



Acts and The Early Church (Week 5/8) Cared for the Least

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect As you use your time for God, which of these should be your focus: (a) Rejoicing more in God's presence; (b) Responding more regularly to God's purposes; or (c) Resting with confidence that God is in control?

Warm-Up

1. When do you remember first giving to a charity? What is your favourite charity to support?
2. What did charities look like in the Greco-Roman world?

Read Acts 4:32-37

3. How are *all* the believers described in verse 32?
4. What does being *one* in heart and mind mean? Who should you love and care about?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 12:24-26. What is the reason Christians should consider themselves as one?
6. How should being one in Christ change our concern for each other?
7. When have you experienced the love and compassion from a brother or sister in Christ? What have you found helpful in nurturing love and compassion towards your brothers and sisters in Christ?
8. What do the early Christians do *in response* to their unified heart and mind?
9. Why do you think people do not share? What are the main barriers for us in sharing what we have?
10. What was the source of the early church's generosity? Do we still have access to this source today?
11. What was the process for how the needy were supported? What was the cost, now and in the future, for those who gave up houses and land?
12. What would need to happen for there to be no need in our church?
13. How is *this example* in the early church an amazing witness to God's grace?
14. When have you seen God meet the needs of others through his people? When has God met your needs, through the generosity of his people?
15. What is your approach to sharing your resources to the needy? How would you like to grow in this? What do you think gets in the way of our generosity individually and as a community?
16. How is being one in heart and mind and being reminded of God's grace transformative for our generosity? What weekly and daily rhythms foster our unity and deepen our understanding of grace?
17. Who is someone you are aware of right now, who is in need of help? How can you respond?
18. How was the generosity of the early church a compelling witness? How can our generosity still be a compelling witness to God's grace today?

Apply Review how you are using your money to care for the least. How sacrificially generous would you like your giving to be?

Pray Gracious Father, please may your great grace be at work amongst us, that we would be a community one in heart and mind, radically generous with all that you have given us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

GOING DEEPER

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On Your Frontline this Week

Look for someone on your frontline who is in need of help this week.

For Families

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- *Listen (sermon):* “Grace and Money” by Tim Keller:
<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/grace-and-money/>
- *Listen (sermon):* “Reaching Out by Reaching In” by Rico Tice:
<https://bit.ly/4lzbya7>
- *Listen (sermon):* “The Church of God United” by Jamie Child:
<https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/talk/53918/>
- *Watch (video):* “The Origins of Western Healthcare” by The Centre for Public Christianity:
<https://publicchristianity.org/video/the-origins-of-western-healthcare/>
- *Read (article):* “The Founder of the First Hospital: Meet Fabiola” by Andrew Menkis:
<https://corechristianity.com/resources/articles/founder-of-the-first-hospital-meet-fabiola>
- *Read (book):* “Bullies and Saints” by John Dickson 📖

Series Resources

- *Read (book):* “Strange Religion” by Nijay Gupta. 📖
- *Read (commentary):* “The Challenge of Acts” by Tom Wright. 📖
- *Read (book):* “Why the Gospel” by Matthew Bates.
- *Read (advanced commentary):* “Acts: Witnesses to Him” by Bruce Milne.

📖 [Available to borrow in the Church library](#)

ACTS: STRANGE RELIGION

Week 5/8 “Cared for the Least”

by Amy Norman (24/08/2025)

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Bible Passage: Acts 4:32-27

Gracious Father, please may your great grace be at work in us all,
that we would be a community one in heart and mind.
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

In the Roman world, *charity* like we know it, didn't really exist. There were no charities set up to care for disadvantaged children, cure cancer, or support farmers in drought.

- You wouldn't be sent letters or approached in shopping centre to support a *worthy cause*, because *there wasn't* an underlying expectation that *good people* are generous.
- The expectation in the Greco-Roman world was that you would help people who could help you.
Only if you got something *back* from a relationship, would anyone even *think of helping!*
- But the early Christians were different. They were not known for calculating how much honour and prestige they would acquire by helping someone.
Instead, they were known for their *radical generosity*, individually but also as a community.
- In fact this was a point of frustration for the Romans! An opponent of the early church, Diognetus, wrote in the second century that Christians:

They share their table with all, but not their bed with all. They are poor and make many rich; they are short of everything and yet have plenty of things. *Letter to Diognetus*, 100-150 A.D.

- The early Christians looked *weird* because instead of sharing their bed with all (like the pagans did), they shared their *money* with all.
Their radical generosity wasn't *just weird* - it was also *compelling*. >

- The last Roman emperor, Julian, who was also not a friend of Christians, could see *just how compelling* the generosity of the early church was. He wrote:

Nothing has contributed to the progress of the superstition of these Christians as their charity to strangers, the impious Galileians provide not only for their own poor but for ours as well.

- As we come to the account in Acts, we get a better look at *what motivated* the early church to use their money and resources to care for the least, and just how they did it.
- We see how the early church were:
**Unified in Heart and Mind,
Living Evidence of God's Grace,
Sacrificially Generous.**

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UNIFIED IN HEART AND MIND | ACTS 4:32

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First, the early Christians were **unified in heart and mind**. Verse 32 ...

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*

- Here, Luke begins with the *primary* reason that Christians cared for the least, not because they were trying to impress anyone, but because they were *unified in heart and mind*.
- What does that mean?
You might think of a sports team, who run onto the field, focused and together. They're of one heart and mind of who they are *together*, and what they are there to achieve. Or you might think of a healthy marriage, in which being one in heart and mind, there is deep unity that gets expressed in a mutual care and understanding.
- Being of one heart and mind shapes *who we love* and *how we relate* to one another. But here Luke says that *all the believers* were one in heart and mind.
- Paul picks up this same idea of being one as he describes how in Christ all Christians are part of *one body*. And even though the parts are different, they should have *equal concern* for each other. God put the body of Christ together,

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so that there would be *no division*. He writes to the Corinthians:

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.
1 Corinthians 12:24-26

- If you are one, then what happens to someone else also *affects you*.
- You might have experienced that type of unity in your family, where what happens to one member impacts *everyone* else.
When someone receives wonderful news, you are all excited - telling anyone you can find.
When someone in your family is suffering, you also suffer, as you share that burden with them.
- So to be one in heart, is a united love for God *and* each other.
To be one in mind, is to have God's priorities *and* his concern for each other.
- This was the foundation of how the early Christians cared for the least.
Their unity in heart and mind *naturally spilled out* to sharing everything they had, as they shared it with people *now part of their family*, this family of new brothers and sisters *in Christ*.
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- I wonder, is that how you feel about your brothers and sisters in Christ?
Do you have a desire to be more unified in heart and mind?
- If we are to be of one heart, then that looks like a united love for God. >

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Persevering in *gathering together*, that together we are growing in love for God.
But it also looks like a *growing love* for each other.

- It is hard to grow in love for people you don't know, or who don't know you.
It's not *necessary* or even practical that you will know everyone here, but *who are the people here* that you regularly meet with to grow in love for God?
If you haven't really met anyone yet, or you don't have a regular rhythm of meeting with other Christians - then I'd love to encourage you to try a small group, or a prayer group, or even a prayer chat.
- Relationships won't be instant of course - it'll take time, but they are great places to begin.
And they can be so helpful, as they *both* help us grow in our love for God together, and also give space to share our lives.
- If we are to reflect the early church in our unity in heart and mind, then that requires each person investing time and openness to be known, and the whole church to be ready to welcome, care, and love all those who God brings along.
- Here in Acts, the *generosity* of the early church *came from* their unity in heart and mind.
- With minds unified in the knowledge of Jesus, and hearts unified in the love of Jesus, they were *compelled* to express that amongst their new family.
- As they *shared* amongst their new family, it *expressed* an inward spiritual reality that faith in

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Christ doesn't just connect you to Jesus, but it connects you to the whole body of Christ.

- Note here that this sharing was not forced, it was not an entry requirement to Christianity, or some form of communism with common ownership.
 - The sharing of their possessions was an *expression* of their love for one another, but it was an *expression* of the truth that they were now all united in Christ.
 - If we also want to grow in oneness of heart and mind, then it's not only in gathering together, praying together, and sharing our lives, but also how we meet one another's needs.
 - We can *know* that in Christ we are one, but what really embeds that truth into our lives, is when we practice it, when we take the time to know and care for our family in Christ.
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- Our culture emphasises that we should put our individual needs and our own desires at the very centre of our existence.
 - And that whatever we possess, be it money, time, or freedom, that it is ours, and no one else has any claim to it.
 - But if you have faith in Jesus, then *you are already made one* with all other believers. It remains *our choice* if our actions *line up* with this reality, and *reinforce* what is already true.

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LIVING EVIDENCE OF GOD'S GRACE | ACTS 4:33-34

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Second, for the early Christians *how* they cared for the least was **living evidence of God's grace**. *Verse 33 ...*

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 34 that there were no needy persons among them. *verses 33-34a*

By now in Acts, we've come to expect the apostles are preaching the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power!

- But what Luke says *next* in verse 34 is surprising. We might expect that result of God's grace being so powerfully at work in them all, would lead to more disciples or more miracles, (which of course it did!) - *but* the result of God's grace at work in them *here*, was that *there were no needy persons among them*.
- Of course, the apostles primary work *continued* to be making disciples, but that is not the only way that God's grace was at work through them. One of the *key ways* the Gospel spilled out into and shaped people's lives, was their care for *all* who were in need.
- Because *of God's great grace* at work, there were no needy persons among them. /

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- It is a pretty audacious claim! We live in one of the wealthiest countries in all of human history, and yet we know that there are still huge unmet needs in our community.
- Imagine this - no one in a *whole community*, with any need.
No one who was homeless, no one who was lonely, no one who was forgotten.
No worrying who would care for them, or how they would make ends meet.
- Imagine what that would look like *here* at St Bart's.
What would we need to do, to share, to put in place, in order to eliminate *all need*, from every single person and every single household?!
- It might seem *nearly* impossible for us to comprehend,
but it is even *more significant* when we consider the position of most people in the early church. In the Greco-Roman world, there was only a very small middle class.
The vast majority of people were poor, and possibly enslaved.
And yet there were no needy persons among them. //
- It really is no wonder *this* radical generosity confounded the Roman rulers.
In a society where the weak and poor were considered property to be used,
Christians cared for them and met their needs.
- It was an astonishing *witness* to God's grace at work *in them*, and it still is today.
- People are extraordinarily generous in our community.
Whenever we have shared a need someone has, that need has been met.
From time to time, I get to hear stories of how people at St Bart's have quietly and without

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fuss, stopped and taken their time and resources to meet the needs of others.

- Regularly people here prepare meals for those who are sick or just had a baby,
People have provided money to get someone out of a dangerous situation,
or opened up their home to someone in desperate need.
There are so many examples of people seeing a need (no matter how big or small), and responding with such care and love. *It is an amazing witness of God's grace at work.*
- And what amazes me, is that is not just people who give out of an abundance,
but so many give of what little they have.
- Yet even though we witness amazing generosity, imagine what it would take to be described like the early church? //
- The early Christians' desire and their ability to meet the needs of others,
was not because they were perfect or had endless resources, but pointed to the *great grace* powerfully at work in them all. And the source of this grace is only from God.
- We shouldn't be surprised God's grace is empowering them to meet needs of people,
for that is how God's grace works. God's grace is an unmerited *gift* from God, that meets us where we most desperately need it.
- And so here, it makes sense that God's grace at work through his people,
would be meeting the needs of others.
It is like a small window into the character of God and the pattern of the gospel,
where God's ultimate unmerited gift that fully meets our needs is Jesus.

SACRIFICALLY GENEROUS | ACTS 4:34-37

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Finally, the early church was **sacrificially generous**. Verse 34 ...

For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), 37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. Verses 34b - 37.

- Here we see just *how* the early church cared for the least.
- Selling of houses or land happened periodically, from *time to time*.
It was not an immediate liquidation of all assets, but this was gradual.
We also get the clue that it was unlikely that all property owned by Christians was sold, for Christians continue to meet in households, like the household of Chloe and Stephanas.
- Clearly *not every* Christian sold possessions either, only those who *owned* land or houses.
- There wasn't a scheme that suddenly the Christian community *owned* everyone's assets, but the *money* from sales was brought to the apostles to be distributed.
The apostles were entrusted to use the resources from the community to distribute it to those who had need.
- We see how this worked out in the example of Barnabas. The pattern of selling, bringing

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money, for those in need, to be distributed by the apostles.

- This system was quite straightforward, but also reflected the *sacrificial* nature of their generosity, where people considered *that meeting the needs of others* was more important than holding onto their own houses or land.
- There was a real *present* and *future* cost to their generosity. They probably had plans for those houses or land. But in giving it away, their plans or even standard of living, needed to change.
- At this point in Acts, generosity is shared between individuals, but later as the church grows, whole communities would generously share to support other local churches in great need. We see that in how Paul collects money from other churches to support the poor in the church of Jerusalem. //
- But what we read *next* in Acts, shows us that not everyone in the church *was perfectly* generous. Ananias and Sapphira also sell their property, but lie about how much they've kept for themselves, and face judgement for it.
- Clearly, the church was not *perfect*, but the consistent generosity of the people, towards those in need, *was significant* enough to completely shape and change the world's value of charity.
- The things we take for granted now - that we should care for the poor, provide medical care for *anyone* who is sick, and protect the weak and vulnerable, were *practices* and *ideas*

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that *began* with Christians caring for the least.

Public hospitals, like we are familiar with, where *anyone* can receive medical care, did not exist in the Roman Empire. If you were wealthy, you could get a doctor. But it was *radical* to think this would be offered to anybody. But in the fourth century, Fabiola changed this. She was from one of the wealthiest families in Rome, and after her second husband died, she became a Christian and used all her resources for the poor. She created the first *truly public* hospital. It was such a novelty, that she had to go out and find the sick, and carry them back to the hospital. She didn't only *fund it*, but actively *cared* for the people there. When she died, the theologian Jerome claimed all of Rome was not big enough for her kindness.

- But it wasn't just the wealthy Christians who were sacrificially generous, but the poor too. That's why Diognetus complained that:
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They are poor and make many rich; they are short of everything and yet have plenty of things.

- The early Christians could be sacrificially generous, because they were simply reflecting God's sacrificial generosity to them.
- We are to be sacrificially generous, for we have received the same generosity from God. God has met all our ultimate need for forgiveness, salvation, and life in Jesus. In Jesus, we have a new family.
- Caring for the least is a responsibility for all Christians - whether poor or wealthy, for the concerns and needs of others, are now ours too.

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- As Christians, we are not to live isolated and self-focused lives. Rather, when we recall God's free and unmerited grace to us, making us one in heart and mind, we can use what God has provided, to meet the needs of his people.
- And no matter how small what we share may be, God can multiply what we give, to point to his abundant generosity to us in Jesus.

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