

A Shared Generosity

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[0:00] But most of all, what we need is the Lord's illumination. So please join with me one more time as we pray. Almighty God, as we come to your word today, we ask that your spirit would open our eyes and hearts to understand that we may not merely read words, but discern the truth you are speaking to us.

Your word is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, judging the thoughts and intentions of the heart. May it pierce us this morning so that it might change us.

Help us to hear it rightly, not for our pride, but for our transformation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Why do we give?

Why do some of us set up a direct debit so that a portion of our earnings goes into this church's bank account every month? Why do some of us put something in the offering box or scan the QR code at the back of the bulletin each week?

Why do we bother to put an item that says missions pledge when we are planning our annual household budget? Why do you give?

[1:19] Why do you give? For some of us, if we are honest, we give because we feel guilty. Maybe we've read about flood victims in Bintulu, or we see a video of pitiful-looking orphans on Instagram, and we feel this knot in our stomach.

We hear a sermon exhorting us to be more generous, and we can't help but feel a pang of conscience. So the next time we're in church, we give.

We give the quiet the discomfort. We give so that the guilt will ease. We give so we can say to ourselves, at least I've done something.

Others of us feel a different pressure. If everyone in your Bible study group is signing up for the missions pledge, you don't want to be the only one who doesn't.

If your friends are all scanning the QR code, you don't want to look stingy. It just doesn't look good. The peer pressure is real.

[2:28] And then some of us might give for a more subtle reason. I give so that God will bless my business. I give so that my children will do well in their exams.

I give so that nothing bad happens to my family. It's not always stated so bluntly, but deep down, we basically give so that God will give back more.

It is at its core a transactional mindset. Now, God is kind and he uses even mixed motives. But today we will see the giving of the Philippians is fundamentally different.

For when they gave, there's no guilt, no image management, no bargaining with God. Instead, there is joy, there is partnership, there is worship.

Because their joy, or their giving, has been reshaped by the mind of Christ. Now, all throughout this letter, have you noticed, Paul has been repeatedly encouraging the Philippians to have a Christ-mindedness?

[3:47] Let me briefly show you. So, on the screen, here is 2 verse 2, where Paul basically says to the church, be like-minded.

And what kind of like-mindedness is he encouraging? 2 verse 5 tells us, in your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

And as Alex showed us last week, 4 verse 2 reinforces that idea. I plead with you, O dear, and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

So, Philippians is a letter about having a transformed mindset. And according to Philippians, to have the mind of Christ is to be so shaped by the cross of Christ that your instinct is to give of yourself rather than guard your own interests.

Your reflex is to do what serves Christ and others, not ourselves. But what does that look like in the area of money?

[4:58] How does that show up in the way we give? Well, today, Philippians 4 verse 10 to 23 will show us. In particular, it will show us that when we are shaped by the mind of Christ, giving is no longer a mere duty or burden, but expresses our care and commitment to gospel partnership by resting in Christ's sufficiency, not circumstantial security, and becomes an act of wisdom and worship.

So, that is a mouthful, so let me unpack all that. Firstly, giving expresses our care and commitment to gospel partnership.

Paul, you might remember, is in prison, perhaps under a form of house arrest. That means he can't work to support himself.

He has no means. So, if you didn't have friends bringing food and supplies to you, you could very easily waste away. But the Philippians, you might recall, sent Epaphroditus to him to take care of his needs.

They brought him whatever was necessary. And that proved to be a real blessing to Paul. So, of course, you would expect him to rejoice.

[6:32] Wouldn't you? If you've been sitting in a cell, surviving on scraps, and someone brought you proper kolomi with char siu, clean clothes, maybe even something to read, along with some cash, you would rejoice.

And Paul does rejoice. That's what verse 10 says. I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me.

But look closely. Did you notice what he rejoices in? It's not actually the kolomi. It's not the clothes. It's not even the financial relief. He rejoices in their renewed concern. That's what he values.

You see, what delights Paul is not merely the gift. It's what the gift reveals. They care about him.

They care about the gospel he is advancing.

[7:39] They care about the mission they're partnering in. That's why in verse 14, Paul can say, it was good of you to share in my troubles.

In other words, Paul viewed their gift to him as a sign of solidarity. It was an expression of their care and commitment to him in his time of distress.

And Paul treasured that. After all, Paul always had the Philippians on his mind. That's why back in chapter 1, verse 7, he said, I have you in my heart.

So what a joy it is for him now to realize that the Philippians also feel the same way about him. They too have him on their minds.

Indeed, as Paul goes on to acknowledge in verse 10, they have always cared about him. It's just that they haven't always had the opportunity to show it, given the geographical distance.

[8:49] But now that they finally have the chance, they jump straight into give because they love Paul and they love the gospel. You see, do you know that's what you are expressing when you give?

Whenever you give, you are communicating concern and care. For those who have the mind of Christ, constantly desire to look out for gospel ministers and gospel ministries in whatever way they can.

And they are such a blessing. Over the years, I've had the opportunity to listen to many people who serve cross-culturally overseas. And what will they tell you they greatly value?

Without exception, they will all tell you they value expressions of loving support, friendship, and encouragement from those back home.

Perhaps it's an email, a handwritten letter, a monetary or material gift, even a visit from someone. And honestly, even those of us not in overseas cross-cultural ministry will tell you the same.

[10:17] So never ever think that what you give, whether it's money, a message, a meal, or simply your presence, is a small thing.

Because to the person on the receiving end who is working for the gospel, it says, I see what you're doing, I believe in what you're doing, and I'm with you.

I'm concerned about you. And what a gift that is. And actually, when you give, you're not just saying you're concerned about your gospel partners.

More than that, you're saying you care about the advance of the gospel itself. Look at verse 15.

Paul recalls the early days when he got to know them.

Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set up from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you only.

[11:34] So here in this verse, we discover the Philippians were early investors in Paul's ministry. They were giving from the very start. But did you notice something striking about the way Paul phrases things?

He doesn't say, in the early days of your acquaintance, with me. Rather, he says, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel.

In other words, he's saying that their giving, in the end, wasn't primarily motivated by Paul, the man himself.

Now, don't get me wrong, they clearly love Paul. We've seen that throughout this letter. But their giving wasn't simply a result of personal affection for a man they admired.

Instead, it was because of what Paul was carrying, the gospel. that's what they love.

[12:46] The incredible news that Jesus has entered this world to establish his kingdom, where evil will be destroyed, where injustice will be addressed, where love and goodness will triumph in the end by dying in our place to deal with the fundamental problem of our sin.

and they wanted everyone to know and be a part of this kingdom of God. And because they knew this was also Paul's heart and mission, they back him.

And my brothers and sisters, what this means for our giving is that the question isn't so much, how much should I give? What matters more is this question.

Do you have a mind shaped by Christ? For if you have a mind shaped by Christ, you will have a heart for the gospel.

And if you have a heart for the gospel, your money will follow where your heart is. That's the logic.

[14:06] you give not to ease guilt, you give not to look good, you give not to strike a deal with God, but you give because you have looked at the cross of Christ, you have seen how he has given everything for you, holding nothing back to free you from the penalty and the power of sin.

and because you have been changed by that, everything about your life, including your wallet, your credit cards, your investments, is now transformed.

Your giving becomes a visible expression of your heart. it expresses your care and commitment to the gospel.

So let's take stock. Let's ask, what does our giving currently show about our hearts?

John Dixon in his book Promoting the Gospel puts it this way. He asks us to ask ourselves and I'll slightly update his examples.

[15:21] Would I spend as much on the work of evangelism as I would on my streaming subscriptions, concert tickets, weekend outings, and even holidays?

Do the missionaries I know get as big a slice of my income as my local restaurants, takeaway joints, or cafes? If not, why not?

What possible reason could there be for not matching my expenditure on luxuries with expenditure on my partnership in the gospel?

Those are searching questions, aren't they? not because giving to the gospel means never going on holiday or never enjoying a good meal.

Paul isn't asking for that and neither is John Dixon. As he goes on to say, it is fantastic that the Lord has blessed us with the resources to enjoy the pleasures of his creation.

[16:29] God is asking, when you look honestly at where your money goes, does the gospel feature?

Does it feature in a way that is proportionate to how much you say you value it? Because here's the thing, the Philippians didn't just say they cared about the gospel, they demonstrated it consistently. Did you notice verse 15, how they kept giving when every other church had dropped out? And they gave even when it was costly.

Have a look at verse 16. For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. So notice that phrase, more than once.

In other words, even when Paul moved on from Philippi to Thessalonica, a journey of about 150 kilometers, they kept giving. They didn't give once and consider their obligation discharged.

[17:47] They gave again and again. Indeed, we find out from other parts of the New Testament, they gave even when it hurt their wallets.

And more than a decade later, here they are, still giving to Paul. That's sacrificial commitment. So my friends, what about us? Again, the point isn't how much we can give. Jesus says of the widow who put just two copper coins into the temple treasury that she was more generous than all the rich people who had come before her.

But the point is, do we have the mind of Christ? Do we have a heart for the gospel? How do we know?

Simple. over the year, look at your bank statement and see where your money naturally flows to.

[18:58] people. Now, here in KEC, I know many of you are generous. Let me just say thank you to God for you.

And I hope today you are reminded that your giving is not an obligation you must perform, but an expression of your gospel partnership.

I hope that when you see the preaching that happens here, the ministries to children and youth and young adults, the outreach we try to do, you will realize your generosity are powerful tools in God's hands.

Because without any money, none of that can happen. And for those of you who perhaps have not put much thought recently into your giving, well, can I invite you today to join us as a gospel partner in this way?

prayerfully and deliberately make that decision. That is the right way to do it. And in fact, that is partly why we don't usually pass the offering back around.

[20:12] You might have noticed that. Because we don't want you to just feel guilty and then kind of fish around in your pocket for loose change and dump in whatever is left over in your wallets.

rather we want your giving to be a decision you have already made before you walk through those doors. Because you have sat with God over a period of time, you have wrestled with him and you said, Lord, this portion is for your gospel.

Take it. That's what the Philippians did. they didn't give reactively out of guilt or out of pressure, but freely and deliberately out of their hearts.

But perhaps you are thinking, I know what you're saying, pastor, but this is really hard. How can I even begin to think this way?

Well, that brings me to my second point today, our giving rest in Christ's sufficiency, not circumstantial security. You see, why do we, and I include myself here, find it hard to give?

[21:36] Isn't it because at the back of our minds, we believe satisfaction comes if we can get just that one thing, whatever that one thing might be?

So we think to ourselves, if I have just have that one item, one job, one relationship, one position, one whatever, I'll be secure. Or maybe we say, I don't have such high aspirations, but hey, as long as I can afford to go makan in paradise regularly, I'll be happy.

And surely, to get all that, isn't it better to have just that one extra zero at the end of that number in my bank account? Isn't it better to hoard than to give?

But here's the thing, over and over and over again, people keep discovering that even when they are well fed and have plenty, the high doesn't last.

Before long, the discontentment returns. That's certainly what the multi-billionaire Elon Musk seems to have experienced. Just a few weeks ago, he tweeted this comment.

[22:59] Whoever said money can't buy happiness really knew what they were talking about. And here's the ironic thing. Some people, upon

experiencing what Elon Musk experienced, go the opposite direction.

They say, oh, let me radically simplify my life instead. That's what some of the gurus tell me I should do, right? Remember Marie Kondo and her does this spark joy philosophy from a few weeks ago? But even then, they discover that doesn't work either. Which is why the words of Paul in verses 11 and 12 are so remarkable.

Look at what he says. I'm not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 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 one.

[24:08] You see, Paul has just expressed deep joy at the Philippians care for him. But he's afraid of being misunderstood. He's afraid they might think, he's hinting, they should give him even more.

So in verse 11, he says, no, no, no, no, no, no, that's not what I'm getting at. Because, you see, even if you didn't give me anything, I have learned to be content.

Whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want, I am content. So here is Paul's claim.

Paul is saying, if he was alive today, and he got straight A's on his exams, he secured a coveted new job, he found a wonderful spouse, and he has lovely model children, he would be content. well, no, duh, you say, that's almost too obvious. But that's not the end of the story. Because he's also saying, if he was alive today, and barely passing his papers, getting turned down for that hoped-for job, getting rejected by the love of his life, and struggling financially, he would be content too.

[25:38] That's the claim. Now, doesn't that just take your breath away? Because that's not how we operate, is it? After all, sometimes whenever I'm visiting a friend's really nice house, I find a little voice in my heart saying, why don't I live in such a place?

Or when I hear of a ministry friend getting more recognition, and a wider platform, sometimes I find myself thinking, why doesn't that happen to me?

I find myself discontented because of my circumstances. So how can Paul be so different? What's the secret?

Well, he tells us in one of the most popular and misquoted verses in the Bible. Philippians 4 verse 13. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Now, that's a verse I suspect many of us have heard. We've seen it on fridge magnets, sports jerseys, even business cards. And it's often taken to mean you can achieve anything as long as you have enough faith.

[26:59] But that is not what Paul is talking about. Look at the context. Paul isn't claiming Christ empowers him to fulfill every ambition.

He's saying Christ empowers him to be content in every circumstance. and in my humble opinion, that is even more mind blowing.

Now, did you notice what Paul doesn't say? He doesn't say contentment comes from practicing mindfulness. He doesn't say it comes from self-affirmation.

Such comments were actually common in Paul's day. There would have been a bunch of stoic philosophers who would have said, oh, you know what? You can gain contentment if you just look within.

You just have to be self-sufficient, try meditation, something like that. Which sounds very contemporary, doesn't it? Just goes to show there is nothing new under the sun.

[28:09] But Paul says, actually, if you want to truly know contentment, you've got to truly know Jesus.

And really, if we've been reading the whole of Philippians, that has been an open secret. Well, hasn't Paul been telling us this all throughout?

Hasn't he been saying from the very first chapter that for him to live is Christ? Because you can lose your freedom and your reputation as Paul has, but you can't lose your liberation from death or your status as God's beloved child.

You see, contentment isn't a technique Paul discovered. It is a person he's come to know. And unlike the shifting circumstances of life, this person never changes.

he is perfectly kind, endlessly patient, completely trustworthy, and sovereign over all things.

[29:22] And we know this is true because he has already proven it by humbling himself to the cross for us. And here is what this means for our giving.

When our giving rests in Christ's sufficiency, not circumstantial security, we will find ourselves not with tight fists, but with open hands.

Now, without a doubt, we will still have to wrestle with our fears. We'll still have all sorts of questions. What if things go wrong? What if there isn't enough?

What if the economy crashes? What if medical bills come? What if my kids need more? God will not spare even his own son for our sake, then it must be true God will not abandon us.

Even when we are experiencing the lows of verse 12, he will get us through whatever comes. For as verse 19 says, my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

[30:43] Now, this is not some prosperity gospel promise because it is not your wants or your ambitions but rather your needs. But you can be sure God will meet those.

Indeed, has God not met Paul's own needs through the Philippians themselves. As he himself puts it in verse 18, he has more than enough.

In the very early days of my ministry in KL, I was actually living below the poverty line. I didn't have much. But again and again I was astonished at how God provided.

I never lacked food, I never went hungry. Then when I needed a pretty huge sum to go to Bible college, once again God provided.

First came a scholarship, then came money from some unexpected places as far away as Canada. God will be so if God will supply our needs, you are not acting recklessly when you give generously.

[32:06] You are simply acting on what you know to be true about God. You are saying, I trust him. I believe he is enough.

my security is not in what I keep but in who keeps me. That is giving that rest on Christ's sufficiency, not circumstantial security.

And ultimately when you give this way, you are really performing an act of wisdom and worship.

That's my third point for today. When you have the mind of Christ, giving becomes an act of wisdom and worship.

Why? Well, have a look at verse 17. Paul says, not that I desire your gifts, what I desire is that more be credited to your account.

So once again, Paul is making himself clear. He is not cultivating their support for his own personal gain. Rather, it's the opposite. It is their interest he has at heart.

[33:23] And I mean that in both senses of the word. You see, Paul wants us to have a picture of a heavenly bank account in our minds. And every time someone gives out of their heart for the gospel, it's as if that account is being topped!

that way. Now, to be clear, again, this isn't the prosperity gospel. The interest and dividends Paul has in mind are not commercial.

So Paul isn't saying your giving will generate a new car or a job promotion. Rather, he's saying imagine every person who hears or grows through the gospel because you funded its advance.

That's your share. That's credited to your account. And his point is when you give, you are not really losing capital.

You're investing into something that reaps eternal returns. Is that not true wisdom? Think about it.

[34:44] We spend so much energy trying to future proof our lives. We look for the best interest rates, the most stable stocks, the safest properties. But Paul reminds us even Elon Musk can't take a single cent with him when he dies.

However, according to Jesus and Paul, you can send it on a hit. And that's why Paul is so happy the Philippians are giving.

Because he knows what we keep here, we will eventually lose. But what we give to Christ, we keep forever.

So gospel giving is an act of wisdom. And more than that, it is an act of worship. For did you notice how Paul describes their offering at the end of verse 18?

They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. He's using the language of the temple to describe their financial gift.

[35:57] In other words, he's using the language of worship. In the Old Testament, when the priest offered sacrifices at the altar, the smoke would rise, and it was described as a fragrant aroma to the Lord.

It was an act of devotion, an act that said, God, this belongs to you. And Paul was saying, when you gave to me, that's what it was.

It wasn't just a financial transaction. It was an act of worship that ascended to God himself. Because if you are a Christian today, you no longer need to go to a physical temple to worship.

Rather, your whole life is meant to be presented as an offering of worship to God. And your money and your giving will form part of that.

So my brothers and sisters, what are the implications? Well, I think it means we need to enlarge our perspective.

[37:13] You see, so often when we think about worshiping, we think about our singing or perhaps our praying, don't we? But have you thought of your giving also as an act of worship because that's what it is.

In fact, the direct debit you set up might be a more accurate and genuine expression of your worship than the lifting of your hands.

For when you are giving to genuine gospel work, you are participating in God's plan. No wonder Paul's response to the Philippians giving is to break out into praise himself.

Verse 20, to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. Because that's what gospel giving does. It doesn't just bless the recipient.

It doesn't just invest in eternity. It glorifies God. It draws praise out of those who witness it. So my friends, today, are you being wise, and worshipful with your money.

[38:31] If you are, then here is the good news. You never know what God might do with it. Because look at verse 22. All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

Now just let that sink in. There in Caesar's household, in his imperial palace, at the very heart of Roman power, are believers.

People who have the mind of Christ. Even there, the gospel has penetrated. You never know what God might do with your giving.

You never know if there are people in households you never imagined who could be reached for the gospel, who might very well be credited to your account because of your gospel partnership.

You might think, oh, I only have 50 ringgit, you know, what can that do? But then, who knows, that 50 ringgit might go to fund a Bible, and that Bible be just a person who will read it, who will be impacted by it, who will trust in Jesus because of it, and then perhaps years later, one day, he will go to Iran, and then he will preach the gospel, and many will come to Christ.

[39:46] the point is, you never know what God is going to do with your giving. My brothers and sisters, this is why you give.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Let's pray. But actually, before I lead us in prayer, I want to give room for the Holy Spirit to do something here in this hall, so I will let you have a moment of silence.

Just talk to God on your own for a few seconds, and only then I will lead us in prayer. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Heavenly Father, I believe you have by your spirit spoken through your word today.

Your word is living and active. It cuts to our very hearts. So I pray, Lord, that we will sit with what you have to say to us.

[41:15] Help us to recognize that perhaps for some of us, we might need to take a bit more time to spend with you, even outside of this service, outside of this Sunday. If that is us, help us to sit with you to consider where we might need to think through this area of our lives.

But Father, above all, I just want also to pray that we will have heard loud and clear your grace as well. Thank you that you are the God who supplies all our needs.

Thank you that in Christ, we have the power to be content because the Lord Jesus is unchanging. We know he is ever loving, ever gracious, ever true, ever good, ever kind, and we can depend on him.

So help us to remember that, especially when we ponder the cross of Christ, please drive us to the cross of Christ just to let it hit us afresh and may the gospel change us so that we might live for you. Pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.