



Session 6: Mission Possible



This session explores ideas about how we engage a post-Christian world with the great story of Christ.

How do we begin to dialogue and share our faith with others who may know little or nothing about the Gospel?

Previous session review

- Recap on your experience of the previous challenge. How did it go? Was it helpful?
- If you weren't able to try the challenge, explore the question: Where and how did you experience God last week?

Read

Read the passage several times through, slowly and prayerfully. It might help to use your imagination to picture the scene. At the end of the text you will find helpful background information in our 'Setting the Scene' section.

As you read, look out for shockers and blockers.

Shockers – a phrase, word, image or something from the text that resonates, stands out or connects with you.

Blockers – something from the text that raises questions for you.

Acts 17.16-34

While Paul was waiting in Athens, he was upset to see all the idols in the city. He went to the Jewish meeting place to speak to the Jews and to anyone who worshipped with them. Day after day he also spoke to everyone he met in the market. Some of them were Epicureans and some were Stoics, and they started arguing with him.

People were asking, "What is this know-all trying to say?" Some even said, "Paul must be preaching about foreign gods! That's what he means when he talks about Jesus and about people rising from death."

They brought Paul before a council called the Areopagus, and said, "Tell us what your new teaching is all about. We have heard you say some strange things, and we want to know what you mean."

More than anything else the people of Athens and the foreigners living there loved to hear and to talk about anything new. So Paul stood up in front of the council and said: People of Athens, I see that you are very religious. As I was going through your city and looking at the things you worship, I found an altar with the words, "To an Unknown God." You worship this God, but you don't really know him. So I want to tell you about him. This God made the world and everything in it. He is Lord of heaven and earth, and he doesn't live in temples built by human hands. He doesn't need help from anyone. He gives life, breath, and everything else to all people. From one person God made all nations who live on earth, and he decided when and where every nation would be.

God has done all this, so that we will look for him and reach out and find him. He isn't far from any of us, and he gives us the power to live, to move, and to be who we are. "We are his children," just as some of your poets have said.

Setting the scene:

- Paul was strategic in spreading the Gospel and spent time in most of the great cities of the Roman world.
- Athens was the home of Plato and Socrates, a centre of philosophy, literature, science and art in the ancient world – but it was tough ground for the Gospel.
- As was his custom, Paul begins with the Jewish audience in the synagogues but then moves out to the 'marketplace' where he engaged adherents of various philosophies leading to an invitation to speak at the Areopagus (an administrative, religious and educational body for the whole city), that welcomed travelling lecturers and philosophers.
- Paul is a keen observer of their culture (especially the various objects of worship). He cleverly borrows language and poetry from philosophies of the day to proclaim the one true God as the one who 'gives us the power to live, to move, and to be who we are' (v. 28) – quoting poetry known to his audience.
- Interestingly, Paul uses the tactic of 'patient persuasion' and in truth he only saw a few new converts. There is no record of any miracles being performed or of a church being established.

Since we are God's children, we must not think that he is like an idol made out of gold or silver or stone. He isn't like anything that humans have thought up and made. In the past, God forgave all this because people did not know what they were doing. But now he says that everyone everywhere must turn to him. He has set a day when he will judge the world's people with fairness. And he has chosen the man Jesus to do the judging for him. God has given proof of this to all of us by raising Jesus from death.

As soon as the people heard Paul say that a man had been raised from death, some of them started laughing. Others said, "We will hear you talk about this some other time." When Paul left the council meeting, some of the men put their faith in the Lord and went with Paul. One of them was a council member named Dionysius. A woman named Damaris and several others also put their faith in the Lord.

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

Reflect

After you have all had time to read the text, pause and be still to listen to God through the Scriptures.

Begin your reflection time by each naming your shockers and blockers. Listen carefully to each other, share your thoughts and reflect on this passage together.

You might also like to explore these questions:

Q1. What observations do you make about our culture today?
What do you think we value as a society, and what are the idols we worship?

Q2. Paul employs a tactic of patient persuasion to engage his audience – is this a good tactic for us also today?

Respond

Word lyfe challenge: As a group, create a challenge that will help you to be mindful of the culture around us and consider ways to dialogue about God, or choose from the following:

Challenge ideas:

1. Engage your mind

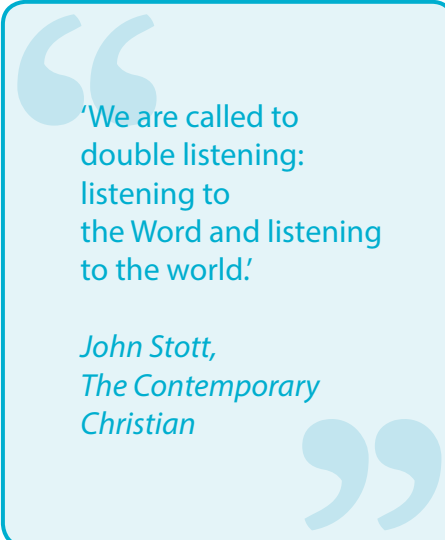
This week ask God to speak to you as you watch the news, read magazines, watch films and listen to music. What might God want you to observe, notice and understand this week that would be helpful in communicating your faith to others?

2. Learn to share

Make it your aim to speak to someone about Jesus this week. Pray for them to be open to you, be polite, and actively listen to them. Don't try too hard to give them everything you know, work with the Spirit and remember Paul's tactic of 'patient persuasiveness'.

3. Building gratitude

Evangelism needs to be a natural expression of our gratitude to God. When our lives overflow with God's goodness, then others will see something different in our lives (the ultimate apologetic) and may be curious about what it is. Take some time this week to reflect on God's goodness in your life.



Group Prayer

You might like to commit to praying for each person in the group as you look to connect faith and culture this week.