

Before and After

Week Five – Changing Together

A NC Congo Lifelong Learning Study

Open

You and I live in the most individualistic culture in the history of the world. In western and especially American society, people fancy ourselves to be self-made. Think about the part of life we're studying in this series. The last time you wanted to make a change in your life – a New Year's resolution or a new resolve of another kind – was your first instinct to find someone else, even a community with whom to take it on? Maybe, but probably not. We're taught when we're young to take things into our own hands.

On the other hand, the books we now call Bible were born in ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman Empires at a time when people primarily saw themselves as the product of a community. This difference became clear to me when a Malawian friend of mine, Harvey Kliwani (speaking at a conference eight years ago right here at Pinnacle!) said this:

In Europe and the U.S., you say with Rene Descartes, "I think, therefore I am." In Malawi, it is much different. We belong to one another, so that even our concept of God's Spirit is communal. Our version of Descartes would go, "We are, therefore I am."

Bringing Bible to our time and place always requires that we translate, not only across language differences but also across cultures. The question for this session is whether the community-based culture of the Bible is one of the things we can safely leave behind (like togas and stonings) or an integral part of the message (like "Love your neighbor" and "Be transformed!"), that should be carried robustly from the first century into ours.

In this session, we will engage the possibility that a strong tilt toward community is an essential part of the habit set of being Christian.

From “Be Transformed” to “Be a Body Part”

Someone has rightly said that for the Apostle Paul the phrase “solitary Christian” is an oxymoron. You and I might have heard “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12.2) as a charge to each of us individually. But Paul couldn’t imagine it apart from the body of Christ, of which each of us is one part. When he calls us to hand ourselves over onto the altar of God in Romans 12.1, he is also presuming that the “living sacrifice” we become is carried out in community. He writes,

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. (Romans 12.3-8)

Take a moment to contemplate the connectedness Paul pictures.

What gift(s) do you bring to your small group/this Bible study/your church?

How are you currently using your gifts to build up the body of Christ?

What would it look like for you to be a more conscious part of that body?

Individual Change within Community

When our two sons were pre-schoolers, Liz and I simply could not get them to sit down long enough to eat lunch. We tried many wiles and methods, but, as one teacher put it, “a young boy has a...theoretical relationship to his chair.” We also had a hard time getting them on eating greens. As we struggled and sought the next sure-to-fail method, I tiptoed in to pick Isaac up during lunch one day at the Rainbow Room, his

pre-school class. When I walked in, there, before my eyes, sat twelve two-year-old kids around a big table, quietly eating their chef salads.

It turns out that “When in Rome” we actually tend to “do as the Romans do.” Evidence abounds that attempts to change individual habits enjoy greater effectiveness in the context of strong modeling and group support. This is why people join AA meetings, teams of all sorts, workout classes, professional klatches...and Bible studies.

One remarkable instance of this sort of collective habit change comes from the third world country of Mozambique, where Dr. Pieter Ernst faced a seemingly impossible problem. The Civil War of the late 1980s and early 1990s had crippled the country’s health services, and left thousands of mothers and children dying from preventable diseases. Ernst knew that he had to change the health habits of over 100,000 people, but he had only nineteen people on his staff.

In 1995, Ernst hatched a plan. He sent his nineteen stalwart staffers out to help educate and change habits among 2,000 Mozambiquan volunteers by putting each in a 10-15-person small group. Those groups became the miracle force. They changed habits together, then they began to go door to door educating the wider population – even doing follow-up knocks every week or two. As they discovered new ways of helping, they shared them in their initial group. Within months, health practices had changed radically among the 107,000-person population of Mozambique.

Here are the results: Not only did they reach the massive population, they also got the changes to take hold. The number of underweight children was cut by half. The mortality rate of children under five dropped. Pneumonia treatment was six times better than before the project began.” (<http://jamesclear.com/care-groups>) The magic was in those original 10-15 person groups, and once people felt that power, they stayed. Twenty months later, 94% of those original leaders were still helping each other and improving the health of Mozambique.

The anthropologist Margaret Mead famously said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” Consider the magnificent power of a devoted small group to make positive changes in their own lives (the leaders’ habits changed first!) and in the lives of others. And notice that Ernst and Company did not try to change 2,000 people directly, lecturing to a stadium. They saw that smaller groups had a better chance to change things.

What difference has belonging to small groups/teams made in your life?

Do you currently have a small group of any kind? (Definition: A group of fifteen or fewer people to whom you are committed.)

If so, is that group connected specifically to your faith walk? Or some other commitment?

If you don't yet have one, how will you find a group? Can your church help you?

A Communities of Virtue

Paul had a project even larger than bringing health to Mozambique. He had been called to extend the message of Jesus Christ to the cities and towns of the whole north half of the Mediterranean basin. His territory became present-day Syria, Turkey, Macedonia, Greece, and Rome. He worked through small groups, too. He planted living-room sized gatherings in every major metropolitan area in his path. His close traveling crew were Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Epaphroditus, Sylvanus, and other fellow itinerants whose lives moved place to place.

Within each of those cities – Antioch, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessaloniki, Athens, Corinth, Rome – he chose and developed committed leaders who consulted with him and with one another as they led small congregations. We know the names of some of those leaders. In local spots, Paul trained and continued to support women and men with names like Chloe, Erastus, Priscilla and Aquila, Phoebe (Corinth), Lydia, Euodia, and Syntyche (Philippi), and others. In Romans 16 alone, he names (before he has ever traveled to Rome) a boatload of these leaders he's trained and accompanied in other places. These local leaders, like the 15-20 person small groups in Mozambique, became the enduring agents of transformation in some of the first local Christian groups ever.

Ancient Ephesian or Corinthian or Athenian or Philippian persons who happened on Paul or the groups he left behind must have been confused at first. Their world featured a pretty cut-and-dried division of labor:

- *Religion*
Pagan priests did the god things. They mediated between humans and the Greco-Roman gods (like Poseidon or Athena or Asclepius) through sacrifices and other forms of divine-human exchange. If you wanted your kid to learn about god, you sent her to a priest.
- *Morality*

Philosophers did the virtue things. They inculcated habits of ethical behavior and self-mastery. From Socrates on, philosophers moved their attention to helping people be good. If you wanted your kid to get good, you sent her to a philosopher.

Notice that religion and virtue did not travel together in the Greco-Roman world. The gods did not hand down commandments (as Israel's God had) or exact punishment for misdeeds. Though devotion to a god could include elements we might call spiritual, religion was largely not concerned with ethics and morality.

You can see how Paul would have confounded expectations in two ways:

- Theology. Paul did what must have looked like a priest's work, because he spoke often about God and enacted rituals like the Lord's Supper and baptism.
- Ethics. Paul also did what his audiences saw as a philosopher's work, because he spoke often about virtuous behavior and habits.

They didn't have a category for Paul and the Christians. Many clearly found that combination compelling, because Paul's little churches endured and grew for decades and centuries.

The end result of all this: these early Christian churches became communities of virtue. They learned from Paul and then taught one another a way of life – the first name of the church was "The Way" (Acts 9.2 and Mark 10.52). In the language of our series, they experienced transformation and then helped one another sustain the change.

Some evidence of this early Christian identity as a moral community comes from a famous letter written over a half-century after Paul in a part of the world where he planted Christian communities. The governor of central Turkey, Pliny the Younger, wrote a letter to the Roman Emperor Trajan reporting on how he was handling the Christians. In it, he reports what he knows about what they do:

They were wont, on a stated day, to meet together before it was light, and to sing a hymn to Christ, as to a god, alternately; and to oblige themselves by a sacrament [or oath], not to do anything that was ill: but that they would commit no theft, or pilfering, or adultery; that they would not break their promises, or deny what was deposited with them, when it was required back again; after which it was their custom to depart, and to meet again at a common but innocent meal..." (Letter written around 110 C.E.)

Fifty years after Pliny, the second century Christian writer, Athenagoras, boasted to other Roman officials about how his church even exceeded the virtue of the philosophical schools. He writes,

What, then, are those teachings in which we are brought up? I say unto you, Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; pray for them that persecute you; that you may be the sons of your Father who is in heaven, who causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. Luke 6.27-28, Matthew 5.44-45) Allow me here to lift up my voice boldly in loud and audible outcry, pleading as I do before philosophic princes. For who of those that reduce syllogisms, and clear up ambiguities, and explain etymologies, or of those who teach homonyms and synonyms, and predicaments and axioms, and what is the subject and what the predicate, and who promise their disciples by these and such like instructions to make them happy: who of them have so purged their souls as, instead of hating their enemies, to love them; and, instead of speaking ill of those who have reviled them (to abstain from which is of itself an evidence of no mean forbearance), to bless them; and to pray for those who plot against their lives?

What Pliny the Roman governor claims around 110 CE and Athenagoras the Christian apologist claimed around 175 CE, Paul and other Christian missionaries put in practice from the beginning. They built communities of common people who signed on for a disciplined and generous new way of life and then helped one another live it. When the 20th-century Notre Dame ethicist, Alistair MacIntyre taught that Christian virtue cannot be understood apart from the communities that give it birth, he was being very Pauline.

Do you experience church as a community of virtue? In what ways?

Our nation is in a bit of a referendum about how people ought to treat one another. How might we become that sort of virtue-fostering community more and more? Ideas?

Makin' Change in the Living Room

So far, we know that these early Christian groups had changed their habits in several ways:

1. They now believed in one God, so had gone from a polytheistic habit to monotheism.
 - a. To his brand new community of Christians in Thessalonica, Paul writes, "They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God..." (1 Thessalonians 1.9)

- b. Paul often had to help his newly-Christian groups define which of their old religious practices could stay, and which had to go. For example, some from his Corinthian church wondered if they could still eat meat that had been sacrificed to pagan gods. (1 Corinthians 8)
2. They now believed that God cared about The Way they lived life.
3. They now devoted a time/times each week to meeting with people making the same habit changes they were.
4. They had begun to think of themselves as teammates in the effort.
Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. (1 Thessalonians 5.11)

These were God-worshipping moral communities, who were being formed by the Hebrew scriptures, the words of the apostles, and their own attempts to build one another up in this new life.

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians came more immediately after his time with them than any of the other letters, because persecutors chased him out of town early in his relationship with that new congregation. In other words, these are VERY new Christians.

When we read words like "be at peace among yourselves" and "abstain from every form of evil" it all seems normal and natural. But how do you imagine these words landing among a brand-new-to-Christianity group? Were they learning new things? Reviewing something they just heard last week? Here's 1 Thessalonians 5.12-22:

We appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to...

- *respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work.*
- *Be at peace among yourselves.*
- *And we urge you, beloved,^[c] to admonish the idlers,*
- *encourage the fainthearted,*
- *help the weak,*
- *be patient with all of them.*
- *See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.*
- *Rejoice always,*
- *pray without ceasing,*
- *give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*
- *Do not quench the Spirit.*
- *Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything;*
- *hold fast to what is good;*
- *abstain from every form of evil.* (1 Thess 5.12-22)

Here, Paul gives the spiritually newborn Thessalonians a guide to their new life together. It's a moral community that receives from Paul and also is called on to help

other Christians in teamwork. I've underlined above the tasks Paul names that move them toward one another.

Changing the Whole Body

Sometimes, whole organizations change, relatively abruptly. A new coach comes, and a football team doesn't just change plays and uniforms, its culture changes. Amazing change can happen when an elementary school gets a new principal, or a theatre troupe gets a new director, or a new conductor comes to a choir, or a corporation gets a new CEO.

In 1987, Alcoa (Aluminum Company of America) was slipping. For decades it had made everything from tin foil to satellite parts, but in the '80s it lost ground on the competition. When Alcoa's board hired Paul O'Neill to take its top job in 1987, investors and other stakeholders knew what they wanted to change: profitability.

This context made it pretty surprising that the O'Neill began his first speech as CEO from the podium of a Manhattan hotel conference room with these words: "I want to talk to you about worker safety. Every year, numerous Alcoa employees are injured so badly that they miss a day of work. I intend to make Alcoa the safest company in America. I intend to go for zero injuries." When the speech was done, investors ran out of the room and made phone calls to their clients, getting them out of Alcoa stock.

They would come to regret that call.

Within a year of O'Neill's speech, Alcoa's profits would hit a record high. By the time O'Neill retired in 2000 to become Treasury Secretary, the company's annual net income was five times larger than before he arrived, and its market capitalization had risen by \$27 billion. Someone who invested a million dollars in Alcoa on the day O'Neill was hired would have earned another million dollars in dividends while he headed the company, and the value of their stock would be five times bigger when he left.

(http://www.huffingtonpost.com/charles-duhigg/the-power-of-habit_b_1304550.html)

So how did that happen?

Paul O'Neill knew that "making money" is not a habit change that a line worker or shift manager can take up. What they do is a long way from the financial number-crunchers' world. And yet he also knew that the workers at Alcoa plants would be the actual agents of change in the company, not the financial people, the investors, or even the board members. He needed to change habits that mattered to them, and he started with safety.

O’Neill said, “I knew I had to transform Alcoa,” O’Neill told me. “But you can’t order people to change...That’s not how the brain works. So I decided I was going to start by focusing on one thing. If I could start disrupting the habits around one thing, it would spread throughout the entire company.”

The habit began with the plant managers, who became newly incentivized to produce better safety habits. Then it moved through the floor managers and on to the work groups and the individuals. The value of safety for people at all levels became obvious to every Alcoa worker, from CEO to lowest line worker. They knew that one of the ways to get ahead in this company was to work safely. They also sensed that the “higher-ups” cared about them. After all, it wasn’t the calculator-and-accountant people who were getting hurt. They mattered to the CEO. That was new, and it energized their performance and loyalty.

As O’Neill hoped, safety was not the only thing to change at Alcoa. Here are two examples among many.

- To get safety done, departments had to communicate well with one another, so the intra-company communication processes got much better.
- O’Neill encouraged worker input toward safety, and their ideas poured in – first about safety, then about other things that would increase efficiency, quality, etc.

Focusing on safety changed the company from a failing, lost group into a focused and rising force in industry.

The story of Alcoa’s success features two insights that are important to us as people seeking transformation

1. Even large groups of people can change. And we can change not just our individual habits, but our habits as groups.
2. Keystone habits matter for groups, too. As we saw a couple weeks ago, there are certain “keystone” habits that carry others with them. Groups have those, too.

In Alcoa’s case, the keystone habit was safety, and the rest is history.

If you could identify one specific habit change for your group (whether church, book group, team, or other), what would that be?

Do you think that habit could become a keystone, impacting other parts of community culture?

Humility as the Key

Community, with all its benefits for transformation and habit change, is impossible without the humility of its members. Anyone who sees no need for the help of others will have no need for community. This truth hurts, in a self-sufficiency-valuing culture like ours. Yet Paul's first words after "do not be conformed...but be transformed..." are these:

by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.
(Romans 12.3)

And soon after that, he writes these:

Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. (Romans 12.16)

As he begins to build community among Christians, Paul knows that arrogance – thinking more highly of self than is proper, being haughty, claiming to be wiser than they are -- will be their nemesis.

Why is this? It is possible for a lot of arrogant people to be in the same room peaceably. But it is not possible for arrogant people to rely on one another. In a sister passage to our Romans 12 verses, Paul actually speaks from the point of view of the body parts:

If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." (1 Corinthians 12)

Many people know that they can't/don't want to sing or preach, and others know that they aren't experts in Bible, so worship and studies are places where we listen to others.

What other venues in your faith life offer opportunities to learn from or receive help from others?

Use your imagination for a moment to ask, how can we “practice” needing one another? How can we trade in our habit of self-sufficiency for a healthy mutual reliance?

Close

The robust community Paul sees as the incubator and sustainer of Christian transformation both helps the individual change and is changed by God as a whole. In a self-help society, one redemptive habit Christianity can offer the world is the mutual reliance that produces is virtue-forming community.

On Humility

By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/83807/jewish/On-Humility.htm

How virtues change! Moses, the greatest hero of Jewish tradition, is described by the Bible as "a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." By today's standards he was clearly wrongly advised. He should have hired an agent, sharpened up his image, let slip some calculated indiscretions about his conversations with the Almighty and sold his story to the press for a six-figure sum. With any luck, he might have landed up with his own television chat show, dispensing wisdom to those willing to bare their soul to the watching millions. He would have had his fifteen minutes of fame. Instead he had to settle for the lesser consolation of three thousand years of moral influence.

Humility is the orphaned virtue of our age. Charles Dickens dealt it a mortal blow in his portrayal of the unctuous Uriah Heep, the man who kept saying, "I am the 'umblest person going." Its demise, though, came a century later with the threatening anonymity of mass culture alongside the loss of neighbourhoods and congregations. A community is a place of friends. Urban society is a landscape of strangers. Yet there is an irrepressible human urge for recognition. So a culture emerged out of the various ways of "making a statement" to people we do not know, but who, we hope, will somehow notice. Beliefs ceased to be things confessed in prayer and became slogans emblazoned on t-shirts. A comprehensive repertoire developed of signalling individuality, from personalized number-plates, to in-your-face dressing, to designer labels worn on the outside, not within. You can trace an entire cultural transformation in the shift from renown to fame to celebrity to being famous for being famous. The creed of our age is, "If you've got it, flaunt it." Humility, being humble, did not stand a chance.

This is a shame. Humility -- true humility -- is one of the most expansive and life-enhancing of all virtues. It does not mean undervaluing yourself. It means valuing other people. It signals a certain openness to life's grandeur and the willingness to be surprised, uplifted, by goodness wherever one finds it. I learned the meaning of humility from my late father. He had come over to this country at the age of five, fleeing persecution in Poland. His family was poor and he had to leave school at the age of fourteen to support them. What education he had was largely self-taught. Yet he loved

excellence, in whatever field or form it came. He had a passion for classical music and painting, and his taste in literature was impeccable, far better than mine. He was an enthusiast. He had -- and this was what I so cherished in him -- the capacity to admire. That, I think, is what the greater part of humility is, the capacity to be open to something greater than oneself. False humility is the pretence that one is small. True humility is the consciousness of standing in the presence of greatness, which is why it is the virtue of prophets, those who feel most vividly the nearness of G-d.

As a young man, full of questions about faith, I travelled to the United States where, I had heard, there were outstanding rabbis. I met many, but I also had the privilege of meeting the greatest Jewish leader of my generation, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. Heir to the dynastic leadership of a relatively small group of Jewish mystics, he had escaped from Europe to New York during the Second World War and had turned the tattered remnants of his flock into a worldwide movement. Wherever I travelled, I heard tales of his extraordinary leadership, many verging on the miraculous. He was, I was told, one of the outstanding charismatic leaders of our time. I resolved to meet him if I could.

I did, and was utterly surprised. He was certainly not charismatic in any conventional sense. Quiet, self-effacing, understated, one might hardly have noticed him had it not been for the reverence in which he was held by his disciples. That meeting, though, changed my life. He was a world-famous figure. I was an anonymous student from three thousand miles away. Yet in his presence I seemed to be the most important person in the world. He asked me about myself; he listened carefully; he challenged me to become a leader, something I had never contemplated before. Quickly it became clear to me that he believed in me more than I believed in myself. As I left the room, it occurred to me that it had been full of my presence and his absence. Perhaps that is what listening is, considered as a religious act. I then knew that greatness is measured by what we efface ourselves towards. There was no grandeur in his manner; neither was there any false modesty. He was serene, dignified, majestic; a man of transcending humility who gathered you into his embrace and taught you to look up.

True virtue never needs to advertise itself. That is why I find the aggressive packaging of personality so sad. It speaks of loneliness, the profound,

endemic loneliness of a world without relationships of fidelity and trust. It testifies ultimately to a loss of faith -- a loss of that knowledge, so precious to previous generations, that beyond the visible surfaces of this world is a Presence who knows us, loves us, and takes notice of our deeds. What else, secure in that knowledge, could we need? Time and again, when conducting a funeral or visiting mourners, I discover that the deceased had led a life of generosity and kindness unknown to even close relatives. I came to the conclusion -- one I never dreamed of before I was given this window into private worlds - that the vast majority of saintly or generous acts are done quietly with no desire for public recognition. That is humility, and what a glorious revelation it is of the human spirit.

Humility, then, is more than just a virtue: it is a form of perception, a language in which the "I" is silent so that I can hear the "Thou", the unspoken call beneath human speech, the Divine whisper within all that moves, the voice of otherness that calls me to redeem its loneliness with the touch of love. Humility is what opens us to the world.

And does it matter that it no longer fits the confines of our age? The truth is that moral beauty, like music, always moves those who can hear beneath the noise. Virtues may be out of fashion, but they are never out of date. The things that call attention to themselves are never interesting for long, which is why our attention span grows shorter by the year. Humility -- the polar opposite of "advertisements for myself" -- never fails to leave its afterglow. We know when we have been in the presence of someone in whom the Divine presence breathes. We feel affirmed, enlarged, and with good reason. For we have met someone who, not taking himself or herself seriously at all, has shown us what it is to take with utmost seriousness that which is not I.

How to Change the Habits of 107,000 People

By James Clear | Behavioral Psychology, Habits
<http://jamesclear.com/care-groups>

It was 1995 and Pieter Ernst was battling a serious problem.

Ernst was a physician with an interest in community-wide behavior change and he was currently in Mozambique. For nearly twenty years, a brutal civil war had ravaged the population and landscape of the country.

The war had ended three years earlier, but the entire healthcare system of the country had been crippled. Thousands of mothers and children were dying from preventable diseases.

The biggest problem was the scale of the issue. Dr. Ernst needed to reach a population of 107,000 citizens with a staff of just 19 people.

Ernst realized that it was impossible for his team to do it alone. Furthermore, he knew that if they were going to reduce the incidence of preventable disease for good, then significant behavior change would need to occur within the community. His team couldn't stay in Mozambique forever. These changes had to happen in the homes and minds of the community.

Ernst came up with a plan.

Changing the Habits of 107,000 People

First, they found over 2,000 volunteers from the community. Then, each member of his 19-person staff was responsible for teaching groups of 10 to 15 volunteers from the surrounding community about the steps they could take to reduce the incidence of preventable diseases.

Then, each volunteer would visit 10 to 15 households and share what they had learned. The volunteers repeated households every two weeks and continued to spread the ideas.

But this was the part that made the plan brilliant: the support group for the volunteers was not the 19-person healthcare staff. It was the other 10 to 15 volunteers in their small group. Each group of volunteers talked among one another about what was working, what wasn't working, and how to get people on board with the changes in their community.

What happened?

Not only did they reach the massive population, they also got the changes to take hold. The number of underweight children was cut by half. The mortality rate of children under five dropped. Pneumonia treatment was six times better than before the project began.

In a follow-up survey taken 20 months after the project had officially ended, the volunteer groups were still operating with 94% of the original volunteers and the health metrics continued to improve.

The changes had stuck. For good.

The public health victory of Ernst's team is impressive, but this isn't just a feel-good story. There is a deeper lesson here that we can all apply to our own lives.

Here's the deal.

The Identity of the Group

Most of our behaviors are driven by two things: our environment and our beliefs. And environment is perhaps the most powerful of those two because in many cases your environment can shape your beliefs. This is especially true when you consider your environment to include the people who surround you.

I've written previously about [identity-based habits](#) — the power that your beliefs have to create better habits that actually stick over the long-term.

But it's not just your identity that impacts your beliefs. It's also the identity of the groups that you surround yourself with.

Consider the community in Mozambique. In the beginning, the community had a certain identity. After the war, many basic public health approaches simply weren't part of daily life.

But as the volunteers began expanding their reach, working with each other, and sharing news of what techniques were working, the community began to develop a new identity. New behaviors began to be seen as normal behaviors. And when a new behavior becomes the norm for any particular group, the change sticks for good.

The lesson is simple: doing something is much easier when it's the normal thing to do in your community.

Before we talk about how to get started, I wanted to let you know I researched and compiled science-backed ways to stick to good habits and stop procrastinating. Want to check out my insights? [Download my free PDF guide "Transform Your Habits" here.](#)

What is the Identity of Your Group?

Every group has an identity.

- Google employees have a set of actions and beliefs that are part of their cultural identity.
- CrossFitters have a set of actions and beliefs that are part of their identity.
- Investment bankers have a set of actions and beliefs that are part of their identity.

The question is, do the groups you belong to have the identity you want?

There were only 2,300 volunteers in the Mozambique project, but 107,000 people began to take on new habits and behaviors when the identity of the group changed.

This happens to all of us. We take on the behaviors of the groups in which we live and the communities to which we belong.

Want to workout more? Become part of a group where working out is normal. Not a goal. Not an event. Just part of the lifestyle.

Want to do better work? Surround yourself with people who make each day a work of art rather than seeing work as a reason to clock in and clock out.

Want to live a life of service? Step into a group where service is part of the day-to-day routine.

Lasting behavior change happens when it's part of the cultural norm. As Jim Rohn says, "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with."