

Our Anchor and Our Compass

Some of you know that my family does a lot of sailing. We mainly sail on Lake Erie. It's a humbling experience to go out on a large body of water to a point where you no longer see any land, only water on all sides. The experience can be quite disconcerting, but, if you have a compass, you'll know the direction back to where you came from. Of course, charts and gps are making navigation so much easier, but still, a compass is incredibly helpful whenever one is lost or simply in need of a clearer direction.

For many years, Christians have considered God to be our anchor, a very present help in troubled times. Having experienced rough seas, I am really drawn to the image of being anchored to God during the storminess of our lives. But many of us only call out to God in those times when we are amidst terrible weather with our backs against a wall. So, I feel that we should also speak of God and Jesus as being our compass as well as our anchor. It is in God that we seek and find our direction. Jesus points us in the direction of life, wholeness and peace. When our lives get foggy, distracted and when we are lost, if we reorient ourselves to God, a way will become clear.

Using God as our compass means that we must proactively enact behaviors that will put us on the right path. Jesus was preaching and teaching us that we have been empowered by God to care for others, to share the bounty of the land, and to work to bring the kingdom of heaven to all on earth. We are called to be active "co-creators" in God's work. We aren't supposed to just sit back and watch the world go by.

So, without further ado, here is my top ten list of behaviors which can help us become better Christians. Please note that these behaviors build off of one another.

1. Remember you are loved by God and nothing can ever separate you from God's love. Since we were created, God has always longed to be in relationship with us. It was out of love God stood by us throughout the many generations, eventually coming to earth to be

with us and to save us. To be loved means to be valued, good and cared for. What a feeling it is to know we are loved! It's also helpful to know that even on our worst days, we also usually have at least a few folks who also love us no matter what. Our families. Our closest friends. Our pets! So, as you prepare to get out of bed, remember that you are loved by an eternal and divine love! It's always nice to know you've got God and some loved ones in your corner...

2. Pray. I'll be the first to admit that I need a lot of practice in these areas which I'll be addressing today. I often neglect to pray and when I do, I'm often distracted. But still, I continue to practice. I would recommend praying at the beginning of each day, as a way of starting the day off on the right foot. Put yesterdays troubles behind, don't worry about tomorrow, but focus on what it is you need to do this day. It's equally important to end the day with prayer. It's a way of overviewing the day, its successes and failures. Share your joys and pains, your hopes and fears with God and allow God to hear you out and bear your burdens.

3. Be humble. I have been noticing the use of the word "swagger" a lot over the past year. It's resurgence comes from hip hop and the word is defined as one's unique style, arrogance and boastfulness. Though I'm a fan of hip hop, I have to reject this idea (as I also had to reject the blatant greed of all things "bling"). Through prayer we are often left feeling thankful as we have been able to put our lives into perspective. Arrogance and self-centeredness do not leave room for anyone else. On the other hand, humility is the ability to temper our needs and wants and to make ourselves available and present to others. Through humility we invite others to participate, to share, to feel that they, too, are valuable.

4. Be open. This is one of the daily practices that I am most adamant about. Jesus really modeled what it means to be completely open to new experiences, new peoples, new ways of thinking. Jesus dined with the tax collectors, prostitutes and lepers. Jesus went to places where others thought were unsafe or imprudent. One cannot help but grow in faith and understanding the more we broaden our horizons and open ourselves to all that this world has to offer. Being open means embracing change and diversity. Some months ago Peggy

Redmond spoke about how renewing and empowering it was to leave her comfort zone and participate in a mission trip in Galveston, Texas. Do it! Leave your comfort zone. Try something new. Do something you thought you'd never do in a million years. Talk to someone new...especially someone who is quite different than you. I am sure that you would find yourself invigorated and developing a better understanding of our world.

5. Do not be afraid. It seems that these days every part of our culture is working to instill us with a daily helping of fear. What's our current alert status – red, yellow or orange? What flu strain is waiting on the horizon to come and destroy us all? Of course, we are always on the verge of economic meltdown. And what ever happened to killer bees? My question is, “what good does all of this fear do?” It just stresses me out, makes me leery of others, makes me defensive and scared. That's not a good way to live. I'm not advocating for stupidity – God gave us a wonderful gift in intuition and street smarts – but many risks often have amazing rewards. Jesus took astounding risks daily in order to give new life to others and to deepen his relationship with God. It is only when we step out on faith that we can tear down walls that separate us from others and we can build true unity.

6. Seek community. After his baptism, the first thing Jesus did in his ministry was build a community with whom he could travel with, share with and find support with. We are social creatures and we thrive when we are in community...when we can share our lives with others. During the good times, we rejoice together, we enjoy God's bounty, and we feel what it is like to be loved, included, and cared for. On the bad days, we share our burdens, we find support in kind words and helpful hands. We are able to cry and mourn, and to find perspective and hope. Many of us are lonely – I know I am. And it is when we are lonely and isolated that we begin to ease our pain with destructive behaviors. We numb our selves with entertainment and distractions. We develop addictions. We try to fill the holes in our souls with greed and consumerism. The best solution to this emptiness is to find folks to share your life with, and to share your faith journey with. Invite a friend to lunch. Invite someone new to your home for dinner. When we begin to experience community, so much of our lives begin to fall

into place. Many of our distractions and addictions become irrelevant. Our desire to horde becomes unnecessary because our needs are met by the community and we feel loved and valued.

7. Seek your calling. Paul speaks a lot about spiritual gifts and how all of our gifts work together as one body. When we are able to find what it is that gives us great passion and meaning, we feel so fulfilled and energized. There are so many distractions today that can keep us occupied, tired and numbed so that we don't focus on what we could and should be doing. Again, by being open, perhaps you might stumble across something new that gives you both joy and is meaningful. Pursue it! See what happens. Passionate people who love what they are doing and who risk much often have no regrets.

8. Work for justice. Despite what Glenn Beck argues, the Bible is very much concerned with the oppressed, the weak, the poor, the outcaste and how those people should also be welcomed into God's kingdom. We need to be aware of what is happening in the world. Do not become complacent. Use your gifts to help others....it's as simple as that. And even the smallest of acts can yield huge results. I want to recommend a film to you all called *Paper Clips Project*. In 1998 in a small town in Tennessee, an elementary school class began collecting paper clips to represent each life lost during the Holocaust. As the town, the country and eventually nations from around the world began sending paper clips to this school, the people of this town realized just how grave the millions of deaths were in the Holocaust. The town is literally transformed from this small act of collecting paper clips; they create a Holocaust museum and the community is strengthened. It's an excellent film.

9. Practice love and forgiveness. Because God made creation good and because of God's love for us all, God wants us all to experience this love – so we are called to express this profound love between one another. Paul tells us that love is patient and kind and not rude or arrogant. It bears all things and hopes all things. I think most of us are successful at loving when it is with those with whom we love, agree with, and understand. But, we know that it can become a significant challenging trying to love folks who are selfish and self-centered, and just plain mean. But, Jesus called us to love all

people, not just the ones who love us. So, keep trying. With this is mind, and knowing that we'll come up short, we also need to practice one of Christ's greatest gifts – forgiveness. Misunderstanding happen all the time. Emotions get the best of us. We hurt one another. So, do we choose to hold on to our hurts and to let our anger fester about those who hurt us, or do we decide to move on, to heal, and to forgive as we have been forgiven?

10. Remember the Good News. Hold fast to the fact that the victory has already been won by Christ and in him, we are free. Nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of Christ. Jesus came to bring the Good news to us all. Despite all of the doom and gloom, God is at work in this world. God has a plan for creation and God has a plan and good things planned for your life. When life gets overwhelming and scary, take a few deep breaths...be still and know that God is with you...and remember the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Truly, we only have the power to change ourselves. But, changing our behaviors and how we interact with the world has profound repercussions. Living with love, purpose, and hope enables us to reflect the light of God. And love is an unquenchable positivity that grows exponentially the more it is used. Lives are changed through small and big encounters with love.

Storms will blown in outta nowhere. Christ is our anchor, our help in danger. But Christ is also our compass. In him, we find our direction. It's a good idea to daily wake up and check your compass...see where you are heading and consider if it is the right direction. Remember that every day is a new gift and it is in our hands to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God...for although we cannot change the direction that the wind blows, we can adjust our sails. Amen.