

Session 5



Jesus Shared

THE POINT

*Our daily connections with people
can be opportunities to share Christ.*

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I recently watched a video on social media of a painter painting a picture in front of a live audience. He started off painting the entire canvas a dark color. It seemed odd until he started putting brighter, more vivid colors on top, drawing lines, and shading things. Suddenly, a beautiful picture of a mountain range with birds flying in the sky appeared. The dark background became the birds, which became the focus of the painting.

The wonderful thing about the gospel of Jesus is how it brings together people from diverse backgrounds—cultures, ethnicities, worldviews, and preferences—to create a beautiful picture of grace for God’s glory. What we might see as different from how we think things should be, or the kind of people God could use, are precisely the kinds of people God wants to save to create His gospel masterpiece.

In Acts 17, we learn about Paul’s interaction with the pagan philosophers at the Areopagus. This account shows us how to effectively share Jesus with people from diverse backgrounds so that we can fulfill our responsibility in God’s masterpiece of salvation. I’m praying for God to use you—like He did Paul—to reach those far from Him!

QUESTION 1:

What’s one of the most unusual pieces of art you’ve seen?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

ACTS 17:16–18

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed 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, as well as in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also debated with him. Some said, “What is this ignorant show-off 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.

When Paul arrived in Athens, he stepped into a world that was very much like the world we live in today. Luke gives us clues about the cultural forces and challenges Paul encountered in Athens. Many people openly practiced idolatry, and pagan temples littered the city. Estimates are that Athens was home to 10–15 major temples (such as the Parthenon, the Temple of Zeus, the Temple of Apollo), hundreds of smaller public shrines and altars, and many families across the city had private, pagan shrines. So, Athens was a significant center of ancient pagan worship.

Not only was Athens a center of idol worship, but it also had a large, practicing Jewish population. The synagogue was the hub of Jewish life outside of Jerusalem in the ancient world. It was a place of worship, community, and culture. It affected how Jews lived and thought. That’s why Paul made a beeline for the local synagogue whenever he arrived in a new city. He wanted to start with those who acknowledged God—Jews and Gentiles—and present Jesus as the Messiah to them.

Athens was also the center of Greek and Roman philosophy. Luke mentioned some of the first philosophers Paul encountered there: the Epicureans and Stoics. The Epicureans were hedonists who sought pleasure and avoided pain, believed the gods were indifferent to their personal lives and struggles, and had no fear of death because “when we are, death is not, and when death is present, we are not.” The Stoics focused on reason and logic, believed in a divine, rational principle called the “logos” that governs the universe, and promoted the virtues of wisdom, justice, and courage.

Stop for a second and think about the people Paul encountered in Athens. They’re the same kinds of people we encounter today.

- Idolaters
- Religious but lost
- Pleasure seekers
- Intellectuals

You see, the world in which Paul ministered and shared the gospel is no different from that in which Jesus has sent us to show and share the gospel. Both Paul's world and ours consist of lost people who need to be saved.

Opportunities to share Jesus are all around us. Just like Paul when he walked into Athens, we are surrounded daily by people who are lost, far from God, and who need to be saved. Many likely don't even know or realize that reality. They might be living for pleasure, worshiping nature, or living by logic, reason, or science alone, thinking there is no God; or if there is, He couldn't possibly care about them. Our responsibility as followers of Jesus is to have our eyes open, be sensitive to the needs of those around us, and take every opportunity to step into their world and tell them about Jesus.

Can you think back on this past week and recognize an opportunity you might have had to share Jesus with someone who was lost? Maybe you met someone at a gas station or the post office. Perhaps it's someone you work with or go to school with. We must, like Paul, live with our spiritual eyes open and be ready to share Jesus with those the Lord brings across our path.

QUESTION 2:

What distresses you about our culture and reminds you that people need Jesus?

ACTS 17:22–23

²² Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said, "People 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 I was a young seminary student, Dr. Gray Allison taught personal evangelism. During one class, he gave examples from everyday life for beginning a gospel conversation. For example, if you're talking with a police officer, you could say, "I'm so thankful you're a minister of God." Of course, they might respond, "What do you mean by that?" And you could say, "Well, Paul said in Romans that those in governmental authority are ministers of God, so I'm just so thankful you're a minister of God." The police officer might, at that point, say, "I don't even know God," or "I don't believe in God." You

could then ask them if you could share how they can come to know Him. Or, if you're at a bank counter or filling out some paperwork with a pencil and make a mistake, you could say, "Aren't you thankful for erasers? You can make a mistake and just erase it like it never happened. Did you know God can erase our sins like they never happened?" You could use simple questions like these to meet people where they are and tell them about Jesus.

Paul was incredible when it came to finding common ground and everyday ways to share the gospel with those far from God. Acts 17:22–

23 is a master class in how to find common ground with the people around you to serve as a bridge for telling them about Jesus. What I find so encouraging and instructive from this account is how Paul didn't attack the Athenians' ignorance. He used their religious curiosity as a starting point for sharing the gospel with them.

QUESTION 3:

What are some barriers to introducing the gospel in our culture?

What experiences do you have that God might use to help you share Jesus with others? What everyday topics, values, or interests do you have that might provide natural openings for spiritual conversations? You might not even consider them as "spiritual," but God can still use them—and you—to tell others about Jesus. Remember, Jesus used parables—common stories about everyday things and situations to share the most important truths of the kingdom, and He can use your experiences to make an impact for eternity in someone's life, too. God never wastes anything, including our past, hurts, successes, and losses. God can take

those things we don't even see as important or valuable and use them as doors and bridges to reach those who need to be saved.

The Areopagus is a unique and significant rocky outcropping that sits in the shadow of the Acropolis. I've been there a couple of times, and I'm always struck by just how important this big rock was for the philosophers in Paul's day and how God used it to show us how to engage those who think differently from us.

One of the biggest challenges we face as Christians when it comes to telling others about Jesus is falling into the trap of isolating ourselves from the world or blending in too much. Paul balanced this challenge effectively when he climbed those steep rock stairs carved into the side of the Areopagus to address the philosophers gathered on top. His example helps model how to effectively engage those who may be antagonistic to the claims of Christ.

QUESTION 4:

What are some bridges for introducing the gospel in our culture?

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."

Engage

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SHARING

Choose one of the following images where you might have an opportunity to share Christ. Then offer a prayer for God to open doors to do just that.



My Plan:

This account of Paul's loving confrontation with the philosophers is a prime example of how we can effectively help others see the truth of the gospel. Paul started where they were, with something very familiar to them—an inscription on an altar reading, "To The Unknown God"—and used it as an introduction to proclaim Jesus to them.

Paul didn't just proclaim the gospel and ride off into the sunset. He boldly and clearly communicated the truth of the gospel and connected it to what they already knew and understood. This is critical because even though "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God," people must also grasp the implications of the gospel to respond meaningfully.

Paul knew his audience in Athens—philosophers and scholars—would need more than just a declaration; they needed reasoning and clarity about the nature of God, sin, and repentance. Why? Because understanding leads to transformation. The goal of sharing the gospel isn't just imparting knowledge but leading others into a genuine relationship with Christ. That's why people must grasp the weight of sin, the necessity of repentance, and the hope offered through Jesus. Paul didn't shy away from hard truths like the coming judgment but presented them in a way his hearers could understand. The clarity of the message impacts how people respond.

Paul never ignored the Spirit's role in conviction. The Bible teaches the Spirit works through the message of the gospel to convict hearts and draw people to Jesus. Paul's example reflects this principle, showing us how he carefully explained repentance, judgment, and the resurrection in ways his hearers could understand.

Since we've been called to share the gospel with those who are far from God, how can we lovingly but effectively confront them with their need for Jesus, as Paul did, without compromising the truth? Here are some suggestions:

- **Build genuine relationships.** People are more open to hearing hard truths from someone who has shown genuine care for them.
- **Share your own story.** Tell them how Jesus changed your life.
- **Be clear about the necessity of repentance.** Don't sugarcoat the gospel.
- **Point to the cross, not morality.** Make it clear that salvation isn't about being "good."
- **Stay humble and avoid arguments.** Don't win the argument and lose a soul.
- **Pray before, during, and after.** Bathe the whole conversation in prayer. Pray for wisdom and for their heart to be open to the truth.
- **Offer an invitation, not an ultimatum.** Paul clearly called for the philosophers in Acts 17 to repent, but he didn't twist their arms. Give space for the Spirit to work.

Never forget that it's a great privilege to be able to share the gospel with people far from God.

QUESTION 5:

How can our group engage some of the different cultures in our community with the gospel?

LIVE IT OUT

Our daily connections with people can be opportunities to share Jesus. Choose one of the following applications:

- **Pray.** Ask God to send people across your path so that you can witness to them.
- **Prepare.** Plan and train for how you can effectively engage the people God sends with the gospel. Check out some of the North American Mission Board's resources at namb.net/evangelism.
- **Do it.** When you see the opportunity, take it, and tell those God sends your way about Jesus. Remember that their response is not what makes you successful; your faithfulness to share is.





A MELODY OF FRIENDSHIPS

by Brad Hambrick

They can transform your life.

At its simplest level, a friendship is a valued relationship that makes your life better. It often surprises us that making a good friend isn't complicated. But it equally frustrates us that making friends isn't easy.

Friendship is as easy as good conversation, shared time, and maybe some common interests mixed with equal parts of laughter and tears. That's not complicated. At a surface level, we all do those things every day. But to get beyond a surface level—where meaningful friendships begin to transform our lives—it takes intentionality.

Especially as we get older and busier, it's easy for friendships that could be transformative to stagnate into relationships that aren't as satisfying or impactful as we want them to be. Let's take seven questions that capture a holistic friendship and put verbs with each question that make a sort of "melody" for thriving friendships. These questions are the outline for my book, *Transformative Friendships: 7 Questions to Deepen Any Relationships*.

- 1. What's your story?** Transformative friends know each other, so as the friendship ages, the knowing intentionally deepens. Stagnant friends merely absorb time in each other's lives in mutually enjoyable ways.
- 2. What's good?** Transformative friends affirm the good gifts from God in each other's lives because they want to contribute to seeing their friend flourish. Stagnant friends treat these good qualities like background music in a restaurant that occasionally gets a passing comment.
- 3. What's hard?** Transformative friends support each other in hard times and remind each other that hard (suffering) doesn't mean bad (sin). Stagnant friends prefer to steer clear of the discomfort that comes with meaningfully engaging hard times.
- 4. What's bad?** Transformative friends engage as allies in each other's battle against the inherent human selfishness that would devour our lives. Stagnant friends fear being perceived as judgmental, so they avoid these uncomfortable topics.
- 5. What's fun?** Transformative friends delight in the joy of their friends and seek to enhance their joy. Stagnant friends depend solely upon common interests and convenient engagements to make the relationship emotionally "worth it."

- 6. What's stuck?** Transformative friends assess life together and make sure old habits are still serving current dreams. Stagnant friends let life happen until a crisis jolts them out of their ruts.
- 7. What's next?** Transformative friends pursue each other's dreams by praying for and investing in those dreams coming to fruition. Stagnant friends merely click "like" on a social media post when something good happens in each other's lives.

This is the melody: (1) know, (2) affirm, (3) support, (4) engage, (5) delight, (6) assess, and (7) pursue. Riff on that melody. Be creative and allow each friendship to develop a life of its own within this melody. Play relational jazz!

BALANCED FRIENDSHIPS

Some of us read this and feel two emotions, strongly and closely together. We feel excited about the possibility, and then we feel skittish as we remember friendships that went awry because they were imbalanced. Here are two things to keep in mind.

First, friendships are marked by proportional, voluntary knowledge of each other. When you know me more than I know you (or vice versa), either the friendship is imbalanced, or it's a helping relationship being called by the wrong name. Helping relationships like counseling, shepherding, and mentoring are wonderful. But they're not friendships.

Use weightlifting as a visual parallel. Avoid having friendships where the level of mutual awareness is imbalanced as "that guy" at the gym with a bull chest and chicken legs. (If that's you, quit skipping leg day.)

Why does bull-chicken man work out that way? He has favorite exercises and muscle groups. Why do we develop bull-chicken friendships? We

have a favorite area of friendship, so we focus disproportionately on that question. Or we want to be a friend more than we want to have a friend. It is safer and less vulnerable to just know and care for others, so we listen more than we share. Conversely, maybe we want to have friends more than be a friend, so we talk more than we listen. Build your friendships proportionally.

My goal with the bull-chicken man metaphor is to ensure you won't be able to unsee it. I want the image to be sticky enough that you won't excuse whatever motivates you toward disproportional awareness in your friendships.

Second, friendships are marked by proportional, shared investment in the relationship. The first point was about information; this point is about involvement. Friends have comparable awareness of each other and put comparable effort into their friendship. This doesn't mean everything has to be 50-50, but if it's consistently 80-20 it's not a friendship, it's a helping relationship.

You can't force a relationship to be 50-50 or 60-40. One person's overdoing doesn't mean the other person owes comparable investment in the relationship. That's transactional. It's an unhealthy expectation—in other words, a demand. Friendship is voluntary.

FRIENDSHIPS WITH NON-CHRISTIANS

I hope, as you read this, your mind drifts toward the question, "Could I have friendships like you're describing with my non-Christian peers? If so, what would it sound like to transition from one of these seven questions to the gospel?" To the first question, yes. To the second question, it sounds like sharing your life in a way that communicates why the gospel is so important to you.

As Christians, we shouldn't be able to answer these seven questions, especially at the deeper levels, without talking about our faith. When your friends talk about things that are most important



to them, you listen with interest. The reverse is true as well. Be a great friend: engage all seven questions together and convey the relevance of the gospel as you do.

Be intentional about deepening your friendships with non-Christians in the same way you are with fellow believers. As the friendship deepens, talk more openly, more passionately, and more vulnerably about your faith. If you do that, you will not only share your faith frequently, but you will do so effectively.

We often miss one of the dominant metaphors the Bible uses for the life of believers. Second Corinthians 5:20 says we are Christ's ambassadors. Ambassadors are relational representatives of leaders of another country. We are God's relational representatives from heaven to our friends—both believers and nonbelievers. Build the melody of these seven questions into your friendships and watch as God uses them to transform your life and the lives of your friends.

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ENGAGE WITH SCRIPTURE	The Greatest Truths of All Time			
OBEY GOD & DENY SELF	How to Handle Life’s Interruptions			
EXERCISE FAITH		Limited Resources, Limitless God		
SHARE CHRIST		Sharing Jesus in a Post-Christian World		
SEEK GOD			God Is: Understanding the Character of God	
LIVE UNASHAMED			Seize the Day: Embracing a Mission with Purpose	
BUILD RELATIONSHIPS				Connecting with Others Like Jesus Did
SERVE GOD AND OTHERS				Essentials for Christian Living

COMING NEXT QUARTER

GOD IS: UNDERSTANDING THE CHARACTER OF GOD

- Session 1 **God Is Holy** • Psalm 99:1–9
- Session 2 **God Is Love** • 1 John 4:7–19
- Session 3 **God Is Just** • Psalm 7:1–13
- Session 4 **God Is Omnipotent** • Isaiah 44:6–9,21–28
- Session 5 **God Is Faithful** • Deuteronomy 7:6-16
- Session 6 **God Is Life-Giving** • Mark 16:1-6; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4,26-28
- Session 7 **God Is Eternal** • Psalm 102:18-28

SEIZE THE DAY: EMBRACING A MISSION WITH PURPOSE

- Session 1 **A Mission Full of Opportunities** • Acts 3:1-10
- Session 2 **A Mission with a Message** • Acts 3:12-20,24-26
- Session 3 **A Mission Met with Courage** • Acts 4:1-3,8-12,19-20
- Session 4 **A Mission Soaked in Prayer** • Acts 4:23-31
- Session 5 **A Mission Outside Your Comfort Zone** • Acts 8:26-38
- Session 6 **A Mission Without Boundaries** • Acts 13:1-3,44-52

DON'T FORGET TO REMEMBER

- Special Focus **Don't Forget to Remember** • Joshua 4:1-7,20-24



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LIMITED RESOURCES, LIMITLESS GOD.

Our culture has often touted the virtues and value of the self-reliant individual. Reality hits us in the face, though, and we discover that, in one way or another, we fall short of being our best and being the people God calls us to be. God never intended for us to stand alone but to rely on Him. When we look to Him, we discover that our all-gracious and limitless God is more than enough to help us live life to the fullest. This study was written by Matt Tullos, a church specialist with the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board.

SHARING JESUS IN A POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD.

Judeo-Christian teaching and thinking have long dominated our American culture, but in recent years, society has been drifting away from this foundation. Truth has become whatever you want it to be, and culture thinks Jesus is whoever you want Him to be. But the gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ—is still as relevant and still as needed today. This study was written by Brad Whitt, the senior pastor of Abilene Baptist Church in Augusta, Georgia.

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