

Remaking Your Character through Grace-Filled Coaching

Spiritual transformation is essential, not optional for Christ-followers.

Spiritual transformation is a process, not an event.

Spiritual transformation is God's work, but requires my participation.

John Ortberg, pastor, author

YOUR PERSONAL, VIRTUAL COACH

Have you ever wished that there was such a thing as a “life makeover,” similar to when a salon fusses over your hair or a personal shopper over your wardrobe, and you come away transformed? I wish getting a life makeover were as painless as those times when I’ve dabbled in the surface-level, cosmetic approach to changing my outward appearance. Whether it was for a milestone birthday or for a family portrait, I must admit that I have found makeovers to be a lot of fun. In fact, I wish every woman could be treated at least once in her life to such a day of pampering!

I’ve also experienced a minor house remodel during which a fresh coat of paint and some new carpet profoundly changed the look of my home; the improvement was fairly quick and obvious. But there are also deeper renovations, the kind where families are displaced for months as a construction crew repairs a house foundation, removes walls, rewires electricity, or updates the plumbing. These types of changes are much more painstaking, messy, and costly—often emotionally and physically stressful—and they typically require the help of more than one expert.

Shelley Leith (my coauthor) and I have both delved deeply into the concept of remodeling character, or doing a character makeover. For Shelley and her husband, Greg, the approach they have used in raising their five children has been something she would call character-based parenting. They established the character traits they felt their kids needed in order to live as fruitful Christians, then set out to build those traits into them throughout

their years at home. From another angle, Shelley and Greg are speakers for marriage conferences, and they have seen time and time again that the *lack* of strong character traits such as humility, contentment, self-control, patience, or perseverance can drive couples to the brink of divorce.

For me, this matter of character development has become my passion for different reasons. For years I have been a Life Purpose Coach®, helping women discover—to borrow Billy Crystal’s phrase from the movie *City Slickers*—their “one big thing.” I have been interested not only in helping them discover their unique purpose in life, but in creating a life plan to ensure that they leave a legacy. I even wrote a series of books (*Pathway to Purpose*, *Praying for Purpose*, *Conversations on Purpose*, and *Pathway to Purpose Personal Journal*) to help women find their specific, second-half-of-life mission.

Yet, it became evident to me after analyzing my own life patterns and those of my life plan clients for more than a decade, that some of us experience a gap between understanding our God-designed legacy and actually realizing that magnificent purpose. We self-sabotage, succumbing to well-worn patterns of defeat, woundedness, insecurity, unworthiness, or self-centeredness that keep us from carrying out God’s best intentions for our lives.

You can know everything there is to know about yourself, your potential, and your goals, but if you are hesitant about developing some of the essential character qualities it takes to fulfill your godly dreams (such as humility, generosity, and confidence), you’ll get derailed from your life’s calling at every turn. I began to see that my coaching had to go further. Thus, *Character Makeover* was born. In this book, I become your personal, virtual coach—taking you on a forty-day adventure of deepening your character as you collaborate with God, role models, and myself . . . preparing you to fulfill your legacy.

Pat Summitt of the University of Tennessee is the all-time winningest college basketball coach. Her 900-plus victories make her the only coach, male or female, to surpass the previous record of 900 wins. A college coach likely dreams about many things: coaching a national championship team, coaching an Olympic team, coaching players who become All-Americans and pros, being elected to the Hall of Fame. Summitt has achieved all of these pinnacles—in some cases, multiple times! In her book *Reach for the Summit* (Broadway Books, 1998), she has this to say about the role of coaching:

Our players understand that all I’m trying to do is help them. They want to win a national championship. Well, I’m going to do everything I can to see to it. . . . Their long-term, repetitive success is a matter of building

a principled system and sticking to it. Principles are anchors; without them you will drift.

That sums up the essence of this book. Are you reaching for a personal dream—your “national championship,” if you will? *Character Makeover* will coach you to realize your dreams by “building a principled system and sticking to it.” Without character, as Summitt says, “you will drift,” and drifters don’t reach their goals!

Frankly, I’ll be a good Character Coach for you, because I have been terribly hard on myself until the last six or seven years, and I distinctly remember what it was like to suffer from the “I’m not good enough” syndrome. You can trust that I now fully realize what a privilege it is to walk alongside you on this *grace-filled* (imagine that word underlined three times!) journey toward truth in your own life. This must be an exercise into newness and joy, not one that causes you to feel defeated. The latter would break my heart to hear. Life has enough struggles without me coming along and increasing your stress and guilt about living a holier life!

What you *do* need from me is to walk beside you and show you how character development will be the very thing that will carry you on angel’s wings during the toughest seasons of your life. My commitment to you is that, with the remembrance of the grace and mercy of God shining brightly on my own muddled life choices, I will gently coach you, not judge you or push you beyond what you are able to bear.

Here are some important things we know up front: God cares more about the character we bring to our life mission than he does about our ministry’s strategic plan. He cares more about our Christlike integrity than our kingdom-building productivity. He wants our honesty in all areas of our lives more than our accomplishments for him. In his Holy Book, learning to be holy is the bottom line (1 Peter 1:15–16). We who dream of doing something outrageously tremendous for the Lord are held to a higher standard by God Almighty himself. We, who have a heart for changed lives, cannot intentionally lead misguided lives. We must do all we can to become the leaders God is asking us to be in our homes, communities, churches, schools, ministries, and vocations.

CHARACTER VS. STRONGHOLDS

With literally dozens of character qualities to choose from, you may wonder why I selected the eight qualities you’ll find in this book: *humility*,

confidence, courage, self-control, patience, contentment, generosity, and perseverance. My choice has to do with the flipside of these very qualities, what the New Testament (2 Corinthians 10:4) refers to as strongholds.

What Are Strongholds?

The term *strongholds* refers to areas where our enemy, Satan, has set up camp and dug in, creating for himself a fortress from which he launches attacks and tries to destroy us. These are the places where we repeatedly experience discouragement, distress, defeat, and damage. These are the monsters that keep us from our God-given dreams.

The eight character qualities I've chosen address the most prevalent strongholds I see in women today. As you read through the following annotated list of character traits and strongholds, ask yourself, "Do I have any of these good qualities or opposite rough edges in my life? Am I 'soaring on wings like eagles' (Isaiah 40:31), or am I living an unfulfilled, wounded life, being held back by one of these forces?" I firmly believe when you and I are deliberate about strengthening these particular character qualities in our lives, the related, destructive strongholds are transformed into areas of victory.

You'll note that half of these character qualities are exhibited inwardly, and half are expressed more outwardly. And they also involve five different relationships which definitively and repeatedly affect the outcome of our life purpose:

Relationship to God

1. **Humility** drives at the *inner* strongholds of pride, self-centeredness, judgmentalism, and—believe it or not—worthlessness. (By the way, humility is foundational; if we don't start with humility, any work we do in other areas of character could make us prideful!)

Relationship to Ourselves

2. **Confidence** is an *inner* quality that speaks to strongholds of insecurity, poor self-esteem, and perfectionism.
3. **Courage** is an *outward* quality desperately needed by women who struggle with fear, anxiety, or untruthfulness.

Relationship to Others

4. **Self-control** is what women need to exhibit *inwardly* if they are impulsive, addictive, undisciplined, overemotional, or stress-prone.
5. **Patience** is a great *outward* character quality for women who are intolerant or demanding.

Relationship to Things

6. **Contentment** is an important *inner* characteristic for women who battle strongholds of envy, dissatisfaction, or perpetual restlessness.
7. **Generosity** is an *outward* expression that comes against greed and an entitlement mentality.

Relationship to the Future

8. **Perseverance** is an *outward* character quality that's needed when women feel like quitting, hesitating, avoiding a decision, or not following through.

Customize Your Reading Sequence

You might want to do something different and try reading this book out of sequence. Look at the character qualities in the preceding list, and invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you about each one. Do you recognize any of these strongholds as your personal battleground? Are you experiencing unusual trials, or do you feel a sense of brokenness in one of the areas? That may be the starting place God has in mind for you. Try going through this book in a sequence directed by the Lord, addressing the character qualities in which you feel the weakest first; then progressing from there.

THREE WAYS TO COLLABORATE

Building character is a collaborative effort, mainly between God and you. It is ignited with your salvation and continues until you have become like Christ, a process which isn't completed until the moment you see him face-to-face (1 John 3:2). God speeds up this process by giving you character-building opportunities—circumstances that are orchestrated to develop the character you need to honor him more with your daily efforts. For instance, if you find yourself in a slew of irritating situations, ask yourself if God is trying to teach you *patience*. If your circumstances are making you fearful, it might

be *courage* that God is working into your life. Do you keep encountering people whose lives you envy? Anybody want to talk about *contentment*?

Every time you forget that character
is one of God's purposes for your life,
you will become frustrated
by your circumstances.

Rick Warren, pastor, author

Has God been giving you some frustrating circumstances? Don't forget that God uses such circumstances to build your character. When you start viewing your circumstances as God's character-deepening tools, then you're ready for your part in the character-building collaboration. In this book, I will coach you to develop your character using three age-old, proven methods of collaborating with God: preparation, prayer, and practice.

1. Preparation

One way we collaborate with God to build character is through preparation. This simply means that through this book, we will learn all we can about what God wants of us, which helps us get his principles ingrained into our thinking and attitudes.

2. Prayer

Another essential way we join God's work of making us more Christlike is by praying—which, as you know, is simply a conversation with God. Through the written prayers in this book, we will invite God to transform us and then rely on the Holy Spirit's power to build into us the principles of character we are addressing.

3. Practice

Character Makeover helps you be proactive and take steps to develop and deepen eight key character qualities that greatly impact God's plan for your life and your readiness to serve him however he commands. You may have never thought that your character was something you could decide to work on, but through the Action Plan you will set up for yourself, you will partner with the Holy Spirit to do just that.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

For each of the eight character qualities in *Character Makeover*, there are five days of readings, assessments, directed journaling, and prayers. My strong recommendation is that you do not blaze through all five days in one sitting. Come to a full stop at the end of each day's reading. Dwell on the concepts and meditate on the verses. Dig deep and be honest; don't settle for shallow answers that enable you to tread water in your spiritual life. Pray the prayer aloud or write out a prayer of your own.

To keep us organized in this endeavor, each day's reading transports you to a special coach-client setting, so you can focus intently on a specific topic:

Day 1: Welcome Back to My Place! Each week, I want you to imagine you are meeting with me at my home. We may choose to sit in my living room or dining room; relax on my front porch bench or on the swing chair in my backyard; or take a stroll around my block. The mental picture I will paint for you will be of my real-time, real-life surroundings, with no phony airs or pretense. When you visit with me in my own home environment, you will begin to see how similar we are in many respects. As your personal Character Coach (or Spiritual Growth Partner or Dream Collaborator!), I want to actually invite you into my life and into my heart, so you will more readily feel the encouragement I have to share with you.

Day 1 starts with strength training where we build the foundation for the week's targeted character quality. We begin by learning about the character trait and how it can be exhibited best in our lives. More importantly, we learn about a complementary quality of God's ways—such as his mercy, compassion, power, or love. Our firm foothold and belief in each of God's attributes will help us deepen the characteristic in our own lives and break free from the strongholds that are blocking our holiness and productivity for God.



Day 2: A Virtual Message. Each week, you will receive a Virtual Message from me. You can either go to my website to actually download it, so you can hear my voice—or you can simply read the text right from this book. Day 2 examines the strongholds that are addressed by the week's character quality. This 360-degree bird's-eye view will give you a broader knowledge base, much more truth to prayerfully consider, and a deeper conviction to ensure your next steps.

On either Day 2 or Day 3, I will introduce you to a precious friend of mine who is a real, everyday woman just like us, a woman who is trying

to deepen specific character qualities in her own life. I can't wait for you to meet these imperfect, but oh, so lovable, friends—each a Life Purpose Coach® herself. These women are passionate about obediently completing the work God gave them to do!



Day 3: You've Got Mail. Each week, you will receive an Email Message from me. I want you to imagine that you have given me your email address and that my words of encouragement have landed in your inbox. You can even blog a response to me at www.LifePurposeCoaching-Centers.com/CM if you'd like. Day 3 drills deeper into the character quality—because by now you will have seen both sides of it, the good and the ugly, and you will be wanting further information about how to live it more diligently in your own life. Enjoy the cyberspace coaching!

Day 4: Perspective-Changing Outing. Each week, I have a field trip treat planned for us! We will “meet” away from my home, somewhere conducive to helping us change our perspective and get out of the ho-hum, doldrums box of how we do life. On this special day, plan to “get out of town,” to let your hair down, and to return home refreshed and invigorated to begin anew. Day 4 is a critical juncture in this process. It is when I gracefully help you evaluate yourself, asking you to honestly respond to questions about how you are doing in each given area. The progress on this day will pole-vault you further into fulfilling the tasks God assigned to you before you were born.

Day 5: Sitting Quietly with Your Maker. Day 5 is a time for reflection and solitude in the privacy of your own quiet-time space with God. This day's exercise will allow you to adopt practices that will deepen the week's character quality in your life. Your final decisions are between God and you. (A good coach or collaborator will never try to push you into doing something you are not ready to do; that just never works out for anyone!) There are prayer strategies, Scripture studies, research ideas, and challenge goals you can use to formulate your action steps.

MASTER ACTION PLAN

You will be prompted to select one key step from your Action Plan each week—one thing you will commit to doing first—to help build a Master Action Plan. If you can take one solid step toward deepening a specific character quality in your life, you will find the rest of the steps will follow more naturally. (See appendix A on page 322 if you'd like a sneak preview.)

Three Ways to Deepen Your Experience

1. **Character Journal:** Try starting a character journal in which you record your thoughts, write out your own prayers, and journal even more questions and answers as you make your way through *Character Makeover*.
2. **Forty Days:** As previously noted, take at least forty days (five days per week for eight weeks) to work through this book. Or, if you prefer, you may extend it to fifty-six days (seven days per week for eight full weeks) by reading for five days, then spending two days meditating on the Scripture prayer in appendix B before moving on to the next week's character topic.
3. **Accountability Partner:** Enlist a reading and prayer partner who knows you well enough to give you feedback and hold you accountable as you work your way through the book.

A COACH'S PRAYER FOR YOU

Before we turn our attention to our first topic, I want to ask you the all-important renovation question: Are you really sure you want to do this? (That's what every good hairstylist would ask before cutting off your two-foot-long locks, right? Or what a savvy construction foreman would ask before starting an overhaul on your house.) I will assume, if you're still reading, that your answer is: "Yes, I want to be the best me I can be for God!"

Above all, remember to give yourself some grace as you learn more about Christlike character in this book. Even the apostle Paul said, "For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (Romans 7:19). I love Paul's honesty when he admits that he is merely human. Know that God is pleased when he sees the effort you are making. He will be applauding you for your improvements, not waiting in the wings to berate you for your shortcomings. As I already said, if this book is not filled with love and hope, what good is it to you? The last thing you need is more pressure. So, breathe deeply and get ready to enjoy becoming the best godly woman you can be!

When the going gets tough on this dream-collaborating character makeover—and let's be clear that it will get tough!—I want you to commit to keeping your eyes on the prize of Christlike character that will better position you to live out the dream God has always had in mind for you. Now as we

begin, I'm going to do something vital to every coaching session, and that is to pray.

Precious Lord,

My sister in Christ is embarking upon holy work to be the best she can be for you. She has picked up this book about making over her character because, at her deepest core, she wants to please you. You, Lord, are the architect of her life, and you have been building something beautiful in her since before she was born. She wants to join you in your work in her life. She wants to prepare her heart, pray for change, and practice the disciplines of a woman of character.

She has a dream of doing something for you, but she is being held back by strongholds that the enemy is using to discourage and defeat her. Lord, show her who you really are and who she is through the truth of your Word and the power of your Holy Spirit, so she may overcome those persistent strongholds.

I pray for your protection to surround her as she starts on this challenging renovation. Bring her encouragement along the way at just the moment when obstacles or self-condemnation threaten to derail her efforts. Show her which character quality you want her to start with, transform her prayer life, and help her persist to the end. I claim your blessings upon her collaboration with you to become that humble, confident, courageous, self-controlled, patient, content, generous, persevering woman you created her to be. May the time and energy she devotes to developing her character cause you to use her all the more powerfully for your kingdom-building purposes, which will reap eternal rewards for her and those you want her to serve.

In the mighty name of Jesus, I pray, amen.