

Are You Dissipating Your Own Energy?

Avoiding and Overcoming Exhausting Habits

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Think about the analogy of the growth and development of the human being in a physical sense. We begin as a helpless infant, but we are not devoid of strength. We cannot walk, but we can kick our legs about and move our hands and arms.

There is strength there but these powers have to be developed and fostered and trained in a positive manner. But we also see, using the same analogy, that there are certain negative truths which are of vital importance for us. In other words, if we are to remain healthy and strong, vigorous and powerful, there are certain things that we must avoid. The fight for health has two aspects: the positive and the negative.

There is no point in trying to build ourselves up if we are doing certain things that are bound to sap our energy and our vitality, and may even rob us of our health altogether. If the strongest man alive walks into a disease-infected room he will probably become a victim of the disease.

So we must avoid, in general, anything that tends to weaken us, to sap our energy, or to rob us of the spiritual health out of which comes our spiritual energy and vigor. Therefore, there are certain things that we have to avoid. We know that both spiritually and physically there are things that we have to avoid so that we do not affect our spiritual and physical health.

The first thing we have to avoid is dissipation of energy. However much energy we may have, if we misuse it, dissipate it, or throw it away the result will be that we will have less of it, and will become less effective and less efficient. This is quite obvious in the physical realm, but it is not quite as obvious in the spiritual realm.

Many people have become weak who were once strong simply because they have been over-exerting themselves in various ways. They have overstretched and overstrained themselves; and the result is that they develop a tired heart, or their adrenal glands become exhausted, and eventually they lose their health, and have to take extensive care of themselves later in life.

This is similarly true in the spiritual realm. It may be one of the greatest dangers confronting many of us today. Speaking generally, sometimes we become troubled about ourselves because we feel like we have lost our edge in our spiritual lives, as we often do in our physical lives.

Do you sometimes find you do not enjoy the Bible as you used to? Do you sometimes find that you do not enjoy praying as you used to? Are you generally unhappy about the spiritual state and condition into which you have fallen?

I think that there are many in that condition and I have no doubt in alleging that one of the most common causes is simply dissipation of energy. We just get flat-out too tired to make the effort.

The apostle Paul points out the main reason for this dissipation of energy as being zeal without knowledge.

Romans 10:1-3 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

Paul is saying that a zeal without knowledge is going to affect all aspects of our lives, both physically and spiritually, and we are going to end up doing things in our lives, dissipating our energy, that are not leading us to God's Kingdom.

This physical ailment is not confined to unconverted individuals, but is quite common among converted people as well. 'Zeal without knowledge'—that means, partly, thoughtless activity, or what is sometimes described as 'activism', or misapplied activity. We are all meant to be active; and there is nothing that guarantees to increase our strength more than being active. But, we have to know *how* to be active. There is all the difference in the world between true activity and misapplied activity, between healthy activity and a dissipation of energy.

Our activity needs to be unselfish, thoughtful, disciplined, governed, and directed. We can easily understand the danger of misapplied activity and how it arises. For everyone to be doing something—anything—seems to be a major push of this outcome-based religious movement that we see. This is not just in religion, but in politics and education as well. So, we see a society here that is getting into activities where the end justifies the means. It does not matter whether they are doing something right or wrong in their minds, but whether they can affect the result that they want to, and that they have humanly reasoned.

The outcome-based philosophy knows that since it has no substance it must keep people busy. Give the new convert something to do (that should be a banner of theirs). It must keep them distracted. This humanly-reasoned philosophy is against the principles of Scripture. Keep them away from the truth by de-emphasizing it. Keep them away from looking at doctrine by focusing on emotion. Get them to feel good about themselves, and act on those feelings, those emotions. This is what we see in mainstream Christianity today. It is a movement going towards activity without thought toward doctrine and truth.

Paul's so-called pastoral epistles oppose such false teaching, and they warn us not to ordain a novice because he is not yet fit to do certain things and it is dangerous for him because he may be lifted up with pride, as was Satan. But, with regard to religion, it is the controlling teaching today and we must all be doing something here, there, and everywhere if we are to be part of it. (When I say we, I am talking about mainstream Christianity, not us specifically). So, if a person wants to be part of this movement in religion today, then they have to be somewhat active in doing the things that they are directed to do that lead them away from doctrine.

Many organizations, especially religious groups, have fallen into this same outcome-based philosophy of always being busy. Busy at this, and busy at that. What busy little bees they are.

Many even claim to be witnessing to the world while spiritually they seem to be declining. It is really very, very sad.

Anyone who overdoes things—and it does not matter what he is doing—will soon discover that, first of all, the quality of his work begins to suffer. A minister who preaches too much, who works too hard, anyone who is overactive—in all cases, the first thing to go is the quality. *All* things should be done in moderation.

Biblically, moderation refers to one's sanity, believe it or not. Those are equated—moderation and sanity. It is sober-mindedness, moderation of the desires and passions. It is the opposite of things that are silly, frivolous, excessive, and to extreme stimulation of desire.

Anyone who misapplies activity lacks moderation. The general public will not detect it for some time. The critics, however, will recognize it. They will say that the man is being carried along by his past reputation, and that he is not as effective as he used to be, that the skill is not there, that he has lost something. (That is, the person who has become overly busy and is losing the quality in his life).

Often, it is simply because the man is overworking and is getting tired, and the result is that he is steadily losing something vital—his physical and spiritual energy. If it affects the physical energy, it affects the spiritual. The area of our physical health is important to keep in mind.

This very thing happened, years ago, in our previous religious affiliation. The ministers were worked so hard that their spiritual lives declined, their families crumbled, and their congregations degenerated under their neglectful lack of care. It really was a crying shame! Many tears were resultant from it.

There were things such as Y.E.S. evaluations, Y.O.U. activities every weekend, multiple socials throughout the year, summer picnics and campouts, Spokesman Club every other week, the Plain Truth distribution program, women's club, and senior citizen fundraisers. And it went on and on and on.

In its pseudo-noble efforts to "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers", our previous religious affiliation caused the different age groups to compartmentalize and to do their own thing. We had preteen activities, teenage Y.O.U. activities, 'young at heart/old-in-body' activities, men's club, women's club, graduate club, and leadership training classes.

Each of these activities in and by itself was not necessarily wrong. But, the combination of all of these together became misapplied activity which dissipated physical and spiritual energy. So, it splintered on a scale like no other religious organization has ever done.

There are many who, with very good intentions, and the feeling that they must be doing something to justify their Christianity, often get into this state because they are afraid of the criticisms of those who advocate misapplied activity. This very real problem is often brought in from the world. People find themselves exhausted, with nothing to give in the end; they are just mechanically doing something which is of little value. Their fault is 'dissipation of energy'—it is unintelligent activity.

Everyone has to sit down and 'be still' and plan his life, and decide what he can and cannot do.

Psalm 4:4 Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still.

There is an indication here that we cannot meditate without being still. So, if in our lives we are so busy that we do not take the time to be still, to stop and contemplate, then the implied indication is that it is hard to meditate.

Psalm 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!

There is another reason to be still. It is part of that meditation and obedience, and it is part of proper worship of God so that we can see the exalted God over the nations, the earth, and the universe.

Especially, Christians who cannot keep still—that always have to be doing something—are suffering from physical, and more importantly, spiritual dissipation of energy as a result of misapplied activity.

We must be resolute and not governed by what our children and others try to push us to do. The parent must be mature enough to say no to his child when it is not in the best interest of the parent or the child. The parent is the one who is in the best position to know how much he can do, when he is to do it, and where he is to do it—not the child. The parent is so far above the maturity of the child, that there is no comparison. A child should *never* dictate all of the goings on in a family.

We should not allow ourselves to be dictated to by others. We must be in charge of ourselves, otherwise we will become weary and tired and exhausted and resentful simply through dissipation—that is, throwing away our energy. So we have to be wise stewards of the energy that God has given us, both in the physical and in the spiritual realms.

We should avoid spending too much time in what we will call debilitating atmospheres. It does not matter how physically or spiritually strong we are, if we are in a wrong environment it will have its effects. Physically, you have no doubt noticed how drained of energy you feel on a humid day, especially here in the southeast.

Ninety degrees in Los Angeles or Tucson feels a whole lot different than it does in Charlotte or Tampa. I have experienced both and it is not hard to understand why people choose those dry areas in which to live. I have lived in California and it is very nice on weather and you do not sweat very much and if you do sweat, it evaporates before it has time to have its effects. It is much more comfortable at 90 degrees, when the humidity is 45% , than when it is 80% .

If I remember correctly, when designing heating and cooling comfort systems, the place on the Psychrometric Chart, where the average human is the most comfortable, is at 75 degrees with 45-50% humidity.

I get harassed almost every Sabbath that it is too hot in the meeting room. I try to keep the thermostat at 73 degrees instead of the normal, everyday 75 degrees, to offset the high humidity in the room from all the exuberant, moist conversations that are steaming up the room.

I have not checked the humidity in the room but I suppose that the humidity level is somewhere between 70% and 80% by the time everyone sits down at the beginning of services. So that gives you the perspective of what comfort really entails, both temperature and humidity.

The point is that we feel the dissipation of energy from our environment. That humidity, the higher it gets—today it is probably close to 80-90%—and we feel exhausted out there. This is the effect that a wrong environment, spiritually, will have on us. It will dissipate our spiritual energy.

A person can just sit about doing nothing; the more he lazes around, the less he will be able to do. Merely to laze around and to be slack through lack of discipline is thoroughly debilitating. It does not necessarily mean that we are doing bad things; time can be wasted in doing nothing or in doing things that are hardly worth doing. We can create our own lethargic environment and we should avoid those as well.

Then, to look at the matter from another aspect, we can spend too much time in the wrong company. I am not necessarily talking about bad company. I am referring to companionship that is not really positively helpful in a spiritual sense. I am not suggesting we cut ourselves off completely from such people; otherwise we would never be able to help them, and we would not be able to learn about others in that way.

Looking at it from another angle, sometimes we may spend too much time just talking with them about nothing. I am not, of course, suggesting that we should be hermits and avoid people altogether. That is a wrong extreme, that is false asceticism, and that is not in line with the teachings of Jesus Christ and His apostles.

But the danger is when we spend too much time just talking for the sake of talking, not about bad things, but about things that really do not matter much. Some of this is called this chit-chat. Internet chat rooms are notorious for this. It is not that the chat rooms are wrong, but they are often misused, and they can become time-wasters and gossip columns. Most chat rooms have no bounds on their subject matter, and quite often the subject matter in general is perverse either in the language or the subjects themselves.

The world is every saint's enemy. We do not become friends with it, and we should not spend time in it socially. If we spend too much time in a worldly atmosphere we will find that the edge of our spiritual life will become dulled. Just like taking a knife and banging it, edgewise, on a stone. Bad habits are often picked up from people in the world, especially impure language.

It is not inherently wrong to look at television, or listen to the radio, or surf the 'Net. But if we spend too much time in doing so, it is certain that we will not be able to pray as well, and we may eventually lose our taste for the inspired written Word of God. Our minds can become spiritually dull, and we become bored with such a dynamic, inspired work as the Bible.

That is the effect that too much of the debilitating atmosphere of the world has on everyone

who is part of it. We have to be watchful; and we can always tell by examining ourselves whether our strength is increasing or declining. An absolute rule, a fact of life is that 'the atmosphere immediately affects our constitution.' So, we must be sure that we are not spending too much of our time in that kind of atmosphere.

Worldliness, of course, has many forms and there are specific dangers to each of those forms.

I Timothy 6:9-11 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.

Here, the apostle Paul is condemning the love of money. Money, in and by itself, is not evil if a person uses it properly as a steward of God. But the moment a person begins to place money in a more important role than God, or other human beings, sin enters. Once this happens, there is always a lowering of the spiritual temperature and a rapid loss of spiritual vitality. Once again we see another form of the dissipation of spiritual energy.

We know that this is a problem even with people in God's church because we look at what happened in the splintering of the Worldwide Church of God, and how many people, when they were told that they did not have to tithe, stopped tithing, and went out and bought that yacht or motorcycle, or whatever else it was that they wanted.

There have been many cases of people who seemed converted from a sinful life, and who, because of their conversion, began to work diligently and succeed; and we have agonizingly watched some of them fall into this trap. Before, they threw their money away; and then, they began to love it. Both extremes are wrong.

A person, before entering the church, may have been in debt up to their ears, then they got out of debt and found that they had money to spend, and were spending it on things that were unimportant or that drew them away from the truth. What they did was that they dissipated their spiritual energy by that distraction.

Related to debilitating atmospheres are diseased atmospheres. This is the kind of place in which there is active infection. If we know that there is infection in a place, the obvious thing to do is to avoid going there unless you have to go there for some good and valid reason. Nevertheless, we should not knowingly walk into infection.

We have to be careful because there are extremes here also. Some are so afraid of infections that they never go out-of-doors, and so they end up dying from a lack of vitality. Spiritual balance and common sense must be used in all areas of life.

This brings us, once again, to the avoidance of bad company. The first psalm deals with this matter.

Psalm 1:1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful;

Bad company will cause us to soon lose the edge off our spiritual life and so we must avoid bad company, and avoid it like the plague. God gives a special blessing to people who avoid it.

Repeatedly, Paul uses such terms as: 'flee', 'avoid', 'shun', 'depart', 'turn away', and 'from such withdraw yourself,' in his epistles. This is the only thing that we can do with regard to diseased atmospheres, whether physical or spiritual, but especially if they are spiritual.

At the end of I Corinthians 5, Paul shows us that even other members who are spiritually diseased with serious flagrant sins should be avoided.

I Corinthians 5:9-11 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.

That is a pretty serious command that he gives us there, having to do with such things. I am not talking about people who accidentally or inadvertently fall into such sins; I am talking about people who flagrantly, habitually do such things.

The apostle Peter speaks of the dissipation of the world's activities and how people give in to all its energy-dissipating desires and that they hate the saints for not doing as they do.

I Peter 4:3-5 For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

All of the sources and forms of spiritual disease go hand in hand in the world and there is no withholding, no restraint. One sin leads to the next, and we know that if we break one of the commandments, we are guilty of breaking them all. They are not ten unrelated laws; they make up a whole package of righteousness. They do not stand individually on their own; they are the foundation of a pure way of life.

We are instructed to not keep company with anyone who is blatantly guilty of these sins—we must have nothing to do with them—but notice what Paul adds that we are to work to produce

righteous fruit as a strengthening force against the diseased atmosphere of the world.

Ephesians 5:8-12 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. [We have to work to find out what is acceptable and we have to work to do the works part of the faith that we are in.] And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.

Paul's command here is to form new, good habits to replace old bad habits that we have absorbed from the world. That is the best way to handle a bad habit—to replace it with a good one. (I will bring more of this in later.)

Another diseased atmosphere is found in the massive amount of reading material available to us. We should avoid bad reading.

This sick society produces an enormous amount of anti-Christian printed material. Some anti-Christian material is even produced by mainstream professing Christians themselves, and is nothing more than humanly-reasoned philosophical teachings that ignore basic biblical principles, while being promoted as helpful to Christians, but in reality, is spiritually diseased.

We do not have to read what other humans have imagined to find the answers to the important questions of life. All the important questions are answered in the inspired written Word of God. We should have enough experience and insight to be able to realize that we do not have to wallow in a cesspool to understand and deal with it. We look to God's truth, the inspired written Word of God for the solutions for the ways to confront and fight the cesspool of the world.

Of the end time, Daniel was inspired to write:

Daniel 12:4 "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."

It is not for the lack of knowledge that the world suffers so many penalties for their sins, it is for the wrong type of knowledge, and for the rejection of the knowledge of God.

The knowledge of the world that is increasing adds nothing to the moral and spiritual improvement of humanity.

I Timothy 6:20-21 O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen.

If we feed the flesh, we should not be surprised if we fall to its temptations and to its lusts. Make no provision for it. Avoid bad reading. We have to be careful of our reading in general, regardless of what the source is, whether it is magazines, newspapers, novels, or the Internet.

Diseased atmospheres affect us both physically and spiritually. Good health and healing are seen as marks of the blessing of God, and illness as an indication of his disfavor. God should be consulted when we become physically or spiritually ill. King Asa, who sought help only from the physicians, is implicitly criticized for doing just that, going to the world. It does not mean that going to the world for advice and for certain solutions to our physical problems, is wrong. But we should not go to the world for solutions to our spiritual problems.

In several of the Psalms (Psalm 32; 38; 41; 107), a number of symptoms are set out and then clearly related to the guilt of the suffering individual.

Psalm 38:3-10 There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness. I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are full of inflammation, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and severely broken; I groan because of the turmoil of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before You; and my sighing is not hidden from You. My heart pants, my strength fails me; as for the light of my eyes, it also has gone from me.

There, we see the result of sin, and it is not always the sin of the individual, often times it is the sin of the society around us. We suffer from the pollutions, the poor lifestyles, and those types of things. If we seek diseased atmospheres, God will allow us to suffer the consequences, and as we see in Psalm 38, there are times when God is actively involved in sending illness as a means of discipline or judgment. Sometimes He does this by allowing the natural penalty of the law that we have broken to taken its effect, and sometimes He brings a specific disease on someone.

Paul uses the same principle in his teaching on the Passover regarding examining ourselves, where he says, that the sin of eating and drinking "in an unworthy manner" leads to judgment and explains why many among us are weak and sick.

I Corinthians 11:27-32 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. [That is speaking spiritually here.] For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we

are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

We also have to realize that, as John 9 shows, it is a mistake to assume that there is always a connection between disease and a specific sin in the life of the individual sufferer. But we see also that God will, at His discretion, bring a specific disease upon us.

John 9:2-3 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.

We see there that *sometimes* we suffer from things that are not our fault. But most of the time when we are suffering it is because of our fault or society's sin. We must develop a spirit of understanding and discernment for fear that we become victims of the deadly, sinister infections which rob us of our spiritual life and vitality, which Satan and the world are constantly trying to do.

There are many people who play on the emotions of others with a false compassion and a very small element of truth. Avoid such people and their beliefs, and have no fellowship with them. This is part of what Paul says when he encourages us to withstand and do all.

Ephesians 6:13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

"Having done all!" What does that mean? It means having fought in every way possible. We put on the whole armor of God, we are filled with the strength and the power, and we fight the battle in the evil day. We go on standing. We cannot relax in this life because we are at war with Satan, the world, and our own human nature. We are always on duty as a member of God's church.

Beware of over-confidence in the fact that we are winning the war. We know that we are winning the war because we have the power of the Holy Spirit to help us, and Jesus Christ fighting our battles for us. But Paul says:

I Corinthians 10:12 "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

Paul's pastoral epistles apply the concept of health and wholeness to the teaching that takes place within the church. False teaching within the body of Christ has the effects of gangrene, something which both spreads easily, and is immensely destructive, as does cancer.

Against this, Paul wants church members to be "sound in the faith" as he says in his epistle to Titus, which will happen as we are taught and encouraged to hold onto "sound doctrine". To be

sound in the faith we have to develop good practices, good routines, and good behaviors. We humans are creatures of habit. That is part of our problem with the dissipation of our energy. Habits are not necessarily bad. We know that we all have both good and bad habits. In fact, without habits we could hardly function normally, let alone accomplish very much.

In looking up "habit" in *Roget's Thesaurus*, we discover such synonyms as "addiction," "custom," "mannerism," and "nature." There was one choice which momentarily threw me, and that was "clothing." Why would clothing be a synonym for habit? But, when I realized how many people are addicted to shopping, it made perfect sense.

Items that are reportedly the most frequent purchase of shopping addicts are clothes, jewelry, electrical gadgets, and all goods that are linked to self-image, which I thought was interesting, because that means vanity. This implies that shopping addiction and status anxiety are closely related. One main result of shopping addiction, of course, is debt. Relationships, jobs, and financial obligations suffer as the uncontrolled spending leads the addict deeper and deeper into debt.

The spectrum of synonyms for the word 'habit' is instructive. Unlike, the compulsive shopper addiction, some habits are quite useful. They establish a tradition or routine, thereby providing a measure of order, efficiency, and meaning to life. Sadly, some habits can also lock you into inflexible mind-body patterns and inhibit your openness to change. This is a serious problem for members of God's church who are trying to overcome problems and sins—which are in all of us.

Embarrassingly, however, the bad habits are the ones that are usually the most noticeable. Drunkenness, gluttony, overeating, drug abuse, and smoking are very noticeable bad habits. These are destructive sins that dissipate our energy.

Ephesians 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is
dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.

Paul there links the physical sin of being drunk with wine, with both physical and spiritual sins. He says, be filled with the Spirit, so that we can end that dissipation and physical sin, which is also by extension a spiritual sin. The word translated 'dissipation' in the *New King James Version* and 'excess' in the *King James Version* means 'that which is unsafe, or not recoverable, lost beyond recovery.' It is abandonment to sensuality and lust; and it includes over-indulgence, decadence, and partying. In all this we see the needless dissipation of physical and spiritual energy.

Everyone allows himself to develop bad habits. Some habits such as stuttering, squinting, and nervous twitches are not sin. Generally, bad habits are conditioned patterns of doing things the wrong way. Of course, any habit that breaks the law of God is sin. And the result of sin is death. So, bad habits are very serious.

We can even think habitually. If we are not careful this can even go as far as leading us to falsely take for granted that false doctrines are true. This is the case with millions of sincere religious people who accept false doctrines and practices because of lifelong conditioning, or careless assumption, or tradition in their families or in their lives. When it comes to matters like

repentance and conversion and salvation, wrong thinking can be a matter of life and death.

The question stands: How do habits form? A habit is a learned pattern of acting—a way of behaving that has become routine. Like a computer, when the short-term memory of the mind is at capacity or being heavily used, the long-term memory is still capable of performing routine repetitive actions.

Even though the short-term memory may have stopped paying attention, the long-term memory can recall its stored memory and use that information without having to think consciously about it. We call these routine actions habit. There are certain things we just do not have to think about doing like breathing, tying our shoes, walking, remembering our names, and what tastes we enjoy.

Habits enable us to distinguish what is new, and what is potentially dangerous, from what is tried and true or expected. Repetition is essential in forming a habit. That is why God wants us to study our Bibles, and read them daily, and to work hard to learn His way of life through Scripture, so that we can form those good habits that come from studying His Word.

It follows, then, that doing something the right way enough times—such as properly executing a tennis stroke, picking up after ourselves, or refusing that extra drink—builds good habits, physically.

Conversely, if we choose the wrong option enough times—such as procrastination about doing needed jobs, eating or drinking too much, or losing our tempers—we will form bad habits. We have all formed physical habits that dissipate our physical energy, and spiritual habits that dissipate our spiritual energy.

Experience tells us that the earlier the conditioning, the stronger the influence. In other words, it is easier to make a good habit in the first place than to break one later on. That is why you see many successful people who have already formed from childhood habits that carry them into success in the business world at an older age. That is why you see so many of the children who grow up in God's church able to later on come back into the church and remember what they had forgotten, because they had earlier formed good habits and just could not block them from their minds.

In the way of a side note, so-called free spirits and individualists are not really free of habits. They merely develop their own idiosyncratic habits.

What we call human personality, in its broadest sense, is to a large extent a composition of thousands of individual and specific habit traits. Humans are compounds of various habits.

Thoughts a human thinks are not habitual, of course, but patterns of thought very much tend to become habitual. Some people develop sound thought patterns; others are habitually scatter-brained, and cannot seem to get anything straight to save their lives.

The capacity to form habits is possible with most higher living things. But the way the marvelous human mind was created with the spirit in man, humans more than any other creatures, and more than we care to admit, are creatures of habit—habits of thinking, habits of acting, and habits of feeling.

There are absolute fundamental requirements and essential steps that must be applied to replace a bad habit with a good one. Many lose sight of such essential steps because of heavy demands on our minds or time, or because of discouragement from past failures to overcome some nagging habit or vice.

How do we stop a bad habit and start a good one?

Here are seven steps, to be followed in order, which can help break bad and harmful habits. They are nothing stupendous in the way of enlightenment, but they are just basic, logical, common sense, and spiritual understandings that we have in God's church. These seven steps could be used by anyone, whether converted or not:

Step 1: We must admit we have a bad habit. (That almost sounds like the Alcoholics Anonymous first rule of admitting that you have a drinking problem.) Admit that what you are doing or thinking or feeling is wrong and harmful. This can be extremely difficult—to say the least. But it is a prerequisite to the elusive goal of personal change. In biblical terms this is the first step in repentance.

I John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

For spiritual sins, we have to first admit them to God, so that He can help us to get rid of them and cleanse them for us. Obviously, this demands the right standard of determining right and wrong. It requires the knowledge of God's Law.

Habituation is the natural enemy of change; our habits actually program us to resist change. Once a habit is ingrained, it becomes invisible to the conscious mind; and the brain, free of paying attention to the action, will notice only if we do something different than we are accustomed to doing.

It is impossible to change without taking this step. So many people fail because they never deep down in their minds squarely determine, or admit to themselves, that they eat too much, or drink too much, or are addicted in a damaging way to some practice or thinking.

You—not someone else—must be convinced you should change.

Step 2: We must see why we do whatever wrong action we are doing. This essentially requires honestly evaluating ourselves. Several factors come into play: childhood conditioning, subconscious desires, rational or irrational fears, peer pressure.

James 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

The downward pull of human nature affects us all; we are all constantly bombarded with the negative thoughts, ideas, and attitudes broadcast by Satan the deceiver, the prince of the power of the air. Satan's evil influence is a root of every harmful habit mankind practices—warfare, sexual immorality, lying, and everything else that is evil.

James 4:1 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?

We see James emphasizing that it is our own desires that lead us to these things, and our own desires are always associated with some pleasure that we want to do ourselves.

Step 3: We must realize that there is a way to break the bad habit. No matter how powerfully motivated we are to follow some wrong pattern; it is possible for us to change course. In the case of those bad habits the Bible calls sin, the urge to lie or keep smoking or overeating or indulging in sexual lusts like pornography can seem overwhelming to the addict.

The apostle Paul, a man of great moral fiber, and a man who no doubt had to overcome tremendous habits, described his own frustration in his struggle with sin, and extension, habits.

Romans 7:19-20 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, [or you could say that he does not want to do] it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

If we do something out of habit that goes against our conscience, it is sin.

Romans 14:23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

So, if whatever is done, when we doubt whether it is right, it is sin.

A bad habit is a struggle between the old man and new man. Forming habits is highly comforting; change is profoundly disturbing, and no human being likes to be disturbed. Trying to change the self into something different threatens the self, and the self sends up danger signals to try to get us to give up.

We may be dieting or trying to stop drinking. In every case the self—what Paul called the "old man"—tries to rear itself.

Romans 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

Bad habits enslave us. We do not want to be enslaved to sin, we cannot be, otherwise we are still the "old man."

A large part of us as human beings is programmed to resist change. But we can change! God made us of matter so that we could. We humans can, after deciding to reject negative behavior, learn to follow right ways and ingrain these right ways into our minds and motivation. We call this developing character.

Step 4: We must develop a change-of-behavior plan. We have to understand the influences or situations that spark old habit patterns and avoid them whenever possible. Some situations we may not be able to totally control or alter, but we can change our attitude toward them.

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Or you could say, but overcome evil, or bad habits, by overcoming them with good habits.

Develop right and positive habits or thought patterns to replace the old damaging patterns. Repeat right patterns as often as you can. These soon replace the wrong pattern of acting or feeling. We can do this if the new pattern has some great value or reward, or if failure to do so means an unwanted or painful result.

Do not try to taper off from a bad habit unless the habit is an addictive drug that must be weaned from gradually to avoid severe bodily harm. Some serious problems may need the assistance and guidance of properly qualified and knowledgeable persons. In the case of drug addiction, a person's heart can stop if they just go cold turkey off a drug, so they need someone who is knowledgeable and able to help them wean themselves from it.

Recognize and control self-defeating thought or reasoning patterns. Justifications such as, "Just this once." or "Everybody does it," must never be allowed to enter your thoughts. Resolve not to start a new pattern of giving way to pressures from friends or others.

This is one of the toughest challenges in habit breaking. We must keep our eyes on the goal. We have to make sure we do not give in to our old habit and get hooked again because Satan knows that once we have overcome a sin, it is easier for us to slip back into that if we are not paying attention and not constantly putting on the armor of God and fighting that sin. The same holds true for physical habits.

It is difficult to break habits, to give up entrenched sins. Most people slip from time to time in the process of struggling against a bad habit. Failure is only guaranteed if we give up. If we are a person who never gives up, then we should have an easier time of overcoming them. But people who are so strongly entrenched in never giving up can also be stubborn, and it can be harder to overcome a bad habit.

Step 5: We must be convinced that breaking the bad habit is worthwhile. Motivation is vital. No one can overcome a habit who does not want to, or who cannot find the resources and determination to do so. We in God's church have a power beyond all others that we can call upon to help us overcome the very worst of bad habits and sins.

To change from the selfish, inflowing way of self-absorption to the way of proper concern for ourselves and love for others ultimately requires God's help, in addition to resources we find in ourselves. But we must first want to change. If we do not seriously want to change our habits, we never will. This means that we must have our reward clearly in mind. Our rewards will match our habits, whether good or bad.

Ecclesiastes 2:10 Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor.

So the pleasure that he got, out of the rewards of his physical labor, was all the rewards that there was. If the rewards, or the pleasure that he got were from a bad habit or a sin, then the rewards he got were not just momentary pleasure, but long term sin. Who knows with all of the concubines and wives that Solomon had if he did not have sexually transmitted diseases. It is almost a given, in one way, although the law of the kings was that if anybody touched any of them (the concubines), that they would be killed. So he was the only one being sexually immoral with them so maybe it did not effect him in that way. I have wondered about that from time to time. He must have suffered from many of his sins because nothing was kept from him as king.

Step 6: We must cease from the habit immediately, not gradually. Though sometimes difficult, completely halting the negative behavior immediately is by far the most effective method of breaking bad habits. This is known, whether you are in the church or in the world, to be absolutely true. We have all seen it and experienced it, but we tend not to apply it in our own lives.

Biblically, this is the second step in repentance. Do not put off the decision. We cannot expect success with a half-hearted or weak effort; we must be strongly motivated to change, realizing the potential consequences if we do not.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

So, with his long life, and the wisdom that God gave him, this is what Solomon concluded. Whatever you do, do not do it half-heartedly, do it with your all, especially things that are

related to your salvation.

You have heard of smokers who tried to beat smoking by eating candy and ended up addicted to candy! There are far better ways to beat bad habits. The most effective long-term solution is simply this: to break a bad habit, begin a new, good habit—but the competing habit must be a positive one, not just a different one.

Instead of eating to cure feelings of frustration or sadness, we can start a positive habit by walking, jogging, or working in the yard or garden, or working on labor intensive hobbies. Or, better yet, reach for your Bible instead of food. If you get a hunger feeling, the first thing you should do is drink water. Experts have found that when your body thinks it is hungry, it is really craving moisture because of dehydration.

Certain behavior modification therapies attempt to wear out the bad habit until personal disgust and exhaustion weaken its hold. If a person is addicted to a certain food, the therapist may attempt to associate the food with some unpleasant experience. I have heard of some parents, over the years, who have caught their teenagers smoking, and they will make them smoke an entire pack, or several packs of cigarettes, one after the other until they are green in the face or so sick that they are disgusted with cigarettes and never touch one again for the rest of their life. I am not advising that, because I do not know what the effects of several packs of cigarettes could do to a person. It could kill them I would suspect.

This is known as aversion therapy. Its merits are debatable, though, in the absence of strong motivation on the part of the person with the habit. As the old saying goes, "A person convinced against his will is of the same opinion still". There has to be a conviction. We must decisively resolve to change and quit the wrong habit immediately. Do not procrastinate, especially with sin.

Step 7: We should be willing to help others who have the same habit, after we have broken our own habit. When someone who has "been there, done that" helps someone who is still there, the motivational benefits to both are great.

I Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."

The application of this principle is associated with helping someone avoid and overcome his sin.

James 5:20 Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

He who turns a sinner from a wicked path does a work which is acceptable to God.

The steps I just outlined can be applied to overcoming any bad habit, but they will only help someone who really wants to change.

Changing from a negative, miserable, harmful way of life, to a positive, happy, productive way involves changing human nature, and that requires the additional power of the Holy Spirit, especially for the more serious habits and sins. No matter what habits we may have, the power of the Holy Spirit can overcome them. Jesus Christ resisted forming any bad habits and overcame all temptations and lived a sinless life because of the full measure of the power of the Holy Spirit.

I Timothy 1: 7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

When we make comments such as, "I cannot overcome this habit, it is just too hard," what we are really saying is that we will not. Basically, we are refusing to overcome sin and energy dissipaters. God commands us to overcome; therefore, any refusal to overcome bad habits is rebelliousness. Every last one of us in God's church find ourselves in a certain stance of rebelliousness. We have to constantly work on ridding ourselves of these bad habits for our entire lives.

God is interested in developing strong, righteous character in every one of us. He wants us to live in a way that benefits us and others. He wants us to be joyous, fruitful, and happy in the way that we are living.

No one who has been overcome by bad, sinful habits—no one incorrigibly steeped in a selfish, harmful way of life—will ever enter God's Kingdom.

I Corinthians 6:9-10 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, [partiers] nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

They just will not. It is an absolute fact.

In contrast, the apostle Paul's epistle to Titus is a compact doctrinal statement that reminds Titus of his responsibility to organize the churches in Crete by appointing elders. He reviews the spiritual qualifications that these spiritual leaders must meet.

Titus 1:5-6 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.

Not only the man and his wife but his children also have to reflect an attitude that is the opposite of dissipation. They should be subordinate to their parents and living their lives in ways that are not debaucheries, drunkenness, overeating, and that sort of thing. The children of a

man being considered for the ministry should not be justly accused of dissipation. This should not be part of their character. If they were guilty of such conduct, it should be seen as reason enough why the man should not be ordained to the ministry. It would show that he has a dissipated, disorderly, unruly, and ungoverned family.

To fulfill God's purpose for us, we have to make sure that we record in our character the finest, most positive, most beneficial, and self-sacrificing habits possible, rejecting everything that harms, is selfish, or does not achieve right goals. In God's Family, there will be no bad habits!

Improving our lives physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually is largely a matter of changing or overcoming bad habits. It is a matter of developing new, better, and more dominating habit patterns of thinking, acting, and feeling.

It is important that we apply these things personally to ourselves. We have seen that bad habits must be avoided. And, if we fail to do so we will continue to needlessly lose our strength, and become spiritually limp and weak.

Our God is not weak and feeble. He is completely able to protect us and provide us with strength. He defends us and sustains us in the trials of life. The God whom we acknowledge as our God is not one whose strength fails, but is powerful, especially when His aid is needed.

Psalm 68:35 O God, You are more awesome than Your holy places.
The God of Israel is He who gives strength and power to His people.
Blessed be God!