

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

FEBRUARY 28TH–MARCH 1ST, 2026 // BOOK OF ACTS

RADICAL GENEROSITY (ACTS 4:32–35)

THE EARLY CHURCH WAS EXPANDING AND GROWING RAPIDLY IN THE CITY OF JERUSALEM.

- Many of the Christians in Jerusalem were international residents who had responded to the gospel on the day of Pentecost.
- They had most likely stayed in Jerusalem since then and were trying to settle in and create a life in the newly formed Christian community.
- There were probably a lot of financial needs.

WHAT WAS THE FIRST CHURCH LIKE?

They were united. Not only did they pray and worship together, but they were of “one heart and mind”—perhaps because they did pray and worship together! (v. 32)

- They were united, but they weren't a socialist cult. Giving all your possessions away wasn't required, but nonetheless, voluntary generosity was a common practice.

NOT ONLY WERE THEY UNITED; THEY WERE UNSELFISH.

The view of possessions shown in this passage centers not on ownership but stewardship, with the Church being viewed as a family.

- “There was not a needy person among them...” Why? Because people were willing to give!
- People gave radically and generously, and it was “distributed to each person as any had need” (vs. 34–35).

THE CHURCH IS ONLY AS EFFECTIVE AS ITS PEOPLE ARE COMMITTED.

The Church can't give away what it doesn't have, and ALL of a church's resources (money, volunteer labor, community involvement, hospitality, etc.) come from the people who are a part of it.

- Church was never intended to be a spectator sport. EVERYONE has a part to play!

The apostles served God by “giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (v. 33), praying, teaching, preaching, leading, and overseeing the distribution of resources to those in need (v. 35).

- Those within the Church served God by praying, witnessing, following, being united and unselfish, and giving generously to the work of the Lord.

FAKING IT (ACTS 4:36–5:2)

There was a man from Cyprus named Joseph, who was called Barnabas (“Son of Encouragement”).

- Barnabas will be a key player in the story of the Church later in Acts. For now, we read of his incredible generosity. He sold a piece of property he owned and brought the money to the apostles so the funds could be distributed to those in need (vs. 36–37).

This was never required of Barnabas. It was a willing act of generosity inspired by love for God and others within the Church.

- What an incredible example of generosity and sacrificial love!
- Barnabas did it out of love for the Lord (not for the praise of others), but this act was likely commended by the Church and Barnabas received encouragement and praise.

We then read of a couple named Ananias and Sapphira who also sold a piece of property. However, they only brought a portion of the funds from the sale to the Church (v. 2).

- This was done under the pretense that they were doing the same thing as Barnabas, when they clearly weren't (vs. 7–8).
- They were lying about doing something they didn't even have to do. But why?

ISSUE #1: CRAVING APPROVAL

Often we're motivated to do good things only so others will admire, compliment, or give us approval or accolades.

- There's nothing wrong with needing encouragement or affirmation, but that can't be what we live for!
- Ananias and Sapphira longed for recognition and approval for their good deed.

ISSUE #2: HYPOCRISY

Whenever we pretend to have virtues or morals we don't possess or we say one thing while doing the opposite, we're practicing hypocrisy.

- Ananias and Sapphira weren't quite ready to practice the kind of radical generosity they saw in Barnabas.
- But they wanted others to think they were that generous, when in reality they weren't.

ISSUE #3: IMAGE MANAGEMENT

Some of us work very hard to curate a public, polished persona that is a mask for our true inner, broken self (social media has made this much worse).

- You can't truly grow spiritually if you're focused on managing an image. True spiritual growth deals in vulnerability, authenticity, and inward righteousness (not just putting on a show).

ISSUE #4: TESTING THE SPIRIT AND LYING TO GOD

Ananias and Sapphira were being deceitful to the Church for the purpose of promoting themselves to gain approval and admiration.

- Even if they had everyone fooled, God still saw the inner state of their hearts. They were motivated by a love of praise and the desire for applause.
- In this way, this couple was lying to God and testing the Holy Spirit.

You and I don't have to pretend to be something we're not. If we're in Christ through faith, we're loved, accepted, known, and seen, even in our shortcomings and brokenness.

- It's OK to not be as spiritually mature as we wish we were, but we've got to be honest about who we really are and where we need to grow. Faking it to try and impress people is dishonest and hypocritical.

LYING TO GOD (ACTS 5:3–11)

When Ananias brought the funds from the sale of his land before Peter (under the pretense that he was far more generous than he was), he got a surprising response.

- Ananias was expecting praise for his spectacular and noble generosity, but instead he was exposed and rebuked (vs. 3–4).
- The Holy Spirit had revealed the truth to Peter about this deception.

“WHY HAS SATAN FILLED YOUR HEART...?” (V. 3)

The devil seeks to destroy us through the love of money, the love of praise, and the lust for approval, power, and reputation/fame.

- The devil tempts us to get those things by whatever means necessary (even if it means hurting others, lying, or being deceptive).

- Satan had filled Ananias's heart with these destructive lusts and desires.

The sad irony of the whole situation is that Ananias wasn't required to give the land or even all the proceeds of the land.

It was his to do with whatever seemed best (v. 4).

- But Ananias so craved the approval of others that he was willing to lie to the Church. But he wasn't just lying to the church, he was lying to God.
- Right as Peter confronted him with his sin, Ananias dropped dead (v. 5).

“...AND A GREAT FEAR CAME ON ALL WHO HEARD” (V. 5)

Some young men carried out Ananias and buried him. After an interval of three hours, Sapphira came in with the same story and suffered the same fate as her husband (vs. 7–10).

- The result of this incident was that the Church was given a holy fear of God. There are real consequences for sin and deception (v. 11).

GOD RESERVES THE RIGHT TO DEAL WITH SIN IN HIS CHURCH, EVEN TO THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE PENALTY.

- Deceit, hypocrisy, lust for approval/praise, and greed in God's Church will always undermine the Holy Spirit's work.
- There must be within us a holy fear of the ugliness and destructive power of sin.
- We must have a holy fear of the consequences of sin and the power of God to stamp it out.

ACTS OF POWER (ACTS 5:12–16)

“MANY SIGNS AND WONDERS WERE BEING DONE...”

What were the miracles of God that were experienced in this church?

- Miracles of healing: The sick were carried into the streets and brought before the apostles.
- Miracles of deliverance: Those tormented by unclean spirits were brought before the apostles for deliverance.
- Miracles of salvation: Believers were added.

“NO ONE ELSE DARED TO JOIN THEM...”

It could mean that, because of the incident with Ananias and Sapphira, the community of Christians in Jerusalem developed a reputation as a people of integrity, holiness, and radical commitment to Christ.

- Those within Jerusalem had a healthy fear of joining this group casually without total commitment and submission to God.

“...BUT THE PEOPLE SPOKE WELL OF THEM.”

Some who weren't totally ready to go “all in” kept a healthy distance, yet they held the Christians in high esteem and spoke well of them.

- It was undeniable that God was working within and through the Christians, yet unbelievers understood how radical a lifestyle it was to take up a cross and follow Jesus.

There's a definite contrast between the first part of Chapter 5 and 4:32–36 and 5:12–16.

- It's not the contrast between sinless and sinful people; it's the contrast between genuine and artificial people.
- It's the contrast between those who are hiding behind the masks of religious performance and those who are truly abiding in Christ and completely surrendered to the Holy Spirit.

TOTAL SURRENDER, NOT CURATED OR ARTIFICIAL PERFECTION.

- God does not demand instant flawlessness, but He does oppose duplicity and hypocrisy.
- A Spirit-empowered life of discipleship can't be built on image management; it must be built on authentic surrender.
- In what areas of your life are you managing perceptions rather than yielding control?

THE REAL DANGER IS NOT SPIRITUAL WEAKNESS BUT SPIRITUAL PERFORMANCE.

- Our spiritual health depends more on our authenticity than our impressiveness.
- When we're vulnerable, honest, and humble, we invite grace. When we're performative and hypocritical, we invite exposure.
- To truly grow, we must refuse to exaggerate or downplay. Who are we really?

GOD'S POWER RESTS ON THOSE WHO KNOW THEY'RE BROKEN AND NEED HIM, NOT ON THOSE WHO TRY TO USE HIM TO SELF-PROMOTE.

- The power of the Holy Spirit in the early Church flowed through Believers who yielded, not those who self-promoted and sought control.
- The Holy Spirit fills those who admit their own spiritual poverty, not those who project spiritual strength and mastery.

WHERE ARE YOU MOST INADEQUATE, UNQUALIFIED, BROKEN, IMMATURE, AND SPIRITUALLY IMPOVERISHED?

- How are you tempted to cover it up instead of surrendering it over?