

What does it look like to truly live as the light of the world in our everyday moments? This message from Acts 11 takes us on a journey through the early church's bold, Spirit-led expansion and challenges us to examine how we handle conflict, hardship, and the quiet nudges of the Holy Spirit in our own lives. We see how honest listening transformed criticism into praise among the early believers, and how that same principle can turn division into unity in our homes, friendships, and communities today. The passage reminds us that trials are not dead ends but platforms, that the same believers who were scattered by persecution carried the gospel with them everywhere they went. We are invited to ask ourselves whether our own hardships are becoming opportunities to point others toward hope, or whether we are getting stuck in the storm. At the heart of it all is a simple but searching question: when the people around us observe our lives, do they see someone who belongs to Christ?

Title: Walking in Faith: Being the Light and the Hand of God in Every Season

Sermon Summary: Drawing from Acts 11, this sermon explores how believers are called to actively participate in God's mission regardless of their circumstances. The pastor emphasizes that honest listening can transform conflict into unity, that trials and hardships can become platforms to point others to Jesus, and that aligning with God's heart positions believers to experience His hand at work in their lives. The sermon challenges the congregation to remain rooted and faithful, to seek partners in ministry, and to live so visibly for Christ that others recognize who they belong to. Throughout, the central call is to respond to the nudgings of the Holy Spirit with boldness and faith, trusting that God has prepared good works in advance for every believer to walk in.

Key Points:

- When you listen honestly to those around you, conflicts can be turned into unity
- Trials and hardships can become a platform to point people to Jesus
- When you align yourself with God's heart and purpose, you will see the hand of God in your life
- Remain true to the Lord with all your heart and mind the gap between where you are and where God is calling you
- When God calls you, obey and pray for a partner along the way
- When people see you, they should see Jesus

Scripture Reference:

- Acts 11:1-30 (the primary passage covering Peter's defense before Jewish believers, the spread of the gospel to Antioch, and the ministry of Barnabas and Saul)
- James 1:19-20 (a call to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger)
- Philippians 2:21 (the warning that many look to their own interests rather than those of Christ)
- Acts 20:23-24 (Paul's declaration that chains and hardships will not stop him from completing his mission)

- Philippians 1:12 (Paul's affirmation that his circumstances have served to advance the gospel)
- Isaiah 48:13 (God's declaration of His creative power through His hand)
- Ephesians 2:10 (believers are God's handiwork, created to walk in good works prepared in advance)
- Colossians 2:6 (the encouragement to continue living rooted and built up in Christ)
- Matthew 5:14-16 (the call to let your light shine before others so they may glorify the Father)
- John 14:27 (Jesus distinguishing the peace He gives from the peace the world gives)

Stories:

- The pastor recounts a personal disagreement with his wife over a project the previous day, illustrating the failure to listen honestly, and how reviewing his own sermon point convicted him to send her an apology that night
- The pastor shares a story from his freshman health class in high school, where he felt a nudging from the Holy Spirit to go speak to a new, isolated classmate; the two became friends, the classmate came to youth group and accepted Jesus, and roughly a year later the classmate revealed that on the night of that health class he had planned to end his life, and that the conversation had sparked hope in him
- The pastor references his father's story, previously shared in an earlier sermon, in which someone responded to a Holy Spirit nudge to invite his alcoholic father to church, an act that changed the trajectory of the entire family's life
- The biblical narrative of Peter's vision in Joppa and his subsequent visit to the house of Cornelius is highlighted as the moment Gentiles first received the gospel, connecting it to the congregation's own identity as Gentile believers
- The account of Barnabas seeking out Saul in Tarsus and the two spending a year together teaching in Antioch is used to illustrate the power of partnership in ministry
- The story of Moses raising his staff in faith, with God stretching out His hand to move, is referenced to illustrate the connection between human faith and action and the movement of God's hand

Here is a list of all scripture references mentioned or alluded to in the sermon:

- Acts 11:1-30 (the primary text of the sermon)
- James 1:19-20
- Philippians 2:21
- Acts 20:23-24
- Philippians 1:12
- Isaiah 48:13
- Ephesians 2:10
- Colossians 2:6
- Matthew 5:15-16
- Acts 7:54-60 (the stoning of Stephen)

- Acts 8:1-3 (Saul persecuting the church)
- Acts 10:1-48 (Peter and Cornelius, the full account Peter recounts in Acts 11)
- Luke 10:1 (Jesus sending out disciples two by two)
- John 14:27 (Jesus speaking about peace)
- Proverbs 18:13 (listening before speaking)
- Romans 8:28 (God working through hardship)
- Jeremiah 29:11 (God's plans and purpose)
- Matthew 5:14 (being the light of the world)
- Acts 1:8 (being witnesses)
- Hebrews 12:1-2 (fixing eyes on Jesus through trials)

Peter's willingness to honestly explain his actions to his critics led to unity and worship rather than division -- in what areas of your relationships might honest, humble communication transform a conflict into a moment of shared praise?

The scattered believers continued sharing the gospel even while fleeing persecution and losing everything familiar -- what does their example reveal about the difference between a life oriented toward earthly comfort and one oriented toward eternal purpose?

The sermon draws a distinction between peace that comes from external circumstances and the inside-out peace that God provides -- how have you personally experienced the difference between these two kinds of peace during a difficult season?

The hand of God is described as his activity, power, blessing, and favor resting on those who step out in faith -- what might it look like practically for you to position yourself so that the hand of God is evident in your daily life?

Barnabas encouraged the believers in Antioch to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts, recognizing how easy it is to start well but fade -- what spiritual disciplines or relationships help you close the gap between where you are and where God is calling you?

The pastor shared a story about a nudging from the Holy Spirit in a high school health class that ultimately saved a classmate's life -- can you recall a moment when you either obeyed or ignored a similar nudge, and what was the outcome?

Barnabas recognized he could not fulfill his calling alone and intentionally sought out Saul as a ministry partner -- who in your life might God be calling you to pursue as a partner in faith, and what is holding you back from reaching out to them?

The believers in Antioch were called Christians not by themselves but by outside observers who noticed something distinctly different about their lives -- if the people around you were to give you a nickname based on how you live, what do you think it would be?

Paul declared in Acts 20 that he considered his life worth nothing compared to completing the mission God gave him -- how does that level of surrender challenge or reshape the way you think about your own goals, plans, and sense of security?

The sermon closes with the reminder that for some people in your life, you may be the only representation of Jesus they ever encounter -- how does that reality change the weight you place on everyday interactions with coworkers, neighbors, and strangers?