

Legacy

November 21, 2021



Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Philippians 4:15-23

Session Outline

1. Trouble is Inevitable (Philippians 4:15)
2. Sharing Burdens (Philippians 4:16-18)
3. God Supplies (Philippians 4:19-23)

Theological Theme

As Paul closed his letter to the Philippians, he thanked them for their provision for him in his trouble. This provision was the providence of God by means of the Philippian church. Just as God had provided for Paul through them, God would also provide for their needs.



Leader Guide

Legacy

Introduction

Maybe you've heard of Douglas Mawson. He was an Australian geologist who explored part of Antarctica with a team in 1912. One day Mawson and two other men left the base camp to gather some data over several weeks. They hoped to cover three hundred miles into the interior to gather scientific data and specimens. They were successful in meeting that goal, but tragedy struck on their way back. One of the men fell into a deep crevasse, dragging down their best dogs and most of the supplies. After several days, the other man died as well. Douglas Mawson was the only one left alive. Finally, after thirty days in the elements, Mawson made it back to camp. He was emaciated and frostbitten. Many lauded him as a hero for his ability to survive in what seemed like impossible conditions. Questions arose, however, about some of the measures he may have taken. It has been suggested that he ate the corpse of the second teammate that died in the expedition.¹

While this is an extreme example, we are all bent toward self-preservation. The idea that life is good and desirable and death is terrible and to be avoided is God-given. When we fight for life and against death, we are reflecting our Creator. But death is a real and present danger. Bad things happen all the time. Tragedy cannot be avoided. So, with the constant threat of death, we worry. When the phone rings in the middle of the night, we may feel a shot of adrenaline and imagine that something terrible has happened. We have anxiety when our loved ones travel. There is no way to escape the stench of sin in this world. It pervades every corner of our existence and affects all our relationships.

- ❓ Can you think of a time when you were overcome with worry or grief? What happened?
- ❓ What are some ways, big or small, that you have seen yourself prioritize your own life over others?

Self-preservation is the way of the world. But in today's session, we will see that Paul taught that the way to true life and gain, even in great hardship is not self-preservation, but is actually in giving ourselves up for God and

the sake of others. The Philippian church had done this for Paul, and in response, Paul reminded them that their sacrifice served as an offering to God, and He would provide their every need.

Session Summary

To close his letter to them, Paul gave thanks to the Philippians for a gift (most likely monetary) they sent to him through their messenger Epaphroditus. The note of appreciation appears in three places: in verse 10 Paul spoke of his great joy because of the Philippians' expression of concern for him; in verse 14 he told them they "did well by" helping him in his affliction; and in verse 18 he used both financial and cultic metaphors to describe the immense value of their gift to him. Paul's expression of thanks was qualified by two efforts to distance himself from the Philippians' gift. In verses 11-13, he claimed that ultimately, he did not need their gift, and in verse 17 he said he did not seek it. Paul was not ungrateful. Rather, he was careful to use the circumstance as an opportunity to teach the Philippians about the reality of suffering and the providence of God.

1. Trouble is Inevitable (Philippians 4:15)

Paul made it clear in chapter 4 that he was in need. He was careful not to complain and sought to avoid giving the impression that he wanted pity. He certainly did not. But neither did he hide the fact that he had trouble, he lacked, and he was suffering. In verse 15, he reiterated this fact by saying, "no church shared with me." Paul depended on the kindness and generosity of churches to help him continue his missionary work. There were times when he had very little. Here we have an important principle connected to our earthly sojourn: all of humanity, both the saved and unsaved, must shoulder the repercussions of living in a marred creation.



What are some false ideas people might have about what it means to follow Jesus and what the condition their life will be after they do? How does Paul's letter to the Philippians remind us this isn't true?

There is a prevalent teaching across the globe today claiming that Christians are exempt from the ramifications of a fallen world. One example of this false teaching is the idea that faithful Christians don't have to experience sickness, will grow financially wealthy, and are immune to tragedy. This teaching is known as the prosperity gospel and it is doing great damage among churches around the world. Not only did Jesus not promise this, but He also told His followers the opposite. Jesus promised His disciples that they would experience trouble and persecutions (see John 16:33; Matthew 5:11-12).

One specific trial Christians must pass through is summed up by Paul's words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12: "all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Christians should not be caught off guard when they experience times of sorrow, affliction, or persecution.

- ❓ Look back at verses 10-14. What purpose was served through Paul's hardship? What purposes are served in our lives today?

When a Christian suffers hardship or goes through a trial, it isn't because Satan is winning and God is unable to protect His children. God has ordained all things in the lives of Christians for their good and for His glory. The affliction that befalls those who want to live a godly life is meant for the good of those who suffer and endure. The Bible speaks to this truth in many places including Romans 8:28 and Genesis 50:20. Christians must remember and rejoice that their times of sorrow, affliction, and persecution are for their good and the glory of God.

Christians should also remember that Christ did not destroy sin and evil in the world at His first coming. That will be His business when He returns. Jesus's mission in His first coming was to atone for the sins of all those who look to Him for mercy and the forgiveness of their transgressions.

- ❓ Application: Are you undergoing some trial as Paul was? What is your perspective on that situation? How is God growing your faith through it? How might you glorify Him in it?

Spiritual Transactions

With contentment (v. 11) and adaptability (v. 12), Paul did not seek the gift. That would abuse his converts and compromise servanthood. With a higher, spiritual motivation, Paul sought the profit that is increasing to your account. Using financial terms, Paul declared this "profit" accrued from an action. "Increasing" is the interest it would bear to the account of the Philippian believers. Giving, a physical and material act, is a spiritual transaction.

2. Sharing Burdens (Philippians 4:16-18)

- ❓ What did Paul mean when he said, "I seek the profit that is increasing to your account" in verse 17?

Paul was saying that the service the Philippians rendered to him and the kindness they showed him was ultimately for their benefit. While their actions were certainly sacrificial, Paul assured them that it was not a sacrifice without reward. The implication here is that they should have gratitude for the opportunity to serve because it resulted in profit being accrued to their accounts. In other words, God had seen their sacrifice and He would reward them for it. This principle is seen time and again throughout the Scripture. For example: Deuteronomy 15:10; Psalm 37:25; Proverbs 11:25; 19:17; Malachi 3:10; 2 Corinthians 9:6.

- ❓ Paul helped the Philippians see that the giving of the gift was actually an act of worship to God (v. 18). How did their gift act in this way?

The Philippians' gift was an act of worship because it was given by faith in Christ for the purposes of the kingdom. Paul was the steward who would be managing it, but the gift was safeguarded in the coffers of the King.



Read Galatians 6:2. How did the Philippians fulfill what Paul wrote in this verse by giving their gift?

Christians should bear one another's burdens for three reasons. First, they are commanded to do it in the Scriptures. There is no doubt that this is God's will for His people. Second, Christians should do this out of love for their fellow Christian. When a Christian helps their brother or sister bear a burden, it is a spiritual help to them. The Lord employs His children to be the means by which He gives comfort to those of His who are suffering. It is a great mercy and service to their brothers and sisters when believers help them bear their load. Finally, Christians should bear each other's burdens because this gives glory to the one true and living God. Humble and selfless acts of service toward fellow believers put the spotlight on a great and glorious God.

There are many ways Christians can bear one another's the burdens. In this passage, the Philippians did so by providing for Paul's physical needs through a monetary gift. This may mean a relationship in which a Christians meet regularly for conversation and encouragement. It may involve teaching immature believers or encouraging saints who have stumbled. It includes visiting the sick and lonely, offering assistance to those in financial trouble, or giving guidance from the Word to those who are perplexed and troubled. We live in this way with one another because of the surpassing way Christ has borne our burdens.

Jesus, the Messiah, is the burden-bearing Christ. Let us take a deep breath and sigh in relief at the remembrance of the great burden that Christ carried up the hill of Calvary. It wasn't the ridicule, the treason, the shame, or the vitriol under which He heaved. It wasn't the weight of the wooden cross that threatened to overwhelm Him. Rather, it was the crushing weight of the wrath of God that He bore. The righteous and consuming fire of the wrath of a holy God against the iniquity of sinful souls was transferred from our shoulders and placed squarely on Christ. No wonder He stumbled and fell. No wonder He thirsted. No wonder He cried out. No wonder He breathed his last.

But He was not crushed. He was not overwhelmed. He was not destroyed. He was not defeated. He bore the wrath of God for our sin in perfect obedience to God the Father. His sacrifice was accepted and He was raised to life. Sin and death were defeated, making a way for those who would call upon His name to be saved. As if we could possibly expect more,

“Blessed be the Lord! Day after day he bears our burdens” (Psalm 68:19). Christ lifts our daily burdens even now: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

 Application: Can you think of a time when a fellow believer helped you carry a load? Who have you helped in this way?

3. God Supplies (Philippians 4:19-23)

The gift from the Philippians included, or possibly was entirely composed of, money. Yet Paul wanted to be careful about money matters. Charlatan philosophers were a frequent sight on the street corners of cities like Philippi in ancient times. They dressed like philosophers, and many were able to gather a following that was willing not only to hear and submit to them but also to give them financial support. According to the second-century satirist Lucian, “they collect tribute, going from house to house, or, as they themselves express it, they ‘shear the sheep’: and they expect many to give, either out of respect for their cloth or for fear of their abusive language.”²

 Look back at verses 10-11. How did Paul seek to distinguish himself from these teachers? How did this serve to glorify God even as Paul’s needs were met by others?

Like itinerant philosophers, both sincere and otherwise, Paul sometimes preached in the open as a platform for evangelistic efforts. Because of this resemblance, Paul was aware that misunderstanding could arise if he depended on the churches he established for his financial support. Although he recognized the principle that those primarily responsible for the spiritual nurture of a Christian community could ask for the community’s financial support (1Corinthians 9:3-14; 2 Thessalonians 3:9; 1Timothy 5:17-18), he usually refused such support to avoid even a hint of an unfair scandal over his proclamation of the gospel.

 What was it important for the Philippian to know “my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus”? Why is it important for us today?

Paul wanted the Philippians to understand two fundamental lessons of the Christian life. In verse 13, he explained that a Christian’s contentedness is not found in favorable circumstances, but in the Rock of Ages. In verse 19, he explained that a Christian may leave the needs of their present circumstances in the hands of God for He has promised to give His children what they need.

Paul advocated for a way of living that flies in the face of our instinct to ensure self-preservation. The natural man captains his own ship (or so

he thinks) and takes matters into his own hands so it will go well with him. But the Christian has given up their life, taken up their cross, and is following Christ. Their life is no longer their own but is in the hands of God. Their contentedness is no longer dependent upon their fortunes but upon their reconciliation with God. They are no longer compelled by the endless and fretful struggle to fill their proverbial barns, for the same God in whose hands their lives rest also supplies their needs.

-  Application: What evidence does your life give that you trust God to supply your every need? What are some ways you might seek what you need outside of God?

Conclusion

A disciple ought not think that they will be above their master. The Christian's master is Christ Jesus, and He suffered greatly in this world. Christians ought not be surprised when they face trials and tribulations. But in those sufferings, God provides. Believers help carry the burdens of other believers. This is part of the reason commitment to the local church is so important. Furthermore, God has promised to intervene and help supply the needs of His children. This doesn't mean Christians are promised prosperity, but it does mean they are under the care of a good, powerful, and sovereign Father who is working out His purposes for their lives.

-  How would your life look different if you truly believed God would provide for your every need?
-  How would this change the way you interact with others and the level of generosity you might show?
-  If God provides all of our needs, how will you choose to invest your life for the sake of the gospel?

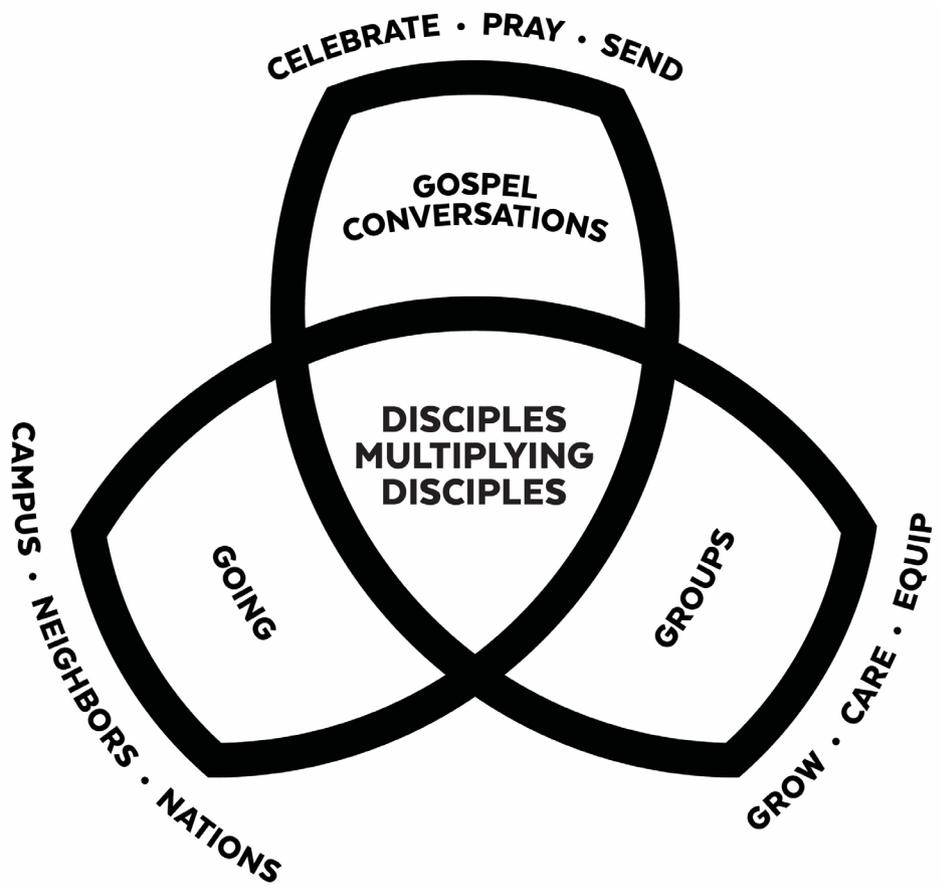
Prayer of Response

Ask the Lord to give you a clearer picture of how He shows His glory and goodness during difficult situations. Ask Him to give you eyes to see and compassion for your fellow brothers and sisters who are burdened. Finally, ask Him to increase your faith so you would trust His providential care and that He will meet your every need.

Additional Resources

- *A Disruptive Generosity* by Mac Pier
- *The Legacy Journey* by Dave Ramsey
- *Enough* by Adam Hamilton

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



For Next Week

Session Title

- Simeon Says and Anna's Austerity

Main Passages

- Luke 2:25-38

Memorize

And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

- Philippians 4:19

Historical Context of Philippians

Purpose

One purpose of this letter was for Paul to explain his situation at Rome (1:12–26). Although he was concerned about the divided Christian community at Rome, his outlook was strengthened by the knowledge that Christ was being magnified. Paul's theology of life formed the basis of his optimism. Whether he lived or died, whether he continued his service to others or went to be in Christ's presence, or whether he was appreciated or not, he wanted Christ to be glorified.

Author

Paul the apostle wrote this short letter, a fact that no scholar seriously questions.

Setting

The traditional date for the writing of Philippians is during Paul's first Roman imprisonment (AD 60–62); few have challenged this conclusion.

Paul planted the church at Philippi during his second missionary journey (AD 50) in response to his "Macedonian vision" (Ac 16:9–10). This was the first church in Europe (Ac 16).

The text of this letter from Paul suggests several characteristics of the church at Philippi. First, Gentiles predominated. Few Jews lived in Philippi, and, apparently, the church had few. Second, women had a significant role (Ac 16:11–15; Php 4:1–2). Third, the church was generous. Fourth, they remained deeply loyal to Paul.

Philippi, the ancient city of Krenides, had a military significance. It was the capital of Alexander the Great, who renamed it for his father Philip of Macedon, and it became the capital of the Greek Empire (332 BC). The Romans conquered Greece, and in the civil war after Julius Caesar's death (44 BC), Antony and Octavius repopulated Philippi by allowing the defeated armies (Brutus and Cassius) to settle there (eight hundred miles from Rome). They declared the city a Roman colony. It flourished, proud of its history and entrenched in Roman political and social life. In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul alludes to military and political structures as metaphors for the church.

Special Features

Philippians is Paul's most warmly personal letter. After initial difficulties in the city of Philippi (Acts 16), a strong bond developed between Paul and the converts there. Paul wrote to thank the church for a gift it had recently sent him in prison and to inform them of his circumstances.

Extended Commentary

Philippians 4:15-23

4:15. The Philippians' gift was not unexpected. They had treated Paul this way before in the early days of his ministry in Europe (Acts 16:12–40). Paul described their relationship with him at that time in technical accounting terms. No other church entered into a financial partnership with him. In a sense, the Philippian letter is Paul's official receipt, acknowledging and giving credit for the church's gift to him.

4:16. Paul went directly from Philippi to Thessalonica (Acts 16:12–17:1). Though we have no record of them, there the Philippians began sending him gifts (compare 2 Cor. 8:1–9). Thus Paul acknowledges the depth and length of his relationship with the Philippian church. He also acknowledged that he had need even when he learned to be content.

4:17. Again the apostle reveals that the motive for his thankfulness of their partnership in his ministry was not to secure another gift. His letter was not a fund-raising attempt. He wanted them to realize that their deeds would not go unnoticed. God is marking them down in the credit column of the heavenly ledger. They have a deposit in heaven that will yield rich dividends. (See Jesus' words in Matt. 6:19–21.)

4:18. Paul finds another way to show he is not writing to ask for another gift. He retains his accounting vocabulary. The letter he sends with Epaphroditus is his receipt marked "paid in full" and more. His storehouse is full. His needs were met through the Philippians' gifts. These good deeds not only satisfied Paul but were a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. Giving to God's servant for God's work is a gift to God, a first-class offering (compare Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:16).

4:19. Their obedience and generosity will bring God's reward. This is Paul's promise to the Philippians, according to the niv. However, other translators follow different manuscript evidence or interpret the Greek tense differently and read this as Paul's prayer that God may fulfill all their needs. Either reading gives encouragement and expectation to the readers. As they met all of Paul's needs (v. 16), so God will meet all their needs. God does this out of the abundance of his treasury, a glorious resource without limits. How does one draw from these unlimited resources? Through Christ Jesus. Only those in him have access to God's account and can ask him to meet their needs.

4:20. Paul concluded the body of the letter with a doxology praising God. The thought of God's providing our needs in Christ naturally led to praise and thanksgiving. The God of glory and honor is not far removed from us, however. He remains our ... Father ready to bring love and resources to meet our needs. Thus, glory belongs to him forever—into the unseen ages.

4:21. Final greetings with a benediction of grace are a regular feature of Paul's letters. He concludes this letter by sending his greetings and the greetings of the Christians with him in Rome. The saints are all the members of the Philippian church set aside to serve God. They are

saints not because of holy lives they live but because they are in Christ Jesus, the source of holiness and thus of sainthood.

4:22. Caesar's household does not necessarily mean the blood relatives of the Roman emperor. Probably, Paul was referring to those employed by the emperor, perhaps including the Roman guards that had become believers, possibly as a result of Paul's confinement.

4:23. The realization of this benediction would hopefully increase the harmony of the church by causing each believer to cherish the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and bring a joyous peace among them. This fulfilled Paul's opening statement in Philippians 1:2.³

References

1. History.com Editors, “5 Stunning Real-Life Survival Stories,” History.com (A&E Television Networks, June 20, 2019), <https://www.history.com/news/5-stunning-real-life-survival-stories>.
2. Frank Thielman, *The NIV Application Commentary: Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>.
3. Max Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians*, ed. Max Anders (Nasville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>.

Author Bio

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Frank Thielman (PhD, Duke University) is Presbyterian professor of divinity at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, in Birmingham, Alabama. He is the author of Philippians in the NIV Application Commentary series.

Max Anders (Holman New Testament Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians)

Dr. Max Anders is the author of over 25 books, including the bestselling *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*, and is the creator and general editor of the 32-volume Holman Bible Commentary series. He has taught on the college and seminary level and is a veteran pastor. Max provides resources and discipleship strategies at www.maxanders.com to help people grow spiritually.

Mac Pier (A Disruptive Generosity)

Mac Pier is the founder and CEO of The New York City Leadership Center and was instrumental in founding the inaugural Movement Day conference. Pier also serves the Lausanne Movement as the City Catalyst. A resident of New York City since 1984, Mac lives in a diverse neighborhood with residents from more than 100 ethnic groups and attends church with people who speak 60 different languages. He is the author of *A Disruptive Gospel*, *Spiritual Leadership in the Global City*, and *Consequential Leadership*; coauthor of *The Power of a City at Prayer*; and a contributor to *Signs of Hope in the City*.

Dave Ramsey (The Legacy Journey)

Dave Ramsey is America’s trusted voice on money and business. His five New York Times bestselling books—*Financial Peace*, *More Than Enough*, *The Total Money Makeover*, *EntreLeadership*, and *Smart Money Smart Kids*—have sold more than 7 million copies combined. The Dave Ramsey Show is heard by more than 8 million listeners each week on more than 500 radio stations and iHeartRadio.

Adam Hamilton (Enough)

Adam Hamilton is senior pastor of The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, one of the fastest growing, most highly visible churches in the country. The Church Report named Hamilton’s congregation the most influential mainline church in America, and he preached at the National Prayer Service as part of the presidential inauguration festivities in 2013.