

# What church is.... Spiritual habits

## – 27<sup>th</sup> Feb 2011

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### **Reading: Romans 12**

Over the last 3 weeks Richard has been speaking to us of “what Church is...!”.

He described the Church as a **place of rest and welcome for the alien and the stranger**. That it is a place where there is **room for each individual to grow** as the disciple Jesus calls them to be. Last week Richard showed us that the **Church means community** where our hearts are changed by Gods Spirit so that we may live in harmony with ourselves, each other and the world.

Today, in the last of this series, we want to say that **Church is also about spiritual habits**.

In Romans 12 Paul encourages us, that in light of all that God has done for us through Christ, *to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice*. When we answer Christ’s call to become one of his followers a change occurs. In our baptism we acknowledge that we die to ourselves, rising to a new life in Christ. And that is the thing, it is a new life, a journey, a travelling along a road that Christ leads us by his Spirit. The Church is a body, made up of individuals who are daily offering themselves as a living sacrifice. So what does this life as a living sacrifice look like? The rest of chapter 12 goes on to answer some of that question and Paul begins by saying “*do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your minds***”. Our minds have been influenced and shaped by the world. Last week Richard reminded us that it is the heart which must be changed first. All knowledge and understanding of Christ’s love will have no real impact on us until we allow him in to our hearts.

But having done this we need God to continue his restoration work in us by the renewal of our minds, by changing the way we think and understand the world and how we are to live in it.

Often that looks totally the opposite to how our world tells us to think and act. Instead of cursing those who persecute us we are to bless them, rather than taking vengeance respond with good. In view of the events of this week many have spoken of a loss of hope, of uncertainty about the future, not knowing how to carry on. Christ is the head of the body called the Church who live in the light of the resurrection. The resurrection is our assurance that whatever occurs in this life, there is always hope.

So how does this renewal process occur? I believe it happens largely in the day to day devotional habits that we commit to. We live by habits. Whether its how we prepare ourselves in the morning for the day ahead, how we shop for groceries, how we ready ourselves for classes, tests or exams. Habits shape our day. Regular habits that allow us to interact and live in relationship with God change us. Our devotional habits have the power to shape not just our day but to change our thinking.

What might these devotional habits look like. There is a danger that we hear how someone else does it and we seek to make that a habit for ourselves. "They read and study the bible for an hour a day, they pray on their knees morning and night every day, they walk in the bush every Sunday". We need to acknowledge that we are all at different ages and stages in life, we are all made differently, what works for one will not for another. I have asked 5 people to share of one devotional habit that has worked for them. As they share may we be reminded of devotional habits that have helped us "be transformed".

People to share 2-3min testimony of:

*Faith stimulators in personal devotional life*

*Key thing that has kept them strong with God*

Dave Baab – Scripture memorisation

Phil Hill – daily Bible reading notes

Michelle Summerfield – prayer walking

Lydia Mills – Journalling

Adrienne Knowles – speaking with God plainly

Have you heard of Horatio Spafford? Weird name but encouraging story. He lived in America in the later half of the 1800's. As a prominent lawyer in Chicago he owned a significant number of properties. In 1871, the great Chicago fire swept through the city destroying almost everything he owned. He was a man of deep faith and trusted God. After two years of rebuilding he decided he should take his family for a holiday to England where his good friend D L Moody, the preacher and evangelist was to be there at the same time. A business commitment came up at the last minute and so he sent his wife Anna on ahead with their four daughters aged 11, 9, 5 and 2. On the trip across the Atlantic their ship collided with another and sank, only Anna survived, all four of the Spaffords daughters were drowned. On hearing the news Horatio rushed to join his wife in England. The Captain of the ship he was on showed Horatio the location where he believed the sinking had occurred and as he past by the billowing, swirling waters that had received his daughters Spafford wrote these words. "It is well with my soul". How was he able to speak with such hope in the face of such great and terrible tragedy?

His broken heart was in relationship with the God of hope. The God who can cope with our cries of anger and pain, can bring peace and comfort when we fall to our knees in anguish, can bring hope when all hope seems gone.

Our devotional habits, whatever they look like for us in our situation, can create space in our lives for God to transform our minds.

In renewing our minds we are not just changed as individuals but as a body, for the faith of each individual, the gifts and talents God has for us to bring are all important to the health and growth of his Church.

Devotional habits are not magic charms. They do not ensure safety from the troubles of this world.

But devotional habits can and will change us to see God's heart for the world he has created, God's hope promised to us in Christ, and God's healing to hearts that are bruised and hardened.

Paul writes:

<sup>12</sup>*Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.*

In response to the horror of the earthquake this week, to the pain of whatever situations we face may we encourage each other to continue devotional habits that will help us to stand strong in uncertain times and live as the Church should live, as a place of hope.