

Stretch Your Habits

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Date: 17 August 2025

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[0 : 00] Have you ever decided that you need to make a big change?! Anybody ever done that?

I hear by your murmuring that you have done that.! How many of you were successful every time you decided to make a big change?

That's what I thought. If you had raised your hand, we would all be coming to you afterwards to ask you to write a book and charge the small amount of \$19.95 every month to help teach the rest of us how to do it.

It is difficult, isn't it? Making a big needed change in our life is very difficult. There's a little secret here. Can anybody see the clue on the screen?

Change your what? Habits. And then that will help you change your life. That's what we're going to talk today about as we continue this series called Summer Stretch.

[1 : 05] We're going to talk about changing our habits or stretching our habits. So, it might be this week we're going to start exercising, right?

This week we're going to start eating better. This week we're going to start reading our Bible every morning. This week we're going to start carving out intentional time to prayer. Whatever it is, whatever habit you feel like you need to begin to change your life, sometimes we start fast and then we fizzle out.

And that's the way of our weak flesh so often, right? Well, let's kind of look at 1 Timothy 4, verses 7 through 8, and see what Paul, one of the greatest figures we have in the New Testament to read about, was talking about 1 Timothy 4, verses 7 through 8.

So far, in our Summer Stretch series, we've talked about stretching our time, stretching our talk. Today, we're going to talk about stretching our habits. So, 1 Timothy 4, verses 7 through 8. Let's read it together. Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales.

[2 : 32] Rather, train yourselves to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things.

Holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. Let's look back at that second part of the verse.

Train yourself to be what, church? We can do better than that. Train yourself to be godly. There we go. For physical training is of some value, stick with me, but godliness has value for all things. All things. All things. So, what is Paul teaching Timothy here in 1 Timothy 4? He's teaching him about habits.

About training himself to be godly. Because godliness touches every area of our life. God wants to transform and change every area of our lives.

[3 : 41] Not just the one area that sticks foremost in our minds. God wants to touch it all. He wants to transform it all. And it has effectiveness both in this life and the life to come.

So, for Paul, training to be godly is not about checking off a list. It's about creating space for God to work in your heart to guide your attitude, your character, your relationships, definitely your habits.

So, that's what we're going to look at today. Point number one. Point number one. Small steps create big results. This is the truth that we can take on stretching our habits.

Small steps create big results. How do we know that? Well, Matthew chapter 13. We talked about this during our last series that we closed the book on not too long ago.

Stories of the kingdom. We talked about the parables of Jesus. The stories that he was teaching us. And the truth that he was teaching us through those stories. And one of them that we studied, and we'll jump back into it for a moment here, is the mustard seed.

[4 : 56] The kingdom of heaven, Jesus teaches us, is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. And it's the smallest of all the seeds, but when it grows, it's the largest of garden

plants.

And we put up a picture on the screen of a tiny little mustard seed, tiniest thing you can imagine. And then it grows into this massive tree with all these branches.

And the birds will come and perch in the branches. It serves a purpose. A good purpose. So, something that starts so small can become huge. Now that can be good or bad in our lives, right? Sometimes you can look at a bad habit that seems so insignificant, so small. But before you know it, when it's unaddressed, it all of a sudden becomes much bigger and has much more effect in your life than you ever thought possible.

And that's why it's impossible with something that in your mind was so small, so meaningless, so insignificant. Well, I'm the only one that it affects. And that's a lie we often tell ourselves, right? It's not hurting anybody but me.

[6 : 03] And I choose this, so it's all right. But on the other side of the coin, something good, a good habit, or a good deed that God wants to work through you, though it seems so small and insignificant.

Anybody ever hear the song in church? I think the Gaithers sing it and many others that says, little is much when God is in it. It's going back a little bit. Labor not for wealth or fame.

There's a crown and you can win it if you'll go in Jesus' name. Whatever God wants you to do, go with Him and do that. Because it might seem small. It might seem insignificant.

If you follow the life of Jesus, so much of His time on this earth was spent with seemingly small, insignificant people.

Whether He was healing the least of these, or meeting a need for people that didn't have a whole lot to offer Him. Or pouring in through the rabbi's school dropouts who became His disciples.

[7 : 08] The ones who didn't make the time. These were the ones that Jesus spent His time with, but He used them to change the world. He used them to start a movement that still to this day has not died.

So little is much when God is in it. Small steps can create big results. That's the way of God. Let's look in Luke chapter 16.

Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much. And whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

There's a principle there, isn't there? You're thinking of the parable of the talents. We covered that not too long ago as well. Where the master gave just a little bit to the one he knew he might not be able to trust.

And then he gave more to his more trustworthy servants. And sure enough, those trustworthy servants invested that little bit wisely and gave him great return on his investment.

[8 : 15] And so he blessed them even more. And the one to whom he gained so little, sure enough, he did what he thought his master would do. And he didn't invest it wisely at all.

God might give you a little to start with. Invest it wisely. Back in his kingdom. Not according to what we think is best.

Not according to what our desires and our flesh will crave. But giving it back to God in accordance with his will. And then we'll reap his results. And then we'll get blessed as he wants to bless us.

Whoever can be trusted with little can be trusted with much. But if he can't be trusted with little, he can't be trusted with much.

So, little things can become big things. Small steps can create big results. There's a couple of key thoughts here. First, it's not the size of the step, but the heart behind it.

[9 : 18] You might be at a little stage in your life where God is giving you little right now. And wanting to give you more. That might be in the area of your relationships.

Might be in the area of inner peace. Might be in the area of finances. I don't know. God doesn't promise us material gain on this earth. He will give us the resources that he knows we need.

But what he does promise is that we always have access to his peace. His power. His comfort. His healing. We have access to all that.

And so, if you aren't experiencing that in his fullness right now. Then it's time for a heart check. Is my heart aligned with the heart of God?

Because if it's not, then I'm living outside of his bubble of peace and comfort and joy, patience, etc.

[10 : 20] So, it's not the size of the step that God's wanting you to take right now. It's the heart behind it. Likewise, it's not the size of the step that you're taking away from God right now.

It's the heart behind it. You see, for years, I had this mixed up in my mind. And I know many of you did as well because I've talked to you about this. We get this idea that there's this list of things that God says, if you do this, then you won't have a good relationship with me.

And there's no bigger lie on this earth than that. Because it's not what you do that gets you further away from your father as his heart.

It's whether your heart is pursuing him or not. Because you can do all the things that you think a child of God would do.

But your heart is not for them. Likewise, you can fail in all kinds of areas that you should not fail in.

[11 : 34] But your heart is still faithfully after God. And so he's still drawing you back to himself.

And often, he still blesses you in spite of those areas.

So it's not the size of the spot. Not even necessarily the thing you're doing is where's your heart.

That was the point of every sermon on every one of those Sundays when we were looking at the story of the kingdom, the parable of Jesus.

In the kingdom of this world, we look on the outside. In God's kingdom, we look on the inside. So little can be much.

It's not the size of the step, but the heart behind it. And then secondly, habits are formed by small, faithful steps toward Jesus. So does it not matter what we do then?

No, it absolutely matters. Because what we do eventually will come from our heart. What we say will come from our heart. What we think will come from our heart.

[12 : 43] So if God has our hearts, then we will eventually start forming habits that lead us to Him.

Now, that doesn't mean that you've been saved for 40 years.

You've been a child of God for 40 years. So you're way further down the line than those who have only been saved for 10. It's not always a matter of time.

It's a matter of how much has Jesus captured the Lord of God. We're going to have it performed by small, faithful steps toward Jesus.

And when we are taking small, faithful steps toward anything else, we're forming the moment in heaven. I'm not even talking about going out and getting hooked on prescription drugs.

I'm not talking about going out and abusing alcohol until it comes to an addiction. I'm not talking about going out and forming a tobacco addiction or pornography addiction or any of the other addictive substances out there that can create these negative habits in our lives.

[13 : 50] Obviously, those are never what God designed for us. That will do nothing but pull us away from God. Those are not taking small, faithful steps toward Him.

They're taking small, faithful steps toward the opposite of what our God wants for us and desires for us. And He's not out there shaking His fist saying, how dare you go and look at that website?

How dare you go and put that in your body? He's grieving and saying, you're moving further away from me. And I'm the only chance you have to find that peace, that comfort, that wholeness you're looking for and you're craving.

And you're running away from it. So we're all taking small, faithful steps toward something. The habits Jesus wants us to form are habits that will take small, faithful steps toward Him.

We're going to look at that a little bit more in just a moment. But I wanted to share this quote by Gretchen Rubin that says, what you do every day matters more than what you do once in a while.

[15 : 08] We're talking about small, faithful steps. Anybody can have a burst of energy that can accomplish something powerful.

Have you ever heard of the mother bear stories? Where a mom, not talking about a bear, but a human mom, just has this incredible burst of strength and lifts up the back of a car or something to free her child.

It's just like, where did this come from, right? Is she really that strong? No, she hasn't trained consistently to become that strong or achieve that level of consistent strength.

But that burst of adrenaline, that burst of fear, oh no, I've got to save my child, can help her do extraordinary things that normally she wouldn't be able to do.

The same is true of walking with Jesus. In a moment, you can accomplish something powerful for God.

[16 : 23] Is that normal? No? That's alright. Okay, stop. Hey, that's good. That's okay. That's okay.

That's okay. That's okay. In a moment, you can accomplish something powerful for God. God can work through you as long as you're not totally close off to Him and just like, God can't wait for me.

Then God can use you to do something great. That doesn't mean that you have a close, daily relationship with Him. I can take it out of the mercy of God.

There have been moments when I know in my heart, I'm nowhere near where I want to be with Jesus. But in a moment, God can use me to accomplish something great.

But I promise you, this walk with Jesus is a marathon, not a 40 yard dash. We've got football season starting. Coach Jones, we've got any good 40 yard dash athletes?

[17 : 22] We've got anybody like, I'm not going to look for four fours, but do we have any like four sixes maybe? We'll say four sixes, that works. You can run fast for a small amount of difference.

But it's harder. It takes forward training to get up to the running fast over a long difference. Jesus is in it for us.

He's in it for the long haul of us. And He cares far more about what we do every day. He wants to transform every day with us.

Not just those short bursts of every once in a while. So, what we do every day matters more than what we do once in a while. Now folks, it's confession time.

While we're speaking on this topic, I have to confess to you that I know from personal experience that doing something every day has transformed you far more than doing it once in a while.

[18 : 28] And I don't know why. Because about a year ago, I ran a 510. And it was awesome. And we had a great time up at Wichita Falls. I had trained for that and trained for that.

Started late spring last year. Trained all the way through and ran that race in September, October. It was tough. Especially training during July and August in Texas, November.

Right? But I did it. And I got to the point where I could run that 5K. For some of you, a 5K is like nothing. For me, it was the hardest thing I've ever done. Now, I would love to say that I kept up consistent training from then on.

You know what I did? I said, man, I hit my goal. I'm going to give myself a little break now. I will get back into it, but I earned myself a break.

Guess what? Still on break. Still on break. I love it. Alright, not anymore. I have gotten back into it. But I'll tell you what.

[19 : 34] I never stopped wanting where that race had gotten me. I had lost some weight. I was feeling better. I never stopped wanting that.

You know what I also never stopped doing? I never stopped trying to get back in shape and start working out again. I never stopped trying. That means every once in a while, I'd show up at the gym.

Every once in a while, I'd go out for a run. Every once in a while, I'd try to be healthy. I kept trying, man. I kept at it. You know what I stopped doing?

I stopped praying. There you do. Shortly after I got here, I preached a sermon about training, not trying.

And we've got to get back to that principle. There's a principle there that not only helps us with our physical bodies, because what did we read in 1 Timothy? Physical exercise can help you a little bit, but godliness can help you in every way.

[20 : 45] And there is a principle here that I can't ignore and you can't ignore. So, number two, how do we stretch our habits? Training beats trying.

Every time. Training beats trying. Trying is spontaneous. It might happen. It might not. Training is planned.

Trying wants something. Training commits to something. Paul's word for train in 1 Timothy 4, 7 and 8 that we just read a moment ago comes from the same root word as gymnasium.

In case you were unclear what he was talking about. He was saying get in the gym and train, okay? But he's talking in this passage about the spiritual gym, spiritual training, godliness, training in godliness.

He's emphasizing that spiritual growth is like physical fitness. It's not about a burst of effort. It's not about a burst of duty or guilt-driven action like sometimes Christians are known for.

[21 : 55] Man, I feel bad. Let me go do something for somebody to make myself feel better. Man, I feel like I haven't been living like I should. Let me open up the Bible this morning to make myself feel better.

That's not what it's about. It's about building deliberate, repeated practices, habits that create space for God to work in our hearts.

So, I'm back training again. If any of you want to see, I'll show you on my little Nike app right here my training history, okay? Not that you can see that, but I'm just telling you, I've been doing it, alright?

Here we go. See this? We're going down. We're going down a little ways, alright? I'm not going to go down too far because that's about as far as it goes, but... I'm back training again.

And I always pick the hottest time of year to do it. That's really dumb. Alright. But this is what it's about. It's about building habits. So, three-step training plan. Three-step training plan.

[22 : 58] Here we go. Number one, the two-minute rule. Start small so it's harder to fail. What do we mean by two minutes? Pray for two minutes. Might be two minutes more than you prayed yesterday.

Read the Bible for two minutes. It might be two minutes more than you did yesterday. Don't sit down and say, I'm going to spend the next hour in prayer when you haven't been consistently praying. It's like me going to the gym and saying, I'm going to bench press 500 pounds tomorrow. But no, you're not. I'll let anybody do it.

I can't go from zero to hero in one day, right? And neither can you. But we can all do something. We can start small.

I can't go out and run a 5k tomorrow. I have to work up to that. I can run a mile. And then a mile and a half. And then two miles. I can start working up to it.

[23 : 56] And you can too. So, if you haven't been doing what you know you should be doing. Why? So, God is happy with you? No. Jesus loves you. He's happy with you.

You're his favorite. I am his, by the way. We're all his favorite. We're all equal. He died for all of us. He loves us equally. And so, if you know how these things will lead you to that, start small.

Start with one verse. Man, the Bible app, you put it on your phone, download the YouVersion Bible app, it literally gives you a verse a day. It'll pop up on your phone. Here's a verse. Fine. Read that verse.

And then tomorrow, start a Bible plan. Start a devotional plan. There's Bible reading plans that you can do. Y'all, in 2025, every resource is available to us. We have no excuse.

You can get online and hear preachers. You can hear podcasts. You can go listen to our... Well, I wasn't able to make it on Sunday. You can go watch the video online on YouTube. You can go on podcasts and listen to it. There's all kinds of ways for you to get scripture, biblical teaching, time with God carved into your busy day. Yes, we're all busier than probably we've ever been.

[25 : 27] The world is probably busier than we've ever been. We hate to slow down. We hate to stop. We hate to wait. We hate to be patient. I hate to wait and be patient. I promise you. But sometimes, God wants us to slow down. So there are all these resources available for us, even if it's five minutes, even if it's two minutes. Start small so it's harder to fail. You might read the Bible for an hour one day, but the next day, you don't have an hour. And so you don't do it at all.

And then you get out of forming a habit. Then number two, habit stack. Attach your habit to something you already do. What are we talking about? This is simple. If you get up and drink a cup of coffee in the morning, then say, tell yourself the night before, maybe even write yourself a note and put it on your coffee maker that says, while I drink my coffee, I'm going to pray.

While I drink my coffee, I'm going to read this passage from the Bible and have your Bible sitting there open to that passage. So when you sit down, it's everything you can, you can, you can only just choose to avoid it because it's sitting there ready for you, whatever it is. When I'm in the habit of training that I've got to set out my clothes the night before, because I'm not going to want to do that in the morning. So I've got to get up earlier than the kids do and get them ready for school and all that. So I got to get up earlier and go out and do this. So stacking our habits onto something we already have. If it's just brushing your teeth and put a sticky note on the mirror that says, pray while you brush your teeth. What? Well, you don't have to pray out loud, by the way.

I love you. You can actually pray in your mind. God hears it just the same. All right. Whatever it is, attach your habit to something you already do. And then number three, don't break the streak.

Track your progress daily. That's why I use it out because I don't like to break the streak. I like looking back and saying day after day after day after day, I went out and did it. Maybe it wasn't as long as I did every day. You know, maybe it wasn't the same amount. Maybe it wasn't the same amount of time. Maybe I didn't go the same amount of distance or the same amount of speed, but did it every day.

Now look, the danger of this is if you do miss a day, then it's like, oh, the streak's broken. It's over. Forget it. Nope. A righteous man falls seven times and rises yet again, the Bible teaches us.

[27 : 46] That means you can fail over and over and over again. And then the next day you get up and say, we're starting a new streak. Starting a new streak with Jesus today. All right, Jesus, here we go. Streak number 47 starting now. Don't break the chain. Galatians chapter six gives us a little bit of motivation, a little bit of reassurance. Let us not become weary in doing good for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. I have to decide that if getting myself in better health is worth the harvest that that could reap.

You have to decide that whatever God has for you in this moment, if it's becoming a kinder person, if it's conquering those forces of fear and doubt that attack you, if it's being more faithful in church, if it's being there for people that you haven't been there before. Whatever it is for you, maybe picking up the Bible and spending time in that treasure chest of spiritual riches every day. Maybe getting alone and talking, having it out with God, your Father who loves you and cares for you with no strings attached. Whatever habit you need to form that stops a bad habit, stops a channel of evil and starts a channel of good, whatever that habit. Whatever that is, think of the harvest that can be reaped.

Think of the goal. Think of the end reward. Is that worth it? So then the encouragement is, don't get weary during the hard part. It's going to be hard. Anything worth doing is, right?

Stop trying and get back to training. You might be thinking, I'm not disciplined enough.

I don't feel particularly close to God in this moment. That's all right. We're talking about a relationship here. And every relationship has its peaks and valleys. This is a lifelong walk.

[30 : 12] It's not a sprint. It's not a sprint. Every person who's strong in their faith started where some of you are right now. Started where some of you might find yourself again right now. You know, the only difference in a black belt and a white belt is a black belt is a white belt who never quit. Black belt is a white belt who never stopped training. Kept training. You don't jump in and just become a black belt just like that. Austin knows that. He went and did, he got his white belt, did the classes, all that. They didn't give him a black belt in that moment. And he would have had to keep training if he wanted one. That's how it is with Jesus. That's how our walk with Jesus is.

You and I have a choice every day. Am I going to try today or am I going to train today? I have a choice every day. Am I going to go out and run? Am I going to go to the gym? When it's time to eat, how am I going to approach that? How am I going to spend my downtime? Is this going to absorb my life? Is the TV going to absorb my life? Is the computer going to absorb my life? Is the tablet going to absorb my life going to absorb my life? What is going to take up my time? You and I have that choice every day. Don't become weary in doing good. At the proper time. It's not going to all come at once. It'll come at the proper time. We will reap a harvest, but only if we don't give up.

The only promise that I will never improve my health is if I give up. But I'm not giving up.

And you don't give up either. You don't give up either. You might have been a Christian most of your life. And by this time, you have tried and failed so many times that you think, what's the use? God's probably sick of me coming back to him and saying, I messed up again, God. The one thing that God never gets sick of is you coming back to him. Even if it's for the same thing over and over again, I promise you, the one thing a parent never gets sick of is their child coming back to meeting them again. And God doesn't have our weak flesh. He doesn't get annoyed and irritated.

[32 : 57] He welcomes our approach every time. So don't give up. He promises you a harvest. And that's our takeaway for today. Stop trying. Start training. It's the same as it was, what, year and a half ago? Stop trying. Start training. Would you bow your heads with me?

Paul didn't tell Timothy, try to be godly. He said, train yourself to be godly. Trying is a burst of effort. Training is a way of life. It's a life that invites the Spirit of God God to take over, to control us, to teach us, to mold us, to shape us, to train us in a new way of life, a new level of relationship with him. So pick one thing. Pick one godly habit to start with.

Y'all, I got multiple areas of my life that I want God to help me in. But let me start with one right now. Why don't you start with one right now? Make it small.

Stack it. Track it. Keep showing up time and time again, day after day. Over time, God will take those small, Spirit-driven steps toward Jesus and turn them into something that you never thought possible.

I believe it. I'm not giving up. I don't want you to give up either. Jesus said, I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. You can pursue any other kind of self-help book.

[34 : 45] You can go online and find gurus that'll try to help you turn your life around. But I promise you, the only one, the only answer is Jesus Christ. If you haven't experienced that, then I want you to experience it today for the first time. If some of you need to open up your heart and say, today is the day that I let Jesus in. I know that I'm a sinner. I know that Jesus died on the cross for me.

I know he rose from the dead and he's alive today. And I want to pray to him and invite him in and say, God, forgive me of my sin. Cleanse me. Wash me. Make me your child. If that's you today and you would like to pray that prayer, would you slip your hand up right now? I want to invite you to do that today.

Thank you. Thank you. Let me ask this question. How many of you would say there are some habits that I need to stop or some habits that I need to start? And I want God's help with me to stop trying in my strength and start training by his spirit, letting his spirit train me in what he wants to change in my life. If that's you, do you say, I've got something I need to start or something I need to stop? Would you slip your hand up and I'll pray for you as well? Thank you. We need to be in prayer for each other through this. Thank you. You can put your hands down. Let's do this. You can join me in this or not. You can say it in your head. You can say it out loud, just kind of like we did last Sunday.

Either way, but I want to offer a prayer to God right now on behalf of myself and our church. church, it goes like this. God, help me start right where I am.

Train my heart. Train my hands. Guide my habits to follow your plan. In Jesus' name, amen. God, you hear that prayer. You know our hearts. They're so easily deceived. But God, right now, I ask you to train us to be different, to train us to be more like you. We come to you with that request as a church. In Jesus' name we pray, amen. Church, would you stand to your feet?

[36 : 53] Make it easy for somebody to slip out if they need to. If you'd like to spend the next couple of minutes down here in prayer, if you'd like to meet me or Jared down here in prayer to pray with, we're available for that. If you just want to sit at your seat, sit back down, kneel down, whatever you'd like to do. Let's spend a moment.