

# Independently Dependent

## A Study of Philippians: Philippians 4:10-23

Kids are all about claiming independence.

As children grow they begin to learn a sentence that shows signs of independence. They say, "I want to do it!" This may be wanting to button their clothes, tie their shoes, or pay for their toy with their own money. Whatever the case, the sentence sticks with them for the rest of their lives.

We do it as adults. It may be changing a tire, doing taxes, or fixing something in the home, but we do it. We may not say it, but in our minds we think, "I can do this on my own. I don't need someone to help me."

Shortly after, there is a call made to the plumber.

Describe a time when you tried to do something without help and were not able to do it.

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We like to do things on our own. We like the sense of independence. We like to feel like we accomplished something.

Why do we have this sense or desire for independence?

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How does it feel when you have accomplished something on your own?

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It seems odd that we would be coming to the end of a book that talks about unity only to end with independence, but this is where we find ourselves.

Paul comes to the conclusion of his letter. Again, we find him rejoicing, but here he adds an adverb. He proclaims that he is rejoicing greatly. His joy is still in the Lord. Paul is appreciative to God for their ability to support him, since there was a time when they were unable to.

Here Paul finishes off the book with a testimony of God's provision in his life and it comes back to a matter of perspective. Notice what Paul says.

He is not speaking from want. He does not want the Philippians to think that he was dependant on the gift given by them or by anyone else. Paul says he has learned to be content in whatever circumstances he is in. Paul learned, that means he drew upon life experiences rather than book knowledge.

How can life experiences be a good teacher?

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Our life experiences can be a valuable trainer if we allow them to be. Of course, we remember the times that we make mistakes and mess up, but are we careful to learn the lessons from those mistakes? We can easily want to step away

*"But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity."*

Philippians 4:10

“Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.”

Philippians 4:11-12

“And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:19

from the life experience and put it behind us, but then we have just turned our backs on wisdom. Nobody likes to take a test over again, so we are better off learning the first time.

The fact that we learn is big, but what we are learning is even bigger. Our English language does not do verse 11 justice. Paul uses a Stoic term rather than the one used elsewhere. It is a term that captures self-sufficiency. A term that signifies not being dependant on external circumstances or people and finding within one's self the resources needed. The contemporaries of his day would have seen this description as the pinnacle of life. Self-sufficiency was the goal of each man. It is the idea of the man finding all he needs within himself and not needing others.

How does our society push us towards self-sufficiency?

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Paul explains himself. He says he knows how to get along with not much and with a lot. He knows how to work through times of hunger and times of plenty. He has found the secret. The word Paul uses means a rite of passage or the secret, difficult initiation into life with its highs and lows. Paul uses six different terms to describe the highs and lows of life and through all of the roller coaster challenges of life, Paul is able to remain consistent and fixed.

How would you describe life's ups and downs?

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Paul seems to be fixed on himself, but verse thirteen is his qualifying statement. He is self-sufficient in God's strength. He recognizes that with God he is able to handle the ups and downs of life. Paul uses a term that captures how God unites with him to provide strength. There is unity!

Another paradox of Paul – the secret of his independence was his dependence.

Paul was able to have independence on himself because of the Spirit of God being within him. How much do we give credit to the Spirit within us? How often do we cry out in exasperation, “I can't take anymore!?!” Paul never placed his ability in himself, he placed it in God.

When was the last time you cried out, “I can't do this!”?

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Verse nineteen explains that it is God who supplies our needs. Paul recognizes that the gift from the church is a good thing and will be a help. He is grateful for the support he has received from this church. It shows their commitment to the cause of Christ, but Paul does not place the focus on the church. He is encouraged by their gift, but he recognizes who the real Giver is.

Are you content with God's understanding of your needs?

George Müller is an excellent example. Here is a man who understood what it means to live in faith of the knowledge of God as provider. At the age of twenty-five, he agreed to pastor a small church. Once he realized that his salary was being paid through the rental of church pews, he gave it up and vowed that he would live by faith. He took another church and became involved in orphan ministry. Through sixty years God provided \$7,500,000 to supply their needs. The children never missed a meal; prayers were often said over empty plates, yet

food arrived in time.

George Müller was an independent dependant man.

He was not a special man who had super powers to believe. He was like any of us. He made the commitment to see God's perspective of his needs rather than his own.

This is not to say that Paul did not appreciate what the Philippians had given him. He was glad, but not because of the gift as much as how it would be counted towards their righteousness.

Then Paul gives them a blessing. He says in verse nineteen, "May God supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Jesus." Some translations miss out on the blessing. Paul is still thinking about the God who provides for his needs and then prays for the same in the lives of the Philippians.

There is something to note here. Paul has had plenty and had little and through this he knows that God supplies in both situations. God knows what we need. This is not a disclaimer that God will be a magic genie granting our every need, but He will care for us. Jesus explains that the flowers of the field and the birds of the sky are taken care of; therefore, God will care for us. God determines our need and responds. Our need is not counted in our terms, but in God's. God is not about giving us what we want, only what we need.

Our independence brings us to depend on God, which unifies us together.

How do you see this working out in the life of the church?

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Paul then comes to the end and again reminds us of perspective. In verse twenty, he says it is all about God – plain and simple.

He closes his letter with some greetings which in themselves show the unity and fellowship that he calls the church to reach for and then closes with a prayer of God's grace being poured out on the believers.

Grace.

It is what we need to reach for unity. It is what we need to have humility. It is what we need to see God's perspective.

So this I pray:

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." – Amen.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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*"Now to our God and  
Father be the glory for-  
ever and ever. Amen."*

*Philippians 4:20*