

Christ-Centred Partnership

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[0 : 01] The scripture reading today comes from Philippians chapter 4, starting at verse 10. Please follow along on the screen or in your Bible. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.

Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

[1 : 18] I have received full payment and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epiproditus the gift you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

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. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Amen. Great. Thank you so much, Sherman.

Welcome again. My name is Chris, if you don't know me. I'm one of the pastors here at Watermark. What I'd love to do as we just get into God's word and before we get into God's word is just to pray for us this morning.

[2 : 26] So let me pray. Father, I thank you that you're a God of life, that you're a God who wants to bring us abundance of joy and of contentment and of satisfaction in you, which overflows to others, Lord.

Lord, I pray even this morning that you would speak to us wherever we're up to, Lord. Whether we're wrestling with decisions, as Kevin shared. Whether we are wrestling with discontentment in our own hearts.

Lord, I pray for us, Lord. I pray for those who are teachers and those who are students and those who are parents, Lord, who are going back to school. I did it last week, this week, or the coming week.

Lord, I pray that for them that there would be this real sense of you bringing protection, you bringing your blessing, but also you bringing a real deeper sense of joy in you through this process.

I pray that you would be at the center of all of that, Lord. I pray for our young people. I pray that they would find joy in you, even as they go back to school, that actually they would see that you are the one who places them in this place for your kingdom and your glory.

[3 : 38] So I pray for today that you would speak to us through your word in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay, great. So we've been looking at the book of Philippians, and we're coming to the last section of the book today.

And we're going to look at something about gospel partnership and what's the source of healthy partnerships and relationships. Partnerships are everywhere, whether it's in marriages, whether it's in community groups, whether it's in businesses.

All around, we are involved in relational partnerships with different people. But I think there is actually in society and in the world, there's a couple of different types of partnership and relationships that people enter into.

I call them egret partnerships and rhino partnerships. Okay. Now an egret, if you didn't know, is a bird. It is a white bird, which hangs around on the top of elephants.

And what it does, it feeds off the parasites and the insects on elephants. And it's really a win-win situation. It's kind of a consumer relationship because the egret gets food for itself and the elephant gets rid of its itch.

[4 : 54] It's like, you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours, literally. And so the problem with this kind of relationship, if for some reason the elephant has got no more insects on him, well, the elephant's feeling fine, but the egret begins to then go, hmm, get grumbling, complaining, this elephant ain't good, let me go and find another one.

That's egret relationships. They're consumer relationships. We're in it for what we can get out of it. But then there are male rhinos. Now rhinos, they are self-sufficient guys.

They can fend for themselves. They don't need other people. They're detached. They're distant. If they need a mate or need something, they'll come in, they'll get it, and then they'll head out and do their own thing again.

You know, they're the kind of people who when the going gets tough, the tough get going, and they're going to get going by themselves. You see, these kind of relationships, these partnerships characterize much of Hong Kong.

Much of what we think of as love is actually egret-style relationship. You know, you make me feel good. I'll make you feel good. We'll stay together as long as that's still the case.

[6 : 07] Otherwise, we'll look elsewhere. Or in marriage, you know, after a while, we enter into the kind of rhino style. You do your thing, and I'll do my thing. We'll live under the same roof together, but functionally, we live separate lives unless there's something we need at that moment.

But the book of Philippians has been showing us a different way of doing relationships and partnerships. It's Christ-centered partnership.

You see, what you've seen, the whole of Philippians, you're seeing this partnership between Paul and the Philippians, which is birthed in Jesus, sustained in Jesus, and whose goal is Jesus. You see, it flows out and is characterized by Christ's sacrificial, generous love.

It overflows in the whole of the book. Paul has said, I yearn for you guys with Christ's affection. I long for you. I love you. You're my joy. You're my crown. And he's poured his life and the gospel into this little church in Philippi.

And the Philippians, in return, they've sent financial gift after gift. They've sent key leaders like Epaphroditus at huge cost to themselves.

[7 : 20] And 2 Corinthians 8 tells us that actually they did all of this out of a condition of extreme poverty, not out of a sense of wealth and abundance to encourage and support Paul, even in his darkest moments and in his best times.

And right now, he's in prison. It's not a great time. It's not an egret relationship. It's not a rhino relationship. It's a Christ-centered relationship. And it could have been so different because Paul, stuck in this prison cell, lonely, hungry, dark, for a while, he gets no support from the Philippians.

And instead of grumpiness, he's rejoicing. He's rejoicing in Jesus. He's so satisfied in Jesus that when Epaphroditus shows up with a financial gift, he doesn't go, oh, it's about time.

Where have you guys been? Talk about a relationship. He goes, I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

And that word concern is the word that's been used at least 10 times in the book of Philippians for the word mind. And it's a word meaning you're thinking of me.

[8 : 33] You're caring for me. His rejoicing in Jesus is actually not that just his physical needs were just met right now. But he's rejoicing that when Epaphroditus came to him, it spoke to Paul that actually in Jesus, his grace has come.

You're still thinking of me. And so what I want us to look at is how do our relationships, how do our partnerships, how, whether it's in our marriages, our CGs, our friendships, our churches, how can we be characterized by that kind of non-entitled, non-detached, non-grumbling, generous, other-centered love?

And Paul is going to give us the secret to this. And I'm going to spend much of today looking at this one word, contentment.

So we're going to look at contentment, say how do we get there, and then we're going to look at a few implications and things that flow out, the fruit of contentment.

So let's just get going in chapter 4, verse 10 and 11. Paul says, You see, Paul is really keen, as he's writing to the Philippians, that they don't get the wrong idea about his situation.

[10 : 12] He's got needs, but he doesn't want to manipulate them or guilt trip them into giving more. And particularly when he's talking about money, he's trying to help them see he's not just making a subtle request for more money.

Instead, he says, I'm content, guys. And that word content was actually a very popular word used by a group of philosophers at the time called Stoics.

And what they thought the word contentment meant was rhino contentment, meant using your willpower, just keep calm, carry on, no matter what the storms of life are, push through by yourself, don't rely on anyone else.

You've got to be detached. And Paul is not saying that. He's saying, I'm not just, I have needs, but I'm not just needy. I'm not just self-sufficient. I'm Christ-sufficient. He says, in what a situation I am, I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.

You see, he's saying, even when you can't provide for me, I have one who continually sustains me. And that is Christ. Now, how can Paul find that contentment?

[11 : 21] Well, he's been telling us he's been pursuing knowing Christ and knowing this God in his life. The God who commands us to praise him is not a needy God.

He doesn't need our worship. He doesn't need us at all to kind of stroke his ego. He's all-sufficient. As the creator of the galaxies, he is rich beyond compare.

And yet he's not. He's all-sufficient, but he's not self-sufficient in some distant, detached way where he doesn't kind of care about us or need us.

Or just care about us in any way. Rather, he's a contented, joyful God. And out of the overflow of his contentment, in fact, Paul says in the book of Timothy, he says, he is the blessed God.

He's the happy God. He's the contented God. And out of the overflow of that, he's told us in Philippians 2 that out of joy and contentment in himself, God both created the world, but he also sent Jesus into the world.

[12 : 26] He came down into that J-curve of humbling himself, sacrificing himself to the point of death on a cross for us, so that we might be restored. But then he raised up again to life, and he's exalted at the highest place above all other names.

He's raised in power for us, seated in glory for us. And if he has loved us with that kind of sacrifice, and if he has that kind of power over even death itself, and if he has even that kind of authority over all things to command worship, then Paul in Romans will say, if God has given us Jesus, then how will he not graciously give us all things?

We don't have a stingy God. We don't have one who right in our current moment, we've got to wonder whether he's going to provide for us. Paul can say, no, I can trust this God that I know in any situation because I'm his beloved child.

I don't have to get grumpy and irritable right now because I rest in him. Sinclair Ferguson, who's a theologian, he said this, Christian contentment is the direct fruit of having no higher ambition than to belong to the Lord and to be totally at his disposal in the place he appoints at the time he chooses with a provision he is pleased to make.

What he's saying is this. He's saying contentment is founding knowing whose you are and trusting him with where you are. My son, Etienne, when he was born, came screaming out of the womb into this dizzying world of lights and sounds and smells.

[14 : 17] It's a scary place for a little kid. But doctors, they recommend that babies have what's called skin-to-skin time.

In other words, in a scary and insecure environment, what happens is you bring the baby to the mother, to the one who has given this little baby life, and it's there that that baby will discover the warmth, the safety, the protection, and the provision of his mother.

And it's there, at that place, that the crying stops and peace is found. His mother will provide for him. That is Christian contentment.

We want Christ more than anything. And Jesus doesn't want an egret relationship with us, where he's died for us, so we've just got to do our bit, pray, do enough things in return to make him happy with us.

He doesn't want a rhino relationship with us, where if we just come to him when we've got a problem, and the rest of the time we forget about him, do our own thing. No, Paul knows, he said, I can be content in Christ, because I have a relationship with him as his beloved child, knowing him is our highest ambition.

[15 : 41] We lay our lives in his hands, because he's a father who loves us, and will supply all of our needs. That's what Christian contentment is. That trusting that even Kevin talked about just now.

But how do we get there? How do we get to that place of trusting our Father, and that Christ will supply all that we need? Paul says this.

He says, I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to abound.

I know how to be brought low. I know how to abound in any and every circumstance. I've learned the secret. I've learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. You see, what he's saying is contentment is learnt. Did you notice that?

[16 : 39] He said, I've learnt it. You don't suddenly wake up one day content. You see, that word, when he says contentment has a secret. He says there's a secret to it.

And that word is actually a word that is used by the secret societies of Paul's time for the initiation ceremony that they would come into, into that little community. And what Paul is saying is, if you want to come into the school of contentment, you don't have to have some initiation ceremony.

The initiation ceremony is Christ, and the sustaining ceremony is Christ. And when he says, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, that's one of the most misunderstood phrases in all of the New Testament, I think, by Christians.

Because we often think, what he means by all things is, I can achieve anything. I can get that promotion. I can fulfill my dream. I can be a success in my life through Christ.

That's not what Paul is talking about. Because if you look back to verse 12, all things refers to this. He says, I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound in plenty or hunger.

[17 : 51] You see, how do we learn contentment? That school of contentment is in the humbling and in the abundance of all of life. You see, it's through classes of being brought low, just like Jesus was humbled.

Financially, you lost your job. Spiritually, you have your sin and your failure exposed to you. Socially, you experience criticism, rejection, even for your faith.

Physically, Paul was beaten. He was sick. He was stoned. He was shipwrecked. All of this was his school to learn contentment.

You know, when Etienne was born, and with that skin-to-skin time, he still didn't actually know how much we really loved him. You see, how is Etienne going to learn how much we love him?

Well, if you're parents of older kids, you know that they learn it through all of life. That actually, the sleepless nights where you're comforting your child, the times of taxing your child to every place under the sun, the struggling with homework and helping them come through it, later on, just all the relational issues that children have, or when they have their own family, or when they see other parents and they feel the pain of parenting, then they realize, I'd never realized just how much my parents loved me and sacrificed for me until this moment.

[19 : 25] You see, that's the same with God as he takes us through life. He's wanting it through all of the ups and downs of life to show us the depth of his love so that we can only learn that contentment as you go through life in him, trusting him.

You know, some of us, we think that if I can just get a job, then I'll be happy. Or you think, if I can just get my kids in school, if I can just get a boyfriend, I can just get out of COVID, then everything will be fine.

Then I'll be content. I think Paul would say, don't skip classes in the school of contentment. Don't wish your present away.

He's not saying you can't long for something different. He's not saying you can't have a desire that things will change. But no, in this moment, God wants to bring you contentment. You see, in Hong Kong, we live in a world of comparison.

We're always comparing to everybody else. We always want to be in a different class than we're in right now. But Christians, we didn't enroll in the school of envy.

[20 : 33] We enrolled in the school of contentment in Jesus. You see, graduates of the envy school have worry and fear. You know, it's a different education system.

Worry and fear tell you, look at your problems, you won't have enough. Envy tells you, look at what they have, you don't have enough.

The school of contentment says, look at Jesus, he is enough for you, today, right now, whatever you're going through.

So I don't know where you're up to. But Paul is not here talking about that holy discontent, you know, where you can actually want to be more like Jesus. That's good.

He's not talking about passivity, just kind of hanging back and just saying, oh, God will do it and I don't have to do anything. No, Paul's ambitious. But he's talking about resting in the sovereign God and trusting in his fatherly care for us that whatever circumstances he's brought you into right now, that he'll provide.

[21 : 45] You see, he says, I know how to be brought low. But he also says, and this is really interesting, he says, I've also learned how to face plenty and how to abound.

Did you notice that? I don't know if you would normally think about that, but Paul himself, he has experienced all the different things in life. He's experienced abounding with a full stomach and everything going well, and he's not living with a guilt trip of, oh, I should be suffering at this moment.

No, he's rejoicing. I've learned how to face it. Some Christians actually think we should just be living in a mud hut and poor, and that's the true sense of spirituality. Other people think you've got to be totally rich and blessed and everything, and that's spirituality.

And Paul's saying, I don't believe in either of those things as true spirituality. I can enjoy abundance, but with open hands. He says, I've learned contentment even in abundance.

You know, Spurgeon, the English preacher, he said this. He said, it is harder to know how to be full than it is to know how to be hungry.

[22 : 54] To know how to be hungry is a sharp lesson, but to know how to be full is the harder lesson after all. Do you know what he's saying?

He's saying, when you're full, when you've got your promotion, when your relationships are going great, everything's swimmingly moving on, you might thank God for that, but secretly we applaud ourselves in that.

Your contentment is often more with your comfort or more with your achievement or more of all the other things that you have, but not with Christ. And that self-sufficient, rhino-like attitude towards Jesus is devastating, because when later on in your life you may be brought low, your contentment will just be blown out of the water, because it was just dependent on the things that you had, not on Christ.

I think many of us, if I can be honest with us, many of us, we don't know how to be content when we're full. Many of us actually are abounding in a lot of different ways in this city, but we haven't learnt that actually Christ is enough for us and that today is a stay of the school of contentment.

You know, how can you be content today? Well, if you realise that you have to run to Jesus whatever your circumstances, if you are abounding, realise your abundance is not earned at all.

[24 : 27] It is undeserved gift. That's why Paul has said, like, think about all the good things, the great things, and see it as grace from God. That's showing you that God's heavenly bank account is far richer than you could possibly imagine.

He can provide abundantly more than you can ask or imagine. But hold that with surrendered open hands, because it's all on loan. It's yours to steward, it's not yours to own.

And God may bring you through times of need and lack and waiting for things, humbling times. Some of us are going through that right now.

But you know, that's the chance to find contentment, because in that suffering, he's showing you, you didn't need all the other things to be content. He is sufficient for you.

So that all the other gifts only point you to the giver. This is what Christ is trying to do. And if you're struggling today with contentment, because this is a fight, like we talked about fighting, rejoicing, fighting for joy last week, praying in all circumstances, bringing our requests to God.

[25 : 41] When we talked about letting our focus be on Christ in everything and doing it together, that's the wrestle that we've got to go through to fight, to find contentment.

And if you're struggling, look back on Christ's faithful love in your life and see where he has provided again and again. So if you're in need right now, you can have confidence.

Your God will supply all of your needs. That is contentment. Now why and how does that even connect with the idea of partnership and relationship?

partnership? Well, why does Paul talk about this? He talks about this because he wants to show us that when you're content in Jesus, when you're content in Jesus, when you're not grasping from others or just detached from others, you can then overflow that on his mission with sacrificial generosity and in gospel partnership with others.

So here's two things that it overflows. The first thing, there is an overflow of contentment in humble, generous partnership. Verse 14 to 16.

[26 : 59] It was kind of you to share, to fellowship, to partner in my trouble. And you Philippians know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership, fellowship with me in giving and receiving except you only.

Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again. You see, Paul, twice there, uses this word for fellowship, for partnership, which is the word *koinonia*.

And it's a word which means to have a common life together, to have a common goal together, to be focused on the same things together. together. And the friendship that these guys had grew out of a gospel contentment that led to partnering the gospel into giving and receiving.

You see, when Paul brought the gospel to the Philippians and Paul's life into them, the Philippians have responded not out of a kind of, oh, we have to give you back, but out of this, what 2 Corinthians 8 says was an abundance of joy and their extreme poverty, they overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

Do you get that? They had joy in Jesus' contentment, that overflowed in generosity. Contentment means that even if you feel like your reserves are running low in a relationship, you're not getting back where you want, your tank feels empty, your spouse isn't responding, your finances are tight, whatever, you can both have the resources in Christ to be able to keep loving and lavishly giving, but also you have the humility to accept help when you do have needs because you're not self-sufficient like a rhino.

[28 : 55] Now, we could play this out in marriages, we could play it out in community groups, in lots of different places. Let me make this a broader church level. The early church didn't believe in isolated congregations.

You see that in Philippians. Like, we don't need help from you, we're just building God's kingdom in our little area. No, they didn't think like that. They built these connections, these partnerships, they were a network of churches that mutually supported and encouraged one another in the mission of God wherever it led.

You know, I think sometimes, even when we think about mission, for example, mission trips, many people, I think we do mission trips like rhino style where we think we're the ones who are going to go and save the poor.

We're the ones who are going to rescue the needy in other places. And so we go as the heroes without having the humility to realize that actually partnership is not just one way, it's two way.

And we will learn through that. We need humility. But partnership, it's not just us helping others, it's not just others helping us, it's a costly sense of us contending Christ and pouring things out to people around us as we can and receiving in ways that are appropriate.

[30 : 19] One of the things in Watermark we want to do is partner with local churches, international churches, churches in Hong Kong and churches around Asia for the cause of the gospel going forth.

We cannot do the mission by ourselves. That means we need to be humble enough to receive people to help us and to walk alongside us.

This is one of the reasons why we had Pastor Paul from the local church come and preach to us. We've had Al Gibbs come and we've had other people who just walk alongside different people in the congregation. This is part of what pastoring is.

Today Oscar is preaching at Emmanuel English Church. What a great opportunity to pastor. We have our resound church here. network that we're part of with churches in places like India and Australia and Japan.

Our prayer is some of us might be able to go over and to support and encourage them just as they came over last year and many of them actually encouraged us. God's vision for kingdom ministry is global.

[31 : 21] It's not territorial. We want to give away our best people. We want to give away resources. We want to partner with people like Amelia in Taiwan so that we can actually be blessing and encouraging the work that's there.

Our prayer is that actually out of watermark more and more people will be able to send to the nations for the gospel. We even had a time last year when our budget was tight and we prayed, should we be giving more to missional justice partners?

God's saying yes, I will supply all of your needs and God has abundantly. Whether we are financially tight, whether we're struggling, we always want the generosity of the contentment of God to fill our hearts so that we're not just tight but we want to be lavish and humble to receive as well when we need.

See, the overflow of contentment leads to humble, generous partnership but also contentment leads is the final thing, to sacrificial worship.

You know, the whole of the book of Philippians is a call to be on mission, making our greatest ambition to know Christ, to follow him together, to become like him and to make him known.

[32 : 45] You know, Jesus who's the one who was brought low is also the one who is exalted and everyone in this universe that one day will bow the knee and will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

That is the heart. It's a call for each one of us because that is true, that we are willing to follow and imitate that J-curve life of suffering which leads to resurrection glory, of humbling which leads to life, of the way down being the way up, and this joy in Christ flows out as worship and praise to him because he alone deserves it.

You see, right at the end of this book, Paul says that the Philippians, your love and your generosity was a fragrant gift, acceptable and pleasing to God.

That's worship language he's using. And then he said, right at the end, it is all for the glory of God the Father who provides in so many ways.

John Piper says God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. But I also think when we are most satisfied in him, we will also sacrifice the most for him on his mission because we know that he will provide abundantly for us.

[34 : 10] I had seven friends. Some of them graduated with me in the UK, all single, working men and women.

And they felt God calling them to the Shamshay Pole of the city we were living in at the time. They were all working in different areas. They weren't working with the church. But they went to this place, this estate, where there was about 30,000 to 50,000 people who had no gospel witness.

And they moved on to the estate and they took years of just this slow, painful process of getting to know the neighbors, of hosting barbecues, of trying to love the people.

They ran pub quizzes. They did anything to reach out to the neighborhood so that people could experience the love of Christ through them and the gospel. But they also made this commitment.

They said if anyone actually wants to date us, you've also got to be willing to get on the mission that we're on. And so we want, like, we're willing to sacrifice whatever it takes because God has called us.

[35 : 23] You know, 15 years on, many of them are in their kind of 40s now. Some of them are married. Some of them are still single. And people have said to them, listen guys, you are just crazy for giving up those opportunities to have children, to have family because of this mission.

That's ridiculous. Others have said, hey, you've sacrificed career opportunities. That's stupid. Just to go on to this rough council estate where you're not getting a ton of great things back from these people.

But if you would actually go and talk to them, if you were going to meet them, you wouldn't find bitter, angry, resentful, regretful people, you would find this community that radiates this joy in Jesus.

You would find these people who would say, we've walked through life and we've seen by our experience, we've learned that contentment is found not in having the one as your partner, not in finding the greatest career or anything else.

It's found in Jesus and being with him on his mission that people might come to praise him who is the Lord of all. Because you see, they're ordinary messy people, but their whole lives are a picture of worship, that Jesus is worth it.

[36 : 51] So is Jesus enough for us? God may not call you, he may call some of us to that. Right now, there may be some people that actually that's what God is placing on your heart right now.

a call for a mission in a way that you're going to have to sacrifice greatly. Some of us, many of us, that's not going to be the call in that kind of way, but actually the call is always that we would find our contentment so much in Christ that we would be these people who are partnering with overflowing, generous, humble, sacrificial worship to the one seated on the throne.

let me pray for us. Thank you, Father, that you say that my God will supply all our needs as we walk with you, all of our needs, not just our wants, but everything we need for true contentment.

According to your riches, you are abundantly wealthy. Father, I pray that we would not be those who live with a poverty mindset, those who live with an egret-like neediness, codependency.

Lord, I pray we would not be those who live with a self-sufficiency, but we'd see that wherever we are right now, you are sufficient for us. Give us that rest.

[38 : 30] Give us that peace. Even in the struggle, even in the challenges, we'd be of a community that is the most content community in the whole of Hong Kong, I pray. In Jesus' name.

Amen.