

ALL THINGS IN COMMON

The book of Acts is an historical book that gives us an invaluable glimpse into the life and times of the early church. If what we see in this book were carefully studied, it could serve as a compelling blueprint for how Jesus intended for His church to live and fellowship together.

One of the most intriguing and, quite honestly, most uncomfortable aspects of this early church history is how believers viewed their relationships and their collective possessions. It was so “other-worldly” that Luke was compelled to report on it twice, detailing what was internally happening within this fledgling band of believers who were rocking the world of their day. Here is Luke’s report: *And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.* (Acts 2:44–45, NASB, emphasis added)

And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35, emphasis added)

Notice that in both passages Luke tells us that the prevailing attitude within the church was that they had *all things in common*. After having read this passage several times, the practical ramifications today of what was happening in this church back then started to come to light. After studying this phenomenon, it seems this phrase “all things in common” might just be the “silver bullet” capable of fueling both a church-wide and consequently a culture-wide transformation today. With that said, let’s unpack the three ways in which this early church had *all things in common*.

THEY HAD A COMMON HEART

All those who had believed were together. (2:44)

[They] were of one heart and soul. (4:32)

The Greek phrase translated “together” is not referring to all believers being together in the same physical location, like at someone’s house. Instead this phrase carries with it more of the idea that the believers were experiencing an overflowing unity among themselves. This togetherness was more of a spiritual and emotional condition than it was a physical location. We might say it this way today, “They were all on the same page.”

I fear many churches today, for whatever the reason, are not experiencing anything like this kind of overflowing sense of unity. Some might argue that it is because the size of their church makes this kind of collective unity nearly impossible, but keep in mind that the early church in Acts started with 3,000 believers and grew very rapidly from there. So, size does not seem to be a limiting factor in achieving this kind of church-wide *overwhelming unity* of heart.

It seems this frame of mind is driven by an attitude of unconditional love and gracious compassion for everyone in the group—a sense of all being family, with all the benefits and responsibilities that go with that. Personal experience can tell you that nothing is more debilitating than when family unity is fractured, sometimes over the pettiest of matters. The early church had an overflowing unity that laid the foundation for the rest of what was happening among them.

THEY HAD A COMMON OWNER

[They] had all things in common. (2:44)

*Not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own,
but all things were common property to them. (4:32)*

Some through history have tried to argue that these verses teach that the only way to have a real church is if every member puts all their possessions into a common pool that is managed and controlled by the leaders of the church—a completely communal arrangement. With this model, no one person owns anything himself, but it is all owned collectively. There is no longer any individual ownership. After all, this passage does tell us that no one *claimed that anything belonging to him was his own*.

If, however, you properly understand the concept of stewardship, this statement will not give you any heartburn at all. “What do you own?” Hopefully your answer is, “Nothing.” We own none of what we possess. It was true back then and it is still true today.

But the Bible does teach individual ownership. It is just that there is only one individual Owner—and we are not it! The Bible also teaches individual stewardship—God entrusts to individuals the privilege and the responsibility of managing some portion of His vast material holdings, according to His guidelines and His directions. All these assets are still owned by Him and still under His sovereign control to be used for whatever purpose He may deem appropriate. The heart and the will of God should direct when and how stewards deploy the funds they manage. This is an unbelievably powerful concept if the church (individually and collectively) would get it.

There is a practical application of this truth. What is the “net worth” of your church? Most would add up the value of the building(s), the furniture, the equipment, and the funds in the bank to calculate its total “net worth.” Actually, the total “net worth” of the church is the combined “net worth” of your entire congregation. If it is all God’s stuff, and we are all part of God’s church, then all the assets we personally manage are part of God’s net worth for our local church. Fascinating idea, isn’t it?

And so when the church leadership discerns that God wants to do some major projects for His church, instead of needing to hire a capital campaign firm to come in and effectively extract the needed funds from the congregation (who believes what they are giving to the church is their own money), the leadership would simply need to inform the stewards of God’s resources that He is calling for His funds under their individual management to be reallocated for this project. And it could be done!

The reality is, if we were teaching our congregations sound life stewardship principles, we would never need to have another traditional capital campaign again! I can hear preachers everywhere are saying a collective sigh, “Amen.” This leads us to the final thing they had in common...

THEY HAD A COMMON COMMITMENT

[They] were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. (2:45)

For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. (4:34-35)

Thousands of Jews had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. During their visit to Jerusalem they got saved. Instead of going back home after the feast was over, they stayed on in Jerusalem to continue to be taught and to enjoy the fellowship of their new forever family. As a result of their extended stay, they ended up running out of provisions, leaving them in the very awkward position of lacking adequate personal resources to remain in Jerusalem. No doubt there were also poor people who got saved who were continually in need, but the number of needs swelled during this time because of the many who never went home after they came to Christ.

What is striking is how the church responded to these needs. Luke says that all who were owners of land and houses would sell them. This was not being done as a rare exception by one or two generous benefactors who were “ponying” up to help out those with the shortfall. It was being done by everyone who owned surplus land and houses. Those who were managing God’s *surplus* resources were voluntarily liquidating some of them to help meet the needs of those who had a *shortfall*.

This is also a great biblical example of the power of making our giving known. Imagine this mass asset-liquidation movement starting with one person standing up and saying, “This is what I am going to do.” And then someone else with means said he would do it too, until everyone who had a surplus got into the asset-liquidation giving game.

They spurred one another on to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24). Giving is contagious, individually and corporately! Why are we so reluctant to openly talk about it? What a loss for the church when we don't share our giving stories. Obviously, what these people were doing was public knowledge and a public encouragement.

There is incredible personal freedom in finally coming to embrace the fact that we own nothing. There is also incredible corporate power when the church understands that God's net worth is the collective whole of all that is being managed by their congregation. This two-fold reality is a real game-changer, personally and corporately for the church. We just need to start teaching both of these truths to our leadership and our congregations!

There is so little time left. There are so few workers. There is so much left to do. The church just cannot afford to allow itself to get distracted in its primary mission and focus. It needs to keep the main thing, the main thing. And one way a church can do that is by creating a culture that promotes a common heart, a common Owner, and a common commitment. Can you imagine what would happen in our country if we could make the church we see in Acts, the church we see in America? Oh, may it someday be so!

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E. G. “Jay” Link has a unique combination of being an ordained minister with a Master Divinity degree in Biblical Theology and a professional Stewardship planning coach who for over 40 years has been working with very affluent Christian families to enable them to optimize their Kingdom impact with all that the Lord has entrusted to them to manage. After retiring from his personal practice, he then served for five years as Director of Taylor University's Stewardship Planning Ministry, which he launched for them. Most recently, Jay founded the Stewardship Resource Group to serve Christian ministries, colleges, and churches to better minister to their highest capacity families. He has written six books, hundreds of articles and has provided extensive training curriculum for hundreds of professional financial and legal advisors in how to provide stewardship planning services for their clients.