

Habits
Part Two: Starting
Daniel 6:3-5, 10

1. Make it obvious.

2. Make it easy.

3. I will do _____,

after I _____.



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Habits - Starting

Today we are picking up where we left off last week with a new series called “Habits.” Of course, this is the time of year that we focus on changing bad habits and try to start new ones, and that’s a really good thing. Today we are going to look specifically at “starting” new habits. I believe this could be the beginning of something positive for many of you because this time of year, people are open to the work of God, people are looking at how they can improve their lives, how they can make changes. So today we want to get very practical in how to start good habits. For this series we are using material from Pastor and author Craig Groeschel, and from various books, in case you want to study this further.

So why do habits matter? Because habits shape the kind of person we become. Our life is a sum total of the decisions we make. Our decisions are one of the few things we can actually control.

Duke University did a study and found that over 40% of our daily actions are not a result of decision making, but a result of our habits. Think about the decisions you made this morning, woke up, cracked your back, bathroom, let the dog out, coffee, cracked your back again, woke kids up, got dressed, checked your phone, read your Bible, brushed your teeth, cracked your back, etc. 40% of the decisions you’ve made so far today were habits.

Habits matter because it’s our habits that determine our success. Most of us want to be successful right? So we set goals for our family or work or about money, or lots of other things. Goals are good to have, but it’s the habits and what we do, that will help us to achieve our goals. So if you made a goal or new year’s resolution this year, and so far, so good (the past two weeks), it’s because you started or stopped a habit and that is what has helped you achieve your goal so far. Your habits help you accomplish what you want.

So because habits are a big part of our lives, we are going to look at the importance of “starting” good habits today. I hope you’ll leave here not just knowing why you should start a new habit, but also leave with some practical ways that will help you know what habit to start and how to start it. Since good habits determine our success, let’s learn from an Old Testament man who was very successful and see how his success can help us in “starting” some new habits. I’ll start reading in Daniel 6:3...

Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.
(Daniel 6:3)

Daniel was dedicated, he was disciplined, and a great leader. A satrap was kind of like a prince or governor of an area. They were usually royal family, appointed by the King and held office indefinitely.

Daniel was one of the top three administrators over the 120 governors, but he wasn’t

from a family of royalty, he wasn't even from Babylon, he was an Israelite captured from the tribe of Judah back when he was a teenager. Now he is in his 80s, but over the years he had worked his way up through loyalty and hard work, so that the king had placed him as one of the top three leaders in the kingdom. Because of the man he was, the king was planning to put him in charge over the whole kingdom. This did not sit well with those who didn't want him in charge, so they watched him and tried to catch him doing something questionable or illegal that they could use against him, and have him punished. Let's continue in verse 4:

At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God." (Daniel 6:4-5)

The other Babylonian leaders many of whom were of the royal family saw Daniel, and they didn't like that he would be even higher in the rankings than them, so they all begin looking to catch him doing something illegally. Because Daniel was devoted to the law and the government, because he was trustworthy, and not corrupt, they couldn't find anything to get him into trouble. So Daniel had 120 people that were constantly watching him to see if he would do anything wrong. The leaders weren't going to get Daniel to break any laws, so they made one up and they tricked the King into signing a decree that said for 30 days, people could only pray to the king. If anyone prayed to anyone other than the king, they would be thrown to the lions. The leaders knew Daniel was committed to God and they had seen him spending time in prayer. The King liked the idea of everyone praying to him for a month, so he went along with it. Let's skip down to verse ten:

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. (Daniel 6:10)

What did Daniel do? He prayed three times a day, **JUST AS HE HAD DONE BEFORE**. His relationship with God was the most important thing to him. He had a habit of daily prayer time with God. Not just when it was convenient or when it was easy. Not just when he was in trouble or needed God's help. That prayer time helped make him the man he was. There were probably times when he didn't always "feel" like giving thanks to God. Sometimes I feel that way.

When thanking God is a daily habit of yours, you realized just how much you have to be thankful for. Daily prayer time is a small habit, but through Daniel's small habit, God used him to do **BIG** things later. I believe God wants to use you in **BIG** ways too, He wants to use our church in **BIG** ways, and it starts with us, it starts with our small habits.

Before you choose a habit to start, the first question to ask yourself, is who do you want to become?

When I was in college, I had to make a choice my senior year to play baseball or take an internship. I wanted to be a pastor, and I knew the internship would prepare me for that. I also knew that the major league was not looking for too many short guys like me.

The church then hired me when I graduated. It started with knowing who I wanted to be. So who do you want to become?

If you look in the mirror and you aren't satisfied with what you see, it's time to start a new habit.

Based on who you want to become, what one habit do you need to start?

1. Want to become organized? Start making your bed in the morning.
2. Healthy? Start going for a walk twice a week.
3. Generous? Start giving a set amount each month.
4. A good listener? Start looking at the person talking to you (without a phone, TV etc. on)
5. A follower of Jesus? Being at church is a start, reading your Bible or prayer at home is a start.

Walking doesn't make you healthy, but it's a start. Making your bed, doesn't make you organized, but it's a start. Coming to church once a week or once a month doesn't make you a follower of Jesus, but it's a start. These are small habits that God can use to guide us in the right direction. As these habits accrue and become a part of our routine, THAT is what helps you become, the person you want to be, and the person God is calling you to be.

When it comes to starting a new habit, think about who you want to become, then choose a habit to start that will help you get closer to being who you want to be. The first tip to starting a new habit...

1. Make it obvious

If you want to be more educated, read more. To start the habit of reading more books, obvious to yourself, put your book on your pillow when you wake up, so you see the book that morning and that night it triggers your memory of the habit you want to do more of. If you want to be healthier, start taking vitamins. To make that habit obvious, leave the container out on the counter by your toothbrush so when you brush your teeth, you see the vitamins and take them.

Don't just make it obvious to yourself, make it obvious to others too. When I was a college intern, I wanted to read though the Bible in a year, I never had done it and I wanted to see if I could follow through, so like most people, I started it in January. A few weeks later, I was still going strong, I obviously had not made it to Leviticus yet, for some reason, I mentioned it to some 5th graders that I was trying to read the whole Bible in a year. From then on, every Sunday for the rest of that year, I had students asking me if I was still reading and keeping up with my plan. I had made it obvious, and it pushed me to want to keep going.

Everyone knew Daniel had good habits of prayer time, it was obvious. If you want to start a new habit, make it obvious, to yourself, and others.

Share with your small group what your new habit is, so they can encourage you. If you

want to read your Bible more, have verses sent to you through text message, make reminders on your phone to read, join a reading plan with someone else, put your Bible on your pillow in the morning, download an audio Bible to listen in the car. All of these are small habits, to remind you about your habit that you want to start to read your Bible more. It'll help to make these small habits, obvious.

2. Another tip when starting a new habit is **Make it easy** (if you want to start reading your Bible every day, commit to one verse, or five minutes of reading. That's all, it's not much, but it's a start. After a little while, reading 2 or 10 verses isn't too difficult because you'll realize it's not much more than your routine of reading one verse. I like to journal and when I first started, I thought I had to write a page reflection of the Bible passage I was reading. Then I forgot one day, and didn't have time to write much the next, then I felt guilty like I had to catch up for the days missed, so instead, I gave up. Now I have a journal and it only leaves room for me to write 2-4 sentences a day, that's it. I actually have a 5-year journal, and I'm on year two now and I get to see on the same page what happened on this day a year ago that I decided to write about. Sometimes, it's a meaningful two sentences, other times is something funny my kids said. But I started small. A small habit that now, I enjoy doing and is now part of my routine.

You want to start exercising, make it easy-10 pushups in the morning. Or one pushup or lying down and getting back up again. To start, make it easy. Four years ago I got into the habit of running, and I ran a half marathon. I wouldn't say it was fun, but I enjoyed how I felt afterwards. So one night, I started feeling sluggish and I was eating lots of candy and soda and just felt blah. So I decided tomorrow I'm going for a jog. I got on the map to try to figure out how much I would actually run if I went to the school and back in our neighborhood. It was half a mile. I'm going to jog half a mile (made it easy-sort of), then I went to bed in my clothes I was going to jog in (not the shoes, come on now). Shoes were first thing I saw in the morning; boom I made it easy. And obvious.

Here's the thing though, like dominos, that one small habit, led to other small habits.

After jogging that morning, I wanted to drink water (I really don't like drinking water), I wanted to eat a healthy breakfast (I usually don't eat breakfast), I was up, already up early, and had some quiet time with God before the kids woke up, I wanted to drink more water during the day, and I didn't want to drink soda and snack on candy. It started with a small habit.

Small habits can lead us to adding more small habits. As small habits accrue, lots of other changes happen. We begin to change who we are. This isn't just about our health, but it's also how God can use us to make an impact in our community, and in our world.

Think about the disciples for a minute, they weren't leaders, at least they didn't begin that way. They were average men that Jesus took and used them to change the world. When Jesus told Peter, "Follow me" he wasn't just saying, walk in my footsteps, he was inviting Peter to learn from Him and His example. Jesus wanted to help Peter become like Jesus. After spending so much time together, the disciples would have picked up on the habits of Jesus. One of the habits Jesus had that we can all follow, is finding time to get away and talk to God. Jesus did a lot of work helping others, heal them, and teaching and being around people all the time. It was probably exhausting. To help him

recharge, he had to make time to get away and find quiet time to spend with our Heavenly Father. Luke 5:15...

Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. (Luke 5:15)

Jesus needed that habit to recharge, we all do. With five kids, its difficult for me to find quiet time in my house, so one habit I have, is not listening to radio on the drive home. I want to have some quiet; so when I get into my house, I can give my family the best version of me. Not the tired or stressed-out version, hopefully. It's not much, it's just a small habit but I know it helps me.

As you think of a habit to start, it helps to create a cue to help us know when we will do that habit.

I will do _____ after I _____.

For me it's, I will turn off the radio, after I park the car. This way, the radio never comes on when I get in to go home at the end of the day.

For Daniel it could have been - I will PRAY, after I EAT. His habit was to pray three times a day. To be clear, Scripture doesn't say it was after his meal, the point is he prayed three times a day, but it helps us to make a cue of what we want to do after something else.

I will read one Bible verse, after I pour my coffee. In the mornings, I will pray with my kids, after we get in the car. I will save \$100 for new clothes after my next payday. I will do some planks and pushups after my kids go to bed. I will talk to my spouse about what habit we can start, after we sit down at lunch today. I will go talk to Pastor Jason about small groups, after Casey shuts up.

Daniel was being watched; his habits were obvious. Everyone knew he prayed three times a day, everyone knew he was a man of God. People are watching you to, what habits are they seeing? Do people know the kind of person you are, based on the habits you have made obvious to them?

Do you have a habit of loving others?

Do you have a habit of saying something you may regret?

Do you have a habit of putting others needs before yours?

Whether you want to become follower of Jesus or not, God loves you more than anything in the whole world. He's crazy in love with you and wants to spend time with you. I want to encourage you to start a habit that is easy and obvious, that will help you spend time with him.

God wants to do BIG things with our small habits, we got to start somewhere.

Prayer

Now is the time to start a new habit. So who do you want to become? What do you want to be known for? And what habit can you start today that will help you honor God each day, as we encourage each other to become more like Jesus? God bless you this week as you go and be a blessing to others. See ya.