



# SHARED STRENGTH

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## Read Together

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 & 2 Corinthians 8:9-15, 9:1-15

“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”  
*(2 Corinthians 9:15)*

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## Learn Together (watch week 7 video lesson)

We see in 1 Thessalonians Paul urging the young church that, as they already have shown love for one another, they ought to do so more and more. In this short section, when Paul says four times to love, the Greek is *agapaō*, and here it does not specifically refer to feelings or emotions, but rather to practical love. It’s about the practical sharing of resources, money and food in particular. Such sharing was a vital part of the strength and unity of the church, a core component of Christian community. That shared strength couldn’t be ignored without eventually eroding the community itself.

Yet the constant and underlying purpose of fund-raising was primarily the unity of the church – the unity between the far-flung Gentile Christians on the one hand, and the Jerusalem-based Jewish Christians, on the other, with Paul believing and constantly contending that if these two demographics could come together, the world may truly know Jesus.

Paul knew that the unity of the church together was necessary for the fullest expression and mission of Christ's Church. Paul even had an easy out to separate groups: Romans 9-11 provides clear evidence that Paul could see the rise of what later became Marcionism, the attempt to split off "Christianity" from Judaism and solidify the Gentile denomination of Christianity. That would have been a reasonably safe option, but Paul's gospel was not about that kind of safety.

Paul wanted to foster and bolster the unity of the church, taking head-on the most difficult barriers to togetherness. He believed that such shared values could topple any barriers, and during this series we've examined seven shared values that Paul used to help knit together these various churches, and we thank God that he did.

## Pray Together

Gracious and amazing God, thank you so much for this series examining the importance of coming together and of all that we share in common together. Help us to realize that we have so much to share that can bolster the unity of the church and that in coming together in Christ, we experience the presence of the Holy One. Help us this day to dream about what we have to offer to you through our church. In Christ's name we pray,

*Amen*



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## Reflect Together

When were you part of something bigger than yourself, accomplishing something that alone you'd never have been able to — maybe through a team sport, a group project, or a mission trip? What was it, and why were you able to achieve such things only through shared strength?

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In the book of Acts we see the early church exhibit shared strength at an almost supernatural level, yet by Thessalonians we see the church fragmenting. Why do you think many excel at short-term compassionate giving but struggle with sustained strength? How might being part of a larger community help foster long-term shared strength?

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Paul's plea for the collection for Christians at Jerusalem is an example of an "abundance mindset." Used first in the economic sector, abundance and scarcity mindsets have become ways of describing God's grace and the Christian hope. Do you believe that there is a finite amount of grace and blessings available, or can we embrace an abundance mindset, trusting that there is plenty for everybody?

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Paul writes, “the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6) and that we must give of our own accord and not under any duress (2 Corinthians 9:7). Have you ever experienced reaping bountifully because of your sowing? Think beyond financial sowing too – like serving, praying and the like! Have you ever felt the opposite, reaping sparingly after sowing sparingly – like a time when you were not engaging fully in your faith life maybe you experienced feeling distanced from God?

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### Serve Together

As we enter the summer travel season, keep your Small Group and your wider church in your prayers. Consider ways you might add to the shared strength of McFarlin Memorial United Methodist, carrying us out of the darkness of the pandemic into a brighter future where we live together as an authentic community in the light of God.

*Thank you for studying with us!*  
Find more worship, discipleship &  
mission opportunities at [mcfarlinumc.org](http://mcfarlinumc.org)