



The Gift of Sharing

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



Introduction:

What is your role in the congregation? What is your function? What do you do? Perhaps the better question is what should you do? **Romans 12:4** says this body has many members, and not every member serves the same function. Just as the eye does the seeing and not the hearing, the ear does the hearing and not the seeing. In like manner, according to **Romans 12:6**, God has bestowed His grace on us by gifting each of us to fill different functions and roles. Some might be Servers, some Teachers, and others Exhorters.

In today's lessons, we want to examine those among us who are Sharers. **Romans 12:8** says the one who contributes should do so with generosity (ESV). Are you a Sharer? If so, what are you doing with that gift? Let's find out together.

Discussion:

I. Am I a Sharer?

- A. The word translated "contributes" in the ESV or "gives" in NASB and NKJV is "metadidomi" and is also used in **Luke 3:11** and **Ephesians 4:28**. I have decided to use the title "Sharer" because I think sharing connotes the correct idea better. There are plenty of people who give when they have more than enough. A Sharer is someone who gives from what they themselves are using. It conveys the idea of taking what I am using and letting you use it.
- B. As with all the other roles, we understand that we all have responsibility in this area. **Romans 12:13** speaks of all of us contributing to the needs of the saints. **Hebrews 13:16** encourages us all to do good and share what we have. While many have learned this behavior, for some, it is natural. We are not simply talking about the contribution on the first day of the week, though this is definitely part of it. The characteristic of the Sharer is not determined by how much you have learned to put in the plate on Sunday, but on the natural bent of sharing with others.
- C. You may be wondering, "Is that my place? Am I a Sharer?" Allow me to demonstrate five characteristic strengths of the gift of sharing. We will be looking at the Macedonians who shared and sacrificed for the Judean Christians. We get to read Paul's teaching inspired by their actions in **II Corinthians 8-9**.
 1. *Sharers quickly volunteer to give or help when needs are revealed (II Corinthians 8:1-5)*: As soon as Macedonia heard about the need in Judea, they were filled with joy at the prospect of helping out and sharing. Like Servers, they are quick to step up to the plate. The difference is that usually Servers are quick to perceive opportunities, while Sharers are quick when informed of opportunities. Sharers are often the first to approach whoever made an announcement, first to respond to the e-mail, or first to get hold of the contact person when a need is explained. The rest of us tend to think someone else will take care of it.
 2. *Sharers see God as the true owner of all things and believe He will care for them (II Corinthians 9:8-11)*: The Macedonians recognized that any bread they might share with someone actually came from God to begin with. They weren't actually sharing their bread, but the bread God was sharing with them. Further, they believed that if they shared, God would provide enough for all. Sharers seem to innately grasp who actually owns everything they have to share. They don't see their house as their own property, but rather as the blessing from God to be used as a tool to help others. Since God has blessed them with this gift, they believe God will continue to bless them as long as they use the blessings He has provided to help and share.
 3. *Sharers see sharing as an opportunity, not an obligation (II Corinthians 8:4)*: The Macedonians begged for the favor of taking part in the relief of the Judean saints. They did not see the needs of the Judeans as an obligation. They saw it as an opportunity to be of use in the lives of others. They wanted that opportunity. They were excited about it. Sharers feel like they are really being of use when they can give to some cause. They don't feel guilty or manipulated. They want to be involved and they look for this kind of opportunity.
 4. *Sharers are willing to go without in order to share with others (II Corinthians 8:2-3)*: The Macedonians gave even out of their poverty. They gave even beyond their means. That means they sacrificed. They saw themselves as so blessed that they were willing to voluntarily forego some of their own blessings to be a blessing in the life of someone else. Sharers are willing to sacrifice. They don't feel put out when they do, nor do they get resentful when they have freely chosen to sacrifice. In fact, for them it often doesn't even feel like sacrifice, which can present a problem as they feel guilty because they think they've never done enough.
 5. *Sharers go beyond giving money to giving themselves (II Corinthians 8:5)*: The Macedonians didn't just give money. They gave themselves to God and to the apostles. That naturally led them to give of themselves to the

Judeans. This is also seen in **I Thessalonians 2:8-9**. While sharing may be weighted toward thinking of financial and material sharing, there is also the element of sharing time, resources, love, care, concern.

D. If these characteristics fit you, you have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. We need Sharers like you.

II. The Struggles of the Sharer.

A. As with all the gifts, the Sharer also has some natural struggles and weaknesses. If you have these weaknesses and struggles, don't spend time beating yourself up. Certainly, these demonstrate you have room to grow and areas to work on in your life. However, they don't mean you are bad or un-useful. They simply indicate that you may well be a Sharer. You have a role and we need you to fill it.

B. This section of the lesson has been the hardest to write in the whole series so far, simply because I have yet to find a comprehensive example of a Sharer in the Bible demonstrating the struggles. So, unlike the other lessons, I'm going to be using several different examples to demonstrate these weaknesses.

1. *Sharers tend to think money is the answer to everything (Ecclesiastes 10:19)*: Sharers can have a tendency to think in terms of writing a check for everything. Someone says, "The building needs to be cleaned." The Sharer's first thought is, "Who do you need me to write the check out to?" Someone might say, "I'm really depressed." While the Merciful might give a hug and listen to the depressed express why, the Sharer is likely to think, "Do you need me to help pay for a counselor?" This in turn can lead to the Sharer thinking that sharing financially relieves them of any other obligation to work. Sometimes the Sharer needs to back up and realize the answer is not with money.
2. *Sharers can be fixated on money, producing stinginess and greed (Luke 19:1-10)*: Zacchaeus was clearly a Sharer. When Jesus came into his house and set him free from his sins, Zacchaeus went above and beyond in making amends, giving fourfold to those he had cheated and giving half of what he had to the poor. He didn't all of a sudden become a Sharer. Rather, that was innate within him but hindered and blocked by his own sinfulness. In this story, we see a struggle that Sharers who are hindered and blocked by sinfulness and immaturity can really struggle with. Because they think in terms of material and financial goods, they can become fixated on money and material goods. They think money is the answer to all problems, so they become horders, stingy, greedy, and materialistic. Their time is spent thinking about getting more money.
3. *Sharers can develop ulterior motives (Romans 12:8)*: In **Romans 12:8**, Paul says those who contribute must do so in generosity (ESV). Some translations say "liberality." However, the term translated here is "haplotes." The word primarily means sincerity or single-mindedness. The concept of generosity and liberality is a secondary meaning because if you are giving with sincerity, you are giving with only the other person in mind and completely without self-seeking. Thus, you will be generous, rather than manipulative. I believe Paul's exhortation here demonstrates a struggle some Sharers can fall into. They can allow their sharing to develop ulterior motives. Rather than simply sharing for the full benefit of the one with whom they are sharing, they share with some personal motive themselves. One example is by having control issues based on their sharing. Either controlling the funds they share or even thinking that gives them more say in something than others because of how much they have given. This is seen in extreme cases when big givers threaten the elders with leaving the congregation and taking their big contributions with them wherever they go unless the shepherds go along with the Sharer on some decision. When truly sharing, there are no ulterior motives or personal benefits that come from it. It is a gift that becomes the recipient's and is then under the recipient's control. (By the way, this illustration does not include the case of helping out a poor steward on the basis that the poor steward start learning how to be a better steward.)
4. *Sharers tend to take pride in self and judge others based on the size of their contributions (Matthew 6:2-4; Mark 12:41-44)*: It seems that each gift is susceptible to thinking what it is best at is the litmus test for true spirituality. Servers resent when others don't get involved in serving. Teachers take pride in their knowledge. Exhorters get outspoken and upset when folks disagree with them. Sharers can think they are more devoted to God because of how much they give and share. The Pharisees who shared would draw great attention to their giving to let others know how spiritual they are. Even when Sharers don't allow the left hand to know what the right is doing, they still have their own private assessment of their spirituality compared to others. Then they begin to look down on others who are sharing lesser amounts.
5. *Sharers struggle with receiving because they are sure someone else needs it more (II Corinthians 8:13-15)*: Paul explained that he wasn't trying to oppress the Corinthians by asking them to share. Rather, it was a matter of fairness. God was blessing them now so they could be a blessing to others. One day, they may be in need and God would bless others who would in turn bless the Corinthians. While Sharers love to be the ones who bless others, they struggle with being on the receiving end. However, please note why. Lots of people have pride issues when it comes to receiving help even when they really need it. I'm sure some Sharers struggle with that pride issue as well. But the real struggle for the Sharer is thinking that others need the gift more.

Additionally, since their natural bent is to share with others, when they have to receive, there is the feeling that they aren't doing their part in the bargain. So, the Sharers do not struggle from an overdeveloped sense of asserting their independence. They struggle to receive because they feel discouraged and useless when someone has to share with them. Of course, Sharers need to learn, as all do, that God set it up this way. We are not encouraging laziness and sloth so others can share with you, but when you have done your work and are still in need, letting others share with you gives them the opportunity to express the gifts God has given them.

- C. If these struggles sound all too familiar to you, your place in the kingdom and this congregation may just be as a Sharer. Don't beat yourself up too much. As we said earlier, they show areas where you need to grow. But they also demonstrate that you have a place here. We need Sharers.

III. Opportunities for the Sharer.

- A. There are numerous ways that you can exercise your function as a Sharer in the work of this congregation. We have a place for you and we need you to ask, "What am I doing with my sharing ability?"

- B. Some opportunities to share with the congregation as a whole.

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| 1. Contributions | 4. Budgeting and treasury work |
| 2. Foreign aid | 5. Giving time |
| 3. Donate supplies | 6. Prayer |

- C. Some opportunities to share in your relationship with other Christians.

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| 1. Financial help | 6. Support other preachers personally |
| 2. Financial counseling | 7. Time with those who have special needs |
| 3. Hospitality | 8. Help with moving |
| 4. Needed meals | 9. Clothes |
| 5. Rides to the assemblies | 10. Toys for kids |

- D. Some opportunities to connect and evangelize.

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| 1. Giving away Bibles | 6. Battered women shelters |
| 2. Lunch bags with congregational information | 7. Unwed mother clinics |
| 3. Volunteer in community | 8. Help in halfway houses |
| 4. Volunteer in schools | 9. Volunteer at a hospital |
| 5. Homeless shelters | 10. Neighborhood hospitality |

IV. Improving our Sharing (help for the non-sharers).

- A. As we recognized earlier, not all of us have our greatest gift in sharing. But we all have responsibility to share and give (**Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:16**). Don't beat yourself up for not being a stellar Sharer as the Macedonians, but don't think you can entirely avoid sharing just because it isn't your greatest gift.

- B. So, let's wrap up with a little help for the rest of us. How can we improve our sharing and through that sharing motivate and encourage those around us?

1. *Become friends with a Sharer:* As we note with each of the gifts, one of the best ways to grow in a gift is to spend time with someone who already excels at it. Watch the Sharer in action. Listen to how they speak. Discuss their faith with them. Let them discuss your blessings with you.
2. *Write gratitude lists:* Make it a regular habit to count your blessings. Put them down on paper and notice exactly how well God really is taking care of you. This will help build your faith that God will care for you when you surrender to Him by sharing with others the blessings He has given you.
3. *Budget sharing first:* Sharing rarely happens on accident. There is rarely just extra money lying around to share. So, if you are going to improve your sharing, make that the first line on your monthly budget. That would include your contribution to the work of the church and whatever other specific sharing and giving you might do. Of course, we might back up and just say you need to budget period. Many folks don't share because, not knowing what they have, they never know if they can. Make a budget and put sharing first.
4. *Volunteer for something that will take time:* Sharing means more than writing a check. Find some cause you can volunteer in. Allot a certain amount of time each week or month to be involved in some kind of volunteer capacity, whether it is for something in the community, something with the church, something with an individual. Find a place to simply give of yourself, your time, your energy, your effort.
5. *Sacrifice something:* Lots of us are great at giving our old stuff away. The kids no longer wear some clothes? A trip to Goodwill is easy. This kind of giving is great and appreciated. I know we have been the benefactors of this kind of giving many times and really appreciated it. But if we want to take our sharing to the next level, we need to sacrifice something. If we only give from our surplus, we are no better than the Jews that put in large sums. If we want to share like the widow with her two mites, we have to sacrifice something. That doesn't mean to give until you become the one in need of sharing by virtue of your giving. It is true that some

have given so much as to hurt their own families. Don't do that. But give up something. Instead of buying that new set of clothes, why not rely on the ones you already have and instead put some extra in the church contribution, send some money to a foreign evangelist, donate to a local homeless or battered women's shelter, or buy someone in need a set of new clothes or a gift card for a clothing store.

Conclusion:

We all have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. Is yours as a Sharer? What will you do about it? When and where will you share? Don't be embarrassed if you can't do what someone else does. Don't be ashamed because you don't have someone else's gift. Make sure you are pursuing the gift God has given you. We need the sharing and giving you can offer as a Sharer. As **Ephesians 4:15-16** says, you are a joint in this congregation and we need the sharing with which you are equipped. If you are a Sharer, the question for you is what will you do with God's gift? Are you sharing? How? When? Where? With whom?