

Learning to Be Content in God's Will

Philippians 4:10-23

Background Information

- On Paul's 2nd missionary journey he founded the Philippian church in 52 AD.
- These events are recorded in Acts 16.
- Paul is writing this letter from prison in Rome, in the year 62 AD, about 10 years later
- Epaphroditus had just come from Philippi bearing a gift of money for Paul (Phil. 4:18).

Philippians 4:10-23

^{NIV} **Philippians 4:10** 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.

¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of

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being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

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;

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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.

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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.

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Thanksgiving for the Philippian's Support (4:10-20)

I. Paul's Situation (4:10-14)

A. His Appreciation (4:10)

^{NIV} **Philippians 4:10** 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.

- Mindful & concerned – but no ability to show it.

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B. His Contentment (4:11)

¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

- Paul had learned contentment.
- To be satisfied with what he was and had.
- To be inwardly independent of varying outward circumstances.

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C. His Adaptability (4:12)

¹² 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.

- “God’s work done God’s way for God’s glory will have God’s supply.” - Hudson Taylor
- Trust in the all-wise Father and His providential care.

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C. His Adaptability (4:12)

- **Philippians 4:6** Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
- And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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C. Dependency (4:13)

¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

- Paul depended on Christ for inward peace and contentment – not on finances.
- Paul knew that God would be with him wherever He led him.
- The key to contentment is knowing you are in the will of God, using what He provides wisely, and then trusting in His good providence.

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D. Commendation (4:14-17)

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.

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¹⁷ Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account.

- Paul commended them because their gifts to him were an investment in God's Kingdom.
- Paul was thankful, not simply because it helped him, but because he knew the blessings of God it would bring the givers.

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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.

- Giving to God's Work is an acceptable Christian sacrifice to offer God.
- Giving to god's Work pleases God.

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¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

- Notice the context of this promise – given to Christians who give to the work of God.
- God meets the needs of those who give to Him.
- God has not promised to supply all our “greeds”
- God will supply in His time, in His way, and for His glory.

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E. Doxology and Conclusion (4:20-23)

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.

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EXPRESSION OF THANKS FOR THE PHILIPPIANS' SUPPORT (4:10–20)¹

An introductory statement of thanks led to an explanation of Paul's outlook on things. This was followed by identifying some of the benefits for those who gave.²

Paul's Situation (4:10–14)³

Appreciation (4:10)

NIV Philippians 4:10 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.

4:10 Apparently some time elapsed between gifts from the Philippian church. It may have been years between the gifts mentioned in 2 Cor 8 and the one delivered by Epaphroditus⁴

The Christian nature of this relationship is supported by the word Paul used for “concern.” It is the key verb of the epistle, *phroneō*. Paul used it consistently to point out proper Christian attitudes in following the mind of Christ. He must have consciously alluded to that in his choice of the word.⁵

He explained that they were mindful of him all along (the same verb occurs, *phroneō*), but they lacked opportunity. The lack was probably that Paul did not have need, but some interpret it as the church's inability to provide what they desired⁶

Contentment (4:11)

¹ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 152.

² Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 152.

³ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 152.

⁴ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 152.

⁵ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 153.

⁶ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 153.

¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

The first reason Paul did not need the gift was his own contentment⁷

Contentment is learned through experience⁸

He meant that he came to grips with his circumstances and fared well in and through them because of his own relationship to Christ.⁹

The reference to his joy on account of their renewed interest and help, was, however, not due to the fact that at present he suffered want or was in need; for under all circumstances—also that of want or privation—**he had learned to be content,⁴ to be satisfied with what he was and had, to be inwardly independent of the varying outward circumstances.**¹⁰

Adaptability (4:12)

¹² 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.

Circumstances were the arena of spiritual growth, and through them Paul developed adaptability.¹¹ He *has learned* (verse 11) in the school of life, and now he *knows* by virtue of his own experience¹²

This knowledge is learned by walking with Christ, who is the sufficient one, and by developing a solid theology of material things. Things ultimately do not matter. Relationships matter. Paul's

⁷ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 153.

⁸ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 154.

⁹ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 154.

⁴ *Beatus est praesentibus, qualiacunque sunt, contentus* (Seneca).

¹⁰ Jac J. Müller, [The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon](#), The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), 146.

¹¹ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 154.

¹² Jac J. Müller, [The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon](#), The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), 146.

attitude contrasted with the false teachers'. They were preoccupied with food and other earthly matters; Paul could rise above any set of circumstances.¹³

By doing Phil 4:6-8 – prayer, with thanksgiving and thought control.

Dependency (4:13)

¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Paul depended on Christ for strength. The expression “through him who gives me strength” clearly refers to the indwelling Christ, and Paul could accomplish all that God wanted through the strength he provided.¹⁴

First, the passage discussed material and physical needs. In the day to day economic fluctuations, Paul knew a stability that enabled him to rise above them. The rule of context means that this must be applied to economic matters.⁶

Second, Paul expressed his dependence on the power of the Lord. In this, he knew that where the **Lord led him, he had power. The will of God limited the application of the strength** he knew. Many who misapply this verse step out of God's will for their lives. They hope to cover their actions by a blanket promise of power, but power comes in the will of God.¹⁵

It may be more difficult to triumph in the good times than in the bad. A Christian's victory comes from a conscious dependence on the Lord and his power, and that is easier understood when times get hard! One mark of maturity in Christ is that the mature know how to depend on the Lord in every situation of life, not only in those for which they assume they need help¹⁶

Blessing (4:14)

¹⁴ Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.

Two important terms indicate the significance of their contribution to Paul.

¹³ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 154.

¹⁴ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 154.

⁶ This does not directly refer to his ministry, even though it was in the course of ministry that he encountered these circumstances. It certainly does not apply to spiritual powers, although in some ways the principle remains. The apostle meant he could get along well in this life because of Christ.

¹⁵ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 154.

¹⁶ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 155.

First, they participated with him. The Greek *sygkoinoneō* emphasizes that participation. The basic translation, “fellowship,” means *a deep partnership of two going the same direction*. This is heightened by the preposition “with” (*syn*), which has a perfective force here.⁷

Second, Paul identified their partnership specifically as with his “troubles” (*thlipsis*). The term naturally implies hardships of any kind,⁸ but it had a deeper significance for Paul. In Col 1:24 he spoke of suffering the “tribulations of the Christ” (the same Greek word) so that his difficulties in spreading the gospel actually related to the Messiah.¹⁷

He knew that he handled **sacred resources** when they came from the people of God (see 4:18).¹⁸

Paul’s Attitude Toward Those Who Gave (4:15–20)¹⁹

Commendation (4:15–17)

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;

It was the only Macedonian church to support him. Paul disclosed one of the reasons he remembered the Philippians fondly “from the first day until now” (1:5). When they first heard the gospel, they saw its implications for others and shared in its propagation.²⁰

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.

Paul commended them because their gifts were an investment. Financial terms dominate this passage.¹⁰ The gifts were an investment in the work of God and in their future. Some believers

⁷ Such compounds may be directive, pointing to an object, or perfective, stressing the meaning of the verb. Here the perfective force comes through. It stresses a complete, deep partnership with Paul.

⁸ BAGD, 362, says primarily “of the distress that is brought about by outward circumstances.”

¹⁷ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 155.

¹⁸ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 155.

¹⁹ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 156.

²⁰ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 156.

¹⁰ This was pointed out long ago by H. A. A. Kennedy, “The Financial Colouring of Phil. 4:15–18,” *ExpTim* 12 (1900–1901): 43ff. Some of these are: “fruit,” “increase,” “account,” and “full payment.”

may have mistakenly assumed that Paul sought gifts, but he clearly stated he sought the blessings it would bring to the givers²¹

Blessings (4:18–19)

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.

Paul also listed **two benefits to the giver**.

First, God was pleased. In terms reminiscent of Rom 12:1–2, Paul pointed out that their gift was an acceptable Christian sacrifice. Like Rom 12, this passage teaches that physical activity can become spiritual in motivation and importance. Romans states that dedicating the body to God is a spiritual act. Here, Paul revealed that giving was a spiritual exercise. Since Paul used the language of the Old Testament sacrificial system, perhaps even his terms subtly countered the Jewish false teachers.

Paul had developed a comprehensive theology of stewardship. Its most thorough statement occurs **in 2 Cor 8–9**, where he solicited support for a famine relief offering.¹³ He stated that the Macedonians led the way in giving, and most likely the primary church to give was Philippi (2 Cor 8:1–5). Their giving was exemplary because **they gave out of “rock-bottom poverty.”**¹⁴ Their contribution was a “fragrant offering” to God because of its sacrifice, its Christian motivation, and its significance to the spread of the gospel.²²

19 And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

The **second benefit** to the believers was that they would experience God’s provision. Just as God had met Paul’s needs in the work of the gospel, so God would meet their needs. **The context of this promise deserves careful attention.**

²¹ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 157.

¹³ The theological aspects of giving as presented in 2 Cor 8–9 are developed in R. Melick, “Collection for the Saints: 2 Corinthians 8–9,” *CTR* 4 (Fall, 1989): 97–117. There are soteriological aspects: It is a Christian grace demonstrating the completion of grace in the heart; it is true to the example of Jesus Christ; it expresses the concept of Christian community. In that text there are also eschatological aspects which overlap with Philippians.

¹⁴ The Greek of 2 Cor 8:2 describes their poverty as “according to the depth” or bottom. The expression “rock-bottom” comes from P. Hughes, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 228.

²² Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 157–158.

Paul spoke to those who actively supported the work of the Lord. His statement of 4:15 indicates what he meant: **God meets the needs of those who give to him**. In the context of ministering being ministered to occurs.¹⁵²³

God has not promised to supply all our “greeds.” When the child of God is in the will of God, serving for the glory of God, then he will have every need met. Hudson Taylor often said, “When God’s work is done in God’s way for God’s glory, it will not lack for God’s supply.”²⁴

Doxology (4:20)

²⁰ To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

CONCLUSION (4:21–23)

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.

The unusual manner of identifying them as a “household” suggests that they were not family members. Most assume that they were in Caesar’s civil service.²⁵

¹⁵ This is much the same as the Lord’s prayer: “forgive us ... as we forgive” (Matt 6:12).

²³ Richard R. Melick, [*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 158.

²⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, [*The Bible Exposition Commentary*](#), vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 99.

²⁵ Richard R. Melick, [*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 159.