

COMPLACENCY VERSUS CHARACTER

Have you read the book *The Purpose Driven Life*? It is the most incredible book to determine God's destiny for your life. I wonder how many people have read the book and then can honestly say, "I know my destiny. I know my purpose and I am doing it." People do not really know how to put feet to the vision that God has given them. They do not even know where to start. Today I want to talk to about a building block that needs to be in your life for you to be able to do that. I hope this helps you.

The title of this lesson is Complacency versus Character. With complacency, you do not get much done. You just roll with the punches and take life as it comes, and you are not extremely motivated. Character is really not motivation. Character is the feet for motivation. That is what we will talk about today.

God wants you to become godly. He wants you to take on His values, His character, and His attitudes about how He sees people and how He handles things. That takes work and determination. If I had to name what I think is the one thing that keeps good Christian people from really doing great things with their lives, I would say they are not willing to do the work and they are not determined enough. Also, they are not persistent. I heard a man that I really admire in the business world say "It is not talent. It is not gifting. It is not ability. There is one thing that makes the difference between success and failure. That is persistence." I totally agree with that. You see people in the news all of the time and you think, "I am more talented than they are. How did they get up there?" They got there because they had persistence. You see people that consistently are at the top in whatever they do. What got them there and enables them to stay there? I believe it is the character that has been developed in them and that character has qualities. One of those qualities really is hard work, another is persistence, and one is determination.

Did you know that if you are lacking in character qualities you can ask God to build them into your life. It is the most wonderful thing in the world. You do not have to be perfect. You do not have to have it all together. All you have to do is go to God and say, "I am your servant and I want to do what you want me to do." About 35 years ago, my husband and I were teaching a college class along with some other couples. One night we had a meeting and were talking about what we were going to be doing with the college kids. One of the ladies said "You know, D.L. Moody said there is no telling what God can do with a man who completely gives his life to Him. But it has never been done." I did not say anything, but I was thinking about that. I thought, "I will Lord. I'll say that. You can have my life. You can do anything you want to with me." You would think that the next day heaven opened, the angels started singing, and I moved out. It did not happen that way. I began the character process. I began growing steadily, slowly, surely in God. There are no short cuts to spiritual maturity, even if you want it so bad you can taste it.

Is there any guideline or guarantee or anything I could say to you that would almost guarantee it is going to happen? There actually is. It is obedience. How quickly you hear God say something and then respond by being obedient to it determines your growth in Him. You can meet people who have been Christians for 50 years and they should still be wearing diapers. They do not know where anything is in the Bible. They do not know God intimately. They do not know what He said to them. They do not know how He thinks. At the same time, those people have just muddled along, still drinking the milk and not eating the meat. A wild person who has lived a hellish life and been disobedient, rebellious to authority, and done everything that the 50 year Christian would never do finds Jesus. Jesus touches them and they get their life changed. They are on fire for God. As fast as they learn something that God wants done, they do it. As fast as God wants something changed, they change. They are going around saying "Tell me how you do it." Obedience is the difference. Obedience is a character quality that God highly prizes. God says "I want you to obey me." He asks "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I say?" You cannot know Jesus as Lord if He is not Lord. One time I heard a saying "If He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all."

Many people know Jesus as their savior, but they do not know Him as Lord. Think about the end times when Jesus comes back. He will be judging everything and people will say "Lord we prophesied in Your name, we healed people in Your name, and we did miracles in Your name." He will say "Depart from Me. I never knew you." You have to know God. It is an intimate thing, not just that He is someone way off,

flying around and running the world. We admire the people who have paid this price to develop their character and gone through what you have to go through to develop it. Complacency and putting things off until tomorrow robs you of what you want. Why not jump in with the rest of us and get your character changed. Some of it is pleasant and some is not, but it is worth it.

I heard about a man who had cerebral palsy and was very incapacitated by it. He wanted to build a business and another man was going to help him build it. He went to the man who was going to help him and asked "What do I really have to do?" The man said he would tell him. He told him how hard it was going to be and how discouraging it was going to be, and it got harder and harder. The man looked at him and said, "Then just tell me it is going to be worth it." The other man said "It is going to be worth it", so he said "Okay then, let's go."

What kind of person are you when it comes to changing your character flaws, growing where your character is stronger than ever? Are you someone that feels sorry for yourself and says you just cannot do it? Are you someone who says "I am not doing that"? Or, are you someone who says "Lord this is embarrassing. I want to change and I can't do it without Your help. I have tried and I can't. Would you change me?" The Lord would love to change you. He does not want to change your personality. It is not that. Open your Bible to Ephesians 4:22. It says "Since then we do not have the excuse of ignorance. Everything, and I do mean everything connected with the old way of life has to go. It is rotten through and through. Get rid of it. Then take on an entirely new way of life, a God-fashioned life." To me, that is how you can tell someone is really saved. It says in I Corinthians 10:13, "The old is passed away, the new has come."

I have been a Christian since I was nine so I grew up in the church. When I was 26, I found out this is a real deal and it is worth everything and I wanted it. I had such a change in my life. I did not want to do the things I used to love to do. They were boring. I would think "How did I ever think that was exciting? How did I ever think that was what I wanted?" I would look at the Christians living their lives and I would think "I used to think that was the boring part but that is wonderful. I want to be there and I want that. Someone tell me how to get it." God says to just let go of that old life. Sometimes that means letting go of friends because bad company corrupts good morals. You cannot run with the people you used to run with. If they pull you away from God, you do not want them. You might say "I don't have any friends then because all of my friends do not like God." God can give you new friends that are 100 times better than your old friends.

If you have a job and you know that God does not want you working in that place, it does not produce good character, then you are going to have to quit and get another job. Do you understand what I am saying? You cannot get good character just by reading the Bible and praying. It would be great if you could. Those things can guide you, but other things influence you such as who you run around with, where you work, what is going on, your thoughts, the movies you watch, the books you read, and what you see on the computer. Does God not want you to have fun? Does He want you working on your character all of the time? It is not that. God loves life more than you do. Instead, he just wants you to realize life is about more than just being complacent, nothing going on.

God's ultimate goal for you is not comfort. It is character development. They usually do not go very much hand in hand. Becoming like Christ does not mean you become a robot of God and lose your personality. God made your personality. God made you like you are. We are all different but God likes us. He likes us just like we are. He fashioned us into what we are. I have tried to change. I have tried to be someone that I was not. It does not work at all. You see someone who is a wonderful Christian and you think they are so far above you. You might want to be like them. Then you take on their personality and maybe you are very demure and try to be holy. I am a fun-loving, laughing, telling funny stories, teasing person. I am a very serious person, too. I can be both. That is who God made me to be and He can use me like that as long as my character is strong. If I have weak character, God cannot use me. He cannot use you because under the test of what would be going on you would fail. Your character would hold you back.

I talk about my church a lot because I love my church and I have learned a lot in it. One thing our pastor has said is, "When I am hiring someone, I would rather hire someone who has good character rather than being very talented. I think I can teach them how to do what we want them to do. I can't do anything about their character." A man and his wife were in the ministry and his wife's parents were in the ministry,

too. The man's daughter was getting married. The mother was talking to her father. He asked her "Which do you think is better for her to marry – a person with good character or a good Christian?" The mother knew her father was a pastor so why would he ask a question like that. He said, "You want the person with good character." A person's Christianity can come and go, unfortunately. Good character cannot. It stays with you all of your life. If you build your character carefully, you will be able to avoid traps and disaster. You will be able to be a person that God can promote higher and higher. God wants to bless you abundantly. Do you know that? Do you know that the true Christian life is the abundant life? It is wonderful and God wants you to have it but He wants you to be able to handle it in such a way that you do not have that disaster we see happening to people. You have to let go of your old ways to do that.

I have had a lot of different ministries. In 1988 I was getting ready to do something. I did not know what it was, but I knew something was coming. It turned out to be the head of a women's ministry of a 6,000 member church. I did not know that, but I could tell something was coming. Have you ever prayed a prayer and wondered why you prayed it? I was sitting in church one time and started thinking about some character flaws I had. I said, "Lord, I have this and this and this in my life that are weak. Would you strengthen my character? Would you strengthen these things in my life where I will be very, very strong in them?" I did not know how long it would take, but I knew it needed to be done. It took two years. You would think it would not take that long, but for me it did. God tested me. He did not test me because He did not know how I was going to act. He already knew that because He knows everything. The teacher gives the pupil the test so the pupil can see where he is. The teacher does not need to know. If the teacher is a good teacher, the teacher knows where the students are in their abilities. The test shows the student where the student is. It took about two years and I thought it was taking a very long time. At the end of the two years, I did not struggle with those issues anymore. In Ephesians 6, the Bible says "Fight to the finish." That about wraps it up. God is strong and He wants you strong.

We have already read Ephesians 4:22 but I want you to read it again. "Since then we do not have the excuse of ignorance. Everything, and I do mean everything, connected with the old way of life has to go. It is rotten through and through. Get rid of it and then take on an entirely new way of life, a God fashioned life." It is talking about a changed life. What were the disciples like before Jesus and what were they like after Jesus? They were business people, working people, common people, and people that had some kind of interest in God. They had ways that they needed to be changed and grown up. By being around Jesus, they were. When my church got started 25 years ago, it was a charismatic church and we were all so excited about finding out about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, being baptized in the Holy Spirit, the benefits of speaking in tongues and that was a wonderful thing, not a weird thing, and seeing God heal people. We were so excited. We could not wait to get to church every Sunday. A man came along and served as the pastor of our church for only two years. This man is now the overseer of Betty Swann Ministries. As the pastor of our church, he did such a powerfully strong work in the lives of those attending that church. After he left, it seemed that he had been there 10 years because of the work he did. He was a person who was really strong in character. He had a lady come in the church and she said, "God has told me to come here and y'all will give me money to pay my bills." He said, "Did God tell you that I am not supposed to get my salary and I am supposed to give it all to you?" He could read through the woman and tell that she was trying to get something for nothing. She was not sincerely seeking God, she was trying to get some money.

This man developed the character in everyone around him. He challenged everyone. You felt, "I have to shape up. I am not doing it right." You have to let the Holy Spirit change your way of thinking. The Holy Spirit will do it in you. In Romans 12:2, the Bible says, "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 learn to know God's will for you which is good and pleasing and perfect." When the Holy Spirit changes you, it is a wonderful thing. Let at Ephesians 4:23. "Let the Spirit change your way of thinking to change your life from where it is now and to do that you have to change first your way of thinking, then your actions. As a man thinketh, so is he."

You have to change the way you think. How do you do that? You do it by reading the Word, by being around Christians who are doing it the right way, by reading books about people you admire and examining their lives. For things to change, you are going to have to change. If you keep on doing it the way you always have, you are going to keep on getting what has always happened. It is not going to change. For things to change, you have to change. You have to stop thinking immature thoughts and

acting in immature ways that are self-centered and self-seeking. I see women in their 50s still pouting when they do not get their way or someone says something they do not like, or they will not do it the way that woman thinks it should be done. She goes into the bedroom, slams the door and does not come out for two hours. Is that good character? No, it is not. Is it hurting her? Yes. Are people afraid to talk to her about it? Yes. It is like walking on eggshells to talk to her about it. For things to change, you are going to have to see yourself like you really are. Ask God to show you, and then do not panic when He shows you. Just pick some things and say "Lord, which ones do you want to work on? Let's work on these." You have to form new habits. You cannot act your old way. It takes about 21 days to form a habit so you have to really work on it.

If you go through life casually, never really taking charge, you will end up at the end shipwrecked because things will happen in life that you do not know how to respond to and you do not know how to act. There are no short cuts. You need God to do it if you want lasting change. You are not in this by yourself. There are other Christians all over the world that are going through this, too. God is not mad at you.

(Someone is watching this show right now. I think your name is Larry. You thought God was mad at you. You thought, with everything that was happening, "Why is God letting this happen to me. He doesn't love me." God is saying, "Larry, that is not true. I love you enough that I died for you, but I love you too much to leave you like you are. I want you to change." You work with him and you can.)

As a parent, sometimes you feel like your children are not acting like they should act and they are not doing what they should do, and you feel like a failure. Once your children leave your home, character growth is up to them. They have choices to make and they may not make right choices. Your job in raising your children, whether you are a father or a mother, is to help them develop good character and want to do it. It is not easy. They have peer pressure. When they become a certain age, they listen to their friends more than they listen to you. Outside pressures and people try to mold them into the world's image and you are wanting to mold them into the image of Jesus.

Respond to your problems. Respond to the issues. Respond to the character changes. Let God change you. You are going to love it. If you do not know Jesus, ask Him into your heart right now. Just say, "Change my life. Come in. I accept You. You are my Savior."

QUIET TIME QUESTIONS

1. What is the opposite of character development?
2. What character trait helps you to become successful?
3. List some character strengths that will help you in your Christian walk.
4. How does Ephesians 4:22 relate to developing Godly character?
5. What does Godly character allow you accomplish?

To watch the video on COMPLACENCY VERSUS CHARACTER, Pillar Six, Leadership Skills, go to www.bettyswann.com.

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