

Everyone Doing Their Part

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Date: 06 November 2022

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[0 : 0 0] All right. Thank you so much. Again, as Jesse said, my name is Alan. I'm one of the pastors here, and it's just an absolute joy, pleasure, and honor that you did choose to be with us today. Yep, we are working through the book of Acts. Typically here at One Harbor, we work through entire books of the Bible and those kind of things. But this particular series, we're looking at Acts from a different angle. We're only going to focus on the first 10 chapters of the book of Acts, basically looking at what the early church looked like, what they did or did not do, and how did they act, and how did they respond to hardships, and of course, the results.

Last week in Jesse's sermon, we learned about the church experiencing tremendous growth and how the apostles were boldly proclaiming Jesus' resurrection, which promptly lands them in jail by the religious leaders. Go team. Their response was not to go out and form picket lines or riots and looting, those kind of things. No, their response was to earnestly pray that God would make them effective, which ends up with them being filled with the Holy Spirit, which led to more and more folks believing. It's just kind of like a backwards mentality of how we focused on today. And so today, we're going to read about how that feeling of the Holy Spirit impacted their own community, the church itself, the newly formed church. And to draw our viewpoint even more focused on one particular area of the church, which is specifically, we're going to zero in on the primary effects of being recipients of grace.

Grace, God's unmerited favor, the word used for the mind-blowing, generous love of God. When that comes into your life by the power of the Spirit, what should happen? I feel like this is probably the key word that separates Christianity from other religions. We receive grace when we should receive condemnation.

All other religions are strictly based on works or deeds, behaviors, etc. You must earn your way into the next life of glory. This concept of grace is becoming more and more countercultural in today's society too. Pretty much everything we do or accomplish is because we earned it. Blood, sweat, tears, tears, tears, hard work. We studied hard in school. We work hard at our job to earn a promotion or acceptance into our favorite college or university we're looking at going to. Let me ask you this, to start showing up late for work and expecting grace. See how long you keep your job.

I'll show you how much grace is around. So in this passage, Luke shines a light on a particular aspect of God's grace and the way it transforms us because God first loved us and extended his hand of grace and acceptance. We are transformed into a more generous, a more caring, kind of a less selfish, close-handed individual with our stuff. You know what I mean? And I think it's fair to say that this one area, it's probably a good way to kind of do a self-audit of how receptive you are being or responding to God's grace. If you're going to examine your life in one area to see how you were doing with sanctification or the journey to becoming more like Christ, there's reason to think this one is one of the biggest. How generous are you? So we're going to jump right into Acts 4. We're going to start in 32 and then we're going to read first six verses of chapter five. So now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power, the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles feet. And it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native of

[4 : 43] Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles feet. But a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property. And with his wife's knowledge, he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man, but to God. When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. Yeah. And great fear come upon all who heard it. The young man rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. Continuing in this passage, the same basically thing happens to his wife. She comes in thinking she's going to be slick and cool. And it didn't turn out so well. Yeah. We'll have a lot of time to get into the Ananias and Sapphira thing, but we'll get there in a little while. Just hang with me. We want to focus on the first aspect of this passage. This is the second time in this book that we get a summary statement like this. In chapter two, of Acts, after Pentecost, they were filled by the Holy Spirit. Same sort of thing. They experienced great generosity, taking care of one another. Now, you might be thinking, oh, here we go.

Another sermon on tithing. This is actually not a sermon on tithing, per se. But don't breathe a sigh of relief.

It will be both better and worse. Better because what we're going to talk about today is way bigger and more glorious than simply tithing. Worse because a sermon on tithing would probably be easier.

Come on. I think if you wrestle with what this text implies, you feel two things. You should feel total freedom and totally being bound. That in one sense, all things are yours and in another sense, nothing is. So let's not merely examine this passage of scripture. Let's have it examine us.

You know, we do believe this is the living word of God written to us. We just don't have the freedom to pick and choose. All of it applies to us. This passage starts by saying that they were of one heart and mind, but then goes on to talk about the generosity of one person. God's grace unifies and diversifies his church. This is a really cool feature of the gospel, by the way, and it's illustrated well in this passage. Some cultural traditions like to create a sense of community by stripping away individuality. The same concept of being on a team, you know? There's no I in team.

[8 : 06] Right, Liam? There you go. No, you and everyone else are formed into the same kind of thing. You function as a cohesive group to accomplish the goal of winning. More traditional cultures are like that.

The emphasis is on what makes us the same. Something to be said for that, for sure. But there are drawbacks because everyone is not the same. We're not the same. Other traditions, more modern and post-modern traditions, emphasize the particular uniqueness of people. Our culture is like that. We're all about helping people see how they are uniquely made, but often at the expense of any kind of universal principle which binds us together. It's not an overstatement to say that the gospel, more than any other framework or culture or way of thinking, brings the best of these together. There's unity and a kind of uniformity in the gospel, in the kingdom, but there's also difference, uniqueness. And you see that in this passage. The opening line, one heart and soul, togetherness, unity, the gift of Jesus makes us all a part of one body. And at the same time, the body has parts and different parts play their parts as they are made. We see this explained in other parts of the Bible, like 1 Corinthians, Romans.

Here, Luke doesn't explain it to you. He shows it to you. So everyone shares something which is significant. And we'll return to that in a moment. For now, there is a unifying feature to the church that everyone is generous. It's a universal feature. But some have more to share. Some are unique in that they have more means. Their higher status of greater wealth. In the Greco-Roman world, land was the principal source of wealth and social standing. And Luke zeroes in on that kind of person. Ultimately, he focuses on Barnabas. Now, why would Luke do that? Because rich people's gifts are more important? Of course not.

But keep in mind, Acts is a letter originally written to one person. Theophilus. One person was written to him. A person who has something unique about him. He's wealthy. He is a person of status.

Which is why many scholars think Luke chose to use Barnabas. I think Luke is being very pastoral here. He's showing Theophilus how he can use his particular gifts for God's glory. How one person can use his unique and particular gifts to do what everyone together was doing in their own way.

[10 : 59] Being generous. So God's grace is upon them. There is a togetherness. A universalizing of the church. Many people who now have one heart and one mind and yet their individual gifts have room to shine.

Now, there are many gifts that the Spirit gives and many things that all Christians are called to do because of grace. But Luke focuses on one in particular. And that is the responsibility Christians have to give and be generous with their possessions. Christians have to give and be generous with their possessions. Now, of all the things that characterize the early church, why emphasize this?

Great grace was upon them all and they shared their money and things. It could feel like Luke just picked, perhaps arbitrarily, one aspect of many. The sacrificial generosity of Christians towards one another. But again, if you read Luke, the Gospel of Luke, and Acts together, I think there's a reason to think Luke had a special reason on highlighting this. In Luke's Gospel, one of the main themes is the care Jesus has for the poor. He, perhaps more than the other Gospel writers, stresses this, that salvation is for the poor and needy and that the total impact of the Gospel is to show the wideness of God's mercy.

The kingdom should mean spiritual and physical good news for the poor. Furthermore, his Gospel emphasizes the strenuousness of self-denial, particularly underlying the call to resist the temptation to acquire riches.

It's pretty quiet. So Luke is teasing that out here in Acts. Look, the grace of God is among them.

[12 : 58] They're doing what Jesus said. They are fighting the temptation to acquire riches and they're taking care of the poor around them. And in showing you this, Luke highlights something that the entire Bible makes clear, which is that grace is fundamentally about generosity.

God's grace was on them. The Greek word, you may have heard it before, is charis. Now, what does charis really mean?

Like most words, it doesn't just mean one thing. Most words have a range of meaning. But in the New Testament, charis does a lot of work. It carries a lot of weight.

Something interesting, though, is this. In most languages, even though words have a range of meaning, when someone uses a word, they generally only mean one of those meanings. Right?

The word run. You can run for office. We hear about that too much. You can run a generator. You can go for a run.

[14 : 04] Charis can refer to an extravagant gift. It can refer to a quality of being charming. It can refer to an attitude of benevolence or generous spirit.

Charis is interesting. In Greek, even outside the Bible, it's often used to highlight both the attitude of the giver and the gift itself. And that seems to be the sense here as well.

God's grace was on them. His posture of generosity in which he gives all good things to his church and the gift of his Holy Spirit, his power. They're both bound up in this word.

So Luke is trying to show you that God's grace, that his lavish generosity is on the church by pointing to the fact that they're all being lavishly generous to each other.

And something that cannot be stressed enough. This generosity was not a result of hearing lots of sermons about giving. It was a response to God's grace in the gospel and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

[15 : 08] In fact, we know from the story of Ananias and Sapphira that this generosity was not commanded. No one was made to do any of this. Luke is highlighting the voluntariness of it because it is a response.

Not to what the leaders say we should do to others. But in response to what God has done to us. To them. God's grace makes you give people grace.

At least it should. And here's why. In Romans 5, Paul talks about how extravagant grace is. He says, where sin increased, grace abounded.

But those two words aren't the same. The increased and abounded. Sin only increased. The word for abounded means to be in great excess. To super abound. In his book on grace, Jerry Bridges points out that it should really be translated as super abounded.

Where sin abounded, grace super abounded. And he uses this illustration. Which I think is brilliant. Take a cup of water. You drop a single dye. Drop a single drop of dye in the water.

[16 : 19] It spreads out. The ink is all through the water. It abounds in the water. It's the sin. But you take that same cup of water. And you put it under a faucet of water.

And what happens? It flushes the cup. It flushes out all the dye. It's overflowing. The dye is completely expelled. And what is left is an overflowing cup of pure water.

I think that's a good picture for what Luke is showing us. God's grace was on them. And it super abounds. It doesn't just go in them. It comes out of them into others.

And as it spills out, it keeps its form. God's generosity to the church instantly super abounds in the form of generosity. One to another.

To another. To another. No one claimed his possessions as his own. That doesn't mean the possessions weren't their own. Barnabas sold his field.

[17 : 16] Ananias and Sapphira brought what was theirs. This isn't about abolishing private ownership. If it was, then it would no longer be about generosity.

Generosity is when something is yours, but you act like it's not. You become open-handed and realize that everything belongs to God and we're just stewards.

Generosity is when you have the right to something, but you choose to give it up. But this also isn't about abolishing poverty. The goal isn't to get rid of an economic problem.

It was simply to share with the people around them. When everyone starts showing generosity to those around them, all of a sudden, everyone has enough. God has provided enough to his church when those who have most share with those who have least.

And you have to see that this is a defining work of the Holy Spirit. Only a result of the Holy Spirit. This is not normal human nature. As you and I both know, we are typically not prone to be nice and generous.

[18 : 32] I mean, let's be real. I'm selfish. I don't want to take a phone call at 10 o'clock at night. It is a work.

The work of God in our hearts. Plain and simple. That's it. Yeah. By the way, this generosity was also anticipated in the law.

Deuteronomy. I said it right this time. For those of you that don't remember, a few months ago, I was quoting Deuteronomy and I could not say that word. Just had to throw it into town and forget about it.

You know that book in the Old Testament. Going into, yep, in that book, chapter 15, verse 4. Going into the promised land, God said, there will be no poor among you.

That was God. Here in Acts, it's happening. Not worldwide, but right there in the church. In his body. Not as a result of a bunch of sermons on giving and sharing, but as a result of receiving grace, which superabounded and flushed their hearts and spilled out all over the place.

[19 : 42] Charis, grace, is all about generosity. A giving for the sake of others. We are of one heart. We are of one soul.

How can we not take care of one another? We do go around, especially on Sundays, calling each other brother and sister. Why would we not take care of our family? People who had received lavish generosity turned around and gave it to each other.

And that's where the diversity comes in. Grace characterizes the way all gifts are meant to be used. Everyone's got a different story.

A different set of skills. A different gift. But they all have one purpose. To bless others. To be used lavishly, extravagantly, generously for others. We only get Barnabas' story, but everyone's doing their part.

It says so. Anyone who owned anything saw it as a resource to benefit the whole. And this is where we also see the tension between the unity and diversity. The universal and the particular.

[20 : 49] God's grace is given to everyone. But the specific gifts or charismas vary person to person. In Romans 12, verses 6 and 8, it says, Having gifts, the charisma, that differ according to the grace charis given to us, let us use them.

If prophecy in proportion to our faith. If service in our serving. The one who teaches in his teaching. The one who exhorts in his exhortation. The one who contributes in generosity.

The one who leads with zeal. The one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness. See it again in 1 Peter 4, 10 and 11. As each has received a gift, charisma.

Use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Charis. Whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God. Whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.

In order that in everything, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Use it.

[21 : 51] Why? To serve others. To build up the body. Grace super abounds in me. So it flows out of me. In the form of using my gifts for others.

God gave me gifts to use. Not for the benefit of myself. But for the sake of others. And that's the point of Ananias and Sapphira. The contrast is remarkable.

The contrast between grace and selfishness. Between truth and deceit. And between God and Satan. That's really what's highlighted here.

God makes you into a giver. Satan makes you into a taker. Ananias and Sapphira sell a field. It's fantastic. They didn't have to.

It wouldn't have been wrong if they didn't. There was no pressure on them to sell by the apostles or other leaders. And then they give part of the proceeds.

[22 : 48] Which actually isn't the problem. I mean I've always been told that anything is better than nothing. The problem is that they give part of the proceeds while claiming to give the whole.

It's a heart issue. What was their motive? What are your motives? What are my motives? You don't want to know.

It's not that they were stingy. Like you'd think the story of the opposite of generosity would be of people who don't give. People that feel like they've worked hard for their possessions and deserve to keep it.

Selfish people. That's what you think the story should be. The opposite story there. Actually this is worse than not giving. The lie occurs because their generosity is not about how they can bless people.

It's about how they can take. They want respect. They want praise. They want to be seen as heroes. By the way, how many times have we all been motivated by those kinds of things?

[23 : 50] Respect. Praise. Seen as a hero. All the time. And yet look what Peter says. Ananias. Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?

See, the church is sacrificially giving generously because they are filled with the Holy Spirit. Ananias is deceitfully greedy. Not just for his own money.

But for the praise of man. And it's because he's filled with Satan. He's not super bounding in grace. Spilling out from an abundance into others.

He's like a black hole sucking it up from others. When you and I hear the term satanic. What comes to mind? Witchcraft.

Ouija boards. Head spinning. Don't watch that movie. It's terrible. Give me nightmares. I mean, that's what we think about, right?

[24 : 53] I submit lying to pretend that you're righteous to make yourself look good. That motive comes from the bowels of hell. The contrast should make you think.

What are you doing with what you've been giving? Some people get filled with the Spirit and they use what they have to bless. Others are filled with demonic pride and they use what they have to take.

What are you doing with what you have? Let me just run straight to that tension and say that that kind of pressure can feel uncomfortable. I feel uncomfortable. It can feel judgmental.

Man, I thought grace was free. If God was really gracious, how come there is so much scrutiny on my life? Sounds like one of those kind of fine print free gift deals on a TV ad.

There's always strings attached, right? That's not really grace. John Barclay has written a book on grace. He makes this brilliant observation that modern society think of anything as a gift only in the terms of a pure gift.

[25 : 58] No strings attached. To give a free gift is to give without any expectation of return. And the problem is, that isn't how real gift giving works.

And it's not how grace works. Right? Grace. There are no prerequisites, but there are always expectations. Think about this with gift giving.

You personally. Do you ever give anything without expecting something in return? You actually do expect something in return at a minimum gratitude. Right?

You would expect somebody to say, thank you. I do. 2 Corinthians 4, verse 15 says, For it is all for your sake, so that as grace, charis extends to more and more people.

It may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God. Charis leads to Eucharistie. The gift leads to thanksgiving. And if God's grace is on you, it should super abound.

[27 : 05] And if it does, there should be gratitude. But also, it should overflow into others. If God's spirit and lavish grace are generously plunging into your life, and it doesn't spill out, something is wrong.

Those who are under grace are immediately reoriented to the obedience of faith. You're actually not just expected, but demanded to become a giver in return.

You give your life to God. You give your things to others. You become like him. Why? Because God is selfish? No. That's not selfish. This is also for your good.

Generosity is the prioritizing of someone else. It is the opposite of selfishness, which is a motive from hell. This is what is happening in Acts chapter 4.

People are treating each other like God has treated them. They're learning the family way. And like it or not, our material generosity is perhaps the best indicator of how we're doing in responding to God's grace.

[28 : 14] Jesus said it. Matthew 6, 21. Matthew, do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In other words, if you want to know where your heart is, look at where your treasure is. What are you doing with your money, your stuff, your things, your resources, your skills? What are you doing with them? Bigger barns?

Have you seen the number of storage units being built in this area? It is insane. I'm like, where is the saturation point? It blows my mind.

What I am saying is we have much to learn, all of us, including myself, about what true charis looks like in reality.

Augustine said the bellies of the poor are safer storerooms than any barn. We are of one heart and one soul.

[29 : 17] God's grace is on us. We are free. And also, we are bound. Bound to be generous. Bound to be givers of grace. Bound to let the superabounding grace spill out in the diverse giftings, the skill sets, the resources that we have been given.

You might not be a Barnabas, but you're a you. And you have something of God imprinted in you, on you. Something to share.

Something to give. If you're not a generous person, the problem isn't merely that you aren't generous. It means God's grace is not superabounding in you.

It can be. Not by being manipulated into a false generosity. All that's going to lead to is the frustration and division. That's terrible.

And I am sorry if that's you. If you have been manipulated into false generosity, I'm sorry. That's terrible. You need the Holy Spirit to quench you.

[30 : 22] To pour into your soul so much that your generosity overflows to all those around you. The hallmark of his generosity flowing into your life is that it spills out of you into others.

Not because you're insecure. Not because you don't know how to say no. You can give selfishly. That's what Ananias and Sapphira did.

In Matthew 25, Jesus said that those who are not generous are ultimately not generous to him. He said he will judge them. For they failed to give to their brothers.

He said in verse 45, Because if you aren't giving grace, it means you haven't received it.

This is not merely a call to tithe. Of course you should. This is a call to be little Christ. To be Christians.

[31 : 30] Grace givers who imitate the ultimate grace giver. You must have come forward and put money into the can to calm your conscience. Don't do that. That won't do anything.

You'll go back to your old ways in no time. You must first find out what's gone wrong. You must go back to the fountain and plunge yourself into this grace.

And for those of you who are generous, For those of you who do give, On behalf of the church, On behalf of Jesus, Thank you. We praise God for you. Keep at it.

It's painful, isn't it? Shelly and I have been on both sides of this spectrum. We have experienced abundance and helped others. And we have been in need. And been helped by others.

It is tough. But it's worth it. Let's not stop. Let's not stop helping each other. Let's keep getting filled with grace. Going back to the fountain and being plunged into it all over again.

[32 : 31] So it can keep spilling out. This is not a one and done. Come thou fount of every blessing. Tune my heart to sing thy grace.

Streams of mercy never ceasing. Call for songs of loudest praise. Oh to grace how great a debtor. Daily I'm constrained to be. Let thy goodness like a fetter.

Bind my wondering heart to thee. Powerful words. One day. One day your Lord will look at you.

Perhaps. Maybe even put his hand on your shoulder. And he will say. Come. You are blessed by my father. Inherit the kingdom. Prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger. And you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me.

[33 : 29] I was in prison and you came to me. In fact every time you did it. To. One. Every time you did it to the least of my brothers.

You did it to me. And I suspect. At those words. Joy will well up in you. Of which you can scarcely now imagine. Think about that.

It is certain that many of us. Will likely regret not giving. We will regret selfishness. But the believer. Will not regret a single instance. Of generosity and sacrifice.

In the life to come. As the band comes up. If you are here or listening. And not yet a believer. Not yet a follower of Christ. The last thing I want for you to feel.

Is manipulated to give money. I do not want that. That is not the goal. Of today's sermon. What I do want you to ponder is. Why would a God.

[34 : 26] Who has everything. Who lives in absolute perfection. Want to know you. Why would he want to get involved. With your jacked up life.

Simple. Because of love. And generosity. You may not want to believe this. But there are. There are two kingdoms. Fighting for you. And eventually one of them will win.

One that gave everything. Out of love. And the other. That promises the good life. But always ends up with nothing but a lie. They are fighting for you. Right now. If you are here.

Or listening. And you are a believer. The simple question. We all need to ask ourselves is. How generous. Am I? Am I generous. Out of an overflow.

Of the Holy Spirit. In my life. Am I giving of my time. My talent. My treasure. To receive the praise of man. Those questions. Are a great way.

[35 : 27] To check where you are. With your walk with God. God. I would submit. That generosity. Is directly linked. To how much time. You spend in solitude. With God.

Jesus had a pattern. Where he would. Spend long amounts of time. In prayer. Alone with God. And then he would minister. And change. All those. Who came in contact with him.

He was generous. Because of an overflow. A super abounding. Amount of grace. And generosity. From the Father. Take 30 seconds. Do business with God.

Take your mask off. And come to him. As your true self. Lord God, first and foremost, we want to thank you.

Thank you, thank you, thank you for your love, your grace, your mercy. For the fact of paying our debt, my debt, that I could never repay. For that, we will be eternally grateful.

[37 : 04] God, we are prone to be selfish. We are prone to be closed-handed with the things that you have given us. Our talent, our time, our treasure, all those things, God.

We want to hoard them. We want to keep them. God, I just pray that your spirit, your Holy Spirit would flow into us, God. That we would be changed. Our hearts would change.

Our minds are changed. Our souls would change to become generous people. People who see others in need and are just compelled to make a difference.

Lord, help us to be known as a people that bring hope. As a people that bring life. As a people that bring joy into our communities. Into our families. Into our workplaces, Lord. Lord, I pray that if, like many of us in this room, including myself, if we don't spend enough time in solitude with you, I pray that today would be the day that we change that, God.

That we just spend an enormous amount of time with you. Listening, praying, seeking your face. Seeking your will for our lives, Lord. So that we can be super abounding in grace and generosity and mercy to all those that come in contact with us.

[38 : 13] Change us, Lord. Make us more like you. In the name we pray. Amen. So we're going to take communion now, which we do every week. And we do it, number one, because Jesus told his disciples to take the bread and the juice often to remember him.

And number two, if you're like me, I need to be reminded of that more than once a week. To be quite honest with you. I get caught up in the busyness of life and forget.

I function more out of my service to my family and the church and the community than I do out of an abundance of generosity. The good news is his grace is sufficient for my shortfalls and for yours too.

So let's take the bread and the juice and remember his love, his grace, his generosity. Take them now.