

Common + Unity = Community
The Believers Gather and Share Everything with Each Other
The Empowered Church – Part 8
Acts 4:32-37
March 4-5, 2023

Introduction

- **We don't go to church as much as we gather AS the Church.**
- **We are better together, right?** We've talked about that a lot. But until we all own that we aren't going to see the outpouring that God has for us. God has big dreams for His church here at Bridgeway and I do to. But, **it's going to need to be all of us doing it together and not just some doing everything.**
- **Everyone one of us matters.** God built our church community with a bunch of different people and parts. When we come together there is no telling what we can accomplish.
- **Your gifts matter just as much as mine.** I play my role, you play yours. **No team sport wins because of one individual player.**

Church is a TEAM SPORT

- **Recap** – Where we are at in the story – *if you're just joining us...*
 - **After Jesus died on the cross and raised again, He gathered His followers together and told them they were going to receive the Holy Spirit and Power**
 - **Pentecost** - That happened in Jerusalem during an event we call Pentecost. It was wild. There was a loud noise like rushing wind that came into their room, flames of fire appeared over everyone's heads, and they all started praising God in languages they didn't know.
 - **The Early Church exploded** - in numbers as they went out into their communities sharing the good news of Jesus' offer of eternal life, loving on people, healing the hurt, setting people free, and performing supernatural miracles.
 - **Leaders jailed but HS brought boldness** – along the way some of their leadership, who were preaching publicly got arrested a couple times, which really scared everyone. So they had a prayer meeting asking for boldness and the Holy Spirit answered with shaking the whole room and strengthening them. They continued to go out and minister and the Church continued to grow.
 - **Where we are at now** – This fledgling new Christian movement went from 120 people to around 5,000 seemingly overnight, although it was probably over a couple of weeks or months. That has the capacity for chaos, in-fighting, power struggles and hurt, but from the beginning they did a couple things that gave them a chance or remaining together and strong.
 - **We pick up the story there.** Please turn with me to page 912

Lesson

- **The Recipe for a Powerful Church**
 - **The Early Church was characterized with unity and unselfishness**
 - **Acts 4:32** – *“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.”*

- **Didn't we already cover this in Chapter 2?**¹ – we kind of did. But this time it's a set up to talk about the difference in people's hearts and how different people engaged with the unselfish culture of the early Church. It's directly tied to the message you are about to hear NEXT WEEK.
- **All the Believers** – A common description of Christians is the term 'believers.' Why? What does someone need to believe to be considered a Christian?
 - **Believing in Christ** – when the New Testament talks about believing it is talking about a very specific set of beliefs and they all center around our interaction with our Creator. A believer would be someone who²...
 - Believes that God is real and Personal
 - Believes that God reached out to mankind to connect relationally
 - Believes that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came down to earth from heaven to rescue us from our sin-problem.
 - Believes that mankind is inherently broken and in need of a savior.
 - Believes that Jesus Christ died on the cross so that He could pay for the sin debt that we have accrued in our selfish lives, taking the judgment that we deserve, so that we would be considered pure, forgiven and free.
 - Believes that we activate that salvation by admitting to who we are and the violations we've done in our selfishness against God.
 - Believes that we can and must release control of our lives to the One who saved us and knows how to run it better, that is Jesus.
 - Believes that God miraculously makes us children of God and that we not only are blessed by that reality now, but we will one day live with God in heaven forever.
 - **Beyond Believing to Trust** – it's important to note that when the Bible talks about believing it doesn't simply mean that we believe a fact, or that something CAN be true. The word is better understood in the way that we use the word TRUST. Trust means that not only do you believe that it's true and right, but that you alter your life because of it. You see it, know it, and act as if it's true.
- **The whole Church was ONE in heart and soul** – They were on the same page and committed to keeping it that way.
 - **Unified in Understanding and Intentions** – heart and soul means to me that they were in agreement on the basics of understanding and intention. In other words, they may have had a million different opinions on social issues, on how to run a household, what the government should do, what the Old Testament says about details, but what they were in agreement about was the core issues, the primary issues, the stuff that mattered. They understood and agreed upon the core doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And from that point they

¹ "The summary contained in these verses is similar to that in 2:43–47, but serves a different purpose in the narrative. The earlier summary concluded the account of the day of Pentecost; this summary introduces the contrasted episodes of Barnabas and Ananias." NICNT Commentary, F.F. Bruce

² It's important to note that I am talking to a modern-day American audience who has access to the things that I'm sharing. I would make a different list for an aboriginal tribe in Australia who may not know the name Jesus Christ. They may not have a well-refined understanding of how Creation works. They may not understand 'original sin'. They would know God exists and that He made a way for them to be rescued from a broken and damaged world. They would need to trust in what He HAS revealed to them, and they would be saved. In America we are overly educated in religious matters in our society, so we talk differently. I am not saying that for someone to be saved they need to be able to understand complex theology. God saves mentally disabled people and children too.

agreed on their intention, their mission in the world. They knew that after everything Jesus did, their lives had to change and they had to share that life-giving truth with the world around them. The rest was just details.

- **They had everything in common** – The Bible says, no one saw their possessions as their own, but they had everything in common. This is a HUGE statement and one that we will wrestle with today. I'll go into detail about how this looked a little later in the message but there's a couple things we need to know before we get there:
 - **The key word CONSIDERED** – for me the key concept that the Bible just said is no one thought, or no one considered, their stuff their own. That is a matter of PERSPECTIVE and perception; that's a mindset. How did they get this mindset? It's actually not something that Jesus Christ directly taught, that I can readily find.³ It's true that the 12 disciples commented that they left everything to go on mission with Jesus, so I think it was a cultural ethic, but it wasn't really a main teaching of Christ for all Christians. So how did they get to that perspective?
 - **Looking through the lens of family** – Jesus and the apostles spoke in family language. The early Church was birthed in family language. They talked about how God was their collective Father and how they were 'children of God'. If there's one Father, then everyone else are siblings.
 - *Mt 12:46–50 – “While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. ⁴⁸ But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”*
 - **How family should work** – not all of us have had healthy families to grow up in, so for some of us we will need to use our God-given imagination when we talk about how families should behave. Here's four off the top of my head.
 - **1.) Families are partners not opponents** – healthy families don't see each other as competition. They see the same last name on their mail and realize that they are a unit, a team.
 - **2.) Everyone participates** – healthy families don't have members who just sit there and are served. Everyone makes it happen. They may have different roles. The dad may work outside the home, the mom may work inside the home, the son may mow the lawn and the daughter may do laundry, or heck, all of those roles can be reversed, but the point is that everyone contributes in some way or another.
 - **Banning Liebscher's Thanksgiving Story** – a few years ago, Banning Liebscher from Jesus Culture guest-preached for us and told a story about how during Thanksgiving, everyone has a role to play and his was 'peeling potato guy.' Nobody gets to just sit there and leech of everyone else. It's a collective effort.

³ The rich young ruler story was an anomaly and not a core doctrine of what Jesus taught. That challenge to give away all his money to the poor and become a disciple was relatively unique. Sure, the disciples talk about leaving everything and following Him, and it was part of their culture, BUT it wasn't something recorded and focused on in the Gospels.

- **Israel in Exodus** - Ex 11:2–3 – “Speak now in the hearing of the people, that they ask, every man of his neighbor and every woman of her neighbor, for silver and gold jewelry.”³ And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants and in the sight of the people.”
 - **Samuel** - 1 Sa 2:26 – “Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and also with man.”
 - **King Jehoshaphat for Israel** - 2 Ki 13:4–5 – “Then Jehoshaphat sought the favor of the LORD, and the LORD listened to him, for he saw the oppression of Israel, how the king of Syria oppressed them.⁵ (Therefore the LORD gave Israel a savior, so that they escaped from the hand of the Syrians, and the people of Israel lived in their homes as formerly.”
 - **Daniel** - Da 1:9 – “And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs,…”
 - **Mary** - Lk 1:30 – “And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”
 - **Jesus** - Lk 2:40 – “And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.”
- **Share and Share Alike**
 - **The Early Church Redistributes Resources**
 - **Acts 4:34-37** – “There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold³⁵ and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”
 - **There was not a needy person among them** – Wow! That’s incredible. Remember the church had grown rapidly. Although a lot of the initial converts may have gone back home to other nations (Pentecost crowd), a huge portion of them were still in town. That means we are dealing with thousands of people and many of whom were needy. Yet, when they had the outpouring of generosity, everyone was taken care of. **That’s a miraculous generosity indeed, but also miraculous organization to take care of those logistics.**
 - **Land and house owners sold and gave proceeds** – I do not see an indicator that everyone sold all their homes and land. It gives me the suggestion that those that had extra, sold them and gave the proceeds.
 - **The big deal about land ownership** – in Israel all land was initially allotted to the tribes and you are not supposed to sell it. It’s family land and inheritance land. You COULD sell it to other family members and distant relatives in the tribe, so that’s an option and likely what these folks did. But owning land was far more of a status thing in Israel than it is today in America. It’s more than being wealthy, it’s a symbol that you own some of the Promised Land of God.
 - **Laid at the apostle’s feet** – what does this mean? It means to humbly donate without any dictation on where it should go. It’s entire trust in their leadership to make sure it gets where it needs to go.

- **Distributed to each as any had need** – is this communism or socialism? Nope, but it's more like those than the principles of capitalism. But then again we are talking about community, not society so it should be different. If a family operated on Capitalism, there would be something seriously wrong.
- **How Early Church finance was handled** – it's tempting to look at this on a surface level and see it as a hippie commune and dream about how sweet it was to share everything in theory. The reality is much more practical.
 - **How need was calculated** – it's important to realize that a lot of the early church were poor and slaves. That means the need was extremely high. In any culture 'poor' is relative. What is poor in one country is not poor in another. But in the 1st century we had significant poverty for people like beggars, disabled, etc. once Rome took over I don't see a lot of community social programs for the people they conquered. Prior, the Jewish community had a lot of social programs like welfare. This means that it was poor-poor, like I don't eat, poor. Honestly, trying to define need or poor is one of the great challenges of any benevolence program.
 - **Those who had more gave more** – I don't want to get into tax structure arguments with anyone, we are talking about community and family here, but those who had more gave more. Giving in the Bible has always been looked at through the lens of percentage. If God blessed you more, you gave more. If God blessed you with less, you contribute less. It was not about strict dollar amounts. It was blessing runoff.
 - **Limits and expectations** – not everyone got financial help in the early church. There were some pretty tight and rough rules. It was not a simple handout concept. Check out these passages...
 - **How widows were handled**
 - **It was the right thing to do** - Jas 1:27 – "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."
 - **It was complicated** - Ac 6:1 – "Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution."
 - **Hardcore expectations** - 1 Ti 5:3–16 – "Honor widows who are truly widows. ⁴ But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. ⁵ She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, ⁶ but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. ⁷ Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. ⁸ But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. ⁹ Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, ¹⁰ and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work. ¹¹ But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when

their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry¹² and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith.¹³ Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.¹⁴ So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.¹⁵ For some have already strayed after Satan.¹⁶ If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows."

- **Expectations of congregants**

- **Leadership Example & Hardcore expectations** - 2 Th 3:7–12 – “For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you,⁸ nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.⁹ It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.”
- **The Strong Works to Help the Weak** - Ac 20:33–35 – “I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel.³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me.³⁵ In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”
- **We help our brothers and sisters in need** - Jas 2:14–17 – “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,¹⁶ and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”
- **Work hard and don’t be dependent on anyone** - 1 Th 4:10–12 – “But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more,¹¹ and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you,¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.”
- **Work to Share** - Eph 4:28 – “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”
- **Great work ethic expected** - Col 3:23–24 – “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”

- **Don't be a burden** - 1 Th 2:9 – “*For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.*”
- **Even young women work at home** - Tt 2:4–5 – “*...so train the young women to love their husbands and children, ⁵ to be self-controlled, pure, working at home,...*”
- **The poor widow's offering** - Mk 12:41–44 – “*And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. ⁴³ And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. ⁴⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”*”
- **Wisdom Caveat** – you can only sell everything once. One of the problems with the romanticism of commune living is that we forget that once someone sells everything they have and gives it, there's not only nothing more to give, but you become completely dependent on the community for your needs moving forward. Once that money runs out the debt load goes up. So it's not very romantic nor a good business strategy. It only works if everyone continues to work and bring things to the table. It's not a one-time explosion and then sit back and be cared for. It would have to be continual hard work, sacrifice and unselfishness.⁴
- **Joseph/Barnabas (Levite, Cyprus)** – This is our first introduction to a key character of the Book of Acts: Barnabas. His real name is Joseph, but his nickname is ‘son of encouragement.’ Which by the way do you realize that ‘bar’ means ‘son of.’ Either bar goes before the name of your father, or it goes before a descriptive word (usually a nickname). There are quite a bit of ‘bar’s’ in the Bible. It's the same thing with the term ‘ben’. Ben-hadad means son of Hadad. Anywho...we find out that Joseph-Barnabas is a Levite which means he would normally be a temple worker by family right. He came from the tribe of Levi who normally didn't own land except in special Levite towns allotted in the past.⁵ Since Rome took over everything that got all messed up. We also learn that he was originally from the island of Cyprus which is off the Mediterranean coast (in modern day, on a map, it's under Turkey, next to Syria and Lebanon).
- **Sold a field and gave all proceeds to the Church** – this was a significant act of unselfishness and generosity.
 - **Voluntary giving principle** –
 - 2 Co 9:6–7 – “*The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one*”

⁴ “The richer members thus made provision for the poorer, and for a time no one had any need to complain of hunger or want. (But later on, when funds ran out and especially after the country was hard hit by the famine mentioned in 11:28, the Jerusalem church became dependent on the generosity of fellow-believers in other places.)” NICNT

⁵ “The Pentateuchal regulations prohibiting priests and Levites from holding landed property seem to have become a dead letter by this time... For the prohibitions see Num. 18:20, 24; Deut. 10:9; 18:1–2; but members of priestly families like Jeremiah (Jer. 32:6–15) and Josephus (*Life* 422) held landed property.” NICNT Commentary

must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

- Dt 15:7–11 - "If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, ⁸ but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. ⁹ Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and you be guilty of sin. ¹⁰ You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. ¹¹ For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'"
- Php 4:14–20 – "Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. ¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. ¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen."
- Ro 12:6–8 – "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."
- **Let's talk about extreme acts of generosity for a moment** – We have had many extreme acts of generosity at Bridgeway, too many to count. I consider extreme acts of generosity an amount that crosses into sacrifice. We have many of you willing to do that. It's less about the actual amount total and more about what the amount means to you. Your generosity is what provides for us to have a church home here in Roseville and what allows us to bless so many people around us. It's your generosity that takes care of the kids financially and gives us the ability to do outreach. Thank you.

Conclusion

- **The More Together we are, the more God can Move Among Us**
- **It's a Family thing.**