



DEVELOPING AN ENVIRONMENT OF SERVING

Thinking

When do you find it easiest to serve—whether serving family, friends, co-workers, or people at church? In other words, what “pre-conditions” make it easier for you to give yourself away to others?

Reflecting

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul invites them to participate in meeting the needs of the church in Jerusalem. To encourage them in this need-meeting, he turns his attention to the example of some Christians in Macedonia. Read about them in 2 Corinthians 8:1-9.

What does Paul tell us about the life-situation of the Christians in Macedonia?

In what ways does the attitude of the Macedonian believers differ from that of most people when given the chance to address a need in another?

Would you find it easy to give to someone else in need if you were in the kind of situation the Macedonians were in as described by Paul? Why or why not?

What enabled the Macedonians to give in such an abundant and gracious way to others?

Taking it to heart

We don’t want to look at the Macedonian example as an example of financial giving as much as an example of wonderful service. What could change in the way you serve others in light of their example?



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## LEADERS' GUIDE FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

JUNE 1, 2008

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-9

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#### *The big picture*

As we take one more week to explore our "environment of serving," we want to look beyond our immediate life situation and explore a bit about what could free us up to give to the needs of others and serve them. In Paul's correspondence with the church in Corinth, he calls their attention to a group of believers who "gave beyond their means" to meet the needs of others. These Macedonian Christians can serve as a model for how we might also come to give ourselves away in service, in the name of Jesus, for the good of others.

#### *Thinking*

You will undoubtedly hear a variety of answers to the opening question. However, there may well be a common element in all the responses: We feel free to serve others when we serve out of our "abundance." When serving "comes easy," we give in to serving more easily. But, perhaps surprisingly, that is not what we encounter in the example Paul presents us.

#### *Reflecting*

Perhaps the best way to aid you to lead your group through this section is to walk through the passage itself and offer a few observations.

8:1: What Paul is about to describe is the result of the grace of God that has reached the Macedonians. They do not give to earn or merit anything from God. They give as a response to the grace they have experienced.

8:2: The grace the Macedonians had experienced did not mean that their day-to-day lives got easier. When they undertook this act of service, they did it in the midst of

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both affliction (or trouble) and out of their great poverty. They didn't give and serve "out of the overflow!"

8:2-3: When they did engage in this act of serving, they did it with abundant joy! They took joy in freely giving in liberality. And, clearly, they did this not because they were required to do it but because they genuinely wanted to. Apparently, the Macedonians found greater joy in participating in what Jesus was doing in the world than they did in their own comfort and ease.

8:3: In this serving, they extended themselves. They gave "beyond their means." I don't think this means that they were foolish, but it does mean that they took risks with their own "safety net" in order to serve others.

8:4: They appeared to think that participating in the meeting of the needs of others was a privilege rather than a burden; they begged Paul for the "favor" of participating.

8:5: The participation of the Macedonians in the meeting of the needs of others flowed out of their lives in a personal way, not a mechanical or "dutiful" way. They gave themselves to the Lord and then, out of that rich relationship, they gave themselves away in service to others.

8:7: Paul presents this example to us to help us assess where our hearts are when it comes to serving.

8:8: But he is not commanding us to do this, as if we jeopardize our relationship with Christ by not serving in this way. He is only helping us grow up to understand and see what joy there is in participating with Jesus in what He is doing in meeting the needs of others.

8:9: And, Paul comes back around to the idea of grace and anchors the Macedonians (and our) loving service in our experience of the grace of God we receive in Jesus.

As you work through the questions in the *Reflecting* portion of the discussion guide, invite your group to think honestly about how challenging (and almost counter-intuitive!) this example of serving is. We tend to serve out of our "extra," while these gracious saints served out of their poverty and affliction. But is it right there, in the midst of their giving to others that they experienced, in their own lives, renewed fountains of grace and their joy overflowed in the serving.

#### *Taking it to heart*

Keep in mind that we are not looking at this example because we want people to give financially to some need (although that is the kind of serving that the Macedonians carried out). But the example is one that we could all take to heart, beginning to serve right where we are, serving out of our experience of grace and not merely out of our "surplus."