

Pastor Kyle Mercer
Good...Is Not Good Enough

September 17, 2023

Series: One

Acts 10-11

**BIG IDEA – GOD IS ALWAYS PREPARING BOTH THE BELIEVER
AND THE UNBELIEVER FOR THE NEXT GOSPEL CONVERSATION**

Who is your one? That is the question we are answering in this series, which is much more than a series. It's an initiative. If you're new, welcome. If you didn't get a book last week, you can grab one at the welcome tent. Guys, here's what we're doing as a church. We're asking this question: What would it look like for everybody in the church...? By the way, this isn't a church vision; this is an individual vision for you.

What would it look like if you (if you call yourself a Christian, that is)...? What if you built one relationship and took one gospel risk to bring Christ to that relationship? Here's how we're saying it: *What would it look like for you to take personal risks to bring Christ to every relationship?*

Here's what I want you to know, guys. If you're new to Two Cities, maybe even if you've been coming around for a while, I want you to know this about Two Cities: we are not playing church. Okay? There are certain places you can go and you play church there. This is not Christian karaoke and a TED talk. That's not what we're doing here. We are on mission together, and we're saying, "Guys, get on the bus. We're headed up the hill. We're on a journey and a time of spiritual renewal."

You saw that video. Don't you want videos like that about your life and people you know? Of course you do. Guys, the only way the gospel goes forward is one relationship, one risk at a time. How do we reach many? We reach many by everybody reaching one more. How do we reach everyone? We reach everyone by you reaching one.

Now, we gave you a card. You don't have to do it right now. You can do it while I'm praying. You can do it while I'm preaching, or whatever. We want you to write down... Hopefully you've wrestled with this this week. Who is that one person that you're going to take personal responsibility for the Great Commission, and you're going to go, "God, I believe the gospel goes forward one invitation, one prayer, one conversation, one question at a time, and I am committed to taking personal responsibility for this person"?

By the way, if you're not ready to write somebody else's name down, do you know what you need to do? You need to write *your* name down. You need to go, "I'm not in the place I thought I was spiritually. God has to do a great work in me. If I can't think of one person's name to write down and I don't want to do this, then God has to do something in me." So, some of you are going to need to put *your* name down.

Here's what we're going to do. At the end of my sermon, we're going to pray, and you're going to bring the cards up. You're going to drop them in a basket. We're going to pray over them as staff and elders. We're going to trust God with you, and it's going to be symbolic. Then we're going to give you one of *these*.

If you're a man, this is a wristband. If you're a woman, it's a bracelet. There you go. You can grab one of these. It says on it "One." It's not showy. It's meant to be simple. If you don't want to wear it, don't wear it, but for most of us, it's going to be a great reminder when we look down at our wrist multiple times a day. "I need to be praying for my one, and I need to be pursuing my one."

Guys, this is a big moment. By the way...just a quick sidenote...today is our seventh anniversary as a church. Isn't that great? Praise the Lord. Here's the most exciting thing. I get to travel a lot and meet a lot of other pastors and meet a lot of other churches. I'm just telling you, something special is happening here.

Here's the most unique thing about seven years in: it genuinely feels like we're just getting started. We're not slowing down. God is using this series and this initiative to prepare us for our new home and hub on Patterson Avenue. So, let's pray, and then let's get to work. Pray with me.

Lord, we are committing right now, as individuals, to take the Bible seriously. We're not playing church. We believe the cross of Jesus Christ matters. We believe that it makes a difference. We believe in heaven and hell. We believe in the necessity to have conscious, saving faith in Christ. We believe in sin, grace, repentance, and truth, and all of that's coming to a focus as we're saying, "We want to bring that message to one person who's far from God but close to us...our one."

Lord, I pray that you would, in this series, protect our church. I know that as we're heading into a series that's about something as important as advancing the mission of the church, what's going to happen in a lot of our lives is there's going to be spiritual warfare.

There's going to be spiritual warfare in marriages and in families and sin struggles and temptations. I pray that you would protect us, Lord, that we might take the gospel to one more and, therefore, reach many more. I pray this in Jesus' name. And all God's people said, "Amen."

All right, guys. I'm not the first to say this, but you need to hear this. I need to hear this. The greatest hindrance to God's mission is the failure of God's people. I know. It's not encouraging, but this is where we're going to start today. It's not where we're going to end. The greatest hindrance to God's mission is the failure of you and me. All you have to do is think about it for five minutes, and that'll make sense.

Yeah, Jesus Christ... You hear it every time we do baptism. Jesus Christ did everything necessary to save you. He did the heavy lifting and the hard work. He lived a sinless life. He died. He rose again. He ascended into heaven. He gave his Spirit. He gave his Word. He gave his church. Yet why are we reaching so few people? We're going to talk about this today. It's because we're not ready. It's because you're not ready. God gets us ready.

If you'll turn to Acts, chapter 10, I want to tell you something very important. If you have to leave early, this is the big idea. By the way, today we're in the largest, longest narrative in the book of Acts about two guys who don't know each other and are about to meet, Cornelius and Peter. We're moving today from Paul to Peter, and then we'll move back to Paul.

Here's the big idea for this whole section: *God is always preparing both the unbeliever and the believer for the next gospel conversation.* That's why we have this portion of Scripture. That's it. I'm convinced it's the main idea of this text. God is always preparing the Christian to share the gospel. He may even be doing a ONE Initiative through the church to help him do that. And he's always preparing the unbeliever to hear the gospel. So, you need to believe that.

By the way, that's an element or aspect of faith. You are believing, "God is at work in my life, and I believe God is at work in the lives of the people I meet, and I believe God actually brought us together for a purpose." Let me give you the whole thing we're going to get into, and then we'll get into it.

We're going to meet this guy named Cornelius, and he lives far away from this other guy named Peter, whom you know. When we see what happens... God comes into Cornelius'

life, and he works on Cornelius to get Cornelius ready to hear the gospel. Then way over here in Joppa, far away...they've never met each other...God is working in Peter's life to get Peter ready to share the gospel.

Then he has to, through some crazy circumstances, bring them together, and then we'll see this. This is the saddest part. We'll get here in about 40 minutes. The saddest part is when they meet each other, they still don't know why they met each other. Peter still doesn't know what to do, and Cornelius still doesn't know what to do. God is gracious, and we'll see how all this works out.

01 CORNELIUS & RELIGIOUSLY LOST PEOPLE

Turn with me to Acts, chapter 10. I want you to see that God is always preparing you and preparing the non-Christian in your life to hear the gospel. All right. Here we go. **"At Caesarea..."** This is north of Jerusalem. **"...there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion..."** So, he's a successful Roman soldier. A centurion was someone over 100 people.

"...a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort..." He's going to be the first European convert. **"...a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God."** We have to talk about Cornelius, because our city, Winston-Salem, is full of Corneliuses.

A couple things about Cornelius. The first thing is he's a Gentile. Here's what you need to know. This will discourage you and hopefully encourage you at the same time. It's always helpful to put the Bible together and go, "Where are we in time? What year is it? How much time has passed?"

Here's what has happened. It has been 10 years, one decade, since Pentecost. So, it has been 10 years since the Holy Spirit fell and Jesus ascended to heaven and the mission to go into all nations was given to the church. Why do I bring that up? Because it has been 10 years, and they still haven't had their first Gentile believer. It has been 10 years, and they haven't had their first Gentile convert.

I think it's a huge critique on the church, but it's very honest about your life. I mean, here's what's going to happen. As soon as we... And we do this, hopefully, in the warmest way possible. As soon as we press on you to share with your sister, you're going to have that conversation. You know, "I've been a Christian for 12 years, and I've never said anything to her." It's like, "Yeah, I know." It took 10 years to reach Cornelius. It's okay.

We say, "You're in your neighborhood for a reason," and you think to yourself, "I hate my neighbors." You're like, "I haven't talked to my neighbors... I mean, a little bit of 'Hello' and 'Goodbye,' but it has been eight years I've lived in this neighborhood." It's okay. Wherever you are is where you start.

This is what a spiritual leader does. Every once in a while, a spiritual leader will come to an environment, and this is what they'll say: "Hey, guys, why hasn't anybody reached that person yet?" It's actually the missionary spirit. Every missionary goes, "Hey, do you know there's this tribe in India that has no access to the gospel? Is there a reason nobody is going there?" Everyone is like, "Uh..."

Like, "We'll go. We're going to go reach new people. We're going to do new things. We're going to go to new places." So, the first thing is I want you to realize the early church is in a situation like you and I find ourselves in. We're a little embarrassed it has been so long since we've reached the people in our lives we need to reach.

The second thing you need to know about Cornelius... This is kind of interesting. Who knows who God is going to call you to? Peter would not like Cornelius. Why? First, he's a Gentile. Secondly, he's in the Roman military, and the job of the Roman military was to oppress the Jews, basically. So, here's another principle you need to understand: God may call you to reach people who are not like you and who you don't like.

I've had so many conversations this week with elders and staff and my Community Group and other people. This one lady this week said, "Pastor Kyle?" I said, "Yeah?" She goes, "I think I've got my one." I said, "That's great." She said, "Here's the only problem: I don't like her." Praise the Lord. We're going to get here. God is going to have to do something in you all the time before God is going to be able to do something through you.

Here's the other thing. This is why I say Winston-Salem is crawling with Corneliuses. By the way, Cornelius is not a Christian, but he's a great guy. Cornelius is religious. He's moral. He's conservative. He's a great neighbor, an awesome uncle, and a fantastic employee. The only problem is he doesn't know Jesus.

Your temptation and mine with a guy like Paul, from last week... We think of certain people like, "They're too far gone." We're like, "He's the crazy frat boy. He's getting drunk. He's part of the hookup/shack-up/breakup culture. He's an atheist. He's too far gone." That's Paul.

Then we look at guys like Cornelius and think, "Well, he's _____ (11:34). Shucks. Don't guys like that get a hall pass? I mean, he believes in God, and he gives money to the church or, I don't know, the Rotary Club or the Winston-Salem Rescue Mission." We'll see in a second he's a generous guy.

Here's what we need to understand here. By the way, in a room this size, for sure, we have a couple of Corneliuses in here. Here's what Cornelius needs to hear: being good...is not good enough. This is what religious people believe. They believe there are good people and bad people, and the good people are in *here*, and the bad people are out *there*. The gospel says, actually, there are bad people and there is Jesus. That's it.

This will be shocking. You can tell a religious person, because they cannot handle this statement: *good people don't go to heaven*. That will mess with somebody who grew up in a religious church. Then they would ask, and it's the right question to ask, "If good people don't go to heaven, then who goes to heaven?" The answer is "Good people don't go to heaven; forgiven people go to heaven."

So, I want you to meet Cornelius. He's a guy who most people think doesn't need God. Why? Because he's a good guy. Secondly, because he has a lot of religious activity. Do you notice that? He's giving. I mean, there's no direct connection between having religious activity and being a born-again Christian.

There are people who can be converted to church culture but not converted to Christ. Do you understand that? They know how to dress. They know how to talk. They know how to say they're struggling with things when they're not; they're just giving in. They know how to say they're praying about it when they're not; they're just thinking about it.

They know all of the language. If they're called on to say a prayer at dinner, they know how to do it for 10 seconds. Woe to us. They have been converted to church culture, not converted to Christ. Did you notice that he's a spiritual man? It says he prays all the time. Okay. This is another thing. It's not enough to just generically believe in God. God does not want us to have a fuzzy view of him. He sends his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as our Savior.

So, here's what we would call Cornelius. Cornelius is religiously lost. Some of you are religiously lost. I had a guy in his 70s call me one time. I was like, "Why is this guy calling me?" He's in our church. He's a great guy, but I didn't know him well. I thought, "This is kind of strange." He calls me. He says, "Pastor Kyle, I've got to tell you. You know how you talk about religiously lost people?" I said, "Yeah," and we started talking. I'm not thinking it's going to go this way.

He goes, "I'm religiously lost." I thought, "I didn't know that." He says, "Yeah. I just came to Christ. I need to get baptized. I'm in my 70s." I thought, "Man! There are religiously lost people in our church." They're in church, but they're not in Christ. See, there are two ways you can be lost: rebelliously lost and religiously lost.

If you want to see rebelliously lost people, get in your car, drive three hours, and go to downtown Asheville. It's like, "There you are. There you are." Right? Rebelliously lost people. It's like, "Okay. You hate your parents, you're living an alternative lifestyle, and you came here to hide." Those are rebelliously lost people, and we get it.

I actually think it's easier to lead a rebelliously lost person to Christ, because they're like, "Yeah, I hate my dad. Yes, I'm living an alternative lifestyle. No, I wouldn't say I'm a Christian. No, I don't know if there's a God. Yes, sin is what I do. That's my hobby: sinning. Yes." It's like, "Okay. Well, then we can work with you."

Sometimes the hardest thing is getting someone, not found, but getting them lost. The religious person is so hard, because they know all of the right things to say. So, the rebellious person needs to repent of their badness, and the religious person needs to repent of their goodness.

We'll see here. I'll show you what happens. So, an angel shows up and speaks to Cornelius. Verse 3: **"About the ninth hour of the day he [Cornelius] saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, 'Cornelius.' And he stared at him in terror and said, 'What is it, Lord?'"**

This is exactly how you would respond if an angel appeared in your bedroom. Right? Don't think chubby baby with a diaper on. That is not what an angel is. Okay? If an angel appeared to you in the middle of the night, and you were in your bed, you would be changing your sheets in the morning. That's what would happen.

He's scared, and he should be. An angel appears to him, and this is what he says. **"And he said to him, 'Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God.'"** What does that mean? "Anybody who seeks me will be found by me," God says. "I will come after the person who's seeking me."

Here's what this means. I know some of you read the Bible and go, "Wait a second, Kyle. There's this verse in Romans 3 that says, 'No one seeks God. No, not one.' But wait a second. There are all of these other verses in the Old Testament that say, 'If you seek me with all your heart, you will find me, and I will be found by you.'"

What does this mean? If somebody is seeking God, that means God is already at work in their life. Part of what you're looking for, among other things, is...*Where is God working?* Where is there already spiritual interest? God is at work. Something happened in this guy's life or he's asking questions. Where is God at work?

So, he says, "I'm going to answer your prayers." Look at what happens in verse 5. **"And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter."** Here it is, guys. God is

bringing people together on purpose, for a purpose. God is bringing unbelievers into your life, if you're a believer, on purpose, for a purpose, and you have to start seeing life this way.

You have to stop having some pessimistic view. So many people have a pessimistic view. "I hate my boss. My neighbors are annoying." Or worse, "They'll never believe. They're not interested." Here's what you need to believe: "If they are in my life, God is working in their life, because God is working in my life. If God brought them into my life, he must be at work in their life, because I'm in their life." That's such a positive view.

It's like, "God must be at work in my kids' lives." Why? "Because he gave them Christian parents. Maybe that's why." Some of you are thinking about your brother. You're thinking about your dad. You're thinking about your mom. You're thinking about your grandpa. I had this lady last night. She was like, "I know who my one is. It's my brother who's 10 years younger than me." Yeah, you know who it is.

The first thing Satan wants to do is discourage you. You need to say, "You know what? God must be working in my brother's life who's 10 years younger than me." Why? "Because I'm in his life, and our church is going through an initiative in which God is working in our lives so that we can reach out to other people."

That's so exciting! You know, you go out to dinner. You're like, "God must be at work in this waitress' life." Why? "Because they stepped into my life." If you want to have a faith-filled, hopeful, optimistic, "God is going to use me," that has to be your conviction. He's bringing Peter to meet with Cornelius. Look at verse 6.

"He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.' When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa."

Now, we don't know our Bibles as well as the first readers of the Bible. They would have been Jews reading the Bible. When you hear "Joppa," you go, "That's an interesting place." When you hear Joppa, you should think of one person: Jonah. Jonah lived in Joppa.

Jonah got a message that he should share the gospel in Nineveh, and according to *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, guess where he heads: not Nineveh. That's what it says. That's what *you* would do. He headed in the exact opposite direction. Now we come back to Peter. He's in Joppa. He's going to get a message to share the gospel with Cornelius, and he's not going to go in the other direction, but he's going to go do that. I'll show you this in a second.

02 THE PREPARATION OF PETER

Now here's Peter. I showed you. In the first eight verses, God is preparing the unbeliever, Cornelius. Now God is going to prepare the believer, Peter. Look here. ***"The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray."***

I can't talk about this a lot this week. I'm going to talk about it a lot next week, but everything starts with prayer. This is like the first thing we're asking people to do. So many of us... We almost never pray. We do zipper prayers. We begin and end things in prayer. We pray a little bit in the morning, a little bit at night, a little bit before a meal, and a little bit before our kids go to bed, but we don't do what Peter does.

Did you notice Peter has a time and place to pray? Would that change your life? I think it might. Actually, by the way, the sixth hour is noon, which means Peter liked to take part of his lunch break to pray. Not a bad idea. Then he has a place. He says, "I'm going to go..." You know, everybody back then was poor, basically...everybody. So, they had these one-floor homes, and on top they had a flat roof, and they turned that flat roof into a deck so Mom and Dad had somewhere to get away occasionally.

So, he goes up there. What would happen in your life if you said, "You know what? I'm going to start picking a time and a place, and I'm going to just pray for 10 or 15 minutes. I don't even know what's going to happen. I'm going to pray until I can pray, and then pray until I have prayed. I'm going to see what God does." It's in the midst of Peter's prayer that God speaks to him. I want to show you this.

"And he became hungry..." I do love the honesty here. Have you ever been praying and got hungry or were like, "I think someone texted me" or "Did anyone update social media?" We're all like that. Or you've been praying, and you go, "That was so long. That was probably an hour," and you look, and it was four minutes. You're like, "I don't know what happened." We've all had that happen.

I appreciate the honesty. Here he is. ***"And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance..."*** You might go, "What is a trance?" It's what some of you fall into while I preach. This is like daydreaming. You're supposed to be one place, but you're thinking about something else. So, he falls into this trance, and he sees.

"...and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and

birds of the air." So, he gets this weird vision. Let me explain it to you. God is dealing with Peter's heart toward the Gentiles. Also, at the same time... He has to deal with a lot of things.

He's dealing with the food laws, or what are called the *ceremonial laws* in the Old Testament. I want to try to simplify something that's very complex for us right now. The *ceremonial laws* were laws God put in place in the Old Testament to make his people distinct, and they basically had two categories: diet and dress.

Have you ever gotten on a plane and gone to Africa or gotten on a plane and gone to Mumbai or gotten on a plane and gone to China? As soon as you get there, you're overwhelmed by two things: how everybody is dressed and what everybody is eating. This is what brings distinctions.

Back then, God taught them there were clean foods, and then there were these unclean foods. For example... I hate to say this, but you used to not be able to eat bacon under the old covenant. Aren't we all glad...? We're like, "Thank you, Lord Jesus. Thank you. We can now eat bacon."

He's trying to basically say, "There's no clean and unclean food anymore, and there are no clean and unclean people anymore." That's what he's going to get at. You'll see this in a minute. In fact, maybe the best way to think about it... Don't think that the Jews are clean and the Gentiles are unclean. How about you think about this? We're all unclean, but Christ can make any of us clean. That's what he's trying to say. I'll show you.

Verse 13: ***"And there..."*** Can you imagine God saying this? You have this image of reptiles and all of these animals. ***"And there came a voice to him: 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.'"*** Every vegetarian hates this verse, but this is what it says. ***"But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord...'"*** You can't say that to God. You can't say, "No, Lord." That's an oxymoron, like *jumbo shrimp* or *airplane food* or *Microsoft Works*. These are words you can't put together.

Anyway, he says, "No, Lord." This is it, guys. He says, ***"...for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean."*** It's almost a statement of pride for him. God wants to say, "Your 'I have nevers' need to change." He's going to have to start eating some unclean food if he's going to meet the Gentiles, if he's going to be in their house, if he's going to share the gospel.

Some of you have too many "I have nevers" as we've entered this series. You know, "I have never thought about just sharing the gospel with one person. I have never prayed for lost people. I have never initiated a conversation about Christ. I have never shared my

testimony with somebody. I've never invited someone to church. I've never offered to read the Bible with somebody else. I've never asked if I could pray."

It's like, "Well, welcome," because all of your "I have nevers" need to be "I'm going to start doing." So, he tells this to Peter, and look at how Peter responds. ***"And the voice came to him again a second time, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.'"*** Here's the main thing with the preparation of Peter, and it's with you and me too. God is saying, "You're going to have to grow before you'll be ready to go."

Before you can do the mission necessary, you need to personally mature. If you're going to go wider in mission, you're going to have to go deeper in discipleship in your own life. Now, here's what I feel. This is what I feel after launching this series last week and, again, talking to leaders and elders and staff and my Community Group and other people.

I have two deep, deep convictions 8 to 10 days into this, or whatever it is. The first conviction is this is the exact right series. This is the series, because this is what's going to prepare us for our new home and hub. I feel like this is what the Holy Spirit loves to do. He loves to save sinners. He loves to give people hope. He loves to change destinies, lineages, legacies, and eternities.

So I'm 100 percent... I've never been more certain that this is the right series at the right time for our church. So, that's the encouraging part. Here's the discouraging part. My second conviction after talking to people all week for the last seven days is our church is not ready for this series, sadly. I have to break it to me. Our church is not as mature as I thought it was.

I mean, yes, you guys like good Bible teaching, you like worship, you like some cultural analysis, and you like good "age and stage" ministries for your kids, but most of us are not where we need to be with sharing Christ with other people. I know it because of the conversations I've had this week. The number of people who have said, "I don't have any non-Christians in my life at all..."

By the way, here's the encouraging thing. Wherever you are is where you begin. Wherever you are, that's where you start. For some people, we need to repent that we have been in such a monastery mindset, such a bomb-shelter mindset, that we have no relationships with anybody who is far from God.

There are other people who have said, "You know what? I have never in my whole life talked to another person about Jesus." You talk to this person, and you're like, "Well, how long have you been a Christian?" "Twenty-two years." You start asking, "How is that even possible?"

I mean, you ask all of these deep, theological questions. How can the Holy Spirit live inside someone like that, and how can they tell nobody about Jesus for 22 years? There are people who are like, "I've never read the Bible with somebody else. I've never gone public with my faith." We have to grow, guys.

Peter had to deal with personal issues and cultural issues, and you'll have to deal with the same. I don't know what your personal issue is. For most of us, it's that we care too much about what other people think about us. God help us. I was talking to my kids yesterday. I have an 11-, 9-, and 7-year-old.

My 9- and 7-year-olds, my boys, were with me, and I said, "Guys, who's going to be your one?" They said, "Well, Dad, basically everyone we know is a Christian." I started thinking. I'm like, "That's basically true." I said, "Well, we're going to soccer. You guys are on a soccer team. Is there anybody on the soccer team who's far from God and close to you who you could talk about Jesus with?"

I appreciate it. My youngest, my 7-year-old, goes, "Dad, it's super awkward to talk to someone about Jesus who's not a Christian." I'm like, "This is exactly how our entire church feels." Out of the mouth of babes and infants. This is it. We have to get over that. So, there are personal issues. For a lot of people, their personal issue is selfishness. You minister out of margin.

Most people are like, "You know what I want to do? I want as many free nights as possible to Uber Eats in, drink microbrew beer, and watch multiple episodes of a show. I know Christ died for me, but I'm unwilling for any of those nights to change. I might give the church one Community Group night, but that will be it. I certainly won't think strategically about my free time and how it could be engaged." We have to get over that, guys.

We have to get over the cultural... There's this enormous cultural pressure. The cultural pressure back then was different. The cultural pressure back then was "Jews and Gentiles don't hang out." We don't have that cultural pressure. The cultural pressure today is "You don't talk to people about Jesus."

I remember I was talking to one guy when I was doing ministry at Duke, and I was really excited. I said, "Hey, you know what? There are a lot of Jewish kids at Duke." Tons...cultural, Reform, secular Jews. I said, "It has been so exciting. I've had to learn all about Judaism, and I've started to share the gospel with these Jewish kids at Duke."

I'm telling this to one guy, and the guy says to me, "Leave the Jews alone!" I thought, "This is it. This is the one thing you don't do. You don't talk to Jewish people about Jesus." It's like, "Wait." Nope. That's exactly what the first church did the whole time.

That's exactly how the apostle Paul came to Christ. You're going to have to get over those taboos.

Let me show you. Here's what happens. Verse 15: ***"And the voice came to him again a second time, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.' This happened three times..."*** Because we need to hear the same thing... Why are we doing this for eight weeks? Because, for some of you, it's going to be in the seventh week, and you're going to be like, "I got it. I got it. It took me a while. I got my guy. I got my gal.

I realized you were talking to me. I realized you weren't talking to the person on my right and my left. I realized that when you're talking about this and when the Bible says, 'Be evangelistic,' there's not an asterisk and a footnote and my picture is in the back, going, 'This guy doesn't need to do that.'" It's going to take some of you multiple weeks to get this. Peter had to hear a vision three times.

"This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate..." See God's timing? The vision ends. The people arrive.

"...and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.'"

Now listen. This is how mission works. God gives us an objective word and a subjective spirit. So, you have, not a vision with God's word, but the written-down Word of God. It's fixed, it's objective, it's eternal, and it's outside you. This is so important to understand. God gives us a fixed objective outside with his Word, and an internal, personal, subjective relationship with the Holy Spirit where he leads us.

You already know. We're talking about what the Word of God says. You need to have a relationship... We always talk about having a personal relationship with Jesus. How about having a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit? Would that be too out of the question? What if you asked the Holy Spirit, "Holy Spirit, would you lead me?"

Say you're checking out in line. You're in a checkout line, and the lady in front of you... You see her, and you feel in your heart, "I should talk to this lady about Jesus." What are you going to do? "No, that's Satan. That's definitely Satan." It's like, "No, I don't think so." "Get behind me, Satan! I'm not sharing with this woman." No. Why would you not think that might be the Holy Spirit?

Here's what I don't want to have happen in heaven. I don't know how the final judgment fully works. I don't want to have a bunch of conversations with God where God is saying, "I was telling you by the Holy Spirit to do this, and you didn't listen." I refuse to have those conversations.

I'm willing to have the conversation where... Say that I feel called to talk to that woman about Jesus, and I get to heaven, and Jesus goes, "That wasn't me, but good job anyway. I'm glad you did that." That's the conversation I'm willing to have. We need to be more sensitive to the Holy Spirit and his leading in our lives. Here's what happens. Verse 21:

"And Peter went down to the men and said, 'I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?' And they said, 'Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.' So he invited them in to be his guests."

Now, we don't think that's a big deal. That's a huge deal, because these guys are Gentiles. You don't invite Gentiles into a Jewish home, ever. So, this is going to be the first time ever Peter does this. Here's another principle for reaching people: *if you're going to reach somebody you've never reached, most likely you're going to have to do something you've never done...obviously.*

My buddy used to play football. He said, "My football coach was a really Southern guy. He used to always say the same thing. He'd say, 'You keep on doin' what you've been doin', you're going to keep on gettin' what you've been gettin'.'" That's true in all of life.

I want that spirit in our church that says, "You know what? I don't think I've tried everything. I'm trying to reach my dad, and I don't think I've tried everything. Yes, I've prayed for him, but I haven't asked him if he'd want to do a Bible study. I haven't bought him a great Christian book and sent it to him.

I haven't asked him how I could pray for him. I haven't asked him more about his spiritual journey so I could better understand where he is and I might be able to speak into it. I've never invited him to some catalytic or strategic event." You just start saying, "If we want to reach somebody we've not yet reached, most likely we're going to have to do something we've not yet done."

03 PETER & CORNELIUS MEET

Here's what happens. Verse 23: **"The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him."** Here's the whole principle: *they're not coming to us; we have to go to them.* I had a lady ask me this this week, which was just a reminder to me of, sometimes, as clear as I feel like I am, maybe I'm not.

I had a lady ask... She meant really well when she said this. She said, "Pastor Kyle, is this initiative about growing our church?" Look. My conscience is completely clear before God. It's 0 percent about this. It's 0 percent about our church growing because we're doing this. This is actually an initiative to say, "We're going to go to people who would never come to church."

As you know, it's not 1952. In 1952, you could knock on your neighbor's door and ask, "Would you like to come to my Sunday school class?" and they'd go, "Okay. Yeah." We live in a fairly religious city, but I would still say half the people will never go to church, ever.

Imagine you lived in Indonesia, and there's a big Muslim mosque. They're building a big building downtown, and they're calling it their new home and hub. Say there's a great kids' ministry there. Are you going? I don't think you're going. What if it was a great pastor, and they had great worship, and the pastor was funny? You're not going. What if they were talking about sex and the Song of Solomon? Well, maybe. No, you're still not going.

The whole point is there are certain people who do not care what we're doing here. The church is so unbelievably irrelevant to them. They will go to church if someone they know gets married or someone they know dies, and even then, they won't like it. So, it's like, "Great. Then we go to them."

Here's how Christianity works: you go and tell, and then you find, "What is the right time for me to say, 'Come and see'?" And you do that the rest of your life. You go and tell. The "Come and see" isn't "Come to church." It might be for certain people. For most people, it will be like, "You know what? Can we have you over for dinner?"

What you're thinking is, "They need to come and see a Christian home. They need to come and see a Christian marriage." You're not telling them that. You go and tell, and then immediately, you go, "You know what? This is the right moment for you to come and see. Come and see." Every once in a while, for the right person, coming to church might be the right "Come and see."

Anyway, he goes and tells them. That's what he does. It says, **"And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his**

relatives and close friends." I love it. Cornelius is a witness before he's a Christian. He's like, "All right, guys. There's this guy coming. He's going to share a message with us."

I've seen this, by the way. God is working in somebody's life, and they're not yet a Christian. God uses them to bring a bunch of other people around as well. Look at what happens. Here's what I want you to see: they're both confused. **"When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him."**

You're like, "Wrong!" But if you got a vision of an angel that said a guy is going to come, you might be tempted to worship as well. Let's give Cornelius a break just for a moment. It also shows you how lost Cornelius is. Cornelius doesn't know what he needs or who he needs. He's religiously lost.

The sadder thing is Peter. Look here. **"But Peter lifted him up, saying, 'Stand up...'"** He actually grabs him and lifts him up. **"...I too am a man.' And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. And he said to them, 'You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.'"**

This is what I want to show you, guys. You're not even going to believe this if you've never seen this before. I want you to understand that God brings Peter to Cornelius after a vision, after Cornelius sent people to him, and he brings them all together. I want you to see what Peter says. **"So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me."** Guys, you wouldn't believe it if it wasn't written down. Peter doesn't know why he's there.

You're like, "Wait. No, no, no. Peter, Peter, Peter, you're the rock that Christ said, 'On this rock I'll build my church.' He said that to you. Peter, hold on, man. You're the leader of the disciples. You speak for and first when it comes to the disciples. Peter, hold on, man. Let's go back eight chapters. You're the great preacher at Pentecost who leads 3,000 people to Christ. You're so bold, and you tell them to repent and be baptized. That was you, Peter." Peter is so dense.

Guys, this is us. Do you see? You are Peter. God has organized everything in your life and put you in front of these people, and you go, "Why am I here?" I mean, how many moms are frustrated and stressed out by their three or four little kids they have around (understandably so), and they think, "What am I doing?"

Well, I don't know. At the most valuable and influential time in your kids' lives, you get to spend all day with them. "What am I going to do all day?" You have four souls in front of you, and you're going to be the first and primary influence in their lives. How many of us are like, "Why am I at work?" You're like, "I hate all of these customers. I hate what I do."

We can be so dense. "I don't want to go to Thanksgiving with all of our nonbelieving family members." You don't get it. That's why you have Thanksgiving. It's like the one of two times a year where you're in front of people you can share the gospel with. So often... It's so humbling and humiliating.

As obvious as it is right now, where we go, "Peter, dude, you're there to tell them about Jesus, and I don't know how you don't see this," that's probably about 10 different dimensions of your life. God has organized everything, brought this relationship together, has prepared you, has prepared him, and you're like, "I don't know why I'm here." Well, finally, Cornelius has to tell him.

"And Cornelius said, 'Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.'"

By the way, this is probably never going to get to happen to you. We all wish this. We all wish someone came up to us and was like, "Hey, listen. I had a dream, and I think I need a Savior. I feel like I'm a sinner. Do you have a message for me?" I wish that would happen. This is what God uses to wake up the church and to wake up Peter. Like, "Dude, you don't get it."

Peter finally gets it. Look at verse 34. ***"So Peter opened his mouth..."*** Everything changes when you open your mouth. You haven't been on mission until you open your mouth. I want you to know this. Until you open your mouth and tell people about Jesus, you're just a nice gal. That's all you are. You're just a nice guy.

You might be a little strange and confusing to them, and maybe you're a little prudish to them or something. I don't know. Maybe you go to church, and they don't really understand why you do that, and you don't use certain words. That's all you are, just so you know. If all you're doing is hanging around, you're just a nice, Christian guy.

Most people think your life is about all of the things you don't get to do, and they actually feel bad for you. Nothing changes until you open your mouth, and when you open your mouth, you have to do one thing. You don't have to do cultural analysis. You don't have to do apologetics. You have to do the one thing Peter does.

"So Peter opened his mouth and said: 'Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed..."

He just talks about Jesus. I know we are so afraid or timid to talk to other people about Jesus. Here's the thing. He talks about Jesus' life. Think about it, guys. Jesus is the most famous person in all of human history. We just need to get better at talking about him in interesting and compelling ways to other people. Guys, go tell people about how he was the hardest on religious people and religious leaders. That'll be an interesting conversation. Jesus hated religion. Start *that* conversation. "Huh?"

"Yeah, and, actually, it was really interesting because he actually got in trouble a lot because he was always breaking the religious commands of the day about the Sabbath and other things like that. What also is interesting is that he was actually really close with sinners. He would go eat with tax collectors, and he would go hang out with prostitutes. No one really understood it. That was really interesting."

You could talk about the kinds of guys he chose and how he chose the people who no one else chose, and they couldn't make it as Pharisees. You could tell them stories about all of his miracles. I mean, they're fascinating. You know he's the best storyteller of all time. Why don't you tell some of his stories and what they mean? He has also preached the most famous sermon of all time.

Guys, we don't talk about any of this. Here's the problem. We talk about two things. You talk about what you love, and you talk about what's making a difference in your life. This is why every girl, when she's engaged, talks about her fiancé. This is why every parent, especially every grandparent, as soon as they become a grandparent or parent, tells everyone about their kid or grandkid.

So, you talk about something you love or you talk about something that's having a big impact on you. This is why, unfortunately, everybody who does CrossFit tells us all about it. We understand why. They lost weight. They added muscle. They have a new community. They have a disciplined schedule. Good for them. Seriously. They literally can't help it, and I understand it.

This is why it's a meme. A person who does CrossFit a lot can't help but tell everyone about it, because it is literally changing their life. The problem with us is that we talk about the things we love and the things that are changing our lives, so, if we're not talking about Jesus, what does that tell us? Yikes! Maybe we don't love him as much and aren't being transformed by him as much as we might think, because if we were, the natural overflow of our life would be to talk about him.

Anyway, he's talking about Jesus, and then you know this. He doesn't just talk about his life; he talks about his death and resurrection. Verse 39: **"And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree..."** He talks about the bloody cross.

"...but God raised him on the third day..." He talks about the empty tomb. **"...and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead."**

So, he talks about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Verse 43: **"To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."** He talks about Jesus, his life, death, and resurrection, and how a person can believe and be forgiven.

I won't read you the rest of chapter 10, but it says that while he was still preaching, the Holy Spirit fell on the people, and they were converted. He can't even finish his sermon. Their whole lives are changed. He sees Cornelius and his friends and his household come to faith in Christ, and he's so excited. I want us to go to chapter 11 very quickly. I want you to see what he does.

In chapter 11, it says, **"Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem..."** He's like, "I cannot wait to tell people about the story of the gospel going forward."

"...the circumcision party..." That's religious people. **"...criticized him..."** This is exactly what churchgoing people do when people get serious about mission. "Well, you're not going to go *there*. You're not going to hang out with *them*. You're not going to do *that* method."

This is what they always do. They always critique the method. D.L. Moody, famous evangelist... Some lady came up to him and went, "I don't like the way you evangelize." He says, "Well, how do you evangelize?" She goes, "Well, I don't." He goes, "I like my way of doing it more than your way of not doing it."

So, here they are. They're critics. They say, **"You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."** He basically tells them the whole story. I won't repeat it. You just saw it. "Well, God gave me this vision, and God was working. God brought it together. I didn't understand, but then I shared the gospel, and the Holy Spirit fell." In verse 15, he says this:

"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?' When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.'"

When the criticism stops, the worship can begin. What shuts the mouths of critics is stories of the gospel advancing and lives being changed. Here's the thing: Peter had stories. We get to see his story. He goes back and goes, "Guys, you wouldn't believe what happened." Chapter 11 is the story of what happened in chapter 10.

What we don't get to see is Cornelius, I'm sure, goes back and starts telling the same story from his perspective. Here's the problem with us, with our generation, in general, just all of us in here: we don't have any stories anymore. Our grandparents fought wars, and they built a nation. At least they had some type of stories. Guys, we have no stories, especially young people.

Why are young people obsessed with traveling? I finally understand it. Because it's the only stories they have to tell. "Honey, if we go to Europe and take a lot of pictures and eat at all of these restaurants and hike all of these trails, then we'll have stories to come back and tell, because we don't have any stories."

Why are people obsessed with movies and television shows? Because they don't have an interesting life themselves. They don't. So, they vicariously live through season 1, season 2, and season 3 of other people's lives who don't even really exist. Why are young men, especially young men, addicted to video games? Because they have no story of their own.

They have no princess they're pursuing. They have no battle they're fighting. They have no mission they're advancing, so they look at a screen and they play with their thumbs. God help us. We need to be a generation that has stories. That's what you want. You want to go to the dinner table every night and be like, "All right. Let's hear some stories. What did you do today?"

What Community Group really should be is it should be a massive bonfire where all you do is tell stories. It's like, "All right. We're going to get to the text in a minute, but hold on. I've got to hear some stories this week. It could be a story of failure. It could be a story of fear. It could be a story of success. I want to hear some stories."

What would it look like if we decided, "You know what? We're going to be a place of stories"? You might go, "What do we want Two Cities Church to feel like?" That's it...stories...where we have so many stories, like the one you saw at the beginning today,

that we go, "Guys, sorry. We're not going to be able to show all of the videos in service. There are just too many stories of the gospel going forward."

Last week, we ended with *pray, guess, go*. I love that. I hope you'll embrace that spirit. We're going to pray (seek God), we're going to guess ("Okay. What is God doing?"), and we're going to go. I want to give you three words as we close today as well. These are the three words God said to Peter. Remember? It was short. I didn't spend a lot of time.

He says to Peter in a dramatic way, because he wants to get his attention, "Rise, kill, eat." I thought, "Maybe that's what we should walk out of here thinking." *Rise*. What does that mean? You cannot stay where you are or how you are. You're going to need to rise. In fact, in a few minutes, we're going to ask you to rise out of your chair, and we're going to ask you to drop the card in a basket as saying, "I'm going to do my best and trust God with the rest."

We're going to ask you to *kill*. "What do you mean, Kyle?" We're going to ask you to put to death the worst parts about you. That's it. What needs to die so that other people can experience spiritual life through you? I will tell you what it is. It's the worst thing about you that you still love.

When you stand and bring the card in a few minutes, you go, "God, would you kill that in me?" It's going to take a few minutes to get up here and drop the card, and you say, "Lord, these are the two or three things that are holding me back. I need you to do something in my life for the sake of other people." Because your life matters. We say this all the time. Your life matters so much more than you know.

You watch that video, and you realize every conversation was important. Remember when Brock said, "And I saw him, and I remembered I was in a place like that, and I took a step forward." Remember, Ryan said, "I saw where he was, and I invited him into my house." Every decision you make matters.

The final thing is you *eat*. What does that mean? Enjoy the fruit of your ministry. You are going to get old. Here's what happens when you're old: you look back on your life and say, "What did I do?" One of the things we want you to do is we want you to look back on your life and say, "God used me in the lives of others," and there's an enjoyment and being satisfied in the fruit God has brought.

So, I'm going to pray that God prepares you, because he is. And I'm going to pray that God prepares your one, because he's going to. Then you're going to walk up and drop this, and you're going to grab this wristband. It's just a reminder to pray and pursue your one, and it's a reminder that we're doing this together as a church. Let's pray.

Lord, this is a big moment. This is a moment, a marker, a milestone. There's something emotional about stepping forward and saying, "Lord..." There's someone's name on this card. A name is a face, is a soul. This is someone's brother. This is someone's son. This is someone's daughter. This is someone who's going to live forever, Lord. There's nothing that says we're serious about Jesus and his mission, and we think the cross matters, and it's so important to us that we're taking responsibility for one person.

Lord, I pray for people in this room who can't write someone else's name down because they have to write their own name down. The truth is if they're writing their name down, probably somebody else in here is also writing their name down. God, would we be a place of life transformation? Would we be a place of stories? We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.