

Week #1 of the 3-Week Series, "ATOMIC HABITS"

TINY CHANGES, BIG DIFFERENCE

Jan. 26, 2020 (9am Service)

Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: So, how many people here have ever had a bad habit that you had a really hard time breaking? And, how many people wanted to develop a good habit, but you had a hard time sticking to it?

Today we're going to start a three-week series on how to create some good habits and how to break bad habits. Most of us don't think about the impact that bad habits have in our lives other than, *"I have a bad habit and I'd like to start a good habit."*

There was an English poet in the 1700's who said about the impact of habits, *"First we make our habits; then our habits make us."*

James Clear, who is an expert in habits (we'll be looking at his book), actually said the key indicator of our success in our lives – the biggest indicator – isn't about how big your vision is or your goals are; it's absolutely 100% the byproduct and the result of what our daily habits are. Habits are consistent behavior and practices that we do over an extended period of time, and these small actions and changes can actually have a huge impact over time on our level of happiness, success and improving many area of our lives.

In 2003 the British cycling team hired Dave Brailsford to be their performance director. At the time, saying the British cycling team had experienced over 100 years of mediocrity would be optimistic! They had never won in 110 years the Tour De France. They had had only one Olympic gold medal in over 100 years (it was 1908). These guys were so bad that European bike manufacturers did not want to sell them bikes; they didn't want to be associated with such a bad team. That is how bad they were! So, this guy comes in and says he's got a strategy for improving things, and it's called the aggregation of marginal gains. What he wanted to do was to make little improvements – 1% improvement – in a number of areas and see if these little changes could make a big difference. Simple changes: like changing and making their seats more comfortable. Having their shorts and their uniforms be made of a different kind of materials, and getting that material heated so it would keep their muscles warmer. They looked at what kind of mattress they slept on; what kind of pillows they used to get better rest. They used massage to recover quicker. They even looked at washing their hands on a regular basis as a practice to stay healthier and not catch colds.

And, do you know, that within five years, the British team at the Olympics in 2008: they won 60% of the Olympic medals! At the next Olympics they set nine Olympic records and seven world records. Over the next 10 years, they won the Tour De France five times; they won 178 international championships; and they won 66 gold medals... all by making a 1% little improvement over time! They dominated cycling, from being absolutely obsolete.

Does everybody know the compounding interest thing, and the power it has? Like, if I were to give you a choice between a \$1 million now or a penny that would double every day for 30 days? We would all generally lean toward the \$1 million now. But in 30 days, that one penny that doubled the amount each day would be worth \$5.3 million!

Well, similarly, habits are the compound interest of self-improvement and making our lives better. How many people – after hearing that – would say, that at some level, you kind of believe that small changes can make a big difference over time? How many would say that habits could really be the compounding interest of success?

And yet, why is it that we don't take advantage of small changes and simple regular habits towards improving our lives and letting them make a big difference over time? Here's the reason why, I think. It's because we have this cultural mindset that is the exact opposite of exactly what would be needed to utilize small changes. Here's some of them.

The first one: we have this idea that massive success equals massive action. We are always looking to hit the grand slam home run. We are always looking for that big break: that one next thing that's going to bust out for the quantum leap. We're looking to win the lottery. We have this mindset that overvalues one big thing and undervalues small things. And, here's what we end up doing. If you want to improve your life in some way – like you want to get more fit or write a book or build a business – we put pressure on ourselves that we've got to hit it big... That we've got to bust out. It's got to be fast and instant success; otherwise, there's almost failure, because we believe this big-hitted, massive success thing.

So, we overvalue the one big thing and we undervalue all the small things. We begin to think that small things are insignificant. *"I went to the gym three times and I'm still not in shape." I took four Mandarin lessons and I'm not bilingual." "I ate six salads last week and I'm still the same weight."*

So, what happens is, because it's so insignificant – it doesn't change every single day – that we think, *"Oh, well, I could just skip one. I could just skip another."* And we end up not doing it, or doing it so spotty that we don't reap the benefits of the change.

The next reason it doesn't work in our culture is because we are an impatient people. We want it, and we want it now! We want in yesterday! The things move way too slow. We want to be an overnight success. Everybody wants the fast track to losing weight, the fast track to gaining wealth. We always want fast.

The final one is – to be honest – we're a little bit lazy. We look to get the biggest result with the least or no effort, if possible. That's what we really want.

So you can see that mindset in our culture – that gets confirmed over and over again – really doesn't fit the idea of small changes over time making a big difference.

If we were observing that cycling club we say, *"It took five whole years?!?"* But they dominated and it's amazing!

So James Clear wrote a book called *Atomic Habits*. He used the word "atomic" obviously intentionally, because the atom is small, but powerful. The atom is what makes up molecules, which make up everything. So, he's saying there are habits that are atomic (small and powerful) that can create remarkable results in our lives. There are small things we can do consistently that will transform and will have a more lasting impact on the kind of life that we have.

So, over the next three weeks we're going to look at how do we can create these powerful atomic habits, and how we can use them to break habits that aren't helping us and to create more positive ones that will take our lives to a greater level.

So, if a plane was leaving LAX for New York, but it altered its angle by just 3.5 degrees, it would end up in Washington, DC! It doesn't sound like a big deal. When it takes off you can't tell much of a difference, but where it ends up ultimately is hundreds of miles away.

Sometimes we think what we're doing right now is going to get us to New York but, based on what we're doing, sometimes we're going to end up in a place that we did not intend to go. Because the reality is: positive behaviors compound and so do negative ones. Positive attitudes compound, but so do negative attitudes! All the things we're doing in our lives are going to lead us and create a trajectory over time that's going to add up to make a big difference.

The first thing we need to do to begin to change and transform our lives and use atomic habits is to understand what we're doing. This is what James Clear says: *"The greatest challenge in improving our habits and our lives is in maintaining an awareness of what we're actually doing and the impact that it is having for us down the road."* He say what we're doing and why we're doing it is important but so is understanding the effect it's going to have; the trajectory it's going to take us on over time. If we're not aware that we will keep doing the thing we're doing and end up in places we don't want to be.

Here's what Karl Jung said: *"Until the unconscious becomes conscious, it will direct your life and it will make you call it fate."* And so what he (James Clear) says we need to do is take an inventory of your daily habit. Like, literally do this: Wake Up. Turn off the alarm. Check my cell phone. Have a cup of coffee. Take a shower. Eat some chocolate. Smoke a cigarette.

Whatever it is, literally listing whatever it is you do all day long will give you an awareness and an inventory. Because sometimes we're on automatic pilot; we don't even realize what we're doing! Like, literally making a list like that will begin to bring into awareness.

Yes, smoking a cigarette might bring some peace in this moment, but what's the trajectory of it over the next five years or 10 years? Again, eating chocolate for breakfast might feel good in the moment, but where's it going to be in three years? And five years? So, just making an inventory to become aware of what you're doing – and looking at the trajectory of where that's taking us – and asking ourselves: is that really where I want my life to go? It seems simple, but it's important.

Everybody, I want you to think of one habit that you know isn't good for you that you're still doing. If you don't have one, I have a couple I could lend you! Here's what I want you to do. Just be aware that that particular habit I have maybe isn't the best thing for the next five and 10 years, or where I want to go. You don't even have to do anything about it this week – we will next week! – because just awareness, alone, suddenly begins to shift our perspective. Just our awareness, alone, will begin to shift how we feel, how we think, how we show up... And it will eventually spill over into what we do. But, just be aware: what is one habit that I know isn't good for me? And just be aware of it, because it's not leading me where I want to go.

The third thing with the inventory is be aware of a habit you're doing that's pretty good right now. Like, you wake up early in the morning and you do yoga or meditation. Or you go to the gym three times or

five times a week. What's something you're doing good? Because it's important to notice: this is a good thing that I'm doing... That I'm consciously doing this good thing and, over time, this thing is going to have a positive impact on my life.

And, you could even think, *"Okay, that one good thing that I'm doing. What's 1% that I could improve the way I do it?"* Literally, just becoming aware of what we're doing – being aware of the habits that aren't the ones that lead us to something greater and noticing the ones that are good for us – is important.

Awareness, alone, begins to shift and change us in an amazing way. Because, in life, either one of two things is happening: you're either contracting or you're expanding. Your habits are either working for you, or they're working in a direction that you don't want to go. They are either helping to support the life you want to create and enjoy, or they're not.

So, the first thing for us for our habits it to take an inventory of it; pick and notice one that isn't working well for you; and then notice one that is working well for you, that you might even want to improve by 1%.

The second one is to be aware of the process that is involved. How many people have ever worked hard at getting results and got no results? Nothing was changing? Has anybody ever felt you've been working really hard at something and things are going nowhere? The fact is, when things aren't going well – or as quickly as we want – we give up. We think it doesn't work, and we try to move on to something else. **But the truth is that there is a process which requires patience and persistence for us to make progress.**

In Scripture it says, *"First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn on the ear."* There is a process of growth. There is a process of success. Like, when you plant, you just don't go to harvest. There's plant, growth and cultivation, and then there's harvest. And, most of the time – in anything we're growing – we can't see the progress that's being made; it's underneath the surface – it's beyond our eyes – but knowing that it makes a difference in the work that we're doing.

I'm sure you've all heard of the bamboo tree. You cultivate it. You work it and for five years; nothing happens. And then – after all those years of cultivating, watering, fertilizing, and all that stuff – it grows 90 feet in six weeks. Ninety feet in six weeks! So, tell me, was nothing happening for five years? Or was something happening and we just couldn't see it? And a part of the patience and the persistence is to trust the process... to know that your work was not in vain.

I ask you: If you meditated for 10 minutes, and your mind wandered for nine and a half, did you waste nine and a half minutes? I would say, No! You engaged and had an intention to meditate and made yourself available to quiet your mind. And, part of that process is when it doesn't look like it's working, but you're still putting in the effort. Effort isn't wasted; you are just building things up – like priming the pump. But we cheat ourselves out of success that's built up, because we haven't seen the result come to break through the earth yet, and see it visibly. There's a lot we're doing right now, and we just need to trust the process: to know that the growth is taking place. The breakthrough is going to come, but you need to be persistent, and you need to have patience.

We need to say things to ourselves when the results aren't coming: to know that all things are working together for my highest good. That things are coming, that things are building, that things are improving,

even if I can't see it yet. That it will come! And keep trusting the process; keep doing the work. It isn't easy – it is frustrating – and sometimes you feel like you're shooting blind. But you've just got to keep it moving. Keep it going and keep trusting.

How many of you have heard of Lizzo, the music artist? I'd never heard of her until a month ago, when I watched *Saturday Night Live* with Eddie Murphy, and she was the musical guest. I love her! She is amazing! So, I saw an interview with her, and she had a tough time. She was heavy her whole life and – from age five – people called her these horrible names and would put her down all the time. She was a music geek; she played the classical flute. She actually went to the University of Houston and studied classical flute. Her father died in her second year of University, and she was so devastated, already struggling with her self-image. And when her father died, she just gave up and quit school, even though she loved the flute, even though she loved music. She was devastated.

She was homeless a while, just sleeping in her car. And she was just struggling and struggling and struggling. She saw an ad on craigslist for a group that was looking for a lead singer. And she was a rapper, but she was desperate, and she thought she'd give it a try. She went and they thought she was a great singer, which shocked her, but gave her some confidence to be a singer, not just a rapper. And then it took her eight years to find her voice: eight years to figure out who she was; eight years to develop her style. In 2017 she led with her first album that went nowhere. But, somebody liked one song called, "Truth Hurts," and it got put in a movie or something on Facebook. It went viral and her career exploded. But what I loved is when she described all that she went through. That she kept struggling and believing towards her own self-image, toward her voice, over the loss of her father that really helped her to get to where she is. She doesn't just talk about "it exploded," she talked about the whole thing and how she had to show up for all of it to make that possible.

They say that sometimes with chiseling, it's the 100th blow that breaks the rock. That means that the 1st blow and the 50th blow and the 99th blow all helped make that rock break, too. And, even though nothing happened on the 1st, the 50th or the 99th, if you didn't hit it on the 100th, it wouldn't have happened. If she didn't hang in there after the death of her dad and all those insults – after all the years of trying to figure out who she was – she wouldn't be who she is today.

The question is: for what you're doing right now in your life, are you willing to have patience and persistence and trust the process until the progress breaks through in a great way? Someone once said, *"It took me 20 years to become an overnight success."*

The final thing is to send a ripple of new momentum out into the Universe. James Clear – when he was a junior in high school – got hit in the head with a bat. He was injured so badly they had to helicopter him to a hospital, and they had to induce a coma. When he came out of it, he had to have little habits to help him re-learn how to do a lot of things.

Two years later, amazingly, he went to Denison University. He wanted to be a baseball player his whole life. He didn't make the starting line-up, but he did make team. He decided, *"I may not be a starter, but I'm going to do some little things that might help me."* So he started to go to bed early in the dorm. Even when all the kids were partying, he consistently went to bed at the same time and got enough sleep. Consistently, he kept his room clean. He consistently did the study of his work in blocks of time that he disciplined himself for. He started feeling kind of empowered about himself and his life. He started lifting weights regularly. And, in his second year, he made the starting team. Every semester, he would

add a little habit that would improve his life. His third year, he was the captain of the team and an All-American. And in his final year, he won the President's Award, the highest honor at his University.

He kept experimenting with habits and starting doing little blogging things. And, over a period of time – one million followers. And he kept doing it, kept experimenting – two million followers. Then he ended up writing his book. And the next thing you know, he's speaking all over the world. And the next thing, you know, *Forbes* magazine, *Time* magazine makes articles on him. Next thing you know, NBA coaches and NFL coaches start calling him for advice on how to create better habits for their teams. And, it started with one habit of going to bed early. That rippled to another one that rippled to another one, that changed him and changed his life and, over time, his life was transformed in an amazing, amazing way.

What's one ripple – one simple habit – that you could make? Do you know one of the habits they say changes us and makes a bigger difference than we realize? Getting up and making your bed every morning! And here's why. What happens is, when the brain sees organization – when it sees order – it begins to see other things in life and wants to put them in order. When you see yourself doing that, you feel like you have more control in your life. You feel more organized. You feel more confident and have a better self-image. One thing that seems unrelated to anything, but a consistent habit of doing it begins to imprint something new within us. Doing yoga or meditation daily, something in us realizes, *"I'm committed to taking care of myself. I'm committed to my own health."* And, done consistently over time, guess what? It will spring to some other little thing, to some other little thing, and then it will become a big thing.

These things are powerful and important and, so, don't be guilty and think, *"I should have been doing that for 10 years."* No! We meet ourselves right where we are today. What's one habit that you can commit regularly to now that will create a new ripple of momentum – a new ripple – of energy? It could be making your bed. It could be going to bed at a consistent, earlier time. It could be to make yourself breakfast every morning. It could be to commit to drinking a gallon of water every day. It could be to commit to five minutes of meditation. It could be to commit to reading five pages a day. It could be anything you want it to be! But, what is one positive habit you would add to your life and see the kind of amazing things it does for you?

Habits! They compound and they can compound for your betterment or to take you further away from where you'd like to go. So, this week, I want to encourage all of us to take an inventory of our habits. To look at one habit that isn't working, and think about the trajectory and ask ourselves, *"Is that where I really want to go?"* And look at a habit that is working for you, and even try to improve it a little bit.

Trust the process. Everything you're doing is not wasting time; it's building up. Things are improving in your life. Things will get better, even if you can't see it at this moment. We all need to hang on to that!

And add one new ripple of good energy and momentum in your life. Because, one thing I know is that these atomic habits teach us that tiny changes can make a big difference.

God bless you all!

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