

Traction gains Momentum
Week #2: Does the punishment fit the crime?

This winter we are going to see how this little movement will get momentum and move out of Jerusalem into all the world. Momentum takes effort to get and, once it is achieved, it is hard to stop.

As the video described, there is this culture of sharing in this Jesus community. People are sharing what they have even selling property to make sure no one goes without. Let's read the last verse of chapter 4.

Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

This is the guy that was being cheered in the video. He wasn't the only one who did it, but he becomes famous later in the story. Now, in contrast, there's our grim tale.

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ² and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to

God." ⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. **And great fear came upon** all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. ⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." ⁹ But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to **test the Spirit of the Lord?** Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ **And great fear came upon** the whole church and upon all who heard of these things. ¹² Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. ¹³ None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴ And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵ so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶ The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. Acts 5:1-16

Does the punishment fit the crime?

This seems **arbitrary**. Couldn't you find some person who was **secretly cheating on her husband?** Wasn't there

someone who was **human trafficking** children? Wasn't there some **war criminal** hiding out in Jerusalem? What about someone who was secretly **worshipping idols**? **Why someone who was giving a really big donation to the church?**

No grace period. No strike one and then strike two before you're out. **No mulligan**, like a chance to go back and get the rest of the money.

"Can this be a down payment with the rest later. I'm good for it. Even the mob gives you time to repay your debts. If you're late, they might rough you up a bit before you go "swimming with the fishes."

This is like being grounded for life the first time you get caught sneaking in after curfew by mom.

This is like bringing a **samurai sword** to a **filet mignon**, a **bulldozer** to weed your flowerbed. **It's overkill, literally.**

This seems so extreme. **I get the idea that you reap what you sow.** That takes a long time. This was immediate. **Judgment usually takes time.** You know that **slippery slope**, a **desire** becomes an **action**, an action becomes a **habit**, a habit becomes and lifestyle, and a lifestyle becomes a **destiny**. The destiny becomes something bad in this case, but it usually takes a long time. **But did this really hurt anybody?**

To properly understand this story that seems so over the top, we have to be honest about three key realities that are under the surface.

The first reality we have to understand is that... **They wanted to be admired.**

It's not necessarily bad to be admired like Barnabas, but to **want to be admired** is always the beginning of something bad. I want to be esteemed. It's really important to me and that's where stuff begins to come off the tracks. **That's different than the truth, or the right thing being important to me and, since I regularly do those things, I am admired.**

It's like seeking fame instead of fame coming because of ability. If I love what brought me fame instead of loving the fame, then that's different.

They lied to win the same sort of esteem that Barnabas had won in the church. 197

When we try to be admired, we are acting, performing, managing a perception that we want people to have of us.

That's what they were doing. **They weren't being real.** They could have **gone to Peter** and said, **"We have this property and we are thinking about selling it.** What if we gave half to you to help our brothers and sisters in need or for your court costs and then kept the other half for a business we want to start. Or they could have been

honest about their feelings toward Barnabas with him or someone.

This lie would set up a false self for these people. A false self makes fellowship impossible. It would cause them not to be really known by others and a desire not to be known by God. People would know the false Anninas and Sapphira, not the real ones. The real people are broken and have some real issues.

In authentic community, where the Holy Spirit and God's Word are present, our real selves, no matter how messed up, are necessary and welcome. We think they aren't. Sometimes they are hard to deal with. They are embarrassing. Fellowship and community are impossible without our real selves.

Where fellowship and community are impossible, transformation can't begin. The false self is me, as I want to be perceived, so I don't need transformation. Then transformation cannot happen. The tools God uses for my transformation are Body, Word, and Spirit. All three are necessary. When the body is lopped off, then it's like a three-legged stool that now only has two legs. It think it also makes Word and Spirit less effective. I will avoid the word and then become calloused to the spirit. That happens when we aren't real.

People from our Come and See Class, can you remember our Core Values? Core values are Real and Ready to change. The order is important. If I am real, then I can see my need to be transformed. Then I can be ready to be changed by Body, Word, and Spirit.

Think about who is rebuking them. Peter, who had his false self unmasked when he denied that he even knew Jesus. **He took it.** He didn't conspire to hide it. He was laid bare and then transformation could begin in his life. **The Holy Spirit dealt with his fear and doubt.** He becomes the man who says to the kind of people who killed Jesus, **"You judge whether it is right to obey you or God. We will keep telling what we have seen and heard."** **Does that sound like a man filled with doubt and fear who wants to appear as something different?** That isn't fake confidence. He's not puffing his chest out. That's a man who is being transformed. But it started with being real.

Culture values appearance, things looking good even if they aren't. This is what **marketing** is about. **It gives a picture** of what we can appear to be. Now here are the things you **buy from us to help you achieve** that picture. Then you will become that person. Look the part, feel the part, and then become that powerful, confident, successful, admired person. **Unfortunately that's not how life transformation takes place.**

I was at **Cabelas** and I almost bought a fishing rod. I didn't really need it. It would have been an upgrade for my fourth rod. When I go out in my kayak I like to have four rods set up for different types of lures for different kinds of fish and conditions. My fourth rod is not the way I like it. **The interesting thing is that I realized I liked the way it looked, its appearance.** How a fishing rod looks has nothing to do with how it will perform. The materials, sensitivity, length, stiffness, or

flexibility, type of reel that goes on it...make a difference, but the color and overall look of it means nothing. I didn't buy it. I wanted to. **Do you think the fish care?** No. There is something in me that wants to appear like I know what I'm doing.

Life transformation and the part community plays in it is vital if this movement is to gain the momentum needed to move out of Jerusalem and across the world.

The **second reality** that is going on **under the surface** that we need to acknowledge if we are going to understand this seemingly over the top response is that... **They didn't properly respect or fear God.**

After Ananias dropped dead and then after Sapphira met the same end, the **same phrase is used**. Can you remember it? **"And great fear came upon..."**

But wait, didn't we say that fear for Peter when he said he didn't know Jesus was a bad thing, a false self? **And it can't be that God wants us trembling** in our boots when we think about him. **He created us to be in a love relationship with him.** How can fear be a part?

"fear"...recognition of what **God is capable of, the power to destroy and the power to rescue and give life from death.** We want God to be powerful enough to save and give eternal life to flesh and blood like us. But wouldn't it stand to reason that that level of power, if used differently, could absolutely destroy, take life to death instead of death to life.

I love that we have lights and projectors and microphones this morning. I love electricity. It has such great power to enhance our lives. Are you there yet? No, not yet. I love it, it's such a blessing. **But I'm not going to work on it.** I want Sam, Kelvin, or Ted. **What has the power to do all of this, has the power to kill me immediately.** That's why I don't mess around, play around with, turn my back on, take for granted electricity. **I enjoy its great power to give light, warmth, and nourishment while respecting, even fearing, its ability to kill me instantly.**

²⁸ Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe. ²⁹ For our God is a devouring fire.
Hebrews 12:28-29 NLT I want us to read this out loud together.

Do you want a Kingdom that is unshakable? Then you are going to get it from a God who is a consuming fire!

Healthy tension between "He is almighty creator" and "He loves and adopted me." On one side, I am pulled by God's power and perfection and, on the other side, his love and grace by which he adopted me, as flawed as I am. Those two pulling at opposite ends keeps me from falling.

Fear is a friend that alerts us of the danger of sin. "But we live in a world where many think that enjoyment is possible primarily through what the Bible calls sin.

People who think in this way consider fear as a spoiler of fun and all good feelings.”

I love the ocean. You must respect its power or you might die. If you play by its rules, the invigoration of riding a wave or just being pushed to and fro by it, feeling the sun, sand, cool water, and watching the beauty and majesty of it. But never forget. It can drag you out to sea or snap you like a twig on the shore, rocks or pier. I can love it and fear it and that enables me to relate to the ocean properly. The same is true of electricity and the same is true of God.

Yes, at first glance it sounds so over the top, even wrong. But there are realities under the surface that we have to take a look at or we will never be able to hear God's voice through this story. Ananias and Sapphira wanted to be admired and they didn't properly respect of fear God.

The other reality is that... **They didn't take their own sin seriously**

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land...Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." Acts 5:3 & 4b

This wasn't a money problem, a lying problem, a conspiracy problem, a "false self" problem. This was a heart problem and those are the most serious kind.

My sin is a serious problem because it is about my core, my heart. It's no little thing.

What did it take in order to deal with my sin and yours? The death of the very Son of God, who had committed no sin. That's how serious my lust, pride, need for a false self, is. I could deal with it on my own. I can't try hard enough, learn enough, or control my environment enough, to deal with my sin and neither can you.

What did Jesus say he would bless in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' Kingdom manifesto. In his kingdom, here is what gets blessed.

- Poor in spirit.
- Those who mourn.
- The meek.
- Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

What do these blessed things have in common? These are all "united in not hiding their helplessness and in accepting their unmerited favor. The one thing that can hinder grace is pride—the sense that we deserve the blessings we get and the refusal to accept our faults. If we try to put on a show of being what we are not, we destroy our chances for growth by blocking the grace of God." 199

Being deluded about the seriousness of our sin is a bit like being drunk. When you are drunk, you think you are funnier, better looking, smarter, more confident, and more powerful than you really are. They call alcohol liquid

courage. Talk about a false self. Now listen to this...

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:8 NIV

Ananias and Sapphira didn't realize that they were being stalked from the point where they saw how people esteemed Barnabas. They didn't know they were being stalked when they **desired to have that feeling. They didn't know they were being stalked with the **idea of selling property** to get that feeling. They didn't know they were being stalked when they thought about **what they would do with the leftover money**. They didn't know they were being stalked when they thought about all the good things they could do with their **newfound influence in the church**. They didn't know they were being stalked until it was too late.**

But isn't that why stalking is so effective? The animals that are good at it, get feed because their prey doesn't even know it's happening.

Are you being stalked right now and you don't even know it? There is a heart issue that has led to thoughts and maybe even some actions, but the lion hasn't pounced yet. Wake up before you ruin your marriage, job, lose your kids, destroy your health, and kill your soul, that part that is meant to connect with your creator and Heavenly Father.

Why such an extreme response to sin? It is because it is at a point when the Jesus movement is gaining momentum and about to head outward. If they do not

understand the seriousness of sin, particularly when it can be a cancer in the body, then this momentum will stop. It's hard to regain it.

¹² Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. Philippians 2:12 NLT

Effort, not earning, always remember that.

The NIV says **"with fear and trembling"** instead of **"deep reverence and fear."**

Living that way sounds so counter to what our culture teaches.

Is temporary good feeling/fun/pleasure better than a life of "fear and trembling?" "I respond that this fear and trembling is the gateway to lasting and truly satisfying joy. When we fear the holiness of God and the consequences of sin, we avoid sin. But we do not turn from sin into a vacuum, we embrace life to the full (John 10:10) We do not spend the rest of our days wishing that we could have had the experience of the sin we avoided. We are glad that we escaped that enslavement and are now "free indeed." (John 8:34-36) We are glad that God freed us to enjoy him, for he is not only holy, he is also loving. The Bible says that God delights in us (Ps 147:11) and that we delight in him (43:4) We run away from sin, we run into the arms of one who we love and delight in

and who loves us and delights to give us joy. NIV
Application Commentary, Acts

Fear of the Lord, keeping that balance, is ultimately there to keep us free and to give us lasting joy. You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. Psalm 16:11 NIV

Remember that phrase in the story that Peter used to describe what Ananias and Sapphira were doing. He asked Sapphira why they would **“test the spirit of the Lord.”**

“Test God”...15 times in ESV.

It is seen as a negative thing to do in almost all these instances. (Excluding Malachi 3:10 and possibly Hebrews 3:9) **In Malachi they are testing him by obeying him and thereby seeing the fruit of God's goodness. The others are acting in disobedience in order to see if God really meant to create a boundary and was he committed to that boundary.**

Don't test God, trust God.

Trust him and look for his goodness and provision as you obey. **Here's how we can take trusting steps of obedience together.**

Approach God as you are...confession.

Confession literally means to agree with God.

Practice real fellowship with one you trust

This is where we allow The Body of Christ to be a part of our transformation, by being real with someone.

Feed on Psalm 51:10-13

Let's read this verse together first. Then take a few minutes of quiet to give us the chance to confess anything that we need to **before we start getting stalked** because of it **and it goes to our heart.**

Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you. ¹³ Then I will teach your ways to rebels, and they will return to you.

Does the punishment fit the crime.