

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs

### Reading the Ingredients

#### *Observing the Text*

*Psalm 119:18; Proverbs 2:1–5*

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



## LET'S BEGIN HERE

The Bible was never meant to be a mystery. God has not spoken to us, as some would claim, in hidden codes waiting to be deciphered through cryptic means. Rather, as the psalmist declares, the Word of God was given to be “a lamp to guide [our] feet and a light for [our] path” (Psalm 119:105). Though the Bible contains words that at times are hard to understand and names and places we often struggle to pronounce, the Scriptures flow with truths we can rely on, offering instruction and insight we desperately need. Still, you may be wondering, *How can I learn to understand and apply the Scriptures to my life?*

To begin with, we must learn the all-important technique of *observation*. Observation focuses on answering the question: *What do I see?* Truth be told, many may read words on the pages of the Bible, but most do not really observe what the words say. We’re going to learn how to do that in this study and then take some time to practice what we learn. Ready? Open your eyes! There’s so much to see.



## Whetting Your Appetite: Getting Started

A good definition of *observation* would be taking careful note of what is presented by paying close attention to the details. Keep in mind, observation is different from *interpretation*. Observation answers the question, *What does it say?* Interpretation answers the question, *What does it mean?* A common mistake in studying the Scriptures is attempting to understand what the passage means before making a careful study of what the passage says by focusing on what you see.



## Read Psalm 119:18.

**What did the psalmist ask the Lord to do?**

## Quotable

*Too many people read their Bibles hurriedly so they can get through the chapter quickly. Forget your speed-reading course when you come to a serious study of the Bible.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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**What was the psalmist hoping to find in God’s Word, based on this request?**

Every time you begin to study a passage of Scripture, take a moment to pray this very prayer, asking the Lord to *open your eyes* so that you might see important details and principles you might otherwise easily overlook.

**Now read Psalm 119:17 and 19. Write down some things you see about how the psalmist described himself and his purpose for studying God’s Word.**

**How many different words did the psalmist use to refer to the Scriptures? What are they?**

When we study God’s Word, we want to see with our physical eyes, but we want the Lord to open our *spiritual* eyes too!



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### A CLOSER LOOK

#### *Seeing with Spiritual Eyes*

The apostle Paul in his later years struggled with diminishing eyesight. He labored at times to write letters to the churches. He often enlisted the help of an editor who'd listen to him speak and then impart his words onto the page. How frustrating the aging process must have been for Paul whose zeal for the gospel only intensified as he grew older but was often hindered by the push back of old age. Perhaps that's why he offered a tender prayer for the believers at Ephesus when he wrote, "I pray that the *eyes of your heart* may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18 NASB, emphasis added). When our physical eyesight fails us, we can still see with the eyes of our hearts.

Learning to open our eyes to *observe* what the Scriptures say is the first step in opening the windows of our hearts so the brightness of God's truth can lead us from spiritual darkness into the transforming light of Christ.

#### *Clues in the Text (Acts 1:8)*

In this familiar text that begins the book of Acts, Luke, the writer, offered clues to how the story would unfold. In this single verse, there is much to be learned by paying close attention to the words Luke used to set the scene.

Take a moment to read Acts 1:8. Read it slowly and carefully, even aloud if you'd like.

Notice that the word *but* begins this verse. This is a *connecting* word that signals a contrast in thought. When you see a word such as *but* or *therefore* or *since*, it's a clue that what has just been written or said is linked closely to what will follow.



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Read Acts 1:4–7 carefully and aloud. What were the disciples doing when Jesus spoke these words? What was their location?

What did Jesus say in verse 7 that would have caused Him to use the contrasting word *but* in the very next verse?

Did Jesus use a positive or negative expression in verse 7?

What did Jesus tell the disciples they would receive in verse 8?

Did they already have what He promised, or would they receive it sometime in the future? How do you know? Explain your answer by writing down what you see in the verse.



By paying close attention to what was happening and being described in Acts 1:8, you can learn some important principles of observation. We've already highlighted one clue: *contrast*. Here are some others you should watch for in your observing.

- *Contrast*

“But [contrast] you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes . . .”

- *Cause and Effect*

“But you will receive power [effect] when the Holy Spirit comes upon you [cause] . . .”

- *People and Places*

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit [God] comes upon you [the disciples]. And you [the disciples] will be my [Jesus] witnesses, telling people [unbelievers] about me [Jesus] everywhere—in Jerusalem [city], throughout Judea [region], in Samaria [region], and to the ends of the earth [all nations].”

You can begin to see the significance and expansive impact of Jesus' vision for the disciples simply by taking note of what you see—*observation*—in the text.

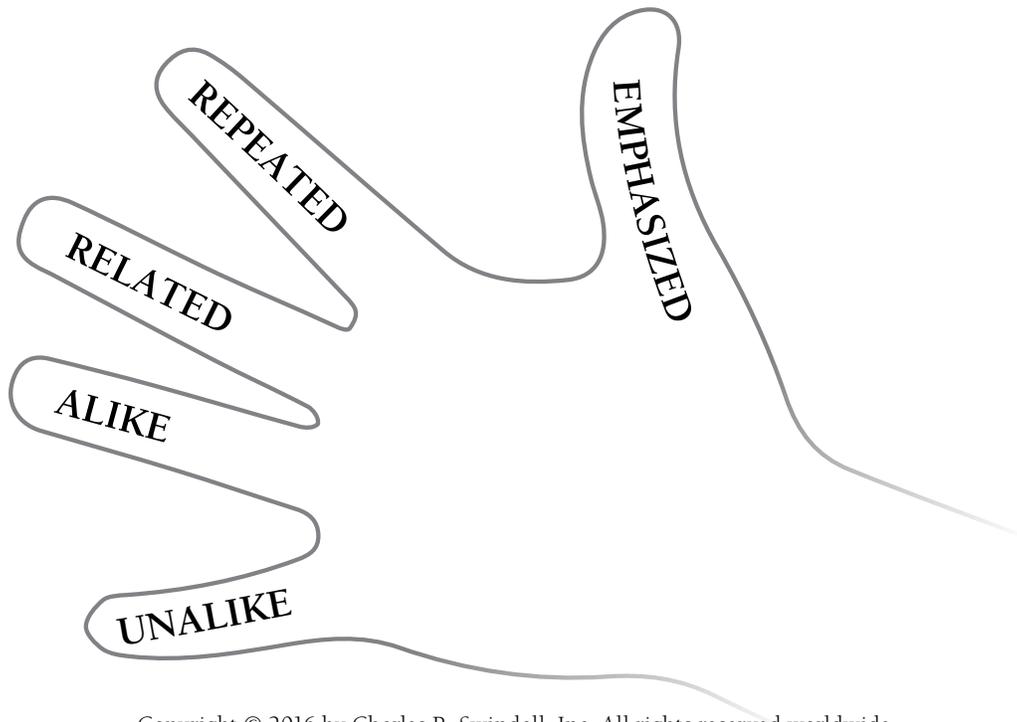
#### *Four Ways to Read the Text with Open Eyes (Observation)*

Below are four important principles for you to learn and ultimately to practice each time you sit down to search the Scriptures for yourself.

1. **Read as if you are reading the passage for the very first time.** This guards against the danger of familiarity. You might try reading the same passage in several different versions and then comparing expressions. Fresh eyes are the best eyes for searching the Scriptures.
2. **Read the passage as if you are reading a love letter from a special someone or dear friend.** That means you are reading with great care and paying close attention to every word, not skimming or speed reading.
3. **Read the passage like a detective**—looking for clues such as details, dialog, emotions expressed, etc. Take careful notes!
4. **Read as if you're in the text**—placing yourself in the story or in the context of when and where it was written. Imagine the scenes, chock full of sounds, smells, and impressions.

All of these principles will only enhance your observation technique and deepen your understanding of the passage.





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### YOUR TURN IN THE KITCHEN

Observation as a technique for searching the Scriptures is much like how reading the ingredients in a recipe is a careful process—one that’s critical for ensuring that a meal turns out right. Similarly, it’s helpful to develop your observation skills as you’re studying the Scriptures. Here are several exercises for you to try:

1. One of the ways you can hone your general observation skills is by using all of your senses. Go to a familiar public place, such as a coffee shop, and sit there for thirty minutes. During that time, write down only the new observations you make about that place. Record what you observe through your five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch). What did you observe that you never noticed before? What did you learn about the power of observation?



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2. Look up John 3:16 in your Bible. Then take time to read all of chapter 3 to understand the context. In your journal or on a piece of paper, write down several observations from John 3:16. Look for the clues we used when studying Acts 1:8 (above). What do you see?
3. While observation begins with an individual verse, it's important to observe a passage of Scripture in context. This skill will be useful whether you're studying God's Word on your own or preparing a lesson or sermon. Slowly and carefully read Philippians 4:4–9, then write down a few observations. Take your time, following the instructions from this message. Write down what you observe.
4. It's important to observe the teachings of Jesus because they provide a foundation for our faith. One of Jesus' most common teaching methods was telling parables or short stories to present and explain His point. Read the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37. Make several observations about what you see in this parable and its context. Pay close attention to what prompted Jesus to tell this story.



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5. The Bible is full of stories where God interacts with people and nations. Learning how to observe a narrative well is important in both studying and teaching the Scriptures. Carefully read the story about Daniel in the lions' den in Daniel 6:1–28. Make several observations about this true account.
6. Practice using your imagination to picture a biblical scene in your head. Carefully read Isaiah 6:1–8, then describe how the seraphim might have looked. How might Isaiah have felt? Use the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) to describe the scene. How does creating this scene in your imagination affect your understanding of it and your ability to communicate it?

Additional tip: Develop a marking system in your Bible for observing the Scriptures. For instance, you could draw a box around connecting words (*and, but, therefore, since*); underline promises; and write “def” in the margin when you come to a word that is defined in the verse (such as *faith*, which is defined in Hebrews 11:1). Write down your system and use it consistently when you study the Scriptures. You may wish to use colored pens to mark words and/or verses in your Bible. Colors can help you emphasize certain words you want to remember. For example, you might want to underscore important commands in red or circle prominent names in blue or highlight significant questions in yellow. The possibilities are endless. Just remember to be consistent with your system.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, Your Word tells me that though people see what's on the outside, You see what's in my heart. Lord, please open the eyes of my heart so that I may know You in deeper and deeper ways. In the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.*

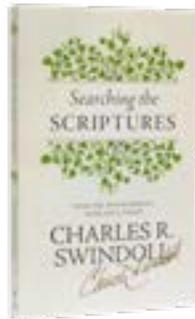




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When the book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* was written, the format for this STS study was developed by Charles R. Swindoll and Rhome van Dyck and published at the end of chapter four under the title “Your Turn in the Kitchen.” For the 2016 broadcast, this STS study was expanded with additional material by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Charles R. Swindoll based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts.



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