

THE GREAT COMMISSION

A *Vision 195* Series

STUDY FIVE

An E-Ticket for Reaching the Lost

Acts 2:41–47

When the church is doing what it ought to be doing, the world discovers what it's missing. It wants to know what makes the Christian so different, so unique, so full of zest and life and enthusiasm and purpose.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE world is a dark place, and many have worked very hard to try to provide ways to brighten it. Modern medicine has discovered cures to hundreds of diseases that have plagued humanity for millennia. Technology allows friendships to bloom among people living on different continents. And high-quality education is more widely available than ever.

Despite all these innovations, however, it still feels like the world is filled with darkness—broken relationships, violence, corruption, and greed. Amid the mix of these advancements and harsh realities, only one *true* force for good has the power to truly advance humanity and expel this world's darkness.

Pastor Ray Stedman says, “Nevertheless, despite its many weaknesses and its tragic sins the church has been, in every century since its inception, the most powerful force for good on the face of the earth. It has been light in the midst of a darkness so dense it could be felt.”¹

When the Holy Spirit arrived 2,000 years ago and indwelt Jesus' original followers, He created changed hearts, which led to transformed communities. Ultimately, the body of Christ would shine its light to the entire world and alter the course of human history forever—and for *good*.

We know *how* God chose to change the world—through the church. But *what* exactly can we do to be a bright beacon of hope to others? In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we will look at how the original church brought the good news to a world groping in the dark.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Offer this prayer to God before you begin your study of His Word today:

Father, I know the world is a dark place, and I recognize I have contributed to its brokenness. But you've chosen me and forgiven me and restored me. Please illuminate Your Word so I might see Your goodness and better participate in Your plan for Your world. I pray in Jesus' good name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The book of Acts reads like a sequel to the gospel of Luke. Luke's first volume introduced us to Jesus and the good news that God's eternal forgiveness, unmerited favor, and intimate presence are available through Christ. Acts, then, shows us how this news spread from a small Jewish community in Jerusalem to reach the entire world.

The narrative of Acts begins with Jesus commissioning His disciples, giving them the plan to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Of course, they wouldn't be alone. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to fuel this mission.

Now, we will journey through Acts to see the bigger picture of what the church did specifically to fulfill this mission in the years immediately following Jesus' ascension into heaven.



Observation: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Rome

In his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck describes the method he follows to understand and apply Holy Scripture.² In this first section, we will *observe* a few key passages to see what the book of Acts *says* about the spread of the good news and the growth of the church. Be sure to keep in mind the words of Acts 1:8!

The Original Christian Community in Jerusalem—Acts 2:41–47

Acts 2:41–47 describes the earliest gathering of Christians, most of whom came to faith after Peter's sermon in Jerusalem during the celebration of Pentecost. Read this passage and write down how many people joined the church that day.



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Based on these verses, what did this community do that would have appealed to those not part of the body of Christ? According to [Acts 2:47](#), what was the result of these behaviors? Who ultimately was responsible for these events?

Growth in Judea and Samaria—Acts 8:1–8

According to [Acts 8:1–8](#), what events caused the Christians to scatter from Jerusalem to the surrounding regions of Judea and Samaria? What did they do there despite their circumstances?

In what ways is this passage similar to [2:41–47](#)? How is it different?



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Paul's Testimony before Caesar—Acts 28:17–30

Paul had been a fierce enemy of the church. But after a miraculous encounter with Jesus, he became one of the boldest heralds of the good news. Just as Paul had once persecuted Christians, so did his fellow Jews target him after his conversion.

They eventually arrested him and sent him to Rome to testify to Caesar, emperor of the Roman Empire. In the space below, summarize what Paul shared with his fellow believers in [Acts 28:17–20](#).

According to [28:28–30](#), who was the focus of Paul's ministry after he arrived in Rome? To understand why, go back and read [28:23–24](#).

In the most natural and zealous and exciting way, they shared their lives that had been transformed by Christ, and the church made room for the growth of brand-new believers. They just kept their arms open and the welcome mat out. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll.



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Interpretation: To the Ends of the Earth

After observation comes interpretation. In this step, we will look more deeply at the meaning of the book of Acts to see what timeless truths God can teach us today.

Look up some of the following references: *Acts 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 9:31; 11:21–25; 14:1; 16:5; 17:10–12*. In what ways do you see these early Christians fulfilling the command Jesus gave His disciples in *1:8*? What are some differences you notice among these events?

It's the great commission on the march, on the move. Opposition didn't silence them, the obstacles didn't discourage them, the odds against them didn't intimidate them.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What was God's role in the growth of the church? How can this truth both encourage and direct Christians today as we seek to spread the good news about Jesus?



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The Romans believed that the reign of Caesar extended throughout the whole earth. In light of this detail, what makes the expectation of an encounter between Paul and Caesar in Acts 28 particularly significant? Use your *Bible study tools* to help you answer, and don't forget about Acts 1:8!³

One soul at a time, God brought more people into the fold of His community. It must have been incredible to watch all the multitudes joining the church in those days. This movement of the Holy Spirit may have been new, but God had this plan in mind *thousands* of years earlier.



Correlation: Working Out God's Plan

Throughout time, God has worked out His plan through *covenants*. These covenants contained *promises* that God would fulfill in His time. In return, His people would respond in *faith*, believing in the promises He *already* has fulfilled and trusting that He still would fulfill the *not-yet-met* promises.

God made one of His first covenants with a man named Abram in *Genesis 12:1–3*. What *promises* did God make? In what ways did Luke reveal that the promises of this Covenant were reaching their fulfillment throughout the book of Acts?

Even though generations would come and go before the Holy Spirit would arrive, God was working out His plan from the beginning of time. And just like Abram and the apostles, anyone who trusts in God today gets to be part of this plan too!



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Application: Reaching the Lost Today

The original church demonstrated certain behaviors in its mission of reaching the lost, and these behaviors indicate principles instructive for us today. Pastor Chuck notes five to guide our participation in God's mission today:

1. *The first Christians were unique and creative in their outreach.*
2. *They did not limit their outreach to church gatherings.*
3. *Outreach was usually connected to non-religious events.*
4. *Church growth never was the result of force or coercion.*
5. *Most first-century Christians did not personally leave home to serve Christ on foreign soil.*

What ideas come to mind when you think of outreach or evangelism today? In what ways are these ideas similar to the early church's mission? In what ways are they different?

Evangelism is not a “churchy” thing. Evangelism is a Christian thing. It is the life of Christ being shared with someone else. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

How do you sense God leading you to participate in His mission of reaching the lost today? List one or two of these five principles you'll use to guide you as you reach out to those who don't know Jesus.



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The book of Acts only begins to highlight the ways the God is using the church for His good purposes in this otherwise dark world. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, He is softening hard hearts, healing communities, and changing the world. May we be inspired by the example set by our Christian forefathers to share with the lost the good news of Jesus Christ!



A FINAL PRAYER

Write your own concluding prayer below. Ask God for boldness as you shine the light of His goodness in this dark world.

ENDNOTES

1. Ray C. Stedman, *Body Life* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1972), 2.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "How to Study the Bible for Yourself."
3. Other tools we recommend are a whole-Bible commentary, such as the two-volume *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* and *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. Pastor Chuck's favorite Bible dictionary is *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. A variety of versions of the Bible are available at BibleGateway.com, and an excellent online Bible commentary by Thomas L. Constable is at netbible.org.

