

Are You All in For Jesus

Acts 5:1-11

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For the record, I don't know much about playing poker.

When you mention "chips," I think about food, or that 70's televisions show with police motorcycle cops Ponch and Jon, and cow piles.

A royal flush sounds like something a king does after going to the bathroom.

Three of a kind is easy enough to understand, but it's hard to remember if it beats a full house.

Occasionally though, I watch some poker on television.

It's broadcast like a heavyweight boxing match, except with poker there is more than one person trying to knock the other players out. The poker bout isn't over until there is only one person left standing, or sitting, with everyone else's chips.

Poker can be an innocent game, but it can also be mired in dangers. I learned that just by watching lots of Westerns.

Years ago, I also read an article by the Associated Press on teenage gambling. Ed Looney, head of the New Jersey Gambling Council on Compulsive Gambling, stated that fifteen percent of all teenagers who play poker will develop some gambling problems and five percent will become addicted. It's not an innocent game.

So, while I am not promoting the game of poker, I do want to use one of poker's most exciting bets to illustrate the kind of life that the Lord wants us to live. Why would I do that? Because you can learn something from everything, even from the game of poker.

In poker, a player looks at his or her poker hand to make some determination on how to bet. The bet might be to raise, to call, or to check.

Another bet, which is the most exciting and dangerous bet of the game is to push all of the chips into the middle of the table and to say, "I'm all-in."

In such a play, a player forces the other players to make a decision. They might fold, meaning they give up all the chips they have already bet. Or they might bet an equal amount of chips.

If the chips are matched, the dealer lays down the flop.

Three cards are dealt as each player seeks to build a hand along with their two cards.

The final card, called the River card, is then laid down. The player with the best hand from these four cards plus their two cards wins the pot.

If the player who is “all-in” wins, that player plays on. If that player loses, that player is out of the game because he or she has no more chips.

When it comes to commitment to God, God wants us to live with an “all-in” attitude.

If we are all-in with our education, marriage, physical training, job, and friendships, we are going to have strong relationships in these areas.

Every coach demands commitment. The coach says, “If you want to play for me, you’ve got to be all-in.”

Every commander of every army demands commitment from his troops. The sergeant says, “If you want to defeat the enemy, you’ve got to be all-in.”

Every trip taken into space, the astronauts have to be all-in if the mission is to be successful.

Every time a fireman pulls a hose off a truck and rushes toward a building, he has to be all-in to his mission, with a desire to save lives and property, sacrificing his own if necessary.

Whenever a bride and a groom say wedding vows, they need to ask, “Are we all-in?”

How about when we become someone’s friend or bring a child into this world?

We have to be all-in when we bring an aging parent into our home, fight a disease like cancer, forgive someone of an injustice they have done to us or to some member of our family, or volunteer our time.

There is a great temptation, though, when it comes to serving God, to hold back. Because everything else in life demands so much of us, it’s easy for us not to be all-in with our commitment to God.

The story of Ananias and Sapphira teaches us that God doesn’t want us to be pretenders. With faith issues, God does not want there to be any bluffing.

God is looking for authenticity. If you say you are all-in, God expects you to mean it and follow through on your commitment.

The members of the early church were so committed to one another that many of them sold partials of land and brought the money and gave it to the disciples to distribute to people within the church.

One of those who did this was Joseph. He was such an encouragement to the church, that they nicknamed him Barnabas, which means “Son of Encouragement.”

There wasn't any commandment or any kind of requirement for Barnabas to do this. It was something that came from his heart. It apparently brought him a lot of love, attention, and praise from the church.

Ananias and Sapphira were inspired by Barnabas and they were influenced by the praise he received for the property he gave.

Unfortunately, they were more in love with the idea of being praised than with the idea of giving love and worshipping God.

So, they held back some of the money from the sale of the land for themselves. What seems to be their sin was that they lied about it. They pretended to be all-in when they really were not. They were pretenders. It was all a big bluff.

They were pretending to have a hand they didn't have. Peter called them on it. He made them show their hand.

Ananias was not expecting that. He was expecting to collect all the praise on his gamble, but it didn't pay off.

We are a lot like Ananias and Sapphira in this way. When we don't go "All-In" for Jesus, we hold back because we are afraid we won't have enough left for ourselves. We are worried we will lose too much, or everything.

It is true that Jesus has asked a lot of us.

He asked his disciples to leave everything.

He said to one man that wanted to go bury his father, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go proclaim the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:59-60).

To another who wanted to go say goodbye to his family, Jesus said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:61-62).

We could name any number of professions, goals, and dreams that are worth pursuing in this life that a person must be all-in for a person to be considered committed and to have a reasonable chance at coming out on top. So why would the Son of God be pleased with anything other than followers giving him complete allegiance?

Moses came down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments. The first one read, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

God wanted to know. "Are you all-in?" But it was obvious that they were not. Moses had been gone long enough that they had already gathered around his brother Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt,

we don't know what has happened to him." (Ex. 32: 1) So they made an idol cast in the shape of a calf to worship.

God wants to know, "Are you all-in?" "Oh, yes," we say.

Once Jesus and his disciples went to the temple where they watched the crowd bring their money and place it in the temple treasury. When the copper coins hit the collection boxes, they made lots of noise. It wasn't much of a secret which worshipers gave large sums of money and which ones didn't. However, no one could know who gave sacrificially, except for Jesus.

When a widow came and dropped two small copper coins in the treasury, worth only a fraction of a penny, Jesus pointed her out to his disciples:" I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on." Mark 12:43-44 (NIV)

This woman was "all-in." She had cast her lot entirely with God, depending totally and completely upon God to take care of her and supply her needs.

Jesus knelt down in the garden of Gethsemane. Falling with his face to the ground, he prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Matt 26:39 (NIV)

Jesus was faced with the brutality of the cross. It was not the hand he wanted to play. God had dealt him a kingly role, but this king had a crown of thorns. It was a great temptation for Jesus to fold.

Nearby, his disciples slept. Among them was a disciple named Peter, a well-meaning disciple who loved Jesus.

Jesus had predicted the hand Peter would play that night. It would be a hand most poker players would die for, three of a kind.

He said Peter would deny him three times, but Peter said, "No, Lord, I'll die for you."

But, he didn't die for Jesus. He thought he was all-in, but he wasn't. When the chips were down, Peter denied he knew Jesus at all. Peter didn't have the faith he thought he did. He held back.

We are often like Peter. When the chips are down, and Jesus wants to know whether we are going to give ourselves totally and completely to him with our marriage, our habits, our jobs, our thoughts, our attitudes, our money, our work ethic, our parenting skills, our language, our future, we sometimes hold back. We deny Jesus. What chips are in play in your life today that you need to push into play and say, "Jesus, I want to live by faith. I'm all in."

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