

Cowboys, Easy Chairs, and Bad Habits

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Someone has said that bad habits are like easy chairs - easy to get into, but hard to get out of. Ain't it so? Life sometimes seems unfair, doesn't it? It's so difficult to form good habits while the forming of bad ones is done almost without doing anything. You just sort of let them happen. They usually demand very little time, and they are acquired in such subtle ways that they become routine almost without notice.

“For by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.” (2 Peter 2:19). “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” (Romans 6:16). What does that say to us? Better watch out what we allow to control us. Bad habits control.

Habits - good or bad - depend on repetition for survival. If you do something over and over long enough it will become an almost unnoticeable routine, a habit. Obviously, those things we enjoy doing are more likely to become habits, so it behooves to be careful to like the right things. If we don't like a thing, we respond by staying away from it.

Breaking habits isn't easy. That's why good ones are so good and bad ones are so bad. I don't know why, but it seems that bad habits are harder to break than good ones.

If we're to cease some bad habit we have to begin by stunting its regularity. And if we are to develop a good habit, we have to have such a conviction as regards its usefulness or necessity that it results in our repeating the action often enough that it becomes a beneficial regularity.

The mind is the incubator for the thoughts we choose. We decide when and what information we will allow into our minds. Our thoughts are our own - nobody does our thinking for us. If we allow our minds to constantly dwell on evil, lewd information, like pornographic material, that type of recurring thinking will soon become habitual. And the people who have studied that kind of mental addiction have concluded that pornography, and things like it, may well be the most difficult of all such mental habits to break. It's easy to start, hard to stop.

We cannot keep bad thoughts from passing through our minds from time to time, but we don't have to invite the evil in and give it a place to stay. We are to “give no place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:27). If we give him residency in our minds long enough he will get a foothold. Too many people not only allow him to come in, but give him a place to sit, something to drink, and a comfortable conversation to enjoy.

To expel evil thoughts as soon as possible is one of the best habits a person can develop and maintain. Impurities have no legitimate place in the Christian's heart. Constant clean thinking is a splendid deterrent to evil advances.

One of the best ways to preclude the devil's invasion into our thinking is to acquire the habit of regular Bible reading. Bible reading puts God in our minds, and the habit of rapid and consecutive contact with God's word is no doubt the most effective way to combat evil encroachments. Good information crowds out evil thinking. "With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You." (Psalm 119:10-11).

Another thing – It's easy to fall into the habit of speaking what you hear around you every day. The world routinely uses foul language and ungodly speech. It is becoming commonplace to hear dirty language in the media, in music and entertainment, sports events, even on the school ground. Language that would not have been tolerated just a few years ago has become routine - habitual - in today's age. It's fashionable, even, to say certain words and phrases of impiety, especially among the young.

Clean speech is another good habit to acquire. We don't need filthy words or inordinate vows with which to express ourselves and we should speak in such a way that it becomes obvious that we are not with the "in crowd" when it comes to dirty talking. We should habitually use words and phrases that are clean, devoid of putridness or impiety.

It's hard to break bad habits. But just as the West Texas cowboy had to "break" the horses to show them who's boss, even so we must "break" bad habits by showing them that we are greater than they are.