COATS BAPTIST CHURCH

THE PHILIPPIAN PARTNERSHIP // Philippians 4:14-20
Message from Pastor Neal Thornton

Paul wrote thirteen epistles that become books of the New Testament; four of these were written in prison, including the letter to the Philippians. Despite its origins in prison, the letter to the Philippians has been called the epistle of joy—Paul uses the word five times in the short letter. His joy is early on expressed in connection with the people of the Philippian church—he remembers them and prays for them with joy (Philippians 1:3-4). Paul clearly had a good relationship with this church, and the letter is sent to thank them for the love offering they have provided. The relationship between Paul and the Philippians is a model of partnering well with missionaries.

What are the marks of a healthy partner church in ministry?
1. Eager to share the burdens of ministry (v. 14).

Philippians 4:10 indicates that the Philippian church had previously wanted to bless Paul, but had not had the opportunity. Now they have had the opportunity and have taken advantage of it. We have to have partners. Anyone doing ministry has spiritual, physical, and emotional burdens. Paul makes clear that God is the one who meets his needs, but God meets needs through other people.

2. Willing to take the lead all alone (v. 15).

The Philippian church has partnered with Paul since "the beginning of the gospel," that is, since the church there was born when they received the gospel. They have supported Paul on at least three occasions, including after he left. Paul indicates that no other church supported him when he left Macedonia. Today, not all missionaries have a supporting local church. We don't need a bandwagon. We can take the lead in partnering with missionaries.

3. Committed on a continual basis (v. 16).

This was not a "one and done" situation. The Philippians took the long perspective, seeing themselves in a life-long partnership. This is the model for our church.

4. Seeking to reap a harvest from a spiritual investment (v. 17-18).

There is a transition from verse 16 to verse 17—we are moving from seeing how the Philippians see Paul, to seeing how Paul sees the Philippians. He sees that their continued support of him demonstrates their own spiritual fruit and growth. In a sense, Paul is seeking fruit for their credit. Supporting missionaries is a spiritual investment.

5. Careful to make their giving an act of worship (v. 18).

God moves among us to prompt our hearts to give, and he is worthy of our gifts. We are to give with a pure heart and motives. There is a difference between giving generously (when you didn't have to give, but you did anyway) and giving sacrificially (giving until it hurts). Healthy church partners give sacrificially.

6. Amazed to see how God has their back (v. 19).

Paul assures the Philippians that "my God will supply every need of yours"—an encouragement to give so much that you have to rely on God to meet your needs. Be faithful to God, and he will show how generous he will be to you.

The verse says that God will supply their needs "according to" his riches, not "out of" his riches. What's the difference? It implies that the gifts of God are proportional to his greatness and a reflection of who he is. In the same way that a chain hotel can supply a continental breakfast "according to their riches," a luxury hotel will offer an amazing buffet breakfast "according to *their* riches"—not just "out of" them, but in a way that reflects their status and mission. So God's gifts reflect who he is. No one can outgive God. As generous as the church is, Christ is even more generous.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are we eager to share the burdens faced by missionaries? How can we keep their spiritual, physical, and emotional needs in mind and find ways to supply them?
2. Do we make giving an act of worship? Why is it important to remember that our gifts are given to God?
3. How does it feel to realize that whatever needs we have, God will ultimately supply them? How can we thank God for his provision?