

6-SESSION
BIBLE STUDY

BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE

Session 6 (Leader's Guide)

SMALL GROUPS

UNSTOPPABLE GOSPEL



GREGG MATTE

 **LifeWay**
Biblical Solutions for Life

SESSION 6

UNSTOPPABLE IMPACT

QUESTION #1: *What do you enjoy most about different cultures?*

Optional activity: Supplement your group's discussion of Question 1 by making travel brochures and books available at the beginning of your gathering. Make sure to bring books and brochures that highlight different cultures around the world, and encourage group members to glance through them as they discuss what they like best about different cultures.

THE POINT

The gospel of Jesus Christ can impact any culture.

Passage: Acts 17:16–31

The Setting: During Paul's second missionary journey, in answer to a vision, Paul and his companions brought the gospel to Macedonia and into Europe for the first time. After visiting Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, Paul traveled to Athens. While waiting for his companions Silas and Timothy to join him, Paul spent his time preaching the gospel to the people of Athens—to the Jews in the synagogue, the general populace and the philosophers in the marketplace, and the leadership at the Areopagus.

Bible Meets Life

If you've ever visited another country, you know things are different.

- We've been taught it's rude to stick your tongue out at somebody, but in Tibet, that's a very polite gesture.
- We shake our heads when we mean "no," and nod our heads when we mean "yes." In Albania, those gestures are reversed.

- We like ketchup with our French fries, or perhaps a little mustard. The Dutch prefer mayonnaise.



Is one of these approaches better than another? No, just different. But even in this rich variety of preferences and styles, one truth is crucial in any cultural setting: the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel can speak into any culture—and does.

As the world becomes more diverse, we will encounter different cultures, ethnicities, worldviews, and preferences in everyday life. That's not a problem; it's an opportunity. We have a command to make disciples of all nations and an unstoppable gospel that can impact any culture for Jesus Christ.

What does the Bible say?

Acts 17:16-18

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was troubled within him when he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with those who worshiped God and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Then also, some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers argued with him. Some said, "What is this pseudo-intellectual trying to say?" Others replied, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign deities"—because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the Resurrection.



Athens may have been the intellectual center of the world, but it was also a place of idolatry and superstition. Shrines and statues to Greek gods stood at the front door of every house, all around the marketplace, and even at street crossings. Athens alone may have held as many as 3,000 public statues and 30,000 idols. In

The Satyricon, Roman satirist Petronius Arbiter, who lived at that time, wrote that it was easier to find a god than a man in that city.

All this idol worship broke Paul's heart, but he chose to do something about it. He walked into the Agora—the marketplace—and sparked conversations. At the Agora he met two types of thinkers:

1. Epicurean philosophers believed the purpose of life was in finding pleasure and eliminating pain. They thought that God, if He existed at all, was not involved in our lives. Furthermore, they did not believe in life after death.
2. Stoic philosophers were pantheists, believing in an ultimate divine principle that exists throughout the universe and nature, including human beings. They believed the way to realize your fullest potential was to live by reason. The Stoics believed they could eliminate suffering through intellectual perfection.

In Acts 17, Paul gave us an example of communicating the gospel in a diverse culture. Singapore is a very diverse country: cultures, ethnicities, worldviews, and preferences. It is our human nature to gravitate toward people who are more like ourselves, but the beauty of the gospel is that it is not only for people “just like me.” The gospel speaks to any culture, any time, and any place. We need to build a bridge from Christ to culture and from culture to Christ. God wants to use us to build bridges and relationships with others.

QUESTION #2: *What are the cultures and subcultures in your community?*

What questions do you have about what it means to impact our culture with the gospel of Christ?

Optional follow-up: In what ways is our culture similar to and different from the one Paul visited in Athens?

Here in the cultural and intellectual center of the Roman Empire—where Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle had once taught, and where intellectuals still loved to debate—Paul dove right into the discussion with philosophers who were worlds apart from him in their beliefs. To be sure, these philosophers made fun of Paul, labeling him a “pseudo-intellectual.” But Paul was not deterred.

When you know the truth and realize people need to hear it, you just engage, whatever the consequences.

Remember the words of Jesus: *“No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven”* (Matt. 5:15-16).

Acts 17:22-23

²² Then Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that you are extremely religious in every respect. ²³ For as I was passing through and observing the objects of your worship, I even found an altar on which was inscribed: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.”

When we meet someone different from us, we have a choice. We can focus on the differences and keep our distance, or we can find common ground and come together. We can build fences, or we can build bridges.

Paul was a bridge-builder.

When Paul talked about Jesus, some of the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers tagged him as a blowhard who didn’t know what he was talking about. But others were intrigued. They wanted to hear more. So they escorted Paul to the Areopagus, the Athenian court and the hill where it convened, for a public hearing of sorts.

Optional follow-up: How can we use the things we have in common with others as a gateway to sharing Jesus?

Building Bridges

Paul used an important element of Athenian culture to build a bridge to the gospel. Choose two of the following elements of our culture and record how followers of Christ might build a bridge from that element to the gospel.

Movies

TV Shows

Books

Video Games

Hobbies

Sports

"Then He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.'"

—Mark 16:15

Paul's audience didn't know about Jesus, nor did they believe in one God. Paul had no obvious connecting point to begin a conversation, but he found one: they worshiped, and so did Paul. Granted, they were worshiping the wrong things, but at least they were spiritual seekers. Paul used their spirituality to make a connection.

QUESTION #3: *What principles and practices can we gain from Paul's approach to sharing the gospel?*

The construction of an altar "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD" was clearly the Athenians' attempt to make sure they didn't unintentionally forget, and thereby risk offending, one of the gods. Paul used their acknowledgment that there could be a god they didn't know as an opening to introduce them to "The God who made the world and everything in it" (v. 24). Moving forward, he proclaimed the truth about God and His plan to save them.

With the growing diversity in Singapore, most of us rub shoulders daily with people who are very different from us. Separated by language, culture, religion, race, ethnicity, and politics, sometimes it's hard to find common ground. Yet, when you begin to look for a connecting point, you'll find it. Love of family, the pain of loss, hobbies and interests, food, work, health—these are things we all share.

Make it a point to look and listen for bridge-building material.

Acts 17:30-31

³⁰ *"Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent,"* ³¹ *because He has set a day when He is going to judge the world in righteousness by the Man He has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead."*

It's great to go where people are and get involved in what they're doing. It's great to ask questions and start discussions. But it doesn't end there. To stop there is like walking away from the marathon just short of the finish line.

QUESTION #4: *Why are so many Christians comfortable with remaining silent?*

This question is designed to help group members consider things that can get in the way of speaking up. Answers will vary based on individual experiences. Optional follow-up: What are some of the ways we rationalize our silence when we miss opportunities to share the gospel?

During the days of Elisha, the Arameans were at war with Israel. The city of Samaria was under siege and food was scarce (see 2 Kings 6:8,24-29). One day, four lepers, living outside the city because of their disease, decided to go to the Arameans in hopes of finding food. To their astonishment, the Aramean camp was a ghost town. During the night, the Lord had caused the Arameans to flee. They left behind food, clothing, silver, and gold. The four lepers had escaped their dire straits and landed in paradise.

The lepers ate and drank their fill and hid their plunder (see 7:5-7). Then they remembered their kinsmen starving back in the city. "Then they said to each other, 'We're not doing what is right. Today is a day of good news. If we are silent and wait until morning light, our sin will catch up with us. Let's go tell the king's household'" (v. 9, emphasis added).



Those of us who know Jesus are a lot like those lepers who found hope. We have found the answer to our deepest need, but it's also the answer to the deepest needs of all those people "back in the city" who don't yet know Jesus as Savior. This is a day of good news! The gospel is too good not to share.

As Paul spoke at the Areopagus, he couched the message in terms familiar to his listeners. He quoted their poets and spoke their language. But he still got down to the gospel. The Athenians struggled to accept God as Creator and

Judge and to believe in Jesus' resurrection, but on these points, Paul did not compromise the truths of the gospel.

Paul met them on their grounds, brought the truth of Jesus into the conversation, and crossed the finish line in communicating the gospel. The rest was up to God

QUESTION #5: *How can our group engage one or more of the cultures in our community?*

This question is associated with building biblical community. Developing an action plan as a group creates connection and accountability among the members. Belonging to redemptive community is an important aspect of being part of an unstoppable impact.

Optional follow-up: What steps do you need to take as an individual to help your group successfully engage your community

Note: The following question does not appear in the group member book. Use it in your group discussion as time allows.

QUESTION 6: What opportunities already exist through our church for spreading the gospel to different cultures in our community?

This question provides group members with an opportunity to identify practical steps for positive actions based on opportunities that are already available to them. Try to steer them away from talking theory; encourage them to get practical.

The unstoppable gospel propels an unstoppable impact.

LIVE IT OUT

We have an imperative to take the gospel to the world, but the nations have also come to us. Therefore:

- **Get educated.** Learn about the different cultures of the people in your community. Ask about their customs, heritage, and beliefs. Attend an ethnic festival or performance. Become a student of different cultures in an effort to start discussions.
- **Get spiritual.** Follow Paul's example by attending a worship service within a different culture. Seek out common ground in order to build bridges between that culture and Christ.
- **Get official.** Talk with a staff person at your church about forming a ministry outreach to serve the different cultures in your community.

Yes, things are different in other countries and in other cultures. Those differences are neither bad nor good, yet they present a wonderful opportunity to share the good news about Jesus

Thoughts

Challenge: As the world becomes more diverse, we will encounter different cultures, ethnicities, worldviews, and preferences in everyday life. That's not a problem; it's an opportunity. The question for you is: How will you use that opportunity? Spend some time this week thinking about specific, practical actions you can take.

Pray: As the leader, close this final session of Unstoppable Gospel in prayer. Thank God for the privilege of studying His Word throughout this resource. Conclude the study by praising God for the impact of His unstoppable gospel throughout history and around the world. On behalf of your group, verbally proclaim your desire to join in the continued advancement of that gospel through the church.