

# BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



## FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

***Faithful in Spite of Opposition? Who? Us?***  
**Acts 4:1-20**

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

## Leaders' Responsibilities:

**Important:** Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the "Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study". That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

## Prior to this Coming Session:

### **Gathering Time Leader:**

Prepare the words to the songs you will sing if they are unfamiliar to the worshippers.

### **Bible Study Leader:**

If you have time at the end of this teaching session, you may wish to have your teens and adults make a list of decisions they are presently struggling with which involve taking a stand for Christ or giving into cultural or other pressures. If so, bring paper or

binders, and pens. Don't ask them to share those publicly—but rather, take them home and pray with the items listed before them.

**Worship Time Leader:**

Ask a youth or young adult if they would be willing to sing or play an instrument for the offering time. Alternately, plan on playing a song from a Christian CD or watching a brief Christian music video.

Before the service starts, ask a youth or an older Christian to pronounce the benediction on the congregation at the end of the **Worship Time** by reading aloud Romans 15:13 from the NIV translation. A copy of that verse is found on the last page of this material.

**Music Sources:**

"Have Faith in God", CCLI #26485  
"How Firm a Foundation", CCLI #4463315  
"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God", CCLI #4461654  
"Tis So Sweet To Trust", CCLI #22609, Public domain  
"Days of Elijah", CCLI #1537904  
"Shout to the Lord", CCLI #1406918  
"More Love, More Power", CCLI #60661  
"Draw Me Close", CCLI #1459484

## ***Faithful in Spite of Opposition? Who? Us?***

### **Acts 4:1-20**

**Focal Text**

Acts 4:1-20

**Background Text**

Acts 4:1-31; 5:12-42

**Main Idea**

Peter and John were faithful to God in spite of the opposition they faced.

**Question to Explore**

How do you respond when faced with the choice of following God or following your culture?

**Teaching Aim**

To lead participants to decide on ways they will be more faithful to God in spite of the opposition of their culture.

**Gathering Together:**

Assign an older child to greet people as they arrive. Consider playing background music softly as people get settled.

Sing “’Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus,” or “Days of Elijah.”

Sing “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (One verse may be enough for your group.), and then relate the following about Martin Luther, author of the hymn:

**First Thoughts:**

In April of 1521, Martin Luther, a professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg, Germany, was commanded to appear before the new emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Charles V. A plague in Nurnberg, first selected for the formal meeting of the officials of the Empire, forced the relocation of the meeting in Worms (pronounced Vorms). Luther had been banned from the Roman Catholic Church, by the pope, and was to appear before Charles V to defend his teachings and to prevent his being banned from the empire. He spent ten days in Worms—ten days that changed the course of religious history and set off the Protestant Reformation.

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***Faithful in Spite of Opposition? Who? Us? – 03-07-04-en***

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When he appeared before Charles at precisely 4:00 p.m. on April 17, 1521, a stack of his books and other writings had been placed on a bench before the assembled group of officials and spectators. John von Eck, the court deputy appointed by the Archbishop of Trier, asked Luther in the name of the Emperor whether he was the author of those books and whether he would retract their content in whole or in part. Dr. Schurf, Luther's lawyer, called out from the assembly hall that the titles at least ought to be named, whatever the outcome might be. Then Luther had his word. He confirmed the authorship of the books, but asked for a day's time for consideration, which the emperor granted.

On the next day, April 18, Luther again appeared before the emperor, ready to make his statement. First in Latin, then in German, von Eck asked Luther once again if he would retract his writings. Luther began his reply without resorting to notes or documents. He refused to conform to von Eck's demand, and, when it was repeated anew, uttered his famous statement.

**"If I cannot be proved wrong by words from the Scriptures, or by some other clear reason—for I do not believe in the Pope or councils alone, since they have been shown often to err and to contradict themselves—then I am bound by those passages from Scripture I myself have quoted. As long as my conscience is bound by the Word of God, I cannot and will not recant, because acting against conscience is unsafe and threatens salvation. God help me. Amen."**

Luther had been granted safe conduct from his quarters in Wittenberg, to Worms, and was given protection by the empire while in Worms. The Emperor issued a ban from the empire on May 8, to take effect on May 26, when it was made public. On his return trip to Wittenberg his entourage was "ambushed" by friends and taken to the castle of Wittenberg, where he was kept safely. While there he had time to reflect on things that had transpired and what he had written and had declared openly. He began his translation of the Bible into German at that time, and wrote the hymn that became known around the world, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

## **Closing the Gathering Time:**

The title of our study today presents us with a clear and important challenge: ***"Faithful in Spite of Opposition"***. Then it asks the question: Who? Us?

"Our lives may or may not be threatened by persons who oppose our commitment to and defence of the Good News of Jesus Christ. But Jesus said that we would face many kinds of opposition. Today, we are going to challenge ourselves to be faithful to Christ and to defend the Gospel, regardless of pressure from others to make wrong decisions."

Let's conclude our Gathering Time by reading together the four verses of the great hymn written almost 500 years ago by Martin Luther to encourage true Christians of his day, "**A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.**"

**Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern** for the church, announcements of ministry, activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

**Break time!** Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

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Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

**Note to the Bible Study Leader:** Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the Teacher Preparation for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the Bible Study Plan for the actual session.

## Teacher Preparation

### ***Faithful in Spite of Opposition? Who? Us?***

#### **Focal Text**

Acts 4:1-20

#### **Background Text**

Acts 4:1-31; 5:12-42

#### **Main Idea**

Peter and John were faithful to God in spite of the opposition they faced.

#### **Question to Explore**

How do you respond when faced with the choice of following God or following your culture?

#### **Teaching Aim**

To lead participants to decide on ways they will be more faithful to God in spite of the opposition of their culture.

### **Introduction to Your Personal Study:**

A Christian family was struggling with the decision to educate their children at home because of obvious and severe social and moral problems among students where their children were assigned public schooling. Others in the neighbourhood did not see it as a big problem. Sexual and alcohol experimentation by young teens seemed normal to many of the families. Although this family felt strongly led of the Lord to do this, the mother was concerned with how their decision would be perceived by the neighbours. Finally she confessed, "I just don't want us to be the 'different ones' on the block." To which her husband responded, "Honey, we're Christians. We already are the 'different ones' on the block!"

Although most Christians may not encounter this situation, God does call all of his followers to prayerfully consider what choices we make for our families. We cannot

simply stand aside and allow our popular culture to dictate our decisions, especially in the critical areas of ethics, morality, education, activities, and lifestyle choices. As we explore the struggles the early Christians had with their culture in this session, pray that God will reveal to you any areas in your life in which you need to take a stand for Him that may be in conflict with culture.

## **Background:**

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study**”, found at the beginning of this Unit. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you as well.

### **Turbulent Winds (Acts 4:1-4)**

God gave Peter and John the opportunity to act in His name. First they were guided to a crippled beggar and healed him in the name of Jesus. (Refer to the discussion of Acts 3 in the **Teaching Guide** for the previous session, **Ministering to Human Need? Who? Us?**) Then God blessed their obedience with the opportunity to speak to the large crowd that had gathered following the miraculous healing. The issue of Jesus' authority once again drew the attention of the religious leaders and temple guard.

As an occupied Roman territory, Israel was allowed some measure of local rule. However, those in power were subject to the Roman authorities and had only a tenuous hold on what little power they did have. The delicate balance of power involved the temple guard, who was responsible for order among the worshippers, and the party of Sadducees, from which the high priests were selected. Apparently these Jewish leaders felt compelled to protect their positions by collaborating with the Romans in order to keep the peace (John 11:49-50, John 18:13-24).

## **Focusing on the Meaning:**

According to Acts 4:2, their primary objection to Peter's preaching was the doctrine of the resurrection of the human body after death (Acts 23:8). For Peter and John were proclaiming not only that Jesus was the Messiah, but also the Risen Messiah in whose name the man had been healed. They had apparently been speaking for some time as it was now evening (4:3). However, God's Spirit had begun a mighty work of salvation and several hundred came to accept Jesus as the Messiah (4:4). The religious leaders were so consumed with maintaining their own places of authority that they seemingly missed the significance of Peter's message.

### **Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:5-12)**

What was their night like? Peter and John had walked with Jesus and had witnessed His arrest and conflicts with these same religious leaders. However, this was their first opportunity to be the focus of the conflict. God in His mercy gave them that night's rest before facing their accusers.



They were brought before the rulers, scribes, and elders in Jerusalem (Acts 4:5). This group of religious leaders made up the Sanhedrin, the senate and Supreme Court of the nation of Israel. These leaders included Caiaphas, the high priest, and his father-in-law Annas, who participated in the plot to arrest and crucify Jesus (John 18:13-14). Scribes and teachers of the law, many of whom were Pharisees, were also included in the group (4:6).

The Council began by scornfully questioning by what authority or in what name would “the likes of you” achieve such a miracle (4:7). In Luke 21:14-15, Jesus had warned His disciples that they would be subjected to such harassing events for His name’s sake, and when it occurred He promised that His Spirit would show them what to say in their defence.

Just as Jesus promised, Peter was filled anew with the Holy Spirit (4:8). He confidently proclaimed that it was by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom they killed and whom God raised from the dead, that this man was completely healed (4:9-10). As he had in his message on the night before, Peter emphasized the contrast between the leaders’ total rejection of Jesus and God’s glorious exaltation of Jesus.

The astonished hearers were most certainly surprised by Peter’s confident announcement. He followed up this pronouncement by preaching the Gospel to his accusers. Peter begins with Psalm 118:22, one of the earliest messianic testimonies. Just as Jesus had done in the parable of the vineyard, Peter now identifies Jesus as the stone that the builders rejected (Mark 12:1-12). Some may originally have interpreted the stone as meaning “Israel.” Yet Peter, the fisherman from Galilee, clearly demonstrates to his learned audience how Jesus alone fulfills God’s plan through history as prophesied in scripture.

Peter concluded that salvation is found in no other name, both salvation for the healed man and for all of Israel (Acts 4:12). The leaders’ choice is clear: embrace the name of Jesus, or reject Him and lead the whole nation into death.

The idea that individual believers are competent to understand the truth of scripture, through the Holy Spirit, is known as *the **priesthood of the believer***. One of the most significant barriers that Jesus broke down through His atoning death was the need for a human mediator between God and man. Through Jesus we have access, individually, to the throne of the God of heaven—an astonishing miracle for which we should be forever grateful (1 Timothy 2:5-6, Hebrews 4:14-15).

A second aspect of this idea is clearly demonstrated by Peter and John as they appear before the council. Each believer can minister to one another and to the world. God can use any believer as a channel for His Spirit and ministry. Each believer is called to submit to the Holy Spirit. Our response is the daily offering of our very selves as living sacrifices unto God (Romans 12:1). God then takes these living sacrifices and works through those individuals who submit to Him to reach the world.

### **Private Deliberations (Acts 4:13-17)**

Whether Peter and John had touched the leaders' hearts remained to be seen; however they clearly impressed their audience with their courage and their expressed confidence in their message (4:13). They were obviously unsophisticated—fishermen who were untrained in the subtleties of the law. As they clearly explained from scripture how Jesus alone fulfilled all of the messianic prophecies, they showed familiarity with the Biblical texts, which amazed their audience. As with most good students, the mark of their teacher was upon them. The council took note that they had been with Jesus (4:14). Jesus also surprised the religious leaders with His authority and handling of the messianic prophecies (John 7:15). Like Jesus, Peter and John used scripture to confirm their message and mighty works to support it. The council could not deny the miracle of the man's healing, yet the fact that Peter and John subscribed the miracle to the risen Jesus put them in a conflict and they privately discussed their options (Acts 4:15-17).

Apparently the leaders were most concerned with their potential loss of influence and power. In their recorded discussions they never tried to disprove the heart of the disciples' claim that Jesus of Nazareth was the Risen Christ.

### **Warning and Release (Acts 4:18-21)**

The council commanded Peter and John not to speak or teach again in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18). This presented the disciples with a dilemma. Jesus had instructed them to preach the Gospel to the whole world (Acts 1:8). The highest court in their nation was instructing them not to preach at all in Jesus' name.

Peter and John did not waiver in their commitment to the Saviour. They asked the council to judge for itself, which was right—obedience to God or obedience to men. As for Peter and John they had no choice, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (4:20).

The religious leaders must have been astonished by the disciples' respectful but firm reply. The leaders seemed mainly concerned with keeping the story of the miracle from spreading (4:17). In light of the fact that many were praising God for the miracle, they chose merely to threaten the disciples further, and released them (4:21).

### **Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:**

What are we to do when faced with the choice of following God or following our culture? Throughout Jesus' ministry He modelled honouring those in authority when such honour did not conflict with the teachings of God (Luke 20:25). Yet there will be times when we are called to oppose our culture and perhaps governmental authority in order to obey God. At such times we can ask for clear leadership from the Spirit and for courage to stand firm in our convictions (James 1:2-4, 12).

## **Personal Reflection:**

1. **What have I learned from this study?**
2. **What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?**
3. **What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?**

## **Bible Study Plan** (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

### ***Faithful in Spite of Opposition? Who? Us?***

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc. Children who stay with their parents in the Youth or Adult study should have the material on worship as suggested in **The Children's Corner** at the beginning of this unit of studies. (Ask your leader who downloads the studies for those suggestions.)

Begin by helping the group locate the **Focal Text** in their Bibles. Also, share with them the **Main Idea** to be learned from the scriptures, and the **Questions to be Explored** by the group.

#### **Focal Text**

Acts 4:1-20

#### **Background Text**

Acts 4:1-31; 5:12-42

#### **Main Idea**

Peter and John were faithful to God in spite of the opposition they faced.

#### **Question to Explore**

How do you respond when faced with the choice of following God or following your culture?

#### **Teaching Aim**

To lead participants to decide on ways they will be more faithful to God in spite of the opposition of their culture.

#### **Connect with Life:**

Say: "Flowing water tends to follow the path of least resistance. However, if our lifestyles are to be pleasing to God, we often have to choose a more difficult path. Sometimes we are called to resist popular culture. Like Paul, it is difficult for us to give in and follow God without fighting back against His guidance." (Acts 9:5, 26:18 (KJV). Pray, asking God to guide your study of Acts 4.

## Guide the Study:

Ask a volunteer to read Acts 4:1-3.

Review the story of the healing of the disabled man from the previous study. Discuss the balance of power in Jerusalem during the first century using the background material found in the **Teacher Preparation** section of this week's session.

Ask a volunteer to read Acts 4:4. Note how God is adding to the number of the believers.

Have someone read Acts 4:5-6.

Ask a volunteer to describe a time God helped him or her prepare for a difficult trial.

Review the information about the Sanhedrin from the background material.

Ask someone to read John 18:12-14.

Discuss the role of the High Priest in the sacrificial system. State that he was the only priest that was allowed to enter the holy of holies to make atonement for the nation of Israel (Leviticus 16:1-25). Apparently this special position, originally reserved for a descendant of Aaron, had been reduced to a political appointment and used to reward the political favourites of the occupying Romans (Leviticus 16:3, 32-34).

Read Acts 4:7-12.

Discuss the scorn with which the council began questioning Peter and John.

Ask someone to read Luke 21:14-15.

Ask someone to share a contemporary example of one who was called before authorities for sharing his or her faith.

Ask: "How had Jesus told His followers to prepare for persecution?" Discuss the meaning of being filled with God's Spirit using the background material.

Discuss the effect of Peter's response to the Council. Note that while there were obviously those among the religious leaders who opposed Jesus on political and religious grounds, there were also those who were open to His message, such as Nicodemus (John 3:1-10, 7:51; 19:39-41).

Ask: "How would popular culture respond to Acts 4:12?"

Have a volunteer define “religious tolerance.” Discuss religious freedom and religious tolerance in light of this verse.

Relate the information regarding the priesthood of the believer from the background material. Discuss the responsibility of each individual to study the truths of Scripture. Note that the believers in Berea were commended for studying the Scriptures for themselves (Acts 17:10-11).

Ask someone to read Acts 4:13-17.

Discuss the private deliberation of the council. Ask: “What appears to be of most concern to these religious leaders?”

Have a volunteer read Acts 4:18-21. Discuss the dilemma faced by the disciples. Ask the class to suggest other responses Peter and John could have made.

### **Encourage Application:**

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to go away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Say: “We are living in day when our culture seems to be drawing farther and farther away from the things of God.”

Ask: “In what areas of your life do you have to make choices that are unpopular in your culture?” Affirm the responses.

Covenant to pray for each other as you seek to live lives that are pleasing to God and to be light in an increasingly dark world.

**Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time.** Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

# Youth!!! Take Ten

## Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

### ***Faithful in Spite of Opposition? Who? Us?*** **Acts 4:1-20**

**A youth will lead the following activity and comments.** No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

**1. Youth: Take a quick survey. Of these three, what would be the most embarrassing to you?**

- a) Your parent kissing you in public.
- b) Wearing the “wrong” clothes to a school event.
- c) Giving the wrong answer to a question your teacher asked you.

**2. What do these things have in common? Why is what other people think so important to us?**

**3. Discuss some scenarios when you’ve had to make some choices that might have been unpopular. Did the choice you make line up with God’s teachings?**

**4. Why do you think doing the “right” thing often seems wrong in the world’s eyes?**

**5. Try this: close your eyes and picture Jesus standing next to you. How do you think he would handle a difficult situation? Now picture Him holding your hand as you make the right choice. Do you trust Him to help you?**

**Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)*****Faithful in Spite of Opposition? Who? Us?***  
**Acts 4:1-20****Beginning the Service:**

Sing "Have Faith in God" or "Shout to the Lord".

Say, "As we go into our time of worship this morning, let us think of times when we've had to choose the narrow road. Hasn't God always been faithful? He loves it when His children choose the eternal rather than the earthly. Maybe this morning you are having to make some difficult choices. Let our time of worship be a time of connecting with God and asking *Him* to be our first choice."

Sing "How Firm a Foundation," or "More Love, More Power."

**Offering:**

Have the children collect the offering this morning as the person you have asked to share in music shares their song. Alternately, play a song on a CD or watch a Christian music video that fits this theme.

**Praying for the World:**  
**(Invite someone to do this part):**

Say, "Thousands of Christians around the world are murdered every year simply because they are known to be Christians. Thousands more are imprisoned because of their faith. Hundreds of Christian churches are burned every year." When we feel helpless do anything about this, we should remember that sincere prayer is the most powerful agent or way to bring about change in the world. Our prayers must include our own determination to forgive. What others do in hate and ignorance must always merit our love and forgiveness in return. Then, if those of us who live in freedom choose to write letters, send e-mails, speak out, or write articles in regard to such crimes, those, too, must be said or written in a Christ-like response. Otherwise, we become hateful ourselves and throw away our opportunity to show Christ's love for all people on earth.

Let's pray now for God's forgiveness of those who hurt His children in hatred or misguided causes.



(Ask someone to pray for protection of Christians who live in dangerous areas of the world and for forgiveness of those who would do harm to our Christian brothers.)

## Sharing Guide

**This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.**

### Faithful In Spite of Opposition Acts 5:16-32

The title of our sharing time today seems to be capable of improvement. Let's restate it and say it this way: Faithful in Face of Opposition." "In Spite of Opposition" may suggest that opposition *may* come our way as Christians, when in fact opposition is *inevitable* for those who take seriously and live faithfully the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Note to Leader:** Read the following story several times beforehand. Then tell it in your own words. It will make it much more interesting to your congregation.

In Martin Luther's time being a Christian was not a spectacular, high-profile life. It was what everyone did: you were born into the church, married in the church, died and buried by the church. Luther found many things about the religion of his day offensive: the more he studied his Bible the more he found to criticize. He felt that many abuses had crept into the church over time. When he nailed the ninety-five theses (statements of beliefs) to the door of the church in Wittenberg, he was calling for debate on those statements. But there were no takers. Instead, the Pope banned him from the church, excommunicated him, and called for a ban from the empire by the new emperor, Charles V. This meant that Luther was supposed to have left the large portion of Europe that the empire controlled.

When he wrote the hymn that became the rallying song of the Protestant Reformation, he knew by experience that the only fortress, the only bulwark sufficient to protect the believer was God. When he wrote that God was "our helper amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing," he knew first hand of those mortal ills. He had been banned by the Pope and by the emperor and was fair game for anyone who wanted to try to capture him. His life was in jeopardy from the time he left Worms, after the edict that banned him from the empire. For that very reason his friends secretly ambushed him and took him to a safe house where he could be protected.

Now read: We need not try to compare our day with the day of Luther, or the day of Peter, John, or the Apostle Paul. We may have not experienced the opposition they faced. Of course those who are Christians, living in many parts of our world today, do face open opposition: active, vicious, mean, and sometime deadly opposition.

But I am not prevented from going to our home church, or expressing my beliefs, or registering my disdain for immorality in its many forms. I can choose to go to a Bible study at a friend's house without fear of arrest or molestation of any kind.

So where is the opposition I must face? In our Bible study we considered culture as a source of opposition to the faithful. Dr. Sandlin tells the following story of his experience of teaching a men's Bible class. He says: "It was a rude awakening to retire from University Bible teaching and to take a Bible class of business men, most of them retired. It was soon very clear that those men, and their many contemporaries, were practicing ***the gospel according to the town where they lived***. The community standards where they lived had, to a great extent, become their standards of morality and conduct. I thought that strange, and exceptional, but upon reflection it occurred to me that such was the practice in the town where I had taught for fourteen years, and in the large city where I had worked for a mission agency, and in the city where I had served as a campus minister. In fact, in every place I had lived the gospel was coloured by that particular locale. My faith, and their faith, had taken on the particular and peculiar coloration of the communities in which I had lived out my Christian experience."

Culture, though somewhat unconsciously, plays a big part in the expression of our Christian faith. Too often we allow it to influence or even direct what we say. In fact, we often permit culture to control the "when, where, and to whom" as well in our sharing the Good News of Christ.

For Peter and John, the opposition was clear and plain: it was first the established religion of their day and its official protectors, identified as the rulers, elders and teachers of the law. And the opposition was clearly expressed: stop speaking in the name of Jesus of Nazareth! Peter and John faced a direct prohibition. We may have never been told to stop teaching or preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, but we are intimidated by culture to "preach" on certain subjects or scriptures—and to do so only at certain times, places, and people. Even in free and open nations across North America, Europe, and around the world Christians are prohibited from speaking the name of Jesus in schools, businesses, government buildings, etc. For billions of people, it is worse. Many, today, are not allowed to own Bibles or proclaim Christ even in their own homes.

The response of Peter and John was clear and precise: "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). Can it be that the secret to being faithful in the face of opposition is at this point: Can we be kept from speaking about that which we have seen and heard? Perhaps we have not seen and have not heard

clearly enough the gospel because we have not stayed long enough in the presence of God.

The apostles were people who had been in the presence of Jesus long enough for him to make a difference in the way they conducted themselves. To be in the presence of Jesus was to be in the presence of God. It is being in that presence that makes us the kind of people that cannot be shut up by opposition, overt or covert, cultural or religious, first- or twenty-first century.

Peter and John seem to have had a holy disregard for what was taught by the scribes; they had seen and heard from another Presence. They did not build elaborate arguments against Judaism; they only spoke of what they had seen and heard from God through Jesus Christ.

### **Call to Commitment:**

The life of Martin Luther is thrilling and exciting, even today. Dr. Sandlin tells about a trip where he walked through the small German town of Worms. It typifies a very modern town, with teenagers taking pictures and shopkeepers selling the latest fashions. While there, he walked around the monument to the leaders of the Protestant Reformation—with Martin Luther standing tall in the centre, surrounded by Petrus Waldus of France, John Wycliff of England, John Hus of Czechoslovakia, Hieronymus of Italy, Elector Frederick the Wise, and Philip of Hesse, Johan Reuchlin and Luther's closest friend, Philip Melanchthon. In the monument group, three seated figures of women represent protestant cities of the time, each having suffered at the hands of the opposition to the faithful spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the last of the fifteenth- and first of the sixteenth-centuries of our time. Seeing and studying such a memorial or monument can help us to understand better the sacrifices of our forefathers who dared to stand up and speak out for Christ.

The greatest monument we can build today is by faithful living and defence of the good news that God has revealed in Jesus Christ, in spite of opposition.

**Leader:** Ask the congregation to repeat with you Acts 5:29:

**“Peter and the other apostles replied: We must obey God rather than human beings!” Acts 5:29.**

### **Concluding the Service:**

Sing “Draw Me Close” or “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”.

Close by asking the congregation to bow their heads. Then ask the person you have chosen previously to read Romans 15:13 as a benediction:

**“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen and Amen.**

Copy, cut apart, and distribute the following two items to the two people who will participate as indicated during the **Worship Time**.

**For the person who will read the following during the time of “Praying for the World” during the Worship Time:**

Say, “Thousands of Christians around the world are murdered every year simply because they are known to be Christians. Thousands more are imprisoned because of their faith. Hundreds of Christian churches are burned every year.” When we feel helpless do anything about this, we should remember that sincere prayer is the most powerful agent or way to bring about change in the world. Our prayers must include our own determination to forgive. What others do in hate and ignorance must always merit our love and forgiveness in return. Then, if those of us who live in freedom choose to write letters, send e-mails, speak out, or write articles in regard to such crimes, those, too, must be said or written in a Christ-like response. Otherwise, we become hateful ourselves and throw away our opportunity to show Christ’s love for all people on earth.

Let’s pray now for God’s forgiveness of those who hurt His children in hatred or misguided causes.

(Ask someone to pray for protection of Christians who live in dangerous areas of the world and for forgiveness of those who would do harm to our Christian brothers.)

**For the reader of the benediction at the close of the Worship Experience:**

**“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”  
Amen and Amen.**