

Eight Good Habits

3. Make it a Habit to Focus on Character

Preached: 9/26/2021, Germantown;

Scripture

Matthew 19:16-22 (NIV)

Message:

Make It a Habit to Focus on Character

We are in a series of sermon studies on the subject of **Habits**. A few months ago, I came across an article on ChurchLeaders.com, written by Neal Samudre. The title of the article is: **8 Habits of Christians Who Live Out Their Faith Every Day, Not Just on Sunday.**

Habit; NOUN

1. a settled or regular tendency or practice, especially one that is hard to give up.

Samudre is concerned that too often we push our faith to the margins of our life.

“[we] let the things that matter drown in our flooded schedules.

This is what has happened to many of us. We’ve let our faith become a Sunday thing, not a 24/7 thing.”

Samudre set out to identify some practices that will help us to live out our faith everyday. As these practices become habits we will see our lives changing. As these habits are engrained into our being, we will find that our **Christian lifestyle will be consistent**. We will not be subject to the accusation that we are **hypocrites** – saying one thing on Sunday when we are “in Church” or with other believers – but living something different the rest of the week when we are with our unbelieving family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, fellow students. A hypocrite is a play-actor – pretending to be something they are not.

Adopting new habits is not easy. We need God to work in our hearts, change our hearts. We need God’s help to be disciplined so that these behaviors will become something that come about automatically. We don’t have to think about them. We just do them. We need the encouragement of fellow Christians if we are going to make a “practice” or behavior, a habit. We need to be accountable – someone asking us, ***How are you doing?***

So far have talked about two practices that we are trying to turn into habits:

1. People who live out their faith every day are in the habit of having “Restorative Times” built into their days.
2. People who live out their faith every day are in the habit of serving others or demonstrating love as a reflex. They don’t have to schedule “Loving or serving”. It is automatic.

Now today, we are talking about **Character Development**. Samudre says it like this: ***“People who live out their faith consider character when everyone else considers outcome.”***

Christianity gives us an awareness of our internal matters. It allows us to not be blind to how certain decisions affect our heart. But most of the time, we can only be focused on our external success, and how outcomes can make us profitable or not. We can entirely ignore character if we’re not careful.

The people who live out their faith daily always keep an eye on their character. They never wholly follow a decision that leads to a profitable, external outcome. They weigh the heart behind the matters.

So next time, don’t silence the voice that begs you to consider character in a situation. Instead, amplify it.

I must admit that understanding this habit is challenging. Just what does Samudre mean by this. What does it mean to get into the habit of prioritizing character? In the past, we have talked often about the importance of being transformed into the image of Jesus. Paul writes in Romans 8:28-29:

²⁸ **And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who^U have been called according to his purpose.** ²⁹ **For those God foreknew he also predestined to be **conformed to the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. Romans 8:28-29**

God's concern in working in our lives is to **change our character** – to transform us into the likeness of Jesus. So as we are living out our daily lives, we need to develop the habit of asking ourselves – **How is this action, or decision, or behavior going to develop the character of Jesus in me.**

There are several factors that we can consider when we are confronted with choices. Samudre suggest that **one thing that people take into consideration when making a choice is “Profitability”** How will this choice benefit me? In the story of the young man who came to Jesus with his question we see that this was his consideration. Now it would be easy to limit our understanding of what is going on in this story to “financial” things. But the lessons of this story extend to all areas of our lives, all areas of our conduct.

Let me preface our look into this story, by considering some things that Jesus said earlier in his ministry. In Matthew 6, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says: **Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matt. 6:19-21).** When Jesus talks about treasures in heaven I believe he is talking about this practice of prioritizing character. We can make decisions that will benefit us, that will be profitable to us. Or we can be in the habit of making decisions that will build up treasures in heaven, or that will demonstrate our character.

When the wealthy young man came to Jesus the focus of his question was on himself. **What must I do to get eternal life?** In Jesus' response, he says, **“If you want to be perfect.....** Jesus' answer to him was to **“Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.”** When Jesus mentions “Perfect.” **He is talking about character.** When Jesus uses the word perfect here he is talking about undivided loyalty and full hearted obedience. And then he uses that expression again – **Treasure in heaven.** An action that would demonstrate his true character. **Jesus emphasizes that the thing he needs to be concerned about is his character.** But the young man realizes that this action is going to result in loss for him. And he cannot do it. Or, he will not do it. When we don't think about character first, we forfeit what is most important – eternal life.

“The people who live out their faith daily **always keep an eye on their character. They never wholly follow a decision that leads to a profitable, external outcome. They weigh the heart behind the matters.”**

Now, let us understand that this is the only instance where Jesus asks someone to sell all they have. It is not to be understood that this is the practice everyone should follow. But the principle should not be missed. When we are faced with a decision, if there is something that is preventing me from having my character developed, perhaps I must make that choice to remove that “influence” from my life.

So we must add another practice to our daily living –

- We get in the habit of taking time for restoration every day
- We get in the habit of demonstrating Love and Service without even thinking about it.
- We must get in the habit of thinking first about how our character is changed. How can my character be transformed into the image of Jesus.

Prayer

Blessing – (From the book of Jude) **Now may the Lord keep you from falling and may He present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy!**