

## **Week #2 of the 3-Week Series, "7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE"**

### **FIRST THINGS FIRST**

**March 22, 2020**

**Rev. Richard Maraj**

**Rev. Richard Maraj:** Good morning, everyone! And welcome!

As we all know, we are going through an unprecedented, challenging and difficult time in our lives and in our history. And so we are joining together to hold everyone impacted: hold the families, the families, the individuals... Holding our leaders, all the medical and first responders in prayer. That's we'll move through this in the most positive way possible, and in some way that our human family will be closer and feel more connected and feel more love and compassion for one another.

So we thank you for holding that in prayer with us!

As a ministry, we are going to continue to uplift and inspire you with spiritual messages every Wednesday and every Sunday. And we will post them online. And besides that, we are probably going to do some more inspirational messages on Facebook. I'll be sending you an email at least once a week with updates. Our staff is still working; we're all available by email. So please know: we want to continue to serve and support you, and let us know how we can do that in the greatest and best way.

Just want to thank you all for all your support of the ministry throughout the year. Thanks to all of you who are auto-givers. And, for those of you who aren't, if you would want to give online, even if it's just one time, to continue supporting the ministry through this process.

We will get through this together; we know that God is in charge, and prayer is powerful. So let's pull together, stay connected, stay prayerful, and stay spiritually center... and everything's going to be great.

Thank you!

### **MEDITATION**

**Rev. Lori Fleming:** I invite you to close your outer eyes; to take in a deep, cleansing breath and release it slowly; to let go of any busy-ness you've had so far today. Just gently let it go as we begin to move our awareness within, focusing on our heart space: into place of unconditional love where God loves us completely and fully, no matter how we show up.

We are God's beloved children, created in the image and likeness of God: a spiritual image, because truly we are spiritual beings. In this time of chaos in the outer world, we come to a time of prayer and meditation, as we go into our inner world, where there is peace that passes understanding. Where there is calm at the very depths of our souls. Where we feel the oneness with the Divine, and the oneness with each other. For truly, we are all one.

We know, God, that we come as perfect human beings, and that every cell in our body right now is energized with health and wholeness. That every cell is filled with God's light and love: the light of spiritual illumination. And that each cell works in concert with every other cell, bringing us to wholeness. That we are whole in body, in mind, and in spirit.

And that in this time of meditation, we come to fully know our connection with God. We come to recognize that we're here for a great and important purpose that only we can fulfill. And in this holy moment – in this perfect holy moment – we are filled with divine inspiration, for divine wisdom, for divine strength and divine power to

do what is ours to do. And so we take just a few moments as we move more deeply into the silence, where we are one with the Divine.

#### SILENCE

Sweet Spirit, we come in gratitude for this time together, for the activity of prayer and meditation that brings us closer to you, O God. For all of the blessings – too many to count – we say thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! And it is so. Amen.

#### MESSAGE

**Rev. Richard Maraj:** So how many people ever had a day where you were busy all day long – I mean, you worked, worked, worked from morning ‘til night – and, at the end of the day, you thought to yourself, “*I got nothing accomplished!*”? Or have you ever had a project that you wanted to do – to renovate something, or fix something, or go somewhere – and then months go by and you still haven’t gotten around to it? Or have you ever had a really long “to do” list, and then you realize you didn’t have enough time to do even half of it?

You know, every one of us wants to be more effective. To be more efficient, to be more productive, and to make more progress towards the kind of life and relationships and fulfillment that we want. So the question is: what’s stopping us from being more effective?

In his book, *The Common Denominator of Success*, E.N. Gray says that there is one thing above all else that is pivotal in everyone’s success... And it isn’t hard work. It isn’t luck. It isn’t who you know. It isn’t personal relationships... The number one thing – and not that those things aren’t important – but the number one thing that makes us effective, he says, are our priorities. Of being **FIRST THINGS FIRST**. Knowing what’s important to us, and then organizing and executing those things in our everyday lives through actions and our plans. Doing the things that are most important, and putting first things first, truly is one of the foundational principles of an effective and successful life.

So we’re in Week #2 of our 3-week series on Stephen Covey’s book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. And what I love about the book is that he talks about living in alignment with the natural laws of effectiveness... That – if we really want to be effective – we have to have a spiritually-centered value, vision and mission. And that, in all situations, that we turn within first, look at ourselves and see what we can do to respond in the most effective and positive way. To know that – whether it’s our happiness or peace or success or worklife or relationship – that it really starts here. That we have to look at ourselves first, and live from the inside out.

And so, last week, we looked at the first two habits. The first one is to **BE PROACTIVE**. To know that, in any situation, we don’t have to be reactive to what people say or what they do, or conditions... and feel like other people or conditions are controlling our lives. But we actually can be proactive, because the foundation of that is knowing the truth that we are all powerful, resourceful and responsible. That we don’t have to feel helpless or hopeless; we actually should feel excited that we’re empowered... That we have the ability to create our lives and have influence in them. And spend time, not worrying about our concerns, but to actually think, “*What is it that I can do? What attitude, what mindset, what perspective? What is it that I need to see differently or let go to help myself in this situation to make it better?*”

And so, we need to remember: I am powerful, proactive and responsible. Let’s say that to ourselves in half-voice: I am powerful, resourceful and proactive. And that’s the first habit of effectiveness: BE PROACTIVE.

The second one is to **BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND**. And what's wonderful about that is: that states, basically, that we have an imagination that can see the result in advance what we want for our goals, for our lives, for our dreams. That any situation in our lives we can have a picture of what the outcome we would like is. We can use our creative spiritual energy to see solutions, see healings in our family, see greater financial abundance. See ourselves calm in rush hour traffic... Increasing our sales and our finances... Anything we want! It's absolutely unlimited what our imagination can see for us.

We don't have to drift in life; we can actually live intentionally by holding a vision, and BEGINNING WITH THE END IN MIND.

So Habit #3 is what we're looking at today: #3, #4 and #5.

And first we will look at Habit #3: putting **FIRST THINGS FIRST**. That's about what's doing most important. It's about investing our time and energy on the things that are going to help make us be more successful, to have more progress, to move us in the direction of the life that we want.

Covey really says that there are things in life that are important and unimportant. And sometimes we spend a lot of our time on things that aren't important. We get distracted very easily; we tend to procrastinate; maybe watch too much TV; do things that really aren't helping us move our lives forward. Whether they're interruptions, or whatever it might be that are trivial, that we tend to engage in a lot of that. And we hold ourselves back.

And so, putting FIRST THINGS FIRST is about knowing what's important to us, and then investing our time on a regular basis in doing those things.

If you look at the first three habits, they are basically this. You're the programmer; be proactive. That you write the program; begin with the end in mind. And then you run the program.

So the question is, are you running your program? Are you doing the priorities and the most important things in your life to bring the kind of success that you want? Do you know that 80% of people say that health is a priority? But only 45% of people back it up with a good diet, exercise and getting enough sleep. You know, successful people do those mundane things – those things they may not really enjoy. They do them; they make them subordinate to what it is that they want to achieve and accomplish. They use their independent will to do things they may not want to do, but they know are important to do.

The German philosopher Goethe said, *"Things that matter most should never be at the mercy of things that matter least."*

So what matters to you most? And what are the things that really don't matter that you are engaging in?

Stephen Covey asked people about, what is it about "put first things first" and priorities that is so difficult? Is it defining and getting clear about your priorities? And most people said, "No." Is it organizing and developing a plan? Most people said, "No." The sticking point and the challenge of putting first things first, everybody said, was having the discipline to actually execute those important things.

You know, the word "discipline" comes from the word "disciple." If you think of a disciple, you think of someone that's loyal and dedicated and committed to a person and the kind of life and goals that they want. Really, being a disciple isn't about being a disciple to a person; it's about being a disciple to a way of living. To a life that we want to live. To the kind of person we want to be. The kind of relationships we want to have. The more that we are "disciples" and disciplined and committed to the kind of values – the kind of life we want – he says, that's what gives us incredible power and the independent will to actually do the things that are important to us.

He said, if we want to be successful, we need to learn to say “Yes!” to the things that are important in our lives. And the only way that you can say “Yes!” to the things that are important is to also learn how to say “No!” to things that aren’t important.

I bet every single one of us has probably said “Yes!” to something we wish we had said “No!” to. Sometimes we let social pressure and other people’s expectations have us saying “Yes” to things we really don’t want to do. That really aren’t how we spend our time and energy. So it’s important for us to learn to find our “Yes!” that will be compelling and get us excited, but we need to learn to find our “No,” as well: of how to say “No.”

You know, in the Book of Matthew, it has a wonderful, powerful teaching line. It says, *“Simply let your ‘yes’ be yes, and your ‘no’ be no; all else is evil.”* And what this Scripture is saying – and it’s saying a lot – is saying know the things that you want, and say “Yes!” to them... and know the things that aren’t yours, and say “No” to them. Because anything else – like saying “Yes” when you mean “No” or “No” when you mean “Yes”... When he says it’s evil, it means that it takes us further away from the person and the life and the happiness that we are looking for. That, until we own what it is that we want to create – and the life and the vision and the things that are important to us – that we will always waver. We will always be distracted, and not follow through consistently.

Stephen Covey says when you get to that place of realizing that you’re not following through on the things that are important to you, he said you need to go back from the beginning, and use your awareness to examine your program, use your imagination and your conscience to create a program that works for you: one that you say “Yes” to. And it is only then that you can find the independent will to say “No.”

Putting FIRST THINGS FIRST works in every area of our lives. Let me give you a spiritual example. In the Book of Matthew it says, *“Seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.”* Seek God first! Making God the priority in our lives. Putting God first: time for meditation, and centering ourselves spiritually, will lead to a place where these things will be added unto us. The more time we spend putting the most important things first, the other things fall into place! That life begins to flow. Things come to us easily.

Have you ever had a time where you weren’t praying; you were too busy? Or, you know, your day went by quick, and you forgot, and you didn’t make meditation or prayer or feeding your spirit and soul a priority? You know, life gets harder when we don’t put FIRST THINGS FIRST. Life gets harder and it’s more frustrating when we don’t do the things that are most important... That we know are important. Seeking God first is putting FIRST THINGS FIRST. And life will always get better. And it’s a principle that makes our lives effective, from spiritual matters to family to relationships to business. Putting FIRST THINGS FIRST really works.

You know, if you look at the first three habits, they what [Covey] calls “private victories”: to be proactive; to begin with the end in mind; and to put first things first.

And then the next habits are actually about “public victories.” He says this: doing the most important things is just not about things, and it’s just not about time-management and self-management. It is also – being effective and successful – is also about enhancing and preserving all of our relationships.

Habits #4 and #5 are really about relationships: **THINK WIN/WIN** and **SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND, AND THEN BE UNDERSTOOD.**

You know, life is about relationships. Whether we realize it or not, we’re all in the people business! Family is people business. Work is people business. In every aspect of our lives, there are people. And our ability to have healthy, effective relationships is a key in it being a happy and fulfilling life.

The Apostle Paul said, *“Love is the fulfilling of the law.”* And relationships are about feeling love in all their various forms: feeling cared for; feeling supported; feeling that people are listening; that people are showing up. And it goes both ways. Relationships are important.

And so being in a mindset of THINKING WIN/WIN is tremendous. Because we don’t grow up with that mindset. We have a mindset that life is a competition. *“It’s a “dog-eat-dog” world. You’ve got to look out for number one. There isn’t enough for everyone, so I’d better get mine before they get theirs.”* This idea that intimidating or pulling one over on someone is the way to succeed... And it’s truly not. Life is about cooperation. It is about helping. It is about caring. It’s about building each other and one another up. It’s about compassion. It is about kindness.

I love that Scripture where it says, *“You are the light of the world. Don’t hide your light, but put it on a lampstand so it gives light to everyone in the house.”* See, truly shining our light – truly being successful, truly being effective – not only blesses us, but it has an intention and a responsibility to bring light into everyone’s life.

Covey tells a story about these mall managers who were really kind of struggling. And he mentioned to them about developing their relationship with the different store owners. Instead of just going there to pick up the [rent] checks, or making sure all the contractual things were being followed, he suggested going and finding out about their families. Finding out how they’re doing. Asking them, *“Do you want to brainstorm some ideas about how you could be more successful?”* And just literally getting to know them – caring and sharing about them – the business started to succeed! But not just the business started to succeed more, but they felt more connected. They felt more loved. They felt more supported.

Relationships are important! And thinking WIN/WIN – knowing that both other people and we matter – and making that priority in all our interactions is significant.

Stephen Covey, for relationships, shares this analogy of relationships with what he calls “an emotional bank account.” You know, we have bank accounts where we make deposits, and we make a lot in those accounts, or we can withdrawals. And sometimes we overdraw! And he said relationships are like that. Deposits are things that we do that are positive, and withdrawals are things that we do that don’t support the relationship: maybe dishonesty; maybe not following through with an agreement or keeping our word; or being unkind; or distancing ourselves; or not really caring or really listening. Those are withdrawals that we sometimes make in the emotional bank account of relationships.

And deposits are when we’re kind and generous; when we’re supportive. You know, when we keep our promises; when we apologize for mistakes that we’ve made; being vulnerable; being more honest. You know, there are all kinds of ways we can create deposits in the emotional bank account so that people feel supported and loved and cared for.

One of the things I like to do to help put a deposit in the emotional bank account is make people smile, and make ‘em laugh. So here goes an attempt to deposit for me into our emotional bank account!

What do you call the wife of a hippie? “Mrs. Hippie.” ***[Pantomimes his own “rim shot” drum roll]***

How about one more? So Frankie goes to the doctor and says, *“Doc! Doc! My little brother thinks he’s a chicken!”* And the doctor said, *“Well, how long has this been going on?”* And Frankie said, *“It’s been going on for six or seven months!”* And the doctor says, *“Why didn’t you come to me sooner?”* And Frankie said, *“Because we needed the eggs!”* ***[Pantomimes his own “rim shot” drum roll and chuckles]***

Okay, you’re probably thinking that was a withdrawal, and not a deposit! But it was an attempt at a deposit, and I’m going to keep depositing!

Because that's the thing about relationships: it takes time. It's not just a one-shot deal. It's a long-term thing. And the more deposits we make over time, it really makes an incredible difference.

So what relationship in your life is maybe overdrawn? And what is a deposit that you're willing to make, just even this week? A family member? A friend? A co-worker? In what ways are you willing to continuously put deposits – good things – to have a WIN/WIN situation, and have our relationships flourish, so that we can all win?

The fifth habit, it really takes a WIN/WIN mindset relationships to another level. And that's to **SEEK TO UNDERSTAND, AND THEN BE UNDERSTOOD**. Because the more we seek to understand, the more close and intimate and connected that we really feel. And the way to actually create understanding is by listening.

Most of us are not great at listening. You know, most of us are not great at listening. You know, I'm sure we've been in conversations where we were talking to someone, and we could tell they weren't listening to us. And that doesn't feel good. And I'm sure we've all been in conversations where someone was speaking, and we weren't listening. Somebody once said that we are either speaking or waiting to speak. But, in reality, we've got two ears and one mouth, and we should use them in that proportion. Listening really teaches us a lot; it brings understanding and helps us know what's going on with the other person. Maybe they're hurting. Maybe they're needing more guidance. Maybe there's something that they need that we could give... but we would never find out if we aren't willing to take time to listen.

Listening is one of the most loving things we can do for other people, and for ourselves! Because it brings down the walls; it opens hearts; and it makes people feel connected. It makes people feel cared for.

You know, being an effective person is about us first seeking awareness of ourselves, but it's also about how we relate to others. A successful, fulfilling life – an effective life – is about moving from these stages: When we're born, we're dependent. But then we have to move to independence. And if we want to go to a higher level of life and effectiveness, we have to move to inter-dependence. That's where we care and trust and want to support everyone in our lives, and feeling better in succeeding and being happy. And then we will be happier, and there will be more light and more joy for everyone.

Living effectively is about managing – and this week, that's what we're gonna... We're going to manage ourselves and the most important priorities in our lives by saying "Yes!" to those and saying "No!" to things that aren't important. And we're going to care for our relationships by making sure we have a mindset of "win/win," and also listening empathetically to what's going on with other people.

We do this, I guarantee you: You'll be a more effective person; you'll be happier and more joyful in every way. And it begins by putting FIRST THINGS FIRST.

God bless you!

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