

CHOOSING GENEROSITY:  
**Enough, Plenty and More**

Philippians 4:10-20

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November 23, 2014

Audio: [www.buzzsprout.com/admin/episodes/223138](http://www.buzzsprout.com/admin/episodes/223138)

Here are our framing questions. ***How does choosing generosity help us distinguish between enough and more than enough? How does choosing generosity help us get to contentment and gratitude?*** The place to begin is to try to pry ourselves out of our own worldview long enough to look down on our culture and see what ravenous consumers we have become. In the movie "The Descendants," there is a powerful statement made by Matthew King (the character played by George Clooney). He says that the trick in life is to give your children enough money to do something but not enough to do nothing. A balance between poverty and too much, much like the Apostle Paul stated in our text. As the holidays approach, let's face the truth, our culture is awash in anything but contentment with what we have!

CONTENTMENT AND GENEROSITY COME WHEN GOD PATCHES THE HOLE IN OUR HEARTS. Do you remember the story of Zaccheus in Luke 19? He was a tax gatherer who was allowed to gouge people financially, so long as the Roman government got their assessed amount. His deepest problem was a broken relationship with God. Until that problem was fixed, enough would never be enough, no amount of money could fix the hole in his heart [I am indebted to Rhodes Thompson for this insight, *Stewards Shaped By Grace*, pp. 116ff].

Zaccheus was rich and had a hole in his heart. But poor people can also have holes in their hearts. Listen to these words by Shane Claiborne: ***Some of us have worked on Wall Street, and some of us have slept on Wall Street. We are a community of struggle. Some of us are rich people trying to escape our loneliness. Some of us are poor folks trying to escape the cold. Some of us are addicted to drugs and others are addicted to money. We are broken people who need each other and God...*** [cited in McLaren, p. 327].

As you probably guessed, one of the most important words IS "content" or contentment (v. 11). This was a famous Greek concept in Paul's day, championed by the Stoics. But it was an idea of self-sufficiency. Paul commandeered the word and took it over for Christ and talked about God-sufficiency. Listen carefully to vv. 12-13. One translation of v. 13 reads, "I am strong in Christ who empowers me." So the key for Paul is to allow God to patch that hole in our hearts. Then enough can be enough.

CONTENTMENT GENEROSITY COME WHEN OUR GIVING IS DONE SACRMENTALLY. When I pastored in St. Joseph, a little boy once asked his mother, "Mommy, what do they do with that money after we put it in the plate?" She replied, "Well, it goes to God." He snapped back, "No it doesn't. I've seen them. They take it downstairs and they count it!" Well, they were both right! Something mysterious happens. It becomes God's and it is holy.

As he sits in a Roman prison, Paul talks very mysteriously and humbly about being on the receiving end of some financial gifts from the Philippians. Read v. 18 and note the sacramental (worship) language. "A fragrant offering...a sacrifice pleasing to God..." Altars have always figured prominently in God's plan. The Cross became an altar where Jesus poured out his life in the ultimate giving. And when Paul got ready to talk about what a mighty and spiritual thing it is when people give themselves and money, he uses altar language. Every time you write a check, drop in a dollar or set up automated giving, you're giving a part of yourself. That's holy! That's us crawling up on the altar.

When we launched our new Praise and Worship service two years ago, I insisted that we pass the plate, that we "take the offering" vs. just put a box at the back of the church. That part of the service IS worship. Paul says so. It is a fragrant offering. This is why we call it an offering and not a collection. I have a pastor friend who says, "Collections are what the IRS does; offerings are what the church does."

When the deacons pass the plate, we are not embarrassed or apologetic; this is a holy time. And sitting in the pews, we reverently pass the plate to others. That shows that we are all part of the family. Even if I put nothing in, because I can't, or I do so electronically, or this isn't my week to give, I worship. I think about all God has given me. I think about all the good this offering will do. And I thank God for the privilege of giving.

A man once said to his pastor, "I've got some extra money to give. What would the church do with it?" The pastor got back to him later and said they would fix up all the women's restrooms, really fancy. So, the man gave \$1000 for the project...and gave the other \$99,000 to another ministry that had a vision large enough to put his gift to work for something Kingdom-sized, God-sized. What an interesting thing, that when Paul got ready to talk about giving, he didn't use accountant language or commerce language. He used worship language. A sweet aroma, a meaningful sacrifice. Because we're doing God-sized things. Because we're doing eternal business.