



How Can I Stay Relevant? Acts 17:16-34

Three characteristics of those who stay relevant: **they are . . .** 1] consistently committed to an awareness of the world around them, 2] on a relentless pursuit for understanding, and 3] committed to informed responses to the beliefs, values, customs, and institutions they interact with every day.

Paul Pursuing Relevance in Athens [provoked]:

- 1] Observes/Engages/Proclaims the Gospel [16-20]
- 2] Commentary on the Culture [21]
- 3] Paul's Sermon - Areopagus [22-31]
 - a. Introduction - Observations [22-23]
 - b. The Creator God [24-25]
 - c. God Created All Men [26]
 - d. Man's Purpose - Seeking and Finding God [27a]
 - e. God's Presence [27b-28]
 - f. Invitation - Repent [29-31]
- 4] Sermon Responses [32-34]
 - a. Mocking [32a]
 - b. Let's set up a meeting [32b]
 - c. Peaceful Exit - Don't Miss This! [33]
 - d. New Believers - Dionysius/Damaris/Others [34]

"If the antidote to irrelevance is change, what does change look like?" [the road to transformation]

1. Love the Mission More Than The Methods
2. Become A Student of Culture
3. Surround Yourself With Younger People

Found in Carey Nieuwhof's book *Didn't See It Coming*

Discussion Questions

1. Of the 3 characteristics of those who stay relevant what is the easiest one for you? the hardest one?
2. Read Acts 17:22-34. Meditate on each deliberate action God used to express His love. For example, "made the world and everything in it" (v. 24), "he is not far from each one of us" (v. 27), and "in him we live and move about and exist" (v. 28). What actions minister to you? What part of your life needs this reminder? [Abide]
3. The road to relevance begins with change. What one of the three transformational practices will you work on this week?
4. Pray asking God for insight on how to stay relevant as we reach the current culture with the gospel.

Acts 17:16-33 [Paul Observes and Engages the Culture] ¹⁶ Now while Paul was waiting for them [Silas and Timothy] at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. [paroksýnō - feelings that lead to action] ¹⁷ So he reasoned [dialegomai - process of giving and receiving information with someone to reach deeper understanding] in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. [where the sages and orators with their own schools practiced their skills] ¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also [1] conversed with him. [see their beliefs below] And some said, "What does this babbling wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ [Invitation to Speak] And they [2] took him and [3] brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰ For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." ²¹ [Commentary on the Philosophical Culture] Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

²² [Committed to an Awareness of the World Around Him] So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ [Relentless Pursuit for Understanding] For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' [Commitment to an Informed Response] What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him [implies the kind of groping around in darkness, without really knowing how to find God, though they hope that they would - ESVSB]

Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for *In him we live and move and have our being*; [Cretan poet - Epinedes, 600B.C.] as even some of your own poets have said, "*For we are indeed his offspring.*" [Cicilan Poet - Aratus, 315-240 B.C.]

²⁹ Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." [scandalous doctrine for the Greeks]

³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this."

³³ So Paul went out from their midst. ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Epicureanism and Stoicism were two popular schools of philosophical thought in ancient Greece. The former was founded by Epicurus, who did not believe in the afterlife and emphasized the pursuit of pleasure and freedom from pain. Founded by Zeno, Stoicism was pantheistic and emphasized the pursuit of virtue. - Tony Evans Study Bible