

Generosity: Helping Our Neighbor Flourish

I think I was just eight or maybe nine years old. My mom took me and one of my sisters with her to pick up some groceries. As we were going through the aisles, Mom told me to go ahead and pick out my favorite meal. Without hesitating, I grabbed a few boxes of Kraft macaroni and cheese. I'm quite convinced that back then I existed almost entirely on that favorite food, with an occasional diced-up hotdog thrown in. I was such a picky eater.

When we got back home and started putting the groceries away, Mom told us we needed to set aside some items for the Thanksgiving food drive at school. I remember grabbing the canned veggies. I figured if we gave away the peas or lima beans, that meant I wouldn't have to eat them.

But Mom prompted us: "You need to give away something you love." Then she drew my attention to the two new boxes of mac and cheese we had just bought. I was crushed. I'm sure there were tears, not just over being forced to offer up my precious mac and cheese, but also for having to keep the peas and lima beans. Let's just say I was not a cheerful giver that Thanksgiving.

So What's Generosity Really About?

Our generosity is a response of gratitude and imitation of Jesus' own character of generosity among us. As an early church confession declares, "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (see [Philippians 2:1-11](#) for the full context).

This passage is often referred to as Jesus' *kenosis* (a Greek word meaning "the act of emptying"). **Though he was and is God of the whole universe, Jesus emptied himself of all his rights, except the responsibility to spend himself on behalf of others.** He "did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage." Jesus showed us that generosity looks for the ways our resources—all that we have and all that we are—can be used for the advantage of others. In Jesus' case, that led to his death on the cross so that we might be reconciled with God and become full participants with the Spirit in God's present-and-still-coming kingdom.

Our response to Jesus' generosity is really shaped through two questions. First, do we desire to join Jesus in seeing others—even our enemies—flourish as recipients of God's grace and participants within God's kingdom? And the second is related to the first: Are we willing to spend all that we have and all that we are to see others flourish, or will we hold something back?

These questions get at the heart of what my mom was teaching me. **Generosity toward others begins at home, and it shapes every area of our lives:** our time; our emotions; our space and

property; our influence and social networks; our thoughts, speech, and social media accounts; our knowledge and skills—and, yes, also our money. God's generosity in Jesus beckons us to live as conduits of God's grace so that God's character might be made known through us.

Basically, a generous character looks for ways to include others within the experiences of God's grace toward us. **Practicing generosity invites us to trust that we will not exhaust God's goodness and generosity toward us.** As Paul wrote to Jesus' disciples in Rome, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" ([Romans 8:32](#)).

This posture is not a call to ignore our self-care or careful planning regarding our finances. We need sleep, seasons of rest and quiet waters, and time and energy to attend to the needs and wellbeing of our families and friends. **Being generous toward ourselves—so that we see ourselves as God's beloved and we delight in God's care for us—is part of a holistic practice of generosity.** While we can certainly make idols out of our self-care, our bank accounts, and other resources, we also need to recognize our ongoing need to receive God's generosity.

Practicing generosity ultimately means that we are learning to live with open hands both to receive what we need from God and to let God give others what they need through us.

How Can We Live Generously?

Questions like the following can help us discern what it might look like for each of us to live generously in our particular contexts:

- To whom can I personally give my time and attention this week?
- What skill, knowledge, or hobby do I have that could enrich someone else's life?
- Can I deepen someone else's experience of belonging and community by welcoming them into my circle of friends?
- What beloved possession can I make available to someone else so that they experience God's care or attention toward them in a timely or new way?

Along with questions like these, the [Faith Practices Project](#) offers a helpful starting place to explore different approaches to generosity. The goal of these resources is to help all of us imagine what living generously could look like in our particular circumstances. As you practice generosity, we'd love to learn alongside you. Share your practices with #CRCFaithPractices and tag us on Twitter (@crc_ffm) and Facebook (@faithformationCRC).