

New Hope Sermon | HOLY HABITS



THE POWER OF HOLY HABITS

The two most recent books I've been reading for review both stress the power of holy habits – *Get Your Mind Right* by Todd Durkin and *Men on Fire* by Stephen Mansfield. Durkin advocates habits from a fitness perspective. He says:

Everybody has habits, whether they're aware of them or not. If there are too many bad habits in your life – like skipping workouts, eating junk food, or staying up too

late to play video games – they will take over your life like weeds infesting a garden.

So let me ask you this: What are your habits like? Which ones take precedence in your life? The reason I ask is because many are unaware that they have fallen into a rut of bad habits. They get up and start their morning shower. They sip their cup of joe while they dress, grab a bowl of cold cereal, and sprint through the front door to join the rat race. When the workday is over, they drive home, eat dinner (either at a fast-food restaurant or straight out of the microwave), check out social media with the TV going in the background, and fall asleep as the Tonight show comes on.

I realize these are generalizations, but ask yourself, do these habits look anything like yours? There's more to life if you can develop a new routine and get your mind right.

Remind yourself that it takes time to establish new habits. It's often been said that it takes twenty-one days to form a new habit. I've been skeptical of that number because I've witnessed with my own eyes how long it takes people to really establish a new routine. It's considerably longer than twenty-one days...it takes sixty two days to wire a new ritual...What matters is that you take the necessary steps to break out of your humdrum routine and start *new* habits that will help you get your mind right. Once your mind is renewed, you'll find change much easier to accomplish. (Todd Durkin *Get Your Mind Right*. Baker Books, 2020. pp. 92-93)

Mansfield emphasizes habits in his chapter *The Fire of Love*. This is also worth quoting:

My father nearly always opened the car door for my mother. He taught me to do the same. Now it is a habit. I nearly always open the car door for my wife. She is certainly capable of doing it herself. Yet it is what a man does – to show honor, to show care, to protect, to serve, and to reveal tenderness. Old school, I know, but I believe in it fully.

Here's what I want you to know....I've opened her door thousands of times in our years, I'm sure. Each time, the deed summons the feelings....the doing draws out affect and tenderness and honor that are there but not active when I'm going about my normal day.

The principle is that the habits of honor surface honor. Habits of love surface love. Habits of tenderness surface tenderness...So one of the arts of manly loving is that we build in habits for those we love. (Stephen Mansfield, *Men on Fire*. Baker Books, 2020. pp.117-118.)

In many ways I think this COVID-19 pandemic has struck at the foundation of the habits (or routines) we had built into our lives. For many, these months of quarantine have meant working at home, not the accountability of being at the

office or school etc., not meetings with friends, not even going to church and having more free time than we ever did before because of daily commutes or class schedules, or business appointments etc.. Having to find a new normal is not bad, but it is wise if we take stock of our lifestyle priorities these past months. Ask yourself these questions:

- Have I actually spent less time with God in prayer and Bible study?
- Am I being as consistent without a group to pray earnest intercessory prayers with tears and fasting like Epaphras who “wrestled in prayer for the Colossian Christians that they may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and full assured” (Col.4:12)?
- Am I being diligent in limiting my time on social media so I have more time with the Lord?
- Am I being consistent with my exercise programs and my healthy eating patterns?
- Am I careful with where my thoughts are taking me, so I don’t meander down the pathways of lust or discouragement or depression or jealousy or woundedness or pride?
- Am I being as faithful to the Lord in these weeks when no one is watching as I try to be when I am in community?

Todd’s book *Get Your Mind Right* has forced me to answer these questions and many others in a similar vein. So let me share how this has helped me with the hopes that some of his ideas can help you too. One of his sections is on the importance of having rules to keep your life on track with your priorities.

MY (Todd Durkin) 13 RULES FOR GETTING YOUR MIND RIGHT

1. I will get at least 7 hours of sleep each night, so I adjust my bedtime accordingly. I will also get two massages per month. Bodywork does amazing things.
2. I will avoid caffeine after 2:00 PM and drink no more than two beers or glasses of wine per month.
3. I will train for at least forty minutes first thing every morning. This includes a minimum of ten to twenty minutes of prayer time, followed by thirty minutes of movement. I will listen to an inspirational podcast while exercising.
4. I will not turn on the phone until I’m done with my morning routine. And that goes for checking email as well.
5. I will think about the power of one. Who will be the “one” person today that I am going to channel energy to and pour love, encouragement, and motivation on?
6. I won’t swear. I will use words and vocabulary that increase the positive vibe in a room
7. I will do my best to make sure I win the day. I am in control with *how* I choose to spend my time, *whom* I spend it with, and *what* I spend my time doing.
8. I will write down my WLAGs every Sunday – my **Wins, Losses, Aha moments**, and my **Goals** for the upcoming week. I want to create my “Daily Big 5” for each day too.
9. I will write in my journal daily for at least five or ten minutes
10. I will be positive in my interactions and communication with everyone I’m in contact with- be it in person, online, or through social media. I will avoid negative interactions in person or online.
11. I will share my desire to motivate, inspire, and create impact with 10 million people in the world. I can’t wait!
12. I will live a life guided by purpose and passion. I will not be steered by jealousy, gossip, temptations, or energy vampires. I will let my big, hairy, and audacious goals motivate and inspire me to do my best work.
13. Finally, I understand that I cannot and will not please everyone. I will focus on living each and every day with zero guilt on how I conducted myself, with what I said or did, the decisions I made, or my actions, knowing that I did my absolute best to be the best father, husband, coach, leader, and person I can possibly be.

What stands out to you from his list? Do you need to make any of these a daily priority?

SOME PERSONAL APPLICATION

For me, the Spirit nudged me in terms of # 3, 5 9 and 11. Particularly #3: “I will train for at least forty minutes first thing every morning. This includes a minimum of ten to twenty minutes of prayer time, followed by thirty minutes of movement. I will listen to an inspirational podcast while exercising.” I appreciate that he always sets aside those 40 minutes at the very beginning of his day and includes his time with God in prayer and Bible reading as part of his

“training.” I am not going to be following his “movement” regimen of push-ups, squats, dumbbells and tread mills – (the book is written for generations much younger than me), but I want to be sure not to rush into the day and cut short time in prayer and listening to God in his word. Fortunately for me, writing *Scattered Flock* is the responsibility that makes sure this daily time with God with an inner listening heart is not neglected. But still I need to take more time to study, meditate and memorize the Word. I realized I also have neglected proper exercise. The Florida heat right now makes being outside very hard on my body but we have a large, predominantly ranch house and so I have begun marching all through the main floor – with my arms moving and high-stepping in my march. A sight to behold, to be sure! But it is a way I can still fulfill this priority.

I also appreciated his emphasis on seeking “one” person a day to whom I can channel love, energy, encouragement and motivation. And then, adding that to #11, holding before the Lord the ways God can use me as His workmanship on a much wider world stage.

I believe these priorities are God’s goal for every believer, so I share this practical sermon because holy habits really are essential to our growing as a Christian and being usable for the Lord.

In Robert Mulholland’s book *Invitation to a Journey: a Road Map for Spiritual Formation*, he says that the classic spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, worship, study, fasting, retreat, solitude and spiritual reading (where we come to a text as a means of grace to open us up to God’s agenda (p. 111)) are “essential for deepening one’s relationship with God, enriching one’s life with others and nurturing on toward wholeness in Christ. This is why they are referred to as ‘holy habits’.”

So today, I want to have us all together as well as separately take a closer look at how we are experiencing God, living out our faith and encouraging others day by day. The COVID-19 pandemic has created untold suffering and anxiety around the world. It has upended our “normal schedules” and often torpedoed our walk with God. It has caused choices we didn’t plan on, substantial free time we haven’t had before, and struggles of our body, mind and soul. But God is able to help us “will and do of His good pleasure” (phil.2:13) so we can buy up this time of substantial uncertainty, confusion and suffering. He is “the God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ.” He has not forgotten nor forsaken his church. Instead, “after you have suffered a little while, He will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever amen.” (1 Peter 5:10-11).

May He be our All and All in these tumultuous days:

You are the strength when I am weak, you are the blessing that I seek, You are my all in all.
Seeking you as a precious jewel, Lord to give up I’d be a fool. You are my all in all.
Taking my sin, my cross, my shame, rising up again I bless your name.
When I fall down, you lift me, when I am dry, you fill my cup. You are my all in all.
Jesus, Lamb of God, worthy is your name. Jesus, Lamb of God, worthy is Your name.
Jesus, Lamb of God, worthy is your name. Jesus, Lamb of God, worthy is Your name.

Amen.

Dr. Mary Lou Codman-Wilson 7 17 20.