

Habits of Happiness

Habit #2: Trusting God's Sovereignty

Part 2

Intro: The ability to trust that someone is in control is a pre-requisite for happiness. Last May Lisa and I were able to travel in Europe, and we spent some time in Switzerland. We were in a place called, Lauterbrunnen. (Show Pic) One of the experiences we wanted to do was paragliding in the alps. Now, there are a few factors that can cause a little fear. (explain) BUT, trusting your guide and your chute, allows you to have fun. (Video)

Trusting that God is in control is not always easy either, especially when life doesn't make any sense and circumstances create fear. Yet it is this confidence that gives us a foundation for our happiness in this life. WHY? Because the journey will always have experiences that will create fear. It's trust that makes all the difference.

The Apostle Paul is writing from prison, yet he is still trusting that God is in control in his circumstances. Most people would have thought that locking up the greatest evangelist and church planter would be a tragedy. Time to panic right? Nope!

Phil 1:12-14 “And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News.¹³ For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ.¹⁴ And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God’s message without fear.” (NLT)

- If we do not learn to trust in the sovereignty of God we will live with constant fear based upon the circumstances. Our happiness will be driven by circumstances rather than by our relationship with God. We'll experience a stressed out life rather than a life of peace. Tough to be happy without peace. God's sovereignty and our happiness are connected.

How do we make trusting God's sovereignty a habit?

1. Have a conviction that God is sovereign

There is no other way the Apostle Paul could be happy while in prison without this inner conviction. Without it, his imprisonment would be nothing but a tragedy. It's obvious by the way he writes that this is already a firm conviction in his mind and heart. He's not questioning God. He's trusting God.

Phil. 1:12 “And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News.” (NLT)

1000 years before Paul, David had the same confidence in God.

Ps. 73:28 “But as for me, how good it is to be near God! I have made the Sovereign Lord my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do.” (NLT)

If we don't believe God is in control, happiness will be pretty elusive. So where does this conviction come from?

- This conviction comes from knowing God

The problem with most people is they really don't know who God is. They have a made up, make believe version of Him rather than the God who is revealed in the Bible. If you want to get to know God better, begin with the book that reveals to us who He is. One of the most life changing things you can do is study who God is. Trust is the result of knowing someone. How can you trust someone you don't know? (Lisa's conversation with the girl who took her paragliding)

- This conviction comes from experiencing God

But as for me, how good it is to be near God! This is experience. David had experiences of being close to God seeing His power and control. Often, we lack knowledge of God and we also lack experiences with God. The more we experience God, the more peace we have. (We had outgrown the Elementary school, and we needed a place to move. There was a vacant grocery store - \$15K to \$5K)

- This conviction comes from a track record with God

There are some people I trust more than others. WHY? Because some people I have an extensive track record with. They have proven to me over and over again that I can trust them. It works this way with God. I have been following Jesus for a long time. I have seen Him come through countless times. These experiences cause me to trust Him in the chaos of this life. The greater your track record the deeper your conviction. The deeper your conviction of God's control, the greater your happiness can be

- Track records are important. The very first time I flew I was nervous. Now after years of flying, there is a tremendous track record. I never give it a thought anymore. It works like this with God.

Do you have a conviction that God is in control?

2. View circumstances through the sovereignty lens

Phil. 1:12 "And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News

This is what Paul is doing for his readers. He is reminding them of God's sovereign plans. He is an evangelist and church planter. How could being in prison be a good thing for the gospel? But wait...God is sovereign!

How do we see our circumstances through God's sovereignty?

- Verbalize God's sovereignty

I sure hear the opposite many times from believers when things get tough. It's easy to verbalize fear, anxiety, anger, dread, instead of trust in God's ultimate control. What comes out of our mouths during stressful times reveals the lens we interpret life through. What comes out of your mouth when life gets tough? Fear, panic, anxiety, complaints, pessimism, or trust in God's control?

- For some of you that are experiencing some life chaos, this would be a great place to start. "Lord, I trust in Your control over my circumstances."

- Can you verbalize this trust to others. Our greatest testimony is not in times of comfort, but in times of chaos. What do others hear you say? Kids?
- Pray God's sovereignty
If we want to work at creating a new lens to view life through, praying God's sovereignty is a great place to begin. What do I mean? These are prayers of trust; they are declarations of your faith. "Lord, I don't understand, but my trust is in You!" We see prayer like this often in the book of Psalms.

Ps. 56:3 "But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you." (NLT)

- How do we pray when life spins out of control? Are they prayers of panic; prayers of asking God to remove the pain; or first, are they declarations of trust?

- Rest in God's sovereignty
What do I mean by this? Paul wasn't planning a jail break. Paul wasn't trying to figure out how to help God out. He wasn't taking things into his own hands. Now I'm not saying that at times we don't have responsibility. What I am saying is there are times when there is nothing we can do, nothing we can fix, no direction we can turn. In these times, we'd better learn to rest in God's control. This is not fatalism...it's faith.
 - You just lost your job / You're worried about your kids / You are stressed out by world events / You're frustrated by political decisions impacting your life. Can you rest in God's sovereignty?

Unless we develop a sovereignty lens in which to view life, we will experience more stress than happiness.

3. Look for pieces of God's bigger agenda

This again is what Paul is doing. He's been in prison long enough now to see parts of what God is doing and he's revealing to his readers the parts he is seeing. "Hey everyone, my imprisonment is actually a good thing!"

Phil. 1:12-14 "...everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. ¹³For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. ¹⁴And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear." (NLT)

The palace guards are hearing the gospel as well as others and because they see Paul's boldness, they in turn have boldness in sharing with others. Paul saw pieces of God's bigger agenda then simply being in prison. This perspective allowed him to have joy. The Gospel has infiltrated Caesar's palace!

So how do we discover pieces of God's bigger agenda in our own chaos?

- Always believe there is more going on than what you see
Our perspective is far too limited for us to interpret life events. God's plans are big, complex, multi-faceted and beyond what we can understand. We simply see a fraction of what God is doing. Often, what we see are a few puzzle pieces that make up an entire

portrait. (Have a box filled with puzzle pieces) We must embrace the conviction that God is the artist and there is a picture of our lives He is creating.

- Choose to see the good even in the chaos

We get so caught up in the circumstances that we can miss the pieces of good that are going on in the midst of the storm. Rarely is everything ALL good. Sometimes things are mostly ALL bad, but there are pieces of good if we choose to see them. Paul was able to see some good by him being in prison. What do we choose to see?

- Ask God to let you see it

“God, please let me see some good in the midst of this pain.” “Let me see your hand in this chaos and pain.” There are seasons of life we go through that feel like this.

- Acknowledge the good when you see it

Because we want everything resolved, we miss out on seeing the good so often. There have been many times I have pointed out some good thing to another person in the midst of their chaos and they respond; “That may be true but I still have the same issue.” (I still lost my job / financial crisis / I still have this physical issue / relational crisis) God is still at work doing good even when things are bad!

We don't deny reality, but don't also deny the good.

- 2 years ago our family's life changed – explain

- An amazing lady from foothills got mom into her rehab facility
- Mom in the hospital again and out walks the nurse...from foothills.

- Tell others about it when you see it

This is what Paul is doing. He knows that how he responds to hardship will impact the faith of others. We need to understand this as well. How we respond to hardship will impact others, especially our children and grandchildren. People are watching us. This is something I am always aware of.

- Being at Woodburn Safeway - explain

Seeing the pieces of God's bigger agenda impacts our emotions when life gets hard.

4. Trust God with the remaining messy pieces

Phil. 1:15, 18 “It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives...Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice.” (NLT)

Even though Paul may have seen how God was using his imprisonment to advance the Gospel, it certainly wasn't perfect. There were mean people with wrong motives simply wanting to cause him even more pain than being in prison. But, even in this case, He still rejoices over the fact the message of Jesus is being preached...even imperfectly. What a great lesson for us! How do we trust God with all of our imperfect, messy pieces that still remain?

- Trust that God can use the imperfect to accomplish His good

Paul believed this. Even though the Gospel was being communicated with wrong motives and more than likely in the wrong way, He still trusted in the fact that God could use even this to do good.

- Can God still accomplish His good through an imperfect, messy marriage? Imperfect, messy parents / imperfect, messy relationships / imperfect, messy church / imperfect, messy pastor / imperfect job situation / imperfect financial situation?
- Our lives are filled with imperfect, messy pieces. If God can't do good through imperfect and messy, we're all in trouble!
- Some of you struggle with this issue. You're convinced God only blesses perfect and you are unhappy about all the things in your life that are not perfect. You struggle finding joy in your marriage / your kids / your job / even your church because none of it measures up to your definition of perfect. It's messy.
- It's time to let go of this distorted view of God and reality. God wants you to find joy in the imperfect, even messy pieces of your life. WHY? Because He is right in the middle of it all! He's accomplishing good even in the broken pieces of our lives! What hope this gives us.
- I take such hope in this. My efforts as a pastor are so imperfect. Sometimes I just don't have much left in the tank to give - sometimes I'm struggling emotionally or with my attitude and still have to speak. I can be pretty hard on myself. (explain)

- Don't allow the imperfect to discourage you from continuing to do good

Sometimes we can get so overwhelmed by the negative pieces that still remain that we can be discouraged from even trying to do good, make a difference, or keep pressing on for change. Why try...look at all the evil taking place." Paul certainly could have went down this road. Why share the Gospel...look at what people are doing. Why even share Christ...I'm in prison. It's pointless!

- I have certainly struggled with this at times over the years. "Lord, do my efforts really matter. This world is so broken, how can you use me to make a difference in it?" (Share – Years ago, I was frustrated with my circumstances – youth pastor – already lived through 2 church splits – ministry was difficult – It was the first time I was thinking about leaving Molalla and moving on. "God, what do you want from me?"

Ps. 37:3 "Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness." (NASB)

- He told me to TRUST Him! – He is in control of my life. Trust My sovereignty!
- He told me to STAY – "Dwell in the land" I want you in Molalla.
- He told me to KEEP doing Good. Don't stop striving to make a difference. It matters even if you don't see it.
- He told me to CULTIVATE faithfulness. Learn to be faithful to Me every day regardless of the circumstances in your life. Learn to do good every day. Learn to do good in the face of opposition. Cultivate this quality in your life and ministry. You're going to need it!

I'm so glad I didn't run off and try to find some perfect ministry opportunity. Instead, God wanted to teach me how to trust Him.

What about you?

- Do you have a conviction that God is truly in control?
- Do you view your circumstances through the lens of His sovereignty?
- Do you see pieces of God's bigger agenda?
- Are you trusting God with the pieces that are still imperfect?

Life is going to be unpredictable and painful at times. The difference maker when it comes to our happiness will be how much trust we have in the One we are tethered to? If we have an unshakable confidence in His control, we will have an enjoyable journey.