

# Open Hands Open Hearts

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 23 July 2023

Preacher: Pastor Bart Leger

- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Let's imagine for a moment that you are on a boat. The sky is blue, the water is calm and serene, the sun is shining, there's a light breeze.
- Then, all of a sudden, out of nowhere, the sky turns dark, the winds begin to blow, and the sea begins to roll, and it's white, and all of a sudden, you are wondering if you are even going to survive.
- You're thrown back and forth, and it feels like everything is beginning to fall apart. In the midst of the storm, you see someone in the angry waves struggling to stay afloat, at great personal risk.
- Would you open your hands to help someone else, or would you cling to the boat trying to preserve your own life?
- It's kind of an unsettling thought, isn't it? Well, this is the picture of the early Christian church. As we are looking this morning in God's Word, as we look back a couple of thousand years, the early church was in a situation where things became unsettled, and in order to survive, they had to open their hands and help those around them.
- [ 1 : 2 5 ]     They found themselves in a storm of persecution and attack from all sides, and their faith was challenged. Yet it's in this storm that we see one of the most beautiful pictures of love within the body of Christ and unselfish giving for one another.
- See, the early believers didn't cling tightly to their possessions, and what they did instead was they opened their hearts, and they opened their hands, and they shared what they had with one another.
- They demonstrated an unwavering spirit of generosity, and that serves even today as a beacon of hope for the rest of the body of Christ.
- And today we're going to step into their story in Acts chapter number 4, verses 32 through 37. So if you have your Bibles this morning, let's turn to the book of Acts chapter number 4, to a story that calls us to examine our own hearts and our own hands.
- Are they open or closed when it comes to opportunities within our bodies? So buckle up this morning. We're going to be going on a journey back into the early days of the church to rediscover the transformative power of open hands and open hearts and what it meant to the body of Christ.
- [ 2 : 5 5 ]     And in doing so, I trust that we'll find the strength to weather any storm that we have together as one unified body of Christ. So let's look at God's Word this morning, beginning with verse number 32 of Acts chapter 4.
- Now, as this is happening, Peter and John has returned to the body from being charged with not saying anything about Jesus anymore.
- And the church says, they responded by saying, let's pray for even more boldness to go out and share the gospel. They were not concerned about their own safety.
- They were willing to take whatever risks necessary to go out and spread the gospel to a broken world. And that's exactly what they did.

And then we come to verse number 32. Yes, 32. Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul. Neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

[ 4 : 04 ] And with great power, the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of Jesus and great grace was upon them all. Verse 34, And now there was there, nor was there anyone among them who lacked, for all who were possessors of land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold and laid them at the apostles' feet, and they distributed to each one as anyone had need.

And Joseph, who's also named Barnabas by the apostles, which is translated, Son of Encouragement, a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

So here we hear the story. Here we hear the account of how the early church responded to opposition and how they responded when they saw needs within their own body.

So what do we see? First of all, we see a church that was unified. They loved one another. They cared for one another within their bodies.

So let's look again at the opening words of verse number 32. It says, Now the multitude of those who believed, there were many who came from all parts of the world at that time, who came to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover.

[ 5 : 37 ] And many of them were still there. And in order for them to survive, because they were excited about what was going on in the early church, and so they had needs.

Some were losing their jobs because of their faith, because they were being vocal for sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. It says, It says, They were of one heart and one soul.

Neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. Can you imagine this?

A group of people, not simply sharing space, or not simply sharing a religious affiliation, but they were of one heart and they were of one mind.

This was not a superficial unity. It was a profound, deep spiritual unity that came from their relationship with Jesus Christ and their interrelated relationship with one another.

[ 6 : 43 ] First of all, we see in verse 32 that they were of one heart. They shared the same love for God, the same love for each other.

They were of one heart, and they were also of one mind, Scripture says. They all held to the same truths about who Jesus was. They all held to the teaching of the apostles and what Jesus Christ had done for them.

So one heart, they all loved God. They all cared for one another. They were all of the same mind. They all believed in Jesus, who He was, and they knew what they needed to do.

It was this unity that allowed them to be a fortress in the face of opposition in the world around them. They weren't just a community.

They were a family. They weren't an organization. They were a family. They weren't just a bunch of people meeting together.

[ 7 : 51 ] They were a family. They were the church as God intended His church to be. So how did Satan's attacks affect the spiritual condition of the church?

If anything, Satan's attacks serve to strengthen the body of Christ. They threatened, or they arrested.

They threatened. They sent them back out and said, probably on penalty of death, don't talk about Jesus. So how did it affect the local church? They prayed for more boldness, and it brought them even closer together.

And so Satan's attacks had the opposite effect of what he intended. It brought them, rather than separating, it brought them even closer together. It made them stronger, and it made them more unified in carrying out the mission Jesus left them with.

You know, people say, well, what's the mission? What's our mission? Making disciples, sharing the gospel. Well, what about everything else we do? Well, everything else we do is to support the mission.

[ 9 : 02 ] You know, God left us here to grow as followers of Jesus. Why? So we can be on the mission of making disciples and sharing the gospel. Why does God want us to lead our families so that they can grow and be closer to Jesus Christ?

So we can carry out the mission of growing His kingdom and making disciples. You see, raising a good family is not an end in itself. It's in order that we can become even more effective at carrying out the mission of sharing the gospel with a lost and a broken world.

Everything that we do is in order to carry out the mission. The church has only one mission. Jesus said, you be my witnesses.

Go out, make disciples. Everything else is to support that mission. Hear it, learn it, and let's do it.

Because God's will, and we know it is, as Faith Bible Church, we are going to be moving forward and doing everything we can do to be the most effective that we can be at being a witness in our community for Jesus Christ.

[ 10 : 16 ] And when they see how much we love one another, when they see how much we care for our families, when they see how much we are, how much God is accomplishing in our lives, just like the early church, the world will have to say, wow, they're different.

There's something there that is going on that we need to be a part of because we don't have that in our life. And those who do not know Jesus Christ need our positive witness.

They need us. It's up to God's Holy Spirit to make the changes in the hearts and their minds. But God wants us, God has left us to be His hands, His feet, His mouths, to share that gospel.

So the fact that Peter and John were arrested, tried, and threatened had absolutely no effect on the spiritual life of the early church because the early church was still unified.

They magnified the Lord Jesus Christ. And in turn, they multiplied. So a church that is doing the will of God, a church that is unified and carrying out the mission, is going to multiply because we are doing the will of God, doing whatever it takes to be the most effective at making disciples from outside these four walls.

[ 11 : 36 ] So when the Holy Spirit is at work, what we're seeing here, giving is a blessing, not a burden. See, what the early believers did was purely voluntary.

We don't see anything here in chapter 4 where any of the apostles said, guys, now come on. You know, we need to start giving. You know, look, we have these needs and, you know, we're going to take some pledges and we need you guys to pledge some money towards them.

No, what was happening? It was all voluntary. All voluntary. They were one heart, one soul. Neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

Now we've got to keep in mind, I've heard some people, I've heard some writings that said, well, you know what, this is like communism. No, because what's communism?

Somebody says, you've got to do this and everybody's got to. We don't see this here. And I've heard people say, well, it was more like communism.

[ 12 : 40 ] Everything was in common. People didn't hold on to what they had and they were willing to let go of it if there was a need.

Chapter 5, verse 4, it was all voluntary. Nor should, we shouldn't think that every believer sold all of their goods, sold all of their lands and made themselves, or they didn't take avowal poverty so that they could help one another.

Acts 4, verse 34, which we're going to get to in a moment, indicates that some of the members from time to time sold what they had in order so that they could help the others.

Then they donated their property to the common treasury when necessary. So when the assembly had a need, the Spirit directed some to sell, give to the apostles so that it could be distributed out.

Now, a real life example, we have a help fund. It's to help others in need. Now, it's not just for those outside of our fellowship, it's also for those within our fellowship.

[ 13 : 52 ] And I trust that you let us know when someone has a need. And I also trust that you let us know if you have a need.

Because, you know, and I get it. I'm one of those people that has a hard time telling someone I need something.

I'm one of those that I'll do it, I'll do everything I can, I'll do everything with my power to just make it work. That's just me. Now, is it right? I think we should be more open with others in the body of Christ.

And so, if you have a need, number one, don't let pride keep you from asking for help. Because how did the early church, how did they know that another fellow member had a need?

They told them. They let people know. You know, we don't have enough food for this week. Well, let somebody know.

[ 15 : 01 ] You know, our vehicle is broken down. This is happening. That's happening. An unexpected need came up. Let us know. That's the need. And also, we need to be giving.

We need to be giving toward it. The help fund is there to be used. And so, things are a little bit different now than it was then. We have, you know, different things set up.

But the principle is still the same. We're there to help one another. So, while the early church's spirit of sacrifice and loving generosity is worth our emulation, we don't have to imitate everything that they did.

We don't have to go sell land just because we need to help someone. Now, if the Holy Spirit prompts you to do that, then by all means don't tell the Holy Spirit.

No. Because I've heard people say, well, you know what? I just really feel the Holy Spirit wanted me to give a car to somebody. Go for it.

[ 16 : 06 ] Go for it. And I've literally heard of people saying that they gave their better car to someone and trusted God not because He would give them something better, but that it was adequate.

for their needs. All I'm saying is we can emulate the spirit of giving that they showed. So, the principles of Christian giving are outlined mostly in 2 Corinthians 8, 2 Corinthians 9.

Nowhere are we necessarily instructed to bring money and lay it down to the pastor's feet. If you want to do that, that's fine. But it's more giving it back into the body and so that it can be disseminated out as there is need.

So, the challenge today may be different from the early church, but I believe they're real nonetheless. So, I want to challenge us today. How can we foster this same kind of generosity of giving here?

How can we foster this same kind of unity the early church had? It could be as simple as getting to know someone else here that you don't know well.

[ 17 : 23 ] I'm sad to say that we have had some fairly regular attenders here for 3, 4, 5 weeks and I've heard someone say, who were they?

I said, well, they've been here for about 5 weeks and you don't know them? That's a shame. That's sad. Now, I will brag on you, there are many, many who will go out of their way to meet them, talk to them and even invite them to lunch.

Those are all things that serve to get to know one another. So, get to know someone else and the better we know someone, the more you can, the more you will care about them because it's strangers that we don't care about for the most part, right?

So, the better we get to know another person, the more we're going to think about them, the more we're going to care for them. send them a note of encouragement, send them an encouraging text, a card, a birthday card, an anniversary card if you get to know their anniversary, know a little bit more about them.

Pray for one another, share with someone who has a need or getting to know someone outside these four walls that are here. Do things together, invite them to your home for dinner, for food, for whatever, go do something, go play.

[ 19 : 01 ] Those are all ways to get to know one another at a deeper level and that we'll care for one another even more. So, it's these small acts of unity that make us strong, that makes us resilient and makes us the church.

So, let's work to be one heart, one mind just as the early church was. So, the early church was unified. Let's look at how they gave. Let's look at their spirit of giving.

Verse 33 to 35, And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. They saw Him, they were there, there were many who came in after Jesus had risen from the dead or maybe had not seen Him personally.

So, the apostles were teaching that Jesus is alive, we saw Him, and great grace was upon them all, nor was there anyone among them who lacked because all who were possessors of land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold.

And then, verse 35, they laid them at the apostles' feet. Now, it's, we have to note that it would seem here that everyone sold everything.

[ 20 : 27 ] We have to look at the word sold. The verb sold here is a present active participle. So, it's not a past tense that said they just sold everything.

And what we get from this is that from time to time those who owned land, those who owned things sold them to help the poor.

So, it wasn't just a mass divester of property. It was from time to time when someone had a need. They were selling their property is what this verb that was originally written.

It's a present participle. So, they were selling what they have. The giving was voluntary and it was driven by love. Now, we shouldn't think that necessarily everyone was always selling everything they had.

They brought the money to the apostles. Acts 4:34, from time to time they were selling this as the Spirit directed. Now, connection to today.

[ 21 : 34 ] Do we expect everyone in the body of Christ to just go sell everything you have and give it away to the rest of the body of Christ? I believe we should emulate the spirit of their giving because we do not have the same conditions today as they had then.

You have jobs. Many of you have good paying jobs. There are some who maybe have more of a need and maybe we can help one another more effectively.

Maybe we're not helping as effectively as we could. But you see, it's that spirit of giving that we see in the early church. Let's be honest.

Sometimes in today's world, giving can maybe feel more like a burden than a blessing. We often give out of obligation instead of out of a heart of love or maybe feel like we're being pressured to do so.

Maybe it's a fundraising event and you just feel obligated to give obligated to do something even if your heart's not in it. I believe God honors the gift where it's given out of love and it's given with an open hand rather than out of obligation.

[ 22 : 55 ] Because sometimes we do give out of guilt instead of joy. But let's look back at the early church. They gave out of love, out of a genuine concern for other believers.

They gave willingly, they gave joyfully, and they gave sacrificially. So how can we foster that same spirit of giving within our own lives, within our own body?

Well it starts with our hearts. It starts by loving one another. It starts by caring about, it begins with caring for one another. and it begins with recognizing that everything we have is a gift from God.

It's not ours. It all belongs to God. Because were it not for God, we would have nothing. He gives us the air to breathe. He gives you the energy to go to work and to make a living to put food on your family's table.

He gives us the health in order to be able to do that. And if you do not have the energy, if you do not have the health, and you're not able, whose responsibility is it to help?

[ 24 : 08 ] Don't tell me welfare. Our welfare in the body of Christ is the body of Christ's responsibility. Do I hear an amen?

See, that's the way the early church started. Now, I'm not saying not to accept government help. I'm not saying that at all. All I'm saying is the primary responsibility, I think, resides within us as the body of Christ, to do everything we can, everything within our ability, and then anything over and above that, we do what we need to be able to take care.

So it starts with love. And just a little note on giving. there were times in Catherine and I's marriage early on where there were some short periods where we didn't give our tithe.

And invariably, we always came to the point where we said, it's not ours anyway. There were times when certain ministries we were involved in where we literally did not have enough of an income to pay bills.

I mean, not even remotely enough income to pay bills, but it's what we accepted. And we decided, Lord, we're going to tithe on our gross, plus give over and above, even though we know mathematically we will never be able to pay our bills, humanly speaking.

[ 25 : 48 ] Do you know what happened when we made that choice? God took care of us. God took care of us. Now, we didn't have a mansion, we didn't have two brand new cars.

There were times when we had plenty of extra, and I think our children that are here know that you didn't go without food.

Now, it might have been a bologna sandwich, and even with not all the condiments, but we ate. So, I just want to give you this as an encouragement.

You may, your finances may look gloomy, but know from where they come, they come from God. When we give sacrificially, joyfully, obediently, God will make up the difference.

As a matter of fact, God will give you to God. That is one of the only promises where God says, test me, and see if I won't bless you because you are willing to give.

[ 27 : 01 ] So, if God gave a promise on that, if God gave a 100% money-back guarantee on giving, then I would trust Him on it. Amen? Amen. Amen. And so, it's in order that we might be able to accomplish the ministry.

Serve one another, help one another, support one another, but also to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ and carry on the ministry. All right, so let's move on.

It's, we need to be loving one another, serving one another, and learn the spirit of giving. And then lastly, let's take a look at the example of Barnabas.

Verse 35 said, they laid him at the apostles' feet and they distributed to each as anyone had need. Something that is in effect today, our help fund, and that's what it's there for.

So, the example of Barnabas, we'll see in our last two verses. Verse 36, and Joseph, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles, which is translated, I mean, think about what more appropriate nickname could he have had?

[ 28 : 14 ] Son of encouragement, a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

So here, we are introduced to Barnabas. His name says, it's translated, son of encouragement, and he truly lived up to it.

He was a Levite of the country of Cyprus. Now, Levites weren't supposed to hold property, but it was in Jerusalem. It was in Cyprus. So, he did have some land.

He did sell it. It was an extraordinary act of generosity. He not only gave of his resources, but he gave of himself, because Barnabas was an essential supporter within the early church.

He was a supporter of others and the leaders within the church. He was a generous giver, and this is illustrated by Luke in his account, otherwise Luke wouldn't have included him here.

[ 29 : 17 ] Now, it's possible that this noble act of Barnabas, to sell his land and give it to help others within the body, apparently filled Ananias and Sapphira, which we're going to hear in our next section together.

It's possible that his generous act filled them with envy, and so they wanted to look better to the church, and so they conspired together, and I won't steal my thunder from the next time.

You can read ahead if you want to, that's okay. But they end up being killed by God. So lying and trying to appear better because of pride or envy is a very, very dangerous thing.

Now, it's important to note that I do not believe Barnabas' gift was to show or gain favor.

Why do I say that? Because if it was, I don't think Luke would have included it as an example for us to follow. Luke included it because he wanted us to realize that what Barnabas did was a good thing, and it was worthy of emulating.

[ 30 : 38 ] It was an act of love and sacrifice. It was deeply rooted in faith and his commitment to the rest of the body of Christ. So the spirit of Barnabas, his encouragement, his generosity, his dedication, is something I believe that we should all aspire to emulate as well.

So our challenge today as we wind this down, I want to leave you with this challenge. How can you be a Barnabas to someone else? How can you carry out the spirit of Barnabas and be someone who helps, someone who serves?

Now, think about it. How can you not just give of your resources, resources, but also of yourself? How can you foster a spirit of encouragement, of generosity, and love?

Now, it's not just about the money that you could offer, but it's about the time, your abilities, your skills that could be used to help someone else within the body of Christ.

Think of ways you can be generous this week. It might be with money. It might be with time. It might be offering to do something for someone.

[ 31 : 57 ] It might be helping them in some way where maybe they don't have that skill that you have, that ability that you have. So, be inspired by the spirit of Barnabas.

So, let's be generous. So, we have unpacked verses 32 to 37. We've journeyed through a portrait of the early church and their generosity.

They're willing to give to one another. We've seen a community that were unified by their love for one another. They were, first of all, unified by their passion in proclaiming the gospel to a lost and a dying and broken world.

But then we also see inwardly they were passionate about the serving and helping and supporting one another as well. So, our final challenge, let's carry these lessons into our daily lives.

So, how do we do this? Some next steps. If you take out your connection card, we do have some next steps this morning. Foster unity.

[ 33 : 05 ] How do we do that? Identify one area where unity can be strengthened within our local body, whether it's a relationship, whether it's in a project somewhere, or within our church community.

Make a conscious effort to promote cooperation and promote understanding. When it comes to unity, I believe if we're on the same page as to what we want to see accomplished, I think we can agree ultimately on how to get there because the goal is what's important.

Embrace giving. Let's embrace giving. Consider one way you can give sacrificially this week. See, not out of obligation, but out of love. Could be financial.

Could be your time. Could be a skill. Could be some other kind of resource. Also, be a Barnabas. Be a Barnabas to someone else this week.

Think of someone you can encourage. Like I said, it might be a note, it might be a text. It could be simply a text. I'm praying for you today. Another reason why we should get to know one another at a deeper level outside these four walls, because then you'll know how better to pray for them.

[ 34 : 29 ] You'll know what they're struggling with. You'll know where they have a need for us to pray, rather than just a pretty face that we see on Sunday mornings.

There's someone that you know at a much, much deeper level. So let's step into our week this week with open hands and open hearts, ready to live out the unity, the generosity, and the encouragement that was embodied by the early church.

Let's pray. Father, this morning may we be used by you to encourage one another. May we be used by you, Heavenly Father, to make a difference in our world around us.

We thank you, dear Lord, that you are a loving God, a loving God who cares for us. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, gave everything for us.

So, Father, let's take that willingness and attitude of giving and let it flow into our lives and realize that we need to have open hands and open hearts with one another, that we may be able to be seeing unity that can only come from knowing and loving and caring for one another and being committed and passionate in the mission you've left us with.

[ 35 : 57 ] We thank you, Father, for it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.