

## REFLECTION GUIDE

### ACTS 4:32-5:11 - BUILT UP OR BROKEN DOWN?

#### KEY TERMS

**The resurrection of the Lord Jesus** - A historical event in which Jesus was raised from the dead. This event is central to the teaching of the apostles in the book of Acts (see Acts 1:22, 2:31, 4:33, 23:6, & 26:23).

**One heart and soul** - The first century Greco-Roman hearer would've understood the heart as the place from which desire, will, and passion comes and the soul as the spiritual embodiment of life. To share these with others is an essentially spiritual friendship that drove them to unity of purpose and mission in daily life. This description echos the prophecy in Jeremiah 32:39 (*I will give them one heart and one way*).

**Barnabas** - First identified in this passage as Joseph; he was a Levite (a priest) from Cyprus. Barnabas goes on to play a major role in the book of Acts as a missionary to the Gentiles (see Acts 11-15).

#### DID YOU KNOW?

It was common in Greco-Roman culture for there to be reciprocity among social equals. However, the Early Church practiced radical generosity because 1) there was generosity between people who were not social equals and 2) because they gave without expectation of receiving anything in return (Witherington, Acts, 1998).

#### BACKGROUND

After recording the first arrest of Peter and John and their subsequent release and bold prayers with the Church, Luke builds on the generosity described in Acts 2:42-47 by providing specific examples in 4:32-5:11. He says that *the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and...they had everything in common* (v. 32). Luke describes the community as a people marked by the apostles teaching *with great power*, a people marked by *great grace upon them all*, and a people marked by the fact that *there was not a needy person among them* (v. 33-34). It's clear the Church was not selling everything they owned because Barnabas is held up as a model of generosity and he only sold *a field* (v. 37) not all of his property, but the point was that *as many as had means* (v. 34) were giving *as any had need* (v. 35). In contrast to Barnabas is Ananias and Sapphira. Peter says that before they sold their field it was theirs to do what they wanted with and, even after they sold their field, the money was theirs to use as they wished; the problem appears to be that they tried to make it seem like they sold a field and gave 100% of the profit to the Church, when in reality they did not (5:3-4). The lying and deception, and not the keeping back of some of the money, appears to be Peter's concern. This sin is motivated by Satan and is the first story of internal discord in the Church. And, in response to their sin, Ananias and Sapphira both fall dead. There are parallels with Joshua 7, where a specific sin threatens to destroy a new community of God and God powerfully and demonstrably punishes the sin and protects the community.

#### GOING DEEPER

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, Matthew 6:19-21, and Philippians 4:10-20. What do these verses teach about money? How do they challenge you to be generous? How do they challenge you to trust God?

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

### **ACTS 4:32-5:11 - BUILT UP OR BROKEN DOWN**

#### **LEARNING THE WORD**

1. Read Acts 4:32-5:11. What positive examples are given? What negative examples are given? What surprises you?
2. How does what happens in Acts 4:31 lead directly to what we see in verses 32-37? In other words, how does the answer to their prayer for boldness lead to a generous community who are together in heart and soul?
3. In verses 32-37, we see the Spirit-guided community is bold with both their words and their actions. Why are both essential to a healthy, spiritual community?
4. In Acts 5:1-11, what was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira? Why do you think they were tempted to act in this way? Why do you think this was so serious that it received immediate judgment?

#### **LIVING THE WORD**

5. Why is hypocrisy such a serious problem to the church? How does it hinder our witness?
6. How can we fall into a similar trap of seeking to impress people with our spirituality? How can we avoid it?
7. Reread Acts 4:33 to see what makes this community "great." How does the gospel of God's grace in Christ mold us into a vibrant, healthy, together, generous, encouraging church?