

## **“Extreme Makeover”**

**Mark 9:38-50**

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Years ago, a man decided to install a new television antenna on the roof of his house. Just for the record, television antennas dotted the landscape of every neighborhood before cable television and satellite dishes made them obsolete. I'm sure many of you have vivid memories of going outside to turn the antenna and watching snowy television screens when the wind was blowing.

After installing the antenna, this man carefully looked at his neighbor's antenna. His neighbor was a television repair man, which meant he was the expert on installation.

He noticed his neighbor's antenna had six prongs on one side of the pole, but only five on the other side, and one of those was bent. So, he proceeded to rip off one of the arms on his new antenna and bend the other to match his neighbor's. After all, his neighbor was the expert!

A few days later, the television repairman noticed his neighbor's new antenna, and asked why a prong was missing and another was bent. "I installed it to look just like yours," he was told.

"Shouldn't have done that," the repairman told him. "I had a prong blown away in a storm the other night and another one was bent, so I am going to have to replace mine."

**This morning, let's talk about the power of influence.** I believe this is the central idea which runs throughout our text.

The disciples unsuccessfully used their close association to Jesus to stop a man from healing someone possessed by a demon. For some reason, they felt they needed to do this since he was not one of the original disciples called by Jesus. Evidently, they felt they were the only ones who should have this kind of power, even though they failed in their attempts to heal someone days earlier. Jesus rebuked the disciples and told them not to interfere with the good work this man was doing.

Some time afterwards, Jesus lectured his disciples on the importance of not putting stumbling blocks in people's pathways. He told them in no uncertain terms the abuse of influence and power would have devastating consequences. It would be better to cut off a hand or foot and pluck out an eye which caused them to stumble, and enter the kingdom of God maimed, than to keep them and continue to do wrong.

I'm sure this got their attention. It certainly impressed Mark, and he included it in his narrative. So, what message was Mark sending his readers, including us?

**The way we use our influence is important to God.** Look at the results of not being a positive influence upon others. Spending your remaining days in the bottom of the sea or trapped in a garbage dump are, to say the least, not desirable. Without a doubt, Jesus used a lot of hyperbole to emphasize the importance of using power responsibly and having a positive impact upon others. I am confident the disciples got the message.

**Why is this so important to God and should it be taken seriously by us?** As believers, it is our duty to bring the best out in others, not the worst. We need to inspire people to achieve their potential, and do all they can to make the world better for everyone, not discourage them or deceive them.

It is one thing for an unbeliever to lead people down the wrong road; it is another for one of Jesus' disciples to do this. God's people should never enable someone to sin or contribute to their demise. To the contrary, we should always offer an alternative vision and voice.

**What does this mean for us?** We should think of others every time we make a decision. Life is not just about us, or what we want. It is about what God wants, and what is best for everyone. Our relationship with God should matter more to us than the momentary satisfaction of pleasure, greed, lust, applause or control.

This means there are things we must say no to, regardless of how appealing they look. Conversely, there are things we must say yes to, regardless of how challenging they may be.

In addition, if there are traits, characteristics or desires which bring the worst out in us and contribute to a negative influence upon others, we must get rid of them. Life changes for everybody when we behave badly, and there is nothing we can say or do to justify this behavior. As Christians, we have a moral duty to overcome these character flaws.

**What flaws do you need to admit and deal with today?** What are you doing or saying which is disrupting your life and the lives of those around you? By your example, how are you teaching someone to misplace their priorities and leading others down the wrong road?

**Why have you not already done something about this?** Is it because “cutting out” the ugly parts of your life which cause you to stumble is not easy?

Whose help do you need to do this and become a good role model? Who would benefit the most by your honesty and makeover?

**Who did this for you?** Who have been your positive role models? On whose shoulders do you stand today? How many people influenced you to be the person you are becoming?

Who inspired you to settle for nothing less than your best by confessing your sins and making changes in your life?

Who taught you how to resist temptation and handle power responsibly?

Who taught you to be honest, trustworthy, reliable and dependable?

Who inspired you to study hard and dream big?

Who influenced you to be compassionate and generous?

Who inspired you to compliment and encourage those doing good deeds?

Who motivated you to make sacrifices on behalf of others?

Who inspired you to be considerate and kind?

Who taught you the difference between important and petty?

Who taught you what's real and counterfeit, temporary and permanent?

Who taught you how to subdue your ego and control your lust for forbidden pleasures?

Who taught you to treat all people with dignity and respect?

Who inspired you to love the unlovely?

Who taught you to consider the welfare of others in all your decisions?

Who taught you how to apologize, forgive and resolve conflict?

Who taught you how to rely upon God for wisdom and strength?

**Who needs you to inspire, influence and teach them?** Who needs you to be the best role model you can be? What will this require of you? Are there changes you need to make in your values, priorities and lifestyle?

Who would benefit the most if you got rid of the ugly and destructive parts of your life? Do you love yourself and them enough to do it? Will you ask God to help you begin that process this morning? I hope so and suspect lots of other people who love you feel the same way.