

## 4. Learning to Listen

**Main message:** To communicate the Gospel effectively, we must learn to ask questions and listen well.

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**Recap from session 3:** Last week we discussed the power of your story. Did you manage to share your story with anyone this week? Did it lead to any good conversations?

*As leader of the discussion, you may want to share your own experience of doing this.*

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**Opening question:** Can you think of a time where you have needed help but have not been properly understood or listened to? How did it make you feel?

*E.g. On the phone to a customer support helpline, seeking help from a doctor, or in a foreign country where language has been a barrier.*

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In Acts 17, the Apostle Paul got an opportunity to preach the Gospel at the Areopagus in Athens. The Areopagus was the centre of cultural influence and political power in the city.

**Scripture:** Read **Acts 17:16-21** together.

**Question:** Before Paul 'proclaimed' the Gospel at the Areopagus, what did he do?

*V.16. He spent some time in Athens experiencing the culture.*

*V.17-18a. He engaged in lots of conversations with local people.*

*V.18b. He regularly shared the Good News of Jesus (at least, the 'core events' of the Gospel). 'Practising' regularly gave him better insights into the kind of questions that the Athenians asked. Regular practise is important for us too, as we seek to become more effective witnesses.*

**Scripture:** Read **Acts 17:22-34** together.

**Question** Why do you think Paul starts by quoting the inscription on the altar to the 'unknown God' (verse 23) and later quotes Greek poetry (verse 28)?

- *Paul is 'building bridges' to his listeners. He demonstrates that he has understood the cultural and religious context he's sharing into.*
  - *Paul looks for the beliefs held by the Athenians that he can happily affirm (things that were in harmony with biblical truth).*
    - *He uses their altar to affirm there is a God.*
    - *He uses their poetry to say we're all connected to God and we all owe our existence to him.*
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**Question:** Think of the assumptions and beliefs held by people around you (those who don't yet know Jesus). What elements of those beliefs are in harmony with the Gospel of Jesus?

*Many cultural values in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain are deeply biblical in their origins! E.g. Equality (we're all made in the image of God therefore everyone has intrinsic value), compassion, care for the poor, ideas of 'right' and 'wrong', etc. See the **book recommendation** below for more on this!*

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**Question:** Paul shares the Gospel between verse 22-31. What do you notice about what he includes as he shares the Gospel?

*After building a bridge, Paul has a platform to share some of the distinctive points of difference within the Gospel. E.g:*

- *V.25. God doesn't draw near to humans because he needs us.*
- *V.29. Human beings do not get to decide what God is like (he's not something we have created. It is the other way round!).*
- *V.30-31a. God calls all human beings to repent – turn towards him – because a time is coming when he will judge all people by his own standards.*
- *V.31. The one appointed to judge is a man and yet has also proven himself to be God by rising from the dead – Jesus!*

*Like Paul, let's be bold in sharing the life-giving message of Jesus!*

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**Prayer in small group:** Read **1 Corinthians 9:19-23** together. Pray that God would help you to listen well and give you insights into what people around you believe. Ask that He would help you "become all things to all people, that by all means [you] might save some."

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**Great Commission challenge:** Speak to someone and find out what they believe about the meaning of life, God, faith etc. You could ask questions like, "Do you have a faith yourself?", "Are you religious?", or "What's your faith journey been like?"

If the person is happy to chat, keep asking questions until you really understand what they believe.

*Leader, you may need to remind the group of this activity during the week!*

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**Book recommendation:** *The Air We Breathe* by Glen Scrivener  
(<https://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/the-air-we-breathe>)

Explore how the teachings of Jesus not only turned the ancient world upside down but continue to underpin the way we think of life, worth, and meaning today. Far from being a relic from the past, the distinctive ideas of Christianity, such as freedom, kindness, progress, and equality, are a crucial part of the air that we breathe.