

Sermon-Based Small Group Bible Study

Join the Journey: Centered on Christ (Acts 17:16–34)

Open

Select one of these “ice breakers” to get the conversation going toward the study.

- What’s your feeling about debates? Love? Hate? Don’t care? Would you attend a debate if invited? Would you participate in a debate if invited?
- Tell about a time when you encountered a custom that was new to you. How did you feel in that situation?
- Name one of your interests and the “prestige place” associated with it (example: football, the Super Bowl; art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art). How would you feel if you were invited to that place (or how did you feel when you were there)?

Dig

After reading Acts 17:16–30 together, discuss these questions.

1. Looking at verse 16, how do you think Paul felt in the atmosphere of Athens? What does his response in verse 17 tell you about Paul and what was most important to him?
2. Reading verses 16–21, what in the description makes you optimistic about people listening to Paul’s message? What makes you pessimistic? What is your impression of Athenians?
3. The altar that Paul describes in verse 23 was probably erected to “play it safe” in case among the many gods worshiped in Athens, one would be accidentally left out and would be angry with Athens as a result. How does Paul adapt the meaning of “unknown God” in his speech (verses 22–31)? Who is this “unknown God”? What has he done for all people? What has he done most recently? What does that mean for the Athenians (and all people)?
4. Christ is the center of Paul’s speech. What does Paul say about Christ? How is Christ important for Athens and all humanity? How does Christ bring light to humanity “groping in the dark”? (Note: you may want to warn members to avoid “Christianese” to bring clarity to their responses. This can be a challenge!)
5. What do you make of the response to Paul’s message in verses 32–33? Would you describe his speech as a failure? A success? Was the result what you expected? A surprise? Why?

Summary: Paul addresses a sophisticated, skeptical audience by declaring that they need to know the true God, their creator and sustainer, and the good news that the divine Son of God entered the world as a human, died and arose. Christ’s work means that all people, regardless of background, can belong to God’s people. The Creator is revealing himself, inviting rebellious humanity to belong to him because Christ has made the way for all, answering our deepest needs..

Reflect

Use any of these prompts to encourage group members to apply the text to their own experiences.

- For many in Paul's audience, the story of Christ did not make sense, but for some it did. What parts of life and experience does Christ make sense of for you? What about Christ's story is hard for you to make sense of right now?
- Pastor Bryan pointed out that Athens in Paul's day was like Champaign-Urbana today, an intellectual center. What does Christ have to offer the well educated? The not so well educated?
- In what ways is Christ at the center of your life, and in what ways is Christ on the sidelines? What commitments can you make to allow Christ more into the center.

Pray

Invite the group to pray together using any of these suggestions.

- What needs have you heard from others in the group that we can pray about?
- What thanks and praise can we offer God for what this text tells us?
- What help from God do you need to live more in the love of the Creator, Redeemer God revealed in Christ?