

STUDY 19 – FOLLOW THE LEADER

PART 2B – HOW TO CHANGE

One thing that you will quickly find out about regarding habits is that **some habits are much more important than others**. They are generally referred to as “**Keystone Habits**”. Architecturally, a keystone is a wedge-shaped stone at the top of an arch that locks the other stones in place and allows the arch to bear weight. It is the single most important stone in the arch because if you remove the keystone, the entire structure falls down. Metaphorically, a keystone represents something which other things depend on for support. **Keystone habits influence everything about your life** – how you live, talk, work, and how you relate to people - everything.¹ Keystone habits can be incredibly life transforming habits **OR** they can be very devastating habits. In my mind, “**spiritual keystone habits**” are extremely critical for our life, so here are two things that I believe we all need to evaluate in our life.

1. **What kind of habits do we currently have in our life.** Why? It is because **our habits are driving our life**. Remember that **we all become what we repeatedly do**. So, if that is the case, and it is, then we must look at what kind of habits we have. What habits are driving us? Are they carnal, worldly habits, or are they godly habits?

One of the underlying ideas contained in **Romans 8:6** when it says “**to be carnally MINDED is death**” is that if we think worldly, then we will develop worldly habits, and worldly habits are counterproductive to anything that God wants to do in our life. Being “**worldly minded**” is when we leave God out of our thinking, out of our decisions, and ultimately out of our life. What God desires for our lives so often just becomes “**optional**” to us. If we want to obey Him in a particular area, we may, and if we do not want to obey Him in an area, then we may not.

2. **Are we doing things that we know are not what God wants us to be doing?** This is such a critical question for the Christian life. Maybe I should say “*Do we even think about what God wants us to do?*” Any area of our life, any habit that is not committed to Christ will quickly become a very bad keystone habit that needs to be broken and removed. Let me give you one CRITICAL keystone habit that we all must have to provide godly direction for our life.

GOD’S WORD MUST BECOME THE SPIRITUAL COMPASS FOR OUR LIFE.

We all know what a compass does. It lets us know in which direction we are headed. That is exactly what God’s Word does for our life. It is a compass that keeps us headed in the right direction. Think of this critical keystone habit as “*following the leader*”. What we know is that **God’s plan for our life is always much better than our plan for our life**. So, if we know that and if it is really a deep conviction of our life, then the best thing that we can do is to simply follow Christ wherever His Word leads us. Listen to what Jesus said in **John 10:27**,

Jn 10:27 (NKJV) My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

The verb “**follow**” is in the indicative mood which means that this statement is a fact. It is in the present tense which means that a true follower is **consistently** following Christ. It is in the active voice which means that the believer is the one who is **intentionally** and **consciously** choosing to follow Christ.

¹ Duhigg, 100.

So, here is what Jesus was saying in this verse. If we are truly born again and have genuinely come to Christ, then **we will follow Him**. We all will struggle at times with temptation, the flesh, with people. However, in the end, **a true believer will follow Christ** no matter the struggles that he may have. **1 John 4:4** says “**He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world**”. Jesus did not say “*My sheep may follow Me*” or “*My sheep do not have to follow Me if they do not want to*”. Jesus said “**My sheep hear me and they follow Me.**” Stated negatively, “*Those who do not follow Me are not My sheep.*”

Now, I know someone is going to ask me “*How do you hear God?*” Simple. We read His Word. **God’s Word is God speaking.** When we talk, we use words. When God talks, He uses words. We read God’s Word, so that we can “**hear**” what He is saying to us about our life and then we choose to do what He wants us to do. This is really simple. True believers “**hear**” Christ, then they “**follow**” Christ. They do not merely give “*lip service*” to the things of God. The Greek word for “**follow**” is used 77 times in the gospels and 76 of those times it is used specifically of “**following**” Christ, of obeying Christ.² It literally means to “**go in the same way**”. If He goes left, we go left. If He goes right, we go right. If He is kind, we are kind. If He forgives, we forgive. The root Greek word for “**follow**” simply means a “**road**”.³ It is the idea that we are walking down the same road together and going in the same direction. Whatever direction Jesus is headed in, that is the direction in which we want to be headed. His example and His Word are our map, our compass. Listen carefully. **If there is anyone that you can trust, it is God, so just “follow the leader”.** This is what it means to be a “**follower of Christ**”.

Unfortunately, many people only give “*lip service*” to the Christian life. They have made obedience “optional”. Making obedience to the Word of God “optional” is **NOT** a good option. Think about verses like **Hebrews 10:24-25**.

Heb 10:24 (NKJV) **And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner (*habit, Greek Interlinear, NASB, ESV, NIV, AMP, ISV, NSRV*) of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.**

What is the issue here? Well, these people had made “**assembling...together**” optional. It was their “**manner**”, their “**habit**” to “**forsake**” meeting together with other believers. For them, that was “optional”. However, if you exegete this verse properly, the “**exhorting**” is referring to “**encouraging**” believers **NOT** to “**forsake assembling themselves together**”, not to make that “optional”.

Now, my motive in using this verse is NOT to badger and harass someone to come to church. V25 just contained another biblical word for “**habit**” (“**manner**”), and in this case, it was a bad habit. So I studied it. Trust me, but this is not my subtle way of trying to make someone feel guilty if assembling for church does not do much for them. If someone does not want to attend a Christ honoring church, there **MUST** be a work of God in their heart that I cannot perform. I love church. I love church because I love Christ. It so embedded into my heart and my soul that I just want to be in church with other believers. I would say that I am addicted to it. In fact, I cannot imagine NOT going to church and being with other believers.

Now, without belaboring the point, it has always intrigued me why so many things in the Bible just seem so “optional” to professing Christians. Obviously, we live in a culture where anything that we may want

² Vines, *akoloutheo*, ep.

³ Strong, *akoloutheo*, #190, ep.

can have thousands of options from which we can choose. However, I have come to a personal conclusion about this which will probably sound much too dogmatic and unsympathetic for some, but this is my discernment. The primary issue is not that church, or obedience to the Word, or even commitment to the things of God is optional to people, but that **God is optional to them**. That is the much bigger “root” problem. They have this mentality, this bad keystone habit that they can just arbitrarily pick and choose whatever they want to obey, and ignore what they do not want to obey. That should always tell us something about their relationship to Christ. **Their Christian life is rarely about commitment, but much more about choices and options**. They will always choose what they want to do. They will **ONLY** be committed to what they want to be committed. These bad habits started out as small habits and small choices, but now they are major “keystone habits” in their life. It is not about a heartfelt commitment to Christ as much as it is a commitment to their personal choices and preferences.

I have heard brother Eddie say many times, and I fully agree with him, that ***“People love the idea of God, but not God Himself”***. That is so utterly profound to me. In referring to those who see the demands of the Christian life as “optional”, I have heard him say that *“Whatever else in life has become a person’s primary attention and focus, that is what has become their God.”* Someone asked Jesus one time what was the most important command in Scripture, or stated another way, what was the most important thing to God for their personal lives. Listen carefully to how Jesus replied to their question in [Mark 12:30](#),

Mk 12:30 (NKJV) And YOU SHALL love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.

Every time I read that verse, it convicts me to the very core of my existence – AND IT SHOULD. I cannot escape asking myself different questions to help clarify where I really am in my Christian life.

1. *“Do I really love God this way?”*
2. *“Have I made the commands of Christ ‘optional’ for my life?”*
3. *“Do I just pick and choose what I want to obey?”*
4. *“Is my Christianity more of a distraction to me than an attraction to me?”*
5. *“Am I coming up with every reason, rationalization, justification, and excuse that I can to avoid following Christ as He wants me to follow Him?”*

No matter where we may actually be on the proverbial “spiritual scale” in our Christian life, the clarity and meaning of what Jesus said cannot be considered casually optional to a true “follower of Christ”. In my mind, **this is the greatest “keystone habit” that a Christian can have in their life**. This is it – to love God with all of our heart. If I can just get this one keystone habit right, then everything else takes on an entirely new meaning for my life. However, if I cannot get this right, then nothing in my life will have any eternal value or significance. So, the ultimate question that we all have to answer is *“How can I personally know if I have made God optional in my life?”* Here is my response to that question.

“Would it make me uncomfortable if Jesus was physically with me each day watching how I was living to see if I was allowing Him to be the Lord of my life?”

This entire series is about “Embracing Change” in our life, and about making the biblical and necessary adjustments that God wants us to make so that we fully honor Christ as the Lord of our lives. Please

appreciate that **this dialogue is not about perfection in our lives, but about direction in our lives.** I personally know much too painfully how I have failed and struggled and disappointed both myself and others at times. However, none of this is a problem for God because He fully understands all of our frailties, weaknesses, failures, and shortcomings. Because of His grace, mercy, and forgiveness, the love of God for us accounts for the fact that we will fail. [Hebrews 4:15](#) says about Christ,

Heb 4:15 (NKJV) **For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as we are, yet without sin.**

Jesus clearly understands our struggles, and this is exactly why [Hebrews 4:16](#) says,

Heb 4:16 (NKJV) **Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

We all have failed as Christians, as a marriage partner, as a parent, as a friend, in our relationships, and in our commitments, BUT God has graciously forgiven us and helped us and strengthened us through it all. This is ALL of God's grace and mercy and forgiveness and love operating on your behalf. Please appreciate that **God's love for you** does not depend on ANYTHING that you do – never. Why? It is because **God's love for you is not based on what you do for Him, but on what He has done for you.** It is based solely on the work of Christ for you and not your work for Christ. We simply could never do enough to merit God's love and forgiveness, and that is exactly why Jesus took our place. **We do not merit God's love by doing things.** I do not have a checklist that I go through each day and mark it off as if I have done what I needed to do to earn God's love and favor. **When God sees you, He does not see you. He sees Christ in you.** You have been given the righteousness of Christ. You have been fully justified by God. You cannot earn your salvation by your works and you cannot maintain your salvation by your works. In fact, the value of our good works regarding salvation equals zero. [Isaiah 64:6](#) says that **"all our righteousness is like filthy rags"**. However, the good news is given to us in [1 Corinthians 1:30](#) which says,

1Co 1:30 (NKJV) **But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God--and righteousness and sanctification and redemption--**

God has freely given us the righteousness of Christ. Theologically, this is called "imputed righteousness" or God giving us what we did not deserve and could not earn. [Ephesians 1:6](#) says that **"He has made us accepted in the Beloved"**. The issue is never if we are good or bad, if we are committed or uncommitted, or if we need to do more. Honestly, none of us could ever be good enough or do enough to earn our salvation. The issue is always whether or not we are truly **"in Christ"** and fully accepted **"in the Beloved"** (which is Christ Himself). If that is true of our life, then God has already marked off everything needed for Him to love us fully and completely. He has no checklist that controls His love for us. Once we can learn to live in the overwhelming, non-condemning, eternal love that God has for us, then a deep desire to follow Him will just supernaturally flow out of our life. We still have the world, the flesh, and the devil with which to contend, and even though at times they may hurt us in our spiritual growth, it never impacts or affects God's great love for us. I do not know about you, but this just thrills me. It moves me. It makes me want to be everything that I can be **"in Christ"**. I do not want to live one more day resisting Him or making Him optional in my life. May God help us all.

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