

The Power of Habit

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Welcome to Brothers of the Word because brother you need the Word!

And I'm going to be talking today about a subject that we all struggle with and I don't just mean some of us. I mean all of us from the three Pastors including everybody and not only do we struggle with it as pastors, it's the biggest thing that we struggle with as pastors and not only that it's also the thing that God has dealt with a pastor on the most in his life. And basically God said, If you do this one thing, that it will bless your life in the ministry more than any other thing. And I believe that same truth holds true for you as I does for the pastors. And it won't be a shouting message today but rather a teaching message. But if you apply the principles God has placed within my spirit to share with you today. I believe it will change your life in a tremendous way.

And even as my classmates are here from Mays High School, when I was about 10 years old, my father took us to the house of the late Dr. Benjamin Mays and he said that he wanted him to impart some wisdom in his children and even at 10 years of age, I can still remember vividly to this day, sitting at the feet of Dr. Mays. This was before I even knew I was going to his high school and my brother Dale at that time was the only one of us that was a minister. And I remember him looking into my brother's eyes and he said, 'Young man, when you get up to preach, don't preach to make the people shout, preach what the Lord God has told you to preach, preach to change lives and live with integrity. And that message stuck with all of us. From that day on, I will be preaching what God has placed in my spirit to give to you this day and my title for today is, "The Power of Habit".

And there was a story about a man and a horse. And this man – he was a distinguished dressed gentleman and he was galloping down the street on his horse and he just looked like he was going somewhere important. He had on his fizzy suit and he had this look on his face and you could just tell. And there was another man bystander looking at him on the side of the road. And as he looked at this man on this horse, he said that man is somebody important and he's going somewhere important. I just really would like to know where this guy is going and who he's going to meet with. He looks like he might be meet with the Governor or the Mayor or somebody really important and he said – Excuse me sir, I just hate to butt in your business. I know it's your business and you're very important and busy man. It's just eating me alive – just of curiosity. Can you just tell me, where are you going? And the man looked at him in the eyes. He said, I don't know, ask the horse.

And that's the horse of habit that we all have. And that's how our habits do us. They take us places, we're not even conscious of a lot of times. We just get in the motions of it. And we're going somewhere without leading the horse and I want to give you some keys in this message today that will allow you to take reigns of the horse and begin to lead that horse of habit until the direction of your destiny. James 2:26 says, For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead

also. Faith without works is dead and faith is defined as a strong belief in something. A goal is a desired result that you believe that you can achieve. You have faith in this goal, believing that you can do it and it can be something positive for you. And as this scripture is rightfully applied to its spiritual faith, I also believe it holds the same measure of truth for our goals here on this earth. Our goals, our dreams, our hopes without works – They are all as dead.

And I'll give you some tools today to achieve your goals in life and to prepare yourself for the destiny that God has for you. And we developed habits at the earliest of age. Even our first week out of the womb, most babies begin to suck on their thumbs and it's not until their parents break them from that habit do they stop. Parents will put something on their fingernails or cover their hands with something. I heard some parents laugh; they know how hard it is sometimes. We need to put some bitter aloe tasting stuff on some of our children's thumb to stop them from sucking their thumb. It was a habit developed early in life. Many habits we pick up from our parents or our siblings. My father had a habit, he would eat very slowly, even when he would drink his liquids, and he would look like he was just chewing on that. And when I got married, I didn't recognize that I had picked up this habit. One day we were eating and my wife said, 'Why are you eating so slowly? Why is it that when you talk you're holding the liquor in your mouth like this and talking?'

I really didn't pay attention. I don't know, all I know is my father did that. I guess I just picked it up. I still have that habit today. I go out to lunch with people I'm the last one to finish eating – slow. I heard some people say Amen, those I've been to lunch with me before. And years went by and I kept going with this habit and before long my wife noticed. She said, 'Do you know how children are drinking and chewing their liquid and they didn't learn that in school.' So the power of habit, even the universe in all its vastness and grandness is established in habit in the macrocosm. All of the planets revolve in a habit pattern. The sun rises every morning in the same pattern. Every evening, it sets in a similar pattern. We just left the beach last week. The moon causes the tides to role wave after wave in a habit formation. The seasons operate on a quarterly habit – winter, spring, summer or fall.

On the other extreme, on the microcosm, like charges particles repel each other and opposite charged particles attract, operating in pattern in any molecule. Animals operate by instinct which are habits built into each species. Mankind is the only creature that can overcome instinct and create his own habits by exercising the power of will and free choice. And although most women I tell you. Even though they got that power, most men still are dogs. And even with that subject, Pavlov, did some experimentation with dogs and he noticed that whenever he would ring a bell and feed the dogs. Even when the food didn't come, they would just ring the bell after the dog would still salivate. So women, you all can use that, you may need to

get some bells around the house. It may explain why the belly dancers, when they are entertaining men, you realize they have bells on their garments and jiggles. You don't know how you can use Pavlov's research for your personal lives.

Rivers they develop banks which are like the confines of habits. Once water gets in a groove, it continues in this groove and it's hard to get a river or stream out of the groove that it has set and so it is with humans, I declare to you today. Habits are hard to break and the fact of it is even evident in the word habit itself. If you look at it, 'HABIT'. Even if you take the 'H' off of that word 'habit', you still have 'ABIT' – a bit is still left, it's hard to break. Even if you keep going, you take that 'A' off you still have 'BIT' – the bit is still there of habit, it's hard to break, even if you take the 'B' off 'IT', it is still there hanging in there. Those habits are hard to break and it's not until you remove the 'I', until you get ego out of the self, out of the way and remove it and say, I want to change this. I have the power to change it. I'm going to let the ego go even though I've been doing it this way a long time. I want to do better for my life. It's not until you remove the 'I' that the habit is broken.

Daily habits build up overtime whether they're good or bad habits. The Bible says that you reap what you sow, whatever type of habit you sow on your life, you will reap the benefits of the detriments, and they're of a bad habit.

Let me give you a brother point and that is, 'Sow a habit, reap a character' and that quote is by Charles Reed – Sow a habit reap a character. If you sow the habit of daily reading, you'll reap knowledge and understanding and a powerful vocabulary over the years. When you hear people on jeopardy that sound so smart and they are answering all of the questions, you can rest assured that they are avid readers, that they read a lot of material to get the knowledge that they have. A lot of people here even comment on how Pastor Nathaniel – like you just know something about everything. Well, that's not by accident when Pastor Nathaniel was in his teenage years and even in his 20's not that he's far from that now but he would actually read almost one book everyday, wherever we would go, he would always have a book in his hands. So he was going through almost a book a day. Am I telling the truth Pastor? Amen.

So that's where his knowledge came from on so many diverse subjects. When you see ministers with a heavy anointing of spiritual gifts you can be assured that they have spent time practicing the habit of much prayer and much study in God's word and much praise. When you see someone with a ripped up body and they got 6 to 8 packs – sticking out, you can be assured that they have spent years in the gym, day after day building up their muscles. On the flip side, if you go to the doctor and he tells you that your arteries are clogged, that didn't happen from eating just one cheese burger or two cheese burger or the fries value meal. No something bad is going into your body over the years. When you put on 30 pounds, it doesn't happen overnight even though that sometimes it may seem like it just popped on there

overnight. I can tell you, news flash, that didn't come on there overnight. These pounds grow day by day. They build up. When you see a lung blackened from cigarette smoke, that didn't get that way from just smoking one cigarette or two or even one or two packs. That came from one cigarette at a time year after year inhaling it.

The power of habit is not inherently good or bad. It's neutral much like money. The quality of it being good or bad comes from how you use it. Here's another Brother Point – Your net worth to the world is usually determined by what remains after your bad habits are subtracted from your good ones. And that quote is by Benjamin Franklin, your net worth is what's left after you subtract your bad habits from your good ones. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new. And when we come to God and give our life to him, we go up into the baptismal and we go under the water and come up. A lot of times we expect to just come up new. All of the things we used to think – they're just gone. We don't have to struggle with what we used to have to struggle but any experienced Christian can tell you, that's not the case.

And now a days, much of the church looks just like the world. The world can't tell the difference on a true Christian a lot of times because they don't see a differentiation in their lifestyles. The reason we struggle to maintain the life Christ lived and told about is because even though we have the spirit of God dwelling within us, that old mindset – those old habits are still hanging on for dear life and almost every year, it seems that we hear about some minister involved in a scandal and when psychologists sit down with this ministers in every case that I've studied following up after that fact, in every case, the psychologists find that this was on a bad habit that they developed, the ones they learned famous and got a lot of money, they go back in spine. Then in college most of them were still practicing this same behavior. That once they began preaching, once they began being a bishop, once they got on television, this habit was still there underneath the whole time that no matter how much they taught the people, the habit clung to them.

Old habits are hard to break. We all have our own struggle trying to live as Christ lived and that's why God didn't give me a message today that would make you shout. He gave me a message that will help you change your habits. Your life will change and we were created as creatures of habit and we were wired so that each time we do something, it gets easier and easier with each repetition. Think about it when you first learned how to drive a car and I can remember it vividly. I was so afraid and I remember sitting there and I would want to keep my hands at the right position in the 9 and 2 o'clock and I would just sit, I was just like scared even to shift around in my sit. And I remember my behind used to get sore. I asked my mother, how do you deal with keeping your behind from getting sore. She said, you've got to shift and move baby and I was just scared to move.

And my first time behind the wheel, my mother might not even remember this but, we were going to my grandmother's house way down in South Jordan and she pulled over to the side of I-75 speed limit about 65 miles an hour and she said, here son take the wheel. I said – What? Which panel is the gas that makes it go?

And I had to drive about 50 minutes all the way down to my grandmother's house and I guess she figured it straight away and I had to do a lot of traffic and when we got on there, I ran excited – Grandma I can drive now. Do you need to go to the store, you need to go to the movies – I'll take you. And my grandmother came out to ride with us and I remember, I backed out of my grandmothers driveway and like I said, I hadn't had a lot of lessons at this point and it was a two way street there and I backed out and went across the line and that wasn't all of the problem. I backed out, I went across the line but I stayed and I said, how do you shift this thing into drive? And grandma looked at the cars coming on the other side of the street toward us and she turned to my mother and got on – she said, why did you bring this boy all the way down here to kill me?

And needless to say, I'm a much better driver today but even with driving how many of you have been driving to work or driving home and you're mind is going off on something else and before you know it, you realize you're at your destination and you're like, I don't even remember making all those turns on auto power. And on the flip side, I've been driving, I've been on the phone talking or talking with my wife in the car and I've been going somewhere new and I'll be on the expressway I just passed my exit and go to where I normally go and the mind would be on auto pilot taking you. Raise your hand if you've had either one of those two experiences. Look around at the power of habit. Some of you may do that on the way home today.

Small actions repeated daily compound over time just like money. These actions accumulate in the great fortunes of healthy bodies, strong minds, fulfilling relationships and develop spirits. It's hard to see growth each day but over time, you and others will see the change. It's like a carrot growing under the soil. The growth is hidden until it has developed enough to pour. And data is a computer information term but today I'm going to use it as an acronym for the best way to form positive habits and it's a Brother Point as well. That is to use 'DATA' to form good habits and that 'DATA' there stands for daily actions that are tracked and accountable – Daily Actions that are Tracked and Accountable. Every major goal has to be broken down into small daily habits. Action items that you must repeat everyday to make the goal happen in the future, to finish in a level of school, finishing school is the goal but the small daily action would be to go to class, do your homework, study and pay attention.

You may have a goal to lose 30 pounds, that's the overall goal but the small daily goals would be to exercise a certain amount to – eat smaller portions of meals, healthier meals. You may have a goal of getting closer to God. The small daily

actions would be to reach your Bible a certain amount of time – spend a certain amount of time in prayer. Goals have to be broken down to small daily repeatable actions. And I think everyone at some point wants more for their life and sets larger goals and where they are at the moment. Where there is a new year, there's a birthday or any other point. We all set resolutions at some point. The difference in those that achieve these goals are resolutionistic establishment of daily habits.

And that's why so many people said, New Year's resolutions every year but only a few are able to make them permanent changes in their life and they don't take the next step performing daily actions that are trapped and have accountability to someone else and you should create daily habits that focus on the total person. Some in the mind category, some in the body category, some in the spirit category, habits to grow each person, or each part of your person. Keep balancing your life.

Here's another Brother Point, the best way to remove an old habit is to replace it with a new good habit, you think about a nail on a wall. You know, you can drive out a nail if you take a new nail, put it at the head and hit it with a hammer. It will drive the old nail out; well that's how habits are. Dr. Maxwell Maltz, he was a plastic surgeon and he noticed that after he would cut off an arm or a leg, that people would have these phantom sensations like the arm and leg was still there. And he began to study them and observe them over a period of time and he's found that it took 21 days for that sensation to cease and he kept doing his research and they found that that 21-day period was how long it takes for your brain to form new neural networks and to form that habit into something that was automatic.

Three months ago, I was in the shower and nobody really ever taught me how to properly take a shower. When I was young, they gave me their soap and rag and said, boy you go now and you get cleaned up. So I was just in there one day and I said – What is it? I noticed that I was washing my face last. I was going over my body and using the soap from the rag to wash my face. This was a habit I formed as a boy. I'm still doing this; I didn't have any logic to it. I said, I'm going to change it. I need to wash my face first. I need to clean it. I wash leave dirt there and then go back over my face. So I said, I'm going to change that. The next morning I got in and before I realized, I was down to my waist. Oh I forgot to wash my face. And the next morning I was down to my knee and I said, oh I forgot to wash my face. And it took me weeks of reminding myself but after those 21 days. Now I go in and then automatic, just from a few months that I automatically, without thinking about it now, I wash my face first.

Now, don't go out telling everybody, Pastor James was washing his face. We've got to keep that in here. 'DATA' – Daily Actions that are Tracked and Accountable. And if you have an addiction and you go to A.A. or drug rehab, they'll tell you two steps to overcome a bad habit. A tracking and having accountability, and people who stopped drinking, smoking or doing drugs usually can tell you exactly how long it

has been since their last fix. I mean, it will sound funny to you sometimes, you talk to a – he said, Man, I've been sober 528 days now. They know it because they talk to track exactly how many days and they found that it is successful in breaking habits.

I found that same thing to be true with developing a good habit. The times Pastor and I had stated most diligent on our daily programs are the times we've had the most tracking and accountability and I found that if no one was watching us, no one else was watching our results. Sooner or later, we weren't watching it ourselves and you've got to have tracking and accountability.

For your accountability partner, you can use a spouse or sibling, a friend, a mentor, anyone you wouldn't want to let down and if you're really serious and want to do something, without a shadow of a doubt, you can even get creative and post your results on FaceBook, saying – Keep track of me, let me know if I'm staying on and we use a website called 42goals.com. – It's free of charge. It will track all of your daily habits and they give you percentages – it lets you know how you're doing every week and month. And it has a feature where it will allow your progress to be shared with your accountability partner.

Schools figured this out long ago. They have to develop a grading scale to let students know well they were doing, they are going to start mailing those report cards to the parents – a lot of them wouldn't take them home. So they mail them and they knew that parents had to make the students accountable. Imagine for a moment, if you've got not grades in school. If there was no report card, there's no way you could flunk a class. Imagine how you would have done at school. Some of you might be saying. Well, I still didn't do my stuff with degree. But I can tell you, you wouldn't have done even less if there were no grades, there was no flunking. In addition to that, even if they gave grace, but only gave them the 'U' and it was like medical information on our privacy act.

With your parent didn't have to write to see and access your grade information. Imagine how you would have done. And I even remember when I got to college. They weren't taking up the role and I noticed the other students and the cut-right – much higher when teacher didn't take the role. So when there was no tracking and accountability, I saw that people got off their daily programs.

Well I thank you, that's all of my time and I hope this message will change your life one habit at a time, one daily action at a time. God to 42goals.com to set up your daily habits and you can go to Brothers of the Word.com to hear this message in its entirety or send it to a friend free of charge. I thank you and God bless you. Thank you for tuning in to Brothers of the Work because brother you need the Word.