

REDEEMING QUALITIES:
Learning to Share Our Mission



Welcome

WELCOME IN SURPRISING SITUATIONS

As you begin this study, take a moment to pause and experience God's welcome into His Holy Word. Then read the 27th and 28th chapters of Acts to explore and discover some surprising ways that Paul experienced and extended welcome as a prisoner on his voyage to Rome to stand trial before Caesar.

- ◆ As you read the four Scripture passages below, look for examples of welcome, and mark them to be used for reference later.

Acts 27:1-3

¹ When the time came, we set sail for Italy. Paul and several other prisoners were placed in the custody of a Roman officer named Julius, a captain of the Imperial Regiment. ² Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was also with us. We left on a ship whose home port was Adramyttium on the northwest coast of the province of Asia; it was scheduled to make several stops at ports along the coast of the province. ³ The next day when we docked at Sidon, Julius was very kind to Paul and let him go ashore to visit with friends so they could provide for his needs.

After facing a storm at sea and surviving a shipwreck. . .
Acts 28:1-2, 7-10

¹ Once we were safe on shore, we learned that we were on the island of Malta. ² The people of the island were very kind to us. It was cold and rainy, so they built a fire on the shore to welcome us. . . . ⁷ Near the shore where we landed was an estate belonging to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us and treated us kindly for three days. ⁸ As it happened, Publius's father was ill with fever and dysentery. Paul went in and prayed for him, and laying his hands on him, he healed him. ⁹ Then all the other sick people on the island came and were healed. ¹⁰ As a result we were showered with honors, and when the time came to sail, people supplied us with everything we would need for the trip.

Three months later, Paul's welcome-surprises continue. . .
Acts 28:13-16

¹³ ... we sailed up the coast to Puteoli. ¹⁴ There we found some believers, who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵ The brothers and sisters in Rome had heard we were coming, and they came to meet us at the Forum on the Appian Way. Others joined us at The Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he was encouraged and thanked God. ¹⁶ When we arrived in Rome, Paul was permitted to have his own private lodging, though he was guarded by a soldier.

Three days after arriving in Rome. . .
Acts 28:17-23, 30-31

¹⁷ Three days after Paul's arrival, he called together the local Jewish leaders. He said to them, "Brothers, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Roman government, even though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors. ¹⁸ The Romans tried me and wanted to release me, because they found no cause for the death sentence. ¹⁹ But when the Jewish leaders protested the decision, I felt it necessary to appeal to Caesar, even though I had no desire to press charges against my own people. ²⁰ I asked you to come here today so we could get acquainted and so I could explain to you that I am bound with this chain because I believe that the hope of Israel—the Messiah—has already come." ²¹ They replied, "We have had no letters from Judea or reports against you from anyone who has come here. ²² But we want to hear what you believe, for the only thing we know about this movement is that it is denounced everywhere." ²³ So a time was set, and on that day a large number of people came to Paul's lodging. He explained and testified about the Kingdom of God and tried to persuade them about Jesus from the Scriptures. Using the law of Moses and the books of the prophets, he spoke to them from morning until evening.

³⁰ For the next two years, Paul lived in Rome at his own expense. He welcomed all who visited him, ³¹ boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him.

⁷ "... blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence. ⁸ They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit."
(Jeremiah 17:7-8)

The soldiers aboard ship knew that they would pay with their own lives if any of the prisoners escaped; therefore had it not been for Julius, Paul and the other prisoners would have been killed when their ship wrecked. Julius, the commanding officer of the ship, was a Roman army officer who was assigned to guard Paul. In this role he had to remain close to Paul at all times. Through this contact, Julius developed a respect for Paul – which resulted in granting Paul some freedom (Acts 27:3; 28:16) and even in sparing his life (Acts 27:43).

Paul had obviously demonstrated welcome to Julius during their time together. Specifically what he did is not recorded in Scripture; however, something swayed Julius to make the decisions he made.

- ◆ What kinds of things come to your mind as you consider Paul’s response to God’s grace that welcomed Julius into a relationship of trust and respect?

- ◆ Similarly, look at the ways in which Paul extended grace and responded with welcome to others in these two chapters of Acts.

- To Publius
- To the people of Malta
- To the people of Puteoli
- To the “brothers and sisters” in Rome
- To the Jewish leaders in Rome

- ◆ In what ways do you see a relationship of welcome offered to Paul?

- By Julius
- By Publius
- By the people of Malta
- By the people of Puteoli
- By “the brothers and sisters” in Rome
- By the Jewish leaders in Rome



WELCOME THROUGH UNLIKELY ENCOUNTERS

In order to allow time for discussion, only portions of Acts 8 and 10 are included here. By taking time throughout the week to read these chapters in their entirety, your study will be enhanced.

In the decades immediately following the resurrection, persecution pushed the Christians beyond Jerusalem and into Judea and Samaria. As this wave of persecution forced the believers out of their homes in Jerusalem, they took with them the Good News! Through examples of faith and obedience in the lives of Philip, Peter, and Cornelius, we get a glimpse of God's work through encounters with unlikely folks in the midst of circumstances beyond human understanding.

- ◆ As you read the passages below, look for examples of God's grace, as well as examples of welcome (a response to that grace) that you see extended to each person introduced in the passage. Mark them to be used for reference later.

Philip, not the apostle, but a Greek-speaking Jew who was one of the seven men chosen to help with the food distribution ministry of the 1st century Church (see Acts 6:1-7) preaches in Samaria. . .
Acts 8:4-13

⁴ ... the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went. ⁵ Philip, for example, went to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah. ⁶ Crowds listened intently to Philip because they were eager to hear his message and see the miraculous signs he did. ⁷ Many evil spirits were cast out, screaming as they left their victims. And many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

⁹ A man named Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years, amazing the people of Samaria and claiming to be someone great. ¹⁰ Everyone, from the least to the greatest, often spoke of him as "the Great One—the Power of God." ¹¹ They listened closely to him because for a long time he had astounded them with his magic.

¹² But now the people believed Philip's message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized. ¹³ Then Simon himself believed and was baptized. He began following Philip wherever he went, and he was amazed by the signs and great miracles Philip performed.

In the middle of a successful preaching ministry in Samaria, Philip received an unexpected call to a new ministry. Obedient to God’s call, Philip headed out on a desert road. Our human minds (and our culture) would interpret such a move as a significant career demotion! Philip, however, followed God’s plan rather than what he perceived as his own success – and the Good News moved into Ethiopia through another unlikely encounter. . .
Acts 8:26-36, 38

²⁶ As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, “Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷ So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

²⁹ The Holy Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and walk along beside the carriage.”

³⁰ Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

³¹ The man replied, “How can I, unless someone instructs me?” And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him.

³² The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this:

**“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter.
And as a lamb is silent before the shearers,
he did not open his mouth.**

**³³ He was humiliated and received no justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”**

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?” ³⁵ So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus.

³⁶ As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?” ³⁸ He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

*⁷ “... blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence.
⁸ They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit.”
(Jeremiah 17:7-8)*

- ◆ What welcoming characteristics do you personally have in common with each of the key players these passages of Scripture?
 - Philip
 - Simon the Sorcerer
 - The Ethiopian Treasurer

- ◆ To which of the key players would you be most comfortable extending welcome? Why? Which would be the most difficult for you to welcome? Why?

As we move into Chapter 10, we witness yet another surprising encounter as God orchestrates a meeting between Peter and Cornelius. . .

Acts 10:1-48

¹In Caesarea there lived a Roman army officer named Cornelius, who was a captain of the Italian Regiment. ²He was a devout, God-fearing man, as was everyone in his household. He gave generously to the poor and prayed regularly to God. ³One afternoon about three o'clock, he had a vision in which he saw an angel of God coming toward him. "Cornelius!" the angel said.

⁴Cornelius stared at him in terror. "What is it, sir?" he asked the angel.

And the angel replied, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering! ⁵Now send some men to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. ⁶He is staying with Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore."

⁷As soon as the angel was gone, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier, one of his personal attendants. ⁸He told them what had happened and sent them off to Joppa.

⁹The next day as Cornelius's messengers were nearing the town, Peter went up on the flat roof to pray. It was about noon, ¹⁰and he was hungry. But while a meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its



four corners.¹² In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds.¹³ Then a voice said to him, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat them.”

¹⁴ “No, Lord,” Peter declared. “I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean.”

¹⁵ But the voice spoke again: “Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean.”¹⁶ The same vision was repeated three times. Then the sheet was suddenly pulled up to heaven.

¹⁷ Peter was very perplexed. What could the vision mean? Just then the men sent by Cornelius found Simon’s house. Standing outside the gate,¹⁸ they asked if a man named Simon Peter was staying there.

¹⁹ Meanwhile, as Peter was puzzling over the vision, the Holy Spirit said to him, “Three men have come looking for you.”²⁰ Get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitation. Don’t worry, for I have sent them.”

²¹ So Peter went down and said, “I’m the man you are looking for. Why have you come?”

²² They said, “We were sent by Cornelius, a Roman officer. He is a devout and God-fearing man, well respected by all the Jews. A holy angel instructed him to summon you to his house so that he can hear your message.”²³ So Peter invited the men to stay for the night. The next day he went with them, accompanied by some of the brothers from Joppa.

²⁴ They arrived in Caesarea the following day. Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.²⁵ As Peter entered his home, Cornelius fell at his feet and worshiped him.²⁶ But Peter pulled him up and said, “Stand up! I’m a human being just like you!”²⁷ So they talked together and went inside, where many others were assembled.

²⁸ Peter told them, “You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean.”²⁹ So I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. Now tell me why you sent for me.”

³⁰ Cornelius replied, “Four days ago I was praying in my house about this same time, three o’clock in the afternoon. Suddenly, a man in dazzling clothes was standing in front of me.”³¹ He told me, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your gifts to the poor have been

noticed by God! ³² Now send messengers to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. He is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore.’ ³³ So I sent for you at once, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here, waiting before God to hear the message the Lord has given you.”

³⁴ Then Peter replied, “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism.

³⁵ In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right.

³⁶ This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after John began preaching his message of baptism. ³⁸ And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

³⁹ “And we apostles are witnesses of all he did throughout Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰ but God raised him to life on the third day. Then God allowed him to appear, ⁴¹ not to the general public, but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses. We were those who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead. ⁴³ He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name.”

⁴⁴ Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message. ⁴⁵ The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, too. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in other tongues and praising God.

Then Peter asked, ⁴⁷ “Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?” ⁴⁸ So he gave orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterward Cornelius asked him to stay with them for several days.

A bit of background information . . . Cornelius was a Gentile who lived in Caesarea, a town on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Joppa, where Peter was living at the time, was approximately 32 miles north and situated 125 feet above sea level overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.

Peter, steeped in Jewish tradition, had definite biases against the Gentiles. In addition, he was well aware of the fact that his life was in danger because of his professed belief in Jesus as the Messiah. In the midst of these unsettling circumstances, God calls him into a situation that would be described as uncomfortable at best, one making no sense when based on human reasoning or understanding.

- ◆ What welcoming characteristics do you personally have in common with each of the key players in this passage of Scripture?
 - Peter
 - Cornelius
 - Members of Cornelius' household

- ◆ To which of the key players in this passage would you personally be most comfortable extending welcome? Why? Which would be the most difficult for you to welcome? Why?

God was at work in each of the key players' lives, and He called them to live out what they professed. Take time this week to listen to the call God is placing on you now.

- ✝ Write down the things that make it difficult to follow that call, and share your thoughts and feelings with a prayer partner. Commit to lifting each other in prayer – and to regularly encouraging each other to take steps of obedience in that calling.

Peter confessed that he was not comfortable as he entered Cornelius' home.

- ◆ What groups of people raise discomfort for you, as a congregation, as you extend a welcoming ministry?

As Peter witnessed the Holy Spirit's outpouring into the members of Cornelius' family, the grace he had personally received from Christ spilled over, causing him to welcome them as equals in the growing Church. This was a crucial step in carrying the Gospel to the whole world.

- ◆ What examples of grace can you, as a congregation, draw upon to allow for a response of welcome to flow to all people in your community and beyond?



WELCOME ENCOURAGES REPENTANCE AND HEALING

In order to allow time for discussion, only portions of 1 Kings 16 and 17 are included here. By taking time throughout the week to read these chapters in their entirety, your study will be enhanced.

Elijah was the first in a long line of prophets that God sent to Israel and Judah. The northern kingdom (Israel) had no faithful kings throughout its history. Each king led the people into worshipping false gods. Few priests were left from the tribe of Levi (most had gone to Judah), and the priests appointed by Israel's kings were corrupt and ineffective. With no king or priests to bring God's Word to the people, God called prophets who would encourage the people and their leaders to return to God.

In this passage, we are blessed to witness a mega-dose of God's grace as well as Elijah's amazing response to that grace.

- ◆ As you read the following Scripture passages, pay particular attention to each character introduced. Look for and mark the places you see an outpouring of God's grace received – as well as responses of welcome extended.

1 Kings 16:29-33 and 1 Kings 17:1-7

²⁹ Ahab son of Omri began to rule over Israel in the thirty-eighth year of King Asa's reign in Judah. He reigned in Samaria twenty-two years.³⁰ But Ahab son of Omri did what was evil in the LORD's sight, even more than any of the kings before him. ³¹ And as though it were not enough to follow the sinful example of Jeroboam, he married Jezebel, the daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and he began to bow down in worship of Baal. ³² First Ahab built a temple and an altar for Baal in Samaria. ³³ Then he set up an Asherah pole. He did more to provoke the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than any of the other kings of Israel before him.

¹ Now Elijah, who was from Tishbe in Gilead, told King Ahab, "As surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives—the God I serve—there will be no dew or rain during the next few years until I give the word!"

² Then the LORD said to Elijah, ³ "Go to the east and hide by Kerith Brook, near where it enters the Jordan River. ⁴ Drink from the brook and eat what the ravens bring you, for I have commanded them to bring you food."

⁵ So Elijah did as the LORD told him and camped beside Kerith Brook, east of the Jordan. ⁶ The ravens brought him bread and meat each morning and evening, and he drank from the brook. ⁷ But after a while the brook dried up, for there was no rainfall anywhere in the land.

- ◆ What is it like for you when your brook runs dry? Does it motivate you to seek God's voice and obey it? Do you switch direction and do something that allows you to move into your comfort zone? Do you give up and find an avenue of escape?

- ◆ What examples do you see of God extending grace:
 - To Elijah
 - To King Ahab

Typically calling others to repentance is not an easy issue for us to even talk about, let alone to act upon; however, in Paul's letters recorded in the New Testament, as well as in Jesus' teachings recorded in the Gospels, we read numerous examples of believers encouraging others to repent.

It is important to note that God's charge to Elijah was to call King Ahab to repentance. What Ahab chose to do with that call/invitation was between him and God.

Sadly, Ahab refused to act on godly counsel, disregarding God's call to repentance. This rejection of God's grace resulted in a life alienated from the very grace that would have led to peace. (1 Kings 22:29-40)

- ✚ What feelings are evoked when you think about encouraging others to repent (to turn back to God)? If this idea seems uncomfortable to you, write down specific things that trigger your discomfort, and take these into prayer this week.

- ◆ How does your congregation reach out to the “King Ahabs” in your community, encouraging them to turn back to God?

Elijah leaves his dried up brook. . .

1 Kings 17:8-16

⁸ Then the LORD said to Elijah,⁹ “Go and live in the village of Zarephath, near the city of Sidon. I have instructed a widow there to feed you.”

¹⁰ So he went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the gates of the village, he saw a widow gathering sticks, and he asked her, “Would you please bring me a little water in a cup?” ¹¹ As she was going to get it, he called to her, “Bring me a bite of bread, too.”

¹² But she said, “I swear by the LORD your God that I don’t have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die.”

¹³ But Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid! Go ahead and do just what you’ve said, but make a little bread for me first. Then use what’s left to prepare a meal for yourself and your son. ¹⁴ For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: There will always be flour and olive oil left in your containers until the time when the LORD sends rain and the crops grow again!”

¹⁵ So she did as Elijah said, and she and Elijah and her family continued to eat for many days. ¹⁶ There was always enough flour and olive oil left in the containers, just as the LORD had promised through Elijah.

Wow! What a gift for this woman and her son! However, even when God has performed a miracle in our lives, our troubles may not be over. God’s provision is never given in order to let us rest upon it. We need to depend on Him as we face each new trial. . .

1 Kings 17:17-24

¹⁷ Some time later the woman’s son became sick. He grew worse and worse, and finally he died. ¹⁸ Then she said to Elijah, “O man of God, what have you done to me? Have you come here to point out my sins and kill my son?”

⁷ “... blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence.

⁸ They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought.

Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit.”

(Jeremiah 17:7-8)



¹⁹ But Elijah replied, “Give me your son.” And he took the child’s body from her arms, carried him up the stairs to the room where he was staying, and laid the body on his bed. ²⁰ Then Elijah cried out to the LORD, “O LORD my God, why have you brought tragedy to this widow who has opened her home to me, causing her son to die?”

²¹ And he stretched himself out over the child three times and cried out to the LORD, “O LORD my God, please let this child’s life return to him.”

²² The LORD heard Elijah’s prayer, and the life of the child returned, and he revived! ²³ Then Elijah brought him down from the upper room and gave him to his mother. “Look!” he said. “Your son is alive!”

²⁴ Then the woman told Elijah, “Now I know for sure that you are a man of God, and that the LORD truly speaks through you.”

- ◆ What grace do you see God extending:
 - To the widow at Zarephath
 - To the widow’s son
 - To Elijah

- ◆ What response to God’s grace do you see:
 - From Elijah
 - From the widow at Zarephath

- ◆ How do you, and how does your congregation, respond to those who need healing? Are there specific types of healing that are easier for you to respond to than others?

- ◆ What extension of God’s grace can you, as a congregation, draw upon in order to offer welcome that encourages repentance and healing?

- ✚ As we wrap up the WELCOME section of this study, take some time with your prayer partner to give thanks to God for the grace He has showered upon you personally and upon Redeemer, Gastonia.

Are you willing to step out of your comfortable, familiar methods of extending welcome and move into surprising situations and encounters to which God calls you? Before you answer, remember – such a gift of grace demands response that sometimes takes us into totally unfamiliar territory!

- ◆ Write down specific ways your concept of WELCOME has changed over the past three weeks.

²⁴Then the woman told Elijah, “Now I know for sure that you are a man of God, and that the LORD truly speaks through you.”

May this be the response of each person who receives welcome from Redeemer, Gastonia!

It is my prayer that your minds and your hearts are open to surprising situations, to unlikely encounters, and to those who need healing and repentance. May you listen closely to God’s guidance as you welcome others, being mindful to make every plan and action an authentic response to God’s grace.