

Living Well Through Advent 2025



*Practicing Generosity with All Your
Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*

The Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church

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Outfitting individuals, families, congregations, and communities with tools and training for the journey toward wellness and wholeness.

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I. Title

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Introduction

During this Advent season we invite you to use the writings from Living Compass to help guide you each day into thinking about what it means to make room for Jesus in your life in the midst of the busyness of these next few weeks. Each day the authors invite us to think about ways in which we might practice generosity as a reflection of the gifts we have received from God through the presence of Jesus Christ in our world.

Make room in your day to sit with the Biblical texts - perhaps immediately after waking in the morning, or on your daily commute, perhaps last thing at night before you head to bed - try to be consistent in your routine so that you build the daily habit of spending time with God.

Each day there are some questions to ponder - perhaps you can share these with a friend or family member, try to engage with these devotions in a way that brings new insight or understanding.

I pray that as you read, pray and think about Christ's presence in your life this Advent season that you will discover new ways in which to share God's love with the world

Blessings,
Maureen Paterson

The First Sunday of Advent

November 30, 2025

Generosity as an Antidote

Randall Curtis

*Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with
dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life.*

—Luke 21:34

I am like many Americans—an easily excitable consumer. I am certain that Internet ad companies love me. I love finding the new restaurant, listening to the new song, watching the new show and finding the new internet meme. When a squirrel jumps across the path where my dog and I often walk, I am the person who agrees with my dog (at least initially) and thinks chasing the squirrel is a really fun idea. I write this with a confessing heart, but I also know that I am not alone.

In a world that is filled more and more every day with tempting distractions, like cell phones, tech gifts, and pop-up advertisements everywhere, it is easy to fall into the trap of trying to consume the newest trend. It is easy, in the race to keep up with it all while worrying about what we might be missing, to spend the day jumping from new excitement to new excitement, from new worry to new worry.

In the first reading of Advent we are told to, “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life.” These distractions are the new “drunkenness and worries of this life,” which means that as we prepare for Christmas and God breaking into the world, we will have to make sure we look up from our phones to see it.

This Advent can be a time to prepare for Christmas by stopping the drunken consumption of the newest thing. To put our phones down and stop the worry that is only a notification away.

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Then we can ask ourselves:

- What am I missing when I get distracted by “the new”?
- Am I giving more than I am taking from the world?
- How can I be on “guard” against all the ways the insatiable quest for the new sneaks up on me?
- Are there others in my community who need something basic that I could provide, yet might not see in my quest to discover the latest and greatest?
- How can I offer generosity toward my fellow human beings rather than mindlessly taking what the world offers, only a tap or swipe away?
- How can I be more generous to my family, friends, and community as I prepare for the coming of Christ into the world?

Advent is the perfect time to explore how we might give more of ourselves on behalf of God in the world, and how that generosity might be the perfect antidote to being “anxiously drunk.” One way we can “be on guard” is to ask and answer questions like these together. I hope you’ll join me.



Monday, December 1, 2025

Grounding Our Generosity in God's Generosity

We love because God first loved us.

—1 John 4:19

Yesterday's reflection introduced us to the profound connection between God's generosity and our own capacity to be generous. This week, we will deepen our understanding of how God's abundant love serves as the foundation for all authentic generosity.

When we ground our generosity in God's generosity, we discover that giving becomes not a burden but a joy. It flows naturally from hearts that have been touched by divine love. This is fundamentally different from generosity motivated by guilt, obligation, or the desire to be seen as good by others.

The season of Advent invites us to slow down and remember that every good gift comes from above. As we prepare our hearts for Christmas, we have the opportunity to cultivate a deeper awareness of God's generous presence in our lives. This awareness becomes the wellspring from which our own generosity flows.

This week we will explore how practicing generosity in heart, soul, strength, and mind creates a foundation for living that is both deeply meaningful and transformative.

Making it Personal: How does knowing that God is the source of all generosity change your perspective on giving? What might it look like to ground your generosity more deeply in God's love this Advent season? Each day this week, identify one specific way God has been generous to you in the past 24 hours, and consider how you might respond with generosity toward someone else.

Tuesday, December 2, 2025

The Parable of the Generous Parent

“Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” And they began to celebrate.

—Luke 15:22-24 (ESV)

The parable of the prodigal son is one of the best-known stories that Jesus shared with his followers. It is the story of a loving father who forgives his wayward son after the son leaves home and wastes his share of his inheritance. Thinking he has forsaken his father so entirely that he will not be welcomed home, the son is overwhelmed when instead his father responds with lavish generosity—offering his wayward son a ring, the best robe, a fatted calf, and a grand feast.

While we commonly know this story as the Parable of the Prodigal Son, it could also be called the Parable of the Generous Parent, reflecting the primary focus on how extravagant God’s love is for us. No matter how wayward we have been in our lives, we can always return to God for love and forgiveness, for we have a lavishly generous God.

This parable reveals the heart of God’s generosity—it is not based on our worthiness or performance, but on God’s unchanging love. The father in the story doesn’t wait for an apology or proof of change; he runs to meet his son while he is still far off. This demonstrates generosity of the heart—emotional generosity that flows from love rather than duty.

Making it Personal: What does this story teach you about God’s generosity? When this parable is discussed in Bible studies, members often wonder if they were the father in this story, would they have responded with such love and generosity? How would you answer that question for yourself? Today, notice when someone needs emotional generosity from you—patience, forgiveness, or understanding—and respond with the same lavish love the father showed.



Wednesday, December 3, 2025

Letting God Be Generous to Us

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

—James 1:17

Sometimes we resist God's generosity out of pride or fear. We may feel unworthy of God's gifts, or we may worry that accepting them will somehow obligate us in ways we're not prepared for. Yet spiritual maturity includes learning to be humble and grateful recipients of God's abundant love.

There is a paradox in the spiritual life: we cannot truly give what we have not received. If we consistently refuse to let God be generous to us, we will find ourselves trying to give from empty wells. The most generous people are often those who have learned to welcome God's gifts with open hearts and grateful spirits.

Consider how a flower absorbs sunlight. It doesn't question whether it deserves the sun's rays or worry about how to repay them. It simply opens its petals and takes in what it needs to grow and bloom. In the same way, we are invited to open our hearts to God's generosity with childlike trust.

This Advent season offers us countless opportunities to practice receiving God's gifts: the gift of rest, the gift of beauty in creation, the gift of relationships, the gift of hope that comes with the promise of Christ's birth.

Making it Personal: In what ways might you be resisting God's generosity? What would it look like to become more gracious in welcoming God's gifts? Practice this today by consciously noticing one gift from God—whether it's a moment of beauty, an act of kindness from another person, or simply the breath in your lungs—and receiving it with deliberate gratitude, without trying to “earn” it.

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Thursday, December 4, 2025

God's Generosity in Nature

*You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between
the hills, ... From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.*

—Psalm 104:10, 13

Nature has been referred to as God's first sacred text. Before the sacred texts of the Bible, there was and continues to be the holy text of God's creation.

Remembering that the root of the word generosity means "to give birth" or "to give life to," we see in nature the ongoing life-giving generosity of our Creator. One of the signs of how God is present in creation is the response that almost all people have to spiritual experiences they describe in nature. Creation pulsates with the generous energy of God. Like fish who live in the ocean, we live and move and have our being in the abundance of God's self-giving love.

As with other acts of generosity—whether from God or others—it is all too easy to take such generosity for granted. Stopping to pay attention to the beauty of a butterfly, a bird's song, a majestic mountain, or the smell of the air after a recent rainfall are simple everyday spiritual practices that reawaken us to the presence of the Divine surrounding us.

When we pause and truly pay attention, the ground we are standing on is always holy ground. Nature's generosity is constant and unconditional—the sun shines on the just and the unjust, the rain falls on both the grateful and the ungrateful.

Making it Personal: When have you felt close to God in nature? What is something simple you might do or pay more attention to today that will help you connect with God through nature? Consider spending at least five minutes outdoors today (or by a window if necessary) simply observing God's generosity in creation, noticing what you see, hear, smell, or feel.



Friday, December 5, 2025

The Generosity of Abundance

And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

—2 Corinthians 9:8

One of the greatest barriers to generosity is operating from a scarcity mindset—the belief that there is not enough to go around. This can create anxiety, hoarding, and competition rather than the joy and freedom that accompany true generosity.

God's generosity, however, flows from abundance. The natural world demonstrates this everywhere. Consider how a single apple tree produces hundreds of apples, each containing multiple seeds capable of growing into new trees. Notice how the ocean contains countless drops of water, each one essential yet part of an inexhaustible whole.

When we understand that God's resources are limitless, we can approach generosity with confidence rather than fear. We don't have to worry about running out of love, forgiveness, or compassion because these gifts are continually renewed by God.

An abundance mindset recognizes that generosity actually creates more abundance. When we give freely, we open ourselves to receive more. When we share our resources, we often discover that our capacity to give has increased.

This doesn't mean we should be unwise or ignore practical realities. Rather, we approach giving with trust in God's bounty, hearts open to how God multiplies our offerings. Abundance thinking is counter-cultural in a world that constantly tells us we need more to be happy.

Making it Personal: Where do you tend to operate from scarcity rather than abundance? How might deeper trust in God's generous provision change your giving? Challenge one scarcity thought today by acting from abundance—share something you've been holding onto, offer encouragement generously, or give someone the benefit of the doubt.

Saturday, December 6, 2025

God is Generous, All the Time

God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good.

—(Traditional call and response)

Several years ago, I (Scott) was invited to be a guest preacher at a church outside of my own tradition. I come from a tradition that has occasionally been referred to as the “frozen chosen,” because we are not commonly known for spontaneous expression of emotions in worship.

The church I was visiting was just the opposite of this—singing, clapping, and shouting “Amen” and “Praise God” whenever the Spirit moved them. Their generous spirits were a gift to me, a gift that continues to this day.

One specific call and response I remember was the pastor saying, “God is good,” followed by the congregational response, “All the time.” Then the pastor would say, “All the time,” with the response being, “God is good.” This began and ended the service and was repeated throughout.

Changing one word in this call and response perfectly concludes our week-long reflection on the generosity of God: “God is generous, all the time. All the time, God is generous.”

Even when life is difficult, even when we cannot see or feel God’s presence clearly, God’s generous love remains constant. This doesn’t mean that God causes all things to happen, but that God’s generous love is available to us in all circumstances. Learning to trust God’s generosity helps us practice generosity with our mind—organizing our thoughts and resources around what we know to be true rather than what we fear might be true.

Weekly Integration: How has this week’s focus on God’s generosity helped you become more aware of the bounty in your life? What one thing do you want to carry forward that will help you stay grounded in God’s love? Looking back over this week’s reflections, what resonated most? How might you integrate God’s generosity into your daily routine?

The Second Sunday of Advent

December 7, 2025

Preparing the Way with Gratitude

The Rev. Shannon Kelly

*O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good;
for their steadfast love endures for ever.*

—Psalm 107:1

Advent is a time of preparation and our reading today is a call to just that. A call to let go of the past and lean toward a future that is yet unseen. John the Baptist, a prophet and truth-teller, is calling people to “Prepare the way of the Lord.” How does one prepare for the coming of Christ? We prepare by readying our hearts, souls, and minds to receive Christ and in this act, we are opening ourselves to new possibilities, new thinking, new living.

I find gratitude to be an extremely useful tool in preparing myself for anything because it reminds me of what I have, the experiences that shape me, and the love that surrounds me. Each day, at the end of the day, I write down three things for which I am grateful. (Sometimes a few more if I can’t narrow it down to only three.) They can be simple things like dinner and games with my family, finishing a project, or watching the sunset as I walk my dog. Or they can be big things like when a loved one reaches a goal, a new job, a birth, a wedding, or adoption. Truth be told, there are also days when I struggle to come up with one, let alone three, and on these days when I dig deep to find what seem like small and insignificant things to be thankful for, I realize that no matter how bad my day, there are always at least three things that made my life better. And when I do that, it completely reframes the day. I also have discovered that there is a close link between how grateful I am and how generous with others I am able to be. It is in giving gratitude for the day that is past that I’m able to more fully prepare and embrace the next day, being more generous both with myself and with others.

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Melody Beatie wrote, “Gratitude makes sense of our past, peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.” Naming our gratitude for what may seem like small things in our lives often allows the big stressors to melt away, even for a moment. Sometimes, it is in giving thanks that we are able to live in the moment, to let go of the anxiety, to leave behind the “what if’s,” and truly prepare the way for God to come into our lives in the most unexpected and generous ways.

Our world is a challenging place right now, one that can consume us if we let it. Finding our voice of gratitude helps ward off the weightiness of the news and events happening around us, because gratitude is also a form of love. In practicing gratitude, we find those things that we truly love and those things that sustain us. In the words of The Rt. Rev. Michael Curry, “Love will show us the way.”

Take some time this week to write down three things for which you are grateful. If they involve another person, reach out to that person and let them know. Notice what brings love into your life and cultivate it. In doing so, you will change your world and prepare the way of the Lord.



Monday, December 8, 2025

Generosity and Gratitude

In practicing gratitude, we find those things that we truly love and those things that sustain us.

—Shannon Kelly

Shannon Kelly introduced us to the relationship between generosity and gratitude, a connection we will explore in depth as our focus for this week. We will provide specific prompts each day this week to help you follow Shannon's invitation to bring to mind, and perhaps write down, three things that you are grateful for that day.

One way that generosity and gratitude are similar is that, ideally, they are both attitudes that we cultivate, not just specific actions. When we describe someone as a generous or grateful person, we are speaking of more than the good deeds they have done. We are speaking of a mindset they have, a way they have of seeing and being in the world.

When parents encourage children to share with others, they hope that through such actions, their children will grow up to be people with generous hearts, and that generosity will become a core value for them. Similarly, when we practice gratitude regularly, we are cultivating a way of seeing that recognizes blessing and gift, even in ordinary moments.

Gratitude and generosity feed each other. The more grateful we become, the more generous we tend to be. And the more generous we are, the more reasons we find to be grateful. This creates a beautiful cycle of blessing that enriches both our own lives and the lives of others.

Daily Gratitude Practice: List three people or experiences from your childhood that you are grateful for because they modeled the core value of generosity.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

A Spirit of Giving

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

—2 Corinthians 9:7

Money is often a topic that many people find difficult to discuss. One person who did not find money hard to talk about was Jesus. He often taught about this topic, reminding us that where our treasure is, there also will be our heart (Matthew 6:21).

The apostle Paul wrote in his first letter to Timothy that “The love of money is the root of all evil.” Note that he did not say that money is the root of all evil. Money is neutral. What we do with money and what kind of attachment we have to it can be a faithful expression of Jesus’ teachings—or not.

At its heart, when we share our money with others, we express our deepest values. To give financially says that we believe in what we are giving to. When we give to strangers, to someone who is struggling, to our church, to a friend or family member in need, to a community effort, or to a cause we are passionate about, we express our care and our desire to help others thrive. We are saying we believe in them and we are expressing our love and God’s love through our giving.

As the verse at the top of this reflection reminds us, we want our giving to be motivated by joy and by our love both for God and our neighbor. God values a sincere and cheerful giver more than one motivated by guilt or duty. Financial generosity is one way we practice generosity—making thoughtful, intentional decisions about how we organize and use our resources.

Daily Gratitude Practice: As an expression of gratitude related to financial generosity, list three experiences where you have had the honor to either give or receive generosity in the form of money.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Wednesday, December 10, 2025

Grateful for Generosity in Times of Challenge

Look for the helpers. There's always someone helping.

—Fred Rogers

Life inevitably brings challenges, losses, and difficult seasons. During these times, we often discover dimensions of human generosity that we never could have imagined. It is remarkable how crisis and hardship can bring out the best in people, inspiring acts of kindness and generosity that help to restore our faith in humanity.

Consider how communities respond to natural disasters. Neighbors who barely know each other become lifelines for one another. Strangers travel great distances to help with relief efforts. Churches, organizations, and individuals donate time, money, and resources to help those in need. In the midst of destruction and loss, we witness the beautiful resilience of human generosity.

The same pattern appears in personal crises. When someone faces a serious medical diagnosis, friends and family often rally in amazing ways. Meals are prepared, children are cared for, rides are provided, and emotional support is offered. These acts of generosity become sources of deep gratitude that can sustain us through our darkest hours.

Being grateful for generosity received during challenging times doesn't mean we are thankful for the difficulties themselves. Instead, we are grateful for the ways that people show up for us when we need them most. This gratitude often inspires us to be more generous when others face their own challenges.

Daily Gratitude Practice: List three people or experiences that showed you generosity during a difficult time in your life.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Thursday, December 11, 2025

Generous Communities

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

—1 Corinthians 12:27

Churches have a unique role in teaching generosity. Not only do they teach what Jesus taught, but when they practice this generosity in how they care for one another and in their outreach to the community, they become living models for all who are watching. Churches also have the opportunity to amplify the good they do because through community, they can accomplish good beyond what any one person can do.

When I (Scott) was serving as pastor of a congregation, several individual members were volunteering with Habitat for Humanity. Once they realized this, they got together and came up with the idea of getting our whole congregation involved. Eventually, over several years, we raised all the money and volunteers needed to build several houses.

What's possible when a church community works together can include meal programs, blood drives, diaper banks, clothing drives, day programs for memory care or unsheltered people, hosting 12-Step groups, and organizing service trips.

As the body of Christ, churches have a unique capacity to both teach and model generosity. When a community of faith works together, their collective generosity can have an impact far beyond what any individual could accomplish alone. Community generosity demonstrates how we can pool our resources and energy to tackle challenges that require sustained effort and resilience.

Daily Gratitude Practice: List three experiences of a church or community practicing generosity that you have either participated in or been inspired by.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Friday, December 12, 2025

The Generosity of Strangers

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

—Hebrews 13:2

Some of the most surprising and moving experiences of generosity come from complete strangers. Perhaps someone stopped to help you change a flat tire, or a person tracked you down to return your lost wallet with nothing missing. Maybe you received an anonymous gift that came at exactly the right time, or someone offered you kindness when you were feeling lost or alone.

These encounters with generous strangers often stay with us for years because they remind us that goodness exists in the world in ways we don't always expect. They restore our faith in our global community, reminding us that we are all connected in the human family.

The writer of Hebrews suggests that when we encounter strangers, we might actually be encountering angels—divine messengers who come to us in human form. This passage reminds us of the sacred potential in every encounter with someone we don't know.

This truth also invites us to consider how we might be generous strangers to others. Every day we have opportunities to offer kindness to people we don't know and may never see again. A smile, a helping hand, a patient response when someone is struggling—these small acts of generosity can have profound impacts on others' lives. Being generous to strangers is atypical in a world that teaches us to be suspicious of people we don't know, yet it reflects the radical hospitality that Jesus modeled.

Daily Gratitude Practice: List three experiences where you benefited from the generosity of strangers, or when you had the opportunity to be a generous stranger toward someone else.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Saturday, December 13, 2025

Grateful for the Simple Things

*'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free, 'Tis
the gift to come down where we ought to be.*

—Joseph Brackett, *Simple Gifts*

The Shakers were a Christian sect known for their simple ways of living, as captured in the familiar song *Simple Gifts*, written in 1848 by Shaker elder Joseph Brackett.

These opening lines mention the word *gift* three times. If simplicity is a gift, then it implies that there must be a giver. Although not explicitly stated in this song, the giver is God.

This song makes me think of all the simple gifts I have received in my life. I am blessed to enjoy the simple gifts of clean water, clean air, food on my table, and a place to sleep indoors each night. There are also the gifts of public spaces that I can enjoy—places others have created and maintained for all to enjoy, such as libraries, beaches, parks, trails, faith communities, and museums.

We can add the simple, sometimes barely noticed offerings of friends, families, and strangers—a door held open, a get-well card or message, a word of encouragement, a friendly pat on the back, or a meal delivered.

Life is full of simple gifts of generosity once we pause to notice. Often the most meaningful experiences of generosity are not the grand gestures but the small, everyday acts of kindness that make life beautiful. Gratitude for simple things requires intention in a world that constantly promotes bigger, better, more expensive, and more impressive. Yet these simple gifts often nourish our soul in ways that elaborate gifts cannot.

Weekly Integration: Looking back over this week's reflections and gratitude practices, which experiences of generosity touched you most deeply? How has focusing on gratitude this week influenced your own desire and capacity to be more generous?

The Third Sunday of Advent

December 14, 2025

Transformative Generosity

Wendy Claire Barrie

*My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;
indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.*

—Luke 1:46-55

For as long as I can remember, I have loved Mary, the mother of Jesus. The Christmas Eve I was five, I came home from church, made my little brother put on his bathrobe, plopped a dish towel on top of his head, and brought him into the living room, where I draped a crocheted Afghan over my own head, swaddled my doll in a flannel blanket, and laid her on a sofa cushion between us. Before I understood Mary's song, I knew that hers was a story I would want to hear and tell again and again.

In time, I learned to sing and pray Mary's song, the Magnificat, it became foundational to my faith, and I no longer recognized Mary of the Christmas cards and carols, meek and mild. Instead, I saw a young woman of exuberance and courage. The Magnificat is at once deeply personal and

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undeniably communal. She gives thanks to God for the upside-down blessing given to her—that she, young, poor, unmarried, will be the mother of God’s own child—and for God’s transforming love and power. To magnify is to enlarge, and that is what Mary’s song challenges us to do—to enlarge our vision of who is blessed, of whom God acts in and through. Mary emboldens us to look beyond what is and see what God intends, the world as it should be, a world of justice and mercy, infused with hope. This is no gentle lullaby, but a fierce anthem, and it seems to me that Mary’s song shows us Jesus is every bit his mother’s son as he is his Father’s. In gratitude and in anticipation may we join in her song, and in the good, long work God gives us of turning this world around, one right action at a time.



Monday, December 15, 2025

Generosity and Hospitality

To magnify is to enlarge, and that is what Mary's song challenges us to do—to enlarge our vision of who is blessed, of whom God acts in and through.

—Wendy Claire Barrie

This week we will focus on the connection between generosity and hospitality. We will explore other biblical teachings on these topics, as both the early church and the church through the ages have worked to express generous hospitality.

In yesterday's inspiring reflection on the Magnificat, Mary's words found in Luke 1:46-55, Wendy Claire Barrie reminded us how Mary, from the very beginning, modeled an expansive hospitality. The quote above from Wendy's reflection is a call to us now to enlarge our vision of generosity and hospitality by examining and growing our vision of who is blessed.

This week we will see how the hospitality that God calls each of us to extend to others is grounded in the same hospitality that God offers to us. Hospitality is fundamentally about making space for others—creating room in our hearts, homes, and lives for people to experience welcome, acceptance, and care.

For people of faith, hospitality and generosity are not meant to be nice additions to a Christian life. Instead, they are meant to be at the center of living a faith that is grounded in the very life that Jesus modeled for us.

Making it Personal: What comes to mind for you when you think about connections between generosity and hospitality? How do you see Mary, the mother of Jesus, as a model for generous hospitality? Today, look for one opportunity to “enlarge your vision” by extending welcome or kindness to someone you might not usually notice or include.

Tuesday, December 16, 2025

Generous Hospitality Offered Without Expectations

Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

This quote from Henri Nouwen, a Dutch priest, professor, writer, and theologian, could be paraphrasing Jesus' words. Jesus did not extend hospitality to others in order to change them. He offered hospitality and love to all because that was his nature.

The love and hospitality that Jesus offered to people did, in fact, create space for them to change. He conversed with the Samaritan woman—something unheard of in his time—creating space for her whole life to change. He welcomed lepers and offered healing to change their lives, not just physically but spiritually.

Transactional hospitality is when we extend kindness and compassion to others and expect something back. This is not what Jesus calls us to practice. His call is to hospitality that is freely given to all with no expectations. This kind of hospitality can be transformational—for others and for ourselves.

When we offer hospitality without expectations, we create safe space for authentic encounter. People sense when our welcome comes with conditions or hidden agendas. True hospitality trusts that welcoming another person is valuable in itself. Offering unconditional hospitality is counter-cultural in a world that teaches us to calculate the cost and benefit of every interaction.

Making it Personal: What is the difference between hospitality that is transactional versus freely given and transformational? Today, offer hospitality (listening, presence, or help) to someone without expecting anything in return.



Wednesday, December 17, 2025

Table Hospitality: Breaking Bread Together

*They broke bread in their homes and ate
together with glad and sincere hearts.*

—Acts 2:46 (NKJV)

Some of the most powerful expressions of hospitality happen around tables. There is something sacred about sharing food with others—it creates intimacy, builds relationships, and communicates care beyond words.

Jesus understood this deeply. Many of his most significant teachings and encounters happened around tables. He ate with tax collectors and sinners, shared meals with his disciples, and used food imagery to describe God's kingdom. The Last Supper established the pattern of communion that continues to nourish the church.

In our fast-paced world, table hospitality has become increasingly rare. We eat on the run, in our cars, or in front of screens. We've lost touch with gathering around a table to share food, stories, laughter, and companionship.

The early church understood that sharing meals together was about building community and expressing love. When they "broke bread in their homes," they were creating space for relationship and mutual care.

Table hospitality doesn't require elaborate meals or perfect presentations. The most meaningful experiences of hospitality happen over simple food shared with open hearts. The gift is the invitation and presence we offer one another. Sharing meals nourishes our bodies (strength), creates emotional connection (heart), builds community (soul), and requires intentional planning (mind).

Making it Personal: What are your most meaningful memories of sharing meals with others? What holiday meals have been especially meaningful and why? Share a meal with someone today—in person, over video call, or by delivering food—focusing on being present and creating connection.

THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Thursday, December 18, 2025

Welcoming the Stranger

I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

—Matthew 25:35

St. Benedict, the Patron Saint of Europe who lived in the sixth century, was one of the first to prioritize monks living in community. Before Benedict, most monks lived solitary lives in the desert.

To provide guidance for monks living in community, he wrote the Rule of St. Benedict, guidelines still used by Benedictine monasteries. In Chapter 53 of the Rule, Benedict writes, “Let all guests who arrive be received as Christ.”

This instruction was more than guidance on practicing hospitality in a monastery. It was a reminder to see the divine presence in everyone, especially the vulnerable. Just as Christ welcomed all, including those marginalized in his time, we are called to do the same.

Benedictines, along with many other Christian groups, have founded hospitals and health care centers focused on providing care for those who couldn’t afford it. This tradition is a powerful witness of Christian hospitality, offering welcome and care for all. Knowing this history, it becomes clear how *hospital* and *hospitality* are related.

Welcoming the stranger requires us to move beyond our comfort zones and familiar circles. It asks us to see the divine image in people who look different, speak different languages, or hold different beliefs. This hospitality can be challenging, but is also deeply rewarding and transformative. It takes courage and resilience to reach beyond our comfort zones, and requires us to care for our own well-being so we have energy to extend to others.

Making it Personal: How might you offer hospitality to a “stranger” this week, welcoming this person as you would welcome Jesus? Today, intentionally engage with someone you don’t know well and practice seeing Christ in them.



Friday, December 19, 2025

Hospitality as Spiritual Practice

Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree.

—Genesis 18:4

The story of Abraham and Sarah welcoming three strangers who turn out to be divine messengers is one of the most beautiful examples of hospitality in Scripture. What begins as a simple act of kindness—offering water, food, and rest to travelers—becomes a moment of profound spiritual significance.

This story reminds us that hospitality is not just a social nicety or kindness. It is a spiritual practice that opens us to encounter the divine. When we welcome others with open hearts, we create space for God to work through our interactions.

The Welcoming Prayer, a contemplative practice developed by Mary Mrozowski and others, offers a way to extend hospitality to people *and* to our experiences. In this practice (on p. 53), we learn to welcome whatever arises in our hearts and minds—difficult emotions, challenging circumstances, unexpected visitors—with the same openness we would offer a beloved guest.

This doesn't mean we like everything that happens or should be passive when facing problems. Instead, we approach life with a hospitable heart, trusting that God can work through all circumstances, even difficult ones.

When we practice hospitality as a spiritual discipline, we discover that it changes us as much as it blesses others. Our hearts become more open, our compassion deepens, and our capacity to see God in unexpected places increases. Hospitality as spiritual practice connects us to God's presence in others and helps us create space for rest and renewal.

Making it Personal: How do you understand hospitality as a spiritual practice? How might the Welcoming Prayer be helpful during the busy holiday season? Try practicing it today—when you encounter something difficult or unexpected, say “Welcome” and look for how God might be present in it.

THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Saturday, December 20, 2025

A Banquet for All

*Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and
bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.*

—Luke 14:21 (NIV)

We began our focus on hospitality and generosity this week by reflecting on Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the beautiful words of the Magnificat from the Gospel of Luke.

Jesus' birth defied all norms—born not in a palace, but in a stable to a young peasant woman. This reversing of norms is repeated throughout Jesus' life, as in God's world, the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.

We see this in Jesus' Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15–24), where he paints a stunning image of God's hospitality. When the original invitees cannot attend the party, the host extends an invitation to the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame—those who in Jesus' time were rarely invited to dinner parties, but who would deeply appreciate the invitation.

The parable teaches us that God's hospitality, like the host's, is unexpected, freely offered, and extravagant. It is hospitality not based on status, achievement, or social standing. God's hospitality is transformational, not transactional. A Christian practice of hospitality calls us to extend beyond our comfort zones and embrace all with God's abundant love. God's vision of hospitality is radical—it intentionally includes those whom society marginalizes or overlooks.

Making it Personal: Who might be missing from our “guest lists” in our social circles, homes, and churches? What fears might keep us from expanding our comfort zones? How does this parable speak to you about hospitality?

Weekly Integration: Looking back over this week's focus on hospitality, which aspect challenged you most? Which daily practice felt most natural or meaningful? How might you continue to expand your vision of hospitality beyond Advent?

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 21, 2025

Learning from Elizabeth

Amy Cook

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy."

—Luke 1:41-44

I have a lot to learn from Elizabeth.

Luke's gospel begins with Zechariah and Elizabeth, both described as "righteous" people but childless. In their day, children were the sign of God's blessing and their lack of a child specifically cast doubt on Elizabeth. She is the one labeled "barren" and she must live with this shame and suspicion even though she is known for blameless living. Zechariah is chosen by chance that year as the priest to enter the holiest place in the temple. While in this holiest of places an angel appears and says that Elizabeth is going to have a son. Zechariah immediately questions the angel and is struck mute for his doubting until the baby is born. Elizabeth does conceive and in her sixth month Mary comes to visit.

I imagine at the time of Mary's visit Elizabeth is bursting with news. Her place in society has changed. She is no longer looked at with suspicion or pity. By having a child, Elizabeth erases the whispers of God's punishment. This is probably the most exciting time of her life, but she is now married to a man who can't talk! In this moment of extreme joy and new life, Elizabeth and Mary meet and I'm sure she is longing for conversation.

If I were Elizabeth in this moment, I would have been tempted to run to Mary and start gushing about the greatest thing that has ever happened in my life. But Elizabeth does something different. She doesn't

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

monopolize the conversation or even treat Mary as the relative who must listen to her news. Instead, Elizabeth generously affirms Mary's (the unwed teen's) pregnancy. Elizabeth generously puts her own good news second, speaking prophetic words as the Holy Spirit moves in her. Her body reacts as she feels the child within her and accepts that as joy and perhaps confirmation that her own baby news didn't need to be first in the moment.

I wonder how I can be more generous with creating a space for the good news of others? I'm sure that Elizabeth had plenty of time to talk with Mary and share her thoughts and feelings, but in the moment of their meeting, Elizabeth didn't need to be first. And because she generously created this open space in her heart and head, the Holy Spirit filled in with prophetic words and Mary responded with a new song, literally.



Monday, December 22, 2025

Love as the Foundation of Generous Living

*Let us not love with words or speech
but with actions and in truth.*

—1 John 3:18 (NIV)

Love Came Down at Christmas is the title of a Christmas poem written by Christina Rossetti in 1885. The words have been put to music by several composers and are sung in many churches during the Christmas season.

Here is the final verse of the poem: *Love shall be our token; love be yours and love be mine; love to God and others, love for plea and gift and sign.*

The poem is a reminder, along with the above passage, that love is more than words or feelings. Love is most fully expressed in action. The birth of Jesus into our world is God's ultimate act of generous love.

As we have seen during this Advent journey, generosity, gratitude, hospitality, and love are best expressed in what we do and how we treat one another. We love because God first loved us, and our desire is to then share that love with others so that "love shall be our token."

This connection between love and action is what distinguishes authentic love from mere sentiment. Anyone can say loving words, but it takes commitment and sacrifice to demonstrate love through generous actions. The Christmas story itself is the ultimate example of love in action—God's love made manifest in the incarnation of Jesus.

Making it Personal: What speaks to you in the scripture verse from 1 John and the final verse of *Love Came Down at Christmas*? In these last few days before Christmas, how might you express love "with actions and in truth"? Today, look for one specific way to demonstrate love through a generous action rather than just words.

Tuesday, December 23, 2025

Love and Serenity

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things
I cannot change; courage to change the things I
can; and wisdom to know the difference.*

—Reinhold Niebuhr

Many churches held “longest night” services this past week to honor many people who are grieving during the holidays because of change or loss, often in the past year. With pressure to feel a certain way during this season, feelings of sadness and loss can be especially hard to carry.

Perhaps you are experiencing a challenging change. Maybe it is your first Christmas without a special person present. Or you just don’t have the “Christmas spirit” this year.

The Serenity Prayer offers wise guidance about finding peace amid change and worry. It reminds us there’s a difference between what we can control and what we cannot, and that wisdom lies in knowing the difference.

While the how, where, and with whom we celebrate Christmas changes throughout our lives, the true meaning of Christmas never changes. It is the love of God made manifest through Jesus. This love provides us, through acceptance, courage, and wisdom, the opportunity to find serenity even when facing different circumstances.

Love provides the foundation for serenity because it assures us we’re not alone, regardless of circumstances. God’s love is constant even when everything else changes. Even in loss or difficulty, we can practice generous love—sometimes accepting help from others or being present to our own pain with compassion.

Making it Personal: How do the words of the Serenity Prayer speak to you this season? How might you cultivate serenity, courage, and wisdom, connecting with deeper spiritual aspects of Christmas? Today, identify one thing you cannot change and accept it with love, and one thing you can change and take generous action.

Christmas Eve

December 24, 2025

Making Room for Love

*And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped
him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger,
because there was no room for them in the inn.*

—Luke 2:7

Amy Cook's reflection last Sunday, the Fourth Sunday of Advent, was an inspiring culmination of everything we have been learning about practicing generosity with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. As she so beautifully described in her reflection on Elizabeth's response to her cousin, Mary, the practice of generosity involves an intentional decision to make space for others and for God.

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are times when we are often filled with many emotions. If we are not mindful, it is easy to make these days all about us and our emotional needs. Amy's reflection reminds us that there is a different choice we can make. We can be more like Elizabeth, who made it her priority to create space for Mary's emotions and to make room for Mary to share her news.

In addition to creating space for others today and tomorrow, it is also important for us to remember to pause and create space to give thanks for God's generosity. As we hear the Christmas story where there was no room in the inn for Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, we are reminded to make room in our own hearts and schedules for prayer and worship this evening and/or tomorrow. As we make room, we help create the space to receive God's gift of the birth of Jesus into our lives.

The irony of the Christmas story is that while there was no room in the inn, there was room in the hearts of humble shepherds, wise men, and others who recognized the significance of this birth. The question for us is not whether we have perfect circumstances, but whether we have room in our hearts for love. Making room for love requires intentional choices about how we organize our time, energy, and priorities—it engages our mind in service of our heart.

CHRISTMAS EVE

Make it Personal: How will you be intentional about creating space for the good news of others? How will you be deliberate about creating space for the good news of the birth of Christ? Today, consciously create space—in your schedule, in conversations, in your heart—for love to enter and be expressed.

Christmas Day

December 25, 2025

Receiving the Gift of God's Generous Love

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

—John 1:1-5, 14

During our journey together through the season of Advent, we have focused on how we can practice generosity with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. Our shared journey has brought us on this day to the celebration of the most generous gift of all—the gift of God's love for us expressed through the birth of Christ.

At the beginning of our journey, Randall Curtis invited us to avoid the cultural distractions that pull us away from focusing on a life of generosity. Shannon Kelly showed us that practicing gratitude and practicing generosity are intimately connected. Wendy Claire Barrie reflected on how deeply Mary's response to God modeled generosity. And Amy Cook inspired us with a fresh interpretation of the story of Mary and her cousin Elizabeth, illuminating how important it is to create space for one another's stories.

Today we focus on receiving the gift of generosity—specifically God's generous gift of the love of Christ. Listen anew to the opening words of John's gospel. Use the lens of what we have learned about the root meaning of the word *generosity*—to give birth, to create a new beginning.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.”

CHRISTMAS DAY

The Word becoming flesh is the ultimate act of divine generosity—God giving birth to new possibilities for human life and relationship. In Christ, we see what generous love looks like in human form. His life, death, and resurrection demonstrate the lengths to which God will go to express love for us. This ultimate gift of incarnation engages every dimension of our being: it touches our hearts with love, connects our souls to the divine, strengthens our bodies through Christ's own embodiment, and challenges our minds to comprehend such extravagant grace.

Here are some questions we invite you to take with you into the coming days and year: What meaning from John's description of the Word becoming flesh might you carry forward with you as a reminder of God's lavish gift of Love? How might you remain open to continue receiving the gift of God's generosity?

It has been an honor to walk this journey with you. May God's generosity and the Light of Christ continue to shine generously in and through you. May you continue to practice generosity in heart, soul, strength, and mind, offering to the world the same lavish love that God has so generously offered to you.

Prayers

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love,

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,

Grant that I may not so much seek

To be consoled as to console,

To be understood as to understand,

To be loved, as to love.

[Amen.]

—Attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi

Lord Jesus, teach me to be generous.

Teach me to serve you as you deserve;

to give and not to count the cost;

to fight and not to heed the wounds;

to toil and not to seek rest;

to labor and not to ask for reward,

except the reward of knowing that I am doing your will.

Amen.

—Attributed to Saint Ignatius of Loyola

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

[Amen.]

—Thomas Merton

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
...To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart. [Amen.]*

—Howard Thurman

*Almighty God, your loving hand has given us all that we possess:
Grant us grace than we may love you with all that we have, and be
found faithful and acceptable stewards of your bounty; through
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

—Prayers, Thanksgivings, and Litanies—The Episcopal Church

*Creator of the fruitful earth, you made us stewards of all things. Give us
grateful hearts for all your goodness, and steadfast wills to use your
bounty well, that the whole human family, today and in generations to
come, may with us give thanks for the riches of your creation. We ask
this in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord.*

—Book of Alternative Services, p. 396

*Save us, Jesus, from hurrying away, because we do not wish to help,
because we know not how to help, because we dare not. Inspire us
to use our lives serving one another. [Amen.]*

—A New Zealand Prayer Book

*Christ of the new covenant, give us the happiness to share, Prayers with
full measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, all that
you give us. [Amen.]*

—A New Zealand Prayer Book

Notes

Notes

Living Well Through Advent 2025

Practicing Generosity with All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind

Living Compass is delighted to join you on your journey through Advent. Designed for both individual and group reading and reflection, this 52-page devotional provides a foundation for seeking a deeper experience of Advent, an experience that will help prepare us for the true meaning of Christmas.

Includes reflections from: Wendy Claire Barrie
Robbin Brent
Amy Cook
Randall Curtis
Shannon Kelly
Scott Stoner

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