


A Five-Day Devotional Journey
February 17 - 23, 2008
Acts 4:32-5:16

Surprised by the Wrath of God

1 No needy people among them

Read. Acts 4:32-37 NLT

All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's great blessing was upon them all. There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.

For instance, there was Joseph, the one the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (which means "Son of Encouragement"). He was from the tribe of Levi and came from the island of Cyprus. He sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles.

Think.

- What appeals to you in this portrait of the early church? What, if anything, scares you? Why?
- How does this church snapshot compare with your own church experience? In what specific ways would you like to see the church move more towards the dynamics you see here in Acts? How can you be part of this reformation?
- How does this church portrait compare with your *family* portrait? With your *small group* portrait? In what ways would you like this to change? How can you be the change?

Pray.

Father, make me a true son/daughter of encouragement. Empower me to be the change in each life setting I find myself in.

Live.

Be "Barnabas" to someone in need today.

We are consumed by thine anger,
and by thy wrath are we troubled.
Thou hast set our iniquities before thee,
our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.
For all our days are passed away in thy wrath:
we spend our years as a tale that is told.

Moses, *Psalm 90:7-9 KJV*

Another study in contrasts.

Barnabas with generous heart gives freely. No trumpets sound the fanfare, there's no duplicity lurking in the shadows, no secret angles being worked. The heart of a true "son of encouragement" issues in a simple, authentic gift.

Ananias comes with similar gesture — to all outward appearances his motions are the same. Land sold, title yielded, money deposited at the foot of the apostle. But behind the façade of faith and love darkness lurked. Below the surface the Enemy prowled — maneuvering and manipulating and fashioning a mask of piety to cover greed and a shameful bid for popularity.

One goes on to great use in the Master's hands. The other falls dead on the spot — followed in short order by his complicit spouse.

The suddenness and severity of Ananias' exposure shocks us — and those who witnessed it. As Peterson puts it, "It put the fear of God into everyone who heard of it." The story is a solemn reminder of the deadly spiral of seemingly innocent "posing" — the high cost of mask wearing and pious facades. In vivid contrast, here also stretches out before us the path of authenticity and its blessings. Instead of young men's hands bearing corpses out for burial, the bodies of the sick are laid along our path that even our shadow might pass over them. Lives are touched, mouths are fed, needs are met, hearts are refreshed, the world is changed.

2) You weren't lying to us but to God!

Read. Acts 5:1-4 NLT

But there was a certain man named Ananias who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property. He brought part of the money to the apostles, claiming it was the full amount. With his wife's consent, he kept the rest.

Then Peter said, "Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself. The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren't lying to us but to God!"

Think.

- What do you think was driving Ananias and Sapphira to lie about the money they were holding back? What do you think was their agenda?
- While we might call this a "white lie," in what terms does Peter address their action?
- When's the last time you were tempted to "pad" the truth or make some "minor" omissions? To what extent do you personally struggle with this issue of speaking the truth?
- How do you respond to people when you catch them in a lie? Why?

Pray.

Holy God, touch this heart and these lips. Lead me forward in the grace of speaking the truth in love, and deliver me from the temptation of padding the truth and shading reality.

Live.

Lovingly speak the truth when called upon to do so, all day long.

4) Great fear gripped the entire church

Read. Acts 5:10-11 NLT

Instantly, she fell to the floor and died. When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear gripped the entire church and everyone else who heard what had happened.

Read. Romans 11:21-22 Message

Make sure you stay alert to these qualities of gentle kindness and ruthless severity that exist side by side in God—ruthless with the deadwood, gentle with the grafted shoot. But don't presume on this gentleness. The moment you become deadwood, you're out of there.

Think:

- How does the judgment on Ananias and Sapphira change the way you see God? In what way?
- Do you tend to see God more as loving or as judging? How do you reconcile these two traits in God?
- What would you say are the dangers in over-emphasizing God's love (can we overemphasize his love?) ?
- What are the dangers of overemphasizing his wrath and judgment?
- How do you respond to people who say that the God of the OT is mean and brutal and the God of the NT is kind and loving? How does this story reflect on that view?

Pray.

Father, help me to see you as you are, not as I would make and remake you in the image of what I may find appealing or agreeable. Lead me to worship and trust you.

Live:

Meditate on the portrait of God in Romans 11:21-22.

3) They will carry you out, too

Read. Acts 5:5-9 NLT

As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor and died. Everyone who heard about it was terrified. Then some young men got up, wrapped him in a sheet, and took him out and buried him.

About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Was this the price you and your husband received for your land?"

"Yes," she replied, "that was the price."

And Peter said, "How could the two of you even think of conspiring to test the Spirit of the Lord like this? The young men who buried your husband are just outside the door, and they will carry you out, too."

Think.

- Since people lie and gossip and do bad things all the time, why do you think God dealt so harshly with Ananias and Sapphira while others seem to get away with it? What do you think is happening here?
- When's the last time someone asked you to cover for them by lying? What did you do?
- Which description best captures you: brutally honest? tactfully evasive? kindly candid? Ask a friend to share which they think best fits you (hopefully they will be kindly candid themselves!).

Pray.

Lord, examine my heart, my motives, and my words; empower me not to leave shadows but a real legacy of authenticity in my speech and actions.

Live.

Read and meditate on Psalm 19 today.

5) Many miraculous signs and wonders

Read. Acts 5:12-16 NLT

The apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers were meeting regularly at the Temple in the area known as Solomon's Colonnade. But no one else dared to join them, even though all the people had high regard for them. Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women. As a result of the apostles' work, sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter's shadow might fall across some of them as he went by. Crowds came from the villages around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those possessed by evil spirits, and they were all healed.

Think.

- What significance do you see in this outbreak of divine signs and wonders in the wake of Ananias and Sapphira's death? What impact on the community does the death of Ananias and Sapphira seem to have had?
- Why are people drawn to the apostles and yet keep their distance at the same time?
- How does this report of the miraculous compare with divine healing that you may have witnessed or even participated in? What would you identify as the key to effective divine healing?
- When has God used you to bring healing to someone? How often does God use you this way?

Pray.

Holy Spirit, use me as a source of healing and blessing today. Let your presence be experienced through me so that even my passing shadow might communicate your kingdom to others.

Live.

Pray for someone's healing today.