

## **Ananias and Sapphira: An Alternate Script**

**[Taking cue from Anna Carter Florence who suggests experimenting with alternate verbs and ways of playing out the script. Cf. *Rehearsing the Scripture*, pp.139-140]**

*In this alternative account of the infamous couple from Acts 5, we observe the struggle of speaking truthfully about money and possessions in the community of faith. Rather than this story ending with Ananias and Sapphira's death (as in Acts 5), they take an alternate course of action that offers a challenge for the church today as it continues to struggle to talk truthfully about our relationship with money and possessions.*

**Props:** *Table, bookkeeping supplies, scrolls, land title paper.*

**Setting/Scene:** *Sapphira rushes into the room while Ananias is looking at the accounting/books.*

**Sapphira:** Ananias, Ananias! Did you hear what Barnabas did?

**Ananias:** Barnabas? Whose Barnabas?

**Sapphira:** Oh, right. I mean Joseph from Cyprus. But he's called Barnabas now, which means "Son of encouragement." The Apostles gave him that name because he just sold a field that belonged to him, took the money, and laid it at the Apostles' feet to help with the needs of the community.

**Ananias:** *[Surprised]* Which field? It wasn't the nice wheat field back in Cyprus, was it?

**Sapphira:** Yes! That was the one.

**Ananias:** Wow. That was a good piece of land. *[confused]* Why would he sell it?

**Sapphira:** After the recent meeting with the Stewardship committee, the Apostles put out a plea for extra financial support to help with the poor in our community and this is how Barnabas responded!

**Ananias:** *[still thinking...]* By selling his field and giving the money to the Apostles?

**Sapphira:** Yup. Gave it away. And it's not as though this was a small gesture either – that field was a significant source of income for him.

**Ananias:** He's like the fourth person in our community in the last while to do something like that. I know the Apostles have said that the Holy Spirit is calling all of us to re-think our attachment to money and possessions, but I'm not 100% convinced selling off land is the best investment strategy. Aren't people worried that if they do things like that, they'll end up broke and maybe even have to work as slaves to get by?

**Sapphira:** I don't know, but...Ananias, don't you think we should try to help too? We're hardly at risk for becoming broke at this point.

**Ananias:** Sapphira, our servant just finished helping me with our books. With our investment properties, we are doing really well for ourselves. I mean, we're not filthy rich but if we stick to our current financial plan without adding more expenses or giving anything away, our future will be pretty much secure and then some. I'm not so sure we should mess with the budget at this point. Have the Apostles asked us specifically for financial support?

**Sapphira:** No, they keep on stressing that this type of giving is voluntary – no one is being forced or coerced to give anything but...they also did report on all the needs in the community right now and so many have responded. Barnabas is just the latest. Don't you want people to see us as an encouragement too?

**Ananias:** I do but, if we sell any of our properties, our standard of living is going to change, you realize that right? We'll have to be a lot more conscious about our spending, we'll have to pull back on some of those luxuries and extras that we enjoy. We'll have to live more simply. Are you prepared to do that?

**Sapphira:** I guess I hadn't thought about that. Well...what if we gave just a little bit to start?

**Ananias:** Yeah, we could...*[thinking]*. *[Conflicted]* But then some "Encouragement" people will think of us as after all the others have given so generously. *[Pauses, looking at paperwork]* Here's a thought: our property in the Eastern quarter, what if we sold it, took 60 percent of the proceeds from

that, and gave it to the Apostles? I'll take the remaining 40 percent and invest it elsewhere – there's a new building project the Roman government is looking for investors for that promises good returns – maybe if we opt in, we could even recoup some of the donation.

**Sapphira:** That sounds great! I'm sure we'll be fine even if we give that much. Besides, we're not the one's in our community struggling financially at the moment and this could be a major help. So, should I set up a meeting with the Apostles to talk this over?

**Ananias:** Well [*cautiously*], hold on though. I'm thinking Joseph...or "Barnabas'" property would have sold for well over 1 ½ times ours and he gave *all* the proceeds away. [*Skeptically*] Doesn't that make him look good...

**Sapphira:** Well, it makes him look generous, yes. Is that a problem? He gave in response to the Spirit and according to his conscience.

**Ananias:** [*Sarcastically*] Oh, come on Sapphira, don't be naïve. He may have given generously from the proceeds of the capital of his field, but he's also gained something in return.

**Sapphira:** He has?

**Ananias:** He most certainly has! His social capital just skyrocketed. He was even given a different name, for goodness' sake!

**Sapphira:** I think you're over-thinking this. Barnabas is a good guy and he's trying to help.

**Ananias:** [*Scoffs*] I don't think so.... [*Lightbulb moment*] Hey! Ok...I've got a plan. If we are going to make this donation, we've got to have our stories straight. [*Secretly*] No one needs to know we only gave sixty percent. We'll just say, "We sold our property in the Easter quarter and are giving the proceeds to help with the poor in the community." No one needs to know that we only gave sixty percent of the proceeds from the sale.

**Sapphira:** Ananias, by saying it that way the Apostles would assume we gave *all* the proceeds from the sale. If we don't specify what percentage we gave from the sale, it would make what we tell them a lie.

**Ananias:** Well...not so much a lie.... Rather *[pauses]* an omission of fine detail.

**Sapphira:** I don't know, Ananias. If we do this, wouldn't this qualify as putting the Spirit of the Lord to the test? I mean, aside from trying to put on a false persona to gain social capital, which frankly we already have, there's no reason not to be honest. The proceeds of our land are at our disposal, and no one is telling us what or how much to give. This is a matter of conscience, Ananias. Let's give what we're ready to give and be truthful about that.

**Ananias:** *[Begrudgingly]* I guess you're right. It's just, well.... will the community see us as selfish? Will they admire Barnabas more if we only give some of the proceeds? *[Sarcastically]* What are they going to name me, "Son of...at least something"?

**Sapphira:** I don't know, Ananias. But does it matter?

*[Pause]*

**Ananias:** *[Repentantly]* You know, I feel ashamed to admit it, but there is a part of me that would rather fall down and die than talk truthfully in our community about our money and possessions.

*[Quietly reflecting]*

**Sapphira:** You know what, this whole discussion has taught me something.

**Ananias:** What's that?

**Sapphira:** Talking truthfully about money and possessions is hard.

**Ananias:** You can say that again.

**Sapphira:** *And* that talking truthfully about money and possessions is really important for our discipleship. We need help, Ananias.

**Ananias:** We do?

**Sapphira:** Yes, we can't hold back what we've learned from this conversation. We need to talk with the Apostles and the whole community to figure out what God is calling us to do with our wealth and privilege.

**Ananias:** I don't know, Sapphira. Isn't this one area where we could keep matters a bit more...private.

**Sapphira:** I think that's part of the problem, Ananias. The new community Jesus has drawn together isn't a collective of individuals or couples with privileged private lives that get together simply as a social club. This movement we've joined is a public revolution, bringing together the rich and the poor, the freeborn and slaves to shape a new world that includes a new relationship to money and possessions.

**Ananias:** *[Reflective]* All things in common, right?

**Sapphira:** Right. You know, this whole time we've been struggling to figure out how to keep our own financial and social future secure as a privileged married couple, but maybe God is calling us to creative new visions for what to do with our wealth and privilege in this community borne of the Spirit.

**Ananias:** You know, Sapphira, I think you're right. *[Lightbulb moment]* And honestly, don't you think we will be a greater encouragement to our community if we share this conversation we've just had? That way, everyone can share together about the struggles we have speaking truthfully about money and possessions in our community.

**Sapphira:** Good idea. I'll set up a meeting with the Apostles and ask if we can share our story with the community.

**Narrator:** From that time on, Ananias and Sapphira shared with the community of Jesus' disciples their struggles around what to do with the privilege their wealth and possessions afforded them. As they shared, the Spirit moved, and awe came upon the community. The community of disciples challenged themselves in greater measure to take up Jesus' call to share generously and not to store up treasures on earth. The disadvantaged among them were cared for, many were encouraged, and *all* were rich in Spirit. What will your community do?

*FIN*