

When everything seems stable, it may be easy to take the good things for granted. I remember going through the Northridge Earthquake in CA. All stability literally went out the window. I awoke to my home shaking violently, and aftershocks, which were almost as bad, continued for over a day. Communication was lost, traffic lights were out, gas lines, water lines, and homes were all destabilized, and everyone longed for more stability.

Before the Apostle Paul gave his closing remarks to the church of Philippi, he urged them, in Philippians 4:1-9, to practice the things that would lead the church into greater spiritual stability.

Philippians 4:1-2 Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. ² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord.

Notice Paul's use of words "beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and my crown." Paul expressed deep concern and care for the church whom he twice refers to as "beloved".

When Paul calls the church to "stand firm," and to "live in harmony" he is urging the church to pursue of spiritual stability.

In Phil 4:2, Euodia and Syntyche were understood to not be "living in harmony". They were likely well known, enough so that people would know them by name. Paul called them by name, most likely because they had been embroiled in some sort of dispute that had not been dealt with by the leaders of the church, and was now threatening to destabilize the whole church. Perhaps their dispute was rising to a level that the church was at risk of being torn apart. It must have been a significant dispute for Paul to call them out by name to "live in harmony".

The church regularly suffers attacks from three main sources, the world, the flesh, and the devil, which work together to destabilize the church. These attacks may come in the form of allurements, stresses, or threats, sometimes subtly, other times overtly. Sometimes attacks will erode over time, or come suddenly.

Therefore, the church is always in need of spiritual strength and stability. How can we pursue and cultivate a spiritually stable life? Paul lists 7 ways. If you recognize the need to be strong in the grace of God, and to stand firm in your faith, then you will want to apply these 7 timeless practices provided by Paul to the Philippians, to aid their pursuit of spiritual stability.

1. CULTIVATE HARMONY IN CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Church members suffer in a myriad of ways when they are isolated. The wolf first tries to separate sheep before attempting to devour them. Because church is commissioned by Jesus Christ to make disciples, which entails rooting and grounding believers in the truth, equipping them to live in the world, without embracing sin, and strengthening the church to live out the beauty of Christ's redeeming grace it is essential for harmony to prevail, lest the mission be compromised. Harmony therefore, should be actively pursued and cultivated, not at the expense of essential truth, but because without it, the growth and radiance of the church, reflecting the mind and image of Christ is diminished.

When conflict occurs between influential people, it often leads to instability in a church. In this case, it happened to be between two influential women, and decisive action was urgently needed to strengthen and stabilize the church. Peter similarly urged:

1 Peter 3:8-12 ⁸ To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; ⁹ not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

2. CULTIVATE A JOYFUL ATTITUDE

Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!

Biblical joy can seem elusive, and near impossible to experience if one attempts to tie joy to feelings and circumstances, rather than to ones relationship with God including His character, purposes, and promises. Though your day be filled with trials, misery, and disappointments, you can rejoice in God who has already provided all you need in Christ, and has promised spiritual good to all those who love Him. The believer's only sure source of joy is God Himself, therefore if you want to cultivate more joy in your life, then cultivate your relationship with God. **Would those who know you best describe you as joyful?**

3. CULTIVATE A GRACIOUS/GENTLE/ HUMBLE SPIRIT

Philippians 4:5a Let your gentle spirit be known to all men.

The Greek word *epieikes* (gentle spirit) has several similarly nuanced words associated with it. Some have defined it a sweet reasonableness, goodwill, friendliness, charity toward the faults of others, or merciful toward the failures of others. Some describe it as graciousness. This is why it is translated differently depending on your Bible version. One thing is for sure, it describes a gracious humility, and other-centeredness and has much to do with contentment. Live this way toward others and you will probably have many friends. Jesus had this quality about Him, and He was referred to as a friend of sinners, and the best disciple-maker ever! **Are you able to be firm when necessary, while generally maintaining a gentle spirit?**

4. CULTIVATE A CONFIDENT FAITH IN GOD

Philippians 4:5b-6a The Lord is near. ⁶ Be anxious for nothing

Sometime the things that remain so clear during peace time are forgotten in battle.

When trials press in, believers often forget what they know about God. For this reason, God calls believers throughout Scripture to continually renew their minds and meditate on the Word. The Scripture reveals how most of the great people of Scripture from Adam and Eve to Abraham, from David to Peter etc., at some point faithful people forgot what they knew about God. “David greatly feared Achish king of Gath” (1 Samuel 21:11-12). Yet this same David, normally “a man after God’s own heart”, who showed no fear in the face of opponents like Goliath, and slew tens of thousands of Philistines for example, when he knew that God was with him. There is no greater source of stability than to know that God is with you (Cf. Psalm 23). **What looms larger in your heart when difficulties come your way: circumstances, feelings, or God’s character and promises?**

5. CULTIVATE A THANKFUL PRAYER LIFE WHEN TROUBLES COME

Philippians 4:6b-7 but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

When believers respond to trials with thankful prayer, they demonstrate an antidote to worry and anxiety, and Christ is exalted because His grace shown to be sufficient in every situation. Just as reacting to trials with anxiety can be contagious, so can responding to trials with a sober mind and a thankful heart in prayer. Developing new mindsets is not easy, perfection is not the goal, but progress is. As believers learn to trust in God’s wisdom, power, and goodness, we are freed from the shackles of fear and anxiety and more readily able to confidently give thanks to God. This is growing in the grace and knowledge of God.

Has there ever been a time in your life when you saw amazing confidence in God expressed by another believer who gave God thanks during a trial? Has God used you as a stabilizing influence in another’s life as you responded with thanksgiving to God during a difficult trial? These experiences can be life changing, as they are times when God strengthen us with in His peace, which surpasses all understanding.

6. CULTIVATE GODLY THINKING

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

Pastor John MacArthur, in his New Testament Commentary on Philippians aptly wrote:

*The word “finally” indicates that Paul has arrived at the climax of his teaching on spiritual stability. The principle that he is about to relate is both the summation of all the others and the key to implementing them. The phrase “dwell on these things” introduces an important truth: stability is a result of how a person thinks. The imperative form of *logizomai* (dwell on) makes it a command; proper thinking is not optional in the Christian life...The verb form calls for habitual discipline of the mind to set all thoughts on these spiritual virtues. The Bible leaves no doubt that people’s lives are the product of their thoughts. Proverbs 23:7 declares, “For as a man thinketh, so he is.” The modern counterpart to that proverb is the computer acronym GIGO (Garbage In Garbage Out).*

7. CULTIVATE OBEDIENT PRACTICES AND RESPONSES

Philippians 4:9 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.

The final essential element of spiritual stability is entirely applicable. Godly thinking and godly behavior are like two wings of an airplane, they are never to be separated.

One of the key words for us to focus on is the word “**practice.**” Christians are to make it their **practice** to live upright and godly lives. Holy living can only take place when everything Paul has been talking about comes together: right thinking, and right attitudes takes captive fleshly desires, and worldly perspectives that the devil uses to destabilize Christ’s church.

For those who “**practice these things**”, (i.e. the things that have been learned, received, heard and seen in Paul), there is a tremendous promise from God, namely that “the God of peace will be with you.”

Of these 7 practices, which one/s do you think you most need to develop to provide greater spiritual stability in your life?

We hope to join with you again next week. Until then we pray for your growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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