly Leave Alone

Let's start with the crack you'll see most often and worry about most unnecessarily: the hairline. A hairline crack in brick or mortar is exactly what it sounds like — a crack about as wide as a human hair, up to about 1/16 of an inch. You can see it, but you can't fit a fingernail into it. It might run a few inches or a few feet. And in the vast majority of cases, it's cosmetic.

Hairline cracks happen because masonry moves. Brick expands slightly when it heats up in the Texas sun and contracts when it cools at night. Mortar shrinks a tiny bit as it cures. The house settles a fraction of an inch in its first years. All of that normal, tiny movement has to go somewhere, and the mortar joint — the weak link by design — takes it. A hairline crack is often just the wall breathing.

Here's how to handle a hairline crack: measure it, photograph it, and watch it. Mark the date. Check it again in a few months and across a season change. If it hasn't grown — and most haven't — it's a scar, not a symptom. You have three

legitimate options: leave it alone entirely (it's not hurting anything), seal it with a masonry caulk or crack filler to keep water out (a ten-dollar DIY job), or have it repointed the next time you're having masonry work done anyway. What you don't need to do is panic, and what you don't need to pay for is a foundation crew.

The exception — and there's always an exception — is the hairline crack that's growing. A hairline that was a hairline last year and is 1/8 inch this year isn't a hairline anymore; it's a crack in progress, and it graduates to the chapters ahead. That's why the measuring matters. A crack measured once is a snapshot. A crack measured over time is a story. The story is what you're after.

One more hairline worth knowing about: shrinkage cracks in mortar on newer homes. Fresh mortar shrinks slightly as it cures, and in the first year or two you can get fine hairline cracking along the joints that has nothing to do with the foundation or the structure. It's the mortar settling into its final size. Monitor it like any other hairline; it almost always stabilizes on its own.

The bottom line on hairlines: they're the most common crack, the least dangerous crack, and the most over-worried-about

crack in Texas brick. Measure it, watch it, and spend your worry budget on the chapters ahead.

Chapter 3: Vertical Cracks — The Settling Story

A vertical crack runs straight up and down — or close to it — through the mortar joints, and sometimes through the bricks themselves. Of all the crack shapes, the vertical crack is the one most associated with plain settling, and it's the one I get called about second-most.

Here's what's usually happening: one section of the wall is dropping straight down relative to the section next to it, or the wall is pulling apart slightly as the foundation settles beneath it. Unlike the stair-step pattern, which signals *differential* movement (one side dropping more than the other, creating a diagonal shear), a clean vertical crack often means the movement is relatively uniform — the whole area is settling together, and the crack is the wall accommodating it at its weakest line.

Vertical cracks from normal settling share a profile: they're narrow (hairline to 1/8 inch), they're stable over time, they appear in the first several years of the home's life, and they don't come with companion symptoms — no sticking doors,

no sloping floors, no interior drywall cracks nearby. If your vertical crack matches that profile, it's almost certainly a settling scar. Monitor it, and when you're confident it's stable, repoint it or seal it and move on.

But vertical cracks have a serious version too, and you need to know the difference. A vertical crack that's *wide* — 1/4 inch or more — or that's *growing*, or that runs the full height of the wall from foundation to eave, is telling a different story. Wide vertical cracks can indicate significant settlement of one section, and a vertical crack that you can see daylight through is never a monitor-and-wait situation. Also pay attention to vertical cracks that appear suddenly in an older home — a new vertical crack in a twenty-year-old house means something changed, and "something changed" always deserves investigation.

There's one more vertical crack with its own cause: the expansion crack. Brick expands as it absorbs heat and moisture over the years — a phenomenon called brick growth — and long walls need room to move. That's what expansion joints are for: the vertical gaps filled with flexible material that you see every twenty feet or so on long brick walls. When an expansion joint is missing, painted over, or

filled with rigid mortar, the expanding brick has nowhere to go, and it cracks vertically to make room. If your vertical crack is near where an expansion joint should be — or where one was caulked shut by a well-meaning painter — that's likely your cause, and the fix includes restoring a proper flexible joint, not just filling the crack with rigid mortar that'll crack again.

The vertical crack verdict: narrow, stable, and young-house — usually settling, usually fine. Wide, growing, full-height, or sudden in an old house — get it evaluated. And always check whether an expansion joint is involved before you fill anything.

Chapter 4: Diagonal and Stair-Step Cracks — The Foundation Story

Now we get to the crack that means foundation movement until proven otherwise. A diagonal crack runs at an angle across the wall; a stair-step crack is the diagonal version that follows the mortar joints in a zigzag — across a horizontal joint, up a vertical joint, across again, like a staircase. In Texas, this is the most common crack pattern in brick, and it's the one this chapter — and its companion book — takes seriously.

The cause, in one sentence: one part of the foundation has dropped or heaved relative to another part. Engineers call it differential settlement. The wall above gets sheared — pulled in two directions at once — and the crack takes the diagonal path because that's the direction of the stress. The crack is widest at the point of maximum movement and tapers as it runs, so the wide end points at the trouble.

Where they show up tells you a lot. Stair-step cracks love the weak points: above and below windows and doors, at the corners of the house, around the garage door. A crack

running from the top corner of the garage door diagonally toward the house corner is practically a Texas cliché — the big opening concentrates the stress, and the clay soil does the moving.

What makes this crack family different from the others is what's underneath it. Hairline and simple vertical cracks are often just the wall itself adjusting. Stair-step and diagonal cracks are the wall reporting on the *foundation*. That doesn't automatically mean you need foundation repair — sometimes the movement happened years ago and finished, and the crack is a scar. But it does mean the foundation question has to be asked and answered, not assumed away.

Here's the triage version — the field identification before you decide anything:

- **Hairline stair-step, stable over time, no other symptoms:** monitor it. It may be old, finished movement. Measure it across a season (the pencil-mark method: mark across the crack, date it, measure the width monthly). If it doesn't change through a wet-dry cycle, it's a candidate for simple repointing.
- **Stair-step wider than 1/8 inch, or growing, or with companion signs** (sticking doors, interior drywall

cracks above door frames, sloping floors, separated trim): this needs professional evaluation. The companion signs are the key — one crack is a data point; a crack plus sticking doors is a pattern.

- **Stair-step through the bricks themselves** (snapping brick units, not just mortar): more forceful movement than a mortar-only crack. Faster professional look.
- **Sudden stair-step in an older home:** something changed — plumbing leak, drainage change, nearby construction, extreme drought. Find what changed.

And here's the rule that saves people thousands, the one I repeat in every book that touches this subject: **never repair the brick before the foundation is stable.** Repointing a stair-step crack on a still-moving foundation is temporary by physics — the new mortar will crack again, sometimes within a single season, as the soil keeps cycling. The order is: diagnose, fix the water and soil drivers, stabilize the foundation, verify it's stable, *then* repair the masonry. Anyone who quotes you the brick repair without asking about the foundation is selling you half a job.

The full treatment — how to measure whether the crack is active, the seasonal behavior of Texas clay, the 2026 cost

ranges for foundation work, and the complete repair sequence — is in the companion book devoted to stair-step cracks. If your crack matches this chapter, read that book next. It's the deep dive this overview points to.

Chapter 5: Horizontal Cracks — The One That Gets My Attention Fast

If stair-step cracks are the most common, horizontal cracks are the most urgent. A horizontal crack runs sideways along a mortar joint — parallel to the ground — and in brick veneer walls, it's the crack pattern I take most seriously on first sight.

Here's why: a horizontal crack in a brick wall usually means the wall is being pushed sideways. Something is applying lateral pressure — force acting horizontally against the wall — and the wall is starting to give along its weakest horizontal line. In Texas, the usual suspect is soil pressure: expansive clay that swells when wet can push against the foundation and the lower courses of brick with enormous force. On retaining walls and below-grade walls, it's often waterlogged soil with nowhere to drain. On a house wall, it can also mean the brick veneer is losing its connection to the structure behind it — the brick ties that hold the veneer to the framing corrode, loosen, or were spaced too far apart, and the veneer starts to belly or lean outward under its own weight.

How to tell which one you're looking at: stand back and sight

along the wall. Is the wall still flat, with just a cracked joint? That's more likely soil or settlement pressure working on the joint. Is the wall bulging outward — belly-shaped, leaning, or visibly out of plumb? That's the veneer moving as a unit, and it's the more serious version. A bulging brick wall is a wall that's lost its attachment or is being pushed, and it doesn't fix itself.

Horizontal cracks also show up at a specific location worth knowing: along the line where the brick meets the foundation, or at the top of the wall under the eaves. A horizontal crack at the base can mean the foundation and the wall are moving independently — the slab drops a fraction while the wall stays, or vice versa. A horizontal crack under the eave can trace to roof thrust or to the wall being pushed at the top.

The urgency rule: a horizontal crack that's new, growing, or accompanied by any bulging, leaning, or displacement gets a professional evaluation promptly — not next year. This is the one crack family where "monitor it for a season" is the wrong advice if there's visible movement. A stable, hairline horizontal joint crack with no displacement can be monitored like any other crack. But a horizontal crack with a

wall that's moving is structural, full stop.

I want to be honest about something: horizontal cracks in brick veneer scare some homeowners into thinking the wall is going to fall on them tomorrow. That's almost never the case — brick veneer failures are slow, not sudden. But "slow" is not "safe to ignore." A bulging veneer wall is a wall heading somewhere bad, and the repair — re-anchoring the veneer with new ties, sometimes rebuilding the section — only gets more expensive the longer the wall moves. Early evaluation is the cheap version.

Chapter 6: Through the Brick vs. Through the Mortar — Why It Matters

Here's a distinction that changes the diagnosis for every crack type in this book: is the crack running through the *mortar joints*, or is it breaking through the *brick units themselves*?

Mortar is the weak link by design. It's supposed to be softer than the brick, so that when the wall moves, the mortar gives and the brick survives. A crack that follows the mortar joints — zigzagging around the bricks, never breaking one — is the system working as designed. The wall moved, the sacrificial element sacrificed itself, the bricks are intact. This is the better version of every crack. It means the forces were within what the wall was built to handle, and the repair is straightforward: cut out the failed mortar and repoint.

A crack that breaks *through the bricks* — snapping units in half, running straight through the middle of bricks along its path — means the force exceeded what the mortar joints could relieve. Either the movement was sudden and violent (a sharp settlement event, an impact, extreme soil

movement), or the mortar was harder than the brick (wrong mortar type — a whole subject in itself), so the stress transferred into the brick instead of the joint. Through-brick cracking is always more concerning than through-mortar cracking of the same width and length, for three reasons: it indicates greater force, the repair is harder (broken bricks have to be cut out and replaced, not just repointed), and it can signal that the mortar is too hard for the brick — which means the *next* crack will also go through brick.

That last point deserves emphasis because it's a common hidden cause. If your home was repointed at some point with a hard, Portland-heavy mortar — harder than the original — the joints are now stronger than the bricks. The next time the wall moves, the crack can't take the easy path through the soft joint, because the joint isn't soft anymore. So it goes through the brick. If you're seeing through-brick cracks on a wall that was repointed in the past, ask what mortar was used. The fix isn't just repairing the crack — it's making sure the repair mortar is the right softness, so the wall's sacrificial system works again.

There's a quick field check: look at the crack path. Does it step neatly around every brick, following joints the whole way?

Through-mortar — good. Does it cut straight through bricks, ignoring the joints? Through-brick — pay attention. A mix — mostly joints with a few snapped bricks — is common in wider cracks and means the force was substantial but not extreme.

This distinction also affects cost. Repointing a through-mortar crack is joint work — labor-intensive but straightforward. A through-brick crack adds brick replacement: cutting out broken units without damaging neighbors, sourcing matching brick, and bedding the new units. On older homes where the original brick is no longer manufactured, matching can be the hardest part of the job. Your mason should tell you upfront whether he can match your brick or whether the repair will be visible — and price it accordingly.

Chapter 7: The Worry Test — Five Questions That Sort Cosmetic From Structural

By now you've met the four crack families. Here's how to put it all together. Walk your house, look at each crack, and run it through these five questions. The answers sort nearly every crack into "leave it alone," "monitor it," "fix it," or "call someone."

Question 1: How wide is it? Get a ruler. Hairline to 1/16 inch: almost always cosmetic. 1/16 to 1/8: monitor. 1/8 to 1/4: needs attention and probably professional eyes. Over 1/4 inch: professional evaluation. Over 1/2 inch: promptly. Width isn't the whole verdict, but it's the first cut — and it's the one measurement no contractor can argue with when you've written it down.

Question 2: Is it growing? This is the question that matters most. A crack that's been the same width for years is a scar. A crack that's widening — even slowly — is active. You can't answer this from memory; you answer it from measurements. Mark it, date it, measure it monthly, and run it across a season change. Texas clay moves with moisture, so

a crack measured only in a wet month or only in a dry month is half a story. Growing cracks need diagnosis before repair. Stable cracks can be repaired with confidence.

Question 3: What shape is it, and where is it? Hairline anywhere: usually fine. Vertical, narrow, stable: usually settling. Stair-step or diagonal: foundation question — see Chapter 4 and the companion book. Horizontal: lateral pressure question — see Chapter 5, and check for bulging. Location matters too: cracks at windows, doors, and corners are stress doing what stress does at weak points; cracks in the middle of long unbroken walls are less expected and more worth a look.

Question 4: Are there companion signs? Walk inside. Doors or windows sticking that used to work fine? Diagonal cracks in drywall above door and window frames? Trim pulling away from walls? Floors sloping — does a marble roll? Any one companion sign plus an exterior crack upgrades the whole situation. A crack with no companions is a wall issue. A crack with companions is a house issue.

Question 5: Through brick or through mortar? Joints only: the system worked, repair is straightforward. Through the bricks: greater force, harder repair, check the mortar

hardness.

Now the sorting:

- **Leave it alone:** hairline, stable, through mortar, no companions. It's not hurting anything. Optional: seal it against water for ten dollars.
- **Monitor it:** anything you haven't measured over time yet, 1/16 to 1/8 inch, no companions. Mark it, date it, check it across a season. Most cracks land here, and most graduate to "leave it alone" or "fix it."
- **Fix it:** stable, understood cause, no active movement — repoint it, seal it, or repair it per the method in Chapter 9. The key word is *stable*: you've proven it's done moving.
- **Call someone:** over 1/4 inch, growing, horizontal with displacement, through-brick with width, any crack with companion signs, any sudden new crack in an older home. "Someone" means a mason for wall-only issues, a structural engineer for anything that smells like foundation, and the engineer first when it's ambiguous.

Run every crack through these five questions and you'll make the right call nine times out of ten. The tenth time — the one

that doesn't fit neatly — is what the phone call is for.

Chapter 8: What Each Crack Costs to Fix in 2026

Let's talk money. I'm giving you the 2026 ranges the way the industry reports them, with the standard honest framing: every number depends on the crack's size, location, access, and cause. A ground-level hairline and a second-story horizontal crack are not the same job.

DIY sealing (hairline cracks): materials run about \$10 to \$50 — a tube of masonry crack filler or elastomeric sealant, maybe a pointing trowel if you don't own one. This is the right spend for a stable hairline you just want to keep water out of. An hour of your Saturday.

Professional crack repair (stable, non-structural): exterior wall crack repair typically runs \$300 to \$1,500 depending on severity, materials, and labor. That covers the common job: a mason comes out, cuts out the failed joints along the crack, repoints with matched mortar, cleans up. Crack injection — epoxy or polyurethane injected into the crack to bond and seal it — runs about \$250 to \$800 per crack in residential work, or \$300 to \$1,500 for injection jobs more broadly

depending on size and access. These are the "the wall moved, it's done moving, fix the wall" prices.

Repointing along crack lines: when the crack runs through deteriorated joints over a longer distance, the job becomes repointing work, and it's priced like repointing: professional repointing averages around \$1,450 nationally per project, ranging from \$400 for small areas to \$2,500 for larger ones. Per linear foot, DFW repointing runs roughly \$12 to \$30 depending on access and condition. A long stair-step run across a whole wall is a repointing job with a crack in it, and it prices that way.

Brick replacement (through-brick cracks): when bricks are snapped and need cutting out and replacing, add the unit cost: individual brick replacement runs roughly \$10 to \$35 per brick installed, scaling with how many units and how hard the match is. A crack that broke six bricks is a different bid than a crack that broke none.

When the crack means foundation work: this is the other price tier entirely, and it belongs to the foundation diagnosis, not the crack. Minor foundation crack sealing runs \$500 to \$1,000. Localized pier work for a settling section runs \$4,000 to \$12,000 in Texas markets. Extensive underpinning runs

higher. The crack in the brick is the symptom; the foundation scope is the disease. Never let anyone sell you the symptom repair at disease prices — or the disease repair without the engineer's diagnosis.

What moves every number: access (second story costs more than ground level — scaffolding and lift time), length and width of the crack, through-brick vs. through-mortar, mortar matching difficulty, and whether the cause is fixed. That last one is the hidden cost driver: a crack repaired without fixing the cause gets repaired twice. The cheapest crack repair is the one you do once, after the diagnosis.

Reading a crack-repair bid. The honest bid names the crack, names the cause as the contractor understands it, specifies the method (repoint, inject, seal, replace units), gives linear footage, names the mortar type and matching approach, and carries a warranty in writing. The bid that just says "fix cracks — \$900" is a guess. And the bid that's dramatically cheaper than the others is skipping something — usually the cut depth, the mortar match, or the diagnosis. There's a full chapter on reading bids in the tuckpointing book in this library; the same rules apply here.

Chapter 9: The Repair Menu — What Actually Fixes Each Crack

Diagnosis done, cause understood, movement stopped (or proven never to have been active). Now the fix. Here's what actually works for each crack type — the methods, in plain language.

Hairline cracks: seal or leave. A stable hairline needs nothing structurally. If you want to keep water out — and keeping water out of any crack is good practice — a masonry-grade elastomeric sealant or crack filler, applied to a clean dry crack, does the job. Don't use rigid patching compounds on a hairline that might still micro-move seasonally; flexible is more honest. And don't caulk a crack you haven't measured yet — sealing destroys your ability to monitor it. Measure first, seal second.

Vertical and stair-step cracks in mortar joints: repoint. The standard, correct repair: cut or grind out the cracked mortar to proper depth — at least half an inch to an inch, down to sound mortar — clean out the dust, and pack in new mortar matched to the existing in strength, color, and texture.

Tool the joint to match the original profile. The cardinal rule of mortar, repeated in every book in this library because it matters that much: the new mortar must not be harder than the brick or the old mortar. The joint stays the sacrificial element. On modern Texas brick veneer, that's usually Type N. On older or historic brick, it's a softer lime-rich mix. A mason who can't tell you what mortar he's using and why is a mason to keep looking past.

Through-brick cracks: replace the broken units. Snapped bricks come out — carefully, without damaging their neighbors — and matching bricks go in, bedded in matched mortar. The matching is the craft: size, color, texture, and age appearance. On newer homes the manufacturer may still make your brick. On older homes it's salvage yards and mason's stockpiles. Get the match question answered before the work starts, in writing if the match matters to you.

Cracks needing structural bonding: epoxy injection. For cracks where the two sides need to be bonded back into one structural unit — typically foundation-adjacent or structural masonry rather than veneer — epoxy injection fills the crack from the inside out and cures into a bond stronger than the surrounding material. It's the right method when the

engineer specifies it, and overkill when he doesn't. Don't let anyone sell you injection for a cosmetic veneer crack — it's the wrong tool, at the wrong price, for the wrong problem.

Wide or recurring cracks: crack stitching. For cracks that are stable but wide, or that have recurred, masons can stitch the crack: thin stainless helical ties set into the mortar joints across the crack, bonded with grout, tying the two sides together. It's a real structural repair for masonry — it reinforces the wall across the crack line so the repair holds. It's more than repointing and less than rebuilding, and it's the right call when the crack is proven stable but too wide for mortar alone to be trusted long-term.

Horizontal cracks with bulging: re-anchor or rebuild. A veneer wall that's belly-shaped or leaning needs its attachment restored — new brick ties connecting the veneer to the structure, installed from outside through the mortar joints — or, in severe cases, the affected section taken down and rebuilt. This is not a caulk job and not a repoint job. It's structural masonry work, and it starts with finding why the wall moved: failed ties, soil pressure, water behind the veneer. Fix the why, then fix the wall.

What doesn't fix cracks. Paint — it hides the crack until the

crack comes through the paint, and it traps moisture doing it. Rigid patching compound smeared over the surface — it cracks again with the first thermal cycle and looks worse than the original crack. Caulk as a structural repair — caulk is a water seal, not a structural bond. And my least favorite: tuckpointing over a crack without cutting it out — smearing new mortar over the top of a cracked joint. It looks fine for a season. Then it pops, and you're paying again.

The order, one more time. Diagnose (measure, identify, check companions). Fix the cause (water, soil, foundation — whatever the diagnosis says). Verify stability. Then repair the masonry. Then maintain. Every shortcut in that sequence has a price, and the price is doing it twice.

Chapter 10: When to Call Someone — and Who to Call

Here's the directory for the moment the Worry Test says "call someone."

Call a mason when: the crack is in the brick or mortar, the cause is understood and wall-level (settling that's finished, an old repair that failed, mortar deterioration along the crack), and there's no sign of active foundation movement. The mason repoints, replaces units, stitches, or rebuilds — the wall work. If you're in Texas and the crack needs a mason's eyes, [brick crack repair](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) is where that evaluation starts.

Call a structural engineer when: the crack is wide (over 1/4 inch), growing, stair-step or diagonal with companion signs, horizontal with any displacement, or sudden in an older home. The engineer diagnoses — what's moving, how much, and what it needs — with no stake in the repair. Expect \$500 to \$1,500 in DFW for a residential assessment with a written report. That report is what every contractor then bids against, which keeps the bids honest and comparable.

Call a foundation repair company when: the engineer says

the foundation needs stabilization. Not before — the engineer's scope first, then the foundation bids. The foundation company does the piers, the underpinning, the stabilization. Then the engineer (or verified measurements) confirms it's stable. Then the mason repairs the brick. That sequence is the whole game.

Call a plumber when: the crack's behavior suggests a water driver you can't see — unexplained water bill increases, one zone of the house moving while the rest is stable, dampness near the crack's wide end. A leak under the slab is a foundation problem wearing a plumbing disguise, and the plumber finds it cheaper than the foundation company treats the symptom.

What to have ready when you call. Your measurements — the dated log with widths. Photos with a ruler in the frame, same angle each time. The crack's story: when you first noticed it, whether it's changed, what else you've observed (doors, floors, water bills, new trees, construction nearby). A professional who gets data gives you a diagnosis. A professional who gets "there's a crack, come look" gives you a sales pitch. The ten minutes you spent measuring is the most valuable part of the service call.

And one last thing. If you've read this far, you now know more about brick cracks than most homeowners will ever know — and more than some of the people bidding on your work. Use it. Get the second opinion. Ask the specific questions. Make them measure. The books in this library — the stair-step deep dive, the efflorescence guide, the tuckpointing cost book — are all free at the [free brick repair books](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>) library, and if you ever need the full engineering picture on what your foundation did and what it needs, that's what a [foundation repair report](<https://metrofoundationrepair.com>) is for. Share the books with a neighbor. That's what they're for.

Chapter 11: Cracks and Water — Why Every Crack Is Also a Moisture Problem

There's a second story to every crack in this book, and it's about water. A crack is an opening, and openings admit water. Water in a crack does three bad things: it carries dissolved salts that show up as efflorescence along the crack line, it feeds freeze-thaw wedging that makes the crack bigger, and in a veneer wall it gets into the cavity behind the brick where it doesn't belong. So even a cosmetic crack deserves a water strategy.

Freeze-thaw wedging. North Texas gets real freezes, and water is one of the few substances that expands when it freezes — by about nine percent. Water sitting in a crack freezes, expands, and pries the crack wider. Thaw comes, more water flows into the now-wider crack, next freeze pries it wider still. It's a ratchet, and it's slow but relentless. This is why a hairline crack in Dallas can become a 1/8-inch crack over a few winters without any foundation movement at all. The crack didn't grow because the house moved — it grew because water moved in. Sealing stable cracks against water

isn't cosmetic fussiness; it's stopping the ratchet.

Efflorescence tracing the crack. When you see white staining following a crack line — the white powder outlining the staircase or the vertical run — that's water using the crack as a highway through the wall. The crack is telling you two things at once: the wall moved, and water is traveling the opening. The water entry at the crack needs addressing as part of the repair, not as an afterthought. This is also a diagnostic gift: the staining maps exactly where the water goes, which tells the mason (or the engineer) where the wall is most vulnerable.

The cavity behind the veneer. Most Texas brick is veneer — a single wythe of brick with an air gap behind it, tied to the framing. A crack through the veneer is a direct path for wind-driven rain into that cavity. The cavity has drainage — weep holes at the base — but it's designed for incidental moisture, not a steady leak through an open crack. A wide unsealed crack in a veneer wall, left through a rainy season, can put meaningful water behind the brick: wet sheathing, corroded ties, interior moisture. This is why "monitor it" in the Worry Test doesn't mean "leave it wide open" — a crack under monitoring can still be temporarily sealed against water

while you watch whether it moves. Monitoring the movement and blocking the water are not in conflict.

What to do about the water, by crack status. Stable hairline: seal it — masonry caulk or crack filler, ten dollars, done. Crack under monitoring: temporary flexible sealant that you can cut out later if the crack needs proper repair — it keeps water out without destroying your ability to measure. Crack awaiting foundation work: seal against water now, repair properly after stabilization — don't let a season of rain punish the wall while you wait for piers. Repaired crack: the repointing or injection is itself the water seal, provided the joints were cut to proper depth and the material is sound.

Weep holes and the sealed crack. One caution: when you seal cracks low on a veneer wall, don't seal the weep holes. Weep holes are the cavity's drainage — small gaps at the base of the wall that let water out. They're supposed to be open, and sealing them (or burying them under mulch, which happens constantly) traps water in the cavity. Seal the crack, leave the weep holes alone, and while you're down there, make sure they're clear. A surprising number of "mystery moisture" problems trace to weep holes that got caulked shut

by someone who thought every gap was a defect.

Gutters, grade, and sprinklers — the crack's water supply.

A crack doesn't generate water; it admits the water that's already arriving. So the water strategy for any crack includes the source work: gutters that don't overflow onto the wall, grade that slopes away from the foundation, sprinklers that don't hit the brick. A sealed crack with a sprinkler still spraying the wall is a sealed crack under siege — the sealant lasts longer when it's not fighting a daily soaking. Fix the supply, seal the opening, and the crack's water story ends.

The short version: every crack in this book is two problems — the structural story and the water story. This book taught you to read the structural story. Don't forget the water story. It's the cheaper one to fix and the one that quietly makes everything worse while you're deciding about the other.

About the Author

Travis Nech has spent 50 years in Texas brick, masonry, and foundation work. He owns [Champion Brick Repair](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) — (817) 900-6324 — [Metro Foundation Repair](<https://metrofoundationrepair.com>) — (817) 670-4474 — and the [LintelLOCK](<https://lintlerepair.com>) lintel system —

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