

"What's your greatest ability?" Who can tell me? I want to suggest to you this morning that your greatest ability is response-ability. Responsibility is the ability to intentionally respond to life. What differentiates you from all other species is the ability to choose your response, to live by intent rather than instinct. You don't choose a lot of the circumstances and events that happen to you. But you do have the freedom to choose how you act, how you respond. Because you have that choice, because you have the freedom to respond and you are able to respond you are response-able. You're responsible. Responsibility has been called the great developer; the price of greatness; the mark of maturity. If you want to do something great with your life you have to become a responsible person, to take ownership of your thoughts and words and actions. It's the first thing Jesus challenged his hearers to do --accept responsibility to change: *Jesus went into Galilee, preaching the Good News from God. He said, "The right time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Change your hearts and lives and believe the Good News!"* The bible says: *In the past, people did not understand God, and he ignored this. But now, God tells all people in the world to change their hearts and lives.* Acts 17:30, If you don't get this one, you may as well forget the rest of the series because you can't build any of the other values into your life if you don't personally accept responsibility for your choices, your values, and your character. This is what it all starts with. Sadly, there's been a dramatic decline in the acceptance of personal responsibility in American culture. Nobody wants to accept responsibility for anything anymore, instead, we want to accuse and excuse. In stark contrast to that, notice what the Bible says, *Live life, then, with a due sense of responsibility, not as men who do not know the meaning and purpose of life but as those who do. Make the best use of your time, despite all the difficulties of these days. Don't be vague but firmly grasp what you know to be the will of God.* Ephesians 5:15-17 (Phillips Translation) Circle "sense of responsibility". God says you're to live your life with a sense of responsibility but more important than that, notice the reason. He says, because you know the meaning of life. The point of this verse is this. If you live your life in a responsible way it means you probably know the meaning of life. You've figured it out. You can answer that question: Why did God put me here? I'm going to give you three reasons why you should accept responsibility now, this Sunday morning, to start changing those things in your values or character that are unhealthy or ungodly during these next 11 weeks. I'm going to give you 3 reasons why its in your best interest to be studying Jesus' values to build life on with us here on Sunday mornings, And why it's critical that you get into a small group study to begin working them into your life.

Why live responsibly? A. Because God sees my life. The bible says in the book of Hebrews that "*Nothing in all the world can be hidden from God. Everything is open before him, and to him we must explain the way we have lived.*" Hebrews 4:13 (NCV) God sees it all and God is going to judge us one day and evaluate our lives on how did we live. If you don't get anything else that I say this morning, get this: Life is a test of responsibility. That's why you're going through all this. God planned you, thought you up, put you on earth and He is testing your responsibility. When you die, that's not the end of you. You're going to live on for eternity one of two places -- heaven or hell. How you do what you do with your life and the decisions you make here are going to influence your destiny. God put you on this earth primarily for two reasons: #1, to get to know Him personally through His son Jesus Christ, and #2, to develop character – Christlike character. Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Christ did. (The Apostle John wrote) God couldn't care less about your how much you've achieved, earned or accumulated, He's interested in your character. Why? --it's the only thing you're going to take with you when you die. Once you've settled the issue, "I know God and I know His Son, Christ, and I am a follower," then the issue becomes, "What did you do with what I gave you." God has made an investment in you when He created you. He gave you talents, abilities. He let you live in this particular time in history, and He expects a return on His investment, as "Each of us will

have to give a personal account to God." Romans 14:12 (NLT) That's why you should accept responsibility for building life on values that will last –God's.

Why live responsibly? B. Because others are affected by my life. None of us lives to ourselves alone, we are all interdependent. We're not independent or dependent but interdependent on each other. The bible echoes this inescapable reality of life: *we are many, but in Christ we are all one body. Each one is a part of that body, and each part belongs to all the other parts.* Romans 12:5, (NCV) the two most common excuses, rationalizations we give for our irresponsibility are, "Nobody will know about it," and "It won't hurt anybody." You're wrong on both counts. You're wrong. You're related to others, and those your most closely related to, you affect the most. That's why the scriptures exhort us: "*Do not look out only for yourselves. Look out for the good of others also.*" 1 Corinthians 10:4 (NCV) You need to be responsible because God is watching and because other people are affected.

Why live responsibly? C. Because God rewards it. And boy, does He reward it! "*You will experience all of God's blessings if you obey the Lord.*" Deuteronomy 28:2 Circle "all". God says, You will not believe what I will pour out on your life if you will live responsibly with your time, with your money, with your relationships -- every area of your life. I will bless you in ways you cannot even imagine. One of the ways God rewards us when we are responsible is He gives us greater responsibility. If you use your influence well, you become more influential. If you use your possessions well, God will provide more of them. Jesus said: *To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who are unfaithful, even what little they have will be taken away.* Matthew 25:29, (NLT) God doesn't have any obligation to help you when you're living irresponsibly, but God promises to reward responsibility

How do I accept responsibility for my life? First, (1). Guard my mind God has given you your mind, and your mind controls everything else. It all starts in the mind. Sow a thought, reap an action, sow an action, reap a habit, sow a habit, reap a destiny. Let me ease your conscience: You are not responsible for every little stray thought that passes through your mind. Stray thoughts can come from all different things. Conversations you overhear by accident, things that you see by accident. Thoughts from the spiritual realm: inspiration from God, or temptation from the devil and his demons –mental pop-ups that make you wonder "where did that thought come from?." The bible teaches that not every thought that you have comes from you –whew! But, you are responsible for what you choose to allow into your mind, through your eyes and through your ears, and the thoughts you choose to make "yours" to own; to focus on; to plan from; to act on. God is going to hold you accountable for what you think about by allowing to let into your mind. Paul urges us: *Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.* Romans 12:2 You alone determine by what standard your thoughts will be governed: the internal (what's coming from you) external (what's coming from our culture), or eternal (God's Truth). God says that –with His help—you can change the way you think, by changing what you think about, what you meditate on. *let the Lord Jesus Christ take control of you, and don't think of ways to indulge your evil desires. (Romans 13:14 NLT), Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.* (Phil 4:8 NLT) Change the process, and you'll change the product. Doing something different is the only way to get different results! What practical ways can you change your focus? 3 simple steps:

1. **Study God's blueprint** for life, commit to read a bit of the bible each day; kind of like skoal for the soul –puttin' a little pinch of God's Truth into your mind and thoughts each day can radically transform the way you see life and think –but it takes time. It takes consistency.

2. **Get onto a Construction Crew:** a Small Group right now. You'll grow faster and stronger with others. No one builds a house by themselves, and God doesn't construct character without help from others.
3. **Let someone inspect your work** –spiritual accountability partner. Most of us don't change alone; we don't make the tough choices to cut out the hurtful habits without help. We each need someone who is a little further along in their pursuit of Jesus Christ who we give permission to check up on us, who we'll report to and get coached by. A starting point: get into a small group and see if there's anyone there to test the waters with. Another option: ask your small group for a referral to a mentor at Discover church. Once they get to know you, they'll be able to recommend a person or two.

How do I accept responsibility for my life? 2. Control my reactions Wise Solomon said: *Foolish people lose their tempers, but wise people control theirs.* Proverbs 29:11 (NCV) The way we usually express our emotions is through our words. Jesus tells us in the book of Matthew: *A good person produces good words from a good heart, and an evil person produces evil words from an evil heart. And I tell you this, that you must give an account on judgment day of every idle word you speak.* Jesus (Matthew 12:35-36, NLT) I wish God had left that statement out of the Bible. It says that God is judging the responsibility of my mouth. Your's too. The good news is that Jesus says that your mouth is connected to your heart, and God can change your heart if you'll yield it to Jesus' leadership, the Holy Spirit's guidance. Scripture says, "God did not give us a spirit that makes us afraid but a spirit of power and love and self-control." (1 Timothy 1:7) Here's a Practical tip: invite the Holy Spirit in (How? Get the message: "Is Christianity Supernatural? From Aug. 26th", or come on Tuesday night Healing Prayer at 8P and ask someone to explain to you and pray with you to receive an infilling of the Holy Spirit. Another tip: Ask for the Holy Spirit's help. It's His job to change your character. Listen to what the Apostle Paul wrote: "when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:21) God control brings self-control. Give God your heart.

How do I accept responsibility for my life? 3. Resist my "enemies" The biggest enemies to real change can be found between our ears, minds –that's why we all need an extreme makeover of the heart –one that only can be accomplished with God's help. What are these enemies of change?

- **Denial** we stay stuck when we overlook & minimize, our flaws & faults and the harm they do to others. *If you hide your sins, you will not succeed. If you confess and reject them, you will receive mercy.* Proverbs 28:13 (NCV) Come clean to God, and get accountable to someone else.
- **Blame** can be an enemy of change when we excuse ourselves by accusing others. Scripture says that: *Judgmental criticism of others is a well-known way of escaping detection in your own crimes and misdemeanors. But God isn't so easily diverted. He sees right through all such smoke screens and holds you to what you've done.* Romans 2:1b-2 (The Message)
- **Procrastination** .. is a way to avoid the painful process of change, by putting it off. Here's what the bible says about change: *encourage each other every day while it is "today." Help each other so none of you will become hardened because sin has tricked you. We all share in Christ if we keep till the end the sure faith we had in the beginning. This is what the Scripture says: "Today listen to what he says. Do not be stubborn as in the past when you turned against God."* Hebrews 3:13-15 (NCV) Circle that word "today." Not tomorrow, not next week, but the present! It's God's gift, so use it to

How do I accept responsibility for my life? 4. Admit my mistakes The bible says that A man who refuses to admit his mistakes can never be successful. But if he confesses and forsakes them, he gets another chance." Pr. 28:13 (LB) Every construction project needs building inspectors to keep the crew honest and the structure safe. King David is a painful

example: He built a kingdom, neglected his heart, and his character collapsed: looking at naked women, getting' a gal pregnant, murdering her husband, then getting called on the carpet in front of everybody. Read about it in 1 Samuel chapters 11-12. He also Accepted Responsibility for his mistakes, read his prayers in psalms 32, 51, and 139. Take time to read them this week. Here are excerpts:

When I refused to confess my sin, I was weak and miserable, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. Psalm 32:3-5

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you... Psalm 139:23-24

Create in me a pure heart, God, and make my spirit right again. Psalm 51:10

Real responsibility begins by looking at me –that's the only thing you can completely control, not others, not circumstances or environment, but your thoughts, your perspective and what follows from them. The bible calls being honest with God and others about your mistakes is called "living in the light", 1 John 1:5-9 (NCV) "if we say we have fellowship with God, but we continue living in darkness, we are liars and do not follow the truth. But if we live in the light, as God is in the light, we can share fellowship with each other. Then the blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses us from every sin. If we say we have no sin, we are fooling ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins, because we can trust God to do what is right. He will cleanse us from all the wrongs we have done."

We've all made messes of our lives at one time or another; we've all sinned and fallen short of God's standard –His measurement of our character. We all need an extreme makeover of the heart –to varying degrees.

- Maybe you feel like your character's rock solid. Why not double-check, make sure these next 10 weeks, better yet –lend your wisdom to a small group and apprentice others on constructing Christ-like character in their lives.
- Maybe you're sitting here thinking: "part of my character construction is sagging or leaning" - lets say in the area of staying self-control, keeping honest, maintaining balance, or purity, or fairness. Avoid collapse –sign up for a small group and shore up that area or two.
- Maybe part of your character's collapsed –it's showed up in your marriage, or your relationship with your kids, or your work, or your health, language, thought life, or as an addiction, or perversion. Great news: you can recover, you can rebuild. But you can't do it without God, and without others. Get prayer when you show up on Sundays. Get into a small group and get accountable to someone who can check up on you and encourage you.

May God direct your steps as you chart a course for change and growth!

Sincerely,

Pastor Kevin McCarthy
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