

The Early Believers

Grades
3-4

SHARE

ACTS 4:32-35

What's happening in this story?

This text gives us a peek into the earliest days of the Christian church. The first believers to follow Jesus were Jewish. But Acts gives us glimpses of what happened when Gentiles joined the fold. Early Christians gathered in homes, in common rooms, by the river, etc. They prayed. They worshipped. They learned the stories of God's acts recounted in the Hebrew Scriptures—what we now call the Old Testament—and the stories of Jesus. And they shared—to such an extent that no one was in need.

What does this story mean for kids?

This story describes a pretty radical community: They share *everything*; nobody is in need. It might sound a little threatening to kids—share *everything*? But we can point out places where this is already the case, and where we are all better for it: the board games we share and enjoy as a family, and the park and playground shared by our whole community.

Why this theme?

Sharing is hard, but kids innately know that it is a part of God's plan for us. We share not because it's the right thing to do (even though it is!), but because we have been given so much by God that it spills over into other people's lives.

AGE LEVEL TIP

Third and fourth graders are beginning to have a broader understanding of sharing than simply dividing up cookies on a plate. Encourage them to see the bigger picture of sharing, going beyond dividing *things* to sharing their gifts.



GENERAL SUPPLIES

- Markers
- Pens
- Clear tape

LESSON SUPPLIES

- Bowl of pennies (50)
- Sticky notes

Do some kids arrive early? Try this.

Place a bowl of fifty pennies on a table. Divide them equally among the first arrivals. Each time another kid arrives, have them restart the distribution process.

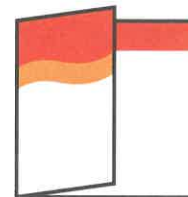
Circle up with kids for an opening conversation.

Sharing is one of the first things kids are taught. Think back to when you were preschool age. What would preschool be like if kids weren't encouraged to share? Now that you are third and fourth graders, you must be experts! Is it easy to share now? Encourage kids to talk about how sharing can be a simple lesson on a preschool level, but still difficult no matter what your age. Today we are going to read about how the first people who believed in Jesus' resurrection practiced sharing.

Pray together: Dear God, thank you for the possessions and gifts we can share with others. All good things come from you! Amen.

Pass out leaflets and markers.

Choose a color and circle all of the items on the leaflet that you would share with your family members. Pause until kids have finished circling. Choose another color and draw circles around things you would share with friends. If you've already circled an item, draw a larger circle around it. Choose another color and draw circles around things you would share with everyone you know. Choose a fourth color and draw circles around items you would share with anyone in the world. Is there something that isn't circled? Choose another color and draw an X over that item. How do you decide what you are willing and unwilling to share and who you will share with?



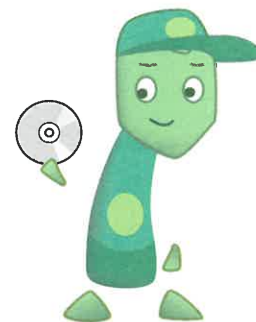
Gather kids around the screen where you'll watch the video.

Have you ever been forced to share something you wanted all for yourself? In today's video, Gabe learns that doing a good thing isn't always easy, even if it's right.

View Episode 11, "The Carpool," on the Year Gold Spring Grades 3–6 DVD.

Ask kids these questions about the video:

- At the beginning of the video, why does Gabe think the carpool is a bad idea?
- Do you think Gabe's memories of riding in the car when he was a little kid are accurate? How might the truth be different?
- What changes Gabe's mind about the carpool?
- Is it better to share with others and feel annoyed inside, or not share with others and feel okay about it? Why?
- I wonder how Gabe could find a way to enjoy the carpool.



Open your Whirl Kids Study Bibles.

Today's passage is from the book of Acts. It's in the New Testament in the Gospels and Acts section of the Bible. If this is your first time reading from Acts, invite kids to check out the book introduction and comic on page 1303.



The passage we'll read tells us about the community that followed Jesus after his resurrection. There weren't any church buildings yet. Early believers met in homes or public places, such as by a river. They prayed and worshipped together, and learned the stories of Jesus and the Old Testament. Their lives had changed because God's Spirit was among them.

Help kids find Acts 4:32-35 and read it in this creative way together: Ask for volunteers to read aloud verse by verse. Pass out sticky notes and pens. Pause between each verse, inviting kids to write on their sticky note words or phrases that refer to sharing. (For example, "one heart and soul" in verse 32 or "distributed" in verse 35.) Reread the passage if kids need to hear it again to catch the sharing words and phrases.

Invite kids to check out what Gabe says about Acts 4:32.

Ask these questions after you read the story:

- **What were some of the words and phrases you wrote?**
- **I wonder how the early Christians dealt with jealousy and feeling annoyed at sharing everything.**
- **Testimony is a big word. It means they told the story of how God shared love in their lives. What are some ways we share testimony about God's sharing love in our lives?**
- **How are Christians today like the early Christians with regard to sharing? How are we not like them?**
- **What can we share with others that isn't "stuff"?**

Make your mark on the Wall Chart.

Look at the chart and find the theme for today. Give kids time to find the word *Share*. The early believers shared everything—food, money, clothes, and more. They were said to be of "one heart and soul." Invite a kid to tape a penny in the box by *Share*.



BIBLE BIT

Before the time of the institutional church, believers gathered in people's houses, sometimes secretly.

WATCH IT AGAIN

If you watch the video again, pause it when Gabe starts to complain and ask kids to suggest another way he could see the situation.

OUR CHURCH

Gather lists from local food shelves or your church's own ministries about what items are in greatest need. What would it be like to live without those things?

RESPOND 10

Open leaflets and pass out markers and clear tape.

Tear off leaflet square.

1. **Who has helped to plant a garden? What food do you most enjoy from a garden?**
2. **Today we are planting a different type of garden. We will plant seeds to share in God's Garden of Gifts. Then we'll think about the people and places where our gifts and talents can be shared.**
3. Tape the squares together on the floor to form a square or rectangular garden shape. (If you have a carpeted floor that would make writing on the leaflets difficult, form the "garden" on the table instead.)
4. Take a few minutes to help kids think of the seeds (gifts or talents) they have to share with others. **Inside the seeds in the garden, write or draw gifts or talents you have to share. Help each other name six.** Encourage kids to think beyond obvious gifts like musical talent. The abilities to listen to others, make people laugh, to be patient with others, and to fix things are all God's good gifts!
5. Talk about people or places with whom kids can share their gifts and talents. **In the writing space beside each seed, write names or places where the "fruit" of that seed can be enjoyed.**
6. When kids are done, invite everyone to walk around the garden, looking and talking about everything growing in the garden.
7. **What gifts in the leaflet garden might the early Christians have shared with each other? What gifts are unique to our life today? What gift can you share this week?** Separate the squares so that each kid has one to take home.

LAUNCH 10

Circle up with kids for a quick review.

The early Christians cared for each other's needs and created a strong life together. What would the world be like if no one shared? Why do you think God wants us to share with others? Why is it so difficult to share sometimes?

Return to the leaflet panels and pass out Whirl Kids Study Bibles and pens.

Invite kids to look at important places in the early Christian church on page 1530 in the Whirl Kids Study Bible and compare that map to the map of the modern-day Mediterranean region on the leaflet. **On the leaflet, circle a place where you would like to travel someday, or write the name if your place isn't on the map. What might you share with people in that place, and what might they share with you?**

Send kids out with a blessing.

Circle up with kids. **God blesses all of us. And that means me** (place a hand on your chest). **And that means you** (place your other hand on the shoulder of the kid next to you). Each kid passes the blessing by repeating those words and actions. When the blessing makes it back to you, say, **Go and bless the world.**

Thank kids for coming today. Remind them of the Family Square on the other side of the leaflet.