

Joyful Generosity

Philippians 4:10-23

Today we conclude our series in the book of Philippians. I hope you feel encouraged by this uplifting book. I hope that our attention has been lifted from the struggles and challenges of life to look up at the glory and grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is a book about joy and that **joy is not in our circumstances but in our Savior.**

Paul was writing from a prison in Rome, chained to a soldier and with minimal food or freedom. He could have been discouraged, even depressed, but instead he wrote the most joy-filled book in the whole Bible. How?

He tells us in this passage! "I have learned the secret of being content." What is that secret? He has said it over and over: **"Rejoice in the Lord."** Fix your joy in HIM. If Jesus is our supreme treasure and highest delight then we can rejoice in suffering and even death because those things bring us closer to Him!

This has been our North Star, our guiding direction, this fall – and I pray that it will continue to be the passionate heartbeat of Oakwood Church moving forward and the vision that we pursue: to rejoice in the Lord and share that joy with others. May we be joy-spreaders. May we be so full of the joy of the Lord that we become a congregation that overflows with that joy to others.

I've asked Hank to help me with a little visual demonstration. Hank, please join me up here. If you've ever been to youth group you know that Hank is an athletic young man, so I've chosen him for this little challenge. Hank, I need you to hold on to this cup, can you do that for me? No matter what happens, I need you to hold on to the cup, ok? [I shake him and water spills out]

Whoa, Hank. What happened? [Water spilled!] Why did water spill from the cup? [Because you shook me.] Yes, but why did WATER spill from the cup? [Ah, because water is what was in the cup!] Yes, when you were shaken, **what was in the cup spilled out.** If it had been filled with coffee, coffee would have spilled out. If it had been filled with acid, acid would have spilled out. Since it was full of water, when you were shaken water is what spilled out. This illustrates the Biblical principle that **when we are shaken what is inside of us comes out.** Or to state it the other way, what comes out of us when we are shaken reveals what was already in our hearts.

Can we say thank you to Hank?

Jesus taught that it is **out of the overflow of the HEART that the mouth speaks.** The Old Testament taught this as well – to "guard your heart for from it flow the wellsprings of life." And the best way to learn what is in your heart is to go through some suffering and hardship – to have your life shaken. Then you'll see what spills out of you. And it may not be water... It may be coffee or acid or filthy, rank sewage...

We talked last week about **being disciplined in grateful prayer, in Biblical thinking and in faithful actions.** We need to be people of prayer, who bring our fears and worries to the Lord so he can turn them into peace. We need to be people of the Bible, filling our minds with the truth and beauty of God from His Word. And we need to be faithful servants, working hard and

working together to serve the church and reach the world. That is how we place ourselves before God so He can fill us with His Spirit and empower us to overflow with love, joy, peace, patience and all the fruits of the Spirit, no matter what hardship or suffering we are called to endure.

Now our final lesson from Philippians is to ***share what we have been given***. In Christ we have joy, so we should be actively sharing that joy with others. In Christ we have peace with God so we should be agents of peace. In Christ we have the fullness of God's love so we should overflow with love for those around us. We are recipients of God's grace, forgiveness, generosity, compassion, power and blessing – we have received SO MUCH – so we should be constantly sloshing that stuff on the people around us.

If what is coming out of us is sewage or poison or acid, then we need to come back to the source – ***to come back to the Gospel*** – and drink from the fountain of God's grace to be renewed and refilled so that we can again become channels of grace who share what we have been given.

In this passage we will see ***seven gifts that we have been given in Christ***. We know from Ephesians 1 that in Christ we have EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING – so this is not an exhaustive list but the fact that it's such a long list should encourage us to remember that we are profoundly blessed in Christ and therefore much is expected of us in terms of not just generosity, but JOYFUL generosity.

The first gift in v. 10 is JOY. "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me."

Notice that even as Paul is expressing gratitude again for the gift of financial support the Philippians had sent to him his joy is not in that gift but he says, ***"I rejoiced IN THE LORD."*** Paul was able to rejoice even in prison, even with little to no food, without the ability to do the work God had called him to. Still Paul could rejoice because his joy was fixed in the LORD, and he was not dependent on positive circumstances to be happy.

God has given us the gift of Joy in Christ. Simply having Jesus is having EVERYTHING. C.S. Lewis writes, ***"He who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God only"*** (The Weight of Glory). To have God, or rather, to belong TO GOD – to be known by Him, accepted by Him, treasured and delighted in by God – this is everything and next to it every other pleasure is merely ashes in our mouths; every other achievement is nothing but dust in the wind.

But in Christ we not only have joy but we have the deepest, most satisfying fullness of joy that will literally last forever. All other pleasures are over almost as soon as they begin and really all they do is point to a deeper desire, a longing for that thing that would truly satisfy our souls. To again quote Lewis: ***"We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased."***

We have been given the fullness of joy in Christ. We have found the pearl of great price, the treasure in the field. **How can we not SHARE this joy with others?** How can we hoard this treasure for ourselves? How can we not rush to our friends and neighbors and loved ones and spill enough of our joy on them so that they get a little taste and the Lord uses this to help them

see that so much more is possible than the fruitless and frustrating pursuit of the American dream.

Let's share what we have been given. We have the fullness of joy in Christ, and as with every happiness, it grows when it is shared. So share the joy you have in the Lord!

The second gift is LOVE. We see this also in v. 10 "You have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity."

The compassion and concern that we experience from other believers is the great gift of overflow – since we have been loved by God, we should constantly be spilling that love and compassion and concern onto one another. The Philippians demonstrated their love by jumping to meet Paul's needs as soon as they heard about them. Ten years before, they had sent Paul ahead on his missionary travels, enabling him to travel on through Greece and down to Corinth. It seems they lost track of him for a while – there was no internet or even phone system back then – and so had no opportunity to provide ongoing assistance. But later when they heard he was in prison in Rome, they were quick to send Epaphroditus with a substantial gift to care for Paul.

How have you experienced God's love through other believers? Hopefully you were warmly welcomed here, as we have been. Hopefully several people have shown concern for you personally, making an effort to get to know you, to hear your story, to hear how you are doing, to pray for you and help you as they were able.

What you have received is what you are called to share. And even if you haven't been well loved by other believers, you have been perfectly loved by God. So we are all called to share HIS love – His unconditional, never-ending merciful and compassionate love. Remember when you were new to the church – even if it was 30 years ago – and reach out to warmly welcome the folks that are new this week or this month. You've experienced love here – now share that love!

The third gift we have received is PEACE. "Not that I am 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." Philippians 4:11-12

Paul is very careful in this letter and in his other letters to distinguish his ministry from charlatan preachers who take advantage of churches in an effort to get rich and live self-indulgent lives. False teachers "whose god is their belly and whose glory is their shame." How tragic that still today there are preachers who talk about heaven but are living for earth, who use the name of Jesus to bring glory to their own name...

That was not Paul. He was so focused on preaching Christ and giving all the glory to God that he usually **refused to accept financial support from churches**, preferring instead to use his skills as a tentmaker and his freedom as an unmarried man to be independent and avoid becoming a burden to any group or group of churches. And the reason he was able to live this way was that **he was content with whatever God gave him**. He was at peace, trusting completely in God's provision and resting in God's sovereign plans.

Paul did not glorify asceticism as if it was more spiritual to go hungry constantly or to deliberately abuse your body. He knew how to enjoy and be thankful for abundant provision. But he also knew that it's not about amassing comforts and indulging ourselves here on earth – ***it's about preparing ourselves for heaven and bringing as many with us to glory as we can.***

So the secret he talks about here is what we've been talking about all along – his joy was in the Lord, not in his circumstances, so he was at peace, he was content whether he was successfully starting new churches or sitting in prison; whether he was well fed and feasting with supportive believers or shivering and starving alone.

Have you experienced the peace of God that enables you to go through hardship and suffering singing, "It is well, it is well with my soul"? That is what you are called to share with others as they go through difficulties. Share what you have been given. God has given us peace, contentment, confidence through every trial. Let's share that peace with one another and ***encourage one another in the joys of a simple life*** rather than spurring one another on to ever greater materialism and the common pursuit of advancement in this world.

The fourth gift we have been given is FAITH. V. 13 "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

The key phrase here is THROUGH HIM. Through Christ – by trusting in Him and living in the strength he provides, believers can do ALL THINGS. This is precisely why Jesus ascended to heaven and poured out the Holy Spirit on His followers. He said, "***whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father***" (John 14:12).

By sending the Holy Spirit Jesus would no longer be limited to one place at one time, but could be with all of His people all of the time through the person of the Holy Spirit, thereby unleashing the power of the Spirit!

But the gift we should focus on here is not the power that Jesus had and Paul had to heal people, drive out demons and even raise the dead on certain occasions. The gift we should learn from here is the gift of Paul's faith. THROUGH CHRIST Paul knew he could accomplish anything. He was not resting even one ounce of his confidence in his own wisdom or abilities but resolved to know nothing but Christ crucified precisely to show that the results of his ministry depended on God's power not man's abilities.

Have you experienced the gift of a special season of confidence and trust in the Lord? It may well be that it was through a time of hardship that the Lord built you up in your faith – so you didn't notice the gift until later. Faith is a muscle that grows by being tested and stretched. Share what you have received! When a friend is struggling, share your confidence in the Lord with that friend. Point them to the promises of God and remember together how the Lord has been faithful to both of you time and time again.

The fifth gift we have been given is encouragement. V. 14 "Yet it was kind of you to share in my trouble."

This word for sharing comes up again in the next verse translated as “partnership.” It is the familiar word often translated as fellowship – koinonia. The verbal form is translated as sharing. Paul says “it was kind of you to fellowship with me in my troubles.” There’s a physical side to fellowship that is better translated partnership, which is the next gift, involving our resources. But the emotional side of koinonia we’ll discuss here as encouragement.

Paul was in trouble and the Philippians entered emotionally into that trouble with him. They shared in his trouble by praying for him, sending one of their own to be with him and sending a financial gift along with their greetings. They showed concern for him. They lifted him up at a time when he was particularly low.

How have you been given the gift of encouragement? Who has entered your troubles to share them with you – to lift you up when you have been down? What you have received from God through others is what you are called to share. Pass it on! Share the encouragement you have been given.

The sixth gift is resources. V. 15-16 “And you Philippians know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.”

As Paul moved on in his missionary journey, having been sent out from the church in Antioch, affirmed by the apostles in Jerusalem and having planted several churches before the one in Philippi – it is sad to observe that NO OTHER CHURCH was actively supporting him at that time. Not one.

This verse is how we know that the word koinonia carries an important meaning of tangible partnership, including financial support. So back in 1:5 when Paul gives thanks for the Philippians and their koinonia in the gospel from the first day until now he is grateful both for their emotional encouragement and their financial partnership. They were invested. All in.

When we think about sharing it is appropriate that we consider the resources God has entrusted to us, remembering that we are managers, not owners. Our kids learned about the virtue of **stewardship** last month – **“taking care of what you have because it all belongs to God”** – so we should use our time wisely and use our things wisely, knowing what matters most for eternity. (Really, if we just paid attention to what our kids were learning we’d learn an awful lot!)

Paul goes on in v. 18 explaining how our giving is an act of worship: ***“I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.”***

The sacrifices the Jewish people would offer were considered acceptable if they were offered with a sincere heart. It wasn’t about how much was brought or how valuable the animal or item was, it was the QUALITY of the animal and the heart behind the gift that mattered. And remember what the word “sacrifice” used to mean: burning something up on an altar. So giving should feel like a sacrifice, like a loss, sometimes – but that is part of what a life of worshipful generosity looks like!

What has God entrusted to you financially? Have you been especially blessed with financial resources? Don't feel guilty about that but use what you have to bring glory to God, to bless His people and to advance His purposes. Most of us here probably feel like we have not been especially blessed financially. But keep in mind if you make more than \$1,500/month you are above the global average. And 1/3 of people in the world live on less than \$2/day. So we are all very blessed, relatively speaking.

And with that blessing comes the responsibility to share – first with immediate family members in need, then fellow believers, missionaries, organizations and beyond. And since it is “more blessed to give than to receive,” there is a special joy in giving our money and possessions away. One of our good friends from our church in NC moved to Costa Rica to join Reach Global, the missions organization of the EFCA. Before they left, they literally gave away all of their stuff. They opened up their house and invited people from church to come and take whatever they could use. As far as I know we were the only family to show up with a U-Haul.

But that we did and they gave us their beautiful cherry dining room set, which we still have over 10 years later, in addition to a nice couch and some other things. It was a huge blessing. They were profoundly joyful to give it to us, and it has been a very effective reminder to us to keep praying for this dear family of missionaries.

We have experienced over and over in our lives the promise of v. 19, ***“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”*** God is profoundly generous and we have found that God's people are also amazingly and creatively generous. Kristin and I are both blessed by generous family members – but we have also seen God provide for us in remarkable and surprising ways. When Seth was born, God provided for his emergency C-section through Kristin's excellent insurance coverage at the school where she had been a teacher's aid.

When Joel was born God provided for his emergency C-section through a hospital admin who caught us as we left and gave us a form to apply for federal assistance that we at first refused but she insisted we take it. 89 days later, after our insurance had limited their payment to \$1,500 for a \$20,000 procedure due to an obscure provision in the fine print, we read that form and overnighted our request form – and since I was in seminary we were poor enough that the government (financed by many of you, no doubt) not only covered the cost of Joel's birth but even reimbursed us for the amount we had already paid up front!

God is faithful to provide for every need of ours – which is what we have seen throughout our move here and even with the strain of a house up north that has been slow to sell. But let me share a story that I found helpful to really understand this verse, which could be easily misunderstood. What the verse says is, “My God will supply every NEED of yours.” This doesn't mean he will give us whatever we WANT or what we THINK we need. It means He will abundantly and generously provide what we ACTUALLY need.

Harry Ironside was a travelling evangelist and preacher in the early 20th century, inspired by DL Moody and eventually becoming the pastor of Moody Church for 20 years. In his younger days of itinerant preaching he operated completely by faith and depended on the giving of those who heard him in one place to fund his travels to his next venue. One night, between engagements, his

money completely ran out. He reflected on this verse – Php. 4:19 – and became resentful. God said he would meet all of my needs – “so why doesn’t he do it?”

That night he settled down for the night under a tree in front of the courthouse of the town. There the Lord encouraged him to press on in faith and for the rest of his trip old friends appeared to provide for his meals, housing and travels. A few days later a letter reached him from his father with this note: **“God spoke to me through Philippians 4:19 today. He has promised to supply all our need. Some day he may see that I need a starving! If he does, he will supply that.”** Ironside concluded, **“God had been putting me through that test in order to bring me closer to himself, and to bring me face to face with things that I had been neglecting,”** like prayer and faith.

God promises to supply every need of ours – and sometimes what we **need** might be illness, poverty, fatigue, uncertainty – all to draw us closer to Him and remind us that in the end, **the thing we need most is HIM**. To come back to Lewis again, “The person who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God only.” So if God has given you resources – share those resources. If he has given you insight through some hardships – share those insights. Above all, since God has given you the gift of HIMSELF, share that gift as much as possible. And that is our seventh and final gift from God: the gospel of grace.

Share what you’ve been given! Joy, love, peace, faith, encouragement, resources and seven: **grace. V. 17. “Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.”**

The fruit that Paul seeks here is the same fruit he prayed for in 1:11, that the believers would be “filled with the **fruit of righteousness** that comes through Jesus Christ.” So the credit he is talking about is not an earned righteousness, but an IMPUTED righteousness – justification by grace alone. It is not that giving generously adds anything to our salvation but it is a fruit of our salvation, an evidence of it.

In Christ we have been given credit for His perfection, the fullness of His righteousness is already ours. But as we grow toward maturity in him – reflecting more of his generous self-giving and self-sacrificing love – there is a fruit that increases, showing more and more of evidence of the reality that we belong to Jesus. There is an overflow that spills out from us and is a credit to what is already inside of us through the Holy Spirit.

Since we’ve been given the gift of grace, we should be joyfully active in sharing the good news of Jesus with as many people as we can. Listen to how Paul concludes this chapter and the book – abounding grace!

“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” God is not reluctant to pour out His grace upon His children. He is profoundly generous. He gives to us not merely OUT OF the riches of his glory but ACCORDING to the infinite bounty, the overflowing perfection of His glorious wealth in Christ.

The result is in v. 20: **“To our God and father be glory forever and ever amen.”** The outpouring of God’s grace and its overflow through us is all to the glory of God – it is not meant to draw attention to us as the channels of the grace but to God as the Giver of the grace. Every gift we have been given is simply ours to pass on. Share what we have been given so that people can see

that the joy, the love, the peace, the faith, the encouragement, the resources, the grace are all from God, not from us. And v. 23 closes the letter: ***“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”***

May we be a people filled up and overflowing with grace. May we be so aware of the riches of glory we have been given in Christ that our lives spill out love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and the other gifts of the Holy Spirit. When we are shaken by suffering or failure we pray that contentment and peace will spill out from us, revealing a deep confidence in our God and Father and His good plans for us. But if other stuff spills from us when we're shaken we will be thankful for that too, as an opportunity to confess our sin and experience God's grace again, inviting Him to continue changing us according to the riches of His glory in Christ. Brothers and sisters, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”

Let's pray.