

## Session 8

# serving honorably

### SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Philippians 2:19–30

### BUILDUP THEME



PREPARE TO SERVE

God expects believers to honor those who serve Him sincerely and sacrificially.

### MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will work to develop Timothy's sincerity and will seek to honor believers who demonstrate Epaphroditus's sacrificial service.

### MEMORY VERSE

"Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me" (Philippians 2:29, 30).

## Teacher Preparation

- ☐ Does your church make regular requests for people to serve in the nursery, help with the mid-week kids ministry, or participate in an evangelistic Bible study? What are the responses like? Why do you think that is?
- ☐ Read Philippians 2:29, 30. Consider Timothy's sincere heart and Epaphroditus's sacrifice in their service to Christ. Epaphroditus nearly lost his life in persevering to complete the ministry he agreed to take on. He put Paul, the Philippian believers, and Christ before himself and never wavered by saying enough was enough.
- ☐ How do the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus challenge you in your teaching ministry and other areas of service in your church? How might you use your own dedication and perseverance to challenge your learners?

## Session Summary

Paul used his plans to communicate with the Philippian believers as a reason to put forward the excellent examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus. Timothy stood like-minded with Paul and as a son with his father. He cared for the Philippians and was anxious to go to them. Epaphroditus, Paul's fellow worker and soldier, brought a gift from Philippi to Rome. Along the way he grew ill but persevered to accomplish his mission. His desire to serve Paul and the Philippians nearly cost him his life. Paul purposed to send him back and instructed the Philippians to honor him for his sacrificial heart.

# Session Starters

## Option 1—Sacrificial Limits

### Gather

- Video of Nik Wallenda crossing the Little Colorado River Gorge (optional).

### Steps

1. Show a video clip of Nik Wallenda crossing the Little Colorado River Gorge. Give the details of his record-setting feat.

Nik Wallenda walked a high wire across the Little Colorado River Gorge near Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona, on June 23, 2013. The wire was about 1,500 feet above the canyon floor and about 1,400 feet long. And Nik did the walk without a safety harness in just under twenty-three minutes.

2. Discuss limits.

**ASK:** What would be your limits for walking a high wire?

**ASK:** What might you do that others would consider risky?

**ASK:** What would be your limits for serving Christ? Would you risk your life?

3. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Paul presented the example of Epaphroditus, a man who nearly died as he persevered in his service for Christ. This session will examine his service along with Timothy's service. They will encourage us to serve God in honorable ways.

## Option 2—Story of Sacrificial Service

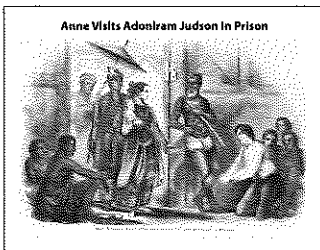
### Gather

- Resource 48-R7.

### Steps

1. Display resource 48-R7 and share the following summary of Adoniram Judson's life as a missionary.

Adoniram Judson (1788-1850), a brilliant man who could have gained fame and fortune in the United States, was burdened for the lost in foreign countries. He sailed for Asia with his new bride in 1812 and ended up in Burma where he spent nearly forty years as a missionary. Trusting God would bless, Judson began to translate the Bible into Burmese, one of the world's hardest languages to



48-R7

master. Six hard years passed before Judson saw his first convert. Life in Burma was hard. Judson spent 21 months in prison after being accused of spying. Later, Judson lost his wife Ann and then remarried only to lose his second wife too. Additionally, Adoniram buried 6 children in Burma, struggled against repressive regimes, and suffered a host of health problems. Yet when Adoniram died, there were 210,000 Christians in Burma. God saw and greatly rewarded Adoniram's sacrificial service.

2. Discuss sacrificial service.

**ASK:** What do you think pushed Adoniram to persevere?

**ASK:** How do his experiences serving God compare to your own?

**ASK:** What are other examples of people who served God sacrificially?

3. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Paul used the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus to encourage the Philippians to be sincere and sacrificial in their service for the Lord. This session will encourage us to do the same.

## Bible Study

### I. Timothy's Like-mindedness (Phil. 2:19–24)

#### A. Sincere care (2:19–21)

Paul was locked up in Rome while the Philippians were in Philippi, eight or nine hundred miles away by road. Although they were separated physically, they wanted to stay in touch, which was obviously not easy to do in their day. So Paul planned to send Timothy to Philippi to be the communication link.

**ASK:** Pretend cell phones were a first century reality. How do you think Paul would have used his?

**ASK:** How might his use compare to ours? *Paul would most likely focus his phone use on others, using it to encourage and instruct others concerning their walk with the Lord.*

**READ:** Philippians 2:19.

Paul informed the Philippians that he trusted in the Lord to shortly send Timothy to them. His plans were subject to God's will. Paul was committed to following God's will; he lived by that principle. The Lord willing, Paul would send Timothy as soon as he knew the verdict concerning his future.

Paul wanted to send Timothy so he could be encouraged when he received a report on the Philippians' spiritual state. The Philippians were special to Paul, so a good report from Timothy concerning their circumstances would cheer him up.

**READ:** Philippians 2:20.

Paul selected Timothy as his messenger to the Philippians because Timothy had shown that he cared about God's people. Paul wrote that Timothy was like-minded, a clue that Paul intended to use Timothy as an example of a believer living out the command to have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:1–5). Timothy shared Christ's mindset and values and therefore shared Paul's concern for the Philippians. In fact, Timothy's care flowed naturally out of his Christlike mind so that he sincerely cared for the Philippians. His genuine care harkens back to Paul's prayer that the Philippians would be sincere in their walk with the Lord (1:10). No doubt Paul's prayers for Timothy had something to do with Timothy's sincere heart.

The care Timothy had for the Philippians was more than just going through the motions of meeting needs. The term "care" includes an emotional concern to the point of being fixated on a need. Timothy wanted to see for himself how the Philippians were doing. He viewed the job personally. Remember he had joined Paul and Silas on Paul's second missionary journey and was present when Paul first crossed over into Macedonia and ended up in Philippi (Acts 16:1–3). At that time Timothy looked to Paul as his mentor. No doubt during that initial visit he took cues from Paul and worked on building relationships with the new believers in Philippi.

**ASK:** What ministries in our church might compare to the rigor of traveling well over a thousand miles by foot or ship to check up on and report back on another church?

Sometimes we treat invitations to be involved in ministries like an invitation to walk thousands of miles. We ought to be eager to minister because we have genuine care for those we serve. The demands of the service shouldn't be the reason we decline.

**READ:** Philippians 2:21.

Paul wrote that everyone but Timothy sought their own things rather than the things of Christ. While others were wrapped up in their own concerns, Timothy was concerned about others. His attitude illustrated the genuine concern Paul wanted the Philippians to show one another.

**ASK:** What correlation do you see between the believers who sought their own things and the teaching of Paul in 2:4? *Those who declined to go on the journey weren't looking out for the interests of others.*

**ASK:** How do you think Timothy felt once he made the trip to Philippi and back? *He experienced the joy of the Lord and had no regrets.*

Sending Timothy to Philippi made good sense. Paul wanted the Philippians to show concern for one another. They could see how Timothy portrayed his concern for them, and they could follow his example.

When Jesus taught His disciples about His inevitable death on the cross—a substitutionary death for sinners—the disciples dismissed His words and focused instead on His coming Kingdom. Hoping to get a jump on the rest of the disciples who wanted prestigious positions in the Kingdom, James and John asked Jesus to give them co-regent positions with one sitting on Jesus' left and the other on His right (Mark 10:37). No doubt both brothers were already thinking about how to get Jesus alone to request to be the brother at His right hand. Jesus didn't let the conversation go that far.

**READ:** Mark 10:42–44. **ASK:** What did Jesus say is the road to honor in His coming Kingdom? *To become a servant of all.*

Jesus offered Himself as the supreme example of selfless concern for others, saying that He came not to be ministered to but to minister and give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). If we truly follow Christ, we, like Timothy, will reflect His character by caring more for others than for ourselves.

## **B. Humble preparation (2:22–24)**

**READ:** Philippians 2:22.

The Philippians knew Timothy had a proven character, for they had witnessed him serve in Philippi. He had stood the test and was suited for the mission of representing Paul to the Philippians. He could teach the Philippians in Paul's absence and address their spiritual shortcomings because he lived what Paul taught concerning the mind of Christ.

Timothy proved his character while he "served" under Paul's guidance. Paul used a word for "served" that means "served as a slave." Timothy worked alongside Paul with a slave mindset in that he disregarded his own needs and interests to meet the needs and interests of others.

Paul also said Timothy served him like a son serving a father. What would that have meant? Timothy obviously highly respected and looked up to Paul. He sensed that Paul cared for him and wanted him to mature in his faith and develop his ability to serve others effectively. Their father and son relationship also meant they had made a life-long commitment to each other. Just as neither a son nor a father would abandon the other in difficult circumstances, so Timothy and Paul

remained loyal to one another because they were both loyal to Christ. Through Christ they weathered stormy trials and the stress of rigorous missionary travel. Paul beautifully rehearsed his relationship with Timothy in his last letter to his son in the faith.

**READ:** 2 Timothy 3:10–12. **ASK:** How is Timothy's humility evident in Paul's final words about their relationship? *Timothy carefully followed Paul's doctrine and manner of life.*

Timothy stood ready to serve because he humbly took the time to learn from Paul both sound Bible doctrine and a biblical manner of life.

**READ:** Philippians 2:23, 24.

Paul again expressed his hope that he would send the well-prepared and willing Timothy to Philippi as soon as Paul learned what was going to happen to him. Though Paul's outcome was not yet decided, he felt confident Rome would release him, giving him the opportunity to visit Philippi again.

**ASK:** How do you think the Philippians responded to Paul's plan to visit them as soon as possible? *They must have again felt compelled to put into action the instructions in his letter to them.*

**ASK:** How should believers today respond to Christ's any-moment return? *Believers should be watching for and anticipating Christ's return by mutually adopting the mind of Christ, esteeming others better than themselves, and looking out for the interests of others.*

Someone has said that a man can be no bigger than the number of people for whom he genuinely cares. By that criterion, Timothy was a giant. How big are you? How many people do you genuinely care for? Begin to care for one person by doing something supportive and loving for that person.

## **II. Epaphroditus's Like-mindedness (Phil. 2:25–30)**

### **A. Personal sacrifice (2:25–28)**

The Philippians had sent Epaphroditus, one of their own, to Rome to help Paul. But Paul was sending Epaphroditus back for good reason. In his explanation, Paul focused his attention on Epaphroditus to provide the Philippians with a striking illustration of self-sacrificing service to others.

**READ:** Philippians 2:25. **ASK:** What do you learn about Epaphroditus from the titles Paul gave him (brother, companion in labor, fellow soldier)? *Brother conveys a loving and close relationship; companion in labor reveals his ownership of his responsibility to do his part of God's work; and fellow soldier communicates his preparedness to stand for and defend the truth alongside Paul.*

Paul also called Epaphroditus a messenger and one who ministered. "Messenger" is from the same Greek word translated "apostle." This word comes from the verb that means "send on an errand or a mission." The Philippians had sent Epaphroditus to Paul as their "apostle" to minister to Paul's needs.

The word for "ministered" describes a priestly act. Epaphroditus brought a financial offering to support Paul's basic need for food, but he also came to offer himself sacrificially as Paul's helper. He went to Paul to give himself to Paul and to the Lord on behalf of the Philippians.

**ASK:** When have you received the benefits of someone's personal sacrifice on your behalf?

**ASK:** How did benefiting from someone's service affect you?

**READ:** Philippians 2:26.

Paul planned to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi as quickly as possible. Epaphroditus experienced an intense longing or yearning for the Philippians. He missed their companionship and became homesick.

Epaphroditus also became distressed that the Philippians had heard he was sick but hadn't heard if he recovered. Most of us don't know what it means to wait days or even weeks and months for news. First century believers regularly had long delays between reports. Such delays taught them to trust God and depend on His grace to endure the waiting. Still, Epaphroditus experienced a distressing heaviness in his heart when he learned the Philippians were unsure of his condition. He was more concerned for others than he was for himself. He lived out Paul's instructions to adopt the mind of Christ by looking out for the interests of others (Phil. 2:4, 5).

**READ:** Philippians 2:27.

Paul shared that Epaphroditus nearly died from his undisclosed illness. But God intervened and healed him as an act of mercy on behalf of both Epaphroditus and Paul. In mercy God had kept Epaphroditus alive. And by His mercy He had kept Paul from having increased sorrow. If Epaphroditus had died, Paul would have had that grief to bear along with the grief of his captivity.

**READ:** Philippians 2:28.

Sending Epaphroditus back to Philippi was a sacrifice for Paul. He needed the help, but Epaphroditus needed to return to the Philippians for his own sake and theirs. Paul felt bad about the cloud of uncertainty and uneasiness that hung over the Philippian believers. He sent Epaphroditus back to Philippi to ease his sense of sorrow for them. Note that Paul felt joy (less sorrow) from knowing the Philippians could rejoice once again.

**ASK:** Evaluate this statement: Those who seek to bring joy and gladness to others will themselves know true joy and gladness as a result. *The statement is true. Seeking to please ourselves yields no lasting joy and satisfaction. Joy comes from lovingly meeting others' needs.*

## **B. Honorable sacrifice (2:29, 30)**

**READ:** Philippians 2:29.

Paul encouraged the Philippians to receive Epaphroditus. The word "receive" includes the idea of welcoming. The Philippians were to welcome Epaphroditus as a brother in the Lord with gladness and joy because of his sacrificial service. Paul added that the Philippians should honor Epaphroditus and others like him, esteeming them for their good reputation.

**ASK:** Why might a church need to be told to honor someone who served the Lord sacrificially? *Some look at those who sacrifice for the Lord with a tinge of jealousy or even resentment. Such feelings cause them to resist giving honor to who it is due. Other churches just need a reminder to give honor where it is due.*

Whether anyone would have resisted honoring Epaphroditus is not known. Either way, the godly response to Epaphroditus was to honor him.

**READ:** Philippians 2:30.

In leaving the Philippians to minister to Paul, Epaphroditus illustrated the attitude that Paul wanted the Philippians to develop. He put his life on the line for the work of Christ because he had a deep concern for others. It appears Epaphroditus, while en route to Rome, became ill and continued to push through to give to Paul the Philippians' financial gift. The Romans didn't provide for Paul's living expenses while he was under house arrest. Paul needed grocery money from supporting churches.

Epaphroditus wanted to make up, or provide, the help the Philippians could not give Paul because of the great distance between him and them. It appears other churches couldn't help Paul or didn't have a servant-minded person like Epaphroditus to send to Paul. And perhaps Paul had exhausted the help the believers in Rome could provide. So the Philippians' gift was more than a loving gesture. Paul counted on it for his well-being. That put pressure on Epaphroditus to persevere when he became ill along the route.

In addition, the Philippians gave sacrificially. Some likely gave more than they could afford (cf. Phil. 4:19). That had been their pattern before when giving to Paul and to the church in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:1–3). They took seriously their support for the Lord's work. Their sacrifice, like



Paul's financial need, pushed Epaphroditus to continue his journey even after falling ill. Paul wanted the Philippians to honor Epaphroditus for serving everyone above himself.

**ASK:** How does our church honor individuals for their sacrificial service?

In a book about having the mind of Christ and experiencing the joy that comes as a result, Timothy and Epaphroditus are exhibit A and exhibit B of Paul's argument. We might even say God allowed Epaphroditus to go through a near-death experience because He wanted to use his testimony to help build Paul's case for like-mindedness.

## Session Application

### Steps

1. Discuss Timothy's example of sincerity.

**ASK:** Does your sincerity for serving God raise to the level of Timothy's?

**ASK:** What key steps did he take to develop a heart of sincerity? *He dedicated himself to knowing God's Word and humbly learned from Paul's wisdom and example.*

**ASK:** What adjustments could you make to your life to increase the sincerity of your service?

2. Discuss honoring believers for their sacrificial service.

**ASK:** What would you have done to honor Epaphroditus?

**ASK:** Whom might our class honor for being a sacrificial servant?

3. Consider asking a volunteer to coordinate a way to honor a believer or group of believers in your church for their sincere, sacrificial service.

## becoming righteous

### SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Philippians 3:1–11

### BUILDUP THEME



BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

God makes righteous those who trust in Christ for salvation.

### MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will consider ways to better pursue knowing Christ.

### MEMORY VERSE

“And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Philippians 3:9).

## Teacher Preparation

- ☐ Have you ever watched a Catholic high mass on TV or perhaps participated in one before you were saved? On the surface, it appears holy, righteous, and worshipful. But those aren't the words God would use to describe it, for the mass at its core celebrates human efforts above God's saving grace.
- ☐ Read Philippians 3:1–11. The Judaizers claimed to have thousands of years of history on their side, going all the way back to Abraham. Their rituals, like those in the present Catholic church, seemed to demonstrate their devotion to and worship of God. But they taught self-righteousness and thereby led people away from God's saving grace.
- ☐ This session will help your learners evaluate whether they are depending on themselves for either their salvation or their Christian walk. Paul taught that salvation and Christian maturity both come by God's grace and through faith in Christ.

## Session Summary

The believers in Philippi were plagued by evil teachers who tried to distract them from the purity of the gospel by demanding the observance of old Jewish rituals. Paul strongly warned the Philippians to beware of these teachers. Then he gave his readers a look into his own religious background and accomplishments. He had lots to brag about, from his heritage to his personal training in the law, but he refused to cling to those outward standards for obtaining righteousness before God. When he met Christ as his Savior, he no longer trusted in those seemingly important things. Paul dedicated his life to knowing and living for Christ, looking forward to when he would be with Christ in the resurrection.