

CHRISTIANS ON THE LEFT.



PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS

BIBLE STUDY/EXERCISE FOR SMALL GROUP OR LARGE GROUP CONTEXT

Feel free to use all, none or some of the questions/sections. Please modify according to context.

ACTS 2:37-47

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

³⁸ Peter replied, “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.

³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

The Fellowship of the Believers

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ 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, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

ACTS 4:31-37

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

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 all ³⁴ 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 sales ³⁵ 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.

These words are incredibly inspiring but also incredibly challenging. So it's very handy that these words were written into a very different context to ours and therefore don't apply. Let me explain why...

Reasons why Acts 2 and Acts 4 type Christianity are not good models or aspirations (with my tongue firmly somewhere in the vicinity of my cheek)

- The church was a minority, whereas today we are a majority.
- The people were under the spell of an overarching empire which controlled much of what they thought or bought, through its branding, advertising and power, whereas we are free from that sort of thing.
- It was a time of relative economic scarcity, whereas today most of our brothers and sisters have enough.



- People didn't really understand what the church was about, whereas today everyone understands our key messages and strategy.
- The church was marginalised, whereas today we usually get our own way in politics or in the law courts.
- God's people were ruled by governments who had massive armies at their disposal, while today we are purely a peace-loving people.
- In those days a sense of connectedness was more needed, whereas today the concept and the reality of the family is strong.
- Committed relationships were more fleeting in those days, compared to now when they are rock solid.
- They needed miracles to believe back then. They were sceptics. But people aren't so cynical and sceptical now.
- Peter called that generation corrupt. You can hardly say that about the 21st century.
- With wealth and property came power, so it was important for them to declare that none of their possessions were their own, whereas that is hardly the case now.
- They had too much "stuff" in their overcrowded cities and living quarters, whereas our lives now are uncluttered.

Questions for Discussion

- What prevents present-day Christians from living in the way described in these passages? List the obstacles.
- How can these be overcome? Is it possible to do this alone?
- Is there a group of people to which you feel this kind of loyalty?
- Why is discussing finances a taboo subject 1) in society, 2) in the church?
- What practical ways might you find to share possessions and money in your area?



When we read the phrase “one in heart and mind”, we need to remember how Jewish ears would hear that phrase. We hear those words, and with our individualistic, dualistic worldview shrink its meaning to simply a sense of agreement about opinions, issues or doctrine. When that phrase was used in the first century (sometimes translated “one in heart and soul”) it would also have been understood as meaning “regarding other peoples’ needs as our own”. It was that sort of oneness. When you add that to a sense of stewardship (that we do not own land or property as individuals, but are merely stewards of it) it is a very potent combination for building community. Our feeble attempts often fail because we have failed to grasp these fundamental precepts.

There is a strong thread of family here too. When people live under one roof their possessions are not described as “my table, my microwave, my dustbin, my sink”. Instead they are “ours”. Imagine if that sense of family could extend further. The early Christians had a word for this. It was agape. What we can often reduce to warm fuzzy feelings was fleshed out in tangible practical disciplines of sharing. When Paul wrote later to the Thessalonians that he wished that they would “abound more and more in love” he didn’t simply mean that their feelings should become warmer and fuzzier!

Add to this the huge symbolic and national importance to the Jews of owning land – their promised inheritance – and you can see what incredible sacrifice was happening, and why it made such a huge impact. This was quite literally a totally different way of life.

- Do you think this sort of life is possible without an internal transformation? How might that happen?
- In terms of their financial dealings, would people perceive Christians today as having a “different way of life”?
- Why do you think a call to a biblical relationship with money has been reduced to the concept of mere charity in so many places?



Luke 12:22-34

Do Not Worry

²² Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!

²⁵ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? ²⁶ Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

²⁷ “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. ²⁸ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. ³⁰ For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

³² “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Questions for Discussion

- When have you known the heart of this passage to be true in your own life? When have you known your investments or spending leading your thinking or actions?
- Why are we driven towards excess spending and accumulation of possessions?
- Do you think of your money as an extension of yourself?
- Do you believe that how you invest/save/spend your money says as much about your values than what TV programmes you watch, or how you conduct your relationships?



- Why do we believe that when we give money to charity it is OUR money feeding the poor in say, Rwanda, but when we invest in stocks and shares, it is not OUR money that is exploiting natural resources in the developing world, or causing environmental pollution?

SHARE

What struggles do you have in this area? Are you financially challenged at the moment? Do you have a tendency to hoard, rather than share? Do you regard your finances as a “no-go area” in terms of sharing with others?

PRAYER

Pray appropriately based on what has been shared. Lift specific needs before God.

Ask for faith to believe that “your Father knows that you need”. Ask for strength to give over control of our finances to God, and bring our financial dealings out into the light. Ask for forgiveness for the times when we fail to trust and instead place our security in man-made things and money ahead of Him. Pray for guidance as to how to address this issue and for strength to walk a different path together.

ACTION

Decide together to participate in one of the PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS campaign actions. Details are on the Christians on the Left website – www.christiansontheleft.org.uk

- Find out what your money is doing while you’re not looking! Where are banks investing your money?
- Move your money to a more ethical bank, and move some to a credit union. (step one may be finding out where your local credit union operates)
- Encourage your church leadership to investigate where your church’s money is being invested and take appropriate action.

Could you share your bank statements with one another to bring some accountability to your finances? If not, why not? What could it mean to have a “common purse” in



ENDING

Agree one simple action that you will promise to carry out together or separately.
Pledge to keep each other accountable to it.



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