

# Leave Your Comfort Zone

ACTS 11:1-18

## GOAL

Adults examine their comfort zones and the borders they have crossed and discern opportunities to encounter the unfamiliar and learn from one another.

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



Visit our YouTube channel, [bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR](https://bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR), for conversation starter videos.

## PRAYER

Creator God, may I bravely cross the borders of my comfort zone to encounter the people who gather for this session. May we grow together in courage and in faith. Amen.

## THIS SESSION

Not all borders are bad. We establish comfort zones to mark places and situations of safety. Within safe borders we can be ourselves. We can be vulnerable, express love, and feel at peace. Understanding the value and limits of our comfort zones allows us to consider what lies beyond our borders and test our limits. This is where we often find growth. Crossing borders to try new experiences allows us to face our fears. Engaging others who are different from us stretches our understanding of diversity and broadens our worldview. Breaking down walls that hem us in provides opportunities to glimpse new horizons.

By examining our comfort zones, we assess the ways that borders help us, limit us, and sometimes define us. We discover that stepping beyond long-established norms allows God's Spirit to work in us and in the world. We explore examples of people in the Bible and across church history who have crossed boundaries with positive outcomes. We identify ways we can encounter the unfamiliar and build relationships across borders. These activities require leaving our comfort zones, opening us to new experiences and building relationships across borders that separate us.

## THE BIBLE STORY

Acts 11:1-18 recounts Peter's report to the apostles in Jerusalem following his trip to Joppa. He had preached to the Gentiles, and they had become believers. The Jerusalem apostles were concerned that Peter was preaching to people outside the borders that defined the people of God. Peter received a vision in which he was asked to venture outside the safe borders of his culture. He witnessed the gift of the Holy Spirit being given to new believers in Joppa without regard to the distinctions that humans put in place. In recounting his vision and his experience in Joppa, Peter opened the door for new understanding and unity in the early church.

## SESSION PREPARATION

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Stepping into the New" (p. 7): Preview the listed webpages.

# GETTING STARTED

## WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome participants and allow time for gathering activities (*introductions, offering, prayer concerns, and announcements*). Review the Summary of the Practice found in the Unit Overview on page 4 of the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Explain that a more detailed discussion of the practice can be found in the foundational essay that begins on page 47 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Encourage participants to read the essay during the course of the next four sessions.

### OPENING LITANY

Refer participants to the litany on page 8 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. As leader, read the opening lines, and have participants respond by reading in unison the lines printed in bold font.

## INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

### CONVERSATION STARTER VIDEO

Show the “*Cross Borders Overview*” video and the “*Cross Borders Session 1*” video from the Growing Faith YouTube channel ([bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR](https://bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR)). Lead a brief conversation about participants’ thoughts and questions the videos prompt as you introduce the practice.

### BORDERS I HAVE CROSSED

Direct participants to the Unit Overview on page 4 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud the bullet points. Invite participants to identify what comes to mind when they think about crossing borders. Have volunteers take turns reading the paragraphs in the Unit Overview. Discuss the reflection questions on page 5.

### COMFORT ZONES

Refer participants to the introduction to session 1 on page 6 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud the quotation about safe harbors from the third paragraph. Then read the paragraph about harbors and comfort zones. Invite participants to identify one or two of their comfort zones.

Explain that there is value in maintaining comfort zones. Yet there are times when we can become too comfortable and miss opportunities to engage with others. Invite participants to identify limitations of comfort zones. Use these questions to continue discussion.

- ➔ When has your comfort zone limited your experience or interaction with others?
- ➔ What might you have done differently in the situation?
- ➔ Think about the border you crossed and named on page 4. What comfort zone did you leave in order to do that?
- ➔ What comfort zones did those whom you encountered have to leave in order to engage with you?

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- This and all sessions require that the leader and participants have their copy of the *Adult Reflection Guide* with them.



**Teaching Tip:** The first session of a practice may be the first opportunity participants have to work with this *Adult Reflection Guide (ARG)*. Activity options in this session will draw heavily on the ARG to familiarize participants with its content.

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- Internet-connected device

# FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

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Bibles

## SHARED VISIONS

Refer participants to “Finding the Practice in the Bible” on page 9 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Have volunteers read aloud the first three paragraphs. Form two groups. Assign one group to read Acts 10 and the other to read Acts 11:1–18. As they read, encourage them to consider the challenges that can arise when different groups of people come together under the Christian umbrella. Discuss these challenges within their groups.

Gather participants to report what they read and discussed. Use these questions for further discussion:

- ➔ What comfort zones needed to be overcome for Cornelius, Peter, and others?
- ➔ What occurred that encouraged each to step beyond their comfort zones?
- ➔ What comfort zones does your group need to leave behind to include others?

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Bibles

## CHALLENGING BOUNDARIES

Direct participants to Acts 11:1–18. Invite four volunteers to read the parts of Narrator, Jerusalem believers, Peter, and a voice/an angel/word of the Lord. Invite participants to identify the boundaries that are being challenged in this passage.

Refer participants to “Finding the Practice in the Bible” page 10 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Begin reading aloud with the paragraph that begins “Peter’s decision to baptize” and continue to the end of this section. Pause to discuss the questions that indicate ways the early church was thrown into chaos by including the Gentiles. For further discussion, ask:

- ➔ How was the trajectory of the church changed by the inclusion of the Gentiles?
- ➔ What groups of people do you find in the church today who differ from you?
- ➔ What comfort zones are challenged by being in community with people who differ from you?
- ➔ What comfort zones do others need to leave behind when encountering you?

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Bibles

## LEAVING COMFORT ZONES

Form pairs and assign one text to each pair: Genesis 12:1–9; Genesis 24:50–67; Exodus 2:11–22; Exodus 13:17–22; Matthew 2:13–23; Luke 2:1–7. Each pair reads the assigned text and identifies the comfort zone that is being left, why the person(s) left it, and the outcome of leaving the comfort zone. Gather the group and invite participants to report on their text. Brainstorm additional examples of biblical characters leaving their comfort zones.

# FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

## STEPPING INTO THE NEW

Direct participants to “Finding the Practice Then and Now” on pages 12–13 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud the first paragraph on page 12. Form four groups and assign each group to read one of the four examples of people leaving their comfort zones to cross borders. If there is interest, they may use internet-connected devices like smartphones to learn more about these ministries through the links below:

- Shekhinah Clinic, Ghana ([bit.ly/FMShekhinah](https://bit.ly/FMShekhinah))
- Presbyterian Education Board, Pakistan ([bit.ly/FMPEBPakistan](https://bit.ly/FMPEBPakistan))
- United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) ([bit.ly/FMumcor](https://bit.ly/FMumcor))
- Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) ([bit.ly/FMHowWeWork](https://bit.ly/FMHowWeWork))
- ACT Alliance ([bit.ly/FMACTAlliance](https://bit.ly/FMACTAlliance))

Gather the groups to report on what they learned about these examples of crossing borders. Discuss what motivates these people to leave their comfort zones. How did they overcome the risks and challenges they faced? What benefits came from their border crossing? What are other examples where people leave their comfort zones in order to cross borders?

## THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

Explain that sixteenth-century religious leaders challenged the teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church for their strict boundaries, which empowered a few and subjugated many. Show the YouTube video “History 101: The Protestant Reformation—National Geographic” ([bit.ly/FMProtRef](https://bit.ly/FMProtRef), 4:27). Invite participants’ reactions to the video. Use these questions for discussion:

- ➔ What challenges were communicated to the church by the Protestant Reformers?
- ➔ How did the Reformers’ challenges affect their comfort zones?
- ➔ How would their challenges disrupt the church’s established boundaries?
- ➔ How was the trajectory of the church changed by the Reformers’ boundary crossing?

## REFUGE CHURCH

Refer participants to the story of the Refuge Church and the Coffee Oasis ([bit.ly/FMRefugeChurch](https://bit.ly/FMRefugeChurch)). Invite four volunteers to read the church leaders’ story. Invite participants to discuss what stands out for them about these ministries. Identify how the Fredericks left their comfort zone to meet people on the street. What comfort zones did they seek to establish with the Refuge and Coffee Oasis? How do ministries like these challenge boundaries of traditional churches?

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# PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

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Pens

## EXAMINING OUR COMFORT ZONES

Direct participants to “Practicing the Practice” on page 14 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud “Examining Our Comfort Zone.” Distribute pens and encourage participants to work independently to acknowledge the landscape of their comfort zones. They may draw images or write brief descriptions in response to the questions about comfortable worshiping community and comfortable living environment.

Gather participants and invite volunteers to talk about their comfort zones. Encourage questions and conversation for clarification and to discover shared and differing comfort zones among the group.

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Pens

## MAKING A PLAN

Direct participants to “Making a Plan” on page 15 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud the first paragraph. Distribute pens and encourage participants to work independently to complete these statements on the page:

- The opposites of my comfort zone are . . .
- Some places I could visit near me include . . .

Gather participants and invite volunteers to discuss their statements. Encourage the group to work together to develop a plan for visiting a worship service that is outside their comfort zone. Use space on the page to record their plan.

## FOLLOWING JESUS IN THE WEEK AHEAD

If time allows, invite three volunteers to each read one of the paragraphs in “Following Jesus” on page 16 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Explain that, even in our comfort zones, we are challenged to step out and work with others who are different from us. Invite participants to commit to looking for a chance to experience something new this week.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Invite participants to pray with you in unison using the prayer on page 16.