

Happy Praise

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Preacher: Jason Webb

[0 : 00] Well, we are going through a book called The Happy Christian. It's by David Murray. And David Murray, the author of the book, begins this chapter, which is called Happy Praise.

! Happy Praise. And he begins it like this. I'm a Scot. And Scots don't do praise. Of God, sometimes, but never praise of one another. Instead, we specialize in pulling people down, thinking the worst of others, and puncturing anyone who achieves anything. We can't let a compliment pass without balancing it with criticism. And woe betide people who make something of their lives, they're just full of themselves.

So, how can we be happy Christians? That's what the whole book is about that we're studying. And today, we're going to see that one way that we can be happier is to criticize less and praise more.

[1 : 16] To criticize less and praise more. And you might say, praise people? And yeah, that's exactly what we are talking about. So, each chapter has this equation.

It's this greater than, less than equation. And the idea is, it's not that one is, they're not completely exclusive. It's not one to the exclusion of the other. But it is, one needs to be, have more of the weight.

And so, this, the equation for this chapter is, praise greater than criticism. Criticism, praise greater than criticism equals positive.

And so, you want to be a joyful person. You want to be a more joyful person. Stop criticizing so much and start encouraging more. That's the idea.

Now, this goes hand in hand with what we talked about last week. Remember, what was, what did we talk about last week? Anyone? What kind of, what was the subject?

[2 : 21] Common grace. And what does that mean, common grace? What do we mean by common grace? Seeing God's goodness in the world. Seeing God's goodness in the world. And, in everyone.

Even unbelievers. We, we looked at that. We, we even gave examples at the end there. Of families that go out together. Or families that, upon the death of someone, they, they loved each other. And they, and that's common grace. Well, that, this, this chapter goes right along with that chapter. And that they, the ideas build on each other. This is the next step. And so, we saw last week that we need to be on the lookout for common grace.

Instead of, everywhere sin, which is out there. But we need to have an eye that's quicker to see the, the good in people's lives. So, we need to be on the lookout.

Well, this is the next step. This is the finish. If you see something good in anyone, you want to affirm it. You want to praise it. You want to encourage them, affirm them. So, David Murray starts this chapter by asking, where does this Scottish critical spirit, where does it begin?

[3 : 32] Why is, why is, why is this whole nation, and which he grew up in, is sort of infested with this more critical than affirming spirit? And part of the answer, he says, and partly it relates to a danger that we can have, is a distorted Calvinism.

Is a distorted Calvinism. So, about 100 years ago, 150 years ago, someone came up with an acronym for Calvinism.

It's not like John Calvin came up with this. Someone in English came up with this idea of this acronym for Calvinism. And it's the acronym that spells out TULIP.

So, what does the T in TULIP stand for? Total depravity. Total depravity. And so, at this church, we're Calvinists. Our confession of faith is a Calvinistic confession of faith.

We believe in total depravity. And the key thing to understand here is that every truth has the danger of going to seed, of getting out of hand, of being distorted, of going too far.

[4 : 48] And Murray says that is probably something of what has happened historically in Scotland. Now, I know you don't care about Scotland all that much, but this is important to us because we have the same foundation as they do.

So, Scotland of any nation has Calvinism in its bones. It was the birthplace of John Knox. It's the birthplace of Presbyterianism. They fought and died for their reformed faith.

We've talked about that. You could go to Scotland and you could see the monuments to the martyrs, to the people that have died in order to keep their reformed faith.

But he says something seems to have happened. And this is really where it touches us. The biblical belief in the sinfulness of all men and women seems to have been sometimes misapplied to exclude any appreciation of humanity, even redeemed humanity.

So, total depravity has gone to seed. So, now, instead of every man and woman is infested with sin, every man and woman and all parts of them have sin put into them or into them, in them.

[6 : 10] That idea has gone to seed. And now it's gone so to the point that now there's nothing good in the unsaved. And even to the point of there's very, there's not even any good in redeemed humanity.

So, as far as our human nature goes, so to speak, there's nothing good in us. The only thing that's good in us is maybe the spirit of God who lives in us. Now, for them, when this goes too far, now there's not even such a thing as common grace.

Common grace is not really a thing that they can think about. Now, in the circles that David Murray travels up in, in Grand Rapids, which has this deep historical connection to the Reformed faith, there has been debates about common grace, whether it's real, whether it's there, whether it's not.

And some people say, we don't even know if there is such a thing. So, the idea is, now there's nothing good about sinful humanity, and maybe nothing good even in redeemed humanity.

Now, I can hear some of that sort of thing when people talk about, and they can go on about how sinful they are, even as a Christian.

[7 : 32] And they say, all I do is sin, or there's nothing good I do. Which is true to a certain degree. But the idea is, even as a Christian, there's nothing good in you.

And that's total depravity. Gone to seed. Gone too far. Where, that's distorted Calvinism. And so, the result is, is now when we look out into the world, and when we look into ourselves, we say, well, we don't want to make them proud, do we?

We don't want to encourage them. We don't want to make light of sin, do we? There's sin in everything we do. And so, praise, encouragement, appreciation, affirmation, those are all somehow incompatible with the idea of total depravity.

Or, that's how the thinking goes. Because, now, if that's how you think, what's your attitude going to be like toward other people?

What are you going to see when you look at other people? What are you going to see when you look at yourself? And then, if that's your attitude, what you see, what kind of things are you going to be saying?

[8 : 43] So, what are you going to be looking for? Sin. Sin. Sin. Sin. Flaws. Imperfections. And then, what your heart is full of?

You're going to speak. So, you're going to criticize. Maybe to their face. Maybe not. Well, it's a dark, negative spirit.

It makes us happy. It makes others around us unhappy. And what we're going to see is, it's not biblical. A half-truth is a lie.

A distorted truth goes too far and it becomes a lie. It's not godly. It's not helpful. It's not a happy way to live.

It's not godly. It's not godlike. We're going to see that. So, this morning, we're going to look at seven, seven encouragements to encourage.

[9 : 44] Seven encouragements to encourage. And the first is this. Encouragers imitate God.

Encouragers imitate God. God praises people. God praises people.

Now, God praises less than perfect people. And we're going to talk a little bit more about that later.

But, I want you to think. And I want you to give some examples of. What are some examples of where God was praising people?

Affirming them. Saying good things about them. Can anyone give me an example? Job. Job.

Remember what God. The Lord said about Job.

There's none like him on the earth. Is that praise? Wow. There's none like him on earth. A blameless and upright man.

[10:48] No one who fears God and shuns evil like Job does. Who else? John the Baptist. What does he say about John the Baptist? What?

And the great. No other. Man walking through. Yeah. No one as great as John the Baptist. In the time of the prophets. That's praise. What else?

David. David. What did he say? He's a good man. He's a good man. A man after God's own heart. Who else? Abraham. Abraham.

Abraham. When he tested Abraham with Isaac. Abraham. And Pastor Testy said. I know you are faithful. Yeah. What else?

Noah was a righteous man. Blameless among the people of his time. And he found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Yeah. Yeah. The Roman centurion.

[11:48] I have not found such great faith even in Israel. Can you think of any other examples? The woman that was poor perfume on Jesus' feet.

Defended her of her actions and her humility. Yeah. She's done a good thing. She's done a good thing. He didn't say. She's done a less than perfect thing.

She's done a good thing. Period. Nathanael. Remember what Jesus said about Nathanael?

Nathanael. Here's a true Israelite.

An Israelite indeed. In whom there is no deceit. No guile. The seven churches in Revelation. He mixes praise and criticism in those.

But he does it in such a way that the praise stands alone. And the criticism stands alone. And in some of the churches. He heaps nothing but praise on them.

[12:47] And there's nothing critical to say. I know what you're doing. I know your deeds. I've heard about your faith and your perseverance. Keep it up. You're doing more than what you did at the beginning.

It's not like, hey, you're still full of sin. No, he just leaves it as you're doing more. You're doing a good thing. Jessica Coleman, a positive psychologist, wrote this.

That there are four possible responses to someone who shares good news with us. There's four possible responses. Here they are. Active, constructive. We share the happiness of the person. And we respond enthusiastically. By asking for more details. And by helping her savor the good news. So that's active, constructive. Passive, constructive. Their response is supportive, but quiet. And understated. Rather than excited and interested. That's not quite nice. Passive, destructive. The response ignores the news.

[13:54] And overlooks the person's feelings. Then there's active, destructive. The person diminishes the person or the news with critical and pessimistic comments.

That won't work. Have you considered the downsides? Do you say things like that? Someone tells you something good or a possible idea and you say.

You instantly find what's wrong. Active, constructive. Passive, constructive. Active, destructive.

Passive, destructive. Let me ask you.

Which one is God? Which one does he do? He's active, constructive. He's an active, constructive.

He says this is good. He doesn't undermine it with something bad. So active, constructive. Passive, constructive. Active, destructive.

[14:50] Passive, destructive. Which one is God? He's an active constructor. You can read Hebrews 11. Now, which one are you? Do you undermine people?

Do you ignore people? Encouragers imitate God. Number two. Encouragers glorify God.

Encouragers glorify God. We can be reluctant to praise others because we're afraid of robbing God of his glory. So we can rob God.

That's what we're afraid of. We're going to rob God by glorifying others. And maybe this is the thing that we're most afraid of. We know we're supposed to do everything for the glory of God.

And God says, I'm not going to share my glory with another. And again, we take that idea and we can go too far with it.

[15:56] But actually, it's the exact opposite that's true. We rob God of praise by not pointing out the things that he has done in people's lives.

The encouragement that we see. We can rob God of praise by not pointing out his reflection. That he has knit into every person's heart.

So we can glorify God and we can praise people at the same time. And that's what Paul did. He said this.

I always thank God through Jesus Christ for all of you that your faith is spoken of throughout the world. So he thanks God and then he commends them.

And he said those kinds of things all the time. In Ephesians 1, he says, for this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you.

[16:59] So he's doing both. He's thanking God. And he's also saying your love and your faith is a good thing. And it's a way of commending them. It's both, isn't it?

And almost all of Paul's letters were like that. The first thing, almost all of them, the exclusion of, I think, Galatians, all of them begins with the heaviest thing on Paul's heart is something to be thankful for about them.

Something that he sees in their life and the church that is so good and he can't help by spilling it and starting it out. And you understand just even with Galatians, like this is something genuine. It wasn't just, oh, I have to find something good to say about them. In Galatians, he had nothing good to say to begin with. He couldn't, the problems were so important that he just started in with the criticism, which was necessary.

But in 85% of the other cases, 90% of the other cases, the thing that is weighing heaviest on Paul's heart when he thinks about these churches is, this is good.

[18:09] And I thank God for this. And so almost all Paul's letters were like that. And he didn't just hear about their faith and their love and thank God.

He heard about it. He thanked God for it. And then he told the church about it. He told them about what he had heard, what he has seen that's good in them.

It wasn't just, they're doing something good, so I'll thank God. And that's the end of it. They're doing something good. I'll thank God. And then I'll encourage them and tell them about what good they're doing. So you can do both.

And Paul shows us how. Now, I don't think we need to have some sort of strict rule about this, like some sort of formula. But the idea is both things need to be in our heart at the same time of thanking God and of encouraging them.

And so encouragers glorify God. They don't rob God of glory. They're actually commending what God is doing in people's lives. So encouragers glorify God.

[19:18] And third, encouragers don't wait for salvation. Encouragers don't wait for salvation. Now, this is just going back to what we talked about in Common Grace. And someone might say, but what about the unsaved?

I don't want to give sinners the idea that everything is okay. Or that they don't need saved. Okay, so we don't want to deceive them.

We don't want to deceive anyone about the reality of their spiritual need. But we don't need to go off the deep end and say there's nothing good that we could say about them.

Or no way that we can encourage them. If God has poured out common grace on them in some way, we can encourage them. We can commend them.

And say that's good. So encouragers, we don't need to wait for salvation. We're going to talk about what you say to your children. And for a lot of us, our children are unsaved.

[20:24] Are we never going to praise them until they're saved? Fourth, encouragers don't wait for perfection. Encouragers, you don't need to wait for perfection.

God doesn't wait for perfection. And we shouldn't either. So take your Bibles. And turn to that one passage.

Where Barnabas. I need you to listen. Or you're going to have a hard time finding this passage.

Where Barnabas went up to that messy, immature church in Antioch. And immediately started pointing out what was wrong.

And started to fix it. You know what passage I'm talking about? Where he went up there and he got on their case because they went ahead of the apostles.

They didn't wait for the apostles to give them instructions. And they were running out ahead. You know that passage I'm talking about, right? Well, it's not in your Bible.

[21:26] So I don't know where you're turning. No. Turn to Acts chapter 11. Acts chapter 11. And look at verse 22.

So the preceding verses just talked about how the church in Antioch got started. And some of the Jews began speaking to some of the Greeks. And a great many people believed. And verse 22. News that this reached the ears of the church of Jerusalem. And they sent Barnabas to Antioch. And when he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God. He was glad. And encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man. Full of the Holy Spirit. And faith. And a great number of people were brought to the Lord. Barnabas. Man. Man. like every church. [23 : 02] But it says he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit, full of faith. He was full of the Holy Spirit. He was a godly man.

He was full of faith. He was a man who trusted in the Lord and was always looking for the Lord to be doing good to him and to the people around him. He was a man who believed. And so he saw progress. He saw growth. He saw the evidence of grace. He saw increase. He didn't see imperfection. And what I mean by that is not that there was none there or he was just so blind to it. I'm just meaning his eyes were focused and looking for what was good. And he found it. He didn't see flaws and this has to change and they got to do better over here. And I just want to say what an example for us, Barnabas is. [24 : 05] What an example for us and our relationship to the people in the church. What an example for us and our relationship with other churches.

And think about our children and our families. If we wait around until they are perfect before we praise them, we're going to be waiting a long time, aren't we? And so here's where I want to do some brainstorming. Some brainstorming of what are some ways that we can praise and encourage our children or let's get this out of the hypothetical. What have you done in your family? What have you done, dads and moms? What ways have you lately seen good in your children, whether they're saved or not, and said, you know what, I'm encouraging that. I affirm that. I'm praising that. I'm commending that. Or if you're really brave, if you're really brave, where have you been too critical?

[25 : 20] And looking back, you say, you know what, I really could have done better. I could have been more encouraging. I could have been less critical. So let's just learn from each other. Let's learn. Encouragers don't wait for perfection. Fifth, encouragers, and this has to do with what, well, a lot of people have talked about. Encouragers open the door to change. Encouragers open the door to change. So that's number five. I think we all have a bias to think that punishment or criticism is really the big gun that is going to get people to change. Now, is it definitely a tool? Yeah, I'm not saying that. But what I'm saying is that we have this bias to think that the real powerful weapon in our arsenal is the criticism, is punishment. And that praise, this is kind of going off of what Rex says, that praise will only sort of encourage more sin or more pride or more, you know, just more sin. [26 : 37] So, do you criticize others to get them to change or do you praise them more to get them to change? Now, it's not either or.

I'm asking positive or relative. Wait, which one are you doing more? Is there a place for criticism? Yes. But like I said, I think we have the tendency to lean that direction too far, too much. Just recall, I just want you to think about who helped you when you were younger in your life to play sports, to do well in school, to do well at a job. Which coach was a good coach? The one who was constantly harping and with a critical negative spirit? Or the one who, along with the criticism, had a great heaping of encouragement, praise, good job. It is the enthusiastic encouragers. The people that say, good job, well done, rather than those who nitpicked over everything.

[27 : 51] I hope I'm being clear here. There is a place for constructive criticism. There is a place for negative reinforcement. There is a place for punishment. There is.

We're sort of talking about the percentages, the degrees. Encouragers, open the door to growth and change.

You know, when life is hard, this is, when life is hard, and we need a breakthrough. We need a breakthrough into something better.

We need a breakthrough in obedience. We need a breakthrough in something. Praise helps in ways that criticism never can. Praise will help in ways that criticism never can.

Studies have shown that just enhancing patients' expectations, so a person's in the hospital or they're sick, enhancing patients' expectations through positive information about the treatment, positive information about the illness, while providing support or reinsurance significantly helps the health outcomes.

[29 : 06] So, just talking positively about the treatment, the illness, how the person's doing, helps significantly the outcome.

One author said this, merciless criticism often makes us dig in our heels in defense, or worse, makes us helpless.

We don't change. We do change, however, when we discover basically what God is doing, what is available, how God has helped us or specific strengths that he has given us, specific things that are hopeful.

And so, what I mean by that is you want your children to grow in certain areas. Well, water that.

Look for where they're strong and water that.

Your church, you want to see your church change or grow. The percentage needs to be much more on affirming what is good than just nitpicking over what is wrong.

[30 : 18] Sixth, we have to keep moving. Encouragers help evangelism. And just basically, by that, we're going to skip right through this one. By this, I mean, so you have a lost person.

If all you're doing is criticizing, criticizing, criticizing them, and you have this general negative disposition to everything that they do, are they going to really hear the gospel from you?

No. Your bad news is going to just totally deafen them to the good news.

So, one author says, consider this. We risk damning others. And that's a strong line, by not praising them. There are people around us in peril of hell unless we commend them.

Affirmation is a way to gain a hearing for the gospel. That's what he's saying. Affirmation can be a way of getting a hearing for the gospel.

[31 : 23] And so, when you see something in your adult child that is good, encourage that. That might open the door for the gospel to come in. If all you're doing is pointing out all the bad in their life, they're not going to really want to hear anything from you after a while.

So, our listeners will be more inclined to hear us if they believe we're not angry at them all the time, but grateful for them. Now, here's last.

Encouragers strengthen. Encouragers strengthen. encouragement builds emotional strength, physical strength, mental strength, relational, spiritual strength.

So, just listen to some of these stats. They've done studies, and managers who recognize and encourage their employees see increased productivity.

You recognize they're good, they'll produce more. The U.S. Navy squadrons, which have won the most prizes for efficiency and preparedness, were those with the most encouraging commanding officers.

[32 : 42] So, they've done where they've gone in and they've helped Army and Navy officers to be more encouraging, more outgoing, and it actually helps these people to do their jobs better.

Remember I told you about that one study where they went in and they tracked all the positive things that were said in a business meeting and all the negative things in a business meeting, and they've sort of just like, is this positive, is this negative, and they looked at the ratio of those statements, and then they looked at how the company or that division was doing, and what they have found is that the ideal ratio for positive to negative is six to one.

six positive things for one negative thing. That's the ideal ratio. Now you can go too far, and I think Karen has said that, where you're just commending them worthlessly.

After a while they just pick up on that and it just becomes chatter, it becomes useless, and it actually becomes demeaning to them. What they have found is under three to one, it actually starts going the opposite direction.

it's not one to one. If you don't do the bare minimum of three positive to one negative, people just start to feel negative because we feel the negative more than the positive, don't we?

[34 : 03] You remember a criticism much more easily than you remember a compliment. So six positives to one negative. so dads and moms, let's just think about that.

How are you doing? I mean, I know six to one is a completely, it's a worldly number I suppose, but six to one, how are you doing? Some days it feels like all we're doing is the negative, isn't it? But we need to, and it can be really hard, but if you're anything like me, you're far from six to one, but that is the general direction that we need to be going.

Instead of catching our children doing wrong so much, how about we start catching them doing what's right, what's good, what's helpful, and that will strengthen our children, and that will change the whole atmosphere.

Is your whole household a negative, gloomy place? Maybe it needs just more praise. We're going to have to skip a whole bunch here.

[35 : 29] I'm going to end with this. One psychologist who wrote a book called The Happiness Advantage just encouraged managers to start the day off with one email encouraging someone.

What does that do? If you're a manager, you're over people, or you're a dad, or you're a mom, and you have responsibility, and you start off each day with some encouragement. What does that do? It strengthens the relationships, doesn't it? It strengthens the relationships within the group and the organization. Then it motivates that encouragement to flow all the way down the line.

If you're being encouraged, you're going to encourage others. And this is how he put it. Geese honk encouragement, and they fly in formation.

Skunks travel alone. Geese honk encouragement, and they fly in formation. Skunks travel alone.

[36 : 31] So let's be a whole church of happy, honking geese flying information, and let's not be so skunky. We're dismissed.