**Sermon Based Community Group Leader Guide**

**Acts 17:1-15**

**\* Read Acts 17:1-15. Open in Prayer.**

**\* Sermon Overview**

In this sermon, both Pastor Scott and Pasto Blake will address the theme of missional living. They will walk through what marks/characterizes Spirit-empowered witnesses who turn the world upside down, and they will discuss how the reactions to God’s Word varies from person to person and place to place.

Take time to pray for them as they continue to think over the passage and the sermon this weekend and pray for your heart (and the heart of all those who will be there on Sunday) to be receptive to God’s Word on Sunday.

**\* Prompt Questions**

1. Was there anything that stood out to you in the pastor’s sermon? Are there any clarifying questions that you may have regarding the sermon?

2. How have you been seeking to apply the sermon in your own life this week? Or, what is one way that you can apply the sermon to your life this week?

3. What was the take away from the sermon for you? If you had to sum up the main idea of the sermon in one sentence, what would it be? What main themes do you see in the text and did you hear in the sermon?

4. How have you seen God at work this week in your life and in the lives of those around you? How has God been working in you this week through His Word, through prayer, through the body of Christ, and through service/evangelism? What were the highlights and lowlights of your week? How can we be praying for you specifically?

**\* Observation/Interpretation Questions[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Note: Please do not feel compelled to get through every one of these questions. I have given them in hopes that they will drive us back to the text so that we may diligently search the Scriptures as the Bereans did (Acts 17:10-15). These questions will give us a grasp of what the text says/means so that we can apply the text to our lives. I would encourage you to spend the majority of your time on application questions so that we can become “doers of the Word and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

**1. What is the context of Acts 17:1-15?**

*Luke wrote Luke and Acts (written around A.D. 62) to Theophilus in order to give him an accurate account of the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and to tell how Jesus continues to work through Spirit-empowered witnesses to carry the gospel to the end of the earth without hindrance and with boldness. Acts 1:8 serves as the theme verse of the book and as the outline for the book, for chapters 1-7 focus on Jerusalem, chapters 8-12 focus on Judea and Samaria, and chapters 13-28 focus on the end of the earth. The risen Lord sends His Spirit to empower followers of the Way to be witnesses who proclaim the kingdom of God to the end of the earth.*

*After being released from prison and asked to leave Philippi, Paul and Silas (and presumably Timothy) traveled to Thessalonica to preach the gospel. In Thessalonica, Paul and Silas spent three Sabbath days reasoning, explaining, and proving from the Scriptures that Jesus suffered and rose from the dead and that Jesus is the Christ. Some Jews believed, along with many devout Greeks and leading Gentile women of the city. Yet, some Jews who were jealous took the following actions: (1) incited a mob; (2) sought to arrest Paul and Silas but settled for Jason and some of the brothers after they could not find Paul and Silas; (3) charged them with disturbing the peace and violating the decrees of Caesar. The city leaders resolved this issue by taking money to guarantee no more disturbances would occur, and Jason and the brothers sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea.*

*Arriving in Berea, Paul and Silas went into the Jewish synagogue to preach the gospel. Yet, the response of the Jews in Berea differed from those of Thessalonica, as they received the word with eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if Paul and Silas were preaching the truth. The Spirit used the preaching of His Word to bring many Jews to faith, along with a good number of Greek women of high standing and men who also believed. However, when word of the Bereans’ faith reached the Jews of Thessalonica, they came to Berea to agitate and stir up trouble. Once again, Paul was sent away to Athens while Paul and Silas remained for a short time. Shortly after Paul left, Silas and Timothy rejoined Paul in Athens from which their ministry together continued.*

*As we read through this passage, we see the following themes: the proclamation of the gospel no matter the reaction/response/circumstance, the power of the gospel to change lives, and the suffering that missionaries endure for the sake of the gospel. As we read through this passage, dwell on the following questions: What is it that leads to the differing responses in Thessalonica and Berea? What characterizes/marks the ministry of Paul and Silas that leads to the Thessalonians saying, “These men who have turned the world upside down…”? What does this passage reveal about the power of the gospel and the cost of following Jesus?*



*Note: This map comes from the ESV Study Bible. It is about 100 miles from Philippi to Thessalonica. Berea was about 50 miles southwest of Thessalonica.*

*Darrell Bock writes, “In sum, the pattern of preaching to mixed reaction and opposition continues, as does each local congregation’s concern that Paul not be put at risk by too much controversy. The additional note here is the character of the Beroeans as willing to seek out what the Scripture teaches. The Christian life is an examined life, where one employs the Scripture like an X-ray to ascertain the nature of religious truth, life, and one’s heart.”*

**2. What is going on in Acts 17:1-9?**

*Upon arriving in Thessalonica, Paul went to the synagogue on three Sabbath days to reason, explain, and prove from the Scriptures that the Christ must suffer and rise from the dead and that Jesus is the Christ/Messiah. In response to the preaching of the Word, some Jews believed, along with many devout Greeks and leading women of the city. However, some Jews stirred up opposition to Paul and Silas by inciting mob violence and by charging them with disturbing the peace and sedition (or violating the decrees of Caesar by declaring that Jesus is King). Since the jealous Jews could not find Paul and Silas, they brought Jason and some of the brothers before the assembly instead. Jason and the brothers were released after giving money to the city leaders, assuring them that there would no longer be a disturbance of the peace, which meant that Paul and Silas would be asked to leave the city.*

*As you read the passage, think over these questions: What passages from the Old Testament could Paul have addressed that would show that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead and that Jesus is the Messiah? What passages in the New Testament would you go to in order to show the same truths? What characteristics/actions mark Paul and Silas, men who turned the world upside down? Why is it that some receive and others reject Jesus? Where do you go to engage and connect with unbelievers? How can we as a community group help one another reach unbelievers where we live, work, and play, and how can we hold one another accountable for reaching unbelievers where we live, work, and play? What are charges that people make against Christians today in order to stymie the growth of the gospel?*

*Note that women play a role in Acts in the belief and proclamation of the gospel. For some passages, see Acts 2:18; 5:14; 9:2, 36-42; 12:12-17; 13:50; 16:13-15; 17:4, 12, 34; 18:18-26.*

*Note that the charges (disturbing the peace and sedition/violating the decrees of Caesar) against Paul and Silas were like those made against Jesus (see Luke 23:2-4; John 19:12, 15).*

*For passages related to the jealousy and opposition of the Jews (and Gentiles), see Acts 5:17; 13:45; 14:2, 19; 16:19; 17:5-9; 18:12-17; 19:23-28.*

*For Old Testament passages related to the suffering and resurrection of Christ, see Psalms 2, 16, 22, 110, 118; Isaiah 52-53; Zechariah 12:10; 13:7.*

*John Polhill writes, “They were claiming that there was another king than Caesar—Jesus. This was virtually the same charge leveled at Jesus (see Luke 23:2-4; John 19:12, 15). Jesus claimed a kingdom not of this world, and Paul and Silas spoke of the same. But to a Roman, the charge sounded very much like a breach of the oath of loyalty that every person in the empire was required to render to Caesar.”*

**3. What is going on in Acts 17:10-15?**

*Shortly after arriving in Berea, Paul headed to the synagogue to preach Christ. Unlike the Thessalonian Jews, in Berea the Jews received the Word with eagerness and examined all that Paul spoke to see if it was true (in other words, in according with the Old Testament Scriptures). Many of the Berean Jews believed the gospel, along with many Greek women of high standing and Greek men. However, when the Thessalonian Jews heard what was happening, they came to Berea to stir up trouble and to agitate the situation. Thus, once again, Paul was run out of a city. In due time, Silas and Timothy would join Paul in Athens where there missionary journey would continue.*

*As you read this passage, think over the following questions: Why are the reactions of the Thessalonians and Bereans so different? How do we see the power of the gospel in these verses? How do we cultivate a heart that receives the Word with eagerness and a heart that examines the Word voraciously? Do we expect suffering and how ought we to respond to suffering? Can you share how the Word of God worked in your life this week? Can you share an opportunity you had for a gospel conversation this week and how that individual responded to the Word?*

*For opening of the Word to the Jews, see a similar experience in Luke 24, specifically verses 26, 44-46.*

*Derek Thomas writes, “Luke provides us with three statements describing the Bereans’ engagement with Paul’s preaching of the Scriptures. They received, examined, and believed what they heard. For the sake of alliteration, we might say they received, researched, and responded to the preaching of Paul.”*

*Regarding the itineraries of Paul, Silas, and Timothy, the ESV Study Bible states: “Luke does not at this point give many details about the travels of Silas and Timothy, but Paul gives more information in*[*1 Thessalonians 3*](https://www.esv.org/1%2BThessalonians%2B3/)*, and Luke gives more details at*[*Acts 18:1, 5*](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2B18%3A1%3B%2BActs%2B18%3A5/)*. These passages reveal the following sequence: (1) Paul traveled to Athens, leaving Silas and Timothy in Berea (*[*17:14–15*](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2B17%3A14-15/)*). (2) Paul summoned Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens (*[*v. 15*](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2B17%3A15/)*). (3) Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Athens (*[*v. 16*](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2B17%3A16/)*;*[*1 Thessalonians 3:1–2*](https://www.esv.org/1%2BThessalonians%2B3%3A1-2/)*). (4) Paul became concerned for the churches he had just founded in Macedonia (in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea), so he sent Timothy to Thessalonica to find out how that church was doing amid its persecution and opposition (*[*1 Thessalonians 3:1–2*](https://www.esv.org/1%2BThessalonians%2B3%3A1-2/)*). At the same time he must have sent Silas somewhere else in Macedonia (*[*Acts 18:5*](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2B18%3A5/)*), being willing to be left at Athens “alone” (*[*1 Thessalonians 3:1*](https://www.esv.org/1%2BThessalonians%2B3%3A1/)*). It is likely that Silas went at least to Philippi but possibly also to Berea. (5) Paul “left Athens and went to Corinth” (*[*Acts 18:1*](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2B18%3A1/)*). (6) Silas and Timothy joined Paul again in Corinth, bringing good news from the churches of Macedonia (*[*18:5*](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2B18%3A5/)*;*[*1 Thessalonians 3:6*](https://www.esv.org/1%2BThessalonians%2B3%3A6/)*). (7) From Corinth, Paul wrote his two letters to the church at Thessalonica (*[*1 Thessalonians 1:1*](https://www.esv.org/1%2BThessalonians%2B1%3A1/)*;*[*2 Thessalonians 1:1*](https://www.esv.org/2%2BThessalonians%2B1%3A1/)*; both of these letters come from “Paul, Silvanus [= Silas], and Timothy”).”*

**4. What are some application points for Acts 17:1-15?**

*As you look to apply this passage, the following application points provide a starting point:*

*(1) Do we have a custom (a pattern/practice) of where we go to engage and connect with unbelievers? For Paul, his pattern was to visit the Jewish synagogues in the cities (see Acts 17:2, 10, 17; 13:5, 14; 14:1; 18:4; 19:8). Where are you and I going to engage and connect with unbelievers? Take time to talk about how you can engage and connect with unbelievers where you live, work, and play. Pray for God to give you wisdom, boldness, and favor as you engage and connect with unbelievers.*

*(2) When we engage and connect with unbelievers, do we reason, explain, and prove from the Scriptures that Jesus suffered and rose from the dead and that Jesus is the Christ? Do you feel confident and equipped to use the Word in witnessing to unbelievers around you? Take time to talk about the storyline of the gospel. Write down 3 to 5 ways that you can become more familiar with the Bible so that you can use it in your gospel conversations.*

*(3) Do you receive the Word with eagerness, examine the Word daily, and believe the Word wholeheartedly? This is certainly the description of how unbelieving Berean Jews received the Word (which is a mark of God working in their lives), but this should also characterize the heart of believers concerning the Word. How can we cultivate a heart that responds to the Word in this Way? How can we prepare our hearts for the Word? Take time to talk about your approach to God’s Word and how you seek to study/understand/apply God’s Word. How can we as a community group spur one another on in this discipline and aid one another in growing in this discipline of the Christian life? As an aside, when you come to community group and to worship, do you expect to hear from God and do you hunger for God’s Word?*

*Derek Thomas writes, “An obvious strategy emerges as Paul seems to deliberately head for the larger cities of the empire. Places such as Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, and Thessalonica were centers of Roman administration and influence. Perhaps one of the reasons he chose these cities was not simply the size of their populations but also that visitors would be present on business (as Lydia, who was from Thyatira, had been in Philippi) from areas that Paul would have had no possibility of visiting. We must not blur the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the apostle directly, as had been the case in Troas when he was constrained by a vision to head over to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10). But this does not negate a strategic plan in the mind of the apostle.”*

*Michael Green writes, “He made for the centers from which the gospel could sound out into the surrounding area, as it did from Thessalonica and Ephesus.”*

*Tony Merida writes, “The Word of God is central in these stories. Paul and his companions turned the world upside down by turning the Word loose! Keep teaching and learning the Christ-centered Scriptures, and ask God to use you to change neighborhoods and nations for the glory of King Jesus.”*

**\* Application Questions**

Note: Please do not feel compelled to use every question, for you will have time for 3 to 5 questions. I’ve tried to offer enough for you to pick the ones you think will best fit your group, as you know what your ladies or men are going through at this time and may need to hear. Also, please note that these questions might be adjusted to reflect what the pastor calls us to do in application of the sermon.

1. One of the patterns of Paul in Acts is that he first goes to a synagogue when he arrives in a new town (if there is a synagogue there), for he knows people who need the gospel are located there. As we look at our own lives, where can we go to connect with and engage unbelievers with the gospel? How can we as a community group leverage the relationships we have in the places where we live, work, and play to go on mission together?

2. When Paul speaks in a synagogue, he reasons (dialogues with), explains (unpacks), and proves (demonstrates) from the Scriptures who Christ is and what Christ has done. In sharing the gospel with unbelievers, how can we call people to Christ by use of the Word? In discipling believers, what will it look like for us to walk through the Word in order to equip them to obey all that Christ has taught and to reproduce/evangelize those around them?

3. In this passage, one of the themes that stands out is the different response to Christ in Thessalonica and Berea. Why is it that the Thessalonians respond differently than the Bereans? What are reasons that people reject Christ (for example, jealousy/pride is noted in verse 5)? Take a look at the Parable of the Sower/Soils in Mark 4. What might this parable tell us about the role of a person’s heart in response to the gospel? Pray that unbelievers (and believers to a different extent) will have receptive hearts (even circumcised hearts—see Ezekiel 36-37) to Christ being proclaimed.

4. When opposition comes, how ought we to respond? Pray for brothers and sisters around the world to stand firm in the faith when opposition arises. Pray for God to give wisdom to us and to our brothers and sisters around the world to respond in a Christ-like way when opposition arises.

5. What marks/characteristics do you see in the lives of Paul and Silas and Timothy that led to the world being turned upside down? For example, in this passage, we see clearly that Paul and Silas spoke the gospel, lived the gospel (they shared their very lives with unbelievers and believers—see 1 Thessalonians 2:8), and suffered for the gospel. Pray for God to lead each person in your community group to know and follow Jesus so that the world might be turned upside down for the glory of God and the good of His church.

6. In Acts 17:11-12, Luke describes how unbelieving Jews respond to the Scriptures and to Jesus, which ultimately leads them to saving faith. Do you know any unbelievers who are currently receiving gospel conversation with eagerness and desiring to examine the Scriptures to see what they say? If so, pray that God would lead them to saving faith. By extension (note that this description is given of unbelievers who hunger for God’s Word and long to know the truth but this should also mark the lives of believers), what is your attitude toward God’s Word and what is your approach to studying/understanding/applying God’s Word? How can we as a community group spur one another on in knowing and following Jesus through the study of His Word? Take time to pray that God would give us a heart that eagerly reads the Word and examines the truths of Scripture and applies the truths of Scripture.

7. In this passage, we see in both Thessalonica and Berea that Gentiles come to faith in Christ (see verses 4, 12). How does this demonstrate the power of the gospel? Do you believe that God can save your unbelieving family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors, etc.? Pray that God would do an amazing work in saving men and women by the power of the gospel as we proclaim the gospel to them this week. Pray that God would give us boldness to share and opportunities to share the gospel this week. Does anyone in your group have a gospel conversation story that they would like to share this week?

8. As you look at this passage, how does it call us to obedience and an others-focused mentality? Remember, Pastor Aaron is challenging us to be about obedience and others in 2018.

9. Here are some good questions to reflect on and act on this week (these were passed along to me by Pastor Aaron and Dr. David Jones):

 A. What do you take as the main theme from this sermon?

 B. What have you learned today about Jesus’ character that has affected you daily?

 C. Do you have any clarifying questions concerning the sermon?

 D. What did the Holy Spirit convict you of because of His Word today?

 E. Will you ask forgiveness and what will you change?

 F. Will you be willing this week to pass on to someone else what you’re learning about Jesus? How will you be intentional this week to do so?

10. In his book, Asking the Right Questions, Matthew Harmon gives the following instructions/questions for understanding and applying the Bible:

 A. Understanding the Bible

 1. What do we learn about God?

 a. Look for God’s character (who he is, what he is like).

 b. Look for God’s conduct (what he is doing).

 c. Look for God’s concerns (what things, events, people, he is concerned about).

 2. What do we learn about people?

 a. Look for aspects of what it means to be created in God’s image.

 b. Look for the fallen condition.

 c. Look for how God’s people should live.

 3. What do we learn about relating to God?

 a. Look for things to praise and thank God for.

 b. Look for sin to confess and repent.

 c. Look for promises and truths to believe.

 4. What do we learn about relating to others?

 a. Look for how we should interact with and treat others.

 b. Look for ways to pursue reconciliation with others.

 c. Look for specific ways to love, serve, and care for others.

 B. Applying the Bible

 1. What does God want me to think/understand?

 2. What does God want me to believe?

 3. What does God want me to desire?

 4. What does God want me to do?

**\* Sermon Take Away**

By God’s grace, live as Spirit-empowered witnesses who speak the gospel, share your life with unbelievers, and suffer the cost.

**\* Bible Reading Plan**

1. Monday—Acts 21; Nehemiah 11

2. Tuesday—Acts 22; Nehemiah 12

3. Wednesday—Acts 23; Nehemiah 13

4. Thursday—Acts 24; Esther 1

5. Friday—Acts 25; Esther 2

6. Saturday—Acts 26; Esther 3

7. Sunday—Acts 27; Esther 4

**\* Unhindered: A Study of Acts (Part 2)**

1. February 18th—Acts 17:16-34

2. February 25th—Acts 18:1-23

3. March 4th—Acts 18:24-28

4. March 11th—Acts 19:1-41

5. March 18th—Acts 20:1-16

6. March 25th—Acts 20:17-30

--. April 1st (Easter Sunday)

7. April 8th—Acts 21:1-26

8. April 15th—Acts 21:27-22:29

9. April 22nd—Acts 22:30-23:35

10. April 29th—Acts 24:1-27

11. May 6th—Acts 25:1-12

12. May 13th—Acts 25:13-26:32

13. May 20th (Mother’s Day)—Acts 27:1-44

14. May 27th—Acts 28:1-31

1. For this discussion guide, I used the following resources: Darrell Bock, *Acts;* I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*; John B. Polhill, *Acts*; Derek Thomas, *Acts*; R. Kent Hughes, *Acts*; R. C. Sproul, *Acts*; John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of* Acts; Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesu in* Acts; ESV *Study Bible*; *NIV Zondervan Study Bible.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)