

SHARE RESOURCES

LUKE 10:25–37;
ACTS 4:32–35

Can you name one thing you have that was not given generously to you by God or someone else?

Sharing resources is one of the most recognizable aspects of practicing generosity. We share what we have with others in order to meet their physical and material needs. We feed people who are hungry. We give water to people who are thirsty. We provide winter coats to people sleeping on streets. We give tithes and offerings in worship in response to God's grace.

While many people think of possessions as their own, Christians believe that everything we have belongs to God. We come to this life with nothing, and we will leave it with nothing. God calls us to use the resources we've been temporarily given for our neighbors' benefit, ensuring that they have what they need to survive and flourish.

The sharing of one's resources is a central theme in one of Jesus' most well-known teachings, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). In this parable, Jesus tells of a Samaritan man who provides care for an injured man on the side of the road, while others pass by and do nothing. The tale exemplifies the two greatest commands upon which all the biblical Scriptures and the gospel hang: to love God and to love neighbor. For Jesus, the Samaritan practices generosity in obedience to the commandments and in the sharing of his resources and his mercy; he recognizes the stranger to be his neighbor.

The earliest Christian communities shared all they had with one another as a means of testifying to God's love and grace. Charity and almsgiving have been and continue to be hallmarks of Christian living. In worship, we collect tithes and offerings, in which all are invited to share their resources out of gratitude for God's generosity shown to them. In addition, many congregations take up additional offerings, urging us to give even more, to assist programs that provide food for the hungry, school supplies for low-income children, emergency kits for flood victims, and much more. When we share what we have with others, we put love of God and neighbor into action; we practice generosity.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

➤ What are some of the resources others have shared with you?

➤ Reflect on a moment in which you shared your resources with others. What words or phrases come to mind?

Close your eyes and settle into silence. Take a few deep breaths, breathing out the distractions of daily life and breathing in a sense of God's loving presence.

Loving God,
thank you for the resources
you have entrusted to me.
Help me to steward these gifts well
and share what I have with others,
so no one will be in need
and everyone will know your love.
Amen.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Sharing resources as a practice of generosity is found in one of Jesus' most well-known teachings, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). Many lessons are taken from this parable. Here we will focus on the generosity practiced by the Samaritan.

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Some relevant information about this story:

- The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notoriously dangerous. Jesus' Jewish listeners would not be surprised to hear about robbers attacking a man and leaving him for dead on the side of the road.
- It would also not be surprising to these Jewish listeners that travelers just kept their heads down and walked by, ignoring the injured man. Who knows, this could be a trap for anyone who stopped. The fact that two Jewish leaders—a priest and a Levite—passed by would not be unheard of.
- The first surprise in the story was that the one who stopped was a Samaritan, an enemy of these Jewish listeners. The second surprise was his extravagant generosity toward someone he did not know.

Although he leaves money with the innkeeper to pay his bill, the Samaritan does not simply give from his purse (or from his abundance). While some may see his acts as more than necessary, Jesus, through his telling of this story, recognizes them as being just right. For Jesus, the Samaritan practices generosity in obedience to the commandments and in the sharing of his resources and his mercy; he recognizes the stranger to be his neighbor.

Can you think of a time when you have passed by someone apparently in need?

➤ What were your reasons for not stopping?

➤ What would a generous response have looked like?

➤ If Jesus told this story today, who would be the Samaritan?





BELIEVERS SHARE THEIR POSSESSIONS

Historically, as a testimony of God’s love and grace, Christian communities have contributed resources to provide for the physical and material needs of members in society. In its descriptions of life among the first believers in the nascent Christian movement, the book of Acts recounts believers coming together to worship and study as well as to share and distribute their resources to all, as any had a need.

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32–35)

Draw a picture of the verse that speaks most strongly to you from this passage.

➤ Where in your life have you seen this level of sharing resources?

➤ What risk did people take in giving away everything?

➤ Have you ever given until it hurts? Describe that.

➤ How did it feel after you did it?

FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Since the beginning, Christian communities have generously shared their resources with others. Charity and almsgiving have been and continue to be hallmarks of Christian living. Today, many churches practice generosity—love of God and neighbor in action—by feeding the hungry, providing medical care to the sick, and providing warm coats to people living on the streets in winter. In this section, we'll explore how Christians have practiced generosity by sharing their resources to care for others, both historically and today.



“Freely you have received, freely give.”
—Matthew 10:8b (NKJV)

TITHES AND OFFERINGS

As followers of Jesus, we continue the tradition of offering oneself to God as part of Christian life and worship. Worship communities collect tithes and offerings as acts of thanksgiving in Sunday services and throughout the week. Special offerings may include collecting winter coats for migrant workers, emergency kits for flood victims, and sanitary items for women who are living on the street.

- If you attend worship, where do you regularly hear the invitation to share your resources in the service?

- What, if any, tithes or offerings do you participate in?

FEEDING HUNGRY PEOPLE

Throughout history, feeding people who are hungry has been a central part of the church's mission. Today, many congregations continue to engage in ministries that focus on feeding people who are experiencing hunger or food insecurity:

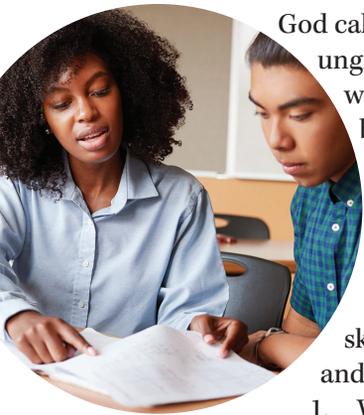
- On Super Bowl Sunday, many youth groups and churches participate in the Souper Bowl of Caring, collecting cans of soup for local food pantries. See <https://tacklehunger.org>.
- Through CROP Hunger Walks, Christians raise money to support Church World Service (CWS), “a faith-based organization transforming communities around the globe through just and sustainable responses to hunger, poverty, displacement and disaster.”¹ Learn about events near you at bit.ly/FMCrop.
- Many congregations host community meals where people come for a free meal, served with a warm welcome.
- Many churches plant community gardens to provide fresh produce for local food banks or to their neighbors in need.

- What efforts does your church or community make to feed people who are experiencing food insecurity?



1. CWS/CROP Hunger Walk, “About the Walk,” accessed March 17, 2021, <https://events.crophungerwalk.org/2021/page/about-the-walk>.

PRACTICING THE PRACTICE



God calls us to practice generosity from both our abundance and limits, giving ungrudgingly, whatever it may be, to meet the needs of the people, especially those who are poor. We share what we have with others, not only when it is convenient, but also when it is hard. Sharing our resources is a choice we make, not once, but over and over again. It's something that takes practice to become a way of life as we seek to follow Jesus.

TAKING INVENTORY

There are many kinds of resources (money, material goods, time, special skills, or expertise). Spend a few minutes reflecting on the resources you have and how you share these with others.

1. Write the various resources you have in the rows under “Resources”—things such as food, water, time, clothing, special skills, and areas of expertise.
2. Place a check mark next to resources you regularly share with others.
3. Circle one or two resources you might share more. Reach out to your church's leadership or do a quick internet search to find local organizations with which you might be able to share your resources.

Resources	Resources Shared	Ways to Deepen Practice

SHARE RESOURCES

This week, commit to sharing resources by engaging in one of these practices or another one of your choosing. Stretch yourself by sharing more than what feels easy or comfortable to you. As you engage in these actions, reflect on how you feel, including any emotions that arise. Invite a friend to join you in one or more of these practices.

- Share time: Take time to listen to a friend, family member, or colleague. Be fully present with them during your conversation.
- Share money: Skip eating out and give the money you would have spent on a meal to someone asking for help on the street. Alternatively, make a donation to a nonprofit organization that provides food, clothing, or shelter to people in need in your community.
- Share food: Reach out to a local food pantry to see what items they need. Next time you go to the grocery store, pick up some of these items and then deliver them. However, most organizations prefer cash donations so they can purchase what they need in bulk.
- Share skills: Reach out to your church or a local nonprofit to see if any of your skills can be of service to their organization. If you can't make a long-term commitment, see if you can help with a special project, such as cooking a community meal, cleaning, or helping with an office project.

This week, I will practice generosity by . . .

After you've engaged in one of these practices, reflect on the experience:

- What aspect of sharing your resources was the easiest?
- What was most challenging?
- What did you learn about yourself, God, and others through this practice?

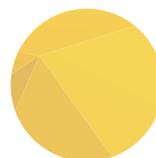
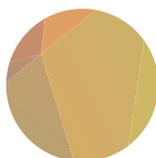


FOLLOWING JESUS



Sharing resources is an essential dimension of practicing generosity. It can be risky to give food to the hungry, medical care to the sick, and safe housing to those who are without shelter. What if we give too much? What if others take advantage of us while we are trying to help that person at the side of the road?

We can find comfort, knowing we are part of an eternal cloud of witnesses who have come before us and will continue long after we are gone. Christians have rejected the common human response of fear and greed, and instead given freely for many centuries. When we care for our neighbors' well-being, we fulfill the greatest commandment—to love God and neighbor—and together, we bring God's kingdom a little closer.



A current popular hymn is “When We Are Living.” It originated as a Bible verse repeated over and over by churches:

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.
—Romans 14:7–8

A Spanish hymnal committee expanded the ways we live, reminding us that no matter what we do, we belong to God. The second verse reflects the spirit of this session (*Glory to God*, #822).² Use it as your closing meditation.

Through all our living, we our fruits must give.
Good works of service are for offering.
When we are giving, or when receiving,
we belong to God. we belong to God.

2. Roberto Escamilla, trans. by Deborah L. Alvarez; Copyright: © 1994 Abingdon Press (BMI) (Administered by Music Services). All Rights Reserved.