

A very dirty little boy came in from playing in the garden one day and asked his father, "Who am I?" Ready to play the game he said, "I don't know! Who are you?" "WOW!" cried the child. "Mrs. Johnson was right! She said I was so dirty, my own father wouldn't recognize me!"

And I guess the point of the story is don't look so much like the world that your own heavenly Father doesn't recognise you. Have you ever made plans to do something but never got around to doing it?

You see we all suffer from a disease called procrastination. And procrastination means, "The act or habit of putting off to a future time." I do it all the time, I wait until the car is almost running on fumes before I put more petrol in the car and sometimes I get caught out and run out of petrol.

Maybe you promised yourself that you would tidy your room up last week but never got around to doing it. Or maybe you promised that you would go along to the next Bible study at your church but you never took the first steps to go.

You see when it comes to change; it's difficult to take those first steps. But that's where the change begins, with those first steps. We all suffer from procrastination to a degree. And with that in mind I would like to share with you all 4 points this morning on the subject of changing your sinful habits. But I'm not going to stand here and tell you that you have to change because when it comes to change it has to come from within.

You need to want to change. 1. You recognise the need for change.

We all know that some of the habits we have in our lives are very good. For example brushing your teeth twice a day to have fresh breath. Having a shower or a bath twice a year to keep the fleas away. But there are also some habits, which are sinful and can be very destructive and dangerous.

For example when I was younger the two most destructive habits I had in my life were drugs and alcohol. But hey I was young, it was fun, I didn't need any help. Or so I thought. You see I was one of the lucky ones and I can say lucky because I'm standing here in front of you all today alive as a Christian.

But one of my best friends wasn't so lucky. He took drugs and alcohol to the extreme and he ended up in a mental institute. He now suffers from paranoia and schizophrenia. Oh he always said that he would stop in the future but he just never got round to it. And let me tell you when you see that happening to one of your friends you have one of two choices. You can carry on with your habit and end up the same way. Or you can get help and change your habit.

But what's your habit? What's the sinful habit that's destructing your life?

Hebrews 12:1 "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

What's hindering your Christian lifestyle? What sin has got you all tangled up so that you can't run the race?

Maybe it's the sinful habit of gossip where you just help but talk about other people to other people! Maybe it's the Friday night binges at your friends' house! Maybe your habit is telling crude jokes to your non-Christian friends!

You see the world has got lots of ungodly habits. And **Robbie Williams** is right when he says, "They're selling razor blades and mirrors on the street." But **The Verve** were also right when they said that, "Drugs don't work, they just make you worse."

But there are many things I would like to change in the world around me. For example **have you ever noticed in most of the soaps that we have on our television screens, the people are always miserable?**

Martin Fowler who is in **Eastenders** is always looking depressed. **Fred Elliot** from **Coronation Street** is another. I said, I said **Fred Elliot** from **Coronation Street**. **Vivian** from **Emmerdale** is another one who's always complaining about something.

Now I think there is one big reason why all these characters are always miserable. It's because their lives are centred in and around a pub. **Have you ever noticed that?** All the so-called top soaps are set in and around a pub!

If I had my way I would change the settings in all these soaps to a church. **Imagine what kind of story lines they would come out with then?** Instead of **Dirty Den**, I would change his name to the **Right Reverend Dennis Watts**. Instead of **Devious Tracy Barlow**, I would change her name to **Tracy the Encourager**.

And maybe you know of some people or even some of your friends you wish you could change. But not just their names but also their whole character.

An Old mystic said this about himself: "I was a revolutionary when I was young, and my prayer to God was, 'Lord, give me the strength to change the world.' As I approached middle age and realized that my life was halfway gone without changing a single soul, I changed my prayer to, 'Lord, give me the grace to change all those who come into contact with me, especially my family and friends, and I shall be satisfied.' Now that I am an old man, and my days are numbered, I have begun to see how foolish I have been. Now my one prayer is this, 'Lord, give me the grace to change myself.'"

You need to take a close look at yourself first. **Two men went to the temple to pray one day. One of them was a well-respected man in his town; the other was a man who people hated. The well-respected guy stood up and prayed about himself and said, "Hey God I thank you so much that I'm not like other people around me, I'm especially thankful that I'm not like this other guy who everybody hates. And hey God just in case you forget what I do for you, I fast twice a week and oh I give a tenth of everything I get from my income."**

The man who was hated by many prayed from a distance and he couldn't even bring himself to look up to heaven, he was so disgusted with himself he would beat his chest. **And when he prayed to God he said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."**

Now you've probably guessed I was paraphrasing **Luke 18:10-13**. You see before you can help others change their habits; you first need to recognise your own habits.

And to do that you need my **2nd point. 2. You need to take the first step.**

One of the hardest things you will ever challenge yourself to do is change your sinful habits. But there is good news because anything that is a habit can be broken.

In the film **Bruce Almighty** when **Jim Carey** life is just a mess. And so he gets the chance to play God for a while. And all the way through the film when he starts to use God's power, you hear the

words, "I've got the power!" But he abuses that power over and over again, until he realises that every time he uses that power it affects the whole world around him.

But the point is that you have the power to change those sinful habits. What you do with your life is your choice. God won't force you change but he will help you, if you want to change. But it takes courage to take those first steps. Can I take you back to the time when God was preparing the Israelites to take hold of the Promised Land?

Joshua 3:11-16 "See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord--the Lord of all the earth--set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap. So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them. Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing."

Imagine the courage that would have taken to take those first steps. They walked out in faith. They took a step and the water flowed back, they took another step and the water flowed back a little more. And on and on they went, trusting God to take care of the next step.

And that's what you need to do. Take that first step of courage to change your sinful habits and then trust God to help you with the next step.

There was a man called Simon the Pharisee who invited Jesus back to his house for dinner. It says in Luke 7 that a woman who lived a sinful life came to Jesus with a bottle of perfume. Now to you and I that's no big deal, but for a sinful woman to walk into a Pharisee's house to get to Jesus, that was a big deal. She was classed as unclean; she was a disgrace to society. If there were ever a crowd of people in the market place, she would stand out from the crowd as the woman with the reputation. But she took the courage to take those first steps to go to Jesus. And you should too!

Take your sinful habits to the Lord and just watch what he can do with them. Luke 7:44-46 tells us that the very things she used to seduce men with, she now uses to give glory to God. She soaked Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. The very lips that were used to kiss many men were now being used to kiss the master's feet. The perfume she used to make her smell attractive, she now used to wash her Lord's feet. God can take your sinful habits and use them for righteousness and for his glory.

Instead of singing praises to The Darkness, He'll help you sing praises of joy and gladness to Him. Instead of sleeping around with some girls or boys, He'll help you stay pure until the day you get married. Instead of getting drunk and being nasty to your friends, He'll help you pray for your friends. Instead of going around like you know it all, He'll help you be humble. Instead of wanting everything now, He'll help you to be patient. Instead of fearing no one, He'll help you fear Him. But it takes courage to trust Him enough to know that He will do that.

3. Be ready for the withdrawal systems.

As Christians there is something in us that makes us vulnerable to temptation. The temptation to go back to how we used to live. You see if you go to your friend's house and get drunk at the weekends, there's no point in going back to your friend's house at the weekends. That's defeating the purpose. And sometimes changing your sinful habits can hurt and it can cost you.

Someone once said to me before I became a Christian, "Take a close look at all your friends and tell me if there's not one of them who didn't take drugs."

And let me tell you, they were right. And so when I gave up drugs, it cost me my so-called friends. All I had left was my family. But I wanted to live.

In the **Terminator series** Arnold Swarzenegar was a bad guy in **Terminator 1** and he went all out to try and kill Sarah Conner to prevent her from having her son John. But in the **second Terminator** film Arnold comes back as a good guy. But as you may remember that no one trusted him, Sarah didn't trust him and even the police recognised him as being a bad guy. Every one assumed that he was still a bad guy.

And the point is that our sinful habits and sinful attitudes towards people can build up a reputation. And if you've got a reputation for sleeping around, **who's going to believe you when you say you've changed?** Most people back in Scotland think I'm still involved with drugs. Most people back in Scotland still think I've got a drink problem.

But let me ask you this, **what's your reputation like? What do people say about you? Are you the guy who swears everyday, except a Sunday? Are you the guy who boasts about how many girl friends he's had? Are you the girl who talks about in detail what you would like to do with Brad Pitt? Are you the girl who slag's off her friends behind their backs? What do people say about you?**

Alexander the Great was walking around their camp one night and he came upon one of his soldiers sleeping when he was supposed to be on look out. Alexander said to the man, **"What is your name? And the man said, "Alexander sir." Alexander said to him, "You know what the penalty is for falling asleep don't you?" And the man said, "Yes sir, its death." So Alexander said to him, "Soldier either change your attitude or change your name."**

You see you can't say you're a Christian and let your actions tell a different story. You can't praise Jesus one minute and say I'm a Christian and then continue with your sinful habit the next. Jesus says you can only serve one master; you can't have it both ways. If you try to serve two masters then that is going to be very destructive and dangerous.

In **Terminator 2** when Arnold comes back as the good guy, he says to Sarah and her son John, **"If you want to live follow me."** And that's the very words that Jesus says to us all today. If you want to live then follow me, follow my example.

Romans 8:12-14 "Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

Do you ever get tired of your sinful nature? Do you ever get tired of having a bad reputation? Well, maybe its time for a cool change or as my mum used to say to me, "Mike a change is as good as a rest."

You see I understand that there are peer pressures and a need to fit in. Just ask my friend, she was bullied for years when she went to school because she just didn't fit in with the crowd, but wanted too so much. And being the odd one out because you're a Christian can be tough too.

Just look at Dot Cotton on Eastenders. She's still as miserable as the others but at least she has some values. Ok she may not be the perfect example of a Christian woman but whenever there's trouble in Albert Square she's always there. She's always asking if there is something she could do to help. And when Den's son Dennis was in that pub scene with his father and he punched his sister, Dot was the hero of the moment for me.

Because she understood, because she too has a son who lived a sinful life. But as the odd one out in the soap, she still fits in with the rest of the cast. [Do you want a challenge?](#) I challenge you all to try being the odd one out for godly reasons.

And instead of sending filthy texts to each other, trying sending a text saying, "I'm praying for you because I love you". Instead of saying, "let's have a party at my house tonight", try saying, "let's have a Bible study at my house tonight." It's not going to be easy to change your sinful habits and you will always have withdrawal systems, where you want to go back to how you used to live. But God will help you overcome those times of temptation, but again you need to want that help.

And that brings me to my final point. [4. There's joy and satisfaction in change.](#)

I started off by saying that procrastination means, "the act or habit of putting off to a future time." One of the most satisfying things you can do is to complete something you know you should do. Now I don't know about you but when I look back at what I used to be, no body here would even talk to me, never mind call me their brother in Christ.

And when I look back at my sinful habits, I don't like what I was. I didn't like me very much but now since I've become a Christian, I like me now. I hope I'm a nice guy, well, that's what people tell me. But there's something cool about being a Christian.

And when I look back at what God has achieved in me as a person, it gives me a sense of joy and satisfaction. Instead of using people to get what I wanted, I help others get what they need. Instead of thinking the world rotates around me all the time, I can see that the world rotates around God and others.

[A man was talking to a farmer's wife one day and he asked her, "What is it like to be a Christian?" The farmer's wife replied, "It is like being a turnip at Halloween time. God picks you from the patch, brings you in, and washes all the dirt off of you." "Then he cuts off the top and scoops out all the yucky stuff. He removes the seeds of doubt, hate, greed, etc., and then He carves you a new smiling face and puts His light inside of you to shine for all the world to see."](#)

There's something exciting about allowing God to change you. Its exciting because you don't know what God's got planned to change in you next. And for me, that's cool. And it gives me joy when I look at my life and see the sinful habits that I used to have but don't have anymore.

I used to tell some of the crudest jokes you've ever heard. But it gives me satisfaction when I stand here and share with you the same jokes, just cleaned up. It gives me joy to look at my friend as someone to be cherished and loved instead of someone to be used whenever I felt like it.

It takes time to develop good habits. If you've never been to church before in your life, it takes time to adjust from your usual routine on a Sunday. If you're used to hanging out with your friends on the street corners, it takes time to get used to going to the Bible club.

So don't expect all your sinful habits to disappear over night. It takes time. And the truth of the matter is that it might take the whole of your life to change a sinful habit. The important thing is that you're trying.

[I would like to tell you about someone whom I was introduced to a few years ago. Now she wouldn't want me to tell you too much about her because she is a humble woman who goes about quietly doing God's work. But she is a huge inspiration for me because of the way she runs her home and looks after her children and her husband. She drags her family off to church every Sunday and even though her husband isn't a believer, she drags him along too.](#)

Now I don't want to embarrass her by telling you who she is but what I will tell you is her name. Her name is **Marge Simpson**. Ok I know she's a cartoon character but I love cartoons. You see she's the one who keeps everything together in her home. She's the one who puts up with Homer and Bart's sinful behaviour. She is always there for them no matter what kind of trouble her family finds themselves in.

She's the one that makes the real difference in the home. And I'm wondering today, **what kind of influence do you make on your home? What kind of influence do you have on your friends?**

Ephesians 6:1-3 "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."Honour your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise-- "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

Imagine the influence that would make if you did this went you went back home? You see, it's not only you, which is affected by your change, it affects everyone around you. And that should give you joy and it makes you satisfied that the Lord is working in you. And that pleases people but most of all according to **Colossians 3:20**, it pleases God.

It's time for a cool change. A change in habits, a change in attitudes towards God and people. And if you're not a Christian today then today would be a good day to think about becoming a follower of Christ Himself and allow Him to help you make those first steps. Oh it's going to be tough but once you take that first step, God will help you with the rest.

So let's finish by practicing what I've been preaching. Instead of just talking about God, let's pray to him.