

## Out of Your Comfort Zone

Acts 10:1-33

### I. Getting out of your comfort zone is required by God; 10:1-8.

*<sup>1</sup> At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. <sup>2</sup> He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. <sup>3</sup> 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!" <sup>4</sup> Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. <sup>5</sup> Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. <sup>6</sup> He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea." <sup>7</sup> When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. <sup>8</sup> He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.*

Cornelius and his family were devout and God-fearing. Two features about the devotion of Cornelius were his generosity to the needy and his regular prayers. Cornelius had a vision at about three in the afternoon. This was one of the three traditional Jewish times of prayer, and Cornelius later tells Peter that he was praying at the time.

During Cornelius's prayer, he receives a vision through an angel. The angel tells Cornelius to summon Peter from Joppa. His message says nothing about what will happen because of his coming. Despite the lack of details, Cornelius obeys immediately.

God-fearing, moral people still need Jesus. Your obedience is absolutely necessary to be who God is calling you to be. God always pushes us beyond our comfort for His kingdom, our growth, and the use of the gospel.

### II. Getting out of your comfort zone requires repenting of some core beliefs; 10:9-16.

*<sup>9</sup> About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. <sup>10</sup> He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. <sup>11</sup> He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to*

*earth by its four corners.* <sup>12</sup> *It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air.* <sup>13</sup> *Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."* <sup>14</sup> *"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."* <sup>15</sup> *The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."* <sup>16</sup> *This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.*

Having set out, the attendants approached Joppa about noon the next day. Peter had gone up to the roof to pray. Hungry and waiting for a meal to be prepared, he fell into a trance. Peter had to be prepared for the encounter as well as Cornelius. There were core beliefs of Peter that had to be overcome. A God-fearing Gentile like Cornelius had no objection to the culture of Jews, but even a moderate Jew would not willingly enter the home of a Gentile, God-fearer or not.

Peter saw something like a large sheet descending from heaven, containing representatives of animals—four-footed animals, reptiles of the land, and birds of the air. It symbolized the entire animal world and included clean as well as unclean animals. A voice from heaven commanded Peter to get up, kill from among the animals, and satisfy his hunger. Peter was confused by the vision and objected strongly. What the voice requested was strictly against the law. He had never eaten anything defiled and unclean. The voice ignored his protest, reissuing the command and adding, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." The command came three times; each time Peter objected and fell into further confusion.

The revolutionary message to Peter came while he was engaged in prayer. God spoke to Cornelius also when he was in prayer. Prayer gets us in tune with God and receptive to His leading.

Our core beliefs from how and where we grew up are deep set. They often even get connected with what is right and wrong or seen as what God wants. They are so strong that even the Word of God seems confusing when it tells us to violate or repent of those beliefs.

### **III. Getting out of your comfort zone requires obedience; 10:17-23a.**

<sup>17</sup> *While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate.* <sup>18</sup> *They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.* <sup>19</sup> *While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three*

*men are looking for you. <sup>20</sup> So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." <sup>21</sup> Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?" <sup>22</sup> The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." <sup>23</sup> Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.*

The answer to Peter's confusion was beginning as Cornelius's messengers arrived. The Spirit directed Peter to the three messengers standing at the gate and identified them as men He had sent. Peter descended, identified himself, and asked why they were seeking him.

The messengers emphasized the devoutness of Cornelius and the leading of God and informed Peter that Cornelius wanted to hear what he had to say. That Peter was beginning to understand is demonstrated by his inviting them to spend the evening as guests.

At first Peter strongly refused to be open to change. He had strong convictions. But when he sensed that God was teaching him something new, he reevaluated his beliefs. Thus, both divine guidance and Peter's willingness to grasp what God was showing him combined to produce a change in his thinking, even though it was something he was uncomfortable with. A passion for obedience makes God's servants open to changes with situations where they may be uncomfortable.

Are you making the connections about what God is doing and your role? Or are you choosing to remain in confusion, not taking the steps of faith the Spirit is leading you to take? Unlike Peter, our stubborn hearts can close our minds and refuse to listen to God's promptings toward change. Making these changes is often difficult. Obedience is where the clarity comes from. How sad to hear God's word and yet say that it can't be God, because it doesn't fit with your beliefs.

#### **IV. Getting out of your comfort zone requires repenting wrong core beliefs; 10:23b-33.**

*The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along. <sup>24</sup> The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. <sup>25</sup> As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. <sup>26</sup>*

*But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself." 27 Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. 28 He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?" 30 Cornelius answered: "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me 31 and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. 32 Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' 33 So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."*

Meanwhile Cornelius gathered his relatives and close friends in his house, ready for Peter's arrival. After a polite conversation with Cornelius, Peter related the unusual circumstances of his coming. Everyone present needed to realize how unacceptable it was for a Jew to associate closely or even visit in the home of a Gentile. God, however, had shown Peter that he should not call another person impure or unclean.

Still, Peter had not realized the full implication of God's sending him to Cornelius. So, he asked Cornelius why he had sent for him. Cornelius responded by reiterating his vision. "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us." Rarely does one find as receptive an audience as Peter found here. The stage is set to move to the next scene: the proclamation of the gospel.

Everyone there, however, including Peter, was certain of one thing: God had brought them together. Cornelius also knew that God brought Peter to him to share something important. That is why he assembled family and friends. Peter had a message - the gospel, the word of life. It was now clear to him why God had led him there. He was to share the message of salvation through Jesus before this gathering of Gentiles.

When people realize that they are accepted as significant and useful to the kingdom not because of any merit of their own but only because of the mercy of God, they also realize that they cannot look down on anyone. They cannot stay in their comfort zones. If we do not feel secure and accepted in Christ, we focus on things like comfort, the familiar, and preferences that make us feel important and secure.

When Peter realized that he had been wrong about his earlier core beliefs, he readily admitted that in his conversation with Cornelius. When he preached to the crowd, he again publicly confessed the lesson he had learned: God shows no favoritism. This attitude of willingness to accept and repent of past wrong core beliefs goes a long way in healing relationships ruptured through prejudice. It also opens an opportunity for the presentation of the gospel. We should, like Cornelius, gather people to hear the gospel.