

THE CHURCH STANDS FIRM



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. God's people testify about the risen Savior (Acts 4:8-12).
2. God's people refuse to be silenced about the risen Savior (Acts 4:18-22).
3. God's people pray for boldness to proclaim the risen Savior (Acts 4:23-31).

Background Passage: Acts 4

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

When Peter and John were arrested and warned not to preach Jesus, they responded that they could not stop proclaiming the risen Savior.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Although they were warned to stop preaching Jesus, Peter and John responded that they could not keep silent about their experiences with the risen Savior. The gospel is great news that must be shared by those who have come to believe in Jesus Christ.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have experienced the great news of salvation through Jesus, we seek to tell all others about how they too can believe in Jesus and be forgiven of their sin.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **When have you witnessed someone do something bold and how did you respond to their boldness?**

(a teenager who stands up to peer pressure and doesn't give in to temptation; an athlete who testifies to faith in Jesus in the public spotlight; a person who takes a risk to advocate for children in the foster care system; a person who gives away financial resources for the sake of world missions; their boldness often inspires, but it can also bring conviction)

TRANSITION: Boldness is a quality many admire in others but find difficult to develop in themselves. Even Christians find it difficult to be bold when circumstances call for it. The apostles after Jesus's resurrection and filled with the Spirit, however, turned their previous cowardice into boldness.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- Much like Jesus Himself, the apostles soon faced hostility from worldly leaders. The Jewish leaders, in particular, were threatened by those who followed Jesus. Jesus's disciples were seen as a rebellious sect who would not submit to the Jewish leaders. In light of the recent healing of the man born lame, Jewish leaders arrested the apostles and questioned them the next day. Peter and John used these questions to once again proclaim the truth about Jesus.



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POINT 1

GOD'S PEOPLE TESTIFY ABOUT THE RISEN SAVIOR (ACTS 4:8-12).

INTRODUCE: After Peter and John were arrested for healing the man who was lame, the Jewish leaders gathered the next day and asked the apostles by what power or name did they heal him. This was Peter's response.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 4:8-12** from his or her Bible.

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, **9** if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, **10** let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. **11** This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. **12** And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

HIGHLIGHT: Highlight in **verses 8-10** the role of the Holy Spirit (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 110):

Those who experience Jesus's love, through the Holy Spirit, testify about Jesus's death and resurrection.

- The apostles were now speaking before Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders were in a position of power, so it would be riskier for Peter to testify in front of them than it would have been to say the same thing before the crowd at large. But Luke mentions the role of the Holy Spirit's filling Peter so that he could speak boldly.
- The apostles were also subverting the Jewish leadership by saying that healing had come through Jesus alone and not through the religious system these Jewish leaders oversaw. They also pointed the finger at the Jewish leaders for Jesus's death. Only through the power of the Spirit could they speak the truth so directly.
- The crippled man also testified to the work and power of Jesus simply by standing there: "by him this man is standing before you well." His healing was a testament to Jesus.

ASK: (DDG p. 110)

How can you more boldly proclaim Christ with the Spirit's power?
(first, pray for the Spirit's guidance and for opportunities to share; cultivate my heart for evangelism and mission in finding opportunities to go; get trained in growing in evangelistic skills; talk to other believers about growing our passion for mission)

DIG: Both Peter’s newfound boldness and the healing of the crippled man show us that we are transformed and made new as we trust in Jesus and His work on the cross. Read the key doctrine below (DDG p. 110):

Key Doctrine #83: New Identity of the Believer: When a person places faith in Christ, that person undergoes a fundamental change of identity. He or she goes from being an enemy under God’s wrath (Eph. 2:1-3) to being welcomed into God’s family as a beloved child (Eph. 2:19). The believer in Christ is declared righteous on account of Christ’s perfect life and substitutionary death and resurrection. No longer is the person a slave to sin, defined by past failures or present struggles. The person has been delivered from the realm of darkness and now belongs to the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13). Anyone who is in Christ is a “new creation” in whom the old, sinful self is passed away and the new, redeemed self is alive and progressing, becoming more and more like Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

ILLUSTRATE: Look up an image of a cornerstone. Use the image (and additional verses if desired: Ps. 118:22; Luke 20:9-19; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:7-8) and the points below to understand the symbol of a cornerstone in **verses 11-12** (DDG p. 110):

Believers proclaim Jesus as the cornerstone—salvation is found only through Him.

- A perfect stone was essential for the cornerstone. This would have been the first stone set and would have marked the intersection of walls going in perpendicular directions. If the stone was off, the entire building would be unstable. If, however, the cornerstone was set correctly, it would give shape to all of the other stones.
- Jesus is God’s appointed cornerstone. God chose His Son as the only means of salvation and forgiveness of sins. He is the foundation from which all of Christianity derives its structure and support (Eph. 2:19-22). Making this point, the apostles linked their statement to the work they had done in Acts 2–3, when they preached that salvation is only found in Jesus.

TRANSITION: Earlier, some in the crowd who heard the apostles’ message were cut to the heart and asked what they should do in response (Acts 2:37). Here, however, the religious leaders had a very different response.



STONE IMAGERY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Scan this QR code for an explanation of the relationship between Jesus and His church using the metaphor of stones.

BUILDING STONES

In contrast to buildings constructed with wood, buildings made with stone were stronger, but they needed the right stones. It was easy for the rough edges of stones to make an entire building unsteady. Stonecutters would need to ensure that the stones were cut to the exact specifications. Stones that were deemed too unshapely to be used would have been discarded—rejected by the builders.

POINT 2

GOD'S PEOPLE REFUSE TO BE SILENCED ABOUT THE RISEN SAVIOR (ACTS 4:18-22).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 4:18-22** from his or her Bible.

18 So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. **19** But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, **20** for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." **21** And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. **22** For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

EXPLAIN: Remember the disciples who hid in a locked room after Jesus was crucified? In **verses 18-20**, before the same council that had accused Jesus and sent Him to die, Peter and John spoke with boldness. When the council ordered them not to speak or teach in Jesus's name, they boldly answered they could not stop speaking about Jesus. Explain the following main idea (DDG p. 110):

In spite of the world's threats, believers continue to testify to Christ in obedience to God.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The gospel is a story of what has happened in history for the whole world. This kind of message needs to be announced as truth by witnesses. While arrogant and aggressive approaches to evangelism have been only too real in modernity, this does not abolish the task to tell the true story of the world and to seek to convince others of its truth and to aim at response, conversion, and discipleship. This is not an act of dogmatic arrogance but simply the discharge of the task that we have been chosen to do. Not to discharge this task is betrayal."¹

—Michael W. Goheen and Timothy Sheridan

- The classic story of teenage peer pressure is an appropriate illustration for the decision faced by the apostles here. A teenager might know his parents' expectations, but the influence of peers can be overwhelming. The teen must decide—"Will I listen to my parents and do what is right, or will I follow the crowd and do what I want to do, knowing it would bring harm?"
- Like Jesus often did when questioned by the religious leaders, the apostles turned the command back to them and put the religious leaders in a bind. Peter and John said, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge." Surely the religious leaders wouldn't say that Peter and John should disobey God. To do so would be to expose that they weren't really intent on obedience. But the contrast also exposed them. The apostles were clearly pointing out that these leaders and God weren't on the same team.
- Most people in America today are not facing the type of persecution described in this passage. Many do not have leaders breathing down their neck telling them to stop talking about Jesus. Yet, even without such external pressure, many are often silent about Jesus Christ. When Christians today see the boldness of the apostles in Acts 4, it should challenge them to testify about the truth of Jesus wherever God has them. If Jesus is good news, Christians can't be silent.

ASK: (DDG p. 111)

What happens when we fear people rather than God? (we are pulled to do things we might not otherwise do based on the preferences of people; the weight of people's opinions can paralyze us to make decisions, especially if some people say one thing and others say something else; we might disobey God because of the pressure we feel to appease others)

CHALLENGE: In Matthew 27:15-26, the pressure of the crowd worked against Jesus. In **verses 21-22**, things have changed. The crowd saw the miracles associated with Jesus's resurrection, Pentecost, and the healing of the lame man. They gave glory to God and advocated for the apostles, who were released but warned to stop talking about Jesus. Discuss the following point (DDG p. 111):

Despite threats, those who witness the Messiah's work can't stop talking about Him.

- Even with continued threats, the apostles continued in obedience in spreading the good news of Jesus.
- Because of the apostle's obedience, this time the crowd praised God, especially after seeing the healing of the man who was over forty years old and who had been crippled all his life.
- When we share the good news of Jesus in obedience, we may not know the outcome, but God knows. In His perfect timing, He will harvest those who are ready to trust in Jesus.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 111)

From Day 3 in the DDG: **What are some ways people face persecution today for telling the good news of Jesus?** (being labeled a religious fanatic; being type-casted; being seen as weird; having people roll their eyes; feeling awkward in the moment)

TRANSITION: Though the religious leaders only threatened and didn't harm the disciples this time, the apostles knew that such persecution was coming. Jesus had warned them that their fate would involve suffering and persecution similar to what He suffered (Matt. 24:9).

POINT 3

GOD'S PEOPLE PRAY FOR BOLDNESS TO PROCLAIM THE RISEN SAVIOR (ACTS 4:23-31).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 4:23-31** from his or her Bible.

23 When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. **24** And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, **25** who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? **26** The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'— **27** for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, **28** to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. **29** And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, **30** while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." **31** And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

EXPLAIN: After being brought before the chief priests, Peter and John returned to the church with a report of everything that had transpired. In light of **verses 23-28**, think about the following point (DDG p. 111):

The body of Christ prays for each other to receive God's power to pursue kingdom objectives.

- The first thing the apostles and their friends did was pray. Surely, the apostles had already prayed privately while they were being threatened, but notice here that as soon as they got back and reported to the others what had happened, they all stopped and prayed together.
- When they prayed, the church (1) acknowledged God for who He is—their Master, (2) worshiped Him for His sovereign power over everything He created, (3) believed the truth of His Word—that the nations will always rage against God's Messiah, and His people, as Scripture has foretold (see Ps. 2:1-2), (4) looked to Jesus as an example of how to endure unjust suffering, and (5) admitted their trust in the Lord's purpose and plan.
- The place to look for boldness during difficult circumstances isn't yourself, but to the Lord. He is the One who grants the power by His Holy Spirit to have courage even in the face of bodily harm. Whatever difficult thing Christians face, they can trust God for boldness through prayer.

ASK: (DDG p. 111)

How do we cultivate more corporate prayer for the work of God's mission in our lives? (plan prayer meetings within our small group or just with friends; make sure we pray for the growth of God's kingdom as we pray for our own prayer requests; make sure every ministry or service opportunity begins and ends with prayer, as well as the in-between times)

HIGHLIGHT: Using **verses 29-31**, discuss the following point (DDG p. 111):

In any service to God, we respond in obedience through prayer and proclaiming Christ, but God is the One working in hearts and changing lives.

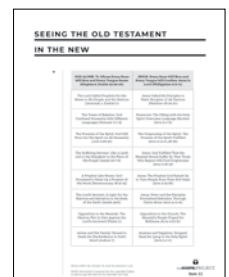
- The apostles waited until the end of the prayer to ask for boldness. It would have been tempting for them to start with this prayer, but they focused their affections on God and His Son, Jesus Christ, first. Once they were properly oriented toward God, they could ask Him for what they needed with confidence.
- Notice again the role of God and of people in this passage. The apostles asked that God would stretch out His hand, heal, and perform signs and wonders. In turn, they asked God that they would have boldness to speak. In other words, the work of salvation is God's, the work of boldness was theirs.
- As a result of their focused prayer, the place was shaken; all were filled with the Spirit and they continued to speak with boldness. In other words, God answered their prayers immediately, confirming His presence and agreement, as they were in tune with His will and mission.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 111)

What are ways we can respond in obedience to God's plan to bring salvation to others who don't yet know Him? (learn more on evangelism and mission to equip us with tools; pray for daily opportunities; find the joy and passion of our faith that we would naturally share this good news; be intentional about proclaiming Christ, knowing it is God's will)

SUMMARIZE: Use **PACK ITEM 11: SEEING THE OLD IN THE NEW** to summarize how Peter and John preached about Jesus as the Suffering Servant and only through Him can salvation come—yet still opposition would come their way. All this, however, had already been revealed in Scripture. (Remind your group to keep this handout for a future session.)

TRANSITION: The continual filling of the Spirit in God's people today still gives us boldness to speak the gospel (Eph. 5:18).



MY RESPONSE

SAY: Although they were warned to stop preaching Jesus, Peter and John responded that they could not keep silent about their experiences with the risen Savior. The gospel is great news that must be shared by those who have come to believe in Jesus Christ. Because we have experienced the great news of salvation through Jesus, we seek to tell all others about how they too can believe in Jesus and be forgiven of their sin.

HEAD:

The apostles were compelled by the truth of what they'd seen and heard. They couldn't stop talking about Jesus because they knew He is God's Messiah, resurrected from the dead. These realities compelled them to speak, even as they were persecuted for their message. These apostles asked the Lord for boldness, not merely to endure suffering, but to continue to speak boldly about Jesus.

Why does the truth of the resurrection compel Christians to speak about Jesus?

HEART:

Boldness is a trait of the heart before it is something that we do. The Holy Spirit strengthens the human heart to love the message of the gospel. He always enables the heart to press through fear and do what is right regardless of the cost. Boldness doesn't come easy. In fact, it's a trait that God has to cultivate in the life of Christians long before they actually need it.

In what ways can you confess that you haven't been bold for Jesus?

HANDS:

Powered by boldness, Christians speak. They don't merely do good things in the world, but they testify that Jesus is the Savior and call others to turn from their sin and trust in Him. It is a waste of the gift of boldness if God promises to give it, but people never take a risk to speak. Christians should first pray that God would give boldness and then seek out those around them with whom they can share the saving message of Jesus.

To whom in your life can you boldly share the good news of Jesus?

PRAY: Father, we know that Your Word tells us that we can ask in Jesus's name, and You will grant our requests in keeping with Your wisdom. We trust that You will continue to empower those who testify about Jesus, and we ask that You give us all boldness to speak truth to those You put in our path.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Suffering . . . is the badge of the true Christian. The disciple is not above his master . . . Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true church, and one of the memoranda drawn up in preparation for the Augsburg Confession similarly defines the church as the community of those 'who are persecuted and martyred for the gospel's sake.' . . . Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer."²

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer
(1906–1945)

POINT 1: GOD’S PEOPLE TESTIFY ABOUT THE RISEN SAVIOR (ACTS 4:8-12).

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COMMENTARY

“Luke makes it plain that both waves of persecution were initiated by the Sadducees (4:1 and 5:17). They were the ruling class of wealthy aristocrats. Politically, they ingratiated themselves with the Romans, and followed a policy of collaboration, so that they feared the subversive implications of the apostles’ teaching. Theologically, they believed that the Messianic age had begun in the Maccabean period; so they were not looking for a Messiah. They also denied the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, which the apostles proclaimed in Jesus (2b). They thus saw the apostles as both agitators and heretics, both disturbers of the peace and enemies of the truth.”³

POINT 3: GOD’S PEOPLE PRAY FOR BOLDNESS TO PROCLAIM THE RISEN SAVIOR (ACTS 4:23-31).

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ILLUSTRATION

You’ve probably played sock puppet with a young child before. The hidden hand is doing the work, but the kid thinks that the puppet is doing it all. Their little minds easily miss the invisible hand at work. So too people tend to miss the invisible hand of God at work in the world. In verse 28, the apostles entrusted themselves to God who can do whatever His hand has purposed to come to pass. The hand of God is executing the will of God from the foundations of the world. Christians remember that God is always at work. He is not standing at a distance and watching the world spiral out of control; rather, God is active and at work in this very moment to bring about His purposes. This should bring us great hope and confidence that the Lord is attentive to the needs and concerns we face. He is able to bring about good in any circumstance.

References

1. Michael W. Goheen and Timothy M. Sheridan, *Becoming a Missionary Church: Lesslie Newbigin and Contemporary Church Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2022), 170.
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (United States: Touchstone, 2012), 91 [eBook].
3. John Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 95.