

THE OTHER-ORIENTED CHURCH **(Philippians 4:14-19)**

For the past 3½ years, I have been serving, part-time, on staff at the Hospice Circle of Love here in Enid. *Bereavement Coordinator* is my actual title, but I also work as a chaplain. I have a badge I wear to identify myself. It reads, “Dr. Matt Miles.” Sometimes, that creates confusion. When a patient or family member says, “So, you’re a doctor?”, I usually respond, “Well, I’m not a physician. I’m a doctor of ministry.” Often, they say, “Oh,” with a hint of disappointment in their voice.

I’m like the preacher who said, “Yes, I’m a doctor but not the kind that does anybody any good.”

At Noon, every other Tuesday, we have an interdisciplinary team meeting at the hospice office. It is attended by nurses, nurse aides, a social worker, a chaplain, a bereavement coordinator, the director of nurses, and sometimes, a real doctor. At this meeting, we discuss the care our patients are receiving and what they might need.

It is quite common for the nurses to use medical jargon with which I’m not familiar since I’m not a real doctor. After a new patient is admitted to our service, often, a nurse will read off significant measurements regarding the state of the patient’s health. There is one measurement I never understood until I looked up this last week. Regarding a new patient, a nurse might say he is “Oriented x3” or “Oriented x4.”

An internet article explained that if a person is x1, he is oriented to a person. He can tell you his name, and he recognizes others who are close to him. If a person is x2, she is oriented to a person and place. She knows who she is and where she is—home, nursing home, hospital, whatever the case might be. If someone is oriented x3, that someone is oriented to person, place, and date. He or she can tell you what year it is, what season of the year, what day of the week it is, or the date. The highest orientation is x4. In addition to the other things listed, if you are x4, you know why you are where you are. For instance, you know you are in the hospital because you took a bad fall at home or in the grocery store.

Let’s take a moment to consider those orientation levels in a spiritual sense. **Do you know who you are spiritually?** Do you know that you are a child of God? Do you know you are in Christ? In Christ, you are forgiven, redeemed, a new creation, more than a conqueror, His workmanship, salt, light, being transformed into Christlikeness, and so much more. Make sure you know who you are in Christ.

Do you know where you are? In one sense, as the hymn says, “this is My Father’s word.” In another, it is the abode of the devil. It is enemy territory, and we live in a mission field.

Do you know what time it is? We are living in between Jesus’ first coming and His second, and His return is getting closer and closer with each passing day. According to the Bible, we are living the last days. It is time to do the works of Him who called us while it is still day because night is coming when no man can work.

Lastly, do you know why you are here? You are not just here to have fun. You are

not here to accumulate wealth and stuff. You not here to mark time. We are here to glorify God and enjoy Him. We are here to know Him and to make Him known.

We need to be oriented to self, place, time, and situation. All of that orientation, however, is focused on self: who **I** am, where **I** am, the time **I** am in, and why **I** am where I am.

Based on today's text, I want to emphasize that there is another kind of orientation. It is not an orientation around self. We need to be other-oriented. Look with me at Philippians 4:14-19. We are going to examine, "The Other-Oriented Church."

The Other-Oriented Church is Filled with Caring People

The Church in Philippi was other-oriented, and their other-orientation was demonstrated by the fact that they cared for someone other than themselves. Specifically, they cared for Paul, and they cared for those God might use Paul to reach.

Sadly, many churches are turned inward. They care, but their care is focused only on those within their own fellowship. They care, but their care is limited to their own people, their own needs, their own problems, their own future, their own welfare.

There is nothing wrong about caring for those things. We are to care for one another. We are to pray for one another. We are to encourage one another. We are to minister to one another. We wouldn't really be a church if we didn't do those things.

Our care, however, must go beyond ourselves. Paul reminded the Philippians of that in 2:3 when he wrote, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

We need to care about a lost world that is literally dying in great numbers daily. Every day, across the world, approximately 150,000 people die. That is roughly three times the population of Enid who go into eternity every 24-hours. How many of those people leave this earth without ever hearing the good news of Jesus?

We need to care about our own city, a city in which illegal drug use is rampant, a city in which child and spousal abuse happens often, a city in which addiction is commonplace (drug, alcohol, gambling and sexual addiction), a city in which homelessness is a real issue. We are a city in which an organization named Forgotten Ministries is needed because far too many people in Enid have been forgotten.

We are a city in which more than 100 churches exist, and if many of these churches were outwardly focused rather than inwardly focused, many of these problems that plague our city would either disappear or be greatly diminished.

A church in Colorado Springs said that their goal was to make it hard to go to hell from Colorado Springs. If we, along with the other 100-plus churches of Enid were other-oriented rather than self-focused, it would be far harder to go to hell from Enid, OK than it currently is. Right now, as far as I can tell, it is far too easy to go to hell from Enid, OK. People routinely ignore the church, and many churches seem content with being ignored.

Are you fine with God and His church being ignored as long we sing the songs in worship that you like, as long as the preaching feeds you, as long as we have enough

funds in the bank to pay our bills?

Look at v. 14. I wonder, whose trouble are we presently sharing?

- Are we sharing the trouble of any single moms who are trying to raise children and make ends meet?
- Are we sharing the trouble of anybody who is trying to escape addictive behavior?
- Paul was a prisoner when he wrote these words. Are we sharing the trouble of anyone who is or has been incarcerated and who is now trying to stay out of trouble?

We have a choice to make. As a church, we can say to those in need, “We want to share your trouble.” Or, we can say, “We don’t want to be troubled.” It really is that simple.

A few months ago, I spoke with a group of homeschool students. I rehearsed something I was told as a child. Some of them had heard it before, and maybe you have, too. Take your fingers and interlock them. Point your fingers skyward. You might remember hearing, “Here’s the church. Here’s the steeple. Open the door to see all the people.”

It’s cute. It’s memorable. It rhymes. It’s terrible theology. Don’t teach that to children. The building is not the church. This worship center or sanctuary is not the church. The enclosed classrooms, kitchen, and fellowship hall are not what make up this church. If this building were to be taken away in a tornado or were to burn down in a fire, Liberty Southern Baptist Church would still exist because you are the church. You are the church, but what kind of church are we going to be?

What we are individually is what we become collectively if enough of us are the same way. In other words, if enough of us are selfish, then we are a selfish church. If enough of us are self-absorbed, then we are a self-absorbed church. But if enough of us are caring, then we are a caring church.

I can’t change you nor will I try because I can’t even change myself. What I can do is ask God to change me. I can pray, “Lord, make me into a caring person.” As He answers that pray, as He changes me into a caring person, and you, and you, and you, we will become a caring church who shares the trouble of others. We will become the other-oriented church God wants us to become.

The Other-Oriented Church is Filled with Giving People

Because the Philippian church cared, they did something. Caring is the first step, but that first step always leads to another step. If we really care, we must do something about it. What did the Church in Philippi do? They gave.

Paul revealed two things about the giving of the Philippian church. **First, they gave when no one else did.** Look at v. 15. What does Paul mean by the phrase “in the beginning of the gospel”? That is an odd phrase.

I do not want to spend too much time on this, but I do want to touch on it. Look with

me at Acts 16. Paul had concluded his first missionary tour. It was confined mostly to Asia Minor in what we would call the nation of Turkey. In Acts 16, he is on his second missionary journey. They are still in Asia Minor, and they are trying to determine where to go next. Look at vv. 6-7. They want to go east, but God won't let them. They go a little west to the coastal city called Troas. In Troas, Paul has a dream. Look at vv. 8-10.

Because of that dream, Paul and his traveling companions crossed the Aegean Sea and entered into present-day Greece. They entered Europe for the first time with the gospel. Our Western, Christian heritage began with Paul going west instead of east as he first intended.

In Acts 16:12, Paul enters Philippi for the first time. Paul is only in Philippi a short time, but while he is there, he leads Lydia and her family to Christ. Paul and Silas get into trouble and are thrown into jail. They lead the jailer and his family to Christ. These two families become charter members of the Church in Philippi.

After they leave Philippi, Paul and Silas and others who are with him go to Thessalonica. Knowing that Paul is in the City of Thessalonica, let's go back to Philippians 4. In our text we see the second thing Paul said about the giving of the Philippian church. The first thing was that the Philippian believers gave when no one else did. **The second thing is that they gave to Paul repeatedly.** Look at v. 16. Their giving was not a one and done kind of thing.

Eventually, Paul made his way to Corinth where he stayed at least 18 months. Paul partly supported himself by making tents, but we read in 2 Corinthians 11:9, "And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need." Philippi is in the region of Macedonia. It is most likely that it was the Philippian believers who came to Corinth with a gift of support for Paul and his work. Because they cared, they gave.

It is possible to give without caring. Some give because of guilt. They feel guilty if they don't give. Some give out of habit. It is just what they have always done. Some give out of a sense of duty. They give because they know they are supposed to give.

While you can give without caring, you can't care without giving. If you truly care, you can't help but give.

Based on a passage in Romans 15 we know that Paul intended to go to Jerusalem with an offering of support to poor believers in Jerusalem. In his Corinthian correspondence, we read about believers in Macedonia contributing to this offering. Let me read to you 2 Corinthians 8:1-4.

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—

Have you ever begged for the privilege of giving? According to this passage, giving is

not a matter of income. We don't give when we can afford to give. We give because we cannot not give, and when we give, we do so with great joy.

Jesus taught, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Those who are other-oriented know that to be true. Those who are self-oriented don't understand that.

In his book, *Everybody's Normal Until You Get to Know Them*, John Ortberg tells the story of a young man named John Gilbert who died at 25 from a debilitating, progressive, genetic disorder. According to Ortberg, John lost something every year. One year, he lost the ability to run. He could no longer play sports. Another year, he lost the ability to walk straight. He was left to only watch his friends play. He lost the ability to speak. Ortberg, however, wrote of a joyous moment in John's short life:

Once he was invited to a National Football League fundraising auction. When it began, one item in particular caught John's eye: a basketball signed by the players of the Sacramento Kings professional team. John so desperately wanted that ball that when it came up for bid, he felt his hand raise up in the air. Not having the funds to participate, John's mother quickly brought it back down.

They watched the bidding go up and up and up. It rose to an astounding amount compared to the value of the ball and especially compared to other items at the auction. Finally, a man made a bid that no one else could possibly match, and he won the prize.

The man walked to the front and claimed the basketball. But instead of going back to his seat, the man walked across the room and gently placed it into the thin, small hands of the boy who had desired it so strongly. The man put that ball into hands that would never dribble a ball down a court, never throw it to a teammate, never fire it from the foul line. But those hands would cherish it for as long as they lived.

"It took me a moment to realize what the man had done," John writes. "I remember hearing gasps all around the room, then thunderous applause and weeping eyes. To this day I'm amazed." He asked, "Have you ever been given a gift that you could have never gotten for yourself? Has anyone ever sacrificed a huge amount for you without getting anything in return except the joy of giving?"

If you are a Christian, you have received such a gift. It was given at great cost, and it was given with great joy. We read in Hebrews 12:2 that we are to look to "Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus gave us the gift of salvation, and though it was excruciatingly painful, He gave that gift with great joy.

Let's learn to be joyous givers by becoming other-oriented.

The Other-Oriented Church is Filled with God-Blessed People

Look again at v. 17. Paul goes out of his way to assure the Philippians that he is not

thanking them for giving so as to induce them to keep giving to him. In fact, in the next verse he says that he is well-supplied. In other words, he is saying, “Don’t give me anymore; I don’t need anything else.” The point he is making is that you can’t outgive God. When your bank account here gets lower because you have given, your blessing account in heaven gets another hefty deposit.

In v. 18, it is almost like Paul is giving them a receipt saying stamped, “Paid in full.” Their offering, however, was not just given to Paul. It was really given to God, and God was well-pleased with their offering.

When you write out a check to the church or place money in the offering plate, you are not giving to the church; you are giving to God. When you give to God, you can claim the wonderful and astounding promise we find in v. 19. This promise is not given to anybody at any time. It was given to a people who generously and sacrificially supported God’s work. If that is you, this promise is for you.

One preacher divided this verse into three phrases: *my God, your needs, His riches*. Paul wrote, “My God,” not the gods and goddesses that the Greeks in Philippi foolishly worshiped, but it was his God who would make good on this promise. Paul’s God was the God of Abraham, the God of Moses, the God of David, and the God of the prophets. He is the God who is the Father of the Lord Jesus. He is the God who speaks and the universe comes into being. He is the God we meet in the pages of the Bible. He is the God of unapproachable holiness and yet a God of tender compassion. This is the God who is in view.

What will this God do? He will supply your needs. Is there anybody here who has needs? Is there anybody here who has physical needs, financial needs, medical needs, emotional needs, spiritual needs?

Father’s Day is difficult for some because some people didn’t have a good father, a father who was there for them in the way that good fathers are. Those who had good dads will be able to identify with what I say next, but if you didn’t have a good dad, I want you to imagine for a moment that you did. Just imagine that you did. Imagine that you had the perfect dad.

Remember or imagine that your dad met your needs. He met your physical needs. He put a roof over your head. He made sure that you were well-fed. Maybe you didn’t have the newest, fanciest clothes, but you were clothed.

He met your financial needs. He worked hard and made a living so that you did not live in abject poverty. Maybe you didn’t have everything you wanted, but you had everything you needed because your dad provided.

He met your medical needs as far as he was able. He took you to the doctor. He paid for the medicine you needed.

He met your emotional needs. He was patient. He listened to you. He was understanding and loving and tenderly disposed toward you. You knew you were loved and felt protected in His presence.

Your dad met your spiritual needs insofar as he could. He taught you about God. He prayed for you. He took you to church, and he modeled what it means to have a relationship with God.

There were other needs you had that maybe you haven't considered. There were times you needed to be disciplined. There were times you needed to be corrected, times you got too big for your britches, as my mom used to say. Your dad was there to let you know you were out of place, and he put you in your place. Maybe you didn't like it at the time, but deep down you were glad that your dad loved you enough to discipline you.

Our loving, heavenly Father meets all of our needs even those we don't recognize, such as discipline and correction.

Finally, God meets our needs according to His riches. Paul could have written that God meets our needs out of His riches, but he didn't.

Let's suppose that you have a need for \$10,000, and you write a letter to the richest man in America asking him to meet your need. Let's suppose that he responds to your request and sends you a check for \$10,000. He would be meeting your need out of his riches. Suppose, however, that he sends his private plane to pick you up and brings you to his palatial office. He sits down with you personally to talk about your need. Suppose he says, "Friend, you don't need \$10,000. You need \$10,000,000 dollars," and he writes you a check for that amount. Now, instead of meeting your need out of his riches, he would be meeting your need according to His riches.

God doesn't just meet our needs out of His riches. He meets them according to His riches. That is why Paul broke out in spontaneous praise in Ephesians 3:20 and wrote, "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us."

I have been encouraging you to become other-oriented because I want our church to be an other-oriented church.

There is, however, only one way for us to become other-oriented, and that is to become God-oriented. Only as we are God-oriented and focused on Him will He makes us into a caring people and a giving people.

This past week, I attended the funeral of my friend—Michael Chaloner. Every day, when he took his children to school, he would tell them, "Learn something, and live for Jesus. Learn something and live for Jesus." Michael was able to say that because that is the way he lived his life. Let's follow the example and counsel of my friend. Let's learn something every day from our Teacher, the Holy Spirit, and let's live for Jesus.