

TAKEAWAY:

God preserves the holiness of His church while producing generosity through grace.

INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS:

- Share about a time when someone's generosity made a significant impact on your life.
- When have you faced a situation where obeying God required you to defy human authority or cultural expectations, and what helped you choose faithfulness over comfort?

UNDERSTANDING:

Have a group member read Acts 4:32-5:11

- How did this sermon help you better understand this passage of scripture? Is there anything that was mentioned during the sermon that stuck out to you?
- Read Acts 4:32-37. What characterized the early church's unity and generosity? What motivated them to share so freely?
- What was the specific sin of Ananias and Sapphira? Why do you think their judgment was so severe?
- How does verse 11 describe the church's response? What does "great fear" mean in this context?
- How does the fear of the Lord differ from being afraid of God?

APPLICATION:

- Where are you tempted to pretend to be more spiritual than you really are? How does hypocrisy damage Christian community?
- Share one relationship where you want to be bolder, and have someone follow up with you next week.
- How should a healthy fear of God shape our daily lives?

GO DEEPER:

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material.

You can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and to deepen your study of our text from this week. Here are two "Going Deeper" discussion prompts that build upon the above provided questions without repeating them:

God of the Second Chance: Both Elmer Towns (co-founder of Liberty University) and Harry Whittaker (author of *Studies in the Gospels*), argue that the Joseph/Barnabas (“son of encouragement”) of Acts 4:36 and the rich young man of Matt 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30 are likely the same person.

- How might this idea shape our understanding of delayed repentance, the enduring patience of Christ's love, and the ultimate triumph of grace over the idol of wealth? Do you know of other specific examples where this has happened?
- If true, what specific spiritual or psychological shifts may have occurred in this rich young man's heart during the intervening years to change his heart? Relatedly read Matt 21:28-32.
- What's the difference between "godly sorrow" and repentance versus being sorry for being caught, sorry for reaping the results of ungodliness.
- Initial grief or resistance to Christ's commands can sometimes be the painful first step of a genuine, inward conviction by God's Spirit. Why? How so?
- Against Paul's viewpoint on the matter, Barnabas wanted to take his nephew Mark on the second missionary journey, even though Mark had forsaken/deserted them on their first trip (Acts 15:36-40). If Towns is correct, how might Barnabas's own personal history of failing Jesus' initial test have uniquely equipped him to show profound grace and patience to others who stumbled? What personal examples can you share with the group of something similar in your life or that of others?
- If Towns is correct, how does the narrative arc of Barnabas from a "failed" seeker to being a key part of the nascent church provide practical hope for those who are praying for loved ones who are brought up in church and/or had a "form of godliness" (2 Tim 3:1-5) but are now not Christ followers?
- Chad Bird states, "[God] keeps no record of how many chances he's given you. For in the end, it's not about how many times you've messed up, but how constant, how unwavering, is the Father's love for you in Jesus Christ." Scripture depicts God as being patient, a God of a second, third, etc. chance and inspires Christ followers to do the same (Lam 3:19-24; Jonah 3:1-2; Matt 18:21-22; 1 Tim 1:16). In what ways have you extended another chance to someone? How can we pray for you to have grace to extend that chance to someone?

Ownership vs. Stewardship: If grace operates not merely as the forgiveness of sins but as power that breaks the bondage of materialism, how does a believer actively transition from a cultural mindset of ownership to a biblical lifestyle of stewardship?

- The sermon's main idea asserts that God produces generosity through grace. Therefore, generosity in the biblical sense is not a moral achievement attained through willpower, nor is it the result of guilt manipulation. It is the inevitable fruit of a heart that has been overwhelmed by the grace of God in Christ Jesus. When a believer truly comprehends that Christ impoverished Himself so that humanity might become spiritually rich, the grip of earthly wealth is broken. The believer ceases to view themselves as an autonomous owner of capital and begins to view themselves as an appointed steward of God's resources, tasked with deploying those resources for the flourishing of the kingdom.
- Martin Luther wrote, ""There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the heart, the conversion of the mind, and the conversion of the purse." How does the physical practice of the early believers laying their proceeds "at the apostles' feet" symbolize a total surrender of financial autonomy and personal control? What does this look like in the context of the modern church?
- What practical, daily disciplines can you adopt to continuously remind yourself that everything you possess is leased from God, not owned by you and I? In what ways does giving sacrificially act as an active spiritual discipline that mortifies the flesh, subdues greed, and starves the idol of materialism?
- How does the radical, open-handed generosity modeled in Acts 4 directly confront and challenge the consumerist mindset prevalent in highly affluent modern cultures?

- How can the church better articulate the connection between experiencing God's justifying grace and exhibiting tangible, costly compassion for the marginalized?

Quotes:

- "The story of Ananias is to the Book of Acts what the story of Achan is to the book of Joshua. In both narratives an act of deceit interrupts the victorious progress of the people of God." F. F. Bruce
- "If the devil's first tactic was to destroy the Church by force from without, his second was to destroy it by falsehood from within." John Stott
- "The deceitfulness of the heart of man appears in no one thing so much as this of spiritual pride and self-righteousness. The subtlety of Satan appears in its height, in his managing persons with respect to this sin." Jonathan Edwards

GROUP EXERCISE: The "Spiritual Resume" Audit: Challenge people to identify one area where they're tempted to exaggerate their spiritual life (prayer time, giving, Bible reading, service).

PRAYER: Create a moment of silent confession specifically for "spiritual inflation."