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

Spiritual Stability, Part 4: Thankful Prayer
Scripture: Philippians 4:6b-7
Code: 50-40

Some of you know that a week ago, Patricia and I had the privilege of being on a ship and we were sailing up to Alaska. It was planned by The Master's Communication, our radio and tape ministry. We had about 270 people on this ship who were there because they wanted to study God's Word in the beauty of God's creation. And so as we sailed along through Alaska's inside passage in southeast – area of Alaska, we were teaching the Word of God. We had services each day and we had time in the Word and great fellowship as we shared those days together.

These are people who come from all across America who are really a part of our radio ministry. We had a number of our dear friends from Grace Church with us as well. But we made some marvelous new friends. About two days into the trip, we made friends with some people, a couple who were across the hall from us, and had occasion to sit down and hear their testimony, how that they had been involved in Christless life for a number of years and four years ago had come to faith in Jesus Christ, and after having come to faith in Jesus Christ, they floundered around in the wrong kind of teaching and finally got in His grace, got them plugged into sound Bible study, and more recently they started listening to "Grace To You" and getting tapes.

And they just came on the cruise because they wanted to meet me and to find out if there was a way in which they could even grow more in their Christlikeness. Just two hungry, hungry hearts. This couple was from Colorado. And so we shared some brief fellowship with them during the week, and they were a great encouragement because of their zeal for the Lord. They told me their daughter would be coming to The Master's College next fall and how thrilled and excited they were, having visited the school.

On Friday as I sat down for an evening meal, it was about 8:00 when we were able to eat our dinner, and we sat down and one of the stewards came to me and he said, "Sir, you must come immediately." And I said, "Well, why?" And he was Indonesian and so I wasn't able clearly to understand what he was trying to say but he just said, "You must come," that much he could say, and so I said, "Fine," and I excused myself and I followed him. And he took me down into the stern in the whole of that massive, 45,000-ton ship to the infirmary. And I walked through the doors of the infirmary, and I saw an amazing scene going on.

That infirmary is there for emergencies while at sea, usually sort of heavily involved with people who are seasick or dizzy or have some minor accident or whatever. But when I walked in there, I was

immediately informed by the doctor, the emergency doctor that was there on the ship, that there were three major heart attacks going on and three patients near death in critical condition. And there were three nurses, emergency room nurses, who were moving as rapidly as they could move between these three rooms, taking care of these three serious heart patients. There was not enough monitoring equipment to handle them, and so I volunteered the services of a medical doctor friend of mine who was with us. Went upstairs, got him from his dinner, and he came down and sat and manually monitored one of these patients.

One of them was this gentleman that was across the hall that I had met, a very dear and gracious man with a great name, Thaddeus. And I went in and, of course, the doctor said to me, “You know, he’s nearly dead and we’re trying to save him.” And he said, “I believe strongly in the power of the mind, so you get in there and you strengthen him.” So I went in the room and I took his hand and I began to pray for him, and his wife was praying and pleading with the Lord as she was by his side. She exhibited great faith and great trust in God. And then some others came down, Jim Rickard was there and Don Hescott and some others who were with us there, Mel Hankinson, our coach at the college, and there was this vigil going on and some of the wives came down, and people were praying for this dear man and for his life, which was hanging in the balance.

Well, of course, they injected him with the things that they do, lidocaine and morphine, and they were giving him oxygen and endeavoring to stabilize his very, very unstable heart. He had had two prior heart surgeries, so he had a very unstable heart. And now it was threatening his very life.

Well, after there was some stabilizing and his color began to come back, God was gracious and he passed the crucial point where they really thought they were going to lose him. The doctor whispered to me in the hall that they didn’t think he was going to make it. And so he came through that. It was kind of interesting, the doctor said to me, “Look,” he said, “you had a good effect on this guy. Go next door to the next guy and pray with him.” And so I went next door and I said to his wife, this lady who was sitting there, and I said, “I am a minister and I just would like to pray for your husband.” I said, “I’m just wondering, do you have any religious background or what is your relationship to the Lord?” And she said, “Oh, we’re Methodist.”

And I said, “Oh, do you believe your husband is trusting in Christ for his salvation?” She said, “Oh yeah, all that good stuff. We believe all that good stuff.” And I realized that she didn’t know what was really going on, but I went in and I talked to him for a few minutes and I told him I’d be praying for him, and amazingly enough, he started to get better. This was very, very significant, I think. He started to get better and the third heart attack patient was the one that my friend, the medical doctor, was personally monitoring and praying for himself, and he improved and stabilized.

Well, all of this is very important pre-evangelism for the doctor, who is, you know, watching all this going on and assessing us. He said, “You know, most of the time, I’ll throw people out in a situation

like this because I have to tend to all of them because they're all in a state of disarray because of the anxieties." But he said, "I want you all to stay and just keep doing what you're doing."

Well, after Thaddeus had become stabilized and the whole time he was fighting for his life, I was praying with him and talking with him and he was saying to me, "Don't worry, John, it's all right, don't worry, it's all right, everything is fine, the Lord is in control." And he was saying to his wife, "Now, dear, you know we've got to stand with John and if I'm gone in heaven, you've got to stand with him." "Yes, dear, I'll stand with him and we'll" – and she would say yes to everything that he would say. And finally, the nurse came in that had been attending to him and he said something to her and she leaned down and lifted up his oxygen mask and he said, "Mary, do you know the Lord?" And she, wanting not to distress him said, "Yes." Later conversations indicated that perhaps she didn't.

And then he called the doctor and he wanted to speak to the doctor and the doctor came in and he began to evangelize the doctor and give him the gospel and ask him if he was saved. It was really remarkable. And then he called me over and he wanted to talk to me, and he had some exhortation for me to remain faithful in the ministry, and he said, "You know, I want you to take the material that you've done on the Lordship of Christ and I want you to put it on videotape and I want you to broadcast that across America. That is the message that this nation needs." And he was getting pretty excited, so he was just – he was functioning mentally and from his spiritual perceptions on all cylinders, even though he was nearly dead. He at one point went into shock and the doctor called me in the room to rub his legs, and so we had an all-night vigil, as it turned out. And he was busy evangelizing and making major plans for the future of the ministry that his wife was going to have to carry out if he was gone or he was going to carry out if he remained.

And the marvelous thing about it was that he was so spiritually stable. Here he was at the greatest crisis of his life, a man only 52 years old, at the greatest crisis of his life in total peace, total calm, tranquility of heart, ready to meet Christ, content that the Lord had allowed this to happen, very concerned about the salvation of everybody there, very concerned that I remain faithful to the Lord, that his wife covenant with him that she would help support the ministry, totally at rest before the Lord. And he even said to me later on, he said, "It's so good that all of this happened, God's purpose was brought through to me."

And by the way, God was gracious and the captain of the ship decided to run at full speed, so he fired the ship at full speed, which they don't like to do for a couple of reasons, one being that it's hard on the engine, two being when you're winding your way through the islands of the inside passage, it can get pretty interesting. And we were down there hearing the churning of these great engines all night long.

We stayed with him until – through the whole night. And in the morning got off into the ambulance and went to the hospital with him. And they got him in the hospital and I stayed and missed my bus,

missed my plane, everything, but felt like I couldn't leave because he insisted that I stay and pray with him and fellowship with him, and it was really incredible. Yesterday was the first day I could talk to him on the phone. He's feeling much better now, everything is stabilized, he's on the way to recovery, and he'll be heading home next week and he's really praising the Lord. And as soon as he gets his strength, he wants to come out here and spend some time fellowshipping with me and planning how God can use his life in a greater way.

But it was wonderful to see this man's stability, and the doctor could see it. The doctor could see the unique trust that he had, the strength that he had. During the middle of the night at one particular point, a few of us men were standing around – Don will remember this – and he began to point at everybody's stomach, the doctor. The doctor was quite a specimen, and I think he was probably in his late fifties, about six foot two, weighed about 215, had about a 30-inch waist. He was really something. He trained underwater scuba paramedics and parachute paramedics for rescues at sea and flew across the Yukon territory in the winter, landing on a ski plane to treat the tribes of Indians. Really a rough guy, just amazing guy. But anyway, he began to point at everybody's stomach and say, "You've got to get rid of that, you've got to get rid of that, you've got to get rid of that." He said, "See all these people here, this is what happens, you see. You're 40 percent higher risk if you have that." And he gave this speech.

And after a little while I went up to him – by now we'd become friends because we've been kind of working together there – and I said to him, "Doc," I said, "you know how concerned you are about our physical condition?" He said, "Yes, sir." I said, "That's how concerned I am about your spiritual condition." And he hit me, said, "Fair enough, fair enough." So he said, "Let's talk about it, let's talk about it. I want to tell you about my spiritual pilgrimage." And so he did. And he said, "I'm still in process, I'm still in process." We had a great talk. And by this time now, he is the happy recipient of a box of tapes which have, no doubt, arrived at his place. But the thing that was so encouraging to me was the spiritual stability that was demonstrated by Thaddeus as a testimony to that man, the strength that he demonstrated, the strength that his wife demonstrated, the strength of the others who were there. And afterwards, he commented to me quite at length about that.

All of us, I think, would like to be able to face death, to face the most difficult circumstance of our life, with spiritual stability, wouldn't we? I mean we would like to think that we have the strength to do that. How can we be spiritually stable in the very most trying times? I believe the answer is in Philippians 4. Let's turn to it.

We're studying the 4th chapter of Philippians, and we're learning about spiritual stability – what it takes to be strong in the trying times, times of great temptation, times of great trial, times of persecution, times of great loss in our families, times of confusion, times of distress and illness. How can we be spiritually strong? How can we have that stability that looks death right in the eye and doesn't flinch and doesn't waver and doesn't equivocate and doesn't doubt? How can we have that

kind of calm, that kind of contentment, that kind of peace in the midst of grave difficulty? I think every Christian hungers for that. And that is precisely why every one of us should learn the great truths in this 4th chapter.

Now, the key is in verse 1. Remember now our key phrase, and this is part four in our study of these first nine verses, the key phrase is: Stand firm in the Lord. Stand firm in the Lord. That's what the apostle Paul is really after with the Philippians. He wants them to be strong. He wants them to be rooted and grounded. He wants them to act like men, to be courageous and bold and strong as they stand for the Lord. Then you'll notice the little word "so." "So stand firm." That means "thus" or "in this way" or "here's how I want you to stand firm, here are the components of a firm life, here's what it takes to be spiritually stable against everything that can be thrown at you."

Now, as we start in verse 2, we begin to see the principles of spiritual stability. The first one – and this is by way of review. The first thing that is required to be spiritually stable is to be in an environment of peace or an environment of love in the fellowship. You are to be a peacemaker, cultivating peace in the fellowship of love. And I won't go back over that point, except to say verses 2 and 3 call for harmony in the church. Why? Because loving, peaceful harmony is a stabilizer. When you are in an environment of harmony and an environment of love and an environment of peace in the church, you are stabilized by that environment.

On the other hand, discord, disunity, chaos, division in the church will always produce great insecurity, and it will destabilize people. We went into that in detail. So the first thing that must be cultivated if you're to be a stable Christian is you are to cultivate peace in the fellowship of love. In other words, you are to enjoy the unity of the church, you are to do everything you can to be a peacemaker so that in the peace of the church and in the loving bond of the church, you find spiritual strength.

Second – the second element in spiritual stability is maintaining a spirit of joy. Verse 4 says that we are to "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice." And this joy is based upon our relationship with the Lord, not our circumstances. We are to rejoice in the Lord. In other words, our joy is because of our privileged, permanent union with the Lord. It transcends circumstances. It transcends difficulties, trials, temptations, persecutions, or whatever. We must cultivate that deep-down joy that comes when we understand, contemplate, and live in the light of a privileged union with the living Lord Jesus Christ.

So spiritual stability comes, then, to those who are experiencing peace and love in the fellowship. It comes to those who have maintained a spirit of joy no matter what the difficulty is because they can focus on their relationship with the Lord, which is always a cause for joy no matter what difficulty comes. Thirdly, spiritual stability requires learning to accept less than you deserve, learning to accept less than you are due. And here is the spiritual grace of humility. This is contentment. Verse 5 says,

“Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men.” That means your contentment, your humble graciousness. It’s the idea that you expect nothing, you demand nothing. And if you expect nothing and demand nothing, and if you rightly assess your sinfulness and know you deserve nothing, then you don’t mind when you get nothing. That’s the bottom line. That’s the essence of humility. But if I wrongly assess my worthiness and assume that I am worthy of much and deserve much, if I don’t get much, I’m very upset and unstable.

But in true humility, when I have no demands and I seek nothing for myself and I know I deserve nothing for myself, I will never be disappointed when I get nothing for myself and when I am mistreated. You can be spiritually stable in the most difficult time, when you are hated, when you are despised, when you are rejected, when you are persecuted, if you understand that as an unworthy sinner you don’t deserve anything anyway, and you should be grateful for the grace of God, which is yours, and not expect anything beyond that.

Then fourthly, and last time we noted this in some detail, spiritual stability demands resting on a confident faith in the Lord. It demands resting on a confident faith in the Lord. Verse 5 says, “The Lord is near;” verse 6 says, “be anxious for nothing.” That’s sequential. We’re talking about here “near,” eggus, in the sense of space, if we can use that as a designation, as opposed to time. It is true that the Lord is near in the sense of His second coming, but that’s not really the priority here. The Lord is near in terms of His presence. And because the Lord is near, we’re not anxious for anything. So spiritual stability, then, is predicated on a confident faith in the Lord. That’s the bottom line.

Remember what we’ve been saying? The way you handle problems, temptations, trials, difficulties, is a reflection of your view of God. If you understand the Lord and who He is and all His power and all His promise and all His resources and purposes and plans toward you and you also understand that He’s always near, then where’s the cause for anxiety? What are you going to be anxious about?

If you understand that God is sovereign, God is loving, if you understand that God is in control of everything in your life for His glory and your good, if you understand that nothing is beyond the purview of God’s control, if you understand that He’s orchestrating everything for eternal purpose and you can rest in that confident faith, then you’re going to be stable in the most serious times. In fact, Thaddeus was saying, “God has a purpose in this, this is the Lord’s doing, God has a purpose in this. We must see the Lord’s purpose.” That is exactly right. That kind of faith will hold you through the gravest difficulty.

The Psalmist really extols God as the strong protector and emphasizes his faith in many of the Psalms, but perhaps none more strongly and firmly than Psalm 31 where he writes, “In Thee, O Lord, I have taken refuge, let me never be ashamed. In Thy righteousness deliver me, incline Thine ear to me, rescue me quickly, be Thou to me a rock of strength, a stronghold to save me, for Thou art my rock and my fortress, for Thy namesake Thou will lead me and guide me. Thou will pull me out of the

net which they have secretly laid for me, for Thou art my strength. Into thy hands I commit my spirit. Thou hast ransomed me, O Lord God of truth." In other words, "You're true to what You say and I trust in You." That confident faith is the bottom line in your ability to deal with difficulty.

When people have difficulties that they can't solve, when they get into problems that debilitate them and raise their anxiety level and cause all kinds of personal trauma, the right answer isn't "You need to go to someone who can talk about your problem." That is not the right answer. The right answer is "You need to better understand the God who is sovereign over your problem." That is the answer. It is a fallacy to assume that some kind of careful human analysis of the problem is going to provide the solution. The solution is to understand "I am a fallen person, I live in a fallen world, it is cursed and I bear the mark of that curse in my own fallen flesh. This is what is to be expected. I will rest in the confident faith that my God is sovereign over all this fallenness to effect His own eternal purposes." That's the solution to the problem, that perspective. An adequate knowledge of God is essential in the matter of spiritual stability.

The Scripture, for example, is the revelation of God so that in knowing Scripture, we know God. In knowing God, we can predict how He is acting, we can predict what His purposes are and thus be content. In fact, in Ephesians 6, when the believer gets into intense spiritual combat with the forces of the enemy, spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies, principalities, and powers, when we're in hand-to-hand battle with demons, it says that our feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. The feet of a Roman soldier had to be prepared with something and they wore a hobnail boot.

This boot was leather and nails were driven through from the inside. Those nails would grip the ground like a football or a baseball or a track shoe would grip the ground in athletics, only in that particular situation, you were in hand-to-hand combat for life and death. It wasn't a game; it was real. And so they had these boots that they were able to anchor in the soil and not slip and slide and thus cause a great amount of vulnerability.

Now, what Paul says is that what makes you stand firm, what anchors your feet, is the gospel of peace. "What do you mean by that, Paul?" "What I mean is that you are a participant in the good news that you are at peace with God." Another way to say that, "God's on your side." What anchors you in battle is the confidence that God is on your side. He's not your enemy; He's your friend, He's your resource, He's your power. So I am anchored in spiritual battle by the confidence that I am at peace with God; therefore, God is at peace with me; therefore, God is on my side to be my defender, as the Psalmist said, my rock, my strong defender. That's stability. You can be stable in any situation if you understand your God and you understand His sovereign control and His sovereign purposes and His great omnipotence that can overpower anything.

Now, let me just digress for a moment to share a burden on my heart. One of the curses on this culture, this Christian culture in which we live in America today, is really the reflection of traditional

Arminian theology. Traditionally, through the years, the Arminian theology and the Calvinistic theology have sort of been at opposite poles. Arminian theology is distinct from Calvinistic theology in terms of principle. For example, traditional Reformed theology that we call Calvinism says God is sovereign. Arminian theology, in effect, says man is sovereign. That's the primary difference.

Now, Arminian theology is pervasive in our culture today. It's pervasive in the church, and even in some churches that wouldn't say they believe in it, it's still pervasive. More subtly so, but it's there. Arminian theology says that man is sovereign. God is hopeful and God is helpful, but man is sovereign. You've got to find it in yourself to come to Christ, you've got to find it in yourself to stay with Christ, you've got to find it in yourself to accomplish your spiritual goals, to win your spiritual victories, with the knowledge that God is hopeful that you will because He'd like to see you in heaven if you could work it out and He's also helpful. Given the right conditions on your part, He'll come along and give you some assistance.

So what happens in this kind of theology? Well, the first thing that happens is that a man may profess Christ, think himself to be a Christian, and never experience the shattering of his own confidence in himself. In other words, the typical Arminian person – and I don't say that in the racial sense but the theological sense – a typical Arminian person, a person who believes that salvation is something he chooses to do on his own, is going to come to salvation and say, "Wasn't I" – what? – "smart to do that?" I have heard a testimony recently, as recently as a few months ago, where a guy said, "I had the sense to commit my life to Christ." Oh, you did, did you? So what happens is this person is now professing Christ without ever experiencing the shattering of his own confidence in himself. He believes he has the power to choose salvation. He believes he has the power, by the way, to unchoose it. He also has the impotence to lose it.

Can you imagine facing death? Lying on a bed and realizing that you had the power to choose Christ if you wanted or thinking that to be true and you had the power to lose Christ if you failed and wondering how in the world you were facing God at that particular moment? Can you imagine battling in your heart the feeling that you might be saved or you might not be saved if you committed too many sins and got disqualified? There wouldn't be a lot of security in that – there might be a lot of anxiety. But, you see, this particular kind of person who believes that they choose to be saved on their own and it's sort of all up to them to stay saved and to fight their spiritual battles has never experienced the shattering of confidence in himself. Therefore, he does not understand what it means to totally trust God.

Furthermore, because he knows God in reality only as hopeful and helpful rather than sovereign, he does not totally trust God. Consequently, he lives with tremendous anxiety. He doesn't understand a sovereign God; therefore, he doesn't understand sovereign grace. He doesn't understand the total divine working power of the eternal God on his behalf. He doesn't understand that he was chosen by God, that he was redeemed by God, that he is kept by God, that he'll be glorified by God, and that

every trial of his life is under the total control of God. If his trouble is a result of his sin, then it's chastening to make him perfect. If his trouble is not the result of his sin, it still fits the purpose of God for his own good and God's glory in some way that he may at that moment not understand. But it's all in God's plan.

But see, if you don't ever understand the shattering of your own confidence in yourself, which then abandons you to God, then you're not going to totally trust God. And that's why I say what I've been saying all along: If you are going to be stable in the tough times of life, it is born out of an absolute distrust of yourself and a total trust in the sovereign God of grace and power. And if you trust that God, you stand stable.

So believers who really know their God can say, "My God is in this; my God has His purposes." Spurgeon once said, "If you believe that everything turns on the free will of man, you will naturally have man as the principle figure in your landscape," end quote. Now, you're really stuck with a dilemma because you know how weak man is and you know how fickle man is, so you have every reason to be full of anxiety. People with right theology shouldn't have anxiety problems. People who believe the truth – I really believe that this pervasive sort of Arminian theology that exists in the church today is the precursor to all this anxiety of people who still believe they've got to orchestrate their life and it's sort of on their own. They've got to try to do it with the help of some well-meaning people who've got some formulas that might work. This is foolishness.

One manifestation of it is this new thing about binding Satan, binding demons. What are you doing – people running around saying, "I bind you, Satan," "I command you, Satan." I hear them doing that all the time. I read it in books, I see it on the television, I hear it on Christian radio and preachers binding Satan. Listen, let me tell you two things. Number one, Satan doesn't listen to you. What do you think you're doing? You don't have any power to tell him to do one thing. And why in the world would he do it anyway? Who are you? You can't even get your kids to do what you tell them. Who are you kidding telling Satan what to do, telling demons what to do?

Do you know even Michael the archangel in Jude wouldn't bring a railing accusation against Satan. That was territory he didn't even belong in. That's foolishness. Who do you think you are? You see, that comes out of a theology that says man is powerful, and that is again an Arminian theology that does not have the shattering of man's confidence in himself. I've got nothing to say to demons. I've got nothing to say to Satan. In fact, there's no illustration in the Bible in the New Testament that anybody ever talked to Satan. Nobody goes around, "Satan, get away," "Satan, you do this," "Satan, I'm commanding you" – you don't do that, that's ridiculous.

Furthermore, what it tells me is you must be very powerful because the One who does have control of Satan is whom? God. And if you're running around taking over for Him, boy, you've got an exalted view of yourself. You better get back on track, my friend. You better have a shattering of all

confidence in your own flesh and total trust in a sovereign God, and if you've got a complaint with the powers of darkness, then go to the One who is over them, and that's our living God. This is absolute folly on the part of these people who do this. See, they don't understand the weakness of man, they think they've got some kind of great power. They run around throwing this weight around as if all the demons were scurrying at their command. Foolish. They neither understand the weakness of man nor do they understand the great power of a sovereign God. They play silly games of a weak theology. Spiritual stability comes to those who understand their God and understand that He is near and that everything is in His plan, and there's no anxiety.

So spiritual stability is the result of strong peace in the fellowship of love, the result of a rejoicing heart in all situations because of our relationship to Christ, the result of humble acceptance of every difficulty and inequity because we know we don't deserve anything anyway, and the result of a strong confident faith in our great God.

Number five – this fits. We've already talked about the virtues: peace, love, joy, humility, faith. Here's another virtue of a stable Christian: gratitude. This point is spiritual stability calls for reacting to problems with thankful prayer. Reacting to problems with thankful prayer. Verse 6: "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God," and we'll stop at that point. Here is the antidote to worry, here is relief from anxiety.

By the way, this section does not emphasize the theology of prayer; it emphasizes the importance of prayer and the attitude of prayer. It's not really a study of the theology of prayer. There are three different words for prayer used here. They're translated prayer, supplication, and request. They all have to do with petitions, and the assumption is that when you get into a problem, you're going to cry out to God, right? I mean that's natural. You're going to cry out to God.

But what Paul is saying is, instead of crying out to God in your difficulty with doubt, with questionings, with dissatisfaction, with discontent, blaming God, cry out to God with what attitude? Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving. Well, you say, "Why?" Well, because you know that He's the God of promise who has promised that nothing's ever going to come in your life that's too much for you to bear, that He is the God of promise who is working all things for your good. He is the God of promise who is causing you to suffer a while in order that you might be made perfect, that you might be settled, that you might be established, 1 Peter 5:10.

In other words, you see in all the difficulty God's purpose and you thank Him, and you thank Him for the available power you know is there. And you thank Him for the promises which He never will violate instead of questioning God, doubting God, sort of shaking your fist at God. He says "in everything." That's like 1 Peter 5:7, "casting all your care on Him." "In everything." When you pray and supplicate and request to God, in the process of doing that, do it with thanksgiving, thankful for His purposes, thankful for His providence, thankful for His power, thankful for His promise, thankful for

His perfecting work, thankful for the hope of relief, thankful for the hope of glory, thankful that it is His Will, thankful that He's doing exactly what He wants in your life to accomplish what He wants, thankful for past mercies that are the foundation of future blessings.

You see, prayer should always be with thankfulness. This immediately releases me from fear and worry because I see God's purpose in it. I never question His purpose. I know my God is sovereign. I know He orchestrates all things for my good – Romans 8:28 – and His glory. I know that. Whatever may come, He can turn to His own praise and to my growth and so I'm thankful. I'm thankful that He knows the problem. I'm thankful that He can deal with the problem. I'm thankful for His knowledge, His power, His promise – all of that. All three of those words, by the way, refer to specific direct requests – prayer, supplication, request. They all assume that in difficulty, you go to God, but the issue here is the thankful heart. And if you really know your God and you can thank Him in the midst of all of this, you have spiritual stability.

I'm – this is so basic, folks. I watch people who are worried and fretting and anxious and troubled about everything, and the bottom line is they do not trust that everything is under the control of God for their good and His glory. They can't handle that. Either they don't understand their God or the sin in their life has caused them to have a weak faith in the God they do know to be a sovereign God. If you understand that my God shall supply all your needs, if you understand that God knows everything in your life and cares about it, if you understand that God has the power for every difficulty, if you understand that God is perfecting you to be like Christ, if you understand that nothing escapes God and nothing is outside of His tolerance and His purposes, then why would you fear and be anxious about anything? I mean get in touch with the reality of it.

Now, what is the result of a thankful heart? Verse 7. Verse 7: "And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." I would venture to say that everybody with a problem would like to find peace, right? We'd like to find tranquility, we'd like to find contentment, some kind of inner calm in the midst of the difficulty. Would you please note that that's precisely what verse 7 promises? Now, I need to just give you a little bit of a thought here. In the middle of difficulty, when you're pleading and supplicating and praying to God, and you have a thankful heart, the answer is not the issue. Did you hear that? The answer is not the issue. It doesn't say that if you will pray and you will supplicate and you will request to God with thanksgiving, God will answer your prayer the way you want. Doesn't say that. It says nothing about the answer. It says whatever the answer may be and whenever the answer may come, God will give you what? Peace. That's the issue – that's the issue.

What is the peace of God? Well, it's the peace which God possesses and gives to us. It's inward peace, Godlike peace given to us. That's what provides the calm. Would you please note again it is a gift from God to one who prays thankfully? This is building to a spiritual crescendo. As you exist in an environment of love and peace, be a peacemaker, as you focus on your relationship to the living

Christ, as you have a humble heart, not demanding anything, as you begin to know your God, understand your God, and trust your God so that in the middle of grave difficulties when you're pouring out your prayers before that God, you can do so with thanksgiving. God, in response to that kind of heart attitude, dispenses His peace. That's the promise. He grants you His peace.

Listen to Isaiah 26:3: "The steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace because he trusts in Thee." That's it. You trust in God, you get a steadfast mind, God keeps you in peace. That's how to face life with stability.

So much wrong advice. So much trust in man's ability. So much distrust in God's sovereignty that we have sent people down the wrong path. Beloved, I don't care what the problem is in your life. I don't care what the difficulty is that creates anxiety, psychosis, neurosis – whatever it is. If you understand who your God is, if you can take every issue of life with a thankful heart as you pray and ask him for deliverance, in the midst of it all, the promise of the Word is that God will give you peace. Now, what kind of peace is it? Please notice verse 7. It is peace which surpasses all comprehension. What does that mean? It's not human, it's not rational, it transcends intellectual powers, it transcends analysis, it transcends man's insights, it transcends man's understanding, man's definition, man's explanation. It is not human. You don't go to man to get it. Did you hear that? You go to God to get it.

There's no counselor in the world that can give it to you. There's no therapy in the world that can give it to you. There's no technique in the world that can give it to you. It is a gift of God to a believer who so confidently understands and trusts his God that he is thankful in the trial, and out of his thanksgiving, God responds by granting him peace – supernatural peace.

Boy, are there a lot of cheap substitutes being offered for that today. It is beyond any approach that attempts to reason your troubles away. It is superior to human scheming, superior to human devices, superior to human solutions, superior to any so-called human security. I can simply sum it up by saying the real challenge of Christian living – please note this because it runs cross-grain to our culture – the real challenge of Christian living is not to see if you can eliminate every uncomfortable issue in your life. The real issue of Christian living is to see if you can trust your infinitely holy sovereign and powerful God in the midst of every situation and have His perfect peace.

People are running around trying to create a perfect world so they'll be happy. They don't like the way they look. They don't like the way they're shaped. They don't like the way their mother treated them. They don't like the way their father treated them. They were abused. They were misunderstood. They weren't treated properly. They don't like the way their husband treats them. They don't like the way their wife treats them. They don't like the way their kids are turning out. They don't like the place they live. They hate their job. And out of all of these things come all these petty anxieties. Sooner we should learn we are fallen people, we live in a fallen world – that's the way it's going to be. And the great reality is that our glorious sovereign God has overruled our fallenness. It says it – doesn't it? –

in John 16:33: “In this world you shall have tribulation but be of good cheer” – what? – “I have overcome the world.”

When are we going to start living on the supernatural plane and accepting that we live in a fallen world and wait for the overcoming God to do His perfect work in us here and someday in the glory to come? I must accept the fact that I’m a fallen person living with fallen people in a fallen world and there are manifestations of that fallenness all over the place. There will never be the tranquility I would like circumstantially in this world, but I will find my peace from God as I entrust everything confidently into His care.

Now, notice what this peace does, verse 7. “The peace of God which surpasses all comprehension shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Guard you from what? From anxiety, from doubt, from fear, from distress. This is a great truth. That term “shall guard” is a military term. It literally means shall keep guard over, shall protect. The Philippians lived in a garrison town where Roman soldiers were stationed to watch out for the Roman interests in that part of their world. They knew what a sentry was, what a guard was, what a garrison was – a protector. And what Paul says – look, he says, if you know your God and you know your God is near and you confidently trust your God in the midst of any trial, knowing that it is effecting His purpose, and then being thankful in the midst of that for the purpose of God even in the difficulty, you are granted the peace of God, that peace will guard you and protect you from anxiety, difficulty, distress, dissatisfaction, discontent, doubt.

Bunyan had a beautiful picture of this. You remember in Holy War, he has the picture of the city called Mansoul, and it’s representative of the soul of man. And he has the prince, Prince Emmanuel who, of course, is Christ, and then he has this special character called Mr. Godspeace. And Mr. Godspeace is in the town of Mansoul, he’s on patrol, and his job is to guard the town. Bunyan writes, “Nothing was to be found but harmony, happiness, joy, and health so long as Mr. Godspeace maintained his office.” And Bunyan talks about how the town Mansoul grieved Prince Emmanuel. Prince Emmanuel left and Mr. Godspeace laid down his commission and chaos resulted. That’s what happens in the Christian life.

When Christ is out of our thoughts, when we no longer see things in the light of how He views them, when we no longer are under, as it were, the confidence in His sovereignty, then all of a sudden Mr. Godspeace doesn’t function anymore and we’re left with troubled minds and troubled hearts. But where we have that confident trust in the Lord, so much so that we can thank Him in the midst of our petitions, then we have Mr. Godspeace on duty, and he is the protector of the peace of our souls. That couldn’t be a clearer perspective for all of us to understand.

Now, why does he mention hearts and minds? Some say, “Well, there’s a distinction.” I think not. I don’t think he’s trying to delineate between the heart and the mind; he’s just trying to make a

comprehensive statement. We could say the heart is the seat of personhood and the mind is the seat of thought, and whatever, but I think he's just saying your hearts and minds in a general sense, saying he'll guard your whole inner person, this Mr. Godspeace. He'll guard them in Christ Jesus. Because you're in union with Christ, you have this guardianship.

So – spiritual stability. How can you face the inevitable day of your death? What if you had a coronary? What if you're told that you have cancer? What if one of your children is tragically taken from you? What about the difficulties that you face right now in your life, how do you face them with spiritual stability? How do you stand your ground?

First of all, it requires, I believe, the stability of the church. I believe we all have to hold each other up. And where you have a strong, unified, peaceful, loving church, you find great strength in the individual members. Secondly, you must maintain a spirit of joy, and that means constantly cultivating your relationship to the living Christ so it's the source of joy for you all the time, no matter what may be going on around you. Thirdly, you have to learn to be humble and not expect anything because we don't deserve anything anyway and not feel like you got cheated or dealt a dirty deal or that God gave you the short end of the stick, we who are so utterly unworthy of anything. And then you must rest on a confident faith in the Lord you understand and trust Him to be consistent with Himself as revealed in Scripture and then react to your problems with thankful prayer, and the promise of God is that peace will guard you; peace, tranquility, contentment. Well, Paul has a couple of other things to say but he won't get to say them until next week. Let's bow together in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for the confidence we have, confidence in You. I thank You also for the lack of confidence we have in ourselves. We thank You for the shattering of our own trust in ourselves that causes us to totally trust in You. O God, we do commit our lives to You and we do long to pray with thanksgiving, no matter how difficult that might be because we know that You have an overarching purpose that is coming to pass for our good and Your glory and thus to know the peace which You alone can give. May we live in such tranquility of heart that the world around us will be as amazed as that medical doctor was on that ship at the peace in the heart of a man facing death. Give us that stability to stand confidently, joyfully, thankfully, no matter what. We love You. We entrust ourselves again to You for the outworking of Your holy purpose in the Savior's name. Amen.

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