

## After the Semicolon Moment

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### Acts 4

**- “I don’t want my life to be explainable without the Holy Spirit. I want people to look at my life and know that I couldn’t be doing this on my own power”- Francis Chan: Forgotten God**

- *This quote has very influential in my life, because I remember right after I graduated college, I couldn’t find a job. I had graduated with a Christian Studies degree with a focus on youth ministry, I knew I was called to vocational ministry, but I couldn’t get any churches to consider me because I wasn’t married yet, and I hadn’t been to seminary.*
- *And I found myself bagging groceries at BiLo just trying to make rent.*
- *And one Sunday I was sitting in Rocky Creek Baptist church in Greenville, SC and Pastor Ken Forrester had just preached an incredible*

*message out of the book of Acts and after the service I was praying a prayer I had prayed 100 times, “God what do you want me to do? I’ll do whatever You want me to do, I’ll go wherever You to tell me to go...”*

- *And in that moment I heard the Holy Spirit clearly say, “Go to Shelby.”*
- *Now that might sound weird for some people. But it wasn’t like I heard an audible voice, the best way I can describe it, was it was like a very clear thought that I knew wasn’t my own.*
- *And the only reason I am so confident that it was the Holy Spirit is because I tried to pass it off as if it was my own thought.*
- *Because the only reason I knew that Shelby, NC existed is because I had dated a girl from there who had since broke up with me, so there was nothing in me that would want to go to Shelby, NC*
- *But the feeling stayed strong and it was either the next day or the day after I had a random lady in the meat section of BiLo tell me all the*

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*reasons why she thought I should go to Shelby, NC*

- *So I reached out to the only church that I knew of in Shelby, it was a small portable church at the time and the pastor got back to me and said that they would love to offer me the youth pastor position, but they wouldn't be able to pay me.*

• *So I thought, there's no way I can do that.*

- *But in that conversation I couldn't shake that quote from Francis Chan, "I don't want my life to be explainable without the Holy Spirit...."*

- So I moved to a city where I didn't really know anyone to work a job that couldn't pay me and I had no choice but to rely on the Power of God. And the result of that was seeing Him come through and be faithful time and time again. I saw financial miracles, I saw a student ministry birthed, I had the opportunity to really live by faith. 2 years later in, we went through a merger and became Hope Community Church, I was brought on full time, I bought a house, a

few years later I got an incredible wife, and all of that led to this church plant!...

- But, now that we've been at this a little while, and things are good... I have to ask myself, am I still relying on the power of God the same way I was when my life was so uncertain?

- Are we as a church, still relying on the Holy Spirit in the same way we did whenever we started this process, needing Him to come through in order to make any of this possible??

- You see the danger of things being good is that we can have a tendency to hit auto pilot and rely less and less on the Power of God

- One of the fears I have for the American church is that we have it easy enough to stop relying on the Holy Spirit the way that we as a Christian community used to as we see in the book of Acts

- If you have your bibles, go ahead and turn with me to the book of Acts chapter 4. And to give us some context of what led up to this particular passage:

- Ch. 1- Jesus give the Great Commission, says you will be My witnesses to the ends of the earth,
- Ch. 2 The Holy Spirit comes rushing in like a mighty rushing wind, 120 believers are FILLED with the Holy Spirit, and they start speaking in other languages and people from all over the known world hear them speaking about the Mighty Works of God. The people are confused, some think that their drunk, but Peter gets up and preaches and 3000 people come to know Jesus that day and this incredible movement that we now call church church began!
- Ch. 3 Peter and John are headed to the Temple, and they see a Lame man begging on the side of the road. Peter says, *“silver and gold I don’t have, but what I do have, in the Name of Jesus get up and walk!”* Then this mans ankles and knees are strengthened and he gets up and dances a little jig and he’s so excited....and the people are filled with wonder and amazement, and Peter takes that opportunity to start preaching about Jesus,
- Ch. 4 the trouble begins.
- **ACTS 4:1-4, 8-13 (ESV)**
- Today I want to piggy back off of what we talked about last week.
- And we talked about Peter, who was one of Jesus’ most passionate and enthusiastic disciples
- He was so passionate that he declared he would follow Jesus anywhere even if it meant prison or death
- And It seems like he means it! He even cut a guys ear off on the garden when they came to arrest Jesus
- But then, in the confusion and panic of Jesus’ arrest, he denies that he even knows Jesus 3 times
  - Peter completely fails. But remember failure is not a period, its a pause

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- And Peter found Himself in the midst of his semicolon moment
- Then Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to over 500 people
- But one of the times that He appeared to His disciple specifically, He focuses in on Peter
  - In John 21, Jesus appears to them while their fishing and He pretty much recreates the scene of when He and Peter first met. And then calls them to shore to sit around a fire and kind of recreates the scene of when Peter denied Him
  - And then Jesus asks Peter 3 times if he loves Him, both to have Peter confront his failure, and also so that Jesus could cover his failure and pull him out of his semicolon moment.
- And then whenever we get to the book of Acts, the majority of the first half of this book is almost like Peter's comeback story
- Everyone loves a comeback
- The greatest sports games we remember are the ones with the best comebacks
- The Olympians that we fall in love with are those with the comeback or underdog stories
- The best movies are those with those comeback scenes
- We are enamored with comeback stories, largely in part, I believe, because something deep within us understands our need for redemption
- Wherever we are in the spectrum of faith, if we are completely honest with ourselves, we understand our propensity to fail, to mess up, to fall short
  - Because of that, we will either live in utter fear of failing, or we will look for a help that is beyond ourselves
- We all want to be able to get to the point where we can go from:
  - Messing up to moving on

- Failing to moving forward
- Being broken to being bold
- How do we get to the point, like Peter did, in verse 13 that says:
  - ***"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus."* - Acts 4:13 (ESV)**
  - Don't we all want to get to the point where we leave people astonished?
    - Everyone wants to exceed expectations
  - Wouldn't you love to be so bold that it superseded any sense of being under qualified?
  - So where do we get this kind of boldness??
  - **BOLDNESS COMES FROM AN AWARENESS OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD**
  - Their boldness caused the others to recognize that they had been with Jesus
- I would be willing to bet that they recognized the same boldness in Peter and John that they had seen in Jesus when they opposed Him
- So what happened to Peter?...Peter seems to be a rollercoaster of a character:
  - When they come to arrest Jesus in the garden Peter is ready to fight to the death, he even cuts a guys ear off...but Jesus tells him to put his sword away and allowed himself to be arrested
  - Then He follows them from a distance, and he finds himself in the courtyard of the high priest, some people recognize him, but he cowers in fear this time. He's scared and denies even knowing Jesus 3 times
  - Then we see Peter at Pentecost Boldly preaching, and then preaching again in chapter 3, and then getting arrested taken back to probably the same courtyard he denied Jesus in

- We would think, based on his previous track record that he would get scared again and deny everything, but he remains bold this time
  - Whats the difference?:
- GOT MY BACK
- I think this is what's happening with Peter. He's in the garden with Jesus. He's been with Jesus a while now, he has seen Jesus do countless miracles and witnessed his power and his glory first hand. He knows he's got the most powerful being in the universe right there, so he can be bold.
- But then, when he's in the courtyard, he doesn't have Jesus with him anymore...so he's going to have a greater propensity to give into fear.
- You may be thinking, here in Acts, Jesus had ascended into Heaven. He wasn't there anymore, so why is Peter so consistently bold now?
  - Well I'm glad you asked...
- In John chapter 16 Jesus says: ***"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper [The Holy Spirit] will not come to you."*** -John 16:7 (ESV)
  - Jesus was letting His disciples know that it was actually better, that He, in human physical form, would leave so that the Holy Spirit could be sent to us
- The prophet Joel prophesied of when the Spirit would be poured out on all flesh and Peter quotes him in Acts 2: ***"And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh... even on My male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit, and they shall prophesy."***- Acts 2:17-18 (ESV)
  - This is completely radical, because up to this time the Spirit of God would only come upon certain judges, warriors, prophets and kings.

- But now, there is a completely new era that is being introduced
    - Now the Holy Spirit would not only be given to select leaders from a select group of people
    - Now the Holy Spirit would be available to all who would call upon the Name of the Lord
  - PETER KNEW AND HE HAD THE PRESENCE OF GOD WITH HIM WHEREVER HE WAS BECAUSE HE TRULY BELIEVED THAT HE HAD THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE RESULT OF THAT WAS HIM BEING BOLD
    - Boldness is a byproduct of truly believing the Gospel
  - Whenever we truly believe that Jesus is who He says He is and that we are who He says we are, we will be bold out of instinct rather than out of discipline
- Now you might be thinking, ok Kenny, I get that in theory, but I need some practical steps I can take:
    - **BABY STEPS TO BOLDNESS**
      - In these steps we are going to see how Peter and the early church utilized these steps but I think if we can just take each step as they are we can start making those steps toward truly living the bold and powerful lives that the Holy Spirit has empowered us to live
    - **Baby Steps to Boldness: SAY SOMETHING**
    - This is hard for us sometimes because we could be looking at the book of Acts and think, well Peter got himself in trouble BECAUSE he said something
      - And now that he got himself arrested, it would be a lot easier to just not say anything
      - But he keeps on talking about what he got in trouble for talking about!
      - But this is the point we need to get to: The first baby step to boldness is...Say

something when saying nothing would be easier

- Now, there are some very well meaning Christians out there that buy into sayings such as: “Preach Christ, use words if necessary”
  - Which is to say, “I don’t need to talk about my faith, I’ll just show them. I don’t need to bible thump, I’ll do more good just sitting at the bar, meeting people where they are”
  - Now there are levels to that that which are true. Which is why I say that they are well meaning.... You should be able to show your faith, you shouldn’t “bible thump,” and you should meet people where they are
  - However, eventually you are going to have to open your mouth and say something
- **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” -Romans 10:17 (NKJV)**

- Which is to say, someones first chance at faith could come from hearing the word of God from you
- And they won’t hear it unless you say something
- *The Christian life is supposed to be a loving one, but not a passive one.*
- *We don’t see Peter or anyone in the early church tip toeing around whenever it comes to sharing the Gospel*
  - *We don’t see them saying... “Well you know I think that Jesus really is the only way to salvation, Um, I believe that the Bible actually could be true, Uh, I’m sorry I don’t want to offend you, but technically that would be considered a sin...”*
- We don’t see people presenting the Gospel as if they are apologizing about it
- *They understood **“The Gospel is the POWER of God unto salvation, for ALL who believe” -Romans 1:16 (ESV)***



- People were captivated by the authority that Jesus Spoke with
- Our passage says they saw the Boldness of Peter and John, they recognized that they had been with Jesus!
- We need to understand that we have the most powerful message that the world has ever known. The ONLY message that has the power to actually transform and save lives!
- The Gospel is the POWER of God unto salvation....so When we go out and share the gospel there is a power that goes with us
- Jesus said in Acts 1:8, ***“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,”- Acts 1:8 (ESV)***
  - *Dunamis (Dynamite): This is the explosive power and presence of God, that is the very Spirit of our Savior Jesus Christ*
- Jesus was the very personification of Power
  - Lackadaisical passive character floating around in his white robe talking about peace and love as if he is more like the first hippie than the all powerful Son of God
- Peace: A powerful peace that surpasses all understanding
- Love: Perfect love that casts out all fear
- Powerful love of which there was none greater than a man would lay down his life for his friends
- Jesus showed the greatest example of love in all of human history when He gave His life on the cross
- He then rose from the grave and declared that ALL POWER and AUTHORITY had been given Him on heaven and on earth
- And He ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God which is the position of POWER and completed work
- But HE DID NOT STOP THERE
  - And then He empowered His apostles and ALL of His people to be His witnesses and

declare His Name in POWER to the point of which they were referred to as those who turned the world upside down

- That same POWER lives inside of each and everyone one of us who have believed on the Name of Jesus
  - The same Spirit of God that was there at the creation of the universe
  - The same Spirit of God that parted the red sea and shook the walls of Jericho
  - The same Spirit of God that rose Jesus from the dead, and empowered His apostles, lives inside each and everyone of us who declare Jesus Christ is Lord
- We will not be able to live in and experience that Power if we keep our mouths shut...
- We can't afford to be apologetic about the gospel
  - Because why would people believe what we believe if we sound like we're not sure if we believe it ourselves?

- Now, this doesn't mean we go out beating people over the heads with the Bible and burning Harry Potter books....we are to Speak the truth in love
- ***“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” -1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)***
  - You can be confident without being critical
  - You can be bold without bashing
  - You can actually speak the truth in Love, with gentleness and respect.
- Now to be fair, there are some issues that we face where it feels like no matter how loving, caring, and kindly we approach the issue, we will still be seen as critical, unloving, unaccepting people.
  - Because there are so many tough issues that are facing the church today, such as homosexuality, transgenderism, abortion, any and all forms of sexual immorality...

- And the church has a tendency to either resort to bashing, or staying silent all together.
  - How could I call myself a loving and caring Christian if my actions or inactions say, “There is no hope for you.....or....It’s ok by me if you want to live a lifestyle that is spiritually and physically destructive. It doesn’t really matter to me if you go to heaven or hell, just as long as you like me....”
- That is the most selfish approach I could ever take.
- No, we have to get to the point where we can confidently say, “We accept you, we love you, we see you, you are welcome here! However we do believe that God has a better plan for your life.”
  - And we have to rely on the Power of the Holy Spirit for those conversations, because if not, we will be more concerned with winning an argument and being right than we are actually having a heart of compassion and

care for broken people in search of a loving God whether they realize it or not.

- *Conversion is not our responsibility, but conversation is.*
  - *You are not responsible if someone rejects the name of Jesus...but you are responsible to at least have the conversation....say something*
- **Baby Steps to Boldness: SEEK OPPORTUNITIES**
- We see in these first 4 chapters, Peter taking advantage of every opportunity
  - Acts 2: The people were confused and their interests were peaked, so he took that opportunity to tell them about Jesus
  - Acts 3: The lame man was healed, people were filled with wonder and amazement, and Peter took that opportunity to say, “why are you looking at us as if this happened because we’re super spiritual or something. No, this is just God doing what God does. We were all

lame and broken and Jesus came to make us whole!”

- Acts 4: They get arrested, but Peter just takes that as an opportunity to now talk about Jesus to the most powerful and influential people in that community
  - Know that no matter where you are, what you do, or how old you are, you have opportunities around you every single day
- Don't just sit back and wait for opportunities to come your way, actively seek opportunities
- DOWNTOWN GREENVILLE
  - All they did was just show up and God did the rest
  - You never know who's life can change if we just intentionally create Gospel opportunities
- And you don't have to worry about if you know enough, if you are eloquent enough, or strong enough BECAUSE THE HOLY SPIRIT IS
- Why do we struggle with this?

- We cringe at the first sign that someone will think we're a little weird or they'll talk about us if we come off as too bold of a Christian
  - The only thing we need to do about that is repent
- We serve a Savior that not only risked His life, but gave it so that we could be saved,
  - WE get caught up in fear of a tainted reputation rather than a desperation to see souls get saved
  - Do you think that Jesus was concerned with His reputation when He allowed Himself to be beaten, mocked, spit on, stripped, and hung naked between two thieves on a cross
- Jesus was more concerned with the people that would accept Him rather than focusing on those who would reject Him
  - Instead on focusing on “What if they reject me” we should be thinking “What if they accept Him.”

- You may get rejected by 100 people but if 1 person has their entire eternity changed, it will be more than worth it and all of heaven will be celebrating with you...too seek out opportunities
- **Baby Steps to Boldness: STAY WITHIN COMMUNITY**
- *Look at the first thing that Peter and John do whenever they get out of prison...*
- ***“When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.”***  
**-Acts 4:23 (ESV)**
- **Baby Steps to Boldness: STAY WITHIN COMMUNITY**
- They immediately go back to their friends, their church, their community
- They don't allow themselves the opportunity to get in their own heads and allow the difficulty to mess with their minds
- They go back into community where they know people will speak life into them and bear the burden with them
- This is why church is so important in the life of a believer
- I see too many people going through a struggle and their default response is to seclude themselves for a while and try to deal with it themselves before getting back into church or community...that's not the way it works
- ***“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day [of Jesus coming back] drawing near. -Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV)***
- You see, the Church is supposed to be a community of believers who gather together with the intentional purpose of encouraging each other

- He tells us to actively consider how we can best love one another, stir each other up to keep doing the right things, and encourage and build one another up
- *The Christian life was never meant to be lived alone*
  - Authentic intentional community is VITAL to the Christian life
- When you have strong believers in your corner you know you can lean on whenever things get difficult you will be much more apt to be bold with your faith because you know you have a community to fall back on
- *And whenever the enemy has lost the battle for your soul, their number 1 tactic in your life will be to try and get you to isolate you from community.*
- Because if the enemy can cut you off from Christian community, they can limit the amount of God's work that you see, and hold you back from walking in the Power that God has empowered you to walk in.
- Because if you are isolated from other believers you are not seeing how God works in other people's lives, you're not hearing the testimonies, and seeing how God empowers and gifts the whole body of Christ.
  - All you see is what happens in your life and you begin to get a very narrow view of the workings of God.
  - And then in turn we become very critical individuals because we'll begin to only look for the flaws of humans who claim to follow God so we can have an excuse to stay isolated, rather than looking for the workings of God Himself.
- I'll never forget at my ordination: My dad was preaching as at one point he looked right at me and said:
  - *"You know, some of the people that have hurt me the most, stabbed me in the back the worst, and completely betrayed me were Christians, and some of them were pastors.*

- *But some of the people who have loved me the most, had my back no matter what, and loved and cared for me and my family better than anyone else, were Christians and some of them were pastors.”*
- *Then he leaned in and said: “Whichever one you choose to focus on is up to you.”*
- And I have needed that encouragement time and time again over these past 11 years since that day:
  - Because I, like many of you, have been let down, discouraged, and hurt by other Christians and Pastors
  - And when I am able to keep my eyes on the Goodness of God rather than the short comings of man....I can realize that I am not above hurting and discouraging people myself
  - And instead of focusing on those who have beat me up I can focus more on those who have built me up and how God has blessed me through their lives!
- And this is so important that Jesus specifically prayed about this in the Garden of Gethsemne, just before He goes to the cross:
  - He prays: ***“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.”***  
***-John 17:20-21 (ESV)***
  - ***“The glory that You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one, I in them and You in Me that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You sent Me and loved them even as You loved Me.”*** ***-John 17:22-23 (ESV)***
  - The goal of Christian community is not to get people to look to us and see how great and loving we are...the goal of Christian community is to point people to Him and see how great and loving He is

- Because if we only look to each other, we will fail each other time and time and time again
- But if we look to Him, He will forgive, heal, and restore us time and time and time again
- So within our Christian Community let's intentionally point each other to Christ so that we can help embolden each other in our faith:
- **Baby Steps to Boldness: ASK GOD**
- ***“And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God...” -Acts 4:24 (ESV)***
- **Baby Steps to Boldness: ASK GOD**
  - What would we have done? Problem solving mode
    - Gotta separate Peter and John
    - Add security, we need you guys to be safer
    - Maybe even change the message a little bit
  - What they did: they prayed
- ***“And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak***

***your word with all boldness.” -Acts 4:29 (ESV)***

- Didn't they already have boldness?
- They understood that the boldness wasn't theirs!
- What preceded the boldness?
- **BOLDNESS IS PRECEDED BY THE FILLING OF THE SPIRIT**
- V. 8: Peter was filled with the Spirit...V.13 they observed the boldness
  - When we are filled with the Spirit of God, boldness becomes more of an instinct than it does a discipline.
- How often do we ask to be filled with the Spirit?
- ***“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” -Luke 11:13 (ESV)***



- The early church knew that they needed to regularly be filled with the Holy Spirit and they regularly asked for it and they knew He would answer
- ***“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” -Acts 4:31 (ESV)***
- They were shaken by the Holy Spirit so that they wouldn't be shaken by the threats of the world
- We need to get to the point where we understand how much we desperately need to be shaken up and filled by the Holy Spirit of God
- SHAKEN CHOCOLATE MILK

When you are making a cup of chocolate milk and you pour the chocolate syrup in and just leave it stagnant and settled it can appear as if it's just another cup of milk. It looks like just a

cup of milk, you could take a sip and it'll taste as if it's just a cup of milk. Now it is still chocolate milk, it's just not very evident that it IS chocolate milk....the same is true for us, once you believe in Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. And all of us have the same Spirit of God living inside of us, there is not a pastor or worship leader that is more “anointed” than anyone else. That's old covenant way of life and we live in a completely new era now where the Spirit is given to all who call upon His Name. However, if we just stay settled and stagnant, it can look and feel as if we don't even have The Holy Spirit in our lives. Now He is there, it's just not very evident that He IS there. But when we seek the Face of our Father and ask Him to shake us up all of the sudden everything changes! We look different, we taste different, we act different, we think different, and we begin to walk in a Power that we never thought possible.

- We allow ourselves to be Shaken by the Holy Spirit so that we won't be Shaken by the threats of the world
- We allow ourselves to be Shaken by the Power of God so that we won't be shaken by the feeling of fear
  - We want to be Shaken so that we don't stay the same!
- Once you intentionally cry out to God and ask Him to fill you and to Shake you it will be impossible to stay the same
  - That's when people become astonished
  - That's when expectations are blown away
  - That's when we say, "Why are you looking at us as if this is happening because of our power or our own spirituality. No, this is just God doing what God does and I desperately want more of Him and want to be a part of what He is doing."
- Because I am Filled with the Power of God:
  - I can boldly speak
  - I can boldly seek opportunities
  - I can boldly stay in community
  - I can, like Hebrews 4:16 says, "come boldly unto the throne of grace"