

I recently read a book titled 8 Habits of Love by an American Episcopalian priest Ed Bacon. What also caught my eye was the forward written by the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The book was about embracing love and not fear. 8 points in a reflection are far too many but most of them are basic.

1. The habit of generosity.

The energy of love, approaching life from your loving self knows no limits. Whenever someone loves, more love is generated. Life flows, imaginative ideas multiply, cooperation and goodwill spread, fear diminishes. Generosity is about approaching the world from a loving, tolerant, open-minded place.

Generosity means giving of our time, resources, but it also means giving people the benefit of the doubt. Seeing the world from another perspective. It is about blessing others. These blessings flow back to us in a myriad of ways. To flow is the root of the word affluent.

I've always thought that despite whatever happens to us, life is good, God is good and the universe is kind. If we are fearful about life the universe is not kind. Generosity is in fact giving a blessing.

The more we give the more we receive.

Sometimes we struggle with generosity. Ingratitude is one of the most destructive character trait of all. It destroys relationships.

Each night before I go to sleep I look back over the days activities and remember the things I've done and the people I've met.

2. The Habit of Stillness.

Stillness is pivotal in overcoming the fear and anxiety that surrounds us.

Thomas Keating a Trappist monk once said that our minds, heart and souls are like a basin of silty water, when stirred the water is cloudy and our vision obscured. But when the water has been at rest the silt filters down to the bottom, leaving the water clear.

Frenzy of normal life is all around us, we need to slow down and take it easy. This stops us acting defensively in life and relationships. It is controlling our fear. Practice stillness in our own unique way. Coming to stillness is about opening our own minds to change.

A mantra that has been helpful to me over the years is a. Be present, b. Be focussed, c. Be still. So now if I have a difficult situation to face I practice stillness.

3. The habit of truth.

We have to follow truth, it does not follow us. It transforms our plans. Seekers of truth can build communities of love.

Many years ago when on study leave in Singapore I did a paper on Islamic Worship. I was able to meet with a leading Islamic scholar Mulavi Abu Sarb. The only stipulation he made, he would do so if I was a seeker of the truth.

We are called to be true to ourselves. I've always liked Spong's definition of Christianity. Live fully. Love generously and have the courage to be the person God intended you to be.

4. The habit of candor.

It is very difficult in how to voice an opinion that may unbalance, anger or put on the defensive the person you are addressing. The fact that you can share a different perspective and still respect one another is among the highest compliment we can pay someone. We need to get rid of the fear to speak our minds.

A fascinating story in the Bible is David's seduction of Bathsheba. She becomes pregnant and David arranges to have her husband killed in battle. Nathan the prophet tells David that his actions were inexcusable. He tells David a parable about a rich man who steals a poor man's beloved pet sheep.

Speaking truth to power. Fear based avoidance of frank conversations set us up to act out our resentments or other difficult feelings. Candor requires courage. It is tricky to get candor right, sometimes it is better to keep your mouth shut. Practicing candor cannot be achieved without some expression of love. Since the goal is to be heard for what you are truly saying and to hear others in the same manner. Blunt words are not candor at all. Candor can help us go beyond the surface.

Helen will sometimes say, Craig I need to talk to you. I need to listen. Something was troubling her.

5. The habit of play.

This is freeing us to operate from openness, using humour and humility, instead of from our fearful selves. We often take ourselves too seriously. Jesus said we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven unless we change and become like

little children. They are great models to us. They have an exquisite capacity to play, to imagine, create stories etc. The world opens up to everyone.

Fishermen know to make certain that there is always play in the line. If the line is too tight it is difficult to gauge whether you have a bite. However if you have some play in your line, you can feel immediately whether is a bite and you can respond appropriately. Play celebrates our humanity and creativity. When we are strung too tightly everything seems a chore our bodies become depleted and our minds muddled. Engaging in the Habit of Play, keeps us fresh, engaged and open.

6. The habit of forgiveness.

Archbishop Tutu tells the story from the Truth and Reconciliation commission, in his book "No future without forgiveness. One day the Commission brought in an elderly black woman to face a white policeman, who had tortured, murdered and then cremated the lady's son and husband. The scope of his depravity extended to forcing this wife and mother to witness his unspeakable crimes against her family.

The last words she heard her husband speak before he finally died were, "Father forgive them."

A Commission member asked her, how do you believe justice should be done to this man who has inflicted such suffering on you and so brutally destroyed your family. She said she wanted him to go where they burned her husband's body and gather up the dust so that she could give him a decent burial. His head bent low, the policeman nodded agreement. The old woman paused, collecting herself and then continued. He took all my family away from me and I still have a lot of love to give. Twice a month I would like for him to come to the ghetto and spend a day with me so I can be a mother to him. She had one last wish I would like him to know that he is forgiven by God and that I forgive him too. She asked for someone to lead her across the courtroom. I would like to embrace him he can know that he is truly forgiven. When he heard these words the policeman fainted.

Together with friends and family gathered in the hearing room, sang Amazing Grace.

This remarkable woman is a wonderful example of what it is to be human and made the connection between forgiveness and her own desire to be her loving self.

Forgiveness is about becoming free. Without forgiveness we remain victims, locked in the past.

We must also forgive ourselves. A woman said this, I think the key to forgiveness is to know oneself as deeply loved and deeply forgiven. If there is someone who I need to forgive, then I also need to forgive for the resentment against that person that I've been carrying around. Without this self forgiveness, I think forgiveness is a mere mental concept.

7. The habit of compassion.

Most religions were founded on compassion. The reasoning behind this belief is the goodness of every human being is pretty simple. Religion often refer to this as the image of God, a loving Spirit that dwells inside each of us.

Archbishop Tutu says all human beings are God carriers, with no exception. Every person is a piece of God who therefore is holy and deserves respect, dignity, compassion and love. It's also about loving our enemies.

Thomas Merton suggests that the Hebrew word *hesed* which is often translated as compassion is a picture word. He suggests we visualize a healthy parent cradling a baby, when the parent looks into the baby's eyes he or she cannot help but love that child.

When family really works it contains people who have known you at your worst and whom you have known at their worst. In healthy families, there is a shared understanding that we are all of us better than the worst thing we ever did.

8. The habit of Community.

You cannot be a human alone. As John Donne said, no man is an island. You cannot be healthy alone; heal alone; flourish alone; cast of fear alone. We are not the human race, we are the human family. We all need community, that is because I come to church. Community gives us courage, inspires us to change and holds us accountable. We cannot make it through tough times alone, nor do we wish to experience the good times alone either. Sharing our pain and joy with others helps us turn away from the bleakness and fear. True community tolerates and even celebrates divergent opinion and personalities.

Love is the key to life. Don't quit. Don't stop. Keep playing. You and I are not alone. The 8 Habits of Love are worth living.