

Giving for Love

The Peace of God Part 11
Philippians 4:10-14 6/17/2017

Summary: Paul lays the foundation for his teaching on giving by teaching on contentment (contentment lowers the priority of keeping earthly treasure, and selfless love raises the priority of generosity). His method is to assume they had all the right motives for giving their gift, and then praising them for that. He points to three aspects of giving: giving for love, giving for ministry, and giving for worship. Giving for love is seen in the fact that they had the attitude toward Paul that Paul has spent the whole book urging them to have toward one another.

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Philippians 4:10 I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been 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 being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything 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; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.

17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account.

18 I have received full payment and even more; 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 his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Contentment as the Foundation for Giving

Paul Teaches Them What is Good about What They Did

Sometimes we need to be taught about things we're doing wrong. We need some preacher to come along and straighten us out – teach us how to get back on track. But other times we need to be taught about things we are doing right. You're doing something good, but you need to be taught the full significance of that good thing you're doing so you can be greatly encouraged. You're doing a good thing, but you don't have the joy you could have if you knew more about the significance of what you're doing. That's what's happening here. Most of Paul's books end with a string of commands and exhortations. But the end of Philippians doesn't have any commands. This whole section he's just saying, "Hey, let me show you what's really beautiful about what you guys did in sending me that gift."

Contentment as the Foundation for Giving

So the topic here is giving. But he starts with a whole paragraph about contentment (vv.10-13) to lay the foundation... , because it's a waste of time to teach about giving to a discontented person. He won't be able to hear it. Discontented people have an attitude about money and possessions and comfort that forms a hard shell around their heart so that teaching about generosity just ricochets off and never penetrates. They might understand it, but their heart won't accept it. They just walk away thinking, *Yeah, I should give more...*, but the willingness won't be there. So before trying to plant seeds of generosity, Paul first plows the hard ground of our discontented hearts so we can be receptive.

Contentment Independent from Circumstances

And the biggest thing he impressed on us about contentment was that it is independent of circumstances. If you got everything you wanted tomorrow, you wouldn't be any more contented than you are right now. If you won the lottery, lost weight, got a better house, a different spouse, whatever – you wouldn't be any more satisfied than you are now, because contentment is an issue of your heart, not what you have. That's why Paul uses this word that means to be to be independent of earthly things. Most of us are the opposite of that – we are *codependent* on earthly things. We're not just dependent; we have an obsessive, codependent relationship with money, and good food, comfort, the approval of men, and a hundred other things.

Needs

I use the word *codependent*, because it's not just a matter of *wanting* a lot of earthly things – we feel like we *need* them. Our culture has bought into Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where everything from food and water to love and self-esteem and self-actualization (whatever that is) are all considered needs. So everything in life becomes a need and life becomes all about getting all my needs met – getting the money I need, the love I need, the attention I need, etc. And that thinking has leaked into the church. The Christianized version is, "Let's use Jesus to get us all those things." Jesus wants me to be happy and fulfilled and to have earthly treasures and so I'll use positive confession, I'll claim things, I'll use the word of faith to get health, wealth, and prosperity, because I *need* all that." Paul says, "No, contentment has nothing to do with what you have."

Resisting Providence

The other key principle we talked about had to do with allowing privation and disappointments to humble us (because we see them as the work of divine providence). If I have a discontented attitude, that's my soul quarreling with its Maker. And whenever we do that, we're really contradicting our own

prayers. We pray, “Your will be done, Father!” Then God does his will and we freak out: “Why God? Why is this happening?” It’s happening because God is answering our prayers – he’s carrying out his will. Do we really want God’s will, or our own will? The bottom line with contentment is, do you trust that God knows what he’s doing?

Trusting God

You're driving down the highway, the traffic report comes on and says you need to get off on this next exit because the highway is shut down. Everything you can observe with your eyes tells you it's fine to keep driving, but the traffic guy says you need to get off. So you get off – why? Because you know that that little guy up there in the helicopter is the only one with wisdom from above. He can see what's ahead. He can see what you can't see.

God is up in the helicopter. He has wisdom from above. He knows the future and everything else. How could we possibly question his wisdom when he decides what to give us and not give us?

I've told you many times that God always does what is best for you. But we hear that language so often maybe it loses its force a little bit. So let me try saying it a little different way. How about this? Think of that situation in your life you are least content with. That thing in your life that you're most prone to grumble and complain about, or that gives you the most anxiety. What if you found out that having that hardship was the only way for you to end up in heaven? Maybe your marriage gets hard and sometimes you wonder what life would have been like if you would have married your high school sweetheart. What if you found out that if you hadn't married your current spouse and gone through these marital hardships, you would have gotten comfortable and complacent, your prayer life would have died out, and you would have ultimately wandered away from the faith altogether? What if God told you that if he gave you a voice that made you a celebrity, or a different body, more skill, different gifts, dream career; if God would have given you that, one thing would have led to another and you would have never been saved? So it turns out this thing you are so agitated about is the best thing that ever happened to you. It's harder for a rich man to go to heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. If you would have been just a little bit richer, or a little bit more - fill in the blank, maybe your heart becomes the weedy soil, and faith gets choked out and you end up in hell? What if that's the reason? Or something else equally important, or even *more* important? Contentment really does come down to the question of who you trust more – yourself, or God?

You Did Well!

Ok, so now that the foundation of contentment has been laid, Paul can get on with what he really wants to do, which is to teach about giving by praising the Philippians for their gift. The core of this whole closing section is in v.14 where he says, **you did well**. The NIV says **It was good of you to share in my troubles**. But literally it's more direct than that - it's: **you did well to share in my troubles**. They did really well, because of the good motives that Paul assumes they had.

Honor Giving

Paul teaches by publicly honoring them. I wish I would have done that more as a pastor. I was always afraid that giving public praise might put too much attention on people instead of God, or encourage wrong motives, etc. But Romans 13:7 is a command: give honor to whom honor is due. Remember when Paul was praising Epaphroditus?

Philippians 2:29 ...honor men like him.

What they do with that honor is between them and God. Be we should honor people, thank people, and praise people for acts of godliness. Last week our church presented a plaque to 2 teenagers for

working especially hard and showing leadership. And they brought them up in front of the whole church on Sunday morning and honored them. That's right on.

We should honor good things - and that includes (brace yourself) *generous giving*. That's really taboo in our church culture. People think all giving should be done in secret, but that's not true. The Philippians didn't send this gift anonymously. And that was good, because the money was an expression of their love. And love isn't anonymous. You don't send your wife flowers anonymously. When you express real love to someone, you want them to know that the love is coming from you. Paul praised these people publicly for their giving, not only here, but to other churches.¹

How to Receive a Gift

One thing we can learn from Paul here is the right way to receive a gift. Some people have a hard time with that. They say, "I don't want to be a charity case." They don't realize they are accepting charity every time they breathe some of God's air. "Oh, I don't mind charity from God - I just don't want to get it from people." People who think that way fail to realize that one of God's preferred ways of giving you gifts is through other people. Remember, the first principle we learned in this passage was that Paul received their gift as a gesture of love from God. It's never a good thing to hold God's gifts at arm's length for any reason.

Be Happy to Receive Gifts

If someone wants to give you a gift, it's unloving to refuse it. The most loving thing you can do is to be happy about it. Same thing with compliments. The most loving thing you can do when you receive a compliment is to let it make your day. That will make the other person's day. That's what people want when they give you a compliment, or a gift. They want to make you happy. So, give them what they want. Be happy about the gift. That's what Paul does here. They give a gift because they want to show love to Paul, and his response is to say, "Hey, I'm SOOO happy now that I got your gift! That gift made me rejoice *greatly* in the Lord!!!" He let's himself enjoy the gift, and he tells them that.

Rejoicing over Love, not Money

But he's quick to clarify two potential misunderstandings. The first one had to do with his discussion of contentment. Some commentators have criticized Paul for talking about contentment here because it seems like it minimizes their gift. How would you feel if you made a huge financial sacrifice to send a gift to a missionary and he wrote back and said, "I got your gift. Just want you to know - I didn't need it." Even if you didn't need it - why would you say that to the people who were so generous?

The fact is, Paul *did* need it.

14 Yet you did well to share in my troubles.

He had financial **troubles**. In those days, when you were in prison, the government didn't provide your food and clothing - friends and family had to do that.² Paul even had to pay rent while he was in prison.³ So why would he say in v.11 that he didn't need it? The answer is simple: he doesn't say that. He never says, "I wasn't in need." What he says in v.11 is that getting his financial needs met *wasn't his reason for rejoicing*. 10 I rejoice greatly in the Lord... 11 I am not saying this because I am in need "I'm super happy about your gift - not because it met a physical need, but for a much greater reason. I would

¹ See 2 Cor.8-9.

² If no one brought provisions, the government would supply a very meager ration to keep the prisoner from starving to death while in custody, but it would only be enough to keep him barely alive. And many times the guards would intercept those provisions for themselves, or they wouldn't let the friends in. (We see that in Acts 24:23.)

³ Most likely this is the imprisonment described in Acts 28, where Paul was under house arrest in Rome for 2 years. So he was in a house, but he was still in chains. And yet he had to pay rent (Acts 28:30).

never say I'm super happy about having a physical need met, because my happiness isn't tied to that. That's what I taught you back in ch.1. So if it wasn't the money that made him happy, what was it? Look at what he says in v.10. Paul doesn't say "I rejoice greatly in the Lord that you have given me this money." He says **I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me.** You see, he's not minimizing or devaluing their gift by talking about contentment. Just the opposite. He's elevating their gift to something much, much greater than just money. This is one of those times when some people needed to be taught about something they were doing right so they have greater joy. He's saying, "I'm super happy about your gift, not because I'm happy about money, but because I'm happy about the love in your heart that motivated this gift."

Not Pushing for Another Gift

So that clears up one potential misunderstanding. Then he clears up a second one down in v.17. Sometimes when people in ministry thank you for a gift, it comes off like they are angling for another gift in the future. The thank you letter comes with another self-addressed giving envelope. He's not doing that. Paul isn't like the preacher who preaches on giving for the purpose of fundraising. He's definitely not fundraising.

17 Not that I am looking for a gift ... 18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied

"I'm not looking to get you to send more money. I have more money now than I even need." When's the last time you heard a missionary or any ministry say that? Usually it's more like, "Thank you for your generosity in the past. We haven't gotten a check from you in a while. Do you really hate orphans?"

Paul doesn't do that. He lets them know that he's thrilled about getting the gift, but it's not to manipulate them into giving more, and it's not because he gets his happiness from money. He's content. But he doesn't ruin their gift by saying, "I'm content without money, therefore the gift doesn't really mean that much to me." Just the opposite – he says, "Your gift means the world to me because it's something far greater than money. It tells me something about what's in your hearts" – and that's what Paul cared about.

Just like Jesus. Other than the kingdom of God, it's hard to find a topic Jesus taught on more often than money and possessions. Why? Because where your treasure is, there your heart will be. Nothing has the power to expose what is in your heart quite like money. It's easy to fool yourself about how much you love the Lord, until money enters the picture. A lot of people are amazing Christians – right up to the point where it starts to cost them money. And that's where it ends. Don't expect to ever see them putting any significant amount of money in the offering plate. But that's not how it was with the Philippians. They immersed themselves right into Paul's financial hardship.

14 You did well to share in my troubles.

Paul had financial troubles, so they gave him money even out of their extreme poverty,⁴ and so now they have financial troubles. That's how they shared in his troubles. If you give to someone in a way that doesn't create any financial trouble for you, then you aren't really sharing in their troubles. But they gave so much that now they have financial trouble, and they did that, not because of guilt, but because of love. They gave generously because Paul's interests were more important to them than their own comfort. And Paul wants to show them the beauty of that.

Teaching through Praise

I love that approach. He catches them doing something good, then he assumes the best possible motives behind their giving, and then praises them for it. What a great way to teach! He's saying, "Here's

⁴ 2 Cor.8:2.

the beautiful portrait of what I'm sure is in your heart," and he makes it so beautiful that we are inspired to live up to what he assumes we are. I've had times when I did something I thought was good, and people assumed I had bad motives for it, and rebuked me. That did not inspire or motivate me toward godliness. All it did was tempt me to have sinful reactions. It tempted me to live down to their assumptions. Paul's approach is the opposite. He makes their motives out to be beautiful and it makes us want to live up to that. So let's look at these motives – this portrait of a beautiful, giving heart, and let that inspire us. And I think we can break what Paul teaches here into three categories:

- Giving for love
- Giving for ministry
- Giving for worship

Giving for Love

Love the Worker You're Supporting

Tonight we'll just focus on that first one: giving for love. Paul interprets their gift as a renewal of their concern.

10 I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me.

And when he says **at last**, it's not like he's saying, "Finally – it's about time." He doesn't want them to take it that way, so he quickly adds this:

10 ... Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.

They had supported him financially early on, but then there was a time when they lost contact, so during that time they had no way of expressing their love for him. But even though they had no opportunity, there was no doubt in Paul's mind that the love remained in their hearts – just waiting for a chance. He puts it so beautifully when he says they **renewed** their concern. That word **renewed** is the word for a plant blooming or blossoming. Their love for Paul was like a tree that looks so dead during the winter. But life is still in it, and when the springtime comes, it buds and blossoms and life reappears. When they lost touch with Paul, it was wintertime for their love, but as soon as they found out where Paul was, it came to life, which shows that it was there the whole time.

So Paul didn't hold it against them in any way that they hadn't been in touch – he knew that wasn't their fault. But still, even if you're confident the people back home still love you, it can be hard when you're on the mission field and you don't hear anything. It can be incredibly lonely. Missionaries who uproot their lives, leave their friends and families, and go into a different culture. At first, they might get a bunch of letters and emails and prayers, but after a while, when the years drone on, the people back home get used to you not being around, and it's kind of out of sight out of mind. Like a soldier who gets left behind enemy lines and his comrades just forget about him.

Missionaries need more than just money. They need concern. Paul needed the money, so it's good they sent it, but the thing that encouraged him so much was that they cared about him and what he was doing. What if each one of us just picked one missionary⁵ to really invest in not only financially, but emotionally?

⁵ I think part of the problem we have in our culture is we spread our concern too thin when it comes to missionaries. Churches want to really be involved in missions, so one church will support 15 missionaries. But then they can only afford to give a little bit to each one, so those missionaries have to get support from 20 different churches. So their heart isn't tied in very closely to any one fellowship, and no one in any of those churches is all that invested emotionally in that one missionary.

The Importance of Reassurance

So Paul is greatly encouraged to receive a gesture of their love, because it shows they haven't forgotten him. And in Paul's case, it went even beyond that. It's lonely when you feel forgotten, but it's even worse when there is hostility against you from within the church, and brothers and sisters in Christ are turning against you. That's what was happening to Paul. So many people close to Paul were rejecting him or turning against him – publicly ridiculing him. When that happens, you don't know who's still on your side and who isn't. You don't know who believes the rhetoric against you and who doesn't. I know what that's like – it's horrible. Normally, if someone has been a good, loyal friend to you for years, there's no reason for them to reaffirm that – you just know that they are good friends – they don't have to keep saying it every few months. But when you have several people who have been good friends in the past, but now they have suddenly turned against you because of the rumor mill and gossip and accusations, then suddenly all your friendships are in question. You don't really know where you stand with anyone – no matter how close you were before. That's happened more than once in my life, and it's very painful. And it's incredibly encouraging in those moments when you are thinking, “I wonder if that friend is still with me, or if they have turned against me now?” and that person gives you some indication that they are still with you. It's a huge encouragement. With all the people who had turned against Paul, and now all this time goes by without hearing anything from the Philippians who used to support him so much financially, I'm sure he was wondering, *Have they turned against me too?* So can you imagine how it felt when this gift arrived? *Oh, the Philippians – they still love me! They're still with me! They still have concern for me.*

The Attitude

That word translated **concern** is our old friend that we've seen over and over throughout this book – the word for *attitude*. It's that attitude he was talking about back in v.2 when he said **I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to have the same attitude**. Most of the book is devoted to calling the Philippians to have that attitude toward one another. He spent the whole first half of ch.2 describing it. In 2:2 he said, “Make my joy complete by having the same attitude so you will have harmony and unity.” Then he went on to say in v.5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus... and went on to describe how Jesus had that attitude. It's the attitude Paul had toward them.

Philippians 1:7 It is right for me to have this attitude about all of you since I have you in my heart.

It's that selfless, humble, loving, Christ-like, “you-first” attitude that is so essential to church unity. So that's a central part of his message to the Philippians – he wants them to adopt that attitude toward one another. And to make it clear, he said, “Here, let me show you my example of having this attitude...” Then he said, “Let me show you Jesus' example of having this attitude...” “And let me show you Timothy's example, and Epaphroditus' example, and my example a couple more times...”

And now he's got one more example they can learn from – themselves! They already know how to have this attitude, because they have it toward Paul.

4:10 I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your attitude for me.

All through the book Paul keeps saying, “Have this selfless, humble, loving attitude toward one another. Have this selfless, loving attitude toward one another. Learn to have this selfless, loving attitude toward one another.” Then he ends the book by saying, “Hey, thanks for having that selfless, loving attitude toward me.”

If they want to learn everything Paul's been teaching them about how to have peace and harmony and unity in the church, all they have to do is take the same love and concern and generosity that they had toward Paul, and show that same attitude toward one another. All they had to do was treat each other the way they treated Paul, and the church would be fine.

This is a great lesson for us. When there is disunity in the church (or the home), the solution might be as simple as this – let’s just start treating each other the same way we treat missionaries. Treat the people you live with the way you treat people you don’t live with. You can have a husband and wife in a shouting match, yelling and screaming at each other, all out of control (“You always do that – every time! You don’t care about anyone but yourself and I’m sick and tired of this marriage and...” and the phone rings, “Oh, hello pastor, how are you today? Oh yes, it’s such a blessed day...” They change on a dime – in a split-second. How is that possible?

People lose their temper, and they say, “I can’t help it. She pushes my buttons, and I just lose control.” No you don’t. It’s not a loss of control. The pastor comes to the front door, and suddenly you have all the control in the world. The issue isn’t *inability* to control your anger; it’s an *unwillingness*. You can be friendly to the pastor, but not to your spouse or your roommate or whoever it is you’re at odds with – why? Because of your attitude. You’re fully capable of the humble, loving, gentle, “you-first” attitude, but you’re just not willing to have it toward this person.

It happens with people you’re around a lot. It’s easy to have a great attitude toward the missionary overseas. But the people in your house, the people in your church, the folks you’re around week after week – sooner or later those people do something that hurts you. Every person on the planet is a sinner, and so if you have a lot of contact with one of them, no matter who it is, it’s just a matter of time before they get lazy in their kindness and they are rude or insensitive toward you. The more you’re around a person, the more often that will happen – it’s inevitable. And so we build up these bitter, bad attitudes toward the people we’re closest to, because they are the ones that hurt us most often. And we lose our willingness – not our ability, but our willingness to show them the same kindness and respect that we show everyone else.

There are a lot of possible explanations. Maybe you’re a jerk to your wife or you scream at your kids because you can get away with it. You can’t be that way toward your boss or you’ll get fired. You can’t be that way at church or you’ll lose your reputation. You’re not like that with other people because you can’t get away with it with other people, but your family is stuck with you. You don’t want other people to see that side of you, but your family has already seen it, so you don’t care with them.

Or maybe it’s laziness. You want to impress other people, so you try hard around them. But when you’re at home, you don’t want to put forth the effort.

Or maybe it’s bitterness. Every time your spouse (or fill in the blank) has hurt you, it’s just added a little bit more bitterness to your attitude. You don’t deal with it in a thorough way to where you can put it to bed forever, and so it just adds another stone to the pile of bitterness. And when you have a mountain of bitterness made up of a million little rocks, nothing can be done about it because even if the person confesses and gets your forgiveness for every one of those offenses he can remember, that only takes a 10 rocks of the mountain, but the mountain remains.

There are all kinds of reasons why we are so unwilling to show this selfless, humble, generous, loving attitude toward people close to us, but we are fully capable of it, and you can see that it the attitude you have toward people you respect. You can teach yourself how to have a better marriage without reading a single book on marriage. Just treat your wife or husband like you treat the people you respect. A lot of marriages would be absolutely transformed if the husband and wife just treated each other the same way they treat total strangers. If they just had that basic level of politeness, their marriage would be a million times better than it is now. And some dying churches could be saved and become healthy and strong if the people would just treat each other the way they treat their missionaries.

Give out of Selfless Love

So the first point Paul makes about the beauty of their gift was that it came from that selfless, you-first kind of attitude that considers others’ interests more important than my own comfort. That’s how a church in desperate poverty can still be willing to give a financial gift so large that Paul is now in one of those times of plenty and abundance.

It's OK to be Generous – Even to Missionaries!

Maybe the reason we never hear missionaries say, “We have more money than we need” is because we never send them more money than they need. The Philippians gave out of extreme poverty so Paul could enjoy a time of abundance and wealth. Most of the time we will barely make a small sacrifice and have a little bit of discomfort in order to help some missionary still be in poverty but have a tiny bit less poverty.

Some people would question whether what the Philippians did is even right. Should missionaries ever be rich? A lot of people seem to have an idea that there's something spiritual about poverty, and so missionaries and pastors should be paid the bare minimum. It's the Lord's money, and so we don't want any of it wasted, so just pay them the minimum amount possible to do their work – nothing extra. A lot of churches won't even pay their pastor a full-time salary (even though the Bible is very clear – those who preach the gospel are to make their living from the gospel). They want to make sure they have plenty of reserves in the bank, or maybe they don't want their pastor to be tempted with all the dangers that come from wealth, or whatever. But they don't have that same attitude about themselves. They aren't worried about themselves being exposed to the dangers of wealth or being too comfortable.

I'm not arguing that people in ministry should be rich to the point of extravagance. I'm sickened by preachers who bilk poor widows out of their last few dollars so they can fly in private jets between their multiple mansions around the country. I'm not talking about that. What I'm talking about is being as concerned for the missionary as you are for your own comfort. The point of the entire book of Philippians - Looking not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others, considering their needs more important than your own. If that's the point of the book, it's fitting that the book ends with a section on selfless generosity and giving. True humility and love will always give generously and sacrificially. **Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus who ... emptied himself...** He gave everything because he considered our needs ahead of his own comfort. If you really do consider others' interests as more important than your own – there is no way to do that without it affecting your wallet. It will show up in your budget, and the way you spend your money, and what you do with your possessions. When a brother or sister has financial hardship, your inclination will be to participate in that hardship – to partner with them in their trouble by being generous with them.

Conclusion

So that's one of Paul's three points about giving – we should give out of selfless love. We'll pick up on the other two next time. For now, let me close with an illustration about the connection between this kind of selfless generosity and contentment. In order to be like the Philippians, we have to go at this from two sides: We need to increase our desire to express love to one another, and We need to decrease our codependent love affair with money, possessions, and comfort. So putting a smile on your face becomes a higher priority for me, and feeding the demands of my own flesh becomes a lower priority. Both of those need to happen, and that's why Paul first had to teach us about contentment – that lowers the priority of getting stuff for myself, and then about generosity – that raises the priority of loving others. And the illustration I have in mind came from Casa Bonita. We went down there last Sunday because Alex had never been there, and Josiah wanted her to experience that place so she could become a bona fide Coloradan. They got the 3 for the price of 1 deal on the game tokens, went to the arcade, and by the end, they had won a huge stack of the tickets that you get from the games and you can use to buy little toys at the arcade desk. If your dad spends \$20 on tokens, the average kid can win enough tickets to buy a 25-cent toy. But the kids love picking out those little toys. The problem is, they usually don't have enough tickets to get much of anything. The real fun toys cost like 100 tickets or something.

So Josiah watches the kids, until he spots this little guy who is looking through the glass, carefully deciding which toy to get, but he doesn't have many tickets. So Josiah just walks up to him and says, “Here, would you like these?” and gives the kid more tickets than he can even hold. The kid just lights up, and the kid's dad lights up even more. “Are you sure?” “Yep! – Enjoy!” “Thanks! This is his birthday.”

I didn't see any of the kids in there giving their tickets away. How was Josiah able to do that? Two things. First, loving generosity. Putting a smile on a little kid's face was of high value to him. It's so much fun to be able to just make someone that happy so easily.

That's half of it. The other part that made it easy was the fact that those tickets were of almost no value to Josiah. There's not a toy in that place that means anything to him, and even if there were, he knew he could just walk next door to the dollar store and get a way better toy for 99 cents.

So the tickets were worth very little to Josiah, and the kid's joy was worth a lot to Josiah, so the generosity was easy. So what Paul is doing in vv.10-13 is saying, "Look, all the stuff in this world – money, possessions, your car, house – it's all a bunch of Casa Bonita arcade tickets. It's of no lasting value. But the joy and spiritual wellbeing of others is of great value." Don't spend your tickets on worthless, temporal junk that will be gone 1000 years from now. Spend them on souls that will exist somewhere a million years from now.

Small Group Discussion

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 and 9:6-14.

- 1) What 1 or 2 points stand out the most to you? Why?
- 2) What do these passages teach us about what God is like?
- 3) How would your life be different if these truths were more deeply ingrained in your belief system?
(Be as specific as possible. Not just, "I would be more generous")

Pray and ask God to bring to your attention a need he wants you to meet, or to burden your heart with a ministry at church or a missionary.