

The Cumulative Effect of Our Little Choices

By Randy Alcorn | May 8, 2017



Have you ever seen a sink hole? Cars can be parked on a street day after day, and everything appears normal, then one day the asphalt caves in and cars disappear into a gigantic hole.

Everybody says, “That hole came out of nowhere.” But they’re wrong. The hole appears suddenly but the process that led to it has gone on for many years. The underground erosion was invisible, but it was there all along.

Likewise, sometimes when a man commits adultery and abandons his family, it appears to have come “out of the clear blue sky.” It hasn’t.

Sink holes remind us of two things: first, something can look good on the outside, when underneath major problems have been going on for years, and disaster’s about to happen. Second, our lives are affected by little choices, which have cumulative effects that can result in either moral strength or moral disaster.

A battering ram may hit a fortress gate a thousand times, and no one impact seems to have an effect, yet finally the gate caves in. Similarly, sinful actions don’t come out of

nowhere—they're the cumulative product of little moral compromises made over time, which ultimately result in ungodly behavior. On the other hand, it's equally true that godly actions are the cumulative product of small, habitual, and Christ-honoring choices for righteousness.

Who Are You Becoming?

Every day we're becoming someone—the question is, who? Author Jerry Bridges, hearing me address this, told me that Dawson Trotman, founder of The Navigators, used to say, "You are going to be what you are now becoming."

Scripture speaks of this process of character development: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" ([2 Corinthians 3:18](#)).

Who you become will be the cumulative result of the daily choices you make. "The path of the righteous is like the first light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day" ([Proverbs 4:18](#)). This is why Scripture continually warns us against wrong choices: "Do not enter the path of the wicked and do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on" ([Proverbs 4:14–15](#)).

You become like what you choose to behold. Behold Christ, you become Christlike. Gaze upon superficiality and immorality, and it's equally predictable what you'll become.

Choices for Godliness

"A long obedience in the same direction," to borrow a Eugene Peterson phrase, is sustained by the small choices we make each day. Most of us know the difference between eating cottage cheese and donuts, or the difference between a daily workout and spending life on a couch. What I eat and whether I exercise will determine the state of my body. The same is true of our spiritual lives. Whether I read Scripture and great books, or spend my best hours watching TV and looking at my phone, will make me into the person I will be several years from now. I should discipline myself today, not for discipline's sake, but for the purpose of godliness ([1 Timothy 4:7, 8](#)).

Psalm 1 says the one who continually meditates on God's Word "is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither."

Trees do not choose where to place themselves, but we do. We determine what our sources of nourishment will be.

Developing Godly Habits

Following Christ isn't magic. It requires repeated actions on our part, which develop into habits and life disciplines. Our spirituality hinges on the development of these little habits, such as Bible reading and memorization and prayer. In putting one foot in front of the other day after day, we become the kind of person who grows in Christlikeness. Once we develop Christ-honoring habits and experience their rewards, we'll instinctively turn our minds to what makes us happy in Christ.

A decade from now, would you like to look back at your life, knowing you've made consistently good decisions about eating right and exercising regularly? Sure. But there's a huge gap between wishes and reality. The bridge over the gap is self-control, a fruit of the Spirit ([Galatians 5:22–23](#)).

The key to self-control is discipline, which produces a long-term track record of small choices in which we yield to God's Spirit, resulting in new habits and lifestyles. In fact, Spirit-control and self-control are interrelated in Scripture, because godly self-control is a yielding of self to the Holy Spirit.

It's true we are creatures of habit—but it's also true Christ can empower us to form *new* habits.

Your Choices Today

So how can you start to make the right small choices? [Ephesians 5:15-16](#) tells us to “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time.” Why not redeem two hours of your day that you would have spent on television, newspaper, video games, phone, working overtime, or hobbies? Change your habits. Spend one hour meditating on and/or memorizing Scripture. Spend the other hour reading a great book. Share what you're learning with your spouse and children, or a friend.

Listen to Scripture and audio books and praise music while you fold clothes, pull weeds, or drive. Say no to talk radio or sports radio, not because they're bad but because you have something better to do. Fast from television, the Internet, and social media for a week. Discover how much more time you have. Redeem that time by

establishing new habits of cultivating your inner life and learning to abide in Christ. “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” ([John 15:5](#)).

May we call upon Christ’s strength today to make choices that will honor Him, bring us great happiness, and help us become the kind of people we want to be ten years from now!

Looking for further resources to help you grow in your Christian walk? Randy has compiled [a list](#) of recommended books, blogs, websites, and software to help readers go deeper into God’s Word and draw closer to Jesus.



Randy Alcorn ([@randyalcorn](#)) is the author of over fifty [books](#) and the founder and director of [Eternal Perspective Ministries](#).