



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

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A Season Of Celebration
HG149 Contentment In Generosity

Philippians 4:10-23

Home Group Study Notes

23 July 2017 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful for your discussions.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

As we bring our 'Season of Celebration' to a close, what has been the highlight for you?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



A Season Of Celebration
HG149 Contentment In Generosity

Philippians 4:10-23

Home Group Sermon Notes

23 July 2017 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction Money is one of those issues that Christians never like to talk about – especially in a church setting. However, you may be surprised to learn that about 30% of Jesus’ teaching had to do with money and material wealth and it’s an issue that Paul wrote about a number of times in his letters. I wonder if that’s because money, and how to deal with it, has messed up as many people’s lives then, as it still does today. If I were to take everything that Jesus said about money and summarize it in a sentence it would be this: ‘money is a tool and a test.’ A tool given by God and a test on how we use it.

If we didn’t know any better we could easily think that Paul’s missionary journeys just happened and that he didn’t need to worry about money. But of course that isn’t how the world works and it isn’t how the church work’s either. Even in the first century, money made the world go round. If you had money you could travel. If you didn’t, you couldn’t.

The sort of ministry that Paul was called to required funding from somewhere. Now I don’t know what the exchange rate was between the Denarius, Lira or the Drachma in those days, but in any case, I imagine what money he had when he set out on his missionary journeys, soon went in paying for food and accommodation and travel.

How did he manage? We don’t often read about those details in the pages of the NT do we? We know people like Lydia in Philippi gave him hospitality, but he couldn’t depend on that, he still needed cash to get to the places he was going (at least up until the point when the Roman government took over and sent him to Rome).

So how did Paul fund his work? We know that on one occasion he worked as a tentmaker but what about the rest of the time? We get hints of how he managed here in Philippians 4. Paul has just finished encouraging them to rejoice in the Lord always and to trust God to look after them. And now he gives them a final example of his own joy in the Lord, joy that bears out what he’s said about asking the Lord to provide what you need.

1. Generous giving brings blessings to others Paul says 4:10: *"I rejoice in the Lord greatly that at last you have renewed your concern for me."* Is he saying that there was a time when they didn’t really care about what was happening to him? No, he’s talking about the way they’ve sent him material aid, presumably money. He knows that they’ve always been emotionally concerned for him, but it’s only now that they’ve had the opportunity to help him out practically. And that is what gives him joy.

What do you think it is about this gift that gives him this joy? I think it’s the fact that they’ve identified with him in his ministry. Look at what he says in vs14: *"Yet it was good of you to share my distress."*

4. Do you believe what Paul wrote in vs19: *"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."* Do you have any examples of this in your own life, or in the lives of others, where this might be the case?

5. Contentment comes when we know God is in control and will give us everything we need. How have you experienced the providing hand of God in these areas:

In your home

In church

In the workplace

6. The book of Philippians has been an informative, challenging and encouraging book in many different ways. What, out of all that we have studied through this series really sticks in your mind? What has strengthened your faith the most? What has challenged your faith the most? What has inspired you the most?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. What are the things in life that bring you the deepest joy and happiness?

Describe a time when you felt truly content and at peace. What was your source of contentment?

2. We tend to feel content when we are 'well fed' and 'living in plenty' vs12. Describe a time when you did not have some of the 'basics' of life yet you still felt content.

3. Does the Apostle Paul's suggestion that giving all we have to God, first, then spending His money wisely, secondly, challenge you in any way? How might this be worked out practically? Is it possible to live in this way?

They may not be able to be there to join him in his prison cell, but they can share with him by this act of financial support. Paul's learnt an important lesson in his missionary journeys and that is to be content; whatever he has! Whether he has little or plenty, whether he's well fed or hungry. It doesn't matter in the end. Why? Because Christ gives him the strength, vs13: *"I can do everything through him who strengthens me."* Let me ask those who've been Christians for a long time, was this one of those Scripture verses you learnt as you were growing up?

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." I wonder what you thought that meant when you first heard it. Did you think of facing lions in Africa, or of standing up for the gospel before your friends, or of being a faithful servant of Jesus Christ? Or did you think of being content with poverty, or with being hungry, with being overlooked for promotion because your Christian values didn't fit the organisation you worked with? My guess is that few of us thought about contentment being to do with financial need. Well, not unless we became missionaries/clergy because they're supposed to be poor. But not for the rest! Yet that's what this verse is about isn't it? And, as we'll see in a moment, this is an important issue when it comes to the question of Christian giving. What do you need to be content? How much will be enough?

We live in an age where we're increasingly urged to be discontent; where covetousness is encouraged and, in the words of Michael Douglas' character (Gordon Gecko) in the film *Wall Street: Greed is good!* That's the age we live in isn't it? We live to spend, spend, spend! Contentment is a pretty rare commodity in today's world simply because contentment seems to be inextricably linked to how much money a person has.

Society today is enamoured with the size of wealth. The Sunday Times regularly produces lists of the wealthiest individuals and companies in the UK. We hear reports of the obscenely large salaries of professional athletes and of chief executives in the city. I remember reading what the billionaire financier Rockefeller once said when he was asked how much is enough? He said: *"A little more than you have."* And if you still need a little more than the Jones', what's your attitude to giving going to be?

James 5:1-6, has a warning, and some challenging words, about our attitude to money: *Now listen you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded and will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have lived in luxury and self-indulgence ... Ouch! It's not money which is the root of all evil, as people often misquote, but the love of money (1 Timothy 6:10).*

St Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne: *If I could live in a tiny dwelling on a rock in the ocean, surrounded by the waves of the sea and cut off from the sight and sound of everything else (as Lindisfarne is) I would still not be free of the cares of this passing world, or from the fear that somehow the love of money might still come and snatch me away.*

2. Generous giving brings blessings to those who give Paul says he remembers the way the Philippians supported him from the start. Even when he'd diverted through Thessalonica they sent him aid over and over again. They were probably well enough off to support him, do you think? Well, were they? In fact, this wasn't a rich Church. Yet, as so often happens, their lack of riches resulted in a wealth of generosity.

Paul tells us a bit more about these Philippian Christians in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians 8:1-5. Notice what Paul says about the order in which their giving came. He says, 2 Cor 8:5: *And they did not do as we expected, they gave themselves first to the Lord and then, by the will of God, to us."*

Here's a major clue in understanding how they could give so generously out of their poverty. As I said before they weren't just giving out of charity. They didn't have someone come to the door collecting for the Saint Paul Foundation, so they looked in their purse ... no! They first gave themselves to the Lord.

Isn't that amazing. Here are these Philippians, being persecuted to the point, I guess, where their livelihoods are taken away, leaving them in extreme poverty, and yet they voluntarily give, not just according to their means, but beyond them.

What's more, they beg for the privilege of sharing in the ministry of the saints. They don't just see their giving as charity. It isn't just good works that God will be pleased with, though it is that as well. No, this is a way for them to share in Paul's ministry and that of those that he's helping with these gifts. It's like they see it as buying into a partnership with Paul.

It seems to me that this is an important principle for us to come to terms with (Not the bit about us being poor. There are actually few of us who can claim that). We all live busy lives, we have varying responsibilities and calls on our time that limit us in how we can minister. Not that we don't all have our own ministries - you will all have opportunities for ministry presented to you, or available for you to discover - but the reality is that the amount of gospel ministry you can do is limited by the time available to you and the other responsibilities you have to employers, family, friends, yourself. But that doesn't mean you can't be involved in a wider range of gospel ministries.

The people of Philippi couldn't go with Paul on his missionary journeys, but they could become partners, shareholders, in his ministry by their financial support. You may not have the right sort of personality to handle living and working in a foreign culture, or you may not be the right age, but you can be partners with others by your financial support. As Phil and Ros said the other week: *"Small things can make a big difference in people's lives. It is fantastic how Emmanuel is at the heart of demonstrating God's love in the community and the wider world."* If this Paul was writing an epistle to the Billericayians, I'd commend you for it.

We've supported the mission and ministry of the church in many different ways - but sometimes mission begins at home and the purpose of a giving Sunday to the Church on our 25th Anniversary is to invest in our building, in the first instance a new boiler, for the next generation of church members and it seems to be the right thing to do. Perhaps Paul's motto from Phil 1:21 had rubbed off on them: *"For me to live is Christ but to die is gain."* They'd handed all they had, their entire lives over to Christ. Nothing they had belonged to them anymore. Have you ever thought that it's always easier to give away someone else's money than your own! If it's not yours in the first place you don't miss it, do you? Well, that's what had happened. They'd handed over everything to Jesus so what they were giving to Paul for God's work, was God's anyway.

3. Generous giving brings blessing to God Paul teaches that generosity is not measured by the size of the gift but by size of our heart. Our giving must not be grudging. We shouldn't say: *"Well, I guess I'd better put my offering in."* It's something we shouldn't moan/groan about. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 2:9: *"Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."*

If we give what we have, God can do great things: When we give what we have, and commit it all to God, great things happen. We may be tempted to say that our money doesn't amount to much, but the pounds mount up. When we are contributing to something that is of God, no matter how little we give it will be multiplied for the benefit of God's Kingdom.

In Matthew 15 a young boy went to see Jesus and took a lunch of five loaves and two fish. When he heard they were looking for food, he approached one of Jesus' disciples and offered his lunch. Who would believe that a little lunch could make a dent in the hunger of thousands of people? However, Jesus honoured the gift of that young boy. He multiplied what he gave and it fed a crowd of five thousand men plus the women and children. The twelve basketfuls that were leftover were more than what the boy had given to begin with. When we give our all to God, he multiplies it. It becomes bigger than what we had in the beginning.

The truth is that our giving to God is not a financial issue; it's a spiritual issue: Paul rejoices because their gift is a sign of maturity of their growth in service to God. He says in vs18, *"... the gifts you sent, [are] a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God."* This act of giving is something that God is pleased with. So Paul rejoices because he can see these people with whom he's shared the gospel growing in their faithfulness to God, not just in their allegiance to himself.

Conclusion The Wall Street Journal quoted an anonymous wit who defined money as: *An article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven, and as a universal provider for everything except happiness.* He might have wanted to add something about money being a wonderful servant but a terrible master. We cannot serve two masters. We cannot serve both God and money. If God is our master than money will be our servant. But if money is our master then we become the servants of money and money is an unforgiving master. We start wasting our lives instead of investing in them.

Creating wealth can, for some, become an all-consuming passion that overshadows all that they do. It takes precedent over: families; relationships; church attendance; marriages; their Christian faith - over God himself. God takes what we give, when we give it in complete reliance on him, and multiplies it more than we can imagine.

It all comes down to our surrender to God the control of every aspect of our life. But what does Paul tell us about the Philippians and their future security, 4:19: *"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."* Paul commended the Philippians for relying on God to meet their needs. What they offered may not have been much from the standpoint of the balance sheet, but they were huge from the standpoint of God's balance sheet and, surely, that's the most important thing of all.

The Philippian Church can be both an example and a challenge to us. Let us be willing to trust God to provide all our needs, let us be content with what we have, and let us be generous in the way we share financially in the ministry of the gospel both here and in the wider world so that we can indeed find *'Contentment in Generosity.'*

Emmanuel Text for 2017

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7:14