

“Generosity and the Gift of God”

Philippians 4:14-23

Turn with me in your copy of God’s Word this morning to Philippians 4, where we will consider the last few verses of this letter which has been the subject of our study for the last little while. As a preacher, I have to tell you that when I come to the end of a book that has been the focus of so much of my study, the feeling is bittersweet. Philippians is come to be like an old familiar friend whose company I am about to part with. Before I go any further, let me mention some things by way of reminder, things about the letter that we’ve seen. Unlike other letters, there has been no major problems addressed. Aside from the small issue between Euodia and Syntyche, there is nothing really that Paul has had to confront or deal with. What we’ve found is a simple, joyful, and delightful letter to read where joy is found in all four chapters. That’s why it is the most positive of all the New Testament letters. Joy has been the theme, and it is a word that Paul has used around 14 times throughout these brief chapters. Joy truly is a rare commodity in our chaotic world. Take a look around and you will be bombarded with bad news, long faces, and heavy hearts—even within the church. If ever there has been a need for genuine joy, that time is now. But Philippians is clear as to where this joy is to be found, for Paul also uses the name of Jesus around 40 times in this letter. His point is unmistakable—real joy is found in knowing Jesus.

This is simply a letter that reminds us of the joy we have in Jesus. In fact, go back through the letter and see how joy is illustrated in each chapter. For instance, there is:

- Joy in living (chapter 1)

Paul begins with a statement of his gratitude in verse 3, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all with joy.” No matter how the situation might turn out for him, he’s going to rejoice in the Lord, determined that Christ be magnified in his body by life or by death. Because for him, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

- Joy in serving (chapter 2)

In chapter 2, Paul tells the church to “complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” And then of course he goes on to explain the attitude which we must possess, the same attitude of Jesus who took upon Himself the form of a servant. And the point is that there’s joy to be found in humility and serving others.

- Joy in growing (chapter 3)

In the third chapter, we’ve seen how Paul calls on believers to rejoice in the Lord and place no confidence in the flesh. There had been a time in his own life when Paul had put a lot of confidence in his Jewish pedigree and performance. But all of that changed when he met the Lord Jesus. His life was changed, and he was given a new desire in life that involved knowing Jesus Christ and laying hold of that for which Christ had laid hold of him. He presses on toward the goal of maturity.

- Joy in trusting (chapter 4)

In verse 4, he writes, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” Joy is not a matter of outward circumstances, but is about inward condition. He says that we must not worry about anything, but are to pray about everything. And regardless of his circumstances, he’s learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. And what is this secret? He says there in verse 13, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” Joy is found through resting in Jesus.

And all the way through, the reason for this joy is Christ. In living because my life is in Christ (chapter 1). There is joy in serving because Christ is my example (chapter 2). Joy in growing because knowing Christ is the goal (chapter 3). There is joy in trusting because Christ is my contentment in life (chapter 4). He is the reason that I can face all things in joy and inner satisfaction. I imagine as we have made our way through this letter, you have perhaps been made to realize you were quoting from Philippians without even realizing it. So many of the 104 verses which make up the letter have been stored in our memory. For instance:

1:6—“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

1:21—“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

2:5-6—Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.”

3:7-8—“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

3:13-14—“But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

4:6—“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

We’ve now come to the end of the epistle with this final passage. In this text, Paul makes some closing remarks expressing his gratitude for the church and the way they have generously given of their resources to help him in a time of need. It really is a powerful text that emphasizes the joy of generosity. (Read)

Most of you are familiar with a company known as VRBO, an abbreviation for Vacation Rentals By Owner. It started as a simple website, VRBO has grown into more than two million properties around the world that vacationers can rent. If you’ve scheduled a beach vacation, more than likely you have used this company. There are some really nice properties available for rent by owner.

A few years ago, we had a weekend getaway where we stayed in a mountain cabin. It was a nice cabin—huge porch with a breathtaking view of the mountains, stainless steel kitchen appliances, big screen television, fire pit, the works. But at the end of the weekend, I left it all behind because it wasn’t mine. I was a manager for the weekend and when it was over, the key code expired and my time was up.

No matter how beautiful or lovely a place our family has found for a vacation spot, never has the thought occurred to me that the property was mine to do with it whatever I desired. Just because I occupied the property for a week in no way made me the owner of it. Temporary oversight and permanent ownership are two different things. The house belonged to someone else. And I've always tried to leave the property in as good a shape as when I arrived. Imagine how different things would be if we all approached life in this way. We're managers and stewards of property which ultimately belongs to God. So that stewardship is overseeing what God created and doing it for His best interest, not our own. In stewardship, God also asks us to give a portion back to Him in worship and gratitude for who He is and what He has done, and to give to others as part of the development of our hearts for His world. It reminds us that He is the Owner who created and provides all we have. It is a major theme throughout Scripture, this idea that God has entrusted us with all we have. What we do with it matters greatly. How we use our resources is the chief concern of stewardship. The word itself refers to an administration. In fact, we come across this word some nine times or so the New Testament. For example:

Luke 16:2—“What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.”

Colossians 1:25—“I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me.”

“Stewardship” —*translates the Greek word ‘oikonomia’ or a compound word from two roots, ‘oikos’ which means house, and ‘nomos’ which means law*

Our English word ‘economy’ comes from this same word. When we think of an economy, it might call to mind the wealth and resources of a country, especially in terms of the production and consumption of goods and services. It also refers to careful management of available resources. When you look at purchasing a vehicle, you probably want to know something about its fuel economy or how many miles it can get out of a gallon of gas. Well, that is similar to the way this concept of ‘stewardship’ is used in the Bible. Stewardship is an economy, a management of household affairs. A

steward is someone who manages another person's property. Stewardship involves a lot more than just our money, even though our money is a major part. Stewardship involves the careful administration of three or four main areas of life. You might think of these as general categories into which everything falls. Before I get into our text, let me mention these to you by way of introduction:

- **First, we all have an amount of time that has been allotted to us.**

There are 24 hours in a day, and there is no one who gets 25. We all have the same 24 hours per day, yet we don't all have the same number of days. There is no one who knows the length of time that God has given them to live on this earth. We may make assumptions, but we have no guarantees. Some live into their 90s, while others come to the end of their days in the flower of youth. The fact of the matter is that none of us are promised tomorrow.

Psalm 39:4-6—“O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! Behold, You have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before You. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!”

Psalm 90:12—“So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”

To number your days is to understand the stewardship of time. It is the same thing that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 5:15-17 where he writes, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” It is wise stewardship that knows what time it is. As stewards, we must use the time rather than lose the time we have. But that's not all we've been given.

- **Second, we all have an availability of talents that have been supplied to us.**

These are the abilities and gifts that have been deposited in us by the Lord. The stewardship of our talents involves using the skills and passions that God has bestowed

upon us for His own sovereign purpose. These have often been referred to as spiritual gifts. As a believer, you have been gifted to make a contribution to the body of Christ so that the body is built up and God is glorified. Those gifts that have been supplied to you are not for your sake, but are given for the advancement of the King's agenda. We are to put them to use for the sake His purpose in the world.

God gives different kinds of abilities and opportunities to His children, and our job is to steward those talents by putting them to work, faithfully serving as He leads us. So whether you realize it or not, you are a very gifted man or woman. This is the stewardship of talent.

- **Third, we all have an accumulation of treasures that have been entrusted to us.**

Each of have an amount of time that has been allotted to us. We all have an availability of talents that have been supplied to us. And on top of this, we all have treasures that have been given to us. Wealth and possessions, the income we receive, houses, property, and assets. What we do with these has eternal implications. Stewardship of our treasures means that we use them in the interests of our Master. God has a design for all that He has allowed you to obtain in this life. And that purpose is to serve Him, to advance His kingdom cause, and to bring joy to others in His name. I am to bring it all underneath the sovereign lordship of Christ. Stewardship is essential to discipleship. It is living all of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

There are some people who have more, while there are some who have less. Some have more money and talent, more strength, better health, and better connections than others. It is useless to play a game of comparison. Who knows why someone got more and another got less? Why one person is born in a nation with an abundance of light, while another is born in a spiritually dark place? Only God knows those things and He is not obligated to explain them to me. Every moment I spend worrying about those things beyond my control is a wasted moment. We may not all be equal in terms of talents, gifts, and resources. But we do all have the same opportunity to do something

with what we've been given. The question is not, "What have I been given?" Rather, "What will I do with what I've been given?" That is the issue. Jesus said:

Luke 12:48—“For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”

Someone has said it this way: Your life is God's gift to you, and what you do with it is your gift to God. It's not what you have, it's what you do with what you have that makes the difference. God gives us what we can handle when we can handle it. You're not responsible for your position, but you are responsible for your disposition.

- **Fourth, we all have an area of trust that has been committed to us.**

That is, we all have various responsibility. Fatherhood, or motherhood, or being a son or daughter, the responsibility of being a student, and so on. Or the circumstances of our lives that may not be what we would have chosen, but we have been entrusted with them nonetheless. It can all be a platform for God to showcase His grace. And so these are just a few of the ways in which we've been made stewards of our time, talent, treasures, and trust.

With this in mind, let me show you some things from these verses and how they relate to stewardship, generosity, and the gift of God. The first thing I want you to notice is:

1—The PRACTICE of generosity (4:14-17)

“Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.”

You can tell a lot about a person's spirituality by what that person does with money. The church at Philippi was a model of generosity. They had supported Paul ten years earlier, but evidently had lost touch with him. Now, they find out that he's imprisoned in Rome. And so they send Epaphroditus 800 miles from Philippi to Rome with a very

sacrificial gift from the church. It was some kind of a care package and financial offering. And it gets to Paul, and in verse 14, he acknowledges that it was kind on the part of the church to 'share' in his trouble.

Though he has just written about being content no matter his circumstance, he doesn't want them to assume that he is being dismissive of their kindness. Phillips paraphrases it this way, "I am not disparaging the way in which you were willing to share in my troubles." In other words, "I don't want you to think that because I have learned the secret of contentment that I don't care about the fact that you are giving." No, he very much cares about the fact that they've given, but for a very different reason than they or we might be tempted to assume. It isn't so much because of what their gift did for him, but because of what their generosity demonstrates about the depth of their faith.

I find it interesting that Paul connects both generosity and contentment in this passage. Perhaps nothing proves our contentment in the Lord any more so than generosity does. Content people are grateful and generous. The opposite is also true—discontent people are marked by ingratitude and a self-centered focus. By fixating on what they don't have, they fail to be good and generous stewards of what they do have. Covetousness is the opposite of contentment. It is the constant drive to have more, never appreciative of what it already has. Jesus said:

Luke 12:15—“Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

I don't know if you realize this or not, but Jesus had more to say about money and possessions than any other subject. More than 15% of everything that Jesus said related to money and the way that you and I respond to it. For instance:

- Out of the 38 parables that Jesus told, 16 directly deal with the way we respond to material wealth
- Jesus said more about money than He did about heaven and hell combined

- 1 out of every 10 verses in the gospels deal with money and material possessions, which equals out to some 288 verses
- The Bible contains more than 500 references to prayer, right at 500 references to faith, but there are more than 2,350 references to money and possessions.

You may ask, “Why is this?” Because of its potential! It has the potential to deceive you and become an idol that takes the place of God in your life. Scripture is clear in its assertion that there is a direct correlation between my true spiritual condition and my attitude regarding money and wealth. And the integrity of my faith is not determined so much by what I say as it is by how I respond to money.

Randy Alcorn—*“Our use of money and possessions is a decisive statement of our eternal values. What we do with our money loudly affirms which kingdom we belong to.”*

There is a certain amount of spiritual power which money and possessions can exert over our heart. Jesus said that where we put our money and possessions is where our heart will end up—“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21). Money has the potential to entice us away from the worship of God. Jesus said, “You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24).

There is also great victory in money and possessions. As disciples, when we invest in the kingdom, we are sending our money and possessions ahead for eternity—“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6:20). Wise stewardship of our treasures means that we use them in the interests of Heaven. God has a purpose for all that He has allowed you to obtain in this life. And that purpose is to serve Him, to advance His kingdom cause, and give in His name.

The Philippians recognized that Paul had a need. It is one thing to identify that someone has a need, it’s another thing to display a genuine interest in the need, and it’s another thing to get involved in the need. Their generosity is seen not in the way that they feel but in the way that they give. It was more than a sympathetic thought. No, it

overflowed in the practice of giving. Like the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, he saw a need and responded with what he had and did what he could do.

Stewardship maintains a biblical perspective when it comes to possessing things. We live with an understanding that differentiates between ownership versus stewardship. You know the difference, don't you? That's what Jesus meant when He said, "Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33). In other words, it means I can't be possessed by my possessions and Him at the same time. The issue is not having things—the issue is tightly possessing them. It isn't about having things, but whether or not those things have you. And the fact is that nothing proves they don't have a hold on me like giving does. If having is more important than giving, it's a major spiritual red flag.

J. Paul Getty—*"Money is like manure. You stack it up, it stinks. You spread it around, it makes things grow."*

2—The PROVISION of generosity (4:18-19)

"I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Here, Paul acknowledges that he had received from them the gift they had sent by way of Epaphroditus. He says, "I am well supplied," which is to say that his needs have been amply supplied. Can you look around at all that God has done for you and make that same statement? But beyond his own needs being met, Paul's main concern is to explain how their generosity serves a much higher purpose than the immediate need itself. Their stewardship is an act of worship that is being given to God. In verse 18, he uses the imagery of an Old Testament sacrifice on the altar that is being offered up by the priest. Incense was poured onto the sacrifice, releasing a fragrant aroma that ascended in the direction of heaven. And it symbolized the pleasure that such an offering brought to God.

The point is that their giving brought glory to God. It was well pleasing to Him. And that is the ultimate objective and motivation for all of our service. Giving bring glory to God. Yes, it meets immediate needs. But the highest aim is the pleasure that it brings to our Father in heaven. This must always be our underlying motivation behind those acts of generosity which we practice. They had met a need in Paul's life, and now Paul assures them that God would meet the needs in their lives. Listen to what he says in verse 19, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." This comes in the form of a promise.

A good rule of thumb when studying and interpreting the Bible is that every text has a context. What's interesting is that this verse comes within the context of the Philippians' generosity. What Paul is saying to the church is this, "You Philippians, who've been so generous with your finances, my God will supply all your need." Time and time and time again they had been faithful in giving. And it is really all the more amazing when you consider that they didn't have that much in the first place.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 8-9. These two chapters are perhaps one of the most important passages in the New Testament on the subject of giving. Paul is calling on the Corinthians to give, the issue is the church at Jerusalem is poor, they are without resources and their needs are vast. To make his point he uses the example of the Macedonian churches which was basically three churches—the church at Philippi, the church at Thessalonica, and the church at Berea. They were givers. They behaved in a very generous way in the matter of their giving. And so they serve as the illustration. What was it that made them exemplary? How did they give? With what spirit did they give? In what manner did they give? All of that is explained down through verse 5. Paul explains how the struggling churches of Macedonia had demonstrated generosity even when it was hard for them to do so. Giving wasn't a matter of circumstance, but was an issue of the heart. They didn't give because they were rich in resources. Rather, they gave because they were deeply motivated by grace. I give because He has given. Grace can be defined as God's inexhaustible supply of goodness that He does for you. It involves those things that you cannot do for yourself. It is His unmerited favor in Christ, something you can never earn, could never repay, and can

never run out of. All of life is the result of God's grace. Well, notice a few things about their giving:

- First, their giving was initiated by God's grace which was at work powerfully in their lives (8:1)
- Second, their giving transcended 'severe affliction' and difficult circumstances (8:2a)
- Third, their giving was out of a deep sense of joy which overflowed from their hearts (8:2b)
- Fourth, their giving was proportionate, sacrificial in nature, and of their own free will (8:3-4)
- Fifth, their giving was the practical result of having first given themselves to the Lord (8:5)

So in 2 Corinthians 8, Paul is bragging on the Philippians, and now several years later they've reconnected. They've revived their concern. He's writing a joyful thank you letter. So that Paul says in verse 18, "I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things which are sent from you, a sweet smelling aroma, acceptable sacrifice well pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours." There are two words I want you to link together. In verse 18, the word 'full' and in verse 19, the word 'supply.' Paul says, "I am full. You made me full." And in verse 19, "My God will supply." In Greek, it is the exact same word—'pleroo.' It means to fill up or to fill to the brim.

Here's what Paul is saying. "You've filled me up. My God is going to fill you up. You made me full. My God will make you full." The principle behind Philippians 4:19 then is God generously treats those who treat others generously. By giving, the Philippian church had laid up for themselves treasures in heaven. And yet they could also live with the confidence that God is going to supply their needs in this life as well. Notice that the promise is that God will supply their need, which is quite different from their greed. God will supply my every need, but not my every greed. There are things I want at times which are simply not in keeping with His will. But He promises to meet my every need.

3—The POTENTIAL of generosity (4:20-23)

“To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”

Look at the last few verses. He brings the letter to a fitting crescendo of praise in verse 20. In view of His grace and provision, to Him be the glory forever and ever amen! Paul wants them to know that their generosity has helped meet a need, which in turn has resulted in more people coming into the family of God. Paul had the opportunity to share the gospel with the members of Caesar’s household. And because the church supported his efforts, they had a part in that. Though it met an immediate need, their giving is an eternal investment.

Many people have heard of William Carey, but fewer have heard of his good friend Andrew Fuller. Like Carey, Fuller was raised in a background that wasn’t enthusiastic toward intentional evangelism and missions. Like William Carey, Andrew Fuller came to believe that every Christian has an obligation to spread the gospel, and some were called to do so cross-culturally. But before he left for India, William Carey famously told Fuller, “I will go down into the pit, if you will hold the ropes.” Fuller held the ropes by serving as the leader of the Baptist Mission Society from its founding until his death in 1814. He traveled all over the British Isles and raised funds by preaching missions-related sermons. The missionaries in India and other places could concentrate on their ministry in the field because they knew Andrew Fuller was advocating for them back home. Some go but all give!

There are many things money cannot buy. Money can buy you a bed, but it can’t give you sleep. Money can buy you books, but it can’t give you brains. Money can buy food, but not satisfy your appetite. It can buy cosmetics, but not give you beauty. It can buy a house, but it can’t make a home. It can buy you medicine but not give you health. It buys pleasures, but it does not provide peace. And it can buy you an audience, but not provide you any friends. At least not in the way you might think.

(Illus. of the Parable of the Dishonest Manager)

Luke 16:9-10—“And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.”

In other words, use your financial possessions for eternal dividends to win souls for Christ. And the idea of ‘friends’ is people won to Jesus Christ, those who are saved. So they become, in effect, your welcoming committee one day in heaven. Use your money like that. Be diligent to use what you have as a steward to make sure that more and more people are gathered into His kingdom. We have nothing that we’ve not also received. We are all stewards. God is the Master. God wants us to wisely put to use all that He has placed in our hands. All of it belongs to Him. And what ever we place in His hands for His glory, He will make sure that He takes care of us now. He will supply our needs. And we can be confident that the fruit which comes from our investment will be tallied up to our account in heaven.

Sometimes we fail to be generous stewards with what we have because we’re too busy to see the needs around us. Though they were hundreds of miles away, the Philippians saw Paul’s need from afar and responded generously, and they serve as a great example for you and me. There is a joy to be experienced through generosity that is motivated by divine grace. God is a giver. There is never a moment when He is not giving. And God’s ultimate act of giving is seen in the gift of His Son—Jesus Christ. He so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life!