

HOLY HABITS

10 Small Decisions



That Lead to a Big Life

Noah Herrin

Foreword by John Lindell

“A moment with Jesus will set you free. Your habits with Jesus will keep you free. Noah Herrin is an emerging voice in the church with a timely message that I truly believe needs to be heard. I would highly recommend *Holy Habits* to anyone who is looking to grow in intimacy with Jesus Christ.”

Jentezen Franklin, senior pastor, Free Chapel;
New York Times bestselling author

“In a world of shallow, the next generation needs a voice of their own that’s pointing them to the deep. In *Holy Habits*, Noah Herrin provides this generation with some practices they can spend a lifetime developing and deepening.”

Carey Nieuwhof, founder, The Art of Leadership Academy; bestselling author, *Didn’t See It Coming*

“In this amazing book, Noah Herrin gives ten practical habits that will make a giant positive impact on your life. Noah shows us how these changes are easy to implement but make a powerful impact! This book is a helpful read for anyone wanting more from Christianity.”

Jonathan Pokluda, lead pastor, Harris Creek Baptist Church; podcast host, *Becoming Something*; bestselling author, *Welcome to Adulthood*

“*Holy Habits* will help you run the race of life. Noah is committed to the long game of following Jesus faithfully, and he’s created a practical and timely guidebook for putting the habits in place not only to run the race but to finish the race well.”

Brad Lomenick, former president, Catalyst; author, *H3 Leadership* and *The Catalyst Leader*

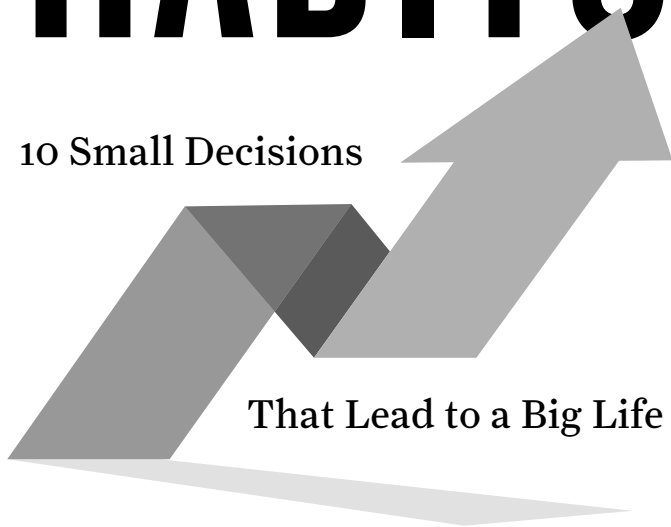
“Transformational truth for every age. Our everyday decisions determine our intimacy with God. Noah challenges the reader not simply to read but also to practice the presence of God. Daily surrender creates a miraculous life of legacy. You will be so encouraged with every chapter. The impact of what he shares will last long after you finish reading!”

Rich Wilkerson Jr., pastor, VOUS Church, Miami, Florida

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That Lead to a Big Life

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To Lion,
the one who made me
the luckiest dad in the world.

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FOREWORD

In our world of instant everything, we can be prone to opt out of the spiritual disciplines God wants to use to shape our lives and build our futures. If we are not careful, we end up exchanging the on-fire life of faith God has for us with anemic spirituality bound to personal comfort. No wonder so many Christians experience so much less than what God wants for them. It's time to go back to the basics, and that's why *Holy Habits* is a book the church needs right now!

I am thankful not only that Noah wrote this book, but that he approaches this topic with both humor and candor. Between stories of his love for queso and his fear of Home Depot, Noah provides practical ways to reignite passion for God and sustain that passion in day-to-day life. There's nothing more essential as Christians than cultivating a deep relationship with God, and these pages will encourage you in your walk with Jesus and help you go to new depths in the life of faith.

Now, before you begin reading, here is something you need to know about the author. Noah is the real deal. He and his wife, Maddy, are living out what you are about to read. This content has been road tested in their lives. They are passionate followers of Christ and have a conviction that God wants you to experience the life-changing power these habits can produce in your relationship with Jesus. This book is a firsthand example of Noah and Maddy's heart to see people strengthened and encouraged in their faith journey.

As you dive into *Holy Habits*, make reading each chapter a holy moment. Lean into what God wants to do in your life. Expect that the Holy Spirit is going to personally apply these pages to your life. Anticipate that as you put these habits into practice, you will watch God lead you to a new place in your walk with Him.

John Lindell, senior pastor, James River Church,
Springfield, Missouri

INTRODUCTION

I spend a lot of time inside of churches. Last year I preached a total of eighty-eight times. I find myself at Christian conferences more often than most people find themselves at the gas station. Because of my job (calling, passion, or whatever you'd like to call what I do for a living), I feel like I have a pretty good idea of what is going on in the American Christian world. In almost every setting I find myself, no matter the age or background, the idea of growing in intimacy with Jesus is always something that is talked about. Intimacy with Jesus is a huge part of the Church's vocabulary, but is it a part of our daily schedule?

We've got loads of talented Christians, that much is certain. I'd argue there has never been a time in earth's history where there have been more talented followers of Jesus than right now. We've got the most incredible worship leaders, teachers, pastors, songwriters, media directors, and vocational ministers that I've ever seen inside the Church. But we've also got the most amazing actors,

doctors, nurses, teachers, songwriters, authors, military members, dentists, marketers, construction workers, athletes, trainers, engineers, and marketplace workers who love Jesus, too. Our talent is extraordinary. Our work is consistently getting better. But what about our relationship with Jesus? Is that going “up and to the right” on the chart as well?

Richard Foster, one of my favorite authors ever, once said, “The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for *deep* people”¹ (emphasis added). Even though Foster penned those words over forty years ago, they are just as true now as they were then. Talented people are everywhere. Deep people are truly rare.

A deep person is someone who has roots, which has very little to do with talents, abilities, or even intellect. Depth is created in people by what they repeatedly do and who they believe they are. Specifically, depth is created in a follower of Jesus when he or she moves beyond the surface into the depths of a relationship with God. It is created when people regularly put themselves in a position for God to speak to them, refine them, and build them back up.

When life gets hard, our work for Jesus does not keep us close to Him, the depth of our relationship with Him does. When a worldwide pandemic hits, our intelligence does very little to keep our faith levels high, but our intimacy with Jesus certainly will. When everything else is stripped away from the surface of our lives, the deepest parts of us will emerge. Are you deep? Would you describe your relationship with Jesus as *intimate*?

I love Sunday morning church services. You might think I'd get tired of church services with how often I participate in them, but that is not the case. If anything, my love for them grows. There is nothing like worshipping God next to friends and family in the context of the local church. Serving God's people while being in the presence of God with the intention of growing together is special.

I love conferences and events, too. There is something unique about the expectancy that we, as believers, have for conferences. We show up believing that something life-changing is going to happen, and often it does. I've had many mountaintop moments with God at Christian conferences. I've had experiences at conferences where I've repented of sin, made purposeful commitments to God, and even been set free from sinful addictions. The reality of church services and conferences is that while they can absolutely mark our lives forever, they are not the foundation of real intimacy with Jesus.

Real depth, the kind that followers of Christ should be hungry for, is only attained in the context of a personal relationship. In any relationship, intimacy grows best in a one-on-one environment. If I want to grow closer to my wife, I can do that by going to a baseball game with a few of our closest friends. We can grow closer by attending a concert together and making memories with 30,000 others, dancing and singing. But our relationship will grow exponentially deeper by having intentional, daily conversation in the privacy of our front porch. The *best* way to cultivate intimacy is through the habit of pursuing it, one-on-one.

It works the same way with Jesus. Intimacy with Jesus grows in the context of our daily habits with Him. Our habits shape our days, our days shape our seasons, our seasons shape our years, and our years shape our lives. And, when all is said and done, our lives shape our eternities.

An ungodly life begins with ungodly actions. Ungodly actions quickly become ungodly habits. Likewise, a holy life is built on intentional, holy habits. Paul writes about this very thing:

Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Galatians 6:8–9

Paul is saying that your actions matter. Your habits matter. This truth is also taught outside of Scripture. James Clear, who is widely recognized in the secular world as the official expert on habits, says this: “Every action you take is a vote for the type of person you wish to become.”² Our habits are forming the future us.

What kinds of votes are you casting for tomorrow’s version of you? Are they leading you to become the person you want to be? Are those decisions helping you growing holier? Deeper in your walk with Jesus? Is your life going to be one that you are proud of?

It’s been said, “Show me your friends, and I’ll show you your future self.” The implication is that your friends have

a massive impact on your life. They definitely do. I would just argue that your habits have an even greater impact. Show me what you repeatedly do, and I'll show you who you'll eventually be.

Sowing and reaping is a massive biblical theme. Where you sow will reveal where you will grow. If you repeatedly sow habits of the flesh, you will continually grow in your desires of the flesh. If you repeatedly sow habits of the Spirit, you will continually be growing in the image of Christ. Where are you sowing?

It is important to note, however, that the power of spiritual habits is not found in the habits themselves. Reading your Bible by itself does not draw you closer to God. There are many atheists who spend time in Scripture. It's when the holy habit is combined with the presence of the holy God inside of us that our habits truly become transformative. A holy habit plus the presence of a holy God equals life transformation. We have to be intentional, and not do things just to do them, but rather *so that* we might see God.

When my wife, Maddy, and I first got married, she did what any good wife would do: She helped me decorate our house and turn it from an ugly bachelor pad into a beautiful home. One of the things she was set on was adding plants throughout the house. Even though I'm allergic to every green growing thing on the planet, I agreed to this because of how beautiful it made our home. "It was a vibe," as the kids say.

A few weeks after we added a particularly pleasant-looking plant to our living room, the plant started to go

from lush green to light brown. I remember my wife complaining in her sweet southern accent that she didn't know what was happening to it. She was watering it regularly, trimming the excess branches to make room for new growth, she was even encouraging it each morning with her words. Yet it still wasn't growing.

Eventually, she solved the mystery: The plant was positioned too far from the window. It was getting some indirect sunlight throughout the day, but not near enough to allow it to flourish. Once Maddy moved the plant in front of our main living room window, it thrived.

Our daily habits are the act of getting our souls in front of the one true, living God. The power is not in the habit itself, but something transformative happens when we regularly place ourselves in front of Him, expecting Him to show up. Our daily habits put us in the right environment that leads to our flourishing in Christ. The most Jesus-like people I have ever met are not the most famous or well-known. They are those who have simply built habits that put them in front of Jesus on a daily basis, and have stuck with those habits for years. Consistency leads to intimacy.

Growth in our relationship with Jesus is stunted when we don't regularly spend time with Him. We can also regularly do things *for* God without doing things *with* God, which equally stunts our growth in intimacy with Jesus. The goal of this book is to help you build holy habits that will increase your intimacy with God, which will result in His powerful transformation of your life.

Massive spiritual results always start with small, daily decisions. Conferences can take us high; our habits take

us deep. Church services on a Sunday morning can include great fellowship; our habits are a great foundation. An encounter with Jesus will set us free; our spiritual habits will keep us free. An encounter with Jesus introduces us to Him; our daily habits allow us to get to know Him.

Before you read *Holy Habits*

For a long time, my dad was an avid scuba diver. He loved being in the water. He would regularly hop on a boat with friends, sail out to the middle of the Gulf of Mexico, and dive down to the ocean floor to take in the beauty of God's creation. He would come back with photos of all sorts of incredible creatures. He has pictures of whales, sharks, an octopus, and even a selfie with a sea turtle.

I've learned a lot about scuba diving through the experiences of my dad. I've learned more effective ways to swim and fight the pull of the tide. I've learned that dolphins love to travel in little communities called pods. I've learned that if you get seasick and throw up your lunch, you quickly become the fish's best friend as they swarm for an all-you-can-eat buffet.

Perhaps the most interesting and important lesson that I've learned about scuba diving is the "art of the descent." If you had never been scuba diving for yourself (or don't have a dad who did it regularly), you might think that if you want to take in the beauty of the ocean floor, you just dive down to the bottom and look at it. That's definitely what I thought: The quicker you can get down there, the better. This couldn't be further from the truth.

Any experienced scuba diver will stress the importance of going deep slowly. When you descend too deep too quickly, the barometric pressure of the ocean can do funny things to your body. In some cases, those funny things can quickly turn deadly. Divers must allow their bodies to get acclimated to the new environment before proceeding to the deep. Reaching the beautiful sights in the depths of the ocean is a journey that must be taken intentionally and slowly.

My prayer for you as you read *Holy Habits* is that by implementing these habits into your everyday life, you will find that there is so much more to a relationship with God than an hour service on a Sunday or the occasional devotional you might read. My prayer is that you would trade a snorkel out for scuba gear and submerge in the boundless riches of God's grace to the depths of intimacy with the Lord.

But before you keep reading, there is something you need to know: Going deep is a process that is often slower than we expect. We live in a culture and world that has made instant gratification possible in nearly every area of life. We are obsessed with speed. We want things, and we want them now! The reality is that most of the time you can get whatever you want rather quickly. But that's not how a deep relationship with God works.

I've watched it countless times in the life of a Christian. They have a life-changing encounter with God and are immediately filled with an unquenchable passion to know God intimately. So they start reading their Bible, going to church, and buying every Christian Living book they can

find on the Amazon bestseller list. They are excited, and they are ready to dive to the ocean floor of knowing God. Then something tragic happens. A few weeks or maybe months pass, and they slowly, maybe even unconsciously, lose their zeal. They didn't try to. But when the results didn't match their passion, they swam back up to the surface. Just as the slow descent in diving is important, the intentional, consistent effort of going deeper with God is pivotal.

God operates on a different kind of timeline. He is stubborn with His timing, and rightfully so. After all, He knows best. He knows what we need and when we need it. He does not desire souls who swim to the bottom, take the photo for Instagram, and swim immediately back to the top. He wants our relationship with Him to get better and better, from now until eternity. He wants us to desire the bottom of His heart, but He also wants us to enjoy the journey of getting there.

If we want to go deep with God, we must adjust our expectations. The goal of this journey is not to see results; the goal of this journey is to see God and to enjoy Him. That's what He desires from us.

As you read this book and implement the habits discussed in its pages, I encourage you to go slowly. If you don't constantly practice any of the ten habits, it would be foolish to try to implement all of them at once. Add one, then observe yourself for a few weeks. Learn when the best time is for you to practice it. Take careful notes on what things cause you to miss the habit, or help you keep it. Have conversations with friends about what you

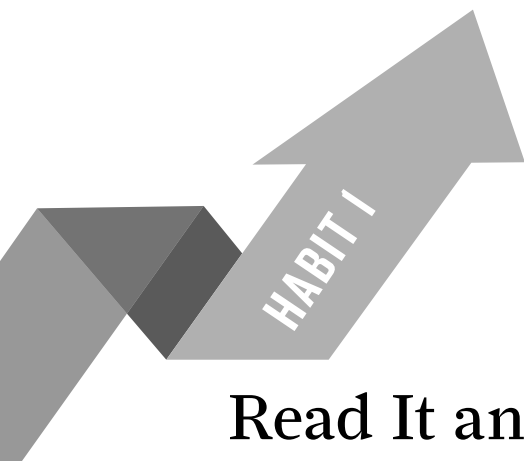
are doing. Give yourself time for the habit to stick before adding another one.

Another wise thing to know is that the results will likely look very different from one habit to the next. You may implement a habit like “Rest so you can run” and immediately feel closer to God and hear from Him in ways you’ve never heard from Him before. But you might implement “Read it and choose it” and not see real results for a long time. That’s okay—keep at it! Remember, we are looking for God, not results.

It is much healthier to look at these habits as a long-term investment account that compounds exponentially over time, rather than looking at them as a get-rich-quick scheme. God’s grace and our salvation through the finished work of Jesus is the closest thing we have to a get-rich-quick scheme. We are saved immediately, praise Jesus! But real intimacy takes time. Real growth takes digging, planting, watering, and waiting.

So don’t give up on a habit when you don’t see immediate results. Keep fighting to be consistent. Keep fighting to see the Lord. Keep fighting to go deeper.

A holy habit works best when it has actually become a habit. Habits, and intimacy, take time.



Read It and Choose It

I LOVE QUESO DIP. *Love* it. On the eighth day of creation, I'm pretty sure God spoke queso dip onto our dinner tables. Hallelujah. One of my favorite questions in the world is: "Would you like to start your meal by ordering some chips and queso?"

Why yes. Yes I would.

When I go to a Mexican restaurant, it's not even a question. We are getting a large bowl of the queso. We are going to be "dipping and chipping." Salsa is a good thing, but queso dip is a God thing! C'mon somebody!

Here's some free advice for you on the first page of this book: Stop letting people treat you like the free salsa. You are the *cheese dip!* I digress.

I obviously love queso cheese dip. But queso does not always love me back. Does that make sense? Sometimes it gives me a stomachache. I am, at a minimum, lactose intolerant. At maximum, I am queso explosive.

The first date I ever went on with my now-wife, Maddy, was a group date at a Mexican restaurant. I was on my best behavior. Not only was I sitting across from my literal dream girl, but three of her closest friends had also joined us on the trial run. I didn't just have one person to win over, I had four.

Our waitress greeted the table and got our drink order. Then, just as she was about to leave, she asked the great question, "Would you guys like some queso as an appetizer?"

Immediately a battle waged in my mind. On the one hand, I *always* ordered the queso. No matter what it did to my stomach, the cheese was always worth it. On the other hand, I couldn't afford to mess this up. What if the cheese dip decided to ruin my life? What if I got knocked out in the first round of dating by an appetizer?

Before a victor could be crowned in the battle in my mind, a decision was made for me: "We'll take two of them!" one of Maddy's friends said.

Checkmate.

I'd love to tell you that when the cheese dip got to our table, I displayed an extreme amount of self-control and that I didn't touch it. I'd love to report to you that I am in fact stronger than my cravings. But that would be a falsehood. The sad reality is that the moment I laid eyes on our appetizer, I began to lie to myself.

Your stomach isn't that weak anymore—you've grown, Noah. You're strong now.

You shouldn't be afraid of lactose. Lactose should be afraid of you.

God hasn't given you a spirit of needing to use the bathroom, but one of power, love, and a sound stomach.

I ate the queso. And it was good, so I ate a lot of it. It took all of ten minutes for my stomach to start “arguing” with me. This wasn’t a hushed tones kind of an argument either. My stomach was singing Taylor Swift break-up songs to me in the middle of that restaurant. “Weee are never ever ever . . . getting back together!”

One of Maddy’s friends could tell something was wrong and asked if I was okay. I don’t know if it was the noises my stomach was making or the one lonely tear slowly rolling from my left eyeball that gave me away. To this day, I legitimately do not think I have ever had a stomachache like that in my life.

Okay—enough about stomachaches. Enough about queso. Enough about lactose. Please don’t stop reading this book because I shared my dairy issues with you in the first chapter. The real problem of my story isn’t any of those things. The real problem is in the lie that I told myself. I knew I shouldn’t have eaten the cheese dip. I knew it wouldn’t end well for me (especially on a first date with my dream girl). And yet there was a little voice inside my head that did not tell the truth. And I listened to it.

In today’s world, people have extremely different opinions on pretty much everything. It’s hard to get large groups of people to agree about even the simplest of subjects. One of the few remaining shared beliefs of our day is that lying is bad. No one wants to be told a lie. That doesn’t end well. No one wants to be known as a liar,

either. But perhaps even worse than either one of those is when someone *lives* a lie. Living a lie has led to the destruction of countless individuals, families, and entire communities. Living and believing lies holds free people captive.

Throughout the course of this book I'm going to use the term *freedom* quite a bit. It's important for me to explain up front what I do not mean by that word. What I do not mean is your freedom of rights. I'm not talking about your freedom of speech or right to bear arms. I'm not alluding to the freedom that comes from getting out of credit card debt or choosing your favorite football team to root for. All of those freedoms are worth writing about. But this book is focused on another kind of freedom.

I'm talking about a freedom found in the Bible. A freedom that Jesus promised, David prayed for, and Paul wrote about. I'm talking about the freedom from sin, addiction, and fleshly desires that plague us all as human beings. The freedom that is granted to us when we decided to put our hope in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. That freedom is real.

But that freedom is *always* under attack. The greatest threat to you as a follower of Jesus in today's climate and culture is not Jeff Bezos or Mark Zuckerberg. It's not Russia, China, or some other country. It's not a social media app. It's not even a virus, vaccine, or doctor. The greatest threat to your freedom as a follower of Jesus is a small, four-letter word: L-I-E-S.

Whether you realize it or not right now, you are in an all-out battle for your freedom in the arena of truth versus

lies. This is not a new battle for human beings. It has been this way from the beginning when Satan went to war with Eve. Do you remember his weapon of choice? A lie. Satan deployed lies to steal freedom then, and he does the exact same thing today.

Jesus called the devil the father of lies. “When [the devil] lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). His effectiveness is not just in the amount of lies that he tells, but in the cleverness of his lies.

Today he even disguises his lies with cute little cultural phrases like “Be true to yourself.” That one always gets me laughing. My response is usually, “Which self?” I’ve got a lot of me’s! One day I think Crocs are a horrible choice for shoes, the next day I’m buying two pairs. One week I might avoid gluten, the next week I’m not even sure I know what gluten is. Sometimes I’m a gym junkie like Troy Bolton, getting my head in the game, other times I skip the gym for Chick-fil-A. There are shifting levels of self.

The devil is not just lying to our culture but to Christians, too. And there is one lie that is absolutely wreaking havoc on believers all over the world today. It’s the lie that *God’s priority is to make us happy*.

“Wait, Noah—that’s a lie? God doesn’t want me to be happy?” It’s not that God doesn’t want you happy. It’s just not His priority. But the devil loves telling you that it *is* God’s priority. Satan would love for you to make life decisions believing that happiness is God’s true goal for your life. If he can get you to do that, you will make choices

based on the best interest of your feelings instead of the best interest of your faith.

You may feel like leaving your marriage one day because it doesn't *feel as good* anymore. Because God just wants you happy, your marriage must not be from God.¹ You might leave the church that you used to love because it doesn't *feel exciting* anymore, instead of being faithful to where you were planted. You'll be tempted to remove yourself from rich friendships the moment one of your friends cares enough to call you out or hold you accountable about something. Instead of seeing them as a friend who cares about your walk with God, you'll feel like a victim and cut someone who loves you out of your life.

Do you see how buying into the lie that God just wants you to be happy can actually ruin your life? Following Jesus has a cost—it just so happens that not following Him costs a lot more.

God's priority for our lives is not to make us happy. It's to make us holy. This is why God sent Jesus in the first place. God wanted to have a relationship with us more than anything else in the world. However, the only way to have a relationship with a holy God is to be holy ourselves—which just so happens to be impossible for sinners like us. So God in heaven, in His infinite mercy and grace, sent His only Son, Jesus, down to earth to die for all of our sins. Not so that we would be happy, but holy. So that we could live in communion with God for the rest of eternity. It just so happens that our holiness eventually leads to our happiness when we realize how great Jesus is.

Holiness is not, however, a destination that we “arrive” at. It looks a lot more like a fight. Holiness is hard. Holiness is a daily invitation to come and die. It’s the same invitation Jesus gave to the earliest disciples in all four gospels. Do you remember Jesus’ words? “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

The cross wasn’t just something for Jesus; it’s for us, too. Holiness is a fight, because many times the last thing we want to do is pick up a cross and walk to our death. The death of our pride, selfishness, preferences, feelings, habits, addictions, lust, greed, and all the rest of our flesh. Holiness is a journey where we follow Jesus, and as we do, we progressively get better and better at saying no to our flesh and yes to the ways and thoughts of Jesus. Holiness is simply choosing truth over lies.

Not long ago, I started working out at a CrossFit gym. If you’re wondering what that has to do with this book, let me explain that when you sign up to start CrossFit, part of the agreement is that you will tell everyone you know that you now do CrossFit. I tease. People who do CrossFit workouts tend to be pretty passionate and talk about it a lot.

It started when my wife and I were expecting our son, Lion, to be born; I got out of shape. I was on the road traveling and speaking a lot, and I let my diet and workout habits slip. I could see the “dad bod” coming on faster than I had anticipated. I started trying to do little at-home workouts, but they just didn’t seem to be working. I remember thinking that fat cells must know Jesus as their

Lord and Savior because those things seemed to have eternal life. So I went to a CrossFit gym to see what all the fuss was all about. Maybe they could help me.

During my first visit, I was a mixture of amazed and terrified. The people inside were legitimately the most fit people I had ever seen in my life. But they were also doing some of the weirdest and most intense exercises I had ever seen. Upon seeing me, the gym owner Alec (now an awesome friend) came over and introduced himself to me. I told him about my predicament and asked if he could show me around and explain the concept more.

For the next twenty minutes, Alec pitched me on why CrossFit was “perfect” for me. You know what Alec conveniently left out of the conversation? How my body was going to hurt. He didn’t tell me that there would be many mornings when I would come home and just lie on my living room floor like roadkill. He never once told me how early the classes were in the morning. He didn’t even tell me about the diet changes I’d have to make. He left all of that important information out of our conversation.

Alec spent our entire time together talking about how awesome CrossFit is. He told me how much better I would be able to move because of it. He introduced me to some guys who looked like Greek gods and alluded to how I too could be Hercules. He talked about how much better I would feel each day and how it would probably lead to a longer life. He spent all of our time talking about the *benefits* of doing CrossFit.

Alec understood a principle that also applies to us spiritually: that a life driven by negatives rarely leads to a posi-

tive. Another way to put it is that if your focus is on what you can't do, you'll never be thankful for what you *get* to do.

Holiness has a cost. Choosing truth over lies is not easy. It hurts. Some days you might feel like roadkill lying in your living room floor. But holiness also has benefits. And if our desire is to be people who fight for holiness on a daily basis, we have to remind ourselves why it's so worth it.

What are some benefits of holiness, you ask?

- an increasingly intimate relationship with the Creator of the universe
- the future joy of a fifty-year marriage anniversary
- peace that surpasses all understanding
- a family that loves each other and stays together (even if Thanksgiving might be a rollercoaster)
- the fulfillment that comes from living your life for the sake of others
- purpose—having a calling from God
- the hope of eternal life
- community that helps carry your burdens

If I were to list all of the benefits of holiness, it would take up the rest of this book. These are just a few of the rich benefits of choosing truth over lies. A holy life is not just about saying no to our flesh, it's about saying yes to true life.

Even God's no is for our good. When we buy into the vision and the plan that God has for our lives, we are simultaneously signing up to see our lives thrive in the best way possible. God's way.

Without the pursuit of holiness, you'll never have the intimate relationship with Jesus you desire. Sin is an intimacy killer. Grace is an intimacy saver. Holiness is an intimacy grower. When you begin to live a holy life, your desire to have holy habits will only grow. And as you put holy habits in place in your life, you will grow in holiness.

So how do we do this? What's the *play* that we run in order to live holy lives? Remember the Scripture in John that I referenced earlier in the chapter? Don't worry, I've got it for you again: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

I love this verse deeply, but it can be extremely misleading. You can read these words from Jesus out of context and think, *All I have to do is know the truth to be set free*. What about the people who know Jesus as Lord but still haven't been set free? What about those who have accepted Jesus into their hearts but are still addicted to pornography or worship their bank accounts? What about the people who have heard the truth of the Bible but still tend to "live my own truth"?

Chances are, if you've been following Jesus for a while now, you've heard John 8:32 quoted hundreds of times. But I doubt you've heard the verse before it nearly as often. Check this out:

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

John 8:31–32

Let’s back up and provide a little context. The first thirty verses of John 8 are fascinating. Jesus is talking to a very large crowd of people. He tells them that He is the Son of God (can you imagine your neighbor telling you that at the grocery store?), He calls out some sin in the people’s lives, and He even alludes to the fact that He is one day going to die for all of them! Those are pretty outrageous claims, and to many they came across as absolutely crazy.

By the time we get to verse 31, the crowd had gotten much smaller. Notice the verse starts off with “To the Jews who had believed him”—the only people left to hear the words that would come next were the people who decided to believe. If you believe Jesus, you should listen up to what comes next; it’s for you too: “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

This is life-changing—stay with me. These people *already* believe in Jesus, they have heard the truth, they even believe the truth. And yet, that alone is actually not enough to set them free. What does Jesus say? “If you hold to my teaching . . . then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” That first part is what often gets left out. It starts with *knowing* the truth, but

it has to lead to choosing the truth in order to live a holy life.


This is why reading the Bible daily is so important. You'll never choose the truth if you don't know it. And if you never choose it, then you'll never live it. You might *know* the truth, but you won't live free.

Remember when we talked about how holiness is a fight? This is the battle. When the devil lies to you and tells you that you will always be your old self and that your identity is tied up in your old ways, first of all, be encouraged, because bringing up your past means he's running out of new material. Then, remember: You fight the lie with the truth. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

And when the devil lies and says you are a victim, you fight with the truth: "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

When the devil lies and says that you are not important, you fight with the truth: "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession" (Deuteronomy 7:6).


When the devil lies and says that you can't be hurting and also be close to God, you fight with the truth: "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18).



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When the devil lies and says you should be afraid, you fight with the truth: “The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?” (Psalm 27:1).

When the devil lies and says that no one even notices you, you fight with the truth: “You are the God who sees me” (Genesis 16:13).

When the devil lies and says that the storm is too great to bear, you fight with the truth: “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure” (Hebrews 6:19).

Why do we know the Word of God? It’s not for the sake of knowledge alone. It’s so that we can choose to live the truth instead of the lie. It’s for the sake of the battle!

Fighting for your peace is worth it.

Fighting for your faithfulness is worth it.

Fighting for your joy is worth it.

Fighting for your purity is worth it.

Fighting for your marriage is worth it.

Fighting for your kids is worth it.

Fighting for your friends is worth it.

Fighting for your legacy is worth it.

Fighting for your holiness is worth it.

Maybe you’re reading this and thinking that this all sounds a bit daunting. The Bible is big, and you aren’t much of a reader. Maybe you just have a hard time understanding what you’re reading when you open it. Or maybe you’ve never opened it at all. All of that is okay.

I’m about to give you an easy habit. It’s simply a repeatable action. Over time, this action will be something you go from consciously making time for to something you

crave. It will help set you free from the lies that enslave you. After this habit becomes part of your normal routine, I believe you will look up one day and realize that the temptations that used to cause you to sin no longer even tempt you.

HABIT: READ IT AND CHOOSE IT

Where it comes from: Matthew 4:1–11 and John 8:31–32

What it is: Fighting the devil’s lies and temptations, by reading the truth *and* choosing the truth, so we can live holy lives unto the Lord.

How to run the play: What are the lies the devil tells you the most? What are the temptations you face daily? Full transparency: For me, the devil really attacks me with lies about money. That we won’t have enough to make ends meet, that I’m not doing a good enough job providing for my family, etc. That lie could easily lead to me not trusting God. It could lead to stress that I take out on my family. It could lead to money being an idol in my life. There are other lies he tells me on a regular basis, but this is one of the main ones he comes after me with. It’s important to recognize those lies.

Go buy a small notebook. Or grab a piece of paper or something else to write on—just don’t lose it, and make sure it’s small enough to keep with you. On the top of the

page, identify the lie. Then, expose it by writing the truth. For example, mine looks something like this:

Lie: You should be stressed out about money. It's up to you to provide more for your growing family, and if you don't, you are a failure because it's completely up to you.

Truth: "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matthew 6:26).

The play is that simple. You think about and ask God to help you identify the lies the devil throws at you regularly. Then, you turn to God's truth to replace the lie. If you aren't sure what Scripture verse fights the lie told to you, there are some things you can do.

1. A quick Google search will get you on the right start. "What are some Bible verses about____?"
2. Ask your local pastor or a mentor. Find someone who has been following Jesus a little longer than you and ask them if any Scriptures come to mind that will help you fight that particular lie. Chances are they will know several.

Fill your notebook with as many lie-and-truth combos as you need. I currently have about sixteen in mine. (I am continually searching my heart and mind, reading and choosing the truth.) Whenever your mind comes under attack, pull your notebook out and declare the truth.

Maybe that looks like reading the verse out loud once or twice. Maybe that looks like reading it and silently praying for God to give you the strength to choose the truth and for the lie to no longer have control of your mind. You will discover what is most comfortable for you.

Over time, not only will the lie lose its power, but you will get so used to the truth that fights the lie, you might not even need to open the notebook. The truth of Scripture will already be in your mind and heart. That's the goal. That's how you win the fight.

Read it and choose it.