

Pastors and leaders

During this May we explore a partnership that changed the history and direction of the Christian Church. This encounter brought together a Jewish follower of Jesus, a Gentile, and the living God and became a catalyst for the launch of Christian Mission in the non-Jewish world.

This event is a striking example of what can happen when people **pray**, when people are willing to sacrificially **give**, when they are open to fresh and deepened **understanding**, and when they are willing to **go** beyond their own communities. It is these elements that allow us to become aware of where God is at work and join Him in it.

This is the story of God, the Apostle Peter, and a Roman Centurion named Cornelius.

Read together Acts 10

- If you are in a **small group** – read the chapter by breaking it into sections and having a different person read each section.
- If you are in a **congregation** - be creative in how you share this chapter (you could also use or refer to Acts 11:1-18 for a summarised version). Arrange people before the service to stand and read sections of the chapter from their seats; get your youth group to act out the events as you read it; or search for an animated or movie version on the internet that tells the story well.
- If you are working with **children** – try to act out the story or share the animated version.
- It's a good idea to read through or present the whole passage in the first week and then revisit relevant verses in the following weeks.



Week 1: What happens when people PRAY?

We cannot underestimate the impact that prayer can have. Not only can it have enormous impact on the lives of those we are praying for, but prayer can have a transforming nature in us, as we pray. We see this time and time again throughout both the Old and New Testaments: when people pray, God responds and this in turn moves people to act. Prayer is not a static event. This week, we see how God revealed His plan to two unsuspecting people through prayer, two people whose lives, relationships and worldview would be completely transformed through this experience.

Key Verses

Acts 10:1-22

Key Points

- Notice how the whole encounter is grounded in and emerges from prayer.
- Prayer is a key part of both Cornelius' and Peter's worship and relationship with God. Their constant prayer demonstrates a life centred on God.
- For both Peter and Cornelius, it was as they were praying that God spoke to them in visions. Prayer is not a one-way activity, as we come into God's presence prayerfully and listen, He promises to speak to us.
- Both Peter and Cornelius allowed their prayer and God's vision to pervade their everyday life. Their 'spiritual life' led to real and tangible action. It is worth noticing that each of them had dedicated a regular time and place to pray, indicating both their discipline and their commitment to making prayer central in their lives.
- Through prayer God prompted two people to act. An action that would play a decisive role in determining not only Peter's future ministry, but the whole focus of the early church's mission. (See also Acts 10:30-33).

Reflection and Action

- Think about your own prayer life and how you interact with God in this way. What might this tell you about your own relationship with God and your understanding of Him?
- What has God revealed to you in prayer? This might be something about His character or nature, or a clear direction or affirmation. How have you responded?
- Challenge yourself, group or congregation to deepen their experience and understanding of prayer. You could commit to carving out time to engage together in prayer, go back to the Bible and explore the way that people prayed, or try new and creative ways to pray – not only for yourself or your group, but for those who are serving around the world with least-reached people groups.



Week 2: What happens when people GIVE?

The words of Jesus, *it is better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35)*, may seem a little backwards and worn out in our current consumer driven world. Giving has often become about the individual who gives or motivated by feelings – either of guilt or for the search of joy. Yet in the case of Cornelius, giving was an action, a demonstration of his commitment to a God that he was still yet to fully know. It would seem that Cornelius gave because he knew it was the right thing to do. Little did he know that the Living God not only knew of his gifts but counted them as worship.

Key Verses

Acts 10:1-4, Acts 10:30 – 33

Key Points

- It seems in this passage, that giving is considered an integral part of a true and deep relationship with God. Similarly, Jesus says that our giving reflects our heart (Matthew 6:21).
- Cornelius' giving is referred to by the angel as “a memorial offering to God” (v4). This term is also used in Leviticus 2:2 where it represents an offering which God shares in and is pleased with – God's people bless Him and give Him delight by their gifts.
- While the Jews and early Christians may not yet have accepted Cornelius as one of them, God accepted the giving and prayer of Cornelius as true worship. God is not interested in what other people think of our giving (Matthew 6:1-4), but in how it overflows from our desire to honour Him.
- Giving is a part of worship. God notices, and responds, not only to prayer but also to generous giving. Our giving is part of our participation in what He is doing. *Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your gifts to the poor have been noticed by God (v33).*

Reflection and Action

- How do you respond to the notion that giving is an integral part of worship? How might this affect the way that you give?
- Brainstorm, look up and read other stories or events throughout the Bible. Are there any patterns, themes or commonalities in the aspect of giving? What might these mean for us today?
- Like prayer, giving is an opportunity for us to participate in God's mission. Why do you think God invites us to be part of this in these ways?
- Consider whether you might give to the work of a Global Interaction Cross-Cultural worker or project. You might decide to do this as an individual or group.

Week 3: What happens when people GO?

This is the one that we sometimes don't like to talk about...going! The topic of 'whether or not someone should 'go'', is often one we would like to avoid, or only speak of in terms of other people. While God does not require every follower to leave their own culture and live in a new one, we are all called to go and share our lives and faith with others. And yes, there are some (maybe even you), in whom God sparks a desire to share his message with those who haven't yet heard it. Just as He did with Peter.

Key Verses

Acts 10:22 – 29

Key Points

- Initially Peter was not keen on going to this Gentile. He was part of pastoring a number of vibrant and growing Jewish Christian communities (see Acts 9:31). He was comfortable within his own community.
- This request from God to GO to the home of Cornelius' went against most of Peter's understanding and practice of faith into another culture. To a Jewish person, the Gentiles were considered 'unclean'. Peter had to sacrifice some of the ways he would naturally think, do and react to respond.
- While Peter was reluctant and almost dismissed God's vision (God repeated it three times just to make sure Peter got the point v13-16), Peter was obedient to God's instruction.
- While God's plan is greater than any one person, by following God's lead to go Peter had the privilege of playing a key part in God's great story. He would have missed out on amazing things if he had decided it was too difficult to go.
- God was already working in the life of Cornelius and his family. Peter may have taken the message of Jesus to Cornelius, but God had been at work long before Peter arrived. Peter stepped out in faith to 'go', but once he did, he was able to see how God had gone ahead of him.

Reflection and Action

- For some, the idea of mission is to take God to the godless – how does this story of Peter and Cornelius challenge this? How might God already be at work among those who don't yet know Him?
- Who are the 'unclean' people in our society today? Those we might think it is difficult or costly to go to? What are the barriers that are hindering us sharing the Gospel with them? How might these be overcome?
- If we are called to share the message of Jesus with those around us, how is this happening in your life? What are the challenges and opportunities? Has God sparked a desire for cross-cultural mission in you?



Week 4: What happens when people UNDERSTAND?

This whole chapter (Acts 10) is an example of two people who were open to expanding their understanding of what God was wanting of them and where God was moving and calling. Although confused at times and wanting to ensure that their growing understanding was correctly discerned, both Peter and Cornelius were open to a fresh and deepened understanding of the activity and mission of God.

Key Verses

Acts 10:34 - 43

Key Points

- At hearing the dual vision God had also given Cornelius, Peter begins to understand God's bigger picture. The vision he had was part of the picture, but it was in crossing the cultural and religious barriers that he really began to understand God's heart and mission for the whole world.
- God's message through Jesus was not exclusively for the Jews, but has always been to include all people. This impact of this statement on the world today and throughout history since cannot be understated. We are Gentiles who have been blessed to receive the Gospel because people like Peter understood this. There are many people around the world today who do not yet understand that the message of Jesus is for them as well.
- With Peter's sharing of the Gospel message, Cornelius too comes to a greater understanding of the life-saving role of Jesus in his relationship with God. As Peter took the first steps to understand Cornelius, God used him to bring understanding and truth to the Gentiles.
- Here we have a beautiful awakening – both men (and those with them) through this meeting gain a deeper understanding of the mighty God that each have worshiped, and are forever changed in the process. As we embrace opportunities to see God at work in others outside our own circle, we too will gain greater understanding not only of them, but of our wonderful God.

Reflection and Action

- How might you deepen your understanding of how God is already working in the lives of those around you and within least-reached people groups?
- Share stories in your group or congregation of how people have encountered God and shared His love and message with others. Through their stories learn more about them and God.
- There is so much you can do to gain a better understanding of the mission work of Global Interaction among least-reached people groups. Check out the Global Interaction website, sign-up for the publications Resonate and Vision, contact your Global Interaction state office and have a coffee with one of the team, skype or email a cross-cultural worker and check out the Joshua Project website.

