**Sermon Based Community Group Leader Guide**

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

**\* Read Acts 4:32-5:11. Open in Prayer.**

**\* Sermon Overview**

In this sermon, Pastor Aaron will walk through the passage highlighting the great power, great grace, and great fear that mark the church in light of persecution from without and hypocrisy from within. He will call us to desperate prayer for boldness, zealous pursuit of Jesus, and generous care for others. He will challenge us to beware of the desire for prestige in the church devoid of devoted pursuit of the Lord.

**\* Prompt Questions**

1. Was there anything that stood out to you in the pastor’s sermon? Are there any clarifying questions that you may have regarding the sermon?

2. How have you been seeking to apply the sermon in your own life this week? Or, what is one way that you can apply the sermon to your life this week?

3. What was the take away from the sermon for you? If you had to sum up the main idea of the sermon in one sentence, what would it be? What main themes do you see in the text and did you hear in the sermon?

4. How have you seen God at work this week in your life and in the lives of those around you? How has God been working in you this week through His Word, through prayer, through the body of Christ, and through service/evangelism? What were the highlights and lowlights of your week? How can we be praying for you specifically?

**\* Observation/Interpretation Questions[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Note: Please do not feel compelled to get through every one of these questions. I have given them in hopes that they will drive us back to the text so that we may diligently search the Scriptures as the Bereans did (Acts 17:10-15). These questions will give us a grasp of what the text says/means so that we can apply the text to our lives. I would encourage you to spend the majority of your time on application questions so that we can become “doers of the Word and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

**1. What is the context of Acts 4:32-5:11?**

*Luke wrote Luke and Acts (written around A.D. 62) to Theophilus in order to give him an accurate account of the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and to tell how Jesus continues to work through Spirit-empowered witnesses to carry the gospel to the end of the earth without hindrance and with boldness. Acts 1:8 serves as the theme verse of the book and as the outline for the book, for chapters 1-7 focus on Jerusalem, chapters 8-12 focus on Judea and Samaria, and chapters 13-28 focus on the end of the earth. The risen Lord sends His Spirit to empower followers of the Way to be witnesses who proclaim the kingdom of God to the end of the earth.*

*Flowing out of the prayer for boldness to witness, the Spirit displays great power and great grace as believers witness by their unity in word (boldly proclaiming the resurrection of the Lord Jesus) and deed (sacrificially giving to meet needs). However, just as the Spirit fills believers to bring unity, Satan fills the heart to create disunity. Standing in contrast to the actions of the church in 4:32-37, Ananias and Sapphira disrupt the unity of the church in word (deceptively proclaiming that they are giving all the proceeds) and deed (selfishly giving for the recognition of others). Yet, God is gracious to His church, as the Spirit guards the unity and purity of the church zealously. Thus, Ananias and Sapphira are condemned to death because they lie and test the Spirit of God. With this display of the great power and grace of God, great fear of God falls upon all who hear of Ananias and Saphira, leading to the continual growth of the church.*

**2. What is going on in Acts 4:32-37?**

*Flowing out of the prayer for boldness, the Spirit creates unity in the church so that the apostles proclaim the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power and that the believers give generously/sacrificially out of their understanding of the great grace of God. The gospel is made visible by both what was said and what was done. In closing out this section, Luke cites the example of Barnabas which is contrasted with the example of Ananias and Sapphira.*

*As for the sacrificial giving, note the following points: (1) The believers understood the gospel. They knew that they had been bought by the blood of Jesus and that they were no longer their own. All that they were and all that they had belonged to the Lord Jesus. Therefore, from this perspective of seeing all as belonging to the Lord, they willingly stewarded the resources the Lord had entrusted to them in order to meet the needs of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. (2) The believers who gave generously did so voluntarily and cheerfully in order to meet the needs of the body. They were moved by love and care for one another, because of their gospel shaped identity and unity. This is a sign/witness to the gospel for the watching world (see John 13:34-35).*

*As you think through this passage, dwell on these questions: (1) Who is it that brings unity and that gives great power and great grace? (2) How does a right understanding of the gospel move us to sacrificially give? (3) What are New Testament principles for giving (see Matthew 6:19-24; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8-9)?*

*For background to this sacrificial giving, see Deuteronomy 15:4-11; Matthew 25:35-40; Acts 2:44-45; For background on Barnabas, see Acts 9:27; 11:22-26, 30; 13:1-6; 15:1-2, 36-39.*

*Tony Merida writes, “Here we see another great example of the need for word-and-deed ministry. The apostles are declaring the gospel in preaching, and the church is displaying the gospel in generosity.”*

*On the issue of why Barnabas, a Levite, owned land, John Polhill writes, “According to ancient provisions (see Deut 10:9; Num 18:20, 24), Levites were not supposed to own land, but that no longer seemed to apply in Barnabas’s day. (Indeed, Jeremiah, a priest, owned land [Jeremiah 32:6-15]).”*

*Darrell Bock writes, “In Acts he (Barnabas) cares for the poor, gives of his resources, welcomes Paul when others are skeptical, encourages him in ministering alongside him, leads a mission in a way that takes the initiative of engagement, and testifies about the work of God to those outside and within the community. He is what we call a rounded character in literary terms, as we see him in various situations, almost always in a positive light. It is no wonder this community did so well with the example of servant leadership Barnabas gave. Luke holds him up as a disciple whose example can be followed.”*

**3. What is going on in Acts 5:1-11?**

*In this passage, we are reminded of the sinfulness of man, the seriousness of sin, and the holiness of God. In contrast to Barnabas and others in Acts 4:32-37 who gave sacrificially for the good of others, Acts 5:1-11 tells the story of Ananias and Sapphira who gave selfishly for the good of their own reputation. Luke tells us that they sold a piece of property and brought a part of the proceeds to lay at the apostle’s feet. The issue arises in verse 3 when Peter confronts the deceitful action of Ananias, who has lied to the Holy Spirit by acting as if he had given all the proceeds of the sale when he had really kept part of the proceeds for himself (note that this “kept back” connects the story to the sin of Achan in Joshua 7). Ananias desired the prestige and recognition of others rather than wholehearted obedience to the Lord and zealous pursuit of the Lord. Due to his greed, deceit, pride, selfishness, and hypocrisy, God brings judgment upon Ananias, which leads to great fear upon all who heard of the death of Ananias. Three hours later, Peter questions Sapphira, who is found out to be deceitful, just like her husband. God brings judgment upon Sapphira, which leads to great fear upon the whole church and all who heard of the death of Sapphira and Ananias.*

*What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira? It was lying to and testing the Holy Spirit (vv. 3, 9). Note the issue: “he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet.” (v. 2) In short, Ananias and Sapphira desired to give the impression and perception that they were faithful followers of Christ, but instead, they were prideful, selfish, and hypocritical. They proved to be much like the religious leaders in Acts 4, who operated out of a fear of man rather than a fear of God.*

*Note that this passage is crucial in showing the deity of the Holy Spirit. See verses 3-4, 9 to think through how this passage teaches that the Holy Spirit is God.*

*As you read this passage, dwell on these questions: (1) Do you remember a time when you deceptively tried to put on a front for others so that they could see you as a spiritual giant? (2) How does this passage remind us of the seriousness of sin and the holiness of God? (3) Why does the purity of the church matter in our witness to the world? What means has God given us to maintain the God-given/created unity and the purity of the church?*

*For other examples where God brings judgment to the community in response to sin in the community, see Leviticus 10:1-5 (Nadab and Abihu), Joshua 7 (Achan); 1 Corinthians 11:27-32*

*Of verse 4, Darrell Bock writes, “He had the option to keep the proceeds or dispose of only some of it. So the deceitful act was completely premeditated, apparently motivated by the desire of Ananias and Sapphira to appear more generous than they truly are. The desire for human praise is more important to them than being faithful to God.”*

*Derek Thomas writes, “The couple was not under any obligation in selling their property, nor, having sold it, were they obligated to give all the proceeds to the church.” He continues, “The judgment was not because Ananias had not given the whole of the proceeds as such; it was because he lied to the apostles as to the amount he had made on the sale. He effectively lied to the Holy Spirit.”*

*Tony Merida writes, “But wasn’t this instantaneous judgment extreme? Only if you minimize the offense by minimizing the One against whom the sin was committed. God had been belittled by the actions of these two, and his church was facing a satanic assault made apparent by their deeds. God takes these things seriously.”*

*Of this great fear, John Polhill writes, “The church is a holy body, the realm of the Spirit. By the power of this spiritual presence in its midst, the young community worked miracles, witnessed fearlessly, and was blessed with incredible growth. The Spirit was the power behind its unity, and its unity was the power behind its witness. But just as with God there is both justice and mercy, so with his Spirit there is also an underside to his blessing. There is his judgment. This Ananias and Sapphira experienced. The Spirit is not to be taken lightly. As the Spirit of God he must always be viewed with fear in the best sense of that word, reverent awe and respect. It might be noted that this is the first time the word ‘church’ (ekklesia) occurs in Acts, which denotes the people of God gathered as a religious community. Perhaps it is not by accident that it occurs in the context of this story. The church can only thrive as the people of God if it lives within the total trust of all its members. Where there is that unity of trust, that oneness of heart and mind, the church flourishes in the power of the Spirit. Where there is duplicity and distrust, its witness fails.”*

*Darrell Bock writes, “The scene is designed to make the point that God’s people are called to holiness and are accountable to God for it.”*

**\* Application Questions**

Note: Please do not feel compelled to use every question, for you will have time for 3 to 5 questions. I’ve tried to offer enough for you to pick the ones you think will best fit your group, as you know what your ladies or men are going through at this time and may need to hear. Also, please note that these questions might be adjusted to reflect what the pastor calls us to do in application of the sermon.

1. Here are some good questions to reflect on in every passage (these are from Danny Akin):

A. What does this passage teach me about God?

B. What does this passage teach me about man?

C. What does this passage teach me about Christ?

D. What does this passage want me to know?

E. What does this passage call me to do?

2. Here are some good questions to reflect on and act on this week (these were passed along to me by Pastor Aaron and Dr. Jones):

A. What do you take as the main theme from this sermon?

B. What have you learned today about Jesus’ character that has affected you daily?

C. Do you have any clarifying questions concerning the sermon?

D. What did the Holy Spirit convict you of because of His Word today?

E. Will you ask forgiveness and what will you change?

F. Will you be willing this week to pass on to someone else what you’re learning about Jesus? How will you be intentional this week to do so?

3. In his book, Asking the Right Questions, Matthew Harmon gives the following instructions/questions for understanding and applying the Bible:

A. Understanding the Bible

1. What do we learn about God?

a. Look for God’s character (who he is, what he is like).

b. Look for God’s conduct (what he is doing).

c. Look for God’s concerns (what things, events, people, he is concerned about).

2. What do we learn about people?

a. Look for aspects of what it means to be created in God’s image.

b. Look for the fallen condition.

c. Look for how God’s people should live.

3. What do we learn about relating to God?

a. Look for things to praise and thank God for.

b. Look for sin to confess and repent.

c. Look for promises and truths to believe.

4. What do we learn about relating to others?

a. Look for how we should interact with and treat others.

b. Look for ways to pursue reconciliation with others.

c. Look for specific ways to love, serve, and care for others.

B. Applying the Bible

1. What does God want me to think/understand?

2. What does God want me to believe?

3. What does God want me to desire?

4. What does God want me to do?

4. Read 2 Corinthians 8-9; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Matthew 6:19-24 (and other passages you can think of on stewardship/giving). What does God’s Word teach on giving? How can we hold one another accountable for how we steward the resources (time, talent, treasure) that God has given us?

5. Who is it that brings unity, purity, boldness to witness, and growth to the church (answer: the Spirit)? If this is the Spirit’s role in the life of the church, then how ought we to respond to this? Take time to pray for the Spirit to work in your community group and in the church concerning unity, purity, boldness to witness, and growth.

6. As we see in Acts 2:44-45 (and in Acts 4:32-37), one of the commitments of community groups is love, displayed by the meeting of needs (financial, physical, emotional, spiritual). How is your community group doing in meeting needs of your group? Do those in your group feel comfortable sharing needs with the group? If not, why not? What does it look like for our community groups to practice meeting of needs?

7. Ananias and Sapphira were condemned to die because they lied to the Holy Spirit. Just like the religious leaders, they feared man more than they feared God. They desired the approval of others, but they wanted that approval through deceptive means. They, like the Pharisees, wanted to give the impression that they had it all together when their hearts were far from God. In your own life, do you try to put on a front when your heart is far from God and you are struggling with things in your life? If so, why do you do this? Are you lying to God (and others) about things going on in your life? How can we guard against the temptation to always present ourselves to others as having our lives together all the time? Is your community group a place where your members feel comfortable sharing that things are not going well? If not, how can we cultivate the relationships and the environment where it is okay to let one another know when you’re struggling with temptation and battling Satan’s foothold on your life/heart?

8. One of the means that God has entrusted to His church to guard the purity of the church is church discipline. Read Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Galatians 6:1-3. What does it look like for us to apply these passages within our community group setting? Why is it important for the church to guard its purity and maintain its unity?

9. Read John 13:34-35. How does the way we love one another and care for one another empower our witness/mission? What are practical ways for your group to grow in relationships and in love this week?

10. In the passage this week, we see terms like great power, great grace, great fear. How do these terms point us back to the Lord? How are we reminded this week of our need for the gospel and the power of Jesus at work in and through our lives, our community groups, and our church?

11. How does a right understanding of the grace of God move us to be sacrificial givers? Also, how does the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man point us to the gospel? How does the gospel enable and empower us to walk in godliness rather than in hypocrisy?

**\* Sermon Take Away**

God guards the unity, purity, and mission of His church.

**\* Bible Reading Plan**

1. Monday—1 Corinthians 15; 2 Samuel 4-5

2. Tuesday—1 Corinthians 16; 2 Samuel 6

3. Wednesday—2 Corinthians 1; 2 Samuel 7

4. Thursday—2 Corinthians 2; 2 Samuel 8-9

5. Friday—2 Corinthians 3; 2 Samuel 10

6. Saturday—2 Corinthians 4; 2 Samuel 11

7. Sunday—2 Corinthians 5; 2 Samuel 12

**\* Unhindered: A Study of Acts (Part 1)**

1. October 8th –Acts 5:12-42

2. October 15th –Acts 6:1-7

3. October 22nd –Acts 6:8-8:3

4. October 29th –Acts 8:4-40

5. November 5th –Acts 9:1-31

6. November 12th –Acts 9:32-11:18

7. November 19th—Acts 11:19-30

**\* Advent 2017 (Passages are Likely to Change)**

1. November 26th—Luke 1:1-25

2. December 3rd—Luke 1:26-38

3. December 10th—Luke 1:39-56

4. December 17th—Luke 1:57-80

5. December 24th—Luke 2:1-21

**\* Unhindered: A Study of Acts (Part 2)**

1. January 7th—Acts 12 (Herod’s Persecution and Death/No government can stop God’s church)

2. January 14th—Acts 13-14

3. January 21st—Acts 15:1-35

4. January 28th—Acts 15:36-16:5

5. February 4th—Acts 16:6-40

6. February 11th—Acts 17:1-15

7. February 18th—Acts 17:16-34

8. February 25th—Acts 18:1-23

9. March 4th—Acts 18:24-28

10. March 11th—Acts 19:1-41

11. March 18th—Acts 20:1-16

12. March 25th—Acts 20:17-30

--. April 1st (Easter Sunday)

13. April 8th—Acts 21:1-26

14. April 15th—Acts 21:27-22:29

15. April 22nd—Acts 22:30-23:35

16. April 29th—Acts 24:1-27

17.May 6th—Acts 25:1-12

18. May 13th (Mother’s Day)—Acts 25:13-26:32

19. May 20th—Acts 27:1-44

20. May 27th (Memorial Day Weekend)—Acts 28:1-31

1. For this discussion guide, I used the following resources: Darrell Bock, *Acts;* I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*; John B. Polhill, *Acts*; Derek Thomas, *Acts*; R. Kent Hughes, *Acts*; R. C. Sproul, *Acts*; John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of* Acts; Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesu in* Acts; ESV *Study Bible*; *NIV Zondervan Study Bible.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)