



Week Five 2016 Lenten Study
Give Up a Bad Habit for Lent
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During this season of Lent we're studying James Moore's book, "Give Up Something Bad for Lent". Today I have the honor of walking with you as we look at the 5th chapter, "Give Up a Bad Habit". Habits can be both good and bad. Good habits are life giving. Bad habits choke life out of us. This lent, James Moore, invites us to cultivate good habits and eliminate bad habits.

Some of you are trying to break free from old habits, trying to change how you eat so that you might lose weight; trying to change how you think so that you are more positive; trying to change how you perceive yourself so that you might love yourself. But no matter how much determination or willpower you can muster you keep hitting the wall – bringing about change isn't happening. You feel frustrated, discouraged, and exhausted. As hard as you try to give up a bad habit it hangs on.

You can understand all too well the Apostle Paul when he wrote, "*The good I want to do, I do not do. But that which I don't want to do I do.*" He was talking about changing his life for the better. He was talking about changing his habits and attitudes so that he might better reflect Christ to the world. But as hard as he tried he failed. That's when Paul discovered God's grace. He came to know that God loves him even though he wasn't perfect. That's a message we need to hear isn't it? Paul heard God say to him, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*" I believe that when Paul heard those words his heart pounded, his spirit lifted, for he learned that change doesn't happen through us alone and by our will power, it happens because of God. Listen, we may not be able to change ourselves but God can. We worship a God who has the power to do great things in our lives, things that appear impossible are possible to God, things that we can't do ourselves are achievable by God, things that loom over us as large as mountains God can move, obstacles that prevent us from moving forward are trampled down under God's feet. Addictions that have strong power over us are weak in the palms of God. Habits and attitudes that are deeply entrenched within us are like clay in the hands of God. Our God is pretty awesome.

Let me show you how this works. I have here a wheelbarrow. If every day of my life I push this wheelbarrow on the same path a rut will develop – sometimes we say we're in rut, meaning we're doing the same old thing over and over. A habit has developed. Let's call it a bad habit. Imagine this rut is 5 inches deep. Inside the wheelbarrow is your bad habit. Maybe your bad habit is getting up and going to work without first spending time with God. What's the bad habit that's in your wheelbarrow that has got you in a rut- that is choking life out of you? What's that one thing that God has revealed to you that you need to give up and get rid of? First, you see **you have to name it**. When you name it, you move it from the darkness and allow the light of Christ to shine on it. It's not enough to

just name it. Second, you must **share it with somebody**. Tell someone else you trust and get them praying for you and supporting you.

Third, you need to **admit that you can't do it alone**. Richard Rohr writes, "You must allow God to remove these faults in God's way and in God's time. If you go after them with an angry stick, you will soon be left with only an angry stick - and the same faults a deeper level of disguise and denial."

I need to admit I can't do it alone. I can sit here all day and try to get this wheelbarrow out of the rut but I'll just struggle and fight and get exhausted and frustrated and eventually I'll just give up. That's what happens to many us when we try to change. We say, "I can do it alone. I know what I'm doing." The problem is you may know how to do it but you don't have the power to do it and pretty soon you just give up. The Bible says, "Two are better than one." There is twice the power when two people are working together. When you admit you can't do it alone you become open to letting someone else help you. Getting out of the rut, changing a bad habit, is tough. It's hard.

James Moore names the fourth step and that is **realizing that you have an outside source of strength**. If I've admitted that I can't get this wheelbarrow out of the rut by myself then the next logical step is to ask for help. Now if I am going to ask for help I'm not going to look around for some scrawny dude to help me – I want power. I want strength. I want God because God is the most powerful helper in the universe. The thing is God won't help me unless I ask. It's all about some weird principle called "Free will." God's not going to intervene in our lives unless we ask. The Bible says, "Pray constantly that you will have strength..." If I want to change something about myself, if I want to become more patient, more understanding, more self-controlled, more forgiving I need to pray not just once or twice but constantly. I need to pray daily, sometimes it's moment by moment, that God will help me change. That God will give me strength to resist temptation. That God will send just the right people into my life to support me. God said through Zechariah that change happens "not by might, not by power, but through God's spirit."

Some of you may be stuck in a rut. Sometimes no matter how hard we try it's never enough. But there is hope and there is grace.

You, despite your bad habits, are a child of God and are deeply loved by God. Never forget that. That's the grace. The hope comes in remembering that we're not alone and when we turn to God and let God's Spirit work that's when amazing, incredible, miraculous things begin to happen by God way in God's time. So what will you do? Will you continue to go it alone? Will you keep trying to reach deep down inside of yourself for the strength to change or will you humble yourself and ask God to abundantly pour God's spirit into your life to do what you cannot do? May you find in God the help you need to eliminate bad habits and cultivate good ones.

