

Boldness

March 5, 2023

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Acts 4:23-31

Session Outline

1. Acknowledge the Lord (Acts 4:23-24)
2. Powerful Prayer (Acts 4:25-28)
3. Request and Results (Acts 4:29-31)

Theological Theme

As Christ continued to work through His disciples, opposition and persecution arose. The early believers demonstrated their faith by praising the Lord, praying His will, and asking for boldness to carry out the mission they had received.



Leader Guide

Boldness

Introduction

Many things in the world are considered “bold.” Some use bold fonts when they type or text so their message can be easily seen and emphasized. There are those who prefer their coffee bold because they like the rich, strong flavor. Certain regions of the country describe their food flavors as bold.

There are also specific situations that call for bold behavior. Jesus has called His followers to boldness for His sake. The early church understood the need for boldness and gave examples of what bold faith looks like. Likewise, we are called to live out a bold faith in our daily lives.

- ❓ What comes to mind when you hear the word “bold”?
- ❓ What is something that you prefer to have in “bold”?
- ❓ What are some situations in your life that require boldness?

Session Summary

The early believers carried on the work of the Lord, and it drew opposition and persecution. Just after being restrained and threatened for preaching with boldness, Peter and John praised God even more. They rejoiced over the opportunity they had to share with the religious leaders and prayed to the Lord, acknowledging His power and presence in their lives.

In their prayers, they also asked God to work His will in their lives and for further boldness to live out their faith. Christians today can learn from their example as we face difficulties and opposition to our faith. We can continually praise God as we take advantage of opportunities to share our faith with boldness.

Leaders: Have your group's missions representative share about your group's upcoming missions project


1. Acknowledge the Lord (Acts 4:23-24)

As always happens when God is at work, the enemy stirred up opposition. After being detained and questioned, Peter and John were released and went immediately back to their fellow believers. They reported all that had happened and the way they were able to share about Jesus during their questioning. The entire group praised God and rejoiced when they heard this report.

We might wonder how or why they would rejoice after they were threatened. Peter and John celebrated and rejoiced because they had been accused of being like Jesus. That was and is the goal for every Christian. When we stand up for our faith or speak up about Jesus, it will not always be well received. No matter what happens, when we take advantage of an opportunity to share our faith, it is cause for rejoicing.


The disciples responded to what they heard in prayer. They raised their voices together as one to the Lord. It is important to note that they were vocal in their prayers, praise, and worship—they spoke it out loud. Although you can pray quietly or personally in your heart, there is great power in praying out loud with other people agreeing.

Not only did they pray aloud, but they were also unified in their prayers. There was no breaking off in groups lobbying for their own desires. They gathered and agreed in prayer. This is a good lesson for the church today. Instead of focusing on each person's agenda, when the church prays in unity, there is power.

 When was a time you experienced the power in praying together with other believers?


Notice how they addressed the Lord in their prayers. They prayed to the Lord of creation and the God of all power. This was not because they needed to remind God of who He is but because they wanted to remind themselves of who they called on. In calling on the God of all creation and power they acknowledged His supremacy prior to bringing their requests.

Instead of asking for help from a human with very limited power and capabilities, in prayer we worship and petition the Most High God, who is beyond comparison. Too many Christians pray weak, limited prayers because we forget who we are talking to.

 How are you prompted to change the way you pray after seeing the example of the early church?

2. Powerful Prayer (Acts 4:25-28)


Our prayers are powerful not because of the way we pray but because of the One to whom we pray. One practice for praying in power is praying Scripture back to God. Because all Scripture is God breathed and given by the Lord (see 2 Timothy 3:16), when we quote what God has already spoken, we can be sure we are praying according to His will and power. The early church was a shining example of this. They not only prayed in unity, but they also regularly referenced Old Testament Scriptures in their prayers.

 How does praying Scripture back to God give us confidence in the things we pray?

Notice the reference to the Holy Spirit giving words to David who wrote many of the Psalms. This is a clear indication that they believed the Scriptures were inspired by God and given to man. This showed their respect for the Lord and belief in what He has said and done. There are those who claim to believe in God but question and doubt the validity of Scripture. Others claim to firmly believe parts of the Bible but ignore or disagree with parts of Scripture they don't like. The Bible is God's Holy Word and needs to be received and believed in its entirety. We should have a high view of Scripture just as these disciples expressed.

In light of the persecution and troubles they experienced, the disciples looked to Scripture for encouragement. Psalm 2, which the early disciples quoted, reminds us that being persecuted for your faith is to be expected. It is also a Psalm that expresses complete confidence in God to achieve His victory in the end.

Referencing Scripture in relation to their situation teaches us another important practice as believers. We should always view our circumstances in light of the Word of God. God's Word sheds light on our hearts to reveal if there is a sin problem. It also reminds us who the real enemy is in a situation, so we know how to pray more effectively. We also pray the promises of God back to Him to receive what we need for the moment at hand.

 How can Scripture help you see a current situation in your life more clearly?

When we are in the habit of looking at our circumstances through the lens of Scripture, we will gain a godly perspective. We are also reminded that God is always working. There is never a time when God is off the clock or forgets about His people. Scripture is a confidence builder that empowers us to trust the Lord with every detail of whatever we are facing just as the disciples did in Acts 4. It also helps us focus on God's will over our own desires so that we pray according to what He wants, trusting that His will is always best.

- Application: What do you need to change about the way you have been praying lately? Have your prayers been more self-focused or God-focused?

3. Request and Results (Acts 4:29-31)

Acknowledging the Lord and His power in line with the Scriptures leads to bolder requests, not more limited ones. The disciples' requests were all about God and His glory. They didn't pray for less persecution or easier days. They asked for boldness that would likely lead to more contention from their opposition. We tend to ask for things to be easier and simpler. What if we prayed more like the disciples and asked for the boldness to live our faith and push the gospel forward with more confidence and strength?

- How might our faith be strengthened and/or our lives be more difficult if we prayed like the disciples did?

As the disciples asked for more miracles to be performed, they were careful to give all the glory to God. They recognized that any miraculous happenings were all for His glory. This kind of humility invites the Spirit of God to work further in our lives. If we aren't careful, we will mistakenly accept credit or glory for God's work. Although the Lord does often work through people, these things are always done to draw people back to Him. The disciples were conscious of this in the way they lived and the way they prayed.

- Why is it so important to acknowledge that only God has the power to do the miraculous?

The results of this prayer were remarkable and powerful. First, the place they were praying was shaken. Second, we are told they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Finally, as a result, the people spoke the Word of God with boldness.

Necessary Boldness

The early Christians recognized that just as Jesus had been promised trouble, they too would encounter persecution for proclaiming him as the Messiah. They asked God for the power to speak with all boldness, even if punishment should follow.

Have you been on a mission trip where your faith or security was challenged? If so, how did your prayer life change? If not, check out missions opportunities at

brentwood.church/missions

The people received what they asked for and more. They all spoke with boldness just as they had requested. This type of boldness was not something they could stir up themselves but was given to them by God through the presence of His Spirit. This is the same boldness that believers today need to reach the lost world with the gospel. Christ followers would do well to emulate the example shown by these early Christians as they prayed for boldness to stand against opposition and speak the truth to the world.



Application: Where do you currently need boldness from the Lord? How will you seek Him in that?

Conclusion

The early church gave some excellent examples to help us grow in our faith and live with a bold faith daily. They didn't complain about the persecution and opposition they faced but they praised God. Instead of continually asking for things to be easier and smoother, we can do what these disciples did and praise God for the difficult things we face, seeking to take advantage of every opportunity to share the truth about Jesus.

We can also follow the example of their prayers: They prayed together and in unity. When believers pray in unity it speaks volumes to the watching world and it is more effective than pushing for our own agendas. When we are unified in our prayers, we are more likely to pray God's will and seek to bring Him glory instead of promoting ourselves.

Praying Scripture back to God fuels our prayers to be more powerful and effective. These believers didn't just stop at praise, they also demonstrated how and what to ask. They asked for boldness to fulfill the call of God in their lives. God responded to the prayers of the people with impressive results when the place they were gathered trembled from the presence of the Holy Spirit. Each person was filled with the Spirit, and they all spoke with boldness. The world is bold and aggressive. It's time for the people of God to speak the truth with boldness that brings about real change!

- ❓ How do you need to change the way you pray based on today's study?
- ❓ What did you learn about praising God in difficult times that you can apply to your life?
- ❓ What opportunity do you need to take advantage of to share about Jesus with another person? How will this require Spirit-led boldness?
- ❓ What mission trip are you considering?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for answering your prayers and being with you in even the most difficult times. Confess the times you have not promoted unity and commit to be unified with your fellow believers. Ask for boldness like the early church did to step out in faith when your prayers are answered.

Additional Resources

- *Be Dynamic* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Acts* by R.C. Sproul
- *The Book of Acts* by F.F. Bruce

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



DxD This Week

Call to Action

Challenge your group to press into the Lord in prayer and worship, asking Him to anoint us with boldness to faithfully share the gospel with all of those around us, that He would work in the lives of others for Jesus's glory.

Questions to Guide Your Group's Discussion

1. What does this passage say?
2. What did this passage mean to its original audience?
3. What does this passage tell us about God?
4. What does this passage tell us about man?
5. What does this passage demand of me?
6. How does this passage change the way I relate to people? (*How can you use this information this week at work or with friends and neighbors?*)
7. How does this passage prompt me to pray to God?

*Adapted from Seven Arrows by Matt Rogers pastor of The Church at Cherrydale, Greenville, SC

For Next Week

Session Title

- Gathering + Groups

Main Passages

- Acts 4:32-37

Session Outline

1. A Church Unified (Acts 4:32-33)
2. A Church that Serves (Acts 4:34-37)
3. A Church that Supports (1 Thessalonians 5:12-18)

Memorize

When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly. - Acts 4:31

Historical Context of Acts

Purpose

The book of Acts emphasizes the work of God through the Holy Spirit in the lives of people who devoted themselves to Jesus Christ, especially Paul as he led the Gentile missionary endeavor. It is no exaggeration to say that the Christian church was built through the dynamic power of the Spirit working through chosen vessels. Another important concept is the radial spread of the gospel from Jews to Gentiles, from Jerusalem to Judea, from Samaria and on to the rest of the world (1:8). Thus Christianity transformed from being a sect within Judaism to a world religion that eventually gained acceptance everywhere, even in the heart of the pagan Roman Empire: Rome itself.

Author

The book of Acts is formally anonymous. The traditional view is that the author was the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke—Luke the physician and traveling companion of Paul (Col 4:14; 2Tm 4:11; Phm 24). As early as the second century AD, church leaders such as Irenaeus wrote that Luke was the author of Acts. Irenaeus based his view on the “we” passages in Acts, five sections where the author changes from the third person (“he/she” and “they”) to first-person plural (“we”) as he narrates the action (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–29; 28:1–16). Irenaeus and many scholars since his time have interpreted these passages to mean that the author of Acts was one of the eyewitness companions of Paul. Luke fits this description better than any other candidate, especially given the similar themes between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

Setting

The date of composition of the book of Acts is to a large extent directly tied to the issue of authorship. A number of scholars have argued that Acts should be dated to the early 60s (at the time of Paul’s imprisonment). Acts closes with Paul still in prison in Rome (28:30–31). Although it is possible that Luke wrote at a later date, a time when Paul had been released, it is more plausible to think that he completed this book while Paul was still in prison. Otherwise he would have ended the book by telling about Paul’s release.

Special Features

The book of Acts provides a glimpse into the first three decades of the early church (ca AD 30–63) as it spread and multiplied after the ascension of Jesus Christ. It is not a detailed or comprehensive history. Rather, it focuses on the role played by apostles such as Peter, who ministered primarily to Jews, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

Extended Commentary

Acts 4:23-31

4:23–24. As Peter and John went back to the believers praying for them, they reported what must have been viewed by all as a victory. What follows is one of the most dramatic prayers of the New Testament because it reflects the way the early Christians prayed.

They began with creation—you made ... everything. The word for sovereign Lord is *despotes*, literally “lord of the house,” used ten times in the New Testament, three to address God in prayers (Luke 2:29; Rev. 6:10; and here) and three referring to Christ (2 Tim. 2:21; 2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 4). As its English cognate *despot*, the term can imply harshness of rule and caprice, but the Greek Old Testament uses it for God twenty-five times, emphasizing God’s unlimited power. Notice also that they prayed together. Peter and John came back to their own people, and now they prayed together. Luke repeatedly emphasizes unity throughout the Book of Acts, a theme which might well be more highly developed in contemporary churches.

Why begin with creation? Why remind God of what he had done? Because creation remains foundational to every other doctrine, and it certainly demonstrates the sovereignty of God, the very foundation for this prayer (cf. Acts 14:15; 2 Pet. 3:1–14).

4:25–26. The second theme of the prayer is revelation—you spoke ... through ... David. Here Luke delivers another *pesher* to describe the praying of the early Christians as they found their present dilemma well outlined in Psalm 2:1–2. They just assumed the nations were Gentile authorities; the peoples, the religious leaders of Israel; the kings of the earth, a reference to Herod; and the rulers, likely pointing to Pilate. All that seems confirmed by the flow of the prayer beyond these two verses.

Let’s back up. This Creator whom the believers addressed in verse 24 is self-revealed. Since we cannot test creation by scientific methods which deal only with repeatable events, it must be understood by faith (Heb. 11:3). Furthermore, faith in a Creator demands a recognition of his involvement in his world (Rom. 1:18–20).

Most people have little difficulty dealing with a Creator, a vague concept accepted by many who have no faith in Jesus. It takes quite another step to recognize that the Creator has personally revealed himself and therefore made his creation responsible for what he has said.

4:27–28. Creation and revelation are followed by a discussion of the incarnation. Not only did the Sovereign Lord create the world, but he controls suffering—both of Jesus and now of his people. Human leaders may deliberate, but God ultimately determines destiny. An ancient king by the name of Nebuchadnezzar learned that the hard way (Dan. 4). Now incarnation becomes a highlight of revelation. All these people clearly understood that God had spoken through prophets for hundreds of years. The praying church emphasized that now he has spoken through Jesus Christ his Son (cf. Heb. 1:1–3).

A little boy finished his bedtime prayers with mommy. Holding her tight, he said, “Momma, I like you better than God.” In shock the Christian mother pointed out how important it is for even little boys to love God more than they love their parents. She inquired why the youngster would say that he loved his mommy more than God. After only a brief pause the boy responded, “Because I can hug you.”

The incarnation made God “huggable.” All that had been heard in the thunderous words of Elijah and Elisha or read in the tomes of Isaiah and Jeremiah had now been seen on earth in the person of Jesus Christ.

4:29–31. At this point the prayer turned to the practical outworking of their dilemma. Creation, revelation, and incarnation are doctrines and important ones. Life and its daily problems are also important to you and to God, so now the prayer turns to motivation. “Sovereign Lord: you made everything; you spoke through David; you anointed Jesus; and now you enable your servants.” They reached out for even more courage, even greater boldness. They continued their witness as God confirmed it through miraculous signs in the name of Jesus.

This was not a prayer for relief, but a prayer for courage, an excellent pattern for the modern church. The prayer assumes dependence and faith. These believers expected to do nothing by themselves; everything rested in the sovereign power of God and the name of Jesus.

How did God respond? The room shook, and he filled them anew with the Holy Spirit and sent them out to speak the word of God boldly. Here they received no baptism, nor did they speak in foreign languages (see chap. 2); it was not necessary. These born-again, functioning believers only needed a fresh filling to continue their effective service.

The model of this prayer is still very applicable for us today. Like these early believers, we need to understand that the self-revealed Creator who sent his Son to earth to die and rise again for our salvation will give us the courage we need to carry out whatever ministry he places before us.¹

References

1. Kenneth O. Gangel, *Acts*, vol. 5, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 62-63.

Author Bio

Warren Wiersbe (Be Dynamic)

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of Back to the Bible, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as “the pastor’s pastor.” He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

R.C. Sproul (Acts)

R.C. Sproul (1939–2017) was founder of Ligonier Ministries in Orlando, Fla. He was also copastor of Saint Andrew’s Chapel, first president of Reformation Bible College, and executive editor of *Tabletalk* magazine. His radio program, *Renewing Your Mind*, is still broadcast daily on hundreds of radio stations around the world and can also be heard online.

F.F. Bruce (The Book of Acts)

F.F. Bruce (1910 - 1990) was a distinguished scholar on the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul, and wrote several studies the best known of which is *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (published in the United Kingdom under the title *Paul, the Apostle of the Free Spirit*). He also wrote commentaries on several biblical books including the Gospel of John, Acts, 1 & 2 Corinthians, and the Epistle to the Hebrews.