

Acts 17:16-34

December 14, 2025



CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What are some highs or lows you experienced this past week?
- What Scripture has been shaping you recently?
- Where have you seen God moving in your life this week?
- What did you hear in today's sermon OR read in today's passage that you would like to discuss?
- What did you learn about yourself in today's sermon/passage?
- What did you learn about God in today's sermon/passage?
- What convicted you as you listened to today's sermon OR read in today's passage?

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Think Tank

How to Play:

- Form students into small groups. Each group will come up with a brand-new idea to pitch to the rest of the youth group.
- Give them 10 minutes to brainstorm a "new" idea they can share.

Some examples to get you started:

- A new youth group game
- A fictional product or invention
- A community service project
- A new holiday or tradition

- After the time is up, each group should present their idea to the group.
- When all the presentations are done, take a vote for everyone's favorite!

Teaching Moment:

Today we shared some new ideas with the group. In our reading in Acts today, Paul was in Athens, where the people loved to share new thoughts and ideas. We'll see how he used this to help tell them about Jesus.

DISCUSSION

🌿 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACTS 17:16-34.

What did Paul encounter when he reached Athens?

Why was Paul deeply distressed? Does this same type of thing bother you? Why or why not?

How did Paul engage with the people he encountered?

What stands out from Paul's sermon?

How did Paul tailor his message to his audience?

Tailoring our message to reach others doesn't mean compromising the gospel. What does it mean?

GOING DEEPER

What are some ways we might tailor our method of sharing the gospel to better engage those around us?

How have others done this for you?

APPLICATION

When have you tried to have a conversation about Jesus with someone who believed something very different from you? What happened?

What can we learn about reaching people who believe differently than us from Paul's example?

Why is it important we seek to reach others with the gospel in a way they might best understand it?

PRAYER

Thank God for giving us the ability to observe and thoughtfully build relationships with the people He has placed in our lives. Ask for His help as you consider how to reach people for Him in your community.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead as we discuss Luke 2 and celebrate the birth of Jesus.

December 21, 2025 --- Luke 2:1-20

COMMENTARY

Acts 17:16-34

17:16 While waiting for Silas and Timothy to arrive from Berea, Paul observed Athens closely. He saw that it was full of idols. Athens was a beautiful city with many magnificent buildings and other monuments, many of them related to pagan worship (e.g., the Parthenon). The city was also a center of intellectual, philosophical, and religious discussion. All of this deeply distressed Paul as a person who knew the one true God and his Son Jesus Christ.

17:17 Paul followed his custom and reasoned in the synagogue, but also expanded his audience even before the onset of trouble from the Jews, by taking the gospel to the marketplace and engaging whoever was there, likely including philosophers, rhetoricians, and teachers.

17:18 Epicurean and Stoic philosophers comprised two of the best-known philosophical schools of thought. Epicureans taught that one ought to lead a tranquil and contemplative life, free of passions and destructive emotions. They didn't deny the existence of gods but believed they were indifferent to humanity. Stoics were pantheists and believed the divine principle was found everywhere. Humans ought to live by reason, the divine principle within them, so as to achieve a virtuous life. Epicureans and Stoics attracted many followers who gathered in various parts of the city to discuss the leading issues of the day. In their arrogance, some of them depicted Paul as an ignorant show-off. This was actually a slang term that meant "seed-picker."

17:19-21 The Areopagus was a rocky hill in Athens overlooking the marketplace. The word Aeropagus was also used to refer to the council that originally met on the hill. During Hellenistic times, the council probably met in the agora—or marketplace. The Greek text here is ambiguous. So it could be that Paul gave an address on the hilltop or that he appeared before this Athenian council elsewhere. The term Areopagus means "hill of Ares." Ares, the Greek god of war, was equivalent to the Roman god, Mars. So the hilltop was also known as Mars Hill.

17:22-31 This is Paul's third and final missionary speech in the book of Acts. He appealed to the Athenians' religious inclinations, drew upon observable data

from nature to discuss the attributes of God, marshaled insights from pagan poets, and identified God and the need for humans to repent in preparation for the day in which God will judge the world in righteousness through Jesus Christ, whom God vindicated by raising him from the dead.

17:22–23 As an example of Athenian superstition, Paul noted the altar erected “To an Unknown God”. No such inscription has been found, but it is no surprise that such an altar existed. Doubtless it was erected to ensure that no gods were overlooked (and thus angered) in the people’s devotion.

17:24–29 Paul’s argument from nature included a basic natural theology: God is Creator of all things; God is beyond the human realm (transcendent); God is not obligated to any human; God is sovereign over all peoples; God as Creator is quantitatively different from his creation.

17:27 Paul did not believe a person could achieve salvation through his own search for God (v. 30), but he did believe God is near to each person and that people through their own reasoning and observation of nature can achieve rudimentary knowledge of who God is. Special revelation from God is necessary for fuller understanding and salvation (see Romans 10:14–15).

17:28 Paul quoted (For we are also his offspring) someone whom these philosophers would have recognized—a Greek poet named Aratus who lived about 315–240 BC.

17:30–31 Paul built upon his argument from natural theology by introducing an eschatological dimension. God had overlooked the times of ignorance, but now commands humanity to acknowledge its evil ways and turn from them (repent). He has established a day of judgment on which the world will be held accountable to the righteous standard set by Jesus, whom God raised from the dead.

17:32–33 Neither Stoics nor Epicureans believed in the possibility of bodily resurrection, though the Stoics did believe the human spirit continued to exist after bodily death. In any event, Paul’s talk about bodily resurrection earned him ridicule but also a measure of curiosity.

17:34 Paul’s missionary efforts in Athens were not as successful as they were elsewhere since he founded no church there. But there were a number of converts. These included a member of the Areopagus, Dionysius, a man of distinction because of this prestigious membership. Damaris may also have been a woman of distinction since Luke bothered to name her (vv. 4–5)