

Ten Happy Habits

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[0 : 00] Well, today is our last day, our last lesson in the happy Christian.! Like I said, I hope it has been helpful to you, this whole study.

I would encourage you to read the book. It's Happy Christian by David Murray. There was a lot of material that we didn't get to, and all of the material is worth going over more than once.

So I would just encourage you to pick it up and read it. Today we are going to end with a practical lesson. A practical lesson.

And the lesson I've entitled is, or I've entitled this lesson, Ten Happiness Habits. Ten Happiness Habits. This idea came from a blog post from Brad Hamrick, who is a biblical counselor in North Carolina.

I think Roger Cryan, you used some of his material in your addictions class. And he has a wonderful website for biblical counseling where he has lots of resources for practical problems.

[1 : 13] He says his four main ideas for biblical counseling are these. One, the necessity of the gospel. Number two, the centrality of the local church.

Number three, the primacy and finality of scripture. And number four is a balanced perspective on how the gospel speaks to both sin and suffering. So he's someone that I think you can generally trust.

His website is bradhamberg.com. And one of his blog posts was called 50 Good Mental Habits. 50 Good Mental Habits.

And this is how he started that blog post. And the reason I'm going this route for this last lesson is, in a way, it summarizes a lot of what we've talked about throughout this whole class.

And it kind of puts a practical emphasis on all of it. But this is how he started that post. Good physical health does not happen by accident. Physically healthy people make small daily choices that contribute to their physical health.

[2 : 29] It should be noted that even those who make healthy choices will get sick and injured. Choices don't remove the possibility of illness or injury. But even when sick or injured, the individual's daily choices still make a significant impact on their quality of life.

So when a generally healthy person with good physical habits becomes sick, it's far different than someone who doesn't have those daily good physical habits.

This is what he says. The same things are true for mental health. Good mental health does not happen by accident. Mentally healthy people make small daily choices that contribute to their mental health.

And this is what he means. I.e. ability to regulate emotions. So you're not ruled. You're not governed by your emotions. Your emotions aren't out of control.

You're able to regulate your emotions. Respond proportionally to disappointments. So you don't get so far down when you're disappointed.

- [3 : 37] Or accurately weigh the significance of successes and failures. So that's part of what we're doing all the time is we're looking at our own life.
- We're evaluating it. And whether we accurately weigh what is going on in our lives and respond is what he describes as good mental health.
- Now, that's what we've seen in this whole series on the happy Christian. Happiness is not a decision that you make one time and that's it.
- Or it is not one big choice or one big event. It's a lot of smaller choices. It's a lot of smaller events.
- It's made up of moment-by-moment way of living. And so we can go back to, I think, chapter 2, where we were talking about the happy gospel.
- [4 : 34] Am I going to focus my thinking on my spiritual to-do list? Or is more of the weight going to be on Jesus' it-is-done list?
- There's a place for both. The question is, where are we going to spend more of the time, the heavier weight of the time? Is it done or, oh, I've got to do this, I've got to do this, I've got to do this?
- Will I watch two hours of news? Will I watch two hours of news every night? Or will I go for a walk and play a game with my family? Will I look for the good in people?
- Or will I just look for the bad? Those are decisions. Those are things that we do moment-by-moment, day after day. And so which will I do?
- Will I do what my wife wants? Or will I insist on doing what I want? We talked about that in that happy marriage or happy giving.
- [5 : 39] Happy marriages are based on giving, not on receiving. And so in the moment, in those everyday moments, am I going to give or am I going to demand?
- It's a moment-by-moment life. And that's what Brad Hambrick is saying. Good mental health, which he calls it, which means happiness, resilience, emotional self-control.
- Good mental health is helped or hurt by everyday choices. You don't go morbidly obese in a week or even in a month.
- It's a day-by-day thing. You generally don't fall apart emotionally, mentally, all at once. There could be triggering situations.
- There could be trauma. There could be death. There could be sickness. But how you weather those things depends on what you have been doing, what you do as you go through those experiences, and what you are doing.
- [6 : 43] And so his blog post, 50 Good Mental Habits, I've reduced and I've sort of taken what would summarize what we've seen in our book.
- And I'm calling it 10 Happiness Habits. And the first thing that you're going to notice is that among these 10 things, it is not simply, they're not simply spiritual things.
- It's not just read your Bible and pray. Because we aren't merely spiritual creatures. We aren't merely spiritual creatures.
- We're physical. We are biological. We are spiritual. We are social creatures. God didn't make us angels.
- All spirit and no body. And he didn't make us pure biology. We are not like the earthworm. Or even an animal. He didn't make us like that.
- [7 : 49] He made us spiritual. He didn't make us to live isolated lives. We are not meant to live alone. It's not good for man to be alone.
- Maybe you've seen, I think it's Planet Earth, that documentary series. They went to all this trouble and expense. And it took so much time to record the snow leopards.

And the reason they're so difficult to get to is, well, one, they live up in the Himalayas. But they're extremely isolated animals.

They generally don't live with each other. They can go weeks and months without seeing another one of their own kind. Well, we're not like that.

God didn't make us like the snow leopard. God made Adam's body. And then he breathed the living spirit into it.

[8 : 47] And then he said, it's not good for man to be alone. And so we are physical. We are spiritual. We are social animals.

Not animals, creatures. And every single one of those aspects can become a doorway for depression and misery and sadness to come in.

And if we want to, and every one of those areas need to be addressed if we're going to be happy. Happy Christians. The other thing is, is we have to realize that just because we are Christians doesn't mean the normal rules don't apply to us.

It doesn't mean that the normal rules don't apply to us. They apply. And God brings salvation, wholeness to every single one of those things.

To every single one of those aspects at one period or another. Now, so this isn't the first time, and this won't be the last time. We are complex creatures.

[9 : 56] To reduce us to biology. Just, you know, wires and chemicals and just to reduce us to that. That's what the world wants us to do.

Is wrong and it doesn't work. That's why the simple thing of like, okay, just give you some medicine. They've shown that that just doesn't generally work.

To reduce us down to spiritual creatures. Where our physical being has no relevance. That's what some maybe are tempted to do in the church.

And that is equally wrong. It won't work. God made us physical, spiritual, social creatures. And these 10 happiness habits recognizes that.

So, let's get into it. So, 10 happiness habits. Number one is this. Get enough sleep. I know that doesn't sound like I came to Sunday school to hear that.

[10 : 56] But, get enough sleep. David Murray wrote in his book, Reset, that he wrote this. I once asked a Christian psychologist how he treats people with depression or anxiety.

Oh, that's easy, he replied. I give them three pills. I mentally or inwardly groaned as multiple caricatures of pill pushing doctors seem to be sadly confirmed.

And after pausing for effect, however, he added good sleep, good exercise, and good diet. Now, those are basically our first three points.

Number one is get enough sleep. About two years ago, in October, I preached a whole sermon on that. And if you want, you can go back.

It's October 6, 2016. Brad Hambrick writes this. The brain plays a dominant role in mental health. Sleep is vital for brain health.

[11 : 58] Inadequate sleep is the equivalent of not changing the oil in your car. You can get away with it for a while, but it winds up costing you dearly.

Rex, can you say that? Yeah. You can get away with it for a little bit, but it ends up costing you. One author wrote this.

Every anxious person I've met has either been in denial about how little sleep they get, or they're overlooking the fact that they're going to bed at random hours every night.

One of my readers wrote this message to me after reviewing an early draft of this chapter. When I began forcing myself to sleep eight hours a night, my physical health problems cleared up, my emotions balanced out, and my anxiety disappeared.

Eight hours of sleep is a miracle pill. God made us to sleep. We need to sleep.

[12 : 59] Sleep is a gift of God. He gives his loved ones sleep, and you need sleep. John Piper wrote this. I am emotionally less resilient when I lose sleep.

There were early days when I would work without regard to sleep and feel energized and motivated. In the last seven or eight years, my threshold for despondency is much lower.

For me, adequate sleep is not a matter of staying healthy. It is a matter of staying in the ministry. It is irrational that my future should look bleaker when I get four or five hours of sleep several nights in a row.

Now, we can say that, can't we? Like, God's promises are just as sure whether I get three hours of sleep or nine hours of sleep. It is irrational that it should look bleaker, but the reality is it does, doesn't it?

It's harder. This is what Piper says, but that is irrelevant. Those are the facts, and I must live within the limits of facts. I commend sufficient sleep to you.

[14 : 12] So number one is get enough sleep. Number two, eat balanced meals. We can't expect our minds to function well if we are stuffing our faces with junk.

And specifically, that means fruits and vegetables. I mean eating them, not avoiding them. Your brain uses the most energy of any organ in your whole body.

20% of your caloric intake goes to the use of your brain. So 20% of your energy gets put to your brain.

About two-thirds of that energy, so about 14% of the food, the calories that you eat, goes to the neurons in your brain to keep them firing.

The brain uses that. And then 7% of your energy, 7% of all the calories you eat, goes to your brain just to take care of itself. Just to keep it healthy.

[15 : 25] So that's about 10%. 10% of your food intake goes to your brain and is used there to just keep it maintained. And that's why we need to be careful what we eat.

That's why we have to eat well. You can't be surprised if your brains don't work so well if you're just giving it garbage. Now, we don't want to get carried away.

I'm not saying this is the only thing. Food is only one of the many factors about our feelings. But God did make us in a certain way.

That's just, he did. It's not like ungodly or unspiritual to say, you know what, he made me in a certain way. And you can't ignore God's creation.

He's put certain nutritional realities into the world. And so David Murray says, when you're down or anxious, let's not only open our Bibles, but open our mouths.

[16 : 36] And don't go to McDonald's. Go to the salad bar. Number three, exercise. Number three is exercise. Go for a walk.

Jog. Ride a bike. Whatever. Go for a walk. Get some exercise. Listen to David Murray again. Moderate physical exercise helps to expel unhelpful chemicals from our system and stimulates the production of helpful chemicals.

It strengthens not just the body, but also the brain. Research has shown that walking just two miles a day reduces the risk of cognitive decline and dementia by 60%.

And aside from the long-term benefits, exercise triggers the growth of new brain cells in the hippocampus and the release of, this is what he says, neurotrophic growth factors, which is akin to mental fertilizer that helps the brain grow and repair itself, make new connections, and stay healthy.

And so, again, this is the way God created us. One man wrote David Murray and said this, I cannot emphasize the effort or the effect exercise has on my mood.

- [17 : 50] It is clearly one of the activities that demonstrate the connection between mind and body. When I was in my deepest depression, exercise kept me from going over the edge.
- And when I recovered, it kept me from sliding back in. So, do you want to be happier? You need to take those three pills of sleep, eat, and exercise.
- Number four, get outside. Get outside. Garden. Walk. Hike.
- Just sit in the sun. Get to the beach. Hit the trails. Do yard work. I can give you what researchers have found.
- But I'll just say this. When men and women were the happiest, they were in a garden. They were outside. And we'll be happiest again when we will be in a garden city.
- [18 : 59] And so, get outside. Enjoy God's creation. You were made for it. And it was made for you.
- And so, it's... The world and all these researchers and psychologists are just discovering what we should just know from the Bible. That people do better when they have some time outside.
- Number five, avoid debt. Avoid debt. What does Proverbs 22, 7 say? Does anyone know? The first line?
- The borrower is slave to the lender. The borrower is slave to the lender. This is just to say debt is stressful.
- Debt means you're not so much in control. I'm not saying debt in and of itself is sinful. But Proverbs never puts debt in the good in and of itself category.
- [20 : 02] It always puts it in the... This is not a good thing. You need to get out of it as soon as you can category. And financial imbalance doesn't stay in its place.
- It overflows to every part of your life. So, listen to Brad Hamburg again. This is what he's going to say.
- Imbalance does not stay contained in one area of life. If you go into debt, you increase stress. You have to work more. Which means you sleep less. Which contributes to emotional reactivity.
- And erodes the quality of your relationships. Avoiding debt does a lot for your mental health. So, debt makes us feel out of control.
- And it does because that's exactly... You're not in control. That's what it means to be a slave. And that's what is stressful about it.
- [21 : 01] And Proverbs recognizes that. You're the servant. Someone else is running at least some aspect of your life. You're working for someone else. And that lack of control, that increased danger, because the credit card company, the auto finance company, doesn't care if Johnny needs the braces, or Susie needs to go to the hospital, or you lose your job.
- The bills keep coming. And that's stressful. And that increases financial risk. And all that erodes your sense of well-being.
- So, let no debt remain outstanding, except the debt of love we owe to one another. So, do you want to be happier?
- Take control of your money. Get on a budget. Say no to yourself. Number six. Commit to church. Commit to church. Not just being here.
- But commit to these people. Commit yourself to these people. People. Get to know these people. Live with these people.
- [22 : 19] Help these people. Serve these people. Build your life around these people. Because people were created for community.
- People were created to live in a fellowship with each other. And so, church is a place for deep fellowship. It's a place for comfort when you're hurting.

And life is going to make you hurt. One way or the other. It's a place to share those hurts. It's a place to share that shame. That failure. Those secrets.

It's a place to share the load. Galatians 6 says, Carry each other's burdens. If the world knew what Jesus has done here, they would be so envious.

Because we have something that they only dream about. Having 100, 200 people that are deeply committed to your welfare, that's something that they can only fantasize about.

[23 : 28] They don't think that's even possible. And yet, that's what we have here. And what I'm saying is take advantage of that. Carry each other's burdens. No one is going to share your burden if you won't commit to share it.

No one is going to share your burden if you keep everyone at arm's length. You can't expect the benefit of the church if you won't commit to the relationship of the church.

And so here's the place where we find comforters. Here's the place where we find friends. Here's a place to serve and to give and to volunteer.

Here's a place to laugh. Here's a place to worship. Here's a place to pray. Here's a place to meditate. Here's a place to love and to be loved.

And when we're isolated, our most deceitful thoughts, our most destructive thoughts, tend to echo in our minds, don't they?

[24 : 41] They go around and around and around and the healthy ones get muted and we don't hear them so well anymore and the bad thoughts just go round and round.

And so we do need to preach to ourselves, but we need other people to preach to us too. Pastors to preach to us, our friends, other people that say, listen, this is true.

Listen, remember this. Or maybe that's not quite true. We need other people to help us and to speak truth and love into our lives. So every single one of those things that I talked about, about finding friendship, about worship and meditating and praying and having comforters and having people that you can share your life with and you're not isolated, all of those things lead to greater happiness, to greater well-being, to joy.

So commit to the church. Remember, geese honk encouragement and fly in formation. And what do skunks do?

Travel alone. So let's be those geese honking encouragement to each other. Number seven, take a social media Sabbath.

[26 : 01] take a social media Sabbath. This goes back to what we studied on digital technology. It's all a gift from God.

It is. And we should use technology and we should enjoy it. But we were made for more than that. And it should only have a smaller part of our lives.

We weren't made to live in front of a screen day by day and listen to it and see what everyone else is doing every moment of every day. The wonderful thing and the dangerous thing about Facebook and about all the social medias is you can find out anything and you can find any group that will talk and speak into your life.

And that could be wonderful. And that could be helpful. But at the same time, I know of people that have gone into the wrong group and now it's all this echo chamber.

And it's just people reaffirming and reconfirming everything that they think is true and it's just bringing the whole group down. So, we need to keep it in its place.

[27 : 21] And so this is where taking a social media Sabbath comes from. Where we take a real break. A rest from it. That might mean more than a day. It might mean totally off of it.

It might be saying, you know what, I'm just really not happier when I'm looking at this. It's become more of an obsession than anything good. And so you get rid of it. Like, when we did all that digital technology stuff, I showed you the statistics.

Happiness and social media have a troubled relationship, don't they? They have a difficult time living together. So that's number seven.

number eight. Make your schedule, make sure your schedule is realistic. Make sure your schedule is realistic.

In other words, you need to learn to say no. To say no. One author put it like this. The point is to say no to the non-essentials so that we can say yes to the things that really matter.

[28 : 31] It is to say no frequently and gracefully to everything but what is truly vital. A pastor wrote of himself.

He was standing in the grocery store parking lot, burned out and angry. And he had one of those moments of seeing himself and this moment of self-revelation, so to speak.

And he said, how did this happen? How did I become this overwhelmed, over-scheduled, exhausted person who is devoid of compassion and angry at everybody?

How did this happen? And in men, that's generally how burnout expresses itself is an extreme irritability and anger.

So, how did this happen? Well, it happens when you don't live within your God-given limits. It happens when you don't live within your God-given limits, when you don't say no, when you always feel like you have to say yes.

[29 : 41] So, if you can't say no because of a hundred different reasons every single time, this is what we're talking about.

You can always find some good reason to do something. But are you learning to gracefully and frequently say no to what is non-essential so you can say yes to what is vital?

Now, it could be a time for you to delegate what you can delegate. So, what am I doing that I don't personally need to do that I can let someone else do that I can teach someone else to do that someone else can figure out on their own and it will be okay that I can delegate this to them?

What can I say to no to say no to that is non-essential so that I can say yes to what is essential? And so, maybe husbands and wives you need to sit down and say we need to make a list of non-essential and essential and we at least need to know what we're dealing with.

So, make sure your schedule is realistic. If your schedule is not realistic, it's, again, it's like changing the oil. You'll be able to get away with it for a while but eventually something will happen and you'll have a breakdown.

[31 : 02] Number nine, meditate on scripture. Meditate on scripture. Ruminates. Slow down.

We are so much to a great degree we are what we think about. As a man thinks about in his heart so he is.

The content of our thinking has a significant impact on our mental well-being, our spiritual well-being. When we meditate on lies and insecurities, when we meditate on the world's idea of our identity, sort of what Pastor John was preaching on, what is our true Christian identity?

When we meditate on those bad things, it's going to negatively affect our wholeness and our health and our spiritual well-being.

But if we are meditating on God's word which is flawless, you turn away from the world and you read this book and it's perfect clean and it's wholesome.

[32 : 31] The spirit takes it and he cuts away all the garbage and leaves the truth. We meditate on that and we just live in it.

We need to realize that meditation is more than just having a drive-by experience with the word of God. It is more like, you know, husbands and wives they live together and after a while they've taken on each other's personalities.

We need to live in the word, live with the word and have it reflect back into our hearts and our minds. So we need to slow down, think more deeply, and we need to talk to God as we read it.

We confess it back to him in prayer. I think we need to learn to do that act of confession of saying this is what I believe to be true God, this is what you say, and so this is what I think is true about you and about me and about what's going on.

To confess it back to him, to confess our sins and our failures and our shortcomings, but to do it in the context of the gospel and of grace.

[33 : 49] We need to just slow down. So write it down. If you're a visual person, maybe draw a picture. Draw it out. The point is to meditate on that truth.

These things were all written for our encouragement. For our encouragement. That's number nine. And last is number ten. Worship.

Worship. Worship personally. Put on some good music. Listen to it.

Sing along. I mean, just personally speaking, sometimes what I just need to do is to put on some good music and just listen to it.

I need those hymns. I need that kind of music just playing in my head. Worship as a family. Sing together as a family.

[34 : 52] Worship with the church. Come here and sing with us. So worship is about rejoicing and exalting in the Lord.

And when we are happy, we sing. And when we are not happy, we should be singing until we get happy. And we can use all that technology to worship.

That's wonderful. I mean, YouTube is terrible and it is wonderful all at the same time. Use that. Use Spotify.

Use your technology to worship, to sing. If you can play an instrument. I just found out on Wednesday, I didn't know Max Rarick could play the guitar, but Max can play the guitar.

I don't know if I could do that, I'd be using that guitar to play music and sing. Worship as a family. Ten happiness habits.

[36 : 01] So just think, maybe which two or three do you need to say, I need to start? Or maybe which two or three, if you're like me, there's probably two or three that you have down and you need to maintain.

Maybe there's a few that you've forgotten and you need to reinstall into your life. Maybe there's a few that you just need to start all together. But just let me ask you, what are you going to do?

If you have this list, if you weren't taking notes, it's being recorded, if you need the list, I can give that to you. But which of these things are you going to start or which ones of these things are you going to double down on and say, I need more of this.

I need to be doing this. I need to make sure I'm doing this. to make good. And as we end, I want you to remember that happiness is just not about making us feel good.

The joy of the Lord is our strength. The joy of the Lord is our strength. It's essential to our holiness, to our usefulness, to loving other people, to glorifying God's name.

[37 : 13] So these things aren't just so that we can feel better. They have that wonderful effect, but they are for God's glory and other people's good. So, which one are you going to work on first?

We're out of time, and so we're dismissed.