

**Stability**  
**Six Steps to Spiritual Stability (Part 4)**  
**Philippians 4:1-9**  
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This last week I was reading an article about an interesting event called The Ironman Triathlon. Now, I don't know if you're like me, but I grew up watching "Ironman Triathlons" on *The Wide World of Sports*. They're ultra-endurance events which test what a man is made of. I don't know if you're familiar with them or not. For those of you who aren't initiated in this event, let me tell you that it is composed of three parts—as you would expect. First, they swim 2 ½ miles. Next they bike 112 miles, and then they end the day's work by running 26 miles in a marathon. About 11 or 12 straight hours of running, swimming, and biking. To seriously compete in this kind of event, the athletes go through a serious training regimen, one that honestly would kill most professional athletes. One man who's had some success at these ironman triathlons, in the article I was reading, talked about his specific training regimen. He said that he typically rides his bike more than 250 miles every week. Every week he runs 50 to 70 miles. And he swims up to eight miles—every week. That is absolutely serious commitment. That is amazing self-discipline. You may also be thinking—it's also stupid. The article went on to say that he spends four hours a day in training. He gets up around five or so and goes to work around eight, so he spends about four hours training his body, preparing for these events. And my question is, for what? To say that he did it? To have a trophy sitting on his shelf somewhere? To say that he is physically fit? Of course, those of us who aren't physically fit—we console ourselves when we hear about somebody like this with thoughts like—Yeah but he must be doing something really bad to his body. What's remarkable about this kind of self-discipline, this kind of self-control, this kind of training and preparation, is, you and I are supposed to be exercising exactly the same kind of discipline in our own lives for the pursuit of something much more important, for something that really matters.

I'd like for us to turn as we begin this morning to 1 Timothy chapter 4. Paul says, in verse 7, "Have nothing to do with worldly fables, fit only for old women. On the other hand, [here's something Timothy, I do want you to do] discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." That word "discipline" is a Greek word that will be familiar to you. It's the word *gumnazó*. It's the Greek word from which we get our word "gymnasium." It means to train, to prepare, to discipline yourself just as an athlete disciplines himself for a serious event. Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness. He goes on to say in verse 8, and this will be a comfort to many of us, "For bodily discipline is only for a little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." Paul says, "I want you to use the same kind of self-discipline that an athlete uses as you pursue, not a prize at the end of a race, but godliness. Because godliness pays off both in this life, and the life to come." Sadly, Christians tend to be utterly undisciplined about their spiritual exercises. And I tell you now, a lack of discipline is deadly to your spiritual life. Why is that? It's because God doesn't zap us into holiness. God instead gives us spiritual resources to use and spiritual growth is only possible as we avail ourselves—as we use those spiritual resources. It will not occur without them. But what ensures that we will use those resources faithfully? Discipline. It's absolutely crucial to the Christian life. Listen to Lloyd-Jones in an excellent book called *Spiritual Depression*. He writes,

I defy you to read the life of any saint that has ever adorned the life of the church without seeing, at once, that the greatest characteristic in the life of that saint was discipline. Invariably, it is the universal characteristic of all the outstanding men and women of God. Read about Henry Martin, David Brainerd, Jonathan Edwards, the Wesley brothers and Whitefield. Read their journals. It does not matter what branch of the church they belonged to. They have all disciplined their lives and have insisted upon the need for this. And obviously, it is something that is thoroughly Scriptural and absolutely essential.

Without discipline you will not, you cannot be, spiritually stable. Because discipline is what enables you to use the resources God has given you for your spiritual growth and development.

Paul makes this point crystal clear in the passage we're looking at this morning—Philippians chapter 4 and verse 9.

I've enjoyed studying these first nine verses of the fourth chapter, because they provide us with a wonderful glimpse into how we can become spiritually strong, spiritually stable. Let me remind you of where we've been. Verse 1 of chapter 4 begins with a very straightforward command. "Stand firm in the Lord, my beloved." Be spiritually stable. We've been looking at how that can become a reality for each one of us. Because the commands that follow verse 1—from verses 2 down through verse 9, this paragraph of thought, Paul identifies for us six specific steps that lead to spiritual stability. We've examined the first five. Let me just remind you briefly of them. In verses 1 through 3 we saw that we must resolve to live in harmony with other Christians. In verse 4, determine to face life's circumstances with joy. In verse 5, make it your ambition to be known for a gentle, or gracious, spirit. In verses 6 and 7, talk to God about everything. And last week we saw in verse 8, choose to think about the right things.

Today, we come to verse 9. Now, I hate to admit this to you, but when I first started studying this section, and I read verse 9, it seemed at first glance to me to be a sort of throw-away verse. I hate to say that, but one of those verses that doesn't at first glance seem to really add anything, and that your eyes and your mind just sort of skip over when you're reading the Scripture. But here's another example of the genius of the Spirit. I know this, but I discovered it firsthand in this passage, that there are no unnecessary verses. Only verses that we haven't come to fully appreciate yet. And after hours of study, I'm now convinced that verse 9 is in reality the crown jewel of spiritual stability. What at first glance seems simple is, in fact, incredibly profound, and the foundation for a spiritually stable life. You'll notice in verses 8 and 9 that Paul reduces our entire Christian lives to two basic categories. In verse 8 he says, "You must think." He deals with the issue of thinking those things that please and honor God. In verse 9 he says, "You must practice. You must do." We've examined the command to think about the right things, and so I want us, this morning, to look at this final command. And in some ways—this final step I should say—and in some ways the most important step to spiritual stability.

As we look at verse 9, let me give you this as this final step. Live a disciplined life of obedience. Look at verse 9, “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” Paul begins this verse by outlining the various methods by which we come to know God’s ways, or God’s standards. He says, “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me.” Each one of those expressions sort of adds a fresh nuance to how we come to understand God’s truth, how we are exposed to God’s truth. And each of us, as the Philippians, have received God’s truth in these ways. The first two refer to Paul’s teaching. The last two to his example. The first two are separate, what “you have learned” and what “you have received.” The last two are really a package—one and the same thing—what “you have heard and seen in me.” What exactly are these methods by which we have come to understand God’s ways and God’s standards? We’re supposed to live a life of obedience, but how do we know what we’re supposed to do? Well, Paul says, “Here’s how you know. It’s the things you have learned.” This is personal discipleship. We have learned God’s truth through personal discipleship. The word “learned” simply means to learn through instruction. It’s one of the verb forms for the Greek word “disciple.” We could translate it, “you have learned through my discipleship.” Christ uses this in Matthew 11. You remember, when he’s giving that amazing invitation and he says “Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” Same word. “Be My disciple,” he’s saying. “Let Me disciple you. Let Me be your teacher.” In John 7:15 the Jews were then astonished, saying, “How has this man”—speaking of Christ—“how has Christ become learned having never been educated? He’s never been disciplined.” You see, in the ancient world, the primary means of education was not a huge school on a corner somewhere. Rather, it was parents who wanted their children to be educated would identify someone in their community—someone in their town or in their region who was a knowledgeable person, who had the skills and the capacity to teach. And they would then have their child become a disciple of that teacher, become a pupil, a student of that teacher. It was the primary means of education—becoming someone else’s disciple. The noun form of this word translated “learn” is the word “disciple.” It means simply a student or a learner, a pupil, a student. But this isn’t like those teachers you and I had in elementary school and high school, because Luke 6 verse 40—let’s turn there for a moment—defines what discipleship really is. I’ve been studying a good bit

about this recently because I've been looking at my own ministry of discipleship and how that needs to change for the future—looking at doing some things starting in January. But I want you to see in Luke chapter 6 verse 40. It's laid out for us—this sort of unique relationship that Paul's describing in Philippians 4. When he says you learned, he's saying you learned from my personal instruction through my discipleship. Here's what it means. Verse 40, "A pupil [there's our word disciple, the noun form] is not above his teacher." To be a disciple means you put yourself under someone as your teacher. But notice it's personal. Verse 40 goes on to say, "But every disciple, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher." There's the goal of discipleship. Paul says, "When I was with you, I disciplined you. I taught you on a very personal level. You learned as a disciple, and the goal was for you to be like me. You learned through my discipling of you." This was Paul's pattern. Notice Acts chapter 20. Paul, when he knows he's no longer going to be able to see the church in Ephesus—that church that was so dear to him—in verse 17. "From Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church." And he said this in verse 18, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;" verse 20, "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable and teaching you." And notice what Paul's missionary outreach looked like. "I taught you publicly," he says and, "I taught you from house to house." Part of the strategy of the apostle was not only public teaching but discipling those who had come to faith in that community through his missionary outreach. House to house, pouring himself into their lives. This was the pattern of Paul, and he says to the Philippians, "You learned from me." And when he uses that word "learned" he's saying, "You learned from me as your discipler."

This is something that's to be taking place in our church as well. We won't take time to turn there, but if you read Titus chapter 2, you find that Paul lays out for Titus, who's stationed on the island of Crete, very specific instructions for how the church is to function, and he says, "I want you to teach the older men that they have a responsibility to teach the younger men. And I want you to show the older women that they have an obligation to shepherd, to disciple, the younger women." This is to be happening in the church. Let me ask you, on a practical level, are you

imitating Paul? Are you discipling? Are you pouring your life into someone else? That's all it means. It has both an informal aspect, just like Christ chose His disciples so that they could be with Him where He was—life on life, living together, dealing with issues together. But it also has a more formal aspect as well, a curriculum if you will, pouring your life into another person, teaching them what you know. Have you attached yourself to someone who's younger in the faith than you—more immature than you and have it as your goal to help them understand the truth that you've come to experience? It also goes the other way. Are you seeking someone older and more mature than you whose life and ministry can shape yours? Discipleship. It's part of God's plan—God's design for teaching us. And Paul says, "You benefited from it. You learned." In other words, you were disciplined by me.

There's a second method Paul used under the work of the Spirit of God. And it's the most obvious. Back to Philippians chapter 4. He says not only did you learn from me—you were disciplined by me, by the things you received. This is a reference to the Word of God itself. The Greek word that's translated "to receive" is a technical term for receiving divine revelation. It's used a number of places in the New Testament. In the interests of time, we'll just turn to a couple. Turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter 2. And, again, there are other words in the New Testament for "receiving," but this specific Greek word is a technical word for receiving divine revelation. Notice 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 13. "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received [there's our word] the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe." Over in chapter 4 he says, "Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received [same word] from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God." Paul says, "Listen, not only did I disciple you, but I instructed you, I taught you in the Word of God. So that the things you have received," Paul is referring to those things that he himself received by divine revelation. You remember that there were some things Paul said, "I didn't learn this from any man. God taught me this by His Spirit." But there were also other things that Paul received, the established elements of the Christian message that had been carefully passed on to him by others. There were already books of the New Testament that had been written. Paul says, "When I came to you, I taught you the

Word of God. Not only did I disciple you, but I taught you the Scripture. I gave you what I had received, both from God and from the other apostles who had written what God had required.”

You and I, too, have received divine revelation. What are we to do with it? This is another message for another time but let me just give you an outline. When you look at these passages that talk about receiving revelation—use this word—you’ll find that we have very specific responsibilities. You and I, too, have received the Word of God. Not only have we been disciplined, in many cases by others in some form or way, but we’ve also received God’s Word. What do we do with it? Well, you look at those passages, you find several things we’re to do with it. First of all, and you saw this just a moment ago in 1 Thessalonians, we’re to receive it as the Word of God. We’re to acknowledge it to be from God. Secondly, we’re to believe it. We’re to believe that it’s true—that it is all that it claims to be, that the words recorded there speak the truth. Thirdly, we’re to obey it. We’re to do what we find there. Fourthly, we’re to guard it. And—Paul tells Timothy—he refers to the Word of God, divine revelation, as the treasure. He says, “Guard the treasure.” What does that mean? It means you and I have a responsibility to keep the Word of God from being distorted and perverted and twisted; we’re to guard it. We’re to keep it pure, and that leads to the fifth thing we’re to do with it, and that is, we’re to pass it on to the next generation. We’re to make sure that the next generation, starting in our own families with our own children, and the rest of the folks who are in our church who are young in the Lord, or perhaps young in age. We’re to pass on the treasure—what we have received, the divine revelation, to them, to guard it and to pass it on, to receive it, believe it, obey it. These are our responsibilities. Paul says, “I disciplined you and I taught you the Word of God, you learned, and you received.”

The third method that Paul used to build his truth into the life of the Philippians, and that God uses to build His truth into our lives, is not only personal discipleship, not only hearing the Word of God taught and receiving it, but thirdly, personal example. Notice he says, “The things you have heard and seen in me.” This refers to the imprint that his life and character left on the Philippians, both what they heard about his character, and what they observed first-hand. Paul has no qualms about saying this. Philippians chapter 3 verse 17 he says “Brethren, join in

following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.” In 1 Corinthians chapter 11 verse 1 he says this amazing thing, “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ.” Imitators. An interesting Greek word. It’s the Greek word from which we get our English word “mimic.” He says, “Mimic me, as I mimic Christ.” We learn the truth of God, not only by being discipled, not only by hearing it taught, but by seeing it lived out in the example of others. Children learn by imitating. I read an article this week in *National Geographic* about speech. You know, this won’t come as any shock to you, but dogs bark, cats meow, and bears growl. This *National Geographic* article said that the ability for these animals to make those signature sounds is hard-wired into them from birth. It’s part of the genetic code of those animals. But none of those animals can learn to bark or to meow or to growl in a new way. They are stuck with those sounds. They are not vocal learners. By contrast, we as humans are created a different way. We have the ability to make certain sounds. The moment we’re born we have the capacity to make those sounds that scientists call phonemes, an innate set of phonemes. They’re the basic building blocks of phonetic sound. For example, the “guh” in the word “gold” is one of those phonemes—a building block. And there are a number of them in our language. You hear little children make those sounds. Those are the phonemes that go together to make up words and syllables and sentences. You see, what we can do that many of the animals can’t is, we can modify those phonemes, those basic building blocks, to create a string of them together that have meaning—words and sentences. How does that happen? You’ve heard your child, and we’ve all delighted in hearing our little children, who have not yet learned how to speak, make all of those individual sorts of phonetic sounds. How do they translate that into the spoken language? The scientist in this article went on to say, they do it by passive imitation. That is, they see and hear us do it over and over again, and they begin to put those phonemes, those building blocks of sound together seeking to imitate the way we put them together. At first rather crudely and even humorously, and then, as they mature, their imitation becomes better and better and better. As Christians, we learn, as well, by imitating others who are more spiritually mature than we are and imitating their faith.

Paul says, “Listen, I discipled you. I taught you the Word of God, and you watched my personal example. I passed on to you the authoritative revelation. I discipled you and I provided you with



a model to imitate.” That’s how we learn the truth of God as well, those same ways that the Philippians learned them. Let me show you the relationship between example and teaching. Turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 3. They are intimately tied together because Paul says this, and he’s dealing with a specific problem in the Thessalonian church. But he says in verse 6, “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life [watch this] and not according to the tradition which you received [there’s our word] from us.” So, when he talks about tradition here, he’s not talking about something extra-biblical. He’s talking about the divine revelation. The divine revelation you received from us. He said, “Listen, I taught you the divine revelation about this issue of work. But verse 7 “You yourselves know how you ought to follow our example.” He said, “Not only did I teach you, but I served as an example of it. We did not act in an undisciplined manner among you. We did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it. But with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you.” Teaching and example always go together to form an unbreakable link of the truth poured into the lives of others. And Paul says, “You had that privilege. You had that example.” Just like the Philippians, we learn God’s ways, we learn God’s standards by personal discipleship, by being taught the Word of God, and by personal example—the example of others.

So, what do we do with all that we’ve learned? Some of you have been in Christ a long time. You’ve learned a lot. You know a lot. What do we do with what we’ve learned? Notice what Paul says back in Philippians chapter 4, verse 9, “The things which you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things.” It’s in the present tense in the original language. Literally, he says, “Be practicing these things.” What does it mean “to practice”? Well, there’s a use of this word in Acts 19:19 that’s interesting. It says, all those who in Ephesus who practiced witchcraft threw their books into the fire and they were burned. To practice means “to do something repeatedly, to be involved in something that is habitual.” Webster defines practice as “something that is habitual or customary.” Even we talk about doctors’ and lawyers’ practices. We say that because they perform habitual duties. Paul is saying, “Listen, you’ve had the personal discipling. You’ve been taught the Word of God. You’ve benefited from the example of others. Now, practice it. Do it.” Like Nike’s slogan, you know, just do it.

Implied in that slogan is, you know exercise is good for you, and now you've got the shoes that are going to remove all the pain, so just do it. That's what Paul is saying. Now, that seems pretty basic, but this is a constant, consistent theme of the Word of God. In the interest of time, I'm just going to show you a couple of the passages that I have even here in my notes, and my notes don't come close to exhausting it. Turn to Luke chapter 6. Just do it. Luke 6 verse 46. He says, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" Chapter 8 verse 21, Christ says—just to give you the context, to remind you, remember Christ was in a crowded house and his mothers and brothers—his physical mother and brothers showed up. They couldn't get to him, and so they send word. It was recorded in verse 20, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, [they want] to see You." Verse 21, He answered and said to them, My [true] mother and My [true] brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it." In John 13, verse 17, Christ makes this same point. "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." John 15 verse 14 "You are My friends if you do what I command you." "Listen, just do what you know," Christ says. Paul says, "Practice these things." And this is crucial, because ultimately, doing what we know is an evidence of the reality of our conversion. I won't take time—I won't take the time to turn there. Uh, as one country preacher said, my tongue got over my eye tooth and I couldn't see what I was saying. But we won't take the time to turn there, but if we were to turn to Matthew 7, you would see that in Matthew 7 Christ gives this amazing parable about the foolish man and the wise man. You learned it as a kid. What's the point of that parable? He says, "Let me tell you who the wise man is. He's the man who hears My word and does it. Let me tell you who the foolish man is," He says, "He's the man who hears My word and does not act on it." Nothing is more dangerous than a superficial knowledge of the Word of God.

But at the same time that I say that, that that is an indication of genuine faith, it's also true that true believers often know a whole lot more than they practice. Why is that? Well, let me give you a few reasons I jotted down. These are not exhaustive, but these are a few of the reasons that come to mind. First of all, sadly there are some people who just enjoy theoretical knowledge. They just enjoy theoretical knowledge. Just like the seminary student that we had to deal with out at Grace Church one time. He was in the Seminary. He was, I believe, a second-year

student. He was working on the clean-up crew and he was going to the library when no one else was looking, and cutting pages out of rare theology books, stealing them, so that he could take them home and put them on his walls. He missed the point. He was into theoretical knowledge. Lloyd-Jones says, “You can be a great student even of the Bible and live a life contrary to it.” Alas, there are many such people. There have been many whose chief hobby in life has been the dissection and analysis of the Bible. But they were rather hard and harsh, and often failed in some of the elementary principles of the Christian life. It is the masterpiece of Satan to make us put theory and practice into separate water-tight compartments—to make men so interested in the Book that they forget to apply its teachings. Others don’t practice what they know because they have been confused. They think the heart of the Christian life is experience, and so they are waiting for that experience when they really feel God’s presence, when they have this sort of life-changing experience. They’re waiting, as it were, for God to zap them with some experience. That’s contrary to the spirit of the New Testament. The Christian life is not about experience. It’s about obedience.

Another reason Christians don’t practice what they know is that they’re waiting until they feel like doing it. They’re waiting for the feeling. I’ve talked to people who’ll say something like this, “Well don’t you think it’s hypocritical to get up early and read my Bible when I don’t feel like doing it?” Welcome to the real world. Who feels like getting up early? If you do, there’s something desperately wrong with you. No, it’s okay to act without feeling it. In fact, James 4:17 says, “To [the] one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.” If you know it’s the right thing, don’t wait for a feeling, just do it.

Another reason people don’t practice what they know is laziness. In 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 5, Peter is talking about building the disciplines of the Christian life, and he says adding, or pursuing with diligence these virtues. A lot of the time it’s just laziness. You know what, it’s a lot easier to get up, go to work, enjoy life, come home, get supper, read the paper, read something you want to read, go to some entertaining event, watch television, and go to bed. It’s a lot easier to do that than it is to deal with our own selfish sinful hearts and to discipline ourselves to do what’s right. Paul says, or excuse me, Peter says, “Be diligent about this. Don’t

be lazy.” Another reason, I think, is distraction. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve had people say to me, “Look, I just don’t know when I’ll find the time to read and to meditate and to pray.” People who say that are really admitting that they have chosen less important things over that which is truly important. We all have the time to do what we want to do.

There’s another reason that I’ve encountered with some people and that is, they’re waiting to start doing what they know until they get victory over a controlling or prevailing sin in their lives. They see that one sin as, “Well, you know, I’ve got to deal with that first.” No, what you have to do is obey the rest of what you know, and God, in the process of that will give you the strength to say no to that sin and build different habits into your life. Just start practicing what you know. Start with the basic disciplines of the Christian life. Don Whitney wrote an excellent book that some of you went through in our home fellowships called *The Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life*. It lists these as the basic disciplines of the Christian experience. Grade yourself as I read them. These should be in all of our lives. Give yourself a grade on how you’re doing. Scripture reading. The study of Scripture. Prayer. Worship. Meditating. Evangelism. Serving. The stewardship of our time and money. The application of Scripture to our lives. Silence and solitude—in other words, time alone with God. How’d you do? How’d you score? You know, many of us know—we understand—that the Bible says these things are important, but if we’re honest with ourselves, we have to admit that at least in a few of these, we should receive a failing grade. So where should you start? Well, you should start with the basics. And let me just say to you that, in this church, and in most churches, very few people are consistently disciplining themselves to the basics of the Christian life and experience.

Let’s start with disciplining yourself to set aside time every day to read and study the Bible. Start there. Just do it. Don’t wait for a feeling. Don’t wait to, you know, for God to zap you with something. Just do it. You say, “Well how? I mean, I’ve tried before, and I’ve not been successful.” Let me tell you that almost without exception, those who fail to spend time faithfully in God’s word, the key issue is that they didn’t get up early enough. And usually it’s because they didn’t go to bed early enough. They’re wasting hours in the evening, and it’s robbing from their time with God in the morning. Let me give you a little practical tip. Job said,

in Job 23:12, “I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.” Having trouble fitting in your Bible reading time? I mean time with God in His Word? Then just commit yourself to this. I will not eat any physical food until I have fed my soul. And guess what? If you make that commitment, there’ll be very few days you go without eating, because you will find time. It comes down to discipline. It comes down to determining what’s important and doing it.

Discipline yourself to pray. I have to confess to you that I’ve been personally rebuked this week as I’ve studied this passage, and I’ve thought about these things, that I don’t pray enough. And so I’ve determined before God and in light of this passage to discipline myself just to do it. To get up a little earlier so I can spend more time in prayer with God. Or perhaps you’re like many people who even as you think of these basics that we’re to discipline ourselves to do, you’re saying, “Look, you know, I’ve tried that, and it doesn’t work.” What does that mean? Well, usually it means two things. I tried it and it felt awkward. Well, of course. All new habits that you’re learning feel awkward when you’re learning. Remember how awkward it was to tie your shoes when you were learning? And secondly it means I tried it and there were no dramatic changes in my life. There was nothing obvious in the first two mornings, and so I stopped. What we’re really talking about here, with disciplining yourself for Godliness—with just doing it—with practicing these things. We’re talking about exercising enough discipline to learn new habits. The principle of habit is a wonderful gift from God. I mean, imagine if you had to think as much about driving as you did the first time you drove a car. Most of you wouldn’t be spending time on the cell phones like you are. You remember that? You remember? I mean, you were thinking about all of the things you’re supposed to keep in mind, and where your feet are and where your hands are and who’s behind you and who’s in front of you, and you were ultra-aware of all of those things, and that was all you could think about. But the beauty of habit, and it’s a gift from God, we abuse it sometimes because of our sinful hearts, but it’s a wonderful gift from God, because now, I can drive my car and I can make cell-phone ministry calls while I’m driving. It’s a wonderful gift because I don’t have to think about it anymore. Those who observe human behavior say that it takes six to eight weeks to learn a new habit, and if you stick with it for six months, it will become so much a part of you that it’ll feel unnatural not to do it,

and it will be yours for a lifetime. So, all we're talking about, folks, is showing enough discipline for six to eight weeks to make it become a habit.

Don't run after some experience. Don't wait for some feeling. Just do it. Practice these things. Paul finishes with an amazing promise. He says, "Practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." The God Who is the source of peace, the one who is characterized by peace—He will be with you. Well, God's everywhere, so what does that mean? He's with everyone in some sense. Well, Christ tells us exactly what it means in John 14. Turn there and I'll be done. John 14 verse 21. He says "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and [here's an amazing promise] will disclose Myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, 'Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and [here it is] make our abode with him.'" In other words, God will be with you as a friend, with you to bless, with you to protect. With you to care for you as one of His own. Verse 24, "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me."

Paul says, "Listen, look at your life. Look at the things you know. Look at the things you've learned, the things you've received, the things you've heard and seen in other godly people around you. Look at what you know and determine to discipline yourself to practice those things. And if you'll do that, the God of peace will be with you."

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for the practical nature of this instruction to us. Forgive us for our laziness. Forgive us for being distracted with less important things. Forgive us for waiting for some experience. Father help us to practice these things—things that we have learned and received and heard and seen. And Father, as You do that, I pray that You would establish us—that You would make us spiritually stable. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.