



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



HG48: Growing The Church (6/6) *Growth In Learning*

Acts 10

Home Group Study Notes

10th April 2011 - Pauline Woolnough



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome/Ice Breaker (10 mins)

Someone once said that the only people that like change is wet babies and they aren't too keen on it either. How do you feel about change personally and in church?



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study Acts 10, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1. Has anyone ever had a vision, encounter or revelation from God that completely changed their views and life?

2. Can you understand how the apostle Peter could preach the gospel message yet still be prejudiced against the Gentiles?

3. Once again we see the link between prayer and God acting, and the incident about the Devon police was interesting. Think of ways we could “bless” the community by developing links with the services in the town and praying specifically for requested topics. (Follow up on any good ideas).

Don't borrow other people's moments of intimacy, don't feast on other people's experiences written in books - discover your own.

God Loves YOU: Finally, Acts 10 shouts of God's love for *us*. He wanted *us* to know Him. He wants all mankind to know of his love for them. Sometimes the hardest people to love are ourselves and unfortunately we can project onto God our own attitudes and feelings that we have towards ourselves, but never ever assume that he feels the same about you that you do about yourself... unless of course you love yourselves compassionately, intensely deeply and unreservedly, because that is how God loves you. Jesus revealed to us what God is like, he disclosed God's true feelings towards us. The people he encountered in the gospels are you and me, the understanding and compassion that he offered to them he offers to you and me, he showed how he loves us and no more so than when he died for us at Easter.

I want to be able to say honestly like Thomas Merton did when he said, “*Who am I asked Merton, I am one loved by God.*” That essentially is who I am and that is who you are. The most crucial thing that we need to learn is that we are loveable and loved by God the Father who Jesus says we can call - our Abba. God loves you, not just because theologically he has to love you but he loves you because of you are who you are in Christ. Frederick Beuchner says this. “*Repent and believe the gospel. Jesus says turn around and believe that the good news that we are loved is better than we ever dared hope, and that to believe in that good news, to live out of it and toward it to be in love with that good news is of all glad things in the world the gladdest thing of all. Amen and come lord Jesus.*”

Our God loves to see change especially when He is doing the changing in us and He can do amazing things when we allow Him the freedom to change our lives and our church. For Peter to associate with Gentiles was scandalous, to take the Good News to a Roman officer would have been unthinkable but Peter obeyed despite his feelings and his background, he was willing and open to change. God repeatedly challenged the early church to do things they were uncomfortable with so that more and more of the lost could be saved and we owe them our thanks and admiration. God wants *us* to reach out beyond *our* comfort zones to reach more and more people for Christ. In Acts 10 34 Peter said “*I see very clearly that God doesn't show partiality. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right.*” God does not show favouritism but accepts men and women from every nation who fear him and do what is right and he wants us to reach out to everyone regardless of background culture, colour or creed. He wants us to love just as Jesus loved and see people as he saw them, - made in the image of God.

This was a remarkable day in the history of the church - very similar to the importance of the Day of Pentecost and all it took was 2 remarkable men, 2 men steeped in prayer and open to the working of the spirit through visions.

There's no doubt that our series on 'Growing The Church' has touched the hearts and minds of many. What, for you, has been the most significant aspect of this study? What has encouraged you the most? What will you 'carry' with you into your future Christian life as a result of these studies?

In February the Daily Mail reported that the Devon and Cornwall Police has found for themselves the link between prayer and effective policing. The mail reported the following. *“When Inspector Roger Bartlett realised his patch had one of the poorest crime detection rates in the area, he decided he needed help. So he asked churchgoers to pool their efforts in calling for back-up - from God. Three years after encouraging Christians from local churches to say prayers to help policemen, detection rates have soared, road accidents have fallen and Mr Bartlett is convinced it is evidence of divine intervention. The clear-up rate for crimes in his force area of Barnstaple was 26 per cent, one of the lowest in the Devon and Cornwall area. But since he asked for the prayers things have changed. Every quarter, the number of crimes solved has risen, so that at its current figure - more than 40 per cent - it is one of the highest in the country. Mr Bartlett said 'the most significant answer to prayer' he had experienced relates to a fall in the number of serious road accidents in North Devon.”* He acknowledged that good policing was a factor and that sceptics would put it all down to co-incidence but the increase in that figure is so marked that it is indeed 'some coincidence'. He said *"From my experience, the more I pray, the more 'coincidences' I seem to see."*

Prejudice: In Acts 10 we see God's attitude and his solution to the prejudice that was preventing the spread of the gospel message. We are all in some way prejudiced, Simon was, he didn't like Gentiles. Prejudice creates a divide between us and others and it stops us from helping people to faith whereas Jesus never put up barriers between himself and others, he was at home among all people, the prostitutes, the down and outs, the tax collectors, -all sinners.

Blaise Pascal said , *“God made man in his own image and man returned the compliment.”* and there's a good example of this in the Parable of the Pharisee and the publican where we see the Pharisee confident of God's pleasure in him as he stands at the temple praying and thanking God that he is not like the rest of mankind, who he sees as unjust, adulterous greedy, he is especially pleased he not like the tax collector because the Pharisee fasts twice a week and he pays tithes on all he earns. *Luke 18 11-12* He thought highly of himself and judged and condemned others but Jesus did not die at the hand of muggers rapist thieves and thugs he fell into the hands of the well respected deeply religious people of the day. We need to be self aware, and question why it is that certain people cause a reaction in us, the homeless man begging in the street, the immigrant seeking employment, the person of a different faith, the homosexual, the benefit claimant and so on.

It's How We've Always Done It! Peter's life had changed dramatically and he must have been overwhelmed at times when he thought about the course his life had taken but like so many of us Peter had become stuck and he'd become content to continue with doing things the way they had always been done. He had remained faithful to Jewish practices which excluded others and allowed religious bigotry to blind him to the truth that Jesus had taught and although he preached the truth his heart was closed to the Gentiles. Peter's challenge, and ours, is to find God for ourselves and not simply to rely on what has gone before, not simply to do things the way they things have always been done, not just to accept what others are doing and what others tell us, because when we do we become lazy and satisfied with what we are told instead of seeking more of the living God and the Risen Lord Jesus for ourselves. Its all too easy to simply learn a few facts and then close our hearts to the rest of God's instruction but God wants us to have hearts that are open to a lifetime of instruction, experience and learning.

It's Not What You Know But Who You Know: Peter knew his scripture, he had been taught from childhood but he failed to learn God's heart for the lost as shown to him in Jesus Christ. We may be experts on scripture and know all about Christ but if we don't know *Him*, then all the bible knowledge in the world counts for little because of course there is a world of difference between knowing about someone and actually knowing them.

4. Thomas Merton said *“..... I am one loved by God”* Discuss how you feel about that. What do you think God thinks about you?

5. God wants us to be open and willing to learn throughout our lives but sometimes its difficult to remember what we have read, studied or heard. Share what methods you use to learn and then apply what you have learnt?

6. You may want to discuss some of the difficult issues the Church faces today which could result in major changes e.g. the women bishops debate or the diversity of opinion about homosexuality in the Church of England.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG48: Growing The Church (6/6) Growth In Learning

Acts 10

Home Group Sermon Notes

10th April 2011 - Pauline Woolnough

Introduction: We make choices every day of our lives some more difficult than others but there are some things we don't get to choose. We can't always choose the people God sends into our lives and who He wants us to share the Good News with. We can't just choose people with similar lifestyles, people that dress, talk, look and act like us. The good news is for everybody whether they are like us or not. Which is what was happening here. The first Christians had come to believe that as salvation had come through a Jew – the Lord Jesus Christ, it was therefore primarily for the Jews and if this belief had taken root in the early church many areas of the world would have been given up for lost. We would be without Christ, but some things are just too important to God to ignore, some things, - some *people*, you and me are just too important to him which forced him to take action to speed up the spread of His Good News. The gospel message had reached Samaria, believers there had responded to God's message and been baptised and they had received the Holy Spirit but although Jewish Christians and even the apostles accepted that the half Jewish Samaritans could receive the Holy Spirit they remained unconvinced as to whether the Gentiles could. It wasn't until Peter's experience with Cornelius that the apostles became fully convinced that the Holy Spirit was for all people. Hebrews 11:6 says that "... *he rewards them who earnestly Him.*" and we see the truth of that here in Cornelius's story. Cornelius didn't go unnoticed by God, God saw his heart and he heard Cornelius's prayers.

A Hungry Heart: Cornelius was no ordinary Roman officer, he was a man of prayer, "*a righteous and God-fearing man... respected by all the Jewish people...*" Acts 10:22. He represented Rome but lived in Caesarea and he had a reputation as being a godly man, generous in meeting other people's needs. He actively sought God, we'd probably sign him up for an Alpha course and call him a seeker because although he wasn't a believer in Christ and not yet saved, he was aware of the Jewish God. He prayed to God regularly (v2) and whilst at prayer this particular day at approx 3pm, God gave him a vision. An angel appeared and told him that his prayers and gifts to the poor had not gone unnoticed and as a result he was to send some men to Joppa to find Simon Peter and bring him for a visit. Cornelius, who was used to obeying orders, immediately did as he was told and he sent some men off to Joppa to find Simon Peter.

An Obedient Heart: The next day as Cornelius's men approached the city Peter was at prayer and God gave him a vision too, this time it was about food. Its interesting the contrast between them because on the one hand we have the quick witted, obedient Cornelius and on the other we have Peter, stubborn, questioning and deeply prejudiced. In his vision he saw a sheet with all kinds of food, animals that from childhood Peter had been told were unclean and not fit for eating. A voice told Peter to kill and eat them and Peter said "*Not likely,*" He was proud of the fact that he had never eaten anything considered to be unclean. The vision had to be repeated 3 times by God before he was willing to consider breaking a long standing custom the Jews had with food. In the end the voice said that if God says something is acceptable then it is acceptable and don't say it isn't!

All Change! None of us likes change. We say we do but for most of us change is only good if its someone else is doing the changing, and we all know that some things are easier to change than others. The early Christians accepted that they no longer needed to offer animal sacrifices because Jesus was the perfect Sacrifice, and they had changed their holy day to a Sunday to honour Christ rising from the dead on the 1st day of the week. These were significant changes but in reality the early Christians were still very much good Jews, and they still thought like Jews. At the time Acts 10 was written, the church was no more than 10 years old, if that, and during those first few years the church membership consisted only of Jewish or half Jewish believers.

You Are What You Eat: From their childhood, every Jewish child learned which foods were clean for them to eat and which were not, (*Deuteronomy 14:6-8,10,12-14*). They were taught that Gentiles, or everyone who was not a Jew, were unclean. They referred to them as Gentile dogs. They wouldn't have a meal with a Gentile, spend a night in one of their homes and anything they bought from one had to be washed before use. Probably the greatest hindrance to the spread of the gospel was this conflict between the Jews and Gentiles. It was shocking for a Jew to even think of associating with a Gentile, and they could only be accepted on one condition: they had to convert to Judaism meaning that the men had to be circumcised..... maybe one reason they didn't get many converts. It was going to be hard for the new Jewish convert to Christianity to change this mindset and accept the Gentile as equal but God planned to bring the Gentiles into His church and we now know that circumcision was not a requirement.

Peter's Revelation: Peter went with Cornelius's messengers, they exchanged stories and Peter shared the Good News. It soon became obvious to Peter that his vision had a far greater implication than simply what he was and was not allowed to eat. He understood that he was not to regard certain people as unclean and to be avoided. God revealed to him that all forgiven sinners were to be accepted, including Gentiles. The four corners of the sheet symbolised the four corners of the earth and the contents, were the millions of people in the world. Peter preached and even before those listening believed, repented or confessed Jesus, God interceded and poured out His Spirit. Cornelius and his household began speaking in tongues and praising God. Nothing like this had happened since Pentecost (In Acts 11:15 Peter said "*As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning.*")_Cornelius and his household were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and Peter stayed with them for a few days for further instruction.

Wasn't It Obvious? Now you would have thought that as Peter had watched Jesus over the 3 years that he spent with him he would have seen the way that Jesus treated people, Jesus excluded no one, and surely he must have understood Jesus message to go to all nations and preach the Good News, but sometimes even when we understand and see the obvious it isn't always easy to put into practice. Fear and prejudice can close our hearts to the truth. Too often, our actions don't mirror the truth we know. Most of us have little trouble accepting the fact that God loves everyone, the difficulty comes in living out that truth in our daily life. Sadly, many of us even struggle with the truth that God loves us personally as individuals.

Prayer ... again: But what can we personally learn from Acts 10. Once again this passage shows us the necessity for prayer (v3, 9) both men were at prayer when they heard from God. Evan Roberts, architect of the Welsh revival at the beginning of the 20th century was asked the secret of this work of God to which replied "*Secret no secret. Ask and you shall receive.*" There is without doubt a link between prayerful dependence on God and being effective in His work.

To be effective, our prayer life needs to be strong enough that God can use it to teach and guide us and give us direction. E Stanley Jones a missionary and theologian once said, "*I find myself better or worse as I pray more or less. It works with almost mathematical precision.*"