



How to Harness Your Habits



3 COVER SUBJECT How to Harness Your Habits

Replacing bad habits with good ones takes time, but is it worth it?

The Bible says:

“Better is the end of a matter than its beginning.”—Ecclesiastes 7:8.

These articles discuss Bible principles that show how people can harness their habits for their benefit.

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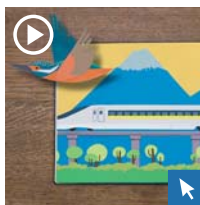
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COVER SUBJECT

How to Harness Your Habits



WHEN Austin's alarm clock goes off, he is sleepy. But he immediately gets out of bed, puts on the exercise clothes he laid out the night before, and goes for a brief jog—just as he has three times a week for the past year.



Laurie just had a fight with her husband. Angry and frustrated, she storms into the kitchen, pulls out a bag of chocolate candies, and eats them all—just as she seems to do every time she is upset.

What do Austin and Laurie have in common? Whether they realize it or not, both have been affected by a powerful force—the force of habit.

What about you? Are there good habits that you would like to build in your life? Perhaps your goal is to exercise regularly, to get more sleep, or to keep in closer touch with loved ones.

On the other hand, maybe you would like to break a bad habit, such as smoking cigarettes, eating too much junk food, or spending excessive time on the Internet.

Admittedly, it can be difficult to overcome a bad habit. In fact, it has been said that a bad habit is like a warm bed on a cold day: it's easy to get into and hard to get out of!

So how can you harness your habits and make them work *for* you instead of *against* you? Consider the following three suggestions based on principles found in the Bible.

1

Be Realistic

It can be tempting to try to change everything in your life immediately. You tell yourself, ‘This week I’m going to stop smoking, stop swearing, stop staying up too late at night, start exercising, start eating better, and start calling my grandparents.’ But trying to reach all your goals at the same time is a sure way to reach *none* of them!

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “*Wisdom is with the modest ones.*”—Proverbs 11:2.

A modest person is realistic. He recognizes that there are limits to his time, energy, and resources. So rather than trying to change everything at once, he makes improvement gradually.

Trying to reach all your goals at the same time is a sure way to reach *none* of them!

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Work on your habits in realistic increments. The following steps may help:

- 1 Create two ‘master lists’—a list of *good* habits that you would like to build and a list of any *bad* habits that you need to get rid of. Do not limit yourself; on each list, write down as many as you can think of.
- 2 Prioritize the items on your lists, numbering them in the order of importance to you.
- 3 Choose a few habits—even just one or two—from each list, and focus on those. Then move on to the next one or two habits on each of your lists.

Speed up the process by replacing a bad habit with a good one. For example, if your list of bad habits includes watching too much TV and your list of good habits includes keeping in touch with loved ones, you could resolve: ‘Instead of immediately turning on the TV when I get home from work each day, I will contact a friend or a relative and catch up.’

RELATED BIBLE PRINCIPLES

“Make sure of the more important things.”
—Philippians 1:10.

“Better is the end of a matter than its beginning.”—Ecclesiastes 7:8.

2

Manage Your Environment

- You resolved to eat better, but that tub of ice cream seems to have your name written all over it.
- You decided to quit smoking, but once again, your friend—who knows you are trying to quit—offers you a cigarette.
- You planned to exercise today, but even digging through the closet for your running shoes seems like too much work!

Can you see a common thread in those scenarios? Time and again, experience has shown that our environment—the situations we put ourselves in and the people we spend time with—influences our success in building good habits and breaking bad ones.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: *“The shrewd one sees the danger and conceals himself, but the inexperienced keep right on going and suffer the consequences.”*
—Proverbs 22:3.

The Bible advises us to think ahead. By doing so, we can cautiously avoid situations that could undermine our goals, and we can thus actively put ourselves in more favorable situations. (2 Timothy 2:22) In short, we are wise to manage our environment.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Make it *harder* to do the wrong thing. For example, if you want to eliminate junk food from your diet, try not to keep food in your kitchen that you know is not good for you. That way, when temptation strikes, giving in will require more effort than not giving in.
- Make it *easier* to do the right thing. For instance, if you plan to exercise first thing in the morning, set your exercise clothing next to your bed the night before. The easier it is to get started, the more likely you are to follow through.
- Choose your friends carefully. We tend to become like the people we spend time with. (1 Corinthians 15:33) So limit contact with people who encourage habits that you are trying to break, and seek out those who can reinforce good habits.

Make it *harder* to do the wrong thing and *easier* to do the right thing

RELATED BIBLE PRINCIPLES

“The one walking with the wise will become wise.”—Proverbs 13:20.

“The plans of the diligent surely lead to success.”—Proverbs 21:5.

3

Take a Long-Range View

There is a popular notion that it takes 21 days to cement a new habit. In reality, though, research shows that it can take some people less time—and others a lot more—to make significant changes. Should that discourage you?

Well, think of this scenario: Imagine that you want to build a habit of exercising three times a week.



- The first week, you meet your goal.
- The second week, you miss a day.
- The third week, you are back on track.
- The fourth week, you barely exercise once.
- The fifth week, you reach your goal again, and from that point forward, you meet it each week.

It took five weeks to solidify your new habit. That may seem like a long time, but once you reach your goal, you will be glad you have cultivated a new good habit.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “*The righteous one may fall seven times, and he will get up again.*”—Proverbs 24:16.

The Bible encourages a long-range view. What counts in the end is, not how many times we fall, but how many times we get up again.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Do not conclude that a relapse is a permanent failure. Expect to face some setbacks as you work toward your goal.
- Focus on the times when things went *right*. For example, if you are trying to improve the way you communicate with your children, ask yourself: ‘When was the last time I felt like yelling at my children, but didn’t? What did I do instead? How can I repeat that?’ Such questions can help you to reinforce your successes rather than dwell on your setbacks.

What counts in the end is, not how many times we fall, but how many times we get up again

Would you like to know how Bible principles can help you in other aspects of life, such as dealing with anxiety, building a happy family life, and finding real happiness? Speak with any of Jehovah’s Witnesses, or visit our website, jw.org. ■

RELATED BIBLE PRINCIPLES

“Fix your gaze straight ahead of you.”—Proverbs 4:25.

“Forgetting the things behind and stretching forward to the things ahead, I am pressing on toward the goal.”
—Philippians 3:13, 14.

What Does the Bible Say About Homosexuality?



GAY marriage is still under debate in many countries. In the United States, however, in 2015 the Supreme Court declared gay marriage to be legal nationwide. Thereafter, Internet searches on the topic skyrocketed. One of the most popular questions asked was, “What does the Bible say about gay marriage?”

The Bible does not specifically comment on legal rights involving *marriage* between

people of the same sex. A more fundamental question is, What does the Bible say about homosexuality?

Without closely examining the Bible, many people think that they know the answer—but their answers are contradictory! Some say that the Bible is clearly antigay. Others claim that the Biblical command to “love your neighbor” supports any and all sexual lifestyles.—Romans 13:9.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Which of these statements would you consider to be true?

1. The Bible condemns homosexual acts.
2. The Bible condones homosexual acts.
3. The Bible promotes homophobia (a hatred of or prejudice toward homosexuals).

ANSWERS:

1. **TRUE.** The Bible says: “Men who practice homosexuality . . . will not inherit God’s Kingdom.” (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10) The same applies to women.—Romans 1:26.
2. **FALSE.** The Bible teaches that sex should be engaged in only by a male and a female who are married to each other.—Genesis 1:27, 28; Proverbs 5:18, 19.
3. **FALSE.** Although the Bible condemns homosexual acts, it does *not* encourage prejudice, hate crimes, or any other kind of mistreatment of homosexuals.—Romans 12:18.^[1]

What Do Jehovah's Witnesses Believe?

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Bible's moral code is the best standard for living, and they choose to abide by that code. (Isaiah 48:17)^[2] This means that Jehovah's Witnesses reject all sexual misconduct, including homosexuality. (1 Corinthians 6:18)^[3] That is the Witnesses' lifestyle choice, and they have a right to it.

At the same time, Jehovah's Witnesses strive to "pursue peace with all people." (Hebrews 12:14) While they reject homosexual acts, Jehovah's Witnesses do not force their view on others, nor do they participate in homophobic hate crimes or rejoice when they hear of them. Jehovah's Witnesses strive to follow the Golden Rule by treating others the way they themselves would like to be treated. —Matthew 7:12.

Does the Bible Promote Prejudice?

Still, some people would say that the Bible promotes prejudice against homosexuals and that those who adhere to its moral code are intolerant. 'The Bible was written at a time when people were narrow-minded,' they claim. 'Today we accept people of all races, nationalities, and sexual preferences.' To them, rejecting homosexuality is the same as rejecting people of a different skin color. Is that comparison valid? No. Why not?

Because there is a difference between rejecting homosexual *conduct* and rejecting homosexual *people*. The Bible tells Christians to be respectful of all kinds of people. (1 Peter 2:17)^[4] But that does not mean that Christians must accept all kinds of *conduct*.

Consider a comparison: Suppose you view smoking as harmful and even repugnant. What if you have a workmate who is

a smoker? Would you be considered narrow-minded just because your view of smoking differs from his? Would the fact that he smokes and you do not smoke automatically mean that you are prejudiced against him? If your workmate were to demand that you change your view of smoking, would that not make *him* narrow-minded and intolerant?

Jehovah's Witnesses choose to live by the moral code set forth in the Bible. They do not approve of the *actions* that the Bible prohibits. But they neither mock nor mistreat *people* whose practices differ from their own.

Is the Bible's View Cruel?

What about people who have homosexual inclinations? Were they born that way? If so, would it not be cruel to say that it is wrong for them to act on their desires?

The Bible does not comment on the biology of homosexuality, although it acknowledges that some human traits are deeply ingrained. Still, the Bible says that certain conduct—including homosexual acts—must be shunned if we are to please God.—2 Corinthians 10:4, 5.

Some would say that the Bible's position is cruel. But their claim is based on the premise that we *must* act on our impulses or that sexual impulses in particular are so important that they should not—even *cannot*—be controlled. However, the Bible dignifies humans by stating that they *can* resist their urges. Unlike animals, they can choose not to act on their impulses. —Colossians 3:5.^[5]

Consider a comparison: Some experts say that certain behavioral traits, such as aggression, may have a biological cause. The Bible does not specifically comment on the biology of aggression, but it does

Jehovah's Witnesses strive to follow the Golden Rule by treating others the way they themselves would like to be treated

acknowledge that some people are “prone to anger” and “disposed to rage.” (Proverbs 22:24; 29:22) Yet, the Bible also says: “Let go of anger and abandon rage.” —Psalm 37:8; Ephesians 4:31.

Few people would disagree with that advice or say that it is cruel to those who have aggressive tendencies. In fact, even those experts who believe that anger is rooted in a person's genetic makeup work hard to help people control such tendencies.

Jehovah's Witnesses take a similar position toward any conduct that conflicts with Bible standards, including sexual acts between two people of the opposite sex who are not married to each other. In all such cases, the Bible counsel applies: “Each one of you should know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not with greedy, uncontrolled sexual passion.”—1 Thessalonians 4:4, 5.

“That Is What Some of You Were”

Those who wanted to become Christians in the first century came from various backgrounds and lifestyles, and some of them made significant lifestyle changes. For example, the Bible speaks of “those who are sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, men who submit to homosexual acts,” and then it adds: “That is what some of you were.”—1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

In saying “that is what some of you were,” does the Bible mean that those who stopped engaging in homosexual acts never again experienced any homosexual desires? That could hardly be the case,

because the Bible also exhorts: “Keep walking by spirit and you will carry out no fleshly desire.”—Galatians 5:16.

Note that the Bible does not say that a Christian will never experience an improper desire. Rather, it says that he or she will choose not to *carry out* that desire. Christians learn to bring such desires under control, not dwelling on them to the point of acting on them.—James 1:14, 15.^[6]

The Bible thus makes a distinction between *inclinations* and *practices*. (Romans 7:16-25) A person who has homosexual leanings can control what he allows his mind to dwell on, just as he would control any other wrong desire, including leanings toward anger, adultery, and greed.—1 Corinthians 9:27; 2 Peter 2:14, 15.

While Jehovah's Witnesses uphold the moral code set forth in the Bible, they do not force their views on others. Nor do they try to reverse laws that protect the human rights of those whose lifestyle differs from theirs. The message that Jehovah's Witnesses bear is a positive one, and they eagerly share it with all who will listen.—Acts 20:20. ■

ENDNOTES:

1. Romans 12:18: “Be peaceable with all men.”
2. Isaiah 48:17: “I, Jehovah, am your God, the One teaching you to benefit yourself.”
3. 1 Corinthians 6:18: “Flee from sexual immorality!”
4. 1 Peter 2:17: “Honor men of all sorts.”
5. Colossians 3:5: “Deadens, therefore, your body members that are on the earth as respects sexual immorality, uncleanness, uncontrolled sexual passion.”
6. James 1:14, 15: “Each one is tried by being drawn out and enticed by his own desire. Then the desire, when it has become fertile, gives birth to sin.”



How to Deal With Change



THE CHALLENGE

- ☐ Your dad's job requires that your family relocate.
- ☐ Your best friend is moving far away.
- ☐ Your older sibling is leaving home to get married.

How well would *you* adapt to such changes?

A tree that can bend with the wind is more likely to survive a storm. Like that tree, you can learn to “bend” with changes over which you have little or no control. Before discussing how you can do that, though, consider a few things you should know about change.



WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Change is inevitable. The Bible states a fundamental truth about humans: “Unexpected events overtake them all.” (Ecclesiastes 9:11) Sooner or later, you will be confronted with the reality of those words. Of course, not all unexpected events are bad. And some changes that at first *seem* to be bad might turn out to be advantageous. Nevertheless, most people thrive on routine, while change—whether good or bad—rattles their comfort zone.

Change can be particularly stressful for adolescents. Why? “You’re already going through *internal* changes,” explains a young man named Alex.* “*External* changes just add to the stress.”

Here is another reason: When adults face a change, they can refer to their personal ‘book of experience’ to see how they dealt with similar situations in the past. But young people have less history on which to draw.

You can learn to adapt. Resilience is the ability to recover from misfortune or adjust to change. A resilient person can not only *endure* a new circumstance but also look at a seeming obstacle and see an opportunity in it. Resilient teens are less likely to turn to drugs or alcohol when they feel overwhelmed.

* Some names in this article have been changed.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Accept reality. No doubt you would like to have total control of your life, but that is simply not possible. Friends will move away or marry; siblings will grow up and leave home; circumstances may force your family to move, leaving behind friends and all that is familiar. It is better to accept reality than to let negative thoughts overwhelm you.—*Bible principle: Ecclesiastes 7:10.*

Look ahead. Focusing on the past is like driving on a highway with your eyes fixed on the rearview mirror. An occasional glance is beneficial, but you really need to concentrate on the road ahead. The same is true when you are confronted with change. Try to keep your eyes fixed on the future. (Proverbs 4:25) For example, what goal could you set for the next month, or six months?

Focus on the positive. “Resilience is about attitude,” says a young woman named Laura. “Find positive aspects of the circumstance you are in.” Can you list at least one advantage that your new circumstance offers? —*Bible principle: Ecclesiastes 6:9.*

A young woman named Victoria recalls that in her teen years, all her close friends moved away. “I felt so lonely, and I wished that everything could have stayed the way it was,” she says. “But looking back, that’s when I really started to grow. I came to realize that growth *requires* change. That’s also when I started seeing possibilities for new friendships that were all around me.”—*Bible principle: Proverbs 27:10.*

Focusing on the past is like driving on a highway with your eyes fixed on the rearview mirror

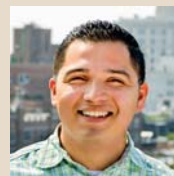
Do things for others. The Bible says: “Look out not only for your own interests, but also for the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:4) A good antidote to your own challenge is helping others with theirs. Anna, 17, says: “As I grew older, I came to realize that when I could help someone else who might be going through a similar situation—or a worse one—it was rewarding!” ■

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Do not say, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’”
—Ecclesiastes 7:10.

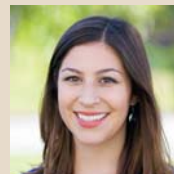
“Better to enjoy what the eyes see than to wander after one’s desires.”—Ecclesiastes 6:9.

“Better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.”—Proverbs 27:10.



JUAN

“Young people can develop resilience by analyzing the situation they are coping with and realizing that change is a part of life. The quicker a person accepts that reality, the easier it will be to move on with life. Things do get better.”



CARISSA

“Once a difficulty has passed, I try not to relive it over and over in my mind. I just move on to the next challenge in life. Part of being resilient, I believe, is looking ahead rather than looking behind.”



A Visit to Kyrgyzstan

SURROUNDED by towering, ice-covered peaks, Kyrgyzstan is nestled in Central Asia and is bordered by Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China. Mountains cover nearly 90 percent of the country. Kyrgyzstan boasts the highest point of the Tian Shan Mountain range, which is 24,406 feet (7,439 m) above sea level. Forests cover about 4 percent of the landmass of the country. It is therefore noteworthy that one of the planet's largest natural-growth walnut forests is found in Kyrgyzstan.

Hospitality and respect are well-known traits of the Kyrgyz people. In Kyrgyzstan it is proper to use the polite form of “you” when addressing someone older and to offer him or her your seat on public transport, as well as the most honorable seat at the table.

Families commonly have three or more children. The youngest son usually stays with his parents, even after marriage, and looks after them throughout their old age.





Jehovah's Witnesses are teaching the Bible to thousands of people in Kyrgyzstan

Komuz is a popular musical instrument



Tentlike dwellings called yurts in the Tash Rabat Valley

From a young age, girls are taught the practical skills needed to be good housewives. By the mid-teens they are fully capable of running a household. A dowry is usually prepared for the bride. This may consist of bedding of all sorts, a variety of clothing, and a handmade carpet. The groom pays a bride-price in money and livestock.

During celebrations and funerals, a sheep or a horse is slaughtered. It is divided into parts, and every part is specially designated for a specific person. Depending upon the age and position of the guests, each one is given his or her portion; again respect is the key element guiding this tradition. Then the national dish, *bashbarmak*, is served. It is eaten with the hands. ■

Koumiss is a bubbly drink made from fermented mare's milk



FAST FACTS

Population: 5,776,000

Capital: Bishkek

Languages: Kirghiz, Russian

Exports: Cotton, wool, gold, mercury, uranium

Religion: Islam (80 percent)

The book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* is published in Kirghiz and is available online at www.jw.org





PHYSICAL BEAUTY

A healthy attitude toward physical beauty can mean the difference between happiness and unhappiness.

Why do we appreciate beauty?

In ways that are still a mystery, the human brain perceives beauty. The Bible does not explain how this happens, but it does reveal why we have an aesthetic sense: God endowed us with his attributes. (Genesis 1:27; Ecclesiastes 3:11) He also created the highly complex human body, giving it amazing form and function. In that regard, an ancient songwriter said: “I praise you [God] because in an awe-inspiring way I am wonderfully made.” —Psalm 139:14.

Today, though, attitudes toward physical beauty are often unbalanced—a trend promoted by the fashion industry and the popular media. According to the book *Body Image*, a number of studies in Western cultures “suggest that body image is the single most important factor in a person’s overall self-image.” Such a narrow focus, however, can mean ignoring

something far more important—an individual’s heart.—1 Samuel 16:7.

Hand in hand with the focus on the body is growing overemphasis on sexuality, especially that of women. “Virtually every media form studied,” says a 2007 American Psychological Association (APA) report, “provides ample evidence of the sexualization of women.” The Bible firmly encourages us to avoid being influenced by such trends—and for good reason! —Colossians 3:5, 6.

“Do not let your adornment be external . . . , but let it be the secret person of the heart in the incorruptible adornment of the quiet and mild spirit, which is of great value in the eyes of God.”—1 Peter 3:3, 4.

Why is it wise to have a balanced view?

Concerning physical beauty, some say: “If you’ve got it, flaunt it!” In cultures where such thinking is common, adolescent and even preadolescent girls learn to

view themselves “as objects of others’ desires . . . , to be looked at and evaluated for their appearance,” says a report by the APA. That view can be most harmful. In



fact, it has become a major social and health concern that, according to the APA, may lead to “a host of negative emotional consequences.” These may include anxiety and “even self-disgust . . . , eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression or depressed mood.”

“Remove troublesome things from your heart, and ward off harmful things from your body, for youth and the prime of life are futility.”

—Ecclesiastes 11:10.

What attitude reflects a sound mind?

The Bible associates “soundness of mind,” or sensibleness, with modesty. (1 Timothy 2:9) Consider: Modest people are not superficial or vain, obsessing about their looks, but they have a healthy, balanced view of themselves. They also consider the feelings of others and thus earn admiration, respect and, above all, God’s favor. (Micah 6:8) Moreover, they are more likely to make true friends and attract potential marriage mates who are interested not just in physical intimacy but also in a lasting and happy union.

For many good reasons, then, the Bible exhorts us to focus on the inner person —“the secret person of the heart.” (1 Peter

3:3, 4) Inner beauty truly is ageless. In fact, it can improve with time! “Gray hair is a crown of beauty when it is found in the way of righteousness,” says Proverbs 16:31. Hence, whether young or old, people who heed the Bible’s superior advice will find the key not only to the beauty that lasts but also to dignity and contentment. ■

“Charm may be false, and beauty may be fleeting, but the woman who fears Jehovah will be praised.”

—Proverbs 31:30.



Many cultures place unhealthy emphasis on body image and sexuality



The Periodical Cicada's Timing

CICADAS, insects resembling locusts, live on all continents except Antarctica. Unique to the northeast of America, however, are the periodical cicadas, which have long fascinated biologists.

Consider: Millions of periodical cicadas appear suddenly in the spring for just a few weeks. During their short time in the sun, they shed their juvenile skin, sing deafeningly, fly, reproduce, and then die. Strangely, the next generation appears either 13 or 17 years later, depending on the species. What happens to these insects in the meantime?

To answer, we need to understand the periodical cicada's unique life cycle. About a week after appearing, adult insects mate and the females lay from 400 to 600 eggs inside tree twigs. Soon thereafter, the adults die. Within the next few weeks, the eggs hatch and the young nymphs drop to the earth, burrow into the soil, and begin a life underground, where they suck fluids from the roots of shrubs or trees for several years. Either 13 or 17 years later, the new adult generation emerges to repeat the cycle.

According to an article in *Nature* magazine, the complex life cycle of these cicadas "has confounded scientists for centuries. . . . Even now, entomologists are



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trying to understand how the insects' peculiar life cycles evolved." It is an unprecedented mystery in the animal kingdom.

What do you think? Could the periodical cicada's timing be the product of evolution? Or was it designed? ■

