

INTRODUCTION

We're in a series called Ten Habits of Healthy Believers. Physical fitness is very important and I've noticed the traffic on the Rose Rudman trail has picked up considerably since January 1. That's great, but spiritual fitness is more important than physical fitness. Here's how Eugene Peterson paraphrases Paul's advice to young Timothy, "Exercise daily in God—no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever." (1 Timothy 4:8 MSG)

Spiritual maturity has nothing to do with chronological age. I heard a funny story about granddaughter who asked her grandmother, "Grandmother, how old are you?" Her grandmother replied, "Sweetheart, it's not nice to ask a woman her age." Then the granddaughter asked, "Grandmother, how much do you weigh?" And the grandmother said, "Honey, it's also not very nice to ask a woman how much she weighs."

The next day the granddaughter said, "Grandmother, you are 69 years old and you weigh 138 pounds." The grandmother was surprised and asked, "That's right. How did you know?" The granddaughter said, "You left your driver's license on the table and I read it." The grandmother said, "Well, you must think you're pretty smart, don't you?" The granddaughter said, "Yep. And I also saw on your driver's license that you flunked sex." She was a little confused.

I don't want you to be confused. This series about Ten Habits of Healthy Christians is simply a review of the basic disciplines of the Christian life. I want to reissue my challenge for this month. How many of you were here last Sunday? Great! You are working on perfect attendance at worship for 2016! Now how many of you weren't here last week, but you had a legitimate reason for missing, you were out of town or you were really sick or with someone who was sick? Okay, I'm giving you a pastoral dispensation, a free pass, you can consider this today as perfect attendance. If you just stayed out because you were lazy or hungover from too much football, you can start today and have perfect attendance for the rest of the month. My guarantee is that if you'll attend the remaining Sundays of January, I promise you'll be more joyous in your walk with God and more excited about your relationship with Jesus. If not, we'll sadly refund your boring, lukewarm Christian life.

I also guarantee you won't learn anything new this month. It's all about reviewing the basics of the Christian life. If you will incorporate these ten habits in your life, you will grow into a healthier follower of Jesus Christ.

Our pattern for healthy believers is found in the description of the early church in Acts 2:42. After Jesus ascended into heaven, He told the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. A small group of 120 believers prayed for ten days non-stop and on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came and filled them and they began to praise the Lord in languages they had never learned. The believers were so full of joy that the people watching them claimed they were drunk! But Peter said, "It's only 9:00 a.m.! Who gets drunk at 9:00 a.m.? And he began to preach and 3,000 people were baptized on that day. Then we read about the basic beliefs and practices of these first disciples in Acts 2:42-47. Let's read it again and I'll preview the ten habits as we walk through the scripture.

“They devoted themselves to [1] the apostles’ teaching and [2] to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and [3] to prayer. [4] Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. [5] All the believers were together and had everything in common. [6] Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. [7] Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. [8] They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and [9] enjoying the favor of all the people. And [10] the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

In the first message we explored the first two habits of healthy believers. All these habits can be expressed as a personal confession. 1. I APPLY THE TRUTH OF THE BIBLE IN MY DAILY LIFE. The Bible says that they continued in the Apostles teaching. A healthy believer handles and meditates on God’s Word on a daily basis. 2. I REGULARLY ENGAGE IN CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP. The Bible says they created a community of love and fellowship where they shared their meals and their lives together.

In this message we’re going to look at the next two habits of healthy believers.

3. I MAKE PRAYER A DAILY PRIORITY

The Bible says, “They devoted themselves... to prayer.” These first disciples made prayer a priority of their lives. At the beginning, the church didn’t have a lot of various ministries. The apostles preached, the people fellowshiped with each other; they fed the widows, but their main ministry was prayer.

They were always praying—the church was born in a prayer meeting. When Peter and John were arrested and beaten, the church prayed. When King Herod executed James and arrested Peter, they prayed. When they were getting ready to send out the first missionaries the church fasted and prayed.

Today we have hundreds of different ministries and prayer is just one of many. But healthy believers make prayer a daily priority.

Famous Christians have all written about the importance of prayer. Matthew Henry wrote: “When God intends to bless His people the first thing He does is set them a-praying.” John Wesley wrote: “God does nothing but by prayer, and everything with it.” F. B. Meyer wrote: “The great tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer.”

How important is prayer to you? The highest and holiest activity you will ever be involved in is when you communicate with the Creator of the universe.

Do you pray daily? In 1 Thessalonian 5:16 Paul wrote, “Pray without ceasing.” That doesn’t mean you can stay on your knees 24/7, it means you maintain a constant attitude of knowing you can speak to God at any moment. It’s like keeping a heavenly telephone line open with God—you never hang up or put Him on hold.

As you know, prayer is such an important topic that thousands of books have been written on the subject. Tens of thousands of sermons have been preached on prayer. I could teach a series on prayer that would last an entire year. But in this series, we're just looking at the basics of these Ten Habits.

Healthy Believers engage in prayer on two levels. They both start with the letter "A." We pray ALONE we pray ASSEMBLED. You must be passionate about both levels. I encourage you to have a prayer partner or two or three. I encourage you to gather regularly with a prayer group and spend time before the Father. If you don't have a prayer group, start one! Assembled prayer is important, but I'm going to talk more about personal prayer.

When I was in college I found a verse in Mark's Gospel that literally changed my life. It spoke of the personal prayer life of Jesus. Mark 1:35 says, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."

If the Savior of the world who was God in the flesh found it necessary to set aside time in the morning to be alone with His Father, I realized this must be a priority of mine. And since that time until now, it has been my habit to get alone with God in prayer every morning.

If you would make that your daily practice, it would change your life. You may be thinking that you're too busy. John Wesley's mother, Susana, had 16 children. She used to sit down in the kitchen and pull her apron over her head. All the children knew this meant they must be quiet because their mother was spending time alone with God. Every morning, we need to pull the apron over our heads and block out the distractions of life and commune with God in prayer.

"ACTS"

I believe every Christian WANTS to have a dynamic personal prayer life, but sometimes they don't know how to pray. Let me share with you a simple prayer outline I've used to many years. All you have to do is remember the word ACTS and it can become a prayer pattern for you to follow. Some people think prayer is only asking God for blessings. That is one part of prayer, but it isn't the only part of prayer. That's the value of praying along the ACTS outline.

You start your prayer with A which stands for Adoration. You enter His gates with praise and worship. Adoration is just bragging on God to God. It is complimenting God for His amazing character. The Psalmist cried out, "I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the Lord." (Psalm 34:1) You could easily spend five or ten minutes just praising God.

The C stands for Confession. It is important for us to ask the Holy Spirit to examine our hearts to see if there is any unconfessed sin in our lives. The Bible says, "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." (Psalm 66:18) God is always ready to lovingly forgive us. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) When we confess our sins we aren't revealing

some deep dark secret to God. He knows about everything in our lives. When we confess our sins, we are agreeing with God that what we have done is wrong.

The T stands for Thanksgiving. The basic difference between adoration and thanksgiving is that we praise or adore God for who He is: loving, compassionate, merciful, and gracious. And we thank God specifically for the blessings He gives to us. The Bible says, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's Will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:18) Thank God for your material blessings, your relational blessings, and your spiritual blessings.

The S stands for Specific requests. After you have praised God, confessed your sin, and given thanks to Him, then you're ready to make requests of the Lord. The Bible says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (Philippians 4:6) Make a prayer list and keep a record of those for whom you are praying, what the request is, and note when God answers that request.

The problem with a lot of our praying is that we only pray in generalities instead of praying specifically. It's like when someone asks God to "bless the missionaries." That's a general request. But what specifically do you want God to do for the missionaries? More specifically, why don't you pray for individual missionaries and ask God to keep them safe and healthy and make them effective in building relationships and sharing the gospel. That's better than just asking God to "bless the missionaries."

Parents and grandparents, it's good to pray for your children and grandchildren, but it's also important to make specific requests for them. I've made a list of seven specific requests you can pray for your children. Keep that list handy and make those requests regularly for each of your children or grandchildren. (Prayer list at end of message.)

Helen Roseveare was a missionary physician working in Zaire, Africa. Despite her best efforts, an African woman died in childbirth leaving a two-year-old orphan as well as the preemie newborn. There was no electricity, so Dr. Roseveare had no incubator, and her only hot water bottle had burst. She wrapped the baby in a blanket and stayed close to the fire and the child survived the first night, but Dr. Roseveare realized that nights would be extremely cold, and her chances of survival were slim. She had taught the children at the clinic to pray specifically, so that morning they gathered to ask God to send a hot-water bottle. A little girl named Ruth prayed boldly, "Please God send the hot water bottle today because the baby will be dead tomorrow. And while you're at it God, please send her sister a dolly so she'll know you love her."

That prayer scared Dr. Roseveare. Yes, she believed in prayer. And Yes, God can do everything, but if God didn't send the hot water bottle that afternoon, how would she explain it to the children?

That afternoon a 22-pound box arrived at the clinic. It was the first package in two years. It was exciting, but who would think to send a hot water bottle to an equatorial country like Zaire? The children gathered around as Helen opened the box. She discovered lots of bright clothing for the children, and found many rolls of bandages for the patients. And as she reached into the bottom of the box, she pulled out a hot water bottle. She began to cry. She had been too afraid to pray for

it to arrive that day, and yet Ruth had enough faith to ask for it. Ruth jumped forward and said, "If God sent the hot water bottle, I know he sent the dolly, too!" And she rummaged around in the box until she pulled out a small, beautifully dressed doll.

Five months earlier, a group of prayer supporters in England had felt burdened to help Helen so they put together a package. Someone thought to put a hot water bottle in the package, even though she felt silly sending it to Africa where it was always hot. And the same woman's daughter decided to place her own doll in the package hoping some African girl would enjoy it.

There are many great prayer promises in the Bible. In Isaiah 65:24 God says, "And it shall come to pass that before they call I will answer." Is prayer a daily priority in your life?

4. I TRUST GOD TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE

The Bible says, "Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles." These first believers saw God perform miracles. There are 18 miracles recorded in Acts. Some say the time of miracles has passed, but I don't believe that. I believe God is still performing miracles. Anytime He does something considered humanly impossible, that's a miracle. As a healthy believer, we need to trust God to do the impossible. Let me give you two points of truth when it comes to God doing the impossible.

A. Jesus gives us His authority and power

Power and authority are two different things. Authority is the RIGHT to do something, and power is the ABILITY to do something. Jesus gave us both. In Luke 9:1 the Bible says, "When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases."

Let me illustrate what spiritual authority is. I want you to imagine a Texas highway. There is a 40-ton 18-wheeler barreling down the highway. Up ahead a 200-pound man steps into the highway right in the path of the truck. Now, who has more power? The truck has the power to squash the man. But the man raises his hand and the truck driver notices that the man is wearing the uniform of a DPS officer, and there is his DPS vehicle on the shoulder of the road with the lights flashing. The officer says, "Stop in the name of the law." Now if that truck driver knows what's good for him, he is going to start downshifting and applying his brakes. That man isn't standing there in his own authority, in his own name. He is standing there in the name of the law. He has been given authority by our state government.

The same is true with spiritual authority. The devil and His demons are much more powerful than we are. And if we try to confront the forces of evil in our name, we will fail. If we try to stand against Satan in the name of Baptists or in the name of Christianity, he just laughs. But we say, "Devil, stop in the name of Jesus," Satan starts applying the brakes. The Bible says in James 4:7, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." But we can only resist him in the name and authority of Jesus. Here's the second truth:

B. Attempting the impossible releases God's power

The reason some believers never experience God's supernatural power is because they never attempt anything impossible for God. They only attempt that which can be accomplished in their own strength. Jesus often asked His disciples to do something impossible, like feed 5,000 people with a few scraps of food. They said, "That's impossible." But we read in Matthew 19:26 that "Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

They had to obey Jesus by faith in order for God's power to be released. I don't believe there was enough food visible to feed a multitude, but they kept on returning and passing out more food. They had to attempt the impossible before the impossible happened.

In Acts 3, Peter saw a lame man at the gate of the temple. The lame man asked Him for money. Peter said, "I don't have any silver and gold, but what I have I will give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth [there's the authority], rise up and walk!" But the man didn't just jump to his feet. Peter grabbed him by the hand and lifted him up. What a cruel thing to do to a lame man because without the power of God he would fall into a pitiful heap. But Peter used both the authority and the power of Jesus. And only after Peter lifted him to his feet did the impossible happen. The man went walking and leaping and praising God.

CONCLUSION

These two healthy habits, prayer and God's power, are connected. Praying in faith can produce miracles. Let me tell you a true story from the life of Hudson Taylor to illustrate this. In 1853 Hudson Taylor was on a sailing ship bound for his first visit to China. He almost never made it. He describes what happened in his journal:

"Our ship was becalmed and gradually drifting toward the coast of New Guinea. We could see savages on the shore. They had kindled a fire and were evidently expecting a good supper of shipwrecked Englishmen that night. When I was in medical school some of the other students used to jeer at me because I was going among the heathen, who would enjoy a dish of 'cold missionary.' Well, it did look that night as if somebody was going to have a piece of hot missionary. We had been becalmed for several days, with never a breeze, or sign of one. In a few minutes we would be among the coral reefs. Then we would be at the mercy of those savages, and they didn't look as if they had much mercy."

So, this great missionary came within a few yards and a missionary dinner from ever arriving. He continues the story.

"I went to my cabin, and I told the Lord that I was just on my way to China; that He had sent me; and that I couldn't get there if I was shipwrecked and killed. I was then going to ask Him for a breeze, but felt so confident about it that I went up on deck. There was the second officer—a very godless man. I went up to him and said, 'If I were you, I would let down the mainsail.' He said, 'What do you want me to let down the mainsail for?' I said, 'We have been praying for a breeze, and it is coming directly, and the sooner we are ready for it the better.' With no breeze, the mate lowered the mainsail." So, they lowered the mainsail in faith – before there was any

wind. Hudson continued: "Then when the mate saw the sail moving, he went to work and soon the sailors were tramping over the deck. As the sails were set a strong wind was down upon us, and we moved to safety... Thus God encouraged me, before I landed on China's shores, to bring every variety of need to Him in prayer, and expect that He would honor the name of the Lord Jesus and give the help which each emergency required." He spent 51 years in China where God performed many more impossible things through faith.

God wants you to be a healthy believer. That can happen if you will make prayer a daily priority of your life and if you will trust God to do the impossible!

PRAYERS FOR PARENTS & GRANDPARENTS TO PRAY FOR CHILDREN

Adapted from a list by Bob Hostetler

- **SALVATION**

"Lord, let salvation spring up within my children, that they may obtain the salvation that is in Jesus Christ." (2 Timothy 2:10)

- **GROWTH**

"I pray my children may grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18)

- **LOVE**

"Grant that my children may learn to live a life of love, through the Spirit who dwells in them." (Ephesians 5:2)

- **HONESTY & INTEGRITY**

"May integrity and honesty be their virtue and their protection." (Psalm 25:21)

- **RESPECT**

"Father, grant that my children may show proper respect to everyone, as your Word commands." (1 Peter 2:17)

- **PURITY**

"Create in them a pure heart, O God, and let that purity be shown in their actions." (Psalm 51:10)

- **KINDNESS**

"Lord, may my children always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else." (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

OUTLINE

1. I apply the truth of the Bible in my daily life
2. I regularly engage in Christian fellowship

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3. I MAKE PRAYER A DAILY PRIORITY

"They devoted themselves...to prayer."

Adoration

Confession

Thanksgiving

Specific requests

4. I TRUST GOD TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE

"Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles."

A. Jesus gives us His authority and power

B. Attempting the impossible releases God's power

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
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