

Christa Reinhardt:

Welcome to the Vanderbloemen Leadership podcast. I'm your host, Christa Reinhardt, senior marketing coordinator here at Vanderbloemen. This week, William talks with Steve Poe, senior pastor of Northview Church in Indiana. Steve provides leadership, teaching and vision for Northview. Steve has a unique background in the business world, allowing him to connect with people at many different life stages. Steve recently became an author with the release of his book, *Creatures of Habit*, where he shares 12 habits that are holding you back from God's best.

Christa Reinhardt:

On today's podcast, Pastor Steve discusses the importance of recognizing the power that habits have in our lives. He shares how to form good habits that act as spiritual disciplines making us more Christ-like, and why we must break bad habits that are destructive, causing us to stumble. Steve's argument is rooted in biblical truth, and he provides examples of how Jesus used habits to worship and honor God as Christians are called to live. Here's William's conversation with Pastor Steve Poe.

William Vanderbloemen:

Well, hey everybody. I am just thrilled that I get to do this podcast because I get to introduce you to my friends, and having been a Presbyterian pastor, I thought I knew everybody. That just meant I knew everybody in the Presbyterian world, which is about like saying, "I know everybody. No. Actually I only know everyone in Scotland." There's a whole bigger world, and I've met so many awesome people. And one of my new friends over the last several years is Pastor Steve Poe who's with us today. Steve is a pastor at Northview in Indiana. Really, I would say Indianapolis, but the spread just keeps growing. It's an amazing church. You may have read about it. If you haven't, you should. Steve, thanks for joining us today. I really appreciate you making time,

Steve Poe:

William, I really appreciate you doing this. It's been an honor to get to know you seriously. You have had such an impact on me and probably didn't even know it. Not only your friendship, but your book, *Culture Wins*, just was such a great read that I did that with all of our staff. I took them through it, and it's just been so, so helpful. So you have spoken into my life more than you realize.

William Vanderbloemen:

Well, thanks man. And we did get to know each other, not through culture, but through succession. That baton pass is in the middle of happening, and it's an honor to know you.

William Vanderbloemen:

But the reason I wanted people to know you was I want them to hear a little bit of the story of Northview for a couple reasons, because I think there's probably some pastors out there who know that their church should be growing, who think they're doing all the right things and nothing's happening yet. And you guys to me are like, I'll get the years wrong, but you're like the 27 year overnight success. Right? So tell us a little bit about Northview and just your journey there and how things have gone.

Steve Poe:

Well, I've been in Northview now for 22 years. When I came to Northview, it was a hurting church. Their pastor had just died of ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease, and pretty much in front of them for three years. And

so nothing had happened in the church for three years. They were grieving all that time and lost a lot of their people, and so it was a church that was hurting. There was about 500 people, pretty introverted.

Steve Poe:

And so when I came in after Tommy Pane, the previous pastor, passed away, they reached out to me and I was reluctant to come. But anyway, after I came in, we just wanted the church to be an externally focused church. I was taking leaders every year up to Willow Creek so that they could experience what I was talking about and dreaming about, and just talking about the importance of reaching our community and helping them to know that we love them.

Steve Poe:

And I constantly tell people if Northview packed up and left town tomorrow, would anybody notice or would anybody care? And in those days the answer is no. No one would have noticed and nobody would have cared. But today that's not the case. You know, today we're a church of over 11,000 people in 12 different locations, and if Northview closed their doors, it would have a dramatic impact on the communities that we're involved with. And so they know that we love them. They know that we care about them.

William Vanderbloemen:

Yeah. Well, I think it's amazing. All that growth didn't happen at once. It took a while for that fly wheel to turn. And I'm convinced that part of the reason it turned is because you kept doing the same right thing over and over. I don't think there was a secret moment where you're like, "Oh, now we know how to grow the church," right?

Steve Poe:

No, I think you're exactly right, William. It really is about just being bold and trusting God and pressing forward. We've continued to keep our eye on the ball, and our focus has been on outreach. Our focus has been on reaching an unchurched community for Christ and loving on them, and we've never wavered from that. It was slow growth in the first years, but it's been up and to the right for the last, oh, probably last six to 10 years.

William Vanderbloemen:

Oh, that's great. I think, and this is one of the reasons I wanted to have Pastor Steve on today, was just I think there is in this world of "got to have it right now," instant everything. Everything's available on demand. It can get really frustrating to keep trying your job and not see results.

William Vanderbloemen:

And what I'm convinced is there is power in practicing the same habits over and over, and eventually the dividends come. And Steve's written a book about that, that we want to talk about. It's just amazing to me what habits happen. I say this all the time. I can kind of kid with you, Steve, because your church I think used to be in Assemblies of God. Right? And I came out of the Presbyterian world and this is a Presbyterian worshiping, right? You get all charismatic, this is what happens and that's it. Right?

William Vanderbloemen:

So you say, "Well, how long is your worship service?" "Well, however long the spirit moves." And I'm like, "Hey man, as a Presbyterian, the spirit moved for 58 minutes, every single Sunday." And that was it. And I used to kind of think, is that not spiritual? But then it dawned on me one day, so God said, let there be light. And there is light. And the very next thing he did was set up a calendar. Like he is a God of patterns and routines and habits.

William Vanderbloemen:

That's his thing. The spirit can move however it wants whenever he wants. But he likes patterns and habits. And when this whole pandemic shutdown happened and neither one of us owned cool lights to do zoom and make us look decent at our desk, you know, I thought, man, if we're shut down for a while, I am going to develop some habits. And it's either going to result in me gaining COVID 19 pounds or losing COVID-19.

William Vanderbloemen:

So we put some habits in place and I just have become a super big fan of habits. Your book, *Creatures of Habit*, really struck me. I was blessed to get a copy a little bit early and read it. And I want people to know about this. And again, I'll just say it one more time. It's *Creatures of Habit*, and you can find it on Amazon or lots of different places. But Steve, tell us what burden inside you made you say, I need to write a book because it's not a fun process.

Steve Poe:

Well, thanks William. I've been into habits. Like you I've been into the whole study of habits for decades actually. There's a lot been written in the secular world that had gained my attention. Stephen Covey years ago, *Seven Habits* had gotten my attention way back in the eighties. And there's still books coming out now, best-sellers. *Atomic Habits* and things like that, that are coming out today, that are grabbing people's attention.

Steve Poe:

And so here back in 2018, I thought, you know what? That is just as applicable in the Christian world as it is in the secular world, and nothing's being talked about in the Christian world. So I decided I was going to do a sermon series on it, and the more research I did on it, the more I realized that this was a bigger deal than I thought it was. I think most of us underestimate the power of habits in our life.

Steve Poe:

In fact, psychologists and neurologists have done studies and found that 40% of everything we do during the day is done out of habit. So wrap your brain around that. I mean, 40% of everything we do in a day is done out of habits. So that's a big deal. And if habits are that much a part of our life, then I think it's important for us to really understand what habits are.

Steve Poe:

And habits are basically just, they start out as a decision we make. You know, today I decided I'm going to do this, and I think it through. And then tomorrow I decide I'm going to do it again, but I don't have to think it through as much. And then the next day it takes less thought. And before you know, it becomes an unconscious pattern. I don't even think about it. It just like when I drive home from work, I don't even

give that a thought. It's just second nature. It just happens automatically because it's become a part of my unconscious pattern in my life.

William Vanderbloemen:

I just this last week was supposed to go pick my daughter up on the way home from work and left the office, and then when I pulled in my driveway at home, I'm like, "Oh wait, I was supposed to go to the school." I just drove home because that's my little.

Steve Poe:

You don't even think. It just like automatic. We become like a machine. That's true of every aspect of our life. I mean, we think about habits as biting our nails or some little bad habit, but it goes much deeper than that. I mean, William, it even goes into issues like humility or pride. I mean, pride actually becomes a habit in our life. Humility on the other hand becomes a habit in our life as well. And so we need to really consider those in our life.

Steve Poe:

For instance, William, habits become our identity. They are so significant and such a part of our life, they become our identity. For instance, let's say that somebody asked me. You and I are good friends, and somebody asked me about William. Tell me about him. And you are a very trustworthy person, let's say. This isn't you. You're trustworthy. But let's say you're trustworthy, but maybe you complain a lot. And so I'm maybe I'm describing you and I say, "Well, William Vanderbloemen is one of the most trustworthy people I know. I mean, he's as honest as the day is long, but he does tend to complain a lot." So what have I just done? I've described you to someone else by your habits. And if you stop and think about it, that's exactly what we do every single day. We describe people by the habits that they've created in their life, good or bad.

William Vanderbloemen:

And so walk me from noticing habits, because you're right. You can go read Atomic Habits. You can go read the Seven Habits. I think I've read them all. I've got a habit of reading them. Why your book, it's a little different. It takes a spiritual bent. And I want to hear what God was pushing you toward and what you're hoping to accomplish through the book.

Steve Poe:

Well, that's good. That's helpful. People oftentimes will ask, how do I know if it's a good habit or a bad habit? And that's a great question, because our brain can't delineate between the two. It has no idea if it's a good habit or a bad habit? But a good habit is something that it's an unconscious pattern that reinforces our desire to be Christ-like. So a good habit is anything that reinforces our desire to be like Christ.

Steve Poe:

So it's amazing to me, William, as I was doing this research, how much scripture really deals with habits in our life. I think, well, the Bible doesn't have much to say about habits, but it actually does. For instance, a good habit, the Bible calls them spiritual disciplines. And so a good habit is I create spiritual disciplines in my life that reinforce my desire to be Christ-like, and those things become stepping stones.

In other words, those are the things that help me. They are stepping stones to help me become more like Jesus Christ, to take on the image of Christ.

Steve Poe:

On the flip side, a bad habit conflicts with my desires to be like Christ. It's any habit that is conflicting with that. And the Bible calls those spiritual strongholds. Those are the things that get a grip on our life. They get a hold on our life and they're keeping us from God's best. In fact we could go off from this, but actually if continued those spiritual strongholds become addictions. Those are the addictions in our life. And they're certainly not stepping stones. They're more like tombstones. They're death. They're literally death to God's plan for us. They're literally death to what God wants to do in our life.

Steve Poe:

So it is important that we know the difference between a good habit and a bad habit, because we've got to be intentional about creating good habits, and replacing our bad habits with good habits.

William Vanderbloemen:

I think they might turn you into a different person, not even just an addict. I mean, this isn't scriptural, but I guess it was Aristotle said, excellence is a habit, not an act. Right?

Steve Poe:

Exactly. Exactly.

William Vanderbloemen:

But then I think about when we talk about whether it's first or second Kings, when we're in this downward spiral in the kingdom and everything's headed down, down, down. There is a line that says "They worshiped worthless idols. And so they too became worthless." Wow. But the other way is true too. Be renewed in your mind, and hey.

William Vanderbloemen:

So we have a lot of pastors that listen. When I read Atomic Habits, I thought sermon series. There's a sermon series here, and he didn't even mean to. Is your book something that pastors could apply and use in their church as they're doing their fall or spring programming, or whatever they're thinking of?

Steve Poe:

Yeah, I've actually done it twice. I took six chapters and did a series. And then a year later I did the other six chapters in a series. And it was probably two of the strongest series we've done in years. The people absolutely loved it. And since that time I've had several pastor friends, large churches across the country, that are all doing it as a sermon series. And so therefore I put together all the manuscripts are available in my book, on my website, and it really does help your people a lot to create this type of a sermon series.

Steve Poe:

The thing that I was so shocked about, William, is just how much scripture dealt with all this. You referenced just a second ago, you started to mention Romans 12:2 actually. "Do not conform to the pattern," or to the habits in other words, "of this world." So in other words, Paul's telling him there don't

conform, don't wrap your brain around the patterns, the unconscious patterns of this world, the bad habits of this world. But he goes on to say, but instead be transformed, be changed by the renewing of your mind. Renew your mind by breaking the old habits and creating new habits.

Steve Poe:

And then of course there's times where Jesus says his custom was to go into the synagogue. He was in the habit of retiring to a deserted place to pray. So Jesus created habits in his life as well.

William Vanderbloemen:

Oh, I think even back in the Old Testament. You look at the setting up the tabernacle, there was a way you did it. If you read it, you'd say, "Man, were the Levites just a bunch of Texas Aggies? They only knew one way to do things." But there was a way to do it. And that pattern, and that ritual, and frankly liturgy, it just ingrains in.

William Vanderbloemen:

I heard a story yesterday of a kid that went up to his pastor and said, "Pastor, when you read the scripture before the sermon, you always say the grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord stands forever. Why do you say that?" And he said, "For that reason. You can repeat that."

Steve Poe:

Yeah. Yeah. That's good.

William Vanderbloemen:

It's a habit. In your book, walk us through a little bit of the progression. Like it's not just, do good habits. Chapter two, do more good habits. It took us on a journey.

Steve Poe:

Yeah. I mean, there's 12 chapters in this book. So there's 12 bad habits that I deal with. And so many times people said, "Well, how did you choose these particular habits?" And literally I made a list of about 40 bad habits, and I looked at them and I quickly gravitated to the 12 that were bad for me. So these are ones that I've struggled with. And I thought, my goodness, if there's any I know how to talk about it's the ones I've been struggling with. And so I've literally battled, William, with every one of these.

Steve Poe:

And so I do know what I'm talking about. I've struggled through them and some of them I'm still struggling through, which I think is why this book is actually almost more of a workbook. I mean, it's a good read, but it's kind of a workbook that you can go back to this. Maybe you have a struggle with anger and you get past it. And then a year later you see it creeping back up. You go back to the chapter on anger and go through the steps.

Steve Poe:

Because in every chapter, after I explain the problem with the habit, then I say, the first thing you'd have to do is own it. You can't deal with the problem until you acknowledge that it's a problem. So I've had a

problem in my life with workaholism. Well, I can't get past being a workaholic if I don't own that I'm a workaholic.

Steve Poe:

And so once you've done that, then I give steps. Every chapter I give specific steps that you can take to break those habits. And if you'll work through those steps, I really do believe that you can break whatever that particular habit is in your life.

William Vanderbloemen:

So of course you play golf a little bit, right?

Steve Poe:

Yeah.

William Vanderbloemen:

Yeah. So I'm convinced Paul was a golfer, even though the sport wasn't invented then, because he says, so why do I keep doing the thing that I don't want to do when I know I shouldn't do it and I'll do it anyway. And oh, what a wretch am I? That's habits. Right?

Steve Poe:

It is.

William Vanderbloemen:

So speak a word to the people that are listening right now saying, "I just did it again. I know I shouldn't have." What would be one critical learning that you've discovered in your research and writing for breaking a bad habit?

Steve Poe:

Well, it's easier to break a bad habit when you replace it with a good habit. You know? Making up your mind, say you've got a habit of lying. You decide, okay, I'm going to be a trustworthy person. And so at the same time, you're not only taking steps to break the bad habit, but you're taking steps to create a new pattern, to create a new characteristic in your life.

Steve Poe:

The same thing would be true with pride and humility. You know, it's like I didn't become a prideful person overnight. Maybe I started out kind of doing it in a joking manner. But before I knew it, it becomes the way I respond. I respond proudly to everything. It's become second nature. So what do I need to do? Okay. I need to replace it by taking on that characteristic of humility. I think it's always easier to break a bad habit when we can determine what we're replacing it with, and where we're trying to go with it.

William Vanderbloemen:

That's so good. I'm reminded of the story where Jesus talks about the demons that got swept out of the house, but nothing new got put in, and they came back and they kicked tail.

Steve Poe:

That's a great analogy. Thanks. I need to take you with me, William. That's some great analogy here.

William Vanderbloemen:

Yeah. Well, if you could think of one way to create a new habit, that's helped you what is it? Do you just pray a little harder? I mean, walk me through an example of a habit you've had to change and how you went about doing that.

Steve Poe:

Well, like putting a rubber band around your wrist, like maybe it's complaining. And I determined I need to break this habit of complaining in my life, which was one I struggled with. I didn't even see complaining as a negative thing. It's like maybe you come up to me and I'm trying to create a conversation with you. And so I'm like, "Man, isn't it hot today?" You know, I'm trying to break the ice by using complaining, not realizing how that comes across to people.

Steve Poe:

So sometimes there are simple little things you can do. Like every time I complain, snap my wrist, just to remember that it's a negativity in my life. Or if I'm going to replace complaining by encouraging others, I've done simple things like put five pennies in my pocket, and said by the end of the day I want to compliment five people. And every time I compliment somebody, I'll take the penny from one pocket and put into the other. I know all this stuff is elementary, but sometimes it's the simplest stuff that helps us to create that pattern in our life.

Steve Poe:

Of course, in the book in each one of these chapters, I get a whole lot more specific and a whole lot more detail of things you can do. But simple things. Those are simple things that you can do that'll help in any bad pattern. Like years ago, I had a lady come up to me. I mean literally about 30 years ago, a lady came up to me at church and she said, "You know, pastor, every morning when I put my feet on the floor," she said, "I start my day by saying, This is the day the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it."

Steve Poe:

That struck me, and I can tell you, William, I've done that 365 days a year for 30 years. Now I don't even think about it. And so people will argue and they'll say, "Well, it doesn't mean anything to you. You're doing it as second nature." And it's like, that's true. But I'm also focusing on Christ the very first thing out of my mouth. And so it sets my daily pattern. So again, it's a little tiny thing, but those little things can make a big difference.

William Vanderbloemen:

Oh, first things can make a big difference. I remember as a kid, I was forever hitting the snooze button way too many times. My brother was a Pittsburgh Steelers fan. He had this helmet digital clock that was blaring. It was a big loud alarm, and I'd hit snooze and hit snooze, like that six extra minutes of sleep actually makes a difference. No. And then one day I thought, you know what, I'm going to move that alarm clock across my bedroom. And I had to get out of bed to go hit the snooze. And it changed. The first things. Right?

Steve Poe:

Create new patterns. It's breaking those old patterns of hitting the snooze button every single morning, just out of habit to creating new ones.

William Vanderbloemen:

Yeah. Well, I've read the book. It's full of really practical advice. It also walks through, I mean, it's basically the seven deadly sins and five more. It's really, really good. If you're an individual, spiritual practices is some of the most ancient ways of doing formation. And if you're a pastor and you're looking for a great message series or small group curriculum, I can't recommend it highly enough. And you need to get to know Pastor Steve and Northview, because they're doing amazing things in correctional facilities and through multi sites. It's used to be one of the better kept secrets in the kingdom, but I think people are finding it pretty, pretty regular now.

William Vanderbloemen:

And by the way, while you're listening, I mentioned at the front end that we talk succession. We'll put links in the show notes, but Pastor Steve did maybe the very best interview I've done with anyone on succession, on one of our podcasts a while back. It was so authentic and just really helpful if you're in that season where you're like, "I don't know how long I'm going to be here before I move to my next church or I retire," or whatever it is. I'd encourage you to go to that show as well and hear more from Pastor Steve.

William Vanderbloemen:

Steve, thanks so much for making time for us today. I know you're busy and trying to navigate a pandemic. Yeah. Just thank you for making time when there is no time to give.

Steve Poe:

Well, William, thanks for having me, buddy. And I can't tell you how much I appreciate your friendship.

William Vanderbloemen:

Absolutely. And if you'd like to learn more, the show notes have everything. And as always, if you don't get the show notes, go to vandercast.com, give us your email address. It's just for the podcast. We won't send you offers of if you order now or, but wait, there's more. It's just to get you the show notes. So thanks for everybody who took time to listen today. Please spread the word. Leave us a review if you would. And I'll look forward to hearing from you all as you write in, and talking to you and another great leader again soon.

Christa Reinhardt:

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