

**Bible Study Series: The Book of Acts**  
**“Signs of a Healthy Church”**



**Sharing with the Saints - Acts 4:32-37**  
**vs.**  
**Suspicious Spirituality – Acts 5:1-11**

**Topics:**

- ☐ Reflection Questions
- ☐ Important Emphasis
- ☐ Outline
- ☐ Key Terms
- ☐ Introduction
- ☐ Exploring the Text
- ☐ Understanding the Text
- ☐ Life Application

**Reflection Questions**

A. Where have you experienced or seen a radical [profound, extreme] act of generosity? How did it impact you?

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B. How would you describe the dominant mindset [attitude, beliefs, way of thinking] of our culture when it comes to *our* money, possessions, and stuff? Where and how do you see that mindset play out?

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## Important Emphasis

**Free Flowing Fellowship-** The community in Acts exhibits commonality which is described as koinonia. The sense of koinonia here is fellowshiping among those who holdfast to their faith and a fundamental principle of living to exercise that faith. Jesus prayers are manifested **John 17:21**

Luke cites wonderful attributes about this community: They are 1) Believers 2) One in heart 3) One in Soul. **Acts 4:32**

**Aristotle is quoted concerning this idea of one heart and one soul. He stated that “friends are one soul”. This was proverbial in antiquity. When Aristotle was asked, What was a friend? He replied, “A single soul dwelling in two bodies”**

This wonderful fellowship of believers are entering into what has been traditionally called “Low Sunday”. The scene in which we are studying is the follow up to “Resurrection Sunday” or what we contemporarily call “Easter”.

“When you think about it, the quality of the church’s life together is evidence for the truthfulness of the resurrection.”... But the ecclesiastical and communal, Why don’t you people look more resurrected.

- **Ministering with power** – great power vs. 33
- **Masters overwhelming provision** – abundant grace vs. 33
- **Main priority-** was not a needy person vs. 34

The way that we handle everyday life should exemplify the resurrection...(possessions, money, the sale of property).

## Willingness of the Witnesses

These individuals had a desire to give, glean, gather, and grow with each other. They saw worth in the community in which they dwelled. They perceived the benefits to be counted in the number of believers. They took on the disposition of their Lord by saying “I will”. **Matthew 8:1-3**

- **Ownership of the grounds- Land**
- **Ownership among the group- Loyalty**
- **Ownership is the gift- Leverage**

Justin the Martyr marveled of his own church, not far removed in time from Luke's church, we who once coveted most greedily the wealth and fortune of others, now place in common the goods we possess, giving them with all the needy (**I Apology 14:2-3**)

### **Challenges Within and Without**

"Barnabas is a prime example of ideal of true friendship."

Ananias and Sapphira are antithetical to this ideology of true fellowship

Ernest Becker noted that as belief in God and other traditional sources of immortality eroded in western culture, money assumed a god-like quality in our lives, our ticket to enduring significance in the face of death.

### **Outline**

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|-----|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| I.  | Sharing with the Saints              | Acts 4:32-37 |
|     | A. Genuine Spirit-led Desire to Give |              |
|     | B. Genuine Spirit-led Giving         |              |
|     | C. Genuine Spirit-led Giver          |              |
| II. | Suspicious Spirituality              | Acts 5:1-11  |
|     | A. Disingenuous Donation             |              |
|     | B. Deceived by the Devil             |              |
|     | C. Co-Defendant's Failed Coverup     |              |

## Key Terms

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|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accusation    | <input type="checkbox"/> Fellowship   | <input type="checkbox"/> Money        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Believers     | <input type="checkbox"/> God          | <input type="checkbox"/> Possessions  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church        | <input type="checkbox"/> Holy Spirit  | <input type="checkbox"/> Power        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Consequences  | <input type="checkbox"/> Generosity   | <input type="checkbox"/> Punishment   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Death         | <input type="checkbox"/> Healing      | <input type="checkbox"/> Resurrection |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deceit        | <input type="checkbox"/> Jesus Christ | <input type="checkbox"/> Satan        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discipline    | <input type="checkbox"/> Lifestyle    | <input type="checkbox"/> Sin          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement | <input type="checkbox"/> Love         | <input type="checkbox"/> Teamwork     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fear          | <input type="checkbox"/> Miracles     | <input type="checkbox"/> Witnessing   |

## Introduction

The final verses of chapter 4 provide a glimpse into the inner workings of the early church. The first-century Christians enjoyed a sense of closeness and \_\_\_\_\_ that caused the world to sit up and take notice. It's one thing to talk of loving others; it's quite another to sell one's valuable \_\_\_\_\_ and give the proceeds to those less fortunate. Yet that kind of \_\_\_\_\_ was common in the early church. And that kind of \_\_\_\_\_ is the essence of true \_\_\_\_\_. (Acts 4:32-37)

Despite the \_\_\_\_\_ of so many in the newly developing Christian Church, there were those who behaved to the contrary. Acts 5:1-8:3 tells of internal and external problems facing the early church. Inside, there were \_\_\_\_\_ (5:1-11) and \_\_\_\_\_ (6:1-7); outside, the church was being pressured by \_\_\_\_\_.

Ananias and Sapphira, a married couple in the Jerusalem church, concocted a plan whereby they hoped to give a little to God but get credit for a lot. Their scheme was \_\_\_\_\_, and God's \_\_\_\_\_ was swift and severe.

As you reflect on their story and the story of Joseph/Barnabas—*Son of Encouragement* (4:36-37), ask yourself the question, **“What are my motives for serving and giving?”**

## EXPLORING THE TEXT

## I. Sharing with the Saints Acts 4:32-37

## A. Genuine Spirit-led Desire to Give (4:32-33)

<sup>32</sup> *And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.* <sup>33</sup> *And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.*

In summarizing the daily activities of the early church, Luke noted the believers' \_\_\_\_\_. Surely the church's \_\_\_\_\_ unity (*all the believers were of one heart and mind*) prompted this material \_\_\_\_\_. No one was required to contribute to the needs of others; this "communal purse" was voluntary. Yet the believers willingly *shared everything they had*, not holding tightly to \_\_\_\_\_, for *they felt that what they owned was not their own*.

These people were Jewish Christians, so they had learned the Scriptures. They may have desired to follow God's law as recorded in **Deuteronomy 15:4**, "There should be no poor among you" (nlt).

The early church was able to share \_\_\_\_\_ and property because of the unity brought by the \_\_\_\_\_ working in and through the believers' lives. This way of living is different from communism because the sharing was voluntary, did not involve all private property but only as much as was needed; and was not a \_\_\_\_\_ requirement to be a part of the church.

The spiritual \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of these early believers attracted others to them. This organizational structure is not a biblical command, but it offers vital **principles** for us to follow.

God worked powerfully among them (see **6:8**) to empower their witness (**Acts 1:8**) and to meet their material needs. Jesus had told his disciples, "Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples" (**John 13:35 nlt**). As the outside world saw the believers' generosity with one another, their care for the needy, and their \_\_\_\_\_ witness, they were drawn to the Lord Jesus.

**CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING**

1. What attitude did the believers have toward one another? (4:32)

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2. How did the Christians show their unity? (4:32)

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3. What godly quality enhanced the unity and service of the early Christians? (4:33)

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4. How effective was the apostles' witness? (4:33)

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**B. Genuine Spirit-led Giving (4:34-35)**

*<sup>34</sup> For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land, or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales <sup>35</sup> and **lay them at the apostles' feet**, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.*

The generosity of the Jerusalem believers was so \_\_\_\_\_ that \_\_\_\_\_ was nonexistent among them. They would bring lavish gifts obtained from selling their properties to the apostles, who would then distribute them to those who were in need. These gifts served as remarkable acts reflecting their **social concern** for those less fortunate.

**C. Genuine Spirit-led Giver (4:36-37)**

*<sup>36</sup> Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement, <sup>37</sup> and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

Barnabas (Joseph) is introduced here because he gave money from the sale of a field he owned to the apostles to give to those in need. Barnabas would prove to be a respected and important leader in the life of the early church.

Barnabas was a \_\_\_\_\_ by birth (a member of the Jewish tribe that carried out temple duties) but a resident of Cyprus. This may explain why he was a landowner (Levites were forbidden to own land in Israel—see **Numbers 18:20–24** and **Deuteronomy 10:9; 18:1–2**).

Luke reports that Barnabas “was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith,” and adds that “considerable numbers were brought to the Lord” via his ministry (**Acts 11:20–24** NASB). Barnabas then went to Tarsus to find Paul, and they ministered together in Antioch for a year (**Acts 11:25–26**). When the church in Antioch decided to send a monetary gift to help Christians in Judaea, they trusted Barnabas and Paul to carry the gift (**Acts 11:27–30**).

[Tresham, Aaron K. 2016. **“Barnabas the Apostle.”** In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*]

Barnabas would later travel with Paul on Paul’s first missionary journey (**Acts 13:4**). John Mark (author of the Gospel of Mark) was his cousin. “Barnabas” means *Son of Encouragement*, and it would prove, over and over, to be most appropriate.

### CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

5. How was the command of Deuteronomy 15:4 exemplified by the members of the early church? (4:34–35)

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6. What did some better-off Christians do from time to time? (4:34–35)

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7. What was unique about Barnabas? (4:36–37)

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## EXPLORING THE TEXT

**II. Suspicious Spirituality (Acts 5:1-11)**

This passage offers a contrast to the example of Barnabas, who sold his property and brought all the proceeds to the community (4:36–37). The negative example involves a married couple named Ananias and Sapphira, whom Peter accuses of lying to God or God’s Spirit. The couple sells the property but retains some of the proceeds (5:1–2). Peter confronts the husband first (5:3–4), and he drops dead and is buried after Peter accuses him of lying to God (5:5–6). A similar scene is repeated for the wife (5:6–11).

**A. Disingenuous Donation Acts 5:1-2**

*<sup>1</sup>But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,  
<sup>2</sup>and kept back some of the proceeds for himself, with his wife’s full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles’ feet.*

These verses tie back to 4:36-37, where Barnabas was introduced as a man who had \_\_\_\_\_ given to those in need. At the inception of the church, the practice of selling one’s possessions to give money to those in need showed the believers’ \_\_\_\_\_ to help other believers. Not everyone was liquidating everything, nor was there pressure to do so (Mary, John’s mother, still owned her home—12:12). This was a \_\_\_\_\_, and it appears to have been practiced only here in the early Palestine church.

It seems that the positive response of the church to gifts from people like Barnabas became a source of envy for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. They also sold some property. They could have given any amount of the selling price, but because they apparently desired the esteem that Barnabas had received, they pretended to give the full amount they had received for the field. Instead, however, they kept back part of the money.

**B. Deceived by the Devil Acts 5:3-6**

*<sup>3</sup> But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the proceeds of the land? <sup>4</sup> While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.” <sup>5</sup> And as he heard these words, Ananias collapsed and died;*



*and great fear came over all who heard about it. <sup>6</sup> The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.*

Given insight by the Holy Spirit, Peter saw through Ananias's lie. Apparently involved in the new church, Ananias and Sapphira had succumbed to temptation and allowed \_\_\_\_\_ into their hearts. Their sin was lying to God and God's people—saying they gave the whole amount but holding back some for themselves and trying to make themselves appear more generous than they really were. This act was judged **severely** because dishonesty, greed, and covetousness are destructive in a church. All lying is bad, but when people lie to try to \_\_\_\_\_ God and other believers about their relationship with him, they destroy their \_\_\_\_\_.

### C. Co-Defendant's Failed Coverup

**Acts 5:7-11**

*<sup>7</sup> Now an interval of about three hours elapsed, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup> And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for this price?" And she said, "Yes, for that price." <sup>9</sup> Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well." <sup>10</sup> And immediately she collapsed at his feet and died; and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. <sup>11</sup> And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard about these things.*

When Ananias realized that Peter knew all about his scheme, he fell to the floor and died. The Greek word *ekpsucho* literally means "to breathe one's last, to die" and usually connotes death by divine judgment (see **5:10**; **12:23**; **1 Corinthians 10:6**; **1 John 5:16**). Peter didn't kill Ananias, nor did he ask the Holy Spirit to kill him. Peter \_\_\_\_\_ the lying, and the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ executed judgment.

Sapphira showed up about three hours later. She didn't know what had happened to her husband. Peter's questions to Sapphira exposed her **complicity** in the deed. Peter gave her the opportunity to tell the truth, but she told the same lie that her husband had told. In so doing she revealed a \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ that had not been touched by the grace of God.

Like her husband, Sapphira fell to the floor and died. As she and Ananias had been joined in their "testing" of God (**5:9**), so they were joined in death. This is more

than just a historical record of events in the early church. This serves as a \_\_\_\_\_ that no one should trifle with the Holy Spirit or take lightly the importance of telling the truth.

This is the first appearance of the term \_\_\_\_\_ (*ekklesia*, meaning “assembly”) in the book of Acts. It will become the regular word for the universal church and the local church in the remainder of the book (7:38; 8:1; 9:31; 11:22; 13:1; 14:23; 15:22, 41; 16:5; 20:28). God’s judgment on Ananias and Sapphira produced \_\_\_\_\_ among the believers, making them realize how seriously God regards sin in the church.

### CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

8. How did Ananias and Sapphira’s transaction compare with Barnabas’s? (5:1-2)

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9. What did Ananias and Sapphira do with the proceeds from the sale of their property? (5:1-2)

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10. To whom did Ananias lie? (5:3-4)

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11. How did Sapphira’s end compare with that of her husband? (5:10)

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12. How did people respond to Ananias and Sapphira’s deaths? (5:5, 5:11)

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## Life Application

- What can we do to trust God to take care of us?

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- What can we do to motivate ourselves and others to be more generous in our giving?

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