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Series: The Story Continues

Title: Alignment with God

Text(s): Acts 4:32-5:11

Big Idea: God desires more than participation – He desires our hearts

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

Good morning, it is great to be with you all today! Grab your Bibles and meet me in Acts 4.

Are you right with God?

Growing up in church, I often heard the phrase “getting right with God.” Usually, it referred to salvation. As I have grown and matured as a follower of Jesus, I have learned that there are several layers to that phrase.

- Layer 1 – get right with God by accepting God’s free gift of salvation offered in Jesus
- Layer 2 – live right with Him by following Him in obedience
- Layer 3 – we live right with Him by having our hearts aligned with His

While each layer may look sufficient, God desires to have all three together. He desires heart alignment.

This week, I took my truck in to get an alignment done. When you get your vehicle aligned, the mechanic adjusts the angles of your wheels so they are positioned exactly the way the manufacturer designed them to be.

In a similar way, God has designed you in such a way to be aligned with Him. The problem for us is that it is all too common for us to get knocked out of alignment or expect God to be aligned with us.

Acts 4-5 shows us what happens when we are aligned with God, and it also shows us what happens when our hearts are not. And because the church is the sum of all its parts, we all need to have our hearts aligned with God – so I have been asking God, by His Spirit, to align our hearts according to His design and plan for us.

WHAT DOES ALIGNMENT LOOK LIKE?

Pick up with me in Acts 4:32, *“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”*

1. Alignment looks like living from abundance rather than scarcity

Luke is describing what a church that is aligned with God looks like— they live from abundance!

Have you ever heard of the abundance mindset vs. the scarcity mindset?

Think of it like this – a scarcity mindset believes there is never enough – enough resources, enough opportunity, enough blessing – so it believes there is not enough to go around, so I must protect what is mine. An abundance mindset trusts that God is more than enough, so it lives open-handed in generosity, confidence, and faith.

Here is what the Holy Spirit does when we yield our lives to Him – He gives us resources, gifts, and talents, not for us, but to bless others *through* us. Remember, you were not put on this earth for you, but to be used by God to be a blessing to others. Through the Holy Spirit, we are conduits, mere stewards, of God’s blessings to the world.

There is no greater description for the early church than to say that when the Holy Spirit landed on this people, they were yielded to Him in a way that they trusted that God is more than enough and were able to live open-handed in generosity, confidence, and faith as a blessing to the church and in their community.

2. Alignment looks like eternal meaning and purpose

Now, Luke describes the church as living from abundance, but then he highlights a member of the church as a tangible example of what this looks like. Look with me in v. 36, *“Thus Joseph, who was also called Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”*

Keep this in mind – while Luke is describing Barnabas as one who was radically generous with his resources, he is really describing one whose heart is aligned with God. He is describing someone who sees their life from God’s perspective and recognizes that he was not put on this planet to serve himself – his needs and his wants – but to be a blessing to those around him. And here is how God uses him:

- God uses his resources to launch and stabilize the greatest missionary movement in the history of the world.
- He risks his life and reputation to advocate for Paul, bringing credibility to him among the disciples, which fortified their relationship for the future of the mission to advance the gospel to the ends of the earth
- He became a mentor to early church leaders who would eventually shape history

What a life of eternal meaning and purpose! This is what happens in a life yielded to the Spirit and a heart aligned with God.

3. Alignment looks like thriving even in difficulty

As we will see through Acts, when a Christian is aligned with God and His Spirit, they thrive under the most difficult experiences. They have joy in suffering, they have peace in prison, they have contentment when they have plenty and when they have not, they are self-controlled in hostile situations, they are loving and kind toward difficult people, and they remain faithful to God and His mission no matter what.

If you are not experiencing these things, there is a good chance that you are not in alignment with God. You may say – but Logan, I pray, I read my Bible, I go to church; and I would say great – but are you asking God to align you with Him, or are you asking God to align Himself to you?

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE WHEN WE ARE OUT OF ALIGNMENT?

Look with me in Acts 5:1, *“But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your **heart** to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? After it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have **contrived this deed in your heart**? You have not lied to man but to God.’ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.*

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

Wow. That seems dramatic, right? But let’s think about this. What is the core issue here? I mean, Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property and gave it to the church, how could that be worthy of this kind of judgment, even death?

Let’s walk through this.

- 5:2 – Luke says the couple “kept back” part of the proceeds. The word means to secretly set aside for oneself in a dishonest way and is the same term used in Joshua 7:1 of Achan, who kept spoils that were devoted to the Lord. Like Achan, the couple chose personal gain over trusting God and obeying him.
- 5:3 – Twice Peter charges Ananias with keeping part of the proceeds, suggesting that he had publicly committed the full amount. The issue was not the portion given, but the lie – claiming outward surrender that did not match his heart.
- 5:4 – Peter makes clear that giving was voluntary; the land and money were Ananias’ to do with as he pleased. This sin was not withholding, but deception. In v. 3 he lied to the Holy Spirit; in v. 4 he lied to God.

- 5:8 – Sapphira is given a chance to come clean, but instead confirms the false amount, choosing to participate in the deception.
- 5:9 – Peter reveals they had agreed together in the lie, thereby “testing the Spirit of the Lord,” a serious act of defiance repeatedly warned against all throughout Scripture.

Yet on the outside, Ananias and Sapphira look just like Barnabas. Barnabas had just sold his property and given it to the church, and, to the casual observer, Ananias and Sapphira were doing the same thing.

But deep in their heart lingered a love of money and a desire for people’s praise. So, they conspired together to present a portion of their money while passing it off as the entire amount. This is light-years apart from the attitude of Barnabas, but looks almost exactly the same.

Their greatest sin has little to do with the money, but everything to do with the fact that their hearts were out of alignment with God, and it cost them their lives. At some point along the way of life, they hit a curb, blew out a tire, and found themselves broken down in a ditch, wondering, “How did I get here?” Well, they got there because their heart was out of alignment with God.

I do find it interesting that the example that we are given for being aligned with God has to do with money. While what we do with our money is morally neutral (Peter demonstrates that in v. 4), it is spiritually revealing. It has a way of uncovering whether our hearts are aligned with God. Jesus says it well in Matthew 6:21, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

So, here is what it looks like to live out of alignment with God: **1. Living from scarcity rather than abundance** – living for you **2. Living a duplicitous life** – presenting yourself as one way but secretly living an entirely different life **3. Living under God’s discipline and/or judgment**

So, here is my concern: Are you in alignment with God, or are you need an alignment? I really can’t answer that for you. I am not entirely sure you can answer that for yourself. What I am sure of is that if we ask God, He can reveal it to you.

Let’s go to the Lord and ask Him to do that this morning.

[TIME OF PRAYER]

Some have asked, “Were Ananias and Sapphira saved?” Though we can never really know the answer to that question on this side of heaven, the context suggests they were. They were included in those who had witnessed the radical movement of the Spirit in Jerusalem and were a part of the church.

The important piece for us to know is this story demonstrates just how serious God is about our hearts being aligned with Him, and it shows us the fruit of a life surrendered to Him and the danger of being out of alignment with Him.

So, let's choose alignment. Let's be right with Him, live right with Him, and make sure our hearts are in alignment with Him.