

# Paul Builds a Bridge

For eleven years, I was a pastor in Seattle, a city often hailed as our nation's "least religious." But this reputation hid a deeper, more compelling story. Many had left religion for good reasons.

Interestingly, the setting of Paul's speech on Mars Hill in Acts 17 became the namesake of two very different Seattle institutions—one a megachurch and one a school of theology and psychology. Both shared Paul's enthusiasm for witnessing to a culture that found Christianity strange. But it seemed as though the megachurch was inspired more by the god of Mars than by Paul, and zealously engaged the culture wars of the day. It later collapsed under the weight of its pastor's scandals and notorious bullying.

The school, by contrast, specializes in training counselors to care for survivors of trauma and abuse, and equips pastors to help their churches be places of healing, service, and transformation in their neighborhoods. It draws its inspiration from the way Paul's speech demonstrates both regard for and concern about the culture and people of Athens.

The verse on our bulletin cover actually comes from the Greek poet Aratus suggesting the radical notion that Zeus was not a mere sky king, managing the sun and moon and weather, but a force breathing life into all beings, surrounding us everywhere. Centuries later, Paul quotes Aratus and points to the next shift. It's as if he says: "Look, your own poets have seen it. God doesn't live in the shrines we make. God dwells within us! We are all God's children. God can overlook our confusion up until now, but eventually we'll be judged for how we treat our brothers and sisters. Worshiping temples is idolatry. Jesus Christ has made us the temple!"

Some scoffed, but others joined Paul and came to believe.

—Ken Miller Rieman  
South Bend, Indiana

**Text for today:** "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" ' ' (Acts 17:24-28, NRSV). **Bible readings for today:** Acts 17:22-31 (28); Psalm 66:8-20; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21.