

# Life: Return to Unity

July 31, 2015

• *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for Aug. 16 focuses on Acts 4:31-37.*

When the early church began meeting together after the movement of the Spirit at Pentecost, the unity of their hearts and minds through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit led them to share “everything they had” with each other. “And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them” (Acts 4:33-34). The believers even sold their land and houses and gave the money to the apostles to distribute to people in need. As a result, they were “highly regarded by the people” (Acts 5:13).

## **The challenges of poverty**

The challenges of poverty are as old as humanity itself. The early church is an example for Christians today that meeting needs in the name of Christ is a testimony to others of the love that unifies believers.

Sharing what we have with anyone who needs it forces us to consider each other’s needs above our own and to follow the great commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 19:19). For example, one enormous challenge in Texas is food security. More than 4 million people in our state are unsure of where their next meal is coming from.

Food insecurity rates are highest in families headed by single mothers and families with annual household incomes of \$43,000 or less. Although food insecurity is most common among families with children, the number of food-insecure adults age 50 or older is rising rapidly. Between 2007 and 2009, the number of hungry seniors increased by 40 percent.

## **A ‘grocery gap’**

The problem of food insecurity in Texas is not scarcity of food. Thankfully, we have enough food to feed everyone. Instead, hunger is more a function of distribution systems. In other words, getting the food we have to the people who need it. Texas, for example, is the state with [the largest “grocery gap.”](#) That means our state “has the lowest number of supermarkets per capita of any state. Supermarkets in Texas also are unevenly distributed among the population, leaving low-income neighborhoods underserved.”

Many low-income families who rely on public transportation live in these “food deserts,” without a full-service grocery store nearby. Consequently, they have difficulty accessing a variety of nutritious food at a price they can afford. Although hundreds of wonderful churches across our state provide food to anyone who needs it, the problem of hunger persists. The church continues to be challenged in its efforts to share with people experiencing crises such as hunger.

Is unity demonstrated by sharing with those in need one of the defining characteristics of your spiritual family? Too often, cultural and economic biases creep into the fellowship of the church, causing disunity and a loss of empathy for people in need. For example, the wealthiest members are asked to serve as deacons or on the finance committee more frequently than lower-income members. Or, those who are not of the majority culture of the congregation are passed up for leadership roles.

### **‘Overlooked in the distribution of food’**

Even the early church had to deal with this issue when the Greek widows “were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food” (Acts 6:1). One could argue the severity of Ananias and Sapphira’s punishment for lying to the early church was in part because it threatened its unity (Acts 5:1-11). I have seen the gospel witness and ministry of many churches completely derail because of disunity, often involving conflict of desires between

people to get their own needs met rather than thinking of others. Consequently, the body of Christ suffers and loses its witness to an unbelieving world.

One key characteristic of the early church was Christians pooled their resources to meet each other's needs. Churches do not need to have a great amount of money or extensive capital resources to begin to meet the needs of those around them.

Once I needed a car to pick up some lunch because my vehicle was in the repair shop. I asked a co-worker if I could borrow her car. "Of course you can," she replied. "That's God's car, not my car." My colleague's generosity is one of countless examples of how the unified body of Christ cares for each other in simple ways, demonstrating a unity of Spirit that will draw others to a deeper faith in Christ.