Small Group Guide

The Hope We Have: Unity, Humility, and Generosity

Based on Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-37

Overview

This week's sermon explored the radical economic life of the early church and what it means for followers of Jesus today. Through Acts 2 and Acts 4, we see that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit produced three defining qualities in the early believers: unity, humility, and generosity. These qualities were not incidental to their witness -- they were central to it. As we navigate a world of growing economic inequality, this passage invites us to ask what kind of people we must be, and what the gospel demands of our wallets.

Key Takeaways

- The early church's unity, humility, and generosity were not the result of compatible personalities -- they were the direct fruit of the Holy Spirit working powerfully among them.
- A biblical understanding of the gospel should fundamentally reshape how we think about money and possessions. Everything we have comes from God and belongs to God.
- Generosity in the early church was voluntary, but it was also normative. From time to time, believers sold land and property and gave the proceeds to meet the needs of others. It was radical, but it was not unusual.
- The early church's generosity was directly connected to their evangelistic witness. People on the outside were drawn to their message in part because they could see the message was real.
- Giving to the local church, when that church is accountable and faithful, is a powerful and biblical way of meeting practical needs and funding the mission of God.

Discussion Questions

Opening

1. Pastor Joel's sermon opened with some striking statistics about wealth inequality in Canada. What was your initial emotional reaction as you heard those numbers? Did anything surprise you?
2. Pastor Joel described Halloween as a moment when his neighbourhood had an unusual sense of unity -- everyone outside, everyone kind, everyone sharing. Can you think of a moment in your own life when you experienced that kind of unexpected community? What made it feel different from normal?

Digging into the Text

3. Acts 4:32 says that all the believers were one in heart and mind, and that no one claimed that any of their possessions was their own. In your own words, why do you think those two things -- unity and a loose grip on possessions -- are mentioned together in the same breath?
4. The sermon made the point that the early church's unity was not the result of easy-going personalities or a lack of conflict. It was Spirit-given. What is the difference between a community that gets along because conflict is avoided and a community that has genuine, Spirit-led unity? What does the second one actually look like?
5. The passage in Acts 4 describes believers selling land and houses and laying the proceeds at the Apostles' feet. Bible scholars note that this was voluntary, not mandated, but it was also regular and normative. What do you think made people willing to do something that radical? What would need to be true about your own heart for you to consider something like that?
6. The sermon drew a direct line between the early church's generosity and their evangelistic effectiveness. Acts 2:47 says they enjoyed the favor of all the people, and the Lord kept adding to their number daily. Do you think there is a connection between how the church handles money and how attractive its message is to outsiders? Why or why not?

Getting Personal

7. Pastor Joel identified three qualities of a fully devoted follower of Christ from this passage: unity, humility, and generosity. Which of the three do you find most natural? Which one do you find most difficult? Be honest.
8. The sermon challenged the common way we think about what we own: "I worked hard, I earned it, therefore it is mine." Have you ever caught yourself thinking this way? How does the gospel push back on that assumption?
9. Pastor Joel said: "The gospel has to invade our way of thinking about our money and property and possessions. Otherwise, we haven't understood the gospel yet." That is a strong statement. Do you agree? What would it look like for the gospel to truly invade your financial thinking?
10. The sermon noted that those with assets have a particular responsibility in the kingdom of God -- that the mission of God has historically been funded disproportionately by those with more. How do you respond to that idea? Does it feel fair? Does it sound biblical?

Practical Reflection

11. Randy Alcorn's list from the sermon includes giving generously, regularly, deliberately, voluntarily, sacrificially, cheerfully, worshipfully, proportionately, and quietly. Looking at that list honestly, which of those words describes your current giving practice? Which ones feel like a stretch?
12. The sermon closed with a direct question: Is the Holy Spirit asking you to give in a specific or significant way? Have you ever brought that question honestly before God? What makes it hard to ask? How do you send the Spirit leading you today?

Practical Applications

The following are concrete steps your Small Group members can take in the coming week and beyond.

This week:

- Set aside 15 minutes to review your last three months of personal spending. Ask yourself honestly: does the way I spend my money reflect the values of the gospel, or the values of the surrounding culture?

- Pray specifically and honestly about your giving. Ask the Holy Spirit whether he is prompting you toward greater generosity, and sit with that question rather than rushing past it.
- If you do not currently give to your local church or any ministry, consider making a first gift this week. The practice of giving matters before the amount does.

As a group:

- Consider identifying a specific need -- within your church community or in your broader neighbourhood -- that your group could meet together. Pooling resources as a Small Group is a tangible way to practice the kind of communal generosity described in Acts 4.
- Discuss as a group whether you would be willing to share your general financial values and practices with one another in a future session. Accountability around money is rare in Christian community, but it is deeply biblical.

Longer term:

- If financial margin is a barrier to generosity for you, consider attending the biblical financial literacy course mentioned in the sermon on November 29th at 1:00pm. Learning to budget and steward money well is not separate from generosity -- it is the foundation of it.
- Read Randy Alcorn's book, "Money, Possessions, and Eternity" as a group or individually. It provides a thorough and challenging biblical framework for thinking about wealth and giving.

Closing Prayer Prompts

Close your group time by praying together. You may want to pray specifically for:

- Softened hearts toward the economic needs of others, both locally and globally
- The Holy Spirit to produce genuine unity, humility, and generosity in your group and your church
- Wisdom and courage to make financial decisions that reflect the gospel rather than the values of the surrounding culture
- Any group members who are themselves in a season of financial hardship, that they would experience the generosity of the community around them

(*Scripture references*: *Acts* 2:42-47, *Acts* 4:32-37, *Romans* 10:15, 1 *Corinthians* 11:23-26)