

MULTIPLY – Gospel Movements

Community of Generosity

Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37

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⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2:42–47 (ESV)

³² 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. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ 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 ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. Acts 4:32–37 (ESV)

Parenting is costly. While there are many stages of parenting where you realize this, I think launching children out of the home and into college makes it very clear. I remember how this struck me when we dropped off our twins. We said goodbye as they ran off to an orientation party full of music, zip-lines, prizes, and games. They were so excited. We, on the other hand, got into our car and drove home.

I commented to Sarah that it was pretty crazy that we've put all this energy into their lives, spent all the money to take care of them, worked hard to disciple them, and then it comes to this. We just walk away and go back to a house with empty rooms. There's no certificate, no trophy, and no party with zip-lines for parents (that's a thought!). On my long drive home, I thought about how right this moment was but how incredibly one-sided it was.

Gratefully, I had not yet found an article that details how much money it costs to raise a child from birth to age 17. Do you want to know? The Department of Agriculture estimates it costs \$233,610—approximately \$13,000 per year. And that doesn't include any college funding. Just in food costs alone, the Department of Agriculture estimates it costs around \$2,800 a year to feed a teenager.¹

¹ <http://money.cnn.com/2017/01/09/pf/cost-of-raising-a-child-2015/index.html>

Parenting is expensive. It is costly financially, emotionally, spiritually, and relationally. Raising children requires a deep level of self-sacrifice. But here's the thing: it is totally worth it. And it's to be expected. The sacrifices that you must make are simply part of the parenting equation. If you are going to grow your family, generosity must be part of the mix. Selfishness and stinginess do not work well with parenting.

Multiplication is Costly

We are in the middle of an eight-week series on the subject of multiplication. As I read our texts for today's message, I can't help but see the connection between parenting and the multiplication of the gospel. In the same way that launching children is costly but worth it, so too, does gospel multiplication require a sacrificial generosity that is painful but worthwhile.

In other words, if you only used the financial costs when evaluating if you should have children, you might be inclined to never have them. But that would be a very concerning way to think. Parenting involves a different calculus. The same is true for gospel multiplication. There is a different equation and another value set at work. That's what we are going to explore today.

Before we jump in, let me give you a very brief review. We are trying to answer three key questions through this series:

- 1) What were the ingredients for the missional movement of the early church?
- 2) What unique mission is God calling College Park to in 2018?
- 3) What is your Spirit-empowered mission?

In the first week we looked at our vision for multiplication in terms our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Week two, we talked about prayer and how it is the fuel for gospel work. I've been thrilled with the attendance and spirit of our prayer at our 7 a.m. gatherings over the last three weeks. I'm hoping the same response happens at our Worship-Based Prayer Night this evening. Last week we learned how the gospel advances as God works through words to reach the world.

Today we are going to see how generosity propels a gospel-shaped community for multiplication. In other words, there is a direct relationship between generosity and multiplication.

Three Key Concepts for Generosity

I've chosen two sets of verses in two chapters in Acts so that you can see a particular pattern that is instructive. With those two paragraphs are two key verses:

⁴⁴ *And all who believed were together and had all things in common (Acts 2:44).*

³² *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 (Acts 4:32).*

These texts highlight three critical aspects of generosity:

- **Conviction** – “all who believed”

- **Emotion** – “were together” and “were of one heart and soul and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own . . .”
- **Action** – “had all things in common” and “they had everything in common.”

Each of these are vitally important for a culture of generosity to be created. Without them, this generosity not only doesn't work, but multiplication doesn't either. What we think, feel, and do are all connected to our ability to hold our possessions--whatever they are—loosely. Generosity and multiplication are deeply connected.

So, let's look at each of these key concepts and see how they apply to our lives and our church.

1. Conviction

The first aspect of generosity is foundational. Generosity is a product of what a person or a community believes. We'll get to the other areas of generosity that are more familiar—such as a cheerful heart and actually doing something. But it is important that we start here because generosity, or a lack thereof, flows from what you believe.

People are generous or stingy based upon what they believe. I did some research on hoarders this week. One article said this: “Hoarders assign too much value to their possessions, making it difficult or impossible to decide to get rid of them. One of the characteristics of hoarding is that people feel this sense of discomfort if they feel like they may be giving away something that they could use in the future . . . patients often become greatly distressed or even angry if they are pushed to give up apparently useless or excess possessions.”² At the root of hoarding is a foundational belief system.

I want to remind you where both of our texts are placed in the book of Acts. The first text (Acts 2:42-47) follows the amazing conversion of three thousand people at Pentecost. The second text (Acts 4:32-37) follows the first real persecution and a prayer meeting that was invaded by the Holy Spirit. These texts both describe the kind of community that marked them as the church continued to prosper.

This community is identified as a group of believers. Acts 2:44 says “all who believed” and Acts 6:32 says “the full number of those who believed.” Believed what? If we were to look back at Peter's sermon in Acts 2, they believed that the crucified Jesus was both Lord and Christ. They believed He was the Son of God. They believed He was the Messiah and that He rose from the dead.

But they also believed that through the name of Jesus they could be forgiven and could receive the Holy Spirit. Essentially, they believed the gospel. Even though they were guilty and deserving of God's wrath, they could be counted as righteous through faith in Jesus. They believed that the promise of God's grace was even for those who are “far off” (Acts 2:39).

This belief led them to a devotion to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. But everything, including their generosity, flowed from their belief in the Good News that Jesus came to give Himself for undeserving sinners. The guilty can be forgiven. But this grace

² <http://healthland.time.com/2012/08/07/inside-the-hoarders-brain-a-unique-problem-with-decision-making/>

comes at a great cost to Jesus. This is the belief which is the foundation of the church, its community, and how we Christians view generosity.

Throughout the New Testament, this conviction in the gospel becomes the basis for many forms of generosity:

- In Philippians 2, believers are told to consider others more important than themselves as they consider the example of Christ, who took the form of a servant and humbled Himself to point of death on the cross (Phil. 2:7-8)
- In 2 Corinthians Paul attempted to motivate the Christians at Corinth to give generously by appealing to their belief in what Jesus did. *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich”* (2 Cor. 8:9)

Charles Spurgeon summarized the meaning of 2 Corinthians 9:8 this way:

“The Lord Jesus Christ was eternally rich, glorious, and exalted; but “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor” . . . it is impossible that our Divine Lord could have had fellowship with us unless He had given to us from His own abounding wealth and had become poor so as to make us rich.”³

Underneath our understanding of generosity is a fundamental belief system. What you believe about the gospel informs how you view yourself, others, and your possessions. What you believe about God’s grace has a direct effect on how you view the entire subject of generosity and, by implication, multiplication. Graced people are gracious.

You would, no doubt, think it wrong for a parent to be stingy with his or her children. Imagine the parent who is regularly complaining about how much kids cost or what is required. Imagine the parent whose attitude is “We gave birth to you, but we’re not interested in helping you grow up.” That is not only unnatural, but it is wrong. So, too, the biblical generosity flows from a fundamental conviction about what has happened to us in the gospel.

Ungracious people give evidence they have not experienced God’s grace.

One of the things that I love about our church--I mean *really* love—is our Core Value of Extravagant Grace. It is one the unique historical markers of our church. From the moment of our church’s founding in 1985, we’ve been committed to living out this value through how we live personally and in how we invest financially. From how we’ve taken up offerings in the past, used Christmas funds, leveraged benevolence needs, bring meals to hurting families, or just try to be sure that we err on the grace, our church has been marked by extravagant grace.

³ <https://www.crossway.org/articles/for-your-sake-he-became-poor-2/>

A few years ago, we put some language to this value. Let me remind you what this core value means to us:

Culture of Extravagant Grace - *We desire to be a community of believers who treat others with the same extravagant grace that God has lavished upon us. We yearn to demonstrate this grace through our church culture and our lives in a way that is transparent, real, and helpful. We are blessed to be a blessing to each other, the city of Indianapolis, and the world.*

This is why we give at Christmas. This is why we are in Brookside. And it is why we started the Next Door Mission. We believe we have a responsibility and an opportunity to lavish the same kind of grace upon others that has been lavished on us.

At a conviction level, we believe we must be generous. Graced people are gracious.

2. Emotion

Generosity for multiplication, however, is not only about what we believe. Giving must also connect with our hearts. We must feel the right things. We must allow our hearts to be engaged. The apostle Paul famously said, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). Generosity requires conviction and emotion and action.

There must be a direct connection between your heart and generosity. We see this in a number of places in Acts 2 and 4.

- In Acts 2:44 we find that Luke describes this church as being "together." This is the Greek word *koinonia*.⁴ It means fellowship. The implication of the word is more than simply meeting in the same place. The idea is that they were unified together. They viewed themselves as a body or as a family. Our discipleship strategy is captured in the word "belong." There was an emotional connection to one another.
- In Acts 2:46 we find the word "together" is used again. This time it is another Greek word which means *single-mindedness*.⁵ They embraced a purpose beyond themselves. And if you look in verse 46, you'll find it being expressed with breaking bread in homes (fellowship) and with joyful, generous hearts.
- In Acts 4:32 it is expressed as "those who believed were of one heart and soul." They were unified, not only in what they believed, but also in their concern for one another. And that is further explained in regard to what they felt about their possessions. They viewed their possessions as not being their own—"no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own..." (Acts 4:32).

⁴ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 121.

⁵ *Ibid.*

“Mine” is an emotion-loaded term. You don’t have to say it loudly or emphatically. It is simply a word filled with emotion. It is important to realize the strong emotions that are connected to what we own or possess.

That’s why the Scripture warns us about keeping an eye on our hearts and our money. We tend to curl our fingers around what we have.

- *“Keep your life free from the love of money . . .” (Heb. 13:5)*
- *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs (1 Tim. 6:10).*

Now the idea in this text is not just that money didn’t have a hold on them. It is more than that. Rather, the idea is that the love for one another created the impetus to give. Their natural love for what money or possessions would give them was eclipsed by their love for one another.

Every time we spend money, we are making a value decision. When you give money away, you are making a decision about what you are *not* going to spend that money on. Deciding to give both reflects what you love and shapes what you love.

Back to the parenting analogy: When you provide for your children, you are doing so because you love them and care for them. Your emotional connection is soil from which giving to your kids comes. So too the body of Christ and multiplication.

Our giving, both individually and as an entire church, says something. One of the reasons I love considering adopting other churches is because I hate seeing churches fold. It bothers me to no end that the Whitestown Community Center is a failed church. My heart aches to help hurting churches. My heart breaks over the needs in Brookside. My soul desperately wants to move the needle on unreached people groups.

Last year we talked about being “All-In.” I invited you to “kill the curl.” And part of the way that God makes multiplication happen is through a heart-based, emotional generosity. One heart and soul means that my heart is all-in when it comes to generosity. People who love the gospel, who love the church, and who love the world are generous. If we love our city, we will be generous even with giving our people away.

Generosity has to reach your heart.

3. Action

The final concept in generosity is simply taking action. Having the heart to be generous and having the conviction that you should be generous doesn’t mean we are generous. Multiplication and generosity require real people with real possessions and real money to act.

We see this expressed in a number of statements in Acts 2 and 4. We find the statement “had all things in common” in 2:44 and 4:32. We discover what that means in two places:

⁴⁵ *And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need (Acts 2:45).*

³⁴ *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 sold³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need (Acts 4:34–35)*

These people saw their possessions as the potential means of meeting someone's need. They held their goods loosely. They were willing to sell them to meet the needs of people around them. In Acts 4:36 we learn about a man named Barnabas who did just that.

The point here is simply for you to realize that generosity requires action. In fact, it is one of the most tangible expressions in regard to what you believe about the gospel and what you feel about the people who are a part of your church. Generosity—or a lack thereof—says something.

Here is how John says it, and rather bluntly:

"But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" (1 John 3:17).

Generous actions are important because they validate our belief in the gospel. They affirm that we love the community of believers. It takes action that is powerful and meaningful. Just look at the effect:

³³ *And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. (Acts 4:33)*

⁴⁶ *And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:46–47)*

God multiplied their efforts. He blessed them even more. And generosity was a critical part of the equation. It was vital to multiplication.

In fact, the Bible goes even further. God promises to multiply our efforts as we get serious about trusting Him through generosity. Whether it is more grace or more opportunity, God's heart is set to bless those who understand they "gain by losing."

⁸ *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work...¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness (2 Corinthians 9:9,10)*

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- \$20 per week = \$1,040 per year
- \$100 per month = \$1,200 per year
- Give to the Multiply Fund: yourchurch.com/give
- My action step: _____

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yourchurch.com/GodOwnsItAll
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yourchurch.com/financialconvo
- Complete the God Owns It All Worksheet
ronblueinstitute.com/tools
- My action step: _____

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