

Making your Money Count

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[0 : 0 0] This morning is taken from Philippians chapter 4, verse 10 to 20. You can find it on page 1181 of the Church Bible. Philippians 4, 10 to 20.

I rejoice graciously in the Lord that, as last, you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty.

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

I can do all things through Him who gives me strength. Yet, 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 the matter of giving and receiving, except you only.

[1 : 1 5] For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. Not that I desire your gifts. What I desire is that more be credited to your account.

I have received full payments and have more than enough. I am amply supplied now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent.

They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus.

To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. This is the Word of God. Thanks, Angela, for reading.

If you keep your Bibles open at Philippians 4, that would be really helpful as we look at that together. You'll know if you're regular here, it's our normal practice at St. Silas to go through books of the Bible, chapter by chapter, so that God sets the agenda week by week.

[2 : 1 8] But from time to time, it's helpful to look at a particular theme in Scripture. And we've come to this section of Philippians 4 because I can't really think of a more important passage of the Bible about gospel giving.

What I mean by gospel giving is actually giving our money to support the work of proclaiming the message about Jesus Christ. Who Jesus is, what Jesus did. So that people can repent and have their sins forgiven and the gospel advances, the kingdom grows.

So let's pray and let's ask for God's help as we look at this together. Heavenly Father, you know our hearts. You know how difficult we find it to be to think about our money, to be challenged about our money, and to be generous with our money.

So we pray that by your Spirit, you will open your Word to our hearts this morning and open our hearts to your Word. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Amen. Well, I remember Arnold Schwarzenegger saying, people say that money makes you happy, but it's not true. I've got \$50 million now, and I can honestly say I'm no happier than I was when I had \$48 million.

[3 : 35] And I guess many of us would believe money doesn't make you happy, but we'd love the chance to test for ourselves, wouldn't we? And it's sobering to think what our cultural blind spots could be.

We see churches in nations and other cultures with huge blind spots. People talk about the church in South Africa and how some churches didn't stand up against apartheid.

There are churches that haven't stood up against oppression and injustice in their cultures. What could our blind spots be? Well, there was a missionary family in Niger who wrote their update, and they said the church here in Niger is completely under the influence of animism and the occult.

And I guess you hear an update like that from a missionary somewhere like that, and you think, that's such a shame, isn't it? People who say they're Christians, they go to church. But in reality, what's governing their life is animism and the occult.

Maybe we think, oh, how typical of that part of the world. But actually, what they said was this. The church here in Niger is completely under the influence of animism and the occult, in much the same way as the church in the West is completely under the influence of chasing after wealth.

[4 : 53] Perhaps that's the blindness we don't see as a church in the West. Well, the church in Philippi and Paul himself bring us a liberating message for our culture.

We understand the situation if we look at verse 10. He says, I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. So one of the things that the church in Philippi that Paul's writing to have excelled in is generosity.

They've sent money through Epaphroditus to support Paul as he goes about the world to seek to plant and establish churches.

So this is giving that changed the world. We read Acts, the account in the Bible of the early church, and we see Peter and then Paul on these missionary journeys, and we know that the Christian message exploded across the Roman Empire.

It changed the world. What we sometimes forget is that people like Paul and Peter were backed up. The apostles were backed up by ordinary Christians giving their money to help the message spread.

[6 : 04] It was the same in Britain in the 18th century in our country. There was a great revival in the 18th century, and you can read books about it. Christian leaders of the 18th century, George Whitefield, John Wesley, they went to places like Cambuslang, there were revivals, they spoke in the streets, in the parks, and many people came to faith through those ministries.

You can read about John Wesley as the great evangelist, about Charles Wesley, his brother, as the great hymn writer. But actually behind those ministries were gospel patrons, Christians who gave their money to enable the gospel to grow.

And we know, don't we, that we need another awakening like that in Scotland today. We need to re-evangelize our nation. And we can't all be Paul. You know, you read about Paul, and he's a pretty unique guy.

But behind every Paul, there are churches like this one in Philippi, giving their money to set people apart, to lead and to plant and to establish Christ-centered, Bible-based churches, just as Scotland needs today.

So what characterized this giving that changed the world? Well, first of all, and the points are inside the notice sheet, if you find that helpful. So you can see in there where we're going with this, as we work through the passage.

[7 : 18] The first point is the mindset behind gospel giving. This is a bit of a recap on the whole letter, the first point. But you see that mindset in verses 14 and 15, because Paul uses the word sharing.

Verse 14, he says, It was good of you to share in my troubles. And in verse 15, he talks about them sharing in the matter of giving and receiving.

That connects us to the mindset that underpins the whole letter, Philippians, from Paul to this church. So if you just turn back to chapter 1 and verse 4, he starts his letter with great joy.

Why is he rejoicing? Verse 4 of chapter 1, In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

That's the key idea for Philippians, partnership. And he starts the main body of the letter in verse 27 of chapter 1 with a brilliant summary of what's to come.

[8 : 22] Chapter 1, verse 27. Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.

So I don't know what your primary picture is of church life and of the Christian life. I think my main picture of church life from the New Testament is family.

I think that's the predominant picture. But Paul here gives us another really helpful picture of the church and its partnership. We know the idea of partnership from the business world, don't we?

When I was a lawyer, I worked in a legal partnership. The kind of ordinary lawyers like me, we wanted to be partners. That's what you wanted. You might think of GP partnerships, doctor surgeries or accountancy.

In a partnership, people work together towards a common goal. At Freshfields, the law firm where I worked, the partners each had their own area of expertise that they were particularly good at.

[9 : 40] They had their own clients, their client base. And they, of course, outside work, had their own homes and families if they ever made it home. But they spent huge amounts of their energy and they gave their time for the common goal of growing the brand of that firm.

They shared their profits equally together. They had a partner's dining room where they could eat lunch if they ever took a lunch break. So the rest of us, when we had a lunch break, we were in the basement.

They were on the top floor, the partner's dining room. And the partners helped each other out. Work was passed between them. And they built trust with one another. And that's the picture that Paul gives us of the Christian life.

We look to one another, we look at one another, and we see partners for a common goal. God has given us a momentous goal to bring glory to him through the spread of his gospel, his saving news about Jesus.

And that partnership, it's joyful. Paul's saying, I rejoiced greatly that at last you renewed your concern for me. It's joyful. It's energetic. You notice that word in verse 27 of chapter one?

[10 : 51] He says that even if whether he hears about them or he goes and sees them, I know that you stand firm in the one spirit, striving together. That word striving is the same root word that we get our word athletics from.

So it's Commonwealth Games language. This is Laura Muir breaking the British record for the mile last month. And if you saw her do that, when she crossed the line, she just collapsed because all her energy had gone.

She'd been striving for that great achievement. It's energetic. Gospel partnership. And it's corporate. Paul says you strive together as one.

We're not lawn rangers in this endeavor. We're a team. We need each other. So the picture is Scotland at Murrayfield with five minutes to go, six points behind with a line out or a five yard scrum.

And every player matters. Everyone throwing in their strength and their effort together. So the question is, is your picture of the Christian life reflective of that image?

[11 : 55] Is it your picture of St. Silas Church? That you've been called into a partnership to promote God's glory through the spread of the gospel by striving together? It's such an empowering picture.

It means that whoever you are, God is calling you to be involved. Church is not a theater. You know, with the minister and the worship leaders at the front and everyone coming along just to watch and be entertained.

It's not that. Church isn't a wellness center. We went on holiday once to a place where there was a wellness center. And you could pay to go in, you know, and there were hot tubs and steam rooms. And there were other people in there with you, but you didn't really have much to do with them.

You were just there for your own comfort and relaxation. You were there to feel better yourself. Well, church isn't that. Church isn't a night school.

You know, it's not an adult education center where you look at the program and you work out what you think you'll benefit from and you just opt in to those bits. You enroll for the stuff that you fancy.

[12 : 58] Well, much more than any of those pictures, church is like a partnership. It's that mindset that meant the Philippians gave their money generously to support Paul's gospel work.

They weren't passively looking on at what Paul was doing. Oh, that's impressive. They were doing it with him. They were making it possible because they saw themselves as partners.

So if you see St. Silas as your church, could you see yourself as in partnership here, striving together with others? If you don't see it like that, but you're coming along, please will you join us?

Will you strive with us, side by side, to make Christ known? I hope you're up for that. I think of a friend, when I was a junior lawyer and a friend of mine who was a more mature Christian than me, who was in the same kind of, he was at a different firm, but similar job.

And he told me about money once and he said that his salary was 65,000 pounds a year and he worked out what he needed to live on with London rent and so on, which is not cheap.

[14 : 08] And he was really happy because he realized that once he'd worked out what he needed to live on and was giving the rest, once you added gift aid on to what he was giving, he was giving 35,000 pounds a year to support gospel work.

So more than half of his gross salary was finding its way into gospel work. But why would he do that when all the other lawyers around us were putting that money into savings for a better home or their pension or they were just spending it on enjoying life?

It was because he saw himself as a gospel partner with his church, striving side by side with his church family to advance the gospel. And there was great joy in that for him.

What a difference it makes when that's our mentality, when that's one of our driving images of the church life. But even if we feel that we're gospel partners, we might still feel that giving our money is the last thing we'd want to do.

Martin Luther described how we need to be converted three times, he said. I'm not sure about this, but he said three times. There's the conversion of the heart, the conversion of the mind, and then there's the conversion of the wallet.

[15 : 24] We feel uneasy giving our money away. So that brings us to our second point, the secret that enables gospel giving. And here Paul shares his own example.

So if you look at verse 11, he says, I am not saying this because I'm in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty.

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. So one of the reasons we don't give or don't give what we should give or could give is because we think we need the money.

We think we've got to keep the money. We're not content with what we have. Or, we might think something like this to ourselves. We don't think we'd be satisfied with what we would have if we gave our money to support the work of the gospel.

We don't think we'd be satisfied with what we would have if we gave our money sacrificially to support the work of the gospel. There was a newspaper article about a TV celebrity who was describing how deeply unhappy she is, and the article concluded with this.

[16 : 43] she was describing how depressed she feels, and the journalist writing the article finished the article like this. She is a very pretty woman with a doting husband, three adored stepchildren, two golden retrievers, seven horses, and a large house with its own cinema and 50 acres.

She's had an extremely successful career in TV and made a fortune. She should thank her lucky stars. It's what people are thinking as they read the article, isn't it? How dare she be unhappy?

But you see the equation that governs that thinking. Good looks plus a doting husband and kids plus two dogs plus seven horses plus a house plus a cinema in the house plus fields plus a successful career in TV equals contentment.

We think that our circumstances will make us content. So we hold on to our money. We don't think we can give it with outrageous generosity because money can change your circumstances.

But it doesn't work. That's why they do the research and they find that when you ask people how much money would be enough it's remarkable people almost always say roughly double what they currently have.

[18 : 15] Whatever their income is if I had roughly double then I would be content. Paul says he learned the secret and part of that secret is contentment is not about your circumstances.

That's why he says whether well fed or hungry he was content whether he was living in plenty or in want.

So what's the secret? Well if you kind of see through the materialistic culture that says you need to spend your money on yourself to be content if you see through that one of the things that people are turning to today in our culture is stoicism.

There are lots of best selling books at the moment the daily stoic how to be a stoic you're going to water stone stuff about oh you've got to learn from these ancient wise people about being stoic and in the ancient world they use the language of secrets and wisdom and initiation to being stoic.

It sounds a little bit like the Freemasons today this idea of there being secrets and initiations and Paul seems to play on the language here because he literally says when he says I've learned the secret he says I have been initiated into the secret of being content so it's as though he's playing on the language of the stoics but Paul's secret of being content is very different.

[19 : 41] So the materialist says to us if you're not content what you need is more money so that you can get more stuff and the stoic says no you get contentment not by adding to your riches but instead by taking away your desires just accept the hand that fate has delivered to you you just don't have the stuff other people have got so stop yearning for it the problem with that is that our desires are very strong within us but Christian contentment is the answer Christian contentment is not about taking away your desires it's about redirecting your desire and Paul refers to that in verse 13 he says I can do all this through him who gives me strength it's literally I can do all things in him in Jesus Christ for Paul his love for Jesus Christ has grown through thick and thin through feast and famine so that his love for Jesus is so deep it's pushed out his love for other things he's redirected his desire away from stuff and towards

Christ we see that journey that he went on in chapter three if you just look back on the same page at chapter three in verse eight he says I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake I've lost all things I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him and then if you look at verse 10 he says I want to know Christ yes to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings becoming like him in his death and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead not that I've already obtained all this or have already arrived at my goal but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me so we often think money will give us security and joy security and people will look at us and think oh they've made it look at that money and joy because we can spend the money on stuff

Paul knows that you find your security when you come to Christ and know that what you've done doesn't matter anymore it's what Christ has done that gives you a new identity Paul knows that in Christ you can have joy he's gripped by the magnificence of Jesus Christ in all his power and wisdom and grace and kindness and goodness his great salvation plan his righteousness so how do we learn that secret well it's partly through discipline the discipline that we need to just spend time day by day with God the discipline of spending time with Christian friends and encouraging each other to look at Christ discipline of being at church week by week of the teaching of communion of worship and also I guess we find the secret of being content we learn it through the discipline of giving that as we give our money we tell ourselves I'm not trusting that it won't satisfy me

I can give it away only God will satisfy me and bring me joy I heard the phrase recently of someone he said when was the last time you taught your savings a lesson that you could look at your savings and you could think you know what I'm going to give away 10% of that as a one-off today for the gospel just to remind myself that my security and joy come from Christ and not from my ISA or not from my property the Bible doesn't command us to do that but maybe for some of us we think I'm going to do that for my own good and for the joy of seeing the gospel advance just give it away so the Philippian church they had the right mindset they knew we're partners to strive side by side for the gospel and they were learning the secret contentment comes from being in Christ and focusing on him so then what does effective gospel giving look like that's our third point the model of effective gospel giving and we see that in the next verses in chapter 4 verses 15 and 16 just going to bring out a couple of things about it first of all it was immediate look at verse 15 he says 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 the matter of giving and receiving except you only so sometimes we think to ourselves I'll get around to giving in a few years time it'll be easier then I've just got this thing that I want to pay for and then I'll get on with giving but the Philippians they started giving in the early days of their acquaintance with the gospel it was a discipline of their Christian life right from the start and their support for Paul changed the world the next thing about their giving was it was pioneering you notice that Paul says nobody else gave me any money no one else shared in my ministry except you only now I don't know what you think about that but I reckon that one of the things that holds us back from outrageously generous Christian giving is that we see other Christians around us not doing it so we judge our standard by what's reasonable giving by what we see or what we think other people might be doing maybe they don't talk to us about it but we just look at their lives and we think okay that's kind of acceptable around here the Philippian church didn't operate like that they didn't wait to see another church set the example they just went for it they just gave with outrageous generosity what a joy it got me dreaming that verse just imagine if at St

[25 : 51] Silas we were known by other churches in Glasgow for radical giving if people looked on in 10 years time at Glasgow and there were gospel churches in Dennistoun and Clydebank and Apostles and on the south side with individuals and whole families in them who had been saved for all eternity and people asked how did this happen where did these churches come from and part of the answer was well there's this church in the West End St.

Silas where people were just outrageously generous for gospel work wouldn't that be exciting so it was pioneering and the last thing about the Philippians giving just to pick up was it was continuous so in verse 16 Paul says for even when I was in Thessalonica you sent me aid more than once when I was in need so they didn't have a one-off gift day you know where there was a big budget deficit and go all right I'll give once and thank goodness I've got that out the way and now I can keep my money for myself no they continually sent money to Paul to help that's the model of effective gospel giving so then what does the money do our fourth point final point this morning the surprising results of gospel giving there's a predictable result isn't there the predictable result is the gospel advances we'd expect that wouldn't we that the more that we can pay to raise up and train workers the more sinners will hear of

Jesus and be redeemed for his glory and the more we ourselves can grow in the gospel growing our knowledge and love of Jesus so that's that's kind of obvious that that would happen but Paul doesn't focus here on what he's been able to do with the money they gave look at verse 17 he says not that I desire your gifts what I desire is that more be credited to your account it's like a business transaction the picture is of a heavenly bank account where credit is building up for the people in Philippi who've given their money not that they were earning their salvation salvation is a hundred percent by grace alone but it's like Jesus command don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven when we looked at that verse at St Silas we talked about the treasure principle it's that you can't take your money with you when you die but you can send it on ahead in other words if we saw by giving money away in this life generously in some way we will reap the benefit in the next life a heavenly reward just imagine what it will be like to meet people in glory who were there because they heard the gospel through a ministry that you were part of just imagine the joy if

Emily's church family focus in in guarding us from thinking that the absolute amount we give really matters in a very real way the gift of five pounds from a student is just as valuable as the gift of five thousand pounds from a worker it could even be much more significant if that gift was a way of a student who's hard up saying thank you Jesus you are enough for me then it can be credited to their account and it pleases God so folks this was giving that changed the world could we be like that could we pioneer in gospel giving just after I became a Christian I moved to London I joined a new church plant and over the next few years the church plant I was part of planted several congregations and was part of a network that was planting churches in London and each time it was costly really costly but when I sometimes asked how it was possible how we were paying for these workers and how we were planting these churches one answer kept coming up it's Dundonald it's

God calls us to be partners in the great gospel endeavor we learn the secret that enables gospel giving that we have contentment in Christ not in stuff and we look to the surprising results of gospel giving that even though the world might scoff and think how ridiculous to have given your money away the Lord quietly credits our account and as we write the checks he smiles at the offering let's pray together father God we thank you that you are the giving father that you have given a people to the Lord Jesus for his glory a mission to him for his glory and you've given us every spiritual blessing in him thank you for that greatest of gifts that you have given us yourself we thank you for your kindnesses to us in so many ways the gift of your spirit the money and homes and essentials for daily living the good things we enjoy heavenly father we pray that you will enable us to share this mindset that we're gospel partners to learn this secret of contentment in Christ that we could use the money you've given us in a way that credits our account in heaven because it pleases you in Jesus name we pray

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