

The Fields pt1

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The Fields / Ac 17:16–34

So we have spent the last several weeks talking about they why...learning about the missionary mindset and examining our own issues with how we view and engage our culture when we are no longer in the majority, and what we believe is no longer the dominant cultural narrative.

But a missionary mindset is not just about changing how we think, it is also about looking for opportunities. When the invite to church is not going to be the first step, we have to think about entering into conversations in a new way. And although this requires some changes, the good news is those changes have a lot more to do with how we think about our day to day lives and relationships. And for many of us, that is going to be a lot easier than changing how we view the culture.

So today, I want to take you to the first stop in our three week journey to the fields. We are going to join Paul on a missionary journey, as we he enters the city of Athens. As we look at how Paul leveraged a unique opportunity the fit the culture of the day, I want all of us to be thinking about where these moments happen in our daily lives.

Let's go to Mars Hill.

Read [Acts 17:16-21](#).

So the first thing I want you to notice is Paul is paying attention- not just in a cultural sense, but in a Jesus sense. He is "provoked."

Paul was deeply disturbed by what he saw. He saw a city full of people who were deceived. And he knew that he needed to do something about what was happening. He cannot be around people who need Jesus without telling them about Him.

Acts (1) The Athenians' Curiosity (17:16–21)

For Paul a thing of beauty was decidedly not a joy forever, particularly when it embodied so distorted a view of divinity.

So grab a hold of this- God will show you your field. And you may have several fields. The Holy Spirit will prompt your heart when it is a holy moment. And we need to be ready to grab it and go (which is what I hope to begin to prepare us for in August- free ad for classes in August)

Next thing to notice- Paul starts where he is familiar and welcome. Paul goes to 2 places- the synagogue, where he knows the customs and how to gain a hearing and the marketplace where these kinds of conversations are common.

We all have places where we are comfortable and feel at ease talking about Jesus- our front porches, the dinner table, with close friends...think about where those places are for you. Who is there? Who needs to know about Jesus or asks you about Him regularly, but does not yet believe? That's a field!

We also, many of us, have places where these kinds of conversations about greater things in life will come up in normal conversation- maybe with a co-worker, or in a group your kids are-sports, dance, etc, or with buddies who you meet up with in different places- locations you are less comfortable, but where you know these conversations are welcome.

That's a field.

Acts (1) The Athenians' Curiosity (17:16–21)

But during the week, on a daily basis, he bore his witness in the agora, the famous marketplace and hub of Athenian life. There he got his most pronounced response, especially from some of the philosophers. *The Epicureans and Stoics were among the leading schools of the day, and they serve as representatives of the confusion caused by Paul's preaching*

See I bet even right now you are thinking about fields you had never considered before. Me too!

Now check this out, look at vs 18-21...someone is listening and invites Paul to a field he NEVER expected!

When we plow our fields, crops grow. And conversations happen that we never would have imagined. We start to get invited into places we would never have imagined. And we get to talk about Jesus in ways we would have never expected. (FA National Conference)

Acts (1) The Athenians' Curiosity (17:16–21)

The NIV has already solved the problem by translating “a meeting of the Areopagus,” which is a clear opting for the first possibility. The Greek is not so unambiguous, merely stating that the Athenians took hold of Paul and led him “to the Areopagus.” The Areopagus was both a court and a hill, due to the fact that the court traditionally met on that hill. The term Areopagus means hill of Ares. Ares was the Greek god of war. The Roman equivalent god was Mars, hence the KJV “Mars’ hill

Acts (1) The Athenians' Curiosity (17:16–21)

one should note that throughout Acts Paul appeared before the leading magisterial bodies—the magistrates of Philippi, the proconsul at Corinth, the Roman governors at Caesarea, the Jewish Sanhedrin, the Jewish King Agrippa, and finally, at least in anticipation, the Roman emperor. It would fit the pattern well if he appeared here before the venerable Athenian court.

So what does Paul do? He seizes the moment!

Read [Acts 17:22-34](#).

Now check this out...Paul does not start off answering the questions he wants to answer- who is Jesus and why should you care? He starts off where THEY are!

Acts (2) Paul's Testimony before the Areopagus (17:22–31)

The main theme is God as Creator and the proper worship of this Creator God. **The language often has the ring of Greek philosophy, for Paul was attempting to build what bridges he could to reach the Athenian intellectuals.** The underlying thought remains thoroughly biblical.

Church this is crucial. We no longer live in a day where the basics of the Gospel are well known. We have to start basic. And that basic will vary on the situation, the person, the location...so many variables! And that means we really need to be listening to the Spirit and the people we are sharing with. **Answer the questions they are asking and connect them to the questions they need to be asking...and TAKE YOUR TIME!**

Acts The "Unknown God" (17:22–23)

Paul's opening remark that he had observed the Athenians in every respect to be "very religious" has often been described as a *capitatio benevolentiae*, an effort to win the favor of his hearers and thus secure their attention. Such introductions were a standard device in Greek rhetoric, and Paul probably did have some such intention. **He surely did not wish to alienate his audience at the very outset.** The term he used for "religious" (*deisidaimonesteros*), however, had a definite ambiguity in current usage. It could be used in a positive sense for one who was very devoted to religious matters. It was also used with a negative connotation for those who were overly scrupulous, even superstitious, in their religious observance

Do not try and force the conversation.

Look at what Paul does- **remember he was PROVOKED- by all the idols, so he starts with the idols...**and the one to the unknown god...that had to be an amazing moment.

Acts The “Unknown God” (17:22–23)

For Paul, who was already fuming at their idolatry (v. 16), the negative connotation would be uppermost in his mind. By the end of the speech, the Athenians themselves would have little doubt about Paul’s real opinion of their religiosity

He then takes them on a journey to meet that unknown god...who is Jesus! And remember, **these folks do this all day every day...they are curious about the gods....**

Acts The “Unknown God” (17:22–23)

First, Paul referred to “what” they worshiped, not “who” they worshiped. Their worship was totally wrongheaded. They did not know God; they didn’t worship him at all. Their worship object was a thing, a “what,” and not a personal God at all. Second, **there is a strong emphasis on ignorance, on not knowing. For Greeks, as for Stoics, ignorance was a cardinal sin.** The greatest virtue was to discover truth through pursuing the divine reason within oneself. Not to live in accordance with reason, to live in ignorance, was the greatest folly imaginable. Paul accused them of precisely this ignorance, this sin

Acts The Creator God (17:24–25)

The philosophers also would have had no problem with Paul’s second critique of human worship, **“He is not served by human hands”** (v. 25). Paul’s qualifier, “as if he needed anything,” would particularly have resonated with them. **It was a commonplace of Greek philosophy to view divinity as complete within itself, totally self-sufficient, totally without need.** And they would have agreed with Paul also that the divinity is the giver of “life and breath and everything else.”⁸⁶ But there

was a world of difference between the philosopher's pantheism and Paul's strict monotheism.

Acts The Providential God (17:26–27)

God's purpose in all this is stated as his desire that people might seek him and find him. **The Stoics would have been in complete agreement. They would have argued that the divine principle was to be found in all of nature and that one should strive to grasp it as fully as possible through cultivating reason, that part of divinity that dwelt in one's own human nature.** They firmly believed that through the proper discipline of reason one could come to a knowledge of divinity. Paul would not have agreed. Even a knowledge of God from nature would still not be a human attainment but a revelation of God in his works

Acts The Worship of God (17:28–29)

Scripture would have been meaningless to the Athenians. Paul still continued to address them as much as possible in their own terms. Some argue that two quotes from Greek poets are in v. 28, but more likely the verse contains only one. The phrase "in him we live and move and have our being" seems to have been a more or less traditional Greek triadic formula. Paul surely did not understand this in the Greek sense, which would emphasize the pantheistic view of the divinity residing in human nature. His view was that of v. 25: God is the giver of life and breath and all that is

Acts The Judgment of God (17:30–31)

Paul now directed his attention to the Athenians, returning to the theme of ignorance with which he began. They were guilty of ignorance. All their acts of piety were in vain, for they did not know or worship the one true God. In his forbearance God formerly "overlooked" such ignorance (cf. 14:16; Rom 3:25). The times of forbearance had now ended because their ignorance had now ended. Now they knew the one true God through Paul's proclamation. He was no longer an "unknown God"; and should they continue in their false

worship and fail to acknowledge his sole lordship of heaven and earth, their sin would no longer be a sin of ignorance but a high-handed sin.

Things to notice and replicate:

- Paul understood the culture and ways of the people he presented to, because he had been around them- in the marketplace
- He was not afraid to use their culture and language to begin a conversation about the Gospel
- He did not shy away from the hard truths of the Gospel, but he did explain them in ways that made them accessible to his hearers
- He called them to follow Jesus

Now look at the reactions in v32-34

Some people mock and dismiss him. That is going to happen. Lean into it. They are not rejecting you. And walking off with hurt feelings is not going to lead to another conversation. And you want the next convo, because no one comes back for more punishment these days...we stand out!

Some wanted to hear more...and that is why you keep going back. Once you have the invite, that is a new field.

But the awesome part is, **some believe.** Folks, this is the reward. Seeing people trust Jesus. I promise once you see it happen once, you will want to see it happen again.

Fields...places where we plant seeds, and water them, and see, after hard labor, harvest.