

“People Who Reach Others For Christ”

Acts 10:23b-48

Series: Book of Acts [#14]

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Introduction

“...All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Therefore, as you go on your way, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and know with certainty, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
[Matthew 28:18-19, personal translation]

With these now familiar words Jesus opened a new, challenging era of God’s reaching out and calling people to Himself. God has always reached out to all people everywhere. He speaks to everyone through the wonder of His creation, through the inner witness of our conscience, His Word, and the work of the Holy Spirit to convict and convince.

For many centuries God worked through the nation of Israel. They were to live under His rule and, by their godly testimony, draw people from all countries and cultures to God. At times their witness was clear and bright, but often it was not as clear and bright as it should have been.

There was a drastic change when the church age began. God’s chosen witness is no longer a nation, ethnic group or culture, but the church. And in the church there is, as Paul wrote, “... neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

Jesus’ command to “make disciples” is given to every believer. Early in His ministry on earth Jesus said, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). If you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, your main service for God to the world around you is to make disciples, to be a fisher of men, to point and lead people to faith in Jesus.

And so a question before us is “Are we people who reach others for Christ?” And, “If not, why not?” What do we need to be and do to be people who reach others for Christ? We see some of the answer as we review the apostle Peter bringing the gospel to Cornelius and his household in the last part of Acts chapter 10.

This section shows us a number of key things about people who reach others for Christ. The first thing we see is that they are ...

Available And Obedient To God.

Available and obedient to God even though they don’t know and understand everything. In the last two weeks we have seen that Peter did not fully understand what was going on, what God was telling him. God gave him that vision of something like a sheet being lowered

with all kinds of clean and unclean animals in it—that is, both okay to eat and not okay to eat animals. Peter heard the command, “Get up... kill and eat!” That puzzled and disturbed him. He tried to figure out what it meant.

Then God told Peter there were three men at the front door looking for him and that He himself had sent them. Even though they were Gentiles, Peter was to go with them without questions or doubts. Peter was a busy man. But he cleared his schedule and headed off to Caesarea along with six other believers (cf. 11:12). When he arrived at Caesarea, Peter still had some uncertainty. Go to verse 28,

“And he said to them, ‘You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me.’” (28-29)

Peter had a growing awareness, but he still did not see the whole picture. He still had questions. After Cornelius told him about his experience, everything began to fit into place. Drop down to verse 34, “...I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.” In other words, Peter said,

“Now I’ve got it! Now I understand that Jesus Christ, His full and free forgiveness, His gift of life forever with God is available to everyone equally because Jesus’ death and resurrection washed away all the old dividing lines.”

Peter was available and obedient to God even though he did not know and understand everything.

Although our circumstances are vastly different than Peter’s, we regularly face the same challenge. We see or meet someone who does not know Jesus. And even after we get to know them, we...

- may not feel that comfortable nor certain about how to talk with them about Jesus;
- we don’t know how this person will respond;
- we may be afraid that this person will ask questions we can’t answer.

When Peter set out to Caesarea to meet Cornelius he did not have it all together. Yet he was available and obedient to God. We need to follow his example. Yes, think through the situation and issues. But don’t allow your questions or your busy schedule keep you from being available and obedient to God.

Secondly, people who reach others for Christ are available and obedient to God even though the person they are talking with doesn’t know and understand much or anything about Christ.

While Peter was trying to put the pieces together, Cornelius was doing the same thing. Cornelius, from what we see later in this chapter, had most likely heard about Jesus, but did not understand how Jesus fit in with his search for God. He was earnestly seeking God through Judaism, but had not yet made a full commitment. He understood and obeyed the angel's instruction to send for Peter who would give him a message from God, but he had no clue about what Peter would say.

After Peter arrived and Cornelius briefed him on the background to all of this, in verse 33 he said to Peter, "Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord." In effect he was telling Peter, "You are God's messenger. You tell us what is going on. Tell us the truth God has for us."

Most of the people you and I can point to Christ at the onset will not have a clue as to who Jesus really is and what it means to truly be a Christian. We need to be sensitive to where they are and not make assumptions or rush by the basics. But we also need to avoid the mistake of not walking through doors that questions, ignorance, or problems provide. The bottom line is that we don't know God's timetable for others, and we should be careful not to impose our own.

Be available and obedient to your commission from Christ even though the person you are talking with doesn't know and understand much or anything about Christ. Bishop Philip Brooks, who wrote *Silent Night*, was once recovering from a serious illness, and so did not allow even his closest friends to come and see him. But when Robert Ingersoll showed up, Brooks let him in. Ingersoll was a well-known speaker who went to great lengths to ridicule Christianity and religion in general,

People wondered, "Why?" "Why this man with all his questions, skepticism and rejection of the faith who was disgusting to many Christians?" Ingersoll also was curious, and so he asked Brooks. Brooks told him, "I feel confident of seeing my friends in the next world, but this may be my last chance of seeing you." Brooks didn't allow Ingersoll's bombastic questions and rejection stop him from be available and obedient to witness to him.

Then we also see here that *People who reach others for Christ are...*

Christlike In Relating To Others.

One of the aspects of Christlikeness we see in Peter here is humility. Like Christ we must be humble in relating to others. Let's pick it up at verse 25. "When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him."

First, let's think about what Luke means when he tells us Cornelius *worshiped* Peter. At that time in that part of the world it was common to bow down before a person who was of a higher rank or position than yourself, showing both recognition of that person's status and your respect. The term used here described that action. So at the least this indicates Cornelius was showing respect for Peter as a spiritual leader sent by God.

But some think Peter's correction of this by telling Cornelius, "I am just a man" may

indicate Cornelius saw Peter as an angel, perhaps even the angel in his vision. In either case, Peter did not accept any honor from Cornelius to which he was not entitled. He had true humility. He knew that even though he was an apostle, he was no higher than anyone else. He set the record straight for Cornelius, and everyone since that day.

People who reach others for Christ are Christlike, humble. Question: how long, how seriously will you listen to someone who has some interesting ideas, but is condescending or arrogant? Listen to how Paul in a very matter of fact manner describes this kind of humility in 1 Corinthians 9,

“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.” (19-23)

Then, always remember Christ’s humility. Philippians 2 beginning at verse 5,

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (5-8)

The next characteristic builds on this humility. It is to truly accept and be ready to share the gospel with everyone. Think about Peter and Cornelius in this regard. After Peter got the status issue set aside, we read in verse 27, “As [Peter] talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled.” Many people, and they all were Gentiles. He was open and accepting.

As the account continues, it shows that he was also friendly and candid. Pick it up with verse 28,

“he said to them, ‘You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me.’” (28-29)

He was candid about his own background and the traditional attitudes Jews had toward Gentiles. His manner is open and friendly, but also candid.

And then Peter moves on to share the good news of Jesus. Drop down to verse 34,

“I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.” (34-35)

This truth is not only foundational to the current church age, it is also foundational to God’s unchanging heart. In Deuteronomy 10:17, as Moses called Israel to reverence and obey God, he described God as “... the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe.” God has never shown partiality to anyone because of who they are or are not, by whatever standard we may use such as position, status, abilities, or wealth. Priest or merchant, master or slave, Jew or Gentile, God is not partial. He rewards true faith in Him through Jesus Christ and judges sin. As we saw earlier, God will give anyone who is truly seeking Him more light. He will accept them in that true seeking, and keep on giving more light until they hear and accept the gospel, coming to Him through Jesus Christ, the one and only way to have sins forgiven and have fellowship with Him.

It has been said that “the ground is level at the foot of the cross.” In Jesus there are no mountains of culture, country, language or any other kind of background to scale. Neither are there any peaks from which one can look down on others. Peter was mirroring Christ’s character here. Christ accepted and was ready to share Himself and His truth equally with the learned, the religious, the leaders, and also with those who were uneducated, everyday and unclean people.

All of us meet our own *Corneliuses*—people who are different than we are, who we might naturally find hard to accept or relate to. They may be from different cultures, ethnic backgrounds, language groups, off the street or from Bay Street. If we are going to fulfill Christ’s commission, we must accept and be ready to share the gospel with everyone.

Then, we also need to follow the example of directly and clearly proclaiming the gospel. Peter was direct and clear with the gospel. He spoke about Christ’s life, 36,

“The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)—you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem.” (36-39a)

He spoke about Christ’s death, 39b, “They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross.” He moved on to Christ’s resurrection, 40,

“God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen

beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead” (40-41).

Then, Christ’s position, 42b, that He “is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.” And he closed with Christ’s invitation, 43, “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

The best example we have, of course, is Christ Himself. Read through the gospels paying attention to how Jesus communicated to his disciples, the crowds and those who opposed Him. Whether it was straightforward teaching or through parables, Jesus was direct and clear.

We also should speak directly and clearly. Don’t expect non-churched people to understand all the terms you know so well, or at least use so easily. A man who was painting up on a scaffold dropped his brush. As he watched it fall he yelled out, “Quack, Quack, Gobble, Gobble!” The brush hit a man walking under the scaffold and splattered paint on his suit. He shouted at the painter, “Why didn’t you warn me!?!” The painter said, “I did. I yelled ‘Quack, Quack, Gobble, Gobble!’” The paint-splattered man said, “What in the world is that supposed to mean?” The painter replied, “Duck, turkey!” Whatever approach you use, make sure you are accurate, direct and clear.

People who reach others for Christ are (1) Available and Obedient to God; (2) Christlike in relating to others, and also...

Committed To Establishing New Believers.

This starts with accepting them as equal fellow-believers. Let’s look at the account beginning with verse 44,

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, ‘Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?’ And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.” (44-48)

The Holy Spirit interrupted Peter’s preaching as people believed, as they put their trust in Jesus Christ.

There are three distinct and purposeful occurrences of the Holy Spirit coming to believers in the book of Acts that are not repeated after this point in the book or church history:

- At Pentecost in chapter 2, with the beginning of the church with Jewish believers.

- Then similarly, but distinctly different in chapter 8 with the Samaritans.
- Now, again similarly, but distinctly different here in chapter 10 with Gentiles.

God's point in these three unique events was, in part, to demonstrate that all the families and nations of people are now on equal footing with Him in the church.

Peter accepted what God was doing—he seemed not to be bothered with his sermon being cut off. He had these new believers baptized. They were given immediate, full acceptance. This is God's pattern has for us as well.

Then Peter invested in their spiritual growth. Look at the closing phrase in the chapter again, 48b, “Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.” We don't know how long Peter had planned on being there, nor exactly how many days stayed. But he took the time to invest in the spiritual growth of these new believers.

This is a necessity, not an option. Imagine that you are lost in the woods at night. You settle down and wait for morning so you can find your way. Then you see a light coming toward you. There is a person with a light. He tells you about his light, how it helps him travel safely in the dark, and asks you if you would like one. You jump at the offer.

Your new friend gives you a box and tells you that inside the box you will find a bulb, cylinder, a cap, reflector, two batteries, a lens and a switch. He tells you to put it together and enjoy walking in the light. Then he walks off, leaving you in the dark with your box.

Investing in the spiritual growth of new believers is a necessity, not an option.

Conclusion.

People who reach others for Christ are available and obedient to God, Christlike in relating to others and committed to establishing new believers. Does that sound like us, like our church? Does that sound like you? Are we people who reach others for Christ?

In the next few moments of quiet reflection with God,

- thank Him for Jesus and that because of Him you could be forgiven and accepted right where you were;
- examine your attitude of acceptance and concern for others who still need to come to Christ; and,
- determine to be a person who reaches others for Christ.

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