

READ John 5: 8. 9. 14 (below). Due to lack of space, the entire passage is not included. You may want to begin at John 5:1 and check out the entire passage, but these are the key verses.

⁸ Jesus said to him, "Arise, take up your pallet and walk." ⁹ And immediately the man became well, and took up his pallet and began to walk. ¹⁴ Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "Behold, you have become well, do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may befall you."

REFLECT Write your thoughts. Again, try to keep it personal. i.e. Sin can, cripple, debilitate, and immobilize me.

RESPOND (Application for this week) **WHAT** were the significant scriptures for you this week? (Write them out.)

WHY are those scriptures *significant to you* at this time in your life?

HOW can you practically apply what God spoke to you about this week? [Try to respond in terms of specific action steps, specific people, long-term plan.]

WHAT will be the time frame for your application?

(1) Start Date _____ (2) *Progress* Check Date(s) _____ (3) Finish Date _____
/ / /

WHO I can ask to hold me accountable for my application: _____

Sermon-Based Devotional

Lawrence Free Methodist Church

(Based on a Sermon by Pastor Alex Alexander on June 3, 2018)

Series: The Book of ACTS: WE ARE THE CHURCH

This week: Unity and Generosity

Acts 4:32-5:11

The Bible is clear that the world is a place of abundance, and it calls us to a life of joyful generosity in response, whether that is with our money, our possessions, our time, or our very lives. Generosity should be a defining characteristic of the church because God is generous. The Father gave His Son. The Son gave His life. The Father and the Son gave the Spirit. And, the Spirit gives the followers of Christ hearts of generosity. As we continue our journey through Acts, we will see how the Holy Spirit works through the hearts of the early church to bring unity to the community of faith through their loving support for one another, and the difference between generosity and greed.

1. The Spirit strengthens the church in unity and generosity.

READ ACTS 4:32-35 Mark what stands out to you.

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. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ 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 ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

REFLECT Write your thoughts from Acts 4:32-35.

Mark 3:31-35 - And His mother and His brothers came, and standing outside they sent to Him and called Him. And a crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, "Your mother and Your brothers are outside, seeking You." And He answered them, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" And looking about at those who sat around Him, He said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, He is My brother and sister and mother."

REFLECT Write your thoughts from Mark 3:31-35.

To our modern ears, this already sounds strong. But to a first-century Jew, this was a far more radical statement. The central value that characterized ancient family relations was the obligation to demonstrate undying loyalty toward one’s blood brothers and sisters.

Our primary bond should not be blood but faith in God.

In Acts 4, this same dynamic is at work. These new Christians now found themselves part of this new family, and the bond that they once reserved for blood relatives and siblings was applied to their brothers and sisters in Christ. If someone had a need, they responded with radical generosity.

Love for the family of God is the centerpiece of the passage.

In the body of Christ, we are all now brothers and sisters, and when a family member has a need, it should inspire the family to respond with love, care, and radical generosity.

2. The Spirit distinguishes between generous and greedy giving.

God is always more concerned with the heart behind our giving than the gift itself.

READ ACTS 4:36-5:2 Mark what stands out to you.

Acts 4:36 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.

^{5:1} But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ² and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.

The issue was not the amount they gave or the amount they withheld; it was their dishonesty. The lie revealed the truth of their hearts—they weren’t giving out of generous hearts but greedy ones, and their greed wasn’t simply material, it was also spiritual. They wanted to give so that they would be seen as radically generous. They wanted the praise of the crowd. Jesus was often critical of this kind of religious performance. While teaching on giving, He said:

READ Matthew 6:1-4 Mark what stands out to you.

¹ “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. ² Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Jesus)

REFLECT Write your thoughts from Matthew 6:1-4. [Try to keep it personal.]

1.E. – “Beware” → Jesus is giving me a stern warning here! “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” To me, that means that my giving should not be made known to others so as to impress or gain approval from them. My security and significance are to come from God – and not based upon the approval of others.

3. The Spirit judges and purifies the church.

What happens next to Ananias, and later Sapphira, is rather shocking:

READ ACTS 5:3-11 Mark everything that stands out to you.

³ But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.” ⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.” And she said, “Yes, for so much.” ⁹ But Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet & breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

REFLECT Write your thoughts from Acts 5:3-11.

Some might think this was a harsh punishment, but it was a sign of the depth and severity of their sin. This wasn’t about money at all. This was about the unity of the family of God and how sin violates the trust and intimacy of His family.

The discipline we experience may not be as severe as Ananias and Sapphira’s, but sin always has consequences, and the pain of those consequences is one way that God purifies and shapes us.

Write your thoughts on Ecclesiastes 7:3 ↓
“Sorrow is better than laughter; for sadness has a refining influence on us.”

The church deepens its purity as it listens to the Spirit, grows in conviction over its sins, and is healed of them by His power.

CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives should inspire such radical generosity, transforming our hearts to mirror Jesus’ own so that we don’t cling to what’s “ours” by rights but give it away to those in need.