

Acts 17 “Making the Unknown Known”
Acts 17:16-33
February 1, 2026

Acts 17:16-21

16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed when he saw that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with those who worshiped God, as well as in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. 18 Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also debated with him. Some said, “What is this ignorant show-off trying to say?”

Others replied, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign deities”—because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

19 They took him and brought him to the Areopagus, and said, “May we learn about this new teaching you are presenting? 20 Because what you say sounds strange to us, and we want to know what these things mean.” 21 Now all the Athenians and the foreigners residing there spent their time on nothing else but telling or hearing something new.

“Deeply distressed.”

Knowability.

Acts 17:22-33

22 Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said, “People of Athens! I see that you are extremely religious in every respect. 23 For as I was passing through and observing the objects of your worship, I even found an altar on which was inscribed, ‘To an Unknown God.’ Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. 24 The God who made the world and everything in it—he is Lord of heaven and earth—does not live in shrines made by hands. 25 Neither is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives everyone life and breath and all things.

26 From one man he has made every nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live. 27 He did this so that they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28 For in him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also his offspring.’ 29 Since, then, we are God’s offspring, we shouldn’t think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image fashioned by human art and imagination.

30 “Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some began to ridicule him, but others said, “We’d like to hear from you again about this.” 33 So Paul left their presence. 34 However, some people joined him and believed, including Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

From 30,000 to 1.

The world is designed to frustrate.

Concentrated or diluted.

Acts 17:30-31. "Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

"Idols can't be removed they have to be replaced."

Life Group Discussion Questions.

- What did God say to you through His Scriptures during our Sunday gathering?
- Have you ever been somewhere that felt oppressive and dark? What factored into your discernment? Paul was "deeply distressed" walking through Athens. What do you think he saw and felt?
- From Paul's day to ours, if the leading philosophies are that God is distant and unknowable, how might that influence how we live?
- We may not live among a diversity of altars and shrines but what would be the false gods of our day? What things rival the value and significance that should be given to God?
- Discuss the idea that God has designed the world to be frustrating and that He wouldn't be loving if allowed us to settle into lesser loves that never give lasting life. How have you seen this to be true?
- Limiting your affections and worship to just the One could feel risky. How does Paul help the Athenians see that Jesus is the right and best focus of our worship?
- Discuss the idea that idols can't be removed, they have to be replaced. In what ways has Jesus helped free you from empty idols?
- How can your Life Group encourage you in regards to this passage of Scripture?