Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Spiritual Stability, Part 2: Harmony and Joy
Scripture: Philippians 4:2-4
Code: 50-38

Would you open your Bible now to Philippians chapter 4, this lovely letter from the Apostle Paul to the Christians in the city of Philippi. For many months we have been examining its great truth. We now have come to the final chapter of what is a short letter and yet a very long letter in terms of the truth it conveys. We're looking at chapter 4 verses 1 through 9 and entitling that particular unit of Scripture "Spiritual Stability...Spiritual Stability." Taking that little phrase in verse 1 "Stand firm in the Lord" as the theme of this wonderful passage.

Now generally I would say that we in our society admire someone who stands firm or stands true or stands up for what he or she believes. We admire resolute kind of people, people who are very stable against pressure, who are unwavering, who are uncompromising, who are courageous and bold. We admire people who can't be bought, can't be bribed, can't be intimidated, can't be softened up, can't be defeated. Just in general I think we hold out admiration for that kind of person. Maybe in especially poetic terms Rudyard Kipling summed it up as well as anyone when he wrote these familiar words, "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you; if you can trust yourself when all men doubt you but make allowance for their doubting too; if you can wait and not be tired by waiting, or being lied about don't deal in lies, or being hated don't give way to hating and yet don't look too good nor talk too wise; if you can dream and not make dreams your master; if you can think and not make thoughts your aim, if you can meet with triumph and disaster and treat those two imposters just the same; if you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools, or watch the things you gave your life to broken and stoop and built them up with worn-out tools; if you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue, or walk with kings not lose the common touch; if neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you; if all men count with you but none too much; if you can fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds worth of distance run; yours is the earth and everything that's in it and which is more, you'll be a man, my son."

We honor somebody who is uncompromising, resolute, firm, strong, bold, courageous. We call that integrity. And there's something very admirable about that kind of human character, that sort of heroic stability. We applaud it. We look for those kinds of people to be our models and our examples and our leaders. And if in fact courage of conviction, integrity, credibility, a non-compromising resolute, truth bearing strong firm stance is admirable among those in our society, how much more essential is it to those who are Christians? After all, the very term "Christian" identifies us with Christ and Christ was the most uncompromising courageous firm-standing person who ever lived. He would not compromise. He would not deviate from the truth. He could not be bought. He would not sell

out. He is the model of courageous integrity.

And those of us who name the name of Christ should know something of that kind of stability, that kind of firmness, consistency, that kind of steadfastness. And that is precisely what the New Testament affirms because repeatedly throughout the New Testament Christians are called to stand firm over and over and over again in a number of different ways using a number of different terms. We are called not to be tossed around. We are called not to doubt or be unstable or be like the waves of the sea tossed to and fro. We are called to be firm, to stand strong. A number of times it says to be of good courage, to be fixed like men, to not be unstable. We are told to be bold, to be uncompromising in living for Jesus Christ.

I suppose we could turn to a number of passages to see this, but let me just draw your attention to one just a page or so beyond our text. Colossians is the next epistle, chapter 2 verse 5 sums it up well. Paul writing to the saints in Colossae in verse 5 says, "Even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit." What he means is I think about you all the time. You're always on my heart, you're always on my mind. And what is my desire? "Rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ." My real desire for you is that I might know the joy of seeing the good discipline that leads to a stable faith, an unwavering faith, a strong faith.

I suppose that any of us who knows Christ personally would admit to the fact that we wish our faith were stronger than it is. None of us is particularly enamored with the prospect of stumbling and bumbling in teetering and tottering around in our spiritual experience, and yet that is in fact the experience of many of us. We would all desire to be firm. We would all desire to be strong. I don't think we want to be victimized by difficulty. I don't think we want to be knocked over by troubles and trials and problems in life. I don't think we want to be defeated by temptation, the onslaught of the world, the flesh and the devil, to trip us up and cause us to fall into sin. I think we would be like the Apostle Paul who saw the sin in his life but hated it and said "When I do it I don't want to do it." I think we would all like to stand firm and be strong. We also must recognize that it won't be easy because we are in a warfare. We were saved to conflict. We are soldiers, we've been called into battle. That's why this term in verse 1, "Stand firm in the Lord," is a military term because we are on spiritual military duty in conflict with the enemy.

So we might all say, "Well yeah, I appreciate the exhortation to stand firm, be strong, be bold, be courageous, be stable, but how do I do that? How can I reach that kind of stability?" In fact, if you look at Christians around you, you might assume that some are more stable than others, and that's a correct assumption. Some appear very stable, some appear very unstable. And then all in between there are all kinds of different degrees of stability. There may be sort of the rising feeling in your heart that maybe you're just sort of genetically unstable. Well I want to indicate to you that genetics have nothing to do with spiritual resources. It's not something you've inherited, your basic instability. It's a spiritual issue. And there's no real mystery in understanding why some people are unstable in

spiritual things and some people are very stable, why some people are immature, some people are very mature, why some people collapse under trials, collapse under temptation, other people endure trials, endure temptation with victory, why some people are seemingly always defeated and others are always triumphing in Christ. There's no real mystery to that, it's just a problem that can be solved by the development of spiritual stability that comes through certain principles. That should be very encouraging to you. You may be weak in the faith, you may be unstable. You may be a new Christian and there's a certain amount of instability in just that because you haven't had an opportunity to grow strong. But the process is clearly outlined in the Word of God.

As I just read you in Colossians 2:5 it is associated with good discipline. The disciplined life becomes the stable life. And so you have to understand that in order to be spiritually stable and not knocked over by all the things that come your way, whether it's the persecution of hostile people or whether it's the temptation of Satan in the flesh or whether it's the trials and troubles that just make up life in this fallen world, there are principles that will enable you to become strong. We're going to work our way in the next few weeks through these principles in verses 1 to 9.

Now would you notice back in verse 1 where Paul introduced the basic principle of standing firm, he used the little word "so." That means thus, or in this way stand firm in the Lord, and then he outlines how to do it. He's saying to the Philippians, if you're going to be firm in the Lord, strong resolute stable Christians, here is how you must do it. And then starting in verse 2 he gives them a series of principles. These are the things that produce spiritual stability. And we're going to see an ever enriching understanding as we move through these verses this week, next week for sure and maybe the week following.

Let's look at the first principle. We have already considered verse 1 so we'll move from there. Let's consider the first principle. Here is how you are to be spiritually stable. Principle number one, by maintaining or cultivating harmony or peace in the fellowship of love, by cultivating harmony or peace in the fellowship of love.

Now I need to explain that a little bit, let me do that. I am convinced that this pursuit of spiritual stability, and I know Paul was convinced of it as well, is somewhat dependent on associations that we have. I can tell you in my own life that it is obvious to me that I become more unstable in isolation from other believers, that the fellowship of believers, the close intimate loving harmony of the body of Christ is a tremendous factor in my own stability. And I believe that you experience that too as a Christian, that's what the church is all about. It's all about people holding up other people, it's all about accountability, it's all about caring. It's about mutual love and harmony and peace. It's about having our lives so intertwined that we can support one another and sustain one anther, lean on one another, hold one another up, restore one another when one has fallen, as Paul says in Galatians. And after you've restored them, build them up. We're all about that kind of involvement.

And that is precisely what is on the mind of the Apostle Paul in verses 2 and 3 as he moves into his subject in some detail. He writes, "I urge you Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed suzugos...that's the Greek word there translated true comrade in the New American...indeed suzugos, I 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."

Now what Paul does here is very very fascinating to me. He identifies a problem of conflict in the Philippian church in no uncertain terms. He's not at all vague, he names the two women who are the problem. And then he names a person to help the problem out...very specific. What he is after here is unity in the church, harmony in the church. You see, there are...there are potential discords at many levels of church life that threaten stability. Let me give you a very simple insight. When a church is generally unstable, when there is a conflict in a church at a high level, it will generate instability throughout the whole church. The people will fall victim to that instability. On the other hand, where there is unity and oneness and peace and harmony, as a whole the people enjoy the stability that that provides for all of them. Paul knows that and he knows that two women having a major conflict in a church can threaten the spiritual stability of believers throughout that congregation because they will fall to all kinds of sins...party spirit, criticism, negative attitudes, bitterness, revenge, hostility, unforgiveness, pride. Paul knows that.

He also knows that when people make peace and make harmony and love one another and cultivate the relationship of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, as Paul calls it, that when that goes on there is stability throughout the whole church. It's as if the general strength becomes the individual strength. When you know you're loved, when you know that people really love you, and when you have made loving commitments to others in the body of Christ, and when you know that the loving people of the church care about you and are praying for you and you are working together with them and they're working together with you and you know that love is at work and you're held accountable but you're also helped and encouraged and nurtured, that provides stability.

There are a lot of people in churches you know that don't have that and they flounder and they drift and they flop and they fall because the environment they're in is not supportive, it's not sustaining. We are to support the weak. We are to lift up the fallen, to restore the broken, those overtaken in sin we are to demonstrate love at work which stabilizes the church. And that's what he's calling for here.

Now let me say this to you right here as a footnote, and I'll repeat this as we go through. Spiritual stability is related to the attitudes that you have, okay? It's not related to your circumstances. It's related to how you think. It's directly related to how you think, how you react to what's going on in your environment. And if you learn to react properly, you will have spiritual stability. And if you don't, you will not. It's how you think that is the issue. And so Paul is going to teach us here how to think.

In fact, when he comes down finally to verse 8, he says, "Let your mind dwell on these things." It's how you think that brings spiritual stability. And primarily, and here's a little secret I'm going to unfold in the next few weeks, primarily it is not how you think about you, it is not how you think about your problem, it is how you think about God that controls your spiritual stability. Everything resolves itself in your theology and how you think about God will control your spiritual life in every dimension, and we're going to see that unfold.

But let's start with this matter of pursuing or cultivating harmony or peace in the fellowship of love. Verse 2, he uses the word urge here, parakaleo, we would get the word paraclete from it which the Holy Spirit is called in John's gospel, one who comes alongside to plead or beg or encourage or help. So Paul is in a pleading, begging, encouraging mode and he says, "I want to plead with these two women, Euodia and Syntyche, to please live in harmony in the Lord." This is most fascinating, most fascinating. Paul is this great theologian with this immense theological mind and this tremendous logical capability and he is delving into the depths of great divine truth and even in the book of Philippians which we tend to think, for the most part is a little bit lighter weight than some of the other epistles like Galatians and Romans and Corinthians, but in fact is very very deep, we wonder how he could sort of after digging deeply into great truth pop up to the surface and say, "Hey, will you tell those two women to get their act together," it seems a bit on the trite side. I mean, there are so many grandiose things he's been dealing with. I mean, if you were with us in chapter 3 you know some of the things he's been dealing with. In chapter 3 he was deeply concerned about the fact that the Philippians were under the attack of false teachers advocating false gospels, false doctrines. And they were under the attack of people who were living a false kind of life saying they were Christians but not living a godly life. There were some very serious problems.

In chapter 3 he warned about the legalism of the Judaizers. He calls them dogs and evil workers and a false mutilation doing a little play on words with their love of circumcision. He says these people are saying grace and faith is not enough for salvation, we have to add works and they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. Don't believe their lies, their damning lies. And then he launches into a discussion of the sort of intellectual elite who were espousing the idea that they had arrived, spiritually they had landed at perfection and he says, "Well, I haven't arrived, I'm still pressing toward the mark and don't you believe their lie that they have arrived at spiritual perfection in some kind of elite gnosticism."

And then he attacked the libertines, the antinomians, the people whose God was their belly, whose flesh was the director of all of their appetites and who consumed whatever they wanted on their lusts. And he calls them all the enemies of the cross of Christ. He's been dealing with some very serious things. And all of these were coming at the Philippian church. And you say with all of those deadly threats to the purposes of God that were skewing and perverting the doctrine of salvation, why would he all of a sudden pop up to the surface after depths like that and say get those two women together? I'll tell you why. Because he understood how discord is equally a deadly threat to the life of the

church. It will rob a church of its power and it will destroy its testimony.

There's a sense in which he is reminding us of the stakes in this particular game that we're involved in. The violently hostile intent of the enemies of Christ leads them to be willing to find any advantage by which they can discredit the church. And the church's discord and in fighting is one that they use frequently...frequently. This could be devastating to the testimony of the Philippians. They were under glass, everyone was watching in this pagan culture. Discord, disunity, conflict at the level of the church could have devastated the integrity of their testimony. And apparently they were really seriously on the edge of that.

Go back to chapter 1 verse 27, do you remember it? He says, "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." In other words, live consistent with your message. "So that whether I come and see you or remain absent I will hear that you are standing firm...here it is...in one spirit with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel." He's crying for unity there. He recognizes that they've got opponents in verse 28, he recognizes that. But he says you've got to stand firm. You've got to be true to what you believe. You've got to live worthy lives.

In chapter 2 verse 2 he says, "If you want to make my joy complete," the assumption here is it isn't complete, "then be of the same mind, love everybody the same, be united in spirit and intent on one purpose, stop doing things from selfishness and empty conceit, be humble, regard others as more important than yourself, don't look on your own things but on the interest of others, be like Christ." There was obviously some discord.

Chapter 2 verse 14 indicates that they were grumbling and disputing about things. That had to stop. Now maybe he focuses a little more directly on the problem. Here are two women who apparently are leading two factions of discord in the church. And he says I want to urge these two women to live in harmony in the Lord. Now obviously we don't know much about these women. But let me tell you what we can surmise from this one verse and the background. Number one, theirs was not a doctrinal issue. It was not a debate over doctrine or he would have resolved it by taking one side or the other, right? If one was teaching truth and one was teaching error, he would have sided with one or the other. It had nothing to do with reality in terms of truth and that is usually the case in church conflict. It has to do with opinion rather than doctrine.

The second thing we know about it is these two ladies were church members. So you had two church members, obviously prominent, they simply are known by name here, prominent church members who are having some kind of personal conflict that's not related to doctrine. Now if it had been related to doctrine, there's a place for conflict. A heretic has to be admonished then put out. Somebody who is teaching error has got to be exposed and eliminated. Anybody teaching a false gospel is cursed in Galatians 1. We're not talking about doctrinal error here, we're talking about two women who couldn't get along with each other, had picked sides, caused a conflict and lined up

people on both sides against each other. They were prominent women and they were obviously beloved women who were having an impact.

Now just who were they? Well we don't know but we can surmise this, Paul says in verse 3 that they were formerly working with him in the struggle of the gospel. It may well be that they were among those women who were by the river in Philippi when Paul arrived there the first time and started the church. You remember when he came to Philippi there was no synagogue there? The reason he would always go to the synagogue and preach first to the Jews, win them to Christ, then get those converted Jews on his side and go evangelize the Gentiles in the city, but when he came to this city of Philippi there was no synagogue, the reason was it took eleven men to constitute enough to have a synagogue. There weren't eleven Jewish men there who lived in that city so there was no synagogue, so some faithful Jewish women met together to worship Jehovah God by the river. They didn't have an official synagogue. So Paul went in and that's where the church really began with that ministry of evangelism to those women. It's very possible that among those women were these two Euodia and Syntyche, we don't know. We do know that they were creating havoc in the church, such havoc that the church was not striving together in one mind for the faith of the gospel, such havoc that they were not maintaining a mutual love for one another and needed to be reminded of the fact they were proud rather than humble, and they were self-serving rather than other serving as he did in chapter 2. And here he identifies their leaders. And he is deeply concerned about this.

So he simply says to them, let them live in harmony, let them live in harmony, recognizing that the only issue was an issue of a lack of harmony, a lack of love which is always the presence of pride and the absence of humility. They were demanding their own way rather than being concerned about the other.

Now will you notice he says, "To live in harmony in the Lord." That's the sphere. If they'll just get right with the Lord, it will solve the problem. You understand that? Two people who are right with the Lord are right with each other, is that not true? If I'm walking in the Spirit and I'm right with the Lord and you're walking in the Spirit and you're right with the Lord, we're going to get along great, no problem. So he says get them together to live in harmony, or live in peace in the Lord.

Now he goes a step further, verse 3. This is very interesting. He is so concerned about this that he doesn't just say I urge them to get together. Now can you imagine that the Sunday they read this thing, those two women were there. And the elders haven't told them what's in the letter and they're reading and reading and these women are sitting there, yes, yes, uhum, uhum. And then they come to the last chapter and they read, "And I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord." Whoa...a direct hit. And then the letter says, "Indeed true comrades...says the NAS...I ask you to help these women." So right in this letter while it's being read to the people he asks this guy to help these women get together in harmony. This is part of the mutual ministry of the church, the believers.

Now notice that term "true comrade," sounds a bit communist, but it isn't. It's the Greek word suzugos. It is translated to yoke fellow, somebody who carries a common load, a yoke, you know, two oxen in it, pulling the same load. A yoke fellow is someone who is carrying the same load, my partner in this effort, my partner in this endeavor, my partner in this enterprise, my equal in this operation. So if you translate it, let's say we take the word suzugosand let's translate it and say it means yoke fellow, then he adds the word true yoke fellow or genuine yoke fellow.

There's several possibilities. One, he's referring to somebody we don't know, somebody that was known as Paul's yoke fellow. We don't know who it is but it's somebody unnamed. That would seem a little strange to me since he just named the two women so explicitly, since he names Clement so explicitly in a moment, why would he not name this person? And since he was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and had perfect recall of everything, it wasn't that he forgot the guy's name. So why wouldn't he put his name in here? So it wouldn't seem to me to make any sense that this is the name of somebody whose name isn't here but who knew who he was and would know that this was him.

The other option is that he's using this singular term in a collective sense and he refers to the church. Indeed as a church entity, you are my yoke fellow so I ask you...it's a singular but it's a collective noun involving the whole church...I ask all of you to help those women. That's a possibility.

But I think there's a better explanation. Let's say we don't translate the word at all and we just leave it in the Greek. It would say, "Indeed, genuine suzugos, I ask you also to help these women." And I prefer that we leave it untranslated and that he's really talking to a guy named Syzygus. You say, "Well who is Syzygus?" We don't know, but it's very likely that he is one of the overseers or elders mentioned in verse 1 of chapter 1. Remember Paul was writing to the Philippians including the overseers and deacons. Syzygus must have been one of the elders in the church, one of the pastors who hadn't really fulfilled his duty, who hadn't solved this problem. And so Paul taking apostolic authority from God says I want you, Syzygus, to get on this case and help these women.

Now somebody says, "Well if you take the term suzugosas a proper name, then why the word true or genuine? Why would he say true suzugos, or genuine suzugos? It doesn't seem to make any sense." But it does...but it does if you understand it this way. Syzygus was named Syzygus and his name meant yoke fellow. When he calls him true Syzygus, he is simply saying...hey, you are a genuine Syzygus in that you are a yoke fellow. It was a way to sort of identify the man as true to his name.

Let me ask you a question. What does the name Barnabas mean? Anybody remember...son of what?...encouragement. Barnabas was a genuine Barnabas, wasn't he? His name was Barnabas and he was a genuine son of encouragement. Do you remember a man by the name of Onesimus? Paul wrote to Philemon, the slave owner, about his slave Onesimus. Do you remember what

Onesimus means? It means useful. And when Paul wrote to Philemon he said "He who was useless formerly is now useful." He is an Onesimus Onesimus. He is a genuine Onesimus, just as Barnabas was a genuine Barnabas and Syzygus was a genuine Syzygus. He was a real yoke fellow. So it's a wonderful commendation of this elder in the church named Syzygus who lived up to his name. So he says, "Syzygus, look, I ask you, help these women."

Now, beloved, that's part of spiritual stability in the church, isn't it? He says to the Philippians, "Stand firm." How you going to do that? You've got to help each other. You have to be a conflict resolver, a peacemaker cultivating harmony all the time, cultivating harmony...harmony, harmony in the fellowship of love which produces an environment of stability, of mutual support. If you don't do that, if you're one who leaves a trail of conflict, you're generating instability in the church.

Now these were significant ladies. Syzygus was going to be a peacemaker. They were significant. Look what he says about them. "These women who have shared my struggle in the gospel." What does that mean? Well it could mean, as I said, that they were part of that original Philippian group that went through the difficulty. And I mean it was a struggle getting that church off the ground in Philippi, wasn't it? Where did Paul end up in Philippi? Where did they put him for preaching? In jail. Not only in jail but in stocks. And what happened one night when he was in stocks? He was singing in there. You remember Paul and Silas were singing, having a great ole time singing hymns to God. And in the middle of the night an earthquake came and let them loose and as a result the jailer and his entire family got saved and a lot of other folks got saved and the church was born. It may well have been that these two dear women were actually there and a part of that early beginning of the tremendous spiritual struggle in Philippi to get that church off the ground. That was not an easy enterprise and there was a great price to pay in the lives of people who were faithful to see that church begun. So these were unique women.

And it points up the fact that sometimes the best people, the good people, the faithful people can become agents of the enemy in inducing conflict. Boy, we have to guard against that. The enemy would twist and pervert any one of us who believes he has some good noble cause to become the agent of discord if we're not sensitive. And he says, and I love this about Paul, when he says I want you to help these women who have shared my struggle...by the way, that verb "shared my struggle" sunathleo, we get the word athletics which means to struggle or to strive, suncompounds, makes it more intense, they have diligently struggled in getting the gospel out. But he says, I just want you to know, it wasn't them alone, together with Clement also. And Clement was another of the leaders in the church at Philippi, we don't know any more about him. And then just so he doesn't leave anybody out he says, "And the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the Book of Life." He's sort of like the MC at the banquet who doesn't want to leave anybody out and so he says and everybody else who helped too. And even their names aren't written in the book of Philippians, he says they're written in the Book of Life and that's a lot better, right? Remember Hebrews 6, God says He's not going to forget your labor, it will not be in vain. He has the names of all of them.

So he says these dear women shared my struggle together with Clement, whom the implied thought is, you know and love, and the rest of all my fellow workers whose names are the Book of Life. In other words, they're on the team, they're believers, they're faithful servants, they're workers. Not the only ones, but their names are in the Book of Life, that's the implication here, their names are in the Book of Life. The Book of Life, by the way, is the register where God keeps the names of the redeemed. Daniel 12:1, Malachi 3:16 and 17, then moving into the New Testament you have numerous references to the Book of Life. That's where God wrote down in eternity past the names of all His elect.

And so, you just get the feeling of the richness of fellowship here, don't you? Here are all these names in the Book of Life and here's Clement and Syzygus and the Philippian church and these two dear women and Paul says we've all been working together, we've all been struggling and we've all been striving and we've all been tried to be used by God to build the church and now all of a sudden these two women have just gotten into discord that threatens the stability of the whole thing. Stand firm in one spirit, is what he's saying, just as he did in 1:27. He loves them all. God loves them all. And they ought to love each other. There's got to be harmony. There needs to be a warm genuine loving unity and that creates an environment of stability. And, boy, when you fracture that, the church becomes so unstable. When there is discord in a church people get unstable, they start falling and tumbling and toppling all over everywhere, attitudes become bad, negative spirits, bitternesses, lack of forgiveness grows, hostility comes into play. There's a tremendous vulnerability personally and individually when there's collective discord.

So, to be spiritually stable means that I must pursue peace, be a peacemaker, blessed are the peacemakers, Jesus said. I want to pursue loving harmony in the church. I want to be a Syzygus. I want to be somebody who helps people resolve their conflict because that's how you create a spiritually stable environment. Let me give you one word to sum it up, "love." Be a lover. We are to be the agents of love to build that stabilizing bond of love in the church. You want to be spiritually stable, then pursue love in all your relationships, pursue peace and harmony and unity.

Now I'm going to give you a second point. Very simple one, verse 4, it's Paul's second principle of spiritual stability. "Rejoice in the Lord always, and in case you weren't listening, again I will say rejoice." He really wants to emphasize this. Rejoice in the Lord always and again I will say rejoice. The second principle of spiritual stability is maintaining a spirit of joy. This is a tremendous force in your own spiritual balance. Why? Because we tend to be victimized by our circumstances. We have our highs and our lows and our highs and our lows and we fluctuate and vacillate all dependent on how stuff is going on the outside, right? If I'm successful in my job, if my relationships are what they ought to be, if there's calm in my life, if everything is going the way I'd like it to go, if everything is in a sort of peaceful mode externally, then I have joy. But if stuff starts to disintegrate, then I lose it. You see, that's not at all what this is saying.

First of all, here is a command, rejoice in the Lord. And somebody would say, "Well how in the world can you command somebody to rejoice? How can you go up to somebody and say, `Rejoice?'" And listen, did you hear what I said, I said rejoice. Well, you just can't...how can you command that? I'll tell you because look what it says. It doesn't say rejoice, it says rejoice in the Lord. I can't rejoice in my circumstances all the time. I can't rejoice...I can't rejoice in my circumstances most of the time. I can't rejoice in the way things are going in this world. I don't like the way things are going in this world. I don't rejoice over my own immense spiritual accomplishments. I don't have any except by the grace of God and all I ever see in my life is my failures. I don't rejoice in that. If I'm going to rejoice in something, it isn't going to be me. You say, "Well don't you rejoice in people?" Oh well, I've been very disappointed by a lot of them. I don't want to tie my joy to them, as much as I like them. I don't want to tie my joy to them because it will come and go. "Well don't you rejoice in success?" No, that comes and goes too. I'd just as soon rejoice in the Lord cause He doesn't come and go, He stays. He never wavers. He never changes. That's it.

So, you see, if I believe in Him and my faith is strong and I know who He is, it doesn't matter what my circumstances are. That's what I said at the very beginning, remember? I said spiritual stability is directly tied to how you think about God. It's exactly what it is. You show me a person who is stable in the midst of any situation and I'll show you a person who is perfectly tuned in to an understanding of God that surpasses any circumstances. He knows God is beyond all of that. And that's why I'm so convinced that these people who have problems, problems, problems and are always worrying about this and that and struggling with all of their little problems in this life and are always running around looking for a quick fix somewhere, a book, a seminar, a tape, a counselor, a psychiatrist or whatever it is to get the quick fix would be so much better off if somebody would put them in a locked box somewhere and slide food under the door and just leave them there until they had memorized the book of Psalms. And then at the end of that, they could come out and they would know so much about God that it would be irrelevant what was going on around them. But we've got all these other solutions, see. And that seems like an obvious thing to me. Why do you think God gave the Psalms to the people of Israel? Why do you think they were put into Hebrew poetic form and meter? So they could be easily memorized. And why were they set to music? So they could be easily remembered. Why? So they could hum a tune to lighten their step? No, so they could sing a hymn to deepen their theology. And then they would know God. And when they knew who God was, everything else seemed rather insignificant. So you rejoice in the Lord. If you don't know much about the Lord it's tough to rejoice. If you know a lot about the Lord, it's not too tough to rejoice.

You know, the early church even rejoiced when they suffered because they said they were so happy, Acts 5:41, to have been counted worthy to have suffered for such a worthy name. What a privilege...what a privilege. This continual habitual joy should mark us. Rejoice in the Lord always and I repeat it, rejoice in the Lord. And it's our knowledge of Him that causes us to rejoice. It says in Romans 14:17 that the kingdom is made up of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit...joy in

the Holy Spirit.

What do you have to rejoice about? Let me suggest a few things and you think about the Lord. Well first of all you can just rejoice in who He is, right? That He is sovereign over everything. To me that is...that's the ultimate. You can't really steal my joy when I realize that God is in charge of everything. He is in charge of every circumstance. The single greatest truth I know about God as a Christian is His sovereignty. He is in charge of everything. Nothing happens out of His control, He controls it all, absolutely all of it. What comfort is in that. Furthermore, He controls it all...get this one...for my good. Did you hear that? We read Psalm 139, we saw how God knows your sitting down, your rising up, He knows the words you speak before you speak them, He knows the way you're going to walk and He holds every part of your life in absolute and total control. What a tremendous truth it is. And when you realize that God is loving, that God is wise, that God has an infinite understanding of every vicissitude, every aspect of life. It's a whole different approach to understand that. It's one thing to know it, to read it, it's something else to believe it with the fiber of your being and that's what holds you in the environment of joy.

Think about it this way. Why do I have joy unspeakable and full of glory? First of all, because everything in my life is controlled by God. Secondly, because God saved me and made me His own child and promised me to give me an inheritance in Jesus Christ. I'm His child, I belong to Him. I rejoice because Jesus Christ is coming some day to take me to be with Himself. And He is right now there preparing a place for me that where He is I may come. I rejoice in that. Furthermore I rejoice because my God is able to supply all my...what?...needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus. Furthermore I rejoice because I am being used by God to serve the one I love the most. What a privilege. Furthermore I rejoice because God is using my life so that other people can hear the gospel and be saved and God is using my life so that other Christians can be encouraged to love God more and serve Him more faithfully. I rejoice because I enjoy instant access to God. Do you know that any time I want to, I can talk to God and He listens? I don't even get that in my own house. But I get that from the God of the universe. The God of the universe listens to everything I have to say, even if it's a long conversation.

You know why I have joy? Because death is gain. Death is gain. That's why I have joy. And the more I understand my God and the stronger my faith in Him and His inviolable plan, the greater the depth of my joy and the deeper my joy the more untouchable it is. You can't get to my joy very easily. On the outside you're not going to touch it, circumstances and all of that, because it's buried deep in my confidence in who God is and in His eternal promises to me. That's spiritual stability.

Why would I compromise? God's in control. Why would I waver in my faith? God is in control. Why would I doubt? How can I doubt a God who is so clearly revealed in Scripture? I can tell you, dear friends, spiritual stability is directly related to these two things to start with...spiritual stability is the product of a person whose life is filled with the love of Christ shed abroad by the Spirit within him and

spiritual stability belongs to the person who is so deeply in understanding of the character of God and whose understanding has been translated into a real faith and he believes God to be the God He is revealed to be and in those things he finds his stability. That's the first two. There are more for next time. Let's pray.

Father, we hear the echo of the words of the Apostle Paul who said, "Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." And we want that to be us. We want to be steadfast, unmovable, not shaken by trials and difficulties and problems and the frailties of our fallen flesh and the difficulties of this life. And we don't want to collapse under persecution or hostility or rejection or intimidation. We don't want to fall to sin. We want to be the strong. We want to be those who are resolute, who can't be bought or bribed or softened or defeated. We want the world to see us and see the strength of Christ in us. We want to be like Daniel, didn't know how to compromise because he knew too much about his God to be swayed. Give us a greater knowledge of You and a greater experience of that love and joy which You grant Your faithful children for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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