

If the ballerina in this picture had decided to give up after the first or second try, leaps like these would not be possible. Don't lose heart, Paul says, and he attaches no qualifier. Do not lose heart. Period. No matter what. Praise God, he is faithful even when we are not! He will work in us the courage we need to remain firm to the end of our troubles and even to the end of our lives here on earth. **Firmness!**

Taking It Home

We may not be able to dance like prima ballerinas or perform a cartwheel on a balance beam like these graceful young ladies (*point to specific pictures*), yet God makes it possible for you to do something far more spectacular—to live in his grace, the grace that fills your heart through the work of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus, you are unquestionably grace-full:

- Focused on Jesus and his promises
- Flexible in heart, reaching out to others, extending his love to the world
- Fit in faith
- Firm in spirit, persisting through trials and living lives thankful for God's marvelous, Spirit-born gift of grace

Please take this gift as a reminder of how grace-full you really are in Jesus. Like me, you may still bop your head against the kitchen cabinet or trip over the children's toys from time to time. And all of us will struggle to live out of our grace-filled identity in Jesus every minute of every day. But Jesus won't give up on us. And that means we don't need to give up on ourselves either. Grace-full—no matter what happens!

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The Scripture quotation is from the King James or Authorized Version of the Bible.

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LIVING IN GRACE

Getting Started

Project onto a screen or display pictures of female dancers, gymnasts, acrobats, and other athletes. You can find appropriate photos in sports magazines and online at a low cost from www.fotosearch.com or www.istockphoto.com, among other suppliers. Also, prepare a Bible by marking the passages you'll read during the devotion (Philippians 3:13b–14; Romans 12:15; James 2:17; and 2 Corinthians 4:1).

Introduction

You have to be graceful to pull off something like this (*point to the pictures*). You can't trip over your own two feet, like I do quite often. (*Tell about a time when you tripped, stumbled, or fell into something.*)

While the women in these photos probably possess an innate sense of gracefulness, they would never have reached the level of achievement shown in the photos unless they had spent time and energy to develop their natural giftedness. All of them have devoted hours, days, years, and perhaps even decades of work to build their strength and perfect their skill. A lifestyle of commitment and dedication lies behind the focus, flexibility, fitness, and firmness we see here.

Each of us is grace-full, too. Perhaps we can't dance like a gymnast or perform like Olympians on the balance beam or parallel bars. No, our grace-fullness has nothing to do with how athletic we are—or aren't. We are grace-full because God's grace in Jesus has given us a new birth. We are in Christ, his new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). Because of Jesus' death on the cross for our sins, all the riches of God's grace flow into our lives minute by minute. In 2 Peter 1:2 it's described this way, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." The Holy Spirit lives in us and is transforming us into Christ's image day by day. We are becoming more like Jesus, as God works Jesus' love joy, peace, and the other fruit of the Spirit in us (Galatians 5:22–23).

Grace-full! That's you and me! So, for the next few minutes let's explore what a lifestyle characterized by spiritual **focus**, **flexibility**, **fitness**, and **firmness** might look like, as we ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out the grace-fullness with which we have been reborn!

Getting to the Heart

First, **focus**. The apostle Paul offers us a vivid picture of the kind of focus we can have as God's grace-full people, as he describes what we focus on: (*read Philippians 3:13b–14*).

Women of God, perhaps you fell into gossip or envy or loveless words or lust or laziness yesterday. Maybe you fell into these and more besides! Whatever your sin, and no matter how many times you have sinned, because of the cross of our dear Savior you can know for sure that God has forgiven it all! He has placed all of it behind him. He has dropped all of it into his Sea of Forgetfulness. So now,

focus on Christ Jesus and his grace. Let him help you up, dust you off, and set you back on the right path. A gymnast who focuses on yesterday's injury or the low score she received in last week's performance soon loses her concentration on today's events. A focus on yesterday leads to poor performance today.

We need never experience that. As women of grace and growing in grace, we can focus on Christ and on the work he has given each of us to do today. We can concentrate on opportunities to demonstrate his love, to act with his patience, to treat others with his kindness. **Focus!**

Second, **flexibility**. Are you limber enough to touch your toes? to stand on your head? to do the splits? If not, don't worry! God's grace gives us a far more important kind of flexibility—flexibility of heart. This kind of flexibility makes it possible for us to extend Christ's care and compassion to others, to bend over backwards to meet people where they are. (*Read Romans 12:15.*)

Grace-filled, we become flexible enough to bend down to embrace the mourner—even when it's inconvenient. We become strong enough to lift up those beaten down by life and to carry them to the comfort and consolation of our heavenly Father's arms. We become agile enough to throw our arms over our heads to celebrate the successes and joys of other people, knowing the true joy ourselves of resting in Jesus. **Flexibility!**

Third, **fitness**. Probably, most of us could work a little harder on keeping our bodies in shape. The good news is that remaining grace-full rests on God's work in us and not on our willingness to go to the gym every day. His Spirit at work in our hearts prompts us to exercise our faith in real time, in real life—all the time, throughout our lives! We reveal the faith of our hearts as we exercise that faith in actions moment by moment.

(*Read James 2:17.*) Grace-filled, faith-filled lives live and breathe the calling God has placed on our lives to show love to him and to others in everything we do and say. **Fitness!**

And finally, **firmness**—the kind of firmness that keeps us going, that keeps us from giving up when life is hard. And whose life is not hard!? When the Corinthian Christians struggled, Paul wrote to them: (*read 2 Corinthians 4:1*).

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