

DO IT

How to Make or Break
Any Habit in 30 Days

FOR

SNEAK
PEEK



SAMPLE
ONLY

UNCORRECTED
PROOF

Mark Batterson

New York Times Bestselling Author

A DAY

Do It for a Day

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

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How to Make or Break
Any Habit in 30 Days

MARK BATTERSON



MULTNOMAH

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DO IT FOR A DAY

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Do It for a Day Manifesto

*Almost anyone can accomplish almost anything
if they work at it long enough, hard enough,
and smart enough.*

*Destiny is not a mystery. Destiny is daily habits.
It's mind over matter. It's nurture over nature.
It's a daily grind in the same direction.*

*If you want every day to count, count the days.
If you want to change your life, change your story.
If you want God to do the super, you've got to do the natural.*

*Time is measured in minutes. Life is measured in moments.
Bury dead yesterdays. Imagine unborn tomorrows.
Make every day a masterpiece!*

*If you do little things like they're big things,
God will do big things like they're little things.
If you stay humble and stay hungry,
there's nothing God can't do in you or through you.*

*Show me the size of your dream,
and I'll show you the size of your God.
Show me your habits, and I'll show you your future.*

Do It for a Day Manifesto

*The obstacle is not the enemy. The obstacle is the way.
Do the best you can with what you have where you are.
Dream big. Start small. Think long.*

*Can you do it for a day?
That's the question. You know the answer.
Habits happen one day, one step, one rep at a time.*

*If you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat.
Faith is taking the first step before God reveals the second step.
Wade into the water!*

*Yesterday is history.
Tomorrow is mystery.
Do it for a day!*

Introduction

Domino Habits

Show me your habits, and I'll show you your future.
It's that simple.

It's that complicated.

For better or worse, our lives are the sum of our physical, mental, and spiritual habits. Bad habits always come back to bite us. Good habits always come back to bless us. Either way, you cannot break the law of measures. The law of measures will make or break you. "With the measure you use," Jesus said, "it will be measured to you."¹ There are no shortcuts, loopholes, or cheat codes. Simply put, *you'll get out of it whatever you put into it*. And by *it*, I mean everything. Destiny is not a mystery; destiny is daily habits.

You are one habit away from getting into shape.

You are one habit away from financial freedom.

You are one habit away from mental health.

You are one habit away from a happy, healthy marriage.

You are one habit away from any goal you set.

The only catch? It has to be a *daily* habit!

Over the next thirty days, I want to help you hack your habits. I'll cite dozens of stories and studies, as well as best practices. We'll look at the art and science of habit formation from multiple angles—psychological, neurological, and theological. The goal? To tap your full potential. Why? Potential is God's gift to you. What you do with

it is your gift back to God. How? By making or breaking the habits that will make or break you.

There is nothing simple about habit formation. It's as complicated as the cerebral cortex. It'll take longer than you like and be harder than you hope. The good news? Every habit is learned, which means every habit can be unlearned and relearned. Of course, you'll have to overcome task avoidance. It's our natural tendency to avoid things we're not particularly good at. Making and breaking habits takes us back to kindergarten. We have to be willing to fail, willing to fall, and willing to look foolish.

We'll break bad habits using a tried-and-true technique called *habit switching*. We'll build good habits using a bait-and-switch technique called *habit stacking*. We'll identify high-leverage habits—*domino habits*—that yield the highest return on investment. We'll engage in some goal setting, and we'll reverse engineer those life goals into daily habits.

You've probably noticed that this book doesn't have chapters—it has days. Why? The pacing is important. Don't try to do too much too fast. When it comes to habit formation, that's a recipe for failure. If you want to make or break a habit, put the title of this book into practice—*Do It for a Day!*

The average reading speed is approximately 250 words per minute, so each day's reading should take about ten minutes. That said, I would encourage you to slow the pace by taking time to reflect on the question at the end of each day's reading: *How do I make it a habit?* You'll get out of this book precisely what you put into it.

During the first eight days, we'll create the framework for making and breaking habits. Then we'll spend three days on each of the seven habits that were introduced in the prequel to this book, *Win the Day*. Those habits are sequenced in the same order—*flip the script, kiss the wave, eat the frog, fly the kite, cut the rope, wind the clock, and seed the clouds*. Don't worry if you haven't read *Win the Day*. The power of those daily habits will become clear soon enough.

Finally, this book works best with the buddy system. Take the 30 Day Habit Challenge with your friends or family, your staff or team, or even your entire organization. One, it's far more fun. Two, a rising tide floats all boats. Over time, you'll become the average of the twelve people you spend the most time with.² If you don't elevate their game, you're holding yourself back.

HABITUALIZATION

According to a Duke University study, 45 percent of daily behavior is automatic.³ Without the ability to automate, we'd have to relearn everything we do every single day. Habitualization saves us tremendous time and energy, but that savings comes at a cost. When a thought pattern or behavior pattern becomes second nature, we rarely give it a second thought. That's where *Do It for a Day* enters the equation. It's designed to help you deconstruct and reconstruct your daily habits.

"All our life," said the father of American psychology, William James, "is but a mass of habits—practical, emotional, and intellectual—systematically organized for our weal or woe, and bearing us irresistibly toward our destiny."⁴

All of us are creatures of habit. Some of those habits are subconscious. I'm not sure why, but I always set my alarm to an even number. Other habits are consciously chosen, often to correct past mistakes. After I fill up with gas, I always check the side-view mirror before pulling away. Why? Because one time I failed to do so, and I pulled the gas hose that was still in my tank right off the pump! That reminds me . . . I always check my zipper before getting on-stage to speak. You can guess why! On a more serious note, I always take my shoes off before writing as a ritual reminder that I'm on holy ground.

A habit is any behavior that you put on repeat, consciously or subconsciously. There are *micro habits*, such as the way you brush your teeth or hold your fork. There are *macro habits*, such as your

coping mechanisms during crisis or your defense mechanisms when criticized. Big or small, good or bad, habits are recurrent ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Some habits are as old as the adaptive strategies we employed as kids to gain attention. On that note, the hardest habits to break are the ones that are almost as old as we are.

There is some debate as to how long it takes to make or break a habit. Estimates range from 21 days to 254 days. The reality? It depends on the habit, and it depends on the person. Habit formation is not one-size-fits-all. Habits are as unique as you are. However, I'm confident that thirty days will generate the momentum you need to establish a winning streak.

THE HOLY GRAIL

Almost a century ago, a behavioral psychologist named B. F. Skinner theorized that behavior follows a predictable pattern—stimulus, response, reward.⁵ Stimuli fall into two categories: aversive and reinforcing. Skinner believed that, by reverse engineering the stimuli, any behavior could be reconditioned.

The black box is a cluster of brain cells deep within the cerebral cortex called the basal ganglia.

When it comes to habit formation, the basal ganglia is the holy grail. It's the place where habits are stored. It's the switch that flips our behaviors. It's the engine that powers *action selection*, helping us recognize patterns from the past while determining the best course of action when alternative options are presented. The basal ganglia is our chief executive officer when it comes to everyday decisions.

Fast-forward to the end of the twentieth century, and researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology got a good look at the holy grail via neuroimaging technology. Building off B. F. Skinner, their research yielded a three-step process whereby habits are formed. They called it the *habit loop*, and it consists of cue, routine,

and reward. The *cue* activates an automatic response. The *routine* puts the behavior on repeat. The *reward* perpetuates the pattern by dangling the proverbial carrot.⁶

To make or break a habit cycle, you have to (1) *identify the prompt*, (2) *interrupt the pattern*, and (3) *imagine the prize*. That sounds simple enough, but it takes a ton of trial and error. It also requires raw honesty and holy curiosity. You have to approach habit formation from a third-person perspective. Your life is the lab, and *everything is an experiment*.

I have a friend who has commanded ships as a rear admiral and has managed highly sensitive intelligence as the homeland security and counterterrorism adviser to the president. He operates with a simple MO: “I reserve the right to get smarter later.” I love that approach to crisis management, and the same goes for habit formation.

THE HABIT CYCLE

The science of habit formation is evolving in amazing ways, but the idea is as old as the Sermon on the Mount. If you reverse engineer the longest discourse of Jesus in the Gospels, it’s a master class on the habit cycle.

Jesus didn’t offer an orientation to His disciples; He provided a disorientation. The sermon includes six antitheses aimed at unlearning bad habits. “You have heard that it was said,” Jesus said six times, “but I tell you.”⁷ Jesus was uninstalling old default settings like “An eye for an eye.” He was updating and upgrading with a new mindset—Turn the other cheek.⁸ When someone slaps us, our natural reaction is to slap back. Or is that just me? Jesus issued a counterintuitive command that requires reconditioning of our reflexes.

Is it possible that Jesus knew a little something about conditioned reflexes before Ivan Pavlov came along? That Jesus knew about operant conditioning before B. F. Skinner and behavior modification?

That Jesus knew a little something about the basal ganglia before the advent of neuroimaging?

Instead of fighting fire with fire, the Sermon on the Mount offers a counternarrative that is counterintuitive. As a Christ follower, I am called to love my enemies and pray for those who persecute me. Those aren't natural reactions! Neither is going the extra mile or sacrificing the shirt off my own back.⁹ But that is the Jesus Way, and it's not just "out with the old and in with the new." It's a third way, a better way, when it comes to habit formation.

Jesus identified common cues that tempt us and test us and tick us off. Then He interrupted the pattern in ingenious ways. In a dog-eat-dog world, the Sermon on the Mount calls us to live counter-culturally. Jesus stopped the vicious cycle and replaced it with a virtuous cycle. How? Jesus called His followers to a routine of *radical love*. Simply put, love everybody always! Jesus called His followers to *radical forgiveness*. Instead of baiting, trolling, shaming, or canceling, we forgive seventy times seven. Jesus called His followers to *radical generosity*—the ethic of the extra mile.

After *identifying the prompt* and *interrupting the pattern*, Jesus helped us *imagine the prize*. What is it? The grand prize is hearing the heavenly Father say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."¹⁰ The grand prize is storing up treasures in heaven by doing to others as you would have them do to you. Why? "Your Father, who sees everything, will reward you."¹¹

DOMINO HABITS

In 1974, Bob Speca was a sophomore at Marple Newton High School in Broomall, Pennsylvania. That's when he was introduced to mathematical induction. His teacher, Mr. Dobransky, likened the theory to the domino effect. Bob Speca bought two boxes of dominoes that afternoon, and the rest is history.

From that day forward, Speca would devote his life to domino

stacking and toppling. He appeared on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, showing off his skills. *The Guinness Book of Records* even created a category to recognize his accomplishments. Specia set the first world record in domino toppling with a chain reaction numbering 11,111. He would break his own world record five times, topping out at 97,500 dominoes.¹²

Around the time Bob Specia was setting world records, a physicist named Lorne Whitehead took a scientific interest in the domino chain reaction. Whitehead discovered that a domino is capable of knocking over a domino that is one and a half times its size. A two-inch domino can topple a three-inch domino. A three-inch domino can tumble a four-and-a-half-inch domino, ad infinitum.¹³

By the time you get to the eighteenth domino, you could knock over the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Of course, it's leaning so that isn't entirely fair! The twenty-first domino could take down the Washington Monument. The twenty-third domino could waffle the Eiffel Tower. *And* the twenty-seventh domino could cartwheel the one-hundred-sixty-story Burj Khalifa.

Remember the math induction theory? Instead of a fancy formula, dominoes offer a real world example. Knock one over and the sky is the limit. The math induction theory states that we can climb as high as we like on a ladder. How? By starting with the bottom rung of the ladder and climbing one rung at a time. The theory is relatively new, but the idea is as old as the Tower of Babel.

"Nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them."¹⁴

Translation? *Almost anyone can accomplish almost anything if they work at it long enough, hard enough, and smart enough.* That is our working theory over the next thirty days, and the key is domino habits—little habits that have an exponential effect over time.

You are capable of more than you can imagine. Yes, you! The goal of this book is to help you prove it to yourself. How? One habit at a time, one rung at a time, one day at a time!

PICK A HABIT

This book makes a bold promise: *How to Make or Break Any Habit in 30 Days*. I don't want to overpromise and underdeliver, so let me shoot straight. You won't accomplish 100 percent of the goals you don't set. Goals give us targets to aim at, but life goals are lag measures. Goals are the desired outcomes, but you have to identify the inputs that will produce those results. How? You have to reverse engineer your life goals and turn them into daily habits.

Before we embark on this thirty-day challenge, *pick a habit, any habit*.

It can be a *physical* habit like doing your age in sit-ups every day, a *mental* habit like five minutes of meditation every morning, a *spiritual* habit like kneeling next to your bed every night, an *emotional* habit like keeping a daily gratitude journal, or a *relational* habit like smiling at everyone you encounter.

Pick a habit, any habit. Do you have it? Once you pick a habit, you put it into practice by making it as easy as 1, 2, 3. You have to “3M” the habit. How? By making it *measurable*, *meaningful*, and *maintainable*.

1. Make It Measurable

In 2017, I ran my first marathon. I didn't go out and run 26.2 miles the day after deciding to do it. That's a good way to pull a hamstring! The first thing I did was download a training plan, and then I worked the plan—seventy-two training runs totaling 475 miles over six months. The training plan made my goal measurable by reverse engineering it into daily distances.

Getting into shape and losing weight are hopes, not habits. You have to make it measurable by counting calories or mapping miles. Once it's measurable, it's manageable. Give yourself a daily gratitude quota. Download a Bible reading plan. Limit screen time to a set time.

Once you set the goal, you need to add timelines and deadlines.

A dream without a deadline is DOA—dead on arrival. When it comes to goal setting and habit building, deadlines are lifelines. The bottom line? Measure what you want to see more of. If you want to *break records*, you have to *keep records*!

2. Make It Meaningful

Running a marathon ranks as one of the greatest accomplishments of my life. Why? I suffered from severe asthma for forty years. There weren't forty days in forty years that I didn't have to use my rescue inhaler. I slept with it under my pillow and played sports with it in my sock. Then I prayed a bold prayer on July 2, 2016, and God healed my lungs. I haven't touched or used an inhaler from that day to this day.

I ran the Chicago Marathon to celebrate that miracle. Why Chicago? Yes, it's one of the flattest marathon courses in the country! But that isn't the reason. I grew up in Naperville, a suburb of Chicago. That's where I spent many weeks in the intensive care unit at Edward Hospital. That's where I was code blue, taking what I thought was my last breath.

The Chicago Marathon was my way of proving to myself what's possible. My training plan made it measurable, but the miracle is what made it meaningful. When my hamstrings started cramping at mile sixteen, the memory of that miracle is what kept me going. Having accomplished that life goal, I'm dreaming bigger, praying harder, and thinking longer. That's how you steward a miracle. You believe God for even bigger and better miracles. Ironman, here I come!

3. Make It Maintainable

Along with being measurable and meaningful, habits have to be maintainable. It's okay to dream big, but you have to start small. "The best way to motivate people, day in and day out," said Harvard professor Teresa Amabile, "is by facilitating *progress*—even small wins."¹⁵ Don't despise the day of small beginnings! While you're at it, don't worry about next week, next month, or next year!

Can you do it for a day?

That's the question, and you already know the answer. Anybody can do anything for a day! Do it two days in a row, and there is a domino chain reaction. If you focus on inputs, God will take care of outcomes. With each small win, the next win gets a little easier. Why? Because you get a little stronger. Those 1 percent improvements add up like the math induction theory! Of course, you still have to rinse and repeat. You've got to get up every day and do it all over again. There is no other way to win the day!

THE EIGHTH WONDER OF THE WORLD

It takes very little effort to push over a single domino—.024 micro-joules of input energy. That's the flick of your pinkie finger! By the time you topple the thirteenth domino, the kinetic energy is two billion times greater than the energy it took to knock over the first domino.¹⁶ My point? You've got this! Even better, God's got this! If you do little things like they're big things, God will do big things like they're little things.

There are two types of progression in mathematics—linear and exponential. Linear progression is simple addition: $1 + 1 = 2$. Exponential progression is compound doubling: $10 \times 10 = 100$. If you take thirty linear steps, you're ninety feet from where you started. If you take thirty exponential steps, you've circled the earth twenty-six times!¹⁷

A two-inch domino may seem insignificant, but extrapolated across time and space, it has an exponential effect. The same is true of domino habits. Do your age in sit-ups, and sooner or later, it will add up to a six-pack. Write one hundred words a day, and sooner or later, it will add up to a book. Start a training plan, and sooner or later, it will add up to a marathon. Every decision you make, every action you take, starts a domino chain reaction!

This may seem like a self-help book. I promise you, it is so much more than that. At the end of the day, your habits aren't just about

you. They're all about loving God and loving others. Bad habits can have a negative impact, an epigenetic effect, to the third and fourth generations. You don't break bad habits just for you. You do it for your kids and grandkids. You do it for your friends and family, neighbors and employers. Ultimately, you do it with the help and for the glory of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

What God does for us is never just for us. It's also for the third and fourth generations. We think right here, right now. God is thinking nations and generations. Good habits don't just add up; they multiply like compound interest. Speaking of, Albert Einstein reportedly called compound interest the eighth wonder of the world.¹⁸

We overestimate what we can accomplish in a day, but we underestimate what God can do in a year or two or ten. Consistency beats intensity seven days a week and twice on Sunday! Why? Daily habits pay dividends the rest of your life! Give it enough time, and you can transform your body, mind, marriage, finances, and attitude.

A six-pack may be one hundred pounds from here.

A marathon may be 475 miles of training down the road.

A published book may be fifty thousand words away.

Debt-free may be \$100,000 beyond your budget.

Restoring your marriage may be seventeen counseling sessions from now.

Pick a habit, any habit. Make it measurable, meaningful, and maintainable. Then, with a flick of your finger, knock over that first domino. Good habits are good, but God habits have an exponential effect. They establish the baseline and trend line of your life. The only ceiling on your intimacy with God and impact on the world is daily habits, and the compound interest is incalculable. God habits don't just pay dividends here and now; they are the legacy we leave for all eternity!

Yesterday is history.

Tomorrow is mystery.

Do it for a day!

Day 1

Wade into the Water

The Sea saw him and fled.

—PSALM 114:3

There is a legend in Judaism about a man named Nahshon. He gets only one *begat* in the Bible. Of course, that's one more than you and me! Nahshon disappears almost as soon as he makes his genealogical debut, but the Talmud credits him with saving the nation of Israel by one act of courage.¹

When the Israelites were trapped between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea, no one knew what to do. It seemed like a no-win situation. That's when God issued a command: "Tell the people of Israel to go forward."² The problem with that was this—the Red Sea was staring them in the face! None of the tribes wanted to go first, and who can blame them? It felt like a death wish. While the Israelites argued, the leader of the tribe of Judah stepped up and stepped into the Red Sea.

According to rabbinic tradition, Nahshon wades into the water like Aquaman. All right, I may be taking a little liberty by adding Aquaman to the equation, but that's how I envision this epic moment. Nahshon wades into the Red Sea until he's neck-deep, right up to his nostrils. That's when and where and how the Red Sea split in half. It was God who made a sidewalk through the sea, but it was Nahshon who made the miracle possible. How? By wading into the water! In the words of the psalmist, "The Sea saw him and fled."³

There's an old axiom: *If you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat.* That is absolutely true, but here's one more for good measure: *if you want God to make a sidewalk through the sea, you've got to get your feet wet.* Most of us spend the majority of our lives waiting for God to split the Red Sea. Maybe, just maybe, God is waiting for you to wade into the water. What I know for sure is this: if you want God to do the super, you've got to do the natural.

You have to make a defining decision.

You have to take a calculated risk.

You have to make a selfless sacrifice.

You have to take a flying leap of faith.

That's all it takes for God to make a sidewalk through the sea, but you've got to get your feet wet. And the first step is always the hardest step. Why? You have to overcome the law of inertia by exercising initiative. You have to overcome fear by exercising faith. If you aren't ready to take that step of faith on day 1, keep reading. God will give you the wisdom, the courage, and the faith you need by day 30!

"There are decades where nothing happens," Vladimir Lenin is purported to have said, "and there are weeks when decades happen." Let me up the ante: *there are days when decades happen!* This is one of those days, if you want it to be. You are one habit away from a totally different life! The next thirty days can set the table for the next thirty years. This is the first day of the rest of your life. If you believe that, mark the moment by jotting down the date in the margin.

This book is your rite of passage to a new chapter, a new normal, a new you. But you have to wade into the water, right up to your nostrils. Faith is being sure of what you hope for—a clearly defined goal. But faith is more than imagining unborn tomorrows. It's taking initiative today. Faith is taking the first step before God reveals the second step.

What is your next step?

What are you waiting for?

Let me eliminate a few excuses up front.

One, *I'm not qualified.*

Welcome to the club! God doesn't call the qualified; He qualifies the called. God wants to use your strong hand. He's the one who gave you those gifts! But God also wants to use your weak hand. Why? That's where His power is made perfect.⁴ Your weakness is God's opportunity to put His glory on display. How? By doing things you can't take credit for.

Two, *I'm not ready.*

Guess what? You never will be. I wasn't ready to get married. Lora and I weren't ready to have kids. I wasn't ready to start a church. We weren't ready to open a coffeehouse on Capitol Hill or the DC Dream Center. And we weren't ready to buy and build out a city block called the Capital Turnaround. If you wait until you're ready, you'll be waiting until the day you die! Quit living as if the purpose of life is to arrive safely at death. If God gives you a green light, it's not *ready, set, go*. Faith flips the script—*go, set, ready!*

Three, *I'm waiting for the right opportunity.*

Aren't we all? I know people who say they'll give more if they make more, but I'm not buying what they're selling. If you aren't generous with a little, you won't be generous with a lot. Generosity starts right here, right now! I know people who say they'll serve more when they have more time. You don't *find time*; you have to *make time*! I know people who say they'll step up when the big opportunity presents itself. Not if you aren't seizing the little opportunities that are all around you all the time! Quit trying to win the lottery, and start winning the day.

Forty years after wading into the waters of the Red Sea, the Israelites find themselves obstructed by a similar obstacle. It's a divine déjà vu. All that separates them from the Promised Land is the Jordan River. It's almost like God tips the cap to Nahshon by giving the priests who carry the ark of the covenant a curious command:

When you reach the banks of the Jordan River, take a few steps into the river.⁵

This is where so many of us get stuck. We stand on the shoreline, waiting for God to part the water. Then we wonder why nothing is happening. All the while, God is waiting for us to wade into the water. There is a sacred sequence encoded in this ancient algorithm. If you want God to make a sidewalk through the sea, you've got to get your feet wet.

We all want a miracle. Of course, none of us wants to be in a situation that necessitates one. Guess what? You can't have one without the other. What we perceive to be an impossibility presents a unique opportunity. That is when we exercise our faith. How? By taking the first step!

How do I make it a habit?



Baby steps.

Those are the words of Dr. Leo Marvin. Yes, he's the fictional psychiatrist in a very funny film, *What About Bob?* That doesn't make it any less true. Just a little more fun! When it comes to making and breaking habits, it helps to have a few laughs along the way. Why? Because you'll take a few falls and experience a few fails. You have to laugh it off, get back up, and try again. Or in some instances, try different.

We often get stuck trying to figure out steps two, three, and four. Yes, failing to plan is planning to fail. But habit formation always begins with one small step. You can't steal second base if you keep your foot on first.

I believe in setting God-sized goals—go big or go home! But when it comes to forming habits, small wins is the name of the game. Trying to jump-start your goals by getting a jump on the day? Set a goal of seeing the sunrise seven days in a row. Want to write a book? Take a page out of Tim Ferriss's book, and write “two crappy pages a day.”⁶

What river are you trying to cross?

What is the first step you need to take?

If it's running a marathon, you wade into the water by paying the registration fee. Now you've got skin in the game. If the goal is reading the Bible cover to cover, download a reading plan and ask a friend to join you. If it's getting your graduate degree, fill out the application. The same goes for your dream job or summer internship. If it's resolving a personal issue or restoring a relationship, make the counseling appointment.

I admire plotters, with two *t*'s. Plotters are people who see further into the future than the rest of us. Can I tell you who I admire even more? Plodders, with two *d*'s. Plodders are the people who get up and grind it out every day. Plodders put one foot in front of the other like everybody else, but they don't stop when they run into the Red Sea. They wade into the water like Nahshon, the patron saint of plodders.

What if Nahshon had stepped into the water and stopped? *Well, that didn't work.* What if he had called it quits when he was waist-deep? *This isn't happening.* What if he had backed up when the water reached his chinny chin chin? *That was a waste of time.* The answer is simple: Nahshon would have forfeited the miracle right before it happened.

The challenge on day 1? Pick a habit, any habit. Then get your feet wet by taking a baby step! This is the day when decades happen.

Wade into the water!

Day 2

Take the Stairs

God did not lead them along the main road that runs through Philistine territory, even though that was the shortest route to the Promised Land.

—EXODUS 13:17, NLT

In 1987, a group of engineers, entrepreneurs, and earth scientists set out to build an artificial ecosystem in Oracle, Arizona. Biosphere 2 encompassed 3.14 acres, making it the largest closed system ever created. Designed as the ideal ecosystem for plant life to thrive, the climate-controlled environment included purified air, clean water, nutrient-rich soil, and natural light. Despite what seemed like perfect conditions, something curious kept happening. The trees that were planted would grow to a certain height, and then they would fall over. After some head-scratching, the scientists finally figured out what was missing. The biosphere lacked a critical component for growth. Care to venture a guess?

In their natural habitat, trees are buffeted by winds that blow every which way. Trees respond to that wind resistance by growing stronger bark and deeper roots. Without adversity, trees atrophy. Newsflash: humans do too!

One of the mistakes we make as parents and as leaders is this: we do everything within our power to create emotional and relational and spiritual biospheres. We avoid conflict. We mitigate risk. We minimize discomfort. We sidestep sacrifice. Then we wonder why people grow to a certain stature and stop. We wonder why leaders

fall. We wonder why friendships experience a falling out. Like seeds planted in rocky soil, they lack the root systems to sustain growth.

You don't have to go out and look for resistance. It will find you soon enough! My advice? Don't look for a work-around; work through it. Just as Nahshon waded into the water, you have to kiss the wave. The obstacle is not the enemy; the obstacle is the way. In fact, *harder is better*! Without that mindset, you won't make it to day 30.

When God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt, He didn't take the shortcut to the promised land. He took the scenic route! Why? They weren't ready. The goal of going after a God-sized dream isn't simply accomplishing it. It's who you become in the process—big dreams make big people! Don't be so anxious to get out of difficult situations that you fail to get anything out of difficult situations. You've got to learn the lesson, cultivate the character, and curate the change.

Habit formation is not linear. It's two steps forward, one step back. Did you know that there were forty-two stations of the Exodus? They zigged and zagged all over tarnation! You will experience setbacks during this thirty-day challenge, but that is when you need to press in and pray through. Those are the days when you need to double down. It can't just be *rise and shine*; it's got to be *rain or shine*!

When you encounter an obstacle, any obstacle, think of it as resistance training. On days when you experience decision fatigue, God is building emotional fortitude. On days when you feel like throwing in the towel, God is preparing you for something bigger, something better. And, I might add, it's those bad days that help us appreciate the good days!

As a leader, I get frustrated when I cast a vision and people don't get it. Or worse, they oppose it. That said, I've learned to appreciate the resistance because it has a refining effect on vision. It forces me to anticipate objections and answer questions, thereby clarifying the vision.

I don't care if your name is Moses and you come down from Mount Sinai with stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God—you'll still experience resistance. It's called the diffusion of innovation bell curve—16 percent of people are resisters.¹

As leaders, we love early adopters who are on the other side of the bell curve. They're the people who will walk off the cliff with us! Can I let you in on a little leadership secret? I've come to appreciate laggards just as much, if not more, because they force us to become better vision casters. Don't hate the haters! Listen to them. Learn from them. You may not win them over to your way of thinking, but it'll cultivate mutual respect.

Can I take issue with a cultural trend? Giving every kid a trophy regardless of performance has unintended consequences like Biosphere 2. If everyone gets a trophy, emotional-fortitude muscles atrophy. You never learn how to cope with disappointment. You never learn how to get up after being knocked down. You never learn how to dig a little deeper.

In her brilliant book *Mindset*, Carol Dweck made a distinction between two very different mindsets.² A *fixed* mindset is the belief that our capabilities are set in stone. It's nature over nurture—I *was born this way*. With that frame of mind, you try to avoid failure. Why? If you fail, you're a failure. Failure is seen as an indictment rather than an opportunity to learn. People with fixed mindsets are always on trial, always trying to prove themselves. They are only as good as their last game, last election, last case, or last performance.

A *growth* mindset is the belief that capabilities can be cultivated, regardless of circumstances. It's nurture over nature. It's mind over matter. It's the belief that *almost anyone can accomplish almost anything if they work at it long enough, hard enough, and smart enough!* Your failure doesn't own you if you own it. How? You leverage it by learning from it. Nine times out of ten, failure is the result of poorly managed success. But let me flip that script—*success is the result of well-managed failure*.

I'm not ignoring genetic or epigenetic factors when it comes to

habit formation. There are heritable traits that give us advantages and disadvantages. If you're five foot seven and you want to play in the NBA, may the Force be with you, because the odds are against you. You'll have to work longer, work harder, and work smarter. But don't tell me it can't be done! Why? At five foot seven, Spud Webb didn't just play in the NBA—he won the 1986 dunk contest.

Psychologist Benjamin Bloom once conducted a study of 120 outstanding achievers in a wide variety of occupations from concert pianists to Olympic swimmers to research scientists. Most of them were *not* remarkable as children. There was little evidence of future accomplishment. What set them apart? “After forty years of intensive research . . . my major conclusion is: What any person in the world can learn, *almost* all persons can learn.”³

Is that not empowering? Talk about leveling the playing field. I don't want to turn habit formation into a competition, but the prize generally goes to those who work longer, harder, and smarter! Simply put, *the only limit is your dedication to learning*. If you stay humble and stay hungry, there's nothing God can't do in you or through you.

Habit formation is as unique as your history, personality, and chronotype. If you're a lark, you've got to get up early to go after your goals. If you're an owl, you burn the midnight oil. Either way, you've got to figure out what works for you. And give the same grace to others! In the words of Oswald Chambers, “Let God be as original with other people as He is with you.”⁴

Habit formation is as different as thinkers and feelers, introverts and extroverts, goal setters and problem solvers. One way or the other, habit formation starts with a growth mindset. It welcomes resistance as a means of growing stronger. Whatever habit you're trying to cultivate, it will get harder before it gets easier. That's par for the course!

How do I make it a habit?


Take the stairs!

I mean that literally and figuratively. Yes, the elevator is easier. But the path of least resistance won't get you where you want to go. When given the choice, don't take the easy way out. It's a mindset and a metaphor. When presented with the option of an elevator or the stairs, you make a predecision to take the stairs. Why? Harder is better! The stairs and the elevator will get you to the same place, but you'll be in better shape having taken the stairs.

Taking the stairs is all about adding more resistance, but that doesn't mean it has to be less fun. A few years ago, Volkswagen Sweden staged a public intervention aimed at better health. They employed something called the fun theory: "Fun is the easiest way to change people's behavior for the better."⁵ The masterminds behind this intervention installed a piano staircase next to an escalator at a subway station in Stockholm. The stairs looked like and functioned like keys on a piano. That interactive staircase resulted in a 66 percent rise in use!⁶

The moral of the study? Along with adding resistance, add an element of fun. "A major criterion for judging the anxiety level of any society," said Edwin Friedman, "is the loss of its capacity to be playful."⁷ All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy!

Habit formation is serious business, but you have to have fun along the way. Self-deprecating humor allows you to learn from your mistakes by laughing at them. My advice? Take God seriously, but take yourself less seriously. Habit formation is hard enough as it is!

"If anyone forces you to go one mile," Jesus said, "go with them two miles."⁸ In other words, *go the extra mile*. Make it your mantra, your mission, your MO. A Roman soldier was allowed to commandeer a Jewish citizen for a thousand paces. The first mile was required, but Jesus upped the ante. He challenged His followers to exceed expectations by going above and beyond. It's the road less traveled, but there aren't any traffic jams.

When I exercise, I listen to podcasts and playlists. It's one way I habit stack. I exercise my mind while I exercise my body. A few of

my favorite podcasts are *Radiolab*, *99% Invisible*, *Freakonomics Radio*, and *Revisionist History*. Why do I do it? Podcasts are one way I cross-pollinate my mind by learning from a wide variety of disciplines. Plus, they distract me from the pain I'm putting myself through!

I also love worshipping while I'm running. How can I not after God healed my lungs? I often listen to one of my worship playlists. That said, when I need to push my limits, I go old school. I put the *Rocky IV* soundtrack on repeat. Welcome to my world! When I listen to the training montage, I picture Rocky doing inverted sit-ups in an old barn, shoulder pressing an oxcart, and doing lunges in the Siberian snow. I also hear his trainer yelling, "No pain, no pain, no pain!"

That is a growth mindset. It's the old axiom *No pain, no gain*. That's how you make and break habits. And harder is better.

Take the stairs!

Day 3

Get Off the Grid

*With the Lord a day is like a thousand years,
and a thousand years are like a day.*

—2 PETER 3:8

When the Russian comedian Yakov Smirnoff immigrated to the United States, he was asked what he loved most about America. His answer? American grocery stores. “I walked down an aisle and saw powdered milk; just add water and you get milk. Right next to it was powdered orange juice; just add water and you get orange juice. Then I saw baby powder, and I thought to myself, *What a country!*”¹

Instant everything. We wish, right? We live in a culture that aims at fifteen minutes of fame rather than fifty years of faithfulness. We want the quick fix. Even better, get rich quick. We are an instant gratification culture, and it’s evidenced by how frustrated we become with the smallest delays.

Case in point? You’re about to board an airplane that will fly five hundred miles per hour at thirty thousand feet, getting you all the way across the country in five hours flat, and you’re unbelievably frustrated by a fifteen-minute delay! I get it, and I’m guilty as charged. But it beats a covered wagon, doesn’t it? It took a covered wagon, traveling at the speed of oxen, six months to cross the country! And there was no economy plus—I promise you that.

If you’re going to dream big, you need to start small and think long. This goes back to the growth mindset from day 2. *Harder is better*, and *slower is faster*. That’s as counterintuitive as it is counter-

cultural, but that doesn't make it any less true. Whatever habit you're trying to make or break, it'll take more than a minute. You have to hitch the wagon and commit yourself to the long haul called the habit cycle.

In the sixteenth century, an English playwright named John Heywood died about a decade after William Shakespeare was born. He was a lot less famous than Shakespeare, but I bet you've quoted him without even knowing it. A few of his idioms include "many hands make light work," "better late than never," and "a rolling stone gathers no moss." His most famous axiom? *Rome wasn't built in a day.*²

Can I be brutally honest? Habit formation feels like it takes forever. That's when you have to remind yourself that Rome wasn't built in a day! Making habits and breaking habits will take longer than you like, no doubt. But the more time you invest, the more meaningful it is.

Fun fact? In 1947, General Mills introduced its first instant cake mix. They expected instant success, but the cake mix didn't sell well. The company was confused because it had simplified a difficult task. All you had to do was add water. It was easy-peasy. And that was precisely the problem; it was *too easy*!

General Mills commissioned a marketing expert, Ernest Dichter, to figure out why the instant mix wasn't resonating with consumers. His conclusion? We bake a cake for special occasions. In other words, it's an expression of love. *Less effort* made it *less meaningful*.

Remember 3M? Our habits have to be *measurable*, *meaningful*, and *maintainable*. The cake mix was so simple that it felt self-indulgent. What did General Mills do? They made it more meaningful by making it less easy! They made it take more time! When consumers had to add eggs and measure milk, sales soared.³

The lesson? *Harder is better*, and *slower is faster*. And it's not just true of cake mix. If you were looking for easy answers and quick fixes, you bought the wrong book. This thirty-day challenge won't be easy, and I make no apologies for that. By definition, a challenge

involves a degree of difficulty. The technical term is *desirable difficulty*, and it's a critical piece of the habit formation puzzle. I shared an equation in *Win the Day* that I want to solve in *Do It for a Day*:

$$\text{Deliberate Practice} + \text{Desirable Difficulty} = \text{Durable Learning}^4$$

We'll reverse engineer the entire equation over the next thirty days, but let me start with *desirable difficulty*. It sounds like an oxymoron, as oxymoronic as James 1:2: "Consider it pure joy . . . whenever you face trials of many kinds." Really? Why? Because those trials are opportunities to prove yourself. You can't spell *testimony* without the word *test*. When you pass the test, you graduate to the next level. Plus, you'll be stronger on the other side.

Coined by Robert A. Bjork, *desirable difficulty* refers to a task that requires considerable effort.⁵ Difficult tasks slow down the learning process at first, but they yield a long-term benefit called durable learning. If something is too easy, we get bored. If something is too difficult, we quit. *Desirable difficulty* is the middle ground where growth happens.

The sweet spot is called JMD—*just manageable difficulty*. It's a little outside your comfort zone. It's a little beyond your resources. It's a little past your pay grade. That's why we need coaches, therapists, and trainers. We need someone who pushes us past our perceived limits.

Have you ever heard of the 40 percent rule? When your mind tells you to quit—you feel like you've given it everything you've got—you've tapped only 40 percent of your potential. That idea originates with ultramarathon runner and former Navy SEAL David Goggins.⁶ When you feel like you've reached the end of your rope, you have 60 percent more potential than you are even aware of. If you're going to tap your full potential, you have to push past those mental blocks.

As a writer and a pastor, I feel like my job is to *comfort the afflicted* and *afflict the comfortable*. My goal is to coax you out of your

comfort zone and into your growth zone. You have to get comfortable with discomfort. How? By adding time and resistance. When you push past previous limits and achieve a PR—personal record—the ceiling becomes the floor!

How do I make it a habit?

Retreat.

The word *retreat* means “to move back.” The irony? That’s how you make forward progress. It’s as counterintuitive as the law of diminishing returns—less is more.

If you want to make or break a habit, it’s a lot like learning a new dance. My repertoire is pretty limited, but I can *floss* and *churn the butter*, and I do a pretty mean *running man*. How did I learn those dance moves? I had to break it down and slow it down. Then, and only then, was I able to go faster. Simply put, you cannot hurry habits. You have to retreat in order to advance.

Remember Alice in Wonderland? She ran as fast as she could to keep up with the Red Queen, but she didn’t gain any ground. Ever feel like that? “*Here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place,*” said the queen. “If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!”⁷ How do we get off the merry-go-round that goes faster and faster? You’ve got to get off the grid. How? Here’s a simple idea: *day off, phone off*.

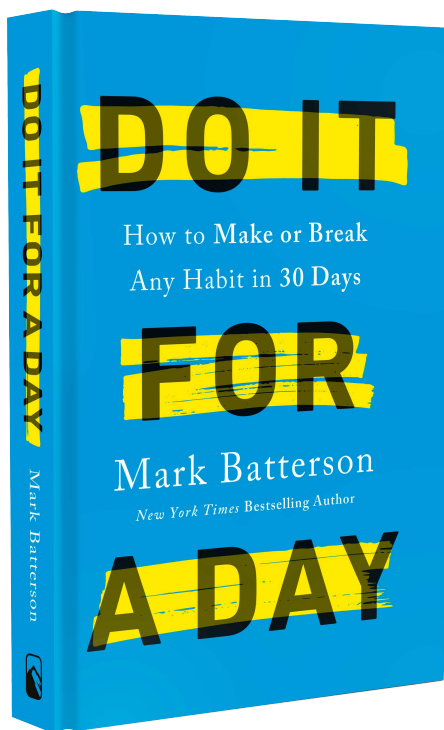
Next time you read the Gospels, notice how often Jesus withdrew. Jesus was retreating all the time—climbing mountains, walking beaches, sailing across the Sea of Galilee. He even spent forty days in the wilderness. Evidently, the best way to make progress is by retreating with great frequency and intentionality! Jesus operated with a sense of urgency, yet He was unhurried. In the words of Japanese theologian Kōsuke Koyama, He is the “three mile an hour God.”⁸

I live by a little formula: *change of pace + change of place = change*

of perspective. There are moments when we need to pick up the pace because of laziness, but more often than not, we need to slow the pace because of busyness. “If the devil cannot make us bad,” said Corrie ten Boom, “he will make us busy.”⁹ Why is it that the Sabbath is the longest of the Ten Commandments? Perhaps because it’s the hardest one to keep! You have to slow down, which is tough to do in a rat race.

At the end of every year, Lora and I take a two-day planning retreat. Along with budgeting and calendaring, we review our gratitude journals and set goals for the coming year. We employ a wide variety of techniques to keep us centered, including a word of the year and a verse of the year. You don’t have to go somewhere exotic. It can be a staycation. But you do need to set aside time for a set purpose. In addition to that planning retreat, we try to schedule a silent retreat once a year. With all the white noise these days, we need to do some ear cleansing! Finally, I’d recommend one weekend a year to set goals, review goals, and reverse engineer your goals into daily habits.

Get off the grid!



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