

# Harvesting in Hard Soil

## Acts 17.16-23

Athens was hard soil.

“Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.” (Acts 17:4)

“And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.” (Acts 17:12)

“But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysus the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.” (Acts 17:16)

What enables us to faithfully share Christ in times and places that feel especially resistant to the gospel?

### 1. Zeal For God's Glory (Acts 17.16)

“Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.” Acts 17:16

"Missions exists because worship doesn't." John Piper, Let the Nations Be Glad

“They made kings, but not through me.,They set up princes, but I knew it not. With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction. I have spurned your calf, O Samaria. My anger burns against them.” Hosea 8:4-5

“For the household gods utter nonsense, and the diviners see lies; they tell false dreams and give empty consolation. Therefore the people wander like sheep; they are afflicted for lack of a shepherd. **My anger is hot** against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders;” Zechariah 10:2-3

**The primary motivation that drives mission in hard and resistant places is zeal for the honor and the glory of God.**

### 2. Faith in the Providence of God (Acts 17.17)

“So, he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those that happen to be there.” Acts 17:17

The question is not how open are the people around us to the gospel but simply who are the people that God has providentially placed around us.

### 3. Awareness of the Ways of God: Opposition May be Opportunity. (Acts 17.19-21)

"Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, 'What does this babbler wish to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities' – because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection." Acts 17:18

God's ways are not our ways. God loves to bring life out of death, order out of chaos.

"Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect." 1 Peter 3:13-15

### 4. Feeling The Worth of God. (Acts 17.22-28)

"And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps find their way toward him and find him. Yet, he is actually not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being;' as even your poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'" Acts 17:26-28

The deepest need of the human heart is to find its way home to God.

All life is a divinely orchestrated message calling humanity to come home to God through Christ.

"These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited." C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

"Levels of happiness and life satisfaction are higher in richer developed countries," VanderWeele noted in a recent podcast, "but, intriguingly, one finds the reverse with meaning and purpose. Meaning and purpose were reported as higher in poor developing countries and

the richer developed world, and I think this leads to interesting and important dimensions.”  
Forbes Magazine, August 2025

## 5. Understanding The Call of God (Acts 17.29-31)

“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” Acts 17:30-31

The resurrection is God’s giant arrow pointing to Jesus as the One for whom all humanity and all history has been waiting.

We share Christ in hard places because our God is graciously calling people home to Himself.

### **1. Zeal for God’s Glory (Acts 17:16)**

- 1. What do you think Paul saw in Athens that “provoked” his spirit, and why do you think idolatry stirred such a deep emotional response in him?**
- 2. How does zeal for God’s honor shape the way we see the spiritual condition of our own city or culture?**
- 3. Where do you see modern forms of idolatry today, and how does recognizing them affect your desire to share Christ?**

### **2. Faith in the Providence of God (Acts 17:17)**

- 4. How does Paul’s daily reasoning “with whoever happened to be there” demonstrate confidence in God’s providence?**
- 5. Who are the people God has placed around you (family, workplace, neighborhood), and how might faith in God’s providence change the way you engage them?**
- 6. What obstacles often keep us from seeing ordinary, everyday interactions as divine appointments?**

### **3. Awareness of the Ways of God: Opposition as Opportunity (Acts 17:18–21)**

7. **Why do you think the philosophers misunderstood Paul and accused him of being a “babbler”? What does this reveal about sharing the gospel in resistant environments?**
8. **Can you think of a time when misunderstanding or opposition created an unexpected opportunity to talk about Christ? What did you learn from it?**
9. **According to 1 Peter 3:13–15, how should we prepare our hearts to respond when people challenge or question our faith?**

#### **4. Feeling the Worth of God (Acts 17:22–28)**

10. **How does Paul connect the Athenians’ spiritual longings with the truth of the gospel? What can we learn from his approach?**
11. **C.S. Lewis says earthly beauty and longing are “the scent of a flower we have not found.” How does this idea help explain modern restlessness, even in wealthy cultures?**
12. **Where have you seen people searching for meaning, and how might Acts 17 help you point them toward the God in whom we “live and move and have our being”?**

#### **5. Understanding the Call of God (Acts 17:29–31)**

13. **Why is the resurrection God’s ultimate “assurance” that Jesus is the Judge and Savior of the world?**
14. **How does the universal call to repentance shape the urgency and tone of our evangelism?**
15. **Where is God calling you to be faithful in a place or among people who may feel like “hard soil”? What step of obedience might that require this week?**