

SEEK TO GIVE MORE THAN TO TAKE!

Today's Text: Phil. 4: 10-19

Extracts:

Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, *no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus* [Phil. 4: 15-19]

*In Charles Dickens' famous novel, **Oliver Twist**, published in February 1837, a nine-year old orphan called Oliver Twist found himself in an orphanage with other poorly fed children.¹ Their rations were so poor that the children "washed" their plates with their mouths. One day, they decided to ask for more food. However, they were not bold enough to do so. They then decided to cast lots and whoever the lot would fall on should ask for more on everybody's behalf. It fell on Oliver. On the fateful day, after Mr. Bumble, the catering officer, had served them their meagre ration, timid Oliver said from behind, "Please, Sir, I want some more!" In wonderment, Mr. Bumble turned back and asked, "What did you say?" Oliver repeated his request. Before he knew it, Mr. Bumble's serving ladle landed on his head! Today, someone who is never satisfied and always asks for more is called an Oliver Twist.*

In our homes, schools, offices or places of worship, we may come across so many Oliver Twists. They are ever asking and receiving but never giving. We may even be among them! Yet the word of God says that it is more blessed to give than to receive [Acts 20: 35]. In today's Bible verses, Paul commended the Philippian church for its members' classic generosity. He invoked the now famous prayer, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" [Phil. 4: 19]. Can you seek to give more than take? Let us find out from today's study.

¹ Story is based on the following sources: "Oliver Twist," From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver_Twist ; "Oliver asks for more- from the novel by Charles Dickens- Excerpts from Chapter 2," <http://www.penguinreaders.com/pdf/downloads/par/sample-pages/oliver-twist.pdf> ; and "Oliver Twist," *Urban Dictionary*, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Oliver+Twist>

1. Background: Giving is a fruit not a gift!

King Solomon, the successor to King David, was said to surpass “all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom.” He was so rich that he made silver “as common in Jerusalem as stones.” In fact, all his drinking vessels were gold and not one was silver [1 Kgs 10: 21, 23, 27]. By all our definitions of material sufficiency, a man like that should need nothing from the rest of us. Beggars in every guise will mill around him to benefit from his largesse. But the Queen of Sheba did not do that. She had heard of Solomon’s fame and she came to test him with hard questions. She did not come empty-handed. She brought King Solomon “one hundred and twenty talents of gold, spices in great quantity, and precious stones. There never again came such abundance of spices as the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon” [vv. 1-10]. In appreciation/response, Solomon gave her “all she desired, *whatever she asked*, besides what Solomon had given her according to the royal generosity” [v. 13]. In other words, she got more than she had bargained for!

God is richer than Solomon because the earth and all its fullness are His; the world and they that dwell in it [Ps. 24: 1]. If He were hungry, He would not tell us because He owns everything and He does not eat the flesh of bulls nor drink the blood of goats. All He requires is that we *offer Him thanksgiving and pay our vows to the Most High*. Then, when we call upon Him in the day of trouble, He will deliver us and we shall glorify Him [Ps. 50: 12-15].

The attitude of a typical congregation in our modern churches is defined by an entitlement mentality. Everybody wants to take but nobody wants to give. The church is full; people want others to pray for them for healing or jobs or prosperity. When it comes to offerings and tithes, most people “exempt” themselves! In fact, the most popular congregations are where a few rich people worship and the rest come there to be in a vantage position to receive favours from them. But commonsense should tell us *that beggars are always asking and receiving but they never quit begging!* Is it not better to give more than to ask? This is where Paul’s letter to the Philippians becomes an appropriate response to that question.

Paul was most appreciative of the giving spirit of that church which we can summarise as follows:

- a) *The Philippians were always seeking opportunity to give*

Paul wrote, “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity” [Phil. 4: 10]. In other words, the worshippers in the Philippian church were always seeking opportunity to give. Their only constraint was lack of opportunity to give.

Paul was not a beggar. He was content in whatever state he found himself. He had known how to be abased and how to abound; how to be full and how to be hungry; how to abound and how to suffer need. But his sufficiency was through Christ who strengthened him [vv. 11-12]. So, he was well placed to appreciate the giving attitude of the Philippians.

Such a giving attitude can be traced to the voluntary sharing among believers in Jerusalem soon after Pentecost Sunday. We are told, “Now the multitude of those who believed were of *one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own*, but they had all things in common ... and they distributed to each as anyone had need” [Acts 4: 32,35]. Barnabas, who later became Paul’s travelling companion even sold his land and laid all the proceeds at the apostles’ feet [vv. 36-37].

b) *They even shared in Paul’s distress!*

Paul wrote, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Nevertheless you have done well that you have shared in my distress” [Phil. 4: 13-14]. Giving is more than material. The Philippians cared about the dangers that Paul faced in his missionary journeys. They prayed for him as he faced persecution, hunger and thirst and other hardships that Paul has well documented elsewhere [2 Cor. 11:23-29]. How many of us can rejoice with those who rejoice as well as weep with those who weep [Rom. 12; 15]? How many of us throw money at other people’s problems that may require simple advice and guidance? It takes caring and thoughtfulness to be able to share in other people’s distress. The Philippians were good at it in their relationship with Paul.

c) *Their giving had no territorial boundary*

Paul wrote, “Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities” [Phil. 4: 15-16]. In other words, their giving knew no territorial boundary. They gave at home and abroad. They gave as hosts and as guests! What a remarkable group of godly people the Philippians were!

d) *Therefore, giving is a fruit, not a gift*

Even so, Paul was more concerned about the motive(s) for their giving when he wrote, “Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account” [v. 17]. Giving is a gift if it is a natural talent like intelligence or singing, etc. If that were the case, only a few of us would

be able to give because they had the natural talent to do so! But giving can be learned until it bears fruits as in the case of the Philippian generosity.

From the foregoing, we learn that seeking to give more than to take has spiritual implications that we must underline. Some of them are covered here.

2. Implications for the modern believer

Here are a few things that modern believers need to learn from the Philippian story:

a) *Your attitude matters*

It is not everyone who gives that is a giver, just as it is not everyone who can drive that is called a driver. Your motive matters. For example,

- Some givers are mere *Ali Babas*. You know the story of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves² from *Tales from the Arabian Nights*. He stumbled on the secret of accessing the hidden wealth of robbers. He stole it and used it to enrich himself and his family members. There are many people who have lavished wealth from dubious sources on their family members and descendants and close associates. They may be able to give quite freely but the motive is dubious. They are ***giving away what they do not own!***
- Some givers are *Robin Hoods*. Robin Hood was a heroic outlaw in English folklore.³ He would raid the estates of the rich and give his loot away to the poor. That made him very popular and, therefore, a wanted criminal that could not be caught! African politicians, for example, allegedly steal from government and give generously to the poor in their constituencies. The people who benefit from their loot praise and protect them when such thieves are wanted by the police. Such is not the giving Paul is talking about. ***You cannot give away what belongs to others without their consent!***
- Some give to clear their *garbage cans*. Look at your wardrobes, shoe racks and food stores. There are items you no longer use or need. So, when you give them away so as to make room for the latest supplies, you are actually not generous. You are only looking for garbage cans to get rid of unwanted stuff! ***To give away what you do not need is not giving!***
- Some give what they value and also need for themselves. That is ***sacrificial*** giving. The Good Samaritan is a good illustration of this. When he set on his journey, he did not expect to see a dying

² <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/alibaba.html>

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robin_Hood

man on the way. Yet, he used of the money he had kept for his journey to take the wounded man to the hospital and pay down part of the bills [Lk 10: 33-35].

Of the above examples, *only sacrificial giving qualifies for the giving that Paul has talked about*. Therefore, *that time or money or other things that you give to others should be what you value and need for yourself*. Recall, for example, when David needed Aruanah's threshing floor on which to build an altar to the LORD. The owner offered it free of charge to the king. But David refused, saying, "I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing" [2 Sam. 24: 18-24].

b) *Giving creates more room for receiving*

When you give away what you need for yourself, you are actually creating room to receive. Take the example of the notable Shunammite woman who was childless and her husband was getting too old. Elisha once passed through her city, Shunem, and she persuaded him to eat some food. She did that quite often. One day, she persuaded her husband to build the prophet a small upper room in their home where he could pass the night each time he passed through their place. In appreciation, the prophet prayed to God and told her to expect a son the following year. She conceived and bore a son [2 Kgs 4: 8-17]. She gave away her wealth and convenience and received what she had wanted all along- a son.

Learn to give more than take. Is it not interesting that *rich people use current (checking) accounts and credit cards while poor people use savings accounts and debit cards*? Jesus taught His disciples, "Give and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you" [Lk 6: 38].

c) *Giving can be learned!*

Giving is a fruit, not a gift. That is what today's Bible verses have taught us where Paul described the gifts sent him through Epaphroditus as "a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God" [Phil. 4: 18]. Therefore, we all can learn to give until we can do so sacrificially and *compulsively*.

d) *Your reward is from God*

In acknowledging his appreciation of the gifts from the Philippians, Paul prayed for them, saying, "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" [v.19]. This is a most

misinterpreted verse in the Scriptures! “All your need” is not the same thing as “all your needs.” In the context of Paul’s prayer, he was asking God to reward the Philippians for their sacrificial giving. He was praying God to supply ALL that the Philippians needed to be able to continue to give sacrificially.

Take the example of Ebed-Melech, the Ethiopian eunuch in the service of King Zedekiah in the time of the fearless prophet, Jeremiah. Following the conspiracy of the princes, the king consented for Jeremiah to be thrown into a dungeon for prophesying doom against Judah. But Ebed-Melech went boldly to the king to obtain his approval for him to bring Jeremiah out of the mire [**Jer. 38: 1-13**]. For risking his life to save Jeremiah, God sent word through the prophet to Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian that, on the day He would bring adversity on Judah, He would not allow him to be killed and added, “Your life shall be as a prize to you because you have put your trust in Me” [**Jer. 39: 15-18**]. Therefore, giving is a two-sided coin: *the more you give, the more you receive*. You are indeed lending to God when you give to the needy and He will repay you [**cf: Prov. 19: 17**].

The Philippians were an embodiment of sacrificial givers, that is, those who give away what they need for themselves. They gave and enjoyed doing it. They were blessed because God rewarded them and enabled them to give more and more until their giving bore fruits in the lives and work of missionaries, such as Paul. That should be your attitude too. That is Paul’s message to the body of Christ today.

3. Conclusion: God has given His all for you!

Solomon gave to the Queen of Sheba in response to her giving. But God gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die for all of mankind while we were yet sinners. He did it out of His love for us [**Jn 3: 16**]. Jesus died for all “that *those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again*” [**2 Cor. 5: 15**]. Jesus told His disciples, “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father, I have made known to you” [**Jn 15: 14-15**].

Jesus has said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” [**Acts 20: 35**]. Have you reached others with His gospel of salvation or you have merely received it and cornered it for yourself? *Are you a mere church-goer, going to collect prayers and make business contacts or working in one of the five-fold ministries- apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors or teachers* [**Eph. 4: 11**]? *Time is running out- and it is time for you to get off those padded pews and chairs to make a difference in the lives of the needy.*

Seek to give more than to take.