

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



"Fellowship in Tribulation"

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Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): Phil. 4:14-17; 1:3-5, 29-30; 2:3-5; 2 Cor. 11:9; 2 Cor. 12:14; 1 Thes 2:1-10

There are moments when someone does something for you that may seem relatively small, but it means far more than the thing itself. Maybe somebody sends a message when you are walking through a difficult season. Maybe they bring a meal, give a gift, or simply show up when you are hurting. What touches you is not necessarily *what* they gave you. What touches you is what it says: **You saw me. You remembered me. You were thinking about me. You are with me.** We often say, "It's the thought that counts," and there really is something true about that. The action itself becomes a tangible expression of what is happening in someone's heart.

That is really at the heart of Phil. 4:14-17. Paul has just explained that he has learned the secret of contentment—that whether he has much or little, whether he is full or hungry, Messiah is enough. So when the Philippians' gift arrives, Paul does not want them to misunderstand his rejoicing. He is not rejoicing because their gift finally filled his belly; **he is rejoicing because it filled his heart.** Their gift says something about their *phronein*—their mind, their attitude, their thoughts toward him. They have remembered him in his suffering, and what Paul sees in that simple act is something beautiful: he sees the mind of Messiah taking shape in them.

1. IT IS BEAUTIFUL TO SHARE IN SOMEONE ELSE'S TROUBLE

Paul says, "*Nevertheless, you have done well to share in my trouble*" (Phil. 4:14). But "you have done well" almost sounds too muted for what Paul is saying. The word carries the sense of something good, noble, even **beautiful**. What you have done is *beautiful*. And what is beautiful is not merely the gift itself, but what the gift expresses about their hearts. Paul says they have "shared" in his trouble. The language is built around *koinōnia*—fellowship, participation, partnership—and here it carries this sense of "**with-ness**". They are saying to Paul, "We are with you." He may be sitting in prison, but he is not isolated. They are participating with him in his *thlipsis*—his affliction, oppression, tribulation.

And what makes that even more beautiful is that the Philippians have troubles of their own. Paul has already told them, "*For to you was granted for Messiah's sake not only to trust in Him, but also to suffer for His sake—experiencing the same struggle you saw in me and now you are hearing in me*" (Phil. 1:29-30). They could easily have said, "We have our own problems right now. We do not have time for someone else's pain." That is the natural tendency when we are hurting—to turn inward. But they don't. Even in their own difficulty, their minds are turned toward Paul. They are looking not only to what is near to them, but also to what is near to someone else. That is the mind of Messiah. Fellowship in tribulation says, "**I may be hurting too, but I still see you. I still care. I am still with you.**"

2. FELLOWSHIP IS PROVEN THROUGH FAITHFUL PARTNERSHIP

Paul then reminds them that this is not something that suddenly appeared in their relationship. *“Now you Philippians also know that in the beginning of the Good News, when I left Macedonia, not a single community partnered with me in giving and receiving—except you alone. For even in Thessalonica you sent something for my need more than once”* (Phil. 4:15–16). Paul takes them back to the beginning of their shared story. From the first days of the Good News in Philippi, they had walked with him. When he left Philippi and traveled to Thessalonica, they didn’t simply say, “Well, Paul is gone now.” Out of sight did not become out of mind. Though Paul was no longer near them physically, he remained near to them in their hearts.

That is real fellowship. Paul began this letter by thanking God *“because of your sharing in the Good News from the first day until now”* (Phil. 1:5). From the first day until now—they had participated, partnered, and fellowshiped with him not only when things were going well, but also when following Messiah became costly. Friendship is a two-way street; there is giving and receiving, walking together and carrying burdens together. Their repeated generosity was tangible evidence that this relationship was real. Their fellowship was not merely something they talked about; it took shape in what they did. There was history here. There was faithfulness here. **They had been with Paul in the Good News, and now they were with Paul in the tribulation that came because of the Good News.**

3. THE GIFT IS NOT THE GOAL—THE FRUIT IS

Then Paul makes something very clear: *“Not that I am looking for a gift, but for fruit that overflows to your credit”* (Phil. 4:17). Paul knows that whenever money, giving, and receiving enter the conversation, motives can easily be misunderstood. There were religious teachers in Paul's world, just as there are today, who could use flattering words as a cloak for greed. Paul wants nothing to do with that. He is not building them up so they will send another offering. He is not manipulating them. He is not chasing after their possessions. As he tells the Corinthians, *“I seek not your possessions, but you!”* (2 Cor. 12:14). What Paul is pursuing is not another gift; **he is pursuing the fruit that the gift reveals in them.**

Their gift matters because it is evidence of what God is doing in their hearts. It reveals generosity, selflessness, love, faithfulness, and the mind of Messiah. In that sense, their physical gift to Paul is evidence of their spiritual health. Paul is seeing fruit, and that fruit is increasing and overflowing. His ultimate concern is not what he can receive from them, but who they are becoming in Yeshua. That is why this brings him so much joy. They are learning to look beyond themselves. They are learning to share in someone else’s affliction. They are learning to put the interests of others alongside their own. The gift is simply the visible evidence of something far greater: their relationship with Yeshua is alive, it is bearing fruit, and it’s continuing to grow.

CONCLUSION

There is something profoundly beautiful about fellowship in tribulation. It is relatively easy to share and partner when life is good and everyone has something to offer. But Paul is sitting in prison. He cannot repay the Philippians. He cannot entertain them, serve them a meal, or return the favor. There is very little he can physically do for them. Yet they give

anyway. They remember him anyway. They enter into his suffering anyway. And Paul looks at that and says, in effect, **“This is beautiful.”** Because toward Paul, they are being like Messiah. They are demonstrating the very mind Paul described earlier: not looking only to their own interests, but also to the interests of others.

So perhaps the question before us is not simply, “Am I generous?” The deeper question is, **“Who am I ‘with’?”** Whose pain have I entered? Who is suffering somewhere outside my immediate field of vision but should still be near to my heart? Today, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal where your heart may have turned inward because of your own pressures, needs, or troubles. Then ask Him to give you the mind of Messiah—the heart that sees, remembers, and moves toward someone else. Maybe He will put a person on your heart whom you need to call, encourage, visit, pray for, or help tangibly. Do not dismiss that prompting as something small. Your simple act may say more than you realize: **“I see you. I have not forgotten you. You are not alone. I am with you.”** And in the kingdom of God, that is beautiful.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In Phil. 4:14, what made the Philippians’ gift “beautiful” to Paul beyond simply meeting his physical needs?
2. How does Paul’s use of fellowship or *koinōnia* help us understand what it means to “share” in another believer’s affliction?
3. The Philippians were experiencing suffering of their own, yet they continued to think about Paul. Why is it especially difficult to focus on the needs of others when we are facing our own problems?
4. Who in your life may currently be “out of sight” but should not be “out of mind”? Is there someone the Lord may be prompting you to encourage or support in a tangible way?
5. If your recent choices, spending, time, attention, and relationships were examined as “fruit,” what would they reveal about the condition and direction of your heart?

CLOSING PRAYER

ADONAI, thank You that You have never left us alone in our trouble. Thank You that in Messiah Yeshua You came near to us and entered into our suffering. Give us that same mind. Forgive us for the times when our own problems have caused us to become so focused on ourselves that we no longer see the people around us. By Your Spirit, make our hearts sensitive to those who are hurting. Teach us to remember those who are far away, to stand with those who are suffering, and to give without expecting anything in return. Let our words, our actions, our time, and our generosity become tangible expressions of fellowship and love. May the fruit of our lives reveal that we are becoming more and more like Yeshua. Help us to be people who can genuinely say to one another, “I see you. I remember you. I am with you.”

B’Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.