

The Church in the New Testament, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2: Unity and Devotion

Acts 4:23-35

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Lesson 1 showed the class how the church was born. This lesson shows them how it held together when the pressure came, and the pressure came quickly. Set the scene: Peter and John have healed a lame man, preached the resurrection in Solomon's portico, and been arrested for it. The Sanhedrin, the same council that condemned Jesus, has threatened them and ordered them to stop speaking in His name. Then comes the hinge of the passage. Released and threatened, the apostles go straight back to their own people, and the church does not convene a strategy session or a committee. It prays. Help the class feel the instinct behind that, because the first response of a congregation under stress reveals what it actually believes.

The prayer of verses 24 through 30 is the doctrinal center of the lesson, and verses 27 and 28 will need your steadiest hand. The believers confess that Herod, Pilate, and the nations gathered against Jesus to do "whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." Be ready for the class to hear Calvinism in that sentence, because that is exactly where it gets pressed into service. What God predetermined was the plan, the cross itself, the redemption He purposed before the world began. He did not decree the sin of the men who carried it out, and He did not override their wills. Peter has already settled that in Acts 2:23, where the very same act is "the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" and also something done by lawless men whose hands are guilty. God is sovereign enough to accomplish His purpose through the free and wicked choices of men without being the author of those choices. Hold both halves of that together and the class will be safe.

Watch also what the church asks for and what it does not ask for. They do not pray for the threats to stop or for their own safety. They pray for boldness to keep speaking, and God answers. Verse 31 says the place was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke with boldness, and you will want to keep the class from reading that as a pattern to reproduce on demand today. This is the apostolic age, confirming the word with signs (Hebrews 2:3-4), not a template for a modern experience to be sought. Then let the closing verses land where they aim. A congregation of one heart and soul, holding possessions loosely, meeting real needs, testifying with great power, with great grace upon them all. The target of this lesson is not admiration of that church. It is a class that leaves asking whether their own congregation prays like that, gives like that, and speaks like that.

Question 1

Student Question:

In verses 23–24, the believers respond to persecution by going to “their friends” and lifting their voices “together to God.” What does this reveal about the role of the Christian community in times of trial?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the small phrase the class will read past: “they went to their own.” Peter and John have just been released from custody, and of all the places they could go, they go to the church. That is worth pausing on. They did not go home to recover privately, and they did not go public with a protest. They went to the people who shared their faith and their danger, and they told them everything. Trial did not scatter these Christians. It gathered them.

Then notice how the church received the report. Verse 24 says they “lifted their voices together to God.” Not one man praying while the rest listened politely, but a congregation with one voice. Luke is describing a body that has learned to carry things to God as a body. Help your class see that this is what the fellowship of Acts 2:42 looks like when it is tested. Fellowship is easy to admire on a calm Sunday. It proves itself when someone comes back from the Sanhedrin with a threat over his head.

Draw out the practical shape of this for the class. God did not design the Christian life to be carried alone, which is why the New Testament is full of commands we cannot obey by ourselves: bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2), encourage one another (Hebrews 3:13), do not neglect to meet together, especially as the Day draws near (Hebrews 10:24-25). A Christian who withdraws under pressure is cutting himself off from the very provision God made for pressure.

Be ready for the honest admission that many of us do the opposite. When trouble comes, our instinct is often to hide it, to manage it privately, to not be a burden. Ask the class gently why that is, and let the passage answer. These believers had nothing to protect and nowhere else to go, and their weakness became the occasion for the church’s finest hour.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The local congregation is God’s appointed provision for His people in trial, not an optional support to be used when convenient (Hebrews 10:24-25)
- Corporate prayer is the church acting as one body before God (Acts 4:24)
- Persecution is normal for the faithful and is meant to draw Christians together, not drive them apart (2 Timothy 3:12)
- Christian fellowship is a shared life that includes shared burdens (Galatians 6:2)
- Withdrawing from the assembly in hard seasons cuts a Christian off from the help God provided

Discussion Prompts

- When something hard happens to you, is your first instinct to go to the church family or to handle it privately? Why?
- What would it take for our congregation to be the first place someone in trouble thinks to go?
- Peter and John reported “all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.” What does honest reporting inside a church family require of us?

Question 2

Student Question:

In their prayer (vv. 24–26), the believers begin by acknowledging God as the sovereign Creator. Why is affirming God’s sovereignty the right starting point when facing opposition?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Point the class to where the prayer starts, because it does not start where ours usually do. It does not begin with the threat. It begins with God: “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them.” The word rendered “Sovereign Lord” (despotes) is the word for an absolute master, one with unquestioned authority over his household. Before these Christians say one word about the Sanhedrin, they establish who actually runs the world.

That order is the lesson. The Sanhedrin looked enormous from where the church was standing. It held the prison, the power, and the crowd. But a council that can threaten you looks very different once you have named the God who made the sea. The church was not denying the danger; they were placing it. Help your class understand that this is not a technique for feeling better. It is the simple discipline of telling the truth about God first, and letting everything else find its proper size afterward.

Then watch how they reason from Scripture. They quote Psalm 2, where the nations rage and the rulers take counsel against the Lord and His Anointed, and the One enthroned in heaven laughs. They are not improvising comfort. They are recognizing that what is happening to them is what God said would happen, which means the opposition itself is evidence that God’s word is holding. A church that knows its Bible is a church that is harder to frighten.

Bring it near the class. Most of us pray as though God needs to be briefed on our problem. This prayer suggests we are the ones who need reminding, and that the reminding is done by rehearsing who God is and what He has already said. Encourage the teacher to ask the class to notice how much of their own praying is spent describing the trouble and how little is spent naming the God who is over it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God is the sovereign Creator and Master of all things, and His authority is the fixed point from which every trouble is measured (Acts 4:24)

- Right prayer begins with who God is, not with what we need (Matthew 6:9)
- The church reasons from the revealed Scriptures, not from impressions or feelings (Acts 4:25-26; Psalm 2:1-2)
- Opposition to Christ and His people was foretold and is therefore no cause for panic
- Affirming God's sovereignty does not minimize real danger; it puts the danger in its place

Discussion Prompts

- If someone recorded your prayers this week, how much would be spent describing the problem and how much naming God?
- Why does it steady us to remember that God made "the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them" when we are afraid of something much smaller?
- How does knowing Scripture in advance change what we are able to pray in a crisis?

Question 3

Student Question:

In verses 27–28, the believers acknowledge that even Herod, Pilate, and the Gentiles acted within God's predetermined plan. How does understanding God's sovereignty over evil give believers confidence?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the verse in the lesson most likely to be misused, so slow down and be clear. The church confesses that Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the peoples of Israel gathered against Jesus "to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." Read carelessly, that sounds as though God scripted their sin and they were only reciting lines. Read carefully, it says something better and truer: what God predestined was the plan, the cross, the redemption He purposed before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20; Ephesians 3:10-11). The plan was decreed. The men were not coerced.

Let Peter settle it for you, because he has already preached both halves in one breath. In Acts 2:23 the crucifixion is delivered up "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God," and in the very same sentence the crowd is guilty: "you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." If God had determined their choices, Peter could not have charged them with the crime, and they could not have been cut to the heart over it. God foreknew what wicked men would freely do, and He wove His redemption straight through it. He is sovereign enough to accomplish His purpose without confiscating anyone's will.

Guard the class here against the Calvinistic reading, and do it without heat. If God decrees every act, then God decreed the sin, men are not truly responsible, and the gospel call to repent becomes a formality. Scripture will not have it. God "desires all people to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4), He is "not wishing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9), and the invitation of Revelation

22:17 is real: “let the one who desires take the water of life without price.” Human beings genuinely choose, and God genuinely holds them accountable.

Now let the class have the comfort the verse actually offers. The church is not saying “our enemies are puppets.” They are saying “the worst thing our enemies ever did, God turned into our salvation.” The Sanhedrin standing in front of them is the same council that killed Jesus, and that murder is now the ground of their forgiveness. If God did that with Calvary, He can be trusted with a threat. That is the confidence, and it is far sturdier than the fatalism people sometimes reach for.

Frame it for daily life. God does not need evil, He does not author it, and He never sanctifies it. He defeats it, often by taking the very thing meant to destroy His people and making it serve them (Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28). That is a God worth trusting when we cannot see the outcome.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- What God predestined was His plan of redemption, not the sinful choices of the men who carried it out (Acts 2:23; Ephesians 3:10-11)
- Herod, Pilate, and the rest acted freely and were held guilty, which they could not be if God had decreed their acts (Acts 2:23)
- God’s foreknowledge is not the same as God’s causation; He knows what free men will do without making them do it
- Against Calvinistic determinism: God desires all to be saved and the gospel invitation is genuine (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 22:17)
- God overrules evil for good rather than authoring it (Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28)
- Confidence rests on God’s proven ability to turn the worst act in history into salvation

Discussion Prompts

- How would you answer a friend who reads verse 28 and concludes that God causes everything, including sin?
- If the cross is God’s clearest example of bringing good out of evil, what does that tell us about the trouble we cannot yet explain?
- What is the difference between saying “God planned this” and saying “God will accomplish His purpose through this”?

Question 4

Student Question:

The prayer in verse 29 asks God to “grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.” Why did they pray for boldness rather than safety or deliverance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ask the class to write down what they would have prayed for in that room, and then read verse 29 out loud. The gap is the lesson. They had been arrested and threatened, and they asked for exactly one thing: “grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.” Not protection. Not vindication. Not that the Sanhedrin be removed. They asked God to make them braver at the very thing that got them arrested.

Notice what they do ask God to look at: “Lord, look upon their threats.” They hand the threats to God and keep the mission for themselves. That is a remarkable division of labor, and it tells you what they thought was at stake. The threat was God’s problem to weigh. The preaching was their assignment, and they had no intention of surrendering it. Paul prays the same way from a Roman prison, asking not for release but for words and boldness to declare the mystery of the gospel (Ephesians 6:19-20).

Help the class see the assumption underneath the prayer. These men had already told the council, “we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Silence was not on the table. So the only real question left was whether they would speak timidly or boldly, and that is what they brought to God. When obedience is settled in advance, prayer stops negotiating and starts asking for strength.

Bring this home carefully and without guilt-mongering. Most of us have never faced a council, and yet many of us have gone quiet at a lunch table. Ask the class what they typically pray for when faith gets socially costly. If our prayers mostly ask God to remove the discomfort, this verse invites a different request: leave the situation exactly as it is, and make me faithful in it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church’s mission is to speak God’s word, and that assignment is not negotiable under pressure (Acts 4:20)
- Boldness is a gift to be prayed for, not merely a personality trait (Ephesians 6:19-20)
- Christians may hand their threats to God while keeping their obedience (Acts 4:29)
- Faithfulness, not comfort or safety, is the proper aim of prayer under opposition
- When obedience is settled in advance, prayer asks for strength rather than escape

Discussion Prompts

- What do you normally pray for when following Christ becomes socially costly?
- Where in your life have you gone quiet, and what would it look like to pray verse 29 about it this week?
- Why do you think they asked God to look at the threats rather than to remove them?

Question 5

Student Question:

In verse 31, God answers their prayer: the place is shaken and they are all “filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” What does this response teach about God’s faithfulness to His people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Let the class enjoy this verse before you qualify it. They asked for boldness, and God gave boldness. The place was shaken, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. God answered the prayer they actually prayed, and He answered it immediately and precisely. That is worth naming, because we often pray without expecting God to do anything in particular.

Notice what the shaking was for. It was not a spiritual experience given for its own sake, and it was not the point. God shook the room and the church went back out to preach. Every measure of power in Acts moves toward the word being spoken. Help the class see that when God visibly acted in this book, the result was proclamation, never a private thrill to be collected and treasured.

Now set the boundary the class needs, and set it kindly. This is the apostolic age, and God is confirming His word with accompanying signs (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4). The shaken building, like the tongues of Pentecost, belongs to that confirming work. We should not read verse 31 as a promise of a repeatable experience to be sought today, nor treat “filled with the Spirit” as a second blessing that some Christians have and others lack. That confirming purpose was served, the word has been delivered once for all (Jude 3), and we now have in Scripture the thing the signs were given to authenticate.

Then give the class the part that is genuinely theirs. What God supplied that day was courage to speak, and He still supplies it, through His Word, through His indwelling Spirit, and through the strengthening of the brethren. The building will not shake. The boldness is still on offer. Point them to Philippians 4:13 and 2 Timothy 1:7, and let them ask God for it this week.

Close the loop on faithfulness. God did not answer by removing the Sanhedrin, and the threats were still standing when the prayer ended. He answered by making His people equal to the situation. That is very often how He is faithful, and a class that understands it will stop reading unanswered prayer as divine indifference.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God answers prayer that is aligned with His purpose, often by strengthening His people rather than removing the trouble
- Every display of power in Acts serves the preaching of the word, not personal experience
- The shaking and filling belong to the apostolic age of confirming signs and are not a pattern to seek today (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4)
- “Filled with the Spirit” here is not a second blessing dividing Christians into two classes

- The faith was delivered once for all, and Scripture is now the confirmed and sufficient word (Jude 3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- God still supplies boldness through His Word, His indwelling Spirit, and the brethren (2 Timothy 1:7)

Discussion Prompts

- God left the threats in place and changed the people instead. Where might He be doing that with you?
- Why does it matter that every show of power in Acts ends with someone preaching?
- How would you explain to a friend the difference between the boldness God gives today and the confirming signs of the apostles' day?

Question 6

Student Question:

Verse 32 says the believers were "of one heart and soul." What does this kind of unity look like in a local congregation, and how is it developed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Start by getting the phrase right. "One heart and soul" is not one personality, one background, or one opinion about everything. This congregation held Hebrews and Hellenists, fishermen and Pharisees, people who had followed Jesus in Galilee and people who had been in the crowd shouting for His blood weeks earlier. That is not a natural constituency. Something had made them one, and it was not that they were alike.

Show the class what actually produced it. Luke has already told us: they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers (Acts 2:42). Unity in the New Testament is a byproduct, not a project. It grows where people are gathered around the same truth, the same table, and the same Lord. This is exactly Paul's argument in Ephesians 4:3-6, where the seven ones are not seven goals to achieve but seven realities to maintain. You cannot manufacture unity by wanting it. You get it by standing together on what is true.

That gives you the boundary the class needs. Because unity comes from shared truth, it can never be purchased by setting truth aside. The modern instinct is to secure fellowship by agreeing to disagree about doctrine, but a unity built on the shrinking of conviction is not the unity of Acts 4. Notice that this same church, in this same chapter, had just refused a direct order to stop preaching. They were tender with each other and immovable about Christ, and those two things belong together.

Then get concrete, because "unity" stays abstract otherwise. In verse 32 it looked like open hands and shared possessions. It looked like nobody insisting on his rights. Ask the class what

one heart and soul would cost in their congregation this year, and let the answers be specific: a preference surrendered, an old grievance dropped, a person welcomed who is not like us.

Be honest about what erodes it. Unity is rarely lost over doctrine in a congregation like this one. It is lost over slights, factions, and self-interest, which is exactly what Paul had to confront at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:10-13) and what Philippians 2:3-4 heads off by telling us to count others more significant than ourselves. Help the class see that guarding unity is daily, unglamorous work.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Unity of heart and soul is spiritual oneness around shared truth, not sameness of background or opinion (Acts 4:32)
- Unity is the fruit of shared devotion to the apostles' teaching, not a program to be engineered (Acts 2:42; Ephesians 4:3-6)
- Unity is maintained, not invented; the "ones" of Ephesians 4 are realities God has already established
- True unity is never bought by setting doctrine aside; this same church refused to stop preaching (Acts 4:19-20)
- Unity is most often destroyed by self-interest and faction, not by doctrinal disagreement (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; Philippians 2:3-4)

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between unity and uniformity, and which one are we usually asking for?
- What would "one heart and soul" cost you personally in this congregation this year?
- Why is a unity that requires us to stop teaching the truth not the unity of Acts 4?

Question 7

Student Question:

Verses 32–35 describe the early church sharing possessions so that "there was not a needy person among them." Was this arrangement mandatory or voluntary? What principles does it teach about Christian generosity?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Answer the question directly, because the class will want to know and the text is not ambiguous. This was voluntary. Luke writes in verse 34 that those who owned lands or houses were selling them and bringing the proceeds, and the tense he uses describes something that kept happening as needs arose, not a one-time liquidation of everything anyone owned. And Peter settles the matter in the very next chapter, telling Ananias about his property: "While it

remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?" (Acts 5:4). Ananias's sin was lying, not withholding. He was under no obligation to sell or to give.

So take the class past the wrong question. This is not the New Testament establishing communal ownership as a rule for the church, and it is not a proof text for any economic system. Christians afterward still own homes and still host the church in them (Acts 12:12; Philemon 2), and Paul's standing instruction on giving is that each one give "as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). Purposed, free, glad giving is the New Testament pattern.

Now go to what Luke is actually showing us, which is the motive. Verse 32 puts the generosity right next to the unity: they were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of his things was his own. The sharing is not a separate policy; it is what one heart and soul does when it notices a need. Grace had gotten all the way to their property. Help the class feel that this is not law being obeyed but love overflowing, and that it is the harder of the two.

Draw the result the passage is proud of: "there was not a needy person among them." That was the outcome, and it deserves a moment. Ask the class whether we would know. Real generosity requires knowing each other well enough to see the need and loving each other well enough that no one has to be ashamed to have it seen. A congregation can be quite generous in the abstract and quite blind up close.

Then press it gently where it belongs. The question is not whether we will sell a field. It is whether anything we own is genuinely at God's disposal, and whether a brother's real need would change how we spend this month. James 2:15-16 and 1 John 3:17 will not let us keep this theoretical.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The sharing was voluntary and occasional, not a mandated communal ownership; the property remained the owner's to control (Acts 5:4)
- This passage establishes no economic system and does not bind common ownership on the church
- New Testament giving is purposed, free, and cheerful, never compelled (2 Corinthians 9:7)
- Generosity here is the fruit of unity and grace, not a rule imposed from outside (Acts 4:32)
- Genuine fellowship includes material care, and real care requires knowing one another (James 2:15-16; 1 John 3:17)
- The measure of the church's generosity was that no one among them was in need

Discussion Prompts

- If someone in this congregation had a real material need, would we know? What would have to be true of us for the answer to be yes?
- What does it mean, practically, for what you own to be at God's disposal?

- Why does it matter that this sharing was voluntary rather than commanded?

Question 8

Student Question:

Verse 33 says the apostles gave their testimony “with great power, and great grace was upon them all.” What is the relationship between the church’s internal unity and its external witness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Have the class read verses 32 through 33 as one sentence, because Luke wrote them that way. One heart and soul, no one claiming his possessions, and “with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection.” The unity and the witness are not two separate items on a list. Luke sets them side by side because they belong together. The church’s life was making the church’s message credible.

This is exactly what Jesus prayed for and why. In John 17:20-21 He asks that His people be one “so that the world may believe that you have sent me,” and in John 13:35 He says the world will know we are His disciples by our love for one another. Help the class see the logic. We preach a gospel that claims to reconcile people to God and to each other. A congregation that visibly loves and shares is not merely nice; it is evidence. A congregation at war with itself is a standing argument against its own preaching.

Notice the phrase “great grace was upon them all.” Not upon the apostles only, and not only in the moment of preaching. The whole body was living under God’s favor, and the power in the pulpit and the grace in the pews rose together. Encourage the teacher to name what that means for the class: the health of the congregation’s common life is not the backdrop to evangelism, it is part of it.

Then be honest about the reverse. Most of what makes an outsider dismiss the gospel is not an argument he heard but a church he watched. Ask the class what a visitor would conclude about the resurrection from watching how we treat each other on an ordinary Wednesday. That question does more than a hundred exhortations about evangelism.

Do not let the class flip this into performance, though. The Jerusalem church was not being unified in order to look good. They were one because they were saved, and the witness followed as naturally as heat from a fire. Aim at the reality, and the credibility takes care of itself.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church’s unity and its witness are joined; Luke reports them in the same breath (Acts 4:32-33)
- Jesus prayed for the unity of His people precisely so the world would believe (John 17:20-21; John 13:35)

- The resurrection is the central content of apostolic testimony (Acts 4:33)
- Grace rested on the whole body, not on the preachers alone
- A divided congregation undermines the gospel it preaches
- Unity is not a marketing strategy; the witness is the fruit of a genuinely shared life

Discussion Prompts

- What would a visitor conclude about the resurrection from watching how we treat one another on an ordinary week?
- Why did Jesus tie the world's believing to His people's oneness?
- How can we pursue unity for its own sake rather than as a performance for outsiders?

Question 9

Student Question:

How does this passage challenge a Christianity that is individualistic and disconnected from the life of the local congregation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Let the class simply try to remove the congregation from Acts 4 and see what is left. There is no private prayer meeting here, no solitary act of generosity, no lone Christian being bold at a distance. Every verb in this passage is plural. They went to their friends. They lifted their voices together. They were of one heart and soul. There was not a needy person among them. A believer who wanted to live this chapter alone would have nothing to do.

That is the challenge, and it lands hard on a culture that treats faith as a private arrangement between an individual and God. But be precise here, because the point is easily overstated into something false. Nobody is saved by joining a congregation. When a person obeys the gospel, the Lord adds him to the body of Christ, which is the whole company of the saved everywhere (Acts 2:47), and that is a work God does, not a membership a church confers. What is true is that no one God saves is left a solitary unit. The saved are members one of another (Romans 12:5), and we are commanded not to neglect meeting together (Hebrews 10:24-25). Help the class see that these are not rules about attendance, and not conditions of salvation. They describe what a Christian actually is: a part of something, joined to people he did not choose, for a life he cannot live by himself.

Be fair to the honest objection, because someone will raise it. People say the church has hurt them, or that they can worship God on a lake, or that the assembly feels like an obligation. Do not dismiss that, and do not argue with the pain. But do point out what Acts 4 assumes: this congregation was under threat, was not comfortable, and was full of imperfect people, and it was still where the believers ran. The church is not a service we consume when it satisfies. It is a family we belong to.

Then turn the challenge around so it does not stay accusatory. This passage does not only ask “are you connected?” It asks “are you the kind of member who makes connection possible?” Someone in Acts 4 sold a field. Someone reported the threat honestly. Someone prayed out loud. Ask the class which of those they are supplying.

Close by naming the loss plainly. The individualist is not merely disobedient; he is impoverished. He prays alone what could be prayed together, he carries alone what could be shared, and he never sees the great grace that rested on them all. The pattern of Acts 4 is not a burden laid on us. It is a gift we are declining.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Christian life in Acts is corporate; the verbs of this passage are plural throughout
- The Lord adds the saved to the body of Christ, the whole company of the saved everywhere, at the moment they obey the gospel (Acts 2:47)
- No one is saved by joining a congregation, and no congregation confers membership in the body; that is God’s work
- The body is composed of saved individuals, not of congregations, so a congregation is not itself a part of the body (1 Corinthians 12:27)
- Yet no one God saves is left solitary; the saved are members one of another (Romans 12:5)
- Neglecting the assembly is neglecting God’s provision, not merely breaking a rule (Hebrews 10:24-25)
- A high view of the local congregation is New Testament, not institutional preference
- Membership is something we supply to others, not only something we receive
- Individualism impoverishes the Christian and hides from him the grace that rests on the body

Discussion Prompts

- Every verb in this passage is plural. What in your walk with God are you currently trying to do in the singular?
- How would you respond, kindly, to a friend who says he loves Jesus but is done with church?
- Are you the kind of member who makes this sort of congregation possible? What are you supplying?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking at Acts 4:23–35 as a whole, what marks of a healthy, devoted church does this passage reveal?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Step back and let the class assemble the portrait themselves, because they have all the pieces now. Ask them to list what this church did when it was squeezed, and write it up. They gathered rather than scattered. They prayed before they planned. They started with God's sovereignty and reasoned from Scripture. They asked for boldness instead of safety. They were of one heart and soul. They held their possessions loosely and met real needs. They testified to the resurrection, and great grace was on them all. That is the anatomy of a healthy congregation, drawn from life rather than theory.

Point out the order, because it is not random. Everything here flows from what they believed about God. The prayer came first, and the generosity came last, and the generosity was possible because of what the prayer had settled. Congregations that try to reverse this, generating unity and sacrifice by exhortation without conviction, always run out of fuel. Help the class see that the visible health of Acts 4 grew from invisible roots.

Then say the word the class needs to hear: this is a pattern, not an anecdote. Luke is not scrapbooking a golden age we should admire from a distance. He is showing the church what the church is. We are not free to redesign the congregation around the tastes of our moment, and we do not need to. God has shown us what His people look like under pressure, and our work is to be that, faithfully, here.

Be careful to keep the class from romanticizing them. This same congregation had an Ananias and a Sapphira in it within a chapter, and a complaint about neglected widows within two. The health of Acts 4 was not perfection. It was devotion, which is a thing they had to keep choosing, and so do we.

End with the mirror, because that is where this lesson has been pointed from the beginning. Do not close with "what a church that was." Close with two questions and let them sit. When trouble comes to us, what do we do first? And if someone watched us for a month, which of these marks would they be able to name?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A healthy church prays first, reasons from Scripture, and asks for faithfulness rather than comfort (Acts 4:24-30)
- Its unity, generosity, and witness flow from conviction about God, not from exhortation or program
- The resurrection remains the center of the church's testimony (Acts 4:33)
- Acts 4 is a pattern to be restored, not a golden age to admire from a distance
- Devotion is chosen repeatedly; this same congregation still faced sin and conflict in the chapters that follow
- The measure of a congregation is what it does under pressure, not what it says when calm

Discussion Prompts

- Which mark of this church is strongest among us, and which one is thinnest?
- When trouble comes to our congregation, what do we actually do first? What would we like to do first?
- Name one specific thing from Acts 4 you want to be true of you before this series ends.