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UNSTOPPABLE LOVE



What are some employee benefits that would get you excited?

QUESTION #1

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THE POINT

Loving people is a powerful expression of loving God.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Many businesses are famous not just for their products and services, but also for their work environments. For example:

- ▶ An Internet-related company offers its employees on-site vehicle maintenance, a laundromat, hair salon, and nap pods during work hours.
- ▶ A toy company offers paid time off for school-related absences like parent-teacher conferences or field trips.
- ▶ Other companies offer physical perks such as on-site gyms, pools, and even bowling alleys.¹

These companies have created an inviting culture that draws people to work and keeps them happy.

The church is known for a culture that is far deeper than corporate perks. The early church's culture overflowed with love—love that reflected Jesus Christ and drew people to Him. Their example in Acts 2 challenges us to continue that reputation and be a church immersed in a culture of love.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Acts 2:41-42

⁴¹ So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about 3,000 people were added to them. ⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.

God did an incredible work in and through His people on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came upon the believers, Peter proclaimed the gospel of Jesus, and 3,000 people responded and were added to their number. Out of their common love for Christ, the believers came together and shared meals, worshiped and praised God together, and otherwise enjoyed one another's company. They continued to grow by learning under the apostles' teaching, fellowshiping together, and praying.

Let's focus for a moment on that crucial last element: *praying*.

Every great movement from God starts with prayer and is confirmed by prayer. As we saw in Acts 1, the first activity of the church was a prayer meeting.

Prayer is the key to effective evangelism. We don't change people's hearts with our convincing arguments or clever presentations. Far more important than anything a believer can learn about evangelism is how much he or she depends on the Holy Spirit for witnessing. Before you start to have a conversation about Christ with your neighbor, coworker, or a fellow student—pause for prayer. It doesn't need to be a long, involved prayer. Sometimes it's enough to say, "Lord, let me speak Your words."

A friend of mine says, "The reason we don't pray is not because we're too busy, but because we're too confident." Jesus said, "You can do nothing without Me" (John 15:5); Paul wrote, "Pray constantly" (1 Thess. 5:17). Prayer should drive us to our knees in humility, knowing we need Jesus every hour.

What aspects of church life have been especially meaningful to you?

QUESTION #2

Prayer allows God to change *me*—the one praying. As I pray in the love of Christ for others who don't know God, I become more burdened for their souls. As I pray for their broken relationships, health concerns, financial worries, or problems at work, I grow in concern and love for them. People will be more open to hearing our message when they sense that we genuinely care about them and what matters to them.

Praying for others leads to caring for others.

Acts 2:43-45

⁴³ Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all the believers were together and held all things in common.

⁴⁵ They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need.

The believers in the early church didn't just meet together to pray and worship. Verses 43-45 shows how they provided for one another's needs. Three characteristics are prominent:

- ▶ **Unity.** They "were together and held all things in common."
- ▶ **Selflessness.** "They sold their possessions and property."
- ▶ **Mutual care.** They "distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need."

Caring for people is an incredible way to open a conversation about Jesus Christ. It's been said that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

The first Christians were so committed to caring for others they sold their own possessions and property to provide for anyone among them who was in need. That's pretty radical.

When have you seen the transformational power of prayer?

QUESTION #3

In the second century, a writer and philosopher named Aristides the Athenian described the early believers this way:

“They love one another, and from the widows they do not turn away their countenance; and they rescue the orphan from him who does him violence; and he who has gives to him who has not, without grudging. . . . And if there is among them a man that is poor or needy, and they have not an abundance of necessaries, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.”²

Anything the early Christians contributed was a gift that came directly from the heart, not from autocratic rule. They gave from the overflow of their generosity.

Just as the early believers weren’t required to sell all their possessions, neither are we. In this passage, Luke was describing what happened in the early church, not giving us a mandate. Nevertheless, their example of caring and extravagant love should motivate us to consider how we can imitate it.

How much should we give and how much should we keep? No one can give a pat, once-and-for-always answer to that question. We must find the balance in our own lives. The point is not to adopt an attitude of “How much do I *have* to give?” Rather, the point is to respond to the God who loves us extravagantly with a heart of loving generosity.



How would you describe a healthy balance between giving and keeping in today’s world?

QUESTION #4

Acts 2:46-47

⁴⁶ Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.

The early church certainly prayed and cared for others. But they didn't stop there. Perhaps if the believers had done only these two things and nothing more, none of us would know about Jesus today. At some point, in addition to praying for and helping people, they had to tell them about Jesus—who He is and why He lived, died, and rose again. They had to give voice to the message behind their loving acts.

In other words, the early believers evangelized! We know this is true because “every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.” This happened because someone who knew Jesus told someone who didn't know Jesus how to know Jesus.

In most situations today, the opportunity to share Christ is built on the foundation of friendship. You'll pray for a person and find some way to demonstrate you sincerely care—even if it's just to say, “I've been praying for you about that problem you shared with me.” In the course of praying and caring, the Lord will give you an opportunity to share how Jesus is the answer to whatever he or she is going through.

Take a moment to think about these three simple acts: pray, care, and share. When we pray, God helps us to care for others. When we care, He leads us to share about His Son, Jesus. And the more we share the gospel, the more we are reminded to pray for those who need it.

Three simple acts become an incredible, dynamic lifestyle of loving God and serving others.

***Loving others involves praying, caring, and sharing.
In which of these areas would you like to grow?***

QUESTION #5

PRAY, CARE, SHARE

Think of someone in your sphere of influence who would benefit from experiencing the love of Christ. Use the questions below to plan out how to pray for that person, care for him or her in a practical way, and share the message of the gospel.

When will you pray for this person each day?

What's one practical step you can take in the coming week to show this person you care?

What will you communicate to this person when an opportunity appears to share the good news of the gospel?

LIVE IT OUT

How will you actively and intentionally show love to people this week? Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ **Pray.** Take a prayer walk through your neighborhood. Pray for the spiritual, emotional, and financial needs of each household—and pray especially for their salvation.
- ▶ **Care.** Actively look for someone in need this week. Determine to give sacrificially, whether of your time, money, or other resources to help that person in the name of Jesus.
- ▶ **Share.** Think of someone you've prayed for or helped in practical ways but never talked to about Jesus. Bring Jesus into your conversation with that person. Let them know your concern for them is motivated by the love of Christ in your life.

As members of the church, we have an opportunity to create a culture that's way more attractive than anything a corporation could produce. But it starts with you. Choose to pray, care, and share as a witness of Christ.

My thoughts



1. <http://www.businessinsider.com/company-perks-that-will-make-you-jealous-2014-7?op=1>
2. *The Apology of Aristides: on Behalf of the Christians*, edited by J. Rendel Harris (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 49.

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLunstopable**