

THE CHURCH AWAKENING AN URGENT CALL FOR RENEWAL STUDY TWO

Challenges, Struggles, Solutions, Priorities

Selections from Acts 4–6

The world has lost its way. So it's not surprising that when a church takes its cues from the world, the church begins to lose its way.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost, the church was born and immediately grew. In response to Peter's first sermon, *three thousand souls* were "added to the church that day" (Acts 2:41). On the *first day* of ministry!

Understandably, with such growth came challenges. Can you imagine a church today expanding from a handful to three thousand members overnight? In addition to the logistical problems of where to meet and how to communicate would be a host of hazards common among fast-growing groups, including:

- Uncertainty of purpose
- Blurred vision
- Fuzzy priorities
- Power-hungry "professional" leaders
- Rigid bureaucratic policies



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Growing so fast, the early church could have derailed into an institutional mind-set. What kept it on track? Its *spiritual values*. Let's peek inside the early church bursting at the seams to see how their leaders managed the church's challenges with solutions based not on glitzy, big-business strategies but godly principles.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Jesus promised His followers that when the Holy Spirit comes, “he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). Invite the Lord, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, to reveal the hidden gems in His Word.

Father, lead me to the treasure You have stored in Scripture. Open my eyes to the insights I might not have seen before, the truths to light my way, and Your message of hope to give me courage to face my challenges and struggles. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The new believers were added to the “church” (Acts 2:41). What church? Not a steepled building on a street corner but the universal family of believers, a movement of God that “all the powers of hell” cannot conquer (Matthew 16:18). Although these insidious powers can't defeat the church, they will assault the church with all possible means, including persecution.



Observation: Strong Resistance, Internal Test, Valid Complaint

Let's observe how the early church handled the firestorm caused by Peter and John's healing of “a man lame from birth” at the temple gate (Acts 3:1–8) and by Peter's declaration, “Faith in Jesus' name has healed him before your very eyes” (3:16). Immediately, the Jewish leaders tried to censure the disciples for preaching the gospel of the resurrected Jesus, whom the Jewish leaders had crucified.



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Persecution: Overcoming Strong Resistance—Acts 4–5

As you fill in the blanks in the following charts, use your skills of observation to summarize selected passages in Acts 4–5 that describe the persecution of the church.

| Acts Passages | Challenges and Struggles When Persecuted |
|----------------|--|
| 4:1–7 | |
| 4:16–18, 21–22 | |
| 5:15–18 | |
| 5:27–28, 33–40 | |



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Instead of shutting down the church, the persecution had the opposite effect because of how the apostles and the church responded. What solutions did they use? What spiritual values did they model as their priorities? Write down what you observe.

| Acts Passages | Solutions and Priorities When Persecuted |
|----------------|--|
| 4:8–13 | |
| 4:19–20, 23–31 | |
| 5:29–32, 41–42 | |

When we’re filled with the Spirit and speaking for Christ, we’re invincible. We’re not filled with fright over what people will say or do. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Hypocrisy: Surviving an Internal Test—Acts 5:1–11

The early church withstood initial external assaults, but the adversary was too determined to wave a white flag and retreat. No, the devil just went undercover and slyly attacked from within.

Read *Acts 5:1–11*. What do you observe about an internal challenge the church faced from two of its members?



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Summarize Peter’s response to Ananias and Sapphira. What spiritual values did Peter affirm as nonnegotiable priorities for the church?

God’s solution to Ananias and Sapphira’s sin: death for the couple. Why so severe? They were trying to fool God and the church by parading false spirituality. Their hypocrisy would have infected others and over time corrupted the church from within, much like hypocrisy had poisoned the Jewish leaders. The solution was severe, but it preserved the church.

The problem with Ananias and Sapphira was lack of integrity. Why is that such a big problem? Because so many people were counting on so few to walk in integrity. Leaders can’t compromise their integrity without affecting the church. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Favoritism: Dealing with a Valid Complaint—Acts 6:1–7

A third challenge the early church faced came through a valid complaint by certain members of the church. Read [Acts 6:1](#) and summarize the problem. What was at the heart of the Greek-speaking believers’ complaint? How serious was this problem?



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What was the apostles' wise solution, according to *Acts 6:2–7*? What priorities did their solution illustrate?

We've observed three monumental challenges in the early church that could debilitate any church today: *persecution*, *hypocrisy*, and *favoritism*. Let's develop some key principles based on their example to help us thrive like the early church.



Interpretation: Principles to Help Us Face Our Challenges and Struggles

In the interpretation phase, we explore the meaning of the text and then draw principles. Principles are universal statements of truth that apply to Christians in all times. When writing a principle, it helps to include a “should” statement—to express the *what*; and a “by” statement—to illustrate the *how*. For example, “*When persecution strikes, we should . . . by . . .*” Review your observations under the headings above and write principles using the following prompts based on key verses.

Key Verse

So they . . . commanded [the apostles] never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, “Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:18–20)

Obedience Principle:



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Key Verse

All the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God: “O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them. . . . O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word.” (Acts 4:24, 29)

Prayer Principle:

Key Verse

“Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? . . . You weren’t lying to us but to God!” (Acts 5:3–4)

Integrity Principle:



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Key Verse

“Select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word.” (Acts 6:3–4)

Delegation Principle:

Do other key verses stand out from the passages you observed? If so, what principles can you write based on these verses?

We have nothing to fear serving our sovereign God! He never slumbers or sleeps. He never says, “Sir,” to anyone or asks permission of anybody. He is our Master. As a church, we answer to Him and exalt Him and seek to please Him. That’s what gives us a sense of invincibility. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: Growth as an Outcome

As a result of the early church's commitment to its values, the church grew. Read the following verses and in the space below, write down the reasons people converted. What deep needs of the soul was Christ meeting through His church?

They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. (Acts 2:46–47)

But many of the people who heard their message believed it, so the number of men who believed now totaled about 5,000. (4:4)

Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women. (5:14)

So God's message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too. (6:7)

And the believers were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. The same thing happened in Iconium. Paul and Barnabas went to the Jewish synagogue and preached with such power that a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers. (13:52–4:1)

People today still hunger for a soul-satisfying relationship with God, and when they find what their spirits yearn for in Christ and His church, they will respond. The key is to stay focused on our spiritual values, regardless of the pressure to compromise.



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Application: Truths in Action

Our challenges and struggles may or may not be the same as those of the early church, but the solutions they modeled and the spiritual values they prioritized are the same. Write down one or two principles you gleaned from this study that stand out.

What positive changes in your life or the life of your church might result by putting this principle or these principles into action?

How might people's souls be nourished?



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God was moving through the early church in extraordinary ways. What attribute of God stood out to you in the verses you read? How can that attribute encourage you in your walk with Him today?

Although the adversary still disrupts, the Lord always blesses churches that uphold His Word. At the heart of our mission must be prayer, boldness, honesty, love for all people, and a determination to proclaim the name of Jesus. Just as the first-century church endured, so will the church of the twenty-first century as we hold onto these core spiritual values.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the power of Your Word that brings us back to Christ, our Head. Guard us from chasing the glitter of the world and its promises of success and influence. Bind us to the spiritual values that secured the first church and can keep us on track with Your will, in Jesus' name, amen.



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

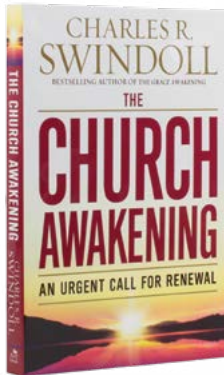
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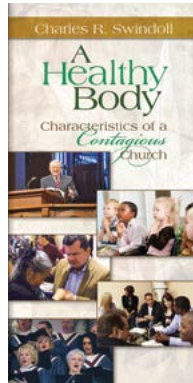
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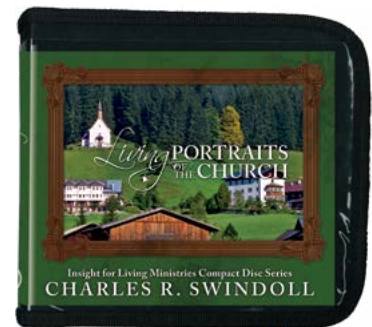
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