



ENTER God's presence

Your ways, God, are holy. What god is as great as our God? You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. With your mighty arm you redeemed your people.

- Psalm 77:13-15a

Heavenly Father, every day you greet us with new surprises. Each day you come to us and speak to us through your living word. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us again as we gather around your word. Surprise us again with the truth of your great love for us as we encounter you through your word. Amen



SHARE life together

1. **How have you seen Jesus at work in your life this week?**
2. **Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?**
3. **What's the biggest or best surprise you have ever received?**

Have you ever felt the urge to rearrange your bedroom, your wardrobe, your lounge room? Maybe it coincides with a new resolve to improve your life. Perhaps it's the need to convince ourselves that we have really changed. But the truth is, we can rearrange our lives as often as we like and still remain in a comfort zone where there is little change or progress in our lives. Comfort zones are simply a form of protection we erect in our lives to say we are willing to be stretched so far, but no further. We gravitate to those comfort zones because life is safe, predictable and understandable in that space. But as Peter discovered, sometimes our comfort zones become the very obstacle that the Spirit needs to remove to use us more fully and to help us see more clearly what God is doing in the world. The Spirit of God works through surprising acts to rattle, shake and stretch us beyond our comfort zones; extending boundaries, breaking conventions, changing expectations, shaking certainties and enlarging our vision to see the fullness of his kingdom plan break into this world...whether we are comfortable with it or not!

Week beginning
Sunday 20th June 2021

Worship series:
Getting Our Acts Together



VERSE for the week

Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right."

Acts 10:34-35



REMEMBER this week

God is never bound by what keeps us comfortable. He will keep moving us out of our comfort zones in surprising acts, always for the sake of others.



LISTEN attentively

Read Acts 10:1-48

- 5. What surprises you about this text?**
- 6. How many scenes from this passage of scripture would you say contain surprising acts?**
- 7. What do you know from other parts of scripture about the apostle Peter's character? How might that impact/influence the way you understand this story?**

Surprises - they visit all of us at one time or another and usually at the most inconvenient moments! Some of us thrive on the adrenaline fueled response we can get when unexpected changes or challenges interrupt our plans and take us by surprise. Perhaps Cornelius was one such person. Can you imagine a more fluid, changeable and surprising task than being in command of 100 men in a Roman legion. This has to be a guy who could make split second decisions in the heat and pressure of battle. I suspect he had encountered a few surprises during his time and by virtue of him still being alive and being in command of a group of men, he must have handled things pretty well.

Peter, on the other hand, has a reputation for talking a big game but an unfortunate record when placed under pressure. This is the same guy who jumped out of a boat to walk on water with Jesus, but started to sink when he noticed how big the waves were getting. This is the same guy who said he would fight to the death to protect Jesus, yet on the night Jesus was arrested, denied even knowing him.

- 8. How do you usually respond to surprises? Do they excite and energize you or do they frustrate or terrify you? Share.**

Not all surprises are equal. There are obviously good surprises and bad surprises. Each of us would likely have a differently reaction walking into a surprise birthday party than we would if we were to be surprised by finding a snake in our boots. Different surprises require different responses. However, generally speaking, the way we respond to surprises and challenges is largely affected by the way we think about surprises or challenges. Are they seen as obstacles to overcome or opportunities to take advantage of?

- 9. How would you categorise both Cornelius' and Peter's responses to their respective 'visions'? Did they see opportunities or obstacles?**
- 10. How do you think you would have responded if you had been either Cornelius or Peter?**



GROW deeper

Surprises have one major side effect – they force us to react – usually immediately and without much time to pause and reflect on the best course of action. This means they are great for getting us to move outside our comfort zones. Our comfort zone is that place which we all default to, the place of peace, equilibrium, and balance where our lives feel stable and comfortable. We all have a comfort zone. For some of us the zone is bigger and for others it might be smaller but often the best parts of life are to be found *outside* our comfort zones.

- 11. In what ways do you think Cornelius might have acted outside of his comfort zone in response to the message of the angel?**
- 12. In what ways do you think Peter was led outside of his comfort zone by his heavenly vision?**

The problem with comfort zones is that they are comfortable. We like to be in them, we often fail to see that there is more out there for us to be a part of, more which could be part of a new and more expansive comfort zone if only we would step out and give it a go. But our own fears, our own desire for comfort and safety keep us locked in our little zones, sometimes oblivious to what might be going on around us. We can even do a pretty good job of convincing ourselves we should not leave our comfort zones.

13. In verse 14, Peter is at odds with the vision he has just witnessed and questions the validity of it. Have you ever felt God leading or prompting you to do something but shrugged it off as too ridiculous, too uncomfortable or too 'out there', to really be God?
14. What parts of your experience of 'church' have become comfort zones? What are the things you like best about your church? What would happen if they were suddenly changed or removed?



LIVE purposefully

To cut a long story short, God did something surprising as far as Peter was concerned. Peter knew that God had sent Jesus as the promised Messiah for the Jews, he had not yet come to realise that Jesus had come to reconcile all of humanity to God. God asked Peter to do something that was outside of his comfort zone, something that it seems Peter had never considered God might actually want him to do. Even greater than this, God was asking Peter to do something he had been conditioned to believe he should not do. The Old Testament Law of Moses, as it was taught by the Pharisees, was quite strict about associating with Gentiles and those outside of the nation of Israel. God wants so much more for all of us and for all of his creation than simply our comfort. He wants us to have fulness of life. Jesus says that is the reason he was sent (John 10:10). But fulness of life exists outside of our comfort zones, and it only comes to others as we reach out with the love and grace of Jesus – even if it gets uncomfortable at times.

15. Have you ever been forced outside of your comfort zone and ended up having a really positive experience? Share it with the group.
16. What comfort zones might God be calling you to step out of this week? How will you try to do that?
17. Find a buddy in your LifeGroup who will pray for you and who you will pray for as you both try to faithfully step out of your comfort zones and allow God to take you on a surprising adventure.



PRAY intentionally

- Praise God for his daily surprises, and for equipping you to address each surprise that comes your way.
- Ask God to give you courage to view surprises as opportunities and to faithfully follow wherever he leads you.
- Continue to pray that God might use us to reach others with the love and grace of Jesus Christ.



BLESS one another

You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

[Name], God accepts and loves you unconditionally. Amen.