

The sermon

Intro

Philippians 4:13 is one of the most celebrated verses in the Bible. It's often taken to mean "I can accomplish whatever I set my mind to" or "I can be the best" or "I can lead my team to the championship."

Professional athletes have latched on to the verse. In 1996 Evander Holyfield came to the ring for a fight against Mike Tyson wearing a boxing robe with Philippians 4:13 on it. Professional wrestler Shawn Michaels came to the ring with a Philippians 4:13 t-shirt. Football player Tim Tebow wore black paint under his eyes with Philippians 4:13 referenced in the paint. Mixed martial arts champion Jon Jones has Philippians 4:13 tattooed on his chest. NBA champion Stephen Curry wrote "I can do all things..." on his basketball shoes.

Often Christian athletes and weight lifters wear Philippians 4:13 gear. What is it about Philippians 4:13 and sports?

Putting sports aside, what should we make of "*I can do all things through him who strengthens me*"? What's the "all things" Paul has in mind? Is Paul teaching the "you can do it" religion of today?

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

Paul's instructions are complete. As he closes his letter he's sharing his heart and personal experience with friends. Here Paul lets us in on his spirituality.

Point 1: Joy producing generosity (4:10)

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

Joy flooded Paul's heart when Epaphroditus arrived with gifts from the Philippians (4:18). Gifts like money, food, clothing, bedding, medical supplies, ink, and parchments.

Concern

"Concern" is used frequently in Philippians. Being of the same mind (2:2), having the mindset of Christ (2:5), thinking about things that are true and godly (4:8). "Concern" indicates their minds were on Paul. They were thinking about his needs.

Revived

The word translated "revived" was a word for flowers blossoming again. Like the flower blossoms in the spring and goes dormant in the winter and comes back again the next spring, the Philippians' generosity towards Paul went dormant for a season and sprouted up again.

You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.

Paul clarifies his statement. No accusations here. Why weren't you helping me during this period of time? isn't what he's saying. Just joy in their generosity. Their concern never wavered. They just lacked opportunity.

Why couldn't they help him?

Maybe they had lost track of his whereabouts for a time? Paul was frequently on the move. Missionary travels, Caesarean confinement for two years, traveling to Rome by sea for a period of months before Roman imprisonment.

Application

What I want to highlight for you here is the fact that Paul “*rejoiced in the Lord greatly*” because of the material gifts that arrived for him. Human generosity resulted in joy in God.

Paul sees God behind their giving. That’s what Paul mentioned in **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-

Paul notes the grace God gave to the Macedonian churches. Located in Macedonia, Philippi was one of the generous churches.

Experiencing poverty themselves, they gave generously and sacrificially to “*the relief of the saints.*” A collection for the Jerusalem church.

Paul speaks “*about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia.*” That’s grace given by God to Macedonian churches. What grace? The grace of generosity. Paul’s saying God’s grace was evident because of their generosity.

Why were they generous? God’s grace. God was the source of their generosity. In other words, God worked in their hearts. Without God’s grace, this generosity wouldn’t exist.

So Paul can rejoice greatly in the Lord (Jesus) over gifts distributed by Epaphroditus because he sees God as the cause of their generosity. Paul was ecstatic over the evidence of God’s work in their hearts.

It’s like thanking God for a sermon or an encouraging word or a financial gift. We thank God because we know that God behind the ministry we receive.

So I thank God for your abundant, over the top, humbling generosity in baby shower gifts and meals. And I thank God that he set you free from the shackles of hoarding your resources and moved you to seek the interests of others.

When we see evidences of grace in one another, we rejoice in God.

Point 2: Strengthened to be content when low (4:10-13)

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. – 4:11

Paul’s saying I’m not joyful because my needs were met. I’m sure he was happy about that. But he’s joyful about God’s work in their hearts, not his own benefit.

Paul has a really, really, really radical mindset. Paul isn’t about personal comfort or personal recognition or accumulating wealth and possessions or recreational pleasures. Paul is about glorifying God and helping Christians progress in maturity and bringing the lost to salvation.

That’s why he can say “*to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*” If I remain alive it’s opportunity to help you in “*your progress and joy in the faith*” (1:25). If I am to die, it’s opportunity to honor Jesus in my death (1:20). Paul sees his present imprisonment as opportunity “*to advance the gospel*” (1:12). Paul’s mindset is God-centered.

Contentment

Note that Paul learned contentment. He wasn't instantly content upon conversion. He became content over a period of time.

There's no quick fix. No instant spirituality. No quick prayer at a small group that confers contentment on a person. Contentment comes as we pray, ponder, and practice godliness over time. Contentment is formed over time, through experience.

In the board game Monopoly you can draw a card that says Advance To Go (Collect \$200). Contentment doesn't work like that. We can't skip the board to collect the prize. No, we need to travel through the board of life, every step of the way, to acquire contentment.

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. – 4:12

At this point I want to focus on *“brought low...hunger...need.”* Sometimes Paul's experience involved being brought low or being hungry or being in need.

Brought low

Hunger and need humbled Paul. “Brought low” is a common word for humility. The humility of children who depend on their parents' care (Matt 18:4). The humility of the tax collector who said, *“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”* (Luke 18:13-14). The humility of Jesus in obeying his Father to the point of death on the cross (Phil 2:8).

Some circumstances brought Paul rather low. In 2 Corinthians 11:27, Paul spoke about *“many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.”*

Frequently on the run from gospel opponents. During a storm at sea, Paul was without food for 14 days (**Acts 27:33**).

Prison

Multiple imprisonments required Paul to have his needs met by others. First, he was imprisoned in Caesarea for two years where his friends were allowed to attend to his needs (**Acts 24:23, 27**).

That's Paul had food, drink, clothing, bedding, and hygiene because of the generosity of friends.

Second, he was imprisoned in Rome where he wrote Philippians. The arrangement was *“Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him”* (**Acts 28:16**) for *“two whole years at his own expense”* (**Acts 28:30**).

Meaning Paul was chained to a Roman guard 24/7 (**Acts 28:20**) and again needed his friends to provide his needs. *“At his own expense”* indicates Paul was renting a dwelling place with the financial gifts his friends were bringing.

My point? There's plenty of instances where Paul was brought low. He wasn't exaggerating. He learned contentment through these experiences.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. – 4:13

That is in times being hunted down by persecutors and experiencing shipwreck and imprisonment, Paul survived in the strength Jesus supplied. There Paul learned contentment and experienced God's peace. Regardless of circumstances. Because Jesus lived inside him.

His faith flourished and grew during these times. Circumstances didn't break him. Because God strengthened him. That's God using Paul's distressing circumstances to produce contentment in Paul. That's why Paul was okay with little.

The word translated **strengthens** speaks to Jesus enabling Paul, making him able to endure distressing circumstances. That's outside strength given to a man who would otherwise be crushed by devastating circumstances.

Distressing circumstances might cause us to give up, quit, lose heart. Distressing circumstances might cause us to question God. Distressing circumstances might make us angry, hateful, bitter, jealous.

What's Paul's secret?

Paul doesn't state it here explicitly. But we have clues. It's divine strengthening in distressing circumstances. It's Paul's God-centered vision of life. All of life is opportunity to glorify God. Whether I'm in need or I have plenty, I always have opportunity to glorify God. Whether I'm executed or released, I always have opportunity to glorify God.

When you believe God will strengthen you in every circumstance, when you believe every circumstance provides opportunity to glorify God, you can be content in any situation.

Application

Paul lived a unique life. He never had a settled dwelling. His mission required imprisonment and moving from place to place. How might Paul's secret transfer to us?

For me, when the church is declining or not growing as I desire or challenges arise, I have opportunity to experience divine strengthening and glorify God.

For the teenager, when you don't fit in with everyone else and can't make friends as easily as everyone else because of your devotion to Jesus, you have opportunity to experience divine strengthening and glorify God.

For the stay at home Mom, when you have a hard child or a needy child or a child that doesn't learn easily or a lot of children, you have opportunity to experience divine strengthening and glorify God.

For the person in the workplace, when work is demanding or short staffed or unstable or your boss is demeaning, you have opportunity to experience divine strengthening and glorify God.

For the person experiencing physical decline, when facing the unknown and pains you never imagined, you have opportunity to experience divine strengthening and glorify God.

Every situation in life is opportunity to turn to Christ for strength!

Point 3: Strengthened to be content when full (4:10-13)

Paul also learned how to be content when he had plenty and abundance.

The word translated "plenty" literally means eating to the point when you are filled and satisfied. You don't need anymore because you're filled. There were times when Paul had enough food to fill his stomach. In those times he learned contentment.

How you ask? We don't normally associate plenty with contentment. It's the person who has little that has to learn contentment, not the person with plenty, right?

I think Paul's saying he learned not to be greedy when he had plenty. He was satisfied with what he had. He wasn't always looking for more. Think Solomon's self-indulgence with wine, houses, vineyards, gardens, pools, herds, flocks, silver, gold, concubines in Ecclesiastes 2. Solomon confessed, "*And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure*" (Eccl 2:10). Paul didn't pursue possessions like Solomon did. He was satisfied with what he had.

And Paul learned to let go of plenty. Say he was on a missionary journey and was at a church for several months. During those months he was well fed. But he knew the time was coming to leave for another location. What would befall me there? Starvation? Prison?

To fulfill his mission, for example, imprisonment, Paul had to be willing to let go of a full stomach.

Application

The temptation in plenty is to want more. Paul found the secret of being satisfied in Christ. I don't need to have plenty because Jesus will strengthen me in times of lack. I don't need to have plenty because times of lack are opportunities to bring glory to God.

Living in confidence of divine strengthening. Living to bring Jesus glory. That's how Paul did life. Paul wasn't driven by possessions. Paul's treasure was God, being a shining light to a broken world, and gospel advance. That's what mattered to Paul.

What do you treasure? Where does eating to the full rank in comparison to glorifying God and gospel advance? Where does acquiring possessions rank in comparison to glorifying God and gospel advance?

There's nothing wrong with eating to the full. Paul's conscience wasn't bothered. Food is a gift of God to be joyfully received with thanksgiving (1 Tim 4:3-4). The problem comes when we treasure food more than God. The problem comes when we neglect the pursuit of godliness and kingdom advance because we're fixated on pleasures. Is fixation on food and stuff stifling godly ambitions?

Non-Christian

We've heard about how God strengthens those who trust him. It all starts with faith.

An understanding that God is King. An understanding that we've sinned against God because we're broken sinners. An understanding that Jesus died on the cross to take away the guilt of all those who trust in him. An understanding that we respond to God's offer of forgiveness and eternal life through faith and repentance. That's turning from sin by trusting God's promises.

You can learn contentment in all things through faith in Jesus.

Conclusion

So what does "*I can do all things through him who strengthens me*" have to do with sports? Nothing specifically. But the principle ties to everything ("*In any and every circumstance*"), including sports.

Applied to professional basketball it would mean something like whether I'm drafted to an awful or average or quality team. Whether I'm located in Boston or Los Angeles or Cleveland. Whether my team has great players at my position that prevent me from playing or there's ample playing time. Whether I get traded to a worse situation or a better situation. Whether my coach knows how to use me or not. Whether I win zero championships or six. Whether I'm blessed with the health of Bill Walton or A. C. Green.

Regardless of my situation, I have opportunity to experience divine strengthening and glorify God and speak the gospel. That's what Philippians 4:13 means.