*How can we keep our enlivened soul ablaze with the enthusiasm of the “first love” for Jesus?*

Aliveness in Christ, and the sense of evangelistic drive that accompanies it, fade away for many of us. And along with it the intense desire to bring acquaintances and relatives into saving, transforming relationships with the resurrected and living Jesus.

The good news is that there are spiritual practices or habits that enable us to be renewed spiritually and have that first love with God again and again. That through developing certain habits we can regularly re-experience a joyful and fulfilling oneness with God.

Michael Frost says, we need to develop habitual practices that don’t just deplete our energy and burn us out, but which re-energize us, replenishing our reserves and connecting us more deeply to Jesus.

He has seen the following habits do just that.

Two habits - from Michael Frost’s: *Five Habits of Highly Missional People*

***Learn Jesus - Spend at least one period of the week learning Christ.***

The expression to learn Christ was a common one among the earliest Christians, but not one we use much these days. In the earliest centuries of the Christian movement, conversion involved denying the pagan gods and “learning Christ.” This meant entering a period of catechism, committing oneself to an intensive study of the person and work of Jesus.

***1. Study the Gospels***

Read, reread and reread again the four canonical Gospels. I know you think you’ve done that before, but I’m asking you to develop a habit of really marinating your mind and your soul in the four Gospels.

You might want to mix up the manner of your reading. Consider taking the time to read one or another through in one sitting. Mark will take about 90 minutes, John about two hours, and you can get through Matthew and Luke in around two-and-a-half hours each. Reading them in one sitting helps you to connect to their broad themes and the rhythms of their themes and language.

Of course, you can read them in sections. And you can read them with the use of commentaries or daily devotional material. All I’m asking is that you inculcate a habit of constantly reconnecting with Jesus through the words of Scripture.

***2. Read about Jesus***

There are so many scholarly and popular works written about Jesus that it might be hard to choose. Allow me to suggest a couple I have written. Jesus the Fool (Baker, 2010) looks at the way Jesus reframes our conventional wisdom. And I mentioned earlier, my book with Alan Hirsch about the need for the church to rediscover Jesus and His message—ReJesus (Baker, 2009)—is useful for church leaders.

I would also strongly recommend scholarly works like *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (IVP, 1999) by N.T. Wright, and *Jesus According to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* by Darrell Bock (Baker, 2002) and *Jesus and the Gospels* (B&H Academic, 1997) by Craig Blomberg. Look out for anything about Jesus by Ben Witherington as well. At a more popular level, check out Tim Keller’s King's Cross: *The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus* (Dutton, 2011). I’ve included below a list of 10 more great books you could use.

*The Life: A Portrait of Jesus* – J. John (Authentic Media, 2003)

An excellent introduction to the living, breathing human being at the centre of the Chris an Good News: Jesus of Nazareth. Easy to read, with helpful answers to some of the common questions we all have about Jesus’ life. Read it, and then give it to your non-Christian friends.

*Following Jesus: A Non- Religious Guidebook for the Spiritually Hungry* – Dave Roberts (Relevantbooks, 2004)

This will revolutionize your walk with God, revealing a perspective on Jesus you’ve never seen before. Explores what a real, dynamic relationship with Jesus looks like. Excellent, particularly if your faith life is getting a little stale.

*The Jesus of Suburbia: Have We Tamed the Son of God to Fit Our Lifestyle?* – Mike Erre (W Publishing Group, 2006)

Have we settled for a watered-down, safe, comfort Christianity? Mike paints an exciting, inspiring and powerful picture of the real Jesus. He challenges us to embrace the message of Jesus Christ as a revolutionary, life-transforming, culture-impacting movement of God. Brilliant! Good for ring you up for a radical life of sacrificial Jesus-following!

*Paradoxy: Coming to Grips with the Contradictions of Jesus* – Tom Taylor (Baker, 2006)

This unfolds some of the core mysteries of Jesus’ upside-down teachings (e.g. die to live; serve to reign; walk by faith not by sight, etc.). This book helped me understand the lifestyle Jesus wants His followers to live more than any other. Really explains why doing life Jesus’ way is be er than any other.

*Mealtime Habits of the Messiah* – Conrad Gempf (Zondervan, 2005)

A funny, quirky and informative book that looks at 40 of Jesus’ encounters with others, with questions for reflection. Jesus: alive, fun, engaging, warm and occasionally dangerous. This will give you an extra shot for the day.

*God in the Flesh* – Don Everts (IVP, 2005)

Don looks at Jesus via the reactions of those who met Him. The real Jesus jumps off the page and comes to life as a compelling person and very, very cool. Short studies included. Good for a personal devotion or maybe a Home Group.

*A Spectator’s Guide to Jesus* – John Dickson (Blue bottle books, 2005)

The back cover sums it up: “If you have ever wondered how a crucified Palestinian peasant could end up winning the allegiance of 2 billion confessed Christians today, this book will provide some of the answers.” Really useful historical teaching to correct some of the rubbish out there!

*The Jesus I Never Knew* – Philip Yancey (Zondervan, 1995)

Now a classic. Yancey uncovers a Jesus who is brilliant, creative, challenging, fearless, compassionate, unpredictable and ultimately satisfying. A great read.

*Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* – Kenneth Bailey (SPCK, 2008)

More than 400 pages, a very weighty exploration that puts Jesus in His socio-political and religio-cultural context. Challenging, but essential reading for those wanting to understand Jesus.

***Spend at least one period of the week listening for the Spirit’s voice.***

The second habit I want you to foster is that of listening for the Spirit’s voice. I suggest you find at least one chunk of time, preferably at the beginning of each week, to stop and create space to commune with God.

In lifting or opening the heart to God, most people tend to do all of the talking and do not allow time for a reply. You must learn how to listen. You must learn how to let the Holy Spirit do the prompting (talking).

Here is some advice in fostering an openness to the Spirit’s promptings:

***1. Set aside a designated time***

Don’t try to connect to God the Holy Spirit on the run. Set aside a designated time each week.

I’m only asking for one (although, if you want to do it more than once a week, be my guest). See it as a precious time alone, just between you and God.

***2. Eliminate distractions***

For the person untrained in listening to the Holy Spirit, you should find ways to avoid any intrusion on the senses of touch, sight, smell, taste or sound. Music, noise in the distance, the tick of a clock, voices of people, the gentle breeze of the wind, even the written words of others in inspirational books—each will cause a distraction and prompt us to listen to what our ear or other senses are picking up. The quieter the room or surroundings, the more conducive to listening to the Holy Spirit. After all, Jesus taught us, “Whenever you pray, go to your room, close the door, and pray ... in private” (Matt. 6:6).

Find a comfortable position in a chair and adopt a posture most helpful to you for spiritual concentration. Lacing your fingers together, placing the palms together or sitting on your hands can help you become unaware of them. Closing your eyes in a dark or semi-dark room can help to eliminate any visual distractions.

After eliminating all of these distractions, you will be ready to listen.

***3. Let God in***

Don’t start your meditation by asking questions or telling the Holy Spirit what you want. He already knows. Start by simply enjoying God’s presence. Sit quietly and let the Holy Spirit possess you. Most likely thoughts of your sins and unworthiness will surface, which can discourage you. You must always remember God loves you because He created you. While you may be well aware of your unworthiness, the Holy Spirit is most anxious to dwell in your heart, the temple He created for himself. In times like this, I am conscious of the words of St. Therese of Avilla: “If you are willing to bear serenely the trial of being displeasing to yourself, then you will be for Jesus a pleasant place of shelter.”

If you’re an outcomes-oriented person, you’ll be desperate to get to the point of it and ask the Spirit to grant you knowledge or wisdom or courage or righteousness, or whatever you need in your current circumstance. But before you get to that, simply abide in His presence. Let His love wash over you. Listening to the Holy Spirit can become for you, just as it has for me, a source of comfort, a source of great peace and a source of answers to present problems. Listening to God can be one of the highest forms of prayer.

***4. Follow God’s promptings***

The Spirit might bring to your mind the name or the face of a person you are to connect with. The Spirit might convict you of sin, or encourage you in your faithfulness. The Spirit might prompt you to re- engage with someone you connected with last week, or He might bring to mind something you ought to have said to someone but didn’t. You will sense God’s presence in your heart, and that presence will add strength to you and oxygen to your soul, and you will be filled with His rewards: love, joy, peace, or any of the other fruit of the Holy Spirit.