

## Bible Study: Sharing in the Early Church

### The believers share their possessions

<sup>32</sup> All the believers were one in heart and mind. 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 was no needy person among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales <sup>35</sup> and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Acts 4:32-35

As you read the text above ask yourself the following questions:

1. What do you make of v 32 'one in heart and mind' or 'one in heart and soul' and the concept of sharing everything they had? Is this possible, desirable, and/or necessary for a community to be Christ-following? Are there circumstances when this could be helpful and others where it could be dangerous?

2. It is interesting that v 32 is followed by a reminder of the power of the community and the writer is prompted to return to the resurrection of Christ. What might the links be between verses 32 and 33? Methodism emphasizes God's grace being given before any faith or response can come, might we prefer verse 33 to come before 32? Might this make a difference to our thinking about question 1?

3. How do we as individuals and church communities relate to v 34 'there was not a needy person among them'? What works of justice and peace come from us?

Grab a Bible and read Acts 4:36-5:11, about Barnabas and Ananias & Sapphira. Barnabas offers encouragement and Ananias and Sapphira provide a warning.

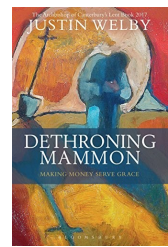
1. Barnabas, is a Levite from Cyprus, not from Israel; and he is given a new name by the apostles as someone who is a man of encouragement, or as one whom others are encouraged to imitate. What might have enabled him to share so profusely? Are there individuals or groups whom we see as a Barnabas?

2. Responding to God's grace does not always bring us to be as generous and life-giving as Barnabas. Notice what Ananias does and doesn't do: he is generous, but he doesn't tell the truth, turning his gift from being life-giving to death-dealing. Consider the reasons why Ananias and Sapphira might have held back, and the times when we have found it easy to be generous and when and how we find the need to hold back. Why might they have been selfish? What might have made them afraid to give their all? Have another look at verses 3-4, do you think Peter is angry, perplexed, sorrowful, disappointed, or just furious? Ask yourself the same question about verse 9.

3. What are we to make of the deaths? Are they to be understood as punishment? Or are they coincidences? Or are they an illustration of how deception and holding back from generosity brings suffering and diminishes all those involved?

### Non-Fiction Books

- **Dethroning Mammon: Making Money Serve Grace**



Justin Welby

This is a very accessible book that can be read by oneself or in a group with others. Money is an important resource. How do we handle the power of money? What does it mean to dethrone Mammon in the values and priorities of our civilisation and in our own existence? As we learn to trust in the abundance and grace of God - anything might, and probably will, happen. Be prepared for a thought provoking journey with decision and action.

- **Beatrice the Cadbury Heiress Who Gave Away Her Fortune**



Fiona Joseph

A biography of Beatrice Cadbury (1884-1976), daughter of the world famous chocolate empire. Beatrice discovers that being wealthy in a world of people who don't have very much isn't all that it is cracked up to be. She decides to give away all her shares in the company and what happens next isn't what she might have expected.

# Sharing with Those Who May Find it Difficult to Share

There may be people in your congregation who have autism, dementia, mental health issues, who find it difficult to share but who want to be part of the church. Each person will have different needs and blockers, and it is important that we embrace these. Have you spoken to them (or where it is more appropriate to their carer) about how you can enable them to participate and share more in the life of the church? In time they might feel able to share with the congregation about their particular situation and so increase everyone's understanding.

Look out for information about RomDAG, one of our new charities. They are a group of volunteers who are dedicated to promoting awareness and understanding of dementia across our local community of Romsey. Romsey was successfully launched as a Dementia Friendly town in May 2014. RomDAG is registered under the Test Valley Community Services charity (no.1061655 Ref. RomDAG).

## Connexionalism

Connexionalism isn't just a way of organising ourselves; rather it is way of being Christian. We are all parts of the body and together we make up the whole. We are connected one to another through the love and grace of Jesus Christ. We are diverse but interdependent. Joined together we form the whole. As a Connexion we believe that no local church – or minister – can be an autonomous unit complete in themselves. We all contribute and we all receive.



But we're not a random selection of things tied together. So secondly, we share self-similarity: each part of us has the same characteristics as the whole. What are the characteristics we all share? Put simply, it's God's love.

Look at each of us individually, we see God's love reflected there. Look at each church, we see God's love. Look at the Methodist Church in Britain, or in the world. We see God's love. The self-similarity in our Connexion is the love of God.

And thirdly the whole is incomplete without any one part of it. There is no hierarchy of importance within the church; the newest and freshest growth is as important and vital as every other component. It is incomplete without every part; the Church is incomplete without you.

## Reflections from Andrew Roberts

When did we last review our giving in all its forms? Create some time and space to sit with the Spirit and review your giving of money, possessions, time, love and anything else the Spirit draws to your attention.

How can your home be a gift for others?

How can your local Christian community develop its giving?