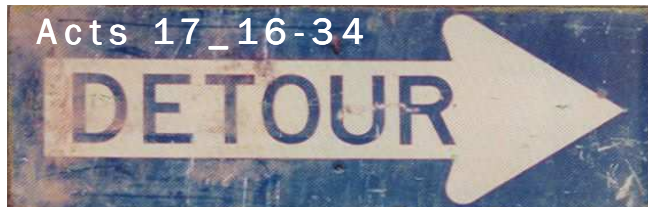



**A Five-Day Devotional Journey**
**August 10 - 16, 2008**

**1 Deeply troubled by all the idols**
**Read.** Acts 17:16-17 NLT

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city. He went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there.

**Read.** Isaiah 40:18-20 Message

Who even comes close to being like God?

To whom or what can you compare him?

Some no-god idol? Ridiculous!

It's made in a workshop, cast in bronze,

Given a thin veneer of gold,

and draped with silver filigree.

Or, perhaps someone will select a fine wood—

olive wood, say—that won't rot,

Then hire a woodcarver to make a no-god,

giving special care to its base so it won't tip over!

**Think.**

- How well do you handle flight delays or road detours?
- What was Paul waiting for in Athens? What troubled him while he waited? What did he do about it?
- What aspects of our culture do you find really “get under your skin”? What specific steps have or can you take to help address these issues in our culture?
- How does Isaiah seem to feel about idolatry? What emotions do you hear? What is his argument against idols?
- What are some common idols in our culture? Which idol do you find has a particularly strong pull on you?
- What would you say is the key to “cutting the strings” of idolatry in our lives and becoming bona fide “God worshippers”?

**Pray.**

Almighty God, Living Savior — pull my heart out of the orbit of the idols that would suck me in. Kill their attraction and reveal them for the sham they are. Draw me deeper into your light, your truth, your love.

**Live.**

Identify one idol in your life and do on your part what it takes to sever your ties with it.

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe?

Where is the disputer of this world?

Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

1 Corinthians 1:20 KJV

**I don't think he wanted to be there.**

**His heart was in Thessalonica, with the young community of believers he deeply loved and longed for.**

**His vision was no doubt already down the *Via Egnatia* all the way to Rome. Going to Rome was to become a life-long passion for Paul — like a salmon heading upstream to spawn. But circumstance and opposition kept driving him further south.**

**And now he sat in Athens alone, waiting for Silas and Timothy to come with word of his friends. Waiting for the roadblocks to be removed — waiting to get moving again.**

**It was a frustrating detour to nowhere. And there he sat surrounded by no-gods. “In Athens, you are more likely to meet an idol than a man,” it was said. And Paul met them everywhere. With each meeting, he grew more and more furious. There was a Jewish synagogue in Athens, so, of course, Paul sought it out. But Luke doesn't dwell there, whatever the results might have been. You get the feeling that the reasoning and debate in the synagogue was drowned out by the sights and sounds of idols and philosophers in the streets. The real story of Athens was in the *agora* — the marketplace. Paul blew into it like a tempest, leading to a classic showdown in the old court known as Mars Hill or the *Areios Pagos* (hill of Ares) with representatives of the great thinkers of the day. It was more than a friendly chat. There are veiled references to the demise of Socrates on that very spot with charges of preaching “foreign gods” in a secret society. But they were probably just toying with Paul. The meeting doesn't have a promising outcome, with slim pickings and patronizing snickers. Only a few take him or his message seriously. Paul felt truly *little*. The tide of the gospel had seemingly broken on the rock of Athens, to no end.**

**Paul's nerves are rattled — no more waiting for Silas and Timothy. He decides to move on. When he shows up in Corinth still further south, he's afraid to even open his mouth — until God reminds him in that unlikely place that God can do surprising things even in detours.**

## 2) What's this babbler trying to say?

**Read.** Acts 17:18-21 NLT

He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. When he told them about Jesus and his resurrection, they said, "What's this babbler trying to say with these strange ideas he's picked up?" Others said, "He seems to be preaching about some foreign gods."

Then they took him to the high council of the city. "Come and tell us about this new teaching," they said. "You are saying some rather strange things, and we want to know what it's all about." (It should be explained that all the Athenians as well as the foreigners in Athens seemed to spend all their time discussing the latest ideas.)

**Think.**

- How often do you find you just have to pick up one of the latest "gossip rags" while waiting at the check stand? Why do you think people in our culture seem to be so consumed with the latest news about celebrities?
- What was the obsession in Athens? What seemed to be their interest and take on Paul? How accurate does their impression seem to be of his teaching? Where do they take him, and why?
- When's the last time you really felt "on the spot" to explain your faith to a less than sympathetic audience? What happened? What can help increase our confidence at such times?

**Pray.**

Spirit of the Living God, arm my spirit with fresh boldness, with the audacity of love to give a clear answer when people ask me about you. Let me not shrink back from controversy and entrust you with all outcomes.

**Live.**

Read, meditate upon, chew, memorize, digest the counsel of 1Pet. 3:14-16. Picture what carrying out this counsel would look like.

## 4) He is not far from any one of us

**Read.** Acts 17:27-31 NLT

"His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' And since this is true, we shouldn't think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone. God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead."

**Think.**

- What themes/facts does Paul emphasize as his speech continues? What does Paul identify as God's overall purpose in history through his dealing with the nations?
- What do you make of the fact that Paul quotes one of their own poet/philosophers? What new conclusion (to them) does he draw from this quote?
- What divine, worldwide call does Paul echo as he nears what ends up being his conclusion? What does Paul say makes this call so urgent for everyone?
- What is "repentance"? What would this mean, practically speaking for the Athenians? How has knowing Jesus opened up a whole new worldview for you? What difference has this made in your life?

**Pray.**

Lord, remind me each moment of this day that in you I live and move and have my being. Allow me to relish your presence.

**Live.**

Savor & reread Paul's entire speech 3 times today if possible.

## 3) The God who made the world

**Read.** Acts 17:22-26 NLT

So Paul, standing before the council, addressed them as follows: "Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way, for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: 'To an Unknown God.' This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I'm telling you about. He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn't live in man-made temples, and human hands can't serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need. From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries."

**Think.**

- Paul is standing before an audience that feels very self-superior and looks upon him as an object of curiosity or even of scorn. What do you hear in Paul's tone as he begins his address to them?
- How would you have felt if you were standing in his place addressing a skeptical crowd of intellectuals? How might you have started your own address to them?
- What truths does Paul emphasize to them as he begins? What are his "talking points"? How do you imagine his audience responding to him at this point?

**Pray.**

Living God, free me from the detour of idolatry and the false intellectualism that promotes it. Give me courage to live and speak the message that you give life and breath to everything.

**Live.**

Cultivate "God-awareness" today. Keep Paul's words about the Creator God before you as you go through the day. Look for Him.

## 5) We want to hear more about this later

**Read.** Acts 17:32-34 NLT

When they heard Paul speak about the resurrection of the dead, some laughed in contempt, but others said, "We want to hear more about this later." That ended Paul's discussion with them, but some joined him and became believers. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the council, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

**Read.** 1 Corinthians 1:22-25 Message

While Jews clamor for miraculous demonstrations and Greeks go in for philosophical wisdom, we go right on proclaiming Christ, the Crucified. Jews treat this like an anti-miracle—and Greeks pass it off as absurd. But to us who are personally called by God himself—both Jews and Greeks—Christ is God's ultimate miracle and wisdom all wrapped up in one. Human wisdom is so tinny, so impotent, next to the seeming absurdity of God. Human strength can't begin to compete with God's "weakness."

**Think.**

- What ends the discussion? What are the different verbalized reactions to Paul's message? Who actually listens?
- How do you think Paul walked away from this experience in Athens? Do you think he is upbeat or disappointed? Why?
- How do you respond to seemingly disappointing results from your best efforts? What keeps you going in the face of that?
- How does Paul's thoughts in 1 Cor. 1 reflect his experience both in the synagogue and at the council in Athens? What encouragement and lessons do you draw from this whole episode in Acts?

**Pray.**

Lord, impress upon me anew the miracle of your grace in the cross.

**Live.** Endure in the face of disappointment you may face this week.