

THREE

A person is sitting in a theater, wearing a dark blue t-shirt. They are holding a black remote control in their right hand. There is a bowl of popcorn on the left side of the frame. The background is a light blue wall.

A MISSION MET WITH COURAGE

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WHAT MOVIE OR TV CHARACTER DO YOU THINK EMBODIES TRUE COURAGE?

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

After an evangelism class, Art sheepishly approached the leader. He explained that he had recently met up with old friends, guys who weren't Christians. He hadn't seen them in years. They invited Art to the lake on Sunday morning. Art confided, "I told them I was busy. I didn't mention church. It was the perfect opportunity to share my faith, but I was afraid of what they would say." The leader encouraged Art and prayed with him for boldness for the next time. Speaking up for Christ takes courage. Peter and John were placed in an intimidating situation, but God gave them courage to speak boldly.

THE POINT

God gives us _____ to speak boldly about Christ.

Peter and John encountered a lame beggar at the gate of the temple, and God used them to heal the man. Word of the miracle quickly spread, and a crowd of people wanting to see the man for themselves gathered around the disciples. Peter used the opportunity to preach the gospel. The crowd also attracted the attention of some religious leaders who were angered by the message of the disciples.

Acts 4:1-3 ¹ While they were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple police, and the Sadducees confronted them, ² because they were annoyed that they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³ So they seized them and took them into custody until the next day since it was already evening.

1) Speaking about Christ can lead to _____.

The temple was busy with people coming and going. Even so, the large crowd gathered at Solomon's Colonnade attracted the attention of the religious leaders. The commander of the temple police went to investigate. He was responsible for maintaining order in the temple. Some Sadducees heard them discussing the resurrection of the dead. Since they didn't believe in the resurrection, they also got involved. The gospel message can be offensive to those who don't believe. The Sadducees were offended by the teaching of the disciples. The temple police were troubled by the crowd. Both groups wanted to stop what was happening, so they took Peter and John into custody until they could arrange a hearing with the Sanhedrin.

Acts 4:8-12 ⁸ Then Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders: ⁹ If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a disabled man, by what means

he was 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 and whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing here before you healthy.¹¹ This Jesus is the stone rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone.¹² There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.”

2) Proclaim faith in Christ as the _____ way to receive eternal life.

After spending the night in jail, Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin. The leaders stared at them with grim faces and asked, “By what power or in what name have you done this?” (v. 7). Everything about the encounter was designed to intimidate the disciples. However, the Holy Spirit filled Peter with boldness. Without hesitation, Peter proclaimed the death and resurrection of Christ. Finally, Peter made an astounding claim: Jesus alone provides salvation (v. 12). These religious leaders trusted their Jewish heritage for their salvation, but their religion and traditions had no power to save. Even religious leaders must turn to Christ to receive salvation.

Acts 4:19-20 ¹⁹ Peter and John answered them, “Whether it’s right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; ²⁰ for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

3) Speak boldly about Christ despite _____.

When intimidation didn’t work, the religious leaders threatened Peter and John. They forbade them to speak about Jesus to anyone (v. 18). Despite the real threats, Peter and John continued to speak boldly. The disciples had a choice—they could listen to the Sanhedrin and disobey God, or listen to God and disobey the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin could throw them in jail. But God had given them forgiveness, eternal life, and purpose in Christ. There was no choice. Peter and John would obey God, but their decision then left the Sanhedrin with a choice. They could pass judgment against the disciples for obeying God or let them go. Peter and John awaited their judgment but had no intention of changing their minds.

ENGAGE

Think about times you’ve faced opposition for your faith. How did you respond? Using the space in the margin, list ways you can stand firm against opposition like Peter and John.

LIVE IT OUT

What actions will you take in response to today's study?

- **Pray.** Visit imb.org/pray to learn about Christian boldness around the world. Pray for courage for these Christians as they share the message of Christ.
- **Memorize.** We can have confidence to speak boldly when we know our message is the truth. Memorize Acts 4:12 this week. Use a Bible memorization app, save the verse as the wallpaper on your phone, or post it somewhere you'll see it daily.
- **Share.** Have a conversation with someone who needs to know Christ. Ignore the voices telling you that the person may not respond well. Trust God to give you boldness.

TALK IT OUT

Want to go a step further? Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read Acts 4:1-3, 8-12, 19-20, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.

Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrin. The religious leaders were accustomed to intimidating the Jews who stood before them. They expected the disciples to bend to their wishes. Instead, the religious leaders encountered their boldness and determination to stand their ground. And when the Sanhedrin threatened them if they spoke the name of Jesus, Peter and John refused to be silenced. Boldness like that only comes from God.

- ? **What are some ways the message of Jesus conflicts with our culture?**
- ? **How do Peter's actions in these verses challenge you?**
- ◎ **Share situations in which you need boldness. Then pray together for boldness and courage only God can provide.**

DAY 1: Speaking about Christ can lead to confrontation.**Read Acts 4:1-4.**

The healing of the lame man (Acts 3) drew a crowd. Peter took the opportunity to proclaim Christ to the Jews gathered in the temple. Before long, this attracted the attention of the Jewish authorities. In verse 1, Luke identified three groups of people who came over to see what the issue was. Priests were likely in the temple to conduct official business, such as leading prayers, offering sacrifices, and tending to the incense burning on the altar. Next was the temple police. He was a priest with the responsibility of keeping order in the temple. Finally, a group of Sadducees noticed the gathering. Sadducees were a conservative sect that tended to maintain wealth and power. They didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. These leaders didn't think Peter and John should be teaching in the temple. They didn't like the talk of resurrection and were concerned about the disruption the crowd could cause in their carefully ordered society.

The healing of the lame beggar didn't seem to be a big problem for these leaders. However, when Peter and John announced that the healing had been accomplished in the name of Jesus, this raised concern. The elite, powerful leaders of the temple were unconvinced. Instead of welcoming the good news from the disciples, "they seized them and took them into custody until the next day since it was already evening" (v. 3).

Peter and John were taken away, but the crowd didn't seem to lose interest. This incident sparked opposition from the religious leaders to the spread of the gospel, but the common people disagreed with the Sadducees. In fact, Luke tells us that belief in Christ spread quickly. "Many of those who heard the message believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand" (v. 4).

- 🕒 **Peter and John continued to speak the truth, even under pressure. Ask God for boldness in your own faith conversations. Confess any fears or hesitations. Pray specifically for one person in your life who needs to hear about Jesus.**

DAY 2: The Holy Spirit empowers us to share the gospel.

Read Acts 4:5-10.

Peter and John spent the night in jail awaiting the hearing with the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin typically met each morning, except on the Sabbath. When Luke described those present, he named Annas as high priest. While records suggest that his son-in-law Caiaphas was actually serving in the role at the time, Annas was definitely the one who held the power to lead the gathering. We don't know who John and Alexander were, though some have speculated that John was Annas's son Jonathan, who later became high priest after Caiaphas. The rulers, elders, and scribes were seated in a semicircle around Peter and John. Clearly, this gathering was intended to intimidate the two young men.

As the leader of the Sanhedrin, the high priest would have likely posed the question of the body: "By what power or in what name have you done this?" (v. 7). The question seems a little vague. Were they asking about the healing? Or was the question about the preaching that had gotten them arrested? Regardless, the answer for Peter was the same: Both the healing and the subsequent preaching were by the power of Jesus and in His name.

"Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 8) as he began to proclaim the truth about Jesus. What does that mean? The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is the presence of God in the life of every believer (John 14:17; Acts 2:38; 1 Corinthians 6:19; Ephesians 4:30). While the Holy Spirit abides with every believer, the Bible often references moments or occasions when the Holy Spirit "fills" God's people. That is to say, there are times when the Holy Spirit is uniquely and powerfully at work in and through God's people to accomplish God's purposes (Luke 1:67; Acts 2:4; 4:31; 13:52). For Peter, this moment was one of those times.

Peter faced an intimidating gathering of men who had the power to harm him. Peter didn't try to defend himself but instead launched into a sermon. The power of Jesus saved and healed this man, and He's willing to save all who turn to Him.

- 🕒 **Using the space in the margin, describe your understanding of how the Holy Spirit aids you in sharing the gospel.**

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Without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing. We are as ships without wind. We are useless.

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Charles Spurgeon

DAY 3: Salvation comes from Jesus alone.

Read Acts 4:10-13.

Peter didn't shy away from speaking about Jesus. Look at what he proclaimed:

- **You crucified Jesus (v. 10).** Jesus was killed by Roman crucifixion, but the execution was orchestrated by many of the members of the Sanhedrin who were sitting in judgment of these disciples.
- **God raised Him from the dead (v. 10).** Most in the Sanhedrin would have denied or tried to cover up the resurrection of Jesus. Peter didn't back off from this key fact. Jesus was alive.
- **The lame man was healed in Jesus's name (v. 10).** The power of Jesus was on display before the Sanhedrin. He had been raised from the dead by the Father; He certainly had the authority to heal a man's legs.
- **Jesus was the stone the builders rejected (v. 11).** Peter referred to Psalm 118:22, highlighting that although Jesus had been rejected by the religious leaders present, God made Him the cornerstone—the spiritual foundation of His people. (The early church believed strongly that this psalm pointed to Jesus. It's also referenced in Luke 20:17 and 1 Peter 2:7.)
- **Salvation is found only in Jesus (v. 12).** Jesus was the only hope for the forgiveness of sin and a right relationship with God. This was true for the disciples. It was true for the lame man and the crowds at the temple. It was true for the men of the Sanhedrin. It's true for all people today.

Peter didn't make a long speech, but what he said left the religious leaders with their mouths hanging open. He spoke with authority, though he was a simple fisherman. Their only explanation was that he had been with Jesus.

? What are some "stones" that people tend to build their lives on? What does it look like practically to build your life on Him? Journal your thoughts in the margin.

DAY 4: The message of Jesus can't be silenced.**Read Acts 4:13-18.**

The members of the Sanhedrin were taken aback by the boldness of Peter and John. They dismissed the disciples so they could discuss what to do with them. On one hand, the disciples had been brash. They were “uneducated and untrained” (v. 13); that is, they were simple laymen with no formal training in the Law. Jesus was also without formal training, and He, too, was bold. The leaders were used to people wilting before them, but these disciples of Jesus even dared to confront them about their role in the crucifixion. They certainly didn't want another uprising like the one they experienced with Jesus.

On the other hand, the man they had healed also stood before them. It isn't clear why he was there. Perhaps he had been detained or kept in custody with Peter and John. Or maybe he was called as a witness. It's possible he just came to offer support to Peter and John. In any case, his ability to walk was a strong testimony in favor of Peter and John. The disciples had gained a positive reputation with the people. More and more of them were listening to the message of Jesus.

The Sanhedrin just wanted the situation to go away. They wanted Peter and John to stop preaching. The leaders didn't want the message of Christ to spread any further. The leaders had the authority to imprison the men, but such action would have been seen by the people as an improper use of their authority. And how would they explain imprisoning men who had healed a lame beggar?

The leaders finally decided to threaten Peter and John. Perhaps they could intimidate the men into compliance. They demanded that the disciples stop preaching in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John weren't intimidated.

- 🕒 **Meet up with a Christian friend for a “courage check.”**
Talk about times you've felt pressure to stay silent about your faith and how you can have the courage to speak up, even when it's uncomfortable. Commit to pray for and hold each other accountable.

DAY 5: We must continue to speak about what we've seen and heard.

Read Acts 4:18-22.

The Sanhedrin “called for them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus” (v. 18). Perhaps their threats went something like this: “We’re a tolerant body, so we’re not going to punish you for what you’ve done. However, let us be very clear. You won’t be allowed to continue your incendiary teaching. You must not speak about Jesus, His crucifixion, or His resurrection again. If you do, we’ll have no choice but to exact serious punishment on you both.”

The disciples responded calmly. The religious leaders would have to decide if they thought their words should carry more weight than the words of God (v. 19). Could someone be a priest of God if he stood against the commands of God? Essentially, Peter and John were saying, “If you’re willing to stand against the word of God, you may well be able to punish us.” Nevertheless, the disciples stated clearly that they didn’t have a choice in the matter. They were compelled to continue to speak about Christ and the things they had witnessed about Him. Regardless of the threats, they wouldn’t quit preaching “in the name of Jesus” (v. 18).

No doubt, the response wasn’t what the religious leaders had expected. The disciples wouldn’t submit. The Sanhedrin didn’t see a way to act further. The man who had been crippled all his life had been healed. The people were praising God for this miracle. Peter and John were recognized by the community as men of God. Seeing no simple option, the religious leaders let them go.

May we also be “unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard” (v. 20).

- 🕒 **Reflect on the things you have “seen and heard” of Jesus in your own life. Spend some time in prayer today, asking the Lord to give you the boldness and courage to keep speaking of Him and what He has done, no matter what.**