

Series: Going Public with Your Faith (Part 3)

## Build Bridges

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September 6, 2009

### Scripture:

#### Acts 17:16-34 (NIV)

<sup>16</sup>While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. <sup>17</sup>So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. <sup>18</sup>A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler 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. <sup>19</sup>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?" <sup>20</sup>You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." <sup>21</sup>(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

<sup>22</sup>Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. <sup>23</sup>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. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

<sup>24</sup>"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 hands. <sup>25</sup>And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. <sup>26</sup>From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. <sup>27</sup>God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. <sup>28</sup>'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

<sup>29</sup>"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 man's design and skill. <sup>30</sup>In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. <sup>31</sup>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 all men by raising him from the dead."

<sup>32</sup>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." <sup>33</sup>At that, Paul left the Council. <sup>34</sup>A few men 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.

#### John 3:1-18 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.

<sup>2</sup>He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

<sup>3</sup>In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again"

<sup>4</sup>"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

<sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. <sup>7</sup>You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' <sup>8</sup>The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

<sup>9</sup>"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

<sup>10</sup>"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? <sup>11</sup>I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. <sup>12</sup>I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? <sup>13</sup>No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup>Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

<sup>16</sup>For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,<sup>[f]</sup> that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup>Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son

# Group Session

## Opening Question

The service started out with a video about Florida Quarterback Tim Tebow's mission trip to the Philippines. Tim is very outspoken about his faith in Christ, using his platform as a Heisman Trophy winner to share Christ with others. Do you think it is easier or more difficult for us to take a stand for Christ than it is for famous people? Why?

## Discussing the Scripture & Life

1. Pastor Les said that Paul was concerned about the Greeks because he believed in the reality of heaven and hell. How often do most believers give thought to eternity? What would change in the lives of most believers if we really believed in and often thought about heaven and hell?
2. We've got to start where people are in their journey to faith. How near are the people on your Impact List to be ready to hear the gospel?
3. Paul's starting place in sharing the gospel was finding common ground. We can have common ground in both spiritual and non-spiritual areas of life.
  - a. What are some possible areas of common ground that will just help us build relationships with people (non-spiritual areas)?
  - b. What are some likely areas of spiritual common ground that we might have as a jumping off place to share Christ with others? (religious background, big life questions, the majesty of creation, etc.)
4. Les said, "People don't want to be our evangelism project, but they do want to be our friend." What are the implications of this statement? How do we keep people from feeling like a project in our lives?
5. Eighty-five percent of Americans are less connected with our neighbors than we were ten years ago. Here are some questions to ask yourself: (don't wait for answers) Do you know your neighbor's names, children, hobbies? Do you know the parents of children on your children's sports teams? Do you know about other religions enough to dialogue about them?

How have you done at developing relationships with people outside of home and church?
6. Bill Hybels in his book Contagious Christianity gives a great formula for having maximum impact on the lives of others. Explain the formula and then ask the group these questions:
  - a. Which of these is the strongest of the three in your life?
  - b. Which of these is the weakest of the three in your life?
  - c. What can we do to strengthen the weak area?

High potency + Close proximity + Clear communication = Maximum Impact

High potency

Dfn.: Living a vital spiritual life.  
If we aren't living it, we can't sell it.

- Close proximity      Dfn.: Having relationships with lost people.  
We can impact something with which we don't have contact.
- Clear communication      Dfn.: Using words to let people know why our life is different.  
People won't come to Christ unless we tell them how.
- Maximum Impact      Dfn.: Seeing lives changed.  
Without all three parts of the formula, God won't likely use us to be an impact on others.

### **Closing Challenge**

Choose one of the parts of the formula and make a commitment to improve that area this week. Share with the group what you hope to change this week.

### **Notes**

A good web site to look for information on other religions is found at [4truth.net](http://4truth.net)

### **Other Passages Referenced**

#### **Acts 17:16, NIV**

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.

#### **Acts 1:8**

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

#### **Romans 1:16**

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.