

**Acts 10:44–48**

**Ps. 98**

**1 John 5:1–6**

**John 15:9–17**

# No More Barriers

**Goal for  
the Session**

*Tweens will engage with the story of Peter and Cornelius and observe that no boundaries can limit the work and purpose of the Holy Spirit.*

## ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### Focus on Acts 10:44–48

#### WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” A. Katherine Grieb

As our passage begins, Peter has just given testimony concerning Jesus’ healing ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection. Peter summarizes: “To this all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (v. 43). The word “everyone” apparently functions as a dramatic cue for the Holy Spirit to fall upon Cornelius and upon his companions, fulfilling the prophecies Peter has just mentioned and demonstrating beyond a doubt that these Gentile believers in Jesus have also received forgiveness of sins in his name.

#### WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Noel Leo Erskine

The intervention of the Spirit in Peter’s meditation indicates that God in the Spirit often goes before to plead the case of those on the margins, those who are excluded. In Peter’s case the Spirit interrupts his meditation and orders him to engage strangers at his door. Peter is presented with another opportunity to learn something new concerning the divine persistence on behalf of persons in need. It is interesting that an apostle as devout as Peter has something fresh to learn about the divine character.

#### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Jeffrey D. Peterson-Davis

While Peter and Cornelius have central roles in this narrative, it is not a story about them. Rather, it is a story about the Holy Spirit and how the Spirit’s purposes are accomplished in spite of the boundaries constructed by humans. The witness of the text is that neither Peter nor Cornelius was able to cross the boundaries on their own. But the outpouring of the Holy Spirit empowered each of them to move from their segregated places. The Holy Spirit broke the barriers and propelled the witness of the resurrection beyond the boundaries of Jerusalem and Galilee.

#### NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Barbara K. Lundblad

The Holy Spirit can be disruptive. Church historian Rosemary Radford Ruether says that the church must be organized to do two things: to pass on the tradition from one generation to another and to be open to the winds of the Holy Spirit by which the tradition comes alive in each generation. Sometimes the Holy Spirit has a hard time getting through our stubborn desire to stay the way we are. Where is the Holy Spirit trying to break through traditions that have become rock hard? How do we continue to pass on the traditions from one generation to another while also being open to the Spirit that brings the tradition alive?

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

**Acts 10:44–48**

## Focus on Your Teaching

The tweens in your group will have encountered barriers of all kinds: “You are too young,” “We have always done it this way,” and expressions of prejudice. This session provides the opportunity to examine the way in which the Holy Spirit pushes through such boundaries to bring God’s love to all. As you prepare to teach, think about any learners who seem somehow on the outside of the group. How might you become an advocate for their full inclusion into the life of your faith community?

*God of new life, bring to my attention any barriers I put up that hinder your love, and give me a fresh start in welcoming others into community with you. Amen.*

**YOU WILL NEED**

- ☐ white cloth
- ☐ gold or yellow streamers or ribbons
- ☐ large battery-powered candle
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 1, 2
- ☐ Color Pack 21, 33
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ wind chimes
- ☐ copier paper, scissors, pencils
- ☐ bowl of water
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player
- ☐ internet-connected device (optional)

**For Responding**

- ☐ option 2: Color Pack 22, construction paper, scissors, pens, tape
- ☐ option 3: recording of “Come All You People,” music player, dowel rods or sticks; Internet-connected device (optional)

## ■ LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

As tweens arrive, greet each by name, saying, “(Name), the Lord is risen!” As needed, prompt learners to respond, “Christ is risen indeed!”

Invite tweens to work together to arrange the white cloth in the center of your meeting space, placing the candle on it and arranging gold or yellow streamers in a festive design. Note that it is the sixth Sunday of the Easter season. As you light the candle, say, “The light of the risen Christ is with us!” Pass the candle from person to person, inviting tweens, as they hold the candle, to tell about a high point or low point during the past week. Offer this prayer:

*God of love, send your Spirit to teach us more about your love for all and how that might change the way we live. Amen.*

Display Color Pack 21. Allow a quiet moment before inviting discussion:

✠ If you were on a vacation trip, how would you feel if you encountered this barrier? How might you get around it?

Describe a time when you were barred from doing something, and invite tweens to also tell a story, if they like.

### EXPLORING

Provide some background to the story by distributing copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Clean or Unclean?) and asking volunteers to read information given. Ask tweens to recall times when Jesus put aside purity laws in order to care or serve someone (*some examples: touching the dead, healing on the Sabbath, touching those with skin diseases, and going to the houses of tax collectors*).

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Peter and Cornelius: A Choral Reading). Ask for volunteers to read the parts of Narrator 1 and Narrator 2, and to sound the wind chimes. Form two groups from the remaining learners. After the choral reading, discuss:

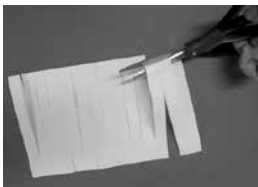
- ✧ What do you find surprising about this story?
- ✧ What do you think the first people in the early church found surprising about this story?

Ask tweens to turn to Acts 10:44–48 in their Bibles, helping one another as needed. Read aloud the story as they follow along in their Bibles. Discuss:

- ✧ Why do you think the Jewish believers were amazed that God had poured out the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles?
- ✧ Why do you think God wanted to pour out the gift of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles?
- ✧ Why do you think the writer of the book of Acts included this story?

Encourage tweens to look again at Color Pack 21. Invite them to name the kinds of unhelpful barriers people face in their lives today. Ask:

- ✧ What kinds of things exclude people and make them feel like outsiders?
- ✧ What kinds of things in our church might cause people to feel excluded?



Distribute sheets of copier paper, and invite tweens to write a brief description of a barrier others might face and then fold the paper in half lengthwise. Make a series of straight cuts in the paper as shown in the sidebar diagram, being sure to make the first cut from the fold. Make the cuts from alternate sides, not straight across. Open the paper and cut along the fold in the center of the sheet, but leave the last strip on each end uncut. When tweens open their papers, they will find a hole big enough to allow them to climb through the barriers named. Option: View the video “How to Climb through a Hole in a Piece of Paper” at [bit.ly/FOWHolePaper](https://bit.ly/FOWHolePaper) so that you will feel comfortable demonstrating the technique step-by-step.

Recall that in the story today Cornelius and the other Gentiles faced the barriers of traditions and prejudices that excluded them. Ask:

- ✧ How did the Holy Spirit make a way through those barriers? How did Cornelius and Peter help?
- ✧ What did Cornelius and Peter risk by taking action?
- ✧ How might the Holy Spirit be working through us to push through the barriers people face?

**EASY  
PREP**

## RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Belonging Tag** The early church learned that God welcomed and included all people. Followers of Jesus today are challenged to let the Spirit work through them to find ways to include everyone. Invite tweens to play a lively game of “Belonging Tag.” One person is “It” and tags another person. Those two join hands to run and tag others, adding each person who is tagged to the “It” group. Continue playing until everyone is included in the “It” group. The last person to be tagged may begin a new game. After playing, talk about ways to include others in activities at home, church, school, and neighborhood.

Challenge tweens to name one thing they wish the Spirit would do through them to help break down a barrier that excludes others.

2. **Art Reflection** When tweens move with the Spirit to push through barriers and welcome others, they are faced with choices: How will we act? What does Jesus expect of us? Display Color Pack 22. After a quiet moment, discuss: What kinds of barriers might these individuals face? Who is extending a welcome? Who is being welcomed? What does body language and facial expression tell you about how these individuals are feeling? Have tweens cut “speech bubbles” from construction paper and write what the people in this picture might be thinking or saying. Tape the speech bubbles to the picture, placing them to show who might be saying or thinking what. Brainstorm things that tweens might say to include others at school or at church.
3. **Musical Community** Creating music together can overcome barriers to community. Play “Come All You People” (© 1986 World Council of Churches and the Asian Institute for Liturgy and Music) or another song about Christian community. Option: A nice version of this song can be found at [bit.ly/FOWComeAll](https://bit.ly/FOWComeAll). Encourage tweens to listen to the words and notice the beat and rhythm of the song. Ask: In what ways do you find this song welcoming? Provide dowel rods or sticks, and invite tweens to find something in your meeting space to serve as a percussion instrument. Play the song again, inviting tweens to accompany the music in their own way. Imagine ways that the Spirit might use music to build a sense of community among God’s people.

## CLOSING

Gather the group and light the candle. Place a bowl of water on the white fabric. Dip your hand in the water, letting water splash back into the bowl, as you say, “In baptism, we are called by Christ Jesus into a new and changed life.” Invite tweens to take turns dipping a hand in the water as they name one way they hope the Spirit will work through them this week.

Close by singing “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me” (Color Pack 33; track 11 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024).

Extinguish the candle.

As you say good-bye to tweens, let them know that you will pray for them in the coming week, and ask them to pray for you as well.

### **I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me**

I’m gonna *\*live* so God can  
use me  
anywhere, Lord, anytime!  
I’m gonna *\*live* so God can  
use me  
anywhere, Lord, anytime!

2. *work*

3. *share*

4. *care*

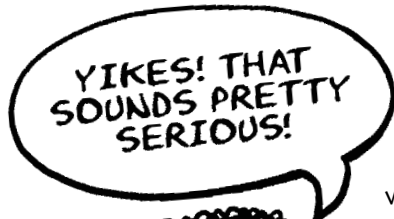
## Clean or Unclean?



In the time of the early church, the issue of cleanliness was a very important one. This was more than just washing regularly. According to the Law of Moses, different things were clean or unclean. People could become unclean if they had certain kinds of diseases, when they touched a dead body, or when they ate particular kinds of food, such as pork or shellfish. People who were not Jewish (also known as Gentiles) were considered to be unclean. Anyone who shared a meal with them or went into their house would be considered contaminated and, therefore, unclean.



So what's the big deal? Well, if you were ritually unclean, you were thought to be outside of God's circle of love. God's sacred promises no longer applied to you. You could not worship with the rest of God's people. It was believed that God would not listen to your prayers. It was thought that you could contaminate other people, so you would be shunned and pushed aside. You became an outcast! If you wanted to become clean again, you had to wait for a certain period of time, go through a solemn washing ritual, and then make the right kind of sacrifices.



The Law of Moses was given to the people to set them apart as God's chosen ones. Following the rules reminded them that they were different. By the time of Jesus, following the rules had become more important to some people than caring for others. Jesus showed another way. Jesus sometimes put aside the purity laws in order to show God's love.

## Peter and Cornelius: A Choral Reading

**Narrator 1:** There was a man named Cornelius who lived in Caesarea. He was a good man who had a habit of prayer and worship, but he was not Jewish.

**Group 1:** Oh, too bad! He sounds like he would be a good Jew.

**Group 2:** But he was not. Cornelius was a Gentile.

**Narrator 2:** One time, God sent an angel to talk to Cornelius, to give him a message.

**Group 1:** God sent a message to a Gentile? That's absurd!

**Group 2:** What is going on here?

*(Sound the wind chimes.)*

**Narrator 1:** When the angel had gone, Cornelius sent two of his servants to invite Peter to his house.

**Group 1:** Peter is a good and faithful Jew, so he won't accept the invitation.

**Group 2:** The Law of Moses says we are not allowed to go into the house of a Gentile.

**Narrator 2:** While the servants were traveling to his house, Peter had a vision from God.

**Group 1:** That's more like it! God should be talking to Peter.

**Group 2:** After all, he is Jewish. Peter is one of us.

*(Sound the wind chimes.)*

**Narrator 1:** In the vision, Peter saw that God loves the whole of creation. The Spirit said that nothing God has made is unclean.

**Group 1:** What? But that can't be right! Our law says that only certain things are clean.

**Group 2:** What is going on here?

*(Sound the wind chimes.)*

**Narrator 2:** So Peter went to the house of Cornelius, even though Cornelius was a Gentile.

**Group 1:** But that's not allowed!

**Group 2:** We are not allowed to go into the house of a Gentile!

**Narrator 1:** When Peter got to the house of Cornelius, he found a large crowd of Gentiles gathered. Peter began to tell them about Jesus.

**Group 1:** But how can that be? We are not allowed to talk to Gentiles!

**Group 2:** What is going on here?

**Narrator 2:** Peter told them that God loves and accepts everyone, regardless of their background.

**Group 1:** Can it be true?

**Group 2:** What does this mean?

*(Sound the wind chimes.)*