



Life Guide

applying God's Word to life

Thank God, Dear Christian!

October 25th, 2020

Philippians 4:10-20

¹⁰ I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.

¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² 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. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength. ¹⁴ Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. ¹⁵ 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; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have received full payment 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. ¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1. Think of a time when you wrote “thank you” notes. What was occasion? What did you say? How have your “thank you” notes changed over the years? **Answer will vary. Typical times: Confirmation, Graduation, Wedding Shower, Wedding, Baby Shower, Anniversary; Funeral Memorial, etc.** I gave the example of my Confirmation. Typically you might offer simple thanks. If the gift is money, you might say how you intend to use it. As the years have passed, I’ve found “thank you” notes an opportunity to acknowledge and appreciate what the friendship of the giver mean to me.

2. What tricks does Satan use to sow seeds of discontentment in our hearts? What is his goal in doing so? How is he succeeding in your life? **Satan uses my sin against me. He uses my greed to make me dissatisfied with what I have, so that I always “want” more, thinking that if I get it, I will be satisfied. He uses my worry to cause me to miss the blessings of this day as I fret over tomorrow instead. This leaves me discontent with the good things that God is doing in my life today. I’m afraid that Satan succeeds much to often. About the time I learn to dismiss this or that concern, a new one pops up. If it isn’t money, it’s my health. How foolish of me!**
3. What is Paul’s “secret” to contentment? Why does he call it a “secret”? **Paul’s secret to contentment is the good news of the gospel – God’s message of grace that assures me that God will never leave or forsake me (Hebrews 13:5, that he will make all things serve my good (Romans 8:28). This message gives me confidence that I can do “all this” through the one who gives me strength (Philippians 4:13) Paul rightfully calls this a “secret” because it is not something that we can discover or figure out on our own. It is a message that God’s Spirit must reveal to me through God’s Means of Grace – his gospel in Word and sacrament. Without the Spirit’s revelation, this message is a great mystery – something that unbelievers regard as foolishness. This is not meant to be a secret that is kept, but one that is to be shared the world over as we proclaim Christ.**
4. Read Romans 8:32. How does Paul’s secret (v.13) change the way we look at and deal with the troubles of life? **As I mention in the sermon, the truth of Philippians 4:13 must and does go “hand-in-hand” with the message of Romans 8:32. God’s promises of help to those in need is always connected to Jesus and his sacrifice for sinners. Without this connection, I’d have no reason to think that God would want to love and help me. But when I hear of what his grace has accomplished for me, rescuing me from my sin for the sake of my Substitute who gave himself for me, then everything else falls in place. The One who loves me so that he gave Jesus, loves me in Christ, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. For the sake of the**

same Jesus, there isn't anything that God wouldn't do for me. Given the great sacrifice he has already made, I can count on this same love to do whatever it takes to bring me safely to heaven. This includes taking my worst days and using them to bring me one blessing after another. This is how God strengthens me to live every day of life whether it brings good or bad.

5. Why is Satan's "divide and conquer" strategy such an effective means of attacking Christian faith? When has Satan attacked you in this way? How did God rescue you? **God did not make us believers to live or function as islands in the faith. He brings us into his church and urges us to gather together for encouragement and accountability. When Satan tricks us into thinking that we are all alone in the faith, he is more easily able to deceive us as he tries to convince us that God does not love or care for us. In this "lonely" state we might soon give up on God's promises, starve our faith by failing to listen to God's Word or receive his sacrament, and before you know it, we're lost. Satan has tried this with me in times of great stress or trouble. Each time God has rescued me by sending someone to my side, a brother or sister in the faith whose kindness or compassion (and sometimes their "scolding") has caused me to "wake up" and see that God's love and goodness never fail. In fact the presence of those people in my life is a testimony to that goodness. I see Satan's lies for what they are. I pray for God's forgiveness for my sins of doubt and despair, and I'm renewed by his never-failing mercy!**
6. Paul found in the Philippians' gift, much more than monetary assistance. Explain (see Philippians 4:14). What does Paul's experience teach you about the gifts that you receive from your fellow Christians? What does this teach you about gift giving? **In addition to and beyond financial assistance, Paul found in the Christians' gifts a powerful expression of fellowship and friendship by which they actually shared in Paul's suffering, lifting him up in prayer and assuring him that the gospel he preached was true and precious to them. By sharing Paul's burden, they lightened his load. They cheered him up by**

reminding him of the gospel's power, good news that created in their hearts the same faith that lived in Paul. Paul teaches me to see the same "additional" blessing in the gifts that my fellow Christians give me. When Christians give me a gift, they are making a "connection" with me, reminding me that we are partners in Christ. I'm not alone in my faith. Paul's words remind me the importance of reaching out to others with simple gifts by which I can show my love and appreciation to the people around me. Sometimes I might hesitate to give a gift because I don't feel I can give "enough." Paul reminds me in the best way that it isn't about the amount. The monetary isn't the important thing. What's important is the statement and the connection that is made and fostered with the gift.

7. In what sense are the gifts that we Christians give, credited to our "account"? (Verse 17) How might this verse be misapplied? **This is a challenging verse. This misapplication would be this: That somehow we earn God's credit for doing loving things. We work our way into his good graces. This is a dangerous and deadly lie. Falling for this lie could destroy our faith in God's free grace.**

It is possible to understand the passage in this way, that the generous gifts that we give are fruits of the faith that God has given us. All good works are fruits of faith. They don't earn us any special favors from God, but God is pleased to grant us "rewards of grace." In other words, in the same grace that saves us, he blesses us for these fruits of faith. Everything here is God's doing. He works the faith; he moves and equips us to respond to his love with good works, and then he turns around and blesses us even more for these fruits of faith. This is grace, upon grace, upon grace.

In the sermon, I took a slightly different approach. I "cut to the chase" by pointing to the way that our gifts (and good works) testify to or give credit to God for the love he has shown us in bringing us to faith in Jesus. He works in us and with us to respond to his love. The credit and praise belong to him. Paul was happy as a spiritual father to see his spiritual children

responding in such wonderful ways to God's grace in their lives. He wanted this life of thanks to keep growing and growing to show more and more who these people had become in Christ.

8. List some ways that sin threatens to “stink up” the gifts we Christians give. Why is this so discouraging? **Here on earth we believers in Christ remain sinner saints. We cannot and do not live perfect lives. Sin clings to us and spoils the things we do. In the sermon I mentioned how greed and worry and spoil our gifts. Sinful pride is another gift “spoiler.” This can be discouraging. We might wonder if there is any point to trying to serve God.**
9. Since we still sin, how can our gifts be a “fragrant offering, and acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God”? (verse 18) Why is this so encouraging? **God, who has taken away our sin by charging it all to Jesus, does not see our gifts as spoiled. He covers us and our gifts in Jesus' holiness and so accepts them as pleasing. Our gifts are “fragrant offerings.” Paul's words remind us that we count on Jesus continually to purify us and what we do. Jesus does not fail us. This is a great encouragement to us. This truth reminds us that every day God's accepts our lives as a thank offering. We see our failure as spouses, employees, employers, children, parents, etc. God does not see these failures. He sees his holy Children in Christ living lives of thanks and praise. I get to serve him! I can serve him. He's pleased with me and my life!**
10. Why is Commitment Sunday at Mount Olive a time to give “double” thanks? **This is a time when we can thank God in anticipation for the blessings we will receive and enjoy through the offerings of our fellow believers. This is also a time when we thank God for the privilege of pledging and giving gifts. He provides both the financial means that makes our offerings possible, but more importantly, in works in us the will and desire to give gifts. This is his doing! How grateful we can be that her permits us to share this way in his saving work!**

Joyful Thanks for a Gift of Love

Philippians 4:10–20

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Too many people in our busy society do not take the time to practice the courtesy of acknowledging gifts. The apostle Paul was not like that. Although it was not his chief purpose, part of his purpose in writing to the Philippians was to acknowledge a gift, probably a gift of money, that they had sent to him at Rome and to thank them for it. No doubt the apostle had sent the Philippians a verbal acknowledgement, perhaps with someone who was traveling from Rome to Philippi, as soon as he had received the gift. Now he takes the time to write his thanks. He states what the gift really means to him, and he tells of the uniquely Christian reason he appreciates it.

From the time they had first become acquainted with Paul, the Philippians, more than any other congregation of Christians, had shown a special, personal interest in the apostle's physical welfare. Now once more, like a tree that puts forth new shoots each spring, the Philippians' concern for him had found a way of expressing itself. As soon as they had learned about his imprisonment, the Philippians had wanted to do something to help the apostle.

For a time, however, they were unable to carry out their resolve. Something had hindered them. Perhaps the grinding poverty that had affected the entire region some years earlier (see 2 Corinthians 8:1, 2) was still making life economically difficult for the Philippians, or perhaps no messenger was immediately available to make the long journey to Rome. At any rate, the obstacles that had previously prevented the Philippians from expressing their generosity had now been removed, and Epaphroditus had brought a generous gift to the apostle on the Philippians' behalf. He was now returning to Philippi with this letter and with the apostle's warm thanks.

When Paul received the gift from the Philippians, he "rejoice[d] greatly in the Lord." Here Paul uses that key word "rejoice" for the last time in the epistle. We can well imagine what special joy receiving this gift brought to Paul. After a long and dangerous sea voyage, he had arrived at Rome as a prisoner. In a huge city he had never visited before, he had to go about the task of preparing a legal defense to present to the highest court in the empire. He knew that if that defense failed, it could cost him his life.

What a joyful surprise it must have been when a trusted friend, Epaphroditus, arrived from his beloved Philippian congregation to serve as his personal attendant in Rome, to bring a gift from the congregation and, most important of all, to cheer the apostle with the assurance that his friends in Philippi had not forgotten him. Paul was an emotional man, and he was deeply moved by the Philippians' kind gesture.

Paul was deeply grateful to the Philippians for their thoughts of him and for their gift, and he was lavish in his thanks. Still, always the teacher, he did not want to give the Philippians a wrong impression. He did not want them to think that earthly things had suddenly become overwhelmingly important to him. Nor did he want them to think that the Lord had left him in desperate physical straits or that his warm thanks was nothing more than a veiled plea for another gift. He wanted the Philippians to pause with him and see this gift of theirs in its proper perspective. He wanted them to know that there were certain things about their giving of the gift that were even more important than the gift itself.

Regardless of his physical circumstances, Paul tells his readers, he had learned to always be content. Throughout his lifetime, and especially during his years as an apostle, Paul experienced earthly circumstances that varied from great need to great fortune. At times the Lord granted him periods of rest and refreshment, even relative prosperity, but more often the apostle had lived in less than prosperous circumstances. As he served the Lord—often, in fact, *because* he served the Lord—he suffered hunger, cold, nakedness, beatings, imprisonment, and lack of the physical comforts many others would have considered necessities.

No matter what physical circumstances he faced, Paul had learned the secret of being truly satisfied. He had found that secret in Christ. Daily, as Christ came to him in God's Word and as he came to Christ in prayer, the apostle found a source of strength and a never-failing fountain of contentment that could lead him to confidently declare, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength [namely, Christ]."

Whatever needed to be faced or done or accomplished or suffered, Paul was confident that he could meet the challenge because by faith he was "in Christ." Christ's grace was sufficient for him. Christ's power rested on him. Christ himself stood by Paul, supplying his every need. Whatever physical things the Lord chose to give to him or withhold from him, no matter how the

Lord worked in his life, Paul was content because he knew the Lord Jesus was on his side.

We too can be content with whatever the Lord gives us, be it little or much. We too have the assurance that because we are in Christ by faith, he is always there beside us to give us the strength he knows we need to cope with life in the world and to live our lives for him. Many Christian families have attractive plaques hanging in their homes inscribed with the words “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” There was one in this author’s boyhood home. What a good reminder those words are for each Christian every day. What a wonderful assurance they provide, an assurance that grows more precious and meaningful with every passing year.

Having taught the lesson, Paul now returns to his thank-you. He wants the Philippians to know that he was pleased with the gift and that he appreciated it. Note how he does it. He does not just say, “Thanks for the gift. I am glad about it because I can surely use it.” He says, “Thank you for the gift. I am glad about it because of what it says to me about you.”

Their giving him this gift, the apostle tells the Philippians, was a beautiful deed. In deciding to give the gift, the Philippians had felt the apostle’s affliction as if it were their own. This was not the first time the Philippians had shown such extraordinary generosity. Paul vividly remembered that, soon after their congregation was founded, they had sent him a gift to assist him in his ministry at Thessalonica, the very next stop on his second mission journey. The congregation had been, and still was, a particularly generous congregation.

As generous as their gifts to him were, however, Paul reminds the Philippians that the truly important thing about any gift is not the gift itself but the heart of the giver. Above all, it was because they had given their gift in the right spirit that Paul was overjoyed. The Philippians enjoyed a blessed giving and receiving relationship with the apostle Paul. He had given them the gospel, and they had

gladly received it. They, on their part, had shown their gratitude for the gospel by providing the apostle with material gifts that the Lord used to support and sustain him in his ministry. On their side of the giving and receiving ledger stood a clear and beautiful testimony to their generosity. Paul knew that the Lord would graciously reward that generosity, as he always does, even though believers don’t give for the sake of a reward (see Proverbs 11:17; Malachi 3:10–12; 2 Corinthians 9:7; Luke 6:38).

As for himself, Paul says, his needs have been amply supplied. He rejoiced because he recognized the Philippians’ generosity as a fruit of their faith. The Lord was also pleased with their gifts. He regarded them like the sweet-smelling incense offered to him by the Old Testament believers. Our gifts also are like sweet-smelling offerings to the Lord if—but only if—they are given out of hearts filled with genuine faith and love for him.

Just as they have so generously given to supply his needs, Paul assures the Philippians that God, who used their generosity to bless him, would in turn bless them by satisfying all their needs. He will do it “according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” Those who are his children in Christ Jesus are the special objects of God’s providence and loving care. They have the promise that he will never leave them or forsake them. He will supply their needs, not simply out of his glorious riches, as a millionaire throws coins to a beggar, but richly and daily in accord with the all-surpassing riches of the one to whom the whole universe belongs.

Reflecting on all of the things for which he himself can thank the Lord, as well as on the blessings and the care that the Lord bestows on all his children, Paul breaks forth in a final song of praise, glorifying God. To this great God, who in Christ Jesus is the believers’ Father in a special way, the apostle ascribes adoration and praise. He calls for all believers to join him in a constant, never-ending song of praise. And his solemn “Amen” underscores the truth that this song of praise is a spontaneous expression of a heart redeemed by grace.¹

¹ Kuschel, H. J. (1986). *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (pp. 95–100). Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House.

