

This is the last in our series called, Small things, Big difference. We've seen that many people make resolutions at New Year, usually with the best of intentions, but most never stick to them. Often it's because they try to make too big an adjustment all at once and what we've discovered is that it is not really about making big changes, rather it's learning **that it's the small things that no one sees that result in the big things that everyone wants.** Let me say it again, because this is such an important principle. We have to understand that it's often the small things in our lives that no one else sees that make all the big difference in the things that everyone else wants.

In week one we thought about thoughts, and why they matter so much – it's because our thoughts influence our words, and our words influence our actions, and our actions become our habits and our habits have the potential to create a destiny.

King Solomon, the wisest person who ever lived said this: **As a person thinks in his heart, so he is.** In order to change our thinking we must do two things:

1. **Learn how to capture destructive thoughts** - 2 Cor 10:3-5 *“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”*
2. **Fix our thoughts on spiritual things** - *“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”*

So, the first step is to begin to deal with our thinking.

Step two is to realise that words are incredibly powerful and they can bring hurt, harm and death or they can bring life. Our thought for this was: **If you want to change the life you have, change the words you speak.** Here are two rules about life-giving words.

Number 1 - **If you can't say something helpful, don't say anything at all.**

Ephesians 4:29 *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

The second rule is: **if you think something good, say it.** Proverbs 16:24 *Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.*

Today I want to talk to you about our habits, or to use another word our disciplines, because we are what we repeatedly do. How many of you would say that you are very disciplined? How many would say fairly disciplined? How many would say not at all disciplined? What I want to suggest is that we are all disciplined – there are things that we do repeatedly and some of them are good and some of them are not so

good. I'm pretty disciplined about washing every day, and eating; not so much about going to the gym, and definitely not about the ironing!

So, here's a thought that I hope will help you. It is actually fairly obvious, but may be so obvious that we miss it.... If you want to live a more discipline life we need to know what discipline is – **discipline is simply choosing between what we want now and what we want most.** Discipline is simply choosing between what we want now and what we want most.

Think about that thing that you're really good at and that you love. If you're sitting there saying, "I'm not good at anything" you need to get online and watch that sermon again! That's a lie the devil would have you believe but God says he's created you and given you ability and he wants you to use it. So think about something you are good at and if you look hard at that thing you'll see consistent disciplines.

Any area that you're not succeeding in, you've got some disciplines, they're just not the right disciplines. We can be so inconsistent in the right disciplines. For example, you might say, "I'm going to work out this year." And so you're going to get going and you're going to wake up early and you do it on Monday and you do it on Tuesday. And on Wednesday, "Oh, shoulder's kind of hurting," so you take a rest day. And on Thursday, "It's kind of cold outside" and so you take a rest day. And you started but then you end up stopping.

You say, "I'm going to be disciplined in my eating." And so Monday, you do it. And Tuesday, you do it, and Wednesday. And you've got momentum Thursday and Friday. And then on Saturday, you're rushed, your kids have to go here and there. And suddenly, the golden arches start calling your name. And the next thing you know, you have lost momentum. You started strong and yet you end up so inconsistent. I totally and completely relate to that and understand. And what's even more encouraging to me is that the Apostle Paul, who wrote a big portion of the New Testament, arguably one of the most effective spiritual leaders in the history of Christianity, he struggled with this very same problem.

If you wonder why you're inconsistent then listen again to what Paul says in Romans 7:15 *I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.* I know I can relate to that: I want to do this thing, but I end up doing that. I want to do what's right but I don't do it. Instead I do the very thing I hate. I don't want to do what's wrong but I end up doing it anyway.

He says in verse 20, "But if I do what I don't want to do" -- and this is interesting -- he says, "I'm not really the one doing it." Okay, then who is it, Paul? Who is it? He says, "It's actually the sin living in me that does it."

By nature we are not self-disciplined. By nature, sin tends to pull us away from what God wants, and drags us toward doing what is wrong, rather than what is right. So if you've ever felt like this, in verse 24, he says, "Oh, what a miserable person I am. Who will free me from this life dominated by sin and death?" And then he answers the question and this is so important. In other words, "Who can help me overcome the temptation? Who can help me walk away from this sin? Who can help me be consistent? Who can help me have the right disciplines?" And he says, in verse 25, "Thank God, the answer" -- and then, if you notice, it's not in a principal but the answer is in a person – he says, "Who can deliver me?" The answer is "in Jesus Christ, our Lord," with his help, I can be different. With his help, I can change. By his power, I can be transformed.

Today is the day to be set free – you're never going to be truly self-disciplined because self is bent towards sin. But when the Spirit takes over in you, the very same spirit that raised Christ from the grave, you can be Spirit disciplined to do what God wants you to do. Who can deliver me from this body of death? Thank God the answer is found in Jesus Christ our Lord. By the power of Christ, we will choose what we want most, over what we want now. We're going to train our bodies to be disciplined in what matters most.

So how do we move from where we are now to becoming disciplined in the right disciplines? Listen to these words of Paul as he talks to the Corinthian Christians about running in a race – they would have understood clearly what he was talking about because they were very into games and they held what would be Olympics for us. 1 Cor 9:24-25 *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.* All of the athletes go into strict training – they are disciplined. They are running to win. They are running to be the best. The gymnasium was a prominent and important building in that culture. Athletes would choose to go to train and they had a very strict diet. In a 10 month programme, they would be exposed to extreme cold and extreme heat, so that their body would learn to perform in any condition. In fact, they were so into this race that they would train and run naked, so that there was nothing to hinder them from doing well. And what were they running for? A wreath of leaves, and a bit of passing fame.

As followers of Jesus we are living for eternal glory. We are living to stand in front of the presence of God, to bring him glory and use everything within us to make his name known. So suddenly, we are not just self-disciplined, we have a secret weapon. The Spirit helps us overcome the power of sin: we are Spirit disciplined. Who can help me overcome the temptation and power of sin? The Holy Spirit can. He has the power to help me overcome.

So, in verse 26, Paul says: *Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.* He's running with purpose in every step.

He's not pretending, his enemy is real, and his enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy. So what does he do? Verse 27: *I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.* He disciplines his body like an athlete, training it to do what it should.

When we understand this and decide to choose what we want most over what we want now we are running with purpose in every step. We take one step and say, "You know what? I'm saying no to the extra five minutes in bed, and yes to reading a chapter of the Bible." "I'm seeing now to the unhealthy and yes to the healthy option." "I'm saying no to a third hour of TV and yes to being present, with my family."

The more steps we take, the more we begin to change and we begin to hear ourselves say: "I woke up this morning with the holy spirit living inside me, and I will glorify God's today." "I run with purpose and every step because God is directing each one." "I am weak, and want what is convenient and easy, but more than that, I want to bring glory to God, and I rely on him to help me."

I hope you're not imagining that somehow this is very easy for me; that somehow you think because I'm a Minister, I am naturally more disciplined. The power of sin is just as real in my life as it is in anybody else's. And this whole area is one in which I still have a lot of work to do. There is a book by Charles Duhigg, called 'The power of habit'. In it he talks about what he calls 'keystone habits' which, if they exist in your life, create other positive momentum and leads to other positive disciplines. If however you compromise on those most important habits is a negative spiral and it makes you more undisciplined and other areas of life. Over this past few months one of my keystone habits has been to go to the gym. I tried at different times over the years, but without anyone guiding me and checking up on me I never kept up. Last year I joined a gym on a joint gym and golf package, intending to play much more golf than be in the gym. As it happened, worked out the other way and I began to like going to the gym. I lost some weight, I felt better and I had more energy. Then as we came into November and December, things began to get even busier than usual and there were more things that required an actual start time, it became increasingly difficult to get to the gym. And it was easy to miss a day which became two days, which became a week. And then when you go back what you were doing before seems harder, and is because you've lacked consistency. And there were more days when I didn't feel so energetic. And so, surprised as I am, I've discovered that I miss regular time at the gym and the benefits that it brings.

And so the point is, when God helps me to choose what I want most over what I want now. It creates a forward spiritual momentum in my life. I am led by the spirit of God and my steps have a purpose because I'm running a race that really matters. And if I'm going to glorify God and what I do I need to be disciplined.

So here are two application questions: the first is this - what do you want most? Think about it for a moment. What do you want most? Maybe you want to lose

weight; maybe you're lonely and want a friend; maybe you want to get close to God. What is it that you want most?

The second question is about discipline - what do you need to do now to have what you want most? What one discipline do you need to add to your life now that will help lead you towards what you ultimately want most? Want to lose weight - decide how you want to exercise, tell somebody and let them hold you accountable. Looking for a friend - decide to be a friend, regardless of the cost. Maybe you want a new job. Maybe God has been nudging you towards a new area of service. Maybe God is calling you to Ministry. I don't know what it would be for you, but when you seek God and say, "What do you want most for me? What one thing do I need to do now that will help me have later what you want me to have most?" I believe God will answer that question, and give you the power to succeed.

I want to close with the reminder that in 2015. We are going to think big but we are willing to start small. Our thoughts matter because our life will always move in the direction of our strongest thoughts. Therefore, we will take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. We will think of those things that are excellent, pure and lovely and will let God renew our mind to follow his truth. Our words have the power of life and death. Therefore we will not let any unwholesome talk come out of our mouths, but we will make every effort to build each other up, because if we want to change the life we have, we will change the words we speak. We will speak words of life because that's the way we want it.

We will, by the power of Christ, choose what we want most over what we want now. We would discipline our bodies so that we run with purpose in every step, recognising that sin in us will try to take us off course, but Christ in us will keep us on track. Therefore, we ask the Holy Spirit to do what we cannot do to enable us to be faithful in the small things. God says whoever is faithful in the small things he will trust with bigger things. And one day when God promote should influence more people, to make a bigger difference in the world, someone might look at you and say, "What big changes did you have to make to be the way you are?" And then you realise that it really is the small things that no one sees that result in the big things that everyone wants.