

PART 9 – BREAKING BAD HABITS – BUILDING GOOD HABITS

PART 2 – HOW TO CHANGE

This morning we want to **BEGIN** to address what we call “habits”. A habit is something that you do over and over until you do not have to even think about it. For instance, I do not go to bed without brushing my teeth. It is automatic. You can have good habits or you can have bad habits, and what we want to learn how to do is to **break bad habits and build good habits**. There is only one verse in the NKJV that actually uses the English word “habits” and it is found in [1 Corinthians 15:33](#).

1Co 15:33 (NKJV) Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."

The word “habits” is the Greek word “*ethos*” and in the New Testament, it refers to manners, customs, morals, and/or character.¹ Most of the translations use the words “morals” or “character” rather than the word “habits”, so for the most part there are not a lot of places in the Scriptures that even talk about habits. Other words that could also be considered what we are addressing would be your customs, routines, patterns, inclinations, tendencies, or preferences. I.e., **we tend to do what we prefer to do**.

So, from where did we derive the concept of habits for this discussion? Well, we did it from our primary verse last week in which Paul talked in [Galatians 6:7-8](#) about “sowing to the flesh” or “sowing to the Spirit”. Both of those need to be considered as a habit where one is a very bad habit and the other is a very good habit. Both have consequences, - one bad, one good. We have stated this often, but **the more you do the right things, the more you get the right results, and the more you do the wrong things, the more you get the wrong results**. This is never going to change. It is a spiritual law. Here is the principle.

YOU CANNOT REAP GOOD THINGS BY DOING BAD THINGS.

So, if you truly want to enjoy all that God has for your life (and you may not), then you have to do “**God things**” and not “**your things**”. Please understand that **God will not stop you** from doing “your thing”. You have to choose to do this. You can talk how you want to talk, you can act how you want to act, you can think how you want to think, and you can live how you want to live, and God is NOT going to stop you. It is always your choice. Another way that the Bible describes this is that you “**put off**” what is bad and you “**put on**” what is good. [Ephesians 4:20-24](#) says it this way,

Eph 4:20 (NKJV) But you have not so learned Christ, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: ²² that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, ²³ and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

The key word in these verses relative to this study is “YOU”. You “**put off, you put on**”. God is NOT going to do this for you. He will not live the Christian life for you. What He wants to do is to live the Christian life “through” you, but you have something to say about His doing that. You are fully responsible to make godly choices and to develop godly habits in your life that help you to do what is both pleasing to God and valuable and constructive for your own personal life. Here is the undeniable reality of your life. I want to say this in a negative way and then in a positive way, so listen carefully.

¹ Zodhiates, *ethos*, ep.

The more that you replace God’s things with your things, the more you will reap your things.

The more that you replace your things with God’s things, the more you will reap God’s things.

This is the spiritual law of sowing and reaping out of [Galatians 6:7-8](#) that you **cannot change**. It is very intuitive, just common sense. For instance, today, you can look back over your life and see where your bad choices and your bad habits have led you. It is always obvious simply because wrong choices and bad habits are simply “**sowing to the flesh**”, and when you do that, you ALWAYS “**reap corruption**” in your life. “**Sowing to the flesh**” represents actions and decisions that you **willfully choose** to do that bring your life into a worse condition. We saw last week that the word “**corruption**” means to shrivel up, to wither, to spoil, to rot, to decay. Here is how it works. Making bad choices and then developing habits as a result of those bad choices have a decaying and rotting effect on your life. For instance, if your HABIT is to be abrasive and toxic with people, then you will have an abrasive, toxic relationship with them. However, if you make good choices and develop the good habit of “**sowing to the Spirit**”, or simply doing what you know God wants you to do, then everything about the quality and value of your life will improve.

There are two primary approaches to this idea of embracing change, so listen carefully, because one works and the other one does not work. The first approach is called “**behavior modification**”. The inherent problem with behavior modification is that it is unsustainable, and ultimately just too draining on you. For instance, you can say good things like “*I am going to stop procrastinating so much*”, or “*I am going to stop being impatient with people*”, or “*I am going to exercise more*”. All of those are great goals, but if that is all that you have to go on, then they will be very difficult to sustain over even a short period of time. The Pharisees were experts at behavior modification, but there was nothing in their life that had any spiritual content to it. Jesus said of them in [Matthew 23:27-28](#),

Mt 23:27 (NKJV) Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men’s* bones and all uncleanness.²⁸ Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

I.e., there was nothing on the inside that helped them do what was right on the outside. They were arrogant, hateful, spiteful, selfish, unloving, uncaring, bitter, angry individuals. What they were advocating was nothing more than a spiritual scam. The point is that you can change something outwardly, but until your heart has been changed inwardly, it cannot have a lasting impact in your life. Just as an example, I can encourage you to read your Bible more, but if you really do not want to, then what difference does it make. God does not look on the outward appearance, but at the heart.

The second approach is not that of acting differently, but of **thinking differently**.²

THINKING DIFFERENTLY MUST ALWAYS PRECEDE ACTING DIFFERENTLY.

Thinking differently is what actually drives acting differently. If you see people who are always struggling in their life with doing those things that God would want them to do, then you can be assured that they are not thinking like God wants them to think. Several weeks ago, we looked at [Romans 12:2](#).

² Groeschel, *Power*, 17.

Ro 12:2 (NKJV) **And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

However, I want to read this same verse to you out of the [NLT](#). I think this is good.

Ro 12:2 (NLT) **Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the WAY you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.**

Here is the point, so listen carefully,

Learning to think the way that God wants you to think is ultimately what will have the greatest impact on what you do and how you act.

That is why the habit of renewing your mind to the truth of God's Word is so important to your life. Just think about this for a moment. If you really think that something is wrong, then you will NOT be very inclined to practice it. I stay in the right lane on the highway. Why? It is because I know that the left-hand lane on a two-lane highway is not a good place to be. However, if you truly believe and think that something is right, then you WILL be much more inclined to practice it. Once again, my habit is to brush my teeth several times each day. Why? It is because I think that it is the right thing to do. Here is what I want to do. I want to give you the reason why you want to make good choices and develop good habits in your life. Write this down. This is so important, super critical, so listen carefully.

Making good choices and developing godly habits is the means by which we become more Christlike.

We want to develop spiritual habits that deal with our character, our attitudes, our speech, how we treat people, and our relationship to God. You can develop other good habits like eating right or getting good exercise, but that is not what we are addressing. We are addressing spiritual habits that you develop in your life. Here is what you want to ultimately happen. Listen carefully.

You want your habits to become an intrinsic part of your personal identity, of who you are as a person, of what is important to you in your life.

When someone looks at your life, you want them to be able to define your life by the habits that you have developed in your life. It is not that you just "*want to be*" a certain kind of person, but that you are "*actually becoming*" the kind of person that you want to be.³ I.e., your godly choices and habits have become an innate part of who you are. A very important passage of Scripture is in [Mark 12:28-30](#).

Mk 12:28 (NKJV) **Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"²⁹ Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: '*Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.*'³⁰ 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.**

If you are going to genuinely love God the way that He wants you to love Him, then you have to use your "**mind**". I love this. I love what this does inside of me. You have to think about what is right and

³ Clear, *Atomic*, 33.

what is wrong. You have to think about how you act and how you talk. You have to think about your priorities and those things that are wasting your time. You are personally responsible to make good choices and to develop good habits, and you have to do this “**with all of your strength**”. You cannot just be casually “mindless” about the Christian life because it simply does not work that way. You have to use your “**mind**” to determine how your life can genuinely reflect that you do love God “**with all of your heart and all of your soul**”. Everything that we are doing in our life should be to this end. If this is the greatest thing that Jesus says we can do, then this should be the clear direction of our life. This should be intrinsic and central to our life, the absolute core conviction of our life. However, to integrate this conviction into our life, we must make good choices and develop godly habits that help us to do this.

Research has shown that once someone genuinely believes in a particular aspect of their identity, then they are much more prone to act in alignment with that conviction.⁴

My identify, your identity must be that we are “**in Christ**”. Everything that we do in our life should reflect that conviction. I am “**in Christ**”. You are “**in Christ**”. The decisions we make, the habits we develop, the way we talk to people, and how we respond to difficult moments should all reflect the reality that we are “**in Christ**”. They should always reflect that we are a part of Christ, that we are the salt of the earth, that we are the light of the world, that we have been called to live a holy life, that we are being conformed into the image of Christ. I have no idea where to stop. This is so critical! Why? It is because this is to be our identity. This is who we are. This is your identity. This is who you are if you claim to be a believer. Either we love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, or we do not. Either He is our life, or we find our life in the things of this world. Think of it this way.

What lies behind us and what lies ahead of us are very small compared to what lies within us.⁵

One of the best things that we can do is to work on those areas of our life that we know God wants us to change – words, attitudes, kindness, patience, mercy, forgiveness, etc. We want to embrace these kinds of changes in our life, so here is a very important principle to help you do just that.

Every good habit begins with first identifying what God declares is best for your life.

How do we do that? Well, we renew our minds to the truth ([Romans 12:2](#)), then **we begin to develop specific habits that help us to achieve what God declares is the best for our life**. You want each day of your life to contribute in a meaningful way to the plan that God has for your life as a whole.⁶ What is that plan? It is that you become more and more Christlike. That will never change. So, you want to begin each day with God’s values firmly anchored **in your mind** so that when the challenges come, you will be able to make the choices of how you respond based on the godly values that you have placed into your life by “**renewing your mind**” to that which never changes.

If you cannot define your destination, then you will never reach it.

So, what do you want to be your destination, your goal? **Your destination is to ALWAYS be Christlike, to always be becoming more and more like Christ**, and here is what you want to be

⁴ Clear, *Atomic*, 34.

⁵ Covey, 103.

⁶ Covey, 105.

developing as a habit to achieve that goal. You need to make this a habit at the very beginning of every day, a habit that you do every day. Here it is. Write this down. This is what you want to do.

VISUALIZE yourself responding to life’s difficult moments with the love, power, and self-control that only God can provide.⁷

THIS IS SO IMPORTANT. If you will do this one thing day after day, if you will pray about this on your way to work, or before you get the kids out of bed for school, or before you go to a meeting, or before you come home, your life will begin to change. You will begin to be “**transformed**”.

The more that you can VISUALIZE exactly what God wants you to do during stressful moments, then the more inclined you will be to do the right thing when those difficult moments arise.

Jesus knew EXACTLY how He was going to respond to Pilate, Caiaphas, the scribes, the Pharisees, and the soldiers who crucified Him before those stressful moments ever happened in his life. It is no different for us. Before a stressful moment occurs in your life, you have to **pre-determine** what to do **in your mind**, so that how you will choose to respond has already been determined. You already know what and how you are going to respond, what and how you should say something. This is exactly what Jesus was referring to when He told the lawyer “**You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**” How do you do this? How do you love God with “**all of your mind**”? It is simple. On a consistent basis you do the following.

1. You think ahead **in your mind** of how God wants you to respond to difficult moments.
2. You find time to renew and refresh **your mind** to how God thinks and what pleases Him.
3. You become anchored **in your mind** to God’s truth that never changes.

Let me close by reinforcing for you this **habit of learning to respond rather than react** to difficult moments. You can know if you reacted just by the inflections of your voice, the words that you use, the tone of your voice, the look on your face, or how quickly you become impatient and toxic with someone. So, here is the change that you need to embrace in your life. This is so compelling.

You have the power to choose how you are going to respond to difficult moments in your life before they ever happen.

Never blame your wrong reactions on other people, even if they have facilitated the difficult moment. You are always responsible for how YOU respond, responsible for the choice of words that you use under difficult circumstances. Listen very carefully. Please write this down.

YOUR RESPONSE TO YOUR DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES POWERFULLY IMPACTS THOSE CIRCUMSTANCES.

When you change just one part of a chemical formula, you completely change the effects of that formula.⁸ Your response, good or bad, will greatly impact the outcome that you will experience. This is the law of sowing and reaping, so take the time to visualize becoming Christlike before that moment ever happens.

⁷ Covey, 141.

⁸ Covey, 93.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Clear, James. *Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results*. New York, New York: Avery Publishing, 2018.

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

Groeschel, Craig. *The Power to Change: Mastering the Habits that Matter Most*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Books, 2023.

Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Revised Edition, 1993. Chattanooga, Tennessee: AMG Publishers, 1992.