





# ENGAGING A CULTURE FOR GOD ACTS 17 PAUL IN ATHENS

L'AMABLE BIBLE CHAPEL

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***Last week:*** the Gift of Choice and the Call to Spread the Good News in cooperation with God

***This week:*** the example of Paul – engaging a culture for God



**I call it, “Paul’s Straight A Speech in Athens”..**

**But it is crafted by the Holy Spirit, guiding and speaking through Paul...**

## **Backdrop: Acts 17:1-4:**

When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. <sup>2</sup> As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," he said. <sup>4</sup> Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women. ***Now...on to Athens...***



# 1. AWARENESS

Paul begins by becoming aware of the people and their values

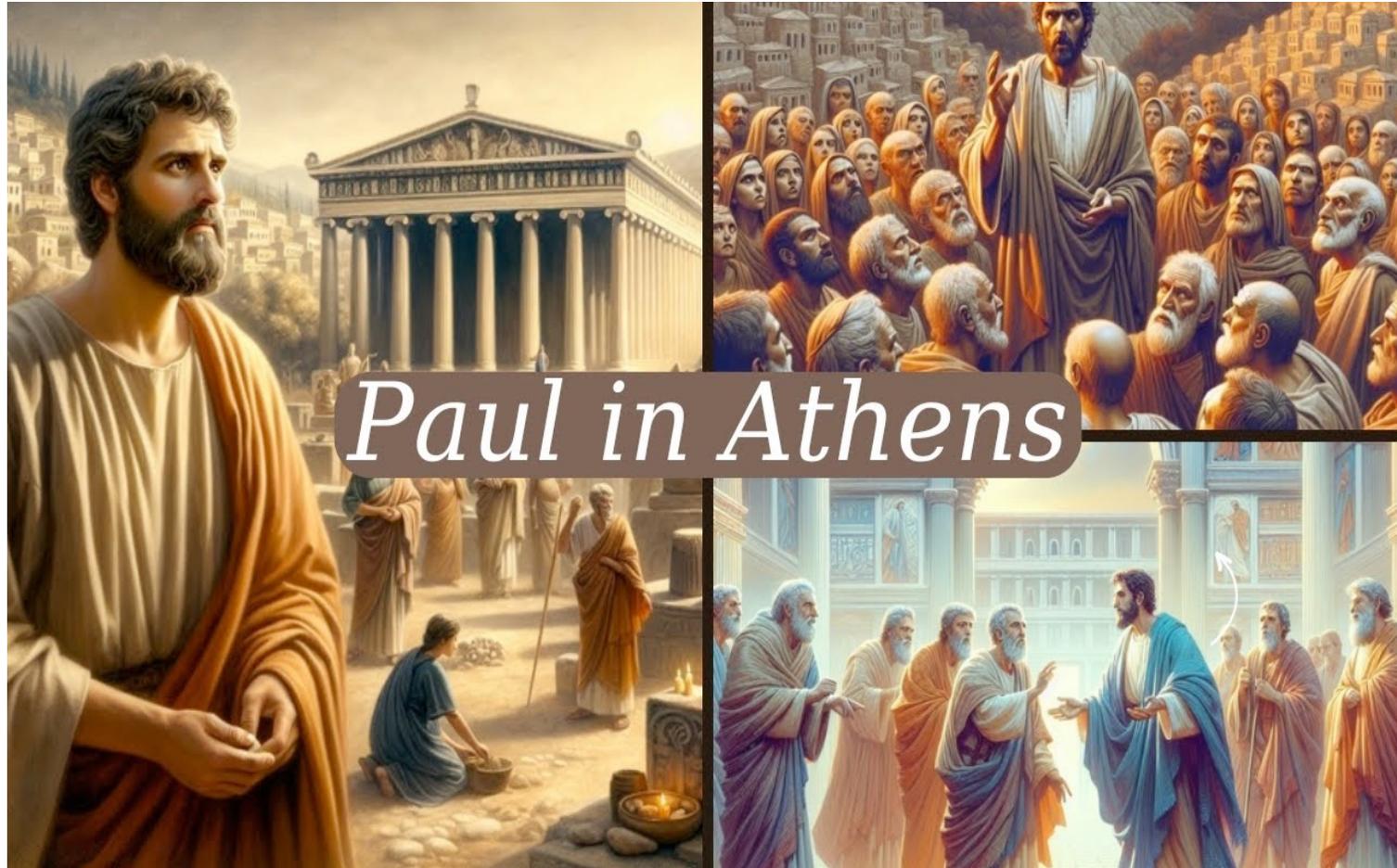
Text: Acts 17:13-34

...when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.

<sup>14</sup> The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. <sup>15</sup> Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

## **In Athens**

<sup>16</sup> While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.



*Paul in Athens*

<sup>17</sup> So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. <sup>18</sup> A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him.

Some of them asked,  
“What is this babbler trying  
to say?” Others remarked,  
“He seems to be  
advocating foreign gods.”  
They said this because  
Paul was preaching the  
good news about Jesus  
and the resurrection.



<sup>19</sup> Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? <sup>20</sup> You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.” <sup>21</sup> (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

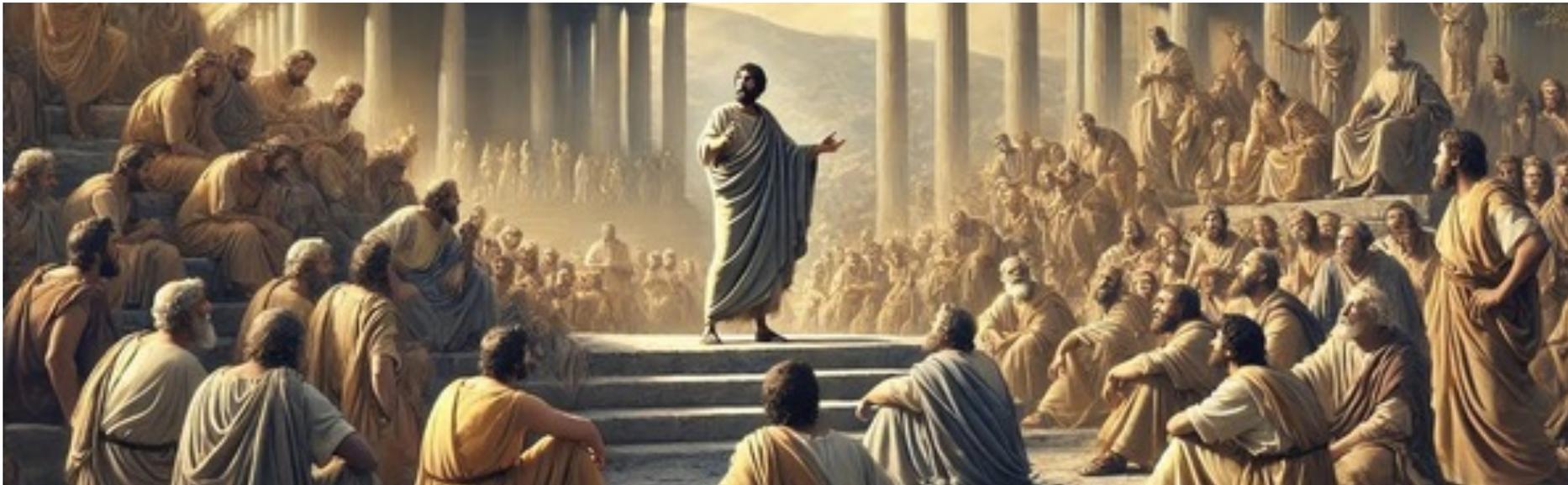




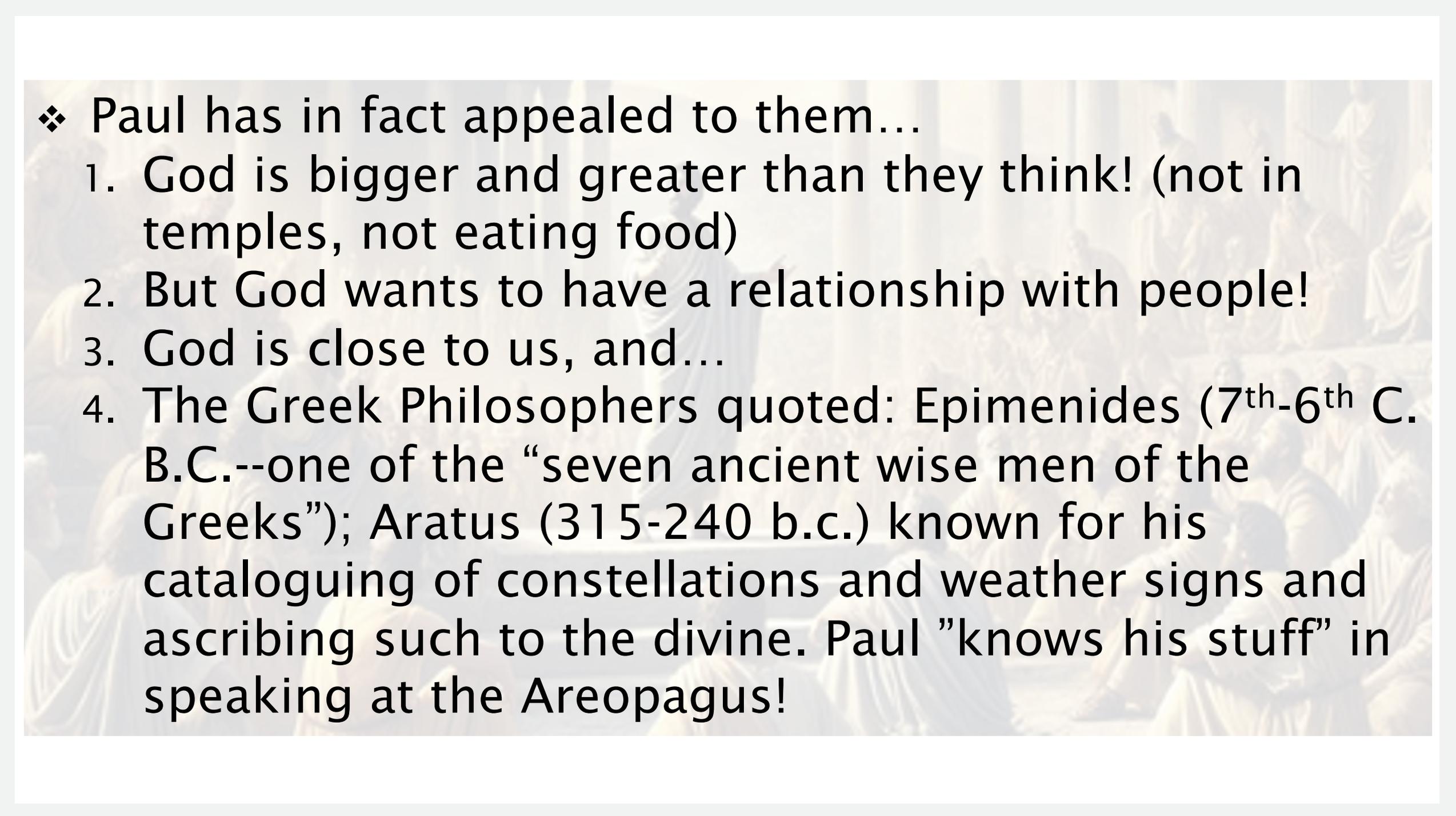
## **2. AFFIRMATION**

From the beginning,  
Paul identifies reasons  
to commend his  
audience

<sup>22</sup> Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. <sup>23</sup> 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.



<sup>24</sup> “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. <sup>25</sup> And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. <sup>26</sup> From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup> God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. <sup>28</sup> ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

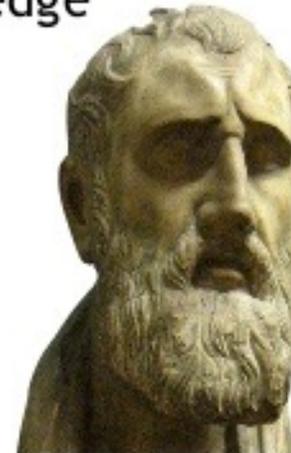
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- ❖ Paul has in fact appealed to them...
    1. God is bigger and greater than they think! (not in temples, not eating food)
    2. But God wants to have a relationship with people!
    3. God is close to us, and...
    4. The Greek Philosophers quoted: Epimenides (7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> C. B.C.--one of the “seven ancient wise men of the Greeks”); Aratus (315-240 b.c.) known for his cataloguing of constellations and weather signs and ascribing such to the divine. Paul “knows his stuff” in speaking at the Areopagus!

Paul is reaching out to both of these influential groups, through a call to holiness and experience

## NEW PHILOSOPHY

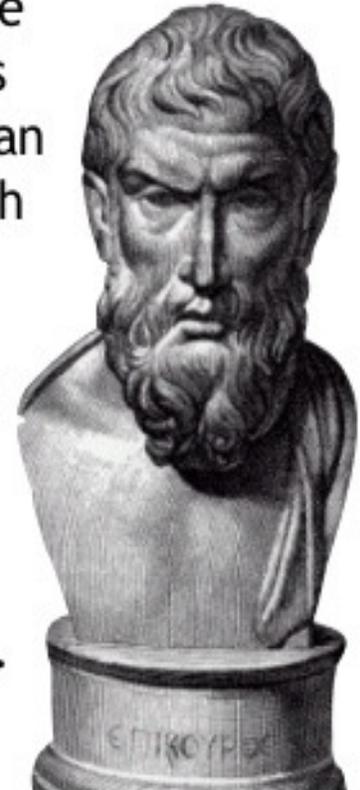
### STOICISM

- Founded by Zeno
- Stoic philosophers believe that humans should not pressure desires like power and wealth, because these are dangerous.
- The ultimate good is seeking knowledge and showing no emotion towards pleasure or pain.



### EPICUREANISM

- Founded by Epicurus
- Epicurean philosophers believe that the only real things are those we can experience with our 5 senses.
- The ultimate good is seeking pleasure and achieving harmony of body and mind.





### **3. ADMONISHMENT**

We now see Paul turn, rather gently but firmly, to prod the Athenians and identify their ‘unawareness’



Common pictures can be misleading, as clearly women were present...

<sup>29</sup> “Therefore, since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. <sup>30</sup> In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. <sup>31</sup> For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”



## **4. ASPIRATION**

Although some sneer, the possibility of relationship with a supreme God, and a possibility of eternal life intrigues a number present...some of whom become followers

<sup>32</sup> When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” <sup>33</sup> At that, Paul left the Council. <sup>34</sup> Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.





Paul's "straight A speech" is carefully designed to engage with his audience, many who are the intellectual elite of Athens...

- ✓ **Awareness**
- ✓ **Affirmation**
- ✓ **Admonishment**
- ✓ **Aspiration**

What comes next?



## **5. APPLICATION**

The challenge is to take Paul's principles and apply them in our culture today...



In our culture?

✓ **Awareness**

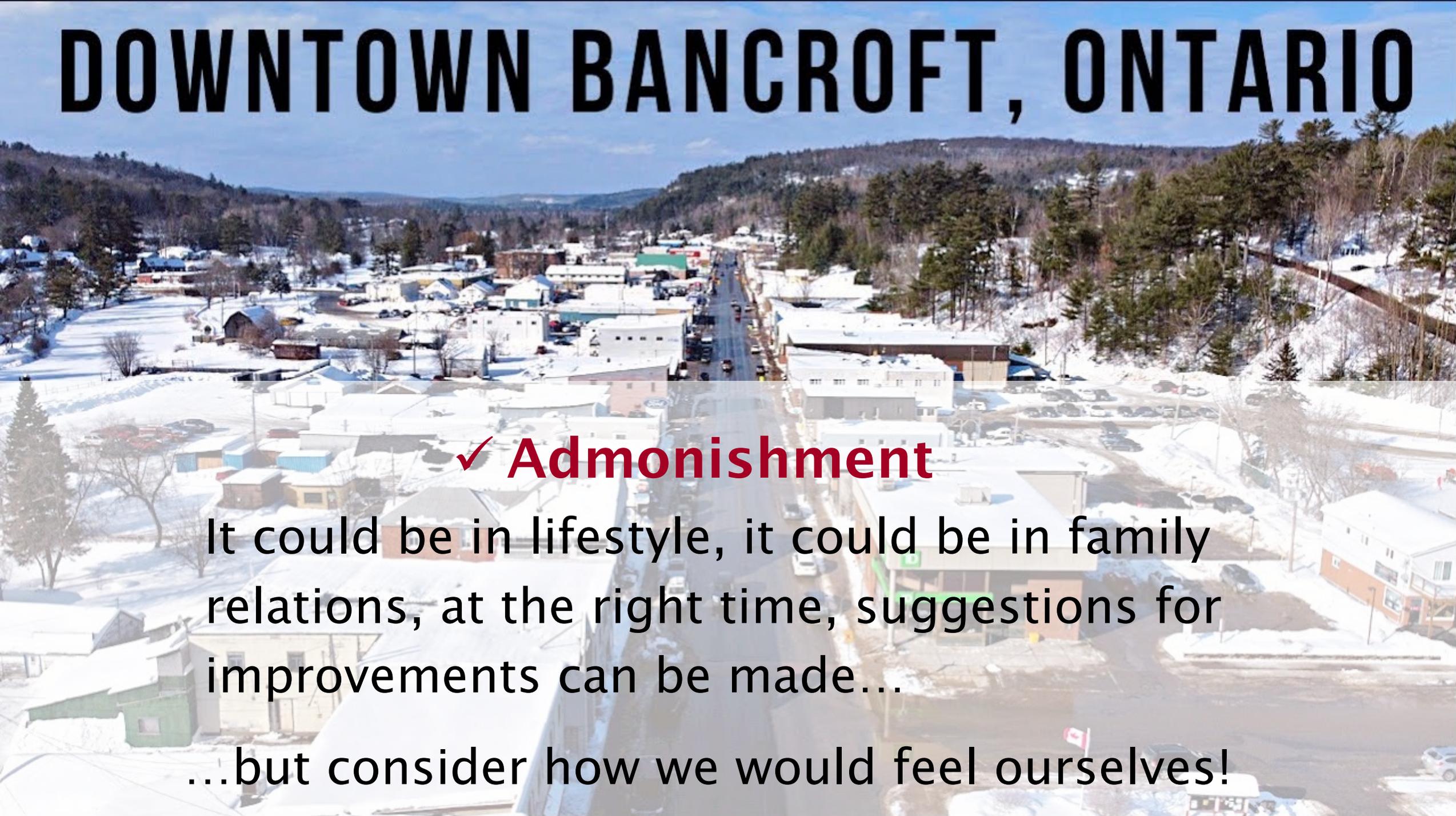
What does our  
culture value?

## ✓ Affirmation

People's accomplishments can be affirmed, but are all their questions and hopes met?



# DOWNTOWN BANCROFT, ONTARIO



## ✓ Admonishment

It could be in lifestyle, it could be in family relations, at the right time, suggestions for improvements can be made...

...but consider how we would feel ourselves!



## ✓ **Aspiration**

Can we challenge people—  
what do they want their life  
to mean and accomplish?



## CONCLUSION

- ✓ Awareness
- ✓ Affirmation
- ✓ Admonishment
- ✓ Aspiration

An example and pattern for us today...

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