

# Philippians 4:10-20

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Can I invite you to turn to the letter to the Philippians that Paul's just read from chapter 4. And for a brief time tonight we're going to look at verses 10 to 20 of that chapter, where Paul describes his approach to giving and receiving aid.

Paul's concern really in this section of the letter is about concern amongst believers and that word comes up a couple of times if you noticed it. In verse 10, I rejoice because you have revived your concern for me. He goes on, you were indeed concerned for me.

Earlier in chapter 2 he talks about Timothy who is genuinely concerned for your welfare and actually that word in the Greek is the same root word as some of the words that we looked at last Sunday evening in Colossians 3 where Paul says, set your minds on things above, concern yourself with things above. It turns out that word is all over Philippians, it's not so clear maybe in the English but it's there at least 10 times. Chapter 1 verse 7, it's right that I feel this way about you Philippians or I am concerned with you, I concern myself with you. Chapter 2 verse 5, have this mind which is Christ's or this concern among you which is Christ's. It's everywhere. It means this focus of attention, this attention, this observation, this care about, this concern about one another in chapter 4.

He's telling us something here in another one of his prison letters written from prison, something I think particularly helpful for life at the moment for us in this situation. Because being concerned for one another, serving one another is a very complex issue really. Giving and receiving, expressing needs and getting help or answering needs and giving help. It's not an easy issue actually, especially at the moment. So I've got three statements on concern that are represented in this letter. I want you to see what you feel about them. The first statement is, I crave your concern. I crave your concern.

Paul, we know, writes this letter from prison and the Philippians, he tells us, have been very generous in providing for some of his needs, providing supplies. If you look at verse 18, the messenger, Epaphroditus, has acted as a sort of courier, hasn't he, between the Philippians and where Paul is. He's brought a gift from the Philippians to them and it's been a wonderful provision for Paul.

[ 3 : 1 1 ] And it's worth mentioning because it's quite unusual, especially for the time. But as you read the whole of the letter, we see the tendency of the human heart in every age, in every time.

When the going gets really, really tough, we are naturally inclined to be concerned, mainly with ourselves. Self-isolation can, if we're not careful, lead to self-obsession.

You see this danger all through the letter, actually. So chapter two, particularly, Paul has to constantly tell them to have the same mind, to count others more significant than themselves, not looking to their own interests, but to the interests of others, not grumbling or disputing. And then there's the famous argument, isn't there, in chapter four between these two women, Judea and Syntyche, this underlying hum of unrest, rivalry and jealousy and individualism.

And our hearts are inclined this way, aren't they? To crave and even to expect that my concerns should be your concerns.

I want you to care for me. If you're like me, the danger of a time like this that we're all going through is that our minds wander into making unhelpful comparisons with others when everyone else is better off than me.

[ 5 : 1 6 ] As we look into this little virtual window now into each other's living rooms and into each other's lives, what do you see there?

Gallery mode. It's kind of a mixed blessing, isn't it? It's great. But if you're like me, perhaps deep down, we begin to focus in on the things that we see in each other's little windows that we wish we

had.

Or we imagine the circumstances that we wish we were in but aren't in. Self-isolation, it can breed self-obsession in this way.

I wonder if you feel that. Well, if that is you. Secondly, listen to Paul. Listen to statement number two. And this comes from Paul himself.

He says, I rejoice when you're concerned for me. I might say I crave your concern. He says, I rejoice when you're concerned for me.

[ 6 : 19 ] And that's what he says in verse 10, isn't it? I rejoice that you revive your concern for me. And at first, it sounds like he's as selfish as everybody else. Finally, someone has paid me attention.

Finally, someone understands my needs in prison. Is that what Paul is saying? Well, look at verse 17. Why is he rejoicing?

He clarifies why. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. First and foremost, Paul isn't rejoicing because his needs have been met, although I'm sure he's happy about that.

He isn't seeking their concern for him as the end in itself. But so that the Philippians would bear fruit in giving.

So that they would grow in credit before God. He says they've been concerned before, but not had the opportunity to express it. Now that Epaphroditus has made that possible.

[ 7 : 28 ] He is absolutely delighted. He rejoices at their fruit in this concern for him. It's worth noting that Paul doesn't just see the horizontal value of giving and receiving gifts like this.

It's not just because Paul values human life, although he does, but it's a vertical act of worship. Do you see? He talks about their credits, doesn't he?

But before God. It's not just what he what he sees happening horizontally. Verse 18. The gifts you sent are a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

God sees and smells the sacrifices of giving and it smells good. It is pleasing to God.

As many of you at the moment in our church are making huge sacrifices at the moment with with your kids or making phone calls or praying.

[ 8 : 37 ] Homeschooling. Homeschooling. Holding your tongue. Sacrificing your own time for others. And when you do that, when you share, even from your own poverty.

And God is pleased with that. It is to your credit. And so Paul says, I care that you care for me. But for your credit, for the fruits that you are bearing.

So it's a very different perspective, isn't it? This is more than just thankfulness for his relief at being given some stuff. This is more than a satisfied appetite.

Notice verse one again. I rejoiced in the Lord. I rejoiced in the Lord. And that is the Christian thing, isn't it?

Everything is in the Lord with Paul. He faces plenty and hunger. And his main aim is to see the Lord Jesus preached and praised and to see people grow to be more like Jesus.

[ 9 : 40 ] That is his mission. And as they display this concern for him, what thrills him most, what delights him most is seeing them bear this fruit. It's a radical perspective.

He's not demanding their concern for him. But he rejoices when they give it. For the spiritual health that it shows in them. Thank you so much for this gift.

And what really thrills me about it is how much like Jesus you have become. And that is exciting. So it's so different, certainly, from how I think.

And the question I want to ask is, how on earth does Paul do it? How does he do this? How in such dire circumstances does he rejoice?

Not just in the relief that he gets from receiving things, but in their fruitfulness. And I want to spend a bit more time on this last point. I might crave your concern for me.

[ 10 : 45 ] He said, I rejoice in your concern for me for the Lord's sake. How does he do that? Well, it's because of the third statement. It's because Paul also says, I know God's concern for me.

That is how. I think I've got a spider crawling on me. Paul says, I know God's concern for me. I rejoice in the Lord.

And that's the key, isn't it? In the Lord. In the Lord is the place where Paul does everything.

Whether it's rejoicing or mourning or whatever. However, the presence and the lordship and the provision of the Lord Jesus is what makes him so different.

It's what makes Christians different. Christian concern is a concern that is only truly expressed under the concern of the Lord.

In the Lord. And this is really important because I think it is really easy this evening to hear Paul in this passage, but only almost get him and almost understand what he's saying.

[ 11 : 56 ] How does he do it? Look at verses 11 to 12 again. Not that I am speaking of being in need. For I've learnt in whatever situation I am to be content.

I know how to be brought low and how to abound. In every circumstance I've learnt the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. Now the problem is that we often stop there when we read this passage.

The world actually is quite happy with what Paul says until there. It's quite on board with Paul's message. You don't have to be a Christian.

You don't have to know Jesus Christ to almost get Paul. To be on the journey with him of contentment and radical concern up until that point.

To think you've understood how Christian contentment works. But to only go to the end of verse 12 with Paul actually is not full Christianity.

[ 13 : 06 ] It's pagan philosophical stoicism. And the worry is that at the moment that is what a lot of us could be doing in this situation.

It could be what I'm doing. But let me try and explain. Stoicism is a way of thinking. It's a way of coping with hardship. And that's what we're all trying to do, isn't it?

And it's perfectly described in verses 11 and 12. So rip those verses out of context. And the secret for contentment and being concerned for others actually is just stoicism.

Stoic principles. It's an ancient philosophy, isn't it? It's all about changing your reaction to what's going on around you. You might not be able to change what's happening to you, but you can change the way you think about it.

And how you think about it actually is where the battle is. So Stoics would have coped really well in a lockdown. They'd have had mechanisms to deal with it, to think about it in a different way.

[ 14 : 12 ] They would have been brilliant at giving to charity. They would have been quite generous. They would have looked almost like Paul here. They would have looked almost Christian.

Stoics would say things like, external things are not the problem. It's your assessment of them which you can change. We suffer more in imagination than in reality.

Marcus Aurelius said that. Sounds really clever, doesn't it? But it's a way of looking at your circumstances, looking at the bright side. It's a bit mind over matter.

And sure, it does have some positive effect. How we respond to our circumstances definitely does have an effect, doesn't it? A right mindset does change things.

It offers relief, but only to a point. The average Londoner at the moment actually is living a stoic lifestyle. The average Londoner will say things like, what doesn't hurt me makes me stronger.

[ 15 : 21 ] Don't get too down because it could be worse. Mustn't grumble. We've got to have a positive mental attitude. And we need to latch on to the good news stories, which are great.

And we need to look at the silver linings in the clouds. And it all looks and sounds a bit like Paul, but it isn't quite Paul. It isn't quite Christianity. He talks about the ability, doesn't he, to find contentment in all circumstances.

He talks about facing plenty and hunger. And a stoic would agree, but there is one major thing missing. There is one thing that Paul has that makes him different.

That makes Christianity different from a world that stoically struggles to find the good news in all of this mess. It's God.

He is missing. Paul and we with him don't just have verses 11 and 12. We have verse 13.

[ 16 : 32 ] Look at that with me. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Yes, Paul has learned to think about his circumstances in a different way and he can face them.

But he does that by thinking about God. On God and his rich supply. On his power and his provision and his strength.

With God, you don't need to just look for silver linings. For even the darkness is as light with him. And he knows that shared concerns given or received or pledged or pending are all underwritten and supplied ultimately by God.

God is the one who holds the abundance. And he uses us often as the means. And whether we can or whether we can't supply the fulfillment of needs across the board is overruled by God.

And Paul depends then upon the revelation of a loving God who knows what I need. And cares about what I need.

[ 17 : 50 ] And supplies what I need. A God who is concerned for me. Do not be anxious about anything. But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.

Let your requests be made known. To this God. Others may be the means that God answers that prayer. You might be the means that you answer that prayer for somebody else.

But that abundance comes from him. Ultimately. The story is told of a beggar who was on the roadside who asked for arms from Alexander the Great.

Alexander the Great was walking down the parade. He was a very, very poor man. And the emperor, when seeing him, threw him a few golden coins. And a courtier with Alexander the Great was astonished at his generosity.

He said, Sir, copper coins would have sufficed to meet this poor man's need. Why give him gold? Alexander responded in royal fashion.

[ 18 : 58 ] Copper coins would have suited the beggar's need. But gold coins suit Alexander's giving. He is a God who is in the business of provision from his abundance.

Who prepares a table in the wilderness for his people. And his giving is not limited to our capacity in receiving.

God's heart, not mine, is the measure of his giving. My capacity to receive, it isn't. But his capacity to give. So Paul isn't simply ignoring his needs here.

He doesn't pretend things are OK when they're not. He has, if you listen to him, categories like hunger, plenty and abundance. And he speaks of his needs being met.

But he still has needs, doesn't he? He speaks of sorrow and hardship. He's not coy in sharing needs. He doesn't stoically gloss over them.

[ 20 : 09 ] If it's more blessed to give than receive, then the old joke goes, doesn't it? I'll happily indulge you. Let me help you exercise your gift of giving.

And although that's a bit of a daft joke, there should be actually a godly way that we can express that. We're not stoics. We can talk about needs and share them without fear of guilt tripping or loading people down or embarrassment.

Neither do we have to demand to be the prime concern for other people. Because in either case, we have a God who is concerned for each one of us. And it's God who provides, often through the means of others.

But his is the abundance. I just want to level you with you for a moment as a preacher and having studied this passage this week. It's very easy to understand, actually, what's going on in the passage, isn't it?

But actually, pastorally, it's quite a difficult passage to apply. Or I've certainly found that. Because each of our households at the moment will struggle with this in different ways, won't they?

[ 21 : 24 ] Depending on our situation. Some of us might need to share our needs a little bit more. And we need to do that. And we're not doing that. Some of us might want to be at the centre more when we ought to concentrate on others.

Some of us just feel that, frankly, we haven't got time to think about this at the moment. Others of us would love to help others more. But we can't. We're not in a position to do that.

Now, you know your conscience and the Lord knows your heart on those things. But in all cases, the remedy is not to get stoical about it. But to think on God.

God who provides. It's really interesting. There are times we might not be able to fulfil each other's needs. And Paul doesn't feel guilty about that either, does he?

He's in prison. Some of us are in a position to help others. And others of us need to be in a position to receive help, actually. And that's the reality.

[ 22 : 28 ] And Paul is not embarrassed about that. He's not worried that he can't return the favour at this point. Because he can appeal to the one who always can.

Verse 19. My God will supply every need of yours. And that is not a throwaway comment. He's convicted that the provision of God can more than match his inability to provide at that time.

Now, we're not sure how all of this is going to pan out, are we? It might be that things have become serious for you already. And maybe they will be with livelihoods and jobs and things.

So let us, honestly, let us make our needs known to one another. And share concern where possible. To give where possible.

But without embarrassment. And without rivalry. And let us rejoice at the receiving of gifts from others. But for their credit.

[ 23 : 32 ] For the giver's credit. For their fruitfulness. Let us say thank you for this gift. I am so thrilled. And how you are growing to be more like Jesus. And let us rejoice in the Lord.

Shall we pray together?