



Paul in Athens

Unit 10: Living in Hope

LAST WEEK

When Paul and Silas are imprisoned for sharing the gospel, an earthquake opens their cell door and a prison guard comes to believe (Acts 16:16-34).

THIS WEEK

Paul continued his missionary journey around the Mediterranean in Athens, where he challenged the cultural practices of the time (Acts 17:16-31).

The Point

God is the creator, sustainer, and redeemer of the whole world.

Bible Nuts & Bolts:

Gentile

A Gentile is any person who is not Jewish. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were often commanded to remain separate from other people so that they could follow the laws God gave them. In the New Testament, Jesus' ministry is primarily directed to Jewish people. Paul's ministry targeted the Gentiles, and one of the first controversies in the Church involved whether Gentiles need to first become Jewish and obey Jewish laws in order to follow Jesus. Paul felt strongly that all were included in God's love, both Jew and Gentile, without regard to obedience to Jewish law.

Story Summary

The apostle Paul traveled to the city of Athens to spread the good news of Jesus. People became curious about Paul's message and invited him to speak to a group of philosophers. The city of Athens contained statues to many gods, including one dedicated to any "unknown" gods, and Paul used this interest in spirituality and the acknowledgement of possible unknown gods as a starting point to teach about God. He began by explaining that there was one God who created the entire world and was not created by human hands like the Greek deities with which they were familiar.

Practice: Prayer

Time spent in prayer deepens our relationship with God, helping us to claim our identity as God's beloved children and our call to help bring God's reign through service and witness. This week, seek God daily in prayer and be assured that God is not far from you.

NEXT WEEK

Despite his imprisonment for preaching the gospel, Paul rejoices in the Philippians and rejoices even more that the gospel of Christ continues to spread (Philippians 1:1-18a).

Going Deeper

As you hear and study these stories each week, consider what God has to say to you and your family. What is God's message to us? Consider the following basic pattern as a way of forming family devotions:

- ✦ Light a candle to help you focus this time as "God time." Pray a simple prayer together.
- ✦ Take a moment to check in with each other; what are each person's "highs" and "lows" today?
- ✦ Read aloud from the Daily Bible Readings from below. Discuss the questions following each.
- ✦ End with a blessing, by simply tracing a cross on each other's forehead. The Lord's Prayer is a good way to end your devotion time. If you used a candle, extinguish it as a sign of the end of the devotions.

Note: This is only a suggested pattern. It will vary with your household's context and patterns. What works best for you? First thing in the morning? Over breakfast? Bed time? Be creative and flexible with how you practice and keep your devotions!

Daily Bible Readings

Sunday — Read Acts 17:16-31

Paul told Gentiles about God the Creator and Redeemer.

- What false gods do people follow today? Think about priorities and how time and resources are spent.
- What does repentance look like?

Monday — Read Acts 17:32-34

Although some scoffed at Paul's speech in Athens, others came to believe.

- Is it worth it to serve and witness to a crowd if only a few believe as a result?
- How have you seen God turn something around that felt unsuccessful?

Tuesday — Read Acts 18:1-17

In Corinth, some Jews said Paul was corrupting their faith, but others believed and were baptized.

- Do you think Paul turned to the Gentiles out of a sense of calling, frustration, or both?
- What do you see as the government's role in disagreements within religious communities?

Wednesday — Read Acts 19:1-10

Paul baptized believers in Ephesus and preached in a lecture hall after being turned out of the synagogue.

- Why do Christians baptize?
- What does it mean to receive the Holy Spirit? How do you know if you have?

Thursday —

Read Acts 19:21-22; 20:17-28

Knowing that he was headed to Rome to go to trial, Paul defended his ministry and encouraged others to continue his work.

- Given Paul's experiences, what response should we expect when we share the good news?
- What does it mean to "shepherd" the church of God as overseers?

Friday — Read Acts 22:1-11

Paul defended himself in front of the court, reminding them of his education and telling them the story of his conversion.

- How would you tell the story of your faith in Jesus to someone else?
- What is most surprising to you about Paul's defense?

Saturday — Read Acts 22:12-21

Paul continued his defense, telling how Ananias healed his sight and explaining the vision that led him to preach to the Gentiles.

- Do you believe someone like Paul can have their sins forgiven and turn to a new life?
- Why did Paul have a vision of Jesus?