

Philippians Small Group 3

4:10-23 – New Generosity

Resource: 'A Life worth Living' by Nicky Gumbel, Chapter 9

Timing: One hour, including worship, prayer and ministry

Materials: A large sheet of paper and a marker pen

Focus: Choose one or two sections that are most appropriate for your group

Welcome

Icebreaker: If you won the lottery this weekend, what would you do with the money and why?

Worship

If you can, show a film clip contrasting healthy and ruinous values about money (e.g. *Oceans 11*, *Ransom*, *Wall Street*, *Trading Places*, *Trapped*). Or read quotes from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, portraying the same thing. In a time of prayer focus on God's promises and provisions for us, and how trustworthy He is. Ask that the Holy Spirit will transform our views about money.

Word and Witness

Read out Philippians 4:10-23. We often shy away from talking about money and giving. But Paul doesn't – he's open about the issue and this amazing passage contains two famous promises (v.13 and v.19) as well as outlining a three-fold blessing of generous giving.

1. Give Generously and Bring Joy to Others (v.10-16)

Paul starts by thanking the Philippians for making him so happy (v.10). He then reveals his own attitude to money.

- Ask the group to look through v.10-16 and share their thoughts about Paul's attitude to money. Note down key words or phrases on a large sheet of paper. Ask probing questions to drill deeper into interesting insights, e.g. "Do you think Paul always felt that way? Was that a result of his religious background? How do we reconcile that attitude with his lifestyle and the needs of his itinerant ministry?"

On the one hand, in some ways Paul doesn't need money (v.11a). Why? In Romans 7:8 Paul reveals he used to covet and be envious of what others had. But now he has learned the secret of contentment (v.11-12). Paul has learned that contentment isn't in possessions, relationships, self-image or achievements. Not that there's anything wrong with these things, but these should not be the primary source of our contentment. Rather, he has learned that contentment is found in the transforming friendship of Jesus Christ (v.13). He has learned to live not on his outer resources, but on his inner resources.

On the other hand, Paul did need the money (v.14-16). He had been through troubles and had been in need. The Philippians have been partners with Paul – sharing in the hard times and the good, often sending him money. Their generosity has brought Paul and others great joy. The Greek word for "share" here is *koinonia*, meaning fellowship, communion or close, intimate relationship. It is used elsewhere to describe marriage. Within the church we should share together so that the entire burden doesn't fall on a few, and so that the needs of the less well of are met.

- The secret to contentment is therefore nurturing our friendship with Jesus Christ and sharing our resources (we are all rich in some areas) with others in the church. In what ways is our small group wealthy and what are we doing to share that with others?*

2. Give Generously and Receive Joy Yourself (v.17-18)

Paul not asking the Philippians for money, he's more concerned that they should be blessed. Paul uses banking, accounting and financial terms (v.15-18) to present giving as an investment of capital. Elsewhere he uses a farming metaphor (2 Corinthians 9:6). Giving is like planting seed – an investment for the future, where a harvest will be reaped in excess of what has been sown.

This spiritual principle applies to everything in our lives: the Lord multiplies whatever we give, whether it is our time, home, gifts, ambitions, or money. Our return will not necessarily be financial (although it may be), rather we are investing in people. Whatever return we experience in this life is a foretaste of the full harvest we will see in heaven.

- Ask whether anyone has personal testimonies where they have received an amazing return on the little (or much) they feel they gave, or “invested” into someone else's life.
- Find some different stories of others who have experienced an amazing return on their giving and read them out to each other (e.g. the story of Hudson Taylor is on p.107 of Nicky's book).

2. Give Generously and Bring Joy to God (v.18b-19)

Paul now uses Old Testament language of the temple to describe our giving. First, it is a “fragrant offering” (v.18), an act of beautiful, selfless love. Secondly, it is an “acceptable sacrifice” (v.18) in the sense that it costs, it's hard to give and goes against the grain. It also liberates us from the hold of money. It's not a sacrifice in the sense of earning our salvation – only Jesus is the sacrifice earning that. Thirdly, giving is “pleasing to God” (v.18).

- When we give money, what is our motivation, why do we do it? Why does giving please God?

Our giving should be regular and proportionate to our income (1 Corinthians 16:2). Many Christians believe it is right to give a tenth of our income, based on Matthew 23:23. But generosity is the only rule in the New Testament.

- How do we decide how much to give to whom? What different criteria does the group use? What practical steps can we take to ensure our giving is generous?*

Paul trusts God intimately that God will meet all their needs (v.19). God meets our material needs (although not necessarily our material *wants*) in abundance – what we are left with after giving proves more than sufficient to meet all our needs. Our needs are met “according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (v.19) – they're met in a manner that befits Christ Jesus. We cannot out-give God, and many find that God returns our giving in great and wonderful ways.

- “*We cannot out-give God*” - have you found this to be true? In what ways?

Our Generosity stems from God's generosity to us – Philippians begins and ends with grace (1:2; 4:23). “Grace” summarises the essence of Christianity: all the riches of God's undeserved love for us, made possible through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In closing his letter, Paul expresses three loves central to the Christian message: his love for God (v.20), his love for others (v.21-22), and God's love for us (v.23) – which enables us to love Him and to love others.

- Does the way we handle and invest our wealth reflect these truths? What adjustments do we need to make, or things we need to think through as a result of this bible study?*

Prayer and Ministry

- Pray for one another in those areas identified earlier, marked with an asterisk*
- Be sure to end on a positive note (2 Corinthians 9:7) so that people don't feel guilty or trapped in a new legal code! Pray that God would give us new courage to grow in faith in this important area of our lives. Thank him for his provision and the abundant joy he has already given us.