

John MacArthur said, *“Generosity is impossible apart from our love of God and of His people. But with such love, generosity not only is possible but inevitable.”* Have you ever thought about this? Giving generously takes faith because you have to trust that when you give away your money, God is going to make up for it by providing for you. Giving generously means that I have to trust God. If there is any area that Satan attacks, it’s our faith. It goes right back to the Garden when that old Snake cynically asked our first parents, “Did God actually say...?” He wants us to question God, whether He’ll take care of us: What if I give and some unexpected emergency comes up? What if I give and lose my job?

I heard of a fellow who was struggling with the idea of giving 10% of his income to his church. He told his pastor that he didn’t see how he could do it and keep up with his bills. The pastor replied, “If I promise to make up the difference in your bills if you should fall short, do you think you could try tithing for just one month?” After thinking about it for a moment, the man replied, “Sure, if you promise to make up any shortage, I guess I could try tithing for one month.” And then the pastor responded, “Now, what do you think of that? You say you’d be willing to put your trust in a mere man like myself, who possesses so little materially, but you couldn’t trust your Heavenly Father who owns the whole universe!”

Maxey Jarman, an internationally known Christian businessman, took a company from seventy-five employees to 75,000. His company, GENESCO, at one time, was the world’s largest apparel company. During his heyday, Maxey Jarman gave away millions. He built churches around the world and gave generously to all kinds of Christian causes. Then, he experienced financial reverses. He lost his company and most of his personal fortune. During the darkest days of his financial crunch, he was asked by a friend if he ever thought of the millions he’d given away over the years. Jarman answered, “Of course, I have. But remember, I didn’t lose a penny I gave away. I only lost what I kept.” That’s the paradox of the Christian life – what we give, we keep; what we let go of, we hold onto. When we’re willing to empty ourselves, we become full. No gift that we make to God ever leaves us poorer, instead it makes available to us the gifts and riches of God. The act of giving forces us to trust God and deepens our relationship with Him so we’re blessed in the act.

The book of Philippians is a thank-you note from the Apostle Paul to the church at Philippi. He’s writing to thank them for the gift they sent when they heard he was a prisoner in Rome. This morning we want to look at the final paragraph of his letter. It contains a direct statement about the gift he had received from them, Philippians 4:10-20 (p. 982). A careful study of Paul’s words reveal some wonderful truths about Christian giving. They demonstrate a consistent truth and promise that we find on page after page of the Bible, yet one we struggle to believe: **God will take care of you.** Since this passage is about Christian giving, that’s what this message is about. Instead though of being a sermon generated by a financial crisis, this is a sermon to a congregation that has proved itself generous. With that background, let us seek to hear what God is saying to us.

**1. We are to give where we are blessed.** This is the story of a church that cared. When Paul first visited Philippi some ten years earlier, he’d planted a church there

amidst enormous spiritual opposition. He and Silas ended up being beaten, arrested, thrown in jail, placed in chains, and then were miraculously delivered by a midnight earthquake. The next day they were escorted out of town by the authorities to avoid further disturbance (Acts 16:11-40 tells the story in vivid detail). Evidently, these new Christians never forgot what it cost Paul and Silas to bring the gospel to their city. When Paul traveled on to Thessalonica and later to Berea, Athens and Corinth, they sent him gifts time and again.

We know that Paul kept good records of their gifts because he uses accounting terminology when he mentions the matter of *“giving and receiving.”* In Paul’s mind, Christian ministry was a two-way street. He preached the gospel—which benefited those who heard the message. As the hearers supported him financially, he received a blessing from them.

This is an important principle of Christian giving: **We are to give where we are blessed.** You should give where you are blessed because when you do, you’ll receive a blessing.

That’s the background of Malachi 3:10, *“Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.”* You see, the temple in Jerusalem contains certain rooms where the grain given by the people, in payment of their tithes, was stored. The priests received an allotment of that grain—which freed them up to minister directly to the people. The poor were also given food from those same storage rooms. When the people of Israel failed to tithe, the priests weren’t paid and had to begin farming. This meant that the religious life of the nation was hindered and the poor were not cared for. Ironically, by failing to tithe, the Israelites were ultimately hurting themselves.

Giving where you’re blessed is an enormously important guideline to remember. Are you blessed by your church? Then, give there. Give where you’re blessed and you’ll receive a blessing. This is nothing more than what Jesus said in Luke 6:38, *“Give and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”* Sometimes I think we read that verse and fail to take it as literal truth. When Jesus said, “It will be given to you,” He based that promise on the reality of who God is. Our God is a generous, benevolent God who loves to give good things to His children. Because it’s in His nature to give, God will always give more to us than we’ll ever give to him. In a sense it’s the first law of Christian Giving: You can’t out-give God.

And in the end this is the great motivation for Christian giving. We give because we’ve received. God gives to us, then as we’re blessed, we give to others. As a result we receive a blessing...which causes us to keep on giving. While I believe that giving is a matter of obedience, it should never deteriorate to the level of guilt-ridden duty. God never intended for you to grumble and groan as you put money in the offering plate. God loves a cheerful giver—and rewards those who give because they want to. In the late 17th century, German preacher August H. Francke founded an orphanage to care for the homeless children of Halle. One day when Francke desperately needed funds to carry on his work, a destitute Christian widow came to his door begging for a ducat—a gold coin. Because of his financial situation, he politely but regretfully told her he couldn’t help her. Disheartened, the woman began to weep. Moved by her tears,

Francke asked her to wait while he went to his room to pray. After seeking God's guidance, he felt that the Holy Spirit wanted him to change his mind. So trusting the Lord to meet his own needs, he gave her the money. Two mornings later, he received a letter of thanks from the widow. She explained that because of his generosity she'd asked the Lord to shower the orphanage with gifts. That same day Pastor Francke received 12 ducats from a wealthy lady and 2 more from a friend in Sweden. He thought he'd been amply rewarded for helping the widow, but he was soon informed that the orphanage was to receive 500 gold pieces from the estate of Prince Lodewyk Van Wurtenburg. When he heard this, Francke wept in gratitude. In sacrificially providing for that needy widow, he'd been enriched, not impoverished.

My friend, make sure you get this principle: Give where you're blessed and you'll receive a blessing. Most of the time, it's much better than gold coins. It's rewards in heaven that you'll have forever. It's spiritual blessings where God works in your heart and produces spiritual fruit. And sometimes God blesses us monetarily as well.

**2. We are to be thankful for God's gifts, vss. 17-18.** *"Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God."* Now Paul reveals the greatness of his heart. He wants them to know that while he appreciates their gift, he wasn't depending on it. Because he'd learned the secret of contentment, he was willing to live with a little or with a lot. He'd done both and would do both again.

That's very different from many fund-raising letters. Many of them are crisis-oriented in a negative sense. "We're in trouble and we need your help to survive. If we don't hear from you in the next ten days (or two weeks, or whatever), we'll have to close our doors." While that may be true from a human point of view, it's not the approach that Paul took when he made his appeals. Some Christian organizations may serve the Kingdom best by going out of existence. I know that's a hard thing to say, but not every group or ministry necessarily needs to keep on going year after year. Some do, but others having served their purpose, would be better off closing their doors or merging with another ministry.

Paul was glad the Philippians gave because of what it did for them. Every gift was an investment in their heavenly bank account. Jesus mentioned the same thing when he talked about laying up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21).

Do you remember that Christian song, *Thank You*? It goes like this: *"I dreamed I went to heaven / And you were there with me / We walked upon the streets of gold / Beside the crystal sea. / We heard the angels singing / Then someone called your name. / We turned and saw a young man running / And he was smiling as he came. / And he said, 'Friend you may not know me now.' / And then he said, 'But wait, / You used to teach my Sunday School / When I was only eight. / And every week you would say a prayer / Before the class would start. / And one day when you said that prayer, / I asked Jesus in my heart.' / Thank you for giving to the Lord. / I am a life that was changed. / Thank you for giving to the Lord. / I am so glad you gave. / Then another man stood before you / And said, 'Remember the time / A missionary came to your church / And his pictures made you cry. / You didn't have much money, / But you gave it anyway. / Jesus took the gift you gave / And that's why I am here today.' / Thank you for giving to the Lord. / I am a life that was changed. / Thank you for giving to the Lord. / I am so glad you gave."*

That song was enormously popular because it vividly pictures an important truth. When we give to God's work; we're touching lives for eternity. We don't see it now, yet someday we'll stand before the Lord and see people in heaven because we gave.

That's what our giving does. When we invest in God's work, He keeps a record and He credits our account. He doesn't just keep track of what we give, but of the good that's done with our money and of the lives that are touched through our gifts.

Paul uses a beautiful picture to explain how God views our giving. It's like a fragrant offering, an aroma that reaches up to heaven, a sacrifice that pleases the Lord. There is a wonderful symmetry in all of this: When we give, God is pleased, lives are changed, and we're blessed. In management terms, generous giving is a win-win proposition.

**3. When we give we are rewarded,** vs. 19-20. *"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen."* Verse 19 contains a famous promise. James Montgomery Boice said that this may be the greatest promise in all the Bible because it contains within it every other promise. There are three parts to this promise:

**a. There is the source of the promise.** *"And my God."* This is an unusual expression because Paul could easily have said "And God will meet all your needs." But when he says *"my God"* he's making it exceedingly personal. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is *"my God."* The God who raised up Moses is *"my God."* The God who led Joshua around the walls of Jericho is *"my God."* The God who enabled David to defeat Goliath is *"my God."* The God of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and all of the prophets is *"my God."* The God of the Virgin Birth is *"my God."* The God who raised Jesus from the dead is *"my God."* The God of the Apostles is *"my God."* When Paul says *"my God,"* he wants us to remember that the same God who worked all the mighty miracles in the Bible is the same God who makes this amazing promise.

**b. There is the statement of the promise.** *"Will supply every need of yours."* The most important word is the little word *"every."* Whatever you truly need, God has promised to supply. Do you need forgiveness? God will abundantly pardon. Do you need more grace? His grace is sufficient for you. Do you need hope? He's the God of hope. Are you tired and about to give up? He said, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."* Are you confused about the future? In all your ways acknowledge him and He will direct your paths. Do you need a miracle? Nothing is impossible with God. Are you worried about what may happen? *Fear not, says the Lord, for I am with you always.* Do you need salvation? *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.* This promise is as comprehensive as the needs of your life and you may claim it at any time.

**c. There is the sufficiency of the promise.** *"according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."* This is God's way of saying, "You can always come back for a second helping. There's plenty more where that came from." Do you ever worry that you might be asking too much from the Lord? It is not possible to do that.

We're like children with a plastic pail trying to drain the Atlantic Ocean. After we've done our best, the ocean is still there, untouched by our efforts. And so it is with God. He'll supply what we need not according to our resources—which are limited and finite—but according to His riches in Christ—which are unlimited and infinite. In this promise we come to an ocean without a bottom or a shore.

While it's true that Philippians 4:19 is a promise that God will supply all our needs, that

doesn't mean our prayers will always be answered the way we'd like. Often we don't really know what we need.

In the early days of his ministry Dr. Harry Ironside went to preach for two weeks in Fresno, California. As was often his custom, he didn't ask for any financial guarantees but simply went on faith that God would supply. For some reason things didn't work out and in the middle of his meetings, he ran out of money. Hungry and broke, he was forced to leave his hotel room and put his bag in a drugstore until he found a place to stay. By his own testimony, he thought about the words of Philippians 4:19 and got angry with the Lord. "You promised to supply my needs. Why don't you do it?" That night as he rested under a tree in front of the courthouse, the Lord spoke to him about areas in his life that had become sloppy. He confessed his sins and asked God for the strength to make a new start. The very next day things began to turn around. People came to the meetings, friends invited him for meals, and he never again lacked a place to stay. When the meetings were finished, he went to the post office and was surprised to find a letter from his father. In the P.S. his father said that he had been meditating on Philippians 4:19, "And my God shall supply all your needs." He added these words, "The Lord has promised to give me whatever I need, and if I ever need a starving, I'm sure he'll give that to me too." The Lord spoke to Harry Ironside and said, "That was for you." In that moment he realized that his greatest need had been to go without food and a place to stay so that he'd turn his heart back to the Lord.

This is the true meaning of Philippians 4:19. It's not some blank check that guarantees an easy road or an answer to all our prayers. But it does guarantee that our God will supply whatever we need when we need it. Sometimes that means miracles and sometimes that means a visit to the desert. But whatever it is we truly need to make us what God intended us to be, He'll supply that for us...every time and all the time.

**Conclusion:** One final point and I am done. This verse has a very specific application in its immediate context. Sometimes we fear to give because we think we want have enough if we do. That's a legitimate concern, if we're running the show. After all, who can afford to give when you've got mortgage payments, school bills, credit card debt, alimony, child support, and the rest of the monthly expenses? The answer is, you can't if it depends on you. You'll never have enough money to give if you wait until you have enough money.

This verse is God's promise to generous givers. When you give to support God's work, He promises to meet your needs. You may not get rich by giving to support the Lord's work, but I'll bet you'll get rich quicker by giving it away than you will by hoarding your possessions and keeping it all to yourself. Howard Harvey puts it this way: "*God shovels it in, and I shovel it out. And he's got a bigger shovel than I do.*" Just remember that God pays off in many ways—and money is generally the least important of His many blessings.

So how should we apply this message? Two things come to mind. **First**, let us give because we have a great God. **Second**, let us pray to that great God in the confidence that He will meet our needs. If we give, we'll be blessed. If we pray, our needs will be met. If we dare to do what God has asked, He'll do for us more than we have dared to dream.

To give generously to the Lord's work requires that you believe that there really is a

heaven ahead. Since you plan to spend eternity there, you send your money over to the other side in advance, where it's earning interest in heaven's bank, awaiting your arrival. Jesus called it "*laying up treasures in heaven*"(Matt. 6:19).

It's like the story of a sailor who was shipwrecked on a South Sea island. He was seized by the natives who carried him to their village and set him on a crude throne. They treated him as royalty. Soon he learned that their custom was once each year to make a man king, king for a year.

He thought this was a pretty good deal until he started wondering what happened to all the former kings after their year was up. He found out that after the year, the king was banished to a deserted island where he starved to death. That worried him, but he was a smart king, so he put his carpenters to work making boats and his gardeners to work transplanting fruit trees and other crops to the island where he'd be banished. His carpenters built a nice home there. So when his year was over, he was banished, but not to a barren island, he was banished to an island of abundance. In the same way, if we really believe that this life is temporary and eternity is ahead, we'll wisely be sending our treasures over to that side by our giving, so we'll have something there waiting for our arrival.

***Building Changed Lives Together*** is an opportunity given to our church by God to invest not just in the here and now but in eternity. Will you do it? Will you trust God? Will you choose to invest in eternity and not just this dying, passing world? Building Changed Lives Together is trusting that when we give and trust God, we can trust that God will keep His promises and that **God will take care of you.**