

Acts of the Holy Spirit - 6
Spiritual Integrity – Week of Oct 23, 2016
Bay Park Life Groups – Leader

Rosemary M Dowsett is noted for saying: *If Acts were a novel it would be a blockbuster thriller!*¹ Acts 5 certainly doesn't disappoint – there's growth, miracles, arrests, authority clashes, and even two untimely deaths! The book of Acts is more than basic Church history; it's our vital link to understanding how God works across time, culture, and denomination. He even works in the face of resistance. Our prayer is that your time in Acts will deepen your experience of God's forever presence in your daily life.

The chapter is long and so we tried to keep the questions to a minimum. Some of the questions will naturally lead your group to more significant dialogue than others. As a leader you need to gauge when to slow down and when to speed up, even when to skip. Having gone through the questions yourself beforehand is vital to being able to adjust accordingly. The goal is to have a spiritually enlightening dialogue, not to finish all the questions. Make sure no one person dominates the conversation. Be sure to leave time for group prayer at the end. Have a great time together!

Read Acts 5:1-11 together

1. Peter is clear – Ananias' sin is that of lying to God (vv 3&4).
 - a. What lie got you in the most trouble as a child?
 - b. Why is lying so harmful to the faith of believers and their witness?

The real, deep-level problem about lying is that it misuses, or abuses, the highest faculty we possess: the gift of expressing in clear speech the reality of who we are, what we think, and how we feel. . . . when we tell lies we not only hold heaven and earth apart; we twist earth itself, so that it serves our own interests. Lying is, ultimately, a way of declaring that we don't like the world the way it is and we will pretend that it is somehow more the way we want it to be. At that level, it is a way of saying that we don't trust God the creator to look after his world and sort it out in his own time and way. And it is precisely the claim of the early church that God the creator has acted in Jesus Christ to sort the world out and set it right. Those who make that claim, and live by that claim, must expect to be judged by that claim. N T Wright²

2. With verse 3 in mind, which of these statements best describes you and why?
 - a. *I am rather nervous of talk about the devil and evil spirits.*
 - b. *I would like to be more discerning spiritually and sense God's presence more.*
 - c. *I am more conscious of the presence of Satan's activity than that of the Holy Spirit.*
 - d. *I am more conscious of the Holy Spirit's presence than of Satan.*

¹ Todd C Penner, Contextualizing Acts, (Society of Bible Literature, 2003) p 319

² N T Wright, *Acts for Everyone – Part One*, (John Know Press, 2006)

- e. *I am not particularly conscious of either...or I am only aware on rare occasions.*

It's important to distinguish being tempted by Satan from being controlled by Satan. Peter didn't offer to cast demons or Satan out of Ananias. Peter's reply in verse 4 clearly shows that Ananias always had a choice. As believers we don't need to fear being overpowered by Satan, but we can count on being tempted by Satan with false promises of hope and life. Peter himself understood what it meant to be tempted by Satan's agenda versus God's agenda (Matt 16:23). Like Peter, Ananias and Sapphira, we have a God given choice to be filled with the Holy Spirit – Ephesians 5:15-20. Jesus secured that choice for us in his death and resurrection. The key then is to be continually praying and seeking the filling of the Holy Spirit, otherwise Satan will gladly help fill the void with powerfully tempting lies and deadly counterfeit values and agendas. Satan's temptation is always fear based and self-centered. God's will is love based and other focused.

Together read 5:12-16

3. Though Acts 5:1-11 makes for a very uncomfortable read, the fact remains that the consequences of Ananias and Sapphira's actions had a healthy impact on the church and their witness. Scripture tells us that *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom* - Proverbs 1:7, 10. What does the fear of the Lord look like for a follower of Jesus Christ? How can we cultivate a healthy appreciation for the holiness of God?
4. *What exactly does Luke mean when he tells us that "No one else dared join them?" He does not mean that new believers did not become part of the church, for verse 14 declares they did. He might mean that no one dared join them on his or her own authority or perhaps that no one dared antagonize them or prevent their meetings. Most likely this is a geographical reference. Many new believers became part of the congregation, but they did not meet in Solomon's Colonnade since that seemed to be the center of Sadducean attack. (Kenneth Gangel³)*

On the one hand an awestruck reserve... on the other great missionary successes. This paradoxical situation has often recurred since then. The presence of the living God, whether manifest through preaching or miracles or both, is alarming to some and appealing to others. Some are frightened away, while others are drawn to faith. (John Stott⁴)

Was there a time you when you kept your distance from Christians? What changed? How do you deal with people who keep a safe distance from you because of your faith?

³ Gangel, K. O. (1998). *Acts* (Vol. 5, p. 76). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁴ John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, (Intervarsity Press, 1990) p 113

5. Miracles are a hot topic that unfortunately doesn't get enough airtime. Here's your opportunity to dig deeper. With verses 15-16 in mind, what's your take on miracles then and now? Can you back your answer up with Scripture?

The text doesn't clearly say that Peter's shadow healed, nor does it say it didn't. It's certainly different from the majority of the miracles in Acts which are personal and relational – think of Peter looking the lame man in the eyes and grabbing him by the hand. The Bible is decidedly against miracles that are based in superstition or magic (Acts 8:9-25, 19:19), which makes Luke's recording of Peter's shadow a bit of a head scratcher. What we do know is that:

1. At times God accommodates our misguided faith to bring us to an enlightened faith. He meets us where we're at, which is always in a state of brokenness and error.
2. The New Testament miracles can be broken down into 4 categories.
 - Apostolic – Immediate, undeniable, signs of unparalleled authority. (Acts 3:6)
 - Gifted – Specific believers with occasional power. (Acts 6:8)
 - Answers to prayer. (Acts 12:5ff)
 - Divinely initiated – God's action without human partnership. (Acts 5:19)

Of all the types of miracles, what we find in Acts 5 is the Apostolic variety. Apostolic miracles affirmed that Jesus is alive and were used to build the foundation of the Church. That foundation was laid only once and so Apostolic miracles ended with Apostolic times.

3. Miracles do not occur throughout the Bible uniformly. They come in clusters and at special times. We cannot insist that miracles is a necessary sign of vitality. Why? As we can see from here, and from texts like Hebrews 2:3-4, miracles were only a means to an end — the end being the converting of people to faith in the gospel. To focus on miracles too much is to miss the principle in these verses — friends bringing friends to the church! That is a sign of a vital community. Tim Keller

Read 5:17-20 together

6. In verse 17 we discover that the religious leaders were *filled with jealousy*. The Greek word for *filled* is the same one Luke uses to describe the filling of the Holy Spirit (cf 2:4, 4:8, 31). It would be easy to lob grenades at the religious leaders for their petty jealousies, but the truth is that jealousy is a common portal that Satan uses to spiritually derail us. Think of Ananias and Sapphira, two early churchgoers. Their lives unravelled when they became jealous of the honour and attention that Joseph, aka Barnabas, was getting. Look up Proverbs 14:30, 12:12 and Ecclesiastes 4:4. Has jealousy ever undermined God's work in your life? How has God given you victory over jealousy?

7. What's your take away for this week?