

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Thank You Letter

by Dan Trygg

“The things you experientially-learned (as-disciple-apprentices) and took-to-yourself and heard and saw in me, practice (be-doing) these things; and the God of peace shall be with you. ¹⁰ But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I speak from lack; for I have experientially-learned to be content (self-contained/satisfied) in whatever circumstances I am. ¹² I know both to be humbled, and I also know to abound; in any and every circumstance I have-learned-the-secret/skill (by experience) of being filled and going hungry, both to abound and to lack. ¹³ I am able/capable (to do) all things in/by the One empowering me. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, you did well partnering/sharing-together-with-me in my affliction. ¹⁵ You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, not even one church shared/participated with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; ¹⁶ for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the fruit which abundantly-grows unto your account. ¹⁸ But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:9-19

This letter of Paul to the Philippians begins and ends with appreciation for their partnership with him in the gospel ministry. They were the first to see the value of Paul's ministry, and choose to support him financially. For the most part, Paul paid his own way, out of his tent-making business. It was a skill that he could easily pack up and move with him, when he travelled from place to place. That was what both he and Barnabas did, as they struck out to preach the gospel. They went to Cyprus, and then to the mainland of what is modern-day Turkiye, preaching the good news, and starting home churches. On their second missionary journey, Paul and Silas revisited many of the churches on the mainland that had been founded on that first journey, and **were led by the Holy Spirit to go to Philippi in Macedonia. They were able to start a church there.** One of those that responded to Christ was Lydia, a wealthy dealer in purple fabrics. She insisted that they stay at her household, and she hosted the church meetings, as well (Acts 16).

Their ministry there was brought to an abrupt end, and they were unfairly and brutally mistreated by the court. Beaten and bruised, they nevertheless sang praises to God in the prison, ...which ultimately led to the prison keeper and his family giving themselves to Christ. **The next day, when the authorities were simply going to drive them out of town, Paul revealed that they were Roman citizens.** Upon hearing that, the authorities were afraid, and apologetic, ...because they had punished Romans without a proper trial, which could have severe consequences. **Paul insisted that they come and publicly escort them out of prison, so that it would be known that they had done nothing wrong.**

Part of the agreement was that Paul and Silas would leave town, which they did shortly thereafter. From that time on, **the Philippian church would send them gifts of support to free them up from their other hand work, so that they could devote themselves to preach the gospel full time. This financial support was their “partnership in the gospel”,** which Paul wrote about here, and in chapter 1. In 4:16, he recounts how they sent gifts to him more than once, when he went to Thessalonica. In Acts 18:5, when Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, he began “devoting himself completely to the word”, probably due to another gift from this church. As a result, it was not long before Paul had led more people to Christ, and had managed to start another gathering of believers, meeting in a house right next door to the synagogue (Acts 18:7).

Paul's letter to the Philippians was primarily a thank you letter, but, of course, **he took the opportunity to fill them in on some news about his life. His imprisonment had actually worked out to further the gospel.** His situation had become well known among not only those who guarded him, but even people in Caesar's household. Again, like in his imprisonment at Philippi, **his attitude and joy in the Lord caused him to be noticed.** People wondered at his joy, because his circumstances were anything but joyful. As Paul entrusted his life to Christ, however, **he was able to look for God in the midst of the trials. He was not afraid of what may come.** He was ready to die, if need be, ...but he expected that God would secure his release, so that he could continue to serve Him. **He also encouraged them to seek to have a mindset like Christ, who willingly gave up so much in order to serve and save us.** He exhorted the believers to remain unified, and to be willing to serve one another. **He warned them of the false teachers,** who were bringing people into religious bondage. **Pursuing self-righteousness is not the answer. Rather, it is far better to put your hope in Christ, and to obtain the righteousness that comes from Him by faith.** Paul had a mindset to put aside all else, in order to find Christ, and have a relationship with Him. **This is the mindset of those who are mature in Christ: to disregard everything that might conflict, and stretch ahead to reach for God's purpose for your life.** THAT was Paul's example, and he urged the believers at Philippi to take note of those who have a similar heart and focus. **Sadly, so many are not focused on Jesus, or the business of the kingdom of God. They are living for earthy things,** and their inconsistencies

actively work *against* the gospel of Christ. **Our citizenship is in heaven, not here on the earth.** Our focus should be Jesus. **We are to be people of JOY!** We are to display a gentle and reasonable spirit to everyone. **We can be free from anxiety, if we will bring our concerns to God, and leave them with Him!** We can be thankful, because **God is in control.** When we acknowledge *that* truth, we can be at peace. **Instead of negative thoughts, we are to focus on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good reputation, excellent and worthy of praise.** We are to think on *these* things.

So, again, in this section for today's study, **Paul uses his life as an example.** The original language is much more vivid, "The things you experientially-learned (as disciple-apprentices) and took-alongside and heard and saw in me, *practice these things*; and the God of peace will be with you." Again, **we need to look at this passage through the lens of discipleship.** Paul was the experienced master who was exhorting the Philippians to put into practice what they could glean from his example. **It was not enough to learn information, or even to observe someone else. We need to put these insights into practice. A disciple is a do-er, a practitioner, a hands-on apprentice, ...one who is pursuing growth, new skills, and life-transformation.** This is the underlying thread that ties this whole chapter together.

Paul shifts to another focus: He rejoiced in the Lord that they remembered him, and sent another gift of support. They had been mindful of him, but did not have an opportunity to help. (Maybe they lost track of where he was, and therefore could not send help, ...or maybe they did not have resources for a time. In any case, **Paul looked to God as the ultimate Provider.** – This is an important insight for those who would look to God for support. *HE* is able to bring us to someone's mind, ...*HE* knows where we are, and what our needs consist of, ...and *HE* is able to provide the resources at the right time.) **BUT, (here comes the next lesson) Paul was not complaining, or speaking according to need. He had experientially-learned (as-a-disciple-apprentice) to be content (self-contained/satisfied) in whatever circumstances he was in.** He had-learned-the-secret/skill of being filled and going hungry, of having extra and experiencing lack. **Pay attention: THIS is the context of this next oft-quoted statement: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."** This is *not* about accomplishing great, external things. **This statement is about maintaining inner contentment and peace. Through the empowerment of God, Paul had learned to live free of anxiety or inner turmoil.** This is a discipleship skill, ...something we all can learn, ...in fact, it is part of learning to follow Jesus.

Then, Paul turned his attention back to commending the Philippians for choosing to support him. He said, "**You did well sharing-together with me in my affliction.**" This was consistent with the heart of Jesus, ...to help others in need. More than that, however, Paul saw this as "partnering-together-with" him in ministry. He recounted their history of repeated support. They were *the first*, ...and they had *repeatedly* come to his assistance. **They exemplified the mission-heart of the disciple. Assisting people in ministry was an important part of the evangelism outreach of the early church. Some are called to go, and others are called to support and send** (Rom. 15:20-28; 1 Cor. 9:7-14; 16:15,16; Gal. 6:6-9; 3 Jn. 1:5-8). **We all work toward a common end, ...getting the message of Jesus to as many as we can.** They "did well" in *their* part, so that together they and Paul might enlarge the expanse of the gospel. This *teamwork* would result in the fruit of people coming to know Jesus.

Paul knew that their giving was sacrificial. Lydia was fairly well off, but many of those in the Macedonian church were not. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-2, Paul wrote that out of "an abundance of joy and deep poverty", *the grace of God overflowed in a wealth of generosity.* **Givers find a way to be givers, no matter what they have on hand.** Out of confidence in God, and joy in their hearts, they gave abundantly. **In the end, their "doing well", by participating in Paul's ministry, will produce a "well done" because their sacrifices for the kingdom will produce much fruit.** Truly, such sacrifices are "a fragrant aroma, acceptable and well-pleasing to God". **Pay attention: THIS is the context of this next oft-quoted statement: "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."** This is *not* a "prosperity promise". This is an assurance that God will make a way, when there seems to be no way. **The original language actually says, "BUT..." This is important. This little word ties this sentence to the previous one as a contrast. "YOU made a sacrifice, yes, ...BUT my God will fill up every need of yours."**

This is part of Paul's secret of contentment, trusting that *God will somehow meet the needs.* Notice that **there are needs, ...at least at times. BUT, God will "fill up" where there is a need. HE will make a way.** Remember, Paul learned to be content in times of plenty, and in times of lack. **To make a real sacrifice means that sometimes you choose to go without, or make due with less, in order to give more. THAT is what the Macedonians, the people from Philippi, chose to do, ...give with an overflow of joy, out of deep poverty, trusting that God indeed would take care of them, if they took care of His people!** Again, this is a "discipleship skill", a "faith perspective and choice" that we need to experientially test-out-by-experimentation to find the right balance, ...to discover the leading of the Spirit, and distinguish that from our fleshly emotions. **Giving sacrificially, with joy and faith, is a growth edge.**

In closing, Paul wrote, "Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen. ²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (4:20-23). **Indeed, may God get the glory, and may you live in grace. Each one is important, and the gospel is spreading, ...God's people are in Caesar's household!**