

# Spiritual Stability

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Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, how good it is to be gathered with the saints on the Lord's day. To be able to look around the room and even though I don't know a lot of people here, to know that I belong among the saints; that I'm part of Your people. Lord, we're glad to be gathered among the precious saints of God. We're glad to worship the Lord Jesus Christ today. We're glad to lift up His name. We're glad to exult in the gospel of our salvation. We thank You for the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus in which we place our only hope for time and eternity. Lord, we thank You for Your Word that You've given us. And we thank You for the Holy Spirit. And we pray for the help of the Spirit today that the Spirit may apply the Word; that He might give us understanding; that He might open our eyes to spiritual reality in some way. Lord, for each one, that You'd have something for us from this particular hour. Oh Father, our eyes are upon You, and our confidence is in You today. Glorify Thyself, we ask. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Well, I remember back, I guess a few months ago when things started brewing between Evan and Charity. I did have the thought: "Well, maybe this will be the year we'll finally make it down and visit San Antonio." And sure enough, in the providence of God, here we are. So glad to be able to be here today. To be among you precious brothers and sisters to worship the Lord Jesus. I suspect most of us here would say that we're Christians. And so, I'd ask you that are Christians to participate in a little exercise with me this morning, right at the beginning. Over here, I know you all have a screen used for songs. Imagine that projected on that screen was a chart of your Christian life. On the left side, beginning when you were converted all the way over to the right side being today. And there's a squiggly line on there representing your sanctification. Your growth in grace. Your relationship with the Lord Jesus over time.

I'm asking you to imagine that for yourself. Everybody's got a different chart, right? Our lives have been unique - our walk with the Lord. What does your chart look like this morning? What does your chart look like? Now some of you are going to have a line that just kind of steadily goes up over time. That's really great! Praise the Lord if that's the case. Some of you might have a chart where the line starts upward for a little ways, and then just falls off the table and disappears. That's really bad. You're probably not even a Christian in that case. But then I suspect a bunch of us have a chart where the line is really jagged. It's up and down, and up and down, up and down. Peaks and valleys, hit and miss, herky-jerky. Wild, volatile swings. At times, you're a blazing fireball of zeal for Jesus, and other times you're down in the dumps of depression and disobedience and unbelief. Or just think about, more recently in your Christian life. Just think the last year or two. How consistent has your walk with the Lord been recently?

I want to speak to you this morning on the subject of spiritual stability. Or the long title would be: "The Underappreciated Virtue of Spiritual Stability." Stability in the Christian life. I mean we usually appreciate steadiness, consistency, stability, in other areas of life, don't we? We like to have a spouse that's really stable and loyal from day to day. We like to have co-workers at our jobs that are that way. That are consistent, steady, reliable, stable. We even appreciate this in ball-players, don't we? That they're stable and consistent. You know, just a few

years ago we lauding Cal Ripken Jr. and then Brett Favre for their streaks of consecutive games played. Just the fact they played so many games in a row. That was a big deal. We appreciate it in those fields. This message is about how we should strive for those same qualities in our Christian walk.

Let me describe a certain type of brother, I imagine you have many in the church here in San Antonio. He's a brother that seems like a pretty ordinary man. An ordinary sort of job. Ordinary sort of family. He's a guy who does not do open-air preaching. He is not a foreign missionary. He's not a theology expert. He maybe doesn't say a whole lot in your church meetings even. But listen. Listen, this brother, he reads his well-marked Bible through every year. Every morning, you can find him alone with God pouring out his heart in prayer. He shows up at just about every single church meeting he can possibly be at. He wants to be there! He wants to be an encouragement to the brethren without causing trouble. He's generous, he's helpful in every way he can be. His family is a joy to be around! He walks with God with a clear conscience from day to day. I tell you there is glory in that ordinary brother's life. There is great grace from God in his life. What is it? He's stable. He's consistent. He's pressing on! He's enduring. He's running the race with endurance to the end. That's what we're talking about today. Praise God for that grace!

Some of you here are maybe like that brother. Maybe some of you are actually discouraged; actually thinking, "Well, this year looks an awful lot like last year. There's not a lot of big things changing here!" Well, maybe this message can encourage you. It's a good thing to be stable in your walk with Jesus. Or maybe the other hand, some of you here are unstable unbelievers. Maybe everything spiritual for you is all hit and miss, herky-jerky. Up and down, hot and cold, inconsistent. And you realize, "Yeah, that's a need in my life!" Well, we're going to talk about some ways to get better at that - to become a more stable Christian, in your walk with the Lord. So, there's just so much Scripture on this and you start looking for it, it's like, there's all these different Bible verses really pointing at this basic thought. But, I'm just going to look today with you at a few Scriptures and along the way I want to point out seven characteristics of stable Christians.

So let's start by turning to Psalm 1. The first psalm. Psalm 1:1. "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. 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. The wicked are not so. But they are like chaff, which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous, for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the path of the wicked will perish."

So the righteous man here is described in verse 3 as what? He's described as a tree - a tree planted by streams of water. A tree with roots that go down into that perpetually moist soil around that stream. He's always nourished from that water that's coming past all the time. He is stable and he's thriving there! By contrast, we have the wicked in verse 4. It says, "They're like the chaff that the wind drives away." What a picture. Just little dry husks. The wind just drives it away. It's a contrast, isn't it? Between the stability of the righteous man, like the tree, and the chaos of the lost man. If you are not a Christian today, this is how God pictures your life! This is

reality for you! You're like chaff that the wind drives away. There is no stability outside of Jesus Christ. That's the big problem in your life! You need to know Jesus! You need to become a Christian. And turn from your sin, put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. You can be like this tree.

### **Stable Christians are Fruitful**

Well, what can we learn from this picture then about spiritual stability? Well, the first thing to point out is that stable Christians are fruitful. Stable Christians are fruitful. This tree isn't just there, but it's a fruitful tree, right? Verse 3 says, "It yields its fruit in its season." And then it says, "In whatever he does, he prospers." So, there's life. There's growth. There's fruitfulness. There's progress happening in the life of this saint. Fruitfulness. What does fruitfulness look like in our lives as believers? I assume the first text we think of in that regard is Galatians 5. The fruit of the Spirit, right? These character qualities that the Spirit produces within believers. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The stable Christian will be producing more love, more joy, more peace, and so on. Will be producing these character qualities in their life.

But you know, it's also biblical to think of our fruitfulness in terms of what we do; in terms of our service to the Lord - what we do for Him. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:58 - that last verse in that long chapter - he says, "Therefore, my brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." You see how he combines the two thoughts of stability on the one hand and fruitfulness on the other. Be steadfast and immovable that you might be abounding in the work of the Lord. You see at times ministry, at times service to the Lord, there's times it's not as fun as other times. There's times where you're discouraged, right? And you think, what's the use? Why are we messing around with this? And you start casting your eyes about at different greener pastures perhaps. Well, very often, the right answer is just be stable. Just be where you're at. Just be fruitful right there where God has you in that place.

I thought too of this application. And I don't know how it is here in your church, but I know in many churches, there's some young men that have thoughts - I was in this spot once - have these thoughts about, maybe I'm going to be a preacher someday. Maybe the Lord is calling me to some kind of ministry work in the future. If you're in that spot; if anybody's here in that spot, my question to you, brother, is how stable is your Christian life? How stable is your basic walk with the Lord Jesus? If it's all up and down; if it's unstable, you're not going to be producing much fruit. And that instability of your life is going to hold you back from doing all this stuff for the Lord that you imagine yourself doing. It's going to hold you back way more than your Greek skills will hold you back or your ability to cobble together a sermon will hold you back. Is your walk with the Lord stable? Is it consistent? Is it solid like this fruitful tree here?

### **Stable Christians Avoid Bad Influences**

Well, the second thing we see here about stable Christians is that they avoid bad influences. You see that in verse 1. It says, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the path of sinners, or sit in the seat of scoffers." You see, if you want to be a stable, fruitful Christian, you've got to be careful about who is influencing you. We are all affected by the people around us, the friends we have, the things we're listening to,

the things we're taking in from the media, the entertainment stuff that we're into, the websites we read. We're affected by all these things. The Bible talks about it a bunch of places and it can affect the stability of your walk with the Lord. If you've got bad influences, it can cause you to doubt God. It can cause you to become discontent. It can defile your conscience with foul stuff. It can cause a worldly way of thinking to begin to influence you and change how you think about spiritual things. It makes a difference for us. You start to lose touch with spiritual reality and before long, the chart over there kind of takes a nosedive. Why? You're hanging out with scoffers too much. It's affecting you. And so in order to become more spiritually stable, you might have to cut off certain things - certain habits where you say this is not good for my soul. I need to change this. And so you maybe lay aside - maybe you have to lay aside some friends or some of the media you consume. Of course, we want to be evangelizing lost people. That's what people say. I want to witness to my lost friends. And of course, we want to be doing that. Jesus hung out with sinners that He might witness to them. The crucial thing is who is influencing who in this deal. Be careful. Maybe scoffers are influencing you too much rather than vice versa.

There's actually a similar thought to this over in Proverbs 24:21. It says, "My son, fear the Lord and the king. Do not associate with those who are given to change." Interesting verse. Do not associate with those given to change. Who are these people given to change? Well, it's unstable people. It's up and down people. Have you noticed this often? That unstable people tend to gravitate towards other unstable people? And they don't help each other very much. It's so much better; so much better if the shaky person would seek out the solid, mature saints, like that brother I described at the beginning. Maybe he's not the coolest guy in the church, but if you'd seek him out; if you'd hang out with him, you could learn a lot. He'd be really good for your soul in a lot of ways.

### **Stable Christians are Consistent in Spiritual Disciplines**

A third thing about stable Christians is that they are consistent in spiritual disciplines. Look at verse 2. It says of this stable saint, it says, "his delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law, he meditates day and night." This guy's in the Bible, isn't he? He's in the Bible. I mean, we're happy to get somebody reading the Bible once a day. This guy's in it day and night. I mean, his life is saturated with the Scriptures. Now, there are Christians - maybe there's some even here - who if you had to give a report publicly of your Bible reading over the last year, you'd be ashamed. You'd be ashamed for others to know your own Bible reading. Maybe you go days at a time and don't read anything at all. And maybe it's just kind of this haphazard, just sort of jump around here and there in the Word. I was that way for a while in my life. I know there were seasons like that. And you know what was going on during those seasons? The chart was looking real bad. It was going down. When you're inconsistent in the Word, it's like everything else suffers. Brethren, there's some of you that haven't read certain wonderful books of the Old Testament since the Bush Administration or something. There's wonderful things in that Bible. If we don't see them regularly, we forget they're there. There's just riches in God's Word.

But look at this guy in Psalm 1. It's not just that he's disciplined, but he's also delighting, right? Those are the two things you have to hold on to, right? Both discipline and delight. Verse 2, "his delight is in the law of the Lord." How is it that he's able to enjoy the Bible? It says, "in His

law, he meditates day and night." I think that's the key to it. He's meditating on the Word. He's not just grinding along. "I'm going to read my two chapters today." Not just reading across the tops of the words, like we often do, but he's meditating on the Word. He's stopping. He's praying over it. He's seeking to apply it to himself. He's seeking to obey the Word of God. He's meditating on it, and it's become his delight now. And now he can't get enough of it. He's soaking in the Word day and night. It's a wonderful picture here. The daily feeding on Scripture. It's like the streams of water that keep supplying this tree that's planted by the stream.

Now, I know Psalm 1 here - it's just talking about consistency in the Bible, but could we broaden the application a little bit and just include spiritual disciplines generally? I assume you guys are familiar with Don Whitney's book on spiritual disciplines? Really, a fine, helpful work. I think he covers like a dozen things in there. I mean, who's going to keep track of a dozen things? I tend to talk about three things with the guys in our church, if you'll do these three things, you're probably going to be pretty solid: Bible, prayer, and church. Bible, prayer, and church. If you're in the Bible every day, if you have a time of private prayer - real private prayer, not just saying a couple sentences in the car, but real private prayer with God - and then thirdly, if you're involved in church life in a thorough, healthy way, if you do those three things consistently, you'll probably grow like crazy. There's great grace that comes through just doing the basic means of grace that God has given to us. So, anyway, this fellow in Psalm 1, he's consistent in the spiritual disciplines.

### **Stable Christians Can Handle the Trials of Life**

A fourth thing about stable Christians is that they can handle the trials of life. And I get that from verse 3 where it says that, "its leaf does not wither." Its leaf does not wither. So picture this time of terrible drought in the land, and all around this tree, there are plants that are withering. There are even trees that are dropping their leaves and about to die. It's a bad scene out there. And then you look over at this tree by the water, and he's still doing just fine. His leaves aren't dropping. His leaves aren't even withering. He's continuing to thrive in the midst of the drought. There in Jeremiah, the prophet uses a really similar picture to this. I'll just read it - Jeremiah 17:7. He says, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, for he will be like a tree planted by the water that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes, but its leaves will be green; it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit." That's it exactly. The tree that's stable can handle the drought; can handle the hard times, the trials of life. See, spiritual stability is not the idea of, well, I'm doing okay now, and I'll do okay as long as nothing bad happens. See, that won't get you very far because bad stuff is going to happen. It's promised to us. There will be tribulation. There will be hard trials. A verse on that - 1 Thessalonians 3:3. Paul says, "that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions, for you yourselves know we've been destined for this." He says you've been destined - for what? Destined for afflictions. He says I'm telling you this so that you'll not be disturbed by them; you'll not be destabilized by the afflictions when they come. I'm telling you in advance, you're destined for this that the Lord might sustain you when it arises.

You see this sometimes though. Somebody seems to be a Christian; they seem to be doing okay, but some crisis happens. Something happens in their family. Something happens with their kids or their job or something, and it's like they just fall apart. You know, they start

missing meetings, stop communicating, become distant and disappear. It doesn't have to be that way. Psalm 55:22 is such a wonderful promise. Do you know this promise? It says, "Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you. He will never allow the righteous to be shaken." So here's this burden, right? Here's this problem that is weighing down on you. What does it say to do? It says cast your burden upon the Lord. Put it upon Him. Lord, You take it. I can't handle this, Lord. I'm putting it on You. I'm trusting You with this. And then the promise that He'll not allow you to be shaken by it; the promise that He will sustain you in that trial. Stability, consistency, fruitfulness can continue right through the trial. And you know how it is with many Christians. Their life becomes sweeter and more fruitful as they go through hard things. There's more glory to God coming from those times. God is sustaining them. Similar verse - Psalm 112:6 says, "For he will never be shaken; the righteous will be remembered forever. He will not fear evil tidings. His heart is steadfast trusting in the Lord. His heart is upheld. He will not fear." Just saying it again and again, God will sustain you. You don't have to be shaken by this. You can be steadfast and stable through the trial because God is sustaining you in it. That's spiritual stability. That's encouraging, isn't it. So that's four things from this psalm, but I'd like to add a few more thoughts if I could from the New Testament and kind of build this out a little further.

### **Stable Christians Embrace Sound Doctrine**

A fifth thing that we see - a fifth characteristic of stable Christians is that they embrace sound doctrine. Stable Christians embrace sound doctrine. Truth is a big deal. Maybe we could turn in the New Testament to Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4 is talking about at the beginning of the chapter about how Christ has given gifts to all these preachers for the building up of the body of Christ that we might become a mature man, it says in verse 13. And then the next verse, verse 14, he says, "As a result..." So, as a result of these ministries of teaching and proclaiming truth to us, enabling us to become mature - as a result of that, Ephesians 4:14, "We are no longer to be children tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the Head, even Christ." What imagery this is in verse 14! Children, tossed here and there by waves; carried about by every wind of doctrine. I picture little kids in a rubber raft out in some storm at sea or something. It just is this horrible, scary position. I mean, they're just being blown everywhere. They can't do anything about it. They're up and down and all over the place. And there's people whose lives are that way because they're not grounded in truth.

See, the issue here is truth. It's sound teaching. It's truth that will settle us down and make us stable. Hebrews 13:9 says, "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings." Carried away. Drawn off course by varied and strange teachings. Have you met a Christian before that seems pretty solid, seems to love the Lord a lot, but they have this strange teaching? It's like there's this one thing that's just weird that they're into. And that one thing never helps them, does it? They think it's a big deal, but it's not helping them. It's drawing them off course. It's getting them away from the things that matter - Christ and Him crucified, the gospel essentials. Varied and strange teaching. When the Apostle Peter warns about false teachers, he says in 2 Peter 2 - he says that they entice unstable souls. He says false teachers are actually looking for unstable people and they prey upon them. So the person that's unstable

because they don't have truth, now the false teacher comes after you and now you get worse. It's like this downward spiral into error. Fearful picture.

Peter says something similar in the next chapter. We probably ought to turn over to this. This is 2 Peter 3:15. 2 Peter 3:15. So here Peter is talking about these letters from our beloved brother Paul. And he mentions in verse 16 that in his letters are some things hard to understand, and we know what he's talking about there. We've encountered some of those things in Paul's letters that are hard to understand. But what he has to say is really very serious. It says, "Which the untaught and unstable distort." Untaught and unstable. That always goes together - just about always goes together, doesn't it? Untaught people tend to be unstable people. And what do they do? Well, the verb is distort. They distort those difficult things as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. So, they're distorting Scripture. The untaught person; the spiritually unstable person; the person not grounded in truth, they're distorting the Bible. They're taking it out of its proper proportion, right? They're majoring on minor stuff often. And it's like why do you think that's a big deal? Can't you see the big picture looks like this? It's distorted. It's twisted. But the consequence of this is big, isn't it? It says, "to their own destruction," at the end of verse 16. It's not just their theology's a little wrong, but no, they can be destroyed for distorting the Scripture, not understanding truth. And then he goes on in verse 17, "you therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard." He says we need to be careful about this. "Being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness." It's like you think you're solid. You think you're doing well now. Well, just be careful, you don't get enticed by some of this false teaching out here and you lose your own steadfastness. You can be steadfast and then lose it when you get into error. That's what he's warning against. So truth matters, right, you cannot separate good doctrine from right living. The more grounded in truth you are the more stable and consistent your Christian life ought to be.

### **Stable Christians Resist the Devil**

Well, that leads us to a sixth thing about stable Christians, and that is that stable Christians resist the devil with the whole armor of God. Stable Christians will resist the devil through the whole armor of God. See, there's things that come at us to try to destabilize us. So false teaching tries to do that. Trials seek to do that. Well, here's one more. Here's the devil. The devil's coming at us to try to destabilize us; to knock us down; to make the chart go crazy. Ephesians 6. Let's just read that paragraph about the armor. Ephesians 6, and as we read this, I want you to look for all the references to stability in these familiar verses.

Ephesians 6:10, he says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord..." Be strong. "...And in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God that you may be able to stand firm..." There's the stability term. "...Stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the full armor of God that you may be able to resist in the evil day having done everything to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth; having put on the breastplate of righteousness; having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace, in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you'll be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of

God." So the devil is constantly attacking us. He's trying to destabilize us with lies, with slanders, with temptations, with all sorts of unbelieving thoughts and ideas. However he can get those into our heads. Ultimately, he's trying to make us casualties. He's trying to get you off the battlefield. He's trying to destroy your soul.

Christ on the other hand, He wants us to stand firm against the devil's schemes. To resist. Resist him. Resist the doubts and temptations. How are we going to do that? Verse 13, "Take up the full armor of God." The full armor. I emphasize that "full" part. We're not going to go through, we don't have time to go through each of the parts of the armor that he mentions here. The point is that God has given us the equipment. God has given us sufficient means whereby we don't have to be exposed to him. When somebody keeps being attacked by the devil and brought down, it's often the case that they're just not applying the spiritual armor. They're leaving themselves exposed somehow and the devil's going right after that thing again and again. They're in trouble. Their life is unstable as a result. God's armor is sufficient to protect us; to enable us to stand firm. He's provided all the means necessary, but it's up to us to put on the armor. That's what it says. You've got to do something here. You've got to apply this. You've got to put it on yourself. You've got to walk in this reality. And if we do, we'll stand firm. We can stand firm against him. We can resist the devil and he'll flee from us, it says. Very encouraging words. We can resist him through the armor that He's given us.

So six things so far about stable Christians. We'll see if I can remember them. The first is that stable Christians are fruitful. They're fruitful. You might think of stability as being something kind of boring. You think a person that's real stable, I bet they're not really accomplishing much for God. No, just the opposite. The stable Christian is going to be the one abounding in fruitfulness. He's going to be the productive Christian. So fruitfulness is first off. Secondly, stable Christians avoid bad influences. They're not hanging out with scoffers all the time and being brought down by that. Thirdly, stable Christians are consistent in their spiritual disciplines. Just read your Bible and pray every day. Just that kind of stuff. Fourthly, stable Christians can handle the trials of life without being destroyed by it; without being brought down by it. Fifthly, stable Christians embrace sound doctrine. You've got to have truth if you're going to stand firm. Then sixthly here, stable Christians resist the devil through the whole armor of God that He's provided.

### **Stable Christians Make it to Heaven**

And that leaves us with one more. Stable Christians make it to heaven. Stable Christians will make it to heaven. I want you to be clear. I'm not preaching about these things just so your pastors will have an easier time counseling you in your life. Though it may have that effect. But I'm talking about these things because they're essential for you making it to heaven at all. Without this stability, I doubt whether we can make it. If the chart is just volatile, if it's just up and down and up and down, maybe at some point, it just crashes, and you're never heard from again. You see, a true Christian doesn't just make a profession of faith, but he also steadily perseveres in that profession. He perseveres. How long? How far? All the way to the end. Jesus talked about it again and again. Jesus made a big emphasis that it's not in how exciting; it's not in how much drama there is when you become a Christian, but it's continuing on steadily in that walk with the Lord that gets you there; that gets you to heaven in the end. Jesus says



repeatedly really, but here's Matthew 10:22, "It's the one who endures to the end who'll be saved." Jesus kept saying that. Endure to the end. Endure to the end and you'll be saved. How about there in Luke 9 where Jesus says, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back... is fit for the kingdom of God." If you become a Christian - if you put your hands on the plow, you go right straight on across the field. Don't keep looking back. Don't keep looking back to Egypt. You press on with the Lord.

Jesus' parable about the sower and the soils. Really, it's the same thing, right? You guys are familiar with the four different types of soil. It's not the beginning that matters. In three of those cases, the seed germinates and grows and looks great at first. The issue is what's going to be fruitful in the end. There's only one of those four that actually makes it to maturity; actually becomes a fruitful plant in the end. That represents the real Christian. The book of Hebrews gives so many warnings about the danger of apostasy. One thing it says in Hebrews 10:23, it says, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering." Without wavering. Without this up and down inconsistency. Hold it fast without wavering all the way to the end. You see, this is why spiritual stability is so important. A lifetime is a really long time. A bunch of you younger folks, you might need to follow Christ - if the Lord tarries, you might be following Christ another 50 years. A whole lot of stuff's going to happen in those 50 years. Things are going to happen to you. Things are going to happen in the world. We can scarcely imagine I suspect. How are you going to continue on with the Lord if there's not a settledness; if there's not a day to day consistency in your walk with Him; if you're just up and down and up and down. How are you going to make it that far? How are you going to make it that far? We want you to make it all the way home to Heaven.

There's a race that's set before us the Bible says. There's a race. And it's not a sprint. It's not a sprint, is it. It's a long distance marathon. It's an ultra-marathon that is set before us. Those marathon runners - they're not flashy. They're not usually very muscular. They're almost mechanical. They just keep on going. They get to the pace and they maintain that pace until they reach the end. That's a picture of the Christian life. That's steadiness. That's consistency. That will get you to heaven. Paul could say at the end of his life, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I've kept the faith." He finished the course. He was consistent all the way to the end.

Now, brethren, we know that it's God - it's God in His mercy that enables us to persevere, right? I mean, we're kept by the power of God it says in 1 Peter 1. We know that. We know it. Peter says in chapter 5 that it's God who perfects and confirms and strengthens and establishes us. Our perseverance is a miracle of divine grace. But this sermon's not about that. It's not about the sovereignty of God side. This is about the responsibility of man side. That God has given us the means; He's put it right in our hands right in front of us - means we can lay hold of to become more spiritually stable in our walk with Him, and thus more fruitful; thus more productive in the kingdom; thus have more love and joy and peace; thus know Him more, etc., etc. God has put the means in our hands if we'll be diligent to lay hold of them. So that's our exhortation for today. And as we do that, our chart will start to smooth out. Instead of the big ups and downs, the ups and downs will get smaller. And the line will start going upward. There will be growth. There will be progress with the Lord. Are we all convinced that we can make progress? We can grow in grace. Are we all convinced that we can become more sanctified?

That there's more of Christ to be known? There's more reality to walk in? There's more of Canaan to be conquered and enjoyed in this life? Are we still pressing on the upward way? New heights I'm gaining every day? Though some may dwell where these abound, my constant aim is higher ground. Can we say that? Is that a reality for us? I hope so. Amen.