



Acts: The Church Unleashed: Session 2

Acts 3:1-10; 4:5-31

9.16.18

Facilitation Tip:

When you are preparing for your group to discuss the material, a simple pattern that you can follow will help you in preparing and structuring your discussion. Here is the pattern:

- **Context:** Share the who, what, when, where, and why something is being said. To set the context of the passage use this video as an illustration: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOP2FBFHbLA>.
- **Truth:** Share the main truth of the passage. Use the commentary provided or from other biblical resources to help discover the truth in the passage.
- **Illustrate:** Share a personal story, ask questions, another example from Scripture, anything that can be used to illustrate the main truth of the passage being read. View the supplementary quotes and illustration section.
- **Apply:** Answer the question: What does this look like in my life?

Introduction: Introduce the main theme of the passage.

What bold acts have you taken in your life, and what were the results?
What circumstances led to such boldness?

(Prepare to share your own personal story of boldness)

There are circumstances in our lives that lead us to make risky decisions, to do brave things, because of a sudden burst of boldness and audacity. Many stories of boldness are obvious and familiar, like the mother who sees her child in harm's way and confronts a grizzly bear, a moving car, or a rattlesnake. Something that would normally make a mere mortal cower in fear can be confronted with boldness (and a surge of adrenaline). Firefighters, policemen, and EMS workers often make bold and fearless decisions in moments of crisis. On 9/11, for example, after the buildings were struck and set ablaze, these public servants ran into the buildings that others were streaming out of in terror.

The stakes aren't always life and death. It takes boldness to pursue a career of almost any kind, and it takes boldness to try to be an artist or an entrepreneur in light of the fact that so many others fail in these pursuits. Romance and love also require a certain boldness. In a world where marriage seems so fragile and the odds of sticking together seem so slim, it takes boldness to choose to say "I do." But in each of these cases, boldness leads to something good. Boldness saves lives. It allows us to

follow our dreams and pursue our sense of calling. It leads to love and to reconciliation and to the deep community that can only thrive in a family.

Christian boldness isn't something we simply have to "muster up" for ourselves; rather, it comes through faith in Jesus and through the gift of His Holy Spirit, who empowers and emboldens us to live for the glory of our Savior. He deserves first place in our lives, and this will be reflected in our actions for His name's sake. If we are convinced that the gospel is true, then we must act on what we believe, praying to God for boldness and then proclaiming what we know to be true. We should find ourselves compelled to say and do bold things for the sake of the gospel.

How can boldness be dangerous when not tethered to wisdom?
Why is the requirement of boldness not sufficient by itself to make an action wise or justified?

Transition: Today we are going to discuss about the source of our boldness through the story of Peter and John as they encountered a lame man. As we go through this life, we are going to discover that there are times when we are called to be bold to help further the gospel. Furthermore, when we are bold, we consider that the cost to follow and proclaim Jesus far outweighs our temporary convenience of remaining silent.

1. God's people do good deeds and give glory to Jesus (Acts 3:1-10; 4:5-12).

Have a volunteer to read Acts 3:1-10 and 4:5-12.

Ask: What are the two acts of boldness in Jesus' name that we can identify in the passage?

In this story are two separate instances of Spirit-empowered ministry: the act of healing the lame man and the act of bearing witness concerning Jesus to the Jewish leadership. In each case, Peter and John needed the Spirit to enable their work. Trusting the Spirit's presence and power, Peter offered the lame man healing—a profoundly better gift than silver and gold. He offered this gift not for its own sake but "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." Healing and health came to this man so that others would hear about Jesus.

For the act of healing the lame man here are some key details to know:

This act occurred in a public space, for all to see, Peter told the crippled man to get up and walk, and the man took Peter's hand, stood, and began walking, leaping, and praising God. Then, seizing this amazing opportunity to speak to the gathering crowd that was amazed at the miracle, Peter preached yet another sermon about Jesus being the crucified and risen Messiah, in whose name this healing had occurred (Acts 3:11-26).

Pastor Nick asked the question: Why were Peter and John able to see this lame man?

They were able to see the man because they had been seen.

They were once a hopeless case.

Because Peter had been seen at his worst by Jesus and yet reinstated. He was more able to see those around him that others may look over or past. He had the spirit of God living in him, so he began to act accordingly. (John 21 is the restoration of Peter)

What does it mean to you that Jesus saw you in your condition and yet extended His grace to you? What impact should that make as you encounter a world that Jesus sees?

The second act of bearing witness to the Jewish leadership involved the following details:

After being arrested for this spectacle (4:1-3), Peter and John were called before the Jewish leaders to explain themselves. Don't miss the high tension of this moment. They had healed a crippled man in a public setting in the name of a "convicted heretic" that these leaders had killed. This wasn't merely a theological exam; this was a life-and-death encounter with authorities who had a distinct interest in silencing anyone doing anything in the name of Jesus.

Ask: How does Peter's response compare and contrast from his earlier experience of denying Jesus and the sermon that he preached? What does this tell us of how God loves us even through moments of weakness? Are you leveraging your life situations as opportunities to share the gospel?

Peter's response to their interrogation was revolutionary. He could easily have sought to save his own skin, to deny any knowledge of the events, or to minimize the involvement of Jesus' name. But in this moment, he confronted them directly: "We healed in the name of Jesus, whom you crucified and God raised from the dead." He defied their hatred of Jesus and was clear in accusing them of the murder of the Messiah. Peter was not trying to be a hero here with his bold stand and defiance of the religious authorities. He was simply telling them the truth about who Jesus is—the cornerstone of all creation, the only source of salvation in the world.

In what ways does the lame man's healing used as a way to share the gospel? How does his story compare with yours? How can God use your circumstances to be a way to testify of His grace and mercy?

How can our good deeds done in Jesus' name lead to others hearing about Jesus?

What risks are involved in proclaiming Jesus as the only way of salvation in the world?

Transition: Just as God used the healing of the man and Peter's message as ways to testify the gospel, He desires to use your life as a way to share the power of transformation that can occur in any person in the name and power of Jesus Christ. Let's now look to how God calls us to have our allegiance to Him alone.

2. God's people reserve ultimate allegiance for Jesus (Acts 4:13-22).

Ask a volunteer to read Acts 4:13-18.

What are some ways you have experienced the pressure to minimize your witness to Jesus?

Throughout the past two thousand years, efforts have been made by religious, political, and cultural leaders to ban the name of Jesus and to silence His followers. At times, that effort is driven by violence. The first-century church suffered intense persecution and severe forms of execution at the hands of both Jewish and Roman leaders. Today, Christians throughout the Middle East are under constant threat from ISIS and other groups like it. View the illustration section for an article of how this happened this week to a church in China.

At other times, though, the effort to silence the name of Jesus comes under a subtler guise in our American culture. It comes from certain corners of academia, where the historicity of Jesus is sought

to be discredited. It comes from political leaders and activists who pressure Christians to abandon orthodoxy and accommodate the fashionable ethics of our time. It comes in still-more-subtle ways from friends and neighbors who wish we'd talk about something else, anything else but Jesus.

To resist the pressure to minimize Jesus, we need three things. First, we need simply to keep our eyes on Jesus-on who He is and what His life, death, and resurrection have accomplished for us. This sounds simple, maybe even simplistic, but it's not. The Bible is replete with admonitions to "remember" our God. We are terribly forgetful creatures, and we are immersed in a world that's telling counter-stories for every aspect of our faith. We need to remember constantly the name of Jesus if we want to be prepared to declare the name of Jesus under duress.

Second, we need the gathering of God's people. When we gather with the church, we're reminded of our hope, of our confession of faith, and of the Savior who draws the people of God together (Heb. 10:23-25). We're also reminded that we're citizens of a different kind of kingdom and under a different kind of authority than the political and social kingdoms we live amongst. Pressures from these lesser kingdoms might get very intense, and at times they might press us to live and act against our consciences or against our allegiance to Jesus. But with one voice, the church resists those pressures each time she gathers, remembering that while we seek to be good citizens in the nations we call home, we're ultimately citizens of Jesus' kingdom that is not of this world.

Third, we need the boldness that comes from the filling of the Holy Spirit. According to Acts 4:19-22, Peter and John were prepared for this moment, and filled with the Spirit of God, they answered their oppressors with faith and boldness, refusing to deny Jesus in order to satisfy the Jewish leaders. Empowered by God's Spirit (see Acts 4:8), Peter and John refused to obey the command of the Jewish leaders, appealing to their role as witnesses of what they had seen and heard.

Pastor Nick stated, "When you add the Holy Spirit to ordinary, it becomes extraordinary." How has this statement been a reality in your personal life? How does this statement change a perspective you have had of your life currently to being more like the way God sees you?

As we have stated before, one of our most powerful tools for sharing the gospel is our story with the gospel. What we've seen and heard, the ways we've experienced the power and presence of God, the change we've witnessed in ourselves and in our church family-these things can't really be argued or debated. Spirit-empowered evangelistic boldness will often flow from our stories, and these will often be the most compelling way we can share the good news about Jesus with others.

Which one of these three areas do you struggle with the most in your daily walk? What things in your life distract you from being fully allegiant to Christ? Why do we so often go with the flow of the things of this world instead of following Jesus?

What will it look like in the areas of your work, family, school, hobbies, or free time for a Christian to have his or her ultimate allegiance for Jesus?

What is one step you could take this week to demonstrate your allegiance is completely to Christ and not to this world?

Transition: Just as Peter and John were able to face the opposition that arose in their life, they also understood that they were not alone. For the final section, let's look at how we can be empowered through the prayers of others in our lives.

3. God's people pray and preach with boldness (Acts 4:23-31).

Read Acts 4:23-31.

There's an important connection here between bold prayer and bold ministry. After a string of Spirit-filled ministry victories, even in the context of an unjust imprisonment, the church responded by seeking the face of God in worshipful prayer. These Christians were keenly aware that all that had happened—the healing, the bold confrontation with the Jewish leaders, the favor of the crowds—was the work of God, and more specifically, the work of the Holy Spirit. So in response, the church turned back to God and asked Him to continue His work. They prayed for continued boldness, for healing, signs, and wonders, and they prayed for these things to happen in the name of Jesus.

This is the model for Spirit-filled ministry: First, there was an awareness of who was hearing their prayers. God is the One who made the heaven, the earth, and sea—and an awareness of what God had done—He had spoken through David and anointed Jesus—and this served as the background for what they asked. Their prayer could be paraphrased like this: "Lord, we know who You are, we know what You've spoken, and we know who You've sent. Because of this, we believe You can deal with the threats in front of us, and we ask that You keep blessing our ministry in the name of Jesus." This prayer models knowledge of God and dependence upon God.

Second, there's also a wonderful sense of perspective in the prayer from Acts 4. These Christians saw that God's work began long before them, and they were merely participating in that bigger story. This perspective humbled them—knowing that God's story was much larger than their own—and empowered them—they saw how God had faithfully carried out the work for centuries. And so, the people were able to go out with boldness. The pressure was off of them; God had been doing and would continue this work. (For a group exercise about prayer in the church go to the supplemental section.)

Finally, we can follow in their footsteps by dedicating as much time and energy to the prayers that surround our ministry as we do to the work itself. By taking prayer as seriously as we take the "actual" work—be it music ministry, feeding people in need, preaching, or sharing the gospel with friends and neighbors—we put the work of ministry in its proper place. Bold ministry requires bold prayer, and bold prayer enables bold ministry. It is God's work that makes the deaf hear, the blind see, and the dead walk again, and yet these miracles happen only when people of faith step out in Jesus' name and touch, speak, and love their neighbors. It is paradoxical, but it isn't contradictory. It's the mystery of life in the Spirit. God works as we work. We work as He works. In prayer, these efforts are united.

Do you expect most ministry-oriented prayers are reactive or proactive? Why do you think that is? Why should we pray both in response to circumstances and in preparation for our acts of ministry? How does praying through the story of God's work in Scripture, in history, and in our lives embolden our prayers?

Apply

Once the Holy Spirit arrived, the disciples began proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Savior. They put on display the power of His kingdom by performing miracles in His name. When confronted by earthly

authorities, they reaffirmed their allegiance to Jesus and continued to declare the gospel with confidence that Jesus is mighty to save.

Group Questions:

What is one way that you can be bolder in your confession of Jesus as the only way of salvation? Pray as a group for opportunities to share the love of Christ with others and couple it with a gospel conversation.

What is one act that you could do as a group together this week to share of your allegiance to Jesus Christ? Write down the act and be prepared to text each other this week to encourage each other to continue to participate.

Encourage each other to spend five minutes extra this week praying for the persecuted church. Finish your time together praying for boldness as you leave your group time and encounter a world desperately in need of the hope of Jesus Christ provided through his death, burial, and resurrection.

.....

Supplemental quotes and illustrations:

Acts 3:1-10; 4:5-12

"Once the heart of creation beats with the heart of the Creator of all the nations, it will be impossible to remain silent." -Rodney M. Woo

"Those men who received power from God never used that power as if it were their own but referred the power to him from whom they received it; for the power itself could never have any force except through the name of him who gave it. And so both the apostles and all the servants of God never did anything in their own name but in the name and invocation of Christ. For the power itself derived its force from the same source as its origin, and it could not be given through the instrumentality of the ministers, unless it had come from the Author."

-John Cassian (360-435)

"The verdict of 'well done' is in, and as a result you and I run the race of faith, putting off judgment and the fear of man. Even though we will fail miserably, we make the effort nonetheless. After all, God's 'well done' motivates and inspires a life consecrated to His glory."

-Trillia J. Newbell

There once seeing a televangelist working a line of people who had come for healing. He got to one man in particular and asked him what he needed healing from. The man had a broken collarbone. After a short prayer, the televangelist declared the bone to be healed and invited the man to begin moving his arm around. He did-wincing severely with pain. The "healing" hadn't taken. How would you compare the miraculous healing of the lame man with the typical "faith healings" presented on television? How was it different? How can we learn to discern between the two?

Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: The Bible not only affirms the full divinity of the Holy Spirit but also His personhood. Many people have mistakenly believed that the Spirit is a force or power, not a person. However, Scripture affirms His personhood by acknowledging that He is treated as a person

(Acts 5:3; 7:51; Heb. 10:29), acts like a person (John 14:26, 15:26; Rom. 8:14), has attributes of a person (1 Cor. 2:10-11; Eph. 4:30), and acts in personal ways (Isa. 63:10; Acts 13:2). In addition to these, the Bible also affirms that Christians relate to Him personally (Acts 5:3-4; 7:51).

Acts 4:13-22

China Church article: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/september/china-bans-zion-beijing-house-church-surveillance-ezra-jin.html>

"For better than all others he knows the nature of things. He knows that fierceness is not quenched by fierceness but by meekness. If you wish to see this in action, read the book of the Acts of the apostles and you will see how often, when the people...[were] rebelling and sharpening their teeth, these men, imitating the dove and answering with suitable meekness, released their wrath, quenched their madness and dissolved their impetuosity."

-John Chrysostom (circa 347-407)

"If you do not plan to live the Christian life totally committed to knowing your God and to walking in obedience to Him, then don't begin, for this is what Christianity is all about. It is a change of citizenship, a change of governments, a change of allegiance. If you have no intention of letting Christ rule your life, then forget Christianity; it is not for you."

-Kay Arthur

"[W]hen there is a conflict between what human authorities require and God's commands, we have to obey God and risk the consequences. For example, we cannot accept a command that forbids us from ever speaking about Jesus. Peter made his stand clear. John and he, and the entire company of the disciples, would never stop testifying about what they had seen and heard."

-Babu Immanuel Venkataraman

Acts 4:23-31

"[Luke] tells of how the church sought the support and help of God only by prayer. They were not careless, nor did they make light of the dangers approaching. They did not flee to human wisdom, help or counsel but sought all manner of aid and support by prayers. This is the sure sanctuary of the church, because God promises everywhere to be the defender of those who seek help from him." 11

-Rudolf Gwalther (1519-1586)

"Father, I pray for those in the persecuted church and for their leaders. Strengthen them, encourage them, and grant miracles of provision and deliverance. Cause the gospel to spread like wildfire. Give them so much joy, peace, and love that their persecutors will be convicted and fall down and worship you."

-Scotty Smith

Group exercise: Go to www.persecution.com and find names of people that are being persecuted around the world for their faith in Jesus. Bring those names to your group and ask groups of 2-3 to spend some time praying for their persecuted brothers and sisters mentioned in the requests. Challenge the groups to pray specifically for God to grant these Christians boldness as needed to suffer for their ultimate allegiance to Jesus.

.....

Further Commentary

Acts 3:1-10; 4:5-12

"Of the many miracles recounted in Acts, none has more formal resemblance to the miracles of Jesus in the Gospels than this one. There is one major difference-Jesus healed by His own authority; Peter healed by the 'name' of Jesus, which was indeed by Jesus' authority at work through the agency of the apostles...In Acts the miracles were always in the service of the word, confirming God's presence in the spread of the gospel or as a sign that enabled faith. Nowhere is that more evident than in this healing of the blind beggar."

-John B. Polhill

Acts 4:13-22

"[J]ust as Jesus' teaching was coupled with demonstrations of miraculous powers, which reinforced among the people the impression of authority (cf. Mark 1:23-28; 2:1-12; etc.), now Peter and John were beginning to do the same. There was no denying that the man had been healed. There he stood before them, physically regenerated at an age when regenerative cures do not occur of themselves (cf. v. 22, 'for the man...was over forty years old'). But even the miraculous is not self-authenticating apart from openness of heart and mind; and the Sadducees' preoccupation with protecting their vested interests shut them off from really seeing the miracle that occurred."

-Richard N. Longenecker

Acts 4:23-31

"The request in Acts 4:29-30, however, is not for the removal of enemies but for boldness to speak the word of God in the face of opposition. It begins with an extended address to God (vv. 24-28) which is really a form of praise, acknowledging his sovereignty in all things, even in the events associated with the death of Jesus. The apostles imply that what they have just experienced is a continuation of the opposition experienced by Jesus himself. The petitions that follow ask God to allow the work of testifying to Jesus to continue, unimpeded by the threats of the authorities (vv. 29-30). A further filling of the Spirit to enable such boldness is the stunning response (v. 31). 'Thus Luke makes it clear, not for the last time, that attacks upon the church and its message result only in further Christian expansion.' "

-David G. Peterson