

# Session 6

## GATHERING + GROUPS

*March 12, 2023*

### Memory Verse

*Now the entire group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common.*

– ACTS 4:32, CSB



## Gathering + Groups

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** The early church provided a model for future bodies of believers. They continuously gathered and shared with one another while they engaged in prayer and learned through the apostles teaching, all under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Think about the children's game "Follow the Leader." It can be such a fun game with a good leader. The goal is to do whatever the leader does and follow him or her with enthusiasm. Invariably there will be someone in the line who grumbles about what is happening or how the leader is leading. But the more involved everyone is the more fun is had.

As you have grown, you have likely changed in your views on leadership. Whether you read books on the subject, watch TED talks, or just learn from life experiences, you have developed your own opinions about what makes a good leader. The reality is everyone is a leader in some way, even if you are not "the boss." We all have people who follow us. Therefore, we are all leaders, and we all have influence.

Today we are talking about how the early church set an example we should follow today. They weren't perfect and had some struggles, but we can relate to what they went through because we deal with similar issues and our God is always the same. He gave instructions to help us be the leaders we are called to be as well as part of the body of believers we call the church. When we focus on our own role it will strengthen the body as whole.

 What was your favorite part of "Follow the Leader" as a kid?

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**?** Where do you get your ideas of good leadership today?

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**?** Do you often think of yourself as a leader? Why or why not?

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## Session Summary

One of the first identifying marks of the early body of believers is they were unified. Unity does not mean the same in relation to culture, race, or even thoughts. These were not cookie cutter Christians, but they were a group of people who agreed on the important things and supported one another in many ways. This kind of unity is a direct result of the work of the Holy Spirit and affected everything that they did.

Another identifying characteristic of the early church was their generosity. Because of the great grace and power of God they experienced, they freely shared their resources and there was no one who lacked. This generosity was indicative of how God was working in and through them.

After this time, Paul also wrote specific instructions to Christians on how they should treat leaders that still apply to us today. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we should respect and encourage our leaders. We should esteem them highly in love for their work and commitment. Above all else we need to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks. These things set us apart and prepare us to do the will of God.

### 1. A Church Unified (Acts 4:32-33)

This group of believers demonstrated the right attitude toward each other as well as their possessions. They placed value on the right things and were more concerned with people than material things. This is a challenging concept for many in today's world. Our culture tends to value money, wealth, and accumulating things to the detriment of the people around us. It seems as if the divide between the haves and have nots is growing ever wider. Consider what it would look like if our community placed more value on people than we do on things.



How do you see our culture valuing material things over people?

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This group was described as having one heart and mind. This does not mean that they were alike in race, culture, or religious background. Rather, this unity was evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit among them because a wide variety of people came together around one goal and with one heart. Only God can unite people in such a powerful way.

This work of the Holy Spirit also led the people to share everything in common. This means they were not possessive and stingy over their material things. They recognized God owned everything, and they were just stewards of their resources. Because God had worked powerfully in their lives, they found it easy to share all their things in common. This view of material possessions enables us to hold them more loosely so that we can use them for God's purposes just as the early church did.




What does it mean to you to regard your possessions as belonging to God? What would that look like in your daily life?

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Having your priorities in order is key to a life of faith. The early church was an example of what happens when God is first, people are second, and material things fall after that. They experienced great power and great grace as they gave witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If you wonder why you aren't seeing great power and grace in your life, it could be because of mixed up priorities.


There are several key takeaways we see in the early church. First, they were unified and had all things in common. They had their priorities in the right place and kept God first and foremost. They made it their mission and central focus to continually preach and testify about the resurrection of Jesus. When we get these things right, we will also enjoy the grace of God among us. Scripture tells us God's grace was on them all. The early church enjoyed the favor of God, and it was evident everywhere.

 Application: Where do you need to testify or share about what Jesus has done in your life?

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## 2. A Church that Serves (Acts 4:34-37)


These verses indicate not only was the early church generous with their possessions, but they were also generous with their homes and land. To sell all they had and use it for each other displayed radical generosity. God does not always demand or expect us to do the same, but He does call us to be willing to do whatever He asks. We should have the same attitude about our possessions. We will see our possessions differently when we acknowledge that God owns it all. When we are surrendered to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to guide our generosity, we will make choices and decisions in keeping with His will.

 What stands out most to you regarding the level of generosity displayed in the early church? How do you think you would respond if called to do the same?

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The fact that many of the believers had moved from other places affected the way the early church worked. These people had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost, and when they responded to the coming of the Holy Spirit and the gospel message, they became part of the church and stayed. For those possessing nothing but what they had brought with them, the need was great.

But no one was forced into generosity—all gave freely as they felt led. Likewise, when we live under the authority and leadership of the Holy Spirit, we will know when and how He wants us to display generosity. The very generosity that set apart the church would also be taken advantage of when men began to listen to themselves more than they listened to the Spirit of God.

 How would our lives and our world look different if we listened to the Holy Spirit more than we do to other people or ourselves?

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The broken world we live in will always have those who are looking for an angle they can distort and manipulate for their own profit just as happened in the early church. It is not our job to judge the hearts of other people. When we trust the Holy Spirit, we can rely on His discernment and guidance. This removes pressure for anything except what God tells us to do.

**?** Application: How does the example of the generosity and service of the early church inspire you to make changes in your own life?

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### 3. A Church that Supports (1 Thessalonians 5:12-18)

First Thessalonians gives further guidance on healthy practices for the church. These are things all Christians should be actively engaged in doing. Most Christians are part of the congregation of the church and not staff leaders, but it is crucial for all people to recognize their responsibility to lead out in faith where they have influence and opportunity.


Paul called believers to highly esteem and respect the leaders of their church body. These verses describe these leaders in three ways. First, these are leaders who stand out by their service. Second, Paul these leaders “lead you in the Lord” (v. 12). These leaders act as shepherds over the sheep of God. Third, Paul described these leaders as those who admonish. To admonish means to caution or reprove gently. We all need those who love us enough to point out where we need to adjust in life. These acts of leadership are done in love and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the good of the body of Christ.

**?** Who stands out to you as a leader in one or more of these ways?

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We are called to esteem leaders in love and not only when they do as we desire. Too many people in the church spend time grumbling and complaining about leadership due to trivial things. Scripture is clear that we should esteem leaders highly and give love and recognition because of their service for the Lord. When we get this right, we will be at


peace among ourselves. Peace within the body of Christ is crucial to the effectiveness of our ministry. The lost world watches to see how Christians relate to one another and if we are truly different as we claim to be. When we love and esteem our leaders while putting away arguments and discord, we show the world what a difference Christ makes in and through us.

 **How have you seen peace or the absence of peace in the church make a difference in the effectiveness of the church? How have you contributed to this either way?**

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How the church relates to its leaders is important, but Paul also gave instructions on dealing with difficult people. Where there are groups of people, there will be some who are difficult. As believers, our approach to others should always be patient and loving. We can practice patience and love as we warn against behaviors and attitudes that are counterproductive to what God is doing in the church. We are also to encourage and exhort to build up those with weaker faith. True Christianity is shown by its ability to love and help difficult people. The church is not a gathering place for perfect people. We all have issues that can be challenging, and we all need to be encouraged and built up in our faith at different times. The goal is to pursue what is good for all and not return evil for evil.

Lastly, Paul focused on other specifics the church should be engaged in. When these things happen, the body will flourish, and the witness of the church will be built up. Paul said to rejoice always. Our joy is not in circumstances but in our God. Our circumstances will change but our God never does. We are also called to pray without ceasing. We should live our days with a conversation flowing between us and God. There will also be times we stop and bow our heads and focus in on the conversation differently. Both are vital. Finally, Paul exhorted his readers to give thanks in all circumstances. We don't have to give thanks for all things but in all things. We can give thanks even when our situation is difficult because we know we are not alone, and we can trust God even when we don't understand what is happening. Living this way isn't easy but by the power of the Holy Spirit we can walk in God's will for us in Christ Jesus.

 Application: What do you need to do differently because of what we discussed today? How will you seek God's help and guidance in this?


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## Conclusion

The early church is a great example for the church today. They were unified and of one mind. We are called to focus and agree on the things that matter most over what has the potential to cause divisions. It is easy to be distracted by our own desires and agendas but putting the work of the Lord first adds to the health of the church.

Another characteristic of this body of believers is the way they served and loved one another. This group of people shared everything that they had and considered their possessions as belonging to God first. This perspective on possessions makes it possible to share and give generously. In a world that teaches us to seek after money and material things, it is counter cultural to think in terms of radical generosity. Following God's way instead of the world's makes all the difference.

Providing further guidance on how to live as the church, in 1 Thessalonians Paul said to esteem and love our leaders. We are to support and encourage them because of their service for the Lord. We are also told to love, encourage, and warn those we fellowship with in the body of Christ. The key is to do this all out of love and with patience. Finally, Paul called believers to rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all things. These practices are foundational to living the Christian life and fulfilling the Will of God. When we get this right, the church will flourish and God will be glorified.

 What will you do to help promote unity in the body this week?

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❓ How has God challenged your views on generosity through today's study?

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❓ Who can you pursue a gospel conversation with this week? How might you use the principles we've discussed this week to do so?

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## Here's How to Become a Christ-Follower:

*Read the following verses and ask after each one: "What does this say to me?"*

- **All have sinned:** Romans 3:23 & 1 John 1:8
- **The wages of sin:** Romans 6:23 & John 3:18
- **But while we were sinners, salvation was provided:** Romans 5:8
- **Become a Christ-follower:** Romans 10:9-10 Confess and Believe

## Accepting Christ is Just the Beginning:

Next Steps:

- Publicly profess your faith by being baptized (Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 3:21; Romans 6:4).
- Join a church which follows the Bible, where you can grow in your faith through prayer, Bible study and fellowship with other Christians.
- Get involved in groups for encouragement and accountability.
- Begin a daily personal worship experience with God where you study the Bible and pray.
- Share with others what Jesus has done for you. Tell your story (Romans 10:14; Matthew 28:19-20).
- Begin to live for God (Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; James 1:19-27).



# FOR NEXT WEEK

## Awe and Admiration

### Main Passages

- Acts 5:1-11

### Session Outline

1. Holding Back (Acts 5:1-2)
2. Honest Confrontation (Acts 5:3-6)
3. Hard Consequences (Acts 5:7-11)

### Memorize

*Now the entire group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common.*

- Acts 4:32, CSB