

W@WPhil41

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AGREEING TOGETHER

Phil. 4:2-3 *I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life.*
(NIV)

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Churches, like any other people-packed organisation, are liable to encounter disunity, party spirit, anger, slander and lies. Of course, such behaviour is wrong and damaging to the cause of the gospel, as Paul outlined in [Eph 4:17-32](#). But in today's verses his attention is focussed on two women who have created a 'septic wound' in the fellowship. Euodia means 'prosperous journey'; and Syntyche means 'pleasant acquaintance': but they were certainly not travelling the same road together and hardly considered each other as friends.

We do not know the cause of their rift, but we know that it was sufficiently disruptive for news to have travelled to Paul in Rome (probably via Epaphroditus see [Philippians 2:25](#)). Paul was eager that their fellowship should be restored, and properly so because these women are born-again believers, who will inherit heaven. But the Apostle does not advocate some shabby 'lets forget about it all' deal. Instead he pleads equally to both of them, yet in a way which honours both women. After all, both had been part of Paul's gospel ministry in Philippi as trusted team members. What was needed, was not some coercive mediation, but an open acceptance of the truth of the matter and a wholehearted agreement to choose to work together.

Like so many secular groups, the church has often failed to put truth at the forefront of mediation. Agreement in good conscience can only come on the basis of what is true; otherwise trust will be forfeited for a long time. How many ministries have been compromised by agreements that were neither heartfelt nor wanted. And how many attempts at unity have fallen apart when everybody agrees the words, but each group believes they mean different things. The same problem occurs in many marriages; and also spells the downfall of trust in business negotiations. When this problem comes to your door, don't try to stitch up a solution; but honour all, seek to understand the truth which divides and, as trust starts to emerge, fresh agreements can be made in good faith. True resolution will be marked by a fresh desire to work together; and in the church, this means gospel work.

Prayer: *Loving God. Thank You for Your grace towards me, even though I do not deserve it; and for the truth which brought me to repentance and faith, trusting You with everything. Help me to work by the same principles where there is disagreement, honouring each person, so that You may be honoured too. May my communication-style be directed towards clear-sighted agreement so people may enjoy working together; and in the church the gospel will be let loose to do its work once again. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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REJOICE BY COMMAND

Phil. 4:4 *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

This simple instruction is a direct command. Seeing God's goodness and celebrating with joy is not a Christian option, nor is it to be reserved for special occasions. It is to be the everyday normality of living in Christ. Yet that is not many believers' experience, either for themselves or of others, which is why we need to be instructed to rejoice. However, looking at their circumstances, many might reply, "But I don't feel full of joy, so I cannot rejoice". And that is precisely the problem. Our feelings are motivated by what consumes us, and if we take our eyes off Jesus there is little cause for joy. But when we are absorbed by the love of God, the grace of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit, joy floods our emotional horizon.

We do not know why Paul wrote this. Perhaps it was an antidote to interpersonal friction (see [Philippians 4:1-2](#)), or to the inevitability of suffering (see [Philippians 1:29](#)). Naturally, any adverse circumstance induces fear and despondency: but in Christ we can see that God is always working everything together for our good (see [Rom 8:28](#)). Jesus certainly suffered, but He looked with joy beyond the suffering to the Divine purpose (see [Heb 12:1-2](#)). Therefore He is an example to us to endure and not give way to fear and give up. Paul's double instruction to rejoice is more than a helpful reminder that we can have peace because God is in control. We must celebrate that peace as a reminder to ourselves of God's covenant faithfulness, and as an expression of delight that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (see [Eph 1:3](#)). Rejoicing in the Lord, is an essential act of worship

Rejoicing is not dependant on temperament or culture, circumstances or feelings; but on obedience. True, happiness depends on what happens, but joy is the result of the Holy Spirit's work in obedient hearts. Rejoicing (the celebration of inner joy) is an act of obedience which marks the believer as belonging to Christ, especially when the outlook is bleak. Your colleagues at work cannot fail to notice, and at some point you will need to give gospel answers to their questions.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You that in Christ I have every reason to be confident even though I cannot see the future. Help me to be obedient today by celebrating Your sovereignty in my life and over all things. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

STRONG BUT GENTLE

Phil. 4:5 *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

In many cultures, and especially in the world of business, gentleness is seen as weakness. Of course it is valued in the caring professions: nobody appreciates a rough nurse or harsh child care worker. But gentleness almost seems out of place in the traditionally strong roles in construction or corporate management. However, the Bible says otherwise. Gentleness is the strong characteristic of God Himself. It was part of Jesus' nature, and is one of the qualities the Holy Spirit grows inside people who follow Jesus.

This verse calls for God's powerful gentleness to be expressed. It was the Apostle Paul's personal behaviour pattern (see [1 Thess 2:7](#)). It is not enough to have a peaceful heart if our behaviour is hostile; or to believe Bible truths when others are in fear of our verbal or physical attacks. Some think that if gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit (see [Gal 5:22](#)) then God will do it automatically in us. But today's verse is a command to cooperate with God's Holy Spirit. God is working gentleness into us, but we have to work it out with others. That requires an agreement with God that gentleness should be our normal mode of relationship, and another decision to curb aggression and practise being gentle with each person we meet.

But gentleness is only possible if we know we are utterly secure. Otherwise the instinct of self-preservation, or the vice of self-advancement take over. Past experiences of being intimidated may have taught us to intimidate others, as a sort of self defence. But that ignores the fact that God loves us dearly and we are secure in Christ. He is watching over us to do us good. Yes, we may become victims of wickedness; but so did Jesus, yet He never reviled those who abused Him (see [1 Peter 2:21-23](#)): like Him, even in suffering, we are safe. When Christ returns, He will be looking for people whose characters are like His. So, the prospect of His second coming is a healthy motivation to practise the heaven-inspired art of gentleness, before you get there. The workplace, with all its frustrations, pressure and excitement is an ideal place to do it!

Prayer: *Gracious Lord. Thank You for this fresh reminder that I need to practise gentleness every day so that others can appreciate a little bit of heaven. Thank You for the work of Your Holy Spirit who helps me to abandon old styles of self-protective behaviour, as I accept the security I have in Christ. May my lifestyle become a compelling witness, to my family, friends and colleagues, of the grace which flows from Jesus my Saviour. In His Name. Amen.*

RESOLVING ANXIETY

Phil. 4:6 *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Anxiety is very disabling: it is never a good thing. Paul commands his readers that it should be expelled from their lives. "Easier said than done", I hear someone say; and you are right ... but it is not impossible, otherwise this verse would not be in the Bible. What is anxiety? It is the fear-laden emotion of uncertainty about the future. Sin infected humanity believes it is in control, or ought to be in control. However, in real life, circumstances can easily run out of control, and relationships do not always go the way we want. When that happens, we naturally try to fix the problem. However, often the matter is too big to be completely fixed, or we make matters worse by our meddling: the problem remains unresolved and then we get anxious.

The spiral of anxious thoughts always continues until the uncertainty is resolved. Everybody handles it differently, but the effects can range from desperation to suppressed feelings which manifest the internal tension in unexpected behaviour. The Bible's advice is simple: resolve the matter by giving it to God, and trusting that He will resolve what you cannot. Of course, the Lord knows the future. And He sees how all the different parts of the problem are joined together; so He is uniquely placed to deal with it. God has the authority, power and wisdom to know what to do and the ability to do it.

So our task is to tell Him the problem in detail, thanking Him for His promise to care for His children. Of course, He already knows, but He wants us to tell Him (and thank Him for the answer). Our relationship with Him has to be built on trust, and sometimes He will allow unresolved problems to persist, until we have learned to commit them to Him, take our hand off the controls and trust Him to work. We can and should do that with everything - not just 'spiritual' matters. The workplace usually has enough issues so that the watchful believer will pray as much at work as in church. If you know others who follow Jesus at work, it is good to meet regularly to pray ... not just about your own needs, but the needs of the business too. Your decreased anxiety will be a happy relief for your colleagues!

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Please forgive me for the many times when I worry because I do not pray. And forgive me when I pray, but don't believe that You can and will hear and answer. Help me to get into the habit of committing all the unresolved issues in my life to You as soon as I notice them. And please remind me that in giving thanks, I am not only praising You, but consolidating my relationship with You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

PEACE THROUGH RELEASE

Phil. 4:6-7 *Do not be anxious about anything, but ... present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Peace is not just a comfortable feeling: it is the absence of war. Paul talks about peace with God as a legal statement (see [Rom 5:1](#)). When we have surrendered ourselves to God, and accepted the sacrifice of Jesus as being in place of our punishment for sins (see www.crosscheck.org.uk to know more), God declares that we are no longer under His wrath (see [Rom 5:9](#)). Peace has broken out, and His Holy Spirit has broken into our lives. And, of course, that will and should bring very good feelings of relief and acceptance - our emotional reaction to believing in God's grace.

However, when believers forget that God is the 'Boss', and think that they have to control their future, that is when things go wrong. Their failed attempts to do what only God can do lead to frustration and anxiety (as we saw in yesterday's passage). Not only that, but they forfeit the blessings of the peace which God has given them. God's rule over their lives has been broken when they try to take control again, and as they drift further from God, the old habits of self-preservation take over, until their peace ebbs away.

That is all reversed when we come back to the Lord confessing the failure of our self-sufficiency and give the problem over to Him to manage (even though He may well ask us to play a part). When we entrust it to Him, then He gives a renewed peace: we are no longer fighting against Him, but working with Him. That peace is supernatural, and even defies the logic of the circumstances. It acts like a garrison of soldiers, in our hearts to keep us safe in our desires, decisions and emotions; and in our minds to protect our thoughts against Satan's attacks. It is an essential part of the Christian's witness too. When others see the follower of Jesus under pressure but not cracking, or under threat and not panicking, then they know that relying on Jesus brings peace. As they see you, they will want what you have, as a gift from God. And when they ask the questions, you will be able to tell them that Jesus helps you all the way, every day.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Please forgive me for going back to the sadness of not being at peace with You, when I resist Your control of my life. Help me to long to preserve that peace between us, by giving everything to You; instead of going through all sorts of worries which deny Your lordship and strip out my peace. May I desire to stay in such a trusting relationship with You that my heart and mind will be continually protected from the attacks of the world, flesh and devil. And may the peace which flows from my life of trust also influence my colleagues to trust You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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THINKING MATTERS

Phil. 4:8 *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Following Jesus should change the way we think, although not automatically, because thinking involves choices. Choose to think about bad things and you will become shaped by evil desires. Choose to think the way that Jesus thought, and you will start to see the world through His eyes. But, I hear someone say, surely you cannot control what you think! Oh yes you can! Paul says so in this verse.

Of course, all kinds of thoughts do come to our minds. Some are from God, and some from Satan: so we need to learn to distinguish the voice of the Holy Spirit from temptations or fleshly desires. The Bible is our central reference point: if the Bible says it is wrong, it is. If the Bible shows that God is pleased with it, He is. Simple as that. The important thing is to put our thoughts through a Biblical filter to identify what is godly and what is wicked. When a bad thought comes we say, "I refuse to even think about it", and when a good thought arrives, say, "God will be pleased if I think about this". Like this, we can train our minds to accept what the Bible approves, and reject what the Bible condemns. Don't forget that we do not do anything without wanting to do so, and that 'wanting' develops as we spend time thinking about it.

There are many lovely things to see and do in God's world. Polluted, it may be; but there are still wonderful evidences of God's handiwork and character reflected in creation, people and the church. Even the world of work has amazing examples of enterprise, energy, creativity, teamwork, negotiation and arbitration. God's creative nature may well be expressed even through people who disown Him, but God is to be praised for every honest business deal, every scientific discovery and every elegant design. But in the same way that photographers train their eyes to see the picture before they press the button, Christians need to learn to recognise God's footprints all around them. Look out for whatever is noble or true or honest or pure or lovely. When you see it, think about its value to God, to yourself, to others and to the world. When you look at the world through the lens of the Bible, you will see hope despite despair, peace beyond war and love overcoming hate. What you think about, will become a part of you; and you will become a part of Jesus' work in helping others and glorifying Himself. Practise that kind of thinking today - it will excite your prayer life, motivate your service and mould your character.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for so many evidences of Your creative and caring nature all around me. Help me to value all that is good and reject what offends You, so that I can grow into a good follower of the Lord Jesus. In His Name I pray. Amen.*

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LEARNING THAT WORKS

Phil. 4:9 *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*(NIV)

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Following Jesus is an active business. He is not interested in us collecting spiritual ideas or even Bible verses, if we have no intention of doing anything about them. Truth in the Bible is not an ornament to decorate our minds, or a plaything for intellectual debate; it is God's communication about how we should think and act. Of course, we will need to think about it, and it is good to study it with others, but if there is no practical lifestyle change its purpose has been thwarted.

The connection between truth and action is not automatic. The process of translating 'fact to act' begins when we hear the truth. Then we must choose to receive the teaching as being for us (as opposed to being a good idea for somebody else!); and then learn how to do it. Paul's personal behaviour provided an important example for the church in Philippi: in the same way that every godly believer should be a role model to less mature Christians. In fact, most of us need to see the truth done, to help us understand how to do it, and as an encouragement that it really is possible. Bridging the gap between theory and practice is essential if we are to become the people God wants us to be - and practised godliness brings God's peaceful presence to the centre of our hearts.

Many people want peace as a calm feeling, but do not understand that true peace cannot be detached from God. To reject Him is to abandon all hope of peace, but obeying Him opens the door to peace - because God is the God of peace. Those who display His presence become role models to the church. So look for such people; see how they live, and learn how to be like them. At the same time, others will be looking to you for an example of how to live. The home and workplace is where we show what is in our heart, and even non-believers are looking to see if we can do what we say. Above all, Jesus ultimately showed that what He said, He did. Living in His way, we can have the same confidence which comes from the close presence of the God of peace.

Prayer: *Holy God. Thank You for giving us examples of godliness: Jesus, the Apostles and friends who show that they love Jesus. Help me to learn to do the truth, and to benefit by the role models around me. And please help me to live out the truth I know so that children and seekers after truth will also see how to live a life which pleases You, and to enjoy the blessing of Your peace. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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GRATEFUL WITHOUT GRASPING

Phil. 4:10-11 *I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

This verse gives us a direct view into Paul's biblically balanced heart. He had great joy knowing that the believers in Philippi cared about him, but in other circumstances when Paul suffered alone (see [2 Tim 4:17](#)), he found strength and comfort in the Lord. Human kindness is a wonderful gift in which God works through other people, but if we become totally dependent on them we will forget that our sufficiency is of God (see [2 Cor 3:5](#)). That does not mean that good inter-personal relationships are not important, but we must not be so emotionally reliant on them that our world totally falls apart in their absence.

Emotional responses to people are a fact of human life: God gave them to us, and we are not designed to function properly without them. However they can never be the ultimate security for our personality. Our relationship with God should predominate over every other bond of friendship and love. Indeed, our personal encounters with God should also have an emotional component: we should be glad about His goodness, feel secure in His love and joyful at His provision. So, when others express their love to us, we will be uplifted and grateful to the Lord for His kindness through them; but when they don't, we are content because we trust in the Lord's love.

Paul maintained this important balance. He relished the care of the Philippian church, but was not distraught without it. His normal life was one of contentment. He knew that God was working everything together for his good (see [Rom 8:28](#)), however he also joyfully received human kindness, but as a gift from the Lord. Seeing everything as a gift from God will help you to give Him thanks in all circumstances (see [1 Thess 5:18](#)), neither to despise what comes nor demand what is withheld. If you embrace that truly Christian mindset, you will enjoy the Lord's peace, and your colleagues, friends and family will gain strength from your confidence in the Lord. So, be God's person in the office, hospital or factory today: show them on the farm, in the laboratory and in the transport industry that you know the God of peace (see [Phil 4:9](#)).

Prayer: *Generous God. Thank You for Your many displays of kindness toward me, through other people, and by Your power. Help me to see Your hand in all my circumstances, and to give You thanks, even when things do not work out as I would like. However, may I always be grateful for the love others show me, but not to presume that they must always supply my needs. Help me always to look to You so that I may find my contentment in the certainty of Your love. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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THE SCHOOL OF CONTENTMENT

Phil. 4:12 *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. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Most people would like to be happy, carefree and self-confident: but the Apostle Paul described himself as 'content'. Happiness depends on what happens, carefree living has no responsibilities and self-confidence comes from competence and acceptance by others. It may sound like an idyllic childhood scene, but it is not the real world for most adults. By contrast, Paul's life of hardship included cold and hunger, riots and imprisonments, shipwrecks and false brothers (see [2 Cor 6:4-10](#) & [11:23-28](#)) - yet he was able to claim he was content. Interestingly, many today, who have none of his disadvantages, cannot find contentment.

Paul's contentment was neither inherited nor the result of nice circumstances: it was learned in the hard school of the Christian life. Indeed, the dangers and personal insults were all part of the curriculum (so were the times of plenty). God was not being mean to Paul, but testing him in his training to see if he would rely totally on the power and grace of God. Such a man of God is usable for great tasks; and we know he fulfilled his commission well (see [2 Tim 4:7-8](#)), because contentment is very different to complacency. Contented Christians are not wasting energy in fighting what they cannot win, but neither are they apathetic to the Lord's commands. On the contrary, contentment enhances faith, logic and zeal; it enables the job to be completed with clear sightedness and commitment.

Following Jesus will involve learning this essential lesson of faith. The learning process may be longer for some than others ... it cannot really start until we stop resenting the problems and start trusting that the Lord knows what He is doing. That thankful trust is not specific to particular circumstances, but is the normal response of mature faith to any and every situation which comes our way. Even the 'problem' of having an abundance of good things is a test of faith: the Lord is watching to see how we deal with the privilege He gives us. Like many lessons, we rarely achieve consistency in the early stages; and sometimes we have to relearn essential basics. However, the Lord is determined that we shall learn to accept His will in all things, and He will allow whatever is necessary to get us to that point. So think twice before complaining at work, or resenting a family member - the Lord wants you to pass the test so that He can use you more in the future than in the past.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for investing Your life in me. Help me to appreciate all the training You set before me, and the tests which show us both how far I have come in Your 'school of faith'. May I see changing circumstances as an adventure with You, rather than an assault on my security. Help me to see my work and friends as all part of Your training so that I can be more useful to You in the future. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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'CAN-DO' CONFIDENCE

Phil. 4:13 *I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Paul's missionary life was full of impossible challenges, but met by supernatural strength and wisdom. The preceding verses ([Philippians 4:4-12](#)) show how Paul was always praising the Lord, always praying and always receiving God's peace. Even in hardship he was content, and in prosperity he was not proud. He knew his limitations, but was confident of God's power. He did not set a personal 'energy budget' telling God what he could and could not do; he was certain that he could do whatever God asked of him. His confidence was not in his own ability or power; but in his weakness he knew that God would give strength to him.

Don't forget that Paul was in prison awaiting trial. Prior to receiving the gifts from Philippi he was sustained by the Lord. Now he had more than enough to meet his needs (see [Philippians 4:18](#)). But he wanted the Macedonian church to know that although he was very glad that they had sent provisions and a helper, his strength still came from God. That kind of inner vitality is the work of God's indwelling Holy Spirit, and is available to everybody who trusts in Jesus. It is not proportional to how we feel, or our resources nor even the encouragement from fellow-believers: it is God's gift to people who recognise their weakness (see [2 Cor 12:9-10](#)), and yet are determined to obey His next command.

This verse applies to obeying God in everyday things, as well as special acts of ministry, and for dealing with every circumstance which God allows. It does not apply to the fantasy 'wish-list' in which a few immature believers think that God is obliged to pass their exams for them or get them promotion at work. The power of Christ is for the work of Christ so that the glory will go to Christ. His gifts and provisions are not toys for us to play with, so that we can feel empowered; but tools which we use at His command so that He will be glorified. That means there is no Divine command which we cannot obey and no gospel mission which we cannot accomplish; also there is no temptation which we cannot overcome. So living for Christ is not as impossible as some might think - as long as we really are living for Christ, and not for ourselves. And His power is not just available in church, but wherever He leads us, including our places of work.

Prayer: *Lord of power and might. Thank You for not leaving us alone to flounder in our weakness. Thank You for giving strength to all who wait upon You, who trust You and are willing to obey what You command. Please forgive me for trying to serve You in my own strength, or refusing to serve because I felt weak. Help me to believe what You say in this verse and start to live in the strength You have provided. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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MORE THAN SYMPATHY

Phil. 4:14 *Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Paul trusted God, first and foremost; but he never despised genuine Christian fellowship. The Philippians had a great concern for their Apostle and would have prayed for him; but they also wanted to be part of the answer to their own prayers. They had collected money and provisions, appointed Epaphroditus to be the courier, and sent him off on a dangerous land and sea journey - only to have the worry of hearing that he became ill and almost died (see [Philippians 2:25-30](#)). They chose to be involved, and Paul commended them for what they did ... 'it was good', and he was very glad to receive their sacrificial love gifts.

The word translated 'to share' in this verse comes from the same Greek word which also means 'to communicate', 'become a partner', 'to give', 'to distribute', 'to come into fellowship' and 'to participate in communion'. It is one of the great words of the New Testament which takes believers from being spectators to being players; from splendid ideas to sacrificial involvement. This sense of obligation to be practically involved in fellowship is not merely a sociological phenomenon, because it crosses normal community boundaries (in the same way that Paul's missionary journeys crossed religious, racial, cultural and linguistic divides). It is informed by the imperatives of the gospel and fired by the Holy Spirit. Their motivation to help Paul was not that he was 'one of their own' (he was a Jew from S E Turkey and they were Greeks from Macedonia), but that they wanted to partner in his gospel mission (see [Philippians 1:4-6](#)).

This same conviction to mission partnership has fuelled a huge outpouring of missionary giving: sending people and money all over the world. It is God the Holy Spirit who convinces people to give and sacrifice their own interests for the sake of the gospel. Today God is mobilising many thousands of people to take the gospel cross-culturally; and they are being partnered by many more who are giving money and resources to see it happen. Of course, all gospel communication is cross-cultural (from the kingdom of light into the kingdom of darkness (see [1 Pet 2:9](#)), and can happen in your shop, factory, farm or station. Paul saw his supporters as also being gospel practitioners: both, not one or the other. Alas some believers today think that they can be observers, and occasional patrons; when God is looking for wholehearted participants in the work of the gospel, whatever it takes. Will you be one of them?

Prayer: *Sovereign Master. Please forgive me for assuming that gospel needs which are 'out of sight' can remain 'out of mind'. Please stir my heart by Your Holy Spirit to urge me to take an active and sacrificial share in the extension of gospel work, both where I live and work, and in supporting others who take Your gospel to people who have never heard of the love of Christ, and His command to repent and be saved. In His Name. Amen.*

W@WPhil52

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PARTNERSHIP DEMANDS CONSISTENCY

Phil. 4:15-16 *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; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Paul had experienced true partnership in the gospel. But these verses highlight some alarming contrasts with the ways many followers of Jesus think about mission partnership today. Paul built mission training into the earliest stages of discipleship training for the new believers in Philippi. It was not an afterthought or a 'bolt-on extra'. Spreading the word about Jesus was an integral part of being a Christian. When Paul moved south to the rest of Greece, the church in Philippi wanted to become a 'sending church'. They assumed responsibility for supplying Paul's physical needs. When he arrived in Thessalonica, it was Philippian support which enabled the brief and persecuted mission to the city.

Paul says that their excellent example was not followed elsewhere; and so other churches missed out on the privilege of giving, and also the joy of receiving news and encouragement for further giving and prayer. True mission partnership must be two-way; and that is one of the reasons why Paul held this church in such high esteem. He received from them and they received from him (including this letter which is one of the gems of the New Testament). They also had the great characteristic of true partnership: consistency. This is vitally important in business, marriage and parenting: it is also critical in enabling gospel work to continue unhindered. The Philippian church kept on giving, 'again and again'. They were not project supporters, or committed for a short time: they were true partners, in it for the long haul.

How much we need to revisit this apostolically validated approach to gospel mission partnership! It is certainly not universal today. Partnership without persistence is the kind of patronage which does not build two-way relationships, and is unlikely to sustain a ministry. Partnership, in which supporters do not intend to be gospel practitioners themselves (albeit in their local communities), will always lose momentum; as interest is diverted onto the next exciting project elsewhere, or onto more self-satisfying pursuits. Partnership which only involves giving to ones own family, tribe, nation, has lost the point of cross-cultural mission. So, do you think that this might be the wake-up call you need so that you can be a real mission partner, and therefore a wholehearted follower of Jesus?

Prayer: *Gracious God. Thank You for calling me to follow Jesus as I understood the gospel message which somebody else shared with me. Please stir my heart to be a consistent partner in cross-cultural mission, starting where I live and work, but with a heart to see many others won for Christ. Please show me how I can play my proper part in Your world-wide mission of love and hope. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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ACCOUNTING INTEGRITY

Phil. 4:17 *Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Giving should be a normal part of Christian fellowship. However it can expose a minefield of motives, both for the giver and for the recipient. Paul wanted the church to be clear that in thanking them for their kindness, he was not making a subtle demand for more. He was grateful; but his dependency was on the Lord, not them (see [Philippians 4:10-13](#)). However, he was also concerned for them: he wanted their giving to be a progress-marker in their Christian lives. He wanted them to grow up as good followers of Jesus, for their characters to become like His and for Jesus to be glorified through their lives. Giving is a very important part of spiritual training, enabling the values of Jesus to be built into the character. And God uses it to care for others and to resource gospel ministry.

Giving reflects God's nature, and the gospel. God loved ... so He gave. He gave Jesus to be our Saviour because He knew that we have no future without Him (see [Rom 5:8](#)). Jesus' pattern of giving was self-denying and sacrificial. He commended the poor widow for giving all that she had (see [Luke 21:1-4](#)), but shamed the wealthy who refused to be poor so that others might have enough (see [Matt 19:16-30](#)). That was exactly the opposite of Jesus' motivation and mission (see [2 Cor 8:9](#)). So in commending Philippian giving, Paul was giving credit to their growth as disciples.

Alas, mixed and greedy motives often spoil both givers and receivers, and are no credit to either. Those who give in order to get back: those who only give what they don't want: those who ask for prayer but are really demanding money: those who receive without giving thanks and fail to give God the glory ... all these have no credit. Yes, the food shortage may be averted, mission travel and resources may be paid for, but if godliness of character remains static, there is no demonstration of God's grace or any blessing. However, when we give because we love Jesus and want to be true partners in the gospel, we grow in faith, and the reputation of Jesus grows among people who are yet to find Him. And if you need resources, don't forget that the Lord is your 'primary supplier'. We have no right to demand from others, and if sharing our needs becomes begging or even threatening, we have missed the point of grace. So today is a good time to examine your motives about money. Let the Lord shape your heart so that you will want to give, and receive, to His praise and glory.

Prayer: *Gracious God. Thank You for providing all that I need. Help me to be an active partner in Your gospel mission, with true motives for giving and receiving. May I grow up in Your grace and may others receive Your love. May I glorify You in my decisions about money and serving today. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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RECEIVED WITH THANKS

Phil. 4:18 *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)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

It is God's nature to provide abundantly. Paul never felt neglected when he had little, but neither is he ungrateful now that his needs are met. We do not know what Epaphroditus brought from Philippi, but Paul wants to make the point that the gift provided even more than he needed, and he is truly thankful. He does not assume that the gifts are a right, the duty of a church towards their apostle; nor does he presume that they will send more: his gratitude overflows.

But Paul is also their pastor. He wanted to teach the church that their present was more special than they may have thought, because their physical gifts to him were also a sacrifice to God. Doubtless, the presents were costly and therefore a sacrifice for the believers; but giving them to the apostle was to give to God Himself. In [Matt 10:40-44](#) Jesus says "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

God sees beyond even our best intention, to His own purpose in stimulating us to give. He wants us to participate in His reward when we see Him one day. He wants our lives to count now, in blessing others, but to do it for His sake. The nature of that reward is not defined (see [Mark 10:29-30](#)), but includes a more-than-adequate provision now and all the blessings of eternal life to come. God sees our sacrifice as a costly offering (the same word is used of the sufferings of Jesus in [Eph 5:2](#)) which comes from an obedient heart and is greatly pleasing to the Lord. The Macedonian church was not wealthy, so even more important than Paul's gratitude for the gifts, the Lord accepted them as an offering to Himself. And [Hebrews 6:10](#) says, "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them." So it is time to ask the Lord to prompt your heart to give!

Prayer: *Dear Lord, who has given Yourself for me, please prompt my heart to give out of gratitude to You. May my giving be the means of blessing through Your love, and may others have opportunity to glorify You because I have been obedient to Your call. In the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

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NO WORRIES

Phil. 4:19 *And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Will God look after His people? This verse says a big 'Yes'. By describing God as 'my God', Paul did not mean that he had invented his own god, or somehow had ownership over God: he simply rejoices in being a loved child of his Heavenly Father, who never fails to care for His own. The poor Macedonian believers had met Paul's physical and emotional needs through gifts and a companion. They had given out of poverty, but God would give out of His great abundance. They need not be worried that their gift will leave them destitute, because God would certainly meet all their needs.

'Needs' are different from 'wants'. Even when we do not know the difference, God does. He has no obligation to give us what we demand, but He is committed to supplying whatever is necessary to get us to the next point in our journey of faith with Him. These provisions may be edible food or spiritual meat, human encouragement or divine peace, physical protection or strength in suffering, personal affection or heavenly love, finance or grace. It is up to God to choose the 'currency', the method of delivery and the timing which He uses to satisfy our real deep needs.

Alas, we often try to play God, diagnosing our own needs and prescribing our own solutions ... but then we become disappointed or sad; start grumbling, complaining or even get angry and bitter because God does not dance to our tune. Paul had learned to be content with a little or a lot. His heart was peacefully satisfied by his God (see [Philippians 4:6-7](#)), and so he had no need to worry about how his needs would be satisfied. But those who do not rest in the Lord will never find strength, nor be content with His supply for each day. As Paul wrote (see [Philippians 4:11-12](#)), he had learned the secret of contentment whatever the circumstances; however each day went, he would still trust the Lord. So whether you understand what your real needs are, you can be confident that the Lord will meet them. He will provide in His way and His time, whether in your workplace or in the family, in the church or the community - God is faithful to His promises; and "God will meet all your needs" is one of them!

Prayer: *Loving Father. Thank You for this assurance that I can trust You and have no need to worry about today or tomorrow. Help me to relax in the confidence that You will meet my needs, and the needs of my loved ones. Forgive me when I dictate what I want, or get angry when I do not receive what I demand. Help me to trust You more and more each day, using the varying circumstances of life to practise the peace of God in a contented lifestyle. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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GLORY UNENDING

Phil. 4:20 *To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

At the end of Paul's discussion about missionary giving and God's never-failing provision, he gives the glory to God. 'Glory' is a major Bible word which has its roots in the weighty, majestic solemnity and holy beauty of God. Glory describes both the magnificently powerful nature of His character and every way in which that is displayed. The glory of God is awesome. Moses could not see God's glory and live ([Ex 33:18-23](#)); Isaiah was in fear of his life at the manifestation of God's glory ([Is 6:5](#)) and the glory covering Jesus provided Peter, James and John with an unforgettable validation of His Deity ([2 Peter 1:16-18](#)).

God's glory is both yesterday's wonder and tomorrow's hope. It is also the purpose of our lives today: as we serve Him in a Christ-like way, our transformed lifestyle points to the glory of our heavenly Master ([Matt 5:16](#); [Eph 1:2](#)), whose power has enabled us. So promoting God's glory becomes a primary motivation to please Him. That is true in showing kindness to the needy, giving time and money to provide resources for the gospel, and being content with what we have. Holy living of that calibre always gives glory to God. And the glorification of God is unending; it will be the theme song for all eternity: amazingly, we (who know Him) will share in His glory for ever ([1 Pet 1:5](#)).

But all that is in stark contrast with our fleshly nature which desires our own glory. Such ambitions are futile because all glory, apart from God's, will disappear when He appears in glory. That should start us thinking about what we do each day and why we do it. The Christian author John Piper puts it like this: "... *the most freeing discovery this sinner has ever made, is that God's deepest commitment to be glorified and my deepest longing to be satisfied are not in conflict, but in fact find simultaneous consummation in His display of and my delight in the glory of God*" (from 'The Supremacy of God in Preaching'). That is not just for preachers, but for farmers and financiers, health and harbour workers, teachers and trades-people, researchers and retailers, managers and musicians. Wherever God has placed you, your task is to live so that God is glorified. Even if they resist your witness, God is still glorified. Promoting God's glory is the everyday challenge for every believer: as God allows even the strangest of circumstances - so that in relying on Him and resting in His peace we may confidently point beyond today, to the God of Glory.

Prayer: *Glorious God. Thank You that I have the privilege of knowing You now, and anticipating seeing You and sharing Your glory one day. Help me to live each day so that I promote Your glory as my transformed life reflects Your grace. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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BUSINESS AS USUAL

Phil. 4:21-23 *Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Paul is positive to the end. Why shouldn't he be? He may be imprisoned far away from the church which had provided his greatest support, but he was not downcast. These few sentences might have been the last he ever sent to them, but there is no suggestion of gloom, or self-pity. Instead he sends a great message of 'business as usual'!

All the believers in Philippi belong to God, not to the apostle; they are God's precious 'saints' (the New Testament word for people who have been made holy by the blood of Christ ... see [Heb 10:14](#)). They are His, and He will continue the work of sanctifying them, long after Paul has gone to glory, until they receive their reward (see [Acts 20:32](#)). And Paul is not isolated; he has other believers around him, and they are also praying for the church in Philippi. Furthermore, some of the new believers in Rome are part of Caesar's household. As a result of gospel preaching, the news about Jesus has got right into the imperial palace. Some who served the top man in the empire also served Jesus Christ. The future of Christianity was not just in the hands of a captive apostle, to be snuffed out at any moment: God was in charge, and had already placed His gospel so that it was unstoppable.

No wonder that Paul reminds them that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ continued to be with them. They had all that they needed: the Word of God from the apostle, fellowship amongst themselves in the Holy Spirit, and the prospect of glory to come. Meanwhile, they should be encouraged that the gospel was continuing to burn like a forest fire through the hearts of many people who heard it. Influential people were being converted and praying for them. This is a message for the church today. Wherever you are, and however isolated you feel, God is still at work. If you have received Him (see www.crosscheck.org.uk for a fuller explanation), you are one of His saints; and He is committed to refining you so that you will be like Jesus. You are part of a worldwide network of believers (some are praying for each other on our [Facebook](#) site). The gospel you have believed is still delivering new-born believers into Christ's Kingdom. And the grace of Christ is still available for you and for them. So it really is 'business as usual' for followers of Jesus! Go with that confidence, to work and holiday, to church and family and the Lord be with you!

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You that through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, I am saved, am being sanctified and that I have brothers and sisters all over the world praying for me. Even when the light grows dim, You are still at work in people's hearts, and I should not fear. Help me to depend on Your grace every day and to be a gospel bearer, working with You to bring life and peace to my little corner of the world. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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