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For reprint requests, please contact C.C.M. at
christiancounseling@earthlink.net www.ccmVT.org

FOUR PRACTICAL STEPS FOR DEVELOPING NEW HABITS

INTRODUCTION: These steps, the “Four Ms,” are *not* a full-orbed biblical model of spiritual transformation in Christ.¹ However, they provide a structure for effective behavior change common to all humans, made in God’s image. The Scriptures cited and the reflection questions embed these steps in a distinctively Christian worldview.

1. **MAKE A COMMITMENT** – Choose to change. A commitment alone will not make things change, but nothing will change without it. This addresses our heart-level motivations.

...Choose this day whom you will serve.... Joshua 24:15

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. John 10:11,27

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. James 1:22

REFLECTION: What commitments for change should you make that are biblical and appropriate to your situation? Be absolutely specific, and write them down. Include both “put off” and “put on” items (See 3., below).

2. **MODIFY YOUR ENVIRONMENT** – Control your surroundings, as much as you are able, in order to make it more difficult to do wrong and easier to do right. This addresses the impact that our actions and lifestyles have upon our environment, either increasing or decreasing the level of temptations that we face.

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:12-13

For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice....

Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness. James 3:16-18 (NIV)

REFLECTION: What specific situations or events should you avoid or modify in order to minimize unnecessary temptation? What can you change in your environment that will assist you to keep your commitments (See 1. above)?

3. **MONITOR PROGRESS** – Check yourself regularly. Use the “replacement principle”: be absolutely clear, both negatively (what you will stop doing) and positively (what you will start doing instead). For instance, every day write in a journal how well you are stopping the sinful behavior and practicing the godly behavior. Rate yourself on a scale of -10 to +10. This addresses the practical and incremental nature of progressive sanctification.

¹ Christ-centered conversion leading to eternal life requires personal trust in the Savior. See www.ccmVT.org, Resources, “Gospel Presentation.”

(You were taught)...to put off your old self..., and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.... Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:20-24

Do not let any rotten word come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building up others according to the need, that it may give grace to those who listen. Ephesians 4:29 (author's trans.)

...Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Galatians 5:16

REFLECTION: What concrete plans can you make that will remind you often of your commitments and demonstrate how well you are keeping them? Be specific as to what, when, where, and how.

4. MEET WITH A MENTOR – Contact him often. You must allow others to hold you accountable to keep the commitments. A mentor should be a mature and trustworthy person such as a pastor, biblical counselor, or prayer partner. This addresses the fact that God places believers in churches, with structure and accountability. We need one another.

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2:1-2

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.... (Leaders) are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Hebrews 13:7,8,17

REFLECTION: Are you committed to a particular church body with leaders who know you and want to help you follow Christ? Are you willing to be completely truthful with particular leaders, without any excuse-making or deceit if you fail? Are you willing to follow their counsel “in the Lord,” insofar as it is biblical?