



"The Churches of God Outreach Ministries provides leadership, information, and biblical teaching in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:19-20"

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Mini Study

Walk With God

"...because of the time you are due to be teachers, yet you need to have someone to teach you again the rudiments of the beginning of the Words of God, and you came to be having need of milk, and not of solid food; for everyone partaking of milk is without experience in the Word of Righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for those full grown, having exercised the faculties through habit, for distinction of both good and bad" (Hebrews 5:12-14).

"exercise yourself to Godliness" (I Timothy 4:7).

Babies don't walk. So how do they learn? The first stumbling steps usually end in a fall - but they don't give up, nor do the parents. Eventually, by reason of habit the complex skill of walking is mastered. It's the same with learning to drive. The first moment behind the wheel is scary; but, by persistence, the complexities become habitual. So too, with dressing or dental hygiene, we know how to unthinkingly put on our clothes and clean our teeth. These recurring actions will become habitual.

- As the children of God, we are to *"become perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect"* (Matthew 5:48). Jesus is the perfect example, and a Christian should emulate Him. But we have not yet reached that lofty goal, even though we are, now, God's children (I John 3:2).
- All humans develop what can be considered *"bad habits."* What are yours: how about anger, lying, pride, lust, vanity, selfishness, greed, laziness, an over fondness for strong drink? Are you struggling with such? If so there's a way to learn to safely and successfully walk a Godly path.
- Habits (good or bad) develop in the same way. There's a God-given, inborn, habit-forming facility that enables us to by-pass unnecessary laborious effort. We don't have to figure out, daily, how to put on our shoes, tie our laces, or clean our teeth. Godliness too, can - must - become habitual.
- Every habit (behaviour pattern) develops by practice. We lie because we learned to get out of a hole by lying. We deal with our emotional turmoil by anger because we learned to deal that way, perhaps following dad's example. The apostle Peter writes of those who are *"trained in greed"* (II Peter 2:14). Paul wrote of those who have *"exercised the faculties through habit for distinction of both good and bad"* (Hebrews 5:14). And he urges Timothy (I Timothy 4:7) to *"exercise yourself to Godliness."* All use the same word - related to our word gymnasium - implying training, focused effort.
- In the Scriptures, God provides a two-pronged principle for habit-forming success: put off and put on. We could ask: When is a thief not a thief? Not because he has stopped stealing, for who knows what he would do under economic pressure. Rather, Paul emphasizes, it is when *"The one stealing, let him steal no more, but rather let him labor, working what is good with the hands, that he may have something to give to the one*

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that has need" (Ephesians 4:28 LITV). The apostle gives seven examples - read vv.25-32. Other Biblical examples may be found in I Peter 3:9, III John 11, I Thessalonians 1:9, Isaiah 55:7 and Matthew 16:24 as an example from the words of Jesus.

- But change becomes permanent only by our persistent and enduring diligent effort to “*put off*” a wrong habit and to “*put on*” the desirable habit. We need to determine what are the “*good habits*.”
- Recall Paul’s admonition: “*exercise yourself to Godliness*” (I Timothy 4:7). Godliness - how God wants us to live, how Jesus behaved - is our goal. It is explained in the Scriptures: “*Wherewithal shall a young man keep his way pure? By taking heed thereto according to your word*” (Psalm 119:9). All we need to know about what behaviour is Godly - and what is not is in the Scriptures (Psalms 119:18-22).
- By diligent effort, some, unaided or with the help of wise counsel, may change an undesirable habit. But that’s an achievable challenge (*cf* the number who want to stop smoking *etc*): “*Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also may do good who are accustomed to doing evil*” (Jeremiah 13:23). It is possible to change our habitual pattern of behaviour!
- In-depth change, however, is a “*fruit of the Spirit*” (Galatians 5:22f). The character of God - perfectly reflected in Jesus - is summed up in those fruits. Only the indwelling Spirit can transform hatred to Godly love (as described in I Corinthians 13), or impart divine peace (Philippians 4:6-7). “*And likewise the Spirit also joins in to help our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes on our behalf with groanings that cannot be uttered*” (Romans 8:26). Through confident prayer we find “*grace to help*” (Hebrews 4:16).
- “*...cultivate your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is working in you both to will and to work for the sake of His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:12-13). That is, He works for our perfection.

“the loudest sound in the universe is that of a person abandoning old behaviour patterns and putting constructive ones in their place.”

(All Scripture references are KJV unless otherwise noted.)

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