

Week 2: Giving Together

Acts 4:32-5:10 To be studied in response to February 10, 2019.

life together

A people apprenticed to
the Life of Jesus

Begin with Prayer

Gather in a comfortable setting. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Consider including a few minutes of silence.

Introduction:

As always, *our common goal as apprentices of Jesus is to learn to be loved by Jesus, to be led by Jesus, to become like Jesus, to lead others to Jesus.* This study is part of a six-week series, "Life Together," focused on the essential practice of **Christ-centred community**. For us to open up to God and one another, let's remember to respect the following guidelines for a safe environment:

- Practice *good listening skills*
- Honour *"sharing boundaries"* and *confidentiality*
- Practice *healthy conflict resolution*
- Seek to be *co-learners* and make this a safe space to ask *any and all questions*.
- *Don't try to fix, problem-solve or rescue.* Our aim is to apply the truth of our identity in Christ and the completed work of his life, death, resurrection and reign to the circumstances of our lives.

Re-connecting and Debriefing (10 minutes)

If you are in a community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3-4 people (ideally same-gender). Spend a few minutes catching up on life (e.g. 1 min each, highs and lows). Then discuss:

1. *Were you able to hear Sunday's teaching on Acts 4:32-5:10? What's one way God spoke to you?*
2. *If you're able, share a time when the generosity of your community provided for your needs in a meaningful way.*
3. *If you'd like, share a time when you felt prompted to give from your own resources to help someone in need. What difference did you see that act of generosity making?*

Listening to God's Word: (20-25 minutes)

Gather as a whole group, and read the following: Our culture is fiercely individualistic and independent. As the needs of our world seem to multiply, people become more and more protective of what is "theirs," and giving becomes something people only do "strategically" and sparingly. In his classic tune, Frank Sinatra sang, "I did it my way!"; many chase this dream, and assume that others are responsible to pave their own way to success. But doing it "my way," alone, is a pipe dream that has only become more difficult in today's society. Most people carry wounds and needs, loneliness and poverty that they simply can't overcome alone. These make it difficult to survive, let alone thrive. Not only that, but most people discover that a guarded attitude about their resources often leads to more worry, not less. Today's study and practice will challenge us to allow the abundance of Jesus' kingdom to flow among and through us for the sake of those in need.

Setting the Scene for Acts 4:32-5:10: The story we are studying gives us a closer look at what it meant for the early Christians to "give to everyone as they had need" (Acts 2:44-45). In Acts 3-4, as the apostles told the story of Jesus more widely in Jerusalem and in the temple courts, the meaning of Jesus' words in John 15:20 became more vivid: "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also." Their message of Jesus' resurrection was met with confusion and threats of reprisal if they continued. In response, the new family of Jesus didn't shrink back; rather, they turned to God with a prayer for boldness, signs and wonders. God filled them anew with the power of His Holy Spirit. The result, however, wasn't just boldness; it was a fierce commitment to take care of each other! (This would become all the more necessary as persecution intensified.) We are left with a story that provides both a positive and a negative example of what it means to be a generous community under the rule of Jesus. As you listen to this story, reflect on this question: **Who or what do you relate to in this story, and why?**

1. **Tell the Story:** From memory or by reading, listen together to **Acts 4:32-5:10**.
2. **Rebuild the Story:** With Bibles open to **Acts 4:32-5:10**, verse by verse, identify the details (who, what, where, when, how) of the story.
3. **Debrief the Story:** Respond to these questions:
 - *Who or what do you relate to in this story, and why?*
 - What do you notice about the environment/culture of the community described in 4:32-37? (Compare it with 2:42-47.) Why do you think it was this way?
 - What was wrong with the way that Ananias and Sapphira participated in what was going on? Where have you observed a similar attitude/approach in your own life or in Christian communities you've been part of?
 - Why do you think the Holy Spirit, through the apostles, thought it was important to expose and judge their actions? What was at stake?
 - What encouragement or warning about how we give to one another can we draw from this story?

Practice: Sharing with Those in Need (15-20 minutes)

In Acts 4:10-5:10 we see a positive picture of sincere and practical care for others, born out of confidence and joy in God's generous provision. We also see a negative picture of insincere, image-oriented giving, "strategic" giving which was really an investment in their own reputation. This week's practice gives us an opportunity, first, to bring to our attention some of the needs that exist among us, as well as needs beyond us that we carry on others' behalf. Second, we want to reflect on the difference that having a Spirit-filled "abundance" mindset could make in how we respond to these needs. Finally, we will begin to dream about some ways that this group could express this mindset more intentionally together. Here are your instructions:

1. Distribute **two slips of paper** (preferably identical) to every group member. Make sure everyone has a pen.
2. Ask each person to write on each slip of paper (1) a **personal need** you struggle to meet by yourself (may be physical, emotional, financial, relational, practical, etc.). Describe in **10 words or less**, but **do NOT sign your name**. (2) a need of a **person or cause that you care about** outside of the group that would benefit from a shared, community effort of giving. (Each may use their discretion on whether you use names.)
3. Toss all the slips of paper into a **hat/bowl** and mix them around. Pass the bowl around the group and have each person **randomly pull out two slips of paper**.
4. *If you have a large group, split into smaller groups of 4-5.* One by one, invite people to **read one of their slips of paper out loud**. For each, discuss the following questions:
 - What would it look like to respond to this need with a *worldly, "scarcity" mindset*?
 - How would we respond to this need with the *"abundance" mindset of Jesus' kingdom*?

Listening to One Another (10 minutes)

After you have completed this exercise, regroup and discuss the following questions together:

- ❖ *Why is hard to voice our needs to those around us? What are we afraid of?*
- ❖ *Why is it hard for us to volunteer our help (especially financial) for the sake of others? What are we afraid of?*
- ❖ *How could a community of accountability (like an Apprentice Group) inspire generosity and guard against hypocrisy in the area of giving? Are you ready to invite those kinds of questions from a loving brother or sister?*
- ❖ *Which of the needs you heard anonymously expressed here tonight surprised you? What did you relate to?*
- ❖ *What is one need you heard that you think the group might be able to get behind, perhaps even this week? What plans could you make, and who will take the lead?*

Then, using **the Lord's Prayer** (Matthew 6:9-13) as a guide, based on what you've shared together, spend time listening to God and praying for one another.

Leader Notes

This shocking story in Acts 4:32-5:10 points to a number of interesting insights about generosity, giving, and helping one another meet needs. A few highlights to point the group toward as you study together:

- Remind the group of what has happened in Acts 4:31: “They were all filled with the Spirit.” This kind of practical, intentional generosity is not meant to be forced, coerced, or manipulated. It is a natural outflow of intimacy and joy in the Holy Spirit. So...
 - A hesitancy to live generously and freely with our material goods for the sake of others points to the real state of our intimacy with God.
 - Growth in generosity is connected to the seriousness with which we are seeking after the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. This seriousness is expressed in the other “devotions” of the early church – a hunger to understand the Word (the good news about Jesus) as deeply as possible, a willingness to connect deeply with others, hospitality toward strangers and a willingness to forgive offenders, and a habit of conversation with God (Acts 2:42).
- The story of the fate of Ananias and Sapphira is intense. It’s for good reason that “great fear seized the whole church”! The issue was a lack of integrity: their generosity only went as deep as appearances – the very definition of hypocrisy. Try and get the group to reflect seriously on why it’s so tempting to settle for the appearance of generosity instead of sincerely giving to others.
- The anonymous approach to expressing needs is a way of getting things out in the open that people might not immediately know how to share. It gives the group a chance to perhaps express its willingness to be part of meeting that need, even before that person has had to admit to it. As a leader, pray that people will see the role that they can play in helping someone else.