

Session 5

THE CHURCH SACRIFICES TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER

*Luke 6:30-31;
Acts 4:32-35; Philippians 2:1-4*

Memory Verse

“Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them.”

– LUKE 6:31, CSB



The Church Sacrifices to Serve One Another

THEOLOGICAL THEME: A healthy and faithful church is radically generous, and that requires individual sacrifice.

CALL TO ACTION: What can you give up this week to be able to give to others? Maybe it's that latte. Maybe it's that subscription. Or maybe you need to be humble enough to talk to someone about getting help for yourself.

If you've ever participated in the phenomenon known as "retail therapy"—buying something for yourself when you feel stressed or sad in an attempt to feel happy—you know it can be fun to get new things. But does that happy feeling last?

Probably not, according to Nature Communications. In 2017, they conducted a study that found that giving back to people could make you happier than you would be if you spent money on yourself. Maybe we have "retail therapy" backward. In their study, fifty participants were given one hundred dollars over several weeks. Half the participants received instructions to spend it on themselves and half received instructions to buy things for other people. You know who reported higher levels of happiness at the end? The ones who bought things for other people.¹

Could giving actually be . . . good for you?

The Cleveland Clinic says it can! Their studies found when you give back to others your brain can secrete serotonin, dopamine, and oxytocin—"feel good" chemicals." Not only can giving make you happy, but it can also lower your blood pressure, help you live longer, reduce your stress levels, and combat feelings of depression.²

Even more interestingly, God has been weaving the idea of generosity into the fabric of how He defines right living for millennia. His Old Testament law made sure that the most vulnerable in society were taken care of in many intentional ways, and in the New Testament, Jesus's teachings promote taking care of and loving those around us. In the book of Acts, we get a front-row look at how the early church attempted to put the teachings of Jesus into action by providing for their community.

In our study today, we will look at how this foundational principle of taking care of your neighbor manifested itself in the early church and consider ways we can put it into practice in our own community of faith today.

 Are you surprised by the fact that giving back is good for you? Do you think our society supports this idea or rejects it?

 What does it mean to serve your neighbor?

Session Summary

Jesus modeled and taught radical generosity. One of the ways we live this out is by taking care of others, even when it means sacrifice. This is modeled in Acts 4, where we see that the church was unified in making sure everyone was taken care of. They collectively sacrificed, resulting in no one being needy and the church thriving.

Paul's teaching on humility in Philippians also supports this idea of radical generosity. When we humbly put others' needs before our own, we make the sacrifices needed to help care for our community and those in need around us. And when we do, our church body and our relationships with God and others are all better for it.

Today, we'll explore the question: What does the Bible say about generosity, and what would it look like for me to be radically generous?

1. The Golden Rule (Luke 6:30-31)

 What is the Golden Rule? How did you learn it?

 The Golden Rule is part of Jesus's teaching about loving our enemies. How do you think He meant it to be followed? What does this tell us about sacrificing for others?

Many of us are familiar with the Golden Rule: “Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them” (v. 31). Did you know that rabbis (religious teachers) in Jesus's day had a similar teaching? We know it today as the Silver Rule, and it is, in some ways, the inverse of the golden rule. The Silver Rule taught that you should not do to others what you would not want done to yourself.

Do you see the difference there?

We can excel at following the Silver Rule by staying in our own lane and minding our own business. If we aren't doing things to our neighbors that we don't want done to ourselves, we're in the clear. Jesus, however, had a higher standard for His followers.

Whereas the Silver Rule focuses on what we should not do, the Golden Rule focuses on what we should do; it requires action and intentionality. We should do to others what we'd want done for us. This profound teaching comes nestled among Jesus's countercultural instruction about loving our enemies. If someone takes our coat, Jesus said to throw in our shirt also (Luke 6:29). If someone asks for something, Jesus taught that we should give it without expecting to get it back or to receive reciprocity (Luke 6:30,34-35). Jesus didn't just teach generosity; He taught radical generosity that defied human nature.

Jesus has been the most radically generous Person, giving His life for us even though we don't deserve it (Romans 5:8). We are called to be similarly generous.

But providing for those in our community isn't exclusively a New Testament idea. God's law in the Old Testament also made many provisions for the vulnerable in society: women, widows, foreigners, the poor and needy, servants, innocents. Jesus's New Testament teaching reiterated the heart behind those foundational laws, giving us simple guidelines to live by.

 Application: How do you observe the Golden Rule?

2. All Things in Common (Acts 4:32-35)

 What does it mean for a body of believers to be “of one heart and mind” (v. 32)?

 How would you describe the church community's action in this passage?

Jesus taught that we should do for others what we want done for us and that we are to be known by our love. In Acts 4, we get a front-row look at how the early church put these ideas into practice. We live in a very different culture today, and while our church's living out this generous lifestyle won't look the same as it did for these first Christians, we can learn much from their example.

Notice what verse 32 describes: unity. The New Testament consistently teaches unity among bodies of believers (1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Colossians 3:14). Luke records that all the believers “were of one heart and mind” (v. 32). They were united in intention and action.

Does living in unity mean we will always agree and be aligned on everything? No, it doesn't, but it does mean we agree on the most important things. In the case of the Acts 4 example, the church agreed that people were more important than things. When we're fully bought into the Golden Rule and Jesus's teachings, that's where we stand too.

Look at their radical generosity. They weren't selfish with their possessions; they shared and gave as others had needs; and "there was not a needy person among them" (v. 34). What an astounding reality! Remember that this body of believers likely included many who had traveled to Jerusalem from far away and converted after hearing Peter's Pentecost sermon.³ There were likely some big tangible needs among them, including places to live and sleep and everyday necessities. They were dedicated to taking care of one another.

We should note also that this wasn't done perfectly (Acts 5). We won't be perfectly generous either, but when we live by the standards Jesus taught, we will take radical generosity seriously.

When we hold this posture of radical generosity, we maintain that every good thing we have is a gift from God. That raise you got last month, the salary you work hard to earn, the side hustle that's thriving, your comfortable house, your car, the food in your fridge—these blessings are all from God, and He expects us to steward them well. Being a good steward doesn't necessarily mean selling all your stuff or your house to give to the needy, but it does require intentional sacrifice.

Hebrews addresses this idea too:

"And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

- Hebrews 13:16, NIV

Note the assumption in this verse that sharing with others well requires sacrifices that are pleasing to God. Did you see the sacrifices the believers made in Acts 4? Some laid down their pride in their own importance and wealth while others made material sacrifice of goods, houses, and lands, but all these sacrifices were made for the common good. If every church truly lived this way, think of how much better the world would be!

The result of living with radical generosity isn't just that no one is needy, it's that the church thrives. Verse 33 says "the apostles were giving testimony" in the name of Jesus "with great power," living out Jesus's command in Acts 1:8. A faithful, generous church is a thriving church, one where the truth of the gospel is proclaimed and God is glorified.

❓ Application: How might our group take care of our community as the early church did?

3. Christian Humility (Philippians 2:1-4)

❓ What does it mean to be humble?

❓ What does it mean to “consider others as more important than yourselves” (v. 3)?

This passage teaches an important call in the Christian life: humility. When we are humble, we don't boast because we have a right understanding of our status: We are sinners saved by the grace of God. This type of humility affects how we live daily, how we interact with others, and how we approach giving and generosity.

Note the instructions Paul gave here:

“Make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose” (v. 2): Paul instructed the church to be united, just like we saw in Acts 4.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit” (v. 3): How are we living? Are we doing things only for ourselves and to fulfill our desires? Paul teaches us to do nothing this way. Note that Paul specifies “selfish ambition.” Not all ambition is bad, and this doesn't mean we should never advocate for ourselves, but it does mean we don't have a selfish heart posture.

“In humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others” (vv. 3-4): This type of humility requires radical generosity. When everyone is looking

out for the interests of others, and no one is solely looking out for themselves, everyone is taken care of.

This is easier said than done and is never executed perfectly. This unity wasn't even executed perfectly in the early church, whose example shows us what a healthy Christian community looks like. Still, this radical generosity is the goal we should all strive for. When we exercise the Christian humility Paul wrote about here, we live like people are more important than things, and we are radically, sacrificially generous.

? Application: What are some examples of Christians around you putting your interests above their own? How has this impacted you?

Conclusion

We live in a society that is all about more. To quote John Mark Comer in his book *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, we live in “a society built around the twin gods of accumulation and accomplishment.”²⁴ But at what point do we realize living this way is getting in the way of our biblical call to radical generosity? At what point do we put our foot down and say enough is enough? We would likely all say we think people are more important than things, but do our lifestyles reflect that belief?

Today, let's recognize those twin gods for what they are: idols standing in the way of right living the way God intended and designed. When we recognize this, we are prompted to consider what kind of sacrifices we're making today for the sake of others.

? How would you sum up the idea of radical generosity? We explored what this looked like in the early church, but what does this look like for believers in 2025?

❓ What are some intentional things you could do this week to put the Golden Rule into action in your life?

❓ What are some simple things we can do as a group to be more radically generous with those who have needs?

Memorize

“Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them.”

- Luke 6:31, CSB

References

¹Soyoung Q. Park et al., “A Neural Link between Generosity and Happiness,” *Nature Communications* 8, (2017): 1-10, <https://doi.org/10.1038/ncomms15964>; Renée Onque, “An Act of Generosity Is One of the ‘Quickest and Easiest Ways to Get Happier’—Here’s Why,” Health and Wellness, CNBC.com, February 28, 2024, <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/02/28/heres-the-science-behind-why-you-feel-happier-after-being-generous.html>.

²“Why Giving Is Good for Your Health,” Mental Health, Cleveland Clinic, December 7, 2022, <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/why-giving-is-good-for-your-health>.

³David Guzik, “Acts 4 – Peter and John Face the Sanhedrin,” Enduring Word, accessed April 8, 2025, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/acts-4/>.

⁴John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2019), 147.