

Eight Good Habits

4. Make it a Habit to Cultivate Community

Luke 19:1-10

Preached: 10/03/2021, Germantown;

Message: Make It a Habit to Cultivate Community

We are in a series of sermon studies on the subject of **Habits**. A few months ago, I came across an article on ChurchLeaders.com, written by Neal Samudre. The title of the article is: **8 Habits of Christians Who Live Out Their Faith Every Day, Not Just on Sunday.**

Habit; NOUN

1. a settled or regular tendency or practice, especially one that is hard to give up.

Samudre is concerned that too often we push our faith to the margins of our life.

“[we] let the things that matter drown in our flooded schedules. This is what has happened to many of us. We’ve let our faith become a Sunday thing, not a 24/7 thing.”

Samudre identifies some practices that will help us to live out our faith everyday. As these practices become habits we will see our lives changing. As these habits are engrained into our being, we will find that our **Christian lifestyle will be consistent**. We will not be subject to the accusation that we are **hypocrites** – saying one thing on Sunday when we are “in Church” or with other believers – but living something different the rest of the week when we are with our unbelieving family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, fellow students. A hypocrite is a play-actor – pretending to be something they are not.

So far have talked about three practices that we are trying to turn into habits:

1. People who live out their faith every day are in the habit of having “Restorative Times” built into their days.
2. People who live out their faith every day are in the habit of serving others or demonstrating love as a reflex. They don’t have to schedule “Loving or serving”. It is automatic.
3. People who live out their faith every day are in the habit of considering character over other outcomes
- 4.

Now today, we are talking about **Cultivating Community**. Samudre says it like this: ***“Creating Community is about adding value to people’s lives. It recognizes that people are not to be used but loved.”***

“A person who lives out their faith every day is involved in the messy work of creating community because they believe people are in their lives for a godly purpose – not to be wasted for a quick flash of entertainment.”

For those of you who come down more on the Extrovert side of the personality profile, connecting with people will come more easily for you. For those of us who fall on the Introvert side of the profile line, this is hard work. But it is important.

Let me try to dig in a bit into what Samudre says here and then we will look at our Biblical text. When we hear the words “Cultivate Community” the picture that comes to mind initially is getting a group of people together for a specific purpose, or getting a group of people to sit down around a camp fire and sing Kum Ba Ya. Community is a locality where a group of people live. We only think of community in terms of a large number of people. When Samudre talks about cultivating community, he is talking about it on a much smaller scale – one to one. **Cultivating community is making a connection with one person by affirming that they have value and worth.** Cultivating community is trying to let someone know that they are loved for who they are, not for what we can get out of them. **People are “In your life” for a godly purpose.** I think this is a powerful practice to embrace and develop in our lives. This habit has the **potential to significantly alter the direction**

of someone's life. Samudre suggests that we must make this practice of connecting with others a regular part of our life and daily behavior.

The four gospels are filled with examples of Jesus cultivating community. As the one who came into the world to save the world, the picture that we have of Jesus is not one of him gathering people so that he could use them. To get people to like him, or puff up his ego. He certainly calls people to a life of following and serving, but his primary focus is on reaching out to people so that their lives would be transformed.

- A Samaritan Woman at a well
- A centurion
- Matthew
- The Paralytic who was carried by four of his friends to Jesus
- Mary and Martha
- Simon the Pharisee

The encounter that I want to focus on today is His encounter with a man named Zacchaeus. Perhaps you are familiar with Zacchaeus' story. Many of us sang a song in Sunday School about him when we were children. But his story is more than a cute song for toddlers. It is a story for grownups. Zacchaeus lived in Jericho, an economically prosperous city. Zacchaeus was a tax collector. Tax collectors were representatives of the hated Romans. They contracted with the Roman government to collect from the citizens of the land and give that money to the Roman government. Their income came by extortion – often taking more money from the people than they were required to give to the Romans. His practice of extortion made him a very wealthy man. Luke also says that he was a Chief tax Collector. That meant that he had a cadre of sub-collectors that he had recruited and supervised, who likely would have paid him a portion of their take. Zacchaeus was a hated man – He was a sinner. Vs. 7 **All the people muttered, "[Jesus] has gone to be the guest of a sinner."** Zacchaeus learned that Jesus was coming to Jericho. We assume that Zacchaeus had heard of Jesus, because he wants to see him. No explanation is given as to why he wanted to see him. Just curious? As the crowds lined the street where Jesus was passing by, Zacchaeus had a problem. A couple of things prevented him from seeing Jesus. First of all, he is a short man. He would never be able to see over top of the tall people in front of him to get a glimpse of Jesus. But there is a second reason why Zacchaeus would not be able to see Jesus. It would be impossible for him to get to the front of the crowd. The people knew who he was. They hated him. No one was about to step aside and let this short man through to the front of the crowd.

Zacchaeus found a solution to his problem. In order to get above the crowd to see Jesus, he climbs up into a sycamore-fig tree. I suppose he tried to be inconspicuous, or incognito. Jesus could have easily walked on by without noticing this small man up in the tree. But he doesn't. He stops under the tree, calls to the man perched on a branch, invites him to come down and take him to his home, and then invites himself for dinner. And Zacchaeus comes down from the tree, and gladly welcomes Jesus into his home. Jesus cultivates community with Zacchaeus. In spite of his lifestyle, he is a person who has worth and value. Jesus wants him to know that. We don't have a record of what they talked about at Zacchaeus' home. Jesus engages in a lot of "Table Fellowship", in his ministry and many lives are changed as a result. As the story is recorded, Zacchaeus' life was changed.

Again, Samudre writes **"A person who lives out their faith every day is involved in the messy work of creating community because they believe people are in their lives for a godly purpose – not to be wasted for a quick flash of entertainment."**

Jesus was willing to involve himself in **the messy work of creating community.** What was messy about reaching out to Zacchaeus? Jesus is now attacked and criticized – He has gone to be the guest of a sinner. Jesus **risks his reputation.** Jesus risks turning people away who would have followed him because he has welcomed a "Sinner" into his community. The grace of cultivating community often appears to be scandalous. But Jesus pursues him and makes a connection with him. And that connection results in a dramatically changed life. **Actually many lives were impacted by Zacchaeus' change of heart.** I'll give half to the poor and pay back 4 times as much if I have stolen. Jesus reaching out to Zacchaeus opens his heart to be merciful to others.

Listen to these words from Chuck Colson:

“Finally take Jesus as your model – reach out to identify with the most unloveable, those hurting inside, many sick and despairing in ghettos, in prisons. There are people who have never come into our Churches. And without you going to them, they never will.

The most convincing evidence for me of Christ's deity is the supernatural capacity He demonstrated to relate to every human being He came into contact with. He didn't say 'Wash up, put on your best clothes, and let me take you to the temple'. If those I need were in the gutter, He was in the gutter with them. If they were suffering, He was suffering. And that is why He touched everyone He dealt with, except the hard-hearted religious people of His day.”

Everyday, God brings people across the pathway of your life. Do you respond to them at all? Do you acknowledge them? Do you interact with them? Do you affirm their value and worth by simply spending a minute with them? Welcoming them into your circle? Christians who live out their faith every day, are in the habit of cultivating community with others.

Developing a new habit requires making a plan. When you are confronted with a situation where you encounter another person, what will you say? How will you interact with that person. You could be the person who changes their life.

Prayer

Lord's Supper