# Bold and Generous Discipleship

## 2 Corinthians 9: 1–11

## *This sermon works best with the* [*PAR Month Campaign Plan*](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/ways-give/giving-monthly-through-par)*.*

Good morning and thanks be to God! I am so glad to be with you today.

Before we begin our time of reflection, I would invite you to pray with me.

Generous God. Let the words of my mouth and the pondering of all our hearts create movement towards a more just and loving world. Amen

Today I want us to focus on the spiritual practice of generosity and how this practice is foundational to being a follower of Jesus—a disciple.

Maybe calling yourself a disciple is new or even a tad uncomfortable, but as we in the United Church are called to Bold Discipleship, pondering what discipleship means in our lives and how our actions embolden it has become essential and exciting!

So where do we even start? Well, we, as disciples of Jesus, centre our lives in the love and grace of God. Discipleship is the expression of our faith in action in the world. And as Christians, we have so many tools to do just that: spiritual practices that sustain and strengthen us on our discipleship journey.

Right now, we are worshipping together. Participating in this time of worship is a spiritual practice that helps to strengthen us on our spiritual journey.

Also, loving service is a spiritual practice—whether that is marching in a peace rally, serving lunch to the unhoused, signing a petition, or visiting a member of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ United Church who needs companionship. These activities also strengthen us on our spiritual journey. Prayer and Bible study are other important examples of spiritual practices. Together, all these practices both feed our faith and are expressions of our faith in action.

Note that these are “practices”. Not “perfects”. We do these things not simply to do them, but to feed our souls, to grow and stretch in our faith.

Which reminds me of a story.

A man who attends worship regularly is complaining that he doesn’t really remember any of the sermons he’s heard over the years. That they all blend together, and he is musing to his current minister that maybe it doesn’t even matter, he could probably stay home and watch football. She nods thoughtfully and says to him, “Do you remember what you had for supper last week, or lunch two months ago, or breakfast last year? No? Well, all those meals, the thousands of bites of food you have put in your body over the years matter. You are the person you are today for having eaten them. Not every meal is memorable, but all of them feed you. The same goes for sermons and worship.”

I liked that story because it illustrates that discipleship is ongoing. There is no end point. No finish. Just practices to build our lives on; activities to live our faith and grow closer to God.

Participating in worship, even if you don’t remember a word of this sermon, is feeding you. The practice of being here matters, and the more times you walk through this door, or enter this zoom room, the more you will get out of it.

There are lots of sayings that speak to the importance of *doing*: “You are what you eat.” “Actions speak louder than words.” “You reap what you sow.” ...which is what Paul told the people of Corinth in the scripture passage \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ shared with us: “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”

The lives we have—our friendships, our hobbies, our work, and so on—are all a result of the effort we put in. Relationships, whether between spouses, friends, family, or co-workers, all require cultivation. We need to call once in a while, show up for coffee, make time for vulnerable conversations, give hugs, remember birthdays. Similarly, we can’t expect to be great knitters, or golfers, or guitar players if we only pick up the hobby once a year. What we invest time, energy, and money in matters. It shapes who we are, and how people see us.

The same goes for what we sow here at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ United Church. What spiritual practices do we value and do well? Are we individually and collectively sowing the seeds we hope to harvest? Are we sowing generously?

This morning, and all month long, we are talking about the United Church’s monthly giving program, Preauthorized Remittance, or PAR. PAR is a tool we can use to share our financial gifts with our community of faith and Mission and Service, on a regular monthly basis. This type of giving helps ensure we are intentionally, prayerfully, and consistently sowing seeds, with faith that the harvest will be plentiful.

*[Add more about what specifically your community of faith is doing to encourage monthly giving during PAR month, and/or how PAR works there, who to contact for information or to sign up, and what goals you may have for increasing PAR participation.]*

PAR is a great way to practice generosity.

As we live out our faith by being generous and sharing consistently and with love, we are shaping and transforming this community of faith and the wider community and world.

*[Consider telling an inspiring story of ministry and meaning-making at your church in the last year. Talk about how people’s generosity (especially of money) made it possible. Talk about how it made a difference to an individual, the church, or the wider community. Also, choose from* [*Mission*](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service/mission-and-service-stories) *and Service Stories to inspire people about Mission and Service.]*

Back to the reading from 2 Corinthians: Paul is writing to remind the Church in Corinth of a promised act of faith—a gift of money. Paul plans to take this collection to the Christians in Jerusalem. The gift was intended to make a difference. It was to bring practical assistance to the believers in Jerusalem who were very poor because they had suffered a severe famine. Paul is sending some brothers in advance to inspire them and to make sure that the gift is generous and given voluntarily.

I want to acknowledge that sharing our time, money, or energy isn’t always easy. There are many voices around us telling us that we are consumers first and foremost, voices advocating for individualism and autonomy. But one of the things Jesus invites us to do is cast off the identity of consumers, and instead see ourselves as disciples.

Are you familiar with Adriene Mishler? She has a highly subscribed YouTube channel called Yoga with Adriene. If you know Adriene, she chats and tells stories throughout the online practices she leads. Recently she was telling a story about a friend of hers with back pain. I guess he said something along the lines of, “This back pain is not going away, so I just need to learn to live with it.” Adriene’s half-joking, wonderful response was, “Well, it ain’t going away with that attitude.”

Hearing that made me think of all the minor aches and pains I have told myself to simply live with. I pondered that maybe my attitude and my orientation are part of the reason they persist. Now, I am not suggesting that physical suffering isn’t real or that we can mindset-shift our way out of chronic pain. But I do think the lives we have are in large part a reflection of how we think and how we spend our days.

I think that means we can look around this room, our homes, our neighbourhoods, this [city/town], and see problems and deficiencies we must “learn to live with,” OR we can look around and see hope. See beauty. See the Divine. See abundance and opportunity.

Seeing the world this way fills one with gratitude. And with gratitude, we can’t help but respond with generosity. It is with a sense of abundance and gratitude that we are inspired to give freely, no strings attached. Just like Paul asked the Church in Corinth to do.

This is why PAR, or any form of consistent giving, is such a powerful tool. We prayerfully decide and commit to make a gift, every month. This financial contribution is an act of faith that we make as disciples of Jesus, and a statement about our hope and excitement about the ministry at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ United Church, the inspiration we feel about Mission and Service, and the sense of abundance and God’s presence in our life. This automatic withdrawal is a gift, voluntarily given, that demonstrates faith, generosity and trust. It is a gift to our Church, but more importantly it is a blessing to us, as we practice discipleship and grow closer to God (deeper in our faith).

We are called to co-create God’s vision here on earth, and this is not easy or light work. Our spiritual practices—especially the practice of sharing generously—done together and individually, help us share our abundance with others, always remembering that God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Amen.

*—by Vicki Nelson, Community of Faith Stewardship Support for Pacific Mountain, Chinook Winds, Northern Spirit, Living Skies and Prairie to Pine Regions of the United Church of Canada*