

GIVING

Week 5 | Ancient | Acts 2:42

Acts 2:42-47

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Deeper Dive

The book of Acts begins with Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus before He ascended to heaven. Soon after, we see thousands coming to faith in Jesus, and the birth of the early Christian Church. Acts 2:42-47 describes the Spiritual Practices adopted by followers of Jesus, as this early body of Christ forms into what we know as the modern church.

Day 1 - Why talk about Giving?

Many churches shy away from the topic of giving. It’s one of those Sundays we tend to avoid bringing friends to church. In fact, you might have grumbled when you read the topic for this week. If you find yourself wrestling with this topic today, it’s okay. Take a moment to pause here - name your struggle, be honest with God, and ask His Spirit to guide you this week and to allow you to hear His heart for you in this message about generosity.

While we may tread lightly on this topic, it’s important to remember that Jesus did not. Jesus boldly spoke about money & possessions, even more than He spoke about faith and prayer. Of course, this may seem contradictory when we look at Jesus’ life of serving the poor and marginalized. He wasn’t busy championing “fundraising galas” to the wealthy elite of His day, or giving tearful speeches to guilt folks into giving large sums to feed the hungry, or promising prosperity in exchange for generosity. Jesus didn’t try to prove his ministry’s need or worth because, spoiler alert, *God doesn’t need our money*. He’s God and He IS the provider of all that we have. Everything we have, or ever will have is ALREADY under His authority. It’s all His, whether we recognize it or not.

Now, you might be asking yourself, “If God doesn’t need our money, then why talk about it?” Great question! Ultimately, it’s not about the money, possessions, or what we can or can’t do with them. It’s about the place they hold in our hearts. God knows that we allow our money to falsely lure us into thinking, “I’m in control”, “I earned this”, “I deserve this”, “It’s mine”, “I am the provider & it’s all up to me”. This puffs us up with pride when things are going well, and devastates us when financial instability inevitably comes our way. The truth is that we will never have control, and God didn’t create us to sit on His throne. It’s way too much for us to bear. Surrendering everything we have to Him through our generosity places our trust rightfully in God’s hands as our provider, protector & THE Good Shepherd in our lives.

- How have you felt in the past when the church talks about giving? Does realizing WHY God asks for our generosity change this feeling? Spend some time in prayer this week and ask God to open your heart to the way the early church showed radical generosity. What is God calling you to surrender to Him in this way?

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Galatians 5:22-23** ~But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
- **Proverbs 3:9** ~Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops
- **2 Corinthians 12:9** ~But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."
- **1 Peter 2:2-3** ~Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation
- **1 Corinthians 13:11**
~When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.
- **Hebrews 6:1** ~Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God,
- **2 Corinthians 9:9-10**
~"They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever." Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

Day 2 - Radical Giving Requires Devotion

What does it look like to live a life of fully surrendered generosity to God, like we talked about yesterday? We have a glimpse of this in Acts 2 where it says the early church "sold property and possessions to give to anyone in need". Wow, let's just pause and take a moment to imagine selling everything you own. Close your eyes and fully imagine the steps you would have to take in your current situation to accomplish this. Would you need a real estate agent for your home (or multiple homes), or someone to sell your car(s)? Think about all the clothes and belongings you have, stocks & investment accounts, absolutely everything. This is radical giving!

Of course God is not calling all of us to give away everything we own, He's not asking us to be poor or destitute, He's not calling all of us to be Monks or live a life of abstaining from material possessions. Having wealth is not evil, and it is not a sin to have good things. God is the ultimate radical giver of all good things. We can never earn the goodness & grace that He freely gives to us when we need it most. As we talked about yesterday, God gives us every good thing that we have or ever will have. However, He wants us to worship Him, and not the blessings He gives us. He knows that having our hearts and our minds surrendered to Him is worth more than anything our possessions could ever provide for us.

While God isn't necessarily calling us to give away everything, He is calling us to be sacrificially and radically generous with what He has blessed us with. So, how do we get to a place where we can joyfully give in the way that God calls us to? Let's look at the early church as our guide: FIRST, they devoted themselves to teaching, to prayer, to fellowship, and regularly worshiping & breaking bread together. THEN, it says they sold their possessions to share with those that were in need. This type of amazing, miraculous, radical generosity doesn't happen by itself, it can't be forced or coerced, it's not just one person's good nature, nor accomplished by reading a self-help guide on generosity. This type of radical generosity is evidence of the Holy Spirit maturing & changing their hearts collectively from the inside out. This maturing happens when we become devoted to the spiritual practices the early church was founded on. This is what God is calling us to. Hearts that are maturing with surrender and full devotion to His Spirit in our lives. This is how we learn to give generously with "glad and sincere hearts", freely, and joyfully. We can only do this through a maturing relationship with Jesus and the strength of His Spirit moving in and through us.

Daily Reflections:

- What areas of devotion are you struggling most during this study? Teaching, Fellowship, Breaking Bread, Prayer, or Giving? What changes is God calling you to make in this new year to surrender in an act of radical generosity to Him?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Matthew 5:42** ~Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.
- **2 Corinthians 8:2-3** ~In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,
- **Leviticus 19:9-10** ~Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God.
- **1 Peter 4:10** ~Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.
- **Hebrews 13:16** ~And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.
- **1 John 3:17** ~If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

Day 3 - Radical Giving Requires Fellowship

Have you ever experienced a time of great need in your life? Maybe it was long ago as a college student eating ramen every night while trying to work off student loans, or maybe you can remember a time of being on food stamps or government assistance, or a time you were out of work and shouldering large medical bills. Some of us have experienced more of these moments than others, but most of us have experienced being in need at least once in our lives. These moments are often humbling & painful memories, filled with fear and anxiety, as we first-hand learned how "out of our control" life can be. When you were walking through that time of struggle, who was there for you? Who helped you? Who stuck by your side? Who were you close enough to say "I need help"? Most likely it was someone who knew you, who got close enough to see your struggle, and hopefully it was someone that cared enough to offer help.

When the early church sacrificially gave to those in need, they had to be close enough to "see" the needs of those around them, AND they had to be close enough to vulnerably be able to share their needs with each other. As it says in Acts 2, they were devoted to fellowship with "glad and sincere hearts" (just as we learned about in Week 1). The "givers" had glad & sincere hearts in their sacrifice, without acknowledgment, judgement or bitterness. While the "receivers" had glad & sincere hearts that were authentically open about their struggles, and graciously accept the assistance. We don't see a list of names for those that were big givers, and a list of those that needed help. We don't see a separation of the "haves" and the "have nots" in this early church fellowship. Again, this is so hard for us to comprehend in our very individualistic, reward based, acknowledgement driven society. God's economy is so different than ours. When we recognize that everything we have is a gift from Him in the first place, then we can start to understand how truly powerful, radical, spirit filled and unconditional generosity is freely given!! We can learn to give in this way, AND to receive in this way, because He gave everything for us! None of this is possible without His Spirit moving through us.

Whether you are currently in the space of giving or receiving, both require surrender and sacrifice. Pray for God to move in your life today to open your heart to experience true Godly fellowship that leads to sacrificially giving and receiving with a glad & sincere heart.

Daily Reflections:

- What do you struggle with the most: giving or receiving? Why?
- What steps could you take to develop the practice of "seeing" other's struggles? What steps could you take to develop being able to authentically share your struggles with others? What are the barriers that are keeping you from this type of fellowship?

Deeper Dive

Scripture for today's study time:

- Acts 5: 1-11** ~Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God." When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

Day 4 - Radical Giving Requires Surrender

Throughout the Bible there are moments when God calls for radical giving, requiring sacrificial surrender. The important thing to remember when reading these stories, is that God calls each of us according to what He knows we uniquely need to surrender in our hearts. These stories are not for us to take and apply as some sort of "blanket formula" for everyone to follow, however, they are examples of the specific ways God can call us surrender our lives to Him. No matter what it takes, God desires our full devotion. Maybe God hasn't called you to sell everything you own, or to risk your life, but He has called you to be devoted to Him. Through the process of spiritual maturity we grow to trust Him with everything He asks, and learn that His plans are always the best for us. Just as it says in Jeremiah 29:11 His plans are "to prosper and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future". These verses were written during a difficult time of Babylonian rule for the Israelites. It's not a promise for success or ease of life, but it is a promise of peace despite difficult circumstances if we surrender our lives generously to the Lord.

- Giving ALL** - Acts 5:1-11 (See Deeper Dive): This story is Acts is not exactly one of those Sunday School favorites. However, it teaches us that when God asks for something, anything we selfishly hold back will only lead to our destruction. This could be literally, or spiritually in our hearts and minds. *Reflection: Even if it's small or only a "part" of something, what are you holding back from God? What would it take for you to give it ALL to Him?*
- Giving LIFE** - Genesis 22:1-18: When Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, Issac, he trusted that God knew best. Abraham was obedient and God provided, not only an alternate sacrifice, but with the promise that Abraham's "faith" saved him. *Reflection: Is there something in your life that you're gripping tightly to? Would you be willing to give it to God BEFORE knowing the outcome?*
- Giving FUTURE** - Esther 4:15-16: When Queen Esther went before the King, she risked her life, her future, and ultimately the lives of her family and friends. However, she knew God had called her to "such a time as this". She was willing to say "yes" to God, and God faithfully delivered her and all the Jewish people from peril through her sacrifice. *Reflection: Where am I holding back parts of myself to stay safe? What would it look like for me to trust God enough to give over my WHOLE future to His purpose and plan for me?*

The ultimate radical giver is God himself. He sacrificially gave his life in exchange for our sin and brokenness on the cross. God knows first-hand what He's asking when He calls for radical sacrificial giving. He knows the tears and agony that go behind the decision to surrender and say "your will be done". We can trust Him when He asks us to do the same. *Ask yourself today...do you trust Him?*

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Proverbs 11:24-25** ~One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.
- **2 Corinthians 8: 9** ~For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.
- **Matthew 6:19-21** ~Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
- **James 1:17** ~Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.
- **Luke 12:33-34** ~Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Day 5 - Living a Radically Generous Life

In 2 Peter it says we are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”. We are called to be radically different than the world. The Jesus Way of living our lives is counter cultural, radical, and maybe slightly “crazy” to those that don’t know Him. When God calls you to radical generosity, it won’t make sense to your accountant, or your co-workers, or maybe even your family & friends. It won’t make sense to the world, but it will bring you one step closer to the Kingdom, or God’s world, to come.

Let’s take a look at a few practical ideas to start living radically generous in your life today.

1. **Grow:** Revisit Day 2 of this week. Where do you need to grow in spiritual maturity? Pick ONE area to focus on & make a plan to grow one step closer. Remember that growing in your faith is a life long process. God can use you at any stage of that process and will give you the strength to be a radical giver today!
2. **Get Close:** Are you in a growing small group of believers that you can experience true fellowship with? If not, what can you sacrifice in your schedule or life to make time for this next step? Let us come alongside you, and help you to get close enough to see other’s needs & to authentically share the needs in your own life. Reach out to meloniep@gumchurch.com if you need help.
3. **Share what you have:** Start a list of all the items that you have, like a “blessings inventory”. How could you give, share, borrow, sell, or lend these items to others in need? Pray over this list and ask God for opportunities to share communally with those around you. Then wait with joyful anticipation for the ways God will move through you to bless others in His name.
4. **Start a “Yes Fund”:** Pray about at least one area in your life that you can start living below your means. Take the finances from this area and set them aside into a “Yes Fund”. Use this as your radically spontaneous giving fund. Pray for God to provide opportunities to use you to accomplish His Kingdom work.
5. **Radically Glorify God:** It’s tempting to praise ourselves when we are radically generous. However, this puffs us up with pride and is the exact opposite of what God is asking us to do by surrendering our hearts humbly to Him. As it says in Matthew 6 “when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing”. Our generosity is only possible with power & blessings of Jesus Christ, and He should get 100% of the glory.