



Jesus likes Recycling

A THREE DAY DEVOTIONAL

BY MAUREEN WISE



Day One: Learning from the Feeding of 5000

Our devotions over the next few days are going to focus on the story of Jesus feeding 5000 men plus the uncounted women and children in the crowd. This anecdote is told in all four gospels, but John has an extra little nugget that speaks to Jesus's attitude about waste, reuse, and in turn, recycling.

Let's start with the account of what happened: Jesus was busy in his ministry preaching and healing. He was tired and wanted to withdraw with his disciples for some rest. The team traveled by boat across the Sea of Galilee (in present day, Lake Tiberias) (John 6:1).

Upon landing, the huge crowd surrounded Jesus. He had compassion for them and, although tired, he healed their sick and taught his Good News. As the day drew to a close, Philip and the other disciples were worried about feeding the mass of people. Andrew found a boy with five small loaves of barley bread and two fish. With this meager offering, Jesus multiplied the meal and fed the entire crowd.

John 6:12 tells us: "When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, 'Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted,'" and they collected twelve baskets of uneaten food. This same amount was collected in all the accounts, but only John mentions Jesus's request "let nothing be wasted." But the gathering of these miraculous leftovers was obviously by Jesus's request since it happened in each version.

Jesus's love for people, his giving nature, and his power are all evident in this well-loved and well-known miracle. Additionally, we can better understand that Jesus is asking us to take care of what he has entrusted to us. Although Jesus could have made the exact amount of food needed, he made an abundance. He also desired that the extra, the abundance, be saved to nourish his followers in the future and not be wasted or thrown away. It is amazing how our loving God provides above and beyond what we actually need. Dear Lord, thank you for demonstrating your love and power in this story.

Thank you for caring for us well, and we pray that we can in turn take care of the Earth you've entrusted to us as best we can. Amen.



John 6:1-14

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."



Day Two: Jesus Lived in a Reuse Culture

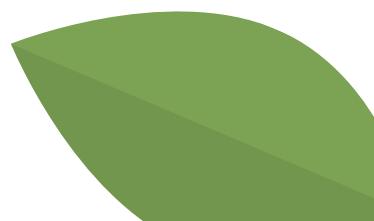
The Bible has nothing to say directly about recycling, reuse, or single-use plastic. As you know, there wasn't plastic or recycling during biblical times. Jesus is not depicted carrying his reusable water bottle or sorting his glass kalamata olive jar into the correct recycling bin.

Historically, reuse was simply a constant in Jesus's place and culture. People stored food and wine in ceramic vessels, wrapped food in cloth, and carried water in reusable jars. These containers and tools were not cheaply or easily made (and so had more worth) and were necessarily used over and over. Even Jesus's first miracle involved refilling reusable clay jars with water and then transforming that water into the best quality wine. There was not a throw-away culture of disposable plastic baggies, paper plates, to-go cups, or single-use water bottles, let alone plastic clamshell packaging (we'll talk more about these tomorrow!). In fact, during the miracle we're focusing on in this devotion, baskets were already there for the disciples to use to collect the leftover bread and fish from the big, miraculous meal. People regularly carried these totes with them as a habit.

After performing the miracle, we see that Jesus wanted the extra food to be saved for later and not go to waste. Although he made the food miraculously, he valued it. This speaks to his attitude toward waste reduction and reuse. In our First World economy where everything comes so easily, we do not value what goes through our hands as much. At a different time in history, I can see Jesus as an active recycler supporting recycling efforts in the communities he visited, understanding that waste itself can still have value when recycled correctly.

But Jesus is never changing. He rose again and is not dead, so he is in our current time, though not physically participating in bodily form. I believe he is happy when his followers care for creation, responsibly use their leftovers, and recycling correctly. Tomorrow we'll talk about some specific ways to act like Jesus in our Earth-minded efforts.

Dear God, thank you that we live in modern times with our modern conveniences. We pray that we can work to waste less in our lives and responsibly take care of your creation, our home away from heaven. Amen.





Mark 6:30-44

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

But he answered, "You give them something to eat."

They said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

"How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see."

"When they found out, they said, "Five—and two fish."

Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.



Day Three: A Recycling Challenge for Followers of Jesus

With Jesus's attitude in mind about keeping leftovers and using what we have, can you challenge yourself to be a better steward of your own "leftovers?" Don't just limit yourself to your food but also consider your waste. As Christians, we have been charged with taking care of this planet. As you know, God made the Earth and everything in it (Psalm 24:1–2). He told Adam to take care of Eden (Genesis 2:15), and I don't believe that this mandate was dissolved when the first couple was kicked out of the garden.

We are still charged to take care of the land we are entrusted with, our own so-called garden, as well as the rest of the earth. Collectively we all support and therefore indirectly care for public lands and parks. Taking care of the land includes being responsible for our waste like Jesus instructed the disciples when he fed that huge crowd of people. How much easier is it to be responsible for the trash and recycling from your own household compared to what resulted from more than five thousand people!

And so I ask you: do you recycle the way you should? Do you recycle the way your municipality asks you to—not just the stuff you want to recycle? As an example, plastic clamshells that berries come in at the grocery store aren't widely recycled in the United States anymore. However, many people still want to recycle them and feel guilty throwing clamshells in the landfill bin. This tiny act of putting berry containers in the recycling bin (what some call wish-cycling), contaminates the recycling stream with trash and puts stress on the recycling system. Do the Earth a favor and double-check your own recycling habits. Know what belongs in your local recycling system.

Can you reduce your usage of single-use plastics and paper products, adopting the reuse culture that Jesus was part of? Plastic baggies, paper napkins, and paper towels are often the easiest single-use habit to kick to the curb but also the most popularly used disposable products. Using consumables and then trashing them is not great for the planet when we can use durable alternatives that can be used over and over.



Using durable vs. single-use products not only reduces waste but also resources needed: less oil is drilled and fewer trees are cut down. Then the need to process, transport, manufacture, package, and retransport the resulting products is eliminated. Your food containers, cloth napkins, and cloth rags profoundly reduce waste and pollution at the same time!

I challenge you to consider how you can throw away less and embrace Jesus's attitude of saving leftovers! Want to dig deeper into a sustainable lifestyle founded on Biblical principles? Learn more at Maureen Wise Books (www.maureenwisebooks.com) for more devotionals and green tips!

Dear Almighty, thank you for the Earth you've given us. We pray that we can be more mindful of the waste we produce and how we dispose of this waste. We pray that we can collectively take better care of your creation. Thank you for all you've given us. Amen.

Psalm 24:1-2

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the waters.

Genesis 2:15

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.