

THE GREAT COMMISSION

A *Vision 195* Series

STUDY ONE

What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20

The plan Jesus set in motion before He ascended back into heaven is the only plan that will work.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

As the end of the conference drew near, the decision makers discussed, “What now?” When William Carey realized they favored the wide road with a smooth path, he grabbed Andrew Fuller’s arm crying out, “Is nothing again going to be done?”

William Carey wanted a missionary society that supported international workers who would make disciples among people who had never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. Eventually, his vision materialized and he became one of those workers—going to India. For more than forty years, without returning home, he translated the Bible, preached the gospel, and made disciples. We now know William Carey (1761–1834) as the father of modern missions.

The global vision that compelled Carey comes from the words Jesus spoke in Matthew 28:16–20. As Christians, we’re indebted to those who’ve proclaimed Jesus’ message before us, and we’re summoned by our Lord to continue in that worthy endeavor so others, too, may enjoy Christ.



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S01
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What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20



PREPARE YOUR HEART

It's always important to pray before reading God's Word. Since we'll focus on Jesus' global mission, read Psalm 67:2–3 below, and write it as a prayer in your own words while also requesting God's aid in this study.

*May your ways be known throughout the earth,
your saving power among people everywhere.
May the nations praise you, O God.
Yes, may all the nations praise you.*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The passage for our *Searching the Scriptures* study is known as the Great Commission—Jesus' marching orders for His followers. Jesus had risen from the dead, but would soon leave them to ascend into heaven. What were they to do next?

In the momentous words of the Great Commission, Jesus answered the “What now?” question all of His disciples must have been asking. His words still ring true today, giving us *the central plan* for carrying on Jesus' ministry until He returns.



Observation: The Great Commission

We begin with observing what the Bible says by reading it slowly and paying attention to the words.¹ Read [Matthew 28:16–20](#) and note questions you may have about the text or anything that stands out to you.



What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20

According to Matthew 28:17, the eleven disciples responded in what two ways to Jesus?

1. _____

2. _____

According to 28:18, how much authority has been given to Jesus?

According to 28:19, to what nations did Jesus send His disciples?

According to 28:20, which of Jesus' commands are His disciples to obey?

According to 28:20, how long will Jesus be with His people?

Did you catch the “therefore” in 28:19? In observation, we note the logical connection of statements—especially when we see connectives like “therefore.” So how does the “therefore” connect verse 28:19 with verse 28:18?

There's nothing following Jesus' words in Matthew's gospel. This is it. This is the plan. This is the Great Commission. Here are the instructions for all disciples who will follow Jesus after He has left the earth. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20



Interpretation: Jesus' Plan to Reach All Nations

Observing the text helps us break it down into sections so that we can understand what it means. In the interpretation step, we want to see through the author's eyes to avoid imposing our own opinions into the author's meaning.

The Setting—Matthew 28:16–17

Begin by looking up *Galilee* (Matthew 28:16) in the maps section of your Bible or your Bible atlas. In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll suggests a possible site of “the mountain where Jesus told them to go” as Mount Arbel. This vantage point would have given the disciples a broad view of the Galilee region and the highways that linked Israel to the rest of the world.²

Why do you think Jesus wanted to meet His disciples there instead of Jerusalem?

Review the prophecy about Galilee at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in [Matthew 4:12–17](#). Do you see any interpretive connections between the launch of Jesus' ministry and His commissioning His disciples?

Imagine seeing the resurrected Jesus on that mountain in Galilee. His new, immortal body must have appeared awesome, and yet He still bore “the wounds in his hands and his side” (John 20:20). The disciples worshiped Him, but some doubted—perhaps fretting over how they could carry on without the Master. Jesus answered their doubts and settled their hearts with His specific and encouraging instructions.



What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20

The Great Commission—Matthew 28:18–20a

Jesus began with a declaration of His authority (*Matthew 28:18*), the same theme that Matthew had developed throughout his gospel (7:29; 9:6; 16:1–4; 21:23–27). What earlier event in Matthew 28 proved Jesus' authority once and for all?

Rephrase in your own words Jesus' statement, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth." Doing this increases our understanding because we must know what the text means before we can restate it.

According to *Matthew 28:18–20*, how do we make disciples and what does a disciple do? Note the central verb, *make*, and the other action words that complement it. For help identifying the verbs, read pages 322–323 of Pastor Chuck's commentary.



What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20

The Divine Assurance—Matthew 28:20b

How does Jesus' assurance in [Matthew 28:20](#) encourage His disciples and empower them to carry out His command to make disciples?

Just think—the God of the universe cares about us, gives us purpose in life, reveals to us His plan for the world, and equips us with His presence to do what He commands!

Jesus said in so many words, “I will give all the strength you need, provide all of the energy necessary, open all the doors that need to be opened, and when I do, walk through them. Open your heart, open your doors, open your life.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

In the upper room before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would come. According to [John 16:8, 13–15](#), what did Jesus say the Holy Spirit would do to aid His disciples in their mission?



What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20

Right before Jesus ascended into heaven, He met His disciples one last time. The setting for this encounter was the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem, and Jesus had a final word of instruction for them. According to [Acts 1:8](#), what did Jesus say about the source of their power, the job they were to do, and where they were to go?

*Insight for Living Ministries has **Vision 195** as part of our marching orders. It's our vision to go to all 195 countries of the world with the message of Christ!*
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: The Great Commission, Our Mission

What principles can we apply from Christ's Great Commission? At least four streams of application flow from His powerful words.

First, *Jesus spoke to very ordinary people who knew Him personally*. No super-spiritual saints were in the group of people who received the Great Commission! They were people just like us.

Second, *Jesus presented a plan that was brief, simple, and clear*. Anyone can grasp the action points—*make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching*. His plan is doable because we operate under His authority and in His power, not our own.

Third, *Jesus was intense about the mission but relaxed regarding the method*. Jesus used the word *all* to communicate His passion: “all authority,” “all the nations,” “all the commands I have given you” (Matthew 28:18–20). We must be all-in regarding His mission, but remember, Jesus never gave us a specific method. We can be flexible to adapt our ministries to be as effective as possible.

Fourth, *Jesus expected obedient action from all His followers*. Each follower of Christ *can* participate in the Great Commission, and we *should*. Making disciples is not an option.



What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20

As you conclude this study, pray for clarity and wisdom about how God would have you move forward in a new way in His Great Commission. If He's made it clear, then pray for courage to do what He's revealed. Write down the one thing you know to do this week to further His plan.

God will always guide you as you find new ways to share the glorious news of His Son, Jesus. May God give you opportunities to speak about His mysterious, glorious plan of Christ to those who desperately need good news.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I give You my heart, hands, and feet in Your Son's service. Give wings to the words of the gospel as I proclaim them to others. Motivate me to find new ways to participate in fulfilling the Great Commission. Thank You for the reassurance of Your Son's abiding presence and the Spirit's energizing power to make Your kingdom a reality on earth. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](https://www.insight.org/how-to-study-the-bible-for-yourself)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 16–28*, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 320–21.



THE GREAT COMMISSION

A *Vision 195* Series

STUDY TWO

Kick-Starting a Plan to Reach the World

Acts 1:6–11

Why would anyone doubt that Jesus is coming back? We live in the light of it, in the hope of it, and the point is we have more to do than stand and stare into heaven. We have the baton. We have the calling. Remember, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the end of the earth.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SAYING goodbye to a loved one never is easy. Those final moments spent with someone we hold so dearly give us a new kind of appreciation for the relationship. You lean into the hug for a few extra moments to savor the warmth of the embrace. Your eyes linger on his or her face—as if to capture a snapshot. You hold on to every single word, listening more intently than ever before.

How much more closely must the disciples have listened to Jesus during their final moments with Him! They already had taken for granted Jesus' departure once before, and they wouldn't let this precious time with Jesus slip away like they did before His crucifixion. So what did Jesus say?

Thankfully, Luke preserved this goodbye between Jesus and His disciples so future generations might listen in on the conversation. In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll see what parting words Jesus shared with His closest followers and why these words are just as vital for us today.



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Kick-Starting a Plan to Reach the World

Acts 1:6–11



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Our God is not a distant God. He's ever-present and relational. Although we didn't walk physically with Jesus as the disciples did, we can still commune with Him through prayer. Offer your own prayer to God before diving into His Word today, thanking Him for who He is and asking Him to speak to you in a fresh way.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The book of Acts is the second part of a two-volume work written by Luke, a companion of the apostle Paul, and continues the story Luke began in his gospel account. If the book of Luke explains the good news of Jesus—the arrival of God's kingdom through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son Jesus—then Acts tells how the world would receive, or even reject, this good news ([Acts 1:1–2](#)).

Right after Jesus' resurrection, He gathered His disciples together in Galilee to give them one last teaching session. Today, we call this last lesson "The Great Commission." Read [Matthew 28:18–20](#), and briefly summarize its key components.

This may have been the final *lesson* the disciples heard from Jesus, but it would not be the last time they spoke with their teacher. The beginning of Acts records their last moments together, and this final interaction would kick-start the process of reaching the world with the good news.



Kick-Starting a Plan to Reach the World

Acts 1:6–11



Observation: Final Moments with Jesus

Many are eager to experience God through His Word and to see their own lives changed. Before this experience can happen, though, we must grasp what Scripture says. This often feels like a daunting task, so Pastor Chuck likes to look for a few key things in each passage: people, events, and timeless truths.¹ Read [Acts 1:6–11](#), and list all the people present at this event.

According to [1:6](#), what did the disciples ask Jesus that sparked this conversation. Based on this question, what did the disciples think Jesus planned to do after His resurrection?

According to [1:8](#), what kind of power did Jesus say He would offer? What would this power source enable them to do?



Kick-Starting a Plan to Reach the World

Acts 1:6–11

According to [Acts 1:8](#), in what areas did Jesus say the disciples would be witnesses? Look for these locales in a [Bible atlas](#) to get an idea of the scope of Jesus' new mission.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Looking up, the disciples watched the Son ascend to dwell with the heavenly Father once again. Then, looking down, their eyes suddenly fell upon two strangers they'd never seen before—striking men dressed in pristine white robes. What promise about Jesus did the two men make to the disciples in [1:11](#)?

What a way to make an exit! Jesus did not intend His dramatic departure merely to leave His friends starstruck. He had something greater in mind . . . an objective. Let's now ask some deeper questions to understand what Jesus meant in His final words to His disciples.



Interpretation: Witnesses to the Ends of the Earth

With our observations compiled, let's mine the information to interpret the timeless truths embedded in these ancient yet eternal words.



Kick-Starting a Plan to Reach the World

Acts 1:6–11

What “kingdom” did the disciples have in mind in [Acts 1:6](#)? How is the power of this kingdom different from the kind of power Jesus offered through the Holy Spirit in [1:8](#)?

The Greek word translated “witness” is a legal term, and it often refers to someone testifying in a courtroom. How does this background help make sense of the disciples’ new role? What specifically would be the focus of their testimony? (Hint: Cross-reference [Acts 1:21–22](#).)

The disciples *did not* like Jesus giving them Samaria as a part of their mission. Read about the Samaritans using your [Bible study tools](#), and summarize why Jesus’ statement would have sounded radical. What theological and practical implications does Jesus’ statement reveal to Christians today?

That’s what He means by the ends of the earth. You name it, and wherever God may lead, however He may open doors, you go there. You speak of Him there. You’re involved with Him there. You represent Him there. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Kick-Starting a Plan to Reach the World

Acts 1:6–11

Put yourself in the sandals of the disciples. A few weeks ago, they had witnessed the unthinkable. The long-awaited Messiah was murdered by His own people. Just as the disciples had started to accept that Jesus was gone—along with any hope He offered—they heard a rumor about an empty tomb. Soon enough, they stood in the presence of their dear friend once again.

But Jesus always had another surprise, and just as quickly as He returned, He was gone again. How would you have reacted to the events depicted in this passage? What would you have done next? (See [Luke 24:49](#).)

Jesus didn't think small. He wanted *the whole world* to hear the good news of the arrival of the kingdom of God: from family to foreigners, from friends to foes. And He didn't reserve this objective just for His disciples back then . . . we have the very same commission today!



Correlation: Jesus' Promise of the Holy Spirit

Jesus comforted His disciples by saying they wouldn't have to carry out His mission alone. He would send them the Holy Spirit as the mission's divine power source. This shouldn't have surprised them, though. Jesus talked about these things with them during the Last Supper in John 14.

Read [John 14:15–21](#). What did Jesus say the Holy Spirit would help them do? (Hint: Focus on verses 15 and 21.) What do Jesus' statements reveal about *how* the Holy Spirit would help the disciples reach the world with the good news of Jesus Christ?



Kick-Starting a Plan to Reach the World

Acts 1:6–11

Read [John 16:7–11](#). It might be hard to believe, but Jesus said it was *better* for Him to go than to stay. According to these verses, why?

Jesus needed His friends to know that He wasn't abandoning them. He knew they couldn't accomplish His mission without divine assistance, so He gave them—and us—the gift of the Holy Spirit.



Application: Being Witnesses for Jesus Today

Although Jesus originally offered to the apostles this plan for reaching the world, we are called to continue this mission today. Pastor Chuck offers three practical ways we can apply this passage to our lives:

1. *To embrace an uncertain future, God's promise must be remembered.*
2. *To implement an effective plan, the right people must be engaged.*
3. *To reach an ever-challenging world, Spirit-led power must be involved.*

As you look at the broken world we occupy and consider what unknowns the future might hold, you might feel overwhelmed by the task of being a witness for Jesus. But this passage shows how the apostles needed to rely on God's promises to fulfill His mission. How do the promises in this passage encourage you to participate in the mission God has prepared for you?



Kick-Starting a Plan to Reach the World

Acts 1:6–11

*We build this church in the power of the Spirit. We face tomorrow in the power of the Spirit.
We represent the Savior in the power of the Spirit. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Jesus laid out a plan for ministry that the apostles carried out through the book of Acts. They started in their local city (Jerusalem) then spread out to the surrounding regions (Judea and Samaria), and they continued to move the gospel farther and farther.

What is your Jerusalem? Your Judea and Samaria? How do you sense the Holy Spirit leading you to be a witness for Jesus in these areas? Is it possible that He is calling you to go farther than you've ever gone before?

Jesus' kingdom doesn't require political or physical or financial power for success. Instead, Jesus has given us power from above through the Holy Spirit. We aren't called to use this divine power to make our own names great, but to proclaim Jesus' name throughout the whole earth. This mission began 2,000 years ago with the apostles and continues through us today.



Kick-Starting a Plan to Reach the World

Acts 1:6–11



A FINAL PRAYER

Write your own concluding prayer below asking God to guide you as you seek to continue the Great Commission in your context today.

ENDNOTE

1. For helpful instruction from Pastor Chuck, consult our online instructional web page, “*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*.” This page provides an introduction to four important skills in Bible study—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—along with other helpful study tips. You can also follow the link to purchase a copy of Pastor Chuck’s book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, on which our studies are based.



THE GREAT COMMISSION A *Vision 195* Series STUDY THREE

Essential Fuel for Fulfilling the Mission

Acts 2:1–13

The Holy Spirit became the fuel for the mission of the disciples—the fuel that would ignite the engine of evangelism. The Holy Spirit gave them the courage they needed, and when the Holy Spirit took charge, they didn't care if they died. They were no longer operating in fear because the fuel of the Holy Spirit transformed their lives.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

HAVE you ever found yourself missing something you *needed*? You're hoping to bake a cake when you realize you have no flour. Perhaps your phone battery runs low in the middle of a conversation, and you can't find a charger. Or even more disappointing, your vehicle runs out of gas in the middle of nowhere.

What's a cake without flour? Inedible. A phone without power? Just a paperweight. A car without gas? Time to call a tow truck! God's people today will be just as useless if they fail to rely on God's power to accomplish God's mission. God's power is simply that *essential*.

In Jesus' final moments with His disciples, He gave them a mission—one they wouldn't be able to accomplish by mere human effort or earthly clout. No, this would be a *divine* mission, and a divine mission requires a *divine* power source.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we will look at Acts 2:1–13 to see what fuel Jesus provides to empower His mission, how this fuel empowered Jesus' disciples then, and how this fuel still empowers His followers today.



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S03
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Essential Fuel for Fulfilling the Mission

Acts 2:1–13



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Write your own prayer below, asking the Holy Spirit to guide you in your study of God's Word today. Specifically ask Him to help you understand your role in His mission.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Jesus shared these final words with His disciples before He finally rose into the sky to dwell in heaven. The disciples knew the mission: *to share the good news of Jesus*. They knew who would enable them to accomplish this mission: *the Holy Spirit*. But at that moment, they weren't clothed with the Holy Spirit, and they didn't even know what to expect for His arrival.

Thankfully, however, Jesus didn't leave the disciples wondering what would happen next. According to [Luke 24:49](#), what did Jesus tell His disciples to do after His ascension?

This information provides us with the context of the passage—the foundation upon which we will build our observations, interpretation, and application. So, let's start making observations!



Essential Fuel for Fulfilling the Mission

Acts 2:1–13



Observation: The Arrival of the Holy Spirit

The first step in studying any passage of Scripture is observation, which involves taking note of what the text says.¹ With that in mind, read *Acts 2:1–13* carefully.

Good observations always look for clues about the passage's *context* and *setting*. We've already discussed the context, so we can now consider the setting. Where and when did these events occur (see *2:1*)?

In his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck teaches that the words *like* or *as* can show comparison.² In *2:2–3*, Luke discusses signs that announced the arrival of the Holy Spirit. What signs did the people experience? To what did Luke compare these signs (look for *like* and *as*)? Fill in the chart below.

	Sign	Comparison
Verse 2		
Verse 3		

According to *Acts 2:4*, what was the third sign of the Holy Spirit's arrival that the believers experienced personally?



Essential Fuel for Fulfilling the Mission

Acts 2:1–13

There isn't always a one-to-one correspondence between words in the original Greek and words in our modern English. Read [Acts 2:6–7](#) in a few different Bible translations. List the different words the various translations use to describe the emotional response of the Jews who witnessed these spectacular events. What specific sign elicited their reaction?

List all the locations these Jews in Jerusalem would have considered home, according to [2:9–11](#). Try to find some of these locales on a [Bible atlas](#). This will help you get an idea of how far these Jews dispersed from their homeland.

According to [2:11](#), what did the Christians say to their fellow Jews using their new, supernatural language abilities?

What Jesus meant to the disciples during His earthly life, the Holy Spirit means to us. The Spirit of God comes alongside us to bring to our remembrance the things Jesus taught and to give us the kind of strength, vision, courage, insight, cooperation, and willingness to serve that Jesus gave His disciples. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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S03
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Essential Fuel for Fulfilling the Mission

Acts 2:1–13



Interpretation: Spirit-Empowered Witnesses

Now, we'll move to interpretation, which asks, "What does this passage *mean*?"

It's easy to glide over certain words when reading, assuming they don't add much to the narrative, but Luke had good reason for including each word he used. The fact that these events occurred at Pentecost may mean little to us, but this small detail would have stood out prominently to those present in Jerusalem that day and to Luke's original readers.

Using your *Bible study tools*, look up the term *Pentecost*. Summarize what this feast meant to the people of Israel.³ How does this background help you better understand the meaning of Acts 2:1–13? Check *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org for a detailed discussion of this topic.

Based on this passage, what did the gift of "tongues" or "languages" allow the Christians to do in this instance? What was the bigger purpose for which the Holy Spirit gave this gift to the believers?



Essential Fuel for Fulfilling the Mission

Acts 2:1–13

Based on [Acts 1:8](#), how does [2:1–13](#) demonstrate Jesus' command and promise already being fulfilled so soon after His departure?

The disciples were now equipped supernaturally with the ability to speak to whomever in whatever setting, telling them of the wonderful works of God. And the people stood amazed as they heard about the wonderful things God had done—how Jesus had paid the penalty for their sins. They'd never heard anything like this before, and they heard about Him in their own language. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Tower of Babel

The devout Jews witnessing these miraculous events may have looked around and thought, “This seems familiar.” No, they had never seen anything like this before, but they likely remembered a story they had known from the time they were little children: the story of the Tower of Babel.

Read [Genesis 11:1–9](#). Summarize what the people did and why they did it. How did God respond and why did He respond this way?



Essential Fuel for Fulfilling the Mission

Acts 2:1–13

List some points of similarity and difference between the account of the Tower of Babel and [Acts 2:1–13](#).

In what ways did the events in Acts 2:1–13 reverse God’s judgment on the people’s sin at Babel? (Hint: It involves their language and worship.)

We’ve looked at what this passage says and then considered what it means. Now that we have a good understanding of what Luke intended to communicate, let’s ask ourselves, “How can I apply the truth of this passage to my life and participate in God’s mission like the apostles?”



Application: The Difference the Holy Spirit Makes

In his discussion of the power of God in Acts 2:1–13, Pastor Chuck lists four benefits of the presence of the Holy Spirit—specifically as they relate to God’s mission. The Holy Spirit makes a difference in . . .

- *How we think*
- *What we do*
- *Where we go*
- *Why we serve*



Essential Fuel for Fulfilling the Mission

Acts 2:1–13

Whether it's across the globe or across the street, God is calling each of us to go *somewhere* to testify about the good news of Jesus Christ. But going often demands sacrifice: moving somewhere new and unknown, turning down that dream job, spending some hard-earned savings. Thankfully, God doesn't expect us to do these things by our own strength.

The Spirit of God will do a number on why you serve. You won't be as selfish as you have been. You won't hold the grudges that you've held most of your life. You will drop the prejudices that you've had for all your years. We serve for the sake of others.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

How do you sense God is calling you to go and share the good news with others? Is He leading you somewhere specific? What gifts and abilities has He uniquely given you that you can use to participate in His mission? Write your reflections below.

What might be holding you back from serving in God's mission? How has this passage reminded you of the reasons why we serve?

The Father had a mission. The Son enlisted the apostles. The Holy Spirit was the fuel. And we are invited to participate in this supernatural work of bringing the good news to the whole world. Thankfully, just as the Holy Spirit empowered the apostles to proclaim God's work of redemption, He also empowers us today to testify boldly about all the wonderful things God has done through Jesus Christ.



Essential Fuel for Fulfilling the Mission

Acts 2:1–13



A FINAL PRAYER

Thank You, Father, for the gift of salvation You've given me through the death and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ. And thank You for the gift of Your presence and power through the Holy Spirit. I ask You to attune my ear to hear the urgings of the Spirit so that I might go with confidence wherever You lead me. In Jesus' mighty name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. 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](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 101.
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](#).



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

WHAT 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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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?



An Original Snapshot of the First Church

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.”¹ 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?



An Original Snapshot of the First Church

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.



An Original Snapshot of the First Church

Acts 2:41–47

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.



An Original Snapshot of the First Church

Acts 2:41–47

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 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?



An Original Snapshot of the First Church

Acts 2:41–47

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?



An Original Snapshot of the First Church

Acts 2:41–47

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 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.

ENDNOTE

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



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S04
8

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*.



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S05
1

An E-Ticket for Reaching the Lost

Acts 2:41–47



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!



An E-Ticket for Reaching the Lost

Acts 2:41–47

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.

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?



An E-Ticket for Reaching the Lost

Acts 2:41–47

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

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](#).



An E-Ticket for Reaching the Lost

Acts 2:41–47

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.



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?



An E-Ticket for Reaching the Lost

Acts 2:41–47

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!



An E-Ticket for Reaching the Lost

Acts 2:41–47



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



An E-Ticket for Reaching the Lost

Acts 2:41–47

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.

The book of Acts only begins to highlight the ways 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](#).



THE GREAT COMMISSION
A Vision 195 Series
STUDY SIX

Needed: A Few Good Neighbors

Luke 10:25–37

What the ball is to the game, what the musical note is to the symphony, what the book is to the librarian, what the diaper is to the mother of babies, a neighbor is to the Christian.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EVERYONE has neighbors. Whether you share a wall in an apartment building or a long stretch of country road, sharing life with a neighbor can be such a blessing. You can always swing by for an egg or a cup of flour. They trust you enough to watch their pets while they're away on vacation. Your children forge friendships and play together at each of your homes.

Having a neighbor, however, doesn't necessarily make someone a *good* neighbor. If God has *physically* placed these neighbors in our lives, He must have a bigger *spiritual* purpose than simply sharing space with someone else.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study focuses on the familiar story of "The Good Samaritan," which forces us to grapple with what it means to be a *good* neighbor. The picture Jesus paints of a good neighbor is both more broad and more beautiful than what we might think . . . or even care to imagine.



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S06
1

Needed: A Few Good Neighbors

Luke 10:25–37



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare to dive into the waters of God's Word and swim with the characters, the imagery, and its truths, ask God to give you eyes to see clearly what it means to be a good neighbor. Write your prayer in the space below.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Who is my neighbor?

This question from a legal expert prompted Jesus to respond in Luke 10:25–37, not with a straightforward answer but with a *parable*. Jesus told these colorful stories to reveal truths about Himself, God, or His kingdom. He did so because ideas often resonate with us more deeply when we are led from the familiar to the mysterious—from what we know to what we can only imagine.

However, Jesus rarely explained the purpose of His parables, so His audience occasionally missed His point. Here are a couple tips to help you understand Jesus' parable:

1. Each parable has only one theme. We must resist the temptation to look for multiple themes or to search for hidden meaning behind every image. As a wise man once said: "We can't make a parable walk on all fours."
2. Always read a parable in its context. Seeing what event, conversation, or question prompted Jesus to tell the parable will help us see *why* Jesus even chose to tell a parable at all.

With these ideas in mind, turn to Luke 10:25–37 and see how this question about neighbors prompted Jesus to tell the well-known parable of "The Good Samaritan."



Needed: A Few Good Neighbors

Luke 10:25–37



Observation: A Talk and a Tale

Read [Luke 10:25–37](#), and allow the tips above to guide you. Be sure to *observe* the questions the characters ask and how other characters answer to see the parable's context.¹

A Talk—Luke 10:25–29

According to [Luke 10:25](#), what did the legal expert hope to do by approaching Jesus? What question did he ask?

In [10:28](#), Jesus showed that the legal expert knew the correct answer to his own question. What did the lawyer say in [10:27](#) that someone must do to inherit eternal life?

According to [10:29](#), what was the second question the legal expert asked? Why did he ask it?



Needed: A Few Good Neighbors

Luke 10:25–37

These observations may seem random or even insignificant, but this context will help us make sense of the meaning of Jesus' parable in the interpretation phase of our study.

A Tale—Luke 10:30–37

According to [10:31–33](#), who were the three people who witnessed the naked, beaten, and abandoned Jewish man?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Which of the three stopped to help the needy man? _____

Reread [10:34–35](#). What kinds of sacrificial actions did the Samaritan do to help the needy man?

What question did Jesus ask to conclude His story in [10:36](#)? How did the legal expert respond in [10:37](#)?

Jesus didn't ask, "Who is my neighbor?" But, "Which one proved to be a neighbor?" Jesus is not concerned about what kind of person my neighbor is but . . . what kind of neighbor I am.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Needed: A Few Good Neighbors

Luke 10:25–37



Interpretation: Who Was the Good Neighbor?

Jesus' parable would have hit His original listeners like a blow to the heart, and unless we modern-day readers catch certain cultural nuances, we'll miss the full force of Jesus' message.

Hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, foreign conquest scattered the Jews all across the ancient Near East. Many remained in Jerusalem, while others gathered in Samaria.

The Jews in Jerusalem, however, held prejudices against the Samaritans and often regarded them with hostility. The Jews considered Samaritans half-breeds because they intermarried with foreigners (see [Nehemiah 13:23–27](#)) and viewed their worship as artificial because they built their *own* temple and didn't worship at the *true* temple in Jerusalem (see [John 4:20](#)).

How does this cultural context enhance our understanding of Jesus' parable, especially regarding the Samaritan's behavior?

In a twist of irony, the despised foreigner proved to be the good neighbor! In your own words, summarize Jesus' main point of this parable. How does this point relate to the discussion between Jesus and the legal expert in [Luke 10:25–29](#)? Feel free to use your [Bible study tools](#) for help.²



Needed: A Few Good Neighbors

Luke 10:25–37

The Samaritan saw what others did not see because of the man he was. To me, that is the message of the story. What you are determines what you see, and what you see determines what you do. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jesus didn't tell the legal expert that being a good neighbor merits eternal life. Quite the opposite! Jesus flipped that idea on its head and taught that mercy and compassion are *signs* of having received eternal life, not *requirements* for entering eternal life. Being a good neighbor naturally flows out of our connection with God.



Correlation: Neighborly Compassion

Neighborly compassion characterized Jesus' ministry from His original call of the disciples until His glorious resurrection. In [Matthew 14:13–21](#), Jesus acted like a good neighbor, not just to one but to *five thousand*!

According to [14:14–15](#), how did Jesus react to seeing the crowd? What did the disciples want to do with the crowd? How did these responses differ?

According to [14:16, 19](#), who gave the food to the crowd? What vital lesson do you think Jesus taught here about being a good neighbor?



Needed: A Few Good Neighbors

Luke 10:25–37

Jesus saw the crowd's needs, felt compassion, and responded. These are the kinds of actions that characterize Jesus' followers—that make someone a good neighbor. Let's finally turn to application to discuss how we can be good neighbors in our own situations today.



Application: A People of Compassion

In his application of this passage, Pastor Chuck encourages followers of Jesus today to be like the Samaritan in Jesus' parable—to be a *good* neighbor to those God has placed around us. Pastor Chuck makes this heartfelt plea:

I would love it if we were known as people of compassion.

First, look up the word *compassion*. Summarize the definition you find. How can showing compassion to others provide us with an opportunity of sharing with them the good news about Jesus?

Compassion won't just sit there and be quiet, it accelerates a number of very important steps toward the person to whom your heart goes out. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Who are the people God has placed in your life who are *hard* to love? What would it look like for you to be a good neighbor despite these feelings?



Needed: A Few Good Neighbors

Luke 10:25–37

In His infinite wisdom, Jesus has taken the attention away from the characters in the parable and moved the focus toward our own hearts, compelling us to ask, “Am I a good neighbor?” Indeed, Jesus proved to be the *best* neighbor by dying in our place. As we fill our lives with gratitude for that sacrifice, Christlike, neighborly compassion is bound to overflow toward those around us.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for being a God of compassion. Thank You for sending Your Son to die for my sins, even though I deserved no such act of grace. I ask You to help me see the needs of my neighbors so I can serve them with the kind of compassion You’ve shown me time and again. Help me be a good neighbor. I pray in Jesus’ compassionate name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. For helpful instruction from Pastor Chuck, consult our online instructional web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).” This page provides you an introduction to four important skills in Bible study—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—along with other helpful study tips. You can also follow the link to purchase a copy of Pastor Chuck’s book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, on which our studies are based.
2. 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](#).



THE GREAT COMMISSION A *Vision 195* Series STUDY SEVEN

The God of Limitless Possibilities

Selections from Luke 18

God is the God of limitless possibilities. Think about that. Perhaps for the first time in your life, think rightly about God. With Him there are no limitations. No restrictions. No boundaries. There is no stopping. There is no hindering. There is no impossibility. In fact, God has yet to experience a challenge. It's all as good as accomplished when He determines this will be done.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EVERY detail of Jesus' life shouts, "Impossible!" A virgin birth. Innumerable miraculous healings. A peasant carpenter crowned King of the universe. Consequently, many who hear the story of Jesus consider it nothing more than an ancient fairytale.

Luke foresaw this objection as he composed his gospel account. So in the very first chapter he recorded this declaration of the angelic messenger Gabriel: "Nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37 NASB). The rest of Luke's account of Jesus' life would ride on the undercurrent of this divine truth.

Did you catch Gabriel's emphasis? *Nothing* will be impossible with God. Not even raising to life the murdered Son of God . . . nor the impossible situation staring you down today.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will wrestle with that statement from Gabriel. Is there *really* nothing impossible for God? By discussing stories of people in insurmountable situations, Jesus Himself reveals that "what is impossible for people is possible with God" (18:27).



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S07
1

The God of Limitless Possibilities

Selections from Luke 18



PREPARE YOUR HEART

One thing unites the people of God whose lives span centuries. They don't simply face their obstacles by their own grit and determination. *They trust that God can and will do the impossible.* Say your own prayer to God, showing your trust in Him and in His mighty power—that even during your study of His Word today, He might do the impossible in your life.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you prepare to mine this passage for its gems of theological truth, remember that the Bible is not a sandbox full of cute stories and catchy one-liners. Real, human authors wrote each book of the Bible under the divine guidance of God's Spirit. Each book presents its own unique purpose, theme, and message.

Luke 18:1–30 might read to you as though Luke threw together four random stories. However, the gospel writer arranged these stories intentionally. We may not see the unifying thread at first glance, but exercising the Bible study tools of observation and interpretation will reveal a profound truth about the God who created the universe.



Observation: Four Impossible Situations

The first step of Pastor Chuck's Bible study method is to observe the passage by simply reading it and focusing only on what it says.¹ Read the four stories preserved in [Luke 18:1–30](#), keeping a careful eye out for each story's main *problem* and the sequence of events. Try not get too lost in the weeds of the finer details and miss the broader meadow of the major themes.

An Impossibly Stubborn Judge—Luke 18:1–8

What request did the widow make of the judge in [Luke 18:3](#)? According to [18:2](#), what characteristics did the judge show that prevented him from granting her request?



The God of Limitless Possibilities

Selections from Luke 18

According to [Luke 18:5](#), why did the judge ultimately yield to the widow's request?

An Impossibly Guilty Tax Collector—Luke 18:9–14

According to [Luke 18:11–12](#), what did the Pharisee say in the temple? What did the tax collector say in [18:13](#)?

According to [18:14](#), which of the two men walked away from the temple justified before God?

Impossibly Insignificant Children—Luke 18:15–17

According to [Luke 8:15](#), how did Jesus' disciples treat the parents who brought their children to Jesus? Why?



The God of Limitless Possibilities

Selections from Luke 18

What did Jesus teach about the kingdom of God in [Luke 18:16–17](#) by using the example of these children?

An Impossibly Proud Ruler—Luke 18:18–30

According to [Luke 18:18](#), what question brought this ruler to Jesus? How did Jesus answer his question in [18:22](#)?

How did the ruler respond in [18:23](#) to Jesus' answer?

This is about belief, humility, trusting Jesus. It's not about impressing and doing so that others will stand and take notice. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

At this point, these four isolated events may still seem totally unrelated to one another. However, they each have one major theme in common: Jesus made an *impossible* situation *possible*.



The God of Limitless Possibilities

Selections from Luke 18



Interpretation: Jesus Does the Impossible

With a basic understanding of the plot of each of the four stories recorded in Luke 18, let's look back to see the key theological *meaning* behind each account. As you review the passage, focus on how Jesus made possible an otherwise impossible circumstance.

Thankfully, biblical authors occasionally do much of the heavy lifting and interpret the text for us. Based on [Luke 18:1](#) and [7](#), what example does the persistent widow provide for those who believe in Jesus?

How did the dispositions of the Pharisee and the tax collector differ as they stood before God? What does this contrast reveal about what kind of attitude characterizes those in Jesus' kingdom? Look also at [18:14](#).

During Jesus' day, most children were at best ignored and at worst despised by adults because they couldn't contribute to society the way an adult could. In light of this reality, what does [18:15–17](#) reveal about how Jesus sees those whom society considers insignificant?



The God of Limitless Possibilities

Selections from Luke 18

This entire chapter of Luke's gospel is a symphony about the power of God that gradually crescendos until its climax in [Luke 18:26–27](#). In light of the conversation with the rich ruler, what does Jesus' statement in [18:27](#) say about trying to earn salvation by human efforts? Based on this passage, what—or who—is the basis of salvation?

If you allow God to be God . . . you will have no difficulty with worry, or praying as you should, or thinking and living as He would be pleased for you to do.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Judah's Impossible Circumstances

People across time have faced impossible situations and consequently have needed reminders about the God of limitless possibilities—just as the disciples did in Jesus' day and just as we do today.

Jeremiah was a prophet during a time when Judah was on a fast downward slide into evil. Judah's kings worshiped false gods, and the threatening shadow of conquest by Babylon loomed ever larger with each passing day. This led many in Judah to question either God's faithfulness or His ability to save them . . . or both! Jeremiah tackled their concerns head-on.

Read the prayer recorded in [Jeremiah 32:17–25](#). What timeless truths does Jeremiah share about the Lord in [32:17](#)?



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What impossible situations did Jeremiah describe in this prayer? How did he show that these circumstances weren't too difficult for God?

These truths penned by Jeremiah ring as true today as they did thousands of years ago. It may be easy to say nothing is too hard for God . . . but what does it look like for us to live in light of that truth?



Application: Facing Today's Impossibilities

Before we look at Pastor Chuck's application of these incredible truths of Scripture, take a few minutes to prayerfully reflect on your present circumstances. Have your actions shown a trust in the God of limitless possibilities? Or do you look at everything going on around you thinking, *mission impossible*?

For application, Pastor Chuck sees this passage asking each of us three challenging questions. Think about these questions and record your thoughts in the spaces below.

First, *how big is God in your mind*? Does your perspective jibe with the theological truth we discovered through this passage?



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Second, *what specific thing have you marked off as “impossible”?* Healing from a past wound? Overcoming a struggle or addiction? Restoring that broken relationship? Wading into the waters of the unknown and unfamiliar? Remember, God does the impossible all the time, and He can do it again in your life as well as in the lives of those you love.

Third, *if God is leading you in a whole new direction spiritually, will you say yes?* Perhaps He is nudging you to renew your prayer life, to switch careers, to leave your home and pursue ministry in a completely new way.

For God, there is no such thing as impossibilities. When people think, *mission impossible*, God declares, *mission possible*! No mountain is too tall for heaven to move. And no impossible situation you face today is too difficult for Him. Pray. Trust. ***He is God!***



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A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I thank You that You are the all-powerful king and that You don't keep Your power to Yourself. Thank You for all those times You've met me in the valley of impossibility, taken my hand, and guided me out. I ask that You give me the faith to trust that You will do this again and again. I pray in Jesus' great name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. 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](#)."



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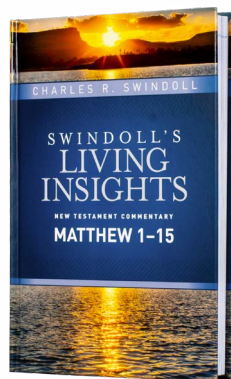
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The God of Limitless Possibilities

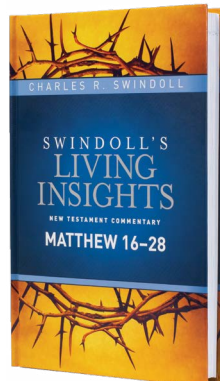
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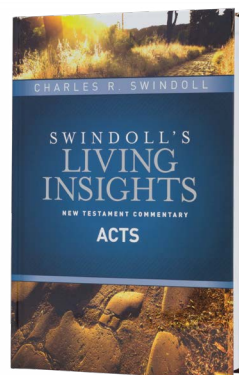
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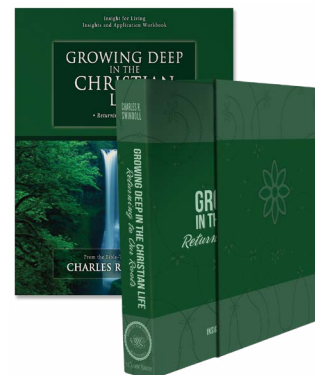
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For the 2021 broadcast, these *Searching the Scriptures* studies were developed by Brad Smith, writer, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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