

# BEING

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## SERIES

40 days to being more like Jesus

### January 7, 2025 - Being Challenge Launch

Guest: Zach Zehnder

As important as all the goals and resolutions that you can make and achieve in a year, the greatest opportunity in a new year is that it's one more year where to grow in your relationship with God. You can hit every other metric you can think of, but if you didn't grow in your relationship with the One that made the universe, I'm not convinced it was altogether a successful year. All goals don't matter if, by the end of the year, we haven't grown as a disciple. And not because you have to, but because you want to because He is worthy.

-What if this could be the year where you really grew in your relationship with God unlike any year previously?

In these 40 days I'm going to challenge you to practice what I believe are the 5 keystone habits of Jesus Christ so that ultimately you can grow in your relationship with God. Today is laying the groundwork but **it's going to require** your participation and buy-in for the next 40 days. We actually get to BE in relationship with God. We can definitely commit 40 days of participation.

-What is the 21.40 Challenge? Click [HERE](#) for more details.

-How will you stick with this commitment? What makes it difficult?

-What can be done to lessen roadblocks to your success in this 21.40 Challenge?

Our adventure is going to start with Michael Phelps at the 2008 Olympics. Michael Phelps was a huge success as a swimmer: he has the right body, big hands, a long, powerful torso, short legs and feet that rotate beyond ninety degrees (he can bend his feet more than most ballerinas). **The one problem he had before his races was getting nervous.**

Like many of us, the greater the challenge, the more nerves we have. So, his coach introduced a series of habits into Phelps before every race to help him find routine and alleviate the anxiety. So even if the competition and challenges got bigger and better, it still would feel close to the same.

These were the habits: he would eat his breakfast of eggs, oatmeal, and 4 high calorie shakes on time, and never vary the menu. He would do the same warm-

ups/stretchers, put on his racing suit which takes 20 minutes to do, put on his headphones listening to the same music that he trains to, and he visualizes in his mind every element of every race- literally close his eyes, take deep breaths, and visualize exactly how many strokes it's going to take.

In the 2008 Olympics, when Phelps dove into the water, his goggles came loose and by the time he reached the final turn, he was almost blind. But he did not panic because as part of his training, he would swim in a pitch-dark pool just to prepare him for such. **He counted his strokes, just like the routine he had established.** Not only did he win a gold medal, but swimming blind, the guy beat the world record.

This story shows us the power of habits, that as we do things over and over, they will become easier and easier until one day we can do them blindfolded, or without even thinking about them.

-Do you have any such habits in place in any area of life?

There are habits that can help transform your life and help you live as God has always intended you to live. Over the next 40 days, you will be challenged to practice the 5 keystone habits to help you grow in your relationship with God **so that ultimately you can be** a greater disciple of Jesus. Discipleship starts with relationship. **Great disciples of Jesus are in a great relationship with Jesus.**

If you are a part of Good News Church, you know we have 3 Pillars/Core Values: Connect, Disciple, and Empower. The greater our connection is to God and one another, the greater disciples we will become. The greater disciples we become, the more you will be empowered to live as God intends us to live.

The big questions we are tackling over the next 40 days are:

- 1) How do I grow in my relationship with God?**
- 2) What are keystone habits and how will they help us connect with God?**
- 3) What are the keystone habits that we find in the life of Jesus?**

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### **1) How do I grow in my relationship with God?**

Before God ever asks us to do anything, He invites us to **be** with Him in a real relationship. So, how does a person grow in their relationship with God? It's probably wise to look at the person who has had the best relationship with God and whom we can learn from and try to be like: **Jesus**. We would be wise to not only look at Jesus, but **do the things that Jesus did.**

Jesus said: **Matthew 11:29** "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." The Message version: "Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace."

This is the anchor verse of the entire series. We are called to learn from Jesus. And as we do, we find rest; we find who we are; our soul is at peace. The goal of being like Jesus is that we would see habits in His life and then these habits become the unforced rhythms of grace in our lives. Creating new habits may be work at first and may even be difficult, but over time these habits become a part of who we are. We don't even have to think about them...it's just what we do and who we are.

-What habits of Jesus do you long for? What have you been able to implement into your life?

-Do we ever "arrive" and have all the "right habits" figure out?

**Even though the world changes all around us, we don't have to change who we are!** Because we know who we are, we know what to do, we know where to aim...at Jesus...to connect with God. It's important where you aim. Remember the Zoom example: **Good intentions looked right but they were not directed at the right thing and it cost people.** Through the wild and disruptive times we are living in, it's never been more important to keep our eyes and our lives fixed on Jesus. If we are just a little bit off, it will have devastating consequences.

-What does Pastor Zach mean when he says "if our aim is just a little bit off, it can lead to devastating consequences?"

-What good intentions were off in the zoom example? In what ways can you relate to this story in your own life?

In Western Christianity, many people have good intentions to follow Jesus, to be His disciples, but don't know what to do next. And because of this, we've collectively given a really confusing representation of Jesus.

**Intention to follow Jesus without direction on Jesus leads to confusion.  
Intention to follow Jesus with direction on Jesus leads to transformation.**

-Break these down. What does this mean?

I don't think Christianity has an intention problem. I think with good intentions many of us love Jesus and want to be more like Him, greater disciples of Him, and yet, collectively, Christians are not even closely known for the same words as Jesus. We have a directional problem. **You can have all the right intentions but even if you are little bit off, it can lead to devastating consequences.**

We can **want** to be like Jesus, but if we aren't hitting the right targets something is off. **If our aim is to be like Jesus, aim to do what Jesus did!**

67% of Nebraskans say they believe in Jesus as Savior yet in the same survey, we have one of the lowest number of “practicing Christians.” Plainly, we don’t have an unevangelized city, we have a “SLEEPINESS PROBLEM” in Omaha. We don’t want to do the work and aim to be like Jesus.

-Discuss this statement.

What did Jesus do to connect with and grow in His relationship with God? **He implemented keystone habits.**

## **2) What are keystone habits and how will they help us connect with God?**

### **40% of our actions that we perform each day are habits (Duke Univ study)**

meaning almost half of what we do isn’t thoughtful decision-making, but habits. And while each habit may mean very little on its own, over time, the meals we consume, what we say to our spouse each day, whether we save or spend, how often we work out, etc has enormous impact on our health, productivity, financial security, and happiness.

As a pastor, I have focused a lot of my attention on trying to help people make the right decisions in life. But if I want them to be greater disciples of Jesus, I need to not only teach them how to make good decisions, but maybe more importantly teach them to put habits in their lives that will automatically put them in a position to make good decisions.

-How would this look different than just teaching someone how to make good decisions?

The **definition of a habit** is “a regular tendency or practice, especially one that is hard to give up.” All of us are a result of good habits and bad habits. Habits do serve some sort of purpose or you wouldn’t do them. This is not rocket science but a lifelong process that doable though not easy is breaking bad habits and making good habits.

There’s another level of habits that goes beyond good habits: **Keystone Habits-- “a habit that people introduce into their lives that unintentionally carries over into other aspects of a person’s life.”** - author Charles Duhigg

Keystone habits create a **domino effect** that can change every area of your life. **This one habit can lead to multiple other good habits.** A keystone habit is no more difficult to form than any other habit, but provides the most benefits. Examples of keystone habits that have been proven to actually affect several areas in our lives: regular exercise, making your bed every morning, flossing

-How have you seen the domino effect, good or bad, of habits in your life?

**If the goal in life is to be a greater follower of Jesus, then it's important that I have habits in my life that point to this goal.**

**1 Timothy 4:7** "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness."

Paul reminds us that to ultimately become more like God, more like Jesus, takes discipline.

Message says "Exercise daily in God—no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever."

Physical, mental, and emotional good habits are important but there is nothing more important than spiritual habits. Our spiritual life habits lead the other areas of our lives.

### **3.) What are the keystone habits that we find in the life of Jesus?**

What habits did Jesus practice to be in relationship with God, the unforced rhythms of grace that Jesus had in His life? What should we do to be more like Him? You may have heard these referred to as spiritual disciplines. As I looked through all 4 Gospels, I found 5 habits that came to the top of the list. This is not an exhaustive list, but again, I think it's important to set targets we can hit, and to aim right at Jesus, and where He aimed, and what He practiced.

The 5 keystone habits that Jesus spent His life doing and that I believe can make a life-changing difference in our relationship with God:

- 1) Committing to Community**
- 2) Studying Scripture**
- 3) Prioritizing Prayer**
- 4) Seeking Solitude**
- 5) Choosing Church**

**Community** is important because we are wired for **relationships**. Our relationships really can help dictate the habits in our lives. And this one is chronologically the first one we see. Jesus chose His 12 disciples first because **it makes little to no sense to try to practice the other habits in your life if you don't have the environment and people around you first who value the same things.**

-Is your community helping you become more and more like Jesus or not?

-What do your closest relationships value? Is it the same as you? Do these values prioritize Jesus?

-Are you in biblical community? One way to start is Wednesday Night Breakouts or finding a Life Group

**Scripture** is important because it's where we find our **identity**. Before we determine what habits are in our lives, it's important we know who we are. Amazingly, 10% of the words that Jesus says in the Bible, the red letters, are Him quoting Old Testament

passages. Jesus knew who God was and He knew who He was. Discover who He is and you will discover who YOU are.

-How so?

**Prayer** is important because it allows us to communicate with God and He gives us **direction** in a world that has never been more confusing. We have the opportunity to communicate with God and grow in relationship with Him, the Creator of the universe. Why would we not prioritize this communication?

**Solitude** is important because it allows us to **focus** in what is a very loud and distracting world. This one feels so far removed but amazingly, it's documented 39 times in the Gospels. Jesus got alone to spend time with God. You are never fully alone. ONLY Jesus was ever fully alone and that was His CHOICE on the cross so that we would never have to experience that. We need the quiet with Him to bring clarity in the midst of constant confusion.

**Church** is important because it is where we **consistently** hear the Good News of Jesus, which is what compels us to not only want to grow in relationship with God, but compels us to want to be the greatest follower of Jesus this world has ever seen! We never come here and NOT hear the good news of Jesus. We need that every week, at minimum, wouldn't you agree?

As we practice these 5 habits, I guarantee that not only will you grow in your relationship with God, but you will be a greater disciple of Jesus. So, over the next 40 days, in the weekend worship experience, in your daily readings in the book, in your weekly life groups (it's not too late to jump into a group), even in kids and YTH ministry, we're going to be challenged each day to do something to help us BE with God and put these habits into practice.

-What should we DO to BE with Him and to BE more like Him? Practically what does this look like in your life over the next 40 days, over this year?

#1 Do the 21.40 challenge with our church family.

**Many of us will want to just start doing, doing, doing.** But take a breath. Even when it comes to habits and goals, the wisest thing to do is simply something small. There is power in the small choices that you make.

**People often overestimate what they can do in the short-term and underestimate what they can do in the long-term.** Our long-term is to be more like Christ, but for now, let's take one step in the right direction.

In fact, my entire goal for the series is that you would implement just one new daily habit in your life. That's it. One step every day. **Small habits done over a long time make a major difference.**

There's an ancient Chinese proverb that says, "A journey of 1000 miles starts with a single step." **We are all capable of one single small step.** The end goal may seem way out there, but if I take one small step toward the goal, I'll be getting closer, and eventually I'll reach my destination.

Now the danger in this, is to make sure I'm walking in the right direction, which is why I'm saying, we are taking dead aim at Jesus Christ. Because if you are not careful, if you don't know where you are going, you could be moving in the exact wrong direction, and you could find yourself after a whole lot of steps and effort going in the complete wrong direction.

-What's one step in the right direction that you can take this week? Ideas: Come to one of the extra prayer meetings, join the fast, commit to reading the 40 simple readings of the Being Challenge

The daily challenges don't start until next week, so let me issue a challenge from the stage today: put one small, daily habit into your life **this week.** I don't even need it to be a spiritual thing yet this week. **But what's one thing you can do this week every day?**

Never underestimate how our God can start something big through one small habit. Our God loves to take small acts of faithfulness and do something special through those things. Five loaves and two fish = food for thousands. Faith as small as a mustard seed can move mountains. Salvation for the world comes through a baby in Bethlehem born in a manger in a feeding trough. This is powerful truth!

Some of you might think, "even if I wanted to, I can't change. I can't even think about good habits because I'm stuck in a life of bad habits and I can't find a way out. I'm stuck in some bad habits that I can't get out of."

I'm here to tell you today, **no you are not. That's a lie.** Our God is not just a habit-maker, he's a chain-breaker. Remember that God always provides a way out. **1 Corinthians 10:13** says, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."

**Jesus Christ not only was your way out when He went to the cross, but He is still your way out today.** And what's amazing about shooting to be like Jesus is that not only is He a great teacher and model for us, much of what we will be looking at in this series, but He's also our Lord and Savior. **The truth is that if you are just following Jesus as your teacher and model, you'll learn some cool things, but you'll also be crushed by the expectations.** You won't live up to them.

**But because He's also your Lord and Savior and your Redeemer,** every time you fall, and you will, God will have grace that the Bible says is sufficient for you. So the answer isn't I've failed so let me give up. No, the answer is, "Wow, God has grace beyond grace for me!" **There's a lot of people that are really hard on themselves. And what you need to see today is that 2 steps forward and one step backward is still one step forward. And God is proud of you. God loves you.**

-Are you inspired today? How will you respond?

You and your habits absolutely can change. You are a child of God, and if a child of God, not only do you have His grace for the times you fail, but you have the Holy Spirit inside of you.

**Romans 8:11** "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you." You have the same Spirit that rose Jesus Christ from the dead inside of you!

**The very heart of the Gospel, the Good News, is that when Jesus Christ comes into your life by grace, through faith, that not only do you inherit eternal life with Him, but you are changed right here, right now. You are a new creation. And a new creation that gets to be in relationship with Him. That gets to be a disciple of Jesus. And live empowered to go and change this city and beyond. This is the greatest opportunity in this world that we will ever have!**

-So my question to you...will you commit to be with God for the next 40 days?