



# DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

## Sunday, June 26-July 2 (B) – 2 Corinthians 8:7-15

**Focus:** *Generosity in Giving*

### **word of life**

**“For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”** (2 Corinthians 8:9 NRSV)

Read 2 Corinthians 8:7-15.

We read in these verses one of the reasons for Paul’s letter. In an earlier visit to Corinth, Paul had called for a collection from the Gentile churches for the needs of the Christians in Jerusalem. (This is recorded in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4) The significance of this offering can easily be overlooked. Paul and the Jewish believers had disagreed about the place of Gentiles in the early church.

There are many occasions in the book of Acts where this conflict is described. Yet here is Paul, asking for resources from the Gentile Christians to respond to the needs of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. It would be an act of generosity from one faith community in response to another’s need – even if there is disagreement between the two. What a vision of unity in the early church!

1. *What are some barriers that keep us from responding to the needs of others in the church?*
2. *How can those barriers be overcome?*

Paul is the master teacher of stewardship and makes the case for the Corinthians to be generous in their giving. With the following points, Paul:

- ❖ lifts up the example of the generosity of the Gentile churches in Macedonia, who gave beyond their means and who even asked (“begged”) to be a part of the offering; (vs.4)
- ❖ exhorts the Corinthians that as they excel in faith and wisdom, so should they excel in generosity; (vs. 7)
- ❖ points to the generous act of Jesus Christ, who “...though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich;” (2 Corinthians 8:9 NRSV)
- ❖ advises the Corinthians to turn their previously-expressed desire to help into action by completing what was begun; (vss. 10-11) and finally,
- ❖ acknowledges a principle of “fair balance” between the Corinthians’ present abundance and the impoverished needs of others. (vss. 13-15)

Many preachers and congregations have used Paul’s teaching in their stewardship appeals.

3. *Which of the points do you think would be most effective? Explain.*
4. *What motivates you to give?*

This call for a “fair balance” within the Christian community echoes the description of the early church in Acts 4:32-37 where those who had resources shared with “... each as any had need.” (Acts 4:35 NRSV). This equality also recalls the Exodus story of the Israelites gathering manna in the wilderness, where each was to gather as much as was the need. Paul summed up the call to fair balance by paraphrasing the Exodus story: “...those who gathered much had nothing left over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.” (Exodus 16:18 NRSV)

5. *How do we live this equality in our society today?*
6. *Should the church discuss money? Explain your answer.*

## **word among us**

Many congregations have an annual stewardship emphasis, usually occurring around the time the budget for the coming year is prepared. There are often “temple talks” where members of the congregation share their reasons for giving their resources to the church. Giving in response to the needs of others – benevolence – is often lifted up. Members of the congregation are asked to make a pledge of time, talent, and treasure for the coming year to support the work and ministry of the church.

1. *Do you have a yearly stewardship emphasis in your congregation?*
2. *What inspires your giving?*

St. Paul gives the church in Corinth several motivations for giving. The foundational motivation is found in verse 9 of the assigned reading: “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9 NRSV) For Paul, giving is grounded in grace. We are to respond to the gifts we have received with a life of giving. Grace comes before generosity, not because of it. Generosity flows from a heart of gratitude. We are blessed to be a blessing to others.

3. *What difference does it make to have the example of Jesus as our primary motivation for giving?*
4. *What does “blessed to be a blessing” mean to you?*

Paul’s emphasis on “fair balance” offers a vision for the church. The needs of others are to be addressed. Those who have resources are to share with those who have need. Sometimes when we give, we think that we are the donors and those to whom we give are the recipients. But Paul reminds us that the recipient is also the giver. He writes, “... it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need...” (2 Corinthians 8:13-14 NRSV) Each has a need; and each has a gift to share.

5. *What are the implications of “fair balance” in the giving and receiving of resources?*
6. *Does this view change the way and the reasons we give? Explain.*

## **Faith practice in daily life**

### **Serve all people, following the example of Jesus**

In our baptism, we are joined into a family of faith. We have brothers and sisters all over the world. We are a part of the body of Christ. And when one part of the body suffers, we all suffer.

As we hear of the needs of our brothers and sisters, both near and far, we are compelled to respond in service to their needs. We all have something to give, whether it be monetary resources, a particular skill or talent, or even the ability to pray. Responding to the needs of others also forces us to examine our abundance and ask, “How can I help?” We follow the example of Jesus, who gave of himself freely for the sake of others.

7. *What is the key message of this passage?*

### **Prayer**

Open our eyes, O God, to see the needs of others. Open our hands, O God, to respond with generous and grateful hearts, following the example of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen

## ***last word***

Examine your personal budget this week to see if you are sharing as much as you are able.

*Daily Faith Practices*

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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