

## **Part IV**

### **Habits to help you flourish through 2019 and beyond.**

***Ps Dermot Cottuli***

Aside from uncontrollable life events, where you are today and the person you've become, is a result of the habitual things YOU do, day in and day out.

"Your habits are key to who you are and the change you want."

"We first make our habits, and then our habits make us"

Change the bricks you're building your life with and you'll change the house you end up living in.

God never intended for us to sit around wishing that things were different. He's given us the tools we need to create a life that won't just satisfy us, but will have a profound influence for good in the world around us.

Last week we had a bit of fun describing what the perfect Christian would look like. It's no use worrying about the habits you need to work into your life if you have no idea where it is that you want to end up. We looked at the characteristics that Jesus and Paul along with Peter identified as being needed in a person's life if they were to experience life to the full. We realised that all of the characteristics stemmed from habitual behaviours that were engaged in day in and day out.

For those who missed it here's what we came up with for a person who actually does what the Bible encourages them to do.

They pray constantly, give thanks all the time, obey the commands of Jesus to love God and others, spend time studying what God has said, look for opportunities to do good, tenderly care for the weak, warn the lazy, live humbly, meet together with other Christians regularly, encourage others, live generously, hold onto their hope, do what the Lord wants them to do, they don't get drunk, are being filled with the Holy Spirit constantly, avoid evil, don't give up, and are growing in faith, goodness, knowledge, self control, perseverance, godliness, kindness and love.

So if you want a life that 's characterised by peace, faith, hope, kindness, love, resilience, generosity, goodness, humility, joy. A life that's a breath of fresh air to everyone who comes in contact with you, a life that pleases the heart of God and leaves a mark on eternity, then you're in the right place this morning.

The key that unlocks all of the above is found in the habits we engage in day in and day out. You see most of have a problem, some of us have multiple problems, we're not where we want to be in life. We see the promise and it makes the present so much worse because we're consumed with our problems. The link between any problem and promise in your life is a simple word called process. Process simply describes the steps you need to take to lay hold of the promise. And here's the wonderful news that you've all been waiting for. Those steps that will take you to the promise are made up of the habits you engage in, day in and day out. In themselves they look kind of insignificant but as Paul told us, when we don't give up doing good we will always end up reaping a harvest. That's the power of good habits!

Now last week I said that in this series I'd share a habit with you that helps us to depend on the Holy Spirit more and more, because the Holy Spirit is actively involved in producing fruit in our lives and the fruit that He produces helps us to experience all of the above.

So it makes sense to start this next part of our series where we target specific habits that we should consider developing, with the most important one of all. The one that gets us moving in harmony with the Holy Spirit.

Why is that so important? Why start with this one?

### **Romans 8:5-14 (Amplified)**

For those who are living according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh [which gratify the body], but those who are living according to the Spirit, [set their minds on] the things of the Spirit [His will and purpose]. Now the mind of the flesh is death [both now and forever—because it pursues sin]; but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace [the spiritual well-being that comes from walking with God—both now and forever]; the mind of the flesh [with its sinful pursuits] is actively hostile to God. It does not submit itself to God's law, since it cannot, and those who are in the flesh [living a life that caters to sinful appetites and impulses] cannot please God.

However, you are not [living] in the flesh [controlled by the sinful nature] but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God lives in you [directing and guiding you]. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him [and is not a child of God]. If Christ lives in you, though your [natural] body is dead because of sin, your spirit is alive because of righteousness [which He provides]. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.

So then, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but not to our flesh [our human nature, our worldliness, our sinful capacity], to live according to the [impulses of the] flesh [our nature without the Holy Spirit]— for if you are living according to the [impulses of the] flesh, you are going to die. But if

[you are living] by the [power of the Holy] Spirit **you are habitually putting to death the sinful deeds of the body**, you will [really] live forever. For all who are allowing themselves **to be led by the Spirit of God** are sons and daughters of God.

Paul is telling us here that if we habitually give space to the Holy Spirit we will end up pleasing God and experiencing life forever because it will change what we pursue in life. When we habitually set our minds on the Spirit we experience life and peace. I don't know about you but I reckon the majority of people on the planet today need a lot more life and peace than they're currently experiencing.

Last week we read in **1 Thessalonians 5** Paul's instructions to never stop praying. Just in case you think it was just the translation we were reading from, even the Message Bible translates it "pray all the time."

I'm sure the majority of us skim over that part of Paul's instruction because let's face it, it seems quite unreasonable on the surface. However Paul doesn't say anything without a reason. What was he talking about here? I mean was he expecting that we sit in a corner and pray constantly? How would we get any work done? We'd be terrible company at parties if we never stopped praying.

I want to set your minds at ease, I don't believe that Paul was saying we had to be praying the Our Father over and over again or even praying in tongues 24/7. Paul obviously wasn't praying when he wrote any of the Epistles because he was writing to believers. It's hard to compose a letter and talk to someone at the same time.

So what did he mean?

I believe what Paul was talking about was the habit of being constantly conscious of the Spirit of God in our lives. At times that will lead you to verbalise prayers for yourself or others and at other times it will lead you to act. A lot of the time it won't require you to do anything.

One of the habits which I think has been lost to the modern western church is the concept of waiting on God, being aware throughout your day of the presence of God. It's this habit that I believe Paul was alluding to when he said we were to pray all the time.

### **Isaiah 40:27-31**

Why would you ever complain, O Jacob,

or, whine, Israel, saying,

"God has lost track of me.

He doesn't care what happens to me"?

Don't you know anything? Haven't you been listening?

God doesn't come and go. God lasts.

He's Creator of all you can see or imagine.

He doesn't get tired out, doesn't pause to catch his breath.

And he knows everything, inside and out.

He energises those who get tired,

gives fresh strength to dropouts.

For even young people tire and drop out,

young folk in their prime stumble and fall.

**But those who wait upon God get fresh strength.**

They spread their wings and soar like eagles,

They run and don't get tired,

they walk and don't lag behind.

If there was only one habit that you could develop this year and you chose this one, you would be so far ahead of any other year in your life that there would be no comparison.

The habit of waiting on God is the habit of being conscious of God throughout your day regardless of what it is that you're doing. It's being aware of His presence in any social setting that you find yourself in. Whether you're driving your car, sitting in a meeting, mowing the lawn, even having a conversation with a friend you can be aware of God's presence.

Jesus said to his disciples not to worry about what they'd say when dragged before kings and rulers because the Holy Spirit would give them the words to say. The inference being that they would be aware of his presence with them.

It's a learned behaviour and one that if you habitually practice, can become over time as automatic as breathing. It's not a super spiritual trait reserved only for mystics. I believe it's for every son or daughter of God. It's the key to an abundant life full of peace. What did Paul say in Romans? He said that those who "set their minds" on the Holy Spirit will experience life and peace. It's that little statement "set their mind" which tells me that this is something which we do, and can do, and that it's something that we need to make a habit of doing.

This is what I call the super habit. It's the habit from which all other spiritual habits flow from. It's the habit that empowers everything else. You can form other habits without this one in place but if this is in place, everything else is so much easier. It's like building a house, you don't start with the roof or the doors, you start with the foundation. Get the foundation right and it sets the boundary line for the rest of the house.

### **So practically, how do you do it?**

Remember how we said during week 2 of our series a key to making habits stick was to embed them in a behaviour chain? Patterns of behaviour that

you already follow are the best place to stick a new habit. So in the morning if the first thing you do when your alarm goes off is head to the toilet, say good morning to the Holy Spirit before you fall out of bed. Say good night to the Holy Spirit when you turn out the light at night before sleeping. Make it a habit. When you sit in your car as you reach for the seat belt, stop for a second and say hi to the Holy Spirit.

What you're doing is looking for moments throughout your day when you can pause on the inside and fix your attention on His presence within. I'll often just say His name, that's all it takes to turn my attention toward Him, and momentarily wait on Him.

***Here's the key, life is made up of moments. Your aim is to have less and less time between the moments that you're aware of His presence.***

**What do you think would happen if you started to do this more and more?**

Do you think it would become easier to figure out what God is saying to you, to know His will in any given situation? Of course it would. Do you think it would become easier to forgive others, to be generous, to be kind, to read your bible, to talk to God on behalf of others? Absolutely. What about peace, joy, thankfulness, will they increase in your life if you're becoming more and more conscious of the Holy Spirit's presence with you throughout each day?

What about handling temptation? If Jesus was right beside you and there were two pieces of cake being divided between you and someone else, and they weren't the same size, which piece would you take, knowing that Jesus is watching? Choosing the smaller piece would be so much easier. Do you see what I'm saying?

You need to write this down in a place you'll see it regularly.

***"I will become more conscious of the Holy Spirit in my life each day."***

By writing it down you're making it both a promise and a goal.

Many of you already know my story of learning to wait on the Holy Spirit. For a whole year every Monday morning an alarm would go off on my phone, which would pop up with a reminder, "Go to the Botanical Gardens and wait on God." It went off for nearly a year before I eventually hopped in my car and drove to the Gardens out of sheer frustration. That started a habit and over the next 5 years every Monday morning I would go to the Gardens and wait on the Holy Spirit. It changed my life and changed the way I relate to Him.

If you were to work on this habit and this habit alone in 2019 your experience of God will change forever, your relationships will improve, your joy and peace will become so much more stable in your life, your hope for the future will blossom, your faith will become so much stronger. In fact you could quite easily find a whole bunch of other habits attaching themselves to your life, as the Holy Spirit starts to have more say in it.

If you're a believer, Paul says you already have the Spirit living in you so you're ready to get going. If you're not a believer you have a choice before you this morning. Go through life alone or invite Jesus in and ask Him to give you a brand new start. The Christian life invites you into a relationship with your Creator. A relationship that will challenge and change you like no other. It's not a set of rituals rigidly followed but rather a growing relationship with Jesus who has your very best at heart and the power to help you achieve it.