



**LC STUDY GUIDE: DONE IN SYNC WITH
THE “LIVING ON MISSION” SERMON SERIES
The Passage – Acts 17:16-23
For LCs meeting 10.6.13-10.19.13**

***Preface:** These LC studies will complement the sermons, often using the same biblical texts, and will help your LC go deeper in personal understanding and application. These italicized portions are meant to resource and help you in leading and not to be distributed to the entire group (it limits conversation). Not all these questions need to be used in your LC meeting. Best to consider this a head-start and customize these for your LC study.*

Possible Starter Questions:

What city has had a significant impact on your life?
(think hometown, education, career, culture, etc.)

Which word best describes your default stance toward culture – Engaged, Friendly, Neutral, Antagonistic, other?

Study’s BIG Idea: The Christian gospel is a unique and influential message having the power to raise interest, bring rejection, or offer acceptance. We won’t know until we engage in our society.

Acts 17:16-23 (NIV)

16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. 18 A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbling trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. 19 Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20 You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.” 21 (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

(For sake of time, it’s recommended to focus on until vv. 16-23. However, I’m including vv. 24-34 for further context.)

24 “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. 27 God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 28 ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

29 “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. 30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” 33 At that, Paul left the Council. 34 Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

○ – How similar/dissimilar are Boston and Athens?

○ – What do you find interesting about Paul’s starting point with the Areopagus?

I – V. 16 says Paul was distressed Athens was so full of idols. Of all the things to be distressed about why do you think Luke points idols out specifically?
(Paul is a first-century Jewish rabbi. Therefore, he knows the Old Testament’s major teachings like the first Commandment of having no other god but Yahweh and the forbiddance of graven images.)

A – What do you find most distressing when you visit a foreign city? What do you find distressing when you are walking around locally?

○ – Paul is invited to the meeting of the Areopagus, which is the highest court in Athens (think of it as an academic senate hearing). What events led up to his invitation? How may have they initially perceived Paul?

I – The Stoics believed divinity was were near and in everything, including one’s self. Reason and discovery could unlock meaning and virtue. The Epicureans believed “the gods” were very distant and did not communicate with us or with each other. So the goal of life was to gain the maximum amount of meaning and pleasure from a quiet and peaceful existence. Why would they disagree with Paul’s Christian faith respectively?

(The Stoics were very reason-based. The concept of faith would undermine the materialist demand for logic. Further, they were nearly pantheistic so choosing one

monotheistic God giving salvation flew in the face of the idea the divine was within and around. The Epicureans and Paul would have agreed that God was not within us but would have disagreed on the nearness of God. Further, Epicureans did not believe the mortals could connect with the immortal so the idea of prayer, faith, and surrendering one's life in obedience would have seemed bizarre and unnecessary. Both would have felt Paul's message was too narrow-minded. But perhaps the biggest reason both philosophies would have rejected Paul's Christian proclamation was because of his insistence on Jesus' divinity, resurrection, and return to judge the world. This would have been incompatible on a number of levels for them respectively. Yet verse 34 says some believed.)

A – What kinds of responses have you encountered as you attempt to discuss spiritual things with people?

A – How would you describe the “culture” of your immediate neighborhood/town? How could you more actively engage it? Are there any particular problems/challenges/communities in the city that you feel burdened for?

A – What do we learn from Paul's example about communicating spiritual truth to people in our culture?

Key: O – Observation. I – Interpretation. A – Application

- a. **Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single meeting.** Take some time and select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your LIFE Community group. Certain questions work better for certain groups. You are encouraged to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best.
- b. Complement OIA questions with “process questions” (what else? what more? what do others think?).
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don't rush people but encourage their participation. And avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Timing/pacing: allocate your time and move forward gently, with a steady pace.
- e. Application: Pace the study to conclude with “difference making” application.
- f. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into “teaching,” rather than facilitating. It can cause people to feel distracted or de-powered.