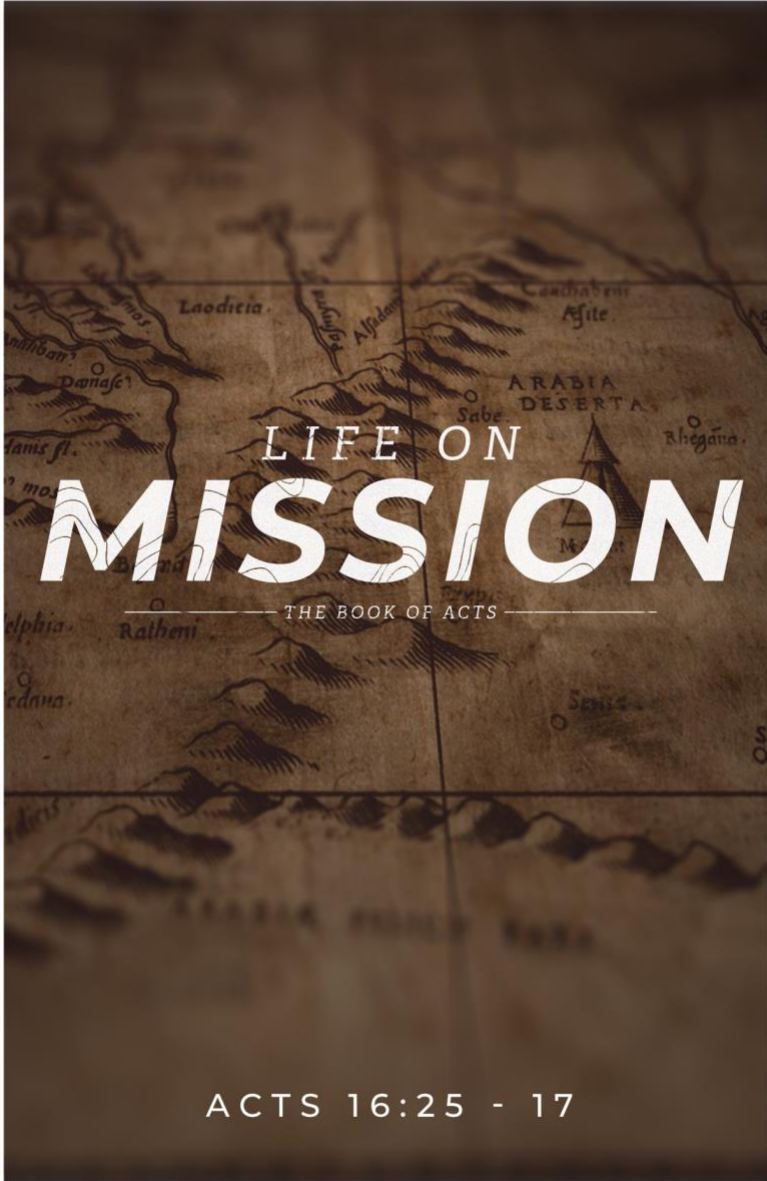
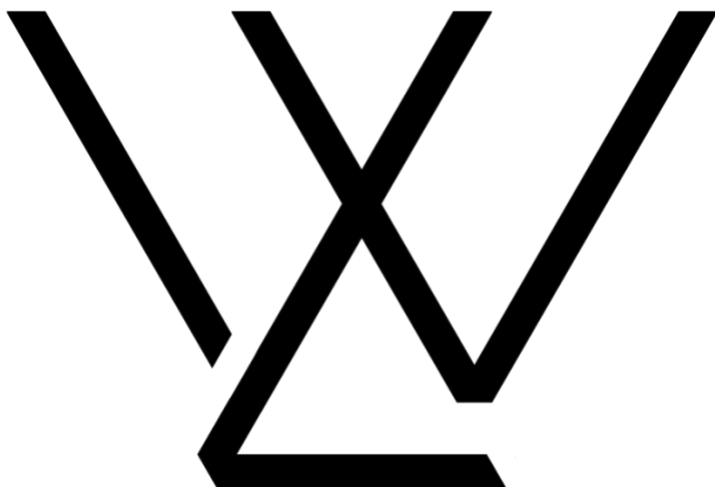




WORD TO LIFE

WEEKS 13 - 16





Word to Life's are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

Writers:

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— **WEEK 13** —

- APR. 18
- APR. 19
- APR. 20
- APR. 21
- APR. 22

— **WEEK 14** —

- APR. 25
- APR. 26
- APR. 27
- APR. 28
- APR. 29

— **WEEK 15** —

- MAY. 2
- MAY. 3
- MAY. 4
- MAY. 5
- MAY. 6

— **WEEK 16** —

- MAY. 9
- MAY. 10
- MAY. 11
- MAY. 12
- MAY. 13

Week 13: Acts 16:25-40

Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

READ: Acts 16:25-40

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 16:25-40 and complete the activities below.

- **Activity:** Acts 16:25-40 is not only packed with action, but also with theological depth. Spend some time creating a brief outline for the order of events in the passage.
 - o *Pay close attention to the sequence of events following the jailer's conversion in Acts 16:32.*

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- **Question:** After reading and outlining the biblical text, what are some ideas and themes that appear?
- **Question:** How did Paul respond when the jailer informed them about the magistrates' decision to let them go? Why do you think he responded in that way?¹
- **Question:** Where did Paul and Silas go after they were eventually released by the magistrates? Why do you think that is significant given the previous sections of Acts 16?

¹ See Acts 16:35-39 for reference.

Week 13: Acts 16:25-40

Day 2: A Venue for the Gospel

READ: Acts 16:25-40 and Lamentations 3:52-57

EXPLORE:

Like Paul and Silas, the prophet Jeremiah was once imprisoned for his faith. He felt as though his life had been cut off and he might die there.² In his place of despair, Jeremiah cried out to the Lord.

Reflecting on that moment in Lamentations, he wrote, *“I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit; you heard my plea, ‘Do not close your ear to my cry for help!’ You came near when I called on you; you said, ‘Do not fear!’”* The biblical character named Job expressed a similar affliction, saying, *“You put my feet in the stocks and watch all my paths; you set a limit for the soles of my feet.”*³

Paul would have been familiar with the imprisonment of Jeremiah and the affliction of Job. He was well-acquainted with enduring hardship in his commitment to the Lord. In our study today, we learned that, at midnight, Paul and Silas were in a deep inner prison with their feet in stocks. Their bodies would have most likely been bleeding from the beating and their feet were bound tightly. However, their spirits were not broken, and they continued to persevere in peace. Paul not only wrote about a peace that is available in every circumstance; he lived it out! Their imprisonment was exacted upon them for preaching the gospel and now, like Jeremiah and Job, they were invited to remain faithful while suffering.

They were not bitter. They had experienced real peace and they were deeply aware of its source. With loud voices, they cried out praises and songs of worship and God provided a miraculous deliverance. As we have read and will continue to study this week,

² See Jeremiah 37:15-21 and Lamentations 3:52-57 for reference.

³ See Job 13:7 for reference.

the prison guard almost committed suicide out of fear. What we need to notice in this moment is that the prison guard went from wanting to kill himself in the face of the unknown to willingly hearing and responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

For such a time as this, the early Christian missionaries were positioned to faithfully communicate the gospel. Acts is a history book of the many settings and personalities that are radically transformed by the power of the gospel. This section of Acts 16 is yet another reminder of the incredible power of gospel communication in unlikely spaces.

Passages like this ought to force us to ask a few questions. Are you in a tight place that seems too difficult or too dark for God to provide a way out? What is a current platform that God has placed in your life to faithfully communicate the gospel? Let our text today remind you that Paul and Silas had an attitude of gratitude as they were constantly ready for ministry! Remember, they did not run prematurely from the prison, and, as a result, the prison guard and his household were given the opportunity to experience the goodness of God in Christ.

BIG IDEA: The Bible reminds us that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.⁴ Only God is wise and powerful enough to form a gospel platform from a prison cell.

APPLY:

- **Question:** When you are in difficult, uncomfortable places, what is your attitude? What would change about your attitude if you began to look at your circumstance like Paul and Silas?

⁴ See Romans 8:28 for reference.

- **Question:** God has placed you where you are on purpose. In what ways can you have gospel conversations in the places where you live, work, and play?
- **Activity:** Let's spend some time praying for an attitude that is receptive to the opportunities which God has placed in our lives.

Week 13: Acts 16:25-40

Day 3: Citizens of Rome

READ: Acts 16:25-40 and Acts 22:22-29

EXPLORE: In this week's passage, we gain important insight into the background of Paul and Silas that will come into play as the story of Acts unfolds. They were both Roman citizens. There were two ways to become a citizen of Rome. One was either born a citizen, or citizenship was purchased for a hefty sum.

Special protection for citizens of Rome had been written into their laws centuries ago. These laws afforded legal rights unavailable to non-citizens, such as the ability to have a trial, appeal a conviction, and not be subjected to especially gruesome punishments such as scourging and crucifixion.

The authorities in Philippi had broken Roman law when they beat Paul and Silas without a trial. When the authorities were made aware of their misstep, they were afraid. They apologized and politely asked Paul and Silas to leave.⁵

As Paul and Silas left the home of the jailer and his family, who had come to faith in Christ just hours before, there is little doubt that the fearful eyes of the magistrates and the police were upon them. One can imagine the scene as word quickly spread throughout the town that an egregious error had occurred. With everyone watching, Paul and Silas made one more stop before they left town. They went to the home of Lydia, the first to believe in Philippi.⁶ There they met with all the believers.

Here is a pertinent and yet often ignored point that is visible in this story. The actions of these missionaries were not born from a

⁵ See Acts 16:38-39 for reference.

⁶ See Acts 16:13-15 for reference.

vindictive spirit. By demanding the presence of the authorities and associating these believers with their unjust treatment, Paul and Silas secured some measure of protection for this new body of believers who would have otherwise been a target for persecution.

BIG IDEA: Paul and Silas enjoyed the coveted benefits of Roman citizenship but did not use their positions selfishly.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Paul could not take credit for the citizenship he received at birth. Similarly, you may have inherited specific physical, social, or economic advantages. Regardless of how they came about, how are you leveraging the resources God has given you to bless others?

- **Activity:** Considering how the church in Philippi began, and the fact that Paul later writes to them from a different prison, read or listen to the book of Philippians. Imagine Lydia, the jailer, and their families in the audience as this letter is read aloud for the first time. See what stands out to you when viewed from this perspective.
 - Note: The book of Philippians can be listened to in about 9 minutes.

Week 13: Acts 16:25-40

Day 4: For Me and My House

READ: Acts 16:30-34

EXPLORE:

The story of the Philippian Jailer's conversion is like a theologically dense action-packed thriller. This gripping story gives us a beautiful window into the heart of a household that was redeemed by God's grace. Because this gripping story is filled to the brim with theological insight, we need to unpack smaller sections to focus on some incredible truths.

In today's Word to Life study, we are going to focus in on the conversation and events that unfolded between the jailer, Paul, and Silas immediately following the God-given earthquake that shook the prison.

Falling at the feet of Paul and Silas, the understandably desperate and bewildered jailer asked them, "*What must I do to be saved?*"⁷ In response to this all-important question, Paul and Silas responded, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.*"⁸ As with many other sections of the biblical text, the response of Paul and Silas is worth a closer look.

In the conversion story of the Philippian jailer, Luke makes explicit what was previously implicit in the story of Lydia. If you remember in Acts 16:15, Luke tells us that the conversion of Lydia resulted in the subsequent baptism of her family. If we inappropriately isolated that story from other examples in Scripture, we could be left to wonder about the presence of individual salvation decisions in Lydia's family. It is important to note that the New Testament presents a paradigm of faith and repentance before baptism without exception! The

⁷ See Acts 16:30 for reference.

⁸ See Acts 16:31 for reference.

jailer's family was not saved simply by association; they were saved by grace through faith.

Namely, the household that was baptized was a household that first believed. At first glance, it can seem as though Paul and Silas are saying to the jailer that his individual faith will actively save his entire household. However, Luke intentionally positions the jailer's household as responsive hearers of the gospel message as it was told through Paul and Silas. Remember, the jailer's family was not saved simply by association; they were saved by grace through faith. Therefore, Paul and Silas's promise was rooted in a deep assurance in the gospel's ability affect hearts and lives around the new believer.

When Paul and Silas mentioned the household to the jailer, they were alluding to a deeply held assurance in the gospel's power to influence a family through an individual by God's grace through the powerful working of His Holy Spirit. The implication in Luke's retelling of these Philippian conversions is that the listening parties in the jailer's home were old enough to hear and respond with belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior. We should not miss the fact that the conversion of the Philippian jailer immediately resulted in gospel influence, celebration, hospitality, baptism, and a heart of service toward the Christian missionaries. Paul and Silas were prisoners no longer, but brothers at the same table!

BIG IDEA: The baptisms in the jailer's home followed a willingness to repent and believe the gospel. They were not saved by mere association, but by grace through faith.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** In your own words, summarize what Paul were and were not saying to the jailer in their response to his question in Acts 16:31.
- **Activity:** Study the actions of the jailer following his question in Acts 16:30. What do you notice and in what ways do you feel convicted to better live out your faith?

Week 13: Acts 16:25-40

Day 5: Faithful Witness in Prison

READ TOGETHER: Acts 16:25-34, 1 John 1:5:4-5

***Instructions:** We believe that Biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, Day 5 of each week is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Paul and Silas have had a long day. They have been beaten with rods and thrown into prison after a full day of preaching and teaching. Their feet have been put into stocks and they were thrown into the inner prison where the worst criminals were placed. It seems that they couldn't get to sleep so they spent their time in prayer and singing hymns.

This is such an out of the norm experience in the prison that the other prisoners just listened in. I think we can be confident this was their first time witnessing such an event in prison. Suddenly, this dark and dingy prison became a holy place filled with light. And it was not only the fellow prisoners who were listening in but God Himself also. God heard their prayers and received their songs of worship and responded by sending an earthquake.

Normally an earthquake is not a welcome event, but on this occasion, it was as it bore testimony to Paul and Silas' ministry. The earthquake made all the prison doors open and loosened all the bonds of the prisoners. Every prisoner was now free to flee but amazingly they all stuck around. It is as though due to the prayer and singing there was no better place for all the prisoners to go. They were witnessing a concert of faith and they had front row seats!

Since Paul and Silas were staying put, all the other prisoners decided to stay put also.

This witness by Paul and Silas caused the jailer of the prison to ask what he must do to be saved? The jailer was moved by faith and sought to share that same faith that he saw in them. Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to him, and he believed with all his household. They were baptized and he invited Paul and Silas over to his home to share a meal. After such a long day a celebration meal in the middle of the night would have been a great blessing to Paul and Silas.

What we see in this text is a commitment to live out faith in every situation of life. We cannot just live out our faith when things are going well, but also when life seems to come crashing down on us. It is when we go through trials that faith seems to shine the brightest. It is by faith that we overcome the world!

BIG IDEA: Faith can shine brightest in the darkest trials.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** What would have been Paul and Silas's mindset as they were praying and singing hymns in prison?
- **Activity:** List five ways we can live faithfully in a trial.

Week 14: Acts 17:1-15

Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

READ: Acts 17:1-15

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 17:1-15 and complete the activities below.

- **Question:** What do you notice about what Paul did when he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath in Thessalonica?

- **Question:** Acts 17:4 says that some were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas. Do you think it is significant that they were not only persuaded, but that they also joined the Christian missionaries?

- **Question:** What did the Jewish leaders do in response to the ministry of Paul and Silas? Where else have we seen behavior like this in Acts?

- **Question:** They accused the early Christian missionaries of “turning the world upside down.” Would you say this is an accurate description? Why or why not?

- **Question:** Why do you think the situation in Thessalonica ended with the city leaders taking money and letting them go?

Week 14: Acts 17:1-15

Day 2: Powerfully Conversational Apologetics

READ: Acts 17:2-4

EXPLORE:

In Acts 17 Luke faithfully records the witness of Paul and Silas in Thessalonica. Remember that Acts is the second writing from Luke in a two-part volume of the life of Christ and the development of the early church designed to encourage Theophilus's faith. It should come as no surprise, then, that Luke would give such a detailed account of Paul's actions and witness.

Luke writes, "*And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.'*"⁹ There is a lot that we ought to notice in Luke's summary.

First, the word translated as "*reasoned*" is *dialegomai* in the original Greek.¹⁰ Ten of the thirteen occurrences of *dialegomai* in the New Testament occur in the book of Acts. It refers to the process of deeply thinking through conversation with others. *Dialegomai* does not refer to an uninterrupted and lengthy monologue, but to a conversation between individuals. Paul was a gifted public speaker, but we are reminded again in this text that he often chose a method of conversational evangelism.

Second, the apologetic dialogue centered upon the legitimacy of Christ in His suffering and resurrection. Paul later reiterated this idea to the Corinthian church, writing, "*If Jesus has not risen from the dead, we are still in sin and faith is futile.*"¹¹ He did not merely converse with those whom he was teaching; Paul filled his speech

⁹ See Acts 17:2-3 for reference.

¹⁰ Our modern word, "dialogue" derives from this Koine Greek word.

¹¹ See I Corinthians 15:17 for reference.

with explanation and proof. As one who reasoned from the Scriptures, he would have certainly explained how Jesus fulfilled prophecy in his birth, life, death, burial, and resurrection. He would have talked about the post resurrection appearances of Jesus to His disciples, His half-brother James, and to more than five hundred people at once.¹² Additionally, Paul would not have had to look farther than his own heart and life to talk about the powerful, redemptive work of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit, who was given to all those who believe. Paul's evangelistic witness was deeply grounded in proof.

Finally, we need to notice that Paul's evangelism and witness included a defense not just of Jesus's resurrection, but also His suffering. One of the biggest criticisms of the Christian faith by Muslims is the suffering and death of Jesus. They ask what many people wonder, "How could an all-powerful, creator God suffer and die?" The Scriptures are clear that although Jesus never sinned, He willingly suffered on our behalf as a fundamental part of His mission to redeem a world in need. He was tempted, tried, deserted, mocked, tortured, and ultimately crucified as a display of His love for a sinful humanity.¹³ The example of Paul's witness reminds us of the great – and excruciating – extent of God's love. Acts 17:2-3 reminds us of the significance of conversation in apologetics, the wonderful proofs of the resurrection, and the incredible love embodied in the sacrificial love of Jesus.

BIG IDEA: Conversational apologetics modeled by Paul is the compassionate dialogue about the truths of Scripture and the evidence for the Christian faith.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Today's Word to Life study briefly examined Acts 17:2-3 to show how evangelism is often conversational and that it is established by evidence. When you think about

¹² See I Corinthians 15 for reference.

¹³ See Romans 5:8 for reference.

sharing your faith with others, which do you think is more personally challenging, conversational apologetics or remembering the evidence for your faith? *Ask your LifeGroup to help you grow and to hold you accountable as you do.*

- **Activity:** Spend some time reading the texts below to remind yourself of the great sacrifice of our loving God and Savior Jesus.
 - Psalm 16:11
 - Isaiah 53
 - 2 Corinthians 5:21
 - Matthew 27:45-54

Week 14: Acts 17:1-15

Day 3: Disruptive on Purpose

READ: Acts 17:1-9

EXPLORE:

If Acts 17 ended in verse four, we might be left with an incredibly different picture of how things went down in Thessalonica. Initially, it seems as though the response to Paul's witness was resoundingly positive with the Jews, the Greeks, and even some notable women.¹⁴ It did not take long, however, before the all-too-familiar jealousy broke in and threatened the Christian movement. Luke faithfully recorded what happened next.

*But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have **turned the world upside down** have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."¹⁵*

One of the chief claims from the Jewish leaders who dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the authorities was that they had a pattern of "turning the world upside down." Ironically, their claim that the Christian missionaries were upsetting the world order came immediately following their own formation of a mob, thus sending the city into an uproar. In today's Word to Life study, we are going to unpack the claim that the Jesus followers were turning the world upside down.

¹⁴ See Acts 17:4 for reference.

¹⁵ See Acts 17:5-7 for reference.

Obviously, the indictment against the missionaries as people who flipped the world upside down was intended to insult them and to incite violence against the early church. However incendiary their claims might have been, there is profound truth in their words. The Christian ministers were indeed turning the world upside down – one person, community, city, and region at a time. They did not attempt to merely fit into a preexistent culture that prized status, achievement, and power. In the same way their Savior did, they sought to think, live, lead, and communicate differently. This radically countercultural living identified them as ones who actively *turned the world upside down*.

Although the Jewish leadership meant this identification as a critique, it ought to be a rallying cry for those who are seeking to live for Christ here and now. If you have time in your day, I (Stephen) would encourage you to read Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount. In that sermon from Jesus, you will undoubtedly encounter the message of a world turned upside down for the glory of God. People who follow Christ are called to remember the ways in which He encouraged, enabled, and embodied an unwavering love for others, an unyielding passion for eternity, and an uncompromising commitment to holiness. Truly, Jesus has turned the world upside down and the church is called to turn with it!

BIG IDEA: Jesus turned the world upside down and the church is called to turn with it!

APPLY:

- **Question:** The crowd's response to the accusation against Paul and Silas was swift and violent. Why do you think they responded so powerfully?
- **Question:** Is it possible to bring about good disruption in a bad way? Why or why not?
- **Optional Activity:** Read Matthew 5-7 and consider the ways Jesus advocated and embodied a world which was radically turned upside down.

Week 14: Acts 17:1-15

Day 4: The Berean Example

READ: Acts 17:10-12

EXPLORE:

Though Berea had been a city of little significance geographically, historically, or politically, Luke, with just a few strokes of a pen, etched these faithful seekers into the pages of God's Word. For thousands of years thereafter, the Bereans became a premier example of Christian discipline as they zealously studied the Word of God. Today, we will comb through some of the specific attributes that caused these brothers and sisters to be "even more noble than those in Thessalonica."

- 1. The Bereans were ready.** Though this is a simple point, it runs the risk of being easily over-looked. When Paul and Silas arrived, these Jews positioned themselves in the right place by going to the synagogue. Though this would have been the custom for most, they were nonetheless in the right place to hear Paul and Silas teach.
- 2. The Bereans were eager to receive.** Even though the message was unorthodox, their posture was one of willingness to hear and a desire to understand. Their hearts weren't so critical of the new things they heard that they couldn't receive and understand what was being taught. They listened with the willingness of an open heart.
- 3. The Bereans were diligent to review.** Their open-mindedness was accompanied by wisdom and diligent examination to make sure that what they were hearing was indeed accurate. They gathered every day to study the Scripture and dialogue about their findings. If what the teachers were saying was true, God's Word, the source of truth, would validate it.

- 4. The Bereans were redeemed.** As a result of their being in the right place, their eagerness to receive the new message, and their diligence to explore the Scriptures for themselves, their eyes were opened to the truth that Jesus was the Messiah whom God had promised and that through Him only could they find salvation. Many of them believed in Jesus!

For Christians, this is a powerful example of how we should posture ourselves as we live out our faith. We should be ready to receive the preached Word of God by being in the right place every Sunday in worship. We should listen with an eager willingness to understand what is being spoken and have a natural propensity to accept God's message from our pastors. We should study Scripture daily to ensure that what we are hearing is in alignment with the whole counsel of God's Word. We should gather regularly with our brothers and sisters in Christ to discuss and encourage one another towards right belief. Understand, these are not merely activities to do, this is a lifestyle to live. In using these noble brothers and sisters as a model for our lives, we too will be strengthened in our own faith and love for God.

BIG IDEA: As Christians we should eagerly hear God's Word taught, diligently examine the Scriptures for validation of what we've heard, and regularly gather with other Christians to discuss and discern together.

APPLY:

- **Assignment:** Assess how the following elements of spiritual discipline fit into your life. Consider and write down how following the model of the Berean example in these areas might encourage your faith.
 1. **Daily Devotion:** Do you spend time with God in His Word daily?

2. **LifeGroup Community:** Do you have a community of Christian believers, such as a LifeGroup, that you regularly gather with to discuss God's Word?

3. **Sunday Worship:** Is gathering with Christian brothers and sisters to worship and hear God's Word preached a priority in your life?

Week 14: Acts 17:1-15

Day 5: Receiving the Bible Well

READ TOGETHER: Acts 17:1-15, Psalm 119:9-16

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

In our passage today we have two groups of people who received the Bible differently. The people from Thessalonica were not as open to the Bible as the people of Berea. We are told the Jews in Berea were more noble (translated “fair-minded” or “open-minded” in other Bible translations) and received the Word with eagerness, examining the word that was given to them by the apostles. Obviously, we want to follow the example of the people of Berea when it comes to our reception of the Bible. In our WTL today we are going to list some key characteristics that we need to receive the Bible well.

First, as we begin in our time in God’s Word, it is important that we come prayerfully and humbly. These two characteristics must be practiced together – we will not be truly prayerful if we are not humble. We need to ask God to give us wisdom and enlightenment as we read His word. Psalm 119:18 says, “*Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*” We should come humbly to God’s Word by posturing our hearts to be teachable and to connect with God. Devotional time should not just be about becoming more knowledgeable or about checking a spiritual box, but should be about communing with our Lord and Savior who loves us and died for us.

We also need to come to God's Word desperately and expectantly. We are all in great need of a word from God, whether we have been a Christian for forty years or four months. We do not always recognize our desperation, but every day we wake up we are going to be filled with something. We will either be filled with words of man or the words of God. Jesus says in Matthew 4:4, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" We also need to come to God's Word expecting that He is going to meet with us and minister to us. God's Word does not return void. We may not always feel like we received a lot out of the text; however, if we come with the proper heart posture, we will never waste our time, and what may not seem useful today may prove fruitful tomorrow.

Finally, we need to receive God's Word communally. Personal devotions are good and important, but we always need to receive God's Word with others, too. The Bible is filled with examples of God's leaders reading God's Word to God's people. Reading the Bible communally gives us mutual accountability and mutual encouragement. This is why we have turned Day 5 of the WTL into one which is meant to be shared!

BIG IDEA: We must receive God's Word with the right heart posture.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Which of these characteristics is a strength for you and which characteristic(s) do you need to work on?

- **Activity:** Name a few additional characteristics that would help us receive the Bible well.

Week 15: Acts 17:16-21

Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

READ: Acts 17:16-21

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 17:16-21 and complete the activities below.

- **Activity:** Read Acts 17:16-17 and answer the three questions below.
 - Question 1: Is there a difference between being provoked and being provoked in spirit? If so, what is the difference?

 - Question 2: What did Paul do after his spirit was provoked within him?

 - Question 3: How do we respond similarly or differently when we are provoked in spirit?

- **Question:** Based on the Epicurean and Stoics' first impression of Paul in the marketplace in v. 18, why do you think they invited him to teach?

- **Question:** In your opinion, do you think that Acts 17:21 is a positive or negative description of ancient Athenian culture?

- **Question:** Have you ever personally encountered anything like Paul's experience in Acts 17:16-21? If so, what was it and how did you respond?

Week 15: Acts 17:16-21

Day 2: Idol Worship

READ: Acts 17:16-21

EXPLORE:

After being with the Bereans, Paul finds himself now waiting for Silas and Timothy in the beautiful city of Athens. This city was known throughout the world for flourishing in the sciences and philosophies. It attracted intellectuals from all over. All marveled at the incredible architecture of the temples and illustrative artwork throughout this majestic city.

At a certain point in Paul's stay, he notices that most of these art pieces are images of gods and goddesses from the Greek pantheon. The entire culture was emersed in a vast portrayal of fake gods to whom the people devoted themselves in worship. This ignited a righteous anger in Paul's spirit, prompting him to engage people in the synagogue and marketplace and reason with them that there is only one true God to be worshipped. Eventually Paul even writes to the church in Rome about the unrighteousness of people who don't worship God, saying *"claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things."*¹⁶ Paul had a big problem with others giving worship to things beside God and he did something about it.

As we consider Paul's experience and his response, we should recognize that we find ourselves in a not so different situation. We live in an eclectic culture with a myriad of beliefs, philosophies, and idols that are worshipped by the masses. A point of concern should be that most people don't recognize the vast array of idols in this land or that they are immersed in worship of them. One might think that an idol is merely a statue or painting, and worship involves bowing down, or singing songs. On the contrary, an idol is anything

¹⁶ Romans 1:22-23

that captures the love and affection of the heart over and above the one true God. In a culture of such prosperity, activity, self-indulging and pleasure seeking, we have no shortage of opportunities to have our hearts gripped by the things of this world and pulled into worship of them.

In addition to identifying idols, we should also assess our heart's response to this pandemic of the soul. How do we feel about the fact that worship is being lifted to created things that are worthless in comparison? Are we bothered that the glory of God is being relegated from the Lord? Is it possible that our numbness to this reality might be because we too are captive to the worship of idols? Do we think upon or pursue with great zeal anything more than the Lord? Let us start by asking the Lord, right now in this very moment, to reveal if our heart's affection is drawn to anything other than the Lord. We should repent and ask God's forgiveness and realign ourselves with a passion for the Lord. It is not until we cease to worship our idols that we can effectively minister to the world around us that is saturated in lust for theirs. As Pastor John Piper says often, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him." Let us seek to find our ultimate joy and satisfaction in the Lord so that the worship of our hearts would be directed to Him only.

BIG IDEA: An idol is anything other than God that assumes the deepest place of affection, attention, and worship in our hearts.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Make a list of things in our culture that are idols, but people are likely not aware of.
- **Question:** Can you identify anything in your life that your heart is drawn towards more than the Lord?
- **Article:** <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/hello-i-am-an-idol/>

Week 15: Acts 17:16-21

Day 3: Among Other Worldviews

READ: Jude 3 and 2 Timothy 2:24-26

EXPLORE:

Paul's ministry in the ancient city of Athens brought him face to face with some of the most prominent philosophical schools in the ancient world. To understand Paul's address to them that we will unpack next week,¹⁷ we need to do a quick study of what they believed and why it mattered.

As with Paul's experience in Athens, it would have been a common practice for different philosophers to reason publicly in the marketplace. Clearly, Paul did not shy away from these encounters. The Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics represented three of the most popular philosophies of the day. As a result, it makes sense that we encounter both Stoic and Epicurean philosophers engaged with Paul in Athens.

Epicureans developed from the teaching of a man named Epicurus who lived from 341-270 BC. As a general practice, they were materialists and believed that everything derived from matter. To be clear, Epicureans did not deny the gods' existence, but they did deny the active engagement of the gods in everyday life as personal and knowable. They did not believe in life after death, preferring the perspective that everything and everyone returned to matter once deceased. The Epicurean philosophers preferred to exist in detached tranquility. As a result of this viewpoint, they believed that the good life meant being free from pain and fear.

Stoics, on the other hand, followed the teaching of a Cypriot named Zeno who lived from 335-263 BC. Stoicism's name is derived from the stoa or colonnade in the agora in which Zeno would have taught. Stoics had a livelier view of the gods than their Epicurean

¹⁷ For reference to Paul's speech, see Acts 17:22-31.

counterparts. The stoics conceived the gods as an impersonal, rational principle which coordinated the world together.¹⁸ The gods could be accessed through reason, logic, and ethical living alone. When the early Stoics envisioned the good life, it entailed the “*natural perfection of a rational being as a rational being.*”¹⁹

With this context in mind, we are meant to see the connections between Paul’s words and the different philosophical schools of thought. I (Stephen) would like to challenge you to read Paul’s speech and notice how his words would have directly challenged the different worldviews present in Athens. Ultimately, we ought to be challenged by the fact that the apostle was not only ready to communicate in the synagogue, but he was also ready to defend his worldview in the marketplace of the ideas.

BIG IDEA: Luke gives us the philosophical context of ancient Athens so that we can see how Paul’s words directly challenge unbiblical worldviews.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** In your own words, broadly summarize the perspective of the ancient Stoics and Epicureans in Athens.
 - The Epicureans believed...
 - The Stoics believed...
- **Activity:** Read Acts 17:22-31 and ask yourself, “Which parts of Paul’s speech would have been particularly challenging to each philosophical school of thought and why?”

¹⁸ The Stoic philosophers referred to the impersonal, rational principle of the universe as the word *logos*. See John 1 for a christological view of the same concept as it is truly exemplified in Christ.

¹⁹ See Diogenes Laertius, *Vit. Phil.* 7.94 for reference.

Week 15: Acts 17:16-21

Day 4: The Goodness of Newness

READ: Read Acts 17:16-21

EXPLORE: Have you seen the new Tesla? Have you tried the new pizza place? Have you watched the new season of...? Preoccupation with the latest and greatest is alive and well. After all, who doesn't like the smell of a new car, discovering that new coffee shop, or hitting the town in that new pair of shoes? There is something exciting about new experiences, but how does newness fit in with the Gospel message? Ecclesiastes tells us that there is nothing new under the sun, while Lamentations tells us that God's mercies are new every morning.²⁰

The people in Athens were all about the next new thing, especially when it came to philosophy and religion. Their obsession with newness was well-founded because the desire for newness is driven by dissatisfaction with what one currently has. How often have you been completely satisfied with your new phone... until the next model came out?

People bounce from hobby to hobby, job to job, relationship to relationship, only to find that the satisfaction of newness eventually wears off. Enjoying newness isn't a bad thing, but it becomes damaging when the dissatisfaction is driven by a "grass is greener" mindset, looking for eternal satisfaction in temporary things. Many will live and die running full speed ahead towards the illusion of fulfillment in the newest version of what has already failed them.

As followers of Christ, we should, like Paul, learn to be content in all things.²¹ The one thing I (Lucas) never want to be content with is the depth of my relationship with Christ. I want to grow deeper and

²⁰ See Ecclesiastes 1:9 and Lamentations 3:22-23 for reference.

²¹ See Philippians 4:11-13 for reference.

deeper in my love for Him. I want to maintain a humble and healthy dissatisfaction that causes me to press on and push forward in my service to Jesus.²²

The gospel is not a new thing. Salvation by grace, through faith, in Christ has been a part of God's rescue plan since before the beginning.²³ And yet, as our relationship with Christ deepens, the way we experience Him grows to new depths. As we abide in Christ, we see new fruit being produced. In all these things, God is glorified. We will only be truly satisfied in our lives when God is truly glorified by our lives.

BIG IDEA: Enjoying new things isn't bad, but it should not distract from focusing on the eternal satisfaction that is only found in Christ.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In what areas of life have you fallen into the trap of pursuing newness instead of God's goodness?

- **Activity:** Read Isaiah 65:17 and Revelation 21 (*notice God's statement in verse 5!*). Spend some time considering all of the newness you will experience in Heaven.

²² See Philippians 3:12-14 and Hebrews 12:1-3 for reference.

²³ See Revelation 13:8 for reference.

Week 15: Acts 17:16-21

Day 5: Sharing our Faith

READ TOGETHER: Acts 17:16-21

***Instructions:** We believe that Biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, Day 5 of each week is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

It is important for all Christians to be able to share their faith. Here we see the apostle Paul share his faith with intellectual sophistication and apologetic fervor. Now, the apostle Paul was a gifted evangelist and an intellectual giant. Most of us don't meet these qualifications (I know I don't) but I believe we can still fruitfully share our faith with others. We will need a couple of key characteristics to share our faith well in the marketplace and that is what we will discuss in the following paragraphs.

The first characteristic we need to share our faith well is to know our faith well. They say to know how to detect a counterfeit bill, you need to know a genuine bill like the back of your hand. When we first place our faith in Jesus Christ, it is normal for us to know little about our faith. We are probably not able to wisely talk about the difference between the Old and the New Covenant when we are first saved. We are probably unable to articulately talk about the difference between the Law and the Gospel. However, as we grow in our faith, it is necessary that our knowledge of the Scriptures grow. We don't have to be the next great theologian, but we do need to be well acquainted with the Bible. As we see with the apostle Paul, we also need to learn how to speak to different groups of people. Some people we speak with will be very familiar with the Bible and the Christian story while others will have never even heard of Adam and

Eve. Scripture commands us to love the Lord our God with all our mind. A lazy, unstudious Christian is a disobedient Christian. May we redeem the time to learn our faith so that we may share our faith.

The second characteristic we need to share our faith is a holy life. We may know all the apologetic arguments in the world but if we have not love then we are simply a clanging cymbal. A virtuous life can often speak just as loudly as our words. 1 Peter 3:15 says, “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect”. This verse first speaks to character and holy life before it speaks about giving a defense for our faith. We are to honor Christ the Lord as holy in our hearts. Christ is glorious to us. He makes our hearts rejoice. We are also to be filled with hope. A hope filled Christian is one who believes the promises of God. They are full of faith and have a sure hope in God. This character and holy life will lead people to ask you about your faith, which then gives an opportunity to share our faith. May God use us to spread hope to a lost and dying world.

BIG IDEA: To share our faith well, we need to be knowledgeable about our faith and lead a holy life.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** What do you think are the top three reasons that keep you and other Christians from studying our faith well?
- **Question:** Why do you believe a holy life is so important to sharing your faith?

Week 16: Acts 17:22-34

Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

READ: Acts 17:22-34

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 17:22-34 and complete the activities below.

- **Question:** If you read the introduction to Paul's speech from Acts 17:22-25 only, what impression would you have of his communication style and strategy?

- **Question:** In v. 28 Paul references some popular writings from outside of the biblical text. Why do you think he chose to reference them when he was communicating in Athens?
 - What do we learn about evangelism through his example?

- **Question:** In your opinion, what do you think Paul means when he references the “*times of ignorance overlooked?*”

- **Question:** What was the response to Paul’s speech detailed in Acts 17:32-34?

- **Question:** Why do you think Acts 17 concludes with the mentioning of specific people who believed Paul’s message as credible?

Week 16: Acts 17:22-34

Day 2: Paul's Witness | Conscientious and Uncompromising

READ: Acts 17:22-31

EXPLORE:

More scholarly work has gone into Acts 17 and the Athenian culture than almost any other section of Acts. Theologians and diligent students of the Bible have spent a lot of time unpacking this incredibly important text. In Paul's speech we have an incredible model of Christian witness in the public arena. Today, we are going to take a closer look.

One of the first things that Paul does in his speech is create common ground with the Athenians through a favorable word.²⁴ Specifically, Paul calls them very "*religious*."²⁵ The word translated "*religious*" from the original Greek only occurs once in the biblical text. From what we can discern, Paul did not mean this as an insult, but as a statement complimenting their seeming diligence and conscientiousness toward the gods. Even though many Athenians considered Paul to be a babbler, it is important to note that his first word was not one of condemnation, but of common ground.

After commenting on the Athenians apparent religiosity, Paul alluded to what he noticed in their culture and worship. Specifically, Paul referenced the altar to the unknown God. In a sense, Paul referenced their own self-perceived gaps in knowledge to highlight the nature of the one, true God of creation.²⁶ Paul brilliantly connected the Athenians' own expressed ignorance about the gods to the true

²⁴ An ancient rhetorical strategy entitled *copitatio benevolentiae* was often used in Greek contexts to win the favor of the hearers. It appears Paul used this strategy in Athens as he shared the gospel.

²⁵ Some translations understand Paul's word choice to mean *superstitious* rather than *religious*, but there is little evidence grammatically or contextually for that to be the case.

²⁶ See Acts 17:23-25 for reference to this transition.

nature of the biblical God. Interestingly, Paul does not directly cite the Scriptures, but chose to speak about the evidence for the Judeo-Christian God using common language that would have been prevalent in philosophical discussions of the day. Paul models a life of faithful witness.

Paul's example in Acts 17 is a challenge to resist two negative extremes that often plague the church and her witness in the world. First, the example of Paul challenges an anti-intellectual practice in Christianity which is deeply suspicious of secular learning. Certainly, we are called to be conscientious and wise, but it does not mean that we should shy away from the pursuit of truth and intellectual discussions in the public space. Paul was able to witness faithfully because he was intimately aware with the religious and intellectual practices of the world around him.

Second, the example of Paul ought to challenge compromising Christians who attempted to falsely synchronize their faith with distinctly nonbiblical worldviews. The point of Paul's words in Acts 17:22-31 is that Christianity has a substantive and satisfactory response to a world in need. In conclusion, the strategy and approach of Paul in Athens ought to challenge our own conception of conscientious and uncompromising witness.

BIG IDEA: Paul's speech in Athens presents a good example for conscientious and uncompromising witness.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Why do you think that Paul chose to start his speech by referencing the religious commitment in his crowd? What do we learn and not learn from his example?
- **Activity:** God has called each of us to show the love of Jesus by sharing our faith with others. Take time to pray about who God has positioned in your life with whom you can share the gospel.

Week 16: Acts 17:22-34

Day 3: Knowledge and Mystery

READ: Psalm 8

EXPLORE:

Almost every summer, my wife and I (Stephen) have been able to travel north to see our family. The trips involve a brief, yet wonderful escape from the grueling Texas heat to somewhere cooler and more mountainous. One of our favorite things to do with family and friends is to go on hikes in the long days of summer sun. These hikes usually start out innocent enough, until I get a crazy idea. Instead of walking a normal path, I usually spend time and energy trying to convince everyone to make it to the very top of the mountain at all costs! In full transparency, the costs are often quite extensive...

At its core, my desire to hike off the beaten path to the very top comes from a deeply held desire not just to experience the base of a mountain, but its peak as well. It is one thing to observe the majesty of a mountain from beneath, but it is nothing short of incredible to reach the very top. In Paul's famous Acts 17 speech, he encouraged the Athenians to experience the grandeur of God not just from down below, but with the clarity that only exists above the proverbial summit. Paul rightly talks about the biblical God who is transcendent, yet personal, sovereign, and yet fully engaged in human life!

Paul spoke of a knowable and yet mysterious God who is worth exploring and experiencing with clarity. The Athenians were, at least to some extent, aware of their own lack of awareness. In a sense, they knew what they did not know. For this reason, they created an altar to the unknown god. What Paul invited them into was a relationship with a simultaneously knowable and yet mysterious God.

The same message of Paul in Acts 17 continues to be communicated every time the gospel is faithfully preached. Because of what God has accomplished in Christ and revealed through the Holy Spirit, we

can know God intimately. We are not called to merely know about God; we are called to know God directly! It is a profoundly good thing that the bigness and majesty of God goes beyond our limited imagination. Like a mountain that invites us to experience its grandeur and beauty closely and personally, God has invited us to intimately explore his power and goodness. Let's spend some time in closing today reflecting upon the majesty and power of God.

BIG IDEA: We are not designed to embrace God at a distance, but to discover His majesty anew each day.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Read Psalm 8 below and spend time reflecting about the knowable, mysterious, and powerful, God of goodness.

Psalm 8

¹ O Lord, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

² Out of the mouth of babies and infants,

*you have established strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.*

*³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,*

*⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?*

*⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.*

*⁶ You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,*

*⁷ all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,*

*⁸ the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

⁹ O Lord, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Week 16: Acts 17:22-34

Day 4: Communicating the Cure

READ: Acts 17:22-34 and Acts 3:19-21

EXPLORE:

Even though I (Stephen) am a huge fan of education and lifelong learning, I know firsthand how creative a student can become in an attempt to get out of class. The excuses might range from mildly believable to downright supernatural. Perhaps no excuse was more popular than the much-needed trip to the nurse. Now, this tactic was often effective, but seldom truly necessary.

My recollection of “treatment” in the nurse’s office was a wintergreen mint and swift note back to class. I distinctly remember remarking to friends that a student could go in with a legitimate and apparent illness only to be sent on their way with minty fresh breath. Times have changed!

Now, receiving a mint from the nurse after trying to get out of class was not too egregious an error, but it would be a totally different story if a person was truly ill. If a person was legitimately sick, the prescribed mint would not be compassionate; it would be cruel. The level of medicine is prescribed to counteract the level of disease. In the case of the crowd in Athens, the remedy for their issues was not a painless placebo, but the sobering truth of the Christ.

We need to remember that Athens would have been a particularly challenging place to participate in ministry. Certainly, everywhere has its challenges, but the context of Athens which we have been studying would have been particularly challenging. Think about an environment in which people have seen it all, read it all, and seem to have learned it all. This is the background of Athens.

Considering this context, Paul’s primary goal was not to make the Christian message culturally palatable. His primary goal was not even to demolish them in each argument. Rather, Paul’s goal was to

faithfully communicate the gift of God made available in Christ. He was not interested in dulling the symptoms, he was interested in communicating the cure. Paul's call for repentance in Athens and a turning from ignorance was an act of God's grace for a people in need.

The reality is that we are not too different from the ancient Athenians. We need saving not merely because the world is broken around us, although it is. We need saving not merely because we have made a few mistakes, although we have. We need saving, because, apart from Christ, we exist in rebellion against God. In Acts 17, Paul joins a long line of biblical prophets who were positioned to tell the great kindness of God who extends grace to those in rebellion. We, like the ancient Athenians, are not in need of a pleasant placebo, but a true and everlasting cure.

BIG IDEA: In a world that often desires easy, painless answers, the gospel offers eternal hope.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Today's Word to Life used the metaphor of medicine to talk about the intense and yet necessary remedy of the gospel. With that metaphor in mind, why do you think so many people prefer to manage symptoms rather than embrace the cure?

- **Activity:** Read and meditate upon 2 Corinthians 7:10
"For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."

Week 16: Acts 17:22-34

Day 5: Paul Preaching in the Areopagus

READ TOGETHER: Acts 17:22-34

***Instructions:** We believe that Biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, Day 5 of each week is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

The apostle Paul is given an invitation to give a public address in the Areopagus. The Areopagus was a religious and judicial council. It seems Paul was not so much on trial, but the Athenians were interested to hear this new teaching that Paul was sharing. He starts off with a point of solidarity with the Athenians. He observes that they are very religious, and he wants to share with them about the “unknown God” that they acknowledge. This was a great introduction for Paul to share his faith.

Paul begins his presentation by declaring that the “unknown God” is the Creator of all things. He does not live in temples made by man. Since God made man, it is absurd to think that man can make a house that God can live in. God cannot be contained in a house of wood or stone. This is a backwards idea and what the Athenians currently believed about their gods. Secondly, God is the Sustainer of life. He is not served by human hands, as though he needs anything, since He give to all mankind everything. In other words, mankind is dependent on God for life and breath. God does not need man to prop him up or keep him going. He is self-sufficient.

Thirdly, God is the Ruler of the nations. God is in control of both the history and boundaries of each nation. He is in control that we might seek Him. If God is indeed the ruler of the nations, then He is ruler of

the Athenians, so they ought to grab a hold of what Paul is saying and place their faith in Him. Fourthly, mankind is God's offspring. If this is true, we should not think that God is like gold or silver or stone. These objects are less than man and if they are less than man then surely, they are less than God. In other words, if man is God's offspring, then God must be more advanced and complex than man.

Finally, Jesus is the judge of the world. There is a coming day that Jesus will judge all men, the living, and the dead. Since this judgment is certain, the Athenians are culpable of their ignorance and God commands them to repent. Paul also states that God appointed Jesus as the judge and God has given proof of this by raising Him from the dead. The only person worthy to judge every other person is the Resurrected King.

BIG IDEA: We need to teach non-believers who God is, what He does, and who His Son is.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Of the five truths of God mentioned above, which one do you think people have the hardest time believing today and why?
- **Question:** Paul directly combated the false beliefs about God that the Athenians held. What are the common false beliefs that people have today about God?



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