

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

www.ffbic.org

SERMON: *Tassels & Doorframes*

SERIES: *Habits*

SCRIPTURES: *Leviticus 23:23-25; Deuteronomy 6:4-9*

SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*

DATE: *2022 - 1 - 9*

**Credit to Rob Douglass;*

Mark & Maggie Roth have 5 mins in the service

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you. Want to say welcome to all of you here in this room and to those of you gathered on-line, at home, tuning in to the live stream.

Take out your Bible if you don't mind and I'm gonna ask if you would find two passages of Scripture, kind of mark them for now. Leviticus 23 & Deuteronomy 6. We'll be coming back to them in a few mins...mark them...

I want to start with a riddle this morning: **I am your constant companion. Your greatest helper and your heaviest burden.** (Some of you are probably thinking your spouse, it's not your spouse!) **Half the things you do, you might just as well turn over to me. Show me exactly how you want something done, and after a few lessons I will do it automatically. Those who are great, I have made great. Those who are failures, I have made failures. Take me, train me, be firm with me and I will place the world at your feet. Be easy with me, and I will destroy you. Who am I?**

Habits of your life (**Series Graphic**).

This morning we are beginning a four-week series called “Habits”.

A couple of months ago, I was in a continuing education seminar for my pastoral license, themed around this concept. And the presenter, was making a case for the impact of our daily habits on our discipleship. I was intrigued by the presentation, but most of all challenged as I reflected upon my own habits and how much I needed this message.

And I’ve discovered that the best way for me to learn and grow these days, given my role at church, is to turn into a sermon series. So you’re welcome, this series comes from the failure of my personal life habits to contribute to the person I want to become and that God wants me to become.

So, four weeks...talking about our habits of life, so that we might re-orient our lives in the pattern of Jesus. Today, I just kind of want to lay the ground work for why this is such an important conversation for us to have. Much of what I will be sharing today comes from the seminar led by Pastor Rob Douglass.

This morning...I want to answer two questions: First, I want to help us understand **what a habit is?** Knowing what a habit is, will help us appreciate why our habits are crucial to following Jesus. Second, **Why habits?**...why is it so important that, as followers of Jesus, we grasp the significance of the habits that we’ve created in our lives?

So, that’s where we begin...

I. What is a habit?

Author Justin Earley defines habit like this - **A habit is a behavior that occurs automatically, over and over, and often unconsciously.**

A habit isn't just something you do regularly...it's a behavior that you do so regularly, it becomes automatic, you no longer have to think about doing it.

Pause for just a moment and walk yourself through your morning routine. Habits all over the place.

From how you respond to your alarm clock, to the emotion you feel when you hear your alarm clock...to shampooing your hair, brushing teeth, tying your shoes, buttoning your shirt, fixing your coffee, putting your seatbelt on...We do what we do, because it's our habit.

Now, this is really important to understand. Some of the science behind what is taking place in habit formation. Brain activity during habits, happens in the deepest part of your brain, the basal ganglia...which allows us to function involuntarily in certain ways, so that we no longer have to think about doing a certain task, we do it automatically.

In other words, as we do things over and over again...something beyond the action begins to happen.

Author, Charles Duhigg writes, that **“when a habit is formed the brain stops fully participating in decision making. The patterns we have unfold automatically.”**
(The Power of Habit)

This might sound confusing but it's really very simple, and you're doing it all day, every day.

I'll give you one example of this...

(IMAGE OF CAR IN DRIVEWAY) Do you remember backing your car out of the driveway for the very first time? When you first learned how to drive, before you had ever formed any driving habits, backing your car out of the driveway required an immense amount of concentration. Opening the garage door, inserting the key in the ignition, adjusting the rearview and side mirrors, checking for obstacles, putting your foot on the brake, calculating how reflected images in the mirror translate into actual distances between the bumper, the garbage cans and the hedges, all while applying slight pressure to the gas and brake and, most likely, telling your passenger to quite fiddling with the radio.

Today, you do all of that, every time you back up your vehicle out of the driveway with hardly any thought. The routine occurs by habit. (Duhigg 17)

In fact, a study by Duke university suggests that as much as 40% of what we do in a given day is the result of habit rather than conscious choice.

Sometimes we call this...the process of developing a “second nature.” No longer needing to think about it, but instinctively doing it.

When you put your shoes on today, did you think about how to tie them? When you type on keyboard, do you stop to think about each letter you are typing? Swinging a golf club, using a TV remote control, playing keys on a piano...have all become habits...

Now why 4 weeks on this. What’s the big deal about tying my shoes and backing the car out of the garage...and what does it have to do with following Jesus.

II. Why Habits?

I’d like to suggest two primary reasons for this series. First it’s...

A. New Years

No matter how you feel about New Years resolutions, there are a lot of people considering making changes in life. And so this is a natural time of year when many people are contemplating and reflecting on their own personal habits.

The concept of taking time to reflect on life...what your life entails, who you are becoming, is one of the most important things you can do as you begin the New Year. And this is a biblical principle.

If you were with us last January, we actually did an entire sermon on the Jewish concept of New Year. And we talked about how God's people celebrated New Years with a time of reflection.

Let me just refresh your memory on this, the Jewish New Year is described in your Bible in **Leviticus 23**. You can go ahead and turn there for a moment...

Leviticus 23 - ²³ The LORD said to Moses, ²⁴ "Say to the Israelites: 'On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of Sabbath rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. ²⁵ Do no regular work, but present a food offering to the LORD.'"

Jewish New Years begins with trumpet blasts, the blast of the shofar (**image of shofar**)...a ram's horn. And these blasts are intended as **a wake-up call!** Think of it a little bit like a modern-day alarm clock.

The idea is that we create habits, patterns, rhythms of life...some good, some bad. But soon we fall into this trance of just following the habits of life that we've created without thinking about them. "Just going through the motions."

We become oblivious or apathetic towards the life we are living and ultimately the person we are becoming day after day, moment by moment.

The scary thing would be to wake up to life...5 yrs, 10 yrs., 20 yrs from now and look back and say *“For 20 years, I was going through motions/dead to the world, life was happening, but I was oblivious. I never thought about the habits I was creating or the person I was becoming. I am missing out on the life God wants me to have. The person God wants me to be.”*

New Years provides us with a clear opportunity to practice this Biblical principle and evaluate our life habits.

But, second, there is something even more important here about habits and our choice to follow Jesus, than just that it’s a New Year. And that is the connection between...

B. Habits and Discipleship

One of things we’ve been talking about more and more as a staff, church board and really as a church, is the importance of **discipleship**.

We’ve been trying to emphasize, that following Jesus is more than mental assent to a set of beliefs, it is about a life-transformation.

That a Christian is someone who is growing more and more into the likeness of Jesus. Discipleship is not an upgrade or add-on to our faith in Jesus, it is the essence of our faith in Jesus.

We believe that the habits we create are one of the primary factors in learning to live like Jesus. This is why, the connection between discipleship and habits is found in Scripture.

1. Habits and Scripture

Turn ahead in your Bible from Leviticus to **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**. This passage of Scripture is known in the Jewish world as the **Shema**, it's a core Bible verse in Judaism. Think about it a little bit like we would use John 3:16.

When Jesus is asked about the greatest command in Scripture, he quotes the Shema...look at verses 4 & 5...

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.^[a] ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

That's the greatest command.

Now, often we stop reading there, but look at the instructions that follow the command...

⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. (They should form your character...so how does that happen? Through habits...look)
⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Do you see what this is saying...make this command a habit of your life? Make it a regular, daily, routine practice of your life, so that it will change your heart. And the Jews took this literally.

Tie them as symbols on your hands... Anybody know what this is? (**Image of Jewish prayer shawl**). This is a picture of a Jewish prayer shawl. You'll notice these little tassels on the fringe of the shawl. These tassels are called **"tzitzit"** in Hebrew.

They are further described in your Bible in **Numbers 15** when God says to Moses...

'make tassels on the corners of your garments...³⁹ You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the LORD...

The tassels were a daily reminder, to live the way God created you to live. A habit to remind you of the Shema.

Write them on the doorframes of your houses... Does anyone know what this is? (**Image of Jewish Mezuzah**) This is a picture of a Jewish **mezuzah**. The mezuzah is a little piece of parchment often contained in a decorative case, inscribed with the words of the Shema, and is placed in the corner of the doorframe in many Jewish houses. As a reminder, as one enters and exits the house (a daily practice)...to live the way God created you to live.

The idea is, learn this, memorize this, do it every day, regularly...make the Shema the foundational habit of your life.

And we'll come back to some of these things in the next couple of weeks...but the importance of habits is also noticeable in the New Testament.

Luke 4, we are told, **"on the Sabbath day he (Jesus) went into the synagogue...as was his custom."**

Jesus was in the habit of regular fellowship and study of God's word.

Or how about this, there were certain obvious habits, noticeable in the lives of followers of Jesus from the very beginning...

Acts 2 - 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

The early church, met regularly for worship, eating, praying, fellowship. Habits are crucial to discipleship. Why?

We got hints in the passage we read from the Shema...

6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

Habits are so important because...

2. Habits form character.

“We each become a certain kind of person in the depths of our being, gaining a specific type of character. And that is the outcome of a process of spiritual formation...” (Willard 19-20)

In your habits, and in your routines of life...you are, developing a “second nature.” Your heart is being formed. It becomes who you are, it becomes your identity.

John Dryden, **“We first make our habits, then our habits make us.”**

Our word **character** comes from a Greek word, the Greek word is...**characteros**...which literally means to engrave.

The process of engraving, doing something over and over again until it becomes permanent. Your habits are engraving your character!

Attitudes, language, responses, emotions, actions all become formational habits in our lives.

You see, while some habits like tying your shoes or backing up your car, may not have much to do with character formation, many of the habits and patterns that we create in our lives are engraving us into a certain kind of person.

Can I just give you one example of how think this happens for some?

Consider how the habit of “evening news” can begin to impact your character...may not happen this way for all of us, but this is just one example...

You have a habit, watching the 6 o'clock or 10 o'clock news every day. The day isn't complete until you've watched the news. You turn it on.

The first story is the same headline it's been for the past two years. Covid cases are on the rise. Thoughts begin to run through your mind: why is this always the first new story? When will it all end? I wonder if I can really trust what their saying? This new variant is extremely contagious, what if I got it?

The next story is about a fatal shooting, then a child abuse case, then domestic assault.

Pretty unbeknownst to you, you are wrestling with a mixture of emotions. Concern. Uncertainty. sadness. Anger.

Then the new jobs report. A lot people not working. It makes you even more upset. Too many people living off the system. But not you, you're a hard worker. You'd never do what these other people do. (Pride start creeping around in your heart).

The final story of the day is the new Powerball winner. You immediately think, life isn't about money anyway...but it sure would be nice to have more. If you played the lottery and God allowed you to win all that money, you'd be really generous and share and give a lot away. Why doesn't God give you that kind of money? (Unbeknownst to you bitterness, greed, materialism starts to brew in your heart.)

And after all that you soon, head for bed with some of those thoughts, emotions still brewing in your heart. And then you wonder why it's so hard to become a person known for love, patience, gentleness, self-control.

It started with that 6 o'clock news habit you couldn't let go of it...which quickly effected not only your evening routine, but your attitude, your emotions...and ultimately YOU! Again, I'm not saying watching the 6 o'clock news is bad or evil. I'm saying that habit is having an impact on who you are becoming. You need to evaluate what's going inside your heart when you practice that habit.

Now think about this...if 40% of what we do in a day is the result of habit and not conscious choice, we're just going through the motions...makes you wonder what is being written on our hearts all day long. When was the last time you took time to evaluate and think about your daily habits and they are impacting you?

These things define vast portions of our lives, and while we'd like to think we've chosen them carefully, most us haven't given them a second thought.

(Justin Early 149)

And this brings us to the final point I want to make this morning...

3. Habits and life-change.

One of the markers of maturity as a follower of Jesus, is a willingness to embrace change in our lives. The Apostle Paul wrote this about the change that happens in us as we follow Christ...

2 Corinthians 5:17 - ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:^[a] The old has gone, the new is here!

Scripture says that when you accept Christ, you are infused with power, the power of the Holy Spirit to become a new creation...you develop a new nature and not just any nature, you develop the nature of Jesus. What Jesus says, thinks, feels, does...becomes second nature to you. Many of us wonder if it's even possible to live like Jesus.

At the seminar Rob Douglass shared just a phenomenal example of how our habits influence incredible change in our behavior. Just such a powerful illustration.

Does **March 30, 1981**, stand out to you? Do you remember what happened on that day?

It was the day an assassination attempt was made on then president **Ronald Reagan**. But what is so fascinating about the events that unfolded that day has to do with these two men (**IMAGES OF TIM & JERRY**)...two men you may not be as familiar with. Tim McCarthy and Jerry Parr, two US secret service agents at the time. Listen to their actions that day.

*When the gunfire began (**Image of Reagan Assassination**) that day Tim stretched out his arms and legs to make himself into the largest barrier he could. Tim's actions to*

shield the President, resulted in Tim being shot in the chest. Agent Jerry Parr was the one who pushed Reagan into the limousine. Jerry then dove on top of the President to protect him as the car sped away.

Now here is what is so fascinating about the behavior of these two men on that day. One of the most basic, if not the basic human instincts, human nature, is self-preservation. You've heard of the concept of fight or flight.

When we feel anxious or threatened our bodies naturally tend to constrict. This instinct is what causes us to duck whenever we hear loud noises, such as a gunshot. When the gunfire started on March 30th nearly everyone ducked, including the DC Metro Police officers who were present.

There is nothing wrong with ducking. Ducking at gunfire is not a sign of cowardice. It is what all humans who are not frozen in fear and confusion naturally do. The question is not why weren't those who ducked, brave? The much more intriguing question is, why didn't everyone duck? How is it possible that people can be trained to overcome the most natural reaction to the most dangerous situation? How can someone be trained to do something that is not merely contrary to our most basic nature but diametrically opposed to it?

McCarthy and Parr behaved in a way that was contrary to the most basic human response. It is as if their natural instinct for self-preservation was replaced with a new instinct. (The Apostle Paul would say: the old has gone, the new has come.)

Hinkley, the shooter, fired his gun six times in 1.7 seconds. There was no time to process options, no time to huddle and devise a plan, or to work through a Standard Operating Procedure. In fact, from the moment the first shot was fired, only .4 seconds elapsed before Jerry Parr began pushing the President into the car.

Jerry Parr and Tim McCarthy were able to act as selflessly and quickly as they did because months and years before that day, they had made their response to situations like this, second nature. The process of making a particular way of acting second nature is called habit.

Are you with me? By habit these two men had learned a new second nature in response to gunfire. Imagine the change that can and should be present in the life of a follower of Jesus, if we practiced, with this same intensity, the habits of the life of Jesus.

Take me, train me, be firm with me and I will place the world at your feet. Be easy with me, and I will destroy you.

Can I share a scary statistic with you? Barna Research group, did some research among young people here's one of the statistics they found...

84% of young people who don't go to church, will say that they personally know a committed Christian. Ready for this part...but only 15% think that the committed Christian lives any different from them.

Do you know what that means? It means there are a lot of people who are calling themselves Christians, but living just like their un-Christian friends. Our language is no different, the way we spend our free time, the way we spend our money and resources, the way we relate to and interact with other people is no different, we are just as likely to cheat, just as likely to lie, just as likely to lose our tempers, we don't have any more joy or hope or peace in our lives than anyone else. There is no visible change in our lives.

We have, without giving it much thought, picked up the habits of the world around us and its shaping our character. We Christians are living just like the rest of the world.

We often seem confused about it. We wonder why, how that could be the case? We asked Jesus to forgive our sins and come live in our hearts, and so we're waiting for him to change us, in the meantime, we went back to living life the way we always did. And we wonder why we don't change.

“We each become a certain kind of person in the depths of our being, gaining a specific type of character. And that is the outcome of a process of spiritual formation...” (Willard 19-20)

I want to encourage you this week to become aware of your habits. If habits are those things that have become second nature, we often do them without thinking...then we must start by becoming aware of our habits.

What habits of life are you creating for yourself and your family? (diet, exercise, spiritually, leisure, work, volunteering)

Who are you becoming? What kind of person are you becoming? Based on the habits and patterns that you are living? Are you growing into a person that is gentle? Patient? Joyful? Content? At peace? Slow to anger and abounding in love?

Of course this only matters, if you believe living more and more like Jesus is important. And that's what we're talk a little bit about next week. Understand our purpose in life. When you know what your purpose is, why you were created, it allows you to begin including in your life, those habits that will form you into that purpose! So next week we'll talk about why God made you anyway.