

## Chapter One

# 1

Principle One: *Humility—choosing to change from the inside out*

# Change your life and it will change you

## The most important decision

I remember it as if it were yesterday. It was the summer of 2000. I was a corporate executive in Southern California for the world's fastest growing fitness company and I had just concluded a phone call with the president of the *Central California division* of our operations. He was generating a year-end report for the board of directors and needed to know how much revenue my area would generate in the last quarter of 2000. Instead of answering his question, I responded, "I need to speak with you about my future with this corporation." He insisted that I drive to the corporate office and meet with him later that day.

As I drove, I reflected on my eight-year career. It was amazing that I had made it this far—a country boy working in corporate America. I had learned well through my dad’s example—long hours and hard work, and I applied them. During the first six years of my career, I received awards, set sales records, received large bonuses and climbed the corporate ladder; I was living the “American dream” (all while in my mid and late twenties). But I wasn’t meeting with the President to talk about future opportunities; I was meeting with him to resign.

This may not have made sense to my friends and colleagues, but to me it made perfect sense. For years I was driven, but for the wrong reasons. Although I felt a sense of purpose, it often left me feeling empty. I was passionate, but for the wrong things. I focused on everything society had to offer, but ultimately I found that it offered little of lasting value. While I had focused on money, status and recognition, I had starved other important areas of my life, including my relationship with God. Due to my misguided focus, my life took many turns for the worse.

Desperate for direction and fulfillment, I began to search the pages of a Bible shelved long ago. As I read, two Scriptures seemed to leap from the pages: “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?” (Luke 9:25), and “...Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 4:7). I realized that I had been looking for fulfillment in all the wrong places. It was then that I finally recommitted my life to Christ. I quickly learned that **before meaningful, lasting change can occur on the outside, it first must occur on the inside**. We cannot successfully change actions and circumstances without first changing the inner condition of our heart—we must humbly *choose to change from the inside out*. Just as investing in

## Chapter Two

# 2

### Principle Two: *Acquire knowledge*

# What you don't know “can” hurt you

As stated earlier, many of my teen years and early twenties were spent working for our family's construction company. One morning while I was digging a trench with a backhoe, I broke an existing water line. Within minutes, the trench filled with water. I rushed to shut off the valve, but the handle appeared broken. I struggled to close it with a screwdriver, a pair of pliers and other wrenching tools, but nothing worked. Hesitantly, I called my dad to tell him that I couldn't stop hundreds of gallons of water from pouring into the street. When he arrived, clearly frustrated, he reached into his truck and grabbed

a long pole with a special socket attached. As he placed the socket on the “broken valve” and turned it; the water stopped immediately. He reminded me, not so patiently, of his words just weeks prior. He had instructed me to keep the special wrench with me at all times for emergencies like this.

I learned two important lessons. First, I received proper instruction, but I failed to listen to my father’s advice. Had I used the right tool, the damage, if any, would have been minimal. In the same way, **biblical principles and godly wisdom are available to us, but it’s our choice whether we use them or not.** I thought I had other options, the pliers, screwdriver and other tools seemed as if they would work; I felt I could manage without the water-meter wrench, but my failure to heed my father’s advice cost us the price of the job. In the same way, we often think of “our way” as best and God’s principles as optional when, in fact, the opposite is true: God’s directives are essential and absolute.

Second, I realized that I could not fix the problem alone and called for my father’s help. Likewise, we all encounter problems, and need to ask for help even when problems are self-created. Calling on our Heavenly Father should be the first resort, not the last. Had I called my father first—or listened initially—the damage would have been considerably less. In the same way, heed the *right* advice and look to the *right* source for help in building a foundation of knowledge in your life.

### *Timeless tips*

Although the entire Bible provides knowledge, wisdom and guidance for difficult decisions, the following pages contain timeless tips from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs

## Chapter Three

# 3

Principle Three: *Discipline vs. regret*

# Finding Purpose

## Understanding the will of God

In the years preceding my decision to re-commit my life to Christ, I was restless and unhappy. I thought that a move would help; therefore, I would often spend time in the mountains or at the beach, but the void never left. It would be years later before I would understand why I lacked fulfillment and a genuine passion for life.

We were designed to fellowship with God, to do His will and to obey His principles. Walking outside of this plan often brings discouragement and disappointment. Searching

for purpose affects every area of life. It can determine where we'll live, whom we'll marry, where we'll work and how we'll spend our time. Unfortunately, many search for purpose and meaning in material possessions, hobbies and other things that do not hold eternal value. If you believe that materially successful people are happy, think again. Most of us understand that money can buy the best mattress, but it can't guarantee sleep. Why do millionaires, movie stars and top entertainers often turn to spirituality, drugs and alcohol for the answers if success satisfies? Many discover that money, fame and recognition are not the answers. CEO's, presidents and vice presidents frequently admit that they are happy when they reach production goals, but very unhappy when under budget, *largely because they measure happiness by what's happening to them*. When things go well, they're happy, when things go poorly, they're un-happy. I'm not suggesting that we shouldn't be productive, but if happiness is measured by our circumstances, it's going to be a very rough road.

One of the happiest times in my life, for example, was when I went from running multiple fitness locations to making much less money digging ditches, writing and managing nothing but my daily life. During this transition, I quickly learned that **the more I owned, the more owned me**. Goals, dreams and aspirations are God's desire for our lives, but when these things are based on self-gratification, we encounter problems emotionally, physically and spiritually.

Proverbs 13:12 states, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life." In other words, when our godly desires are fulfilled, it brings joy to our lives. The goal then is to align our desires with God's. God wants us to experience a fulfilled and abundant life, but we must look to the right source. Abundant

## Chapter Four

# 4

### Principle Four: *Preparation*

# The source of our strength comes from the food we choose

There was a young man who was determined to find help for his troubled life. After years of frustration and regret, he was deeply discouraged and despondent. He had worked several years and had nothing to show for it. He had been easily influenced, and most of his friends were major contributors to his negative attitude. As a result, his mind was constantly filled with depressing thoughts.

The young man was determined to find help. He walked to a neighboring church and found a pastor at work in his study. He told the pastor that he was a Christian but that he

had a difficult life. He wanted to make better choices, but he couldn't seem to stay on track.

The young man continued, "It's as if I have two dogs constantly battling within me. One dog is evil and negative, while the other is good and positive!" He continued to say that the battles were long and very difficult; they drained him emotionally and mentally to the point of exhaustion. He explained further that he couldn't seem to make the right choices in life.

Without a moment's thought, the pastor asked the young man, "Which dog wins the battle?" Looking a bit confused, the young man said, "The constant battle leaves me depressed and negative, and I often look for something to kill the pain. Isn't it obvious that the evil dog wins?" The pastor looked knowingly at the young man and wisely said, "Then that's the dog you feed the most! *If you want to experience victory, you need to starve that dog to death!*"

He realized, as should we, that *the source of our strength comes from the food we choose—what we feed grows, and what grows becomes the dominating force within our lives*. In order to win the battle in our mind, we need more of Christ and less of the world living within us. One or the other will prevail but it's up to us how much we allow in. If we attend church sporadically, open the Bible on Holidays and pray only when we are in need, it will not be enough to overcome the constant bombardment of outside influence. Again, it's our choice what we choose to feed.

## Chapter Five

# 5

### Principle Five: Wisdom—*Choose wisely*

## Consider the results

One way to gauge wisdom, or good judgment, is to consider the results. In Matthew 11:19, the Jewish people were having difficulty grasping the unexpected nature of Jesus' ministry. Many alleged that John the Baptist, the one chosen to prepare the way for Jesus, was demon-possessed and that Jesus was a glutton and drunkard. Instead of arguing with them, Jesus made this statement "...But wisdom is shown to be right by what results from it" (NLT). Godly wisdom bears righteous fruit: people received healing and deliverance, and many accepted Christ as their Savior. This was obviously not the work

of demons, drunkards or gluttons. Jesus encouraged them to look at the end result and not at how things appeared.

Again, we gauge good judgment by considering the outcome. Do your choices produce the results you want? If not, consider who's leading you—God's Word or the cultural value system and mindset. Does our present society promote good judgment and/or produce good outcomes? Is society building godly leaders and developing admirable character? Let's take a look...

*All too often...*

Daily Bible reading and prayer is called fanatical while working twelve hours a day is called success.

Talking, chewing gum and making noise were the top three public school problems in the early sixties. Currently, rape, robbery and assault lead the list.

We build our career and neglect our marriage.

Corporate executives are praised and family men frowned upon.

We protest war but say little about abortion.

We can act out murder, adultery and arson while playing a video game and call it "healthy" entertainment.

We've increased our wealth, but decreased our values.

We take better care of our cars than our bodies.

We search the heavens for answers and turn from the One who created them.

Pride is considered an asset and humility a liability.

We know more about our favorite athletes than our wives and our children.

We'd rather be seen leaving a bar than leaving a church.

Televisions break from over-use while Bibles become dusty.

We raise our hands and praise our favorite team, yet appear handcuffed in church.

## Chapter Six

# 6

### Principle Six: *Prioritizing*

# Putting first things first

When Matt was just four years old, his parents introduced him to a new friend. He was excited because he had someone to play with, and they were happy because their friend could baby-sit when they were busy.

As the years went by, Matt and his friend spent countless hours together playing video games and watching sports. In time, things changed. His friend began to use profanity and show disrespect to his family. Although his mother and father disapproved, what could they do? His friend was like a family member now. He taught Matt how to dress, how to act and even how to treat others; and although his parents wouldn't admit it, he taught them a thing or two as well. He promoted the importance of career and

money; he encouraged Matt's mom to pursue her dreams outside the home, and his father to continue his pursuit of financial success. Sadly enough, they listened to his advice; as a result, Matt rarely saw his parents.

Once Matt reached his teen years, his friend's influence was obvious. Matt spent more time with him than with his family. Since Matt's dad was always gone, his friend taught him how to be a father and a husband, and since his mom was busy most of the time, he offered to teach Matt about women, and how to treat them.

When Matt was fourteen, his friend introduced him to sex. He explained how it wasn't a bad thing; everybody was doing it, even with same sex partners. At this point, Matt's parents became upset and warned Matt not to see his friend again, but he couldn't end the relationship—he'd been his close companion for the past decade. Surprisingly, Matt's parents allowed his friend to continue to live in their home. After all, they enjoyed his company and didn't really want to see him leave—he was a great entertainer.

During the years that followed, Matt's friend introduced him to alcohol, drugs and pornography, and again assured him that everyone was doing it. Matt could see his friend's point; he showed him literally thousands of people who agreed with this lifestyle.

When Matt grew older, he looked back over the years and saw that the friendship should never have continued. He believed that his friend's influence encouraged his father's affair, his mom's problem with alcohol and it may have ultimately contributed to their divorce. His friend's impact on his life was just as devastating.

Today, with full knowledge of the damage done, Matt still allows his friend to live with him, and amazingly, he still listens to his advice. Matt's friend has a name: it's *television*.

## Chapter Seven

# 7

### Principle Seven: *Character*

# Character—a lifetime to build; seconds to destroy

Building has been booming in Southern California for as long as I can remember, and contractors are often very careful in preparing the ground and laying the foundation before a building is constructed.

Although, the cost to build a strong foundation is expensive, a weak foundation could cost more. Without proper support, a structure may not be sound and could present future problems. Developers hire engineers, appoint a contractor, pay fees to the city, develop a

set of plans and use heavy equipment to move tons of dirt, all to prepare the foundation. In the same way, our character provides the foundation on which we build our lives.

Many spend years rebuilding simply because their foundation is weak. Again, *a strong foundation will cost you something, but a weak foundation may cost you everything*. Companies who neglect the foundation can, in the end, spend millions of dollars reinforcing, restoring and rebuilding. In the same way, we may spend years rebuilding and restoring our lives if we neglect our foundation.

It's unfortunate that society focuses largely on external factors such as looks, money, position or status. These superficial values have left our nation in a moral, and a spiritual crisis. It's little wonder that godly character is declining in America—our foundation as a nation, and as individuals, has slowly deteriorated.

Since recommitting my life to Christ, one of my prayers has been to continually focus on character development, but I had no idea what I was asking. Imagine a man entering the Marine Corps; he knows he wants to be a Marine but has no idea what to expect. The countless hours of training, the ongoing testing and the discipline to remain committed eventually pay off and he graduates a Marine. Was the process easy? Hardly! It was the most difficult training he'd ever faced. One doesn't merely attend boot camp for a few days, take a test and go home; the process is rigorous and intense. Likewise, when God develops character, He does so to meet the challenges ahead and to prepare us for life.

We are also tested, trained and disciplined, but the rewards far outweigh the struggles. How do we develop patience if we're not tested? How do we develop forgiveness if we are never wronged? How do we learn to trust God if we're never in need? **Trying times are often intended to build us up not break us down.** James 1:2-4 states, "My

## Chapter Eight

Divorce—hope for the hurting

# Broken-yet Unbreakable

As a child, I was captured by the stories that my grandfather told about life on the farm in Oklahoma in the mid 1900's. The images I've held are not those of pleasant surroundings and ideal conditions; they're impressions of twelve-hour days spent working the land, wind storms that could devastate a crop, blistered and sunburned skin and poverty unlike most Americans know today. Life, in general, was harder then, but interestingly enough, character seemed much stronger. It was a time when commitment, integrity and honesty stood in place of contracts, disclosures and bylaws. I'm not suggesting that we return to that time in history, but that we learn from the past and strongly encourage those same principles today.

In the past, a life-long commitment and exclusive intimacy in marriage held the family together. It was in that setting that children learned and character developed. Divorce was

rarely an option, and a husband or a wife was considered an asset rather than a liability. Today's culture tends to ask, "What can I get from this relationship?" rather than, "What can I give to this relationship?"

What do you bring into a relationship? Are you willing to develop qualities that support commitment? **Many focus on *finding* the "right" person without first focusing on *becoming* the "right" person.** The principle of *reaping* and *sowing* not only relates to financial success, but it relates to success with others. If one desires to find a trustworthy, honest, committed person, he or she should first offer the same. Unfortunately, marriages, families and other relationships often fail because they embrace values that promote meeting self-centered needs rather than meeting the needs of others.

With millions of American's now classified as divorced and "newly" single, and the countless others who are contemplating divorce, the need to address this topic is unavoidable and necessary. It's been well stated that **life can make us bitter or it can make us better.** Those who do not allow hurt to entrap them can turn brokenness into an unbreakable force, but those shackled by past pain are truly imprisoned by it—*the walls we build to protect us may eventually imprison us.*

How can we undo the emotional pain we experience from failed relationships? First, understand that it's not an external fight—it's an internal struggle. Our minds are battlefields where personal conflicts are either won or lost. God works within our spirits by transmitting His Word into healthy thoughts. I don't mean to discount the deep emotional and psychological pain of failed relationships, but I do want to remind you that God makes provision for all of our needs.

Second, of all the books I've read, the sermons I've heard, the couples I've talked