

## Responsive Love

**A**s Latrell drove to the apartment, he reminded himself again that he was doing this because God told him to, not because it would look good to the church.

Keenan was a responsible 38 year old who had been part of Latrell's church for the last six years. Keenan had been in an accident that totaled out his car and did not have the money to get a new one. Keenan put the money he got from the insurance claim in the bank and was saving until he could get another car that was not just a junker. In the meantime, Keenan and his family were having hardships getting around. Keenan had a 45-minute commute to work that included walking two blocks to the bus stop and then after his stop walking several blocks to the office. His wife was catching rides to do the grocery shopping and other chores.

On the other hand, Latrell had two vehicles. In addition, Latrell lived two blocks away from the city's light rail system that dropped him off one block from his job.

Latrell had told Keenan, his wife, and their nine-year-old daughter that he was coming to take them to lunch and had a surprise for them.

"I can't borrow your car," said Keenan at the restaurant.

"You can, and you will," said Latrell. "We are brothers in Christ. We have to help each other. If I have something you can use, you got it."

"Besides," he added, "what do I have that God didn't give me?"

**1.** *Why do people want others to see them as good people?*

**2.** *What does Jesus say about those who do good for man's approval?*

**3.** *Why should we test our motives before serving God and others?*

## A Sharing Community

*Acts 4:32–35, KJV*

32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

*Acts 4:32–35, NIV*

<sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>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 <sup>34</sup>that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales <sup>35</sup>and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

The early Jerusalem church exhibited remarkable harmony and unity generated by the Holy Spirit (4:31-32). This unity led to sacrificial giving on the part of many to meet the needs of the poorer members in the church. As a result of this generosity, Luke could say "there were no needy persons among them" (vs. 34). However, this sharing of wealth did not happen all at one time. As needs became known, those who could afford to do so stepped forward, sold land or houses, and provided for the poorer members.

This did not lead to communal living. Believers still maintained residences for their families, many becoming gathering places for the believers (Acts 2:46, 12:12-14).

Besides meeting the needs of the poor, the sharing accomplished two additional purposes. First, it enabled the apostles to devote themselves full time to the Word, to prayer,

and to their testimony regarding Jesus' resurrection (4:33, 6:1-7). Second, caring for the poor was a powerful testimony of their love for each other.

**4.** *How did the believers in Jerusalem demonstrate their oneness with each other?*

**5.** *What purposes did the sharing of possessions accomplish in the Jerusalem church?*

## **Barnabas's Positive Example**

*Acts 4:36–37, KJV*

36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

*Acts 4:36–37, NIV*

<sup>36</sup>Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), <sup>37</sup> sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

To illustrate the generosity of those in the Jerusalem church, Luke told the story of Barnabas. Although he grew up with the Hebrew name of Joseph, the apostles gave him the nickname of Barnabas because as Luke said, "Barnabas" means "son of encouragement." Barnabas sold land and placed the entire proceeds from the sale at the feet of the apostles. But at least one couple in the church did not give to the ministry in the way that Barnabas did.

**6.** *Why did Luke include the story of Barnabas in his narrative of the generosity of the Jerusalem church?*

## **Ananias and Sapphira Test God**

*Acts 5:1-11, KJV*

1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,

*Acts 5:1-11, NIV*

<sup>1</sup>Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.

*KJV*

2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?

4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.

7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.

10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men

*NIV*

<sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup>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?

<sup>4</sup>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."

<sup>5</sup>When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. <sup>6</sup> Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

<sup>7</sup>About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup> Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

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

<sup>9</sup>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."

<sup>10</sup>At that moment she fell

*KJV*

came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

*NIV*

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. <sup>11</sup>Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

As the story of Barnabas' generosity became known among the believers in Jerusalem, Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of land they owned. They likely saw the praise Barnabas received for his generosity and desired it for themselves.

As Ananias brought the money to the apostles, the Lord revealed to Peter the deceit of claiming it represented the total sum from the sale of the land. Peter attributed the behavior of the couple to Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44).

Peter clarified that Ananias's sin did not consist in holding back some of the money, but in deceitfully claiming to give all of it. The couple had every right to keep a part or even all of the proceeds. They sinned by claiming to give all the proceeds while holding back some of the money for themselves.

The apostle did not pronounce a death sentence on Ananias; his sudden death may have surprised him as much as anyone else who witnessed it. His death represented God's judgment.

Sapphira arrived three hours later, not knowing about her husband's sudden death. Peter exposed the fact that she was a willing participant in the deception.

After seeing what happened to Ananias, Peter assumed Sapphira would suffer the same fate. As a result of God's swift action against the sin of this couple, great fear fell on those who heard of it (vs. 11). They all realized the extreme danger of testing the Lord through deceit in attempting to appear spiritual before others.

**7. What was sin that Ananias and Sapphira committed?**

**8. What factors may have contributed to the couple's attempt to test the Lord in such a way?**

## Emptiness or Fullness

Joe loved volunteering at his church. He proudly taught Sunday school classes, served on the worship team, cooked food for newcomer lunches—you name it. While he was serving, however, he always had an eye to see if the pastoral staff was watching. Joe not only served, but he also eagerly attended all the church Bible studies offered to him. His knowledge of the Bible was keen, and he used it by answering any—and every—question he could. Sadly, the more Joe sought the approval of others, the less his focus was on loving God. Soon, Joe was doing everything in his own strength, which led to exhaustion and spiritual emptiness.

James rarely stood before a large crowd. He preferred to meet one on one with people and share God's truth. He loved having people over for dinner, even though he could barely afford food for his own plate. When he wasn't meeting with people, he was praying for them. Few people noticed James's servant heart, but he didn't serve for others to notice. James served God and others because he daily experienced God's joy, grace, and peace in his life.

Often, we desire the tangible applause and approval from others instead of the less visible joy and peace from God. In order to receive the visible approval of men, we serve others openly seeking to appear sacrificial in our actions. Yet, God sees our motives and often reveals it to others. Seeking the approval of man over God's approval leads to emptiness. As we desire to grow in our relationship with God and serve Him and others, we will find ourselves spiritually full, regardless of whether we gain favor from others or not.

**9.** *Why do we often prefer the applause of others over God's less boisterous approval?*

**10.** *Do we naturally stop and think about how temporary human approval and gifts are? Explain your answer.*

**11.** *When was the last time you stopped to ask yourself, "Why are you serving someone?"*

## Only One Life

British missionary C.T. Studd (1860–1931) wrote a poem entitled “Only One Life” that includes these lines: “Only one life, ’twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last. Only one life, the still small voice, gently pleads for a better choice, bidding me selfish aims to leave, and to God’s holy will to cleave.” We all need to ask ourselves, are we doing what we do for His glory, or for praise and glory we want to be given to us?

► *Pray silently and ask God to examine your heart for any unconfessed sins, especially in the area of serving with wrong motives.*

### KEY VERSE

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. —Acts 4:32, KJV

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. —Acts 4:32, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

November 23 through November 29

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Matthew 12:1-8—Extending Mercy More Important than Sacrifice.
- Tues.** 1 Peter 1:17-23—Love One Another from the Heart.
- Wed.** Galatians 3:6-9, 13-14—In Christ Gentiles Share Abraham’s Faith.
- Thurs.** Exodus 2:1-10 —Faith of Levite Mother Saves Moses.
- Fri.** James 2:14-17—Unexpressed Faith Has No Value.
- Sat.** James 2:18-26—Faith and Works Complement Each Other.
- Sun.** James 2:1-13—Disdain the Practice of Partiality.