

Unusual Boldness (Acts 4:23-31)

The early church is often described as being "filled with the Spirit." Whether after opposition or before a big decision, the result is almost always an unusual courage and joy. That's what we see happening in Acts 4:23-31. It's a story of overwhelming circumstances that lead to honest prayer, and Spirit-empowered boldness. This unusual boldness is exactly what the Spirit has been producing in followers of Jesus ever since. As we celebrate seven years of Local Church St. Pete, I can't think of a more important prayer to adopt as our very own.

1. Overwhelming circumstances (Acts 4:23)

2. Honest prayer (Acts 4:24-30)

3. Spirit-empowered boldness (Acts 4:31)

QUESTIONS (Pray, read the passage and pick 4-5 questions to discuss. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide.)

1. Read Acts 4:23-31. Describe the circumstances the early church faced. How did they respond?
2. Their prayer begins by celebrating what they know is true about God. Why do you think they start that way? Have you considered this practice? What might the benefits be for us?
3. They don't ask for persecution to stop, they don't ask for God to strike down their enemies, they don't ask for safety and comfort. What *do* they ask for? See Acts 4:29-30
4. Look closely at verse 28. How does the church's belief in God's absolute sovereignty over the death of Jesus fuel their confidence in the face of their own persecution?
5. We know the Holy Spirit indwells a follower of Jesus permanently at salvation (Ephesians 1:13). What is the difference between *possessing* the Spirit and being *filled* (empowered) by/with the Spirit for a specific task? Read Ephesians 5:18. How does the imagery of living "*under the influence*" of the Spirit help?
6. Often today, we associate Spirit-empowerment with private emotional experiences or miracles. In the book of *Acts*, however, the primary evidence is almost always unusual courage (boldness) and joy. Why is the Spirit so committed to empowering our *speech* specifically?
7. The passage shows a cycle: Crisis ---- Prayer ---- Spirit-filling ---- Boldness. If we feel a lack of boldness in our lives, is it possible we are trying to skip the "Prayer" and "Dependency" steps? How can we cultivate a lifestyle that is "under the influence" of the Spirit rather than just calling on him during emergencies?
8. Jesus set an example for us in prayer. He prayed after times of ministry (Mark 6:45-46), in the midst of success and popularity (Luke 5:15-16), before making a major decision (Luke 6:12-13), with regularity (Luke 22:39) and honesty (Luke 22:39-44). What does his commitment to prayer teach us? What would it look like for you to follow Jesus in this practice? What obstacles need to be overcome? What benefits and joys have you experienced in prayer?

Boldness was defined as "*the freedom to speak plainly, without fear of consequences.*" Where in your life do you feel the most "muted" or "quiet" about your faith? Ask the Spirit to embolden you. Ask him for the opportunity to share Jesus with others. Use Acts 4:23-31 as a model prayer, specifically verses 29-30.