

# James Shepherd

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[ 0 : 00 ] It's always a bit sad and a bit emotional when someone dear to you makes that big decision to jet set, to go overseas, to go on a big holiday for a long period of time, or to go on exchange, or to make that actual big move to live overseas and to work overseas.

I've had a few friends of mine do stints of working holidays and exchanges overseas. And it's always a bit sad when you see them, when you drop them off at the airport and say goodbye to them, knowing that you're not going to see them face-to-face for quite some time.

It's nerve-wracking because there's a fear that things might not be the same afterwards. You know, what if the relationship changes? What if you guys stop talking to each other?

And what if they change so much that when they return and when you see them again, you don't even recognize them anymore? I had a friend who went to Sweden for exchange for six months, and he was probably my best mate at the time.

We were very familiar. We loved the same taste in music. We loved to do the same things together. And most of all, we were Christians. We were brothers in Christ. And that brought us so much joy and so much intimacy to our friendship.

[ 1 : 06 ] But during his exchange, we stopped talking. It was hard to get in contact with him. I didn't understand what was going on. But when he came back, when I saw him face-to-face again, he had completely changed.

He was totally different. He even looked different. He was no longer into the same music as me. He had become a lot more of an angry person. It was really strange. And most of all, he had also lost his faith.

He no longer believed in Jesus to be his Lord and Savior like he had previously six months ago. And so in six months, so much had changed in regards to our friendship. It's why saying goodbye to someone can be scary and sad at the same time.

There is a fear that if we lose contact with them, the relationship might change in some regards. Something might happen. And we won't be there to try and alleviate the pain or to sort the pain out. And this was Paul's fear. When we read this passage that was just read, we get a sense that this actually happened to Paul. He had lost contact with one of the churches he had set up in Philippi.

[ 2 : 11 ] And Paul was concerned for them because it was unusual, unusual amount of times since he had heard any word for them. He was rightly fearful of what might have happened.

But all his fears were alleviated when Epaphroditus arrived at the door. A representative of the church of Philippi who brought with him many gifts and supplies for Paul.

And most of all, the assurance that the church of Philippi was still faithful to the gospel and still faithful towards supporting Paul in his ministry.

In fact, it's quite clear that this concern went both ways. Whilst Paul was concerned for them, they were also concerned for Paul, in particular how he was going in prison.

Which is why Paul assures them in Philippians 1.12 that his imprisonment is going well. It's actually serving to advance the gospel going out into Rome. And this urgency is seen in both people.

[ 3 : 10 ] Both in Paul and both in the church in Philippi. They long to know how the other is doing so they can continue to encourage each other. To have the concerns alleviated as well.

It's a beautiful reunion we see here. Which is why he says in verse 10, I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me.

Paul's joy is overflowing and it's all throughout this letter. The character of rejoicing in Christ that we see throughout this whole letter can be linked back to this moment when Epaphroditus walked through the door.

And saw Paul for the first time in a long time. Confirming to Paul that they were still in the faith as he was. And so it's no wonder why Paul begins his letter in Philippians saying in 1 verse 3, I thank my God every time I remember you.

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy. And so Paul now responds explicitly here at the end of the letter to that moment when Epaphroditus walked through the door.

[ 4 : 16 ] He wants to explain to them the significance of this joyous moment. Particularly the receiving of the gifts he received. And what they mean to him, but also what they don't mean to him as well.

Then he wants to finally encourage them, as he has been encouraged, to continue to find joy in all circumstances. So firstly, let's look at what the gifts don't mean to Paul.

Verse 10 and 11. So Paul is very quick to clarify here why he is rejoicing.

He doesn't want him to think he is rejoicing purely because he has received these gifts from the Philippians. So he can continue his ministry financially. He doesn't want him to think this for, as he says, he has learned to be content in whatever situation that comes by.

And in verse 12, he lists all the different circumstances of which he has found contentment in. He says, In fact, he has known need more than wealth throughout his life.

[ 6 : 01 ] Paul has been homeless, beaten, hungry. He's been imprisoned multiple times, including currently. He faces death every single day.

He has been shipwrecked three times. He has received the 39 lashes from the Jews, minus one. He has been beaten with rods three times. He's been stoned once.

He has been in danger from robbers and bandits, in danger from Jews and Gentiles, in danger in every single city he has been. He is constantly facing danger, constantly on the run, constantly fearing for his life.

Imagine what his body just would have looked like from that kind of lifestyle as he was a Christian. Paul knows what it is to be in need.

He knows every circumstance. And yet, he is content. He is satisfied. He has discovered, he says, the secret to this contentment.

[ 6 : 58 ] Now, there was a group of people in Paul's time called the Stoics. They believed life was all about finding inner peace and contentment. And to get there, one had to rid himself of all passion and of all desire.

The logic was that the less you desired, the less you had passion for, the less things would affect you when they left you. The less things would affect you when they would fail you.

And so, therefore, the more content you would be with your life. At the heart of this philosophy was looking at the self. Looking to the self. Looking inwardly.

Detaching yourself from all of your passions and all of your desires in order to find that contentment and inner peace. And throughout history, this philosophy has influenced much of our culture, including Christian culture.

It's where the church got the idea of monasteries from. The concept where you take yourself out of society and place yourself in this isolated place where you can quietly reflect on God's word without any sort of desire or passion influencing you.

[ 8 : 04 ] It's also filtered its way into what is probably the biggest movie franchise of all time. Star Wars. I'm a big fan of Star Wars. And as you know, the Jedi religion in the film resembles much of the tenets of this philosophy.

For a Jedi, if you're a fan like I am, it's forbidden to love. For as Yoda says, because love leads to passion. Passion to hate.

Hate leads to fear. And fear leads to the dark side. All passions are forbidden for a Jedi. They are to have none.

That sounds familiar, doesn't it? Stoicism and the Jedi religion are very, very similar. Also, much of our inspirational posts we see on social media, in books and the like, have a stoic idea behind it.

To look into the self, to see in the self and to pursue in the self inner peace and contentment.

Stoicism is alive and well today as it was in Paul's time.

[ 9 : 10 ] But is that what Paul means by contentment? Has he found this inner peace by detaching himself from all his passions and desires? No.

Verse 13 clears this up for us. In verse 13, he reveals the secret behind his contentment. He says, I can do all things through him who gives me strength.

One of the most famous verses in the Bible. At the same time, one of the most misunderstood. This was the first verse I memorized as a Christian, actually. Back in year 6, 2002 on mountain camp. I memorized this verse in my little small group. Saying, I can do all things through him who gives me strength. Many have memorized this verse, like I have.

And also many are taken out of context, like I have as well at times in my life. Many understand this verse to mean to be an inspiration. To achieve the things in our life that we thought weren't possible to start with.

[10:11] Like starting a new business in the name of Christ. In the strength of Christ. Getting honors at uni in the strength of Christ. Getting that renovation done on my house. In the strength of Christ.

Having the courage to ask out that girl in the strength of Christ. I may have used that at one point in my life. People see it as an inspiration.

And whether or not these things are done in Christ's mind, that is not what Paul has in mind here. The context is not inspiration, but contentment.

Paul is not inspired by Christ. He is content in Christ. He can be in any circumstance, whether well off or in need.

In extreme poverty or extreme wealth. And still be deeply content and satisfied because of Christ and because of what he has done. Indeed, it's much better to translate this not as through Christ, but in Christ.

[11:13] And so unlike the Stoics who seek contentment in themselves, Paul seeks it in Christ. And that is why he can face every situation, no matter how dire and extreme, and still be truly satisfied and content in Christ.

Because in Christ, he knows the joy of his salvation. And nothing can take that away. He knows the assurance of eternity that his sins are forgiven.

Therefore, in Jesus, Paul has his ultimate need provided. And he knows no matter what, whether he lives well, or if he lives in need and eventually dies, he gains Christ.

So in regards to receiving this gift of money and supplies, he wants to assure them that his joy is not in those things in of themselves, not in the gifts themselves, because his needs ultimately are supplied in Jesus.

He's rejoicing for his needs being provided are in Jesus, not in these gifts. He's saying, I'm so thankful for your gift, but not because they have met my needs, for Christ has ultimately met my needs, for it is him who has truly met my needs.

[12:27] And him, being united to him in the gospel, I can be content in knowing my hope is sure, my eternity secured, and that is why I can face every situation with joy and hope and satisfaction in Jesus.

This verse is not encouraging to us because it's inspirational. It's encouraging because it meets us where we are, whether we are well off or in need.

And it says to us, let your contentment be in Jesus and in him alone. The challenge for most of us here on the North Shore is to not allow our wealth to become the means of our contentment, but to always see Christ as the one we truly find contentment in.

So in times we are well, when things are incredibly good, when we feel immensely blessed, will we hold on to such things loosely that we might not lose our focus on Jesus, on where our contentment truly lies.

For when things do go pear-shaped, when things do fail us, when we have to live through pain and suffering, we'll be able to look outside of ourselves and towards Jesus, to live in him and to find our contentment in him, to know no matter what circumstance we are in, we find our hope and our salvation in Jesus.

[13:58] We've seen what these gifts don't mean to Paul. He hasn't rejoiced because he can finally kick off his new ministry plan. He hasn't rejoiced because his needs have finally been met.

No, the rejoicing for his needs are being met in Christ. He rejoices in Christ, not the gifts. So what does this gift mean to Paul? The gift of the Epaphroditus, the gift that he brings with him, what do they mean to him?

Why is he rejoicing so much when he sees these things? Verse 14. Yeah, it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in that of giving and

receiving, except you only.

For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent aid more than once when I was in need. The Philippian church was very, very generous.

They were the only church to support Paul at the very beginning of his ministry. And we're constantly sending him aid and aid again and again, he says. They were more than just his partners in the gospel.

[15:09] For Paul and for the church in Philippi, they were family. Paul saw them as his brothers and sisters who were dear to him and likewise to Paul.

For Paul, for the Philippian church, Paul was their brother and someone they dearly loved as well, who they found concern for as well. And so when the messages stopped coming, when the giving and the receiving halted, Paul was genuinely concerned, not for the gifts, but for them.

His concern was for their well-being. Paul's biggest fear was not in not receiving the gifts so he couldn't continue his ministry. Paul's biggest fear was that the church of Philippi might have lost their faith.

It was thought that something might have happened to them. What if they lost their property and were persecuted and they gave up? What if they were no longer following Jesus? You can understand why Paul is concerned here, why he's in fear.

But the coming of Epaphroditus alleviated all those fears. And the gifts that he brought with him show that the church in Philippi was still very generous, which was evidence, therefore, of their faith and commitment to the gospel.

[16:31] Look at verse 18. I have received full payment, have more than enough. I amply supplied now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Paul describes their generous gifts as being like a fragrant offering, acceptable sacrifice, something that pleases God, that God enjoys and delights in.

The language of sacrifice here tells us that the Philippian church didn't simply give out of their wealth. They gave out of their need and they gave out of their own struggle.

Even when they had not much to give or to live on, they continued to give. Indeed, the rest of the letter seems to show us that Epaphroditus reported to Paul all the struggles that were going on in the church.

For example, false teachers in chapter 3. There were a lot of issues that were happening in the church of Philippi. A lot of needs they had, a lot of struggles they had, and yet they were still willing to give generously to the work of the gospel.

[17:40] And for Paul, this tangible gift was what showed him that they were still his partners in the gospel. But more than that, more than that, it showed him that their faith was still in Jesus.

They had not fallen away, but they were continuing to serve Jesus as they generously partnered with Paul in ministry. And this is why Paul was rejoicing in verse 10, because a church he dearly loves for, a church he prays for, a church he longs for, is still committed to following Jesus, is still in Christ as he is in Christ.

This is what the gifts mean to Paul and why he is rejoicing. Paul is encouraged. Paul is filled with joy because those he dearly loves are still in Christ.

I hope I can speak for Steve and the staff here. I know I'm only a student minister and a more college student, but as most more college students do, we speak for our churches.

So I think it's fair to say this is our desire for you too. When we talk about radical generosity and invite you to give financially to the work of the gospel here in Chatswood, we are not doing this to purely ask for your money or because we think God can't work here without your money first.

[19:04] We ask that you partner with us generously for our encouragement and yours also, that you would know the joy of seeing the advancement of the gospel here in Chatswood.

But even more than this, our joy in seeing your generosity is that it continually reminds us that you are in Christ, that your faith is in him, that you are citizens of heaven, not of earth.

As we give up our treasures and our finances to God, it serves as a joyful reminder to each of us that we are all united in Christ, that we all share the same hope, that we share the same faith, that we share the same assurance in eternity, a reminder of where our citizenship truly is.

As the generosity of the Philippians was evidence of their faith in Jesus, so is your generosity evidence of your faith, not only to the staff here, but to each one of you around you.

As you give, as you put money in the play, as you give electronically, it is evidence of your faith to each of us here, evidence which leads to us having joy, knowing that we share in the faith together. [ 20 : 21 ] I wonder how you are going with being generous. Do you struggle to give generously to the work of the gospel?

Or do you even struggle to give at all? I must confess to you, I struggle. I struggle to remember to give, and sometimes I don't give. I play the Paul card, the student card, the Moore College student minister card.

I play all the cards. But really, for me, and maybe you as well, it's an issue of contentment. I'm not willing to part with my money sometimes, because optimally, I don't find contentment in Jesus sometimes.

I find it in me, or my money. But really, I need to learn the secret of contentment, as Paul did. I need to continually trust in Jesus, and to find contentment in him.

I think the Philippians as well knew this, just why they were able to be so generous in such a rough and difficult period of their life, as a church. They knew Jesus had ultimately provided for them in the cross, that he had paid for their sins.

[ 21 : 35 ] And therefore, whether in wealth or poverty, whether through life or death, they were going to continue to give, because ultimately, Jesus had provided for all. How generous we are with our money is an indicator of where our contentment lies.

I'll say that one more time. How generous we are with our money is an indicator of where our contentment lies. The question of whether we find our contentment in Christ alone, or in our wealth, can be answered by simply looking at our bank accounts, at our wallets.

Again, this is not because we want your money. Please don't hear me saying that. Our rejoicing for our needs as a church are being met in Christ, who has paid for our sin in full.

Who we rejoice in, looking forward to the day which he will return and bring us home. Our only desire for you is that you love Jesus and follow him.

That your faith be true and express through the generosity of partnering us with the gospel.

Contentment in Christ is what leads to being generous.

[ 22 : 45 ] And the result is joy as we look around each other giving generously and therefore showing your love and devotion and commitment to the gospel.

A reminder again and again week in, week out that you are in faith in Christ. Money is often hard to part with as I struggle with, especially when life seems to cost so much.

But Paul leaves us with a final word of encouragement to continue to ground us and remind us of the wonderful God that we serve. Verse 19. What a verse.

Seems a lot to promise and easy to misunderstand and take out of context. The key to understanding is in the word my. Paul says my God.

He is saying here the God who strengthens me to be content in every situation in Christ whether I am well off or in need. this God, my God, he will strengthen you to be content in Jesus also.

[ 23 : 56 ] He will provide for all of your needs in order that you might be content also. For his generosity knows no bounds. The God who has been good to me will be good to you.

For you belong to Jesus as I do as well. It's not a hope that we might expect that every single need that we have of ours we met on our own terms the way we would like it.

it's the hope to expect that God will continue to provide for us in order that we might joyfully partner together in the gospel and encourage each other as we give and express our faith financially to the work here.

Indeed, this encouraging word is supposed to free us to give and to be generous. Knowing God will provide in order that we might be content and be generous that we might get to experience the joy together of partnering together in the gospel.

We will find joy in all circumstances whether we're well off or in need when our contentment is in Jesus as expressed through generosity.

[ 25 : 07 ] In a moment the bags are going to come round and as they do let me encourage you to give and to give generously that you might know the joy of partnering with us in the gospel but more than this that you that we might rejoice together that we all truly belong to God in Christ just as Paul rejoiced to God that he and the Philippian church were together in Christ not only as partners for the events of the gospel but they would continue to worship the same God now and for eternity so that as we give let us rejoice together that we all truly belong to God that we get to look forward to

worshipping now together and for eternity indeed as Paul says to our God and Father be glory  
forever and ever Amen