



OVERVIEW SECTION

How to Read This Lesson Plan

The **Overview Section** is the foundation of this lesson plan. The questions and activities for the class that you will be teaching on Sunday morning have been based (sometimes loosely) upon what you read in this section. The **Overview Section** is composed of five components (each component is underlined in the lesson plan):

How to Read This Lesson Plan (defines all components of the lesson plan)

Purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation (a reminder of why we do this)

Scripture(s) for the Session (a reminder that the scripture is to be read in every class)

Key Verses & Theology (background for teachers to ponder)

Themes to Focus on from the Scripture (the ideas that the session's lessons are based on)

The actual lesson is found in the second section, **The Sunday Morning Experience Section**. Think of this section as the step-by-step instruction guide to your Sunday morning teaching experience. There are four components to this section (again, each component is underlined in the actual lesson plan):

Preparation (including supplies needed)

Classroom Statement (a brief explanation of what will be taught/happening in the classroom)

Step-by-step process of the lesson (including the scripture to be read)

Suggested variations for age groups (Self-explanatory but not always applicable)

We encourage you to read the rest of this **Overview Section** before reading the **Sunday Morning Experience Section**.

Purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation

The purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation is, with God's help and in community, to hear and interact with the stories of our faith tradition, to pray, worship and play together, and to equip and support the building of relationships with God and with each other.

Scripture(s) for the Session: Acts 10:9 – 23

Please READ this aloud in every class you teach. The actual words to the scripture can be found in **The Sunday Morning Experience Section: Step-by-Step process of the lesson**. When reading to the class, please read it from the lesson plan (not an actual Bible) as the wording of the scripture has been modified to help clarify some language issues.

Key Verses & Theology: These are provided to help the teachers think about and build a framework for understanding the story to help in answering some of the questions that the students might raise in class.

14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." 15 The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." God's promise to Abraham is that his people would be as numerous as the stars and would be a blessing to all nations. However, the Israelites during Jesus' time and Peter's time are very insular (and had been! Being insular was a tradition). If you were not an Israelite, then you were a Gentile. And the Israelites had become pretty certain that they were not, in any manner, going to interact with Gentiles. If the Israelites spend all this time and energy keeping everyone out, how exactly are they going to be a blessing to all nations? This vision, then, that Peter has, is about this tension between how God calls Israel to function and how Israel often thought it was to function.

17 ...Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen. Peter is praying when he has this vision. It is not a dream. It is a picture given to Peter as he pays attention to God. And it puzzles him. Sometimes, when we're paying attention to God, we're going to hear things, see things, think things that don't make sense right away. Sometimes the things won't make sense because they go against traditions that we've been practicing for so, so long. And we just won't be able to get our minds around it. That's ok, because....

22 "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." It's ok if we don't have all the answers, because God is talking to others, too. And when others are listening, then what we are being shown is then made clear with the help of others. It's like we're each given a piece of a puzzle and then God points us in the correct direction, so that when we compare information, a bigger picture starts coming together. As individuals, we are not made to know it all. This is humbling, but also necessary. Peter was able to have the vision. But he would not have had the boldness to carry it out in the way that Cornelius does. Cornelius is an upper-class Roman citizen. Even though his servants are polite, his actions are very forward and direct in a way that the Israelites would not have been (and could not have been due to cultural conditioning mentioned earlier) towards Romans. Cornelius' rather naked desire is what helps cut through the fog/confusion Peter has about the vision.

Themes to Focus on from the Scripture: Themes are provided to help teachers understand the teaching of the *session* (not necessarily the class). Sometimes an activity in one class may not match up with any of the themes.

Who's in, who's out – The Israelites were giving God a bad name. They were supposed to be a light to all nations, but instead they kept excluding all the nations but themselves. How are other people, other countries supposed to learn about God, if Israel just keeps ignoring them and shunning them and calling them 'unclean'? They won't! And so God, starting with Jesus, but really driving the point home with Peter (as well as with Pentecost – everyone speaking in different languages) is really

seeking to shift this inward, insular focus of the Israelites outward. The reason for this outward shift is because the insularity of the Israelites makes God look like God is playing favorites. The message the Israelites are sending is that in order to be loved and cared about by the one true God, you have to be an Israelite. But that's not the truth of who God is, so God is challenging Israel. God is calling not just one nation home, but all nations home, to God. None are out, all are in.

Prayer/Vision/Repetition – Of course, on his own, Peter would not have come to this conclusion of reaching out to the Gentiles. And on his own, Cornelius would not have known to seek out Peter. But because they were both praying, then they were able to be pointed toward each other and prepared for each other. Cornelius is directed by a “holy angel.” Angel simply means “messenger of God.” If Cornelius isn't seeking God's direction, then he most likely would not have listened to this messenger. Prayer prepares us to hear messages from others who are listening and paying attention to God. When Peter is praying, he sees pictures and hears a voice say something that seems to involve these pictures. A vision is another way in which we might hear God when we pray. Also, the picture and the words are repeated a total of three times in Peter's prayer. This is another way in which we might hear God, through repetition of the message.

Synchronized (congruence; one accord) – This story is about the start of the bridging of a chasm that is between the Israelites and the rest of the world. It's about the removal of boundaries that says “Israel is *in* with God and everyone else is *out* with God.” And the only way that chasm is bridged is by God. And the only way individuals can receive that instruction and wisdom from God is by praying. Once this happens, though, amazing things can start to happen. It may not seem like much to us, but in the last verse, the fact that Peter went to Joppa, that is astounding! And it is the beginning of something new. All because two people were paying attention to God.

THE SUNDAY MORNING EXPERIENCE SECTION

Preparation

- Print out this lesson plan and bring it with you on the Sunday Mornings you are teaching
- Arrive at pre-arranged time to join other teachers, shepherds and staff for an opening prayer.
- Supplies Needed: The story of Peter telling about his vision; pictures for the memory game. (print out two of each picture. I use regular copier paper cut in half. Then I place a blank half-page on top of the picture page and tape the two sheets together at the top of the sheets, to make sort of a hinge, so that the blank sheet can be lifted up to reveal the pictured sheet. Once you've done this to all sheets, then you can tape them all to a wall in a 5 x 5 or 4 x 6 pattern).

Classroom Statement

This Storytelling class involves the telling of Peter's Vision in Acts 10. The class will also participate in a Memory game as a way to demonstrate how repetition helps us to better remember.

Step-by-Step Process of Lesson

Shepherd comes in with students

SHEPHERD ASKS "Question of the Day."

INTRODUCE yourself

Hi, my name is ____ and I want you call me (tell the students how they may address you).

PRAY (Short and simple is perfect)

God, thank you for this day and for each other. We need your help. Help us to learn about you this day. Amen.

TELL

- The word "disciple" means "student."
- The word "apostle" means "sent out."
- Peter was first a disciple (a student) of Jesus, and then Peter became an apostle of Jesus (sent out to share what he knew of Jesus)
- The story we're going to read today is about the apostle Peter.
- This story takes place after Jesus was resurrected and ascended (or physically left) this world.
- This story is about how Peter came to understand that he wasn't to be sent out to just Israelites, but also to people who were of other nations.

- That may not sound like a big thing, but it was! For instance, if Peter and later Paul had not listened to God about this, then this church, EGCC, would either not exist, or would only allow those who were Jewish to come here.

READ Acts 10:9 - 23

10:9 About noon the next day, as Cornelius' servants were on their journey and approaching the city of Jerusalem to see Peter, Peter became hungry and wanted something to eat. 10 While a meal was being prepared for him, he went up on the roof of where he was staying to pray. While praying, he had a vision. 11 He saw the sky open and something like a large sheet came down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 Then Peter heard a voice (more like a thought) saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." 15 The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call unclean." 16 This happened three times, and then the sheet with the animals was suddenly taken back up into the sky.

17 Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the servants sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Peter and were standing by the gate. 18 They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. 19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look, three men are searching for you. 20 Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them." 21 So Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?" 22 They answered, "Cornelius, a Roman centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well-spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." 23 So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging. The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went with Peter.

TELL

- Now I'm going to read the story to you again, but this time it will be as if Peter is telling it to you.

DO Storytelling

It was mid-day. I was feeling a little hungry. I asked someone to make me a snack and I went up to the roof to pray as I waited for the food. It had been an exciting time since my teacher, Jesus, was resurrected and then ascended. Now his disciples, including me, Peter, have been sharing the good news with any Israelite who will listen. However, there have been some reports of some Roman soldiers who are interested in what we have to say. But we don't want anything to do with those Romans. They aren't Israelites! They aren't part of God's people. How would they even begin to understand what we're talking about when they are so...*different*?!

So while I was praying on the roof waiting for my snack, those thoughts were going through my head. But when my head gets so full of thoughts, then I can't listen to God. So I said, outloud, "God, I'm going to pay attention to my breathing so that my head is quieter. Please help me to do this. And if you have anything you want me to pay attention to, I'm listening." Then, I slowed my thinking down by paying attention to my breathing. I listened to the air come in my nose as I breathed

in...until both my lungs and belly were full of air. And then I listened to my breathing as I let the air out slowly until I'd let it all out. And then I did this over and again.

So while I was paying attention to my breathing, a picture started to form in my mind, sort of like when you look at the clouds and as you keep looking at them, they start to look like familiar shapes, like a turtle or a bird or a cow. That's how this was, though my eyes were closed. This picture that was forming in my mind was at first just a big white thing coming down towards me. I couldn't even tell what it was at first. As it got closer, the big white thing turned out to be like a sheet. And there were things inside it. As it got even lower and closer to me, I was able to see up and over and into the sheet (it was sort of cupped like a bowl). And inside, there were all these different types of animals. And many of these animals were animals that we, the Israelites, consider unclean. Being unclean meant that if we ate any part of an unclean animal, then we became unclean too. This meant we'd be shunned by our community; our families and neighbors would stop talking to us and we'd have to live somewhere else, on our own. Then we'd be no better than those Roman soldiers.

Then, inside my head, I heard a thought that said, "Peter, take and eat these animals."

And my next thought was, "Whoa! Wait a minute! I'm hungry but I'm not THAT hungry! I can't eat those animals, they are unclean!"

The image of the sheet comes back to mind. And then another thought comes with it. That thought says, "Peter, do not call unclean what I call clean. Take and eat these animals."

This time, my response is a little less fearful, "But *why?*"

And the answering thought comes back, "Do as I tell you. Take and eat of all these animals. Do not call unclean what I call clean."

I know that these thoughts are from God, because on my own, I would not ever have had the thought that I should be eating unclean animals and calling them clean. But these thoughts being offered God were making me uncomfortable.

I went back inside the house to get my snack. Just as I came in, there was a knock at the door. The men at the door are servants of a Roman army captain named Cornelius. They are looking for me. They tell me that Cornelius is very interested in this man named Jesus and wants to know if I, Peter, can help him to know more. I'm about to tell the men, "Are you crazy? Of course not! You're Romans!" But then I remember the thought from up on the roof, "Do not call unclean what I call clean." And then, suddenly, I understand.

God is calling me to share the Good News that God's Kingdom is at hand not just with the Israelites, but with anyone that wants to hear. The Roman Centurion wants to know about God. God's telling me to go and share with Cornelius. The thoughts on the roof made me uncomfortable. Acting on those thoughts makes me even more uncomfortable. But God is right. I will not call unclean what God calls clean. And so I choose to go with the servants back to Cornelius' house.

ASK

- What does Peter do on the roof? (He prays)
- While Peter is praying, what does he see? (he has a vision of animals in a sheet descend from the sky)
- What instruction does Peter receive regarding the animals in the sheet (to eat them)
- How many times does God tell this to Peter?
- Why is this a problem for Peter (Because many of the animals are unclean)
- What does God say to Peter about unclean animals (to not call unclean what God calls clean)
- At the end of the story, what does Peter realize that God is telling him? (that he is to not call non-Israelite people unclean).

TELL

- One of the ways God helps us to know that God is talking to us in prayer is by repeating what God wants us to understand.
- That's one way we can be more sure about whether or not God is talking to us.
- It's also a good way to help us remember.
- At the very end of the story, Peter remembers the words "Do not call unclean what I call clean" and because he remembers this line, then he is able to know more clearly what he is to do with the request from Cornelius.
- We're going to play a game where we'll see how repetition helps us to remember.

EXPLAIN instructions for Activity

- We need to get into two teams.
- On the wall, there are pieces of paper.
- On the other side of those pieces of paper there are pictures of animals that might have been in the sheet from Peter's vision.
- Each picture has an identical twin.
- The goal is to match the two identical pictures together by choosing two pictures to turn over.
- If you pick two cards that do not match, then it is the other team's turn.
- If you do match two pictures, then your team gets to go again.
- The game ends when all the pictures have been matched
- The team with the most matched pictures wins.

DO Memory Activity

TELL Good News

- The more we hear or see something, the better we are at remembering it.
- Just like in this game, where the more we saw a certain picture, the better we got at remembering where it was.
- This is why we have Sunday School the way we do, where you get to hear the same story three times during a session – so that you'll be more likely to remember the story.
- And, just like God talks to Peter in the story by repeating the same image and command three times,

- God also talks to us in the same way.
- But we have to listen for God first.
- And that's the good news for today.

CLEAN UP

DISMISS FOR SINGING