A Much Needed Introduction (Acts 17:16-34)

Where do you start when "God" is a generic word and truth is determined by the individual? When it seems like people have heard it all before? In Acts 17 the apostle Paul is in Athens, the cultural and philosophical center of his day. He's surrounded by the greatest artists, thinkers and philosophers – but also by thousands upon thousands of idols that are deeply troubling to him. He knows they are a gross distortion; a mere caricature of the Living God. He knows the God of Creation is the passionate seeker who has made a way for us to seek and know him. So he begins with a much needed introduction.

1. A deeply troubling sight (and the decision to do something about it) (Acts 17:16-21)
As Paul waited for Silas and Timothy to arrive he was deeply troubled/provoked by what he observed. Before we speak we need to first SEE and FEEL.
He *"reasoned"* in the synagogue and in the marketplace.
"Reasoned" = "say it thoroughly"; enter discussion; involved hearing objections and answering questions.
Epicureans = pursue pleasure and avoid pain. *"If it feels good, do it."* God is uninvolved.
Stoics = *"what will be, will be"* - life is determined by fate, live in harmony with nature and reason – however painful it might be. Looked inward to find hope.
V18 *"What is this babbler saying (*slang = *one who picks up seeds/scraps; word-scatterer)?"*
Some thought he was preaching two gods. Brought before the greatest philosophical council of his day.

2. A much needed introduction (Acts 17:22-31)
He observed an altar with an inscription: "to the unknown god" – jumps on this opportunity!
Notice he doesn't start with Jesus. V24 Speaks of God as Creator and Lord of all.
V27 That they should seek (worship; seek after; desire) God and *feel* their way towards him and find him.
God is the passionate seeker who has made a way for you to seek and know him.
God has made a way for you to know him BUT it *has* to be on his terms.

3. A deeply personal invitation (and the decision to do something about it) (Acts 17:30-34)
V30 "repent" = turn away; a total life change. God is going to judge the world through Jesus.
He's given assurance (guarantee/promise) this is going to happen by raising Jesus from the dead.

QUESTIONS (Pray, read the passage and pick 4-5 questions to discuss. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide.)
1. Read Acts 17:16-34. Have you ever observed something that made you so upset you decided to do something about it? Why was Paul's spirit *provoked* in Athens? What did Paul do about it?
2. Paul reasoned in the synagogue and the marketplace *"with those who happened to be there."* What did this "reasoning" include?
3. Describe the two groups who entered the conversation with Paul while he was in the marketplace. How are their views a lot like ones in our day? What did they say about Paul?
4. Paul is brought before the Areopagus, the most prominent intellectual and philosophical council of his day, and gave them a "much needed introduction." Slowly read VV22-31. List the things Paul says about God. How do these truths about God confront their idolatry? Are they confronting and/or encouraging you today?
5. V27 is filled with invitation to *seek* (worship) God. It was said, *"God is the passionate seeker who opens the way for us to seek and know him."* Why is this important to always keep before us?
6. Paul eventually brings the Athenians to Jesus – the one with all authority and power – who will judge the world. In V30 he basically says, *"OK, enough of this ignoring God! He's commanding (he can do that!) all people everywhere to repent."* What does repent mean?
7. The resurrection is the promise/ guarantee that Jesus is going to "right every wrong," bring justice and peace. How is this a comfort to followers of Jesus? Also a motivation?

Pray for people who are aware there is "an unknown god" but do not know who he is or how to find him. Pray the Holy Spirit will enlighten them with the knowledge that leads to faith in Jesus. Pray the Spirit will use you to be bring this *"much needed introduction."*