

# WHO ARE WE REACHING?



## STUDY 4

## Reaching across Cultures (Acts 10:1 - 11:18)

*“Ethnic divides were deeply ingrained in the culture of first-century Israel. Even Jewish Christians such as Peter thought of themselves as being among God’s favorites. This is why a thorough reading of the New Testament, especially noting the literary structure of many of the books, reveals a careful progression in thought to lead the audience out of their biases and into the truth that Jesus came for all people.”*

*The Jesus Bible Commentary*

*(Note: This is a long passage to read together. You might want to have everyone read it on their own prior to gathering.)*

*Previously in Acts, we see that other non-Jews have turned to Jesus — a Gentile in 6:5, an Ethiopian Gentile in 8:26-39, and some Gentiles with Philip in 8:40. But this situation, beginning in chapter 10, carried great impact because Peter was the recognized leader of the early Christians. Peter had not yet understood that the Good News of salvation found in Jesus was a message that extended well beyond the Jews. How kind and gracious of God to prepare Peter for what he was, soon, to encounter. This involved Cornelius, a Roman military commander, a man who represented everything the Jewish people would have hated about Rome’s reach and authority.*

*The term “culture” speaks to so much more than our ethnic diversity. Within each of our communities, we have very diverse subcultures. Even when we don’t understand some of these cultures, we must understand that Jesus died for each and every person in each group.*

### Read Together:

**Acts 11:1-18 (NIV):** *“The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.” Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’ “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with[c] water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?” When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”*

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## Explore Together:

**1. Cornelius Seeks (Acts 10:1-8)** - Evidently Cornelius had turned from the typical Roman gods of the military and was worshipping God according to Mosaic law. Notice that God met him at his very point of obedience when he was praying at an appointed time for Jewish prayer. *“One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, “Cornelius!”” (10:3 NIV) “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13 NIV)*

● **Discuss:** Where might you encounter someone who is seeking Jesus? Share times that you have met someone who was eager to ask you about your faith. What can we do to be aware of someone who needs us to respond to the questions of their heart? How can we be ready to respond? (1 Peter 3:15)

**2. Peter Sees (Acts 10:9-23)** - Just as for Cornelius, God met Peter at his point of obedience in prayer. God’s words were clear but the meaning was not. Yet as Peter wondered about the meaning of his vision, the Spirit brought further clarity. Jesus had already taught that it is not what goes into a person, but what comes out of them, that defiles them (Mark 7:18-20). Now, as Peter was beginning to understand that truth, his perception of Gentiles was shifting.

● **Discuss:** When have you had pre-conceived ideas about other cultures or subcultures that needed to be corrected? Describe how you were able to adjust. How can we be people who live out of the reality that the love of Jesus extends to **all** people?

**3. God Moves (Acts 10:28-29, 34-35)** - What a profound shift it must have been for Peter to say “But God...”. But God had shown him that he should not call anyone impure or unclean. God, in his wisdom and grace, had revealed this truth to Peter gently, through a vision. By the time the representatives from Cornelius arrived at Peter’s house, Peter was ready to welcome them inside as his guests before he traveled to meet Cornelius. When he reached Cornelius, Peter could boldly proclaim, *“I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.” (10:34-35 NIV)*

● **Discuss:** Consider times that God has gently corrected your wrong assumptions about others. What is the role of hospitality in breaking down cultural barriers? (Notice the times of hospitality in this passage — verses 23, 25, and 48.) How can we help each other become better at sitting at tables with people we might not understand and with whom we might disagree?

**4. Hearts Open (Acts 11:1-18)** - Even without today’s technology, news traveled quickly! Believers throughout Judea had heard that the Gentiles had received the word of God. Undoubtedly, Peter arrived in Jerusalem filled with excitement over his own, personal enlightenment and the excitement in the celebration of new believers amongst the Gentiles. Yet, he was immediately greeted with criticism over the rumours that preceded him (11:2). Interestingly, Luke (the writer of Acts) reviews the occurrences again, repeating the truths that had been recorded in chapter 10. Thankfully, when the critical believers heard the good report from Peter, they “had no further objections and praised God.” (11:18 NIV)

● **Discuss:** In what ways are you challenged to broaden your social circle to include people from other cultures and faiths who need to know the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ? Spend time in prayer for your cross-cultural connections and for empowerment to take the first steps.

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## Pray Together:

*Lord God! We acknowledge that it is too easy to stay in our comfort zones and spend time only with people who seem to be just like us and are easy to understand. Show us how we can open conversations with those around us who seem so different to us. Be glorified in our city, oh God, through a movement of diverse people who are united around the truths of our Redeemer, Lord, and King — Jesus Christ.*

*Amen.*

### SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- **Book:** Nabeel Qu'reshi - *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*
- **Book:** Timothy Keller and John Inazu - *Uncommon Ground: Living Faithfully in a World of Difference*
- **Book:** Richard J. Mouw - *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World.*
- **Video:** The Bible Project - *The Apostle Paul, Acts 8-12*; <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/gospel-acts-2/>

### GOING DEEPER:

- Acts 22:15 says, "You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard." Begin to make a record of all that you have seen and heard about Jesus. You might want to go back to the very beginning of your journey as a follower of Jesus. What a beautiful way to not only have specifics that you can share with those who need your witness, but also to increase your praises for God's faithfulness!
- Study the great revivals throughout church history. As you study, pray. Gather others to pray with you. One commonality in revivals is that every revival seems to have been prefaced by prayer and repentance. (Many resources are available through 24/7 Prayer International: [youtu.be/09n8WRCcb78?si=qKObO3STVVe9t6eD](https://youtu.be/09n8WRCcb78?si=qKObO3STVVe9t6eD))