

REDISCOVER MACEDONIA

A spirit of gratitude and generosity



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

Bible Study #2 – Commitment

By Rev. Serena Sellers

Gave themselves first to the Lord ... total commitment

*“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—and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you.**” – 2 Corinthians 8:1-6*

I sat in the auditorium with sweaty palms. I wasn't on the stage. I wasn't going to be on the stage. I was not qualified to be on the stage. First, and most obviously, I was too old. Every person on that stage was under the age of 15. I was an adult. Second, I had too much schooling. No one on stage had completed 8th grade. I had a seminary degree. Finally, and most importantly, I couldn't spell to save my life.

My fourth grade teacher, Miss Raleigh, had kindly written on my report card, “Serena is a very creative speller.” I thought it was a compliment! I was a constant reader. More than once I had been in trouble because I was too engrossed in a book to hear the call to the dinner table. But somehow, when the pencil was in my hand, letters were wild and untamable things. How I rejoiced when I first encountered “spell check.”

But here I was, attending the county semi-finals of the Scripps National Spelling Bee, with sweaty palms and a lump in my throat. I covered my mouth to be sure that my unconsciously moving lips would not disqualify anyone, and to prevent anyone from hearing my gasps at misspellings. I couldn't breathe while I listened to the spelling of words I had never heard before. My stomach was in knots, my head hurt, my jaw clenched. It was excruciating.

My son sat on that stage.

Has love ever taken you to a place you would never have expected to be?

(Pause to share stories!)

The Macedonian Christians were not expected to be generous participants in the collection for Jerusalem. One might have thought that the Macedonians, living in poverty, would be reluctant to give their meager resources away, especially when they were undergoing some

kind of affliction. Yet here they were, surprising everyone with their “wealth of generosity” and passion for giving. Paul claims they were **“begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints.” – 2 Corinthians 8:4**

Have you ever wanted something so much that you risked pain, embarrassment or rejection to get it? (Pause to share stories!)

Why? Why were the Macedonians so eager to participate in the offering? It was not because of the great need in Jerusalem. It was not because they had a surplus of resources. It was because “They gave themselves first to the Lord.”

Knowing that they were in God’s hands, the Macedonian Christians did not hesitate to commit themselves fully to God’s purposes. They made God’s priorities their own. They entrusted themselves, and their future, entirely to the Lord.

Their faith and commitment was so great that it spilled over to Paul. Paul was so inspired by their generosity that he was also willing to risk his own pain, embarrassment and rejection.

Paul had been in conflict with the congregation in Corinth:

“So I made up my mind not to make you another painful visit. For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? And I wrote as I did, so that when I came, I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice;” - 2 Corinthians 2:1-3a

Yet, despite the strained relationship, Paul was inspired to send a request to the Corinthians with hat in hand. He sent Titus with a request. The request for funds had the potential to pour fuel on the fire of Paul’s problems with the Christians in Corinth. But, if God could create a miracle of giving in the hearts of the poor Macedonians, could the Lord not inspire a miracle of forgiving in the hearts of the Corinthians? The commitment of the Macedonians was contagious to Paul. Could their generosity go viral?

**Have you ever been inspired to give by someone else’s generosity?
Have you ever reconciled after a conflict? How did you know that the conflict was really behind you? (Pause to share stories!)**

Our commitments, if they are true, take us to places that may not only be unexpected, but uncomfortable. They may inspire us to take risks that seem foolish to others. On the other hand, our commitment to Christ, and to his ways of generosity, may inspire others to overcome their pride and fear to leap into the passion of truly abundant, a-b-u-n-d-a-n-t, abundant life!

Let us pray,

Loving God, all things work together for good for those who love you. With the love of a mother hen you gather us to yourself and care for us. Your love was willing to go to the cross for our sake. Help us to utterly trust your love so that we can fling ourselves into your mission with abandon, passion and joy!