

Generous Grace, Generous Community

(Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37)

What do you think is the **GREATEST** miracle seen in the book of Acts?

- *Instantly healing a 40-year-old who was born crippled?*, which we saw in chap 3?
- *Accurately Prophesying the future?*, which we'll see in chapter 11? . . . or
- *Raising the dead?!*, which we will see in chapters 9 and 20.

All of these are *beyond* impressive!

And yet, personally, I think the most stunning miracle in Acts might be a conversion . . . the stunning conversion of . . . the Wallet!

Not a wallet itself, of course, but the **heart of the wallet owner**.

Jesus said, "*Where your treasure is, there is your heart.*" (Matt 6:21, Luke 12:34)

So our use of money reveals the state of our soul.

Charles Spurgeon wrote that in some Christians,

*" . . . the last part of their nature that ever gets sanctified is their **POCKETS**."*

But Jesus made far **stronger** statements about money. He said,

"No one can serve two masters . . . You cannot serve both God AND money." (Luke 16:13)

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." (Luke 18:25)

Why is it so difficult?

Because money is POWER. Power to control. To get *what* we want, *when* we want it!
And the more power we have, the harder it is to let go of and submit to God.

But until we grant that Jesus is Lord of our lives – including our wallets – we cannot enter the kingdom of God.

If you're fairly new to Grace Bible church, don't worry, we do not routinely rant about money like televangelists do.

And our is a passage this morning is much more about MAJESTY than money.

It's a passage about the **Majestic Unity** of ***Generous Community***.

There is almost nothing more attractive on the face of the earth than a community which sacrificially SHARES with one another from the **heart** – not from coercion.

Acts 4:33 says, **{DP}**

*"With great **power** the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great GRACE was on all of them."*

Grace is the bestowal of underserved favour/an unearned gift. Our passage is clear: The Christian **motivation** to share is a *RESPONSE* to God **Grace**, not force.

So I've titled today's Message, **{DP}** *Generous Grace, Generous Community*.

And with a passage like this, I know many valid QUESTIONS are swirling in your mind:

- Is this passage teaching *Communism*, and that private property is sinful?
- I can't bear the burden of *helping everyone?!* To whom am I primarily responsible?
- I've heard of so many charities abusing money; can we really entrust money to others?

Our passage answers ALL of these Questions!

So the only practical way I could think to OUTLINE our passage, is by straightforward answers to these Questions: **{DP}**

- **WHAT & WHEN** of Generous Community
- **WHO** of Generous Community?
- **HOW** of Generous Community?
- **WHY** of Generous Community? (all the Qs are crucial, but esp. motivation, Why?)

Because this is **no typical** community, and **no typical** grace,
I think the passage's main idea could be summed up like this: **{DPa}**
*God's Resurrection Grace **Unites** Us in Generous Community*

(Acts 4:32 begins) "Now the entire group of those who believed were of ONE heart and mind"

Let's now consider this community, & I pray, *copy* this community, Acts 4:32-37 (nearly identical to Acts 2:44-47, which we skipped previously, to consider together now).

WHAT & WHEN OF GENEROUS COMMUNITY {DP}

Chapter 4 Verse 31 sums up the previous context, of Prayer after Persecution:

*When they had prayed . . . they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God **boldly**.*

In the verses that now follow, we learn . . .

The Spirit-filled church is not only *courageous* in proclaiming Jesus,
The Spirit-filled church is *generous* in living like Jesus.

Because it is not to be missed, Luke states this twice: **{DP}**

Acts 2:44-45 "Now **ALL** the believers were together and held **ALL** things in common. They sold their possessions & property and distributed the proceeds to **ALL**, as any had need."

Acts 4:33 – "No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common."

But what does this mean?! And *not* mean?!

We need to cover the "not mean" so that we get the correct meaning.

But I'll address what it does "not mean" at a brisk pace, the so we can **dwel**l where the passage dwells: grace-based generosity.

So let's begin with **{DP}** the elephant in the room: Is this communism?

What is Communism? To answer that, we start with what is Capitalism: [1 min definitions hat!]

Capitalism?: simplified **{DPa}**

*An economic system advocating that most goods & services should be owned privately, by individuals or business partners/shareholders, who are free to determine **where to invest**, **what to produce** and **how to price** the exchange of goods & services. [FREE Market; LIMITED Government regulation]*

Socialism?: **{DPb}**

*An economic system advocating that most means of production, distribution & pricing should be **regulated & owned** by the State. [BIG Government; Heavily Regulated Market/Industry, Big Taxes]*

Bernie Sanders *almost* beat Hillary Clinton as the Democrat party's presidential candidate to go against Republican Trump. Bernie Sanders is a socialist advocating a **90%** tax rate on high income. [*coerced* giving]

Socialism is the half-way house, the necessary pathway to . . .

Communism: **{DPc}**

*An political-economic system in which all means of production (industry) & even most property is **publicly** owned.*

[theoretically level/'public', communism is actually Totalitarian Government, controlling everything – all production & distribution, pricing]

George Orwell wrote a satirical story about Communist Russia called *Animal Farm*. Someone has to lead the people – I mean, the animals! – so the **PIGS** assume command & issue a decree – *All animals are equal* – but then qualify it for their own interests: **{DPc}**

"All animals are equal, but some animals are MORE EQUAL than others!"

Is Acts describing communism? No. Here's a few reasons why. **{DP}**

1] The Bible does not formally endorse any man-made economic "system".

All economic systems are flawed & corrupt, because *people* are flawed & corrupt.

John Steinbeck, a famous 20th century author, shared this insight: **{DPa}**

*"It has always seemed strange to me... The things we admire in men – kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling – are the [accompaniments] of failure in our system. **{DPb}***

*And those traits we detest – sharpness, greed, covetousness, meanness, egotism and self-interest – are the traits of success. **{DPc}***

*While men admire the **quality** of the first, they love the **produce** of the second."*

Sad but true.

The founder of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, said: **{DPb}**

"Communism's failure is its failure to produce a selfless man"

Therefore, communism's *totalitarian* power enables near total corruption by government.

No man-made economic "system" can eliminate **greed!**

No man-made system brings about the **generosity** described in Acts! **{DP}**

2] Communism is a FORCED, once-for-all divestment of private property.

Acts describes the FREE-WILL, occasional selling of private property, as needed.

Notice the repeated phrase, "AS ANY HAD NEED" . . . (2:45, 4:35) **{DPa}**

*"They sold their possessions & property and distributed the proceeds to all, **as any had need.**"*

*" . . . those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of what was sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet. This was then distributed to each person **as any had need**"*

As well, the verb tenses describe NOT once-for-all actions, but ongoing, habitual actions.

In English, "*I played tennis*" could mean "*I tried tennis, gave it a shot once*".

So to express habitual action, we'd add a phrase, like "*I played tennis every Friday*".

But in Greek, ongoing action is 'built into' the tense & mood of these verbs . . .

Not just the *distributing*, but the *selling* & *bringing* was also ongoing – **not** once for all.

This is why the NIV is **{DPb}** quite helpful in translating like this:

"FROM TIME TO TIME those who owned land or houses sold them"

The extra phrase 'as any had need', makes it doubly clear this is *periodic acts of charity*.

Because the popular trend today, especially in media, is anti-capitalism/pro-communism, we need to realise Christian's in the NT had private property. Paul wrote to Philemon **{DP}**

*To Philemon our dear friend & coworker . . . and to the church that meets in **YOUR** home.*

Paul did not say, "*and to the church that meets in what formerly was your home.*"

But the immediate context helps us most, since Acts 4 rolls straight into Acts 5, where Peter asked Ananias **{DP}**

*Wasn't [the land] **YOURS** while you possessed it?*

*And after it was sold, wasn't it at **YOUR DISPOSAL**?*

The land before the sale and the proceeds after the sale belonged to Ananias and were *at his disposal . . . his choice*.

So giving of Christians is a **FREE WILL offering**, not a coerced action!

Ananias had issues, which we will consider next week.

For now we note Christians in the NT Church still had private property/private ownership!

It was their mindset **{DPa}** that made the difference:

"No one CLAIMED that any of his possessions was his own"

It's like when James wrote: **{DPb}**

"CONSIDER it joy when you encounter various trials"

Trials are not joyful, so we are called to view them as joyful, because of the outcome trials bring – building our character.

Likewise, in Acts 4, no one claimed or viewed their possessions as their own, because of the outcome of blessing others, meeting the real needs of others.

→ So the *What & When* of Generous Community is

FREE WILL giving, AS needs arose . . . a marvel to behold & to experience.

WHO OF GENEROUS COMMUNITY? {DP} NEED TO SPEND TIME ON THIS ONE

Acts 2:44 – Now all the believers were together

Act 4:32 – Now the entire group of those who believed were of one heart & mind,

The **Church** . . . those who in 2:41-42,

repented & believed, were baptised, added to membership, devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

New Covenant community of committed members . . . Not only is this clear, it is crucial. Acts is all about the unstoppable good news of God's kingdom.

The church is the *primary community* where "*God's kingdom comes, God's will be done on earth as it is in Heaven*" . . .

- In Heaven God's will is done, His glory is untainted.
- In Heaven there is *no persistent, unrepentant sin*.
(why we have membership to demarcate God's community; church discipline to protect it)
- In Heaven, there are *no unmet needs, no poverty!*

The Church should be a foretaste of God's eternal kingdom, a bit of 'heaven on earth'!... a community of committed members who know & love each other, with spiritual and material care.

Kent Hughes put it this way: **{DPa}**

Communism says "What's yours is everyone's."

Christianity says, "What's mine is yours."

To 'sharpen' that, I'd add an extra word to each line,: **{DPa}**

Communism says "What's yours is everyone's, STRANGER."

Christianity says, "What's mine is yours, BROTHER / SISTER / MEMBER" . . . in the family of God.

This answers the Question of as far as *sacrificial care*, who is my **PRIMARY** responsibility?

We all have **limitations** of capacity, including financial capacities.

I'd like us think about the primary "**commitments**" that you have or might have:

- You make vows & form a *marriage covenant* with your **spouse**, to protect & provide, to love & cherish above all others. This commitment usually spreads quickly to **kids**. And the biblical mandate to "*Honour your father & mother*" has *financial* responsibilities. In the context of a needy widowed mother, Paul tells Timothy, Christian children who do not assist her in her need are worse than unbelievers!!!
- Likewise, in the *new covenant community*, the **church**, there is a *membership commitment* when joining, to look after the family of God in this local assembly . . . since we cannot care for all Christians in Logan.
- A further sphere of **lesser** degree of "commitment" is the world.
We are called to *love* the world, but we are not *in covenant* with the unbelieving world.

This is important, given the growing focus on "Social Justice" **{DP}** in churches today, mercy ministry to the wounded world - which has both positives & negatives.

The **positives** of Social Justice include:

- trying to minimise overspending of millions of dollars on flashy church facilities, and
- instead using resources to show the love of Christ, to have compassion to world.

The compassionate *gift of healing* was being shared around Jerusalem, not *just* in church!

We do need to **care** for the world, firstly out of love, and secondly to overcome negative media bombardment that the church is full of hateful bigots.

One church, New Life Church in NSW, has helpfully outlined steps of ENGAGING the world:
Memorable Steps with 4 C's **{DP}** **Connect, Care, Communicate, Commit**

Connect: simply engaging the world, starting relationship: co-workers/neighbours/students

Care: as you get to know them, show care/be helpful in ways that you can:

Have them for a meal, offer them a lift, baby-sitting, advice when they ask.
In that advice, ask good Qs to get them thinking about foundations for life/ethics!

Right now my family is listening to a challenging audio book called **{DP}** *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, by Rosaria Butterfield.

Rosaria was extremely anti-Christian, but due to a series of meals with Christians, openly conversing about faith & life, she was soundly converted . . . and now uses her house for meals to 'care & share' Christ. **{DP}**

Communicate: is simply sharing the gospel. Often your testimony, God's story in your life, is quite helpful to personalise things.

Commit: is what we see throughout the Book of Acts, a call, an invitation to repent & trust in Jesus.

All 4 steps are not 'essential/sequential'!

In the lunchroom or on campus, you might have 1 great conversation about Jesus and invite someone to follow Him, with no "practical care" shown apart from the love of sharing the good news.

Or, all 4 of these steps could take place in one event, like ours 3-day Holiday Kids Club. *Connecting* with kids in the community, *Caring* for them with time, food, activities, *Communicating* the gospel in skits & small groups, then calling them & parents to *Commitment* to Jesus.

When we have outreach events, we plan to *inform* you on what sort of event it is, to help you know what to expect & also what the friends you're inviting should expect. a 1-C event, primarily Connect, BBQ? help non-Christians meet other Christians, hopefully learning you're not the only Christian who is a "*normal*", *thoughtful*, *thinking person*
a 2-C ministry is when practical care will be shown, like 'care packages' for Project 139 for pregnant women who let their children live, which, like a sharing a meal, can become a 3-C ministry if you get to communicate the good news while caring.
A 4-C event is like Kids Club, or a series I'm planning for Sept, "*I'd be Christian except*"

The **NEGATIVES** of the Christianised "Social Justice" movement include:

- Some "holistic" mercy ministries do not share the gospel. That's "*halfistic*", not holistic!
[Don Carson calls a failure share the gospel "practical atheism"]
- Displacing the primary priority of meeting needs in the church
- making churches & Christians in them feel guilty for not meeting the needs of the world: "*How can our church not \$ supporting "Rescue this or that overseas Human Trafficking" organisation?"* Or even the needs of Logan: "*How can you sleep at night if some people in Logan have no shelter?"*"

In Acts, the church met all the **church's** needs, **not** all of Jerusalem's needs . . .
never mind the world's needs!

The church offers the gospel - **JESUS** - as the ultimate solution to the world's problems.
But the church is primarily called to *CARE FOR* **Jesus' community** with its resources.

(Acts 4:34 says) "*There was not a needy person among THEM*" . . . **the church**.

No small accomplishment with many thousands already in the church!

Unlike today in Australia, there was no Centrelink in Rome in the 1st century, so one's *family* and one's *church* were truly the only 2 spheres of care/welfare.

And many Christians were **disowned** by family, kicked out of homes as they are today in many countries . . . making the local church the only sphere of care/welfare.

This is exactly what Jesus meant when He said in Mark 10,

*Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for My sake & for the gospel, who will not receive a hundred times more, **NOW AT THIS TIME** – houses, brothers & sisters, mothers and children, and fields – with persecutions*

This is being fulfilled in Acts 2 & 4 as the church sharing resources as the family of God! Likely most powerful **ATTRACTIVE FORCE** for the Gospel is a Church that is an internally Generous Community: Our passage says, (4:34a, 2:46-47)

“There was not a needy person among them

*They devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. **Every day** the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

Generous Christ-centred Community is *morally, spiritually* compelling, attractive. . . not mood lighting, trendy dress & snazzy speeches.

This is why Tertullian, a 2nd century convert to Christ from a pagan home, wrote to his still pagan friends:

*“See how they love **ONE ANOTHER!**”*

referring to Christian fellowship – koinonia – sharing.

Another 2nd century author, a pagan, named Lucian marvelled at Christian community, *“the willing self-sacrifice so **common** among them . . . they are all **BROTHERS.**”*

a **Family** that breaking down every barrier of class, gender, language, and race – as the gospel goes to the Gentile world later in the Book of Acts.

So the church is not to ignore the *bodily* needs of the lost,

But our primary calling is proclaiming Jesus as the *spiritual* need for the lost,
then caring for *practical + spiritual* needs of His church.

You'll see this better if I give a sneak-peek 'behind the scenes' into the network leadership meeting we had about choosing a passage for Luke Thomson to preach on for the *Compassion* ministry Sunday back in March . . . Compassion supporting *children in need*.

Not “churched kids”, but care administered **through** local churches, so with an additional goal of bringing them into church & bringing to gospel to families.

It was SO difficult pick a passage about caring for the poor outside the church. **Nearly every** NT passage we considered about practical mercy ministry focused *on the church!*

We settled on Galatians 6:10 **{DP}**

*“As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people,
especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”*

Even that passage still has the Biblical priority of caring for the church, but at least it specifies all people, the world!

You would not believe how many passages we considered, that when looking at the context, we had to say . . . "No, that's about the church."

Only occasionally in the NT a "brother" is a genetic/ethnic brother, like when Paul says, "The Israelites, my brothers, my kinsmen **according to the flesh**" (Romans 9:3-4a)
Often the context indicates clearly when it's genetic or ethnic brotherhood.

The **vast majority** of the time, "brother/sister" means Christian/fellow believer – spiritually adopted into the family of God.

Jesus set this pattern when his genetic family showed up, Mary & His half-brothers **{DP}**
Someone told Him, "Look, your mother & your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you!" Jesus replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Pointing His hand toward His **DISCIPLES**, He said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!"
Which is why Jesus said "You'll have 100 times more houses, brothers & sisters".

Matt 25 – the famous passage about sharing clothing/food/visits to prison – is the context of persecuted Christians. So when Jesus means Christians when He says, **{DPb}**
"Whatever you did these for the least of My brothers or sisters has done so for Me" (Mt 25:40)

Or James **{DPc}** If a brother or sister is lacks clothing & daily food & one of you says, "Go in peace, stay warm, be well fed," but you don't give them what the body needs, what good is that?!" (James 2:15)

If anyone has this world's goods and sees a FELLOW BELIEVER [lit., 'BROTHER'] in need, but withholds compassion from him – how can the love of God reside in that person? (1 Jn 3:17)

Again & again & again, the NT priorities care for the body of Christ.

I highly recommend a book called *The Mission of the Church* **{DP}** by Greg Gilbert & Kevin DeYoung. Subtitle: "Making sense of Social Justice, Shalom & the Great Commission."
2 Chapters alone are worth the price, a pretend conversation with a young zealous Bible College graduated and a seasoned inner city pastor.

A church has a *limited* budget & *limited* mercy ministries it can commit to. But individual Christians in a church are diverse in # & geography, and can connect locally in *many* avenues of community need where those individuals are burdened to care for the lost, forming connections/inviting them to witness the even *fuller love* of Christian community.

We're open to ideas – Cassie, the chappy here, still has unmet *practical & spiritual* needs
Please, speak with Kyosti, our Mission Coach, if you are interested in finding out more!

While we each of have particular burdens and diverse spiritual gifts,
The many ALL's in our passage, and viewing our "stuff" as for the common good, means
• **Giving is every member's ministry!** (to support all ministry & to provide mercy)
Particularly true for those blessed with earthly things, 1Timothy 6:18-19 **{DP}**
"Instruct those who are rich in the present age . . . to be rich in good works, to be **generous & willing to share.**"

Not forgetting the persecuted church overseas, not putting their needs lesser than the lost.
"Each of the disciples [in Europe], according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers & sisters who lived in Judea."

We have a Deacons Fund with the purpose of meeting urgent needs of our members.
 . . . which forms a nice transition to our next big Question . . .

We've just seen the WHO of Generous Community:
 The Church – generous in \$ resources *primarily* to the Jesus' family,
 generous with the *Gospel* to the world, sharing *some* \$ resources.

HOW OF GENEROSITY COMMUNITY {DP} THIS POINT IS MORE BRIEF, BUT CRUCIAL!

Q: I've heard of so many charities *abusing* money; can we really entrust money to others?

If the WHO Q focused on wise priorities about *Church* mercy money for the *world*.
 The HOW Q focuses on being wise in distributing Church mercy money within the *church*.

This is precisely why our passage emphasises of **oversight of resources**: {DP}

*They brought the proceeds of what was sold, and laid them at the **apostles' feet**. (4:35)*

*Barnabas . . . sold a field he owned, brought the money, & laid it at the **apostles' feet**. (4:37)*

By chapter 6, the task is **too big** for the apostles, so servants ("deacons" in Greek) are specifically chosen to take on this task. The deacons qualifications: {DPb}

*"men of **good reputation**, who are **full of the Spirit and wisdom**" (6:3)*

Whether the *apostles* in Acts 4, or *deacons* in Acts 6 (and today), the "How" of Generous Community is Centralised Oversight of resources by the **Spiritually mature**
 . . . for Accountability
 . . . and for Wisdom {DP}

1] for **Wisdom** (of priorities of allocation)

When dealing with multiple needs, wise prioritising is essential with limited finances.
 And tricky or heart-rending situations require the wisdom of Solomon to address well.

With simple needs, forum's like our member's Facebook page can be a great place to share quick needs & share stuff freely (we've given away a couch, a TV, & more on FB. You, too).

But when it comes to giving money, centralised giving is far better for a few reasons...

Laying finances at the apostle's feet allows **anonymous** giving, *protecting relationships* in the church!

- Preventing *manipulation* by those who give ("*now you owe me!*"), as well as
- Preventing *pestering* from those who want, and know who has given before!

("Hit up Barnabas, he's a soft touch!")

Long after the day, Luke tells us readers about Barnabas as a godly example of using wealth.
 But there's no indication the church at the time knew he sold a field to help others.

In Jane Austin's novel "Pride & Prejudice", a sad example of both *Pride & Prejudice* is the horrible clergyman, Mr. Collins {DP} who almost never talks about God but is always on about pleasing *Lady Catherine de Bourgh*, because he knows that she funds his ministry.
 He is always grovelling to her, at her bidding.

Whether clergy or laity, anonymous giving of mercy funds is a wise.

Unlike the ugly thing from *Pride & Prejudice*, it's a **beautiful** thing when members give leadership an envelope – either to help someone in particular, or any need as it arises – but insist on the gift anonymous.

But a second reason centralised oversight by the Spiritual Mature is important . . . {DP}

2] For **Accountability** (so that no one is taken advantage of)

Christians are still sinners.

And we will see trials & temptation surrounding money next week, again in chapter 6, then again chapter 8.

This is why the Bible has 'Resource RULES' to uphold fairness & prevent taking advantage. There are a fair few, but here are just a couple:

First, there is fairly common biblical benchmark of "Need": {DPa}

"The LOVE OF MONEY is a root of all kinds of evil . . .

But godliness with contentment is great gain!...

*If we have **FOOD** and **CLOTHING**, we will be content with these. (1 Tim 6:6-10)*

Brothers, sisters, we need to revive {DP} a Theology of "**Enough**"...a Theology of Contentment

Acts 2 and 4 say {DPb} "*there was not a NEEDY person among the believers.*"

It does not say "there no one had WANTS, desires, wishes."

When you reconsider the other passages we looked at {DP}

If a brother or sister is lacks CLOTHING and DAILY FOOD (James 2:15)

If you saw a brother HUNGRY & fed him, without SHELTER & took him in" without CLOTHES and clothed him" (Matt 25:37-38)

We see a *pattern* in the biblical benchmark of needs: sustenance–shelter/clothes/daily bread
Not an iPad Pro, a T1 internet connection, trendy clothes, a classy holiday,
& cold-press organic virgin olive oil.

Second Rule: {DP}

*"We gave you this rule: 'The one who is unwilling to work **SHALL NOT EAT**.'"*

We hear that some among you are idle & disruptive, not busy but busybodies. (2 Ths 3:10-11)

So even with basic needs – food!...

There is to be no indulging the lazy with lunch, no aiding & abetting free-loaders!

Character plays a clear factor in Resource Rules of distributing mercy funds.

As a brief homework lesson, read in 1 Tim 5 the character qualifications for a widow to go on the church dole . . . it's detailed! Just a sampling . . . she must be:

*A wife of one husband, if children: raised them well, known for good deeds – hospitable,
humble: washing the feet of believers, if she has children they must first contribute . . .*

Clearly, leaders are called know the life context, circumstances & character of members, so they administer mercy funds w/wise **accountability**.

We Transition from character accountability to the final Question . . . {DP}

WHY OF GENEROUS COMMUNITY

MOTIVATION IS MOST IMPORTANT!

Notice {DPa}

*The thief must steal no more, but **must do honest work** with his own hands,
Why?! No merely to “provide for himself”, but . . . {DPa}*

*So that he would have something to **share** with those in NEED.” (Eph 4:28)*

The Goal is not self-sufficiency, but to share & help others have sufficient.

Notice this is not “coercion” . . . like huge taxation or seizure of private property.

It’s quite the OPPOSITE: {DP}

Now as you excel in faith, speech, knowledge . . . excel also in this GRACE of giving [to the needy]. I am not saying this as a command . . .

*Each of you should give what you’ve decided in your heart—**not** reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a CHEERFUL giver. (2 Cor 8:7, 9:7)*

Free-will donating & freedom-of-amount, not set at 10%, and from a **glad heart!**

Rikus was saying in Grace Group this week,

It’s not as if we give God a percentage of our stuff.

God gives us 100%, everything! We just stewards of it.

Where does motivation come from for this marvel of generosity?

By nature . . . are we happy to share?

You parents . . . did you need to train your kids to share with their brother/sister . . . share with you?

The vast majority of children do not naturally say,

“Sister, Jesus said it is better to give than to receive.

You have with the toy, and you have the last piece of chocolate cake, too!”

NO! By nature we don’t share . . . we **grab!**

The motivation is not our nature, but **God’s Grace!**

The same passage in 2 Corinthians just quoted shows that JESUS led the way: {DP}

*For you know the GRACE of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though He was rich,
for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich. (2 Cor 8:9)*

What kind of poverty of His & riches for us? {DP}

Jesus, existing in the form of God,

did not CONSIDER equality with God

as something to be exploited/clung to

Instead He emptied Himself

by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity.

humbling Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.

He died to save us!

As we are to not VIEW/CLAIM our possessions as ours for self-gain . . .
Jesus did not CONSIDER His heavenly right as something to clutch for self-advantage.

WOW! This is our motivation.

So Paul says,

*"In any and all circumstances—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need –
I have learned the secret of being content"*

JESUS. *"I consider everything loss compared to the supreme value of knowing Jesus!"*

Church is a covenant community of committed members who know & love each other,
because we know the Jesus – we know HIS love, HIS grace! {DP}

God has shared everything with us, so we can share everything with each other.

Even more than dying for us, Jesus rose to life . . . this is a **Resurrection grace**:

*"they were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus,
and great GRACE was on all of them."*

IF Jesus is raised, and we will be raised . . . **this world is not our lasting home!**
Earthly stuff is not our lasting treasure.

Resurrection Grace is seen as I finish a few Bible verses I left the endings off of: {DP}

*"receive a hundred times more, now at this time—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and
children, and fields, with persecutions— and ETERNAL LIFE in the AGE TO COME. (Mk 10)*

*" . . . be rich in good works, to be **generous** & willing to share,
storing up treasure as a good foundation for the COMING AGE (1 Tim 6:19)*

God's perfect timing, just yesterday at The Gospel Coalition Women's Conference
(TGCW), Jen Wilkin said, {DP}

*"Those who know that good awaits them in heaven can afford to be **GENEROUS** on earth.
They lose nothing in the giving of what has been given to them"*

CLOSING QUESTIONS TO ASK OURSELVES:

- **"...and then what?"**

A helpful Q to non-Christians, but also helpful Q to ask ourselves about possessions.
'I'm getting a new...' 'And then what?' The only satisfying answer is RESURRECTION GLORY,
because of Resurrection Grace bestowed to us by Jesus, the first-fruits of the resurrection.

- OWN: How tightly I am clutching/clinging to this?
- BUY: How will this serve the gospel? How will this house, car, etc., bless others?
- NEED: We must to "Be real with each other about REAL needs." This takes humility.

And we need real relationship, fellowship for this . . .

Brothers & sisters asking the questions, and us giving honest answers.

Means we've got to build relationships & community on more than Sunday.
Grace groups, smaller groups, one on one.

- Like Barnabas, would you be called an a “son or daughter of encouragement” with how you use your resources?

Not just sharing \$...meals, time, counsel, skills, friendship.

Rosaria also uses her home for Christian hospitality, not just evangelism!
Whatever you are “rich” in, be generous with *that!*

Spiritual unity of generous community comes with being preoccupied with God’s gospel grace in Jesus, a resurrection grace.

*He is no fool, if he would choose
To give what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot loose!*

Let’s Surrender all to him.
[our closing song. I will pray as the musos come up]

CLOSING PRAYER