The Seven Habits of the Burning Heart
E. Stanley Ott

Years ago I heard Dick Halverson, who was at the time the Chaplain of the U.S. Senate, describe a dramatic event in his life that took place at the Forest Home Conference Center in the San Bernardino mountains on June 24, 1947. Louis Evans, Jr. who ended his ministry as pastor of the National Presbyterian Church was present with Dick in that event in 1947 and said it was in that moment he became a believer in and a follower of Jesus. It was a Sunday school teacher conference. Henrietta Mears the great Director of Christian Education at the Hollywood Presbyterian Church spoke that evening to some 1000 Sunday school teachers on the concept of being an expendable for Christ. She had just returned from a post-World War II tour of war torn Europe

Young men on the front lines during the war had been sent on missions from which they were not expected to return. They were called “the expendables.” Their stories profoundly touched Henrietta. Her concept of being an expendable for Christ spoke deeply to the people gathered at Forest Home in 1947. Four young men including Dick Halverson and Louis Evans asked Henrietta if they could meet in her cabin to pray with a few others who would gather with them. Late in the evening when Dick was praying they shared an overwhelming experience of the presence and reality of God and God’s call to reach out to the students of the world with the news of Jesus Christ. Afterwards, Dick went out by himself to pray. The other three men prayed together. Dick told me that he was impressed while he was praying that the Lord was going to send him away from the Hollywood Presbyterian Church where he was assistant pastor. Before he could tell his friends, they said to him, “Dick we believe the Spirit is going to send you to a new ministry.” Clearly our Lord was working.

In the midst of that overwhelming experience of the presence and reality of God, those four young men worked with Henrietta on a pledge of faithfulness they called, “The Fellowship of the Burning Heart.” The following is a brief synopsis of that pledge from Baldwin and Benson’s book Henrietta Mears and How She Did It.
The name, the Fellowship of the Burning Heart, was based on Calvin’s seal which shows a hand offering a heart on fire, around which is the inscription: “My heart I give Thee, Lord, eagerly and sincerely.” A brief statement of commitment was drafted to which were added four disciplines. The whole text read:

The name adopted by those who wish to be expendable in this program of world evangelism is the Fellowship of the Burning Heart. It has taken as its emblem the famous Calvin seal. It is composed of those college-age youth who have offered up their hearts as a sacrifice to the Lord Jesus Christ in behalf of a needy world.

Believing that the urgency of the hour in which we live demands the highest type of Christian Discipleship, I desire to unite in the Fellowship of the Burning Heart by the following commitments:

I am committed to the principle that Christian Discipleship is sustained solely by God alone through His Spirit; that the abiding life of John 15 is His way of sustaining me. Therefore I pledge myself to a disciplined devotional life in which I promise through prayer, Bible study, and devotional reading, to give God not less than one continuous hour per day (Psalm 1).

I am committed to the principle that Christian Discipleship begins with Christian character. Therefore I pledge myself to holy living, that by a life of self-denial and self-discipline, I may emulate those Christ-like qualities of chastity and virtue which will magnify the Lord (Philippians 1:20, 21).

I am committed to the principle that Christian Discipleship exercises itself principally in the winning of the lost to Christ. Therefore I pledge myself to seek every possible opportunity to witness and to witness at every opportunity to the end that I may be responsible for bringing at least one to Christ every 12 months (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8).
I am committed to the principle that Christian Discipleship demands nothing less than absolute consecration to Christ. Therefore I present my body a living sacrifice, utterly abandoned to God. By this commitment, I will that God’s perfect will shall find complete expression in my life; and I offer myself in all sobriety to be expendable for Christ (Romans 12:1, 2; Philippians 3:7-14).¹

What would it mean for us to experience our own version of the Fellowship of the Burning Heart as our Lord works in fresh and new ways in your life and in mine? A report of the self-study of a presbytery made this key statement, “Everything we are and what we do should be done in light of this question, ‘Will it help our congregations grow and make disciples?’” All of us long to have vigorous disciple-growing and need-responsive churches that are making a genuine and humble attempt to touch as many people as possible. We want to enable them to grow as winsome disciples of Jesus Christ, those growing in personal communion with our Lord and whose lives are expressions of his grace. Sometimes we as Presbyterians, with good heart and intent, manage to spend more emotional energy on the politics of making decisions and less energy on the making of disciples.

The verse in the Bible that has had the greatest impact on my own sense of call in life is Galatians 4:19, “My dear children, for whom I am again in labor [the labor of childbirth] until Christ is formed in you.” Nothing else is as important as this. We are to be about the work of calling people to faith in Christ and doing everything we can to help them and ourselves mature Christianly and sending them and ourselves to serve a hungry world. Dallas Willard, one of the most articulate voices on the matter of spiritual disciplines and discipleship, makes the following statement,

“Think of how we exclaim over and mark as rarities those who seem truly to have the power and spirit of Christ about them. The very way the bright exceptions stand out proves the rule that the guidance given by the church is not even counted on by the church itself to produce the kinds of people we know it should produce.”

¹ Baldwin, Ethel May and David V. Benson. Henrietta Mears and How She Did It!. Glendale, California: Regal Books Division, G/L Publications. 1966. 240-241.
There are many different ways of expressing the essential patterns of Christian living. Sometimes we use the term spiritual disciplines or spiritual practices or spiritual exercises or the “means of grace” such as prayer, Bible reading, fasting, and the singing of hymns and spiritual songs. The word discipline, like the word disciple, is derived from the Latin, *discipulus*, meaning to student, disciple, or pupil. A discipline teaches you something or helps you learn something, become something. In its negative sense, if I discipline a child or correct that child’s behavior, it is to help the child learn. In its positive sense, I practice a discipline, a specific way of life in order to train myself in Christ’s lifestyle. The daily reading of Scripture is a way of life that trains you and me in the way of Christ.

Any facet of the Christian life can be lived as a spiritual discipline if we deliberately choose to practice it. Habit has a somewhat different meaning than discipline. Our word, habit, from the Latin *habitus* means a state or a condition. A habitat is where we live. I remember when I was growing up it was not unusual to see a Catholic nun walking on a sidewalk wearing clothing called her “habit.” We call it a “habit” because it represents her condition, her way of life. Brushing my teeth is a habit. I do it two or three times a day and never think about it. It is my condition; it’s who I am. Flossing, on the other hand, is still a discipline for me. I have to choose to do it. Personally, I like to think of a discipline as a chosen habit. When we think of a spiritual discipline as a “chosen habit”, we expect the conscious practice of the discipline will lead to the unconscious practice of the discipline. It becomes who we actually are.

One of the most useful concepts I know of in the development of a biblically grounded spirituality, the formation of Jesus Christ in a person, is the idea of a profile of a disciple. A profile of a disciple is just a verbal picture of a disciple. If I shared with you the characteristics of Abraham Lincoln or Mother Theresa those characteristics would be their profiles. The Sermon on the Mount offers one profile of a disciple (blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, and so on). The fruit of the Spirit offer another profile or picture of a disciple (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control). Jesus said, “A disciple is not above the teacher but when fully trained will be like the teacher” (Luke 6:40). So if the disciple becomes like the teacher, then the ultimate profile of a disciple is...
Jesus Christ. A profile of discipleship includes everything that is meant by growing in the image of Jesus Christ. How can we know what that profile is? Only the whole of Scripture, correctly interpreted, can give a complete profile of discipleship. That is, as complete a description of the image of Jesus Christ, what it is to be a citizen of the kingdom of God, as has been revealed to us by scripture.

Christians through the ages have sought to identify the hallmarks of such a profile, the essential descriptors of true spirituality and piety from faith, hope, and love, to the fruit of the Spirit, to holiness, righteousness, purity, humility, and perseverance. So, how many spiritual disciplines are there? Richard Foster’s wonderful Celebration of Discipline examines 13 spiritual disciplines. Dallas Willard’s thorough The Spirit of the Disciplines lists 7 disciplines of abstinence and 8 disciplines of engagement for a total of 15 spiritual disciplines. The Holy Rule of Saint Benedict “Chapter 4: The Instruments of Good Works” lists seventy-two including “Loving the Lord thy God,” “Refreshing the poor,” “Not loving much speaking” and “Never despairing of God’s mercy.”

Frankly, I can’t remember seventy-two things. I have trouble with ten. Take the concept of food groups: the meat group, the fruit and vegetable group, the bread group, the pizza group, fast food group, and so on. The idea is that if you eat something from every food group each day you will have a balanced diet. In the 1940’s there were seven food groups. By the 1960’s there were four groups. In the 1990’s there were five groups because they decided they needed to add “fats.” Today there are six food groups. It’s not that the kinds of foods have changed. It’s very simple. People had trouble remembering seven things so they reduced the number to four and then they became convinced they had to make “fats” a food group which brought them to five and so on.

I began to realize that a short list of spiritual disciplines or holy habits would be helpful if it did not try to include everything or even everything of significance. However, if it included the most central habits of the faith and if we pattern our lives with groups of habits of the burning heart, we would in essence receive a balanced spiritual diet. If you want to deliberately grow Christianly as a disciple of Jesus, to be personally spiritually vital, and if you want to create a climate of spiritual growth
within your congregation, it is helpful to identify what you consider the essential habits of the faith and spend the rest of your life learning them and building them into others. Also, we must always remember the practice of spiritual disciplines or habits of the burning heart are the gift of God’s grace; and we can never earn God’s grace. Bear in mind it’s not the habits but the heart – which inflames the habits and is in turn inflamed by them.

I am going to move through the *Seven Habits of the Burning Heart* habit by habit hitting the highlights while affirming that the in-depth wrestling with their application in your personal life and congregation will require more reflection and implementation on your part.

**The Seven Habits of the Burning Heart**

*Guiding your growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ*

Knowing that Jesus Christ loves me, gave His life for my life, and that it is Christ who lives in me, I am persuaded that He calls me to a life of deliberate discipleship to serve Him in all aspects of my being. Out of love for Jesus Christ, I therefore commit myself with godly passion to keep the following habits. I know that these habits do not, in themselves, merit or earn God’s grace, but are means by which God’s grace may grow in my life, and extend through my life to others. I know my relationship with God is through grace, by faith, trusting in Jesus Christ, and that by means of these habits I am both loving the Lord who loves me and showing gratitude for the grace He has given me.

- **The Habit of Devotion**
  - Growing my passion for God
- **The Habit of Well-Being**
  - Caring for myself
- **The Habit of Growing Family and Friendships**
  - Deepening my relationships
- **The Habit of Fellowship**
  - Spending time with other Christians
- **The Habit of Stewardship**
  - Managing what God has given me
- **The Habit of Ministry and Mission**
  - Giving myself in service
- **The Habit of Work**
  - Offering my work to the Lord
THE HABIT OF DEVOTION – GROWING MY PASSION FOR GOD

Glorifying God with my life and enjoying God.

Growing in my relationship with Jesus Christ through faith, love, obedience, and the deliberate practice of the habits of the burning heart.

Worshipping in church every week that I am physically able to attend. Participating regularly in the celebration of the Sacraments.

The keeping of a daily devotional time in which I seek the Lord through prayer and study of the Bible (Word) and applying its teaching to my lifestyle (Walk).

The keeping of a Christian Sabbath - one day of rest each week spent with the Lord, the Lord’s people, family, and friends.

Of course everything about our life in the faith and in the church starts here. I remember theologian Marva Dawn asking twenty-two “successful” pastors how many had a daily “Quiet Time,” a time of devotional prayer and Bible reading to connect with the God who loves them. Only two hands went up. Is time alone with your Lord and worship with God’s people each week built into your daily and weekly life and into that of your congregation’s participants?

E. Stanley Jones tells of climbing one of the Himalayan mountains at four in the morning. As the sun rose he saw there were twenty glorious mountain peaks arranged in a great semi-circle in front of him, each twenty thousand feet high, each capped with white snow. He said, “For half an hour we worshipped the God of heaven who could create such a sight. Then mists from the valley below began to rise until they completely obscured the view and they were gone. Gone? No, not gone, preserved forever in our grateful hearts.” E. Stanley Jones was to conclude, “Quiet Time is like that. I arise early in the morning and through prayer and Bible reading I catch a glimpse of the God of the universe and I worship. Then I go about my day. As the mists of activity rise and demand my attention, seeming to obscure my view of God, I carry the memory of my meeting with God throughout the day.”

I once had the opportunity to have supper with Dick Halverson when he was Chaplain of the U.S. Senate. Someone asked, “Dick, would you tell us what you do for your
devotional life, your private Quiet Time with God?” Dick replied, “Well, when the
alarm goes off, I roll out of bed and onto my knees with my elbows on the bed quietly
saying, “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.” Then I get
up and have breakfast and read the newspaper. Afterwards I take my Bible and the
newspaper to a quiet place. I read the Bible and I pray over the newspaper, for the
crises, the people, the situations, asking God’s love and power would be evident in
each one.” As Dick was talking I suddenly realized this was no forced discipline if by
a forced discipline I mean something like flossing my teeth. Something that is good
for me but that I don’t want to do and I make myself do it. This was utterly natural,
the habit of an actual life. Bible reading and prayer had become a part of Dick’s daily
normal routine. What began as a discipline was now a habit of the burning heart. It
was who he was.

My friend Jim Tozer used to live on Glen Lake Michigan where one of his favorite
activities was trolling for lake trout. One afternoon he stepped into his boat that he
had named The Word since he wanted to spend, “A lot of time in the Word!” He also
thought of naming it “Immediately,” since the Gospel of Mark says Jesus stepped
into his boat, immediately! Anyway, one day Jim steps into his boat, sets two fishing
poles out, each with bait trolling at some distance behind the boat. He sets the boat on
a course across the lake and settles down on a beautiful day to do some reading in his
personal Bible. Absorbed in his reading he didn’t notice another boat with a man and
his wife pulling up along side him until they were right next to him. The man says to
Jim, “Hey, Buddy, what are you doing?” Jim feels funny telling him that he is reading
the Bible. “Oh, I’m just reading a book.” “Well, what book are you reading?” asks
the man. “The Bible,” says Jim and at the exact moment that Jim said, “The Bible”, a
huge fish grabbed the bait on one of Jim’s fishing lines, the rod bent over double, and
the reel whizzed as the line rushed out. As Jim drops his Bible and grabs the fishing
rod, he hears the man say to his wife, “Hey, Martha, next time we go fishing, bring the
Bible!”

One of the things I most appreciate about Jim was his genuine heart to be with the
Lord, to read and immerse himself in the Bible. He did that not in order to teach or
preach but because he learned that in the process of reading and enjoying and puzzling
over the Bible, the Lord met him, the Lord spoke to his heart, the Lord renewed his
spirit. Their relationship was real, intimate, powerful. The habit of devotion was a habit of the heart for Jim. It’s who he was, a habit of his burning heart. Jesus arose while it was still dark in order to pray in a solitary place. Commit yourself to worship every week. Bring your children with you. Figure out how and when in your crazy busy life you will carve out and protect some one-on-one time with God, a solitary place and moment in your life. To the one who says, “I am just too busy and too tired” we gently prompt you if something is on your heart, you will find a way for it to shape what you do, even if you are tired, distracted, or not in the mood.

My friend Chuck Miller explained to me that in the wonderful story of Abram and Sarai in the Book of Genesis we see a very clear pattern of Abram’s behavior. After God sent Abram and Sarai on their way, we read in Genesis 12:7 that Abram build an altar to the Lord. After some more travel (12:8) Abram builds another altar and calls on the name of the Lord. Some time later he comes back to an altar he had built (13:4) and calls again on the name of the Lord. After still more travel he builds another altar. In other words, Abraham’s heart burned for time with the Lord who loves us. It’s why I find taking time early each morning to read some of the Bible and pray helps keep me connected with the Lord who loves us. I know what a challenge it is in your crazy busy life to set a few minutes aside, but it can change your life. Get to know the dearest friend of your heart, the Lord who loves you.

Be an altar-builder. Commit to a devotional pattern that will work for you. Try every day in the morning or before bed or four weekday mornings a week or Sunday afternoons. Find a pattern that you can follow most of the time. Are you deliberately growing in a devotional practice as God seeker, God lover who would draw closer to Jesus Christ by loving him, listening to him, and doing what God says to do? It is a basic habit of the burning heart.
**THE HABIT OF WELL BEING – CARING FOR MYSELF**

Confessing my sins to the Lord.

Caring for the body God has given me by means of regular exercise, diet, and hygiene. It is God’s temple.

Growing in perseverance and encouragement.

Seeking support and healing where I am suffering physically, emotionally, or spiritually in my life. I will seek the joy of the Lord for my strength.

It’s very simple actually. As the Scripture says, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit... you are not your own... therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 7:18-20). We are to care for ourselves so that we may continue to serve our Lord and the people God puts into our lives. I remember, rather vividly, one summer afternoon during ROTC camp at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. We were undergoing an obstacle course physical test that required us to climb high wooden walls, run down rows of old tires, swing across ditches of water, and so on. I had finished my run and was sitting by a pit that had been dug in the ground that was about six feet long and two feet deep. The cadets running the course were to approach the pit at a full run and leap over it. As I watched, one poor fellow leaped and misjudged the distance, falling short and hitting his shin on the far edge of the pit. *Crack* everyone for thirty yards heard his shin bone fracture, and there he was writhing in agony in the bottom of the pit.

Instantly, everything stopped. They radioed for help and shortly an ambulance came roaring up, sirens wailing. Carefully they immobilized his leg, put him on a stretcher, into the ambulance, and off to the hospital. The soldier standing next to me knew that I knew this fellow and he said to me, “Don’t worry. The U.S. Army will take very good care of him. They will want him back on duty as soon as possible.”

A thought came to mind. I had thought of compassion as only the act that heals, the act that cares out of empathy and sympathy for a suffering person, out of the desire to relieve pain and suffering, out of love. I hadn’t considered the possibility of another,
simultaneous motive, to get the person back into life and service. Of course every coach understands this when a player is injured.

When I have blown it and have sinned. When I struggle with some self-defeating behavior. When I am ill. When I am disheartened. When I am out of shape. When I am any of these things, I am no longer the available servant God has called me to be. To practice this Habit of the Burning Heart is to understand your life is not your own. You have been bought with a price. Take care of yourself so that you might more effectively serve. Have the spiritual humility to admit your need for help and get that help and take care of you!

THE HABIT OF GROWING FAMILY AND FRIENDSHIPS — DEEPENING MY RELATIONSHIPS

Growing the unity, well-being, and relationships of my family.

Seeking to be at peace with all people, restoring broken relationships through the practice of confession, forgiveness, and deliberate acts of love.

Practicing hospitality, regularly inviting people into my home, developing new friendships, and deepening old ones.

Consider the difference between a friendship of the road and a friendship of the heart. A friendship of the road is a friendship that comes as you walk life’s road with someone. You are in the same office, the same neighborhood, the same church, or the same social group. However, when one of you leaves the shared road by moving to a different office or neighborhood or whatever, the friendship of the road comes to an end. A friendship of the heart on the other hand is a very deep permanent bond between you and someone else. Your friend of the heart could be living in Europe, you may not see each other for ten years, and your friendship is as deep and loving and mutually encouraging as ever. This habit of the burning heart has to do with making as many friends of the road as possible and moving as many of them off of the road and into the heart.

---

For example, a friendship-building pattern I appreciate is called the Emmaus Meal. It is based on the story of the two friends who were on their way to the town of Emmaus following the resurrection of Jesus. They invited a stranger (having no idea he was Jesus) to join them for a meal. In our crazy busy day we find people very often only hang out with their closest buddies and rarely share meals or have people over who are less familiar to them. The Emmaus meal concept is simple. You with a buddy ask someone who is a not a close friend to share in a meal or a cup of coffee with you as a step toward growing a new friendship.

Another example of this habit is the practice of blessing children. When Jacob was an old man, his son Joseph brought his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh to be blessed by their grandfather. Jacob put his hands on his grandchildren and said:

> May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all of my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm --may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth (Genesis 48:15-16).

When our son, Lee, graduated from high school, I started thinking that the father of the prodigal son waited until the son came home before bringing out the fatted calf. I thought, “Why wait? Why not bless and send Lee that same way now?”

I went to a butcher, brought home five thick juicy steaks, and we had a feast. Then our family gathered around Lee and laid hands on him. After each one had had opportunity to pray for Lee, I prayed:

> Lord, May Lee know who he is and Whose he is, May he know that wherever he goes You are sending him, that you have a purpose in his being there, May he remain true to the Lord with steadfast purpose. And now bless Lee and keep him;
make Your face to shine upon him and be gracious to him.
The Lord turn his face toward him
and give him peace.

A great friendship-building habit for a family is a practice known as “the family table.” My family practices it on Sunday night. If the format of a small group Bible study is Word-Share-Prayer, the format of the family table is Eat-Share-Prayer. After eating we would go around the table with each of us sharing blessings from the last week and concerns (which often led to extended conversations). Then we hold hands and pray around the circle thanking God for the blessings in our lives and for the concerns we shared. The family table grows friends of the heart among those in your home.

A similar practice is known as “The Blessing Cup.” A special cup is set aside only for this purpose and on special occasions such as achievements or birthdays it is placed in the center of the table filled with something like apple juice. After dinner as the cup is passed around the table each person says why the special person is a blessing, takes a sip, and passes the cup. After the circle is complete they hold hands and pray around the table thanking our Lord for the blessing this person is to them.

I remember a conversation with the wonderful pastor Charlie Shedd early in my marriage. Ann Marie and I met him and his wife Martha when they were 80 and we were in our thirties. He said to us, “I have taken Martha out for dinner every week for forty years and you should, too! And every month you should take every at home child out to lunch until they leave your home.” For thirty-eight years we have done just that. As you might imagine over that time we have shared some absolutely wonderful times and some rough patches, and yet week after week the meal out together has been a huge blessing in our lives. And the once a month with each child out to lunch event – well let’s just say that everything has come up from boys and girls and birds and bees to living life, courtship, and career – and with incredibly significant results over a life.

These kinds of habits allow the flame of the burning heart to draw people close together and to offer them a sense of security and hope with the people of God.
**THE HABIT OF FELLOWSHIP — SPENDING TIME WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS**

Making fellowship with other Christians a priority in my life.

Participating in a Christian small group on a regular basis.

I called on a doctor and his wife as a part of a capital campaign many years ago. After fifteen minutes of conversation, the doctor leaned forward and said, “Stan, you seem to think the church is a place for dear friendships and close relationships. Gail and I do not see it that way at all. We already have our friends. We just come on Sunday morning for a word of encouragement.” What a classic expression of the American view of church! However, the Bible’s view of church surely is *koinonia* - trusted, loving friendships of the heart. Where in the life of your church can fellow believers forge deep and lasting personal friendships of the heart?

The fact of the matter is the vast majority of present church programming is based on the audience or the service model. The audience model in its best expression is a time of affirmation, teaching, and encouragement. In its lesser expression it is simply, “Let’s get together, listen to the speaker, and go home.” When it is at its’ best expression the service model gets people together around a common task of service as they attend to their own relationship and the Lord who loves them. In lesser expressions, “Let’s get together to perform some act of service and go home,” where the focus is the work and not the relationships of the workers.

By contrast, the face-to-face model centers both on relationships, mutual encouragement *and* on whatever task may be at hand. The growth of small groups in congregational life during the latter half of the twentieth century provided a wonderful way to allow people to connect with their Lord and each other and to undertake joint service projects together. In our present day, the sheer busyness of the average American life is threatening to diminish small group life. Nevertheless, the small group was clearly a defining vision of the ministry of Jesus and of the early church and remains an essential component of the vital life of faith today.

My wife and I met and courted while we were members of a small group of singles. That group came to an end when all of the members married each other and that was
the end of that. After we were married, we thought we would try a small group of married couples. We have since learned that a small group can be all married couples, all singles, a mix of married couples and singles, all one age, a mix of ages, all men, all women, a mix of genders, and so on. It really makes no difference. After praying over the church membership list for a couple of months we invited four couples to join us for ten weeks on a Thursday evening. As it turned out we were the youngest couple. One couple was a good twenty years older than we were.

We asked the participants to observe a few basic ground rules. First, the ground rule of priority, that every person would make every meeting unless sick or out of town. Second, the ground rule of confidentiality, that whatever was shared in the group would be kept in the group, even after the group came to an end. Third, the rule of Quiet Time, that each of us would engage in some prayer and Bible reading every week. When we started that group I remember thinking how young we were as disciples. Few of us had a devotional life, few of us served in the church, if you asked one of us to share our faith in Jesus with a non-believer, it would only be a matter of how fast we ran from you.

That group met weekly for four years and came to an end when each of the couples was ready go on to lead another small group. During those years every family had some major crisis. One family had their business sold out from under them, another experienced a major health crisis in a five-year old, another had an unexpected pregnancy, another was dealing with a very rebellious teenager. These were not the sorts of problems that went away in a week. Often for months it was the group that stood by each of us and loved us through it. In a deeper sense, the life of the group itself became pastor as it shepherded its tiny flock.

When the group came to an end every member had the habit of a devotional Quiet Time, all of us had grown in family relationships, all of us were serving the church in some ministry capacity, and all of us could and would share our faith. The small group had been a caring fellowship loving us through the tough moments in life; it had been a disciple-building fellowship helping us develop into the profile of a follower of Jesus Christ.
Why dwell on this small group? Because no other organized experience within the church, let me repeat that, *no other organized experience within the church*, outside of one on one mentoring, is so helpful in enabling people to actually live the Seven Habits of the Burning Heart or any other set of spiritual disciplines you may prefer. Significant spiritual growth has the potential to occur when a person is in some kind of face-to-face group that is centered on learning the Scriptures, loving one another, and sending one another to ministry.

**The Habit of Stewardship — Managing What God Has Given Me**

Managing my money, sexual behavior, power, time, and speech according to Biblical teaching.

Giving a definite percentage of my income to the Lord’s work in and through the church, and deliberately growing toward or beyond the tithe (10 percent); making offerings of generosity and also secret gifts to persons in need (almsgiving) as the Lord leads me.

Behind this habit is the basic conviction that what you own and the capabilities you have are literally from God to be used to honor God by meeting your basic needs and serving others. Stewardship of money goes far beyond our giving, and it is to include our savings, our debt load, our lifestyle expenses, and our taxes. Indeed, growing in the habit of stewardship goes beyond the management of money. Any and every capability you have, money, speech, time, falls under Christ’s Lordship.

When it comes to giving, I find it helpful to practice three habits of generosity that flow out of the burning heart beginning. We begin with proportional giving growing to the ten percent tithe. I have learned to call it the ten percent tithe, because I preached an entire sermon once on tithing and how it is a clear biblical guideline for giving without being some kind of a guilt trip. After the sermon a young man walked up and said, “I loved your sermon. What’s a tithe?” So we encourage people to calculate a definite percentage of their income that they can offer with a cheerful heart, and that is the systematic gift offered our congregation in the form of a pledge.

The second habit of generosity is known as, “the offering of generosity.” Whereas proportional giving is planned, the offering of generosity is more spontaneous. It
is given when the Lord melts your heart. The Book of Acts reports, “There was a Levite…whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas… He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:36-37). The needs of people melted Barnabas’ heart, and he gave. The offering of generosity may be offered to particular needs that arise in the life of the congregation but also in the wider world from Haiti Earthquake Relief to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, the National MS Society, and many other forms of ministry and mission. The offering of generosity is one practical way we pass on the grace we have been given.

The term for the third habit of generosity is “almsgiving.” Jesus said, “But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Matthew 6:3). Alms in the day of Jesus was money given to the poor. Almsgiving as Jesus taught it is the giving of money or other resources to a person you know to be in need, but you give to them secretly so neither the gift recipient nor anyone else knows who gave it (including the church and the IRS)! There is no tax deduction or receipt for such a gift as it is offered in secret. Almsgiving is in essence one practice of people eyes – the eyes of Jesus for people that sees people in need and passes on the grace that has been given as the grace cycle continues.

I was the recipient of almsgiving myself. I was a graduate student without two cents to my name. I met with a men’s Bible study at church and one day shared with them that there was to be a gathering of 80,000 Christian college and high school students at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas Texas for a week long meeting and that I wanted to go but simply could not afford it. A few days later when walking into my dorm room I found an envelop had been slipped under the door with two hundred dollars in it and the words “Explo ’72 – go to Dallas” written on it. Ther were no names. So I went. I had arranged to meet a former girlfriend for the final night in the Cotton Bowl with Billy Graham speaking. We missed each other, and I wound up sitting next to a pretty co-ed by the name of Ann Marie – to whom I have been married for 38 years and now have three kids and three grandchildren. Guess how much I appreciate the anonymous gift of alms in my life! Biblical burning habits of stewardship and generosity can literally change people’s lives.
The Habit of Ministry and Mission — Giving Myself in Service

Seeking to grow people in Christian discipleship and well-being.

Serving the church with my time, energy, and spiritual gifts with some specific ministry assignment.

Seeing myself as sent into the world, fulfilling Christ’s mission in word and deed; being a deliberate and winsome verbal witness to Jesus Christ, offering his compassion to those in need.

We know that serving the Body of Christ is not a three-year term of office and that we are all ordained to ministry in our baptism. I remember a summer Bible study in which we were studying the subject of spiritual gifts. Kevin Ball, though fairly new to the guitar, was our music leader. During the course of that study, several people said, “Kevin, you have the gift of music and certainly the gift to exhort and build up people with your music.” Kevin was stunned. It was the first time he had received that kind of affirmation. That very moment was the start of a remarkable ministry. He became an outstanding guitarist and worship leader. He had found his gift and the place to which he had been sent to serve within the church.

So, let me touch on this matter of being a deliberate and winsome verbal witness to Jesus Christ. Larry and Marian were leaders of a couple’s fellowship in our church. One evening the leadership team of the group were meeting in a home to do some planning. After the meeting, Marian walked over to me and said, “Stan, my neighbor and friend came over to my home this morning. She has been going through some tough times in her marriage and in her health. She said to me, ‘Marian, I see something in you that give you strength and vitality and I need it so desperately. Marian, what is it that you have?’”

“Stan,” Marian continued, “I know what she is referring to. Its Jesus Christ... but Stan, I just can’t talk to her about that. You are a pastor. You can talk about these things. Stan, would you be willing to speak to my friend?” I told her, “No!” I said, “Marian, your friend has seen the vitality of Christ in you, she has sensed His presence in you, and your life is the fragrance that has drawn her to you. However, I would be willing to help you with how to approach her and what you might say.” With that little urging and a little preparation, Marian went on to have a very special and life-changing
conversation with her friend.

In the vast majority of cases, American Christians today do not speak about their faith in a personal conversational way, even when given an obvious opportunity to do it. In my opinion, until we are in face-to-face small groups and learn to be comfortable speaking of spiritual things with other believers we are not going to be very direct in speaking of Christ with those presently outside the faith.

**THE HABIT OF WORK – OFFERING MY WORK TO THE LORD**

Doing my work, serving the Lord as my employer.

Committing myself to excellence in work responsibilities and relationships, in order to please Christ.

“Standing in the gap” to bring Biblical ethics, integrity, and justice to my world - whether in my home, school, the marketplace, or community.

Your work matters to God. Work is not a punishment but a calling. Sir Christopher Wren was the British architect who designed St. Paul Cathedral. He was directing the construction when he stopped to talk to one of the laborers at the building site. “What is it that you do here?” asked Christopher Wren. The laborer was a cement mixer that didn’t realize who Wren was. “Can’t you see, Sir, “ he said, “I am building a great cathedral.”

Here’s a question for you. Does God introduce the concept of work to Adam before or after the fall, before or after his expulsion from Eden? A lot of people think it was after the fall as part of God’s punishment. In Genesis One, God says, “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it” (1:28). “The Lord took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (2:15). Indeed the very act of creating was the work of God (1:2).

Martin Luther King was to say, “If a person is called to be a street sweeper, that person should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. The streets would be swept so well that all the host of heaven and earth will pause to say, ‘Here lived a great street sweeper who did

his job well.’' The habit of work is to understand God gives dignity to all work and that your work matters to God.

When Dick Halverson was an associate pastor at the Hollywood Presbyterian Church, he went to see his dentist, Jimmy Sheetz. Jimmy was on the Board of Deacons and was president of the Homebuilders Class, that involved some one thousand young married couples. He was in church every Sunday and every Wednesday night. Dick says, “I was in Jimmy’s dentist chair, and he did what dentists do. He filled my mouth and asked me a question!’’ “Dick, I’ve been asked by the Board of Education of Inglewood (a suburb of LA) to be president of the Board. This will require a great deal of my time. It will mean that I can only come to church Sunday morning. I will have to be relieved of my job in the Deaconate, and I will no longer be able to run the Homebuilders class. What do you think?’’

Dick said,

Well, you know, I was raging inside. What right does the Inglewood Board of Education have to take Jimmy Sheetz out of the Hollywood Church? But because I couldn’t speak, I had to listen and God began to speak to me.” “How many members are there in the Hollywood Presbyterian Church?’’ God asked. About 8000, I guessed. God said, “How many does it take to run the church?’’ I made a quick estimate and came out with about 750. And God said, “What about the other 7250 members? Are they just to be unemployed? Wouldn’t it be wonderful, Dick if every Board of Education was headed by a godly person like Jimmy Sheetz?

As soon as I got out of the chair, I said, ‘Jimmy, take the job.’ Back at my office I calculated that if every person could have only one job in the church, it would take about 630 people to run the religious establishment of that big church. I realized I was so jealous of the members of the church that I resented it when the world called them out of church busyness. I then remembered Jesus’ prayer that the Father has sent disciples into the world just as He sent Jesus. I would have pulled every member out of the world into church busyness and then God really rebuked me. I saw that the church was doing its most effective work when it was invisible, scattered, everywhere, the salt of the earth penetrating the earth. This is the real influence and witness of the
church, not the things that are visible, but what’s happening when the church is scattered and invisible in the world and penetrating all of its organizations and institutions. So, [said Dick], I learned to make a distinction between church work, which is what you do for the establishment and the work of the church which is what the church is doing between Sundays -- child rearing, practicing law, dentistry, teaching, doing the work that honors God.”

The measure of the effectiveness of a local church is not when the sanctuary is full on Sunday morning, and the programs are in operation. The measure of the effectiveness of the church is what’s happening when the sanctuary is empty, the parking lot is empty, and the programs are not in operation, and people are scattered all over a metropolitan area, penetrating all of the organizations and institutions of that area, because where they are Christ is - in them. You are the church.” -- Richard C. Halverson

So the place you work is a significant venue for ministry. My friend, Kerwin was manager of a Pizza Hut in an inner city area. One winter he discovered the street people who were spending the night on the hot air grills along the sidewalk behind his store. There were so many people sleeping on the grills that the air wasn’t flowing out properly and expensive heat exchanger equipment was burning up. His corporate bosses wanted a screening mechanism placed over the grills so that people could no longer block the airflow. His quandary was simple. He knew those people depended on that hot air to survive. At expense to his own store, he devised a solution that left the hot air grills in place and let those people continue to receive heat. That’s standing in the gap on behalf of the land.

Conclusion

When I study a list of Christian spiritual habits, I never read them with a false sense of guilt, “Oh my, look at all the things I am not doing or not doing well.” Instead I say, “Lord, I know you have a lot of work left to shape me into the image of Jesus. As I study these spiritual habits, help me zero in on a habit to develop. Help me make it a spiritual discipline, a chosen habit until it is who I am.”
It is easy to take a list of Christian practices and turn them into a sort of yardstick of spirituality. Then easily we find ourselves putting people next to this yardstick of spirituality to “measure” them. We may be heard to say (or think), “What, Janet doesn’t have a devotional life?” “Jorge isn’t in a small group?” “Sondra never practices hospitality.” Such an approach may be an accurate assessment of a person’s life reflection of basic Christian disciplines but it feels judgmental and overbearing. Lists such as the Seven Habits of the Burning Heart are offered merely as a guide on how to grow in the intimacy of our friendship with God and the expression of God’s love in and through our own lives. We should approach such a list with humility recognizing that all of us fall far short; and with grace, we use the list to guide our growth in ways that affirm and encourage those with whom we are growing the fire in our hearts.

A profile of a disciple’s life, such as these seven habits, or like the Sermon on the Mount or the Fruit of the Spirit are lists of grace that can be used in a very positive way to show us where to grow. Our people are missing out on the joy of personal devotional Quiet Time. Let’s teach them how. Our people haven’t discovered the incredibly wonderful Christian friendships that come from being in a small group. How can we help them set aside what fears they may have and try a small group just for seven weeks? Our teenagers do not know how to speak of Jesus Christ in winsome, effective ways. Let’s give them a picture of grace.

Be sent to fan the flame of the burning heart for our Lord that beats in you!