

## **EXTREME MAKEOVER:**

### **Christian Edition**

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

There is a popular television program, “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition.” The episode Polly and I watched was a New York City apartment that they totally renovated in 12 hours with a crew of about 100 workers. Throughout the program, they showed other homes they’d done on previous programs. Usually they take more than 12 hours, but they are all very quick. It is amazing the transformation that can happen with a combination of the know-how, skill, creative imagination, and an unlimited budget. A program like that appeals to our fantasy of the home of our dreams happening quickly, painlessly (the family is sent away on a vacation), and a sort of miracle in transforming something ordinary into an amazing creation.

Yet, it strikes me of how typical a program like that is of our American way of thinking. We want it fast, without mess and discomfort, and absolutely perfect. At the same time, we know that is not how it *really* happens (unless our home gets selected for the program). Polly and I once did a makeover of a house (we thought it extreme, but nothing like what they do on TV). We were working hard at it for three years, dealing with the mess and inconvenience— but also having fun working at it together. I didn’t, in fact, get at the last pieces of trim until we were ready to sell the house ten years later. Then, the people wanting our house came to look at it before I’d had a chance to get the trim up. I explained to them I’d do it. Well, he was a carpenter and cabinet maker. He said to me, “Ken, I’ll do it.” I wasn’t sure if he was just being nice or if it was a commentary on my previous work, but I quickly agreed to his offer.

The Bible, in a number of instances, uses a building image for our lives. Once we begin following Christ, an extreme makeover is what we’re in for. That is good news, since the end results we are promised will be beyond our wildest dreams. The not-so-good news is that it doesn’t take place without some mess, some pain, and it takes a lifetime.

Our Scripture is the story of two builders that Jesus uses to end His most extensive body of teaching, The Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5-7. We know it well. In fact, if I just give you part of the sentence, “The wise man built his house upon the \_\_\_\_\_,” most of you completed it in your mind. But there is important truth here that I hope you will find freshly motivating. Let’s read it this morning, Matthew 7:24-29.

#### **BUILDING OUR HOUSE**

Both men were building a house. This does not vary in the story. You can replace the word “house” with “character,” “soul,” or “life.” We are all building. How are you constructing your life?

John Ortberg notes in a book I’ve been reading that we construct our lives primarily by the choices we make. Every commitment we make, every friendship we enter, every promise we honor or break, becomes part of my house. The quality of the choices we

make will determine the quality of our character. That captures the point Jesus is making. He concludes this sermon with a call to commitment, saying we have a choice to make. One is wise and one is foolish.

It is important for us to realize, no one sets out to build a bad house. The foolish man didn't set out to do something bad or evil. He is not a wicked man— just “foolish.” He didn't find a sandy spot and say, “This is a good place to build a house. There's no need to mess with a foundation, we'll build on the sand so a good storm will wash it away.” It happens because there isn't careful planning and clear thinking.

Isn't it the same way in life? No one plans on cultivating anger and nursing a grudge in hopes of becoming a bitter resentful person. Couples don't take their marriage vows planning to divorce. Couples don't give birth to children planning to be so busy their children end up being starved for their attention and love. No one sits down and plans a mediocre life.

If we ask the question, “Why? Why did you do this?” a likely response will be, “I don't know. It just happened.” Of course, we ask the question of ourselves too— and often the reason is a mystery. “Why did I shade the truth there?” “Why did I join in running down that person?” “Why have I let my life slip by focusing so much on my work that I've missed enjoying my family?” Why don't I give more time to prayer? Why don't I read the Bible more?” We know those things are wrong. But, because of a lack of planning in the right way, those things become a reality, one tiny choice at a time.

Of course it is popular today to avoid taking responsibility at all for our lives. We find someone or something to blame. It's the fault of the school, the teacher, the government, my boss at work, and any number of other things. In general, it seems as Americans we blame super-sized bodies on the super-sized meals offered by fast food restaurants. We like to conveniently leave our choice out of the equation.

Psychiatrist, Dr. Paul Tournier, wrote, “To live is to choose. It is through the making of successive and resolute choices that man traces out his life.”

You are building your house, brick by brick. It is made up of little decisions you make each day. How can we be sure we have a good house, one that will stand the test of storms— one that will not in the end be a pile of rubble? How can we be sure are lives are lived for what is of ultimate value?

Jesus is telling us the foundation is the key.

*Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. (24)*

Jesus notes two components about the two builders: hearing Jesus' words and then putting them into practice. Both builders heard the truth, but only one put it into practice. Let's consider both of these components, for they are both essential.

## **HEARING JESUS' WORDS**

We need to be sure we have accurate knowledge. Jesus' words are the ultimate measure of all truth. He Himself is the embodiment of truth (Jn. 14:6). Notice, Jesus begins our Scripture with "therefore." Thus, it builds directly upon what He has just been saying. Jesus has been giving us the truth in this sermon. It is a great summary of all Jesus taught. It is about stripping away the lies and illusions of our lives, and getting to the heart of the matter. And, Jesus tells us, it's what's in the heart that matters. He begins with the beatitudes, describing the nature of the Christian life. He calls upon believers to influence and guide society in the right direction. He says lust, anger, unforgiveness, and pride all destroy life. We are not to worry, not judge others, and not put trust in money and things. Those are just a few of the truths Jesus teaches that we must not ignore.

Today, there is a great effort to ignore objective truth as far as the faith is concerned. Surveys show two thirds of Americans believe there are few if any absolute principles to direct human behavior. Sometimes it is expressed as, "If you feel you're all right with God, you are." Or, "If you're sincere about what you believe, that's fine— it's your truth, and you should follow that."

But, a faulty grasp of truth can be disastrous. Did you know that on Dec. 14, 1799, George Washington, the father of our country died after a one day illness because of a false belief? He went horseback riding out at Mt. Vernon. He rode hard, getting rid of his tension, and became sweaty. He walked around outside to cool down (remember it was December) and got chilled. He came in and went to bed. In the middle of the night he awoke, feeling great distress and had his wife call for the doctor. George Washington's doctor was the head of the medical school at the U. of Virginia. He came and diagnosed the problem as "inflammatory quinsy." The treatment was to bleed the President. It is all in the records. They took a pint of blood. After three hours he was not getting better, so they bled him a second time. Then, three hours later, they bled him a third time. The physician noted, "He seems to be getting weaker." The solution? You guessed it: bleed him again. Following the fourth pint of blood, the president died. Today, considering the described symptoms, it is thought he had strep throat. But, that was the current medical practice and state of the art medicine based upon faulty foundations.

So much of our current culture's beliefs are downright wrong and countless lives are being lost. We are told that things like:

- violence and sex on TV and in the movies don't affect us;
- the flood of pornography in our land must be protected as free speech;
- we can be good, moral people without a belief in God.

But that is all a lie. We are created in the image of God, so we must go back to Him for knowledge about how life is meant to work. Character **does** matter. Moral values like integrity, honesty, faithfulness, and purity are signposts on the right path. Our mindless pursuit of more things has left our souls empty. The busyness of our culture and the emphasis that "more is better" has left us stressed and harried.

This Sunday, we are celebrating our Sunday School year. We've honored our teachers

and students. What we're doing in Christian education is part of the makeover of our lives in teaching the truth as found in Scripture— objective, unchanging truth. But our education in The Truth must never end. We all need to continue studying God's Word and evaluating all our living against the unchanging standard. Remember we have adult Sunday School classes and home groups to help you in continuing your education in the truth.

Knowing the truth is one part. But both builders in the parable know the right facts and built impressive houses. To the casual observer there was probably little difference in the looks. But here's the difference between the two builders: only the first builder who built his house upon the rock put what he learned into practice. The practice is where the rubber meets the road. Those who apply the truth to their living have a secure foundation under them. Those who fail to put it in practice are built upon sand.

## **PRACTICE**

There's a curious phenomena in our lives. In our day we hear and take in a huge amount of information. We may agree with it, and as far as moral and spiritual truth is concerned, we can accept the diagnosis: "That's me all right! I need to be more loving." In accepting the diagnosis and applying the truth to ourselves, we have the feeling we've done something about it. Yet, all we've done is acknowledged our defect. We have done nothing to actually change it. We live in a time when we hear so much and do so little. Neil Postman refers to this as a "Low Information-Action Ratio." He says we are bombarded with all kinds of contextless information: on the internet, on the radio, on TV. It is impossible to act upon all of it. What it does then is it trains us to NOT ACT on what we learn and hear. Consider, on a Christian radio station, you can probably hear four or five good sermons every morning. This can have that danger for us. To try to put into practice one truth may absorb several days. But with so much truth coming at us, we have input paralysis. We end up not acting on any of it, yet we feel quite spiritual.

Each word of Jesus' teaching helps us build, brick by brick, upon a secure foundation.

When I choose to obey Jesus in:

- forgiving another for the wrong they did to me;
- refusing to judge others;
- giving away money I'd rather hang onto;
- doing my best to seek first His will in all I do;
- praying about everything;

I'm building my house one brick at a time. Each act of obedience, each little victory over self or temptation to sin, is building my life on the right foundation. Mostly it is quiet, day-in and day-out stuff. Small choices for Christ. A nail here, a board there, removing what doesn't fit, and reinforcing things that are not strong enough.

It is tempting in our day with the big names, the big meetings, the conferences and retreats to assume that's where we'll really get major building done on our house. Certainly all those things can help. But the doing, the obeying at home in your family, in your relationships, at work, in ordering your every day priorities is where the foundations are truly laid.

It is the storm that reveals whether the foundation is good. The same storm shook both houses. Jesus describes the two storms identically, word for word.

*The rain came down, the streams rose,  
and the winds blew and beat against that house;*

One stood, the other fell. Jesus makes it clear this is not about avoiding storms. Adversity will come, tragic things will happen in every life. Be prepared. There is only one foundation that will keep your life together.

However, I think we often end up putting-off the practice end. We delude ourselves in thinking, "When the crunch time comes, I'll get serious about prayer." I remember a scene when I was in the fifth grade. I'd stayed after school to help the teacher. This teacher had a great year-long project for art— making marionettes from scratch. We modeled clay heads as a form for the paper mache' heads, carved wooden limbs, sewed clothing, etc. It was all to culminate in a big performance with a marionette show in the spring, a cute musical involving all our marionettes. I'd had a couple of months of piano lessons at this time and knew all the notes and scales. I was feeling quite confident, thinking, "Hey, every piece of music is just combinations of those notes." In my mind, I felt if I really practiced hard at something for a couple of months, I could probably play almost anything. So, I just mentioned to the teacher in passing that I could probably play the music for the program if she needed someone. That was a sincere feeling I had— but incredibly naive. Fortunately, she didn't just take my word for it and inquired about how long I'd been taking lessons. She then suggested my marionette be Liberace on stage, I would know just how to correctly move his hands on a little pretend marionette-size piano while someone else provided the piano music. You see, I didn't know enough yet to know how challenging the piano could be. I had no concept of how difficult it could be.

The same thing happens with the practice of the spiritual life. When the storms hit, you may not have what it takes to get the foundation secure. When you need to get a hold of God and know His will; when you need to know how to wrestle in prayer for your loved one; when you need to know how to draw upon the promises of Scripture to keep you stable and know the will of God; a cram course may not do it. The little daily obediences where we've learned to relinquish in the small things enable us to know how to let go in tough ones. Learning to forgive in the minor offenses serves us well in the big ones. Dealing with lust as it arises keeps us faithful in the big assaults. Have you learned how to bring yourself into God's presence with praise and worship? Are you familiar with His gentle voice giving guidance or assurance?

## **CONCLUSION**

Trouble comes to all at some time, shaking us to our foundations. Winds of adversity blow to topple us. Jesus says, if we're wise, we'll be looking to our foundations, seeing if there is anything false in us. For only that which is true to His Word will remain standing in the end.

Of course, the ultimate storm that Jesus is referring to is the last judgment. On that day our lives will be scrutinized by God. Every deed and word will be under examination. Every part, every hidden corner of our houses tested. We need not fear that day if we've

asked Jesus to be our Savior and Lord. He alone is the secure rock to stand upon.