
Alright. Well, I want to welcome everybody joining us at all of our physical locations and those of you online. So glad that you are here.

Before we get going today, I've got something to celebrate and I've got a piece of news to share with you that is really exciting.

But before I do that, I'd like to pray. I'd like to just offer a pastoral prayer over all of us—those of you in one of our auditoriums, those of you maybe in your living room right now, because obviously we've come through another challenging, difficult, divisive week that just reminds us of everything that is broken in ourselves and in this world.

Right now, regardless—one thing I do know is that all of us have seen what has happened last week in the Capital through a certain set of lenses, we have our opinions about it. I've got my opinions about it. And yet, I'm not up here to tell you what my opinions are, because who really cares?

What I do want to do is I want to just encourage us to lift our eyes heavenward. There are so many voices, chattering in our ears and in our heads and our hearts are conflicted.

I know that I've experienced a wide range of emotions this last week: anxiety, fear, anger, isolation, confusion. And I would imagine that you have as well. And I got up really early this morning because I knew I needed to say something, but what do you say? What do you say that people need to hear? What do you say so that it won't add to the confusion and division?

So, I just got up before the sun came up and I was just praying. And God led me to this verse in Exodus. It's one of my favorite verses. We actually have it painted on one of our walls at home. And the context is the Israelites—they're on the run from the Egyptians and they are fearful, anxious, angry.

And they lash out at each other and they lash out at Moses and it's confusing. And Moses stands and he speaks these God-ordained words. He simply says to them, "Hey, listen I need you to stand firm right now in the midst of this crisis."

And he says this in Exodus 14:14:
"The Lord will fight for you. You need only to be still."

And I think that right now could I just implore all of us...? This has nothing to do with politics, it has nothing to do with opinions, it has everything to do with where we are looking and what we

are listening to. Can I just implore you right now to just figuratively and literally lay your weapons down? Right now for this moment and in this space...

We have this entire week ahead of us in which there is all kinds of confusion and all kinds of things coming our way. Can we lay our weapons down and can we just take a deep breath?

I want to remind us of what we've been saying around here for years. And we often forget when we are in seasons like this: God is in control of who is in control. He is sovereign over kings and kingdoms even to this day even if it doesn't match our particular political persuasions.

So, we recognize that government has its place, but it is not our savior. It never has been, and it never will be. Jesus alone is. He desires that space in our lives. So, could I just pray and lift our eyes heavenward?

Father, we come to you right now after another week of just emotion, division, and confusion. And many of us are pent up. We're angry. We're fearful. We're stressed. We're confused—
anxious.

So, God, I just pray that we could take those words from Moses to the Israelites that apply just as much to us today, that we would stand firm, and that we would trust that you would fight for us. We only need to be still. That doesn't mean passive. That doesn't mean that we don't have convictions. It doesn't mean that we are not passionate. It means that the battle is your alone.

You've asked us to be faithful. You've asked us to be compassionate. You've asked to be on mission. So, God, I pray that you would help us. If we miss this moment as your followers, we miss it all. Right now is the moment when we stand firm, and we represent you well to a watching world.

So, I pray that in the midst of the division you would unify us, people from both sides of the aisles, people who see things very differently, that we'd be unified in the person of Jesus Christ and keep our eyes fixed on him. I ask this in Jesus' name. And in unity we say: Amen.

Hey, thank you for that. If I could switch gears, I've got something to celebrate today. Our North campus turns five years old this weekend. So could we give it up for our North campus? Make some noise for them. I got a text message just during the worship time. It was a picture of North. It said it was a packed house—pandemic packed. And so we just want to say happy birthday to North campus.

You know, when we went multi-site, the North campus was the very first campus that we launched. It was a brand-new thing for our church. And 300 brave souls said, "We'll go." And they went. They did portable set up and tear down in a middle school and since then we've moved them into a permanent location. That 300 has grown to nearly 2,000 who call the North campus home.

So, love you guys. Over the last five years you've had about 350 baptisms, all kinds of people into groups, doing so much good in the Carmel community. Bart Shaw, the campus pastor, and your whole team, we love you guys—way to go. Can't wait to see what God is going to do in the next five.

Another piece of information I want to share with you before we jump in, our West campus meeting in the Avon area has been going since August of 2017. And they have been in a middle school, portable set up and tear down since then, which leads me to say that they are our grittiest campus.

They have been setting up and tearing down since August of 2017 and they've done it with a Christ-like attitude. They have been so joyful. And God has really had his hand on campus pastor, David Cupp, and their whole team out there.

We've been actively searching for a permanent location for them. We're not fixated on buildings. Buildings are just a tool. And so we've been looking for them. We thought we had some land secured and we were going to build a facility for them.

But over the course of the last 12 to 18 months, it kind of seems as if God has been closing some doors on that. One thing that we've learned for sure is that when God seems to close a door, don't try to force it open. We'd make a big mess of things.

So we've just been trying to listen to that, even as disappointed as we were. David Cupp has been a part of all of that process. We had a team of people looking. And here's one of the things that we discovered, one of the things why we believe that God closed the door—if I could show you a map, this is the current portable location of our West campus in Avon, these blue circles are where the primary bulk of our people are coming from to that location.

So you can see a lot of it is to the south. So we've been searching for a location sort of centralized to this area. And we found a former Marsh grocery store in Plainfield. I'm really excited to share with you that we've purchased that facility for our West campus.

This is where that Marsh campus is. It is in a great location, less than a mile from I 70. You've got 267 and 40—it's just going to be a great, centralized location. We believe that it is better than the piece of property that we were looking at before. So, West hold on, man. Thank you for your patience. The timeline on this is hopefully we'll get you moved in some time in 2022, Lord willing.

Well, if you are just now joining us, we are in week number two of this series that we started last week that we call *Atomic Habits*. If you missed last week you can jump online sometime later today or tomorrow and get caught up on that, because these messages work like building blocks. They build one upon the other.

If I could just by way of review say last week, we said that: small changes really do make a **BIG DIFFERENCE** in our lives.

And we don't want to underestimate the cumulative power of small, incremental changes made over the course of time. And I think that most of us are open to change. We evaluate our lives, especially at the beginning of a brand-new year. Like, "I really want to make some changes."

And maybe that particular area, whatever it may be for you, statistically speaking, many of us will get to the end of 2021 without necessarily experiencing the change that we wanted to see if we do what we've always done. And so we need to make some sort of an adjustment, some sort of a change.

Last week I said that most of us hope that this year is going to be better than last year. We said hope is a great place to start but it is not an effective strategy.

And what I mean by that is if you look at your finances and if they are not where you want them to be—like if you've got way too much debt, and you're not saving enough for the future, and you're not being generous with what you know you need to be generous with—you can't just look at that and say, "Well, I hope it gets better by the end of the year." No, you've got to set something into motion, you've got to make some small, incremental changes to get you there.

If you are looking at your health and your diet and your exercise program, you can't just look at it and say, "Well, hopefully at the end of 2021 I'll be thinner than what I am now—hope so." No, you've got to begin to make some small, incremental changes.

This is especially true in our spiritual growth. If you are not where you want to be right now, spiritually speaking, that is okay. We've all got room to grow in that area. We are all in process. None of us has arrived. But yet if you want to grow spiritually you can't just say, "Well, I hope I grow spiritually. I hope I fall into that." You've got to begin to make some small adjustments in your life to begin to ensure that.

And it's really, really hard. Implementing change into our lives is challenging for all kinds of reasons. There are all kinds of things working against us, aside from our own brokenness, inconsistencies, and failures.

God's word tells us very clearly that there is an enemy, and he operates like a roaring lion, he's prowling around looking for somebody to devour. So, you make a decision to change. I guarantee that there will be resistance against it. Maybe even that same day.

So last week I gave you this graph where many of us get stuck, this results time graph. And I said that oftentimes we implement a change, what we want to experience is rapid growth—up and to the right. But most of the time it doesn't work that way.

So if you make a decision that you want to be more physically fit and healthier or you want to grow in your marriage or relationships or to grow spiritually or your finances, whatever—you make a change, but chances are that before you see the results that you want there is going to be a dip. And if you stay with it, over time, and I'm talking maybe months and months of time, then you'll turn a corner and you'll begin to experience exponential results.

But is the space between progress and the dip that derails so many of us. We called it the valley of despair. This is where a lot of New Year's resolutions go to die. This is where a lot of our well-meaning goals kind of stay. And we get frustrated. We say, "This isn't working." We've got to stick with it.

Last week we said that there are three concentric circles that are so important, because oftentimes you've got goals, you've got action steps to get to those goals, and then in the middle you've got who, your identity. Like who do you want to be? And goals are so important.

But oftentimes we make goals without getting a lot of thought to *who*. So we make goals, and they stay in the outer circle, and this is an understandable but well-meaning mistake—we've got to start with who. Before you ever develop goals, you say, "Okay, who do I want to be?"

I want to get even more specific with this. It's not just who you want to be, but it's who God says you are in Christ Jesus? And you develop this clearly and then you begin to develop the goals and the action steps or the habits that will get you there.

And the reason why is this:
your identity drives your behavior.

What goals do is they set direction, but your identity will drive the results that you ultimately want to see.

We're not talking about these big, giant leaps. We're talking about these small, incremental steps. That's what atomic means. Atomic doesn't mean this huge, big explosion. Atomic means:

Atomic: incremental, extremely minute, tiny

And that should be good news. It's the idea, "I just need to make a small adjustment and I need to stick with," it for this reason:
Habits are cumulative in their effect and more powerful than your will.

So when your willpower gives out, the habit is still there. When your motivation wanes the habit is still there. And this idea of focusing our daily habits is found all throughout God's word. It's such a biblical concept, beginning with Jesus.

I told you last week that Jesus, himself, had daily habits. He would often retreat to get alone, to be by himself. He would often go to the synagogue to worship.

The Apostle Paul had daily habits. We see another example of this in the Old Testament book of Daniel. If you don't know the story, Daniel was an Israelite teen-ager who gets kidnapped, taken against his will by the Babylonians—the most powerful nation at the time. And there Daniel is. This young man, he's in a foreign land and he just begins to live a solid, consistent life. His character shines through.

The king notices it. So he ends up promoting Daniel to second in command in the entire nation. You look at this story and you're just like, "Wow. Daniel must have come across a real streak of luck in order to get promoted to that."

Luck had nothing to do with it. It was his character. And when you look closely at Daniel's life, behind his character were these daily, atomic habits that show you where his character was found.

In fact, we see an example of this in Daniel, chapter 6, verse 10 right after he had received some bad news that was going to affect him:

"But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual," in other words, he did this all of the time, not just in crisis, *"in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day,"* here it is once again, *"just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God."*

I read that this last week and I thought to myself, "You know, oftentimes there are seasons in my life I will do what I know I need to do when the pressure is on." Like, when I'm in the midst of crisis, when I'm in the midst of the storm—it's sort of like smelling-salts that awaken me emotionally and spiritually and I go, "Man, I haven't been praying as much as I need to."

Or, "I haven't been reading God's word as much as I need to. I better get on my knees and I better seek the strength of the Lord." And then when the crisis is averted, when the storm calms down then I may slip back into some of those old patterns of behavior.

But the source of Daniel's strength was that he did this regardless of the season of life that he was in. And these daily, atomic habits gave him the footing that he needed when life got turned upside down.

And I think that there are going to be a number of blessings that are going to come from 2020 and 2021, we just can't fully see them yet. But I think we've got to make some decisions for it to be a blessing.

I said this last week. Right now we have an opportunity, and we don't want to miss it. Right now we are developing, you are developing, and I am developing, daily habits right now in the midst of this pandemic season that we are in. The question is: are we developing the right kind of habits?

The pandemic will eventually end. The virus, while it might not go away all together, there will be a time when it will not be as much of a threat. But after it's over, you will still have the habits that you formed right now. The question is: are they the kind of habits that you want to have? Are these habits strengthening your character or are they weakening it? And right now it is not too late to switch course.

So here's where I want to go today. Today I want to get extremely practical, alright? And some of you are going to look at this message and you are going to go, "Man, that is so, so simple."

Can I just say, “You’re welcome.”? We need more simple right now. We don’t need these big, complex things. Our minds are too full. But I really do believe that this is going to be super, super helpful for so many of us.

Here’s the question that I really want to unpack together in the remainder of our time. Last week I left you with this: what are the habits you want to implement, who do you want to be—those questions.

And maybe you’ve thought about that a little bit. Maybe you’ve formulated some habits that you want to develop. But here’s the question:

Based on who you want to be (your identity, who God says you are in Jesus), what are (this is so important) 1-2 new habits you’d like to start this year?

And I know that there are some of you who are like type “A” hard-driver, get-r-done kind of people, but one to two? Give me 25. Can I just say, “Thank you so much for your productivity, 1-2.”? What are the one or two atomic habits that you want to develop and implement and stick through all the way to the end of this year? Because that’s the goal here. How are you going to develop these habits so that they will stick?

If you’re taking notes, if you want to take a picture of the screen, you can do that. I just want to get super, super practical. Here’s what you do when you are developing one to two atomic habits. The first this is:

Make it CLEAR

You’ve got to be so clear. You cannot be vague in this.

There was this research project done back in 2001. British researchers took about 250 people who said that they wanted to exercise and workout at the beginning of the year. They separated them into three groups.

The first group they said, “Hey, work out every day. Just do it. See what the results are in a few months.”

The second group they said, “Work out every day but add some motivation to your workout.” Like get some exercise magazines. Look at pictures of really fit people, get some headphones and listen to whatever music pumps you up. Add some motivation to it.

The third group they said, “Hey, just pick a time and a place where you are going to work out.”

Then they came back and tracked the results a few months later. Out of those three groups, who do you think had the best results? Well, the first two groups, the ones who just worked out and those who added motivation to their workout, about 35 to 38 percent of them hit their goal. In other words, motivation, while it may get you out of the starting blocks, doesn’t carry you through to the finish line.

The third group, though, astoundingly 91 percent of them were still exercising and working out months and months later. Here was the difference, they specified this. They said: I will exercise each week on this [DAY] at this [TIME] in this [PLACE]. I know. Super boring, isn't it? Not really all that motivating. Super clear. And clarity trumps motivation every single time.

The two most common triggers for habit formation are TIME and LOCATION. So, for example. If you say, "You know what? I really, really want to read God's word this year." The most effective way in which to implement that habit is to pick a time and a location in which you are going to do it.

Here's why. Do you know:
We have 11 million sensory receptors.

Well, what is that? That's all of your sight sound touch smell—all of these things that really, what they do is they trigger a response. So when you smell some food it triggers you to want to eat.

Do you know that out of those 11 million sensory receptors:
Nearly 10 million are dedicated to vision/sight

So actually, what we see determines a lot about the habits we develop. Grocery stores know this. Items that are at eye level sell way better than items that are above or below. So they ones they really want to sell, they'll put it right at eye level.

I don't know how many times I go to Costco or I go to Meijer and I come out of there with all of this stuff that my wife didn't send me there to buy. It wasn't on my list. It was just what I saw, "Oh, man. I need that." I didn't need that.

Maybe my favorite illustration of this is, back in 1990 there was an airport in Amsterdam and the men's restrooms were just an absolute mess. What can I say? Guys are messy. And they were trying to figure out to do. They had done a number of things, but they weren't working.

So they decided to try a little experiment and they put a sticker of a fly inside the urinals. I don't know if we have a picture of that or not. There we go. I don't know if any of you have seen this in a urinal ever and you're like, "What is that for?"

This was part of the experiment in 1990—this is a real thing, by the way. The idea was that this would give men something to aim at. And it worked. At the end of the first year in which they implemented this; they reduced their cleaning cost by 10 percent.

Some of you ladies right now are going, "Can we buy those for home? Can we put a fly sticker in the toilet at home?" Maybe you need to try it.

See, we are visual beings. And:

Small changes in what you see can lead to big changes in what you do.

And we see this all throughout God's word. God is a very visual God. That's the reason why he gave us 10 million visual sensory receptors. So God gave us a rainbow to get us into the habit of trusting him in the midst of the storm.

Jesus gave us communion, the bread and the wine. He said, "Hey, this represents my body and my blood." Why do we need something tangible? Why do we need something to hold and to look at and to taste? Well, Jesus knows that we are visual beings. He says, "I want you to get into the habit of remembering what I've done for you. So I gave you this tangible example to look at."

In the Old Testament we see that God really wanted his word, his law to get into people's heads and hearts on a consistent basis. And so they developed what was called these phylacteries. And a phylactery was this leather box and it contained God's laws and they were to wear them and to keep them visually in front of them. Check out what it says in Deuteronomy, chapter 6. It says"

"Repeat them," the law of God, "again and again to your children." That's a habit. "Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders."

In other words, he knew out of sight out of mind. And so he's like, "Hey, put God's word in front of you to where you can see it very clearly."

And Scripture is just reinforcing what experts in human behavior currently tell us. If you want a habit to stick, you have got to change what you see. You've got to change what you're looking at. And might I add, you've got to change what you're listening to.

So if you want to start eating healthier, we just know you've got to change what's in the pantry and what's in the fridge, because your will power, your motivation will only take you so far.

Several years ago I gave our entire church a rubber band. Every one of you. I'm so generous, aren't I? One of the best gifts I've given you. And... I crack myself up. And I said that the rubber band is a visual reminder of what? We were talking about the power of the gospel and the tension between grace and truth. That is tension and tension is where the power is. So a rubber band without any tension isn't useful for really anything.

So grace without truth and truth without grace isn't transformational. Grace without truth is not going to change me. Truth without grace—I can't hear you. So we just said we want to be people of grace and truth because that's where the tension is at, that's where change happens.

So I just gave everybody a rubber band and asked you to put it around your wrist and anytime you were tempted to just be all about grace or tempted to be all about truth, you just grab the rubber band and just snap yourself on the wrist. Maybe we need to bring your rubber bands

back out again, just as a visual, tangible sensory reminder of the habits that we oftentimes forget.

James Clear, who wrote the book *Atomic Habits*, which this series is inspired by, said this. He said, “Many people think they lack motivation when what they really lack is clarity.”

And so here’s the question of application for this first point:
How can I make my new habit clear?

When you’re developing a one to two habits make them clear and just say, “How can I make it as clear as possible?”

Here’s the second step:
2 Make it SIMPLE

This is so counterintuitive because we oftentimes want to fall into the trap that if something is going to really be transformational then it must be difficult. Like the harder it is the better the results. And yet, we need to not underestimate how one small change done repeatedly can really transform our lives.

Here’s the reason why. Have you ever noticed that when it comes to habits that bad habits are so easy to implement, aren’t they? You don’t have to give any thought to bad habits. It is so unfair, isn’t it?

I can fall into all kinds of bad habits. I am really, really good at over eating. I’m really good at sleeping in too long. I’m really good at just turning on Netflix and just binge watching something. These are just bad habits. I don’t have to be intentional about them. I just slip into them.

And it’s for that reason—it’s why the good habits you’re trying to implement need to be simple. So that you’ll actually follow through with them so that you’ll actually do them.

Now, I’m talking about just getting out of the gate. Jesus actually said something very, very similar in Matthew, chapter 11. He said this:

“For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

And Jesus could have said, “Hey, the yoke that I give you is difficult and the burden I give you is heavy.” He could have said that, but he didn’t. He said that it’s easy and it’s light. Now, what in the world does Jesus mean by that? Does he mean that following is really, really easy? No, that’s not what he means.

He says this within the context of religious leaders who were making things difficult and heavy. And he said, “No, no, no, no. They’ve got it wrong. My yoke is easy and light and if it isn’t then you’re doing it wrong.” And primarily what he meant—he didn’t mean that following him is easy, he meant that doing it outside of the power of his Spirit is really, really difficult.

See, what you need to do and what I need to do is spend all of our time getting ourselves in alignment with his Spirit. If we can do that, then it is easy and light. So we've got to start with these small, atomic habits.

Keep in mind once again what atomic means:
Incremental, extremely minute, tiny

So, if you're one to two habits that you want to develop—let's just say it's engaging in God's word and you haven't been in it for a while, don't say, "Hey, I'm going to read the Bible one hour a day." No you won't. So don't even go there. How about you just say, "Ten minutes a day. Five minutes a day."?

"I'm not much of a reader." Okay, good. There are apps where somebody will actually read the Bible to you in whatever accent that you want. Mine is British because it sounds so much more sophisticated.

If you say, "I'm going to diet and exercise. And you know what? I'm going to cut out all sugar and all bread and all dairy and all fun, just cut it all out." No you won't. You want to start with a small, incremental step. "I'm going to work out for three hours a day." No you won't. How about just 20 minutes of movement, let's just start there.

You see:

Life change doesn't happen when we do something complicated occasionally, but when we do something simple consistently.

So here's the application question:
How can I make this new habit simple?

How do I make it clear? How do I make it simple? Here's the last step. It's so crucial:
3 Make it KNOWN

Make your new habit known. Don't just keep it to yourself. Now, I'm not talking about humble brags. I'm not talking about self-promotion, "Hey, everybody look at me. All of the new habits I'm implementing."

No, no, no. I'm talking about find one or two people, maybe a small group of people and say, "Can I share this with you? I want to implement these one or two small, little habits into my life and there will be some moments when I'm going to get discouraged and want to give up. And in those moments, would you encourage me? Could you hold me accountable in the best sense of that word so that I'll follow through with this? I'll be happy to hold you accountable as well."

See, who you surround yourself with is so critical to creating and maintaining these habits that you want to implement into your life. It just makes all of the difference.

So, I've got a little app on my watch. And there are just a small group of people who, whenever they finish a workout, my watch vibrates, and it tells me what they just did. It's so annoying, alright?

But at the same time it's motivating. I'm like, "Oh man. They've already exercised to day. I need to do it." And all it is just a simple reminder, a simple accountability, a simple, mutual encouragement to say, "I need to move today."

It is the reason why every seven days we do church. If you notice, those of you who tune in or attend on a regular basis, we don't alter a whole lot of what we do. We sing three songs, somebody comes up and hypes us up, somebody gets up here and teaches for 30 to 35 minutes. Sometimes it's good. Sometimes not so good. And then we sing another song. And we leave. About an hour.

What's that all about? Why do we do that every week? And it's not because God's in heaven putting stars on your attendance charts. We do it for the same, exact reason why we eat a meal every day, because we get depleted and we need the nutrition.

I don't know about you, but at the end of seven days I'm pretty depleted, especially right now. And I'm running on fumes and I need some hope and I need some help and I need some direction from God, and I need to be encouraged and I need to encourage others.

See, so much of the time we think about church solely by what can I get out of it. And yet, can I tell you that there are other people who need you? There are other people who need your encouragement. They need your prayers. They need your smile. So we gather together as Hebrews 10 says to stir each other up, to encourage one another, to continue on as we develop these daily habits to get filled up.

Proverbs 13:20 says,

"Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble."

Do you want to know how to implement these habits into your life? Find someone or a group of people who have implemented the habits that you want to implement and run with them. And I guarantee it's going to help.

So here's the question of application:

How can I make this habit known to someone else?

So those are the three steps. Super, super practical: How do I make it clear? How do I make it simple? How do I make it known?

But I want to conclude with this.

Did you know that there are actually certain habits that are not created equal? There are certain habits that actually other areas of our life that have nothing to do, necessarily, with the habit that we've made itself. What I mean by that is what is called a keystone habit. Let me give you this definition. A keystone habit is a:

small habit that you introduce into your routine, that ends up improving many other areas of your life.

It spills out into other areas—a keystone habit.

The one to two habits you need to develop this year, one of them needs to be a keystone habit, because it will be exponential in its impact. So let me give you some examples of a keystone habit.

One keystone habit is eating dinner together as a family around the table. If you're not married, you don't have kids, then maybe it's getting together with friends or roommates and you just get around the table and you eat dinner together. And all of the social sciences say that we are healthier human beings emotionally and spiritually when we do that.

If you've got family at home, kids who are a part of a family who eat together on a nightly basis or as many nights as you can, statically those kids will have better homework skills, higher grades, greater emotional health, and more confidence. Eat together every night. It's a keystone habit.

One keystone habit is exercise. And people who exercise they sleep better, they eat better, their stress levels generally go down. It's a keystone habit. It affects every area of your life.

1 Timothy, chapter 4, verse 8 says:

“Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come.”

So, I want us to think about habits like training. They are training us for godliness. So what if there was one keystone habit that we could implement at the beginning of this year that could affect other areas of our lives?

I was thinking about that this last week and I thought, “You know, every single one of us, me included, we are in this season where we really need direction, because there is so much confusion and division.”

I know somebody needs to hear this today. Right now there is somebody and you're sitting there and you're thinking, “I really need to hear from God. I don't even know if I fully believe in him, but if he's there, I need to hear from him. God, what's the purpose of my life? God, what's the purpose for this season that we are in? God what's going on in this world?”

And then maybe at a more personal level, maybe you've got some key decisions to make in your life and you're like, “I'm really wrestling with this depression that I'm going through. God, when am I going to see the light again? When am I going to emerge from it?”

“God, I’m kind of coming to a dead-end at work. I don’t really know if this is what I should be doing. So, God, should I stay in this job or should I go into a different job. I don’t really know. What’s your will for me?”

“God, should we move here, or should we move there?”

“God, should I date him or dump him? I don’t really know.”

“God, should I get a cat or a dog?” Don’t ask God that. Don’t spend any time asking him that. We all know. You need to get a dog. That’s—it’s in God’s word, spelled out. I am joking. Do not email me. Just relax. We love cats. We love cat people too. It’s just a joke, alright?

So here’s what I want to leave you with:

THE keystone habit that will impact every other area of your life is engaging daily in God’s Word.

I didn’t think I’d get applause for that. That’s pretty much...

This isn’t in my notes, so this is a risk. I remember when we got pregnant with our last daughter, our youngest daughter, I remember when we told our kids that we were pregnant, we told them we had a surprise and so we got in the room and we said, “You’re going to have a little sister.” And Kennedy, our daughter, goes, “Is there anything else to the surprise?” She wasn’t that thrilled.

This reminds me of that. I’m kind of building up to this, “Hey, the keystone habit, buckle up, take notes—is daily engaging in God’s word.” And you’re sitting there, “Is there anything more to that? Really, Aaron? You spent all week on this?”

Notice I said engaging, not reading. Engaging—there is a difference.

Listen. I’m all about Bible daily reading plans. I’ve actually done the Bible in one year. Here’s the challenge I’ve found. I’ve found myself getting behind a few days and then I try to get through it, and I think I miss the voice of God on days I really need to hear.

Engaging in God’s word. This is about as exciting as me saying, “Hey, this will totally change your health—eat your Brussel sprouts. And you are like, “Oh, that is not exciting at all.” And I know that some of you probably feel that way. And maybe you’ve heard messages on this, you’ve had people tell you to do it. Maybe you’ve even tried it and you didn’t think it changed anything.

I want to show you... There have been a couple of studies done on this. It’s truly amazing. There was a study called The Reveal Study done several years ago. They took 400,000 people in all 50 states and they tracked them over a period of years.

They wanted to know what is the one thing that you did that propelled you in your spiritual growth. And they looked at everything. They looked at church attendance. They looked at serving other people. They looked mission trips—all of this stuff that you would think would

grow you spiritually. The number one thing—it was two times more catalytic than anything else—was those who daily engaged in God’s word.

The Center for Bible Engagement did a similar study. They found those who engaged in the Bible at least four times a week—listen to this—they were 30 percent less lonely, 32 percent less destructive thoughts, 228 percent more likely to share their faith, 62 percent less alcohol abuse, 59 percent less porn use, 45 percent less gambling. It is the keystone habit that affects other areas of your life.

Now there are oftentimes the gap between people’s interest in reading the Bible and then actually doing it. What I mean is that I would say the vast majority of those listening to this would say, “Man, that sounds good. I want to read God’s word more consistently.” But those of us who actually do it are far fewer. And I’ve learned from personal observation and experience this right here—I think this is the reason why we don’t:

The two biggest barriers to Bible engagement: The Bible is too big and I don’t know where to start.

Would that be true for you? “Man, it’s just so complicated. I don’t know what I’m reading. It just seems so confusing. I’ve tried to start reading and I started reading this book called Lamentations.”

Could I say that might be part of the problem? Don’t get me wrong.

Lamentations is equally the inspired word of God. Maybe not the best place to start.

Maybe the best place to start in Proverbs. Just wisdom literature. It’s like your own personal coach. There are 31 of them. You can read one new one a day during the whole month. Start in the gospel of John. Start in the Psalms. Start small.

Listen. You’re not just reading it to get through it. I would say if you just limit to say, “Let me just read 10 verses.” And here’s what you change. Before you read you say, “God, I need to hear from you today. Would you please speak? Would you give me some direction for my life?” And then you just read maybe 10 simple verses and then set it down and be quiet. And in a still, small voice see if God might provide some direction for your life.

Some of you are like, “Well, Aaron, I just don’t read. It’s hard to read and my mind wanders.” It’s the great thing about technology. You can download an app and it will actually read it for you when you are in the car, when you go for a walk, just have it read it for you and say, “God, please speak. I need to hear from you in my life right now.”

So, let me just give you three really practical handles here if you’re struggling.

First of all, maybe go to:

www.tpcc.org/dailybiblereading

It's our daily Bible reading. Sign up. We will email you a passage you can read every day. That's just maybe one small little step that you can take. Here's another one. I've actually talked about this book before:

Core 52

It is a 15-minute, daily guide to build your Bible IQ in a year. This is written by a friend of mine. It is excellent. I know a number of you have it. You can go on Amazon and get it. This will actually help you just get familiar with what you're reading in God's word.

One more that I will give you is:
YouVersion Bible app

You find this. Download it from where you get your apps. And it will read it to you. There are all kinds of Bible reading plans. You get every translation on there. It's just right there in front of you.

Here's what I might recommend. Clear all of the apps off of you home screen and just put this there. At least for a month. And see because here's what I'm wondering. Many of us, when we've got a little extra time we click on maybe Facebook or a social media app and we scroll when we should be engaging.

And man, if you are reading or listening to all of the stuff, all of the talking heads on social media and not spending enough time hearing from God and you're not experiencing peace, you're filled with anxiety, you're filled with rage—now maybe you know why.

Because Jesus is the prince of peace.

And if you all bent up, out of shape about what is going on in the world and all of the fear... I'm not saying that you need to leave social media for good, but maybe you need to take a break, you just need to silence it and say, "Okay, everybody shut up but Jesus. Everybody be quiet. I don't care about your opinion, I don't care about what you heard, I don't care about what your uncle said who works for this organization over here.

"God, I just really need to hear from you, because I'm all twisted up and I'm anxious and I'm fearful and I'm angry and relationships have ended, and I need to hear from you." That's what I'm talking about. "God, I need to hear from you."

And God is like, "I've spoken. It is right there in your hand." All you need to do is listen. You need to clear the deck and listen because he is speaking. He is speaking.

Psalm 119 is one of my favorite passages. It says in verse 105:

"Your word," talking about God's word, the Bible, *"is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path."*

That is the purpose of God's word. God's word is not a history book, it's not a science book, God's word is not an equation, if you do this and this it equals that. I've heard all of the cute

acronyms: BIBLE, Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth—it's cute, but not accurate. At least not what Psalms says. What does it say? It's a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.

Light comes to us in different forms. The Psalmist chooses to use this descriptive word *lamp*. It's like a lantern you go hiking with. If you've ever been hiking in the middle of the night the lantern helps you, but the lantern only illuminates the steps right in front of you, not the path all of the way to the end.

And I don't know about you, but that frustrates me sometimes because what I want is for God's word to act like a spotlight—God, just show me the whole path, bring up the house lights, God, so that I can see clearly everywhere. And God goes, “No, no, no—no. Just a lamp. That's what you need.”

So right now, in the midst of all of this darkness God's word is the lamp. The question is are you using it? He says, “It's a lamp. It gives you just enough light to take the next step that you need right in front of you.

Can I encourage you? Maybe here's the challenge. Right now for maybe the next week. Can we just get off social media? Some of you are like, “No, I can't do it. I've got to do it for my job.” Okay, I get it. But spend more time consulting the lamp of God's word, than the darkness of social media and see what it might do to your overall disposition.

Stick with it. Some of us give up far too soon. Some of you right now you're like, “Oh, Aaron, I've tried to read God's word. I read every day for two weeks and my wife still won't listen to me.” Bro, that's not how it works.

“I've read every single day and my problems are still there.” Yeah, I didn't say it would take your problems away. He said that he will illuminate the next step you need to take. It is the keystone habit, the thing that affects every other thing. And it's right here in front of us. The question is, are we using it and are we listening?

Father, we come to you right now. We're hurting. And we're afraid. And we're stressed. And so because of that we have a tendency to make the mess that we are in messier. So we lash out. And we demonize other people who have a different opinion than what we have.

And we live in the echo chamber, rather than being people who grow in empathy and compassion, rather than being people who demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control—God, that's not describing very many of us right now.

So, God, would you give us the courage and the strength to just shut down all of the voices so that we can listen clearly to yours. In Jesus' name. Amen.