

**“There will be no poor among you.”**

But there will be no poor among you; for the Lord will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess. (Deut 15:4)

Before they enter the Promised Land, God tells the Israelites that he wants them to form a generous community when they get there. And they will have enough to do that, because he will provide it. That’s what it means when we read “FOR the Lord will bless you. For = because.

Of course, the people of Israel did not create that kind of community. They did not care for the widow, the foreigner and the refugee. So God kicked them out of the Land and sent them into exile.

Fast forward 1500 years to Acts 4:

<sup>32</sup> All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his 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 much grace was upon them all.

<sup>34</sup> There were no needy persons among them

It’s amazing! The early church accomplished what Israel failed to do. They did not claim that their possessions were their own, because they were overwhelmed with the realization that everything they had was an undeserved gift from God.

People who know they have been saved *by grace alone* have the opportunity to be the kind of humble, grateful community that gives freely and generously. Because God freely gave us our sonship, and because we are bound together by Christ into one family.

## ***A Mercy Ministry “Sandwich” Acts 2:41-47***

Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.” —John 6:26-27

## What was the early church like?

In Acts 2 we read about thousands of new believers who came to believe in Christ. Peter preached to the crowd in Jerusalem:

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (Acts 2:38-41)

Those 3,000 people became part of the earliest Christian community. Let’s look at what they did together as a church family:

### Acts 2:42-47

<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

<sup>44</sup> *All the believers were together and had everything in common.* <sup>45</sup> *They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.*

<sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

## A holistic community of believers

This passage is kind of a ministry sandwich, with the mercy ministry stuff in the middle (in italics). Let’s first look at the “bun.” What do you see the people doing in verses 42-43, 46-47?

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How are these things similar to what we do as a church today?

## Mercy Ministry must be done in the *context* of real community

The reason I set verses 44 and 45 apart is because we are naturally interested in this radical generosity, this selfless giving of resources.

But, notice a few things about the context:

- ✓ Who was it that were “together” and had everything “in common”?
- ✓ It wasn’t everyone in Jerusalem, was it?
- ✓ What was it that united these people? (They weren’t united by the *idea* of community, but by Christ.)
- ✓ They had Christ in common—that created their community

### Some points to make:

Our church longs to be this kind of community, and to show radical generosity through deeds of service and mercy. However, we can’t remove that from the context of a church family.

Does God care more about souls or bodies? He cares about both, but which is eternal? If we feed and clothe people, and neglect the needs of their souls, we are putting Band-Aids on gunshot wounds.

Mercy ministry should be done in the context of, and through the development of, covenantal relationships where we say to one another: “Come *with* me to the cross, where we will *both* find the healing, truth and encouragement we need.”