



GOSPEL
partnership

DEVOTIONALS 9

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-23

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

¹⁴ Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. ¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. ¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

DAY 1

PHILIPPIANS 4:10, 14-17

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As we make our final approach to the book of Philippians this week, we see Paul return to the theme of partnership. As we know, Paul is under some sort of house arrest in Rome, which means that he has expenses to take care of with no opportunity to work. When the Philippians heard of Paul's situation, they immediately sent Epaphroditus with a gift to sustain him. Paul received this gift with joy but not surprise. He knew that Philippi was a generous church as they had demonstrated over the last decade. In 2 Corinthians 8:2, Paul highlights their commitment to generosity in Philippi by noting that they not only gave out of their excess, but "in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty [had] overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part."

This type of generosity is a mark of the "mind of Christ." "For God so loved the world, that he gave . . ." is at the heart of where we stand in grace (John 3:16). Paul says it this way to the Corinthians: "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich*" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Here in Philippians, Paul not only highlights generosity as a product of our justification, but he notes that generosity is part of the believers' experience of the joy that we have in Christ. This idea is at the heart of his reference to "the fruit that increases to their credit." The more generous we are, the more we experience the joy of our salvation. Thematically this lines up with what Jesus taught when he said, "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25). The more we give away, the richer we become.

As we proceed this week, we will see that we have all the confidence in the world to live such generous lives because God will supply our every need. For today, though, will you pause with me and consider ways that you might demonstrate this generosity? With money? With time? With giftings? Is there a neighbor in need? A sister or brother within our fellowship who could use a boost? A ministry that would benefit from an unexpected boon? What an opportunity we have!

REFLECTION

As you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:7–9)

~ Andrew VanderMaas

DAY 2

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-13

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Paul received the welcome gift of support from his friends at Philippi in the same spirit he received each day—it was what God was giving and he could rejoice and be glad! This did not mean Paul was disengaged. No, Paul could fully appreciate and enjoy this gift because he was free from needing it. He now knows that God is great enough and good enough to do anything he wants to do, wise enough and tender enough to send help at exactly the right time. Now an older man, Paul has seen God prove his faithfulness again and again.

So Paul says he is content; he is at rest; he is free. The rest that was established on the seventh day of creation, symbolized in Canaan, and which will be complete in eternity filled his soul. How did Paul arrive at such a place? He says he has *learned* it. Being an apostle did not exempt Paul from ordinary human experience; even Jesus learned and grew in wisdom as he obeyed his parents, studied the Torah, and learned a trade. Surely Paul grew in his understanding of how to engage people, where to find the best opportunities for ministry, where to find the best ways to travel. This practical obedience kept Paul in a place to see God at work.

But Paul was also learning to be more like Christ in these places by putting off his old self and putting on the new day by day, a dying and a rising that took intention and exertion. He learned that God is patient and wise. He does not immediately eradicate our old self; he allows it to become increasingly useless. He gives us something better so that we don't need those things anymore to fill our lives. But the key to Paul's secret came from a deeper place. Soon after Paul's conversion, God told Ananias that Paul would be shown how much he would suffer for God's name (Acts 9:16). Paul often mentioned the privilege of sharing Christ's sufferings, knowing that even Jesus learned obedience by what he suffered (Heb. 5:8). Paul did not often mention the specifics of what he endured, but when forced to validate his authenticity as an apostle, he named the staggering dangers and deprivations that were his continual experience (2 Cor.11:23-28).

What does such suffering accomplish? First, it is clarifying. Even the suffering that all people endure living in a broken world forces us to see what really matters and helps us prioritize our lives. But suffering for Christ brings a second purpose; it is purifying. Choosing Christ as our first love cleanses us from the self-life that belongs to our old nature. When he has replaced ourselves as the center of our universe, other things fall into their rightful place. Marriage, education, entertainment, achievement--to name just a few--can be enjoyed without having to bear the weight of our worth. Friends and acquaintances no longer have to be competitors, for we have nothing to prove. This is the contentment, the place of rest that allowed Paul to see that poverty and wealth are equally beside the point, just two different places to live for Christ and love people. He had learned the secret: he could do all things through Christ whose strength allowed him to triumph through all the trials. Paul's joy was not that he was strong, but that he had found a strength to bear his weakness. He was free.

PRAYER

Father, you know the fears and distortions that rule our lives. Will you help us take another step in seeing what you see? We think suffering is a mutilation, but you have shown us it is the path to glory. Jesus, we love you for the lowly and gentle way you carry us through our sorrows. We want to be like you as we love each other. Thank you for the honor of your name. Amen.

~ Judy Vander Ark

DAY 3

PHILIPPIANS 4:18-20

¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

If we have watched the news at all the last month, we know that supply chain issues are a big deal this fall. We've seen pictures of ports full of shipping containers waiting to be shipped on trucks to their domestic destinations and scores of ships waiting offshore to be unloaded. We've heard about the shortage of truck drivers. We've heard about the difficulties companies have in finding enough workers to unload the trucks in the warehouses. The main point to absorb is that we have a mess, and it will take months to clear it all up. So, we'd better buy our Christmas gifts early. The longer we wait, the more likely it will be that we won't be able to get what we want.

Supply chains work best when demand is regular and consistent and when the suppliers have full access to getting all the raw materials or all of the elements of products so that they can produce it in a timely way to meet the demand evenly. When everything flows, the supply chain is almost invisible to us. For instance, we barely even notice a tanker truck filling the underground tanks of a gas station in normal times. But when there's been a hurricane in the Gulf, and we know the oil rigs or refineries have been shut down, we breathe a little sigh of relief that at least we got another tank of gas to last for the next week or two. Up until a couple of years ago, we took it for granted that we would always be able to purchase toilet paper any time we needed it. These days in our land of plenty, we have anxiety wondering if we'll get what we want when we want it.

Paul clearly had his own supply chain issues. He didn't know when friends or food were going to show up. He virtually had no control over his circumstances. I doubt he even knew if or when he would eat. He knew he was being supported by the Philippian church, but he didn't know exactly when that support would appear. In short, he had a human supply chain that was erratic and somewhat unpredictable. Remarkably, he clearly navigated those uncertainties well because he knew that ultimately God was in charge of his supply chain, and he could fully depend on it.

There is no set of circumstances that catches God off guard. God knew where the pack animals and the people were that would carry Paul's food to him. Paul knew that God also was aware of every detail of his needs. Every situation Paul faced fit within the Sovereign's plan. There was even a deep spiritual dimension in the ways his supplies got to him. There is nothing that is beyond God's control. His resources are infinite. His ability to get things done is absolute. Because he knew all these things so well, Paul doesn't hesitate to say God can and does supply every need we have

PRAYER

Father, may we be like Paul and consciously know how big you are, how vast your resources and compassion are, and how you care for all the details of our lives. Give us insight into the ways you support us even now so that we may richly experience all the elements of our salvation. Remind us always that you are our loving heavenly Father and that we have the certainty of eternal life in you from this day forward.

~ Richard Malone

DAY 4

PHILIPPIANS 4:21-22

²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

Over the past fall, there has been a tiny gathering of an otherwise normal group of women in the halls of Christ Church. They may or may not have been friends prior to this occasion. What makes them unique though is that there was one thing in particular that brought them together: their pandemic babies made them all first time mothers. What has been for many a season pronouncing isolation and death, has for these women, been a season declaring life.

Paul's letter from the Roman jail to the Philippians was much like a pandemic baby birth announcement. Amidst many concerns of safety and wellbeing, he sent news of unbridled life. This did not mean that Paul had broken out of jail or even that he found exceptionally favorable treatment from the authorities that put him there. What Paul witnessed, and took this opportunity to share, was something that he desired even more than his own freedom and happiness. Paul speaks of new life through the gospel of Jesus—seeds of faith blossoming even from a jail cell.

Verse 22 says, “all the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.”

The Philippian believers would have immediately understood the significance of this statement, since they themselves lived in a Roman colony.

Here is an excerpt from Gordon Fee's commentary on the passage,

While the Philippians suffer at the hands of Roman citizens loyal to Caesar, Paul is an actual prisoner of Caesar. But in making him a prisoner at the heart of the empire, Rome has brought in a member of the “opposition” who is in the process of creating a “fifth column” within the very walls of the emperor's domicile. Paul either has found or has made disciples of the “Lord” Jesus among members of the imperial household, who are thus on the Philippians' side in the struggle against those who proclaim Caesar as Lord!

...thus, here is a word of encouragement to the Philippians in the midst of their present struggle. The “word of life” to which they hold firm in the midst of their “crooked and perverse generation” (2:15–16) has already penetrated the heart of the empire. They have brothers and sisters in Caesar's own household, who are on their side and now send them greetings; and therefore the Savior whom they await (3:20) in the midst of their present struggle will gather some from Caesar's household as well as from Caesar's Philippi when he comes.

PRAYER

Father God, thank you that you continue to build your global Church in all ages, through all circumstances. Help us to see your work in the world with eyes of faith, drawing us to greater joy and praise over your Kingdom's advancement. Fix our eyes on the eternal city, our heavenly home, where we will praise you forever in tandem with brothers and sisters born from the most unlikely of circumstances. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*. The New International commentary on the New Testament

~ Masakuni Hotta

DAY 5

PHILIPPIANS 4:23

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Paul is consistent in the way that he formats his letters. As he opens the letter and addresses his audience, he proclaims grace and peace to his readers:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:3)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:2)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father. (Colossians 1:2)

But then when he closes his letters, he switches. He prays that grace would be with the believers.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen. (Galatians 6:18)

Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible. (Ephesians 6:24)

Grace be with you. (Colossians 4:18)

And so he closes Philippians with, “*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*” (4:23)

A letter that began with grace is shot through with joy, resounds with peace, and concludes again with grace. But, as in all his letters, he sends grace with his readers. It’s as if this grace which he writes about is personified. Paul sees Grace walking with the Philippians to the marketplace and accompanying their business ventures. He sees Grace sitting with friends at the pub as they weep and rejoice. He sees Grace in their homes--fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, grandmothers and grandfathers working through conflict, finding encouragement with one another. Grace covers believers as they stand against the Empire with their very lives at stake.

How can Paul be so confident, chained as he is to his guards? Surely the answer lies in the fact that for Paul, and for us, grace has a name, Jesus Christ. He is the true Lord. The one who did not despise the cross and has now been exalted. He has been given the name above every name.

Grace be with you all ...

~ Andrew VanderMaas