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THE “BAD” SAMARITAN? A VIEW OF THE ECONOMICS OF RADICAL
GENEROSITY FROM LUKE 10:25–37

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THE “BAD” SAMARITAN? A VIEW OF THE ECONOMICS OF RADICAL GENEROSITY
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Which of these three men seems to you to have become the neighbor of the man who fell among the thieves? And he said, “The one who was practicing mercy with him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go! And you, yourself, do likewise.”

— Luke 10:36–37¹

Introduction

America is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, but currently ranks among the lowest in terms of percentage of Gross National Product given among major Western donors of foreign aid to impoverished nations.² Such tight-fistedness in our nation was unthinkable at the close of World War II with the re-building of Europe.³ However, this magnanimity mostly ceased in the 1960s with America’s embrace of John F. Kennedy’s mantra, “give a hand, not a hand out”⁴ as well as the rise of per capita income in the United States, which nearly doubled between the years of 1960–82.⁵

Thus, sociologists Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson note this paradox of affluence: the more we have, the less we give.⁶ In other words, the more affluent Americans became, the

¹ All Scripture references are author’s original translations from Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece* (28th ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

² Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1990), 31.

³ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴ Robert A. Sirico, introduction to *Transforming Welfare: The Revival of American Charity* (ed. Jeffrey J. Sikenga; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Acton Institute, 1997), x.

⁵ Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 31.

⁶ Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson, *The Paradox of Generosity: Giving We Receive, Grasping We Lose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

less they gave in terms of their money, time, and lives both within and without the church.⁷

However, Smith and Davidson also note another paradox—the paradox of generosity: “giving we receive, grasping we lose.”⁸ Such a paradoxical view toward generosity is evinced not only in their recent (2014) scientific study, but also in numerous ancient works including Christian Scripture.⁹

Perhaps the pinnacle of Jesus’s teaching on radical generosity is the pericope of the so-called “Good Samaritan” in Luke 10:25–37. For the purposes of this essay, “radical generosity” may be defined as an *intentional investment* of one’s life and resources in helping those truly in need, which transcends the expected ethical norms of society. Radical generosity seeks to restore *shalom*, “wholeness,” “well-being,” and “peace,”¹⁰ in the lives of the needy, and *contagiously displays* a living demonstration of God’s love toward others.¹¹ Such a “radical generosity” posits a threefold understanding of stewardship: 1) God owns everything; 2) what we have was given to us by God; and 3) our resources are assets to be invested in God’s kingdom, and are not to be selfishly hoarded.¹² Luke 10:25–37 displays “radical generosity” in that the unlikely “hero” of the story (the anonymous Samaritan) undertook as much risk, sacrifice, effort, and time in service to a stranger as he likely would have for himself or a loved one.¹³ Such a radical generosity as displayed in Luke 10:25–37 contradicts many contemporary views toward

⁷ Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 31.

⁸ Smith and Davidson, *The Paradox of Generosity*, 1.

⁹ For a succinct synopsis of ancient, secular and ecclesiastical texts highlighting the concept of radical generosity, see Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), 340–41.

¹⁰ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, “שְׁלוֹם,” *HALOT* (study ed.; 2 vols.; ed. and trans. M. E. J. Richardson; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 2:1510.

¹¹ Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard, *Contagious Generosity: Creating a Culture of Giving in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan, 2012), 18.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Raymond Angelo Belliotti, *Jesus the Radical: The Parables and Modern Morality* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2013), xvii.

economics,¹⁴ which might take Jesus’s teachings as a *negative* example of sound economic practice due to its shocking display of open-ended generosity. Yet this pericope concludes with Jesus’s twin commands for us to follow the Samaritan’s example of radical generosity, “Go! And you, yourself, do likewise” (Luke 10:37).

Hence, the problem questions: Does the radical generosity of Luke 10:25–37 offer Western Christians in consumerist cultures a “bad” example of sound economic practice? How does Luke 10:25–37 impact the economics of global Christianity? This essay argues that Luke 10:25–37 presents a timeless, positive, and universal example of the open-handed, radical generosity contemporary Christians—reflecting upon God’s gifts to us in Christ—are to display in practicing economics, and that such an engaged, hands-on generosity has tangible economic, physical, and missiological benefits. Moreover, such a view intersects faith, work, and economics in at least three key areas: 1) stewardship and flourishing; 2) productivity and opportunity; and 3) responsible action.

The “Bad” Samaritan? An Analysis of the Greek Text of Luke 10:25–37

Luke’s Gospel is the longest document in the New Testament (NT) and is a Gospel of great reversals.¹⁵ By this, I mean that the central characters and unlikely “heroes” (e.g., Luke 10:37; 13:16; 16:25; 19:9) within Luke’s narrative are often those whom the world has ridiculed and rejected. Luke 10:25–37 is no exception in that the Samaritan would have certainly been an unlikely “hero” to the Jewish scribe as Samaritans were typically portrayed by Jews as “stereotypical villains.”¹⁶ Regarding the Jewish antipathy toward Samaritans, Reinhard Pummer

¹⁴ See e.g., the “three worrisome trends” in Frederick S. Weaver: *An Economic History of the United States: Conquest, Conflict, and Struggles for Equality* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 235–45.

¹⁵ Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H, 2009), 256, 280, 283.

¹⁶ Lauri Thurén, *Parables Unplugged: Reading the Lukan Parables in Their Rhetorical Context* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2014), 66.

notes that even in the seventeenth century the European consensus was that the “Jews hate and curse the Samaritans.”¹⁷ Such animosity is further illustrated by the attitudes of two of Jesus’s own inner circle of disciples, James and John, who desired to obliterate the Samaritan village in Luke 9:54. Such an unloving, hateful attitude was perhaps the motivation behind the pejorative moniker *Βοανηργές*, “sons of thunder,”¹⁸ which was ascribed to them by Jesus himself (Mark 3:17).¹⁹ However, Luke’s thematic development of Jesus’s love for the outcasts of society would have likely served to give soteriological hope to Luke’s primarily Gentile audience (Luke 2:32).²⁰

Furthermore, ancient Jewish assumptions regarding the interpretation of two of their key Scriptures (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18) are turned on their head by Jesus in Luke 10:25–37. No longer is the concept of “neighbor” restricted to ethnic, familial, or socio-economic boundaries. Rather, Jesus elucidates in this pericope that everyone is a potential “neighbor.” The point of this pericope is not the question of, “Who is my neighbor?” as parables scholar Lauri Thurén suggests.²¹ Instead, Jesus emphasizes the importance of *becoming* a neighbor to anyone who may be in need.²² Thus, Jesus reveals the importance of *living* and *practicing* the teachings of Scripture, and not just its memorization (Luke 10:28, 37).

While some may argue that this pericope is merely parabolic fiction, or perhaps an “example story,”²³ whose ethical demands are not timeless, transcendental, or required for

¹⁷ Reinhard Pummer, *The Samaritans: A Profile* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2016), 263.

¹⁸ W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, “*Βοανηργές*,” BDAG 179–80.

¹⁹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 162.

²⁰ Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 265–66, 282–83.

²¹ Thurén, *Parables Unplugged*, 62, 65.

²² François Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27* (Hermeneia; ed. Helmut Koester; trans. Donald S. Deer; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2013), 65.

²³ See Jeffrey T. Tucker, *Example Stories: Perspectives on Four Parables in the Gospel of Luke* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 198.

hearers today, these are highly debated topics that have no clear consensus in parables scholarship as evinced in the plethora of interpretations surrounding this pericope.²⁴ However, the issue of genre is really a moot point as Jesus explains in Luke 10:25–37 that the key to inheriting eternal life is not merely *orthodoxy*, but also *orthopraxy*²⁵—that is, our obedience to Jesus’s so-called “great commandment” of loving God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves (Matt 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25, 27–28, 37).²⁶ The example of the Samaritan’s radical generosity toward a dying man is a practical, living example of what such orthopraxy (i.e., love for “neighbor”) looks like from the eyes of God. A cursory summary highlighting the more salient thematic and theological points of the text related to the thesis of this essay will be proffered below.

Thematic Analysis

N. T. Wright heralds Luke 10:25–37 as “one of the most brilliant miniature stories ever composed.”²⁷ Our story begins with a “certain lawyer” who put Jesus “to the test” by challenging his hermeneutic regarding the eschatology and soteriology of Scripture (Luke 10:25). Interestingly, the lawyer addresses Jesus with the vocative Διδάσκαλε, “Teacher,”²⁸ but as will be seen in the subsequent verses, it appears that the lawyer’s motives are impure, and he does not desire to be “taught” by Jesus.²⁹ Jesus, knowing the hearts of men (John 2:24–25) does not fall

²⁴ For a survey of contemporary approaches to Luke 10:25–37 see Belliotti, *Jesus the Radical*, 13–34.

²⁵ Bovon, *Luke 2*, 54–55.

²⁶ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*; London: SPCK; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1996), 304.

²⁷ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 305–06.

²⁸ J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, eds. “διδάσκαλος,” L&N 1:416.

²⁹ Alfred Plummer disagrees with scholars (such as Joel Green) who suggest the impurity of the lawyer’s motives. See Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke* (ICC; 5th ed.; ed. Samuel Rolles Driver, Alfred Plummer, and Charles Augustus Briggs; 1896, 1984; repr. London and New York, N.Y.: T&T Clark, 2004) 284; and Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; ed. Gordon D. Fee; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 427–28.

for the lawyer's trap, and responds by asking the lawyer to display his own understanding of Scripture's requirements for inheriting eternal life (Luke 10:26).

The lawyer obliges in v. 27 by reciting a conflation of the *Shema* (Deut 6:5) and the holiness law of neighborly love (Lev 19:18)—two of the most famous passages within Scripture for the Jewish faith.³⁰ However, in v. 28 Jesus explains that it is not enough to simply memorize and recite the great commandment (orthodoxy),³¹ this concept must also be *practiced* (orthopraxy)—“do this and you, yourself, will live.” Jesus's conditional imperative command to the lawyer (ποίηι) to become a practitioner of the great commandment underscores the ethical praxis commensurate with those who inherit eternal life. Furthermore, Luke employs the middle voice ζήσῃ, “you, yourself, will live,”³² in v. 28b, which originally “conveyed a reflexive idea” in drawing attention to its subject. The middle voice “carries the most semantic weight of the Greek voices,”³³ and is “not very common” in the GNT.³⁴ In using ζήσῃ, Luke appears to be exposing the false assumption of the lawyer that he is already within the eschatological family of God simply through his Jewish ethnicity. The implications of v. 28b are displayed in a conditional protasis “(if) you do this” and apodasis “(then), you, yourself will live.” Jesus subtly reveals here that inclusion into God's kingdom is not based upon ethnicity, but circumcised hearts (Jer 31:33)—hearts within people who not only *hear* God's law, but they *practice* it as well (Rom 2:13; Jas 1:22).

After Jesus explains to the lawyer the necessity for him to practice this dual love for God and neighbor in his own life, the lawyer wishes “to justify himself” (Luke 10:29). Wright notes

³⁰ Ibid., 428.

³¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (2 vols.; BECNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 1994–1996), 2:1024.

³² The term ζήσῃ is also an intransitive verb, which fits Porter's requirement for reflexivity. See Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (2d ed.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 67.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ S. M. Baugh, *A New Testament Greek Primer* (3d ed.; Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2012), 70.

that this is not some Pelagian “self-justification,” but rather the “justification of the Jew, seeking to draw the boundaries of the covenant at the appropriate place, with (of course) himself inside, and sundry other specifiable categories [including Samaritans] outside.”³⁵ This is why affixing the title “Good Samaritan” to this story obfuscates Luke’s intention to perform a “great reversal” of eschatological expectations for the original hearers/readers of his story as Gentiles as well as Jews are now able to become members of the kingdom of God.³⁶

In vv. 30–35 Jesus tells a story involving six anonymous characters—the beaten and dying man, thieves, priest, Levite, Samaritan, and innkeeper. Despite many commentators’ desire to ascribe a Jewish ethnicity to this “half-dead” man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho (so Wright),³⁷ the text is silent regarding his ethnicity. It appears that this is intentional as Luke’s point is not the dying man’s ethnicity (although it is possible he was in fact Jewish),³⁸ but the fact he is a human being, made in God’s image (Gen 1:26–27), who is truly in need. Two Jewish men—a priest and a Levite—not only do not offer any help to the dying man, they go out of their way to avoid the man as seen in the ingressive aorist ἀντιπαρῆλθεν, “began to pass by on the other side.” The priest and Levite were possibly avoiding the dying man because of their ritual purity laws, and did not want to be rendered “unclean” by being in contact with a dead body (Lev 5:2–3; 21:1–3). However, Luke’s choice of the temporal aorist participle ἰδὼν, “after seeing,” implies that the men were perhaps staring intently at this dying man, who may have possibly been crying out for help, writhing in agony, or otherwise revealing that he was not yet deceased. Regardless, after seeing the dying man’s deplorable condition, they unlovingly chose

³⁵ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 306.

³⁶ Thurén, *Parables Unplugged*, 66–67.

³⁷ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 307.

³⁸ Leopold Fonck, *The Parables of the Gospel: An Exegetical and Practical Explanation* (3d ed., ed. George O’Neill; trans. E. Leahy; New York, N.Y.: F. Pustet, 1914), 574.

to close their eyes and do nothing.³⁹ Moreover, the priest and Levite failed to show him compassion—“the obligatory complement to piety”—despite their supposed religious occupations.⁴⁰

In vv. 33–35 a most unlikely “hero” emerges: a journeying Samaritan, who “after seeing” (ἰδὼν) this dying man, does not fail to join ἐσπλαγχνίσθη, “compassion,”⁴¹ with piety.

Ἐσπλαγχνίσθη is only employed two other times in Luke’s Gospel (7:13; 15:20), and, in both instances, Christ’s/God’s saving mercies are in full view. Ἐσπλαγχνίσθη is not merely “pity” as some suggest,⁴² but is an intimate portrait of the heart of God himself.⁴³ Lukan scholar Mikeal Parsons argues that Luke’s use of ἐσπλαγχνίσθη in 10:33 implies that the Samaritan is to be seen as a type of Christ, and is clearly functioning as God’s agent.⁴⁴ It also appears that Luke is using the aorist ἐσπλαγχνίσθη in an ingressive fashion, “he began to have compassion.” In other words, upon seeing the plight of this dying man, the Samaritan immediately began to have compassion for him. Thus, the ingressive aorist ἐσπλαγχνίσθη in v. 33 serves as the antithesis of the ingressive aorist ἀντιπαρήλθεν, “he began to pass by on the other side,” in vv. 31–32. In these verses, Luke vividly contrasts the Samaritan’s compassionate concern against the backdrop of the priest’s and Levite’s apathy.

The radical generosity of the Samaritan in vv. 34–35 knew no bounds. The Samaritan recognized that this man had no means, monetary or otherwise, to care for himself and was in desperate need of assistance. So the Samaritan became a neighbor to this dying man in very

³⁹ Bovon, *Luke 2*, 57.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Louw and Nida, eds., L&N 2:226.

⁴² See Bovon, *Luke 2*, 56.

⁴³ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke* (Paideia; ed. Mikeal C. Parsons, Charles H. Talbert, and Bruce W. Longenecker; Grand Rapids, Mich. Baker Academic, 2015), 180–81.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 180.

practical, necessary ways: “he approached (him), he bandaged up his wounds while pouring oil and wine (on them), and after he mounted him upon his own animal he brought him to (an) inn and took care of him” (v. 34). The medical imagery of tending to the dying man’s wounds further underscores the divine agency of the Samaritan’s loving acts as Luke’s language recalls Old Testament (OT) imagery that portrays God as redeemer and healer (Ps 147:3; Jer 30:17; Hos 6).⁴⁵ However, the radical generosity of the Samaritan did not stop there: “And on the next day he took out two *denarii* (and) gave (them) to the innkeeper and said, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you might spend I, myself, will repay to you when I return’” (v. 35). Thus, the Samaritan was not questioning whether or not this dying man was legally a “neighbor,” like the self-justifying lawyer of vv. 25–29. Rather, the Samaritan *became* a neighbor in considering the needs of this dying man as more important than his own (Rom 12:10; Phil 2:3–4).

What made the Samaritan’s generosity “radical” was that the Samaritan displayed an *intentional investment* of his life and resources that transcended the expected cultural norms of his society. It was apparently socially acceptable to the priest and Levite to shut their eyes to their neighbor’s plight and do nothing, despite the clear prohibitions against such apathy in OT texts such as Proverbs 28:27. The Samaritan, however, displayed a living demonstration of God’s love toward others. In other words, by becoming a neighbor to this dying man through showing him radical generosity, the Samaritan also *became the gospel* in that he demonstrated God’s boundless love toward us in Christ who are/were also dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1, 5; Col 2:13).⁴⁶ The Samaritan’s radical generosity evinced a stewardship of recognition that his available resources were merely assets to be invested in God’s kingdom through investing in

⁴⁵ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (combined ed.; 2 vols. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 2:51–52.

⁴⁶ Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2015), 2.

the needs of others and were not to be selfishly hoarded. Such radical generosity was costly as the Samaritan's tab was open-ended. Not only did the Samaritan's generosity cost him δύο δηνάρια, "two days' wages,"⁴⁷ but the Samaritan tells the innkeeper—another unsavory character in Jewish circles⁴⁸—to "Take care of him, and whatever more you might spend I, myself, will repay to you when I return" (v. 35b). Thus, the Samaritan's radical generosity ensured that the dying man would not be jailed for bad debts and would be allowed to leave the inn on good terms.⁴⁹ A Jew would have been able to recover money from a loan to another Jew, but in this case, the Samaritan could not legally require the dying man to repay his debt.⁵⁰ Thus, the Samaritan became the gospel not only to the dying man, but to the innkeeper as well in a radical display of generosity that was willing to pay whatever price he could—even the potential risk of being robbed and murdered himself—to help this dying man.⁵¹

After having illustrated what true love for God and neighbor looks like in this practical application, Jesus then asks the rhetorical question to the lawyer in v. 36: "Which of these three men seems to you to have become (the) neighbor of the man who fell among the thieves?" The implied answer is, of course, "the Samaritan." However, despite the positive connotations affixed to the word "Samaritan" in contemporary Western culture, the Jewish stereotype of Samaritans as "bad" and certainly not "good" is concretized in the lawyer's periphrasis "the one who was practicing mercy with him." Thus, the lawyer refuses to utter the "hateful" word "Samaritan" in v. 37.⁵² It is interesting that the lawyer refers to the radical generosity of the Samaritan as

⁴⁷ Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, BDAG 223.

⁴⁸ Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes*, 2:53.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:54.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2010), 124.

⁵² Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; ed. F. F. Bruce; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 314.

“practicing mercy with him” (i.e., the dying man). The substantival aorist participle *ποιήσας* is rendered “showed” in most English translations for v. 37, which seems an odd translation as the term is typically rendered elsewhere as “doing” or “practicing.”⁵³ Moreover, the preposition *μετ’*, “with,”⁵⁴ is also used by Luke here to convey that radical generosity includes both the giver and receiver—that is, the Samaritan “was practicing mercy (via generosity) *with* him.” In other words, if the man did not accept the Samaritan’s help, then mercy and neighborly love could not be enacted. Mercy and neighborly love have a symbiotic relationship and are essentially two sides of the same coin. It took both men to practice mercy (generosity). This is an important point as pride can sometimes become a stumbling block in rejecting the radical generosity of others.

Jesus’s twin imperatives, “Go! And you, yourself, do likewise” echo back to v. 28 and serve as a startling reminder to the lawyer (and us) that his ethnicity is not grounds for inheriting eternal life—he must intentionally practice the great commandment by becoming a neighbor to those in need, and in so doing, become the gospel to them as well. Jesus’s commands remind us of our own ethical responsibilities to become a neighbor to those in need by considering the Samaritan’s example of radical generosity in three key spheres of economics to which we now turn: 1) stewardship and human flourishing; 2) productivity and opportunity; and 3) responsible action.

Stewardship and Human Flourishing

While little information is given by Jesus regarding the economic status of the Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37, we can, nevertheless, draw a few conclusions related to his stewardship and desire for

⁵³ Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, BDAG 839–42.

⁵⁴ Louw and Nida, eds., L&N 2:160–61.

human flourishing. The expected term that Luke employs in his Gospel to describe characters of significant economic means is *πλούσιος*, “rich, wealthy.”⁵⁵ This term occurs seventeen times in the GNT with eleven of these occurrences (sixty-five percent) appearing in Luke’s Gospel. However, *πλούσιος* is absent from Luke 10:25–37.⁵⁶ This implies that the Samaritan was not characterized by Luke as “rich,” but as a good steward over the resources that God had entrusted to him. Apparently, he had an abundance and was able to care for the medical needs of the dying man (v. 34), as well as be responsible for an open-ended tab (v. 35) to the innkeeper for his care. By being a good steward of what God had so graciously entrusted to him, the Samaritan was able to promote flourishing in others. Thus, flourishing begets flourishing—the flourishing in the life of the Samaritan begat flourishing in the dying man. While Luke 10:25–37 does not give the details regarding what happened to the dying man, Luke leaves his hearers/readers optimistic that the dying man would eventually be restored and become a neighbor to others as the Samaritan was to him.

Productivity and Opportunity

The Samaritan produced more than he consumed, and as a good steward of God’s resources was allowed to serve the dying man’s needs. Being productive and a good steward of your resources allows us to help someone in need when the opportunity arises. This is evinced in the life of the Samaritan in that he displayed a heartfelt compassion immediately upon seeing the dying man’s needs. By seeing the opportunity for service, the Samaritan saved the man’s life, and displayed a “living sermon” to the dying man, the innkeeper, the lawyer, and us today.

⁵⁵ Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, BDAG 831.

⁵⁶ Andreas Köstenberger and Raymond Bouchoc, *The Book Study Concordance of the Greek New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H, 2003), 470.

Responsible Action

The Samaritan was not passive in his display of radical generosity. He took swift action as soon as he saw the desperate plight of the dying man. The Samaritan sacrificially risked being robbed or even murdered by thieves himself, in order to establish *shalom* in the dying man's life.⁵⁷ Thus, in putting the *needs* of this dying man above his own *wants* (Rom 12:10; Phil 2:3), he promoted flourishing and hope in the dying man's life. His actions ensured that this dying man would be cared for and restored.

In this sense, the income earned from the Samaritan—a character not classified by Luke as a wealthy, elite member of society—serves as a vivid reminder as to how vocation can be missiological in becoming a neighbor to those truly in need. Adopting an intentionally missiological mindset of work and economics allows us to see work through new eyes. Rather than loathsome toil, labor can be seen as exciting, participatory, kingdom work through investing our lives and resources in others. Rather than feeling disconnected, workers can invest themselves in God's mission—thus, becoming intimately connected within the family of God as an agent of God's redemptive purposes.

Summary of Luke 10:25–37

The familiar slogan for State Farm Insurance—“like a good neighbor”—aptly summarizes the moralizing notions that many ascribe toward the Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37.⁵⁸ However, the point of this story is neither to make the Samaritan “good,” nor to simply imitate him as an exemplar. Rather, the call is to become the gospel by becoming a neighbor to those in need—even your enemies (Matt 5:44; Luke 6:27–28). Oftentimes, this process requires radical

⁵⁷ Belliotti, *Jesus the Radical*, 8.

⁵⁸ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 306.

generosity that transcends cultural boundaries and norms as vividly displayed by the Samaritan of Luke 10:25–37. Luke 10:25–37 upsets the *a priori* assumptions of the lawyer and other Jews who thought that ethnicity determined both inheritance to eternal life as well as the qualifications of a “neighbor.” However, Jesus shows the lawyer in Luke 10:25–37 that what matters most in inheriting eternal life is not ethnicity or scriptural knowledge, but the intentional practice of the great commandment.

Thus, the following analogies can be made in analyzing the characters within this story: The Samaritan’s actions toward the dying man are contrasted by Luke/Jesus with the actions of the priest and Levite (whose actions were similar), and the thieves. This is visualized in the table below:

Luke’s Characterization of the Thieves, Priest, Levite, and Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37		
The Thieves	The Priest and Levite	The Samaritan
See him	See him	Sees him
Intentionally approach him	Intentionally avoid him	Intentionally approaches him
Display violence	Display apathy	Displays compassion
Rob him	Reject him (unclean)	Pays for him
See him	See him	Sees him
Forsake him	Forsake him	Promises to return and pay “whatever more”

The lawyer is inductively challenged by Jesus to determine which group he belongs to—those groups who volitionally chose not to become a neighbor or the Samaritan who became a

neighbor to the dying man. Lukan scholar Kenneth Bailey aptly summarizes the rhetorical situation of Luke 10:25–37: “The lawyer is pressed to understand: I must *become* a neighbor to anyone in need. To fulfill the law means that I must reach out in *costly* compassion to all people, even to my enemies. The standard remains even though I can never fully achieve it. I cannot justify myself and earn eternal life.”⁵⁹

What can we glean from the economic praxis of the Samaritan of Luke 10:25–37? First of all, the Samaritan saw all resources as being owned by God, and he was simply to be a compassionate steward over God’s resources. Second, the Samaritan recognized that his resources were God-given gifts to be used as God, alone, saw fit. Thus, obedience to the great commandment required the Samaritan to have open hands and an open heart to those in need. Third, and last, the Samaritan did not see resources as something to be selfishly amassed and hoarded, but rather as assets to be invested in the kingdom of God. Through his intentional investment of time and resources, the Samaritan became the gospel through his vivid display of radical generosity to both the dying man and the innkeeper (v. 35). However, is the Samaritan’s example *descriptive* or *prescriptive* for us today? In other words, is his radical generosity to be commended or eschewed in Western consumerist cultures? Should contemporary Christians deem the Samaritan’s economic praxis of radical generosity as “bad” or “good”?

Smith’s “Vile Masters” and the Paradox of Generosity in Western Culture

In 1776, Adam Smith, the so-called “founder of modern economics,”⁶⁰ wrote: “All for ourselves, and nothing for other people, seems, in every age of the world, to have been the vile maxim of

⁵⁹ Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes*, 2:55.

⁶⁰ Weaver, *An Economic History of the United States*, 243.

the masters of mankind.”⁶¹ Since Smith, solidarity and sympathy for the masses—the average working class—have increasingly become rare virtues. It is the self-centered concern of the “vile masters”—whose “god” is money, and for whom profit has become *l’idole du jour*⁶²—that Luke denounces in his Gospel (Luke 12:33; 16:14, 20; 18:22). Any economic system that promotes avarice and apathy for the needy stands in contradistinction to the teachings in Luke’s Gospel. For such “vile masters,”⁶³ the Samaritan within Luke 10:25–37 could never be seen as “good,” because his example of radical generosity toward his “competing neighbor,” would therefore stand against the vile masters’ goal of *radical inequality*⁶⁴ (i.e., the disparity between the lauded “avarice and ambition in the rich,” and the indolent “hatred of labour and the love of present ease and enjoyment” in many of the poor).⁶⁵ Rather, this Samaritan is “bad,” because not only does he not seek to reap a profit from his neighbor, he potentially puts himself in dire straits financially—thus, risking his life, his hopes and dreams, and his legacy of wealth. Such radical generosity is not advancing the cause of individualistic attainment—it is, indeed, antithetical to it. However, we must ask, “Is radical generosity a bad economic practice?” No, not at all.

According to the scientific research of sociologists Smith and Davidson there is a paradox to generosity in that: “Those who give, receive back in turn.”⁶⁶ But they also note a

⁶¹ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of the Nations* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1843), 169.

⁶² That is, “the idol of the day.”

⁶³ For many within the Protestant Reformation, the “Roman see” typified this behavior. See W. Carlos Martyn, *A History of the Huguenots* (New York, N.Y.: American Tract Society, 1866), 49. Moreover, John Cottingham, a contemporary English philosopher, sees Jesus’s call to love our neighbors (all people) as ourselves as pernicious in that it eliminates the concepts of genuine “affection” and “specialness.” See John Cottingham, “Ethics and Impartiality,” *Philosophical Studies* 43 (1983): 90.

⁶⁴ See James Halteman, “The Market System, the Poor, and Economic Theory,” in *Toward a Just and Caring Society: Christian Responses to Poverty in America* (ed. David P. Gushee; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999), 72. It is important to note that Smith argued that some economic inequality is actually *beneficial* if it provides a service to society (as in the case of providing an affordable public education). However, radical inequality only seeks the goodwill of the economic elite (the minority) usually at the expense of, and with no tangible benefits for the working masses. See Smith, *Wealth of the Nations*, 57.

⁶⁵ Smith, *Wealth of the Nations*, 279.

⁶⁶ Smith and Davidson, *The Paradox of Generosity*, 1.

second paradox in that those who do not give are depriving themselves of numerous, tangible physical and spiritual benefits.⁶⁷ Such tangible benefits include: happiness, bodily health, purpose in living, avoidance of depression, and interest in personal growth.⁶⁸ Furthermore, they argue that an intentional lifestyle of radical generosity can even contribute to the wealth of the giver as the increased health, productivity, expanded social-networks, knowledge of the world, and overall well-being produces a more productive and satisfying life overall.⁶⁹ Thus, radical generosity entails much more than a mere uninvolved, monetary exchange (the problem with many benevolence programs), there are tangible benefits for the giver as much as the recipient. As theologian Kent Nerburn states: “True giving is not an economic exchange; it is a *generative act*. It does not subtract from what we have; it multiplies the effect we can have in the world.”⁷⁰

While the economics of Smith’s “vile masters” are untenable, Marx’s communism and Rauschenbusch’s idealistic socialism are no better. Both Marx’s and Rauschenbusch’s systems have failed because of their anthropocentric worldview and humanity’s insatiable appetite for private property/wealth.⁷¹ True equality only exists when *shalom* is restored.⁷² We must strive in our economic praxis to use our God-given resources in becoming neighbors to those in need (Mark 14:7) so that they, too, can flourish. As theologian Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. explains:

We are expected to show hospitality to strangers We have been assigned to seek justice for our neighbors and, wherever we can, to relieve them from the tyranny of their suffering. . . . But we have also been called, and graced, to delight in our lives, to feel their irony and angularity, to make something sturdy and even lovely of them.⁷³

⁶⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 49, 53–85.

⁷⁰ Kent Nerburn, *Simple Truths: Clear & Gentle Guidance on the Big Issues in Life* (Novata, Calif.: New World Library, 2005), 44, emphasis added.

⁷¹ Darrow L. Miller and Marit Newton, *Lifework: A Biblical Theology for What You Do Every Day* (Seattle, Wash.: YWAM, 2009), 192–94.

⁷² Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 197, 199.

⁷³ Ibid., 197.

Is there a solution? Economist Michael Novak proffers an alternative framework that buttresses “democratic polity, an economy based on markets and incentives, and a moral-cultural system which is pluralistic and, in the largest sense, liberal [that is, free].”⁷⁴ The attractiveness of Novak’s proposal is that it seeks the moral as well as physical well-being of humanity. In other words, if we only address the surface-level, physical needs and ignore the spiritual ones, then we fail to offer any meaningful and lasting aid.⁷⁵

In Luke’s Gospel, apathy and avarice are scathingly critiqued (Luke 1:53; 18:25). Luke appears to recognize both the “literal problem” in the hoarding of such wealth, as well as the power wealth exerts in dominating people’s lives.⁷⁶ Moreover, Luke uses the term *φιλάργυροι*, “lovers of money,”⁷⁷ to describe the Pharisees, who apparently loved wealth more than they loved God (Luke 16:14).⁷⁸ Such a term castigates those who delight in creating a system of avarice and negative reciprocity—that is, one party (the rich elite) continuously extracts from others in a limited goods society without any intention for reciprocation. Negative reciprocity is still a major problem in the economic praxis of the West today.⁷⁹ In Luke’s Gospel, such negative reciprocity would be practiced only on those labeled as outcasts, strangers, or enemies, and not ethnic “neighbors.”⁸⁰ It seems that the paradox of affluence—the more we have, the less we give—is evinced in Scripture, and especially in Luke’s Gospel as the following table illustrates:

⁷⁴ Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (Lanham, Md.: Madison, 1991), 14.

⁷⁵ Brian Flickert and Steve Corbett, *When Helping Hurts: Alleviating Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 2009), 64.

⁷⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Literary Functions of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (SBLDS 39; Missoula, Mont.; Scholars, 1977), 159.

⁷⁷ Louw and Nida, eds., L&N 1:301.

⁷⁸ John A. Szukalski, *Tormented in Hades: The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) and Other Lucan Parables for Persuading the Rich to Repentance* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 120.

⁷⁹ Scott C. Todd, *Hope Rising: How Christians Can End Extreme Poverty in This Generation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 140–41.

⁸⁰ Szukalski, *Tormented in Hades*, 157.

The Paradox of Affluence as Illustrated in Luke’s Gospel				
The Samaritan Luke 10:25–37	The Rich Fool Luke 12:13–21	The Rich Man Luke 16:19–31	Rich Young Ruler Luke 18:18–23	Zacchaeus Luke 19:1–10
Saw others’ needs	Only saw his own needs	Only saw his own needs	Only saw his own needs	Saw others’ needs
Saw himself as an outcast	Saw himself as blessed	Saw himself as holy	Saw himself as holy	Saw himself as an outcast
Willing to help others	Only helped himself	Only helped himself	Only helped himself	Willing to help others
Willing to give	Hoarded wealth	Hoarded wealth	Hoarded wealth	Willing to give
Jesus’s/Luke’s Conclusion Regarding Their Stewardship of God-Given Resources:				
“Go! And do likewise.”	“You fool!”	“In Hades, he lifted up his eyes”	“One thing you still lack”	“He, too, is a son of Abraham”

In the character analysis above, we can compare/contrast the radical generosity of the Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) with those of the rich fool (Luke 12:13–21), rich man (*Dives*)⁸¹ (Luke 16:19–31), rich young ruler (Luke 18:18–23), and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10). As previously mentioned, the term *πλούσιος* is not employed in Luke 10:25–37, but it does appear in each of the other pericopes above. Moreover, in the case of the rich fool, the rich man (*Dives*), and the rich young ruler, the text makes it abundantly clear that they are exorbitantly wealthy by repeating the term *πλούσιος* (in each episode) and by using adjectives/vivid descriptors to describe the magnitude of their wealth (e.g., the rich young ruler was “extremely rich,” Luke 18:23). While the chief tax collector, Zacchaeus—a figure who would have been hated and

⁸¹ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 2:1130.

ridiculed by his Jewish contemporaries due to his occupation, wealth, and diminutive stature⁸²— is labeled as “rich,” it is his later conversion, and subsequent radical generosity that is commended by Jesus. It is the former outcast, Zacchaeus, who is a true “son of Abraham” (Luke 19:7–10). This leads to the question, should not our impoverished neighbors around the world have the opportunity to flourish as “sons/daughters of Abraham,” too?

The Impact of Luke 10:25–37 on the Economics of Global Christianity

Luke 10:25–37 presents a timeless, positive, and universal example of the open-handed, radical generosity contemporary Christians—reflecting upon God’s gifts to us in Christ—are to display to their *global* neighbors. The economic concepts of stewardship and flourishing evinced within Luke 10:25–37 directly impact the economics of global Christianity in that Christians are to have concerned compassion for their global “neighbors” and to promote human flourishing throughout the world. Second, Christians are to imitate the practice of the Samaritan’s productivity and opportunity in order to have an abundance to share (not hoard) with others. Such productivity enables Christians to have the resources necessary to promote human flourishing throughout the world. Third and last, the Samaritan’s responsible action requires us to be “seeing” the needs throughout the world. Whenever one of our brothers or sisters in Christ is hurting, it should require us to help bear their burdens (Gal 6:2), whether they are across the street, or across the globe. Responsible action requires informing ourselves of the global issues and formulating responsible and realistic plans of action, so that we can help in educated and meaningful ways.

All of Western civilization faces a host of crises such as a food shortage for nearly one billion neighbors on planet Earth despite the superabundance of food production and surplus in

⁸² Parsons, *Luke*, 277–78.

the West.⁸³ As a result, over thirty million neighbors (including innocent children) die annually from hunger.⁸⁴ While Christian economist Ulrich Ducrow argues that the root for these global crises can be traced “back to the origins of capitalism—not only as an economic-political system, but also as a culture,”⁸⁵ not all models of capitalism are untenable, as Novak’s model above has shown.

In our desire to share the gospel to the “ends of the earth” (which is a good thing), we so often ignore the importance of economics, human flourishing, and *shalom*.⁸⁶ Bob Pierce, evangelist and founder of World Vision, a Christian humanitarian organization, once remarked: “[T]he *whole* gospel involves more than preaching; it also means caring about the *whole person* and finding ways to meet that individual’s needs.”⁸⁷ Simply put, Americans live in the richest society in human history,⁸⁸ but often neglect to see that an apathetic and Darwinistic “capitalist society destroys the proactive and creative character of human beings and solidarity among them through competition.”⁸⁹ Yet, Western consumers can employ the concepts of radical generosity to their global neighbors in several key ways.

First, Western consumers can leverage their vast resources in buying from businesses who invest in impoverished nations. Corporations like TOMS (the shoe company) realize that by employing cause marketing and fair trade practices for these impoverished nations (\$1.52 billion

⁸³ Ulrich Ducrow, foreword to *Church and Ethical Responsibility in the Midst of World Economy: Greed, Dominion, and Justice*, by Paul S. Chung (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2013), ix.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Bruce Ashford and Chris Pappalardo, *One Nation Under God: A Christian Hope for American Politics* (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 2015), 87.

⁸⁷ As quoted in Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel: What Does God Expect of Us? The Answer That Changed My Life And Might Just Change The World* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 248, emphasis original.

⁸⁸ Ronald J. Sider, *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999), 27.

⁸⁹ Paul S. Chung, *Church and Ethical Responsibility in the Midst of World Economy: Greed, Dominion, and Justice* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2013), 247.

in 2008), they can earn new customers as well as help those in need.⁹⁰ By Western consumers purchasing from companies that support cause marketing and/or fair trade practices, these impoverished countries can employ more workers and improve their quality of life.

Second, churches can show radical generosity to their global neighbors through leveraging their vast resources. The world's largest corporation (China Petro-Chemical) employs 1,190,000 employees, but the church has hundreds of millions of members with the capacity to mobilize hundreds of millions of volunteers.⁹¹ God has given his people a superabundance of resources, which could be pooled together and implemented to help these impoverished neighbors. The church must earn the right to be the first choice (rather than the government) when it comes to matters of poverty alleviation. While American Christians may think of themselves as "generous givers," Smith, Emerson, and Snell's research reveals that twenty percent of all American Christians self-reported giving "nothing to church, parachurch, or nonreligious charities."⁹² If twenty percent of congregants admitted this, then how many more did not give, but were too ashamed to admit it? Such a tight-fisted parsimony stands in contradistinction to the radical generosity displayed by the Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37. Unrestricted economic growth of these impoverished nations will not suffice in establishing true *shalom* and a healthy society.⁹³ The church must become the gospel in displaying radical generosity as God's chosen conduit (Eph 3:10) in using its God-given superabundance to address the physical *and* spiritual needs of our global neighbors.

⁹⁰ Todd, *Hope Rising*, 137–38.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁹² Christian Smith and Michael O. Emerson, and Patricia Snell, *Passing the Plate: Why American Christians Don't Give Away More Money* (Oxford and New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2008), 29.

⁹³ Ashford and Pappalardo, *One Nation Under God*, 89–90.

Third, individual Christians can make a difference in the three important sectors necessary for global poverty alleviation: government, business, and the church.⁹⁴ In terms of the government sector, Christians can vote for candidates who make radical generosity and the restoration of *shalom* a priority. Christians can operate businesses, join churches, and support parachurch ministries that offer holistic, meaningful approaches to their global neighbors in need. Christian pastors and church leaders can lead by example (1 Pet 5:3) in making the radical generosity displayed within Luke 10:25–37 a vibrant part of their church culture and a major part of their church budget. Generous churches are led by generous pastors, and while we may see a generous pastor leading an ungenerous church, Christian philanthropists Chris Willard and Mike Sheppard argue that they “have never seen a generous church that is not led by a generous pastor.”⁹⁵

Just as the Samaritan became the gospel to the dying man in Luke 10:33–34, we become the gospel to our global neighbors when we show radical generosity to them. Such a radical generosity is beneficial missiologically because it does much to tear down the socially constructed barriers that often prevent “outsiders” from coming into the presence of Christ.⁹⁶ By investing our lives and resources in our global neighbors, we become the gospel by showing them the love of Christ in intentional and practical ways—giving hope where so often there is none. Now that we have made the case above for radical generosity, what are the implications?

The Implications of Radical Generosity: Four Key Questions

It has been shown above that both Scripture and the devastating effects of hunger and abject

⁹⁴ Todd, *Hope Rising*, 120.

⁹⁵ Willard and Sheppard, *Contagious Generosity*, 79.

⁹⁶ Byungohk Lee, *Listening to the Neighbor: From a Missional Perspective of the Other* (ASMMS 24; Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 178–80.

poverty require us to display radical generosity to our global neighbors in need. Such radical generosity leads us to four key questions regarding the potential implications: 1) To whom are we to display radical generosity? 2) Where do we draw the line? 3) How can we live a life of radical generosity if we are not wealthy? 4) How can we create a culture of radical generosity?

To Whom Are We to Display Radical Generosity?

While wisdom, discernment, and much prayer are in order, we must remember that, according to Luke/Jesus, we are to display radical generosity to anyone *truly* in need (Luke 10:37; 16:19–21). Jesus explains that we are to show radical generosity to those who are unable to repay us and not for the sake of reciprocity (Luke 14:12–14). We must also be good stewards of our God-given resources (Luke 19:12–27), and not enable a lifestyle (for those whom we are helping) that dishonors the Lord (Eph 4:28; 2 Thess 3:10). First of all, we are to display radical generosity to those within the church (especially to orphans and widows, Rom 12:13; Jas 1:17) and then to the surrounding culture. The church must show family members their God-given responsibility in caring for their needy parents and relatives (Matt 15:1–9; 1 Tim 5:3–4).

Giving is morally neutral.⁹⁷ If the resources we give contribute to a drug or alcohol addiction, then giving becomes ethically *negative*. However, if giving contributes to restoring *shalom*, then giving can become ethically *positive*. Christian sociologist/economist Marvin Olasky explicates the problem of uninvolved giving in the West: “If people were paid for not working, the number of non-workers would increase, and children would grow up without seeing work as a natural and essential part of life.”⁹⁸ Such a poor economical praxis cannot be perpetually sustained.

⁹⁷ Marvin Olasky, “Effective Compassion: Seven Principles from a Century Ago,” in *Transforming Welfare: The Revival of American Charity* (ed. Jeffrey J. Sikkenga; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Acton Institute, 1997), 47.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

In contemplating these issues, Olasky offers seven helpful principles from the nineteenth century (before the government replaced the church's role in American benevolence)⁹⁹ in displaying radical generosity to the poor: 1) *affiliation* (to generate a genuine sense of belonging by bolstering and healing the recipient's ties with family and loved ones); 2) *bonding* (showing the recipient that you genuinely love and care for him/her); 3) *categorization* (we must not adopt a monolithic approach to generosity as every individual has a unique situation); 4) *discernment* (we must prayerfully consider whom and how to help through engaging and inspecting each case); 5) *employment* ("programs operating without the discipline of the marketplace" are "inherently flawed"); 6) *freedom* (we must help recipients resist "enslavement to governmental masters" by escaping the cycle of abject poverty); and lastly, 7) *God* (radical generosity addresses the person's physical and spiritual needs).¹⁰⁰

While Olasky's principles are appealing, a word of caution is needed here from Luke's Gospel. Poor Lazarus had a "network" of those who apparently cared for him as they habitually carried Lazarus to the rich man's gate (Luke 16:20). Despite Lazarus's supposed social "safety net," the rich man is not excused by Jesus for his inaction, and neither are we. Just because impoverished neighbors may have family members or friends who have the means to help them, it does not mean that they *will* help them. Christians must seek to create a sense of affiliation, but also recognize their duty to help those persons if the severed strands within their social safety nets are irreparable. While "family relations, churches, and private charities should respectfully be the first responders to the needs of the poor," sometimes the family fails this obligation

⁹⁹ Ibid., 41.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 41–47.

miserably.¹⁰¹ Moreover, what of our global neighbors? Olasky's principles fall short in this area as well.

Where Do We Draw the Line?

So should we “sell all that we have and give to the poor” as Jesus commands the rich young ruler (Luke 18:22)? Is there a balance?

These are valid, complex questions as it seems Jesus is commanding us to do these very things (Luke 10:37), but we must realize that hyperbole is often employed in Jesus's teachings (e.g., Luke 18:25),¹⁰² and at the heart of the issue is salvation and entrance into the kingdom of God.¹⁰³ In other words, what do we love more—money or God (Luke 16:14)? The great commandment requires us to display love for God and neighbor, and it appears that the underlying principle within Luke's program is that *shalom* and balanced reciprocity be restored.¹⁰⁴ If we have the God-given resources to be a part of such restoration, then we should do so with open hands and loving hearts (Luke 10:33–35; 19:8). We must remember that Jesus did not require Zacchaeus to denounce *any* of his goods, and certainly not *all* of them. Zacchaeus took the initiative to restore *shalom* and balanced reciprocity through his voluntary willingness to give away *half* of his possessions (Luke 19:8). For a wealthy person, half of their goods is still a lot of money. Luke does not disparage wealth *per se*, only its misuse.¹⁰⁵ So we must look to our own hearts and honestly ask ourselves, “Are we being good stewards of our God-given resources in restoring *shalom* to our communities and around the world?”

¹⁰¹ M. Victor Carpenter, “Aid Strategies for the Poor as Proposed by Marvin Olasky: A Review and Critique as to Their Faithfulness to New Testament Teaching” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 271.

¹⁰² Bock, *Luke*, 2:1482, 2:1485–86.

¹⁰³ Belliotti, *Jesus the Radical*, 33.

¹⁰⁴ Szukalski, *Tormented in Hades*, 156–57.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

The balance seems to be in honestly assessing our own misuse of our God-given time and resources—asking forgiveness of God for any misappropriation—and living an intentional lifestyle of radical generosity in using our God-given resources to restore *shalom* and balanced reciprocity both locally and globally. This often involves sacrificing some of our *wants* so that the *needs* of others can be met. This gets at the heart of Paul’s intent in honoring/considering others above self (Rom 12:10; Phil 2:3).

How Can We Live a Life of Radical Generosity if We Are not Wealthy?

The Samaritan of Luke 10:25–37 was not characterized as being wealthy, yet he displayed radical generosity to the dying man. Another beautiful portrait of radical generosity from Scripture is the widow who gave all (Mark 12:21–24; Luke 21:1–4). The giving of her two λεπτά, “1/128 of a *denarius*,”¹⁰⁶ would have perhaps been the equivalent of someone today throwing two pennies into the offering plate. Yet, this widow is commended by Jesus for her radical generosity as she “brought all the possessions she was having” (Luke 21:23–24). Thus, this story reveals that the amount of what we give is not of utmost importance to God. It is the motivation behind our giving that counts. The rich gave to please people and receive their praise, whereas the widow—a disenfranchised, impoverished member of ancient Middle Eastern society¹⁰⁷—desired to please and praise God by giving herself *in toto* to God (Luke 21:4).

Moreover, according to historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, “check-book philanthropy” is not nearly as effective as *giving ourselves* in becoming a neighbor through “direct and immediate concern” for those whom we are helping.¹⁰⁸ Radical generosity involves more than merely giving

¹⁰⁶ Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, BDAG 592.

¹⁰⁷ Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes*, 2:133.

¹⁰⁸ Gertrude Himmelfarb, “Welfare and Charity: Lessons from Victorian England,” in *Transforming Welfare: The Revival of American Charity* (ed. Jeffrey J. Sikkenga; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Acton Institute, 1997), 32.

money—it can also involve the giving of time and talents to help someone in need. For example, if you have talents in auto or small engine repair, then you can be a blessing to those who cannot afford to pay for those services. If you have a few extra hours in the afternoon, you could be a blessing to a single, working mom by being her mentor, helping watch her kids while she seeks a job, or helping her with writing a résumé or interviewing skills. If you have some extra food or leftovers during the holidays, then donate that food to your local bread basket or soup kitchen. Better yet, invite someone who has no family or funds into your home to share the holidays together. The possibilities are endless no matter how wealthy or poor we may be. Being creative in living an intentional lifestyle of radical generosity exceeds cultural expectations and displays the love of Christ to those in need.

How Can We Create a Culture of Radical Generosity?

The Holy Spirit, empowers believers to create a culture of generosity. Willard and Sheppard explain that generosity can be modeled by pastors and caught by a congregation, and then pervasively spread throughout the surrounding culture. In their words: “Generosity, when it flows naturally from the heart of a church community is *contagious*. It has an undeniable effect on people who come into contact with it. It expresses in practical and powerful ways the message at the core of our faith: God gave his only Son to us that we might have life.”¹⁰⁹

Conclusion: Our Ultimate Example of Radical Generosity

Christians should contemplate the radical generosity displayed by God in the gift of his Son, Jesus the Christ, who paid the ultimate price—his own life—so that we might live (Rom 5:8). As Pauline scholar John Barclay explains from Romans:

¹⁰⁹ Willard and Sheppard, *Contagious Generosity*, 20, emphasis added.

Christian life is an impossible newness given as an unfitting gift, such that everything in this new life refers back to its source and foundation in the Christ-gift, and forward to its eschatological fulfillment as eternal life. Everything that can be said about Christian action, obedience, and obligation arises from this generative basis, because the very life that believers now live is created and sustained by the resurrection life of Christ. To live from faith is to “put on the Lord Christ Jesus” (13:14), whose presence in power motivates, enables, and shapes their patterns of behavior (15:1–3).¹¹⁰

Is the Samaritan’s example of radical generosity “bad” to us today? Does Luke 10:33–35 offer a deplorable view of economics? Not at all! A better question for the Christian might be, “How can we give so little of our time and resources when God has given us so much in the inexpressible *gift* of Christ (2 Cor 9:15)?” Simply put, true Christians cannot.

One day *shalom* will be restored by God, and poverty will cease to exist.¹¹¹ Until that day comes, however, God’s supreme example of open-handed, loving generosity—displayed to us in Christ—should motivate Christians to live lives of radical generosity in becoming the gospel to those neighbors in our “Jerusalem,” and to the ends of the Earth (Acts 1:8). The radical generosity of Christ as described by Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:9 will serve perhaps as a fitting end to this essay: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that because of you, he—being rich—became extremely poor, in order that by his extreme poverty, you might become rich.”

¹¹⁰ John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2015), 517.

¹¹¹ Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be*, 10, 199.