Beliefs Matter
Discovery Starters

Witness
We are called to **share the Gospel of Jesus Christ**
with those who do not know Him
Psa 78:1-7; Isa 40:3-11; Mic 4:1-2; Hab 2:14; Luk 24:44-48;
Act 3:12-26; Act 10:39-43; 1Co 9:19-23; 2Co 2:12-17; 1Pe 3:15-18

Belief #3 – Witness:
Peter's Conversion

Biblical Foundation:

And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (Act 10:39-43 ESV).

Discovery Starter:

Shouldn't the title be "Cornelius' Conversion"? Hold on for just a bit... Peter's opening statement at Cornelius' house reflected his reluctance to be among Gentiles. "You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home ... tell me why you sent for me" (Act 10:28-29). It had not occurred to him to preach the gospel! Cornelius had to coach him how to proceed. Then Peter misquoted Jesus. Peter stated that Jesus "commanded us to preach to the people." The word translated here is not *ethnos* (the word Jesus used in Mat 28:18-20), but *laos*. Whereas *laos* was used to describe exclusively the Jewish people, *ethnos* denoted all other people – the Gentiles. Though Jesus said one thing, Peter had heard another. Like Peter, we're often deaf to words which challenge our cultural paradigms.

Acts tells the story of the expanding reach of the gospel. At first all the followers of Jesus were Aramaic-speaking, Jewish "men of Galilee" (1:11). Then they included women (1:14) and non-Galilean Jews (2:5-11). The growing number of Greek-speaking believers even included one ex-Gentile (6:1-6)! The story continues with the inclusion of half-Jews (Samaritans in 8:1-25) and a wanna-be Jew (an Ethiopian in 8:26-39). That brings us to the two central conversions in the book: Paul's (9:1-22) and Peter's

(10:1-47). So why call it Peter's conversion? Well, Cornelius obeyed immediately (10:7) but Peter did not. When God visited him his immediate response was, "No, Lord" (10:14) – two words which should never be used together. If he's Lord, shouldn't the answer always be "Yes"? But after three visions and one prophetic word, Peter finally obeyed. So though both changed, it was Peter's "conversion" that required the greater effort.

Let's step back and look at the big picture. Acts is built around the stories of Peter and Paul. Their respective conversion stories are each retold twice (Peter's in 11:4-18; 15:7-11; Paul's in 22:3-21; 26:2-23). The telling and retelling of these two iconic stories occupies one eighth of Acts. They embody its central message: all who desire to follow Jesus are to be included! And for that reason we must all bear witness to all.

Keep Going:

Consider Peter's situation. Seven years after Jesus' instructions to preach the Gospel to every person (Mar 16:15), he still was only moving in familiar, culturally-comfortable circles. How about us? Are there changes God wants to make in the way we think and live like he did in Peter's life? Are we moving beyond the known and the familiar to reach those who are culturally different from us? Are we sharing good news with those who were born elsewhere and speak a different language? Are we communicating redemption to those who are outside our day-to-day activities? Take time to consider how you can move beyond your relational circles to share the gospel with those who are different from you. How can you include them? How can you reach them? Take time to listen to God about your role in extending his kingdom with a commitment to say, "Yes, Lord" when he speaks.