

Grace Soaked Soul

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God Delights in Using All Things

10 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. 11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 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. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

14 Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 15 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. 16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. 18 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. 19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.
(Philippians 4)

Amen.

What more can be said? I have not faced hunger and I have not been brought to the very bottom but I share these verses not because my circumstances are similar to Paul's, but rather because I share Paul's heart, for I am learning from his example. Paul was not ashamed to share of need in a time of need and to rejoice in God's provision. He was secure in God's promises, having seen God work time and time again. He was content in Christ's ways. He was full of hope in God's leading. He shared plainly and received

humbly and loved intensely and felt a proper sense of responsibility for that which he had been given.

And he recognized that the gifts were not for him but were for the Kingdom, for **God's absolute pleasure and enjoyment** - "*a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.*"

Each one of you who has ever encouraged with a word, or uttered a prayer, or offered a dime, to God's work here in Italy, is a partner with us in the ministry, "Philippians" who have given of yourselves when you have "had opportunity".

And yet *I have failed*. Forgive me for failing in keeping each one of you adequately informed about one aspect of the ministry: my financial situation here. For too long I have believed the lie that somehow the practical is less spiritual. I have put finances in a separate, more taboo category . . . meaning that I have seen encouraging others to give of their time in prayer and talents as somehow different, somehow more spiritual than financial giving. *But it's not.*

From investing through prayer to investing through God-given abilities to investing through finances, it's all part of God's great economy and kingdom-building. And what's more, I become a "joy-stealer" when I don't allow others to find the intense joy in giving away that which was entrusted to them to be able to give to God's kingdom.

Personally, I find it easy to share about what God is doing in the lives of the believers here and to share about evangelization and what's happening in the ministry. It's easy to share about because it's marvelous seeing the hand of the Almighty at work.

But would there even be ministry if not for the faithful prayers AND the financial gifts of other believers? I believe not. How could we go on in the ministry if not for your prayers and financial support?

It is a fact that I must be supported financially in order to stay in Italy. Legally, it is not an option for me to have a job here in Italy, i.e. to work off of the Italian economy, although it would be so much “easier” to be independent and support myself as I had always done up to a few years ago. But, I can only stay if I am financially supported from outside Italy. I can only give if I am supported by the giving of others. Aren’t God’s ways beyond ours? How thankful I am that they are! For God continues to grow me by doing things in His perfect way.

Allow me to share one recent example:

My monthly support levels continue to be extremely low but praise God, I am not lacking in anything. The Lord provides often through one-time gifts and I want to share specifically about one of His miraculous provisions several months ago.

A little over a month ago I received a record of my support levels over the prior several months. Our gracious God had provided through many of you. A heartfelt thank you to you!

However, despite the generosity, the figures on the first page continued to shout *not enough long term*. I determined to practice heart praise in that moment, having seen God do the impossible many times.

And with a praise-medicated heart (God wanted to inject me with thanksgiving before working more miracles), I turned the page and saw a solitary name. Only one name. An unfamiliar name.

The only name on that second, *and final* page, was the name of someone I’ve never met in my life. Someone who has never met me. Someone with whom I’ve never exchanged a single word.

Someone who gave \$5000.

I remained speechless, blinking a couple times. How do I respond? A stranger giving to a complete stranger.

But that’s just it. He wasn’t giving to me.

And then my insides responded for me. I couldn’t help it or stop it.

Welling up on the inside was something which is too often smothered or weak in me.

Faith.

Oh, my feeble faith.

My faith was fortified in that very moment by a perfect stranger who is not a perfect stranger to God and His ways but who knows that the purpose was

not to give a gift to me, as an individual, but to the work of the Kingdom, the building of Christ’s empire.

God’s ways were perfect in that He impressed upon this person to give, and he gave. This gift was not given because of familial connections or as a result of a personal contact. This person gave not because he knew me but because he knows what it means to be a farmer and to sow into God’s kingdom work and wait for a harvest.

And in the end, the point of this gift was not the money, but that God wanted to fortify my faith. That was obvious. And God is able to do that as easily with \$10 as He does with \$5000. A widow’s mite is often used mightily to teach deep lessons and instruct the “faith-waners”.

Oh, and this is not the first, nor will it be the last time, I believe, that God teaches me to receive and humbles my proud, independent self over and over by means of your giving and prayers, and teaches me to have *faith* in His ways.

I want to thank each of you for being willing to take bold steps of faith yourselves each time that you give out of your means. For \$10 to one individual is as \$5000 to another. The giving takes faith, to be willing to say “I trust this will be invested in Your Kingdom, Father, and I trust that You will provide even for me.” And He always does. We certainly don’t lack materially and He provides even more spiritually, by fortifying weak faith and humbling proud vessels and giving joy upon joy and grace upon grace to the giver.

I share this recent example with you not because I am in need, but to increase praise to the Giver. I want to praise the Giver of all good things, the Fortifier of our weak faith and . . . I thank each one of you deeply, for your continued partnership. All the prayers, time, words, finances, etc. offered, are from Him and to Him . . . and I pray that it’s all used in just that way - for God’s glory.

Thank you for being willing to be used of God to teach me so much. May you be prepared for the “*fruit that increases to your credit*”.

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