

Many of us still find ourselves trying to rely on our own ability to follow the Laws of God to earn our way into God's presence. But the truth is, we can't do it. But because we place our faith in Jesus, we do have access to the throne of grace.

3. Expanding Your Table

Acts 10:45-47 NLT - 45 The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, too. 46 For they heard them speaking in other tongues and praising God. Then Peter asked, 47 "Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?"

What did Peter observe that confirmed that God had accepted the Gentile believers? His question may have been rhetorical- who can object to welcoming those God has accepted into the church? But have we restricted our own acceptance to only those we find familiar or similar? When you reflect on your own circle of friends or those who attend our worship services, are there any people who are being left out? How can we expand our table and invite everyone who believes into our lives?

WRAP-UP

The early believers struggled to figure out who should be included in their church community. There was a strong cultural and religious norm that cause them to separate themselves from many other groups. But the blessing God had always intended for mankind had come through the line of Abraham to the Messiah, Jesus, and now was available to all who believe. And so we can welcome everyone to fellowship at our table who call Jesus Lord.

MEMORY VERSE

So the promise is received by faith. It is given as a free gift. And we are all certain to receive it, whether or not we live according to the law of Moses, if we have faith like Abraham's. For Abraham is the father of all who believe.

- Romans 4:16 NLT

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life.

Challenge – Challenge yourself to step outside of your comfort zone and share a meal with someone new or different from your usual friends. Maybe someone of a different age, gender, or social circle.

Communities that Disrupt

Beautiful Disruption #5

INTRODUCTION

The newly birthed church in the book of Acts was noticeably disruptive to the surrounding culture. They related to God in a different way, they proclaimed a new Gospel, they shared their gifts and resources selflessly and they crossed cultural barriers of race, wealth, and gender. The way they lived was just so strange that it disrupted the surrounding communities. One of the most significant changes was in the way Jewish believers treated the Gentile believers. It was revolutionary in that day for the two to politely interact, much less to show the unity and the love that could only be empowered by the Holy Spirit in them. Let's pray we continue to be a beautiful disruption to our culture in the same way.

Ice Breaker

Is there someone who is vastly different from you but because of your shared faith, has become a dear friend? What differences were set aside to form that bond?

Key Passage

Acts 1:8 NLT - 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere--in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. From Exclusion to Inclusion

Genesis 1:27- NLT - Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

From the very beginning in Genesis 1 we see that it is God's desire to bless mankind. But when man abandoned God's authority and took the knowledge of good and evil into his own hand and followed his own path, we forfeited that blessing. Thankfully, God is faithful, and out of the many He chose one, Abram, to receive the blessing and through Abram's descendants to make that blessing available to all the nations once again.

Genesis 12:1-3 NLT - 1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. 3 I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

In what ways did God begin by setting Abram apart? Why do think this was important in establishing his new relationship with God? In what ways are we still being set apart to God?

Galatians 3:16 NLT - 16 God gave the promises to Abraham and his child. And notice that the Scripture doesn't say "to his children," as if it meant many descendants. Rather, it says "to his child"--and that, of course, means Christ.

Romans 4:16 NLT - 16 So the promise is received by faith. It is given as a free gift. And we are all certain to receive it, whether or not we live according to the law of Moses, if we have faith like Abraham's. For Abraham is the father of all who believe.

God gave Abraham a two-fold promise. One promise (to be a blessing) to his seed (his offspring singular) and another (to receive a blessing) to his descendants (his offspring plural). God's promise that Abraham would be a blessing to all nations was passed on to and through the Messiah who would open the way into God's presence for all who believed. And so, God's promise to receive His blessing was no longer exclusively for the Jews. It was now available to the Gentiles. But this was a major shift in the beliefs and practices of everyone, and so disruption followed.

Acts 10:1-3 NLT - 1 In Caesarea there lived a Roman army officer named Cornelius, who was a captain of the Italian Regiment. 2 He was a devout, God-fearing man, as was everyone in his household. He gave generously to the poor and prayed regularly to God. 3 One afternoon about three o'clock, he had a vision in which he saw an angel of God coming toward him. "Cornelius!" the angel said.

When God opened the door to Gentile believers, He revealed this truth to both a Gentile (Cornelius) and a Jewish believer (Simon Peter). In Cornelius' vision described in Acts 10, he is given explicit instructions to send men to summon Peter. As soon as the vision ended, he did as he was directed. How does the description of Cornelius, and his response, show us he is ready to become a Christ follower?

The following day around noon Peter also had a vision, but one that required some interpretation. He saw a sheet filled with both clean and unclean animals (according to Jewish dietary laws). And the Lord told him to kill and eat them.

Acts 10:14-15 NLT - 14 "No, Lord," Peter declared. "I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean." 15 But the voice spoke again: "Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean."

There are two words that just don't go together, "no" and "Lord". We can't call Jesus Lord but refuse His explicit direction. Well Peter did. And Jesus essentially said, don't do that in verse 15.

Then He said, go with the men I've sent. And of course, they were Gentiles who would be considered "unclean" and with whom a Jew would not normally associate.

Acts 10:23, 28 NLT - 23 So Peter invited the men to stay for the night. The next day he went with them, accompanied by some of the brothers from Joppa. ... 28 Peter told them, "You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean.

How did Peter's actions demonstrate his changed perspective towards Gentiles? Are there still classes of people we tend to consider "unclean"?

2. Trusting the Law or the Lord?

Romans 4:9, 16, 23-24 NLT - 9 Now, is this blessing only for the Jews, or is it also for uncircumcised Gentiles? Well, we have been saying that Abraham was counted as righteous by God because of his faith. ... 16 So the promise is received by faith. It is given as a free gift. And we are all certain to receive it, whether or not we live according to the law of Moses, if we have faith like Abraham's. For Abraham is the father of all who believe. ... 23 And when God counted him as righteous, it wasn't just for Abraham's benefit. It was recorded 24 for our benefit, too, assuring us that God will also count us as righteous if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

The Jews were set apart to bear witness to what it looked like to live as a covenant people dedicated to God alone. But their righteousness was not based on how they lived or how they followed the laws. And that's a good thing because they failed repeatedly.

What was the basis of Abraham's righteousness? Why would God see us as "children of Abraham" if we are Gentiles? If we don't base our righteousness or salvation on our ability to follow God's laws, then why follow them?