

Philippians 4:10–23 (NKJV)

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. 14 Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. 15 Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. 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. 19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. 20 Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. 21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household. 23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Paul says

12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Paul is saying that he knows through experience and practice how to handle all kinds of life situations. He has had **nothing to eat**. And he knows how to think about that and handle it. He has had **affluence**. He knows how to think about that and handle it. He does not get addicted to luxury. He does not demand poverty. He lives in a real world where the resources he has fluctuate. Now when he says "suffer need", he probably does not mean the lack of luxuries that we might get bent out of shape about. He, more than likely, has faced the situation of having **nothing to eat** and no way of knowing he would **get** something to eat.

Right now we need to use our imaginations for this. There may come a day when we **relate** to this. That is why scripture is so very important.

And look at what all this resolve works its way back to.

13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

I think of this verse often to make two points about Bible Study.

The first is how often scriptures are used **out of context**. This is one of the best examples. People use this verse to describe how they can carry out all kinds of feats. Some **spiritual**, some **physical**. But as our brother Pawson pointed out in our overview, it is really talking about **living within one's means** and **accepting that which God has provided for us**.

It is interesting that many people apply this to doing something to **overcome** their circumstances. That is exactly the opposite of how Paul used it. Context is always important when we are quoting verses.

The second lesson is that we always need to limit the word **"all"** to the context it is used in. This quote of Paul's does not mean I can fly off a tall building through Christ who strengthens me. But it does mean I can face situations where I am **suffering need** that was created because someone else did not **fill that gap** for me. I do not resort to whining. I do not resort to blaming. I do not resort to self pity for the cost I must pay. I do not get bitter. I simply do the thing that is directly in front of me. I face the difficulty. I face the discomfort. I face the dilemma. And I do **all things** like **these things** with the understanding that the Christ who arranged my **circumstance** is the Christ who arranged my **provision**. The Christ who provided the **hardship** is the same Christ who provided the **strength**.

Now lets look at the phrase, **"who strengthens me"**. We need to be careful when we say that God never gives us more than we can handle. There is truth to that but we must always factor in **"through Christ who strengthens me"**. Sometimes we have nothing left but to cry out to God for help because we have reached our limit.

God does so graciously promise **His strength** when it is needed.

Isaiah 40:29–31 (NKJV)

29 He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, 31 But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

We can rely upon **Christ's** strength and we can rely upon the strength He will **give us**. Are you facing a situation that you regard impossible to face this week. Do

not be afraid to call upon God for strength. He will provide it if you need it. Now sometimes it does not come the way we expect it.

Paul says this in another place. This may be another place where Paul LEARNED this important lesson.

2 Corinthians 12:7–10 (NKJV)

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Sometimes it takes the **hard situations** for us to receive **the strength**. Sometimes God wants to show off in our lives. He will take us past where we in our flesh could go so He can receive all the glory. Paul had learned these things. He knew that **Christ’s resources are most visible** when **our** resources are **most absent**.

Have you considered that maybe that is what God is doing with you right now? Paul had to go to that school to learn what he learned.

Paul said this also about strength.

Ephesians 3:14–16 (NKJV)

14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,....

Ephesians 3:20–21 (NKJV)

20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

The Christian life is dependent upon the strength that God provides. The truth is that anything of value that **we do** is **not** from fleshly natured strength but from **Spirit led** and **Spirit empowered** actions.

But it is important that we don’t forget this. While there are times when it is very necessary for us to **pray** for the spiritual power we need, Paul already laid the most often used method of gaining the spiritual power we need. If we live the

way Paul lived, we are likely to experience the power he obtained. And he already laid out how he was living. He was living each day **by faith**. He was pressing on each day for **the spiritual goal**. If we think that we can live our lives for ourselves all day every day, and then one day have all the strength to meet some tremendous difficulty, like we will just pray and God will **zap us** with Paul's kind of spiritual maturity, we are mistaken. God will always meet us where we are. He is so very merciful and gracious. But the more we **live** the way Paul lived, the more **maturity and spiritual strength** we will experience.

14 Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.

Nevertheless. Why does Paul say that? I think the nevertheless has to do with what Paul just said about not needing the gift. He just got done saying he was content. He was, in a sense, self sufficient based on the strength he had in Christ to face the hardships. That is why Paul says, nevertheless. Even though I was making it **without** the gift, nevertheless it was great that **you gave it**. It was the right thing for you to do. You showed yourself **faithful to God** and **loving to me**. You were treating me the way you would want to be treated. That was good. And it is still interesting, the situation Paul was content in he here refers to as "**my distress**". We would think contentment in a situation and a distressful situation would be an either/or proposition. Either I am content or I am in distress. But Paul was both in distress and content. Sometimes our life's situations are stressful. We may find ourselves in a pressure cooker. We will see some of those situations in Daniel. The trial of our faith is likely to feel like a trial. It will feel hard to handle. It is supposed to be. But even in those seasons of life we can follow Paul's example and his instructions. Even while we work for our situation to change, we can trust God's sovereign wisdom in placing us in the trial.

15 Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.

This is pretty amazing, seeing that Paul has gone through a period of suffering real hunger and need. What is he focusing on? He is focusing on **the love he has received**. What would happen in our lives if, instead of focusing on the things we have been denied, the things we had to do without, we focused on that which those who loved us **provided** to us? Sure, we might have some legitimate gripes. Paul probably had some legitimate gripes. If you did not have enough to eat you might feel like you had legitimate gripes. But he focusses on **that which was**

given to him and he does not focus on that which was **not** given to him. We can imagine all kinds of things that people **could** have given to us or maybe **should** have given to us. But Paul does not focus on that. He focuses on what they **did** give to him and draws his conclusion about their love for him based on **that** track record.

He also notes that they surpassed all the other churches in their giving. Again note that he does not focus on what they **did not** do. He focuses on what they **did** for him.

And next we get to the real heart of the matter. And I suspect this will be even harder to apply. Look at this. Look at what he cares about most. The status of the beloved.

17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.

This statement is absolutely amazing. It is mind blowing. Paul is saying that the highest priority is not that I have **all the things to meet my needs**, like giving me enough food to eat. What we see here is Paul's **highest focus**, his **highest priority**.

The focus of Paul's heart is not the **benefit** the gift would give **him**. He does not focus on how the gift would make his life better. His focus was on the reward it would give the **giver** of the gift.

Paul's thrill comes in knowing that the gift that these Philippians gave would result in **a rich spiritual reward** in their account.

Now is he talking about the fruit of actually **giving the gift**, or the fruit of **the ministry that the gift will enable**. I suspect it is both. Just the fact that they lovingly and cheerfully gave it provides some fruit. But the result of extra work that will be done in Paul's ministry guaranties even more fruit. And all of that it added to the Philippians spiritual bank account. They are storing up treasures in heaven.

As I was preparing this sermon I had to be honest. I do not want to be a hypocrite.

I still struggle knowing how to decide how to divvy out the money God provides for me. Those dollars are opportunities. Now, how much should we give and how much should we spend on ourselves? No matter how you slice it, that is a matter of faith. I used to approach it more from a perspective of avoiding guilt. The question, when phrased that way is, how much can I faithfully spend on myself. I am beginning to see that is the wrong way of looking at it. The real question is, **how much reward** do I want to gain? And that truth is not always a pleasant one. There are pleasures I want now that I am not willing to forego in

order to sink that money into ministries that will last forever. But this is often the decision in front of us.

While I think it is true that whatever I can enjoy with an open hand and thank God while doing it is not a sin. I wonder what I will think of my decisions when I see Jesus. The highest question is not one of, is using this money on myself a **sin**? That is a valid question. But that is not the ultimate question. I think the best question is more like, which one will bring me the most pleasure. I can have a **few hours** of pleasure a purchased experience will bring. I can purchase something that may give me pleasure **over a lifetime**. And I can give that money to ministry of some sort or another and it will give me **pleasure for eternity**. That is what Paul is talking about. The Philippians gave their money to something that would give them **eternal pleasure**. And Paul was overjoyed about that. He knew they had chosen wisely.

Now, Paul, caring more about the **givers** than the **gift**?

How do you get there from here? How do you care more about the eternal rewards of the **supporters** than the here and now benefits of **their gifts**? How do you care more about what is good for **those around** you than that which is **good for you**? I guess it means truly seeking the Kingdom of God first, seeking eternal things first. Paul is the example in this.

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.

This is Paul's response when receiving the gift.

Where he says, I am full, I think he is saying this is one of those times that I am **abounding** in physical provision. This is one of those, "I have much" times. But he clearly is receiving it on **two** levels.

He regards it for how it will provide the needs of himself and his ministry. But he also regards it from a heavenly perspective. He tells them how it is viewed from God's throne. He uses language that would have been similar to a gift offered on the altar. The money these people gave **to Paul** was a **sacrifice** these people gave **directly to God**. It was an act of worship.

Isn't this interesting. Paul began in his teaching about anxiety earlier in the chapter by putting **his need** and **his circumstances** as a situation directly between **him and God**. Just like all the things that could cause us to be anxious. We take them directly to God. We are content because we see them in light of God's sovereignty. And when Paul receives the gift he also sees **that** too, from a perspective between the givers and God. He does not see it as a gift between

friends. He sees the gift as an act of worship between **the givers** and **their God**. Ultimately that is what all true worship is. And that is what all true love is. We do not give agape love based on the loveliness of the beloved. We give it based on the loveliness of our God.

I saw a quote from CS Lewis but could not find it again. It was something like “no act of love is ever wasted because its value is not determined by the response of the recipient.” That wasn’t exactly right but it was the essence of it. When we really love people, the **motivation for the act** always follows its way back to our **worship of God**. Paul knows this and lets the Philippians know that God is pleased. God loves a cheerful giver.

Then Paul goes on.

19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Now the Philippians were in tough straits. They were probably giving to Paul in a way that threatened their own ability to provide for their own households. Things were not easy at Philippi.

And this is what Paul has to say. Even though there were periods where Paul was hungry, ultimately those things that Paul needed to survive were provided by Christ.

And Paul is telling the Philippians that those things they most need will be provided by Christ, even if the math does not work out in their heads.

Now this is not to say it all works out **on this earth**. God’s riches in glory reflect upon an **eternal** reality. So that might be **where** it works out. But the point is we can always rely upon God to **provide for our ultimate needs**.

Paul is actually pointing out what kind of giver God is. When this God supplies according to His riches, we have no fear of being short changed. God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. God created the world and it is His to freely divvy out as He desires. But in addition to that, in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. So when God supplies our needs, it consists of **every kind** of need **and every kind** of provision. We do not always get to pick what we actually need. God knows better than we do. But He promises to meet all those things that are truly needs.

We tend to limit our need to what **keeps us alive on this earth**. What we really need is that which **ushers us into eternity**. And Christ ALWAYS promises to provide that. And He has every resource at His disposal.

20 Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

This statement could be at the end of every book of the Bible because this is surely what it is always all about. Everything that Paul wrote was with the desire to **bring glory to God** in the lives of those Paul was writing to.

His life was lived to bring God glory.

His admonitions were always to bring God glory.

The greatest aim of a man's life is to bring God glory.

No effort is ever wasted if it will bring God glory.

Our every moment in life is best lived to bring God glory.

So there is nothing Paul could say as he leads to the conclusion of this letter better than the highest purpose of man. To bring God glory.

21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household. 23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Basically Paul is saying hello to every Christian. There are likely some new believers that Paul did not know. He wants them greeted as well. He is not building his own **kingdom** or working to accomplish some kind of **selfish end**. He wants everyone in the church of God to receive a warm greeting. Whether he knows them or not, they are all kindred spirits, comrades in arms.

Then he goes on to say that all of Paul's coworkers are on the same page as Paul. They all get that believers are where it is at. All **my** friends are **your** friends. That is how it works out in the body of Christ. If they are **with** me, they are **for** you. Period.

Now it is very interesting that Paul emphasizes those who are of Caesar's household. I think they were included because it emphasizes that what God does is **truly amazing**. The gospel is working its way all the way to the inner circle of the most corrupt government of its time. I would say of all time, but I have to deal with the fact that our government is endorsing the mutilation of children's bodies and the sacrifice of unborn children. While the sensibilities of our nation may be offended at the child sacrifice of Baal, we are doing the same thing without the same kind of visibility.

We need to always keep in mind that God saves the people he wants to save. God's plan was to reach deep into the **devil's territory** and save those He wanted to save. And that is what He always does. Maybe the Philippians would have a real understanding of what this is really about since they know a little more about

the Roman government than most. It is also possible that some of them may have known these people. It is hard to tell.

And maybe those of Caesar's household could have had an even deeper appreciation of their salvation. Who knows?

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Isn't that a great way to end any letter with a believer? Isn't that what it is all about? What could we possibly need more than grace?

I think a good application for this week could be for us to examine our giving to various ministries. It might be good for us to think about how we can maximize our reward in heaven by how we use our money now. How should we use it to most glorify God, most help our brothers, and provide us the most long term pleasure.