

MAIN POINT

When we make room for more OF God, we are filled with more FROM God.

INTRODUCTION

How likely are you to give to a charitable organization or cause that solicits your support? What are the determining factors in your decision to give or not to give?

When it comes to giving to advance God's work through the church, which do you think is the greater hindrance to generosity among believers—lack of resources, misplaced priorities, or something else? Explain.

When God is at work in a congregation, generosity happens. He expects His people to share what He has given them, especially with those who really need help. As we will see in this study from the Book of Acts, such generosity honors God and advances His work; selfishness and hypocrisy dishonors God and brings His judgment.

UNDERSTANDING

READ [ACTS 2:45](#).

What differentiates the mutual sharing of believers from mere humanitarian acts of charity?

How does the expression of Christian fellowship in [Acts 2:45](#) contrast with the way fellowship is commonly understood and practiced in the church today?

True fellowship cost something in the early church. It was not just a sentimental feeling, nor did it take place simply because the members gathered around food. Fellowship is expressed through sharing and giving. True fellowship costs something.

What “costs” have you incurred in fellowship with other believers?

What gains have you experienced as a result of fellowship with other believers?

READ [ACTS 4:32-35](#).

If you were to describe your attitude toward giving in one word, what word would you choose?

What attitudes toward giving do you see reflected in [Acts 4:32](#)?

What motivated the early Christians' generosity?

When we adopt the attitude that everything we have comes from God, we will approach giving from the perspective that whatever we give away was already His.

READ [ACTS 4:36-37](#).

What do we know from Scripture about Barnabas?

Barnabas was also called Joseph, of the tribe of Levi, from Cyprus, key leader in the

early church, prominent companion of Paul, cousin of Mark, and his name meant “son of encouragement.”

**Barnabas was given the nickname “son of encouragement.”
Do you think his nickname was related to his generosity? Explain.**

**How would you describe the relationship between generosity and encouragement?
How have you been encouraged by the example of someone’s generosity?**

READ [ACTS 5:1-11](#).

What facts do we know from these verses about Ananias and Sapphira?

Ananias was married, he sold a piece of property, he plotted with his wife to deceive the church about the selling price, he was given an opportunity to explain, he dropped dead, and he was buried. Together, Ananias and Sapphira plotted to deceive the church about the selling price of their property. Sapphira lied to Peter, and she died and was buried next to her husband.

**Why would Ananias and Sapphira go to such lengths to lie?
What factors might have led to their attempt to deceive the church?**

What did Peter mean when he said Ananias did not lie to men but to God ([v. 4](#))?

Ananias and Sapphira tried to make themselves appear more generous than they really were. In reality, they were self-serving and hypocritical. The expression “lied to the Holy Spirit” in verse 3 can also be rendered “falsified the Holy Spirit.” The couple’s action was, in effect, a denial or falsification of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the church.

How might people attempt to lie to God today? What are the consequences?

**Compare verse [11](#) with verse [5](#). What is the common theme in these verses?
Do you think we take sin seriously enough in the church?**

Do you think the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira helped or hurt the early church’s witness in their community? Explain.

When the Spirit of God is at work in a church, there is unity around the gospel, unselfishness, and sincere generosity; thus, the church’s witness thrives. Where there is hypocrisy and self-centeredness, the church’s witness fails.

APPLICATION

How have you seen God use the generosity of members in your church for the advancement of the gospel?

What sacrifices of generosity do you need to make this week in order to promote unity within the body of believers, and to present a faithful witness of Christ?

In what specific ways could you encourage someone through generosity this week?

PRAYER

As you lead your group in prayer, give thanks to God for both His spiritual and material blessings. Pray for members to have generous hearts. Ask God to use their generosity to advance the spread of the gospel and to enable the church to minister to people with desperate needs.

COMMENTARY

ACTS 2:45

In verse 45 we see that the believers in Jerusalem sold their possessions and property to help one another as needs arose, they. The verb rendered sold is in a tense that suggests the believers sold items from time to time. There was no expectation that new believers must immediately relinquish all their possessions upon conversion (as some religious cults in history have practiced). When Christians discovered that someone was facing great need, the grace of Christ moved them to sell items to help relieve the hardship.

Generosity is an attribute of God's grace, and He delights to see it practiced in His church. Numerous surveys throughout modern times have revealed that most churches function with less than 20 percent of the members committed to consistent, proportional giving. Too many church members seem to develop an allergic reaction to calls for generosity. If every believer practiced godly generosity, it would not only advance the spread of the gospel but also enable churches to minister mightily in the name of Jesus to people with desperate needs.

ACTS 4:32-37

4:32-35 As long as there was complete unanimity of purpose and intention among them, the early Christians shared their possessions freely, such that there was not a needy person among them. They were able to do this not because of their own strength, but because great grace was on all of them. Therefore the generosity was above all a work of God. Yet trouble was coming (5:1-11).

4:36-37 Joseph (aka Barnabas) led by example, selling his field and donating all the proceeds to the church. Such charitable acts inspire others to do good, but also incite some to seek acclaim.

ACTS 5:1-11

5:2 Not everyone shared in Joseph's liberality. Ananias and his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property but kept back part of the sale price despite claiming otherwise ([v. 8](#)).

5:3-4 Ananias and Sapphira assumed they were merely lying to men (the apostles), but in reality they had lied to the Holy Spirit who is ever-present in the church. Peter's wording indicates that the Holy Spirit is God. Peter's question (wasn't it at your disposal?) implies that Ananias and Sapphira would have been justified to sell the land and give only a portion to the church. Their sin lay in their deception and their desire to win praise.

5:9 The deception of Ananias and Sapphira, and in particular Sapphira's lie to Peter, was a test of the Spirit of the Lord. This is a powerful indication of the Spirit's role in the church and church leadership; Peter was a mere man, but he was God's man to lead this fellowship of believers.

5:12 Undaunted by their previous arrest at the temple ([4:3](#)), the apostles continued to perform signs and wonders among the people they encountered in Solomon's Colonnade.