

HABITS
of the
HEART



*365 Daily Exercises for
Living like Jesus*

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KATHERINE J. BUTLER



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Habits of the Heart: 365 Daily Exercises for Living like Jesus

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23	22	21	20	19	18	17
7	6	5	4	3	2	1

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: *Do You Long for Lasting Change?* ix

WEEK 1: *Practicing God's Presence*

Developing an awareness that God is always with you as you continually direct your mind toward him and awaken to his activity in your everyday life.

WEEK 2: *Slowing Down*

Resisting the need to hurry and replacing trust in your own speed with trust that God has everything under control.

WEEK 3: *Receiving God's Love*

Internalizing the theological truth of God's special, unique love for you.

WEEK 4: *Receiving God's Acceptance*

Believing that you are fully approved by the only one who matters.

WEEK 5: *Reflecting on God's Attributes*

Learning the foundational truths of God and then examining your life for areas where you are not living in the reality of those truths.

WEEK 6: *Practicing Self-Examination*

Voluntarily testing and examining your heart.

WEEK 7: *Offering Confession*

Coming face-to-face with God so that you can truly receive his mercy and experience forgiveness of your sin.

WEEK 8: *Seeking Humility*

Not seeing yourself as less, but rather seeing God as so much more—the one who is good, loving, and in ultimate control, and whose plans for you are far better than your own.

WEEK 9: *Becoming Teachable*

Being a lifelong learner, with the Lord as your teacher and guide.

WEEK 10: *Learning Discernment*

Learning to better recognize God's voice and becoming more sensitive to his direction in your life.

WEEK 11: *Choosing Joy*

Making a conscious decision to develop an attitude of appreciation, thanksgiving, and rejoicing—regardless of circumstances.

WEEK 12: *Practicing Conversational Prayer*

Bringing every thought and feeling to God in prayer.

WEEK 13: *Caring for Yourself*

Making time to care for your heart, mind, and body—all of which make up the soul.

WEEK 14: *Serving Others*

Intentionally recognizing the needs around you and then meeting them.

WEEK 15: *Welcoming Silence*

Creating quiet space in your noisy, chaotic days to hear from God more clearly.

WEEK 16: *Offering Worship*

Recognizing God's great work and gifts in your life and responding by giving him the praise and glory he deserves.

WEEK 17: *Living in Contentment*

Being at peace with how God made you, where he has placed you, what he has given you, and who you are in relation to him.

WEEK 18: *Practicing Generosity*

Giving freely and joyfully of your time, possessions, talents, and money.

WEEK 19: *Keeping an Eternal Perspective*

Living on earth with eternity in mind.

WEEK 20: *Being Steadfast*

Cultivating an enduring and patient trust in God's faithfulness.

WEEK 21: *Unplugging*

Detaching from routine distractions, especially technology, to be fully present with God and others.

WEEK 22: *Being Present*

Awakening to the world around you so you don't miss the gifts God has for you in the moment.

WEEK 23: *Listening*

Letting others know they are loved and valuable by paying full attention to what they say and showing them respect, care, and patience.

WEEK 24: *Practicing Thoughtfulness*

Being considerate and attentive to the feelings, needs, and situations of others.

WEEK 25: *Controlling Your Tongue*

Growing in awareness of what comes out of your mouth and then, with the power of the Holy Spirit, changing hurtful words into those that are gracious, grateful, encouraging, loving, truthful, and a blessing to others.

WEEK 26: *Praying for Others*

Coming before the Lord on behalf of another.

WEEK 27: *Developing a Heart of Compassion*

Opening your heart to the hurt around you and then doing something about it.

WEEK 28: *Being in Fellowship*

Exemplifying God's nature as you do life together with your brothers and sisters in the church.

WEEK 29: *Caring for Creation*

Seeing all of what God has made as "good" and then working to be a good steward over it.

WEEK 30: *Living Simply*

Letting go of things that clutter and complicate your life in order to keep your focus on Jesus.

WEEK 31: *Meditating on God's Word*

Deeply pondering God's Word and what it reveals about him.

WEEK 32: *Keeping Sabbath*

Setting aside one day a week to embrace rest so that you have space to worship and enjoy God.

WEEK 33: *Trusting in God*

Believing that God loves you, that he's absolutely good, and that he wants and is able to do good things in your life.

WEEK 34: *Witnessing*

Telling others about your experience of how you grew to know and love Jesus.

WEEK 35: *Making a Sacrifice*

Relinquishing something you think you need or that makes you feel secure in order to rely on God to provide what he knows you need.

WEEK 36: *Incorporating Prayer Postures*

Using your body in prayer to move your heart toward a place of humility, boldness, submission, gratitude, reverence, and worship.

WEEK 37: *Accepting Solitude*

Intentionally stepping away from normal human interaction in order to grow in your friendship with the Lord.

WEEK 38: *Hoping in God*

Choosing confident joy in the face of uncertainty as you trust God with your present and future.

WEEK 39: *Waiting Well*

Using your seasons of waiting to learn to walk with God in patience and hope and resisting the urge to rush ahead of his timing.

WEEK 40: *Using Imaginative Prayer*

Actively engaging your mind and heart in prayer by placing yourself in a scene in Scripture through the use of your imagination.

WEEK 41: *Keeping Secrets*

Keeping certain things between you and God.

WEEK 42: *Developing Hospitality*

Becoming a safe person and cultivating space for others to experience the welcoming presence of God.

WEEK 43: *Praying Scripture*

Reading the prayers in the Bible as your own.

WEEK 44: *Being Frugal*

Choosing to live below your means to be free from wants (and debts!) that would otherwise distract you from effectively knowing and serving God.

WEEK 45: *Resting*

Making time in your everyday life to intentionally restore your mind, body, and soul.

WEEK 46: *Guarding Your Heart*

Learning to be more alert to temptation and then guarding your heart from giving in to it.

WEEK 47: *Practicing Gratitude*

Staying connected to God by thanking him—no matter what life has in store for you today.

WEEK 48: *Letting Go*

Releasing your grip on things in this world that have come to replace your need for and trust in God.

WEEK 49: *Celebrating*

Opening up your heart to delight in, be thankful for, and fully enjoy God and the life he has offered you.

WEEK 50: *Memorizing Scripture*

Allowing God's Word to shape your mind and heart through repetition and reflection.

WEEK 51: *Reflecting on the Past Year*

Pausing to reflect on how God worked in and around you this past year.

WEEK 52: *Looking Forward to the New Year*

Pausing to reflect on how God might be leading you as you enter into the New Year.

Additional Resources 417

Acknowledgments 419

About the Author 421

Notes 423

INTRODUCTION

Do You Long for Lasting Change?

If you want to change your life, you have to do something different. Lasting change comes only from developing new habits. A “habit” is *a routine of behavior that a person repeats regularly and usually unconsciously.*

Many of us try to make physical exercise a daily habit. Or perhaps we want to become good at playing a musical instrument, so we get into the habit of practicing every day. If we want to graduate from college, we need the habit of regular study. *Developing a habit is really a way of training our bodies or minds to behave differently so often that it becomes routine.*

Many of us don't think about training our hearts, but the truth is, we train them every day. When we watch a TV show, we are training our hearts. When we focus on lies instead of truth, we are training our hearts. When we choose to pray instead of worry, we are training our hearts. The apostle Paul tells us that our whole lives are a training of some sort, whether we realize it or not: Everything we do is training our hearts either toward

God or away from him. When our hearts are conditioned to discern the Spirit of God and act upon what he wants, then we experience the greatest possible joy, peace, and satisfaction. It is essential that we develop the habit of “exercising” our hearts in the practice of godliness.

What shape is your heart in? Consider this book a training program to develop habits of the heart that will draw you into a deep and lasting relationship with God. This simple guide focuses on one essential aspect each week and provides daily exercises to make it become a habit. Each day begins with Scripture, followed by a question to prayerfully consider with the Lord or a spiritual exercise that calls you to put God’s Word into action. The exercises are based entirely on Scripture and Jesus’ life and teachings. Over the next year, you will be introduced to fifty-two spiritual disciplines that will connect you with God in new ways. The goal is to recognize the places where you currently live apart from God so that you can prayerfully invite him into all your daily moments. That is the beginning of real transformation.

A FEW GUIDELINES TO CONSIDER

Be open. What does it mean to “be open to God”? It means having a posture that is ready to receive. For

example, if someone throws you a baseball, you need a posture to catch it. This requires not only having your hands out and open to receive the ball but also paying attention to the one who throws it. To keep yourself open to God, as you work through each devotion, ask him, “What do you want to teach me from this?” Some exercises may seem pointless and silly. Can listening to music, enjoying flavorful foods, driving in the slow lane, or using your imagination really be part of your spiritual transformation? Yes, they can! Anything that draws you toward God can be “devotional.” Be open to the variety of ways God may teach you, trusting the Holy Spirit is in control.

Be patient. Spiritual exercises are not quick fixes to make you a “good” Christian. They are meant to *slowly* open and shape your heart to become more like Jesus. There is no right way to do these exercises. If, in a particular week, you feel you’ve failed to grow, that area may be one where growth is occurring more subtly. Just as your body is made up of many muscles, so it is with the soul. Feeling resistance is a sign a spiritual muscle needs to be strengthened. God may also use an exercise to show you something about yourself that you find difficult to accept. Remember, the only way he can transform your heart to be more like his is to first show you the places

where you aren't like him. Learn to see this as a gift because God is showing you something that is keeping you from fully trusting and loving him.

Be expectant. God is active in the world and present in your everyday life. You have the very power of God inside you! As you go through this devotional, wake up each morning anticipating that the Holy Spirit is doing great work within your heart. The fact that you have picked up this book is evidence that God is already at work. Keep a journal to record your thoughts and prayers, frequently looking back and reflecting on your journey. May God bless you as he uses his Word to challenge and change you to be more like Jesus.

Jan
1*Look Again. Can You See Me Now?*

If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.

J E R E M I A H 2 9 : 1 3

The Bible tells many stories of people who were in the very presence of God but were completely unaware of it. Jacob was camping overnight, for instance, when he realized he had missed God trying to communicate with him and exclaimed, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I wasn’t even aware of it!” (Genesis 28:16). Jesus’ own disciples didn’t recognize they were walking with him on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-16).

What causes you to miss God’s presence and activity in your day? Practicing God’s presence is about awakening a constant attentiveness to God always being with you, working on your behalf. As you develop this awareness, worry, discouragement, and fear will lose their power over you.

This book intentionally begins with “Practicing God’s Presence” because this sets the stage for the rest of the year. As you work through each devotion, remember God is with you in every moment. Don’t miss what he is doing right in front of you!

Jan
2

I Am with You

The LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.

ZEPHANIAH 3:17

I am with you always.

MATTHEW 28:20

Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence.

EPHESIANS 3:12

Set an alarm on your phone or place a note in your home as a simple reminder that God is with you and delights in you. When you see the reminder, pause for a few moments and say to him, "Thank you for taking delight in me, even though sometimes I have a difficult time accepting that. Help me to remember throughout this day that you are by my side in each and every moment."

Jan
3*Open Your Eyes*

I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.

P S A L M 139:7-10

How easy is it for God to get your attention throughout the day? In *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, C. S. Lewis wrote, “We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade, the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere *incognito*.”¹

Look for his presence all around you today in ways you hadn't thought about before (through the comfort of another person, a beautiful sunset, a song on the radio, or a Scripture that comes to mind).

Let Me Come with You

This is my command—be strong and courageous!
Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD
your God is with you wherever you go.

JOSHUA 1:9

I know the LORD is always with me. I will not
be shaken, for he is right beside me.

PSALM 16:8

Imagine God speaking these words directly to you:
“Do not be afraid . . . I am with you wherever you go.”

How might this encourage you in the transitions you currently face (such as moving to a new home, starting a different job, experiencing a child’s move out of the house)?

Memorize one of the above Scriptures to remind you that God is with you right now and will continue to be with you every day for the rest of your life.

Jan
5*Let Go to Focus on Me*

The Lord said to her, “My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her.”

LUKE 10:41-42

What details in your day distract you from being present with Jesus?

Make a list of these disruptions and talk to the Lord about each of them. Ask him to make his presence more urgent to you than your distractions.

When you are done talking to God about your list, place your Bible on top of the list to symbolize letting those things go for today in order to focus on being more present with him.

Jan
6

Remember Me

Commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands.
... Repeat them again and again. ... 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. ... Write them on the doorposts of your house.

DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9

I know the LORD is always with me. I will not
be shaken, for he is right beside me.

PSALM 16:8

Every time you remember God's faithfulness, your
trust in his love and care for you grows stronger.
Today, carry something with you that can remind you
of God's constant presence.

For example, wear a special bracelet, place a token in
your pocket, or put your Bible in a visible spot in your
home or office. Whenever you see this item, thank God
for never leaving your side.

Jan
7*I Follow You with Blessing*

You go before me and follow me. You place
your hand of blessing on my head.

P S A L M 139:5

God does not want you to go through this day alone. As you think through the things you need to do, close your eyes and picture God's hand on your head.

What blessing is he speaking over your day?

Write out that blessing and carry it with you throughout today as a tangible reminder to encourage you.

At the end of the day, come back to this page and consider these questions:

- ✦ When did you feel close to God in the past week?
- ✦ What exercises helped you remember God's presence with you?
- ✦ How can you make practicing God's presence a habit?