



LET'S BEGIN HERE

“I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist” (Matthew 11:11). Such words you’d expect Jesus to have conferred on Moses, a man determined by God to deliver His people from the bondage of Egypt . . . or upon David, Israel’s shepherd king, a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22), the one who fought the mighty giant, Goliath! Instead, those remarkable words fell like a garland around the neck of an unsung hero named John. Unconventional, to say the least, John the Baptist was that enigmatic prophet living in the wilderness, proclaiming an uncompromising message of repentance to prepare the hearts of God’s people for the Messiah.

God had uniquely prepared this uncommon prophet to represent His Son as His forerunner and to accomplish three primary tasks: *clear the way . . . prepare the way . . . and GET OUT OF THE WAY!* In this study, we will learn the secret to John’s ability to get out of the way and to exalt Jesus! And perhaps we’ll also be inspired to live our lives that way too.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As we turn to this passage, we’ll use the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study to observe, interpret, correlate, and apply the text. Chuck Swindoll’s book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, explains these methods in more detail. You can purchase a copy at Insight for Living Ministries’ [online store](#). Also, you may wish to check out [Chuck’s commentary on John’s gospel](#).



Observation: What Do You See?

Often in the Scriptures, there is much to learn by taking a close look at how a person is described, either by the narrator or the person himself or herself. That is certainly true in this story of John the Baptist. Both John the gospel writer and John the Baptist offer important clues as to who this uncommon prophet was and what made him tick. You can also see other clues in the story about the setting and why John the Baptist’s ministry was so crucial to launching the public ministry of the Messiah.

Quotable

*John’s greatness
was in his
unwavering resolve
to decrease so
that Christ—
whom he boldly
proclaimed—
could increase.*

— Charles R. Swindoll





Searching the Scriptures Tool

Observation is a critical beginning technique to put together the pieces of a passage of Scripture. Read the passage carefully, noticing features such as contrasts, comparisons, repeated words, cause-and-effect, and emphasized words. Particularly notice imperatives (commands) and verbs (action words), which are like tree limbs. All the ideas in the paragraph, like branches and leaves, connect to these words.

A Biography of John the Baptist—He Must Increase (John 3:22–30)

Read John 3:22–30. As you do, note what is happening in this scene. Who are the main characters? What is the focus of this story?

How would you describe the conflict that emerges? How do you know there is an issue?

What element does John the author use to introduce the conflict?



Geography . . . What Is the Setting?

Where does this story take place? What significance is there to Jesus leaving Jerusalem and going to the Judean wilderness?

Using your study Bible or Bible atlas, find a map titled “Ministry of Jesus” or something similar. See if you can locate the area in which this story took place. Make some notes about what you discover.

Jesus’ ministry had been in Galilee up to this time. Now He moved into the area where John the Baptist preached. That proximity likely contributed to the tension that arose among the disciples of John the Baptist. Let’s see what we can observe about the nature of the conflict.

In John 3:25, what sparks the conflict regarding John the Baptist’s ministry versus Jesus’ ministry?

What is the main complaint that John the Baptist’s disciples bring to him? (John 3:26)

How does John the Baptist respond? (3:27–30)





Interpretation: Finding John's Original Intent

Interpretation answers the question, *What does this passage mean?* To clarify the meaning of a text, first view it through the eyes of the original audience. How did John intend his readers to understand this story? What principles or theological truths emerge that help us understand the meaning of this amazing story about the forerunner of the Messiah.

Reaction of the Forerunner (John 3:27–30)

John the Baptist's response, as you just read, throws cold water on his inflamed disciples, quenching any further conversation as well as their competitive spirits.

Read again John 3:27–30. Based on what John the Baptist says to his disciples, what is the basis for his remarkable response?

What cultural metaphor does John the Baptist employ to illustrate his point?

Where else in Scripture is this metaphor used? (Put on your Bible thinking cap!)



What is the primary principle John the Baptist points to here in explaining his response?



Correlation: How Does It Relate?

Let's do some correlation to help us deepen our interpretation of this passage. Look up the following passages, and in the space provided explain in your own words how each relates to John the Baptist's principle of humility.

Numbers 11:26–29

Psalms 75:6–7

Proverbs 18:12



2 Corinthians 4:5

Philippians 2:3–4

A Doctrinal Declaration—What It Really Means (John 3:31–35)

In John 3:31–35, this humble forerunner delivers his doctrinal statement on the person of Jesus Christ:

“He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things, but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else. He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them! Anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true. For he is sent by God. He speaks God’s words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit. The Father loves his Son and has put everything into his hands.”

There are times in Scripture, when an author provides explicitly the meaning of the text. This is an excellent example of one such declaration of meaning, minimizing the need for interpretation.

How would you summarize John the Baptist’s doctrinal declaration in your own words?



Application: Bringing Home the Lessons

John the Baptist's rare humility provides lessons for all of us who genuinely desire to follow Christ and help prepare people's hearts for Him! After each principle below, write down one or two personal applications.

God is always in charge, not people (John 3:27).

Application _____

Application _____

All work is significant, but only one work is preeminent (John 3:28).

Application _____

Application _____

Joy comes from being obedient, not from getting the glory (3:29).

Application _____

Application _____

Genuine humility calls attention to Christ, not self (3:30).

Application _____

Application _____

Are you ready to lay low and exalt Christ today? Make that commitment to Him in prayer.



A FINAL PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I want You to increase in every aspect of my life today. Show me areas where I continue to exalt myself or have a view of myself that is overriding my thoughts of You. Be exalted in my thoughts, in the attitude of my heart, and in all I do, say, and think. In Your name I pray, amen.



BEHOLDING CHRIST . . . THE SON OF GOD

The Preacher Who Lost His Congregation

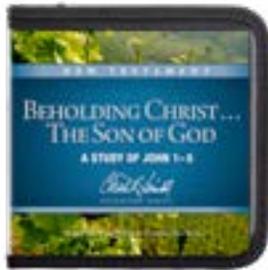
John 3:22–36

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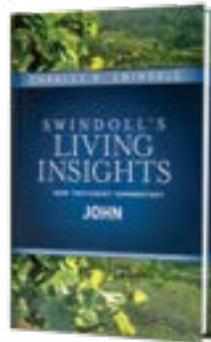
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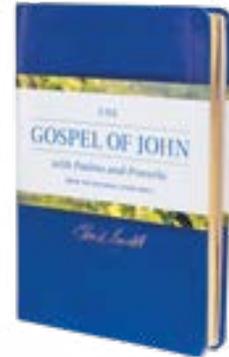
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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon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



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