

## A Christian Thanks

### Philippians 4:10-20 (NIV)

<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength. <sup>14</sup> Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. <sup>15</sup> 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; <sup>16</sup> for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. <sup>17</sup> Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup> To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

If you want to write a thank you, it should be no surprise that you can Google, “How to write a thank you,” and you will get all sorts of links from sites like Shutterfly and Hallmark that walk you through it step by step. You start by greeting the person, generally “Dear person-who-gave-me-a-gift.” Next, you do what you set out to do and write: “Thank you.” This should be followed up with a more specific reason that you are thanking the person, something like why or how you appreciate what they’ve done. Then you write a forward-looking statement, something like “Looking forward to seeing you next year.” You thank them again, and end with a warm regards for the person. That’s how you write a thank you.

The entire letter from Paul to the Christians living in Philippi is like one big thank you. After greeting the people with regards, Paul’s first words are, “I thank my God every time I remember you.” (1:3) As Paul is wrapping up his letter, he thanks the Philippians yet again, following the format of a thank you by being more specific as to how he appreciates their gifts to him. “I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me.” (verse 10) The gifts from the Philippian Christians were both monetary and personal as they sent Epaphroditus to care for Paul’s needs. Paul’s thanking them not just for the gifts themselves, but also for the fact that they showed how much they were concerned about him.

“Thank you for your concern.” Often we hear that phrase as a bit of a dismissive and empty platitude instead of one of deep appreciation. Paul meant it sincerely. Do we do the same? Do we thank people for showing their concern, for being there with me through something, for someone asking the honest question of “How are you doing?” Or is my mind more filled with people who I thought should have shown me more concern? Do I hear Paul’s words and start pointing fingers, or do I reflect on myself and ask if I show people that I appreciate the concern they have shown me? Maybe I have to ask if I show concern for others, or if I think it’s better to keep to myself, to just do me, and avoid everyone else’s drama and trouble.

As your pastor reflecting on these words, I say, “Thank you.” Thank you for showing your concern for me. Thank you for your prayers, your gifts, you sharing with me in the gospel ministry at Light of the Valley. Thank you for those who have shared in my sufferings – both personally and as a minister. Thank you for those who go out of their way to ask me how I’m doing and won’t let me sidestep the question. Sincerely, thank you for the concern you show me. And maybe there’s someone in your life that you want to thank because they’ve shown their concern for you. Thanksgiving is a great time to thank them because a Christian thanks.

Paul’s thank you continues, but it takes a deviation from the standard thank you procedure as laid out by Hallmark. “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” (verse 11) Paul’s kind of saying, “Thanks for the gift, but, you know, I didn’t actually need this.” It’s not the obligatory, “You shouldn’t have.” If one of us tomorrow at Thanksgiving said, “Thanks for the meal, but I’m not saying thanks because I needed this meal. I have food at home, and I’ve learned to be content when I don’t eat,” we know that this would rub some people the wrong way and probably come off as being ungrateful and we wouldn’t be invited back next year. Yet, Paul is teaching an important truth. He’s teaching contentment.

Are you content? As we come to another Thanksgiving with Christmas right around the corner, are you satisfied with what you have, with how life is, or are you discontent, thinking of what you lack, what you want, what you want improved? Do I blame my malcontent on myself or do I blame others? Do I blame God for not satisfying all my needs? How can we be content when we see so many people going without, so many that won’t have the big feast tomorrow, so many who are out of work, so many who are always struggling to make ends meet?

This is why Paul teaches us how he can be content whether he has plenty or whether he is in need. “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” (verse 13) Contentment, satisfaction with what we have in life, comes from God and his strength, not from us, not from our circumstances. God gives you the strength not to worry when you have little. He also gives you the strength to resist trusting in yourself and your abundance of wealth when you have plenty. He strengthens you through his promise as Paul declared, “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.” (verse 19)

God gives us our daily bread, the sustenance we need to survive physically, mentally, emotionally each and every day. He gives us the food we eat. He gives us jobs to earn money to buy the food. He gives us the strength to work those jobs and prepare that food. He gives us days of rest, days off of work, days off of school. He gives travel, recreation. He gives us the friends who show concern for us. He gives us the strength to show concern to others, even when it involves their drama. He gives us all these good physical, daily bread items.

But God’s richness to us doesn’t stop there. The King of Kings stepped down from his throne on high and took on the very nature of a servant as he took on flesh and blood. The Ruler of all humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. His obedience to God’s will was done for us. He substituted his perfect life in place of ours. He sacrificed his life in place of ours. Then God the Father exalted his Son, raising him from the dead and seated him at the position of power at the right hand of God to rule everything for our good and to care for us. Because God became poor for us, he has given us all his riches – the riches of his perfection, the riches of his life paid for ours, the rich inheritance of heaven.

God richly meets all our needs. When you think back to times of need, God gave you the strength to get you through. He will continue to meet all your needs because he is our rich God who lavishes us with his riches every day. This is how we can be content like Paul in any and every situation. So, this Thanksgiving, we, as Christians, thank God for contentment.

Paul’s thank you continues, but it’s not about the gift. Instead, he focuses on what the gift shows about the Philippians. “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.” (verses 17-18) Yes, Paul had benefited from their gifts, but he wants to talk about how awesome this care and concern is in regard to their Christian walk of faith. These were their fruits of faith, prompted by God’s love that they had experienced in their lives. They showed care and concern and brought help to Paul because God’s total love and care for them had prompted them to do so. It’s not the gift itself that was pleasing to God; it was the fact that this gift was given as a result of their faith in God that Paul gives thanks.

This is one more thing we as Christians can say thank you about: your fruits of faith. A couple of weeks ago, Joel, our church president, wanted to put out the announcement for the annual Christmas gift donation. That donation is taken up as a thank you not just to the pastor but also for people who give significant time and talents in service to the Lord here at Light of the Valley. After Joel got the announcement out, I drafted an email with a list of people and what they do at church. I started with our volunteer organist, then our volunteer office assistant, and our volunteer coordinator. Then I thought of the person who changes the church sign, the people who fold and staple the bulletins and Bible studies, the people who edit and post videos, the people who maintain and upgrade our tech, the people who lead and teach Sunday School, the men who serve on the Church Council and the Board of Elders, the people who serve on committees. I thought of those who take care of our worship elements, everything from setting up and supplying the elements the Lord’s Supper to filling and trimming the candles to changing the paraments. Then there are those who write letters to people, who design ads for our church, who make or bring goodies for people to enjoy after worship. I thought of those who mow the lawn and those who remove the snow. Then there are the people who pray for others and with others, the people who tell their friends about what God has done for them, invite them to come to worship here with us. I thought of the people who give of their treasures to support all the work being done here. The list goes on and on. I’ve chosen not to name these people because there are many who don’t want the recognition but simply want to be in the background while they serve and show their concern for others. These are your fruits of faith and I thank God that not only are you supplying so many needs here, including my needs, but you are giving fragrant offerings and acceptable sacrifices that are pleasing to God. I thank God for you.

A Christian gives thanks, not just on Thanksgiving, but all the time as God meets all of our needs. We thank those who show us concern. We thank God for contentment. We thank God for the fruits of faith that we see in others. Christians give thanks. Amen.