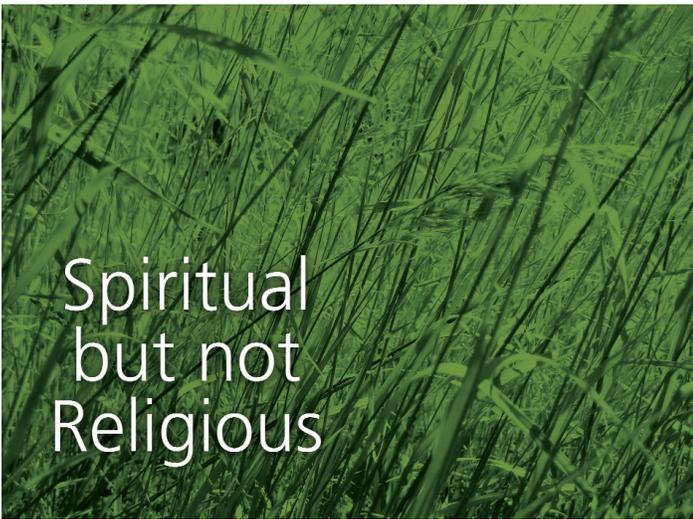


Small Group Discussion ?

ACT OUT | SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS
AUGUST 1-2, 2015 | ACTS 17:22-28a

*Dear God, open our eyes to opportunities
to engage in your mission. Amen.*

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.'"



Spiritual
but not
Religious

UP with God

What does "spiritual but not religious" mean?

What does it mean to be spiritual? What does it mean to be religious? What is the difference? Can you have one without the other? Why, or why not?

Do you think people who claim to be spiritual but not religious are rejecting God? Or are they rejecting the human-made institution of church? What is the difference?

Can meditating, going for a run, walking in the woods, watching a sunrise, helping a neighbor, or spending time with family be more spiritual than going to church? Can someone experience God more fully, or in more profound ways, while doing those things? Is that okay? Can people inside a church community learn something from those who reject religion and find spirituality in other ways?

Can gathering in community, and simply being in each others' presence, fill our souls in ways that isolation and nature cannot? Does something special happen when we gather in God's name? Can those who reject religion also learn something from people who gather together for worship?

Are there ever church gatherings that are awkward, tense, or empty, and somehow miss the intended warmth of community? Are there faith communities that miss the point?

What is the point? What are the implications of being more religious than spiritual? What are the implications of being more spiritual than religious? Do those things need to be at odds? Can they work together?

Where is God in this conversation?

What do you suppose God would say about the distinction between spiritual and religious? Does God make a distinction between what is spiritual and what is not? Is God invested in ritual, sacraments and Sunday morning gatherings? Does God require those things? Why, or why not?

Did God invent religion? Did Jesus? If Jesus was a flesh-and-bones kind of alive today, do you think he would go to church? Where? Why? Which religious practices would Jesus value? Which religious practices would Jesus find spiritual? Which religious practices would he reject? Why?

How religious or spiritual should we be? What does God require?

*For fun, listen to Rob Bell's "Everything is Spiritual" here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2rklwkm_dQ*

Could the line between spiritual and secular be more blurry than you had imagined? In what way?

IN through community

How does this affect our church?

“The church of today is obsessed with what happens inside its building ... but mission happens when we physically go to where the people are. Paul doesn’t set up a storefront in Athens and wait for the philosophers to come to him. Paul goes to them. If the church is going to thrive, we need to do the same. The world around us has radically changed. People are increasingly spiritually hungry but increasingly disinterested in religion. We can blame them, condemn them and tell them to change, or we can accept that we need to change how we do ministry for the sake of God’s mission in the world. The thriving church of the future will do ministry like Paul, meeting people where they are.” (– from Pastor Jeff’s sermon notes)

What do you think of those words? Is your faith community obsessed with what happens inside its building? Are you waiting for people to come to you? Are you convinced that with the best preaching, the best programming, and the best coffee, people will show up? Is that the way it works today?

Do we struggle to understand people who aren’t interested in our preaching, our programming, and our coffee? Are we frustrated when people won’t join us, or listen to us? Are we disappointed (even angry) when people put other things – like sports, friends and vacations – before weekend worship? Are we annoyed when people think walking in the woods is a more spiritual experience than attending our weekend worship services filled with inspirational words and music?

Why do we have this divide? What is the real issue here? And what is the answer?

What is the difference between being right and being effective?

Does being “right” about how to worship, and convincing as many people as possible to share that value, matter more to us than loving people where they are? Are we ultimately trying to convince other people to be just like us, and to think just like we do? Do we struggle to think about church differently because we want to validate our own choices, traditions and habits?

Do we love our way of doing church so much that we want other people to love it, too? Are we so happy with our current system that we fail to understand why anyone would ever want to opt out? Are we just trying to share our joy? What’s wrong with that? But what do we do when our joy and inspiration are different than someone else’s? Is that why we have different churches, styles, and denominations? Are we all supposed to do things the same way? Is it possible to please everyone? Why would we even want to branch out?

Yet if we don’t change to include our community, and new generations of people yearning for spirituality, how can we really be a connecting church? What do we gain by continuing to do church the same way? What do we lose?

OUT for the world

How do we meet people where they’re at?

Through genuine relationship and conversation, Paul meets the people in today’s story where they are, and he earns the right to be heard. Are we like that? Do we simply complain that our culture has lost its way, or do we do what’s necessary to earn the right to be heard?

Do we create *genuine* relationships with people outside the church, accepting people wherever they are? Do we listen to them and care for their needs? Or do our beliefs and choices make us feel superior, or set apart?

Do we speak the language of our culture?

Paul can quote his audience’s favorite writers; he gets their pop culture references, and he can communicate with them easily. Can we do that? Could finding that sort of common ground affect the way we do mission and ministry? Do we need to learn new ways to communicate? What does this mean for the way we use technology for mission and ministry?

Should we talk about sports again?

Churches often hold up youth sports as an obstacle or barrier that keeps families from attending worship. What do you think? Do sports get in the way? Do we disparage those who participate in sports events on Sunday mornings? Could we instead choose to be Christ’s presence on the sidelines, meeting people where they are and loving them there? Who will be the pastor of the soccer field, hockey arena, baseball diamond and gym? What does that look like? Is this about convincing people, or simply loving them? Is this about being a preacher, or a peacemaker? What exactly is our role in youth sports?

Is this just one obstacle between a traditional church and a non-religious community? Are there others? How do we navigate these obstacles, keep the main thing the main thing, and still meet people where they are? What do we have to do differently to reach people who hunger for God but cannot be confined to our church walls they way they’re erected right now?

What about our own sense of importance?

How do we, as a faith community, measure our “success”? Is it the number of people attending worship or youth ministry? Or is it how much we impact the rate of poverty in our community, or how much we raise the literacy rates in our schools? Which one aligns best with the way of Jesus?

When we get these things backwards, is it possible to be religious but not spiritual? What does that mean? How does it affect our mission, our vision, and our impact in the world?