

**Spiritual Stability, Part 3: Humility and Faith**

Scripture: Philippians 4:5-6a

Code: 50-39

Those of you who have been with us over the last number of weeks know that we are considering the theme of spiritual stability, and we are looking at the text of Philippians chapter 4 where the apostle Paul gives us the principles that create or generate a spiritually stable life. You know, this entire society in which we live struggles with the matter of stability. It ought to be obvious to all of us that we live in a very unstable world, and we are in the midst of very unstable people. Our world is filled with anxiety. It is filled with an inability of folks to cope with circumstances in life. There are a myriad of solutions but not many that work or any that work, apparently, as the society continues to escalate in its instability.

Sad to say, our particular culture and maybe even sadder to say, the church itself continues to direct people in the wrong direction to find the solutions to their anxieties and their instabilities. We have bought into the psychological lies that indicate that man can solve his problems through certain psychological principles, certain introspective self-adjustments, and those have proven not only to be unsuccessful but to be diversionary so that people pursuing the wrong thing and the wrong area come up with the wrong answer, and not only that but they then, therefore, miss the right answer. The legacy of philosophy and psychology to this particular day and age has been to sell a whole generation snake oil, which doesn't do anything that it promises to do.

This was pointed out rather forcefully to me by an interview that I read with Dr. Robert Coles, C-O-L-E-S. Dr. Robert Coles is a social psychiatrist. He is perhaps as esteemed as any man in our country in terms of his area of psychiatry. He is an M.D., he is a research psychiatrist for Harvard University, he is professor of psychiatry and medical humanities at Harvard Medical School. He has written 36 books. He has authored 600 journal articles of one kind or another, and in 1973, he received the Pulitzer Prize. He is a very decorated, esteemed, and respected psychiatrist.

This interview points up the futility of his own area. While understanding superficially some things about Christianity, he will not call himself a Christian, does not believe he is a Christian, and makes that clear in another part of the article. But his answers are very interesting. They asked him why he was not a surgeon. His answer, "I'm sloppy, not a great quality for a surgeon." He said, "When you get a combination of a befuddled slob who doesn't have the necessary toughness and is a little mixed up himself, you've got a psychiatrist." A befuddled, mixed-up slob with no toughness is a psychiatrist. The question is: A mixed-up psychiatrist? Coles: "Of course."

Question: Is it futile, then, to search for ultimate answers in psychiatry or psychology? Coles: "The futility is in searching for ultimate answers in the entire secular culture. Psychology happens to be a temporary secular religion. How long will it last? Fifty years. Secular religions come and go. Today it's psychology, tomorrow it will be weight reduction or cholesterol or getting to the moon or Mars. Who knows what our culture will be preoccupied with next? But none of this is going to give us answers to the moral, spiritual questions that we ultimately hunger for. Psychology isn't equipped to answer those questions. Psychology gives us some information about the mind but the mind is not the soul." Question: Psychology, then, can help a person's mental health? Coles: "We shouldn't even use words like mental health. The question is not: What is mental health? Or: Do you have mental health? The question is: What do you do with your life?"

Question: But even ministers today are becoming psychologists. Coles: "That is paganism." Question: Pastoral counseling is the term for it. Coles: "It's paganism. My mother was dying here in Massachusetts General Hospital. A minister came to see her. He wanted to negotiate her through the stages of dying. She wanted him to pray for her. She knew she was dying. He wanted to talk about anger and denial, but she wasn't angry and she wasn't denying, she just wanted him to pray for her." Question: Is this all part of the same syndrome and we all want to worship the expert? Coles: "The secular expert. Who are these secular experts anyway? What do psychologists and psychiatrists know about the Christian life? What can they tell us?"

Quite an interesting response, isn't it? You get the feeling he's been dropping his bucket in a dry well and he's come to that conclusion. Where do you go to find stability in life? Where do you go to learn to cope? Where do you go to learn to deal with anxiety? Where do you go to deal with circumstances that you find debilitating you and pressuring you? Where do you go to get your life really stabilized? You hear people all the time say, "Well, I've just got to get my own life together." We are literally living in a sea of people who are emotionally unstable.

Let's look at a biblical illustration of stability, Psalm 1. This was one of the first Psalms I ever memorized as a child. It is the foundation song of the psalter. It is the foundation Psalm, and it speaks directly to this issue of stability. It says in verse 1: "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. And he will be like a tree, firmly planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither, and in whatever he does, he prospers." Now, that is the kind of life that most people would really like to live. They would like to be firmly planted in a place that flourishes with all the delights of life. They would like to produce significant fruit. They would like not to dry up and wither away but to flourish throughout their lives and whatever they do, to prosper. I mean that is the scenario that anybody could paint for his own life. That's the stable life. That's the spiritually stable person.

Look at the contrast, verse 4. The wicked are not so. They're not firmly planted. They are not benefiting from life. They're not producing fruit. They are withering, and what they do does not prosper. They're not like that. But rather, "They are like chaff which the wind drives away." And anybody in an agrarian culture who knows anything about chaff knows it is absolutely worthless. And what is the psalmist saying here? This is remarkable. He is saying there is a man whose life is deeply rooted and firmly planted, who sucks up the pure water of life, a man who is productive, a man whose life is sustained in its flourishing capability, and a man who does things that really count and prosper. And then there is a man who's just like chaff, just blowing around without purpose, without value, shapeless, worthless, rootless, unstable, good for nothing.

Now, which would you rather be? The first one is the one who walks with God. The second one is the wicked man who rejects God. Would you notice that the key to the first life is found in verse 2? "His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night." Two things contribute to a stable life: delighting in the Lord – that's having a living relationship with the Lord – and then meditating in His Word so that life is viewed from a divine perspective. On the other hand, you have the shifting, blowing, useless, worthless, flotsam and jetsam, the chaff of this world, headed for judgment. I don't know about you, but I'd rather be that productive, stable life, and that is offered every Christian. That is God's desire in salvation, is to root you and to make you productive. It's a marvelous description of the godly, of what God wants you to be: spiritually stable.

Now, we're learning how to be spiritually stable here in Philippians 4, so let's turn back to it. Would you notice Philippians 4 verse 1 and let me briefly review. In Philippians 4:1, the key statement is: Stand firm in the Lord. That means be spiritually stable, don't be like those who are tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine. Don't be like the man in James who is unstable in all his ways, wavering like the sea. Be firm, be strong, be stable in the Lord. We ought to be the very demonstration of spiritual stability. But how? That's the little word "so" – thus or in this way stand firm in the Lord, here's how, I'm going to tell you how. Here's what it requires to be stable.

Now, what we already learned, I briefly review. Point number one: Spiritual stability demands cultivating peace in the fellowship of love. Spiritual stability demands cultivating peace in the fellowship of love, and we noted that in verses 2 and 3. Two women, Euodia and Syntyche, were causing discord in the church. Paul exhorts them to harmony in the Lord, verse 2. Then he asks Syzygus – which is the proper name, translated "true comrade" – he asks Syzygus to help those women who have been a help to him and among others been a part of his ministry, and what he's saying here is, "Look, if you're going to experience firmness and stability, you've got to be in a stable environment that is not being ripped by conflict."

We pointed out a couple of weeks ago that where you have a church environment that is in conflict, you will not only have an unstable environment but you will have unstable individuals who will literally

be affected by that instability. But where you have harmony and unity and love and peace in the environment of the church, it becomes the strength to the individual and so they experience personal stability. Harmony in the church is a great stabilizer. The unity of believers stabilizes the individual. So if I want to experience spiritual stability, then I want to be a peacemaker. I want to demonstrate love. I want to eliminate discord. I want to do all I can to cultivate peace, to cultivate harmony, to cultivate unity in the fellowship of love so that I become a strengthening, stabilizing influence so that the environment begins to produce a stabilizing bond among Christians who can stabilize one another.

The second thing we talked about, the second principle, if we are to be firm in the Lord, is not only to cultivate peace in the fellowship of love but secondly to maintain a spirit of joy. Verse 4: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice." This, too, is directly related to spiritual stability, cultivating an attitude of joy, maintaining a spirit of joy, incessant joy, independent joy in the sense that it doesn't depend upon circumstances. Please notice "rejoice in the Lord," not in your circumstances. You can't always rejoice in your circumstances, but you can always rejoice in the Lord, in your privileged union with Him, that's the idea. That's a joy no circumstance can touch. So to be spiritually stable requires maintaining the habit of constantly expressing joyful wonder when contemplating an eternal, unchanging, enriching relationship with God through the living Lord Jesus Christ. Great truth. As long as I contemplate the Lord and what He's done for me and is doing for me and has planned to do for me, I find my joy there.

By the way, that is a command. It is no less a sin not to rejoice than not to repent or not to do anything else God commands you to do. We rejoice in the Lord. You remember in Luke 24 the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus met with them, talked with them out of the Scriptures, describing the things about Himself. Finally they came into the house and in the breaking of bread, He revealed Himself to them, and it says their hearts burned within them. What is that? That's the burning heart that is the result of a relationship with the living Lord. It was in the joy of His presence that they experienced the burning heart. Stable people are people who bring peace to situations, who create in the fellowship of love a unity, who are a stabilizing influence in discord, and the spiritually stable are those who in the ebb and flow and rise and fall of circumstances in life always maintain joy. Joy is at the heart of stability.

Let's go to the third principle. Spiritual stability also requires learning to accept less than you might think you're due. Learning to accept less than you might think you are due. Verse 5: "Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men." Now, that's a very, very important statement and a very important element in this matter of spiritual stability. It is really speaking about contentment. It could read, "Let your contentment be known to all men." In fact, I suppose that for every translation of this text, there is probably a different word used here because this is one of those almost untranslatable Greek terms – *epieiks*. It's practically untranslatable if you're talking about translating it one word for one word. It means more than any one English word can capture.

If you've studied it long enough, you get the feeling of what this word means. For example, it has the sense of sweet reasonableness, that you are responsive to an appeal, that there's a gentleness about you when someone asks you something, you're sweetly reasonable about it. It also could be translated big-heartedness. Not only are you sweetly reasonable but it goes beyond that, you are very generous. It could be translated good will. Since you only wish good or will good on others, you tend to almost bend beyond what would be expected to grant them good.

Some have suggested it could be translated friendliness. That seems a little bit thin when compared to the others. Some have chosen the word "magnanimity," let your magnanimity be known to all men. In other words, your over-generosity. Some have suggested it means charity toward faults of others. Some have said mercy toward failures of others. Some have said the best word is leniency. Some have said it should be indulgence. Let your indulgence be known to all men, not your personal indulgence in sin but your ability to indulge all of the failures of others and not be personally offended or unkind or bitter, retaliatory, or vengeful. It is a kind of patience which is able to submit to injustice, disgrace, mistreatment without hatred, without malice, without retaliation, without bitterness, without vengeance.

Now, if you add all that up – at the risk of standing against a lot of better Bible scholars than myself in the translation process – I would suggest the best word I can think of is graciousness. Graciousness. Let your graciousness be known to all men. Certainly in sweet reasonableness, there is grace. Certainly in big-heartedness, there is grace. Certainly in good will, there is grace. Certainly in forbearing, there is grace. Certainly in friendliness, magnanimity, charity, mercy, leniency, indulgence, you're demonstrating graciousness, and that word probably in a Christian sense embodies it.

But there's another element to it that we have to go into to understand it. It is the graciousness of humility, which basically says you may have offended me, you may have mistreated me, you may have misjudged me, worse than that you may have misrepresented me, you may have maltreated me, you may have not given me what I deserve, you may have given me what I do not deserve, you may have ruined my reputation with some, you may have acted in hostility against me unjustly, I may be the recipient of your inequity, injustice, and mistreatment, but I humbly and graciously accept it. That's what it means, and again, isn't that exactly what the grace of God is like? You may have hated Me. You may have been My enemies, God could say. You may have shaken your fist in My face. You may have blasphemed Me. You may have mistreated Me, misjudged Me, you may have done all of that, and I still reach out to you in love. Boy, when you have that kind of an attitude, you're a stable person. Spiritual stability belongs to the humbly gracious – let's use that phrase. Let your humble graciousness be known to all men.

You don't demand your rights. You get into that kind of mentality, and you will become an unstable person. The philosophical mindset of our day behind, say, the contemporary psychology that's

infiltrated not only our country but the church, the philosophical mindset is primarily the mindset of existentialism, and existentialism basically says, bottom line, every man has a right to do whatever feels good. That's existentialism. By the way, existentialism is a reaction to humanism. Humanism made man a machine. Humanism says we're nothing but biological machines and we really don't have choice and we really don't have solutions to problems, we just function like an animal and really a reaction to the humanistic, that's a materialistic humanism. Materialism says man is a machine. In reaction to materialistic humanism came existentialism, which says I don't buy that, man, I've got dignity, I'm somebody, and so existentialism says you are somebody and you ought to feel good about who you are and you ought to do whatever feels good.

And so we talk about human dignity as a reaction to materialistic humanism, and we talk about the fact that man ought to be whatever he wants to be and do whatever he wants to do, and whatever feels good, you ought to do it. And therefore, what you get is massive self-centered pride and ego. With everyone wanting to react to materialistic humanism philosophically, even if they don't see it as that, and be someone and be who they are and that's who I am and I have a right to what feels good to me, that's what existentialism says, that's the only value in existentialism is do what feels good, and the only rule is if what feels good to you hurts me, you can't do it. But if it doesn't hurt me, what's the difference?

That's why you have homosexuals saying, "Why is homosexuality against the law? It doesn't hurt anybody." See, that's existentialism. That's philosophical existentialism. If it doesn't hurt anybody, what's the difference? If it feels good to me and doesn't hurt you, then forget it. Well, AIDS has shot that argument down. Could end up destroying a whole generation of people. Sin always eventually hurts somebody else.

But when you have a world of basically pragmatic existentialists like we do, and that's the kind of world we live in, absolutely the kind of world we live in, what does Burger King say? Have it your way. I'll tell you what, I've been to Burger King a lot of times. I have never yet had it my way. You know what my way is? I get the hamburger, I don't pay, that's my way. They're not giving it to me my way, I pay every time, that's their way, not my way. The bottom line: existentialism doesn't work. It doesn't even work at Burger King, let alone in philosophy. But that's what's the mindset of our day. You've got to feel good about yourself, elevate yourself, love yourself, develop yourself, and that kind of thinking is in the church to an incredible degree.

I was listening to a tape today of a friend, Dr. Paul Brownback, and in this tape he was saying – I hate to say this, but he said, "I believe this is true, that if you and I went into a Christian bookstore" – Christian bookstore – "and we pulled off the Christian books that are being written today and took highlight pens and I highlighted everything that came out of Carl Rogers' self-love theory and you highlighted everything in those books that came out of the teaching of Paul, I would run out of highlighters before you would." That's how insidious this is and how far into the church it's come, the

cult of self-love, which means whatever feels good to me, whatever satisfies me, whatever builds me up, whatever gets me over my inferiority complex, whatever gives me a better self-image, whatever gives me better self-esteem, that's what I do. On the other hand, what Paul says is be humble, gracious, don't demand anything, give charity to those who are committing crimes against you, give mercy toward the failures of others, you'll be a stable person. You see, you cultivate all that self stuff and you don't create stability; you give them a never-ending trail to greater and greater instability and unfulfillment. Tragic. We are to be characterized by the right virtues.

Spiritual stability comes when I have no demands for myself. Then if I get something, fine. If I don't, fine. If I'm treated a certain way, fine. If I'm treated this way, fine. Doesn't really matter to me – I'm not concerned about me. That's what makes Paul say – and he's the living illustration of all of this as we shall see in the next session – “In whatsoever state I am, therewith to be” – what? – “absolutely content.” Why? Because Paul's not the issue. I'm not an issue so I can have a forbearing spirit. I can have a gracious, big-hearted, magnanimous, humble, charitable spirit. That's stability. Boy, you can't get knocked off your pins. Some people live and die in that revolving door of listening to what everybody says about him and taking in personally every single thing that ever happens in their life and filtering it through their little ego process, and if it's wounded them in any way, they're in immediate instability, anxiety.

You can't be knocked off balance by inequity, injustice, unfair treatment, lies, humiliation if you're not the issue – if you're not the issue. That's humility, humble graciousness. So spiritual stability belongs to those who cultivate peace in the fellowship of love, those who maintain joy, and those who do not demand what they might be due but are graciously humble.

Let me reduce those to three virtues: love, joy, humility. Let's look at one more, number four, and this is at the heart of everything. Verse 5, back to it again, let's put verse 5 and 6 together: “The Lord is near; be anxious for nothing,” stop there. Boy, in those two sentences there is so much to say. That's our fourth point – here it comes. Spiritual stability requires resting on a confident faith in the Lord. Spiritual stability requires resting on a confident faith in the Lord, and I'll say it again – I've said it before – your view of God is what stabilizes you. This is crucial. Look at verse 5. “The Lord is near.” That's a great statement. The term “near” – eggus – can mean near in space or near in time, just like the word “near” can be near in space or time. I could say that pew is near, that's near in space. I could say Monday is near, that's near in time. Same “near,” just used in different terms. It can be a spatial word, it can be a time word, a chronological word. We have to decide which in this text.

The Lord is near. What do you mean, He's near in time? You mean soon He's coming? Soon He will be here? Are you talking about the Rapture? Are you talking about Christ's return? Well, that certainly could have been in his mind, after all chapter 3 verse 20: “Our citizenship is in heaven from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Certainly the Lord was near in terms of time. I mean there was going to be a return of Christ sometime soon – soon, obviously, was a relative term.

We still say His coming is soon, relative to the history of this world and to eternity. So it could be that he's got the Rapture in mind. The Lord is near; stop worrying.

Well, maybe it's used in the sense the Lord is near in time because you're going to die pretty soon. Well, that's a possibility, that he is saying, "Well, you're going to die soon anyway, so the Lord's going to be around to take you home. He'll come and take you to be where He is and you'll meet Him face to face and all of that. So since you're going to see Him soon and He's very near, don't be anxious."

Now, I don't want to say that those two thoughts are not in the mind of the apostle Paul or the Holy Spirit because they may well have been a part of what he was saying here. But it seems to me that the real strength of this exhortation is that the Lord is near in terms of space, if we can use that concept. It's not so much that He's near in terms of His coming, in the sense that He's near in terms of His immediate presence, that He's there, He's encompassing you – personal presence. That's what the Psalmist meant in Psalm 119:151 when he said, "Thou art near, O Lord." "Thou art near, O Lord," You're here, You're near. The Lord who will come, the Lord who will meet us in death, is now near. Don't you live your life in that confidence? Don't you live your life in the confidence that even when you think a thought, He's near enough to read it? When you whisper a prayer, He's near enough to hear it? When you need His strength and His power, He's near enough to provide it?

In fact, is He not living in you, providing the very spiritual life which is your life? It is the life of God in your soul? We are dependent on that, and I think that's what he's saying. The Lord is near, so don't be anxious, so don't be unstable, so don't be wavering, so don't be collapsing, having a breakdown, paranoid, or whatever. Understand the Lord is near.

Now, we have to understand not only that the Lord is near but we have to understand who this Lord is who is near. And now we get to the crux of the issue because your view of God will control your conduct. Can I give you an illustration? Let's go back to 1 Samuel chapter 21. First Samuel chapter 21 verse 10. David is running from Saul. He's really in no-man's land, right? If he's going to get away from Saul, he's got to get out of the area, so he runs to the next region, which is Philistia, and he winds up in Gath, and he goes to Achish, the king of Gath, and so I guess in a sense he was looking for some kind of asylum from Saul. But the servants of Achish said to him, to the king, "Is this not David, the king of the land? Did they not sing of this one as they danced saying, Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands? And David took these words to heart and greatly feared Achish, king of Gath."

David's running for asylum, exile in a sense, protection. The servants of Achish run in, they say, "Hey, you don't want this guy around here. If you think Saul is a formidable foe, the song goes Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands. This guy is a warrior. This is the rightful ruler, and he's even greater than Saul." And so they tell the king this. Well, David finds out that they told him that, and now he panics, assuming now he's right there in the environs of the king who can kill him on



the spot, and in his panic he has to come up with a ploy to get out of there. “So he disguised his sanity before them and acted insanely in their hands.” David decided to act like a total maniac. “He scribbled all over the doors of the gates.” I mean this is the king, this is David, scribbling on the gate, “and let his saliva drool all through his beard” – like a mad man. And, of course, that was a desecration of the symbol of your maleness, the beard.

Why did he do this? Why? I’ll tell you why he did this. He got unstabilized. He was so fearful that he was taking things into his own hands, and Achish’ response – the thing worked. Achish says to his servants, “Behold, you see the man behaving as a madman. Why do you bring him to me? Do I lack madmen?” I love that. “Do I need another one? I’ve got you, right? I don’t need another one. Don’t bring me another one. Get him out of here. I don’t need some guy scribbling on the gates and drooling all over the place. Get him out. I don’t want him in my house.”

So David’s little ploy works. So he’s off the hook. So he’s still got to run from Saul. Where does he go? Chapter 22: “He departed from there, escaped to the cave of Adullam,” you know, panting in the cave. “It worked, it worked.” He sits in the cave and starts to think about what a jerk he had just been. Do you think God could have delivered him from Achish? Did he think God could have delivered him from Achish? Theologically? Yes. Practically? Panic set in. It was in the middle of that that he, apparently, from historical notation, wrote Psalm 57 and he starts to put his theology back together. He says, “Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me. My soul takes refuge in You. In the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge until destruction passes by. I will cry to God Most High, to God who accomplishes all things for me, He will send from heaven and save me.”

And he goes through this tremendous statement about the power of God. “My heart is steadfast” – verse 7 – “O God, my heart is steadfast. I will sing, yes I will sing praises. Awake harp and lyre, I’ll awaken the dawn, I’ll give thanks.” He launches off with this great stuff about God. Well, if he’d have remembered that up there in Gath, he wouldn’t have acted like such a jerk. He wouldn’t have embarrassed himself and been such a reproach to God as if the God of David couldn’t deliver him from that little man named Achish.

But that’s the way we live our life so often. Our theology works on Sunday, but when we hit the wall on Monday through Friday and we get some trauma in our life, then we start, you know, drooling in our beards, metaphorically speaking. We lose our self-control. We flip out. And it’s a lack of confidence in God. You see, if I have a confident trust that the Lord is near, what am I worried about? What am I worried about? Well, it doesn’t matter to me what men say against me. It doesn’t matter how I’m treated. The Lord is near and the Lord knows the truth about everything, and the Lord is the ultimate equalizer. All things are equitable in His hands for everyone else and me, and this is the source of my security, trust in the presence of my God. If I understand who my God is and that He is near, that’s all I need to know.

Let me give you another illustration. Turn to Habakkuk and if that – if you don't know where it is, look in the index. Habakkuk – Habakkuk was an interesting prophet in Judah, and he had an interesting problem, and this will speak volumes to us about our own problems. Habakkuk – in verse 2 – cries out to God, this little prophecy is very important. “How long, O Lord, will I call for help?” “Lord, I've been calling for help for a long time.” This is a prophet who's doing more praying than prophesying. “God, what are You doing? Look at Your people, they're a mess and You're not listening, You won't hear. I told You about violence and You won't save. Why do You make me look on this iniquity? Why do You make me look on this wickedness? Why do You make me look at the destruction and the violence in Judah? The strife, the contention, the ignoring of Your law, the terrible miscarriage of justice, wicked surrounding the righteous people, justice being perverted, why, God, are You tolerating this? This is – remember us? – Judah, Your people. Why don't You bring revival? Why don't You cause repentance? Why don't You turn this thing around?”

So God answers him. Verse 5: “Look among the nations, observe, be astonished, wonder,” which is an old way of saying, “I'm going to blow your mind with what you're going to hear, you aren't even going to believe this. I'm going to do something in your days that you wouldn't believe if you were told.” Apparently that's why He hadn't told him up to now; he wouldn't have believed it anyway.

“I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who marched throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs, they are dreaded and feared, their justice and authority originate with themselves, they have no law but themselves. Their horses are swifter than leopards,” and this, by the way, is poetry and this entire book was meant to be played on a stringed instrument and sung. That's why it has these poetic hyperboles. “The horses are swifter than leopards and keener than wolves in the evening, their horsemen come galloping, their horsemen come from afar, they fly like an eagle swooping down to devour. All of them come for violence. Their horde of faces moves forward. They collect captives like sand. They mock at kings, and rulers are a laughing matter to them. They laugh at every fortress and heap up rubble to capture it. Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on but they will be held guilty, they whose strength is their god.”

Here is an utter pagan nation who believe only in their own might, and they're a law unto themselves and they sweep in to – He says, “They're going to come and just wipe you out.” Now he's got problem number two. Problem number one: Why doesn't God bring revival? Problem number two: How can God use a worse nation to punish Judah? “How can You take the Chaldeans, they're worse? And how can they be Your instrument against Your covenant people? None of this makes sense. You're a holy God, You ought to revive Your people. You're a covenant God, You keep Your covenant. You're a just God, You don't have a worse people punish a better people. Doesn't make sense, I don't understand this.”

Heavens are silent, no answer. “How am I going to deal with this?” You say, “Was he seriously traumatized?” Yeah, seriously traumatized. How seriously? Chapter 3 verse 16: “My inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered, decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, for the people to arise who will invade us.” This guy should be hospitalized. He’s shaken on the inside, all his organs are going up and down, his stomach is in knots, his whole inside is – his heart is beating irregularly or uncommonly. His lips are shaking and quivering. His bones ache through his whole body and he’s shaking from head to foot. This guy is really traumatized.

Now, what’s he going to do? Let’s go back to chapter 1. Here stands a totally distressed prophet in a state of panic, not over an imaginary problem, not an imaginary problem like “I don’t like the way I look.” No, no, no. “I just can’t cope with life, I’m overweight.” No, no, no. He’s talking about the wiping out of his nation. This is a real problem, not “I’m not understood at work.” No, no, no. This is a real problem, major problem. “What am I going to do? I’m shaking all over. I can’t deal with it.”

Here’s what he does. He starts to remind himself about his God who is near, and you want to know – look at verse 12. And it’s in the form of questions. He’s asking questions of himself. This is a catechetical exercise. He’s going to develop a catechism of theology proper and try to respond to himself so he can get back on the rock. And so he starts to talk about God. He says – verse 12 – “Art Thou not from everlasting?” “God, aren’t You eternal?” “You are” is implied. “You are, You’re eternal, which means You’re before history, You’re after history, You’re above history, You’re outside of history, You’re independent of time, You’re independent of history. You reign in eternal timelessness. You’re bigger than this little deal. You’re way beyond this little thing. There is a massive eternal plan that is way bigger than what I’m seeing here. I feel better already. Somehow this fits the eternal perspective, even though I don’t understand how You can do it this way.”

And then he says this: “O Lord,” he uses Yahweh, my God, O Lord my God, Yahweh, that means “I am,” the eternal “I am,” the uncaused cause of all causes and effects. “You are the eternal ‘is.’ No beginning, no end. You are self-existent,” that’s what he’s saying. “God, You are eternal, above, beyond, outside of time and history, and You are self-existing.” In other words, “You are uninfluenced.” Did you know that? Did you know that God by nature is uninfluenced? He is uncreated. He is unperturbed. He is the God who exists in perfect unperturbed tranquility, uninfluenced by anything or anyone. “You’re self-existent so You’re not falling under the spell of someone who is giving You bad information.”

Then he says this: “My Holy One” – “You’re also holy; that means You don’t make a mistake. You’re too perfect to make a mistake. In fact, You’re also so holy You have to deal with sin.” Down in verse 13: “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil and You can’t look on wickedness with favor. So this has got to fit Your holiness. I know, You’re punishing us because of our sin, and if I follow that, You’ll punish them because of their sin, too. God, You’re eternal. God, You’re self-existent. God, You’re

holy.” And then he says, “We will not die. God, You’re faithful.” He’s reminding himself that God made a covenant, we won’t die, we can’t die. God had a covenant. God is true. God can’t lie. Then he says, “Thou, O Lord, hast appointed them to judge.” “You’re almighty. You’re using them for Your own purpose. You’re sovereign. You’re in control. You’re never a victim.”

You see what he’s doing here? “God, You’re eternal. God, You’re self-existent. God, You’re holy. God, You’re faithful. God, You’re almighty. Everything I know about You tells me to quit worrying about this problem even though I don’t understand it. I don’t have to understand it. In the first place, my mind is too small to understand it. What egotism that I should be even trying to understand it.” So Habakkuk is starting to feel better. Just saying that made him feel a lot better – a lot better. Chapter 2 verse 4, he puts it in to a principle. The end of verse 4, “The righteous will live by his” – what? – “faith.” There’s that wonderful statement, “The just shall live by faith,” that Paul uses. He’s starting to sound – “I’m just going to have to trust God for this one. I’m just going to have to believe even though I don’t understand.”

Go to chapter 3 verse 17, see how strong his faith was. Chapter 3 verse 17: “Well,” he says, “I’m going to trust God even though I’m shaking. I’m going to trust my glorious, self-existent, eternal, sovereign, holy, almighty, faithful God.” So – verse 17: “Though the fig tree should not blossom” – not likely, fig trees blossomed, that was normal – “and there be no fruit on the vines” – not likely, that was normal, lots of fruit, lots of vines – “and though the yield of the olive should fail” – boy, that would really have been abnormal.

Do you know those little statues they carve in Bethlehem that we get when we travel over there? They have to cure the wood 400 years before they can carve them cause they’re so full of oil. We saw olive trees in the garden over there that they told us were little seedlings when Jesus walked the earth. Those things last a long time.

He’s saying, “Look, if all the normal things of life you always count on all of a sudden stop and the fields produce no food and the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no cattle in the stalls” – what’s the next verse say? – “yet I will exalt in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength and He has made my feet like the feet of mountain goats and He makes me walk on my high places.” Whew – boy, that’s confidence. He said, “I don’t care if the whole world goes wacky, I don’t care if everything I always depend on falls apart, if everything is reversed, if everything you can always count on you can’t count on anymore, if all of nature is skewed completely out of its normal course, I will still rejoice in the Lord, I will still put my hope in God, and God will give me the ability like a mountain goat to walk upon the precipices along the cliffs of life confidently” is what he’s saying. That’s a stable man. That is a stable man, and his stability was directly related to his assessment of his God.

Now, let me tell you something, folks. The Lord is near and this is the Lord who is near, the capable God of the Scripture, and if you will delight yourself in Him and if you will meditate on His law day and night, on His Word day and night, you will then know the God that He is, and you will know how He acts, and that will be the source of your own confidence.

Now, what is the result of knowing the Lord is near? “Be anxious for” – what? – “nothing.” What am I going to be worrying about? Something God can’t handle? Wait a minute, that’s blasphemy. If you fret, worry, are in trauma, are unstable, if you launch off into everything from anorexia to schizophrenia and all kinds of things, you are really saying, “I can’t cope with life. I can’t handle life.” And if you – whatever mechanism you use to manifest that inability, the real demonstration – and I want to say this with love and graciousness – the real underlying demonstration is you really don’t trust whom? God.

That’s a form of blasphemy. Two ways. One, if you imagine that God can’t help you, then you have created a god other than the true God, and that’s blasphemy. You have created a god who is not God. Two, if you believe that God could help you but won’t, that’s blasphemy, too, because you’re questioning not His character but His integrity and His Word. So the key to a stable, firmly planted life – back to Psalm 1 – is to be delighting in the Lord – I delight in who He is – and meditating on His law, I become very familiar with how He acts. And as I understand who He is and how He acts, I can look at my life and say, “That’s the one who’s near, this is who He is, this is how He acts; I’m not going to worry.” And again I go back to what I said: The great weakness of the Christian church today is a lack of understanding about who God is and how God acts. They do not understand the majesty of His wonderful attributes, and that is why we have such wholesale instability. Because we do not know God, we do not trust God to act consistently with His revealed character and His revealed history of acts.

So what do we do? In the church, we’ve got all these unstable people with all their problems. Instead of giving them God and His character and His attributes and the history of how He functions and how He acts and the amazing integrity of all of His acts, we try to give clever human solutions to the instability, which in the long run projects that instability into a way of life and gives no solution at all.

In the last generation, A. W. Pink in his book *Gleanings in the Godhead* wrote, “The God of this century no more resembles the sovereign of holy writ than does the dim flickering of a candle resemble the glory of the mid-day sun. The God who is talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday school class, and mentioned in so much of the religious literature of the day and preached in most of the so-called Bible conferences, is a figment of human imagination and invention of maudlin sentimentality,” end quote.

We aren’t even giving people a knowledge of the true God in His character and His works. As a result, there is a tremendous lack of confidence in Him. No wonder people have guilt, fear, and

anxiety, have an inadequate knowledge of God and an inadequate trust in God – both are blasphemous. If you imagine God to be other than He is, that's an idol, that's blasphemy. If you imagine God to do other than what is consistent with His own character and promise to His people, that, too, is blasphemy; it questions His integrity. And instead of teaching God and getting people into the Word of God, most churches are trying to patch up the unstable by giving them human solutions and worst of all, psychology, of which even psychologists say it has no answers.

There's only one resting place for the soul and that's in God. We stand fast in the Lord. We stand firm in the Lord, back to verse 1 where he said that. Martin Luther said to Erasmus, "Your thoughts of God are too human." And Paul here is saying what the poet wrote. "I cannot know why suddenly the storm should rage so fiercely round me in its wrath, but this I know – God watches all my path." And as a result, be anxious for nothing. Be anxious for nothing. Stop worrying. Don't get knocked over by trials and temptations and the fact that your little world isn't absolutely perfectly the way you wish it was. That's a form of unconscious blasphemy. Don't worry.

Can I close with this text? Matthew 6. By the way, this teaching of Paul is consistent with the teaching of Jesus, so let's see what our Lord said. Matthew 6:25: "For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, nor for your body as to what you shall put on." Don't worry about that. You say, "We don't worry about that, no, we're a long way from that kind of culture. They were worrying about where am I going to get something to eat? Where am I going to get something to drink? And where am I going to get something to keep warm?" We don't think of – the only time we think about eating, we're worried about eating too much. Our society is worried about drinking too much. The only thing we have to worry about with clothes is not will we have some, but which ones do we choose to wear?

But they had real, basic problems. We've got people today who get all kinds of apoplexy in our world where they have all of that stuff. They're not even struggling with anxieties over real needs, they're only perceived and imaginary peer pressures. They aren't even real needs. Those people had real needs, food and drink and clothing, and Jesus says, "Hey, look at the birds of the air, they don't sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. I mean they don't work to provide for themselves. Your Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they?"

Then in verse 28, He says, "You worried about your clothing? Why don't you look at the lilies of the field? They don't toil and they don't spin, but even Solomon in all his glory didn't clothe himself like one of these." And then in verse 30, the sum of it all: "If God is so concerned with the plants of the field which are alive today and tomorrow are thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you who will live forever, O men of little faith?" Your problem is you're anxious because you don't believe God. That's the bottom line. So don't be anxious then, verse 31. Don't say, "What do we eat? What do we drink?" You know – that kind of fretting, that's behind so many contemporary phobias and anxieties. That's what the pagans seek.

“But Your heavenly Father knows you need all these things. Just seek His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you. Do not be anxious for tomorrow; tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Now, boy, that is a great point. Look, you’ve got enough trouble, why add anxiety to the trouble? Now, you’ve got double trouble. Then you’ve got to go to the counselor – you’ve got triple trouble and it’s going to cost you 75 bucks a week. Look, just take the trouble, will you, and leave it at that? And trust your God.

How can I be stable? Love, seeking peace and harmony in the fellowship of love; joy, cultivating a joy that I have that is deeper than my circumstances that’s in my relationship with the living Christ, and then not only the graciousness but the graciousness of humility that demands nothing, accepts anything, commits it to God, and then that great confident trust in the Lord that knows that He’s got it all under control. That’s how to have a stable life, and there’s more when we come back to our text. Let’s pray.

Our Father, we do thank You for such a clear passage to put us back on course that we might be stable. Help us to know that our stability comes from You. We don’t want to be the product of a confused culture. We don’t want to get diverted down tracks that don’t lead to stability but just lead to increasing instability. We want to be where You want us to be. We want to be delighting in You, and we want to be meditating day and night in Your Word, and we want to be every bit the biblical Spirit-filled Christian that You want us to be who can be stability to those around us, who can be firmly planted like a tree by the streams of waters, flourishing with fruitfulness, prospering, not withering in the midst of a world of chaff, blowing in every direction. Make us stable, Lord, not for stability’s sake but that being firmly planted, we may bear fruit to Your glory in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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