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Reap A Destiny

Where is your life going? The path you *now* tread will determine it.

by James McBride

From our first rising until bedtime much of our day is bound by routines. They make life easier. Each morning we don't have to struggle with figuring how to wash and groom, or how to dress, or how to make breakfast.. Such activities simply become '*habit*'.

Habits are '*a settled tendency or practice*', and we can't comfortably get through the day without them. In general they are positive and helpful. They are occasionally acquired slowly, undercover, un-noticed. Other desirable habitual behaviour is acquired painfully, with much persistent effort. For Christians it may be the habit of daily prayer or study of the Word or regular fellowship.

But there's a dark side to habitual behaviour - as would be agreed by the alcoholic, or the chronic worrier, or the TV addict. Wrote Dr Samuel Johnson: '*The chains of habit are too weak to be felt until they are too strong to be broken*'. Those chains can bind us for life - and for eternity: '*Sow an act and reap a habit. Sow a habit and reap a character. Sow a character and reap a destiny*'.

However, for the Christian the chains can - with effort and with divine empowerment - be snapped.

It's unlikely *you* are not bound by some practice that you would prefer to finish with! And undesirable habits can be forsaken, put behind you. As with helpful habits, so too with the negative - effort must be applied. Wrote the apostle Paul: "...*who on earth can set me free from the clutches of my own sinful nature?*" (Romans 7:24). The good news is that the Scriptures provide the tools needed to break those chains.

Examine Yourself

A first step in conquering a wrong habit is an awareness that you are in its grip. Habits become '*second nature*' - so much a part of us that we don't recognize their presence. The Psalmist knew this and prayed: "*Search me, O God, and know my heart...and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*" (Psalm 139:23-24). Self-examination, Word of God in hand, can uncover buried

unsavoury character traits that are hidden from us because now habitual. You could, too, ask someone you trust - though your spouse has probably already told you, and often!

God's Word is the mirror that reflects our wrong habits. It 'hits us between the eyes' with right practices and thus condemns our sin (for that is what it is). Study it. Allow the Bible to shine a light into those dark corners of life.

What Are the Consequences?

What hidden habits lurk in your life? Anger, perhaps? Do you often 'fly off the handle' - and not realize it has become a habitual reaction to your circumstances? Anger may have its beginnings in the example your parents set you. Or, it may be that you 'got away with' responding in anger to life's challenges. It became habit.

Wrote King Solomon: "*He that is soon angry deals foolishly*" (Proverbs 14: 17). And Job understood the consequences: "*Wrath kills the foolish man*" (Job 5:2). It's general knowledge that anger and wrath and resentment can cause illness - and even may literally kill!

And that's a further step in getting rid of a habit: *understand the consequences*. Look at the alcoholic retching in the gutter and note the effect it has on family and work and life. And on your church brethren - for Christians are far from being immune. See the iron grip that imprisons the paedophile - the consequence of habitual pornographic input. Or, watch the perspiring grossly overweight man or woman as they gasp for breath on an incline. *Consequences!* Such habits don't just happen. They result from a chosen life-style - whatever the cause of that choice.

There are, too, *long-term* consequences to ingrained habit. The apostle Paul: "*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the Kingdom of God*" (I Corinthians 6: 9-10). They are '*works*

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of the flesh' Paul told the Galatians (ch 5:19-21). Allow any of these practices to become habitual - part of your total life-style - then you are barred from God's eternal Kingdom. If that concerns you then it should be incentive enough to deal - now - with your habit!

Some of the Corinthian brethren had been ensnared by these practices. Paul adds, however (v.11): "*Such were some of you*". They had come to grips - and beaten - their poisonous life-styles, their destructive habits.

Nip in the Bud

So you are now aware of your problem. But that doesn't stop it spilling out! A sudden burst of anger. Simmering resentment. More gossip. Another back-stabbing slash. Another drink, another cream cake, another furtive paging of a top-shelf magazine. Bang goes your resolution!

You must move on. Writing to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul says: "...*you must no longer behave like the Gentiles* [i.e. the unconverted], *whose lives are spent in the uselessness of their ways of thinking*" (ch 4:17). He is pointing out that our behaviour results from our thought patterns. Or, as Solomon wrote: "*As a man thinks in his heart so is he*" (Proverbs 23:7). To conquer a habit, then, we must work on our habitual mode of thinking, be '*transformed by a complete renewal of mind*' wrote Paul (Romans 12:2).

Divine Help

How? By first looking in the mirror of God's Word to identify what's right and what's wrong, to focus the spotlight of truth on your personal sinful habit. Many men and women have successfully identified and beaten undesirable habits through sheer unaided gritty will-power.

Christians, who have God's Spirit - His mind - indwelling them, must in like manner exercise the same power of their mind. It's the Spirit of a sound mind implanting in us the seed of spiritual fruit - including *patience* and *self-control* (Galatians 5:22-23). Soul-destroying habits don't happen in isolation. They affect - and are affected by - the whole of life. A man who is habitually resentful or angry - or has other life-dominating problems - harms his family, friends, social activity, finances, work, church, his relationship with God. He is deficient in the all-encompassing divine love that is another vital 'fruit of the Spirit'. As we nourish the growth of the Holy Spirit's influence - through 'the means of grace' - we can win battles beyond our normal strength. The Christian way of life is more than just 'pie in the sky when you die'! The man or woman converted to Jesus Christ links to the power-house of the universe.

In working with the alcohol-dependent, AA appoint a 'buddy' to help - someone to contact when the going gets tough. Christians have also the support and encouragement of their church fellowship. God's Spirit guides us, but the Spirit works, too, through human instruments - those brethren in whom He dwells. Such support is an important key to successfully overcoming any habit. Wrote James: "*Is any of you suffering trouble?... Confess your sins* [i.e. offences, problems] *to each other, and pray for one another that you may be cured. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great effect*" (ch 5:13-16). We can call on the brethren - as well, often, as family and friends - for support when faced with destructive habits.

Avoidance

Another key to conquering habitual life-style patterns is to identify those 'triggers' that initiate a bout of anger or gambling or alcohol abuse *etc* - and avoid them. The apostle Paul gives us the principle: "*Flee fornication*" (I Corinthians 6:18), and "*Steer clear of the activities of darkness*" (Ephesians 5:11).

Is 'demon drink' a problem? Don't linger around bars - take another way home! Where appropriate avoid the bakery or the betting shop or the race track or the TV or top-shelf magazines. And don't carry cigarettes around with you.

Tough - but decisions you must make in the light of your eternal destiny.

Use and Disuse

Now link with this a further principle. You could call it 'put off-put on'. Writes Paul, again: "*You are to rid yourself of the old nature with your previous habits, ruined as it is by deceitful lusts* ['rotted through and through with lust's illusions']; *that you be renewed in your mental attitude and that you put on the new nature which is created in God's likeness in genuine righteousness and holiness*" (Ephesians 4:20-24)

So - become aware of your wrong habits. Consider their consequences - for this life - and for the next. Discipline your mind - that is, use sustained daily effort aided and strengthened by God's indwelling Spirit - to develop a new healthy and positive thought process encompassing every aspect of life.

The chains of habit can be broken. The prize of becoming a member of the spirit-Family of God is worth every drop of sweat we expend.

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