

“The Five Habits of Highly Spiritual People”

1 Peter 4:12-14 and 5:6-11

12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

5: 6-11 6 Humble yourselves therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. 7 Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. 8 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your fellow believers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and may you strong, firm, and steadfast. 11 To Him be the power for ever and ever. AMEN.

Business leadership guru Stephen Covey wrote a book published back in 1989 that was titled “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People”. Covey sold over 10 million copies. It was on the New York Times best seller list for over 220 weeks (over 4 years). Corporate America has snapped up Covey’s books, tapes, CD’s and lined up to attend his seminars as though he were offering them secret insider-trader information. So what in the world is this business leadership guru selling? The evangelical message that doing well means doing good and that doing good means being good!

Covey is preaching that principles and morals, values and accountability actually belong in the office place. Several years ago I spent four days with Max Depree who was the CEO of Herman Miller Company while it grew from 40 employees to 4,000. Everything Max Depree spoke about oozed the same message that Stephen Covey expresses in his book, that of “principle-centered leadership.” [NOTE 1]

Qualities that result in “principle-centered leadership” include nothing more than fairness, integrity, honesty, human dignity, respect, service, quality, and excellence. In order for a business or any other entity to flourish and grow, they must undergo a moral transformation. Things like downsizing, profit sharing, home offices, electronic networking---none of these will guarantee a corporation a bright future like “principle-centered leadership” can and does.

The secret, Covey, maintains, is eliciting a change of heart, a sense of soul, at the level of every member of the organization. None of the quote “7 Habits” that Covey teaches in his book are all that startling. They include: “1) Be proactive, take initiative, be responsible, 2) Begin with the end in mind—envision the outcome you want, while maintaining your values. You must know what your priorities are, 3) Put first things first—allow your values to discipline your feelings and impulses, 4) think win/win—

keep a “no losers” attitude, 5) Seek first to understand, then to be understood—focus on listening, not on replying, 6) Synergize—which means to enable more energy to be released that was put in, and 7) Sharpen the saw—cultivate yourself—a saw quickly becomes worthless if it is not sharpened—in the same way we need to do things that will sharpen us physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, and spiritually.

My question is that if corporate America is making Stephen Covey a rich man, convinced that his message of moral transformation is the key to success and well-being, then why are our churches still half-empty on Sunday morning? Or maybe the better way to ask that question is why are our churches only half-full on Sunday mornings? Why is it suddenly okay to be principled and spiritually aware in the office Monday thru Friday, but not on Sunday morning? Why are Sundays still reserved for an early golf game, sleeping in, or a leisurely brunch??

Now I know that Stephen Covey does not have the last word in encouraging moral and spiritual growth. What he has done, though, through his books and CD's is to make it clear to all who will listen how crucial their personal and moral and spiritual health is to the welfare of the entire corporate structure. Perhaps it is time for the Church to demand more from its members than their physical presence on Sunday morning. The church must make it clear that it ALSO demands spiritual leadership from every person. Maybe the principles that Jesus taught His disciples are necessary to the welfare of the whole societal structure!?! What a concept huh?

Now, please don't get upset, I know that many of you in this church are giving so much of your time and energy to this ministry that some of you may be on the edge of burnout. Please know that I am very appreciative that almost every single person and family in this church serves in some capacity. When looking back at the Neighborhood Cookout it was easier to think of who didn't volunteer to help. Because almost everybody helped in some way. **[NOTE 2]**

My point this morning is that Peter in these last two chapters of his letter is offering the Gentile Christians his own version of what is needed for us to successfully negotiate life in the midst of a hostile pagan culture. I am calling these needed things, “The Five Habits of Highly Spiritual People,” the title of this sermon. The Christians that Peter addressed were faced with consequences more dire than a production slow down or an increased interest rate. Their very lives and future welfare were threatened by the fact that they dared to be Christians at all. For many it was a life threatening decision.

The “Five Habits” Peter suggest offered those believers a way to remain in the midst of a foreign culture, yet stand apart as members of the distinctive church community. Peter knew those believers of his day needed to be about growing good habits so that bad habits wouldn't be allowed to take root.

An old teacher was once taking a walk through the forest with a pupil by his side. The old man suddenly stopped and pointed to four plants close by the path. The first was just beginning to peep above the ground, the second had rooted itself pretty well into the earth and the third was a small shrub. The fourth plant was a full-sized tree. The

teacher said to his young companion: “Pull up the first.” The boy easily pulled it up with his thumb and fore-finger. “Now pull up the second.” The youth obeyed, but found the task not quite so easy this time. “Now pull up the third,” said the teacher. The boy had to put forth all his strength, and using both arms and legs, after much jerking, yanking and groaning he finally uprooted the shrub. “And now,” said the master, “try your hand at the fourth.” The trunk of the tall tree barely moved in the arms of the youth. The leaves didn’t even move. “This, my son, is just what happens with our bad habits. When they are young, we can get rid of them quite easily with the help of God; but when they are old and have taken root in our lives it is extremely difficult, though we pray and struggle ever so sincerely.”

People of God, the same is true of good habits. The sooner we develop good habits the quicker they become rooted in our daily lives. Devotions, prayer, Bible reading, Bible memorization, and study should be good habits that we cultivate so that they are deeply rooted and impossible to pull out just like that tall tree. **[NOTE 3]**

The five habits that I have identified from the fourth and fifth chapters of Peter’s letter are these: Highly spiritual people dream, they scheme, they work as a team, on God they lean, and their focus on the Word of God is like a beam. I am hoping that by making them rhyme you can commit them to memory more easily. The first habit of highly spiritual people that I want to talk about is the habit of living a dream. Don’t be afraid to dream God-sized dreams. One church I was affiliated with had a Dream Team/committee that continually challenged the church with things that could not be accomplished on simple people power. If we never dream things that can only be accomplished by God we will only reap human sized fruit instead of God-sized fruit. Part of dreaming is keeping alert to what God is doing around us so that we can come alongside and work with Him. Seek to be attuned to everything happening around you without necessarily getting sucked into anything that is not of God. That means turning the dial around some to tune in to God’s radio station, pay attention to where the fruit is being produced in the community, then start to scheme.

The second habit of highly spiritual people is the habit of scheming. Scheming is gotten a bad rap because Paul tells us to not give in to the schemes of the devil. But he never tells us not to scheme good things into our lives that can lead to the dream. Seek to lead a disciplined life that your dreams may come true. Keep a clear head about your life and your life projects. Decide ahead of time what your values and priorities are. Make the time to put them on paper. Then come up with a plan, scheme if you will, to work toward the goal or dream. Putting things on paper helps us to clarify and define the thoughts rattling around in our heads. Decide what is the most important. Order your priorities. Stay focused on God’s plan and purpose for your life. Make a plan for when you are tempted. Come up with a scheme to deal with temptation when it comes. If you have a scheme or plan in place ahead of time, you are more likely to achieve your dream, resist the temptation, and have some success and produce some fruit by the power of the Holy Spirit within you. Run all your decisions through the filter of your priorities and values. That is what the Consistory seeks to do. We have our Vision, our

Mission, and our Core Values. By God's Grace I pray that we make no decisions that do not fall in line with our Core Values and that we are always doing our best to keep things moving toward each and every one of us becoming disciple-makers in the power of the Holy Spirit, by standing on God's Word, walking in love, and resting in the arms of Jesus.

The third habit is to be a team. Use the word team as an acronym for Together Everyone Accomplishes More. Yes, you have heard that before. It is a great principle to remember and live by. Humble yourself in the realization that you can't do it alone! We can't do anything outside of power of the Holy Spirit that produces fruit. There is no such thing as a vital, growing, lone-ranger Christian. We must admit our weakness and fight the urge to go through life solo. We must rely on God's strength as well as networking with others. The Old Testament image of "The mighty hand of God" pointed out the difference between divine power and the humble human condition. God's "Hand" is God's active intervention in human history for the saving sake of God's people.

1 Peter suggest that by humbly putting ourselves in God's hands, we can rest assured that God will "exalt" us. Humility is transformed into exaltation in the Divine Hand. An Italian proverb helps us here: "Once the game is over, the king and pawn go back into the same box." It is referring to the game of chess. A revivalist used to say, "God has not gone on vacation and left you in charge." But isn't that how we act sometimes? Don't we try to do things on our own over and over again, like God is gone on vacation somewhere?

The fourth habit of highly spiritual people is leaning. "Cast all your cares on Him." Cast all your anxieties, all your worries, on God ... that anchor holds! Believe in God's care, trusting in God's love. Remember that God's love is infinite and unconditional. It is without limit and it is without condition. Remember that Jesus promised us that He would never leave us nor forsake us. We must depend on God if we are to live a successful Christian life and produce fruit like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

The fifth or final habit of highly spiritual people is that of beaming. We are all called to beam in on God's Word for strength, for steadfastness, and confidence. Instead of saying, "Beam me up Scotty" as Captain Kirk often said on the TV series and in the movie series, "Star Trek." We should be saying "Beam me the Word, Lord." A beam of light is formed when you focus and intensify light by forcing more light through a smaller opening. We should be forcing as much of the Word of God through our small opening of a life as possible. Firmness and faithfulness are byproducts of marinating one's life in the Word of God. That means you spend time with God in prayer and in His Word, you give it time to soak in and effect your character just as a marinade soaks into the meat and gives it flavor.

The five habits are things we need to cultivate in our lives if we want to be effective spiritual disciples of Christ. We must learn and seek to dream, scheme, team, lean, and beam. The first Gentile Christians struggling to maintain their identity and

survive in a hostile culture must have learned successfully to adopt these “five habits,” for they obviously inspired another generation to join them. The church is always dependent on the current generation to witness to and bring in the next succession of believers—to think of that in a somewhat negative way, it could be said that the church is always just one generation away from extinction. **[NOTE 4]**

I preached a sermon in my first year here titled, “The Three Chairs” based largely on Bruce Wilkinson’s message given several times to thousands of men at Promise Keeper’s stadium events across the country. In this message Wilkinson illustrates how several times in the Old Testament, we see one generation serving the Lord, followed by a generation that knows God but doesn’t serve well and a third generation growing up not knowing the Lord at all. All of us need to decide that no matter what, a priority in our life will be to learn to be a disciple who makes disciples so that the church can survive and grow. Realize that nobody is worthy of God’s use, but He still chooses to use us. He uses us cracked and broken pots to carry His Word to others. Don’t let the next generation grow up without knowing the Lord and these five good habits. Our young people need to know that they cannot live off the faith of their parents or grandparents. They need to dream, scheme, work as a team, lean on God and focus on His Word like a beam ...of light.

Our children need to see how a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit is different, powerful, effective and fruitful. They need to know that the Holy Spirit can make a difference in the world through them if they will only let it. Cultivate in your life the habits of dreaming God-sized dreams, scheming to live by God’s Word, His values and priorities and have a plan on how to deal with temptation. They need to know what it looks like to make it a habit to team up with God and His Family, our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our children need to see what it looks like to lean on God and to focus our life on His Word so much so that people notice. Dream, Scheme, Team, Lean and Beam. Please do something about this! Help Jamie and Angela Roush, Ken and Daisy Skibbe, Jim and Sarah Nicholas, Brian and Amy Tack as parents of teenagers, and all of us parents and grandparents to not allow the next generation to grow up not know Jesus as Lord and Savior. Shine your light, example them, teach them, love them, and point them toward Jesus every chance you get.

Let’s pray ...Lord, God, there is only one piece of wood between us and certain death. Only a piece of wood between us and eternal separation from You. That piece of wood is the cross. Lord, grant us the courage and the wisdom to serve You. Teach us Your ways. Bring forth in us the fruits of the Spirit. May love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control come to characterize our lives. Help us to build into our lives good habits that lead us toward being more like You. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, the master of the art of living. AMEN

**Sermon Notes for “The Five Habits of Highly Spiritual People” based on 1 Peter
4:12-14 and 5:6-11
Given October 25, 2015 at Voice of Hope Church**

- I. People like Max Depree and Stephen Covey made integrity and honesty in the workplace popular again in the 90’s. They called it “principle-centered leadership.” Covey’s “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” are basically:
 - a. Be proactive, take initiative, be responsible.
 - b. Begin with the end in mind—envision the outcome you want, while maintaining your values. You must know what your priorities are and make decisions accordingly.
 - c. Put first things first—allow your values to discipline your feelings and impulses, use your time according to priorities.
 - d. Think win/win—keep a “no losers” attitude.
 - e. Seek first to understand, then to be understood—focus on listening, not on replying.
 - f. Synergize—which means to enable more energy to be released than was put in.
 - g. Sharpen the saw—cultivate yourself—a saw quickly becomes worthless if it is not sharpened—in the same way we need to do things that will sharpen us physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, and spiritually.
- II. Peter gives us a list of things needed by the Gentile Christians of his day to successfully negotiate life in the midst of a hostile pagan culture. It is very important to develop good habits. The sooner we develop good habits the more likely they will be to become deeply rooted and impossible to remove.
- III. Highly Spiritual people need to develop good habits to negotiate life well and have an impact on their community.
 - a. Dream God-sized dreams**
 - b. Scheme – they depend on God to help them plan.**
 - c. Work as a Team, with other Christians and the Holy Spirit.**
 - d. On God they Lean – they realize they can’t do it on their own.**
 - e. Focus on God’s Word like a laserbeam.**
- IV. We are responsible for the next generation. Our children need to see how a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit is different, more powerful, effective and fruitful.