



THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURES

2 Corinthians 8:1-8, 9:7; 1 Kings 17:2-16; 2 Corinthians 9:11-14; Luke 21:1-4; Exodus 16:11-20; Matthew 6:9-13; Matthew 4:18-20, 9:35-38; 2 Corinthians 9:9-10; 1 John 3:16-18

REFLECTION AND STUDY

DAY 1: Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-8; 9:7

Paul encouraged the relatively wealthy church in Corinth to give joyfully. He did not command them to give or tell them how much to give. Instead he held up the example of the impoverished church in Macedonia which had given a generous gift to relieve the poverty of the church in Jerusalem. He described how the believers in Macedonia had given with “overflowing joy” because they were blessed by God and wanted to share their blessing. Sometimes we give out of a sense of duty. We might even grumble under our breath about our obligation to support the ministries of the church, but financially supporting the church’s work is a disciple’s privilege and a way to partner with God. It is a natural response and an outflowing of our hearts because of the gift of salvation we have received.

- Pause for a time of prayer and reflection to assess the state of your heart and your motivation for supporting the local church.
- If you find you are giving out of obligation rather than gratitude, ask the Holy Spirit to instill in you the heart of a steward who shares with joy.

DAY 2: Read 1 Kings 17:2-16; 2 Corinthians 9:11-14

Paul reminds us our generosity reflects the love of Christ in a broken world. The neighbors we serve at Open Arms, our Homeless Meal, the Jubilee, Student Serve days and other outreach ministries often express thanks with statements like “God Bless you.” Because the help they receive comes from a Christian church, they have a chance to observe and experience the love of Christ. They in turn, love us back and strengthen us with prayers and thanksgiving of their own. The woman who shared her meager rations with Elijah did not hoard what she had. She shared what she had and was rewarded by God for her extravagant generosity. She never went without food – even during the famine. When we share what we have, whether it is our money, our talents or time we often find ourselves rewarded in ways we never expected.

- Think about a time when you received an unexpected blessing by sharing or doing a good deed. Do you think that was an accident?
- Pray that God will open your eyes to the many ways that you are blessed each day.
- Thank God with confidence and gratitude. You are a child of God!

DAY 3: Read Luke 21:1-4

Sometimes we hesitate to give because we think that our gift won’t make a difference or that it is too small compared to the gifts of other people. That is not what Jesus thought or taught about giving. Jesus recognized that people have vastly different financial resources. His encouragement to us is for us to share what we have and to do so in ways that demonstrate our understanding of God’s providence and desire for us to be good stewards. To someone like a homeless person who has nothing, a small gift can provide the most basic necessity. Many of our ministries like Open Arms and the weekly homeless meal offer physical sustenance and spiritual encouragement to those who have nothing. When we pool every financial gift, we can share with impoverished neighbors who have even less than some of us have.

- We hope that every person or family who calls St. Paul their church home will complete a Commitment Card, no matter the amount of the gift.
- Take time to pray today, asking God to ensure that you have a heart like the widow and the believers in Macedonia. They did not have much, but they recognized the importance of being part of God’s Kingdom plan.

DAY 4: Read Exodus 16:11-20; Matthew 6:9-13

In the Exodus story we see how God provided for the needs of his people. They were instructed to take only the food they needed. Those who took more did not benefit from their selfishness. When Jesus taught the disciples to pray, he included a petition that asked God to provide their daily bread, not to provide more than what they needed – but only what was needed for the day. Jesus encourages us to pray each day, and also to distinguish between our wants and our needs. Our culture, on the other hand, teaches us to get all we can, keep all we can, and spend all we can on stuff the world deems important.

- Pause for a time of reflection. Think about the things you want and what motivates your desire.
- Are you following the example of the Lord or the temptations of the world?
- Ask God to help you identify one thing you currently enjoy but could learn to do without because it does not represent a real need.

DAY 5: Matthew 4:18-20, 9:35-38; 2 Corinthians 9:9-10

In our text this week, Paul quoted Old Testament Scripture when he said, *“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.”* He went on to add, *“Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.”* Paul was not speaking about a harvest of crops. He was reminding us of the Lord’s words when he promised the disciples that he would make them fishers of men and women and when he reminded the disciples that workers were needed to reap a plentiful harvest of new disciples and believers. The harvest of our righteousness will be found as we introduce people to Jesus Christ and serve those who suffer from conditions of poverty.

- Think about the last time you shared your faith AND your resources with someone outside the walls of St. Paul.
- Ask God to help you remain vigilant as you seek opportunities to “enlarge the harvest” each day.

DAY 6: Read 1 John 3:16-18

During the last three weeks, our messages on Sunday have considered how our offerings of time, talent, love and treasure fuel the ministries that help St. Paul live into her mission statement to “Glorify God, Grow in Faith, Give in Love.” We are called to partner with God in the coming years as we seek to introduce Jesus to 20,000 people in a 5 mile radius of our church, so that they experience and share Him, and to follow Jesus by reaching out to those experiencing poverty and striving to reverse its effects on our community. Our community includes thousands of people who experience homelessness, hunger, poverty and illiteracy every single day.

- This Sunday, November 20 we will offer God our Commitment Cards during worship. Your generous response will enable us to address the living conditions and spiritual sicknesses of so many people.
- Let today be a day when you pray for God’s guidance as you or your family decide what to offer toward our 2017 ministry plan.
- Let God guide you and trust His still small voice.



The image shows a '2017 St. Paul United Methodist Church Fledge Card'. It is a form for individuals to pledge their support to the church's 2017 ministry plan. The form includes fields for 'Legal Name', 'Address', 'City/State/Zip', 'Email', 'Preferred Name', and 'Contribution #'. There are checkboxes for 'I am interested in:' including 'Monthly minimum giving', 'Including St. Paul UMC in my will', 'Thinking about and other ways', and 'Following the plan'. A note says 'See the back of this card for more info on \$100 year pledge.' Below these are options for 'Please send my quarterly statement in the following amount:' with choices for 'each week until the end of the year', 'semi-monthly until the end of the year', and 'monthly until the end of the year'. There is also a checkbox for 'I will make a special offering (donation) to support you!' and a section for 'Offering frequency: [] I would like offering frequency.' and a signature line.

DAY 7

Today is your "Sabbath" and a time for reflection. How has God been speaking to you over the week? Use what the Lord has said to you to remold and reshape your life. If you are having trouble hearing God’s voice, slow down or even stop what you are doing so that the busyness of life’s demands do not squelch the whispers of God’s language of love upon your heart.