



Connecting Heart to Heart

Part I: Awareness *By Sharon Rapp*

In the first chapter of Acts, verse 8, Jesus told those present at the Ascension: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Our Lord Jesus Christ commands us also to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them ... and teaching them” (**Matthew 28:19–20**). Both our Savior and the disciple Peter modeled this Gospel outreach for us. The focus of Part I of the study is on raising awareness of attitudes toward interactions with other cultures. We will look at Peter’s meeting with Cornelius (**Acts 10**), his defense to the early church (**Acts 11**), and the criticism Peter receives from Paul (**Galatians 2**). With these goals in mind, we begin.

Opening Prayer

Savior of the Nations, come to us. Be among us as we study Your Word. Draw us together as one in You. Guide our thoughts, give us open hearts to see our shortcomings, and grant us repentance, comfort, encouragement, and spiritual growth. These things we ask in Your name. Amen.

Opening Activity

Many of us treasure family practices that are part of holiday festivities. Make a brief list of customs that are or were special to your family during one or more of our holiday celebrations. Share one of those traditions and its origin, if you know it, with a partner or in a small group.

Cornelius

A centurion was a Roman soldier who commanded a unit of one hundred men. Caesarea, a seaport built on the Mediterranean by King Herod and the Roman capital of Judea, lies some 30 miles north of Joppa (now Jaffa) and about 60 miles northwest of Jerusalem.

Read **Acts 10:1–8; 24–26; and 30–33**. What time of day does Cornelius have his vision? _____

Who visits him? _____

What is Cornelius’ response? _____

List several characteristics you would ascribe to Cornelius. _____

Peter

While Peter was visiting the saints in Lydda, his healing of Aeneas (who had been bedridden for eight years) became known in

the area. When the widow Tabitha (also called Dorcas) became sick and died in nearby Joppa, disciples sent two men to ask Peter to come at once. Peter went with them, was taken to the upstairs room where the body lay, asked those grieving to leave the room, got down on his knees and prayed, and invited Tabitha to “get up.” He presented the widow alive, and **Acts 9:42** says that many people believed in the Lord. While in Joppa, Peter stayed at the home of Simon the tanner.

Read **Acts 10:9–29**. Compare the details of Peter’s vision in verses 9–16 with that of Cornelius. _____

What significance comes to mind when you notice the fact that the vision is repeated three times (verse 16)? _____

Which words indicate that Peter does not immediately understand the vision? _____

How does the Spirit prepare Peter for the arrival of Cornelius’ servants? _____

Which verses show the meaning of Peter’s vision? _____

What was the meaning? _____

Restate the meaning in your own words. _____

Why do you think this vision was necessary (verses 14 and 28; **Galatians 2:7**)? _____

How does Peter's response in verses 17–29 confirm the saying, "God doesn't call the qualified; He qualifies the called"? _____

In what way(s) does this experience fulfill **Acts 1:8**? _____

Read **Acts 10:34–48**. What is Peter's realization in verses 34 and 47–48? _____

List essential elements of the Gospel message expressed in Peter's witness in verses 34–43. _____

Jerusalem Accusation and Peter's Explanation

When the Holy Spirit *came on all who heard the message (Acts 10:44–46)*, Peter is quite confident that he has understood correctly: God wants all to be saved. When Peter returns to Jerusalem, the apostles and brothers throughout Judea have already heard about the Joppa event.

Read **Acts 11:1–18**. According to these verses, on what basis did the church at Jerusalem criticize Peter's visit to Cornelius? _____

How does Peter use the description of his experience to present his case in a logical way? _____

How does personal experience enrich our witness? _____

Do restrictions such as verses 1–2 exist today? ____ If so, please give an example. _____

What limits our contact with a variety of cultures within our own communities? _____

How does this limit our relationships? _____

Why do you think we tend to undervalue those with whom we are not yet acquainted? _____

What makes us uncomfortable in situations that are cross-cultural? _____

How is it possible to communicate even without a common language? _____

For Further Study and/or Discussion

Look up the passages from this Bible study in another translation and/or paraphrase.

Locate and read Edwin Markham's short poem "Outwitted." Reread the poem out loud, substituting feminine pronouns for "he" and "his" and remembering that "God is love." Memorize the poem so that, when the opportunity arises, you can share it with others.

Listen to, or read, the lyrics of "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught," from the musical *South Pacific* (1949, composed by Richard Rodgers, with lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, book by Hammerstein and Joshua Logan).

Read chapter 12 ("No Oddballs Allowed") in Philip Yancey's book, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (published in 1997 by Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan).

Who/what builds our confidence? _____

What are some things that we can do to ensure that we reach beyond our usual boundaries? _____

Old Habits Hard to Break

Paul recounts that during a later visit to Jerusalem, those in the church there saw that God was at work in his preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles, just as He was in Peter's work as an apostle to the Jews. Paul set before the church the Gospel he [Paul] was preaching to the Gentiles. Even Titus, who was with him, had not been compelled to be circumcised. James, Peter, and John gave to Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. Paul presumes upon their common faith and fellowship to admonish Peter in Antioch.

Read **Galatians 2:11–16**. According to Paul, how is Peter in the wrong? _____

What consequences could have developed had the situation continued? _____

Why is it easy to return to old patterns of behavior? _____

List opportunities to reach out that are already present in your life. _____

With whom will you share the love of Christ? _____

Closing

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb (Revelation 7:9).

Say or sing together: "Lord of All Nations, Grant Me Grace" (*LSB* #844), "We Are Called to Stand Together" (*LSB* #828), or "Jesus Shall Reign" (*LSB* #832; *LW* #312; *TLH* #511).

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, You call us to witness to every nation, tribe, language, and people. Give us awareness to be mindful of the opportunities we have, courage to reach out to all Your people, and boldness to tell of Your love from our own personal experience. Amen.