

The Habits of Happiness

Prayer That Works

Part 7

Intro: Clichés are common in every culture. We have them in our culture. (Share) Clichés are also common in Christian culture. The problem with Christian clichés is that if we're not careful, we define our experience with Jesus with overly simplistic clichés rather than an authentic encounter with Jesus. (Share Christian clichés.)

Cliché: a phrase or expression that has been used so often that it is no longer original or interesting; a phrase or opinion that is overused and betrays a lack of original thought. In other words, it's used so much it loses its meaning.

Sometimes prayer can be used this way. Yet prayer is never to become cliché for a believer in Jesus. In fact, prayer is one of the greatest joy producers of our lives.

Phil. 4:6-7 "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." (NLT) Who doesn't need this?

This isn't about practicing prayer. It's about practicing prayer that works! Prayer that works is a joy producer, because it puts you in the environment where joy can be experienced. Prayer by itself doesn't produce joy. Prayer is a pathway that takes you to the One who gives you joy.

What does this type of praying look like?

1. Prayer That Is Trusting

"Don't worry about anything"

- I know what you're thinking; "That's impossible!" That's true. We all will struggle at times with worry and anxiety. BUT, we can live in a manner that reduces it. How can we be happy if we're always stressed out?
- Worry and anxiety will not cause us to pray more. In fact, it actually makes us pray less. All our energy is used up with stress and the fear of the future. There's no room for trust. It is trust in God that actually produces more praying in our lives. Trust is the foundation for praying. If I don't trust God why pray?

What am I trusting in? What does prayer look like that trusts?

- I trust that God hears

Ps. 31:22 "In panic I cried out, "I am cut off from the Lord!" But you heard my cry for mercy and answered my call for help. (NLT)

I choose to believe that God hears every prayer, every cry, every request. Even if I don't feel my prayers make it past the ceiling, I choose to trust He hears me.

- I trust that God cares

Ps. 31:7 “I will be glad and rejoice in your unfailing love, for you have seen my troubles, and you care about the anguish of my soul.” (NLT)

Sometimes it’s easy to think God doesn’t care about our pain...our anguish emotionally. Nothing could be further from the truth. Pain is not an indicator that God doesn’t care. Pain is an indicator we live in a fallen broken world and we need Him more than we ever thought possible. God’s love for us is profound, eternal and as vast as He is.

- I trust that God acts

*Ps. 119:126 “Lord, it is time for **you to act...**”*

I choose to believe that God will act on my behalf, but I also trust His timing of His action. Let’s face it, God’s timing is radically different than mine. If God is delaying, it doesn’t mean He’s not acting. He may be orchestrating events you cannot see. I may ask God to act according to my time expectations, but I still must trust Him even if He doesn’t.

- I trust that God is near

Ps. 34:18 “The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.” (NLT)

God doesn’t retreat from us when we hurt. Instead, He draws even closer. Sometimes, we simply have to take this by faith. Sometimes I feel His presence in powerful ways; and sometimes I take it by faith He is near whether I feel Him or not. Often, our feelings are very poor indicators of the presence of God.

- I trust God’s will

Is. 55:8 “My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the LORD. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.” (NLT)

I’m going to trust that even in circumstances that I do not understand, don’t like, and may actually cause pain, God is accomplishing His will somehow. I choose to believe and submit my life to His will. I trust He knows better than me. His plans are perfect not mine.

- If we do not have this foundation of trust in place, our prayer life is going to be pretty ineffective. It’s not going to work very well because we really don’t trust the One we’re praying to.
- The only way I can grow in not worrying about everything is to have an unshakable trust in the One I am praying to. Our trust is not in prayer. Our trust is in a person. Is your prayer trusting? How can I grow in this? Tell God repeatedly you trust Him. Speak these statements out loud, in your praying. Let them be declarations!

2. Prayer That Is Comprehensive

“instead, pray about everything”

This is an amazing statement. Does God really want me to talk to Him about everything?

Why would God want me to do this? Maybe it has something to do with what Jesus said in John 15. *John 15:5 “...For apart from me you can do nothing.” (NLT)* If this is true, then it would make sense to pray about everything. Comprehensive praying! This is why comprehensive praying is so important.

- Praying about everything demonstrates dependency

The more we learn to depend on God the more joy we will have in this life. The more we depend on ourselves, the more stress we will have in this life. Prayer is the dependency indicator of the believer’s life. The more you pray the more you depend. The less you pray the less you depend. Think about the areas of your life you don’t pray about? WHY?

- Praying about everything increases spiritual power

Whose power do you want to see? Your limited power and resources or God’s unlimited power and resources? I love Pastor Dee Duke’s quote: Little prayer, little blessing. Much prayer, much blessing. Want to see God’s power in your marriage / parenting / ministry / our church / our community? (Talk to people who serve: Never go into a serving situation without being prayed up. – explain)

James 4:2 “...Yet you don’t have what you want because you don’t ask God for it.” (NLT)

- Praying about everything keeps us connected relationally

Prayer is a relational experience not a religious one. God values the relationship with us. He values the conversation with His kids. Example: Talk about when we travel, I want to talk to my kids / grandkids almost every day. (Share)

- Praying about everything protects me from trusting myself

When we are constantly connecting relationally, we protect ourselves from moving in directions where we are simply trusting ourselves. We are giving God daily opportunities to redirect and lead us. When there are longer delays in communication, we will naturally do our own thing.

Matt. 7:7 “Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.” (NLT)

Notice the how we are encouraged to “keep on”. Are we “keeping on” praying about everything?

3. Prayer That Is Honest

“Tell God what you need”

This one sounds rather simple but how often are we truthful before God about our needs? Are we prayerfully honest? Do we reserve our praying for the really big issues and save the little needs for ourselves to handle? Do we sometimes try to sound more spiritual in our prayers than is reality? Do we tell God what we think He wants to hear from us?

There are 2 key areas where we need to practice brutally honest prayers.

- Prayers that are personally honest (The focus is you!)

These are times when you're not praying for others. This is personal transparency between you and God. I find there are many people who struggle with this issue. Praying for others is easy. Focusing on yourself at times is tough. This is where we embrace the reality that WE are the needy person before God. This is not the time to pray for others. This is personal honesty and neediness before God. It's time for heart exposure before God. (Share my own journey)

- I can't be the husband (or wife) my wife (husband) needs me to be.
- Lord, I'm struggling being the parent my kids need me to be.
- Fears over your finances
- Anxiety over the future
- Disappointment with your circumstances
- The stress of your job
- Being overwhelmed by life. "God I can't do this anymore." I am convinced that humble desperation is an attitude that makes prayer work! (broken desperation)

If we ignore personal honest prayers, we miss experiencing God's personal, specific answers. It's these unique answers to our prayers that impact our faith profoundly. They are demonstrations of His personal care. Are you giving yourself permission to tell God what you need?

- Prayers that are emotionally honest

These are prayers that are emotionally "unedited". People tend to emotionally edit their prayers. I can't pray angry / I can't pray disappointed / I can't pray struggling with bitterness and unforgiveness / I can't pray questioning what God is allowing in my life. Therefore, we emotionally "dress up" our prayers. There is a word for this: FAKE!

- God can handle our emotions

Do we really think our emotions surprise Him? He's an "all-knowing God" He already knows how you feel. What's the point in faking it? We need to develop the habit of being emotionally honest when we pray. We're not always "Fine". I love the Psalms because in this book we see brutal honesty before God.

Ps. 69:1-3 "Save me, O God, for the floodwaters are up to my neck. Deeper and deeper I sink into the mire; I can't find a foothold. I am in deep water, and the floods overwhelm me. I am exhausted from crying for help; my throat is parched. My eyes are swollen with weeping, waiting for my God to help me." (NLT)

God, I'm dying down here! Where are you!

- God can heal our emotions

Ps. 69:29 "I am suffering and in pain. Rescue me, O God, by your saving power." (NLT)

Ps. 34:18 "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed." (NLT)

I love this because it gives me hope that pain does not have to define our lives and

emotions. God can and will heal our hearts. Being honest before God with my wounded heart gives Him the opportunity to heal what this life has broken.

- I think about the first 12 years of ministry for me. It was defined by profound disappointment and pain. There is no way Lisa and I should be in ministry today. (Dog years – explain – 1 year = 7.) There were plenty of times I poured out my broken heart to God.
- Are you pouring out your wounded heart to God giving Him the opportunity to heal it?

➤ God can restore our emotions

Ps. 73:26 “My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.” (NLT)

When I am emotionally honest before God He not only heals, but restores our emotions. He doesn't just heal the pain but He restores our emotional health and strength. My life and heart moves on. I'm not destroyed by pain I am strengthened by it because God was in it with me. Pain doesn't define my heart, but Jesus does!

- Who or what is the strength of your heart? Yourself / your hard work / your success? When I'm honest about my emotions God becomes the strength of my emotions...the strength of my heart.

Prayer that works is prayer that's honest.

4. **Prayer That Is Thankful**

“thank him for all he has done”

- Thankfulness reminds me of God's past faithfulness

This is where having a track record with God comes in handy. I remind myself in stressful times of God's past faithfulness all the time. I thank Him for all He has done personally in my life already.

- When I find myself struggling with anxious thoughts over circumstances (personal – relational – professional), I have an extensive track record of God's faithfulness on this journey.
- Thankfulness allows me to see current issues in the light of past history.

- Thankfulness moves my focus off the current issue

Stress can cause us to be obsessed with whatever the issue is that is creating the anxiety. Thankfulness is an alternative mental path we can choose to take. Thankfulness allows me to see Jesus when stress and fear block my view.

- This is a way we “take every thought captive” to Christ. There is neuroscience behind gratitude - share

- Thankfulness opens my heart to receive God's peace

Stress and anxiety can be a lid or a hindrance to receive the peace God wants to pour into our lives. It fills our hearts to such an extent there's no room for His peace. Choosing to be thankful in stressful situations allows for a transfer to take place. It allows the stress to pour out of our hearts and allows God's peace to pour in.

Notice the result of prayer that connects with Jesus in this environment? ***Then** you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*” (NLT)

God wants you to not simply practice prayer. He wants you to practice prayer that works.