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# Paul in Athens , The Unknown God

*Scripture: Acts 17:16-34*

**Theme: We can share Jesus with people who don't know Him yet**

*4th-6th Grade (Ages 9-11)*

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Free curriculum for small and rural churches

## Lesson Overview

This Sunday school lesson explores Paul's encounter in Athens, a city filled with idols, temples, and worship of many gods, where he encountered an altar marked "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." Through Acts 17:16, 34, students will learn that even in places where people worship something they don't fully understand, God is still present and longs for them to know Him. Paul's bold message challenges them to recognize that the "unknown God" is actually the one true, loving Creator who desires a relationship with those who seek Him. The lesson will also explore how faith can be shared with curiosity and respect, even when people are skeptical or distracted, while encouraging students to live as witnesses to Christ in their own world. The key verse, Acts 17:23, reveals that the "unknown God" Paul points to. Optional reflection: children can draw a picture of Jesus helping their friends, then share one way they can help someone else this week. This extra activity supports the lesson's theme and gives teachers a simple, lowprep option for extending the discussion.

## Bible Story

Paul and Silas had been traveling through Greece for quite some time, teaching about Jesus in various cities. One day, they arrived in Athens, a bustling city known for its many temples and intellectuals. Though Athens was filled with statues of gods and idols, Paul noticed something strange, many people were worshipping something they didn't truly know. As he walked around, he spotted an altar with an inscription that read: 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' This caught his attention because it showed that even though people were offering sacrifices and prayers, they didn't really understand who they were worshipping.

Paul stood one day near the marketplace, where many Greeks and foreign visitors gathered. Some of them noticed him because he was arguing passionately with the people who had invited him to speak. One man named Dionysius, a prominent Athenian, listened carefully. As Paul explained the truth about Jesus, Dionysius said, 'Show us more

about this Jesus whose existence you claim.' Paul happily shared how Jesus had risen from the dead and was alive today, offering forgiveness and eternal life to all who believed. The message touched Dionysius, and he invited Paul to come to his home to learn more.

Not everyone in Athens believed Paul's message, though. Some of the philosophers and religious leaders scoffed at his claims. They said, 'We know these things without a teacher,' and sneered at Paul's teaching. Even though they had an altar for an unknown God, they didn't recognize Jesus as the true God. But Paul didn't give up. He kept sharing the love of Jesus with anyone who would listen, knowing that God's word had the power to change hearts.

That night, Paul and his companions prayed together. They thanked God for the few who believed, like Dionysius, and asked Him to help more people hear His truth. The next morning, Paul stood before the crowd again, speaking boldly about Jesus. Some of the women and foreign visitors listened and believed, while others remained skeptical. But Paul's message was clear: Jesus was the only way to know God, and anyone who turned to Him would find eternal life. Many were moved by his words and began following him.

By the end of Paul's time in Athens, several people had trusted in Jesus, including a group of women and some foreign visitors. Though not everyone accepted his message, Paul knew God was working in ways he couldn't see. He left Athens, trusting that God would use him to share His love in other cities. His words reminded him of the altar with the inscription: 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Paul knew the truth, Jesus was the God they were really seeking, and He wanted everyone to find Him!

## Key Verse

**Acts 17:23 , 'For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship , and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.'**

The key verse (Acts 17:23 , 'For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship , and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.') calls us to respond to God's truth.

## Activities

### Activity 1: Gospel Story Drawing

Children draw their favorite part of the story of Paul sharing Jesus with the Athenians. They can illustrate the altar to the unknown God, Paul's speech, or the cross. This helps them visualize how God is present in even unfamiliar settings.

#### Supplies needed:

- Paper
- Crayons, markers, or colored pencils
- Optional: Printed images of the altar or cross for reference

1. Ask each child to draw their understanding of the story (e.g., Paul at the altar, the crowd listening, or Jesus on the cross).
2. Encourage them to label key elements (e.g., 'Unknown God,' 'Jesus,' 'Athenians'). Discuss why Paul pointed to Jesus as the answer to their unknown God.

### Activity 2: Bridge of Truth Craft

Make a simple bridge using a shoebox or wooden stick to represent how Paul used the altar to bridge the gap between their unknown God and the Gospel. Kids will learn that sharing faith isn't about forcing beliefs but offering a way forward.

#### Supplies needed:

- Small wooden dowel or stick

- Cardboard or shoebox
- String/yarn
- Paint or markers (optional)
- Glue

1. Build a small bridge from the materials (e.g., fold cardboard into a bridge shape).
2. Write 'Unknown God' on one side and 'Jesus' on the other, then glue the dowel to represent the bridge Paul used to connect their hearts.

### Activity 3: Storyboard the Speech

Create a simple storyboard with 3, 5 panels to act out Paul's speech. Kids can act out the moment he saw the altar, his pointing to Jesus, and the crowd's reaction. This helps them internalize how to share faith in everyday conversations.

#### Supplies needed:

- Printed storyboards (or draw on paper)
- Small props (e.g., a 'cross' made from a popsicle stick, a toy altar)

1. Divide into small groups. Assign each panel (e.g., 'Paul sees the altar,' 'He speaks of Jesus,' 'Crowd listens').
2. Act it out! Discuss how Paul didn't argue but offered hope, just like we should when sharing Jesus.

### Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the Athenians had altars to 'unknown gods'? What does this tell us about their lives?
2. How did Paul use the altar to share Jesus? What was the 'bridge' he used?
3. If you saw someone talking to their phone instead of God, how could you gently share Jesus with them?
4. What is one way you can 'point' to Jesus in your school/work this week?
5. Why do you think the crowd didn't all believe Paul immediately? How can we be patient like Jesus?

### Prayer Focus

*Pray for courage to share Jesus with friends who don't know Him, especially in places where beliefs are often questioned or forgotten. Ask God to help us speak His truth with kindness, just like Paul did at the altar.*

#### >> Missions Spotlight

In today's world, many people have 'unknown gods', they believe in something but don't know the real God. Paul's story shows us how to share Jesus without force, using the things around us (like the altar) to point to truth. Today, we can use our phones, conversations, or even social media to tell others about Jesus in a way that feels natural and loving.

#### -> To the Cross

Paul didn't ignore the altar but used it as a starting point. He said, 'You worshipped something unknown, but God made everything, He proved it by raising Jesus from the dead!' The cross became his climax, showing that Jesus was the answer to their 'unknown God.'