

THE GREAT COMMISSION

An Original Snapshot of the First Church

Acts 2:41–47

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

“Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.”¹

Few have stated it better than Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882). He captured an enduring principle that threads history and spans cultures: enthusiasm. It became the hallmark of the early church. Only, it was a special kind of enthusiasm fueled by divine power—a magnetic power. Excitement bubbled out of the members of the early church because of what Jesus had done for them and because of the Spirit of God in them.

Today we will walk through the door of Acts 2:41–47 and lock hands with Christians in the first church. We will sit among them, learn from them, and stand in awe of God with them. For we have the same Spirit, follow the same teachings, and unite under the same strong name: Jesus Christ.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Today we will apply Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method to Acts 2:41–47—the last passage in this four-part series. So far, we've studied the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16–20), Jesus' plan (Acts 1:6–11), and the Spirit's igniting (2:1–13).

Before studying the Bible we want to pray, because the Spirit of God who inspired this passage of Scripture is the very same Spirit who empowers us to learn spiritual truths and grow spiritually. Pray these words with me:

Father, thank You for preserving Your Word, for making it so accessible, and for providing this snapshot of the first church. I ask that You bless this time set aside to learn more about You and Your ways. Please illuminate my mind and kindle my heart so that You may be glorified in my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Quotable

“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”; those are the priorities.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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To gain more familiarity with the context of today's passage, read all of Acts 2 so you can experience the first sermon preached by Peter after the Spirit's empowering. Don't forget that Jews from all over the world heard Peter that day during Pentecost.



Observation

Before understanding what the Bible means, we must perform a careful reading of what it says. We call this observation. It's step one. During observation, we want to read the text—we're not trying to understand culture, word translations, or adopt a principle for living. That all comes later. For now, with intentionality and attentiveness, read Acts 2:41–47, letting each word nestle in your mind.

First, you'll want to write down what you see. In narrative, we observe the characters, action, location, and dialogue. The more we find now, the easier and deeper our interpretation will be later. For each verse, write down two to three observations.

Acts 2:41

Acts 2:42

Acts 2:43



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Acts 2:44

Acts 2:45

Acts 2:46

Acts 2:47



Searching the Scriptures Observation Tip

Sometimes the authors of biblical narratives insert their theological interpretation of the events or teaching. These statements are important to note in observation so we can use them during our own interpretation.



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Yes, observation can take a bit of time, but it helps us walk through the orchard of the Bible, see the green leaves, feel the rough bark, and taste the sweet strawberries and juicy oranges. Rushing the observation process would be like looking down at the orchard from the window of a plane.

What are the four priorities to which the new believers devoted themselves in Acts 2:42?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

What does fellowship (Acts 2:42) look like according to Acts 2:44–46?

In what two places did the church meet according to Acts 2:46?

- 1)
- 2)

Did you see how Luke interpreted the events of our passage in Acts 2:47? Again, we want to mark statements like these because they help us in the next step, interpretation, to which we will now turn.



Interpretation

We seek to understand what the author means during interpretation—the second step in our Bible study method. We want to understand the author’s intention and discern those great truths that bind the pages of Scripture. We also want to understand cultural references and the original languages underlying our English translation. Did you know the Old Testament was first written in Hebrew with a few parts in Aramaic and the New Testament was first written in Greek?



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Acts 2:41 says that three thousand people were added to the church after Peter's sermon. How many believed in Jesus before Peter preached? (Cross-reference Acts 1:15.)

Where were the new believers from? (Cross-reference Acts 2:5.)

Just imagine all those faces with different clothes, lifestyles, and languages. If visiting Jews stayed in Jerusalem beyond Pentecost to learn about Jesus, what would they have needed? Now revisit Acts 2:45. Who would have been sharing their property and possessions with whom?

According to the end of Acts 2:43, God confirmed the message of the apostles by performing signs and wonders through them. Use your Bible dictionary to look up the word *sign*. If you don't have a Bible dictionary, we recommend *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. You can also reference Dr. Constable's *notes* on this verse—they're in the right reading pane. Write down what you learn about the theological significance of signs.

Remember Luke's theological interpretation in Acts 2:47? How does his statement imply God's involvement and approval of the events in Acts 2?



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Imagine a Roman worshiper of the mythological god Jupiter reading this in the first century. Part of Luke's intent for writing Acts was to display to Roman citizens how the power of God was working in the church and not through the political fist of Roman might.

It's false to think a true, thriving church will always be persecuted. In Acts, churches were either persecuted or well-received depending on what God ordained in that specific location. In our passage, how did the people in Jerusalem respond to the first church? What verse tells you this? What characteristics about this first church do you think would have caused this response?

“And a deep sense of awe came over them all” (Acts 2:43). Talk about enthusiasm! The exciting part is that God still works miracles today—giving us new hearts, transforming lives, restoring relationships, and releasing us from deadly habits. Before we move on, take a moment to thank Jesus for the change He's made in you.



Correlation

In this third step, we compare our passage with other biblical passages to gain a better understanding of the topic in our passage. We call this correlation.

Acts 2:42 contains four basic descriptions of the first church: 1) apostolic teaching, 2) fellowship, 3) sharing meals like the Lord's Supper, and 4) prayer. From these characteristics, churches today can measure if they are prioritizing the important things. After Paul planted churches all over the world, many of them gradually or immediately strayed from these four foundational practices and focused instead on nonessentials. He addressed the churches in letters.

Paul praised a core practice in the Macedonian churches which he wanted Corinth to emulate (2 Corinthians 8:1–15). The church in Corinth had neglected to do what the churches in Macedonia were doing. Peruse the passage and find the core practice that we also see in Acts 2:41–47. Find it? So how did Paul use the gospel to encourage and exhort the church in Corinth to emulate the Macedonian churches?



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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.

If you're looking for a new Bible reading plan, a good study would be to read all 13 letters by the apostle Paul, and note how he led each congregation back to the key operating principles: apostolic teaching, fellowship, sharing meals including the Lord's Supper, and prayer. As Chuck emphasizes in his sermon, churches are to devote themselves to these things with a single-minded perseverance.



Application

In the previous three studies, we brainstormed ways you can fulfill the Great Commission. Hopefully, you've celebrated how Jesus has used you and your church in His global mission and have identified opportunities to further engage your community and our world with the gospel.

We just read how the first church exuded awe toward God (Acts 2:42). So in this final study of this series, we'll focus only upon worship. We exist to worship God, stand in awe of Him, give thanks for all He's done, and adore Him for who He is. Our missional activities will not work if worship doesn't precede and pervade all our going and doing.

Grab your calendar and fill in a few slots over the next week with one word: *worship*. During these times, you might want to listen to worship music or read the Bible. Simply go to your favorite location without distractions—a room or bench where you can quickly prepare your heart and mind for the presence of God. You may even invite friends or family. To make it purposeful, note the specifics of how you wish to spend this time. What songs will you sing? How many chapters will you read? At which time will you pray?



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, how amazing and inspiring it is to see Your work in the beginning of Your church era. You continue to work in our age as You did then—healing broken hearts, enlightening darkened minds, and comforting anxious souls. You give us true hope. Thank You for restoring my life, that though I was dead, now I live; and though I was blind, now I see. You are my hope, my life, my breath, and my rock. I praise You and give You all the glory and honor. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Circles,” in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: The Collected Works* (n.p.: Bybliotech, Kindle, n.d.), 7116.



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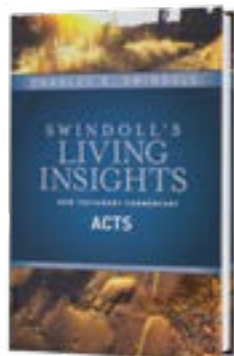
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Tools for Digging Deeper



Swindoll's Living Insights
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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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