

# THE GREAT COMMISSION

## A *Vision 195* Series

### STUDY FOUR

## An Original Snapshot of the First Church

*Acts 2:41–47*

*The first priority for the original church was instruction from the Scriptures. Second, there was a commonality of relationships. Third, there was worship as they gathered for their meals and then saved some for the table of the Lord. Fourth, prayer undergirded the ministry.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**W**HAT is the best way to “do” church? From very early on, Christians have disputed this question with debates on matters great and small. Indeed, the dialogue will continue because Scripture doesn’t answer *all* our questions about the best way to “do” church. God leaves many aspects for us to think through and work out.

Scripture, however, does offer a snapshot of the very beginning of the church right after the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Luke’s book of Acts highlights certain essentials that immediately catch our attention, and for good reason . . .

This *Searching the Scriptures* study on Acts 2:41–47 will take us back in time to see these first believers in action. We may not settle the age-old debates, but we will get a glimpse of how they *did* church. The biblical standard remains valuable for faithful local congregations to uphold in our day.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

## An Original Snapshot of the First Church

*Acts 2:41–47*



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Offer this prayer to God, asking Him to lead you as you dive into His Word today.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the church, and thank You for inviting me to be a part of Your people both now and forever. Please, guide me today as I read the Scriptures, and allow me to learn what it looks like to be a part of Your church. In Jesus' name, amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Just as Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit arrived with more magnificence than the disciples ever could have expected. With the sound of howling wind and little lights dancing like flames, the Spirit of God now dwelled among His people. But Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to do more than just create a spectacle . . . He would equip the church to reach the lost with the good news.

Read [Acts 2:4–11](#). How did the Holy Spirit allow the earliest believers to reach the Near Eastern Jews who were gathered in Jerusalem that day?

With the captive audience before Him, Peter preached the first sermon of the original church. He told of Jesus the Messiah who died and was raised to make God's forgiveness and favor available to be enjoyed forever. According to [Acts 2:41](#), how did the crowd respond to Peter's sermon?



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*Acts 2:41–47*

So began the Spirit-filled church. Now that the first church had been formed, this new collection of people would begin to *do* something together to participate in the mission of spreading the good news of Jesus to the lost. Let's turn to Acts 2:42–47 to see what they did.



### Observation: Practices of the Original Church

In His book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck says the first step in Bible study is to “observe the words that form sentences.”<sup>1</sup> Read [Acts 2:42–47](#). As you read, list the different *verbs* Luke used to describe the actions of the original believers.

According to [2:42](#), what four activities did the first century believers devote themselves to practicing?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

According to [2:44–45](#), how did the earliest Christians respond to the needs of those around them?



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*Acts 2:41–47*

*With the teaching of the Scriptures, you're taking in, absorbing, learning, receiving. With fellowship, you're giving out, reaching out, touching others' lives, showing care and compassion. You're expressing your faith to those who are hurting or who need what you have. A balanced church has both. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

In what two places did the church meet according to [Acts 2:46](#)?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

Based on [2:47](#), what effect did the behavior of this new body of believers have on the nonbelieving community around them? Who was ultimately responsible for this result?

These observations show a lot of the behaviors the earliest Christians exhibited. But we must look more closely to determine their top *priorities*. For that, we'll turn to the next stage of our Bible study: interpretation.



### **Interpretation: Teaching, Fellowship, Worship, and Prayer**

To understand what features are most essential to the church, we must not only look at what the text *says*. We must also determine what the text *means*.

[Acts 2:42](#) states that all the believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer.” The word translated “devoted” has the sense of persisting in an action, and the sentence structure suggests that this devotion was ongoing over a long period of time.



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What does this information suggest about the importance of these activities? What would it look like for believers to commit themselves to these practices today?

One particularly noteworthy activity that characterized the original church was *fellowship*. This term refers to sharing things in common—both possessions and mutual interests. In ancient Greek literature, the same term often described close relational bonds, such as those existing between husband and wife.

What insight does this context reveal about unity in the church—both then and today?

*They had one thing in common: Christ. They've all placed their trust in Jesus. That's what united them in fellowship. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

*Acts 2:46* notes that the new Christians would gather at the temple—the center of *Jewish* worship. This may seem odd as Christian and Jewish practices are so different today. However, these early believers still considered themselves Jews. They worshiped the same God, but unlike their fellow Jews, they also believed Jesus to be the long-awaited *Jewish* Messiah.



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Considering this, why is it significant that the new believers chose to continue to meet in the temple with other nonbelieving Jews? See *Constable's Notes* [netbible.org](http://netbible.org) for some guidance.

The recipe for a healthy church has four essential ingredients: teaching, fellowship, worship, and prayer. Season the community with joy and generosity, and you will have a church that will both welcome outsiders to the table and nourish the souls of hungry believers.



### Correlation: Correcting Misguided Churches

The Holy Spirit sparked the flame of rapid church growth. Yet, the heat eventually cooled, and the growth began to slow. As different regions established their own churches, some fell prey to false teaching or poor priorities. In these instances, the apostles would write letters to set these congregations back on the right path. Let's look at a couple of examples from Paul's letters.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul used the example of the Macedonian church to instruct the church in Corinth. Read [2 Corinthians 8:1–15](#), and identify the behaviors from Acts 2:41–47 which the Macedonians also exhibited. How did Paul use the gospel to encourage and exhort the Corinthian believers?



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The church in Colossae also wandered from one of the priorities discussed in Acts 2:41–47. Read [Colossians 2:1–10](#), and note how the Colossian church strayed. Then summarize how Paul sought to reestablish them.

Paul didn't have much trouble pointing out where these churches went astray because they all were familiar with the first church's priorities. Many of them likely even belonged to the group of the original 3,000 converts! But what about us—we who are much further removed from the original church? How can we emulate their priorities in our lives today?



### Application: Emulating the Original Church Today

Pastor Chuck dips into the well of this passage and draws out the application using the first church's four priorities: *teaching*, *fellowship*, *worship*, and *prayer*. Oh, they also showed plenty of *joy* and *generosity*!

In what ways have you seen your own faith in God strengthened by practicing these four spiritual disciplines or two attitudes? How does this recollection encourage you in your spiritual walk today?



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What practical steps can you take this week to better cultivate one or two of these behaviors in your own life? Go ahead and grab your calendar and block off some time throughout the week. Maybe reach out to some friends or family members and ask if they would join you as you seek to emulate the priorities of the original church.

We may not be able to determine the health of a church based on its music style or its governance structure. However, we do know the essential behaviors and characteristics that God's designed for His people. May we strive to be a community committed to biblical teaching, joyous fellowship, authentic worship, and fervent prayer!



### A FINAL PRAYER

Offer this prayer from Pastor Chuck as you conclude your study:

*How grateful we are, our Father, for Your work in us, through us, among us, and often in spite of us. Thank You for igniting the flame and never letting it go out from the days of these early Christians. Thank You for leading them and changing the world through them. Make us winsome, magnetic people today in a world that has long since lost its way. May Christ be glorified in and through us. In the name of Jesus we pray, amen.*

### ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 108.

