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## Generosity- A Faith Practice

Faith practices. What are they? When I was talking with a colleague about leading devotions for youth, he told me about this resource on the CRC website called "Faith Practices." I decided to look it up, and what I found was quite interesting and helpful. What I found was also a little unexpected, for I thought I would find topics like personal devotions, prayer, worship, and the like. These are important for nurturing our faith, but that is not what the website was talking about. Instead, I found such topics as sabbath, generosity, and gratitude. I was a little puzzled at first, but as I read through the material, I understood better the direction that the website was taking its readers as it talked about faith practices.

We are granted the ability to believe by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in us. This we confess as Reformed Christians. If it were not for the work of the Holy Spirit, we would not come to believe that Jesus Christ died for our sins. So, our faith is first and foremost the work of the Spirit in us. But when we have faith, we can develop that faith so that we believe all the more. Growing in our faith by putting our faith to work is what practicing our faith is all about.

So, let's take generosity as an example. How does being generous help us become stronger in our faith? In the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 8 Paul is commending the Macedonian Christians for their faithful giving. There was a famine in Jerusalem, and Paul decided to go to the Christian churches which had been established throughout much of southern Europe and ask the believers there to give money to help their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. The Macedonians had taken a sizable collection, and they had sent it with Paul to bring to Jerusalem. What amazed Paul was that the Macedonian Christians were not wealthy. In fact, he tells us that they were living in near poverty, having only enough to feed themselves, if that. Yet, they gave, and they gave beyond what they were really able to give.

Contrast this to a man I talked to several years ago. He told me that he gave to the church, but he always waited until the end of the month to do so. His argument: I don't know what expenses I will have, and I need to make sure that I meet those first before I give away my money. I need to live. Because I know him reasonably well, I would say, further, that he was not the first person who comes to mind when I think of generous people. It should be said that he also wasn't the richest man in the church, although he had more than enough to live on.

So, let's go back to the Macedonians. They gave beyond what they were able, but how were they able to do so? The answer is simple: they trusted that God would provide for them if they would find themselves in need. By giving more than they had, they were learning to trust God. It was vital that someone help the people in Jerusalem, for they were on the verge of starvation. The Macedonians understood that if they didn't give, their brothers and sisters in Christ would not survive, and they put their own wellbeing on the line to help them. They were generous, and their generosity caused them to have to trust in God.

Many of us reading this, if we live in Canada, have more than enough money, and most of us can give some away without feeling any great negative impact. Some of us could live until we are 150 years old and still have some money left over. Many of those who have more money than they need are also quite generous,

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and that is wonderful. And we should continue to give out of our bounty to help those in need. At the same time, if we give what we have without feeling the impact on our lives, perhaps that is not the kind of generosity that increases our faith. So, instead, we might need to look at something else in our lives that is in short supply.

One of the things that people seem to claim to have too little of is time. Time does seem to be in short supply, and perhaps that is where we need to learn to be generous. There are lots of people whose needs do not require money in order to have those needs met. Some people are lonely. Some need some repairs done to their decks. Others cannot drive safely to get their groceries. Giving a little time will help them greatly. But can we afford that time? Probably not, but then we also must not forget that God, who is the creator of time, can also give us time that we didn't know we had. Relying on God for what we do not have is a way of practicing our faith.

Or some of us have no room in our lives for others. We have many friends, and we are surrounded by family. We don't know if we have the mental or emotional capacity to have someone else become part of our lives. Of course, as we well know, there are people who have almost no social life. Perhaps they have just moved to the community. Perhaps their family circle is really small or even non-existent. Or perhaps they are a little odd and maybe a bit hard to get along with. Can we be generous with our relationships? It's hard, of course, and we might fear that leaving the supporting network of family and friends is a little dangerous. But can we be generous, trusting that God will also meet that need?

Being generous is faith building especially when we are generous with what we view as a scarce resource of commodity. Money, time, social group, or maybe something else are things that we need and sometimes we don't feel we have enough of. When we are generous with those things that we have in short supply, and when we are generous with the understanding that God will meet our needs, then being generous is a way to build our faith. Generosity can be a faith practice, a way to learn to trust God more.

I would not have identified generosity as a faith building exercise, but it is. When we think about it, the more we give of what we have to help others, the more we have to rely on God. And the more we rely on God, the more we will find him trustworthy, and the more we find him trustworthy, the greater will be our faith.

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