

Week 3: Committed to Stewardship

Philippians 4:10–20

Hook



Main Point: We demonstrate commitment to stewardship when we trust Christ to meet our needs and generously give.

In the book *The Paradox of Generosity: Giving We Receive, Grasping We Lose*, authors Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson make the claim that joy and contentment are found more in giving than receiving. They argue:

Rather than leaving generous people on the short end of an unequal bargain, practices of generosity are actually likely instead to provide generous givers with essential goods in life – happiness, health, and purpose – which money and time themselves simply cannot buy. That is an empirical fact well worth knowing.ⁱ

Other research supports similar responses to giving, from lowering blood pressure to overall happiness.ⁱⁱ

Q: Who in your life has exhibited a lifestyle of generosity? In which ways were they generous?

Q: How do you differentiate between a want and a need?

Q: Why do you suppose God instructs us to be generous? How is generosity related to our faith?

Transition: Paul closes out his letter to the Philippians by offering two great encouragements. First, he wants the believers to know that it is only in Christ that one can experience true contentment. Union with Christ is what gives Paul constant joy through any and every

circumstance. Secondly, Paul commends the Philippians for their generosity and service to Paul, not for Paul's sake, but rather for Christ's. Paul wants the Philippians to see that it is all for Christ that the Church sacrifices and serves. It's not for earthly repayment, but rather for heavenly reward.

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Philippians 4:10–20

Book

Main Point: We demonstrate commitment to stewardship when we trust Christ to meet our needs and generously give.

Philippians 4:10-13 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Find contentment in Christ, not circumstances.

Q: How has Paul experienced abundance in his life? How has he experienced hardship? Use Scripture.

Q: Why should the lifestyle of the Christian be one of service?

Paul is thankful that the Philippian church has begun their support of him again. The word Paul uses in verse 10 is translated as *revived*. “Paul borrowed this word from the horticultural practice of his time; it denotes plants and flowers ‘blooming again’ (Ezekiel 17:24).”ⁱⁱⁱ

Paul says the Philippian church has reignited its pursuit to sacrifice for and serve Paul in tangible ways. This is Paul’s purpose throughout his letter: He wants the church to exist to serve one another and have the same mind – the mind of Christ. The church is practicing what Paul has been preaching to them through his letter. It’s not known why the church at Philippi was hindered in its support of Paul. However, it’s understandable that sending gifts to Paul wasn’t easy. One commentator explains, “[sending gifts to Paul] brought suspicion on the Philippian Church because of who Paul was, a man in chains.”^{iv}

The church’s loyalty to Paul was costly, but nevertheless they continued. These verses, along with Paul’s letter in its entirety is concerned with one thing: lifestyle of the Christian. Paul doesn’t just want Christians to serve, to model Christ here and there. He wants it to be the way of life for the Christian. That’s why contentment, he exhorts, is not found in earthly gift-giving or gift-receiving.

Paul starts in verse 11 making sure the Philippians know that it’s not because of their financial assistance that He rejoices. He says, “Not that! Not that!” Paul says he’s learned the secret to lifelong joy: Christ. The secret to having joy in every circumstance is knowing that Christ is enough. If you can remain joyful and content through times of great gain and great loss, there’s nothing this world can do to your joy.

This occurrence of “I have learned the secret” is found only here in the New Testament. “It was a Greek word, a technical term in the Hellenistic mystery religions for being initiated into the mysteries by going through sacred rituals. The term draws a line between those on the outside and those on the inside.”^v Paul experienced terrible hardship and great reward. But through it all, he has found that Christ is always enough. Corrie Ten Boom, the famous Dutch Christian who lived through the Holocaust, famously said, “You never know Christ is all you need until Christ is all you have.”

Paul was not looking to others to complete his need or his joy. Paul learned to keep his focus on Christ. Good gifts and financial provision must never divert the focus away from the giver.^{vi} “Paul’s joy in the Lord was not heightened by prosperity or diminished by poverty.”^{vii} Christ-centered contentment, contentment that rises above circumstances, can’t be learned through self-discipline. Rather, it comes through knowing (a knowing that translates into an action-driving conviction) that Christ is truly satisfying, no matter what earthly circumstances scream.

It’s in this context that verse 13 must be read and understood. One source notes “Translating the preposition *in* as ‘through’ may cause one to miss Paul’s point that it is by being in Christ that one is empowered. In this case, everything refers to his ministry as an apostle, not to anything he might set out to do.”^{viii}

While this verse is wildly used to promise victory in all circumstances, that’s not Paul’s intent nor is it the context in which Paul is writing. Hansen writes, “Any use of this verse to support a claim or goal of a triumphant, victorious Christian life without weaknesses or limitations conflicts with the immediate context and the wider teaching of Paul.”^{ix}

Paul can be brought low, or he can soar on the heights, yet his joy and focus never change. He’s offering the spectrum of life while saying no matter where he falls, his joy remains because Christ remains. Having Christ and being found in Him is worth more than anything else. This is the active pursuit of the Christian life. And when this is achieved, Christ works in His followers to spread that joy and advance the Gospel that says Christ is the source of contentment.

Q: Why is contentment in Christ such a foundational element to trusting God?

Q: What are some enemies of contentment in today’s culture?

Q: How can we be content despite our circumstances?

Philippians 4:14–16 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Use resources sacrificially, not selfishly.

Q: What do you believe prompted the believers to give so generously to Paul?

Q: What words describe a Christ-follower's attitude toward giving?

The Philippian church sacrificed greatly for Paul. Paul commends them for this. He returns to partnership language, proud of how the Philippians are serving for the sake of Christ. Paul wants to commend the act of giving, not necessarily the gift itself. Paul orients their focus heavenward. He wants them to know that the act of giving is the very thing Christ calls Christians to, just as he wrote in the early section of chapter 2. Commending the act of giving directs the attention to Christ and does not draw attention to the gift itself because Christ is the gift that is worth more than all else.

Notice that the Philippians continued their support of Paul even when other churches failed to do so (v. 15). Their giving truly advanced the Gospel without barriers in the sense that their support of Paul made it so that new converts didn't have to. The Philippians knew it would be easier for someone to hear the Gospel message and respond if he or she knew money was not attached to his/her decision.

Paul commends the sacrificial state of the Philippians' heart. Again, being associated with Paul wasn't the best situation for this church. Supporting a prisoner such as Paul was costly for them because it brought suspicion on them.^x Yet they gave anyway. The Philippians set an example of sacrifice, not one of selfishness. They used their resources for the sake of the kingdom's advancement, not their own gain. If they sought their own gain, they wouldn't have continued to support Paul.

Paul remembers their service to him with joy and thankfulness. The language he uses sounds more like a teacher's congratulating a student.^{xi} Paul commends their sacrifice and their act of giving because it follows his own example. Paul has poured out his life for the sake of the Gospel, and he is proud that those he has served in life are following his example, but more importantly, they are following the example of Christ.

Q: What barriers get in the way of giving sacrificially?

Q: What are some keys to giving in a way that pleases God?

Q: When have you felt inspired to give above and beyond?

Philippians 4:17–20 [Read]

Talking Point 3: The Christian's reward comes from the hands of God, not the hands of men.

Q: What does it mean for Paul to seek the fruit that increases to the credit of the Philippians? (v. 17)

Paul reiterates that he isn't seeking gifts from the Philippians. Instead, he wanted their heavenly accounts to swell with abundance (v. 17).^{xii} This is the spiritual nature that Paul wants the Philippians to see. He wants them focused on the Christlike purpose in sacrificing for others. Paul didn't want them to focus on whether their gifts made Paul happy. He wanted them to see that their gifts pleased the Lord. One commentator explains this well by saying it's not about getting repaid on earth and it's not about exchanging gifts – Paul wants them to know that God sees their sacrifice, and He will reward them. This divine reward, as it relates to serving others, was absent from the culture of the day.^{xiii}

Notice in verse 18 Paul uses sacrificial language. Hansen writes, "From a social perspective, these gifts demonstrated the friendship of the Philippians by amply supplying all that Paul needed; from a theological perspective, these gifts demonstrated the faith of the Philippians by pleasing God as true sacrifices."^{xiv} Paul assures the Philippians that God will supply their needs based on their example of sacrificial giving (v. 19). Paul does this to show them that any reward one may seek by giving unto the Lord will come from the Lord. The Philippians won't be repaid by Paul. It's not in this life their reward will come. Paul continues to divert their focus heavenward. Paul confirms that God will take care of them and that their example is pleasing to Him.

Q: Why does Paul want to make sure the Philippians know that God honors and rewards their generosity?

Q: Why is it hard to believe that heavenly rewards from God's hand are worth more than accolades and praise from men?

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Took

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Stewardship lessons are often difficult to discuss as many people may be in financially unhealthy situations. For those who may be struggling, our God is a God of *restoration*, and He can restore your financial situation. The Bible is filled with story after story of how God restored His people. In addition, God took care of the biggest problem that man has (sin), so why would he not care about any financial struggle that you may be experiencing?

Jesus looked at them and said, "*With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.*" —Mark 10:27

Our church has resources to assist you:

- One-on-one Financial Counseling
- Classes (Financial Boot / Financial Freedom)
- Career Transitions Ministry
- Discipleship
- Prayer Support

The key is to seek the Lord with your struggles, come up with a plan, and execute on that plan while continuing to seek the Lord as you draw closer to Him through Bible study and prayer.

For more information, contact the Prestonwood Foundation at 972-820-5439 or go to Prestonwoodfoundation.org to learn more about the above.

Challenges

THINK: Take time this week to look through your recent bank statements and ask: “Am I trusting in money more than Jesus? Do money and possessions bring me more joy than Jesus?”

Am I making generosity an active part of my lifestyle?" Identify an area that needs to change. What steps will you take to make that change?

PRAY: Praise God for the opportunity to experience the kind of joy that only comes from serving Him. Ask for eyes to see chances to increase your joy this week through sharing the resources God has blessed you with.

ACT: What need can you meet within your church and within your LifeGroup Bible Study? Look for an opportunity to bless others as a response to the blessings God has given you in Christ.

ⁱ Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson, *The Paradox of Generosity: Giving We Receive, Grasping We Lose*.

ⁱⁱ <https://time.com/4857777/generosity-happiness-brain/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ralph Martin. *Tyndale New Testament Commentary: Philippians*. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987], p. 181.

^{iv} Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians - Philemon*. [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006], p. 258.

^v G. Walter Hansen, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Philippians*. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2009, p. 312.

^{vi} G. Walter Hansen, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Philippians*. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2009, p. 303.

^{vii} *Ibid.*, 313

^{viii} Longman & Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians - Philemon*, 258

^{ix} Hansen, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: Philippians*, 314

^x Longman & Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians - Philemon*, 258

^{xi} Hansen, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: Philippians*, 317.

^{xii} Longman & Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians - Philemon*, 260.

^{xiii} *Ibid.*

^{xiv} Hansen, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: Philippians*, 323.