

Session 11



EMPOWERED

Session 11: Empowered to Speak Into the World

Primary Scripture

Acts 17:16–34

Introduction — Living Faithfully in a Complex World

Many Christians feel uncertain about how to engage the world around them.

Some respond by:

- withdrawing
- avoiding difficult conversations
- or remaining silent about faith altogether

Others respond with:

- anger
- fear
- hostility
- or constant argument

But Acts 17 presents another way.

When Paul arrives in Athens, he enters a culture filled with:

- competing beliefs
- spiritual confusion
- intellectual pride
- and countless voices claiming truth

And yet Paul does not respond with panic or hostility.

He responds with attentiveness, wisdom, courage, and faithful witness.

This matters because Christians today also live in a world filled with:

- competing worldviews
- political tension
- spiritual confusion
- anxiety

- skepticism
- and deep cultural division

The Holy Spirit does not call believers to:

- fearful withdrawal
or
- aggressive domination

The Spirit empowers believers to engage the world with:

- truth
- wisdom
- humility
- discernment
- compassion
- and courage

This session explores an important question:

How does the Holy Spirit help believers engage the world faithfully?

Because Spirit-led living is not only about private spirituality.

It also shapes how believers live, speak, listen, and interact with the world around them.

Movement 1 — The Holy Spirit Produces Awareness, Not Avoidance

When Paul arrives in Athens, he pays attention to the city around him.

Read Scripture: Acts 17:16–17

Paul notices:

- the culture
- the beliefs
- the idols
- and the spiritual hunger surrounding him

This is important because Spirit-led living requires attentiveness.

Many Christians engage culture primarily through:

- assumptions

- fear
- stereotypes
- outrage
- or secondhand opinions

But Paul actually pays attention.

He observes carefully before speaking.

This matters deeply today.

Faithful Christian witness requires understanding:

- the fears people carry
- the questions people ask
- the longings people feel
- and the stories shaping the culture around us

Read Scripture: James 1:19

Read Scripture: Colossians 4:5–6

The Holy Spirit forms believers who:

- listen carefully
- observe thoughtfully
- and engage people with wisdom rather than reaction

And importantly:

Paul does not ignore the spiritual confusion around him.

But neither does he respond with contempt.

The Spirit produces discernment without dehumanization.

Reflection

How do you usually respond to ideas, beliefs, or people you strongly disagree with?

Why is careful listening and observation important for faithful witness?

Movement 2 — The Holy Spirit Helps Believers Speak With Wisdom

Paul eventually speaks before the Areopagus.

Read Scripture: Acts 17:22–23

Notice how Paul begins.

He does not begin with insults or condemnation.

He begins with connection.

Paul recognizes the spiritual searching already present in the people around him.

This is important because Spirit-led witness is not primarily about:

- winning arguments
- humiliating opponents
- or proving intellectual superiority

The Holy Spirit helps believers speak:

- truthfully
- wisely
- patiently
- and relationally

Paul does not compromise the Gospel.

But he communicates in ways the people around him can understand.

Read Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:22–23

Read Scripture: Proverbs 15:1–2

This matters deeply today.

Many people are not resistant merely because Christians believe differently.

They are often resistant because Christians communicate:

- harshly

- dismissively
- defensively
- or without genuine compassion

The Holy Spirit forms believers who learn to:

- speak truthfully without cruelty
- remain convicted without arrogance
- and engage difficult conversations with grace and humility.

Reflection

What makes difficult conversations feel threatening or uncomfortable for you?

What is the difference between speaking truthfully and speaking harshly?

Movement 3 — The Holy Spirit Keeps Jesus at the Center

Although Paul begins with connection, he does not stop there.

He eventually points clearly toward Jesus and resurrection.

Read Scripture: Acts 17:24–31

This is extremely important.

The Holy Spirit always points people toward Jesus.

Not merely:

- spirituality
- morality
- politics
- ideology
- or self-improvement

The Gospel remains centered on Christ.

This helps believers maintain balance.

Some Christians become so fearful of offending people that they avoid speaking clearly about Jesus altogether.

Others become so focused on confrontation that they lose compassion and humility.

Acts presents something healthier.

The Holy Spirit empowers believers to remain:

- loving
- truthful
- humble
- and centered on Christ

Read Scripture: John 16:13–14

Read Scripture: Ephesians 4:15

Paul neither:

- withdraws from the culture
nor
- blends completely into it

Instead, he remains faithful while engaging thoughtfully and compassionately.

This is one of the great challenges of Spirit-led living:

remaining deeply rooted in Jesus while still remaining deeply engaged with the world around us.

Reflection

Why do Christians sometimes drift toward either silence or hostility when engaging culture?

What helps keep Jesus—not fear, politics, or anger—at the center of Christian witness?

Movement 4 — The Holy Spirit Produces Faithfulness, Not Control

Acts 17 ends with mixed responses.

Read Scripture: Acts 17:32–34

Some mock Paul.

Some remain curious.

Some believe.

This matters because the Holy Spirit calls believers to faithfulness, not control.

Christians cannot:

- force transformation
- argue people into faith
- or control outcomes

The role of believers is to:

- speak truthfully
- love faithfully
- remain prayerful
- and trust the Holy Spirit to continue working in people's lives

Read Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:6–7

Read Scripture: Isaiah 55:10–11

This is deeply freeing.

Many Christians feel pressure to:

- always say everything perfectly
- win every argument
- or carry responsibility for outcomes they cannot control

But Spirit-led witness is ultimately rooted in trust.

The Holy Spirit is already at work in the world.

Believers are invited to participate faithfully—not anxiously.

This also produces humility.

Not everyone responded positively to Paul.

And yet Paul remained faithful.

The goal is not popularity.

The goal is not cultural dominance.

The goal is faithful witness centered on Jesus.

Reflection

Where do you feel pressure to control outcomes, conversations, or people's responses?

How does trusting the Holy Spirit change the way believers engage others?

A Note on Christians and Culture

Christians often respond to culture in unhealthy extremes.

Some withdraw completely in fear.

Others become consumed by outrage, conflict, or political identity.

But the Holy Spirit forms believers who remain:

- grounded in Christ
- attentive to people
- wise in speech
- discerning in thought
- compassionate in posture
- and faithful in witness

The goal is not isolation.

Nor is the goal assimilation.

The goal is faithful presence.

Spirit-led living helps believers remain deeply rooted in Jesus while engaging the world with humility, courage, and love.

Formation Practice (This Week)

Practice: Listening and Speaking With Wisdom

Each day this week:

Step 1 — Read Slowly

Read Acts 17:16–34 slowly each day.

Pay attention to:

- how Paul observes the culture
- how he speaks
- and how he keeps Jesus central throughout the conversation

Step 2 — Practice Attentiveness

Pay attention to:

- what people around you fear
- what they hope for
- what they value
- and what spiritual questions may exist beneath the surface

Listen more carefully than usual.

Step 3 — Pray Before Speaking

Before an important conversation, pray:

“Holy Spirit, help me speak with truth, wisdom, humility, and love.”

Step 4 — Practice Faithful Presence

This week:

- engage someone thoughtfully
- listen without defensiveness
- ask questions
- show compassion
- or remain present in a difficult conversation without becoming reactive

Do not aim to win.

Aim to remain faithful and loving.

Living It Out

Where do you most feel tension between your faith and the culture around you?

How do fear, anger, or anxiety sometimes shape Christian engagement with others?

What would Spirit-led wisdom and faithful presence look like in your everyday relationships and conversations?

Final Reflection

Acts 17 reminds believers that the Holy Spirit empowers Christians to engage the world:

- thoughtfully
- courageously
- compassionately
- and faithfully

The Spirit does not call believers toward fearful silence or hostile argument.

The Spirit forms people who remain:

- deeply rooted in Jesus
- attentive to others
- wise in speech
- and faithful in witness

The question is not:

“Can Christians engage the world faithfully?”

The question is:

“Will we remain dependent on the Holy Spirit as we do?”

Weekly Prayer

Holy Spirit,

Help me remain rooted in Jesus
while engaging the world around me with wisdom and grace.

Teach me to listen carefully,
speak truthfully,
and respond compassionately.

Protect me from fear,
arrogance,
and hostility.

Help me become someone whose words and actions reflect the character of Christ.

Give me courage to remain faithful,
and humility to trust You with the results.

Amen.