



COVENANT CHURCH

2020 Vision for Others

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Main Idea – Through prayer you can perceive how God perceives. Because each of us has been influenced by our environment - and by significant people in our life - we naturally presume things about others. Only God can show you how things really are.

The natural environment

- Each of us is born into a unique environment made up of individual people, circumstances, and belief systems.
- Your environment has a great impact on how you perceive others and the world outside your personal experience.
- It is easy to stereotype and generalize. However, when you do that you will “get it wrong” most of the time.
- Do not evaluate the world – and individual people - solely on your own experiences, observations, and instincts.
- Desire to interpret things the way God interprets things.

Cornelius and Peter responded differently

- Although he was a Roman soldier born outside of the Israelite religion, Cornelius nevertheless was more open-minded than was Peter – one of Jesus’ disciples.
- **Acts 10: 1-5** – At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and *prayed continually to God*. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, “Cornelius.” And he stared at him in terror and said, *“What is it, Lord?”* And he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. (ESV)
- While Cornelius replied to God with an open heart, Peter challenged what God was telling him. Peter responded to God based on his own prejudices he had been taught from his cultural and religious experiences as a Jew.
- **Acts 10: 9-14** – The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, *Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray*. And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let

down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter, kill and eat.” *But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.”* (ESV)

- You have the same options when responding to God; you can respond with an openness to what He wants to show you, or you can respond from the limits of your own, personal experiences.
- Both Cornelius and Peter were seeking God through prayer. Only one of the two men was open to receiving a new understanding from those prayers.
- It is possible to be very Christian and yet very wrong at the same time.

Don't put pressure on yourself to always be right

- It is easy to unwittingly develop a prideful attachment to being right all the time. Other than Jesus, no human has ever been able to come close to being right all the time.
- You must embrace the idea you will be wrong from time to time, and to welcome the chance to see something from a different perspective.
- When you see people from God's perspective, you will also be able to see yourself as if in a mirror. **Acts 10: 15-16 – And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.** (ESV)
- When you embrace the opportunity to see things in a new way, you will often find yourself doing things outside your comfort zone or common practice. **Acts 10: 19-23 – And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.” And Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?” And they said, “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.” So he invited them in to be his guests.** (ESV)
- **Acts 10: 27-28 – And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. And he said to them, “*You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.*”** (ESV)
- When Peter finally opened himself up to accepting a truth outside of his personal cultural experience, he was able to perceive different kinds of individuals as *people rather than things*.

- Acts 10: 14 – But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten *anything* that is common or unclean.”
- Acts 10: 28 – And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call *any person* common or unclean.

Don't develop a world view from a small sample of experiences

- From actively seeking God in prayer, and then being attentive to what He will show you, you will be able to regard people as individuals rather than as members of a generalized group.
- Guard your heart from being influenced by a few events that are actually exceptions to what most often occurs.
- Don't let a handful of bad experiences influence your world view.
- You will need God's help in order to see beyond your own limited experiences.

What to pray

- Both Cornelius and Peter were praying men. But, only one appropriately received God's response.
- When you pray, pray God will show you something about yourself. By learning more about yourself, you will be better able to understand what God will show you about others.
- Pray God will have His way in your life. A good prayer might be something like, “Lord, help me to see others how You yourself see them. Lord, help me to treat them how You treat them. Help me to love them how You love me. Help me forgive them how you've forgiven me.”

Reflective Questions for 20/20 Vision for Others

1. Some of life's most rewarding experiences happen when we perceive an individual in a new way. Do you have an example of this from your own life?
2. Cultural and religious beliefs can be difficult hurdles to overcome when learning a new truth. What was the cultural and religious practice that had compromised Peter's ability to interact with those outside his belief system? As a Christian, have you had similar feelings about Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Atheists, or others? What

does the above Bible story tell you about how to overcome incorrect stereotypes?

3. Why, do you suppose, it is necessary to ask God to show you something about yourself before He shows you something new about someone else?