

Christa Reinhardt:

Welcome to The Vanderbloemen Leadership Podcast. I'm your host, Christa Reinhardt, senior marketing coordinator here at Vanderbloemen. This week, our CEO and our founder, William Vanderbloemen, talks with pastor and best selling author, Mark Batterson. He shares about his newest book, *Do it for a Day: How to Make or Break Any Habit in 30 Days*. In this conversation, Mark challenges listeners to adopt powerful habits that can jumpstart their journey toward reaching big dreams. They talk about how in Genesis, the Lord created calendar and patterns in the beginning, and how our lives are built around patterns of behavior, both constructive and counterproductive habits. Mark makes it clear that your habits are not just about you. They are about loving God and loving others, and ultimately, to help glorify the Father. So here's William's conversation with Mark Batterson.

William Vanderbloemen:

Hey, everybody. Welcome back to the podcast today. I love having return guests. We don't have a lot of them, so this is kind of special. We've got my friend, Mark Batterson here. I wish you had a view of his office. We're audio, and you would know he is a man of books if you could see his office. Mark, thanks for joining us today. I appreciate you.

Mark Batterson:

Yeah. Hey, William. Always good to be with you. And I'm old school. I occasionally will read a book in digital format, but 99 out of 100 are books that sit on my shelf.

William Vanderbloemen:

That's awesome. There's something about turning a page. I don't know, I guess I'm getting old. And I don't go to sleep as well if I read right before and I'm looking at a screen. And honestly, if it's on device, that's just a temptation for me to go ahead and check that message, or the email, or whatever the thing is.

Mark Batterson:

Yeah. This is crazy. I'm taking a shot in the dark here. But I listen to a lot of podcasts like everybody else. And I always wonder, "Am I going to get two or three things that are really unique that are going to add value?" Could I just throw something out here right at the beginning? People always ask me how I read. Or how do I remember what I read? And the truth is I have a terrible memory for what I read, but I always remember what book it was in. And so I have a really simple system.

Mark Batterson:

A level one gets an underline in the book with a pen. A level two gets an asterisk in the margin. A level three gets circled. A level four is a top page leaf, and a level five, this is something that I want to make sure I don't lose, is a bottom leaf. And so what that allows me to do is I can go back and reread any book, kind of level five in three minutes, or level four in five minutes. Or if it's a really good book. If it's a book you've written, William, then I can go back and I can read the whole thing in about 10, 12, 15 minutes.

William Vanderbloemen:

I think we have a mutual friend in John Maxwell.

Mark Batterson:

Yes.

William Vanderbloemen:

John took me under his wing many, many years ago when I was a young pastor. And I remember one of the first times I spent time with him, he took me to his house there when he was still in Atlanta, into his study. And John has, oh my gosh, lots and lots of book. And I think he's donated his library now, I forget which college. But he used to have one of the largest collections of writings of Wesleyan. And so he was showing me all of his books, and he said, "Do you know the difference between a good preacher and a great preacher?" "Okay, John, what is it?" He said, "A good preacher can always find a good illustration. A great preacher can find that illustration 10 years later."

Mark Batterson:

That is brilliant. Right?

William Vanderbloemen:

Do you have a system? The five levels of reading, I love it. It's beautiful. Then you can actually, okay, that was good this week. But when I've got to go back, how do I remember? That's beautiful. That's a great nugget, Mark. Thanks for sharing it.

Mark Batterson:

Yeah, absolutely fun, fun.

William Vanderbloemen:

It'd be a good habit to start, which honestly, I'll just cut right to it, I am particularly drawn to your newest book, Do it for a Day, it's about habits, which I've come to think may just be the secret sauce of ... I look at the creation narrative. I'm Presbyterian, Mark, so this is where we're different. Right? You grew up I know in the AG tradition. And I'll visit our friends in the AG ... In fact, the church that I think you grew up in, we helped find their senior pastor in the last several years. And I'll ask, "So how long does service last?" And they're like, "Well, until the spirit's done." And I'm like, "Well, I grew up Presbyterian and the spirit moved for 58 minutes every Sunday and that was it."

Mark Batterson:

Amazing, amazing. Yeah, so timely.

William Vanderbloemen:

Well, I used to apologize for it, but then I realized it's fine. I don't want to make people mad in the AG tradition. You have a wonderful, beautiful thing. But God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And what's the very next thing he did? He set up a calendar. He did. He set up patterns. He separated the day from the night. He set up patterns and habits. And God can do whatever he wants, but he's a God that brings order, and habits are ordered. So when I see a book, whether it's Atomic Habits, or there's a bunch of them, my mind goes straight there. And I was so stoked to see that you were writing Do it for a Day. And before I get too far into the subjects within the book, I'd just love to hear what ... Even as much as you write, there's got to be some holy discontent that drives you to put something out

there on paper. Tell us just kind of a snapshot of the book. And then why in the world would you spend time writing about it?

Mark Batterson:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. The quick snapshot is show me your habits and I'll show you your future. You are what you repeatedly do. Destiny is not a mystery. Destiny is daily habits. And I know a lot of the folks that listen to this podcast, William, they're leaders. And so leadership is self leadership. That's where it starts, and self leadership is all about daily habits. And so it was with a little bit of fear and trepidation to be honest, writing this particular book, kind of throwing my hat into the habit ring. But I felt the same way years ago when I wrote a book on prayer called The Circle Maker. I thought to myself, "Certainly, the world doesn't need another book on prayer." But you know what, it did. And I feel like what makes this unique, and we know each other well enough, you know I love the science of habit formation. I love neuroanatomy. I love psychology. I love all of it.

Mark Batterson:

But I think what's unique is that I add theology to the mix and make no apologies for that. I think spiritual formation is habit formation, and habit formation is spiritual formation. And so really, it's a book about making and breaking the habits that are going to make or break us. And I better put the disclaimer out because the subtitle's How to Make or Break Any Habit in 30 Days. Let's be honest, the estimates vary from 21 to 254 days to make or break a habit, but it depends on the person and it depends on the habit. So I'm not making a 30 day promise, but it will give you a running start to making or breaking that habit. And I think you and I both know that's the secret sauce right there. And it's why I love hacking other people's habits and kind of reverse engineering how they do what they do. And so there's quite a bit of that certainly in the book.

William Vanderbloemen:

Well, any significant change that I've had in life, other than Jesus meeting me and saying, "Hey, it's time to come home," other than that one, was I needed to develop something, I'm just going to take one extra step each day. And I don't know about you, you're pastoring a church in DC. I was there last week. And I realized different parts of the country are having different paces for coming out of the pandemic. Right? So we're in Texas, it's a whole lot different. Right? So you guys, I was almost like dropping back in time a few months to see kind of just a different approach, not a right or wrong.

William Vanderbloemen:

But the people that I'm talking to, and I wonder if it's the same with your people, it's almost like we're coming out of this fog. Right? And it's like the optimists that I know are like, "This is awesome. It's like a blank canvas. I can start over." Right? And I just wonder if this isn't a special time for saying, "What a cool time to start some new habits, or get rid of some old habits." And I don't know if you're feeling that as well or not, or if I'm just speaking my own situation.

Mark Batterson:

No. I think you're spot on. I think you have a unique pulse on the great resignation, and in the great relocation because of the waters that you swim in, so I won't even dare say a whole lot about that. But people are reinventing their lives right now, from where they live, to what they do. And part of that is figuring out: What are the habits that I need to make or break? And this is probably as good a time as any to make or break that habit. And so I do think that this is a timely moment. I will make one little

commentary. I almost call it the COVID cloud. And like you said, I travel enough that it's so different in different parts of the country. You're kind of alluding to the fact that DC would be ... Well, I'll put it this way. We went a year and two weeks where we could not gather.

William Vanderbloemen:

Wow.

Mark Batterson:

And even now, the restrictions are a little bit more just because of the nature of where we are. And again, not a commentary on it per se, it's just we are on one side of that bell curve. And what I've found is that no matter where you live, there are a lot of people that are languishing. That seems to be kind of one of the words for the year. It's not mental health, but it's not mental illness. It's kind of this no man's land. And I would just say to anybody that's out there, that you feel like you're languishing a little bit, well, number one, welcome to the club because I think all of us have experienced a little bit of that. It kind of feels like we're one tick, some of us, or we feel like we're trying to find our way forward, but our rhythm has been disrupted a little bit.

Mark Batterson:

Well, I think those are the moments where it disrupts the status quo, and instead of going back to that old normal, finding a new normal. And that could be something as simple as pace of life. I mean, average person spends 142 minutes on social media. That represents 15% of our waking hours.

William Vanderbloemen:

Wow.

Mark Batterson:

And so my immediate question would be: Is that how we want to spend 15% of our lives? And maybe evaluating things like that because, William, isn't it interesting once something becomes second nature, we don't give it a second thought, we just become ... We do it automatically. And part of what I'm trying to accomplish with the book is that there are moments where you need to deconstruct and reconstruct morning routines, or just the way that you're spending your time, your rhythms, your rituals. And the goal is to really help people reexamine, and in a sense, reinvent some of those habits.

William Vanderbloemen:

I mean, I just don't know anybody that did a better job of the prodigal journey than me. I was so good at being bad. And one of my many bad habits was smoking, and I was two and a half packs a day. I was two packs a day, and then decided if I went from Camel Lights to not light, I'd probably smoke less. It really doesn't work that way. It kind of went the other way. And I remember when I quit smoking, it was just like, "What else does anyone do 50 times a day?" Is there anything you do with 50 ... And at the time, you'd be like, "No." Well now, heck yeah, check my phone 50 times every two hours. And it's just this bondage.

William Vanderbloemen:

And so to get to your book, what it made me think of was, you mentioned Sermon on the Mount. And I thought, "Actually, the people that first heard that, there's some congruences here." They were living in

a highly legislated, restrictive, you can't do this kind of culture, or else. And that's what we've all been living in for the last 12, 18 months. Or if you've got an addiction like smoking or whatever the thing is. And then they heard words of liberation, but it was liberation to a discipline. Right?

Mark Batterson:

Yes.

William Vanderbloemen:

So talk to me about how habit forming works with the words of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, the spiritual lessons that you're seeing.

Mark Batterson:

Yeah. Well, when we were in seminary, we would've heard it described as the sixth antitheses, that Jesus said six times, "You have heard that it was said, but I tell you." But I would see it as six counter habits, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, bless those who curse you, turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, give the shirt off your back. Those were counter habits. Jesus was habit switching. And the best way to break a bad habit is to create a good habit. It's almost this conundrum. In psychology it's called a double bind, that if I said to you, "Be spontaneous," well, now you can't be. I just put you in a double bind.

Mark Batterson:

So it's this idea that you don't stop sinning by not sinning. You need a vision that's bigger and better than the temptation, than the addiction. You have to cultivate these positive habits to break some of those bad habits. And so to me, the Sermon on the Mount is just brilliant when it comes to habit formation that so much of it is Jesus reconditioning these Old Testament reflexes, where it was an eye for an eye, and in a sense, interrupting that BF Skinner stimulus response reward cycle and saying, "Hey, why don't we try something different?" And so I play off of that a little bit in the book. And the more I study science, the more amazed I am at scripture because we may have not had the terminology or the language, but so much of it is there thousands of years ago. And finally, we're catching up with the genius of God's revealed word, and certainly that Sermon on the Mount is kind of our ... It's our center of gravity, those of us who follow Jesus. And it's such a great example of making and breaking habits.

William Vanderbloemen:

So if I'm going to give you a day, I'm going to do it for a day. I'm going to not just take away a bad habit, but I'm going to add some new ones. What would be the ones that you're like, "Okay, this is some low hanging fruit. Everybody can grab hold of this," whether it's a time of day, or a thing? Help me plug and play this for starting tomorrow morning after listening to this podcast.

Mark Batterson:

Yeah, absolutely. A couple of simple plug and plays, one, gratitude journal. It's as simple as writing down two or three things you're grateful for every single day. What it does is it sanctifies that reticular activating system, the part of the brain that determines what we notice and what goes unnoticed. And there aren't any shortcuts. There aren't any cheat codes. There's just something significant about keeping a gratitude journal would be a simple kind of low hanging fruit. And it has the ability to shift your focus. I would say a daily Bible reading plan would be right up there, William, that you got to

download the plan. It's almost like, well, this year, I biked a century. That was kind of my annual challenge this year, did 100 mile bike ride.

Mark Batterson:

And you can't just go out, at least I can't, not at my age. I can't just go out and bike 100 miles. I would pull a hamstring or a quad pretty quick. So it was a 10 week training plan, and then you have to work the plan, especially on the days that you don't feel like it. In that same sense, I think a daily Bible reading plan is one thing that is a game changer. This is kind of fun. I keep in my Bible, and I know we're audio only, but I'll show it to you, I keep a little note card in my Bible. And this is what it looks like. It's an AW Tozer, and here's what it says, "Whatever keeps me from my Bible is my enemy, however harmless it may appear to me."

Mark Batterson:

I think I talk a little bit about rule of life in the book, and how to create a rule of life. But one great example of that would be, you put different rules in place like Bible before phone would be an example. Or day off, phone off. And I know many of us Americans especially, we have this allergic reaction to rules. But the truth is there's no game that you can play, there's no sport that you can play that doesn't have rules. Rules are what allow you to play the game and enjoy the game. And so in the same sense, I think we've got to create a rule of life, things that give structure, give boundary, give priorities to our lives, and then begin to put some of those simple habits in practice.

William Vanderbloemen:

I'm sure you're familiar John Milton of Paradise Lost. In hell, the way the devil maintained control was by convincing everyone they could do whatever they wanted. And it what was called pandemonium, devil is everywhere. And so what is absolute pure democracy? Everybody's got a vote, everybody ... And that meant that nobody was in control. There was no order at all. And for me, now help me, counsel me for a little bit, little session. You can send me a bill. But I think that I ... Maybe I'm just simple minded, I think what I do very first in the morning somehow sets a tone. And I don't know, in your research, you've looked at a lot of science. Am I crazy? Or is that just my habit or what? I mean, I think there's a principle of first things that boils down to how I spend the first words of my mouth every day.

Mark Batterson:

Yes.

William Vanderbloemen:

Tell me what you think about that.

Mark Batterson:

Well, the first thing that comes to mind is the Shema, this prayer in Deuteronomy 6:4, Hear, oh Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord is one, a practicing Orthodox Jew, that would be their first words in the morning and their last words at night.

William Vanderbloemen:

Wow.

Mark Batterson:

It would be their first thought in the morning, their last thought at night. Every day was book ended by this simple prayer, where they reaffirm God's rule in their life. I think you are spot on that this is where many of us, what we do is we set our alarm clock to the last second possible to get up, get in a quick shower, get a quick breakfast, say a quick hello to our spouse or kids, and then drive really quick to work. Everything is fast. Everything has to be fast. And if we don't hit our mark, we're going to be late. I just don't think that's the best way to start the day. And I'm not here to beat anybody up, especially, hey, if you have young children, I want to give a special dispensation right now because sometimes just getting your kids clothed and out the door, you just won the day, my friend. So let's have a dose of reality here.

Mark Batterson:

But I think in habit formation, kind of two principles, one is implementation intention. You have to determine when and where you're going to do something, otherwise, it's just left to chance and it's probably not going to happen. The second thing is a commitment device. And this is so interesting. For example, I leveraged my 35th birthday as the deadline to write my first book. And it was a commitment device that I made to myself. Well, I would argue that the old fashioned alarm clock is one of the best commitment devices in the world. And don't just set it to determine when you're going to get up. We just did a do it for a day series with our church, William, and so I challenge everybody to pick a habit, any habit, and then put it into practice for 30 days.

Mark Batterson:

So for my wife and I, it was kneeling at night and praying for our kids. Guess what, I forgot a few nights, but my wife's alarm saved the day because she set it for 9:00 PM. And so you've got to find mechanisms until it really becomes ingrained as a habit. You've got to find mechanisms to sort of help yourself. And one of the ways to do that is just the accountability for other people. Right? Just inviting people into your life to help hold your feet to the fire a little bit. And so all of that kind of mixed together I think puts us in a good position to make or break those habits.

William Vanderbloemen:

Well, and for me, we have a high school senior boy right now. He's a good guy, but his frontal cortex just is not developed. It's just biologically not. It's not his fault. But man, you would think getting out of bed would be the thing he could do and, "I can't do it, Dad." "Set your alarm." "I did. I just can't get up." I'm like, "Okay, let me tell you what I had to do when I was your age." I had a nasty ... It was an awful ... You remember the LED clocks that all it was, was a red number?

Mark Batterson:

Yes.

William Vanderbloemen:

And it was a Pittsburgh Steelers football helmet. I have no idea why.

Mark Batterson:

Come on.

William Vanderbloemen:

And it was the nastiest alarm clock ever. It's just like DEFCON-5 kind of a sound coming out of it. Right?

Mark Batterson:

Yes.

William Vanderbloemen:

And I had to put it on the other side of my bedroom.

Mark Batterson:

Yes.

William Vanderbloemen:

So why don't you just put it on the other side of your bedroom, Will? And he said, "But then I can't hit snooze." Exactly.

Mark Batterson:

Oh, that is classic.

William Vanderbloemen:

You're dense like me.

Mark Batterson:

This is so funny. I think we may be giving away our age here that there was a day when alarm clocks were just alarm clocks. And my record in college, William, when I was at the University of Chicago, as a freshman, I once hit my snooze, I had to go back and do the math, I once hit my snooze button 19 times. I don't know if anybody else out there, maybe [inaudible 00:24:31]. That's 19 times every nine minutes is kind of ridiculous.

William Vanderbloemen:

Well, most tools of the devil are inventions that come right after a tool of the Lord was invented. The alarm clock was a tool of the Lord. The snooze button is a tool of the devil. It's good for [crosstalk 00:24:51]. You don't get quality sleep in seven minutes. Are you kidding me? You're not going to sleep anymore. Anyway, I think that if you're out there listening today, this is the season for habits. Some of you are coming out of COVID-19, you're more fit than you've ever been because you're like, "Hey, man. Life's changing. I've got to buckle down." But most of us are coming out of COVID-19 with an extra 19. Right? Or most of us are coming out, come on, somebody knows, somebody knows. We're not going to name names. Right?

Mark Batterson:

Yeah.

William Vanderbloemen:

But most of us got out of our normal habits for a year and a half, and I don't know that we'll ever have a chance like this to say, "The whole world is hitting reset." And if I could encourage you to get your mind around a subject, it would be: How do habits happen? And if there's a book right now that I'd point you to, to just say, "Just give it a try, just do it for a day," from Mark. So Mark, you're the king of not just with book, but a quickness with resources as well. So where can people learn more about your book and resources that might come along with that?

Mark Batterson:

Yeah. We've got some free downloads, some freebies at markbatterson.com that would go along with the book. And I think, I don't want this to be too tangential, but I don't want to lose this spot either because we're trying to add value to listeners lives. So the one thing I would say is if you do this by yourself, it'll be twice as hard as doing it with someone else. By the way, game changer for me, when I went through my life goals, 100 life goals, and for what it's worth, those 100 life goals and seven steps to setting life goals would be available on my website as one of those free downloads. The key for me was when I added a relational element. Why would I want to run a triathlon when I can do it with my 13 year old son and cross the finish line together? And that was a few years ago. He's a few years older now, but as an example.

Mark Batterson:

Or hiking the Grand Canyon rim to rim as a rite of passage, or attempting the escape from Alcatraz swim with my daughter, all of these things, doing these things together, I think is ... There's a supernatural synergy that happens when we go after these things together. And so just a little word of exhortation there that hopefully doesn't get us too far off track.

William Vanderbloemen:

No, no. It's always better together. Right?

Mark Batterson:

Yeah.

William Vanderbloemen:

Yeah. First thing the Lord cursed. You ever think about this? You know the power of first things, first time you read something in the Bible. What's the first thing God cursed? It is not good with man be left alone.

Mark Batterson:

It is not. Is it?

William Vanderbloemen:

Yeah. I mean, it took the pandemic for me to realize he cursed people being alone before sin entered the world. Wow. You just preached an entire sermon in one sentence. The theology of that, that never struck me quite ... I playfully would include that when I'm officiating a wedding. I'll playfully say, "Not good for ... " But wow, because I think you're striking at the heart of something here that there's so much loneliness.

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Mark Batterson:

There is. But I also think it's not just about sitting around and singing Kumbaya. Right, William?

William Vanderbloemen:

No. It's driving each other rim to rim across the Grand Canyon.

Mark Batterson:

Come on. It's beyond mission. It's co-mission.

William Vanderbloemen:

Absolutely.

Mark Batterson:

Let's go after these goals. Let's cultivate these spiritual habits together, so that's awesome.

William Vanderbloemen:

That's good, man. Well, I hope that you will go out, listeners, and not just order one copy, but two.

Mark Batterson:

Yeah.

William Vanderbloemen:

And man, you need to go to markbatterson.com and look at just the resources that are there and get to know some of the things that are going on through his church. Mark, it is such a joy to be with you. Frankly, I'm hoping for a little better outcome than the last time we were together. The last time we were together, shortly afterward, your team beat mine in the World Series. And we're recording this right before that might happen again with a different team.

Mark Batterson:

Yeah. Well, listen, William, on the positive side, and your team has to make up a little bit of ground. But at least your team is in it again this year, so there you go.

William Vanderbloemen:

God bless you, man. I'm so thankful for your work and your ministry. And I really appreciate you making time for us and our listeners.

Mark Batterson:

Thanks, William. God bless.

Christa Reinhardt:

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