

MANUSCRIPT

“Assembling my Team,” “Extreme Makeover: Heart Edition” Introduction, September 9, 2007

Do you know God’s plan for your life? Have you gotten it clear? Wrapped your arms around “why you’re here?” Can you say definitively, I know why I exist?

God has a plan for your life: **You were created to become like Jesus.** God has intended this from the very beginning. The first chapter of the bible notes: *Then God said, "Let us make people in our image, to be like ourselves... So God created people in his own image; God patterned them after himself; male and female he created them.* (Genesis 1:26, 28 New Living Translation) Becoming like Jesus in your character and conduct is one of God’s five purposes you’re here on earth: to love God (worship), love God’s people (fellowship), serve God’s world (ministry), share God’s message (evangelism) and become like God’s son (discipleship). *God wants us to grow up... like Christ in everything.* Paul writes to the Ephesians (4:15a, The Message). The bible teaches that life is God’s learning lab to shape your character toward Christ-like maturity: *“God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him.* (Romans 8:29, The Message). Genesis one shows that God’s original intent was to shape our characters so that we would be like God: be just, loving, generous, gracious, merciful, fair, pure, patient –in short, to possess God’s moral likeness. Yet, Genesis three shows us that Satan derailed God’s character construction project for humanity; he deformed and distorted the image of God in each of us. The rest of the bible is chronicles God’s efforts at reclamation and renovation of the human heart. That’s what every one of us is in desperate need of: an extreme makeover of the heart. If you are a Christ-follower, becoming like Jesus is the goal of life, as the Scripture notes: *“we are already God's children, and we can't even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns. But we do know that when he comes we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.”* (1 John 3:2, New Living Translation). Now if Christ-like character is God’s original intent, and ultimate destiny for you, don’t you think that building Jesus’ values into your life is something you ought to put a priority on?

Now if God’s plan doesn’t inspire you, let me give you 3 practical reasons to build Christlike character in your life. **Your character will determine A) What kind of people those you love most will become.** Here’s an iron-clad principle of life: you shape the lives/souls of those connected closest to you --whoever looks up to you. They’ll either be drawn to imitate you out of love for who you are, or repelled to react to you out dislike or even hatred of who you are. This principle of the power of modeling is captured in the lyrics to Harry Chapin’s hit song, “Cats in the Cradle:”

*“My child arrived just the other day, He came to the world in the usual way
But there were planes to catch and bills to pay; He learned to walk while I was away
And he was talkin' 'fore I knew it, and as he grew
He'd say "I'm gonna be like you dad; You know I'm gonna be like you"”*

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon; Little boy blue and the man on the moon

*When you comin' home dad? I don't know when, but we'll get together then son
You know we'll have a good time then*

My son turned ten just the other day; He said, "Thanks for the ball, Dad, come on let's play

*Can you teach me to throw", I said "Not today; I got a lot to do", he said, "That's ok"
And he walked away but his smile never dimmed
And said, "I'm gonna be like him, yeah--You know I'm gonna be like him"*

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon; Little boy blue and the man on the moon

*When you comin' home dad? I don't know when, but we'll get together then son
You know we'll have a good time then*

Well, he came home from college just the other day

*So much like a man I just had to say, "Son, I'm proud of you, can you sit for a while?"
He shook his head and said with a smile*

"What I'd really like, Dad, is to borrow the car keys, See you later, can I have them please?"

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon; Little boy blue and the man on the moon

*When you comin' home dad? I don't know when, but we'll get together then son
You know we'll have a good time then*

*I've long since retired, my son's moved away, I called him up just the other day
I said, "I'd like to see you if you don't mind"*

He said, "I'd love to, Dad, if I can find the time

*You see my new job's a hassle and kids have the flu, But it's sure nice talking to you,
Dad*

It's been sure nice talking to you"

And as I hung up the phone it occurred to me

He'd grown up just like me... My boy was just like me

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon; Little boy blue and the man on the moon

*When you comin' home son? I don't know when, but we'll get together then dad,
You know we'll have a good time then*

*"As I hung up the phone it occurred to me; he'd grown up just like me... My boy was just like me." Sobering words!!! "Cats in the Cradle" is a sad story about how a preoccupied pop unintentionally infected his son's soul with his character flaw. What kind of person are you? What are your character flaws? Do you want your children and grandchildren to be like you? If not, then why not change the things you don't want them imitating? Life & faith is more caught than taught; more modeled than lectured, as St. Paul noted: *I became your father in Christ Jesus when I preached the Good News to you. So I ask you to follow my example and do as I do... For the Kingdom of God is not just**

fancy talk; it is living by God's power. (1 Corinthians 4:15b-16, 20). The kind of person you are (virtues, vices, & values) will be remembered by your loved ones long after they forget everything else about you. If you love those around you, it makes sense to prune your vices, build your virtues, and pursue the right priorities –for their sakes! The great news is: God is ready and willing to renovate your heart –do a radical makeover- whenever you're willing to let Him get going on this project.

A second practical reason why you should spend a semester with us concentrating on changing character is this: **your character will determine B) How effective you will be at pointing people to Jesus.** In his most famous sermon, Jesus said: *"You are the light that gives light to the world. A city that is built on a hill cannot be hidden.. In the same way, you should be a light for other people. Live so that they will see the good things you do and will praise your Father in heaven.* (Matthew 5:14-16 New Century Version)

Later in that very message he stated: *Don't be impressed with charisma; look for character. Who preachers are is the main thing, not what they say... Knowing the correct password—saying 'Master, Master,' for instance— isn't going to get you anywhere with me. What is required is serious obedience—doing what my Father wills. "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 7:15b, 21, 24, The Message) Jesus offers us values to build life on –values that will last! Our vision is to become a community of spiritual demonstration – a church where people show God's love. God told me two years ago that He was going to reposition us for harvest. Right now Discover our church's leaders are looking at what changes we can make to connect our county to Christ in a bigger way. Learning how to better walk our talk is a prerequisite for introducing interested people to God! It's been said that *"The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians, who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and walk out the door, and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable."* The question is: does your character and lifestyle draw people to Jesus, or drive them from Jesus? Tune them into God, or turn them off from God? That's why we're concentrating on character these next 3 months; God is repositioning our church for harvest –to transform lives by connecting people to Jesus. God wants us to keep the mission the main thing, and character is critical to mission!

A third practical reason for focusing on building values that last into our lives this semester is that **your character will determine C) How well you will fit into heaven when you die.** Now you're not saved *by* good works, but you are saved *for* good works, which implies a change of character as follow Christ as leader in life. Jesus said that he looks for character, who you are, not just what you say you are. So does St. Paul. Listen to his words to the Church at Corinth: *Don't you know that evil people won't have a share in the blessings of God's kingdom? Don't fool yourselves! No one who is immoral or worships idols or is unfaithful in marriage or is a pervert or behaves like a homosexual will share in God's kingdom. Neither will any thief or greedy person or drunkard or anyone who curses and cheats others.* Paul is warning the morally lax Christ-followers at Corinth that you can't be someone who's lifestyle is characterized by these vices –for whom these sins are characteristic—and expect to fit into heaven. He then reminds them: *A number of you know from experience what I'm talking about, for not so long ago you were on that list. Since then, you've been cleaned up and given a fresh start by Jesus, our Master, our Messiah, and by our God present in us, the Spirit.*

In the second to last chapter of the bible: Revelation 21, the Apostle John had a vision of heaven coming to earth. *"I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God*

himself will be with them... All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children. "But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." That's a clear warning that if you don't develop Christ-like character, you won't fit into heaven. It's a must, a necessity. Without Christ-like character, eternity's a bust. That's what we're going to devote the next 12 weeks to growing like Christ. Because you're banking eternity on it!

Let's next look at *how* God builds Christ-like character into your life: three "tools of the trade" that God uses for His Extreme Makeover of our hearts—our character. **The first tool which God uses to help you become like Jesus is: 1. God's Word.** The Scriptures, particularly the teachings of Jesus. Paul penned these words to his apprentice: *All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do.* 2 Timothy 3:16-17 NLT God is in the heart renovation business, and His chief tool is His Word, the bible; more specifically: the example and teachings of Jesus. He doesn't take a mallet or a crowbar to you, but something much more effective, and targeted: *God's word is alive and working and is sharper than a double-edged sword. It cuts all the way into us, where the soul and the spirit are joined, to the center of our joints and bones. And it judges the thoughts and feelings in our hearts.* (Hebrews 4:12, New Century Version).

To renovate any building, you need blueprints & a standard measurement. It's no different for a makeover of the heart. Jesus said *"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. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock. "But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards."* (Matthew 7:24-27 The Message) Would you live in a home which was built without blueprints or a level or tape rule? I certainly wouldn't! I'd want to have assurance that the walls were plumb and the floors level; that the house wouldn't collapse under the weight of winter snow, or rain, or my family inside. For the next 12 Sunday mornings we're going home in on 12 foundational values to build life on. Values that will last! I want to challenge you to make these messages, don't skip a Sunday, get God's word steeped into your soul so God can straighten out what's wrong in your life, and prepare you for every good thing God wants you to do with your life.

The second "tool" God uses to help you become like Jesus is 2) Influential people—others who connect close enough to change us. Solomon observed that *As iron sharpens iron, so people can improve each other.* (Proverbs 27:17 NCV) We're to push each other toward Christ-like conduct, and protect one another from failing in faith. We each need mentors and monitors, people to guide us and guard us. The fact is, truth alone can't make you mature. You need others. That's why Jesus didn't just teach truth, he started a small group, and why St. Paul urges us in these words: *We should continue following the truth we already have. Brothers and sisters, all of you should try to follow my example and to copy those who live the way we showed you.* Philippians 3:16-17 NCV

Ask yourself this question: what has been the greatest positive influence in my life? I guarantee that it hasn't been a sermon, a seminar, or a Sunday school lesson; it's

been a person who's shaped your life through a close relationship and a positive example. Let me ask you: Who are your models for following Christ? Who are you watching and learning from? On the flip side: who are you modeling Christ-like conduct to/for? Who are you mentoring in faith and life?

You'll grow faster and stronger if you're on a training team than by yourself. Let's learn from the construction industry: you can't build a house alone, and God doesn't build believers in isolation. Have you assembled your team? Gathered people around you who can mentor you, encourage you, challenge you, correct you, protect you? You'll grow faster and stronger, and build your character bigger and better on a team! You have a great opportunity these next 12 weeks! How: follow Paul's advice: *Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise. Use his words to teach and counsel each other.* (Colossians 16:a NLT) Sign up for a small group study of the values and character qualities we'll be unpacking for you on Sunday mornings. Just 6 sessions between now and Christmas –but they'll get you on a training team where God can really begin to build Christ-like character into your life, as the bible says: *encourage one another and build each other up,*(1 Thess 5:11 NIV). Better yet: Get a group going in your home! We'll show you how easy it can be in a brief Orientation session on Sunday, September 9th & 16th at 9A, 10:45A, or 12:15 AM.

God uses His Word, and God uses His people, and God also uses 3) Difficult circumstances as a tool for constructing Christ-like character in you. God has a purpose for every problem you face, an opportunity in every obstacle you encounter. Listen to what St. Paul observed: *God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son,*" (Romans 8:28-29a, NLT). If God is guiding your life, then accidents are incidents for Him to construct Christ-like character in you, values that will last. St. Paul had plenty of problems, yet this perspective of enables him to write: *We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us--they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation. And this expectation will not disappoint us. For we know how dearly God loves us...* Romans 5:3-5 NLT

God is far more concerned about your character than your circumstances. It's not what happens outside you that's important, but what happens inside you. Circumstances are temporary, character is eternal. I don't know about you, but I learn more from my mistakes and my failures than my successes. Tough times are great teachers. Here's what God's Word says about life's circumstances: "*God is doing what is best for us, training us to live God's holy best.*" (Hebrews 12:10b, Msg). In life's learning lab, every trial is a training lesson, if you look to God, listen to Truth, and let others coach you. If you'll let him, God will use His Word, His people, and your circumstances to change you on the inside –do an extreme makeover of your heart. The question is: will you let him? Will you commit to take a semester to get into a study group, grab ahold of values that last, and let God work them into your character and life? If you do, you'll influence your loved ones in the best way possible; point others toward Jesus, and get outfitted for heaven?

Here's two commitments I'm asking for this fall:

#1. Commit to listen to every message! Spend a semester concentrating on character with us. You'll become a better person by Christmas. Make Sunday services during this series, or listen to the message on CD if you miss a Sunday. God's going to guide us through some foundational values to build life on –values that last.

#2. Assemble your construction team --Sign up for a small group study. They'll begin the week of September 23rd. You'll grow stronger and faster with a spiritual/moral training team. Take an example from the Construction trades: no one builds a house alone. Have you assembled your (Character) construction team? Do you have a mentor(s)? Any apprentices? It's time to get into a small group and let God use others to challenge you to change as you study God's Word together and apply it to your lives. The stakes are too high! The Goal too important! So commit to make the messages, get onto a small group! Build your character on values that will last –those of Jesus: ***"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!"***

Kevin McCarthy
Lead Pastor
Discover Church
September 9, 2007