

## Sermon-Based Small Group Leader Notes

For the week of February 19, 2012 (week 6 of 10)

### Introduction

#### Topic

Sermon Title: "Living Beyond Greed"

Sermon Series: *Flow* (week 6 of 7)

Scripture: Hebrews 13:5

Sermon by: Dr. Tom Harrington

#### Goals for This Gathering

1. Explore how staying in the Flow of the Spirit can help us avoid greed, while still being content
2. To discuss the homework
3. To pray together

#### Prayer

- Take prayer requests and praises
- Pray for all Small Groups meeting at Northwest and in homes
- Pray for the spiritual growth of your group
- Pray that the Holy Spirit convicts you of areas in your life where you lack a grateful attitude

### Getting Started

**Questions 1 and 2:** These two opening questions shift the focus to what we valued in the past, helping us to transition our thoughts to the way we once regarded our things, our image, and others' perceptions. Try to encourage the group to dwell on childhood and teenage\* years; later in the study, people will have opportunity to consider their current thought patterns regarding these matters.

\*Note: If this study is being used by Youth LIFE Groups, change **Q.2** to focus on the time of childhood, that is, "When you were younger, did you place a high priority...."

### Into the Bible

Into the Bible — group will read Acts 4:32–37

**Question 4:** Which of the following words would you use to characterize those who gave great monetary gifts to the Christian community meeting at the church in Acts: generous, manipulated, selfless, radical, idealistic, mandated, cultish, liberated, etc?

Encourage participants to come up with other descriptive words. This exercise will help flesh out underlying feelings in the group about the early church's dedication to living in this way. Remember, the response to communal living, as lived out in Acts 4, does not signify spiritual maturity as

much as it reveals our context and its impact on how we perceive church and the Christian community.

#### Read Acts 5:1–11

**Question 6:** Where did the actions of Ananias and Sapphira go wrong? What was their sin?

This couple was not required to sell their property, nor were they compelled to give any of the money as a gift to the Christian community. It was within their rights whether or not to give the complete or partial amount from the sale of their property. Ananias and Sapphira sinned when they purported to have given the entire amount, causing them to lie about the gift.

**Question 7:** What might this couple have hoped to gain by their gift to the church?

This goes beyond greed for the balance of the money that they withheld. Ananias and Sapphira also coveted others' perceptions that they were the types of followers, like Barnabas and others, who would give such grand monetary gifts. They were greedy for a "super-Christian" image within the Christian community. We must also consider their apparent disregard for a holy, omniscient God who would not put up with blatant lies to his bride, the church.

**Question 8:** Is it wrong to be acknowledged for giving, whether those are gifts of money, time, spiritual gifts, or things?

Please foster an atmosphere where group participants are safe to answer this question. There are different views on this matter within the church, and these different views can be supported with Scripture, for example, Matthew 6:3-4, on the one hand and Matthew 5:16, on the other (see below).

*Matthew 6:3–4* "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (NIV).

*Matthew 5:16* "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (NIV).

**Question 9:** How could a seemingly generous display of giving, yet rooted in greed, have affected the early church? Does the dramatic end that came to Ananias and Sapphira seem in proportion to their sin?

When compared to the sinfulness that exists within churches today, God's judgment and swift punishment of

Ananias and Sapphira may seem harsh. This response reveals our modern context and assumptions, rooted in an expectation of God's forbearance. Twentieth century German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote of this tolerant attitude towards sin as "cheap grace."

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate (Bonhoeffer 47).

There is a Scriptural precedent for God's swift and thorough punishment towards those who grieve his spirit. Conversation within your group could steer towards the lives of Cain, those who lived in the days of Noah, Lot's wife, Jonah, or the foolish rich man from one of Jesus' parables, to name a few.

## Digging Deeper

- The questions in this section prompt life application.
- Allow your group to answer these more personal questions as they feel comfortable. Newer groups or established groups with several new members might find less responding initially.

**Question 10:** What are ways that we lie to the Holy Spirit? What personal motives often feed our actions? What values reveal themselves in our excuses to others, to ourselves, and to God?

Responses could range from general to personal. Motives will reflect the actions people mention, but ones that might be fresh on people's minds from this sermon series could be the desire to be in control of our own lives, a refusal to admit our own sinfulness, a lack of grace towards others, fear, anger, and greed.

In regards to the question on excuses we make to others, try to get at the core of those values that lie at the heart of the excuse. For example, someone might not be available to participate in a church-sponsored marriage retreat this year, because they will be taking a family vacation, instead. It's neither the attendance at the retreat, nor the vacation, that is the concern. The value behind the excuse is what is to be considered between an individual and God. The value could be a desire to keep up with others' vacations or it could be a way of celebrating time with family members.

**Question 11:** Why is it so important to God that we live contented lives? How does this impact our relationship with him, with the church, with the world?

Greed is rooted in an ungrateful heart, but thankfulness and the satisfaction it brings are an acknowledgment of a gracious God. Greed ties our hands so that we are unwilling to open them to others. It keeps our focus on our own

desires for more, causing us to ignore the lives of others in this community and world we inhabit.

*1 Timothy 6:6-8* "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that" (NIV).

**Optional Question:** What assumptions lie behind our conviction that we deserve more? Why is this so offensive to our heavenly Father? Conversely, why is satisfaction in us so pleasing to him and so freeing for us?

**Question 12:** At the core of greed resides the discontented impression that things are not enough, not good enough, that more can and should be had. In what areas do you struggle most to be content in your life?

Some examples are finances, influence on others (power), esteem from others (fame), physical attributes, abilities, etc. Perhaps participants might allow the group to pray for these voiced struggles or those not shared at this time. This is a good segue to prayer time.

## Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer

Close with prayer, praying for each other and for God's wisdom and power in allowing God his proper role as Lord over every part of our lives. Commit to keep private those requests and struggles that have been expressed during the session.

Leader, consider reading from Psalm 63 to close prayer time.

*Psalm 63:1-8*

- <sup>1</sup> You, God, are my God,  
earnestly I seek you;  
I thirst for you,  
my whole being longs for you,  
in a dry and parched land  
where there is no water.
- <sup>2</sup> I have seen you in the sanctuary  
and beheld your power and your glory.
- <sup>3</sup> Because your love is better than life,  
my lips will glorify you.
- <sup>4</sup> I will praise you as long as I live,  
and in your name I will lift up my hands.
- <sup>5</sup> I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;  
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.
- <sup>6</sup> On my bed I remember you;  
I think of you through the watches of the night.
- <sup>7</sup> Because you are my help,  
I sing in the shadow of your wings.
- <sup>8</sup> I cling to you;  
your right hand upholds me.

## Bibliography

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1963.