

# What Matters Most | Philippians

## Bruce's Final Series

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Here in Texas, summer tends to overstay its welcome so when the Christmas decorations appear at Costco in October, it's especially jarring. Yet here we are at that spot on the calendar. Along with the twinkle lights and 8-foot-tall Santas comes the onslaught of advertising that accompanies the season. These messages insist that we couldn't possibly be happy and fulfilled without buying stuff. Lots and lots of stuff — gifts for our loved ones and gifts for ourselves. Yet, by the time January rolls around we can sometimes feel less fulfilled than ever.

In our passage for this week, Paul takes a very different view of both gift-giving and contentment. His reaction to the financial gift from this beloved church is something that will challenge us once again to what matters most.

## Day 1

Recall that in our passage from last week, Paul addressed a conflict in the church and then urges the Philippian believers to focus their minds on what is "excellent and praiseworthy" and take all their anxieties to God in prayer. We now enter the deeply personal conclusion of his letter in 4:10-23. Here, Paul expresses his feelings about the Philippians' generous support of his ministry. Yet, this passage reveals more than just gratitude; it offers a powerful message about contentment, partnership, and God's provision. This passage invites us to consider not just how we give, but how we trust God to provide, both in our abundance and in our need.

As we dive into Philippians 4:10-23, consider what it means to live with a heart that is content in Christ alone.

## Read

### Philippians 4:10–23 (NIV)

<sup>10</sup> I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup> I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

<sup>14</sup> Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. <sup>15</sup> 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; <sup>16</sup> for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. <sup>17</sup> Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

<sup>20</sup> To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

<sup>21</sup> Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. <sup>22</sup> All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

<sup>23</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

## Reflect

- Once again, Paul's perspective is as remarkable as it is challenging. Paul has consistently talked about rejoicing, even in his imprisonment. Now he's speaking of contentment in times of want. As we've seen in Philippians, it's his devotion to Christ and the gospel mission that makes this perspective possible. As you move through the week, think about how you can cultivate this attitude of joy and contentment, regardless of your current circumstances.

## Bruce's Challenge

Bruce has challenged us to read the entire letter to the Philippians every week. You can [use this link](#) to do that now.

## Day 2

It's hard to be content, isn't it? I'm sure that's always been the case, but our generation seems particularly susceptible to being unsatisfied. We can be plagued by envy and FOMO (fear of missing out). Let's see if Paul can teach us the secret to contentment.

### Read

#### Philippians 4:10–13 (NIV)

*<sup>10</sup> I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup> I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

### Think About

As Paul nears the end of his letter to the Philippians in 4:10-13, he transitions to thanking them for their financial support. Yet, as is typical of Paul, he uses this moment to teach a deeper truth about contentment and the sufficiency of God. While he expresses great joy over the Philippians' renewed concern and generosity, he quickly qualifies that his joy is not because of personal need, but because of what their support represents—ongoing partnership in the gospel.

Paul's gratitude for their gift is not rooted in a transactional relationship but in a mutual partnership. In ancient Rome, the giving of a gift often implied obligation. Paul shifts the focus to

God as the ultimate provider, for both himself and the Philippians, and draws attention to their shared reliance on God's grace and provision.<sup>1</sup>

Paul's contentment also contrasts with the Stoic philosophy of the day, which prized self-sufficiency. For Paul, contentment is not self-generated but rooted in Christ's empowering presence. The word "content" used in verse 11 carries connotations of sufficiency or independence in Stoic thought, but Paul redefines it as "God-sufficiency." As Brown puts it, Paul has learned the "secret" of living with little or much, not through detachment from circumstances but through Christ's strength and provision.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Paul's ability to "do all things through him who gives me strength" (v. 13) is not about superhuman abilities but about his dependence on God to face both abundance and scarcity with faith.

Paul's teaching here models a distinctly Christian form of contentment. His message is clear: circumstances will fluctuate, but Christ's strength remains constant. This passage challenges us to seek contentment not in material wealth or comfortable circumstances, but in the sufficiency of God who empowers us through every season of life.

## Reflect

- Pray for God to help you cultivate a spirit of contentment, trusting that his provision is sufficient in both seasons of abundance and scarcity. Ask him to teach you, as Paul learned, how to find peace in all circumstances.

## Day 3

Yesterday Paul showed us a countercultural way to think about contentment — it's not about circumstances but about the sufficiency of Christ. Today we'll get a glimpse into how Paul understands the generosity of others (hint: it's also about Christ!).

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon D. Fee, [Philippians](#), vol. 11, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 182.

<sup>2</sup> Jeannine K. Brown, [Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary](#), ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: IVP, 2022), 228.

## Read

### Philippians 4:14–19 (NIV)

<sup>14</sup> Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. <sup>15</sup> 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; <sup>16</sup> for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. <sup>17</sup> Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

## Think About

In Philippians 4:14-19, Paul returns to acknowledging the Philippians' financial gift and celebrating the tangible support they have provided. Paul expresses heartfelt appreciation, not just for the gift itself but for their partnership in his ministry, as seen in their "sharing" in his affliction (v. 14). This participation demonstrates the strong bond between them.

We should note that the Philippians' generosity has a history, and Paul sees their partnership in the gospel as a foundational aspect of their relationship, dating back to his early ministry in Macedonia, where the Philippians were the first to support him financially. He reminds them that from the very beginning of his ministry in Greece, they were the only church to share in "giving and receiving" (v. 15), language that comes from the business world, but Paul uses it metaphorically to describe the spiritual exchange that accompanies their financial generosity.<sup>3</sup>

Paul clarifies that his joy is not because he seeks more gifts from them, but because their generosity results in spiritual fruit that "increases to your account." Paul is more concerned about the blessings that their giving will bring to them than the benefit he receives. Paul is careful to

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<sup>3</sup> George H. Guthrie, [Philippians](#), ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023), 303.

express gratitude while making it clear that his interest lies more in the spiritual significance of their gift.

Paul's description of their gift as a "fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (v. 18) draws on Old Testament sacrificial language, indicating that their generosity is not only beneficial to him but also an act of worship to God. Paul attributes their generosity to God's grace at work in them, making their offering something that brings pleasure to God.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, in verse 19, Paul assures the Philippians that just as they have met his needs, "my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." God's provision will come from his limitless resources. Paul's promise assures them that God, who has been the source of their ability to give, will also continue to supply their every need as they continue in their partnership with Christ.

We can celebrate this divine reciprocity—God meeting our needs as we meet the needs of others—as the grace that undergirds God's Kingdom economy. An economy we participate in today! Whose needs can you help meet?

## Reflect

- God is so generous and promises to meet our needs! How does this promise impact your faith in God's provision, especially in times of financial uncertainty? How could greater faith help you become more generous?
- Thank God for the ways he has provided for your needs and pray for a heart of generosity that seeks to partner with others in advancing the gospel.

## Day 4

We've come to the last few verses in Philippians. Even in the way Paul signs his letters, he's all about Jesus!

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<sup>4</sup> D. A. Carson, [\*Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 122.

## Read

### Philippians 4:20–23 (NIV)

<sup>20</sup> *To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

<sup>21</sup> *Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings.* <sup>22</sup> *All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.*

<sup>23</sup> *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*

## Think About

As Paul concludes his letter to the Philippians, he draws everything together with three key elements: greetings, grace, and glory. In this short yet meaningful section, Paul sends greetings from his companions in Rome and asks the Philippians to greet each other in Christ. The mention of "Caesar's household" (Philippians 4:22) signifies how far the gospel has spread, even reaching into the heart of the Roman Empire. This would have reminded the Philippians that even in hostile environments, Christ's influence is present and active. "For believers in a Roman colony like Philippi, the penetration of the gospel to the very heart of the empire and to Caesar's own sphere of influence would have been wonderfully encouraging."<sup>5</sup>

Paul's final benediction, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (Philippians 4:23), emphasizes the sustaining power of Jesus' grace, which is central to the life of the Christian community. Throughout the letter, grace has been a recurring theme, underscoring that everything—from Paul's joy in suffering to the Philippians' partnership in the gospel—is rooted in the grace of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> George H. Guthrie, *Philippians*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023), 316.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, vol. 11, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 197.

In these final words, Paul leaves the Philippians, and by extension us, with the assurance of Christ's grace, the joy of shared fellowship, and the eternal glory of God as the ultimate goal of our lives and mission.

## Reflect

- Pray a prayer of thanksgiving, praising God for his goodness, grace, and faithfulness, and asking him to help you recognize and honor his work in all areas of your life. Ask for a heart that constantly gives glory to God, just like Paul.

## Day 5

Can you believe it? We're at the end of Philippians. Slow down and reflect on what you'll take away from this amazing letter. Invite the Spirit to guide you to apply his Word.

### Reflect on what you've learned

Read through [Philippians 4:1–23](#) once more.

What did you learn about the secret to being content?

How Paul's words encourage generosity?

## Respond

This passage provides another beautiful reminder of the bond between Paul and the Philippian church, one built on mutual love and generosity. As Paul reflects on their renewed support for him, we see more than just gratitude for financial assistance—there's a deep appreciation for the shared mission they are engaged in. Paul's words give us a sense of partnership, one where giving and receiving go far beyond material needs. It's a picture of gospel-driven community, where every gift and every prayer is an offering to God, a participation in his mission.

Paul makes it clear that his joy isn't tied to the gift itself. His contentment is grounded in something far deeper, something unshakable — the sufficiency of Christ. No matter his circumstances, Paul has learned that true contentment comes from trusting in God's provision, whether in times of plenty or in times of need. This contentment is not passive resignation but an active trust in the God who provides all we need through Christ.



How often do we base our contentment on our circumstances—on what we have or don't have? Paul reminds us that we can find joy in every situation. And just like the Philippians, when we give out of love for others, our offerings are more than just financial help—they're a fragrant sacrifice, pleasing to God.

So, it's not just about giving or receiving, but about trusting that God will supply our needs. This is a promise that goes beyond our present situation. It's an invitation to participate in God's work, confident that as we pour out for others, God will take care of us. In this way, the entire Christian life is a partnership—with God, with his people, and for his mission. And as we do this, we're reminded, as Paul ends the letter, that it's all for God's glory. The grace that began the work in us will carry it to completion, and in the end, we will all stand in awe of God's faithfulness.

## **What's Your Next Step?**

- Paul speaks of learning contentment in all circumstances, whether in plenty or in need. How are you challenged by Paul's attitude? How does it confront the way you are currently handling the ups and downs of life? Remember, you can do this through Christ who gives you strength! Pray that God would guide you to rely on his grace as you navigate difficult times.
- Paul commends the Philippians for sharing in his troubles by supporting him. In what ways can you better participate in the mission of the gospel? Ask him to guide you in how you can support his work through your resources, time, or talents.
- Paul assures the Philippians that God will meet all their needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Pray for a deeper trust in God's promise to meet all your needs according to his riches in glory. Ask for the grace to rely on his provision in every season of life, and pray for peace in moments of financial or material insecurity.
- Throughout his letter, Paul has emphasized unity. Pray for greater unity in the body of Christ — locally and globally. Ask God to break down barriers that hinder relationships among believers and pray for opportunities to strengthen the bonds of unity in Christ Fellowship.
- What's your biggest takeaway from the book of Philippians? Pray and invite the Spirit to guide you.