

Overlooking Offenses (part 2)

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Preacher: Jason Webb

- [0 : 0 0] We have quite a few visitors, and it's just a good reminder that what we are doing in this classroom is going through David Murray's book, The Happy Christian.
- Remember the very first chapter, the very first equation that we talked about when we talked about The Happy Christian. I see some of you like digging into your archives.
- The reason I'm, and you're probably thinking, what was that chapter? What was that chapter? Well, it was Happy Facts. The idea was that facts are greater than feelings.
- The more we're able to get that equation right, the happier that we're going to be. And so that's what we want to do.
- Right here at the beginning, we want to do a review of that. And the reason I want to do a review of that is because have you struggled with getting your facts and your feelings straight in the last weeks or in the last months?
- [1 : 2 8] Or did you hear it one time and boom, you got it, you remembered it, and now you do it? It's probably not like that. You probably need to be reminded. And so I want to start with some review as a way to just remind you.
- We started with a quote from Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones in his book Spiritual Depression. And he started his book like this. Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?
- Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You've not originated them, but they are talking to you. They bring back the problems of yesterday, etc.
- Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now, this man's treatment in Psalm 42 was this.
- Instead of allowing this self to talk to him, what does he start to do? He starts talking to himself. Why are you cast down, O my soul?
- [2 : 4 0] He asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. And so he stands up and he says, Self, listen for a moment.
- I will speak to you. That was what that first chapter was really all about. It was about speaking to ourselves the truth.
- Facts. Instead of just going with our feelings. Now, there's nothing wrong with feelings. God gave us those emotions. The point is not facts instead of feelings.
- It's talking about the proper balance. And so facts greater than feelings equals happiness. And we talked about some damaging thought patterns.
- I hope you're starting to remember some damaging thought patterns. And I want to see how well you can recall that. We talked about one happiness killing way to think was black or white thinking.
- [3 : 4 6] Black or white thinking. What did that mean when we talked about that? What was that? Anyone? Anyone? All or nothing. All or nothing.

Either or. So, for example, my sermon goes badly one Sunday. And I conclude from that that I was never called to the ministry.

I mean, and you could put that into your own experience. You have a bad day at the job and you say, that's it. I was never meant to do this.

There's no shades of gray. It's all or nothing. And so let me ask you, are you recognizing that black and white thinking in your life?

Where it's all or nothing. There's no shades of gray. There's no depth of insight. There's no nuanced way of thinking.

[4 : 42] It's just all or nothing. Are you recognizing that in your life? We talked about filtering. Filtering.

Remember that. It's where you go panning for the wrong. And you go mining for gold. And your idea of gold is to find the bad in every situation.

So, maybe the best way to say it is like you pan for gold and then you throw the gold away. And then you're left looking at your, the leftovers. So, your child comes home with a 90% on a test.

And what do you say? Rex, what do you say? What happened to the other 10%?

What happened to the other 10%? I won't talk about what we talked about in your daughter's golf score. Or you hear a good sermon.

[5 : 48] But your pastor says one thing you don't like. And that is the one thing that you can't forget. That's the one thing you pull on. So, that idea has come up a lot in this series.

Are you looking for the good? Or are you just looking for the bad? Are you filtering out all the good and just keying in on the bad? We talked about mind reading.

Another damaging way of thinking that ruins our happiness. So, when we do mind reading, what are we doing? What are some examples of that? We're judging motives.

We're judging motives of what? You have a person in a situation where you said, well, this is what they had to have meant when they said that. Yeah. It's any time where we think, we assume, we know what those other people were thinking or what they were doing and all their reasons behind it.

And I guess the important thing is, what are we assuming about them? The worst. The worst. So, somebody walks by me in the church and doesn't say hi to me and what do I think?

[7 : 06] Oh, they're mad at me. I know what they're thinking. Something like that. And then we have fortune telling. Fortune telling is another kind of mystic art that we somehow think we're experts at.

We're not mind reading. What are we doing when we're fortune telling? We're taking today's circumstances and projecting it into the future in a negative way. Yeah. Okay. Like, that's a great summary.

Can you give me an example? Like, my kid got a D. So, that means he probably won't graduate. He'll be homeless or living in a negative way.

So, Karen, do you have some expertise? Yeah. Predicting the future.

You don't know the future. You've never known the future. It's a damaging way of thinking.

[8 : 10] Okay. We talked about perfectionism as another damaging way of thinking. And in perfectionism, what kind of words do we say to ourselves?

We're talking to ourselves when we're a perfectionist. What kind of words do we use? A lot of it. I should have done this differently.

I what? I should have. Could have. Ought to have. I could have. I ought to have. I mean, you just walk away from an experience just saying.

And I know there's a place for that where you reevaluate yourself. But there's a, you learn your lesson and then you move on. You don't just sit there and say, oh, I could have done this.

I should have done that. So, you're looking for perfection. A perfect day. A perfect home. A perfect family. A perfect performance.

[9 : 10] A perfect project. A perfect report card. A perfect yard. A perfectly completed to-do list. Never. And you're never done.

And you're never satisfied. And you're never happy. Well, this is what we said. You don't have to be some sort of Sigmund Freud character to realize that that kind of way of thinking, all those different patterns, are going to lead to unhappiness.

If we're always thinking about the problems and the negatives. If we're always thinking about the problems and the negatives, and we're always looking to the future, and it's hopeless, and we are assuming that everyone hates us, or is looking down on us, or we assume that because we've achieved, we haven't achieved everything, that we've now achieved nothing.

That's, we're going to be pretty unhappy people. It's going to be hard to know the joy of the Lord when those are the ways that you're thinking.

So, we talked about if you want to be a happier Christian, then you need to reverse those ways of thinking. And the key first step is realizing that with the Lord's help, you can.

[10 : 34] A pessimistic Christian can become an optimistic Christian. Romans 12.2 says, Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

New thinking. New ways of processing what's coming into your life. And you change as your thinking changes. And so, sad, pessimistic Christians can become happy Christians.

So, that's what we talked about. And I hope to do some more of these reviews, because I think it's, this is bread and butter. This is stuff that we need and use every day of our lives.

And so, that was the first lesson. Today, we're going to move into a different chapter called Happy Giving. And this is actually the longest chapter in the whole book.

And rather than spending four weeks on it, I'm just going to hit on one thing. And that is Happy Thanksgiving.

[11 : 41] Now, the equation for this chapter, remember every chapter has an equation, is giving greater than getting equals positive.

Giving greater than giving equals happiness. Now, what did Jesus say about this whole matter of giving and getting?

What's one of his most famous things he's ever said? It's more blessed. It's more blessed. What's that word blessing mean? Mark?

Yeah. Happy, fulfilled. The sense that life is going in a good direction. Things are flourishing. And Jesus says it's more blessed.

It's a better way of being blessed to give than to receive. And so, this morning, we're just going to limit ourselves to giving thanks.

[12 : 56] Giving thanks. What we started this Sunday School lesson with was just giving thanks is one of the key ways of being blessed.

It's one of the most important things that we can do. It's not only the Bible that teaches us that. We've looked at, and David Murray is very fond of looking at what modern science and researchers have discovered.

And just listen to some of these things. Studies have shown that gratitude is a powerful force for creating positive changes in individuals, in families, and in organizations.

One research professor of what is called positive psychology wrote, The expression of gratitude is a kind of meta strategy. It's one of the great big strategies for achieving happiness.

Now, let me give you some of what the researchers have found. The first is from a book called Thanks. How the new science of gratitude, which is so hilarious.

[14 : 11] This new science that they've discovered called being thankful. This new science of gratitude can make you happier, and it's this. Grateful people have more energy. They have more happiness.

They have more friends. They enjoy better sleep. And they enjoy better health than people that aren't thankful. Better sleep. Better sleep.

Who here has seen White Christmas? Remember Bing Crosby's song? When I'm worried and I can't sleep, what does he do?

I count my blessings instead of sheep. And I fall asleep counting my blessings. Other findings.

When we count acts of kindness done, so when we think about the kind things I've done, but also the kind things I've received, that increases our levels of happiness.

[15 : 13] Again, what you're thinking has a powerful effect on your level of happiness. They did a study of resilience and emotions following September 11th.

So, you know, there's a huge number of people immediately affected by the September 11th attacks, and they found that gratitude helps people cope with painful and stressful life situations.

So they looked at how these people were handling it. And they found that gratitude was one of the key differences between those who handled it reasonably well and those who weren't handling it.

Grateful people are more helpful. They're more helpful to others. Now, can you think about why that would be? Why would grateful people be more willing to help others?

Their? Their minds not on themselves. That's one thing. What else? What's involved with giving thanks?

[16 : 21] It's the assumption that what? Someone has done something for you. Like, you weren't worthy. It wasn't a matter of a paycheck. Someone did something for you.

They helped you. And because you have that sense of, I've been helped, now I'm more willing to help others. When we express gratitude to others, we strengthen our relationship with them.

You all know how it feels like to be taken advantage of. Where you do something for someone and they don't have any gratitude towards you. Is that good for a relationship?

No. But when it's mutual giving and then receiving, giving thanks, that helps relationships. Gratitude reduces negative emotions like anger, envy, greed, anxiety.

That's what all this new science has found. I don't want to put up charts and graphs and show you that. I'm just saying that's what they've discovered. But they also come to this realization that it's more than just a polite thank you.

[17 : 40] Just being a polite thank you, it doesn't do any of the things that we talked about. This is what one said. It has to be a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation.

So real gratitude is felt gratitude. It's relished gratitude. It's deeply felt. Now, that's what all this new science is discovering.

But again, isn't this what the Bible teaches? Isn't this what the Bible has been teaching for thousands of years? Isn't that what Jesus said?

Isn't that what the Psalm said again and again and again? And we ran into it last week in Psalm 95 too. Giving thanks is truly God's way of living.

It's not just being polite. It's not good social manners. This is God's way that we were meant to live. With a sense of gratitude and showing it and expressing it.

[18 : 50] And giving thanks is what happens when the gospel comes into a person's life. Gratitude begins to come out of their lives and incredibly new in different ways.

So, you remember that parable of the man who found the treasure in the field. He found a treasure in somebody else's field. And what did he do?

Pardon? Right. He buried it again so no one else could find it. Then he sold everything he had and he bought that field. And how did he feel when he was doing all of that?

How did he feel? Like, oh no, I gotta give up everything? He was ecstatic. He was so grateful.

Like, he found the lottery ticket with the winning numbers on it out of nowhere. And he's won. He's grateful for this opportunity.

[19 : 52] And Jesus says that's what the kingdom of God is like. people receive it with amazing joy and gratitude. And when people see it and when people are swept up into that kingdom's power, they are filled with grateful joy.

Now, Paul doesn't say that gratitude, I don't think, is one of the fruit of the Spirit. But, it very much is, isn't it? It very much is.

So, we see the grace of God and we overflow in response with gratitude. Now, so you see how at the very bottom of what the gospel does is it produces that felt sense of gratitude.

gratitude. It reaches down to the very bottom of who we are and it makes us thankful. And the degree that we are thankful is a degree of, oh, are you spiritually healthy or not?

Because when you are having a relationship with God and you're no longer thankful, what is that saying about how you're doing spiritually? You're not doing well. I mean, whatever's going on on the outside, you might have a perfect, wonderful life just like a Pharisee on the outside and yet, I don't think gratitude was one of the key features of a Pharisee.

[21 : 24] So, the whole gospel produces this prerequisite to gratitude. Now, why is the gospel so powerful at producing gratitude in our lives?

Well, let's go again to that guy who said thanks or, you know, who wrote this book Thanks to the New Science of Gratitude. He said this, at the cornerstone of gratitude is the notion of undeserved merit.

The grateful person recognized that he or she did nothing to deserve the gift or benefit it was freely bestowed. This person is not a Christian, but he's saying this is how gratitude works in people.

It's the notion of undeserved merit that he did nothing to deserve the gift or benefit. Now, in a Bible word, what is that? In one word, what is that?

Grace. Grace. Out there in the world, apart from Christianity, without even a common grace sense of grace, there's not gratitude.

[22 : 37] gratitude. It's grace. And so, all these new scientists are so ecstatic about finding this stuff out, but what they have just discovered now, God has been doing and working in his people's lives from the very beginning.

Now, again, don't we as Christians, shouldn't we as Christians have an advantage here? shouldn't we as a whole be so much more thankful than the people outside of Jesus?

Because our whole faith is based on what? It's based on grace. Not what my hands have done.

Not on works. And so, while we're still sinners, Christ died for us.

That's at the bottom. When we were powerless, powerless, and ungodly, Christ died for us.

[23 : 51] And so, if anyone should be happy, it should be us. If anyone should be living with a heartfelt sense of gratitude permeating their lives, it should be us.

The more we think about God's love and grace, the happier you will be, and the more you will be saying thank you to God. Because when that's the basis of your whole life, that at the very bottom of who you are, there's the sense of sin, sin, or sinfulness, but, and this is so important, it's not at the bottom of who we are, it's just the sense of sin, period, full stop, but, when greater than all my sin and shame, God has loved me.

When that's going on, greater far than all my sin and shame is this love and grace of God, when that dynamic is at work, your whole heart opens up and you're ready to say thank you.

Thank you to God. Thank you to others. And it's in every direction and it's every track. And so it's seeing all of God's blessings in every way that he gives them, through others, through circumstances, through past, through the present, through the future, and then seeing his love everywhere.

I love that song where he says the whole earth, the whole earth is full of your love. Are you seeing that?

[25 : 36] The whole earth is full of God's love. Now, the point of all of this is as Christians, gratitude should be like a landmine that we are continually stepping on and then blowing up with an expression of gratitude and thanksgiving.

And not just when we're here, but when we're everywhere. I should be stepping on gratitude and then expressing it because God has been so good and I've seen his gifts everywhere.

the real fundamental problem is not that God hasn't given us enough. The real fundamental problem is we're not training our eyes to see it, to look for it.

And so when we think the whole earth is full of his love, maybe we think, but, but, but what about this? And but, what about that? And we have a thousand caveats and we miss.

we miss his love. So, the real problem is we need to train our eyes to see God's blessing. It's already there, or what we've already received, and mark it down, and give him thanks.

[26 : 57] So, the rest of our time, we've got eight minutes or so, I want to talk about just three concrete, I think I have three, yeah, three concrete ways of, of, of doing gratitude better, more consistently, training our eyes.

This is like practice makes perfect, and so what we want to, how can we put this discipline of gratitude into our lives? And I have three very practical, basic ideas, and the first one is this, is start a gratitude journal, and I've mentioned this before, and this is a really, it's a good idea.

So, what's involved? You get a journal, you get a notebook, you can be cheap, it can be expensive, mine costs four dollars at Walmart, it's just a book with lines on it, and, and then page one, with the lines, you put a number one, and you start putting things you're thankful for.

number one is this, I started this about two and a half years ago, number one was finish my Sunday school lesson and afternoon sermon today. I don't know what that was, but I was thankful that I had that work out of the way.

Number two, able to buy beautiful flowers for Steph. Number three, Hap Indiana, and that's some sort of hearing aid organization, I don't remember what it was now, Hap Indiana lady named Karen was so nice.

[28 : 40] That was two years ago. And, you know what, it makes me happy, even to this day, to think that there's this kind woman named Karen who was helping families, answering questions.

I remember she was as sweet and kind and patient as can be. And, just her kindness stuck out to me. I don't know if she's a Christian or not, but it makes me happy to just think there's a Karen out there.

Being nice to families who have questions about, you know, what are we going to do? So get a journal. Write number one. Jot down the date.

And off you go. And you work at three things every day. Three things that went well. Three things that were good. Three gifts. It doesn't only have to be three, but three is a good number to shoot for every day.

And I'll tell you this from experience. I've been doing this for two and a half years now. Three things sometimes as easy as pie. Right? You just jot them down and you got them and they're right there on the surface.

[29 : 47] Other days you're not feeling so good. And you're going to have to dig deeper. And maybe you're not going to have to go by what you feel or what was so good.

because maybe what you're feeling and really what happened in the circumstances weren't particularly good or pleasant. But then you have to dig deeper and you say, okay, now what am I thankful for that I know is true?

Go back to chapter one of the happy Christian. Now, this is one of the favorite things that they've had people do out in the world.

And they've done studies giving people this homework of keeping these gratitude journals. And what they found was that the people that did this were more optimistic because they'd seen good and now they're starting to look for good.

They're more content. They're even physically healthier than people that have done nothing. so they've done college and college campuses and they've broken up the kids, large groups of kids, and they found out the kids that did the gratitude journals went to the doctors less often than the people that didn't.

[31 : 00] So they've discovered the same results in chronically ill patients. Basically, in other words, gratitude, Jesus' words, it's better to give than to receive is true for everyone all the time, regardless of the circumstances.

number two, this is something for you to do as a family. Dads, this is especially for you to set the tone.

Second, eat together as a family and ask for three blessings from each of the family members. So you go around the table three times and you ask everyone to give something that went right today, something that was good today.

And I try to do this at least once a week with my family, where we all sit down. I mean, we generally do a good job of sitting down together and eating dinner, but where you, instead of just talking about whatever, you say, okay, what are we thankful for?

Now, the first time you do it, they're going to struggle, but you know what? After a while, they know what's coming and they know what to do. So just that.

[32 : 13] What are you thankful for? What are you happy about? And you go around the table and that encourages thanksgiving in your family and that sets a different kind of tone in your family. So here's the third idea.

It's sort of an elaboration of that second idea. And it's basically, we call it savor. You know what it means to savor something?

Like if you have some candy and you savor it, you relish it. That's what we called it at our house. And basically, it works like this. We make, we plan it.

We make food that everyone really likes, comfort food. Two weeks ago, anyone and Phoebe made a whole Thanksgiving dinner in August.

Right? But hey, it was good. And we plan it ahead of time. And so a week from now, we're going to do this. And then what we do is we do our three blessings in that context of we're enjoying our family.

[33 : 16] We're purposely setting down to say this is a family special time and God is good to us and we're going to celebrate that. You know, the Old Testament calendar was full of feasts and festivals and Sabbath days and Sabbath weeks and new moon celebrations and special days.

In the New Testament, there's evidence that the church had what was called love feast. And the early church in a lot of areas practiced this where they got together in people's homes and celebrated God's goodness.

Now, the point I'm just trying to get at is that the whole biblical pattern is that there are times of feasting and enjoyment where we enjoy God's presence.

We acknowledge his gifts and we do it not only as a church, but we do it as families. Now, I guess that's the second.

Here's the third idea. This is where we have to end. And this is what people call a gratitude visit. And this is where you think about someone in your life.

[34 : 34] You locate someone to whom you have a special debt of gratitude. Maybe it's a parent. Maybe it's an uncle or an employer or a coach or a pastor.

And you sit down and you write a letter. And you either send it to them, you call them on the phone, and you read it to them in person, or you sit down with them and you read it to them.

And to just say, this is how you've helped me. Thank you. We say thank you. You're specific about what that person did and how it helped you.

And you're concrete. You're not just talking in generalities. You're saying, this is what you did, and I want to thank you. That's a way of honoring God.

That's a way of honoring that person. Well, so those three things. Gratitude journal, going around in your family, writing a letter, sending it to them to say thank you.

[35 : 42] I think that's all the time we have. May God help us to do this. We're dismissed. for now.