

Atomic Faith

Part I: The Force of Habit

July 13, 2025



Today we're learning how **tiny habits generate nuclear faith**. Cuz the *direction* of our *destiny* isn't determined by the *occasional big decision* – it's the *consistency* in our choices that *creates* our *character* and *charts* our *course*. So the *question* at the core of this five-part sermon series is *this*: **Where are your habits taking you?** And more importantly, **Is that where you want to go?**

These are the same questions I, like millions of others, asked after reading the bestselling book *Atomic Habits*. Cuz in it, James Clear makes the case that *habits drive identity*. As he puts it plainly:



“Habits are the small *decisions* you make and *actions* you perform every day... [so] Your life today is essentially the *sum* of your habits.” And so, the *rest* of the book is *built* on one *massive implication* of *this simple truth*: **change your habits – change your life**. Cuz if we can *consciously control* our *routine*, we can *deliberately decide* our *direction*! But *until* we *do*, we *stay slaves* to the *subconscious influence* our *current* habits *already have* over our *identity*. And just think of how *many* things you *do* every day just from the *force* of *habit*: *checking your phone* when you *wake up*, *locking doors* before *bed*, *eating* while watching *TV*, *tapping fingers* when you *talk*, or *humming* when *happy* – they're all *automatic* actions we perform *without effort* and they *all contribute* to the kind of *life* we live. They can *increase* our *anxiety* or promote *patience*; they can help *express* our *feelings* or make us emotionally *unavailable* – all because **habits have the power to define us and the pull to guide us** – and modifying *them* means modifying *us*. So, for five sermons, we're going to unpack these powerful principles and apply them to our faith. Cuz the **same strategies that guide our actions can also steer our spirit**. After all, if *habits* help *decide* what we *do*, they *should* affect our *faith*!

[Because] Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. – James 2:14-26 NIV

And everything **[all action]** that does not come from faith is sin. – Romans 14:23 NIV

And since *action* and *faith* go *hand in hand*, we're going to explore how **we can use the force of habit to produce the action of faith** – so that our *simple* daily *routines* lead us into *God's presence*. And if *that goal* seems *too grand* for *little* habits – I would like you to consider the answer to *this* classic question: How **do you eat an elephant?** Don't overthink it... **One bite at a time!**

It's a funny *metaphor*, but it *reminds* us that even the most *impossible* ambitions *become possible* with *small, consistent* steps. Like the book says: **strength isn't always about size**. In *physics*, maybe. But in *friendship, faith, and life* – it's the *small* things that move us *most*. Like Jesus said:

If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. – Matthew 17:20 NIV

So today, we're gonna start with a *quick* look at *seven* key *ideas* that'll help us take *small* steps toward the formidable *faith* that Jesus is talking about! And we're already *halfway* through the *first*:

1. The Strength of Small Look, we're calling the series *Atomic Faith* cuz we've all seen an atom bomb and we've all been *shocked* to *learn* that the biggest *power* humans have ever *produced* came from harnessing the *smallest* thing humans have ever *seen*. But *that* principle of *potential* also applies to the *path* of our *pursuits*, cuz *in life*, **massive movement comes from minute modification**.



Did you know that if you take a plane in Los Angeles and adjust its course by just 3.5 degrees – it'll land in *Washington D.C.* instead of *New York*? That's a difference of *hundreds* of miles, even though the adjustment at *takeoff* was almost *imperceptible*. Well, our *faith* works the *same way*! If we give our *spirit* a *barely-noticeable nudge* in the right direction *today* – that change *multiplies by the minute* to totally *reroute* our destination.

Don't believe it? Well, let's say you *pray* and *read* your Bible for a *total* of *5 minutes* in the morning; if you can *commit* to a measly *1% improvement* each day, you'd *only* have to add *three* seconds tomorrow – *but* by the end of *one year* you'd be spending more than *3 hours* a day with the Lord!

[So,] Let us not become weary in doing good, [take it slow,] for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. – Galatians 6:9 NIV

Remember, **slow and steady wins the race – while fast and furious burns you out!** Think of it like an ice *cube* in a cold room: raise the temperature *one* degree a day and nothing *seems* to change. 25°... 26°... 27°... but hit 32°, and *presto* – a *puddle*! It hit its *proper* time. Small steps may look like nothing's happening, but they're *building* the *breakthrough*. So *slow* your roll and trust that *small steps* lead to *big leaps* of faith. Cuz **small doesn't mean insignificant, small means sustainable – and faith** that's *sustainable* makes real change *attainable*. Which leads to our *second* simple idea:



2. The Strength of Systems Cuz *systems* are the *key* to *making* something sustainable. Remember the first time you ever went on a *diet*? Are you *still* on it? *Me neither! Why not?!* Well, the problem *isn't* the *goal*; the problem is the *system*. Because **success isn't about having the right intention – it's about having the right approach**. Which Paul echoes:

Be very careful ... how you live ... making the most of every opportunity – Ephesians 5:15-16 NIV

Fail to plan – plan to fail, *right?!* Your *heart* might be in the right *place* but without a structure to *support* it, even the best *goal* will collapse under pressure. As Clear says, **"You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems."** Which means **consistent faith is built on a sustainable system**.

So, if you want *faith* that *moves* mountains, start by learning how to *climb* a mountain. And here's a hint: **your plan must be plausible!** If you expect to *scale* the summit *tomorrow*, you're already *toast*! And if you expect to *defeat sin* before building the *framework* for your *faith*, you've *already failed*!

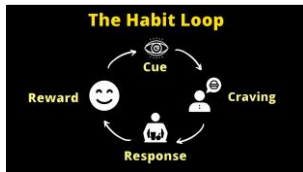
So *how* do we build a framework for our faith? *Easy!* Just *engineer* everyday *opportunities* for *faithful habits* to be *welcomed* into our routine. Make prayer a *prerequisite* of every meal; *earn* your screentime with *Scripture*; or start a *swear jar* to make yourself *pay* for pointless profanity! Don't forget, faith **isn't the goal; faith gets us to the goal!** Faith is one *way* we can *choose* to live – and we *repeat* the *daily* decisions that our systems *set us up to choose!* Cuz we *all* live by *habit* –



[but] The *righteous* will live by *faith*. – Romans 1:17 NIV



Which brings us to key **3. The Who of Habit** Cuz Clear makes a powerful point in his book: **"Every action you take is a vote for the type of person you wish to become."** Let *that* sink in. If you wish you read more books, The goal *isn't* to read a book; the goal is to *become a reader*. Every prayer is a vote for *being* a prayerful person. Every *offering* is a vote for *being* a giving person. And every time you open your Bible, you're confirming your Christ-like *character* by adopting *His identity*; **"I am someone who listens to God."** Because **being a believer means our identity influences our behavior**; *not* the other way around!



[Like Paul says:] If anyone is in Christ, the new creation *has come*: The old *has gone*, the new *is here!* – 2 Corinthians 5:17

Our actions don't define our faith cuz our *faith* defines our actions! And Paul's trying to *pound* that point *home* by telling us to *accept* our identity *now* so it can *start* influencing our actions. So stop saying, **"I wanna pray more,"** and start saying, **"I am a child who talks to their Father."** Cuz habits *may* drive our identity, but if we *interrupt* to adopt a new identity *first* – the new *habits* that *naturally* follow *reinforce* that new *reality* thanks to key idea **4. The How of Habit** Cuz identity flows through a *pattern* that we can see in what Clear calls the Habit Loop of *cue*, *craving*, *response*, *reward*. But this pattern isn't just *psychological* – it's deeply *spiritual*; and Paul says how habits plot our path.

Don't you know ... you are slaves of the one you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to *death*, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? – Romans 6:16 NIV

In other words, certain things *cue* us to *crave* an experience, *that* craving *compels* us to *respond* with an *action* so we can *obtain* a *reward*; and that *reward* primes the *next* *cue*. So, it *all* hinges on whether we see *earthly sin* or *godly obedience* as more *rewarding* – before our *habits* reroute our *destiny*.



Cuz our identity is *shaped* most by the loops we *value* most. But here's the good news: **We can hack our habits by stacking the ones we want on the ones we have.** So if you want to *exercise* more, make it a part of your existing *snack* habit! And to become someone who faithfully follows God, use your existing *cues* that lead to *rewards*. *Pray* before you put on *perfume*. Put *Scripture* into the *morning mix* that makes your *commute* more *fun*. Just find a way to fit them in, cuz all faithful habits come from key **5: The Humble Beginning**. Y'know, one of the biggest *lies* we *buy* is that if we're *not* doing something *big*, it *doesn't matter* – but everything awesome in God's kingdom starts small!



James Clear tells a great story of a friend who lost 100 pounds. *How'd he start?* He went to the gym every day – for *five minutes*. *That's it*. He wasn't trying to *change his body* – he was trying to *change his identity*; so he *became* someone who *went* to the gym and the habits *grew*. And *likewise*, Clear encourages *us* to scale all *new* habits down to less than *two minutes*. Why? Cuz as his friend put it, **"The heaviest weight at the gym is the front door."** It's all about *getting started!* And if we want to *become* someone who *lives by faith*, **all we have to do is start – the size of step doesn't matter!**

[Cuz like David said:] [God's] Word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. – Psalm 119:105



Notice it's *not* a floodlight for the *whole* road. It's a *lamp*, just enough light for the *next step*; *that's* how *God* leads. Cuz **when something feels achievable, it feels repeatable**. And *repeatable* means *transformational!* So fire up your *faith* with a *humble* beginning. Start with one *verse*. One *minute*. One *prayer*. But do it *again* tomorrow. Eventually, you'll learn to **trust today's light to lead into tomorrow's transformation**. And once we *do*, we can experience key **6: The Powerful Present**.

This is where the magic happens – not in *the someday*, but in *the right now*. Cuz change may come *from* consistency, but **the secret to being persistent is being present**. We have to *stop* chasing *future* change and *start* building *today's* identity. Stop saying, **"I want to be more spiritual."** Start saying, **"I'm gonna walk with Jesus today."** Not next week. Not *after* vacation. *Just today*. The way Jesus said to see things:

"Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself." – Matthew 6:34

Stop putting *off* faith for the *future* and just focus on winning *one day; today*. Talk to God *today*. Practice gratitude *today*. Love one person well, *today!* *That's* a faithful day. And **every faithful life starts with a single faithful day**. Simply commit to being a faithful follower *for 24 hours* and afterward, we'll deal with tomorrow. Your faith *doesn't* have to move mountains *today* – it just has to move *you* today. Because the *power* of the *present* is only expressed through *action* – which leads to key **7: The First Bite** Listen, elephants are *huge* – so you might feel *overwhelmed* by how *far* you have to go – but God isn't asking for *huge leaps*; He's asking for *consistent* steps. And the *first* step is *always* in the *right* direction cuz it just *puts* you *on* a path – we'll worry about the *rest* later!

[Like Paul says:] Put on the new self **[now]**, which is being renewed – Colossians 3:10 NIV

Get it? The *new* you is still "*being* renewed" cuz **a new identity is instant but a new faith takes formation**. Remind yourself: *transformation* it's a *process*; and *faith* is a *system* – so don't *wait* to feel *ready* – just start eating your elephant and you'll *find* the *system* as you *trust* the *process!* After I read this book, I called the bluff and committed to a *tiny* daily walk – *three* months later, I'm up to a 90 minute average and I've covered more than 390 miles with over 900,000 steps! So here's *your* challenge *this* week: **Take a bite!** Pick *one* 2-minute *holy* habit. Attach it *something* that's *already* a cue for *you* – like seeing a *Starbucks* or *starting* your *car*. Repeat it for *six* days – and then *show up* next Sunday for *part two!* **Cuz over four more weeks, we're gonna outwit all our obstacles as we learn to make our faith so obvious, attractive, easy, and satisfying – that it goes nuclear!**