

Acts 4:32-35

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.

Hi, my name is Emma and I am a student at the University of Minnesota. I have been a Lutheran Campus Ministry leader for the last year. I want to just upfront tell you how much your generosity means to me and my fellow students who are here along with me today. It definitely does not go unnoticed and I want to express my gratitude for not only your financial support for our ministry but also for so graciously hosting me here today.

As we dive into this passage from Acts, it has a lot to pull from. There is a lot here to sort through. The first time listening through it, it

makes it sound as though we are supposed to give up all of our belongings and possessions to then share them with everyone. How does that sit with us as a society living in 2024? Most people I know are very materialistic, including myself.

I have fallen victim to the idea of “retail therapy”, where one goes shopping as a way to boost their mood. I have been known to buy, (what my friends would call), several “teacher outfits”. This consists of bright and peppy colors, fun earrings to match my outfit of the day, occasionally a fun headband, and some patterned or silly socks to finish the look off.

I realize that this passage can spark some tension in a lot of people. It’s **hard** to consider giving everything up. I want to just acknowledge that I am still grappling with this concept as I imagine many others may be as well. However, for today, I want to focus more on the parts of these verses that get at generosity. Does this passage instruct us to give up every single thing we have OR is it getting more at the conversation of being generous in the way that God is generous to us?

How are we as a community called to exercise our generosity by caring for others who have greater needs than we do?

The reason for my *slightly impulsive* shopping for my teacher wardrobe is that I am a current sophomore studying Special Education and Spanish Studies. My ultimate goal is to eventually work as a middle or high school special education teacher in a school district around the Twin Cities area.

Currently, I work two jobs and am placed in one field experience practicum for my education degree. I work at an early childhood center where I am an assistant teacher for two to three-year-olds. I volunteer in a high school federal setting 3 classroom for students with special needs, who are all around 15-18 years old. The students I work with are served by various disability categories, some of them being Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, and Developmental Cognitive Delay. Then I also work as a nursing assistant at an assisted living in Hopkins, where I work with older adults all the way up to my oldest resident, who is 101.

Life for me right now centers around dreaming up the next sensory bin to put in our toddler classroom, learning how to write Individualized Education Programs, or IEPs, and working on planning new activities for nursing home residents. All of this to say, I have a wide range of super awesome people that I have the privilege to interact with on a daily basis. The amount of wisdom I feel that I receive from my two-year-old students and my 100-year-old residents alike is unsurpassable.

I felt through hearing these verses for the first time that envisioning a community without any needy people was really challenging for me. I chose specifically to preach on this passage from Acts 4 because every single person that I directly work with has needs, and my job is to support them through those.

The toddlers I work with have basic human needs that are to be fulfilled, like being fed or having dry clothes. The high schoolers I work with have slightly different needs, whether those are higher

needs for sensory input, different needs in their socialization with others, or speech or occupational therapy needs as a result of their disabilities.

This is not at all an attempt for me to stand up here to brag or try to talk about my work the whole time. What I am getting at is that the main theme between all of these different populations of people that I have the opportunity to serve, is that they all have various needs, but the greatest of these is the need to be **LOVED, CARED FOR, AND RESPECTED.**

When we read texts like this one from Acts, how are we perceiving the notion of having needs?

The passage says that “*there was not a needy person among them*”. You all know just as well as I do that as humans, our nature is to be needy. We all have various social, educational, physical, emotional, and mental needs of all kinds.

Does this passage from Acts make it sound as if **having needs** is something that others should respect you for?

I had a really hard time with this because the connotation of needs in this text is that they should not be present when the community is filled with God's grace and when community members are making sacrifices. I am positive that everyone in this room makes sacrifices and holds space for grace for those they care about so that their loved ones' needs can be met. Whether those are the basic human needs like food and water, or whether those are the underlying needs of needing to be loved, cared for, and respected.

The high school students that I work with are increasingly self-aware about their disabilities and the needs that they have. This allows them to advocate for themselves throughout their high school career and then beyond, into their transitional services. I personally have extreme amounts of respect for anyone who can not only acknowledge the needs that they have, but then advocate for themselves and the assistance required for those needs to be met.

Could we instead reframe this passage to think about it in a way that prompts us to EMBRACE and RESPECT the community's needs so that not one single person feels ostracized from the rest or that their needs are too great?

For as long as I can remember, I have gravitated towards experiences that allow me to help and take care of other people. I have too often found my identity and self-worth in how I show up for other people, not how I show up for myself or how I show up for my relationship with God.

As someone who struggles with this myself, I want to give you permission to wrestle with your priorities as they relate to attending to your own needs or to those of others.

I have slowly begun to encounter God in the midst of helping others and also allowing myself to receive help from people in return.

If we go back to the beginning of these verses, it says "*All the believers were one in heart and mind.*" Have you ever had a time in

your life when you felt so deeply cared for and taken care of by your community members at a time when you could not take care of yourself?

At Lutheran Campus Ministry, where I attend church on the University of Minnesota campus, we start each of our leader meetings by checking in with one another to talk about significant moments from our past week and sharing prayer requests that we have moving forward.

I can not even begin to express in words the way that I genuinely feel so listened to, supported, and cared for by my fellow community members not just at LCM, but at Special Olympics Minnesota, with my roommates, with my friends from home, and all of the other spaces and communities that I am apart of.

I have found that my most valuable experiences in community are when I can show up, FULLY MYSELF. I am not worried about how I

show up, because ultimately, my community ACCEPTS and EMBRACES me, no matter what I am bringing to the table.

I have truly found a place and a home in LCM. For me, it's a space where I am able to be my most full and genuine self. At LCM, there is mutual support and encouragement. As I care for those around me, they also help and care for me in return, sometimes unknowingly. I receive love from my community and I am able to be vulnerable in such a judgment-free and safe space.

There is so much room for grace and mercy in our most vulnerable moments!!! When we invite God into those moments, we experience some radical love and transformation for ourselves **and** for the community!

I want you to reflect on all of the various communities and spaces that you contribute to.

What would it look like if all of us took steps to give up our time and resources to fulfill the needs of others, but also allowed ourselves to

more willingly take that help when others are extending that to us? [
] This will build and strengthen the foundation of our communities.

My hope for you all is that you feel called to be generous and merciful for the needs you and others have in the community and that you would work to learn how to support yourself and others through the spaces you all share.

I encourage you to think about how you perceive the needs that exist in your community and how you would choose to better advocate for those needs in yourself **and** others.

Whether you are in a season of consistently helping others or in a season of embracing the vulnerability to *receive help*, God sees that. God sees that and I know that He can fulfill each of our needs to be LOVED, CARED FOR, and RESPECTED.

God's love for each and every one of you is UNCONDITIONAL. God LOVES you, no matter how "needy" you might feel.

GOD LOVES YOU, YOUR COMMUNITIES LOVE YOU, AND YOU SHOULD LOVE YOU.

Thank you!