

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.

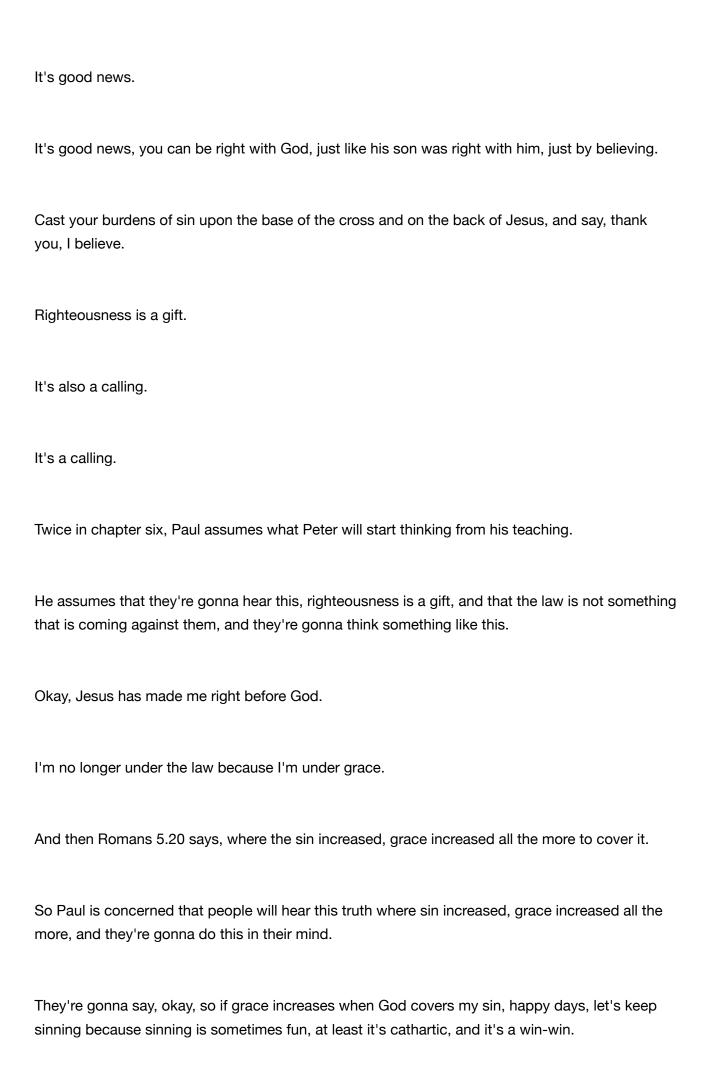
But it's interesting that Jesus said, if you love me, you will obey me, didn't he?
Jesus said in John 15, my father is a gardener, and he cuts off the branches that bear no fruit.
There is a connection between what has been declared over us by faith and our behaviour, us owning, us appropriating the 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.

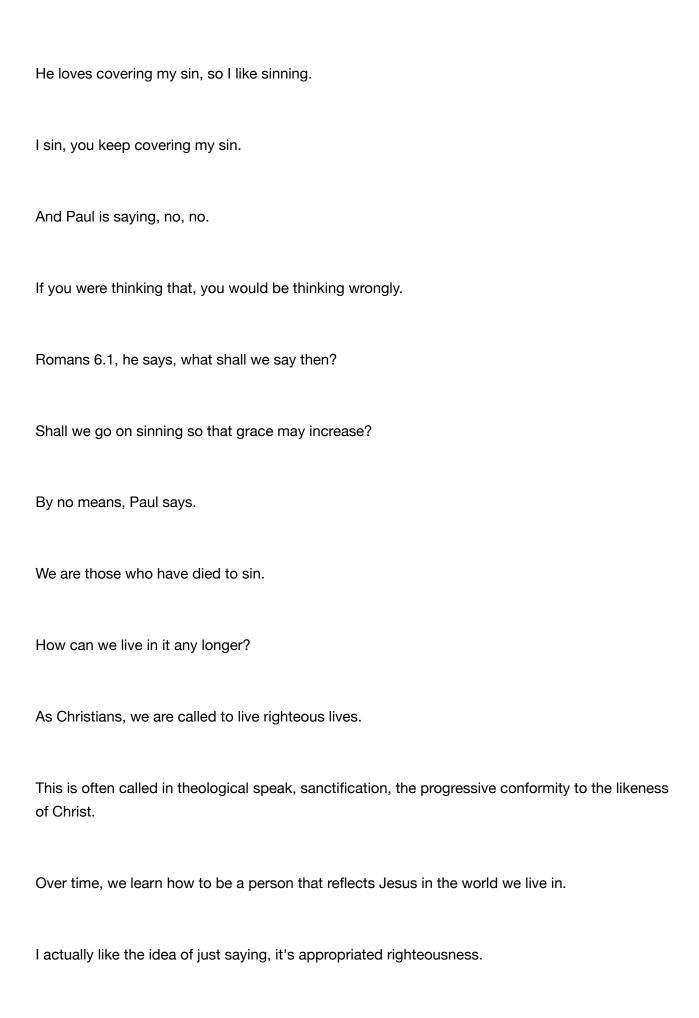
In fact, the law, or what amounts to a bunch of rules given to the people of Israel and given to us to define by God who is good enough, the Ten Commandments, they can never make a person righteous.
That is apart from Jesus Christ.
The Bible says that the law, again, the Ten Commandments, the rules for 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 rained 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.

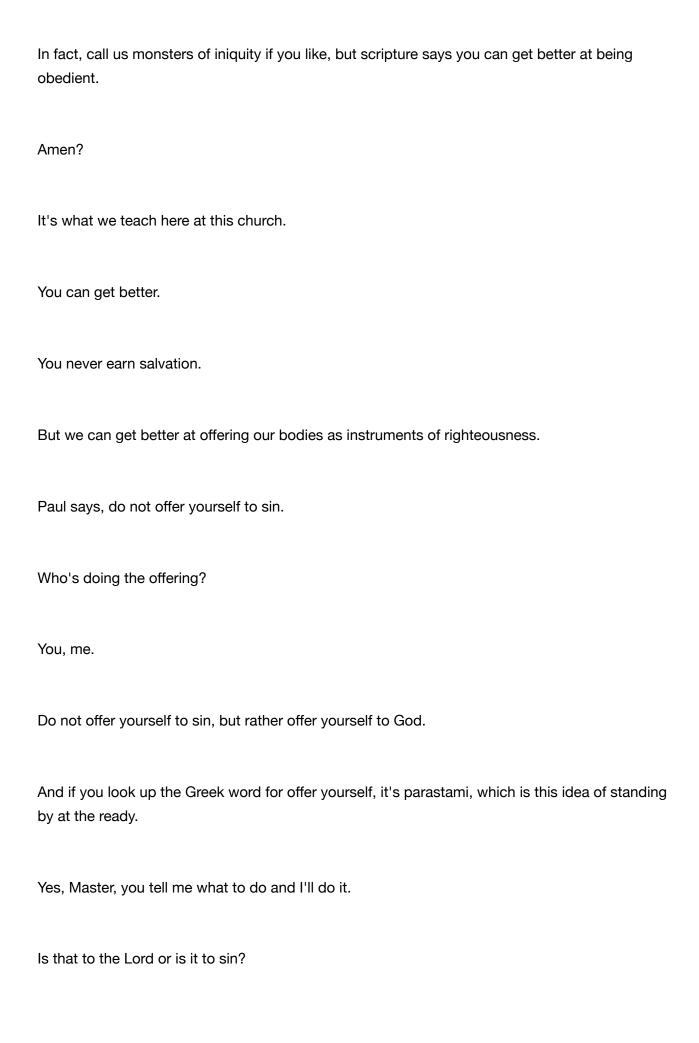
I find this quite regularly over the decades of being a pastor, that a faithful, committed Christian will have a loved one who has not put their faith in Christ, but the comment once they die will be something like, they were a good person.
They were a good person.
And of course, I'm not going to say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

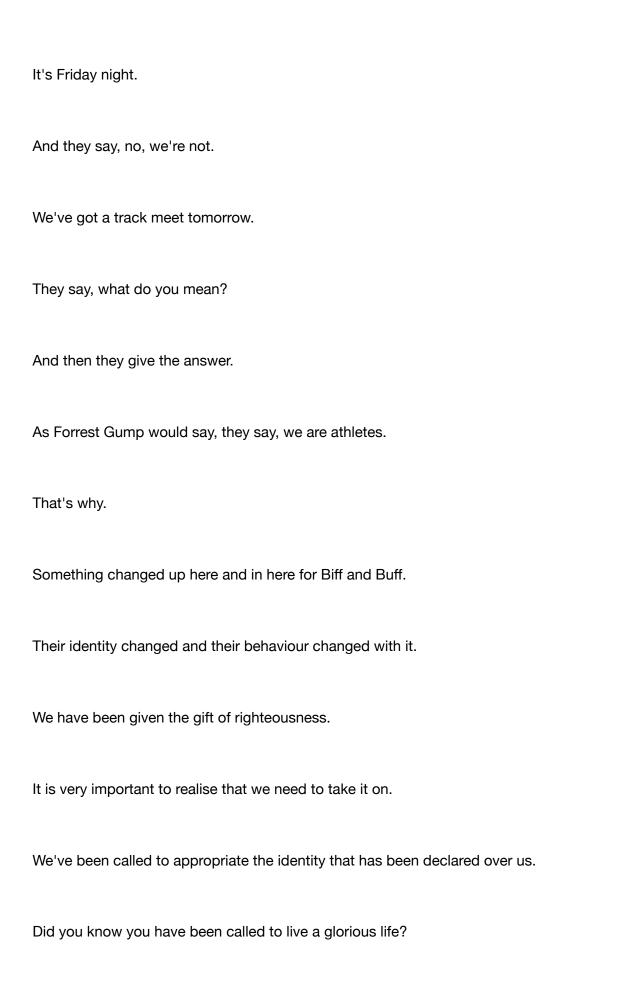


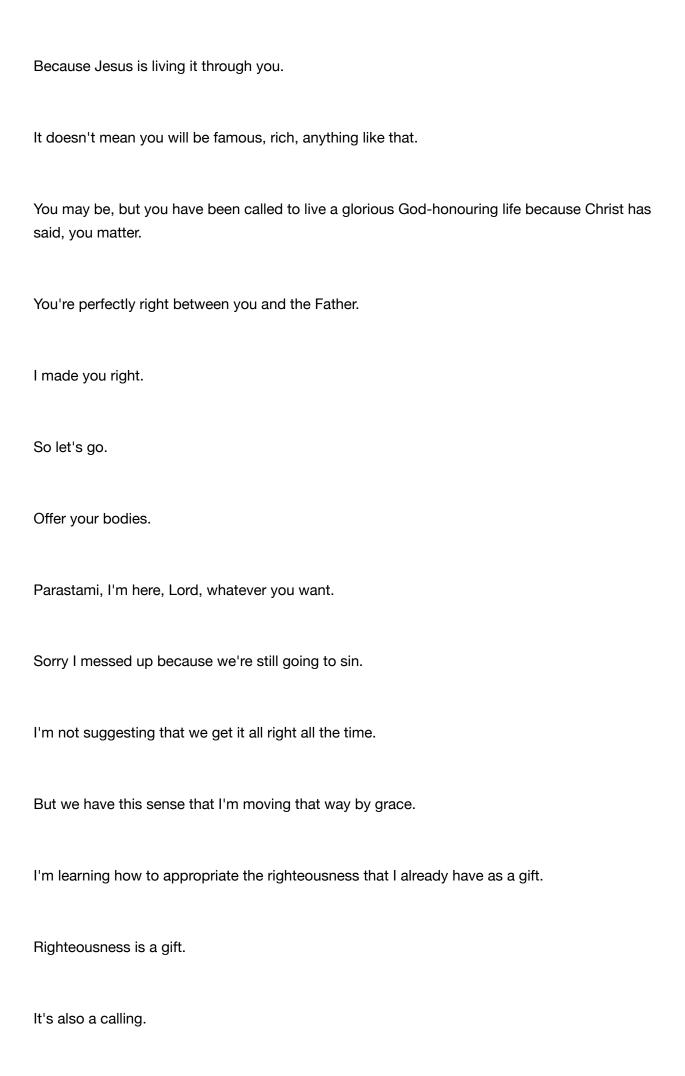


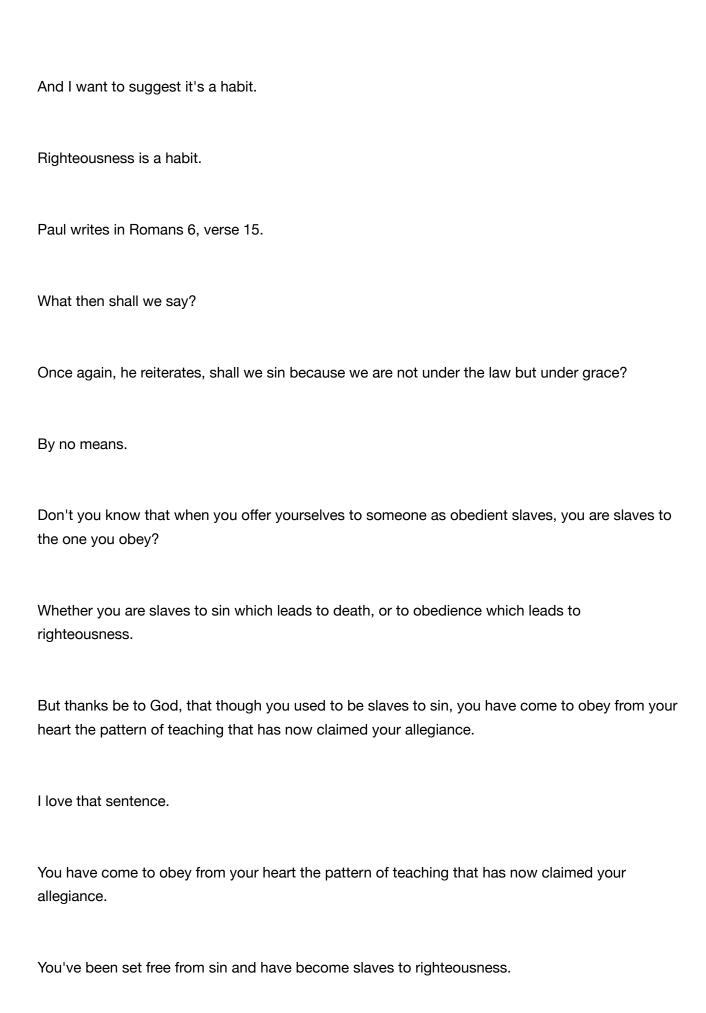
Righteousness was declared over us by faith, but we need to take hold of what Christ has already died to give us by faith.
It's becoming the person, grace says you are in Christ.
That's what life is about.
Becoming the person that Christ, that grace says, I am in Christ.
And this is what Romans 6 basically 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.



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?

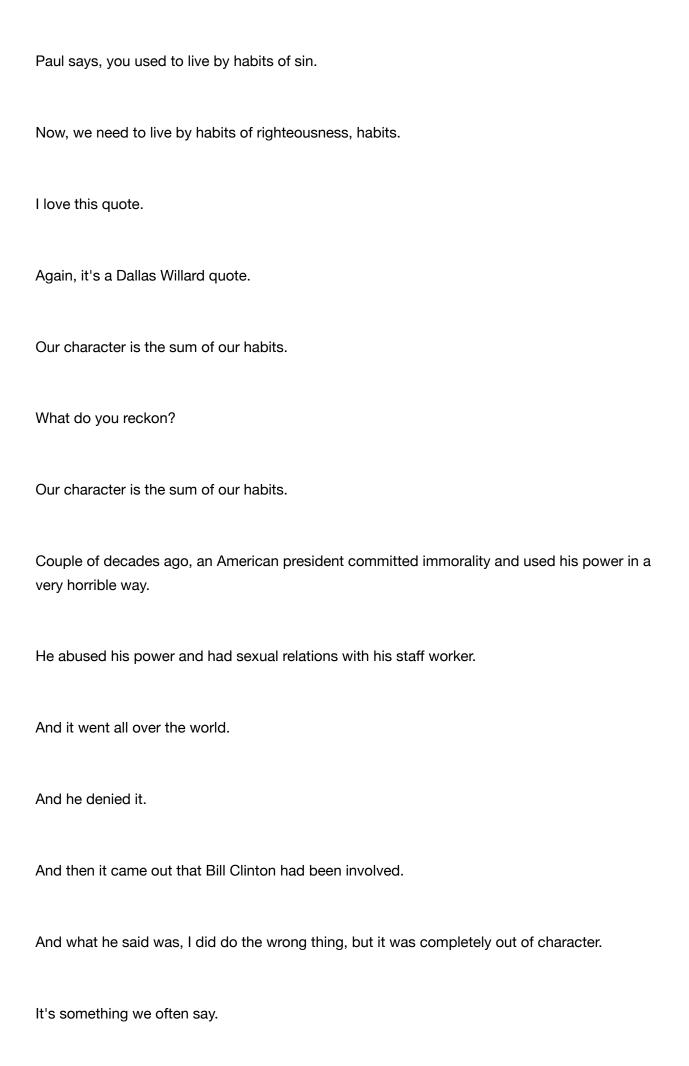






That word parastami there is all over the place.
Obedient servants.
Paul is saying, are you an obedient servant to sin or the Lord?
A couple of chapters later in Romans 8, he's going to say, are you an obedient servant to the flesh or to the spirit?
One or the other?
He says, don't offer your bodies 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.

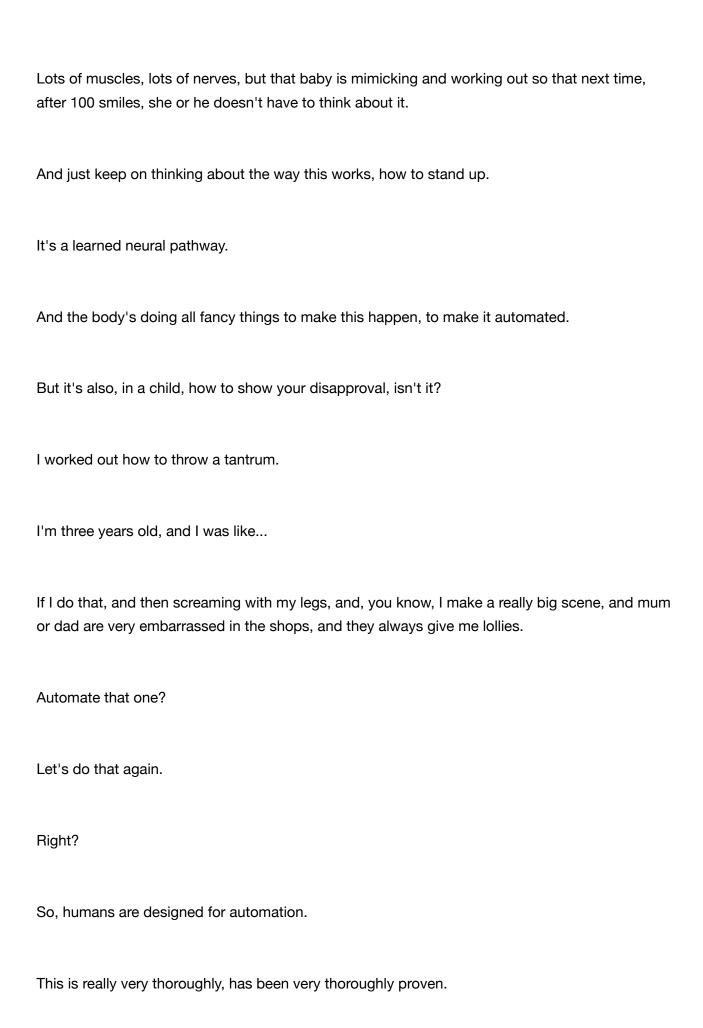
Your heart.
If you look up in the Old Testament and New Testament, you find over 800 references to the heart in the Bible.
It never once refers to a organ that pumps blood.
It always means something like this.
The mind, the character, the inner self, the will, our intention, our centre.
It's where habits 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.

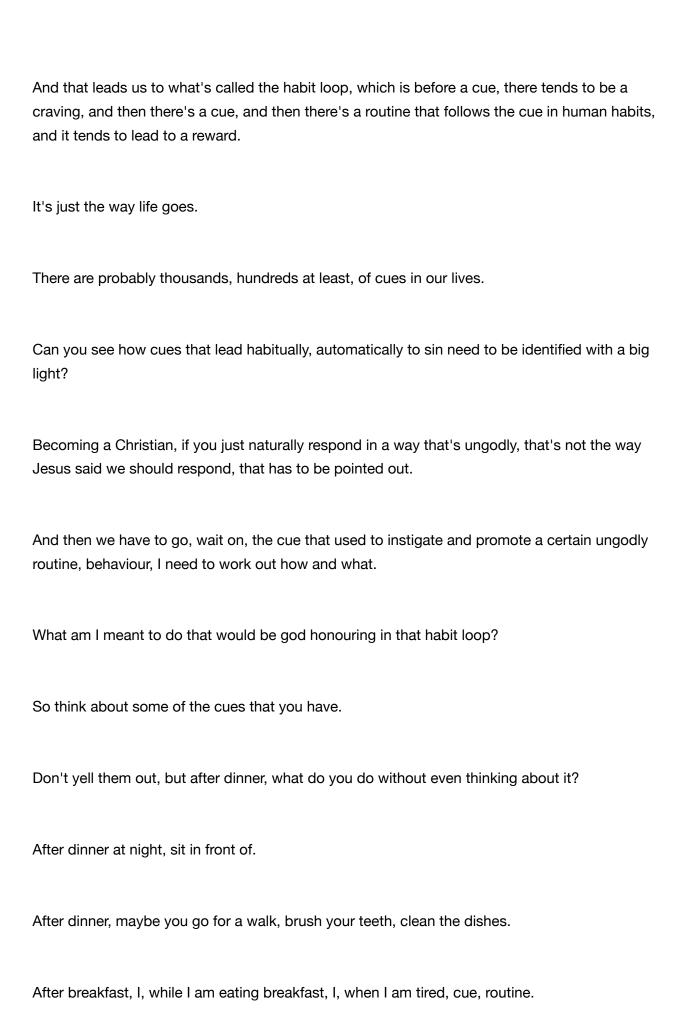


I messed up, but it was out of character.
What Dallas Willard would say is, that never happens.
You always act out of character.
We always act out of character.
Because character is the sum of our habits.
It doesn't mean that I don't make mistakes that are anomalies in my life.
But Bill Clinton lived 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.







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.

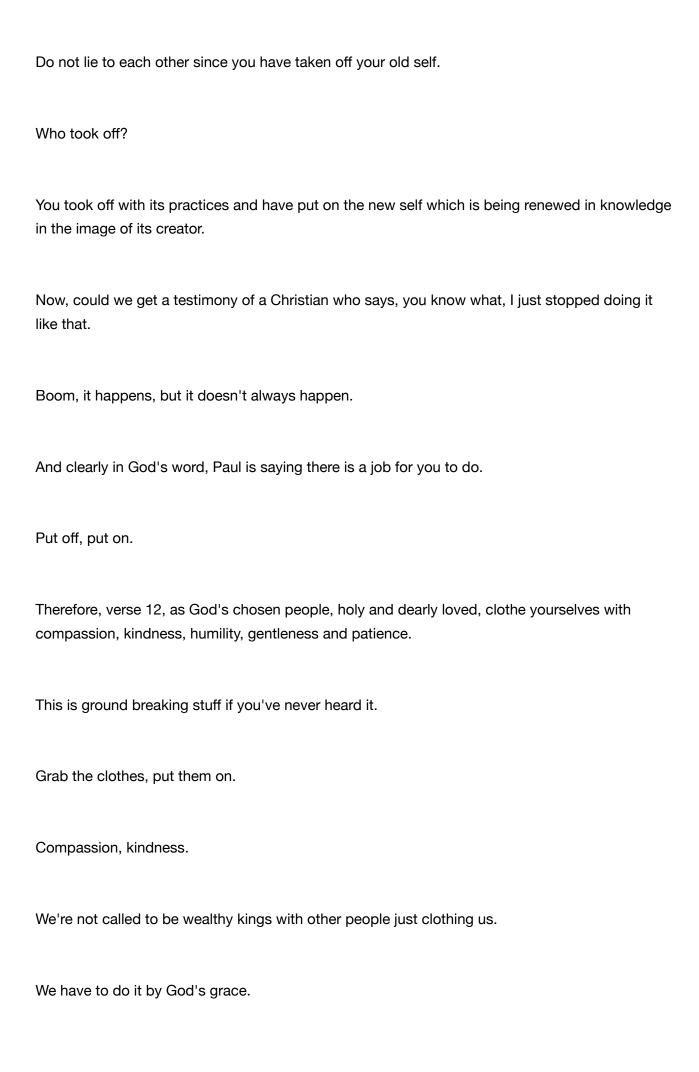
So there's a bit of time involved in this.

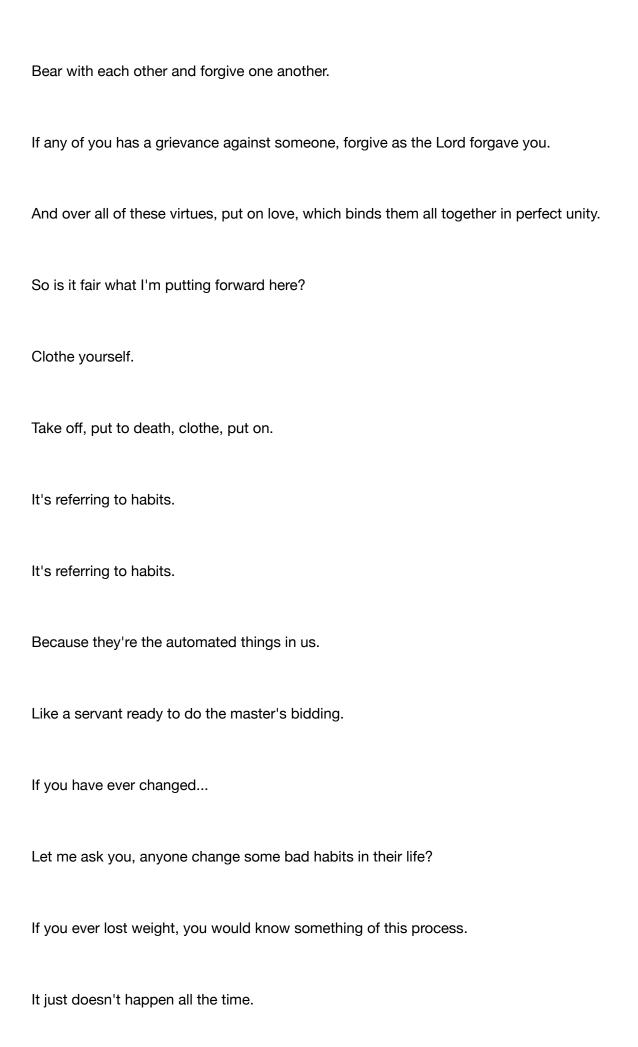
So if you're a newish Christian, or an old one struggling with bad habits, welcome to humanity, amen?

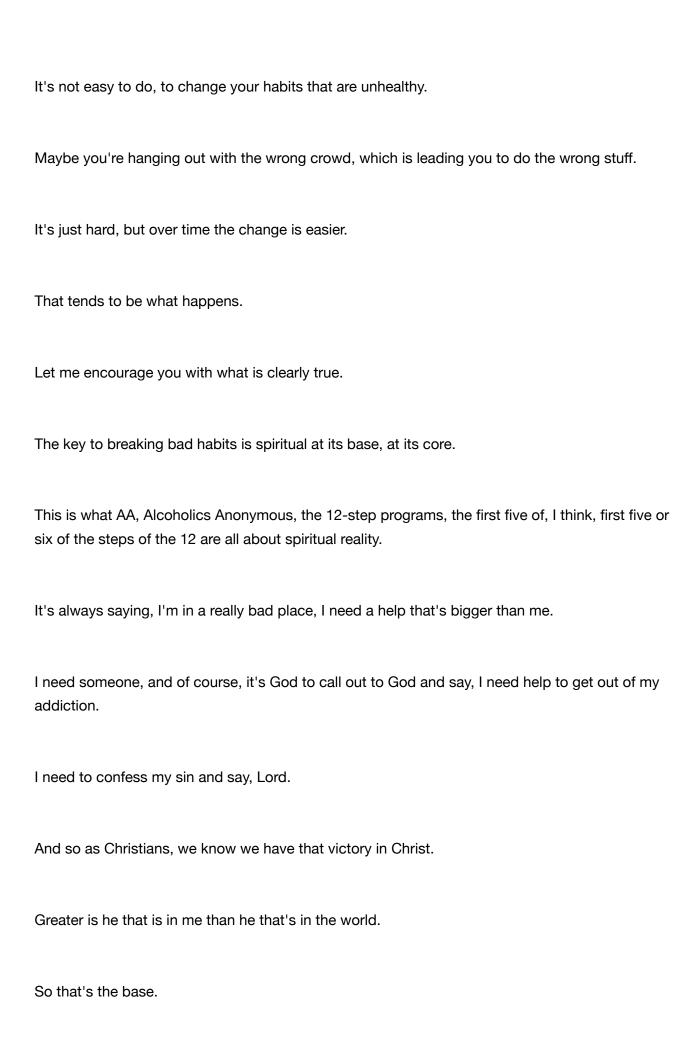
It's a progressive conformity thing.

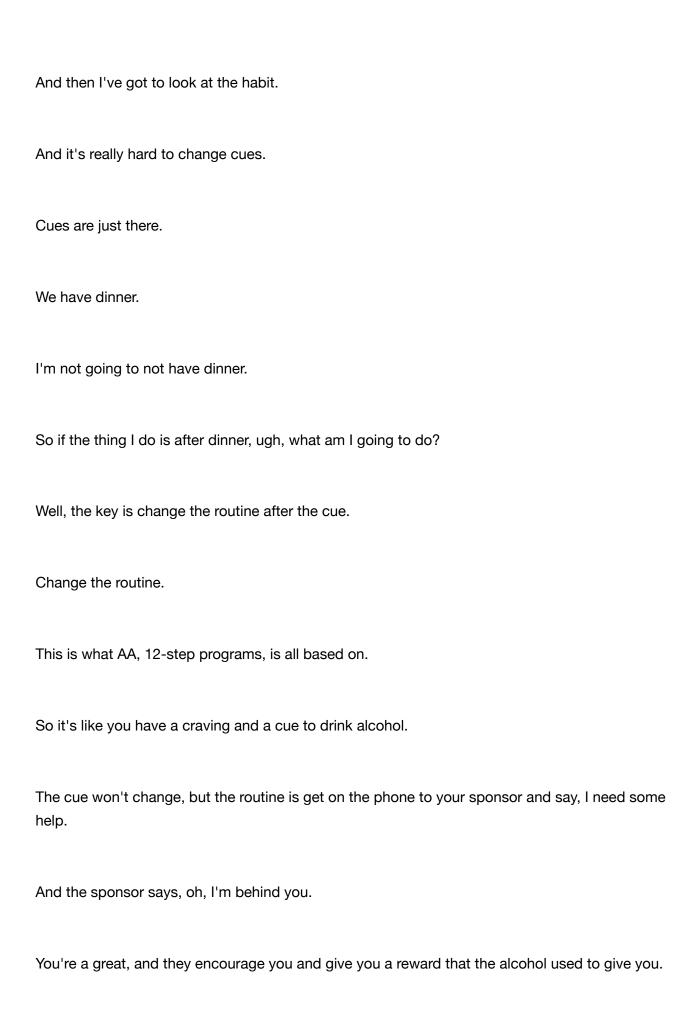
The important thing is that we're on a journey.

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.

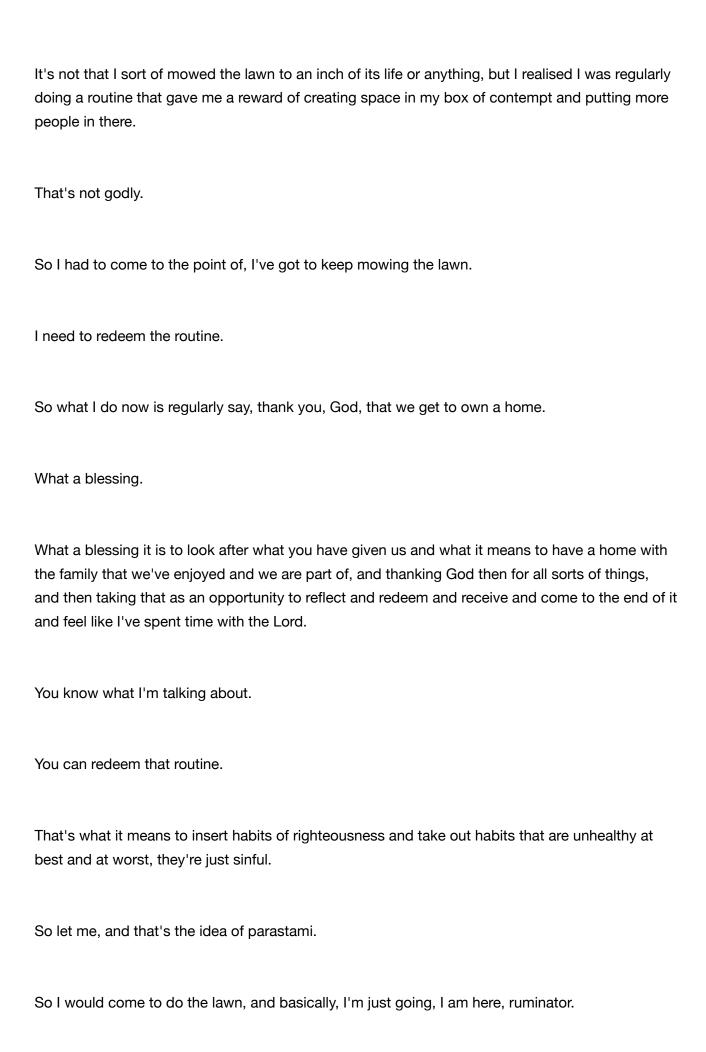


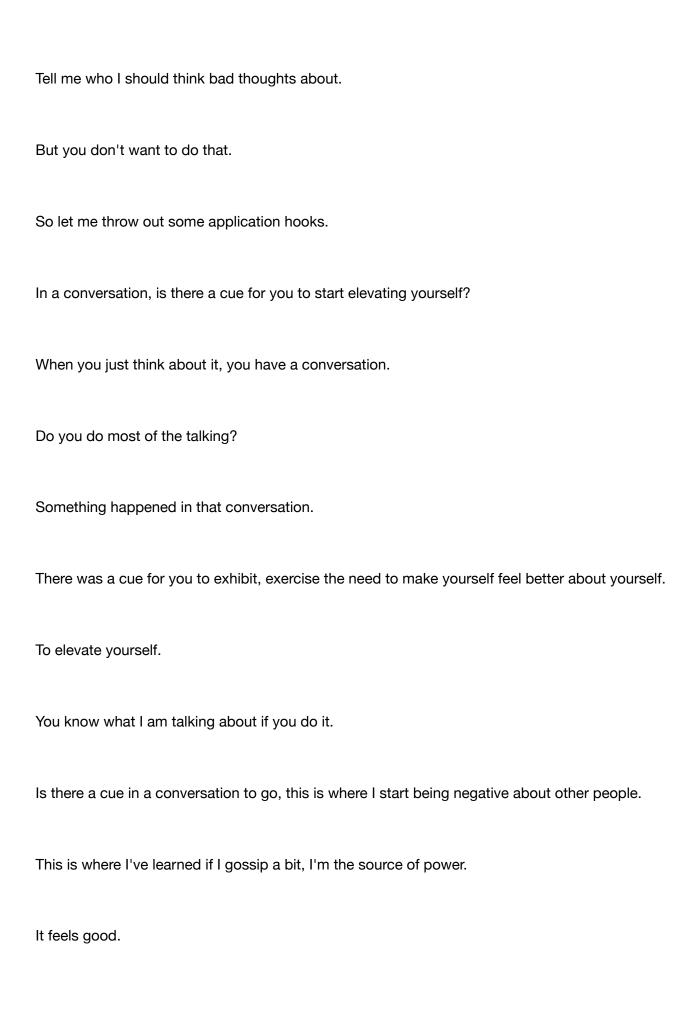


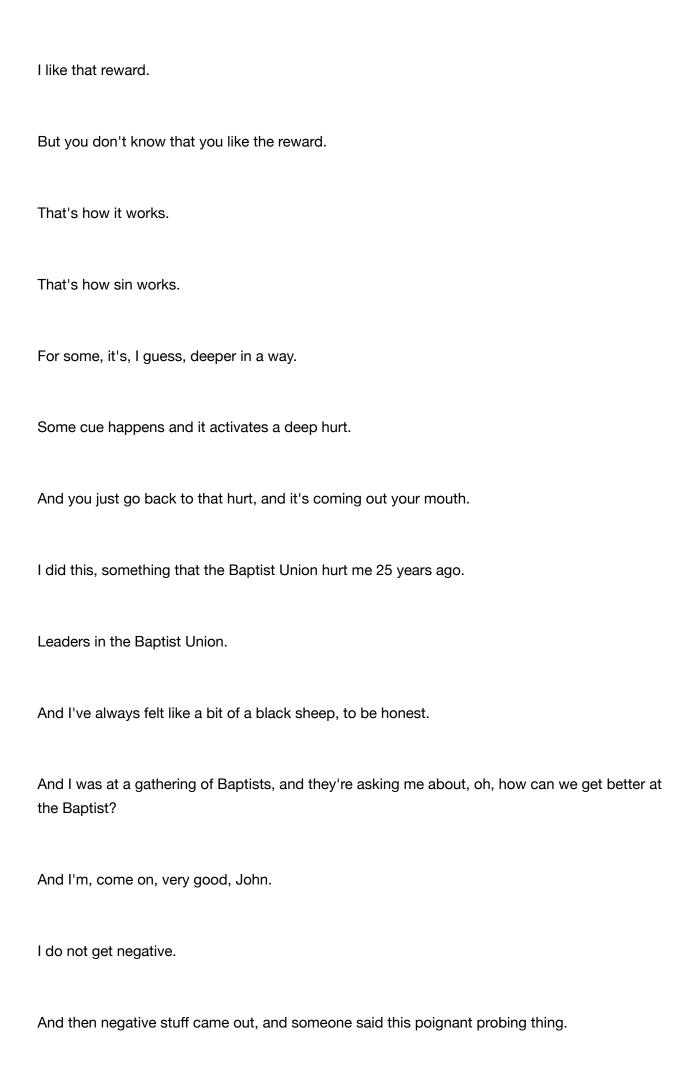


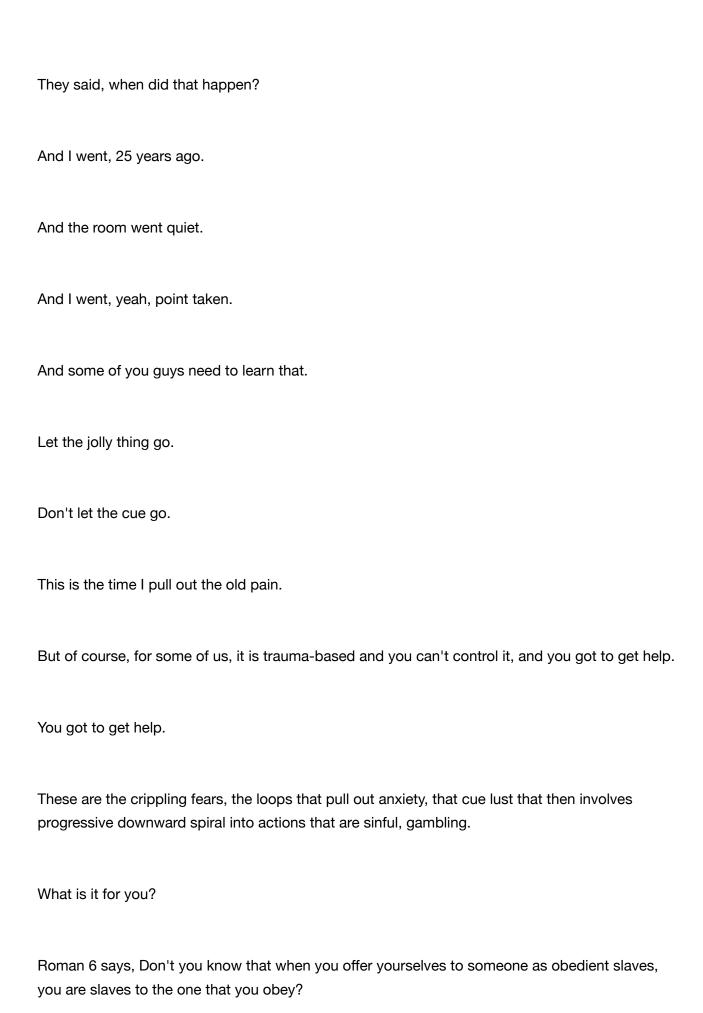


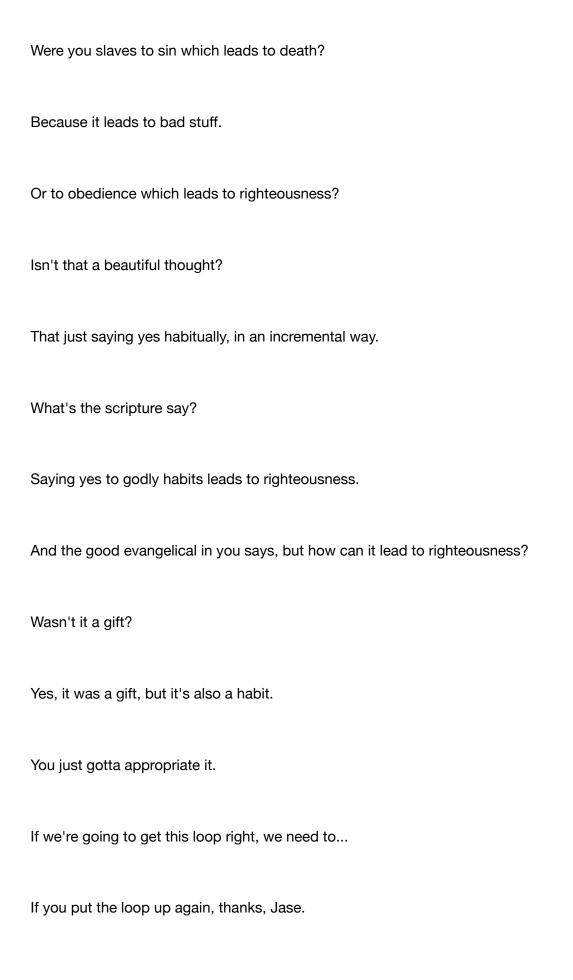
That's the non-rocket science of 12-steps.
Have someone journeying with you, pointing you to the higher power, to God, and to say, I'm with you in this.
I'm in your corner.
So cues don't change, but you have to change what's in it.
Do you have something that you do that's unhealthy or sinful because 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.



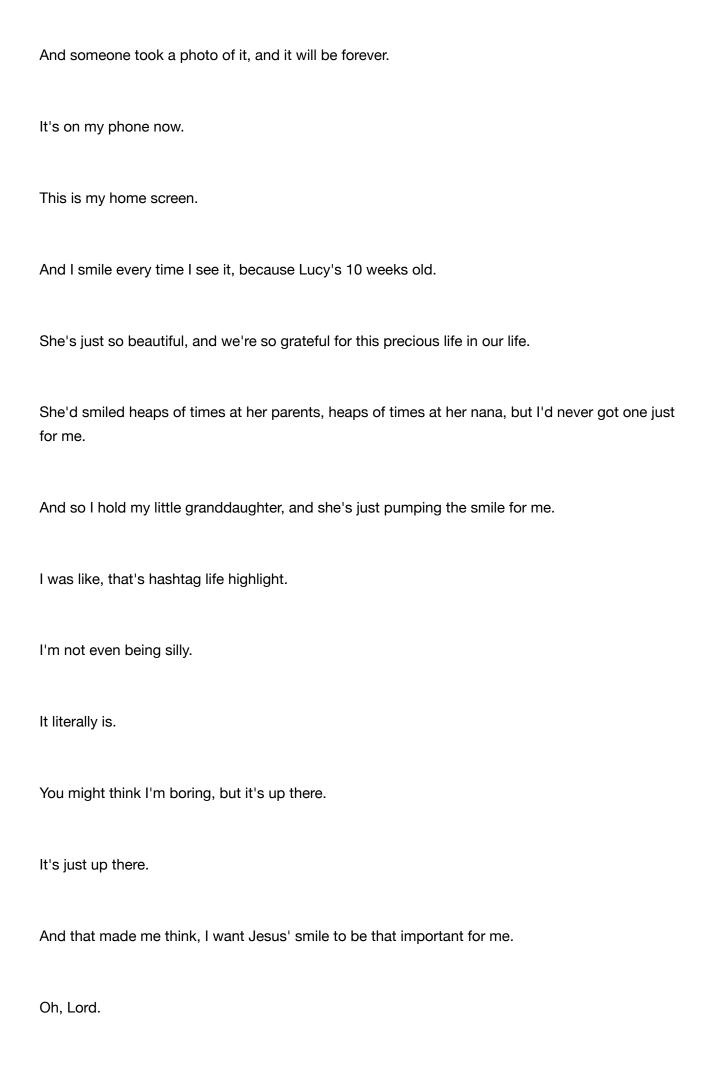




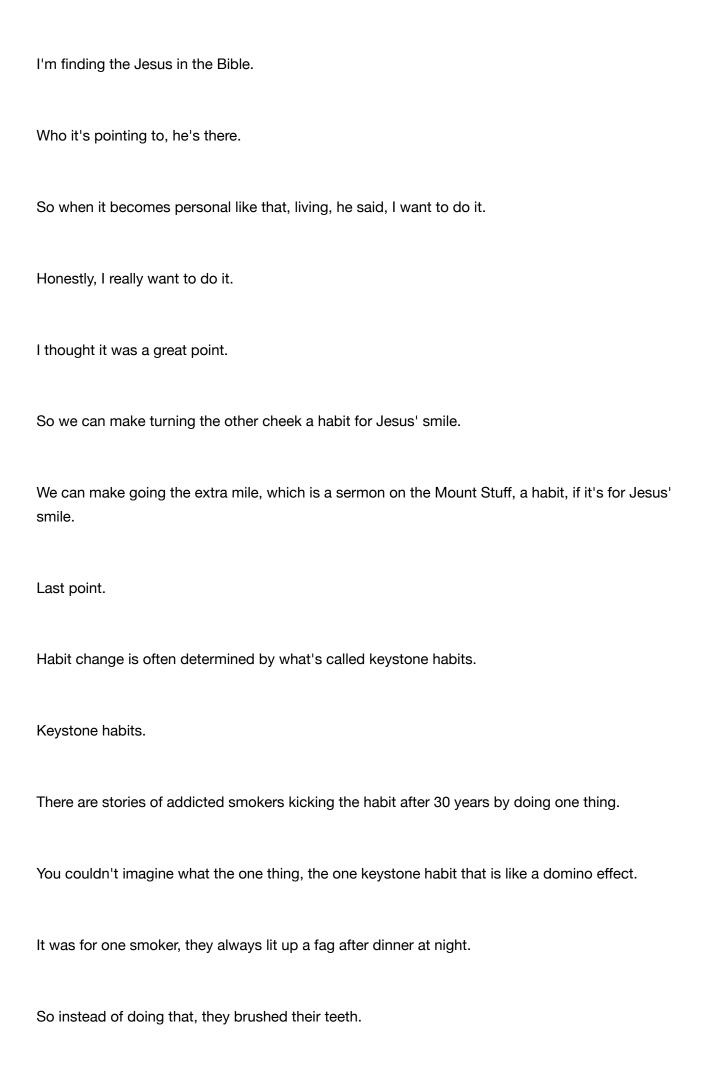




Can you see, I need to actually have a reward that's worth it.
You know, if you do the right thing, you help someone out because you feel like I should as a Christian.
If I'm helping out a human being, sometimes I get the reward immediately.
They go, well, thank you, and sometimes they even tell others, 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.

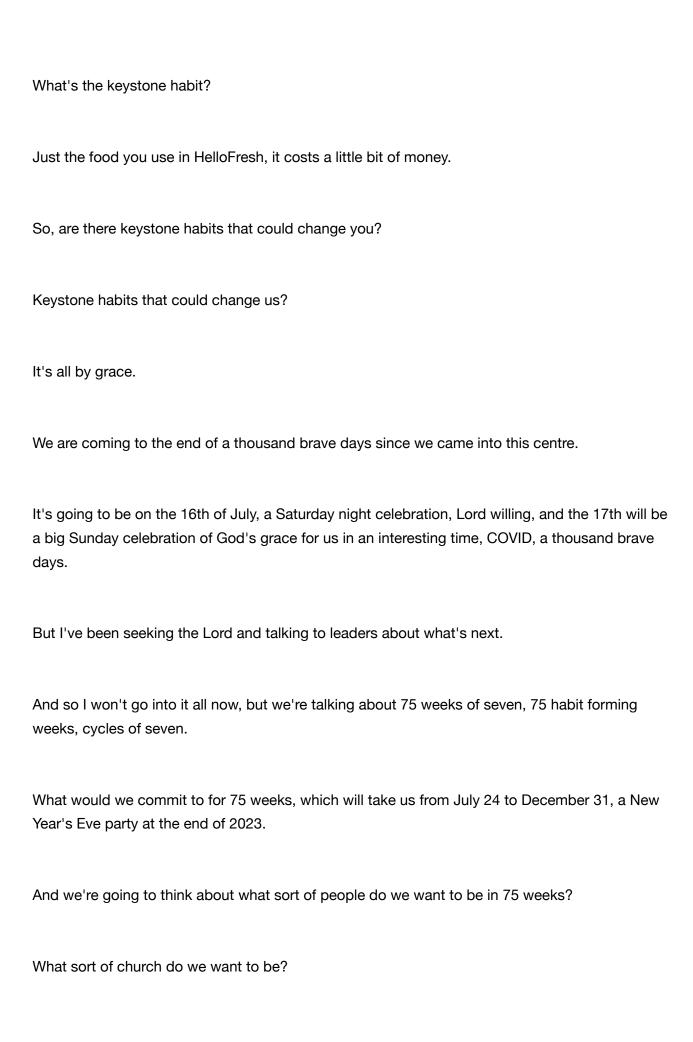


And I think of Jesus smiling, you know, sort of a wry smile when Peter hops out of the boat.
He's going to walk out on the water, and Peter jumps out and starts walking.
He's like, get on you, mate.
And then he starts falling in when he takes his eyes off Jesus.
Jesus' smile.
Jesus' smile.
You got to 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.



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.



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.

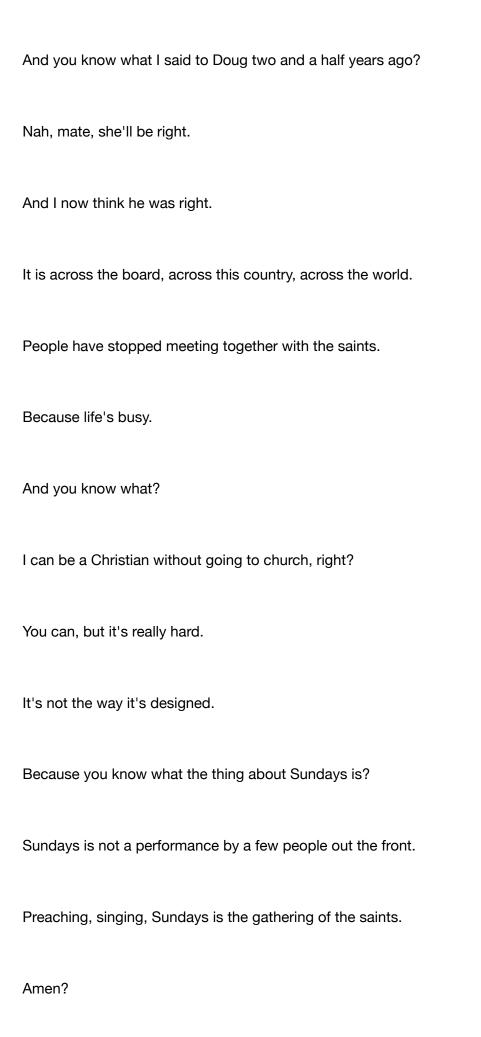
One habit, to turn up on Sundays, if you can.

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.



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.