

# The Power of Giving

## Introduction

At a young age, I saw my parents faithful giving habits and I watched as they put their tithe check in the offering plate week after week. I never heard my parents worrying about money. They always told me that everything we have is God's and it is our responsibility to give him back a portion of it. I grew up knowing the great significance of tithing and knowing that it was more than putting money in a plate. When I was in middle school I began mowing the lawns of people in my church to make money. Usually, I would mow about one lawn a week and I would take whatever the people gave me. Once I started making a little money, I immediately began tithing and originally this came easily to me. Then came high school and I had to start saving up, so I could afford to go to football camp over the summer. My parents told me that if I wanted to go, I would have to pay for it myself. I worked very hard to make the money to pay for camp and suddenly tithing became a lot harder. I wanted to hold onto my money to get to my goal faster. I eventually got there, but I did not feel satisfied because I had not been tithing.

Then came college, where I got my first real job. I did not tithe when I first began getting paychecks because I determined that since I am a poor college student I did not need to and that would be something I would start doing later in life. However, my relationship with God did not feel right when I was doing this. I felt like I was holding something back from God and his kingdom. Once I began to feel this conviction, I began tithing and trusting that God would provide the amount money I needed to make that Summer so that I could pay for school. My challenges with tithing have not stopped there and it will likely be a struggle I have throughout my life but the answer I keep coming back to is that I need to trust God with everything. I need to trust God with my money, with my time, with my resources and he will provide for me.

This is what God says to us in our scripture today which is found in Philippians 4:10-20: that when we trust God with our resources he will use them for good and provide for us. Being generous is difficult but it is what we are called to as the Body of Christ and it is what we are called to individually. Being generous looks different to all people but God has a message for all of us through Paul's writings in Philippians 4.

Let's turn together to the scripture. Starting on verse 10, Paul writes, (Read the Scripture). In this scripture, we see that God is calling his people to be stewards of everything they have and everything they are to advance the good work of the kingdom. As God calls the people to be generous, he provides in every way that they need. Let us examine how God worked in the Philippians as they gave generously and how he will work in us when we do the same.

## Trouble in the Text

The first thing to recognize from the text is that Paul had physical needs in his ministry. In this section of his letter, Paul spent a lot of time talking about how he has learned to become “content” in all situations. This is clearly a very important virtue that must be learned but that is not what I want to focus on today. What I want to focus on is the needs that Paul had in his ministry. He starts off the letter sounding relieved that the people of Philippi have shown concern for him which shows that he must have been in some form of hardship when he received help from them. If you do not know the stories of the ministry of Paul, you should know that perseverance is a word often attributed to it. We know of multiple times when Paul was imprisoned because of his ministry and testimony. In this scripture, Paul recognizes how crucial the gifts from the Philippians were in his ministry in verse 16 where he says, “... for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.” (NIV).

We can also see that the Philippian people must have needed a reminder of why their giving and stewardship is so important. When referring to their gifts, Paul says in verse 19 that, “They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.” (NIV). Paul is trying to remind the people that they are to give for the sake of offering a sacrifice to God and give for the sake of the kingdom of God, not give to help any individual specifically. He is expressing that whatever happens with their resources after they give it to God is a product of their sacrifice.

## Trouble in Our World

So why does this matter to us? This matters first because it is crucial that we become proficient at recognizing need in the world around us. Just like the Philippians saw the needs that Paul had in his ministry, we must see the needs of those around us. Seeing Paul’s needs is one reason the people felt so compelled to give and that is what can happen to us in the church today. The problem is that there is a disconnect between the church and the needy. In the book *Devotional Classics*, edited by Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith, there is a letter written by Elizabeth O’Connor entitled, “Dealing with Money.” At the end of it, Foster suggests some practical exercises to help people deal with money in the way O’Connor was preaching. He suggests, “Begin to identify the ‘faces’ of the poor. O’Connor notes that the Church of the Saviour was able to give so much to the poor because the poor were no longer ‘them’ but ‘us.’” (Foster 257). Imagine how our giving would look differently if we looked at all people with need as part of “us” rather than “them.” Instead, we see the dirty, homeless man on the street and shrug because when you do not know them, it does not hurt you to see them like that. Or we see missionaries struggling and fighting for their ministry in a third world country, but we do not think twice about it because we might not have a personal connection to them. I wonder how much more we could do if we saw the people who need help as part of “us”, the children of God?

We also lose sight of why we give of our money, time, and resources to the church. When I was a kid, I struggled with tithing because I did not know where my money was going to. I thought, “How is giving my money to the church giving it back to God?” We are not engaged enough in our churches and our communities and that in turn is impacting our willingness to be good stewards of God.

Now let’s look back at the Philippians 4:10-20 to see how God worked in and through the people because of their generosity.

## God's Grace in the Text

First, the people's giving blessed the ministry of Paul. In Philippians 4:13, Paul says, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength." One of the ways God gave Paul the strength to get through was by the help that the Philippians gave him. God worked through their generosity to bless the ministry of Paul. We see Paul recognizing this in verses 18 which reads, "I have received full payment and even more; 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." (NIV). God blessed Paul through the generosity of the Philippians in their gifts and the messenger they sent, Epaphroditus.

Next, God blessed the people because of their generosity. In verse 19, Paul promises, "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." (NIV). Considering the generosity of the people, Paul points to the generosity of our Lord which will be extended upon the Philippians. Paul wants them to know that their giving has opened the door for them to be blessed in ways they could never have imagined.

Finally, our generosity pleases God. We have seen this in the last few verses I have read, verses 18 and 19. At the end of 18, when referring to the Philippian's gifts Paul says, "They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." (NIV). Then we get further evidence in verse 19 as Paul says, "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." (NIV). God takes special care of those who give what they have for the sake of the kingdom and that is exactly what the people in the church of Philippi were doing and if we do the same, God will recognize it.

## God's Grace in the World Today

God is an amazing God and that can be seen in what he can do with what we give today. The same way that God blessed the ministry of Paul through the giving of the church, God can use what we give to bless the ministry of many. When we give, we need to have faith that God is going to do amazing wonders with our money. It may not even be money, as God can use our services, our time, and any other resource we have to do amazing wonders in the kingdom. In the Church of the Nazarene, our mission is to make Christlike disciples of all nations. One of the ways churches in America can help to do this is by dedicating part of their tithe every month to Nazarene Missions International. Instead of giving to it just because our churches ask us to, we should give with great hope, knowing that our money will make a difference in those countries where missionaries are working hard to "make disciples of all nations." Just as the giving of the church in Philippi blessed the ministry of Paul, our giving can bless the ministries of our missionaries today.

Next, when we give, we should give with the hope that God will provide for us because that is exactly what he does. The voices of the world tell us to hold on tightly to our money and grasp every dollar we can get, but the voice we should be listening to is the counter-cultural one of the church that says give any amount that you felt led by God to give, whether it is a small portion of what you have or it is everything you have. This is the lesson I learned from my parents; they never worried about whether we had enough money to tithe, they just wrote the check because they believed with all of their hearts that God would provide for us and he did! He blessed my family and I never lacked anything in my life. I challenge us to begin giving without worry today. Every time we write a check or put cash in the offering plate we should pray, thanking God for his blessings and reminding ourselves that he will provide!

Finally, we need to be aware that our generosity pleases God. When we give our money, time, and resources to Him, we are offering up a sacrifice saying, "God do what you desire in and through us." This submission pleases God greatly and is also why verse 20 is important from our scripture which says, "To our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen." This is the prayer we should be giving when we tithe because it is our recognition that God has empowered us to be generous with what he has given us and our reminder to ourselves to stay humble through it all.

## Conclusion

Earlier this year, I was struggling with my call to ministry. I felt doubt and insecurity in my call and I felt I was not good enough for the plans God has for me. This was right around winter break and I was relieved to get some time away from campus to think things over. I went home and one of the places I was most excited to go was my home church. My first Sunday back I was excited to see a lot of people there and the people were excited to see me. One such person was a 95-year-old woman whom I connected with when I was in high school. I used to sit with her and have long conversations in the church lobby. When I saw her over break, the first thing she said to me was that she wanted me to come see her after church. So, after the service and I went over to see her. Before I could say anything, she shoved something into my hand. I could tell it was money, but I had no idea how much. I went into my Dad's office to see how much it was and I opened my hand to see \$500. I was shocked, I couldn't believe how much she gave me. Over the week I wrote a thank you note for the next time I would see her at church. The next Sunday I gave her the thank you note but she snuck something right into my pocket when I went up to her. When I looked to see what it was, I saw it was more money! I could not believe it! I told her I couldn't accept but she would not let me give it back. For the next few weeks I was home, she gave me money every time I saw her. I have never experienced such generosity in my life. I kept trying to refuse but she would just tell me, "I can't think of anything better to do with my money than to invest it in you and your ministry."

That money given to me by the woman was God telling me that he is going to take care of me in my ministry and I won't need to worry about money when I am trusting God with everything else I do in life. To be good stewards, we need to trust God in every aspect of our lives and he will empower us to be generous with our funds, time, and resources. When we do this we are living into God's plan for us and becoming who he created us to be.