

The Problem with Habits . . .

From all the books that are out on the topic, we should know by now that habits can make you or break you—bad habits can wreak havoc on your life, while good habits can make you effective and successful. The problem, as everyone knows, is that bad habits are really hard to break and good habits are really hard to sustain. How do you do both?

“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”
(Romans 13:14)

“You are not born with your habits—you weave them and wear them. Your habits can be the rags of self-centered addictions or the robes of Christ-centered self-control.”

—June Hunt

Q: “How do I know if I have a destructive habit or a hidden addiction that is not consistent with God’s will?”

Desire to be accountable before God, and take an honest appraisal of your life. Ask yourself whether you have any habits or desires that would cause you to answer yes to the following questions:¹

The Compulsive Checklist:

- Are my thoughts consumed with it?
- Is my time scheduled around it?
- Could my health be harmed by it?
- Does my guilt increase following it?
- Are my finances affected by it?
- Am I defensive when asked about it?
- Are my relationships hurt by it?
- Am I upset when I can’t do it?

*“Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous
way in me, and lead me
in the way everlasting.”*
(Psalm 139:23–24)

Beauty or Beast

A German shepherd can be trained as the ferocious accomplice to evil intent. Yet, this same highly intelligent canine is also schooled to be a helpful companion for the visually impaired. This is learned behavior! In the same way, habits are learned behaviors that become a powerful force in your life for good or bad. Every habit is either Christ-centered or self-centered . . . a virtue or a vice . . . potentially a beauty or a beast!

All **habits** are . . .

Habitual—occur with regularity

Automatic—happen without thinking

Behavioral—reflect inner morals

Intense—grow stronger and more ingrained

Tenacious—persist and become hard to change

Satisfying—provide a degree of pleasure

“No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”
(Luke 16:13)

Key Verse to Memorize

“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”
(Philippians 4:13)

Key Passage to Read and Reread

1 Corinthians 6:9–20

Steps to Self-control

- **Start** with a commitment to God.² (Deuteronomy 32:4)
- **Separate** yourself from sin.³ (Romans 6:1–2)
- **Set** a new goal.⁴ (2 Corinthians 5:9–10)
- **Stand** on the truth.⁵ (Romans 6:6)
- **Substitute** God’s thoughts for your thoughts.⁶ (Romans 12:1–2)
- **Surrender** your will.⁷ (Romans 6:19)
- **Stay** on track.⁸ (Romans 5:1–2)

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”
(Galatians 5:22–24)

Harvesting Good Habits

- **Sow the seeds** of moral sensitivity. (Psalm 119:11)
—Measure all your behavior with the scriptural yardstick.
- **Sow the seeds** of accountability. (Proverbs 28:13)
—Daily or weekly, talk with a friend who will help you “kick the habit.”
- **Sow the seeds** of gratefulness. (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18)
—Keep a prayer journal, and give thanks for answered prayer.
- **Sow the seeds** of forgiveness. (Matthew 6:14–15)
—Remind yourself of the many times God forgives you.
- **Sow the seeds** of selflessness. (Philippians 2:3)
—Ask God to shine a spotlight on your acts of selfishness.
- **Sow the seeds** of communion with God. (Psalm 104:34)
—Seek out time every day to be alone with God.
“Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love.”
(Hosea 10:12)

Hitting the Target with Positive Truth

Target #1 . . . God's purpose for me is to display Christ's character. (Romans 8:29)

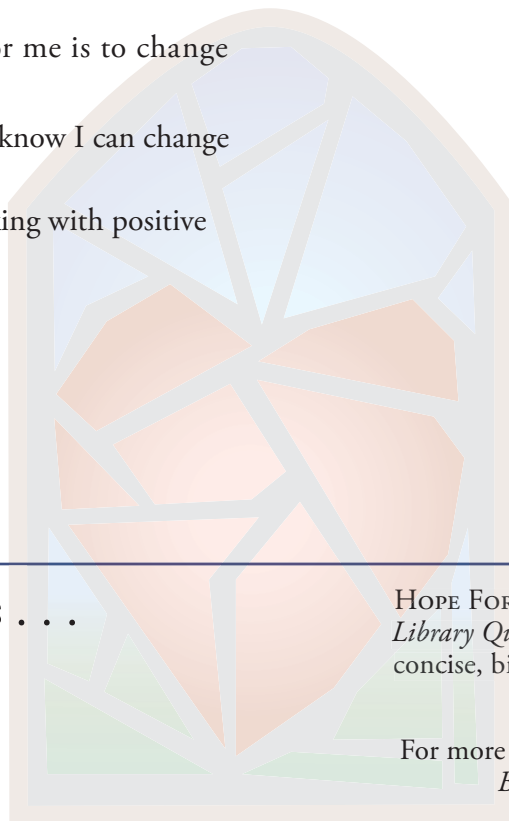
- "I want to be the best representative of Christ that I can be."
- "I will yield to His control and do what is best for my body."

Target #2 . . . God's priority for me is to change my thinking. (Romans 12:2)

- "Nothing is too hard for God. I know I can change in His strength."
- "I will replace my defeated thinking with positive promises of victory."

Target #3 . . . God's plan for me is to rely on Christ's power to change me. (Philippians 4:13)

- I can give Christ increasing control of my life in order to taper off gradually . . .
 - by carrying a limited number of cigarettes for each day along with a gradual cutback schedule
 - by making myself accountable to someone who is willing to help



Related Topics . . .

- Overeating:
Freedom from Food Fixation
- Perfectionism:
The Push to Perform
- Procrastination:
Preventing the Decay of Delay
- Purpose in Life:
Pinpointing Your Priorities
- Temptation:
Promise of Pleasure—Lured by a Lie

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Habits:

Success in Self-Control.

If you would like more information, call 1-800-488-HOPE (4673) or visit www.hopefortheheart.org.

For prayer encouragement and biblical counsel call 1-866-570-HOPE (4673).

1. Erwin W. Lutzer, *How to Say "No" to a Stubborn Habit: Even When You Feel Like Saying "Yes"* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1986), 48–49.
2. Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr., "The Sin in Self-Discipline," *Discipleship Journal*, no. 44 (1988).
3. William D. Backus, *Finding the Freedom of Self-Control* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1987), 153.
4. Backus, *Finding the Freedom of Self-Control*, 43–4; Lutzer, *How to Say "No" to a Stubborn Habit*, 48–49.
5. Lutzer, *How to Say "No" to a Stubborn Habit*, 52–53 and 100–8.
6. Neil T. Anderson, *A Way of Escape* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994), 117–33.
7. Lutzer, *How to Say "No" to a Stubborn Habit*, 76–77.
8. Lutzer, *How to Say "No" to a Stubborn Habit*, 98–108.



*Together . . . Changing Minds.
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