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 Mothers Day

Habits of the Heart
John 10:10-18

¹⁰ *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*
¹¹ *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*
¹² *The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes^[a] it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”*

This whole 10th chapter of John is about Jesus, our ***Good Shepherd***.
 And most of us know ***Psalms 23*** very well.
 The idea of God as a shepherd is found all throughout the Bible.

But what does it mean ***to know and follow*** our Good Shepherd?
 And what does this ***abundant life*** he promises look like?

Listen again to verse 14:
I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,

Of course, Jesus knows us, better than anyone else.
 But, ***how do WE really KNOW Jesus?***
 How do we really ***FOLLOW*** Him?
 And what can we ***learn*** from the way He followed his heavenly Father?

You know I used to think that just ***believing*** the right thing,
 Would lead me to ***do*** the right thing.

But I read something *different* this week---
that **DOING the right thing**, making good choices,
leads to **BELIEVING the right thing**, and having the right identity.

And it made me wonder---

Does our BEHAVIOR lead to deeper FAITH?

What if it does?

We have so many references in scripture about **not just** believing or hearing,
but **also doing** the Word of God, like James 1:22.

One pastor I read said that **studies** show how behavior affects belief.

For example, people who started recycling,
started to care even more about the environment.

People who put a sign in their yard for some cause,
started to have deeper connections to that cause.

Following and Believing, David Lose, Dear Working Preacher, 2013.

(Kind of makes you wonder if putting a FPCO sticker on your car,
makes you even more loyal to FPCO!)

Have you ever thought about how doing something—deepens your beliefs?

I've been reading an amazing book called ***Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results***, by James Clear.

It's about how to break bad habits, and create good ones.

And it got me thinking about creating **good FAITH habits**.

Who here wants to have better faith habits?

He argues that **good habits** come from **a good environment**.

So it's important to change your **system, and context**,

If you want to break bad habits, or create good ones.

And, he suggests that changing your life is about **changing WHO you want to be**,
not just what you want to **do**.

And it all starts by asking yourself: **WHO do I really want to be?**

Think about it this way.

Instead of saying ***I'm going to read more***,

You might say to yourself, ***I am an avid reader***.

See the *difference*?

Clear also says that making *incremental changes* yields enormous results, kind of like *compounding interest*.

And the more good habits,
the more that behavior *shapes who we are*.

Basically, to change who we are, you have to change what we do!

James Clear, *Atomic Habits*, (Penguin: New York, 2018), pg. 34-39

When we decide the *type of person* we want to be,

We *make choices according to that*.

Every action is like a “*vote*” for who we are!

This creates a positive *feedback loop*,

where habits shape identity, and identity influences more good habits!

Sounds good, right?

James Clear, *Atomic Habits*, (Penguin: New York, 2018), pg. 37-40.

I love this idea!

Because it focuses on the *positive*, not the negative!

Instead of telling yourself to ‘*stop eating junk food*’,
you say ***I am a healthy person***.

And then when faced with choices ***you ask yourself*** ---

What would a healthy person do?

Creating a good *environment* leads to good *choices*,

Which leads to *becoming who we want to be!*

And who God made us to be!

So if you want to eat healthier,

Remove the junk food, set out a beautiful bowl of fruit....

And you know what might happen?

You’ll reach for the fruit, right?

James Clear says there are ***four keys*** to making a good habit.

You need to make the good choice:

Obvious, Attractive, Easy, and Satisfying.

Like that bowl of fruit on the cabinet, for snacking.

But doing this requires us to *be conscious* of our habits, right?
 So often we do things *without even thinking* about it.
 Have you ever arrived somewhere, but you can't remember getting there?

James Clear says we need to *be thoughtful about our habits*—
 And he uses a great example of Japanese subway conductors,
 who use a *'point and call' method* of working the trains.
 They point and call out loud each and every step of conducting,
 and this method of making every decision *obvious*,
 and saying it *out loud*, significantly reduces accidents!
 James Clear, *Atomic Habits*, (Penguin: New York, 2018), pg. 62.

All this habit-forming got me thinking about *how we know and follow Jesus*.
 How do we do more than just believe in Him?
 Maybe the old *WWJD question is important*, right?
 If we want to be disciples,
 we will ask *What Would Jesus Do?*
 What would *a disciple do?*
 And when it comes to learning the Bible—we might even need to read it out loud!

It may not help us to say *'stop watching TV and read the Bible instead'*
 But it might change our lives if we say *'I am a disciple of Jesus'*,
 and then we make choices that disciples make,
 we vote for discipleship, with our behavior!

And the *smallest* habits, like reading a Bible verse every day,
 Can lead to becoming a disciple,
 with a *deeper faith, and a deeper relationship* with Jesus.

What are *other ways to make faith habits* obvious, easy, attractive, and satisfying?

Maybe we *put our Bibles* right beside our bed, or on the dining room table,
 or install a Bible app on our phone with a daily reminder?
 Maybe we ask a friend to swap thoughts about a book or verse?
 I frequently send excerpts of *Streams in the Desert* to some my sister.

What are *other habits of the heart?*
 I have seen many of you doing creative things to grow your faith.
 One person puts post-it notes of Bible verses in her car,

Another man turns off the radio and prays all the way to work.
 Another person has prayers from our bulletin taped to her mirror,
 to read while brushing teeth!

I have an *email reminder* from You Version Bible app every single morning—
 directing me to the verse of the day!
 And I receive a Tuesday email called Treasure Box Tuesday, with faith ideas.
 I receive several different devotional readings electronically,
 prompting me to read, meditate, and pray in different ways.

Why are things like this so powerful?

They not only make good faith habits easier,
 they are also effective because they are *attached to an activity*
 that we are already doing.

I start every day with *Bible verses* and *Streams in the Desert* devotional,
 With my morning *coffee and smoothie*.
 It's just a part of my whole morning routine!

What about you?

When do you read the Bible?
 When do you spend time with God?
When and where do you do devotional reading?

James Clear says that choosing *a specific time and location*
 helps form good habits,
 and it's easier when it's *attached to an established habit*.

Location is just as important as timing.
 Sitting on your *sofa* might make you want to watch T.V. and eat ice cream.
 Or maybe it's an invitation to nap!

Is there a place *in your home* that's best for prayer and Bible study?
 Is your car ideal for prayer while you drive?
 My seat at our dining room table puts me in God-mode.

Thinking about all of this really can deepen our relationship with Jesus, right?
 If we consciously think of our faith habits, and changing them, or solidifying them,
 the results can be amazing!

Jesus spent so much time with his Heavenly Father.
 He is our model for good faith habits, isn't he?
 He was not just fully divine, he was also *fully human*.
 He spent time creating the *right environment* for faith, and making good choices.
 He often *went away alone to pray*.
 We know he *knew and studied God's Word*, as evidenced in his first sermon.
 He traveled and lived with *12 disciples* who were called to ministry.
 And He taught and healed people who knew they needed God.

John 10 reminds us that he went even further,
 in *laying down his life* for us on the cross.
 He made that ultimate gift and sacrifice,
 Just like he lived his calling *each and every day* on earth.
 Laying down his desires, *to love and serve others*.

So, how will we follow in Jesus' footsteps?
 How will we *create good habits of the heart*,
 and grow in our relationship with Him?

Well, what if we go back to old Nike logo: And *Just Do It*.
 What if we ask, *What Jesus would do?*
 What if we told ourselves---*I am a disciple of Jesus*.
Would a disciple do that? Would a disciple say that?

And wouldn't the world be *transformed*
 if we asked ourselves that question--all the time?
 Can you even imagine the power of the church if that were the case?

Sometimes, people ask---*how do I hear from Jesus?*
 And how do I *know it's His voice?*
 John says we know the voice of our Good Shepherd, and we follow Him.
 What if there's a simple answer?

Learn what Jesus did,
 think about *what he would do*,
 and *DO THAT!*

And as we do that, *we learn what Jesus' voice sounds like*,
 and *how Jesus speaks to us*.

Only you know *when* God is speaking to you, and *what* God is saying to you. The question is *not IF* God is speaking, but whether we ***LISTEN AND FOLLOW!***

In the bulletin today is a sheet that asks ***How Can I Follow Jesus This Week?***

I urge you to pull that out and look at it with me right now...

Now think about which of these activities—a few of them—that you can ***do this week!***

I urge you to ***circle*** those, and put this paper in a ***prominent place*** in your home, so you'll have accountability.

Do you remember the end of Matthew 25?

When the master separates the sheep from the goats, and tells those at his right hand, that whenever they ***served the least of these, they served Him?***

I guarantee you will feel the ***reward and deeper faith***, just by serving Jesus--- and hopefully this little list is just a starter!

Because can't we all think of even more ways to serve Christ?

Which brings us back to John 10:10.

What is the abundant life that Jesus promises?

The ***world*** would say abundant life means ***acquiring MORE***—more money, time, leisure, opportunities, friends....

Which is where they are oodles of commercials telling us that we need, deserve, and must get MORE.

But what if Jesus is talking about something ***different?***

What if abundant life is ***less about QUANTITY,*** and ***more about QUALITY*** of life?

What if abundant life is ***a life of faith,*** and ***a growing relationship*** with Jesus?

What if it's a life full of ***fruits of the Spirit,*** like love joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self control?

What if abundant life is ***following our Good Shepherd***—

who leads us to the green pastures and still waters,

who protects and feeds and anoints us,

so we may live with Him always?

What if abundant life is the life described in John 15—
of *abiding in Jesus*.

Jesus as the vine, and we are the branches---

What if that relationship is abundant life?

If that's the case, I want it---do you?

Friends, hear the *Good News of the Gospel* today:

Creating good habits of the heart leads us to *know and follow* Jesus.

May we take the time to create these *habits*,

And receive the *abundant life* that comes from them!

And to that, all God's people said, Amen!