

Greg Laurie: Is There a Cornelius in Your Life?

More than 50 years ago, there was a man named Charles Smith, known by his friends as Chuck, who felt called to teach God's Word in an understandable way. After pastoring a number of churches, he took over a small church in Orange County, California, known as Calvary Chapel.

Meanwhile, the counterculture revolution was in full swing, and the mantra of the day was sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. Young people were collectively losing their minds and parents thought they had lost an entire generation.

Chuck looked at those hippies and, for the most part, really didn't want much to do with them. But his wife, Kay, had a real heart for hippie kids and she prayed for them. She wanted to reach this culture.

So, one day their daughter, Jan, brought home a living, breathing hippie. It turned out that he was a Christian, and he talked to Chuck and Kay about how God was reaching his friends and they were coming to faith. They wanted to open their church to the hippies, and Chuck went to his board of elders and told them he wanted to invite the hippie kids to come to Calvary Chapel.

They weren't very receptive to the idea, however, because not all the hippies took baths and they could soil the new carpet with their bare feet. (For the record, I was an exceptionally clean hippie.) But the next Sunday morning, Chuck was waiting at the front doors of the church with a basin of water and a rag, ready to wash all the hippies' feet so they could come to church.

And It Changed Everything

Chuck won that battle and the hippie kids started coming in. What happened next is now called the Jesus Movement. It was a modern revival and the impact of it continues to this day. Countless churches were started by young men who came to faith during this time, and I am one of those men.

What we know as contemporary Christian worship and contemporary Christian music was born during this time. It was a significant revival that altered American history because one man was willing to overcome his personal prejudice and say, "Yes, Lord."

Now, I am not saying that Chuck Smith started the Jesus Movement, because it was Jesus who started it. But he was a key person in this great revival that took place simultaneously in Orange County, other parts of the United States and even the world.

In the New Testament book of Acts, we read about a man named Cornelius who was searching for God. He was a Gentile, which doesn't mean a great deal to us today. But in this culture, the culture of the first century, Jews mostly avoided contact with all non-Jews. Gentiles, the non-Jews, worshiped false gods like Baal and Molech. The Romans worshiped various Roman and Greek deities, and sometimes they even worshiped Caesar himself.

Therefore, Jews kept themselves separate from these people. Yet God called Peter, a Jew, and all the rest of the apostles to take the gospel to the entire world.

At this point in the book of Acts, six years had passed and this new group of believers were pretty much staying within the confines of Judaism. And if something didn't change, Christianity would become another sect of Judaism. This, however, was not God's plan.

Growing the Church

The Scriptures pointed to something that was yet to be fulfilled and that something actually was someone. Jesus did not come to do away with the law but to fulfill it, which He did at the cross and the Resurrection.

But somehow Peter and the others didn't get that memo; or at least they were keeping it to themselves. So God used Cornelius to get Peter's attention. It was time for Peter to leave his comfort zone and go to people who needed to hear the gospel.

Interestingly, all this happened in a place called Joppa, the same city where Jonah found a ship going to Tarshish, paid the fare and tried to get as far away from God as he could. Jonah didn't want to preach to the Ninevites because they were the enemies of Israel.

But God always has the last word. He sent a great fish or a whale (we don't know which) that swallowed Jonah. Jonah eventually obeyed and the entire city of Nineveh repented before God. And just as Jonah feared, God spared them from judgment.

So there was Peter in Joppa, and God was telling him to go and reach out to the Gentiles. Peter had a choice. He could run from God like Jonah did, or he could obey. He did the latter. We sometimes criticize Peter for his legendary shortcomings, but when God told him to go, he went.

Cornelius was a centurion who lived in Caesarea, a Roman outpost in Israel. Because he was truly seeking God, he was instructed in a vision to send for a man in Joppa named Peter. God wanted Cornelius to be saved, but he also wanted to use the conversion of Cornelius, a Gentile, to open Peter's eyes to the fact there was a big world out there that needed to hear the gospel.

Finding Your Cornelius

Ultimately, Peter went and shared the gospel with Cornelius, who came to faith in Jesus Christ. And the gospel was then brought to the Gentile world.

Is there a Cornelius in your life? Is there someone you know who is different from you and you don't necessarily want to reach out to him or her? Maybe there's even someone in your life whom you regard as an enemy and you're kind of glad they're separated from God. You don't want to talk to them, much less share the gospel.

God wants us to love our enemies and tell them the Good News of Jesus Christ. They may accept what we have to say, or they may reject it. But the results are in God's hands.

May God help us to go where He wants us to go with the message He wants us to bring. {eo}

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