

NOTES



OPENING PRAYER

Father, unsettle us with what you love, and steady us with what you've called us to. Open our eyes to our city/suburb the way you see it, and give us the courage to walk into it rather than away from it, in Jesus' name, Amen.

OPENING QUESTION_(OPTIONAL)

What's one thing about our city that outsiders always get wrong, or one thing about your own street or suburb that surprised you once you actually got to know it?

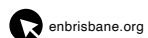


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WORD

Acts 17:16-21

16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. 18 Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babblers wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. 19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20 For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." 21 Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

MAIN REFLECTION POINTS

Paul arrives in Athens alone, waiting for Silas and Timothy to catch up, and what he finds provokes him. Luke reaches for an unusually strong word here, the city is full of idols, saturated with them, the kind of visual density ancient writers joked you couldn't walk a street in Athens without bumping into a god. Paul's reaction isn't polite discomfort. It's something closer to grief mixed with anger, the same instinct Scripture has always had toward what replaces the living God with something carved and lifeless.

What Paul does next is the part worth slowing down on. He doesn't write Athens off, and he doesn't just stew in his provocation either. He goes to the synagogue, where people already share his framework, and he goes to the marketplace, where they don't, reasoning daily with "those who happened to be there."

Two completely different rooms, two different vocabularies, one unchanged message. He's not there to observe Athens from a safe distance. He sits down in the middle of its actual daily life, on its actual philosophical home turf, and lets Epicureans and Stoics push back on him in person. Some of them dismiss him outright, a term of real scorn, not a gentle jab. Others are curious enough to bring him before the city's council to explain himself. Either way, Paul doesn't get to control how he's received. He only gets to control whether he shows up.

MAIN REFLECTION POINTS

This is the same posture Jesus modeled first. He was sent into a culture that misread him constantly, that called him mad, that mocked what it didn't understand, and he never withdrew from it. He kept eating at tables, walking roads, and speaking to whoever happened to be there. Paul is following his Lord's pattern before he's following any strategy of his own. That's the pastoral center of this passage: being provoked by what's broken around you was never meant to end in commentary. It's meant to end in presence.

Key Reflections:

- Provocation is a starting point, not a destination. Paul's spirit is stirred in verse 16, but that feeling doesn't stay a feeling. It becomes daily engagement in verse 17. Don't let what bothers you about your city stop at frustration.
- Two rooms, one message. Paul reasons in the synagogue and the marketplace, on the same day, in different language. Speaking differently to different people isn't compromise. It's love paying attention.
- You don't need an invitation to show up. Paul doesn't wait for Athens to ask him in. He goes to where people already are, the marketplace, the ordinary daily foot traffic of the city.
- Being misunderstood isn't proof you did it wrong. Paul gets called a babbler before anyone gives him a real hearing. Faithful presence doesn't guarantee a warm welcome.
- Jesus went first. He was sent into a culture that mocked and misread him, and he stayed present in it anyway. Our sending into Logan follows his pattern, not the other way around.
- Attention is the first act of love. Before Paul says a single word of the gospel in this passage, he's already looking, listening, and learning the city. Love a place enough to actually notice it.

MAIN REFLECTION POINTS (cont...)

Gospel Invitation & Missional Activation

Gospel Invitation:

- Jesus was sent into a culture that misunderstood him, and he didn't withdraw from it, he gave his life for it. If you've never surrendered your life to him, tonight is a good night to start there.
- Repentance here isn't just about personal sin, it's also about repenting of an "I just live here" posture toward the place God has actually placed you.
- Faith looks like trusting that God's sending you to a city/suburb that isn't a lesser calling than sending you somewhere else. Ask him to help you actually believe that this week.

Missional Activation

- This week, identify one specific person already in your world, a neighbour, a school friend, a coworker, and share a coffee or a meal with them, with the deliberate goal of learning their story and how they see our city/suburb.
- Walk your own street once this week the way Paul walked the marketplace, slowly, paying attention, praying as you go, rather than driving past it.
- As a group, talk about one practical way that your Life Group could bless your city/suburb this term, not in the abstract, but a specific act of outreach tied to a real need you already know about.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When's a time you felt genuinely provoked, unsettled, bothered, by something you saw in your own community or city?
2. Paul's reaction to Athens' idols doesn't make him pull back, it pushes him further in. What's your natural instinct when something in your city/suburb frustrates you, do you withdraw or engage?
3. Paul speaks in two very different rooms on the same day, the synagogue and the marketplace. Where in your own week do you need to learn a "second language," a different way of speaking about faith depending on who's in the room?
4. Do you tend to think of city/suburb as somewhere you live, or somewhere you've been sent? Be honest, has that question ever actually crossed your mind before?
5. Paul goes to where people already are rather than waiting for them to come to him. Where do you already have natural access, a school, a workplace, a street, that you haven't thought of as your "marketplace"?
6. Read Jeremiah 29:4-7 together. God tells a displaced, reluctant people to actively seek the welfare of a city they didn't choose. How does that change how you think about a suburb you also didn't necessarily choose?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, thank you that you didn't stay distant from a world that misunderstood you, you were sent right into the middle of it. Give us Paul's kind of provocation, one that moves us toward our city and your people instead of away from it, and show us this week exactly who you've sent us to sit down with. In Jesus' name, Amen.