



FOOTHILLS

F E L L O W S H I P

PLEASE JOIN US FOR WORSHIP
SUNDAYS AT 9:30 AM

[12504 CANDELARIA RD NE, ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87112](#)

<https://thefoothills.church>

Sermon Delivered by: Elder Paul Droege

Date: July 13, 2025



Sermon Recording:

<https://thefoothills.church/sermon/heart-hearing-hands-head-the-path-to-deep-engagement-with-god/>

As you read through this sermon, may the words of Scripture and the reflections that follow draw you deeper into the love of Christ. Feel free to print this message, share it with others, and return to it often as you meditate on God's truth.

Heart, Hearing, Hands, Head: The Path to Deep Engagement with God



ARE YOU WILLING TO OBEY GOD BEFORE YOU UNDERSTAND WHY OR WHERE IT WILL LEAD?

Scripture Referenced: [Acts 10:1-16](#)

Good morning.

Why don't you go ahead and take your seats? Please just join with me in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we're grateful that you've gathered us here this morning. We're grateful, Lord, for Your Word. We're grateful, Lord, for the way You used these two men, Peter and Cornelius, to open Your kingdom to all of us.

Lord, help us to hear Your voice. Help us to see Your action. Help us, Lord, to trust You and believe in You, and to engage with You as You speak to us, as You lead us. We lift up this prayer now in Jesus' name. Amen.

For the want of a nail, the shoe was lost.

For the want of a shoe, the horse was lost.

For the want of a horse, the rider was lost.

For the want of a rider, the battle was lost.

For the want of a battle, the kingdom was lost—and all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

That nursery rhyme is attributed by some to Ben Franklin, to others to somebody that worked with Jim Henson on the *Muppets*. It's been attributed—or traced—all the way back to the 14th century.

It points up a really interesting reality:

What happens in the world, what happens in history, is really a series of unforeseen causes that just unfold and bring about a situation we never would have guessed might have happened.

Something that happens all the time—sometimes we engage with this thought in our own lives where it's like: *Oh, if I had only gone to work the other way, I wouldn't have had that guy rear-end me. Oh, if I had only gotten out of bed five minutes earlier, I would have caught the train and gotten the job.*

All these different things—there's just a cascade of events that happen. This is often the way our life unfolds. It's really the story of our lives in a way, because all these different things that at the time we have no idea what their impact is—but they actually affect the trajectory of our lives.

Often there's a fork in the road determined by seemingly trivial things like when you get out of bed or what road you take to work. And sometimes we don't even realize we've passed a fork in the road.

I was on a hike one time where we drove right by the fork in the road that was to the trailhead. We didn't realize it. And all of a sudden, we stop and think we're at the trailhead and we start

hiking up the mountain—and about halfway up the mountain we realize we have no idea where we are.

This can happen to us—

You just blow right by that fork in the road and don't even realize there was a fork there. Usually, we only begin to understand the implications and the consequences of these forks in our road when they're way in the rearview mirror

—when all the events have unfolded and all the consequences have played out. Then we realize: *Wow*.

For instance, do you realize that World War I—an extremely brutal and bloody war—was triggered by the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand? Now, assassinations aren't a pretty thing, but they don't usually trigger a world war. They don't usually bring about such a consequential outcome.

And yet these things happen all the time in our lives, and usually we're clueless in the moment. We don't really understand what's going on until much later.

Today we're going to look at a fascinating story of how

God navigated the church through a most improbable and unexpected fork in the road by means of two remarkable prayers—Cornelius and Peter.

In other words, these are the prayers—the persons who are doing the praying. They're the ones that we're going to really look at, and how they approach God.

Acts 10 is a story where two different people were deeply engaged in separate conversations with God—in which He gave each of them assignments that literally changed the church and thus the world.

In fact, most of you who hear this sermon probably wouldn't be here this morning—you might not even be a follower of Christ—had either of these men failed in their assignment. Think about that. They were given these assignments. They carried them out well. Because of that, we're here.

Had they not done so, who knows if this church would exist? Who knows what history would have unfolded?

Although neither of them knew what was happening at the time, their deep engagement with God was the key ingredient that He used to bring about this unexpected and profound change in the trajectory of the early church

—changing it from what was really a small Jewish sect into a global institution that people from all nations, tribes, and tongues were a part of.

That's a big deal.

Before we jump into the story, let's look at this concept of **engagement**.

When you say the word “engagement,” a lot of people are like: *Oh, show me the ring. When's the big day?*

I'm talking about a different kind of engagement—one that's probably more common today than it was 25 years ago, because of the world of the Internet.

When we talk about engagement, I mean involvement, commitment, and connection of people to some other entity or activity. Engagement is a very valuable thing.

It's not something that people really understood until just a few years ago. During the Internet age, people figured out just how

valuable it was. Huge companies were built on just this concept of engagement. Think of Facebook. Think of Twitter. These companies are multi-billion-dollar—even trillion-dollar—companies. What they're built on is just this idea of engagement.

Because engagement requires two critical things:

1. **Time** —which is really, if you think about it, the substance of life. When your time is up, your life is over in this world.
2. **Awareness or attention** —if you're there, but your mind is elsewhere, you're not engaged. Engagement vanishes.

But if you're there, giving up your time, and your mind is engaged—your awareness is there—now you're giving true engagement.

My hope is that this morning, this sermon will be engaging for you—that you'll be here and you'll hear this.

When you think about it, awareness is sort of the unique characteristic of life—it's our mind, our thought world. So our time and our thought world are really some of the essential elements of life.

Because of that, every little piece of engagement costs a piece of your life—a tiny piece of your life. Every moment of engagement takes both time and awareness. And so it's no wonder engagement is so highly valued in economic or business terms.

When you think about it...

Engagement is also what God desires of us. God is relational.

Think about this—the greatest commandment from Deuteronomy 6:5: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength.* You can't do that without engagement.

It requires your engagement. God is looking for us to give our time and awareness so that we have involvement with Him, commitment to Him, and connection to Him.

Now, how we do this—this is really something that happens in daily life.

Engagement with God should span all of our activity. But one of the main ways that we do it is in prayer.

When you think about it, prayer is intended to be a conversation. It should be mutual interaction—not just where we talk to God, not just where we bring Him our woes and our cares, but where we hear from Him, where He speaks to us.

The best conversationalists are actually great listeners. When you find somebody that's a wonderful conversationalist, they lean in, they hear what you're saying, they ask good questions, they really engage. They are focused. And listening requires not just hearing, but also thinking and processing it—getting to the meaning of what is said.

How many times have you had this happen where somebody says something to you—maybe it's your spouse—it never happened to me—but where they tell you something and ten minutes later they remind you what they said, and you say something like, *You never said that*, or *When did you say that?* Has that ever happened to you? Of course it has. It happens to all of us.

It's because we're not present with our minds. We're not engaged. The words are just washing right over us, and then they blow right by—we don't even catch the point.

So relationships are built on time spent together and in communication. This is true whether we're talking about with other people or with God. True, deep engagement with God

makes our relationship with Him much richer and more real. It enables us to actually hear Him.

This is vital because hearing God is one of the most challenging things. In fact, a guy named Pete Grieb wrote a book called *How to Hear God*. He says, *Learning to hear God is one of the most demanding and yet confusing things you will ever learn to do*. And I think that's true. It's astounding, but it's also confusing, because God doesn't normally speak to us audibly where we hear His voice.

Now we see His Word in the Bible, and that's one of the ways God speaks to us. But how does His Word in the Bible answer questions for us like, *Should I marry that person? Should I go to that place? Should I take that job?* How does God's Word tell us anything about those daily life questions?

We want to hear from God, but we're not going to just open the Bible and put our finger there and say, *Oh... Judas hanged himself. Go and do likewise*. Obviously, those are little phrases from the Bible, but we can't use that as a way of understanding God's guidance. We have to actually hear Him, understand what He's saying, and engage with His voice.

God can use many different languages. It might be Scripture. It might be a vision or a trance like we see in our passage today. It might be the advice of a Christian brother or sister. It might be just

a sense of clarity and awareness that He impresses upon us with His Holy Spirit.

So there are all sorts of different ways that God can speak to us. But we have to learn not only what those languages are and how to hear them—we have to have deep engagement in order to actually hear Him.

The four key elements that I have found in this passage about deep engagement are:

Number one, the **heart**. We have to be fully sold out to God—unconditionally surrendered and given over to Him. If we haven't given Him our heart, we can't expect to hear Him.

We also have to have **hearing**. We've got to actually attune ourselves to hearing His voice. We have to be paying attention. We have to have that awareness. And it's not just awareness—we have to listen carefully to hear exactly what He is saying.

Then there are **hands**. We must act on what He says right now—immediately. If we hear God, if we've heard His voice, we've got to act upon it. We can't say, *Okay, I'll think about that, Lord*, and then lay it aside and wait until we decide we're willing to obey.

If we want God to speak to us, we can't expect Him to speak over and over again until He browbeats us into submission. We have to be obedient. We have to obey right away.

And finally, our **head**. Yes, we should think about what God is telling us. We should be engaging with it and trying to meditate on what He's saying, what He's doing, maybe why He's doing it. We want to do those things—but what we often do, and you'll see it in the passage here, is we sort of jump ahead and say, *We know what God is doing here, or We know why He's doing this.*

We set ourselves up to misunderstand God when we do that. We overthink what He's telling us and fail to just be obedient. God wants us to engage our brains—it matters that we think about what He says—but that's really something that comes after the obedience. That comes after we step out in faith without having clarity of understanding the outcome or the consequences.

Let's dig into our story. Let me give you a little bit of background first.

In chapter 9, at the beginning, Saul has his Damascus Road experience and has become an ardent Christian. He began preaching boldly—first in Damascus and then in Jerusalem—where Hellenistic Jews try to kill him. That prompts his exile to Tarsus by way of Caesarea. Caesarea is the place where Cornelius lives.

The church is expanding at that time. It enjoys a time of peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and its numbers are increasing. But the church is essentially just a Jewish sect at this point—made up of Jews who have come to the Lord.

The apostle Peter travels around as an itinerant preacher. He visits Lidda, which is about 20 miles west of Jerusalem—almost due west—and about 10 miles southeast of Joppa. That's where Peter is at the beginning of our story.

Peter starts in Lidda. While there, he heals Aeneas of paralysis, and those living nearby turn to the Lord. It's a real impact of this miracle—Peter tells Aeneas to get up, and he does. There's a kind of revival—many people come into the kingdom.

It would have been easy for Peter to think, *Okay, I've got this down. Here's what we do: we go do these revival meetings all around Israel, and we build the kingdom. That's what we're doing.*

But then Peter gets summoned to Joppa. They heard he was nearby—10 miles away. Joppa is about 10 miles northwest of Lidda, right on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and about 35 miles from Caesarea.

He's summoned to Joppa because a woman, Dorcas—or Tabitha—who was a follower of Christ and dearly loved by the people, dies. Peter goes quickly, and he resurrects her—calls her back to life. Again, many more people turn to the Lord.

So, Alright, God's on the move. This is what we do—we work miracles in each village and build the kingdom. Peter has the plan. But he extends his time in Joppa, staying with Simon the Tanner.

This is the context in which our narrative unfolds.

Now Cornelius is living in Caesarea. He's a centurion in the Italian Regiment. In looking into this, apparently there were two different regiments of the Roman army, and the Italian Regiment was considered the more elite and prominent.

We might think of him as like a Green Beret—it was the crème de la crème. These soldiers were highly respected, highly thought of, known to be loyal to Caesar. Cornelius was a centurion, so he was one of the leaders in the Roman army stationed in Caesarea.

He's a God-fearing man—generous to the poor, and a follower of Yahweh. We don't know for sure what he's heard about Jesus Christ. There are hints in the passage beyond what we read this morning, but we don't really know his relationship with Christ. What we do know is that he's a follower of Yahweh, at least as the Jews understood Yahweh.

He has a vision where an angel tells him to summon Peter to Joppa. Peter might have thought, *Okay, another call to a new city. Let's go. We're going to expand the kingdom. What miracle do you want me to do here, Lord?*

Interestingly, Cornelius seems to have had an impact on those around him. His household was also God-fearing. He had a servant he trusted enough to tell about the vision. He had a devout soldier he entrusted with the message as well.

Cornelius had genuine faith and seemed to be spreading it to others. He was a man of prominence, yet he had nothing to gain in this world by being a follower of Yahweh. Think about it—the Jews were subjects of the Roman Empire, not the leaders. And he was giving to the poor—who had nothing to give him in return. He did it because he truly believed in God and was living according to his understanding of God's will.

He was earnest and devout—breaking for prayer in the middle of the afternoon. How many of you, at three o'clock in the afternoon, take a break to pray? You can raise your hands if you want. I love God and I pray daily, but I can't claim to be as devout as Cornelius.

Culturally, there may have been a prayer rhythm in their day, but still—he's in the middle of the afternoon praying.

When the angel comes to him, the message is very clear: send for Simon, who is called Peter, staying with Simon the Tanner, who lives by the sea. Very specific. And Cornelius immediately acts on this guidance—he doesn't hesitate.

To me, this is profound. He summons Peter without knowing why. Think about that—he's in a prominent position, sending for Peter

with no reason other than that an angel told him to. Later in the story, Peter asks him why, and Cornelius simply repeats the angel's message.

Cornelius is all in with God. When he calls Peter, it's not secret—he tells two servants and a soldier. He sends them right away. Then he gathers his family and friends to wait for Peter. He's assembling a crowd to hear Peter say... something. He doesn't know what. That takes faith, courage, and confidence that he truly heard God.

In the meantime, while the messengers are on the way, Peter is praying at noon on the roof of Simon the Tanner's house. Heaven opens, and a sheet is lowered with all kinds of unclean animals. A voice says, *Kill and eat*.

To me, this is borderline humorous. Peter says, *Surely not, Lord*.

When did Peter say something like that before? In Matthew 16:22, when Jesus said He would suffer and die, Peter essentially said, *Surely not, Lord*. And Jesus rebuked him: *Get behind me, Satan. Your mind is not on the things of God, but on the things of man*.

That's the danger of overthinking—we run ahead of God, completing the story before He's finished telling it.

Peter says, *I've never eaten anything impure or unclean*. Maybe there's some pride in that. But graciously, God repeats the vision two more times. Peter has a pattern with threes: he denies Jesus three times, Jesus reinstates him three times, and here's another threefold moment.

Maybe Peter's thinking, *Pay attention. Tune in*. He asks, *What does this mean, Lord?*

While he's pondering, the men arrive. The Holy Spirit tells him, *Go downstairs. Don't hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them*. Now Peter's tuned in—he's listening. The main guidance wasn't really about the animals in the sheet—it was that God had sent these men, and Peter was to go with them.

So he goes. He even invites them in for dinner—a breach of Jewish law, since they were Gentiles. But Peter has the confidence that he's heard God, so he's willing to step outside the bounds.

Already on the road to Caesarea, he knows he's breaking with tradition, but he trusts God's voice.

The story unfolds—and all the way through it, both Cornelius and Peter are in a place of cluelessness. They each get a word from God, but they're not sure what it's about. They don't understand what God is doing.

What they do understand is that He told them to do something specific. So they do it.

Peter goes to Cornelius's house and meets the crowd assembled there. His cluelessness is obvious in one of his first comments—a sort of throwaway line: *I now realize how true it is tha t...*

... God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right.

It's almost as if he's saying, *Okay, cut me a break here—God showed me this*. That part of the vision is only beginning to come into focus for him.

Then Peter immediately asks, *Why did you call me here?* Cornelius simply repeats his vision: an angel appeared and told him to summon Peter. That's the only reason.

Peter begins to share the gospel, but not in the way we might expect. He says, essentially, *You know about Jesus. You know what's happened*. He frames it as current events—they already know the facts. Then he says, *We are witnesses*—including the six others with him—that Jesus was crucified and resurrected.

He concludes, *If you believe in Him, you will be saved*.

At that moment, the Holy Spirit falls on them. They begin speaking in tongues and praising God.

Peter has just given what might seem a less-than-compelling gospel presentation, but it's enough. They believe instantly. And Peter realizes:

if the Holy Spirit has come on them just as He came on us, then they are part of the kingdom. True believers.

He says, in effect, *We can't do anything but baptize them and welcome them into the church.* And so he commands that they be baptized.

Later, Peter is called on the carpet by the other apostles and believers in Jerusalem for bringing Gentiles into the church. But once they hear the story—that this was clearly God's doing, not Peter's scheme—they accept it.

Peter wasn't trying to inflate numbers.

He was simply obeying what God told him to do. Only afterward did he, and everyone else, see the glorious thing God was doing.

Peter's initial reaction—*Surely not, Lord*—is something we're all prone to. We can cite chapter and verse for why something is "settled" and don't even feel the need to hear from God about it. That's essentially what Peter was doing: *I've read Leviticus; I know what it says. Don't tell me to eat that.*

Sometimes we overplay our hand with Scripture, assuming everything is universally prescriptive when some things were for a specific time and place. That's what happened with the dietary laws—most of us here have eaten bacon, shrimp, or lobster. We're not holding to those laws, though they're in the Bible.

Once the events in Acts 10 reached their conclusion, there was no backing away.

Peter had taken a risk—not because he understood the end of the story, but because he understood a single piece of it and obeyed.

God used both Peter and Cornelius because they were deeply committed to Him, open to hearing from Him, and willing to obey without hesitation—as far as they understood. They thought about the significance and implications after they obeyed.

It's remarkable that they carried out these assignments without clear understanding of exactly what they were doing or how their actions would fit into God's plan.

We need to recognize that God has intentions in the world, and we're a part of them. We may not understand what they are, and often we won't this side of eternity.

But we can lean in and ask, *What are You saying to me, Lord?*

When we hear His voice, we need to obey—fully engaged—allowing Him to speak and lead.

This kind of deep engagement is not just about prayer—it's an attitude of prayer. It allows God to speak to us in prayer, but it's really a way of life. It's a walk of faith.

Recognize that prayer is as much about hearing and receiving from God as it is about talking to Him. Often, our prayers are laundry lists of things we need God to do, help us with, or show us.

But we're less comfortable saying, *Speak to me, Lord*, and then sitting still in silence to wait. That's part of prayer too.

The important prayer in this account is that kind—the prayer that hears from God.

This deep engagement takes:

- **Heart** —fully sold out to the Lord, with an unqualified *Whatever You say, Lord, I'll do it.*
- **Hearing** —listening attentively, leaning in, even asking, *Do I understand this right?* and discerning His meaning.
- **Hands** —being willing to act immediately. *I heard His voice; I know what He wants me to do; I'm going to do it now.* This is critical—that's where we commit and step out in faith, not just hearing but acting.
- **Head** —still using our minds, thinking and pondering like Mary, who kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. But like Mary, we should say *May it be to me according to Your word* before we start analyzing. Obedience first,

reflection afterward.

If we pursue deep engagement with God in our lives and in our prayer life, we will see a much richer, more real relationship with Him develop.

We will begin to draw near, really know Him, and know His heart.

This is vital. This is what we desire, isn't it?

And as we do that, God will begin to confide in us. He will trust us with important assignments—perhaps even assignments that can change the world.

We may not know it at the time. It may be as simple as, *Go to this place. Leave now. Turn here.* Simple things whose significance we don't recognize—but if we listen and obey, we will see amazing things happen.

Let's pray.

Holy Father, I pray that You would help each of us to engage deeply with You in our walk and in our prayer life. I pray, Lord, that You would help us to draw near, to trust You fully, and be completely sold out to You. Help us to listen attentively and really hear Your voice and Your meaning.

Help us, Lord, to act on what You speak to us—to take action without hesitation, without compromise. And help us to ponder what You're doing, to see the beauty of Your plans, and to give glory to You, to praise You for the part You've given us to play in Your kingdom.

And Lord, may our lives—just like in Cornelius's and Peter's case—be used by You to bring about Your plan. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."

Numbers 6:24-26

PLEASE JOIN US FOR WORSHIP
SUNDAYS AT 9:30 AM

[12504 CANDELARIA RD NE, ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87112](#)



<https://thefoothills.church>