

<b>Series:</b> Heart of Worship	<b>Reference:</b> Acts 2:42–47 / Acts 4:32–37 / Acts 20:32–35	<b>Title:</b> The Giving Church	<b>Date:</b> 09.26.2021
<b>Website Writeup:</b> In this discussion of worship being out of an all encompassing gratitude toward God overflowing to others, we find grateful worship translates to giving community.			

### **COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES**

In this series we've centered our thoughts on this all-encompassing gratitude & love of God overflowing to others. Today we'll see - **grateful worship translates to giving community.**

In early Acts there were people gathered from every nation in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit falls on the Disciples who begin to speak in the languages of those present. But some thought they were drunk, so Peter addresses the crowd. "His sermon recorded in Acts 2 was his first & greatest. He closed saying, *"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord & Christ."* Then...*"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart & said to Peter & the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'"* So, he gave instructions...*"Repent & be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (v. 38).<sup>1</sup>

Thusly the Early Church was born as 3000 were added to their number that day up from 120! Three thousand people needing baptism, shepherding, teaching, care, etc. One pastor said one of the great days of ministry happened when several families professed Christ. As he drove home, he & his wife discussed the future. He recalls saying, "They mean a lot of joy & a lot of trouble." He was right, there are continuing joys along with long nights of counseling, conflict & disappointment. In Acts 2 these new believers were 3,000 bundles of joy & 3,000 accidents waiting to happen.<sup>2</sup> The church is messy joy, requiring time & resources over long periods by all its members!

Acts 2:42-47 continues to describe this Early Body of Christ...*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching & to fellowship, to the breaking of bread & to prayer. 43Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders & signs performed by the apostles. 44All the believers were together & had everything in common. 45They sold property & possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes & ate together with glad & sincere hearts, 47praising God & enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

The Early Church was in a pressure cooker. The external heat & pressure of society unified them, producing something incredible in a short time. Joy & difficulty at the same time. The Epistles of the NT outline those joys & problems which arose over time

<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Acts: The Church Afire](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 45.

<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Acts: The Church Afire](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 46.

in local churches. To be a part of it must've been exciting, everyone newly in Christ, the resurrection recently behind you. Apostles present. That pressure cooker forcing souls to rely on each other to survive. But as Christianity became normalized, the external heat & pressure dissipated for the Early Church. Possibly it was then we began to focus too much on internal pressures of relationships. A common external threat tends to make us overlook smaller internal difficulties.

The Church grew like wildfire under the Roman Empire through suffering Christ-like love for the first 4 centuries. Then Constantine, Emperor of Rome, converted either genuinely, or for political reasons as Christians became numerous. In 313<sup>ad</sup> Christianity is legalized in the Edict of Milan. Then in 381<sup>ad</sup> Christianity's declared the official religion of the Roman world & Christians get their first taste of 'power over' others, prompting some to think, "With Constantine on our side we can 'enforce' Christianity." Less than one year later in 382<sup>ad</sup>, the first non-Christian's put to death for heresy.

How quickly worldly notions of power diminish worshipful loving attitudes & behaviors which formerly cared for neighbors & drew them to Christ. Centuries of bloodshed follow, heretics are burned, unbelievers murdered, the Inquisition & Crusades, etc. God's kingdom, married with that of the world, always corrupts. The kingdom of the world's always about coercion, or threat of force. Whereas, the Kingdom of God's about repentance, grace, mercy & sacrificial love. Loving God, loving neighbors - giving of ourselves & resources out of gratitude of what we've been given in Christ!

History's formed us, not always well. As postmodern individualistic Americans, our culture hasn't always promoted communal care, giving & self-sacrifice. Instead of looking to Scripture for our model, churches have allowed themselves to be influenced. Therefore, local church is add on, not central. We've not been under pressure, threatened with loss of life, family, or livelihood due to our allegiance to Christ. So, we don't feel the need to rely on each other in God's calling.

That's changing. Soon, we may be forced to care for each other at greater levels as false crutches are taken away. Sensing the need for Christian community more, as we stand with Jesus to face the loss of jobs, opportunities, relationships, or worse. One friend, a lawyer, said after voicing his Christian convictions on certain issues, "What I just said to you would get me fired." True, but what looks bad may be opportunity for spiritual growth! To become that transformative community God intend's us to be, indicative of Jesus' words in Acts 20:35...*"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

Notice, as a result of Jesus, the Early Church devoted themselves to four simple things with great results...*the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread & prayer.* Practicing those four together, they had everything in common, selling property & possessions to give to anyone who had need, continuing to meet together openly in the temple courts, practicing communion, eating together with glad & sincere hearts, praising God & enjoying the favor of people. Coupled with the Gospel Message, that's attractive, powerful & convicting, evidenced by the response of their community.

Despite pressure & persecution, the result was, *'the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved'*. Daily, even though it could mean their life, livelihood, or the loss of relationships to identify with Christ & His Church. Think about how much you have to love God to worship Him openly in the courts identifying with your church family in that environment.

Before COVID & all the difficulties of politics, cultural shifts & people moving, we were transitioning to a larger church. Fast forward...this is a new church, with new people. Look around you, look at these people...do you know what they do, where they live, what's going on in their lives? Their names? Do you introduce yourself? This is your church, the past or future we can't control...what matters is now. These people. This place. This moment.

Do you know Moses & Nikki just had their fourth kid & we've been doing a meal train for them? Do you know Kat Sas's father was just diagnosed with Esophageal Cancer? Do you know, due to Covid, the Christies haven't been able to see their family in Australia? Or Tomoko's a single mom trying to make ends meet? Do you know the names of the kids in this church? That someone here played for the Phillies? Or some in this church are new to America & need a friend? Or are college students in need of input & prayer? And that some of us do Prison Ministry?

Have you logged enough hours with people for quality moments & memories; Sunday mornings, Community Groups, meals & parties in your homes. Time spent in difficulty translating to sweetness & joy. Wednesday night Community Group's a great opportunity to practice this devotion to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread & prayer. A place to eat, talk, pray, get to know one another, hear needs & possibly answer them. For the mature Christian secondary small disagreements don't divide - so we don't just leave. Wherever we go, there we are, bringing the same set of problems to a different group of people with the same set of problems. But still, sometimes we convince ourselves the grass is greener on the other side of the septic tank. Be committed to the messy joy of the local church God's planted you in to grow - make quantity time a priority with these people to gain quality time with them!

We've been talking for 3 weeks about grateful worship. The way we live reveals what we value most. God calls for worship of our entire being, what we do in life reflects our worship of Christ. Knowing *who* we are in Christ, means a growing gratitude & self-realization of our individual influence in the local church. What we've been given in Christ drives us to give more of our time, talent & treasure. According to the Scriptures, Church is greatest priority, because of what Christ has given. It's been said, the local church is the hope of the world, yet only as its members give of themselves out of grateful communal worship!

No one orders our schedules, or makes us desire Christian community. We can only teach & provide opportunity. But an awareness of what Jesus has done for us can birth desire to give & receive in community which is the greatest witness. You have profound opportunity to build a powerful witness to the outside community in how you interact &

give of yourself here. Consider, what's Jesus done for you, leading to the question, what do we do for Him by way of our selfless giving to others in our church?

The answer's here in Acts 2. Filled with the Holy Spirit, we give of ourselves in the four areas of teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread & prayer - grateful worshippers building a giving community. It's actually 'continually devoting' themselves to the Apostles teaching in the original language. Teaching which governs all other characteristics of the church in which the Spirit reigns. 'We marvel at professional basketball players who, already tired, step to the free throw line & seldom miss, often maintaining an 80 percent success rate. They make it look so easy because they have innate ability & continual devotion to their sport.'<sup>3</sup> A talent & practice. Our innate power's the Holy Spirit. Our continual devotion to the teaching of Scripture makes a great witness.

It's Colossians 3:16...*'let the word of Christ dwell in you richly'*. The backbone of Christian life is teaching. John Calvin preached twice on Sundays & every weekday on alternating weeks - about 10 sermons every two weeks! 1 Peter 2:2 says, *"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation."* You've witnessed a newborn craving moms milk. We should crave milk from our mother, the Church - hard to do in a non-reading, experience-oriented, frantically-busy culture of people who think occasional attendance is good enough. We want to be a *Bible-believing* church, to be a *Bible-living* church - so we show up, put in the hours, engage with teaching, carry, read & mark up our Bibles, since it's the Word of Life!

Fellowship's where teaching comes to life & to which they also continually devoted themselves. A kind which didn't exist before Pentecost. The Greek word, *Koinonia*, isn't even found in the Gospels. This is the first occurrence in the New Testament, denoting intense commonality. Every time the word's used in the NT, it denotes some kind of sharing with, or in something, with another. The Early Church foundation was this sense of giving, beyond sentimental feelings of oneness. *Koinonia's* practical & descriptive of unity of thought & action toward each other. True fellowship costs! If it doesn't, then we've not experienced the great joy which can come from giving of ourselves in community. True fellowship demands we give of ourselves intentionally to others in a myriad of ways in time, talent & treasure. All centered on our shared values & beliefs arising from teaching about Jesus as 1 John 1:3 states, *We proclaim to you what we have seen & heard, so that you also may have fellowship [koinonia] with us. And our fellowship [koinonia] is with the Father & with his Son, Jesus Christ.*

Worship is further expressed in the breaking of bread & prayer. In verse 46 the phrases 'broke bread' & 'ate together' are purposely separated. After eating together they'd take the remaining bread & wine, and remember Christ's death. Continually devoting themselves to keeping Christ & His atoning work constantly before them - daily lifting each other upward in solemn & joyous contemplation.<sup>4</sup> Through that, hearts of people were moved to worshipful prayer leading the church to relate to the world in a way God

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<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Acts: The Church Afire](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 47.

<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Acts: The Church Afire](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 50.

intended. Someone once said, “Where the Spirit reigns, believers relate to the Word - *teaching*. Where the Spirit reigns, believers relate to each other - *koinonia*. Where the Spirit reigns, believers relate to God - *worship*. Where the Spirit reigns, believers relate to the world - *evangelism*.”<sup>5</sup>

They were filled with awe, not just due to the miraculous, but more akin to what Isaiah 6:5 says... “*Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips!*” A grateful sense of awe in what Christ had done - a reaction from the fallen & frail, before a mighty God of love & grace! Which prompted them to meet with each other in the Temple Courts & in homes, practicing these things continually - very human & full of joy! The Church filled with the Holy Spirit devoted to teaching, fellowship & the worship of breaking bread & prayer, always results in evangelism.

Paul himself worked hard his whole life for the sake of the Gospel in the lives of others. In Acts 20:18-21 he said...*You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. <sup>19</sup>I served the Lord with great humility & with tears & in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. <sup>20</sup>You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly & from house to house. <sup>21</sup>I have declared to both Jews & Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance & have faith in our Lord Jesus.*

Paul’s example is one of commitment to giving his life & resources to the church for the sake of the Gospel in the lives of others. As Paul speaks to a group of leaders from the churches in Ephesus in Acts 20 (vv29-30), he reminds them, they’re to live as shepherds caring for the flocks need to which they’ve been entrusted. Paul stresses this commitment by citing his own model to them in vv31–35.

As he closes those thoughts, he reminds them of the words of Jesus in Acts 20:35 where he says...*‘In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’* Paul’s life is a viable example of grateful worship in giving to Jesus by giving to His church. He received from Jesus, so he gives back by giving of himself to others. *Jesus is Paul’s foundation & desire, owning Jesus words in Matthew 25:40... “... Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers & sisters of mine, you did for me.’*

Acts 4:32-37 gives more detail of this Early Church in saying...*All the believers were one in heart & mind*. Important point! People of Spirit & Truth. True worshippers - the kind God wants (John 4:23). Unity of conviction & heart. When you have those two things in community with others, you naturally care for & want to give to them. If not, you’re just arguing & playing the victim. Being of one heart & mind is the American churches hardest issue. Unity’s only centered on shared value & belief. There are competing voices out there which want to steal your joy, deconstruct conviction, inject doubt & dismantle the trust you have in the Scriptures, your church, its members & leadership.

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<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Acts: The Church Afire](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 50.

Disagreement on minor issues is fine, but the majors have long since been established. If you don't know where you stand on larger issues, explore the Scriptures in the context of Christian fellowship, being devoted to the teaching of sound leadership over centuries. Issues such as who Christ is, what the Church is, human sexuality, marriage, salvation, repentance, etc...because the teaching over the centuries has not & will not change on these things, since the Bible is God's inspired word. *2 Timothy 3:16 & 17...All Scripture is God-breathed & is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting & training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Many want their answers in soundbites on very complicated issues. When they don't get them, they run to those who tickle their ears, telling them what they want to hear. The truth is, we need to slow bake in the church, immersed in teaching, fellowship, breaking bread & prayer to fully understand some of the more complicated issues. Which takes humility & trust. As Francis Chan once said, *"When I disagree with something in God's Word, I just assume that I'm wrong."* Good principle. If you don't know your theology on an issue, align yourself with your Bible-believing church & accept it, until you understand it. Trust your church & the leadership God's put in place to lead & guide. Or you might end up like Paul to whom Jesus said in Ac 26:14, *"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads."* Like Paul, when we stop kicking & begin to trust the teaching of Jesus in the local church, we develop a heart to give of ourselves & resources, realizing we've been kicking against God the whole time!

Worshipful giving's outlined as we continue Acts 4:32-37...*No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. <sup>33</sup>With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all <sup>34</sup>that there were no needy persons among them.* The Spirit-filled local church, in gratitude of what they've received in Christ, give of themselves in joyous & practical ways. Time, talent & treasure, which takes intentionality. Believers gathering & living in communion with God produce a giving culture, a natural byproduct of living as grateful worshipful redeemed people. As the early church gathered consistently & with the intention of honoring God through their relationships, we're told *"the Lord added to their number day by day those were being saved"* (Acts 2:47). **Worship leads to giving community. By committing to giving out of the gratitude for what's been given, we keep God on the throne of our hearts, while living out His love with others.**

Self-evaluate & step up if need be...if someone added up the time, talent & treasure you give to church community, would it reveal a grateful worshipful heart of giving in ministry with others? If so, great! If not, maybe you need to reevaluate how you spend your time & resources, because we want to be a Bible-believing church, leading to a Bible-living church of worshipful souls witnessing to our world!

This is a great time to do this sermon, since we had a long meeting about all the needs in our church this Friday - maybe you can begin to fill them (Greeting, Announcements, Counting, Slides, Tech, Sound, Worship, Kids, Prayer, Hospitality, etc...)