

**TEXT:** **Acts 10:10-16** He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. **11** He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. **12** It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. **13** Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." **14** "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." **15** The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." **16** This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

**TITLE:** **Faith and Family**

**INTRO:**

1. This week I came across an article that I had saved many, many years ago and my attention was captured by the title of the article... "Dealing with Flawed families".
2. I thought it was very interesting to come across an article about the difficulties families face as we enter into the Holiday season this year.
3. The article is written by a lady by the name of Lisa Earle McLeod and it is from a series of articles titled "When bad relatives happen to good people".
4. Now my curiosity was really heightened, and I was not disappointed after reading the column.
5. I thought I would share a few paragraphs with you this morning because it really struck a chord.
6. It's the late-night, whispered conversation between you and your spouse when you're finally alone in the bedroom after an exhausting day of dealing with family holiday drama. "You've got to talk to her," hisses the wife, who has been counting the days until the "holiday" is over.
7. "She's just trying to be helpful," says the conflict-avoider husband, who by this point in the visit has started to measure his time in minutes. "How is criticizing everything I do helpful?" the wife seethes.
8. "I promise, if she makes one more comment, I will strangle her. You mark my words, get me in front of a jury, and when I tell them everything that woman has done to me over the years, there's not a court in the land that will convict me."
9. That story is somewhat humorous but not nearly as entertaining when you consider that that exact conversation probably plays out more than we'd like to think.
10. We may be tempted to think that it just happens in our family, but the truth is it isn't just your family. As a matter of fact, a study was done by the authors of a book titled "Crucial Conversations" that revealed that 80% or 4 out of every 5 people have attended what they would call a miserable family

event, and that the majority of the time that miserable event occurred over the holidays.

11. Whether it's the critical in-laws or a mooching cousin, the holidays mean family together time, and for many, it's just plain torture.
12. I have made the statement before, but I think it bears repeating, there are some people in your family that you only see once or twice a year and there is a good reason why you only see them once or twice a year, because you only want to see them once or twice a year.
13. Maybe they did something to hurt you, or you had a heated disagreement at some point, or they just rub you the wrong way. Whatever the reason it is work to be around them and the truth is you feel like the holidays shouldn't be so hard.
14. Especially since it seems to start at the end of November with Thanksgiving and goes all the way to the end of the year. 4 or 5 weeks every year of having to deal with the emotions and the difficulty of being around those you would just prefer not to be around, but you feel like you have to be around them because they're your family.
15. I remember several years ago, the night before Thanksgiving, my wife and I stood in the kitchen trying to make a decision about what we were going to do the next day.
16. We had been invited to a yearly, family thanksgiving celebration where anywhere from 35 to 55 people would attend and there were many people we wanted to see, but there is one person who is always there who has done unspeakable things to a member of my family and to be quite honest we were just not sure we wanted to be around them.
17. We finally decided to put our love for the others ahead of the distrust we have of the one and go and have a good time, and we did have a good time.
18. But I'm here to tell you from experience it's hard. It's so hard that for some people it can literally ruin the holiday season.
19. Someone who loves me asked me what my topic was going to be today and when I finished telling them they said well that doesn't sound very Christmassy, where is the story of Christmas in all that.
20. I responded, I think that's the point. The Christmas season is supposed to be about God's love for us in sending his one and only son to live in a crazy world, to experience life as we know it and to then eventually give the ultimate gift of his life so that we can have eternal life.

21. That's what Christmas is supposed to be about, but for many people, even Godly people, the whole meaning of the Christmas season is lost because of crazy family problems.
22. Somebody here today is absolutely miserable thinking about the holiday season. You may hide it well, but you just wish you could skip over this time of year.
23. Somebody here you have faith in Jesus, you have accepted him as your Lord and savior but you wonder why isn't my faith keeping me from experiencing these family difficulties.
24. How does my family relate to my faith when my family is flawed and blemished?
25. I have to tell you if you are asking those question those are really good questions. And I am also glad to tell you that the bible, the word of God has some really good answers.
26. Because the bible is not a book about people who got along wonderfully without every having any fallouts, the bible is a book that contains stories of people just like us who had faults and shortcomings and who didn't get along well with others sometimes.
27. A great example of that kind of flawed person is the apostle, Peter. Peter was one of the original twelve disciples or apostles. He was with Jesus constantly for about three and a half years and Peter was not the poster child for human behavior. As a matter of fact, if Peter had been alive today he might have been that family member you avoided.
28. Peter was somewhat of a loudmouth. He was a big talker. He bragged more than he should. He bragged to Jesus in Luke chapter 22 that he was willing to go to prison and even die if necessary. He boasted that he would never turn his back on Jesus and within less than 24 hours he denied he even knew Jesus on three separate occasions.
29. After Jesus was risen from the dead, in John chapter 21 they were eating some breakfast beside the lake and Jesus questions Peter, do you love me, Peter.
30. Well, you know I love you Lord, as if his previous failure had never occurred. Two more times Jesus asks him if he loves him, and each time Peter responds you know I do Lord, until Peter is actually offended that Jesus would repeat the question three times.
31. There was probably a part of Jesus that wanted to say, I need to repeat it three times so it will get through your thick skull.

32. It was this Peter that was chosen by Jesus to be the leader of this new worldwide family of believers called the church.
33. And it is this same Peter in Acts chapter 10 that needed God to get his attention once again.
34. Peter was a devout Jew, and as a devout Jew he would have absolutely despised and disliked anyone who was a gentile. A gentile was simply anyone who wasn't a Jew.
35. Let's be completely honest. Peter was prejudice against non-Jews. He was offended by their very being.
36. And that created a problem and a difficulty for Peter because God's plan was to include and begin to save and bring into this worldwide family of believers not only the Jews but also the Gentiles who Peter couldn't stand and who probably couldn't stand Peter.
37. God was going to expect this new blended family if you will, to not only tolerate one another but to get along with one another and to work together to tell the entire world about Jesus.
38. Now maybe you have no intention of developing a plan to work together day in and day out with this family member that you dread being around, but it would be nice if you could at least get along and be at peace with one another.
39. What we will hopefully discover today is that not only is that possible but it's what God wants for your life. He doesn't want you to spend every Christmas season dreading those family get togethers.
40. Today I want to give you some keys that I pray will turn that dread into a manageable situation.

### **Determine to deal with you first.**

1. In the first part of Acts chapter 10 an angel appears to a man by the name of Cornelius. Cornelius is a gentile. Remember, Peter can't stand gentiles.
2. This angel tells Cornelius to send some men to find Peter and ask him to come to Cornelius' home.
3. So, Cornelius obeys, and he chooses three guys, and he sends them to Joppa which is about two days travel or 30 miles.
4. Keep in mind that Peter has no idea what has happened with Cornelius. He has no idea these men are coming to find him.
5. Let's read here what Peter is doing while these men travel to come look for him.

6. Acts 10:9-10 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance.
7. Let's put this in everyday language. Peter goes up in the warm afternoon sun to pray. While he is up there on the roof, he gets hungry. He calls down to ask if they will fix him something to eat and while he is waiting, he probably falls asleep and has a dream. More than likely that's what it meant when it says he fell into a trance.
8. Do you think for a moment Peter would have been up there praying, thinking about food, and sleeping if he had known what Cornelius was up too?
9. If Peter had known that Cornelius was sending people to invite him to his house, the house of some dirty, heathen gentile, do you think he would have been lounging around on the roof taking it easy?
10. Probably not. He might have been pacing and worrying and probably upset. Who does this Cornelius think he is? What is he doing sending people here and trying to take me to his house. Why didn't he just come here? Why does he want me to travel to him? Is he lazy?
11. I don't think it is an exaggeration to think that Peter would have been acting differently had he known what Cornelius was up to.
12. And that's exactly why God didn't tell him right away what Cornelius was up to. God needed Peter to come to grips with Peter's emotions before he and Cornelius could get along with one another. God's beginning point to bringing Peter and Cornelius together was to demand that Peter deal with Peter first and not Cornelius first.
13. If there is someone that you are going to have to be around this Christmas season and you are uneasy about being around them keep in mind you can't control what they do. You have no power over what they are up to, but you do have power and control over yourself and over your emotions.
14. As Spirit filled believers, one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control.
15. Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.
16. As Spirit filled believers we can and should go to God and pray to the Holy Spirit and ask Him to help us be in control of our thoughts and emotions.
17. Now, I shared last week that when I am nervous or fearful that my thoughts can begin to race if you will.
18. I want to be clear. We are not bad or terrible people if we experience fear or racing thoughts. It's just that we don't want that fear or that worry to go

un-checked. Because if those racing thoughts go unchecked then generally the outcome isn't good.

19. If we let our mind become consumed with what they might do or what they might say or how they might act this year, then chances are we will be mad and upset at them before we ever even get there.
20. And if we are mad and upset at them before we even get there, we stand a good chance of losing control of our own emotions because we are going to see everything they do as an offense even if it wasn't meant that way.
21. If we start thinking around thanksgiving, "well I'm dreading this year because I know it is just going to be like last year and I just know it will be a nightmare." Guess what? It probably will be a nightmare.
22. But if when those negative thoughts start bombarding our mind, if we will stop and cry out to the Holy Spirit HELP. I need help with these emotions that are overtaking me.
23. Holy Spirit, I don't know what it's going to be like this year and besides I don't have any control over what they do anyway, but Holy Spirit, with your help I do have control over what I think and what I allow to become lodged in my mind.
24. The beginning place is to determine to deal with me first, and to rely on the Holy Spirit to help me get control of me, and let go of what I can't control.

### **Don't deny differences.**

1. Acts 10:11-15 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. 13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." 14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." 15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."
2. Remember Peter was a Jew and as a Jew following the Jewish law there were certain animals that were considered unclean.
3. God had given his children a list of clean and unclean animals in Leviticus chapter eleven. Because certain animals were considered unclean Jews were forbidden to eat them.
4. Well guess what? In this dream Peter sees a sheet full of all kinds of unclean animals.
5. God blows his mind when he commands him in this dream. Go ahead Peter, take any animal you want and eat it.

6. Peter responds with shock. Well, I never. I have never eaten anything unclean or impure.
7. God responds don't call anything impure that God has made clean.
8. Now we know that what God was trying to do was condition Peter's mind into accepting the gentiles as being acceptable. Just as God now considered these animals to be clean, God wanted Peter to consider the gentiles to be clean. Specifically, God wanted Peter to consider Cornelius a brother instead of an enemy.
9. If Peter was ever going to get along with Cornelius, he was going to have to accept the differences between them.
10. I didn't say that Peter needed to agree with or even like all those differences. He just needed to accept that they existed.
11. Peter followed the letter of the law, Cornelius didn't even know about the law.
12. Peter considered himself righteous because he observed the Law, God considered Cornelius righteous because Cornelius prayed regularly and gave gifts to the poor. Their values were different.
13. These two men were as different as different could be and what God was saying to Peter was don't be shocked and repulsed by your differences.
14. What is it about people who are different than us that make us act un-Christ-like sometimes?
15. To be clear I am fixing to use the words we and us because what I am about to say next applies to me as well.
16. We see someone who has different color skin or who dresses differently than we like or who wears more makeup than we like or who talks more or less than we like or who is younger or older than we like or who are excited about something that we can't stand and rather than accepting the fact that we are different we judge them, "can you believe them."
17. Look at them. What is the matter with them? We may not let the words slip from our mouths but what we really mean is if they would straighten up and act just like me then I could get along with them.
18. When are we going to give up on the fact that everybody has to be just like us? I'm going to say there's a pretty good chance that the reason we don't get along with that family member is because we are different.
19. Well, you just don't know how different. They are weird.
20. Can I tell you we can get along with people who are weird all the time?

21. My wife gets along with me most days and after 32 years of marriage she still thinks I'm weird. I've been living with me a whole lot longer than that and I think I'm weird some days.
22. The other day I said something and she didn't agree with me and I became upset. I didn't say anything I just festered about it. Gave her the silent treatment. Later on, I realized I was upset because she doesn't think like I think.
23. News flash, women and men think differently. And we still get along. If thinking just like everybody else is a prerequisite to getting along with others, then we wouldn't get along with anybody. The only person in this world who thinks exactly like I think is me. And sometimes I'm not too happy with me.
24. Don't deny or act shocked or repulsed by differences. Refuse to let differences bring division.

### **Differences don't determine destiny.**

1. Acts 10:19-20 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. 20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."
2. Destiny is an interesting little word. We don't hear the word destiny very often, but I really love its meaning. One definition of destiny is: *The predetermined, usually inevitable or irresistible course of events.*
3. I believe with everything in me that every person, every believer in Jesus has a destiny. I believe we have a destiny because God has a plan and a purpose and a desire for every single life here today.
4. You are not an accident, you are not accidentally here on earth, you are not accidentally here today, your life is not aimless and pointless you are on a path, on a journey and God has a destination for you. He knows where he wants to take you. You may not fully know but he sure does.
5. Peter was on a path. God had a destination for him. And part of that destination was that he accept the gentiles as brothers and sisters in Christ and that he no longer reject them but embrace them.
6. But in order to arrive at God's destination Peter had to refuse to allow the differences that existed to determine his course.
7. Peter is still trying to wrap his head around the vision he has seen from God and before he even gets it figured out God says to him there are three men looking for you, I have sent them. Go with them. They are going where I want you to go.



8. At that moment Peter had a choice. Am I going to let my differences with these people keep me from following God or am I going to follow God's plan despite our differences.
9. Every day we are faced with the same decision. If we will listen close enough, if we will allow the Spirit of God to speak to us, if we will get in the yoke with Jesus, we will realize that each and every day God has a divine plan for our life that day.
10. He knows where we are starting from, and he knows where he wants us to wind up. And there is a part of us that wants to believe that. There is a greater part of us that needs to believe that but yet it seems like that instead of our life flowing along a divine plan we are darting here and there and everywhere.
11. Could it be that the reason why there seems to be no flow is that every time a person crosses our path that is different or is not like us or rubs us the wrong way, or every time a situation crosses our path that stretches and pulls on us that instead of continuing in the flow of God's path we try and dart and dodge and choose a path that looks a little bit easier.
12. And all the while God is saying I don't need you to dart and dodge I just need you to listen to me and keep your eyes on me, and stay in the yoke with me.
13. Sometimes we have conflicts with family members, and we are tempted to think, this thing is ruining my life, well it may be difficult but it can only ruin your life if you choose to allow that conflict to get you off of the path of destiny God has for your life.
14. Don't let the difficulty or the differences determine your destiny. Let God determine your destiny.

#### Conclusion:

1. Let's review today.
  - a. **Determine to deal with you first.** Your thoughts. Your emotions.
  - b. **Don't deny differences.** We're different. Duh.
  - c. **Differences don't determine your destiny.** God does. That person doesn't control your life; you and God control your life.
2. Relationships are not easy. If relationships were easy there would be no fights and there would be no divorce and there would be no family squabbles.

3. Relationships take work. Relationships take effort. They don't come naturally. How many know if you are going to do some work then you have to have tools and not only do you have to have tools you have to know how to use those tools.
4. I can give you all the tools in the world to have healthy relationships but you won't know how to use them unless you have made right the ultimate relationship. A relationship with Jesus.
5. I have found that relating to others is much easier when I am relating to Jesus as I should be.
6. How are you and Jesus? Are you close to him? Is there some secret sin that separates you from him? Do you know him as savior? Salvation call.
7. Prayer for those who need a miracle in a family situation.