

“Take Action”
By General Pastor Peter F. Paine
Sunday, July 1st, 2018

Amen. Please be seated. It is great to be here with you today. I'm very thankful. I bring you greetings from Sister Davis. She wanted to make this trip, but, frankly, she wasn't up to it, physically. And, so, keep her in your thoughts and prayers. She's doing well, she's doing well, but she was tired and felt she needed to stay home. And, so, she'll come when she can, and I'm hoping that's not going to be too long. She's doing very well. For those of you don't know that, our founding Pastor is Pastor Davis, and that's his wife. Pastor Davis passed in 1999. And, so she is still with us, and we're very, very thankful for that.

Parrish was kind enough to loan me his Bible. I forgot to bring mine today. I think it's the first time I was ever supposed to preach and I forgot my Bible. So, I want to talk to you a little bit before I get into our text, today. And, I want to visit with you, and I want to ask you some very deep and serious questions. And, I'm not going to ask you, at this point, for any show of hands or any, you know, shouting back, yet. But, I would like you to really think about these questions, very personally, as I ask them. Have you ever really felt that, that you've had God speak to you and give you direction? Have you ever really felt like, you know, “This is God showing me a direction, a path, a place for me to go; this is God actually answering a prayer, ministering to a need I have?” Isn't that a powerful thing? Isn't that a beautiful thing, when you feel like God through His Scripture or through the Holy Spirit, however it comes to you in some way, you know that God has heard, and is answering your prayer? What a powerful and wonderful thing. What I hope will happen, as I share what I feel God has laid on my heart today, is that we will, afresh, find ourselves knowing exactly how to be in a place where we can hear from Him, where we can know His direction, where we can feel His presence, where we can be led by His Spirit, amen? And, now I will ask you for a show of hands: how many of you think that's an important thing? That when you read God's Word, you can actually say, “That's God speaking to me. That's God answering my prayer. That's God ministering to my need?” And, sometimes it's not what we expect. Sometimes, you know, we think we know the best path. We think we know the best direction. And, then, God speaks and says, “No, don't,” or, God says, “Go now!” or, God says, “Wait on Me.” But, what a powerful thing when we know it's God speaking to us, and guiding us, and directing us, and saying, “I have a plan for you, and I'm going to share it with you, so that you don't miss the blessing, the benefit of what I have for you.” amen? And, so, I want to spend a little more time kind of plowing the field, here, before I get into the text, because I hope that, that someone today will be reminded afresh, “You know, God wants to speak to me, God wants to lead—” and, I'm not—you know what? In all my years in ministry, I've probably had a handful of dreams that I felt God was trying to share something with me. Anybody here ever had a dream and you felt like, “That was God telling me something. I think that was God actually—” you know, that's pretty powerful, isn't it? Most of my dreams have been caused by pizza. Or, just, you know, I had a goofy dream. But, every once in a while I've had—I had a dream once, and this is embarrassing to share this with you, but, I had been a Christian for a handful of years, and I had a situation where someone had treated me poorly, and I mean very, very, very big deal. It was enormous. It was. It was the kind of thing where, you know, I felt like I had a right to exact some punishment. Can anybody relate to what I'm saying? Did I start by saying this is embarrassing? Did I? Okay. And, I had a dream, and God showed me, that in this dream that I was on death row. And, in the dream, it was time for me to go before the judge and plead my case. I know that's backwards. Dreams aren't always perfect, right? And, I went to the judge, and I have an attorney there, a court-appointed attorney, and the judge was saying, “How do you plead?” and I kept screaming, “I'm guilty, your honor!” because I had killed this guy. I left

that piece out. I had killed this guy, so now I was being tried for murder. And, I was pretty pleased about it. It's like, that's pretty embarrassing, isn't it? Visitors, I apologize. "So, who's this guy you invited to your pulpit?" And, in this dream, the attorney kept saying, "Stop, stop, stop. Not guilty, your honor." And, I'm screaming, "Guilty," and my attorney's screaming, "Not guilty." And, I get sentenced to death. And, then I wake up. And, God said, "If you don't learn to forgive, if you don't get a right attitude and this, it's going to kill you. It's going to kill you. It's going to destroy you." and I felt, absolutely—I felt then, and I still feel, now, all these years later, and I was able to get it right, and I was able to learn that, you know what? It wasn't about justice from my earthly perspective, it was about saying, "God, what do You want me to do, here? How do you want me to handle this situation?" And, then, I got to realizing, you know, really, the wrong that had been done to me was like that, compared to what have been the wrong that had been done to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And, in the parable that Jesus teaches on forgiveness, what I was being asked to forgive was like that compared to what I've been forgiven of. That's pretty big, isn't it? And, I felt that was God speaking to me, but you know what I think, in spite of my wrong attitude in that space in my life, I really, really, really believe did the reason that God—I'm setting up for the text here, and then I'm going to be able to preach pretty quickly—I really believe that the reason God was able to speak to me, is because I was praying, I was seeking, I was living a life that was yielded to God, but I had this problem in my life. So, those two things can exist simultaneously. I believe that. But, it couldn't exist forever simultaneously. Amen? And, God was telling me, "You've got to get this out of your life or it will destroy you." Amen?

I want to talk to you, today about two guys that really loved God. One is a Jew; one is a Gentile. They both love God. They were both seeking God. They were both asking God to show them what they should embrace, and what they should let go of. They were both asking God for direction. They were both very sincere in their prayers. These two men that we're going to look at today in the Scriptures, were not just the kind of guys that prayed before they ate. These are the kind of guys that—they didn't, in fact, we're going to specifically see that they didn't just pray in the morning and in the evening, they took time in the middle of their day to dedicate themselves to prayer. They took time to say, "I'm going to divorce myself from every other activity in this moment, and I'm going to commune directly with God, and see if I can't be closer to my God." And this Jew, who was an apostle, who had walked with Christ, loved God with all his heart. And, yet, he knew that he didn't have everything he was supposed to have. There was more of a relationship that he was supposed to have with God. I wasn't talking about, "Well, you know me, you know who I am? Ha-ha. I've walked with Jesus, I'm an apostle. Capital A." And, the Gentile we're going to talk about, today, was a warrior. He was a soldier. And, he wasn't just a soldier, he was the soldier. He was a centurion; he was highly respected, and he took time in the middle of his day to stop all his military activities, all his other responsibilities, and say, "I'm alone with God right now. Don't bother me." Both of these men also believed in fasting. They spent a lot of time fasting. They spent a lot of time denying their flesh, so that they could draw close to God. Someone asked me to explain fasting once, and I think it really just boils down to that simple statement that I shared. I think fasting is denying your flesh so you can draw close to God. I don't think fasting is about losing weight; that's called a diet. And, that's fine, and you might be looking at me and saying, "You might want to read up on that, Pete." By the way, last year, you guys gave me a Fitbit, and I've lost weight, and I'm losing more. I know, when you're as big as I am, and you say, you know, "I've lost weight," I know somebody wants to yell, "Don't stop!" and, I'm not, I'm going to keep going until I get down to my fighting weight. And, I'm excited about that, and I thank you. You know you're fat when the congregation gives you a Fitbit. Or a gym membership. Okay? I felt that it was given with love, and I thank you. And, for those of you who don't know, I had a pretty serious health scare, and this was a gift to say, you know, "We'd like you; come on back." And, I said, "Thank you very much. I'm honored." Okay, so, we've got these two guys; they love God, they're taking time in the morning, and in the

evening, and in the middle of the day to pray. They both believe in fasting. Something else they also believe in, they believe in giving. They believe in giving. They believe in giving. And, by the way, this is not a message on giving your money. But, I heard something, years ago, that will help me put it in perspective the aspect of that that is I think part of this text, I heard someone say that they were raising money, they were raising money for their child's heart transplant. And, they were going everywhere, to business owners. They somehow found out who the wealthiest people in their community were, and they went to meet them personally. And, when they were— someone said, “You're real bold in your request.” He said, “Yes, I'm bold in my request. Because I'm not asking for me. I'm asking for my daughter.” Amen? I get that. Do you get that? I mean I'd walk up to anybody and say, “Well, can you help me? I need this much money for my child to have this operation, which I think is her best chance of having a healthy life.” I'd ask anybody. I'd say, “You got ten bucks? How much you got? How much you got? How many— how much you got?” Right? Because that's a different kind of asking, isn't it? Isn't it? I mean, I'm asking for someone's life! Right? And, so, these guys were givers, and I share that with you because when I talk about giving, today, it's between you and God; it's not between you and the church. So, that's all I'm going to say about that in set up for that, but I want to highlight, again, that both of these guys really believed that that was part of their relationship with their God. And, you're going to see that they were not only praying, and they were fasting, but they were giving alms. This was a, this was a way of life for these two men to say, “In every way, how can I be closer to you, God?” Amen? So, is the setup sufficient enough? No, let's add a little more. My prayer is that you will hear something, today, maybe it'll be a word I speak, maybe it'll be from the text, a Scripture, maybe it'll be the Holy Spirit, that still small voice saying, “There it is. There it is. That's what you need. This is what you need to tweak. This what you need to adjust. This is what you need, that has allowed you to have—” Have you ever heard of people saying that they fell out of love? Debbie mentioned earlier that we've been married forty-three years. And, she also ratted me out. She said, “I married an older man.” That's true, she did. She did, she did. But, that's okay, it's working. And, where was I going with that? Oh, oh, here it is, so, in forty-three years, you ever think there's been a moment where, like, maybe she looked at me or I looked at her and thought, “What am I doing in this relationship?” Anybody? You know, I mean, we have a great marriage, we do. But, you know what? It takes work. Does that make sense? So does your relationship with God. So does your relationship—and, for those of you who are young, and single, don't take my comment that it takes work to have a great relationship as a negative comment. It's worth the work to have a great relationship. I'm going to do that again: “It's worth the work to have a great relationship.” And, if we can accept that in natural terms, you know, I said to my brother, I was home visiting, not too long ago, and I'm one of five boys, one of six children, five boys and a girl, and I said to one of my older brothers when I was visiting him, not too long ago, and he was talking with one of his high school buddies on the phone, and he still lives in the town that we grew up in. And, he has relationships from high school. Several good friends that he went to school with. And, I said, “You really have great friendships, long-standing friendships, with guys you went to high school with.” And, he said, “It's a lot of work, but it's worth it, you know, to stay in touch.” And, that stuck with me. And, I use the marriage reference, and then my brother's reference with his friends, so that I hope you will put your personal scenario in there, as you listen to this. If you're with me, say Amen. So, I noticed I'm just visiting with you, I haven't preaching yet, and I don't want to lose you. Because, there's something here today for each and every one of us. I believe that. I believe that. And, so, I would say that your relationship with God is worth the effort it takes to have it. I'm going to say that again, your relationship with God is worth the effort it takes to have it. And, it does take some effort. You know, you can't just have a 98.6° temperature, and have a great relationship with God. So, let's jump into our text. It's in the Book of Acts, the 10th chapter. Just curious, how many of you already knew that's where we were going today? A lot of you did, I'm sure. And, that sort of fun isn't it.?

Acts 10:1 *There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,*

A devout man. Listen to this description in verse two of Acts ten. Listen to this description of this soldier.

Acts 10:2 *A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, [all is a big little word, isn't it? He feared god with what? He feared God with all his house.] which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.*

So, we know that he was devout, he feared God with all his house, and he gave much alms to the people, and he prayed to God always. That's a pretty power definition, isn't it? That's a pretty powerful description of this centurion, of this soldier, of this warrior. He really knew that his relationship with God mattered. Do you know that your relationship with God matters? Do you know how important your relationship with God is? Do you want it to be better? How many of you really would like to improve your relationship with God? You'd like to have a better, tighter, more meaningful, closer relationship with Him, even if that means, sometimes, that God's saying, "Nope. Not that way, this way." Right? Or, do you want to say, "God, I'll do it my way, and we can talk about it in Heaven." No, I want God to be with me every day. I want God to be with me along the journey. Could you say amen?

So I was in the United States Navy, it was 1972, I was in San Diego, California. And, they had mail call. I don't know exactly how that do mail call now, but I know, back then, usually, the chief, or whoever was in charge of that group of people, would stand in front of that group of people, and he would call out your name and hand you your envelopes. Is it still pretty similar to that, or is it—do you have your own mailboxes, now? But, anyway, mail call was an event. And, you know, you always hoped that when there was mail call that your name would be called, because it's always great to get something from home, right? And, so, I was in San Diego California, and he says, "Paine," and he threw out, because there was sort of a group of us, and he'd throw it out to us. And, so, it was a thick envelope, too. You know, this is cool. I got something from my dad, and it's thick, and I'm thinking, "This is—I wonder what he sent me? I can't wait to see it!" and I opened it up, and it wasn't just a small envelope, it was an eight and a half by eleven envelope, you know, and, it was stuffed. And, I thought, "Wow, it's probably money!" You know? And I opened it up, and there were six envelopes, and they were all stamped. And, there were about twenty sheets of blank paper. And, there were five freshly sharpened pencils. No note. I think he was saying, "I'd like to hear from you, son." Maybe—and I knew my dad pretty well, I can just imagine him saying, "Well, Pete probably doesn't have any paper, or envelopes, or stamps out there in San Diego where he's stationed. That's probably the problem. I know he wants to write me; he just doesn't have any tools. I'll send him the tools." So, no note—and, I opened it up in front of my friends and they all laughed out loud, of course. But, God wants to hear from you, too. God wants you to write Him a letter. I mean, I don't mean that literally, obviously, on paper. But, I mean, God wants you to share your heart to Him. It takes a little time to write a letter, doesn't it? It takes a little time to write a letter, doesn't it? God wants you to write Him a letter. God wants you to spend some time on your knees, and say, "Dear God, I was thinking about you today. I just wanted to say I love you. I just wanted to tell you how thankful I am for salvation. Just wanted to ask You, Lord, if you're pleased with my life, and, is there any area in my life that You would like me to tweak, adjust, change?" Hello? Anybody with me? Anybody with me? Anybody think that, you know what? Anybody already in this message. I just need to know where we're at, so I know how long to take on this point. The more hands I see, the faster I can preach this. Anybody thinking, "You know, I need to get better at communicating with God?" Well, I can do it faster. Okay, here we go. Anybody—are you with

me, Saints? I can do better. And, so, here was the centurion, he's a devout man. We're in verse three:

Acts 10:3 *He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him...*

By the way, if I had time I would go back into the history of it; it would not have been a normal practice for a centurion to be praying at the ninth hour of the day. I wish I had a little more time to develop that point, but this was a unique practice. This wasn't what every centurion was doing in the ninth hour of the day. But, he was, and:

Acts 10:3-4 *He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, [I love this. What was his reaction? He was afraid, Now, we read earlier that he feared God, didn't he? And the Bible says, in Proverbs, that fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). And, the root word for this word, "fear," is respect. Okay? And, he was afraid because he knew whose presence he was in. He had awe and respect of the awesome power of the presence, what was happening. And, when he looked on him, we're in verse four], he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? [He knew who was speaking, he knew where the voice came from, because he was ready. Hello? He didn't say, "Who is it?" He said, "It's the Lord. This is the one I've been seeking. This is the one who I have a relationship with. I know who it is. I know who it is." Hello? I'm that close, when he speaks, I know His voice. Amen?] And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms [two separate things, but they both came up to God, didn't they? Thy prayers and thine alms. Alms is a form of worship. I said it before, I'm going to say it again: I'm not asking for your money, I'm asking you to prayer fully include that in your relationship with God. Does that make sense?] are come up for a memorial before God.*

His prayers and his alms. The way he communicated with God, and the way he communicated to others with their needs. That's the alms. The way he communicated to others with their needs. Amen? That's their alms. And, are come up before Me as a memorial before God. Is that powerful? Spend a moment on that word, memorial. Hello? There's a monument. There's a monument, because of his prayers and the way he lived, and the way he gave, and the way he sacrificed, and the way he set aside the things of the world, so that he can have a place with God. There's a monument, I memorial. I don't mean a physical monument. But, can you picture how big that is? I know Who you are. Woo. Does God know who you are? Of course he knows who you are, but, would you like him to know you better? Would you like him to know you better? Amen. Listen to this, verse five:

Acts 10:5-7 *And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants...*

When did he call the servants? As soon as the angel departed. He was still in his prayer room. Amen? He was still in his prayer room, and he heard from an angel of the Lord, God had spoken to him through an angel. And, how long did it take him to take action? Immediately.

Acts 10:7-8 *And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.*

This is a powerful point, and I only have a few moments to really develop it. But, he declared everything that was said to him. "I want everyone to know what the Lord said. I'm not going to keep this to myself." Plus, think about this, what if he had a little bit of it wrong? Which, he knew he didn't, because he knew his relationship, but how bold are we to speak, "This is what God told me, and this is how we're going to do it. This is what God told me and this is how we're going to do it." It's all on the line. He's a centurion! He's these guys' leader. He'd better have it right. Amen? And, he called these guys, and when he had declared all these things under him he sent them to Joppa. Now something's happening, about a day's journey away. Verse nine:

Acts 10:9 *On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:*

So, now Peter's praying, the sixth hour, but I love the way God set this up. Cornelius' men are already on their way. Cornelius didn't send a runner to say, "If we come, will you receive us?" He heard from God and he took action. Is that exciting? So, now, the next day, while Cornelius' men are on route to Joppa, Peter's praying, and something's about to happen. So, they drew nigh into the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour, verse ten:

Acts 10:10-11 *And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: [do you see what kind of prayer he's in? The kind that follows fasting. He's hungry, he's praying, he's not stopping to eat] but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain ...*

Now work with me on verse eleven. Who's this praying? And he's a Jew, right? And, he understands Jewish customs. He honors the Jewish customs. He's a devout man. He loves God, God loves him. Peter has never seen an uncircumcised Gentile accepted by Jesus Christ. Only the Jews. Now, we know that God has made His Word clear. In Acts, 2, and 38, which precedes this and He's given the...

Acts 2:38 *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

And, what does it say in verse thirty-nine?

Acts 2:39 *For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*

Right? Okay? And, so, but, Peter's never seen a Gentile saved, and, where are we at? Verse eleven:

Acts 10:11-12 *And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending upon him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.*

Now, if you're familiar with Jewish Law and customs, you realized it what's going on here. Peter seeing something that was very different.

Acts 10:13 *And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.*

Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

Acts 10:14 *But Peter said, Not so, Lord...*

Now this wasn't disrespectful. It was Peter making sure he was understanding what he was being told. And, I want to say to you, it's okay for you to say, "God, help me understand this. This is not what I've been taught." Hello? I'm going to share just a brief snippet of my testimony. I was raised—my mother was devout Catholic; my father was devout country club. My mom got sick when I was 10, and she went to a nursing home. And, my dad said to the six children, "You guys want to keep going to church? Or, we can sleep in and I'll make pancakes when you get up." So, I was devout pancake. And, okay? And, when I realized at age nineteen, when our founding Pastor shared this simple Gospel message with me, and he asked me if I had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, I had never heard of a personal—I believed in God, I believed in Jesus—but, I'd never heard of anyone having a personal relationship. You mean, the kind of relationship where, what we're reading about now happens? Where God speaks, and you hear it? Hello? Sign me up! Amen?

Acts 10:14-15 *But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. [Verse fifteen] And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.*

Do you understand? Can I help us understand how big of a deal this is? This is like everything Peter's ever known, God is saying, "It's not that way anymore." Everything Peter's ever known, God is saying, "It's not that way anymore. I changed it, Peter." Now, Peter knows that Christ was crucified, ascended, came back, gave the Great Commission, he walked with Him, he talked with Him, they ate together. He knows everything is changed, but he didn't understand this piece of it like he does now.

Acts 10:16 *This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.*

Three times this happened, this sounds familiar with Peter. Three times this happened, hello? And, then, it goes up.

Acts 10:17 *Now while Peter doubted in...*

God? Yeah, Peter didn't doubt God, but he doubted himself. It's okay to doubt yourself. It's okay to have questions. It's okay. But, know that God is true. Amen? If something comes from the Word of God, and you're like, "That doesn't make sense," don't just say that isn't the way my grandpa taught me, so I'm going to do what Grandpa did. Right? No, doubt in yourself, and say God, help me understand it. God help me understand it." I'm not finding fault with your grandpa, don't hear me wrong. Don't hear what I didn't say, please. I'm just saying, the Bible says let every man be a liar and the Word of God be true (Romans 3:4). Amen?

Acts 10:17 *Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,*

I love this! Peter's doubt—you see how God orchestrated this. You think God doesn't want to orchestrate the events in your life? I say He does. So, while Peter's doubting himself, he's seen the vision three times, right? He saw it clearly, he heard, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat." Right? He said, "Not so, Lord; I've never done that." And, now there's a knock at the door. A knock at the door—perfect timing. God's timing, amen? We serve an on time God, don't we?

Acts 10:18-21 *And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, [Let's capture that: While Peter thought—here's Peter, he just saw the vision, he's still seeking understanding, but what did the spirit do? It said:] Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?*

Do you see the immediacy of the response to God speaking to him? First through a vision, then through an angel? Is that powerful? Or through the spirit? Is that powerful? Do you want that relationship with God? Well, then, what you're going to have to do is what these men did. I'm not telling you what I want you to do, I'm telling you a prescription out of Scripture that both Cornelius and Peter were praying and seeking God. Not just saying grace before a meal, and saying, "God, thanks for this food. By the way, I need some money." No, those aren't bad prayers, but that's not enough to build a relationship with. Okay, some of you aren't quite getting it. Okay, so, Debbie, would you come stand with me? This is my wife at forty-three years. Suppose this is the only time I ever talk to her. "Oh, this is a nice lunch." "God, I thank you for Debbie, she's a beautiful wife." "I sure do love you, Debbie." And, then, I'll talk to her the next day, "Oh, what a nice meal. Hi. Thanks for this meal." Oh, what a beautiful wife. "God, thank you for my beautiful wife." And, then the next day, I'm out of town, so I don't say that to her, but, the day following, I get there, and she makes a nice meal, and I say, "Oh, hi." "God, thanks for the—" How do you think our relationship's going? Yeah. Thank you, Debbie. But, but, but, you know what? Sometimes we get so busy, hello? Am I stepping on your toes sufficiently? Am I tromping on them sufficiently? You know I mean that in love, don't you? Okay? But, have we reduced our prayer life to that? Have we reduced our relationship-seeking with God to that, you know, quick prayer each day? You know, (yawn) set the alarm. "God, thank you for a wonderful day." (Snore). I mean, that's better than nothing, but barely. (Chuckle). This clown didn't come here today to tell me that I need to pray more, did he? Okay, yes I did. This guy didn't come here today to say I need a better relationship with God, did he? Oh, yes, I did. This guy didn't come here today to say that I need to prayerfully examine how I'm living and how I'm giving, did he? Oh, yes I did. Yes, I did. I came today to say you need a tune-up, a spiritual tune up. Maybe a whole new engine. (Chuckle).

My high school car, I took it to a mechanic once, I finally quit. I'd done everything I knew how to do, I was, you know, a shade tree mechanic and I did everything I knew how to do. And, he said, "You're trying to fix something that doesn't deserve to be fixed, man." And, he looked in the car and everything, and he said, "Your radio is worth more than the rest of the car." I would take the radio out and junk this thing." So, I did. Okay? And, then I did something fun. And, so, my buddies and I got together oh, and we had seen the movies with the big car crashes, you know, where they go off the cliff in this big fiery—and, so, we took my car, after I took the radio out, and we went down the hill to a place where—I grew up in Western Pennsylvania, in the mountains, and there was a big drop off, and that's where people used to dump stuff like old refrigerators, water heaters, and stuff over the hill. People don't do that anymore, but anybody old enough to remember there used to be places where you could dump stuff like that? And it was called a dump. Fancy that. And, so, we thought, "We're going to take this car off to the dump and, man, fly it off the cliff in a big fiery—" and, so, we drew straws. There were four of us my brother, two buddies, and me, and I got the straw that said I'm the driver. And, so, I put the brick on the gas pedal, we're going down the field to the—and they're watching, and they've got the super-8 camera that was my dad's, you know, and they're filming it, and I put the brick on the gas pedal, and I jump out of the car, and I roll into the field and the car goes to the cliff, it was going about twenty miles an hour, and it went boom, boom, boom, boom. No fiery crash.

No big bang. It barely left the ground. Some of you have a prayer life like my 1963 Corvair. It just barely... boom. I'm sorry. You were wondering where I was going with that, didn't you? I was wondering myself. I'm going to read verse twenty-one again:

Acts 10:21-23 *Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, [I imagine at this point Peter's probably already saying to himself, "Cornelius? The centurion? What do I have to do with him?" Right? He didn't expect it someone would come and start talking about this centurion. That wasn't an existing relationship.] a just man, and one [we're in the middle of verse twenty-two] that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.*

Now, I've been making a point about the immediacy of this, the fact that he lodged them wasn't procrastination, it was just the right way to travel. They were traveling by foot, it was about a day's journey, and starting first thing in the morning would be the right way to go. And, so, that's what he did. He lodged them, he fed them, and the next morning they left.

Acts 10:24 *And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and he had called together his kinsmen and near friends.*

And I like that. Cornelius is getting everybody he can. "Hey, guys, we're about to hear a special message from someone that God's sending here. I want everybody to hear it. I want everybody to hear it." Don't be shy with this message. Amen? Share it with others. Saints, I know sometimes, I preached more evangelistic, and a little louder, and a little faster, but stay with me on this message., It because there's some gold here if you'll just harvest it. There's some gold here if you'll receive it. Could the Church say Amen?

Acts 10:25 *And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.*

And, I want to take just a minute moment to unpack this. When Cornelius worshipped Peter, it was because he thought maybe this was the Messiah. I've spent some time studying this passage, and he wasn't sure. And, then, what Peter does, is he confirms, "Oh, no, no, no, I'm just a man, I'm just a messenger." Hello? Sometimes we get that mixed up today, too. We think somebody's bigger than they are. You know, we're just messengers. We're just messengers. We have a message from God. And, the message is God. But, we should never think of ourselves more highly than we all thought, because the reality is that we're messengers. But, we carry a very valuable message. Amen? And, what verse are we in? Maybe twenty-six?

Acts 10:26-28 *But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; [so I'm breaking the law here] but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.*

He's got the vision now. He understands exactly what God was showing him in that vision. Right? If I have cleansed it, it's not common or unclean. I know the Law was, but now it is. I know what the law was, but now it is. God is showing him that he's going to be the

forerunner of the change. And, these first Gentiles are going to be converted unto Christ. Is this awesome what happens, what's happening here? And, sometimes, we'll say, "Oh, if I lived back then I would be a hero for the Gospel!" You could be a hero for the Gospel, today. You could be a hero for the Gospel, today. Amen? Amen?

Acts 10:29 *Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, [which means he didn't waste any time] as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?*

Let's get down to business. We don't have time for pleasantries.

Acts 10:30-31 *And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.*

Now, earlier, it said, as a memorial, now it's saying remembrance. I said a monument, I didn't mean to physical monument, but I meant that he is known. He's known.

Acts 10:32 *Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.*

When he cometh he shall speak to thee. Has anybody come today, and you've been saying, "God speak to me." You know, you may get the answer today, or you may get the direction to the answer. The Bible says, one plants—I'm paraphrasing—one plants, one waters, but God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). But, keep seeking. Keep saying, "God, show me. Send me to the messenger that's got the message. Let me read it in your Word, Lord. Lord, let me draw closer to you. Let me learn how to pray more, seek more, serve more, have a better relationship with you." amen?

Acts 10:33 *Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*

They realize, "This is it, guys. We're about to get direction, and it's not a suggestion." Hello? Can I say that again? We're about to get direction and it's not a suggestion. I'm not saying every day of your life, but there are defining moments—I'm going to say that again—there are defining moments in your life, when you get direction. "Let this go. Embrace this. Do that. Stop that." There are defining moments—could you say amen? And, I will suggest you today that you could miss those defining moments if you don't have the right prayer life. You will miss those defining moments if you're not studying the Bible. Paul said to Timothy, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, but rightly dividing the Word of God." (2 Timothy 2:15) Amen? Amen? Do you study to show yourself approved? I'm not trying to criticize today. I asked you earlier, "Have I sufficiently stepped on your toes?" This is a step on your toes kind of message. Maybe that's why I'm preaching it so soft. Because, I don't want you to think that it's me saying it. It's God saying, "I want to have a better relationship with you. I want to have a clearer relationship with you. I want you to know when I'm speaking to you." Could you say amen? Do you want that relationship with God? You know what? In this day of technology, I was in a restaurant the other day, I saw what appeared to be a mother and father and two teenage children, all four of them on their devices. None of them talking to each other. I'm not criticizing them; I'm just saying they were missing something special. They were missing the opportunity to talk to each other. Hello? they were missing the

opportunity to hear from each other. Hello? Have we gotten so busy that we're missing our opportunity to talk to God? Have we gotten so busy that we're missing our opportunity—Debbie, could you come to the keyboard, could you play and help me, as I try to wrap this up? Are you too busy to hear from God? Are you too busy to have God's say, "Stop. Stop, I've got a message for you."? I'm going to share a little of my testimony. I was nineteen when I gave my heart and life to Christ. I was in the United States Navy. I had a very clear plan for my life. I was going to go back to Pittsburgh, where I grew up, and I was going to—I knew the building, my dad was going to be a silent partner with me, and we were going to open a restaurant. I know it sounds silly, but in high school, I used to write menus, and that was my dream. When I was a little boy I always wanted to own a restaurant. In fact, I took a food service class in high school. It was the first year they offered it, and I took it. And, then when I went to my recruiter in the Navy, I said, "Could you—I want to be a cook." And he said, "You *want* to be a cook?" And I said, "Yes, I want to be a cook. In fact, can you guarantee me that I'll be a cook?" he said, "no one has ever asked me that." He said, "Son, let me tell you something: you have pretty good marks on your ASVAB," he said, "You have a lot of options." And, I said, "I want to be a cook. Because I want to own a restaurant." He said, "Okay." And, I was a cook and, when I gave my heart and life to Christ, it wasn't very long after that that God said to me, "I've got a plan for you, son, and, it doesn't include owning a restaurant." I'm not saying owning a restaurant is a bad thing. Do you know that that was not an easy pill for me to swallow? Until, until, until, I said what Jesus said in the garden, when he prayed, "Nevertheless not my will, but thy will be done." (Luke 22:42) And, can I tell you how thankful I am that I didn't go build a restaurant? Because God has blessed me in my journey. God has blessed me. And, I don't have any regrets about the path that God has chosen for my life, and I'm so thankful that I had a prayer life where I could hear it. And, I'm here today rooting for you, that you'll say, "You know what? I want that." I want to be able to read God's Word, and know when it's speaking directly to me." Hello? Let me share another story. I might be done with my text, now, I'm not sure. We'll see.

So, I was—I hit a spot. This was about thirty years ago, give or take. And, my relationship with my God had grown cold. And, I was frustrated, and I was hurt, and I was tired. I was like the husband that would say to his wife, "I have fallen out of love with you. I need to seek someone else." But, I knew that wasn't right, so I said, "God, show me. How did I get here? How did I—" I wasn't out living in sin. But, I had let my prayer life become routine. Hello? I was doing all the right things, but I had lost the passion. Hello? I remember where I was sitting, and I was reading, and I said, "God, I'm not going to sleep until I get an answer. I need to hear from you, God." and I started reading. Could you turn to James, one, and eight for me, Malcolm? I think that's the verse, I have to double-check. And, I said, "God, I need—" And, I read the verse. And, it was, not physically like a light shined on the page, but emotionally, like, "That's it. Stay there. There's your answer." Does that make any sense? Okay. And, what does that say, Brother Malcolm?

James 1:8 *A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

That's it. That's the verse. And, it was like it was emotionally highlighted. I don't mean it was like it was physically, like I saw a highlighter on the page, that's not what I'm saying. But, emotionally, Hello? Hello? Hello? And He said, "That's your problem. You've become double-minded. You've got all these activities going on in the world." None of them, they weren't sinful activities, but, I was working a lot of overtime, and I was, you know, I was trying to provide for my wife and children, and I've got busy being busy. Hello? Anybody ever got busy being busy? And I sort of let my relationship with God just be something—that's how I identified myself, "I'm a Christian," but I wasn't spending time with Him. Hello? Somebody knows what I'm talking about. And, he said, "Read it again." "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." I had lost my single-mindedness of God being first in my life. I had a wife; a man doesn't provide for his wife,

then he's worse than an infidel (1 Timothy 5:8). I can quote you that, God. You want me providing, don't you? You don't want my wife starving, or our kids naked. Right? Of course I'm supposed to provide. But, not at the expense of my relationship with God. Hello? Somebody came to hear this today. Somebody came to hear this today. Get back with God. Renew your relationship with your God. Start studying His Word with passion. Expect, expect a blessing. Don't just eat because you need nourishment, eat because you're hungry. Eat because you want to taste it. Get alone with God. When the Holy Spirit speaks to you, when you start watching—I'm not against watching TV, in proper proportion, but, maybe you're like me. I've sometimes wasted a whole evening watching TV, when it's time to turn it off and go to bed, I couldn't tell you what I watched. I watched NCIS. What was it about? I don't know. It was probably a bad guy and a good guy, and the bad guy get caught by the good guy. Hello? Hello? And, I love that other show about the cops who catch the bad guy and lock him up. Boy, that'll improve your relationship with God. How about when the Holy Ghost says to you, "You want to spend some time with me?" You pick up the remote, you turn it off, you open the Bible, or you just get on your knees. I know this is a simple message today, it's not feel logically deep, but it'll work for you, if you work it. Hello? It'll work for you, if you work it. Let's stand together. Singers, could you come and get ready to sing, "For He Is Lord?"

God, Almighty, we love you. I thank you for the privilege to be here today. I thank You for Your reminder that, we have time to renew our relationship with You. We have time to hear You say, "Yes." we have time to hear You say, "No." we have time to hear You say, "Stop," and we have time to hear You say, "Go." But, to do that, we need to be close to You so we know it's You. So, let us get better at studying Your Word. Let us get better at our prayer time. Let us get better at being quiet, and seeking that still, small voice. Help us have a better relationship with You, God, so that we can be better as husbands, and wives, and sons, and daughters, and parents, and children. Help us, Lord, to have a memorial in Heaven because of how we live on Earth in our relationship with You. Lord, I love my brothers and sisters and I don't know where everybody's at on their journey today, but You do. Maybe there's one here today who needs to say yes to You, and say, "I accept You as my Lord and Savior." Let this be their day. Whether it's coming to this altar during the song, whether it's speaking with someone after the service, and saying, "Show me the Scriptures." Maybe there's someone here today, and they know You, and they love You, but they've never been, as You said in Romans six, "Buried with You in baptism, raised to walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:4) Let this be that day for them, Lord, to say, "You know what? I need to take that step of faith and follow that commandment that You give in Your Scripture." Maybe there's someone here today, Lord, and they've grown cold in their relationship with You, and, today's the day they can warm it up. Heap coals of fire on it, and bring the passion back. Maybe there's someone here today and they've never had it, and they think it's just something other people get. Tell them that You want that relationship with them, that You shed Your blood on the cross at Calvary for their sins, and, You want that relationship with them. Lord, we've heard testimonies today of loud people and quiet people, but You love them all the same. Thanks for loving me. Thanks for loving each of us and all of us. We thank You, in Jesus name. We thank You in Jesus name.

I'm going to stand in this altar if anybody wants to pray. I know that you have people that you assigned to pray in the altar; if they would like to come and join me, please do. I know I'm just doing this sort of spur-of-the-moment, but we want to be here to pray with you as we sing together. I'd like to invite everybody to sing.