

When 'God' Is a Generic Word (Acts 17:16-34)

Where do you start when "God" is a generic word or when truth is determined by the individual? What do you say when it seems like people have heard it all before? Acts 17:16-34 brings us face to face with those questions. It's a much-needed introduction to the God of Creation as *the* passionate seeker who has made a way for us to seek and know him.

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; hear objections and answer questions.

Epicureans = pursue pleasure and avoid pain. "*If it feels good, do it.*"

Stoics = Life is determined by fate; "*What will be, will be.*" Looked inward to find hope.

2. A much needed introduction (Acts 17:22-31)

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 God is the passionate seeker who has made a way for you to seek and know him.

3. A deeply personal invitation (Acts 17:30-34)

V30 "repent" = total life change

QUESTIONS (Pray, read the passage and pick 4-5 questions to discuss. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide.)

1. How would you describe the prevailing philosophy or world view of the people around you?
2. 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?
3. Paul reasoned in the synagogue and the marketplace "*with those who happened to be there.*" What did this "reasoning" include?
4. 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?
5. Paul is brought before the Areopagus, the most prominent intellectual and philosophical council of his day. Slowly read VV22-31. List the things Paul says about God. How do these truths confront their idolatry? Are they confronting and/or encouraging you today?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. The resurrection is the promise/guarantee that Jesus is going to "*right every wrong*" and bring justice and peace. How is this a comfort to followers of Jesus? How is it 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 bring this "*much-needed introduction.*"