

Giving in Faith

The Peace of God Part 13
Philippians 4:15-19 6/30/2017

Summary: The 4th principle for joyful giving is giving in faith – trusting God for his promises of reward. Paul points to that three times: 1) the benefits you get from those who minister to you (v.15 – giving and receiving), 2) credit to your account in heaven, and 3) financial blessing to meet your needs and enable more giving. But none of that will be enough motivation if you love money.

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Philippians 4:15 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.

Introduction

What if You're Still Reluctant?

When you hear stories about Christians who live really simple lives, very few comforts and luxuries, so they can give 50% or or 80% of their income more, and their lives are full of joy and all kinds of blessing, how does that hit you? Does it inspire you, or does it just weigh you down with guilt? Like the man who walked away sad when Jesus told him to sell his possessions and give to the poor, because he was a rich man. Not that you walk away from the Lord altogether, but does the idea of radical giving make you more sad than happy because of what it would cost you?

How can you transform a reluctant heart that gives grudgingly into a willing heart that gives joyfully? Paul points us to 4 things in the closing section of Philippians. So far we've looked at the first three. First, realize that giving is a wonderful act of selfless love. Second, realize that giving is a real

partnership and participation in ministries that would not happen if not for that giving. And third, realize that giving can be pleasing, acceptable worship that greatly honors God.

Those are the first three aspects of their giving that made their gift so beautiful. But even with those three, there is one major obstacle that could still prevent us from having the kind of joy we need to give like this. You're struggling to pay your bills as it is, and the thought of increasing giving is just really scary. How do you get over the hump? You get over that hump by giving like Abel and not like Cain. And what was the difference between their gifts? Faith. And that's the 4th principle: giving in faith.

Give in Faith

Faith is the most crucial element is giving joyfully – do you really believe the promises of reward for givers? If you know for a fact that some stock is about to double in value, then you're excited to invest as much as you can in it. But if you're not sure whether it will go up or down, then it's scary to invest any money that you can't afford to lose. So when it comes to giving to God, it's all a question of how confident you are that you will come out ahead. If you're 100% certain that you'll come away better off, then you'll be excited and joyful about giving. If you're not so sure you'll be better off, you'll be apprehensive. If you feel like you will be impoverished by giving a lot, then you'll be reluctant. If you feel like you'll be enriched by giving a lot, then you'll be excited.

God Gives to Givers

The Responsiveness of God's Heart

So what it really boils down to how you think about God. Take a look at v.19 for a second, and notice how Paul refers to God.

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

Why does Paul say **my God**? He's appealing to his personal knowledge of God from past experience. "Thank you for sending this expression of your love and this partnership in my ministry, which is pleasing, acceptable worship. I know it was a sacrifice, but listen, I *know* my God. If I know my God at all, and I do, then I can tell you without equivocation – he's going to lavishly **meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus**. That's just what he's like." Because you are connected to his Son, Christ Jesus, there is no way he's going to scrimp in taking care of you.

This is more than just saying, "People who are generous tend to do well financially" as a general observation of the way life tends to go. It's not just about natural, built-in benefits that come from being generous. It has to do with the way God responds. God is a person, with emotions, and he responds to acts of love and faith and obedience and worship. And God's personality type is such that his response to those things is effusive. That's just the kind of person he is.

Can you predict exactly what form that response will take? No. God is a person, not a vending machine. You can't just predict, "I gave \$100, so God will give me \$1000 as a reward." He might, but he might do something else. You wouldn't like a guy who says, "I'm bringing my wife some flowers tonight so that she will cook me a steak dinner." That's not real giving – it's just manipulation. But in a love relationship, he might say, "I'm bringing her flowers to make her happy. Her being happy would be reward enough for me, but on top of that, when she's happy, all the best parts of her personality come out, and she does lots of wonderful things."

Paul is saying, "I know my God, and one thing about him – generous giving provokes blessing from him." Just as you can do things that provoke his wrath, you can also do things that provoke or stimulate or that stir up his kindness and blessing. And near the top of the list of things that do that is giving. God *loves* a cheerful giver.

So principle #4 that will get you over the hump of reluctance is believing that God really will make it worth your while when you give. Or to use the language of **Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is**

impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe ... that he is a rewarder... God is a rewarder, and he's not pleased with you until you see him as a rewarder. But when you do see him that way, then giving becomes exciting.

There are three different times in this section where Paul points us to reward as a motive for giving – three different benefits you will receive if you give. One is credit.

Philippians 4:17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account.

Another reward is financial blessing.

19 And my God will supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

And another one is in v.15:

15 ... when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only

Giving money is a **matter of giving and receiving**. You give but you also receive. When we understand all three of those, that will enable us to be truly excited about giving, and the reluctance will fade away.

Give for Reward?

What I've said about contentment and giving the past few weeks hasn't been controversial. Most Christians have no problem with the idea of giving to show love, giving to fund ministry, and giving to express worship to God. But when we get to this idea of giving for reward – giving to get, that's where we run into some controversy.

It's controversial, not because the Bible is obscure or unclear on the subject. The statements in the Bible about reward are crystal clear. The reason it's controversial is because in our culture there is a prevailing philosophy that an act is more virtuous if you get nothing out of it. And so doing something for reward is a substandard motive. That philosophy does not come from the Bible. It comes from Immanuel Kant. Kant persuaded the world of that philosophy, and it is a stupid philosophy. It's the opposite of what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that the more you love the rewards of doing good, the better person you are. I will elaborate more on that in the podcast (I only have time to get through about half my notes tonight, so the rest I'm just going to record on a podcast).

So all that to say, being motivated to give because of the rewards God promises is not a substandard motive by any means. It's just as important a motive as the other three – giving out of love, giving to fund ministry, and giving for worship. Just as important as those is giving for reward, because giving for promised reward is giving out of faith, and nothing pleases and honors God more than faith. Ok, so let's take a look at the three promises of reward in this passage.

Three Rewards for Joyful Giving to Ministry

1) The Personal Benefits from that Ministry

The first one is in v.15. He mentions the fact that the Philippians were the only ones who sent him money, but he says that in an odd way. He doesn't say, "Not one church supported me" or "Not one church gave to me."

15 ... not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving

The word **shared** is *koinonia* – the word for partnership. The Philippians were the only congregation in the world willing to partner with Paul in the **matter of giving and receiving**. So what, exactly, is the **matter of giving and receiving**? Why doesn't he just say, "Not one church gave to me?" Because it

would be inaccurate for them to think of their giving as them giving something to Paul. If you just give something to someone, now you have less and they have more, so for you it's a loss. But this kind of giving isn't like that. In this situation, the Philippians and Paul both gave something and both received something. Paul was receiving their money and their concern and love, and the Philippians received the fruit of Paul's ministry.

1 Corinthians 9:11 If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?

The Corinthians get a spiritual harvest, and Paul gets a material harvest – both parties get a harvest. Both parties are receiving something. And it's the same with the Philippians. What did the Philippians receive? For one thing, they got this letter. Think about that - the Philippians gave Paul some money, and in return they got *the book of Philippians*. You tell me – who came out ahead in that deal? How much money is the book of Philippians worth? Not to mention all his ministry to them over the past 12 years. And not to mention the fact that they were going to heaven because Paul was willing to come there and be thrown in prison and all the rest to bring them the gospel. Even aside from all that, just getting the book of Philippians was more than worth whatever financial sacrifice they made.

So the point is this: when you give to support a ministry, if it's a ministry that ministers directly to you, you end up receiving more than you give. It's a **matter of giving and receiving**. I don't know how you feel, but for me, if I'm sitting in the church and the pastor delivers a sermon that just really grips my soul and inspires me or comforts me or gets me excited about some spiritual truth or shows me some marvelous aspect of God that I didn't see before - when that happens, if it happens one time per year, it's worth every dime that I put in the offering for that whole year. Those moments are priceless. And on top of that, I benefit from all the other ministries that the church provides.

Deuteronomy 25:4 Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.

Two different times Paul quotes that verse when talking about paying your pastor a full salary. If you let the ox eat some of the grain, he'll have the strength and energy he needs to do the work of threshing the rest of the grain – so even though it costs you a little grain up front, you come out way ahead. Your pastor is your ox. And Paul says, feed your ox – for your own sake. When you let that ox eat a little bit of your grain - that is, you put 10% of your income into the offering so that he can have a salary and devote his full time to feeding you in the rest of the flock, you end up receiving more than you give.

2) Credit to Your Account

That's one reward that comes from giving. The second one is in v.17, and it has to do with **credit**.

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

The literal translation is this: **I am seeking abounding fruit into your account**. Paul wanted the Philippians to get credit for producing **abounding fruit**.

Fruit

So what is that? Paul mentioned fruit earlier in the book. Back in ch.1 he said the reason he didn't want to go to heaven just yet was because he wanted to bear more fruit, which he goes on to define as the results of the work of the gospel in people's lives (Php.1:22-26). He wanted to continue in this life, even though he was suffering, because he wanted more fruit. And he was looking for the Philippians to also bear that kind of fruit.

17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for abounding fruit to your account.

You see, Paul didn't bring the gospel to Philippi just to give them something to do on Sunday mornings. In fact, he didn't even bring them the gospel just so that they could go to heaven. Paul didn't

travel 1000 miles and suffer all kinds of persecution and get thrown in prison and put in stocks in Philippi just so the Philippians could go to heaven. He did want them to go to heaven, but he wasn't even close to being satisfied with just that. Paul wanted them to bear fruit – just like Jesus did.

John 15:8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit

Fruit bearing is what really mattered, because that's what brings glory to God. Paul wasn't interested in getting fruitless converts. The only purpose of planting an apple tree is to get apples. The whole point of getting a new convert is for that person to bear much fruit.

So when those people at Philippi became Christians, Paul was happy, but not satisfied. He wasn't satisfied until the books in heaven showed big numbers in their fruit bearing column. Until that happens, his ministry in Philippi is a failure. He wanted them to bear fruit.

And so when that gift arrived – boom! Paul was satisfied. Success! Now Paul can be assured - the Philippians' fruit column is going to be huge. Paul knew the fruit of his ministry, and so as soon as they attach themselves to that and become his equal partners, now they have all that fruit to their credit in heaven.

In God's eyes, funding the preaching of the gospel is morally equivalent to doing the preaching yourself. Raise your hand if you wouldn't mind getting the same reward in heaven that William Carey will get, who brought the gospel to India, and who translated the Bible into Bengali, Arabic, Hindi, Sanskrit, and three other languages. If you want the same reward as some missionary or Bible translator, support that missionary or translator financially. We remember all the amazing stories of people like Jim Elliot and his friends, who were speared to death trying to reach the Auca Indians, and then their wives went back to the men who murdered their husbands and finally reached that tribe, and now the church is strong in that tribe and those people who used to be unreachable savages are now taking the gospel to the other tribes in that jungle that no white man could ever reach. What kind of reward are those 5 men receiving in heaven right now? Whatever it is, there are a lot more than 5 getting it. All the people who financed that trip are getting the same reward.

How many souls have you won to the Lord in your lifetime? It's hard to say. However many people have been saved through the ministries that you've supported financially, that's how many people God would say you brought to faith in him. For every one of those souls, God makes another deposit into your account.

Account

17 ... I am looking for abounding fruit to your account.

The Philippians had an **account**. Where is that account? It's not in a bank in Philippi. Their bank account in Philippi is empty after sending the gift to Paul. This is a different account. It's the account Jesus was talking about when he commanded that we store up for ourselves treasure in heaven rather than on earth in Mt.6:20. Did you know that if you're a believer you have an account in heaven? The letters IRA stand for individual retirement account – money that's invested somewhere for your retirement. Not everyone has an IRA, but every Christian has an IEA – individual eternal account. There is an account that has been opened in your name in heaven. It can't be touched by moth or rust, no thief can steal it, no one can hack into it – not even the IRS can touch it. And we all have different amounts saved up in that account. Some have a tiny bit, others have staggering amounts. And Paul's entire reason for living – the thing that got him out of bed in the morning, the thing that made him eager to stay here on earth and suffer rather than to just go be with Christ, the big, driving passion of his life, was to enable as many people as possible to pad their IEA account as much as possible before they die.

3) Supply for Your Needs

Ok, so what are the rewards of giving? First, you'll receive the benefits of those who minister to you. And second, you'll end up with eternal rewards that will blow your mind when you see them, and for billions and billions and billions of years and through all eternity you will be saying, "Oh, am I ever glad I gave that money!" But that's not all.

God Will Bless You Financially

At this point you might be tempted to think, "Spiritual reward is great, riches in heaven, credit to my IEA account – that's all great, but I can't eat that. I can't wear it, I can't drive it. Crowns in heaven aren't going to pay my mortgage. If I give away my money, I still have the problem of getting my bills paid and taking care of my responsibilities, and supporting my family." So you're still reluctant. So Paul says this:

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

The word for **needs** is the same word he used back in v.16 –

16 ... you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.

That's clearly talking about temporal, physical, financial needs here and now in this life. And that's what God promises to supply in Philippians' lives. They gave away money that they needed to live on, and so as a result, God promised to supply that need in abundant, glorious ways.

Proverbs 11:24 One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. 25 A generous man will prosper

2 Corinthians 9:6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

Luke 6:38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

2 Corinthians 9:11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

God promises financial blessing if we are generous.

Questions

Why Are We Often in Need?

Now, that creates some questions, right? Like, why doesn't it seem to work? I'm not exactly swimming in money. And what about Paul? He makes all these promises about how to get massive riches from God, and yet look at his life. He just got done saying that he has known poverty, he knows what it's like to go hungry, he knows that it's like to be in financial need. He was in need in Macedonia again and again. If Paul has all this information about how to receive lavish wealth from God, why does he spend so much time in poverty? And if God is going to lavish us with financial blessing, why does Paul need to teach us about contentment with a little before teaching us about generous giving?

Is This the Prosperity Message?

That's one question. Another one is about the prosperity gospel. If Paul is saying God will lavish you with money if you give generously, isn't that the message of the health/wealth, prosperity, word of faith heretics?

Money is for Giving

The answer to both of those questions has to do with what you see as the purpose of extra money. You need money to eat and supply your needs, but what about extra money beyond that? Do you think of money as being for personal comfort and financial security? Or is it for helping those in need and funding the work of the gospel? If you think of it as being for comfort and security, then it's true – Paul didn't have a whole lot of that. But if you think of it the second way, Paul was incredibly well-funded. Did Paul have enough money? Well, he didn't have enough money to live a comfortable, luxurious life. But he did have enough money to spread the gospel throughout southern Europe. He had enough money to travel the world for the progress of the gospel. He had enough money to write 13 books of the Bible. He had enough money to plant countless successful churches. He had enough money to produce fruit that endures to this day and that will continue until the Second Coming. So by that standard, he was loaded. Paul saw ministry and helping the poor as the purpose of money, and so in his eyes, God really had lavished money on him, and he promised the same for us.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

God has prepared a whole lot of good works for you to do – a lot of really important, really wonderful things he wants you to get done. Some of them will require a lot of resources, and so he promises to richly supply you with more than enough to afford to accomplish every good thing he has prepared for you to do – just like Paul.

Give to Get to Give

So, does God promise to lavish you with cash if you are generous? Yes, but not cash for you to keep for yourself. If you give to fund ministry, God will give you more ability to fund more ministry.

2 Corinthians 9:6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

For a farmer, that statement is so obvious that it seems silly to even say it. Obviously, if you want a big crop, you have to put a lot of seeds in the ground. However much you plant, that's how big your harvest will be – never any bigger. You never plant 1 acres and get a harvest in 10 acres. The more you sow, the more you reap.

That's obvious; but what's not so obvious is the fact that giving money is equivalent to sowing seed. You see, there are three things you can do with money: spend it, hoard it, or sow it. If you spend it, it's spent – it's gone. If you hoard it, you'll start to love it and it will destroy you. But if you sow it, it multiplies and produces a crop. A crop of what? Righteousness and spiritual fruit. That's what money is for – to get more of that in the world.

7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

That's the standard for giving. Give that way, and here's what God will do:

8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

The word “all” appears 5 times in the Greek. You will have absolutely ALL you need at all times. All you need for what? Maximum comfort?

8 ... in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

You’ll have all you need to generate more righteousness.

9 As it is written: “He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”

If you scatter your money like seed, your righteousness will endure forever. 10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food Think of that description of God. He supplies bread for food – that has to do with your personal needs. God doesn’t want you to give away all your money – you need to feed your family. And if you give generously, God promises to supply that. In all the 20 years I was pastoring, we helped a lot of people who were in desperate straits financially. And almost always it was people who weren’t tithing. If you’re not giving, not only do you not have the promise that God will supply you with more seed to sow, he may not even supply you with enough bread to eat. But if you are a giver, he will also lavish you with bread to eat and seed to sow. And the more you sow, the more seed he’ll give you.

10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

People get confused when they think, “If I give generously, God will give me more bread – more stuff for me.” That’s the prosperity message. But that’s wrong. God doesn’t give you more bread, he gives you more seed – more stuff to give for bringing about more righteousness. 11 You will be made rich in every way Why? So you can be comfortable? So you can have fun? So you can feel secure?

11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

This is God’s welfare program. If you want the most effective possible welfare program, it’s easy to do. Just put lots and lots of money into the hands of the most generous people. But this goes beyond mere welfare. It’s not just to make poor people a little more comfortable; it’s for bringing more glory to God.

12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

The “Gospel” of Greed

And that’s why this is 180 degrees different from the prosperity gospel. The prosperity gospel is all about getting money for luxury and comfort and security. Kenneth Copland lives in a \$6 million house, a \$20 million dollar private jet, a fleet of other jets, and his own private airport by his house. Benny Hinn has accumulated \$50 million dollars, and TD Jakes has \$150 million. The opulence that these people live in is unbelievable. They get rich by promising people that if you give them your money, God will supply you with money for nice cars, nice houses, nice clothes – comfort, luxury and security.

That’s nothing like what Paul is saying here. That message is right out of the pit of hell, because it is the opposite of the gospel. The gospel calls us to give up the treasures of this world and embrace Christ as our great treasure. The prosperity gospel calls you to use Christ to get the treasures of this world. It promotes love of money.

Love of Money

So does the Bible teach us to give in order to get? And if so, how is that different from the prosperity message? Simple. The Bible teaches us to give to get to give. The prosperity message is give to get to keep. And if you give to get to keep – that’s love of money, which is lethal to your spiritual life.

Love of money is deadly, because even with all these motivations we've talked about the past few weeks – the fact that your giving is an expression of selfless love, giving enables ministry, giving pleases God as acceptable worship, giving brings you spiritual benefits from your church, giving results in huge rewards in heaven, and giving stimulates God to bless you financially so that you can give a whole lot more – even with all those motivations, if you love money, and love comfort and ease and luxury and nice clothes and nice cars, and you get your security from money instead of God, then even with all those marvelous motivations, your heart will still be reluctant to give, because the one benefit God doesn't promise to givers is a lot of comfort and luxury and ease in life.

And so the writer of Hebrews pleads with us: Keep your life free from the love of money (Heb.13:5), and Paul warns us that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil and that people who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction (1Tim.6:9-10).

John Wesley: "Money never stays with me. It would burn me if it did. I throw it out of my hands as soon as possible lest it should find its way into my heart."¹

If money finds its way into your heart so that you love it, it will end up costing you your eternal life.

Conclusion: You Need God's Blessing

Malachi 3:7 ... Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty. "But you ask, 'How are we to return?' 8 "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. 11 I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty.

Very often people say, "I can't afford to tithe. I couldn't live on 90%. I can't even make it on 100% of my income." Of course you can't. The people in Malachi were having financial hardship because they were stealing from God by spending that first 10% on themselves instead of giving it to God. That money wasn't theirs. People who steal from God don't tend to do very well financially. If you spend that first 10% on yourself, you might as well break into a church and steal money out of the offering.

These are your two options: get by on 90% plus God's help and blessing, or 100% without it. Try to live on 90% plus God's blessing or 100% without God's blessing. People who try the 100% option – of course they're going to struggle. And if you choose that option – keeping 100% for yourself, that means God's help and blessing are worth nothing to you. They aren't even worth a measly 10% of your income.

I've tried to live on 100% of my income before, and it was a disaster. I went farther in the hole every month, no matter how hard I worked. But the day Tracy and I decided to start tithing – from that day on, we were always able to pay our bills, even though my income didn't go up at all. But I've never had trouble getting by on 90%. So we raised our giving to 15%, and we never had any trouble getting by on 85%. And after that, I'm ashamed to say, I never raised it any higher. I could have. God blessed us, and after the kids moved out of the house, we could have easily given more than 15%... , but I guess I just wasn't thinking about the principles we've been studying the past few weeks. And now my income is a lot lower. So we decided to start working on bumping it up. Last week we notched it up to 16%, and we're going to be more intentional about finding creative ways to give – like John Piper praying that his car bill would come in cheaper than the estimate so he could give the difference to the church. But all that to say, it's much harder to get by on 100% than it is on 90% because you forfeit so much blessing from God.

So let's end the way we started: how do you think about God? Do you see him as a giver or a taker? Does your heart think, *I need money for my wellbeing*, or does it think, *I need God's blessing for my*

¹ Cited by Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*.

wellbeing? Don't be afraid of radical generosity, because if you live like that, I promise you, **my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.**

Discussion Questions

- 1) Share any stories you might have about how God blessed you in response to giving, or joy that you received from giving.
- 2) Are there any specific changes you want to make in your giving?