

Philippians 4:14-23 Rejoice in Sharing Your Gifts

¹⁴ Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. ¹⁵ Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. ²¹ Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. ²² All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

I'm sure many of you guys have seen a t-shirt like this before, am I right? Yup, in fact, I see them around town when I walk into Menards or the grocery store. I know some of you probably have a couple of these in your drawer. It's a t-shirt that comes from Thrivent, a company with which many of you are familiar because you utilize their financial products and services. Now, this sermon is not in any way meant to endorse or discourage the use of Thrivent's services. You go ahead and buy life insurance from whomever you wish, from whomever gives you the best deal. I simply bring it up because I love the slogan which Thrivent has adopted and which they print on all of their t-shirts. It's a slogan which really sums up how we as Christians want to conduct our lives. Christians want to "live generously."

I thought of that slogan as I read and studied this portion of Scripture, the ending of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians. Philippians is the great book of joy. Paul has been expressing his Christian joy throughout this book. And now Paul wraps up this great letter of joy by saying to the Philippians, in essence, "*I rejoice that you are sharing your gifts. I rejoice that you are living generously.*" As we dig into this section of Scripture today, we'll have opportunity to think about what it means to live generously and we'll also have opportunity confess those things that stand in the way of living generously. But we'll also remember what motivates and empowers us in lives of generous living and giving.

In order to really appreciate all that the Apostle Paul is saying here, it's good to remember the circumstances under which Paul wrote this letter. Maybe you recall some of these details from our previous sermons on this book. So Paul was originally arrested in Jerusalem for faithfully preaching the good news about Jesus, no less; he got transferred as a prisoner to a town called Caesarea. His court case hung up in the Roman court system. A threat was made on his life. For that reason Paul appealed his case to the Roman emperor. He got put on a ship crossing the Mediterranean Sea. He got caught in a storm, got shipwrecked, got bit by a poisonous snake, survived all of that by the grace of God, and finally then arrived by another ship in Rome.

So, Paul had been through all of that. He's in a city where he'd never been before. He's under arrest. And he needs to prepare a legal defense for the time when his trial would be heard by the Caesar of Rome. And if he lost his case, he'd be executed. He'd face the death penalty. That's a scary and stressful situation, right? No doubt, Paul was facing all sorts of temptations to question God's goodness to him and to lose hope.

So what an amazing surprise it must have been for Paul-what an amazing joy he must have felt when he encountered a very familiar face in a strange city under stressful circumstances. A man by the name of Epaphroditus, a dear friend, a Christian, and a colleague in the ministry, a man from the congregation in the Greek city of Philippi, was there to meet Rome. Epaphroditus was there to be with a friend during a time of trial, to work as a personal attendant for Paul during his house arrest, and, most directly related to what Paul writes here, Epaphroditus had come to deliver a gift to Paul from the Philippian congregation. Can you imagine what that must have meant to Paul under those circumstances. Can you imagine how that must have warmed Paul's heart, what encouragement that must have offered to him? His friends in Philippi had not forgotten about him, but loved him and, when they heard about his predicament, they did something to support him and to be sure that his needs were met. Awesome.

And this wasn't the first time they had done such a thing, right? Paul makes that really clear. Listen to what he wrote: "**Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only;** ¹⁶ for even when I was in

Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.” As soon as these Christian in Philippi had become Christians through Paul’s ministry efforts, they demonstrated love and concern for him. In fact, every indication is that this gift sent to Paul in Rome is at least the third gift which the Philippians had collected to support their brother and spiritual father in the faith. So, this was a lifestyle thing for the Philippians. They were people who made it their habit to *live generously*.

So what does this look like for us? What does it mean for a Christian to live generously? No doubt, it means having a desire to support the gospel work of Christ’s church. This, finally, is why those Philippians held Paul in such high regard. Paul was the earthly reason these people knew that Jesus had died to save them and that they were now right with God and had heaven to look forward to. Paul had proclaimed God’s saving grace to them. And these Philippians wanted to support Paul so that he could continue to proclaim the gospel after he was a free man again, God willing. And that’s exactly what ended up happening.

I think it’s easy to lose sight of this. When we drop an offering in the basket on our way into church, when we set up our online offering to church, what are we doing? Are we just doing it because that’s what we’ve always done? Because that’s what we’re supposed to do as Christians? Do we even think about what that gift of money is doing? We’re doing something, we’re supporting something that changes lives forever. Literally! People use that phrase all the time and it’s really just an exaggeration to make a point. Like, “dad, these double stuffed Oreos will literally change your life forever”-things said in my house. But double stuff Oreos don’t literally change our lives forever, right? But when the gospel of Jesus Christ is shared, when people hear that Jesus paid for their sins in full and that they have peace with God now and forever in heaven, when the Holy Spirit works faith in a person’s heart...that literally changes lives forever.

And that’s what our church offerings do. It enables the gospel to be proclaimed intentionally and frequently. It puts teachers in classrooms where Christ is the beginning, middle, and end of the curriculum. Our offerings put missionaries in places like New York City and Joplin, Missouri, and Amarillo, Texas and in central Africa so that modern day Philippians might hear about their God’s saving love and have lives changed forever. Literally! Christians want to live generous lives that support the spread of the gospel.

But Christians want to live generously not just by supporting gospel work, but also by simply looking for opportunities to help people who were in need. No doubt, the Philippian congregation wanted to support Paul in hopes that he could do more gospel mission work in the future. But it would be a mischaracterization to say that that was their only reason for wanting to support him. Finally, these Philippians sent Epaphroditus to Rome with a gift for Paul simply because they wanted to help a friend who could benefit from some help. Did you notice how Paul characterizes the gift which the Philippians sent to him? He says in verse 14: **“It was good of you (Philippians) to share in my troubles.”** That is a Christian idea. We want to help and support people who are in trouble. Christians are to be people that help to shoulder the burdens which others are carrying.

And that’s precisely where there’s a rub for you and me. See, this is an ugly truth. But it true nonetheless. There is a part of us that is not at all interested in bearing the burdens of others because it’s inconvenient and messy and costly. It’s going to cost us time and effort and money. And there’s a part of us that wants nothing to do with giving up our time and effort and our money to others. There’s a part of us that looks at others who are in trouble and says, “You keep those troubles and hardships over there. They’re yours. I’m not sharing my time or resources or money with you. Because they’re mine.” That’s the way our sinful nature thinks and talks, right? And it is ugly-ugly to the core. And that sort of sinful selfishness deserves nothing good from God. That sort of sinful selfishness puts us in real trouble with God-eternal trouble.

But it was our spiritual trouble which caused the costliest gift ever to be given. You want to talk about living generously? That’s what our God did for us. That’s why Jesus came into this world. To give us the gift of a perfectly righteous life that he lived, but to credit it to our spiritual account. And Jesus didn’t just live generously for us. He died generously. He gave his life so that all our sins of selfishness and self-interest would be paid in full, so that we could be claimed by God as his own, so that we would be welcomed into our Father’s heavenly home. Forever. A gift given to us that makes an eternal difference.

And that is what motivates us to live and to give generously. That’s what motivated the Philippians to care for their dear friend Paul. And that’s what drives us to want to seek out opportunities where we can use our time and our effort and our money to help those in need. It’s a fruit of our faith. It’s a thank offering. In fact, that’s how Paul goes on to describe the gift that the Philippians brought to him. Paul writes, **“Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account.”** What Paul means by this is that, even though he’s thankful he’s received a gift which will surely help him in his situation, he’s even more thankful that his personal troubles gave a group of Christians an opportunity to put their faith on

display in real life. Faith bears the fruit of generous Christian living in our lives. Paul continues, **“I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, and acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.”** What smells do you love? I love the smell of the woods from my tree stand in the fall. I love the smell of fresh baked bread; it reminds me of Sunday afternoons spent at Grandma Folkman’s when I was a kid. Maybe you love the smell of pumpkin spice like Pastor Ehlke does. Didn’t he say that a couple weeks ago? Aromas which are pleasant to us. What does God love to smell? It says here that our lives of generous living are like sacrifices which rise before him. Not dead sacrifices like the ones offered in the Old Testament. Christ is our once-for-all sacrifice for sin. There’s no need for dead sacrifices anymore. Now Christians offer their lives as living sacrifices to God—living thank offering sacrifices to God. And as those sacrifices rise before God—our acts of generosity—our Lord smells them, so to speak, and he loves what he smells. **“A fragrant offering, pleasing to God.”** May Christ’s saving love continue to drive you to live generously toward your neighbors as thank offering to our God. Amen.