

How God Wants Us to Renew Our Minds to Change Our Habits

Every person wants to change something about themselves but few have any idea how to do that. In my case, I weighed 430 pounds and wanted to lose weight.

When I finally got to the point that I surrendered this issue to God, I knew I couldn't go on another diet. Diets had never worked for me because I always went back to the way I had eaten before and gained the weight back.

God revealed to me through several different sources that I needed a forever lifestyle change. However, in order to change anything about myself, I realized I had to learn how to change the habits that had gotten me into the mess I was in.

What Is a Habit?

A habit is simply a routine or a shortcut our minds use to conserve energy. We are creatures of habits. But our minds don't know a good habit from a bad. They only know there are certain things we do every day the same way at about the same time.

Every morning I get up, I take my morning vitamins and I'm so glad I have those vitamins put into my weekly planner because if not, some mornings I wouldn't even remember taking them. I have to check and make sure. Why? It's habit. I don't have to think about it.

My mind reads the habit I have programmed by doing the same thing the same way at about the same time. When I do this long enough, I form a habit that doesn't require anything from my mind than automatically accessing that routine. Then my mind is free to think about more complex issues.

Good and Bad Habits

Several years ago, we were gone for over two weeks. When we got home the next morning, I got up to go exercise and my phone told me how many minutes to the pool and what the traffic was like. The mini-computer in my phone does that every morning when I'm in my hometown and get in my car at about that time.

Our minds do this same thing. They remember our habits, even if we've ditched them for a time period. If we try to stop a habit but haven't put another in its place, our minds will again suggest the habit we are trying to stop.

Exercise is a good habit but my phone doesn't know if the pool is a good place for me to go or not. I could be going to Dairy Queen every morning and it would still remind me because I would have programmed it by showing it what I want to do.

Changing Habits

To make my phone change, I would have to be in my hometown, leave from my house at that same time and go somewhere else. When I had consistently done that for a long time, then it would automatically suggest the new route.

This is basically how we change our habits. We stop an old habit that is bad for us and start a new, better habit in its place. Our minds will recognize the better habit if our intention is to get the same reward system activated and we have done the new habit consistently. For example, instead of eating when we are frustrated, we might choose to listen to soothing music. If we do that enough, it becomes the habit our minds recognize that we want to do.

The key to developing a new habit is choosing the new habit over the old consistently for a long enough time that our minds recognize that as our preferred habit. Then our minds will work with us instead of fighting against what we are trying to change.

Habit Highways

Habits travel on a kind of nerve highways in our brains. In order to negate any habit, we have to put a better one in its place. I call this process stop-start because I am stopping a negative habit and replacing it with a positive one.

My first stop-start was to stop eating candy and start exercising three times a week in the water for at least 30 minutes. It worked for me because both were things I knew I needed to do. They made sense to me and they were things I would do.

My goal was to eventually give up all sugar, but this was early in my journey. I had surrendered sugar to God but I still had a desire for it. I knew giving up all sugar cold turkey would just result in me running back to it like a long lost, though evil, lover.

Lasting Habit Change

Changing my bad habit of eating sugar was something I wanted to make happen, but this time I was determined to make it a lasting habit change. Still, I had to start slow and creep up on myself.

My mentor advised us to make our stop-start something with a little challenge but something we felt we could do relying on God for help. He wanted us to experience at least a small success.

Small successes are great motivators. The more success we have, the more we want. Successes no matter how small will keep us on the journey.

Goal Realized

Around four months from when I started my first habit change, I had cut out all sugar and was able to make that a firm stop. The good habit I started was to eat as much fruit as I wanted. I mainly ate strawberries or other berries in a protein shake in the mornings or salads in the evenings.

This helped eradicate my desire for sugar and gave me a fallback of a fresh fruit as a dessert if others were having sugary desserts. It's the fallback I still use instead of dessert.

Each stop-start has helped me look at my life in a different way. I am not on a diet. I am looking at my life and asking God what are the bad habits I have? What are the good habits I need to start? Which one is the most important for me to work on now? How can I break it down, so I can be successful?

Biblical Basis for Stop-Start

Stop-start is all through the Bible I realized when I began looking for it. There are many examples, but the one that really relates to transformation is the best.

“Do not be conformed to this world, [any longer with its superficial values and customs], but be transformed and progressively changed, [as you mature spiritually] by the renewing of your mind [focusing on godly values and ethical attitudes], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His plan and purpose for you],” (Rom. 12:2, AMP).

Hear the stop-start in there? Stop being conformed to the world. Stop focusing on things that don't matter. Start being progressively changed. Start renewing your mind.

God loves to help us with this project, but we have to want Him to help us be progressively changed. We have to allow Him to renew our minds and change our habits. We have to ask Him to show us what needs to change in our lives so we can begin this journey to transformation.

Habit change is one major issue we work on in Overcomers Academy. Doors are open now. For more on this topic, listen to episode 116: How Habits Work on Sweet Grace for Your Journey podcast:

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