

# REDISCOVER MACEDONIA

A spirit of gratitude and generosity



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

## Bible Study #5 – Sacrifice

By Rev. Serena Sellers

### Gave beyond their means ... extreme sacrifice

***“We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints” 2 Corinthians 8:1-4***

A young woman was riding in the car with her father in Atlanta, Georgia when they stopped at a traffic light. On the sidewalk at the intersection she noticed a homeless man begging for food. A man driving a black Mercedes Benz convertible pulled up on the other side of their car. Having volunteered regularly at a local feeding program, the teenager’s heart went out to the hungry man. The contrast of wealth and poverty stirred something in her. “If that man had a less nice car, that man there could have a meal.” She remarked to her father. Her father replied, “Yes. But you know, if we had a less nice car, he could have a meal.”

Hmm...

The young woman’s name is Hannah Salwen. The response her father, Kevin, made to her observation really got under her skin. She couldn’t let it go. As a result of his off-hand comment she prodded and prompted her family to think seriously, and discuss seriously, the implications of their wealth. After some deep deliberation, the Salwen family decided to sell their million-dollar home and give half of the proceeds to help the poor.

They did *what*?

It is a remarkable true story. The family recognized that they were exceedingly blessed, and that they could have a real impact for good in the world if they dared to give big. Hannah and her father wrote a book about how their family decided to try and change the world entitled “The Power of Half”. Initially they were reluctant to be public about what they were doing, but they decided to tell their story in hope that their remarkable journey would inspire others.

**Have you ever felt a call to action tugging at your heart?**

**Have you ever given a gift that seemed excessive or unreasonable to someone else?**  
*(Pause to share stories!)*

When Paul asked the Macedonian Christians to make a contribution to the mission in Jerusalem, his expectation was that their gift would be small. Theirs was a community that knew poverty. Paul expected their gift to be proportionate to their limited means. But their gift exceeded Paul's expectations. It far exceeded them.

In fact, their giving was so extraordinary in light of their circumstances, Paul found their gift inspirational. He was convinced that when the Corinthian church heard about what the Macedonians had done they would be as exalted by their example as he was, and filled with a desire to be generous as well.

***“We want you to know,...” 2 Corinthians 8:1***

Dictionaries offer more than one definition for the word “means.” Means can be financial resources. But means can be the way in which something happens i.e. “the means to an end.” Means can refer to the capacity to make something happen. Means is not just our money, but also our power, our ability to impact the world, our ability to inspire.

Through their extraordinary giving, the Macedonian Christians went from being people of limited means, in Paul's view, to people of extraordinary means.

**Have you ever been inspired by the generosity of someone who had less than you?  
Have you been inspired by the generosity of someone who was very wealthy (like Bill and Melinda Gates for example)?**

**Is it the size of the gift or the size of the sacrifice that moves you more?**

*(Pause to share stories!)*

Odd isn't it? The poverty of the Macedonian Church was integral to their witness, and a necessary factor in how they had the power to inspire. Weakness was transformed into strength. Poverty was transformed into power.

Their transformation was inspired by the one who turned the world over by his demonstration of power in weakness.

***“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even***

***death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Phillipians 2:5-11***

**Have you ever been surprised by someone's generosity to you?**

**How does it feel to surprise someone with a generous gift? *(Pause to share stories!)***

The means of the Macedonian Christians, and the means of a teenage girl, did not only exist in the funds that they possessed. They had the means to inspire by making an extreme sacrifice on behalf of others. Their power came from the surprising and unexpected nature of their generosity. So can ours!

*Let us pray,*

*Lord, your acts of outrageous generosity in the incarnation and cross transformed the broken to whole, and the worthless to the priceless. Give us the desire to love out loud in acts of radical compassion and surprising self-sacrifice for the sake of your kingdom. Amen.*