

Happy Praise (part 2)

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- [0 : 0 0] My original plan this morning was to go on to the next chapter in our book, The Happy Christian, which was about happy giving. But I felt that there was just so much stuff that we left on the table from this last chapter on happy praise, on affirming and encouraging people, that I thought, you know what, let's go back and just pick up some of the things that we missed.
- Maybe encourage you to do what we even talked about. And so last week we talked about happy praise and the idea is that praise needs to be greater.
- More praise, less criticism is the way for more happiness. That's how we can make the other people around us happy, happier.
- How we can make ourselves happier. How we can help others flourish. And last week we talked about that ideal ratio of praise, positive statements to sort of negative statements.
- They found to be five to one or six to one. So they've gone into businesses, they've looked into organizations and they've seen where people are affirming each other and praising and commending each other.
- [1 : 2 1] And they've seen where people are saying about five or six times what they do criticize. Those organizations are doing the best. And I think that's some wisdom that we can take from the world.
- That's part of the truth and the way that God has made us. And so we looked at that. And then I challenged you to try to catch people, catch your children, catch co-workers doing good instead of trying to catch them and having your eyes on what's bad.
- I want you to be on the lookout for what people are doing right instead of what they're doing wrong. And as we start this morning, I wonder, do you have any examples?
- What about this week? Did you catch anyone doing something good and say something about it? Any examples? Well, I want to keep on challenging you as I challenge myself to let's be looking, catching our kids, catching our co-workers, catching complete strangers.
- Doing good. Well, this morning I want to talk about, to keep talking about this happy praise and affirmation.
- [2 : 4 2] And I want to talk about three sort of different topics, but they're all related to this topic of praise. And the first is praise in the gospel.
- Praise in the gospel. So affirming people in the gospel. The second is going to be praise and wisdom. And the third is, then how do we criticize? Remember, none of these categories, none of these equations are all praise.
- It's not an either or. It's a matter of proportion. It's more than the other. And so we want to talk about, well, then how do we, what's a good way that we can criticize? Or what do we need to be thinking about on that side of the equation?
- Well, so first we're going to talk about praise in the gospel. And you remember, I gave you those four categories of ways that people respond when they hear good news.
- So there was these four ways that when someone shares good news with you, how you can respond. How people can respond. And the first is active, constructive.

[3 : 48] And that's where you share the happiness of the person who is telling you the good news. You share in their happiness. And you respond enthusiastically by asking, oh, tell me more.

Or you're responding enthusiastically. You're commending that. You're encouraging that. And so you say, fantastic. I'm so happy to hear that. Tell me more. Something like that.

So when you see good, you're happy about it, and you say something about it. The second is passive, constructive. And that's where you're not so enthusiastic. You're merely, the response is supportive, but it's quiet and understated.

We'll say something like, well, that's nice. And you genuinely mean it, but you're not very enthusiastic about it. Next is active, destructive, and where we say, that won't work.

It's just a matter of time before that fails. You instantly look for the bad in whatever good thing that you're looking at. And then there's passive, destructive, where you just say, whatever.

[4 : 59] That's nice. Whatever. Guess what happened to me when you talk about yourself? And we said, which one is God? Active, constructive, passive, constructive, active, destructive, passive, destructive.

We said, God is active, constructive. He is an active, enthusiastic responder to what good he sees in people.

He's not unenthusiastic. He's not unenthusiastic. And he's not destructive, where he's instantly going to come down and say, look at all the problems. We just gave some of the examples last week.

God says, well done, good and faithful servants. Jesus says, behold, here's an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.

I haven't seen such great faith in Israel. Oh, woman, great is your faith. He sees it. He sees something good. And how does Jesus feel in his heart when he sees something good?

[6 : 04] Let's start there. What does Jesus feel in his heart? What kind of emotions is he feeling? Joy.

He's positive about it. He saw good. And then out of the overflow of his heart, he spoke.

He spoke. So he was happy and he responded with warm approval and encouragement. He was the holiest of men.

And he was the quickest to praise the good in others. He was the holiest of men. And yet he was the quickest to praise good in other people.

Listen to what C.S. Lewis said. And he wrote a book on the Psalms. And he said this. I had not noticed how the humblest and at the same time, the most balanced and capacious, which means roomy, big hearted minds, praised most while the cranks, the misfits, and the malcontents praised least.

[7 : 21] So who had a more humble, well-balanced, big heartedness than Jesus? He was a big hearted man.

He is a big hearted man. And that's why he could genuinely see good in others and be pleased with it and commend it and say something about it. Now, I want you to think of an occasion because there's a few occasions where we get to see someone in the Gospels doing good.

And there's a variety of responses. And we get to see how Jesus responds to this good thing. So you remember that there's a couple of situations where a woman, a sinful woman, comes in and anoints Jesus.

And there were a variety of responses when the sinful woman came in and spent all this money to anoint Jesus.

Do you remember what the Pharisees said? They were thinking in their hearts. Simon was thinking in his heart. What? Do you remember? Pardon?

[8 : 32] Pardon? Yeah. What's he thinking about? Oh, I know what kind of lady this is. And if Jesus knew what kind of lady this was, he wouldn't let her touch him.

Remember what Judas thought about the situation? Save the money. Why are you wasting the money on that? So there we have it.

We have a couple of different responses to the same situation. Neither of them are positive. But what does Jesus say? She has done a good thing for me.

She has done a good thing for me. Yeah. She has done a good thing for me. And wherever the gospel is preached, they're going to talk about her. So here we are. Talking about her.

Now did Jesus... The Pharisees thought it in their heads. Judas said it out loud. What did Jesus do? Did he keep it to himself?

[9 : 33] Or did he say something out loud for that woman to hear? He said it out loud for that woman to hear. So Jesus is not a crank.

He's not a malcontent. He's not a misfit. He's a big-hearted, kind man who is God in the flesh. And when he saw something good, he said something about it.

And here's the connection to us. His spirit is in us. The spirit of Christ lives in us. And the more deeply and richly and more we live filled and controlled by the spirit, the more of that we're going to see coming out of our lives.

It is no mark of Christlikeness to be a constant criticizer. It is a mark of godliness to see good in others and actually say something. Now C.S. Lewis said it's the humble that praises others.

And if that's true, it's the proud that are the quickest to ridicule, quickest to see fault, quickest to come down hard, quickest to, you know, to nitpick.

[10 : 47] Now, let me ask you, why do you think that is? Why is it the proud that do that? I want you to think real hard about that.

Dare? Well, I think it's because they question their own abilities, and so they have to put somebody else down. Okay.

Right. We're going to come back to that. Karen, did you have something to add? It was kind of similar. The other thing that was, they have to put others down in order for them to stay proud.

Exactly. To feel like they're superior. Even if the other person may be superior, or I can find a way to tear them down, and then I can stay. Right. So everyone's goodness is an assault on my goodness, on my pride.

And so I have a vested interest in seeing the wrong in others. You know, like a vested interest. Like, you're in this.

[11 : 49] You have a reason to see this in others. And that's why the humblest are the quickest to praise the good in others. Because, you know what, the humblest have been set free by the gospel.

And so, let me just put this in terms of the gospel. And I hope this helps us to look at this area in our life through a Christ-centered, gospel-centered way.

So, in my pride, I need my good works. I need to be a good person. I need that. I need to be better than others.

That's my righteousness. That's my righteousness. Now, what does the gospel say? The gospel says, I am a bigger mess.

I made a bigger wreck. I made greater mistakes. I am in a big mess. But, I have been loved with an even greater love.

[12 : 52] Grace greater than all my sin. I don't. So, now, I don't have to see the bad in others.

Because the gospel has set me free to see the good in others. And the way it works is this. The competition is over.

The competition between me and him. Between me and them. Between my good works and them. The need to score a goal. The need to score a goal. The need to win.

The need to set up my own righteousness. The competition is over. The game is over. And through the life and death of Jesus, I've been justified.

The score has come in. And it's perfect tense. All the way down the line. And it's not because of my performance.

[13 : 47] It's because of Jesus' performance. And so, do you see how that sets you free to see the good in others? Jesus has won the game for me. And then given me the trophy.

And now I'm free to love and help and encourage and praise in a way that I never could before. Because I don't need.

I don't need them to be bad. I don't need to set up a false righteousness. Because I already have a righteousness. And so, before all my life depended on being a good person.

But now it doesn't. All my life depends on Jesus. So, encouraging, praising, commending others is not just something that we should do.

It really is a fruit of the gospel working itself deep into our souls. So, it's just not a good thing we should do. It's really a barometer.

[14 : 53] To say, now how deeply has the gospel gone into your heart? How deeply has it gone into your heart? And so, let me give you a scenario to help you see this in real life.

So, we have a Christian. He's a man. He's a real Christian. We're not going to. He's not a false Christian or anything. He's a real Christian. And yet, at work, he's pushy. He's critical.

He's demanding. He's grouchy. Grouchy. Everyone is always messing up. Everyone around him is always failing him. Letting him down.

And he's always on the edge. Being ticked off. I'm going to explode any minute. Now, I want you to think about what is going on in that man's soul.

He goes to work. And people are messing up. He's always seeing it. What's going on down in his heart? What do you think?

[15 : 54] Roger? I wish they could all be a lot more like me. Okay. There's pride going on in his heart. That relates to what we were talking about earlier. Pride is what we do when we haven't.

To the degree that we haven't experienced the gospel, that's how far we are proud. So, pride. Dave. The thing that perhaps is, I am a really big sinner. And really focusing in on sin.

And then seeing the sin on others. Okay. Let me ask you. If he's really focused on sin and himself, who is he really focused on? Himself.

Who is he not focused on? Jesus. He's not. What else is going on? Maybe he has this idol of work.

So, he goes to work. And his work is a part of this self-righteousness that he still is carrying around. That he hasn't completely repented of.

[16 : 57] Maybe he's blind to it. But his work is part of his status. Of his feeling like I'm doing good. I'm a decent person. And so, he thinks of himself in that way.

And so, his well-being, his soul, is still trying to satisfy itself at this idol. This nine-to-five job. And so, the people messing up at work are messing up his performance.

They're messing up his story. They're messing up what he is trying to do. Now, what does he need to remember? What does he need to remember about the gospel?

Well, he really does need to remember he's a sinner. That's true. But what? But what? That's the first truth.

What's the second truth? Christ is the Savior. God has loved him. And he's a Christian. God has loved him with an everlasting love.

[18 : 03] Jesus has saved him. Jesus has given him a righteousness. He's failed a hundred times. And yet, God loves him. And adopted him. And Jesus has said, it is finished.

And so, when that starts working in his heart, he doesn't need to be a perfect person. He doesn't need to construct work and demand that people work in such a way in order to reflect on him. He doesn't need to have this perfect work record, perfect work experience, perfect way of being a manager, whatever it is, to be a good person.

Because he already has God's acceptance. He already has God's heart. You know what will set your tongue free to commend others?

When the Spirit of God is testifying in your own heart, I love you. You're justified. You're my child. You don't need this idol of work.

It's unnecessary. It's unnecessary because you already have a real Savior. You already have a real righteousness. You already have something better.

[19 : 13] When those thoughts are playing in his mind and in his heart, that sets a totally different tune to the way he's thinking. And now work is different.

It's better. People aren't tools to make me feel good. They're not obstacles to my good life. There are people to love, to help, to encourage.

I can affirm them. Not only should I, but I can. For what the law was powerless to do, the Spirit of God does in us through the gospel, through Jesus.

So if you're more critical than encouraging, the simple answer is not, well, hey, you need to remember to do this. Listen, the deeper answer is you need to remember the gospel.

You need to thrill your heart with the love of God and the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And you need to listen to the Holy Spirit testifying through his word of who you are and how he loves you.

[20 : 25] And when you have that deeper experience of grace, you're free. You're free to affirm others. Well, that's praise in the gospel.

I'll let you think about that more. Let's talk about praise and wisdom. Praise and wisdom. Take your Bibles and turn to Proverbs chapter 18. Proverbs chapter 18. We've talked about praising others and encouraging them in terms of the gospel.

And we want to do it in terms of wisdom. And so as you're turning there, well, here we are. We're parents. We're fellow church members. We're children. We're friends. And we want to see growth.

We want to see change. We want to see people doing better. Moms, dads, we want to see our children growing as friends. We want to see our friends growing in the Lord as brothers and sisters, as a pastor.

Now, our natural bent is to use criticism in order to affect change. In other words, our natural bent is to use criticism as the primary tool for our instruction.

[21 : 42] To think of it in terms of punishment, to think of it in terms of silent treatment, pointing out all that's wrong is the way to get those people to change. Now, our natural bent is to use harsh words instead of kind words.

And that's what comes out of us when we're upset, isn't it? Now, what I want you to see is God himself, as our wise father, comes to us and tells us, now, let me give you some wisdom about how this actually works.

Let me show you a better way. Let me help you help them. And the first question right away is, are we going to listen to our father? Proverbs 1, 7, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but fools despise wisdom and correction.

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and correction. It's just this simple. God's asking us right at the beginning of Proverbs, are you going to listen to me or are you just going to ignore me?

Are you going to think what you think is right or are you going to actually listen to what I say? That's the first thing we need to ask in this whole matter.

[23 : 00] So you're in Proverbs 18, and here we are. And we begin with reckoning with what we're actually dealing with. When we're talking about our talk, when we're talking about praise and criticism, the Bible wants us to be clear and understand what we are doing, what we are about, what we are using.

And I want you to look at verse 21. 21, 18, 21. The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit. So what, when we're talking about praise and criticism, what are we dealing in? What does he say?

Life and death. Life and death. The power to give life, the power to destroy. You can't say anything without consequence. You need to know that.

That's why every word will be judged. Because with every word, you know what we're doing? We are invading a person's life with either, in their heart, with either life or we're invading them with death.

[24 : 18] And so what are we dealing in? We're talking about criticism. We'll talk about that in a minute. But criticism is always destructive. That's not necessarily a bad thing. When we criticize, we want to actually destroy something in their life.

And that could be a good thing if the thing we want to destroy is a bad thing. And so we want to use constructive criticism to deal death to something sinful or bad in a person's life.

But we need to realize that constructive criticism is destructive. Now, it could be a good destruction. But it is death. And praise always gives life.

Even among the wicked. Oh, hey, you stole that. I mean, you can read Proverbs 1 and 2. And the wicked are encouraging each other.

And they praise each other for their sinful deeds. And that praise, you know what it does? It fosters. It gives life to something.

[25 : 19] It gives life to something bad. And that's what I want you to see at the very beginning. And our Father in Heaven says, I want you to know what you're dealing with. Every word is doing something.

Now, what else does wisdom say? Turn to Proverbs 16. Proverbs 16. And the question then is, which direction should we lean towards?

What should we emphasize? Praise or criticism? And you can look at verse 21. The wise and heart are called discerning. And what?

Pleasant words promote instruction. Pleasant words. Pleasant words show that you have a discerning, wise heart.

You think about things. You're not a big oaf wielding your words like a wrecking ball. You're a heart surgeon.

[26 : 24] You know what you're dealing with. And you're careful. And pleasant words show that you've actually thought about things. You know about people. You understand how people respond and how they don't respond.

Pleasant words. Kind words. Cheerful words. Those are persuasive words. Those get the job done. Now, you know that so often negativity just causes us to, you know, dig in our feet.

And now we're not going to budge. Not because it's right or because it's smart. Just because we don't like the way you're saying it. And that's not good.

That's folly. That's dumb. But you know what? Wisdom takes that kind of response into consideration. Wisdom thinks, okay, how can I get the best results?

It's not like, well, I'm going to say what I say and they're going to have to deal with it. Whether they like it or not. That's not wisdom. Wisdom thinks, okay, how can I best say this?

[27 : 36] What's the most pleasing way? Look at verse 23. A wise man's heart guides his mouth and his lips promote instruction. So the way a wise man talks is persuasive, is encouraging.

The wise man thinks about what he says and he uses his lip to promote instruction. Again, it's all about being realistic, winsome, thoughtful.

Criticism is rarely winsome. It's easy to do wrong. It's hard to do right. So look at the next word, the next verse.

Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. We talked about encouraging words.

Where did those pleasant words go? So when Karen was talking to Nate, when Evie was talking to Scott, other examples, where did those pleasant words go?

[28 : 45] What does it say? Right down deep, didn't it? To the bones, to the soul. And down deep, they bring delight and they bring healing.

Well, how do you get delight and healing? Pleasant words. Pleasant words. So which way should we lean?

We should lean toward pleasant words. You can see, if you read the first nine chapters of Proverbs, you know what it is. It's a father wooing his son with wisdom.

And he's saying, here's death. You want life? Listen to me. My words will give you life.

Here's poverty. You want to be wealthy? Listen to me. He's wooing his son. I can give you life. Wisdom herself has honor and riches and life in her hands.

[29 : 52] It's the father wooing his son. He's using pleasant words. He isn't saying, you big dummy. Why aren't you thinking? This is obvious. No.

I want you to flourish. I want you to be happy. I want you to have real honor. I want that for you. I'm going to tell you how to get it.

Pleasant words. And he's pouring honey and pleasant words into his son's soul. So which way should we emphasize?

The encouragement. Now, we need vinegar and we need honey. But we need more honey. We need vinegar. We need honey. But we need more honey.

So that's praise and wisdom. We're going to quickly go right then to how do you do criticism. And I'm just going to give you a very few suggestions. First is this. Fill the bank with praise before you withdraw it with criticism.

[30 : 55] Now, what I'm not talking about is before you say anything bad, make sure you say something good right away. Because you know what's going to happen? As soon as they start hearing something good from your mouth, you know what they're going to start to see?

Uh-oh. Here it comes. Don't do the sandwich method. Oh, praise, criticism, praise. Pretty soon, they're going to hate that sandwich.

What I am saying is this. The whole context, it's like a bank account. Your kids have so much. Your kids, your friends.

People, you need to be investing encouragement and affirmation and positive into their hearts before you can start drawing down.

If you want any hope of doing anything, it needs to be set in the wider context of praise. And remember the ratio. It is five or six to one.

[31 : 58] Six praise bucks equals one criticism buck. That's the exchange rate. We need to think about that. Number two, make it infrequent. Some people think a little bit of praise sprinkled permits you to launch missile attacks of criticism.

Well, I said something nice about it three months ago. That doesn't matter. Some people think it's a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.

And it's not. It's a shovel full of sugar will help the medicine go down in the most delightful way. Five to one, six to one.

Think about that. So a shovel full of sugar helps the medicine go down. Number three, it majors on the majors. Remember, you're dealing with destruction. And you can have the best laser-guided bomb.

And that's good. The better. But you have to realize there's always the danger of collateral damage. Do you see what I'm saying? Even the best intentions of criticism. It has the danger of destroying something you don't want to destroy.

[33 : 06] So be careful. And in other words, don't waste your missiles on ten cans. You use your missiles on the bunkers. You use your missiles on things that really need worked on and changed.

Not every little thing. The best of us are full of flaws. And love covers over a multitude of sins.

Fourth, pray. I'm going to tell you this from experience. If you're talking without praying, get ready to say something that you're going to regret.

If you're talking before praying, get ready to say something that you are going to regret. Not in every case, but almost every case.

Murray says, it's almost always advisable to wait 24 hours and pray before you say anything. To think before you send that email.

[34 : 22] To think before you stop and tell someone something. Pray. So how do you criticize? You fill in the bank before you withdraw.

A shovel full of sugar helps the medicine go down. Don't waste your missiles on ten cans and forth. Pray. Our time is up.

I want you to remember how we finished last week. Geese honk encouragement and fly in formation. Skunks travel alone.

So let's be a whole bunch of happy, holy, honking geese. Encouraging each other on.
We're dismissed.