

## Week #2 of the 3-Week Series, "ATOMIC HABITS"

### MAKE IRRESISTIBLE CHANGES

Feb. 2, 2020

Rev. Richard Maraj

**Rev. Richard Maraj:** We're in week two of a three-week series on habits. And I know every one of us has some habits that are not exactly great for us; we have some bad habits. And we also have some good habits! And we always wonder: why is it so hard to break a bad habit? And why is it so hard to start a new one? Why is it so easy to keep doing one that's not good for us, and tough to find traction doing a new and a good one.

This series is about the impact that we don't realize that habits have on our lives. You know, James Clear, who wrote the book, *Atomic Habits*, said that the single greatest indicator of our success isn't how big our vision is... or our goals... or how big we talk about it and affirm about it. He said the single thing that determines our success is what we are doing on a daily basis: that small, regular actions that are consistent over time will have an exponential benefit on our lives. You know – like compounding interest! Habits are the compounding interest of improving and making our lives better.

James Clear is considered an expert in habits, because when he was young – I think he was a junior – he got hit in the head with a baseball bat. And he had to be helicoptered; he was in a coma. And he had really wanted to be a professional baseball player. When he came out, he had to do all this physical and occupational therapy: little habits he had to do. And then two years later, amazingly, he made the baseball team at his university, but he wasn't starting. So he decided to do little habits, like go to sleep early, study regularly, take care of himself in little ways. Do a little bit of weights. And every year, he kept adding another habit, and another habit. And in his senior year, he became All-American, won the President's medal: the highest honor at his university. He kept doing it. He started writing little blogs. He got a million followers. He had two million followers. He wrote his book. Speaking all over the world. Getting phone calls from NBA coaches, NFL coaches, because they wanted to know and understand the power of habits, and how to use them in a way that will transform our lives. Because he said little changes – little habits – make a big difference if we are willing to work with them.

How many people believe that little habits, over time, will do great things? See, we all put our hands up, and yet....

**[Congregation laughs]**

It is because, culturally, we have been conditioned into believing certain things that are contrary to the principles behind the whole idea of habits, and their compounding benefits.

And the four are – that I mentioned last week – that we're in a culture where we think if we want massive success, we need massive action. We're all looking for that one big break. We're looking for the grand slam home run. We want to win the lottery; we want that thing that'll just change our lives. We think it's always got to be a big thing.

The second thing is that we think small things are insignificant. You know, if we go to the gym four or five times in a week, and we don't get in shape.

**[Congregation laughs]**

And so we think it's so small, it's easy to skip one. And miss another one. And another. And it's hard to get traction on our habits.

Another one is that we can be kind of impatient, because we want it and we want it now! That's our kind of culture. Nobody wants the slow, dependable way to success. We want the fast, three steps, the quickest way to almost everything.

And then the final one is, if we're really honest, we are a little bit lazy. Most of us are just looking for the biggest benefit with the least amount of effort, and if possible, none at all.

***[Congregation laughs]***

We want our lives to just improve without having to do anything.

And so, how do we begin to learn and understand about habits? He says, the first thing is awareness. Most of us aren't even aware of some of the habits we do. And he said you should just begin and write down every single thing you do. Wake up in the morning. Check cell phone. Eat some chocolate.

***[Congregation laughs]***

Whatever it is that you do, just even recording it down will begin to bring an awareness. Because, he said, the first step to liberation and transformation is awareness. Unless we are aware of what we are doing and what's happening... And then beginning to look at one: what is one habit I know is not good for me? And if I keep doing that, where's that going to lead me? Eating chocolate for breakfast, or having a smoke, might feel good in the moment... But if you do it over time, it is going to put us in a place we probably don't want to be?

And so, we need to look at – and just even notice – what things we aren't doing well. And even just being aware of it will begin to shift something in us.

The second thing is to be more aware that everything in life takes a process, and it takes patience, and persistence for us to progress. You know, like, it takes nine months to have a baby. In Scripture it says, *"First the blade, then the ear, then the full ear of the corn."* There's a planning period, a growing period, then a harvesting period. Things take time! And sometimes we think – because we're not seeing results – we think, *"Ah, I'm getting nowhere; I'm wasting my time!"* And it's not! It's that you're just priming the pump, and things are happening, though you can't see it. Just like the bamboo tree: you cultivate it, water it, for five years, fertilize it. And then it doesn't grow for five years! But then it grows 90 feet in six weeks! And I'm sure most of us don't want to wait the five years, but it's the principle. And sometimes you think something isn't working, and it actually is. You're not wasting your time. The breakthrough is coming!

I always tell people, if you meditate for 10 minutes, and your mind wanders for nine, you didn't waste nine minutes. You invested 10 minutes in the willingness to have your mind be open to feel the presence of God.

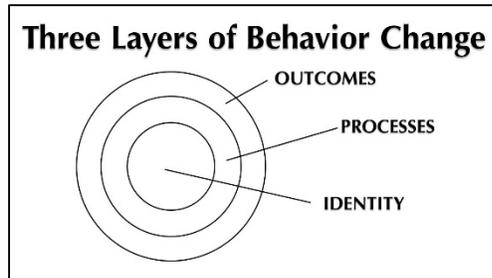
And then the last one was to start a new ripple, because habits create ripples of energy. And the thing I'm always amazed at is how much of the research says that making up your bed, alone, brings ripples of good benefit. That just starting your day making up your bed, your brain starts to see disorder become order. And you actually feel more productive, and it actually has benefits.

And so, how many people picked a new habit to start? Anybody do that? Okay. Five!

**[Congregation laughs]**

And so, no matter what it is – even if it’s meditating for a couple of minutes or going to the gym, whatever it is – a habit in a positive direction begins to actually have ripples of benefits in our lives.

This morning, we’re going a little deeper and look at two reasons why it’s so challenging to make changes: why it’s so hard to get traction in our habits. And he said, there are two reasons.

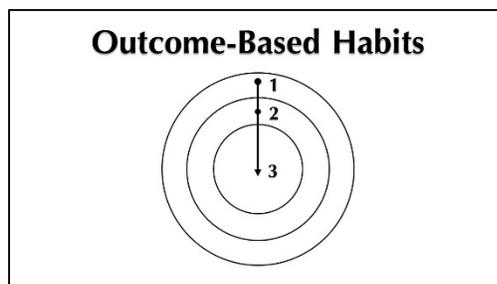


Reason number one is we try to change the wrong thing in the wrong way. And so, we’re going to look at the three layers of behavior change. And Slide #1 going to come up. And so the outer one is outcomes. We’re looking for results: whether it’s losing weight, publishing a book, building a successful business, doubling our income, whatever it is. Outcomes are about the goals: the things we want to change. The results.

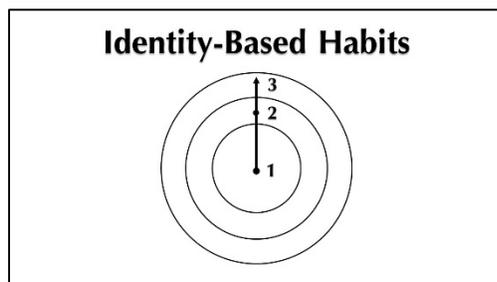
The layer is process. This is about the actions and the routines. So whether it’s going to the gym, or decluttering our desk, or developing a meditation practice, these are associated with habits. Process is about the actions or habits.

And then the interior one is about our identity. And that is about what we believe and feel about ourselves: our self-image. You know, our ideas of what we think we’re capable or worthy of. Our identity.

And so, you know, the outcome is really about *getting*. The process is about *doing*. But the identity is really about *being*, and *becoming*. It’s about consciousness.



And most of us start on the outside. We want results! We do an action, and then we think we’ll be changed: we’ll be happier, we’ll have all these other things. But he said, if you really want to make your habits more attractive – irresistible – and have more traction, that we need to go the *opposite* way, which is counter-intuitive to us, but actually a more effective way is to start from the inside, out.



So, start with who you came here to be, and *then* a process and a system. Then the results will follow. Because every single habit we do is an expression of something we believe about ourselves. Or what we believe about our world. Or what we believe about others. Or what we believe is possible. Every single habit that we engage in is a reflection of what we think we’re worthy of, or what we think we can do.

So often, we want to quickly change our lives: change this, change that. We don't think of changing and transforming *ourselves*. A perfect example that shows how that doesn't work is: how many people have New Year's resolutions? Anybody ever?

***[Congregation laughs]***

Studies show that people come out of the gate wanting to overhaul *every* area of their life; you know, the outcome, outcome, outcome, outcome, outcome. And then, after two weeks, 90% of people have forgotten their resolutions, let alone are still working on it. And we go back to living our same lives. Why? Because we don't think about the changes we need to make to actually attract and support that kind of life.

He said the most important thing – if we really want our habits to be effective – is, first, to think about: who do I want to become? Who am I being? How am I showing up in life? And until we *become* that, we're not going to really attract anything greater.

And so, imagine two people trying to quit smoking. And they're tempted; they're offered a cigarette. And the first one says, *"No, thanks; I'm trying to quit."* The second one says, *"No, thanks; I'm not a smoker."* So the first one identifies as a smoker trying to quit. The second one identifies as not being a smoker any longer. And it seems like a little thing, but it is a *big* thing. Because it's about saying, *"Okay; I just don't want this, I want to become this."*

It's one thing to want something. It's another thing to *be* it.

So, I'll give you some examples. This guy bit his fingernails all the time, and his fingers were all chopped up and looked pretty beat up. And he was always ashamed and embarrassed about it. And his wife said, *"Come on; you've got to stop this. So you're going to let your fingers heal for the next month, and I am making you a manicure appointment."* So he doesn't bite them for a month and they're looking kind of all right. And he goes and gets a manicure. And falls in love with his fingers!

***[Congregation laughs]***

And he says, *"Wow! I've got beautiful fingernails! I've got beautiful hands."* And suddenly, he switched from being a nail biter to someone who takes care of his hands; who takes care of his fingernails. And you can even extend that... that successful people take care of the little details of their hands, and all areas of their lives. That it's important to realize who are we becoming. Who do I need to become to support and to allow this to be a part of who I am?

Joel Goldsmith once said, *"You can be anything you want and have anything you want but, first, you must become it in consciousness."* Whatever it is you want to become, what is the consciousness of that person who takes care of their nails? Who makes up their bed? Who is productive? What is that like? What is the consciousness of someone who wants to build a million-dollar business? We just think of the million-dollar business. No! Who do we need to become? How would we show up? How would we speak? Who would we connect with? What kind of things would we do?

And you know, sometimes, things that are not in alignment of who we are very difficult to figure out. And there are things we won't do when we know who we really are. Somebody might say, *"Hey; let's do this!"* I say, *"No; that's not me. That's not what I'm about."*

All change – to be effective and true – has to bring some change in us. We have to become it. And we will either attract it – and become it – or we will choose things that aren't for our best, because of our identity. Knowing who we are is an important: an important step.

Sometimes we don't realize some of the things we say about ourselves. Like, *"I am such a loser."* *"Things never work out."* *"Things are hopeless."* We think a lot of negative things, like, *"I'm always broke."* *"I'm always late."* *"Life is so unfair."* *"I always get hurt in relationships."* Or, *"I always pick the wrong kind of person."* *"I'm really bad with names."* These things, over time, become a part of who we are and affect how we show up and the habits and the things that we think and engage in.

Breaking bad habits isn't easy. You know, I heard carrots have a hard time breaking bad habits. Yeah. Because some of their issues are really deep-rooted.

***[Congregation laughs]***

Hey; I was just checking to see if you were still paying attention!

***[Congregation laughs]***

I was just checking it out!

So, again, new habits are great. You remember when [Scripture] talked about old wine and new wineskins or new wine and old wineskins? That's what it was about. See, the new wine needed to be able to stretch and expand. And if it was in an old wineskin that was already stretched, it was going to actually burst the skin. And so there has to be a consciousness and a mindset that prepares for this thing that we want. We must literally become it.

And we don't need to be it in the moment, but we must be willing to become it. Moses didn't start as a good leader. When he was called by God at the burning bush, he said to God, *"Who me? Hey, I'm not fluent in speech. I'm not good enough. Go to Pharaoh and do what?"* And he said, *"No; send my brother, Aaron."* And then God says to him, *"Moses, stop your whining and beating around the burning bush..."*

***[Congregation laughs]***

Not an exact quote, but it's a paraphrase!

***[Congregation laughs]***

And it's pretty close. It's pretty close.

But he says, *"I have called you. I have called you to be a leader,"* knowing that it was already in him. And over time, Moses became the leader. He didn't just do the action. There was a consciousness and a transformation that happened in him.

And so, for each of us: who are you here to be? What are the qualities that you need to embody to live the kind of life you want to live? To make the kind of difference you want to make? To experience the kind of relationship you want to have? What is it that we stand for? What is it that we want to express? How is it that we want to show up?

And one thing [Cleary] says is that – it's really important – that we need to be open and flexible with who we are, and not rigid. That we need to be willing to let go of the old image that we've had of

ourselves. To let go of the old stories. To let go of the feelings of unworthiness. To begin to grow into all that we came here to be. I mean, why not think, *“Hey! I have a great memory! I’m great with names!”* Why not, *“I’m the kind of person who remembers someone’s name. I’m the kind of person that tends to be on time. I’m that kind of person!”*

And when we put it there, it really helps the other things begin to trickle and transform in amazing ways. Why not say, *“I am more professional; I am more organized; I am more generous and honest and sincere and appreciative in how I show up in the world”?* When we begin from a place of being, things begin to move and transform in a greater way. We have to shift our mindset. The goal isn’t just to read a book; the goal is to become an avid reader. The goal isn’t just to learn an instrument; it’s to become a musician. The goal isn’t just to run a marathon; it’s to become more fit... to become a person of fitness and good health.

An interesting thing is: our identity affects the habits that we engage in. But our habits can actually help create our identity, as well. James Clear tells that he never thought of himself as a writer. But he developed a habit of writing articles, a habit of writing his blog. And, over time – when he wrote his book – he realized, *“I am a writer!”* Sometimes we realize things as they come.

So it’s an inside-out and an outside-in. But the inside-out first is the most important thing!

So here’s what we’re going to do. Remember that list that you made about what you do every day? Ask yourself the question, first: who have I come here to be? What is it that I want to embody? Even if it’s just to pick one thing – that I want to be more efficient or productive, or effective, or kind. And then look at your list and say, *“What on my list are the things that are not supporting the person that I came here to be?”* And add even just one thing, one habit that would support the kind of person that you want to be, or that you could be currently doing right now.

Changing habits isn’t easy, but they’re infinitely easier and more effective when you start within. Think first, *“Who have I come here to be?”* Be the change you want to see in the world; we’ve all heard of that. And the reason you hear it is because it’s true! And when we do, guess what? The habits become easier, more attractive, more enjoyable, and more irresistible for you to actually do them.

The second that is important is about the system and the process. Here’s what [Cleary] says. *“If you’re having trouble changing your habits, the problem isn’t you. The problem is your system. Bad habits repeat themselves over and over again, not because of you, but because you’ve got the wrong system. You don’t rise to the level of your goals, you fall to the level of your system.”*

So, remember the Great Britain cycling team that only won one gold medal in 100 years? One hundred years of mediocrity. They always had the goal – the outcome – to win. That was always there. But it only changed when they developed a good system: a system for improvement and success that included washing their hands, appropriate pillows to sleep on, massages after workouts, the kind of fabric and material their uniforms were made out of, the kind of seats being more comfortable. There was an entire system that literally, five years later, took them from obscure and a laughingstock to dominating the world in cycling. Why? Because they had a system.

You know, you could want to win a championship, but your system is how you recruit, how you train, how you coach. Anything you want to do, there is a system that makes the change and the success possible.

So, since it's Super Bowl Sunday, let's talk about Bill Walsh: one of the great football coaches of the San Francisco 49ers. Won three Super Bowls. But everybody would tell you, what made him great was: his system was so solid. If a star got hurt, it didn't matter; they had a system that was so effective. And one thing he says is, *"If you take care of your system and all the appropriate parts, the score will take care of itself."*

We are so preoccupied about the goals and the results that we miss out on creating good systems. We just think the idea of having one is enough, and it isn't. Look for those areas that are going to help, just like those cyclists. I mean, who thought washing your hands might help you ride a bike better? But it's an overall... And that's one thing.

We get mesmerized with goals. You achieve your goals, then you go back to your old ways. And maybe you have this conditional thing: when I reach that goal, then I'll be happy. He says systems are about progress and improvement. It's a system of continuously developing and making ourselves better and better. It is a commitment to a better life and to more joy, not just the thing. And there's nothing wrong with the things, but look at the bigger picture, as well.

So my question for you is: what kind of system have you currently got? I won't use Dr. Phil's, *"So how's that working for ya?"*

***[Congregation laughs]***

But it's probably a good thing for us to think about. First: do I have the consciousness I want to become? Then: do I have a system that's supporting and backing it up? And that's just to look for little areas, like the cycling team, to say they improve by just one percent. By just one percent.

They actually they did a study about tracking people and exercise and the efficacy of that. And so the first group was told to exercise, and all they were to do was record what you exercise for the week. The second group was to record the exercise you've done for the week, and also study the benefits of health and exercise and working out. The third group was to record, was to study, but was also to write this sentence in this way: *"During the week, I will partake of 20 minutes of vigorous exercise on this day, at this time, in this place."* That whatever they were going to do, it had to be on this day, at this time, in this place. At the end of the study, 35-38% of group one and two actually exercised. Group three: 91% of them exercised. Why? Because they call it an "implementation intention."

See, everybody wants to say, *"Hey; I'm going to be healthier!"* or *"I'm going to work out more,"* which is different than, *"I'll go every Monday and Wednesday at 7 pm at the gym,"* or *"I am going to do 30 minutes of weightlifting,"* or whatever you're going to do. When there is an implementation intention that clearly says, *"Here's what I'm going to do and when I'm going to do it,"* it begins to mentally go in our heads that we will actually do that.

One other interesting example: they've done these studies with people in voting, and when pollsters call them and say, *"So, what time will you be voting?"* Or, *"What driving route will you be taking to the polling station?"* The point is that there is an implementation intention. When there's a consciousness of becoming, we need an intention to set the system: an important thing. When are you going to do this? How are you going to do this? Where? I mean, all these things absolutely make a difference.

And then the final thing I want to talk about is to feel good about what you're doing. To feel good – not feel onerous, not feel like it's a burden or a punishment: to actually feel good. You know that any time we feel a reward or pleasure, there's dopamine in the brain. We release dopamine. Most people think it's just when you get the reward when it happens. But studies show that anticipated benefit will bring dopamine into the system, too, and actually make you feel good.

So that means that making your bed up in the morning.... If there's an anticipated, *"This is a great way to start my day; this is a beneficial way to create order and success in my life, and I know good things will come from it,"* then you will actually begin to enjoy that process. You will do it more, and it will be more attractive, because you know you're building a better life. You know you're doing good things for you. And it will give you a rush! It's not just mechanically doing things; it's doing them with joy. Doing them with anticipation that this is helping build a better life for me.

So, as we know, last week Kobe Bryant, his daughter and seven other people perished, and it was a tragic and painful thing. And there have been Kobe Bryant tributes on TV all week. And one of the things I've always admired about him is: his work ethic was apparently second to none. As talented as he was, he worked even harder. He had an amazing system. And I saw a clip this week and, on the clip, he said you could achieve goals through hard work. Hard work will help you achieve goals. But he said, when you start enjoying the process – every part of it – it will bring you even greater success and joy and fulfillment than just working hard. And so, when we look at our lives in that way – when we look at our systems, and we look at wanting to become more in the fullness of who we are and create that kind of life – there's a joyfulness that's about fulfillment. He pushed himself as hard at 5 a.m. as he did in the middle of the game. And what a great, great legacy to leave: about living life more fully, about leaving it all out there and investing ourselves fully in it.

Habits are powerful. And they're not easy to break when we've established them for a long time. And they're not so easy to start! But they will be infinitely easier if we start from the inside out: by thinking, *"Who have I come here to be? What are the qualities that am I here to embody?"* And then to create a system of little improvements that'll help you get there. To have a plan of knowing when and where you're going to do the things. And especially infusing a level of joy – infusing a level of love and fun in actually what you're doing – and it will raise your game in an amazing way. And will make all your habits irresistible.

God bless you all!

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***Thank you to volunteer Dot Sagnis for transcribing this message***