The Problem with Habits...

From all the books that are out on the topic, we should know by now that habits can make you or break you—bad habits can wreak havoc on your life, while good habits can make you effective and successful. The problem, as everyone knows, is that bad habits are really hard to break and good habits are really hard to sustain. How do you do both?

“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”
(Romans 13:14)

“You are not born with your habits—you weave them and wear them. Your habits can be the rags of self-centered addictions or the robes of Christ-centered self-control.”
—June Hunt

Q: “How do I know if I have a destructive habit or a hidden addiction that is not consistent with God’s will?”

 Desire to be accountable before God, and take an honest appraisal of your life. Ask yourself whether you have any habits or desires that would cause you to answer yes to the following questions:

The Compulsive Checklist:

☐ Are my thoughts consumed with it?
☐ Is my time scheduled around it?
☐ Could my health be harmed by it?
☐ Does my guilt increase following it?
☐ Are my finances affected by it?
☐ Am I defensive when asked about it?
☐ Are my relationships hurt by it?
☐ Am I upset when I can’t do it?

“Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”
(Psalm 139:23–24)
Beauty or Beast

A German shepherd can be trained as the ferocious accomplice to evil intent. Yet, this same highly intelligent canine is also schooled to be a helpful companion for the visually impaired. This is learned behavior! In the same way, habits are learned behaviors that become a powerful force in your life for good or bad. Every habit is either Christ-centered or self-centered . . . a virtue or a vice . . . potentially a beauty or a beast!

All habits are . . .

Habitual—occur with regularity
Automatic—happen without thinking
Behavioral—reflect inner morals
Intense—grow stronger and more ingrained
Tenacious—persist and become hard to change
Satisfying—provide a degree of pleasure

“No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”
(Luke 16:13)

Key Verse to Memorize

“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”
(Philippians 4:13)

Key Passage to Read and Reread

1 Corinthians 6:9–20

Steps to Self-control

- Start with a commitment to God.² (Deuteronomy 32:4)
- Separate yourself from sin.³ (Romans 6:1–2)
- Set a new goal.⁴ (2 Corinthians 5:9–10)
- Stand on the truth.⁵ (Romans 6:6)
- Substitute God’s thoughts for your thoughts.⁶ (Romans 12:1–2)
- Surrender your will.⁷ (Romans 6:19)
- Stay on track.⁸ (Romans 5:1–2)

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control . . . . Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”
(Galatians 5:22–24)

Harvesting Good Habits

- Sow the seeds of moral sensitivity. (Psalm 119:11)
  —Measure all your behavior with the scriptural yardstick.
- Sow the seeds of accountability. (Proverbs 28:13)
  —Daily or weekly, talk with a friend who will help you “kick the habit.”
- Sow the seeds of gratefulness. (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18)
  —Keep a prayer journal, and give thanks for answered prayer.
- Sow the seeds of forgiveness. (Matthew 6:14–15)
  —Remind yourself of the many times God forgives you.
- Sow the seeds of selflessness. (Philippians 2:3)
  —Ask God to shine a spotlight on your acts of selfishness.
- Sow the seeds of communion with God. (Psalm 104:34)
  —Seek out time every day to be alone with God.

“Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love.”
(Hosea 10:12)
Hitting the Target with Positive Truth

Target #1 . . . God’s purpose for me is to display Christ’s character. (Romans 8:29)
• “I want to be the best representative of Christ that I can be.”
• “I will yield to His control and do what is best for my body.”

Target #2 . . . God’s priority for me is to change my thinking. (Romans 12:2)
• “Nothing is too hard for God. I know I can change in His strength.”
• “I will replace my defeated thinking with positive promises of victory.”

Target #3 . . . God’s plan for me is to rely on Christ’s power to change me. (Philippians 4:13)
• I can give Christ increasing control of my life in order to taper off gradually . . .
—by carrying a limited number of cigarettes for each day along with a gradual cutback schedule
—by making myself accountable to someone who is willing to help

Related Topics . . .
• Overeating: Freedom from Food Fixation
• Perfectionism: The Push to Perform
• Procrastination: Preventing the Decay of Delay
• Purpose in Life: Pinpointing Your Priorities
• Temptation: Promise of Pleasure—Lured by a Lie

5. Lutzer, How to Say “No” to a Stubborn Habit, 52–53 and 100–8.
7. Lutzer, How to Say “No” to a Stubborn Habit, 76–77.
8. Lutzer, How to Say “No” to a Stubborn Habit, 98–108.