



## Summary

This powerful exploration of Acts chapters 4 and 5 confronts us with one of the most sobering accounts in the early church: the story of Ananias and Sapphira. We're challenged to examine the difference between genuine charity and religious pretense, between communal generosity born of love and the dangerous hypocrisy that seeks human recognition over divine approval. The early believers faced immediate excommunication from Jewish society when they embraced Christ, losing their livelihoods and community standing. In response, those with means voluntarily sold possessions to support fellow believers who could no longer earn wages. This wasn't socialism or communism imposed by force, but rather what we might call 'communism with a small c'—a voluntary sharing motivated by grace and charity. The contrast between Barnabas, who gave freely without seeking recognition and was named 'son of encouragement,' and Ananias, who pretended to give everything while holding back, reveals a timeless truth: God desires our hearts, not our money. The shocking deaths of Ananias and Sapphira weren't punishment for giving too little, but for lying to the Holy Spirit through hypocrisy. This account forces us to ask ourselves: Are we genuine in our worship, or are we performing for human applause? Do we come to church asking if God was pleased with the service, or only whether we enjoyed it? The passage reminds us that we cannot lie to God, and that pretense in the church—when left unchecked—brings spiritual death to individuals and congregations alike.





## Points

### **Title: The Danger of Hypocrisy: Lessons from Ananias and Sapphira**

Sermon Summary: This sermon examines the early church's response to economic persecution and the severe consequences of hypocrisy in God's house. The message contrasts genuine charitable giving, exemplified by Barnabas, with the pretense and deception of Ananias and Sapphira. The pastor emphasizes that God desires authentic hearts over material gifts, and that hypocrisy—appearing to be what we are not—is a deadly sin that can destroy both individuals and churches. The sermon warns against grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit through resistance to His conviction, while offering hope that genuine repentance is always available. It challenges believers to examine their motives in worship and giving, recognizing that God sees the heart and cannot be deceived.

### **Key Points:**

- - The early church practiced voluntary communal sharing due to economic persecution following excommunication from Jewish synagogues
- - This was not communism or socialism, but voluntary charity (communism) motivated by grace and love
- - Jesus advocated principles of investment and capitalism, not forced redistribution of wealth
- - Charity is only possible through private ownership and earned wealth
- - Barnabas exemplified genuine giving without seeking recognition, earning the name "son of encouragement"
- - Ananias and Sapphira died not for withholding money, but for hypocrisy and lying to God
- - God set this standard at the church's inception to show that pretense and fakeness are unacceptable
- - It is impossible to lie to God; He knows the heart
- - Worship services are primarily about pleasing God, not about our personal preferences
- - Hypocrisy causes a conspiracy within oneself, authored by Satan, between flesh and soul
- - Christians can grieve the Holy Spirit through sin and quench the Spirit by refusing to listen to conviction
- - Marital consultation is crucial for maintaining godly righteousness in the home
- - People who desire to be seen as good would rather die than publicly repent
- - Pretense will kill any church when allowed to flourish

### **Scripture Reference:**

- - Acts 4:32-37; 5:1-11 (primary passage)
- - Matthew 6:19-21 (treasures in heaven)
- - Matthew 19 (rich young ruler)
- - Matthew 25:20-27 (parable of the talents)
- - Luke 12:1-3 (beware the leaven of the Pharisees)
- - Luke 16 (parable of the unjust steward)
- - John 9:22 (excommunication for confessing Christ)
- - Acts 9:1-2 (Saul persecuting the church)
- - Acts 11:29-30 (relief sent to Judea)
- - Acts 26:9-11 (Paul's testimony of persecution)
- - 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 (collection for the saints)
- - Leviticus 10:1-3 (Nadab and Abihu)
- - Ephesians 4:25-32 (do not grieve the Holy Spirit)
- - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-23 (do not quench the Spirit)



**Stories:**

- - Barnabas selling his land and giving the proceeds to the apostles, receiving the name "son of encouragement"
- - Ananias and Sapphira selling their property but lying about the proceeds, resulting in their immediate deaths
- - Nadab and Abihu offering profane fire before the Lord at the first worship service and being consumed by fire
- - The rich young ruler who went away sad when Jesus told him to sell everything
- - Saul of Tarsus persecuting the early church before his conversion
- - Paul's later collections for the poor saints in Jerusalem from churches in Galatia and Corinth
- - The parable of the talents demonstrating investment and stewardship
- - The parable of the unjust steward showing worldly shrewdness with finances





## Scripture

### **Explicitly Mentioned References:**

1. Acts 4:32-37 - Primary text about the early church sharing possessions
2. Acts 5:1-11 - The account of Ananias and Sapphira
3. John 9:22 - Excommunication from the synagogue for confessing Christ
4. Acts 9:1-2 - Saul breathing threats against disciples
5. Acts 26:9-11 - Paul's testimony of persecuting the church
6. Matthew 25:20-30 - Parable of the talents
7. John 12:8 - "The poor you have with you always"
8. Matthew 6:19-21 - Laying up treasures in heaven
9. Matthew 19 - Rich young ruler (general reference)
10. Matthew 19:28-29 - Disciples' reward for following Jesus
11. Luke 16 - Parable of the unjust steward (general reference)
12. Acts 4:29-30 - Prayer for boldness to speak God's word
13. Acts 11:29-30 - Relief sent to brethren in Judea
14. 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 - Collection for the saints in Jerusalem
15. 2 Corinthians 8-9 - Giving for the saints (general reference)
16. Leviticus 10:1-3 - Nadab and Abihu offering profane fire
17. Luke 12:1-3 - Beware the leaven of the Pharisees (hypocrisy)
18. Matthew 23 - Woes to the scribes and Pharisees (general reference)
19. Ephesians 4:25-32 - Do not grieve the Holy Spirit
20. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-23 - Do not quench the Spirit

### **Additional Relevant Verses for Themes Discussed:**

#### **On Communal Sharing vs. Communism:**

- Acts 2:44-45 - Early church had all things in common
- 2 Corinthians 9:7 - God loves a cheerful giver

#### **On Hypocrisy:**

- Matthew 6:1-4 - Don't practice righteousness before men
- 1 John 1:6 - Walking in darkness while claiming fellowship

#### **On God's Omniscience:**

- Hebrews 4:13 - All things are naked before God
- Psalm 139:1-4 - God knows our thoughts

#### **On Worship:**



- John 4:23-24 - Worship in spirit and truth
- Hebrews 10:25 - Not forsaking the assembling together

On the Holy Spirit's Conviction:

- John 16:8 - Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment





## Quotes

Communism says what's yours is mine. Communism says what's mine is yours. And that only happens by means of charity.

The inherent problem with public displays of charitable giving is that it can cause the flesh to rise up and seek the degree of notoriety that Barnabas received.

God did not want or need Ananias' money. His money was for Ananias to decide freely and joyfully what he would do with that money. All God wanted was Ananias' heart.

Pretense, fakeness, hypocrisy is unacceptable to God. And God had set that same standard.

The question is, did God like the service? Was God blessed by what he saw in his church? Did he enjoy the sincerity of the worship of God and the devotion to his word?

Pretense will kill any church when it is allowed to flourish. They're called dead because they are. They died because of pretense.

People who desire to be seen as good people by the public would rather die than publicly repent. Because there's shame involved in that, isn't there?

When you do not respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, that, my friends, is sin.





## Discussion Questions

How does the voluntary sharing of resources in the early church differ from modern socialism or communism, and what role does genuine charity play in that distinction?

In what ways might the modern church be tempted toward hypocrisy in charitable giving, and how can we guard our hearts against seeking recognition rather than serving God?

What does it mean to worship God in a way that pleases Him rather than focusing on what we get out of a worship service, and how might this shift in perspective transform our church gatherings?

Why do you think God chose to make such a severe example of Ananias and Sapphira at the inception of the church rather than showing them mercy and allowing repentance?

How does the progression from grieving the Holy Spirit to quenching the Holy Spirit manifest in a believer's life, and what are the warning signs that we should heed?

What role should spouses play in holding each other accountable to godly standards, and how might Ananias and Sapphira's story have been different if one had confronted the other?

When Peter asked Sapphira the leading question about the price of the land, why do you think she chose to continue the lie rather than repent, and what does this reveal about the power of pride and shame?

How does the principle that we become like what we worship apply to our daily lives, and what might we be worshiping if we find ourselves struggling with hypocrisy or pretense?

In what ways does the conviction of the Holy Spirit serve as one of the greatest assets of being a believer, and how can we cultivate sensitivity to His voice rather than resisting it?

Do you believe Ananias and Sapphira will be in heaven, and what does their story teach us about God's desire for genuine hearts over outward religious performance?



## Small Group Guide: Genuine Hearts in God's Church

Based on Acts 4:32-5:11

### **Opening Prayer**

*Begin your time together asking God to help you examine your hearts with honesty and receive His conviction with grace.*

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### **Ice Breaker**

*Share a time when you witnessed someone's genuine generosity that made a lasting impression on you. What made it memorable?*

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### **Key Scripture Passages**

- Acts 4:32-37; 5:1-11
  - Matthew 6:19-21
  - Ephesians 4:25-32
  - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-23
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### **Discussion Questions**

#### **Understanding the Context**

1. *What economic challenges did the early church face? How did their newfound faith in Christ immediately impact their ability to earn a living?*
2. *How does the voluntary sharing described in Acts 4:32-35 differ from communism or socialism? What made this arrangement work in the early church?*

#### **The Heart of the Issue**

3. *What was the real sin of Ananias and Sapphira? Was it keeping back part of the money, or something deeper? (See verses 3-4)*



4. *Why do you think God dealt so severely with Ananias and Sapphira at this particular moment in church history? What was He establishing?*
5. *\*\*The sermon mentioned that "people who desire to be seen as good people by the public would rather die than publicly repent." Why is this true? What makes public repentance so difficult?*

## **Hypocrisy vs. Genuineness**

6. *What's the difference between Barnabas's giving and Ananias's giving? What does "son of encouragement" tell us about Barnabas's character?*
7. *How does hypocrisy act as "leaven" in the church? Can you think of examples where pretense has damaged Christian community?*
8. *The sermon asked: "When was the last time you stopped to consider the opportunity to be truly pleasing to God in service to God?" How does this question challenge our typical approach to church services?*

## **The Holy Spirit's Conviction**

9. *What's the difference between grieving the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) and quenching the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19)? What does this progression look like in real life?*
10. *How does the conviction of the Holy Spirit actually serve as "one of the greatest assets of being a believer in Christ"?*

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### **Key Takeaways**

1. *God desires our hearts, not our money. Ananias was free to give whatever amount he chose; his sin was pretending to give everything while holding back.*
  2. *Hypocrisy is deadly to the church. God set a standard early that pretense and fakeness are unacceptable in His house.*
  3. *You cannot lie to God. He sees our hearts and knows our true motivations, even when we successfully fool others.*
  4. *The only thing that matters in worship is whether God is pleased. We too often ask "Did I like the service?" rather than "Did God like the service?"*
  5. *Marital consultation in righteousness is crucial. Spouses should hold each other accountable to godly standards, not conspire together in sin.*
  6. *Public repentance is better than public pretense. Peter gave Sapphira an opportunity to come clean; she chose to continue the lie.*
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## **Personal Reflection Questions**

*(Allow 5-10 minutes of silent reflection)*

- *Is there any area of my life where I'm pretending to be something I'm not, especially in church?*
  - *Am I listening to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, or have I been ignoring His voice?*
  - *What am I truly worshiping? Recognition? Reputation? Or God Himself?*
  - *Do I come to church to serve God or to be served?*
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## **Practical Applications**

### **This Week's Challenge**

*Choose one of the following to practice this week:*

1. *Examine Your Giving: Reflect honestly on your motivations for giving (time, money, service). Are you seeking recognition or genuinely serving God?*
  2. *Prepare Your Heart for Worship: Come 15-30 minutes early next Sunday to pray and prepare your heart to worship God genuinely, asking "How can I please God today?"*
  3. *Practice Genuine Confession: If the Holy Spirit has been convicting you of something, confess it to a trusted Christian friend or your spouse this week. Don't let pretense continue.*
  4. *Respond to Conviction: Make a list of areas where you sense the Holy Spirit's conviction. Don't quench or grieve Him—respond with repentance and change.*
  5. *Encourage Like Barnabas: Look for an opportunity to encourage someone genuinely this week without seeking recognition for it.*
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## **Accountability Questions**

*(For checking in next week)*

- *Did you sense God's presence in worship this week?*
  - *Were you genuine in your interactions with other believers?*
  - *Did you respond to any conviction from the Holy Spirit?*
  - *How did you practice giving or serving without seeking recognition?*
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## **Closing Reflection**

*Read together: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:21)*

*Final Question: What does the location of your "treasure" reveal about the condition of your heart right now?*

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## **Closing Prayer**

*Pray together, asking God to:*

- *Reveal any areas of hypocrisy or pretense in your lives*
  - *Give you courage to be genuine, even when it's costly*
  - *Help you worship Him with sincere hearts*
  - *Create in you a desire to please Him above all else*
  - *Restore anyone who has quenched the Holy Spirit's voice*
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## **For Further Study**

- *Read the account of Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10:1-7*
- *Study Jesus's warnings about hypocrisy in Matthew 23*
- *Explore what Scripture says about the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 9:10, Psalm 111:10)*
- *Examine other examples of God's discipline in the early church (1 Corinthians 11:27-32)*



## Daily Devotional

# 5-Day Devotional: Living with Authentic Faith

## Day 1: The Heart God Desires

**Reading:** Acts 4:32-37; Matthew 6:19-21

**Devotional:** The early church demonstrated radical generosity born from genuine transformation. Their sharing wasn't mandated socialism but voluntary communion—hearts freed from materialism's grip. Barnabas exemplifies this authentic faith, giving without fanfare, earning recognition not because he sought it but because he didn't. Consider what truly owns your heart. Jesus teaches that where your treasure is, your heart follows. When we invest in God's kingdom—through time, resources, or talents—we're not just giving things away; we're repositioning our hearts toward eternal values. Today, examine what you're treasuring. Are you storing up earthly recognition or heavenly reward? Authentic faith gives joyfully, secretly, and sacrificially because it understands that everything belongs to God already.

## Day 2: The Danger of Pretense

**Reading:** Acts 5:1-11; Luke 12:1-3

**Devotional:** Ananias and Sapphira's story shocks us, but it reveals something crucial: God sees what we hide. Their sin wasn't keeping money—it was pretending to give all while holding back, seeking recognition for a sacrifice they didn't make. Jesus warns that hypocrisy is leaven that corrupts everything. Nothing is hidden from God's sight. This isn't meant to terrify but to liberate us. When we stop performing for human approval and live transparently before God, we discover freedom. The question isn't whether others see our devotion, but whether God receives our genuine worship. Today, ask yourself: Am I presenting an image or offering my authentic self? God desires your heart, not your performance. Repentance is always available, but pretense leads to spiritual death.

## Day 3: Worship That Pleases God

**Reading:** Leviticus 10:1-3; John 4:19-24

**Devotional:** Nadab and Abihu's tragic death reminds us that worship matters to God—not because He's petty, but because He's holy. They offered "strange fire," worship on their own terms rather than God's prescription. Similarly, when we gather for worship, the critical question isn't "Did I enjoy it?" but "Did God?" True worship requires genuine engagement with God's presence, not mere attendance or routine. Jesus taught that God seeks worshipers who worship in spirit and truth—authentically, from transformed hearts. Every Sunday presents an opportunity to truly serve God through worship. Before entering His house, prepare your heart. Come early. Pray earnestly. Worship isn't entertainment we consume but service we offer. God is present, watching, longing for your sincere devotion.



## Day 4: The Conviction of the Holy Spirit

**Reading:** Ephesians 4:25-32; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-23

**Devotional:** The Holy Spirit's conviction is a precious gift, not a burden. He alerts us to sin, guides us toward righteousness, and warns us of judgment—all because He loves us deeply. But we can respond in three ways: heed His voice, grieve Him by ignoring His promptings, or quench Him entirely until we no longer hear. Ananias and Sapphira conspired against the Spirit's conviction, choosing pretense over repentance. When your conscience stirs, when you sense God's gentle correction, respond immediately. Don't let the sun set on unconfessed sin. Don't give the enemy a foothold through rationalization. The Spirit grieves when we resist His loving correction. Today, listen carefully. Is He convicting you about something? Rejoice that He cares enough to speak. Respond with honest repentance.

## Day 5: The Goodness That Leads to Repentance

**Reading:** Romans 2:1-4; 2 Corinthians 7:8-11

**Devotional:** God's severity with Ananias and Sapphira might seem harsh, but it demonstrates His commitment to protecting His church from the cancer of hypocrisy. Yet remarkably, even in judgment, God's goodness shines. Peter gave Sapphira opportunity to repent with his leading question. God always extends grace before judgment. Paul reminds us that God's kindness leads us to repentance, not His harshness. The shocking examples in Scripture aren't meant to terrorize but to awaken us to reality: God sees everything, hypocrisy destroys, and repentance is always available. No matter how far you've wandered, how deeply you've grieved the Spirit, God's arms remain open. His love pursues you. Today, if you sense distance from God, return. Genuine repentance restores genuine relationship. His goodness awaits you.

