group Bible Study - November 7, 2007

Read Exodus Chapters 25-40

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1) Once a week I water and feed the plants in my office.
2) Twice a day I brush my teeth. After brushing in the morning, I use Listerine. After brushing in the evening, I use a mouthwash with fluoride (to strengthen enamel, of course).
3) I listen to Björk at least three times per week.
4) Before work I drive through Starbucks.
5) I always try to park in the Emerson lot first. If there is no space, I next go to the Ross Lot. If there is no space I go back to the Emerson lot. If there is no space I park on the street.
6) When I get to work I walk down the hall and say hi to Deb.
7) At the end of the day I refill the candy bowl and clean the meeting table in my office (with orange scented multi-purpose 409 and 2 paper towels).
8) I watch an episode of South Park on Monday nights.
9) I watch BBC world news most other nights.
10) I go to church with my parents on Sunday morning.
11) I meet with group staff for 6 hours on Tuesday evenings.
12) I study Exodus on Monday afternoons.
13) I go to Chapel on Tuesday mornings.
14) I read a novel just before going to bed each night, after taking a shower.

It's time for us to become really comfortable with a very important word: ritual.

To a large extent, our lives are made up of rituals. Habits. This is not inherently good or bad—it is just a fact of human existence. We find patterns, we follow patterns, we make patterns. And we better wake up and see these patterns, because we're stuck in them whether we know it or not. The key to Christian discipleship and growth is creating the right kind of habits in our lives and weeding out the destructive ones. We want daily and weekly and monthly and yearly rituals that shape us into followers of Christ. But this takes some work.

In Exodus chapters 25-40 we read a detailed set of instructions that God gives to the people, telling them how to construct the tabernacle—the tent in which God would dwell as the people wandered through the desert. These passages seem almost ridiculous in their attention to detail: “Make curtains of goat hair for the tent over the tabernacle—eleven altogether. All eleven curtains are to be the same size—thirty cubits long and four cubits wide. Join five of the curtains together into one set and the other six into another set. Fold the sixth curtain double at the front of the tent” (Ex. 26: 7-9). And so on...for 15 chapters. In Exodus we read not only about the construction of this elaborate monument, but we also read detailed instructions for how the people are to use it and interact with it over the course of the years—this is a long-term plan that essentially gives the people a new calendar to live by, a new schedule for living.

Here’s the deal: God had done amazing things for this people. Parting seas, divine plagues, pillars of fire to protect them. But God also knows how human beings work. We can’t just live with a memory of some experience we’ve had. That’s not enough to form us into followers of God. What we need is an on-going reminder. We need to see symbols and hear stories over and over again. We need to do certain actions over and over again—for years, even for a lifetime. And only in this way do the patterns of our lives slowly change.

New habits form—in our bodies, and remarkably, also in our minds. It is the rituals of our lives that gradually define who we are.

This week, please think about this (or even make a list to keep track):

1) What are my daily rituals?
2) What are my weekly rituals?
3) For each of these things in my life, what is my motivation? Who or what has influenced me to place value on this particular thing?
4) Understanding that over time our habits and rituals shape us into who we are, how are these rituals shaping the future me?