



#3 In the Family Foundations Series

The Power of GOOD HABITS

Forest Park Church

May 14th 2023

By Jason Corder

Despite what social media, movies, and ads suggest, very little of our lives are spent in exciting mountaintop experiences.

- Between the highlight-reel moments lie most of your mundane days.
- This is just as true for your faith as it is for your Instagram feed.
- Our tendency to overlook the ordinary makes it easy to look around at your life and wonder what difference God is making in it.

In reality, life with God doesn't happen by chasing spiritual highs.

- He meets you every day, inviting you to walk with him for a lifetime.
- How you spend your days add up to how you spend your life.
- So, if you're longing for a big life change, start with small changes in your day.

Habits and routines reveal where your hope is.

- The best thing you can do to grow in your faith is to change out old habits and routines for new ones that put God at the front and center.

2 1. Self-Control

Proverbs 25:28

A person without self-control is like a house with its doors and windows knocked out.

Without self-control, you will be susceptible to every desire that wants to raid and rule your life.

That's a super scary thought because my desires are dangerous if left unchecked...

- If I don't have self-control over my tongue, I will gossip and tear down others.
- If I don't have self-control over money, I will find myself in debt and unable to give generously to God's kingdom work.
- If I don't have self-control over my emotions, I will lose my temper or wallow in self-pity, or be consumed with worry.
- If I don't have self-control over my time, I won't read my Bible or pray because I won't be able to resist the temptation to sleep in or scroll on social media or get other things done.

In **1 Samuel 25**, we are introduced to a remarkable woman named Abigail.

Abigail had a crazy life!

- She was married off to a man named Nabal (whose name literally means "foolish").
- Nabal was wicked, evil, and harsh (1 Sam. 25:3).
- He had a huge business farming sheep, and the Bible tells us that he was very rich.

Abigail is described as beautiful and intelligent (1 Sam. 25:3).

But what makes her remarkable is the way she controls herself and the whole chaotic situation around her!

- She controls her actions and words while remaining confident and wise.
- She makes quick, wise choices, while controlling her words with grace.

In just the opening chapter of 1 Samuel, we see 3 examples of Abigail's self-control!

The first one is when she hears that David is on his way with 400 men!

- She hears this from servants that choose to go to her with this issue instead of her husband.
- Her husband was so foolish that those servants weren't willing to put their lives in his hands (vs.19). Abigail, on the other hand, they trusted.

Abigail responds with immediate, calculated action.

First, she sends food ahead for the angry (or hangry) army.

Then, when she meets David, she controls her tongue again.

- She speaks graciously and truthfully owning up to Nabal's foolishness.
- She doesn't present herself as a victim.
- Instead, she works to de-escalate the situation!

Abigail uses her words to heal the wounds that Nabal had created.

David is able to see reason from her grace and calls off the invading army.

When they part ways, Abigail has to use self-control yet again.

- She knows she has to tell Nabal. She just gave away enough food to feed an army, and he is sure to notice.
- When she goes home, she finds that Nabal is drunk and feasting.
- She doesn't explode at him or complain to her friends that Nabal is so foolish.
- She reasons that it will be better to tell him when he is sober, so she decided to wait until morning.

The chapter ends with Abigail telling Nabal what she had done,

- God strikes Nabal down!
- When David hears of it, he asks Abigail to marry him and she says yes!

Abigail is a powerful example of a meek, wise, and strong woman. She was definitely a Biblical woman of influence!

Abigail's words were always laced with grace.

- We never see her use her tongue as a weapon! Instead, she uses it to heal.
- Abigail healed a rift between David and Nabal.

- She would not have been able to do that if she had just said whatever came to her mind first.

Self-control is incredibly important to be a faithful Christian.

The power to say “No” to sin comes from having something better to say “Yes” to.

4

Exodus 1:15-22

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, 16 “When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.” 17 The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live.

When you focus on the Goodness of God, you’ll find it far easier to demonstrate self-control and say no to the fleeting pleasures of sin.

5

2. Gratitude

Money can’t buy happiness, but gratitude can.

Our brains are not unlike the web browsers on our phones.

- Stored cookies and search data cue up the most frequented visits and make it easy for us to revisit those places with minimal effort.
- So much of our time is spent pursuing things we don’t currently have.

But the Bible tells us our brains were created for more than wishing after and searching for stuff.

- **Romans 12:2** teaches in Romans that we should renew our minds so they aren’t stuck in the patterns of this world

Gratitude is one of the easiest (and most overlooked) ways to reorient yourself toward your Creator.

- When you take time to notice the gifts God has given, you build healthy pathways in your brain.
- And these paths connect us vertically to God instead of horizontally to the world when we're searching for happiness.

The mother of Jesus, young as she was, demonstrated incredible gratitude and spiritual maturity.

6

Luke 1:46-55

46 *And Mary said,*

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

47 *and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

48 *for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.*

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

49 *for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.*

50 *And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.*

51 *He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;*

52 *he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;*

53 *he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.*

54 *He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,*

55 *as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”*

Here are three ways to put gratitude to work in your life.

1. Ask God to increase your awareness of his good gifts.

2. Meditate on what those gifts reveal about God.
3. Express your gratitude in worship back to God.

Regardless of what your mental space looks like today, there is room for gratitude.

- When you give it the proper attention, your eyes will be opened to the truer happiness of your Creator.

7

3. Prayer

Prayer is not an easy habit to form, but it is an easy idea to throw around.

- “I’ll be praying for you,”
- “My thoughts and prayers are with you,”
- “Send all the prayers!”

We probably all know how to pray when we feel a need, but do we really know how to live a life that’s habitually transformed by prayer?

- Jesus himself spent large portions of time in deep contemplative prayer.
- Yet, we still have such a hard time moving beyond vending machine prayers that ask God to give us what we want.

Hannah is a woman in the Bible who dealt with a lot of adversity in her life, yet she was steadfast in seeking out the Lord.

In 1 Samuel 1, we learn about Hannah’s story

- She was one of two wives to Elkanah.
- Hannah was barren, taunted by her foe, and was angry with God.
- But despite Hannah’s challenges, she was determined to surrender and submit her cares before the Lord.
- She prayed through her pain and resolved to continue to trust God.

Like Hannah, we also face difficult challenges and difficult seasons in life.

- Seeking God in prayer will guide, uplift, and encourage us to move forward in faith.

- Our circumstances may not always yield our desired outcome, but God wants us to continuously pray to Him with courage, boldness, and expectation.

Making prayer a habit is more than marking something off a to-do list. When you integrate prayer into your daily life the way Jesus calls you to, you will start to see how deeply prayer can transform your heart and mind.

What if Christians saw prayer as a way to connect with God and reorient their hearts to his will (rather than a means of getting something from him)?

Jesus taught his followers how to pray with the Lord's Prayer.

As we break it apart in pieces, we realize that it is designed to remind us of who God is and to challenge us to live in line with his kingdom.

Matthew 6:9-13

The Lord's Prayer:

8

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever.
Amen.*

9 **4. Rest**

Mark 2:27

10

Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

God doesn't just order us to do things out of some arbitrary power trip.

- God created us.
- He loves us.
- **And because he knows us better than we know ourselves, he knows precisely what we need to thrive.**

The commands God gives us are for us. This means, in order to thrive the way God intends us to, we need to rest.

However, the reality is, many of us live like we don't need rest.

- We read the life-giving, soul-filling instructions that come straight from the one who gave us life and filled our souls in the first place...
- Then we set them on the back-burner as a suggestion to maybe get around to if we find ourselves with extra time.

What if instead, we said “yes” to the gift God offers, believing with our lived-out actions that God (the one who made us) knows what we need better than we do ourselves?

One simple way to establish a daily habit of rest is to protect your sleep.

- Keeping your bedtime and wake-up time consistent.
- Putting your devices (phones, computers, TVs) away one hour before bed.
- Stop eating or drinking anything but water three hours before bed.
- Repeating a restful activity every night before it's time to sleep.

You're already sleeping daily, so tweaking your existing routines is an easy way to make sleeping more restful.

- By intentionally setting this time before sleep apart from the rest of your busy life, you're actively choosing to prioritize the good gift of rest God offers.

11 5. Reading Scripture

Hebrews 11:24-26

12

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the



fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

Moses said “No” to the pleasures of sin because he had been introduced to a greater treasure and a better pleasure.

Exodus 2:7

Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, “Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” 8 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, “Go.” So the girl went and called the child's mother. 9 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, “Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed him. 10 When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, “Because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

As a young man he was raised in the household of the Pharaoh as the son of his daughter

- But as an infant he had been raised by his mother
- **And those lessons he had learned before the age of 5 or so would shape the rest of his life!**

Consider Ezra who was Jewish, but he'd never seen Jerusalem.

- Like most of his peers, he was born somewhere in the region of modern-day Iraq and Iran,
- He grew up as a subject of the Persian empire.
- Nebuchadnezzar, a Babylonian king, brought Ezra's ancestors to this region in an effort to assimilate them into Babylonian culture.

What's strange is that the assimilation didn't work.

- The strategy was effective for almost all other people groups
- but the Israelites were stubbornly... Israelite.

How did they maintain their religious identity?

How did they resist the allure of affluence in Babylon?

We get the answer after Ezra's first visit to Jerusalem. When he arrives in his homeland, he continues a habit he began abroad:

13

Ezra 7:10

"For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it."

Ezra resisted Babylon by developing a habit of reading Scripture, not only for personal study but also for practical application, shaping how he lived out his faith.

1

Conclusion

In so many ways we live in a modern Babylon. Culture wants to assimilate us. Going to church once a month and sporadically attending Bible studies won't help you resist. The only way is to develop a habit of Bible reading. Like Ezra, you can begin studying God's word so you know how to live it out.