

Together in Generosity

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[0 : 00] Hey Hey, Faith family, if you have a Bible, turn to the book of Philippians.

Philippians chapter 4 is where our passage is going to be today. As you already know, I am out this weekend, but I am looking forward to being back with you next weekend on Memorial Day weekend.

I'll be there live and in person to preach the weekend services. And excited about that, we'll wrap up our Together series next weekend. And then as many of you know by now, starting June 1, I will start my five-week sabbatical.

And if you were not here last week when we announced that, in the month of June through early July, I'm going to be taking a five-week sabbatical. One of the big things that I'll be doing is joining with some other pastors and studying the missionary journey of the Apostle Paul and John. And then when I return to Faith family, we'll be preaching the book of Acts. And so very, very excited about this opportunity personally, as well as what I hope will be of benefit to you, Faith family.

[1 : 37] So thanks for giving me the freedom as we flex our ministry methods here at Faith family to come to you today by video.

But we're going to continue in our series that we've been in now for the last several weeks, a series called Together. We've been looking at the importance of the local church, why our belonging really matters.

We've looked at together as his body, that we belong to Jesus. The church is his church. We've talked about together in unity, and the importance of maintaining the unity together.

Together in ministry. We talked about last week how we put our preferences aside for the sake of something greater, and that's gospel ministry. And today, we're going to look here at Philippians chapter 4 in Together in Generosity.

Together in generosity. This is an important part of what it means to be a local church. Let's look here at Philippians chapter 4. Philippians chapter 4.

[2 : 40] If you have your Bibles and you're able to stand in your locations, would you please stand as we honor the reading of God's Word. Philippians chapter 4 and verse 10, the Apostle Paul is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and he says, I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low.

I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I've learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger and abundance and need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble, and you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only.

Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

[3 : 50] I have received full payment and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in the glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever.

Amen. Pray with me. Lord, we thank you for this opportunity now to study your word. We at Faith Family care deeply about your word and what it calls us to.

And we pray that in this moment, as we look through these verses, that you would teach us, that you would really stir in us by your spirit what it means to be not only generous as an individual, but generous as a Faith Family, generous together.

So guide us now, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. You can be seated. Well, every night, Julio Diaz would leave work.

[4 : 54] He would catch his one-hour-long subway ride to his neighborhood in the Bronx, always making sure to stop at his favorite local diner.

But one night when Julio stepped off the train onto the platform, the number six train, a teenage boy approached him with a knife and demanded his wallet.

Julio didn't want things to escalate, and so he gave the boy his wallet, and the boy turned to go away. And as he did, Julio shouted, Wait! If you're going to be robbing people tonight, you might as well take my coat.

The boy looked at him quite puzzled. He stopped, turned around, and what he saw was Julio standing there holding his jacket out. And the boy asked him, What are you doing?

And Julio said, I figured if you're willing to risk your freedom for just a few dollars, you probably need the money. I was about to go get something to eat.

[6 : 04] If you'd like, you could join me. To Julio's amazement, that young boy agreed, and the two of them went to his favorite diner.

Once inside, Julio was just, as he normally would be, friendly with everybody in the place. The young boy just sat there kind of thinking, Man, this guy knows everybody.

He's nice to everybody. He even knows the people that are washing dishes. And then he turned to Julio, and he said, Why are you so nice to everyone?

Julio said, Well, haven't you been taught to be nice to people? And the boy said, Yeah, but I didn't actually think people behaved that way. Well, finally, they corresponded throughout the night and enjoyed the meal.

And at the end of the meal, the bill came, and Julio turned to that young boy, and he said, You know, I would be more than honored to pay for this meal, but you have my wallet.

[7 : 05] And the teenage boy slid the wallet back across the table to Julio, along with the knife.

You know, when Julio's mother was asked later about that story, she said, It doesn't surprise me at all that something like that would happen in Julio's life, because, quote, He's the type of guy that if you ask him for the time, he'll probably give you his watch.

Faith family, I wonder today if you know anybody in your life, have you ever experienced a situation that was just extremely generous? Maybe you know somebody in your life that was really generous with their time.

They're just the kind of person that loves to help people. They're always available. Maybe you know somebody that's generous with their hands. They love to help out.

They love to do stuff. Maybe you know somebody that's generous with their possessions. I mean, they will let you borrow anything. They don't hold tight to anything they own.

[8 : 16] Maybe you know somebody that's generous with their finances. They love to bless other people through their giving. Faith family, what I want you to understand today is that that is exactly the kind of Christian, that's exactly the kind of church that these Philippians were.

They were Julio-type Christians. They were the kind of people that if you ask them for the time, they'd give you their watch. They were a generous people.

The book of Acts even gives us some insight into just how generous the early church was. Look here at Acts chapter 2 and verse 42. It says, As they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer, everyone kept feeling a sense of awe, and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

And all those who had believed were, here's our word, together. And they had all things in common. And they began selling their property and possessions and sharing them with all as anyone might have in need.

Day by day, continuing with one mind in the temple, breaking bread from house to house. They were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all people.

[9 : 44] And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. Faith family, the early church was a church that was together.

And part of their togetherness was their extreme generosity. These people were selling their possessions to make sure that there was no one in need.

This was a generous, generous church. Now, how do you get to the place of that kind of generosity?

If we were to model the kind of generosity the early church had, that togetherness, what would we need? Well, the apostle Paul tells us that here in Philippians chapter 4.

Look with me in verse 11. Paul says, Notice here the essence of contentment.

[10:45] Now, I don't know about you, but when I read that kind of verse, it's like I want to be able to say that about my life, don't you? I want to be able to say, listen, whether I am abounding or whether I am in need, I have learned the value, the secret of contentment.

So what is contentment? Well, the Greek meaning, the way it was used in the time of the Philippians, was really more of kind of a self-sufficiency or an independent, I'm content in that I don't need anything, I don't need anybody.

But that's not what Paul means here. In fact, the Stoics would use this word to describe kind of a detachment from things. But notice this here on the screen.

Paul is not using this word to mean I don't care about anything. What Paul means is that I am at peace with anything.

Not that I don't care about anything, but I am at peace with anything. Look in Philippians chapter 4 and beginning at verse 4, earlier in the chapter.

[11:50] He says, Faith family, let's be clear.

Okay, look at me here. Contentment is not enjoying your circumstances. Remember that the Apostle Paul is writing this letter as he is a prisoner in a Roman prison.

He is not saying, yay, prison. I love prison. Of course not. Contentment is not lacking drive. Paul will say, I want to see you again.

I want to be somewhere other than where I am right now. It's not emotionlessness. Paul is not saying, you know, I just don't really care about anything. It's not laziness.

It's not comfort. Here's what contentment is, all right? So come in close here. It is soul rest. It's soul rest.

[13:07] The peace of God that surpasses all understanding guards your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. It's that kind of peacefulness in any circumstance of life.

That's what the Apostle Paul talks about here when he talks about peace. So even if my circumstances don't change, even if I never reach what I'm striving for, I'm at peace in Christ.

Notice here on the screen, Psalm 73, verse 25. That is what the Apostle Paul is talking about.

God's my portion. He's all that I need. And so if I have a little, if I have a lot, it doesn't matter because I'm content in God. He's enough for me.

My soul is at rest because he is my portion. So that's what contentment is. But notice now how far reaching this contentment goes.

[14:25] Look at verse 12. Paul says, I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I've learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

So now Paul kind of gives us the extremes of this contentment. That is, in the setting of abounding. There were times in the Apostle Paul's life when every goal was met, every desire was filled, there was plenty of money in his pocket.

And some of you know seasons like that. There are seasons where you discover that you're pregnant or you get a raise or the refrigerator is full or everything just seems to be going fantastic. It's a season of abounding, of abundance. Paul knew those seasons. And yet Paul here says that I had contentment even in those moments.

Which seems a little odd because we might think that it's easy to be content when things are flourishing, when it's abounding, but not so fast.

[15:34] You see, it's easy to be discontent even when you have everything going your way. Even when you have things in abundance. And there's maybe no culture on planet Earth that proves this than the American culture, right?

I mean, our culture in many ways, even with many of the things we're facing today, we still are a very affluent culture. And yet there are so many people that lack contentment.

And think about this. You kind of know this. Some of you, like if you're married, like you talk to couples and they'll say, you know, the time in our marriage when we were the most content, when we were the most happy, when we were most at peace, were those times when we had living on a futon, you know, had no worries.

We had shag carpet. You remember those days with the lava lamp? You're like, those were the good old days, right? We didn't have a lot, but we were content. And notice this question on the screen, Faith Family.

If contentment is found in abundance, then why are so many Americans sad? Somebody say preach, preacher, right? I mean, that's a serious question. If contentment is found in abundance, then why are so many people in America lacking contentment?

[16:54] Take, for example, the great Michael Jordan. Talking six NBA titles, five MVPs, 10 scoring titles, 14 all-star appearances, billion-dollar shoe brand Michael Jordan.

In an ESPN interview, he was talking about life after basketball, and someone described Michael Jordan's life post-basketball this way, and I quote, Michael isn't happy.

He's constantly searching for release on the golf course at the blackjack table as an owner of the Charlotte Bobcats and wishing he could return to the game.

Without it, he feels adrift. Who am I? What am I doing? Even after all his success, his restlessness remains, close quote.

Listen, Michael Jordan proves it. American culture proves it. Just because you're abounding doesn't mean you're content. But the Apostle Paul said he learned the secret that even in those seasons when he had a lot, his soul was still at rest in God.

[18:12] Not his things. This secret is also experienced not just in abounding but in lacking. That's the second part Paul addresses here.

And Paul knew times in his life of distress, when he had very little money, when things were not going very well circumstantially. And I know there are many of you that have had seasons like that. Some of you are in seasons like that, where it just seems like it is one thing after another, one more issue after another. You prayed for the blessing of Abraham and somehow you got the suffering of Job.

And you know what that's like. That's why our series on the ashes resonated with so many people. We know those seasons of lacking. But Paul says that even in those moments when he didn't have much, he was content.

You see, here's the other odd way of thinking. You can actually be content and not have very much. Just in the same way that you cannot be content even when you have a lot, you can actually be content and have very little.

[19:22] The apostle Paul said he had that. He knew that secret. And he had learned in either one of these extremes to be at peace, at soul rest with God.

And so important was this secret, he passed it on to his young brother, his young mentee in the faith, Timothy. Listen to 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verse 6.

Godliness with, here it is, contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. It's through this craving, that is through this discontentment, that some have wandered from the faith and have pierced themselves with so many pains.

[20:25] Paul, even to young Timothy, is like, you've got to understand the importance of contentment, of being at peace with God in all circumstances of life.

Now I know some of you are like, how in the world could I ever get to a place like that in life? How could I ever get to a season of really being at rest and peace, whether I am abounding or whether I am lacking?

Well, Paul tells you how this can happen. Verse 13, I can do all things through him, through Christ, who strengthens me.

This is the energy of our contentment. This is how we are able to live this way. And this may be one of the most well-known, and yet I would argue misquoted verses in the Bible.

We've kind of taken this verse and turned it into a slogan that with Jesus, I can do anything. Man, if I got Jesus on my side, I can lift 400 pounds above my head.

[21 : 32] If I got Jesus on my side, I can do this. If I just believe it, there's nothing to it.

I believe I can fly. I believe I can touch the sky. That's exactly how many of us have taken this verse.

Like, man, if I've got Jesus on my side with his strength, I can dunk, I can do anything, because there's nothing impossible with Jesus.

Well, the problem with that interpretation of this verse is context, context, context. Listen, faith family, the all things, the I can do all things, is not anything in the world.

It is, from verse 13, it's referring back to the all circumstances of verse 12. In other words, listen, Paul can be content in all things, that is, in all circumstances, not because he's superhuman, but because he has a supernatural strength that God supplies him through Jesus Christ.

[22 : 46] I am at peace with God. The peace of God guards my heart and mind in Christ Jesus, and that has helped me in times of abounding, in times of lacking, be content.

But I didn't do that on my own. I don't have the strength to live that way. I can do all things. That is, I can be content in all circumstances through Christ who gives me strength.

Notice here on the screen, Ephesians chapter three, verse 20. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we could ask or think, according to the power at work within us.

That's the energy. That's the power of being able to have this kind of contentment. Now, here's what some of you are thinking. I know some of you are like, you set this whole thing up about a sermon on generosity, and you've just spent most of the time talking about contentment.

Like, I thought this series, this whole sermon series was about togetherness. Why in the world are you talking about contentment? Well, here's why. Listen to me, faith family.

[23 : 59] You will never reach, I hope you're listening. You and I will never reach the level of generosity the gospel calls us to until we are content in Jesus.

Let that sink in. You and I, together, individually, as a church, we will never reach the level of generosity that the New Testament calls us to if we are not content in Jesus.

because now, I want to show you from what we've been looking at in contentment, how Paul talks about this Philippian church, how they were together in generosity because of contentment.

Notice the expression here of contentment. Notice how Paul expresses this really throughout the book of Philippians, to be honest. First, in Philippians 2, verse 17, notice this, this is Paul, even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I'm glad and rejoice.

Here's the Philippians, Philippians 4, 15. You Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership, that is, fellowship, with me in giving, in generosity, in receiving, except you only.

[25 : 27] And then to Timothy, later in 1 Timothy 6, verse 18, be rich in good works, be generous, and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

See, I can preach on generosity all day long. I can show you verse and verse, verse after verse in the scripture about how understanding the gospel leads to generosity.

I can show you all the passages where Jesus addresses money. I could fill you with all kinds of commands. But listen, listen, listen.

Until your heart is content in Jesus, until he's enough, no matter what's going on in life, we will show up week after week and nothing in terms of our generosity will change.

You see, notice this on the screen. Commitment to generosity comes from contentment in Jesus. Paul had that.

[26 : 39] Paul learned that secret. The Philippian church together learned that secret. It's actually from our contentment in Jesus that we are generous for Jesus.

And Paul then gives a list of things that pictures for us their generosity. That is, the generosity of the Philippians together. First, is you'll notice that their generosity was sacrificial.

It was sacrificial. In 2 Corinthians 8, to the Corinthian church, Paul will actually give the Philippians as an example of generosity.

So he says this, we want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that he has given among the churches of Macedonia, that is, the Philippian church. In their severe test of affliction, their

abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part, for they gave according to their needs, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part and the relief of the saints.

In other words, these Philippians were sacrificial. They didn't have anything and yet they were begging for an opportunity to participate generously in the work of the gospel.

[28 : 01] It's because they were content. They had peace in Christ and that allowed them to be sacrificial for Christ. Number two is they were abnormal in their generosity.

In verse 15, Paul will say that no one partnered with him through the giving and receiving like this church. They were absolutely abnormal when it came to generosity.

No other church was like this one. Number three is it was natural. In verse 16, Paul will say, even in Thessalonica.

Well, if you know a little bit about history, this was two weeks after Paul had left them. So two weeks after Paul leaves the Philippians and is in Thessalonica, he is already receiving this support, already being a part of their generosity.

Now listen, two weeks in our culture, that's a lot of time, right? I mean, we're in an email, text message, fast food kind of culture where we expect everything now.

[29 : 11] But back in the ancient Near East, back in biblical times, two weeks, he had already received something. I mean, that's like five seconds today.

The point here is that their generosity just flowed naturally. It was something that they wanted to be a part of. It was natural for them.

Most churches take six months to figure out the color of the carpet. It took the Philippian church two weeks to join Paul in the mission of God through generous giving.

Next, is it was habitual. That is in verse 16, Paul says, once and again. That is, this was an ongoing part of their life.

It wasn't just a one-time deal. This was something that marked the entirety of their ministry. Number five is it was plentiful. In verse 18, Paul says, I have received full payment and more.

[30 : 16] In other words, it was even more than I needed. I mean, I asked you for the time and you gave me a watch. I mean, it was way more than I could have ever needed because you gave in abundance.

I mean, faith family, can you imagine being known for that? The Philippian church was known for being a church that gave above and beyond for the work of the mission.

Can I just encourage you at this moment to say, thank you for your generosity together as together we partner, we fellowship in the ministry of the gospel.

Next, is missional. Missional. In verse 15, he says, no church entered into partnership. They gave because they were a part of something.

That word partnership, fellowship. Again, this series talking about togetherness. This just wasn't an individual or two.

[31 : 17] Together, they were participating in this generosity. They were a part of this mission together. And Paul recognized that in their giving.

Next was faithful. They were faithful. Verse 19 says, God will supply every need. So what I mean here by the word faithful is that they were full of faith.

They trusted God. Remember what Paul told the Corinthian church, the Philippian church gave out of their extreme poverty. In other words, they gave faithfully.

They gave in faith. They didn't necessarily know how the Lord would provide, but they trusted him to provide as they generously gave.

And then lastly is spiritual. Spiritual. Back at the beginning of the book of Philippians in chapter 1, verse 6, Paul says that God will finish.

[32 : 14] He will complete the work that he started in you. You see, faith family, generosity is a sign of something bigger than money or time or anything like that.

Generosity is something bigger than the thing itself. It's a sign of God's work in your life. Someone who is growing in the Lord is growing in generosity.

So it really isn't just about the giving of money or the giving of time or the being generous with one's life or whatever. It's that that is a fruit of being conformed into the image of Christ.

My point here today is simply this. You're never going, we're never together going to get to this level of generosity until we are content in Jesus.

