

# Joyful Generosity 6

October 22, 2017

**Philippians 4:14-20 (EHV) – <sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, you did well by becoming partners with me in my affliction. <sup>15</sup> You Philippians know that in the beginning of your experience with the gospel, when I left Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. <sup>16</sup> Even while I was in Thessalonica, you sent help more than once for my needs. <sup>17</sup> Not that I am seeking a gift, but I am seeking the fruit that adds to your account. <sup>18</sup> I have been paid in full, and I have more than enough. I am fully supplied since I've received from Epaphroditus the things that came from you, a sweet-smelling fragrance, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup> And my God will fully supply your every need, according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup> Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever! Amen.**

## Introduction

We've come to the final sermon in our "Joyful Generosity" series. If you've been here all six Sundays, you'll hopefully note that I've never told you how much you should give. It's amazing that in the New Testament God makes every gift completely voluntary. But that doesn't make it easy, does it? In the Old Testament, God commanded his people to give 10% of their income to the Lord. They didn't have to think about how much to give. They knew exactly what was expected of them.

So why doesn't God make it that easy for us in the New Testament? God lets us choose what percent of our income we're going to give. And that's not easy! I'd love to give everything I have to the Lord. But God also wants me to provide for my family, pay my taxes, and help those in need. Why didn't God just make it easy and demand 10% the way he did in the Old Testament? The reason is that when we wrestle in our hearts and count our blessings and have to think about this and pray about this, then God gets more from us than our money. God gets our hearts in joyful thanksgiving and praise.

In this last sermon on joyful generosity, I want to talk to you about the importance of our giving being **INTENTIONAL AND REGULAR**. The congregation in Philippi was noted for that.

## Part 1: Intentional and regular is a blessing to God's church.

One of the reasons Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians was to thank them for the gifts they'd sent his way to support his mission work. You can't help but compare the congregation at Philippi with the one at Corinth. The Corinthians were wealthy, and the Philippians were poor. The Philippians gave to the needy saints in Jerusalem beyond their ability. They begged for the opportunity and **"their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity."** (2 Co 8:2) The Corinthians said they were going to give toward this offering, but they just didn't seem to get it done.

What was the difference? It seems that the Corinthians had good intentions, but the Philippians were more intentional. What I mean is that the Corinthians were eager to do something, but they never sat down and planned how they were going to get it done. Paul even shared a plan with them, which was to set aside part of their income on the first day of every week. Yet they never got into the routine of planning what they would give and then regularly doing it.

Aren't we guilty of that same weakness of our sinful nature as well? An example: You know that reading your Bible is important. It's the most important thing you can do every day. Do you have a plan? If you don't have a plan on when and where and what you're going to read each day, there's a good chance you won't succeed. You'll only have good intentions. And even if you have a plan, has your plan ever gotten derailed so that you've missed a whole week or more of Bible readings? It's not easy to have a good plan and the discipline to carry it out. Why? Because you're fighting against your sinful nature and because the devil doesn't want you to stay connected to the Word. He'll distract you any way he possibly can.

The same is true of your joyful generosity. Do you have a plan on how much of your income you want to give to the Lord? Does your plan include not only how much, but when and how? Will you set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income before you start spending for Christmas? Remember that you're fighting against your sinful nature all the time, and the devil doesn't want you to give to the Lord and his work. The devil doesn't want God's church to have the resources it needs to do the Lord's work. He'd rather have us cut corners than expand our gospel ministry. He'll always be tempting you to spend more than you can afford and then have nothing when you have an opportunity to give to the Lord.

And sometimes our enemies – the devil and our sinful natures – win, don't they? The financial secretary recently stated that a certain Sunday's offerings were the lowest he can remember. A few times a year, our treasurer has to draw on our line of credit – which means that we have to pay the bank interest – in order to pay all the bills. And it's not because we're overspending in any area of the budget – we're actually carrying out a pretty bare-bones ministry here at St. John – but because often our offerings aren't regular and intentional. May God forgive us for irregular and unintentional giving!

We can be thankful that God doesn't treat us as our sins deserve. Where we've been stingy, God's been generous. Where we've been inconsistent, God's been faithful and regular. Did the sun come up this morning? God's mercies are new to us every morning! Are the farmers bringing in a crop this fall? Yes, and I'd challenge our farmers to remember a fall when there was no crop. Has God put food on your table this week? I'd challenge you to remember the time when there was nothing in the house to eat. Even during times of depression, God gives his dear children what they need.

And has God forgiven your sins today? Yes, he has. We confess in the explanation of the Third Article, **“In this Christian Church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers.”** Do you believe this? Of course you believe this. You wouldn't be able to sleep at night if you didn't believe that God forgave all your sins in Jesus. God's mercies are new to you every morning! God's forgiveness for you is both intentional and regular, which is why you can trust in him and not be afraid.

When you give like the Philippians gave, you're reflecting God's abundant grace, his faithful grace, his consistent grace, in your life. You in turn become a blessing to God's church. **“Nevertheless, you did well by becoming partners with me in my affliction. You Philippians know that in the beginning of your experience with the gospel, when I left Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. Even while I was in Thessalonica, you sent help more than once for my needs.”** Think of the impact that the Philippians' regular gifts had on Paul's gospel ministry. He never asked for anything from the people to whom he was preaching. He lived meagerly by making tents for a living. These regular gifts that the Philippians sent Paul gave him relief and freed him to spend more of his time preaching the gospel.

Friends, your church is blessed when you support the ministry of this congregation with your regular and intentional gifts. How amazing it is that our offerings help support the \$400,000+ of ministry that we carry out! Paul thanked the Philippians for their regular support of his ministry, and I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you.

## Transition

Not only are you a blessing to this church, but your giving is a blessing to you as well.

## Part 2: Intentional and regular is a blessing to the giver.

Paul says in our text, **“Not that I am seeking a gift, but I am seeking the fruit that adds to your account. I have been paid in full, and I have more than enough. I am fully supplied since I've received from Epaphroditus the things that came from you, a sweet-smelling fragrance, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.”** This is a difficult truth to understand. When we give, we give out of thankful hearts. We're not looking for anything in return. When we give, we're not trying to earn salvation or God's favor. Our gifts are our grateful response to God's grace. Then what does Paul mean when he says they can be credited to our account?

Maybe we can look at it this way. A grandma might go all-out to buy Christmas gifts for her grandchildren that they really want. In a week or two, the grandkids might send cards in the mail thanking her for those gifts. There are stick person drawings on the card and words that are scrawled and misspelled, yet she takes those heartfelt expressions of thanks, which are hardly a thing of beauty, and pins them to the refrigerator or puts them in some other prominent place. When the grandkids visit, they see that grandma accepted their thanks with joy.

The point is that your gifts to God's ministry are noticed. If God had a refrigerator door and magnets, then he'd hang your gifts on his fridge so that he can look at them every day. Your gifts of thanks to God give him joy and great pleasure. Paul says they're a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. Maybe, when you get to heaven, you'll see your expressions of thanks hanging on God's fridge. That's what I think Paul means when he says that the Christian's gifts are credited to their account. That's why we say it's more blessed to give than it is to receive.

There's another way in which you're blessed by your regular gifts. Paul writes, **"And my God will fully supply your every need, according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."** Why do you suppose Paul said **"my God"** and not **"your God"**? It's because he'd experienced in his life how God always keeps his promises. Just before the verses of our text, he said that he'd learned the secret of being content whether he had a lot or not much at all, because he could do all things through Jesus, who gave him strength. He'd personally experienced God's providence in his life and he was confident that the Philippians would as well.

You heard a similar promise from God in the lesson from Malachi this morning: **"Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house. Test me in this way,' says the LORD of Armies. 'See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure.'"** If you wait until you have an abundance of money left over in your account before you give to the Lord, which almost never happens, you won't experience the truth of these passages. You'll only be giving God what you have left over. God isn't honored with leftovers! But if you're a regular and intentional giver, you'll plan on writing out a check on the first day of the week – or on the first and sixteenth of the month, because that's when you get paid. You're giving to the Lord before you know that you'll have enough left at the end of the week or the end of the month to meet your bills. Your gifts take priority over your bills and your savings and your retirement. God is honored by that kind of gift because you're trusting him to provide for your needs. That's a blessing. You get to see God's promises fulfilled in our life.

I can really appreciate this truth. From the time I was a teenager, I've given upwards of 10% my income in the church envelope. No one ever told me I had to do that, but I've always felt that if the people in the Old Testament could give that amount, so could I. I have to confess that there were times when we wondered how we'd make ends meet – when it was tempting to cut back or skip an offering here or there. We had kids in school and cars on the road and trunk-loads of groceries along with all the other bills. But there was always enough. Like the widow in Elijah's day, the flour and oil never ran out. We are so blessed to experience God's promises come true in our lifetime!

## Conclusion

And that's just the tip of the iceberg of God's blessings. Paul says that **"God will fully supply your every need, according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."** A possible alternate translation might be **"all his riches in glory."** Life has been good, and what we're waiting for in heaven will be better still! I pray that through your joyful generosity you'll be a blessing for your church and that you'll see God's blessings in your life as well. Amen.