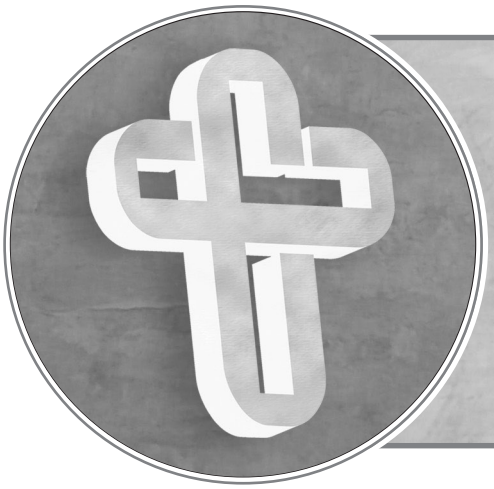


CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
JANUARY 24 2026

# truth and you

**Scripture Story:** Acts 4:32–5:11.
**Commentary:** *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapter 7.
**Key Text:** Acts 5:1, 2.

## PREPARING TO TEACH

### I. SYNOPSIS

One of the most compelling snapshots of generosity in the Bible is found in Acts 4:32-36. Following that poignant picture of God's people "sharing everything they had" and giving "to anyone as he had need" is the unsettling story of Ananias and Sapphira. The juxtaposition of the narratives is jolting to say the least.

Ellen White offers insightful commentary on both stories. Speaking of the generosity in the early Christian church she writes: "This liberality on the part of the believers was the result of the outpouring of the Spirit. The converts to the gospel were 'of one heart and of one soul.' One common interest controlled them—the success of the mission entrusted to them; and covetousness had no place in their lives. Their love for their brethren and the cause they had espoused, was greater than their love of money and possessions" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 70, 71).

Referring then to the story of Ananias and Sapphira, Ellen White comments: "In sharp contrast to the example of benevolence shown by the believers, was the conduct of Ananias and Sapphira, whose experience, traced by the pen of Inspiration, has left a dark stain upon the history of the early church" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 71).

This lesson offers extreme examples from Scripture of both hypocrisy and integrity. You cannot escape the radical calling of authenticity and God's uncompromising character in this story. So present the story and let the students grapple with the gritty and messy dissonance in the text. You might just read the passage, and a lively discussion about integrity, hypocrisy, and giving is likely to follow.

### II. TARGET

The students will:

- Be exposed to the best and worst of the early Christian church. *(Know)*
- Grapple with the seriousness of God's judgment. *(Feel)*
- Be challenged to live a life of integrity and generosity. *(Respond)*

### III. EXPLORE

**Stewardship, Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs, No. 21**

We are God's stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use. We acknowledge God's ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow human beings, and by returning tithe and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church. Stewardship is a privilege given to us by God for nurture in love and the victory over selfishness and covetousness. Stewards rejoice in the blessings that come to others as a result of their faithfulness (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15; 1 Chron. 29:14; Haggai 1:3-11; Mal. 3:8-12; Matt. 23:23; Rom. 15:26, 27; 1 Cor. 9:9-14; 2 Cor. 8:1-15; 9:7).

# TEACHING

## I. GETTING STARTED

### *Activity*

*Refer the students to the* What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

### *Illustration*

John D. Rockefeller, Sr., became a millionaire at an early age. Sometime after that he became a billionaire and was dubbed the "richest man in the world."

However, not everyone thought highly of Mr. Rockefeller. Many of his aggressive business practices led to the destruction and dissolution of smaller companies until his company, Standard Oil, had almost a complete monopoly on oil production in the United States.

At the age of 56 America's first billionaire retired from his company and became a philanthropist with the goal "to promote the well-being of mankind throughout the world." It is reported that he returned a tithe and that he gave much of his money away to universities, churches, hospitals, and medical research.

Today many significant discoveries in medicine are the result of money given by the Rockefeller Foundation. It is reported that his foundation has given away more money than Rockefeller earned in his lifetime. Eventually his large company was broken up into several smaller ones, but he continued with his great acts of benevolence. His goal was to live to be 100, but he died at 97. However, he died knowing that his generosity had helped thousands and that the impact of that would be felt long after he was gone.

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www.investopedia.com/articles/economics/08/jd-rockefeller.asp

www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/rockefeller-obit.html

## II. TEACHING THE STORY

### *Bridge to the Story*

Jesus taught this principle long ago: "Give, and you will receive. You will be given much. Pressed down, shaken together, and running over, it will spill into your lap. The way you give to others is the way God will give to you" (Luke 6:38, NCV).

Giving is therapeutic. The more we give, the more we benefit. What do you see as the primary benefits of giving?

### *Out of the Story for Teachers*

*After you read the* Into the Story *section with your students, use the following questions to process it with them.*

- **Acts 4:32-35—**Make a list of any similarities and differences that you see between the early Christian church described in this passage and your church today. How well would you have fit into the early church? How easy is it for you to share with others? What barriers to generosity do you see in our world today? How might God use you this week to reach out to someone in need?
- **Acts 4:36, 37—**What is your nickname? How did you get the name? Is there something about your nickname that expresses a truth about who you are? Joseph is best known by his nickname—"The encourager." What is it about Joseph in verses 36 and 37 that merits a name like "the encourager"? Who is the most encouraging person you know? Explain. Who could use some encouragement today? What does God want you to do about it?
- **Acts 5:1-11—**Does God's punishment of Ananias and Sapphira seem too severe to you? Why or why not? How would "great fear" be used by God in the early church? What do you think the members of the early church learned from God's judgment of Ananias and Sapphira? How can you apply this in your life today?

### *Sharing Context and Background*

*Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.*

William Barclay offers this commentary on the story of Ananias and Sapphira:

"This is one of the stories which demonstrate the almost stubborn honesty of the Bible. It might well have been left out because it shows that even in the early church there were very imperfect Christians; but the Bible refuses to present an idealized picture of anything. Once a court painter painted the portrait of Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell was disfigured by warts upon his face. The painter, thinking to please the great

man, omitted the disfiguring warts. When Cromwell saw the picture, he said, 'Take it away, paint me warts and all.' It is one of the great virtues of the Bible that it shows us its heroes, warts and all.

"There is a certain encouragement in the story, for it shows us that even in its greatest days the church was a mixture of good and bad."[1]

In Acts 5:1–8:3 we see both internal and external problems ravaging the early church. Inside there were dishonesty (5:1-11) and administrative problems (6:1-7). Externally, the church was being persecuted. Nevertheless, leaders stayed focused on what mattered the most—spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This story is a reminder that the evil one was alive and active in the early church. Still today the church is under attack (see Ephesians 6:12; 1 Peter 5:8). While Satan's fate was sealed at the cross, it will not be fully realized until Jesus comes again (see Revelation 20:10).

The sin that Ananias and Sapphira committed was not frugality or withholding money—it was their decision whether or not to sell the land and then how much of the money to donate. Their sin was lying to God and to His people—claiming they gave the whole amount while keeping some back for themselves, thus appearing to be more generous than they really were.

Still today, dishonesty, greed, and covetousness will destroy God's church. All lies are evil, but when we lie to try to deceive God and His church, we seriously compromise our witness for Christ.

## III. CLOSING

### *Activity*

*Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.*

Conclude by asking what the benefits are of being a giver. How are others impacted by their generosity? How does giving change the giver? What happens when giving people give too much? Or when the takers take too much? Talk about balancing giving with taking. Discuss ways your Sabbath School can model the generosity of the early church.

### *Summary*

*Share the following story and discuss with your students how it illustrates the principles of this lesson.*

Wayne Cordeiro, pastor of New Hope Christian Fellowship O'ahu in Honolulu, Hawaii, writes:

"Some time ago some wonderful people in our church gave Anna, my wife, and me a dinner certificate to a nice restaurant for $100. We thought, *Wow, a hundred bucks. Let's go for it.* We found a free evening. We dressed up. . . . I even washed and waxed my car, because we wanted to take it through the valet, and I didn't want my Ford Pinto to look bad. The night came, and we were excited.

"We went to this ritzy restaurant and walked in. They gave us a nice, candlelit table overlooking a lagoon adjacent to a moonlit bay there in Hawaii. Oh, it was nice. . . .

"When the bill came, I said, 'Honey, why don't you



## Teaching From the Lesson

*Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.*

- **Key Text**
  *Invite students to share the* Key Text *with the class if they have committed it to memory.*
- **Flashlight**
  *Read the* Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* The Acts of the Apostles. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  *Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.*
- **Further Insight**
  *Ask them how the quote in* Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

## Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

*Experiential Learning*

Jesus' teaching that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35, NIV) is true—*especially* for young people. But how can you teach this truth in a way that it sticks and shapes generous kids?

Students are usually on the receiving end—they get food, clothing, education, and so on just given to them. Give them a chance to step outside the receiving role, however, and they learn the satisfaction of *being* the generous one, and they vibrate with joy. They feel grown up. It empowers them.

If you are serious about teaching your students generosity, you *must* make the experience their own. Take, for example, the typical food drive at the local school. Too often Mom or Dad throws some extra cans in the cart and the kids deliver the goods at school. It's a good start, but the kids aren't really participating in the process. All they're doing is delivering your purchase to the school.

The difference between Dad's $10 and the kids' $10 is the difference between watching generosity and learning generosity experientially. Let the students decide how they want to respond to what this lesson teaches. Encourage them to dream about aiding the homeless or funding a well in Africa or giving money to a needy family in the church—and then let them pay for it!

give me the certificate.'

"She said, 'I don't have the certificate. I thought you brought it.'

"I said, 'You have to have it. You're supposed to have it. You're the wife!'

"She said, 'I don't have it.' And I thought, *We are in deep yogurt. Here we are. We look rich, we act rich, we even smell rich. But if we don't have that certificate, it invalidates everything.*

"There are times in our lives when we can look holy, we can act holy, we can smell holy. But without a relationship with the Lord, we're missing something essential. It's relationship that validates everything else."[2]

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[1] William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 44, 45.

[2] Wayne Cordeiro, "A Personal Relationship," *Preaching Today,* audio No. 225.

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapter 7.

# CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

JANUARY 24 2026

## STUDENT LESSON

**Scripture Story:** Acts 4:32–5:11.
**Commentary:** *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapter 7.

# truth and you



Photo by Alden Ho

## keytext

"Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet."

**(Acts 5:1, 2, NIV)**

## flashlight

"In the case of Ananias and Sapphira, the sin of fraud against God was speedily punished. The same sin was often repeated in the after history of the church and is committed by many in our time. But though it may not be attended by the visible manifestation of God's displeasure, it is no less heinous in His sight now than in the apostles' time. The warning has been given; God has clearly manifested His abhorrence of this sin; and all who give themselves up to hypocrisy and covetousness may be sure that they are destroying their own souls" (The *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 76).

# what do you think?

**What do you think—Y (yes) or N (no)?**

____ A student can do well in school without cheating.
____ Truth is always the best policy.
____ Athletes caught cheating in sports should be severely punished.
____ Honesty pays.
____ People can't be true friends if they are not perfectly honest with each other.
____ It is possible to lie by saying nothing.

# did you know?

**God has made the proc-**lamation of the gospel dependent upon the labors and the gifts of His people. Voluntary offerings and the tithe constitute the revenue of the Lord's work. Of the means entrusted to man, God claims a certain portion—the tenth. He leaves all free to say whether or not they will give more than this. But when the heart is stirred by the influence of the Holy Spirit, and a vow is made to give a certain amount, the one who vows has no longer any right to the consecrated portion. Promises of this kind made to men would be looked upon as binding; are those not more binding that are made to God? Are promises tried in the court of conscience less binding than written agreements of men?" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 74).

# INTO THE STORY

**"All the believers were** one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

"Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement'), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet."

"Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.

With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

"Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.'

"When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

"About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, 'Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?'

"'Yes,' she said, 'that is the price.'

"Peter said to her, 'How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.'

"At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events."

**(Acts 4:32-37; Acts 5:1-11, NIV)**

# OUT OF THE STORY

*Read the passages in the* Into the Story *section and answer the following questions:*

**Acts 4:32-35**

What strikes you most about this picture of the early Christian church? What do you think the church needs to do today to recapture the core features of this biblical community?

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**Acts 4:36, 37**

Note that Barnabas sold a field and "brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet." (The believers donated their proceeds in the same way—see verse 35.) In other words, he donated it with no strings attached. He said to the apostles, "You know where this money is needed most to build up the kingdom of God; I trust you enough to lay it at your feet." Contrast this attitude of giving to that of Ananias and Sapphira.

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**Acts 5:1-11**

What's the most shocking thing to you about this story? Why?

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_____

# punch lines

**"What is more,** he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man" **(2 Corinthians 8:19-21, NIV).**

**"But if there are** any poor Israelites in your towns when you arrive in the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tightfisted toward them" **(Deuteronomy 15:7, NLT).**

**"If you help the** poor, you are lending to the Lord—and he will repay you!" **(Proverbs 19:17, NLT).**

**"Don't love money;** be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, 'I will never fail you. I will never abandon you'" **(Hebrews 13:5, NLT).**

**"Jesus told him,** 'If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me'" **(Matthew 19:21, NLT).**

# further insight

**"It is God who blesses men with property, and He does this that they may be able to give toward the advancement of His cause."**

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles,* p. 75

## Sabbath

**Read Hebrews 13:5.**

Review your answers in the *What Do You Think?* section. Circle the statements that you are 100 percent sure about in the answer that you gave. Underline the statements that you could argue an answer of "Yes" or "No."

## Sunday

**Read 2 Corinthians 8:19-21.**

Underline everything in the *Into the Story* section that teaches about integrity, hypocrisy, and giving. From the text, what can we learn about integrity?

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_____

What can we learn about hypocrisy?

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_____

What can we learn about giving?

_____

_____

## Monday

**Read Acts 5:1, 2.**

Read the *Key Text* and consider these questions:

- Were Ananias and Sapphira required to sell the property and lay all the money at the feet of the apostles?
- What sin did they commit?
- Did their sin merit such stern punishment? Why or why not?

_____

_____

## Tuesday

**Read Deuteronomy 15:7.**

Reflect on the comments of Ellen White that come just before her statements in the Flashlight section:

"Let truth telling be held with no loose hand or uncertain grasp. Let it become a part of the life. Playing fast and loose with truth, and dissembling to suit one's own selfish plans, means shipwreck of faith. 'Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.' Ephesians 6:14. He who utters untruths sells his soul in a cheap market. His falsehoods may seem to serve in emergencies; he may thus seem to make business advancement that he could not gain by fair dealing; but he finally reaches the place where he can trust no one. Himself a falsifier, he has no confidence in the word of others" (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 76).

## Wednesday

Read the verses in *Punch Lines*. Determine the key point in each verse. Then write one sentence that captures the core idea of all the texts.

_____

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## Thursday

**Read Proverbs 19:17.**

How trustworthy am I? How can I nurture the trust that others put in me? How can I build my trust in God? How can I foster God's trust in me?

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## Friday

**Read Matthew 19:21.**

Marilee Jones, dean of admissions at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), resigned after admitting the résumé she submitted 28 years earlier for an entry level position in the admissions department was filled with lies. According to her résumé Jones had attended and graduated from Albany Medical College, Union College, and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute—three well-respected schools in New York. In truth, she attended only Rensselaer as a part-time student for just one school year!

"I misrepresented my academic degrees when I first applied to MIT 28 years ago and did not have the courage to correct my résumé when I applied for my current job or at any time since," Ms. Jones said in a statement posted on MIT's Web site. "I am deeply sorry for this and for disappointing so many in the MIT community and beyond who supported me, believed in me, and who have given me extraordinary opportunities."

Since Ms. Jones took the position of dean of admissions in 1997, she has widely been considered a guru in the field. She is the author of several books, including Less Stress, More Success, in which she writes: "Holding integrity is sometimes very hard to do because the temptation may be to cheat or cut corners. But just remember that 'what goes around comes around,' meaning that life has a funny way of giving back what you put out."*

Ask yourself:

- Is there something from Ms. Jones's story that I should learn?
- Are there any compromises in my life that will come back to bite me?
- How can I live with nothing to hide?

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*Tamar Lewin, "Dean at MIT Resigns, Ending a 28-Year Lie," *New York Times*, April 27, 2007.

## this week's reading*

*The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapter 7.

* Unlikely Leaders is a special adaptation of *The Acts of the Apostles* created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.