



The inward area is the first place of loss of true Christian life, of true spirituality, and the outward sinful act is the result.

Francis Schaeffer

God knew what He was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love Him along the same lines as the life of His Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity He restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in Him.

Romans 8:29 (The Message)

What it is to be “transformed.”

Understanding Habits

The vast majority of what a person does is driven by instincts and habits – ways of behaving that are automatic and almost effortless. We are individually designed by God to have certain instinctual behavior. Instincts may be the initial basis for a habit, but habits are different than instincts because they are learned.

Taking a peek at our physical design may give some insight and hope with regards to habits. It is a long held belief that neurons operate by a biochemical reaction that lets a nerve cell carry a current, then shut it off. As each cell releases a chemical to the next cell, the next cell fires. With each firing, a stronger biochemical connection is made.

Your brain is made up of 100 billion neurons. As you grow and develop, these neurons are “wired up” to each other, and communicate through thousands of connections - synapses. Habits are formed when certain connections are strengthened. Weaker connections tend to atrophy away, making it harder to change. This can work for you or against you.

A habit is any behavior that is repeated often enough to become automatic and almost effortless. Your environment when you are learning a new behavior may later help trigger the habit, good or bad.

In order to become more like Jesus, many of our habits have to change, resulting in the development of godly character traits. According to the Apostle Paul, to offer yourselves to this change is a form of worship.

Is it any wonder why obedience is so necessary? It is for the sake of our growth and the blessings that come by following God’s way of seeing and doing things. God asks for obedience because He knows what is best for us. After all, He designed us. We create our own bad weather at times by remaining outside of His ways.

This is the beauty of Romans 12:1-2. The idea of giving our bodies as a form of worship recognizes that there is a sacrifice that includes our very being. The next verse warns us to

not copy the behaviors and customs of this world.

Do some of our habits fit into this category? Paul says

let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.

New habits born out of obedience change the very wiring of our brain, if we offer ourselves to this end. And the benefits are incredible in knowing God’s will.

Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

An interesting fact on habits is that new habits become easier as time goes by because of the actual transformation of your mind. This offers new hope of success when you understand that the hardest part of starting a new habit or replacing an old one is at the beginning.

Godly Habits Define Godly Character

Character is what you are in the dark.

D.L. Moody

Our character is revealed by what we do when no one is looking. Therefore our habits are a reflection of our character. They reflect the true condition of our heart when our guard is down. When our habits are in obedience to God's Word, moral excellence radiates from our lives.

God is more interested in the character of Christ in our lives than our convenience, comfort, or wealth. To this end, God allows circumstances into our lives to reveal our character and opportunities to develop new character as we choose to respond in obedience. But circumstances can also be a two edged sword. We could also choose against responding the right way. And as we do, we further develop our unhealthy habits, thereby perpetuating unhealthy outcomes.

Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey His commands.

Deuteronomy 2:8 (New Living Translation)

Developing New H.A.B.I.T.S.

We recognize that spiritual character development is the natural outcome of developing godly habits. Whereas God supplies the power for change, we offer ourselves to the process. The following H.A.B.I.T.S. are meant to be a memorable starting point for creating the fertile soil for spiritual character development. They are not meant to become another burden for the believer. Our motivation should never be about the process, but the person of Jesus. Otherwise our pride would turn our efforts into an exercise of legalism. We would miss the person of the Scriptures for the sake of knowing them.

You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you'll find eternal life there. But you miss the forest for the trees. These Scriptures are all about Me! And here I am, standing right before you, and you aren't willing to receive from Me the life you say you want.

John 5:39-40 (The Message)

H = Humble Devotions

Our faith combined with God's grace unleashes in us the power of becoming more like Christ and breaking out of old habits. Since God gives grace to the humble, we come to Him with a humble heart. To come to Him with a preconceived plan and ask Him to bless it is acknowledging that His ways are better than my ways and His thoughts are higher than mine.

"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55:9 (New International Version)

In our humility we want to develop the habit of having devotions. This is a special time that we spend with God on our own. This may include a time of prayer, reading a passage and reflecting over it, singing to God, waiting on Him for answers, conversing with Him, giving thanks and more. It helps to grab a Bible and find a quiet place free from distractions where a healthy habit of connecting your heart with God can take place. As for how long of a time, I once heard it described like digging a well. Dig as deep as it takes to hit the water of life so that your thirst is satisfied.

A = Accountability

One of the healthy ways of belonging to the body of Christ is in the relationship

of accountability. It is easier to sin when we feel like no one will know. By having an accountable relationship of the same gender with someone who knows the good and bad of me, I become stronger. One of the greatest temptations that befalls mankind is that of being independent and isolated. Independence has pride that resists the power of grace. Isolation denies the power of community.

A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer.

Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 (New Living Translation)

B = Bible Memorization

The habit of hiding God's Word in our heart through memorization is so powerful for transformation and becoming more like Christ. The correlation of sin and the lies that we believe that infiltrate our way of thinking is clear. Most of us learn basic presuppositions about truth and life from our culture and environment. These presuppositions become the basis of our truth. And soon the data of life seems to validate these beliefs. These assumptions about how life works infiltrate our thinking to the point that we question God and His ways. We start off in our walk of faith often questioning God's principles as valid.

As our journey progresses, however, we start to find that our way of thinking leads to brokenness and His way of thinking leads to freedom. But how can we break the patterns of our destructive thoughts unless we introduce new principles to our mind in a way that they become second nature. This is where memorization becomes so important. To know of a truth versus having it hidden in your heart is the difference between falling into old patterns or choosing new ones. When a principle is memorized we are able to bring it up on the screen of our mind and meditate upon it's truth. We can imagine situations where the principles apply so that new reactions take place when we encounter those very circumstances. And it is by doing what God asks verses just hearing God's truth that leads us to the blessings that God affords us.

Dear friend, listen well to My words; tune your ears to my voice. Keep My message in plain view at all times. Concentrate! Learn it by heart! Those who discover these words live, really live; body and soul, they're bursting with health.

Proverbs 4:20-22 (The Message)

But don't just listen to God's Word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the Word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

James 1:22-25 (New Living Translation)

I = Involvement

Becoming mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ, starts in part by coming together in service. And this service is based on our design. God made us and gave us gifts so that we can cooperate and that through this cooperation God's work can be accomplished. That we would be unified in faith and in our knowledge of Jesus. That others may look upon our unity of purpose and be attracted.

Also accomplished is interdependence, our design for community. Again we were made in the image of a "we." To not participate in the community robs the individual and the body as a whole. God designed us incomplete without others. So, though it benefits the whole body for you to participate, it completes you and your purpose when you become involved! It moves you to maturity.

It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11 (New International Version)

But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where He wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body.

All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

1 Corinthians 12:18-20; 27 (New Living Translation)

T = Tithes, Gifts and Offerings

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to Him.

Psalm 24:1 (New Living Translation)

From the very beginning in Genesis we are called into stewardship of this earth. The perspective of stewardship comes by an understanding that everything is God's and we are called to act on His behalf. There are many destructive habits in our life that find their roots in a belief that all that we have is by our own hand. Therefore it is difficult to part with our resources of money and time. Control issues build that spread into other parts of our lives. Eventually we are slaves to the process of building resources and tithing becomes counter intuitive.

The whole point of building this habit is to move us to the proper understanding of our place before God and the resources He entrusts to us, both now and for the future. He doesn't need our resources for He is rich, but He needs our trust in him with regards to resources. One way to build interdependence is for God to bless others through us.

The Christian is no longer under the legal obligation to give. Rather, we are compelled by the love of Christ to give freely, as He freely gave Himself for us. On this basis, we are encouraged to give generously and willingly, in proportion to the blessings that we have received. We give because we have received more than we could possibly ever repay.

Bringing the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this, says the LORD Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

Malachi 3:10 (New International Version)

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.

1 Corinthians 16:2 (New International Version)

S = Study of Scripture

The study of Scripture involves more than just reading it. Just as a baby must be weaned from milk, so must we be weaned in order to chew on the meat of Scripture. God's Word is incredibly rich. It would be naive to believe that we could access all of the truths through a general reading. God's Word is timeless and surpasses even culture. There are methods of study that we can learn that help us overcome cultural and personal bias and careless interpretation to get at the truth. It is much like searching for gold. Only so much can be found at the surface.

The rest requires some digging. When we seek for wisdom as if we were seeking for gold, then we will come into a deeper relationship with Him. We will learn the right way to go, which is the first step towards becoming like Jesus.

My child, listen to what I say, and treasure My commands.

Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding.

Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding.

Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures.

Then you will understand what it means to fear the Lord, and you will gain knowledge of God.

For the Lord grants wisdom! From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.

He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest.

He is a shield to those who walk with integrity.

He guards the paths of the just and protects those who are faithful to Him.

Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair,

and you will find the right way to go.

Proverbs 2:1-9 (New Living Translation)

We are also called as believers to handle accurately God's Word.

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what

Paul said was true.

Acts 17:11 (New International Version)

Proactive vs. Reactive Growth

A life that is not transformed has a tendency to go through life reacting to life. When we don't grow, we tend to be victims of circumstance rather than victors over circumstances. It is important for us to allow the circumstances of our lives to grow us.

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.

Romans 5:3-4 (New Living Translation)

A proactive life does not wait for circumstance to be the motivation of change. It makes choices in obedience towards transformation because it is right to do so. It is a proactive message in Romans 12 that calls us to offer ourselves as a spiritual form of worship. It takes work to submit to the process of change and it takes character to go about it in a proactive way.

So don't lose a minute in building on what you've been given, complementing your basic faith with good character, spiritual understanding, alert discipline, passionate patience, reverent wonder, warm friendliness, and generous love, each dimension fitting into and developing the others. With these qualities active and growing in your lives, no grass will grow under your feet, no day will pass without its reward as you mature in your experience of our Master Jesus. Without these qualities you can't see what's right before you, oblivious that your old sinful life has been wiped off the books.

2 Peter 1:4-6 (The Message)

Balanced Growth

Our Process of Growth Revisited

Taking a look back at our process of growth, we are reminded of different aspects of growth coming together. Our lives reflect different areas of process in different areas of our lives. I might be at the "begin" stage in one area and at the "become" area in another. When it all comes together, this model tends to be more descriptive than prescriptive. This model helps you to quantify any one area you are in.

This model is helpful in another area as well. Each area has a transitional point built in. When we move from one area to the next, such as “Begin” to “Belong”, we will notice transitional moments of discomfort. It is important for us to understand these transitions as growing pains that serve to move us along in our growth.

Here are the various growing pains to expect. While in the “Begin” place, I may find that I become uncomfortable in that there are those further along than myself who seem to have something I don’t have yet. At this crisis point, I may choose to move on or work through it. This may mean entering into relationship. That relationship may represent itself by receiving Christ as Savior, committing to the church through membership, or joining a group. However it plays out, there is a renewed excitement as the individual makes the transition into deeper relationship.

Through deeper relationship, this same person over time may find that they are attracted to those who seem to have a deeper faith. They see the blessings of their life and would like to see those same things in their own life. They once again will enter into a crisis way of thinking. They may begin to think of themselves as weaker or less spiritual. They may be tempted to move on rather than feel incomplete. At this point they need encouragement to move to the next level of growth which takes their commitment to Christ into the level of being His disciple. It is moving from milk to meat. And with this transition comes a renewed excitement as the individual discovers the depth of the Truth of God. They discover that God’s Word is alive. That His principles for life make sense as more areas of understanding are turned over to Him. At this point there is a thirst for knowledge and going deeper.

Over time, however, this same excited individual will enter into their next crisis. They will become more and more frustrated as they start to run into the same truths. God’s Word does not change and there is a lifetime of riches to be found, but they will begin to hear the same stories and begin to critique the message giver in an attempt to recreate that early excitement. They are at risk of becoming cynical and stagnant in their walk. They are at risk of becoming a hearer only. In doing so, they are at risk of holding to a form of godliness yet denying its power.

At this point they need to move into the phase of “reaching beyond”. If they start translating God’s Word into action, a whole new excitement will return as they see the three dimensional quality of God’s Word. Those same old principles take on a whole new meaning as they are brought to life. If a person understands their design for ministry and enters into service for Jesus, they will experience the joy of having and serving a purpose.

The last transition point comes when they realize that a small percentage of believers actually enter into this stage of their walk. They hear the statistics that 20% of believers carry 80% of the load of ministry. They are tempted to badger others into fulfilling the responsibilities of being a disciple. They also come up with plans on how to do it better. In their frustration, they have yet to figure out they are called to use their gifts not only in service, but also in helping others to move along in their growth. They have become leaders, not so much as in the gift of leadership, but in the area of discipling another person along. A new excitement is realized when they are involved in the life of another and have a front row seat to what God is doing.

This whole process of growth, the joys and the frustrations, make up the interdependent relationship we have with each other in our journey of faith. It is important for us to encourage each other through the growing pains, as well as celebrate with each other when it all seems to come together.

Illustration: The Four Seasons

Principle: Every season has its value in bringing forth fruit. Embrace the seasons as they come for what they are.

The Law of the Harvest

Don't be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit.

Galatians 6:7-8 (New Living Translation)

It is a pretty simple principle, but powerful nonetheless. If you want apples, plant apple seeds. If you want pumpkins, plant pumpkin seeds. But if you plant pumpkins and want apples, you will still get pumpkins. That is the law of the harvest. You will harvest what you plant.

This also means that if I plant new seeds today, I can harvest new fruit tomorrow. Unfortunately, I will still have a harvest today of what I planted in the past. There are seasons of transition that you will just have to be patient with, but in time a harvest will come.

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Galatians 6:9 (New International Version)

Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until He comes and showers righteousness on you.

Hosea 10:12 (New International Version)

Balanced Living

There is a great word picture that can help us diagnose ourselves from time to time as to the current condition of our walk. It is called the living water principle. In nature, in order for life to be maintained in a stream of water, you need water coming in and water going out.

Dry Land

Dry land represents when water is not coming in or is going out faster than it is coming in. This person's walk seems dry because they are either always serving but never being fed or not putting themselves in the position of being fed, by living water.

Dead Sea

The Dead Sea represents a place where water is always coming in but has no outlet. The water evaporates away leaving the poisonous chemicals behind. This represents the person who is always drinking from the fountain but never has an outlet through ministry service. Their walk is characterized as stagnant.

Living Stream

The life-giving stream represents life giving water constantly moving through the land. It characterizes someone who has struck the balance between giving and receiving, between hearing and doing. This person's walk is alive with the water of life flowing within.

Each of these scenarios have their own beauty. But only one sustains life. A balanced life offers a way for beauty to translate into life.

Ways to Become

"Come, follow Me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

Matthew 4:19 (New International Version)

- **Westminster Life: Beyond** - Explore how the desires of your heart, the experiences of your life, your spiritual gifts, your personality, and your natural abilities all work together to define your purpose within the body of Christ and your ministry to the world.
- **Christian Growth classes** - Make Sunday more than a one service event by joining one of the many classes designed to grow your faith.
- **Small Groups** - Join or host a small group that focuses on study or ministry.
- **Discipleship** - Accountability and mentorships help us stay on track and obeying God to the point of transformation.
- **Celebrate Recovery** - A safe place to work through some of the unhealthy patterns that hinder us from becoming all the we can be.

Will you consider committing to the following?

- To proactively pursue growth opportunities through Christian Growth classes or small study groups.
- To find an accountability partner to journey with.
- To be a doer of the Word not just a hearer, so that there is balance.
- Ongoing seasonal evaluation of personal growth.

Our Commitment to You

- To follow God's direction as we lead the body.
- To provide opportunities for balanced biblical growth.
- To provide a healthy balance of connection opportunities within the church.

Signs that I'm ready for more -

"I'm ready to live out what I know to be true. "

"I'm ready for God to use me to accomplish His purposes as He sees fit."

"I'm desiring for His purpose in me being realized."

"I'm ready for a deeper connection to the principles of Scripture."
