

CONVICTED BY THE GOSPEL



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Lord prepares people for the gospel (Acts 10:1-6).
2. The Lord calls people to act in faith and share the gospel (Acts 10:9-16,19-23).
3. The Lord transforms people by the power of the gospel (Acts 10:25-28).

Background Passage: Acts 10

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Through Peter's vision and the Lord's calling to meet with Cornelius, God revealed that the gospel is for all people.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Through a vision given by God, Peter came to understand that Jesus was the Savior of all people—Jews and Gentiles alike. Anyone who trusts in Jesus is no longer unclean because of sin but rather has been cleansed from all unrighteousness and is now part of the one family of God.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Christ's work has cleansed the sin of all who believe, we forgive one another of any wrongdoing and stand together in unity to show the world God's power to change people.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **As you look back on your life, what major turning points in your path might look different now if things had gone the other way?** (allow for a few group members to provide a nutshell version of their turning point; if you have your story, consider starting off with your story to model the brevity desired)

TRANSITION: The Holy Spirit had been working in the hearts of people from Jerusalem, Judea, and now (at long last) to the ends of the earth. But there were truths about God's work among the Gentiles that the early church needed to embrace if they were to continue to carry out the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations. It took the obedience of two men to change the course of the church's understanding of God's mission to bring the gospel to the world.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- Acts 10 begins the longest episode provided by Luke. It still took place in Judea, but the gospel message was about to bust through barriers in a big way. The prominence and importance of this narrative is such that we cannot overstate. If Peter did not have the teachability and obedience to follow God's lead, Christ's church may be in quite a different place today.



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POINT 1

THE LORD PREPARES PEOPLE FOR THE GOSPEL (ACTS 10:1-6).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 10:1-6** from his or her Bible.

1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, **2** a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. **3** About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, “Cornelius.” **4** And he stared at him in terror and said, “What is it, Lord?” And he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. **5** And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. **6** He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.”

EXPLAIN: Discuss **verses 1-3** and the following idea (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 74):

In His desire to save all, God calls His people by name for He sees us as unique individuals with our own journeys.

- As the capital city of Judea, Caesarea was the Roman military station for the area. Thus, the city was a symbol of Roman occupation and oppression—and despised by the Jews. Philip had preached in Caesarea (Acts 8:40), likely among Hellenistic Jews.
- Someone with the rank of centurion commanded a hundred soldiers. Rome would have paid Cornelius well. He would have been a wealthy, successful, important man.
- Though not a bona fide religious term, “man who feared God” is a descriptive label used throughout the book of Acts. God-fearers practiced many of the Jewish religious rites, but Jewish society did not consider God-fearers as an official part of the congregation. In contrast, Gentiles who wanted to completely convert to Judaism—proselytes—would become Jewish in every way, save genetics. They would fully embrace every aspect of Jewish life, including circumcision. God-fearers like Cornelius were distinct from these “all-in” Jewish proselytes.¹
- Cornelius is described as one who was generous and prayed often. Three in the afternoon, the ninth hour, was an hour of prayer for the Jewish people, pointing to Cornelius’s pious practice. He was probably praying when the angel appeared.
- Angels are God’s special messengers. Angelophanies—special appearances of angels to humankind—are found throughout Scripture.
- In Cornelius’s vision, he clearly saw an angel come in and call his name. There would be no doubt about it. Even as a “God-fearer,” God sought him out knowing he would respond positively.

CORNELIUS

A pillar of Roman rule and culture as a centurion in the Italian military, Cornelius was known not only for his military status, but also as a God-fearer. In his pursuit of God, he attempted to follow many of the Jewish ways of worship.

ASK: (DDG p. 74)

How can someone be a devout religious person who fears God, but not actually have salvation? (the gospel is about what Christ has done to save us, not what we do for God; knowing about God and fearing Him is different from trusting Him and having a relationship with Him; many trust in their good deeds and acts of worship as the basis for their spiritual worthiness, but when it comes to attaining salvation, our good works without faith in Jesus are worthless in the kingdom of God; possessing a general fear and reverence of God is different from clinging to the work of Christ for salvation; Cornelius may have been only a God-fearer at first, but he was ready to be a child of God)

REFLECT: Ask the group to reflect on the following questions, “Am I more of a God-fearer or a true believer? Is being Christian-like and doing Christian things a part of my life, but a negotiable one? Do I just do churchy things or do I have a relationship with Jesus? (Give the group a moment or two of silence to process. Invite them to reach out to you if they are not sure if they are a true believer.)

HIGHLIGHT: Use **verses 4-6** to discuss the following (DDG p. 74):

Those who obey and submit to God’s instructions will be prepared to receive a word from the Lord.

- Cornelius responded with awe and submission to the angel's appearance, asking, “What is it, Lord?” (v. 4).
- The angel started with encouragement and acknowledged knowing Cornelius’s generosity and devoted prayer life.
- Then the angel was very specific in his instructions, telling Cornelius what town to send the men to, the name of who these men needed to find, and the house of where they would find him. It would be abundantly clear to the men Cornelius was sending that they had found the correct place and the right Peter.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 74)

How do we know when God is giving us instructions? (if we have already been following His ways, we will sense the Spirit speaking; we can confirm His direction through other believers; we confirm God’s direction through Scripture)

TRANSITION: God knew Cornelius’s heart’s desire was to know and worship the one true God. God kick-started a series of events so that Cornelius—and many more to come—could know the way to eternal salvation.

POINT 2

THE LORD CALLS PEOPLE TO ACT IN FAITH AND SHARE THE GOSPEL (ACTS 10:9-16,19-23).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 10:9-16** from his or her Bible.

9 The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. **10** And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance **11** and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. **12** In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. **13** And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” **14** But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” **15** And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” **16** This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

EXPLAIN: Using **verses 9-16**, explain the following (DDG p. 74):

God prepared Peter to accept Cornelius, and other Gentiles, into the family of God, despite their differences.

- Earlier in Acts, God worked through corresponding visions of Paul and Ananias. These double visions highlighted the great importance of the message within.
- With the new covenant, Jewish Christians needed to make a massive shift in their beliefs and practices so to embrace the inclusion of all nations into the kingdom of God. Gentile converts would not need to adhere to the Jewish dietary laws and more importantly should be embraced into the family of God when they accept and trust in Jesus. As the former impurity of the food symbolized how some Jews viewed the impurity of foreigners, the vision made it clear that God did not consider foreigners as impure any longer.
- As the gospel spread further and further out from Jerusalem, more and more people who were not ethnically Jewish were coming to place their faith in Christ. The Jewish way of life upheld specific laws from the old covenant, but they were now fulfilled in Christ. The new covenant was now for all people who trust in Jesus for salvation.

ASK: (DDG p. 74)

What types of actions do some Christians and churches today think fall outside the accepted Christian culture? (having tattoos; drinking alcohol; body piercings; colored hair)

UNCLEAN ANIMALS

In Leviticus 11, Old Testament law declared many animals to be unclean. Some of these unclean animals include: (1) certain mammals such as pigs and camels; (2) fish without fins and scales; (3) certain birds of prey; (4) flying insects; (5) other swarming animals like mice and lizards; and (6) clean animals that die of natural causes become unclean.²

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“The seeking Saviour will find the seeking sinner. Wherever there is a searching heart, God responds. This is why it is essential that we as God’s children obey His will and share His Word. You never know when your witness for Christ is exactly what somebody has been waiting and praying for.”³

—Warren Wiersbe (1929–2019)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 10:19-23** from his or her Bible.

19 And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. **20** Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.” **21** And Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?” **22** And they said, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.” **23** So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.

DIG: Instruct the group to go back through Acts 10:19-23 and underline the actions of Peter. Allow a few to share what they observed. (pondered, went down, spoke, invited, rose, went away; Peter was led by and obeyed the Spirit; he also showed hospitality and knew not to do things alone)

INSTRUCT: Discuss **verses 19-23** and the following idea (DDG p. 74):

When God calls us to bring a message of hope to others, we must act in faith.

- Cornelius’s men arrived at the gate of Simon the tanner’s house right after Peter’s vision, a detail provided in Acts 10:17. The ESV uses “behold” to indicate it happened immediately. God’s timing is impeccable.
- God graciously directed Peter through what must have been bombshell news. The Spirit proclaimed specifics about the three men who just arrived. We can assume the men were servants of Cornelius, probably Roman soldiers, who normally would be seen as enemies. But the angel assured Peter to go with them.
- Peter listened to the men and was hospitable to them. The next day, he went with them, along with other disciples, to go meet Cornelius.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 74)

What are other ways Peter could have responded to God’s message and call? (he could have waited until all his questions were answered; he could have ignored the calling of God, or explained the vision away as just a weird dream; he could have run away like Jonah; he could have been angry with God)

TRANSITION: God proclaimed a life-changing message for His people. Peter with the Gentile visitors accepted the plan of God and the barriers between Jews and Gentiles were beginning to fall.

POINT 3

THE LORD TRANSFORMS PEOPLE BY THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL (ACTS 10:25-28).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 10:25-28** from his or her Bible.

25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. **26** But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.” **27** And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. **28** And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.”

INTERACT: Use **PACK ITEM 2: EARLY CHURCH EXPANSION MAP** to show where Peter met Cornelius near the coast in Caesarea. In groups of 3-4, ask “Why do you think Cornelius fell at Peter’s feet in worship?” (if any angel told him he was to find someone, that someone must be extremely important; maybe the angel was pointing him to the Messiah; knowing he himself was a foreigner, he might have felt unworthy to be in the presence of one of God’s servants)

INSTRUCT: Discuss **verses 25-26** and the following (DDG p. 74):

When doing the Lord’s work, we must remember to stay humble.

- Cornelius put himself in a posture of humility to worship Peter, unsure of who he was. Peter rightly rejected Cornelius’s worship. Cornelius was still in need of the gospel message. He was eager in his pursuit to worship the one true God of the Jews, but he was confused as to how.
- Peter, in turn, responded with humility by lifting him up and stating that he also was “a man.” Peter did not want to be worshiped and knew he was not to be worshiped. As servants of God, when it is so easy to take in fame and love from others, we are to always point to Christ.

ASK: (DDG p. 75)

How do we safeguard ourselves from putting the focus on ourselves instead of Christ in ministry? (we have friends to keep us accountable; we pray often; we rejoice in successes and failures in ministry programs, knowing God is in control; we work as teams when possible, collaborating with others)

EXPLAIN: Using **verses 27-28**, explain the following (DDG p. 75):

Because of the gospel, God transformed an exclusive religion into one that embraces all nations who trust in the name of Jesus.



- Peter continued to follow the Holy Spirit's lead. While speaking with Cornelius, he went into the house and found even more people.
- Cornelius demonstrated a great excitement and expectancy to receive that which God promised: a divine message from Peter. In his eagerness, he gathered many people so they could receive this good news together (v. 24).
- This pivotal moment in the history of God's unfolding plan was about ten years after the day of Pentecost.⁴ God is purposeful, yet patient. There was much for His people to understand, and God knew that they needed time and specific circumstances to be able to receive this stunning news.
- For the Jews, it was unacceptable to enter the home of a Gentile. In their attempts to obey the levitical law, they drew clear boundaries around anything that might result in defilement. Jews assumed unclean foods were present in all Gentile homes. Thus, for Peter to enter Cornelius's home would result in the apostle's defilement.
- Peter finally put all the puzzle pieces together: the vision, the calling to Caesarea, and a room filled with souls searching for salvation. God had sent him a significant message to share the gospel message to the Gentiles, even a Roman centurion and his friends, accepting them into the family of God.

FOCUS: Invite someone to read the key doctrine "Adoption" in the DDG (p. 75).

Key Doctrine #74: Adoption: Adoption into God's family is one of the positive benefits of justification. Not only are we pardoned from the judgment against us through justification, but we also experience a change of identity—we become children of God (John 1:12; Gal. 4:5). Through adoption our relationship with God, which was once lost through the fall, is now restored, resulting in the benefits of being an heir of God and a coheir with Christ (Rom. 8:16-17).

DIG: Pass out **PACK ITEM 9: ADOPTION** and highlight the comparisons between Roman adoption and adoption into the family of God.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 75)

From Day 5 in the DDG: **Understanding adoption, how can I extend the grace of God today to someone whom I consider different?** (knowing that when we become a family, we are a unit with one identity, I stand up for all in God's family; understanding that some families consist of both biological and adopted children, but all siblings are just as much a member of the family, I love and care for all in God's family; accepting others as unique image-bearers in the same family, I can extend love and grace despite differences)



MY RESPONSE

SAY: Through a vision given by God, Peter came to understand that Jesus was the Savior of all people—Jews and Gentiles alike. Anyone who trusts in Jesus is no longer unclean because of sin but rather has been cleansed from all unrighteousness and is now part of the one family of God. Because Christ's work has cleansed the sin of all who believe, we forgive one another of any wrongdoing and stand together in unity to show the world God's power to change people.

HEAD:

God shows no partiality (Deut. 10:17; Rom. 2:9-11). Though it is easy to give in to narrow, regional thinking, God is a global God. He loves every soul from every tribe, tongue, and nation. To fulfill the Great Commission, we must grasp the scope of the strategy. God's plan and desire is to bring the gospel to every corner of the earth so that all unreached people can hear the good news.

What are some ways to keep the urgency of the mission at the forefront of my mind, so that I can better pray, give, and go as God leads?

HEART:

Our salvation is not dependent on the ethnicity, religiosity, or fidelity of any person. Through His sacrifice, Christ has provided deliverance from sin and adoption into God's family. When we grasp the magnitude of God's mercy and the enormity of the undeserved grace we've received, it is right and good for our hearts to overflow with gratitude and adoration.

How can I express my gratitude to God for all He has done to include me in His family?

HANDS:

We can easily fail to remember how much we've been rescued from and how we do not deserve such a great salvation. Our forgetfulness can sometimes stem from being stuck in our Christian bubble, sequestered with the saved. Other times, we simply lose our passion for the lost or give into fear. For the sake of the lost and the glory of God, we must stay the course and finish well this race of faith.

With whom can I share the forgiveness and grace of Christ today?

PRAY: God, thank You for rescuing us from our sin! Grant us the grace to remember daily all You've done for us. Give us opportunities today to spread the gospel message to those who still need it.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"I will charge my soul to believe and to wait for Him, and will follow His providence, and not go before it, nor stay behind it."⁵

—Samuel Rutherford
(1600–1661)

POINT 1: THE LORD PREPARES PEOPLE FOR THE GOSPEL (ACTS 10:1-6).

+ **COMMENTARY**

“The angel addressed him by name (cf. Luke 1:13, 30; Acts 9:4), and Cornelius displayed the terror which is the natural reaction of human beings to the supernatural and is a constant feature in stories like the present one. But there was no cause for alarm. The angel came to assure him that God had taken note of his prayers and his deeds of charity. The language used is that of sacrifices whose smoke ascends to God, and Bruce (Book, p. 216) thinks that Cornelius’s prayers had a sacrificial efficacy before God. The language had already become traditional (Ps. 141:2; Tobit 12:12; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15) in this sense, and it is this tradition which is reflected here rather than a direct allusion to Leviticus 2:2 (as is suggested by Bruce). The implication is that God will respond to the prayer uttered by Cornelius. But at this stage the nature of the response is not revealed. Rather Cornelius is to send to Joppa for a man called Simon—here given his Jewish name. To follow this instruction would be an act of faith and obedience.”⁶

+ **ILLUSTRATION**

Most people admit they are not good with names. In some situations, such as Sunday morning gatherings or other regular meet-ups where there are numerous people to meet, it can be easy to forget someone’s name almost as soon as he or she has revealed it. It takes much intention to catch it the first time, and even more to retain that name in your memory bank.

It can be embarrassing when you’ve encountered someone many times, and it’s simply past the point where you can ask the individual for his or her name again. This is the time when one must resort to asking a mutual friend if they caught the name, or even start some social media sleuthing to find a connection!

In this vision, the angel of God came to Cornelius, and though his magnificent presence was enough to command attention, the messenger called Cornelius by name. There is great power and affection displayed in using someone’s name. It demonstrates a level of emotional nearness and a sense of importance to hear your name mentioned by others.

Not only did the angel recognize Cornelius by name, but he also reported to him that his prayers had been heard, and his good deeds had been seen. God demonstrated His delight in Cornelius

EXTRA

through these personal recognitions. Indeed, “His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love” (Ps. 147:10-11).

POINT 2: THE LORD CALLS PEOPLE TO ACT IN FAITH AND SHARE THE GOSPEL (ACTS 10:9-16,19-23).

+ **COMMENTARY**

“Some scholars feel that Peter’s vision dealt more with food laws than with interaction with Gentiles. This is to overlook the fact that the two are inextricably related. In Lev 20:24b–26 the laws of clean and unclean are linked precisely to Israel’s separation from the rest of the nations. The Jewish food laws presented a real problem for Jewish Christians in the outreach to the Gentiles. One simply could not dine in a Gentile’s home without inevitably transgressing those laws either by the consumption of unclean flesh or of flesh that had not been prepared in a kosher, i.e., ritually proper, fashion (cf. Acts 15:20). Jesus dealt with the problem of clean and unclean, insisting that external things like foods did not defile a person but the internals of heart and speech and thought render one truly unclean (Mark 7:14–23). In Mark 7:19b Mark added the parenthetical comment that Jesus’ saying ultimately declared all foods clean. This was precisely the point of Peter’s vision: God declared the unclean to be clean. In Mark 7 Jesus’ teaching on clean/unclean was immediately followed by his ministry to a Gentile woman (7:24–30), just as Peter’s vision regarding clean and unclean foods was followed by his witness to a Gentile. It is simply not possible to fully accept someone with whom you are unwilling to share in the intimacy of table fellowship. The early church had to solve the problem of kosher food laws in order to launch a mission to the Gentiles. Purity distinctions and human discrimination are of a single piece.”⁷

+ **ILLUSTRATION**

There have been many odd medical treatments performed in the past, attempting to cure people of their diseases. Some practitioners employed leeches and other means of bloodletting to remove the body of its “humors.” Others believed that powder of mummified bodies would cure various maladies. Widely used, topical rubs and ingestible tinctures containing mercury were common cure-alls. Though the manufacturers and medical professionals deemed these medicines and procedures successful, many had no true therapeutic value. It was merely perceived. Even worse, some of these regiments helped with the suppression of one ailment, only to cause irreparable damage to vital organs, leading to death.

Over time and with the arrival of medical advancements, we’ve come to understand the role of pathogens and enjoy the benefits of antibiotics. It has also been proved that elements such as mercury and practices such as bloodletting typically cause more harm than good. Furthermore, there were many superstitious beliefs surrounding sickness that dominated the minds of many, who believed that the primary causes of illness were spiritual ones.

In a similar way, Christ established the new covenant, which clearly provided the cure for our sin problem. Instead of tablets of stone, God has written the law on our hearts—and not just for the Jewish people. No longer do we need continual offerings for sin, within the Old Testament

lifestyle. God showed Peter that a huge paradigm shift needed to occur. Christ came to save any and all who would put their faith in Him, regardless of their genes and upbringing.

POINT 3: THE LORD TRANSFORMS PEOPLE BY THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL (ACTS 10:25-28).

+ COMMENTARY

“28–29 Peter’s audience is well enough informed about the strictures of Judaism to recognise the strangeness of the occasion (‘You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with Gentiles or visit them’). Association with Gentiles was a cause of defilement in Jewish tradition (cf. Jub. 22:16; Test. Jos. 7:1), rather than being strictly defined as such by the law of Moses. It was ‘unlawful’ (athemitos) in the more general sense of being against their custom. This was especially so because Gentiles did not observe the biblical rules about food. Such defilement would have to be removed by following the provisions of the law for cleansing. Even Gentile possessions needed to be purified before they were used by Jews. ‘But God has shown me that I should not call any anyone impure or unclean.’ The vision in vv. 11–16 was about not calling anything impure that God has made clean. Peter now applies this to human beings, which explains why he has come ‘without raising any objection’. His question (‘May I ask why you sent for me?’) then provides Cornelius with the opportunity to declare how God had been encountering him and preparing him to receive the gospel.”⁸

+ ILLUSTRATION

The printing press, steam engine, and immunizations such as the smallpox vaccine are all considered to be inventions that have transformed life forever. The assassination of Archduke Ferdinand Francis, the Declaration of Independence, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ each are events that changed the course of history. These (and more) are watershed moments: “an event or a period of time that marks an important change.”⁹ These milestones are a particular point in time we can point back to and clearly observe a point of no return that would affect the world as we know it.

This passage in Acts 10 presents a watershed moment for God’s people, a turning point and a paradigm shift. As Peter walked into that room full of eager souls, he finally understood God’s calling and visions. God’s heart is for all people. His salvation is not solely for the Jews. God is building a kingdom—a family filled with people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. The requirement for adoption as saints is faith in Christ, not rituals of the former covenant. Jesus has established a new covenant, one that unifies all people under His Lordship.

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