

# WHAT LIES BENEATH

GOING DEEPER  
DISCUSSION GUIDE  
April 13, 2014



# Discussion Guide

## **The Monster that Challenged the World**

*Acts 4.32-5.11; Ephesians 4.15-16*

### **Connecting:**

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they answer that they have held back.)

### **Getting Started:**

10 minutes

- Do you remember when you were caught in your first lie? What was this experience like for you?

### **Diving Into the Text:**

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Use the notes to describe the nature of lying.
- Read Acts 4.32-5.11 aloud slowly twice. Invite group members to imagine the scene unfolding before them.

- What shocking events took place in the early Jerusalem Church? (Look for as many as possible, including both positive and negative events.)
- What about these events, if anything, is shocking? What might these events reveal about God's character and desires for his people? Would you elaborate?
- Lying is obviously a big deal to God. Where do you see lying today? Where do you see it within the Church? Do we still view lying as a big deal? Could you explain?
- In your understanding, why do people lie? Is this similar or dissimilar to the lying seen in Acts 5?
- If an episode like that with Ananias and Sapphira were to happen today, do you think it would be enough to keep people from lying? Would you explain why you think this?
- What, if anything, are we attempting to accomplish when we lie? Why is this so important to us?
- Sometimes we lie in an effort to obtain a better reality than the reality we currently experience. Read Ephesians 4.15-16 aloud slowly. To which realities does Paul say truth telling leads us? Are these similar to or dissimilar from the realities we are seeking when we lie?
- What might it take to become a person who tells the truth? What, if anything, keeps you from taking these steps?

## Context and Background

### *Lying*

When we lie, we intentionally deceive or portray that which is false. Lying includes both that which is spoken and that which is intentionally not spoken when withholding information leads to misperception. Misspeaking is not to be considered as lying so long as such misspeaking is done in error and without intentionality or forethought. Lying is considered to be a serious offence by the people of God, having been explicitly forbidden by God (Exodus 20.16; Proverbs 12.22; Colossians 3.9). In part, the seriousness of lying is found in God's explicit instructions against it, but the deeper seriousness of lying is found in its nature, a nature which contradicts God's true character. Lying contradicts three specific aspects of God's character: holiness, truth, and community. When a person lies, he intentionally seeks to mislead, to create a reality or the perception of a reality that does not exist; that is, he seeks to make things other than they are. To make things other than they are when seeking God's own standard is righteousness, but when the other sought is not God's own standard then the other sought is sin, a violation of God's holiness. This may be why the explicit forbidding of lying is included in the holiness code of Leviticus 19 (Leviticus 19.11). Second, when a person lies, she deliberately states that which is not true and thus stands opposed to God's own character of truth, as God is truth (John 14.6; 16.13; 17.3). Finally, when a person lies he often does so in an effort to serve himself, thus breaking community and the bond of mutual submission found within the community life of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

## The Text

### *Acts 4.32-37: The early Church—The good*

In Acts 4.32-37, Luke pauses to reflect upon the outworkings of the Holy Spirit's presence among the early believers in Jerusalem. The presence of the Holy Spirit has brought about an unusual level of unity among the Jesus followers. This unity leads them to exercise the practice of absolute mutual submission in which they share all they have. The apostles are proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus with great power and boldness in light of their recent persecution (Acts 4.1-31). God's grace is overflowing in a powerful way, effecting real life-change as need begins to disappear from the Christ-community. This is due, in part, to the radical mutual submission of the believers who are selling their possessions and bringing the proceeds to the apostles so that these funds might be given to those who have need. Barnabas, the mission companion of Paul, is one such person who engages in this life-giving practice.

### *Acts 5.1-11:*

#### *The early Church—The bad, and the ugly*

One couple, members of this Jerusalem Christ-community, also decide to participate in the physical act of selling their possessions in an act of mutual submission and caring. However, once they sell the field which they own, they begin to question the appropriateness of giving the full proceeds away. After some untold amount of discussion, the couple decides to withhold a portion of the proceeds and to bring the rest to the apostles. However, the mention of laying the money at the feet of the apostles indicates that they intend their fellow Jesus-followers to believe they have given the full amount; that is, Ananias and Sapphira intentionally set about to deceive the early Jerusalem Church. Their motives are not stated but it is easy to surmise that at the very least they wish to be recognized as participating in the radical acts of mutual submission within the Christ-community.

However, when Ananias gives his money he does not receive the accolades he desires. Rather, he is greeted with a rebuke from Peter who states that Ananias is under the control of Satan in his efforts to deceive. This statement of being filled by Satan does not imply possession but rather demonization, the controlling influence rather than possession of the person. Those who are possessed by God cannot be possessed by another but they may be influenced, in this case influenced by Satan. (See also Ephesians 4.27.) From what can be surmised, Ananias is a Christ-follower who has chosen to allow Satan to guide him. As Satan is the father of lies, Ananias enters into a life of lying (John 8.44). What is important to note is that Ananias has sought to deceive the Jerusalem believers but Peter claims that such deception is really an attempt to lie to the Holy Spirit; that is, Peter claims that to lie to the people filled with the Holy Spirit is to lie to the Holy Spirit. Confronting the Holy Spirit with a lie is an affront to the very nature of the Holy Spirit's character of holiness and the result is that Ananias is struck dead. God's holy power strikes fear in those who see and hear of this event.

Some three hours pass and Sapphira, Ananias' wife, arrives. Obviously no one has thought to inform her of the events that have unfolded. Peter asks Sapphira about the amount given and she states that the full amount was given. Thus, Sapphira too seeks to deceive the Jerusalem Church. Peter notes that her deception is tantamount to testing the Holy Spirit. In the language of the New Testament, the word "test" seems to imply challenging the Holy Spirit. This may be a challenging of the Holy Spirit's power but it more than likely means that Sapphira has challenged the purposes of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's movement has brought unity and the meeting of needs, but the actions of Ananias and Sapphira stand against this unifying movement of the Spirit. Sapphira also falls dead, and once more fear grips those who witness and hear of these events.

## Application:

Lying is serious business, deadly serious business. Those who lied in the early Church were struck down as they stood against God's character of holiness and his purposes of grace. Fear swept through the Jerusalem Church as probably did a rash of truth-speaking. However, a few years later the Apostle Paul is once again warning believers of the dangers of lying (Colossians 3.6-9; Ephesians 4.25). Lying seems to be natural, a part of our character that is misshapen and in need of transformation. When we lie we do so in an effort to help ourselves and others. We view the alternative realities we create with our words and the withholding of our words to be better for us and others than the harsh realities of the truth. Our lies are our attempts to seek what is best, and even, in some cases, our attempts to show love. However, our lies are inconsistent with God's character of holiness and his purposes of unity among the people of God. When we lie to God's people we are lying to God himself, something that is more than an affront but a direct challenge to his position and role as first in our lives. The only antidote for lying is to tell the truth (Matthew 5.37). When we speak the truth, we do so in love (Ephesians 4.15) and partner with God in who he is and what he is doing in this world.

Want to know how this looks in real life? Check out Blake's blog at [BlakeShipp.blogspot.com](http://BlakeShipp.blogspot.com)



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