

ON FORMING GOOD HABITS

by Walton Weaver

Few people live up to the old Greek adage, "Know thyself." Cicero was right when he said, "Everyone is least known to himself, and it is very difficult for a man to know himself." So many think they know themselves when they don't. An old Arab proverb said: "There are four kinds of people . . . those who don't know that they don't know; those who know that they don't know; those who don't know that they know; and those who know that they know." Too many of us belong to the first class. We don't know that we don't know ourselves completely.

It may be that we will never come to know ourselves completely. There is one thing though which we must have come to realize about ourselves. Just how much we are creatures of habit. If we have learned this we have taken a giant step in the right direction.

Our habits make or break us. We do not give enough attention to them. There is an old saying which well describes the importance of our habits: "We first make our habits, but they eventually make us." Habits are really more important than we think. C. A. Hall got to the heart of the matter when he said, "We sow our thoughts, and we reap our actions; we sow our actions, and we reap our habits; we sow our habits, and we reap our characters; we sow our characters, and we reap our destiny."

A Matter of Choice

Our habits are formed by the choices we make, whether these choices are good or bad ones. Notice, I said formed. We are not born with them. Habits are the result of the choices we make time after time. These choices finally harden into habits.

A person does not become an habitual swearer or liar over night. He grows into it. Seldom does one choose to do a thing only once. Choices once made tend to be made again, especially bad ones. The bad habits people develop do not result from carefully thought out plans to follow such a path. They are the end result of a course followed often enough that we can pretty well predict what such victims will say or do in a given situation. Watch your choices. When bad choices are made consistently and regularly, they result in habits that are not good and, hopefully, not wanted.

Good Habits

Good habits are the result of wise and good choices just as much as bad habits grow out of wrong choices. It is a good thing to keep one's body in good physical condition. Paul says that bodily exercise is beneficial (1 Tim. 4:8a). By way of contrast, godliness is even more valuable (1 Tim. 4:8b). One is profitable for this life only, the other has rewards both in this life and in the life to come. For one to reap the benefits of either the development of good habits is essential.

It is not easy for one to get into the habit of walking, jogging or lifting weights to keep one's self physically fit. All will admit that this practice is good, but not many choose to exercise regularly and therefore are not in the habit of doing it. Most people have taken the easy road so long they now give little, if any, thought to the matter. The only way the best habit will be developed is through choosing to exercise. We must choose to exercise enough times that it will finally form into a habit with us.

The Psalmist tells us that the good man delights in the law of the Lord and meditates in it day and night (Ps. 1:2). A good habit, wouldn't you say? But one is not born with this practice of finding delight in God's law, nor does he inherit special inclinations for meditating in God's law regularly. He develops this interest in the word of God. People come to like the things they choose to do the most.

The Best Life

Life can be lived only one day at a time. The estimate we make of our own life determines the kind of choices we make each day. The habits which stem from these day by day choices tell us more about ourselves than anything else. If we would know ourselves, let us step back and take a long, hard look at what we do-what has become habitual with us. What we see will give us a clear reading of our character. What we are in character will determine our destiny. Remember?

If we would live the best life we must view each day as a day which the Lord has given us. With the Psalmist, let us say, "This is the day which the Lord has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:24). One day at a time and one choice at a time gradually make up the whole of our life. With each passing day and each choice made day after day, step by step our character is molded and our destiny is determined. We cannot recall our days, and we cannot remake our choices. All along the way we are making ourselves what we shall be at the end of the way. We must take special care that the habits we are forming will give us the very best life possible.

Jesus came to make it possible for us to have the best life. He said, "I came that you might have life, and might have it abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). He not only points us in the right way, He lived the best life and calls upon us to follow Him. He is our example (1 Pet. 2 : 2 1).

The habits we see in Jesus are the kind that are best for us. He was one who was thoroughly familiar with the Scriptures and viewed them as an authoritative and complete guide for life. Read the gospels and see how often He appeals to the Scriptures for this reason or that. He was a man of prayer. He made a habit of it. It was a part of the very fabric of His life. Notice Him as He regularly gathers with those in the synagogue who have assembled for public worship. See Him as He goes about everywhere doing good for others. These things were habits with Jesus because He had chosen the best life, and He would lead you and me into the same abundant life if we follow.

The abundant life will make us better and happier in this life, and it will give us hope in the life to come. Take care that your life is properly directed; form habits (begin early in life) that will enable you to enjoy the most important things life has to offer—things that give quality as well as permanency to life.