

Empowered

The Amazing Church of Jesus Christ

Week 2

Peter and John: Men on a Mission

Acts 3:1 – 5:42

Teacher Notes

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*Bible versions used throughout the Empowered teacher notes are
NASB, ESV, NLT, and CEB.*

✧ Introduction to Week Two

ILLUSTRATION: What is the greatest gift that you've ever received? Do you remember, as a child, making your Christmas wish list—compiling items that promised to be perfect gifts? As adults, each of us has probably imagined a certain item, a desired circumstance, or even a relationship that we believed would be 'perfect' for us. But things break, go out of style, become obsolete. Circumstances constantly change. And people—well, they let us down and disappoint.

⇒ **Acts presents us with stories of men and women who received the greatest gift of all—salvation through their faith in Jesus—and, in that, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. A life changing and eternal gift!! A perfect gift.**

- This week we will see men and women who become bold, generous, and unified as they live out what they believe—strong in faith and committed to the truth.
- ⇒ **In our study today we will see two distinct choices— to submit to the Holy Spirit or not. One will result in blessing and glory, no matter the circumstances. The other will open the door to 'victimhood' and defeat, becoming easy prey for the adversary.**

Study One:

Acts 3:1-26 Signs and Wonders in the Temple

- Peter and John headed to the temple to pray at 3:00 in the afternoon.
 - ~ Jews, and even Gentiles, would go to the temple in the mornings, afternoons, and evenings to pray.
- **NOTE:** The workbook reminds us that these were Jews being Jewish and continuing their discipline of prayer.

APPLICATION: Paul encourages us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to *"... pray without ceasing."* Prayer is a discipline that we should commit to!

- As they headed to the temple, they encountered a man who had been crippled since birth. He was sitting by the temple gate and asked them for money.
 - ~ This was a man who knew no different life than begging.
- Peter responded to this man in an unexpected manner – *"I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!"* (Acts 3:6)
- ⇒ **Peter commanded the man, who had been crippled since birth, to walk—in the name of Jesus. And he did. Can you imagine this scene?**

TEACHING TIP: Don't miss the fact that the man had not asked for healing. He asked for material goods. He sought money to buy whatever he needed or wanted. But Peter, in the boldness of the Holy Spirit, offered this man much more than he asked for or could ever imagine.

APPLICATION: Can we relate to this crippled man and his expectations? Do we, ourselves, put God in a box? This man did not even consider asking for healing, he just did what he had always done, expecting the same result. But God offers so much more ... let us not miss this truth!

⇒ **Let us remember Ephesians 3:20, “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us ...” This is our God!! May we not put him in a box!**

⇒ **This man received an unexpected gift that changed his entire life, not just his lameness!**

→ **NOTE:** It is important to see that Peter did not have the authority to heal this man on his own. It was only by the power of Jesus Christ.

† Acts 3:7-8 *“And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. With a leap, he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.”*

⇒ **What power lies in the name of Jesus! From crippled, outside the temple, to healed and going inside the temple courts! From pity to praise!**

APPLICATION: When we submit our lives to Jesus, the power that healed this man is readily available to us. He wants to heal us ‘inside out’ and with that give us the same joy this man experienced.

⇒ **What is crippling you? What is weighing you down? Look to Jesus and fully submit these things to Him. He is the only One who has the power to truly, radically, change the trajectory of your life.**

→ **NOTE:** Not only was this man impacted in this scene, but others were moved by what they had witnessed take place in his life.

† Acts 3:9-10 *“And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.”*

▪ Peter had caused a stir among the people and there was an excitement that quickly grew.

▪ Peter asked a poignant question in Acts 3:12-13— *“Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him.”*

~ Peter wanted the people to know that it was by God’s power, not his own.

TEACHING TIP: Do you see the changed life of Peter in this scene? Bold and courageous in speaking truth to this crowd. Using this opportunity to proclaim the power and goodness of Jesus.

- Peter used this specific description of God because it was familiar to his Jewish audience.
 - Picturing Jesus in this way reminded the people of God’s faithfulness to His covenant with Abraham. Furthermore, this man, Jesus, was the Messiah the prophets had foretold.
- ⇒ **When God works in the life of a man or woman it does not go unnoticed. In fact, it attracts the attention of others; and we are given the opportunity to point them to Jesus.**

ILLUSTRATION: This picture of courage and boldness is seen in the life of Catherine Booth. She and her husband, William, were the founders of the Salvation Army. William was active in street-corner preaching. It was rare at that time for a woman to speak publicly, but Catherine told William that she had a message she felt compelled to share, and he trusted her. One morning he announced that his wife had something to say. Catherine approached the podium and began to preach of God’s love, she encouraged the people to come forward, to repent and to ask forgiveness for their sins. The people were moved by her boldness to speak and the power that came from her message.

When asked what happened that morning, she responded, “I felt the Holy Spirit all the way down to my hands and to my feet. It seemed as if a voice said, ‘If you will go and testify, you know I will bless you and those who hear you.’” Catherine was empowered by the Holy Spirit; she was bold and had courage to use the power given to her which created an opportunity for many to hear about salvation through Jesus Christ and accept it. What a gift she shared with those people that morning.

- ⇒ **Such boldness to stand up and confidently share the gospel requires a step out in faith and dependence upon the Holy Spirit.**

▲ **QUOTE:** The theologian Stanley Grenz once stated, *“According to the New Testament, God wills that the church be a people who show what God is like.”*

APPLICATION: Will we seize opportunities when they arise to boldly share Jesus as Catherine Booth did? In the face of breaking cultural norms, she spoke Jesus—it was as if she could not be silent! May we have such confidence, one that is deeply rooted in our relationship with Jesus Christ and is totally reliant upon the Holy Spirit.

- Peter’s boldness not only caused a stir among the people, but also among the religious leaders—the Pharisees and the Sadducees.
 - ~ Two different parties with differing mindsets; yet they held one thing in common, hatred toward Jesus.
 - ~ Jesus was their common enemy whom they both wanted to destroy.

Study Two:

Acts 4:1-14

Peter Testifies Before the Religious Leaders

- Chapter Four begins with the Sadducees putting Peter and John in jail because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

TEACHING TIP: Peter and John proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. The Sadducees taught there was no resurrection. (Acts 23:8)

⇒ **The gospel message was demolishing the doctrine taught by the Sadducees.**

- Not only were Peter and John testifying to something that went against the Sadducees' teaching, but Peter and John's teaching also threatened the Sadducees' power over the people. For it made clear:

- ~ Jesus had power over death.
- ~ Jesus was the promised King.

→ **NOTE:** Throughout the Book of Acts we will see that the gospel message and its impact cannot be jailed or shut away!

✠ Acts 4:4 *"But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand."*

⇒ **No man could accomplish this on his own, especially from a prison cell. Only Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit could achieve such a miracle.**

- The following day, Peter and John were brought before these wealthy and powerful men—the rulers, the elders, the scribes, the high priest Annas, Caiaphas and John and Alexander who were of high-priestly descent. Without a doubt, this was meant to be an intimidating atmosphere.
- In Acts 4:7 these religious leaders asked—*"By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"*

→ **NOTE:** The last time Peter had seen these religious leaders he had denied knowing Jesus. Peter now stood before them fully understanding the significant role they had played in Jesus' crucifixion.

- Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter did not crumble before these wealth, powerful men. Instead, with confidence and power, he boldly preached the gospel knowing full well the persecution his words could bring.

APPLICATION: Would you be willing to go to jail if you knew five thousand people would come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ? To Peter and John, there was nothing more important than sharing this gift, salvation in Jesus. They were willing to suffer the consequences for their God.

- Peter told this panel of men that it was by no other name under heaven which a man can be saved—not by works or deeds.
- He explained that salvation could not be bought or attained by following rules made by men.

TEACHING TIP: A different Peter stood before the Sanhedrin council. One who knew, understood, and fully believed in the exclusive saving power of Jesus Christ.

⇒ **Peter’s clarity of words and his bold disposition caused these intelligent men to realize that these unschooled, ordinary men had been with Jesus—the healed man gave evidence to Peter’s words—and these religious leaders were left speechless. How could they deny the gift of new and changed lives that these men had so visibly received?**

Study Three:

Acts 4:15-31 The Believers Pray Boldly

- The Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body, had a problem—what to do with Peter and John?
 - ~ The miracles they were performing were gaining the attention of the entire city.
 - ~ Their message was growing, putting the power of the Sanhedrin at risk.

→ **NOTE:** It was too risky to punish them because they had broken no law.

APPLICATION: One of the greatest ways to shine the light and love of Jesus Christ is to share your testimony.

⇒ **A changed life shows the power Jesus has had on your own life, whether well received or not.**

~ There should be a distinct difference in who you are now in Christ versus who you were as an unbeliever.

~ As a follower of Jesus, your choices, actions, words will reflect His light in you.

~ You may be ridiculed or questioned, but your new life will give evidence of the Holy Spirit working in and through you.

⇒ **No one can debate your personal testimony because it is your Jesus story—no one else’s.**

⇒ **The evidence was overwhelming---Peter stood now before the Sanhedrin a bold, confident man full of the Holy Spirit and a crippled man stood by him, completely healed. Who could debate this?**

- But the religious leaders had to stop the gospel message from being spread, so they commanded Peter and John not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. (Acts 4:17-18)

† Acts 4:19–20 *“But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.’”*

- Being imprisoned had not discouraged or frightened Peter and John; rather it had emboldened them further with courage and zeal for the Lord.
 - ~ It was not an issue of “could not” but they “would not” stay quiet in sharing the truth of the gospel.
 - ~ No matter the consequences, they would continue to speak in Jesus’ name!
- Finally, the religious leaders had to relent because there was no basis for punishment, so Peter and John were released. (Acts 4:21)

TEACHING TIP: Consider this command—*“do not use Jesus’ name, do not use His name at all.”* Isn’t this a response of fear toward the evidence before them? In this command they are, in fact, giving credence to the power of Jesus’ name!

- Peter and John went to their companions and reported all that had happened; they understood that what they had encountered had been foreseen in the Old Testament.
- A beautiful scene of worship then broke out. In one accord they worshipped and prayed to God.
- They acknowledged the threats made by the religious leaders, then prayed for strength, for boldness to speak His word, for healing, signs, and wonders to take place through the name of Jesus.

“Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”
(James 1:2-3)

⇒ **Endurance and perseverance were being developed in Peter and John.**

→ **NOTE:** What was missing in their prayers? Fear of men! What was present in their prayers? Faith in Jesus, the One who had called them!

- We are told in Acts 4:31 that after a time of worship and prayer, the place where they had gathered was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness!

QUOTE: Dwight L. Moody once said— *“There is not a better evangelist in the world than the Holy Spirit.”*

⇒ **Boldness, despite the opposition they knew existed. How? Through the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Study Four:

Acts 4:32-5:16 Unity and Deception in the Church

† Acts 4:32 *“And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common*

property to them.”

- Unity was essential to the early church.
 - ~ It was understood that all a person had belonged to the Lord.
 - ~ It was understood that if someone had a need, that need would be met because they were willing to share everything.

TEACHING TIP: Love, unity, and generosity characterized the hearts of the early church. What a visible testimony!

→ **NOTE:** Acts 4:34 shares that there was no needy person among the people.

- And in these circumstances, we see—
 - ✚ Acts 4:33 *“And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.”*
 - ~ The word “grace” here means “favor.” Favor was upon them all—not only from God, but from the people outside the church.

⇒ **The love, unity, and generosity demonstrated among the believers motivated those who were outside of this group, unbelievers, to give them “favor” as well.**

- From time to time those who owned land or houses sold them and brought the money from the sale to the apostles to distribute to anyone who had a need. In Acts 4:36-37 Barnabas made such a contribution.
 - ~ Barnabas owned a tract of land, sold it, and brought the proceeds to the apostles. He laid the money at their feet. A picture of what the workbook termed as “generous grace.”

→ **NOTE:** Chapter 4 ends with a bright visual of unified attitudes and actions building up the church. However, in Chapter 5, we are introduced to hypocrisy and deceit within the church—poisons that divide and destroy—a sad and lethal contrast to unity.

- ✚ Acts 5:1 *“But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife’s full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles’ feet.”*
 - ~ Like Barnabas, this couple sold land and brought money to the apostles to use.
 - ~ In contrast, Barnabas gave all of the proceeds from his land for the Lord’s use—whereas, Ananias and Sapphira held back a portion for themselves.

- There is a “but” as we look at Peter’s response to this couple’s gift—

- ✚ Acts 5:3 *“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?’”*
 - ~ Peter said that Ananias’ heart had been deceived by Satan.

- ~ Ananias, with his wife's full knowledge, kept back part of the money for themselves, not giving the full amount which they had promised.

→ **NOTE:** This couple was a part of the church, members of this congregation.

QUOTE: George MacDonald, the Scottish author and minister once said—
“Half of the misery in the world comes from trying to look, instead of trying to be, what one is not.”

TEACHING TIP: What is the issue here? Was it sinful to keep back a portion of the money? NO! Peter made it clear in Acts 5:4 that while the land was unsold, they had freedom to do what they wanted with their property. It was after the land was sold—

- ~ They had promised all the proceeds of the sale would be given to the Lord.
- ~ They lied about their gift. Not just one of them, but both lied.
- ~ Their gift was based in hypocrisy, a deliberate deception. They tried to make people think they were more spiritual than they really were.

⇒ **Peter reminded them that this act of deception was against God Himself. They had, in fact, lied to the Holy Spirit.**

→ **NOTE:** Both Ananias and Sapphira were given an opportunity to tell the truth about their gift, but instead they held fast to their lie! If only they had confessed to their sin, God would have forgiven them. Instead, both remained selfish and the consequence was death.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
 (1 John 1:9)

- Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about this couple and the events that led up to their deaths.

⇒ **This act of divine judgment led the people to realize the seriousness of sin.**

TEACHING TIP: Why would Luke include this story?

QUOTE: F.F. Bruce (*Acts Commentary, NICNT Series*)— *“The story of Ananias is to the book of Acts what the story of Achan is to the book of Joshua. Both tell of deceit which interrupts the victorious progress of God's people.”*

- ~ God was doing something new with Joshua when he led the people into the promise land to start fresh, to have a new life.
- ~ Same here, with Peter and the others. God was starting a new thing with the church, and He wanted all to know that, even though He was full of love and grace, He would not tolerate sin.

→ **NOTE:** We see two different spirits represented in these stories of ‘giving.’

- ~ Barnabas was led by the Holy Spirit.
- ~ Ananias and Sapphira were controlled and motivated by a lie whispered by Satan, the whisper to deceive the Spirit of truth.

- Even in this painful situation, many signs and wonders were done through the hands of the apostles. God was moving! And His church was growing!
- ✠ Acts 5:14 *“And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number.”*

APPLICATION: No one is perfect, no church is perfect. This early church certainly was not perfect. But we see in this husband-and-wife relationship, that the need to encourage and exhort one another to do that which is good and right before the Lord was missing. Instead, Ananias and Sapphira supported one another in compromising their faith and truth.

QUOTE: Matthew Henry— *“How sad to see those relations who should quicken one another to that which is good, hardening one another in that which is evil.”*

⇒ **We need to uphold one another in truth, self-examination, and prayer, understanding that we not only need God’s grace and forgiveness all the time, but we also need to live in constant dependence on Him and His leading.**

- Many gathered. People brought the sick out into the streets, fully believing that even Peter’s shadow could bring divine healing. And the people were being healed—healed through the power of God, in answer to prayer!

Study Five:

Acts 5:17-42 “Fighting Against God”

- A quote by the essayist Kathleen Norris seems to sum up the scene in our last day of study— *“Maybe the real scariness of conversion lies in admitting that God can work in us however, whenever, and through whatever means God chooses.”*

TEACHING TIP: Think back to the apostles’ prayer in Acts 4:30. They asked God to stretch out His hand to heal. The healing in Acts 5 was a direct answer to their prayer, and their faith continued to be strengthened. This type of faith, power, and abundant grace can be seen throughout the Bible.

- ~ Displayed in Joshua when he led the people and conquered the promise land.
- ~ Countless battles won by kings who kept their eyes and focus on God.
- ~ With Nehemiah, God’s outstretched hand was upon him as he made a nine-hundred-mile trek back to Jerusalem from exile in Persia.
- ~ With the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament disciples, we read of God’s grace and outstretched hand upon them.

- The religious leaders were filled with jealousy regarding the apostles.
 - ~ They had commanded Peter and his friends to stay quiet about Jesus—they didn't.
 - ~ They had threatened the apostles—they continued to preach the gospel.
 - ~ They had imprisoned them—but this did not dampen their spirits to share the message of Life.

TEACHING TIP: Being “filled with jealousy” reveals how envious these religious leaders must have been regarding the apostles’ success—the numbers following the apostles continued to grow despite the best efforts to quell their mission.

⇒ **These religious leaders could not hold back God’s plan!**

- But they tried. With murder on their mind, the religious leaders once again imprisoned the apostles.
- God intervened by sending an angel to open the prison doors, to take them out, and to tell them to *“... Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.”* (Acts 5:20)

TEACHING TIP: There is no prison, no bondage, that God cannot bring us out of! The purpose of their release was for God’s glory to be known.

ILLUSTRATION: This principle is beautifully illustrated through the life of Samuel Morris. In the 1800’s he was born in western Africa, in Liberia. His father was King of the Kru tribe. Unable to pay his war taxes, the king was compelled to surrender his son, Samuel, as collateral until the debt was paid. This happened twice—once when Samuel was a young child, and his father was able to pay his debt and free Samuel quickly; but the second time happened when Samuel was a young teen, and his father was unable to pay.

During his imprisonment Samuel was whipped and beaten. In one of these thrashings, a blinding light flashed, and he heard a voice say, “Rise up and run.” Strength returned to his wounded body, and he ran into the jungle. Warriors followed him into the night, but Samuel did not stop running. He shared that God provided a miraculous light to guide him.

Samuel made his way to a town where missionaries told him about Jesus. Samuel spent the rest of his life speaking about the powerful saving grace of his Lord. In fact, he came to our country to show Americans the love of Jesus.

- At daybreak the men began to teach the people, just as they had been told.
 - ~ A message of Life. Eternal life offered to the spiritually dead.

APPLICATION: Consider this scene! Under the circumstances, do you think you would be willing to be this bold? To immediately speak or teach on the very thing that put you in jail in the first place?

~ Peter and the others had priorities—obedience to Jesus’ calling. They were witnesses to His power, while on earth, and now through the Holy Spirit and angels.

⇒ **When fully empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can be bold and have confidence to speak out for Christ.**

- Meanwhile, the high priest and his associates came back to the jail—calling the Sanhedrin and all the Senate to go with them.
 - ~ This was not going to be a “visit,” but a trial.
 - ~ These powerful men were willing to do anything to stop the apostles from testing their authority.
- When the council arrived at the jail, the officers did not find Peter and his friends inside. They reported in Acts 5:23— *“We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside.”*
- No, the prisoners were not inside because they had been set free to teach in the temple!
- Once again, the apostles found themselves in front of the council and, once again they did not crumble.
 - ~ Peter and the apostles told them that they must obey God rather than men.
 - ~ They described God’s relationship to Jesus, the very One these religious leaders had put to death, had murdered, by hanging on a tree.
 - ~ They summarized the situation by declaring they were first and foremost Jesus’ witnesses and, in that, must obey Him.

TEACHING TIP: Consider this scene! Peter not only accused the high priest of murder, but he let him know with total clarity that the followers of Jesus would obey God over man-made rules!

TEACHING TIP: Matthew Henry says, *“We cannot expect to be redeemed and healed by Christ, unless we give up ourselves to be ruled by Him.”* Romans 12:1 tells us *“... to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”*

⇒ **We worship God Almighty by offering all of ourselves to Him.**

- In response to this scene, Gamaliel, a prominent rabbi who was well respected by all the religious leaders in the Council, delivered wise advice— *“Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men ... So in this present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.”* (Acts 5:35, 38-39)

- ~ He recommended that they flog the men rather than keep them in jail.
- ~ The men were flogged, receiving thirty-nine lashes which was the standard amount given to avoid exceeding the Old Testament legal limit of forty lashes.

- * Thirty-nine lashes were also found to inflict the greatest amount of suffering without causing death.

TEACHING TIP: Gamaliel arose as one who understood who God was. What sage advice—do not find yourself fighting against God!

TEACHING TIP: Flogging consisted of whipping or beating someone’s bare body with whips, lashes, rods, switches, or even cat-o-nine tails. The blows were usually aimed at the back but sometimes focused on the person’s feet and hands. Salt was sometimes used to pour into the wounds to increase the pain further.

⇒ **Can you picture this? Probably not. But these men willingly endured this for the sake of Christ!**

- Bloody and exhausted the apostles left the council rejoicing and praising God! Praising that they were counted worthy enough to suffer for the name of Christ.
- ⇒ **Empowered by the Holy Spirit, these men were able to rejoice in the grace God had given them to endure the flogging and be able to further proclaim His name.**
- Considering all the suffering these apostles had endured (physically, mentally, emotionally), they continued to preach Christ and glorify Him. Verse 42 is an amazing statement.
- ✚ Acts 5:42 *“And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”*

✚ FINAL THOUGHTS

- ✚ **Bold, generous, and growing describe the people of the early church.**
 - ⚙ Take time to examine your boldness for Jesus and your generosity toward His people. Are you growing in your faith?
- ✚ **Be encouraged from this week’s study to be bold in your faith, knowing that God is growing something within you that no man has the power to destroy.**
- ✚ **Through the empowering of the Holy Spirit, let Acts 5:42 mark our lives—as we use the opportunities the Lord gives us to tell others about Him and glorify His name.**