

## **Oct 15 – Leader’s Guide - Deuteronomy 15; Acts 4 – No Poor in our Midst**

1. N.T. Wright wrote “you become what you worship”. In what ways is this true? How does this speak to the import of our worship as a community?

*Wright gives some examples – he says –*

*if you worship money – you will increasingly define yourself in terms of it and treat other people as creditors, debtors, partners, or customers, rather than as human beings*

*if you worship sex you’ll increasingly define yourself in terms of it, your preferences, practices, past histories, and increasingly treat other people as actual or potential sexual objects*

*if you worship power you’ll increasingly define yourself in terms of it and treat other people as either collaborators, competitors, or pawns*

*To restate the principle: One of the primary laws of human life is that you become what you worship – you become what you ascribe ultimate worth to*

*For us as a community this speaks to the deep importance of worship being at the heart of everything that we do – in particular our pressing into matters of Justice. As we ascribe ultimate worth to a God of mercy justice love and grace we become a people of mercy justice love and grace.*

### **Read Deuteronomy 15:1-5; 7-11**

2. One Old Testament Scholar spoke of biblical justice as “having the conditions present where everyone is able to flourish”. Deuteronomy 15 outlines one of those conditions. Do you sense that the systems, structures, and laws of our nation, our city undergird the flourishing of all? What should the response of the Jesus follower be in this regard? Why?

*This is a personal reflection question that likely you will have lots of examples shared and potentially fodder of disagreement and tension. It’s ok if people disagree and we can acknowledge that both sides of the political divide want to address the same problems that just don’t always agree on how. Just bring enough to the surface so that you can acknowledge that we likely have many structures, systems and laws that don’t support flourishing intended or not.*

*The second part of this question is the more vital piece. The people of Israel’s worship of a God of justice led them to be deeply concerned about the systems and structures and laws of their nation. It wasn’t an optional add on to their faith but right at the heart of their worship.*

*Again there may be differences in how we address this reality out of worship. Prayer, advocacy, our political engagement, supporting people who for whatever reason (ability, language, etc) can't navigate the structures that were intended for their flourishing and more...*

*Again what is key is that such engagement isn't an optional add on but part of our worship of a God of mercy and justice.*

3. The systems, structures and laws that undergird flourishing are only effective to the degree that the hearts of those who administer them are similarly motivated toward that flourishing. What is needed from the human heart in light of this text?

*Generosity – disadvantaging oneself for the sake of others – giving the amount that would be sufficient to meet their need.*

*Hospitality – opening your door to the plight of those in need.*

*Listening ears – not closing the ears to their cries.*

*Guarding the heart against thoughts that would position you against the one in need.*

### **Read Acts 4:29-37**

This first community of followers of Jesus is marked by the distinctive feature that there are no poor in their midst. They are the fulfillment of the hope of Deuteronomy 15.

4. What were the distinctive features of this community?

*The following is an unedited excerpt from the sermon where Tim reflected on these distinctive features.*

*As they finish praying – something happens – and the results of it are stunning – first they continue to speak with boldness – meaning the fear stirred up by the threats no longer held them.*

*I think this is key to understanding the incredible generosity that marked this community – you see I think what often keeps us from being generous is fear – it is for me – my savings – investments are what I believe are keeping me safe in the face of an unknown future – the only way I will face an unknown future is I have the resources to do so – whatever happened undercut that fear – loosened the hold money had on their hearts – as vs. 32 highlights they didn't consider anything that they owned – to be their own – they held everything in common – some have said that what we see here the banishment of private ownership – the first fully communal society - but no - that isn't the case at all – throughout Acts it is clear*

*that ownership remained – but – but their approach to things radical shifted – they were not so much owners – as stewards – everything they had was a gift from God – that they were to steward – to manage for the sake of others – and so – whenever a need arose those who had means would sell what they had – lay it at the apostles feet - who would then distribute – heart and system of justice were aligned – and there were no poor in their midst.*

*Whatever happened shaped their hearts to be active and intentional with their money - you see most of us are passive and spontaneous when it comes to giving money away – we will give – but only when asked – often motivated by guilt – but whatever happened here led them to be active – intentional in their giving – they were looking for ways to give it away*

*There was a biblical practice that was meant to shape this active and intentional approach to giving – it was called first fruits – which involved giving the first 10% away – doing that prompted active intentional questions – I have this amount – this 10% - where is it most needed – where can it support the work of God – it was also a practice that built deep trust – ancient Israel was an agrarian society – so giving away the first fruits – the first 10% - meant the remaining 90% may still be in the field – still in a barn – susceptible to weather – vermin – giving the first fruits built an approach to giving away money that was not only active and intentional – but was founded upon and built deep trust - whatever happened here made that discipline – that practice - a reality.*

*Whatever happened here also impacted relationships – vs 32 tells us - they were one in heart and soul – one of the commentators points out that this is the distinctive Greek philosophical language of friendship – language used by Aristotle who argued that such friendship was only available to those in the same social class – but here we see a community of Jesus followers – that we already know was racially diverse - now also socio-economically diverse in deep friendship – friendship that crossed countless cultural barriers – whatever happened brought this about.*

*There may be more features than this – but these may get you started in your reflections...*

## 5. What brought this transformation about?

*This is a total Sunday School question – that demands a Sunday School answer. A simple reading and reflection of vs. 31 will do. They prayed – were shaken – filled with the Spirit.*

*I wanted this to be a simple yet separate question as in many ways this is the key to the entire transformation wrought in this community. It is all the fruit of the work of the Spirit. Reliance upon any other means of transformation will likely be born of self- sufficiency - a reliance upon human faculties.*

*Is there a place for obedience – yes. Is there a place for pressing into what we know is fitting for the people of God – yes. But let us exercise those faculties in reliance upon the Spirit.*

In John 16 Jesus reflects on the reality that the Spirit's work is to glorify Jesus. Glory means weight, significance, importance – their Spirit presses the truth of Jesus, the truth of the gospel down into our hearts such that Jesus becomes the most weighty, the most significant, the most weighty reality in our lives.

6. What truths of the gospel were pressed down into the hearts of this community to bring the transformation you noted above?

*Again an unedited section of the sermon that will help to guide your reflection. There are likely far more truths that would have been "pressed down", so only lean into these three as examples and not as an exhaustive list...*

*The Spirit descended and truth became real – oh yes they believed Jesus would come again to make everything new – but now the Spirit pressed that truth home – and they released their resources knowing it wouldn't be their wealth that would keep them safe in the face of an unknown future – it was Jesus who was bringing a more glorious future than they could possibly imagine.*

*Oh yes they knew a person's value was not wrapped up in their race – nor their wealth – but in who they were in Christ – but they remained in their homogenous circles - but the Spirit came and pressed that truth home – and deep friendship flourished across cultural barriers.*

*Oh yes they knew God desired justice and mercy – conditions where all could flourish – but the Spirit came and pressed that truth home – and heart and structures aligned – they became active and intentional in their giving and there were no poor in their midst.*

7. How can this be our reality as a church?

*I would hope that you would spend some time lingering on this question. I think some key thoughts will come to the surface.*

*Worship MUST be central – for we become what we worship.*

*Faithfulness to the revealed truths of Jesus MUST be central – for it is the Spirit pressing those truths down that brings transformation.*

*Prayer is absolutely key – which expresses our dependence upon the Living God in all things.*

*They were together in that prayer – in their practice – in their relationships. This is the work of a community not of an individual.*