

The Mission of My Church: “There was not a needy person among them.”

Focus Passage: Acts 4:32–5:11

Other Passages Referenced: Deuteronomy 15; 2 Corinthians 8:9

Notes to Leaders

- In this week’s discussion, let’s try to focus on the Big Idea of how the Church’s generosity points to the gospel because the gospel powers the Church’s generosity.
- There is a lot happening at the Chapel between now and the end of the year. Please encourage your group members to participate in some element of the live nativity. There are roles for pretty much everyone’s skill set and interests.

Sermon Recap

In the first centuries of the early Church, the Church displayed a generosity and self-giving that stood in remarkable contrast to their non-Christian cultures. When a plague ravaged the region of Carthage in 252, as people were deserting their own sick family members to save themselves, Christians were arriving to care for the sick, often dying themselves. Once the plague ended, the regional Church tripled in size, at least in part due to their sacrificial love and service during the plague. In the 300’s, the Roman Emperor Julian complained that the Church was doing more for the poor of his empire than the government was, which was making him look bad in comparison.

The Big Idea of the sermon was: “The Church’s generosity points to the gospel, because the Church’s generosity is powered by the gospel.” Throughout the Book of Acts, Luke is quick to point out the Gospel is informing the way the early church is responding to the needs of the community. The gospel changes the way believers see their possessions and the way they see others. The world had not seen a generosity like the Church practiced. As a result, the world took note in wonder, and the Church grew as the gospel spread and was received.

Throughout the Bible, God has expressed a desire for His people to be generous with one another, and especially with the poor. Deuteronomy 15 instructs God’s people to observe a sabbath year in which the land was to lie fallow and debts were to be forgiven by those to whom they were owed. It was to be a year of release. Debtors were not only to be set free, but they were to be given animals and tools to provide for themselves in a fresh start. The underlying reason for the sabbath year is explained in Deuteronomy 15:14b-15: “As the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore, I command you this today.”

In both chapters 2 and Chapter 4 of Acts, Luke describes a process:

1. The Holy Spirit comes.
2. The spirit of God fills the believers with God’s presence and God’s power.
3. The believers speak boldly concerning the resurrection of Jesus.
4. receive unity of mind and heart, and care for each other’s needs so that “there was not a needy person among them.”

It is because of the Gospel, because of Christ’s death and resurrection, that we are able to be generous. The Gospel informs us that all we have is a gift from God. It is His and not ours. We are stewards, not owners. In that way, the Gospel empowers us to see our possessions and one another differently. Jesus intentionally and actively became poor for our sake so that we might become rich (2 Cor 8:9). Because

God's generosity to us has not been dependent on our worthiness or good choices, we are called to extend that same grace to others. We can fall into the temptation of elevating our own choices while we try to evaluate the choices of everyone else. Our generosity needs to be active and intentional.

Note of Application

When people are recorded as selling their belongings to meet the needs of others in Acts 2 and 4, the donors did not directly give to the needy but gave through the Church. The Agape Ministry is the Chapel's designated vehicle for distributing donated resources to meet needs within the church family and the community.

Group Gathering

Group Check-in — Care, Celebration, Encouragement (About 1/3 of meeting time)

1. Informal conversation to allow individuals to catch up with one another.
2. Ask if anyone would share how they've been hearing and obeying God's direction.

Allow the Word to Speak — Be Hearers of the Word (About 1/3 of meeting time)

READ Acts 4:32 – 5:11

1. What from the passage or sermon was most impactful to you?
2. Were you left with any questions or confusion about the passage or sermon?
3. How does Acts 4:32 describe the believers in the Church?
4. In Acts 4:32–33, Luke uses the word "great" two times in connection with the generosity and lack of needs within the Church. What are those two "greats" and how do they relate to viewing our resources and others differently?
5. Why did God take Ananias and Saphira's lives in Acts 5:1-11? What word is associated with two different "greats" recorded in Acts 5:5 and 5:11?
6. What was the charge against Ananias and Saphira that led to their deaths?

Put the Word into Practice — Be Doers of the Word (About 1/3 of meeting time)

1. What are some ways the Church's generosity points toward the gospel?
2. What are some ways the gospel powers the Church's generosity?
3. How do you think you would respond if a sabbath year that involved forgiving the debts of people who owed you and then giving them resources and tools to have a fresh start were required of you every seven years as a follower of Jesus?
4. Can you think of anything you might sell in order to meet the needs of others with the money?
5. What step might God be leading you to take to be more intentional and active in generous giving?
6. How is the incident with Ananias and Saphira more about the gospel than about the money?

The Big Question: What do you sense God's Spirit saying to you and what concrete action will you take in response? Share your answer with the group or another trusted Christian and ask them to pray for you.

What We Hope Members Glean from the Passage

1. No set answer.
2. No set answer.
3. The believers 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."
4. As a result of the Church's generosity and sharing, "great" power in witnessing was given to the believers, and "great" grace was upon them all.

5. "Great fear"
6. God took Ananias and Saphira's lives because of their deception in pretending to have given more than they actually had given. Peter charged Ananias with "lying to the Holy Spirit," not lying to man but to God. Then Saphira participated in the same lie.

SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES: Click [here](#) for some good opportunities.