

- Well, it's incredibly emotionally to me just to watch and see the looks in people's eyes when they go under water this weekend to be baptized. And I hope you'll join me in thanking the goodness of God that we get to see over 1,200 people, believe it or not, say yes to Jesus, going public in baptism, and the reality that every single one of those people have a story. I read through just a few of the stories and want to give a little shout out. Alicia from the Stillwater campus, one, I thank God that you survived the car wreck and are able to walk again. But also I congratulate you on two years of being clean. And we celebrate your baptism today. From Overland Park, Kimberly, you said you didn't think that God could forgive you. His grace is real. You are new, and the old is gone, and we praise God for your baptism today. And Donya from Rio Rancho. I am heartbroken that you lost your marriage, but I thank God that you see there are new chances, there is grace, and we congratulate you today and every person who's being baptized. It's amazing to realize we're part of something where so many lives are being changed. We are in a message series called Habits, and what I want to do just to start the message today is ask you to think about your last normal day. If you work, what did you do at the beginning of your work day? You might say I'm a stay-at-home parent. That is a job and you need a raise. Whatever you did on the last normal day, think about what you did when you woke up. Here's what I know. The odds are very, very high that what you did on that day was very similar to what you did on the normal day before that. In other words, if your alarm woke you up that day, you probably were awakened by your alarm the day before. Or if you just normally get up with no alarm, you probably got up on that day with no alarm again because you probably did something similar to the day before. You probably went to the bathroom somewhere early in the day and then you probably did something like the day before, which might be check social media, maybe check your email, maybe read your Bible, maybe do a little workout, perhaps make coffee, maybe make some food. You probably took a shower, which is good, or you may not be employed if you don't do that every day. You probably got to work a similar way as you did the day before. You probably worked with the same people, did similar things. You probably got home the same way. If you drove, what's very scary is you probably don't even remember the drive home, like you just kinda automatically got home. You probably had a normal evening routine. You might work out in the evening, or you might do fast food normally, or you might cook the meal and then gripe at everybody who didn't help cook the meal because they didn't clean up the dishes afterwards and they didn't say thank you, and you have every right to do that in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. You might have a normal routine with your kids. You put three kids in the bathtub, one always escapes. You always find that kid, throw him back in the bathtub. Once the kids are done, you have an evening routine. It might be you look at social media, you binge-watch Netflix. It could be that you spend prayer time or you journal. At the end of the day, maybe you leaned over to your spouse and made a move, you got rejected again, you went to bed upset. I don't know what your day is like. But chances are it was pretty similar, a lot of similarities to the day before. In fact, if you're taking notes, I want you to write this down. Most of what or much of what you normally do isn't a result of conscious choices but of daily habits. Much of what you do every single day is not a result of a decision that you make, but of a habit that you already have in your life. In fact, Duke University did a study in 2006, and what they found is that fully 40% of the actions that you take in any given day are not a result of decisions, but are a result of habits. 40% of what you do every single day is a result of habits. That's why if you wanna change where you're going in life, if you wanna change who you're becoming in life, we have to change our habits. If you were with us last week, I recommended a few different books, one of them is the book called Atomic Habits by James Clear, and he talks about the reality that many

people have similar goals. Think about it, we all wanna have good relationships. If you're a Christian, you wanna be close to God, you wanna make a difference in this world. I don't know anybody who wants to drown in debt. Most of us wanna have some financial freedom or flexibility. Most of us wanna be healthy. The reality is that so many of us have similar goals, but we have dramatically different results, why? James Clear writes this, because goals don't determine success, but systems determine success. A quote from his book I like was this. You don't rise to the level of your goals, but you fall to the level of your systems. I wanna talk today about systems from a spiritual perspective, and I'm gonna show you a powerful example of a guy who had a system. Or we could say he had one habit that helped shape him to become the person that God wanted him to become. We took a brief look at him last week. I wanna take a more detailed look this week. His name is Daniel. And if you've grown up, maybe you were in Sunday school and you know who Daniel is in the Old Testament. When you think of Daniel, most people think of Daniel in the lion's den. That's impressive that he had the faith to stand down lions and survive, but to me, what's also really impressive is there were 120 young leaders who stood out in the nation, and of the 120 top leaders, Daniel stood out amongst all of them as having exceptional qualities. In fact, here's what scripture says in Daniel six, chapter three. Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the entire kingdom. Why in the world did Daniel stand out? What was it that made him who he was? He might've had a spirit of excellence, maybe great leadership gifts, maybe he was good relationally. We don't know exactly what it was, but there was something in the life of Daniel that caused him to stand out amongst 120 top people around. Before we answer the question of what made him stand out, I wanna tell you what kinda happened. He became popular with the king, he was gonna get promoted. There were a lot of people that didn't like him. Anytime you rise in success, you have people that don't like you, and so his enemies decided to try to take him down. They looked for any kind of weakness, any kind of flaw in his character, any kind of defect so they could trip him up. But they had a problem finding it. Scripture says this in verse four. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to found grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. So what they wanted to do, is they wanted to trip him up. They couldn't find any flaw or weakness, so they determined the only way we can trip him up is to do something about his God. This guy is so into his God, that that's the only chance we have of getting him to make some kind of mistake. So what they did is they tricked the king into issuing a decree, that if anyone prays to anyone except the king in the next 30 days, that they would have to be thrown in the lion's den. Daniel stood out. He was so distinguished that amongst 120 top leaders, he was the one that rose to the top. What was it that made him who he was? I would argue it was a system. Or it was one very small habit that over time shaped his identity and gave him confidence to be who God created him to be. I'll show you this system. Daniel 6:10 says this, when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, don't miss it, here it comes, are you ready for it, here it is. He gave thanks to God just as he had done before. What did Daniel do? Not once a day. Not twice a day. But three times a day. Not when it was convenient. Not when it was easy. Not when you'd watch every good show on Amazon Prime. But every single day he stopped, he sought God, he listened for the voice of God, he brought his burdens before God, he petitioned to God, he let God direct his steps, three times a day, as he had done before. He prioritized his life around intimate time with his Heavenly Father.

What did Daniel do? He lived a habit, a system. Fellowship, intimacy, time with God. One small discipline. What I would say to you is this. Never underestimate how our God can start something big through one small habit. Never underestimate what God might do, something special, something powerful, something that impacts a lot of people that starts with one single, small act of obedience. Our God loves to take small acts of faithfulness and do something special through those things. In fact, what I'm gonna do today is I'm gonna share with you a little bit of what's helped shape me. For three decades now, if you can imagine that, I'm 51, probably a little more than three decades, I have started one new discipline a year. One small, little seemingly insignificant discipline. If you look at the totality of the 30 years, I had a few years where it didn't take. I had a couple that I dropped along the way. But I would say with complete confidence, sincerity, and integrity that I have 20-plus disciplines that are now in my life that were started one small discipline, one year at a time. And there's not a single one that's made me a great husband to Amy, a good dad to my kids, an effective leader, or closer to God. But all of them together over time have helped reshape how I see myself, renew my mind toward truth, change my body and my posture, my spiritual confidence, all of them together have made a real difference. One small discipline a year. I'll share a few of these with you. My first one that I started was flossing. And I'm not talking about that, you know. Although I am practicing, I may master that before the end of the year. Could be my new discipline to learn to floss. Flossing my teeth, the reason why I did that is because I hate flossing. And this one small, simple act tells me I am a person who chooses right over comfort. I am a disciplined person. Years ago, I determined that to be close to God, I had to have some disciplines in my life. In other words, nobody just stumbles into intimacy with God, like aw man, I was just sitting, and bop, I got close to God, wow, that was amazing. Nobody accidentally becomes full of spiritual strength, power, and faith. And so years ago, I started the discipline of tithing. Very simple, one discipline. Any time God blesses me, I choose in that moment to honor him and put him first. It's a constant consistent reminder that he is my source, my provider, the goodness, and so I worship in the tithe. When I met Amy, when we were dating, even before we were married, we made a choice together that we worship God every week at church. And so we have. I promise you, there has never one time been a conversation in my house where any kid has ever said, are we gonna go to church this weekend? Because that is not something we talk about. You can ask my kids, we're on vacation in the mountains, we're there on a Sunday, we find a little Baptist church, a little Bible church, and we go to church. Because that's what we do, we are people of God, and it's a priority to us. I decided years ago that I needed to learn God's word, so I decided to read the Bible every day. I want you to notice that the fact that I'm telling you I decided to do it meant there was a time I did not. Just to make you feel better, okay? I read the Bible, then I decided to read the Bible one year from front to back. It's probably been 17, maybe 18 years that I've done that over time, started it years ago. I started journaling, and then I failed one year. I started another year, and I failed again. I finally found a five-year journal where you only journal five lines, I'm on year number five 'cause I can do five lines of journaling what God is doing in my life. I used to not pray with Amy. There are a lot of reasons, the biggest of which, it takes her about 45 minutes just to get warmed up. I mean, like, okay, she's not here at this service, so don't tell her I said that, but-- Get on with it, God's like going, get on with it, Amy. And so I just didn't do it. And so one year, we created a discipline. Before I leave for work, we join hands and we pray. It's a very short prayer, but every day we're connecting with God. If you've been with us for a while, you know that I used to, I started declarations a few years ago. I had some insecurities, some wrong thinking, and so I declare spiritual truth, say it out loud, to renew my mind. I've got other categories, and I can go on and on. With health, years

ago, man, I could drink more Dr Pepper and Mountain Dew than any five of you put together. I quit drinking soft drinks, only water. One year, I limited myself to one dessert a week, then one cheat meal a week, now my diet is much stricter. And I can go on and on and on and on. I go back to one habit that helped make all this possible. One of the books that I recommended to you was *The Power of Habits* by Charles Duhigg, and he talks about what he calls a keystone habit. What you'll do in your life is you will find there are certain habits that when you have them in place, they help propel you on to other helpful, God-honoring disciplines. Daniel stopped to pray three times a day. This was a keystone habit that I promise you brought other elements into his life that helped him become who he was supposed to become. The presence of that one habit, when I floss, I tell myself I'm disciplined. Therefore, I go to bed on time, I get up on time, I do my Bible reading plan, I go to work, I have a productive day, I come home in a good mood, I kiss my wife, and that is why we have six kids for the glory of God. If I do not floss, I don't feel disciplined, I hit snooze on the alarm, I don't have time to do my Bible plan, I rush into work, I'm not productive, I have a bad day, therefore I have to stay late. I know Amy's gonna be mad at me, so I drove home really, really fast, a police officer tries to pull me over, I don't want a ticket, so I try to outrun him. Eventually four of them capture me, put me in jail, all because I didn't floss. And you can tell that I'm slightly exaggerating, but not by much. I was going over this message with some staff members from my floor, I always do that ahead of time, and there was a 25-year-old in there, and there was a 40-year-old in there, and they said, oh, don't tell 'em all your disciplines. They're not gonna like you. They'll be like, you're perfect, like, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, you don't understand. They said, that's just, that's unrealistic to do all those things. Look, you're 25 years old, I'm 51. You do this one a year, you're gonna have 26 disciplines. 26. One a year. The 40-year-old, you'll have 11 by the time you're my age. There's not a single one small discipline that really improved my marriage, dramatically improved my leadership, completely overhauled my relationship with God, but I promise you, one small one year over year consistently built my faith, changed my marriage, empowered me as a dad, and equipped me as a spiritual leader. What set Daniel apart? Three times a day, he stopped to have intimate fellowship with God, just as he had done before. Never underestimate how God might start something big, something special, through something very small, one act of obedience. If you were with us last week, we said let's start a little different way this year. Instead of starting with the do, what do I want to do, let's start with the who. Before we ask what do I wanna do, who does God want me to be? Who am I supposed to be? A godly parent, a bold witness, a person who's healthy, breaking generations of obesity in the fam, whatever it is, I wanna be a person that's clean and sober. Who do you want to be? Now we add another piece of application this week, and here is your one assignment. Based on who you want to become, what one habit do you need to start? Based on who God is calling you to be, what is one small discipline that will move you in that direction? And I wanna tell you right now, it's better if it's not big. Something small, it may be for you that you're not gonna hit the snooze button ever again. Listen to me, you can do all things through Christ who gives you strength. Get up and go on with your day. It could be something incredibly small. You might say Bible before Instagram. Before I pull up social media, I'm gonna do my YouVersion plan for the day, or I'm gonna pray with my kids before they go to bed. But just one simple prayer. What do you do based on who you wanna become? You may say, I wanna be a person that cares about others. So for you, it's, I'm gonna write one note a day to express my gratitude or appreciation to someone in my life. Or I wanna be a person that's organized. So for you, you're gonna make your bed every day. Why, because you start the day that way. You wanna be a godly example to your kids, so you do a YouVersion reading plan with them, so every day there's this

spiritual touchpoint together. You wanna be a person that's focused. You take out your little note card every day, three things. These are my three priorities, you do them every single day. You wanna be a person that's healthier, so you walk three times a week for 20 minutes or you eliminate soft, whatever it is. Based on who you wanna become, what one new habit do you need in place? What new system do you want that will take you where God wants to take you? Now some of you will say, well, I don't do systems. We all have systems. You either have systems by intent or by default, but you have systems. We all do. Your system may be hit the snooze button four times, get up late, kick the cat, yell at the kids, drive like a bat out of the dark place all the way to work with your hair wet, putting makeup on. Get at work, be grumpy all day, come home, yell at the kids, go to bed, and feel guilty. It's a system. It's not a good one, but it's a system. What new habit, based on who God wants you to become, do you need to create? In all the different books on habits I read, they all talk in different formats about the habit loop. Let me show you how this plays out. This is what happens in the life of everybody, habit loop. There is something that will be a trigger or a cue for you. You see something, you walk by the refrigerator, you get bored, you get angry, you get hungry, you get lonely, it's the end of the day, it's the beginning of the day, there's a trigger or there's a cue that always leads to an action or some sort of response. Then you do the act, you eat the piece of cake, you pray with your kids, you sleep in later, you yell at somebody, you eat a second hamburger. Whatever it is, there's an action. Then you get the reward, the dopamine, the sugar rush, the pleasure, the extra seven minutes of sleep, and then it goes back to the trigger. This is how habits are formed. There's a trigger, we see something, we feel something, we have an emotion, we go to the same type of action, we get a similar type of reward, and then the process repeats itself. How do we start a new habit? What we want is we want the trigger and the action to be two things, if you're taking notes. We wanna make it obvious, everybody say make it obvious.

- Make it obvious.

- And we wanna make it easy. Somebody say make it easy.

- Make it easy.

- The first thing we're gonna do is we're gonna make it obvious. If you wanna change what you do, then we're gonna change what we see. Make the trigger obvious. If you wanna take vitamins every day, put the vitamins out the night before you go to bed so when you wake up, boop, there's the trigger, I'm gonna take the vitamins. If you wanna be someone who is reading every night before you go to bed, take your book, put it out on the pillow at the beginning of the day. At the end of the day, yeah, oh, there's the trigger, it's really, really obvious. If you wanna write a note every day to encourage somebody, at the end of the day, put the note and the pen on your desk so when you walk in the next day, oh, there's a trigger, this is what I'm supposed to do every day, make it really obvious. Then make it easy, and this is what's so much fun. You don't need to say I'm gonna read through the whole Bible this year. If you try that, you might be done by the third week of January. Instead what you might do is simply say, this year, I'm gonna read one verse every single day, every day. Get a streak going on your YouVersion Bible app. Do you know there's streaks that tell you how long you've done it? Get a streak going, then every day you just open it up, first thing, and read the verse of the day. Here's my promise, if you do that for 27 days, you might just get an appetite to read two verses, and then one day you're reading a chapter. Start small and let it grow from there. You might say, I wanna pray with my spouse. But we don't know how

to pray together. It's just too awkward and too intimate. I mean, I know we can have sex together, but we can't pray together. Should I have said that out loud, I don't know. But it just felt right in the moment, okay? I mean, we can just like but we can't, you know, woo, okay, so I don't know. So we don't know how to do that, so what we're gonna do is just grab your spouse's hand and thank God for one thing, just one, every day. Thank you, God, that we have heat in our house on this cold day. Those of you in Florida, thank you, God, it's not cold here ever. Whatever, you know? Thank you, God, that we didn't kill one of our children. Thank you, one thing every single day. You want to journal, what do you do? One sentence, just start there. Here's where I saw God work today, one sentence. You might get carried away, have two sentences one day. And then one day you might be as good as me, five whole lines. I wanna get in better shape, something. 10 pushups, can't do 10, do five. Can't do five, do one. Can't do one, put your knees down. Do it the, can't do that, lay down on the ground and stand back up, do that once a day. Do something, start small, and see what happens. What are you doing? You're building a system. There's a cue, there's a trigger that tells me, after this, this is what I do because this is a new habit in my life. And here's how you'll write it out in your notes. You'll say this, you'll say I will do blank after I blank, there's your system. I will do blank after I blank. Daniel would've said this. After I eat my eggs, I pray. After I eat my ham, not a ham sandwich. After I, not a ham sandwich. After I eat my roast beef sandwich, I pray. After I eat my chicken dinner, I pray. I do this, and then I do this action. I will do blank after blank. My morning routine looks like this. My alarm goes off, I go to the bathroom first thing. I do my Bible plan, I spend time praying for similar things, and then whatever God puts on my heart. I do my daily declarations, I meditate on one truth. Then I make my oatmeal, I put my 12 berries in it, I take a shower, I shave, I get dressed. After I get dressed, I go pray with Amy, then I start my day. What I've got is, I've got a system, a routine that aligns my heart with God, renews my mind with truth, empowers me to do what God called me to do. Just a few small things started over a patter of time have helped shape who I've become. What's yours gonna be? It might be after I drink my coffee, I read one Bible verse. After I put my kids to bed, I do a 30-second plank. After I brush my teeth, I journal one sentence. After I journal one sentence, I grab my spouse's hand and we thank God for one thing. After we thank God for one thing, I look my spouse in the eyes and I let the Spirit lead me to wherever he leads me. Or what it is for you. But successful people do consistently what other people do occasionally. People who are close to God, but not there by accident, they have small disciplines that draw them close to God. People who are financially strong, they don't do it going shopping for whatever they wanted or they want. There's discipline, there's a plan, there's a mindset, there's habits. People who are in shape like you, doesn't happen going to all-you-can-eat buffet three times a day. It takes a plan. It takes some exercise. It takes some small disciplines consistently done over time. We all have similar goals, but we have incredibly different results. We don't have goal problems, we have system problems. We got habit problems. What set Daniel apart? Time with God three times a day. The biggest revelation I've had in my life in recent years is this. I'll just be honest with you, if you look from the outside, you might say, well, you've had some things that have fallen into place that might be called success. And yet I am never satisfied. I'm always wanting something else, something different, something more, and what I've realized is that I've been living with the wrong kinds of goals. My goals had been primarily means goals. What is a mean goal? A mean is a goal that leads to something else, it's a means to an end. How do you know if your life is full of means goals? Because on the other side of your goal, there's always a so. I wanna get good grades so I can go to a good school, so I can get a degree, so I can get a good job, so I can make enough money, so I can take her out on a date, so we can get married and go on a good

honeymoon, so we can raise a family in a nice house, and so on. My goals have always had a so on the other side of it. The problem is this, whenever there's a so on the other side of it, then happiness or fulfillment or contentment or joy is always deferred to the future. There's always something else out there, it's always in the future. And what I've realized is that instead of setting means goals, what I wanna do is I wanna set end goals. And the only end that I can find on the other side of every so is not a what, but it's always a who.

- Amen.

- It's not what I'm getting or where I'm going or what I'm doing, but who I'm becoming. And the only end goal that ever seems to matter is if I become more like Christ.

- Yeah, amen.

- More like Christ. More of anything, why would I ever want it unless I could use it for his glory? More like Christ. And if that becomes the driving force of your life, then success is not somewhere out there, but you can be successful when you're obedient to him today. It's not some big result that's five years in the future. It's in a single act of faithfulness and obedience today. I am successful because I honored God today. So if there's always a so at the end of your goal, you're always gonna be reaching for something. My hope, my prayer, based on who God wants you to become, what one small act of obedience will you start today, and then find joy in it. I did what you called me to do. Wasn't big, but I was faithful in the small things, and guess what, God's word says that whenever you're faithful in the small things, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, God will trust you with big things. Be faithful to few, and God will trust you with more. But don't kid yourself. You're not successful when you get more. You're successful when you're faithful today. So Father, we ask that you would help us be faithful today. Stir, God, within us, the desire to please you, to find joy in pleasing you, even in the small ways. At all of our churches, as you reflect in prayer today, who does God want you to become? Based on who he wants you to become, what one small habit, make it easy, make it obvious, do it for the glory of God. All of our churches, those who say I'm gonna seek him, I'm gonna talk about it, talk about it in my life group, talk about it with my family. I'm gonna go public with it, this is real. I'm not gonna try to do 20, I'm gonna do one. And I'm gonna be faithful to God doing that one. Would you lift up your hands right now, all of our churches. Those who say I'm all in, I'm in, I'm in, I'm in, I'm in, man, hands going up all over the place. Thank you, God, speak to us. May we hear from you. God, help us be faithful, direct our steps more than anything else, God, that we could become like your Son, Jesus. Help us be obedient today, successful today in doing what you called us to do. And God, I thank you that when we're faithful with what you put before us, you may put more before us. But God, help us to not wait for the more to feel successful, but be fulfilled in being obedient to you even today. As you keep praying today at all of our different churches, we're talking about starting a new habit, a new discipline. Let's talk about the word start. There's some of you, you need to start a relationship with Jesus. What does that mean? I grew up going to church, and I believed in God, but I thought God was kind of some separate entity, some distant ruler and such. I had no idea that God sent Jesus, not only to save me from my sins, but to reveal the character and the nature and the goodness of God, that God wanted to have a relationship with me. What's the problem, why is it that just we can't just like openly talk and hear from God on our own? The problem is that we're sinners. Our sin separates us from God. God is so holy that sin separates us. And this is why Jesus was

born without sin. This is why he was perfect, why he never sinned. He was the innocent sacrifice who became sin for us on the cross. He, the innocent one, died for us, the guilty. And by the grace and the goodness of God, God raised Jesus from the dead. He defeated death, hell, victory, and the grave, why? So that anyone who calls out on the name of Jesus, the name that is above every name, anyone who calls on the name of Jesus would be saved, would be forgiven. There are those of you here, if you're honest, you're not following Jesus, you're not walking with Jesus, he's not the dominant source of truth in your life, he's not your Savior, he's not the Lord of your life, and you realize you need to start something. How do you start a relationship? Very simply, we confess and acknowledge that we have sinned. We ask for his forgiveness and grace, and then we decide to follow him. He will direct your steps, he will make you new. At all of our churches, there are those of you, you recognize you're doing life without him. You're not here by accident, you're not watching by accident, God brought you here for this moment. You can sense it. Your decision is to start a relationship with him. I turn from my sins, I give my life to Jesus. Today, I give my life to him, that's your prayer. Lift your hands high right now all over the place and say yes. Right back here in this middle section, praise God for you, and over here as well, both of you here, sir, right back over there in this section others of you saying, yes, Jesus, I lift up my hand, I surrender to you. Back here in this section, praise God for you. Others of you today, I call on him, Jesus, save me. Church Online, you click right below me. As we have people coming to faith at all of our different churches, would you simply pray aloud with those around you. Pray, Heavenly Father.

- Heavenly Father.
- Forgive all my sins.
- Forgive all my sins.
- Make me brand-new.
- Make me brand-new.
- Jesus be first.
- Jesus be first.
- My Savior.
- My Savior.
- The Lord of my life.
- The Lord of my life.
- Fill me with your Spirit.
- Fill me with your Spirit.
- To direct my steps.

- To direct my steps.
- My life--
- My life--
- Is not my own.
- Is not my own.
- I give it all to you.
- I give it all to you.
- Help me to show your love.
- Help me to show your love.
- And honor your name.
- And honor your name.
- In all I do.
- In all I do.
- Thank you for new life.
- Thank you for new life.
- I give you all of mine.
- I give you all of mine.
- In Jesus' name I pray. Could somebody celebrate today, somebody thank God for new life in Christ.