


**A Five-Day Devotional Journey**
**June 8 - 14, 2008**

Acts 11:1-30

# Pushback

## 1 The believers criticized him

**Read.** Acts 11:1-10 NLT

Soon the news reached the apostles and other believers in Judea that the Gentiles had received the word of God. But when Peter arrived back in Jerusalem, the Jewish believers criticized him. "You entered the home of Gentiles and even ate with them!" they said. Then Peter told them exactly what had happened. "I was in the town of Joppa," he said, "and while I was praying, I went into a trance and saw a vision. Something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners from the sky. And it came right down to me. When I looked inside the sheet, I saw all sorts of small animals, wild animals, reptiles, and birds. And I heard a voice say, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat them.' "No, Lord," I replied. 'I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure or unclean.' But the voice from heaven spoke again: 'Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean.' This happened three times before the sheet and all it contained was pulled back up to heaven."

**Think.**

- Why did the Jewish believer's criticize Peter? What was their problem?
- What strikes you so far about Peter's answer?
- Why do you think Luke is taking the time to tell this whole story over again here? Why not just a quick summary statement?
- How well do you weather criticism? Which of the following would you say captures your response to criticism?
  - a. Bring it on!
  - b. Where can I hide?
  - c. I can't wait to hear what they have to say...
  - d. I can't wait to tell them what I have to say...
  - e. Idiots.
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
- How well do you share criticism when you have a problem — and who do you share it with?

**Pray.**

Father, write James' counsel on my heart: "Lead with your ears, follow along with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear."

**Live.** Meditate on James 1:19 today.

When you dig a well, you might fall in.

When you demolish an old wall, you could be bitten by a snake.

When you work in a quarry, stones might fall and crush you.

When you chop wood, there is danger with each stroke of your ax.

Proverbs 10:8-9 NLT

**They hadn't seen the vision three times repeated.**
**No tongues of fire.**
**No voices raised in praise.**
**No irresistible baptismal celebration by fresh gentile believers.**

**They only saw an ancient boundary crossed, a taboo violated, potential chaos unleashed. So when Peter returned to Joppa, he faced the fire of criticism and accusation from his own. You have to love his answer: "Don't blame me, God did it."**

**It's serves us warning that it's not just an unbelieving world that coughs and sputters when we live faithfully and decisively as Jesus followers. Some of the loudest hacking can come from those closest — as Jesus found out in his home town.**

**"When you chop wood, there is danger in each stroke of your ax," says the sage. As long as the ax sits idle, all is safe and sound — though the house will remain unbuilt and the dinner uncooked. There is potential and peril in its every swing. The solution, of course, isn't to bench it, but to use it wisely, as the teacher says, continuing his proverb: "Using a dull ax requires great strength, so sharpen the blade. That's the value of wisdom: it helps you succeed."**

**Peter could have avoided trouble by staying put, by chalking up his vision to yesterday's pita bread sandwich. But that really wasn't an option. So he moved, and with witnesses at hand, he carefully followed God's lead each step of the way. And when the criticism came, he patiently recounted what had happened and, having listened to his brothers, responded with grace that soothed the hacking and had them acknowledging God's hand, even as they shook their heads in disbelief at the sudden turn. It doesn't always work out so well — but it's the risk we take when we put our hand to the ax.**

## 2) They stopped objecting

**Read.** Acts 11:11-18 NLT

“Just then three men who had been sent from Caesarea arrived at the house where we were staying. The Holy Spirit told me to go with them and not to worry that they were Gentiles. These six brothers here accompanied me, and we soon entered the home of the man who had sent for us. He told us how an angel had appeared to him in his home and had told him, ‘Send messengers to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. He will tell you how you and everyone in your household can be saved!’”

“As I began to speak,” Peter continued, “the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he fell on us at the beginning. Then I thought of the Lord’s words when he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ And since God gave these Gentiles the same gift he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to stand in God’s way?” When the others heard this, they stopped objecting and began praising God. They said, “We can see that God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of repenting of their sins and receiving eternal life.”

### Think.

- How do you think Peter handled the criticism he received? How did he manage to turn them from criticizing him to praising God?
- What lesson(s) do you learn from Peter? From the Jewish believers?

### Pray.

Father, help me not to fear or avoid confrontation and conflict. Teach me how to answer softly like Peter and so defuse anger.

### Live.

Meditate on Proverbs 15:1. If you have been holding on to a grievance of some sort, pray about how to talk with the person involved.

## 4) The believers were first called Christians

**Read.** Acts 11:22-26 NLT

When the church at Jerusalem heard what had happened, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw this evidence of God’s blessing, he was filled with joy, and he encouraged the believers to stay true to the Lord. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. And many people were brought to the Lord. Then Barnabas went on to Tarsus to look for Saul. When he found him, he brought him back to Antioch. Both of them stayed there with the church for a full year, teaching large crowds of people. (It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians.)

### Think.

- When news of what was happening in Antioch filtered down to Jerusalem, how did the church there respond?
- This is now the third time we meet Barnabas in Acts (see 4:36-37 and 9:27). How does Luke add to Barnabas’ profile here—what does he say about him?
- What did Barnabas see and do upon arriving in Antioch? What impact did he have?
- Why do you think Barnabas thought of Saul at this point? What does Barnabas do? A decade after we last saw him, how do you think Saul felt when Barnabas found him?
- What’s the significance of the disciples being called “Christians”? Do you think this was meant as a compliment? An insult? Or was it just a label? What does this label mean in our culture today?

### Pray.

Lord, give me the heart of Barnabas to really see people and to encourage your presence and further work in them.

### Live.

Look for someone “benched” by life, and help them get in the game

## 3) Preaching to the Gentiles

**Read.** Acts 11:19-21 NLT

Meanwhile, the believers who had been scattered during the persecution after Stephen’s death traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch of Syria. They preached the word of God, but only to Jews. However, some of the believers who went to Antioch from Cyprus and Cyrene began preaching to the Gentiles about the Lord Jesus. The power of the Lord was with them, and a large number of these Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord.

**Read.** 2 Timothy 4:3-5 Message

You’re going to find that there will be times when people will have no stomach for solid teaching, but will fill up on spiritual junk food—catchy opinions that tickle their fancy. They’ll turn their backs on truth and chase mirages. But you—keep your eye on what you’re doing; accept the hard times along with the good; keep the Message alive; do a thorough job as God’s servant.

### Think.

- Go back and reread Acts 8:1-4. In addition to Philip going to Samaria in Acts 8, where else were other believers going and sharing Jesus after Stephen’s death? Who were they talking to—perhaps even before Peter’s vision? What was the response?
- How passionately are you “keeping the Message alive”? With whom have you shared Jesus most recently?

### Pray.

Lord Jesus, give me fresh and bold and unassuming confidence and passion to simply share the message of Jesus with someone who really needs to hear good news today.

### Live.

Watch for the opportunity to share Jesus with someone outside the box today — risking being peculiar, but not being weird or religious.

## 5) Everyone giving as much as they could

**Read.** Acts 11:27-30 NLT

During this time some prophets traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up in one of the meetings and predicted by the Spirit that a great famine was coming upon the entire Roman world. (This was fulfilled during the reign of Claudius.) So the believers in Antioch decided to send relief to the brothers and sisters in Judea, everyone giving as much as they could. This they did, entrusting their gifts to Barnabas and Saul to take to the elders of the church in Jerusalem.

**Read.** Galatians 6:9-10 Message

So let’s not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don’t give up, or quit. Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith.

### Think.

- What message did the Jewish prophet Agabus share in this heavily gentile church? How did the fellowship in Antioch respond?
- What is the significance of this gift — and of the two believers who were carrying it to Jerusalem?
- What is the place of prophecy in the body of Christ today?
- How do you typically respond to impending crisis? What can we learn from the church in Antioch — individually and as a church?

### Pray.

Holy Spirit, help me not to fear your movement among us. Help me to listen when you are speaking, and to open my mouth when you would have me speak. And let my open mouth be followed up by open hands that generously share.

**Live.** Meditate on Galatians 6:9-10 today.