

Finances and Faith

2. 'All Things in Common' *Community and sharing*

Aim of the study: To reflect on the struggle in human nature to share what we have been blessed with. To consider that building a community which reflects God to the world involves not just finances but an attitude of concern for each other and involvement in others lives. To appreciate that creating community and caring for each other can be expressed in many ways - be it financial, hospitality, our possessions, our gifts and even our friendship and time.

To start with (10 min max):

Which of the following areas would you say you are generous/ protective with? (*Note to leaders: You could ask people to rank themselves on a scale of 1 (extremely generous) to 10 (extremely protective) for each. This could be done privately if it feels too exposing for people to share with the whole group; then people can share what they feel comfortable to.*)

- Your free time?
- Your home?
- Your money?
- Your food?
- Your friendship?
- Your possessions? (What would and wouldn't you be prepared to lend to others?)
- Your spiritual gifts?

Why do you think you have those responses?

Thinking through the issues:

In an individualistic society like modern Britain some of the descriptions of the early church are dramatically counter-cultural.

Read Acts 2.42-47 and 4.32-37.

1. How would you summarise the attitudes of the early church towards:
 - a. God?
 - b. Their faith?
 - c. Each other?
 - d. Their possessions?
2. What appear to be the consequences of these sorts of attitudes? Why do you think that is the case?
3. Given that this 'season' in the early church was short-lived and that soon persecution caused them to scatter, how far do you think we should see this lifestyle as 'normal' for Christians and how far was it only for this time?

Rather than idealising the early church as a utopia of generosity and thinking that more 'communal cultures' find this easier, it is helpful to see that they too struggled with their attitudes.

Read Acts 6.1-6, 1 Corinthians 8.1-8 and 1 Corinthians 11.18-22.

4.
 - a. What do these passages suggest about how people 'naturally' relate to each other and their possessions despite their faith?
 - b. Why do you think that is the case?
 - c. How far do you think we still struggle to 'share' and why?

Often people feel that if they give money to charity (or church) they have 'done their bit'. The Bible suggests something different for Christians.

5. **Jesus rarely gave people money.**
 - a. What different examples of generosity did he model and teach his disciples to demonstrate during his ministry?
 - b. When was Jesus on the receiving end of generosity and how did he respond to that?

6. If we combine these attitudes with the positive behaviour of the early church, what conclusions can we draw about how God views:
 - a. The people around us?
 - b. The material things he provides for us?
7. If churches did function as 'generous communities' how do you think that would influence those who were not yet believers?
8. Go back to '**To start with**' and consider your responses again.
 - a. How might this idea of being involved in each other's lives and of being a community of God's people affect the way we view the things we have?
 - b. Practically, what do you feel challenged to change in your lifestyle in the light of this conversation?