



The key to life transformation—for yourself and then for others—is building habits that become part of your life. In *8 Habits for Growth*, Darryl Dash wants to show you the eight long-term practices—all very doable—that will lead to permanent growth if you incorporate them into your life.

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HABIT #1 SUMMARY



Make Time

HABIT

Make Time. Specifically, make at least 10–15 minutes per day to work through this book, and once you're done, to continue practicing these habits.

ASPIRATION

To make room to develop lasting habits that will help you grow over a lifetime.

CHOOSE YOUR ACTIONS

Choose one or more of the following:

- Pick a time of day when you're alert and not likely to be distracted. Make an appointment with yourself.
- Set an alarm to remind you of your daily appointment.
- Post a reminder of your new habit where you'll see it throughout the day.

HABIT 1, LESSON 1

Introducing Habit #1: Make Time

ONE OF THE KEYS to discipleship is to make time.

Welcome to your first official day of *8 Habits for Growth!*

Today, and in the coming days, I'll tell you more about what to expect and why it matters.

But first, it's time to introduce your new habit: **Make Time**. Specifically, make at least 10–15 minutes per day to work through this book, and once you're done, to continue practicing your habits for growth.

Today, and every day for as long as you're working through this book, and then beyond this book as you practice these habits, I want to encourage you to make time.

I know how busy things can get. Work seems to pile up everywhere. There's never enough time to get everything done.

I get it. We're all busy. But there's a problem with busyness.

Busyness can keep us from getting what's most important done.

8 HABITS FOR GROWTH

I wish I could solve the busyness problem, but I can't. I've tried. We all have twenty-four hours, and an abundance of opportunities and responsibilities.

I can't change the challenges you face, but I know this: *Focusing a small amount of your time each day or week to make time for what's most important will add up to big changes in knowing God and becoming who you were made to be.*

Here's what you can do.

- **Decide how much time, realistically, you can spend on this book and these habits each day.** Maybe you are able to get up ten or fifteen minutes earlier, read during your commute or break time, turn off the news, or spend a little less time on social media in the evenings. Or maybe your schedule flows better when you book an appointment with yourself for a longer amount of time a few times a week. Go with what works. The important thing is to decide that time spent working on these habits is essential.
- **Make your decision a reality.** Unfortunately, we don't have a time dispenser. Nobody can give you that, although it would be nice! Whether you grab it, claim it, make it, or give it to yourself as a gift, the key is to take action. Moving from decision to reality always involves an action step.

This time is your commitment to knowing and living the gospel in every part of the one and only life that is uniquely you. Take an action step to protect this time: change the wake-up time on your phone, make a recurring appointment in your calendar, post a reminder, or tell a friend or family member about your decision.

By the way, if you don't know what will work best for you, I encourage you to try the different suggestions mentioned or come

up with a few ideas of your own and then experiment to see what works well for you most of the time.

Speaking of what works well, let's take a moment to set healthy expectations. Discovering what works well for you means that sometimes you will discover what does not work for you. If you miss a day or your scheduled appointment time, there's no need for self-criticism. Instead, take a moment to acknowledge the reality, set a new appointment time, and carry on.

I call this the Clean Slate Policy. It's God's policy, and Jesus made it possible, so it's a great rule for life no matter who you are!

HOW DO THESE HABITS WORK?

Here's a little about how *8 Habits for Growth* will work.

In total, I'll give you eight new habits to practice. But don't worry: we'll build them one at a time. The habits are designed to be simple and doable. You get to decide how to apply the habits to your life. Over time, these small habits add up to some big changes in your life.

Each habit has five lessons, five sets of questions, and a review. You can do them over a week or two, or take the time you need. Each lesson or set of questions should take ten or so minutes.

The important thing is to take the time you need to build the habits. I also encourage you to work through this material with others. It's more enjoyable and effective than doing it by yourself.

I want *8 Habits for Growth* to fit into your life. It will take some time; the goal is to make it sustainable. Start small, and then build from there.

LET'S GET STARTED

This first habit is a time to get settled in. I'll introduce you to the overall approach, and put some important pieces in place.

For today, smile, relax, and drop by the online community at Gospel for Life (members.gospelforlife.com). You can join with others who are working through this material and share your thoughts and your progress.

In the next lesson you get practical and take action with the first habit: Make Time.

I'm glad you've started *8 Habits for Growth*, and we can't wait to see what God will do during our time together.

WHAT TO DO TODAY

- **Ask for God's help.** Take a moment to pray. Ask for God's help in making time.
- **Choose your pace.** Take one week to work through each habit (lesson and question each day), or take two weeks per habit (lesson one day; questions the next day), or set your own pace. The choice is yours. I recommend two weeks per habit for most people. This gives you the time you need to really build each habit into your life.
- **Set aside at least 10–15 minutes a day** to work through this material each day to work through this book. Remember: the goal isn't to complete the book, but to build the habits from this book into your life. Start now by making time. It's the foundational step for all that follows.
- **Join with others.** If you're reading this book alone, it's not too late to invite someone else to join you. We grow best with others, not alone.

- **Join the online community** at Gospel for Life (members.gospelforlife.com).

Reflect and Respond

REVIEW

- Busyness can keep us from getting what's most important done.
- Focusing a small amount of your time each day to make time for what's most important will add up to big changes.
- Decide how much time, realistically, you can spend on the habits in this book.
- Make your decision a reality: take an action step.

CONSIDER

- Do you thrive on daily routines? Do you want to add or grow a daily habit?
- Does your weekly rhythm include some days that are busier? Consider your weekly rhythm and identify when you think you will be most successful in making time (for example: 20–30 minutes on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday).

DISCUSS

Here are some questions to help you get started. Take the time you need to set yourself up for success.

1. What do you want to get out of *8 Habits for Growth*?
2. How much time can you realistically spend on *8 Habits for Growth* each day?
3. As you look ahead this week, what things could get in the way of you making time?
4. What action step will you take today to make time and stay on track with *8 Habits for Growth*?

HABIT 1, LESSON 2

Small, Consistent Habits

DON'T BUILD BIG HABITS. Aim for small, consistent habits.

Building habits is hard. Today we're looking at what science can tell us about what works, and what does not work, when we want to create or grow a habit.

TINY HABITS

Do you want to change your behavior? Change your habits. Habits are the unconscious, automatic routines that shape our lives. Charles Duhigg, author of *The Power of Habit*, defines habit as “a behavior that starts as a choice, and then becomes a nearly unconscious pattern.”¹ We all have habits, good and bad. Because a large portion of our lives is lived by habit, it's essential that we learn to build good habits that will help us grow.

Habits are powerful, but they're also pretty easy to understand. We want something (desire). We take action to get it (behavior).

And if it works, we may repeat this behavior the next time we face the same situation (prompt). The more we repeat this pattern, the more ingrained the habit becomes.

According to BJ Fogg, a behavior scientist, there's no guesswork involved in building habits. Fogg writes:

In order to design successful habits and change your behaviors, you should do three things.

- Stop judging yourself.
- Take your aspirations and break them down into tiny behaviors.
- Embrace mistakes as discoveries and use them to move forward.²

In other words, the place to start is to experiment with small, consistent actions to find what will help us reach our goal. Fogg isn't alone in encouraging us to start small. Saint Basil of Caesarea, who lived almost 1,700 years ago, offered this advice:

Don't, then, immediately try to force an over-strict discipline on yourself. . . . *It's better to advance in godliness little by little.* So then, withdraw by degrees from this life's indulgences. By slow degrees cast off all your customary bad habits. . . . Master one passion first, and then launch your attack against another. By this method, you will eventually win the victory over them all.³

The best way to make changes in your life is to build small, consistent habits.

WHAT THIS MEANS

What does this mean for the eight habits in this book?

Get clear on your goal. Where do you want to grow in your life? What would success look like for you?

Make it easy. Fogg says that it's best not to set a goal to floss all of our teeth. Instead, set a goal to floss one tooth. That behavior is so small that you're likely to do it. You just may decide to floss the rest of them once you've started.

I encourage you to set small goals for the eight habits. Don't be too demanding at first. It's better to take small actions consistently than to take big actions occasionally.

Keep experimenting, and don't give up when you fail. Embrace mistakes. Become a student of your behavior. Learn from what doesn't work. Stay curious. Refuse to get discouraged.

You need more than information and motivation. Don't get me wrong. I will give you information, and I definitely want to motivate you. But we need more than content. We need to translate knowledge and motivation into action.

OVER TO YOU

My advice as we begin? Start small. Be realistic. Expect that things won't always go well. That's okay. Progress is better than perfection.

Anticipate problems. When things don't go well, see if you can shrink the challenge and make it even easier. Make it so small that you can't possibly fail.

When you begin a new habit, it's always a good idea to ask how likely you are to succeed. If you rate yourself lower than a 9/10, then shrink the action. Keep shrinking the action until you rate your likelihood of success at 9/10 or higher.

It's a great idea to relax and to take things slow. We're interested in creating lasting change. In the long run, tiny habits work best.

Don't get discouraged! Christopher Love encourages us: "God not only exactly takes notice of, but also tenderly cherishes and graciously rewards, the smallest beginnings and weakest measures of grace which He works in the hearts of His own people."⁴ Small, consistent actions are bigger than we think.

WHAT TO DO TODAY

- **Schedule 10–15 minutes of time each day** to work through this book.
- **Keep experimenting** to find what works best for you.

Reflect and Respond

REVIEW

- **Get specific.** Break down desired outcomes or goals into behaviors.
- **Make it easy.** Ask how you can shrink the behavior so it's easier to do.
- **Keep experimenting.** Treat mistakes as learning experiences.

CONSIDER

- Think of an action or behavior that was beneficial or uplifting and was easy to do. What did you do? Who were you with? Where were you? At what time of day or night? What prompted or encouraged you?
- Think of a recent task or behavior that was difficult for you. What did you do? Who were you with? Where were you? At what time of day or night? What made it difficult?
- What kinds of things make an action easier for you? What makes it harder? Be patient. Experiment with different approaches to building new habits in your life.

DISCUSS

Use these questions to move yourself forward. Take the time you need to learn a little more about yourself and grow your habit of making time.

1. How is the making time habit working for you?
2. What would it look like if you had a little more success with this habit?
3. How can you shrink this habit so that it works even better for you?
4. What's one good thing about this habit for you?
5. How will you remind yourself to practice this habit every day?

HABIT 1, LESSON 3

Why Are You Here?

TAKE THE TIME TO EXPLORE your motivations and goals.

You've started working through this book. You've decided to bite the bullet and take steps to grow over these next few weeks.

You may be here for any number of reasons. So I want to ask you two personal questions. What's your motivation? And what are your goals?

FIND YOUR MOTIVATION

It's possible that you started this book only because someone invited you. But I'm guessing that you have a desire to grow spiritually.

What motivates you to grow spiritually? What areas of dissatisfaction do you sense in your life right now? What's your big "why" for wanting to apply the gospel to every part of your life?

Is there a reason, right now, that you're making your growth a priority?

FIND YOUR GOALS

In just a few weeks, if you keep going, you'll have finished this book. You'll have read forty lessons, answered numerous questions, and practiced eight habits. I hope you'll also have enjoyed working through this book alone or, even better, with others.

This isn't a long time, but it's long enough to make meaningful progress. When you finish the last lesson, how do you hope that your life has changed?

For now, don't worry about being practical. Picture the future you. Where do you want to be? How do you want to feel? How will your life have changed? Try to describe your hopes and goals in as much detail as possible.

- I want to be . . .
- I want to feel . . .
- I want to change . . .

Don't worry about coming up with the perfect answers. It's sometimes hard to understand our own motivations and goals. Just make your best attempt.

WHAT TO DO TODAY

- **Look ahead** to your plans for tomorrow.
- **Decide when and where** you will practice your habit of making time.
- **Think about your motivations and goals:** Why do you really want to grow? How will your life have changed at the end of this book?
- **Keep making at least 10–15 minutes per day** to work through this book.

Reflect and Respond

REVIEW

- **Find your motivation**
- **Find your goals**

CONSIDER

- As you look at your life, where are you experiencing joy and satisfaction?
- Where are you dissatisfied?
- Is there a reason, right now, that you've made *8 Habits for Growth* a priority?

Don't worry about coming up with the perfect answers. It's sometimes hard to understand our own motivations and goals. Just make your best attempt.

DISCUSS

These are some of the most important questions for you to answer. Later in the book we'll come back to them.

Take the time to think about them as honestly as you can.

1. What's your big "why" for wanting to apply the gospel to every part of your life?
2. Why is [your previous answer] important to you?
3. What's the real challenge here for you?
4. Picture the "future you." Describe your hopes and goals in as much detail as possible.

I want to be . . .

I want to feel . . .

I want to change . . .

WHAT'S COMING UP

Keep practicing your habit of making time:

8 HABITS FOR GROWTH

- Take a few minutes today or tomorrow to look ahead at your plans and commitments for the coming week.
- Decide where and when you will practice this habit each day.
- Ask yourself if you need to shrink the habit.
- Create reminders of your habit to increase your chances of success.

Next, we'll go deeper with the role of the heart in how we change.

HABIT 1, LESSON 4

The End Game

REAL CHANGE HAPPENS at the level of the heart.

How do people change? Entire books have been written to answer this question.

People need knowledge to change, but knowledge isn't enough. We all know we should eat more vegetables, but we don't always do it. Reading books, attending classes, and learning new things are helpful, but they don't always change our lives.

Knowledge isn't enough. Neither is behavior change. We can try to change our actions for a while, but behavior is just the tip of the iceberg. Only a small percentage of our behavior is the outcome of conscious, deliberate choices. The rest of our actions and behaviors come from a much deeper place.

Many of our efforts to change focus on knowledge and behavior, and don't really work over the long term. We need to go a lot deeper if we want to change.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HEART

Real change happens at the deepest possible level. It happens in the heart.

The Bible contains an important truth:

Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it.

(Prov. 4:23 NIV)

Real change happens at the deepest possible level. It happens in the heart.

In Scripture, the heart represents the inner being of a person. It's more than just the mind or actions. It's the control center of our lives. According to the verse, everything we do comes out of our heart.

We often try to change our actions, thoughts, and feelings. God wants to go deeper and change us at the level of the heart, the source of all our behaviors.

Growth involves knowledge and action, but it goes much deeper. Real change happens at the level of the heart.

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

Jesus asked two of His disciples a penetrating question: "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:36). Their answer revealed a misshapen desire: they wanted to sit at Jesus' left and right hand, places of prominence. Jesus didn't just deal with their behaviors. He probed their desires, and then showed them how their desires could change to be more like His.

In the same passage, Jesus repeated the same question to a blind man named Bartimaeus. This time, the answer to Jesus' question

revealed a legitimate desire: “Rabbi, let me recover my sight” (Mark 10:51). Jesus answered his request and healed him.

“What do you want me to do for you?” What an insightful question. Our desires and longings determine everything about us. They shape our actions and behaviors, sometimes without us even knowing it. The Christian life involves asking God to change what we want. It’s praying something like this: “Father, teach me to want rightly, and help me to live in obedience to those right desires.”⁵

We need to aim for more than knowledge and actions. We need to experience change at the deepest level: in the heart.

Discipleship is about growing as a disciple of Jesus in every area of life. What comes to mind when you think of a mature Christian disciple? The goal of discipleship may surprise you.

Sam Storms, a pastor in Oklahoma, explains:

God is most glorified in us when we are most happy and delighted and satisfied in Him. . .

The single most important principle I ever discovered is this: the goal or purpose of the Christian is precisely the pursuit of happiness—in God. The reason for this is that there is no greater way to glorify God than to find in Him the happiness that my soul so desperately craves.⁶

Jesus told us that the greatest command is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). David, the psalmist, modeled this when he wrote:

As a deer pants for flowing streams,
so pants my soul for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.

(Ps. 42:1–2)

The goal of discipleship is happiness, joy, delight, satisfaction, and intimacy with God. The holiest person you will ever meet is also the happiest person you'll ever meet.

That's the kind of Christian maturity all of us can get behind.

The goal of discipleship is happiness, joy, delight, satisfaction, and intimacy with God.

THE STARTING PLACE

Christianity isn't about us changing ourselves. It's about God giving us a new heart. God promises to remove our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26).

God is holy. We are sinful. Something is wrong with all of us: our hearts are dead.

We can't fix that problem ourselves. Nothing we can do by ourselves can change the condition of our hearts. God must change us.

God has acted through Jesus to rescue us, change us, and bring us into relationship with Him. He promises to change our hearts.

God made you to desire Him. He made you for relationship with Him. The most important thing you can do to change is to stop living life on your own terms and to trust in Jesus. He will change you at the level of your heart, and you'll never be the same.

If you haven't already done so, this is the place to start. If you're working through this book with someone else, talk to them about what this means. Don't go further until you've settled the issue of God giving you a new heart.

THE PATH TO CHANGE

God changes us at a fundamental level when we trust in Jesus. He changes us from the inside out. We continue to grow as we learn to delight in Him.

If we want to deepen the transformation in our hearts, fight sin, and grow in grace, then this is the path. Revel in the beauty and splendor of God, and become happy in Him.

Sam Storms writes:

The only thing that will ultimately break the power of sin is passion for Jesus. The only thing that will guard me from being entrapped by sin is being entranced by Jesus. In other words, the key to holiness is falling in love!⁷

This is the ultimate goal of discipleship: to find our happiness in God.

WHAT TO DO TODAY

- **Celebrate your success** today with making time.
- **If you haven't already done so, ask God to give you a new heart.** If you're going through this book with someone, talk to them about what this means. Turn from self-reliance to Jesus, and ask Him to change you from the inside out.
- **Look ahead** to your plans for tomorrow and consider what challenges you may face in this habit of making time. Do you need to shrink the habit? Or do you need a bigger challenge? Decide what will work for you.
- **Commit** to when and where you will practice your habit of making 10–15 minutes a day to work through this material.

Reflect and Respond

REVIEW

- Efforts to change that focus on knowledge and behavior often fail in the long term.
- Real change happens in the heart. We are what we want.
- God changes us by giving us new hearts.
- The goal or purpose of the Christian is the pursuit of happiness in God.⁸

CONSIDER

How is making time working for you?

If it's not working the way you want it to, think about what's getting in your way. What could you do to

- shrink the habit?
- change the trigger?
- get encouragement from a friend, mentor, or coach?
- pursue happiness in God?

DISCUSS

1. The goal of discipleship is happiness in God. How is this different from the way you usually think about discipleship?
2. George Müller said, "The first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to get my soul to be happy in the Lord."⁹ What steps can you take today to make your soul happy in God?

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