

Habits of Happiness ***Doing the Inner Work*** **Part 5**

Intro: I was raised to believe working hard pays off. I was taught that working hard is a good thing. It is something to be proud of. It is something that is good for you. Working hard wasn't something to avoid; it was something to embrace. It develops character, endurance, perseverance, and it leads to happiness. There is satisfaction that is unique that comes from working hard for something.

- I grew up working all summer long. I remember being 13 and working all summer and buying my deer rifle – Marlin 30-30. Share
- We all can relate to some degree. You worked hard to get through school – you worked hard to advance in your career – you work hard in your marriage – the result is a satisfaction – happiness – fulfillment from the results of hard work.

Now, can we have a spiritual work ethic? Can we embrace working hard spiritually? Because this is going to be the next habit of happiness.

Phil. 2:12-13 “Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. ¹³For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.” (NLT)

These verses represent the beautiful tension of God's grace combined with our efforts. It is understanding how to live in this tension that allows us to experience the happiness of this mysterious combination. Fall off the edge on either side, and you're going to be spiritually frustrated.

- You can make it all about your effort. Legalism – burn out – anxiety – fear – performance Christianity. This produces a guilt and shame-based approach because you can never measure up.
- You can make it all God - This results in a license to live however you want – cheap grace – my behavior doesn't matter since God forgives everything. This is faith without any responsibility or accountability. BOTH are wrong!

Paul is NOT saying we earn our salvation either. The original idea behind this phrase is to “bring to full expression.” In other words, bring your faith to its full expression. It's kind of like developing a muscle that already exists. It has the potential to be so much more so let's develop it together. Let's live up to our spiritual potential. Let's not allow our faith to atrophy. So, the question is how?

1. Practice a consistent spiritual work out

Let's begin by talking about physical workouts. What I see with most people is inconsistency. If we want to see results in the gym, we need to be consistent with our workouts and consistent with what we eat.

- Therefore, I have a plan for both. You've heard the phrase; "If you fail to plan you plan to fail." If you want to see the results of your workouts, you need a plan.
- I work out 5 days a week – I have specific exercises for each day
- I have a very controlled diet – I track MACROs – explain
- That's a lot of work? Yes it is, but I believe in choosing your hard. It's hard being out of shape and it's hard being in shape. There's no such thing as NOT HARD – therefore, choose which hard you want to live. Our faith is like this as well.,

What does a consistent spiritual workout look like?

- Consistent Spiritual disciplines (habits) – 5 spiritual exercises that will grow your faith.
 - **Reading God's word** – One of the single greatest influencers of your faith will be reading God's word. You don't have to read much, but you do need the habit. Pick a time and pick a method and stick to it. Read less and reflect more.
 - **Daily Prayer** – Prayer is simply about communication with God. Are you talking with Him? Are you processing life with Him? Are you talking about your feelings-struggles-fears-hopes-dreams-even your brokenness? This makes God real – intimate – experiential – close (Pick a time – expand it to throughout the day – explain)
 - **Community with other believers** – We are designed to do life in community with others. We don't work out alone. We work out our faith with others. We're supposed to have spiritual workout buddies. This is why the church is so important. Where are you connecting with other believers (explain)
 - **Serving through my gifts** - The Holy Spirit put spiritual gifts in every follower of Jesus for the sole purpose of serving. Our faith grows exponentially through serving. Serving stretches your faith muscles and makes you stronger. Are you serving somewhere? Here's how you can start - explain
 - **Generosity** – Giving is a habit. Generosity is directly connected to our faith. Giving develops your faith in God's provision and your faith in God's priority. (We can't serve God and money – so choose). Too many believers have these faith muscles underdeveloped because they don't work them out. Here's how you can start - Explain
- Consistent Obedience (Not perfection)
 - Obedience is what matures / grows our faith

James 2:21-22 “Don’t you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete.” (NLT)

- We cannot grow our faith by knowledge alone. That’s like saying knowing how to work out results in you being in physical shape. OR because you went to a gym and sat there 3 times a week you’re in shape. (People do this with church.) No! You actually have to DO something. Faith works like this too.
 - Obedience grows your faith because it creates tension. Just like a muscle needs tension to grow so does your faith. Comfort kills! It kills your body and your faith.
 - Obedience makes you uncomfortable – makes you risk – makes you change – makes you work at following Jesus. The hard work of salvation is in the application not in the knowing. Obedience is what makes you stronger.
 - You’re literally not working out spiritually until you wrestle with application. Therefore, we all need an application bias to be consistent.
- Consistent Confession
 - Confession is not about groveling before God. It is not about guilt – shame or trying to avoid punishment. It’s about transparency – about dependency – it’s about seeing ourselves accurately before God.
 - I confess to God not only my failures but my ongoing struggles - my weaknesses – my stress and anxiety – my discouragement with myself – my inability to move forward at times.
 - What I receive through confession is His grace -His ongoing forgiveness – His unconditional love that I can never be separated from. It’s through confession where I find hope to keep going. Confession doesn’t beat me up it builds me back up.
 - Consistent Perseverance
 - Consistency wins the game. We must persevere in these things. Working out for 3 weeks isn’t going to get it done. (I see this in the gym every year in January – All the newbies in the gym – explain)
 - If you want to see results in your salvation, then work out spiritually for years – decades – make it a lifestyle and your faith will grow strong.

Heb. 10:35-36 “Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.” (ESV)

2. Practice being in awe of God

with deep reverence and fear

Working hard must come with the right attitude. We have all worked hard with a bad attitude. There's no joy in that. For the follower of Jesus, we work hard with reverence and awe. Now, what does that even mean?

- A deep awareness that God is holy
 - This is more about being in awe than anxiety. I am in awe of who God is. I feel in our attempts at making God more personal and relatable, we have lost the reverence and awe of God. It's not one over the other. We need both. We need God as a friend, but we also need to step back at times and see Him for who He is.
 - For me, it is creation that helps me experience the awe of God.

Ps. 8:3-4 "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" (ESV) I think we need to experience this same type of awe David is describing.

- Standing at the rim of the Grand Canyon (pic)
- The Swiss Alps (pic)
- A stary night – Explain – Our galaxy – The Universe.
- This same God loves me – saved me – adopted me – prepared an eternity for me. Wow!

- A recognition that following Jesus matters (reverence piece)

How does it matter?

- **It matters in this life**

Working out my salvation matters because my choices in this life matter. I am going to reap what I sow. I am going to harvest in life what I plant. This is how God set this world up to operate. (Gal. 6) My choices will either result in blessing or negative consequences. It's up to me. This creates a seriousness to my decisions. My life will be the sum result of my choices.

- **It matters in the next life**

How so?

2 Cor. 5:10 "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." (ESV)

How we live in this life impacts the next. That's sobering? Although our eternity is certain because of the forgiveness of Jesus and the cross, our lives will still be evaluated for obedience and rewards given for faithfulness.

- Past sins are not remembered – they are forgiven
- Rewards will be earned – Therefore not everyone in heaven will be rewarded the same. (I Cor. 3)

Can you see why we are working hard to show the results of our salvation? Can you see why we do this with an awe and reverence? It matters!

3. Practice the partnership with God

¹³*For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.*”

We work hard at showing the results of our salvation because God is actively at work within me helping me with this process. I’m not alone in this hard work. God is actively helping me in two very significant ways. He is giving me the desire and the power to do this.

- God gives us desire for motivation

- Have you ever lacked motivation to do something? We all have! For example, we all know we should get in shape, but we just don’t have enough desire that results in the motivation to go to the gym. When I desire something strong enough, my motivation increases. Without desire and motivation, right behavior feels like work and it’s hard to maintain it.
- God knows this about us so He works in us increasing our desire for His will so our spiritual motivation increases. He doesn’t want your relationship with Him to feel like a burden. He literally aligns our desires with His will.
- This is a process. It doesn’t happen all at once. But, as you give yourself to things like spiritual exercises (habits), He will start changing your desires. Therefore, don’t wait for the desire first. Choose it first and watch what happens.
- Also...ask Him to align your desires.

- God gives us power for obedience

“...and the power to do what pleases him.”

- God’s power is for “doing”. God’s power is for obedience. If you never choose to do you forfeit God’s power. God’s power is for His thing not your thing. You can ask God to empower you all day long for some self-oriented purpose-direction or behavior and it will never happen. His power is for “what please Him”.
- Therefore, God aligns our desires with His, motivates us even more and then empowers us to be successful spiritually accomplishing His will. God is never going to ask you to do something He will not empower you to achieve.
- I feel like my life is an example of this. I never wanted to be a Pastor, yet God changed that desire and empowered me to do it.
 - It started by giving me the desire to be a youth Pastor
 - Then God began changing my desire to work with adults
 - Then God gave me the desire to go back to school and get my Master’s Degree. (I hated school!)
 - Then, God began to change my desires about being a Sr Pastor. (All through this process, God is empowering me along the way.)
 - Then, God finally gave me the desire to start a church called Foothills and then empowered me to do what was pleasing to Him.

I'm not here to tell you any of this is easy. Paul does say; "work hard" at this. But I am here to tell you to choose your hard today. It's hard being in spiritual shape, practicing spiritual habits, learning to be in awe of God, allowing God to change your desires and being empowered for His will. BUT...it's hard being out of shape spiritually too. It's hard having no spiritual stamina – living a life only empowered by your own strength – and accomplishing things only you think you can do. So, choose your hard. There is no easy path. There is only a path that will be defined either by you or by God. Which hard do you choose today.