



Acts:

A Life of Witness

Week Eight: Acts 10, 11:1-4, 15-18 The Witness of CHANGING OUR MINDS

Opening Question: Have ever seen a movie, read a book, or had an experience that changed something about how you see the world?

CONTEXT

A quick look back: If someone asked you to summarize what you have learned about God, witness, or life as a follower of Christ in the first 10 chapters of Acts, what would you tell them? How does Acts 1:8 help to frame the themes and stories of this book?

Today's Passage: In Acts 1, Jesus told his beloved ones that they would be witnesses "to the ends of the earth." But based on today's story, we learn that many of them- even the most devout like Peter- didn't really understand (or maybe didn't want to embrace) what that actually meant. Today's story is a tale of two dreams- one given to a Roman soldier named Cornelius and one given to Peter. At the heart of Peter's dream is a vision of traditionally "unclean" food, which represents part of the whole system of Jewish life that was meant to keep them clean, separate, and holy. These early followers truly believed that keeping these food laws was part of the way- even in their new life with Christ- that they could be obedient as a people "set-apart" for mission. But through Peter's interaction with Cornelius, God helps Peter totally reimagine the boundaries of Christ's kingdom and the standards for being part of this new family of Christ. Today we learn why changing our minds- when that change is firmly rooted in the Spirit's movement and in the Word of God- is a powerful and important part of our life of witness.

CONTENT

Read Acts 10, and 11:1-4, 15-18 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (Option A, B, or C) to help your group engage with this passage.

Option A. Notice/Wonder: Ask everyone to read the passage again quietly on their own. As they read, ask them to make a list like the one below. Remember that what people notice or wonder can just be small, simple things.

What do I NOTICE about this text? What do I WONDER about?

Once everyone has had the chance to make their list, come together as a group to share and discuss your observations, writing them in a place where everyone can see the list as it develops.

Option B. Creative Engagement: Give everyone paper and drawing supplies. Have everyone read the passage again on their own, then invite them to spend some time illustrating the passage (or a part of the passage) in whatever way they want- concrete, abstract, colors, images, lists, words. When everyone has completed their art, come together to share and discuss what you drew and why.

Option C. Guided Bible Study Questions:

1. Cornelius is a Roman officer of the Italian Regiment, which means he serves in a very important post in the town where the Roman governor of that region lives. What do we learn about him in 10: 2-4, 22? In what ways does this remind you of the description of the early church in Acts 2: 42-47?

2. Peter does not understand the meaning of his dream when it happens, but how does it prepare him for what happens in the rest of chapter 10? God could have simply instructed Peter to go to Caesarea- why might his dream have been so important in this story?
3. Read Peter's words in 10:34-35 and 43. How is Peter's understanding of Scripture and of Jesus' life and mission changing even as he speaks? What is he coming to "now realize..."?
4. What happens to Cornelius and his large crowd of friends and family in 10:44-48 as they hear Peter tell the story of Jesus? In what ways does this remind you of the Pentecost story in Acts 2? Why might this connection be important?
5. What is the response of the "circumcised believers" (aka, the Jewish believers) in vs 10:45 and 11:2-3 as they witness the Spirit moving in these Roman gentiles and hear about Peter's actions among them?
6. What does Peter come to understand as the basis of belonging to Christ in 11:17?
7. What is the result among the other Jewish believers in 11:18 when they hear Peter witness to the way God has now changed his understanding?

APPLICATION

How does all of this connect to our lives? Here are some questions to help guide your discussion. Choose one or several.

- In most areas of our lives, we embrace change, growth, and new ways of understanding. But sometimes there is a unique fear when we "change our minds" in the context of our faith life. Talk about this idea and your experiences. How does this story speak to this idea of change or new perspectives? What does it mean that God included this story of Peter in his Word-a faithful, devoted, and true-hearted companion and follower of Christ who still had things to learn?
- In this story, Peter basically stands before his most trusted and respected friends and ministry partners and says, "Friends, we had some things wrong..." Have you ever had an experience where you said those words-related to your faith or to other aspects of your life? Has anyone ever said them to you in a way that helped you change your perspective or brought important healing or change to your life with Christ?
- God uses a very vivid visual dream to help re-shape Peter's understanding. Has God ever given you a vision, dream, or picture in some way that helped you understand or know Him more clearly? Or is there a "word-picture" in Scripture that has been important to you?
- As a whole, how has your time in Acts changed, challenged, or shaped the way you think about what it means to be a witness for Christ?

PRAYER

Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below

- Use words/images/themes from the passage to guide your prayer.
- Raise up your "wonderings" from the notice/wonder section to God in prayer
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Use this written prayer:

All-knowing, All-seeing, All-wise God-

Sometimes we are SO SURE that we have You and your story figured out that we forget to expect and embrace when your Spirit pours out fresh ways of hearing and seeing and living and sharing your gospel. Thank you for the witness of Peter-one who loved you so much and devoted his life to you- and was willing to say, when touched and taught by Your hand and vision, "Now I understand..." May we be people who open our hands and hearts to your wisdom and ways and Word as they teach us, form us and even change us for our whole lives. Spirit, continue to pour yourself into our everyday lives so that we can bear faithful witness- to our friends, to our neighbors, to our enemies, to the people we can't even imagine as we say these words- to the miraculous truth that the love and life of Christ is truly for "all and everyone." We pray this in the unchanging name of Christ- the One who makes all things new.

Amen