

Philippians 4:10-20

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[0 : 00] Turn back again to Philippians chapter 4, look at verses 10 to verses 20.! You know, if you go to the shops, like to W.H. Smith or something, you look for the thank-you notes, you'll find that the thank-you notes are conveniently small, generally.

Because, you know, you write thank-you for such-and-such, and then you're thinking, now what should I say? Well, I could tell them about my week, I could talk about the weather. You know, sometimes you're not quite sure what to write, and so you're glad that you can pick small cards. And they already have thank-you written on them, and you just have to say, you know, thank-you for the lovely flowers and really enjoying them.

And sign your name. And that's about it. Well, really, the letter of Philippians is a thank-you letter from Paul, but he wouldn't have gotten one of those little minuscule cards.

He wrote a long letter to them. And he did that because it's not just that they sent a check, or they sent flowers, or they gave him a gift, but they did much more for Paul than that.

[1 : 16] Last week, we looked in chapter 2, where Paul talks about Epaphroditus. Here was this opportunity that the Philippian church had.

They found out about how Paul was doing in Rome, and of his great needs, so they figured out Epaphroditus. Can you get off work and go for an undetermined period of time?

Can we entrust this money to you? Maybe they said it's getting toward winter. Can you take this woolen cloak? Can you take this warm scarf that somebody knitted?

And can you take some books that we got for Paul, because we know he loves to read? So they put together a basket, and they put together all these gifts. And Paul talks about the gifts you sent, not just the gift.

And they sent it with Epaphroditus, and Epaphroditus gets there, he gets sick, he almost dies. So Paul is sending Epaphroditus back, and this letter goes with him to give thanks to the church in Philippi for their gifts.

[2 : 19] There's three different kinds of fellowship that are talked about in this passage. And that word may not jump out at you, because sometimes it doesn't come out as the word fellowship. But that's a theme for us to think about as we look at this particular chapter, this particular passage.

There's three kinds of fellowship. There's the fellowship expressed by their giving, that they shared in his sufferings, and they shared with what they had. They said that Paul is our co-worker, we want to give to him what we have.

And then there's the fellowship expressed in receiving. That's the other side, the way in which we receive is important, not just the way we give. But overall, there's the fellowship with the giver, the fellowship with God, because God is the one who is supplied.

God is the one who really writes the thank you note and expresses and keeps a record of what we have done. God is the one who pays the dividends for what we have given. So first of all, this fellowship of giving that the Philippians have given to Paul.

One of the things that Paul wants to appreciate is their constant concern expressed in their giving. You notice in verse 10, he says, I rejoice to the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

[3 : 39] You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. And these days we keep in touch with people. You know, you get a Twitter from somebody or a tweet.

That's what it's called, right? I don't do this. And the younger generation is all laughing, smiling. But, you know, people keep us updated on Facebook and what's going on, and we know what's happening in their lives and what their needs are.

But you think about Paul. Paul went from Philippi, that was the first place in Europe he went, up in Macedonia. And he went from there, after they'd received the gospel, he went down to Thessalonica, which was 70 miles away.

And no telephones. And so you had to walk, and they'd pass messages back and forth. And Paul talks about how, even in verse 16, even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again.

And then he goes down to Achaia in the southern part in Greece proper. And he's in Athens, and then he's in Corinth. And they give to him again. Now he's 280 miles away.

[4 : 48] That's a long way to keep in touch with what's going on. What does Paul need? So they just make assumptions. Go find Paul. We know he needs something. And so they care for him, and they send for him.

Now Paul's 600 miles away in Rome. And getting news from Paul and what's going on is not an easy thing. So when Paul isn't trying to give them kind of a backhanded criticism, they're saying, now at length you have revived your concern for me.

But he says, you were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. People would come through and you'd say, do you know anything about Paul? Where is he now? How is he doing? What's happening in his life?

And people might shake their heads and say, no. Somebody came and said, I know where he is. He's in prison in Rome. And so now they had an opportunity. They knew where he was.

They had some idea what his needs were. And they took advantage of that opportunity, and they sent Epaphroditus with a gift. So Paul is not kind of subtly complaining that they had neglected him for a long time.

[5 : 55] But he says, you have had a constant concern for me over all this period of time, and you have been caring for me. Secondly, in this fellowship of giving, Paul says it's a unique concern.

In verse 15 and 16, he says, And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, that doesn't mean when the gospel started, but when the gospel began to be preached and bear its fruit in Macedonia, in the beginning of that, when I left Macedonia, not one church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.

So it was not just Thessalonica, which is also in Macedonia, but when he left there and when he went down to Athens and to Corinth.

What they're experiencing, what they're showing was a fellowship. Verse 14 says, Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And that word share is koinonia.

You entered into my trouble. You made my trouble your own, and so you were concerned for me.

And then in the following verse 15, And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.

[7 : 19] Their response to knowing what his needs were was, How can we partner with Paul? Because we have resources and we are concerned for him. We have a fellowship with him, and that fellowship involves giving and receiving.

Go back to Acts chapter 18, and you see how this works out. In Acts chapter 18, Paul has gone from Philippi and from Thessalonica, and he's gone down south to Achaia.

He's been in Athens, and now he goes to Corinth. And when he gets to Corinth, he finds Aquila and Priscilla, and they are fellow Jews, they are fellow believers, but also they have the same skill of tent making.

And so Paul joins in business partnership with them. And so in verse 3 it says, So during the week, he's making tents with Aquila and Priscilla.

On the Sabbath, he goes and he reasons with people. The next verse, When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, where Philippi is, Paul was occupied with the word testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.

[8 : 42] Well, that's the ESV being precise. They have one Greek word that they translate occupied. He was occupied with the word. Now, sometimes the way that phrase sounds, it almost sounds like he's ignoring Paul, Silas and Timothy.

Silas and Timothy arrived, but Paul was occupied with the word. So he was too busy to talk to them. Well, that's not actually what it means. The NIV says, instead of occupied, it says devoted himself entirely or completely.

In other words, before they came, he was working five or six days a week and in the synagogue on the seventh day.

When they came from Macedonia, he devoted himself completely to preaching and teaching the word. In other words, he no longer had to earn his own living. Because they came and they brought a gift.

If you go into Corinthians, 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 8 and 9, Paul was talking about the church in Corinth.

[9 : 55] And there was a lot of rivalry and a lot of difficulty there. And Paul felt an awkwardness about receiving any support. He didn't want to do like the false apostles did and say, I'm going to give a lecture on Thursday night about how the Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ.

It will be 10 pounds at the door. Or if you buy tickets in advance, it's only 8 pounds. Paul said, I'm going to preach the gospel without charge.

So Paul says in chapter 11, verse 8 and 9, Well, I'll start in 7. Did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted?

Because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge. I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone.

For the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. Sometimes it's awkward for preachers to talk about money.

[11 : 06] That's why it's better for me to be here than for Paul leaving. But there's other ways in which it can be awkward. I will tell you something that shouldn't leave this room. I have been going down a lot to lists.

And many people in lists would be happy to say, Can we pay your mileage? They've done that in the past. But there are a few people who are not so happy about loan elders.

And also they're financially tight. So I don't turn in my mileage. Sometimes what I do is I turn in my mileage to Missions of the World, which is fine with them.

And then Bill 7 sends money to Missions of the World. And covers my trip down to this. So they are my Philippi. And this is the Corinthians.

Where there's a few people, it would stick in their craw to have to pay for my mileage to come when they don't want me to come. That's just a few people. And so the easiest way is to know that I have a Philippi.

[12 : 09] And Titus and Epaphroditus and people like that. So Paul is thanking them for the uniqueness of their concern and their faithfulness in it.

It's also a faithful thing if you look at the history of it. You see that from the time that Paul went to Philippi and they began to get involved in caring for his needs, it's been over 10 years that now he's writing to them and thanking them for this gift.

It wasn't just something that happened on the spur of the moment. It was not an infrequent concern. But Paul says, you have had this concern all along.

You just needed an opportunity and that's what it needed. Paul writes to the Corinthians and says, When you give, don't just wait until you feel like it, but give consistently.

Every Sunday morning when you get together, set aside your money so that this offering that we want to take up, it doesn't wait for a special occasion. But there's a consistency to your giving.

[13 : 08] And that's an example for all of us to follow. The consistency in giving that it's not sort of as the spirit moves. I was joking with somebody about how we take up the offering generally before the sermon because otherwise the offering becomes a means of rating the sermon.

Oh, it must have been a good sermon. We had a higher giving level than normal. Or that was really a bad sermon. Our giving is down, we can tell. It needs to be something which comes from our planning and comes from our heart and not just from kind of what we feel like in the moment.

Paul also describes their giving as a generous concern. If you look at verse 18 and 19, Paul uses some current financial terms.

Paul says, I have received full payment and more. I am well supplied having received from Epaphroditus the gifts. There's that plural word that you sent.

Paul says, I've received full payment. He uses the kind of Greek term that you find on little scraps of papyrus or little pot shirts that archaeologists uncover.

[14:21] One business is writing a note to another business. And this business had sent the money to them. And they write a note and they say, I have received payment in full.

And they send that back to the one who had sent it. Paul uses that same expression. But you see that Paul doesn't use it as a bookkeeper would because Paul says, I have received full payment and more.

I am well supplied. In what context do we write somebody and say, you have given me more than I needed, more than was due?

Well, if you break out of the business context of buying and selling, where the books have to balance, and you get into another context that we could call giving and receiving, where relationships are expressed by the fellowship that I know your need, and I can meet that need, and so here's what I want to do.

Then we've broken away from the constraints of the buying and selling. And your receipt to someone says, thank you, you have given me far more than I need or deserve.

[15:31] You know, if you have a relationship with someone and you're keeping careful track of who bought the coffee last, so you know that it's not my turn.

It's not much of a relationship, is it? Or if your relationship is such that you, you know, you buy the lunch and then I buy the lunch, but you took me to kind of a cheap place last time, so I'm not going to take you to a nice place this time, because we get out of balance.

But when you're in a relationship and you don't know who bought last time, and frankly you don't care, because you would invite this person out if you paid every time, then you know you have a relationship.

In Kikamba, the language we use in rural Kenya, they had a proverb, kasele katune katune vasu nikonengola nilge, which means you go to your neighbor and you want to borrow something.

In this case, you borrow some cooking fat. They put it in a little half-gourd and you take it home.

And then you think, oh, I should send that back, and so you send back as much or more than they gave you.

[16:47] And what happens is this cooking fat gets rubbed into that gourd, and it becomes shiny, and it becomes red, and it becomes an object of beauty. When there is a relationship like Paul had with the Philippians, it's become an object of beauty, because we look at it and we are pleased with this relationship.

And the Philippians are not saying, Paul owes us. Paul is not saying, you know, why don't you send me some more? But instead they say, we have a beautiful relationship.

And that's what Paul is saying in this chapter. There's a beautiful relationship because of the fellowship of giving. The fellowship of receiving. Paul says in verse 11, not that I am speaking of being in need.

I'm not complaining. Don't take me wrong. Not that I'm speaking of being in need. For I have learned in whatever situation, I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound.

In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

[18:01] Paul isn't one of these kind of a thing, you know, there's a subtle message here that I'm really complaining that you took so long, or that you didn't send what I want, or that it wasn't generous enough.

He's not saying, it's okay, I've learned to suffer. You know, poor me, I'm suffering here while you live in prosperity, and finally, you've done something to care about me.

Paul is saying, no, I've learned to live in a different way. God has given me a contentment. God gives me a contentment so I can be here in prison in Rome, and I can be content that God is caring for me, and he's doing that for you.

I was content when I was in Philippi, and Lydia said, come and stay in my home, and she had this big grand home because she was a prosperous businesswoman, and she took care of them.

Paul says, I can be content in either of those circumstances because I see the hand of God in it.

God is the one who's provided. So Paul's not being a stoic who's trying to suppress his real needs.

[19:07] It's not just stiff upper lip and all of that, but Paul has learned to be content. And that means learning to trust God, learning to be grateful for what God has given even if it may not be grand, learning dependence upon God and being satisfied in his provision.

If you want some examples of that, look at Paul's experience as he travels by ship to go to Rome. So here's Paul in this ship, and the sailors are afraid.

You know, the soldiers want to kill the prisoners so they don't escape. The sailors are trying to sneak away in a lifeboat, and they're all desperate to save themselves.

And Paul says to them, God has shown me that he will take care of us, and none of us will die. So here's the last bit of food. Let me give thanks to God for this food that we can eat before we get shipwrecked.

And then they land on the beach, and they build a fire. Paul gets bit by a snake, and he shakes it off, and he lives. And here's Paul giving, he gives thanks again on the beach that the Lord preserved their lives.

[20 : 16] So Paul has learned to be thankful in every and every situation. Paul is thankful for their generosity, and their warmth, and their care for him.

And Paul concludes that a little bit by saying, I have learned, I can do all things through him who strengthens me. So there are some Christians who have a t-shirt that they wear when they go to the gym, or when they run a race, or something that says, I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

This verse actually comes from a missionary, learning to live according to what God provides, and being satisfied that God has given him the ability to make tents, and he can live by that.

And friends to work with, or that God has sent Titus to come and to bring a gift from Philippi, so that he doesn't have to work and earn his own way.

God is the one who provides for us. And when you look at his thanks to them, he expresses that, the generosity of what they have given to him, that he is well supplied.

[21 : 28] They have given him full payment and more. All this comes back to the fact that God is the giver of all things. And so it reflects a mutual fellowship that we have with God as the giver.

God is the provider. You can see that in some ways in the way in which Paul uses the bookkeeping. Instead of this buying and selling mode, it's the giving and receiving that God has graciously provided.

And so God is the one who has given them what they have so that they can give for Paul. Paul says in verse 17, not that I seek the gift, not that I seek the gift from you, that is, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

So that word fruit is like a dividend. The bonus which is added on to your credit. So here's God keeping records. Instead of keeping records like the world does and thinking, oh, I've got you, you know, I'm going to pay him this much.

I'm going to give him this much goodness in his life because he's done this good thing. That's the way so many people think. If I help this little old lady across the street, then maybe I will get the right answer that I want.

[22 : 43] If I do this particular thing, then God will benefit me. Even in The Sound of Music, there was that song that she sings.

Somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good. And so now she ends up getting married and that must be the reward for something that she did. But God doesn't think that way.

God instead looks at their gift here and God says, I'm just going to add a benefit on to you on top of it. It's what Jesus talked about when he says, don't worry about what you're going to eat or what you're going to wear.

Don't worry about your wealth because God will take care of those things. Seek first the kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you. They will be the benefit that comes on to you.

Jesus says, don't invest in things in this world because you're going to buy this new suit of clothes and the malls will come and eat it. You're going to store up gold for yourself and someone will steal it.

[23 : 44] You're going to buy something really nice and it's just going to deteriorate. Instead, invest in heaven and God is the one who will provide. That buying and selling mentality gets us into trouble in a lot of ways.

People will subtly think, wait a minute, I get more money than this person in the church and the pastor goes and sees her all the time and visits her. He's never once come and seen me.

I'm not getting what I paid for. We face it in missions sometimes. There are churches and individuals and people who say, well, if we send this much money to England, you've been there for 10 years and you haven't planted your own church yet, but this other missionary in Africa or the Philippines or something, we sent less money to them and they planted 10 churches.

So we aren't getting the return on our investment that we ought to get. Why should we send you to someplace expensive and less responsive? That's thinking about we're buying these things in our ministry through our giving.

Instead of saying, God is good. If we give it to him, we can trust him. He will take good care of it and he will do what he needs with that thing.

[25 : 05] My little investment, what's it worth? But in God's hands, it's worth a lot. In 2 Corinthians 9, verses 6 to 11, and Paul talks about God providing for us.

But he says, you know, the Corinthians are being encouraged there to give. And Paul doesn't say, if you give, then God is going to give you an abundance for your own consumption.

Instead, what Paul talks about is God will give you the seed for sowing so that you can sow it and reap a harvest from it. If you have an experience in gardening or in farming, when you get your crop at the time of harvest, you don't wait, put it all away and eat the best for yourself.

And then at the end, you kind of sweep up whatever is left over and you take it out to the field to sow it for next year's crop. No, instead you take the best seed that you've got from the most productive plants and you set that aside in a special place and protect it because the best is going to be your seed because that way you're going to get a good harvest.

And when it comes to sowing the seed in the field, you don't say, well, how little can we sow and still get a crop? Instead, you think, well, if we ought to sow this, maybe we should sow twice as much because the more abundantly we sow the quality seed, the better the result we will get.

[26 : 37] And so Paul is using that same kind of image for giving. When you give, you don't say, well, God, it's been a hard month, a lot of expenses and bills were higher than normal and so this is all I have left.

I've swept up this little pile of leftover seed and dust from the bottom of my greenery. Instead, instead you say, this is the seed I want to give to God because God is going to be a harvest from that and God will provide.

In Malachi chapter 3, it uses the same kind of language that God is saying to the Israelites, why have you robbed me? And they say, well, how could we have robbed you? And he says, well, in tithes and offerings, you gave me the things which were left over and then you wondered why you had so little.

He said, give to me what is due to me and put me to the test and I will fill your barn so full you won't know what to do with it because I will provide for you abundantly.

Don't set a bad example. Don't give to God in a stingy way. When we were in North Dakota, there was a story about a man who was a generous giver and people knew that he gave generously to the church.

[27 : 55] If there was some kind of a need, he would give generously to that. He was a very open-hearted man and they couldn't understand why it was that he was always giving away much more than they were and he always seemed to have more than they did.

He was never concerned about those things. And he said, well, he said, I shovel into God's greenery and God shovels into my granary. God has a bigger shovel.

You can never out-give God. In verse 18, Paul talks about God's attitude toward this.

He says, I've received the gifts that you've sent a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

It's a fragrant aroma that comes up to God's nostrils and God is pleased. It's a pleasing act for us to give to God. And that gets us to the core of it.

[28 : 57] That giving is not a matter of paying the bills. It's not a matter of buying God's favor or buying the services of the pastor. Or if I give some more money, we could get more comfortable seats or something like that.

But instead, it's a matter of investing. It's a matter of worship to God. And God is pleased when we worship Him in that way. It's a fragrant offering that comes to God and pleases Him as acceptable to Him.

But Paul also goes on to say, And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. There's God's accounting again.

God doesn't look at it and say, Well, He gave me this. This is what it's worth. This is what I will give.

If you give a gift of, you know, a hundred pounds, then you will receive such and such.

If you give two hundred pounds, you will receive such and such. Instead, the measure that God uses is not what is on our column in the books. God looks at His balance.

[30 : 04] That's what Paul says. My God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. God says, I'm going to take care of this person.

What have I got available? Well, I've got everything. And that's the measure that God uses to determine what He's going to give us. We don't buy services from a ministry.

But the way in which we determine is we learn from our Father how to be generous. That's how you learn as children. You see the way your parents give and the way they think of other people.

You learn from that example. And the same way we learn from the example that God has given to us according to His riches. And He's given to us in Christ Jesus.

So there's a unity with Christ. It's because He sees us in Christ. When He sees us He sees His Son.

And that's the connection we have. One of the missionary families well a missionary family and a single woman we visited in Munich are involved in a church there.

[31 : 13] And the people we sat behind in that church are part of the family that owns the Hofbreihaus. So everybody goes to Oktoberfest in Munich.

And the main place you go to the appointed royal place is the Hofbreihaus. These are the people who own it. And so our friends go in like one of the the woman said this woman said to her you and I are going to do a Bible study together.

She says here's how it's going to work. I don't know the Bible nearly as well as you do but I have the position in Munich that if I invite women to come to my house they have to come.

So I will invite women and you teach them the Bible. The single woman is a counselor. And I said well where do you do your counseling?

She says a lot of it I do at the Hofbreihaus. And because it's a public place and I can meet people and if we need more privacy they give me a room. And so you know they do whatever we need to get this counseling ministry done.

[32 : 24] The family said sometimes we will go to the Hofbreihaus just to get a meal and something to drink and this family sees that we're there. So somebody will come and get us and they bring us they take us out of that main public dining room and we go through the kitchen to get past security.

And they take us up into this other room. And we start meeting people who are there. This person has a high position in BMW. This person is the assistant minister of finance for Bavaria.

And these people start talking to us and they say how did you get in here? And they said we know the owner. He invited us. That's what it means when Paul says God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

We know Jesus. That's how we get in. Let's pray.