



How God Builds Your Character

By Rick Warren

Did you know that God uses a very predictable process to build your character? I call this process the "Six Phases of Faith." If you don't understand this process, you'll get discouraged when problems arise. You'll wonder, "Why is this happening to me?" But if you understand and cooperate with what God is doing in your life, your ministry, your faith - like a muscle that is stretched - will develop great strength.

Phase 1: A dream

God gives you a dream - an idea, goal, or ambition. Every great accomplishment first begins as a God-given dream in someone's mind. "God is able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of - infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, or hopes." (Eph. 3:20 LB)

Phase 2: A decision

A dream is worthless until you decide to do something about it. For every 10 dreamers, there's only one decision-maker.

This is the moment of truth where you decide to invest your time, money, energy, and reputation and to let go of security. If you want to walk on water - you must get out of the boat! "You must believe and not doubt ... a double-minded man is unstable in all he does." (James 1:6, 8 GN)

Phase 3: A delay

There is always a time lapse before your dream becomes reality. God uses this waiting period to teach us to trust him.

Remember, a delay is not a denial. Maturity is understanding the difference between "no" and "not yet." God says, "These things I plan won't happen right away. Slowly, steadily, surely, the time approaches when the vision will be fulfilled. If it seems slow, do not despair, for these things will surely come to pass. Just be patient! They will not be overdue a single day!" (Hab. 2:3 LB)

Phase 4: A difficulty

Now the problems start popping up. The two most common types are critics and circumstances. Don't worry. It's all a part of God's plan. "At the present you may be temporarily harassed by all kinds of trials. This is no accident - it happens to prove your faith, which is infinitely more valuable than gold." (1 Peter 1:6-7 Ph)

Phase 5: A dead end!

Your situation will deteriorate from difficult to impossible. You are backed into a corner, you reach the end of your rope; it looks hopeless. Congratulations! You are on the edge of a miracle.

Trust God. "At that time we were completely overwhelmed ... in fact we told ourselves that this was the end. Yet we now believe we had this sense of impending disaster so that we might learn to trust, not in ourselves but in God who can raise the dead." (2 Cor. 1:8-9 Ph)

Phase 6: A deliverance

God provides a supernatural answer. Miraculously, things fall into place! God loves to turn crucifixions into resurrections so you can see his greatness. "I expect the Lord to deliver me once again so I will see his goodness to me" (Ps. 27:13)



Bad Theology Equals Bad Marriage

By Mark Gungor, author of **Laugh Your Way To A Better Marriage**

There is line of thinking that began in American culture during the hippy movement of the 1960's and has continued to grow in popularity until it proliferated even Christianity. I'm referring to the concept of "unconditional love".

Over and over we hear people talking about how we need to love others "unconditionally" and how others should love us "unconditionally". It also has morphed into the idea that God's love for us is "unconditional". What a bunch of horse manure!

Nowhere in the Bible does it say that love is to be without conditions...in fact, the phrase "unconditional love" isn't even in the Bible. (Not to mention that the Bible is clearly a list of conditions God has for his people.) Funny how Christians are so quick to make such unbiblical ideas and phrases in to pillars of the faith!

The other phrase that is repeated over and over again until it, too, has become accepted "doctrine" is "God loves you just the way you are." Wrong!! God loves you in spite of the way you are!

He loves you when you are broken and in sin. He loves you when your life is a disaster, if you've committed adultery, are lost in addictions, or cheating and lying up a storm. It's not that God doesn't love you, he does... but he expects you to change.

We need to repent, to grow, to mature as Christians. But when people mistakenly say, "God loves you just the way you are", what is either spoken or implied is the caveat that you don't have to change.

Words have meaning and by using this oft-repeated phrase, we've created a generation of Christians who do nothing to please God, simply because they don't think they have to. They think that God is there to please them. Most think, "I said the prayer. I'm covered." But they are still committing adultery, looking at porn, cheating, lying, and not going to church, or giving of their time or money. After all, they believe, "It doesn't matter what I do...God loves me unconditionally...just the way I am." It's broken theology.

This misguided concept of Christianity is the very reason why so many marriages stink. Quite simply, people are taking their bad theology into their marriages, where they think there are no requirements, no consequences, and no conditions. They expect that the same "unconditional love" that they mistakenly believe God has for them applies in their marital relationship too. The worst marriages on earth are those that one or both spouses buy into this broken thinking.



Why you need Family Meetings

By Kimberly L. Keith

When we were children, families shared mealtimes, leisurely summer evenings on the patio, weekly worship services, and long car trips to grandmother's house. Families didn't need meetings because they hashed out mutual concerns around the dinner table. But, with both parents working and children participating in more structured activities than ever before, hectic schedules are squeezing out the household rituals which bonded past generations. Togetherness is not something today's families can take for granted.

If we as parents want to pass on our values and raise strong, confident children, we have to be more deliberate about our parenting. Holding family meetings is one of the quickest, easiest ways to improve communication and build character within our families. These gatherings can require as little as 15 minutes each week, and **Our Family Meeting Book** makes planning the agendas simple and fun.

In a family meeting, everyone's opinion-even the youngest child's-is respected and heard. Kids learn to assert themselves, communicate their feelings, listen to others' viewpoints, and solve problems. Everyone airs frustrations and

shares dreams in a setting that is supportive and not emotionally charged. What's more, since every family member gets input into decision-making, they are more likely to embrace the resulting policies and expectations.

Family meetings also provide a practical way for families to coordinate busy schedules, distribute allowances, accomplish chores, plan menus, and more. You don't have to be organizationally challenged to be overwhelmed by today's hectic pace! Even a very organized parent will find family meetings helpful.

How To Hold a Family Meeting.

Time Required: 30 minutes

Here's How:

1. Parents decide together to begin holding family meetings.
2. Tell children that you will begin holding family meetings to talk about what's going on in everyone's life.
3. Let everyone decide together when and where to hold meetings.
4. Mom and Dad should be the co-moderators for meetings at the beginning. Share the moderator duties with children as you go along.

5. At the first meeting remind everyone to contribute to the conversation, listen to others, and be supportive not critical.

6. Use the "Go Around" method. Go around the circle giving each family member the opportunity to respond to the topic.

7. Go Around Topic 1 - Something that made you feel good this week.

8. Parents offer praise, encouragement, and support for the good things that each person mentions.

9. Go Around Topic 2 - Something that bothered you this week.

10. Parents listen for and acknowledge the feelings that are expressed, ask open-ended questions to clarify the problem, then brainstorm solutions with the entire family.

11. Go Around Topic 3 - Something that you want to work on or accomplish next week.

12. Parents model making an action plan and help children set a specific goal to continue positive experiences or address problems identified this week.

13. Go Around Topic 4 - Your schedule for the week. What meetings, appointments, tests, special events or projects you have this week.

14. Parents identify any scheduling conflicts and individual responsibilities necessitated by the week's schedule. Plan your week. Teach good time management.

Tips:

1. Set a scheduled time for meetings, post it where everyone will see, and keep the time. If parents are committed to the project, it will have more impact.
2. Make the meetings fun too. Tell a story or a joke, play games, have contests.

Our Family Meeting Book: *Fun and Easy Ways to Manage Time, Build Communication, and Share Responsibility Week by Week* by Kimberly L. Keith

Compliments of the District 1 Marriage and Family Ministry, FFWPU

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