

THE CHURCH WORKS TOGETHER

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God judged Ananias and Sapphira for lying about the gift they gave, protecting the purity of the early church.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Acts 4–5

+ **SETTING:**

After Peter’s preaching and the group’s prayer for boldness and for God to act in miraculous ways, the group felt a sense of further oneness, and one of their first actions was to give generously to meet the needs of their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. The first picture of generosity was given in Acts 2, where all the believers shared everything they had, even selling their possessions to give to all “as any had need” (v. 45). Here in Acts 4, this pattern continued, though not all would be generous.

DAY 1

READ:

Acts 4:32-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 4:32

NOTES

It's worth considering what it means to have all things in common with others. Particularly for those who live in individualistic societies like the United States, it can be hard for us to admit how much we prize and prioritize our own stuff. We tend to live for ourselves and use our resources in a way that advances our good or the good of our immediate family. In many cultures around the world, however, decisions are made on the basis of the collective good of the community as a whole. The resources of the community are given in such a way that everyone in the community is blessed.

Sometimes this communal posture is due to government policies, but many times it develops out of necessity. In some societies, survival depends on the fact that people work together. It seems that the early church functioned in this communal spirit. They were not forced to do so, but compelled to live as a collective whole by virtue of their submission to Jesus and their understanding of the gospel. They lived to make one another better. They lived in unity as one body. Today's church could stand to learn from this example.

How can we, as a body of believers, feel and act more unified?

DAY 2

READ:

Acts 4:32-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 4:33

NOTES

Wouldn't it be nice to live with great grace upon your life? Grace can be defined as unmerited favor. Whereas mercy is not getting the treatment that you deserve, grace is getting better than you deserve. It is unusual, unexpected kindness.

The early church experienced great grace as the Holy Spirit worked to perform miracles and bring people to saving faith in Jesus Christ. They felt great grace from the hand of God, even in the midst of challenge and persecution.

Christians today, especially many in the United States, have unusual grace from the Lord as well. We've been saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and made one with the people of God. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. We have the Word of God in our language and the ability to gather with healthy churches where we can grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. For these things, we should give thanks.

Additionally, we should ask God for the unique manifestations of His grace in the transformed lives of people in our church community. As witnesses of God's power, we should live with thankfulness for the Lord's great grace in our lives.

Where do you see the great grace of God in your life and the life of the church?

DAY 3

READ:

Acts 4:32-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 4:34

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #88: **STEWARDSHIP**

God's intention for mankind is that we serve Him as faithful stewards of His creation (Genesis 1:28; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2). We are to invest the time, talents, and material possessions God has given us for His kingdom work (Matthew 25:14-29), knowing that God is the true owner of all we have, and that our true treasure is found not on earth but in heaven (Matthew 6:19,21; Luke 12:16-21). Motivated by God's generosity to us made most clear in the gospel, we are to give God the best of what we have (Proverbs 3:9), regularly (1 Corinthians 16:2), sacrificially (Matthew 12:41-44), humbly (Matthew 6:1-4), and cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:6-7), praying that God may be glorified in our stewardship of His provisions.

The early followers of Jesus seemed to do more than merely take the leftovers of what they had and give it to those in need. Instead, they intentionally sold their possessions in order to bless others. In other words, they were proactive in finding ways to be generous, even when that level of generosity was costly to their own pursuits and pleasures. In that day, selling land and houses was a huge sacrifice—more so than might be common today.

Christians today should consider how they are called to actively pursue generosity. It's common to think about caring for the poor out of the leftovers of whatever resources might be available. But what might change if Christians were proactive to see how they might leverage what they have to create means of blessing others? Such generosity would require that Christians learn to live simply and consider how to be content without many of the pleasures that are expected in today's world. But the fruit of such generosity could be such that all those in the church are cared for and burdens are lifted.

Where are you called to display sacrificial generosity?

DAY 4

READ:

Acts 4:36-37

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 4:36-37

NOTES

A man named Joseph—whom we know as Barnabas—sold his field and gave the proceeds to the apostles to bless those within the church. This generosity calls to mind the words of Paul in Galatians 6:10. Christians have a general call to model the love of Christ to all people, but they have a more specific responsibility to care well for those who are members of the church body. Certainly, “doing good” means more than simply giving financial blessing, but it doesn’t mean less than that. This level of care requires that Christians actually live in close community with members of their church. It’s through community that they can be aware of needs and know how to best give care to those who are hurting.

Church members caring for one another is far more than a social program to address poverty or need. It is believers seeking out the welfare of one another by modeling the love of Jesus with generous giving.

Who is someone in your church community whom you could help this week?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Any temporal possession can be turned into everlasting wealth. Whatever is given to Christ is immediately touched with immortality.”¹

—A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

DAY 5

READ:

Acts 5:1-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 5:3

NOTES

The role of Satan is explicitly linked to the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. While some may overemphasize the role of Satan, others likely underestimate his role in sin. Peter stated that Satan filled Ananias and Sapphira's hearts and prompted them to lie and retain some of the money from their sale for themselves.

In his later letter, Peter described Satan as a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour (1 Peter 5:8-9). Satan is like a wild animal seeking to do harm, and his primary aim is to lead people away from God and toward sin. Christians are called first to recognize that Satan is at work in this world. Christians are then called to resist Satan's attacks. The idea of resisting means to fight against or to press back. Christians press back against the enemy by fleeing from and fighting sin. As they do, they remain firm in the faith. Christians renounce following after Satan and his work in the world and instead commit to faithfulness to the Lord.

How do you need to resist Satan today?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"As to those feeble spirits who, though they cannot be said to prefer earthly possessions to Christ, do yet cleave to them with a somewhat immoderate attachment, they have discovered by the pain of losing these things how much they were sinning in loving them. For their grief is of their own making."²

—Augustine (354–430)

POINT 1: God's people practice generosity (Acts 4:32-37).

When individual believers see themselves as one unified body in Christ and act as such through generosity, God's power and grace will be present.



From Day 1: **How can we, as a body of believers, feel and act more unified?**

KEY DOCTRINE #88: STEWARDSHIP

God's intention for mankind is that we serve Him as faithful stewards of His creation (Genesis 1:28; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2). We are to invest the time, talents, and material possessions God has given us for His kingdom work (Matthew 25:14-29), knowing that God is the true owner of all we have, and that our true treasure is found not on earth but in heaven (Matthew 6:19,21; Luke 12:16-21). Motivated by God's generosity to us made most clear in the gospel, we are to give God the best of what we have (Proverbs 3:9), regularly (1 Corinthians 16:2), sacrificially (Matthew 12:41-44), humbly (Matthew 6:1-4), and cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:6-7), praying that God may be glorified in our stewardship of His provisions.



What does it take to sacrifice worldly goods for the sake of needs in the church body?

POINT 2: God's people confront sin (Acts 5:1-9).

Part of the role of the church is to combat and confront sin in the church and in the life of individual believers.



How easy or difficult is it to confront sin in others and why?

God gives us opportunities to repent, but confronted unrepentant sin will lead to dire consequences.



When confronted with sin, why do we sometimes fall into more sin when we are unrepentant?

POINT 3: God's people display reverence (Acts 5:10-11).

God made it clear that He is almighty and all-holy, and He will continue to take sin seriously.



How do we balance a seriousness for staying away from sin and grace to forgive when sin happens?

Christians should live in awe of God's grace among them while maintaining a reverent fear for His holiness and hatred of sin.



How can the church instill more understanding of reverent fear of the Lord to its people?

MY RESPONSE

Because God has lavished us with riches of salvation and new life in Christ, we live in unity, being generous and honest as we reflect Christ's truth and love.

- **HEAD:** How was Jesus generous, and how can we imitate Him?
- **HEART:** How have you experienced the generosity of the church body that you can thank God for?
- **HANDS:** Where do you need to demonstrate increased generosity?



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"But progress means getting nearer to the place where you want to be. And if you have taken a wrong turning, then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man."³

—C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)