

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Ministry: A Study of Matthew 14–20

STUDY NINE

Three Nevers We Must Never Forget

Matthew 16:21–26

If we are going to live as we should, then we must think as God thinks. That's why we need a Bible. This Book is full of God's thoughts, God's counsel. It contains the truth to live by.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

YOU are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Through a flash of divine illumination, God had revealed a dazzling truth to Simon. Perhaps for the first time ever, he could see clearly. He was thinking God's thoughts, not human thoughts—thinking vertically, not horizontally.

So rock-solid was the truth of Simon's confession that Jesus consecrated the moment by giving Simon a new name, Peter—the “rock.” However, it didn't take long for this rock to show signs of cracking.

As we'll see in Matthew 16:21–26, Peter's thoughts reverted to flesh-and-blood thinking when he brazenly tried to reprimand Jesus. What flipped Peter's mental switch from vertical to horizontal? Let's glean from Peter's errors *three nevers we must never forget*.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Three Nevers We Must Never Forget

Matthew 16:21–26



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The Holy Spirit alone knows God's thoughts. But, thankfully, "we have received God's Spirit . . . so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us" (1 Corinthians 2:12). In prayer, invite the Lord to reveal His mind to you through His Spirit as you study His Word. Write your prayer below.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

After confessing Jesus as Messiah and hearing Jesus' praise, Peter must have felt confident and courageous, ready to wave the banner and lead the King's troops into battle. But then Jesus "sternly warned the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah" (Matthew 16:20).

Why restrain His messengers? Jesus was on a mission—to redeem the world, not to conquer it. To overthrow death, not Rome. To liberate captives from bondage to sin, not Caesar. To swing open the gates of God's blessing to all people, not just the Jews.

Of course, Peter and the others didn't understand any of these purposes because they were thinking only about earthly kingdoms. Read [Matthew 16:21–26](#) and write down the statements that would have most shocked Peter and the disciples from their earthbound perspective.



Three Nevers We Must Never Forget

Matthew 16:21–26



Observation: Jesus' Prediction, Rebuke, and Requirement

Use your observation skills, based on Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, to examine Jesus' teaching, which comprises three parts.¹

Jesus' Prediction—Matthew 16:21

What does the phrase “From then on” in [Matthew 16:21](#) indicate? How does the word “plainly” contrast with Jesus' previous teaching (see [Matthew 12:40](#))?

Specifically, what did Jesus predict? Watch for those verbs. Who would be His antagonists? Be sure to keep these key characters in mind as we continue our study of Matthew.²

Jesus' prediction of His death was so unexpected, the rest was a blur. Ever had that happen to you? All of a sudden, the world stops. You reel and try to stay on your feet as you deal with something you never dreamed would happen. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Three Nevers We Must Never Forget

Matthew 16:21–26

Jesus’ Rebuke—Matthew 16:22–23

Use the charts below to contrast Peter’s confession in Matthew 16:16 with his reprimand of Jesus in *Matthew 16:22*. Then contrast Jesus’ commendation of Peter in *16:17* with His rebuke in *16:23*.

Peter Confesses Jesus <i>16:16</i>	Peter Reprimands Jesus <i>16:22</i>

Jesus Commends Peter <i>16:17</i>	Jesus Rebukes Peter <i>16:23</i>

How did Peter the “rock” so quickly become Peter the “stumbling block” (NIV)? Based on the *verses* in the charts above, what clue sheds light on the cause of this shift?



Three Nevers We Must Never Forget

Matthew 16:21–26

Peter's rebuke eerily echoes Satan's temptation in *Matthew 4:1–11*, especially when the devil offered to Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory" (Matthew 4:8). Like Satan, Peter wanted Jesus to grab the glory now and avoid the cross. Just as He resisted the devil's temptation, Jesus resisted Peter's.

"Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me! You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's." (Matthew 16:23)

Jesus' final line says it all, doesn't it? How often we see life through earthly eyes and not God's divine perspective. The disciples were barely beginning to understand the paradox: *the Messiah must die to save the world.*

According to horizontal thinking, the Messiah can't die. Messiah conquers. The Messiah shouldn't submit. Messiah rules. When we operate from a human viewpoint and things happen that we don't expect, we resist. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jesus' Requirement—Matthew 16:24–26

In a short span, the disciples must learn how to follow a shameful, murdered Messiah. *But how?* Jesus gave the answer in *Matthew 16:24–26*. What did Jesus tell them they must be willing to do? What rationale did Jesus provide for this seemingly insane exhortation?

*Living for Christ is really explained in one word, dying. The best servants are those who have died to themselves. The fight is over. The resistance is finished.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

By bringing the disciples to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus had led them to a crossroad. Would they follow their Master to Jerusalem now that they knew what came next? What did Jesus mean by "take up your cross" anyway? Let's take a deeper look.



Three Nevers We Must Never Forget

Matthew 16:21–26



Interpretation: The Threefold Requirement

In the interpretation phase, we seek to understand the meaning of Jesus' threefold requirement for His disciples:

"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me." (Matthew 16:24)

What does it mean to "give up your own way" (16:24)? Other Bible versions offer insight in their translations of the phrase: "deny himself" (16:24 NASB); "set aside selfish interests" (16:24 AMP); "forget about yourself" (16:24 CEV); "let me lead" (16:24 MSG). Based on your study so far, explain the phrase in your own words.

In Jesus' day, the Romans often forced condemned criminals to carry the very planks upon which they would be hung to their own crucifixion site. If Jesus must walk the way of humiliation and death, His disciples must be willing to take up their own crosses too.

What does it mean to "take up your cross" (16:24)? What does it *not* mean? For help with the answer, consult page 37 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*. For an online resource, consult [Constable's Notes](http://netbible.org) at netbible.org.



Three Nevers We Must Never Forget

Matthew 16:21–26

What does it mean to “follow me” (Matthew 16:24)? The Greek verb is a present imperative, which describes a command to an ongoing action. This verb contrasts “give up” and “take up,” which emphasize complete action.

*Turning from our selfish ways, we take up our cross and follow Him. We never lead Him.
We listen closely, come to terms with what He is saying, then we adapt accordingly.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



Correlation: Lesson Learned and Taught

That day, when Jesus rebuked Peter for his devilish reprimand, Peter learned a vital lesson about thinking God's thoughts and submitting to Christ's authority. The way of Christ includes setting aside our self-interests and being willing to suffer—even to die—for the sake of Jesus.

Later in his life, Peter taught this lesson to other believers. Read *1 Peter 2:21–25; 3:14–17; 4:1–2, 12–14; 5:10*. Then write your reflections on one of Peter's principles that really stood out to you.

The world offers immediate gain but eternal loss. The way of Christ's cross brings immediate loss, suffering, humiliation, and even death. But with it comes eternal gain. *How much better is following Christ!*



Three Nevers We Must Never Forget

Matthew 16:21–26



Application: Three Nevers We Must Never, Ever Forget

Out of the granite of Jesus' teaching, we can carve three foundational principles on which to build our lives.

First, Jesus' unexpected revelation about His eventual death teaches:

We must never think that just because something is unexpected that it is unacceptable.

Has life thrown you any curves lately? Perhaps an unanticipated medical diagnosis, a change in a relationship, a job relocation? In the space below, write a prayer letting go of your resistance to God's unexpected way as the first step to opening your mind to His perspective.

Second, Peter's reprimand of Jesus illustrates:

We must never think that the Lord should alter His plan to fit our preferences.

Jesus deferred Peter's dream of an immediate realization of God's kingdom. He was telling Peter in so many words, first comes the cross, then the crown. Have you ever tried to tell God what He can or cannot do? What preferences may Christ be asking you to set aside to follow Him?



Three Nevers We Must Never Forget

Matthew 16:21–26

Third, Jesus' requirements for discipleship reveal:

We must never think that being a close follower of Jesus can happen without self-denial.

Are you willing to give up your agenda, take up your cross, and follow Jesus? What specific step can you take to embrace His way . . . which is always the better way?

At Caesarea Philippi, the disciples had come to a decision point. Would they turn their backs on the kingdom of the world to follow Jesus to the cross? The same question applies to us all today. Jesus beckons you to let go of all that you are to gain all you can imagine . . . *and more!*



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, so often I look at life backward, grasping onto the things of this world to keep me safe. Turn my thinking around and help me find refuge in letting go of everything—even my own life—for the sake of Christ. Help me see what matters for eternity over the things that concern me only in the present. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. The "elders and chief priests and scribes" (Matthew 16:21 NASB) plotted Jesus' arrest and adjudicated His trials. They obtained false witness, spat in Jesus' face, beat Him, brought Him to Pilate, incited the crowd, and demanded Jesus' crucifixion. Afterward, they ordered soldiers to guard the tomb and bribed them to lie about the resurrection. They were against Jesus each step of His way.

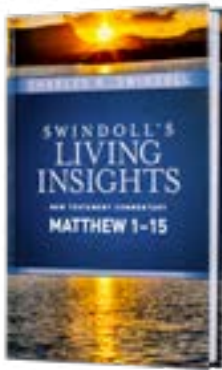


Three Nevers We Must Never Forget

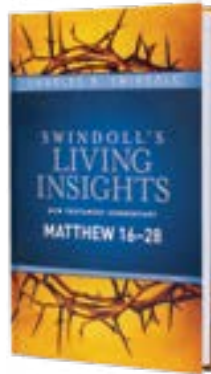
Matthew 16:21–26



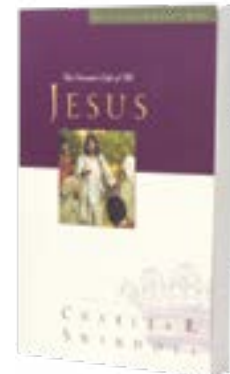
Tools for Digging Deeper



Swindoll's Living Insights
New Testament Commentary
Insights on Matthew 1–15
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For the 2021 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Brad Smith, writer, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

