

II. Group discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better.*

Read Acts 11:1-18 aloud.

1. What item came up for discussion when Peter went to Jerusalem?

Who raised concerns about Peter's actions? *Jewish believers.*

What specifically was their concern in verse 3?

Why was eating the problem? Isn't baptism the bigger deal?

How well did this conference resolve the Gentile question?
It didn't. That's why they had to meet again in Acts 15.

2. What were some dietary differences between Jews & non-Jews?
Jews did not eat pork or food sacrificed to idols, and Gentiles often did not mind consuming the blood of slaughtered animals (see Acts 15:29).

What would be some challenges of bringing Jews and Gentiles to the same table, given their dietary differences?

Peter knew how disruptive it was to eat with Gentiles. Why did he take such a divisive action? *See verse 17.*

If God had not forced these Jewish Christians to include Samaritans and Gentiles, when do you think they might have done it? *Never!*

How do you think it felt for ancient Jews to recognize Gentiles as co-heirs in Christ? How difficult would it have been to respect a Gentile like Cornelius as a leader in the church?

3. How often do you suppose a significant change occurs in society that has no relationship to God's dreams for the world?

Spirituality has made a comeback – not so long ago, it was seen as archaic and superstitious. Now spirituality is widely accepted. How could God be involved in societal changes like this?

How could God be involved when a society's values change for the worse?

Romans 1:21-27 talks about how God encouraged unbelievers in the past to sin more so that they could experience the consequences.

I know God is not pleased with everything going on in our society, but I wonder if he might be using and even causing trends like...

Possible answers might be: the internet, the fall of communism, people's openness to spirituality, people who are starving for relationships, movies like The Passion of the Christ and The Chronicles of Narnia.

4. What changes in the world offer a new opportunity for serving God in our society?

5. When a society becomes hostile to Christianity, what are some faithful ways to respond?

What could be some advantages of the church having less power to direct society?

Fewer hypocrites to water down our witness. The only people who attend church now are the ones who are highly motivated. Less of a temptation for us to use the church for political objectives.

6. The first lesson in this series looked at Acts 1:8, where Jesus commissioned the apostles to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. How does Acts 10-11 fit with that commission?

When Acts 1:8 talked about going to the end of the earth, how many of the apostles would have thought that meant embracing Gentiles?
Probably none. They might have thought Gentiles would adopt Jewish customs, but they could not have foreseen the boundaries of Judaism changing.

How well does our church welcome people who don't look "Christian"?

What might make it difficult for our church to welcome the following:
People with tattoos or body piercings?
Artists or intellectuals with wild hair and outlandish outfits?
Poor people?
People of other races?

III. Other resources

The point – Even though the world seems to be headed in the wrong direction, we believe that God is still working to bring people to faith. And we believe that he has placed us in the world as joyful witnesses of the wonderful blessings of faith in Christ.

Prayer

Pray for God to bless the world.

Ask God to help us love the world, just as he does (John 3:16).

Have silent prayer for the non-Christians we love.

Seek courage and wisdom as we let God's light shine through us.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Pair up adults and kids for a brief discussion.

Kids describe their class at school. Grown-ups share memories about what happened to them when they were that age.

How is this particular grade different now than it was then?

As you watch how our society is changing, what are some things that cause you concern?

Read Matthew 6:23-34 aloud.

How does this passage help you not to worry about the future?

Look especially at verse 34.

How do Christians make the world a better place?

How do you make the world a better place?

"The Church has Left the Building" is a series of Small Group guides written in support of the Missional Church curriculum by David Wray and Chris Benjamin. It is designed around the concept of adults discussing material in Bible class and then processing it in small group meetings during the same week. These guides, as well as the Missional Church curriculum, are based on the book, *Treasure in Clay Jars*, by Lois Barrett and others.

Training tools and study guides are at www.collegehills.org, then Ministries, then LIFE groups.

The Church has Left the Building

Acts 11 – It's a scary world out there

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme for this meeting: **Being faithful in a changing world.**

Our society is changing every day, and some of the changes are disturbing. There was a time when you could expect that most people went to church. If not, at least they closed their businesses on Sunday. Today, Sunday is a day for shopping and sports. Non-Christians are critical of or even hostile toward the church, and it is unusual to see Christians portrayed in a positive light in the movies. Makes you long for the 1950's (well, not really!).

The church and its members have been pushed from the center of society to the margins. How should Christians respond to this marginalization? This guide and the accompanying Bible class will help your group understand some of the changes and develop healthy responses.

Acts 10-11 is the story of another time when life was changing radically. God made it clear in Acts 8 that Samaritans belonged in the kingdom. Now Acts 10 says Gentiles are full participants. It would be tempting to say those changes were easy because they were led by God and were for the better, but that would ignore how dramatic and unsettling the changes were at the time. Relationships and customs, even interpreting the Law of Moses, had to be re-negotiated with Gentiles at the table. Transition is never easy, but God leads us and grows us through it.

Leadership tip: To prepare, read through the scripture and the questions. Star the best questions, and check the ones you might cover if time permits. If you ask all the questions in a single meeting, your group is not engaged. Ask friends in the group what might promote more conversation.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and "break the ice." No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ What is something you remember from 6th grade?
- ❖ One thing I don't miss about the "good old days" is...
- ❖ How many e-mails do you send and receive in a typical week? How has e-mail changed your life?