

Stability
Six Steps to Spiritual Stability (Part 1)
Philippians 4:1-9
November 14, 2004
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Well, as you know, this past week was the celebration of Veteran's Day. I know we have some veterans in our congregation. A great opportunity to remember the sacrifices of those who've served in the Armed Forces. I was reminded as I was thinking about that of a book I had the opportunity to read several years ago by Stephen Ambrose called *D-Day* about the events of that fateful June day back at the end of World War II. You are probably aware that the worst fighting that our troops encountered on D-Day was at Omaha Beach. It had the worst of conditions. It started ten miles out, because many of the landing craft were swamped by high seas as they tried to make their way in the ten miles from the ships to the shore. The survivors, once they did reach the beach, were overwhelmed with seasickness, and they were quite wobbly. Well over half of the amphibious tanks that were supposed to support the landing couldn't make it because they were victims of the heavy seas, that really, they hadn't been designed to navigate. Strong winds and heavy currents re-directed some of the landing craft to different areas of the beach separate from the target they were supposed to hit. And all of that vaunted allied air-craft power that was supposed to provide support for those landing on Omaha Beach wasn't effective because of the low cloud cover. They were flying blind. And because of fear of somehow hitting their own troops with the ordnance, they pulled up and dropped it farther inland than they were supposed to—in some cases up to three miles inland is where the ordnance fell that was supposed to support the troops on the beach. The beach itself was a tangle of obstructions. The Germans had had years, literally, to prepare for this event. In addition, ~~the~~—the circumstances of the geography made it hard for our troops because there was a four-mile run of cliffs that ran somewhere on average of a hundred to a hundred and fifty feet high. And the Germans, set up on those cliffs, simply able to look down and take shots at whatever came onto the beach.

But in spite of all those odds, as you have heard and read, there were some heroes on that day on Omaha Beach. One of them that you may not have heard of was actually a group of Rangers—three companies of Rangers—who had been assigned the responsibility to destroy a battery of six 155mm guns that were positioned up on the cliff front. Through all of those obstacles, through all of the difficulties I’ve just detailed, they made their way—actually up—scaled the hundred-foot cliff, which was where they needed to go, and they arrived at the top, defeated the Germans that were on the top, and then realized that the gun placements had been moved back several hundred yards. In spite of that, they made their way to those six-gun emplacements, were able to spike all of them, and then they held their ground. They held their position for two days against continuing waves of counter-attacking Germans. When they were relieved two days later, the three companies were down to ninety men. But they stood their ground, defending their post against all costs. That’s standing firm in the face of fire, and that’s what Paul wants each of us to do in the spiritual war which we are called to be engaged.

Let’s turn back to Philippians chapter 4. ~~For those of you who are visiting with us today,~~ . For those of you who are visiting with us today, we’ve been involved in, I guess now, about a little over a yearlong study of the book of Philippians. We find ourselves in Philippians chapter 4 and verse 1. Notice how Paul writes to these dear friends of his in Philippi, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.”

Notice that Paul begins this verse by highlighting his personal affection for these people. He says they’re his brethren. That is, they’re like brothers and sisters to him. He says he loves them. Notice he uses the phrase “beloved” twice in this one verse. He says, “I long to see” you. He has this longing in his heart to be with these people. And then he adds that “you are my joy and crown”—you are the cause of my joy and you are the ones who bring me honor.

But verse one is really a transition verse. Even as Paul expresses his love for these people, he's transitioning between what he's been discussing in chapter 3 and what he's going to discuss later in chapter 4. Notice the transition word that begins the chapter, "therefore." This Greek word—~~it~~ always looks back to what has gone before. You remember we saw last time at the end of chapter 3 verses 20 and 21, Paul had said our citizenship is in heaven. This is not where we belong. And we're waiting eagerly for a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, "who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory." Paul says, listen, in light of the fact that you don't belong here, in light of the fact that your citizenship is in heaven, in light of the fact that you're eagerly waiting for Christ to return, and when He returns, He's going to make you just like Him in terms of a body, just like Him, just like His body—he says, in light of all of that, I want you to stand firm.

Interesting words, "stand firm." Paul uses it often throughout his epistles, but I think you can get the best flavor for this word from a usage in Romans chapter 14 verse 4. We won't turn there, but in that passage, he refers "to standing firm" or "falling. That contrast gives you an idea of what this word means. "To stand firm" is the opposite of falling. To stand firm or fall. Those are the two alternatives in the Christian life. This word "stand firm" means "to be stable"—"to remain steadfast"—"not to be moved from how you live or what you believe." This word was often used in secular Greek to describe a soldier who stands firm at his post regardless of what it costs him, just like those companies of Rangers on D-Day. It's describing spiritual stability. That kind of spiritual stability is the goal of every Christian—the ability to stand firm, to stay at your post, and to be unmoved by the circumstances around you.

It's really a lack of stability that characterizes spiritual immaturity. If you want to see spiritual immaturity, turn back a few pages to Ephesians 4 and notice how Paul describes it. He says, after he's discussed the wonderful gift to the church of gifted men to help build up and equip the saints, he says in Ephesians 4:14, I don't want you to be any

longer “children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming.” You see, immaturity is characterized by instability. He says, instead—verse 15—I want you to “grow up. . . into Christ who is the head.” Because as you grow up, as you mature, there comes with maturity, stability.

So, Paul’s desire for each of us is that we become spiritually stable. You say, well that sounds wonderful. How do I do that? How do I get there? Well, you’ll notice back in Philippians chapter 4, Paul tells us how. It’s contained in one little word. He says, “Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, stand firm in this way.”

I slightly re-ordered the order of the text there in order to give you an idea of what he’s expressing. Stand firm in this manner. In this way. In other words, what follows verse 1—the staccato imperatives that are recorded in verses 2 through 9—outline the path to spiritual stability. You want to be spiritually stable? You want to be solid? You want to stand in the face of whatever comes? Then you’re going to learn how in verses 2 through 9. “Stand firm in this way.” Because in those verses Paul identifies six specific steps to spiritual stability or maturity. ~~Six specific steps to spiritual stability.~~ Now, we’re going to look at each of these steps over the next couple of weeks.

Let’s begin today with the one that’s contained in verses 2 and 3. The step is this:

Resolve to live in harmony with other Christians. ~~Resolve to live in harmony with other Christians.~~ In verse 2 Paul writes

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I ~~al~~ ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

He says if you're going to be spiritually stable, then it starts with having ~~the right~~—a right relationship with the Christians around you. Why is that? Because in this spiritual battle, as in physical war, you need your fellow soldiers. We depend on each other for strength. We depend on each other for help. And if you're going to be spiritually stable, then you need to be in right relationship with other Christians. Now, there's so much confusion about what true unity is. Let me, before we look at what this means, tell you what it doesn't mean. Paul is not saying that you and I should compromise fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith in order to have unity with others. If you have any doubt about that, just look at some of Paul's writings. Turn to Galatians. You don't need to turn there, but if you were to turn to Galatians chapter 1 verses 8 and 9. What does Paul say about those who distort or twist the gospel? He says let them be accursed. Let them be damned. Paul is not at all encouraging us to fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. Nor is he encouraging us to overlook a pattern of gross unrepentant sin in the lives of fellow Christians. You know, there are some who say, "Well, I know so-and-so is entrapped in a sin, but you know, I just want us all to get along." Kind of the Rodney compromise on the King approach to Christianity. Can't we all just get along? Paul wasn't into this either. Turn back to 1 Corinthians chapter 5. I want you to see this in his—~~in his~~ own words. 1 Corinthians 5. Shockingly, in the Corinthian church, the leadership and the people were tolerating the sin of incest. And Paul addresses this in chapter 5. And then after he addresses the specific issue that's going on in Corinth, he steps back, and he looks at the bigger picture. Notice verse 9. He says, "I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people." Now, they misunderstood. He says, "I did not at all mean with ~~imm~~—the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world."

He says, listen, I didn't mean don't associate with people like that who are unbelievers. Because if you didn't associate with people like that who are unbelievers, you'd have to leave the world. This is what unbelievers do. He says, instead, verse 11.

But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother [that is, somebody who says I'm a Christian. Don't associate with any so-called brother] if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

What is Paul saying? He's saying, listen, if you know of someone who says "I'm a Christian" but is living a pattern—an unbroken pattern—of sin, then you're not even to associate with that person. You don't even have a meal with him in fellowship. He goes on to say, verse 12, "For what have I do to with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves."

So, Paul is not advocating—and in Philippians chapter 4 ~~verse~~—verses 1 through 3—that we should overlook serious doctrinal error or that we should overlook a pattern of unrepentant sin. So, what does he mean? Well look at the circumstances here in Philippians chapter 4. Notice these two women are not peripheral people. These are not two ladies who are known for bad tempers and wagging tongues. Look at how this passage describes them. They were obviously members of the church. That's why they're in this letter to ~~Phili~~—the church at Philippi. And they were genuine believers. Look at the end of verse 3. He says their names are in the book of life. These are true believers. Not only that, these women were active in ministry. He says in verse 3, they have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel. And they had previously shown an ability to work alongside of others. Notice he says, they shared my struggle "together with Clement." Now, we don't know who that is, but obviously the—~~the~~ Philippians did, "and the rest of my fellow workers." So, these ladies were not known for being antagonist, hard-to-get-along-with women. They had labored together with Paul. They had labored together with these other people. But now, these two women disagree over some issue—we don't know what it was—that doesn't involve fundamental doctrine, or

Paul would have addressed it. And it doesn't involve a clear biblical sin, or Paul would address that as well. A disagreement between two women over something that doesn't rise to that level. Now, listen folks, this will happen in every church. Men and women will disagree, and it will happen. It happened even between Paul and Barnabas. Turn back to Acts chapter 15. In Acts 15 at the end of the Jerusalem Council, after that wonderful high point in the life of the church, when they came together and decided ~~to~~ to defend the true gospel against the Judaizers, and to make sure that works wasn't added to faith as a way to be justified before God. At the end of that, verse 36, it says that "After some days had passed, Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.'" He said, let's go back, and let's check and see how things are going.

Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, [a relative of his] along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches

Obviously, if a disagreement arose between one of the apostles of Christ and his traveling missionary companion, then it's important to realize, for us, that disagreements will happen. But what's important is how we choose to respond. If you choose to try to get others to side with you against the other person, then you're in real danger of becoming what the Bible calls divisive. A divisive person is simply one who uses an issue of disagreement to try to drive a wedge between others in the church.

God hates that kind of division, and those who cause them. In fact, Proverbs 6 couldn't be clearer. You remember that passage where it says, six things God hates, yes seven are an abomination to Him. The last one listed in that list is the one who causes strife among brothers. You know, it's interesting to me that even in Corinth—we already saw in 1 Corinthians 5, the church in Corinth was a very troubled church. I mean, tolerating incest. You go on later in the book and you discover that they were having these sorts of drunken brawls at their love feast connected to the Lord's Table. They were suing one another. But where does Paul begin when he begins to address the problems in Corinth? What is first on the radar screen with Paul when he starts with the church in Corinth? Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Verse 10. He's just gotten done with his greeting and here he goes, "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and the same judgment." And then he goes on to describe the differences. Chapter 3, he comes back to it. Verse 3. He says, "since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?"

In other words, you're acting like you're not even regenerate. This was a constant concern of Paul's. He comes back to it in chapter 11 verse 16. Disagreements will occur, but when there are disagreements, determine in your heart that you will not allow that disagreement to become a point of division. So, how do you deal ~~when~~—with disagreements when they come? When neither a fundamental doctrine nor a clear Biblical sin is involved, how do you ~~res~~—resolve a situation between you and another brother in the church? You and another sister in the church? Well, there are some clues back in Philippians chapter 4. Let's look at them together.

Here's how you deal with that kind of problem. Here's how you resolve those disagreements. First of all, understand how important resolution is. Notice verse 2. Paul says I urge you. Literally the Greek word is "to beg"—"to plead." He says I plead with you, I beg you, and he repeats the word twice. Notice how he says—in English as in

Greek—the word “urge” before each of their names. It’s as if Paul turns to one of the ladies in the congregation and he says I plead you, I urge with you, I beg you. And then he turns to the other and he says I beg you. And he mentions them by name. That’s unparalleled in the writings of Paul, for those who are faithful to the truth, to sort of bring them up publicly. You see, we don’t tend to think of disagreements as a major issue, but they were for Paul, because Paul could see what could eventually come. It could eventually divide the church. Understand how important resolution is. Listen, if you get into a disagreement with a brother or sister in Christ, don’t let it lie. Resolve it.

How do you resolve the issues? Understand how important it is. Work at personal resolution. ~~Work at personal resolution.~~—He says to these ladies, I want you to get together and work at complete understanding. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind—to have the same mindset in the Lord. How can they do that? Well, Paul’s already told us. Look back at Philippians chapter 2 verse 1. He already has laid the foundation for what he’s urging these ladies to do. In chapter 2 verse 1 he says, “if there is any ~~com-~~encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”

He says listen, let me appeal to you on the basis of the common spiritual resources we all enjoy. And let me appeal to you on the basis of the one purpose we have in life, which is the gospel and Jesus Christ. Whatever you’re disagreeing over, it isn’t that important. And then he goes on to say, verse 3, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

Boy, you know how many disagreements would be resolved if we took that approach? Paul’s laid out—he’s mapped out how to come to one mind in those verses. We looked at

those in detail. If you have any questions, you can get the tape, or get the CD and listen again. He said, here's how you resolve it. But what happens if that doesn't work? What if the two ladies can't get it together? What if they can't work it out? Well, there's another step you can take—verse 3. Get a third party involved. Get another mature believer if necessary, but don't leave it unresolved. Notice he says, verse 3, “Indeed, true companion”—true yokefellow. Now, we don't know who that is. ~~It~~—t's reasonable to assume that it was either one of the elders of the church at Philippi, or it may have been; ~~uh~~—one of Paul's traveling associates that he had assigned there. We don't know, but the Philippians obviously knew. Regardless, he says I want you to help these women. Come alongside these women, because unresolved disagreements—listen to this—unresolved disagreements will eventually produce settled conflict. You say, “Well what happens if after all of that we really still disagree?” If we can't resolve it and if we agree that the issues are too important to just overlook, well there's only one thing left to do and that's to graciously part ways, but without sowing discord. Paul and Barnabas's example is a great one in Acts 15, as we saw. They parted ways, and yet there's every indication that they remained close friends. But the key is: don't become the flashpoint for division in the church.

The first step to spiritual stability, Paul says, is to ~~re~~—resolve to live in harmony with other brothers and sisters in Christ. The second step to spiritual stability is found in verse 4. Determine to respond to life's circumstances with joy. ~~Determine to respond to life's circumstances with joy.~~ Notice verse 4: “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice!”

You see, for Paul, joy is an indispensable element of the Christian life. And this letter—this brief letter—sets forth this theme of joy like no other. We've already seen it several times. We saw it in chapter 1 verses 4 and 5. Chapter 2 verses 17 and 18. Chapter 3 verse 1. And now he returns to it here again with an unqualified command. “Rejoice always.” Now, can we just be honest with each other? If anybody else had written us a

letter and said, alright, here it is. I want you to rejoice always. What would our first response have been? Huh? Yeah, right! There's a guy out of touch with the real world. He must not understand my circumstances. He must not understand my situation. But the Philippians knew better. They couldn't respond that way to Paul, and neither can we. You see, Paul had an incredible credibility with the Philippians. You see it in Acts 16. We won't turn there, but you remember the story, in Acts 16 when the church was founded. A story, I'm sure, that was still spread by the members of the church. Paul saw Lydia, the first European convert come to faith in Christ, and then he was followed by a slave girl. You remember the story, how she kept following him day after day, and Paul eventually turns around and he casts the demon out of her and she becomes gloriously saved, and one of the charter members of the church. And of course, her owners didn't like it. Those who were profiting by her fortunetelling. And they had Paul arrested. They accused him of sedition and terrible things, and those who led the city agreed. They had his clothes stripped and had him and Silas beaten with rods. And then ~~he~~—they tell the jailer, "Lock him up and make sure it's done securely." So, we're told the jailer puts them in the inner prison and puts their feet in stocks. How do they respond? God, I don't deserve this. I'm here serving You. How could You let this happen to me? No, you know the story. They're singing at midnight and praising God! There's joy in the ~~worse—in the~~ midst of the worst circumstances. Now, Paul, as he writes this letter to the Philippians, he's a Roman prisoner again. And he has been for almost two years. And for those two years, a death threat has hung over his head—possibility of execution. And if that isn't bad enough, Christians in Rome are criticizing him for how he's handled himself and are even trying to make his circumstances worse. So, Paul isn't writing these words from some chalet on the south of France. He's not writing them as he sort of takes a break from paddling around in the Bahamas. He's in a terrible situation. But this kind of trouble wasn't new to Paul. This was like the story of his life. Trouble was Paul's middle name. Look at 2 Corinthians—~~II Corinthians~~ chapter 11. Paul says, in verse 23 of 2 Corinthians 11, he says I've been

in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. This guy's got trouble for his middle name. He's like that guy in Lil' Abner. You remember the cartoon that the cloud just followed him everywhere he went? Like, maybe you should get a different job. Verse 26,

I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, in dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. [Oh, and by the way] Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.

Listen, I may not be qualified to tell you to rejoice in everything, but Paul is. Not a person sitting under the sound of my voice has come close to enduring what Paul has endured, and the Philippians knew it too. And he says to them, and he says to us, Rejoice always. Notice he doesn't say, just hang in there and maybe things will get better. No, he says, I want you—literally he says—I want you to be filled with joy. There's a sense in which it's a little embarrassing to have to be reminded to be joyful as a Christian, isn't it? I mean, after all, our sins are forgiven. We've been declared righteous before God, our creator. We've been given the Spirit as a seal of our future inheritance. We've been adopted by God as His own children. We have **eternity**—an eternity of joy before us. It's a little embarrassing to have to be reminded, but if we're honest, we don't remember. Joy is a part of what we've inherited as Christians. In Romans chapter 14 verse 17, Paul says the kingdom of God is a kingdom of joy. Nehemiah 8:[9-10](#) says the joy of the Lord is to be our strength.

What is this joy? Some confuse joy with happiness. You see, happiness is always tied to our circumstances. You're happy when the circumstances are good. But joy is never tied to circumstances. You see that hinted at even here in Philippians 4 because he says, "rejoice always." Nobody has good circumstances always. You look at some other texts and you see him using this word "joy," and ~~he~~—he puts it together with affliction, trouble, pressure. Joy is completely unrelated to our circumstances. Notice ~~he says~~—he commands us to rejoice, and to do it always. That means in every circumstance with no exceptions, and as long as we live—rejoice. You say, well that sounds good, but it doesn't happen, and I don't know how it can happen. Well, Galatians chapter 5 says, this kind of joy is the product of the Spirit in our lives. Galatians 5:22 says joy is the fruit of the Spirit. But ~~here in Philippians 4, (cough, excuse me)~~ here in Philippians 4 we do see a key to how we can maintain that kind of disposition—this kind of state of mind. Notice in Philippians 4 verse 4, ~~5, excuse me verse 4~~ he says, "Rejoice in the Lord." There's the key. You see, this state of mind can only flow from a right theology. It flows—joy does—from a settled conviction that God is absolutely sovereign over my life and circumstances. You find yourself, perhaps today, in some kind of difficulty—in some kind of trouble. Imagine what it would do to your joy if you really believed and embraced that whatever you're enduring right now, God is in control, and He's always in control. If you really believed that God's promises toward you never change, that He will use this for good even as He's promised. If you really believed that God's character never changes—that even in the midst of trouble you could say with Jeremiah, even as his city is destroyed in Lamentations. He says I looked at You and I saw great is Your faithfulness. I saw that your mercies are new every morning. Listen, God's character doesn't change in the midst of your trouble. And God's relationship with you will never change. Romans 8 ends with those great verses, ~~We'll look at them tonight as we look at the love of God. By~~ saying that nothing can separate us from the love of God, and he lists a series of circumstances. Listen, if you and I really believe those things, if we really believe that God is always in control—that His character never changes in the midst of

my troubles, that His promises toward me never change, and that His relationship with me never changes then you can have joy. You can have joy if you're confident that whatever circumstances you find yourself in, they are ordered by the sovereign hand of God and He means them for your good and for His glory.

But there's another mindset that builds joy. It's remembering that this life is short, and eternity is coming. Peter puts it this way in 1 Peter 1 verses 5 and 6. He says, you "are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." In other words, you're looking for Christ to come back and to truly be delivered from everything. And he says, "In this [that is, in the return of Christ] you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials."

You see, many Christians look for their ultimate joy and satisfaction here. If you do that, let me tell you, you're in for a terrible disappointment. That's so short-sighted. Keep your eyes on eternity, and ~~you will be joy~~—you will have joy. You will be joyful. You remember the parable Christ tells in Matthew 25 about the servant who is faithful? And He says this to them in verse 21. "He said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'" You've heard that all your lives. Listen to the rest of the verse. "You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your Lord."

Listen, folks, this life is about serving. It's filled with trouble and difficulty, as God designed it to be. But this isn't all there is. The time is coming when, if you're faithful, He'll say to you "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord." I love Psalm 16:11, which puts it this way. He says, "You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forevermore." Listen, don't look for fullness of joy here. Don't expect it here. You can

enjoy joy to a measure here, but in God's presence, you will experience perfect unending unmitigated joy.

I hate to say this, but if you aren't being joyful in every circumstance of life, then according to Paul, you're what? You're sinning. It's a command from God. And it's probably because you aren't focusing on the Lord and you aren't focusing on eternity. And that's true of me as well. We're all tempted to look at our circumstances and to get our eyes off of the Lord and off of eternity. And when we do that, it steals our joy. When you face circumstances that are stealing your joy, remind yourself of who God is. Remind yourself of His promises to never leave you and never forsake you. Remind yourself that He said He will use whatever you're facing for your good, and for His glory. Remind yourself that He's always in control and that none of this is happening outside of His purpose. Remind yourself that He is now and forever your Father, and that you will soon know real lasting uninterrupted joy in His presence. We all have known people who've exemplified this kind of joy in the midst of trouble. Sheila and I were talking this morning about a gentleman that has exemplified this in our lives—a man who was a professor of both of ours. Sheila knew him before that. His name is Dr. Walt Fremont. Dr. Fremont used to say in class many times, "Praise the Lord. Rejoice in the Lord." And I have to say, as a student, I thought many times, "I wonder how deep that really goes. He seems just a little too quick to say it." But he's proven us wrong. He's proven that it was deep. Fifteen, almost fifteen years ago now, Dr. Fremont was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease. About ten years ago he lost the ability to get around, and even to speak, and he's been confined to a—what amounts to a hospital/convalescent home for those ten years. At first, he could use a computer, and sort of type out a few things, but Sheila visited him recently and—when we were back in that area. Now he has a board—a little white board sort of thing, and it's divided into squares, and on that—in those squares are questions that he likes to ask. "How are you doing?" "How's your family?" There are things that he needs for himself if he needs help from the nursing staff. And then there are verses and sayings that he likes to remind people of. He can't speak them,

but as he communicates, he just takes his finger and best he can he points to a place on the board. Sheila tried to ask him how he was doing, and he kept instead simply asking, turning the question around to how she was and how our family was. And she said his eyes were absolutely filled with joy. You could see them dancing from behind a body that's decaying. And at one point ~~she~~—she was reminded of the fact that the nurses loved to go in his room because he's so joyful. He looks at the sunset and he has a little note on his board that says "Isn't it a beautiful day?" And as she was complimenting him for the ~~w~~attitude with which he's handled all of these ten years in the hospital, a very bright mind confined to a dying body. And when she tried to compliment him, he pointed to a place on his board, and she leaned over to look and read what it said, and it said simply this, "God gets all the glory." May God help us to rejoice in our circumstances, even as men and women like he have set such a great example.

How can you become spiritually stable? Follow the steps that Paul lays down here in Philippians 4. Resolve to live in harmony with the other Christians. Secondly, determine to respond to life's circumstances with joy, and the third step and we just looked at it briefly is, make it your ambition to be known for a gentle spirit. ~~Make it your ambition to be known for a gentle spirit.~~—Notice verse 5, "Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near."

It's interesting how Paul puts it, isn't it? He doesn't say "Have a gentle spirit." He says, "Be known for a gentle spirit." Make it your ambition. Make it your reputation. What is it you desire to be known for? Your good looks? Your quick wit? Your sense of humor? Your wealth? Your connections with the powerful? Or perhaps you're a little more pious—you want to be known for your prayer life? For your teaching? For the books you read? For your theological acumen? For your ministry? Paul says, pursue this instead. Be known by all men—that is, those within the church and those outside the church for your gentle spirit. Paul uses this word in I Timothy 3 where he says it's required of an elder. He uses this word in Titus 3:2 where he says it's how we should

respond to the unsaved. In James 3:17 he says the wisdom that comes down from God that all of us as believers has received teaches us this quality. So, what is it? What is this gentleness? Well, there's no one English word that captures this Greek word, but these are some good translations. Sweet reasonableness. Big heartedness or here's a word we use sometimes, graciousness. Aristotle contrasted this word with the idea of strict justice. He said it refers to the generous treatment of others that doesn't insist on the letter of the law. It's similar to our expression "cut people some slack." Be gentle. Be gracious. One commentator says it is that considerate courtesy and respect for others which prompts a person not to be forever standing on his rights. It's the opposite of a harsh contentious self-seeking attitude. It's looking out for others and being concerned about them. Let me just ask you. Are you known for being gentle? For being gracious? For being kind with people? Paul tells us why we should. Notice verse 5. Here's a reason—because the Lord is near. What does that mean, the "Lord is near"? Well, "near" could be a reference to space, that is, Christ is personally close to us, but probably better to understand it as near in the sense of coming soon. Paul says don't be quick to assert your rights, to defend yourself, because the Lord is coming. He will vindicate your cause and you want Him to be gracious to you, so you be gracious to others. The apostle says you want spiritual stability? You want to stand firm in the battle? Then you must, first of all, resolve to live in harmony with other Christians. Secondly, you must determine to respond to life's circumstances with joy. And thirdly, you must make it your ambition to be known for a gentle spirit.

Thomas Jonathan Jackson was born in what is now Clarksburg, West Virginia. He had a strong military background at the start of the Civil War. He was trained in the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He was recognized as a hero in the Mexican war. And at the start of the Civil War, he served as professor of physics at VMI, the Virginia Military Institute. And he also instructed and drilled cadets in artillery tactics. All that experience justified Jackson's rank as Brigadier General at the first major battle of the Civil War near Manassas, Virginia. That's where he came to be known as Stonewall

Jackson. His famous nickname was first given to him by a friend of his from West Point, General Bernard Bee, on the battlefield—the first battle of Manassas in 1861. This name referred to Jackson’s steadfastness under fire. Jackson—you’ve probably heard the story—was trying to motivate his men and he was riding around on the back of his horse in the face of the enemy and with bullets passing right and left barely missing him, encouraging his men into the battle. Jackson’s demeanor inspired Bee—General Bee—to shout to his troops, “Look men, there is Jackson, standing like a stone wall. Let us determine to die here and we will conquer.” May God help us to stand firm in the spiritual battle in which we’re engaged, like that.

Let’s pray together. Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for the wonderful example of Paul, who didn’t merely teach these things, but who lived them. Lord, I pray that You would help us to commit ourselves to spiritual stability. Help us to see that, as ~~the diligent~~—the result of the diligent pursuit of these things that you lay out in this passage. Lord, help us to be committed to preserving harmony with other Christians. Help us to rejoice in all of life’s circumstances, knowing that You are sovereign and in control, and that ~~eternity~~—an eternity of joy is coming. And Lord, help us to be known, to have a reputation, for graciousness—for gentleness. Father, I pray for the person here today who doesn’t recognize himself or herself in any of those qualities because they don’t know You. I pray that the beauty of this passage, and ~~of the~~—of the character of Paul that’s presented here would be so winsome that it would be a great stark contrast against their own sinfulness, that they would repent of their sins and embrace Christ as Lord and Savior even today. Lord, make all of us who know You to stand firm in our faith. We pray in Jesus’s name. Amen.