

2-Manage Your Tendencies

We all go through life following a routine. We get up at a certain time, eat at a certain time and go to bed at a certain time. In the early years this routine was established by others. Our parents woke us up, prepared our meals, drove us to school or youth activities and tucked us in at bedtime. We became creatures of habit! Our genetics and our environment shaped how we saw ourselves. If we grew up in a two parent household we had a male and a female role model. Role models set “standards”! As kids we see and follow these standards. When we become teenagers we “test” these role models. We want to be our own people! Some of us reject the role model and rebel! Some of us test the model and adopt it because it feels “natural”. Some of us start to set our own course through life and experiment with a variety of life styles. But ALL of us to some degree are creatures of habit.

The ongoing question that we sometimes fail to ask on a regular basis is “How is that working for me?” Once we have formed our “norms” we tend to stay with them. We follow our tendencies. The question I had to answer was--- “Are my tendencies best for me and those closest to me?” When I asked that question I was faced with a challenge--- How can I adapt my behavior so I’m happy AND those closest to me are also happy. Like most folks I wanted to be selfish, but once I came face to face with the toll that my selfish nature had on those closest to me I had a decision to make. I could put my needs first or I could do what was best for all involved. Yes I had to look at the impact of how I lived my life and make a decision. Do it my way and sometimes hurt those closest to me or look at the “greater good” and move away from my selfish ways.

Many of us never ask ourselves the question---“is what’s best for me also what’s best for those closest to me?” That is why I am asking you that question now.

If your answer is NO then you’ll want to read on as we explore how we can manage our tendencies for the “greater good”. If you don’t care about the greater good, than this is probably where we will part company. If you believe “It’s my way or the highway” then enjoy your way. But don’t be

surprised if you become lonely as people choose the highway and leave you to enjoy “your way” by yourself!

There are three simple steps to managing your tendencies:

1-Clearly identify your tendency. How do you act or react?

2-Determine if your tendency works for those around you. This means you’ll have to be vulnerable and ask those closest to you to be honest and speak “truth” to you. Helpful hint-much of what you do works well for those closest to you. Remember this is an upgrade not a tear down and start over.

3-Decide how to change course. What will the new action/reaction look like? Helpful hint-this is not focusing on what not to do, but it is focusing your mind on the new positive action/reaction. A goal must be positive!

I said there are three simple steps. I’d didn’t say they were three EASY steps. Looking in the mirror is never easy. For years many of us have worked hard to avoid even a glance because we knew we would not like what we saw! However once you come face to face with who you really are then the journey to peace and joy can begin. That look in the mirror provides the motivation to move forward and do something to “improve” what you see. I chose the word improve rather than correct or fix intentionally. Those words imply there is something wrong with us. I prefer to see myself as a work in progress. I am far from perfect but since “God don’t make no junk” I’m just underdeveloped!

Once you’ve faced reality about who you are it is time for the next difficult step---enlisting others to be open about how your behavior affects them. Most of us don’t want to tell someone close to us how much they have hurt us. So when you come to them and ask them to detail how your actions and reactions harm them they are not going to say “Great, here’s the list!” They’ll wonder what happened to you. They want to gloss over your transgressions and tell you how wonderful you are. You’re going to have to CONVINCE them that they need to be COMPLETELY honest.

After the first two steps it does get a little easier. You now can honestly look in the mirror and those around you can encourage and support your efforts. That's right. I said those around you can support and encourage you--- not discourage and tear you down. When I came to my wife and asked her to be completely honest with me she was skeptical. Once I explained that I needed to manage my tendencies for "our" benefit instead of my benefit she saw that what I was doing was good for her too! That is when she switched from skeptic to supporter. Only when I followed through did she really believe the transformation she was witnessing. But she had faith in me and was willing to take the risk of being open and honest because my transformation would be good for us not just me.

Once you have your insight and the support of those closest to you, it's time to **develop an action plan**. Again I propose a three step process:

Prioritize---what actions and reactions need to be improved?

Focus---work on one action/reaction at a time

Practice---it takes 21 days to instill a new habit, 66 days to instill a new lifestyle and 180 days for it to become a "natural" lifestyle.

The secret ingredient to this process is--- **Patience**. It took years to develop the tendency you are "upgrading" (remember we are improving). It will take time and patience to complete the upgrade and if you rush it or try a short cut you'll be dealt the card that says **"Go Directly to Jail, Do Not Collect \$200"**! For those of you who never played Monopoly ask an elder what this means. For those of you who have played Monopoly you know it teaches life lessons---no shortcuts!

Verse:

Romans 12:2 – "Do not conform to the pattern of the world."

Personal Reflection:

Examine your tendencies. Which tendency is the top priority for you to focus on? Who can speak "truth" to you? Develop a plan and select someone to hold you accountable.

Group Discussion:

Why do we find that tendencies are so hard to break?

How can each member of the group encourage their brothers and sisters to complete the mission of "upgrading" the quality of your relationships with those closest to you?