

Message Transcript

MAKE BOLD MOVES | NOW IS THE TIME

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Hey, can we give that up for Megan and Austin? That is such a powerful video. That's the fifth time that I've watched that video and every time I watch it I pick up something new that they say.

I'm just astounded by the fact that, listen, they came in here about two years ago as agnostics and God has worked in powerful ways in and through their lives.

And I don't know if you picked up on what Austin said. He said, "There was something blocking me from moving forward that I needed to remove and give by faith."

And that's the story there and I'm just praying to God, that same God who has been at work in their lives would be at work in somebody's life here today, this weekend. You guys believe that? I hope that you believe that.

If you've got a Bible, go ahead and head over to Acts, chapter 4. That's where we are going to be together today. We have got a ton of ground to cover and very little time to do so, so I hope that you've had your caffeine and your running shoes are laced up. This is the 11:15 service. So, typically you guys are the most awake. You better be. Alright?

So, we're in week number three of a series called Now Is The Time. And if you are new or you just need a reminder, in the fall of 2023 we kicked off this journey that you've been hearing a lot about lately called Awaken, which is a focused season of discipleship.

And the question behind that word is: What does God want to do in me? And then the next word is generosity, which is this question: What does God want to do through me?

Now, I just want to caution us, if we get those words flipped it messes things up. I want us to begin with the word discipleship, and the question: What is it that God wants to do in me? Hard stop.



And then, once we begin to figure out what it is that God is doing within us, then we move on to the question of generosity and: What does God want to do through me? Because God doesn't want anything from you. He wants something for you.

And as we said on week number one, Matthew 6:21, Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Your heart always follows your treasure; it is never the other way around. So, we determine, "Where do I want my heart to go?" And we preemptively send our treasure there.

So, Awaken wraps up December 31st. But I want to be super clear. That does not mean that our mission and vision wrap December 31st, it's going to continue to go on into 2026. We are just getting started.

What we want to do with this initiative is to finish strong because what Awaken has been is a shot of caffeine to the system to exponentially move our church forward and to wake us up from the spiritual slumber that we found ourselves in a few years ago.

And guys, that is what it has done. And I'm going to keep saying it whether you see it or not. I know many of you see it. God is on the move right now in this crazy world and time in which we live, and He is on the move right now in our church in ways that I've never seen before.

And in the book of Acts, which is the book we are studying right now, Luke finds it fit to talk about some significant numbers that mark certain events within the early church.

So, in that same spirit here are a few numbers to mark the move of God here lately in our church over the last couple of years.

Baptism since start of Awaken: 2910

Guys, since the beginning of Awaken we have had 2910 baptisms. That's amazing. Over the last couple of years. Acts, chapter 2 they did that in one day. We did it in two years but I'll take it.

Baptisms since start of 2025: 2050

Baptisms so far this year, in 2025 we've had 2050. We crossed 2,000 this last Tuesday with Rooted and the Rooted celebration. Guys, our prayerful goal for 2025, many of you remember this, was 1001. Why 1001? To remind us that there is always one more. We hit our goal by May. We just crossed 2,000 and we have a month to go.



Rooted grads since start of Awaken: 2,793

Rooted grads since we started Awaken 2,793, with a total of 5,112. Where are you Rooted grads? Anybody go through Rooted? Man, powerful night Tuesday night of Rooted. We saw some incredible baptisms that night.

Attendance growth since start of Awaken: 7,000

Attendance growth since the start of Awaken in our church is about 7,000 people. Guys, what God is doing here is unlike anything I've seen in my 18 years here.

We could call it—I don't think that it is an overstatement to call it a movement. It's what we prayed for. That God would breathe out upon our church.

Worship Night this past Thursday, literally, if you were here or at one of our locations God shook this place. I saw so many young people. More young people than I've ever seen at any worship. In fact, afterward, I was down front praying with as many people as I could before I left.

This is not an exaggeration, I don't think that I prayed with anybody over the age of 23, unless you guys have just had some work done and you are looking really good, which may be awesome. I don't know.

Hey, by the way, can I just very lovingly point this out? I say this with all love. I had a number of people after Worship Night get so excited about Worship Night. I'll see comments on social media, people come up, "Hey, we should do Worship Night more often. We should do it once a month. We should do it once a week."

I'm like, "Guys, we do. It's called the weekend services." Hey, what's the difference? It's the same venue. It's the same worship team. We're singing the same songs. It's the same Holy Spirit. So what could be different? Well, I don't know. Maybe the way that we are showing up.

So, receive that with loving admonishment. And I say that to myself. Every weekend is a time for worship night. I'm glad you guys are with me on that. The other services just looked at me.

So, we are in the book of Acts and the book of Acts, if you've never studied it before, is sort of like a documentary of how the early church gets started. And the growth of the early church was absolutely phenomenal. It defies all sort of man made explanation because it wasn't man made. It was the Spirit of God.



So, a small group of unqualified, ordinary nobodies like you and me with no money, no power, no influence literally turned the world upside down and changed the course of history.

And throughout the book of Acts (there are 28 chapters) there are a lot of key players who God uses, men and women that He uses in powerful ways, but the lead role is the Holy Spirit.

So, a little recap. Matthew 28, Jesus gives us the Great Commission. And He says, "I want you to go." That's the primary word there. The church of Jesus Christ is always on the move. "And I want you to be My witnesses throughout the whole world." Acts 1:8, after Jesus' resurrection, before His ascension He says, "I want you to wait."

And I just kind of held up a couple of weeks ago the dichotomy of those two words. He says, "I want you to Go," and "I want you to wait." "Well, Jesus, which is it?" It's both.

"I want you to go but I do not want you to move without the power of the Holy Spirit. When you do you get out over your skis and that's when you make a mess of things. So, you wait to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

That's what happens in Acts 2. We looked at that last week at the day of Pentecost. This small group had all gathered together, the Holy Spirit falls freshly upon them. Tongues of fire rain down. They are speaking in different kinds of languages so that way the gospel message could move forward.

There were some who watched all of this happen and they accused the people, not of being filled with the Holy Spirit, but of being filled with a little too much Jack Daniels. And Peter was like, "No, no guys. We are not drunk. It's only 9 a.m. We are clear eyed and sober minded."

And that's what motivates Peter, this guy who could not even tell others that he knew Jesus around a campfire a couple of months prior, before Jesus' crucifixion, to preach his very first sermon, and it is a bold sermon in the name of Jesus and 3,000 people give their life to Christ.

And the result of that move of God in Acts 2:42 to 2:47 (we ended last week with that) was that the church was marked by generosity, the response to this move of God was that they were generous.



Now, in chapter 3, Peter and John encounter a lame man. This guy could not walk; he'd been lame or crippled his entire life. They see him at the temple at the gate called Beautiful.

And he sees Peter and John walk by and he's begging them for money, quite possibly because that's what he did every day. Quite possibly because he recognized them as leaders in the church and he heard that this church was generous.

And Peter turns to the guy and says, "Hey, look right at me. I don't have any silver or gold, but I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk. And the dude does. That is baller. That's the first time Peter had ever done that. Peter's like, "Oh, wow. That actually worked. That's amazing."

In verses 12 to 26, Peter then preaches another bold sermon, it's like the most non-seeker friendly sermon ever in the sense that Peter says this, "You killed the author of life." That's not very seeker friendly. "But God raised Him from the dead."

So, verse 19:

"Repent of your sins and turn to God." Here's why, "So that your sins may be wiped out and that times of refreshment might come."

And then Peter and John find themselves before the Jewish Council called the Sanhedrin.

Now we're going to go through all of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5. And what I want you to mark if you are jotting down some notes (and I would encourage you to in some way) is that chapter 4 marks the first stiff resistance against the movement of God within the early church.

Up to this point about the most resistance they got was that people were accusing them of being drunk at 9 a.m. Now it's going to get ratcheted way up. So, look with me at verse 1. It says:

"While Peter and John were speaking to the people, they were confronted," that's conflict language, "by the priests, the captain of the Temple guard, and some of the Sadducees. These leaders were very disturbed that Peter and John were teaching the people that through Jesus there is a resurrection of the dead."



So, understand that this comes right after chapter 3 where Peter had healed the lame guy and now they are explaining that this healing power provides a picture of Jesus' power to save the soul. It wasn't just magic tricks.

And the Sadducees didn't like it because it was a threat to their power. They had no Messiah. They had no hope. They were their own messiah, their own hope.

That's why in verse 3:

"They arrested them and, since it was already evening, put them in jail," kind of like a holding cell, "until morning."

Verse 4:

"But many of the people who heard their message believed it, so the number of men," it's talking about heads of households there, "who believed now totaled about 5,000."

So, I just want to draw your attention to this. In Acts, chapter 2 3,000 people give their life to Jesus after Peter's sermon. Here in Acts, chapter 4 another 5,000. Peter has preached two messages and 8,000 men gave their life to Christ. That is astounding.

And it says: heads of households. Meaning these were representing households, not counting women and children, so we just take that 8,000 and times it out by three or four, guys, the early church at this point a few weeks in has already grown to 20 to 25 thousand people. So, if you don't like big church... It makes our 7,000 look like nothing—25 thousand people.

Keep in mind the population of Jerusalem at the time was about 40,000 people. So we're talking that this is more than half of the population who have given their lives to Jesus. This would count as a massive movement. And it's gotten everybody's attention and they are threatened by it so they are going to come against it.

What I want you to see here, don't miss this, is that we look at this and we go, "Oh, man. Eight thousand men gave their lives to Christ and a lame man got healed. These are good times." Where are Peter and John? In jail.



Have you ever had somebody come up to you and they are like, "Hey, man. How's it going?" And you catch yourself not really knowing how to respond in the moment because everything flashes through your mind, good and bad?

You are like, "I don't know how to respond to this. Because there are some good things that are happening right now but there are also some bad things that are happening right now. And if I just say things are good, I'm not being really honest because there is some really tough stuff. But if I just say things are bad, are they going to look at me like I'm Eeyore."

Or am I just giving you guys too much of a picture of what is going on in my mind?

So, what ends up happening is we're like, "I just can't wait until I turn a corner and life gets good again." What we're talking about is like peaks and valleys. Good and bad. And we're waiting for better times.

Guys, you've heard me say this before. It's not a matter of ups and downs. Life is a matter of two sets of rails that represent the challenges and the blessings. And they always exist in our lives.

I'm bringing that up to say this. The church is experiencing a massive move of God, good things. Yet, Peter and John find themselves in jail, bad thing. That's how God works.

The whole book of Acts is resurgence and resistance. It's the wheat and the tares. It's light and dark. And for every move of God with the Holy Spirit you can just count on a counter move of Satan and unholy spirits.

So it says:

"The next day the council of all the rulers and elders and teachers of religious law met in Jerusalem. Annas,"

That's pronounced Annas, not anus. I've made that mistake before. Although that might be a better description of him. I don't know. Man, I was really hoping you guys—I thought the 11:15 service would like that joke.

Anyway:

"the high priest was there, along with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and other relatives of the high priest. They brought in the two disciples and demanded, 'By what power,' There is that word again. That word is mentioned a lot in the book of Acts, "'or in whose name, have you done this?'
"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit,"



Here's a little exercise. Read through the book of Acts on your own and highlight every time you see that phrase filled with the Holy Spirit.

"said to them, 'Rulers and elders of our people, are we being questioned today because we've done a good deed for a crippled man? Do you want to know how he was healed?'"

In other words he's going, "Are we in trouble because we healed a dude? Wouldn't you even want to know how that happened?" Verse 10:

"Let me clearly state to all of you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the man you crucified but whom God raised from the dead.

'For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says, "The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone." There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved."

Amen and Amen.

Guys, that is the distinct difference between Christianity and every other world view or philosophy system around the world. There is no other name by which we must be saved.

Every other philosophy or world religion teaches that either you save yourself or somebody else saves you or you do enough righteous acts. Only Christianity says Jesus has done it all.

And it is such a bold move. Peter, the guy who denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed, he just runs right at them without even flinching.

It reminds me of Neo and the last scene of the first Matrix, I know I'm dating myself but it was the best one. Can I get a good amen? Neo finally realizes who he is in that last scene and he stops running from the agents and he starts running right toward them.

That reminds me of Peter here. Peter is like, "I know who I am. I'm going to run right at you." And he goes, "If we are going to be put on trial for healing a guy, then let me be clear about where the power of healing came from. It's Jesus."



Guys, that's why we sing the song I Speak Jesus. Because when you've got nothing left, you speak His name. When you don't know what to say, you speak His name. When you are in the midst of your pit, you speak His name.

Can I just say this? To those of you moms and dads with young kids or teenagers in the home, or maybe you're a grandparent and you are looking at the world going, "Man, we're trying to raise this generation in this crazy, dumpster fire of culture right now," Here's what you do. You pray Jesus over your kids. That's what you do. There is power in the Name.

Ans so it says in verse 13:

"The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus."

Guys, can I just encourage you for a minute? They looked at them and go, "Man you are just a bunch of ordinary dudes. There is nothing about you that is special at all." We're talking: Carhart, hoodies, camels, and trucker's hats. No special training. Didn't mean that they weren't in God's Word, they just didn't have theology degrees. Guys, you might want to write this down:

God Plus Your Willingness To Give Him Your "Ordinary" Is Always Enough
God plus your willingness to give Him your "ordinary" it is always enough. And we focus so much on what we don't have or what giftedness isn't in our gift mix. And God is like, "I'm not looking for that. I'm just looking for your sold-out availability to Me."

And then it says, "Man these guys aren't so special, but it is clear that they have been with Jesus." Oh, man. May that be said of us. May that be said of us.

The way you spend your time, your money, your resources, the way that you interact with others, your disposition with people, both in person and online, they may not agree with you, they may not believe what you believe, but they go, "Man, there is a different spirit in the way that they carry themselves. It is clear that they have been with Jesus."

It says in verse 14:

"But since they could see the man who had been healed standing right there among them, there was nothing the council could say."



This is where I wish we had a picture Bible. Because what this is saying is that they are looking at Peter and John, trying to get them in trouble and they want to come down hard on them, but the dude that Peter healed is standing there smiling, grinning ear to ear, doing air squats. And they are like, "There is the evidence right there in front of us, man. It's like I don't know how to explain this but they healed a guy."

And so it says that they ordered Peter and John out of the council chamber and conferred among themselves. They had a private meeting. Here's the question: "'What should we do with these men?' they asked each other. 'We can't deny that they have performed a miraculous sign, and everybody in Jerusalem knows about it.

'But to keep them from spreading their propaganda,'" that's interesting, they would call it propaganda, "'any further..." because you know more healed people getting up out of their wheelchairs, which would just be the worst, "'we must warn them not to speak to anyone in Jesus' name again.'"

Wow.

"So they called the apostles back in and commanded them never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus."

Pause right here. Time out. If this feels like a threatening ultimatum to you, that it is because it is a threatening ultimatum. They cannot doubt there is power here, and so what they are going to do is they are going to just try to stamp it out.

And they are like, "Okay, if there is power in the name of Jesus, we're just going to tell you, we're going to threaten you, you cannot speak the name of Jesus anymore."

And at this point Peter and John could have been intimidated, their knees starting to wobble, "Okay, I guess you have a point. We'll try to do better. We'll soften it a little bit." That's not what they do. Instead, Peter and John clear their throats and they say this in verse 19:

"Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard."

Translation: If we are going to step into oncoming traffic, you've got a Kia, God's got a Mack truck. And so we're going to go with God. Here's the word. Luke has already used it. It's boldness. They were bold in the face of opposition.



I'm going to explain here in a minute what boldness is and what it isn't, but let me just, first of all, talk about opposition. Opposition in our life today is probably not going to be a group of Sadducees who are coming against us and telling us not to speak the name of Jesus.

But it could be a governing official, it could be your boss, it could be a neighbor, maybe it could be a grumpy person online. Oftentimes it could be a person. It could be circumstances. It could be ideologies, deceptions. It could be you. It could be your own personal temptations and shortcomings.

So, identify what the opposition is that is actually keeping you from living fully for Jesus or speaking freely for Jesus.

Bold, here, let's not misunderstand, bold does not mean arrogant, abrasive, or divisive. Bold doesn't mean being mean. Bold doesn't mean raising your voice. You can actually be bold and winsome. You can be bold and use some humor. You can be bold and clear eyed.

Here's what bold means. It is clear that a man or that a woman has been with Jesus. They are unflappable and unflinching. So, let me give you a definition of boldness:

Boldness is having the courage and confidence to take risks, speak truth, or act decisively—especially in the face of fear, opposition, or uncertainty.

Guys, can I ask you this today, right now? Is there any area in your life that needs a little bit more boldness? Would you do a little bit of work with God this morning and this week and say, "God, is there any area of my life where I need to be bolder? Who do I need to be bold with?"

"And God, would You help me to get the disposition right? Would you help me get the tone and timing right? God, would you help me to do this in such a way that is not defensive in nature where I feel like I'm defending myself, but I'm living clear eyed to speak truth and I'm not backing down.

"I'm not just silently affirming what other people say because I don't want to rock the boat, I'm willing to step into oncoming traffic for the name of Jesus."

Verse 21 tells us that they finally let them go. And then in verse 23 it says: "As soon as they were freed, Peter and John returned to the other believers," so they go back to their church, and their small group, "and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. When they heard the report, all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God:"



So, what I want you to notice here is that as Peter and John come back saying, "Hey, guys. You wouldn't believe this. I healed a lame guy and then I got thrown in jail, and then they threatened us."

And notice their instinctive reflex to this was that they prayed. That was humbling to me. As I was studying this last week I thought to myself, "What would my instinctive reflex have been if they would have... You know we were on a conference call, a little Zoom call, catching up and I'm trying to encourage them or coach them, what would my first instinctive response have been?"

I started thinking about that. I was like, "You know we might have tried to encourage Peter and John, 'That's okay, guys.'" You know, "I'm really glad you got released from jail. That was a close call. And do you think that maybe you guys could dial it down a little bit? Is it really necessary to be so controversial? Maybe it's time you use a little more nuance, fly under the radar."

"New policy. Peter and John are never allowed to travel by themselves again. Too risky. You guys are like fireworks and gasoline. You're going to get each other blown up."

"Have we review our key man life insurance policy lately? Because you guys are a high liability."

"Can you guys maybe be... Peter, Peter we love this new bold thing that you've got going on, but could you be a little bit more nuanced in your preaching?"

"A little feedback here. The whole, 'You killed Jesus, the only way of salvation, so you need to repent line,' it isn't playing well. A lot of negative emails, a lot of nasty comments on social about it."

"Could you lead with the story of the prodigal son or maybe the woman at the well? Let's be a little bit more grace filled."

That might have been what we would do. They prayed. Listen. When you are walking in the power of the Spirit, prayer becomes your natural reflex because you know how dependent you are upon Him.

And if your natural reflex is to defend, to explain, to worry, to complain, to strategize that's a good indicator that you have begun to operate in the flesh and not in the Spirit.



So, they pray this incredible prayer from verses 24 to 28. I don't have time to read it. You can read it on your own. Verse 29, at the end of the prayer it says this:

"And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants..."

And before you read any further just stop for a second and ask yourself, "What do I think they might pray for?" Just think about that for a second.

Don't read ahead, "Lord, hear their threats, and give your servants..." Here's what we might have prayed for, "God, would You please give your servants protection? Give them traveling mercies, God."

I don't know where we got the whole traveling mercies thing, but we didn't get it from Scripture.

"Hey, God. Would You put a hedge of protection around them? Would you please provide."

And I'm not necessarily saying any of that stuff is bad. I'm saying that's not what they prayed. Look with me at your Bibles what they prayed:

"God, would you give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

Guys, pray for more boldness? Great boldness? Isn't it the boldness thing that got them into this mess?

What You Pray For In The Midst of Pressure or Pain Reveals Your True Motivation
What you pray for in the midst of pressure or pain reveals your true motivation. And before they would pray for an improvement of the circumstances around them, they prayed for a more faithful spirit within them.

Maybe that's what you need to pray. Oftentimes we tend to pray to God asking Him to remove us from painful circumstances. And I'm not saying don't ever do that. I'm not saying God doesn't have the power or the willingness to do that.

But if that's all we pray, maybe we need to stop saying, "God, would You please level the ground under my feet?" And maybe we say, "God, would you please give my feet steadiness to navigate on unstable ground? God, either change my circumstances or change me so we believe that You have enough power to be bold regardless of outcomes."



Listen. There is resistance coming against you in the spiritual realm, the physical realm, the emotional realm, and boldness implies that that resistance is there. And if there was no resistance, then it wouldn't be bold.

One of the things... It's a gift, I think, right now in this world in which we are living in that, because of the conditions of the world—and you can fill in the blank as to what I'm talking about: all the division, all the anger, all of the stuff that we see going on—right now the pain of that is the uncertainty and fear of this world, the gift of that is that it is actually shrinking consumer Christianity.

What I mean by that is that no longer can you just sort of straddle the fence and be kind of in the mushy middle, you're either going to be all in or all out. You are either going to stay faithful to live for and follow Jesus and declare it boldly or you are going to say, "Hey, I was just a cultural Christian. I was just doing this for what I could get out of it. And if I'm going to get persecuted, if I'm going to have people come against me, then I'm out."

And what He's doing is that God is purifying His church and it's becoming very, very clear. And declaring God's Word with boldness is something that is going to be required. So, here's what this means...

Listen. You don't need to be argumentative, angry, or divisive. You don't have to be. All you have to do is to boldly live for Jesus and you will experience resistance.

You can be as winsome as possible and it doesn't matter because you are following Jesus faithfully. Because, right now, there is a spiritual war going on between the Holy Spirit and unholy spirits. You pick a team.

And if you are like, "Well, I don't really know. I'm kind of like, I'm in the middle." Actually, no. It's either one or the other. Jesus would say, "If you are not for Me you are against Me."

So, understand that when you begin to live for Jesus and when you begin to boldly speak for Jesus, even if it's as winsome as you can possibly be, you are still going to get threats, angry emails, nasty comments, and one-star google reviews.

Guys, I've received more of this in the past three years than I have in the previous 15. And it's almost as if the movement of God in our church is in direct correlation with the resistance that gets ramped up.



All of Acts is resurgence, resistance, resurgence, resistance. And God blesses lives and churches that remain bold and make bold moves because in that moment we are relying on the Spirit of God.

Now, here was the result. Verse 31, it says:

"After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness."

And then this happened. It's the replay of Acts 2:42 to 47. There is this clear linkage here. Look at what it says in verse 32:

"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."

Now, if you've got an actual Bible in front of you, connect Acts 2:42 to 47 to Acts 4:32 to 35. There is a cycle. What we see in the book of Acts is people like you and me waiting upon the power of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit falls. God breathes out upon the church. Miraculous things happen. We boldly preach the Word of God. People get saved. Resistance comes against. We remain bold. And the church is joyful and generous. Wash, rinse, repeat. And we see that play out in the first four chapters of Acts.

And the result of their boldness was a bold generosity. Here's what is happening. The gospel loosened their grip on their earthly stuff and tightened their grip on God's heavenly mission.

So, here it is in a nutshell: Hold people tightly. Hold your stuff loosely.

When was the last time you prayed for boldness to speak the message of Jesus more effectively and truly felt the urgency of the gospel so powerfully that you felt this desire to transfer your earthly possession into eternal ones?

This goes back to the video where Austin said, "There seemed to be this blockage, this thing that was keeping me from God. So I decided by an act of faith to give."



And it wasn't that God needed the last six hundred dollars in their account, it was that God was saying, "That is the thing that is blocking you from fully giving Me your heart." And by faith He removed it.

And I would say I've actually seen couples who were following after Jesus for 25 years who don't have that kind of maturity. It's as if it was like they were moving into maturity in light years because they decided to make that decision early.

Guys, statistically (we hit this on the podcast last week if you want to go back and listen to it) people's giving lags their decision to follow Jesus by two years. It is always the last thing that we baptize.

You go into the baptistry, you are like, "I'm going to hold my Venmo out of the water as I go down. Okay, dunk me again so I can keep that up out of the water," because it's the last thing.

And we've got all of our excuses, our cynicism, our distrust. And I get all of that. But listen. God is saying, "Hey, evidence that I've been at work in your life is how you view your stuff."

It's been said that when it comes to generosity some people's hearts are like a rock and God just can't get in. And it's like He's hammering away but it's just like chips and sparks. Nothing can get in. Nothing can get out.

Or maybe your heart is like a sponge and some things can get in but in order to get anything out God has to squeeze you.

Or for others of us our hearts are open and porous, a lot like a honeycomb and it flows in and sweetness flows out.

Can I just ask you today which one describes you? Are you living more guarded with your stuff? Do you have a scarcity mentality? Are you close fisted? "What I've got is mine and mine alone and I'm not going to part with it." And God's like, "Okay, but if your hands aren't open I can't give you anything else."

Too many of us are too focused on what we don't have (me included, I've been there, I'm there often) keeping us from boldly advancing Jesus' Kingdom with what we do have.

And right now, whether you think you've got much or you don't have a lot, God has given you some very specific earthly, temporary resources that He wants you to—here's the word, steward.



None of us are owners of anything that we have. We steward, temporarily, what God has entrusted to us. And one way or another, God says, "I just want you to trust Me with the things that I've temporarily given you to steward to advance My Kingdom and as you do so, I shape your heart."

I grew up in southwest Missouri where we did a lot of creekin'. Any of you do any creekin'? "No, Pastor. We don't know what you are talking about. You are speaking in tongues."

We would roll up our pant legs and we would wade in creeks and catch crawdads and we'd skip rocks. And I always noticed the flow of the creek because the rocks were smooth. What was happening was that the flow of the water over the rocks would shape the hard rock.

And if you've been in our church for a while, then you've heard me say this. From the day that you begin to earn your very first paycheck, from babysitting to mowing yards, from the day that you take your last paycheck before you retire, paychecks flow in and flow out of your life. Easy come. Easy go.

And as money flows in and out of your bank account, it shapes your heart: how you view it, what you do with it, what you think about it. And for many of us, we say...

Most Americans never think that they make enough, "If I just made 25 percent more then I'd be set." And it's never enough because we always ratcheted up our lifestyle.

So, if you are waiting, you are saying, "You know what? One day, when I get enough in savings; one day when I get that six figure salary at the job that I want, then I'll be generous," we are fundamentally thinking about it wrong.

God is like, "I don't need your money. I want to shape your heart. And, actually, I want to make a difference right where you are right now, regardless of what you make." And it's not the amount that you give, it's the willingness according to what you have.

We talked about this on the podcast. We talked a lot about tithing and that sort of thing. I don't want to get too hung up on tithing and is it legalistic and is it a command and is it law and is it grace and all of that kind of stuff.



How about this? You premeditate what you are going to return back to God. Let's just start there, "What's my premeditated gift back to God? God, You've just handed me this stuff to steward temporarily and I want to use it to advance Your Kingdom." Now is the time.

Well, to keep all of this out of the realm of the theoretical, because so far, what we've read... Isn't it easy to think about how big groups of people do things to make a difference with money, it's another thing when you start getting into individual stories.

And so far in Acts, Luke has just said, "Hey, here's what the church collectively did." Now what Luke is going to do is he is going to give us two specific examples from individuals within the early church.

One of them goes really, really right—super inspiring. The other goes really, really wrong. And Luke finds it necessary to include both. So, look with me at chapter 4, verse 36. It says:

"For instance," you could say, "For example." "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."

Now, I love this guy. I think that he is one of the most underrated leaders in the Bible. He makes six appearances in the book of Acts. The most notably, he was the first one to embrace Paul after his conversion when his name was Saul.

If you know anything about Saul's story he was the one going around killing Christians. It would be like if Marilyn Manson came to Christ, you are like, "I don't think I want to buddy up with him and be in his small group."

So, everybody is nervous about Saul. Barnabas was like, "I'll vouch for him." That is Acts 9. Same guy. He's the one who leads the church in Antioch in chapter 11 and go cross cultural and do ministry with the Gentiles.

He was put in charge of dispersing emergency funds to Jerusalem when it got hit with a famine. And I think it was quite possibly because he had proven himself trustworthy with finances.

He accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey. In fact, one time there was an intern by the name of John Mark who really got under Paul's skin because John Mark was sleeping in. And he said, "I'm done with kid." And Barnabas was like, "I get it. I get it. I'll go with him for the next two years. I'll work on him." That's Barnabas.



Barnabas in a nutshell. He lays down money and resources picks up people. He holds his stuff loosely, but holds onto relationships tightly. And it rightfully earns him the nickname "Son of Encouragement".

Any of you guys have any nicknames? I've had a few nicknames over my lifetime. I won't tell you what they are. I don't want you to start using them. My nickname has never been encouragement.

Barnabas' nickname was encouragement. And Luke says that he was a part of the early church and he's got an investment property that he's been holding onto, you know, down in Florida somewhere.

And maybe he was going to hold onto it for retirement, maybe he was going to put in his kid's trust fund, he's just holding onto it using it as an Airbnb or something.

And he's like, "You know what? Wait a second. Guys, I have never seen a move of God like this ever. And God is breathing out and we've just seen 8,000 men give their life to Jesus. I want to be a part of this. I'm not going to wait and leave this property later after I die. I'm going to use it now to advance the Kingdom of God."

So, he sells the property and leverages the money and lays the money at the apostles' feet, "You see fit to use this however to advance the Kingdom."

And many of you have done that during Awaken. I know for a fact people have sold property, stocks, and houses and given the money to Awaken.

And Luke could have just ended right there. In fact, I even thought about, for the sake of time, ending right here. That's awesome. It makes us feel good. Let's just pray and go home. But we're going to give one more example.

And I wish we could stop there but Luke gives us one more example and I think it actually might be a more formative example because it's a sobering warning.

I'm just going to go ahead and give you a heads up. If you've never read Acts, chapter 5, verses 1 through 11 and you don't know the story of Ananias and Sapphira, it's a tough one. So, look at what it says. It says:

"But there was a certain man named Ananias,"



Now Ananias' name means God is merciful, which is sort of ironic, because of what happens to him, and true at the same time. That will make more sense here in a minute.

'who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property.'

Right. So far so good. They've just done the same thing that our boy Barnabas has done. Here's where they went wrong, verse 2:

"He brought part of the money to the apostles, claiming it was the full amount. With his wife's consent, he kept the rest."

Now, I want to be super clear. Nothing wrong with what they have done in the sense of selling the property, it was totally their prerogative as to how much of it they were going to give away.

In fact, Luke is going to tell us later, they didn't even have to give any of it away. Sell the property, not sell the property. Give part of it. Give all of it. Give 10 percent of it. It didn't matter. They could have done whatever they wanted. Where did they go wrong? It's right there in the verse. They claimed it was the full amount. It was an integrity issue. They lied. And what's coming to them is death. And that's pretty severe.

I grew up in the 1980s and I went to a private, Christian school. We had chapel twice a week. And we sang all of these songs. We sang a song about Ananias and Sapphira. Any of you know the Ananias and Sapphira song?

"Ananias and Sapphira got together to conspire a plot to cheat the church and get ahead. Peter prophesied and they both dropped dead.

"Hey! God loves a cheerful giver. Give it all you've got. He loves to see you smiling when you're in an awful spot. So, when the odds are up against you and you cannot do a thing, praise God..."

Alright. Enough of that. Alright? Listen. We sang songs about God striking people dead. The 80s were a twisted time, man.

So, they sell the property. They only give a part, but they claimed they gave it all.



Here's a question. What do you think their motivation was? Do you think they were just nasty people? Do you think that they were dishonest? I don't think so. I want to give them the benefit of the doubt.

I think what happened is that they were watching this guy named Barnabas in their small group get all of these accolades for his generosity. And I think they saw how people admired him and how his stock went way up.

Man, people are saying all kinds of great things about him. And that was so alluring. They saw the attention and the affection he was receiving and they wanted some of that.

I think it was lie, a deception, that they just sort of fell into. So, it says in verse 3: "Then Peter said, 'Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart?'"

Now it's worth mentioning here that this is the first time that Satan is mentioned post crucifixion. The first time he's mentioned in the book of Acts.

So, before the cross Satan's strategy was to kill Jesus. When he couldn't do that, now he's striving to destroy Jesus' church and he can't do it from outside. So, he does it from within.

No coincidence that Peter uses the phrase to contrast the phrase filled with the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, filled with the Spirit. And now he goes, "Ananias, you've allowed Satan to fill your heart." And he says:

"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!"

See, what he is saying is, "You were under no obligation." It wasn't like a guilt thing, this isn't like, "You should have given all of it and so God is mad at you." He's like, "You didn't have to do any of it."

Listen. Ananias wasn't being confronted for only giving some. He was being confronted for misleading everyone to believe that he gave all.

Later in 2 Corinthians 8:12 Paul says if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.



And in verse 5 it says:

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

So, the interns filed in, "Dirty job. Somebody has got to do it. We'll take his body out."

"About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened." She must have had her do not disturb on her phone. "Peter asked her, 'Was this the price you and your husband received for your land?'"

And at this point you are like holding your breath, "Don't do it." She did it.

"'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.'

"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." (NLT)

Would you not agree that this was a tough passage? It's easy to understand why a lot of pastors skip over this. They kind of glean over it or we just reduce it to a kid's song.

Honestly, it does sound kind of harsh and it kind of ruins the whole... Like have you ever had somebody say this or maybe you've said it, "You know, I just really like the God of the New Testament. He's so much more loving and gracious than in the Old." Nope. Same God. Striking people down in the New Testament too.

So, let's unpack this. I'm going to tell you why here in a minute. Let me unpack this with this last verse going up. It says that great fear entered the church. Now, great fear is not like this, "I'm being abused by somebody fear." Great fear means this:

Awe combined with intimacy



We don't talk like this now but this is the type of awe and intimacy you have with people who you love the most. There are some people in your life: your spouse, your kids, your family who you have a greater fear with than others. Not in the sense that, "I'm afraid of you," but in the sense that, "I have more awe and intimacy with you." There is more at stake with them.

In Acts 9:31 it tells us that the church in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and became stronger as the believers, listen, lived in the fear of the Lord and with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit they grew in numbers.

What that is saying is, that to a church as the fear of God increases so does the sense of His love, the move of the Spirit and more conversions.

Can I just say this? I think one of the things that the western church has lost, and hopefully we're beginning to get it back, is that we don't have a high enough view of God.

We have too high of a view of ourselves, too low of a view of God. And so we question God instead of worshipping God. And it's that old hymn, "...tis grace that taught my heart to fear."

And coming into the presence of God is like a butterfly landing on the surface of the sun. We don't take God seriously enough and we take ourselves too seriously. And an anemic, deconstructing faith is often the result of the absence of a healthy fear of God.

So, what do we do with this text? When you look at this and you're like, "What do we do with this?" Well, can I just say a couple of things?

Number one: There is nothing in the text that tells us that God sent them to hell. We don't have any reason to believe that we will not see them in heaven. In fact, I think we will see Ananias and Sapphira in heaven.

We'll be walking by and we'll see them and be like, "Hey, Ananias and Sapphira got together..." We sang a song about you guys. So, that's that. I think as soon as they dropped dead they were immediately in the presence of the Lord and it was an act of God's mercy and grace. That's Ananias' name: God is merciful.

Here's the other thing. They were leaders in the early church. God always holds leaders to a higher standard. These are the early days of the establishment of the church, the bride of Christ, where everything is magnified: tongues, fire, miracles, healing—including God killing a couple for lying about what they gave.



And everything is much, much more tender and sensitive in the early days of this thing. Kind of like when you bring a newborn home from the hospital and you are overprotective of that newborn—almost to the point you're jumping up at every little thing. A binky drops on the ground and you burn it. You're just like, "Nothing is going to take this child from me." I would equate that to the...

Listen. Church is not just what we do on the weekends to feel better about ourselves and sing a few songs and hear somebody teach God's Word. The church is God's plan "A".

And He says, "Listen. I'm not going to let anything interfere with that. I'm not going to let somebody's personal sin or lack of integrity derail this church." And it reveals to us how seriously God takes personal sin, lack of integrity, and selfishness.

So, here's just my opinion. I think that God is on mission. He sees all of our lives at once. I think God was removing Ananias and Sapphira from the equation before they could cause too much more damage.

"Well, that seems harsh, Aaron." Yeah, any of you ever been the recipient of church hurt? It was likely because of somebody's lack of integrity. And they were on their way to causing some significant church hurt. And God says, "I'm going to bring you in with Me so you don't mess the church up."

And I can say this. God will always purify His church. Anybody who has ever hurt you, nobody is getting away with anything. And it's a sobering reminder for you and me. Our personal sin might be personal, but it never affects just you. It affects everyone.

And if you are a part of a church, it affects the mission of the church. In fact, it will hinder the work of the Holy Spirit, which is why revival always begins with personal repentance.

And their lives, their lies were symptomatic of a much, much deeper problem. They loved the security of money and they loved the praise and admiration of people. So, they told a lie to keep more money and still get the praise of the people.

I don't know about you guys, but all of us are guilty of that. If you are offended by the swift judgment of God described in Acts 5 1 through 11, it only reveals, and I say this lovingly but plainly, it only reveals your naivety of God's holiness, your sinfulness, and the seriousness of our sin in relation to His holiness.



See, the question shouldn't be, "Why did God take their lives?" The question we should wonder is, "Why am I still alive?" I don't know about you guys, I've done way worse things than Ananias and Sapphira. And I'm so grateful that God has been gracious to give me another chance. And you should be too.

R. C. Sproul in his book *The Holiness of God* says this:

God is indeed long-suffering, patient and slow to anger. In fact, he is so slow to anger that when his anger does erupt, we are shocked and offended by it.

We forget rather quickly that God's patience is designed to lead us to repentance, to give us time to be redeemed. Instead of taking advantage of His patience by coming humbly to him for forgiveness, we use this grace as an opportunity to become bolder in our sin.

We delude ourselves into thinking that either God doesn't care about it, or that he is powerless to punish us. The supreme folly is that we think we will get away with our revolt.

See, I think that if God would have allowed Ananias and Sapphira to do this very public thing that the next time it would have just been more grievous. And they would have said, "Hey, we got away with it once. We'll get away with it again." And God is actually using them as an example to the church to say, "This is how serious I take my mission."

The missionary Jim Elliot, who gave his life in an effort to lead others to Jesus, once made this sobering observation that when we, as Christians, sing the hymn *I Surrender All*—you know that hymn, "I surrender all"—but secretly harbor areas of our life that we do not allow God to touch, including finances, we are living inconsistently. And then Jim Elliot drops this bomb, "Christians don't always tell lies, but they do sing them."

So, here's the question. Are there any areas of your life right now that you have not fully surrendered to God?

And what we see here from Ananias and Sapphira is that oftentimes it is in the area of finances and reputation because those are our functional saviors.

So, here's the question. Are you willing to obey Jesus with your resources? Are you willing to live and speak for Jesus no matter what people say to you or about you or do to you?



Two big areas that will take me out: arrogance and cowardice. The antidotes are: humility and courage.

See, two big areas right now that will take you and me out of life and take us out of effectiveness is our arrogance and our cowardice. Both of those show up in this passage. The antidotes are humility and courage.

Now, listen. You might hear all of this and be tempted to despair. You are like, "Man, Aaron, this is a real bummer today." No. I want you to receive some good news. No sin is fatal. It is the refusal to be honest and come clean about the sin and seek forgiveness that becomes fatal.

So, 1 John, chapter 1, verse 9, let this wash over you:

"If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness." (NLT)

Do you know what that verse is saying? It's saying if you own your sin and come clean with it, then God will release you, redeem you, and forgive you from it. If you hide it, accommodate it, or excuse it, He will hold you accountable for it.

I'm just telling you, it is much, much better to let Him pay for it than for you to pay for it. That's why Jesus went to a cross. And the invitation is open.

And would you please recognize that entitlement will kill your growth in Jesus faster than anything? Even if God gave us nothing else, He's already given us more than we deserve because He gave us His only Son. And that Son walked out of a grave so that you might have life.

So, if you are drawing breath in your lungs right now, thank God for that. If you've got another opportunity to earn a living, thank God for that. If you can enjoy another sunrise and sunset, you thank God for that.

And you ruthlessly root out entitlement and pride from your life and you come to Him with a spirit of contentment, courage, and humility, and say, "God, would you please bring me into alignment with Your Spirit."

Guys, God is moving in our church right now. And I don't want you to miss it. And I don't want any of our issues with personal integrity to derail it. If we are a church that repents and confesses and has a high view of God, then we are just getting started to awaken to this tremendous work. It is the only hope of this world. And I want you to be a part of it.



So, the invitation now is would you stand. I will lead us in prayer. And I want to encourage you in these moments to not leave this space and this place without doing whatever business it is that the Holy Spirit has for you, the same Holy Spirit that filled these early believers in the book of Acts, He's in the room right now. Don't miss Him.

The same Holy Spirit is here, ready, calling upon you bringing to mind those things that you need to bring into alignment with the will of God, those things that you need to confess and drag out into the open, that you need to release to God right now.

Father, we come to You and we just pray that You would do a purifying work within us. That You would be a God who is on the move.

Forgive us, Father, for we've had too low of a view of You, too high of a few of ourselves. May we flip that and in humility come into Your presence confessing sin and asking the power of Your Spirit to pour out once again.

God, some of us are facing some things in life right now. We are throwing everything that we've got at them and nothing is working. So, now forgive us where we do that. May we begin to operate in the power of Your Spirit. Come Lord Jesus, come. We ask this in Jesus' name. And everyone said: Amen.

