



Amazing Conversions Part 9

Cornelius: Family & Friends

Pastor Mike Fabarez

The book of Acts seems to take longer than is necessary to give us a narrative of the conversion of Cornelius, which we're in the middle of right now. It takes so long in the book of Acts to talk about one man's conversion to Christ because the early church was filled with Jewish men and women who had to learn to grasp, I mean, really grasp this idea of Gentile inclusion into the Church. I mean, the descendants of Abraham, as our passage reveals here today, they struggled with the idea of non-Jewish salvation. And you can understand why in the series on Amazing Conversions, Cornelius is right in the middle of it.

We're spending four weeks on it. It's an amazing conversion because if you think about who he was, a Roman centurion, you recognize here was a leader in an army military occupational force that was subjugating the nation of Israel, God's chosen people. And more than that, I mean, conceivably, here is Cornelius going to boot camp with other soldiers who were over there in Jerusalem, hoisting up a bloodied and beaten Jewish messiah on a Roman execution rack. That, I mean, was a hard thing to think that if Cornelius was going to have full grace-filled access to Yahweh, the God of Israel, through the Jewish Messiah, the Christ, you'd better give me more than three verses on this, right? And so we encounter literally by the time we're done, 66 verses covering the conversion of one guy primarily and his household. That is necessary because of the current state of cultural expectation that at least in a Jewish background, we expected that salvation is of the Jews. So you better prove to me that this is a biblical thing.

Now I know that speaking here to a bunch of Gentiles, largely, predominantly, I am not having to convince you of what takes so long, 66 verses, to convince them of that the Gentiles should be included because the Gentiles are you. You kind of figured that out when you came to Christ, if you're a Christian, it's like, yeah, you don't need 66 verses to recognize, "Yeah, I get it. I responded to the Jewish Messiah. My God is the God who created the world, and we're good to go with all that."

So this long-form coverage of Cornelius' conversion to Christ gives us a little time as students of the Bible to step back and look at some things in this narrative that we do need some convincing about. We need to be convinced of what we see scattered all throughout this narrative that's ubiquitous. It's everywhere in this text then I think we'd do well to recognize it. And kind of in a little excursion, step out of the purposeful, extended discussion about Gentiles really are included in salvation and say, "Hey, but look at how they live." There is a key ingredient here that's going on in this passage that our cultural currents in the 21st century in western, you know, America here, western civilization, we're not very good at. Matter of fact, I think we're dismally failing at it. Our culture has certainly brought this into decline, if not a full-blown demise at this particular point in history.

So we can learn a lot by looking at Peter's life and Cornelius' life and just stepping out of the narrative for one Sunday and saying, OK, what is going on with this aspect of their lives? So



this key is so important in God's economy that you won't do well in the Christian life, matter of fact, you will atrophy in your Christian life, you will not grow spiritually as you ought to in your Christian life, our evangelism is going to be curtailed if we don't have this key ingredient and our culture is not going to help you with it at all.

So let's take our Bibles and look at verses 21 through 29 of Acts Chapter 10, our third installment of covering the conversion, the Amazing Conversion as we called the series, of Cornelius, and take a look as we get back into this narrative at something that's going on here. First, let me just try and read it for you without any commentary. (audience laughs) I know, I'm going to try. Just read it straight through. So here we go. Nine verses, verse 21, let me first get all my commentary out of the way. First nine verses we were dealing with beginning of this Chapter 10, Cornelius is prepared by an angelic visitation, a rare thing, of course, obviously. And yet he says, get ready. There's someone named Peter, Simon Peter, in a city named Joppa 30 miles south that you need to go get and bring to your house.

So he sends guys to go get Peter and as this contingent of three people from Cornelius' house is going down this Mediterranean highway on the coastal highway there, Peter is being prepared as we saw last time we were together. He has this trance, this vision that God gives about kosher and non-kosher foods and you ought to eat everything now, you shouldn't worry about dietary distinctions, which was all representative of the kind of social distinction between Jew and Gentile. And it was preparing him, of course, to actually go with some Romans, some Italians, up to Caesarea Maritime, the port there that Herod had built and to share the gospel with them. So he gets the lesson as we'll see in the text that we're about to read, and that's where we pick it up in verse 21.

Follow along, I'll read it from the English Standard Version as we see Peter here, encountering the men that came for him. 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 nation of Israel, 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. The next day he rose and went with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, 'Stand 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 it is unlawful 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. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I asked then why you sent for me.'"

So we pick up next time the discussion, the evangelistic encounter that Peter has with Cornelius, and here's the setting. Now I, amazingly, read it without commentary, and I just want you to think of something that's there that we're used to reading about, but we're not very used to doing and our culture is not giving us any help with it. And that's the fact that if you look back at what's going on with Cornelius and Peter, none of this is done in the kind of



isolated setting that someone might think they would do in response to anything that God asks them to do. I mean, God is asking Cornelius to have this encounter with Peter, and Peter is asked to go have this encounter with Cornelius. And this seems like, you know, two people should be involved in this. And yet there are people involved in every other verse of this text. I mean, he's gathering family and friends. He didn't need to do that, right?

Peter, it says has people accompany him on this trip. This is a journey, by the way, of 30 miles. It is going to take on foot about eight hours. It's like you having to go to Tucson, Arizona, at the drop of a hat. I mean, they do spend the night after these guys get here and they go. But it says in Chapter 11 of Acts that he's got six people from Joppa, brothers from Joppa, Christians from Joppa, who go with him. That's a big deal. If I said after the service, I got to run to Tucson and I don't know how long I'm going to be there. Unless you're unemployed or got a really boring week ahead, you're probably not going to say, "Oh, I'll go with you." And yet off they go, they go as this big posse to Caesarea. I say Tucson because it's going to take, you know, seven or eight hours to get there, and that's just moving without any stops.

You have all that take place, including the fact that the emissaries from Caesarea didn't come by themselves, they came in a small team. You have the whole point of this, I guess, getting closest to the germane point of the passage that you shouldn't call anyone, you know, common or unclean, right? The barrier socially should be broken down for the sake of evangelism. And then, of course, he sets us up for actually having this take place, which is an evangelistic conversation.

Evangelism is about people, both people on both ends are surrounded by people. They're interdependent. They live life together as they say today, you know, life-on-life is taking place in every individual's life in the church. I mean, we've learned that from the beginning of the book, the Church in Acts Chapter 2 is almost, you could argue, living in what seems to be this communal setting. And I only say that seems to be because it's not the kind of commune that you might think of today, certainly not communism, where things are forced from you. But these people are joyfully giving up their stuff. They're having people in their homes, they're meeting in big groups on the Temple Mount, but then they're having people inside of their houses and it's just a common thing.

Peter has someone knock on his door and he doesn't say, "Great, I'll be with you tomorrow when I can travel." He doesn't say, "Here are a few bucks to go down to the roadway inn," he invites them in. That means they're going to eat with them. They're going to stay in his house. And the whole point is these people are not Jewish people, that seems unlawful for you to do. But for Peter, "I'm learning the lesson and I learned the lesson. I shouldn't call you common or unclean. So I'm going to do all this." I mean, it's a basic picture of first-century hospitality. Now, the cultural current of the first century was all about hospitality. People had people in their homes all the time. As a matter of fact, the hotel thing was kind of on the fringe of first-century Jewish society. And even in Roman society, there was a sense in which you want someone in your home. That's what you do. You open up your table, you open up your



house, you connect with people, you live interdependent, intertwined. You have lives that are full of real networks of relationships.

And I say that we don't have that much going on in our day because our culture has worked really hard it seems, satanically so, toward a kind of isolation, a kind of sequestering, a kind of independence. I often call it the atomization of people just kind of going into their own corners. Even Christianity has been reduced to a personal relationship with God, we call it. Even evangelism, we talk about personal evangelism. And I mean, those phrases have meaning and purpose and utilization in various conversations. But I mean, we've really gotten things down into this kind of individualized perspective, and it's a reflection of culture.

That's why from time to time, I put on the back of your worksheet books that were not written from a Christian perspective. There are sometimes demographers or sociologists or just statisticians looking at things that are going on in our culture and drawing conclusions about them. This week, I added a couple. I got Bellah's book called Habits of the Heart about the individualistic nature of western society. I put on there, I'm pretty sure, Putnam's book Bowling Alone, which talks about the collapse of kind of community within western societies and western civilization.

Sometimes I'll even put an older book down there Amusing Yourself to Death by Neil Postman. I don't think that's on there this week. But how just to be moving of society into increasing categories and patterns with Postman about a media and image-driven society, a technological society that's resulted in this kind of oxymoronic world of social media. Which I say it's oxymoronic, think about it, the oxymoron of it, the social and media. Well, there's not social if it's media. Kind of like the new oxymoron of social distancing, those are moving in two different directions. The idea of people being sequestered and put into corners, this is where our culture has gone. Now that's not where they were in the first century. And I can only think that God just completely litters this passage with reminders of how intertwined culture was, how hospitality was the norm, how people traveled in groups and did things in groups, not just because it was a dangerous road from Joppa to Caesarea. I mean, it's not like the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Now this is a coastal city, a pretty well-to-do area like a lot of coastal areas.

And this is because people lived life in groups and not just their family. They didn't run to work and sit in their corner office and then run back home and open the garage door and drive in and shut it and then sit there, isolated in my immediate family and watch a little Netflix. And now we're all watching different things on different screens, and we're just everything has gotten so individualistic. And all I'm telling you is that's where our culture is at. You're not going to get any help when it comes to seeing the value that the Bible always puts on and the exhortation and command the Bible puts on us living life in networks of real relationships. Not only where our chairs get face-to-face, I preached on that recently. And that's super important that we get chairs face-to-face. But what happens when our chairs are face-to-face?

Now this has to be real, authentic connection. There needs to be that kind of openness and authenticity and sharing of life. There needs to be a realness in those conversations. There



needs to be a sense of having a confidence in people where I have confidants, where I have circles of people that I entrust my life to, that I'm known and I know others. We're not good at that, right? And this whole COVID pandemic didn't help us with that. Have you noticed? I mean, look at even the demographers and the sociologists talking about what's happened in the last couple of years, just in terms of people's, what they would call, mental health as it relates to what's happening. You know, when we drape our faces and when we go in our corners and everything's on Zoom and now I don't even have to commute anymore. I don't need an office. I can telecommute and all these things that are happening, you need to realize that Christianity is a counterculture to that.

And I'm saying, even though you are expressing a countercultural experience right now, think about how countercultural this is. This is not a paid concert, right? This is not a sporting event. You didn't get a ticket to get here. You were sitting here with the doors that were open. You came in in a group setting and you're here in a group, right? This doesn't happen. This isn't a PTA meeting where we're doing business. It's not a concert. You're not paying for this. This is countercultural. And for that, I'm happy unless of course, you're streaming online, if you got broken legs or whatever, it's fine. But I'm telling you that the world of you sitting in pajamas in front of a computer screen and saying I did church virtually. Even that, virtual reality, you want to talk about another oxymoron, right? If it's virtual, it ain't reality, right?

The point is you cannot do communal life and community life and networks of fellowship and relationships and real family life through a screen, you cannot do that separated in sequestered communities. They are not communities if you drive into your garage, shut the garage door and don't know your neighbor's names or the problems they're going through. We don't live in the kind of community that we used to. We have hotels and motels everywhere because we're not used to saying, "Hey, you can sleep in our house if you need to. Here's our pantry. Here's our food. Here's our stuff." We don't live that way anymore. And all I'm saying is though we're countercultural and at least that we have things like this and you run off to meetings where your chairs are face-to-face, I'm just thinking the world is going to have to think you're pretty well crazy to kind of get to the norm of the biblical vow of ensconcing this biblical virtue in your life. And that's the goal this morning. Just to look at it, identify it, see it by way of observation in this passage. I know it's excursive, right? We're stepping out of the text of trying to convince us that Gentiles should be accepted within this Jewish messiah named Christ.

OK, we got that. But let's observe this principle. Put a spotlight on the virtue and make sure that we firmly affix it in place in our life. And oh, between now and the time I die, I need to reflect this picture of relational priority that goes beyond me just finding my comfortable chair, putting my feet up and watching Netflix and saying, you know, "I've got a pretty decent life, because I got an air conditioning and I got a nice, padded chair and I got an office at work," and we live in these sequestered little bubbles. We're not in good shape as a culture. People, even in sociological circles and discussions and panels and articles and journals, at least they're starting to see the effect this is having on us.



We talk about the vulgarity and the coarsening of language and we talk about hostilities online. Well, the reason you can drop a bomb in your, you know, your pajamas online and say things you would never say to someone's face is again that isolation of individuals. And just to quote the Scriptures here, when it comes to Proverbs 18 verses 1 and 2, it talks about the "pleasure that some people have in expressing their opinions." And I'm thinking, was that written during, you know, social media times? No, it wasn't. But it diagnosis the problem. "It's the fool who doesn't take pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion." Well, that's verse 2 of Chapter 18. Verse 1 says that the problem is it's someone who "isolates himself who seeks his own desire," right? And he doesn't really want understanding. We don't even want cognitive dissonance to talk about the realities of sociologists looking at the problem of the individualistic experience where I don't even want to have, you know, other people kind of weigh in on what I'm thinking or hearing.

And yet, Cornelius says, "Hey, if I'm going to hear something important, I want everybody here that I know who can fit into my house, bring my relatives, my close friends. Let's hear it." Peter is going to go. He's got a group by the time we're done of 10 people traveling with him to go there to this city in Caesarea. And I just want you to think about the reality of that even. This is not just like a one-on-one, "You want to meet and talk about God. Well, let's go to Starbucks, get a private booth and talk about it." This is a group thing. Life was lived in groups, and all I'm telling you is this has to be an important priority of our lives.

So that's a pretty long introduction for a six-point sermon. So cancel your lunch plans. (audience laughs) Let's go through these really quick. OK? But let's make quick observations here. One of them, I basically made by looking at the totality of verses 21 through 29 and highlighting some of the occurrences of all these networks of relationships and life lived on life and interdependence and intertwined lives. I just want to say this strongly as a needed exhortation to you. You need to be, number one, you need to "Be Relationally Connected." That doesn't mean you attended church this week or even went to a small group. Those are important things but in those settings, were you relationally connected?

You live in a neighborhood, unless you live on a ranch, you know, with all this land around you, you got neighbors. You can see them out your windows. The whole point of, as we would say biblically, the ontological purpose of your life involves, by necessity, relationships, right? "Ontologically" - the word "to be," that this is who you are. You exist just like you need food and air, the Bible says you need relationship. And we're kind of, you know, sipping our air through this tiny little stir stick and thinking we've got enough because I have a friend that I talk to mostly through text and online, right? That's not how God created us.

The point of God creating us in his image and then making a point about the fact that, yeah, the elephants are fat and the giraffes have long necks, but really, you're by yourself. And the first thing he said that was bad was, "It was not good for man to be alone," and you're going to have now someone made especially for you, a coequal person. Right? Of course, there have to be leadership structures just like there are in the Trinity. The point is this eternal fellowship of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they together in fellowship and in harmony and relationship exist, right?



And then they build this angelic host, this angelic band. And then we are going to see Adam and Eve create families, and we don't even get out of the first few chapters of Genesis before we have cities and villages and lands and people, and people are exploding exponentially with networks of relationships. That's exactly how God designed it, because it's not good for man to be alone. It's not good for you to be isolated. You should not be isolating yourself. Someone like that just seeks their own desires. And I get it. You can watch whatever you want if you do it on your phone, right? As soon as I say to the family, what are we going to watch tonight, now all of the sudden, this is a bad example, but there... Then if I say all of us, "Hey, we're going to show a movie Friday night at church," right? We don't do that but let's just say we were. Now I got a thousand people I got to figure out, you know, it's going to be harder and harder and harder to live life in relationship. I get that.

I'm not saying it's going to be easy. I'm not saying it's going to be convenient. But I am saying, just like air, you need it. You were created to thrive in relationship, in networks of relationship, and you should be in relationship. If you want to know kind of a standard, and I know this is a standard for your closest circles. I get it. And again, I don't care what sociologists say, but they're making observations about God's created order and they're right in saying that we have at least five or six confidants in our lives. And then we probably have, you know, a group of 15 people that are our close friends. And then we probably have anywhere from 100, some say as many as 150 people that are our friends. We know their names, we know their kids' names, we know what kind of things they're going through, where they work. We care about things like when they lose their job or get sick and in a life you ought to have those.

But to start with that inner circle, I can think of when David and Jonathan are described as becoming friends. There's this great descriptive Hebrew phrase, and it said that their "souls were knit together." That's just a big phrase. And in our hypersexualized culture, of course, people say, "Well, maybe there were homosexuals." This is not about homosexuality, right? This is about two people who had a real friendship because their lives were intersecting. They knew each other's lives. They cared for each other. They had a loyal friendship with each other. And that's just kind of how people were made to function. And you ought to have people in your inner circle that your lives are knit... your souls are knit together. You got to have that and it needs to go beyond your biological family. We see that for Peter. We see that for Cornelius. We see that all throughout the Bible. And you and I need to be committed to being relationally connected. You've got to have it. That's the way you were designed and that's the way you're made.

Cornelius, in verse 22, was described as being someone who was well-spoken of by all the nation of Israel, the Jewish people, "he was well-spoken of by the whole Jewish nation." Do you see that? It starts with the fact, of course, his occupation, his name and that he's a God-fearing man and he's a good person, morally speaking, he's a good person. And then it says, "He's well-spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, and he was told to come get you." So we're here, we're coming to get you and come on with us. OK, well, that's a big phrase and an important one, and one that we ought to think about. Because if I were to ask you, are you well-spoken of by a bunch of people? The problem with most of us is we don't even really



know a bunch of people and a bunch of people don't really know us to even form an opinion about us.

If I went around and I said to the people around you who lived in your neighborhood, "Hey, what's the reputation of the person who lives in that house?" And I'm pointing at your house, right? First, they'd have to know you like, "I don't know. They drive a, you know, whatever, a Honda. And I don't know. I don't really know them." I mean, that's pretty much how we live, right? And it's worse here in Southern California, we're the worst at it, right? But the point is, I don't know that you have much of a reputation. You certainly don't if you don't have relationships and webs of relationships and authentic sharing life on life with people around you. You don't. If I went to your office and said, "Hey, I want to poll everyone at your office, "What kind of reputation do they have?" I mean, if it's all just based on, "I don't know. I think they're a pretty good employees. I don't really know. All I know about is something that they do at work or they're part of this process of processing stuff in my office, and they do seem to be a good... I don't have any complaints." That's not a good reputation. That's not being well spoken of.

Now, if you go back up to the beginning of this chapter, we know at least two reasons he's going to have a good reputation. I mean, you might want to look back at it in this passage. You can see up there at the beginning of this passage, it's describing him in verse 2 as someone who is generous. He's a devout man, fears the Lord. He gave alms generously to the people, not just, "Man, he was really good to his kids. He bought his kids a convertible when they were 16." Nothing like that. He's generous to the people, and he prayed continually to God. And as we studied that a couple of weeks back, we said, "Well, I mean, you know, you can run out of things to pray for yourself." I'm assuming, because it comes on the heels of he's generous to the people, this is a guy that interceded for the people. He prayed to God for other people, and his neighbor said, "I'm going into this legal problem," or "My kid, you know, crashed his camel" or whatever. It's like, "Ah man." He would pray for them, and he had that sense of caring for people.

I'm just saying this, Let's put it this way, number two. You need to "Build a Good Reputation," and the only way you're going to build a good reputation is for you to have a sincere concern, contra Proverbs 18:1 and 2, a sincere concern for other people. It's not about just you getting through life and getting everything you want and I want the right toys and want the right devices, I want the right subscriptions. No it's about I want to have a good reputation with people around me, people I work with, people in my neighborhood, people at church, people in my small group. I want a good reputation because I'm sincerely caring about them. I'm willing to sacrifice for them. I want to know them. I want them to know me. I'm willing to have friends, real connections and friends beyond my immediate biological family. And I could preach that, I mean, some of us don't even know our family members. But we've got to be connected to where they would say, "Yeah, this person has a good life and a great reputation. I can speak well of them."

Some of you say, "Well, I know this is not biblical now because Jesus was very clear. If I'm supposed to build it, you're saying I'm supposed to actively pursue a good reputation, I



shouldn't do that because I've read the Sermon on the Mount and I know what Jesus said. Jesus said in Matthew Chapter 6, he said, 'Do not practice your righteousness before men.' Slam dunk, Mic drop, told you Pastor Mike, you're wrong." OK. All right. I'm glad you brought that passage up. OK? To say that Jesus said not to practice our righteousness before men is to quote half of a verse. OK? Let me give you this. And this is very important for any sentence, any translation of any sentence.

Let's start with where's the imperative verb in this sentence? Well, you didn't quote it. The very first word in English in our text of Scripture in Matthew Chapter 6 verse 1 is, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men," comma, purpose clause, "to be seen by them." When you go to give, don't, you know, blow a trumpet. Don't sit there and look all gloomy so people can think you're really godly when you're fasting, right? You're giving. Don't be like ostentatious about it. I'm not asking you to be ostentatious so you can get a good reputation. I'm not saying, why don't you cloak your greed to have a good reputation by trying to make sure everyone knows what you're doing. I'm not saying that.

I am saying what he said just previously in the Sermon on the Mount in Chapter 5, when he said, hey, here's the thing, "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. You don't light a lamp and put it under a bushel. No, you put it on a stand so the light can be seen by everyone. Let your light shine before men so that they might see your good works and glorify your Father who's in heaven." I know Jesus wants you to practice your righteousness before men. He wants you to do it with the right motive, which I would say is Cornelius' motive. He sincerely cares about people, and he acts on it. Some of you have a PR problem. You do care, but you don't show it, you don't act on it, you don't do anything about it. And you may even quote Matthew Chapter 6 to say, "Well, I'm just trying to, you know, and 'not let my right hand know what the left is doing' and kind of doing it all in secret, because that's what Jesus said." He didn't say to live your life in secret and to care for people in secret.

Matter of fact, you should have a good reputation. Two examples of this, both of them from the pastoral epistles. How about this one? First Timothy Chapter 5 talks about women in the church who have their husbands die, they're widows, and they don't have an income and they come to the church and they say, "I need help. I'm a part of the church and I need help." Here's what it says, you cannot give them financial help, the pastor cannot authorize a check request for a widow in the church unless she has a good reputation for good works." She's got to be known for that. She's got to be someone who cares for other people. Now the church is going to care for her. You say, "Well, that sounds like something I can't imagine having as the policy of your church." Here's the point. The Bible requires godliness to go with a good reputation, and you can go back up to Chapter 3 when it talks about the fact that the pastor cannot even be the pastor unless he not only has a good reputation with the church, but it says he has a good reputation with those who are, here's the word, "outsiders." You should be able to go to the neighbors and say, "Do you hear him yelling at his kids? Do you hear him, you know, throwing cans over your fence? What kind of guy is this? When there's a problem, does he help? Does he just go into the garage and shut the garage door and he really doesn't care about anybody else?"



Good reputation. I can't even be a pastor. I can't lead in the church without a good reputation. And you can't even be considered for financial aid unless you have a good reputation. Yes, you should build a good reputation. How? By living your life in such a way that your good works are seen by people. Don't do it TO be seen by people so that you can get a good reputation like the Pharisees did. You've got to beware when you practice your righteousness there before people, but Jesus just told us just three paragraphs earlier, "Let your light shine." Right? Do your good works before people. Let them see them. So I want you to work harder at building a good reputation. And again, it just reinforces the underlying point of the sermon. You can't do that without engaging in people's lives. You have to engage.

You're walking out of your office. someone's got a car problem, they need a jump or they need to fix a flat or there's whatever issue or somebody in your office or in your family, you know, had some tragedy and they're collecting money for who knows what, the extra mile, extra dollar, right? Doing all that, staying the extra hour, spending the extra hour, going the extra mile. All of those things that we talk about around here are something that should be done regularly, so people, I could come to your office and they say, "Yeah, man, he really is good. I speak well of that guy. You know, I was in a jam once and he was there. Generous? My kid just had to sell Girl Scout cookies." That's kind of a double-sided, self-serving thing that we do, but "send her down to my office. I'll buy her cookies." But seriously, buy more cookies than I need. The kind of things that we do to show that we care about people ought to be what you're shooting for. And that's going to necessitate that people know you and you know people. Build a good reputation.

Verse 23, look at this text now, verse 23. Just the first part, it says, "So he invited them in," so this is Peter inviting them in "to be his guests." OK, now if you are a Bible student and you've got tools or software, look at that word, that word that's translated "guests." Right? "He invited them in to be his guests." He is now a Jewish apostle, a pastor of a Jewish congregation. Right? These are converts to Christ in Jerusalem. He's traveling through this valley to the coast, and he's stopping along the way, doing evangelism. He's staying with Simon the Tanner, this guy who's slaughtering animals and producing leather goods. And here come Italians, three Italians. One of them is actually a part of the soldiers, the regiment of soldiers, I'm sure there, who is representing Rome, who is the occupying force, who is subjugating the nation.

And Peter says, "Guys come on in." Well, it ain't even your house. Well, I'm assuming that Simon the Tanner is keen with this as well, but they're going to have them come in. They're going to sure feed their horses, give their horses something to eat, water to drink. Come on in. We're going to share a meal. Matter of fact, they don't leave until the next day, so they're giving them a place to sleep. They don't send them to the hotel. These are guys who are showing hospitality. The word "guest," by the way, if you looked at that, if you have, you know, on your phone or your software or whatever, or you got your Greek New Testament open, you'll see the core of that word is the word "Xenos," right? You've heard of "xenophobia," right? Phobia, Greek word "Phobos" means "fear." Xenos means "stranger, outsider." Someone who's different than you. Stranger. OK?



Here's the word it is used, a little different form of the word, to mean that you've got an outsider that you're being receptive to and welcoming to. That's the word "guests" here. It is the noun form, plural noun form of that word. An outsider that really you don't have any right to my cupboard or my refrigerator here to use modern analogy, but I'm going to let you in. The Bible takes that one step further, and it smashes together another Greek word that you know and that's the word "Phileo." "Philoxenos." That's a compound word in the New Testament and you know the word like Philadelphia, a transliteration of "Phileo" and "Adelphos." Adelphos is the word "brother." Right? And we call Philadelphia the City of Brotherly Love. The point is the word phileo is the word "love." Love in a sense that I care for you like you're my family member. Philoxenos is the word that combines the word "stranger, outsider, foreigner" with the word "I love you," and by that I mean, I'm going to treat you like you're my brother, you're my friend, you're an insider. That word is translated in the New Testament, some of you know, "hospitality."

That's when I go beyond just saying, "I guess you could sleep on my couch, but I'm going to watch you closely. I'm going to have my little, you know, video gear on you. Make sure you don't take anything." No, now it's like, "I care for you. I love you. I'm going to take care of you as though you need something? Hey, make yourself at home." That picture of hospitality is, at its root, is the word for stranger, others, outsider, someone who doesn't belong here. And all I'm telling you is here is what the whole point of Gentile inclusion is about. It's getting over that sense of you are an outsider. We have here before the evangelism ever starts, Peter doing what Jesus was accused of all the time. You're treating people like insiders when they're really not. Right? We quoted the passage real briefly last week, and that's in Luke Chapter 15 verses 1 and 2, and the Pharisees grumbled because Jesus was receiving these sinners, these tax collectors. And it's like, "No, no, no. They're outsiders, keep them outsiders."

Our relationships need to be, let me put it this way, number three, you need to "Be Relationally Entrepreneurial," entrepreneurial. I use the word entrepreneurial not just so I can say a French word in church. It is a French word, but it means enterprising, adventurous. I like the word in this context. I was bold enough to use it in this point because we think of the word entrepreneurial, entrepreneurial, see, I shouldn't have used a French word in this sermon, entrepreneurial because we are usually thinking of business, right? You're a business owner and you're really expanding your market share and you're worried about your budget expanding your P&L being on the good side and you're going to do this good work and get into this market and make this business happen. You're an entrepreneur. You're going to start from scratch. You're adventurous, you're risk-taking. OK?

And all I'm saying is that we need to be that relationally. And most of us are not that way. As a matter of fact, not only are the relationships shrinking in most modern days and today in America and the current cultural current flow, but we are whatever's left as the most obvious ones, right? Of course, we're going to... like I'm about to be done and when I'm done, you're going to be released to go get your kids. And then we put the velcro tables out there. I mean, velcro because we're trying to get you to stick there for just a little bit to get coffee and donuts. Your kids are quick to running, grab five or six, put them in their pockets as I see them (audience laughing) and whatever's left you go and you're supposed to slow down and stop



there. What we're trying to prevent is you doing what I see people doing and that is running to their car. Right? Like before the last song is over, you're just going to run to my car.

And unless your house is on fire, I'm just going to tell you you're not allowed to do that. Stop. Don't do that. We're not just making donuts for your kids, right? Just so that they can test their conscience and be tempted at taking things more than they should. But donuts and coffee are there to slow you down so you can make connections. And here's the thing, the natural thing for you to do is to do what you do every week if you happen to stop at the velcro tables and that is you will talk to people who you normally talk to. And I'm saying, even before we get into trying to be entrepreneurial in our relationships in our neighborhood or our office, can we start here? When you're done and you walk down those halls and you go where all the pop-ups are, the awnings, and the coffee and donuts, can you say I'm going to now start to practice the sermon Pastor Mike just preached? I see my friend over here who I always talk to. I'm going to look for someone I don't know.

And I know the passage talked about people sharing their homes and their guest bedrooms and their pantries and their quote unquote refrigerators, you know, and the hay to feed their animals, I'm just going to start by sharing my name and a little bit of my story. And as a matter of fact, I'm going to be the kind of person that Cornelius was in hearing. I'm going to listen better than I talk. I'm going to ask some questions. I'm going to get to know someone. And if you really want to be a varsity Christian today, actually, instead of going off to lunch by yourself, why don't you do what the Bible would, I think, recommend and was the cultural current of the first century and in the Old Testament, practice the kind of hospitality that was so common in the early Church of sharing your meals together. Say, "Hey, let's go to lunch." Maybe you're thinking, "Well, we can't afford to do that." Well, then split the ticket then, right? Go to lunch, take people with you, people you don't know, you didn't know before today. Ask them questions. Expand your circle.

Now I say entrepreneurial. That's going to be risky just for the sake of doing it, because we're so averse to this kind of like authenticity and openness. I mean, we can go to church for weeks and never really meet anyone new and never connect and get involved in anyone's life. I want you by the time put your head on the pillow tonight and go to sleep, I want you to have known things and new things about people you didn't know so that you can start to carry one another's burdens. Remember when the shutdown took place, I did a devotional every day and I added all the one-anothers of Scripture? You can't practice those one-anothers, really, if you look through them, with just your immediate family. You just can't. And you can't practice all of them, really, just by the people who you have as your best five friends right now. I mean, if you going to need to do the biblical stuff you're going to have to expand your circle, be entrepreneurial just so you can do what God is asking you to do, to be connected in webs and networks of interdependent relationships.

And so it starts in about 15 minutes. You're going to go out there and it's like the challenge will be on. I will be roaming around on the edges watching to see what you do. (audience laughing) Are you going to reach out? And then some of you're going to say this, "Why I'm new here, they should be coming to me, so I'm just going to stand there." You don't get a



pass just because you're new to the church. OK? Matter of fact, I understand you may have to be the one who primes the pump in starting a conversation. "Hey, my name is..." That's a good way to start the conversation. Just get it going. Some think, "Well, I don't know. Maybe they're new too." Just start the conversation. Get to know someone. Go beyond the current borders of what's normal. Be entrepreneurial in your relationships. And then would you do that in your neighborhoods? Would you do that in your offices?

Jesus was accused of that because he had a mission. The woman at the well, his concern was she's receptive to truth. "I'm going to build a relationship and I'm going to talk about her life. I'm going to get to know her." He knew everything about her anyway, "But I'm going to talk about things in her life she wouldn't normally talk to strangers about and then she's going to go into town and she's going to bring people back." He had a strategy. Talk about the risk. You know what you want to do when you take risks in business, you care about the bottom line. Well, there is a bottom line. It's being strategic and that may not feel good to you. And I don't mean to throw you off here, but our relationship should be strategic. Jesus said, "Make friends by means of mammon," money, "that you might have them welcome you into eternal dwellings." I want them in the kingdom. I want to "Let my light shine before men to do good works that they might see so they might glorify God who's in heaven." I want them to be a brother or sister in Christ.

So, you need to see that as a goal, both in your non-Christian relationships, your coworker relationships and in your church relationships. And it starts today to where you're not that shrinking group of people that we see as being, as the title of Putnam's book says, like *Bowling Alone*, right? You never should never go bowling alone, right? Who bowls anyway anymore? But don't do it alone, right? Don't do really hardly anything alone. Socially engage and expand your borders. Be relationally entrepreneurial.

Number four, verse 23b. Look at the second half of this verse, "And some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him." And I already talked about the fact that there were a handful of people here who went with him. Six of them Acts Chapter 11:12 tells us. And I'm just thinking if I am called to have an evangelistic conversation, I'm probably not going to take eight people with me, seven people with me, six people with me. And yet Peter walks into the courts of the household of Cornelius with 10 people. I'm just telling you, when it comes to our representation of Christ, we ought to see that as a team effort.

One of the sermons, I think I put this on the back, about team evangelism, and I talked about our church together doing it as a team, but I'm not even talking about that, even though I put the message there because I want us to get past the personal evangelism mindset. I'm all for personal evangelism. You're one-on-one with someone on a plane, whatever. Talk about Christ. But I want you to think more strategically the way that Peter did naturally and the brothers at Joppa did naturally, which is, "Hey, you're going on a trip. I will go with you and see if we can make a difference for Christ here." And I'm saying you can do that in a microcosm in small ways all the time. I mean, you could.



You could go golfing by yourself Saturday afternoon because you got a little time. Or you could team up with another Christian and say, "Hey, let's go get a foursome on a crowded golf course in the afternoon. They'll assign two people to us, Let's go and get, you know, get coffee before we go or talk before we go and let's pray specifically that we might represent Christ on the golf course. Let's talk about it. Let's do the right thing, and let's bring up eternal matters," and you become now, you're teaming together.

Let's put it that way. Number four, "Team Up to Represent Christ." Team up. You've got a, you know, a soccer team that your kids are on, or a basketball team your kids are on, and you've got that team. And you know, "Oh, I got some gals at church that go with me to the practices and the dads show up for the games and you think that's great. And all you do is sit with your church friends. And I'm saying, that's great. Sit with your church friends. But can you pray on the way over? Can you talk before you get there and say, "We want to make a difference in the parents there who don't know Christ? Let's specifically think about that, strategize about that. Let's bring up conversations that bring it back to what we're all about as Christians. Team up to do this. Right?"

You don't even see the cult groups going out in neighborhoods by themselves. They go in teams. We need to think as teams and we need to be teamed up to represent Christ, not just inviting people to church, which is the ultimate team evangelism, right? That can happen, and it can be a good and fruitful thing. But I need you to think about doing this as teams within our church.

Two passages to write down. Philippians Chapter 1 verse 27. Philippians 1:27. Write this one down too, Philippians 4:2 and 3. Philippians 4:2 and 3. Philippians 1:27 uses a word, and this word is only used twice in the Bible and the other one is in Philippians 4. But in Philippians 1:27, it talks about Paul, and he's going on about how proud he is of the church. And then he says this about them. He says, "You're standing firm in one spirit, with one mind," here's the phrase, "striving side-by-side for the faith of the gospel." Striving side-by-side for the faith of the gospel. That word, that's translated side-by-side, that idea is the teaming together of these Christians side-by-side now representing something for the faith of the gospel. This is this outgoing offensive together. You guys are not doing this as individuals.

I often talk about chairs face-to-face at church on Sundays, and I'm all about that. You got to be side-by-side. They were side-by-side as they stood and listened to the preaching of Peter, and then they broke up and got their chairs face-to-face. That's very important. But now I'm saying there's also a side-by-side component is now when you get out of your small groups, get side-by-side, team up to represent Christ to the world. You don't have to do this by yourself. That's what I'm trying to say. Team up to represent Christ.

Well, here's one of the reasons, and this is going to catch a lot of other things I've said already, and that is that there's going to be opposition in your heart to doing what I'm saying. It's easier for you to watch whatever you want, do whatever you want, be whoever you want because you can isolate yourself, seek your own desire, be individualistic in everything that you do. You don't want more people in your life because you know what happens if you get

more people in your life? You're vulnerable to pain and hurt and argument and disagreement. You don't like the cognitive dissonance. You don't like the differences. I just want my opinion, my thing, and I know that there's hurt involved. You've been hurt in the past. You've got people in the background of your life, the debris of relationships because you let people in and you got burnt.

The only reason I bring up the second use of this word side-by-side is because here is Paul calling out two women in the church who are at odds with one another. I mean, one was sitting here and one was sitting there when the pastor got up to read this letter from Paul. And in the middle of all this great stuff about how they're doing side-by-side ministry to represent Christ in Philippi, he says now in Chapter 4 verse 2, "Hey, I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche," even the repetition of the verbs here, right? I entreat you and I entreat you, who now are sitting on opposite sides of the church or, in our case, going now to different services. He says, "To agree with one another," get along, be together.

He says, "I ask you true companion," which was probably the guy who brought the letter. Here comes a guy who's going to help, "help these women," these two women, "who have labored," here's our word again, "side-by-side with me in the gospel." You have been together with me trying to advance the gospel in Philippi. I don't know what kind of things they did, I don't know what kind of outreach they did, I don't know what kind of conversations they had. But Euodia and Syntyche were at one point side-by-side along with Paul. And then he says, "and Clement was with us too." We had a team of people and "the rest of the workers," he says. Then he adds, this little stinging salt in the wound, he says, "whose names are written in the Book of Life." "Hey, Euodia, you're not saying Syntyche is a non-Christian, or Syntyche you're not saying Euodia's name is not written the Book of Life. Can you guys get past whatever it is that's dividing you guys?"

And I'm just saying this, we're going to do a whole series in chapters 11 and 12 of Acts, all about the unity in the church that we need to have. It is important. But first, we got to start with having relationships. You mean, the church is not like "no one at church offends me." It's like its life-on-life, its intertwined lives, its souls knitted together. That's going to be messy because we're all fallen people. And when we hurt each other's feelings, when we have disagreements, I'm just telling you, don't let that keep you from representing Christ together. And that's Paul's concern. When the church is divided like this, and relationships aren't working the way they're supposed to, and everyone's atomized, individualized and sequestered, we don't have the power that we had when we represented the gospel to the lost world side-by-side. Team up to represent Christ.

Verse 24. Are you still in our passage here? Are you with me on this? "On the following day," so they sleep on it, they come in, they rest, their animals rest. "On the following day they enter Caesarea." They travel. They spend a night somewhere on the way. They enter Caesarea. "Cornelius was expecting them and he'd called together his relatives and close friends." He called together his relatives and close friends. And I add now verse 27, because it describes it with a different phrase. "As he," Peter, "talked to him," Cornelius, "he went in and found many persons gathered." So here is a one-on-one concern, the conversion of Cornelius and all



these people are there. And as I said when I read it, here is Cornelius thinking, "If I'm going to learn something important, I'm not going to learn it by myself. I mean, I'm going to have everyone I can get in my house."

And according to historians and archeologists, the homes that you might have had for a centurion who might have even been more powerful than just over 100, some argue that he had, you know, oversight of the whole cohort, six hundred people. But a powerful military man in the first century in Caesarea Maritime probably would have a house that could literally have in it, they would guess within the eating area, like the dining room we would call it, probably up to 12 people and in the atrium could probably have comfortably seat up to 50 people. That's kind of a wealthy home, but you think about that, you could imagine a home that's got like 50+ people in it. And all I'm saying is he's going to say, "If I got something important to learn, I'm going to make sure others are learning it with me."

And then, of course, he takes the gospel back to Rome, and I don't know how many people might have been dependent on his testimony. Trust me, his family was going to know about anything he learned. Right? He was concerned about the people around him learning it. I put it this way. Number five, we need to always pass on our learning. "Always Pass on Your Learning." Anything, whether it's evangelism or if you're a new Christian. You become a Christian today you ought to tell your friends and your family and your relatives. You ought to call people over and tell them what happened. If you are learning anything, say in a Christian book that you're reading, you ought to communicate it with people. And I'd say communicate in person, face-to-face with your mouth and their ears. Speak to them. Talk to them. Here's what I learned.

If you learn something in a sermon today, you should talk to people this week about it. You should have people in your life who you care about. Start with your family. Do your kids learn anything about what you learned in church from you? Sure, they have their thing going on across the way. Talk to them about it. Tell them what you're learning. Share what you've learned. That's always the case. Paul did everything in the context of these relationships. He had his Timothys. He had his Siliases. He had his Barnabases. He had his Silases and Tituses. He had all these people who he was making sure to invest in. And it was always in group settings.

Listen to this passage. Second Timothy Chapter 2 verse 2. Second Timothy 2:2. He says, "The things," Paul says to Timothy, "that you have learned in the presence of many witnesses," he had entrusted to them, you "entrust to faithful men, who'll be able to teach others also." Always teaching. We're always moving. It's not like "here's a great website with some good sermons on here." "Here, I read a book. You read it." This is about you passing on and imparting the things that God is teaching you. Always pass it on. And guess what that assumes? That there are relationships in your life that if anything in your life happens spiritually for good, you've got enough relationship and connection there to pass it on.

I mean, you have the tool, you may not have 50 seats in your house. Right? Some will say, "Well, my dining room only holds six chairs." Well, great. I just ask you this. When was the

last time you filled up your dining room with people and made sure that during the conversation you were talking about things that God is teaching you? That would be a really godly thing to do. "Well, that feels kind of weird." Well, that's the cultural currents of our day, leading us to this individualistic thing where you're supposed to just write it in a journal and then it's done. Share it! Pass it on. It necessitates the network of relationships that undergird that kind of conversation.

Lastly, weird little scene. Two minutes on this. Verse 25 and verse 26. Right? Here is a weird thing that happens. "When Peter enters, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him." By the way, I just want to say that is an amazing picture of a Roman centurion with all the power kneeling down in front of the Galilean pastor. That is just an amazing, humbling thing to do. He's a humble man. He went too far. He's got to be corrected. But then I don't have the pastor here going, "Well, yeah, I am the VIP and he and his band probably crucified Christ. And I do deserve a little respect here. I work hard to prepare those sermons." I mean, none of that. He goes, "No, no, no, get up." I mean, look at how it says it here. "Peter lifted him up," verse 26, "saying, 'Stand up. I too am a man.'" I'm just a man. Don't worship me.

We see that in Acts 14 when Paul and Barnabas are worshiped by the people there on that missionary journey. And he says, "No, get up." This is wrong. Even the angels in Chapter 19 of Revelation, Chapter 22 of Revelation, we have two scenes where the angels are worshiping. They say, "Don't worship me, worship God." All I'm saying is, well, OK, I guess that's just we want to avoid blasphemy. It also is a great picture of the humility, the relational humility of both of these guys. And that's something that we should all have. Which by the way, you're not going to have many good relationships if you're not relationally humble. So number six, "Remain Relationally Humble," remain relationally humble. Some of you are humble in your relationship with God vertically. I do think you understand the highness of God. You maintain a high view of God. But it's almost because of your relationship with God, you don't have a lot of relational humility.

And I want to say this: I don't care how powerful you are in being used in some powerful way within society, some big business owner or whoever you are or in the church, you can be the senior pastor of the megachurch in Jerusalem and an apostle named Peter. You better be a humble person and recognize you're just a man. In Romans Chapter 12, speaking of Romans, he writes about the fact that the body of Christ, he says the same thing in First Corinthians 12, but he says the body of Christ in Romans 12, all of you need to think as you ought to think about your role within the body. God could have chosen any part of the body to be the hand, any part to be the shoulder, any part to be the kneecap. He chose you for the part he's given you, so don't think more highly of yourself than you ought. You ought to think so as to have sound judgment and then he talks about the body parts.

The body is all one. It's got to work together. Someone's got to be the pastor, someone's got to be this person, someone's got to be that person. And we've got to run the businesses over here. Someone's got to be, you know, the wealthy, powerful person over here, but you're just



a person. Some of you do not have good relations with other people because you have a problem of seeing yourself as better than them. I'm just saying you've got to be humble.

By the way, one diagnostic of that is how much do you talk and how well do you listen? "Well, you talk more than anyone I know Pastor Mike." OK. Hopefully, I listen well when we're one-on-one. Right? The whole point of our lives is to care authentically about the people around us as an entrepreneur, someone who's going to go out and actually see good things happen because of my connection with other people. And I want to do that with sincerity, and I want to care for people, and I want to be the kind of person that doesn't see myself as someone entitled to anything other than that I am in debt to you, as the Bible says, to love. I don't want to be in debt to anybody financially, but only the debt to care for them, to love them.

Whether it's the good Samaritan who helps this Jewish person with all the social barriers. He powers through that. He saw himself humbly. Cornelius and Peter are both very powerful people in their own spheres, and both of them prove a kind of humility in this passage that I think is instructive. And I just beg you to be a humble person. Listen. Put yourself in the sandals of the other person. Care about where they're at. Cornelius and Peter, they were not mavericks, they were not isolated, they were not loners, they were not out in a corner by themselves. They were networked in relationships.

During World War II, they did some experiments trying to find out the best way to torture people to get information out of them. And there are a lot of means of torturing people, obviously. And in World War II, at least, a study that I read was that they found that isolation was one of the most powerful and best tools to leverage information, fully isolated. It's going to take time, you got to have the time to do it. But we are, as I say ontologically, who were made. We not only need air and food, you need relationship. And they found that the leverage of having, you know, the ability to get information out of people because of their isolation is powerful because of the need that individuals have.

Talk about the torture. Our culture is torturing itself by atomizing ourselves, sequestering ourselves, right? The distance that we have between one another now is killing us. And the effects are bad. Be countercultural. Make the world think you're crazy because you are so engaged in relationships and networks. That will please the Lord. It's not just about the theological inclusion of the Gentiles, it's about learning lessons in this passage this morning about the things that God would have us do because our culture is not helping us in this department.

Let's pray. Let's pray. That sigh was I could keep going, but your kids are done in their classes, so let's pray. God, help us, please, to be the kinds of people that actually put your word into practice, we want to be hearers who deceive themselves. We can learn Greek words and know theology and be able to check boxes about biblical geography and how far Joppa is from Caesarea, but if we don't do what your word tells us to do and in this case, what is commanded in so many places in Scripture and illustrated so well in this passage, then we're just deceiving ourselves. So help us this morning to be doers of the word, starting right now. By the time we sing this quick song, being down the hallways, looking for people we



don't know, expanding our circles, caring for people, sharing a meal, sharing our home, getting engaged with authentic, real, transparent relationships and conversations that please you because this is the way we were designed to live. So, God, get this done in our hearts, I pray whatever the excuse, whatever the barrier.

In Jesus name, Amen.