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**Word to Life**’s are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

**Week 9: Acts 3:11-26**

**Day 1: Amazed and Unchanged**

**READ: Acts 3:11-26, John 10:22-32**

**EXPLORE:**

Imagine, but if for just a moment, that you are transported into the setting of Acts 3:11. In the aftermath of a miraculous healing, the man previously identified as a lame beggar is clutching desperately to both Peter and John. The crowd that witnessed this supernatural moment is unsurprisingly filled with wonder and a healthy dose of confusion. In the chaos, Acts 3:11 tells us that all the people ran together toward John, Peter, and the healed man.

Imagine a human tidal wave filled with adrenaline, confusion, and chaos! We are told that this human stampede of chaotic amazement flooded Solomon’s Colonnade. This reference to what is often called Solomon’s Colonnade or Portico is not accidental or insignificant. Solomon’s Colonnade was the name given to the entryway which ran along the east side of the outer court of Herod’s temple. For the ancient audience and us today, the setting of Solomon’s Colonnade should immediately remind us of Christ’s ministry in that same area. Location is never accidental.

Similar to the setting in Acts, Jesus also had an interesting encounter at the portico in John 10:22-32. Jesus, John, and Peter were all positioned to offer clarity for a crowd of confused onlookers. As a result, when we read Acts 3:11 and Peter’s speech that follows, we are to be reminded of the specific ministry of Jesus.

In the Gospel of John and Acts, it is important to remember that just because a person or group is excited or enthusiastic does not necessarily mean they have understanding. Both sections of scripture that were assigned for today ought to remind us that it is possible to be dumbfounded and even amazed but remain altogether unchanged.

Be reminded today that anticipation and enthusiasm for the work of God does not always lead to correct understanding of the work of God.

**Big Idea:** Following the example of Christ in the Gospel of John and the work of the early apostles in Acts, we are called to help clarify confusion and foster right understanding.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: As you have considered Acts 3 and John 10, what significant elements do you notice in each? How are they interconnected with one another?
* **Question:** It is possible that we can be amazed at the work of God but be left unchanged by the work of God. Why do you think this sometimes takes place? What can we do to add to our enthusiasm with understanding?

**Week 9: Acts 3:11-26**

**Day 2: Exalt Jesus, Not Yourself**

**READ: Acts 3:11-26, Philippians 2:1-10**

**EXPLORE:**

God-honoring humility is a difficult practice to implement in everyday life.

There is probably no greater understatement than this. True humility is really challenging. Believe it or not, the balance for humility is often a war between two extremes: pride and self-deprecation. The balance of Christian humility is modeled well in the scene we have been studying this week.

In Acts 3:12, a real succinct and powerful picture of humility is put on display through Peter’s initial response to the rush of post-miracle people. To the incoming crowd, Peter responded, “*Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?*”

Peter’s initial response was to deflect glory away from himself and John and redirect all attention to what had been accomplished by God through Christ. Obviously, the crowd’s attention was initially drawn to the apostles, but Peter’s response was foremost to highlight his own inability to complete the miraculous work in his own power.

Men and women of God who possess Christ-like humility are not afraid to deny self. Remember, though, that self-denial is only half the battle. Immediately after deflecting glory from himself, Peter continues in Acts 3:13 saying, “*The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servantJesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him*.”

The early apostles did not merely deflect glory from themselves, they appropriately refocused glory on the work of God in Christ. Self-denial is good, but true humility is lived out when a person is not only willing to deny self, but also willing to make much of Jesus.

Life presents us with many opportunities to wrestle with our own lack of humility. For Peter and John, it might have been easy to claim glory and attention for themselves. Rather than allowing pride to fill the moment or permitting a self-deprecating attitude to keep them from fully exalting Christ, the apostles modeled true and genuine God-honoring humility.

**Big Idea:** Christian humility is the practice of denying self and exalting Christ.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: Why do you think Peter was able to deflect glory from himself and reflect glory towards God? What can we learn from these two verses that can help us live in humility?
* **Question**: Why do you think that Peter chose to reference Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their fathers when he was talking about God in Acts 3:13?

**Week 9: Acts 3:11-26**

**Day 3: Jesus: The *Archegos***

**READ: Acts 3:14-15, Acts 5:31, Hebrews 2:10 and Hebrews 12:2**

**EXPLORE:**

In his speech to the crowd, Peter described Jesus as the “Author of life (ESV).” It can be easily overlooked, but the words chosen in Scripture are incredibly valuable and life-giving! The original word that is translated into our English Bibles as “author” in Acts 3:15 is the Greek word “*archegos*.”

*Archegos* occurs only four times in the New Testament and is often translated in our English Bibles as author, pioneer, leader, and founder.  *Archegos* is an ancient term that would refer to a person who goes out first and leads the way. Furthermore, the idea of an *archegos* is an individual who would guide, direct, pioneer and lead by coming alongside others.

Imagine a singular spy who is sent behind enemy lines to infiltrate the territory while making it possible for his fellow operatives to join in the victory. Christ, our *archegos,* is the divine reconnaissance officer who has been sent by God, behind enemy lines, to make victory and hope possible.

Whether *archegos* is being used in Acts or in Hebrews, we are meant to see Jesus as the one who leads out ahead and welcomes others into an accompanying relationship with himself.

The four examples of *archegos* in the New Testament have been **boldened** and underlined. As you read through each of the four examples below, take time to meditate on the idea of Christ as our *archegos*.

* Acts 3:15 (ESV) “And you killed the **Author** of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.”
* Acts 5:31 (ESV) “God exalted him at his right hand as **Leader** and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”
* Hebrews 2:10 (ESV) “For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the **founder** of their salvation perfect through suffering.”
* Hebrews 12:2 (ESV) “Looking to Jesus, the **founder** and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

**Big Idea:** Christ is our founder, leader, and guide who invites us into an accompanying relationship with himself.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: Christ is our ultimate leader, but we are called to pioneer in sharing our faith here and now. How is God challenging you to be a pioneer in your faith toward others?

**Week 9: Acts 3:11-26**

**Day 4: Ignorance is not Bliss**

**READ: Acts 3:17-26**

**EXPLORE:**

We have all heard the phrase, “Ignorance is bliss.” It is a popular statement that asserts that an individual who does not know the truth can be happy through a general lack of awareness. To state it clearly, a person’s ignorance to unpleasant realities can lead to blissfulness.

This phrase is well popularized, and it does have some shreds of truth. Ignorance can lead to bliss, but ignorance is not bliss. Friends, ignorance is not blissful; Ignorance is sinful!

When Peter is communicating with the crowd of confused onlookers in Acts 3:17, he says that they participated in the crucifixion of Christ in ignorance. At first glance, it can seem as though Peter is giving them an excuse for their actions and handing them a pass on their past participation in the death of Christ.

Even in their ignorance and confusion, this crowd is very far from blissful. In the remaining sections of Acts 3:17-26, Peter explains exactly how their ignorance was fueled by a rejection of God’s continued revelation through the Old Testament. Their ignorance was not innocent, and it was not passive. Rather, their ignorance was a sinful and active rejection of what God had been proclaiming throughout Israelite history.

Think about it like this, if ignorance could lead us to blissful innocence, then Peter’s call for repentance and conversion would make no sense at all. It is precisely because their ignorance was sinful and deadly that Peter exhorted the crowds of people to seek a deep and lasting change through repentance. Much like the audience in Acts 3, we too are called to notice the times in which we knowingly or unknowingly reject the work and word of God.

Do not miss the fact that the deepening of our Christian faith does not lead us into ignorance, but into an amplified awareness of God and an increased receptivity to the work of God. Ignorance is not bliss. It is sin.

We too are called and encouraged to repent and be converted back to the Holy One and the Author of Life.

**Big Idea:** Ignorance is not bliss. It is sinful.

**APPLY:**

* **Activity**: Think of a time in life (*funny or serious*) when ignorance most certainly was not blissful. Pray that God would convict you of ignorance in your life so that you can repent and be transformed by Him.

**Week 9: Acts 3:11-26**

**Day 5: Repentance and Refreshment**

**READ: Acts 3:19-21, Romans 5:12-21, Colossians 3:1-2**

**EXPLORE:**

For those of us who call Houston home, it is not hard to remember the last time we experienced a day of suffocating heat. I am not talking about an average warm afternoon, but more like the sort of scorching temperatures that often accompany a Texas summer. It is the sort of heat that makes you especially thankful for air conditioning, equally grateful for a cold drink, and particularly appreciative of cooler evenings.

For times of intense heat, great refreshment is necessary! In the sections of Scripture that we have been studying there has been a profound call for repentance followed by a time period of deep refreshment.

As Peter continues to instruct the onlookers in Acts 3:19, he encourages them to repent and turn back to God for forgiveness. After repentance, Peter promises in Acts 3:20 that “*times of refreshment*” will accompany a spirit of repentance. Simply put, repentance leads to refreshment.

The specific word[[1]](#footnote-1) that Peter uses for refreshment is only used here[[2]](#footnote-2) in the New Testament and it refers to the feeling you get when you experience a cool breeze on a hot day or when you finally take a deep and cooling breath. Be reminded today that God desires to give you refreshment through repentance.

Peter’s overarching point is that repentance to God leads to refreshment from God. Take some time to read the passages below and write down what they teach us about the character of God toward us.

**Big Idea**: Repentance to God brings refreshment from God.

**APPLY**: (*Read and Take Notes about the character of God*)

Romans 5:12-21

Colossians 3:1-2

**Week 10: Acts 4:1-12**

**Day 1: Sadducees and Waiting on God**

**READ: Acts 4:1-12**

**EXPLORE:**

The intertestamental period is perhaps the most overlooked era in biblical history. As its name would suggest, the intertestamental period refers to the 400-year timespan between the Old Testament and New Testament. The intertestamental period stretches from the work of Malachi, ending approximately in 420 BC, and the ministry of John the Baptist, which began early in the first century. Even though this era in Christian history is often overlooked or neglected altogether, a lot of really valuable developments took place.

We could spend multiple days delving into many of the occurrences in the intertestamental period, but we are going to purposefully narrow our focus to help us understand the background of Acts 4:1-12. Namely, we are going to focus on the four major Jewish sects that arose in the intertestamental period and why they matter.

The four most notable Jewish sects that emerged from the intertestamental period that interacted with the church in the first century are the Essenes, the Zealots, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees (*referenced in Acts 4:1*).

1. Essenes: The Essenes were largely pacifists that did not resist the rule of Herod. They were known to live in isolated monk communities in order to preserve purity. They believed that ritual cleanliness such as meticulous bathing and strict dieting would honor God and encourage their promised Messiah to come.
2. Zealots: The Zealots were known to lead armed revolts against those they deemed impure or invasive. On occasions, they would even lynch individuals who were married to different races. They believed that their energy, passion, and zeal would encourage the Messiah to come and continue the liberation on their behalf.
3. Pharisees: The Pharisees are perhaps the most well-known Jewish sects that emerged in the intertestamental period. They constantly shifted between separatism and from the Roman government and collaboration to maintain peace and order. They valued a strict keeping of the Torah and were often willing to die for it. They believed their outward righteousness and behavior would please God and His coming Messiah.
4. Sadducees: Finally, as referenced in Acts 4:1, the Sadducees were consistent collaborators with Rome. In the 400-year waiting period between Malachi and the movement of Jesus, Sadducees had developed a theology that involved no afterlife, no divine providence, and no divine intervention. They were generally known as rich and aristocratic.

Whether it was ritual purity, violent zeal, rigid obedience, or outward pessimism about the work of God, these sects demonstrate how the human heart often compensates while waiting for the promised deliverance.

**Big Idea:** Each of the Jewish sects compensated with different ungodly alternatives while they were awaiting their Messiah.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: Each of the sects compensated as they waited for Jesus. How do you think we compensate and lose focus when we are forced to wait on God? In what ways do you see the responses of the four sects in life today?
* **Question:** When you read Acts 4:1-12, how does the context of the Sadducees’ background help you understand the passage?

**Week 10: Acts 4:1-12**

**Day 2: You had one job!**

**READ: Acts 4:5-12 and Matthew 26**

**EXPLORE:**

“You had one job!” is a phrase that you have probably heard, but hopefully never experienced. When someone or something is tasked with completing one simple duty and fails in the process, you might sarcastically say, “You had one job!” This phrase can be told either in a disgusted, mocking, or angry tone to people, animals, inanimate objects, and anything else that fails to complete the simple task for which it was designed.

Priests in the Old Testament had many duties; but fundamentally, they only had one job. As the figurehead of the Jewish faith, their job was to be obedient and lead the Jewish people to a deeper connection between God and humanity. Their role was to guide them in submission to God, honorable worship, and an expectancy of the one true Messiah. They were called to rightly discern the work of God and direct the people well.

When we look at human examples of the priesthood, such as Caiaphas in Acts 4, we could rightly say, “Come on Caiaphas, you had one job!” At this period in history, as high priest, Caiaphas would have been the supreme official in the temple.[[3]](#footnote-3) According to the Jewish historian named Josephus, Caiaphas had the longest tenure as high priest of anyone recorded in the first century.

His life’s calling was to be in relationship with God and lead others into deepening obedience. However, when the time came, as he presided over the Sanhedrin, he interrogated Jesus and sent him onward to Pontius Pilate. He failed to recognize the work of God through the messianic kingship of Christ. He failed at his one job!

The failures of Caiaphas to respond rightly to the Christian movement are so significant that they are recorded in each of the four Gospels (Mt. 26, Mk. 14, Lk. 3, Jn 11). In Acts 4:5-6, he is given another opportunity to experience the truth of Jesus and respond rightly. Despite his position as priest, he failed to notice what God was completing in Christ. This background information and context is helpful for us as we explore the remainder of Acts 4.

**Big Idea:** Caiaphas ought to have acknowledged Jesus as Messiah, but he did not.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: Why do you think it was so challenging for Caiaphas and other religious officials to recognize Jesus as the Messiah and the Holy Spirit’s work in the early church?
* **Question**: Only a handful of events are recorded in each of the four Gospels. Why do you think Caiaphas is mentioned specifically in each Gospel account?
* **Question**: If you had to make connections from the tragic example of Caiaphas to modern day, what would you compare him to?
* **Question**: If you read Peter’s quotation in Acts 4:8-12 and consider the context of priestly duties, what catches your attention as significant?

**Week 10: Acts 4:1-12**

**Day 3: The Rejected Cornerstone**

**READ: Psalm 118 and Acts 4:8-12**

**EXPLORE:**

In Acts 4:11, Peter quotes directly from Psalm 118:22 when he identifies Christ as the rejected cornerstone. As we explore today’s reading, this reference to the Psalmist’s words is both purposeful and profound.

We need to remember that Peter’s speech was directed toward the religious elite of his day. Although we could miss the connection that Peter was making when we read Acts 4, it would have been a very familiar passage to those of the high priestly family! They would not only have been familiar with Peter’s reference to Psalm 118, but they would have been well-acquainted with the many references to the promised cornerstone in Hebrew Scriptures.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah all individually prophesy about the one who will come as the promised cornerstone. By quoting familiar Scripture, Peter is being pointedly and purposefully convicting with them. He is rightfully asserting that Jesus is the true fulfillment of God’s unfolding redemptive plan! But we should not get so caught up in assessing biblical references that we miss the specific significance that a cornerstone represents.

A cornerstone is a crucial element used in the construction of ancient and sometimes modern structures. The cornerstone unifies a structure and is crucial for a successful building. It is often the first stone laid and represents the essential element that will make everything else sturdy. Without a cornerstone, the building will not stand. We have good evidence to believe that cornerstones were not only looked at as essential in the ancient building process, but fundamentally beautiful. They were crucial, captivating, and central.

A cornerstone was something that connected and united a whole structure together. After being placed, all other stones and angles would have been measured outward from it. A cornerstone unites, connects, aligns, and strengthens. A person’s rejection of the cornerstone did not make it any less significant! This text ought to rightly encourage us to daily receive and not reject Jesus as our true cornerstone.

**Big Idea:** Like a cornerstone in an ancient structure, Jesus is crucial, central, and captivating.

**APPLY:**

* **Activity**: Look up other references to cornerstone in scripture. Take time to write down what you notice.
  + **Old Testament**: Isaiah 28:6, Zechariah 10:4, Jeremiah 51:26
  + **New Testament**: Matthew 21:42, Mark, Luke 20:17, Luke 20:17, Ephesians 2:20, I Peter 2:6
* **Activity**: The idea of Christ as the cornerstone is a frequent theme in Christian music and poetry. Take time to listen to “In Christ Alone” or “Cornerstone.”
* **Optional Question**: Is a cornerstone still captivating if it is rejected? Why or why not?

**Week 10: Acts 4:1-12**

**Day 4: The Gospel Behind Bars**

**READ: Acts 4:3-4 and Matthew 5:11**

**EXPLORE:**

The passage we have been studying this week introduces us to one of the major themes in the early church. Acts mentions this topic more than any other biblical book. The prevalent feature that is introduced in Acts 4:3 is none other than **imprisonment**.

That’s right... If you were awaiting something majestic or motivational, this may not be your day. If you were hoping for something powerful and catalytic for the early church, then look no further than the Gospel that goes behind bars!

As mentioned previously, Acts discusses prison and jail significantly more than any other biblical book. In Acts 4:3, we are told that the captain of the temple and other officials arrested the apostles and put them in jail. Disturbed by their words and with intent to strike fear in the hearts of their adversaries, the temple police seized the apostles. These actions by the temple officials were designed to strike fear and yet they increased faith.

You will notice as we continue to study Acts, the biblical text does not gloss over the gritty details of what it looks like to follow Jesus in the early church. It does not neatly skip over the persecution, the hardship, or the imprisonment.

Think about what it must have been like for the early followers of Christ. First, even after some explosive growth, the Christian movement was still relatively small in number by comparison. Second, they were led by an overall inexperienced group of leaders. Third, they were commanded not to fight back in response to persecution. Finally, they were opposed by some of the most powerful institutions and organizations in the first century.

Despite these early struggles, God used their time in custody to continue growing His church to about 5000! The difficult reality of the Christian movement throughout history is that it is often purified and grown through adversity. It is not in the times of comfort and complacency that real faith is shown with the greatest clarity. We should not wish for times of adversity, but we should certainly not fear them either. As we see in Acts 4:3-4 and in life today, God still works even when His Gospel is behind bars.

**Big Idea:** God often grows His church through adversity.

**APPLY:**

* **Question:** Why do you think persecution can lead to such explosive growth for the Christian faith?
* **Question:** Should we be afraid of persecution if it is often used to grow genuine communities of faith? Why or why not?

**Week 10: Acts 4:1-12**

**Day 5: “Salvation In No One Else”**

**READ: Isaiah 43:10-12, John 14:6, and Acts 4:12**

**EXPLORE:**

At the close of Acts 4:12, Peter makes a bold and accurate statement about how Jesus uniquely and completely gives salvation. As we will find out in next week’s study of Acts 4: 13-22, this response astonished the onlookers. Peter’s statements about Christ directly oppose a viewpoint that is often called religious pluralism.

Religious pluralism is the viewpoint that no one system of thought or belief possesses absolute truth. You may have heard pluralistic quotes like, “All religions lead to God.” The idea that it doesn’t matter what you believe so long as you are sincere, is often endorsed through religious pluralism. It is a prevalent and seemingly innocent claim that seems to promote unity. Despite this façade, the reality is that the abandonment of truth will not and cannot lead to peace.

Today, as in the ancient context, it is not easy to be a defender of truth. Even though it is often thought of as a new idea, religious pluralism is an ancient struggle. Babylonian and Assyrian exiles in the Old Testament came on the heels of the Israelite’s embrace of religious pluralism. As one who is good and loving, God commands exclusive worship throughout the Scriptures.

Religious pluralism fundamentally assumes that all religions are similar and seek to achieve the same result. It superficially assesses all worldviews without acknowledging key areas of distinction and contradiction. Simply put, all belief systems cannot be simultaneously correct. Therefore, the better question to ask is, “Are there any reasons to believe that a worldview is true?”

Although we have discussed this in previous studies, be reminded today that we have solid evidence to believe the truth claims made in the Christian faith. The exclusive claim of Christ as the securer of our salvation is central to biblical doctrine. In Acts 4:12 Peter is simply being faithful to the words of Christ himself, “salvation is found in no one else.”

**Big Idea:** Salvation is found exclusively through the salvific work of Christ.

**APPLY:**

* **Question:** Why do you think that religious pluralism is so popular and appealing?
* **Question:** Imagine you hear someone repeat, “It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere.” How would you respond to this common phrase?
* **Question:** There is a biblical balance of bold truth and compassionate love? How have you learned to incorporate both when talking to someone who holds a differing worldview?

**Week 11: Acts 4:13-22**

**Day 1: Up Close and Personal with the Sanhedrin**

**READ: Acts 4:13-22 and Numbers 11:16-17**

**EXPLORE:**

We have briefly discussed the Sanhedrin in previous studies, but in Acts 4:13-22 we get a new inside look. Through their innerworkings and conversations we are given a view that is up close and personal. It is not pretty.

The Great Sanhedrin was a governing body made up of a chief priest, a vice chief priest, and 69 general members totaling 71 men. Their formation and structure were designed as a continuation of a divine command given to Moses in Numbers 11.

In Numbers 11:16-17 God commanded Moses to assemble 70 leaders and officials from ancient Israel. The total, including Moses, was 71 men. Moses was commanded to gather these leaders in the tent of meeting to experience the work of God, encounter God’s Spirit, and share the burdens of leadership. The original collection of leaders had a tremendous opportunity to experience the power and work of God in their day.

Notice in Acts 4:17 that the voices of the Sanhedrin are not even willing to directly say the name of Jesus. Instead, they said, “*let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name*.” In this text, Luke only has the name of Jesus specifically come through the voice of the narrator rather than that of the Sanhedrin directly.

When challenged with seemingly undeniable evidence of the continuing movement of Christ through the Holy Spirit in the disciples, he Sanhedrin failed to live out the example that their assembly was created to emulate from Numbers 11:16-17. When they were confronted with the miraculous work of the disciples in the name of Jesus, they sought to deny the truth and silence the movement. They chose to threaten the messenger rather than embrace the message. As we continue through our studies this week, be reminded of both the denial of truth by the Sanhedrin and the powerful resilience and courage evidenced in the early church!

**Big Idea:** When faced with the truth of Christ there are two responses: denial or submission.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: When we get up close and personal with the Sanhedrin, we can see how tragically they missed the mark on replicating God’s command in Numbers 11. What do you notice about their struggle and conversation in Acts 4:13-22? Why do you think it was such a difficult decision?
* **Question:** People outside the Sanhedrin would have been customarily asked to leave the area while a ruling was being established (*see* Acts 4:15). If the area was emptied of non-Sanhedrin individuals, how is this conversation recorded in detail by Luke in Acts?

**Week 11: Acts 4:13-22**

**Day 2: Courage in the Common | Part I**

**READ: Acts 4:13-22**

**EXPLORE:**

As we transition into the second and third days in this week’s study, consider their ideas to be deeply interconnected. Today, we will look at the common, but courageous, ministers of the Gospel. Tomorrow, we spend time studying the phrase, “They recognized that [the disciples] had been with Jesus.” Although these are separate discussions on separate days, be reminded that there is no courageous Gospel ministry apart from simply being with Jesus.

With that in mind, let’s take a look at some of the descriptions and actions of these early apostles. After listening to the Gospel presentation recorded in Acts 4:8-12, the religious officials described these men as ‘uneducated’ and ‘common’. This English translation may actually be too kind compared to the meaning in the original language. Basically, the members of the Sanhedrin labeled Peter an illiterate idiot[[4]](#footnote-4).

In the moments following Peter’s speech, the religious elite of the Sanhedrin were astonished and taken back. Peter had been equipped far beyond his capabilities to complete a work that was far beyond his qualifications. It is hard to overlook a seemingly idiotic and illiterate zealot fisherman who speaks with conviction, clarity, and discernment.

Prior to his encounter with the resurrected Christ, Peter already had a bold personality. Now the work of the Holy Spirit has redirected his passion toward Gospel-oriented movements and ministry. For example, in Acts 10:34-36 the common but courageous Peter boldly and purposefully extended the Gospel to the Gentiles. Just as it was hard for the Sanhedrin to overlook the formerly crippled man, it was quite a challenge to overlook the commoner who spoke with profound courage!

It is the boldness of Peter combined with his seeming lack of capability that astounds the Sanhedrin. He was suspiciously ordinary in their eyes. Yet, God’s strategy for redeeming the world includes the faithful service of common and courageous ministers.

**Big Idea:** God delights to use the ordinary and redeem their weakness to relentlessly advance the Gospel to a world in need.

**APPLY:**

* **Activity:** Read through the following passages in the life of Peter. (see Mt. 26:35, 69-75, Mt. 14:24-31, Mt. 16:21-23, Jn. 18:10)
* **Question:** What aspects of Peter’s character do we see being utilized by God in his ministry? How does the example of Peter encourage you in your faith?

**Week 11: Acts 4:13-22**

**Day 3: Courage in the Common | Part II**

**READ: Acts 4:13-22, Proverbs 13:20**

**EXPLORE:**

“They had been with Jesus.” It is such a simple phrase. Only a few words in length and altogether uncomplicated. It is so short and so simple that you may overlook its incredible significance. We often fail to recognize what the Sanhedrin was able to plainly see in Peter. The source of his passion and boldness was not established in his own excellence, but through his closeness with Christ, because they had been with Jesus.

If you remember our discussion yesterday, the Sanhedrin finished hearing Peter’s sermon and were collectively astonished at his courage because of his commonness. They wondered, “How could an illiterate idiot communicate so intelligently?” The idea of such uneducated men producing such an impassioned argument about Christ was a frustrating mystery for the Sanhedrin.

In their defense, after spending tremendous energy attempting to end the life of Christ, they were understandably frustrated by the continuation of the Jesus’s ministry through uneducated commoners. The source of their confidence in the face of opposition was founded in their closeness to Christ.

Proverbs 13:20 says, “Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.” If this proverb is true about human companionship, how much more is it true about our daily walk with God? The disciples lived with and learned from Jesus. They walked with Christ himself. Through the person of Jesus, these men walked alongside the wisdom of God, watched the example of Christ, and now are empowered by the leading of the Holy Spirit. This reality was emboldening for the apostles and mystifying to their opposition at the same time.

The indwelling work of the Holy Spirit alongside the faithful fellowship with Christ was an enigma to the elite and gave courage to the common! Because they were Christ centered, they were prepared to be biblically bold. It was clear in their lives and to those around them that they had been with Jesus.

As we move into reflection and discussion, allow Acts 4:13 to not only inspire you but to challenge you as well.

**Big Idea:** The source of God-glorifying courage in the common is founded in closeness with Christ.

**APPLY:**

* **Question:** What do you think it was about the way that Peter communicated to the Sanhedrin that made them conclude that he had been with Jesus? What would it look like for us today to represent ourselves as ones who had been with Jesus?
* **Optional Question**: Theologian Martyn Lloyd Jones wrote, “Let us meet with this Jesus and listen to Him, and soon we, too, will become phenomena. We will become men and women who are enigmas to everybody else.”
  + Obviously, there are some aspects of God-glorifying courage that are puzzling to unbelievers, but how would you describe the dynamic between a mysterious courage and an obvious Gospel?

**Week 11: Acts 4:13-22**

**Day 4: Cannot Help but Speak**

**READ: Acts 4:13-22 and Proverbs 24:11-12 and Romans 10:14**

**EXPLORE:**

There are times in life and in Scripture where silence is the appropriate behavior in a given circumstance. Whether it is the powerful silence of Christ before Pilate in Luke 23:8-9, or the awe-inspiring stillness commanded in Habakkuk 2:20, there are moments in which purposeful restraint is necessary and holy. But in the apostles’ response to the Sanhedrin’s orders, there are moments in which followers of Christ are commanded to speak regardless of consequence.

Irish philosopher Edmund Burke once wrote, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” It is highly unlikely that Burke had the early apostles in mind, but this quote could rightly describe what we witness in Acts 4:13-22.

After Peter’s speech concluded in Acts 4:12, the members of the religious elite commanded them to “not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Peter and John’s unsurprising response was to directly and unequivocally refuse the council’s orders. Even though they were given serious orders, they had a greater, God-given commission to spread the good news of Christ.

The apostles specifically say that they cannot help but speak of what they have both seen and heard. This biblical text does not say, “We will choose to continue teaching.” Instead of making their desire to share the Gospel optional, Peter and John look at their Gospel witness as an inescapable reality of what it means to know Jesus and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Simply, they could not help but speak.

We need to see the irony in this passage. The accused speak with courage, clarity, and conviction while the accusers sit in confusion and chaos.[[6]](#footnote-6) Do not miss the fact that these apostles are following the brilliant example of their crucified, risen, and ascended king. The threats of the world were nothing when compared to the power of the Gospel.

They could not help but speak! I wonder if we could describe the heartbeat of our ministry with this same conviction. Based on what you have experienced in Christ, are you one who cannot help but speak the goodness of God? As you pray today, allow yourself time to reflect on this text.

**Big Idea:** When good people say nothing, it plays into the enemy’s hand. Speak boldly as ones who have been transformed by the work of Christ.

Activity or Application points...Isaiah 52:7 and I Peter 3:15 and Deuteronomy 6:6-9

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: In your life and faith, where have you learned to balance silence and speaking? Maybe a better question is: Where have you struggled to balance silence and speaking in your life and faith?
* **Question:** The disciples’ response was that they could not help but speak. Have you ever had a moment like that when you were sharing your faith?
* **Activity:** Read and meditate upon Isaiah 52:7, I Peter 3:15, and Deuteronomy 6:6-9. Write down your thoughts to share with your LifeGroup.

**Week 11: Acts 4:13-22**

**Day 5: Resting in Victory**

**READ: Acts 4:13-22 and Daniel 3:16-18**

**EXPLORE:**

In II Timothy 2:4, the apostle Paul writes, “*No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him*.” Paul’s overarching point for his young protégé Timothy is that the calling and commission of God on the life of the believer is of unique and unparalleled importance. Regardless of persecution or hardship, the calling of God cannot be cancelled by the commands of human authority.

In Acts 4:13-22, we have been able to see this dynamic play out. Even though the early apostles were commanded to stop proclaiming the Gospel, they refused to allow the earthly authority to hold their ministry hostage. They resolutely proclaimed that they could not help but speak about Christ. As such, the power of God’s victory far outweighed the fear of human opposition.

Peter and John show us what it looks like to humbly serve God in submission to His calling without compromising because of fear. In fact, this is a theme that has been present throughout Scripture.

Think about the example of Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego recorded in the Old Testament book of Daniel. In this Hebrew text, King Nebuchadnezzar formally commanded the worship of a massive golden idol. On penalty of death, all the people were commanded to fall down in reverence to the idol. However, Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego refused to bow and willingly faced the fiery furnace.[[7]](#footnote-7) For those who are not familiar with the conclusion of this story, continue reading Daniel 3. To summarize, their allegiance to God outweighed any potential fear of earthly opposition.

Whether it is found in Daniel, Acts, or 2 Timothy, the reality is that God’s victory and calling far outweigh any human hostility. If you have placed your hope and faith Christ, God’s eternal victory positions you in a place of victory regardless of earthly opposition. The God who created you also empowers you with His Spirit, making it possible for you to live a life that rests in His victory. To this God and this God alone be the glory!

**Big Idea:** We can rest in the victory of Jesus becausethe calling of God is not cancelled by the commands of human authorities.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: Consider the leaders, systems, and powers that could be hostile against the faith. As you read Acts 4:19-20, pray that God would give you assurance and confidence to rest in his victory?
* **Question:** What do you think that resting in God’s victory actually looks like?

**Week 12: Acts 4:23-31**

**Day 1: Persecution and the Greatness of God**

**READ: Acts 4:23-31**

**EXPLORE:**

“*Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men and women. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks*.” - Phillips Brooks

You will find in Acts 4:23-31 that the early church firmly believed in God’s sovereignty[[8]](#footnote-8) and in His perfect plan for them, His people. Since their lives were marked by this belief, they were faithful to witness and to pray. Peter and John just emerged “from the trenches”, after experiencing immense opposition. As a result, the church gathered together to pray.

Their prayer was born out their witness and service unto the Lord. Their belief and faith in God’s divine sovereignty was coupled with their human responsibility. This text is a tremendous encouragement for us, as believers, to continue serving, especially when life’s circumstances become difficult. As St. Augustine wisely said, “Pray as though everything depends on God, and work as though everything depended on you.”

The truth that permeated their communal prayers was a deeply rooted assurance in God’s sovereignty despite the persecution they were experiencing. Take a look at Acts 4:24. Notice that their trust in the sovereignty of God was founded in that fact that He was their creator God. Following the example of our ancient brothers and sisters, our response to persecution should also be essentially grounded in the greatness and unrivaled power of the creator God.

At this point, we ought to ask, “Why is their response to persecution rooted in the God who creates?” Take another look at Acts 4:24 as it is connected to verses 28-31. As we read this text, we need to notice how the God of creation is still in the business of creating new things! Regardless of persecution or hardship, the God of creation can and will still bring things to life! These early disciples did not pray for escape. They prayed for empowerment. As a result, the sovereign, creator God birthed renewed boldness in the believers!

**Big Idea**: What we believe to be true about God matters, especially in prayer and while facing opposition.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: Keeping the definitions mentioned above in mind (God’s sovereignty and persecution). How should God’s sovereignty affect our response and mindset towards persecution? How might that mindset impact our service and worship unto the Lord?
* **Question**: Should we pray to be delivered from persecution, why or why not?
* **Question**: Why is it important to remember God as the “God of Creation”? How does this affect our day to day living?
* **Activity**: What are two areas of your life that you need God to empower you in with boldness?

**Week 12: Acts 4:23-31**

**Day 2: The Helping Hand**

**READ: Acts 4:27-31**

**EXPLORE**:

The hands are arguably the single most important body parts necessary to work, play, and function on a day-to-day basis. Though you can live without your hands it is very difficult to actually livewithout them. They are our agents of movement, control, and the mechanisms that bring what is in our mind to fruition in everyday life.

The hands of God are no different. In fact, the Bible often uses the language of “God’s hands” to declare His active work and control over the things on this earth. In our text today, we are able to see the hand of God being praised through the miraculous workings of Jesus in the ministry of the disciples. The biblical significance of hands in the New Testament is not limited to the Gospels and Acts.

When encouraging to the persecuted church, Peter exhorts them saying, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

We should live with confidence because our God is not passively standing by in the unfolding matters of life. His hands are working things to a marvelous and glorious end, even if that end seems very unclear or uncertain to us. In the times when we feel like He has totally abandoned us, we should be reminded that it was God’s hands that led Jesus to the cross, brought sight to the blind, and provided food for the hungry. in prosperity or adversity, our God is good, and His hand is at work.

Ultimately, regardless of what happens to us in this life, we know that, through faith in Jesus Christ, we are safe and secure for all eternity in God’s hands. Jesus says in John 10:29, “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.”

**APPLY**:

**Big Idea**: God’s hands are always working to produce His will and protect His people.

* **Activity**: Try living 30 minutes of your normal day without using your hands to see just how significant they are.
* **Question**: What is an area of your life that you feel like God’s hand is *not* at work? Pray that God would give you an awareness of his love, protection, and plan.

**Week 12: Acts 4:23-31**

**Day 3: The Inspiration of Scripture**

**READ: Acts 4:25**

**EXPLORE**:

The inspiration of the Holy Spirit is one of the great mysteries of God. Our text today gives us an example of how God works through David to bring about His Word. The manner in which God has brought about His Word, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is a worthwhile topic to explore as Christians. Today we will look at 3 elements of inspiration and the formation of God’s Word.

The Father

The Father is the source of the Word. Even when Jesus was on earth, his words and flowed directly from the Father in heaven. He says in John 12:49, “For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.”

The Holy Spirit

As the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is the acting agent. In the creation account in Genesis, we see that all creation comes from the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the acting agent in the creation. The same pattern is seen in the inspiration of the scripture. The Father speaks and the Spirit then works to bring these words *to* and *through* David.

Humanity

Amazingly, God has chosen to use people in the fulfillment of his big plan. Primarily through spoken and written words, he uses humanity to bring forth His message to the world. In the Old Testament, God often communicated by the Holy Spirit through the voice of the prophets (Hebrews 1:1). II Peter 1:21 tells us, “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

We often hear that the Word of God is not reliable because it was written by fallible men. Throughout history, we continually find that the opposite is true. Although many have tried to discredit the Bible, we have seen it stand the test of time and scrutiny, proving to be incredibly accurate and consistent in matters of history, anthropology, and archeology. Think about the fact that the 66 books of the Bible were written by roughly 35 authors and they still maintain a cohesive and unified message throughout!

**Big Idea**: God the Father spoke by written and spoken word, by the Holy Spirit, through humanity to inspire the Scriptures.

**APPLY**:

* **Activity**: Biblical inspiration goes hand-in-hand with the illumination of Scripture. Although we did not have the chance to explain the illumination of Scripture in this study, research and write some notes about the subject matter.

**Additional Resources**:

* **Book:** *The Story of the Bible,* Larry Stone
* **Book:** *Can I Trust the Bible,* RC Sproul
* **Book:** *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures,* D.A. Carson
* **Free Video Teaching:** *Scripture and Authority in an age of Skepticism*, David Platt

**Week 12: Acts 4:23-31**

**Day 4: Close-knit Communities**

**READ: John 15 and Acts 4:23-31**

**EXPLORE:**

Peter and John had been taken into custody for teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They were strictly warned and threatened by the religious leaders to no longer speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Afterwards, they were released.

Immediately upon release, we are told they went to their friends to inform them what happened. Their “friends” are, of course, the believing community of disciples. Here we can see the importance and value Peter and John placed upon the believing community. The term “friend” is one of endearment. The believing community was special to the apostles and therefore was a galvanized group. The apostles learned this from Jesus. Jesus says in John 15:15, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”

Peter and John went immediately to the believing community because they knew that they would be a source of comfort, strength, and boldness. The believing community was, is, and always ought to be a close-knit community. Here are three biblical descriptions of close-knit community.

Close-knit community is a source of comfort. After experiencing a trying circumstance (jail), the first thing needed is comfort and encouragement. As such, Peter and John went immediately to those whom they know would comfort and care for them. The believing community was important to the apostles and the apostles were important to the believing community.

Close-knit community is a source of strength. One of the most empowering things we can do together as a close-knit community is pray with and for one another. We are not strong in and of ourselves but in connection to our relationship with God and union with Christ. As we pray with and for one another we connect our brothers and sisters in Christ to the Almighty God. We are strong because He is strong. We point our brothers and sisters to Christ who is strong on our behalf.

Close-knit community is a source of boldness. Just as we are only strong in connection to God, we are only bold in connection to God. Close-knit communities will make it a habit of asking God for boldness. God graciously grants His children’s request for boldness.

As members of the body of Christ, God uses us to be sources of comfort, strength, and boldness to one another. If the apostles needed the believing community then surely, we do also. As Paul David Tripp says, “God makes His invisible grace visible, by sending people of grace to give grace to people who need grace.”

**Big Idea:** Christian community is a source of comfort, strength, and boldness.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: Luke, the author of Acts, calls the believing community “friends.” How should this change or deepen our view of what it means to be the people of God?
* **Question**: The believers were all filled with the Holy Spirit as they were all together. How might the scriptural examples of close-knit community challenge you to further embrace biblical friendship?

**Week 12: Acts 4:23-31**

**Day 5: The Promises of Christ**

**READ: Mark 16:17-18 and John 16:1-2**

**EXPLORE**:

In Mark 16, Jesus promised the apostles the signs that they we are reading about in the book of Acts. In Acts 2, we experienced the believers speaking in tongues and in Acts 3 we see Peter take the lame man by the hand and raise him up. Later, we will read about demons being cast out and the apostle Paul who was bitten by a venomous snake without serious harm.

It is amazing to see Jesus’ words come to pass. As a prophet, God did not allow any of his words fall to the ground. Jesus predicted these future events with precision and accuracy. This should give us encouragement and faith in all of Christ’s words.

Jesus often told his disciples what was to come. He often spoke of his coming suffering, betrayal, and death on a cross. He often predicted his resurrection. He also communicated to the disciples about their own coming persecution and suffering (see John 16:1-2). This passage in John highlights how Jesus told the disciples of their coming persecution in order to keep them from “falling away.”

Any time Jesus gives the church prophetic words, He does so for our good and for God’s glory. Even when the prophetic words are not pleasant (persecution and suffering), we can trust that God allows them for good. Most of the promises to Christians are promises of blessing, hope, and glory.

For example, in John 14 Jesus tells his disciples that in His Father’s house there are many rooms and that he goes to prepare a place for us. Right now, at the right hand of the Father, Jesus is preparing a place for us to dwell with him forever. In John 17 Jesus prays that the love that the Father has for the Son would be in us (believers). The Father’s love for the Son is perfect and more immense than we can comprehend, and this is the same love the Father has for us. These promises of Jesus should seep deep within our hearts and cement in us a deep security and rest in God.

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

**Big Idea**: The promises of Christ to His apostles were fulfilled in Acts and so we can be sure that His promises towards us will also be fulfilled.

**APPLY**:

* **Activity**: Read through these three passages of promise and offer up to God a prayer of thanksgiving and praise.
  + Matthew 6:31-33
  + Matthew 11:28-30
  + John 11:25-26



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1. *Anapsuxis* is the Greek word meaning refreshment or recovery of breath. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The technical term for a word that only has one occurrence in the biblical text is a hapax legomena. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Luke gives an aside comment that lists several individuals in the high priestly group. Annas was high priest from A.D. 6-15. Annas is most likely listed first as the father-in-law and predecessor of Caiaphas who served during the first century. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The identification of Peter as an unlearned individual does not suppose he was actually uneducated. Rather, this identification of Peter as an uneducated common person was their perception. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Acts 4:18 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The dialogue of the council is often communicated through the narrative form rather than in direct speech. As such, Luke is underscoring the timidity of the council in comparison to the courage of the apostles. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Daniel 3:16-18 was one of the assigned readings for today that articulates the trio’s allegiance to God despite opposition. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Describing divine sovereignty, John Piper writes, “God is powerful and authoritative to the extent of being able to override all other powers and authorities.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. I Peter 5:6 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)