

## Empowering Habits

“Change might not be fast and it isn't always easy. But with time and effort, almost any habit can be reshaped.”

— Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*

Often when we talk about habits we tend to focus on so called bad habits. These bad habits are disempowering. Good habits are empowering. A lot of what we talk about is how to break bad habits but ultimately bad habits need to be displaced with good ones. Successful people have habits that average people don't have. Healthy and fit people have habits that unhealthy unfit people don't have. You see this when you go to restaurants, and you also see it in what they do differently as soon as they get up in the morning. You see it in their buying habits. When we make disciples we are teaching people to obey the Word and in many ways to displace bad habits with good ones.

**“A nail is driven out by another nail; habit is overcome by habit.” — Erasmus**

People tend to be negative about rules but a lot of good habits are empowering rules (not debilitating rules) that we choose to live by. Habit formation tends to be slow and it requires discipline. Discipline is following through on what you have pre-decided is best for you to do despite your current emotional state. But once the habit is formed it is almost automatic. Pay now (formation phase) and benefit later. Behaviour that stems from trauma etc tends to occur quicker. Acquired behaviour through habit formation tends to take some time to develop.

So this message focuses on how to develop empowering habits. A key question to answer throughout this message:

**What do you do from time to time that needs to now become a habit and lifestyle?**

*The secret to greatness is hidden in your daily routine.* Don't measure your success in life based on your peaks. Look at your lifestyle.

**“We become what we repeatedly do.” — Sean Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens***

**Is what you are trying to do sustainable?**

If there is someone you admire, try to study their daily routine. Read their biography and you will see that our lives are a summation of how we use our time.

### 1. What is a habit?

**A habit is an automatically activated response that can achieve goals**

Dictionary.com

1. an acquired behaviour pattern regularly followed until it has become almost involuntary:  
the habit of looking both ways before crossing the street.

Merriam-Webster

1: a settled tendency or usual manner of behaviour

her habit of taking a morning walk

2a: an acquired mode of behaviour that has become nearly or completely involuntary

got up early from force of habit

b: ADDICTION

a drug habit

c: a behavior pattern acquired by frequent repetition or physiologic exposure that shows itself in regularity or increased facility of performance

In the psychology of habit formation, intentions and goals to perform become less influential guides to behaviour. With habits there is a shift from goal directed to habitual behaviour through repeated learning. Habits are stored in the procedural memory relatively separate from goals and intentions.

Habits form when we repeat behaviour in the same context. The context is important because our brain associates a context with a response. E.g. my wife resuming her run instinctively when an unknown lady passed her. That is why it is important to have a contingency plan in habit formation because we tend to stop habit formation when we are in a different environment. For example, our exercise strategy works well until we go on holiday.

## 2. What are some examples of habits in scripture?

### **Practising the word consistently**

#### **Hebrews 5:14**

*But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*

Hexis = practise

### **Jesus' prayer life was a habit**

#### **Luke 5:16**

*But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*

#### **Mark 1:35**

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*

### **Attending a place of worship was a habit in the New Testament**

#### **Luke 4:16**

*He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom....*

Custom = eithos = based on habit or tradition

#### **Acts 2:46**

*Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,*

Continued = to attend constantly

#### **Acts 17:2**

*As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,*

#### **Hebrews 10:25**

*not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Habit = custom

When people stop going to church, they often struggle to get back simply because it becomes a habit.

**Habits become deeply ingrained and hard to change.**

## Jer 13:23

*Can an Ethiopian<sup>[a]</sup> change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.*

### 3. How do you embed and reinforce a habit?

#### 1. Connect the habit to a value, principle or scripture

You are more likely to stick to something that you have a conviction about

#### 2. Translate your goals into habits

#### 3. Develop a routine and context around that habit

##### Mt 6:5 – 6

*<sup>5</sup> And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

Try to do it in the same context and at the same time. Smokers have been retriggered with smoking cues even when they were not experiencing cravings.

#### What are some dangerous cues in your life that are linked to bad habits of the past?

Smokers brought images of their favourite smoking places and it was found that these triggered cravings more than the general smoking environments. When people want to form new habits and break old ones it seems to be easier when their context is disrupted through a house move, life change (e.g. having a baby etc)

*Environmental cues direct attention and activate a habitual response in the mind even when people are not experiencing a desire to act.*

This has implications for infidelity and promiscuity. Don't mess around before marriage or else one day that environmental cue can come back to haunt you.

When I see the running track I want to run because of the connection my brain still has with the reward. This happens despite how unfit I may be feeling.

#### 4. Find a cue or trigger for the habit

#### 5. Invest in your habit

This is the sunk costs fallacy. You are more likely to follow through on something you have already paid for.

#### 6. Develop a reward system for achieving milestones within the habit

Research has found that stimuli that has been rewarded in the past gets higher attentional priority than non-rewarded ones. The reward helps to develop a positive association.

#### 7. Start small with the habit

This is important so that you enjoy the journey. Rather do a little bit each day and get into a flow instead of doing a lot just one day of the week. Space repetition is a key in learning.

#### 8. Adjust your self-concept to suit the habit

Do you see yourself as that person or is it foreign to your identity?

I don't just jog from time to time, but I see myself as a runner. I am an athlete.

**“Habits stay with you even when you don’t have the motivation.” — Neeraj Agnihotri, Procrasdeemon - The Artist's Guide to Liberation from Procrastination**

## **9. Create scripts and affirmations to reinforce your habits**

### **4. What are some scripts to pre-decide and reinforce habits?**

#### **Eye habits**

When I see an attractive female I always....

The moment I see inappropriate scene is coming up in a movie I always.....

#### **Character habits**

When someone cracks a coarse joke I always.....

Whenever I am waiting to pick up my kids I .....

When a female walks into a room I always.....

I always inform my wife about any interaction I have with someone of the opposite sex

#### **Homelife habits**

Whenever visitors come to our house I always....

Whenever visitors arrive we always....

Whenever visitors leave we always.....

Whenever visitors sleepover we always...

When I am eating with my family and the phone rings I always....

When I arrive at home I always ...

When I am about to leave home I always.....

When my kids arrive home I .....

#### **Security and safety habits**

When I am in the car and don’t have hands free and the phone rings I always.....

I never walk downstairs with my hands in my pocket.....

When I am crossing the road I always.....

#### **Money habits**

Whenever I receive any form of income I always (thank the Lord, inform my wife, tithe.....

### **Speech habits**

I make sure that everyday I .....

Whenever people praise me I .....

When someone gives me feedback I always say "....."

### **Marriage habits**

When my wife talks to me I always.....

Before we go to bed at night I always make sure I kiss my wife goodnight and pray for her and.....

### **Health Habits**

When I am at home I only eat ice cream once a week, usually Sundays.

When I go to that business school and have lunch I never....

When the waiter says there is no Sprite Zero my default is to ask for water.

When the waiter asks whether I want it fried or grilled I say, " ...."

When the waiter asks what I want as a side I say, "

Whenever I sit down to work, I sit with a bottle of water....

e.g. of a bad health habit is the concept of "Cheku Left" where you cannot drink tea or coffee without a bun.

Often you are not hungry but you just associate the two.

### **Devotional and ministerial Habits**

When I get up in the morning the first thing I do is.....

When we open corporate prayer meetings we always.....

Before we eat we always.....

When I prepare a sermon I make sure I .....