

Five Habits for a Merciful Heart



Parker Palmer is a world-renowned writer, speaker and activist who focuses on issues in education, community, leadership, spirituality and social change. His most recent book *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, encourages us to follow five habits of the heart and to put them into practice in our ministries through our acts of mercy.

The five habits of the heart are:

1. an understanding that we are all in this together
2. an appreciation of the value of “otherness”
3. an ability to hold tension in life-giving ways
4. a sense of personal voice and agency
5. a capacity to create community.

Through the five habits of the heart, Parker Palmer describes ways of seeing, being, and responding to life that involve our minds, our emotions, our self-images, our concepts of meaning and purpose that are critical to nurturing and sustaining society.

Below are five of our favourite ‘habits’ to cultivate into our lives:

1. Learning to measure our efforts not by short-term effectiveness but by long-term faithfulness to the vision we care about.
2. Becoming people who offer hospitality to strangers which requires us to open our hearts time and again to the tension created by our fear of “the other”. That is why many wisdom traditions highlight the creative possibilities of a heart broken open instead of apart. Only from such a heart can hospitality flow – toward the stranger and toward all that we find alien and unsettling.
3. Realising that the power for authentic leadership is found not in external arrangements but in the human heart. Authentic leaders in every setting – from families to nation-states – aim at liberating the heart, their own and others, so that its powers can liberate the world.
4. Believing that good work is done with heart as well as knowledge and skill and is done with a depth of commitment that brings integrity and courage to the workplace. But workplace culture can make it risky to reveal our hearts. So we hide them – and sometimes lose them. By supporting those who want to reclaim their hearts, we bring new life to them, their work, and the people they serve .
5. When faithfulness is our standard, we are more likely to sustain our engagement with tasks that will never end: doing justice, loving mercy, and calling the beloved community into being.

References: To find out more about the Habits of the Heart visit www.couragerenewal.org/habitsoftheheart or read *Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit* (2011).

REFLECTION

The human heart asks many questions ...

- > Do you have the confidence to speak your voice clearly, and the humility to listen to others openly, in the ongoing effort to create a community worthy of the human spirit?
- > How are the Habits of the Heart promoted and supported in your ministry?