



## Week 5: Peter and Cornelius Acts 10:1-48

### GOAL:

Open ourselves to the possibility that God may want to speak to us and expand our view of his kingdom.

### CHECKLIST

- Prepare for the meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- Spend a few minutes in breakout groups applying today's discussion and praying for each other.
- Lead the group in a prayer time consisting of worship, thanksgiving, and intercession.
- Close by giving the group any final words and a blessing.
- Talk about your group's upcoming plans, including serving at Fallapalooza on Oct 30.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members.

### PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

*Heavenly Father, thank you so much for including me in your family and in your kingdom! I confess that it's sometimes easy for me to narrow my view of what you're doing around me and to assume that you're only working in the lives of people like me. Please expand my vision of your kingdom, helping me to see that you are at work all around me. Teach me to listen for your voice and to be open to all people, even those who are different from me. And please use me as an ambassador for Jesus - sharing his love with others and inviting them to follow him together with me. In his name I pray, Amen.*

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*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25*

## CONNECT (15-20 minutes)

As your meeting begins, allow group members to visit and catch up informally. After a few moments, lead the group through the following connecting activities:

**Group Connection:** Discuss the upcoming schedule for your Grow Group, including serving at Fallapalooza on Sunday, October 30th from 4:00-6:00pm. Each group will be responsible for hosting one “Trunk or Treat” station. This involves decorating a vehicle, leading some kind of game or activity, and giving out candy. Begin brainstorming with your group now about what you’d like to do!

**Relational Connection:** In this section, spend time catching up relationally. You might want to use an icebreaker question (“What’s one of your favorite memories?” or similar) or share “highs and lows.”

**Spiritual Connection:** Ask your group the following two questions:

- Where have you seen God at work this week?
- In what specific areas do you need God to work this week?

*This is an opportunity to praise God for the good things happening and to ask for his help in our challenges. Our natural tendency will be to focus on our circumstances, and that’s ok. But this can also be related to our spiritual lives as well!*

## PRAY (5-10 minutes)

In this week’s version of our “worship-focused prayer,” we’ll focusing on attributes of God. You can use this script if it’s helpful, or say it in your own words:

*“All right, we’re going to begin by **praising** God for who he is. Today, let’s think of the names of God or attributes/characteristics of God. In popcorn fashion, you might say ‘God I worship you because you are\_\_\_\_\_.’ You can pray more than once or not at all. Let’s worship him now. After a minute or two we will transition to thanksgiving.”*

**Give time for prayers of praise.**

*“OK, now we’re going to transition into some thanksgiving. You might thank him for something God has done for you this week. Or thank him for something you notice he is doing among us at VRBC. Whatever is on your heart – thank him now.”*

**Give time for prayers of thanksgiving.**

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*“All right, we’ll close with some intercession – praying for each other’s needs. Based on what the group members shared a few minutes ago, let’s pray for each other’s needs. You don’t have to pray out loud, but you’re welcome to. I’ll close us in a minute.”*

**Give time for prayers of intercession.**

After a few moments, offer a brief prayer to close out this time.

## **DISCUSS (35-45 minutes)**

- What was one thing from the Scripture readings and reflection questions this week that challenged you, encouraged you, or made you think?

***Leader’s Note:** As you have seen, we ask this question every week. You don’t need to spend a ton of time on it (although you can if the Spirit is moving!), but it’s helpful to give people the opportunity to share with each other the way that God has been speaking to them in their times of Scripture and prayer. And hearing how God is speaking to others broadens and deepens our own experience with God and encourages us to stay consistent in investing in our own spiritual lives.*

*For the following questions, note that some of the passages are on the long side. Feel free to summarize the passage out loud or give the group time to read it silently rather than reading it aloud if you think it will work better for your group.*

- Read Acts 10:1-16. What were Cornelius and Peter each doing in this story? Read John 10:27. How is Jesus’ description of sheep similar to what we see Cornelius and Peter doing? Do you tend to think of prayer as a one-way conversation or a two-way conversation with God? How do you know when something is from God?

***Leader’s Note:** Peter and Cornelius were both spending time in prayer, which included receptively listening to what God might have to say to them. What follows for each of them is an ongoing engagement with God, a two-way conversation where they are listening and responding to God. One of the categories listed in our church’s Life Measures is to “know Jesus by spending time with him.” And one way we do that is by asking ourselves, “Am I in an ongoing two-way conversation with God?”*

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It's likely that each of your group members experiences this differently, so this is a great opportunity for your group to widen your experiences of prayer as a two-way conversation by sharing and learning from one another. In Psalm 95 and twice in Hebrews 3, Scripture says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..." As believers today, we can expect that God will speak to us through the Holy Spirit. It was not a phenomenon unique to biblical times. As your group discusses this important topic, let's encourage one another to desire to hear from God and to actively listen for what God might be speaking to us.

As we seek confirmation that a word is from God (and not, say, a bad burrito!), we can look for consistency with (1) Scripture, and especially the words of Jesus, (2) the character and humility of Jesus, and (3) how God continues to speak to us through prayer. Our Grow Group can also be a place that we seek to collectively discern if something is from God. Sometimes God may be speaking similarly to multiple members of your group, so sharing this provides an opportunity to confirm and affirm what God is doing among you.

- Read Acts 10:15 again, then read 1 John 1:7. What types of people might you consider "unclean," or be reluctant to engage with personally? How does Peter overcome these barriers to engage with Cornelius? What is it that unites us with those who might seem very different from us? If God wanted to expand your view of the Kingdom, what might that look like?

***Leader's Note:** While food issues might not top the list, there are a number of reasons we may be hesitant to engage personally with someone who is very different from us. Maybe it's a difference in culture or custom, in backgrounds, in politics, or a whole host of other differences. Help your group to think through ways our "categories" might constrain our relationships. But in Acts 10, Peter not only associates with Cornelius but eats with him and stays in his home (verse 48)!*

*1 John 1:7 uses the same Greek word as Acts 10:15, translated as "make clean" or "purify." When we see this story in its historical context, we learn that cleansing and forgiveness come through the shedding of blood (See Hebrews 9:22). In the Old Testament, that happened through the spiritual ritual of animal sacrifice. But Jesus changed that. Jesus took on the sin of all humanity, and through his blood he has made everyone who follows him clean. And as a result of this, as 1 John 1:7 says, "we have fellowship with one another."*

*Help your group members come to a point of honesty with themselves – is this kind of in-each-other's-homes friendship possible with someone who is very different from us? It is interesting to note that Peter went to the home of Cornelius BEFORE he became a follower of Jesus. How can we see those around us as someone in God's pipeline of redemption? How might a conscious awareness of their potential to be redeemed by Jesus increase our willingness to engage with them at a deeper level?*

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- Read Acts 10:17-23. What do you learn from the first parts of verses 17 and 19? How long do we tend to think about and wrestle with what God is saying to us through Scripture and prayer? Read Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 119:15. What does Scripture say about meditating on God's Word? What would it look like for you to create opportunities throughout your day for meditating on God's Word spoken to you through Scripture and prayer?

**Leader's Note:** *Most of us don't have a schedule that allows us to spend huge blocks of time (maybe one hour or more) with God each day. But perhaps all of us can find ways to open up some "white space" throughout the day to meditate on what God has spoken or is speaking to us from our times of Scripture reading and prayer. How can you encourage your group to extend their times with God into the day?*

- *Maybe it means turning off the radio during a morning commute to meditate on what God is saying.*
- *Perhaps you can take advantage of times when your hands are busy and your mind is available, such as mowing the lawn, washing dishes, or vacuuming.*
- *Maybe it's taking a break once or twice a day for a brief walk outside, even if it's just once around the neighborhood or office building.*

*Regardless of what form it takes, encourage your group to be intentional about experimenting with times of meditation. You might close this question's discussion by sharing the promise found in Proverbs 2:1-6, that God will give wisdom and understanding to those who seek it.*

- Read Acts 10:24-33. How had Cornelius prepared for Peter's visit? Like Cornelius, how can you cultivate an expectation within yourself that God is going to do something significant? How can you share what God is doing or saying with others in your life?

**Leader's Note:** *Cornelius was expecting God to do something, so he gathered all his family and friends (verse 24), so much so that Peter found a large gathering there (verse 27)! Verse 33 is especially striking: "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us." Sometimes we miss what God is up to, simply because we weren't looking for it.*

- Read Acts 10:34-48. Why were Peter's friends "astonished" at what God did in verses 44-46? How did Peter's response in verse 47-48 show a change in heart? How can we support and encourage those who are new to the faith who may still look and act very different from us?

**Leader's Note:** *Sometimes we expect other believers to look and act exactly like us. When they don't, perhaps we doubt whether God is really at work in their lives. But when we step out in faith and obey God's promptings to engage personally with those who are different, the Holy Spirit surprises us by working in ways we don't expect.*

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*It's interesting to see how Peter responds. If God has accepted these Gentile believers, who is he to stand in the way of their being baptized?!? There were likely a whole host of discipleship issues they would need to sort through, as they figured out what would need to change in these Gentile believers lives as they become followers of Jesus. But since baptism is a first step of obedience in a lifelong journey of following Jesus, the Jewish Christians showed an immediate willingness to publicly testify to what God was doing in their lives through baptism*

## BREAKOUT GROUPS (5-10 minutes)

As a reminder, we're experimenting with spending some brief time in smaller breakout groups each week as a way of "going deeper" with each other. Ideally, these groups would be 3-5 people of the same gender, but feel free to make adjustments based on the needs of your group. If you're a Sunday morning group, you might want to split into four smaller groups and ask them to make a circle in one of the corners of the room. If you think it would be helpful to these breakout groups, feel free to designate one person in each group as the "facilitator," but you certainly don't have to.

After (or as) people move into their breakout groups, read (or paraphrase) the following out loud:

*In his sermon, John referenced a phrase they use in their house often, "Don't yuck my yum." When someone loves a food that is different (like Grace's Lima bean sandwiches), and someone else talks about it as gross, you might say, "Don't yuck my yum." The point is that sometimes we have a tendency to "yuck" God's "yum," when we look down upon or are hesitant to engage with someone that God loves. In your groups, take turns sharing 1) someone that God may be calling you to engage relationally, and 2) what that might look like. After everyone has had the chance to share, spend a minute praying for each other. Since we just have a few minutes, make sure to keep it brief so everyone has an opportunity to share.*

## CLOSING

After the groups are finished (or when it's time to go!), call the group back together for a brief closing. During this time, you can give any final thoughts you need to share and close with a brief word of blessing.

**Blessing:** (feel free to use this blessing, substitute your own, or just close with a prayer)

*May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. (1 Thessalonians 3:12)*

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