

I am excited to announce this morning that I have discovered my God-given purpose. I believe God made me to be a social media influencer. I mean, think about it! What a life! You get lots of money and notoriety and free stuff and your role is to post stuff on your social media and make it look so incredible that you capture people's hearts and impact their buying decisions. It could be exotic travel, products, or lifestyle. And from what I've seen, it's pretty easy. You basically need to master three poses and you can sell anything. First is "throw your hair back and relax" pose that clearly shows whatever exotic place you're in is perfect. Then there's the "exuberant glee" face that says the product you are consuming is clearly life changing. And, finally, there's the "pouty-lips face" that communicates whatever activity you are doing is evidence you are winning at life. Plus, what's more irresistible than pouty lips? I want to have that kind of influence. So, I invite you to follow me on @KurtPressler and I promise to change your life.

Influence is a heck of a thing, isn't it? Influence directs the devotion of hearts and the actions that flow from it. That's true in the marketplace, families, romance, and in our spiritual lives individually and collectively as a church. If we follow the right influence, our heart will remain devoted to God and one another and we'll live out our calling as the church. **But if we follow the wrong influence, our devotion to God will be divided, our fellowship will be threatened, and our witness will be compromised.** The question for us is how seriously do we take those influences and the results of following them? As we continue our study of the early church in the book of Acts, Luke will show us the impact of two different influences, one positive and hopeful, the other negative and sobering. It's a good check for us to determine what influences we are following and what effect they have.

[Acts 4:32-37] ³² Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Luke again telescopes out to give us a report of what is happening in this new community. They are a people under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is more than some godly force. He is the third person of the Trinity, sent from the Father to personally indwell believers in Jesus individually and unite and indwell us collectively as the Church. We are his temple. His influence directs our heart towards God and one another, and the results are unmistakable.

Luke says this group is of one heart and soul. This would be a significant phrase to use with Greek readers. Aristotle defined a friend as "one soul dwelling in two bodies." This Greek ideal has become a reality in the young Christian community. They are characterized by their friendship, intimacy, and unity of Spirit, belief, purpose, and mission.

This past week is the 41st anniversary of the start of the Lake Placid Winter Olympics. Some of you might remember those being the Olympics where our upstart hockey team defeated the

Russian juggernaut. That moment was memorialized in a movie called *Miracle* starring Kurt Russell as head coach Herb Brooks. As the team is coming together, Herb keeps asking them who they play for. They were all college kids, so they answer with the college they played for. That was until he was running them to death and Mike Eruzione, who would become team captain, shouted his own name, and then Herb asked him who he played for. Mike said, “The United States of America”. That was the turning point. Herb knew that, unless they were of one heart and soul about their team and mission, they’d have no chance. But once they united around that identity and that cause, everything changed.

You ever wanted to be a part of something like that? Well, you can be. We all have to answer the question “Who do you play for?” The Holy Spirit wants to influence our answer to be “God and one another.” When we do that, we become part of a people and mission God wants to use the change the world.

Their oneness is expressed in care of one another, in bold generosity. **There is nothing like how we handle our money and stuff to reveal what is influencing our hearts.** Because of famine, many new believers coming to Jerusalem to be with the church, and growing persecution from non-believing Jews, there was great need that many in the community met by selling goods and offering it to be used for their care. This not communism or compulsory church rules or even prescriptive for the church. We won’t see this practice spread as the church grows. This was a people so captivated by the love of Jesus and moved by the influence of the Spirit that they freely loved one another by taking care of their needs. **They held their stuff loosely as they held one another tightly.** They remembered the words of Jesus when he said, [Luke 12:32-33a] ³² “**Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.**” ³³ **Sell your possessions, and give to the needy.** And Luke gives us the example of Barnabas, whose name means Son of Encouragement. He is a character we will hear much more from, but here, he’s a faithful example of what Luke wants to show.

This is the kind of community God wants to work through. They are sold out for God and for one another and the power of the Spirit is working through them as they witness to the world. God gives grace to live this way and continues to pour out his grace as they do so faithfully. Do you think Fellowship could look like this church, or is it an unattainable biblical ideal? I already know we are generous, and I’m excited about the **Food and Frames** cause. We believe we can be of one heart and soul, which is why we are explicit with things like our core beliefs, our mission and vision, and Covenant Membership, because they declare who and what we are about. If you do not know what those are, give them a look this week and ask the Holy Spirit to direct your heart towards them, and pray that God would pour out his grace for us to be like this.

[Acts 5:1-11] **But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ²and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet. ³But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.” ⁵When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶The young men rose and**

wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. ⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.” And she said, “Yes, for so much.” ⁹ But Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

In the midst of all the good stuff going on, there is another influence at work: Satan. Satan is the enemy of God who hates God, hates us, hates everything our one heart and soul are about, and exists to destroy it. Scripture says he prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour, and he finds his prey in this married couple who celebrate Valentine’s Day by carrying out a devious act. While the community is of one heart and soul, Ananias has allowed Satan to fill and divide his heart. It is a scheme that destroys his wife and him and has the potential to destroy this community.

Now, what exactly did they do wrong? I remember studying Acts with a group of young guys, one of whom was a brand new believer, and one morning he ran into my office clearly troubled. He tried to speak but finally just blurted out “Ananias and Sapphira! And I don’t give everything!” He read this passage to mean that those who don’t give everything they have to the church will die on the spot. That’s not the case. Peter even says it was theirs to do with as they wanted. They are guilty of lying, of hypocrisy, and of testing the Lord. Apparently, whether by pledge or intent, the expectation was for them to give the full amount they received for the property. But they kept some back, Luke using a word that means embezzle. They wanted to have the appearance of giving the full amount without actually doing so. Again, money and stuff reveal what’s in a heart. While Barnabas, the encourager, is the example of building others up, these two are examples of building themselves up in the eyes of others.

You ever do that!?!? A gesture more about making yourself look good than for the impact it may have? That’s the motivation behind half of the social media posts, virtue signaling. And that motivation can make its way into the church. We can feign piety, devotion, sacrifice. I could craft messages that are more for my glory than God’s. And all of that is wickedness.

This is such an egregious act because it does two things: Defames God and violates and threatens the community. Jesus bought the church with the price of his life. It is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who has empowered and influenced them to live like this. We are our God’s representatives on earth and have been called to be holy as he is holy. But these two act falsely, acting as if they are just as changed and committed as everyone else, but it’s not true. They lie not only to the church, but also to God. He died to make them right. They are trying to see the limits of doing wrong. Their hypocrisy is an offense to a holy God.

Additionally, they are lying to those who would be their family. **[Proverbs 26:28] A lying tongue hates its victims.** They are bringing contempt and hatred into this community, not love and charity. It is a threat to their unity and can become an impediment to them living out their

mission because it is not of God. If the church is to have genuine spiritual power in its life and witness, it must operate under the influence of the Spirit and be devoted to maintaining its purity.

So God moves. In the first scene, he continues to pour out his grace. Here he pours out judgment and strikes them both dead. If you are a follower of Jesus your sin has been paid for and your eternity is secure. But that doesn't mean God keeps us from experiencing consequences of sin here and now. God hates sin and will not leave it unaddressed, and he moves quickly in this young community to remind them of his holiness and to eradicate a threat to their unity and mission. The church appropriately responds in fear, holy awe of God, and it would benefit us to respond likewise. Thankfully God does not operate in the same way today. As one old preacher said, the church would keep the undertaker very busy if he did. But it should stop us in our tracks and remind us of God's holiness and the sacred and sanctified body we are a part of called Fellowship.

Take God seriously. I want you to think about God, his bigness, majesty, holiness, awesomeness. Got that picture? Ok, now multiply it by infinity and you'll start to get close to who he really is. God is wholly other, beyond our comprehension, his thoughts and ways are not our thoughts and ways. He is truly AWESOME, and it is wholly appropriate for us to fear him in reverent awe. Our motivation is not so we can behave and not be struck dead. Our motivation is that the more we fear him, the more we are open to his influence. Ananias and Sapphira did not fear God, they trifled with him, and the results were disastrous. When we fear God we are sensitized to his influence, and the more we are under his influence, the more our hearts and souls are united around who he is, who we are in him and to one another, and what he has called us to. We also become desensitized to influences that are not of him, whether that's Satan or our own flesh. Read the Psalms. Read Colossians 1. Take a spiritual breathalyzer to see what you are under the influence of. Humbly ask God to search your heart and he will graciously show you what you need to see. **The greater we see God, the greater his influence will be in our lives.**

Take sin seriously. If you have believed in Jesus nothing can separate you from the love of God and the inheritance he has secured for you. But participation in this community and the effectiveness of our life and ministry is hugely dependent on our attitude and response towards sin. If we believe this passage, we know we must engage it, and I have a picture of what that could look like. This is Texan mom Phyllis Pena. She made news this week as she was filmed tackling someone peeping in her 15-year old's bedroom. Great form: dropped the hips, feet shoulder-width apart, head up. She saw the threat and engaged. We need to be this aggressive with sin because it is a threat that can interfere with our relationship with God, with one another, and with the mission he's called us to. **It starts with us getting serious about our own sin.** Confessing to God and confessing to one another where we have fallen short and where we are tempted. Sin is a community matter because sin does not exist in isolation. That's why Paul warns that a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Sin can infect the church and must be addressed. None of us are perfect, nor is there any expectation for us to be. But we are in this together, and if we are of one heart and soul, we become advocates for each another and graciously, lovingly, and restoratively help one another as we battle sin in our lives and the influence Satan is trying to exert over us. Do not do this alone. Join a Life Group. Ask for prayer. And together let's pursue the holiness God calls us to.

This passage is the first of 23 times Luke calls this community the church. I don't think it's a coincidence. This is who we were always meant to be; a people set apart, loving God, loving one another, proclaiming the Gospel to the world, and facing head on anything that threatens it. It is not beyond our grasp because the one who influenced these people is in and with us today. Let us yield to his influence, be renewed in our calling, and become the people he's made us to be.