



The Community of the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:32-37)

Notes: Week Ten

Acts 4:32-37 (NIV)

The Believers Share Their Possessions

³² 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.³³ 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 all³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"),³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 4:32-37 (HCSB)

Believers Sharing

³² Now the large group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one said that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common.³³ And the apostles were giving testimony with great power to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on all of them.³⁴ For there was not a needy person among them, because all those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of the things that were sold,³⁵ and laid them at the apostles' feet. This was then distributed for each person's basic needs.^[a]

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite and a Cypriot by birth, the one the apostles called Barnabas, which is translated Son of Encouragement,³⁷ sold a field he owned, brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 4:35](#) Lit *person as anyone had need*

Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*¹

Acts 4:32-37

[4:32-35](#) As long as there was complete unanimity of purpose and intention among them, the early Christians shared their **possessions** freely, such that **there was not a needy person among them**. They were able to do this not because of their own strength, but because **great grace was on all of them**. Therefore the generosity was above all a work of God. Yet trouble was coming ([5:1-11](#)).

[4:36-37](#) **Joseph** (aka **Barnabas**) led by example, selling his **field** and donating all the proceeds to the church. Such charitable acts inspire others to do good, but also incite some to seek acclaim.

English Standard Version - *Study Bible*²

Acts 4:32-37

[4:32-5:16](#) *The Community Shares Together*. The second extensive “summary” in Acts deals with the practice of fellow believers sharing goods (see [2:43-44](#)). Luke describes their practice and holds forth Barnabas as a model ([4:32-37](#)), followed by the account of the abuse of the practice by Ananias and Sapphira ([5:1-11](#)). A final summary highlights the growth of the community and its experience with the Spirit’s power ([5:12-16](#)).

[4:32](#) **everything in common**. See note on [2:44](#).

[4:34](#) The believers’ sharing exemplified the OT ideal of there not being a **needy person among them**—that is, there should be no poor in the community of faith (cf. [Deut. 15:4-11](#)). To realize this ideal the Christians would sell some of their goods and bring the proceeds to the apostles for distribution to the needy. Neither their sharing nor their bringing offerings should be seen as any sort of communal ownership such as was practiced by the Essenes and by later Christian monks, for the practice was strictly voluntary (see [Acts 5:4](#) and note on [2:44](#)). Such sacrifice and giving is seen as exemplary.

[4:36](#) **Barnabas** would not have been cited as an example of sharing if the practice had not been voluntary. Barnabas is introduced in the Acts narrative at this point; he is a major character in later chapters, particularly as Paul’s companion on his first mission. That mission began on **Cyprus** ([13:4b-6](#)), the home of Barnabas. The nickname **son of encouragement** fits his personality well. He introduced the newly converted Paul to the apostolic circle when everyone else was suspicious of him ([9:27](#)). He brought Paul to Antioch to participate in the outreach to the Gentiles ([11:25-26](#)). And he stood up for the young John Mark when Paul did not want to take him with them ([15:36-39](#)).

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 4".

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 4".

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

Acts 4:32-37

4:32 Differences of opinion are inevitable among human personalities and can actually be helpful if handled well. But spiritual unity is essential—loyalty, commitment, and love for God and his Word. Without spiritual unity, the church could not survive. Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians to urge the church in Corinth toward greater unity.

4:32 None of these Christians felt that what they had was their own, so they were able to give and share, eliminating poverty among them. They would not let a brother or sister suffer when others had plenty. How do you feel about your possessions? We should adopt the attitude that everything we have comes from God, and we are only sharing what is already his.

4:32-35 The early church was able to share possessions and property as a result of the unity brought by the Holy Spirit working in and through the believers' lives. This way of living is different from communism because (1) the sharing was voluntary; (2) it didn't involve *all* private property but only as much as was needed; (3) it was not a membership requirement in order to be a part of the church. The spiritual unity and generosity of these early believers attracted others to them. This organizational structure is not a biblical command, but it offers vital principles for us to follow.

4:36 Barnabas (Joseph) was a respected leader of the church. He was a Levite by birth, a member of the Jewish tribe that carried out Temple duties. But his family had moved to Cyprus, so Barnabas didn't serve in the Temple. He traveled with Paul on Paul's first missionary journey ([13:1ff](#)). For more information on Barnabas, see his Profile in [chapter 13, p. 1849](#).

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1823-1824.

Life Essentials Study Bible⁴

A Principle to Live By Acts #8: Generosity

from Acts 4:32-37

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are to be godly models of generosity.

In the early days of the church in Jerusalem, Christians exemplified generosity as perhaps at no other time in church history. To understand this dynamic, however, it's important to understand the larger social context. God-fearing Grecian Jews had come from all over the Roman world to celebrate the Passover and the 50-day Festival of Weeks ([Ex 34:22-23](#)). It was on the fiftieth day, Pentecost, that the Holy Spirit came and the church was born.

As travelers to Jerusalem, what would any of us have done, especially in view of the last words from the two angels following Jesus' ascension? They had addressed the apostles with these words:

They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen Him going into heaven." ([Ac 1:11](#))

Though Jesus had clearly stated that the apostles and all believers were to bring the good news to the ends of the earth, many decided to stay in the Jerusalem area, probably expecting Christ to return any day. This noncompliance and eschatological confusion in no way detracts from their unselfish example. These new believers became a generous and caring church. In fact, the Holy Spirit wanted us to know specifically that one of these Christians "sold a field he owned, brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet" ([4:37](#)). The apostles, who were carrying the burden of meeting the physical needs of all of these believers, were so encouraged by this man's act of generosity that they changed his name from Joseph to Barnabas, meaning "Son of Encouragement" ([v. 36](#)). This man stands out boldly as a model to all of us.

Reflection and Response

*How does Barnabas' public act of generosity
correlate with Jesus' instructions regarding private giving?*

4. Gene Getz, *Life Essentials Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2011), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1486-1487.