

SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM

Acts 4:32-37 – The Heart of a Spirit-Filled Church

Ice Breaker Question

- What was your favorite movie from childhood?

Acts 4:32-37 – The Heart of a Spirit-Filled Church

- What was something that stood out to you from this week's service?
- What are potential barriers to unity or generosity?
- Describe a time that you have experienced the generosity and sacrifice of others and the impact this had on your life.
- Why is it important to have the right identity before we try to participate in the right activity?
- What do you think your next step is because of this message or discussion?

Additional Study

Here are two resources that Christians could use to study Acts 4:32-37:

- Matthew Henry's Commentary: This comprehensive commentary offers detailed insight and historical context for each verse in Acts 4:32-37.
- The Expositor's Bible Commentary: This resource combines the work of various scholars to provide a thorough understanding of the passage, including its theological implications.

Day 1: Unity in the Body of Christ

"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had." Acts 4:32

Unity is an amazing thing. You'll notice that unity is not the same as uniformity. God's Kingdom is not a uniform Kingdom, but a united Kingdom. Every team and business knows that it's often the diversity that brings strength to the unified team. Diversity within unity allows for greater perspective and great vision toward how to accomplish the mission. Before ministry, I worked at a bank in a nearby town. Banking was not my thing, but customer service was. I wasn't always the best at being a banker, but I believe I stood out in customer service. This bank happened to have biblical principles that drove their core values, and one of them was that 'people make the difference.' I found that statement to be remarkably true. Sometimes, it's people who make a good thing into a bad thing. It can be people who make small ideas into large businesses and accomplishments. People in a church can make the difference in the unity of that church.

The greatest way the enemy could keep the modern church from fulfilling its mission, is by creating prideful, selfish, egotistical, and greedy individuals within. It's been said that 'the hell bound are not those who look downward, but those who look inward.' The enemy of our souls desires that we would worship our own heart, sacrifice at the altar of our emotions, idolize ourselves over the rest. If he can do this in one, then it will affect a multitude. The heart of unity comes with the posture of humility, service, and proper worship of God. Humility allows us to be served, found in need, and willing to lean on the support of others. Service enables us to give to others in the way they have given to us. Worshipping God keeps our hearts centered on the gospel, therefore adding God's blessing to all that we do. Where selfish greed reigns, war is one step away. Where humble unity is practiced, a family is formed.

True unity in the body of Christ goes beyond mere agreement; it involves a sacrificial love that puts others' needs above our own. Consider how you can cultivate unity in your community. Look for opportunities to share, support, and serve others with a generous heart.

Reflection Questions:

- Is there someone in your church or community in need whom you can help today?
- What steps can you take to foster deeper unity within your circle of believers?
- How can you make sharing a regular part of your life?

Day 2: The Power of Testimony

"With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all." Acts 4:33

It's amazing the impact that stories, and drama can make on a group of people. I think of those infamous commercials that show sad animals in slow motion behind a cage, their faces sagging and their posture seeming weak. Sarah McLachlan's voice beings to sing "In The Arms of the Angels" as you are asked to give to support animal shelters. Images that have impact, and stories that have substance. It all seems to create a movement in people's hearts that drive them toward greater willingness and support. The gospel is the greatest message you could hear, and the most powerful story you could tell. Imagine hearing the apostles, passionately giving testimony to Jesus' resurrection. Maybe you hear Thomas saying "No, really, I touched His wounds and I couldn't deny that it was Him!" Or you hear Peter saying "Our Teacher appeared to us after He died, He did what He said He would do and it changed everything for me!" The apostles boldly testified to the resurrection of Jesus, and their testimony was backed by the powerful work of God's grace in their lives. Their stories, empowered by the Holy Spirit inspired others and cultivated greater unity and generosity among them.

It seems that 'great grace' was the fruit of messages told with great power. The church was inspired to give. The church was kept together as a unified force. The surrounding community observed a gathering of people that acted unlike anything they'd seen before. The outsiders looking in saw a church that demonstrated the heart of God in tangible ways. This is why it's important for us to remember that our walk, our words, and our worship is our witness to the world. The way we act tells a story about who we worship. The words we speak tell a story about who we worship.

Our testimonies have the power to impact others profoundly. Be bold in sharing how Jesus has transformed your life. Trust that God's grace will work through your words to touch hearts and draw people closer to Him.

Reflection Questions:

- How can you be more intentional about sharing your testimony with others?
- What recent experiences of God's grace can you share to encourage someone today?
- Who in your life needs to hear about the transformative power of Jesus?

Day 3: Radical Generosity

"There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need." Acts 4:34-35

I love a quote that says "Giving is not a debt you owe. It's a seed that you sow." This quote tells a story about the freedom we have to give, and the blessing that it is to do so. Sowing a seed means that it is a small act, that will flourish and bear fruit in the right time. If giving is a debt we owe then we are obligated to follow a system. Another quote expresses that generosity is not measured by what we give, but by what we keep. It's a test, I believe, toward our generosity to consider all that we have as available to the Lord to do with it what He pleases. What we keep can show more about our heart than what we give. What I found most delightful is being in a church that has expressed such consistent generosity for years. The founding of our church tells a remarkably similar story of radical, sacrificial generosity for others. ***"Charter members, Fred and Sue Kadel, the owners of the Country Manor subdivision, donated three acres to the church to build its first building. Fred's company built the church, and members generously volunteered their time and talents to keep costs down. The first service in the new church was held on March 13th, 1977, and dedicated to the Lord on May 22nd. This church was built upon the generous gifts of its people...and it still is!"***

The early believers demonstrated radical generosity by selling their possessions to meet the needs of others. Their actions reflected their deep love for God and each other, ensuring that no one lacked anything. What a God-sized goal! Eliminate need within the church. As a reflection of our Father, we can be people of sacrificial generosity toward those around us. Consider how you can practice radical generosity in your life. It may not mean selling your house, but it could involve giving sacrificially of your time, resources, or talents to bless others. Trust that God will use your generosity to meet the needs around you.

Reflection Questions:

- What are some ways you can practice radical generosity in your community?
- Are there possessions or resources you hold tightly to that you could release to help others?
- How can you cultivate a heart of generosity in your daily life?

Day 4: The Example of Barnabas

"Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement'), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet." Acts 4:36-37

When I worked at the bank, I learned that there were many things that the corporate leaders would do to make it feel more like family, and recognize the good work of everyone within the company. About every month, the executive teams send out an email that recognizes the good work of people at various levels within the company. It made working there very special. In one way, it gave us a sense that our work was being observed and recognized, which we appreciated, and were motivated by. This also spurred us on and encouraged us to read how other employees were going above and beyond to be a bank for the people of the community. It's important for us to give honor to those whom honor is due. It's good practice to recognize those who do good and right things for others. Barnabas, known as the "son of encouragement," set a powerful example by selling a field and giving the proceeds to the apostles. His act of generosity and encouragement was a testament to his faith and love for the community.

Barnabas was a fitting name for Joseph, probably chosen for a very good reason. Barnabas was a walking and breathing encouragement. People knew the sacrifice he made, the humility he demonstrated and the love and concern that he shared. As people observed this in Barnabas, they undoubtedly were encouraged toward their own acts of sacrifice and even inspired to sacrifice more. I believe the lesson here is two-fold. First, be encouraged that God sees your sacrifices, and He will honor your generosity. It can feel difficult to do these things, especially if you are paycheck to paycheck. God knows. God sees. He wants more than money or acts of generosity. God wants your heart. If God has your heart then generosity is fueled by love not obligation of reputation. If God has your heart, then we know that when we give and sacrifice, that God knows and will bless us. Secondly, we can learn from Barnabas by being encouragers in our communities. Encourage someone today with your words and actions. Look for ways to support and uplift others, demonstrating the love of Christ through your generosity.

Reflection Questions:

- Who in your life needs encouragement today, and how can you provide it?
- What acts of generosity can you perform to inspire and uplift others?
- How can you embody the spirit of Barnabas in your daily interactions?

Day 5: Living Out Our Faith

“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. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 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 sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.” Acts 4:32-37

Identity always precedes activity. Who you are changes how you act. It’s easy to hear messages about how to act and simply add more to your to-do list of lifelong behavior. It’s another to hear a message that reminds you of who you are, and then who you’ve been called to be. In the Lion King, Simba is lifted as the rightful heir to the throne of the jungle. He would one day be King. For many years, he couldn’t wait to be king. Then Simba lost his father. Over time, Simba forgot that he was a child of the king, called to be the next king of the jungle. This meant that meeting Rafiki was an important moment in Simba’s life. Simba discovers that Rafiki knew his father, Mufasa, and had an important lesson for Simba. When Rafiki led Simba to water, Simba saw his reflection and ultimately learned that his father lives inside of Him. Most of all, Simba needed to remember the one thing that he forgot...who he was.

When children of God forget who we are, we immediately forget both the foundation we stand on and the kind of building we’re supposed to build. Reflecting our Father should be our goal, and we get to reflect Him in many ways. Unity among brothers and sisters reflects God’s united trinitarian nature. Generosity reflects God’s generosity toward His creation. Our testimony of Jesus reflects God’s testimony of love and sacrifice by sending Jesus to be the ransom for many. Our sacrifices can reflect the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf.

Consider how you can incorporate these principles into your daily life. Strive for unity, boldly share your testimony, practice radical generosity, and be an encourager. Let your life reflect the love and grace of Jesus to those around you.

Reflection Questions:

- How has this passage challenged you to live out your faith more fully?
- What specific actions will you take to apply these lessons in your life?
- How can you continue to grow in unity, testimony, generosity, and encouragement?