

Connecting Heart to Heart

Leader's Guide

Part I: Awareness

PURPOSE: The goal of this Bible study is to help us examine our own attitudes about cross-cultural interactions and to challenge us to build bridges to, and friendships within, groups beyond our present boundaries – connecting Heart to Heart. **NOTE:** All references are from the NIV.

Introduction: 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 ... ”* (Matt. 28:19-20 NIV). Both our Savior and the disciple Peter modeled this gospel outreach for us.

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/were special to your family during one or more of our holiday celebrations. Now share one of those traditions, and its origin if you know it, with a partner or in a small group. **answers will vary**

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.

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? **verse 3 about 3 o’clock in the afternoon**

Who visits him? **an angel of God**
What is Cornelius’ response? **called two servants and one soldier, told them what the angel said, and sent them to Joppa to bring back Peter**

List several characteristics you would ascribe to Cornelius. **sample answers: devout; God-fearing; giving; prayerful; obedient; respected; respectful**

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.

Peter: about noon; voice + sheet; Peter answered 3 times, "Surely not, Lord!"; wondered; went with men (More!)

Cornelius: 3 p.m.; angel; Cornelius asked once: "What is it, Lord?"; understood; sent men to find Peter (More!)

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

sample answers: a new concept needs reinforcement; reminds us of the Trinity; confident he (Peter) was sent to the Jews, but mission to the Gentiles was a whole new idea

Which words indicate that Peter does not immediately understand the vision? verse 14 "Surely not, Lord."; verse 17 wondering about the meaning; verse 19 still thinking about the vision

How does the Spirit prepare Peter for the arrival of Cornelius' servants? prayer; Spirit tells him to get up, go downstairs, do not hesitate to go with them, for they are sent by Him

Which verses show the meaning of Peter's vision? What was the meaning? verse 15: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean"; verse 28: "I should not call any man impure or unclean";

Restate the meaning in your own words. answers will vary

Why do you think this vision was necessary (verses 14 and 28; Gal. 2:7)? Peter was sent to the Jews; lived under the law to reach them; was not to enter house of uncircumcised; Peter needed a dramatic and forceful message to prompt change in his behavior

How does Peter's response in verses 17-29 confirm the phrase, "God doesn't call the qualified; He qualifies the called."? sample answers: Peter had no experience witnessing to Gentiles; he uses his understanding of the vision and the power of the Holy Spirit to answer the call without raising any objection (v..29)

In what way(s) does this experience fulfill Acts 1:8? Peter witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and elsewhere; he receives power from the Holy Spirit

Read **Acts 10:34-48**.

What is Peter's realization in verses 34 and 47-48? God accepts all people, and all may come to Christ and be baptized; the Holy Spirit has been poured out on Cornelius' household, just as on the circumcised with Peter

List essential elements of the gospel message expressed in Peter's witness in verses 34-43. verses 36-43; compare to the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed

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? **verse 3: they said that he "went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them"**

How does Peter use the description of his experience to present his case in a logical way? **his realization --> message of God to Israel --> his personal witness (Gospel) --> others' witness**

How does personal experience enrich our witness? **sample answers: it is real; it comes from the heart; it makes connections; it confirms the truth of God's Word**

Do restrictions such as verses 1-2 exist today? **yes**

If so, please give an example. **sample answers: cultural, religious and political; answers will vary**

What limits our contact with a variety of cultures within our own communities? **sample answers: tendency to stay in our own groups; inability to communicate in another language; fear; discomfort**

How does this limit our relationships? **sample answers: we miss opportunities to interact, to witness, and to create new friendships**

Why do you think we tend to undervalue those with whom we are not yet acquainted? **sample answers: we don't understand them; we are fearful of differences; we have not yet encountered their best qualities; we have no basis for "accurate evaluation"**

What makes us uncomfortable in situations that are cross-cultural? **sample answers: fear of the unknown; not understanding the language and/or customs; fear of making mistakes in etiquette; we are out of our comfort zone; old teachings and beliefs can hinder us (see also page of additional resources.)**

How is it possible to communicate even without a common language? **sample answers: smile; laughter; gesture; touch; food; music; care/compassion; children**

Who/what builds our confidence? **the Holy Spirit; practice; the Great Commission; answers will vary**

What are some things that we can do to insure that we reach beyond our usual boundaries? **sample answers: attend alternate language church services; enjoy "food and culture" festivals; make an effort to be friendly to one person; be a greeter at church; invite someone new to LWML events and introduce her to others (More!)**

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? hypocrisy; verse 12 Peter used to eat with Gentiles, but when certain men came from James, he began to draw back and separate himself from them; verse 14 he was living like and with Gentiles, but forcing them to follow Jewish customs; he was putting law before Gospel

What consequences could have developed had the situation continued? sample answers: the Christian outreach to Gentiles might become confused and/or limited; it might lead others astray

Why is it easy to return to old patterns of behavior? sample answers: fear; we are imperfect and inconsistent; we grow by small steps; it takes time to establish a new habit, it is easy to return to the old way; it takes less energy; we know the new may be criticized; want to stay in comfort zone

List opportunities to reach out that are already present in your life. answers will vary

With whom will you share the love of Christ? answers will vary and may be private

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 ...”* (Rev. 7:9 NIV).

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.

For Further Study and/or Discussion:

NOTE to Leader: More information concerning the suggestions below may be found in the “Additional Resources” on the last page of the Leader’s Guide (see below).

Study the passages above in another translation and/or paraphrase.

Locate and read Edwin Markham’s short poem called “Outwitted.” (Type <“Outwitted”; Edwin Markham> into a search engine.) 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). If you don’t have access to the sound track, the words and/or the song may be available on line.

Read chapter 12 (entitled “No Oddballs Allowed”) in Philip Yancey’s book, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* It was published in 1997 by Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND INFORMATION
LEADER'S GUIDE
Parts I and II

(I) *What's So Amazing About Grace?* by Philip Yancey was published in 1997 by Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. While Chapter 12 is particularly appropriate to this study, all the chapters are thought-provoking.

(I) The poem "Outwitted" is the first one in Markham's book *The Shoes of Happiness and Other Poems* (Publisher: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1915). The full text of the poem (four lines) may be found at several locations on the Internet.

(I) In the musical *South Pacific* (1949, composed by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, book by Hammerstein and Joshua Logan), Lieutenant Cable sings "You've Got to be Carefully Taught." If it is available to you, play the song for participants. If not, find the words on line. Listen/read/sing and discuss.

(II) To research the Internet for varied cultural attitudes toward interrupting, non-verbal communication, typical distance between conversationalists, physical touch, discussing money, try entering a phrase such as: <cultural differences; eye contact>.

(II) In *Angel Unaware*, first published in 1953, (special edition 2004; Publisher Revell), Dale Evans Rogers tells the poignant story of daughter Robin Elizabeth, who died of complications of Down Syndrome. Evans was very influential in changing public perceptions of children with special needs and served as a role model for many parents.

(II) "Jesus Loves the Little Children" was written by George F. Root (1820-1895), who wrote the words and music for several well known hymns. The chorus may be found in *The Other Song Book, Revised Edition*, published in 1987 by The Fellowship Publications. Words are also available on line.