

Session 3



EMPOWERED

Session 3: How Does the Holy Spirit Give Courage?

Primary Scripture

Acts 4:23–35

Introduction — Why Fear So Often Shapes Us

Most people want to live courageously.

They want to:

- stand for what is right
- remain faithful under pressure
- speak honestly
- and live with conviction

And yet fear shapes much of human behavior.

Fear of:

- rejection
- conflict
- failure
- criticism
- uncertainty
- losing control
- or standing out

Fear often causes people to:

- stay silent when they should speak
- compromise what they know is true
- avoid difficult conversations
- or retreat inward when life becomes challenging

This is not only true personally.

It is also true spiritually.

Many Christians quietly assume that faithfulness should feel safe and comfortable.

But Acts presents a Church that repeatedly faced:

- pressure
- opposition
- uncertainty
- and resistance

And yet the believers continued moving forward with courage.

Why?

Because the Holy Spirit does not merely comfort believers.

The Holy Spirit strengthens believers to remain faithful even when faithfulness becomes difficult.

This session explores an important question:

How does the Holy Spirit give courage to ordinary people?

Because courage in Scripture is not the absence of fear.

It is faithfulness in the presence of fear.

Movement 1 — The Early Church Faced Real Opposition

After healing a man at the temple, Peter and John are arrested and questioned by religious authorities.

Read Scripture: Acts 4:1–22

The leaders threaten them and demand that they stop speaking publicly about Jesus.

This is important because the early Church was not born into comfort or cultural acceptance.

From the beginning, following Jesus involved pressure.

Many modern Christians unconsciously expect faithfulness to lead toward:

- approval
- ease
- and stability

But Acts repeatedly shows that obedience often creates tension.

The apostles are not facing inconvenience.

They are facing genuine risk.

And yet they refuse to retreat.

Read Scripture: Acts 4:19–20

Peter and John answer:

“We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.”

Notice what gives them courage:

not personality,

not confidence in themselves,

but conviction about Jesus.

Courage grows when something becomes more important than self-protection.

This remains true today.

Fear becomes powerful when:

- comfort becomes our highest value
- approval becomes our deepest need
- or safety becomes our ultimate goal

But the Holy Spirit continually reorients believers around something greater than fear.

Reflection

What kinds of fear most often influence your decisions or silence your voice?

Where are you tempted to prioritize comfort or approval over faithfulness?

Movement 2 — The Church Responded With Prayer, Not Panic

After their release, the believers gather together.

Read Scripture: Acts 4:23–30

Notice what they do not pray for.

They do not pray:

- for escape
- for easier circumstances

- for protection from difficulty
- or for their enemies to disappear

Instead, they pray for boldness.

This reveals something very important about the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit does not always remove difficulty.

Often, the Spirit strengthens believers within difficulty.

The early Church understood that opposition did not mean God had abandoned them.

They saw themselves as participants in God's ongoing mission.

Read Scripture: Isaiah 41:10

Read Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:7

Fear naturally narrows our focus.

It pushes us inward toward self-protection.

But prayer reorients believers toward God's presence and purposes.

The Church in Acts does not respond to fear by becoming reactive or defensive.

They become prayerful.

This matters deeply today.

Many Christians respond to cultural pressure, uncertainty, or conflict with:

- anxiety
- outrage
- panic
- cynicism
- or withdrawal

Acts presents another way.

The Spirit forms believers who remain:

- prayerful
- steady
- courageous
- and faithful

even when circumstances feel uncertain.

Reflection

How do you typically respond when you feel pressure, uncertainty, or fear?

Why do you think the early believers prayed for courage instead of comfort?

Movement 3 — Courage Comes Through the Presence of God

Acts says something remarkable happens after the believers pray.

Read Scripture: Acts 4:31

The meeting place shakes, and the believers are filled with the Holy Spirit and speak the Word of God boldly.

This passage is important because it reminds us:
the Holy Spirit is not merely an idea or doctrine.

The Spirit is the active presence of God among His people.

And throughout Scripture, awareness of God's presence repeatedly produces courage.

Read Scripture: Exodus 33:14–15

Read Scripture: Hebrews 13:5–6

Most fear grows when we feel:

- alone
- unsupported
- uncertain
- or overwhelmed

But the Spirit continually reminds believers:
God is present.

This does not mean believers stop feeling fear entirely.

Even faithful people in Scripture experienced fear:

- Moses
- Elijah
- Esther
- Peter
- Paul

Courage is not emotional invulnerability.

Courage is choosing faithfulness while trusting that God remains present and at work.

This also helps us understand why spiritual practices matter.

Prayer,
Scripture,
worship,
and community are not merely religious habits.

They help believers remain attentive to God's presence.

And awareness of God's presence changes how people face difficulty.

Reflection

When do you feel most aware of God's presence in your life?

How might greater awareness of God's presence affect the fears you currently carry?

Movement 4 — The Spirit Creates Courageous Communities

Acts 4 does not describe isolated courage.
It describes shared courage.

Read Scripture: Acts 4:32–35

The believers supported one another through:

- unity

- generosity
- prayer
- and shared purpose

This matters because courage becomes difficult to sustain alone.

Isolation often increases fear.

Healthy Christian community helps believers:

- remain grounded
- encourage one another
- speak truth to one another
- and continue forward when faithfulness becomes costly

Read Scripture: Hebrews 10:23–25

Read Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

The Holy Spirit forms communities where people strengthen one another in faithfulness.

And importantly:

their courage was not loud, aggressive, or self-righteous.

Acts does not portray believers as:

- angry
- arrogant
- combative
- or obsessed with winning arguments

Their courage flowed from:

- confidence in Jesus
- dependence on the Spirit
- and commitment to truth and love

This is an important distinction.

Christian courage is not hostility.

The Spirit does not form fearful people who hide.

Nor does the Spirit form harsh people who attack.

The Spirit forms faithful people who remain rooted in truth, love, humility, and courage.

Reflection

Who helps strengthen your faith and courage right now?

How can Christian community help people remain faithful during difficult seasons?

A Note on Boldness and the Holy Spirit

Some people assume spiritual boldness means:

- loudness
- certainty about everything
- emotional intensity
- or forceful behavior

But biblical boldness is different.

The boldness of the Holy Spirit produces:

- courage without arrogance
- conviction without cruelty
- truth without hostility
- and faithfulness without fear

The goal is not domination or performance.

The goal is faithful witness.

The Holy Spirit empowers believers not to draw attention to themselves, but to remain faithful to Jesus in every circumstance.

Formation Practice (This Week)

Practice: Naming Fear Honestly

Each day this week:

Step 1 — Read Slowly

Read Acts 4:23–35 slowly each day.

Pay attention to:

- what the believers prayed for
- how they responded to fear
- and what the Spirit empowered them to do

Step 2 — Name One Fear Honestly

Each day, write down one fear that has been influencing your decisions, relationships, or spiritual life.

Be honest and specific.

Step 3 — Pray Differently

Instead of immediately praying for the situation to disappear, pray:

“Holy Spirit, help me remain faithful within this situation.”

Step 4 — Practice One Small Act of Courage

Choose one small step of faithfulness this week:

- speak honestly
- encourage someone
- apologize
- pray with someone
- serve quietly
- share your faith naturally
- or take a needed step you have been avoiding

Do not aim for dramatic.

Aim for faithful.

Living It Out

What fear currently has the strongest influence over your life right now?

What might faithfulness look like in that situation?

What is one specific act of courage you sense God inviting you toward this week?

Final Reflection

The early Church was not fearless.

They were Spirit-filled.

And because they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they learned to remain faithful even when life felt uncertain or costly.

The Holy Spirit does not always remove opposition.

But the Spirit continually gives believers:

- courage
- steadiness
- wisdom
- and strength to keep moving forward faithfully.

The question is not:

“Will I ever feel afraid?”

The question is:

“Will fear or faithfulness shape my response?”

Weekly Prayer

Holy Spirit,

When fear begins to control my thinking,
remind me that I am not alone.

Give me courage where I feel uncertain,
wisdom where I feel confused,
and steadiness where I feel overwhelmed.

Help me become someone who remains faithful,
truthful,
loving,
and courageous in every circumstance.

Teach me to trust Your presence more than my fears.

Amen.