

ACTS 5:1-11

Ananias and Sapphira

Memory Verse

“Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.”

Acts 5:4b

Real-life Problems

Selfishness—All of us, at some point, will feel selfish; and almost as often, we will act selfishly. Maybe we'll put down our friends to make ourselves look better, or we'll keep something to ourselves that could help someone close to us. Our selfishness can show up as jealousy, anger, dishonesty, or any number of other ways—all of which are sinful. Our selfishness usually hurts other people, but it always hurts us and fractures our relationship with the Lord.

The Good News

Our selfishness always hurts us and, like all sin, it drives us away from God. The good news is that Jesus, in paying for the guilt of our sin and selfishness, has also released us from its power. As a result of Christ's work, we're free to pursue God and His kingdom rather than ourselves and our own desires.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: How do you typically react when someone does something that hurts you?

Idea #2: In which areas of your life are you most selfish? Your time? Your relationships?

Idea #3: Who is the least selfish person you know? Do you enjoy being around them? Why or why not?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever

What is grace?

God's undeserved love for sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the book of Acts?

Luke wrote Acts as a history of the earliest days of the church.

2) Who was the original audience of this book?

The original audience of Luke, narrowly speaking, is Theophilus. More broadly, though, Luke has written Acts with elements that appeal to both Jew and Greek, so the ultimate audience appears to be any Christian from any ethnicity.

3) Why was the book of Acts written?

The book of Acts was written to record the works of God in the early church.

What's going on?

REMIND

Because of Jesus' work for us and in us, our biggest problem—our sin—has been solved. That being the case, we're free to live courageously for God.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) What Ananias and Sapphira did.
- 2) What happened to them.
- 3) What this passage shows us about who God is.

Read

Read **Acts 5:1-11** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) What did Ananias and Sapphira do, according to Acts 5:1-2?

They sold a piece of property but withheld some of the profits from the church.

2) What does Peter say has happened to Ananias (v. 3)?

He asks why Satan has filled his heart, implying that Satan has indeed come to live in his heart.

3) While the land remained unsold, to whom did it belong (v. 4)?

Ananias and Sapphira. In fact, Peter indicates that even the profits from the field would have been theirs to do with as they pleased.

4) To whom has Ananias lied (v. 4)?

Ananias has lied not just to man—not merely to Peter—but to God.

5) What happens to Ananias as a result of this (v. 5)?

He falls down and breathes his last; he dies.

6) How do the people who hear of this react to it (v. 5)?

Great fear comes upon them.

7) After Peter brings Sapphira in, he asks her about the price for which the field was sold. She says the same thing Ananias does. What is Peter's reaction (vv. 8-9)?

Peter asks how it is that they have agreed to test the Spirit of the Lord, and he mentions that there are people at the door ready to carry out her body, just as they did her husband's.

8) What happens to Sapphira then?

She dies.

9) How do the people gathered there react (v. 11)?

Great fear comes upon the church and everyone who hears of what happened.

B. SO WHAT?

1) Notice that Peter says that Satan has filled Ananias. This is almost directly opposite of the New Testament idea of Jesus filling believers (or living inside them). What do you think are some important differences between a person like Ananias, in whom Satan lives, and a believer, in whom Jesus lives?

The difference, at least with this passage in view, is at the very least that those in whom Satan lives are selfish for their own glory and act in their own interest with no concern for God— as Ananias seems to have done. Those in whom Jesus lives are (imperfectly) zealous and desirous of God's glory. The key difference between Ananias and a believer is that Ananias lies for his own interest until the end, while believers, though they still sin, always return to Jesus in repentance and receive His grace freely.

2) Do you think it was sinful of Ananias and Sapphira to keep back some of the profits for themselves?

Though the passage doesn't say clearly one way or the other, Peter's remarks in verse 4—that the land belonged to Ananias and Sapphira as long as it was unsold and that it was at their disposal even after it was sold—seem to indicate that the land and money was theirs to do with as they saw fit. The issue was that they lied to the Holy Spirit about how much they were giving.

3) Why do you think Ananias and Sapphira lied about how much of their profits they were giving to the church?

The text doesn't tell us specifically why they lied, but we can guess that it had something to do with the fact that they may have wanted to earn praise from the rest of the church for their generosity. This, at its root, is selfishness—a desire for praise and admiration as opposed to faithfulness to God. It's probably not unfaithful to keep some of their proceeds back; the issue is that they wanted both the benefit of having the profit themselves and the glory of having given it away.

4) Why do you think the punishment for Ananias and Sapphira was so severe?

Answers might vary a bit here, but make sure your students know that the severity of punishment is commensurate with the status of the one offended. For example, lying to a friend might result in strain on that friendship, but lying to God is a much more serious matter because God occupies a much higher position than humans do.

5) Do you think we should always expect punishment like what Ananias and Sapphira received when we're dishonest with God?

No. Keep in mind two things: First, this event happened at a very specific time in the history of the church. Signs and wonders of both positive and negative varieties were being performed all over the place, but now that seems to be less the case. Second, it appears that Ananias and Sapphira were false converts—people who claimed to know Jesus and be in a relationship with Him but in fact were not. Since this is the case, the punishment they would receive eternally was simply drawn into the present. Since they were not united to Jesus by faith, they had no sacrifice to cover their sins. Thus, they had to bear the responsibility and punishment for their sins themselves.

C. NOW WHAT?**1) Upon your reading of this passage, what are the feelings you experience about God?**

Answers will vary here, but it's natural for students to feel some fear as a result of this. God is gracious and loving toward His people, but He's also just, meaning the penalty for sin must be paid. For us as Christians, that sin is fully and finally paid for on the cross. Non-believers, though, must pay that debt themselves, as Ananias and Sapphira were forced to do. Impress upon your students that they won't be called upon to pay a debt for their sin—Jesus has already paid that debt completely and fully for them. So, while the situation with Ananias and Sapphira shows us a lot about selfishness and God's justice, a similar situation won't take place with believers.

2) Christians aren't like Ananias and Sapphira in that they will not be judged so severely for their selfishness. However, Christians are like Ananias and Sapphira, and every other human, in that their natural inclination is toward selfish gain. Can you resonate with this? Why or why not? Do you find yourself being selfish, maybe without even realizing it?

Answers may vary, but push your students to realize that they really are sinfully selfish down to the core of their beings. Even if they don't notice selfish actions all the time, they can probably think of some selfish thoughts or inclinations they have on a very regular basis.

Scrooge McDuck

One of the cartoons I watched frequently as a kid featured a character named Scrooge McDuck. He was a duck, shockingly, who accumulated and hoarded a ton of money. He gathered so much, in fact, that he often swam in it. He appears early on in his cartoon career as a greedy antagonist. This is interesting, because we often think that with more money would come more happiness. And yet, the more money Scrooge acquires, the less content he is with what he has. This is the fruit of selfishness—of living for our own gain primarily. There will never be enough, and we will never be content. But, if we give of our gifts to others and seek the Lord's kingdom over our own, there will be no end to our joy and contentment, because that's what we were created to do.

3) What is your reaction to realizing the depths of your own selfishness?

Answers will vary, but it's important to help your students realize that understanding the depth of your sinfulness, while certainly a bummer, should lead us to a greater joy in, and adoration of, Jesus and His grace. Jesus saved us and continues to love us even in our selfishness and sin. How wonderful is that?

Main takeaway

Though our selfishness drives us away from God, Jesus' work on our behalf repairs that relationship so that we don't have to bear the punishment for our own selfishness. What's more, Jesus continues to work in us through His Spirit, causing us to love His glory more than our own.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

You'll never escape selfishness and sin this side of heaven. But by God's grace, you've been saved from the penalty of it, and the Lord is working on you even now to make you less selfish and more like Jesus day by day.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Lord, we're thankful that You're just and that You don't let evil go unpunished. We're thankful in the same breath that You sent Your Son, Jesus, to pay the price for our evil. Help us to keep in mind that that's how much You love us—enough to send Your selfless Son to pay for our selfish sin. Help us to love You more as we cast our eyes on that glorious grace! Amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) When was the last time you can recall being outwardly selfish?
- 2) Who is the most selfless person you know?
- 3) Ask the Lord to reveal to you places in your life in which you're selfish or sinful and don't even realize it. And then ask Him to show you grace and love in the midst of those places, and to help you grow in them.

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) What does selfishness look like to you? How would you define it?
- 2) How often has being selfish led to a good outcome in your life?
- 3) Do you regret moments of selflessness or selfishness more? Why?