



### How do I explain what I believe in to somebody totally new?

As an immigrant to Canada in 1972 I had no idea what it meant "to be Canadian," or how to become one. So I asked, and I was told, "Learn how to ice skate."

Well, that made things nice and simple, so I threw on a pair of ice skates and flung myself onto the ice at a local skating rink to make myself Canadian. Two steps out, however, I instantly went horizontal and crashed to the ice with a body jarring thump.

I clearly needed somebody to explain to me in terms I could understand as a total novice how this skating thing worked, starting with something as simple as how you stay vertical for more than two steps. And frustrating though it was that I couldn't become a Canadian right away, it gave me a vital clue when introducing someone to Christianity.

Becoming a Christian is just like being an immigrant, because in Christianity a person is entering a totally new world as well. Start them off simply too, then, which is exactly what Paul did in Acts 17 when introducing total novices to Christianity in Athens.

Weird though the Athenians were with their 30,000 statues to empty gods, they did at least believe in supernatural beings. On that point, then, Paul could connect with them, which he did by complimenting them on being "very religious," verse 22. People today might not like to hear that, of course, because of the jaundiced view of religious people on TV and movies, but like those Athenians, people today are seeking something, anything, that lifts them above the drudgery of everyday life.

For some, just like the Epicureans in Athens, it means partying and trying to get as much personal enjoyment out of life as possible. For others, like the Stoics in Athens, it means enduring life, stoically trying to "grin and bear" whatever life hits them with.

Either way, God is a total stranger, just like the "Unknown God" of verse 23. So we're in much the same situation today as Paul was in Athens, trying to explain the Christian message to people who were seeking, but had no idea about, or even interest in, the real God.

So when my non-religious 19 year old granddaughter asked me what I believed in, completely out of the blue one day while eating a hamburger in a restaurant, I immediately thought of Paul's approach here in Acts 17.

He started off, even with those highly sophisticated philosophers in Athens, with something so simple. He talked about God as the Creator, verse 24. So I did that too, by asking my granddaughter where the hamburger she was munching on came from. Did it float down from out of space and land on her plate, or what? No, it was made for her by a chef in the kitchen.

It was "check mate," first move, because all I had to do next was ask her how this world came into being too. Somebody had to make it, because anything made, hamburgers or universes, needs a maker, right?

And what if her hamburger was really tasty too, and it had been beautifully presented on the plate, with obvious pride and love by the chef, wouldn't she want to know more about the chef and what else he could do? The same with this world, in how beautifully it has been presented by its "chef" and maker too.

"So," I said with a flourish, "that's what I believe in, a God like that, who's jolly well worth knowing, and especially when he looks upon us as his kids whom he deeply loves as well." It was a page right out of Paul's book in verses 27 and 28.

In asking the question, then, "How do I explain what I believe in to somebody totally new?" I admit to blatantly plagiarizing Paul in his opening gambit with those seeking but totally ignorant people in Athens. He kept it so simple.

And fortunately there were Canadians willing to start me off so simply too, in having me learn how to ice skate. "You'll love it when you get it too," I was told, and the same can be said of Christianity. There is a sting to it too, which Paul added in Acts 17:30-31, but that was like telling me as an immigrant I couldn't be a Canadian without wanting and attempting to be one.

But what made that "wanting and attempting" so much more appealing was being given something like learning to ice skate that made me feel like I was a Canadian. And that was a leaf right out of Paul's book too, because he told those Athenians they too could feel like they were the Creator's much loved children by simply reaching out to him and discovering he wasn't far away at all, verses 27-28.

And that's the same for anyone entering the brand new world of God and Christianity. "Just seek him and you'll find him, and you'll love it when you do." It's so simple.