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Simon

*Bargaining with God***Acts 8:9-25**

There are no atheists in foxholes,” wrote William T. Cummings in 1942 in his *Sermons on Bataan*. While crouched in a trench with bullets zinging overhead, even the most reluctant heart begins to bargain with God—just in case he might exist. “God, if you’ll only get me out of this alive, I’ll . . .” But foxholes are not the only bargaining fields with God. Too many of us relate to God mostly for what we think we can gain.

GROUP DISCUSSION. What are some ways that you see people bargain with God?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Why (in terms of motive) are you a Christian? Be honest. Talk to God about what you find in this exercise of self-examination.

From ancient Samaria, a man named Simon stands as an example of all that is wrong with attempts to use God for our own designs. *Read Acts 8:9-25.*

1. Who are the different people in this story, and how do they relate to each other?

2. What danger was Simon to the people who followed him (vv. 9-11)?

3. What indications do you see that Simon’s practice of sorcery would not fit with his new faith in Jesus?

4. Why did Peter and John go from Jerusalem to Samaria (vv. 14-17)?

5. Notice the events that accompanied the coming of God’s Spirit to Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-6). Why is this event important to the Samaritans of Acts 8, who became Christians a few years later?

6. Of what importance is the Holy Spirit in your own life?

7. What precisely did Simon want, and how did he propose to get it (vv. 18-19)?

8. In view of Simon's recent past, what use do you think he planned to make of this gift?

9. What did Simon's offer suggest that he believed about God?

About the abilities God gives to his people?

10. What, according to Peter, was wrong with Simon's attitude and his offer (vv. 20-23)?

11. What, other than money, do people use to try to get what they want from God?

12. Take a moment to name a dozen or so of God's attributes, for example, "God is holy, God is kind, God has all power." How might you adjust your praying so that it reflects what you know to be true of God rather than what you hope to get from him?

Pray, beginning each section of your prayer with one of these attributes. Try to make much of this prayer about praise and commitment. When you move to petitions, try to shape your requests from God around his character. For example, "Because you are holy, I ask . . ." or "Because your kindness never ends, I ask . . ."

Now or Later

God doesn't need anything from us—ever. So we have nothing with which to bargain with God. Yet he gives generously to us over and over. In the days ahead, practice some of this Christlike generosity to others. Try to refrain (even mentally) from the "give-to-get" connection.