



Bible studies for disciples who make disciples

Loudonville Community Church

Volume 1 - Number 8
The week of November 22, 2015

Consumed by Appearances

Acts 4:32-5:11

THIS WEEK'S CORE STATEMENT

Stewardship - We believe that everything we have and all that we own belongs to God. As stewards, we have been entrusted with the resources of our Master and are accountable for how we use them.

One of the ways that we can become better stewards is by trying to live simpler lives. In his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster provides ten principles that help us live simply.

1. Buy things for their usefulness rather than their status.
2. Reject anything that is producing an addiction in you.
3. Develop a habit of giving things away.
4. Refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry.
5. Learn to enjoy things without owning them.
6. Develop a deeper appreciation for creation.
7. Look with a healthy skepticism at all "buy now, pay later" schemes.
8. Obey Jesus' instructions about plain, honest speech. "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil" (Matthew 5:37 ESV).
9. Reject anything that breeds oppression in others.
10. Shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God.

Foster concludes by writing the following statement: "May God give you – and me – the courage, the wisdom, the strength to always hold the kingdom of God as the number-one priority of our lives. To do so is to live in simplicity."

Peter Kreeft is a professor of philosophy at Boston College and The King's College. He is a prolific Christian author whose plain style is profound and memorable. In his book, *Before I Go: Letters to Our Children about What Really Matters*, Kreeft expresses these reflections on the topic of Money: "Money is not bad. Greed is. It's not true that 'money is the root of all evil.' That's not what the Bible says; it says that 'the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils.'"

Only persons are to be loved. Loving only people wonderfully simplifies our life, frees us up, and liberates us from the billions of little things we worry about, like pennies (Ten million dollars is only a billion pennies!). When someone we love is dying, we know that money is nothing. We'd all rather be alive and poor than rich and dead. And we'd rather be in love in the South Bronx than fighting in Hawaii and rather be married in a tent than divorced in a mansion."

As we seek to become the faithful stewards God desires, let's begin to take these principles, to live simply, and to love people, to heart.

This Week's Complementary Passage

Psalm 50 (ESV)

¹ The Mighty One, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. ² Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth. ³ Our God comes; he does not keep silence; before him is a devouring fire, around him a mighty tempest. ⁴ He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people: ⁵ "Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!" ⁶ The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge! *Selah* ⁷ "Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God. ⁸ Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me. ⁹ I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. ¹⁰ For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. ¹¹ I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. ¹² "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. ¹³ Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? ¹⁴ Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, ¹⁵ and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." ¹⁶ But to the wicked God says: "What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant on your lips? ¹⁷ For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you. ¹⁸ If you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you keep company with adulterers. ¹⁹ "You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit. ²⁰ You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son. ²¹ These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you. ²² "Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver! ²³ The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!"

Marking Guide for Acts (not all words occur in the passage)

appointed

baptized

Caesar

enemy/demons/Satan

eternal life

fathers & children [in one color
different from Moses]

Gentiles

gospel

grace

Holy Spirit

in the name of Jesus Christ

Jesus

Jews

Law (of Moses)

men of the council

Moses [in different color from
fathers & children]

prayer

repent (repentance)

resurrection (raised up)

salvation

suffering

the Way

the promise of the Father

witnesses

word of God

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This Week's Text for Study - Acts 4:1-31 (ESV)

STEP ONE . . .

READING what the passage says
(*Read it at least three times*)

Acts 4:32-5:11 (ESV)

³² Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

5 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,² and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." ⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." ⁹ But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

STEP TWO . . .

OBSERVING how the passage moves

Return to the passage and **mark key words, phrases and movements:**

Circle all of the words in this passage that speak of the Triune God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit, etc.).

Underline the significant verbs/action words in this passage.

Highlight Acts 4:32.

In Acts 4:33 highlight the phrase “great grace was upon them all.”

In Acts 4:34 highlight the phrase “not a needy person among them.”

In Acts 5:3 highlight the phrase “lie to the Holy Spirit.”

In Acts 5:4 highlight the phrase “You have not lied to man but to God.”

In Acts 5:9 highlight the phrase “test the Spirit of the Lord.”

Highlight Acts 5:11.

STEP THREE . . .

Ask the five “W” questions and the one “H” question:

1. **WHO** is speaking? Who is this about? Who are the main characters? And, to **whom** is it speaking?
2. **WHAT** is the subject of the passage? What does the passage say about the subject?
3. **WHEN** do or will the events occur? When did something happen to a particular person, people, or nation?
4. **WHERE** did or will this happen?
5. **WHY** is something said or mentioned? Why would or will this happen? Why at this time? Why this person?
6. **HOW** will it happen? How is it to be done? How is it illustrated?

STEP FOUR . . .

UNDERSTANDING what the passage means

This commentary is intended to enhance your own study of the text.

Commentary on Acts 4:32-5:11

4:32 - who believed were of one heart and soul. The spirit of unity among the believers reflected the unity of God.

had everything in common. They shared everything; the Church felt and acted like a family.

4:33 - were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The central truth of their message was that Jesus is alive!

4:34 - there was not a needy person among them. The church felt a responsibility for one another. This was not communism, but love in action.

4:36 - a Levite. Although the Old Testament did not allow priests to own land, the Roman authorities had changed many things in Palestine.

5:1 - Ananias. The full Hebrew name would have been Hananiah, which ironically means “The LORD has graciously given,” or “The LORD is gracious.”

5:2 - He kept back for himself. The idea is to ‘steal, embezzle, or pilfer,’ a sin that had the potential of hurting the entire church.

5:3 - Satan ... Holy Spirit. This shows the presence of the two spiritual forces who are active in our world, in human lives, and even in the church.

filled. This is the same word used of the Spirit. Filling requires cooperation! We are filled with something. In this case, Satan was involved, but Ananias and Sapphira were responsible.

to lie to the Holy Spirit. Ananias and Sapphira lied to Peter and the church but, above all, they lied to the Holy Spirit. Theologically this is very similar to Jesus asking Paul on the road to Damascus, “Why are you persecuting Me?” (see Acts 9:4). Paul was persecuting individual believers, but Jesus took it personally, as does the Holy Spirit here.

5:4 - While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? Ananias was not compelled to sell the land at all; nor was he under any obligation to share the proceeds with others.

You have not lied to men but to God. It was not that Ananias and Sapphira kept part of the money, but that they lied to make themselves look spiritual. Even a kind, generous act, done with a bad motive, is a sin. Also, observe that the Holy Spirit mentioned in vs. 3 is called God.

5:5 - great fear came upon all. This possibly was the purpose of this temporal judgment.

5:7 - About three hours. This shows the vividness of the account by an eyewitness. Luke’s writing is characterized by careful attention to details.

5:9 - to test the Spirit of the Lord. This Greek term means, “to test with a view toward destruction.” This reflects OT passages that warn against tempting/testing The LORD. Ananias and Sapphira did not think they were “testing” God. Instead, they viewed their actions as if they were independent from God’s scrutiny and judgment (many of us operate this way as well).

5:11 - And great fear came upon . . . all who heard of these things. Luke uses the common Greek word, *phobos* (we get the English word ‘phobia’ from this root word) several times in this same general sense. For believers, it is a sense of reverence, respect, and awe. For unbelievers, it is a sense of foreboding, fear, and terror.

church. This is the first time this term is used in Acts. This is the Greek term *ekklesia*. It is from two words, “out of” and “called.” The term implies the church consists of the divinely called-out ones. The early church took this word from secular use and used it for themselves as the people of God who were on His mission around the world.

An essential part of the mission of the church is for its members to live in such a way that outsiders would notice Jesus. However, some of the messages the church sends out fail to look like Jesus at all. One of the common reasons people cite for dismissing the church today is that the church is filled with hypocrites. How many times have you heard an unbeliever say, “Well, I’d go to church if it weren’t for all of those hypocrites?”

It didn’t take long for hypocrisy to surface in the early days of the church. The fourth chapter of Acts concludes by telling us that the believers sold what they had and shared the money with those in need. Barnabas stood out as a sterling example of this kind of generosity. Unfortunately, in Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira contrived a plan to gain personal attention and praise for their apparent generosity. It seems that every act of true benevolence has its counterfeit. In this case, it prompted a married couple to play the hypocrite by pretending to be more benevolent than they actually were. However, their scheme backfired and their lie was exposed.

If we’re not careful, the same kind of phoniness can even creep into our lives as well. We’ve all been guilty of exchanging the applause of God for the praise of men. We haven’t been struck dead (yet!) but each time we are motivated by appearance, we take a step closer to hypocrisy and further away from honesty. Why do we even move in the direction of phoniness? *One reason this tragic story suggests is that we want to hide our flaws so that our appearance portrays the perception that we have everything together, even though we don’t.* We want to impress others so they’ll say nice things about us.

Our passage also introduces us to **the first case of discipline in the early church**. Generally, *there are two types of discipline: preventive and corrective*. **Preventive discipline** occurs in the normal process of doing life together as a church through teaching and a small group experience. **Corrective discipline** is confrontational. It’s important to point out that Peter didn’t kill Ananias and Sapphira! The Holy Spirit was so displeased with their actions, however, that He took their lives. God used Ananias and Sapphira to set an early example of acceptable behavior for those who were a part of the church.

Ananias and Sapphira weren’t pointing people to Jesus, and without some form of **corrective discipline**, the reputation of the church would have been damaged. So God took this drastic action resulting in two funerals. The Lord is sending a clear message He won’t bless any church where hypocrisy is the norm. While God’s swift action seems incredibly harsh, it’s because the stakes were so high. Just as we want to protect our family’s name, God is showing that the reputation of the church is even more important, for the church is the body of Christ—and an essential part of our mission as a church is for each of us to live in a way that outsiders would notice Jesus.

STEP SIX . . .

EXPLORING the passage through discussion

1. Following Peter's sermon at Pentecost, Luke summarized the life of the early church (cf. Acts 2:42-47). Following the healing of the lame man and the disciples being brought before the religious authorities, Luke summarized the church's life again (cf. 4:32-37). What stands out to you in these summaries? What's the same? What's different?

2. Why does Luke turn the spotlight on Barnabas? What do you know about his later ministry that causes him to be introduced here?

3. How can we handle our possessions so that we don't always hoard but also consider how we might share them?

4. What do you think motivated Ananias and Sapphira to do what they did?

5. How would you define hypocrisy? Why does hypocrisy damage the church's reputation?

6. Do you think the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira was too harsh or warranted? For either response, cite your reasons why.

7. What is the place for corrective discipline in the life of the church? (see Matthew 18:15-20.)

8. How do we conquer the temptation of hiding our flaws in order to keep up our appearances?

THE MISSION OF LOUDONVILLE COMMUNITY CHURCH

We are committed to reaching and teaching people to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ, connecting them to one another and sending them to serve their families, communities and world.

10 CORE BELIEFS OF A DISCIPLE

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

The Godhead *2 Corinthians 13:14*

We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Deity and Sinlessness of Christ *Colossians 2:9*

We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life.

The Sufficient Atonement of Christ *2 Corinthians 5:19-21*

We believe in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood.

The Resurrection and Return of Christ *Acts 1:3, 9-11*

We believe in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential and that a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit *John 14:16*

We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

Unity in Christ *Ephesians 2:14-17*

We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Eternity *Revelation 21:22-27*

We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

We believe that everything we have or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES OF A DISCIPLE

Undiluted Worship *Matthew 22:37-40*

Loving the Lord God with all of our physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual vigor and, my neighbor as myself.

Constant Abiding *John 15:1-11*

Abiding in Christ in order to be faithful and bear fruit.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

Reading the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for daily life.

Desperate Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

Praying to God to know Him, laying requests before Him and, finding direction for daily life.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

Fellowshipping with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, other people's lives and, in the world.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

Using my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Total Forgiveness *Ephesians 4:30*

Practicing forgiving others as God has forgiven me in Christ.

Tangible Compassion *Matthew 25:31-46*

Showing compassion to those in need and so minister to Jesus Himself.

Generous Giving *2 Corinthians 8:7*

Giving away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

God Space *Ephesians 6:19-20*

Increasing the quantity and quality of our gospel conversations.

10 CORE VIRTUES OF A DISCIPLE

Love - a sincere affection for others *1 John 4:10-12*

Love is acting in someone else's interest no matter who they may be, no matter how you feel, and no matter what it costs.

Joy - a delight unaffected by circumstances *John 15:11*

An inner delight in God that is sustained in spite of the changing seasons of life.

Peace - an abiding sense of harmony *Philippians 4:6-7*

Relationships are free from friction. Positively, it describes harmonious relations with others in the church.

Patience - a willingness to stick with things *Proverbs 3:3-4*

Being willing to live with a difficult situation for a long time—even if things are slow to change or never change.

Kindness - a sense of compassion in the heart *Job 6:14*

An inner disposition that puts others at ease and out of which kind actions flow.

Goodness - a goodness that flows outwardly *1 Thess. 5:15*

Choosing to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Faithfulness - an unwavering loyalty *Psalm 26:3*

Being the kind of people who keep our word to one another.

Gentleness/Humility - an attitude of humility without any entitlement; a lack of self-awareness *Philippians 4:5; 2:3-4*

Gentleness is power and strength under God's control.

Humility is considering others above myself, if I consider myself at all.

Self-Control - an ability to direct your energy wisely

Titus 2:11-13

The strength to restrain our desires, emotions, and actions has to come from within rather than from some outside source.

Hope - a certainty of what is to come *Hebrews 6:19-20*

Coping with the hardships of life and with death because of hope in Christ.

Each week this Bible Study will feature either a core belief, practice or virtue vital for growing disciples.

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