

## Lesson Four

### Living in Community

*Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

Luke 12:32-34

*And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.*

Acts 2:44-45

*And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.*

Acts 4:33-35

I admit it; actually, I confess it--I find "sell your possessions, and give it to the needy" (Luke 12:33) a hard and difficult saying. Probably more than any other saying of Jesus—even "love your enemies"—I'm inclined to throw up my hands and say "I can't do that."

As an apprentice of Jesus, this deeply concerns me, challenges me, and drives me to my knees.

#### **Selling for the Needy**

Someone in that crowd to which Jesus said "sell your possessions" asked Jesus to adjudicate between himself and his brother over their inheritance. Jesus refused and pointed to their hearts--only they can act on the nature of their hearts. Life, Jesus said, "does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (Luke 12:15).

Ok, I know that, but what does it mean? Well, it means that we don't build bigger barns. This is the parable that Jesus told in response to this inquiry about inheritance. What do I do with the blessings God has given me? Do I build bigger barns so I can contain them, hoard them and consume them? Or, and I think this is Jesus' stinging point, don't build bigger barns. Instead, take your increase and give it to the poor.

Perhaps that is my starting place on my journey to obey "sell your possessions and give to the poor." Perhaps I just need to start with the simple resolve to never build any more bigger barns and then take my increases and give them to the needy.

So, if you are troubled as I am by this saying to "sell your possessions and give to the needy," perhaps we start by refusing to build "bigger barns." We start with using our increase to bless the poor, and then perhaps we can begin downsizing and increasing our giving to the needy. I think God will honor that direction, but he will not honor the other option.

### **Communal Living**

Living in community not only means sharing with the needy in the community, but also sharing the burden of being a community that serves the interests of the kingdom. When a community of disciples acts as a group to serve the world in a particular way, disciples share a common responsibility.

Being part of a community means we share responsibility for the ministries and needs of the community itself, including paying the bills. We don't expect people outside the community to support those kingdom interests and neither should we expect the needy to fund the community. But membership in the community entails responsibility, and the use of the services, ministries and facilities of the community involves a responsibility to support the group's efforts through funding.

Regular contributions that share the burden enable the community to continue its ministry within the church as well as to the needy and those outside of the community of faith. If we have received benefit from participation in the community, then ingratitude neglects to share with the community when we have resources to do so.

Communal living means living as a community in sharing our mutual burdens, including financial ones. This is a mark of the kingdom of God in the world—the people of God use their money for the sake of community and invite others into that community to experience the riches of God's grace.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. What attitudes or perspectives do you see in these Luke-Acts texts that empower the gracious sharing of resources by disciples of Jesus?
2. What is a contemporary equivalent to "selling our possessions" in terms of providing for the needy? What does that look like in our contemporary economic system where most think in terms of their income rather than their mortgaged property?
3. What experiences can you share with the group in terms of "selling your possessions" for the needy either as recipient or provider? In what ways have you seen disciples of Jesus live out this principle?
4. What does "living in community" as one who shares the benefits of a particular community (like Woodmont Hills) mean for regularly contributing to the needs of that community (e.g., paying for the electricity used, services rendered by staff, convenience of a building, etc.)?