

Made to Change: A Guide to Unwinding Habits

by Michael Todd

Scientists and Prophets Agree that You Were Made to Change!

Introduction

I have good news—you were made to change! Both your body and your spirit were designed to grow, mature, learn, and improve. The ability to change is built into the very design of your body. Your Heavenly Parents created you with the capacity to become more like Them and, ultimately, to be perfected through Jesus Christ. Isn't that amazing?

And yet, that process can be challenging at times. Isn't it frustrating when you do something you really didn't want to do? Do you ever find yourself asking, "How did that just happen? I was so determined not to repeat that exact thing, and now I have done it . . . again! Why do I sometimes do things I don't want to do?"

If you have ever felt this way, you are not alone. It happens to all of us. Welcome to the club!

This booklet will examine how and why our brains create habits and patterns, because understanding habit patterns is the key to changing them. We will explore some of the latest scientific research on habits, and we will also tap into the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. When we combine the principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the latest scientific research, we have a powerful combination that can help us change.

This booklet is designed for habits of all kinds. Here are just a few:

- Anger
- Anxiety and worry
- Blaming others
- Compulsive behaviors such as nail biting or skin picking
- Excessive phone and social media use
- Gossiping or complaining
- Impulsive spending
- Negative self-talk
- Poor sleep habits
- Pornography
- Procrastination
- Substance abuse
- Unhealthy eating

The intent of this booklet is *not* to read through the entire thing as quickly as possible so you can be done with it. Instead, the goal is to read and learn something new each day, and then allow the activities to guide you, shape you, and *change* you.

Each day's reading and the included activity are designed to require about 10-15 minutes. The message for each day is relatively brief so that you can develop a habit of doing it every day. A consistent effort makes all the difference! For real results, try hard not to skip a day.

And when you finish the booklet, plan to go through it again—and then again. As you work through it for the second and third time, you may notice something interesting: even though the activities are the same, you will not be the same. You will be changing.

Each day's lesson will include the following sections:

- Neuroscience Research
- Power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ
- Activity

As you can see, each day's lesson will conclude with an activity. Some of these activities may seem simple or unrelated. They may even feel like a waste of time. But completing every activity is important. Don't rush through the activities – slow down and spend a few minutes to really focus on it. These exercises will help you strengthen the mental muscles and abilities that are essential for change.

Before you begin, make a clear commitment to put forth a consistent effort every day. Choose a specific time and place where you will read the material and complete the activity. In other words . . . make a habit of it!

The latest neuroscience and the Gospel of Jesus Christ agree on this: **You were made for this. You were made to change!**

Day 1 – Habits and Addictions Are Not Permanent

The first thing for you to know about habits is that they are always changing. Habits are not permanent. They are fluid and dynamic. “Neuroplasticity” is the term that describes your brain’s ability to adapt, reorganize, and rewire its neural pathways. Isn’t it awesome to know that your brain is capable of change? Instead of being stuck with an unwanted habit, your brain can learn how to evolve and change. *It can be rewired.*

Most habits are helpful

If you want to change a habit, then you need to understand how and why your brain creates habits in the first place. The truth is that much of what we do every day is by habit. Humans truly are creatures of habit. Some scientists estimate that more than 40% of our actions each day are habitual in nature.

Our brains develop habits to speed things up and conserve mental energy. When we do the same thing over and over and over, the brain picks up on this, and it figures out that if it can automate this process, it will save time and effort. This automated process is a habit. And habits are super helpful. Some common examples include:

- Automatically buckling a seatbelt when you get in the car
- Looking both ways before crossing a street
- Placing your keys or wallet in the same place every day when you return home

We all have a multitude of habits. Most of these habits are actually helpful. But we also have habits that are not helpful. This booklet is about understanding exactly why we sometimes do those things that are not helpful, because understanding *why* unlocks the power to change.

(Wendy Wood, Quinn, J. M., & Kashy, D. A. (2002). Habits in everyday life: Thought, emotion, and action. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(6), 1281–1297.
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26361052/>)

Your unwanted habits are not your fault

It is really important for you to know that your habit is not your fault. Habits usually happen by chance, not by choice. While it is true that you can intentionally create a habit with repeated and consistent effort, most of our habits are not intentionally created. They just kind of evolve on their own.

An unwanted habit is not an indicator of your righteousness, nor does it reveal the desires of your heart. It may have originated because of a scary or traumatic experience. It could be the result of surprise when you saw something shocking or intriguing online. Or it may simply be a pattern that you have fallen into by accident. It really doesn’t matter why or how your habit formed, because it can always be changed.

We will revisit this idea in a couple of days. But for now, just know that your habit is not your fault. You are not broken. There is nothing wrong with you. In fact, it is probably very unfair that you are stuck with this. But that is OK, because Jesus Christ knows all about being treated unfairly, and you can tap into His strength and His power to help you change.

The path to change is different than what you think

Many people think that the key to breaking a habit is willpower and determination. But this is actually not the case. Recent scientific discoveries have confirmed that the key to overcoming addiction isn't about being stronger, it is about being more *curious*. Willpower doesn't work. Willpower is backwards. Your brain is not wired to respond to force, and so it usually pushes back if you try to force it. You can't force yourself out of your habit. But you absolutely can find your way out with honest and non-judgmental curiosity. Awareness and curiosity open the mind and allow it to be re-wired. Most of us try to go about it in the wrong way, which is why it seems so hard. Changing is actually easier than you think, if you go about it in the right way. (Brewer, J.A.)

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is all about change

Neuroscientists are not the only ones teaching that we can change. Jesus Christ and His prophets have been teaching this principle for millennia. Change is the essence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is called repentance, and repentance really works.

Christ has invited all of us to repent and change. Repentance is the process of change, and the Savior made it clear that everyone needs it. He taught that "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3). Yes, everyone needs to repent. Please don't think that you are somehow the only person in the world who has a bad habit and needs to repent. Repentance is wonderful! It is the opportunity to change.

The prophet Isaiah explained it like this, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). Isn't that remarkable? Your sins can be taken away! It seems too good to be true, but it really is true. Because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, your sins can be taken away. Your mistakes . . . gone. Your guilt . . . swallowed up in Jesus Christ.

Activity: Focus on Gratitude

Spend 5 minutes making a list of things you are thankful for. Set a timer, reflect and then write. Don't be in a rush, but take the time to really let gratitude fill your heart. Remember to include gratitude for Jesus Christ. His sacrifice for you is what makes change possible.

Day 2 – How and Why Habits Form

Have you ever noticed that habits can feel almost involuntary? It's as if your mind and your body are on autopilot, and there is nothing you can do about it. This is because your brain, in an attempt to be efficient and helpful, has created a neural pathway to make this behavior automatic so that you don't have to think about it. The brain does this because it wants to conserve energy, freeing up your brain to think about other things.

If your brain can convert a conscious decision pattern into an unconscious pattern, it thinks it is making life easier for you by using less brainpower. This is great if it is a pattern that is helpful and useful. But it is not so great if it's something you really don't want to do.

The good news is that neural pathways are not permanent. In fact, they are always changing. The neural pathways in our brains are constantly being modified and refined. Our habits and neural pathways will morph and change based on changes to our environment, and changes to our needs and wants. You can take advantage of this critical fact to change the unwanted habits in your life.

The Three Steps (or Gears) of Habit Change

Judson Brewer, MD, PhD, is an internationally renowned addiction psychiatrist and neuroscientist. He is one of the world's leading experts on habits and addictions. In his book, *Unwinding Anxiety*, Dr. Brewer explores how to break negative cycles and heal your mind.

Dr. Brewer has broken down the process of changing habits into three steps. He likens them to gears on a bicycle. Of course, you start in first gear, and then shift into second gear and eventually into third gear. I will briefly mention all three gears now, so that you can see the big picture. Then we will dive into the details of first gear tomorrow. These are the three gears:

First Gear: Map Your Mind

Recognize and identify your habits by noticing the habit pattern or habit loop. This is done by dividing each habit into three parts: the trigger, the behavior, and the result. Habits always follow these three steps, and it will be helpful to map out your habits, so that you can accurately see what is really taking place. A habit means that we are likely to repeat the same pattern of trigger, behavior, and result. We call it a habit loop because we keep looping back and repeating it.

Second Gear: Pay Attention

This step involves paying close attention to each step of your habit. Develop awareness. How do you feel during the different steps of your habit? Don't judge yourself, just notice the details. Developing an honest awareness of the rewards and benefits and consequences of your habit is important.

Third Gear: You Can Choose

Realize that you can choose something better. You are not as stuck as you thought. You will learn to choose what you really want. As you become aware of the consequences of your habit, you will learn to step away from things you don't want in your life. The worry, procrastination, and self-judgment will fade away, and you will learn to make the decisions that you want to make. (Brewer, J. A. (2021). *Unwinding Anxiety*. Avery Publishing, p 50)

You will notice that these three steps (or gears) do not require you to do anything that is impossible. In this booklet, you will not be asked to exercise willpower. You will not be told to "never let it happen again." Instead, you will be given exercises that will help you pay attention and *become aware* of what you are doing.

Everyone needs to change

Please don't be discouraged because you have a habit and have made some mistakes. Everyone has unwanted habits. And everyone makes mistakes. We all need to repent, and we all have some changing to do. The good news is that Jesus Christ is here to help all of us!

Even Nephi, the hero prophet of the Book of Mormon, wanted to repent and change. Look at what he said: "O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me. And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted" (2 Nephi 4:17-19).

Nephi clearly knew what it was like to feel awful because of his mistakes. He does not specify what he was talking about, but it kind of sounds like a habit, as if his shortcomings were not completely in the past.

But also notice Nephi's words and testimony when he finishes his record, several chapters later: "I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell" (2 Nephi 33:6).

Nephi realized that Jesus Christ was the only way to change and redemption.

Partner with Jesus Christ

Your ability to change will be enhanced exponentially when you access the power of God. God loves you. He knows you. And He has the power to help you change.

It is going to require both your effort and the power of God. Because God values your agency, He will not simply do all of the changing for you, without your effort. Similarly, you cannot change all by yourself, without His help. But when you partner with Jesus Christ, when you put forth a consistent effort to change, and when you plead for God's help in making those changes, miracles will take place. Every time you prayerfully make an effort to change, you are changing.

Little by little, you are being transformed. Real change is a process. It does not happen overnight. But if you are trying, then rest assured that it is working. Be patient with yourself, and keep trying.

When you are humble enough to recognize that you really need God's help, something miraculous happens. Your humility opens your heart to God's power. And then, when you turn to Him in prayer with a sincere heart, and plead to God for His strength, His power enters your humble heart.

The Lord has reminded us that we should "Pray always, that you may come off conqueror; yea, that you may conquer Satan, and that you may escape the hands of the servants of Satan that do uphold his work." (D&C 10:5)

Activity: Prayer

Get on your knees right now and pour out your heart to God. Plead to Him for help and strength. Acknowledge that you cannot change on your own, that you need His help. Express gratitude for Jesus Christ, because it is Jesus Christ that allows you to practice this over and over, and eventually change.

After you are done praying, consider when and where you want to pray every day to bring God's power into this process of change. Invoking the power of God early in your day, and especially multiple times throughout your day will be more powerful than one prayer each evening before bed. Where, when, and how many times do you want to pray each day? You may want to set an alarm to remind you. Prayers do not have to be lengthy to be effective. You can offer a brief but meaningful prayer in all kinds of situations. Write down your daily goal for prayer.

Day 3 – First Gear: Mapping Your Mind

If you want to gain control over your mind, it really helps if you know how your mind works. Simply becoming aware of the steps surrounding your habit will help immensely. Notice what is happening in your mind before, during, and after your habit. Don't try to change anything at this stage, simply pay attention. First gear is not about changing your habit, it is about understanding your habit.

The following three steps are what Dr. Brewer calls a "Habit Loop."

1. **Trigger.** The trigger is what starts the habit. It can be something you see, a place you visit, a specific thought, or a physical sensation.
2. **Behavior.** This is the actual habit itself. It can be a physical behavior like biting your nails or scrolling on social media. It can also be a mental behavior like worrying or self-judgment.
3. **Result.** The result is how you feel during and after the behavior. In the short term, this might feel good, but in the long term, not as much. Most unwanted behaviors have a complex mix of results and rewards. Take note of both wanted and unwanted consequences, and assess these results without judgment. Be honest with yourself, but don't be hard on yourself.

Let's look at some examples of habit loops to give you an idea of how this works. For starters, let's see how this pattern works in some of our habits that are helpful. Consider the following examples:

Seat Belt

Trigger - You get in the car.

Behavior - You fasten your seatbelt without thinking.

Result - You are safely buckled up every time you get in the car.

You don't have to hear the annoying bell that reminds you to fasten your seatbelt.

Car Keys

Trigger - You come home from work or school feeling tired and exhausted.

Behavior - You drop your keys in the same place every day without thinking.

Result - You always know where you can find your keys in the morning.

Now let's consider some examples that are not so helpful.

Eating a bag of chips

Trigger - You are stressed out after a long day at work, because your boss is mad at you.

You feel restless and notice all your favorite foods in the pantry.

Behavior - You eat the whole bag of chips without thinking.

Result - It feels good to have a snack, it takes your mind off of work.

The salty snack tasted good. You feel out of control because you ate the whole bag.

You are discouraged because it will contribute to unhealthy weight gain.

Yelling at your brother

Trigger - Your friend just sent a text that makes you feel bad.

You are anxious and upset.

Your brother is in the room and does something mildly annoying.

Behavior - You yell at your brother without thinking.

Result - You are momentarily distracted from the unwanted feelings of anxiety.

But then you feel even worse because your brother erupted back at you, and things spiraled into a shouting match.

It Isn't a Sin to Be Weak, by Wendy Ulrich

(The following excerpts are from an article published in the April 2015 Liahona Magazine.)

We commonly think of sin and weakness as merely different sized black marks on the fabric of our souls, different severities of transgression. But the scriptures imply that sin and weakness are inherently different, require different remedies, and have the potential to produce different results.

Human weakness plays an important role in these essential purposes of mortality. When Moroni worried that his weakness in writing would cause the Gentiles to mock sacred things, the Lord reassured him with these words:

“And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

The implications of this familiar scripture are profound and invite us to distinguish sin (encouraged by Satan) from weakness (described here as a condition “given” to us by God).

We might define weakness as the limitation on our wisdom, power, and holiness that comes with being human. As mortals we are born helpless and dependent, with various physical flaws and predispositions. We are raised and surrounded by other weak mortals, and their teachings, examples, and treatment of us are faulty and sometimes damaging. In our weak, mortal state we suffer physical and emotional illness, hunger, and fatigue. We experience human emotions like anger, grief, and fear. We lack wisdom, skill, stamina, and strength. And we are subject to temptations of many kinds.

We cannot simply repent of being weak—nor does weakness itself make us unclean. We cannot grow spiritually unless we reject sin, but we also do not grow spiritually unless we accept our state of human weakness, respond to it with humility and faith, and learn through our weakness to trust in God. When Moroni fretted about the weakness of his

writing, God did not tell him to repent. Instead, the Lord taught him to be humble and to have faith in Christ. As we are meek and faithful, God offers grace—not forgiveness—as the remedy for weakness. Grace is an enabling power from God to do what we cannot do on our own (see Bible Dictionary, “Grace”)—the appropriate godly remedy by which He can “make weak things become strong.”

Even when we sincerely repent of our sins, obtain forgiveness, and become clean again, we remain weak. We are still subject to illness, emotion, ignorance, predispositions, fatigue, and temptation. *But limitations and inadequacies are not sins and do not keep us from being clean and worthy of the Spirit.*

Activity: Map Your Own Habit Loops

Map out 3 of your own habit loops and write them down. Identify one helpful habit, and a couple of habits that are not as helpful, and map all three of them.

The key to mapping out the habit loops of your mind is to write them down. Take some time to write down some of your habit loops. It is common when you map out your habit loop to feel an immediate need to change or fix it. But please don’t try to fix your habit at this stage, just map it out and be patient. The change will come.

You might notice that these behaviors can often be followed with the phrase, “without thinking.” That is what makes a habit a habit. Your brain is doing it automatically, without thinking, because it is in autopilot mode. That’s OK. You are going to learn how to turn off the autopilot setting later, but for now, just notice the patterns.

Trigger:
Behavior:
Result:

Trigger:
Behavior:
Result:

Trigger:
Behavior:
Result:

Day 4 – Your Habit Is Not Your Fault

Habits usually happen by chance, not by choice. A habit is not an indicator of your righteousness, nor does it reveal the desires of your heart. The circumstances of your environment combined together to create this habit. It could be the result of surprise and shock when you stumbled onto something you didn't expect to see online. It may be the result of any number of contributing factors. It really doesn't matter how it formed. Your habit is not your fault.

I remember reading about Kate Seselja, a woman who lived in Australia, where gambling machines are prevalent. One night, when she was 18 years old, her boyfriend encouraged her to place \$20 in a gambling machine, just for fun. To everyone's surprise, she actually won hundreds of dollars. The lights flashed and machine blared music. The whole restaurant celebrated with her. It was wonderful!

At least she thought it was wonderful at the time. Nobody who was with her that night would have guessed that winning that one time would lead to a destructive gambling habit. Yes, even just one exhilarating experience with a gambling machine was enough to create a powerful habit that she couldn't control. Over the next 12 years, she lost over \$300,000 on gambling machines. Even though she knew gambling was a terrible idea, and she was only losing money, she couldn't stop. At her lowest point, she sat in front of an electronic gambling machine for hours, crying as she stared at the glowing \$0 balance. She was so mentally, physically, and emotionally done with her existence, this addiction, that she wanted to end her life. The only thing stopping her from ending her life was the fact that she was pregnant with her daughter. She said, "I couldn't figure out how to take my life and not hers."

The point of this story is that her gambling addiction was not her fault. She didn't ask for it. Placing \$20 in the machine was not even her idea. But the excitement of that one evening created a powerful habit that took her on a painful and unwanted journey with gambling that took her a long time to break out of. But she did break out! (BBC News, 23 March 2023, "Australia has a 'pokies' gambling problem, but is change coming?" by Tiffany Turnbull, Sydney Australia)

Habits can be created by exciting and exhilarating experiences. They can also stem from traumatic and unwanted experiences. And often they simply evolve without our noticing. It does not matter how your habit was created, it is not your fault. So don't blame yourself.

Get Immunized Against Your Habit

Did you know that it is possible for you to be immunized against unwanted habits? President Russel M. Nelson taught us that reading the Book of Mormon every day can protect you. Actually, he used the word "immerse." So it will require more than a casual verse or two each day. But what a blessing to know that you can be protected against your habits! This is what he said:

“I promise that as you daily immerse yourself in the Book of Mormon, you can be immunized against the evils of the day, even the gripping plague of pornography and other mind-numbing addictions.” (Russel M. Nelson, October 2017).

A prophet has promised you that you can be immunized against bad habits by reading the Book of Mormon every day. This does not mean that you will instantly be rid of your unwanted habits. If you are immunized against a virus, it means that you are protected against serious harm and illness. So that if you do contract the virus, (i.e. develop a bad habit) the impact on you will be minimized. What a promise! Take advantage of this prophetic promise by reading from the Book of Mormon every day.

One of the reasons the Book of Mormon is so powerful is that it is filled with examples of redemption. Nephi, as mentioned earlier, is one example. Others include Alma the Younger, the Sons of Mosiah, King Lamoni, King Lamoni’s father, Zeezrom and many others. As you read the Book of Mormon, look specifically for examples of individuals that experience redemption, including a significant change of heart.

Ammon is one of many examples. We read that Ammon and his brothers “were the very vilest of sinners.” (Mosiah 28:4). I mean, “the very vilest of sinners”? It is hard to comprehend a criticism more harsh than that!

This is what Ammon later said: “Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things.” (Alma 26:12).

“Therefore, let us glory, yea we will glory in the Lord; Behold, who can glory too much in the Lord? Yea, who can say too much of his great power, and of his mercy, and of his long-suffering towards the children of men?” (Alma 26:16)

Whether you are a long-time member of the church, or a new convert, whether you are young or old, we all need redemption. Look for examples of redemption in the Book of Mormon. Redemption is change, and we all need to change.

Activity: Commit to Read the Book of Mormon Every Day

If you haven’t read from the Book of Mormon yet today, spend some time reading it right now. Then make a commitment to read from the Book of Mormon every day. As you do, look for examples of redemption, and create a list of them. The message of the Book of Mormon is that anyone and everyone can find redemption through Jesus Christ. As you recognize God’s ability to redeem others, it will increase your confidence in His ability to redeem you.

Day 5 – First Gear Review

You will remember from a couple of days ago, that the first step in changing a habit is to map it out. A habit can be broken down into three steps:

Trigger: What situation led me towards this specific behavior?

What was happening just before the habit?

Behavior: What, exactly, did I do?

Result: What did I think I was going to get from this behavior?

What did I actually get from this?

How did the short term rewards compare with the long term rewards and results?

Let's review some more examples together, so that we are very clear on this. We will consider both good habits and bad habits, because the pattern is exactly the same for both.

Charging your phone at night

Trigger: You are going to bed

Behavior: You plug in your phone to charge

Result: Phone is fully charged in the morning

Making your bed in the morning

Trigger: You get out of bed in the morning

Behavior: You make your bed

Result: Bedroom looks tidy, and you feel more in control of your day

We often think of habits in terms of physical activities, but many of our habits are more related to our thoughts than our actions. Consider the following habit loops:

Worry and Anxiety

Trigger: You are reminded about something that troubles you.

Behavior: You fixate on this, allowing the anxiety and worry to dominate your thoughts.

Result: You become paralyzed by the anxiety, unable to feel joy of any kind.

You have a hard time staying focused on anything else, the anxiety dominates everything.

Procrastination

Trigger: You are feeling overwhelmed or uncertain about a task at hand.

Behavior: You scroll on social media or perform mundane tasks.

Result: You are temporarily distracted from the task at hand, which is kind of nice.

The task remains unfinished, and now you have used up valuable time, which only adds to feelings of being overwhelmed.

Losing your temper

Trigger: You feel disrespected because your children are not obeying you.

Behavior: You raise your voice and say unkind things

Result: You experience a temporary sense of control.

You feel better for a moment because you can release the emotional tension.

After you calm down, you feel terrible about what you said and the way you said it.

Viewing pornography

Trigger: You feel an unwanted feeling of stress, loneliness, or boredom.

Behavior: You view pornography

Result: You experience a temporary pleasure and are able to briefly escape.

This is followed by feelings of shame and isolation.

Review: Revisit the habit loops that you mapped out on Day 3. Is there anything you want to adjust or change? You may want to modify some of the details. Remember to be honest and thorough as you map out your habits. Many of our habits are complicated, with a mix of good and bad results. Be sure to include both, but most importantly, don't judge yourself.

Trigger:

Behavior:

Result:

In April 2025, Sister Tamara Runia spoke in General Conference. Here are some excerpts from her talk.

“Your Repentance Doesn’t Burden Jesus Christ; It Brightens His Joy”

By Sister Tamara W. Runia

Today I want to speak to those of us who sometimes feel, “Repentance and forgiveness seem to be working for everyone but me.” Those who privately wonder, “Since I keep making the same mistakes, maybe this is the way I am.”

I’ve learned that if you wait until you’re clean enough or perfect enough to go to the Savior, you’ve missed the whole point!

What if we thought about commandments and obedience in a different way?

I testify that while God cares about our mistakes, He cares more about what happens after we make a mistake. Are we going to turn to Him again and again? Are we going to stay in this covenant relationship?

We don't stay on the covenant path by never making a mistake. We stay on the path by repenting every day.

As mission leaders in Australia, during our last visit with each missionary, we talked about 3 Nephi 17, where the people were close to the Savior and could hear Him praying for them. We asked, "If you could hear the Savior praying for you, what do you think He would say?"

To hear their answers was one of the most Spirit-filled experiences of my life. Every one of those missionaries would pause, and tears would fill their eyes as we reminded them, "Your Savior knows the degree of difficulty you're experiencing. He's felt it!"

This is what those missionaries quietly and tenderly shared: One sister said, "Jesus would tell the Father, 'She's doing her very best. I know how hard she is trying.'" An elder said, "With everything that's happened in his life, I'm so proud of him."

Let's try this. Tonight, before you pray, imagine Jesus Christ close by. He is your Advocate with the Father. Ask yourself, "What would my Savior say to the Father about me?"

And then become silent.

Listen for that voice that says *good* things about you—the voice of the Savior, your finest friend, and your Father in Heaven, who is really there. Remember, *Their* love and *your* worth are always great, no matter what!

(Tamara W. Runia, "Your Repentance Doesn't Burden Jesus Christ; It Brightens His Joy," General Conference, April 2025.)

Activity: Follow the invitation of Sister Runia.

Ask yourself, "What would my Savior say to the Father about me?" Then spend time being silent and listen.

Day 6 – Understanding Shame

Brené Brown, PhD, MSW, is a research professor, author, and speaker who has spent more than two decades studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy. Her work has helped millions of people better understand why shame can have such a powerful effect on our thoughts, feelings, and relationships. Dr. Brown explains that shame is different from guilt. As she writes, "Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging." In other words, guilt says, "I made a mistake," while shame says, "I am a mistake." (Brene Brown, "I thought It was Just Me (But it isn't)", Gotham, 2007, p 5)

Shame is a universal experience. It can develop when we feel judged, rejected, embarrassed, or like we don't measure up. Because shame tells us that we are not good enough, it can make it harder to build healthy friendships, succeed in school or work, and feel confident about who we are.

Dr. Brown's research also shows that shame grows stronger when it is kept secret. Shame grows in silence, but it begins to lose its power when we talk about it with someone we trust. This does not mean sharing everything with everyone. Instead, it means finding safe, caring people who will listen with understanding rather than judgment. Self-compassion, empathy, and honest conversations remind us that everyone struggles and that no one is perfect.

The good news is that shame does not have to control our lives. Simply learning to recognize it is an important first step. When we notice shame, name it, and talk about it with trusted people, we can begin to separate our mistakes from our value as human beings. We all make poor choices and face difficult moments, but those experiences do not define who we are. By practicing honesty, self-compassion, and courage, we can step out of shame, grow stronger, and remember that everyone deserves love, respect, and a sense of belonging.

Changing has less to do with you, and more to do with Christ

You might be surprised to learn that your ability to change is less about you and your mistakes than you think. No offense here, but it's not really all about you! That's because your ability to change is actually all about Jesus Christ. He is our Redeemer, and it is the Atonement of Jesus Christ that makes change possible.

President Russel M. Nelson taught this when he said, "My dear brothers and sisters, the joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives. When the focus of our lives is on God's plan of salvation . . . and Jesus Christ and His gospel, we can feel joy regardless of what is happening—or not happening—in our lives." (Nelson).

Our habits and mistakes are the circumstances of our lives. And our joy is not determined by these weaknesses, but by our focus. Our own weaknesses do not have to rob us of our

happiness. As we stay focused on Jesus Christ and His gospel, our weaknesses will become strengths, and we will find happiness in all circumstances.

Elder Boyd K. Packer taught something similar when he reminded us that focusing on the solution is more productive than focusing on the problem. He said, “True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior.” (Boyd K. Packer, “Little Children,” Ensign, November 1986, 17).

If we want to change, we must come to truly understand and appreciate the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Now, we are not talking about simply knowing the textbook answers of faith, repentance, baptism, etc. We are talking about you coming to truly know and appreciate that Jesus Christ can take your sins from you. All of your sins!! And He can take them away over and over and over. As you come to truly accept this truth in your heart and soul, the change will take place.

It's time for you to realize that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not just for others. It is for YOU. And it's for YOUR mistakes. Let Jesus Christ take your shame...all of it! He knows how to get rid of it.

“Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame...” (Isaiah 54:4)

Shame is rooted in the conviction that we are worthless and unable to change. Those two ideas—that we are worthless, and that we can't change—are lies. They are insults to Jesus Christ.

Your worth as an individual is not determined by your actions. Your worth comes from the fact that you are a child of God, the most powerful being in the universe. Because He is the Father of your spirit, you have a divine heritage. Your value is infinite because you are the child of Royalty. Your Heavenly Parents will love you no matter what!

We all make mistakes, that is for sure. But you will never be a mistake, because you are a child of God.

Activity: Identify someone you trust that you can share your habit with.

Pray for guidance to discern who the right person is. You can also seek direction about knowing when and how to share it. A bishop is often a great place to start. Depending on your situation, sharing it with your parents, your spouse, or a trusted friend can also be helpful.

Some possible ways to preface the conversation include:

- “I want to talk to you about something that is weighing on me. I am a little nervous to share this with you, but I feel that it is the right thing to do.”
- “I love you, and because I value our relationship, there is something personal that I want to share with you.”
- “Can I talk to you about something that is burdening me?”

Day 7 – Second Gear: Pay Attention

Now that you are cruising along in first gear, it is time to shift into second gear. First gear is about recognizing the steps of your habit loop. Second gear is becoming aware of the results and consequences of your habit.

You have probably already realized that you can't think your way out of a bad habit. You can tell yourself over and over that something is not good for you, but that doesn't remove the urge to do it. Telling yourself is not a good way to rewire the brain. The brain needs to see and feel and experience the details for itself in order for it to be rewired.

Let's take smoking as an example. Smoking is one of the hardest habits to break. Most smokers started smoking when they were teenagers. At the time, smoking seemed like the cool thing to do. They may have started because it felt rebellious and they wanted to push back against their parents and others who were telling them not to smoke. But years later, the coolness is long gone. They know that smoking is harmful, that it can cause lung cancer, and that many non-smokers dislike the smell. On top of all that, they may feel ashamed or frustrated with themselves for continuing to do something they know is harmful. Yet, despite knowing all of this, they keep smoking.

Second gear brings awareness to the situation, and allows your brain to be rewired. In order to convince your brain, the awareness must be honest and without judgment. If you can bring an honest awareness to what your body is actually experiencing, then your brain will get the message. Your brain doesn't want to be told what to do. It wants to recognize it for itself.

When a smoker is able to pay attention and become aware of the experience of smoking, things begin to change. He realizes that smoking actually smells terrible and tastes like chemicals. He may notice that he experiences a brief "rush" when the nicotine first hits his brain, and that feels nice because it is stimulating. He may also notice that it makes his throat feel scratchy and irritated, and that he experiences an uncomfortable tightness in his chest and lungs. As he pays attention to these bodily sensations and feelings, he is able to rewire the reward associated with smoking. It will not happen immediately, but over time, the brain will come to see smoking for what it really is, a very unpleasant experience, and it won't want to do it any more.

As you pay attention to the results of your habit, your brain is able to turn off the autopilot setting, and reconsider the actual rewards. Your brain will be able to ask, "What do I really get from this behavior?" Then, as you become aware of the true rewards, instead of repeating your habit, you will be able to choose something better.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Don't try to change your habit at this stage. Second gear is simply about awareness and curiosity. When you notice yourself looping through your habit again, pay close attention. That's all. Don't be critical of yourself, just allow curiosity to take over and notice the details: How do you feel? What bodily sensations do you recognize? How is your

breathing? What is your heart rate? Do you notice any sensations on your skin? What do you see, smell, taste, hear and feel? Do you experience a tightness or tension?

Repentance is Unlimited

Did you know that there is no limit to the number of times that you can repent? Isn't that remarkable? Because of Jesus Christ, we can repent over and over and over. Even if it is for the exact same mistake.

Look at a few of the things that the Lord taught Alma in the Book of Mormon:

"For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world; for it is I that hath created them; and it is I that granteth unto him that believeth unto the end a place at my right hand." (Mosiah 26:23)

Yea, and as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me. (Mosiah 26:30)

In other words, you can repent as many times as you need to. God is pleased when we repent. And He is pleased when we repent over and over. God understands that it isn't easy to have a physical body that is burdened with the realities of life. He gets it.

Activity: Retroactive Second Gear

For this activity, find a place where you can sit and relax for a moment. Close your eyes and take a couple of deep, relaxing breaths. Then think about the most recent time that you experienced your habit. Now go back and re-live that experience retroactively in your mind's eye. What triggers did you notice? Where were you physically when the behavior occurred? How did it make you feel? Spend a few moments paying attention to this most recent experience. And remember: Don't be critical, just be curious!

Day 8 – The Power of Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of bringing attention to the present moment with openness, curiosity, and without judgment. Instead of becoming caught up in worries about the future or regrets about the past, mindfulness helps us notice our thoughts and emotions as they arise, allowing us to respond thoughtfully instead of reactively.

When you are mindful, you are able to take a step back from the thoughts in your mind and the activities going on around you, and see everything from a new perspective. This new vantage point will help you to pay attention.

Check In With Yourself

One way to practice mindfulness is to simply check in with yourself, the same way you would check in with a friend or family member. This involves pausing, and asking yourself a few questions, such as:

- How am I really doing right now?
- What am I thinking about?
- How am I feeling? What emotions am I experiencing?
- What physical sensations do I notice in my body?
- Is there anything I want or need right now?

As always, it is important that there is no judgment here, just an honest reflection. Pause right now, ask yourself the above questions, and check in to see how you are doing.

You Are Not Your Thoughts

Did you know that you are not your thoughts? It's true! All kinds of thoughts come into our minds. Sometimes they make perfect sense, but other times, they seem to come out of nowhere. Your thoughts do not define you. In other words...you are not your thoughts!

As you come to see that thoughts and emotions are temporary things that come and go, you will also begin to realize that your thoughts do not automatically determine your behavior. This increased awareness will create a buffer between what you experience and how you respond to it.

Sometimes your mind will be filled with thoughts that you don't really want. You may even be embarrassed by them. That's okay. You can relax, because you are not your thoughts. Trying to run and hide from your thoughts, or pretending that they aren't there does not usually work. For some reason, resisting thoughts we don't want actually gives them more power. So don't let those thoughts worry you, they are not you!

Breathing and Mindfulness

Breathing exercises are one of the simplest and most effective ways to practice mindfulness because your breath is always with you. When you focus your attention on slow, steady breathing, your mind has something positive to return to whenever it begins to wander. Instead of worrying about the past or the future, paying attention to each breath helps bring your awareness back to the present moment. This is the foundation of mindfulness—learning to notice what is happening right now without judging it.

Breathing also has a direct effect on the body. Slow, deep breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system, often called the body's "rest and digest" system. This helps slow your heart rate, lower your blood pressure, and reduce the release of stress hormones such as cortisol. As your body begins to relax, it will also help your mind to calm down. This is why many people use breathing exercises before a test, during a stressful situation, or when they feel anxious or overwhelmed.

The regular practice of breathing exercises will improve both mental and emotional well-being over time. Research suggests that if you practice mindful breathing regularly, it can help reduce stress and anxiety. By practicing for a few minutes each day, people learn to pause before reacting to difficult thoughts or emotions, allowing them to make more thoughtful decisions instead of acting on impulse.

Spend Time with Jesus Christ

I have found that I am more likely to hear God speak to me when I slow down and listen. Whether you call it pondering, meditation, or simply finding quiet time, allowing your body and your mind to be calm and quiet is enormously helpful.

President Russell M. Nelson reminded us that in order to hear the still, small voice of the Holy Ghost, we, too, must be still. He has taught that we can “choose to fill [our] time . . . with the noise and commotion of the world. Or we can use our time to hear the voice of the Lord whispering His guidance, comfort, and peace. Quiet time is sacred time—time that will facilitate personal revelation and instill peace.” (Russell M Nelson, “What We Are Learning and Will Never Forget” April 2021 General Conference)

You might be thinking, “I’m not sure that I have time for that!” I can relate. I admit that at first, I wondered if I was wasting time by meditating because I wasn't actually doing anything productive. I felt like I should be doing something, such as reading my scriptures, or at the very least, praying. But I have come to learn that simply spending time with Christ is very meaningful and very valuable. Sometimes I will share my thoughts with Him, and other times I will simply be with Him. As I do so, I feel of His love and His strength and His power. It rejuvenates me.

I am reminded of an old Zen proverb that says, “You should sit in meditation for twenty minutes every day—unless you're too busy; then you should sit for an hour.” (Origin unknown.)

I feel that way about spending time with Jesus Christ. The more busy and demanding my schedule becomes, the more I need to slow down and spend time with my Redeemer. When I

spend time with Him, I am reminded that He has a plan for me, that He completely understands me, and that everything is going to be okay.

David O. McKay said: “I think we pay too little attention to the value of meditation, a principle of devotion. ... Meditation is one of the ... most sacred doors through which we pass into the presence of the Lord.” (David O. McKay, in Conference Report, Apr. 1946, 113.)

Activity: Awareness and Meditation Exercise

Spend a few minutes sitting with your eyes closed and notice your thoughts and feelings. You will probably want to set a timer for 5 minutes. Pay attention to your breathing. Begin by taking three deep, relaxing breaths. Then breathe normally, but pay close attention to the air flowing in and out of your lungs through your nose. After you have focused on your breath for a bit, direct your attention to Jesus Christ. Imagine that He is with you, standing or sitting nearby. You don't even need to think or speak; just spend time with your Redeemer.

Day 9 – The Shame Cycle

Many people believe that feeling bad about themselves will motivate them to change, but shame often has the opposite effect. When we feel ashamed of an unwanted habit or behavior, it actually makes that behavior harder to stop. That's because shame doesn't just make you think, "I made a bad choice." It tells you that you are a bad person, and that you'll never change. But that simply isn't true. You are a good person, and you can always change.

Shame is so uncomfortable that our mind automatically looks for ways to escape it, and it often turns to habits to do so. Whether it's procrastinating, doomscrolling, overeating, or another behavior, habits can temporarily distract us from uncomfortable feelings. Even though the relief is temporary, the habit feels like the easiest way to escape in the moment.

This creates a cycle. The shame increases the urge to return to the habit for relief. Afterwards, we often feel even worse than before, which only adds more shame. Being hard on yourself doesn't help, it actually perpetuates the cycle.

The good news is that when we use the right approach, breaking out of the shame cycle is much easier than most of us realize. The solution is not pretending the behavior is okay or avoiding responsibility. It means recognizing that mistakes don't define your worth, and that you can change. When you respond to setbacks with honesty, accountability, and self-compassion instead of harsh self-judgment, you will be able to learn from your setbacks, make better choices, and create lasting change.

Below is another excerpt from Sister Tamara Runia's talk in General Conference that was quoted on Day 5. Her message beautifully articulates much of what we have been talking about.

"Your Repentance Doesn't Burden Jesus Christ; It Brightens His Joy"

By Sister Tamara W. Runia

Satan, the great accuser and deceiver, uses shame to keep us from God. Shame is a darkness so heavy it feels that if you took it out of your body, it would have an actual weight or heft to it.

Shame is the voice that beats you up, saying, "What were you thinking?" "Do you ever get anything right?"

Shame doesn't tell us we made a mistake; it tells us we are our mistakes. You may even hear, "Hide." The adversary does everything in his power to keep the heaviness inside, telling us the cost is too high, that it will be easier if this stays in darkness, removing all hope.

Satan is the thief of hope.

And you need to hear this, so I'll say these words out loud: You are not the voice in your head or the mistakes you have made. You may need to say that out loud too. Tell Satan, "Not today." Put him behind you.

Feel that pull, the godly sorrow that turns you toward your Savior, and watch His grace enter into your life and the lives of those you love. I promise that the minute we bring a broken heart courageously toward Him, He is immediately there.

If you saw someone drowning, wouldn't you reach your hand out and rescue them? Can you imagine your Savior rejecting your outstretched hand? I imagine Him diving into the water, descending below all things to lift us up so we can take a fresh breath! No one can sink lower than the light of Christ shines.

The Savior is forever brighter than the darkness of shame. He would never attack your worth.

It is Time to Forgive Yourself

You are a good person. You are a child of God, and God loves you. Of course you make mistakes, everyone does!

For some reason, we often feel that it is a good idea to be hard on ourselves. But this is actually backwards, and works against us. Jesus Christ wants you to be quick to forgive, and this includes yourself. He taught, "I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men. (D&C 64:10). You are commanded to forgive *all* men, and that includes yourself! It is time for you to forgive yourself.

Activity: Journaling

Spend time writing in your journal. Write down your answers to the following questions:

- What role does the shame cycle have in your unwanted habits?
- Do you have a hard time forgiving yourself?
- Do you believe that Jesus Christ wants you to forgive all men, including yourself?
- If you had a child or a dear friend who struggled with your current habit, what would you say to them?

Day 10 – Second Gear Revisited: Paying Attention

Today we will review what we already learned about Second Gear. You may recall that First Gear is about recognizing the steps of your habit loop and mapping them out: trigger, behavior, and results. Second Gear is becoming aware of the rewards and results.

Paying attention allows your brain to be rewired, because it gets to see the consequences and results of the behavior for itself. Your brain doesn't want to be told what to do. But it's smart enough to figure out how to change when it sees the results firsthand.

Avoiding judgment is essential to second gear. Perhaps nothing gets in our way of changing more than self-judgment. When we are critical and judgmental, we don't see things clearly. Remember that you are a good person, and good people make mistakes every day. And also remember that it isn't time to change your habit quite yet. That will be Third Gear, and that comes later. For now, just be curious and pay attention.

“Your Mind is a Stage” Metaphor

Mindfulness is the ability to take a step back and observe the thoughts entering your mind from a little more distance, without getting wrapped up in them. You can think of your mind as a stage. Imagine, for a moment, that you are sitting alone in a theater. The house lights have dimmed, and the stage lights are shining brightly. Now imagine that your thoughts, feelings, and emotions are the actors on that stage. What thoughts and feelings are on the stage of your mind right now? Give each thought its own character. What kind of costume is each one wearing? How is each character behaving on stage? Is it loud and demanding your attention, or quiet and lingering in the background? Simply observe the actors without getting caught up in their performance.

Sometimes, a loud, obnoxious, and unwanted thought can suddenly jump onto the stage of your mind and try to steal the spotlight from everything else. When this happens, there's no need to panic. You can simply notice the thought without judgment. You might even think, *“Isn't that interesting? There goes that crazy thought again . . . always trying to grab the spotlight.”* Then, rather than giving the thought your attention, simply let it be there.

If you notice that the same thought often intrudes onto the stage of your mind, you may want to give it a name. For example, when you notice yourself comparing yourself to a friend again, you might say, “There goes that ‘comparison’ thought again, always pointing out that I'm not as good as so-and-so.” Naming these thoughts can be helpful. You can even get creative and give them names such as, “There goes the Unfair Comparinator again, comparing my worst moments to someone else's highlight reel.” Or, “Thanks so much, Comparison Connie. You always have such a depressing analysis!”

It can also be helpful to notice when the Catastrophizer takes center stage. This is the thought that tells you that life is a catastrophe and the world is ending. It might be triggered by

something as simple as a reminder of an unpleasant experience. The Catastrophizer grabs that idea, runs with it to the center of the stage, demands the spotlight, and yells, “It’s the end of the world!”

As you begin to recognize that the thoughts on the stage of your mind are *not you*, you will also realize that you don’t have to shine the spotlight on the thoughts you don’t like. You can notice them without judgment, let them be, and choose not to give them your attention. *You are the observer sitting in the audience—not the actors performing on the stage.*

Let Christ Lift You Up!

Sometimes, when we see the various thoughts that are on the stage of our mind, and we pay attention to the consequences of our habits, it is painful, and we can get discouraged. Seeing the mistakes we have made and the harm we have done can be downright depressing. If this is how you feel, welcome to the club. I think we all feel like this at times.

Remember the words of Mormon to his son, Moroni. After describing some of the absolutely awful things that were taking place among the people in his day, Mormon offered these words of hope:

“My son, be faithful in Christ; and may not the things which I have written grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto death; but may Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever.

“And may the grace of God the Father, whose throne is high in the heavens, and our Lord Jesus Christ, who sitteth on the right hand of his power, until all things shall become subject unto him, be, and abide with you forever. Amen.” (Moroni 9:25-26)

No matter how discouraged or weighed down you may feel, please remember that Jesus Christ has the power to redeem you. He can make up for all the ill effects of your circumstances, your choices, and your past. The Atonement of Jesus Christ is infinite. There is nothing you have done, and nothing you are facing, that is beyond its reach.

Don’t doubt your Redeemer. Let Him lift you up.

Activity: Retroactive Second Gear

We are going to repeat something we did a couple of days ago. Find a quiet place where you can sit and relax for a moment. Close your eyes and take a couple of deep, relaxing breaths.

Now think about the most recent time you experienced your habit. (It may be the same experience you reviewed before, and that’s perfectly fine.) Go back and re-live that experience retroactively in your mind’s eye. Where were you? What triggers did you notice? How did you feel? Spend a few moments paying attention to this most recent experience.

And remember: Don't be critical. Just be curious.

Now, focus on the moment just *before* the behavior occurred. What did the urge feel like? As you pay attention to it, which of the following sensations best describes what you experienced? Choose only one—the sensation you feel most strongly.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Tightness | ☐ Tension |
| ☐ Pressure | ☐ Clenching |
| ☐ Contraction | ☐ Heat |
| ☐ Restlessness | ☐ Pit in stomach |
| ☐ Shallow breath | ☐ Buzzing/vibration |
| ☐ Burning | |

Now notice where you feel this sensation in your body. Is it stronger on the right side or the left? Is it more toward the front, middle, or back of your body? Where do you feel it most strongly?

Now allow yourself to become curious about this sensation. Take a closer look. Zoom in and focus your attention on it. What other sensations do you notice? What happens when you become really curious about where these sensations are located in your body? Do they change at all when you observe them with an attitude of curiosity?

(Adapted from Brewer, p 183-184)

Day 11 – You Have Nothing to Hide

Have you ever seen a child hide in what they thought was a great hiding place, but was blatantly obvious to everyone else?



(photo generated by chatGPT)

It is human nature to want to hide our mistakes and our sins. We all have a tendency to hide, and often, it is the first thing we think of after we have made a mistake. But there is another option—a much better option. Instead of hiding our mistakes, we can actually *get rid of them*, so that they are truly gone. This is the gift of repentance through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and it is amazing!

When we repent, our sins are swallowed up through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. They are not simply disguised or hidden; *they are gone*. It is a miraculous process, and it is real. And one of the most amazing things about this gift is that we can turn to Christ again and again—even many times in a single day.

Some sins require talking with your bishop as part of the repentance process. If you are unsure about your particular situation, you may want to talk with your bishop to make sure you are taking the appropriate steps. When you sincerely repent and follow the process the Lord has provided, *you can be clean*. That sin is gone. There is nothing left to hide because Christ has taken it away.

Change is Always Possible

The prophet David O. McKay taught that “the purpose of the gospel is . . . to make bad men good and good men better, and to change human nature” (David O McKay, as quoted in the film *Every Member a Missionary*, as acknowledged by Franklin D. Richards, CR, October 1965, 136–37; see also Brigham Young, JD 8:130 [22 July 1860]).

When it comes to change, Jesus Christ is the key. We cannot truly change without Him. But with Him, “nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37). No matter how far away from Christ we may feel, He invites us to come unto Him, so that we can be changed by Him, and we can become more like Him. Change is always possible because Christ is always there.

We Can Do Better and Be Better

By President Russell M. Nelson

Recently I have found myself drawn to the Lord's instruction given through the Prophet Joseph Smith: "Say nothing but repentance unto this generation." This declaration is often repeated throughout scripture. It prompts an obvious question: "Does everyone need to repent?" The answer is yes.

Too many people consider repentance as punishment—something to be avoided except in the most serious circumstances. But this feeling of being penalized is engendered by Satan. He tries to block us from looking to Jesus Christ, who stands with open arms, hoping and willing to heal, forgive, cleanse, strengthen, purify, and sanctify us.

The word for repentance in the Greek New Testament is *metanoeo*. The prefix *meta-* means "change." The suffix *-noeo* is related to Greek words that mean "mind," "knowledge," "spirit," and "breath."

Thus, when Jesus asks you and me to "repent," He is inviting us to change our mind, our knowledge, our spirit—even the way we breathe. He is asking us to change the way we love, think, serve, spend our time, treat our wives, teach our children, and even care for our bodies.

Nothing is more liberating, more ennobling, or more crucial to our individual progression than is a regular, daily focus on repentance. Repentance is not an event; it is a process. It is the key to happiness and peace of mind. When coupled with faith, repentance opens our access to the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

When we choose to repent, we choose to change! We allow the Savior to transform us into the best version of ourselves. We choose to grow spiritually and receive joy—the joy of redemption in Him. When we choose to repent, we choose to become more like Jesus Christ!

Repentance is the key to avoiding misery inflicted by traps of the adversary. The Lord does not expect perfection from us at this point in our eternal progression. But He does expect us to become increasingly pure. Daily repentance is the pathway to purity, and purity brings power. Personal purity can make us powerful tools in the hands of God. Our repentance—our purity—will empower us to help in the gathering of Israel. (Russell M. Nelson, "We Can Do Better and Be Better" April, 2019 General Conference.)

Activity: Repent & Journal

Get on your knees right now and pray. As you do, repent of anything that comes to mind. Be honest with Heavenly Father and ask for His help. If you feel that you need to speak with your bishop as part of the repentance process, send him a text message right now and ask for an appointment.

Once you have repented, take a moment to enjoy the feeling of being clean. Of course, you will make mistakes again in the future. But *right now, you are clean*. Let yourself feel the peace and relief that comes from knowing that your sins have been forgiven through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Now take some time to journal. Describe how it feels to know that you are clean after repenting. Write about what the gift of repentance means to you and how you feel about the opportunity to begin again through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Take a moment to enjoy the gift. You are clean.

Day 12 – Third Gear: The Bigger, Better Offer

Now that you have learned how to use First Gear to map out your habit loops and Second Gear to pay attention to the unwanted consequences of your habit, it's time to shift into Third Gear.

Third Gear is about helping your brain discover the Bigger, Better Offer (BBO). You already know that your habit isn't the best offer out there, but simply knowing that isn't enough to make your brain let go of it. Your brain needs something better to choose instead.

The next step is to find activities and experiences that your brain will prefer over your unwanted habit. We will practice these alternatives over and over until your brain begins to recognize that they feel better than the habit. Eventually, when your brain goes on autopilot, it can learn to choose the Bigger, Better Offer instead of the unwanted habit.

In other words, we aren't simply trying to take something away. We are giving your brain something better to choose. (*Brewer, p. 164*)

Here are some of the activities that we will practice as part of Third Gear:

- Curiosity
- Breathing exercises
- RAIN (Recognize, Accept, Investigate & Note)
- Loving Kindness

Third Gear is all about practicing new ways to respond to old urges and cravings. We are not trying to run away from those cravings. Instead, we want to *lean into them*, acknowledge them, and then practice responding in a different way.

Keep in mind that real change takes practice. Nobody expects a toddler to learn to walk on the first try. We all know that the toddler will fall over and over and over as part of the learning process. Falling is not a failure—it is part of learning. As the toddler keeps trying, he eventually gets the hang of it. He falls less and walks more.

In the coming days, we will practice each of the activities listed above. You may not always see an immediate connection between an activity and your particular habit. That's OK. As you practice, you will develop new skills that can help you step out of your habit loop and choose a Bigger, Better Offer instead.

The Power of Prayer

If you really want help unwinding your habits, you will want to access the power of God through prayer. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). Your prayers make a difference!

Jesus taught: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” (Matthew 7:7-8).

Your habit can become an opportunity to refine your ability to ask God for help. I have found that God is often quicker to answer my prayers when I am specific about what I need. Instead of simply asking God to eliminate your habit, try asking Him to help you develop strength in specific areas. Ask Him to show you what you need to see, teach you what you need to learn, and give you the strength to take the next step. *And keep in mind...this will require not only talking to God, but listening!*

Activity: Pray In Specifics

Make a list of the things you want to ask for in prayer. Spend some time thinking about this in advance so that your list is thoughtful and specific. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Pray for help in correctly mapping your habit (First Gear).** Review your map with God and ask Him to point out additional insights you may have overlooked.
- **Ask God to help you recognize the results and consequences of your habit (Second Gear).** Ask Him to help you see clearly what happens before, during, and after you engage in the behavior.
- **Ask God to help you forgive yourself.** Ask Him to help you let go of shame and discouragement as you work toward change.
- **Ask God to help you recognize that you are not defined by your habit.** Your worth does not come from how well you perform or how successfully you control your behavior. Your value comes from the fact that you are a child of God.
- **Pray for help in seeing God's hand in your life.** Ask Him to show you how He is helping you with the things that matter most.

Day 13 – The Science of Curiosity

You have an innate superpower within you when it comes to making changes: *the ability to be curious*. (Brewer p. 180) There is real power in asking how and why things are the way they are. Albert Einstein said, “I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious.” You might not discover a new Theory of Relativity, but you can use that same superpower to help change your habits.

Most unwanted habits operate automatically. Something triggers us—stress, boredom, anxiety, loneliness—and before we have thought much about it, we reach for the phone, eat something, procrastinate, worry, or engage in whatever behavior our brain has learned will provide some relief. The familiar pattern of **Trigger** → **Behavior** → **Reward** can happen almost automatically, without even thinking about it.

Curiosity can alter the habit loop. Instead of immediately acting on an urge—or desperately trying to suppress it—we can investigate it:

What does this craving actually feel like? Where do I feel it in my body? Is it pressure, tightness, restlessness, warmth? Is it staying the same, or changing from moment to moment?

That shift may sound small, but it can make a significant difference. Curiosity helps you recognize that **you are not your thoughts, cravings, or urges**. When you notice that you are in a habit loop, instead of automatically going through the motions, you can pause and investigate what is happening.

Hmm...that's interesting. I wonder why I'm feeling that craving right now.

Hmm...I wonder why my brain thinks this will make me feel better.

Hmm...I wonder what will happen if I don't do it.

Curiosity helps your brain discover that an old habit may not be as rewarding as it thinks. When you become genuinely curious about a behavior, you begin to notice its *actual consequences*. Mindlessly scrolling on your phone might promise relaxation, for example, but careful attention may reveal that thirty minutes of scrolling actually leaves you feeling more restless and dissatisfied.

Your brain begins to recognize, through its own experience, that the reward may not be nearly as good as it remembered. And instead of responding to an unwanted habit with grim self-control—*Don't do it, don't do it, don't do it*—we replace the struggle with exploration:

Hmm...what happens if I don't immediately scratch this itch? What will this craving do?

An urge that initially feels like an overwhelming force may turn out to be a collection of changing sensations, thoughts, and emotions. *It rises. It shifts. And eventually, it passes.*

There is another wonderful thing about curiosity: **curiosity can actually be fun!** Your brain enjoys discovering new information. Asking, “*Hmm...I wonder what will happen if...*” turns an uncomfortable moment into something to explore.

Invite Help From the Other Side

How would you like some additional help in your quest for change? How would you like to have the powers of heaven helping you along the way?

Temple and family history work can bring remarkable spiritual power into our lives. President Russell M. Nelson taught:

“While temple and family history work has the power to bless those beyond the veil, it has an equal power to bless the living.” (Russell M. Nelson, “Generations Linked in Love,” Ensign, May 2010, 93.)

And what kind of power can it bring? Elder Dale G. Renlund gave this remarkable promise:

*“You will find not only protection from the temptation and ills of the world, but you will also find personal power—**power to change, power to repent, power to learn, power to be sanctified**, and power to turn the hearts of your family members to each other and heal that which needs healing.” (Dale G. Renlund, “Family History and Temple Blessings,” Ensign, February 2017, 39.)*

Think about that for a moment: **power to change**. That is exactly what we are seeking!

Family history work can also bring added protection from the influence of the adversary. And perhaps most remarkably, prophets have taught that as we help those on the other side of the veil, **we can receive help in return**. Elder David A. Bednar offered this promise:

“I promise you will be protected against the intensifying influence of the adversary. As you participate in and love this holy work, you will be safeguarded in your youth and throughout your lives.” (David A. Bednar, “The Hearts of the Children Shall Turn,” October 2011 general conference.)

So if you are serious about unwinding an unwanted habit, don't overlook this source of spiritual strength. Turn your heart toward your ancestors. Learn their stories. Find their names. Serve them in the temple. **As you help them, trust that heaven can help you.**

Activity: Family History

Spend a few minutes right now exploring your family history. Go to FamilySearch and learn something new about your ancestors. **Be curious!** You never know what you might discover.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- What countries did your ancestors come from?
- Who were the first people in your family to join the Church?
- Choose one ancestor and find a story about his or her life.
- Where did your grandparents and great-grandparents live? What might everyday life have been like for them?
- Can you find photographs of your ancestors? What do you notice about them?
- Read a few stories or memories that have been recorded about your family.
- Find an ancestor who needs temple ordinances and prepare a name to take to the temple. Notice how that person is related to you.

As you explore, pay attention to what you feel. Remember that these are not simply names and dates on a family tree. These are real people. They are *your* people. Learn something about them, serve them when you can, and allow your heart to turn toward them.

Day 14 – Choosing a Growth Mindset

Carol Dweck, PhD, a psychologist at Stanford University, is known for her research comparing a fixed mindset with a growth mindset, as outlined below. (*C. S. Dweck, Mindset: The New Psychology of Success, New York: Random House, 2006, 179–80.*)

Fixed Mindset

Individuals with a fixed mindset *fear failure* because they think it defines their abilities. They feel that failure is proof that they aren't good at something, and never will be.

Growth Mindset

Those with a growth mindset *don't mind failure* because they see mistakes as opportunities to change. They believe that they can improve their abilities through practice, learning, and persistence. Failure is not only accepted, it is often embraced.

I want to point out how different these two mindsets feel.

A **fixed mindset** feels tense, closed down and contracted, like you are curled up tight in a ball. This is because your brain is trying to protect you from your fear of failure, so your body might act it out with tense shoulders, a tense stomach, and a feeling that you want to escape or shut down. It doesn't feel very good.

A **growth mindset**, on the other hand, can feel more open and relaxed. There is less to protect or hide because you recognize that *it is okay to make mistakes*. Failure is not a bad thing, it is actually an opportunity to learn something. That realization can bring a tremendous sense of relief—and even joy—as you recognize that you are not trapped where you are right now.

Each of us moves between these two mindsets. So, where do you see yourself on this spectrum? Do you tend more toward a growth mindset or a fixed mindset?

If you find that you spend a lot of time in a fixed mindset, I have good news for you: *you were made to change!* As you become aware of your mindset, and come to realize that mistakes and failures are normal, you will gradually move towards a growth mindset.

You don't have to be afraid of failure. You can learn from it.

Michael Jordan

Michael Jordan is considered by many to be the GOAT—the greatest of all time—when it comes to basketball. His remarkable résumé includes six NBA championships, six Finals MVP awards, five regular-season MVP awards, and ten scoring titles.

Do you think Michael Jordan approached basketball with a fixed mindset or a growth mindset?

In 1997, Jordan starred in a famous Nike television commercial, titled “Failure,” and this is what he said:

"I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

Obviously, Michael Jordan is a powerful example of a growth mindset. You, too, can strengthen your own growth mindset.

Until Seventy Times Seven

The idea of learning through mistakes is not only supported by research—it is also a gospel principle. In a General Conference talk titled *“Until Seventy Times Seven,”* Elder Lynn G. Robbins taught that mistakes and repeated attempts are an essential part of learning, growth, and becoming more like Jesus Christ.

Mistakes are a fact of life. Learning to skillfully play the piano is essentially impossible without making thousands of mistakes—maybe even a million. To learn a foreign language, one must face the embarrassment of making thousands of mistakes—maybe even a million. Even the world’s greatest athletes never stop making mistakes.

“Success,” it has been said, “isn’t the absence of failure, but going from failure to failure without any loss of enthusiasm.”

With his invention of the light bulb, Thomas Edison purportedly said, “I didn’t fail 1,000 times. The light bulb was an invention with 1,000 steps.” Charles F. Kettering called failures “finger posts on the road to achievement.” Hopefully, each mistake we make becomes a lesson in wisdom, turning stumbling blocks into stepping-stones.

Nephi’s unwavering faith helped him go from failure to failure until he finally obtained the brass plates. It took Moses 10 attempts before he finally found success in fleeing Egypt with the Israelites.

We may wonder—if both Nephi and Moses were on the Lord’s errand, why didn’t the Lord intervene and help them achieve success on their first try? Why did He allow them—and why does He allow us—to flounder and fail in our attempts to succeed? Among many important answers to that question, here are a few:

First, the Lord knows that “these things shall give [us] experience, and shall be for [our] good.”

Second, to allow us to “taste the bitter, that [we] may know to prize the good.”

Third, to prove that “the battle is the Lord’s,” and it is only by His grace that we can accomplish His work and become like Him.

Fourth, to help us develop and hone scores of Christlike attributes that cannot be refined except through opposition and “in the furnace of affliction.”

Think about what this means for your habit. Every time you slip up, you have another opportunity to learn. Instead of thinking, “I failed again. I’ll never change,” try asking, “What can I learn from what just happened?” A setback does not erase the progress you have made. Sometimes, failure is part of how we change.

Activity: Visualize Success

Spend five minutes imagining what it will be like when this unwanted habit is a thing of the past. Close your eyes and place yourself in a specific moment in the future. Where are you? What do you see around you? How does it feel to have this habit behind you? What kind of confidence fills your heart? Write these thoughts and feelings down.