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# How's that Again?

Some thoughts on  
God's goodness...



# “How’s That Again?”

By Dr. Robert A. Cook



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It was going to be a bleak Christmas for a certain family who lived years ago in a small California town. Reorganization had cost the father his steady job. Food supplies were dwindling, though not completely exhausted.

Then some compassionate neighbors decided to do something—to take the makings of a Christmas dinner to their friend.

From a front window, a little nine-year-old watched the happy people as they came with huge packages in their arms. The parents, overjoyed and grateful, paid little attention to the child. The mother found her later in her room, crying.

“Darling, whatever is the matter?” she asked.

“O Mamma,” the child replied, “isn’t it terrible? We’re poor.”

Of course, the child missed the point entirely—the meaning of the gracious gesture on the part of the family’s friends. They had come sharing ... loving ... giving. But the little one saw none of these things.

## **We, Too, Often Miss The Point**

We are like Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration. We see a desirable building site, and miss the wonder of God’s glory.

We are like the Emmaus travelers—occupied with our sorrow when the big news is “Christ is alive. Christ is with us.”

Usually it takes us quite a while to wake up to the fact that some tenaciously held idea can actually cut us off from tremendous personal benefit. We read the Word all right, but we often miss the point in its application.

I think this was the case with a certain lady, well known for her violent dislike of “junk mail.”

“I especially hate church beggars,” she would say. “‘Give more! Give more!’— That’s all they harp on. The Lord knows I do what I can, and then I want to be left alone.”

Well, this dear Christian sister is now at home with the Lord. Maybe on arriving there she had a conversation with the Apostle Paul. If she did, I’m sure he set her straight on the purpose of Christian giving—and she “got the point.”

These dear friends in Philippi had already outdone themselves in the matter of generosity, contributing, Paul says, “once and again to my necessity.” But he may have feared they had forgotten the purpose of that giving, so he told them:

*(It is) not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account (Phil. 4:17).*

Oh, yes, Paul was grateful for the gifts sent to him. He could use the money, certainly. He would delight in the food that Epaphroditus brought. Maybe some sister baked him a fruit cake and sent along some parched grain or dried meat or whatever produce could travel in those days. Maybe there was a blanket that could cover his shivering bones in the chill dampness of a dungeon. Yes, he could use these things.

But I think the truth he was trying to get across was this: “I don’t need to have an offering from you people in Philippi. That’s not the point. I want YOU to be blessed.”

God is not impoverished. He will not be bankrupt if we fail to put a dollar in the collection plate. The silver and gold are His and “the cattle on a thousand hills.”

Here is a divine principle that we have neglected too often in our preaching: We give, not only because there is a need, but because the very act of giving does something profoundly wonderful to us. In other words, when I give to God’s work, when I help God’s people, when I encourage God’s ministers, all this becomes seed that will bear a rich harvest in my own life.

Let’s make Phillipians 4 personal, each for himself or herself.

## **God’s Great Plan—For Me**

God desires that we, His children, shall bear abundance of fruit in our lives. Unlike natural trees, we not only can but should bear different kinds of fruit at the same time.

**...The fruit of the Spirit is character.** We are to demonstrate in our lives “*love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*” (Gal. 5:22, 23).

**...The fruit of the believer in Christ is more Christians.** “*Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples*” (John 15:8).

**... The fruit of giving is (or should be) worship.** And worship means oneness with God in His purposes. When I bow my head and pray, “O God, give blessing and usefulness to this gift that I offer to You in Jesus’ name,” I am actually in the mainstream of what God is doing!

Isn't that a tremendous concept? Teach it to your children. Practice it in your own life.

Did you know it is possible for you to go through the form of worship without having it do anything for you? Millions do. They go to temples, cathedrals, synagogues, churches, whatever it may be, and they go through certain forms—but all this does not affect them personally the least bit. But when giving to God is a part of true worship, the giver is changed and blessed!

## **Bear Fruit**

It was my privilege to work with Youth for Christ in various capacities for some fourteen years. At one time it was my responsibility to go around to various cities and towns and see the young fellows who served as directors of the work in their areas.

Often I would discover that there were certain "financial difficulties" of quite large proportions.

On one occasion I visited a Western city where there was a real problem. There were, I suppose, fifteen or twenty businessmen—members of the board—who were gathered to discuss the deficit they had to meet. The budget had been drastically cut, but the bills still had to be paid.

"Well, let's pray," somebody said. I believe in prayer. So we prayed, right around that circle,  
"O Lord, meet the need!"

When we got up from our knees and looked at each other, we were wondering, "What are we going to do next?"

At that point, God gave me an idea. It was very bold, but it worked.

"Fellows," I said, "there is enough money in this room right now to pay that deficit, with a sizable amount left over. Let's do it."

There was a long moment of silence. Then one man got up and said, "I'll pledge \$1,000."

Another said, "I'll give \$500."

Somebody else said, "I can't give that much, but I'll give \$100." And so on.

In just a few moments those men who had prayed became, themselves, God's means of meeting the need.

And oh, the blessing! Man, we sang the Doxology in that room, I can tell you! Oh, the closeness to each other, the joy we felt! Why? Because when we give we make our praying meaningful, and God's work through us becomes effective.

If we want this special kind of bubbling-over joy, we should heed the advice of the beloved hymn writer, Fanny Crosby:

*To the work! to the work!  
We are servants of God;  
Let us follow the path that our Master has trod:  
With the balm of His counsel our strength to renew,  
Let us do with our might what our hands find to do.*

I think we should remember, too, that because somebody gave, you and I were enabled to hear the gospel. Without that, we would know nothing of God's saving grace. And we have come along in that blessed succession of givers. Perhaps we gave out of our need, out of our poverty, out of our concern as to where the means were coming from. And then the wonder of transmutation occurred:

## **Money changed into miracle in God's hands.**

If this has been your experience, then you know how the Apostle Paul felt when he said (in effect):

"I don't need anything, except to see you happy and fruitful. For myself, I have learned that I can be broke, or I can be rich. I can be full or I can be hungry. I can be honored or I can be stepped on and spit upon. Whatever God asks me to do, I can do it because Jesus is strengthening me. No, I don't have to have help from you. But I do want fruit that abounds to your account. That's what I want. I want you to be blessed."

He might have added, "That's God's great plan for me and for every Christian." But there is more.

## **God's Boundless Supply—For Me**

*"But my God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus"*  
(Phil. 4:19).

This is a familiar verse. You've quoted it often. No doubt many of my precious friends have prayed with their finger on these words, "Lord, remember that this is Your promise. Fulfill it to me." I've done that many times.

And yet it is sadly possible that we may have missed the point so far as the deepest meaning of this portion is concerned.

Note the component parts: *my God ... your need ... His riches ... Christ Jesus.*

Paul puts these three things in apposition; they are parallel in importance. First, his personal awareness of God. Second, his deep empathy with the need of another. And third, his perfect confidence in God's ability to supply the need. This combination will make you a blessing wherever you go. Let us look at these parts separately.

**... First, awareness of God.** As the American Express Company says about its credit card, "Don't leave home without it." Don't step outside the door without knowing that God is walking in your shoes, that you have committed yourself irrevocably, absolutely to Him, not only for all time but also particularly for that day, so that you can say, "My God is leading."

**... Next, compassion—empathy—for the other fellow.** We spend far too little time in acquainting ourselves with others' needs. We get busy with our own interests and they fill our whole horizon.

One of President Roosevelt's biographers relates this incident. In a moment of mischief, with scores and maybe hundreds of people passing in a receiving line, the President decided to insert some nonsense into his remarks with people when they came up nervously to shake his hand.

So as one person approached him, he took that person's hand warmly and said, "I just murdered my mother-in-law," and the person said, "How nice," and went on.

Well, there might be an element of truth in that story. Certainly there are some people who have no real understanding of what another is saying.

I was complaining to a friend of mine about what I thought were my troubles.

When I paused for breath he said, "You know, it's wonderful how you understand what I'm going through."

He hadn't heard a word I said. We're all consumed and concerned with our own selves, aren't we? But the Christian way is to be aware of how the other person feels and what he needs.

Would you try to live one whole day, my friend, making an effort to be aware of another's needs? Some people need to be noticed. They think nobody knows they are around and they are right. Others need to be considered as human beings of value. People pass them by as though they were in the woodwork. Still others need to be encouraged. And some need to be helped physically with food, employment and so on. Some need loving ... or correcting ... or coaching ... or the injection of a new idea into their thought stream.

Look at people in terms of what they really need (and God will need to give you enlightenment here), then whisper a prayer, "Lord, work through me for this person's good."

Don't make a federal case of it. Your fellow humans will stay away from you by the hundreds if you do that. Empathize. See life from the other person's perspective. Remember, it's not what you say that matters. It's what your listener thinks you say that counts. It's not what you feel that matters. It's the deep inner hurt of the other person that must be probed for. It's not what you want, but what is the desire of the other person—perhaps not even known by him. All these principles are embodied in Paul's tender expression, "Your need."

... Finally, God's perfect supply. "*His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*" The measure of God's supply is not my need, but His abundance. Isn't that great!

*"It shall be given unto you," Jesus said, "pressed down, shaken together, running over;"*

Pray toward the solution, not the problem. Pray toward the supply, God's rich provision, not your small estimate of what you want. Don't settle for a dime's worth when you could get a million dollars' worth of blessing.

Look again at the principle of the divine triangle:

**My God ... your need ... His riches.**

Awareness of God ... human empathy ... divine supply.

We need not "miss the point" of God's goodness—though many of us do. We need to ask Him to show us daily the immensity of His gracious plan for us: "*My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*"

