

ACTS

GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 2

CONVERSATION STARTER

If you could have an unlimited amount of any one thing (other than money), what would you choose and why?

WINS AND LOSSES IN THE EARLY CHURCH

As we read inspiring stories about the early Church living with radical generosity, worship, and hospitality, Luke drops in a disturbing story about two people who go off the rails. Isn't it somewhat comforting to know that even the early followers of Jesus made mistakes? What's *not* comforting is what happens next.

While everyone around them gives all they have to the community, Ananias and Sapphira hoard resources for themselves—out of greed or anxiety, or some other more complicated reason, we don't know. But their decision costs them their lives. Why does God react so strongly to their deception? There are likely two reasons. First, we must recognize the early Church is at a pivotal moment in redemptive history. God is creating a new kind of community, just like He did at Mount Sinai after the Exodus story. He needs these early Jesus followers to understand the importance of the Kingdom they are building—there can be no room for compromise. During times like this, we often see God dealing with deception, idolatry, and other sins more harshly.

Second, throughout Acts, Luke is training us to view these early Jesus followers as a new kind of Temple—a community that mediates God's presence and helps others understand what it means to be part of God's kingdom. The Old Testament details what happens when Priests approach the Temple with anything less than the reverence and respect God demands (Just read [Leviticus 10](#)). One tradition describes how High Priests would tie a rope around their waist when entering the Holy of Holies, so if they died, their bodies could be recovered. God's presence is not to be trifled with. Luke wants us to understand the great privilege and responsibility of being God's Temple—His

dwelling place and representatives. As N.T. Wright says, “if you want to be a community which seems to be taking the place of the Temple of the living God you mustn’t be surprised if the living God takes you seriously, seriously enough to make it clear that there is no such thing as cheap grace.”

This doesn’t mean you shouldn’t feel bothered by this story or stories like these. It does mean we’re called to recognize that the same Spirit that filled the apostles now fills us, and that is both a serious responsibility and a tremendous invitation.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What stuck out to you about the reading from this week? Was there a verse or idea that was particularly meaningful or challenging for you?
2. In Acts 5:29, Peter boldly declares, “We must obey God rather than human beings! Who do you find yourself regularly trying to please or appease?”
3. Peter and John are described as “unschooled and ordinary.” Yet, God uses them as bold witnesses to the Gospel. Are there times when you feel unqualified to share about Jesus? How is this passage speaking to you in the midst of that?
4. Many times, God wants us to be part of answering the very prayers we pray. What are you praying for this week? How might the Spirit be nudging you to partner with God in the answering of your own prayers?
5. This week, we got to see the different ways the disciples suffer and endure trouble in the name of Jesus. Why do you think the disciples are able to rejoice even as they are being persecuted for their faith in Jesus? How does that change your perspective on suffering?

WEEKLY PRACTICE

The Psalms are not just pretty poetic words, they also make for great prayers! Because the Psalms capture a wide range of human emotions—fear, anxiety, worship, grief, joy, love—they are a great way to join the prayers of countless faithful believers of God who faced similar highs and lows. Read Psalm 118 not just as words on a page but as a prayer you can participate in. Here are a few tips:

Read Psalm 118 through once from start to finish. Now, read it a second time and consider how the words speak to you. What stands out? What are you feeling? What situations or circumstances in your present reality are drawn to the front of your mind? What themes do you notice? Now read it again a third time. Don't just read the words this time—pray them back to God! Don't be afraid to change the language and add thoughts of your own. Summarize each verse as if you were talking directly with God.