

When Leanne and I had our first child, Josiah, he's just there, we named him Josiah.

Why did we do that?

Well, we just loved it.

It was our favorite boy's name.

And so we named him Josiah.

He was born in 1995.

And we were so thrilled to call up family.

And I remember calling my mom and dad.

They had two grandkids.

They ended up having eight grandkids.

And when I spoke to my mom, I said, we've had a baby boy and his name is Josiah.

And the first thing she said was Dr.

Josiah Shanks.

That's got a good ring to it.

Now, I don't know why she said that.

It was weird.

And in fact, in reflection, we didn't choose the name Josiah because it means Jehovah Heals.

But it does mean that.

And as I said before, she didn't say anything like that about the other great grandchildren.

But this year he began, Jos began serving as Dr.

Josiah Shanks at Westmead Hospital.

Now, you could argue, you can't make too much of a big deal about the fact that she said that.

And that would be fair, but I wouldn't agree with you.

I think that my mum prophetically, because she said it has a gift in that, she prophetically, without knowing it, declared an identity over his life.

We called him Josiah, which means Jehovah Heals.

And I think we were prophetically, without knowing it, declaring that he's going to be used by God to bring healing to people as a doctor.

It took a lot of hard work for Jos to become a doctor about eight years of study.

Why am I telling you all this about one of our kids?

When Jesus died and rose again, he invited people to repent and believe, to believe that he had made a way open for a person to be forgiven and made righteous before God.

By faith, in Christ, we are declared righteous before God, or in other words, in right standing before God.

But to appropriate this righteousness, to own it, to know that we know that we know that we are in Christ and we are righteous before God.

Our behaviour needs to match our identity.

Now, please don't hear me wrong.

I'd love it if someone yelled out, heretic, because it would be fair.

It sounds a bit like I'm saying you add something to Christ, but it's not what I'm saying.

It's not what we believe here at this church.

It's Christ plus nothing.

His finished work on the cross, his perfect life and perfect death and perfect resurrection.

Faith in what he accomplished that brings salvation, that forgives our sin, repent and believe, nothing more.

But it's interesting that Jesus said, if you love me, you will obey me, didn't he?

Jesus said in John 15, my father is a gardener, and he cuts off the branches that bear no fruit.

There is a connection between what has been declared over us by faith and our behaviour, us owning, us appropriating the righteousness that we have been given.

And that's what tonight's about.

It's not a perfect metaphor analogy at all.

One of the beauty of having open doors at the back.

We are in it, in our community.

In a somewhat yet not perfect way, there was an identity I think declared over our son Josiah, and he had to appropriate that.

I think there's a similarity that in Christ we are declared righteous, but to know that we are righteous, there is a taking hold of this truth.

So tonight, I want to suggest to you, from Romans five and six, that righteousness is a gift, righteousness is a calling, and righteousness is a habit.

So righteousness as a gift.

Biblical Christianity teaches that a person is saved by grace alone through faith.

Right standing before God is a gift received by faith.

In fact, the law, or what amounts to a bunch of rules given to the people of Israel and given to us to define by God who is good enough, the Ten Commandments, they can never make a person righteous.

That is apart from Jesus Christ.

The Bible says that the law, again, the Ten Commandments, the rules for living in God's kingdom, though they are wonderful and good, so many psalms say, to light on the Lord's law, on his precepts, and they are good.

They are good because they describe a God-honouring life.

They end up producing death because they're like the fluorescent light in your bathroom.

They highlight every defect.

Anyone found any rules lately that you didn't know were there?

It's what the law does.

The law shines a light on our life and says, you failed there.

You failed there.

It's been said that the law of God is like an electric chair.

It kills everyone who sits in it, apart from Jesus.

And this is what Paul says in Romans 5.

To be sure, Paul writes, sin was in the world before the law was given.

But sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law.

Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.

See, the law of God points out how far we have fallen short from God's standard.

Romans 5.20 says, the law was brought in so that the trespass might increase.

Isn't that an odd line?

Why God would you give us the Ten Commandments?

Why would you give us your precepts?

Why would you give us the law, the blueprint of how to live if the purpose of the law was to increase the trespass?

In other words, knowing how we should live without supernatural help from God does nothing but highlight our fallen state.

And it should be clear that you cannot say a person lived a good enough life to please God.

I find this quite regularly over the decades of being a pastor, that a faithful, committed Christian will have a loved one who has not put their faith in Christ, but the comment once they die will be something like, they were a good person.

They were a good person.

And of course, I'm not going to say anything at that moment, but it's odd theology.

Because if a person dies without Christ, they face the judgment of the electric chair of the law, implemented, adjudicated by Jesus, the righteous judge, and no one wins, because the law will highlight every single flaw that we have ever acted out.

Any sin that we have, it's going to highlight.

We cannot be good enough to please God.

Paul writes in Romans 5 again, for if by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ?

Righteousness is a gift.

That's what we just read.

Amen?

Righteousness is a gift.

You can't argue against it.

Jesus died in our place on the cross, and it was enough to satisfy both the wrath of God and his desire for righteousness.

And we are called to repent and believe, receive the gift of right standing before God gratefully by faith.

And the divine exchange happens.

We get what Christ deserved, and he took what we deserved.

Christ sets us free importantly from both the penalty of sin and the power of sin.

But do you believe that?

I think a lot of us who have been Christians for a while believe he set me free from the penalty of sin.

But what about the power?

Does his righteousness, does his spirit in me empower me to learn how to actually live it out?

I hope tonight, if nothing else from this relatively long sermon, you will take that the good news is, we do nothing to earn our salvation.

It is a gift.

And that's why it is, what type of news?



It's good news.

It's good news, you can be right with God, just like his son was right with him, just by believing.

Cast your burdens of sin upon the base of the cross and on the back of Jesus, and say, thank you, I believe.

Righteousness is a gift.

It's also a calling.

It's a calling.

Twice in chapter six, Paul assumes what Peter will start thinking from his teaching.

He assumes that they're gonna hear this, righteousness is a gift, and that the law is not something that is coming against them, and they're gonna think something like this.

Okay, Jesus has made me right before God.

I'm no longer under the law because I'm under grace.

And then Romans 5.20 says, where the sin increased, grace increased all the more to cover it.

So Paul is concerned that people will hear this truth where sin increased, grace increased all the more, and they're gonna do this in their mind.

They're gonna say, okay, so if grace increases when God covers my sin, happy days, let's keep sinning because sinning is sometimes fun, at least it's cathartic, and it's a win-win.

He loves covering my sin, so I like sinning.

I sin, you keep covering my sin.

And Paul is saying, no, no.

If you were thinking that, you would be thinking wrongly.

Romans 6.1, he says, what shall we say then?

Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

By no means, Paul says.

We are those who have died to sin.

How can we live in it any longer?

As Christians, we are called to live righteous lives.

This is often called in theological speak, sanctification, the progressive conformity to the likeness of Christ.

Over time, we learn how to be a person that reflects Jesus in the world we live in.

I actually like the idea of just saying, it's appropriated righteousness.

Righteousness was declared over us by faith, but we need to take hold of what Christ has already died to give us by faith.

It's becoming the person, grace says you are in Christ.

That's what life is about.

Becoming the person that Christ, that grace says, I am in Christ.

And this is what Romans 6 basically says, therefore don't let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life.

And offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.

For sin shall no longer be your master because you are not under the law, but under grace.

You see, nothing could be further from the truth than the idea that I am a good evangelical and I'm nothing but a miserable sinner.

I just sin every day and I come and I put my tab in and get my forgiveness.

We are fallen people.

We sin for sure.

In fact, call us monsters of iniquity if you like, but scripture says you can get better at being obedient.

Amen?

It's what we teach here at this church.

You can get better.

You never earn salvation.

But we can get better at offering our bodies as instruments of righteousness.

Paul says, do not offer yourself to sin.

Who's doing the offering?

You, me.

Do not offer yourself to sin, but rather offer yourself to God.

And if you look up the Greek word for offer yourself, it's parastami, which is this idea of standing by at the ready.

Yes, Master, you tell me what to do and I'll do it.

Is that to the Lord or is it to sin?

It comes out of our identity.

You've probably heard, there's been church for a while, you've heard me say this little sermon illustration.

It's in an American scene, Biff and Buff, these overweight yet quite athletic type guys.

They're friends in America in their early 20s.

And you know, they're in the party scene.

They sort of chase the girls, they drink the beers, they take a little bit of recreational drugs, they eat the fatty food, they don't look after themselves.

And one day, the coach sees them and sees potential and asks them, hey, come join my training track team.

Initially, they say no, but then finally they say, oh, okay, we'll go do it.

And they start doing some weights and doing some cardio fitness and they drink a bit more water and they stop drinking the alcohol and they stop eating the fatty food and they start running and doing track stuff and they find out in their weight, doing weights and lifting weights and they find out they're actually pretty good at this stuff.

And this goes on for a couple of months.

And then the old crew come up to Biff and Buff and they say, hey guys, we've got a big party on this weekend.

You want to come?

It's Friday night.

And they say, no, we're not.

We've got a track meet tomorrow.

They say, what do you mean?

And then they give the answer.

As Forrest Gump would say, they say, we are athletes.

That's why.

Something changed up here and in here for Biff and Buff.

Their identity changed and their behaviour changed with it.

We have been given the gift of righteousness.

It is very important to realise that we need to take it on.

We've been called to appropriate the identity that has been declared over us.

Did you know you have been called to live a glorious life?

Because Jesus is living it through you.

It doesn't mean you will be famous, rich, anything like that.

You may be, but you have been called to live a glorious God-honouring life because Christ has said, you matter.

You're perfectly right between you and the Father.

I made you right.

So let's go.

Offer your bodies.

Parastami, I'm here, Lord, whatever you want.

Sorry I messed up because we're still going to sin.

I'm not suggesting that we get it all right all the time.

But we have this sense that I'm moving that way by grace.

I'm learning how to appropriate the righteousness that I already have as a gift.

Righteousness is a gift.

It's also a calling.

And I want to suggest it's a habit.

Righteousness is a habit.

Paul writes in Romans 6, verse 15.

What then shall we say?

Once again, he reiterates, shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?

By no means.

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves to the one you obey?

Whether you are slaves to sin which leads to death, or to obedience which leads to righteousness.

But thanks be to God, that though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.

I love that sentence.

You have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.

You've been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.



That word parastami there is all over the place.

Obedient servants.

Paul is saying, are you an obedient servant to sin or the Lord?

A couple of chapters later in Romans 8, he's going to say, are you an obedient servant to the flesh or to the spirit?

One or the other?

He says, don't offer your bodies to sin.

And then he gives a hint about what this is sort of all about.

It's in verse 17.

Thanks be to God.

I just read it before.

Well, I'm going to read it again.

Though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.

Come to obey from your heart.

Your heart.

If you look up in the Old Testament and New Testament, you find over 800 references to the heart in the Bible.

It never once refers to a organ that pumps blood.

It always means something like this.

The mind, the character, the inner self, the will, our intention, our centre.

It's where habits come from.

The core of our being.

That's what we can talk about being wholehearted in our devotion to Christ.

The pattern of teaching.

I looked up the Greek word for pattern of teaching and it means a model forged by repetition.

What would you call, starting with H, a word that describes a model formed by repetition?

It's a habit, isn't it?

It's a habit.

Paul says, you used to live by habits of sin.

Now, we need to live by habits of righteousness, habits.

I love this quote.

Again, it's a Dallas Willard quote.

Our character is the sum of our habits.

What do you reckon?

Our character is the sum of our habits.

Couple of decades ago, an American president committed immorality and used his power in a very horrible way.

He abused his power and had sexual relations with his staff worker.

And it went all over the world.

And he denied it.

And then it came out that Bill Clinton had been involved.

And what he said was, I did do the wrong thing, but it was completely out of character.

It's something we often say.

I messed up, but it was out of character.

What Dallas Willard would say is, that never happens.

You always act out of character.

We always act out of character.

Because character is the sum of our habits.

It doesn't mean that I don't make mistakes that are anomalies in my life.

But Bill Clinton lived in such a way that there was the possibility that he would abuse his power in that way, right?

We always act out of character.

And the important thing to know is that the habits that form our character can change.

In Christ, our habits really, really matter.

I was introduced to Daniel Kahneman's book, Thinking Fast and Slow, by Stuart Roberts, who is one of the guys who is in finance in our church.

And I found it fascinating.

It's been sort of a landmark study, where Kahneman studied how people responded to all sorts of tests.

And he came up with this idea that there is system one thinking and system two thinking.

System one thinking is quick.

It's automated.

It's like A.

I went from A to B once, so every time I drive or travel or move from A to close to B, it's probably that I'm going A to B.

But the brain is wired that way.

It wants to go, I think that's right, so it should be.

I live by my gut.

System two thinking is, it doesn't look like we're quite going to land in B if we go A to close to B.

It takes time.

It's methodical.

It's detailed.

It's a bit boring.

It's a bit energy-involving.

So the brain goes, let's go one.

And this has been used in finance to try to understand why, how to follow the dumb money, why people make really dumb choices about money, because they're going, I think that'll be right.

But they don't have the capacity or energy to think it through.

God has designed our brains to look for automation.

Think about kids.

Think about that little baby that can't hold its neck up.

Ten weeks in, it can.

How did it do that?

God made that brain, without the baby knowing, work out, okay, nerves, muscles.

If I do this, it works.

And the baby is working out how to smile.

Now, smiling, we don't know this, but smiling is really hard to do.

Lots of muscles, lots of nerves, but that baby is mimicking and working out so that next time, after 100 smiles, she or he doesn't have to think about it.

And just keep on thinking about the way this works, how to stand up.

It's a learned neural pathway.

And the body's doing all fancy things to make this happen, to make it automated.

But it's also, in a child, how to show your disapproval, isn't it?

I worked out how to throw a tantrum.

I'm three years old, and I was like...

If I do that, and then screaming with my legs, and, you know, I make a really big scene, and mum or dad are very embarrassed in the shops, and they always give me lollies.

Automate that one?

Let's do that again.

Right?

So, humans are designed for automation.

This is really very thoroughly, has been very thoroughly proven.

And that leads us to what's called the habit loop, which is before a cue, there tends to be a craving, and then there's a cue, and then there's a routine that follows the cue in human habits, and it tends to lead to a reward.

It's just the way life goes.

There are probably thousands, hundreds at least, of cues in our lives.

Can you see how cues that lead habitually, automatically to sin need to be identified with a big light?

Becoming a Christian, if you just naturally respond in a way that's ungodly, that's not the way Jesus said we should respond, that has to be pointed out.

And then we have to go, wait on, the cue that used to instigate and promote a certain ungodly routine, behaviour, I need to work out how and what.

What am I meant to do that would be god honouring in that habit loop?

So think about some of the cues that you have.

Don't yell them out, but after dinner, what do you do without even thinking about it?

After dinner at night, sit in front of.

After dinner, maybe you go for a walk, brush your teeth, clean the dishes.

After breakfast, I, while I am eating breakfast, I, when I am tired, cue, routine.



When I am upset, cue, routine.

When someone slights me, I, if you don't think about that, you will do what your body wants to do, and it may not be the best response.

When I don't get my own way, when I feel depressed, habits can be changed, as I said before, and this is the good news, because our character is the sum of our habits.

I think there's a hidden truth that we don't get given when we become Christians, that when you say yes to Jesus, all your habits don't change.

And you could be a new Christian, and you feel sort of a bit down on yourself, because you're like, I'm not like the others, I've still got all these.

Well, when you are born again, you are declared righteous, and the power behind the habit has been demolished, it's been destroyed, yet it lingers in our body.

And we have to work out how to get rid of that and appropriate the godly habit.

So there's a bit of time involved in this.

So if you're a newish Christian, or an old one struggling with bad habits, welcome to humanity, amen?

It's a progressive conformity thing.

The important thing is that we're on a journey.

Righteousness in Christ, freedom from sin, death and judgment, liberty of grace, life in the spirit.

It all has to be appropriated.

Even though it's already been declared over you, you don't earn it.

This is exactly what Colossians 3 says.

It's a bit of text, and I'm going to read it out quickly.

But Paul writes, put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.

I want you to think about who's putting it to death.

Who is doing it?

Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

You used to walk in these ways, you did, in the life you once lived, but now who must, you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these.

You're not going to do it in your own power, but you're going to be doing part of it with the grace of God.

Anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips.

Do not lie to each other since you have taken off your old self.

Who took off?

You took off with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator.

Now, could we get a testimony of a Christian who says, you know what, I just stopped doing it like that.

Boom, it happens, but it doesn't always happen.

And clearly in God's word, Paul is saying there is a job for you to do.

Put off, put on.

Therefore, verse 12, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

This is ground breaking stuff if you've never heard it.

Grab the clothes, put them on.

Compassion, kindness.

We're not called to be wealthy kings with other people just clothing us.

We have to do it by God's grace.

Bear with each other and forgive one another.

If any of you has a grievance against someone, forgive as the Lord forgave you.

And over all of these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

So is it fair what I'm putting forward here?

Clothe yourself.

Take off, put to death, clothe, put on.

It's referring to habits.

It's referring to habits.

Because they're the automated things in us.

Like a servant ready to do the master's bidding.

If you have ever changed...

Let me ask you, anyone change some bad habits in their life?

If you ever lost weight, you would know something of this process.

It just doesn't happen all the time.

It's not easy to do, to change your habits that are unhealthy.

Maybe you're hanging out with the wrong crowd, which is leading you to do the wrong stuff.

It's just hard, but over time the change is easier.

That tends to be what happens.

Let me encourage you with what is clearly true.

The key to breaking bad habits is spiritual at its base, at its core.

This is what AA, Alcoholics Anonymous, the 12-step programs, the first five of, I think, first five or six of the steps of the 12 are all about spiritual reality.

It's always saying, I'm in a really bad place, I need a help that's bigger than me.

I need someone, and of course, it's God to call out to God and say, I need help to get out of my addiction.

I need to confess my sin and say, Lord.

And so as Christians, we know we have that victory in Christ.

Greater is he that is in me than he that's in the world.

So that's the base.

And then I've got to look at the habit.

And it's really hard to change cues.

Cues are just there.

We have dinner.

I'm not going to not have dinner.

So if the thing I do is after dinner, ugh, what am I going to do?

Well, the key is change the routine after the cue.

Change the routine.

This is what AA, 12-step programs, is all based on.

So it's like you have a craving and a cue to drink alcohol.

The cue won't change, but the routine is get on the phone to your sponsor and say, I need some help.

And the sponsor says, oh, I'm behind you.

You're a great, and they encourage you and give you a reward that the alcohol used to give you.

That's the non-rocket science of 12-steps.

Have someone journeying with you, pointing you to the higher power, to God, and to say, I'm with you in this.

I'm in your corner.

So cues don't change, but you have to change what's in it.

Do you have something that you do that's unhealthy or sinful because of a cue?

Think about it.

It can be really normal.

I discovered a while ago that mowing the lawn, the cue of mowing the lawn takes about an hour, doing the edges, the noise, the smell.

It would be a cue for me to ruminate about stuff that was often unhealthy in my life.

Especially if I was going through a hard time in interpersonal stuff.

I'd sort of rehearse how I could hurt that person with words.

How I could justify myself.

I would get to a place that I'd be like, well, it's not helpful.

It's not that I sort of mowed the lawn to an inch of its life or anything, but I realised I was regularly doing a routine that gave me a reward of creating space in my box of contempt and putting more people in there.

That's not godly.

So I had to come to the point of, I've got to keep mowing the lawn.

I need to redeem the routine.

So what I do now is regularly say, thank you, God, that we get to own a home.

What a blessing.

What a blessing it is to look after what you have given us and what it means to have a home with the family that we've enjoyed and we are part of, and thanking God then for all sorts of things, and then taking that as an opportunity to reflect and redeem and receive and come to the end of it and feel like I've spent time with the Lord.

You know what I'm talking about.

You can redeem that routine.

That's what it means to insert habits of righteousness and take out habits that are unhealthy at best and at worst, they're just sinful.

So let me, and that's the idea of parastami.

So I would come to do the lawn, and basically, I'm just going, I am here, ruminator.



Tell me who I should think bad thoughts about.

But you don't want to do that.

So let me throw out some application hooks.

In a conversation, is there a cue for you to start elevating yourself?

When you just think about it, you have a conversation.

Do you do most of the talking?

Something happened in that conversation.

There was a cue for you to exhibit, exercise the need to make yourself feel better about yourself.

To elevate yourself.

You know what I am talking about if you do it.

Is there a cue in a conversation to go, this is where I start being negative about other people.

This is where I've learned if I gossip a bit, I'm the source of power.

It feels good.

I like that reward.

But you don't know that you like the reward.

That's how it works.

That's how sin works.

For some, it's, I guess, deeper in a way.

Some cue happens and it activates a deep hurt.

And you just go back to that hurt, and it's coming out your mouth.

I did this, something that the Baptist Union hurt me 25 years ago.

Leaders in the Baptist Union.

And I've always felt like a bit of a black sheep, to be honest.

And I was at a gathering of Baptists, and they're asking me about, oh, how can we get better at the Baptist?

And I'm, come on, very good, John.

I do not get negative.

And then negative stuff came out, and someone said this poignant probing thing.

They said, when did that happen?

And I went, 25 years ago.

And the room went quiet.

And I went, yeah, point taken.

And some of you guys need to learn that.

Let the jolly thing go.

Don't let the cue go.

This is the time I pull out the old pain.

But of course, for some of us, it is trauma-based and you can't control it, and you got to get help.

You got to get help.

These are the crippling fears, the loops that pull out anxiety, that cue lust that then involves progressive downward spiral into actions that are sinful, gambling.

What is it for you?

Roman 6 says, Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves to the one that you obey?

Were you slaves to sin which leads to death?

Because it leads to bad stuff.

Or to obedience which leads to righteousness?

Isn't that a beautiful thought?

That just saying yes habitually, in an incremental way.

What's the scripture say?

Saying yes to godly habits leads to righteousness.

And the good evangelical in you says, but how can it lead to righteousness?

Wasn't it a gift?

Yes, it was a gift, but it's also a habit.

You just gotta appropriate it.

If we're going to get this loop right, we need to...

If you put the loop up again, thanks, Jase.

Can you see, I need to actually have a reward that's worth it.

You know, if you do the right thing, you help someone out because you feel like I should as a Christian.

If I'm helping out a human being, sometimes I get the reward immediately.

They go, well, thank you, and sometimes they even tell others, and I'm, hmm, I get a bit of kudos from that.

So that's sort of the reward.

But what if no one's watching?

What if it's righteousness that's only for the smile of Jesus?

Does that do it for you?

Does it do it for you?

The smile of Jesus alone.

The other day, we have a brand new granddaughter.

She's 10 weeks old.

And Lucy gave me my first me-only smile.

And someone took a photo of it, and it will be forever.

It's on my phone now.

This is my home screen.

And I smile every time I see it, because Lucy's 10 weeks old.

She's just so beautiful, and we're so grateful for this precious life in our life.

She'd smiled heaps of times at her parents, heaps of times at her nana, but I'd never got one just for me.

And so I hold my little granddaughter, and she's just pumping the smile for me.

I was like, that's hashtag life highlight.

I'm not even being silly.

It literally is.

You might think I'm boring, but it's up there.

It's just up there.

And that made me think, I want Jesus' smile to be that important for me.

Oh, Lord.

And I think of Jesus smiling, you know, sort of a wry smile when Peter hops out of the boat.

He's going to walk out on the water, and Peter jumps out and starts walking.

He's like, get on you, mate.

And then he starts falling in when he takes his eyes off Jesus.

Jesus' smile.

Jesus' smile.

You got to work out what your reward is.

It can't just be, oh, I'm meant to do this.

Richard was talking this morning about Bible reading.

It was really interesting.

I asked the question, what do you do when it gets hard?

And he says, most of the time, it's not hard because I realise it's not a duty I must perform.

It's a person I'm trying to meet.

I'm finding the Jesus in the Bible.

Who it's pointing to, he's there.

So when it becomes personal like that, living, he said, I want to do it.

Honestly, I really want to do it.

I thought it was a great point.

So we can make turning the other cheek a habit for Jesus' smile.

We can make going the extra mile, which is a sermon on the Mount Stuff, a habit, if it's for Jesus' smile.

Last point.

Habit change is often determined by what's called keystone habits.

Keystone habits.

There are stories of addicted smokers kicking the habit after 30 years by doing one thing.

You couldn't imagine what the one thing, the one keystone habit that is like a domino effect.

It was for one smoker, they always lit up a fag after dinner at night.

So instead of doing that, they brushed their teeth.



It became a keystone habit.

They kicked the habit.

They kicked smoking because of brushing their teeth.

Keystone habits.

I was talking to someone this week and I thought it was fascinating.

They said living as a single person, sometimes food portions are hard, motivation for cooking is hard.

So they got on to HelloFresh.

And it costs a little bit of money, but you get good quality natural foods, and you get taught a new skill how to cook it.

You get a diversity of meals that you wouldn't have normally understood.

And then you realise you're not going to the supermarket near the junk food, and you're not buying the things that you used to buy.

So when you have the craving that is there and the queue, it's not there to grab the junk food.

And then what happens from that keystone habit of just getting some food sorted is your cholesterol gets better, and your overall health and your weight drops, and you start feeling better about yourself.

What's the keystone habit?

Just the food you use in HelloFresh, it costs a little bit of money.

So, are there keystone habits that could change you?

Keystone habits that could change us?

It's all by grace.

We are coming to the end of a thousand brave days since we came into this centre.

It's going to be on the 16th of July, a Saturday night celebration, Lord willing, and the 17th will be a big Sunday celebration of God's grace for us in an interesting time, COVID, a thousand brave days.

But I've been seeking the Lord and talking to leaders about what's next.

And so I won't go into it all now, but we're talking about 75 weeks of seven, 75 habit forming weeks, cycles of seven.

What would we commit to for 75 weeks, which will take us from July 24 to December 31, a New Year's Eve party at the end of 2023.

And we're going to think about what sort of people do we want to be in 75 weeks?

What sort of church do we want to be?

But what I'm fascinated by is if there was one keystone habit, remember the smoker, remember the HelloFresh, if there's one keystone habit that we need to have, front and centre as a church, a church, not just individuals, church, what we've nearly been here 120 years, what does a church need if there was one keystone habit to make sure we didn't drop off on?

To keep that church, the baton going from generation to generation, 120 years, like, what would it be?

Interesting question, I'll leave it with you.

What's the keystone habit for a healthy church?

Lots of things that comes to mind, but I'm gonna tell you what I thought.

I think it's Sunday.

I think it's Sunday, not because it's the Sabbath, but because it's the Lord's Day.

Sabbath could be any day of the week, but to be a faithful and fruitful church that represents Jesus year in, year out, Sundays matter, turning up to be with the saints, as the Bible says we should, to worship together, to lift up Jesus Christ as our Lord, to come under God's word.

One habit, to turn up on Sundays, if you can.

And if you've got a family, I would say this, bring your kids.

Used to be called Sunday School.

In 2000 years, there weren't Sunday Schools forever.

But for probably 150 years, there has been.

You know what we're living through now?

A profound revolution where Christians do not come to Sunday Church and don't bring their kids.

Because Sundays are too busy.

And also, and this sounds judgy, I'm not meaning to be, I'm meaning to be prophetic, honestly.

I believe that Doug Schouler, our treasurer, he's not our treasurer anymore, but he said at the beginning of COVID, he said, my fear is that our families and all of our church people will get into bad habits and they'll stop coming on Sunday.

Because we do a great job online.

Some people can't come to church.

They're online.

So good to have you with us here.

But when you put two and a half years of online and COVID, wearing masks and all the awful stuff we've had to do, habits form.

That's what Doug feared.

And you know what I said to Doug two and a half years ago?

Nah, mate, she'll be right.

And I now think he was right.

It is across the board, across this country, across the world.

People have stopped meeting together with the saints.

Because life's busy.

And you know what?

I can be a Christian without going to church, right?

You can, but it's really hard.

It's not the way it's designed.

Because you know what the thing about Sundays is?

Sundays is not a performance by a few people out the front.

Preaching, singing, Sundays is the gathering of the saints.

Amen?

Sundays is when we come and we look.

It's not here, but in the morning, you look up and people have turned up really early to set up all out there.

Because they're serving, they're giving their life away.

And the band, this doesn't all happen.

They're all here at eight o'clock, sometimes 7.30.

The people downstairs, you don't even see, they're running kids ministry.

They've been doing it all week.

But on a Sunday, especially in the morning, but at night as well, there are so many jobs.

Someone, there's four people in the car park, making sure someone's small.

The people at the front are giving warmth.

Is that a gimmick?

No, it's not a gimmick, in Jesus' name.

It's the church loving people, amen.

When you, I think this is one of the most important things that Sundays do.

If you come with a full heart, you can come with an empty heart.

You're more than welcome.

We come at different stages of our heart, capacity to be used.

But if I come, and I've been in the word and in the spirit, and I say, Lord, I'm looking here for drooped shoulders, Sunday, and if I see drooped shoulders, I'm gonna go over, if I've got relational connection, and say, hey, you don't seem to be, how you doing?

Ever done that?

And the person breaks down in tears, because they're like, I didn't think anyone would ever ask me that.

But if there's love and care, then the spirit goes, I could use that body, and I will, and I'm gonna give words and a prayer, and I'm gonna give the manifestation of giftedness that breaks chains.

It all can happen on a Sunday.

Amen.

Now, I know it's a public holiday, and often public holiday is at Tumbleweed Central, people are away doing their stuff, but I'm preaching to the converted here.

You're all here.

Can I just put this out there?

I hope that NorthernLife could get a hold of this keystone habit more and more.

Sundays matter.

Sundays matter.

You could come and be religious and not get a lot of good out of coming on a Sunday, but that's not gonna be your story.

Because you're gonna have your heart open, and we're gonna come under God's word, and all these other things.

Bible reading, of course, it's so important, and prayer and worship and sacrifice.

My hunch is that it flows out of the habit, the keystone habit.

I meet with God's people, if I can, on the Lord's Day.

I do.

I genuinely encourage you to talk to someone about that.

If we're wrong with that, let's find what the keystone habit is.

One thing's for sure, life is lived in habits.



Churches have habits.

They're either really good or not so good.

Righteousness is a gift.

Righteousness is a calling, and righteousness is a habit.

May we be found obedient and willing servants of the king this week and in the years to come.

Amen?

Amen.