OG Pastors: Faith Over a Lifetime

Episode 8 – Dr. Bill St. Cyr

"So Lightly"

BILL [00:00:00]: God's give- given us a dummy light. And it's when we are- we feel anxious, when we lose our peace. Okay, when I lose my peace, something's amiss. You let the peace of Christ reign in your heart, Paul says in Colossians.

[Upbeat music]

STEW [00:00:24]: A lot of people talk about faith, but what does that actually look like over a lifetime? I'm Stewart Foley, and this is OG Pastors, Faith Over a Lifetime Podcast.

[Music continues]

STEW [00:00:43]: Hey, welcome back to a new edition. I think this is Episode 8 of OG Pastors, Faith Over a Lifetime and my name's Stew, otherwise known here as that Texas podvangelist, and you can be too if you just tell one person about this podcast. Our mission is simple: we sow seeds. God takes it from there.

STEW [00:01:01]: And so if you would, please tell one person, that's how we get the word around the world. Today's guest has spent his life helping people grow toward intellectual, psychological, and spiritual maturity.

STEW [00:01:12]: Dr. Bill Saint Cyr has studied political philosophy, theology, and pastoral counseling. He served as a youth minister, led a discipleship ministry on Capitol Hill, served as an assistant to the Chaplain of the United States Senate,

STEW [00:01:25]: and spent thousands of hours counseling committed believers through the challenges of life and faith. And then in 2001 Bill joined his wife, Mary Ellen, in the work of Ambleside, eventually co-founding Ambleside Schools International

STEW [00:01:37]: and dedicated himself to helping teachers and school leaders understand how children grow into mature, thoughtful, faithful human beings. And as I learned more about Bill and Ambleside, I came across two words that immediately caught my attention: "so lightly."

STEW [00:01:48]: You'll understand why those words caught the attention of- of- of that Texas podvangelist given that our job here is to sow seeds. So Bill, thank you so much for being on, I look forward to this, and welcome to OG Pastors.

BILL [00:01:59]: Thank you, Stew, a joy being with you. I should tell your listeners my voice is- is- is not what it was five years ago. I have something called spasmodic dysphonia. It's just a muscle spasm. You might have heard it on RFK Jr.

Uh, the Secretary has, uh, the same disorder. But, so we'll trust that the Lord is with us and it won't hinder our time together in any way.

STEW [00:02:21]: Well, I- I think you sound good to me, and I- I think that every- we're- we're going to work with you however we need to today. So, so first of all, you were- we got introduced, uh, by- by Episode 2 guest, uh, Dave White.

STEW [00:02:34]: And so I just, you know, I want to give thanks to all of the people who help make this podcast possible. And the way we always start, Bill, is- is before all the degrees, right? It's- you have a doctorate degree.

STEW [00:02:49]: And- and you've spent a lot of time thinking about how people think and grow and how relationships shape us, but I'd love to start before that. What was a young Bill Saint Cyr like? What interested you, what was going on, where did it all start, and kind of get us- get us cranking there.

BILL [00:03:01]: Well, it started with family. My parents were high school sweethearts, uh, they were married after their freshman year in college, I was born 11 months later, Greg was born 11 months after me, Peggy was born, uh, 18 months after Greg, Stacy, uh, 24 months after Peggy,

BILL [00:03:13]: and they kept going on. By the time my parents were 26, it was five children and two parents living in a two-bedroom married students' apartment, as Dad finished his PhD.

BILL [00:03:26]: And so in one tiny bedroom, there were two bunk beds and in the other bedroom was Mom and Dad and the baby. And one of my earliest memories was early on Dad would come in every night and he'd kneel down by the side of one of the bunk beds and the four of us would kneel beside him and say our prayers together.

BILL [00:03:40]: So following Christ was always a family priority. And uh, as- as Dad finished his degree and stepped into his first professional job in suburban life, uh, church was important and Dad served on committees and uh, wrote checks and uh, Mom baked cookies and cared for kids in the neighborhood and her own children and we-

BILL [00:03:52]: we were committed to living good moral lives, to believing the right things, being faithful Christians, uh, to the extent we understood. Uh, then when I was, so family was huge, uh, they would go on to have a dozen, I'm the oldest of 12, nine biological, uh, three adopted, uh, and uh, oh 20-something foster children at different seasons in life.

BILL [00:04:07]: And I watched my parents influence hundreds of married couples' lives, they just had an extended ministry. When I was 15, they had gone on a retreat that really turned the corner for them, uh, and- and someone told them for the first time that their marriage was a call to ministry every bit as much as a pastor's ordination. And that was something they had never heard before. And that launched them.

STEW [00:04:19]: That's interesting.

BILL [00:04:27]: I- when they came home from that retreat, they, I heard the car pulling up in the driveway. I came down the, I was coming down the staircase, the front door flew open and in stepped Mom and Dad. And I can tell you I've never seen two people more in love in my entire life than my parents.

BILL [00:04:41]: And my father caught me up in his arms and he held me close and he said "Son, I love you." Well, he had not said those words in that way or held me like that since I was much smaller, not since anytime I could remember, I knew he loved me, but he hadn't held me like that or said those words.

BILL [00:04:52]: That night, I'm lying in bed and I'm 15, tears coming down my eyes and I'm thinking "My dad loves me. My dad loves me. I wonder if my Father in heaven loves me that way too." And as soon as I had the thought, I knew it was true. My Father in heaven loves me.

BILL [00:05:09]: And that launched me. You know, from that point on, never looked back. He loves me. And he's called me to be an instrument of his love in the world.

STEW [00:05:18]: That is such a touching, you know, I just think that speaks to a lot of people, Bill. I mean it does and it's- it's inspiring and- and you don't hear a story like that very often. And- and you've mentioned how important your parents were, were there any other adults that had a- a great influence on- on you when you were younger?

BILL [00:05:36]: There- there were, and I'll come back to that. But first, sha- I need to give a shout out to my dad. Right. Because when I'm 23 and I'm now the youth minister at our- the church I grew up in and- and I dropped by the house one morning

BILL [00:05:49]: and go upstairs and Dad's shaving and I said "Dad, what's your mission? What's your mission in life?" And he paused and he put down his razor, he thought for a second, he turned to me and he said "To facilitate the ministry of my wife and children. That's my life mission."

STEW [00:06:02]: Wow.

BILL [00:06:07]: Uh, my mother passed six months ago. They were married for 68 years.

STEW [00:06:18]: Wow.

BILL [00:06:20]: They had five weeks before she died, the 100th member of the clan was born.

STEW [00:06:28]: Wow.

BILL [00:06:30]: So, so from the 12 children to grandchildren to great grandchildren and in-laws. That's 100 people.

STEW [00:06:41]: Wow.

BILL [00:06:44]: And the amazing thing about it is not just the numbers, but that we actually love each other. Like we love to be together.

STEW [00:06:49]: That is- is amazing. My story is so different than that. I was an only of an only of an only and in- like you could have had a family reunion in a phone booth, at- at our place. But 100 people is astonishing.

STEW [00:07:02]: I mean there's an interesting progression in your education and life. You began with political philosophy at LSU and moved into theology at Catholic University and eventually earned your degrees in personal counseling from Loyola.

STEW [00:07:17]: Then you took your work, youth ministry, discipleship, counseling, teaching, and people kept showing up at the center of it. When did you begin to understand that helping people grow toward maturity was going to be such an important part of your life's work?

BILL [00:07:28]: Well, I started at first I watched my parents, right? I watched the ministry they had. And then I went off to college, uh, give a shout out to LSU. Uh, and uh, there

BILL [00:07:41]: I got involved with Cru, what was called Campus Crusade at that point. And it was just a natural thing that I would get involved with campus ministry.

BILL [00:07:53]: And you know wonderful people, our- our apartment became the center of the relational ministry. So there- there were those who were doing the program ministry and then the then our apart me and my three roommates our- the center of the relational ministry.

BILL [00:08:06]: We didn't know how many keys to that apartment there were. They were just spread out. And we never went to bed, we had a couch that folded out and made a bed, we never went to bed knowing who would be sleeping on our couch when we woke up.

BILL [00:08:17]: And uh, somehow began to see the- the relationships are at the center of ministry. Now I- I want to be du- I want to be careful here because I'm grateful, but the model of- for the community and the positive impact it had for me, but I began to discern that the ministry model,

BILL [00:08:27]: something was missing. Because the- the model went something like this: people have two kinds of problems. They're ignorant, they don't know what they're supposed to do, and they make bad choices. So the solution to that is give them biblical truth and exhort them to make good choices.

BILL [00:08:41]: I would say the- that that's only got two, this nice sounding model. I mean and I led these studies where you'd- you'd find a- the blank line and a verse in parentheses and you'd look it up and you'd fill it in. Uh, the suggestion

though this was not the int- was that somehow if you got the right answers in the right place

BILL [00:08:54]: and you memorized the right scriptures and you made good choices, all would be well. And uh, well, it's only got two problems. One that's not biblical and two it doesn't work. And you can- self-assess by simply asking the question.

BILL [00:09:09]: Think of the, you know, think of it when A and B and C happens, uh, I might respond D and E and D and E doesn't look like Jesus. And uh, this was my experience. And I really don't need another Bible verse.

BILL [00:09:21]: I'm already convinced that D and E doesn't look like Jesus. And exhortation to do better, more likely to cause me to just to feel guilty and defeated because literally when D and E happens it's- it's almost as if those words are coming out of my mouth and I'm saying "This is not good," but they're already out there.

BILL [00:09:34]: And you're just- you're just biblically stuck in Romans 7, right? Where the- the very things I hate I find myself doing. And I found a lot of believers in that situation. Well-intentioned, wanting to do the right things, and yet

BILL [00:09:47]: uh, and just giving them another Bible verse wouldn't help that much. Just make them feel more guilty. So how is it that we actually change? How is it that we grow from what one might call a disposition, or the- the aspects of our disposition that Paul would call the flesh, and how are we

BILL [00:10:03]: transformed from that to the new man? You know, how do we live and experience differently? And basically the models I was being presented didn't seem- seemed to me to come more from, uh, an enlightenment understanding of the human person than from a biblical one. That's a whole longer discussion we could have.

BILL [00:10:15]: But I started that became really my pursuit. That, I mean probably starting in by my sophomore year in college, I'm saying "These are dear people trying to serve the kingdom. I'm trying to serve the kingdom, and yet

BILL [00:10:29]: we keep tripping over ourselves in certain ways and how- how would Christ deliver us from that?" And praise God there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, as Paul begins in Romans. But how do we actually become uh, mature men, mature women? How do we get beyond the things that have held us in bondage?

BILL [00:10:45]: And so that became my quest and I knew it had something to do with community. I had seen the power of community in my family, I had seen the power of community with the Cru group that I was working, involved with, that constituted my tribe at college.

BILL [00:10:59]: I saw the power of discipleship, of having a small band of together pursuing Christ together. That somehow that was more transformative than just having the words.

STEW [00:11:14]: Yeah, that's interesting. I, you know, your- your- your couch that is- is really symbolic of the epicenter of your community, right? Um, yeah, I can relate in no uncertain terms to the idea that the more you read the guiltier you feel.

STEW [00:11:29]: And I can relate to that. Uh, in and it's like "Oh, I said to some- to my in two days' wife, I said 'You know, I- I feel- I- I learned a bunch more stuff that I'm doing wrong today.'" And so it's interesting that you recognized that so long ago and pursued it in this way.

STEW [00:11:43]: So let me go to the next piece here, which is there's a real interesting chapter where you're leading a discipleship ministry on Capitol Hill and you're serving as the assistant to the Chaplain of the United States Senate, which I'd love to know more about that.

STEW [00:11:59]: And it's really interesting because I have had a very, very limited exposure to that world and it is- and at least from my limited experience, a very different world. And there's a lot of very different motivations and how people influence one another and all of that.

STEW [00:12:13]: So what did being in that environment teach you about people and- and our need for God?

BILL [00:12:22]: Well, I think uh, probably the best things is to tell you the story of Jonathan House, right? So I had been thinking uh, this way, I'd come to the conclusion that we are transformed in community. That the human brain is fundamentally bee-like stuff.

BILL [00:12:36]: So so our human brain wants to copy another brain. Another mind. And God has so made us and it's- you see it particularly in children. Now the older we get the slower, the more the slower that process might be. But there's a lot of truth to the statement that uh, you will become the average of your five best friends.

BILL [00:12:50]: And that's why Paul's inf- emphasis on the church and on community and being together, that we're transformed uh, in community not as autonomous selves. So

BILL [00:13:02]: Jonathan House uh, I was a group of us uh, were called to pray, to a season of prayer. We had spent a weekend with a guy by the name of Fletcher Lawless, who at that time was uh, a professor at Gordon's Seminary.

BILL [00:13:17]: And uh, he'd spent his lifetime studying spiritual renewal. And we asked the question uh, "What have you learned? You've spent your whole life studying spiritual renewal from Acts to the Benedictine renewal, the Cistercian renewal, the Franciscan renewal,

BILL [00:13:30]: the Reformation, the Great Awakenings, the Welsh Coal Mining renewal, the Azusa Street renewal. You've spent your whole life studying uh, what have you learned?" And so there were a group of us and just about 10 of us and he said "Well, seems that anytime you have a band of friends

BILL [00:13:43]: who are committed to these things, they're committed to loving one another in a practical way. So if there's a need, you meet it. They're committed to serious prayer, and they're committed to radical obedience. If Jesus said 'Jump,' you said 'How high?' on the way up."

BILL [00:13:57]: He said "When you get a band of people doing that, a small group, things often break loose. I mean we think of Billy Graham's little cadre of friends around him that- that launched and supported his ministry for 50 years."

BILL [00:14:07]: And so uh, I felt led to a season of prayer so uh, I mentioned and four of us started to pray we- we would pray from 6:00 to 7:30 every morning, six days a week, uh, for a year, praying for renewal in our own hearts and the of our friends and for ever whatever he would want to do.

STEW [00:14:23]: Wow.

BILL [00:14:35]: Well, about three months in, I was praying, I heard this little inner voice say "Gather a group of men, move onto Capitol Hill and be salt and light." I, of course, said "That's ridiculous" and put it out of my mind.

BILL [00:14:48]: But it kept coming back. And after a week, I said "Well, at least I should tell the guys about it." So I told them and- and they said "That sounds like it might be Jesus, we should pray about that."

BILL [00:15:00]: Well, when are six months later when our season of prayer was fin- our year commitment was done, I moved onto Capitol Hill in a tiny little apartment. I was in grad school at the time and I would just walk the streets and pray and I'm a poor grad student, right?

BILL [00:15:14]: And if there was a for sale sign, I might see if God would break something loose. So in February of '86, I was walking by 320 East Capitol Street. Now if you're in the rotunda of the US Capitol and you went turned to east and you went through the big bronze doors,

BILL [00:15:26]: down the marble staircase and you walked straight, you'd pass the Supreme Court on your left, the Library of Congress on your right, if you went another 150 yards you'd be standing in front of 320 East Capitol.

BILL [00:15:38]: So I- this is February of '86 and I'm walking by and there's a for sale sign and the door is open and there's what's clearly a real estate agent standing in the atrium. So I walk in and I walk up to her and I say "This may sound really strange to you,

BILL [00:15:52]: but uh, I'm looking for a place where a dozen men could live together on Capitol Hill and try to figure out what it means to love God with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself."

BILL [00:16:04]: And she looked at me and she said "You know the owner might be interested in something like that." You have to say "Go figure," right?

STEW [00:16:16]: Yes, you do.

BILL [00:16:18]: And in the end, owner knew one of the guys I was praying with. And uh, so he said uh, "You can move in on April 1st on condition you buy by the end of the year." And- and we prayed about it, seemed to be of the Lord.

BILL [00:16:30]: And uh, so on April 1, 1986, Jonathan House was born. And we just finished our, for- had our 40th anniversary celebration. There have been-

STEW [00:16:45]: Wow.

BILL [00:16:47]: Yeah, there have been over 200, probably 250 guys who have lived a year there pursued Christ. Uh, when we gathered back, they would bring some of them brought their sons and daughters who are now adults. "You've got to come see this place that was so formative in Dad's life."

BILL [00:16:59]: And we had 150 of the men come back from across the country just to remember and celebrate all the Lord has done. But that was, uh, I then once we had the place, I wrote the house covenant. "This is what we agree to. We're not just a boarding house, we're going to actively pursue Christ together.

BILL [00:17:12]: We're going to be committed to hospitality." And there have been thousands of guests through the years who have come. And there have been people that have met Christ and there are others who have come to see uh, the Christian faith in a whole different light.

BILL [00:17:27]: Yeah, it's been uh, beautiful to watch. So as we were starting Jonathan House, the Senate Chaplain approached me and said "Well, you're going to be on Capitol Hill working with Congressional staff. Would you come be my assistant in my office?"

BILL [00:17:40]: And so that was a great privilege. A man by the name of Richard Halverson, uh, who when I was carrying his briefcase, uh, you know, he had walked with Christ for 50 years. And there's nothing like that. Now I- I'm now at that place who where by his grace I've been walking with him for over 50 years.

BILL [00:17:55]: And uh, but that was just a really he was truly remarkable man. He- what made- what was the most impressive thing about Dr. Halverson is he was not a respecter of persons. He saw the elevator operator or the uh, woman serving in the cafeteria

BILL [00:18:08]: as much the image of God and as precious to God as the US Senator. And that's actually what qualified him to- to ministry for ministry with the

Senators because they knew that- that he just loved them and he really wasn't impressed by the resume.

STEW [00:18:23]: Yeah, I love that. You know, I- I mean you can- you're free- free to disagree, but I think that you're a remarkable man having walked in faith for 50 years. I mean it is- it is as we say in- in my industry, center of the fairway

STEW [00:18:36]: for this podcast, right? This is exactly what we're hoping to deliver. And so there's a sentence in your biography that caught my attention. You've spent a lot, a lot of hours as a professional counselor supporting people who- whose lives have become less than

STEW [00:18:50]: something the scripture describes. And I think a lot of Christians including me can identify with that. The question is though, after spending so many hours sitting with people in those places, what have you learned about genuine spiritual growth and how it happens?

BILL [00:19:05]: So I mean there are one way to think of it is we all have a disposition, but as the brain-programmed ways of responding in any given circumstance. Someone we're driving down the highway, someone cuts us off.

BILL [00:19:18]: Our brain has a pre-programmed response to that event. Actually it might have several possible responses and there might be a and you could parse them by percentage, you know, a percentage chance I respond in a less than Christ-like way and there's a per- but that's brain-based, right?

BILL [00:19:31]: And while with intentionality one can develop new habits, new neurophysiological habits, ways of response, uh, repentant, being quick to repent when I encounter a situation where I'm less than like Jesus acknowledging it. All of that is important.

BILL [00:19:44]: Practicing the spiritual disciplines. But that's only a part of the story, right? Uh, remember I said the brain is made out of bee-like stuff. So human trans- transformation is actually more than just the individual by himself

BILL [00:19:55]: making better decisions, pulling himself up from the bootstraps. Fundamentally, if you had come into my counseling office, I would have begun with the scripture verse and a passage and it's the story of the stoning of Stephen.

BILL [00:20:12]: So I would say "Here's a good man, cares for widows and orphans. One day he's out preaching Jesus. Some people get so upset that they draw on him, drag him out of town and commence to stoning him to death."

BILL [00:20:26]: Here's a good man being stoned to death but for all the world he looks like a man at peace. How is it that you could be a good man being stoned to death and still be a man at peace?

BILL [00:20:39]: And I point out, I- I don't think there's any Bible verse that I could have told him that would have made the difference on that. But there are the

wonderful two verses that say "He looked up and he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father."

BILL [00:20:50]: And I'm convinced but at that point what he's caught what a neurologist or developmental psychologist might call "attunement" with Jesus. So developmental psychology talks about attunement between infants, toddlers, and their mother. Uh, that's a human capacity.

BILL [00:21:05]: When we attune with someone else we get their emotional strength. Our brain actually mimics the one that we're attuned with. So I'm convinced that Stephen seeing Jesus, he's actually attuned with the mind of Christ.

BILL [00:21:19]: It doesn't say he meditated on the sovereignty of God. That would have been of no use to him when you're being stoned to death. Right? That's actually the wrong part of the brain working there. But it says "he sees Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father."

BILL [00:21:31]: And he's attuned to Jesus. The way a player attunes with a great coach. You know, you think of great coach, great coach can make his players play 120 percent of what they're actually capable of on their own.

BILL [00:21:45]: So he, in the same way, he's attuned with Coach Jesus. And by being so attuned he gets Jesus's emotional strength so he can peacefully say "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing. But it's all good.

BILL [00:21:59]: You can take my cloak I can give you my coat, you can strike me on the left I can turn the right, you can force me to go a mile I can go two, it's all good. Not a problem because he's with me and I behold him."

STEW [00:22:16]: It is- it is a powerful, you know, I mean one of the things I- you know, in my industry podcast and when we set out to do this, I- I am blessed to have the opportunity to hear you tell a story like that in all sincerity. It's powerful. It's powerful. And as- as you said in talk when you're talking, like things go through my head just as I'm sitting here listening to you.

STEW [00:22:46]: And- and I can only imagine, Bill, how many other people are just like me and they'll- they'll get a chance to hear you say that and it'll affect them the same way. So, you know, I really appreciate- I really appreciate you for that.

STEW [00:22:59]: Your story intersects with Mary Ellen's work. I haven't had the pleasure of meeting Mary Ellen but I hope to. The two of you find yourselves building something together that becomes Ambleside Schools International.

STEW [00:23:14]: Can you tell me about your lovely wife and Ambleside?

BILL [00:23:26]: And so Mary Ellen was a always a gifted teacher. She was the third-grade teacher that parents would ask, "Can your can our children be in her class?" And then they'd say to her "Will you go up to fourth grade and teach our students again?"

BILL [00:23:39]: Uh, she was just very gifted, very relational. But uh, by the time she'd been teaching eight years, she was becoming uh, profoundly dissatisfied with the status quo. Uh, her contention was while good people, if you took a video camera

BILL [00:23:52]: and you videotaped what was happening in the classroom and then you went down to the to a public school of the same socioeconomic class and you videotaped what was happening there, they would be fundamentally the same except that you would have some curriculum addition.

BILL [00:24:06]: So you might have uh, you would have Bible at the Christian school you wouldn't have it. You might uh, teach evolution uh, secular evolution at the public school you might teach Young Earth or Old Earth creationism, uh, in the Christian school.

BILL [00:24:20]: So some curriculum differences, but the fundamental dance that teachers were doing was the same. And uh, she was 29 and teaching at a thousand-student Christian school associated with a large church

BILL [00:24:34]: and the pastor and principal came to her at the end of her first year and said to her "Will you train all the teachers?" Now she's 29, right? She's been there one year. "Will you train all the teachers?"

BILL [00:24:47]: And she said, this will give you a sense of who my wife is, she said "To do what?"

[Laughter]

STEW [00:24:56]: Like to become electricians or what are you thinking?

BILL [00:24:58]: And they said "To be like you."

BILL [00:25:02]: And she said "There are three problems with that. Number one, I don't know what I'm doing. I have a set of eclectic practices. I see something good, I intuit it's a good thing to do, I do it, it works, it doesn't work, I learn,

BILL [00:25:14]: but I do not have a coherent pedagogy, a systematic approach to education that I could train anyone else to do. I don't have one myself. Problem number two: your teachers are not asking me to train them.

BILL [00:25:28]: I'm 28, you've got people here that have been teaching for 30 years. Why would they listen to me? Number three: I'm so frustrated with this across the hall there's a teacher yelling at students for every wrong answer,

BILL [00:25:41]: down the hall there's a teacher giving a piece of candy for every right answer. I'm so frustrated, here's my resignation."

STEW [00:25:53]: Oh no! I can only imagine the look on the two faces.

BILL [00:25:57]: Oh, no! And so she went to uh, Atlanta to do uh, an internship at a Christian counseling center thinking maybe she'd change careers. And at the end of the six-month internship she said "No, I'm called to be a teacher.

BILL [00:26:12]: And if that's the case, I need to figure out what authentic Christian education is and it- it's got to be more than secular education with Bible verses. You know, it's got to be something different."

BILL [00:26:25]: And she went on a pursuit and that pursuit would end when she was handed the writings of British educator Charlotte Mason, who lived from uh, 1842 to 1923 and uh, she started a teacher trai- training college, she wanted to call it the House of Holy Spirit.

BILL [00:26:41]: Uh, for Victorian England she was told was a little much, so they called it the House of Education. Which she wa- was okay with because she believed one her fundamental tenet is the Holy Spirit is the chief educator of all knowledge.

BILL [00:26:57]: And so uh, Mary Ellen when she started reading said "This is it, this is what I've been looking for." She uh, modeled her class and gained some practical experience. Uh, she then uh, was asked to train teachers uh, at the school which she tried to do,

BILL [00:27:10]: but it was again the second she had the first problem solved, she had a coherent pedagogy that she could instruct in. But the second problem was still there, "Why would they listen to me?" So after a season she said

BILL [00:27:22]: "Look, I'm becoming a source of division here. I'm- I'm not here to do that. You need to either make an institutional commitment to this pedagogy and the leadership say 'This is what we're doing, I can then support it,' or," she said, "I- I need to go somewhere else."

BILL [00:27:33]: Well uh, in '99 she moved to the little town of uh, Fredericksburg, Texas to spend a year in prayer and writing curriculum. Dreaming of starting a school on these principles from the ground up.

BILL [00:27:47]: And uh, a group of parents began to gather and pray that she would start the school in Fredericksburg. So in 2000 Ambleside of Fredericksburg was born. Uh, it opened its doors September 2000. We've now grown to uh, over 30 schools in the US and in schools in South Africa, Mozambique,

BILL [00:28:03]: Kenya, Nigeria, Austria, and uh, Calcutta. All again the Lord's miraculous work in so many ways. Every school has its own uh, story. But we started we were both single uh, for 43 years when we got married.

BILL [00:28:17]: Uh, we met when we were 41 at the National Prayer Breakfast in DC. When we started we started dating seriously right after right when Ambleside was opening its doors in 2000. And we were engaged uh, three months after the first Ambleside opened.

BILL [00:28:32]: And we now had a decision to make because uh, I had an established counseling practice, uh, and she had just launched the school and they were 600 miles apart. So what are you going to somebody's moving, right?

BILL [00:28:47]: And uh, to her credit she didn't want me to feel like I was marrying Ambleside and perhaps the Lord would use her to launch it but she would join me at my- at my coun- in my hometown, right? I- but the key point came when I visited the school and I was sitting on a picnic table watching.

BILL [00:29:02]: And I watched the way teachers and students interacted and students interacted with each other and I I was sitting there and had this thought: "If children could have this kind of formation for 13 years,

BILL [00:29:17]: K through 12, they would be so much less likely to be in my counseling office 20 years from now. And if you can get ahead of it, shouldn't you get ahead of it?"

STEW [00:29:29]: Mm.

BILL [00:29:44]: And so I closed my counseling office, moved to Texas, married Mary Ellen, uh, and we have been on this adventure together for the last 25 years. And we've seen Christ show up in so many ways and in so many lives. And yeah.

STEW [00:29:57]: Wow.

BILL [00:29:59]: One of the maxims of Charlotte Mason is "Education is the science of relations." So that should just fit with my whole life story, right? It's the science of relations. And what is it like to have an entire school

BILL [00:30:12]: in which everything is shaped around the- the relational dynamics and what the questions of what are optimal relational dynamics?

STEW [00:30:22]: Yeah and it's interesting another thing that's struck me about Ambleside is the attention that you give to a student, the person that the student is becoming, right? And so naturally and I was a prof for a while and uh, you know you you you look at grades. How is this is this student absorbing what

STEW [00:30:41]: we're teaching and then you get a- an academic performance, right? But you're also asking deeper questions like "Is this person becoming more curious, more attentive, more diligent?" and so forth.

STEW [00:30:53]: So it occurs to me and this has been an incredibly moving and- and I've learned a lot on this podcast. It occurred to me that those are pretty good questions for a 61-year-old too.

STEW [00:31:03]: So at this stage of your own life, Bill, how do you think about the person that you're still becoming?

BILL [00:31:12]: And- and we are now at the age where habit transformation is a slow and difficult process. In other words our brain has run in certain ways for so long.

BILL [00:31:23]: And our general ability to change cognitive function whether it's to learn German or to learn a new a- it's just not what it once was. But there is a different part of the story and that is

BILL [00:31:36]: I love Paul's statement "as we behold him we are transformed from one state of glory to the next." So what I'm working on is less particular

BILL [00:31:48]: bad habits and more one in focus. That is as I behold him. So like right now, Stew, I am as aware of the presence of Jesus as I am of you.

BILL [00:32:01]: He is sitting in this chair right next to me and he is completely real to me. Now I've been working on what you call "practicing the presence" for probably 50 years. So at any moment in any time in any situation,

BILL [00:32:14]: I can find him the way Stephen found him. And when I find him, it's like being on a glide path. The same temptations just aren't there. I actually live differently.

BILL [00:32:27]: I become in some sense invulnerable. You just can't get to me because he's here and he's real to me, he's as real to me as you are and and the only way the devil gets to me is to get me to forget him or not see him or be blind to him or something because when I behold him

BILL [00:32:42]: glory.

STEW [00:32:44]: Notice that's a completely different way of think. No, it's very- it's very interesting and I can see how it's almost like Jesus is watching. Jesus is watching, right?

STEW [00:32:52]: But you've made that real in your own life, which helps you make decisions that are more Christ-like. Is that fair? Is that a fair representation? Well it's probably an oversimplification. It's the best I've got.

BILL [00:33:05]: Well well what I would say is decision is overstated. Right? You know over- overemphasized. We live in some sense as is our nature to do. In point of fact very rarely through the course of my life, I'm not saying never,

BILL [00:33:21]: that was I ever in the situation where I said "Hmm, I could follow Jesus, I could do what he would want me to do. I could spit in his eye. Follow Jesus, spit in his eye. I'm going with spitting in his eye this time." That just-

BILL [00:33:35]: that just doesn't happen very often. I'm not saying never, but that's extremely rare. Most times it's I'm going to follow Jesus and then I get an impulse out this way and it's gone. You know there was never a choice.

BILL [00:33:48]: You know actually one of my pet irritations is uh, parents who say to their chi- to their four-year-old "Now don't make a bad choice" or "You made a bad choice" and I'm thinking "This kid made no choice. He just lived, you know he just

BILL [00:34:01]: went with the flow. There was no 'Hmm, I could obey Mom, disobey Mom, I'm going to go with disobey Mom,' that's not what happens." Right? And so now what can happen is where we put our attention.

BILL [00:34:12]: And uh, you know I- when the little buzzer goes off and in time you remember the warning lights on car, the dummy light that- well God has given- given us a dummy light.

BILL [00:34:26]: And it's when we are- we feel anxious, when we lose our peace. Okay, when I lose my peace, something's amiss. You let the peace of Christ reign in your heart, Paul says in Colossians. When I when his peace is in my heart then you know-

BILL [00:34:40]: it's all good. I'm- I'm much more resistant to the schemes of the enemy. But first I have to notice it. So the two I'm really only working on two things: noticing when I lose my peace

BILL [00:34:54]: so the peace of Christ is no longer reigning in my heart right now, notice that. And two, find Jesus in the room with me. Behold him because as I behold him I'm transformed from one stage of glory to the next.

BILL [00:35:06]: So that's the two things. That's kind of like the meta issues. If I do those pretty much everything else falls into place.

STEW [00:35:15]: It's very helpful because I think those are good tools to- like that they're practical. It's implementable. Right? You go "You know be more Christ-like" and you go "Okay, now what?" Right?

STEW [00:35:33]: And- and it's like "Okay, I made another mist- I did it wrong again, did it wrong again, did it wrong again." And I just think that's super helpful. I mean there- there's so much more here and I'd love to have you back and I you know it's we're getting up here right I got to I got to kind of wrap,

STEW [00:35:49]: but I'd love to I'd love to have you back. I- I'm inspired, I'm really inspired by what you've said here today and so given everything we've talked about do you have any kind of key takeaway that you want you'd want to share with our audience

STEW [00:36:04]: kind of as a- as we close here?

BILL [00:36:09]: Jesus's prayer in John 17: "That they might be one with each other and one with him as he is one with the Father."

BILL [00:36:21]: And you don't get there by beating yourself up. You don't get there by more information and better decisions. You get there by learning to practice his presence and commune with him.

BILL [00:36:35]: I mean one with him as he is with the Father. There was a time when my prayer life most of it was talking at him. Telling him what I'm thankful for, telling him what I did wrong, telling him what I what I wanted him to do for me.

BILL [00:36:48]: You know and those are all good things. But the heart of it is me sharing my heart with him and allowing him to share his heart with me. I'll give you one more practical that this is kind of one of my go-to recommendations.

BILL [00:37:03]: And that is set aside a little time each day to get yourself a journal and write "Dear" on the page, "Dear Jesus," and write to Jesus everything you would want to say to him.

BILL [00:37:17]: Assume he's your best friend you love and you just want to let him know everything you're thinking and feeling.

STEW [00:37:32]: I think that's a great idea. I'm going to take you up on it, Bill. I am, I'm going to take you up on it.

BILL [00:37:34]: And then turn turn, oh let me give you the second part. Turn the page and write "Dear Stew" and write down everything Jesus might want to say to you.

BILL [00:37:47]: Got to go both ways. Now sometimes you'll write something and you'll say "That doesn't sound like Jesus" or "That's troubling." No problem, just take a pen and draw a line through it. That doesn't fit with who Jesus is, the Jesus of the New Testament.

BILL [00:38:04]: And sometimes you'll say "Hmm, I don't know if that's him or me writing that saying that." Well, when two brains are connected it's often hard to tell whose idea it was.

BILL [00:38:19]: Like if you're talking to your wife, you know at the end of the conversation, "Now whose idea was that? I don't know. Is it hers, mine? No, it was ours. It was created by us."

BILL [00:38:32]: And so, but sometimes you'll read and you say "That is exactly what Jesus would say to me and I would never have put it that way."

STEW [00:38:44]: I really appreciate it. Thank you so much for- for being on and thank you for sharing your your considerable wisdom with not only with our audience but with me. I really appreciate what you had to say today and- and just lots and lots of respect for your journey and

STEW [00:39:04]: I'd love to meet Mary Ellen and have her on. You know, it's really the words that we started with "so lightly," there's something beautifully freeing about that. And- um, I want to I just want to say thank you so much.

BILL [00:39:19]: It's been a joy, Stew. The Lord bless you and your listeners.

STEW [00:39:24]: Thank you so much. Um, we've been joined today by Bill Saint Cyr. I just say, you know, we sow the seeds, God takes it from there. We appreciate you watching. If you would sow one seed by telling uh someone about our podcast. That will make you that Texas podvangelist as well. Until next time, que Dios te bendiga, may God bless you and yours. We'll see you again next time on OG Pastors, Faith Over a Lifetime.

[Upbeat music]