


The Joy of Living the Jesus-Way

Philippians



PART 9: LEARNING CONTENTMENT

By David Fields
Philippians 4:10-23

I. The Three-Way Relationship

“I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you...”

“I” ... “The Lord” ... “You.”

For Paul, for any mature follower of Jesus, we know there are no “two-way” relationships. It’s never just “me and you.” “Him and her.” “She and me.” It’s always: “I”, “the Lord”, “you.” And to the extent that “the Lord” is recognized and invited to be between us, among us - “I”, “the Lord”, “you” - to that extent is our potential for a vital flourishing relationship.

II. Paul’s “No-Thanks”

Paul talks very positively about the gift of financial support the Philippians sent with Epaphroditus. He “rejoices greatly in the Lord” because their financial gift is a sign of their love for him. But here’s where it gets tricky.

Paul explicitly does not say “thank you for the financial gift.” Does that mean he is ungrateful? Not at all.

In the Greco-Roman world, the cultural conventions around “giving and receiving” (Philippians 4:15) were a way for the giver and recipient to establish a relationship defined by power and status. The giver was above; the recipient below. One superior. The other inferior. One honoured, the other giving honour

Paul knows as soon as he says, “Thank you for the money,” it imports this whole cultural convention into this relationship, soiling the three-way relationship they have. So no, he doesn’t say “thank you.” He does something much more important.

His aim is to subvert the power-dance of this culture.

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Lisa's Example (cont'd)

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As one member of the church community said:
"Honestly, I personally would love to learn more about this! How can I best show kindness, love, and compassion to people with diverse abilities?"

- o Acknowledgement! Romans 15:7 – *“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”*

Acknowledging the presence and humanity of the person in front of me.

- o It looks like trying to engage with them – speak to them and listen to them – as best as possible, even though that may be difficult at times.

Tips: Come down to my eye level, for better communication and understanding. For both parties. When you are communicating with me, stand in front of me not behind me.

4. We aim for love. Colossians 3:13-14: *“Bear with each other and forgive one another... And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”*

IV. The Theo-Logical Dimension

It is God, ultimately, that is glorified through giving.

“Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. 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. And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”

- Philippians 4:17-19

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Paul reminds us that this isn't just a two-way relationship between him and the Philippian believers. God is the third party – the one whom they partner together to love and serve. The one who is ultimately glorified through their giving.

a. The Meaning of Money

What does this text mean for how we view money in our horizontal relationships?

- It means that we should never use money or gift giving to create social imbalance either.
- It means those with means don't have greater status in the kingdom of God.
- It means that those with means do not have more "power" to assert their will, on the church.

Mis-using this text: Paul ends with this promise of Philippians 4:19. *"And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."*

This verse is often cited out of context by the so-called "prosperity gospel" preachers to basically say: "If you give X" – which is usually money that goes directly to this charlatan preacher – "then you'll receive Y. The amount you seed into giving is proportional to God's blessing on you."

This treats God like a cosmic vending machine; treats his provision like a magic formula.

God will not be manipulated into bringing you material blessing or a miracle. And God's goal is not to make you healthy and wealthy. And Paul's situation should make that clear enough. His goal is to make you like Jesus.

We are content because we trust the Father to give us what we need, like Jesus taught us and Paul shows us.

b. Redemptive Generosity

The world's system around money is broken; how do we learn to be generous redemptively?

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We remember the words of Jesus: “...from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”

– Luke 12:48

The question isn't if you have money or not. The question is, what are you doing with it? Do you view it as *belonging* to you, or as *entrusted* to you?

Are you seeking your own honour or some form of power from your giving?

Money is often used as a means of gaining power over others – which is anti-Christ to its core – but ironically, it gains power over us. How to be free?

Jacques Ellul, the Christian philosopher, put it well: “There is one act par excellence which profanes money by going directly against the law of money, an act for which money is not made. This act is *giving*.”

– Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power*

In this text we see how money can be emptied of its ‘god-like’ power over us. Both Paul and the Philippians are freed from the power of money. For Paul, because he *doesn't* find his contentment in their gift. And for the Philippians, in their willingness to give it.

What happens when we give generously? We become different. Giving makes us generous. And we see at the very centre of Paul's letter. That God is a God who gives. Jesus gives himself all the way to death, even death on a cross.

When we give, we don't do it to gain power, or influence, to get a kind of “honour”; we are not even aiming for a “thanks.” We aren't asking for our name to be on the building, to buy a legacy for ourselves. Like Jesus says, when we give, “*Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.*” – Matthew 6:3

Why? Because it's the Lord Jesus who is worthy of the honour and glory. It's because Jesus is the third party. And that's good for us. That's good for everyone.

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Discussion

Open Up

Share about a time when you felt more content, OR when you felt less content. As each person shares, consider if there are any themes about circumstances (i.e. financial security, or lack thereof), spiritual posture, or community considerations? Discuss these.

Dig In

Read Philippians 4:10-23

1. Why does Paul rejoice? (Think back through connections that might be relevant through the whole letter as well).
2. Why might you have similar reasons to rejoice in the Lord as you consider people you've partnered with in ministry?
3. In the message we saw how Paul does not say "thank you" directly, as it would trigger the Greco-Roman conventions of "giving and receiving" in a way that could change the relationship between Paul and Philippians. Paul was trying to be very careful that he didn't send the wrong message with regards to their giving.
 - a. How might we be tempted to use financial gifts for personal advantage – a sense of power or status?
 - b. How might this text help us to avoid using money as a power play?
4. Read this quote from the Christian philosopher Jacques Ellul: "There is one act par excellence which profanes money by going directly against the law of money, an act for which money is not made. This act is giving." – Jacques Ellul, Money and Power
 - a. Have you found that true in your life? Describe it and discuss.
 - b. How would you like to deepen the practice of generosity as a step of deeper faithful and alignment with God's own character?
5. Notice the promise of **Philippians 4:19**. While we noted the mis-uses of this text in the message, how does this promise encourage your heart? What areas of your life do you need to trust God with so you can continue working hard and being generous to others?

Prayer

Take time to give thanks to God for the way he has supplied your needs. Take time to pray for the needs of your group, and to make us a people who lean more and more into the ministry of giving.