

## STUDY GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS

### *SPIRIT-FILLED LIVING*

Week 4: Week of October 13

"Be Generous and True"

Text: Acts 4:32-5:11

#### **( For Facilitators mainly - optional for the group)**

In Chapters 1-5: Luke's purposes for writing are to emphasize the following:

- The establishment of a new community is actually the fulfillment of Israel's prophetic hope – and part of God's covenant promises.
- This "Spirit-filled living" is and always has been part of God's sovereign plan.
- Under the power of Jesus' name, God is bringing about God's purposes.
- And there will be a reality of opposition to Christ's mission.

Acts 4:32-37 – another snapshot of this new community:

- Luke liked to emphasize the unanimity of mind and purpose of the first believers.
- The center of the testimony given is "the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" and the great "grace" that was upon them.
- The character of Barnabas is contrasted with Ananias and Sapphira.

5:1-11 - Infringing on the Holy

This story has a shocking and unnerving impact on the reader today.

It appears that

- 2 people are struck dead w/o chance for repentance
- That they are dealing with a cosmic/spiritual power beyond human power
- The story gives the impression that there is a "holiness" surrounding Peter and the new community.
- The purpose is to show and to highlight the church is a vehicle (an agent) of the holy God.
- This also shows God was tangibly present among them. The Divine presence included signs and wonders – mysteries that we cannot explain.

Remember that this all takes place in the temple area, and the temple is considered the holy place – set apart to God. Part of what Luke is trying to tell us, whether we like it or not (and many of course don't), is that the early Christian community, without even trying, was functioning somewhat like the Temple itself. It was a place where the holiness of God indwelled in the people (Peter and the apostles) and in the community. As one commentator suggests: *the episode here reinforces the impression that the beginnings of Christianity were marked by the power of the holy creating a kind of aura around the participants. For anyone*

*to infringe the boundaries was to invite a fearful retribution, not from the guardians of the holy but from the holy thing itself.*

Remember how, when the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem in the first place, carried on an ox-cart, one of its guardians put out his hand to steady it when it wobbled and was at once struck dead, much to King David's annoyance (2 Samuel 6.6– 9)? The Temple itself contained warnings against anyone approaching who was unfit to do so. Gentiles were kept well out of it (see Acts 21.28– 29); Jewish women could only go in as far as a certain point; only the priests could go into the inner court; and only the high priest himself could go into the central shrine, the 'holy of holies', and then only once a year, taking all kinds of precautions.

We do not necessarily live in this kind of world where the spiritual realm is taken as seriously as the physical realm but this was the case in Biblical times.

Notice the following

- Antithetical to Barnabas, was Ananias and his wife is complicit in the plan.
- They were pretending that they were contributing all the proceeds (not that they kept some) but also no one was to give all their possessions. Barbabas didn't give all of his possessions either.
- It could be that this conflict was seen not between Peter and Ananias but between the Evil One and the Holy Spirit (Just as Jesus was tempted)
- If that is the case, then Ananias had lied not to just a human, but to God, (which Peter points out) which has devastating consequences.
- Therefore, Peter pronounces a sentence.

Some things to think about....We either choose to live in the presence of the God who made the world and who longs passionately for it to be set right, or we lapse back into some variety of easy-going irreligiousness, even if it has a Christian veneer. Holiness is not an optional extra. To name the name of Jesus and to invoke the Holy Spirit is to claim to be the temple of the living God, and that is bound to have consequences.

*We may have to face the fact that if we want to be a community which seems to be taking the place of the Temple of the living God we shouldn't be surprised if the living God takes us seriously, seriously enough to make it clear that there is no such thing as cheap grace. If we invoke the power of the holy one, the one who will eventually right all wrongs and sort out all cheating and lying, he may just decide to do some of that work already, in advance. God is*

*not mocked, as Paul puts it (Galatians 6.7)..... Lying is, ultimately, a way of declaring that we don't like the world the way it is and we will pretend that it is somehow more the way we want it to be. At that level, it is a way of saying that we don't trust God the creator to look after his world and sort it out in his own time and way. ~N.T. Wright.*

## Discussion Questions

**Opening Questions (optional – pick only the ones you want to chose).**

1. Think of a person about whom you would describe as generous. What are they like and what makes them generous? Have you ever been on the receiving end of someone's generosity?
2. Think of a person you would describe as someone with integrity or as "true". Why would you describe them in that way? What makes someone "true" or "truthful"?
3. Have you ever encountered someone who was deceitful or lied to you? What was that like and how did they impact you? Have you ever encountered someone who was truthful to you and how did it impact you?

***Read Acts 4:32-5:11.***

1. How do you react to the events of Acts 4:36-5:11?
2. Compare and contrast Acts 4:32-36 and Acts 2:42-47. What do you see that is similar/different? What qualities make this church?
3. Why do you think there was such severe judgment against Ananias and Sapphira? Do you think the punishment fits the crime? Why or why not?
4. What do you think the real issue here? What do you glean from this passage?
5. What happens today when there is dishonesty among community? What about a community of Christians? Have you ever experienced this before? Describe.
6. In what areas of life are we (or are we at least tempted to be) less than honest?

7. In what ways do the acts of generosity and the commitment to speaking truth benefit the Christian community? Why?
8. How does this passage impact how you view your own character?
9. Ben shared that while Barnabas was a good example and Ananias may be a poor example, Christ is our ultimate example. How is Jesus Christ an example of generosity and truth and why is that important in your life?