



#### 4: The Creation of Community | Pastor Brad Williams | December 13, 2009

- Note:** 1. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! The next Sermon Study Guide will come out the week of January 4 for the next series, *God's in it! How God Grows Your Faith*.
2. We will be having Life Group sign-ups on January 17 & 24<sup>th</sup> so please be looking for the return postcard, fill it out and send it back by Jan. 4<sup>th</sup> so we will know if your group has openings and wants to be on the connections form in January.

##### A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

##### B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

**Introduction:** As Americans, we are accustomed to getting what we want when we want it. When we don't, we get frustrated. But as we learn about Living Large in Lean Times, we find that *not* getting what we want is surprisingly beneficial. It might even actually be good for us. No one asked for a recession. We don't want the economy to tank, loans to freeze up, the housing market to slump, or for jobs to disappear. But in the middle of not getting what we want, we're discovering some amazing things. We're discovering what we really need and seeing a generosity in our church like we've never seen before. We're experiencing the grace of gratitude, learning to trust, and coming to terms with the idea that we have enough. Living Large in Lean Times leads us to another challenging surprise: the creation of community.

##### 1. **Living large in lean times means creating a community where we are the primary source of need meeting.**

No group of people has lived larger than the first century followers of Christ. **Acts 2:42-45** describes their life together as a church. [Read passage together now.] The early followers of Christ studied the Bible, spent time together in life groups, took communion, prayed, and shared meals. They also sold their possessions and gave the money to the people in their community who needed it most. While part of this sounds good, we're not sure on a practical level this would work today. We might get stuck with the short end of the stick. But Living Large in Lean Times means creating a community where we are the primary source of meeting needs. In **Luke 12:15b**, Jesus tells the people to change how they view, understand, and manage their stuff. He says, *"A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."* Jesus teaches that we run the risk of living our lives like it's all about what we own. Then He continues with a parable. **[Read Luke 12:16-21]** In this parable, Jesus doesn't teach against preparing for the future financially. Rather, He says this is how it will be for anyone who thinks that everything that comes their way is to be consumed by them, and in doing so, forget to be rich toward God. Jesus wants us to be rich toward God. In **Luke 12:33** He says, *"Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven."* In God's economy, when we take what we have and give it to those who are in need, it becomes treasure in heaven, and we're rich toward God. But knowing what we need to do it and actually doing it are two different things. Jesus tells us in **Luke 12:22-24** how to get from a place where we know we need to be rich toward God to a place where we actually are. *"Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable are you than birds!"* Even though we think we're in control and what we have is the product of what we've done, God is the one who takes care of us. He makes sure that we have what we need.

## 2. God takes full responsibility for the life that's lived richly toward him.

If God takes care of the ravens, think about how much He loves and cares for us. But we feel strapped. We worry because we think our giving won't be reciprocated; the community won't return the favor. But it's not the community who gives back to us. It's God. It's His responsibility. We don't have to build bigger barns because He has us covered. All we need to do is live richly toward God by living richly toward others, and He'll take care of the rest. Creating a community where we are the primary source of need meeting isn't just possible, it's incredibly rewarding. It has an unexpected, unanticipated, wonderful outcome that we can only understand when we've done it. Here are a few practical steps we can take to live large in our community:

- **Be aware of our extra.** If we are living indoors, eating, and have more than one pair of shoes, we're rich. We have extra. If we want to create a community where we are meeting needs and solving problems, we need to see that God has been rich toward us, and we have more than enough.
- **Be willing to give and receive.** When we tally up how much we spend on extras, we can say to our self, "If someone needs this, they can have it." We've got to be willing to give, which means we might have to sacrifice some of the extras, but it's worth it. We'll be more satisfied when we upgrade our generosity toward others than by upgrading our possessions. We also have to be willing to receive, and for some of us, receiving is more difficult than giving. But if we fail to receive, we rob others of the opportunity to be rich toward God. We have to be willing to both give and receive.
- **Be open to the full spectrum of needs.** Not every need is met with money. Some of the greatest needs don't have a price tag on them. Our skills, extra hands, comforting words, or partnering prayers may be exactly what someone needs. Just remember, God takes full responsibility for the life that's lived richly toward Him. That's it. If you get that, then taking the step of living large, by meeting needs, is yours to experience.

### C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. How do gratitude, trust in God and contentment open us up to living in true community?
2. The early Church, as described in **Acts 2:42-45**, consisted of people depending on God and each other. Is it possible for us to live in the same manner? How? What elements of that community can we apply today?
3. Reread **Luke 12:15**. How do Jesus' words run counter to modern society? How do you define "enough" for you and your family? In what ways do you struggle to live according to Jesus' standard?
4. Once you know what "enough" is...is the rest "extra"? When you decide what is "enough" what next step will you take personally? How might your next step foster the growth of the type of community that was displayed in the Acts 2 church?
5. Describe a time in your life when you had some needs. In that situation were you able to receive from others when they offered to help meet your needs? Why do you think it is difficult for people to receive from others when they have needs?

### D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes).

- If you find any of your stuff or activities weighing you down...consider giving the things (and maybe your time) to those who really need them...and experience greater freedom and contentment.
- Enjoy your family and friends during this Christmas season. Identify ways that you can serve friends or family who may have some needs this Christmas.

### E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Thank God for knowing, and meeting, your deepest needs.
- Ask God to help you take a concrete step to put into practice true community in Christ.

- Bring praises and requests to God that came up during your discussion.