

## 5-4-3-2-1

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So, what if I told you that by just counting backwards from five, that it could change and even transform your life? Let's do it together: Five, four, three, two, one. I mean, would you believe that five seconds can really make the difference between success and failure? Between happiness and regret? Between courage and fear?

According to best-selling author Mel Robbins ... How many people have read a Mel Robbins book? Alright; cool! The answer is Yes! That our lives can be changed and transformed in just five seconds.

What I find amazing is that, right at this very moment, every single one of us has all the knowledge we need to improve and change our lives. To be more successful; to be healthier; to get in better levels of fitness; to have a deeper connection spiritually; to be more loving; to be more caring, more forgiving, and a better version of ourselves. We all know what we need to know. And yet, we don't always choose to do the things we need to do to be our best selves.

One of my favorite scriptures by the Apostle Paul -- because it seems so relatable -- is in the Book of Romans, Chapter 7, Verse 18. And it says this: *"My own behavior baffles me. I find myself doing things I know I should not do and not doing things I know I should."*

Anybody relate to that in any way? And the question is: Why? Why is it that we do things we know we should not do and not do things we know that are good for us? And here's the reason why. It is because, between desire and intention and action -- taking action -- there is a battlefield called the human mind.

When we have an instinct to do something that's important -- something that's good but kind of hard -- if we hesitate or overthink, that our brains will go into this self-protection mode. And if we don't take action quickly, our brain will literally start talking us out of whatever that good thing is. Anybody ever talk yourself out of doing something that was good and important?

You know, our brain: we think its primary job is to make us happy. But it actually isn't. Its primary job is survival: is to survive, to do what is familiar, to do what is safe, to do what is certain. So, when we do something new -- when we take on some big challenge or are tossed into a difficult situation or we feel uncomfortable -- our brain often perceives all of that as danger. And so, within seconds, our mind begins building a case for not doing those things and for staying right where we are.

Every day in our lives, there's a battle going on between our higher self and our habit self. The higher self says, *"Exercise, pray, forgive, write the book, start the business, make that difficult call."* Our habit self says, *"Nah, let's do it tomorrow; later. I'm a little tired. I'm not ready. I don't know all my ducks in a row. What if I fail? What if I look foolish?"* And this battle goes on a lot in our lives every single day.

Five seconds countdown: the interesting thing about it and why it's so powerful ... that when we're counting down, it is actually interrupting our mental brain patterns. And it shifts our attention from thinking to doing. That five seconds can start to break old patterns and start to create new positive habits.

Last week we looked at three out of the four cardinal virtues of Stoicism, which is an ancient Greek philosophy. And it is really based on the truth that, in life, there are things we can change and things in life we cannot change. And it says that the root of all human suffering is by wanting or trying to control things that we have no control over. And I'm not just talking weather or the economy. The main thing is other people's opinions; other people's behavior. And so, what stoicism believes is: the best way to live your life is to control the things that you have control over -- ourselves, our beliefs, our attitudes, our mindsets.

The most famous Stoic philosophers were Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. You know, Jesus and Seneca lived at the same time, and the philosophy of Stoicism and what Jesus taught are very much in alignment.

Last week we looked at the first thing that says that our suffering comes most from our imagination than it does from the things that happen in our lives. It is not the stuff that we go through; it's the stories we make up and create about the things that happen to us. Victim stories. You know, *"I'm not lovable or not worthy"* stories. Stories of lack or fear. And so, we need to begin to use our imaginations -- not towards imagining negative things, but positive things, beautiful things, things more loving, things more prosperous for ourselves.

The second one was that we tend to avoid. And when we avoid things -- the more you avoid them, the more power they have in our lives. And the teaching was to not avoid, but to actually embrace and face those things because there is true value. There's a message. There's a teaching and a lesson and good from all the things that we face in our lives.

And then the last one is: we become more powerful when we stop seeking approval. We waste so much energy seeking other people's approval -- hoping they'll like us; hoping they'll agree with us; hoping they'll pick us -- that we literally drain our own authentic energy. And when we stop that, we can be our true selves, live more authentically, and have more authentic relationships.

Today, we're going to use Mel Robbins' 5-4-3-2-1, because 5-4-3-2-1 helps us with three things: discipline, action and courage. And so, we're going to do it in that order.

I bet every single one of us has a list of things that we need to do that we really procrastinate and come up with excuses of why not to do it ... like the laundry. Like paying our bills; organizing our files; you know, fixing that leaky faucet that's been leaking forever. I think we can go on and on. We all have those lists of those things. They're important things, and they kind of get in our way, because we keep finding excuses to kind of put them off.

Now, Mel Robbins was going through a difficult time. She was struggling in her life financially, in her work, in her career. And she was really having a difficult time and, it might sound silly, but getting out of bed. She struggled even getting out of bed. And so, when the alarm went off, she hit the snooze button, and then she'd hit it again and again and again as long as she possibly could. Because she was just stuck in a way.

So, one day, she's in bed thinking, *"I've got to get out of bed."* And then she remembered in NASA; when they sent rockets, they say: 5-4-3-2-1, liftoff (or blast off or launch). And so, she decided to do that. And she did: 5-4-3-2-1. And, for her, it was amazing. She stood up and she got out of bed. And it kind of launched her into her day.

And she started doing this every single day. That she would do this countdown to help her in this area where she tended to procrastinate and struggle. And one of the things that she noticed was: she started developing a bit of self-respect, because she was saying, *"I'm going to do this."* And then when she did it, she had more respect for herself. She had more confidence and belief in herself. The more she said those things, the stronger her character and how proud she was of who she was.

In "The Four Agreements" series that was just done -- be impeccable with your word. It's about being in integrity. Having the discipline to say what we mean and mean it to ourselves and to others, as well. Every time we say, *"I'll do it later,"* and don't do it, we actually weaken our self-respect. We weaken the trust that we have and belief that we have in ourselves.

And so, it's a really, really important thing for us, in this process, to realize it's about **DISCIPLINE** and helping us get over the things that we need to get over.

How many people would say that your life would improve a little bit if you were a little more disciplined? I bet every one of us would be saying yes to that.

Researchers who study habits, motivation, and fear responses have found that hesitation strengthens the brain's tendency towards avoidance and its ability to scan for things that are danger. So, the first aspect of discipline is to catch ourselves in the moments of when we are procrastinating, or when we're making excuses, or when we're putting off these things.

And when we do catch ourselves in the hesitation, we have to count backwards: 5-4-3-2-1, and then take some action. Take a step. You know, make a move in whatever way and shape. It could be as simple as a phone call. It could be as simple as going outside and going for a walk. There are all kinds of things. But the first thing that discipline does is catch and notice this pattern that we have in our lives.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes, Chapter 11, Verse 4, it says, *"Whoever watches the wind will not plant. Whoever looks at the clouds will not reap."* And what it is saying is that when we distract our minds with things that are more peripheral than the focus, we will lose focus on the thing that we want. It's saying: don't watch the wind; don't focus on the cloud. Focus on the thing that you are here and need to do. Don't make excuses. that we need to make sure that we are aware of those and have the discipline to move beyond them.

And the way we move beyond them is 5-4-3-2-1, and then take some action.

Marcus Aurelius said at dawn, when we have trouble getting out of bed, tell yourself, *"I have work to do as a human being."* And I love that! That the reason we get up and move is because there is work for us to do. There are things that we are meant to contribute. There are things that we are meant to become. Taking the action -- and the right action -- is one of the most powerful spiritual things we can do, because it's about bringing forth our goodness, our greatness and our spiritual magnificence.

So, discipline is the first thing to help us get over the hump of doing the things that we tend to procrastinate and just kind of leave piled up or put off. And the way to do that is to say 5 – with me! – [with congregants] 5-4-3-2-1.

And the next one is **ACTION**.

In Scripture it says, *"Don't be hearers of the Word, be doers of the Word."* The Apostle Paul said, *"Whatever you have heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice, and the peace of God will be with you."* Another Scripture also said, *"You will be blessed in your doing."*

You know, many people believe that, when they feel better, they'll act. But the truth is: when you act, you will feel better. Acting creates movement, and movement creates momentum. Momentum creates confidence. Confidence creates joy, and joy creates more action. The happiest people in the world are not the ones who have fewer or no problems. They are the ones that tend to continue living and being more active and moving despite the challenges and difficulties in their lives.

And when you look at it, life is really energy. And movement and activity and motion is what gets things moving, instead of being stuck.

Someone said that action is medicine: that it clears your mind. It makes your body healthier. It gets your mood and your outlook a lot more positive.

I think we know this old one. It says: a man prayed every day, "Lord, please let me win the lottery." For 20 years, he prayed. Finally, he heard a voice from heaven say, *"My child, at least meet me halfway. Buy a ticket."* [Congregants laugh]

It's like we want the universe to move mountains, but sometimes we won't even move our own feet. And it's an important thing to look at the areas of our lives where we need to create more action; where we create more movement. Positive thoughts is huge and powerful, but taking action is a vital, vital part of it, as well.

So where in your life are you being called to take some action? What do you need to do to set things in motion towards your highest desire? What is it that you've been procrastinating on that it's time for you to do? And what do you keep talking yourself out of that it's time for you to maybe give it a shot?

You know, spiritually, action is about moving from fear to action. *"Faith without works is dead,"* and action brings faith alive. Action is bringing faith to life and proving the power of faith.

Remember when Moses and the children of Israel were at the Red Sea and they were trapped there? Moses said, "Stand firm and see the deliverance God will give you today"? And he not only prayed, but he put his staff in the water and he looked up. But he also stepped forward into the water. And what parted the Red Sea was his action. The action of prayer, the action of raising his arm, and the action of actually stepping into the water.

And sometimes we need to take steps toward things in life for things to open up; for things to begin to change and move and transform.

You know, there's an old New Thought principle that says, *"Do the thing and you shall have the power."* And notice the order is not get the power, and then you'll do the thing. It's do the thing first, and then the power will follow. Actions are powerful!

Einstein said, *"Nothing happens until something moves."* John F. Kennedy said, *"Things just don't happen. They are made to happen."* And it requires our action; our movements.

And sometimes we think these actions have to be huge. They can be small, but they are important and relevant to us and our lives. And it could be as easy -- although it's hard -- to make the difficult phone call and have a difficult conversation. It could be stepping out and applying for that job. Or starting a new exercise routine. Or introducing yourself to a stranger or asking somebody out on a date. Or making new friends. Or maybe, for people like myself who don't like going to the dentist, it's making a dentist appointment. You know, doing it for the push-ups that you promised that you'll do: 5-4-3-2-1. Then do the push-ups. 5-4-3-2-1. Then do your taxes or take it to somebody who will.

You know, 5-4-3-2-1 is to encourage us to do these important things that are a bit of a pain in some ways, but they're an important and vital part of our lives. In fact, when we start doing these smaller things, the bigger things start to move and be easier and more successful. Sometimes we get ourselves overwhelmed by all these little things that pile up, where if we would just take time and do them -- the leak that's been on for a long time -- if we just do them, there's a greater sense of ease and flow in our lives.

So, it is discipline; it is action. And now it's about **COURAGE**.

E.e. cummings said, *"It takes courage to grow up to become who you really are."* There's not an aspect of life that doesn't require courage. It takes courage to say yes, and it takes courage to say no. It takes courage to listen, and it takes courage to speak up. It takes courage to hold on; it takes courage to let go.

You know, sometimes we think some people have a much easier life than others. But I think life is hard for all of us and it requires courage for every one of us.

Mel Robbins cited a number of famous folks. Mark Ruffalo: anybody/everybody know who Mark Ruffalo, the actor, is? Do you know that it was almost 600 auditions he had before he got his first role? He had the courage and the perseverance to keep trying and trying.

Ed Sheeran was singing in a park in London because he couldn't get any contracts. And then somehow he got a gig in Los Angeles. He flew to Los Angeles with no money. And he went to this gig, and it just so happened Jamie Foxx was there. And Ed Sheeran had no place to stay, so he offered his couch -- Jamie Foxx did to Ed Sheeran -- and one thing led to another. It took courage for him to leave England and come to L.A. with no contract.

We think everything is easy for folks, but no! Every one of us -- all people -- have to have courage, because it can be a struggle.

Steve Jobs and Wozniak, who developed Apple, were offered a bunch of money. And Wozniak wasn't as confident. He said, *"I don't feel comfortable leaving my job before this thing succeeds."* And so, he had struggled a bit, and it took courage for him to let go of his job to step into this. Of course, things went quite well! But still, it took a lot of courage.

Another one: Michelangelo. Do you know it took the Pope two years to convince him to paint the Sistine Chapel? And then it took him four years to do it. He was so insecure he ran from the Pope, and would leave town and do anything that he could avoid to face the Pope. And look how well that turned out!

But the point I'm trying to make is: it takes courage for everyone. It takes courage to love. It takes courage to forgive. It takes courage to be a good leader. It takes courage to be authentic and to share your heart. It takes courage to grow. I mean, every single one of us has a lot to overcome. We have insecurities to deal with. But the more we keep moving, the more we keep demonstrating courage, the better our lives will be.

E.c cummings, again: *"It takes courage to grow up, to become who you really are."*

A funeral director asked a young minister to hold a burial service for a homeless man with no family. The minister got lost and arrived late. Seeing an open grave with a vault lid in place and the digging crew eating their lunch, he assured them that he wouldn't be long. He preached a passionate, tear-filled sermon that moved the workers to tears. Then, as he was leaving by his car, overheard one of the workers say, *"I have never seen anything like this in my entire life, and I've been putting in septic tanks for almost 20 years."* [Congregants laugh]

It took courage to tell that bad joke in this talk. [Congregants laugh]

So, one of the things I love about this is how practical and simple it is. Because every one of us have tough things to do: tough things that we procrastinate on, all these things that we rather put off than deal with. And they really do clog up our lives. They block our own confidence and even our self-respect.

So, this is a powerful and important practice. When you find yourself procrastinating or putting things off, or making all kinds of excuses, then say: 5-4-3-2-1. Use this powerful tool to increase your discipline; to help you take good actions; and to live your life with courage.

God bless you, everybody.