

Genuine Generosity—Philippians 4:10-11—3/19/2023
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Open your Bibles to Philippians 4 as we continue studying this letter together & let's begin by reading Philippians 4:4-19. [READ]

Today we move into the final section where Paul thanked this dear church for their gift delivered by Epaphroditus.

Paul's words are carefully crafted to convey not only glad gratitude, but also the design of God in giving & receiving gifts & being content.

This is far more than a simple closing, 'thank-you'.

And if you've waded through financial dealings & felt tensions over asking for help & weighed decisions over who & whether to help, you can appreciate some of Paul's cautious & careful wording.

If you've ever felt pressured to give by someone in authority or manipulated to give by someone's story or guilt-tripped to give by others' expectations, you will appreciate Paul's example.

He had been attacked both for receiving & for not receiving support for his ministry & he knew such opposition may come.

So he wanted to guard against misunderstandings & he wrote with both a focus on God & an appreciation for the Philippians.

As he did, he left lessons about giving & gratitude & contentment.

Today we find 4 descriptions of genuine generosity, 4 truths to rightly understand & pursue & appreciate genuine generosity.

I say, genuine, because I don't want us to be generous only for our own selfish glory or for any control it gives over others.

We don't want to give with strings attached that are pulled with expectations for how others treat us or what they do for us.

That's more like bribery than generosity.

That's more like a monetary power play than meeting a need.

Paul did not want to be like that & he did not want the Philippians' gift to be viewed like that & we don't want to be like that either.

And we also don't want to be those who expect gifts, who presume upon everyone being gracious.

Paul did not want to be perceived like that, as if he was the missionary & Apostle always tapping his foot with his hand out to collect gifts.

Yet we DO want to be genuinely generous people.

We do want the fullness of joy & heavenly reward & relational encouragement that come to generous Christians.

We want to experience principles like Proverbs 11:25 & 22:9 that say, "*the generous man will be prosperous*" & "*He who is generous will be blessed*".

And more so, we want to heed the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:19-20 when He said, "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.*"

Note—Jesus was not against storing up treasures—He just told where the securest account is that never crashes or loses value.

Jesus encouraged—& even commanded—investment in the place to bank securely forever—to store up treasure in heaven.

That was not a prosperity preacher's false promise of worldly wealth & it was not a scam to buy your way to heaven.

It was about faith in God that brings freedom from worry over earthly things since this life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.

It was a call to God-centered generosity because that frees you from earthly anxiety & stores up heavenly reward.

It's like 1st Timothy 6:18-19 says, seek *“to be generous and ready to share, storing up for [yourselves] the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that [you] may take hold of that which is life indeed.”*

Generosity has future reward in heaven & it unlocks the freedom to take hold of life indeed or real, true life.

So if we want to seize life as God intended it, to grasp true abundance in life as Jesus promised, we must grasp generosity.

If you are not a regular, sacrificial, faithful giver to God with a heart & habit of freedom to share, you are missing out.

Your spiritual growth is being stunted in a basic area of practical Christlikeness that needs to flow to nourish your fruitfulness.

So I want you to rightly understand & practice genuine generosity as God designed it for your own good.

I want our giving to flow from genuine generosity that God Himself motivates & rewards as Paul described in this section.

I want us to respond to God's Word with the result that our offerings are truly part of our worship of Him.

So let's walk through these 4 perspectives on genuine generosity that point us toward God & Christ for the why & how & when of giving.

Point #1 is that genuine generosity is generated by God.

To pursue & practice generosity rightly & to respond to it from others rightly, we must know that #1 genuine generosity is generated by God.

Read Philippians 4:10 again. [READ]

What was Paul talking about?—he was talking about the concern the Philippians had for him, which they showed when the opportunity opened up to send a gift to him as verses 17-18 explicitly mentioned.

So this section is clearly about the gift they sent to Paul.

But Paul did not just say, *“Hey Philippians, thanks for the gift.”*

Actually, he did not directly thank them.

It would have been completely appropriate to thank them & we can find biblical reasons to directly thank people for gifts.

But Paul thanked God instead—more specifically, Paul rejoiced in the Lord on the occasion of receiving their gift.

He reported his past rejoicing when he had received the gift, but that rejoicing was first over their heart of loving concern for him.

But even that rejoicing was not in the Philippians themselves.

His rejoicing was in the Lord, because the Lord was the Author of the concern in the Philippians that generated their generosity.

Do you see how I get our 1st outline point there?

We know #1, that genuine generosity is generated by God because Paul responded to God when he received their generous gift.

Paul recognized that God was at work in that church who had been faithful friends & supporters at other times as well.

Look at verses 15-16 to recall that. [READ]

They had sent gifts more than once though others had not.

They had been supportive since Paul first preached the Gospel to them as recorded in Acts 16 when God had saved them & started the church.

And their generosity toward Paul was the work of God in their hearts whereby they expressed their appreciation to God & their love for others to whom Paul would spread the Gospel.

Paul had rejoiced in chapter 1, verse 18 & would keep on rejoicing when Christ was preached even if it was by those with wrong motives.

Paul had rejoiced in chapter 2 & verse 17 that he was poured out sacrificially for their faith & he shared his joy with them & called them in verse 18 to rejoice & share their joy with him.

In chapter 2, verse 28 he called them to rejoice when Epaphroditus returned because God had heard prayer & preserved his life.

Then chapter 3 opened with a call to rejoice in the Lord as vital for guarding the Gospel that boasts in Christ alone for His work that saves us because our works are worthless to save us.

Finally, chapter 4 & verse 4 is a command again to rejoice in the Lord & he said it twice to emphasize its importance in the context of strained relationships & temptations to worry.

Setting their minds on the Lord & in the Lord would protect their doctrine & their relationships & their hearts & minds.

Rejoicing was a repeated theme of this whole letter.

So it was only fitting that Paul expressed his thankfulness to the Philippians by saying that he rejoiced in the Lord with the Lord as the Author of their concern & generosity.

Rejoicing in the Lord was not disrespectful or ungrateful—it doubly encouraged them for the joy they brought Paul & the grace God evidenced in them.

Paul rejoicing in the Lord was a more transcendent expression of thanks because it lifted their hearts to praise God with him.

Focus on the Lord turned the thanksgiving from horizontal to vertical in a way that also could send encouragement back down from God.

And for the first time in this letter & the only time in the NT, verse 10 says Paul rejoiced greatly—this was extraordinary & exceeded the normal upper range.

That's what we are unleashing when we are genuinely generous!

Don't you want that? How exciting & encouraging!

When we receive or witness or take part in generosity like this, we should praise God & honor Him & delight in His grace.

We should rejoice in Him & share our joy with others.

Most of us will gladly receive gifts & rejoice in the Lord when we do, but that part only means we get half the point.

This also should remind us that God is the One we must SEEK & be motivated by if we want to BE this kind of GIVER.

Since generosity is generated by God, we want to pray for God to make us this kind of givers who are free & eager to give like this.

It's possible that Paul only accepted this gift because he knew they gave it without any compulsion or criticism.

He knew they gladly applied Galatians 6:6 that "*The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.*"

He knew he did not need to be as cautious as he was in Corinth or Thessalonica where his work was twisted & undervalued.

He defended himself in Corinth for not receiving payment because Greek orators & so-called super-apostles demanded payment.

Listen to 1st Corinthians 9:4-15 where he defended himself.

1st Corinthians 9:6-15, he said, “*do only Barnabas & I not have a right to refrain from working? Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. But I have used none of these things.”*

Because of mixed up views of speaking fees & Gospel freedom & more in Corinth, Paul refrained from receiving gifts there.

Would you want someone to view you like that?—to reject asking you for any help because of how selfish & strange you are?—I hope not.

We don’t want to be like the Corinthians because it got even worse as Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians 11:8-9.

In 2nd Corinthians 11:8-9, he said, “*I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you; and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.*”

Philippi was in Macedonia as verse 15 here in chapter 4 recalls & so the brethren from Macedonia were likely from Philippi.

So ask yourself—would you want the reputation & relationships of the Philippians or the Corinthians when it came to money & generosity?

I trust we want to be like the Philippians & not the Corinthians & that means having a God-centered view of money & giving.

That starts by knowing every good gift comes from God as James 1:17 says & the earth is the Lord’s & all it contains as Psalm 24 says.

So we are not the real owners of anything—we are stewards of what God owns that He has given to us to manage.

Every hour of our time & every dollar of our money & every resource & relationship & opportunity is all from God to use it as He says.

God is the One who provides & we give out of gratitude for what He has given & out of faith that He will continue to give.

In that way, genuine generosity is not about people around us, whether people who receive gifts or know about gifts or not.

Generosity is a response to God expressed in a tangible way.

It’s not done to gain influence or be praised but it is truly free from God first & then free from the giver back to God as it is given to a church or individual in need.

That’s why 2nd Corinthians 9:7 says, “*Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*”

We each purpose in our hearts in response to God’s commands & promises & God’s provision in our lives & we give in faith & worship.

So #1, genuine generosity is generated by God.

I could say a lot more, but I need to move on to the word concern in verse 10 of Philippians 4 for another repeated theme that returns here.

This word ‘concern’ is the word for thinking that has been used repeatedly in this letter of the mindset of Christ to follow.

Paul 1st used it in chapter 1, verse 7, saying it was only right to feel—that’s the word for think literally—to feel/think this way about you because I have you in my heart.

In Philippians 1:3-7, Paul was expressing his appreciation for the Philippians as fellow partakers of grace with Paul in their partnership in the ministry & participation of the Gospel.

They had shared with him in the work & in the mindset for the work.

Some of them have wavered from that unified mindset like we saw in verse 2 of chapter 4 where he urged Euodia & Syntyche to literally think the same, to be of one mind in the Lord.

That’s the same word & that repeated the reference to mindset of Christ in Philippians 2:5 where he said to have the attitude or thinking or mind or mindset that was also in Christ Jesus.

That came after calling them to have the same mind & to be intent on one purpose in chapter 2, verse 2 where he used that same word for thinking twice.

In chapter 3, he warned of those with different thinking in verse 19 & he affirmed in verse 15 that God would show them how to think in areas where their thinking was not yet mature.

So when we come here to Philippians 4:10 & find reference to the Philippians’ thinking or concern for him, we must interpret it in light of the mindset of Christ.

What had motivated & cultivated their ongoing generosity?

It was thinking like Christ like Paul pointed to in a context on giving in 2nd Corinthians 8:9 as the example we follow.

2nd Corinthians 8:9 says, “*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.*”

That is exactly the mindset of Philippians 2:5-11 that frames the entire Christian life & here it is applied to generosity.

Just as Christ set aside His riches of full deity in fellowship with the Father to take on flesh & become a man & give up His life to die for the sake of saving sinners, so we can give of ourselves.

Read Philippians 2:5-11 to recall that mindset. [READ]

BECAUSE Jesus existed in the form of God, He did not need to grasp at His attributes or anything He owned in His equality with God, but He could be gracious to give all of Himself.

And remember that He did so trusting God’s promise to exalt those who humble themselves as a pattern for us to trust God for that same promise in His time.

That’s like Jesus saying to give & let God reward you in heaven, to humble yourself & let God take care of when & how He exalts you.

It’s that same pattern of finding our security & identity in all Christ is for us & being gracious to humbly give & sacrificially serve others out of that rest in Christ.

The same Gospel that saves us is also what cultivates generosity in us.

The glorious work of Christ applied to lead us to follow His example is what nurtures & produces genuine generosity.

That's our 2nd point today to note as we seek to understand & experience God's design for our giving & receiving.

Point #2—genuine generosity is cultivated by Christlikeness.

Genuine generosity is #1, generated by God, & #2, cultivated by Christlikeness & by that I mean the mindset of Christ we follow.

I mean the concern in Philippians 4:10 that Paul said they had for him that is literally the same verb for the thinking or attitude or mindset in Christ Jesus in Philippians 2:5.

The Philippians had that mindset of sacrificial love & Gospel partnership with Paul as they had sent gifts before.

But for several years, they had lacked opportunity to support Paul as he had traveled to Jerusalem & been arrested & waited & sailed with a shipwreck in route to Rome as Acts records.

Their concern for Paul had continued as they prayed for him & likely received updates & yet could not send anyone or reach him.

But he remained in their hearts & minds, in their prayers & concerns, in their interests & investments.

Read verse 10 again to see that word concern used twice. [READ]

When we read those words '*now at last*', we tend to think of it with a sigh as if it included exasperation or complaining, but that is not at all the point of those words. [cf. Romans 1:10]

It's more like an exclamation, a part of the rejoicing, & the word for revived is a beautiful picture of what happened in their thinking about Paul as it blossomed to full flower like in the springtime.

Like a plant stays alive in the winter season but appears dormant without a blossom, so their concern stayed alive.

But when that living concern reached the season in which it could spring forth again, it budded with glorious flowering color.

The imperfect tense indicates they were continually concerned with Christlike care & continually lacking a chance to act on it.

They had kept that gracious disposition toward Paul by keeping the Gospel central in their thinking with love for him.

They had continued & cultivated generosity by focusing on Christ's provision & following Christ's example.

When the proper season came, their heart full of Christlike love could eagerly spring forth into action with their gift sent by Epaphroditus.

And that leads to a 3rd point today—that genuine generosity is prompted by Providence.

Genuine generosity is (1st) generated by God, (2nd) cultivated by Christlikeness, & 3rdly, prompted by Providence.

Providence is God's governing of all things, God's control over all circumstances so that He provides the opportunities to give when & how He wants by His ordering of our lives & others.

God rules over our finances & what He gives us & how He trains us to trust Him & to give sacrificially like Christ gave to us & He presents us opportunities to express faith & gratitude & grow through giving.

He is the One who gives out the talents, like in the parable of the talents, & He is in charge of how much & how many we are each given in abilities & opportunities.

We see that point in Paul's words in verse 10 that they lacked opportunity—literally were without season—but then they blossomed their concern & gave when giving season opened again.

They were ready & eager to give when opportunity arose.

Maybe that involved faithful working & stewardship & budgeting.

But more so, they had prepared their hearts to give no matter what because they were among the churches that gave above their ability & beyond their ability as 2nd Corinthians 8:3 says.

It was not merely that they planned well, but that they trusted God to provide even when they sacrificed to give.

2nd Corinthians 8:1-5 explains that Christlike mentality.

2nd Corinthians 8:1-5 says, “*we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.*”

That may sound a bit risky & over-the-top, but it was a response of sacrificial worship & glad faith to invest in the Gospel ministry out of Christlike love for others.

That was their response to God’s providence presenting them an opportunity to give that they could not pass up & that’s what it was like when they had the chance to give to Paul in prison at Rome also.

They gladly gave as prompted by Providence, as prompted by God’s preparation of their hearts to respond to the opportunity.

And that’s often how God works in our lives as well.

He prepares & presents an opportunity as 2nd Corinthians 8:12 says, “*For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.*”

That readiness to give is cultivated by fellowship with others in Christ & humble mindfulness about others like Christ & then God provides us the chance to act & we respond with generosity.

And in that way, it’s not about the gift itself or even completely about the people themselves who are giving or receiving gifts.

It is about a deeply-anchored sense of all-sufficiency in Christ that overflows in a wealth of generosity for His glory.

We find that mindset in what Paul said in verse 11. [READ]

Note point #4: genuine generosity is sustained by sufficiency in Christ.

Genuine generosity is (1) generated by God, (2) cultivated by Christlikeness, (3) prompted by Providence & (4) sustained by sufficiency in Christ.

As Paul shared his rejoicing in the Lord, he wanted it clear that he was not standing there with his hand out waiting for the next gift.

He wanted to clarify that he was not rejoicing merely over money or whatever the gift itself involved.

His joy was not because he could only be happy if his physical needs were met or his wants satisfied or if he didn’t feel neglected.

No. Not at all. Please do not mistake his rejoicing as making his heart subject to his circumstances.

He was not speaking from an emotional hilltop of situational provision as if his affections rose & fell with how well he was fed or cared for.

Do you see the point he wanted to clarify?

That’s the negative way of correcting it & then he described it positively by pointing to what he had learned.

He was a disciple of Jesus & he was still learning, but God had driven home this lesson that we'll talk more about next week.

He had learned to be content—& that's the word we'll stop with today—content is another word for sufficient.

He had learned to be sufficient in Christ & that allowed him to live above circumstances & not be controlled by them.

He did not need to manipulate his readers for their next gift or whine over any lack or delay in his needs being met because he knew who he was in Christ & he could be settled there.

That sufficiency in Christ—that contentment—transformed how he received the gift from the Philippians.

Sufficiency in Christ changed receiving the gift into a free enjoyment of God's grace in them & from them & with them.

It changed the gift from a debt he owed back to them to a joy he celebrated with them as given to them together by God.

It freed them to enjoy giving as worship toward God & it freed him to enjoy receiving as worship toward God.

Sufficiency in Christ changes both our giving & our receiving.

That's the freeing Gospel perspective of generosity we want to have.

We'll dig into that sufficiency & contentment & how Paul learned it more next week, but for today just note how it transforms & sustains a genuine generosity.

Generosity is not a chore or obligation or drain when we rest our full contentment in the sufficiency of Christ to sustain us & provide for us.

When we know He knows & promises to give what we truly need & to work all things together for our good, we are free.

We are free to humble ourselves & give to others like Christ did.

I trust you see how biblical generosity is very different from any kind of guilt-driven, debt-paying coercion or strings-attached, power-broking mentality.

I trust you see how desirable & worshipful & Gospel-saturated a true heart & practice of gracious giving should be.

And I pray it reminds & encourages us all to follow in the principles & patterns we find in the NT.

It all starts with knowing God through Christ who gave Himself for us as a ransom paid for our sins' that we might have new life.

If you do not know that life, we'd love to help you start today if you will come & talk with one of us after the service.

If you know Christ, then you know His grace that sets you free to show grace to others in relationships & in finances & more.

So let's pray as Paul said in Philippians 3 that we will seek to know Christ more & more until we finally meet Him in glory.

Pray with me now as we close.