

Session 8



EMPOWERED

Session 8: Empowered to Welcome

Primary Scripture

Acts 10:1–48

Introduction — When God Challenges Our Assumptions

Most people assume they are welcoming.

And often, sincerely, they are.

But Acts 10 reveals something uncomfortable:

people can genuinely love God while still carrying assumptions about:

- who belongs
- who is acceptable
- who is “inside”
- and who remains “outside”

Peter was faithful.

He loved God.

He followed Jesus.

And yet Acts 10 shows that even Peter still had boundaries the Holy Spirit needed to challenge.

This matters because the Holy Spirit continually stretches the Church beyond:

- fear
- prejudice
- inherited assumptions
- and limited understandings of God’s grace

The story of Peter and Cornelius is not ultimately about politics or social ideology.

It is about the Holy Spirit teaching the Church to recognize where God is already at work.

And throughout Acts, one pattern keeps repeating:

the Holy Spirit moves outward faster than the Church feels comfortable moving.

This session explores an important question:

How does the Holy Spirit reshape the way believers understand welcome, belonging, and the reach of God’s grace?

Because Spirit-led living continually calls believers to hold together:

- truth and compassion
- conviction and humility
- discernment and openness
- faithfulness and hospitality

And that requires deep dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Movement 1 — The Holy Spirit Often Begins by Challenging Us

Acts 10 begins with two people praying:
Cornelius and Peter.

Read Scripture: Acts 10:1–16

Cornelius was a Gentile.

To Peter, that distinction mattered deeply.

Peter had inherited religious and cultural assumptions about:

- purity
- separation
- and who belonged fully within God's people

Then Peter receives a vision.

Repeatedly, God tells him:

“Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean.”

This moment matters because transformation often begins with discomfort.

The Holy Spirit does not only comfort believers.

The Spirit also confronts assumptions that no longer align with the heart of God.

This can feel unsettling.

Most people naturally prefer:

- certainty
- familiarity
- and clearly defined boundaries

But throughout Acts, the Holy Spirit repeatedly pushes the Church beyond inherited limitations.

Read Scripture: Isaiah 55:8–9

Read Scripture: Psalm 139:23–24

Spirit-led living requires humility.

Humility says:

“I may not fully understand everything yet.”

“God may still need to teach me.”

“The Holy Spirit may still be reshaping my heart.”

This does not mean abandoning truth.

It means remaining teachable before God.

Reflection

What assumptions or categories have most shaped the way you view other people?

Why is it often difficult to let God challenge deeply held assumptions?

Movement 2 — The Holy Spirit Moves Ahead of the Church

When Peter arrives at Cornelius’ house, something surprising happens.

Read Scripture: Acts 10:24–33

Peter realizes:

God was already at work before he arrived.

This is one of the most important themes in Acts.

The Church does not initiate the mission of God.

The Holy Spirit does.

Again and again throughout Acts:

- the Spirit prepares hearts
- opens doors

- creates opportunities
- and moves ahead of the Church

This changes how believers think about ministry and people.

Many Christians unconsciously approach others with suspicion first.

But Acts encourages believers to become attentive to where God may already be working.

Read Scripture: John 3:8

Read Scripture: Luke 15:1–7

This requires discernment.

Not naïveté.

Not abandoning wisdom.

But openness.

The Holy Spirit often surprises believers by working in:

- unexpected people
- unexpected places
- and unexpected ways

Peter had assumed Cornelius stood outside the boundaries of God's work.

The Holy Spirit revealed otherwise.

This remains deeply relevant today.

The Church continually faces the temptation to define people primarily by:

- labels
- backgrounds
- politics
- appearance
- identity
- or past experience

But the Holy Spirit continually calls believers to look deeper.

Reflection

Where have you seen evidence that God was already at work in someone's life before you recognized it?

Why do Christians sometimes struggle to believe God may be working in unexpected people or places?

Movement 3 — The Holy Spirit Creates Humility, Not Superiority

As Peter speaks, the Holy Spirit falls upon Cornelius and the others gathered there.

Read Scripture: Acts 10:34–48

Peter's response is important:

"I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism."

This moment humbles Peter.

The Holy Spirit reveals that God's grace is larger than Peter's assumptions.

This matters because Spirit-led living should produce humility rather than superiority.

Throughout history, Christians have sometimes approached others primarily through:

- fear
- defensiveness
- judgment
- or the need to protect boundaries at all costs

But the Holy Spirit continually forms believers who recognize:

- they themselves live by grace
- they themselves continue learning
- and they themselves are still being transformed

Read Scripture: Ephesians 2:8–10

Read Scripture: Romans 15:7

Humility does not mean:

- abandoning conviction
- ignoring discernment
- or pretending differences do not exist

But it does mean recognizing that no person stands before God through superiority.

Everyone stands in need of grace.

And importantly:

the Holy Spirit consistently moves believers toward:

- compassion
- hospitality
- understanding
- and faithful presence with others

The Spirit does not form fearful or self-righteous communities.

The Spirit forms Christlike ones.

Reflection

What is the difference between conviction and superiority?

How does remembering your own need for grace affect the way you view others?

Movement 4 — The Holy Spirit Expands the Church Through Welcome

Acts 10 becomes a turning point in the life of the early Church.

The Gospel is moving outward.

And the Holy Spirit repeatedly widens the Church's understanding of who belongs within the family of God.

This does not happen without struggle.

The early Church wrestled deeply with these questions throughout Acts.

And the Church still wrestles with them today.

But Acts makes one thing unmistakably clear:
the Holy Spirit continually moves the Church outward toward people.

Read Scripture: Galatians 3:26–29

Read Scripture: Revelation 7:9–10

The Kingdom of God is larger, broader, and more diverse than human beings naturally imagine.

This matters deeply for Spirit-led living.

Because fear naturally pushes communities inward.

The Holy Spirit continually pushes believers outward:

- toward welcome
- toward mission
- toward compassion
- and toward deeper recognition of the image of God in others

The goal is not vague acceptance without discernment.

Nor is the goal fearful exclusion.

The Holy Spirit forms communities where:

- truth and grace remain together
- people are treated with dignity
- and the love of Jesus becomes visible through hospitality, humility, and faithful presence.

Reflection

What fears most often shape the way Christians approach people who feel different or unfamiliar?

How can believers remain both deeply rooted in faith and genuinely open-hearted toward others?

A Note on Welcome and Discernment

Christians sometimes respond to difficult cultural questions in one of two unhealthy ways:

- fearful exclusion
or
- abandoning discernment entirely

Acts points toward a healthier path.

The Holy Spirit continually:

- stretches the Church
- humbles believers
- expands compassion
- and leads people toward deeper understanding of God's grace

At the same time, Spirit-led welcome remains rooted in:

- Jesus
- Scripture
- humility
- and ongoing transformation

The goal is not simply inclusion as a social value.

The goal is becoming a community shaped by the heart of Christ.

The Holy Spirit forms believers who remain:

- truthful
- compassionate
- discerning
- teachable
- and deeply aware of their own dependence on grace.

Formation Practice (This Week)

Practice: Becoming More Open and Attentive

Each day this week:

Step 1 — Read Slowly

Read Acts 10:1–48 slowly each day.

Pay attention to:

- Peter’s assumptions
- the movement of the Holy Spirit
- and the repeated surprises throughout the story

Step 2 — Pray for Humility

Pray:

“Holy Spirit, show me where fear, assumptions, or pride shape the way I see others.”

Step 3 — Practice Intentional Hospitality

This week, intentionally move toward someone you might normally overlook:

- start a conversation
- listen carefully
- share a meal
- show kindness
- or remain present with someone different from yourself

Do not approach this as a project.

Approach it with humility and attentiveness.

Step 4 — Reflect Honestly

At the end of each day, ask:

“Where did I notice the Holy Spirit stretching my understanding, compassion, or awareness today?”

Living It Out

Where do you most naturally build emotional, spiritual, or relational boundaries?

How might the Holy Spirit be inviting you toward greater humility, compassion, or openness?

What would it look like to become more attentive to where God is already at work around you?

Final Reflection

Acts 10 reminds believers that the Holy Spirit continually stretches the Church beyond fear, assumptions, and limited understandings of belonging.

The Spirit repeatedly moves:

- outward
- toward people
- toward reconciliation
- and toward the ongoing mission of Jesus

The question is not:

“Is the Holy Spirit still expanding the Church’s understanding of grace and welcome?”

The question is:

“Are we willing to remain humble, discerning, and open to where God is leading?”

Weekly Prayer

Holy Spirit,

Teach me to remain humble and teachable before God.

Where fear shapes my thinking,
bring compassion.

Where assumptions limit my understanding,
bring wisdom and openness.

Help me become more attentive to where You are already at work in the lives of others.

Teach me to hold together truth,
grace,
discernment,
and love
as I continue following Jesus.

Amen.

