

Session 5



EMPOWERED

Session 5: Empowered for Holiness

Primary Scripture

Acts 5:1–16

Introduction — Why Holiness Often Feels Uncomfortable

When many people hear the word “holiness,” they immediately think of:

- rules
- shame
- legalism
- judgment
- or impossible standards

Others avoid the topic altogether because they associate holiness with:

- hypocrisy
- spiritual performance
- or churches that cared more about appearances than transformation

But in Scripture, holiness is not primarily about religious image management.

Holiness means being formed into a life that increasingly reflects the character and presence of God.

The Holy Spirit does not only comfort believers.

The Spirit transforms believers.

And transformation requires honesty.

Acts 5 presents one of the most uncomfortable moments in the entire Book of Acts.

It interrupts the joy and momentum of the early Church with a story about deception, spiritual dishonesty, and reverence before God.

At first glance, the passage can feel harsh or confusing.

But underneath it is an important truth:

The Holy Spirit was not given merely to create emotional experiences or outward excitement.

The Spirit was given to form a truthful, healthy, holy people.

This session explores an important question:

How does the Holy Spirit shape believers into lives of integrity, honesty, and spiritual authenticity?

Because Spirit-led living is not only about power.

It is also about transformation.

Movement 1 — The Holy Spirit Cares About Integrity

Acts 5 introduces Ananias and Sapphira.

Read Scripture: Acts 5:1–11

At first, the issue can seem confusing.

The problem was not that they failed to give all their money.

Peter makes that clear.

Read Scripture: Acts 5:3–4

The deeper issue was dishonesty.

They wanted the appearance of spiritual devotion without truthful surrender.

This matters because the Holy Spirit is not interested in:

- image management
- religious performance
- or carefully constructed appearances

The Spirit forms truthfulness.

The early Church was becoming known for:

- generosity
- unity
- sincerity
- and devotion

Ananias and Sapphira attempted to imitate the appearance of spiritual maturity while hiding dishonesty underneath.

And Acts makes clear:

God takes spiritual integrity seriously.

This passage is uncomfortable because it confronts something deeply human.

Many people want:

- the appearance of faithfulness without
- the vulnerability of true transformation

Read Scripture: Psalm 51:6

Read Scripture: Proverbs 10:9

The Holy Spirit works in truth.

Not perfection.

Not performance.

Truth.

Reflection

Where are you most tempted to present an image of yourself that feels more spiritually mature than what is actually true?

Why is honesty before God often difficult?

Movement 2 — The Holy Spirit Forms Authenticity, Not Performance

One of the dangers in religious environments is learning how to appear spiritually healthy while remaining emotionally or spiritually disconnected underneath.

People often learn:

- the right language
- the right behaviors
- the right image
- and the right expectations

while quietly hiding:

- fear
- struggle

- resentment
- pride
- addiction
- shame
- or exhaustion

Acts 5 reminds us that the Holy Spirit is not interested in outward performance disconnected from inward truthfulness.

Read Scripture: Luke 18:9–14

Read Scripture: 1 John 1:5–9

Throughout Scripture, spiritual growth begins with honesty.

Not:

- pretending
- exaggerating
- or hiding

The Holy Spirit cannot transform what we refuse to bring truthfully before God.

This is important because many people assume holiness means:

“Never struggle.”

But biblical holiness is not pretending struggle does not exist.

Holiness means increasingly allowing God to transform every area of life through truth, surrender, repentance, and grace.

The Spirit produces:

- honesty
- humility
- conviction
- and increasing alignment between public faith and private life.

This is why conviction matters.

Conviction is not condemnation.

Condemnation says:

“You are hopeless.”

Conviction says:

“This part of your life needs healing, surrender, or transformation.”

The Holy Spirit convicts because the Spirit is forming believers into healthier and more truthful people.

Reflection

What is the difference between conviction and shame?

Where in your life do you most need honesty, healing, or surrender right now?

Movement 3 — Holiness Is About Formation, Not Fear

Acts says that “great fear” came upon the people after this event.

Read Scripture: Acts 5:11

This does not mean terror in the sense of emotional panic.

In Scripture, the “fear of the Lord” often means reverence, awe, and recognition that God is holy and not casual.

Modern culture often treats everything casually:

- truth
- commitment
- relationships
- worship
- and even spirituality

But Acts reminds believers that the presence of God is not something trivial.

The Holy Spirit is not:

- a spiritual accessory
- an emotional atmosphere

- or a tool for personal image

The Spirit is the presence of the living God among His people.

Read Scripture: Proverbs 9:10

Read Scripture: Hebrews 12:28–29

This kind of reverence is actually healthy.

Why?

Because reverence protects believers from turning spirituality into performance or self-centeredness.

And importantly:

holiness in Scripture is not primarily about withdrawal from the world.

It is about increasing alignment with the character of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit forms people who become:

- truthful
- compassionate
- humble
- trustworthy
- generous
- and faithful

Holiness is not cold perfectionism.

It is transformation into Christlikeness.

Reflection

What emotions or ideas come to mind when you hear the word “holiness”?

How does Scripture’s picture of holiness differ from unhealthy religious performance?

Movement 4 — The Holy Spirit Produces Healthy Witness

Acts 5 does not end with fear and judgment alone.

It continues with healing, growth, and powerful witness.

Read Scripture: Acts 5:12–16

The same Holy Spirit who convicts also:

- heals
- restores
- empowers
- and draws people toward Jesus

This is important because holiness and mission belong together.

A healthy witness requires integrity.

People are often deeply skeptical of Christianity not because believers claim to follow Jesus...

...but because they encounter:

- hypocrisy
- dishonesty
- manipulation
- or performative religion

The Holy Spirit forms believers whose lives increasingly reflect:

- honesty
- humility
- compassion
- and consistency

Not perfection.

But authenticity.

Read Scripture: Matthew 5:8

Read Scripture: Galatians 5:22–25

The fruit of the Spirit grows gradually over time.

Spirit-led holiness is not instant perfection.

It is ongoing formation.

And importantly:
this transformation happens through relationship with God—not through fear-based pressure.

The goal is not:

“Become impressive.”

The goal is:

“Become increasingly open to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.”

Reflection

How does integrity affect the credibility of Christian witness?

Which fruit of the Spirit do you most long to see grow in your life right now?

A Note on Holiness and Grace

Some Christians hear “holiness” and immediately think:

- legalism
- impossible expectations
- or spiritual pressure

Others avoid holiness entirely because they fear becoming judgmental or rigid.

But biblical holiness is neither harsh perfectionism nor careless spirituality.

The Holy Spirit forms believers through:

- grace
- truth
- conviction
- repentance
- and ongoing transformation

The goal is not image management.

The goal is becoming people whose lives increasingly reflect the character of Jesus.

Holiness is not opposed to grace.

Holiness is what grace is slowly producing in us.

Formation Practice (This Week)

Practice: Honest Prayer Before God

Each day this week:

Step 1 — Read Slowly

Read Acts 5:1–16 slowly each day.

Pay attention to:

- the seriousness of honesty
- the reverence surrounding God’s presence
- and the contrast between performance and authenticity

Step 2 — Practice Honest Reflection

Spend time asking:

“Where am I tempted to hide, exaggerate, perform, or avoid truth?”

Be specific.

Do not shame yourself.

Simply become honest.

Step 3 — Pray a Prayer of Surrender

Pray:

“Holy Spirit, help me become truthful and open before God.”

Step 4 — Practice One Small Act of Integrity

Choose one intentional act of honesty this week:

- admit a mistake
- apologize sincerely
- tell the truth clearly
- ask for help

- confess struggle honestly
- or stop pretending in an area where you have been hiding

Do not aim for perfection.

Aim for truthfulness.

Living It Out

Where are you most tempted toward spiritual performance instead of honesty?

What might it look like to invite the Holy Spirit into that area of your life?

What is one step toward greater authenticity you can take this week?

Final Reflection

The Holy Spirit was not given merely to create powerful moments.

The Spirit was given to transform people.

Acts reminds us that God is not interested in:

- polished appearances
- spiritual performance
- or carefully managed religious image

The Holy Spirit forms:

- truthful people
- humble people
- repentant people
- and increasingly Christlike people

The question is not:

“Can I appear spiritual?”

The question is:

“Am I becoming more open to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit?”

Weekly Prayer

Holy Spirit,

Help me live truthfully before God and others.

Where I am hiding,
bring honesty.

Where I am pretending,
bring humility.

Where I need conviction,
bring transformation.

Teach me to value authenticity more than appearance,
and surrender more than performance.

Continue forming my life into the character of Jesus.

Amen.