

20 July 2014

7 Habits for Christians - 5

“Seek Interdependence”

The first three habits in this series are all about self-discipline. 1. Be proactive, rather than reactive; that’s gotta come from within. 2. Begin with the end in mind; know what is your personal mission, what God has made you for, what God has given you to do; that’s internal knowledge. 3. Put first things first; don’t let good things crowd out excellent things, the things you have to do and be in order to fulfill the mission you have identified; this, too, you can do pretty much without anyone else noticing.

Stephen Covey calls these private victories. When you work these first three habits you are working on yourself. The next three habits are about public victories, that is becoming more effective with other people. The thing is, you pretty much have to get the private victories down if you want to get to the public victories. You just can’t parachute into this terrain. If you try to do that, it won’t work. Other people will recognize that your are a fake.

Think of it this way. Let’s say there is a church that wants to grow. But the reason it wants to grow is that it’s having trouble meeting its budget. It wants new members not to spread the Gospel or expand ministry or for any of God’s purposes but rather to meet its own needs. So it engages in some really effective marketing practices, and lo and behold, people come. But when they come, they discover that there is a core group that runs things its way and isn’t interested in new way of thinking. And they discover that this core group cares about the people they know and not so much about the newcomers. The newcomers will sniff that out in a hurry. And they’ll leave. And who could blame them? If that church genuinely wants to grow, it needs to get its act together first.

If you or I and or you and I together at Living Water genuinely want to be effective with other people, we need to get our act together first. And that takes work. And re-work. I worked on this stuff about 15 years ago, and while I would definitely not hold myself up as an example, it was really helpful. I’m working on it again, and I have discovered that I have let some things drift. Just as churches almost always experience mission drift over time, I have let some things slip over time. So now I’m re-working my mission and trying to put first things first.

Here’s the catch phrase for today’s sermon: You can’t have the fruits without the roots.

Each year at Living Water we begin with fruits of the Spirit. You may have discovered that just because you got a little yellow card that said love or joy or peace or patience or generosity or one of the other five fruits doesn’t mean that fruit automatically comes to you. It’s a fruit, not a gift. And fruits have to be cultivated. To produce that fruit, you have to let God’s Spirit take root in you. You have to be open to changes in you God’s Spirit might want to make. And it might be that the only way you’re going to produce that fruit is by cultivating it in other people. In other words, You can’t have the fruits without the roots.

That being said, I want to introduce the public victories by talking about emotional bank accounts. You know how bank accounts work. You make deposits; maybe you make a tiny, tiny bit of interest; and you make withdrawals. If you overdraw, if you try to withdraw more than you have deposited, you're gonna pay.

Now apply that to your important relationships and act on it and you'll both have a happier life and be more effective with other people. You make deposits; you make withdrawals. If you don't make enough deposits, when you need a withdrawal, the help won't be there. If you over draw your account, you're gonna pay.

When I rolled around on the floor with my kids, wrestling and tickling and letting them climb all over me, I was making a deposit. When I yelled at them or made them do something they didn't want to do (as parents must sometimes do), I was making a withdrawal. When I listen to a co-worker and try to help him or her through a problem, I am making a deposit. When I order, or even ask nicely, them to do something for me, I am making a withdrawal.

It's really pretty simple. Now, simple doesn't mean easy. If you're thinking of a strained relationship right now, you know full well that making deposits in an effort to re-activate the account, the relationship, might be a bit dicey and require a lot of effort over a lot of time. So simple doesn't always mean easy. But it does mean simple. You want to be effective with people? Make deposits. Want Living Water to be effective with people outside its walls? Let's find a way to make deposits.

I mean, how has God worked at relationships with people? God calls Abraham, making promises and giving gifts. And the laws of this sometimes demanding God? Israel didn't see them so much as demands from an angry God as it did a way of living that leads to a good life. Does God ask a lot, make a some big withdrawals? You bet. Make no mistake, God demands a great deal from us. Those demands come only after God makes some HUGE deposits which begin with the gift of life itself and continue with outpourings of presence, blessings, Spirit, Jesus, cross, body and blood, forgiveness, salvation, resurrection.

See how it works?