

*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.*

*Habits of the Heart*

Edwina Gateley is one of those moms who make nearly everyone else sound like a bonbon-eating, soap-opera-watching lay-about.

She's a single mother who has taught in Africa, sojourned in the Sahara, founded a Volunteer Missionary Movement, and lived in a trailer in the woods all alone for nine months of prayer and contemplation.

She spent a over a year on the streets of Chicago, listening to and befriending the homeless and women involved in prostitution. Currently she leads retreats and serves Exodus, a Chicago program for women in the second phase of recovery from prostitution.

You know who would have loved her? The author of the letters of John.

This first letter has repeatedly refused to separate trust that Jesus Christ shows us the true face of God, from loving our brothers and sisters in the church. Already the letter writer has told us that those born of God love one another. Here the author says those who are born of God are the ones who stake their lives on Jesus as the Christ.

Edwina Gateley is a certified HIV counselor and urban minister. She also writes very contemplative poems that urge her readers to "be still" and "let God love you."

Love by itself can quickly become either sentimental or self-righteous.

Belief by itself can quickly become antiquarian or self-absorbed.

As we look for a true life, an authentic life, *1 John* directs us to the two poles of following Jesus: trust in God and acts of love for one another.

I suppose the problem is that we just read what Jesus has to say in the gospel, we skim over the words of 1 John and we trust that we'll spontaneously begin to live like Edwina Gately or other remarkable Christians.

If so, we've forgotten the kinds of lessons my mother made me learn:

Brush your teeth, twice a day at least.

Put on clean clothes, and don't leave the dirty ones lying on the floor.

Wash your hands.

Say "please" and "thank you."

And I would be corrected over and over, until doing those things became a habit; a routine. I hardly have to think about those small chores; I just automatically do them.

Much of life is shaped by those habits of ours. Companies and congregations have habits, too.

But we are a people loved by God and called to love one another: that is the Habit of the Heart we are made to live without having to think about it.

Instead, we follow our habits away from worship or away from prayer.

We follow our habits away from trusting God. We don't have the habit of saying "hello" to people we don't already know in worship. We don't have the habit of looking for a way to serve.

Together, we can learn the habits of the heart that Jesus taught and demonstrated. We can do the caring thing over and over and over again. We can understand and express our confidence that Christ brings us God's love in a way that changes us.

One Christmas Eve, Andrew M. Barr bought and personally delivered 100 sleeping bags to homeless people in Washington, D.C. . At another time, he read that while a group of teenagers were visiting on a church trip, their van, with all their clothes and money, had been stolen. He found out where they were staying and wrote them a check to replace their loss.

When he was interviewed, Mr. Barr said, "When I see someone in trouble, my brain goes on red alert, looking for something I might do to help. There's usually something you can do if you really look and see what's going on around you, if you make up your mind to do what you can, if you just listen."<sup>1</sup>

His brain goes on red alert, looking for something he might do to help.

Andrew Barr has developed habits of the heart that make it automatic that he will notice what's going on around him and he'll do what he can.

And that poem by Gateley, the activist in Chicago? It reveals the heart's habit of trusting that Jesus has shown us the true face of God:

Be silent.  
Be still.  
Alone.  
Empty  
Before your God.  
Say nothing.  
Ask nothing.  
Be silent.  
Be still.  
Let your God look upon you.  
That is all.  
God knows.  
God understands.  
God loves you  
With an enormous love,  
And only wants  
To look upon you

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<sup>1</sup> July 24, 1991, *The Washington Post* column by William Rasberry.

With that love.  
Quiet.  
Still.  
Be.

Let your God—  
Love you<sup>2</sup>.

Humans operate by habits of the heart; God always acts by choice. And God's choice is to love you and lead you into an authentic life of faith and love.

Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted online in The Journey with Jesus, Sunday, May 20, 2012.