

## Devotions for Sept. 26 – Oct. 2, 2011

**Monday, September 26, 2011: *Community Law Daily reading: Deuteronomy 24:19-22*** This text is surrounded by community laws, guiding God's people to live God's way as they move through the wilderness and prepare to enter the Promised Land. The Israelites see these laws as a gift, not a burden or constraint. This revelation of God's will for them is a remarkable sign of God's love. These specific laws are common to middle-eastern cultures in the ancient world. They connect into many laws regarding social justice and advocacy for the poor and powerless. There is a clear revelation of God's preference for the poor and powerless throughout Scripture and carried through Jesus' teaching about life in the Kingdom. Not only are the Israelites to leave what is originally unharvested out of sheer obedience to God; their obedience is also motivated by their own experience as slaves in Egypt. Do you see laws as a way to protect the poor and the powerless? Ask God to guide your heart into deeper compassion.

**Tuesday, September 27, 2011: *Gleaning Daily reading: Deuteronomy 24:19-22 again*** "Gleaning is the act of collecting leftover crops from farmers' fields after they have been commercially harvested or on fields where it is not economically profitable to harvest. Some ancient cultures promoted gleaning as an early form of a welfare system." (*– from Wikipedia*). Once a field has been harvested commercially, what was missed by the combines and harvesters is fair game for those who will hand-pick the leftovers. The idea is to leave something behind for the poor and the powerless. A core assumption of this text is that all things belong to God and are to be used for God's purposes. Our possessions are not merely to bless us, but to bless others. We are conduits, not reservoirs. And we are specifically called to steward the resources that God has placed in our hands to bless those who have the greatest need and the least power to get what they need. What can you leave behind for someone else? Ask God to open your heart to be willing to "leave something" for someone else.

**Wednesday, September 28, 2011: *Provision Daily reading: 2 Corinthians 9:8-15*** The Corinthian Christians are rich both in spiritual gifts and financial wealth. They have promised to participate in Paul's offering for the suffering Christians in Jerusalem, but have not yet delivered. In 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul addresses the issue of generosity, urging (and sometimes shaming) the Corinthians, not just to secure their generosity, but to press the point that genuine faith will be revealed in genuine generosity. Verse 8 actually begins with the Greek word for "able," emphasizing God's ability to abundantly provide. Trusting in God's generous provision is the foundation of our own generosity, setting us free from worry. This contrasts sharply with the self-sufficient Cynic and Stoic philosophies in Paul's day. God's abundance toward us is not just for our joy (though it's for that, too), but so that we might provide for others in need. Do you really believe God will provide, or are you striving for self-sufficiency? Ask God to lead you away from striving, and toward trusting.

**Thursday, September 29, 2011: *Community Daily reading: Psalm 112:8-10*** What God does in nature, God also does in community. This text reinforces the abundant grace and provision of God, as well as God's preference for the poor. God, who provides seed abundantly and therefore abundant bread for all people, will also supply us with everything we need to be generous. God will take even our halting attempts at generosity and multiply their effect. When people see generosity happening all around them, they join in the joy. Watching food carried away from a food shelf by a family in need grows a deeper desire to give more. Seeing joy in the eyes of a little girl who has never owned a dresser only prompts the person delivering it to tell the story, and more furniture is given. Generosity multiplies generosity, and the flywheel of joy spins. Ask God to grow generosity in your heart today.

**Friday, September 30, 2011: *Enriching Daily reading: 2 Corinthians 9:8-15*** The "you" in this text is plural; these are not personal promises, but promises to the community as a whole. That's important starting at verse 11, where "enriching" is promised in connection with our generosity. This could mistakenly be read as a prosperity gospel in which our obedience bears some monetary reward. Instead, Paul is saying that when the community generously sows they are enriched, just as a farmer, seeing her crops grow, is "rich" even as the grain is ripening. Through both the giver and the receiver, God is thanked and praised, further spinning the flywheel of joy. If you were a farmer, you wouldn't put as few seeds in the ground as possible, just to keep some seeds for yourself. The one who "sows sparingly will reap sparingly." One who gives cheerfully and abundantly will also be enriched abundantly. Are you a cheerful giver? Ask God to guide you down the pathway that leads to joy upon joy.

**Saturday, October 1, 2011: *What? Daily reading: Deuteronomy 14:22-27*** What will we do with what we've been given? All that we have has been given to us by the generous hand of God, and the answer is to enjoy what we've been given, share what we've been given, and rejoice at the opportunity to give. We've been reminded of God's desire that we be conduits of blessing to others by living generously. We give not for the results, but because we've first been given. We give because the Spirit shapes our hearts for obedient generosity, and we give to express our love for God and neighbor. The results are just one more joy heaped on already-abundant joy. The tithe commanded in Deuteronomy is one tenth of everything. Nine tenths for us and one tenth for the work of God in the world. Are you living on nine tenths, and giving one tenth to the work of the Kingdom of God? Could you? Ask God to help you answer this question, "What will I do with what I've been given?"

**Sunday, October 2, 2011: *Seeing Daily reading: Psalm 103:1-7*** The psalmist expresses joy of the heart that can only be found in the One who created all things. God forgives, heals, redeems, crowns, satisfies, and works. God's acts are visible to the human eye. One of the wonderful blessings of this faith community is that we get to see the results of our generosity. We see kids with smiles, learning how much they are loved by God. We see the faces of people who receive what they need in the Mission Outpost. We see the gratitude in the faces of seniors who get to participate in worship and Bible study even though they can't physically get to church. The list goes on. What greater joy can we ask for than knowing we have impacted the life of someone else, trusting that our generosity may point them beyond the person who gives and to the hand of the One from whom all blessings flow? Are you filled with joy from seeing God at work around you and in you? Ask God to fill you with joy today.