

## God's Witness is Already There | Acts 17:16-34 | Dave Cover Sermon Discussion Participant Guide

**Icebreaker:** Would you characterize yourself as someone who values intellectual learning? Why or why not?

### Recap

#### Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

*As we close out our series through Acts 13–17, we've seen God as the primary driver of the mission — pushing the gospel forward despite external opposition from Jewish, Roman, and even darker spiritual forces, and despite internal tensions within the early church itself. All kinds of people have believed through all of Paul's travels. Now, Paul enters the intellectual center of the ancient world. Does Christianity hold up in the strongest academic arena imaginable?*

### Discussion



#### Acts 17:16-17

<sup>16</sup> While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. <sup>17</sup> So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.

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1. Paul was distressed by Athens' idols because he saw false worship as humanity's deepest problem. What might Paul be distressed by if he walked around Mid-Missouri today? What does our culture's false worship actually look like?
2. Paul's response to this was to "reason" with anyone he could get into a conversation with. Why is reasoning a part of what it means to be a witness?

## Acts 17:18-21

<sup>18</sup> A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbling trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. <sup>19</sup> Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?" <sup>20</sup> You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." <sup>21</sup> (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

*Note: Socrates was put to death for advocating foreign gods. So, this is a bit more like a trial than being asked to give a TED Talk.*

3. Even amidst the philosophers in the intellectual center, there was interest to hear more. What are places in our lives that we might be surprised to find spiritual interest? How might this give us more courage?

## Acts 17:22-31

<sup>22</sup> Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. <sup>23</sup> For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

<sup>24</sup> "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. <sup>25</sup> And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. <sup>26</sup> From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup> God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. <sup>28</sup> 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

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<sup>29</sup> “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. <sup>30</sup> In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. <sup>31</sup> For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

4. Paul taps into the Athenians’ existing spiritual intuitions rather than dismissing them as pagans. What are some ways the non-Christians around us might already hold glimmers of belief in God — even if confused or conflicted about it?
5. Notably, Paul doesn’t quote Scripture here — he reasons from their own poets, artists, and intuitions. What are some ways we could have meaningful spiritual conversations with people today who have never opened a Bible?
6. Paul described God as simultaneously more transcendent than anyone could fully comprehend *and* closer than your own breath. Why do we personally need to understand both? How does that help us in spiritual conversations with people who don’t yet believe?

## Acts 17:32-34

<sup>32</sup> When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” <sup>33</sup> At that, Paul left the Council. <sup>34</sup> Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

7. The moment Paul mentioned the resurrection, some people sneered, and the conversation ended. Why do you think the resurrection is still a controversial claim Christianity makes—and why is it also the most crucial one?
8. Despite being interrupted and never even saying Jesus’ name, Paul still saw people believe — including Dionysius, one of the elite council members, and Damaris, a woman (remarkable in that culture). What does it free you from, in your own spiritual conversations, to know that God can work even through an incomplete or interrupted message?
9. How prepared do you feel to reason with others about Christianity? What’s a step you could take to get better at it?

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## Sharing and Prayer:

Have everyone share a place or among certain people that you are feeling the call to be a witness more than you are and share why it seems hard. Do we feel intimidated? Do we not know what to say?

## Pray together for three things:

- **Love** — that we would actually *care* whether the people around us know God
- **Wisdom** — to know when to speak, what to ask, and how to listen well
- **Courage** — to follow through when the moment comes

## What's ahead?:

- This is the last sermon discussion this semester. So, what's next?
- Lessons for the rest of the semester can be found at this webpage: <https://info.thecrossingchurch.com/spring-2026-sermon-discussion>
- For the next study, read part 1 and answer the questions in it on how to have spiritual conversations.