

## INSPIRED BOLDNESS (Acts 3-7)

As this new way gained traction and more were added to their number daily, the Apostles, filled with the Spirit, went on doing the things they saw Jesus do.

Peter and John blessed a lame man with so much more than the monetary blessing he sought. As a kind of metaphor for Israel, representing the people of God, this lame man at the entrance to the Temple was brought to life in the name of Jesus, a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, made to leap like a deer.

Peter healed him in the name of Jesus, and the man followed them into the Temple rejoicing. As the crowd came to recognize him, they were filled with wonder and amazement and Peter seized the opportunity to preach again, a message of repentance and promise.

The religious authorities were greatly disturbed, grieved, vexed by this, so they arrested them and kept them overnight for questioning, but the number of believers still grew to about 5,000!

The next morning under interrogation, Peter preached boldly again, presenting Jesus as the stone the religious leaders rejected, the only One who brings salvation. Met with the paradoxical presence of men both ordinary and extraordinary, there was nothing they could say.

Warned not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus, Peter and John replied... we can't help it. Altogether again, the believers prayed for boldness, and Luke shined a light on this new way of life: Radical generosity, great power, encouraging sacrifice

But among the believers, selfishness and deceit made an appearance. Like Achan, Ananias and Sapphira acted deceitfully. The Lord answered decisively, protectively.

The church continued growing.

The apostles continued healing, full of the Spirit.

The religious leaders, full of jealousy, arrested them again.

But, an angel of the Lord was sent to set them free and set them in front of yet another audience at the temple to tell the people about this new life.

Guards once again arrested Peter and the apostles, so the Sanhedrin could hear them.

The high priest questioned them... reminding them "we gave you strict orders!"

But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God."

Furious, they wanted to kill 'em all, but Gamaliel persuaded them to resist that temptation.

Instead, the apostles were flogged and released.

They rejoiced and went on sharing the good news.

This resolve, even in the face of threats and violence! Wow!

Then, challenged by another threat to their unity, favoritism, the apostles respond with uncommon character. Greek widows were being overlooked.

The apostles appointed Seven men full of the Spirit and wisdom  
This was a pivotal moment for the young movement.  
Inspired community could not neglect the widows.  
Inspired community could not favor Jews over Greeks.  
Inspired community could not be limited by the leadership of the twelve.  
Inspired community shared responsibility.

As a result the number of disciples increased rapidly.

Stephen, then came under fire, the focus of a sinister plot to stir up dissent and discredit the faith.  
Appearing before the Sanhedrin, Stephen fearlessly pointed to Israel's history, a pattern of rejection and resistance, and He finished with a fiery rebuke:  
You stiff-necked people! You are just like your ancestors!

As a result, they stoned Stephen, and a man named Saul stood there giving his approval to their actions.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

As this new movement gained momentum, it also began to draw resistance, just like Jesus.  
As the resistance grew, these men and women had a decision to make.  
How was their response to the resistance remarkable?

The fledgling movement faced both internal and external threats.

Externally, four times arrests occurred and questioning took place.  
Threats were made, but the apostles responded with an unflinching resolve.  
They would not be intimidated. They wouldn't stop testifying as the Spirit compelled them.

What are the external pressures threatening to silence us today?  
How are we doing as a people in the face of that pressure? How are you doing?

Two internal threats also came against the early church: selfish deceit and favoritism.

What kind of message do you think God's response to the sin of selfish deceit sent to the members of this new movement?

In the Roman culture, so stratified by citizenship, title, position and status, how did the apostles' response to favoritism set this new movement apart?  
How did their response set the tone for a different kind of community?  
Today, how do we honor the Spirit who honors everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, or age?  
What would you say are the internal threats to the church today?  
How do we faithfully respond to those threats?

As resistance grew more threatening, Stephen did not shrink, but raised his voice and spoke boldly to those opposing the Son of God. Like Jesus and the apostles, Stephen responded to resistance with an inspired boldness.

What would it look like for us to follow in their footsteps today?  
As a group, pray for inspired boldness and the courage to stand with Jesus.