



NG Study Guide: Acts 4:23-37 “Spirit Empowered Boldness + Unity” [8.14.22]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: The Spirit inspires God’s people to share their faith and their lives graciously and generously. As we grow in understanding and appreciation of the gospel, that we are made right with God through faith in Christ, our affections are transformed. God’s Spirit inspires love for God and others, triumphs over selfishness and anxiety, and produces boldness and unity.

Subject: Spirit-prompted boldness and unity

Object: Be generous with the gospel and resources

A. Spirit empowered boldness (23-31)

And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴ So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, ²⁵ who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: ‘Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? ²⁶ The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD and against His Christ.’ ²⁷ “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. ²⁹ Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, ³⁰ by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

1. They respond to opposition with prayer (23-30)

After the miraculous healing of the lame man (Ac. 3), Peter proclaims Jesus’ gospel to the crowd outside the temple. Peter and John were arrested and brought before the same tribunal that condemned Jesus to be crucified less than sixty days before. They were threatened and commanded to never speak or teach about Jesus again (4:1-22). Peter and John were released, vowed to continue to proclaim Jesus, returned to the disciples and told them all that happened (23). *So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God (24).* The response of the other disciples to opposition was prayer. Rather than lament, mourn, or vent rage to another person, they talked with God. Augustine is credited with saying, “Pray as if everything depended on God, and work as though all depended on you.”

Our modern world claims progress and perfection is available without God, but dependency on God is not optional for a healthy soul or a truly whole (content) life. In prayer, we declare our devotion to and dependence upon God.

2. They recognize that God is in control (24-28)

Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them (24). The Greek term translated *Lord* refers to absolute sovereignty. Our universe and all that is in it is His Creation (24). They pray Psalm 2:1-2, penned by David, *‘Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? ²⁶ The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD and against His Christ’* (25-26). All attempts to thwart God’s redemptive plan through Christ for His Creation are *vain* or useless and futile.

Despite opposition from Herod, Pilate, the Romans and the Jewish leaders, they *were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done (27-28)*. The events concerning Jesus’ life, death and resurrection had been foretold in detail in the Old Testament, and unfolded as God had declared.

In the midst of difficult times and circumstances it is good to pray, seek an eternal perspective, and recognize that God has not abandoned, abdicated, or neglected His throne.

It is also good in prayer to remember and recount God’s promises. Jesus declared that the Church is His and He will build it and the Gates of Hell will not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). That promise comforts me, because God is in control.

3. They pray for boldness (29-30)

Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, ³⁰ by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.”

The disciples recognize the very real *threat* of persecution (29), and rather than praying for God to end the opposition, they prayed for boldness to proclaim Christ (29). The boldness of Peter and John inspired others (See, Daniel and his three friends, Dan. 1). When Paul concluded his letter to the church at Ephesus, he shared his prayer request, “That utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make know the mystery of the gospel” (Eph. 6:19).

4. They experience boldness as they yield to God’s Spirit (31)

And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

God answered their prayer, the power of God was manifest and they spoke the word of God with boldness (See 4:8 re Peter). These disciples who were praying, were likely part of the believers who numbered about five thousand. They received the Holy Spirit when they were saved, and were incorporated into the Church. This filling appears to be an empowerment that occurred subsequent to salvation to enable them to better represent Christ. Boldness flows from yielding to the Holy Spirit. The *filling of the Holy Spirit* occurs as we yield our will to God by the power of the Holy Spirit to do the will of God. Jesus promised, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses” (Ac. 1:8). Thus, the Spirit empowers us to boldly share our faith in Christ.

B. Spirit empowered unity (32-37)

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵ and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. ³⁶ And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

1. The Spirit produces unity (32-33)

The believers were characterized by their unity. They *were of one heart and one soul* (32). In Paul's letter to the believers at Ephesus, he spends the first three chapters helping them to understand their identity in Christ. The fourth chapter begins his discourse on how to live that identity – to walk worthy of our identity. After encouraging humility, gentleness, and patience, they are urged to make every effort to keep themselves united in the Spirit, binding themselves together with peace (Eph. 4:1-3). The Spirit unites God's people despite our differences. We are to keep that unity in peace. Jesus observed that by our love for one another all would know that we are His disciples (Jn. 13:34-35). Real unity, real community requires real commitment to God and others.

The unity was manifest as people cared for one another's needs, *neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common* (32). God's power was manifest through the apostles as they gave witness to Jesus' resurrection (33). *And great grace was upon them all* (33). Grace is God's unmerited favor. The zenith of God's grace is revealed in the gospel. We are made right with God not by our performance, but by Christ's performance on our behalf, and our response of believing (choosing to yield to God). Luke is not simply recording that these believers were the recipients of great grace; but also that an attitude of great graciousness towards one another was generally upon them all. Their relationships with one another were not based on performance, nor quid pro quo, but common identity in Christ. The gospel characterized their culture by the Spirit!

2. The Spirit produces generosity (34-37)

Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵ and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. ³⁶ And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

The unity was manifest by generosity. The theme of Ac. 2:42-47 of "commonality" or genuine communion (community) is echoed at v.32, *they had all things in common*, and then amplified in these examples. People were cared for, *nor was there anyone among them who lacked* (34). Part of the reason that people's needs were cared for was Spirit-prompted generosity. People sold their lands or houses, and brought the proceeds to the church leaders to distribute to care for needs (35). They were not giving out of a sense of guilt, shame, or desire for recognition, but were moved by God's Spirit to generously share their resources. They were responding to God's love and God's gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus declared, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Ac. 20:35). God's people learn that truth as they yield to God's Spirit. Selflessness is a characteristic of a spiritual man, while selfishness is the nature of the flesh. Finally, we are introduced to Joses, who was nicknamed by the apostles, Barnabas, meaning Son of Encouragement. We will learn more of his influence in Paul's life and the early church in the coming weeks. For now it is sufficient to recognize that he was so encouraging that they gave him that nickname; and his generosity was one aspect of his encouragement.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. Engage in a time of group prayer asking God for boldness to proclaim Christ and His gospel.

Q2. What are some ways that unity can be threatened or damaged?

Q3. How can unity be attractive? Share an experience where you discovered the beauty of unity.

Q4. In what ways have you discovered that it is more blessed to give than to receive?

“Disciples Who Dig Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. Here is a good article regarding Christian unity: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-unity.html>.
2. Here’s a thoughtful take on generosity: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/august-web-only/most-generous-not-who-you-expect-vertical-generosity.html>.

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?
2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:
[Create margin to spend time with another follower of Jesus where you live, work, study, play or worship to develop unity.](#)

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don’t force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

1. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
2. **Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn’t enough time to answer them all.
3. **The “Disciples Who Dig Deeper” section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the “Disciples Who Dig Deeper” section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
4. **Every time you meet consider asking:**
 - a. **What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don’t hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.