

## STUDY 24 – BUILDING GODLY HABITS

### PART 2C – HOW TO CHANGE

As we begin a new year, I wanted to encourage each of us to take a closer look at our life, identify some bad habits we may have, then figure out how to replace them with godly habits. Here is what I know:

#### **BAD HABITS ARE REALLY BAD MASTERS.**

The message this morning is specifically designed to help us understand how to get rid of some of our bad habits. The longer we keep a bad habit, the more entrenched it becomes in our life. So, the ultimate goal is to get rid of our bad habits and develop some good habits that will benefit our life. Think of it this way. **Ungodly habits will never benefit your life, but godly habits will always benefit your life.** So, here is the principle we need to fully understand.

#### **OUR CHOICES CREATE OUR HABITS.**

Here is how it all works. (1) We make a choice, (2) our choice moves us in a certain direction, and (3) eventually that choice becomes a habit. For instance, if you choose to treat people with disrespect, then that will become a very bad habit. However, if you choose to treat people with respect, then that choice will become a very good habit. It is clear that either direction you choose, disrespect or respect, starts with a **personal choice** that you make at some time in your life. Listen to [Joshua 24:15](#),

**Jos 24:15 (NKJV) And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, CHOOSE for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."**

These people had made some really bad choices and Joshua was compelling them to make a good choice. [Joshua 24:23](#) says,

**Jos 24:23 (NKJV) "Now therefore," *he said*, "put away the foreign gods which *are* among you, and incline your heart to the LORD God of Israel."**

It was clear that they had to choose who they were going to serve, and if they would put away their idols, and if they would incline their heart toward God. It was a choice each one would have to make. Likewise, we have to make the same kind of choices. Here is what else we know.

#### **OUR PRIORITIES CREATE OUR CHOICES.**

What are your greatest priorities, what are you really living for, where do you actually want your choices to take you? [1 Corinthians 10:31](#) helps give definition to what should be one of our godly priorities.

**1Co 10:31 (NKJV) Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**

Whatever your priorities are, this is what you measure them against – “*Is what I am doing bringing glory to God?*” That is the test. It is not difficult to have the wrong priorities. What was so obvious about Jesus was that every priority that He had was the right priority. Even at a very early age, He told His parents that He “**must be about His Father’s business**”. **Our values create our priorities**. I.e., if we have the wrong values, then we will have the wrong priorities. **Our choices are driven by our**

**priorities, and our priorities are created by our values.** Either we are people of deep, godly convictions who are genuinely committed to God’s glory, or we are not. David said in [Psalms 119:30](#),

Ps 119:30 (NKJV) **I have CHOSEN the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me.**

That was David’s priority. He knew that he had to choose God’s best for his life and **lay that truth in front of his life.** He had to always keep the truth as His priority. He knew that he had to choose “**the way of truth**”, and what was right and was pleasing to God. Every day you make choices, some good and some bad, and then those choices make you. You cannot prevent that from happening. Every bad choice and every good choice that you have made has had some kind of impact on your life.

**Every one of us is a VISUAL snapshot of the choices that we have made in our life.**

We can look at each other’s life – what we talk about, what we look at, how we spend our time, where we go, what we love, how we spend our money, how we take care of what God has given us – and we immediately get a clear snapshot of what means the most to us, of what are our priorities.

Now, I want you to think of growing in your spiritual life as something that you do **incrementally**. You must grow slowly to be strong spiritually. Spiritual growth is NEVER fast. Think of making godly choices and developing godly habits as just becoming **a little better** each day in an area of your life where you need some work, where you need some changes. You cannot sustain growing quickly. It does not work in the long term. **Having to have quick results is a just fast track to failure.** This is exactly why most people fail at what we are addressing. I just want to just get **a little better** every day at what I am working on in my life – say just 1% better. I want to be able to look back at the end of the week and see that I actually made some progress. Unfortunately, the problem in developing small, slow, godly habits is that **there is no immediate payoff or reward.** So, here is what you must accept.

**DEVELOPING GODLY HABITS IS A LONG-TERM PROCESS.**

Developing strong, godly habits never happens quickly – never. Oak trees never become strong oak trees quickly. What you need is to be **consistent** and **steady** in doing what God wants you to do over an extended period of time. This is how you grow. You always want to start with developing **SMALL, GODLY** habits. Trust me, but they are easier to **sustain.**

Now, I want to anchor something in your mind this morning. Okay? Your path to being spiritually successful is simple - **consistently do small, mundane, unexciting, daily disciplines over a long period of time.** I can just hear you saying to yourself “*Oh wow Gary, I just can’t wait to get started. This sounds so exciting!*”. Well, if you think that you have a better idea, then have at it, but you need to understand that doing **small, godly things** over and over is what helps you become spiritually successful. This is how you **DEVELOP** a godly habit. You start small, you start godly. Think of it as working on “**small, godly**” habits. **Every choice you make begins a simple behavior that will eventually become a habit.** Every choice you make, no matter how big or small, in some way alters the trajectory of your life. So, the better your choices, the better your trajectory, and therefore, the better your results.

Now, if you will take an honest look at the habits that you do have, the first thing that you will see is that there are some bad habits that you need to eliminate from your life. For instance, if you are **habitually** irritable or frustrated or grumpy, then you need to eliminate each of those negative behaviors because

they have become bad habits in your life. Trust me, but no one enjoys any of that. There is a keystone habit that you need to understand and develop and it is a simple one, so listen carefully. This is important.

### **YOU BUILD GODLY HABITS BEFORE YOU TRY TO BREAK BAD HABITS.**

**Always focus on godly habits first.** Why? It is because as you build godly habits into your life, that discipline will inevitably purge and crowd out bad habits from your life. **Always, always focus and concentrate more on BUILDING godly habits into your life rather than eliminating your bad habits.** **2 Peter 3:18** says,

**2Pe 3:18 (NKJV) but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.**

You want to grow in grace, grow in knowledge, grow in patience, grow in kindness, grow in love. Whatever Jesus was like, that is what you want to be growing in. Peter did NOT say “*Before you can grow in grace, you must get rid of all of your bad habits.*” He did not say that spiritual growth started with eliminating bad habits. He said to start with the really good things. So, you have to become very **intentional** about developing godly habits in your life. Your habits, good or bad, always have a great impact on determining where you are headed spiritually. If you are serious about your spiritual life, then you must become serious about developing godly habits in your life. Let me give you the simplest way to break a bad habit. You must write this down. This is so important.

### **YOU BREAK A BAD HABIT BY REPLACING IT WITH A GOOD HABIT.**

It is generally accepted that it takes approximately 3 weeks to break a bad habit and approximately 3-6 weeks to build a good habit. Obviously, the more severe the habit, the longer it will take to break it. However, in the big picture, that is not a difficult time frame to make meaningful changes in your life. So, what is a simple example of replacing a bad habit with a good habit? Well, if you do not brush your teeth very often, that is a bad habit. So, what would be the good habit that replaces the bad habit? You begin to brush your teeth several times each day. Just replace your bad habit with a good habit. Set alarms on your watch to go brush your teeth, put a note on your mirror - whatever it takes until this becomes your habit. Take a toothbrush and some toothpaste to work. If you have the bad habit of driving too fast, then replace it with driving the speed limit. Put a note on your dashboard until you slow down.

Developing simple, godly keystone habits are at the heart of your spiritual growth. For instance, a very important keystone habit you need to develop is always **reminding yourself of what ultimately matters the most in your life.** If you choose not to do that, then you will simply waste your life on things that literally have no eternal value whatsoever. Did you have fun in the process? Probably. Did it contribute to you becoming Christlike? Probably not. So, where do you start? Well, when something happens in your life that is stressful or difficult, you need to “mentally” stop and ask yourself a very simple, profound question - “*At this difficult moment in my life, how does God want me to respond to it?”*

**YOU NEED TO DEVELOP THIS AS A KEYSTONE HABIT IN YOUR LIFE.** When the difficult moment comes, you stop what you are doing and you think about what you should do. **YOU STOP, YOU THINK - then YOU CHOOSE to do what God wants you to do.** If you are FIRST willing to determine what ultimately matters the most in your life, then and only then will you be willing to do

what God wants you to do. That is not something that just naturally happens in your life. It must become a HABIT. You must SEE and VISUALIZE a difficult moment as a kind of **spiritual trigger** to get you to do what God wants you to do. This should be a “keystone habit” in your life. Someone says something to you that is ugly, and it hurts you; it offends you; it upsets you. What do you do? Well, you stop, you think, and you ask yourself “*What does God want me to do **right now**? How does God want me to respond **right now**?* **Every good habit needs a trigger, and being hurt or offended is a great trigger.** **You becoming upset is a trigger** and it should ALWAYS drive you back to God, back to Christ, back to His Word and His perfect will. You cannot leave God out of your life and be spiritually successful. Why? It is because God’s will is what always matters the most and it is always the best choice you can make. I am convinced that God will not stop you from doing what you may want to do and ultimately choose to do. So, if you are doing something that is not beneficial to your life, to other people, and especially to your family, and you are not willing to change, then you will just have to live with the consequences of your poor choices. Bad decisions come from being “**worldly minded**”, from having the wrong priorities and values for your life. [Psalm 106:15](#) says it this way,

**Ps 106:15 (NKJV) And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul.**

These people got what they wanted, but in the end, it simply did not satisfy them. Why? It was because they did not want what God wanted them to have, so God let them have what they wanted. In that process, **God sent them leanness and emptiness.** In the end, they got nothing. What they thought would fill their life with fun and pleasure, eventually just left them empty. They keep looking for the next thrill, the next adrenalin rush, the next high. However, what they think they will experience is just a fleeting deception at best. Whatever the world gives to you is always “**passing away**”. You can become so enamored with doing “your own thing” that it drives you to a place that quickly blinds you to what really matters the most.<sup>1</sup> Let me say this in a positive way.

### **CONCENTRATE on developing godly habits that help you to become CHRISTLIKE.**

This is what your thinking should be – “*I always want to reflect Christ in my life.*” If He wants you to wait, wait. If He wants you to not say anything, do not say anything. If God wants you to stop yelling at your kids, stop yelling at your kids. **It is never about what we want, but always about what God wants.** So, here is the habit that you want to develop. This is so super important. Write this down.

### **In every difficult moment, you always want to see yourself as being Christlike.**

You need to get this pictured in your mind. You must learn to THINK this way. This is how you want to see yourself responding. This is how you want to think – “*I CHOOSE to be Christlike.*” When you have godly values and godly priorities, they help you to make the godly choice to be Christlike that eventually becomes your godly habit. So, when the conflict happens, you have already developed a habit that uses the actual conflict to trigger your mind to reinforce how you are going to respond. Think of it this way - “*When this happens to me (and it will), I will choose to respond this way.*” You first figure out **what to say to YOURSELF.** I.e., what can you say to yourself that will **direct your attention back to God?** [Philippians 2:5](#) says it this way,

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<sup>1</sup> Covey, 105.

Php 2:5 (NKJV) **Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,**

If you do not have a habit like this in your life, then you will invariably say or do what God does not want you to say or do. If you do not know where you are going, then any path will get you there. This is a keystone habit that you need to develop in your life. This is what it means to be “**spiritually minded**” and to have “**the mind of Christ**”. Here is the principle.

**Whatever you consistently think about eventually becomes what you consistently do.**

I have to ask myself the right questions in order to get the right answers. I have to be willing to make changes in order to change. **The best way to change something in your life that is not pleasing to God is to simply do what you know IS pleasing to Him.** That is so profound to me. For instance, if you curse a lot or talk ugly to people, God **WILL NOT** use you until you change your speech to be in alignment with how He wants you to talk. So, you have to first learn how to talk to people in a way that honors God. You must be gracious, kind, patient with people in what you say. [Ephesians 4:29](#) says,

Eph 4:29 (NKJV) **Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.**

The godly habit that you develop first is that of **learning to say only that which will edify the person that you are addressing.** Good words, godly words **IMPART GRACE** to the other person. If you will do that one thing, then you will eliminate “**corrupt words from proceeding out of your mouth**”. Do you see how that works? From this verse I know exactly how God wants me to respond to someone, how He wants me to talk. This is crystal clear. The problem with a verse like this is that for many Christians it is just “head knowledge”. It is just words on a piece of paper that have never really reached their heart, and the evidence of this is that they just continue to talk the same way to people all the time without ever changing, without ever allowing a verse like this to impact their life. After a point in time, I have no idea what to call that other than just sheer, absolute disobedience. Let me say this and close – “**Impart grace to everyone you meet, to everyone you know, and in every encounter that you have. Intentionally choose to impart grace to other people and it will become one of your greatest habits.” Amen and Amen!**

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Covey, Stephen R. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*. 25th Anniversary Edition. London: Simon and Schuster, 2004.