

Habits of Happiness

Habit #1: Think Correctly About Others

Part 1

Intro: This world is so broken and painful, sometimes experiencing happiness can seem like an impossibility. I have lost count how many people over the years have said in desperation; “I just want to be happy.” Is too much to ask for in this life? Is it too much to ask? Is happiness a dream we should abandon? Is this another expectation we need to adjust? Does God even care about my happiness?

- Of course He does! BUT, we need to get on God’s agenda for happiness and fulfillment. God’s not going to just zap us with happiness. We need to embrace what God says about it.
- For the next 8 weeks this is exactly what we’re going to be doing. We’re going to unpack the book of Philippians and discover 8 habits of happiness. Why Philippians? Because the Apostle Paul is writing from prison. If there was ever a guy who had reason to be unhappy it was him. Yet, his book is all about joy. In fact, 16 X’s he mentions joy or rejoicing or its equivalent. Therefore, if Paul can be filled with joy and experience happiness being chained up 24 hours a day, I think we can learn some things about happiness from him.
- The first habit we see Paul address is the Habit of Thinking Correctly about Others.

Phil. 1:3-7 “Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. ⁴ Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, ⁵ for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. ⁶ And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. ⁷ So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart.” (NLT)

Here we have a great passage that reveals how Paul thinks about this group of people in the city of Philippi. He is modeling for us how to think correctly about others.

- If we think incorrectly about others and relationships, we will make ourselves miserable. It’s just a fact that if we think negatively about others / bitterly / maliciously / untrusting / unloving thoughts, this makes us unhappy.
- **Example:** Haven’t you ever been in a really good mood then something happened to remind you of someone you really struggle with. Now your mind is flooded with thoughts about this person...thoughts that are not very nice. What happens to your emotions? Do you feel happy? Hardly!
- What does it mean to think correctly about others so I can be happy?

1. Think about people thankfully

Phil. 1:3 “Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God.” (NLT)

- Now let's be honest, we probably all have people in our life where our first thought of this person is not “thankfulness”. Every time I think of you? Really? Yeah, every time I think of you I'm hoping you get what's coming to you. BUT this type of thinking is the fast track to unhappiness.
- Habitually thinking correctly about people is something that God wants us to do and it is something that helps foster happiness in us. So how do I choose to be thankful for people that I don't feel thankful about? How can I be thankful for people who have wounded me?
 - Reject the negative thinking.
There comes a time when we must learn how to control our negative thinking patterns. In fact, unless we learn how to do this we will never be happy.

*II Cor. 10:5 “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we **take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.**” (NIV)*

We either learn how to take our negative thoughts captive or we will be taken captive by them. When negative, critical, bitter thoughts about someone enters your mind, you immediately have a choice. Let the movie play or stop it. Explain first frame thinking.

- Thank God that He has a plan for their lives
We must replace the negative thoughts with the right thoughts...with God honoring thoughts. God does have a plan for their lives. Thank God for that plan. Pray that they discover that plan. Just because they don't know what it is and you don't know what it is doesn't mean this isn't God's desire for them.
- Thank God for the good they do in this life
Now, I know what you're thinking; “What good? They hurt me, wounded me; betrayed me. They're a horrible person. BUT, that's simply your experience. Very few people in this life are completely bad. Aren't we all a mixture of the two? Don't you ever have a bad day? What if the only exposure someone had with you was on one of your worst days?”
 - We must stop demonizing people. This gets back to taking thoughts captive. I've had people who have wounded me deeply still do very gracious and loving things for others. People are not ALL bad. Choose to thank God for the good they do that you may have never seen.

We can either think about others and resent them or be thankful. One choice is guaranteed to make you unhappy while the other is a happiness increaser.

2. Think about people prayerfully

Phil. 1:4 “Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy,” (NLT)

- By far one of the best ways to begin changing your thoughts about someone you are struggling with is to pray for them. It’s just tough to keep hating someone you’re praying for.
- Now, when I say pray, I’m not talking about this. (Read lyrics: I’m praying for You)

How do we think about people prayerfully?

➤ Let your thoughts prompt you to pray

Often if we don’t choose to pray, our thoughts will prompt us to remember and be resentful. This will certainly not make us feel better. Therefore when you think about this person start praying for them.

- Personally, this is something that has helped me greatly over the years. I have had plenty of opportunity to either think very negatively or pray for people, Sometimes even as I drive and go by certain places that can have negative attachments. Therefore, I allow this to prompt me to pray.

➤ Pray that God blesses them

Here is the quickest way to find out if you’re hanging on to bitterness. If you can’t pray blessing you’re still bitter. If praying that God would bless them is a repulsive concept then you still have some issues to resolve. “God, I pray blessing over this person.”

➤ Pray for His will in their lives

Wouldn’t life be better for all of us if we all walked according to God’s will? Here is another way to prayerfully think about people. Pray that God’s will becomes their reality. Pray they discover God and His plan for their lives in a profound manner.

Instead of allowing our negative experiences with others to make us miserable, choose to think about people prayerfully. You’ll be amazed at how it impacts your emotions and your joy.

3. Think about people progressively

Phil. 1:6 “And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.” (NLT)

- What do I mean? It's so important that we think about people as unfinished projects. God is still working in people. This work is not finished until we see Jesus. Often we simply expect people to be more perfect than they really are. We expect them to be more mature than they really are. Thinking about people progressively helps me be much more gracious with their shortcomings.

Therefore, before you get upset and get critical of people.....

- Remember you have encountered an unfinished person
Sometimes we experience the rough edges of people's personalities. We came face to face with the unfinished part of God's project. Don't assume their entire person is like this. This is our problem. We experience a piece and then we judge the whole!
 - Someone wasn't friendly at Safeway / someone walked right by you at church and didn't say HI or even smile / someone was grumpy, critical or even rude /
 - Before you begin to think critically of that person, remember they're unfinished. God is still working on them...just like He's still working on you.
- Remember we all have different issues
Before you criticize another person for their issue they struggle with, just remind yourself that we all struggle, but we all don't struggle with the same issues. Another person's weakness or growth area may be your strength. I have seen so many believers over the years condemn people for an addiction to drugs and alcohol while they have an addiction to gossip / critical attitude / materialistic
 - Thinking about people progressively is choosing to give grace for people and their areas of growth that may be different than yours.
- Remember we grow at a different pace
Just because God is at work in all of us progressively making us more like Jesus doesn't mean we all grow at the same pace. I've made this mistake many times over the years thinking that someone was further down the road spiritually than they really are. So why do we grow at different paces?
 - We all have been exposed to different spiritual climates
Some people have been in environments that have been very productive for spiritual growth. Kind of like a spiritual equator...warm and tropical and everything grows. Others have been in spiritual environment more like Alaska where the growing season is short and the winters are harsh and long. It's a good thing to remember before we get too critical of others.
 - We all have made choices to grow or not
Regardless of the environments we have been exposed to, we all have made choices over the years to grow or not grow. These choices have either stunted our

spiritual growth or accelerated our spiritual growth. Either way, it means we grow at different paces.

Thinking about others progressively gives us a lot more grace and a lot more joy.

4. Think about people lovingly

Phil. 1:7 “So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart.” (NLT)

It’s easy for people to have a special place in our hearts when we mutually get along and love each other. BUT, what about the ones we struggle with? What about the people that rub us the wrong way? Yeah, they have a special place in our hearts as well but it’s not a nice place for sure! BUT, thinking about people like this only makes us miserable. How can I think about these people lovingly?

- Think about others with forgiveness

When someone has wounded us, forgiveness is the most loving thing we can do. Forgiveness is the most loving relational response. It’s also the choice that will impact our emotions in a positive way. Bitterness and unforgiveness always makes us miserable. Unforgiveness is like drinking emotional poison. It poisons our emotions and robs us of happiness. It will kill happiness in you!

- If you have someone in your life you have yet to forgive, this will be the most profound place for you to start when it comes to your happiness. Your future happiness depends on this.

- Think about others with good will

In other words, we don’t think ill-will on others. We don’t have thoughts about people getting what’s coming to them. Rather, we choose to think God’s best for them. It’s what I Cor. 13:7 says, “*Love...always hopes, always perseveres.*” (NLT) In other words, we choose to hope for the best in others regardless. This choice protects us from hoping for the worst. (Which by the way, makes us miserable.)

- Think about others with God’s help

Phil. 2:12-13 “Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. ¹³ For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.” (NLT)

Thinking about others correctly is one way we work hard at showing the results of our salvation. BUT, we can’t do this alone in our own strength. It’s too hard. Notice that it is God who is giving us the desire and the power to do what please Him. This is

something I pray for all the time in my relationship with God. “God, please give me the desire and power to do this.” We need to pray for both issues because sometimes I don’t have the desire to do the hard things. I need His power but I also need Him to change my desires. This helps me think about people lovingly.

It is just a fact that our happiness is connected to our relationships and how we think about others. If we view others as untrusting; if we hold on to bitterness; if we are filled with negativity towards others, this will rob us of joy in this life. I am convinced that one of the greatest sources of happiness in this life is the relationships we get to experience. BUT the foundation for our relational experiences begins with how we think about them.

If you have been consumed with thinking negatively about others I can guarantee that you are not a happy person. I realize it’s easy to think your unhappiness is because of others, but the truth is that your happiness begins and ends with you. Now, will you trust God enough to begin to make some changes in how you think? This is the first habit that will lead you to happiness.