

## NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Win the Day – Eat the Frog

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Bob Speca was a sophomore at Marple Newton high school when he was first introduced to the math induction theory. His teacher Mr. Dobransky, likened that theory to the domino effect. After school, Bob Speca went and bought two boxes of dominoes. He lined them up 112 dominoes in a row pushed one over and you know exactly what happened. It had a domino effect. Now, after graduating high school, Bob Speca appeared on the Johnny Carson show to show off his domino toppling skill. The Guinness Book of World Records actually created a category to recognize his accomplishments. In 1976 Bob Speca set the first world record in domino toppling with a chain reaction numbering 11,111 dominoes. Over the next decade, he would break his own record five times. He would top out tap out at 97,500 dominoes.

Now around the same time Bob Speca was setting world records a physicist named Lauren Whitehead was doing experiments on the domino chain reaction. Whitehead discovered that a capable of knocking over another domino that is one and a half times its size and so just the little two inch like this can topple a three inch domino. A three inch domino, it can topple a four and a half inch domino ad infinitum. By the time you get to the 18th domino, you could topple the Leaning Tower of Pisa of course it's leaning so that's not entirely fair. The 21st domino, you can take down the Washington Monument. 23rd domino could knock over the Eiffel Tower and the 27th domino could cartwheel, the 160 storey Burj Khalifa.

Let me double all the way back to the math induction theory. Instead of a fancy formula let me give you a real world example. According to that theory, you can climb as high as you like on a ladder by starting with the bottom wrong, then climbing the ladder, one rung at a time. That theory is relatively new, but the idea is as old as the Tower of Babel. Genesis 11:6 says it this way, "Nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them." Let me say it another way, almost anyone can accomplish almost anything if they work at it long enough, hard enough and smart enough. The key is what I would call domino habits, little habits that are high leverage habits.

Here's what I know for sure. If you do little things like their big things, God is going to do big things like their little things. And so we continue our series 'Win the Day' we've talked about two habits that will help you bury dead yesterday's you have to flip the script and kiss the wave.

We're gonna switch gears and I want to talk about this third habit 'Eat the Frog'. Let me define it and then we'll unpack it. Mark Twain is purported to have said, if you ever have to eat a live frog, it's best done first thing in the morning. Why? Because you can go through the rest of the day knowing that the hardest thing is behind you. Hold that thought. According to a Duke University study 45% of daily behavior is automatic now that's not bad unless, of course, they're bad habits. Habits are the way that we

put things on repeat. Without that ability to automate, we would have to relearn everything every single day.

And so, habitualization is not just a good thing, it's actually a God thing. Habits save us tremendous time and energy, but the savings comes at a cost. When something becomes second nature, we don't really give it a second thought. That's when and where and why we need to deconstruct and reconstruct our daily habits. And so that's what we're gonna do. There's lots of ways to do this. I think one way is, you can study other people and hack their habits. It's why I love reading biographies. But let me say this, I think leadership starts with self leadership and self leadership starts with self evaluation. You've got to do a little SWOT analysis on your time, talent and treasure. You've got to identify your own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Here's what I believe. You can reinvent yourself. You can reprogram your mind. You can repurpose your emotions; you can even reinvent your body. I got an email not long ago, from a high school principal. He read the Circle Maker topped out at 397 pounds. He read that book decided that he was going to run a marathon had to lose 60 pounds before he even started running. But he started running prayer circles; get this, around the 82 schools in his school district. He not only ran a marathon lost half of his body weight. Now let me say this, I recognize nature, as well as nurture, like height, weight has a heritability factor and I'm not dismissing that but it doesn't change my thesis. Almost anyone can do almost anything if they work at it long enough, hard enough and smart enough. Now, I know what some of you are thinking Pastor Mark just went self help. No, no, no, no, no, this is a stewardship issue. It's about making the most of the time, talent and treasure that God has entrusted to us. It's my utmost for his highest. It's not just cultivating good habits, its cultivating God habits. And so what I want to do is spend a couple of minutes hack your habits. And we'll talk about habit switching, and habit stacking and we'll reverse engineer some goals turn them into daily habits.

And so before we do that, pick a habit, any habit; it can be physical, relational, emotional, mental, financial, spiritual. For the sake of simplicity, let me give you a couple examples. It could be doing your age in sit ups or pushups. It could be keeping a gratitude journal with a daily quota. It could be five minutes of meditation, daily Bible reading plan. Pick a habit, any habit. You have to make it measurable, meaningful and maintainable.

So let me break that down. One, you have to make it measurable. In 2017 I ran my first marathon. I didn't just go out and run 26.2 miles, I would have pulled a hamstring in a hurry. What I did was download a training plan and then I did 72 training runs over six months totaling 475 miles. The training plan is what made the goal measurable by turning it into daily habits, getting into shape and losing weight, or hopes, not habits. You have to make it measurable by counting calories or mapping miles. Once it's measurable now, it's manageable. Now one way to do this is to add timelines and deadlines, that's how I wrote my first book. I leveraged my 35th birthday; I said I'm not turning 35 without a book

to show for it. I only have 40 days but that deadline made that dream achievable. When it comes to goal setting and habit building deadlines are lifelines.

Two, make it meaningful. Now, running a marathon is one of 100 life goals, but it ranks pretty high up the list for me. And I think many of you know why, I suffered from severe asthma for more than 40 years. There weren't 40 days in 40 years that I didn't have to take my rescue inhaler. I slept with it under my pillow, played sports with it in my sock and then I prayed a brave prayer and God healed my lungs. July 2, 2016 I have not touched an inhaler from that day, to this day. So I ran the Chicago Marathon to celebrate that marathon. Now why Chicago? Yes, it is one of the flattest marathon courses in the country but that's not the real reason why. I grew up in Chicago that's where I spent many, many weeks in the intensive care unit. That's where I was Code Blue and almost breathed my last breath. The Chicago Marathon was my way of proving to myself, what's possible. The training plan made it measurable, the miracle made it meaningful. Well, how do you make it meaningful besides a miracle? There are lots of ways to do this but one; you can do it for someone else. You know what? I loved my dad, my dad was a chain smoker before I was born, he made a decision to quit. Why? For his kids and that's what made it so powerful. Sometimes what makes the habit meaningful is doing it for someone else doing it for the third and fourth generation and that is how you leave a legacy.

Along with being measurable and meaningful, our habits have to be maintainable. Its okay to dream big, but you have to start small. You are capable of more than you can imagine but consistency beats intensity seven days a week and twice on Sunday. You have to do it for a day, then you have to do it all over again. That is how every goal is accomplished. The good news, anybody can do anything for a day. So you have to make it measurable, meaningful and maintainable. You're doing great.

Let me talk about these two techniques, habit switching and habit stacking that will help you eat the frog. Now, in the Gospels Jesus says something that I find fascinating as it relates to habit formation. Matthew 12:43 “When an impure spirit comes out of someone, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. 44 Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. 45 Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse (worse) than the first.”

Now, I'll be honest, this is a complicated verse to exegete. But let me ask the obvious question, why is the person worse off? Because they didn't cultivate the disciplines necessary to back up the divine deliverance. God can deliver you in a day no doubt. But you have to cultivate the daily habits that back up that miracle. When God healed my asthma I started smoking. No, I didn't start smoking, okay. That would have undermined the miracle that God did in my lungs. I actually started exercising with greater consistency. Why? To contribute to my own healing. We talked about it when we talk about kissing the wave if you want God to do the super you have to do the natural. You can't just pray like it depends on God you have to work like it depends on you. Hold that thought. You don't break a bad habit by not

doing it. Sure that might work for a week or two or four, but it's not a long term solution. Spiritually speaking you don't stop sinning by not sinning. That's like someone saying don't think about the Jolly Green Giant. Okay, what just went through your mind? I know exactly what did. I

n psychology there is something called a double bind. If I say to you be spontaneous. You can't do it, can you? It creates a no win situation. I think the same goes for every temptation we face, every addiction we're trying to break. I wish that eating the frog was as simple as saying, Just Say No, but it's not. The solution is this you need a vision that's bigger and better than the temptation that you face. The best way to break a bad habit is by establishing a good habit. Easier said than done it takes time and effort but you've got to reinvest time, talent and treasure into a good habit into a God habit.

Now in the 1970s Dr. William Glasser wrote a groundbreaking book called Positive Addiction. "Addiction is not all bad", said Glasser. Now, sure, negative addictions will destroy our lives one drink, one click, one hit at a time but positive addictions have the opposite effect. In a sense, all of us are addicts. The question is this, are those addictions positive or negative? Are they healthy or unhealthy? Are they holy or unholy? All of us can afford to complain a little less. Am I right? All of us. But you don't just stop complaining you've got to habit switch.

Let me give you a simple example. If you want to flip the script, one of the best things you can do is keep a gratitude journal. I can turn someone who has the ability to complain about anything into a person who is grateful for everything with one little habit. Keep a gratitude journal every single day. Write down one genuine gratitude, and then rehearse, it, recite it every single day. Sooner or later, listen, you will flip the script. Why? It sanctifies the reticular activating system, the part of the brain that's responsible for what gets noticed and what goes unnoticed. You aren't a complainer anymore. Now you're someone who is actually profoundly grateful for anything and everything in your life. But you have to habit switch.

The second key is habit stacking. Habit stacking, is coupling our habits with daily rhythms daily rituals. I think one simple way to do this is to turn certain times of the day into alarms. We've done this as a church, we gather in the upper room at 7:14am on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Why? Because we're praying a promise 2 Chronicles 7:14 *"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven, I will hear the land and I will forgive their sin."* 7:14 because it reminds us of the promise that we are standing on.

Now technically speaking, habit stacking or habit chaining is coupling difficult habits with habits that come easy. So my office is right above Ebenezer's coffee house, which means that my mornings generally start with a small latte two shots. After purchasing that latte, I pop up to my office and I open my YouVersion Bible reading plan and I pick up where I left off the day before. That is habit stacking. I read my Bible while I drink my morning latte for a couple of reasons. One, I mean come on, the Bible

just reads better with a little bit of caffeine. In fact, to have a formula the Holy Spirit plus caffeine equals awesome.

Two, my latte almost acts like an alarm. Now lots of ways to do this; for example, if given an option, take the stairs. Have you ever heard someone who just they're trying to get in shape? This is a great way to do it. Yeah, there's an escalator there's an elevator but one way to get in shape is just you make a decision I'm gonna take the stairs whenever that opportunity presents itself. If you work in a high rise, it'll get you in shape in a hurry.

Now the nomenclature of habit stacking might be new, but the idea is as old as the Shema. Deuteronomy, chapter six, verse, <sup>4</sup> *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, is one. <sup>5</sup> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your might. <sup>6</sup> Keep these words that I'm commanding you today in your heart." How, how do you keep them in your heart? And how do you put them into practice? Well, the answer is habit stacking. Listen to this, <sup>7</sup> Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. <sup>8</sup> Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, <sup>9</sup> (oh) and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."*

God doesn't just give us commands. He couples them with daily rituals - getting up and lying down. And so if you're trying to cultivate a prayer habit, for example, one of the best ways to do it is just do it first thing in the morning or last thing at night. Why? Those rituals function as reminders?

Well, here's the good news. Some of you are already habit stacking. What do I mean? Well, you aren't even aware of it, but you pray before meals, or you hug your spouse when you get home. See, you're already habit stacking. The trick is putting this into practice across the board. So pick a habit, any habit, you've got to stack those really hard habits with rituals and routines that come naturally.

Most of us are dehydrated most of the time and it has a detrimental effect on our physical and mental health. Great book by Darren Olien called Super Life. One way to counteract that is habit stacking, get in the habit of filling up your water bottle every time you go to the bathroom. Don't pee until you drink the whole thing.

All right, let me try to land this Eagle. Show me your habits and I will show you your future. Over time, you will become the sum total of your habits. Now that might sound a little overwhelming but let's break it down. Can you do it for a day? Don't try to change 17 things at a time; you will fail on day one. Focus on one habit maybe on two habits if you're habit stacking. But for better or worse good habits always come back to bless us bad habits always come back to bite us. *"With the measure you use,"* Jesus said, *"it would be measured unto you."* In other words, you'll get out of it, what you put into it. And by it I mean anything and everything from health, wealth to your marriage. How you do anything, is ultimately how you will do everything.

Well, I don't want to over spiritualize or under spiritualize habit formation. There is a psychology to habit formation but there is also a theology to habit formation. It's an art and a science but it is also a spiritual battle and the battle is won are lost in the mind and in the heart. *"As a man thinketh in his mind,"* said King Solomon, *"so is he."* It starts up here, it starts in here. The good news, almost anybody can accomplish almost anything if they work at it long enough, hard enough and smart enough. Yes, you! But it starts with that first domino, two inches, domino habit that's how it starts. You got to fill out the application. Make the first appointment, check the first box, do the first workout, lose the first pound. You flick that first domino, and some good news all the way back to the math induction theory, it takes very little effort to push over that first domino - .024 joules of input energy to be exact. It's the flick of a finger. By the time you get to the 13th Domino, the potential energy is 2 billion times greater than the energy it took to knock over the first domino. My point, don't despise the day of small beginnings. We overestimate what we can accomplish in a year or two. We underestimate what God can do in 10 or 20. Listen the compound interest of daily habits make a difference; they pay dividends until the day you die. In fact, they pay dividends beyond that.

Give it enough time, you can transform your body, you can transform your mind, you can transform your marriage, you can transform your finances, you can transform your attitude. A six pack may be 100 pounds from here, okay, writing a book, maybe 50,000 words away, I know that feeling, debt free, maybe \$100,000 beyond your budget, reconciling a relationship, may be 17 counseling sessions away. If you focus on the outcome, the finish line seems so far away that you're tempted to quit before you even start. That's how I feel; by the way as I begin to write every book and the same is true of any challenge you have to slice the pie into pieces. How? You identify the lead measures that will produce the desired outcome you want and then you do it for a day. It all comes down to one question. Can you do it for a day? When it comes to habit formation it is the question. So pick a habit, any habit make it measurable, meaningful, maintainable and with the flick of a finger knock over that first domino. Do a little habit switching, a little bit of habit stacking and the cumulative effect of those daily habits will pay dividends until the day you die. It will leave an inheritance for all eternity. Yesterday is history tomorrow is mystery. Eat the frog.