

Christ-Centered Relationships

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Date: 28 June 2020

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[0 : 00] What does a good relationship look like? Do you feel you have good relationships? Many Americans admit that they don't feel they have as good of a relationship as they should have.

So our question is, what is missing from their relationships? I believe this morning we're going to uncover a few things from our text that may very well revolutionize your relationships if we will follow these principles that we see in Philippians chapter number 4 and verses 14 through 20. In this section, the Apostle Paul closes his letter to the Philippians by rejoicing over the sacrificial gift that he had received from the Philippian Christians.

We see that in chapter 1, verses 5 and 6, verses 25 through 30. The Philippian church was one of those Macedonian churches that was mentioned in 2 Corinthians chapter 2, verses 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 that gave significantly and even gave sacrificially.

One of the only churches that gave to the Apostle Paul when he had a need, when he was in prison, and when he needed to have his needs being met.

[1 : 29] And as we look at that relationship between the Apostle Paul and between the Philippian church, we see a couple of principles emerge from that relationship.

What we see is Paul as an example of Christ-centered receiving, and we see the Philippian church as an example of Christ-centered giving.

Our main idea here in these verses is that Christ-centered relationships require both giving and receiving.

And God intends for our needs to be met through giving and receiving within the body of Christ. And that is the way we see in the New Testament.

We saw it in the early church. We saw that when one had a need, others gave. And if they had extra, they sold what they had extra and gave to the needs of the church.

[2 : 34] And those who had needs willingly received it as not only a gift from that other person, but as a gift from God. And not only the person receiving the gift was blessed, but the person giving the gift was blessed as well.

So let's go on with our first thing that we see this morning, and that is Christ-centered giving. We see that in verses 14 through 16.

We're coming off of the previous verses where Paul is saying he's learned to be content in different states. The state of plenty or abundance where he had more than he needed, but he also had learned to be content when he had nothing and had a significant need.

He said, it's okay. I've learned to be content. I've learned to deal with not having enough. And it might sound interesting to you, but Paul said he learned how to deal with having too much.

The reality is many people can't deal with an abundance. They don't understand how abundance works and that we save, or God intended for us to over and above that we save for that rainy day.

[3 : 49] We use our abundance to help others within the body of Christ. So it's a giving and receiving relationship. Verses 14 through 16.

Nevertheless, Paul said, you have done well. He's talking to the Philippian believers. That you shared in my distress. Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when the gospel was being preached by Paul, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me giving and receiving.

But you only, you were the only church that gave when I needed. And then verse 16, for even in Thessalonica, he says, you sent aid once and again for my necessity.

So this was not a one-off thing. The Philippians continued, they continually gave. They heard Paul had a need, and they took up a collection, and they gave to Paul. They found out later Paul had a need.

They took up another collection, and they gave to the apostle Paul. Paul had financial needs, and God answered his prayers and met those financial needs through the sacrificial gift of the Philippian church.

[5 : 08] But this brings up a point for some of us. How many of you have been in a situation where you had a need of something before?

I'm not merely talking of money, but you had a need that needed to be met. Maybe your car needed working on, or maybe you needed someone to come and do some mechanic work or do some carpentry work or do some type of work, and they offered to do it for you.

Someone comes along, and they offer to take care of it for you without expecting anything in return. But what's our typical response, or how might we respond?

Oh, you don't have to do that. I can't expect you to do it for nothing. I can't accept that. Or someone hears you have a financial need, and they say, the Lord, bless me, and we have a little bit extra, and we feel that you need this more than we do.

And what's our response? Oh, I can't take it. No, I can't take that. No. What's our main problem? Ego. Pride.

[6 : 27] Pride. But what are we doing to a relationship when someone offers to help us, whether financially or with their time, when we give something back in return?

We've made that relationship a transaction. We've made it a transactional relationship. You see, we all have transactional relationships.

We have a transactional relationship with the bank. We give them money and expect in return that they'll take care of it. We go to the auto repair shop.

It's a transaction. You do work for me, I pay you a commensurate amount for that work. You hire someone to do work around the house, and it's a transactional relationship.

You do work for me, I pay you for that work. But if someone is a friend or someone, we are in a relationship with someone in the body of Christ, and they do something for us, and if we feel like we have to give them something back in return, we've made that relationship a transaction.

[7 : 41] That's not the way the body of Christ is supposed to work. Now, if, let's say, you do have a need, and you know someone else has the ability to meet that need with their skill or with their time, and you know maybe they have a financial need, I personally believe it would be okay to say, if you will come and help me with this, I will pay you X amount.

What are we doing? They're able to use their skill. We're getting taken care of, but in return, we're taking care of them as well. So I don't think this is a hard and fast rule.

So let me say this. What if a member of the body of Christ does something for you, expecting nothing in return? Obviously, we thank them. Now, in the South, we have a difficulty with accepting something like that.

Why? Because decorum would say, you have to at least offer to pay them. Well, for many people, that will offend them. But let's say someone does something for you, and out of the blue, sometime later, you provide for them or you give them a very thoughtful gift.

It might be something that you did, that you made for them, or something that just would mean something very, very special to them, and you just provide it for them for no reason.

[9 : 11] What would that mean? I believe that would mean the world to them. For example, ladies, would you rather receive flowers on Valentine's Day?

Now, you expect them on Valentine's Day, right? But what about some random day, your spouse comes and says, here is an arrangement of beautiful flowers, and you go, what's the occasion?

No reason. I thought of you, and I thought of the beauty of these flowers, and the first thing I could think of was the beauty of your face, and la, la, la. We go into all that mushy stuff.

So, ladies, which one do you prefer? Which one means more to you? Let me say it that way.

Getting flowers on Valentine's Day, or getting flowers for no good reason, or for no reason?

Obviously, for no reason, because it means more. They went out of their way. Now, guys, Valentine's is an obligatory holiday.

[10 : 14] Just accept it for what it is, because you are in the doghouse if you do not do something for Valentine's Day. Now, not taking anything away from that.

My point is, we don't want to make it a transaction. We don't always want to have a transactional relationship within the body of Christ, and especially with those that we have relationships with.

So, good relationships work both ways. It's give and take. In the body of Christ, we know that if I have a need in the middle of the night, and I call you and ask you, you will come and help. And the same goes, it should go both ways.

And this is what the Apostle Paul is talking about. I had a need. You met my need. And we're going to see in a moment that it was not just the giving part that Paul talks about, but it's the receiving part, that Paul was blessed by the gift, but the giver was blessed as well.

So the first thing I believe we need to learn is to allow God to meet our needs through others. Allow God to use others to meet those needs that we have.

[11:24] Now, I'm not talking about a need that if we have the money for it, we need something, we go buy it. But if we truly have a need for something, maybe we need someone to talk to. Maybe we need someone to just literally help us.

Someone with a pickup truck to come and pick up an item that, or a trailer or whatever. You know, it's a matter of, we give, you receive, you give, we receive.

And it's that type of relationship. Christ-centered relationships require we allow God to meet our needs through others. The church is called the body of Christ.

Is it not? The church is called the body, I believe, because it shows graphically the connection that we have with one another, with different parts of the body and how they work together.

Now, when the body has a need, the head sends a message to that part of the body and it says, I have a need for this. The circulatory system, the endocrine system, and the brain sends a signal.

[12:28] It says, okay, I need this particular hormone. Okay, I'll produce it. I'll give it to you. And then the brain says, okay, that's enough. And that's the way the body is supposed to work.

And I believe God knew what he was talking about when he used the body, the physical body, as an analogy or as a picture of the body of Christ. When one member has a need, the other member can take care of it.

We all have different abilities and we work together to take care of those. And God's designed the body of Christ to meet our deepest spiritual needs and our personal needs through others.

And if we don't allow God to meet our needs through others, what that is is it's a recipe for stagnation. We may stagnate in our spiritual life and not go as far as we could.

Let's look at verse 21 of 1 Corinthians chapter 12. When Paul was talking about spiritual gifts and how we give to one another within the body based upon our abilities, he says, I cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you.

[13:39] That would be like saying to a member of the body of Christ that offers to help you in some way. That's okay. I don't need you. I think it would be a whole lot better to accept that gift of time or gift of whatever and graciously receive it because we'll learn in a moment that or we'll see in a moment that it's not only the receiver that gets blessed.

It's the giver. And very often the giver is blessed more than the receiver. So some of us have a hard time receiving from others and as a result, our spiritual life is stagnant or at least stunted.

And if we have a hard time receiving, what we may have to do is humble ourselves and realize that's the way God works. Share our... We often...

We need to share our struggles with others. Let others know how we're doing. This is our challenge to us this morning. Now you may be putting on a good face, coming together and sharing trivialities, talking about the weather and instead of experiencing genuine community and letting others know our true needs and how are things going and letting them know maybe something you're struggling with, something that you're dealing with.

And maybe all that's required there is prayer. Or maybe it's, well, let's go have a cup of coffee or let's talk on the phone or we'll talk it out.

[15:13] That's the way the body of Christ is supposed to work. So we need to experience that genuine community within the body of Christ. The next thing is we need to trust that God will meet our needs even when others disappoint us.

God will meet our needs even when others disappoint you. If the first principle is allowing God and receiving is allowing God to meet your needs through others, then the second principle is to trust that God will meet your needs even when others disappoint you.

We saw that in verses 11 through 13. Now, Paul is not relating to the Philippian church out of desperation because Paul believes no matter what, God's going to meet my needs.

Whether it's through this avenue or that avenue, he says God's going to take care of it. So the thing is, Paul wasn't dependent upon anyone.

Paul wasn't dependent upon any situation working out. Paul wasn't depending on all of the other Macedonian churches to take up collections and send to him because in Paul's mind, God knows I have the need.

[16:37] God will take care of the need and God will do whatever he has to do to take care of the need. So Paul wasn't wringing his hands and saying, oh, I hope the Philippians remember me this time.

I know they gave last time, but I hope they remember. Paul wasn't doing that. Paul was trusting God and God used the Philippian believers to meet his needs.

Now, sometimes God withholds others from meeting our needs for our good. Now, sometimes God says, no, wait a minute. The timing is not right. You need to trust me.

And if people always gave to us, if we always had our needs met by everyone else all the time, then we would no longer trust God. It would be a matter of, well, I expect this.

And it's not a God thing. It's a transaction. But he trusted God. Paul learned to be content whether others supplied for him or not.

[17:36] Look what he says in verse 15. He says, Now you Philippians know also that at the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving.

I mean, Paul could have been disappointed with all those other churches. He could have thought, I can't believe them. Look at everything I did.

I poured out my life for them. I gave them blood and sweat and tears and sleepless nights. And I did all of that for them and they're not helping me?

Ugh. But Paul didn't have that attitude with them. He said, They didn't help me. He wasn't saying it to batmouth them. He was saying it to encourage the Philippians.

He said, Even when no one else was giving, he said, You sacrificially gave to me. Now sometimes we're disappointed because we place unspoken expectations on others.

[18:38] We place expectations on others, but we never communicate what they are. But we become disappointed when they don't meet our need that we never communicated to them.

Well, I can't believe they're not taking care of me. Well, did you ever tell them you needed something? And so sometimes we're disappointed because we don't communicate. We expect things from others that we never communicate to them.

And so we can't expect them to necessarily meet those needs. And sometimes we put unrealistic expectations on people. And then when we become disappointed, we withdraw from those relationships.

Well, they let me down. Well, maybe they didn't let you down, but because you put something that was unrealistic because maybe they're not capable of meeting that, or maybe there's a reason why they didn't meet that.

And we have an unrealistic expectation, and then we withdraw from others. So it works both ways. Sometimes we can get disappointed because we never communicate. Sometimes we get disappointed because it was an unrealistic expectation from others.

[19:46] But God expects us to forgive, Matthew 18, 21, 22, because we're organically related to one another in the body of Christ, and we just can't get away from it.

We can't get away with it. So we need to learn to forgive one another. Disappointment is a part of every relationship. We will always let someone else down, no matter what, because we're human beings.

We'll forget. Sometimes we'll say something in the heat of the moment that we don't mean.

Sometimes we will do something that we thought was good, but it ended up offending the other person. And, you know, that's human relationships.

They're not perfect. And none of us are perfect. But God wants us to learn from our disappointments. Think about that. God wants us to learn from our disappointments.

Disappointment, I think it works this way, that disappointment is God's clue that there's hurt in our heart that needs healing. When we become disappointed in someone else or even in God, I think that's a clue that there's hurt in our heart that needs healing.

[20 : 59] The Apostle Paul had learned to be content even when others didn't come through. Maybe he thought they should have. He didn't get disappointed. He brought it back to God and said, God, I'm okay with it.

I'll deal with it because you're still in control. He didn't nurse that disappointment and spiral down into a bad place in his head because it was God that was in control anyway.

And so he chose not to be disappointed because God never disappoints. So the healing will only come in give and take relationships.

And Paul is a great example of Christ-centered receiving. He made his needs known and the Philippian church took care of those needs. And the Philippian church is a great example of Christ-centered giving.

So that's our first component in good relationships, learning how to receive, learning how to receive graciously, but also learning how not to be disappointed when we don't receive because it's still up to God.

[22 : 08] It brings us to the second main principle of Christ-centered giving. We see that in verses 17 through verse number 20. Verse 17, not that I seek the gift.

Paul said, you know, I didn't ask you for it. I just wanted you to pray for me. I let you know of the need that I had. He says, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.

He says, I was looking for you guys to be blessed because you're blessed when you take part in that giving. Verse 18, indeed, I have all and abound.

I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you. A sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

Verse 19 and 20, and my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever.

[23 : 15] Amen. So in essence, what Paul is saying is, thanks for the cash, but I'm more excited about the reward you'll be receiving. Thanks for the gift.

I'm excited about the gift, but I'm even more excited of the blessing that you will receive from God in your graciously trusting God and sacrificially giving the gift that you gave.

And he's using the language to show that grace is abounding. Grace is something that is continually overflowing and becoming more and more in an ongoing permanent gain for the Philippians in the spiritual realm because of their generous giving.

See, God's blessing accrues in their lives which they continually grow when they continually grow in the graces of giving. They give, God blesses. They give more, God blesses more.

And it's a continual thing as they give. Until Christ returns, God will provide those graces. Now what is he telling us? He says we are to give with a heart of faith as an act of worship.

[24 : 26] When we give to another person within the body of Christ, we're literally worshipping God. It's an act of worship when we help one another within the body of Christ.

Give with a heart as an act of worship. He says, verse 18, Indeed, I have all and abound, for I am full, having received from Epaphroditus a thing sent from you a sweet-smelling aroma.

Paul calls their gift a fragrant offering. He said, it's like a... In that realm, he was referring back to the Old Testament sacrifices.

If you remember, when you're reading the Old Testament about the way God received a sacrifice that was given from the heart, he said, it's like a sweet-smelling aroma. It smells good.

It feels good for me to receive this from your heart. So Paul switches gears from the practical dimension of meeting his needs to the spiritual reality of worship as we give.

[25 : 37] The sacrifice that was given in the Old Testament as a whole was acceptable to God itself as well as the heart of the one who was doing the giving.

And it was pleasing to God. So the Philippians' gift to Paul was a sacrificial gift. Paul is saying, you didn't have, but you still gave out of your need.

You couldn't afford to do it, but you sacrificed, and you trusted God would take care of the rest. How many of you have done that in the past? You gave your very last dollar knowing that you still might need to buy groceries this week, otherwise you might go hungry the last few days before payday.

And you trusted God, but you gave to someone in need, and God came through, and God blessed, and God supplied, and God multiplied that gift that you gave.

And that's what we see in the Philippian church. They couldn't afford to give, but they chose to give. Paul says, God was going to bless you for it.

[26 : 48] They gave, and they gave in faith. Hebrews 11, 6, but without faith it's what? It's impossible to believe God. It's impossible to please God. So they gave in faith, believing that it was the right thing to do, and they were going to bless the apostle Paul.

So as the Philippians gave to Paul, they were ultimately giving to whom? They were giving to God. So they gave to Paul, sacrificially, a heart of love, heart of faith.

They literally, as an act of worship, were giving, ultimately, to God. This is what makes meeting the needs of others spiritual and worshipful.

And then, next, give in ways that express your trust that God will take care of you. It would be like you going to a multi-billionaire, and you say, I need \$50,000, \$100,000.

And they gave you \$100,000. Now, to a multi-billionaire, what is \$100,000? You know, that would be like, you know, you coming to me and say, I need a five.

[28 : 03] Now, if it's a good week, five may not be that difficult. On a bad week, you may not have the five bucks. But, what I'm saying is, that multi-billionaire is giving out of his abundance.

Meaning, it's like pocket change. You know, probably doesn't even have to go to the bank to do that. Just writes a check, because it's in that account. Now, if we go to someone and, who virtually has nothing, and they have \$50,000 in their savings account, and maybe they've got \$60,000 in the savings account, or maybe only \$50,000, and you ask for \$50,000, and they give you \$50,000.

What have they done? What have they done? And, they have given you all. So, Paul's point is, you gave, even when you didn't have to give, and that made the gift mean even more.

And, I think Paul was so much more appreciative, because he realized he really didn't have that, they didn't have that much to give. And so, it was more of a blessing for them.

Verse 19. Here's the promise. Here's what Paul says to them. He says, My God shall supply all your need according to his riches. Not out of his riches, but according to his riches.

[29 : 42] He has so much. He has everything. He can give everything. And that's how God will give, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now, to our God and Father be glory forever and ever.

Amen. The Philippian church gave to the apostle Paul when, in the natural, it looked as though they couldn't afford it. We see that in 2 Corinthians 8. Verses 2 and 3 talks about how they didn't have the wherewithal to give, but they chose to give anyway.

So, as Paul closes his letter, he encourages them by telling them that, my God will supply your need. Don't worry about it. I was trusting God when I had the need.

You can trust God when you gave to my need because God is going to take care of you and he will richly supply your need. Their giving was so significant and sacrificial that it cut into their own ability to provide for themselves.

And that's where they gave and they had to trust God for that giving. Christ-centered giving means that we give significantly, we give sacrificially because we know that God provides for us.

[30 : 57] We give when it's inconvenient. Their financial gift represented their financial future. They weren't giving out of their excess because they had no excess. Now, God is telling us to give to others, to take care of one another.

That's how the body of Christ's needs are met. We're there for one another. The promise of God is that he will meet all of our needs.

Every need means that nothing is excluded. Now, do we believe it? We need to act upon it. God, I believe, is challenging us to have that giving relationship and that receiving relationship as well.

if we trust God's grace to abound to us. Pray that God will lay upon our heart the needs of others and how we can take care of one another. Now, there's a difference between believing in God and believing God.

If we believe God will meet our need, we're trusting in faith. If we believe that, if we believe God will meet our need when we give to someone else and can't afford it, then God will still meet our needs as well.

[32 : 13] If we want better relationships, make sure both of these principles are at work. Christ-centered giving and Christ-centered receiving.

Giving without expecting anything in return and receiving graciously, humbly, and without pride.

Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we're so, so very thankful for what you have done for us.

We thank you that you have promised to meet all of our needs, to take care of us, and to give and provide through one another within the body of Christ.

Help us to be Christ-centered givers, but also, Father, help us to be Christ-centered receivers. We thank you for this.
we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.