

# Called to Be Inclusive

## August 27 • Bible Study Guide 13

**Bible Background • ACTS 10**  
**Printed Text • ACTS 10:19–33 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 15**

### Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: REVIEW the story of Cornelius' meeting with Peter; APPRECIATE that the Gospel is for everyone and should reach every person; and COMMIT to enhancing the church's cross-cultural mission outreach.

### In Focus

Juan was a six-foot-four, three-hundred-pound man and was known as the meanest police officer in his precinct. While at the annual barbecue, he couldn't find Curtis, a retired sergeant from his precinct, who usually came every year. He asked around about Curtis, wondering why his friend would miss the event. One of Juan's co-workers told him that Curtis had recently discovered he had terminal cancer and was currently in the hospital. Juan rushed out of the barbecue to see his friend.

Upon entering the hospital room, Juan struggled for the right words to console Curtis: "Curtis, this is terrible. I didn't realize you were so sick." Curtis pulled on Juan's shirt sleeve and motioned for him to bend down closer so he could hear Curtis speak. In a hushed voice, Curtis said, "Juan, I'm fine. Do you know Christ?" Startled, Juan replied, "What do you mean, man? No, nobody ever told me anything about Christ. You just lie back and relax. Don't get yourself all worked up." But Curtis insisted that Juan listen to what he had to say and began to witness to Juan about Christ. On the ride home, Juan cried out loud. He realized that could be him lying in the hospital near death. The next week Juan accepted Christ as his Savior.

*In our lesson today, we will observe how Peter became convinced of his call to share the Gospel with people different from him. Have you ever been challenged to share the Gospel with someone different from you?*

### Keep in Mind

"And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (Acts 10:28).

### Words You Should Know

**A. Without gainsaying** (Acts 10:29<sup>L</sup>) *anantirretos* (Gk.)—Without raising any contradiction, objection, or denial.

**B. Alms** (v. 31) *eleemosune* (Gk.)—Practice of goodwill, charitable giving.

### Say It Correctly

Caesarea. seh-sa-REE-ah.

Joppa. JAH-puh.

### Teacher Preparation

**Unifying Principle—Drawing In.** Traditions and cultural understandings often shape our view of the world and other people in ways that limit our interactions. How do we overcome our limited understandings? Through a vision and the Spirit, Peter learned how and why to witness to Cornelius and his household.

- A. Pray that your students will be able to interact with other people and cultures.
- B. Ask God to give you people to pray for from other backgrounds.
- C. Complete the companion lesson in the Precepts For Living® Study Guide.

### **O—Open the Lesson**

- A. Open by thanking God for people of other backgrounds.
- B. Have students discuss other cultures and religions.
- C. Share a time you felt like an outcast.
- D. Ask about some traditions students or their families hold.

### **P—Present the Scriptures**

- A. Have a student read the Focal Verses.
- B. Have students discuss the Background section.
- C. Allow students time to reflect on the main Scriptures of the lesson.

### **E—Explore the Meaning**

- A. Break the class into two groups and have them create a skit about fitting in.
- B. Review the students' answers to the Search the Scriptures questions.

### **N—Next Steps for Application**

- A. Review the Lesson in Our Society and Make It Happen sections. Commit to putting the lesson into practice in a particular way this week.
- B. Summarize the lesson.
- C. Close in prayer, thanking God for creating such diversity in the world and for welcoming all into the family of faith.

## **KJV**

**Acts 10:19** While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.

**20** Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.

**21** Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?

**22** And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.

**23** Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

**24** And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and he had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

**25** And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.

**26** But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.

**27** And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.

**28** And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

**29** Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?

**30** And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,

**31** And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

**32** Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.

**33** Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

## NLT

**Acts 10:19** Meanwhile, as Peter was puzzling over the vision, the Holy Spirit said to him, “Three men have come looking for you.

**20** Get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitation. Don’t worry, for I have sent them.”

**21** So Peter went down and said, “I’m the man you are looking for. Why have you come?”

**22** They said, “We were sent by Cornelius, a Roman officer. He is a devout and God-fearing man, well respected by all the Jews. A holy angel instructed him to summon you to his house so that he can hear your message.”

**23** So Peter invited the men to stay for the night. The next day he went with them, accompanied by some of the brothers from Joppa.

**24** They arrived in Caesarea the following day. Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

**25** As Peter entered his home, Cornelius fell at his feet and worshiped him.

**26** But Peter pulled him up and said, “Stand up! I’m a human being just like you!”

**27** So they talked together and went inside, where many others were assembled.

**28** Peter told them, “You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean.

**29** So I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. Now tell me why you sent for me.”

**30** Cornelius replied, “Four days ago I was praying in my house about this same time, three o’clock in the afternoon. Suddenly, a man in dazzling clothes was standing in front of me.

**31** He told me, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your gifts to the poor have been noticed by God!

**32** Now send messengers to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. He is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore.’

**33** So I sent for you at once, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here, waiting before God to hear the message the Lord has given you.”

## The People, Places, and Times

**Caesarea.** Caesarea, also known as Caesarea Maritima (“of the sea”) or Caesarea Augusta, (named after Caesar Augustus) was a port city located twenty five miles north of modern-day Tel Aviv. The city was built by Herod the Great sometime between 22 and 10 BC. Caesarea, known for being a very beautiful city, contained many marble structures. It was also known to contain a large hippodrome, a theater, a sewer system, and a sheltered harbor. Five main roads led into the city which, in addition to the harbor, made transporting people and goods easy.

**Tanner.** A tanner’s job was to clean and prepare animal hides to be used as leather. They employed a process that stripped the remaining hair, fat, and flesh from the animal skins. As one might imagine, it was considered an undesirable job due to the sights and smells it entailed. Furthermore, tanners were considered ceremonially unclean by Jews, because they were in constant contact with dead animals. Tanneries were often required to operate outside of city walls or along the seashore.

### Background

Jewish law was very specific about what Jews were to eat and how they were to conduct themselves. The dietary laws that Peter references are found in Leviticus 11. In their original form, these rules were meant to protect the people of Israel and set them apart as God’s people. These laws and covenant agreements made it possible for sinful humanity to commune with God. However, through Christ’s sacrifice, God had removed the barrier of sin between Himself and His people. Humanity could now commune with God through the acceptance of His Son, Jesus Christ ([Romans 3:21–26](#)). This transition from Law to grace through Christ created friction between Jewish Christians who still held to their Jewish culture and the new Gentile believers who hadn’t converted to Judaism. Some Jewish believers expected that non-Jewish believers should fully convert to Judaism, taking on all Jewish customs and practices, including circumcision. This tension not only threatened the spread of the Gospel to Gentiles, but also the unity and potency of the Christian church. Philip’s encounter with an Ethiopian eunuch is recorded earlier in [Acts 8:26–39](#). Salvation is given to the

Ethiopian man based on his acceptance of Christ, not his cultural background. While this instance occurred in relative isolation, Peter's later interactions with Cornelius would be publicly known. This would represent a deep challenge to the beliefs of Jewish Christians, but it would also be an opportunity for them to finally understand God's will for the Gentiles.

### **Worship Guide**

For the Superintendent and Teacher  
Theme: Called to Be Inclusive  
Song: "Oh How He Loves You and Me"  
Devotional Reading: Psalm 15

### **Daily Bible Readings**

#### **MONDAY**

The Servant's Mission to All Nations  
([Isaiah 49:1-7](#))

#### **TUESDAY**

Jesus Heals a Centurion's Slave  
([Luke 7:1-10](#))

#### **WEDNESDAY**

The Lord Meets Cornelius in a Vision  
([Acts 10:1-8](#))

#### **THURSDAY**

People are Neither Unclean Nor Profane  
([Acts 10:9-18](#))

#### **FRIDAY**

Gentiles Hear and Accept the Gospel  
([Acts 10:34-43](#))

#### **SATURDAY**

Gentiles Included by the Spirit and Water  
([Acts 10:44-48](#))

#### **SUNDAY**

Called to Be Inclusive  
([Acts 10:19-33](#))

## At-A-Glance

1. Seeking ([Acts 10:19–23](#))
2. Expecting (vv. 24–29)
3. Doing (vv. 30–33)

## In Depth

### 1. Seeking ([Acts 10:19–23](#))

Peter thinks about the vision he received from God. He then sees another vision from God as well as guidance about what is specifically going to happen. God tells him exactly how many men are seeking him, and He tells him what to do. The Holy Spirit directs Peter to go with the men and not doubt. Peter has no need to guess what is happening.

The Holy Spirit assures Peter that He sent the men for him. Peter goes with the men and lets them know that he is whom they are seeking. Peter also asks why these men are seeking him. They describe the type of man Cornelius the centurion is. Peter and Cornelius were both seekers. While Cornelius sought God, Peter sought a confirmation from God.

### 2. Expecting (vv. 24–29)

Peter does not go with the men right away. Because it is too late to take a journey, he invites them to stay at his house. Peter, the men, and others from Joppa travel to Caesarea. Cornelius is expecting Peter. This meeting is clearly important to Cornelius; he has his family and friends there. Cornelius wants to honor Peter, but goes too far by bowing down at his feet. God is the only one who should receive worship, which Peter makes very clear. Breaking Jewish custom, Peter goes inside the Gentile Cornelius' house. Peter first gives a brief history of the Law and a confession that he believed in the Law. But God shows him that he should not call anything common or unclean. Peter does not deny what God had revealed to him. The reason he comes to Cornelius was the truth God gave to him in a vision. Peter knows now why he had been sought out.

### 3. Doing (vv. 30–33)

Cornelius begins to describe what took place four days before as he was fasting. He then proceeds to say that at the ninth hour he began to pray, and tells of the vision he saw. What he describes would be the common description of angels, as they appeared in the form of man. Luke, the writer of Acts, does not retell Cornelius' vision because it has already been told. Peter being asked to speak about Christ is a miraculous event. Peter's message is that everyone who believes is forgiven. It is very clear that the Gospel was sent to Israel and also the Gentiles. Peter now sees how God called Him to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. They are now included in God's family.

## Search the Scriptures

1. How did Peter know that it was God speaking to him and not his flesh or Satan ([Acts 10:28–29](#))?
2. Why did Cornelius gather others to hear the message the Lord gave Peter (vv. 32–33)?

## Discuss the Meaning

Peter had to be assured of the voice of God in order to embrace the Gentiles. What are the ways that we can be assured when God wants us to do something we thought was inappropriate or out of our comfort zone?

## Lesson in Our Society

You are often accepted when you buy the name-brand clothes, the latest phone, and the coolest glasses. If you speak broken English or a language other than English, you might be talked about and feel like an outcast. It is so easy to make people feel like they are outcast or different. What can you do in your community to help those who are outsiders?

## Make It Happen

How many people do you know who are not native English speakers and could have a speech barrier in communicating? Do you know people who have come to your church from a different background or culture? Do you see people who struggle to understand why they are not accepted? Remind yourself about when you felt isolated, and make it your goal to help the people you see in these areas.

## Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

### Acts 10:19–33

**19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. 20 Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.**

The vision was followed by a clear, divine command. Peter was not only addressed by the Spirit, but was also told that God was at work in this affair. The reader understands with Peter that it was not only the human Cornelius who sent the messengers; they were also sent by God.

Peter was commanded to go with the three men who would take him to the home of Cornelius. “Doubting” (Gk. *diakrino*, **dee-ah-KREE-no**) has a double nuance that is important for the development of the story. The Greek verb can mean to doubt or hesitate ([James 1:6](#)), but it can also mean to make a discrimination or choose between ([James 2:4](#)).

Peter, in effect, is told not to be filled with doubts about the events that will eventually lead him to understand how he is to not discriminate between people (see [Acts 15:9](#)).

**21 Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? 22 And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.**

Peter is expecting the men and is also ready to go with them. He wants to know why they have come. Peter seeks to understand God’s intention, while also showing faith by letting them know that he is the one they are looking for. Their description of Cornelius is juxtaposed against his Gentile name. He is described as “one that feareth God” and a “just man.” He was “just” (Gk. *dikaios*, **DI-kigh-os**), which means “to be righteous or observing of human and divine laws.” He is also of “good report” or reputation among the Jewish people. The messengers here establish Cornelius’ credibility as a God-fearer. On top of that, they also tell Peter that God sent an angel to Cornelius to invite Peter to his house.

**23 Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. 24 And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and he had called together his kinsmen and near friends.**

Peter enters into Caesarea, accompanied by Cornelius’ messengers and some disciples from Joppa. This would prove valuable, as they would witness what happened during Peter’s preaching. Cornelius, seeing the gravity and importance of the occasion, invites his kinsmen and his close friends into his house.

**25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. 26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.**

Cornelius is struck with awe at Peter’s visit. From this, we can infer that Cornelius believed Peter to be a servant of Jesus, thinking that Peter could impart salvation. As a Gentile steeped in paganism, the centurion offers him the required obeisance as a semi-divine son of God who had supernatural powers. Cornelius’ reaction is ingrained and reflexive. Peter refuses this worship and tells him to stand up because he was not a god, but a man.

**27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. 28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. 29 Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?**

Peter talks to Cornelius as they enter the home. When he sees all the people gathered together, he sees an opportunity to express what God has revealed to him. He reminds them of how his presence there is unlawful (Gk. *athemitos*, **ah-THEH-mee-tose**), or contrary to accepted morality or social convention. In the Jewish context, it means forbidden by the Torah. This is in contrast to unrighteous (Gk. *adikaios*, **ah-di-KIGH-os**), which referred to something illegal and wrong.

Peter states that it is contrary to Jewish Law for him to “keep company” with (Gk. *kollao*, **kol-LAH-oh**), or join together with, a Gentile or enter a Gentile’s home. Such practices were not prohibited by Jewish Law. Instead, Peter is echoing a common Gentile perception at the time, which developed out of table fellowship issues. Some Jews avoided eating with Gentiles because certain foods were prohibited in the Mosaic Laws. Of particular issue was food or drink that had been offered as sacrifices and libations to Roman or other foreign gods. So, because it was culturally taboo to inquire about these matters, some Jews avoided eating and drinking with Gentiles all together.

Cornelius and his Gentile associates would have been surprised that Peter was willing to enter his home. Peter explains that not only could they fellowship together, but God even told Peter that he should no longer think of anyone or anything as unclean (i.e., unacceptable to God without ritual purification).

Peter says God has “shewed” (Gk. *deiknumi*, **DAKE-new-mi**) him that he should not call any man common or unclean. The word for “shewed” means to establish the validity of something with an explanation or example. Here the explanation or example is the vision Peter received on the rooftop of Simon the tanner ([Acts 10:9–16](#)). This vision is the basis for Peter’s going to Cornelius’ house without gainsaying (Gk. *anantirretos*, **ah-nahn-tee-RAY-tose**), or without objection.

**30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,**

Cornelius was a Roman centurion, or a captain in the army. Although the term *centurion* means “commander of a hundred,” this was just a round estimate; centurions actually commanded only eighty men. The Bible says he was a “devout man,” meaning he tried to be godly in his ways and gave God due reverence. His godliness was evident by his positive influence over all those in his house, and he gave money to the poor while praying to God “alway” ([Acts 10:1–2](#)).

Cornelius recounted to Peter how God had given him a vision to send for Peter. It was around the “ninth hour,” which was 3 p.m., when Cornelius had a supernatural encounter. This mention of the ninth hour indicates Cornelius’ adherence to the Jewish times of prayer, which corresponded with the morning and evening offerings in the Temple. Because of this Gentile man’s efforts to know God, he was blessed with the vision, which would start a series of events leading to his salvation. The man who wore “bright clothing” was identified as an angel in the actual vision (v. 3). God spoke to Peter and Cornelius in visions leading up to this fateful event to show them both how important and game-changing this encounter was going to be.

**31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.**

The angel in the vision let Cornelius know that God had been heard his prayer and his alms were remembered (Gk. *mnaomai*, **MNA-oh-my**), or God was mindful of them. The word for “alms” (Gk. *eleemosune*, **eh-leh-ay-mo-SUE-nay**) is literally “compassion or pity.” In Judaism in the Roman period, almsgiving was considered comparable to righteousness. Luke intends to show that Cornelius was a righteous, God-fearing man and that God was answering his prayer. These God-fearers were Gentiles who were sympathetic to the Jewish religion, but not full, circumcised converts. They were not fully initiated as Jews but contributed to the synagogue and demonstrated piety.

**32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.**

Cornelius recounted his vision to Peter in order to explain why he had sent for him. The angel, and therefore God, had instructed him to do so. The omniscient God knew exactly where Peter was, just as He knows where all of our blessings are. The blessing that God had for Cornelius was that Peter would “speak unto thee”—the

gift of the Gospel message.

Peter was lodging with Simon the tanner (Gk. *burseus*, **bur-seh-US**). A tanner was a leatherworker who created leather from hides and skins by treating them with lime and juices and leaves from various plants. This leather was often used for making tents. The Tabernacle coverings were made from the skins of rams or goats and were more than likely created by tanners ([Exodus 25:5](#), [26:14](#), [35:7](#), [23](#), [36:19](#)). Due to the nature of their work, tanners were not regarded highly among Greeks, Romans, or Jews. In Judaism, they were not allowed to go to the Temple during pilgrimage season. They also had their own synagogues, due to the bad odor created by the process of curing the animal hides. The Jewish rabbinical tradition (collected in the Mishnah) even allows that in the case of Levirate marriage, the wife of the deceased brother of a tanner was allowed to remain a widow by saying, "I could endure your brother, but I cannot endure you." Due to the odors, tanners were required to do their work outside the city gates or by the sea side.

**33 Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.**

Cornelius tells Peter, "Immediately therefore I sent to thee." Now, he thanks Peter for coming. But what Cornelius did not know was that God gave Peter a vision just before his messengers arrived. And, in Peter's vision, God dealt with Peter's feelings of prejudice toward Gentiles, while telling him to go with Cornelius' messengers ([Acts 10:9–20](#)). God's mighty providence works everything out. God can weave a tapestry of people and events in our lives that appear unrelated or totally unknown to us. Then, when the time is right, God will pull all the pieces together so that we are blessed with something He has been preparing for us for some time.

Cornelius showed his love for his household by having everyone gather to hear Peter's words. His example shows that we should not be selfish with God's Word of salvation, but see to it that all of our relatives and friends get to hear it, whether it comes from us or someone else. We owe it to the ones we love to see that they get a chance to hear the Gospel and receive the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.