



NOTE TO THE LEADER

You will not be introducing *SomeTime* to your group during this study. You will be introducing *SomeTime* during your next gathering.

Also, do not skip the last question: “Who do you think God might be prompting you to pray for?” Highlight it. Star it. Circle it. It’s really important that your group begins praying for friends, co-workers, classmates, or family.

CONNECT

Tell a story about a time you felt deeply troubled by something you saw.

(Car accident, 3rd world conditions, hospitalization, natural disaster, etc.)

PRAY AND EXAMINE SCRIPTURE

Introduction: The book of Acts can be viewed as an extension of the Gospel of Luke. Acts continues to document what Jesus began to do and teach through the apostles. Acts 17 takes place in the city of Athens during Paul’s second missionary journey. (This is his second missionary journey of four—including his trip to Rome to face trial before Caesar.) The city of Athens has lost its former glory, but is still a great center of philosophy, architecture, art, and religion. Paul’s preaching in Thessalonica and Berea has stirred up dangerous opposition and driven him to Athens.

Read Acts 17:13-33

(See “Reference Guide” on the last page for further meaning of main terms.)

1. What stood out to you from this passage?

2. When Paul was in Athens, what did Paul see that ignited the events of this passage?

- A city full of idols.

3. What did Paul feel when he saw Athens with all its idols?

- He felt deeply troubled, greatly distressed, provoked.
- His emotions were a complex mix of indignation and compassion.

4. Why do you think Paul felt the way he did?

- The Athenians simply didn’t know the real, true God who loved them and died for them (v22-23).
- Paul longed for the Athenians to worship God in truth (v23-31).
- Jesus has risen! (v31) (Death has been defeated!)
- God is so near (v27-28), yet the Athenians’ hearts were so far away (v29).
- Judgment is real (v31).
- In the Bible, we see a similar response from God when he sees people placing their hopes and affections in things that cannot help or cannot save. (We’ll look at an example of this later in the study.)

5. What did Paul do? (How did Paul respond?)

- He reasoned in the synagogue (v17).
- He reasoned in the marketplace (v17).
- He talked about Jesus and the resurrection (18).
- He conversed with the philosophers about the gospel (18).
- He talked about God’s attributes (24-31).
- As an aside (you don’t need to turn here), we can see a parallel response from Jesus in Matthew



9:36-38. Jesus *sees* the spiritual state of the crowd, *feels* compassion, and *responds* with prayer and action.

DISCUSS

6. How is the idolatry of Paul's time the same as today? How is it different?

- Idolatry of both Paul's time and today involves "excessive devotion."
- The idolatry of both eras involves giving our affections, hopes, longings, or meditations to anyone or anything but God for help, meaning, peace, or identity.
- Idolatry in Paul's day involved divine worship to a carved image or statue; it entailed attributing power and ability to created things rather than God.
- Most idolatry in today's American culture is less overtly "religious." (For example, much of our culture's idolatry involves things like beauty, fame, power, wealth, recognition, etc.)

7. What kinds of idols are in the hearts of students today? (What are the things that people long for, love, constantly think about, or seek after in their search for meaning, identity, or peace?)

- Beauty, popularity, reason, achievement, money, status, happiness, etc.
- An idol can be anything a person looks to for meaning, peace, or identity. Anything or anyone can become an idol.

DIGGING DEEPER

The first two of the Ten Commandments are about idolatry:

#1 "You shall not have any other god but me." (Exodus 20:3)

#2 "You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind...[I] will not tolerate your affection for any other gods." (Exodus 20:4)

What's so bad about idolatry anyway?

Give your group a moment to respond to this question. Then read Jeremiah 3:6-10 and consider how this passage relates.

- "...every high hill and under every green tree" (v6) and "committed adultery with stones and trees" are references to idol worship.
- In this passage, Israel's idolatry devastated its relationship with God.

- God compares idolatry to cheating and adultery. He sees idolatry as a type of spiritual adultery. If you have ever been close to or been in a relationship where someone has cheated, you know first hand how grievous and devastating cheating is on a relationship. In a similar way, idolatry is devastating to our relationship with God.
- Israel was trying to get its needs met apart from God and turned to idols, which ultimately left the nation worse off.
- If necessary, see also Jeremiah 2:11-13.

8. Let's look closer at Paul's emotional response to idolatry: as you think back on our opening discussion and reflect on your own experience of viewing something troubling, how do you think your reaction was similar to Paul's?

- Perhaps a sense of "this is not how things ought to be" (injustice).
- Perhaps a mix of feeling both angry and sad.
- Perhaps a sense of obligation about doing something.

9. (Optional question) What if you commonly saw people worship on their knees before statues of their own personal idols (things like achievement, money, status, etc.). Do you think this would affect how you feel about or view idolatry? Why or why not?

10. Though some of the Athenians mocked Paul, there was an obvious openness to listening to him...what about today?

A recent study* polled unchurched, young adults: "If someone wanted to tell me what she or he believed about Christianity, I would be willing to listen." 89% agreed. *Are you surprised by the 89% percent figure? Why or why not?*

11. Who do you think God might be prompting you to pray for? (Friends, classmates, co-workers, family?) Take a moment to ask God to give you compassion like Paul's for those around you who don't yet know Christ. Text yourself the names of a few people you will pray for this week.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.



REFERENCE GUIDE TO ACTS 17:13-33

Don't get too caught up in these details! This Bible study has a lot of open-ended discussion questions, so you will likely be pressed for time. But as questions come up regarding some of the terminology and references in Acts 17, I hope the below background information offers some help.

Epicureanism: A school of philosophy advanced by Epicurus that considered happiness, or the avoidance of pain and emotional disturbance, to be the highest good and advocated the pursuit of pleasures that can be enjoyed in moderation. Epicureans were materialists, but they believed in the existence of the gods, though they believed that the gods were made of atoms just like everything else and did not interfere with human lives. Epicurus rejected any possibility of an afterlife.

Stoicism: A school of philosophy founded by Zeno. Stoics taught that the practice of virtue was the first duty of man, and that the only real things are those that bodily senses can perceive. Stoics were materialists. As far as religious belief was concerned, they were pantheists, holding that all things come from God and will be at last absorbed into him again. (Personal immortality was not part of Stoic philosophy.) They were also fatalists, holding that the universe is governed by absolutely fixed laws, and that the private needs of individuals are of no concern to Providence. The way for the individual to be happy was to bring himself into harmony with the course of the universe.

Idle Babblers: This term was originally used in reference to birds picking up seed. Athenians applied this name to those who made their living by picking up and selling scraps found in the market place. Here it is applied to Paul as a "fellow with scraps of learning."

Areopagus (Or "the Council of the Areopagus"): This was a court named after the hill on which it had once met. Paul was not formally tried before this court (which several centuries earlier had condemned Socrates), but he was informally required to give an account of his teaching.

* Stetzer, Stanley & Hayes, *Lost and Found*, (2009)
page 36