

**Philippians: The Gains of Generosity**  
**Sermon 11-18-18**  
**Pastor Curtis Dehmey**

**Philippians 4:10–23**

<sup>10</sup>I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup>Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup>I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through him who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup>In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. <sup>15</sup>You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. <sup>16</sup>For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. <sup>17</sup>Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. <sup>18</sup>I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup>And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

<sup>20</sup>To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. <sup>21</sup>Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The friends who are with me greet you. <sup>22</sup>All the saints greet you, especially those of the emperor's household. <sup>23</sup>The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

**Message:**

(Play video at <https://www.sermonspice.com/product/60831/messy-blessings>) Yes. Blessing others can be messy. Being generous towards others can be messy. In fact, we see this today in our passage. This passage is a bit awkward. Paul begins with, “<sup>10</sup>I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup>Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have.” It’s almost as if Paul meant one thing, but he sees how his words could be misinterpreted especially if they don’t understand Paul’s Spirit. You know, have you ever written an email or text message and after sending it, you thought, “eww...that could be interpreted the wrong way. I didn’t intend to say it that way.” So I think we see something similar here. We see Paul’s humanity in his writing. We see “thanks” expressed for their concern for

him as he's in prison. And he acknowledges that they have had no opportunity to show their concern. But then, he doesn't want them to believe that there is anything lacking from them for him. So, re-worded, it might sound something like this, "Thanks for showing your concern for me. That means a lot to me. Understandably, you didn't really have much opportunity to show your concern. Not that I am begging for more help because I've learned to be content in any circumstance and/or condition that I'm in." And then Paul elaborates on this idea of being content, "<sup>12</sup>I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through him who strengthens me." We often take verse 13 out-of-context as a personal pick-me-up. In a sense, there's not any harm in that. But in Paul's larger argument, to have the strength of the Lord is not just about perseverance, but also about contentment. It's resting in the Lord's presence knowing that the Lord will get us through any and all circumstances. Paul is saying to the Philippians, "While I appreciate your concern and desire to help, understand that it's ultimately the Lord who keeps me going." Now, that's not intended to be a rejection of the Philippian help. It could certainly be interpreted that way by the Philippians. But Paul, is saying don't feel obligated to help me in my suffering.

See, Paul is trying to save the Philippian people from embarrassment. In verse 18, he says, "<sup>18</sup>I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God." Remember, that the delivery of this letter to the Philippians was most likely by the hand of Epaphroditus. The same person who came to Paul to help him while he was in prison. If you remember, Epaphroditus not only brought gifts to Paul, as noted in verse 18, but Epaphroditus was a person sent from Philippi to help Paul with his day-to-day needs. But as we saw in chapter 2, Paul tells us that Epaphroditus got sick, almost to the point of death, and was unable to help. So the Philippian people intended to help Paul, but instead their helper got deathly ill. Paul sends Epaphroditus back with this letter, but doesn't want the Philippian people to believe that he has rejected their help or their gift in a time of need. So do you see why he's stumbling in his explanation? Do you see the mess? Paul seems to understand that it is better for Epaphroditus to be home than to be with him, for Epaphroditus' sake.

But he doesn't want them to think that he's upset by this inconvenience or their lack of ability to help. As if they're in debt. He doesn't want the Philippian people to think that they owe him anything. "<sup>14</sup>In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. <sup>15</sup>You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving

and receiving, except you alone. <sup>16</sup>For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once.” He’s affirming their generosity. That in fact, in Macedonia, no church, other than Philippi, has shared such great generosity and support. They have done more than enough to care for him on his missionary journey. The church of Philippi seems to be so grateful for Paul’s ministry in Philippi, that they want to continue to bless his ministry however they can. They have this extra-ordinary generosity. They may even feel indebted for the salvation they received through Paul’s ministry.

This is the core verse of our message today, <sup>17</sup>“Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account.” It’s really interesting how Paul puts it. When he says that he seeks “the profit” he’s not saying that he seeks the profit for himself or seeks the profit of their gift. He’s not trying to retain the gift that keeps on giving to himself. The “profit” he wants is to “...accumulate to your account.” In other words, it’s gift enough to hear about all the ways that the gospel is spreading in Philippi and how people are coming to deeper relationship with Jesus. He doesn’t want this to be an endless cycle of them just blessing one another. Paul blesses them with his ministry, they bless him back with financial support. Paul sends a letter, they send a helper. Paul is saying, “This isn’t about reciprocity.” I don’t give you teaching and ministry just so that you will give me something in return. This isn’t about commerce or trade. This isn’t about a purchase of services. Paul blessed them with his ministry so that they would pay it forward. If they want to bless him back, then that’s their choice, but more importantly it means more to him to hear of how the gospel is spreading and growing among the Philippian community and beyond. He’d rather them bless others instead of continuing to give gifts to him.

You know, I’ve hesitated to bring this up for a long time. The Mannion funds come to mind as I meditate on this passage, that makes up for our deficit budget every year. The profit on these funds helps keep our church afloat. And it will probably help keep our church afloat for many years. In a sense, we don’t have to worry. We can take comfort in knowing that we are financially safe for a while. But I’m gonna ask the hard question, “Is that a good thing?” Is safety and comfort what we seek? Isn’t the desire for safety and comfort ultimately rooted in fear? I mean, shouldn’t there be some degree of worry or concern in the life of the church? Just enough that it challenges us to be faithful. If there is no concern, are we actually challenged to remain faithful or to be prayerful? If we rely on the profits of the Mannion funds to keep us safe, then is the Kingdom really profiting? If there isn’t any degree of discomfort in the life of the church, then doesn’t that lead us to apathy and stagnation? Do we really have faith in our Lord? Is the safety of the Mannion fund poisoning our faith rather than blessing our faith? I’m not saying we have to go and sell all those funds. And I’m sure those funds were

intended to be a blessing to us rather than a curse. But, if we're the only ones profiting from it, is the Kingdom really profiting from Donald Mannion's generosity? Is the gospel spreading because of Donald Mannion's generosity? I'll let you mull over those challenging questions and I'll be so bold as to assert that I doubt those funds were sent to us just to keep us afloat or just to keep us going as we are. Sometimes too much money can be a detriment to our faith. Too much money, the worship of money, the love of money, is the silent killer of faith. As Dwight Moody once said, "What makes the Dead Sea dead? Because it is all the time receiving, never giving out anything. Why is it that many Christians are cold? Because they are all the time receiving, never giving out anything." To be even more pointed, has the Donald Mannion money inspired Providence to be more generous in their faith to create a profit for the Kingdom of God? To bring more people to Jesus for the Kingdom? Or has that money created or rested in a dead sea? All the time receiving, never giving anything out, never making a profit for the Kingdom?

Maybe Paul senses this too of the Philippian church. Remember that Philippi is a retirement town for Roman soldiers. So I'm sure many of them have gained much wealth in their military career through the spoils of war. Maybe so much wealth that they don't know what to do with it. So they give Paul gifts to support his ministry as penance for their lack of effort of spreading the gospel in their own town. Paul doesn't travel around the Mediterranean world to have followers or sycophants. He doesn't seek a cultic following. Paul preaches the gospel through the Mediterranean world so that many will know the freedom of the good news in Jesus Christ. And that those who convert to Christ through Paul, will also be impassioned with the gospel to also spread the good news of Jesus throughout the Mediterranean world. This isn't about Paul, but about the movement of the good news of Jesus.

In a few days, you'll be given the special opportunity to express thanks for those who are in your lives. You'll have the particular opportunity to give thanks for all the blessings that God has bestowed upon your lives. But I want to challenge you. Don't be a people that just receives deposits. Don't have a spiritual bank account that is flush with cash, but no profit. Meaning, find ways to make a deposit in others. Find a way to take what you've received from Jesus and give it out. We're about to enter the Christmas season in the next few weeks. You'll have plenty of opportunity to be generous. Can you be generous without the expectation of exchange or trading? When we give gifts at Christmas time we often give expecting a gift in return. Can you be a blessing without expecting a blessing in return?

Whenever there is an opportunity to talk about tithing, it's always an awkward sermon for me to preach. Because I know that I'm challenging you to

tithe which goes into our general budget, which cares for my salary and benefits. But I think these things need to be said nonetheless based on principle alone. I am thoroughly convinced that our generosity towards others is directly rooted in our thankfulness. I think I've told you this before, but I'll tell you again, I wasn't a tither for a long time. I always had excuses. "I don't have the means to tithe." "I have student loans to pay." "I have no excess cash." Do you notice that all those thoughts are rooted in what I don't have? They're rooted in complaints. Christine was the first to challenge me on my lack of tithing. Again, I used all the same excuses that I just shared thinking, "When we get in a better financial situation, then, we'll tithe." Well...that could turn into forever down-the-road as many of you know. What changed my heart on tithing was through reading a book by Kent Millard titled, "The Gratitude Path." He basically says that when you ask someone about the problems in their life, they always have more problems to share. When you ask someone about their blessings, they always have more blessings to share. So the act of tithing is an act of generosity which is rooted in thankfulness. This challenged me. I felt convicted one evening driving home from the church. It struck me like a lightning bolt. "If I can't be generous or tithe, what does that say about my thankfulness?" And just as a friendly reminder, what you've been given by God, what God has deposited in you, it's not yours. You're just a steward of God's blessings. Folks, I hate to say it, but we tend to have a propensity towards greed and hoarding. Counting our blessings and sharing our blessings is the actions of Heaven. It's the actions of our savior Jesus Christ. Here's the thing: our God is a God of abundance. He always has enough to give us. If Jesus is in you and He's in me, He has enough for you. So the strange thing about being generous and giving to God out of a grateful heart, is that there always seems to be more than enough. He seems to always provide. And in the few years in which I've attempted to be faithful to God with a generous heart, I can testify that God provides even when you don't think you have the means to give to God and to His Kingdom.

Over the past few years, Providence has identified itself as a "Blessing Church." We pride ourselves on Genesis 12:2, "...I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." Providence, you've been a blessing to each other in countless ways. You've been a blessing to me. You've been a blessing to Abundant Life Bible Church. Where I would continue to challenge you though, can you be a blessing outside the circle of Providence? Can you be a blessing outside the circle of believers? Can you be a blessing to Providence Corner? This is where I believe Paul is challenging Philippi and it should challenge us. The gains of generosity cease when we limit our generosity to insiders. To Providence. To Brethren. To Christians. The profit of generosity comes when we can extend that same generosity to the stranger, to the lonely, to

the broken, to the hurting, to the poor, to the ethnicity that we do not understand and to our neighbor whom we do not know. The profit is when more people come to faith in Jesus Christ and experience the wonderful and magnificent nature of His salvation. Folks, if we can figure out how to push out generosity outward even more, "...my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Blessing others can be messy, but the profit for the Kingdom of God is great. We have the wonderful opportunity to make an eternal impact for the glory of God. So this week, let's first exercise a heart of gratitude that then leads to a heart of generosity. Let's not be the Dead Sea that only receives deposits, but also gives the deposits away, making a profit for the Kingdom of God. May God be glorified by our efforts to seek the profit for the Kingdom of God and to be God's blessing to all those around us. Amen.