



Community in the Early Church

Acts 4:32-37

1. Great Unity (verse 32)
2. Great Power (verse 33a)
3. Great Grace (verse 33b)
4. Great Generosity (verses 34-37)

In January 1882, ten men and a boy set sail from Roseto, Italy, to America in hopes of finding a better life. When they landed in New York, they headed west in search of jobs. Eventually, they found jobs in a slate quarry near Bangor, Pennsylvania.

When word got back to Roseto of the opportunities in the New World, another fifteen Rosetans came the next year, settling in the same town and working in the same slate quarry. This migration from Roseto, Italy continued on through the next decade. At one point, some 1,200 Rosetans made the journey across the ocean in a single year to come to America and join their relatives in Pennsylvania.

With increasing numbers, these Italian immigrants "began buying land on a rocky hillside connected to Bangor by a steep, rutted wagon path. They built closely clustered two-story stone houses. ... They built a church. ... In the beginning, they called their town New Italy. But they soon changed it to Roseto, which seemed only appropriate given that almost all of them had come from the same village in Italy."^[1]

In 1896, a dynamic young priest came to town. He "set up spiritual societies and organized festivals. He encouraged the townfolk to clear the land and plant onions, beans, potatoes, melons, and fruit trees in the long backyards behind their houses. He gave out seeds and bulbs. The town came to life. The Rosetans began raising pigs in their backyards and growing grapes for homemade wine. Schools, a park, a convent, and a cemetery were built. Small shops and bakeries and restaurants and bars opened along [the main avenue]" (Outliers, p. 6).

It all translated into a vibrant and happy community in Roseto. All continued like this for decades. This happy community carried on in their ways. In the late 1950's, when a physician named Stewart Wolf came to Pennsylvania to give a talk at the local medical society. When the talk was over, he went out for a drink with a local doctor, who simply mentioned in passing, "You know, I've been practicing for seventeen years. I get patients from all over, and I rarely find anyone from Roseto under the age of sixty-five with heart disease" (Outliers, p. 6).

This piqued the interest of Dr. Wolf. In the 1950's before cholesterol-lowering drugs and aggressive preventative measures, heart disease was the leading cause of death in men under 65 in America. "It was impossible to be a doctor, ... and not see heart disease" (p. 6).

So, Stewart Wolf decided to investigate. In 1961, with full support of the community in Roseto and with the help of some medical students, Wolf sought to understand this phenomenon. They gathered death certificates and physicians records and constructed family genealogies. With support of the mayor, they took over a local school in the summer and invited the entire population to come, so they could take blood samples and perform EKG's. They found that "virtually no one under fifty-five had died of a heart attack or showed any signs of heart disease. The death rate from heart disease in Roseto was roughly half that of the United States as a whole. The death rate from all causes in Roseto, ... was 30 to 35 percent lower than expected" (Outliers, p. 7).

So, they investigated further. Dr. Wolfe called in a sociologist friend, named John Bruhn to help him figure it out. They hired even more students to go house to house and interview everyone over 21 years of age. What they found was amazing: "There was no suicide, no alcoholism, no drug addiction, and very little crime. They didn't have anyone on welfare. ... These people were [only] dying of old age. That's it" (Outliers, p. 7).

So, they looked into every sort of cause for this longevity. They looked at diet. But their diet was terrible. They cooked with lard instead of the much healthier olive oil that they used in Italy. This means that 41% of their calories came from fat. They looked into exercise. But the Rosetans smoked heavily. Many were overweight and struggled with obesity. They looked into genetics. But those from Roseto, Italy who settled in other parts of the United States didn't share this same trait of longevity. They looked into the location of where they lived. (Perhaps the location of living in the foothills of Pennsylvania was good for their health?) But the two nearest towns, Bangor and Nazareth, both of which were about the same size as Roseto. Both of these cities were populated with the same sort of hardworking European immigrants. In both those cities, "the death rates from heart disease ... were three times that of Roseto" (p. 9).

Finally, Stewart Wolf figured it out. As Malcom Gladwell says, ...

The secret of Roseto wasn't diet or exercise or genes or location. It had to be Roseto itself. As Bruhn and Wolf walked around the town, they figured out why. They looked at how the Rosetans visited one another, stopping to chat in Italian on the street, say, or cooking for one another in their backyards. They learned about the extended family clans that underlay the town's social structure. They saw how many homes had three generations living under one roof, and how much respect grandparents commanded. ...

Living a long life, the conventional wisdom at the time said, depended to a great extent on who we were--that is, our genes. It depended on the decisions we made--on what we chose to eat, and how much we chose to exercise, and how effectively

we were treated by the medical system. No one was used to thinking about health in terms of community (Outliers, pp. 9, 10).

Our important takeaway from this story this morning is this: community is healthy. It's the way that God has made us to be. He has made us social beings. We do best when we live in community. It makes sense, then, when God does a major work among us, the fruit is a strong and vibrant community. This is what we see in our text this morning. We see one of the greatest pictures in all of the Bible of genuine community.

My message this morning is entitled, "Community in the Early Church." It comes from Acts, chapter 4, and verses 32-37. Consider what the text says.

Acts 4:32-37

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. 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. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Now, much of the book of Acts is about the expanding church, the church that is triumphant, bringing the gospel out from Jerusalem, beginning with the regions closest by (Judea and Samaria), and continuing on to the known world. But here, we pause, and get a glimpse of the inner-workings of the early church. And it's glorious.

By way of outline this morning, I want to look at some of the characteristics of the early church mentioned in this text. They serve as good aspirations of what we should be as a church. The first characteristic we see comes in verse 32. We see the early church had ...

1. Great Unity (verse 32)

Acts 4:32

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

When we read "the full number" in verse 32, we are talking thousands of people. On the day of Pentecost, we are told of 3,000 people who repented and believed (Acts 2:37-41). Later, in Acts 4:4, we are told that the total number of men who believed was about 5,000. When you add women and children, this could be many thousand more. This is what makes the book of Acts so exciting! You see thousands of people coming to faith in Jesus.

From best that we can tell, it was only a matter of months since Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected. And there are thousands in the church! This is genuine church growth! It's not transfer growth, moving from one church to another. It's new believers coming into the fold! They are coming by the thousands!

It's not merely numbers that is the emphasis in verse 32. It's unity. Look again at how verse 32 describes those who believed.

Acts 4:32

[They] were of one heart and soul.

These words describe the **form** of the unity of those in the early church. They were united in heart. They were united in soul. Though there were thousands of souls, they acted as one soul. Though there were thousands of hearts, they acted as one heart. In other words, they weren't a divided people. Rather, they were one! They were "unified."

What united them was not the same interests, or the same background, or the same political views. What united them was the gospel. Verse 32 says that those who were of one heart and one soul were those "who believed." That is, they believed in the gospel.

They believe in the good news that Jesus was the Messiah, that he came and lived upon the earth, but was hated by the rulers of the day. He was put to death as a criminal. But death could not hold him. He rose from the dead, that those who believe in him would be forgiven of their sin! This is what they believed! And this brought them together in one heart and one soul.

This expression "one heart and soul" speaks of the **depth** of their unity. When the Lord calls us to worship him, it is to be "with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind" (Matthew 22:36). In other words, our love for the Lord is to come from deep within us. Likewise here, love for the other believers came from deep within.

The only way for us to be of "one heart and soul" with each other is to be vulnerable. Others need to see your heart. Others need to see your soul. We need to have **open hearts**.

Sadly, the church today rarely enters into such depth. Usually things simply stay on the surface. Too often, there's a lot of hiding that goes on in the church, lest others would really get to see what's going on in my heart and soul. Sunday morning becomes a show, as if all is well, when all is not well.

If ever will be of "one heart and soul," we need to be open with each other, so that we can rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (as Paul would later command in Romans 12:15).

I saw a great illustration of this while Yvonne and I took our walk yesterday afternoon. We happened upon a house that a few signs in the

driveway. One sign said, "No Trespassing." The other sign said, "CAUTION: No Soliciting." We walked past the house, and then I thought of what a great picture this is of so many when it comes to their hearts and their souls. They don't want anyone to enter into their personal lives.

At that point, I wanted to get a picture of the signs. So, I stopped and walked back to get a good view of the signs to take a picture. As I took the picture, a woman came out of the front door to see what exactly it was that I was doing. She caught me red-handed, with my phone in hand, taking a picture.

She said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I thought that your signs were interesting. So, I took a picture of them." She said, "Yes. Many people don't read. I have called the sheriff on a number of occasions." I said, "Wow!" and continued on my walk with Yvonne. I was relieved that she didn't object to my taking a picture of her driveway and call the sheriff right then and there.

Too often in the church, people act like this with their own hearts and souls! "No Trespassing." "CAUTION: No Soliciting." Yvonne and I have a friend who confronted her daughter concerning her dating relationship. The daughter was not happy. She replied with a text denoting the boundaries of what she could talk about regarding her dating relationship. In other words, she set up a "No Trespassing" sign regarding her heart. Such an attitude is not helpful if ever mom and daughter are to be of "one heart and soul."

The same is true of the church. If we are to be a church of "one heart and soul," we must be open with each other. So let's share our joys. Let us share our burdens.

We see further examples of the openness of the early church in the second half of verse 32, ...

Acts 4:32

... and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

We see here their **open hands**. Their open hearts were in the first half of verse 32. Their open hands are in the second half of verse 32. They were sharing all that they had with each other. "They had everything in common." Literally, they had everything "in fellowship." This is genuine fellowship, when we so share our lives, so that what is mine is yours.

Now, notice, this is not communism. Communism is a dictate from above that says, "What is yours is ours." But that's not what this is in Acts 4. Acts 4 is all voluntary. Acts 4 says, "What's mine is yours." It's when you share what you have, you are demonstrating life in the early church.

When I think about this, my mind goes naturally to the Wriedt family. They excel in this area. They really do.

The Wriedts have a cabin in the woods several hours north of here. I remember them meeting with me before they built it. Their heart was to build it to use it for ministry. The offer stands, if you want to get away, to a remote place, perhaps for a marriage retreat. Talk to the Wriedts. Their cabin is your cabin.

Beyond that, I know that Dirk has a trailer, that's available for me to use whenever I need it. Over the years, I have probably borrowed that thing close to a dozen times. Dirk has a wood splitter, that's available for me to use whenever I need it. Over the years, I have probably borrowed that thing three or four times. I know that Dirk's trailer is your trailer. I know that Dirk's wood splitter is your wood splitter.

Dirk has skills in many areas that he's willing to help you with. Here are some things that I know that he has helped people with. I remember when someone at church was having a leak in their basement. He came over to their house and consulted them on how to dig a ditch to direct water away from the house. I remember, because I was helping to dig. Dirk was supervising, but I was digging.

I remember another time, when someone at church needed a restraining wall put into their yard. He consulted them on what sort of stones to purchase. He oversaw the work. I remember, because I was helping to move the stones. He was telling us where to move them.

I remember when another family in the church was taking down a wall in their house. Dirk consulted them on how to do it, taking into account the loads that were on the wall. He was there to help oversee the work.

I remember when another family was pouring a concrete slab for an addition to their house. Dirk consulted with them on how to do it. He was there to help oversee the work. I know that he has helped another family recently with some special doors that they put in their house. He built the cross that stands at the back of our auditorium.

I have only told the half of it. I have not told of the missions trips he has taken to do similar projects. I have not told of the missionaries he has consulted on various projects like these. I have not told of other projects he has helped with because I don't know of them all.

Dirk has done this because he has a heart to do this. He has the abilities to share. Dirk is happiest when he is helping others. It's his spiritual gift.

You may not give to others like the Wriedts do. But you may have other ways that you can help.

Before I was a pastor, I was an I. T. Professional. I have computer skills. I have often spent time in consultation with others about all things dealing with computers. I have been in many homes helping to fix them. You have a computer problem? Come to me, I'm more than willing to help. And I have helped many in this church.

Perhaps your skill is in sewing. I know that ladies in this church have given time and effort into helping others with sewing projects. Perhaps your skill is in music. You can teach others. Perhaps you have some sort of equipment that you can share with others.

If we want to have "Great Unity" at Rock Valley Bible Church, we need to have open hearts (verse 32a). We need to have open hands (verse 32b). Well, let's move on. The early church had, ...

2. Great Power (verse 33a)

We see this in the first half of verse 33, "And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."

You say, "What's the power?" The power is the **boldness** of the apostles. The working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the apostles kept these apostles preaching boldly. This takes us back to verse 31, "And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness." Boldness is the outworking of the Holy Spirit in our lives!

Boldness was evident in these apostles. They stood before the religious authorities in chapter 4. The counsel took note of their boldness (Acts 4:13). In chapter 5, we will see them standing before the same counsel with the same boldness as before. When told not to preach any more in the name of Jesus, they continued doing so. They said, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

It cost them. It will cost them dearly. As a result of their refusal to submit to the religious authorities of the day, they were beaten and charged not to speak any more in the name of Jesus (Acts 5:40). But they continued on! This speaks of the power of the Holy Spirit working in their lives.

But the power also was demonstrated with **results** of their preaching. We saw the power in chapter 2, with 3,000 repenting of their sin (Acts 2:41). We saw the power continue in chapter 4, with the number of those believing rising to 5,000 (or more) (Acts 4:4). As we work our way deeper into the book of Acts, we will see that there are more to come. For instance, "The word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). This growth of the church is what we will see in the book of Acts. It all speaks to the power of the preaching of the apostles.

You say, "What did they preach?" They preached the resurrection. "With great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:33). They were preaching Jesus, risen from the dead. This is how they were witnessing to others.

In chapter 1, they saw Jesus, risen from the dead. In chapter 2, Peter preached Jesus as risen from the dead. He quoted Psalm 16, in which David said that God would not let his Holy One see corruption (Psalm 16:10). Peter explained how Jesus "was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption" (Acts 2:31). He then said, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:32).

In chapter 3, Peter preached the resurrection. He preached to those who were in the temple, "You denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses" (Acts 3:14-15).

In chapter 4, we read in verse 2 that the religious leaders were "greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2). And here in our text, we read that they apostles were preaching with "great power" as they "were giving their testimony to the resurrection."

But here in verse 33, Luke, the author of Acts, isn't looking back at what they were preaching. Rather, he was describing what their preaching was like from this point forward. He doesn't give us specific details about specific sermons and situations. All we can assume is that what we read in chapters 2, 3, and 4, is merely indicative of the preaching they did in the future.

We do get a glimpse of their preaching in chapter 5.

Acts 5:30-32

The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.

And looking forward in the book of Acts to the preaching of the apostles, we will see the same thing. They are relentless at preaching the resurrection of Jesus.^[2]

The question to you all is simply this: as you speak with others about Jesus, do you tell them about the resurrection? As they "were giving testimony to the resurrection" the Holy Spirit was using them to pour out his power upon their preaching. I believe that he will do the same for us today. If we but boldly open our mouth and speak with others.

I had a non-Christian friend of mine call me this week. He told me that his father died. I think he called me, because he doesn't have any other sort-of faith community. I don't think that he attends church. I don't think that Christianity is much a part of his life at all. He's simply looking for help and direction in his life. I hope to get together with him this week. I'm praying for an opportunity to speak about the resurrection. So pray with me about this, that I might speak with boldness to him about life after death.

Let's move on. We have seen the (1) Great Unity (verse 32) of the early church. We have seen the (2) Great Power (verse 33a) of the early church. And now, we see the ...

3. Great Grace (verse 33b)

... upon the early church.

It comes in the last half of verse 33, "and great grace was upon them all." This is a statement of the sovereign working of God in the life of early church. Grace is what God gives.

Grace is the only explanation that makes sense about community in the book of Acts. The only way that you have unity in the church is by God's grace. The only way that you have power in preaching is by God's grace.

If you are familiar at all with the concept of revival, you will recognize that this is what we see in the book of Acts. The book of Acts is the testimony of revival. And if you know how revivals work, you know that they come as a result of God's grace through the working of the Spirit of God.

If you read the history of church during days of revival, you see those churches experiencing revival to see great spikes in their attendance during the days of revival. In other words, churches plod along, experiencing slow growth. Then, during the days of revival, there is great interest in the things of God. People are convicted of their sin and see the meaning of the work of Jesus. They repent of their sin and believe, and greater numbers come into the church. Attendance spikes for a few months or a few years. Then, ministry gets back to "normal." Then, when revival comes again a few years (or decades) later, conviction of sin comes, and more people believe. At that time, attendance spikes again. When the revival is over, the church plods along.

There's no rhyme or reason to it. The only explanation is the Spirit of God that blows as he wills. Jesus said, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). That's revival. It's the Spirit coming in extra-ordinary measure. I love how Iain Murray describes it. He writes, ...

What happens in revivals is not to be seen as something miraculously different from the regular experience of the church. The difference lies in degree, not in kind. In an 'outpouring of the Spirit' spiritual influence is more widespread, convictions are deeper, and feelings more intense, but all this is only a heightening of normal Christianity. True revivals are 'extraordinary', yet what is experienced at such times is not different in essence from the spiritual experience that belongs to Christians at other times. ^[3]

That's why my third point is entitled, "Great Grace." The church always has God's grace resting upon it. Only, in the book of Acts, we see **great** grace. That is (quoting Iain Murray), grace that is different, "in degree, not in kind." If ever you read about revivals in the history of the church, it's super-encouraging, because you see the church and all it could be, if God would pour out his grace upon us.

You can't "work it up." In his book, *Revival and Revivalism*, Iain Murray looked at a handful of men who experienced revival in their ministry. He concludes:

The experience of all five men points to the same conclusion: revivals did not occur in conjunction with any special efforts. They were not worked up, but were witnessed in the course of the ordinary services of the churches. Far from their being planned or announced in advance, those who experienced them were all united in the conviction that God alone had determined the time. ... In the work of grace there is no corresponding set period of time between sowing and reaping. The duration of the cycles of time are known only to him before whom "a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past and as a watch in the night." ^[4]

This explains the book of Acts. It was a time of the extra-ordinary working of the Spirit of God upon the life of the church. During those days, they experienced "Great Grace." Finally, we see ...

4. Great Generosity (verses 34-37)

Acts 4:34-35

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.

We see the general statement of generosity in verses 34-35. There was nobody needy among them, because they were of "one heart and soul." They were open with each other and they let their needs be known. Generous people raised up to meet the need. They did so in a great way, selling their property. They were on Craigslist and Facebook marketplace, selling their wares to help supply the need. They were even selling their land or houses. This means that they were on realtor.com, selling massive assets to support those in the church, like houses.

Now, the way that they did it in Acts 4 was to give the proceeds to the apostles, that they might distribute the proceeds. There is wisdom in that, in that the apostles probably had more of a feel for those really in need. Just as church leaders are probably in more of a position to understand those who are really in need. Yet, in no way do I believe, this is the only way to give. You can give anyway that your heart pleases. You can give to the church. You can give directly to others. My only hope for all of us is that we would see "Great Generosity" at Rock Valley Bible Church.

Indeed, I know that many of you are generous. Down through the years, I have always been encouraged by the generosity of those at this church. I was talking last week with a church planter who was struggling after several years of labor in the church. Still, the church isn't independent financially from the mother church. He was seeking me for advice. He was wondering how it was that we were able to be financially independent in a year and a half? I told him that it wasn't because of anything in me or my strategy. We have simply been blessed with generous people. I am thankful to God for your generosity in giving to this church.

In verses 36 and 37, we see but one example in the early church of one who sold land and property to support the church.

Acts 4:36-37

Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Verse 36 introduces us to a generous man named Joseph. But he had a nick-name. His nickname was "Barnabas" (i.e. son of encouragement). They called him this, because he build people up in what he did and in what he said. He encouraged the discouraged. He gave help to the hurting.

Joseph (or Barnabas) is also "a Levite." That is, he was of the tribe of Levi, the priestly line. According to the law, Levites were prohibited from having land (Numbers 18:20; Deuteronomy 10:9). However, here we see Barnabas owning land that he sold. Apparently, the practice was discarded by the time the New Testament rolled around.

We also read that he was "a native of Cyprus." Cyprus is a large island in the Mediterranean Sea, to the northwest of Israel. It's about 100 miles long and 40 miles wide. We will encounter the significance of this statement in chapter 13 of Acts, when Paul and Barnabas travel across the island during their first missionary journey.

Now, as pertinent to our text this morning. Barnabas gave a large amount of money to the apostles to distribute accordingly.

The question comes as to why Barnabas is mentioned here. I believe that he is one of many who could have been mentioned. I believe that Barnabas is mentioned, not because he gave the largest gift, but to prepare us for knowing the man who would later play a large role in the book of Acts.

Barnabas was the one who believed in Paul. When Paul was converted, he was on the road to persecute Christians. Knowing this, the Christians were fearful of associating with him, lest his conversion as a cover-up to get inside the church. It was the testimony of Barnabas that convinced the apostles that Paul's conversion was genuine (Acts 9:27).

Barnabas was the one who united Paul with the church in Antioch. Barnabas was ministering to the church in Antioch. Things were going well, but they were lacking a strong teacher to guide them in the things of God. Barnabas knew that Paul was the man the church needed to continue on in strength. So Barnabas traveled to find Paul and bring him to Antioch to teach those in the church (Acts 11:25-26). This is a great example of the encouragement that Barnabas was. He didn't lift himself up as the teacher. He brought Paul to teach the church in Antioch.

Barnabas was also Paul's partner on the first missionary journey of the church. The leaders of the church in Antioch were ministering to the Lord and fasting. The Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2). The first place they went was the island of Cyprus, where Barnabas was from. Certainly, this was a strategic use of the contacts that Barnabas had in Cyprus.

Barnabas' large gift was a demonstration of the level of commitment that Barnabas had for the church in Jerusalem. In fact, this is often how you can tell if someone is really committed to the church. You simply need to open their checkbook to see whether their verbal commitment is backed up by their financial generosity. Do they have blood, sweat and tears in the game? Or are they all talk? Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). If they do, then they can probably be trusted with the ministry.

I want to close by telling you of a modern-day example of such generosity. I want to tell you about Henry Parsons Crowell. He was born in 1855 (which, I guess, doesn't make him too modern). He was a very wealthy man, who used his wealth to advance the kingdom.

As a young man, he heard Dwight Moody preach. Moody had come to Cleveland for a special meeting. Though this was the only time that Henry Crowell heard Moody, he remembered some things he said. Moody encouraged his listeners to "think big." Moody shared how he was working to travel to England to "win ten thousand souls."^[5] Moody challenged his listeners, "What about you? Do you ever think big things for God? Huh?"^[6]

Moody's words caused Henry Crowell to think about his own life. Even at eighteen, Crowell knew that his giftedness was not as a preacher, but as a businessman. He pondered, "What kind of big dreams should I have in the service of God? I know I can never preach like Mr. Moody ... but maybe I can do something else great for You. Lord, maybe I can make money and help support men like D. L. Moody."^[7] Crowell prayed, "Oh God, ... if You will allow me to make money, to be used for Your service, I'll keep my name out of it. I'll do it so You will get the glory."^[8]

These words set the course of Crowell's life. God blessed him in business. It seems like everything he touched turned to gold. He bought a ranch out west. In a year, he sold it for 100% profit. Eventually, he became the CEO of Quaker Oats. Crowell was an innovative leader. He worked during the depression years. People wanted meat, but it was very expensive. So, Crowell advertised how oats served to give great nutritional value for much less of a price. Further, he was innovative in the packaging of the oats. Before Crowell's day oats were often stored in a big barrel that you would use a scoop to get your oats. It was a place where vermin would come. But he innovated in processing and packaging to oats to sell to the masses. Crowell became wealthy beyond his wildest dreams.

When Crowell was trying to figure out how to use his riches for the kingdom, he was in contact with Moody Bible Institute, especially as the headquarters of Quaker Oats had been moved to Chicago. When D. L. Moody passed away (December 1899), there was a financial crisis at Moody Bible Institute. He met with the board of directors and said, "D. L. Moody knew how to raise money from his friends. But he's gone now, and there are no more friends of Moody to give the kind of money it takes to run this business."^[9]

And so, for the next 40 years, Henry Crowell invested himself in serving Moody Bible Institute. He rode the train to work in Chicago every day, but every Tuesday, he would make the walk to Moody Bible Institute to give himself to helping the school. He gave much of his time to the institution, along with much money. He gave so much money that at one point, the faculty and trustees were in unanimous agreement to name a building after him. They wanted to name it, "Crowell Hall." But Crowell was against it. His biographer writes, "His mind went back to that church meeting in Ohio where he heard D. L. Moody speak on how one man can make a difference. And how he had asked God to allow him to make money for His causes. Then Henry recalled the latter half of his agreement: ... and I'll keep my name out of it. It'll be for Your glory!"^[10]

If we knew all, how much labor and money and time he gave to Moody Bible Institute, it would reveal that he gave much. In fact, Crowell reached a point in his life where he wasn't merely "tithing" of his wealth. He was "super-tithing." Over his lifetime, he gave away some 70% of his income.

In some regards, Henry Crowell is like Barnabas, who was very generous with his possessions. The call for us is to be generous as well. Now, we may never be as wealthy as Henry Crowell. But neither was Barnabas. Yet, he was generous. We all can be generous as well.

Wouldn't it be great to have a church like the early church? They had great unity, great power, great grace, and great generosity. Not only would such a place be enjoyable to experience, but also, the Lord could use it in a mighty way.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 24, 2021 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers*, pp. 5-6. I quote so freely from this book in the introduction that I have included references as end notes.

[2] See my sermon entitled, "The Apostolic Preaching of the Resurrection," which was preached on March 27, 2016 (<http://sermons.rvbc.cc/sermons/2016-013>).

[3] Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 23.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 208.

[5] Joe Musser, *The Cereal Tycoon: Henry Parsons Crowell*, p. 37.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 39.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 132. After I preached this sermon, I was told by a former student at Moody Bible Institute that she was familiar with Henry Crowell because "Crowell Hall" is named after him. Perhaps it was named after him posthumously?