Making Good Habits, Breaking Bad Habits

14 NEW BEHAVIORS THAT WILL ENERGIZE YOUR LIFE

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Chapter 1

The Anatomy of a Habit

Habits are things we learn to do through repetition and eventually do either unconsciously or with very little effort. First we form habits and then they form us. We are what we repeatedly do. Don’t be deceived by thinking that you just can’t help what you do, because the truth is that you can do or not do anything if you really want to. At least you can do anything that is God’s will, and those are the things we will discuss in this book.

I have learned that concentrating on the good things I want and need to do helps me overcome the bad things that I don’t want to do. The Bible says in Romans 12:21 that we overcome evil with good. I believe that should be one of our foundation Scriptures for this book and the journey we are embarking on. The other Scripture I want you to remember as you work toward your goals is found in Galatians.

But I say, walk and live [habitually] in the [Holy] Spirit [responsive to and controlled and guided by the Spirit]; then
you will certainly not gratify the cravings and desires of the flesh (of human nature without God.)

*Galatians 5:16*

Concentrating on the evil things you are doing will never help you do the good things that you desire to do. This is a very important biblical truth. Good has more power than evil. Darkness is swallowed up in light, and death is overcome by life. Whatever God offers is always more powerful than what Satan desires for us. The devil wants us to have bad habits, but God’s desire is that we follow the Holy Spirit and let Him lead us into the good life that Jesus died for us to enjoy. And a good life is a life with good habits.

One of the ingredients of forming good habits and breaking bad ones is focusing on what you want to do and not on what you want to stop doing. For example, if you overeat and want to form balanced, healthy eating habits, don’t think about food all the time! Don’t read cookbooks that are filled with beautiful, mouthwatering desserts, but instead read a good book on nutrition that will educate you about how to make better choices. Stay busy doing things that will keep your mind off of food.

If you want to form a habit of regular exercise, don’t think and talk about how hard it is, but think about the results you will have if you are persistent. Yes, you will have to invest time that you may not think you have to spare, and yes, you will get very sore in the beginning. When I first started working out with a trainer in 2006 at the age of sixty-four, I got so sore that I actually felt as though I was sick. And I stayed sore for what seemed to
me like two years. Honestly, I was sore somewhere all the time. Eventually I got to the point where I enjoyed the feeling because I knew that it meant that I was making progress.

If you want to get out of debt, don’t think and talk about all the things you won’t be able to do and all the things you will have to do without while you are paying off your bills. Instead of thinking of the negative side of your goal, think and talk about how wonderful it will be to be free from the tyranny of overwhelming debt.

We are motivated by reward, so if you will look forward to the reward, you’ll have the stamina you need to keep pressing toward your goal. Don’t defeat yourself before you even begin by setting your mind on the wrong things. Where the mind goes the person follows, so be sure that your thoughts are on what you want rather than what you don’t want.

Repetition

Repetition is the key to forming habits, good or bad. When working toward forming a good habit, you may have to leave notes for yourself to remind you to do the good thing you desire. Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you, too. The Bible says that He will bring all things to our remembrance when we need them (John 14:26).

My daughter Sandra needs words of encouragement. It is her love language, which means she feels loved when people encourage her. Her husband, Steve, doesn’t “speak that language,” so in the beginning of their marriage, it didn’t occur to him to
encourage Sandra verbally. After a few tearful episodes and her telling him several times how important this was to her, he started putting notes on his calendar reminding him to encourage and compliment her. End of problem! Sometimes a simple mechanism such as automatic reminders is the best way to start creating a new habit.

One man shared that he kept a rubber band on his wrist for a year, and every time he caught himself biting his nails, he snapped himself with it to remind him to quit biting his nails. It eventually worked. Some people put a bitter-tasting liquid on their fingernails. When they start to bite them subconsciously, the bad taste reminds them to stop.

The bad habits in our lives are our enemies because they hinder us from being the person we want to be. When an enemy is trying to destroy you, you cannot show that enemy mercy. God was leading the Israelites to possess the land He had promised them, just as He is leading us into the good life He has promised us. Many enemy nations were coming against them, just as the devil is against us. God told the Israelites to utterly destroy the enemy nations and to make no covenants with them and not to show them mercy, and we must do the same thing with the bad habits we have that are stealing our destiny (Deuteronomy 7:1–2).

Deal with bad habits relentlessly and without mercy. Find ways to help yourself do the good things that you truly want to do. Don’t fail to realize that bad habits steal the destiny God has preordained for you. Don’t think, “Oh, it’s just a bad habit, it’s not that big a deal.” If you think like that, you will more than likely never deal with that habit. Say to yourself instead, “This
bad habit is my enemy. It is stealing the quality of life that Jesus wants me to have, and I am not going to permit it to remain in my life.”

Theresa had a bad habit of hitting the snooze bar on her alarm too many times, and she was consistently late for work. She had to break this habit or she was likely to lose her job, so she moved the alarm clock across the room to force her to get out of bed to shut it off. She even went a step further by first pulling the sheets and covers up to the top of the mattress to remind herself not to crawl back into bed. In doing these things, Theresa was dealing aggressively not only with her bad habit but also with her enemy.

Rhonda’s husband drank several glasses of whole milk each day. She was concerned about his fat and cholesterol intake, so she gradually added skim milk to the whole-milk carton until eventually her husband was drinking all skim milk. He now says that whole milk tastes weird. This shows how we can gradually get accustomed to something that is better for us and not even miss the thing we previously did that wasn’t good for us.

Carolyn had a bad habit of eating containers of buttercream frosting. She would sit and watch television while spooning it into her mouth—without cake. In an evening she would consume 3,380 calories of pure sugar. She knew this was a very bad habit and an unhealthy one, so she took serious measures to stop. She asked her husband to throw it in the trash if she brought home a container of frosting from the store. But that didn’t work because she would simply dig in the trash and get it out. She finally asked him to empty the container and fill it with dishwashing liquid. She no longer eats containers of frosting.
Reprogram Yourself

It’s amazing how powerful your subconscious mind is. Every single time you do something, your subconscious programs it into your brain. The more you do it, the more entrenched the program becomes. I have been amazed at how difficult it is for me to do a new exercise and how much easier it gets each time I do it. My coach told me that it is not because I am too weak to do the new exercise but because my cells have to get accustomed to doing it. Each time I do a new exercise, my cells remember it and it is easier the next time. God has created us in an amazing way, and He has enabled us to be excellent people simply through doing the best things over and over again until they become part of who we are.

I have a bad habit of throwing my makeup brushes into a drawer after I use them. When I put on my makeup the next day, I get frustrated because it seems I can never find the brush I want. So I am in the process of forming a new habit right now. In order to do so, I have had to slow down and keep my mind on what I am doing. Now, as I use the brushes, I take the time to put them where I know they will be the next day. I have only been at it about three days, but by the end of three or four weeks it will be a habit and I won’t have to put out the same effort to remember it that I do now. I think a lot of our bad habits are simply the result of being in too big a hurry to do a thing right to start with.

Some people never pay attention to what they are doing, so they almost never know where anything is when they need it. This type of disorganization causes a lot of frustration, stress,
and loss of precious time. Through repetition, you can become organized in any area you need to. Remember, though difficult at first, it will get easier as time goes by. Slow down, breathe, and actually take the time to think about what you are doing.

Charles Dickens said, “I could never have done what I have done without the habits of punctuality, order, and diligence, without the determination to concentrate myself on one subject at a time.” God had given him a tremendous gift of storytelling, but he still had to form good habits of concentration, order, and diligence to be a good steward of his talent.

Many people are talented but don’t bother to form good habits. They won’t discipline themselves to do what they know they should do, but instead they wait to be moved by some outside force. This is called passivity, and it is a huge open door for the devil. If we are not actively doing what is right, it becomes very easy for the devil to get us to do what is wrong.

Be Active

God’s Word encourages us to be active, and by being active we shut the door to laziness, procrastination, and passivity. Remember, if we do the right thing, there will be no room for the wrong thing. Don’t merely focus on breaking all of your bad habits but instead use your energy to actively form good habits. You will soon find there is no room in your life for the bad ones.

Don’t wait to “feel” like doing a thing to do it. Live by decision, not emotion. I have learned by experience that the more I sit around and do nothing, the more I want to sit around and do
nothing, but if I get up and get moving, then energy begins to flow. Activity is like flipping on a light switch. The power is there all the time, but it is not ignited until you flip the switch. We always have the ability to be active, but no energy flows until we actually get moving.

There are mornings when I feel sluggish and as if I could just sit in a chair all day, but I have learned that after my exercise routine, I feel energetic, and that helps to motivate me to do it. If you feel sluggish, try taking a walk or doing some other kind of activity that will get your blood circulating. Don’t wait to feel like it; just do it. You are more powerful than you may realize. God has given you free will, and that means you can decide to do what is right and nothing can stop you. When we decide in favor of God’s ways, He always joins forces with us for assured victory.

As we leave this chapter, choose a habit you want to form and begin putting these principles into practice. Be patient with yourself. It takes time to create habits, and you may not succeed every day. If you realize you have failed, don’t waste time being discouraged; just pick up where you left off and begin again. Be kind to yourself, because beating yourself up for every mistake is another bad habit that needs to be broken.