

SESSION 5

DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL BOLDNESS

Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:12

Group Discussion: Checking In (5 Minutes)

Welcome to Session 5 of *Altar Ego*. A key part of getting to know God better is sharing your journey with others. Before watching the video, briefly check in with each other about your experiences since the last session. For example:

- What insights did you discover in the personal study or in the chapters you read from the *Altar Ego* book?
- How did the last session impact your daily life or your relationship with God?
- What questions would you like to ask the other members of your group?

Video: Developing Spiritual Boldness (12 Minutes)

Play the video segment for Session 5. As you watch, use the accompanying outline to follow along or to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

Notes

Boldness is behavior born out of belief that God is who he says he is.

Example: Peter

- He had bold intentions but he failed Jesus.

- He had a change of beliefs, and boldness was born out of that belief.

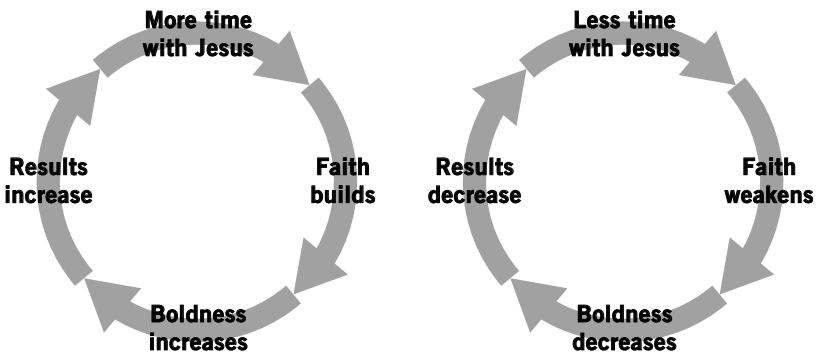
- When Peter preached, 3,000 people were saved.
- He challenged religious leaders who had the power to take his life (Acts 4:8–9).

God specializes in giving ordinary people extraordinary boldness.

The key to developing spiritual boldness is to spend time with Jesus.

The goal is not to be bold; the goal is to know Jesus.

Boldness is a byproduct of knowing Jesus. The opposite is true as well.



When you lay down your life and sacrifice who you are, you can become who God wants you to be.

Group Discussion (40 Minutes)

Take a few minutes to talk about what you just watched.

1. What part of the teaching had the most impact on you?

Risky Boldness

2. Boldness is behavior born out of the belief that God is who he says he is. This belief gives us confidence to take risks. People who are bold for God know when to push beyond the normal rules of politeness and willingly risk things like embarrassment, rejection, or even retaliation to speak about their faith.
 - Briefly describe an act of spiritual boldness you've witnessed, recently or in the past. (If you can't think of one, reference the example Craig shared of giving his testimony at the college athletic banquet.)
 - What did the bold person risk by speaking out? If you had been in this person's shoes, do you think you would have taken the same risk? Why or why not?
 - How did people respond to what the bold person said? How did your response resemble or differ from theirs?
 - Overall, how did witnessing this act of boldness impact you? For example, did it encourage or discourage you from taking a similar risk yourself?

3. The early church was in a risky situation. The same religious leaders who opposed Jesus and conspired to have him killed were just as intent on suppressing his followers. After Peter and John healed a lame man in Jesus' name and proclaimed the gospel to a gathering crowd, they were arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. At this point, their lives were in danger and Peter and John had every reason to be timid, apologetic, and compliant. Instead, Peter boldly threw down the gauntlet:

“Let me clearly state to all of you and to all the people of Israel that [the lame man] was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the man you crucified but whom God raised from the dead ... there is salvation in no one else!”...

The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus (Acts 4:10, 12a, 13 NLT).

The unstable, shifty Simon whom Jesus renamed in the first chapter of John (Session 1) had clearly grown into his new name and altar ego — Peter, the rock. He was an ordinary man made extraordinarily bold by knowing Christ.

- What is most challenging to you, or most encouraging to you, about Peter's boldness and his transformation?
- Craig said, “The goal is not to be bold; the goal is to know Jesus.” What would you say is the potential danger when spiritual boldness *is* the goal — when it is rooted more in love of self (ego) than love of Christ (altar ego)?⁸

8. For a biblical example, consider the description of Peter's behavior in John 18:1 – 11.

Requesting Boldness

4. After threatening Peter and John — likely with imprisonment or worse — the religious leaders commanded them not to speak or teach in Jesus’ name and then released them. When the two apostles shared with the other believers all that had happened, those gathered immediately began to pray. First, they praised God and affirmed his sovereignty (Acts 4:24b–28), and then they presented their requests:

“And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great *boldness* in preaching your word. Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with *boldness* (Acts 4:29–31 NLT, emphasis added).

The Greek word translated as “boldness” is significant and rich with meaning. In Greek culture, *parrhēsia* (par-rhay-see’-ah) was a defining characteristic of free speech. In civic life, Greek citizens had the right to freely (boldly) share their opinions, whereas non-citizens and slaves did not.⁹ In personal relationships, *parrhēsia* was an expectation of conversation among friends — to trust someone was to speak openly and even bluntly when necessary.¹⁰

- How might the meaning of *parrhēsia* in Greek civic life reflect something true about believers in the early church? For example, what does their prayer and boldness reveal about their “citizenship”? What does their ability to preach with boldness reveal about their relationship with God?

9. Hans-Christoph Hahn, “*parrhēsia*,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, Colin Brown, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978, 1986), 735.

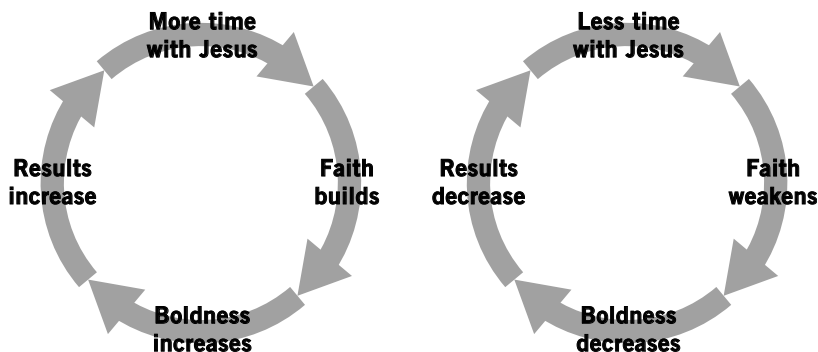
10. David W. J. Gill, “1 Corinthians,” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, vol. 3, Clinton E. Arnold, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 133.

- Perhaps as significant as what the believers ask God for is what they do *not* ask God for. Knowing that their lives are at risk, what kinds of things might you expect them to ask for? Why do you imagine they ask instead for great boldness (*parrhēsia*)?
- The believers' prayer for boldness is specific to speech — they ask for “great boldness in preaching [God’s] word,” and that is the prayer God answers.

In what relationship or area of your life are you most aware of the risks or threat of talking openly about your faith? If God were to answer your prayer for great boldness, what would you want to say?

Circles of Boldness

5. The key to developing spiritual boldness — and growing into your altar ego — is spending more time with Jesus. The opposite is also true; spending less time with Jesus decreases spiritual boldness.



- When you reflect on your faith journey up to now, when would you say you were most intentional about investing in your relationship with Christ? For example, was it when you first became a believer, right now, or sometime between the two? How did you experience the four elements on the circle of boldness?
 - Which of the two circle diagrams would you say best represents where you are right now? If you can think of any, share a recent experience that illustrates your current spiritual boldness level (high, medium, or low).
6. Reflect on and discuss what you've learned and experienced together throughout the *Altar Ego* curriculum.
- What would you say are some of the most significant things you learned throughout the study? How has what you've learned impacted you (for example, in your attitudes, behaviors, relationships, etc.)?
 - How have you recognized God at work in your life through this study?
 - What do you sense God's invitation to you might be?

- At the end of every session, you had an opportunity to talk about what you needed from the other members of the group and how you could be good companions for one another. What changes, if any, have you noticed in the ways you interact with each other now compared to the beginning of the study?

Individual Activity: What I Want to Remember (2 Minutes)

1. Briefly review the outline and any notes you took.
2. In the space below, write down the most significant thing you gained in this session — from the teaching, activities, or discussions.

What I want to remember from this session ...

Closing Prayer

Close your time together with prayer.

Personal Study

- Read and Learn

Read chapters 9–12 of the *Altar Ego* book. Use the space below to note any insights or questions.

- Study and Reflect

Fear keeps our egos front and center and in need of reassurance from other people or from our possessions or titles. But when we lay our egos on the altar of belief, our altar egos become liberated to live by faith and not by fear.

Altar Ego, page 165

1. Living with spiritual boldness means living out loud — allowing what you believe to be obvious in your words as well as your actions. This makes spiritual boldness risky.

Use the prompts that follow to reflect on any risks and fears you might have about spiritual boldness. For each item, ask yourself: *What is at risk or what am I afraid of losing in this area of life if I were to speak more boldly about my faith?*

People: Consider your larger social circles as well as individual relationships with family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, acquaintances, etc.

Possessions: Consider anything that could be called an asset or a benefit you currently enjoy. This might include access to resources, privileges, or even a way of life.

Titles: Consider anything that gives you a sense of significance, authority, or belonging. It could be a job title but it could also be anything that routinely wins you praise or acceptance from others (a reputation for being a fun or an open-minded person, etc.).

Other: What other risks or fears come to mind?

2. Fear keeps the unredeemed ego front and center. In connection with spiritual boldness, it compels us to avoid anything that threatens our image — the idealized person we want to be and who we present to the world for affirmation and acceptance.

As you review the risks and fears you wrote about in question 1, circle or highlight the one you think might pose the greatest threat to your image (your idealized self). Briefly reflect on the context associated with the threat you noted — the physical setting, relationships, activities, etc. Now imagine that Jesus is physically present with you in that context. How might it change your behavior?

How does it shift your perspective to think of Jesus himself — rather than just talking about Jesus — as the thing you are trying to avoid, the threat to your image?

God wants us to be bold, to take risks through his leading us out of our comfort zones.

Altar Ego, page 164

3. In a letter to his young colleague, Timothy, the apostle Paul acknowledged the risks associated with speaking about Christ:

So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don't be ashamed of me, either, even though I'm in prison for him. With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Good News (2 Timothy 1:8 NLT).

Paul made a similar statement in his letter to the church at Philippi:

For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die (Philippians 1:20 NLT).

The shame Paul identified in these passages is not merely an emotion, such as fear, but something intensely relational and antithetical to love. Imagine someone you love saying to you, "I love you, but I'm ashamed to be seen with you. No one can ever know I love you because it would make my life difficult." What would such a statement tell you about this person and what he or she values most? How would it impact the relationship?

Based on the two passages, how would you describe Paul's perspective on what it means to truly love one another? To truly love Christ?

Just before encouraging Timothy not to be ashamed, Paul laid the foundation for spiritual boldness: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7 NLT). Keeping in mind your responses to question 1, use the sentence starters below to reflect on what you need from God.

I need power from God to ...

I need love from God to ...

I need self-discipline from God to ...

Spiritual boldness is not our goal; knowing Christ is our goal.... Spiritual boldness comes from knowing Christ.... I challenge you in the boldest way possible to be the real deal.... Fall so in love with God that everywhere you go, you overflow with a spiritual boldness of love and compassion that draws people to the joy of life in Christ.

Altar Ego, pages 174, 176

Spiritual boldness is not crazy, irrational, odd, illogical, subjective behavior. It is behavior that naturally reflects our love for Christ.

Briefly reflect on recent experiences of spiritual boldness—times you chose to speak or not speak openly about Christ. In what ways does each experience accurately reflect your love for Christ and your relationship with him right now?

● Guided Prayer

Jesus, thank you for enduring the shame of the cross because of your love for me. I want to live my faith out loud, to be bold in my love for you and the people you bring into my life. Yet I confess that there are times I am anything but bold. My fears always seem to get the better of me, especially when ...

Please lead me out of my comfort zones. I claim the promise that you have given me a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline so that I can be bold. I ask that you lead me out of my comfort zones by helping me to ...

Lord, what I want most of all is to know you better so that spiritual boldness is just a natural expression of my love for you. I am not ashamed of you. I love you with my whole heart and want everything I say and do to honor you. Amen.