

October 29/30, 2005

The Unstoppable Church

An Attack From Satan

Acts 4:32-5:16

Pastor Bryan Clark

Imagine this morning that I am a wife abuser. Imagine that I am abusing my children at home. Yet when I come to church, I try to present myself as this super Christian that's got it all together. I preach about how to be a great husband; I preach about how to be a great father. And because you don't know what's going on at home, you're convinced of that. You walk away saying, "You know, isn't he wonderful?"

But how do you suppose my wife and children would respond to that message? They would be offended and disgusted that I come here and try to pretend like I'm this super Christian, when in reality, behind closed doors, they know it's very different than that.

Let me ask you a question this morning: How do you suppose God feels when we do that to Him? Well, we don't have to guess at that; turn with me to Acts chapter 4. Acts chapter 4 is a rather sobering text, and we pick it up today in verse 32. Peter and John have just been released from jail.

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. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 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 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4: 32-37, *NASB)

Last week, from the first half of the chapter, we talked about the need to count the cost and asked ourselves: Are we willing to pay the price of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, what it means to be sold out for the mission? We specifically targeted our youth. God's Spirit did His work and many, many responded, and I believe God will use these youth to do unimaginable things in the years ahead. But what about us, their parents? What about us as adults? Those of us that don't live out our faith on a daily basis in the trenches in quite the same way that they do—what does that mean for us to count the cost? What might that price be for us?

I think Luke has put his finger on perhaps the most difficult area we as adults struggle with. This is the area of stewardship: of understanding that everything we have is ultimately God's to be managed for God's eternal purposes.

Someone once said that most Christians go through two conversions: the conversion of their soul and the conversion of their wallet. And there's great truth to that. I think we would all admit that typically the last thing that we're willing to surrender to God is this grasp we have on our money and possessions. This whole stewardship area is perhaps the most difficult area to surrender to God when we think about counting the cost. Frankly, a lot of Christians count the

cost and say to God, “The cost is simply too high. I’ll keep my own money; I’ll keep my own stuff.”

Luke is dealing with this whole area of stewardship. As a matter of fact, he does this several times in these early chapters of Acts, understanding that these people came together and their commitment to God, their commitment to Jesus and His mission included their stewarding of their resources for God’s purposes. They had a commitment to God and a commitment to one another, and that’s what he’s talking about here.

Now first of all, we do need to understand what we’re *not* talking about. This was not an early version of Communism. This is not saying that everybody sold everything they had and put it in a big pile and it was distributed out.

As a matter of fact, the verb tenses clearly indicate that’s not the case. The verb tenses are such in the Greek language that what’s being talked about here is something that took place over a period of time. Over a period of time as people had needs, others were willing to steward what they had been given in order to meet those needs and in order to further the mission of the church. The verb tenses indicate there was a duration to this; this was something that progressed over time. It was not a moment in time where everybody dumped stuff in a pile.

If you go on farther in Acts, you see people still had possessions; people still had land. They didn’t just dump it all and live in a commune. One of the ways to say this is that there is a difference between personal property and private property. Private property carries the idea, *This is mine. Hands off! You can’t touch it.* That’s the value system of this world. When we find our security and our significance in our money and our possessions, then we have the mindset, *This is mine; keep your hands off it.* And we have the same message for God.

But personal property is just saying, *Yes, this is mine. This has been entrusted in my care. But it’s my responsibility to manage it, to steward it, to use it for God’s ultimate purposes.* The idea here is personal property, not private property.

It’s also interesting as you read through the text to see how Luke is very careful to weave the concept of the mission into this concept of stewardship. In other words, these people weren’t sharing what they had in common in order to just make life more comfortable. What motivated them was a high level of commitment to the mission. And the more they understood the mission, the more their value system changed.

The value system of the world says that I find my significance and security in my money and my stuff. What caused them to shift to a completely different value system? It was the life-changing power of Jesus within them and their understanding that God has called us to an eternal purpose. Therefore, everything I have is now oriented toward that: my time, my treasure, my talents. The greatest investment I can make is investing in that which lasts forever.

Notice in verse 32 Luke tells us that they **“were of one heart and soul.”** He’s saying that the community of the saints came together with one common focus: and that was accomplishing the mission.

The church at this point had to have been, conservatively speaking, 8 to 10 thousand people. There were a lot of opinions; there was a lot of diversity. But what pulled them together was not uniformity. What pulled them together was a common commitment to accomplishing the mission. And that’s a consistent theme in the Book of Acts.

If we figure everybody that calls Lincoln Berean home, it's about 5 or 6 thousand people. Within that umbrella of people there's a lot of diversity and there are a lot of opinions. And we don't have to agree on everything. We don't have to agree on the best way to do everything; I understand that.

But what must unite us is not uniformity. What must unite us is a common commitment to the mission. We're able to say, even though we have our disagreements and we would do things differently, that what draws us together is a common commitment to accomplishing the task that God has given us to accomplish.

You see it as well in verse 33. Right in the middle of this discussion about stewardship, he reminds us: **“And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.”** In other words, he reminds us that the reason that they were stewarding what they had and were taking care of one another was in order to complete the mission: the proclamation of the message of Jesus—the death, burial and resurrection—the message of hope.

What motivates people to steward what they've been given for God's purposes is a grasp of the mission. What doesn't motivate people is trying to make people feel guilty and twisting their arms, with ongoing reports of being behind budget and implying, *You've got to help; we're a sinking ship*. Nobody's motivated by that.

What people *are* motivated by is to be reminded that God has called us to be part of something that will last forever. And God has given us such a spectacular assignment that we reorient our thinking away from the things of this world and say, “I want to invest myself in something that lasts forever, and everything I have, everything that I possess ultimately can be used for God's purposes.”

To help you perhaps understand that as it is played out here at our church, I've confessed to you before that several years ago we as leaders felt like we lost our edge—that we lost our intensity toward the vision and purpose of the church. The economy was shaky and we were hunkering down and trying to just kind of survive. And the more we tried to do that, the more the giving just declined down and down and down and down.

Then in what all of us, I think, will remember as a fairly historic meeting, there was this overwhelming sense that God is calling us to get back to the mission. We felt that it's time to stop playing safe and conservative and to “get with it”—in essence, that there are lost people who need to hear about Jesus, so it's time to get back to what the church is called to do and be.

You do need to understand, to appreciate this, that when we had that meeting, we were at the low end of the giving scale. Things were dropping at a fairly accelerated rate. It was not a time when there was any reason to believe that would change. There was just this overwhelming sense that we've got to get back to the purpose and take some steps of faith and trust God with the rest.

January of 2004 was the State of the Church, and I unveiled to you what I believed God was leading us to accomplish—our steps of faith. I hardly talked about money at all that day. What I did talk about a lot was the purpose of the church, and I asked if you would be willing to say, “Yes, it's for this purpose I live.” And we pounded that message home over the next several weeks.

What difference did that make? If you compare the giving in 2003 (which was the year before that decision was made) with 2004 (which was the year after that decision was made and we collectively re-upped our commitment to the mission), the giving went up 64 percent. That is just absolutely unheard of.

We didn't bring in any professional fundraiser. All we did was remind ourselves of what we're called to, and we asked: Are we willing to re-up our commitment to the purpose? We believed our stewardship would fall in line with that. It has, and it has stayed strong all the way through to this day.

If people choose not to generously and faithfully give to God, I would suggest to you it's because they are not on board with the mission. You might say, "I'm in. I've counted the cost. I'm willing to pay the price. Throw me in jail." Well, fine; but I've got something a little harder. How about stewarding your money and your possessions for God's eternal purposes? There are probably a lot of people that would rather go to jail than to do that.

For whatever reason, that is an area of life that we seem to clutch and grasp, and we're often very unwilling to let that go. But I don't think it's possible to say, "I'm on-board; I'm with it; I'm committed to the mission," if that is not reflected in your stewardship.

Well, I think that's exactly the point Luke is trying to make. And then he uses Barnabas as, in essence, the poster child. We could have a big poster out in the hallway of Barnabas with the theme *For This Purpose I Live*—because that's in essence what Luke is doing. He is saying, "This is an example of someone who is sold out and totally committed to the mission." The similarity and language from verse 35 and verse 37 clearly identifies that's the purpose of mentioning Barnabas here.

As we read through the Book of Acts, one thing we'll learn is that Barnabas was a major player in the New Testament church. He was a man of significant influence, and God used him literally to change the world. When we track it all the way back to the first time Barnabas is mentioned, we're told that he was onboard with the mission, and that was evidenced by his willingness to steward what he had for God's purposes. It's just a peek into his heart that prepared him for what God wanted to do through him. So Barnabas is the poster child.

Chapter 5, verse 1 begins with: "But...." It's unfortunate the chapter break is there, because the word "but" forces a contrast, which means you have to know what preceded and what's being contrasted here. Ananias and Sapphira are the antithesis of Barnabas. They're at the other end of the scale.

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? 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." (5:1-4)

Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property and they kept back some of the price. The word that's translated "kept back" is a word that means to embezzle; it means to pilfer. As a matter of fact, this is the exact Greek word that's used in the Septuagint (which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament) to describe Achan's sin in Joshua chapter 7. You remember Achan stole

from Ai and took possessions that were not his. Because of that, Israel lost their battle. It's the exact same word.

It implies the idea that Ananias had made some sort of commitment and was trying to pretend like he was keeping that commitment, but the reality is he was siphoning off some of that money back to himself. He was trying to pull a fast one on God. And that's what Peter identifies here.

When you notice the similarity of the language of verse 2 with verse 35 and verse 37 of chapter 4, it's clear that this is meant to be a contrast. The language is almost exact. Peter confronts Ananias and says, "Satan has filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit." That's a very interesting phrase. Peter understands that there is a greater power at work here. Satan had to have been doing everything in his power to stop this unstoppable church.

He first tried an attack from the outside and had Peter and John threatened and thrown in jail. But that didn't work. If anything, it just fueled the fire. So now he tries what tends to be a more deadly attack: *I'm going to attack from the inside*. When you have soldiers within your own ranks who are shooting at you, that's much more deadly. And so Satan figures, *I've got to find somebody here that I can get to create disunity and distrust in the body. And I'll create chaos and ultimately bring the church to its knees*. Peter identifies Satan, then, as the author of this attack.

Now it's very important to understand what Peter says here. Peter is not saying that the problem is that Ananias did not give a big enough chunk of money. As a matter of fact, he's very careful to say, "You know, that land was yours. When you sold it, the money was yours. Nobody was forcing you to do this; nobody was twisting your arm. You know, you didn't have to do any of this." That wasn't the issue.

The issue is that he was lying about how much he was giving. Ananias was much more interested in appearance than reality. He was much more interested in showing than sharing. He wanted everyone to think he was as committed and deeply spiritual as Barnabas. He wanted the recognition, the honor, the influence that Barnabas had.

But deep in his heart, he wasn't there. He didn't have that level of commitment. He wasn't willing to pay the price; he wasn't willing to count the cost. He was trying to present himself as a super Christian, but behind closed doors that wasn't the reality of his life. And that's what Peter is confronting. Peter is confronting what we would call spiritual hypocrisy. He says, "Why have you lied—not only to men but ultimately to God?"

This is a temptation I think we all wrestle with: the temptation to try to convince others we're far more committed than we are, that we're far more spiritual than we are. It's easy to come to a service like this and sing the songs: "Lord, with all my heart, with all my soul, I live to worship You." That's great! Is that true?

I have to tell you, if you aren't stewarding your money for God's purposes, you really shouldn't sing that line—because it's not true. You're more interested in living for yourself than you are for God. And what God is asking for here is, "Just please be honest. Don't pretend. Don't pretend to be more committed to the mission than you are."

It's tempting for all of us to put on our best faces when we come to church. We put on our super Christian faces and we want everybody to believe that we've got this thing wired; that we're on track, we're onboard—full speed ahead. But if your life behind closed doors does not line up

with that, that is spiritual hypocrisy. And all God is saying is, “Please don’t do that. Just at least be honest.” Be honest with where you’re at in your commitment to God.

It’s easy to sing “I surrender all.” But if you aren’t willing to steward what you have for God’s purposes, don’t sing that—it’s not true. Maybe we’ll change the words of the song and we’ll say, “I surrender a little bit.” And then at least we can sing that with some enthusiasm.

Many of you *can* sing it and you mean it and you live it. But we all need to look at our own lives and our hearts and ask ourselves, *Is that really where I’m at?* You say, “Well, come on. You’re making a big deal of this. It’s not that big a deal.” Fine. Let’s go on in the text.

And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard it. The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him. Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter responded to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?” And she said, “Yes, that was the price.”

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.” And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things. (vs. 5-11)

Now that’s a rather sobering text, isn’t it? (At this time we’re going to pause and take the offering again.) The reality is, this is very unusual. What you do find is that at the beginning of significant movements, like the birth of the Church, sometimes God steps in and makes a pretty severe statement to set a certain tone—which doesn’t necessarily represent His actions throughout the movement. But clearly how God feels about that behavior remains the same.

Well, that’s the case here. Literally all the commentators believe Ananias and Sapphira were believers and God just took them home. And there is this repetition in the text that “the people feared...the people feared...the people feared.” They got the message: This is God’s way of saying, “Do not do this to Me. I’m letting you know how I feel about that.”

God feels about that the same way my wife and kids would feel about my spiritual hypocrisy. It’s offensive and it’s disgusting. Don’t stand there and say that you surrender all if you don’t. Don’t pretend like you’re totally committed if you’re not. Just be honest: “This is where I’m at.” And sometimes in the process of being honest, we at least reexamine our lives and maybe think about where we need to go—rather than playing the role of a spiritual hypocrite.

It’s interesting to process through the different commentators and their responses to this text. There are some that just could not bring themselves to acknowledge that *God* did this. So they think it was because Peter was so forceful in his confrontation that they died of a heart attack. But that’s not what the text says. As a matter of fact, the phrase “he breathed his last” is used exclusively in the Scriptures for divine judgment. There’s no question what happened here. God was making a statement. And what He was saying is, “Don’t do this to Me.”

The reality is, when we’re not willing to steward what we’ve been given for God’s purposes, what we’re saying is, “God, I don’t think I can trust You. I think I need to make sure that my

significance and my security is in my hands, not Yours. And so I'm going to keep that for myself."

So we can't come here and say, "With all my heart, with all my soul, I live to worship You," and yet behind closed doors God knows we're saying, "God, I don't trust You." That's what offends God. God is just looking for a little honesty here. He's looking for a little authenticity, a willingness to call it what it is. You can't say, "I'm sold out for the mission," if that isn't reflected in your stewardship. You're just not there.

Ananias and Sapphira wanted the influence that God had given Barnabas, but they didn't want the price; they didn't want the cost. And God was saying, "It just doesn't work that way. Don't play games with Me."

Another interesting thing in reading through the commentators was looking at how they responded to Peter as the spiritual leader in his responsibility in this. There were some commentators that felt like Peter was just way out of bounds—that this whole thing was Peter's fault. They suggested it never would have happened this way if Peter wasn't a bad pastor, if Peter wasn't a bad shepherd, if Peter would have extended more grace.

One of the commentators says this:

It could not, of course, be laid as a charge against St. Peter that after his stern rebuke of Ananias the offender fell down dead suddenly, though one would have expected St. Peter in the future to be more careful in rebuking the sinful members of the congregation. But the story goes on to relate that Ananias was buried without word being said to his wife, although she must have been in the neighbourhood. When she came into the house three hours later, St. Peter instead of telling her of the dreadful fall of her husband so as to give her a chance of repentance cross-examined her in such a way that the sin in her heart was brought to light as a downright lie; and then he told her that her husband was dead and that she would be die too....Try how we may, we cannot imagine Christ acting towards sinners as St. Peter is here represented as doing.

—from pp. 83-4 of *The Acts of the Apostles* by L.E. Browne (London, 1925) as quoted in F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), pp. 103-4.

I wonder if it dawns on that commentator that it is Christ Himself who is administering the discipline in this text. This *is* Christ. This is Christ saying, "This is how I feel about this kind of behavior."

There is absolutely nothing in the text that would lead us to conclude that Peter did anything other than exactly what God wanted him to do. As a matter of fact, the paragraph that follows clearly indicates God was pleased and continued to pour out His favor.

But I do believe that if this commentator lived in the first century and was part of the first-century church, he would have written Peter a letter and said, "Peter, you're way out of bounds. You are uncaring; you are unloving; you don't understand grace; you're a bad pastor."

One thing I've learned over the years is that any time you seek to address sin in the body—especially spiritual hypocrisy—it's going to be messy. I have not figured out a way to do it without it getting messy. The people that are confronted never say, "Thank you for sharing that." As a matter of fact, they tend to be quite upset—because they've been exposed. They tend to misrepresent the confrontation. They tend to misrepresent the issues. They tend to paint a picture of themselves as the martyr. They tend to spread information that simply isn't true. And there are always people in the body willing to listen to that and draw false conclusions.

The reality is, there just isn't much I can do about that. I have to examine my own heart. I have to examine prayerfully the steps I take and then seek to do the right thing. And ultimately my reputation is in the hands of God. I don't know how to do that without it getting messy.

The temptation is, *Let's just ignore it*. But we can't ignore it because, as the next paragraph tells us, it's when we deal with sin in the body, that God continues to pour out His favor.

At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.

And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any of them.

Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed. (vs. 12-16)

It's very interesting to notice how this text is structured. You have this wonderful text about everybody having everything in common and the mission going forward. Then you have this interlude of dealing with spiritual sin in the body. Having dealt with that, you have this strong paragraph that God's favor is clearly being poured out upon His Church.

It's Luke's way of saying, "God wants us to deal with spiritual hypocrisy in the church. And as we're faithful to do that, He will continue to pour out His blessing." We could imply that the opposite of that is if we ignore spiritual hypocrisy, God will withdraw His blessing. So it has to be dealt with.

This is a magnificent closing paragraph of this particular unit of God continuing to pour forth His Spirit and His power in ways that was causing hundreds and maybe thousands of people to continue to come to faith in Christ. The church now is 8, 9, 10 thousand at least and growing so fast they couldn't even count the numbers. The apostles had prayed that God would continue to do signs and wonders in order to provide a platform where they could declare the message. And God answered that prayer in remarkable ways.

Now one of the questions that comes out of this text is: Does God still do signs and wonders today? It's a great question. It's not that easy to answer. I would clearly say, without hesitation, God is still in the business of doing miracles today. I would never doubt that for a second.

But are they done at a level of intensity that characterized the first-century church? And my answer would be: I have never seen evidence to convince me of that. I realize there are people that have large meetings and large auditoriums and they claim all sorts of manifestations of the Spirit and all sorts of healings. But you know, when those are investigated, the evidence is not supporting that there are these mass healings.

Former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop did an extensive investigation of people who were supposedly healed at these gatherings and found there was no evidence that any of them were healed. Most of them still die of their diseases. There's very questionable evidence that anything of a miraculous nature took place.

Now don't misunderstand me here. I'm not saying God doesn't still do miracles. Some of you would say, "Well, I know so and so, and that seemed like a miracle." It probably was. God is still doing miracles—but not in the same way and with that level of intensity that we saw in the first-century church.

To illustrate that: To reach the same level of intensity, someone would have to be able to go up to the hospitals, walk through the halls, clear the place out. There would have to be hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people with serious ailments that are suddenly made well. Go to Madonna...clear it out. Go to the Critical Care ward...clear it out. That would be the level of healing and intensity that was experienced in these first-century signs and wonders movements.

I have never seen documentation in the last 2000 years that would convince me that has taken place outside of that early church movement. What this paragraph is showing is another wonderful glimpse of the unstoppable Church of Jesus Christ.

Well, what do we do with this text? How do we respond to this text? One of the things I think we all need to do is to examine our own hearts and make sure that we're not more about appearance than we are about reality. I think we're all tempted with that: to try to convince others I'm much more committed than I really am—that I'm a super Christian, when in reality maybe I'm not.

The more honest we're willing to be, the more likely we are to continue to grow and to become what God has called us to be. When I look in the mirror and recognize I'm not nearly as committed as I think I am, then it causes me to think, *But I want to be*. And I need to be honest with that, because that provides some motivation to continue to grow. But that starts with an honesty in not putting on a mask—not trying to pretend I'm a super Christian if I'm not.

To be more specific to the text, all of us need to examine this very delicate area of stewardship in our lives. It is not possible to say, "I've counted the cost; I'm sold out for the mission" if you are not willing to steward what you have for God's purposes.

If you're not willing to give generously and faithfully, at least be honest that you're not that committed to the mission. And maybe in doing so, it's a little bit of a wakeup, *But I want to be*. And it causes you to rethink some things about your commitment to trust God and get your significance and your security from Him, not from the things of this world.

All of us need to examine that area of our lives and at least be honest in saying, "You know, I have counted the cost." And if it's true, then say, "The cost is too high. I'm not in." At least that's honest. But again, maybe in the process of that you will say, "But I don't like that." And maybe it will cause you to rethink your commitment.

As I said before, this is that area of our lives that we tend to hold out on, that often we're the least willing to surrender to God. But if we're going to come and say, "God, with all my heart, with all my soul, I worship You," if we're going to come and say, "God, I surrender all," then let's not be spiritual hypocrites. Let's mean what we say.

The bottom line is, God doesn't need your money. God just wants your heart. He wants you onboard with what He's doing. He wants you to invest in that which lasts forever. But He knows very well that where your heart is, that's where your treasure will be.

Our Father, we're thankful that You are a faithful God. You've stated very clearly in this text how You feel about spiritual hypocrisy. You don't want us to try to play for the crowd that we're super Christian and yet, in reality, don't really trust You. Lord, if You were to strike dead everyone who is guilty of spiritual hypocrisy, we would empty this auditorium. We would have no one to preach and we'd have no one to listen. So all we see before us is Your grace. But, Lord, we are reminded it still offends You when we try to pretend in our Christian lives.

Lord, I thank You for many like Barnabas who are a part of this church. They are sold out and they steward out what they have for Your purposes. Like Barnabas, this is a way of life. Yet, Lord, there are others who need to take a long look in the mirror and ask themselves if they're really as committed as they think they are, and the need for that to be evidenced in this very important area of stewardship. Lord, we commit this to you in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
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Study Questions
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Opening Discussion

1. The opening chapters of Acts remind us that the believers' commitment to the mission of the Church included a high commitment to one another. In other words, a high value on community was essential to accomplishing the mission. Why is that?
2. What motivates you to steward what you have for God's purposes?

How does your understanding of the mission of the church affect that commitment?
3. Do you ever get caught up in trying to appear more spiritual than you really are?

Are you ever guilty of having more show than substance?

Why do we do this?

Bible Study

1. Read Acts 4:32-37. Why does Luke carefully weave together the idea of stewardship and mission?

What makes a joyful giver?
2. What does it mean to steward what you have for God's purposes?

What does that look like in practical terms?
3. Read Acts 5:1-11. What is the sin of Ananias and Sapphira?

Are we ever guilty of the same sin? In what way?
4. Peter identifies this as an attack from Satan. In what ways might an "internal" attack be more damaging than an "external" attack?
5. In what way are Ananias and Sapphira the antithesis of Barnabas?

What was the difference?

6. Read Acts 5:12-16. What is the purpose of this paragraph following the sobering story of Ananias and Sapphira?

What will be necessary for the Church to continue to flourish?

7. Do you think God still does signs and wonders today? Why or why not?

Application

1. It is easy to *say* you are committed to the mission of the church, but does your stewardship of time and treasure reflect a high commitment to the mission?

2. How can we avoid the temptation of trying to appear more spiritual than we truly are?

In other words, how can we maintain an authenticity to our lives?

3. What will be necessary for us to be more like Barnabas than Ananias and Sapphira?