

## WITNESS IN THE AREOPAGUS (Leader's Guide)

### Acts 17:16–34

#### OPENING QUESTION

Can you think of a book, movie, or piece of art that made you think differently about life or faith? What was it, and what impact did it have on you?

#### CONTEXT

In Acts, Paul's visit to Athens is a pivotal moment in his mission to the Gentiles. Athens, known for its rich intellectual and cultural heritage, was full of philosophical debates and religious diversity, making it a challenging yet strategic place for Paul to preach. Speaking at the Areopagus, a hub for public discourse, Paul uses cultural references, such as the altar to an unknown god, to connect with the Athenians' spiritual curiosity. This story invites us to consider how we can thoughtfully engage with diverse worldviews today on and off campus, using cultural touchpoints to share the Gospel effectively.

#### READ ACTS 17:16–34

#### DISCUSS

What was Paul's reaction to seeing the idols in Athens, and how did this motivate his actions?

Leader Note	<i>Paul was greatly distressed by the idolatry in Athens, which led him to engage both in the synagogue and in the marketplace. Discuss how a deep concern for spiritual truth can motivate us toward witness. Encourage the group to think about what situations or issues on campus distress them and how that might motivate them to take a risk and share the Gospel.</i>
-------------	---

In the agora (the marketplace), Paul encounters two leading philosophical schools of his day: the Epicureans and the Stoics. Epicureans believed that the gods and the material world did not intersect, so one should seek maximum pleasure from a quiet life. The Stoics, on the other hand, believed that divinity resided among and within

people. The good life, then, centered on getting in touch with the inner divine (i.e., rationality). Reflect on the different worldviews and philosophies that you encounter in your daily life, whether on campus, at work, or in social settings.

Leader Note	<i>Encourage the group to identify specific worldviews or philosophies they encounter, such as secularism, relativism, or materialism. Encourage your group to wrestle with how are these worldviews are similar to or different from that of the Epicureans or the stoics.</i>
-------------	---

What is the significance of Paul referencing the altar to an unknown god in his speech at the Areopagus?

Leader Note	<i>Paul used the altar to an unknown god as a starting point to introduce the Athenians to the true God. This shows the value of connecting the Gospel message to existing beliefs or practices to make it more relatable. Encourage your group to discuss how you can use elements of the campus culture or the interests of the university to introduce conversations about faith.</i>
-------------	--

How did the Athenians respond to Paul's message, and what does this teach us about evangelism?

Leader Note	<i>The responses were mixed—some sneered, others were curious and wanted to hear more, and some believed. The reality is that not everyone will respond positively to the Gospel, but some will. Encourage the group to reflect on the value of persistence and faithfulness in witness, trusting that God will reach those who are ready.</i>
-------------	--

## REFLECT

As we reflect on Paul's speech at the Areopagus in Acts 17, we see a powerful example of how the Gospel can be communicated effectively within diverse cultural and intellectual contexts. This story challenges us to consider how we can thoughtfully and respectfully share the message of Jesus in our own contexts and how we can find common ground amidst the spiritual longings of those around us. Just as Paul connected with the Athenians, we are called to engage with and witness to those in our diverse communities.



GRADUATE & FACULTY MINISTRIES

1. Reflect on a time when you engaged someone in a conversation about faith. What approach did you use, and how was it received?
2. Think of those you interact with regularly on campus who identify with a different worldview than your own. How can you find common ground with them their beliefs or worldviews when talking about Jesus?
3. Paul was distressed by the idolatry in Athens. What "idols" do you see on campus that might hinder people from seeking God today?
4. Like the Areopagus, the university can be a challenging space to share the Gospel. How can you support one another in your witness on campus?

## PRAY

Lord, guide us as we engage with the culture on campus. Give us the ability to wisely discern our context and speak truth with grace and wisdom. May our lives reflect Jesus's love for all people and may you give us courage to be bold in our witness. Amen.