

LESSON TWELVE
GENEROSITY
(Philippians 4:14-23 NKJV)

REFLECTION

At birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, births, graduations, and holidays, we give and receive presents. It's hard to imagine a world without this practice. Would you say that you are more comfortable giving or receiving gifts? Why?

SITUATION

Paul began his letter to the Philippians by expressing his thanks for the way in which they had partnered with him in sharing the gospel. He concludes in much the same manner: by expressing his gratitude for the financial gift they have sent to him. In doing so, Paul follows the typical writing conventions of his day, making sure the believers know he has "learned to be content whatever the circumstance" (**Philippians 4:11**), so his words will not be taken as a request to receive more funds from them. Paul's closing words remind us of many important biblical truths, including the need to be generous with the resources God has given to us.

OBSERVATION

Read **Philippians 4:14-23** (New King James Version)

EXPLORATION

1. What are some ways believers can actively share in the troubles of others?

Answer: Believers can share in the troubles of others by being present with them during their times of trouble, laboring alongside of them, giving money to help meet needs. They can also help by referring or directing people to others or agencies that can assist those in need.

2. According to this passage, what were the Philippian's giving habits?

Answer: We learn from this passage that the Philippians were a giving church and wanted to aid in the furtherance of the gospel message. Also, they had a habit of giving more than one time. They were in a partnership with Paul.

3. What do you think Paul means when he says that he does not desire the believers' gifts, but that "more be credited to your account" (**verse 17**)?

Answer: Paul reminds the Philippians that even his reception of their gift is ultimately for their benefit. The word "fruit" can be translated "profit". The Philippians were in effect storing up for themselves treasures in heaven (**Matt. 6:20**). The gifts they gave to Paul were accruing eternal dividends to their spiritual account (**Prov. 11:24-25, 19:17; Luke 6:38; 2 Cor. 9:6**).

4. Paul writes of the good that comes from giving. What good comes to the giver?

Answer: The scriptures listed above show that the giver will receive increase, God will pay back to the giver, and God can even give overflow!

5. What determines whether a gift gets praised (as in this case) or is scorned by God (see, for example, **Proverbs 15:8; Isaiah 1:10-17; and Malachi 1:8**)?

Answer: The heart or attitude of the giver determines whether a gift gets praised or scorned by God. Gifts given with the right attitude are a fragrant (sweet-smelling aroma), an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

6. What is the promise to those who give with the right attitude?

Answer: “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” (**Phil. 4:19**).

INSPIRATION

Today, I will make a difference. I will begin by controlling my thoughts. A person is the product of his thoughts. I want to be happy and hopeful. Therefore, I will have thoughts that are happy and hopeful. I refuse to be victimized by my circumstances. I will not let petty inconveniences such as stoplights, long lines, and traffic jams be my masters. I will avoid negativism and gossip. Optimism will be my companion, and victory will be my hallmark.

Today, I will make a difference. I will be grateful for the twenty-four hours that are before me. Time is a precious commodity. I refuse to allow what little time I have to be contaminated by self-pity, anxiety, or boredom. I will face this day with joy of a child and the courage of a giant. I will drink each minute as though it is my last. When tomorrow comes, today will be gone forever. While it is here, I will use it for loving and giving.

Today, I will make a difference. I will not let past failures haunt me. Even though my life is scarred with mistakes, I refuse to rummage through my trash heap of failures. I will admit them. I will correct them. I will press on. Victoriously. No failure is fatal. It's okay to stumble; I will get up. It's okay to fail; I will rise again.

Today, I will make a difference. I will spend time with those I love. My spouse, my children, my family. A man can own the world but be poor for the lack of love. A man can own nothing and yet be wealthy in relationships. Today I will spend at least five minutes with the significant people in my world. Five *quality* minutes of talking or hugging or thanking or listening. Five undiluted minutes with my mate, children, and friends.

Today, I will make a difference. (From *Shaped by God* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. In what ways can your small gifts and offerings make a difference in other's lives?

8. In supporting Paul, the Philippians were literally supporting a missionary. What are the implications of this for you and your church?
9. Many people feel churches overly emphasize giving. Do you feel this is a fair assessment?
10. God says, “Every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills” (**Psalm 50:10**). He doesn’t need our money. So, why does the Bible say so much about giving?
11. What are your giving habits? Do you give regularly and generously? Why or why not?
12. How would you describe the difference between tithing—the practice of giving ten percent of your income to God—and giving offerings to your church?

LIFE LESSONS

The Bible is clear; money is a blessing, a danger, a stewardship, a test, and a tool. What we do with material wealth is a reliable indicator of our spiritual health. How we behave with money reveals what we truly believe. If we are tight fisted, hoard, and think constantly of get but only rarely giving, we disclose that we do not really trust in God’s goodness or have faith that his supplies are infinite. At issue in this area of giving is not the amount but our attitude. Do we see giving as a duty or a delight? Do we give grudgingly or with joy? Hear again the challenge of Jesus—to use your worldly wealth for his eternal purposes (see **Luke 16:1-13**).

DEVOTION

Lord, teach us the paradoxical truth that the way we “get a grip” on this subject of giving is by “loosening our grip” on our money. Remind us again and again of how generous you have been with us so that we might more willingly and gladly pass on your blessings to others.

JOURNALING

Imagine spreading out your financial records in front of God. What do you think he might say about the way you use the resources he has entrusted to you?