

Title: **The Back Alley of the Bible: Making Sense of Ananias and Sapphira (Part 1)**
Text: **Acts 4:32-5:11**

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Big Idea

The story of Ananias and Sapphira is a bit frightening. There's no getting around that. But when we really settle in with the text, we find it has much to teach us. For one thing, we learn that the church, even at the beginning, was not perfect. They were always dealing with temptation and sin. For another thing, we learn that God sees through our religious games. He doesn't want our external conformity. He wants our hearts.

1. The Presence of It

Considering Barnabas

I think Luke highlights Barnabas intentionally here as a sort of pivot point. On the one hand, Barnabas serves as a particular example of the radical generosity that Luke describes in the verses that came before. But, on the other hand, Barnabas really is set up as a contrast, a foil, anticipating what's up next with Ananias and Sapphira in the verses that come after. We're supposed to see and interpret Ananias and Sapphira in connection and in contrast with Barnabas.

A lot of us want to be used mightily by God, the way Barnabas was. He was one of the first missionaries, bringing the gospel to so many who had never heard. What an amazing thing! But do you want to know where it starts? Right here in Acts 4, with him letting go of his stuff. So many of us want God to use us for great things, we sign up to be leaders of big movements, but we're not willing to give up our comforts and stuff to serve the needy and lowly and the poor among us. We want the flash and the fame. We're ready for the adventure. But listen, you're not ready to lead a ministry if you're not willing to wash feet.

"But..."

If you leave a church looking for the perfect church, you're not just leaving a church, you're leaving *the* church. Because this is the only church there is. We're not going to escape this. They were dealing

with it at the very beginning. So if I could just plead with you: Don't go off looking for a unicorn—called "the perfect church." God isn't calling you to that. He's calling you to press into the church right in front of you, as broken and imperfect as it may be sometimes.

2. The Essence of It

Question #1: What Did They Do?

Layer #1: "Kept Back" (v. 2) - They stole from God.

Layer #2: "Lie" (v. 3) - They lied to God.

Layer #3: "Test" (v. 9) - They tested God.

Question #2: Why Did They Do It?

They want the honor of Barnabas, without the sacrifice; they want the admiration, without the integrity; they want the nickname, without the corresponding character. There's this gap forming for Ananias and Sapphira between who they are presenting themselves to be externally and who they truly are. And they are not just okay with that gap, they are playing into it, encouraging it, working it, selling it.

Here is what we must understand: When you give in to such things, you're not just widening the gap between your outside presentation and internal reality. You're also widening the gap between yourself and the gospel. You can't get grace if you're so busy pretending you don't need it. If you're covering up your struggles and temptations and sins to save face and appear admirable, you don't just keep yourself looking good in the eyes of others, you keep yourself from the cross. Because the only way you get access to the cross is if you're willing to get in the dirt underneath it, with all the other helpless sinners, coming in for mercy.



Reflection Questions

- Upon first read of this story, what are your initial reactions? What do you make of the striking judgment of God in all this?
- Do you find it encouraging or discouraging that the early church seems to have had just as many problems as the church today? Why? What is God calling you to do about it?
- Read 1 John 1:5-2:2 again. In what ways have you been tempted to walk in darkness lately? What do you need to bring to the light? Let's confess and find cleansing in Jesus!

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FAITH: The Way Back to God | We are redeemed to enjoy intimate presses our church *upwards* in love

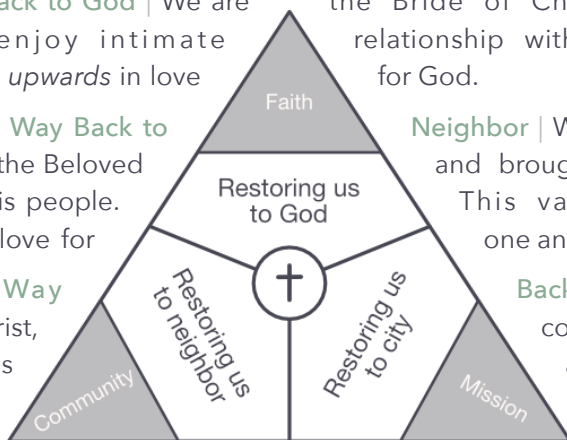
the Bride of Christ, created and relationship with him. This value for God.

COMMUNITY: The Way Back to Christ, adopted in the Beloved relationship with his people. church *inwards* in love for

Neighbor | We are the Family of and brought into covenantal This value presses our one another.

MISSION: The Way the Embassy of Christ, Savior to be his value presses our in love for the

Back to City | We are commissioned by the ambassadors. This church *outwards* unbelieving.



Your Next Steps

When approaching the Christian faith and life, it can be confusing to know where to even begin. Come find us at the Next Steps Table after the service—it would be our joy to help you along in the journey! And if you're a visitor, we have a special gift bag for you. Don't miss it!



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Welcome to Mercy Hill Church.
We are so glad you've joined us today!

Announcement Spotlight

All Church Appreciation Lunch - Today!

Mercy Hill has so many wonderful people who keep all the various dimensions of our ministry thriving and fruitful. And we want to appreciate them! So immediately following the service today, we are planning to have a special all church lunch (think Pizza My Heart pizza party, with salad, dessert, etc.) as a way of saying thanks. The whole church is invited to stay after and participate as we look to particularly appreciate those who have served in various capacities throughout this last year. We hope you can join us!

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at info@mercyhillchurch.org.

Holiday Gift Baskets for Allen School Families!

Mercy Hill Men's Christmas Gathering!

Covenant Membership Class - 12/10/23

End-of-Year Giving

Perspectives on the World Christian Movement

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All Church Prayer

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