

ACTION

Five Steps to Successful Living

Philippians 4:4-9

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Bethany Church

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The following newspaper headlines actually appeared five years ago.

1. Include Your Children when Baking Cookies. 2. Something Went Wrong in Jet Crash, Expert Says. 3. Police Begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers. 4. Drunks Get Nine Months in Violin Case. 5. Iraqi Head Seeks Arms. 6. Is There a Ring of Debris around Uranus. 7. Prostitutes Appeal to Pope. 8. Panda Mating Fails, Veterinarian Takes Over. 9. British Left Waffles on Falkland Islands. 10. Teacher Strikes Idle Kids. 11. Clinton Wins Budget, More Lies Ahead. 12. Plane Too Close to Ground, Crash Probe Told. 13. Miners Refuse to Work after Death. 14. Juvenile Court to Try Shooting Defendant. 15. Stolen Painting Found by Tree. 16. Two Sisters Reunited After 18 Years in Checkout Counter. 17. War Dims Hope for Peace. 18. If Strike Isn't Settled Quickly, It May Last a While. 19. Cold Wave Linked to Temperature. 20. Enfields Couple Slain, Police suspect Homicide. 21. Red Tape Holds Up New Bridges. 22. Typhoon Rips Through Cemetery, Hundreds Dead. 23. Man Struck By Lightning Faces Battery Charge. 24. New Study of Obesity Looks for Larger Test Group. 25. Astronaut Takes Blame for Gas in Spacecraft. 26. Kids Make Nutritious Snacks. 27. Chef Throws His Heart into Helping Feed Needy. 28. Local High School Dropouts Cut in Half. 29. New Vaccine May Contain Rabies. 30. Hospitals are Sued by 7 Foot Doctors.

When professionals commit gaffes like these, it's not difficult to understand how we can mess up when we deal with less familiar things. In sports like baseball, golf, tennis and basketball, the best athletes make mistakes and do things that are self-defeating. However, they usually recognize and correct their mistakes quickly. If they don't, failure looms. The problem we face outside of athletics is that self-defeating behavior is often not quickly detected and corrected. In addition, the stakes are higher. In a game an uncorrected mistake may be costly,

but in life it may be deadly. Instead of losing a game, we may lose our family. Instead of jeopardizing a victory, we may risk our lives. Instead of forfeiting a trophy, we may forfeit our future. Instead of hurting a team, an undetected mistake may wound an entire community.

For the past several weeks we have examined principles that help us identify and correct mistakes crucial to our destiny, so that we actually live in Christ and realize our potential as God's children. There are five principles found in Philippians 4. They are steps we must take. They are celebration, vision, communication, reflection and finally *Action*.

Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul:

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-- put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:9, NIV)

The power of any principle is not in its acceptance but in its application. It really doesn't matter whether you believe in prayer. It matters whether you pray. It doesn't matter whether you think Jesus is Lord. It matters whether you obey him as Lord. It doesn't matter that you think Jesus is Savior. It matters whether you call on him to free you from sin and condemnation. Whatever your intentions, only actions bring fruit.

One of the greatest musicians I know is Toby Waldowski. Toby tours nationally with his wife and appears occasionally on the Crystal Cathedral broadcasts with Robert Schuller. I met Toby in college. He was a pure tenor and played piano with incredible skill. Others told me that he was an accomplished saxophonist. A classmate claimed that Toby's perfect pitch was based on his E-flat saxophone. He had to transpose the note for singing. When I looked skeptical, the classmate turned to Toby and asked, "Toby, what's a B?" I heard Toby hit a note with his voice, then go a few steps down a scale, sing it and say, "There it is." Toby had practiced saxophone so much that its pitches became second nature to him. During college, however, he

changed his emphasis to piano, practicing it 4 hours a day. Soon he no longer thought and heard in terms of the saxophone but in terms of the piano. Practice changed the key for him because practice was the key.

Coming to worship and hearing a sermon make little difference in a life. Going home and implementing a truth makes all the difference. Hearing about a principle does little. Applying a principle changes the future. I often see people grow restless when a worship service extends beyond an hour. That would excite me if I thought people were just itching to get out and implement what God is revealing. Because life is right there! Not in the hearing, but in the doing. When I hear great teaching, I can hardly wait for it to stop, not because I'm bored, but because I want to get to it. I want to act. We see change and reap rewards in the doing.

James, the brother of Jesus, wrote:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it-- he will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:22-25)

We look into a mirror to see ourselves and improve our condition. We comb our hair in front of a mirror, floss and brush our teeth, pop a pimple, or whatever. We use the mirror to not only improve our appearance but to tend to our health. With the mirror we examine ourselves and make the adjustments we feel are necessary.

Suppose an attractive woman peers into a mirror but then turns and forgets what she sees. The mascara is smeared, but she forgot. Her hair is tangled, but she forgot. A string of floss is stuck in her teeth, but she forgot. When she encounters her friends, they'll probably say, "Look, she needs a mirror." One might offer, "Honey, come on over here. I have a mirror." Another

woman might say, “Come to the restroom with me; we can use the mirror there.” In each case, everyone will assume that the lady hasn’t seen a mirror.

James said that this is what it is like to come here Sunday mornings and go home making no changes. Everybody will assume that you haven’t heard from God, that all you did was put in your time here and waste your Sunday morning. James went further. He said to hear but not act is to perpetrate a lie. Your hearing suggests that you came in faith, and therefore you might think you are acting in faith. However, your failure to act on what you hear suggests you left in unbelief, and the only one fooled is you. You’ve deceived yourself.

So what are you doing about Paul’s teaching in Philippians? He says, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” Do you? Are you celebrating any differently? Paul says, “The Lord is near.” Are you more aware of that throughout the day? Are you ready to give an account at any moment? Paul says, “Don’t be anxious.” Are you? Does fear have a hold on you, or are you experiencing peace as you communicate with the one who has the solution? Paul writes, “Think on these things.” Are you? Are you taking charge of your thinking? Do you know what you are telling yourself and what is shaping your life?

One day Jesus invited some fishermen to follow him and become fishers of men. They dropped their nets. When the nets hit the ground, those men heard at most a quiet thud, but in heaven it thundered. The world would never be the same. Their choice changed everything. Your response to what you hear today may seem as unsubstantial, insignificant, and inconsequential as the fall of those nets; but your choice alters your destiny and impact on many. Will you act on what you heard? Will you put into practice what the Holy Spirit says?