Accepting Responsibility

Ephesians 5:15

If I were to ask you tonight, "What's your greatest ability?" **I wonder what some of you would say.** You might say, "I am good at mechanics ... math ... sewing ... surfing ... channel surfing."

But I want to suggest to you tonight that your greatest *ability* is *responsibility*. *Responsibility* **is the *ability* to respond to life.** It is one of the greatest gifts that God has given you. **God created you and made you a human being.** **What makes you a human is the ability to choose your response to life.** You can respond in many different ways to stress, problems, crises, opportunities, relationships. **These all choices you must make.**

There are many things in life that we have no choice in. **You did not choose where you were born or when you were born and all those different things.** You do not choose a lot of the circumstances and events that happen to you. **But you do have the freedom to chose how you act to life.** **You do have the freedom to chose 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 are responsible.**

Justice Lewis Brandais, once said, "Responsibility is the great developer." **It builds your character.** **It is what helps you grow.** Churchill called it, "The price of greatness." **If you want to do something great with your life you have to become a responsible person.**

Tonight we going to talk about personal responsibility. **This is the foundation, ground zero, the bottom line.** If you do not get this one, you may as well forget the rest of the series because you can not

==build any of the other values into your life if you do not personally accept responsibility for your choices, your character, and your values.==

It is very obvious that in the last fifty years there has been a dramatic decline in the acceptance of personal responsibility in our society. **Nobody wants to accept responsibility for anything anymore.** ==In fact, we want to accuse and excuse.== **We want to accuse other people - it is all their fault - and we want to excuse ourselves -- it is not my fault.** **We live in this blaming and accusing and excusing society where nobody wants to own up to anything.**

What causes that? **What has happened in our society?**

In the introduction of this study we said that our *beliefs* determine our *behavio*r and our *behavior* determines what *we become* and what *our society becomes*. **We talked about the ideas of *individualism* and *secularism* and *relativism* and how that has influenced our value system.**

There are three values that are very prevalent today. **Three beliefs that are the antithesis of personal responsibility: The "rights" mentality, the "victim" mentality, the "entitlement" mentality.**

==The *rights mentality* basically goes like this:== "I have my rights! and that is all I am interested in." **Would you agree that today our society is obsessed with personal rights?** ==John Leo from *U.S. News and World Report* said,== "Today American politics is awash in `rights' talk. We have criminal rights, computer rights, animal rights, children's rights, victim's rights, abortion rights, housing rights, privacy rights, the right to know the sex of a fetus, the right to own an AK 47 for hunting purposes, the right to not be tested for aides and the right to not inform anybody if we have been infected. Recently we have acquired the right to die. And according to some rather imaginative theorists a damaged fetus also has the right not to be born. Mental patients used to have the right to

treatment but now that they have been dumped on the streets, and they have an ACLU protected right to no treatment at all. Our culture has reached the point where the obsession with individual rights is making it hard for us to think socially." **He suggests that along with our Bill of Rights that we really need a Bill of Responsibilities.** I want to say, "John, we already have one. It is called the Ten Commandments."

We hear a lot today about rights and we do not hear very much about responsibilities. We hear a lot about entitlement; we do not hear much about obligations. We hear a lot about myself, but we do not hear a lot about what it does to other people. **We certainly hear a whole lot more about choice than we hear about commitment.**

Tonight, as we continue this series on "Life Values," I want us to look at this value, Why do I need to be a person of responsibility?

The second is what I call the *victim mentality*. The victim mentality basically goes like this. "None of my problems are my fault. In fact, they are all your fault." **We blame. You spell blame, *b-lame*. Every time you blame somebody else for the unhappiness in your life, you are being lame.**

We are a nation of victims. **None of it is my fault.** It is every body else's fault. **I have my rights.**

Then comes the third antithesis to personal responsibility. That is the "entitlement" mentality. The entitlement mentality basically says, "I deserve it. The world owes me a living." **This is kind of a strange combination that came about from a generation of baby boomers (all 76 million of them) who are all raised on the second most popular book ever sold, Dr. Benjamin Spock's Baby Book.** In that book it basically says, "Leave the little tyrant alone. If he wants to throw Jell-O around the living room, go ahead. You do not want to harm his creativity." A whole generation grew up not thinking, "I am my brother's keeper." They are not even thinking, "I am my own keeper." Rather,

the mentality is, "You ought to take care of me!" Couple that with the rapid expansion of government intervention in the last 40 years which basically says, "We will take care of you from cradle to grave" and we have people saying, "I have a right not to work," so therefore you should pay me to not work. This has produced what *Time* magazine calls, "Busy Bodies and Cry Babies -- What is happening to the American character?" Inside it says, "A nation of finger pointers. Twin malformations are cropping up in American character. A nasty intolerance and a desire to blame everyone else for everything else."

That is the kind of world we live in that says, "I am not responsible for anything. It is not my fault."

In stark contrast to that, notice what the Bible says, Ephesians 5, "Live life with a sense of responsibility, not as those who don't know the meaning of life, but as those who do." Notice the term "sense of responsibility." **God says you are 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 have figured it out.** Why did God put me here?

On the other hand, if you are living an *irresponsible* life, it just means one thing. You do not know the meaning of life. You do not know your purpose. **You do not know why God put you on this planet in the first place.** Therefore the key to living a more responsible life is to figure out "Why am I here? What did God put me on this earth for?" The first thing we have to deal with is, "Why should I live a responsible life?" **There are three reasons we should live a responsible life:**

1. **Because God is *watching me*.** The Bible says this in the book of Hebrews, "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."

God sees it all and God is going to judge us one day and evaluate our lives on how did we live. If you do not get anything else that I say tonight, get this: Life is a test of responsibility. That is why you are going through all this. **God planned you, thought you up, put you on earth and He is testing your responsibility.** Whether you live 60, 70, 80, 90, 100 years that is simply a little millimeter on the yardstick of eternity. When you die, that is not the end of you. **You are 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 influences your eternity. You will spend far more time on that side of death than on this side.

What is going on in this 50-100 years we live here on earth? This is the warm-up act for eternity. This is the dress rehearsal. **This is where you get the parts right.** Right now, you are in preschool. God is testing your responsibility for what is going to happen later on. **God put you on this earth primarily for two reasons: one, to get to know Him personally through His son Jesus Christ, and two, to develop character.** To become more like God is in character, to develop the values and the responsibility behind all of that. That is the foundation. If you are not responsible you can not build the values.

Why is God so interested in my character? God could not care less about your achievements. What he is interested in is your character. **God could not care less about your bank account.** What He is interested in is your character. Why? **Because it is the only thing you are going to take with you when you die.** You are not taking anything else. You did not come into this world with anything. **I have been there at the birth of all three of my kids and none of them came in chomping a cigar or holding the keys to a Cadillac or anything else.** They came in totally naked with nothing. When you die you are going to die and leave it all behind. **Everything you have here -- all your material possessions -- are really just on loan to you for 60, 80, 90 years.** They are not really yours. You just get to use them, then you pass them on to somebody else. **But the one thing you will take with you is your *character*.** God is evaluating, Are you

responsible? and the Bible says that in eternity we will be rewarded according to our responsibility and our relationship to Christ here on earth. Once you have 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. **He put you in the United States.** He has given you certain opportunities. These are all things He has given you. He expects a return on His investment.

Notice what the Bible says, "Each of us will have to give a personal account to God."
Daniel Webster once said, "The most important idea I ever thought was the day I realized that I am personally and individually accountable to God for how I lived."

2. **Because others are *affected by my life*.** None of us lives to ourselves alone, we are all interdependent. We are not independent or dependent but interdependent on each other. 1 Corinthians tells us, "People should be concerned about others and not just about themselves."

Back in the 60's during the hippie movement there used to be these beautiful psychedelic posters. One of them said something like this; "I was not put on this planet to live up to your expectations and you were not put on this planet to live up to my expectations so let me do my thing and you do your thing and if perchance we happen to meet that's groovy!" We do not say it in such a corny way any more but the attitude is still around. It goes like this (Billy Joel song): "I don't care what they say! This is my life." Or as that great theologian Sammy Davis, Jr. said, "I've got to be me!" Or his theological partner Sinatra, "I did it my way!" **The basic idea behind these type of songs are I live my life the way I want to and what is it to you?** If it does not hurt you or you do not know about it, who cares? It is my life and it does not matter what I do because it does not affect you.

The problem is, you are wrong. Every decision you make affects somebody else -even the secret ones. It changes you and you then influence other people by the changes in your life. **You may not see the visible results but every choice you make influences somebody else and every time you are irresponsible it hurts somebody else.** We are all on this same planet.

When somebody in your family has a problem it is not just their problem; it is the family's problem. It influences everybody in the family. Whether the kid's on drugs or the dad's under stress, it affects everybody in the family. **There is no such thing as a non-affecting decision.** You talk all the time with your mate, influence your family, parents, kids, brothers, sisters, moms, dads, husbands, wives. The choices you make influences your friends. **They influence the people in your neighborhood.** They influence friends at church. They influence society at large in major and minor ways. We are all inter connected because we are on this planet together.

You need to be responsible because God is watching and because other people are affected. There is a third reason, a positive point.

3. **I need to be responsible because God *rewards it*.** And boy, does He reward it! Deuteronomy 28:2 says, "You will experience all of God's blessings if you obey the Lord." Notice the word "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.**

Jesus says, "To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given." **If you use your *influence* well, you become more influential.** If you use your *possessions* well, God will provide more of them. Why should God give you more money when you are not

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responsible with the finances you have right now? **He does not have any obligation to help you when you are living irresponsibly in that area or any other area.** But on the other hand, He says, "If you will be responsible I will bless you in ways you can't imagine."