



Opener

What barriers did you have to cross when you were converted? Were there intellectual, social, lifestyle, family, cultural or any other kinds of hurdles that you had to overcome?

Worship

We are going to read some verses from Psalm 34 together with pauses for reflection, testimony and prayer. Encourage people to make *brief* contributions, remembering that this is a time of worship not of extended testimony or news updates.

*I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.
My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice.*

We don't often take the time to *boast* in the Lord. Has God been good to you recently, has He done something for you? Take a moment to boast about his goodness.

*Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.
I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.*

Have you ever experienced God's presence or help at a time when you have been afraid? Take a moment to thank him.

Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.

Do you think of yourself as radiant? When was the last time someone noticed something different about you because of your faith? Ask God to radiate through you more strongly.

*This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.
The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.
Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.*

In a moment of silence, bring any current troubles before the Lord. Are you taking refuge in him? Ask him to help you to do so.

*Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.
The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.
Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.*

Take a few minutes to thank God for his provision. If we fear him we will lack nothing. Do we need to learn more of the fear of the Lord?

*Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking lies.
Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.*

In another moment of quiet, look back over the last week and ask yourself, "Have I kept my tongue from evil? Have I sought peace and pursued it?" In the quiet, bring your thoughts to the Lord.

*The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.
A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all;
he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.*

Have you been feeling crushed, or broken hearted? Have you experienced many troubles? Reflect on the promise that the Lord is close, and thank him.

Bible Study

Read Acts 10:1 – 11:18 and discuss together:

- What do you think would be the first reaction of a good Jew to the kind of image that Peter saw in his dream? Why? Why do you think God gave him the same dream three times?
- What is the meaning of 10:4? Is this salvation by works?
- Are there people, or types or people that we find it more comfortable to avoid associating with? Who might you be tempted to view as “impure”? (v10:15; 10:28)
- Think back to Acts 1:8, which we looked at in our first study, and consider how the events of today’s passage relate to the promise of that verse.
- What convinced Peter that the Gentiles had genuinely been converted, and what arguments did he use to convince his critics of the fact? What do we look for to convince us that someone has genuinely been converted in our church?
- Why did Peter get so much flack upon his return to Jerusalem?
- How do we react when someone suggests changing something that we have considered immovable, such as the rule about entering a Gentile’s house? Are we inflexible and critical, or are we open to the Holy Spirit doing something new?

Reflection and Prayer

We would probably all agree that we want our church to be open and welcoming to every kind of person, no matter what their ethnic, social or political background.

- Is that the way you believe we are perceived by those outside the church? Who would expect a welcome if they stepped through the door? Who would expect to find rejection? What can we do as individuals, or as a church, to extend our welcome across these barriers?
- Peter and the other Jewish believers had to go through a fairly painful change of heart before they were able to express God’s love to those they considered outsiders. How would TBC need to change to be fully open and welcoming to every kind of person? Are you prepared for such changes?

Spend some time praying into these matters. If you believe that God is giving you specific insights then please feed them back to the Elders.