

## giving graciously

### SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Philippians 4:14–23

### BUILDUP THEME



PREPARE TO SERVE

God supplies our needs as we give generously to support His work.

### MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will evaluate how and why they give to the Lord.

### MEMORY VERSE

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

## Teacher Preparation

- ☐ Read Philippians 4:14–23. Paul wrote verse 19 specifically to the Philippians, who gave sacrificially to support Paul’s missionary work. Many believers have wasted or mismanaged their finances only to claim Philippians 4:19. They expect God to pay for their bills regardless of how they spend their money. God will supply the needs of generous givers. That doesn’t mean God will make generous givers wealthy in this life. God will, however, reward them in eternity.
- ☐ Paul ended his letter with an emphasis on sacrificial giving. He wanted the Philippians to continue their practice so they might bear the fruit from their giving. What are those fruits? Among other things, they include contentment, joy, and peace.
- ☐ Emphasize to your learners that the world’s path to happiness is backwards and invalid. They think getting as much money and as many things as possible will make them happy and content. The fruit of selfish spending is debt, disappointment, and ultimately despair. Only through giving to the Lord will a believer find joy and contentment.

## Session Summary

As Paul concluded his letter to the Philippians, he thanked them again for their generosity, not only in their latest gift but also in consistent giving over the years. While he appreciated their gifts, he also highly valued their willingness to partner with him in his struggles. He didn’t want gifts from them to pad his own pockets, but he greatly desired for them the spiritual fruit that would result from their generous giving. He emphasized that he was fully satisfied on receipt of their gift and that God was pleased with their offering as well. He assured them that God would faithfully provide for them as they had faithfully provided for him and that God has an infinite storehouse of riches, both physical and spiritual. Paul concluded with greetings from other believers, especially from those in Caesar’s household, and a blessing of grace for them.



# Session Starters

## Option 1—Pleasing Aromas

### Gather

- Items with a delicious aroma (e.g., orange slices, cookies, freshly popped microwave popcorn).
- Brown paper lunch bags.

### Steps

1. Before class, gather your food items that have delicious aromas. Put each item in a separate bag. Brown paper lunch bags would work great. Close the bags, leaving a hole at the top for the aroma to escape.
2. Pass the bags around the room. Learners smell what is in the bags using the holes at the top of the bags. Have them keep track of how the smells affect them.
3. Discuss responding to pleasant aromas.

**ASK:** What effects did the pleasant aromas have on you?

**ASK:** What memories did they bring to your mind?

4. Transition to the Bible lesson.

God designed us to respond to pleasing aromas. We know from experience that they bring us joy. Paul used sweet-smelling aromas as a metaphor for the Philippians' sacrificial gift. His metaphor, which we will cover in this session, will help us understand God's view of our sacrificial giving.

## Option 2—Prosperity Gospel Preachers

### Gather

- Video clips of prosperity gospel preachers.

### Steps

1. Play clips of a prosperity gospel preacher making promises that God will make rich those who give to the preacher's ministry. Or read quotes from prosperity gospel preachers.
2. Discuss the video clips.

**ASK:** What promises did the prosperity gospel preacher make?

**ASK:** What is your response to those promises?

**ASK:** Whose interest does the prosperity preacher have at heart?

### 3. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Paul made some promises to those who gave to support the Lord's work. His promises weren't the promises made by prosperity gospel preachers. This session will give us a better understanding of the true benefits of giving sacrificially to the Lord.

## Bible Study

### I. Participate in Generous Giving (Phil. 4:14–16)

#### A. Partner sacrificially (4:14)

**READ:** Philippians 4:14.

Paul had learned to be content with little or nothing. But that didn't mean the Philippians' gift was pointless or unnecessary. Paul still needed to eat. He made sure the Philippians understood his deep appreciation for their sacrifice and for their willingness to join him in his distress. They too felt the pinch of persecution. When they gave to help Paul, they gave sacrificially and with a deep reliance on God for their own provisions.

Paul said the Philippians had done well when they decided to give him a gift. He meant that what they did was beautiful, pleasant, and noble. Paul recognized the Philippians' kindness and love had motivated them to give. He was touched by their generosity. Such generosity is characteristic of true believers.

James taught that faith without works is dead. He used the example of a person who sends a destitute person away with a blessing to be filled. The person says all the right things but doesn't give the hungry person any food. The person's words, then, are empty because the person didn't act to give the hungry person any provisions (James 2:14–16). Paul's point is that those who are saved will show their faith by their good works. The Philippians showed their faith by their sacrificial giving to Paul.

There is also a sense in which the Philippians' gift was beautiful and pleasant because they were obeying God's leading. The Holy Spirit will prompt believers to respond to people's needs, especially the needs of those who minister the Word. To ignore or quiet the Spirit's prompting would be wrong. Had the Philippians refused to give, they would have been doing something unpleasant, leaving Paul, content though he was, to fend for himself.

**READ:** James 4:17. **ASK:** When have you obeyed the Spirit's prompting to give generously to meet another believer's need?

**ASK:** How might we know God is leading us to help other believers

through our sacrificial giving? *We need to pray about opportunities to give, be willing to give, and obey whatever God lays on our hearts to do.*

Since God had led the Philippians to give to help Paul, their efforts weren't just pleasant but also right. We, like the Philippians, need to be sensitive to the Spirit's promptings in our lives and be ready to give sacrificially at times.

## **B. Share persistently (4:15, 16)**

Giving to help Paul wasn't something new for the Philippians. They had made supporting Paul a regular practice.

**READ:** Philippians 4:15, 16.

Paul recognized the Philippian believers for their habit of giving. They kept track of Paul's needs. That wasn't easy to do in their day. And when they made their collection, someone had to volunteer to take the gift to Paul. Sometimes that meant traveling hundreds of miles.

No other church replicated the Philippians' persistent giving. Paul commented that he didn't receive gifts regularly from any other church. What a tremendous blessing the Philippians must have been to Paul.

**ASK:** What does our church do to keep track of our missionaries' growing and changing needs?

**ASK:** What could you do as an individual to track their needs?

Ten years earlier, after Paul had established the Philippian church, he had set out for Thessalonica, a much wealthier area. As he ministered to the Thessalonians, he did not receive payment from them but insisted on supporting himself (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8). The Philippians, however, had continued to send him help as a supplement, perhaps because Paul faced opposition and trouble while he was there (Acts 17). In fact, the Philippian Christians sent gifts twice while Paul was in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:16). When they heard about his need at Rome, they sent financial support again. Through the years they were constant and dependable in their care for Paul's needs.

**ASK:** How did the Philippians' persistent giving fit Paul's teaching in Philippians 2:3 and 4? *The Philippians lived out Paul's teaching, looking out for his needs and interests above their own.*

Consistent giving communicates genuine support for the person in need. It says the giver has bought into God's work for the long haul.

## **II. Benefits of Gracious Giving (4:17–19)**

There are benefits that come from gracious giving. Paul pointed those out to encourage the Philippians.

## A. Spiritual fruit (4:17)

**READ:** Philippians 4:17.

Paul was careful to explain that he didn't habitually ask for the Philippians' support. He never wanted to come off as greedy for money. He wasn't using the gospel as a hustle to get rich. That was obvious to anyone who paid attention to Paul's life. Still, some religious leaders accused Paul of preaching the gospel for monetary gain. Paul made clear to the Thessalonians that financial gain was never his motivation for ministering to them (1 Thess. 2:9). As mentioned above, Paul was willing to work on the side to support himself while he was in Thessalonica (2 Thess. 3:7–10). He did the same in Corinth and other places (Acts 18:1–4).

Paul wanted the Philippians to give so they would experience the spiritual fruit that accompanies generosity (Phil. 4:17). Paul knew the spiritual fruit received by the Philippians was more valuable than the temporary gift he had received from them. He wanted their heavenly bank accounts to accumulate spiritual rewards because of their service for Christ. Their sacrificial giving played an important role in Paul's ministry of spreading the gospel, and Paul knew God would reward their efforts.

Paul must have had in mind additional spiritual fruit that would immediately affect the Philippians. For instance, as they gave, they would know the joy of the Lord and have genuine contentment. As they experienced such fruit, they were motivated to keep giving.

**ASK:** How has the spiritual fruit that comes from giving sacrificially affected your desire to continue to give?

**ASK:** Compare the "fruit" that comes from giving to the "fruit" that comes from being greedy and selfish. *The joy and contentment a person hoped to gain by being greedy can come only from giving.*

## B. Divine pleasure (4:18)

**READ:** Philippians 4:18.

Paul assured the Philippians he had received their generous gift, adding that it had left him well supplied. They no doubt experienced a boost of joy when they read Paul had benefited from their sacrifice. Paul's thank you to the Philippians was part of their reward for giving to him. Those who receive sacrificial gifts must be sure to say thank you. Hearing how a gift impacts the recipient encourages the givers to praise God and consider how they might give again.

Paul continued, comparing the Philippians' gift to a sacrificial offering to God. Such a comparison helps us understand God's perspective on

sacrificial gifts in general. Paul's metaphorical language enlightens our understanding and encourages us to give sacrificially.

First, we can learn that God's greatness was the primary focus in the Philippians's sacrificial gift. The Philippians made a great sacrifice to help Paul, but they didn't make the sacrifice to Paul. They made the sacrifice to God because *God* is great and worthy of their gift. God's holiness and love, among other attributes, motivated the Philippians to give sacrificially to God.

**ASK:** Does God's greatness motivate your sacrificial giving? How do you know?

Second, the Philippians' sacrificial gift drew God's attention. Their sacrificial gift metaphorically produced a sweet-smelling aroma that God couldn't help but notice.

**ASK:** How do you respond when you smell chocolate chip cookies in the oven, steaks on a barbecue grill, or popcorn fresh out of the microwave?

God can't help but notice when believers serve Him sacrificially. He is drawn to the "fragrances" their heart-felt actions produce. They are more compelling to Him than earthly aromas are to us.

**ASK:** How would you respond to someone who thinks his sacrifices for God are too meager for God to notice?

Third, God accepted the Philippians' sacrificial gift as a satisfactory and proper recognition of His greatness. No one could ever make a greater sacrifice than God made when He sent His Son to die on the cross for us. But when we make sacrifices as part of our service to God, He accepts them as proper responses to His sacrifice on our behalf. Our sacrifices reflect God's sacrifice for us and communicate our love for Him.

**ASK:** How does Paul's sacrifice metaphor enhance your understanding of your sacrificial service for God?

**ASK:** Which truths motivate you to want to give sacrificially to God?

### **C. Replenished supply (4:19, 20)**

**READ:** Philippians 4:19. **ASK:** What would you include in a list of the Philippians' needs?

"Supply" is the same Greek word Paul used in verse 18 to say he was "full." So God promised to meet all the Philippians' needs created by their sacrificial giving. They did not need to fear that their gift to Paul would cause a severe lack in their own lives. God could easily make sure they, too, were "full" so they would have funds to survive.

Hebrews 13:16 also describes good works and sharing with others as sacrifices that are pleasing to God.

Paul most have also meant God would bless the Philippians with more funds to give away. Once the Philippians gave sacrificially to Paul, they probably wondered from where they would get the money that would make up their next gift. They were not to worry. God would supply their need for more funds to give in support of God's work. That's part of what Paul promised God would do.

God doesn't need to use people to supply money and resources to missionaries. He chooses to use people because it means spiritual fruit for them and glory and pleasure for Him. The Philippians had caught on to the reciprocal nature of giving to God. They learned that it is indeed more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

**ASK:** Have you viewed giving as a command you must obey or as an opportunity to know God's blessings? Explain.

Prosperity gospel preachers have hijacked God's promises to supply a person's needs. They preach that God will make a person healthy and wealthy if the person will give money to God. God never promises perfect health and extraordinary wealth to those who give. And that is not what happens to the givers. Instead, the preachers pocket the people's generous gifts, taking enormous salaries as "evidence" of their own sacrificial giving. They are running a scam, ruining people's lives, and bringing shame to the name of Christ. Their greedy practices aren't at all what Paul had in mind in verse 19. God will provide for a person's needs, not the person's lust for a luxurious lifestyle.

God's supply, Paul said, comes to the giver according to God's riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19). God gives in accordance with His graciousness and greatness. Paul's point, then, is that God will supply the Philippians' needs because that's the kind of God He is at heart.

The evidence for God's greatness and graciousness is Christ Jesus. God already gave us His Son, so we should trust He will be just as gracious with us in supplying our needs as we sacrificially give to meet the needs of others.

**ASK:** Finish this sentence: I will give sacrificially to God because He is . . .

**READ:** Philippians 4:20.

Recalling God's faithful supply and infinite riches, Paul burst forth into a doxology, or expression of praise. In his writings, Paul often erupted into such praise following the presentation of truth about God (Rom. 11:33–36; 1 Tim. 1:17). This doxology in his letter to the Philippians flows naturally from the theme of joy seen throughout the epistle, so it seems quite appropriate that Paul would use it as a prelude to his letter's conclusion.



## D. Gracious friendships (4:21–23)

The Philippians' sacrificial and consistent giving endeared them to Paul. They built gracious friendships with Paul even though they were rarely in Paul's presence.

**READ:** Philippians 4:21–23.

Paul urged his friends at Philippi to greet all the saints, he sent greetings from his coworkers, he relayed greetings from all the saints in Rome, and he extended greetings from those of Caesar's household. The believers in Caesar's household were probably engaged in imperial service as slaves, soldiers, and freedmen. Evidently several of Caesar's soldiers and servants had come to know Christ because of Paul's witness.

Notice that Paul didn't mention individuals but referred to "every saint" and "all the saints." Perhaps he wanted to reiterate his message of unity among the believers, promoting a loving spirit. Paul showed his equal love and appreciation for all the believers in Philippi. All the saints mentioned in the greeting, regardless of their station in life, were one in Christ.

To be a "saint" is to be set apart for God. The word comes from a word meaning "holy." All believers are saints in that they all belong to God and are available for His use. We aren't perfect yet, but we should strive to become more Christlike every day.

Paul closed his letter with a benediction, or blessing. He asked that Christ's grace be with all the Philippians. Grace can be defined as unmerited favor—something that we don't deserve. The Philippians owed their spiritual lives to Christ's grace, just as all believers do. Because of His generosity and grace, God is willing to supply our greatest need, salvation through Christ, even though we don't deserve it. It is through grace that we can partake of God's generosity in Christ, which motivates us to give generously of ourselves in ministry to others. And it is through His grace that all believers are united together. Paul said "Amen" to what he knew God's grace had accomplished, was accomplishing, and would accomplish in the future.

## Session Application

### Steps

1. Encourage learners to evaluate how and why they give to the Lord.

**ASK:** How have you given to the Lord?

**ASK:** Why have you given to the Lord? What has been your motivation?

**ASK:** What might God think of your giving? Is it a sweet-smelling aroma to Him?

2. Review God's teaching on sacrificial giving.

Those who give because they think God will be obligated to make them rich will be sorely disappointed. And those who don't give because they think using all their money on themselves will make them happy will also be disappointed. God wants us to give because we appreciate His grace in our lives. As we do, we can be confident that God will accept our sacrificial giving and care for our needs, giving us the grace to remain content and obedient to Him when we have just a little and when we have a lot.

**ASK:** Why will you give to God sacrificially in the coming week?

**ASK:** How, besides putting money in the offering plate, will you give to God sacrificially?

3. Have learners share testimonies of how God has supplied their needs as they have faithfully honored Him with their giving.
4. End with prayer, thanking God for the truths revealed in the book of Philippians.