

## GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

**DISCUSS:** Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 60** and ask **Question #1: What's the most fun you've had serving others?**

**GUIDE:** Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life** on **PSG page 61**. Share the author's experience of receiving an act of service from his neighbor, as well as his participating in serving someone else.

**SAY:** "Today, believers can experience the joy that comes by serving others."

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 61: We do not live for ourselves; we serve God by serving others.**

**PRAY:** Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to teach us from the example of the early church the importance of serving those in need.

## SESSION 5

# WHAT SHOULD WE DO NOW?



### ***The Point***

We do not live for ourselves; we serve God by serving others.

### ***The Bible Meets Life***

The greatest thing we receive in this life is salvation through faith in Christ. But if that's the greatest thing we can experience, why doesn't God simply take us to

heaven as soon as we've received Christ? Jesus does more than just save us from sin; He saves us for something: the joy of serving Him. He calls us to serve Him by serving others. He saves us for His glory, and we glorify God when our service leads others to a deeper relationship with Him.

### ***The Passage***

Acts 2:37-47

### ***The Setting***

In the days following Jesus' ascension, 120 of His followers gathered daily in Jerusalem. They prayed and waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus had promised. On the day of Pentecost (fifty days after Passover) the Holy Spirit came in power and did miraculous signs through the believers. When a crowd wondered what was happening, Peter preached the good news of Christ and many people became believers. From that time the believers continued to grow in faith, develop community, and share the message of Christ with others.

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## Acts 2:37-41

**37** When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: “Brothers, what should we do?”

**38** Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**39** For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

**40** With many other words he testified and strongly urged them, saying, “Be saved from this corrupt generation!”

**41** So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them.

**Verse 37.** Those who accept God’s salvation through faith in Jesus Christ have been given the privilege to lead others to faith and growth in Christ. This was what **Peter** and **the rest of the apostles** began doing on the day of Pentecost after the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the believers. As they praised God, the people who were present were all able to hear the message in their own native languages. The crowd wondered what this meant (Acts 2:12-13). Peter then preached about Jesus’ death and resurrection—pointing to Scripture to confirm that the same Jesus they crucified was indeed both “Lord and Messiah” (vv. 14-36).

After hearing Peter’s words, the crowd was **pierced to the heart**. The Greek word, used only here in the Bible, refers to a great emotional distress—being conscience-stricken, broken-hearted, or stunned to the core of their being. The Jewish people had rejected the Messiah and allowed Him to be crucified. They asked the apostles, “**What should we do?**” They recognized their wrong and wanted to know how (or maybe if) they could make it right.

**1 ▶ Verse 38.** Peter responded quickly. First he said they must **repent**. Peter was not the first to use this word—both John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2) and Jesus (4:17) emphasized repentance. While the Greek word literally means changing the mind, repentance goes beyond just a change in one’s thinking. The word gives the picture of changing direction—

## STUDY THE BIBLE

### Acts 2:37-41



10 minutes

**SUMMARIZE:** Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 62.

**READ:** Read or ask a volunteer to read Acts 2:37-41.

**GUIDE:** Refer group members to **PSG page 63** to the author’s explanation of Peter’s response to the crowd when they asked, “What should we do?”

- “Repent,” to change the way you think about your life and your behavior. It means to change your thinking, change your heart, change the direction of your life.
- “Be baptized . . . for the forgiveness of your sins.” The word **eis** can be translated **for, because of, or on account of**. The idea is that since you repented, your sins have been forgiven. Because of or on account of that, be baptized.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use Bible

**Commentary 1** on page 63 and this page to provide further background information about *repent and be baptized*.

- **Be baptized** means to be immersed or submerged in water.
- This is an outward action that symbolizes the inner change that has taken place when a person becomes a believer.
- **Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ** doesn't contradict the Great Commission.
- **For the forgiveness of sins** is best understood as "because of the forgiveness of sins" and is consistent with the whole teaching of the New Testament related to salvation and baptism.
- **The gift of the Holy Spirit** is given to those who have accepted the salvation of Jesus.

turning away from sin and turning toward God. The tense of the word Peter used expressed a sense of urgency.

Next Peter called for them to **be baptized**, which means to be immersed or submerged in water. This is an outward action that symbolizes the inner change that has taken place when a person becomes a believer in Jesus Christ. Peter said that the people in the crowd should be baptized **in the name of Jesus Christ**. The act of baptism symbolically identifies the individual being baptized with the death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it is the public proclamation of a believer's faith in Christ and the action that identifies a believer with all others who have accepted the salvation He offers.

**Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ** doesn't contradict Jesus' command in the Great Commission: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (28:18-19). Jesus' name reflects His identity, authority, and character. Thus for the Jews who had previously rejected Jesus, being baptized in His name would be a way of acknowledging these things about Him, their Lord and Christ.

Some people wrongly teach that baptism is essential for the salvation process because of Peter's words in this verse: **for the forgiveness of your sins**. The problem with this understanding lies with the preposition translated "for." The Greek word can be used to highlight purpose ("to accomplish the forgiveness of your sins") or it can express basis ("because of the forgiveness of your sins"). This latter view is consistent with the whole teaching of the New Testament related to salvation and baptism. Neither Peter nor Paul (or any other New Testament writer) taught that baptism is essential for salvation. In fact, just a short time later (Acts 3:19) Peter linked repentance with the forgiveness of sins without any mention of baptism. While baptism isn't necessary for salvation, an unbaptized believer would have been an oddity in the early church—something the apostles likely never even considered.

Peter also promised that those who accepted the salvation of Jesus would receive **the gift of the Holy Spirit**. This refers to the Spirit's presence in a believer's life, which comes only through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. When the Spirit lives in believers, He unites them together and transforms them so they will produce spiritual fruit (Gal. 5:16-25) and minister through His gifts. ◀

**2 ▶ Verse 39.** Peter noted that God’s **promise** of salvation was for the Jews who heard his words that day and extended to their **children** (including future generations) and to **all who are far off**. This referred to Jewish people in other countries and also to the Gentiles. As Peter noted earlier in his sermon, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21). In Ephesians 2:13-17 (which echoes Isa. 57:19), Paul emphasized the peace Jesus brought for Gentiles and Jews—those who were “far away” and “near.”

God’s gift of salvation is available to everyone He **will call**. The Greek term translated *call* means to summon or invite. This emphasizes God as the initiator of salvation—drawing or inviting people into a relationship with Him. ◀

**Verse 40.** Peter continued to preach to the crowd that day, though Luke only recorded the most important part of his message. The apostle was persistent as he **testified and strongly urged** the people to accept God’s salvation—to be different from others in their **corrupt generation**. *Corrupt* can also mean perverse or crooked. Jesus used similar words to describe those who did not believe Him or accept His message (Luke 9:41; 11:29).

**Verse 41.** An amazing thing happened as a result of God’s call, the Spirit’s conviction, and Peter’s preaching. **About three thousand people** who heard the truth **accepted** Peter’s message that day. They were **baptized** as a public testimony of their faith and were **added** to the small community of believers, which had previously numbered 120 (Acts 1:15).

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## Acts 2:42-45

**42** They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

**43** Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles.

**44** Now all the believers were together and held all things in common.

**45** They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible Commentary 2** to show that the promise of salvation is to ...

- ... *future generations*.
- ... **all who are far off**, which could include Jewish people in other countries, and to Gentiles.

**DISCUSS: Question #2** (PSG, p. 63): **How did you initially respond when you heard the gospel?**

(Alternate: How does Peter’s message compare with your spiritual journey?)

**TRANSITION:** “In the next verses we will learn how the early church developed with this huge influx of new believers.”

## STUDY THE BIBLE

### Acts 2:42-45



10 minutes

**READ:** Read or ask a volunteer to read Acts 2:42-45.

**GUIDE:** Refer group members to **PSG pages 64–65** to the four things that were top priority in the early church to help new believers grow in their new life as disciples:

1. *The apostles' teaching.*
2. *The fellowship.*
3. *The breaking of bread.*
4. *Prayer.*

**GUIDE:** Use **KEY WORDS (PSG, p. 42)** to explain the phrase *breaking of bread*.

**GUIDE:** Use **KEY WORDS (PSG, p. 42)** to explain the term *the fellowship*.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible Commentary 3** on this page and page 67 to provide further explanation to the four aspects of the early church.

**DISCUSS: Question #3 (PSG, p. 65):** In what ways are we following the practices of the early church?

**KEY WORDS: The fellowship** (v. 42)—The root of the Greek word *koinonia*, translated *fellowship*, means “common” and carries the idea of partnership, community, sharing, or connection. *Koinonia* pictures a unity among believers through Christ.

**Breaking of bread** (v. 42)—This is likely the Lord’s Supper. The emphasis on breaking bread recalls Jesus’ action the night before His death when He shared bread (and wine) with His disciples.

**3 ▶ Verse 42.** This verse describes actions that could have occurred over a period of months after the miraculous events of Pentecost. Luke noted that the believers **devoted themselves** to four particular things. The Greek term translated *devoted* has the sense of both persistence and being intently engaged in these activities. These were ongoing, perhaps daily activities that marked the new community.

First they were faithful to learn from those who had been with Jesus—the apostles who had been commissioned by Jesus. This was in keeping with the command of Jesus, who charged His followers to “make disciples” (Matt. 28:19). A disciple is a learner, and a learner requires a teacher. The **apostles’ teaching** certainly included what they had learned from Jesus about the kingdom of God and how citizens of His kingdom were to live. The apostles probably shared stories about Jesus’ ministry that later were compiled into the four Gospels. They also probably taught about Old Testament prophecies that found their fulfillment in Jesus.

A second important element for the disciples was **the fellowship**. The core of the Greek term is found in its root, which means “common”—and especially relates to those things held in common among the believers. This included shared beliefs and actions as members of the family of God. It could also have included shared meals and even possessions that were voluntarily shared with others (Acts 4:34–35).

The believing community was also devoted to the **breaking of bread**. Most likely this refers to the Lord’s Supper (or communion), which commemorates and proclaims the sacrifice of Jesus. This celebration may have occurred at the end of an ordinary meal.

An ongoing practice of the believers was participation in **prayer**. This could refer to personal prayer times as well as times when they gathered in homes for prayer. The presence of the definite article in the Greek (literally translated “the prayers,”) suggests they may have participated in the daily prayer times in the temple. This is evidenced in the actions

of Peter and John, who went to the temple “for the time of prayer at three in the afternoon” (Acts 3:1). ◀

**4 ▶ Verse 43.** Followers of Christ do not live for themselves. God designed the church so believers would support and help one another. When this happens, others notice, just as they did in Jerusalem in the first century. Luke noted this when he wrote that **everyone was filled with awe**. *Awe* refers to a deep respect (reverential fear) or sense of astonishment and amazement. It was probably most evident in the non-believing Jews in Jerusalem, especially as they witnessed the **many wonders and signs** God was doing on a regular basis. In Peter’s preaching on Pentecost he used similar words to describe the incredible things Jesus did while He walked on the earth, which gave proof He was the Messiah (2:19). Typically the word *signs* highlights the source and purpose of the miracles—they are designed to call attention to God. The word *wonders* points to the impact of the miraculous things God did through His apostles—people were amazed. ◀

**5 ▶ Verse 44.** There was an incredible unity shared among **all the believers** in that early community of faith in Jerusalem. Luke first emphasized they **were together**. It is likely the believers regularly gathered together in groups for prayer, fellowship, and worship. Their gatherings could have been in houses or in the temple, but since there were over three thousand believers at that time it seems unlikely they all gathered in the same place very often. By this time some of those who had traveled to Jerusalem for the Jewish festival (on Pentecost) may have returned to their homes outside Jerusalem. Other visitors, however, may have chosen to stay in the city for an extended period to continue learning and participating in the Jerusalem community of faith. Thus the local believers might have opened their homes and invited the visiting believers to stay with them.

There was a generosity within the community that is almost hard to imagine today. Luke noted they **held all things in common**, which means they shared the things they had. This may sound like a utopian concept of communal living whereby no one owns anything and everything is common property, but more likely, this reflected the concern in the community that was demonstrated by meeting the needs of fellow believers. <sup>1</sup>

**Verse 45.** This verse expands on the sharing mentioned in verse 44. Because the believers had experienced the radical love of Jesus to bring them into God’s family, they expressed that love in radical ways within their believing community.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible Commentary 4** to show the people’s responses to what they were experiencing and observing.

**GUIDE:** Refer group members to **PSG pages 65-66**, and compare the utopian view of community in Greek culture promoted by Pythagorus 600 years before Christ with how the early church functioned.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible Commentary 5** on this page and page 68 to provide further explanation to the believers’ being together and sharing their belongings with those in need.

**DISCUSS: Question #4 (PSG, p. 66): What aspect of church life has been especially meaningful to you?**

*(Alternate: How does being involved in these practices help us to serve others?)*

**TRANSITION:** “In the next verses we will see that these practices became a way of life for those in the early church.”

## STUDY THE BIBLE

### Acts 2:46-47



15 minutes

**READ:** Read Acts 2:46-47.

**GUIDE:** Refer group members to **PSG pages 66-67** to the key places where Christians lived out their devotion to Christ in the early church:

1. *The temple*
2. *Their homes.*

Encourage group members to share the significance of these two places in their own devotion to Christ today.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible Commentary 6** on this page and page 69 to provide insights on what it meant for these followers of Christ to devote themselves to these practices.

Jesus noted that love for each other would be the way all people could identify His disciples (John 13:34-35). Thus the believers showed great love to each other in very practical ways. They **sold their possessions and property** and gave the money to those in need. The tense of the Greek verb translated *sold* indicates that this was not a one time action on the part of the believers. It was their continuing practice to sell their possessions and property as needs arose within the Christian community. There was no requirement or even expectation to do this, which is evidenced by Peter’s words to Ananias and Sapphira. Peter noted they had the right to do whatever they wanted with their land (Acts 5:1-4). ◀

## Acts 2:46-47

**46** Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts,

**47** praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**6 ▶ Verse 46.** Because of who God is and what He has done for humanity through Jesus Christ, believers should live to honor God and point people to Christ. This was certainly the way the believers lived in the early Christian community in Jerusalem. **Every day** the disciples met **together in the temple**. The Greek word for *together* expresses a united purpose—they were single minded in living for God. Luke noted they were **devoted** to these meetings, which notes a diligent and continual action. The same term was used in verse 42 to describe the disciples’ activities—devoting themselves to the apostles’ teachings, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. Because the believers of that time all came from a Jewish background, it was natural for them to attend one or two of the daily times of worship and prayer (every morning and afternoon) in the Jewish temple.

The believers' activities at the temple, however, included more than just praying. Because it was a place where many Jews would be gathered for worship it was a natural location for the believers to witness about Jesus Christ. The believers wanted others to know the true identity of Jesus and to experience the salvation that only comes through faith in Him. On one particular occasion the apostles' preaching about Jesus in the temple drew the ire of the temple leaders and got them arrested (Acts 4:1-21).

The believers not only prayed and witnessed together in the temple, but also ate and fellowshiped with each other in their homes. With the large number of disciples this obviously involved many houses. These small group gatherings included an ordinary meal in which **they ate their food** and probably a time of communion where they **broke bread**—shared in the Lord's Supper. These gatherings were later referred to as "love feasts" (Jude 12) and became a source of controversy in the church at Corinth, where the believers were neither unified nor concerned about each other (1 Cor. 11:17-34).

Things were much different in the Jerusalem church, however. The believers had **joyful and sincere hearts**. While Luke used this phrase to describe the tone of their home fellowship gatherings, certainly it reflected their overall lives on an ongoing basis as well. The word *joyful* emphasizes gladness or delight. The sincerity Luke mentioned carries the idea of a group of people who were devoted to and focused on their Lord. ◀

**7 ▶ Verse 47. Praising God** was essential for the believers in the early community of Christ. The believers expressed their gratitude to God and gave thanks to Him for what He had done and what He was doing. This included not only glorifying Him for the salvation made possible for everyone through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ but also thanking Him for the joy, love, power, witness, and so much more they experienced through His Spirit working in them.

The lifestyles of the believing community gained the attention of others in Jerusalem. Luke noted that the believers had **the favor of all the people**. Rather than animosity, most ordinary, unbelieving Jews in the city (most likely excluding the Jewish religious leaders) held the believers in high regard.

As a result of what was happening in and through the believing community, **every day** more people were being **saved**—they accepted the forgiveness of sin and eternal life God offers through faith in Jesus. So day-by-day God added to His family. ◀

1. John B. Polhill, Acts, vol. 26 in The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 120–121.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible Commentary 7** to explain the responses of the people to what God was doing.

**LEADER PACK:** Display **Pack Item 4: Four Priorities**. Use this as a tool to evaluate how your church and your group compare with the early church.



**DISCUSS:** **Question #5 (PSG, p. 68): When have you experienced the church functioning in this way?**

*(Alternate: What can we do to follow the example of the early church?)*

**DO:** Encourage group members to take a few minutes to complete the activity "**Service Survey**" on **PSG page 68**.

**LIVE IT OUT**

5 minutes

**GUIDE:** Emphasize **The Point:**  
**We do not live for ourselves; we serve God by serving others**

**REVIEW:** Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 69)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

**WRAP IT UP**

**GUIDE:** Encourage group members to examine their personal devotion to Christ using the early church in Acts 2:42-47 as their model.

**PRAY:** "Father, help each of us to become deeply devoted followers of Jesus Christ. May our church reflect the values of the early church so that You are always honored and glorified."

**LIVE IT OUT**

God saves us from the penalty of sin, but He also saves us for something: to joyfully serve Him as we serve others.

- ▶ **Serve others with a simple act.** Being kind to others can be done through simple acts that don't cost a lot of money. Reach out to someone who needs a word of encouragement and perform an act of kindness.
- ▶ **Serve others by sharing the gospel.** Sharing the truth of the gospel is one way to serve others. Pray and look for an opportunity to share Christ with a friend, coworker, or family member.
- ▶ **Serve others by opening your home.** Talk to your church leaders about starting a new Bible study group in your home. A home group is a great way to include neighbors and coworkers.

We're saved to serve. *You're up!*



BIBLICAL  
**ILLUSTRATOR**



The Greek Orthodox Church of St. Stephen dominates the north end of Jerusalem's Kidron Valley and commemorates the traditional site of the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

Christianity is a faith with adherents from every ethnicity and nationality, but at its inception the earliest converts were Jewish. On the two earliest occasions when Peter spoke publicly, he addressed his audience as “brethren” (Acts 2:29; 3:17), and identified them as “men of Israel” (2:22; 3:12).

The earliest believers hailed from various strata of Jewish social life. Some converts were from the lower classes; many would have been present day laborers. In contrast, priests and some Pharisees also embraced the faith (6:7; 15:5). While the Epistle of James, which some hold to be the earliest canonical book, mentions wealthy people attending believers' gatherings (Jas. 1:10-11; 2:2-6; 5:1), it does so to condemn their ill-treatment of the poor in the congregation. History

records that many in the early church ... self-identified their group as “the poor ones.”

Maintaining good relations in the broader community had to be a challenge. After all, they saw themselves as the *ekklesia*, a community called out from among their neighbors to reflect true Israel! They practiced two rites, baptism and the memorial meal, which challenged Jewish ritual bathing and more directly, the Passover. Additionally, they went beyond attending temple and synagogue services, meeting in homes regularly to pray and to share in the breaking of bread, thus boldly setting their fellowship apart (Acts 2:42-47).

Overall, the Jews received the initial converts with favor (2:47; 5:13). This was probably because early converts continued upholding the religious traditions of Judaism (e.g. 2:46; 3:1). But along with that, early believers also ministered to their fellow citizens, which ingratiated them to the body politic.

The rulers of Israel saw things differently. Almost immediately, they began mistreating and incarcerating believers. Acts 8:1-2 shows that when persecution began in Jerusalem, Gamaliel's call for tolerance seems to have been applied selectively, bypassing the apostles and presumably the local church—only to focus on another segment of the believing community.

The excerpt above is from the article “The Earliest Converts” (Fall 2016), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

## GROUPS MATTER.

Grow with other group leaders at the [Groups Ministry blog](http://GroupsMinistry.blog).

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