



May 17 – Multiply Your Generosity

Weekly Reading – Acts 4–8

Today's Passages – Acts 2:45; Acts 4:32–37; Acts 5:1–11

Main Point

Generosity is an identifying mark of the people of God and advances the work of God.

MAIN PASSAGES – Acts 2:45; Acts 4:32–37; Acts 5:1–11

Acts 2:45

[45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (ESV)

Acts 4:32–37

They Had Everything in Common

[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. [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. (ESV)

Acts 5:1–11

Ananias and Sapphira

[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. [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 and 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. (ESV)

Background

In the early chapters of Acts, the church is newly formed and rapidly growing as people respond to the gospel. This community is not only marked by belief in Christ but by a radically transformed way of living together. In a culture where possessions were often closely guarded and social divisions were common, the early believers demonstrated a unique unity that crossed economic and social boundaries. Their willingness to share resources was not driven by obligation but by a shared identity in Christ and a deep concern for one another's needs.

Acts 2 and Acts 4 provide snapshots of this Spirit-filled community, showing that generosity was a natural outflow of their faith. At the same time, Acts 5 presents a sobering contrast through the account of Ananias and Sapphira, revealing that God takes seriously the integrity and purity of His church. Together, these passages show both the beauty of gospel-shaped generosity and the danger of hypocrisy, emphasizing that God desires a people who are both generous and sincere.

Christ Connection

The generosity seen in the early church ultimately points back to the generosity of Christ Himself. Jesus did not give out of surplus but gave sacrificially, laying down His life to meet our greatest need. Through His death and resurrection, He made it possible for sinners to be forgiven and brought into the family of God. Because believers have received such undeserved grace, they are freed to live open-handedly, using their resources to serve others and advance the gospel. True Christian generosity is not rooted in obligation but in gratitude for what Christ has already given.

Life Group - The Flow

- 15 minutes - Conversation and relationship-building
 - 15 minutes - Year of Prayer guided prayer time
 - 5 minutes - Introduction (icebreaker, activity, or illustration)
 - 35 minutes - Study and apply the Bible
 - 5 minutes - Optional activity
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Year of Prayer (15 min)

Always pause and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time of prayer.

Isaiah 54:5 reminds us of the importance of praising and adoring You, O Lord alone. “The Holy One of Israel is (my) Redeemer; (You are) called the God of the whole earth.” Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.” 2 Corinthians 1:3.

You may share your words of praise now. (pause)

Almighty Father, we ask for boldness in sharing the good news of the gospel. Open our eyes to the daily opportunities You give us to share of Your love and all You’ve done to provide eternal life with You through Your Son Jesus Christ. Forgive us when we fail to share about Your gift of eternal life. Show us Your glory Lord and may we hunger for more of You with each new day Father, we thank you for family and friends—for laughter and sharing—for opportunities to encourage others through our words, and good deeds.

Share your words of thanksgiving now. (pause)

Father, as we acknowledge you as the Great Physician, we pray for those who are sick and in need of healing or those who are grieving the lost of a loved one. Give us hearts who desire to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

Lift your petitions and intercessions to the Father now. (pause)

Father, we ask for Your wisdom in all our decisions. May we make choices that bring You honor, allowing others to see Jesus in us. Guide us with Your Spirit so that we may act with discernment and integrity.

Share your petitions and intercessions at this time. (pause)

- **Have group members start with those we are asking God to Save:**
 - **Friends**
 - **Family**
 - **Co-workers**
 - **Others**

Then have group members share Prayer Requests

Father God, continue to unite us in spirit and purpose, causing us to seek Your will above all else. Help us to listen to one another with compassion and to lift each other up in faith believing that You will meet all our needs in Christ Jesus. In Jesus name, Amen

Introduction (5 min)

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

“The Macedonian Church” (2 Corinthians 8)

Say:

There’s an account in the New Testament about a group of churches in Macedonia. They were going through extreme hardship: poverty, persecution, and suffering. They didn’t have much at all.

Yet, when they heard about a need among other believers, they begged for the opportunity to give.

Not because they had extra, but because they had been changed by the gospel. Scripture says their generosity overflowed *out of their poverty*.

That kind of generosity doesn’t make sense by normal standards. But it shows us something important: generosity isn’t about how much you have, it’s about what has your heart.

Ask:

- **What stands out to you about that kind of generosity?**

Transition to Passage 1:

In Acts, we're going to see a community that lived this way—not perfectly, but powerfully—and it changed everything about how they related to one another.

Study and Discuss (40 min)

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says about a particular topic.

Passage 1 – Acts 2:45

READ THE PASSAGE – Have a volunteer read Acts 2:45.

Acts 2:45

[45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (ESV)

Commentary

Leader Prep: Use the following commentary to prepare ahead of time. As you lead, feel free to summarize key insights rather than reading it word-for-word.

2:45. In verse 45 we see that the believers in Jerusalem sold their possessions and property to help one another as needs arose, they. The verb rendered sold is in a tense that suggests the believers sold items from time to time. There was no expectation that new believers must immediately relinquish all their possessions upon conversion (as some religious cults in history have practiced). When Christians discovered that someone was facing great need, the grace of Christ moved them to sell items to help relieve the hardship.

Generosity is an attribute of God's grace, and He delights to see it practiced in His church. Numerous surveys throughout modern times have revealed that most churches function with less than 20 percent of the members committed to consistent, proportional giving. Too many church members seem to develop an allergic reaction to calls for generosity. If every believer practiced godly generosity, it would not only advance the spread of the gospel but also enable churches to minister mightily in the name of Jesus to people with desperate needs.

Guide Discussion

Leader Note: You do not need to cover every question. Use the questions that best help your group engage with the passage.

1. **Good for Students.** What was the early church doing to meet each other's needs in this verse?
2. **Discuss.** What makes the generosity in this passage different from simple acts of charity?
3. **Deeper Dive.** What "costs" come with living in this kind of open-handed community, and why are those costs often difficult for us to embrace?

Transition to Passage 2:

"What we saw in Acts 2 wasn't a one-time moment—it became a defining mark of the early church. Let's see how this continued to shape their community."

Passage 2 - Acts 4:32-35

READ THE PASSAGE - Have a volunteer read Acts 4:32-35

They Had Everything in Common

[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.

Commentary

Leader Prep: Use the following commentary to prepare ahead of time. As you lead, feel free to summarize key insights rather than reading it word-for-word.

4:32. The believers are described as being "of one heart and soul," indicating deep spiritual unity rooted in their shared faith in Christ. Their unity extended beyond belief into how they viewed their possessions—they held them loosely for the sake of others. This demonstrates that true gospel unity affects both relationships and resources.

4:33. The apostles continued to give powerful testimony to the resurrection of Jesus, which remained central to the church's message. The phrase "great grace was upon them all" suggests that God's favor was evident in both their proclamation and their community life. Their generosity and unity served to support and validate their witness.

4:34. Luke notes that there was not a needy person among them, highlighting the effectiveness of their shared commitment to care for one another. Those who had excess willingly sold property or goods to meet the needs within the community. This reflects a practical outworking of love that ensured no one was overlooked.

4:35. The proceeds from these sales were laid at the apostles' feet, symbolizing trust in their leadership and submission to the authority God had established. Distribution was made based on need, not equality, showing wisdom and discernment in caring for the body. This structure ensured both accountability and intentionality in generosity.

Guide Discussion

Leader Note: You do not need to cover every question. Use the questions that best help your group engage with the passage.

1. **Good for Students.** How would you describe the attitude of the believers toward their possessions?
2. **Discuss.** What motivated the early Christians to be so generous with what they had?
3. **Deeper Dive.** How have you seen generosity within the church help advance the gospel or meet real needs?

Transition to Passage 3:

“This kind of generosity wasn’t just theoretical—it showed up in real people’s lives. Let’s look at one example.”

Passage 3 - Acts 4:36-37

READ THE PASSAGE - Have a volunteer read Acts 4:36-37

[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. (ESV)

Commentary

Leader Prep: Use the following commentary to prepare ahead of time. As you lead, feel free to summarize key insights rather than reading it word-for-word.

4:36. Barnabas is introduced as a Levite from Cyprus, and his name—meaning “son of encouragement”—reflects his character. His identity as an encourager suggests that his generosity was not an isolated act but part of a consistent pattern of building others up. Luke highlights him as a model example of the kind of life shaped by the gospel.

4:37. Barnabas sold a field and brought the proceeds to the apostles, demonstrating sacrificial generosity and trust in God's provision. His actions show that generosity often involves tangible cost, not just convenience. By giving in this way, he contributed to the unity and mission of the early church.

Guide Discussion

Leader Note: You do not need to cover every question. Use the questions that best help your group engage with the passage.

1. **Good for Students.** What did Barnabas do in these verses?
2. **Discuss.** How do you think generosity and encouragement are connected?
3. **Deeper Dive.** In what specific ways could you use generosity this week to encourage someone in your church or community?

Transition to Passage 4:

"But not everyone responded to this culture of generosity in the same way. Let's look at a very different example."

Passage 4 - Acts 5:1-11

READ THE PASSAGE - Have a volunteer read Acts 5:1-11

Ananias and Sapphira

- [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.
[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 and 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. (ESV)

Commentary

Leader Prep: Use the following commentary to prepare ahead of time. As you lead, feel free to summarize key insights rather than reading it word-for-word.

5:1. Ananias, along with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property, placing them in a similar position to Barnabas outwardly. However, the narrative quickly reveals a contrast in their motives and actions. This sets up a deliberate comparison between genuine generosity and deceptive imitation.

5:2. Ananias kept back part of the proceeds while presenting the gift as if it were the full amount, with Sapphira's knowledge. The issue was not that he retained a portion, but that he sought to deceive others about his level of sacrifice. This reveals a desire for recognition without true surrender.

5:3. Peter confronts Ananias, identifying Satan as the one who filled his heart to lie to the Holy Spirit. This highlights the spiritual seriousness of the act—it was not merely a social deception but a spiritual one. The early church understood that sin within the community was ultimately against God Himself.

5:4. Peter clarifies that the property and its proceeds were under Ananias's control, meaning he was not obligated to give all of it. The sin, therefore, was not withholding but lying about it. By stating that Ananias had not lied to man but to God, Peter affirms the deity of the Holy Spirit and the gravity of dishonesty before Him.

5:5. Upon hearing these words, Ananias falls down and dies, demonstrating immediate divine judgment. This response underscores the holiness of God and the seriousness of sin within His church. The result is great fear among those who hear about it, reflecting a renewed awareness of God's presence.

5:6. Young men come forward to wrap up Ananias's body and carry him out for burial. The swift action emphasizes the finality and seriousness of the judgment. It also reflects the cultural practices of the time regarding burial.

5:7. About three hours later, Sapphira enters, unaware of what has happened to her husband. This delay sets the stage for her own opportunity to respond truthfully. It also highlights that each person is individually accountable before God.

5:8. Peter gives Sapphira the chance to tell the truth by asking about the amount received for the land. She repeats the same falsehood, confirming her participation in the deception. This moment shows that the sin was deliberate and not accidental.

5:9. Peter confronts her, pointing out that she and Ananias had agreed to test the Spirit of the Lord. Testing God in this way reflects a lack of reverence and an attempt to manipulate appearances within the community. The consequence she faces mirrors that of her husband.

5:10. Sapphira falls down and dies immediately, reinforcing the seriousness of the offense and the consistency of God's judgment. The young men again carry out the burial, showing the swift and sobering nature of the event. This serves as a warning to the entire community.

5:11. Great fear comes upon the whole church and all who hear of these events. This fear is not merely terror but a reverent awareness of God's holiness and authority. The event reinforces the importance of integrity, sincerity, and genuine devotion within the people of God.

Guide Discussion

Leader Note: You do not need to cover every question. Use the questions that best help your group engage with the passage.

1. **Good for Students.** What did Ananias and Sapphira do wrong in this passage?
2. **Discuss.** Why do you think they were tempted to lie, and what does that reveal about their hearts?
3. **Deeper Dive.** In what ways might people today be tempted to appear more generous or spiritual than they really are, and what are the dangers of that?

Teaching Toolbox Tip

Passages like Acts 2–5 are meant to create tension. The generosity of the early church is inspiring, but it should also feel a little uncomfortable. Most of us don't naturally live this way, and that's part of the point.

Instead of rushing past that discomfort, help your group acknowledge it. Let them wrestle with the gap between what they see in Scripture and what they experience in their own lives.

If you don't name the tension, people may either:

- admire the passage without applying it
- or dismiss it as unrealistic

Your job is to bring it into the open and let the Spirit use it to challenge and shape hearts.

Optional Activity (5 min)

Choose one of the following activities if time allows.

Option 1: Open Hands, Real Steps

Transition from Passage 4: “These two examples force us to ask an important question—not just what generosity looks like, but what’s really going on in our own hearts.”

Time: 5 minutes

Supplies: None (optional: index cards)

Instructions

Say: We’ve seen that generosity isn’t just an idea; it’s something the early church actually lived out in real, tangible ways.

Then ask:

- **What is one area of your life where it’s hardest for you to be generous?**

Provide some examples to kickstart their reflection:

- money
- time
- attention
- possessions
- forgiveness

Give them 30 seconds to think.

Ask:

- **What would it look like to take one small step of generosity in that area this week?**

Final Question

- **What’s one specific action you can take this week to live more open-handedly?**

Have them write their answer on an index card or put a task/reminder in their phone for this week.

Option 2: Song Reflection – “The Family of God”

Transition from Passage 2: “Before we move on, let’s take a moment to reflect on what it means to truly live open-handedly before God in Christian community.”

Time: 5–6 minutes

Supplies: Index Cards

Instructions

Play the song as a group (or read a portion of the lyrics). Have members write down what stands out to them as the song plays.

Then ask 1-2 of the questions below:

- What does it actually mean to be part of the “family of God”?
- How should being part of that family shape the way we treat one another?
- Where do you see our church living this out well—and where can we grow?

Final Takeaway and Prayer

After discussion concludes, read the takeaway statement:

Generosity flows from a heart transformed by the gospel and reveals whether we truly trust God with what He has given us.

Either pray something like the guide below, or invite someone in the group to close in prayer.

As you lead your group in prayer, give thanks to God for both His spiritual and material blessings. Pray for members to have generous hearts. Ask God to use their generosity to advance the spread of the gospel and to enable the church to minister to fellow brothers and sisters with desperate needs.