



Community Group Discussion Guide

Go Therefore: Acts 11:1-30 – May 9, 2021

I. Starter Questions:

- How do you respond to criticism?
- Think of a time when you might have been critical of someone else. What attitude or thought process might have been at the root of this criticism?

II. Discussion of Scripture:

Last week in Acts Chapter 10 we witnessed God's salvation being opened to the Gentiles. Even though Jesus had foretold this in Acts 1:8 before his departure, it still required God to change Peter's heart on the matter. Now in Chapter 11 we witness the reaction of the church in Jerusalem and how Peter addressed it. Towards the end of this chapter, we see God taking Jewish and Gentile believers and unifying them into one body of Christians in Antioch.

A. Acts 11:11-18 (ESV) Peter Reports to the Church

11 Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, ³ "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." ⁴ But Peter began and explained it to them in order: ⁵ "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. ⁶ Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. ⁷ And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' ⁸ But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' ⁹ But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.' ¹⁰ This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹ And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. ¹² And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³ And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; ¹⁴ he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' ¹⁵ As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" ¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

For Discussion:

1. What is a Gentile? How did the Jews view Gentiles? Why? Can you think of any texts or stories in the Bible that paint a picture of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles?

2. Who was the circumcision party? At this point in church history what challenges might have arisen for a devout Jew in the transition of devotion to the Old Covenant to devotion to Christ?
3. How does Romans 7:4-13 help to answer the question of how devout Jews should have viewed the law considering their new life in Christ?
4. How does Colossians 2:11-15 shed further light on how Jewish believers view of circumcision should have transitioned?
5. What are some examples of how criticism rears its head in the church today?
6. Does it seem odd that Peter, one of the foremost leaders of the early church and one of Jesus' closest friends is being confronted? Why or why not?
7. How did Peter respond to the criticism? Would you say he approached it meekly? Is there any sign of pride on his part?
8. Are there lessons we can learn from this example regarding how we should respond to criticism?
9. In Verses 5-15, Luke inspired by the Holy Spirit essentially repeats verbatim the account given in Acts Ch 10. Repetition in the Bible typically is used to emphasize or place importance on a point. What might God be emphasizing to us in this account?
10. In Acts so far, we have seen the Holy Spirit work powerfully and in mass at Pentecost, in Samaria, and now with Gentiles? In all three cases, Peter was there to witness. What was God communicating through the Spirit's movement in these cases? How does it complement the thematic verse of Acts 1:8?
11. Read Ephesians 2:11-22. How does this passage shed light on what's going on in Acts 11?
12. Are there any personal prejudices, traditions, or notions that God may be working on in your life?
13. In verse 16 Peter recalls the words of Jesus and applies them into his new strange experience with the Gentiles. What does that communicate to us about the importance of evaluating our experiences through the truth of God's written word?
14. How did the brothers in Jerusalem respond to Peter's account in verse 18? What does that teach us about the importance of personal humility and unity in Christ in our church?

B. Acts 11:19-30 The Church in Antioch

¹⁹ Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. ²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists^l also, preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. ²² The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, ²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. ²⁵ So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. ²⁷ Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this

took place in the days of Claudius).²⁹ So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.³⁰ And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

For Discussion:

1. Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria. It was also considered a corrupt city even by Rome's standards. God chose this city to establish a thriving church. What are some things that this reveals to us about God? How should it affect our attitude about where we go to proclaim the Good News of Jesus?
2. When the church of Jerusalem heard about the work that God was doing in Antioch, they sent one of their treasured brothers to the new believers. From earlier in Acts, we know that Barnabas was an encourager, generous with his resources, and an advocate for the rejected. What does the church's willingness to send such a man teach us?
3. How did Barnabas respond and what were his actions when he arrived? What can we learn and apply from his example?
4. As we learn from other passages in the New Testament, quite a bit of time had passed since Saul's conversion. He had ultimately returned to his hometown. Now Barnabas seeks him out to teach and serve at the newly formed church in Antioch which includes both Jew and Gentile believers. How did this play into God's ultimate plan for Paul? What might this teach us about waiting on and trusting in God's timing and plan?
5. In verse 26 we see that Christ followers are now beginning to be recognized as Christians and not just a sect of Judaism. What might have been a derogatory term by some resulted in a title that we own proudly today. It also subtly points out that the church was evolving from solely a Jewish body of believers to a diverse body of believers. What does that tell us about how a healthy church should look today? What does that remind us of the Global body of Christ?
6. What happens in verses 27-29? As we know from earlier passages at this point Christians in Judea were under persecution which likely included financial ramifications. What do the actions by the church in Antioch teach us and how can we apply them today?

III. Responding in Prayer:

Ephesians 4:1-6 (ESV) - **4** I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Pray that we would be a church that strives for the unity that Paul describes in the passage above. Pray that we would seek to root out any personal prejudices or judgmental attitudes and strive to see people through God's eyes of mercy and steadfast love. Pray that God would give us courage to step out of our comfort zones and love others that are different from us in some way.