

Blog



Habits

How helpful are our habits?

“Our character is basically a composite of our habits. Because they are consistent, often unconscious patterns, they constantly, daily, express our character.” (Stephen Covey) We all have habits. Like it or not we are largely governed by the ingrained patterns that come with a lifetime of repetition. We may think that our character is built by moments of decision and motivation. But in truth it is the recurrence of regular habits that make or break us. We are what we repeatedly do.

Habits are powerful because we are creatures of habit. “Every single day, we make hundreds of choices without being aware of it. Most of those choices, we make automatically, based on the choices we made yesterday and the day before that.” (Katherine Walden) If we want to grow and prosper in life we have to come to terms with the habits that dominate our life.

It is fascinating to consider that even Jesus, during his earthly life, had habits. Whilst it is true that he did only what he heard from his Father, it is also the case that he observed some habitual routines. Luke gives us a glimpse into this with the following observation.

“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day.” (Luke 4:16)

For Jesus, attendance at the synagogue was one custom or habit. He had other habits such as prayer and patterns of ministry. If we want to follow Christ it would be helpful to know something about habits.

Bad Habits

Some habits are bad habits. “A single bad habit will mar an otherwise faultless character, as an ink-drop spoils the pure white page.” (Hosea Ballou) The nature of sin is that it grows and becomes an ingrained feature of our personality. Sin makes slaves of us all. Like a chain around us a bad habit comes to dominate our life. “Habit is a cable; we weave a thread each day, and at last we cannot break it.” (Horace Mann) Bad habits need to be broken, and for that we need the power of the gospel. It is the cross of Christ that breaks the addictive power of bad habits. Only Christ can deliver us from bad habits, and by God’s grace, through faith, all things are possible. Break bad habits.

Good Habits

Some habits are good habits. The New Testament is full of encouragement to Christian believers about living a life that pleases God. Much of this practical advice includes the development of good habits. Life works when we intentionally develop good habits, and the Christian life blossoms with godly discipline. Good habits around what we think, speak and do are invaluable to a blessed life. Good habits around spiritual disciplines will help us enormously. Good habits around healthy living, social interaction and spiritual practice will benefit us more than we could imagine. “Habit is more dependable than inspiration. Habit will sustain you whether you’re inspired or not.” (Octavia Butler) Develop good habits.

Neutral Habits

Some habits are neutral habits. They are neither negative or positive. Neutral habits just are what they are. Ironically, however, it is these neutral habits that can prove most damaging for a follower of Christ. Living on auto pilot is fatal to a pilgrim of faith. Neutral habits soon become traditions, and legalistic religion feasts on human tradition. Both the nation of Judah in Isaiah’s day and the Pharisees of Jesus’ day were criticised for supplanting a vibrant walk of faith with doctrines taught by men. When the innovative pragmatism of our fathers becomes a creed for the sons it is time to overturn such customs. The Christian religion is plagued by innocuous customs which have become sacred requirements. Keep neutral habits neutral.

“Habits change into character.” (Ovid) For that reason it is vital that we break bad habits, develop good habits and remain alert to neutral habits. “Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going.” (Jim Rohn) Jesus, in his flesh, was a man of exemplary habits. It will do us good if we follow in his footsteps.
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