

# Total Unity

What happens when we give to God's Kingdom? Paul finished his letter to the Philippians with a description of six things that God does when we give. Comprehending all of these helps us to give with faith and joy.

## Philippians 4: 15-23

The Philippians had a long and unique partnership with Paul: although he refused to be dependent on them or demanding of them, they'd provided for him many times, allowing him to focus on preaching (cf. Acts 18:1-5, 2 Corinthians 11:8-9).

Our latest church financial report is full of encouraging news: we're a generous church and God is doing good things among us. As we look to expand (church planting, more ministries, increased staffing) we need our income to grow by £2,000 a month. But even if we had so much money we didn't know what to do with it, I would still want you to give because of what God does through giving:

### 1. The Kingdom advances (verse 18)

As Paul's time in Corinth showed, he was willing to preach whatever his circumstances, but when his needs were met he could do it all the time. People, facilities, and ministries all require money to make them happen. That's not the only thing they need, but it is part of what they need. However much you give, when you do you are helping the kingdom of God to advance in this way.

### 2. Relationships are strengthened (verses 14, 15, 17, 19 and 20, 21 and 22!)

This is a key point for Paul: their giving has been part of a deep association between him and them. They aren't giving to an abstract concept but to a person, and this makes giving personal. He says that they have a "*partnership*" and he uses a phrase, "*giving and receiving*," that was understood in Greco-Roman culture to mean friendship. If there's any sense of obligation here, the gospel destroys it: no-one can be superior to any other person at the foot of the cross. In any case, says Paul, even if he should ever feel indebted to them, "*I can't pay you back for this but I know Someone who will...*"

### 3. God provides (verse 19)

The Bible says that we're not to put God to the test – except when it comes to giving (Malachi 3:10 is explicit about this). Giving, like every act of faith, brings you into involvement with Him and helps you realise the “giving and receiving” nature of relationships. Mostly it's Him giving and us receiving but our giving is real and God responds to it.

We have to remember when we read of Paul promising that God will meet “*your every need*” that he was writing to them from prison – he had learned what it was to be content with whatever provision God chose to give him (verses 12-13, 1 Timothy 6:8).

### 4. Eternal rewards (verse 17)

Using a term that refers to compound interest being earned on an investment that will be claimed in the future, Paul is looking forward to eternity and how our giving will impact this. 1 Timothy 6:17-19 makes this clear, and this teaching comes straight from Jesus (Matthew 6:19-20). We might find the concept of eternal rewards uncomfortable, thinking that our giving should be selfless but God is happy to motivate us this way because again this is an issue of faith, when we endure loss or less in this life for a promise of more in the next. The exact nature of rewards may not be clear but the principle is: you can't take anything with you but you can send it ahead by giving.

### 5. God is worshiped (verse 18)

Paul is using Old Testament language when he talks about “*pleasing aromas*” and “*acceptable offerings*” (Genesis 8:21, Leviticus 1:9 et al.). By doing this he is saying to the Philippians that their giving isn't just to Paul but it is to God. You're not just paying for what the church is doing, you are saying to God, “*You are the best. I treasure You more than anything else I could use this money for.*” A lot of people make sacrifices for money, but God is inviting you to make sacrifices with money.

### 6. God is glorified (verse 20)

All that we've looked at is in Paul's mind as he finishes with a shout of praise to God! Everything comes from God and goes to Him, and yet He's chosen to involve us. We

who would by nature be selfish and short-sighted, enemies rather than co-labourers, are brought in to generous, Kingdom-investing worship. This is His greatness and His grace, we see it and celebrate it when we give.

## Questions

- How did the preach affect your thinking about giving to the church?
- Which of the six effects of giving that Luke mentioned most surprised you?
- Because money has such high value for most of us, giving is a very simple way to express faith. Has anyone in the group found giving to be especially faith-stirring? Could you share examples of this?
- How should we understand the promise, “My God will supply ever need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus”? (19) How does the context of the section (verses 10 to 20), and the whole letter and Paul’s circumstances help us with this?
- How can we keep ourselves aware of the riches of giving?

*Further reading: 'Money, Possessions, and Eternity,' by Randy Alcorn*