

JESUS: THE INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

Jesus: The Gift of God's Grace

Twelve Daily Studies for Christmas

John 1:1, 14, 16–17; 8:3–11; 2 Corinthians 9:15

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



Quotable

My desire is that we will learn the importance of making the most important part of Christmas our focus—and that's Jesus.

— Charles R. Swindoll

Every Christmas, millions of us go in search of the perfect gift for our loved ones. If the gift is just right, our loved ones open the package and say with a gasp, “It’s wonderful! Thank you!” as we beam with delight.

On the first Christmas, God gave the *ultimate* perfect gift to His loved ones—to all of us! He wrapped heaven’s treasure in the tiny, humble frame of a baby and, beaming with delight, gave us His only Son. On that night, like a proud father, God sent angels to deliver a heavenly birth announcement to some astonished shepherds, who rushed to see the baby born in an animal shelter and laid in a feeding trough as a makeshift crib (Luke 2:7).

And so, the first Christmas took place not in a cozy home around a brightly lit tree but in a pen with a few farm animals, some shepherds, and two exhausted parents gazing at the greatest gift anyone has ever received.

In this first of twelve daily Christmas studies based on four holiday messages by Chuck Swindoll, we’ll join the small gathering around the manger in their worship of Jesus Christ—God’s indescribable gift. We’ll look deeply into the child’s eyes, imagining the man Jesus, reflecting on His death and resurrection, and admiring four gifts that He offers us today—grace, truth, love, and hope.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a few moments to quiet your spirit and invite the Lord to minister to you through His Word. Read the following verses, and imagine the setting of the nativity as it might have been. A cold winter night. The sounds and smells of animals. A location in a hillside cave or on the dirt floor of the lower level beneath a first-century house.

After Mary and Joseph had settled into this shelter, “the time came for [Mary’s] baby to be born.” Luke continues,

She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them. (Luke 2:7)



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After hearing the angels' announcement, the shepherds "hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And *there was the baby*, lying in the manger" (Luke 2:16, emphasis added).

For centuries, artists have attempted to capture the moment the shepherds saw the newborn Savior and His mother treasuring her baby. View the online image of the 1622 painting, *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, by Gerard van Honthorst, which is exhibited at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne, Germany.

What feelings do the figures in the painting convey? In the space below, record their perceived emotions, and write a prayer to God expressing the feelings you might have had if you had been there.

Now, let's open the Word to find Paul's description of adoration for Jesus.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In his message, Chuck reflects on Paul's expression of wonder: "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15 NASB). Read [2 Corinthians 9:15](#) in the New Living Translation. How does this Bible version translate the verse?

Like a dry inkwell, Paul's mind was an empty reservoir from which to draw words to describe the wonder of Jesus. Perhaps one reason for Paul's speechless awe was Jesus' *eternal nature*, which John portrayed in the first chapter of his gospel.



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Observation: Jesus Existed Before Bethlehem

A key principle in the *Searching the Scriptures* process is observation. Observation helps you grasp what the text says before attempting to interpret and apply it. Read slowly John 1:1–5, and write down the answers to the following questions.

What did John say about the divine nature of “the Word” in John 1:1?

Write the phrases in verses 2–5 that describe “the Word’s” actions. Note any parallel phrases, comparisons, repetitions, or themes.



Interpretation and Correlation: God's Son Became Human

Who is the Word? The apostle John unveiled His identity as Jesus, specifically the Messiah, to whom John the Baptizer pointed (John 1:6–9, 15, 29–34).

What does it mean that “the Word became human and made his home among us” (1:14)? To help with your interpretation, correlate John 1:14 with Paul’s explanation of Jesus’ incarnation in Philippians 2:6–7. What added information did Paul provide?



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Application: Worship Jesus, God Incarnate

Chuck summed up this study, connecting the doctrine of the incarnation with the birth of Jesus:

Do not think that Jesus began at Bethlehem. Do not think that Jesus began to exist when He was conceived in the womb. That's when He became a human. He has always existed. Being deity, there has never been a time He did not exist. This is what the Pharisees could never grasp. . . . But we see Him, and, thanks to John, we understand Him to be the One who came through the miracle of the Holy Spirit's work in Mary's womb.

Take a few moments of private worship to picture the baby in the manger as *God in the flesh*. “This gift too wonderful for words” (2 Corinthians 9:15) is the giver of your life and the light shining in your dark world. Write down your praise to God for His indescribable gift: Jesus!

Why did God give us His Son? One reason was to channel His grace to the world. Through Jesus, we have all received “grace upon grace” (John 1:16 NASB). In the next study, we'll examine this verse in more detail and focus on Jesus as the giver of grace.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, through Your Son, You made the universe. The tiny fingers on the baby in the manger formed the planets and flung the stars in space. In the misty, precreation past, You had me in mind as Your beloved. I praise You for the awesome God You are, and I thank You for Your indescribable gift: Jesus. Amen.



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Quotable

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of Christmas
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that's Jesus.*

— Charles R. Swindoll

Christmas is the day we celebrate the birthday of Jesus. But is it accurate to say that Jesus has a birthday in the same sense as other great men and women in history? Can a day in December truly mark the beginning of the Son of God?

Unlike every other baby, Jesus had no beginning point. He existed before His birth just as the apostle John stated: “In the beginning the Word already existed” (John 1:1). Jesus Himself declared His preexistence: “Before Abraham was even born, I AM!” (8:58). And He affirmed His true origins: “I have come down from heaven” (6:38). John the Baptizer, who was born before Jesus, testified to Jesus’ eternal nature: “He existed long before me” (1:15).

In eternity past, Jesus as the Son of God communed in perfect harmony with His Father and the Holy Spirit. This is the mystery of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three in one. Coequal, coexistent, and coeternal.

Why, then, did God the Father send His Son into His creation? For what purpose was Jesus born?



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As we seek answers to these questions in God’s Word, let’s prepare our hearts by meditating on the angel’s song to the shepherds. After announcing Jesus’ birth, the angel “was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

*“Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”*
(Luke 2:13–14)



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The angels sang glory to God and a blessing of peace to humankind. In the space below, join the heavenly host by writing a prayer of praise to God for giving us His Son and asking the Lord to bless you with the peace the angels offered the fearful shepherds that first Christmas night.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Now read slowly and reflectively the following verses from John's gospel.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (John 1:14, 16–18 NASB)



Observation: Jesus Gives God's Grace

The *Searching the Scriptures* method of observation invites you to examine the text as a detective might look for clues. What stands out? Do you see any repeated words, contrasts, or comparisons? Can you summarize the flow of thought? What are the action words and descriptors? Do you see a word you need to define?

With these questions in mind, reread the verses above using your Bible study magnifying glass. Feel free to print the page and make notes on paper or use the PDF tool to highlight a word or phrase with your cursor. What do you observe?

Back to our initial questions. Why did God the Father send His Son into His creation? For what purpose was Jesus born? One purpose was to give us the gift of God's grace. Did you notice the word *grace* appearing several times? It's a significant theme in John's gospel. Let's look closer at the meaning of *grace*.



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Interpretation and Correlation: We Receive Grace upon Grace

Focus on the verse, “For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace” (John 1:16 NASB). In his message, Chuck Swindoll explained the phrase “grace upon grace” this way: “I like to think of it as one gracious act after another, one grace moment after another.” Read John 1:16 in *the New Living Translation* and in Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase *The Message*. How do these versions express the phrase?

Did you notice in John 1:16 the contrast between Jesus and Moses? Grace upon grace came through Jesus, but *law upon law* (so to speak) came through Moses.

The Mosaic law revealed God’s holiness and lit the way to freedom from sin. God meant the law to be a blessing for God’s people, like a jeweled crown. Unfortunately, this glittering headpiece was corrupted into an iron yoke of traditions forged by religious tyrants to enslave God’s people (Mark 7:8).

Correlate this text by comparing the unbearable yoke of the legalists with the yoke of grace Jesus offered in *Matthew 11:28–30*. What words describe Jesus and His yoke, along with its blessings to all who wear it?

Jesus’ gentle nature attracted weary people burdened by legalism. His open arms of grace drew crowds of overburdened people. In his message, Chuck defines *grace* in two ways. First, grace is God’s unmerited favor, such as our pardon from sin. Second, it is the quality Jesus displayed through His gracious acts. It is the “the loveliness of God,” as Chuck puts it.

Instead of chaining us to a religious grindstone, Jesus invites us to walk with Him forever linked by grace. We *live in* His grace as we receive His love, forgiveness, and acceptance, and we *live out* His grace through our gracious acts to others.



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Application: Receive Jesus' Gift of Grace

Chuck urges us this Christmas to keep our focus on Jesus and His gracious deeds.

Think about Jesus. He often touched the unclean. He always welcomed sinners. He ate with them. He was with those suffering from leprosy. Not only did He touch them, He cleansed them and welcomed them back. He even stayed in their homes. He dined with scoundrels and tax collectors. . . . He broke the mold because He was a man of grace.

As you prepare to celebrate the birthday of Jesus, celebrate His gift of grace. How do you need to receive His grace this Christmas? Write your answer below. In prayer, thank Him for His gift of grace, and ask Him for help to pass His grace to others.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I want to follow Your Son who drew crowds of overburdened people with His song of grace. I join the multitudes who followed Him then and throughout the centuries. Thank You for sending Your Son to show me Your heart of love and acceptance. I receive the grace offered by Jesus and the peace offered by the angels. Help me to overflow with Your grace and peace to all I meet today. Amen.



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DAY 3

Jesus was born at a time when law was king. Rome kept order in its vast empire by wielding a club of judgment to crush any lawbreakers who challenged the emperor's authority. At the local level, kings and governors chiseled in stone their own laws to lay on people's backs. But that's not all; Pharisees, scribes, and priests added to the Jews' burden thousands of religious laws on top of the civil laws.

To this world sinking under the weight of laws and tyrants, God gave His Son as a gift of grace to display God's true law and reveal the compassionate heart of the Lawgiver. In this study, we'll highlight a scene in which Jesus gave His gift to a woman condemned under the law at just the moment she needed grace most.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As we begin, reflect on your need for God's gift of grace through Jesus. If not for Him, we would all stand under judgment before God. Meditate on the following verses to prompt a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord for His compassion, then ask the Lord to reveal His grace in a fresh way through His Word.

*The LORD is compassionate and merciful,
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. . . .
He does not punish us for all our sins;
he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve.
For his unfailing love toward those who fear him
is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth.
He has removed our sins as far from us
as the east is from the west. (Psalm 103:8, 10–12)*

Quotable

*My desire is that
we will learn the
importance of
making the most
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our focus—and
that's Jesus.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

What do we find when we receive God's gift of grace through Jesus? Something we don't deserve—forgiveness. A certain woman caught in adultery and dragged before Jesus needed such a gift. Read the account in John 8:1–11.

Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?" They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."



Observation: A Woman in Need of Grace

Let's observe the details of this account. The setting was the temple where sinners went to atone for their sins and receive forgiveness. Against this backdrop of divine mercy, the merciless legalists brought a woman to trap Jesus. What was the dilemma Jesus faced?



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We don't know what Jesus drew in the dirt, but some think He may have been listing the accusers' sins. In this way, Jesus shifted the question from "What judgment does the woman deserve?" to "Who is qualified to judge her?" Reread Jesus' statement in John 8:7. How did Jesus turn the dilemma back on the accusers?

How did Jesus show grace to the woman while also confronting her sin (John 8:10–11)?



Interpretation and Correlation: Judgment Satisfied, Grace Offered

Let's explore further the meaning of this text by looking at the big picture. On a broader scale, who does the woman represent?

In general, who do the accusers represent?



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What are the lessons? One lesson is this: whether our sin is exposed or hidden, shocking or subtle, public or private, we all deserve judgment and desperately need grace. Jesus demonstrated that He alone is qualified to judge us and mediate our sin. He is our High Priest.

What does Hebrews 10:19–22 tell you about Jesus' role and work in atoning for your sin?

We all thirst for the compassion and forgiveness Jesus offered the woman caught in adultery, and we are so thankful to hear His words of pardon. As we count down the days to Christmas, let's remember that the baby in the manger was God's gift of saving grace to all sinners, then and now.



Application: We Need Grace in Every Season

In his message, Chuck Swindoll urged us to lean on Jesus' grace not just for pardon from sin but every day through every season of life.

We need grace all through our lives. We need grace as little children growing up. We need grace as teenagers, adapting to a world of adulthood. We need grace as middle-agers when the pressure of life is intense. We need grace when we get older. Grace is needed for those of us who marry and for those who remain single. Special grace is needed in releasing children from the nest. Grace is needed to forgive one another, to understand one another.

Close this study by writing down the ways you need God's gift of grace this Christmas season. Thank Him for your pardon from sin through Christ's atonement on the cross, and express your desire to lean on His grace in a special way today.



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your amazing grace that saved me. In my condition before You, I am no different than the woman caught in her sin standing before Jesus. But through Him and the grace You showed at Calvary's cross of mercy, my sins have been atoned and my soul set free! This Christmas may I lean on You for Christ's saving power to continue upholding me. Amen.



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Jesus: The Gift of God's Truth

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John 1:14–18; 8:31–32; 14:1–6

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Quotable

*Jesus was in
a category by
Himself. He
never left a false
impression. Never
tried to appear
as someone He
wasn't. He was the
personification of
the truth.*

— Charles R. Swindoll

Have people ever led you to believe something that wasn't true? It happens frequently during the Christmas shopping season as advertisers glamorize their products to make a sale. Only after we buy the item do we realize we were duped by a slick sales pitch.

If only we had a truth-meter that would flash green when people were being honest and red when they were misleading us, then we'd know the real score. With this handy device, we could test the words of advertisers, politicians, commentators . . . anyone, and we'd never be hoodwinked again!

God never lies. It goes against His nature to lie, so it follows that when God became flesh, *truth* became flesh as well. Jesus was the embodiment of truth. If a truth-meter existed in the first century, anyone who tested Jesus' words would have seen only green lights all the time!

We continue our Christmas series with three daily Bible studies on Jesus as the gift of God's *truth*. As we open God's Word, let's prepare our hearts to receive the teaching of the Holy Spirit.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

If you've been hurt by someone who lied to you, then you may have difficulty trusting people. Through God's Word, the Holy Spirit ushers us into a safe realm where only truth exists, never deception. Because God speaks truth, we can trust Him. Take a few moments to invite God to use His Spirit to "guide you into all truth" (John 16:13) through His Word today.



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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

If you're in a private place, read the following verses aloud. Reading aloud focuses our mind and tunes our ears to hear the author's emphasis.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 NASB)

Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (8:31–32)

What words or phrases stood out to you as you read?



Observation: Truth Personified

Observation is the *Searching the Scriptures* method of looking in the text for contrast, comparisons, repetition, cause-and-effect, and other features that might help us understand the author's intended meaning. Notice in John 1:14 (NASB) the flow of thought which begins with "the Word" and concludes with "truth." You might draw a line between those words in your Bible to show the connection.

We define *Word* in this context as "the true communication of God's essential nature." As the incarnation of the Word, Jesus was a true expression of God in human form—the heart and soul of God in flesh and blood. Read again John 1:14. What did the Word do? And what were the results?



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In the setting of John 8, Jesus was talking to people who “believed in him” (John 8:31). These people saw Jesus for who He truly was. They saw the inner glory of Jesus just as John described in John 1:14. What did Jesus say true disciples did (8:31)?

What were the outcomes of being a true disciple (8:32)?



Interpretation and Correlation: Truth Experienced

By interpreting and correlating, we seek to understand the meaning of a passage in context, compared to similar passages. According to John 8:31, abiding in Jesus' teaching is linked to knowing the truth and being set free (John 8:31–32).

An interpretive paraphrase can provide us a fresh understanding of Scripture. Read John 8:31–32 in Eugene Peterson's interpretive paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*:

Then Jesus turned to the Jews who had claimed to believe in him. “If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure. Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will free you.”

According to this reading, we experience truth when we live out what Jesus taught. How is that so? What's the connection between truth and doing what Jesus taught?



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Likewise, what's the connection between freedom and doing what Jesus taught?

Because Jesus embodied the truth *and* taught the truth, we never have to worry that we're on the wrong path if we follow Him. His way always points us in the right direction to the best result: freedom.



Application: We Need Grace in Every Season

In his message, Chuck Swindoll described the world of freedom when we enter through the gate of truth:

When I know the truth, I'm freed from self because I know life isn't about me. I'm not the center of attention. I know the truth about myself. I'm free from others' expectations and opinions. I am free from sin. Sin no longer masters us when the Lord tells us the truth about it.

Where can you find truth this Christmas? Certainly not in the fairy-tale hype of the season. Only in the baby in the manger, who grew up to become the greatest of all teachers, can you find truth to nourish your soul. On what truth would you like to focus your mind today and throughout this Christmas season? If you need prompting, read the rest of John 8, looking for one special truth in Jesus' words to which you can cling today.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You give the best gifts: peace, love, joy. But the greatest gift is Your Son whose words of life are true and trustworthy. Help me today to shape my thoughts around His words so I can keep my mind and heart free from the contamination of the lies of this world. Thank You for the gift of truth, in Jesus' name, amen.



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JESUS: THE INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

Jesus: The Gift of God's Truth

Twelve Daily Studies for Christmas

John 1:14–18; 8:31–32; 14:1–6

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



Quotable

*Jesus was in
a category by
Himself. He
never left a false
impression. Never
tried to appear
as someone He
wasn't. He was the
personification of
the truth.*

— Charles R. Swindoll

Chaplain of the Kansas Senate Fred Holloman was known for his plain-spoken manner and unpretentious invocations when he opened senate sessions. In his book, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, author Kent Hughes recalls this simple prayer for God's help in discerning truth.

Omniscient Father:
Help us to know who is telling
the truth. One side tells us one
thing, and the other just the opposite.
And if neither side is telling the truth, we would like to know
that, too.
And if each side is telling half the truth,
give us the wisdom to put the right halves
together.
In Jesus' name, Amen.¹

Thankfully, we never need to pray for divine discernment when listening to Jesus speak. With Jesus, there was no half-truth, political spin, or rhetorical sleight of hand. Every word He uttered was true, which means we can *trust* His teaching in His word. That's a good thing because our future depends on it!



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Today's study pulls back the veil of the original home of the baby whose birth we celebrate at Christmas. Jesus promised that His home one day will be our home too. As you open God's Word, invite the Lord to reveal His truth to you. Write a brief prayer asking the Lord to open your eyes to His marvelous plan and encourage you today.



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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The night before Jesus went to the cross, Jesus focused His teaching on the truths that would sustain His disciples and give them courage after He was gone. Read John 14:1–4 and see how many commands and promises you can find. Mark them with the PDF highlight tool, or print the page and underline them.

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know the way to where I am going.”

What promise is the central point of this passage?



Observation: Truth about the Future

Chuck Swindoll’s four-step Bible study method begins with observation. Observation requires that we slowly examine what the text says, reading the lines rather than reading “between the lines.”

As the personification of truth, Jesus made four true statements. First, what did He say about heaven in John 14:2?

Second, what did He say that He was going to do (John 14:2)?



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Third, what did He say He will do “when everything is ready” (John 14:3)?

Finally, note the phrase in John 14:3, “so that,” which indicates Christ’s objective, purpose, or reason. According to Jesus, *why* is He preparing a place for us in His Father’s home?



Interpretation and Correlation: Truths We Can Trust

The methods of interpretation and correlation help us understand the meaning of a text in context, compared to similar passages. What is the context of Jesus’ teaching about heaven according to John 13:1, 31–33?

The disciples’ hearts were troubled . . . understandably so! Jesus had just told them He would remain with them only a little while longer, and where He was going, they could not follow. To calm their fears, Jesus told His disciples to trust Him (John 14:1). Read the following verses and write down the basis for the disciples’ trust.



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John 7:16–18

John 8:31–32, 51

Our trust in Jesus is based on His trustworthiness. He never spoke anything that wasn't true, nor did He promise anything He could not fulfill.



Application: Trusting When We're Troubled

Are you feeling troubled during this Christmas season? The holidays can cause our deepest fears to surface when pressures increase in the family or at work. And for those who've lost someone close, songs of joy and love only heighten feelings of grief and loneliness.

The same baby Jesus who nestled in Mary's arms calls us to infant-like trust in Him. For what troubles do you need to trust your Savior this Christmas? List them below, and write a prayer of faith as you entrust your life into His care . . . both now and in the future.



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Jesus promised us a home in heaven, but even greater was the reassurance of His eternal presence: “you will always be with me where I am” (John 14:3). How does this promise encourage you today?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You sent Your Son for many reasons, but one reason was to deliver a promise that I will dwell forever in Your heavenly home with You and Your Son. The promise of Your presence gives me hope to endure my trials today. Give me a feeling of closeness to You as I move through the moments of my day. Jesus is worthy of my trust, so I believe Your words to be true. I put my faith completely in You. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Fred Holloman, as quoted in R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 119–20.



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DAY 6

When people think of Christmas, they often picture a nativity set with carved figures of Mary and Joseph, shepherds, wise men, and a few farm animals serenely gazing at baby Jesus. For many folks, Christmas is about a baby in a manger, and that's as far as their spiritual understanding goes.

However, Christmas is much more than the birth of a baby. It's about *who* the baby is: the God of the universe in human flesh. And it's about *what* He did: proclaim the kingdom of God, die to bear the sins of the world, and rise again to offer eternal life. The splendor of His identity and the significance of His mission comprise the wonder of the baby Jesus, the *true* glory of Christmas.

In this study, we'll examine a statement Jesus made about His identity and mission, and we'll reflect on the spiritual impact of Jesus' life to add deeper meaning to Christmas.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a few moments to look at a nativity scene in your home or a painting online, such as Caravaggio's *The Adoration of the Shepherds*. Notice how all the figures orient toward the baby who is the focal point of the scene. In the space below, express to the Lord your desire to make Jesus the focal point of your life, and ask God to help you find the deeper meaning of Christmas through His Word.

Quotable

Jesus was in a category by Himself. He never left a false impression. Never tried to appear as someone He wasn't. He was the personification of the truth.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the previous study, we read that Jesus was going to prepare a place for His followers in His “Father’s home” (John 14:2) and that He would return to take them there. Let’s pick up just after Jesus said, “When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And *you know the way to where I’m going*” (14:3–4, emphasis added):

“No, we don’t know, Lord,” Thomas said. “We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.” (14:5–6)

Thomas was like a lost person in the woods who wandered off the trail. Reflect on Thomas’ question to Jesus for a moment. What does a lost person need most? What is a lost person’s greatest fear?

Now, let’s see what Jesus said to lost people like Thomas to meet their needs and calm their fears.



Observation: The Person and Work of Jesus

The *Searching the Scriptures* method of observation invites you to examine the text as a detective might look for clues. What stands out? Do you see any repeated words, contrasts, or comparisons? Can you find the key words? What are the action words and descriptors?



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Circle the key words *where* and *how* in Thomas' question (John 14:5). Thomas wanted to know where Jesus was going and how he could get there. Jesus' answer wasn't what Thomas expected to hear. How did Jesus shift the focus of Thomas' question (14:6)?

What did Jesus say about His identity using "I am" statements?

What did Jesus say about His mission? A clue to spotting His mission is the sentence, "No one can come to the Father except through me" (14:6). Compare this verse with Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 1:15.

From a human perspective, Thomas' question made sense. He couldn't go to the place Jesus described unless he knew where it was and how to get there. Lost and confused, Thomas strained to find the way to the Father's home. Jesus, however, shifted Thomas' mind-set from human effort to faith, from trying to find his own way to, instead, trusting a Person to lead him. Jesus answered Thomas' *where* and *how* question with a *who* answer: Jesus, Himself! Thomas really did "know the Way" after all!



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Interpretation and Correlation: The Uniqueness of Jesus

Let's take a closer look at what Jesus meant as we interpret the passage. What is the significance of the definite article in Jesus' statements, "I am *the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life" (John 14:6, emphasis added)?

Second, what crucial truth about Jesus do the words *no one* and *except* reveal (14:6)?

Correlation is a method of interpreting a passage by comparing it to another passage. How does Paul's teaching in Romans 10:8–13 help us understand Jesus as the *way*?

How does John 1:9, 14 (NASB) and 8:31–32 help us understand Jesus as the *truth*?

How does John 6:40, 53–54 and 11:25–26 help us understand Jesus as the *life*?



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Jesus doesn't just point the way to God, He personally ushers us into God's presence through His mediating sacrifice for our sins. Because we know the Way (Jesus), we are *never* lost. Because we know the Truth (Jesus), we are *never* in the dark. And because we know the Life (Jesus), we will *never* die!



Application: Trusting in Jesus

In his message, Chuck Swindoll described his view of the baby in the manger:

I love the baby in the manger, but that's not all. When Jesus was born, deity became humanity. He grew up, He called disciples, and they followed Him. He taught the truth and lived the truth and died for the truth. And He said in His dying, "If you will trust in Me, I will take over the controls of your life and I will lead you in a way that you could never find on your own. And when I get you to the Father's home, you'll be safe forever."

Close this three-part study of Jesus as God's gift of truth by inviting Jesus to "take the controls of your life and lead you." In what area, specifically, do you need Him to take control?

Thank the Lord for His gift of Jesus, who is the truth in bodily form. When He said that He was the way to eternal life, He was not lying. He could not lie! Now that you know more about the true meaning of Christmas, express your gratitude in a prayer of thanksgiving for the baby in the manger.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I acknowledge that Your Son is the way, the truth, and the life. Christmas is about more than a baby in a manger; it's about me accepting Your gift of Jesus into my heart and following Him. He offers me what I could never earn. He leads me to my heavenly home on a path I could never find on my own. Thank You for Your precious gift of Jesus! Amen.



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John 3:1–17; 7:45–52; 19:38–40; Romans 5:8

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Quotable

*Every Christmas,
God announces
to every one of us,
the three words
that are most
important to hear.
He says to us,
“I love you.”*

— Charles R. Swindoll



PREPARE YOUR HEART

What must've gone through Mary's mind as she held newborn Jesus? According to Luke, after the shepherds came to worship the baby and told Mary and Joseph about the angels who appeared to them, “Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her *heart*” (Luke 2:19 NASB, emphasis added). As you prepare to open the Word, ask the Lord to give you Mary's pondering heart. Bible study is for the heart, not just the mind. So in a moment of silence, invite the Lord to touch your heart with the love of Jesus. You may wish to write your thoughts in a prayer.



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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Now read the opening verses of John 3, which describe the encounter of a hungry soul seeking out Jesus in the still of the night.

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.” Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.” (John 3:1–3)



Observation: Seeking Light in the Darkness

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, observation is the first step toward unlocking the meaning of a text and applying its principles. Look closely at the passage and answer the following questions.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, perhaps to catch Jesus in a private moment without interrupting crowds. What piqued Nicodemus' curiosity about Jesus? (Compare John 3:2 with 2:23).

A member of the elite Sanhedrin and a “respected Jewish teacher” (3:10), Nicodemus knew the Bible better than most. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus painstakingly observed every detail of the Old Testament law along with the countless regulations of the rabbinic law. But Jesus, who “knew what was in each person's heart” (2:25), perceived a gaping hole beneath Nicodemus' perfect facade.

If this Sanhedrin official had come to size up Jesus, he quickly realized that he was the one being sized up and found lacking in the most basic truth of the spiritual life. Neither Bible knowledge nor religious duty nor even a direct line to Abraham merits entrance into the kingdom of God. Jesus said that Nicodemus must be “born again” (3:3). Let's look at what Jesus meant.



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Interpretation and Correlation: What It Means to Be “Born Again”

The word translated “again” in Greek is *anōthen*, which, according to commentator William Barclay, has three possible meanings:

- (1) It can mean *from the beginning, completely radically*. (2) It can mean *again*, in the sense of *for the second time*. (3) It can mean *from above*, and, therefore, *from God*.¹

Because no English word can communicate all the nuances, most versions of the Bible translate the phrase “born again” and note a secondary translation, “born from above.” Barclay helps us put the pieces together with this insightful interpretation:

To be born anew is to undergo such a radical change that it is like a new birth; it is to have something happen to the soul which can only be described as being born all over again; and the whole process is not a human achievement, because it comes from the grace and power of God.²

With this meaning in mind, read John 3:4–8.

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Nicodemus. “How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?” Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit.”

Supposing that only people with Abrahamic DNA qualified for God’s kingdom, Nicodemus was fixated on physical birth and completely missed Jesus’ point. What did Jesus say to shift Nicodemus’ perspective from physical to spiritual?



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What light did Titus shed on Jesus' meaning? Highlight the theme of water connected to the Spirit in these verses:

When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life. (Titus 3:4–7)

Theologically speaking, the term *regeneration* best captures Jesus and the apostles' teaching on new birth. At Christmas, we celebrate not only the birth of Jesus but also God's plan to give new birth and new life through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit—all motivated by God's heart of love to save us!



Application: Trusting in Jesus

In his message, Chuck Swindoll gave thanks for God's amazing love that is the foundation of our new birth:

Thank You, Father, for sending Jesus and for what prompted You to do so—Your great love for us. We give You thanks for loving us, who are in many ways so unlovely, and yet You find in us a reason to give Your Son. Thank You for Jesus who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Close this study on new birth in Christ with your own prayer of thanksgiving for the radical change the Holy Spirit performed in you when He gave eternal life to your soul through spiritual rebirth. Recall the moment you trusted Christ as your Savior, and give thanks to the baby in the manger who made it possible for you to be born again. And if you've never put your faith in Christ, trust Him now as your source of new life.

In the next study, we'll examine Jesus' illustration of faith drawn from a powerful story of salvation from the Old Testament.



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I acknowledge that I have no life in myself apart from the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, who draws me out of the darkness of sin into the light of new birth. Thank You for washing me clean in the waters of Your mercy and generously pouring out the Spirit through Jesus my Savior. It's because of grace I am made right in Your sight. I pray to You with confidence in my eternal inheritance and in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. William Barclay, "The Man Who Came by Night," in *The Gospel of John*, rev. and updated ed., vol. 1, The New Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001), John 3:1–6 (contd), Logos.
2. Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, John 3:1–6, Logos.



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STUDY

DAY 8

At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus—the moment God's Son entered humanity with a mission to change the course of history and save the world. Sin had humankind under a curse of death. "You were *dead* because of your disobedience and your many sins" (Ephesians 2:1, emphasis added), wrote the apostle Paul. But then Jesus changed our destiny through His sin-bearing death and life-giving resurrection.

Through His triumph, Jesus won for us what we were powerless to attain: new life. Paul explained that God "gave us *life* when he raised Christ from the dead" (2:5, emphasis added) and "created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago" (2:10). The theological word for this heavenly re-creation is *regeneration*. Jesus called it being "born again" (John 3:3).

How does a person become born again? Jesus illustrated to Nicodemus the single requirement using an ancient account from Israel's past that Nicodemus would have known well. Before we eavesdrop on the private conversation between the Savior and the Pharisee, let's prepare ourselves to receive Jesus' teaching.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Charles Wesley reflects on our new birth through Jesus' birth in the third verse of his classic hymn "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." Read or sing the words, but take a moment to meditate on their meaning.

Quotable

*Every Christmas,
God announces
to every one of us,
the three words
that are most
important to hear.
He says to us,
"I love you."*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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*Hail, the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Ris'n with healing in His wings,*

*Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that men no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.¹*

Write a few of your own lines of praise to your Savior who was born to give you second birth.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

We pick up the nighttime conversation after Jesus jolted Nicodemus with the statement, “Unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God” (John 3:3). He wrinkled the Pharisee’s brow by explaining only “the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life” (3:6).

“How are these things possible?” Nicodemus asked. Jesus replied, “You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don’t understand these things? I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won’t believe our testimony. But if you don’t believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.” (3:9–15)



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Observation: Believing What We Don't Fully Understand

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, the first step is to observe the passage by noting any repeated words, contrasting words, cause and effect, or allusions to other biblical passages.

Circle or highlight the most repeated word in John 3:9–15 and write it down. Also, write down the contrasts that Jesus made between the earthly and the heavenly (John 3:12) as well as between human limitations and His mission (3:13).

What is the focal point of Jesus' message to Nicodemus (3:15)?

Nicodemus was the type of person who had to know *how* a thing worked before he believed it. Jesus, however, told skeptical Nicodemus that it was no use trying to figure out the “new birth.” It was a miracle conceived by the Spirit in the heavenlies. So rather than scrutinize the gift, *believe in the Giver . . .* and receive eternal life!



Interpretation and Correlation: Belief and New Life

To illustrate the connection between belief and eternal life, Jesus drew up for Nicodemus a mental image from the pages of the Pentateuch. Read how Moses lifted the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness so that God healed all who looked upon it (*Numbers 21:4–9*).



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JESUS: THE INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

Jesus: The Gift of God's Love

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John 3:1–17; 7:45–52; 19:38–40; Romans 5:8

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The Israelites' impatience and complaining grew out of their root sin of unbelief, which they vocalized by speaking against God. Of what did they accuse God and Moses (Numbers 21:5)?

The poison from the snakes symbolized the curse of sin coursing through the spiritual bloodstream of humankind. Like snakebites, the bite of sin leads to death in every human. Moses lifting the snake on the pole symbolized God's offer to end His judgment on the Israelites and dispense healing mercy. What event did the lifting of the snake foreshadow, according to Jesus (John 12:32–33)?

The Israelites, who were under the sentence of death, received new life when they looked at the snake on the pole. What point was Jesus making about the act of belief, the object of our belief, and God's merciful response?

The same love that moved God to restore life to the Israelites stirred God to lift up His Son on the cross to give eternal life to all who look to Jesus in faith. What a wonderful act of mercy!



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Application: Because of Love, God Gave His Son

Christmas is not usually a time we think about snakebites and poison, sin and death. But just as a star gleams brighter against a dark sky, the love of God through Jesus shines with even more brilliance against the bleakness of our condition without Christ. As Chuck Swindoll said in his message, “Every Christmas, God announces to every one of us, the three words that are most important to hear. He says to us, ‘I love you.’”

Do you need to hear those words from your heavenly Father this Christmas? Take a moment as you close this study to “listen” to God’s love. What message do you hear God saying to you personally through the birth of His Son?

Today, as you move through the pre-Christmas hustle of shopping or decorating, carry God’s love in your heart as you thank Him for His life-giving gift of Jesus.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, words cannot express the gratitude I feel for the gift of Jesus, who entered the stream of humanity with the mission to bear the judgment for my sin. Help me to live today in the joy and peace of knowing I have been born again—given eternal life because of the One who was born to give me second birth. I worship You with a grateful heart. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles Wesley, altered, “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing,” in *The Celebration Hymnal: Songs and Hymns for Worship* (n.p.: Word Music/Integrity Music, 1997), hymn 277.



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DAY 9

In the final days before Christmas, most people are busy buying last-minute gifts, finishing decorating, and preparing for guests. At the center of the holiday hubbub amidst the flurry of activity is the tiny figure of the baby Jesus in the nativity set. Although often overlooked next to the lights of the Christmas tree and the colorful spread of wrapped gifts, the figure in the manger represents the essence of Christmas. Everything else is dispensable, mere wrapping to be torn away to reveal the true gift: the love of God in human form—Jesus.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son,” begins the most beloved verse in the Bible (John 3:16 NASB). No greater expression of love has been recorded in all the annals of time because no greater gift has been given. As commentator B. Milne explains:

If the depth of love is measured by the value of its gift, then God's love could not be greater, for his love-gift is his most precious possession—his only, eternally beloved Son. He could not love more.¹

Such amazing love! Let's pause from our busy pace for a moment of quiet reflection to prepare our hearts to receive God's love.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

For the next few minutes, set aside your mental to-do list, close your eyes, pace your breathing, and allow yourself to slow down. You may play calming worship music or find a warm spot by a sunny window. Read slowly the following words from John 3:16.

- *For God so loved . . .* Emphasize the word *so*. This is the unfathomable depth of God's love. He loved *so much*.
- *. . . the world . . .* Emphasize *world*. This is the wideness of God's love, which extends beyond those who are worthy or lovable even to those who don't love Him in return.

Quotable

*Every Christmas,
God announces
to every one of us,
the three words
that are most
important to hear.
He says to us,
“I love you.”.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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- . . . *that He gave* . . . Emphasize *gave*. This is the initiative of God's love, which acted not to condemn us but to save us.
- . . . *His only begotten Son* . . . Emphasize *begotten*, which means "one and only." This is the unique manifestation of the love of God, who gave a gift that no one else could give.

Use the space below to ask the Lord to help you receive the full extent of His love as you reflect on the gift of Jesus in this study.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The context of John 3:16–17 is Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. Whether the apostle John wrote these words to summarize Jesus' meaning or Jesus spoke these words to Nicodemus, Nicodemus got the message. After reading the passage, we'll examine the impact the message had on Nicodemus and apply it to our lives as well. Read the verses from the New Living Translation.

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16–17)



Observation: God's Gift of Love

Observing a passage is the first step of the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study. Sometimes we miss details in a familiar passage, so let's read John 3:16–17 again, this time noting the what, why, and how of the passage.

What did God do? Write down the words that describe God's actions.



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Why did God take these actions? Note words or phrases such as *so*, *so that*, or *to*.

How did God send His Son? Jesus made a similar statement in John 3:13, “the Son of Man has come down from heaven.” How did the apostle Paul explain Jesus’ coming down from heaven in *Galatians 4:4–5* and *Philippians 2:7–8*?

Now let’s look closer at how believing in Jesus gains us eternal life.



Interpretation and Correlation: Salvation through Jesus Christ

Paul’s epistle to the Romans, which explains the saving power of Christ’s atoning sacrifice, fleshes out the theology embedded in John’s gospel. Reflect on the connection between John 3:16–17 and Romans 5:8–9.

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation.

What similarities do you see between John 3:16–17 and Romans 5:8–9?



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What additional information did Paul offer about the role of Christ's death in our salvation?

Combine these passages in a summary statement of God's plan of salvation for the world.



Application: Taking the Step of Faith

To discover how Nicodemus responded to Jesus' invitation to believe in Him, we page forward in John's gospel to John 7:50–51. In the context, the Pharisees were pronouncing judgment on Jesus and spewing curses on those who followed Him when Nicodemus spoke up.

Then Nicodemus, the leader who had met with Jesus earlier, spoke up. "Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?" he asked. (John 7:50–51)

Nicodemus appeared open to Jesus' claims even though the others had already slammed the door shut. After Jesus' crucifixion, Nicodemus emerged from the shadows as a follower of Jesus when he joined Joseph of Arimathea to remove Jesus' body from the cross. Together, "they wrapped Jesus' body with the spices in long sheets of linen cloth" and laid His body in the tomb (19:40).

Just as Mary had lovingly wrapped baby Jesus in swaddling cloth and laid Him in a manger, these two courageous men lovingly wrapped Jesus' body in burial cloth and laid Him in a tomb. They had received God's gift of love and responded by saying in their actions, "I love you, Lord Jesus."



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How about you? Right now, join Nicodemus in returning love to the One who loved you enough to come from heaven and die in your place. Write a prayer expressing your belief in Jesus and your love for Him.

Take your prayer with you through the coming busy days of Christmas and read it often.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for loving me so much to send Your Son to die for my sins. As the hymnist writes, “Amazing love! How can it be That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?” Thank You for the gift of grace in Jesus, the gift of truth in Jesus, and most of all the gift of love in Jesus. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Bruce Milne, *The Message of John: Here Is Your King!* The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 77.



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JESUS: THE INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

Jesus: The Gift of God's Hope

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Romans 4:18–24; 8:24–25; 15:13

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Quotable

Hope is a sense of confidence that God is at work.

It has nothing to do with age, marital status, or experience from the past. It has everything to do with the living God.

— Charles R. Swindoll

It was a rare moment when the apostle Paul couldn't find the right words to express spiritual truth, but when he put his pen to parchment to describe Jesus, no word came to mind. "Thanks be to God for. . . ." Paul must have paused to contemplate what to write next. The great theologian's vocabulary could have filled a dictionary, but he lacked the language to express the wonder of Jesus. So Paul penned, "Thanks be to God for His *indescribable* gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15 NASB, emphasis added).

What puts Jesus beyond description is His divine nature. In Jesus, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, "lives all the fullness of God in a human body" (Colossians 2:9). He "radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God" (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus embodies God's *grace*—divine favor toward underserving humankind. He embodies God's *truth*—reliable principles for living. And He embodies God's *love*—infinite compassion for sinners. God offers these gifts to us in the person of His Son, and as we receive them, we discover another gift in Jesus: *hope*.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

What do people hope for at Christmas more than material things, like a new TV or the latest tech gadget? Here are a few items that won't fit under the Christmas tree but may be on our wish list:

- Restoration of a broken relationship
- Healing of a physical ailment
- The return of prodigal child or grandchild
- Renewed joy after the loss of a loved one



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Who wouldn't trade all their Christmas presents for just one of these gifts? What are you hoping for this Christmas?

Offer to the Lord your heart's desires in a quiet moment of prayer. Ask the Lord to reveal His Son to you through your study of His Word and to renew your hope in Him.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Hope has been an integral part of Jewish life since the beginning. We might say that the Jewish nation was conceived in hope. Let's trace the origin of Jewish hope two thousand years before Jesus to the heart of the first parents of the nation of Israel, Abraham and Sarah. Read Paul's description of Abraham, who "believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing" (Romans 4:17).

Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, "That's how many descendants you will have!" And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah's womb. Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises. (4:18–21)



Observation: Hoping for the Impossible

Observing a passage is the first step of the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study. Look again at Romans 4:18–21. Underline the key nouns and circle any key verbs that stand out.



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What did God promise Abraham (*Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–6*)? Why might this promise seem impossible to fulfill (*18:1–2, 9–14*)?

What convinced Abraham to keep hoping in God's "impossible" promise (Romans 4:21)?

Truly, it was Abraham's confidence that God would provide an heir that resulted in the Jewish nation. Hope, indeed, is in the nation's DNA.

This same tenacious confidence in God's promises kept the nation afloat for about fifteen hundred years through wave after wave of enemy invasions . . . until the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and exiled the Jews. All hope seemed lost, but the prophets buoyed the Jews' spirits with reminders of God's faithfulness, such as this word from the Lord to the captives in Babylon.

This is what the LORD says: "You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:10–11)

Let's take a closer look at the context of these verses to discover the meaning of the passage.



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Interpretation and Correlation: Putting Our Hope in God

After Moses freed the Hebrews from bondage in Egypt and Joshua led the conquest of Canaan, it seemed God's promises to Abraham had been fulfilled for good. Why, then, did the Lord remove the Jews from their land (*Jeremiah 17:1–4*)?

The people's sin may have lost them the freedom to live in their land, but their sin didn't lose them their *relationship with God*. What promise from God gave the exiles hope? To find the answer, read *Jeremiah 29:10–15*.

What attributes of God gave the people hope? None other than the same attributes we celebrate in Jesus at Christmas: *grace* to the underserving, *truth* we can count on, and *love* for sinners!



Application: Trusting in God's Plan

God's grace, truth, and love in Jesus offer us hope, even at times when we think all hope is lost. In his message, Chuck Swindoll offered this assurance:

Babylon isn't forever. Captivity isn't terminal. Let me add, the difficulties and challenges of the old year are not forever. God has plans for us that are filled with "a future and a hope."

What is one principle about God—as illustrated by His dealings with Israel—that you can apply today?



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Think back to the hopes you listed in the beginning of this study. How does the principle you mentioned above encourage you?

Tomorrow is Christmas, the day we celebrate the birth of the one true hope of the world. Thank the Lord on this Christmas Eve for the promises He fulfilled in the past, and trust Him to continue fulfilling His promises in the future.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the hope I have in Jesus. How powerful is this hope! It fuels my life when I await Your answers to my prayers today. On this side of Your yet-to-be-fulfilled promises, I lean on Your attributes to keep me hoping. I lean on You and wait with confidence in Your grace, truth, and love. In the name of Jesus, amen.



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Quotable

Hope is a sense of confidence that God is at work.

It has nothing to do with age, marital status, or experience from the past. It has everything to do with the living God.

— Charles R. Swindoll

For centuries, righteous Jews have put their hope in the coming of the Messiah. They've lived on tiptoe, looking toward the horizon for the Promised One to arise like the dawn of a new day to restore Israel as a nation and rekindle the people's devotion to the Lord.

With joy, Paul proclaimed to his fellow Jews in Rome who were awaiting the Messiah, "I believe that the hope of Israel—the Messiah—has already come" (Acts 28:20)! But Paul added, Jesus came to save *all* people, not just the Jews, and to establish the kingdom of God, not just a new nation for Israel. How did the Jews receive Paul's teaching? "Some were persuaded by the things he said, but others did not believe" (28:24).

Unlike the skeptical Jews in Paul's day, Christians have received God's gift of Jesus with open hearts. We celebrate the fulfillment of past hopes in Him, and we anchor in Him our hope for the future. Ring the bells on Christmas morning! The hope of the world has come!



PREPARE YOUR HEART

God's promise to Abraham that "all the families on earth [would] be blessed through [him]" (Genesis 12:3) was fulfilled at the birth of Jesus. Aging Simeon, who had hoped to see the Messiah before he died, saw God's light for the nations in Jesus when he took Jesus in his arms to bless Him,

*"Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace,
as you have promised.
I have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared for all people.
He is a light to reveal God to the nations,
and he is the glory of your people Israel!" (Luke 2:29–32)*



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Simeon saw in Jesus “salvation . . . for all people” and “a light to reveal God to the nations.” Invite the Lord to shine Christ’s light on you and your family today and fill your home with His peace and joy. Pray for those you love who may be living in darkness. Ask the Lord to open their eyes to the light of hope in Jesus so they can receive Him as their Savior this Christmas.

Now let’s open the Word to discover the hope of Christmas for which the whole world searches.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Most people think of *hope* as the feeling they get when they buy a lottery ticket. They hope they will be a winner but with no certainty. In contrast, God offers us a sure hope because it is based not on chance but on a person: Jesus. Because Jesus is trustworthy and the words of Scripture are reliable, our hope is more than wishful thinking; it’s confident faith. Let’s take a few minutes to look at the crucial connection between faith and hope.



Observation: The Connection between Faith and Hope

Read the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
(Hebrews 11:1 NASB)

According to this verse, what element does faith add to our hope?



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In the previous study, we traced Israel's hope to Abraham. Let's pick up where we left off in Romans 4 to observe the connection between Abraham's hope and his faith.

Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises. And because of Abraham's faith, God counted him as righteous. (Romans 4:20–22)

What was the reward of Abraham's faith?



Interpretation and Correlation: Our Faith Is Credited as Righteousness

Paul explained the significance of Abraham's faith:

And when God counted him as righteous, it wasn't just for Abraham's benefit. It was recorded for our benefit, too, assuring us that God will also count us as righteous if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. (Romans 4:23–24)

What is our assurance, according to verse 24?

Abraham's faith is a prototype of the faith of every person who seeks a relationship with God. "It is impossible to please God without faith," wrote the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 11:6). In faith, Mary and Joseph believed God would give them a miracle child, Jesus. In faith, the wise men, like Abraham, came from the East seeking God's promised child (Matthew 2:1–12). And in faith, we cling to our Savior at Christmas and put our hope in the redemption He won for us through His death and resurrection.



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Application: Bringing Hope into Life

When we wish for something, we sometimes say, “I’m getting my hopes up!” This kind of hope goes up and down, like a hot air balloon that is carried along by winds of fortune. However, our hope in God is certain. It is based on God’s promises and character in the person of Jesus, not on hot air and shifting winds. Be assured, God *will* make good on His promise and deliver us to the ultimate land of promise: our Father’s eternal home (John 14:1–3).

According to Chuck Swindoll in his message,

Biblical hope begins with an attitude of faith in things we are promised regarding the future. Hope grows as faith counts God’s promises as true.

Close this Christmas study by expressing to the Lord your hope in Jesus, the baby in the manger, in whom our future rests secure.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for offering me more than wishful thinking. Others may wish for a better future or have a “hunch” that things will improve, but in Christ, my hope is certain. Once again, I place my confidence in You and the promise of eternal life in Your Son. While I can’t describe the details of how You plan my future, I can depend on You and Your character. In You, I have a future and a hope for today and always. Amen.



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In the weeks leading up to Christmas, we knelt beside Mary and Joseph at the manger and joined their adoration of God's gift to the world. We imagined eternity in the eyes of the Christ child, who "existed in the beginning with God" (John 1:2). We recognized Jesus as the embodiment of "the very character of God" (Hebrews 1:3), in whom we saw:

- Grace—divine favor toward undeserving humankind
- Truth—reliable principles for living
- Love—infinite compassion for sinners
- Hope—resilient confidence in a certain future

Soon, we'll take down the tree, tuck away the twinkling lights, and box up the nativity set. And yet, while the figurine in the manger may return to storage, God's gift of Jesus—a gift "too wonderful for words" (2 Corinthians 9:15)—remains in our hearts.

As we anticipate the New Year, we'll focus on Jesus as the gift of God's hope by examining three principles hidden in three Hebrew words for *hope*; these principles will carry us through whatever unknown lies just around the bend.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

To prepare your heart today, read a verse we introduced in the study on Day 10.

For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."
(Jeremiah 29:11)

Quotable

Hope is a sense of confidence that God is at work.

It has nothing to do with age, marital status, or experience from the past. It has everything to do with the living God.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application



JESUS: THE INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

Jesus: The Gift of God's Hope

Twelve Daily Studies for Christmas

Romans 4:18–24; 8:24–25; 15:13

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

As you pray before opening the Word, thank the Lord for His plans for the coming year. In the space below, express any concerns you may have about your future, and ask the Lord to help you fully embrace God's hope in Jesus.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Because God is all-knowing, He is fully aware of every hill or valley, twist or turn in your life's journey. And because He is all-powerful, He can carry us through whatever rough roads stretch just beyond the horizon. God "gives power to the weak," Isaiah assured us (Isaiah 40:29), and then the prophet described what happens when we wait for Him.

*Yet those who wait for the LORD
Will gain new strength;
They will mount up with wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become weary. (Isaiah 40:31 NASB)*

Let's use the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method of observation to identify in this verse the first aspect of hope which is highlighted in the word *wait*.



Observation: What Do Hopeful People Do?

Wait is the verb form of the Hebrew word, *qavah*, which, interestingly, is translated "hope" in Jeremiah 29:11—God's plans "give us a future and a *hope*." There is an apparent connection between hoping and waiting. What do hopeful people do? They wait for the Lord.

According to Isaiah 40:31, what does the Lord do for us through our period of waiting?



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What else do hopeful people do? We need look no further than Job, a man of resilient hope. Job declared,

*“Though He slay me,
I will hope in Him.” (Job 13:15 NASB)*

This Hebrew word translated “hope” is *yachal*, which Job expressed through his determination to endure. Specifically, Job kept on hoping even through the worst of his suffering. What does James 5:10–11 tell us about the outcome of Job’s enduring hope?

We observe a third aspect of hope in the Hebrew word translated “confident” in Psalm 27:3.

*Though a mighty army surrounds me,
my heart will not be afraid.
Even if I am attacked,
I will remain confident.*

The word translated “confident” is *batach* in Hebrew, which describes an attitude of trust amid threatening circumstances—so that the psalmist can say, “my heart will not be afraid.”

So people who put their hope in the Lord, first, wait for Him, second, endure through trials, and third, trust the Lord for their future.



Interpretation and Correlation: What Principles Can We Understand?

Let’s interpret what we’ve observed by formulating principles, which are timeless truths that summarize the meaning of a passage. Think of principles as bridges of truth from the past to the present. In his message, Chuck Swindoll gathered from these verses three requirements of hope and three results, which he formulated into principles.

- Hope requires waiting, which strengthens us.
- Hope requires enduring, which brings patience.
- Hope requires trusting, which results in relief.



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Now you try. Look back at the verses you just read and formulate a principle that emerges from each Hebrew word we highlighted.

Isaiah 40:31

Principle about waiting:

Job 13:15

Principle about enduring:

Psalms 27:3

Principle about trusting:



Application: How Can We Apply God's Gift of Hope This Coming Year?

Often our tendency when we feel stress is to worry about the future rather than hope in the Lord. Instead of appreciating God's strength as we wait, we *rush* ahead and feel worn out. Instead of growing in patience as we endure, we *complain* and feel irritable during delays. And instead of experiencing the relief of trusting that God will handle our situation, we *push* for results only to feel defeated.

What circumstances or people are causing you stress or filling your heart with worry?



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Stress and worries could have weighed down Jesus, but He placed His hope in His Father—and His hope is available to us today. In a concluding prayer, tell the Lord that you put your hope in Him. Reflect on the stresses and worries in your life, and use the following space to express your thoughts to the Lord. Specifically, write down how you intend to wait, endure, and trust instead of rush, complain, and push.

Let Chuck's concluding words in his message guide your week:

Every day we have a choice. . . . Each day could be a day in which your imagination will go to work, take charge of you, rule your life, and fill you with fear. Or you could say, "Lord, these hours are unlived. I have no clue what they will include, but I want You to know I'm Yours. I'm trusting You, and I will walk with You. I will rely on You."

May this prayer from Paul be your guiding verse for the new year. Receive God's gift of hope in Jesus, and truly put your confidence in Him!

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.
(Romans 15:13).



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, right now, as I step into the New Year, I release all my fears to You. You are strong and powerful, full of grace, truth, and love. Help me face whatever challenges may come with "confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit." Fill me with Yourself through Your Son, Jesus, and it is in His name I pray, amen.



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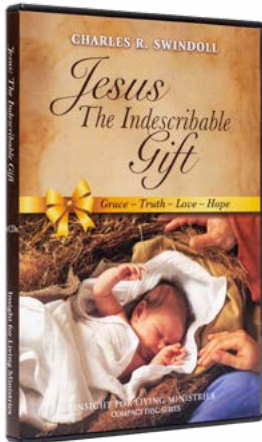
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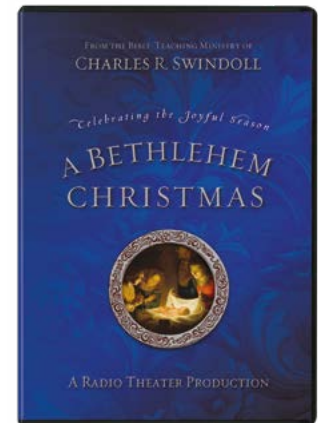
Tools for Digging Deeper



Jesus: The Indescribable Gift
by Charles R. Swindoll
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**A Bethlehem Christmas:
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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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