



One Heart, One Soul

Kicking It Off

If you had to describe what "being part of a family" means in three words, what words would you choose?

Read

Acts 4:23-37

Summary

You know how some workplaces say "we're like a family here," but it doesn't really mean anything? Real family is different. Real family pays for dinner without keeping score. Real family tells the kids "this is your house" even though the parents pay the mortgage. Real family shows up when things get hard, even when it costs something.

That's what the early church was supposed to be, and honestly, that's what church is still supposed to be.

In Acts 4, Peter and John had just been arrested for healing someone. Arrested for doing something good. When they got released, they went straight to their church community and told everyone what happened. The church's response wasn't to pray that God would destroy their enemies or fix the government. They prayed for boldness to keep doing what they were doing. They basically said, "God, give us the courage to keep sharing the good news, even if it gets us in trouble again."

And then God showed up. The building shook. They were filled with the Spirit. And they kept preaching.

From that, the community became incredibly generous with each other. People sold property and gave the money to help whoever needed it. But here's what's important, nobody made them do it. There was no guilt trip, no fundraising campaign. They did it because they loved each other like family. When you really love people, sharing what you have isn't a burden. It's a joy.

You don't calculate percentages when you buy your kid an ice cream cone. You don't keep a ledger when you help out a family member who's struggling. That's what family does.

You don't have to be generous. You get to be generous. When you understand how much God has given you, giving to your church family stops feeling like an obligation and starts feeling like the most natural thing in the world.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. The early church prayed for boldness to keep sharing their faith rather than asking God to remove their opposition. When you face resistance or difficulty in living out your faith, what do you tend to pray for?
3. Sharing testimony isn't limited to dramatic conversion stories but includes remembering what God has done throughout your life. What is one way God has shown up for you that you haven't shared with others recently?
4. The believers in Acts shared their possessions freely because they saw each other as family, not strangers. What would it look like for you to treat the people in your church community more like family members than acquaintances?
5. There's a difference between giving out of obligation and giving out of joy. When you think about generosity, whether with your time, resources, or attention, which motivation tends to drive you more?
6. The early church focused on proclaiming Jesus rather than pursuing political power or societal change as their primary mission. How do you personally navigate the tension between engaging with the world's problems and keeping the gospel central?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"The early church was not praying destruction against their enemies. It was praying for boldness. The early church understood the enemies have a place. They're not condoning their evil. They're not condoning what Pilate did, what Herod did. What they're saying is even in their evil, God's perfect and predestined plan was accomplished."

"It bothers me when I see churches be political. What that is proclaiming is that politics will save you. Wrong. My Jesus will save you. I don't pray for a better emperor than Nero. I pray that Jesus comes home, that he comes back. I pray that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven, that his kingdom come, not man's kingdom."

"You don't have to give money to the church. You do not have to. You get to. When you are in a family, there is joy in being generous. When you know someone and you know they're going through a hard time, do you have to give them a gift? No. And I think this is the problem of a materialistic, consumeristic society: we make it so transactional, but that's not the heart of what it means to be in community."

"Worship is inherently extravagant. Worship is inherently costly. We understand this when it comes to family. Family is beautiful when the family is there when it gets hard, when things are difficult. It costs a lot to be family, and yet it's worth it because there's love, because that's what God has wired us to be: his church, a community that learns that extravagant worship is a way to respond to God with our best, our first fruits."

Sermon Notes

Acts 4:23-37

²³ When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ²⁵ who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

"Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?

²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed'—

²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. ²⁹ And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

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.

Outline

1. One Voice in Prayer (v. 23-31)

- a. Peter and John, released from the Sanhedrin, go to their friends (the church) and share their testimony of what God had done
- b. The church is meant to be a place of sharing testimony, not just conversion stories but what God is doing and has done
- c. The Israelites' repeated failures came from forgetting what God had done for them
- d. Their unified prayer (homothumadon, "together") focuses on God, not the problem: "Sovereign Lord, who made heaven and earth..."
- e. They don't pray for destruction of enemies but for boldness to speak (v. 29): "Grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness"
- f. They understood enemies play a purpose in God's plan, as with Jesus' arrest and crucifixion
- g. God's way of winning is through resurrection power, not overpowering force
- h. Result: the place shook, they were filled with the Spirit, and continued preaching boldly (v. 31)
- i. The early church didn't pray for political change; they prayed for God's kingdom to come and boldness to proclaim the gospel

2. One Heart in Community (v. 32-35)

- a. "One heart and one soul," no one claimed possessions as their own but shared everything in common (v. 32)
- b. This generosity would be crazy for strangers but makes sense for family
- c. Family illustration: telling children "this is your house," paying for meals together without keeping score
- d. The giving wasn't compulsory; it was a response to the Spirit's work and love for one another
- e. What mattered wasn't the generosity itself but what God had done, the miracle of Peter and John being freed
- f. Budget doesn't dictate how miraculous God is; He provides what is needed for His will
- g. Distinction: You don't have to give; you get to give
- h. The early church was devoted to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers (not to giving as a requirement)
- i. Generosity comes in response to what God has done, not as obligation

3. One Example of Grace (v. 36-37)

- a. Joseph, called Barnabas ("son of encouragement"), a Levite from Cyprus
- b. Sold a field and laid the money at the apostles' feet, no strings attached
- c. His giving was extravagant worship, not transactional or obligatory

- d. Parallel examples: the widow's two mites (Mark 12), Mary's expensive perfume (John 12)
- e. Cain vs. Abel: The difference wasn't what they offered but their heart posture; Abel gave in worship, Cain gave from obligation
- f. True worship is inherently extravagant and costly
- g. When filled with the Spirit and understanding God's grace, the response is generous love for family
- Conclusion: We aren't required to be generous; we get to be generous to one another

Notes

What does it mean to be family? Not in the watered down, corporate sense where every workplace claims to be a "family," but in the truest, most costly sense of the word. This question sits at the heart of what the early church was and what the church today is called to be.

When we look at Acts 4:23-37, we encounter a community that operated in ways that seem almost foreign to our individualistic culture. They prayed with one voice. They shared everything in common. They sold land and laid the proceeds at the apostles' feet. To modern ears, this sounds radical, perhaps even reckless. But understanding why they did this changes everything about how we think about church, community, and generosity.

The scene opens with Peter and John returning from a traumatic encounter. They had healed a man who couldn't walk, doing so in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit. For this act of compassion, they were arrested and questioned by the Sanhedrin, a council of seventy men plus the high priest. The absurdity is striking: they were in trouble for doing something good.

Luke, the author of Acts, draws a deliberate parallel here. Jesus himself was arrested for doing ministry, for healing people, for teaching the word of God. He was murdered for it. Now his followers face the same pattern. The Sanhedrin wanted to silence them, but because the crowds had witnessed the miracle, they released Peter and John with threats instead.

Where did Peter and John go when they were released? They went to their friends, and their friends were the newly formed church. These weren't just casual acquaintances or fellow club members. This was a community of about 5,000 people who had come to proclaim Jesus as Lord.

What happened next reveals something essential about how the church is meant to function. Peter and John shared their testimony. They told the community what God

had done. They recounted how they were surrounded, threatened, and yet freed by God's intervention.

This practice of sharing testimony isn't reserved for dramatic conversion stories. Testimony encompasses what God is doing in your life right now, what He has done in the past, and how He has shown up in moments when you expected the worst. The Israelites repeatedly fell into trouble precisely because they forgot to remember what God had done for them. He saved them from Egypt, yet they kept forgetting. They turned to other gods because they lost sight of their own story with the true God.

The church is meant to be a place of sharing, where we remind one another of God's faithfulness. This sharing then naturally leads somewhere: to prayer.

The prayer recorded in Acts 4 is remarkable for what it doesn't contain. When Peter and John's friends heard about the threats from the Sanhedrin, they didn't pray for the destruction of their enemies. They didn't ask God to strike down the religious leaders who had threatened them. Instead, they prayed for boldness.

"Sovereign Lord," they began, "who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them." The prayer starts with God, not with the problem. They acknowledged that enemies existed, that Pontius Pilate and Herod had conspired against Jesus, that the Sanhedrin threatened them now. But their interpretation of these events was striking: all of this was part of God's predestined plan.

This doesn't mean they condoned evil. Nobody was saying what Pilate or Herod did was good. But they recognized that even in human wickedness, God's perfect plan was accomplished. Jesus had taught them this. He submitted himself to an evil government because he knew God could use even that for His purposes. The resurrection proved it.

So the early church learned a different kind of warfare. Their battle was spiritual, and their weapon was boldness to speak truth. Their prayer in verse 29 was simple: "Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness."

And God answered. The place shook. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. And they continued to preach.

A question arises here: weren't they already filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? Why this apparent refilling? The text doesn't explain the mechanics, but it reports what happened. They were filled again. The earth shook. And from this filling came continued boldness to preach.

What the early church did not do is equally important. They didn't pray for a better emperor. They didn't organize political campaigns. They didn't tie their hopes to

legislation or governmental reform. They prayed for Jesus to return, for God's kingdom to come, for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

This creates tension for us. We live in a world full of causes, protests, and political movements. Churches on both the progressive and conservative sides get pulled into these currents. But the early church was called to something different: proclaiming the gospel with boldness. Full stop. Setting captives free in the name of Jesus. The Gentiles will rage, as David wrote in the Psalms. The world will be a mess. Only God can redeem it. Only God can do the miracle.

The unity in prayer produced something else: unity in life. "The full number of those who believed were of one heart and one soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common."

This is where things get uncomfortable. They sold their possessions and gave the proceeds to the apostles for distribution. It sounds like a requirement, like some kind of mandatory communal living. But that reading misses the point entirely.

You would never do this for a stranger. Selling your house and giving the money to someone you barely know would be foolish. But for family? That changes the calculation completely.

Think about how parents treat their children. When a family buys a house, good parents tell their kids, "This is your house. This is our home." The mortgage might be in one name, but the home belongs to everyone. When the family goes out to eat, nobody expects the children to Venmo their parents afterward. There's joy in providing for those you love.

The early church wasn't operating under compulsion. They were operating out of love. The Spirit had filled them, and that filling produced a love for one another that made generosity natural. It wasn't "I have to write another check." It was "I get to share with my family."

Luke gives us a specific example in Joseph, whom the apostles called Barnabas, meaning "son of encouragement." He was a Levite from Cyprus who owned a field. He sold it and laid the money at the apostles' feet.

Notice what Barnabas didn't do. He didn't attach conditions. He didn't tell the apostles how to spend it. He didn't demand an accounting. It was a gift, freely given, for the community to use as needed. This is what generosity looks like when it flows from a heart transformed by the Spirit rather than a mind calculating obligations.

Too often, giving in churches comes with strings attached. That's the way strangers operate, keeping everything transactional. Family operates differently. When you give a gift to someone you love, you don't dictate what they do with it. You give, and you trust, and you find joy in the giving itself.

Jesus noticed this dynamic when a poor widow put two small coins into the temple treasury. He said she gave more than all the wealthy donors because she gave out of her poverty. The point wasn't about percentages or amounts. The point was about heart posture. She was giving as an act of worship, saying to God, "It's all for you."

Mary demonstrated the same thing when she broke an expensive bottle of perfume, worth a year's wages, and anointed Jesus' feet. Judas objected that the money could have helped the poor. But Jesus defended her. What she did was worship, and worship is inherently extravagant.

This brings us to the story of Cain and Abel. Both brothers brought offerings to God. Abel's was accepted; Cain's was rejected. The difference wasn't in what they offered but in how they offered it. Abel gave his best, his first fruits, from a heart of worship. Cain gave out of obligation, from a heart that Hebrews later describes as full of jealousy and selfishness.

Here is the distinction that matters: you don't have to give to the church. There is no law requiring it. God won't strike you down if you keep your wallet closed. But you get to give. When the Spirit fills you, when you understand how much God has given to you, when you grasp that Jesus died to make you new and that all your past, present, and future has been covered by his grace, then generosity becomes a response rather than a requirement.

The early church wasn't devoted to giving. They were devoted to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Generosity wasn't on the list of requirements. It flowed naturally from everything else. When you're devoted to the right things, when you're filled with the Spirit, when you love your church family the way you love your own household, then giving becomes joy rather than burden.

This isn't a fundraising appeal. It's an invitation to understand what community really means. When the Spirit shakes your world, when you realize how much you've been given, the only natural response is to hold your possessions loosely and share them freely. Not because you have to. Because you get to. Because that's what family does.

Blog

The apostles had just walked out of the highest court in Israel. Peter and John had been arrested, interrogated, threatened, and commanded to stop speaking about Jesus. The Sanhedrin made their position clear: silence or suffer. Now these two men return to their community. We might expect fear. We might expect strategic planning sessions or heated debates about how to respond. Instead, we find prayer, generosity, and witness. The early church's response to opposition shows us something essential about what it means to be the people of God.

Luke records this scene in Acts 4:23-37, and he wants us to see three interconnected realities: united prayer that seeks boldness rather than safety, radical community that breaks the grip of possessiveness, and generous living that testifies to resurrection life. These aren't separate programs to implement. They flow from the same source, the Spirit's work creating a new kind of people.

When Peter and John returned, they went "to their own people." That phrase carries weight. This is family language. The believers weren't just a religious club that happened to meet in the same place. They were family. Peter and John came home. And they came home with full transparency, reporting everything the religious leaders had said, the threats, the warnings, the commands to stop. No spinning. No minimizing. Just honest accounting of what they faced.

The community's response was immediate and unified. Luke uses a distinctive Greek word, *homothumadon*, meaning "with one mind" or "in one accord." This word appears repeatedly throughout Acts to describe the early church. It points to something deeper than organizational unity. These believers weren't just praying at the same time. They were praying as one. Corporate prayer, not parallel private prayers happening in the same room.

The content of their prayer reveals their theological instincts. They didn't rush to their requests. They started with who God is. "Sovereign Lord," they prayed, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them." Before they mentioned Herod, Pilate, or the Sanhedrin, they established who was actually in charge of the universe. The Greek word they used for "Sovereign Lord" is *despota*, which refers to absolute authority, the kind of power that admits no rivals. Their prayer was God-centered, not problem-centered. They oriented themselves to reality before addressing their circumstances.

Then they turned to Scripture. They quoted Psalm 2, a royal psalm about opposition to God's chosen king. Four categories of enemies appear: nations, peoples, kings, and rulers. Two targets of conspiracy: the Lord and his Anointed One. The early

church didn't interpret their circumstances through their feelings. They let Scripture frame their experience.

They saw Psalm 2 fulfilled in the crucifixion of Jesus. Herod represents the kings. Pontius Pilate represents the rulers. The Roman soldiers represent the nations. The crowds crying "Crucify him" represent the peoples. The conspiracy against God's Anointed found its ultimate expression in the cross. These enemies "did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen." Human conspiracy accomplished God's purpose. The most wicked act in history, the murder of God's Son, was simultaneously the free choice of sinful humans and the predetermined plan of God. This isn't fatalism, which would remove human responsibility. It isn't a view that removes God's sovereignty. It's biblical mystery. Human beings remain fully responsible for their choices, and God remains fully sovereign over all events.

This matters for how we face opposition. If God's sovereignty extends even to the crucifixion, then no circumstance in our lives falls outside his purposes. The Sanhedrin thought they were in control. They weren't. They were unwitting servants of a purpose far greater than their opposition. They didn't pray for the threats to stop. They didn't pray for protection from harm. They didn't pray for the Sanhedrin's hearts to change. They prayed for boldness. The Greek word is *parresia*, which originally referred to the right of citizens to speak freely in the public assembly. In the New Testament, it means bold, confident, fearless speech. The early church prayed to continue the very activity that got them arrested.

This should challenge how we pray under pressure. Do we pray for escape or for boldness? Do we pray for comfort or for courage? "Lord, make us bold" is a far more dangerous prayer than "Lord, make them stop." But it's the prayer the early church prayed. God answered. The place was shaken. Everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit. They spoke the word of God boldly. Notice what happened: God didn't silence the Sanhedrin. He empowered the church. Prayer didn't change the situation. It changed the people who prayed, aligning them with God's purposes.

Luke then shows us what this Spirit-filled community looked like in everyday life. "All the believers were one in heart and mind." Heart in biblical thought refers to the center of will and intention. Soul refers to the seat of life and identity. This is comprehensive unity, not just intellectual agreement but deep solidarity. They weren't uniform in opinion. The church included fishermen and tax collectors, former Pharisees and former Zealots. They disagreed on many things. But they were united at the deepest level. One heart. One soul. One Lord.

This unity expressed itself in transformed possessiveness. "No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had." Now we

need to read carefully here. This is not the abolition of private property. The believers still had possessions. The text says so. What changed was their attitude toward those possessions. Ownership remained. Possessiveness was broken. This matters because the passage has been misused to support mandatory wealth redistribution or socialist economics. But notice the key features. The giving was voluntary. No compulsion is mentioned. Private property still existed (as Acts 5:4 explicitly confirms). Distribution happened according to need, not equality. The motivation was spiritual transformation, not political ideology. This is generosity flowing from resurrection life, not a system imposed from outside.

The result was noticeable. "There were no needy persons among them." This echoes an Old Testament promise. Deuteronomy 15:4 says there "need be no poor people among you" if Israel fully obeys the Lord. What Israel failed to achieve under the law, the Spirit-filled church achieved under grace. The church became the community in which God's ancient purposes found fulfillment.

There's a connection between this community life and evangelistic power. Luke tells us the apostles testified to the resurrection "with great power" and "God's grace was powerfully at work in them all." Unity and generosity didn't distract from witness. They strengthened it. A divided church undermines its message. A selfish church contradicts its gospel. But a community marked by supernatural unity and sacrificial generosity becomes a living argument for the resurrection. People see how we live together and ask, "What makes them like this?" The answer is a risen Lord.

Luke closes this section by introducing us to a man named Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus. The apostles called him Barnabas, which means "Son of Encouragement." He must have been so consistently encouraging that encouragement became his identity. The apostles saw something in him that prompted a new name.

Barnabas sold a field he owned, brought the money, and put it at the apostles' feet for distribution. This is the first appearance of Barnabas in Acts, and his actions match his name. He embodies what Spirit-filled community looks like in one person.

Luke places this positive example here intentionally. Immediately after comes the tragic story of Ananias and Sapphira, who also sold property and brought money to the apostles, but lied about the amount. The contrast is sharp. Barnabas gave freely and fully. Ananias and Sapphira pretended to give fully while holding back. One is the work of the Spirit. The other is lying to the Spirit.

So what does all this mean for us? Three questions press in.

First, how do we pray under pressure? Do we start with our problems or with God's sovereignty? Do we pray for removal of obstacles or for grace to overcome them?

Second, what is our relationship to our possessions? Not whether we own things (of course we do), but whether our things own us. Is our grip on our security so tight that we cannot respond to need when we see it?

Third, what would the church call us? Barnabas earned his name through consistent character. What would our community name us based on what they consistently see?

The watching world asks why. Why do these people pray with such confidence? Why do they share so freely? Why do they care for one another so deeply? The answer isn't better organization. It's a risen Lord whose Spirit creates community that cannot be explained any other way. One heart. One soul. One Lord. May it be so among us.