

“Godly Habits”
Sunday, September 27, 2009
By Pastor Peter F. Paine

Isaiah 58:2-3

2. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.
3. Wherefore have we fasted, [say they], and thou seest not? [wherefore] have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.

The Bible talks about habits. It may not use that word, but it talks about our routines and the way we find consistency in our walk with God. Through study, we find throughout the Bible that habits do one of two things: they can either pull us closer to God, or push Him away from us.

Pastor Paine made it clear that this is not a message to beat up those of us who have developed bad habits in our lives. Instead, it is to build us up and give us the knowledge we need in order to get rid of those habits and replace them with positive spiritual habits.

Pastor Paine got a white board and asked for the congregation to shout out some good and bad spiritual habits. This is the list we compiled:

Good:

Prayer, Bible reading, fasting, connecting with others, fellowship, good communication, spiritual songs, and examining ourselves

Bad:

laziness, gossip, lying, procrastinating, complaining, prejudging, fault finding, forsaking fellowship, and not reading

These all seem to be pretty straight forward. There probably is not much on either the good or bad list above that would shock many Christians, but these are the habits that determine our spiritual success. Pastor Paine urged each of us to take the time to examine ourselves and do some spiritual inventory (which is a good habit to get into). Use the lists above to spark some thought about what habits we have allowed to develop in our lives and then later in the sermon, there will be a challenge for what to do with the spiritual habits you identify on these lists.

Job 1:1-5

1. There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name [was] Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.
2. And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters.

3. His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.
4. And his sons went and feasted [in their] houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them.
5. And it was so, when the days of [their] feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings [according] to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.

Just from this short passage of scripture, we see that Job had many habits that defined who he was spiritually:

- Upright and perfect in his actions (verse 1)
- Feared God (verse 1)
- Eschewed evil (verse 1)
- Wealthy- Pastor Paine reminded us that someone is wealthy because of their habits with their possessions and money. (verse 3)
- Brought his family together (verse 4)
- Early riser (verse 5)
- Made offerings to God (verse 5)

We can see from Job's actions just in these five verses that he had established habits that kept him in God's will. He wasn't lazy or just haphazardly going about his day-to-day life wondering what would happen next. He had habits that brought him to God every day and he was proactive in maintaining his relationships both with God and his natural family.

After looking at Job's habits, Pastor Paine talked about some habits that we find in the Bible that are not as good.

II Samuel 11:1-4

1. And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth [to battle], that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.
2. And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman [was] very beautiful to look upon.
3. And David sent and enquired after the woman. And [one] said, [Is] not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?
4. And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house.

Reading just these four verses would make anyone who didn't know the story of David's whole life think that he was just a bad guy. That's not the case though. When David was a child, we see that he had good spiritual habits. He was the same little boy that made the habit of talking about the great things God was doing (when he told Saul that he had killed a lion and a bear and would be able to take on Goliath), and he had the habit of making sure that no one talked bad about his God (which is why he decided he needed to

fight Goliath in the first place). So how does someone who starts out like that end up being the adulterer and murderer that we see during his reign as king? His habits slipped. It's just that simple.

In verse three we read that one of the servants that David sent to get Bathsheba told him that she was a married woman and that her husband was Uriah (one of the men fighting for David in battle when he called for Bathsheba). If David had been in the habit of accepting feedback from his servants and allowing his motives to be checked, he would not have found himself in this situation. He would have heard this information from verse three and gone back to his chambers, maybe gathered a few of his close advisors and read some scripture, sang a Psalm, and gone back to sleep. But of course, that did not happen. David could have made the choice to replace his bad habit of giving in to his physical desires with making himself busy studying the word of God or praising instead.

The same is true in the present day when we find ourselves bombarded by pornography at the click of a button. This is not a comfortable topic. Most people think this is something that is best left out of sermons, and should be left alone in public forums, but this is a problem that has become an epidemic in our society. God does not want us to shy away from the tough subjects when we choose to live our life for him, and just pretend that there are things we can handle on our own. Pornography is a habit, and it is becoming an addiction for hundreds of thousands of Americans every year. So what does God think of this habit? It pushes us away from Him. It is a habit that damages our relationship with God. Because of that, it needs to be talked about in the pulpit.

How do we fight the habit of pornography? We can take a cue of what not to do from the way David handled his situation with Bathsheba. Instead of thinking that we are all alone, remember that God is with us all the time. We can never "close the door" on what God sees in our lives, so we have to act as if he is in the room with us even when there isn't anyone else around. If we find an impulse to do or look at something we shouldn't we have to get in the habit of checking our motives.

Pastor Paine offered this story that he heard at a Promise Keeper's conference several years ago. A minister was speaking about the struggles of life on the road for ministry. His calling took him away from his family for weeks at a time, and he made a habit to ensure that he never found himself slipping in his dedication to his wife and children while he was on the road. Every time the minister arrived in a new hotel room, the very first thing he would do was take out a picture of his family and put it right on top of the TV to remind him that he wasn't alone. He had a wife and children that were at home counting on him. Pastor Paine said that this is a good habit he borrowed after hearing the story to help keep him from temptation while traveling. Little habits like this one are the best way to make sure that temptation is stopped at the very start. It's not about big actions that make it impossible for you to fall, instead, it is a series of small spiritual habits that we can make that strengthen us to do what God is calling each of us to do.

To understand what good habits feel like, Pastor Paine asked if there were any runners in the congregation. There were about a dozen avid runners in our group on Sunday morning. He asked if any of them ever miss a day of running and miss it. They all agreed that they do feel like something just isn't quite right when they don't get their daily run. Running is a habit for them, and even though running is very difficult for many to start, once it becomes a habit, missing a day is harder than running ever was in the first place.

Pastor Paine said that there is a list of reasons why he isn't a runner right now. "First of all," he said, "I had back surgery about a decade ago. I have tennis shoes, but they're not good enough to run in, and frankly, I'm fat." Even though it was humorous to hear such a blunt explanation of why he's not a runner, Pastor Paine used this point to say that we don't develop good habits for us (whether it is physically or spiritually) because we let our bad habits get in the way. It is not a lack of habit. It is a lack of having the right habit. If he was to replace his habit of letting his shoes be an excuse with making due with what he had, he would be off to a good start. If he broke the habit of accepting his current weight, he could replace it with a habit of being proactive to do something healthy every day. If Pastor Paine replaced his habit of letting past health issues affect his future, he could replace it with pursuing better physical health.

Of course this sermon isn't about physical health, and the illustration above is not about getting in shape through running. It is about using our bad habits as an excuse that won't allow us to establish good habits in their place. **What spiritual bad habits do we have that we use as our excuse not to get closer to God?** This is the challenge with the lists of good and bad spiritual habits from the beginning of these notes. Go back and identify what bad spiritual habits have formed in each of our lives personally and then identify the spiritual good habit that is its direct counterpoint. If we identify good spiritual habits that we used to have, but replaced them with a habit of excuse making, go back and reverse that process. If we have the habit of not reading, replace it with the habit of consistently making a set time to study and spend quality time with God. If we have the habit of finding fault, replace it with the habit of asking God to show you the positive in every situation and dwelling on that instead.

Philippians 4:4-19

4. Rejoice in the Lord alway: [and] again I say, Rejoice.
5. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord [is] at hand.
6. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.
7. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
8. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things [are] honest, whatsoever things [are] just, whatsoever things [are] pure, whatsoever things [are] lovely, whatsoever things [are] of good report; if [there be] any virtue, and if [there be] any praise, think on these things.

9. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.
10. But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.
11. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, [therewith] to be content.
12. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.
13. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.
14. Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.
15. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.
16. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.
17. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.
18. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things [which were sent] from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.
19. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Here are the habits described in the passage of scripture in Philippians chapter 4.

- Rejoice in the Lord
- Be moderate (so much so that everyone around you notices!)
- Don't be careful/ Leave it in God's hands
- Take everything to God in prayer
- Be thankful when we pray
- Think on things that are pure, lovely, and of good report
- Let our life serve as an example to other believers
- Be content
- Trust that through God we can do anything
- Communicate
- Care for those around us
- Trust God to meet all our needs

These are some habits worth having! Verse 8 is a great scripture to keep in mind when making spiritual habits for what we *think* about.

Pastor Paine told a story about one bitter cold afternoon in Chicago as he was finishing up a road trip. He just got through the last toll before his house when he saw a young girl that was broken down on the side of the road less than a quarter mile from the toll plaza. He admitted that he didn't want to stop and help because of the sub-zero temperatures, but the young woman looked like she was the same age as his daughters, and he couldn't just pass her by. Luckily, there was no severe damage to her car. She just had a flat tire. As he pulled out the jack and the spare, the young woman looked at Pastor Paine and said "this is an awful place to break down". He was stunned at her take on the situation. He pointed out that she was right by a payphone, there were people in the toll booths that

could make sure she was safe, they were on a solid (and wide) shoulder that would make changing the tire pretty simple, there was daylight, and she still had gas to get where she needed to be.

The point of this story is not that the woman was wrong for thinking that her situation was not the best, but her thought habit was to find the negative in the situation. Because of the positive thought habits Pastor Paine had, he was shocked when she thought it was a bad place to break down because he honestly didn't see any of the negative things about it.

We can do the same thing if we learn to live verse 8 of Philippians 4. If we start to “think on these things” that are lovely, pure, and of good report, we will start to see things the way God sees them, and in a light that leaves us poised for victory every time. We can establish the habit of praise when things are going wrong too, just like the lyrics of Blessed Be Your Name say:

*When the darkness closes in Lord
Still I will say
Blessed be the Name of the Lord*

Hebrews 12:1-7

1. Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset [us], and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,
2. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of [our] faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.
3. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.
4. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.
5. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:
6. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.
7. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

Some habits we find here:

- Lay aside things that distract us and hold us back
- Move forward with patience
- Focus on Jesus
- Strive against sin
- Be thankful when God corrects us: It's because he is treating us like His children and he wants to keep us on the right path. (Pastor Paine took a few minutes to develop this point because so many of us get so down on ourselves when we are corrected by God, but the fact of the matter is we should face correction with a lot of joy. Not because we like being told we're wrong, but because God has not given up on us.

Instead, He reached out to us when we mess up to lead us back to where we need to be with him because our relationship with him is important not only to us, but to God.)

Here is another great passage to look at when we are deciding to replace bad habits with good ones. How different would our lives be if we took these things and made them a part of our daily lives we just couldn't live without like a runner who just doesn't feel right without their daily run?

Romans 12:1-2

1. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, [which is] your reasonable service.
2. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what [is] that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

How about this for a couple of habits? If we establish the habit of viewing our lives as a sacrifice to God, we should be able to ask him every day of our lives: "What would you like me to do for you today, Lord?" and then follow through on it. By keeping our spiritual eyes open as we go through life, we won't miss opportunities to stand out for God. We won't realize in retrospect that God was trying to use us. Instead, we will be able to act on opportunities God gives us every day. When we renew our minds, we can flush the junk and get down to the business of being Christ Like. That's why we are called Christians in the first place.

Finally, we took a look at Acts chapter 10 and saw exactly what it looks like in action when someone lives their life as a sacrifice to God with a renewed mind. This incident in the life of Cornelius changed the entire world!

Here is the challenge Pastor Paine left each of us with:

- List our spiritual habits both good and bad.
- Find good spiritual habits that are a direct counterpoint to all of our bad habits
- Seek to change