

# REDISCOVER MACEDONIA

A spirit of gratitude and  
generosity



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

## Bible Study #1 – Generosity

By Rev. Serena Sellers

**Received the grace of God... it is grace!**

***“We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia;” – 2 Corinthians 8:1***

Grace is a central concept of Lutheran faith. We know that we receive what we do not deserve because of God’s love and generosity. Grace is God’s unmerited favor. Grace is a gift of what we cannot earn or pay for.

Once, when I was a penny poor student, I was driving on the highway and had a tire blow out on my car. The car turned 180 degrees so that I was facing oncoming traffic in the left hand lane. Fortunately no one was immediately behind me and, stunned as I was, I was able to pull over to the side of the road.

I was terrified, miles from school and miles from home. I was also miles from an exit! The shoulder was narrow, and a sheer rock face made it impossible to turn my car around or even exit the vehicle without putting myself into oncoming traffic lanes. I had no phone, no credit card, and less than \$20 in my pocket. My situation looked hopeless!

A passing tow truck operator saw my predicament. His name was Mr. Reed. (After nearly 30 years I still remember his name.) He towed my car to the next exit, and when he learned of my financial situation, he provided a tire and refused to accept any payment or even provide an address so that I could send a thank-you.

Shaken, but safe and grateful, I continued on the journey to return to my family.

You could say that I was very lucky that Mr. Reed came along. Not all gifts of grace are so obvious or dramatic, but almost all of us have been the recipient of another person’s generosity.

**When has another person given you a gift of grace? (Pause to share stories!)**

The Macedonian Christians were not wealthy. In fact, in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, he refers to their “extreme poverty”. Paul also refers to “a severe ordeal of affliction” that the church in Macedonia experienced. We don’t know the details, but Paul’s choice of words makes clear that it was pretty bad. It sounds like the Macedonians were not

exactly lucky. Yet Paul is eager to tell the Corinthian church about the “Grace” that God poured out on the Macedonian church!

***“for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.”***

**-2 Corinthians 8:2**

The Macedonians were asked by Paul to make a contribution to the collection for the church in Jerusalem.

The “grace of God” Paul wrote about was not an end to their financial struggles, or an end to their affliction. What had God generously given to the church in Macedonia? God gave them an opportunity to participate in the mission of Christ to love and serve the world! Nobody expected the Macedonians to give much of anything. People saw the poor Macedonians as needy, not as a valuable resource for serving others. But God saw them differently. The Macedonians did not only believe in God, they rejoiced to know that God believed in them!

**Have you ever had someone doubt your ability?**

**Have you ever doubted yourself?**

**Can you remember a time that someone believed in you, and gave you an opportunity to do your best? (Pause to share stories!)**

The Macedonian church members, extremely poor and undergoing great affliction, were overcome with “abundant joy” that God had confidence in them. They were inspired and thrilled by the realization that to God they were valuable partners in ministry. They responded to the opportunity to give to the collection for Jerusalem with an enthusiasm that astounded everyone.

***“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;”***

**-2 Corinthians 8:3-5b**

**Have you ever been surprised by someone’s generosity?**

**Have you ever experienced joy in giving? (Pause to share stories!)**

Mr. Reed told me that he had a daughter. He was happy to send me safely home to my family. Mr. Reed did not expect anything specific from me. There were no conditions on his gift. Yet his gift carried a hope for me. A hope for my safe return to my family was implied. His generosity was all about relationship!

The gift of a tire was generous. The gift of my safe return to my family was priceless!

The generous gift of God to the Macedonians was the gift of God’s mission. This was a gift that God had paid for with the life of his Son. Nothing could be more precious to God. The Macedonian congregation recognized what a precious gift they had received and they were filled with abundant joy that overflowed in surprising generosity.

The financial gift of the Macedonians was generous. The gift of God’s trust in the Macedonian church was priceless!

*Let us pray,*

*Gracious and loving God, everything that we have, and everything that we are, has come from you. You have provided us abundant resources of time, talent, and treasure. More importantly, you have entrusted us with your mission to love and serve the world. As rich as we are, we are still greedy for joy. Teach us to see your generosity, and participate in your grace, so that your joy, and ours, may be complete!*