



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Impossibilities. We can all name a few problems we've faced that defied solutions. The disciples encountered their share of daunting obstacles, such as the time when more than five thousand people gathered and Jesus asked Philip to buy bread to feed them. As Philip fingered the pennies in his pocket, he cast a dubious eye over the crowd. *It can't be done! Impossible!*

Do words like *can't . . . won't work . . . impossible* leap from your lips when the financial numbers don't add up? Or a medical condition defies treatment? Or a dispute snarls into an irresolvable impasse?

In this study, we'll see how Jesus overcame not one but two humanly impossible obstacles by multiplying food to feed thousands and walking on water to rescue His disciples. He performed these miracles to open our eyes to what lies beyond our dead ends. His miracles replace the word *impossibility* with a new word: *opportunity*. Because all things are possible for God, our impossibilities become opportunities for God to reveal His power, inspire our faith, and give us hope.

Let's raise the curtain on a biblical scene where the disciples faced an impossible problem: how to feed a multitude when the cupboard was bare!



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

What's your impossibility? It may relate to a recent turn of events, such as a financial setback or a job loss. Perhaps your impossibility involves a relationship or health issue. Identify your impossibility by writing it in the space below.

Quotable

*One sage wrote,
"We are all faced
with a series of
great opportunities,
brilliantly disguised
as unsolvable
problems."*

— Charles R. Swindoll



Now, read the following verses out loud as you prepare your heart to receive the lessons from John 6:1–21.

“O Sovereign LORD! You made the heavens and earth by your strong hand and powerful arm. Nothing is too hard for you!” (Jeremiah 32:17)

“I am the LORD, the God of all the peoples of the world. Is anything too hard for me?” (32:27)

“What is impossible for people is possible with God.” (Luke 18:27)

Pray this simple prayer as you place your impossible situation on the altar before the Lord:

Lord, I offer You my circumstance that seems impossible to me but poses no problem to You. Help me to sense Your presence in this study today. May I gain a firm conviction that with You all things are possible. Amen.



Observation: Biblical Examples of Impossibilities

A key principle in the *Searching the Scriptures* process is observation. The observation process helps you grasp the flow of the passage and identify the parts that make up the whole. Chuck Swindoll divided this passage into four parts: the setting, the opportunity, the test, and the response. As you read a passage of Scripture, remember to look for repeated words, commands, questions, and emphatic statements.

Read John 6:1–21, and write down your initial observations here.

The Setting

The first four verses of John 6 establish the setting for God's power to meet the seemingly immovable obstacle of human impossibility. After each of the following key phrases, write down the answer to the questions.

“After this” (John 6:1). Jesus returned to His home base of ministry from where (5:1)?



According to Mark's account, what else were Jesus' disciples doing prior to Jesus feeding the five thousand (Mark 6:30)? And what was the purpose for Jesus leading His men to a remote place (6:31–32)?

"Jesus crossed over" (John 6:1). John stated that "Jesus crossed over to the far side of the Sea of Galilee" (6:1). On this Bible map titled "*Ministry of Jesus*," locate the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee. Find letters "H" and "I," which identify the possible areas where Jesus fed the five thousand and walked on water.

"Jesus climbed a hill and sat down" (6:3). Although Jesus and His men tried to find refuge, "a huge crowd" interrupted their retreat (6:5). For what reason did the crowds gather (6:2)?

The Opportunity

"Jesus soon saw a huge crowd" (John 6:5). When observing a text, always notice *repetition*, *emphasis*, and *detail*. Observe John's repetition of the phrase "huge crowd" in verses 2 and 5 and Andrew's emphatic description of the crowd in verse 9. He uses the Greek word *tosoutos*, which means "so many." John details in verse 10 the number of men in the crowd—five thousand. Including women and children, this figure could have easily been eight or ten thousand!

The *size* of the crowd is a key element of the story. Why do you think John put so much emphasis on the size of the crowd?



One reason the size is significant is the contrast it highlights between the human and divine points of view. In the following chart, write your own list of contrasts between how the disciples most likely viewed the crowd from their human point of view and how Jesus viewed the crowd.

| The Disciples' Perspective of the Crowd <i>Impossible Problems</i> | Jesus' Perspective of the Crowd <i>Divine Opportunities</i> |
|---|--|
| | |

Jesus viewed the swarm of people not as an interruption but an opportunity to teach His followers about trusting God when faced with impossibilities.

The Test

"[Jesus] was testing Philip" (John 6:6). John noted that Jesus "already knew what he was going to do" (6:6). However, He kept His plan to Himself to test His disciples' faith. Look closely at Jesus' question to Philip: "Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?" (6:5). They were far from any town, and Jesus knew they had little money. So if Jesus knew the answer to His question, what was His purpose in asking Philip?

Andrew went "shopping" for food in the crowd but found only a boy with five loaves and two fish. His question, "But what good is that with this huge crowd?" (6:9) literally means in the Greek, "What good is so little for so many?"



Philip's and Andrew's answers revealed their limited, human perspective. What answers would have reflected a divine perspective toward impossibilities?

The Response

Jesus answered Andrew's question, "What good is so little for so many?" with a miracle that illustrated God's power in an impossible situation. What do you observe about Jesus' calm and deliberate actions (John 6:10–13)?

What do you observe in the people's response (6:14–15)? Instead of submissive faith, the people displayed what typical human flaws?

As the food in the disciples' stomachs digested, the faith in their hearts dissipated. How did they respond when a stormy sea put their lives in danger (6:16–21)?



**Correlation: Deeper Insight**

The parallel account in Mark 6:47–52 offers deeper insight into the disciples' faith struggles. What did Mark say about the disciples' hearts?

**Interpretation: Biblical Principles about Impossibilities**

Bible stories are a rich source of principles for godly living. We learn best by example, don't we? Lists of points are quickly forgotten, but the images of Jesus feeding the five thousand and walking on water set memorable pegs in our minds so that the next time we're called to trust God, we have some solid truths to hang on to.

Divine Perspective of Impossibilities

These two miracles demonstrate the nature of Jesus' true kingship, where He provides generously out of His abundance and rules over creation. Viewing impossibilities from a *divine* perspective reassures us that nothing is impossible for Him. He can multiply the little we offer Him and calm our fearsome storms.

Write down in the form of a principle the meaning of the miracles Jesus performed in John 6:1–21.

Faith When Faced with Impossibilities

As Chuck explains in his commentary, *Insights on John*, the disciples' fledgling faith faltered because:

According to Mark, "their heart was hardened" (Mark 6:52 NASB). This idiom didn't mean they were unkind or cruel (as it does in English). Rather, their reasoning and emotions were resistant to development. We would say they were "thickheaded." Nevertheless, Jesus remained patient with His disciples. If He rebuked them at all, He was gentle (Matt. 14:31).¹



What principle do you glean as you consider the meaning of the disciples' struggles with faith?



Application: Valuable Lessons We Can Learn

In his commentary, Chuck outlines four applicable lessons based on John 6:1–21:

First, *acknowledge your own inadequacy and the Lord's omnipotence. . . .*

Second, *be certain the challenge before you glorifies the Lord, obeys one of His commands in Scripture, or helps to fulfill a scriptural mandate (such as the Great Commission). . . .*

Third, *give the challenge back to the Lord as an opportunity for Him to accomplish it on your behalf and to receive glory for the victory. . . .*

Fourth, *do what you can, supply what you have, put forward your effort, then allow the Lord to multiply it (or not) at His discretion.²*

Thinking back to the impossible situation you noted at the beginning of the study, how can you apply Chuck's four insightful steps? Write down what you intend to do.

We live in an era of specialization. We have specialists in medicine, law, computers, finances, education, and the list goes on. However, only God can claim to be a specialist in impossibilities. Now, pray to the Impossibility Specialist with a heart filled with faith!





A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I bring to You what little I have and all I have. Give me Your perspective on my impossible situation, restore my hope, and help me to rest in Your will. Nothing is impossible for You, and I commit to You the people, situations, and problems that are out of my control. I give to You the challenges I face, whether impossible tasks or fearsome storms. Work Your will in Your way and in Your time. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on John* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 140.
2. Swindoll, *Insights on John*, 141–42.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

God's Specialty: Impossibilities

John 6:1–21

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



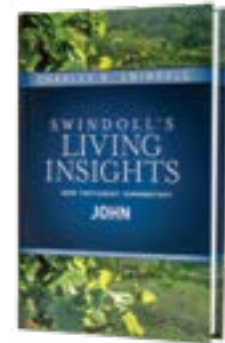
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FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Bread Delivered from Heaven

John 6:22–71

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

When Jesus fed the five thousand, he provided an *abundance* of food — more food than the people had ever seen. The leftovers filled twelve baskets! Perhaps for the first time, these common folks Jesus fed ate until they could eat no more (John 6:11–12). It's no wonder, then, that the next morning the people followed the prompting of their growling stomachs and went searching for their next bountiful meal from this Miracle Worker. After all, where else could they find so much food?

Let's join the crowd on their hunt for Jesus as they track Him to the synagogue at Capernaum. At this place of religious learning, Jesus fashioned the object lesson of feeding the multitude into an unforgettable sermon that many commentators call the Bread of Life Discourse.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

You'll need a map of the region around the Sea of Galilee to follow the movements of the crowd searching for Jesus. *The Swindoll Study Bible* contains a set of helpful maps, including "*The Ministry of Jesus*." On this map, find the northeast section of the Sea of Galilee and locate the general area around Bethsaida where Jesus likely fed the five thousand. Then locate Capernaum, where the crowd found Jesus, and Tiberius, which John also mentioned.

Now, read John 6:22–25, tracing on the map the movements of the people as you read. Consult page 147 of Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on John*, for further explanation of Jesus' route and a picture of the fourth-century synagogue that sits where Jesus delivered His discourse. For an online resource, find the discussion of these verses in "Constable's Notes" at lumina.bible.org. Write your findings below.

Quotable

It's a distressing thought that these people stood in the very presence of God in the flesh, heard Him give the offer of salvation, and they didn't accept it.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Bread Delivered from Heaven

John 6:22–71

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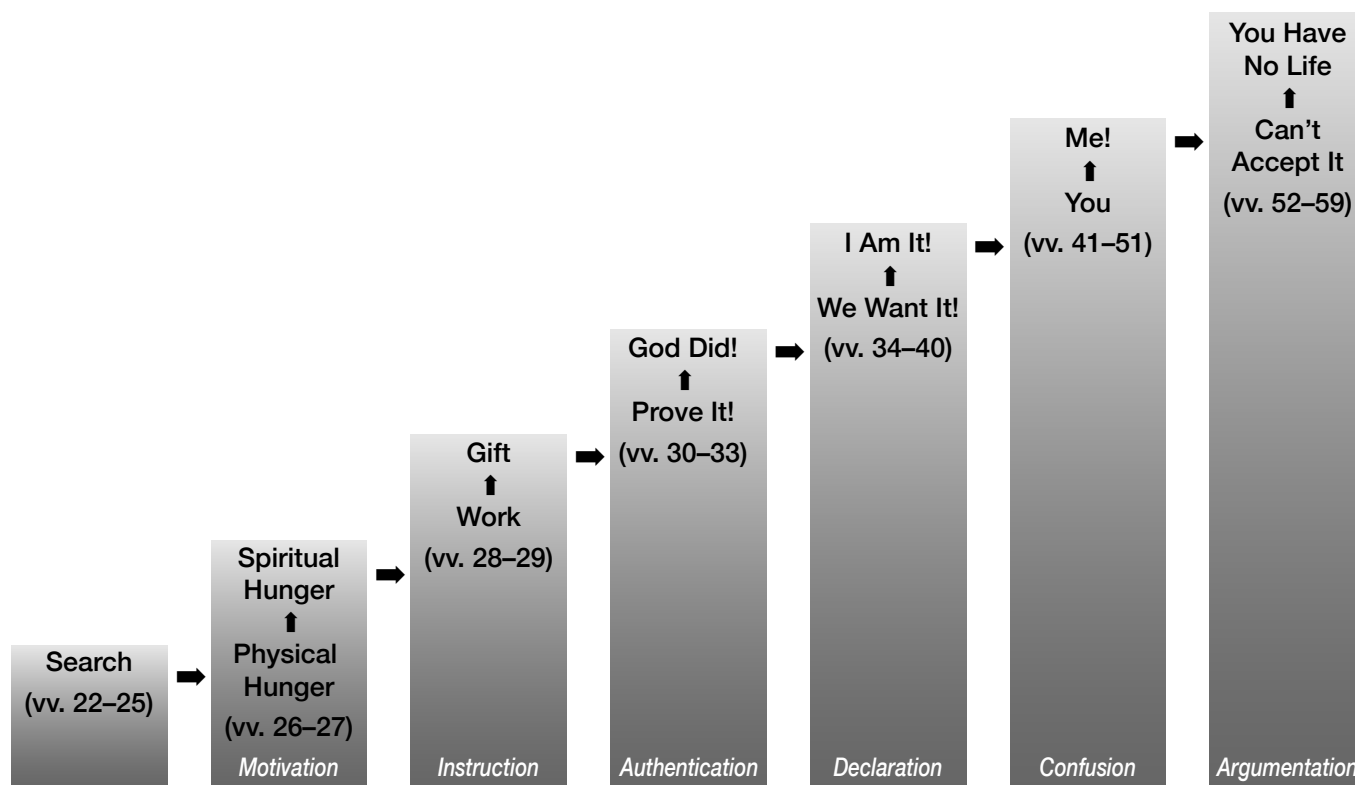
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The Bread of Life Discourse consists of a dialogue between Jesus and the people. Read John 6:25–59, beginning with the people’s question: “‘Rabbi, when did you get here?’” (John 6:25) and concluding with John’s summary: “He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum” (6:59). As you read, notice the following pattern.

Jesus replied . . . (6:26) → They replied . . . (6:28)
Jesus told them . . . (6:29) → They answered . . . (6:30)
Jesus said . . . (6:32) → They said . . . (6:34)
Jesus replied . . . (6:35) → Then the people began to murmur . . . (6:41)
But Jesus replied . . . (6:43) → Then the people began arguing . . . (6:52)

The following chart illustrates the progression of intensity in the dialogue.

Charting the Bread of Life Discourse in John 6



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S02
2



Observation: Preeminent Issues

Let's follow Chuck's six-point outline of Jesus' sermon, which includes six *preeminent issues* noted on the chart: motivation, instruction, authentication, declaration, confusion, and argumentation. Then we'll examine the *personal impact* on the people, the disciples, Judas . . . and us.



Searching the Scriptures Tool

Observation is a critical first step to understanding a passage of Scripture. Features to look for include contrasts, comparisons, repeated words, cause-and-effect, and emphasized words.

First, Jesus addressed the people's *motivation*. What contrast do you notice in John 6:27? Read the verse in the *New American Standard Bible* to see the contrast more clearly. Write down this significant contrast, which Jesus pointed out to redirect their motives from earthly to heavenly.

Instead of bread, what did Jesus desire them to seek from Him (Matthew 6:31–33; John 6:27)?

Search the word *life* in your *online Bible text*, and record the number of times this key word is repeated. What might be the reason Jesus repeated this word so many times?



Instruction. When Jesus talked about “eternal life” (John 6:27), the people assumed eternal life required “works” (6:28). What instruction did Jesus give the people about *how* to gain eternal life? To find the answer, compare John 3:16 with John 6:29.

Authentication. Bread for one meal was not enough to satisfy the people’s selfish appetites; they wanted a *daily* ration—like the manna their forebears gathered every morning except on the Sabbath (Exodus 16:13–31). Only then would they believe in Jesus. How did Jesus correct their misunderstanding of Scripture (God, not Moses, gave food “from heaven” [Exodus 16:4]) and draw their focus back to Himself (John 6:33)?

Declaration. Jesus tried to shift the subject from *manna* to the *Messiah*, but the food-obsessed people refused to connect the dots. How did Jesus declare His identity in plain terms in verse 35? And what assurance did He give future believers, like us today (6:36–40)?

Confusion. Ironically, the Jews who demanded manna murmured like their Israelite forebears. What was the crowd’s excuse for not believing in Jesus (6:41–42)?



Like an ocean swell building in strength and then breaking onshore in a mighty roar, Jesus' discourse came to a climax in verses 47–51. What did Jesus tell the people, and, from the depths of His compassion, what did He urge the people to do?

Argumentation. Jesus' invitation washed over the crowd, but the people's rock-hard hearts did not budge. Instead, the people argued. What did they argue about, and how did Jesus answer their objection?

Jesus' answer created an either-or response. Either the people would follow Him in faith or walk away in disbelief. What would you do?

Before examining the *personal impact* of Jesus' discourse, let's pause for a moment and explore the meaning of "eating" Jesus' flesh and "drinking" His blood.



Interpretation and Correlation: Exploring the Meaning

Eating is a metaphor for faith that illustrates the main idea of Jesus' sermon: "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life" (John 6:47). Just as eating bread *sustains* physical life, believing in Jesus *secures* eternal life. Write down a few points of comparison between eating as a physical act and believing as an act of the will.



Drinking is also a metaphor for faith. Jesus said, “But anyone who eats my flesh and *drinks my blood* has eternal life” (John 6:54, emphasis added). What does blood represent? Blood *recalls* the blood-smeared doorposts during the first Passover when God’s judgment passed over the Israelites the night before they fled Egypt (Exodus 12:21–23), and it *foreshadows* the cross where Christ bore God’s judgment for sin. Drinking Christ’s blood is a metaphor for believing in Jesus as the atonement for sin.

Months later, on the night of Passover before His crucifixion, Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper using these same metaphors of faith. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 along with [Constable’s Notes](#) on the four major interpretations of the Lord’s Supper. Which view represents your church tradition? Does Jesus’ teaching in John 6 enhance your appreciation of the Lord’s Supper? What new insight can you incorporate into your spiritual practice as you receive the Lord’s Supper?



Application: Personal Impact

Now, let’s consider the personal impact of Jesus’ discourse.

Open Defection

The superficial disciples recoiled when the points of Jesus’ message pricked their thin skin. What was their response (John 6:60–66)?



Firm Determination

Turning to His twelve disciples, Jesus asked, “Are you also going to leave?” (John 6:67). What was Simon Peter’s response (6:68–69)?

Subtle Deception

Judas, the furtive wolf among the sheep, represented the third type of response. Why do you think Jesus called him “a devil” (John 6:70)?

No one who hears the words of Jesus remains the same. How about you? How have Jesus’ words impacted you? Take a little time as you close this study to craft a prayer to the Lord telling Him your response to His words of life.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You sent Your Son to be the Bread of Life for my starving soul. I accept Your provision, confessing my emptiness without Jesus’ presence in my life. I affirm my belief in Him, receiving Him as my food and drink and delighting in His offer of life everlasting! Amen.



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Bread Delivered from Heaven

John 6:22–71

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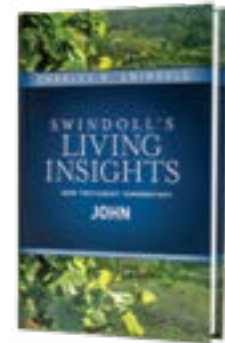
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FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Jesus in the Lions' Den

John 7

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Have you ever been unjustly accused? Perhaps someone charged you for a wrong when you did right or pronounced you guilty when you were innocent. Maybe it was a group of people who plotted against you, determining to destroy your reputation and bring you down.

If anyone knows what it's like to be torn apart by enemies, it's Jesus. In today's passage, His attackers come in three groups: the Jewish leaders, the crowd, and—the first and most hurtful group—His own brothers.

They swipe at Jesus and roar their threats like lions on the prowl encircling their prey. But Jesus shuts His attackers' mouths with His calm, truthful words. Let's look closer at Jesus' responses and draw strength from Him when we're cornered by enemies.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

If you've ever been attacked by "lions," you know the heartache and fear of being a victim. Take a few moments to draw near to our Savior who also suffered at the hands of evil people. We share a special bond with Jesus through the "fellowship of His sufferings" (Philippians 3:10 NASB). Write down your need for His supportive presence, and ask Him for wisdom through this study.

Quotable

*I invite you who are
given to rebellion,
stop your running.
And those who
are given to fear,
rest your fear in
God's hands.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Observation: Where, When, Why, and Who?

In his book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Chuck Swindoll explains his approach to Bible study, which includes four essential methods: observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. You can purchase a copy at Insight for Living Ministries' [online store](#). Also, we recommend that you add to your study library Chuck's [commentary](#) on John's gospel.

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method, a crucial first step is observing the text closely through the magnifying glass of key questions. Answering questions enhances understanding and helps you reach the goal of a closer walk with Christ. Take a few moments to read John 7, and look for where, when, why, and who!

Where?

Where was Jesus at the beginning of the chapter (John 7:1)? Where did He go from there in secret (7:10)? Finally, where did He make His public appearance (7:14)?

When?

When was the trip to Jerusalem (John 7:2)? Look up background information about this festival on page 162 in Chuck's commentary, *Insights on John*. You can find additional information at [biblegateway.com](#) in the [article](#) "The Conflict Intensifies at the Feast of Tabernacles." Write down any interesting facts you uncover.



Jewish festivals presented ideal backdrops for Jesus to step on the national stage and declare His true nature. Here's a list of the festivals in John and the traits of Jesus' identity.

| Jewish Festival | Passage | Trait of Jesus' Identity |
|--|------------|--|
| First Passover | John 2:13 | Jesus cleansed His "Father's house," the temple (2:16). |
| Unnamed "Jewish holy day" | John 5:1 | Jesus claimed to be "the Son of God" (5:25). |
| Second Passover | John 6:4 | Jesus announced, "I am the bread of life" (6:35). |
| Festival of Shelters (Booths or Tabernacles) | John 7:2 | Jesus declared, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me!" (7:37). |
| Festival of Dedication (Hanukkah) | John 10:22 | Jesus proclaimed, "I am the good shepherd" and claimed to be God (10:14, 33–38). |
| Final Passover | John 12:1 | Jesus entered Jerusalem as Messiah and King (12:12–19). |

Why?

Jesus told His brothers, "You go on. I'm not going to this festival" (John 7:8). Why did Jesus not go to Jerusalem with His brothers and, despite the death threats from the Jews, come later in secret (7:1, 8–10)? Check out Chuck's commentary on page 163 for help with this answer. Also, the Greek word for *time* gives a clue to the reason for Jesus' secretiveness.



Getting to the Root

The word *time* in verse 8 is *kairos* in Greek and refers to the epochal moment when Jesus would present Himself as the Messiah, the promised King of Israel—a time set by Jesus' heavenly Father, not His cynical brothers or even His devoted mother (at the wedding in Cana, John 2:4).

What conclusion do you draw from Jesus' statement "my time has not yet come" (7:8)?



Who?

Throughout chapter 7, John beamed the spotlight on Jesus who stood on center stage. But John also highlighted three groups: Jesus' brothers, the Jewish leaders, and the people. Write down the attitude or reactions that characterized each group.

| Jesus' Brothers | |
|-----------------|--|
| John 7:2–5 | |

| The Jewish Leaders | |
|--------------------|--|
| John 7:11, 30 | |
| 7:35–36 | |
| 7:47–48 | |

| The People | |
|--------------------|--|
| John 7:12–15 | |
| 7:20, 25–27, 31–32 | |
| 7:40–46 | |

Answering where, when, why, and who helps us uncover the *background* and *setting* as well as the *people* and *their reactions*. Now let's take a closer look at the *what*. What is the meaning of Jesus' teaching on His relationship with the *Father* and the *Spirit*?





Interpretation: What Is the Meaning?

As Jesus taught, the people marveled at His understanding of Scripture, particularly since He had attended no school and studied under no famous rabbi. Jesus identified the source of His knowledge and authority as God Himself, Jesus' Father.

The Father Gave Jesus His Authority

The people wondered about Jesus' source of knowledge: "How does he know so much when he hasn't been trained?" (John 7:15). What was Jesus' answer (7:16–19)?

The people also questioned Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, saying, "For we know where this man comes from. When the Messiah comes, he will simply appear; no one will know where he comes from" (7:27).

How did Jesus correct their misunderstanding by pointing to His relationship with the Father (7:28–29)?

Why do you think Jesus' relationship with His Father is so central to Jesus' ministry?



Jesus Will Give the Holy Spirit to All Believers

Jesus also taught about His relationship with the third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Understanding the ceremonial backdrop to Jesus' words helps us appreciate the impact of Jesus' words. In his commentary on John, scholar William Barclay explains:

Each day of the festival the people came with their palms and their willows to the Temple; with them they formed a kind of screen or roof and marched round the great altar. At the same time a priest took a golden pitcher . . . and went down to the Pool of Siloam and filled it with water. It was carried back through the Water Gate while the people recited Isaiah 12:3: "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" [NIV]. The water was carried up to the Temple altar and poured out as an offering to God. . . . The whole dramatic ceremony was a vivid thanksgiving for God's good gift of water and an acted prayer for rain, and a memory of the water which sprang from the rock when they travelled through the wilderness.¹

Against this background, the time was ripe for Jesus to reveal His messianic identity as the One who would fulfill the spiritual hopes of the nation for salvation and inner transformation. What did Jesus proclaim in John 7:37–38?



Correlation: The Promised Spirit

The "living water" was the Holy Spirit whom Jesus would pour into the hearts of believers after His ascension (John 7:39; Acts 1:5–8; 2:1–4). Read the following verses and write down what the prophecies foretold about the Spirit's filling and when Jesus fulfilled them.

Ezekiel 36:25–27



Acts 2:1–4, 14–21



Application: What Do We Learn?

Jesus entered the lions' den knowing He was opening Himself to attack. Jesus' brothers were sarcastic, skeptical, and unbelieving. Some in the crowd considered Jesus demon possessed, and they mocked Him. And the Jewish officials? They had only murder on their minds.

Instead of fighting back, Jesus showed concern for His attackers. He extended His hand of grace to the ruthless "lions" who were crouching in the shadows and offered to all people, even those who hated Him, the refreshing water of life in the Spirit.

Imagine Jesus in this hostile setting as He offered living water to His enemies. What impresses you about our Savior?

In what ways can you draw from Jesus' strength and love as you face the lions in your life?

Let's close our time in the Word today by dipping our hands into the refreshing water of the Holy Spirit and drinking deeply from the source of all life as we give thanks to our heavenly Father.





A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I come to You thankful for Your Son and the life He offers. As I drink from His love and grace, Your Spirit flows like rivers of living water within my soul, refreshing me with the truth of Your presence and encouraging me to face my trials. Help me to speak with grace and to see my lions as You see them—thirsty people in need of the water only Jesus can give. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. William Barclay, "The Fountain of Living Water (John 7:37–44)," in Bible Commentaries: William Barclay's Daily Study Bible, John 7, StudyLight.org, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dsb/john-7.html>, accessed Apr. 17, 2018.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Jesus in the Lions' Den

John 7

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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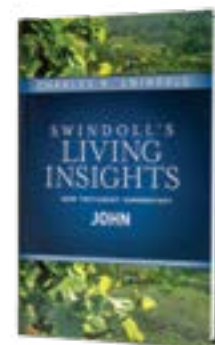
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S03
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FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Letters in the Sand

John 8:1–11

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

It was early morning in Jerusalem. The city was still damp with dew as purple shadows fell among the temple columns. Echoing through the courtyard were the words of Jesus, who, in rabbinical fashion, had sat down to teach the gathered crowd.

John described this serene scene and then explained what followed.

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. (John 8:1–3)

The sudden interruption drew all eyes from Jesus to the disgraced woman. She was a pawn in the Jewish leaders' political game to get rid of Jesus. Would Jesus condemn the woman or show mercy? Either way, the legalists would have grounds to discredit their rival and send Him away humiliated.

Jesus, however, refused to play their insidious game. Let's see how Jesus turned the tables on the Jewish leaders to expose their hypocrisy while compassionately confronting the woman's sin . . . without condemning her.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Our passage today is about Christ's mercy toward us in our sin and shame. As you open your Bible to John 8:1–11, open your heart before the Lord in prayer. In his book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Chuck Swindoll writes of the importance of prayer as we seek to understand and apply God's Word.

Study without prayer is an incomplete process—a futile effort. . . . I often pray, "Lord, speak to me. Help me understand what this passage is saying. I am listening. I'm sensitive to Your truth. Lead me into it."¹

Quotable

*The Son of God
stood eye-to-eye
with the adulteress.
And suddenly, there
was an incredible
bridge between
them . . . just like
the bridge He built
between us and
Himself when
we came to know
the Lord."*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Take a moment to pray Chuck's prayer for yourself in your own words, and write down your thoughts to the Lord in the space below.



Observation: The Setting, Attack, and Answer

In these studies, we follow Chuck's approach to Bible study described in *Searching the Scriptures*, which includes four essential methods: observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. You can purchase a copy at Insight for Living Ministries' [online store](#). Also, we recommend that you add to your study library Chuck's commentary on *John's gospel*. Online tools for our study include [BibleGateway](#), [Lumina](#), and William Barclay's classic commentaries in The Daily Study Bible Series at [StudyLight](#).

Now, read John 8:1–11 to get an overview of the account. Then, answer the questions below as we follow Chuck's outline and make observations of the text.

The Setting—John 8:1–2

Notice Jesus' pattern in John 8:1–2. When Jesus visited Jerusalem, He would spend the night on the Mount of Olives. In the morning, He would enter the temple courtyard, crowds would gather, and, perhaps in the shade of Solomon's columned portico (John 10:22–24), He would sit down to teach.

What similarities do you see between Jesus' activities here in John 8:1–2 and His Passion Week activities later in Luke 21:37–38? What do Jesus' habits say about His priorities?

Every day at the temple, judgment and mercy met at the altar where sacrifices were slain and sinners were pardoned. In this place, Jesus taught the gospel—the good news of God giving His Son as the supreme sacrifice for our sin (John 3:16). And here, the religious leaders put Jesus' gospel of grace to the supreme test.



The Attack—John 8:3–6

Interruption. The “teachers of religious law and the Pharisees” (John 8:3) interrupted Jesus while He was teaching and roughly shoved the woman before the crowd for all to see and scorn.

What do these teachers’ and Pharisees’ actions say about their attitude toward this woman and any other lawbreaker trapped in sin?

Accusation. Write down what you observe about the teachers’ and Pharisees’ accusation of adultery. What does the phrase “caught in the act” imply (8:4)?

We can’t help but wonder, *Where was the adulterous man?* The law demanded punishment for him too (Leviticus 20:10). Perhaps, when the moral police raided the love nest, he escaped. More likely, he was in on the plot—a collaborator. Surely, these religious authorities didn’t merely happen by these lovers’ bedroom window. No, the incident smells of a premeditated trap to snare the woman and use her to catch the ultimate prize: Jesus.

Question. Embedded in the question, “The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?” (John 8:5), are venomous fangs poised to strike Jesus the moment He answers. “They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him” (8:6).



Commentator William Barclay explains the deadly dilemma:

The dilemma into which they sought to put Jesus was this. If he said that the woman ought to be stoned to death, two things followed. First, he would lose the name he had gained for love and for mercy and never again would be called the friend of sinners. Second, he would come into collision with the Roman law, for the Jews had no power to pass or carry out the death sentence on anyone. If he said that the woman should be pardoned, it could immediately be said that he was teaching men to break the law of Moses, and that he was condoning and even encouraging people to commit adultery. That was the trap in which the scribes and Pharisees sought to entrap Jesus.²

Rather than trap Jesus, however, the accusers' own words entrapped themselves. Read the verse again in the NASB: "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone *such women*" (John 8:5 NASB, emphasis added). Do you see the holier-than-thou, us-versus-them labeling in the phrase, "such women"? What about this statement betrayed the religious leaders' hypocrisy?

What Jesus did next turned the tables on these smug hypocrites.

The Answer—John 8:6–9

Observe what Jesus did and said and how the crowd responded (John 8:6–9). What do you notice about Jesus' frame of mind under pressure?



**Getting to the Root**

What did Jesus write in the dust with His finger? The Greek word translated into *wrote* in John 8:6 and 8:8 is not the word normally used for writing in the New Testament—*grapho*. Rather, it is the word *katagrapho*, “which can mean *to write down a record against someone*. . . . It may be that Jesus was confronting those self-confident sadists with the record of their own sins.”³

While the religious authorities pointed to the woman’s sin, Jesus pointed to the religious leaders’ sins with His writing in the dust. His statement, “Let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” (John 8:7), referenced sins not just of the body, like adultery, but also of the heart, like lust, covetousness, guile, hypocrisy, and hate.

What does “throw the first stone” mean (8:7)? Literally, it means to execute the woman by stoning her to death. But figuratively, the phrase implies a broader meaning that other passages of Scripture help us interpret.

**Interpretation and Correlation: The Meaning of Throwing Stones**

What possible definitions of “throwing stones” do these verses offer?

Matthew 7:1–5

James 4:11–12



The Counsel—John 8:10–11

Jesus, the only One who had the right to condemn, spared the one who deserved condemnation. What did Jesus say to the woman in John 8:10–11?

After the crowd departed the scene, Jesus turned to the woman. In that poignant moment, the sinless One built a bridge of redemption to the sinner. How did Jesus balance confrontation of her sin with care for her soul (John 8:11)?



Application: The Principles

With the sound of Jesus' caring yet confronting words to the woman ringing in our ears, let's bring home our study with three principles from Chuck about confronting, condemning, and correcting wrong.

The practice of confronting wrong calls for humility, not pride. In keeping with Jesus' example, the apostle Paul wrote, "if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself" (Galatians 6:1).

The privilege of condemning wrong is based on righteousness, not knowledge. We must "get rid of the log" in our own eye before we "deal with the speck" in our friend's eye (Matthew 7:5).



The principle of correcting wrong starts with forgiveness, not rebuke. Forgiveness restores the relationship so that the truth can be received. Speaking the truth in love, just as Jesus spoke to the adulterous woman, is the key to confronting with care. Author and counselor David Augsburger outlines four *ineffective* ways to confront someone and a fifth *best* way.

- I win; you lose.
- I want out; I'll withdraw.
- I'll give in for good relations.
- I'll meet you halfway.
- I can care and confront.⁴

Is God prompting you to gently and humbly restore someone to the right path? Take a moment to reflect on your approach. What can you do to confront with care?

We can't leave this study without imagining ourselves as the woman caught in sin. What is our gentle and humble Savior saying to you as you stand before Him?

Receive His words of pardon, and, in the power of His grace, respond to His call to sin no more. Let's conclude our study with prayer.





A FINAL PRAYER

Father, like the woman caught in the act of sin, I stand before You as I am—in need of Your love and help. Relieve the weight of my shame. Lift my head so that I can look into Your Son’s eyes of compassion, and help me receive His noncondemning words of grace. Fill me with Your Spirit’s power and the inner resolve to sin no more and live freely. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2016), 128.
2. William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, (Chapters 8 to 21), rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 2.
3. Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, 3.
4. David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to Confront*, rev. ed. (Ventura, Ca.: Regal Books, 1981), 17.



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Letters in the Sand

John 8:1–11

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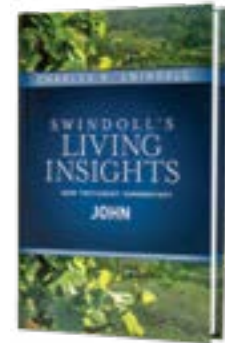
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FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Reasons for Rejection

John 8:12–59

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

In the opening of his gospel, the apostle John declared that Jesus “existed in the beginning with God” and “God created everything through him” (John 1:2–3). As the Son of God, Jesus is the source of all life, the spark from which all living things generate and are sustained.

“His life,” according to John, “brought light to everyone” (1:4). Like the sun rising on a new day, Jesus’ light dawned on the world at His birth and radiated throughout His ministry. During the Feast of Tabernacles, the perfect opportunity came for Jesus to unveil His true identity at the lighting of the lampstands ceremony. “I am the light of the world,” He declared as the massive temple candelabras lit up the night sky (8:12).

However, just as the apostle predicted, Jesus’ own people rejected His light (1:11). Why would they turn their backs on Jesus and His offer of life? In our passage for this study, John 8:12–59, John revealed the reasons why people rejected Him and even tried to snuff Him out. These reasons endure today in the hearts of those who prefer darkness to light (3:19). Let’s not be like them; instead, let’s come out of sin’s dark shadows, welcome the Light, embrace the life He offers, and follow Him!



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Each time we pray, we invite the light of Christ’s presence to flood our souls. Pause in this moment of preparation to open your heart to the Lord. Perhaps there is a dark corner of fear or distrust that Jesus’ light can chase away with hope and faith. Write down your prayer here.

Quotable

*Jesus spent His
days fearlessly
declaring the truth,
continually joyful,
and yet constantly
in trouble.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Let's start our study by reading three life-giving invitations Jesus made amidst the onslaught of hostility from the religious leaders.

"I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life." (John 8:12)

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)

"I tell you the truth, anyone who obeys my teaching will never die!" (8:51)

With the highlight function, highlight the three key responses to Jesus' invitations: "follow me" (8:12), "remain faithful to my teachings" (8:31), and "anyone who obeys" (8:51). Hang on to these thoughts, and we'll come back to them. Now, let's dig into the text!



Observation: Background and Setting, Declaration and Response

Observation is a critical beginning technique in Chuck Swindoll's approach to Bible study described in his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*. Observe the phrase at the beginning of John 8:12: "Jesus spoke to the people *once more*" (emphasis added). "Once more" indicates that Jesus was repeating *and* continuing His teaching, signaling us to look at our passage within its broader context.



Searching the Scriptures Tip

In *Searching the Scriptures*, Chuck writes, "We understand a verse of Scripture better when we grasp its context—when we acquaint ourselves with the surrounding verses."¹ Context gives us clues about the text's historical background, literary themes, and the author's overarching message. To know the meaning of the *text*, we must know the *context*.



Background and Setting

Review John 7, which we studied along with Chuck’s message, “Jesus in the Lions’ Den,” and then scan John 8:11–59. Do you notice similarities or thematic threads that weave through both texts? What was the festival that brought Jesus to Jerusalem (John 7:2), and where was Jesus teaching (7:14, 28; 8:20, 59)?

Notice the statements that suggest continuation of time: “midway through the festival” (7:14), “On the last day, the climax of the festival” (7:37), “once more” (8:12), and “Later Jesus said to them again” (8:21). What is repeated in 7:30, 32, 44–45, and 8:20, which culminates with an attempt to stone Jesus (8:59)? Also, what phrase is repeated in 7:8, 7:30, and 8:20?

From these connections between John 7 and 8:12–59, what can you conclude about these two passages?

Declaration and Response

Jesus declared, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12) at the temple treasury (8:20), which was located near the Court of Women. “According to the Mishnah,” writes Chuck in his commentary, *Insights on John*,

Priests erected four giant lampstands in the Court of Women during the Feast of Tabernacles. Each evening at sundown, young men climbed ladders to light these enormous oil lamps, which, according to Mishnah tractate Sukkah 5:3, reflected in every courtyard in Jerusalem.²

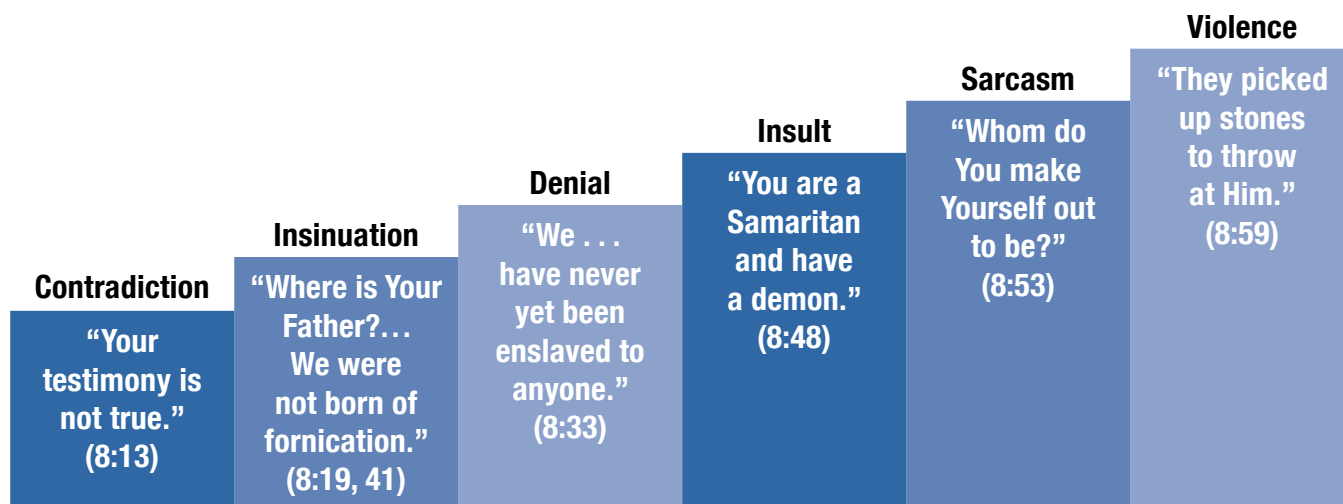


These magnificent beacons emanating from the temple were a reminder of God’s pillar of fire that glowed over the tabernacle and guided Israel through the wilderness (Numbers 9:15–17). Against this blazing backdrop, Jesus’ declaration was profound! Read John 8:12 one more time as you consider the following italicized words, and write down in your own words what Jesus was saying about Himself:

- Exclusive claim: “I am *the* light . . .” (not just *a* light)
- Inclusive offer: “. . . of the *world* . . .” (not just of the *Jews*)
- Salvation invitation: “. . . *follow* me . . .” (as the Israelites followed God’s *fire*)

The implications of Jesus’ claim inflamed the Pharisees, whose hostility intensified from a smoking coal into white-hot fury. The following chart illustrates their rising rage.

Progressive Attitudes of Hostility



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Let's follow the Pharisees' trail of hostility as they rejected Jesus. Emerging from the text are five reasons for rejection—five gates of unbelief that people tend to pass through on their way to a hardened heart.



Interpretation: Deciphering the Reasons for Rejection

Dig out the deeper meaning from Jesus' messages to the Pharisees to understand why people, then and now, reject Jesus.

Lack of Knowledge—John 8:14, 19

Because the Pharisees didn't know God's essential character qualities of mercy, compassion, justice, and truth, they didn't recognize these divine attributes in Jesus. Read John 8:14, 19, and summarize Jesus' words.

Lack of Perception—John 8:15, 23

The Pharisees' lack of perception was linked to their faulty mind-set. "You judge me by human standards," Jesus told them (John 8:15). They didn't have the discernment to look beyond the horizontal plane—Jesus' flesh-and-blood ancestry—to the vertical plane of His divine origin. Why could they not see who Jesus was (8:23)? And what was the tragic result of their error (8:24)?



Lack of Appropriation—John 8:37, 43

The word *appropriation* means “to take exclusive possession of . . . to take or make use of.”³ Although the Pharisees had appropriated the Scriptures and knew the Law better than anyone, they refused to appropriate Jesus by believing in Him and taking His words into their hearts. Why not (John 8:37, 43)?

Lack of Desire—John 8:44–45

The Pharisees’ biological heritage linked them to Abraham, a man of deep faith and obedience, but what did Jesus say was the root of the Pharisees’ unbelief and lack of desire to obey Jesus (John 8:44–45)?

Lack of Humility—John 8:52–53

As illustrated by the chart earlier, the Pharisees contradicted Jesus (John 8:13), then they insinuated that He was illegitimate-born (8:19, 41). They also denied His words (8:33) and insulted Him (8:48). Now, with smug superiority, they taunted Him with sarcasm: “Who do you think you are?” (8:53).

Jesus responded with one of His clearest declarations of His divine identity in the Gospels. Jesus had already declared, “*I am* the bread of life” (6:48, emphasis added) and “*I am* the light of the world” (8:12, emphasis added). In 8:58, He said simply and boldly, “I AM.” Let’s compare Scriptures to discover the meaning of this title.





Correlation: The Meaning of the Title “I AM”

By stating, “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I AM!” (John 8:58), Jesus claimed not only timeless existence but also equality with the God of the Old Testament. Read Exodus 3:13–15, and note the background of Jesus’ claim.

Jesus declared Himself to be God! Heaven’s light shone for all the world to see, but the Pharisees refused to open their eyes. Tragically, these Bible scholars who memorized and mastered the Scriptures couldn’t receive the Word (John 1:1). Filled with hell’s fury, these children of the devil “picked up stones to throw at him” in an attempt to execute Jesus on the spot for blasphemy; but “Jesus was hidden from them and left the Temple” (8:59).



Application: What’s Our Response?

The Pharisees slid down rejection’s slippery slope from ignorance to violence. Perhaps you’ve been a victim of someone rejecting you, and you have felt the sting of misunderstanding or even the bruising attack from an abuser.

Jesus is an understanding friend to the rejected, and He invites you to come out of the darkness of your pain and confusion into His light. Take another look at the verses we read at the outset of our study: John 8:12, 31–32, and 51. What are the amazing promises Jesus makes to you in these verses?



By faith, cling to His promises of life, truth, and freedom, and respond to His invitations: “follow me” (John 8:12), “remain faithful to my teachings” (8:31), and obey (8:51). What can you do, even in your difficult circumstance, to follow, remain faithful to, and obey Jesus?

Let’s close our study in prayer, raising hands not filled with stones of rejection but with love for the Light who leads us out of darkness.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I open my eyes to the Light of the World, Your Son, and I see Your grace and truth shining on His face. I reject the darkness, and I follow my Savior wherever He may lead. Help me to obey Him, even when I feel the sting of rejection from others. Comfort my heart, satisfy my longing for peace, and give me hope as I follow Jesus. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2016), 128.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on John*, (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 179.
3. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam Webster, 2007), see “appropriate.”



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Reasons for Rejection

John 8:12–59

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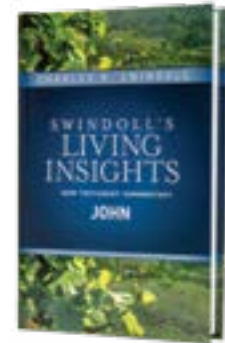
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LET'S BEGIN HERE

The Pharisees were experts in the Scriptures and the guardians of morality. In matters of right and wrong, they swung the gavel of authority. And yet, despite their rank in religious society, pride had blinded them to the true nature of godliness. They put on a good show of piety, but, as commentator William Barclay wrote,

because they had clung to *their idea of religion* instead of to God's idea, they had in the end drifted so far from God that they had become godless. They were in the terrible position of men who were godlessly serving God. (emphasis added)¹

In John 9, the apostle set in contrast these pretentious Pharisees with a sight-impaired beggar who, despite his label of "sinner" by the religious elite, turned out to be the godliest of them all. It's dramatic irony at its best! The real blind men were the Pharisees who play-acted their spirituality, "blind men's bluff," while the one with the clearest spiritual sight was a beggar who couldn't see!



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As you open the Scriptures, ask the Lord to open your eyes like He opened the eyes of the beggar to see His radiant glory. Ask Him to lead you into deeper worship by revealing any blind spots—areas of unbelief—that Jesus can heal and cleanse. Write your prayer below.

Quotable

The man born blind confessed Jesus as "My Lord." Isn't that marvelous? Not only was he given sight physically, he was given sight spiritually. What a day in that man's life!

— Charles R. Swindoll



**Observation: Case and Cure, Questions and Answers, Belief and Unbelief**

A key principle in the *Searching the Scriptures* process is observation. Observation helps you grasp the flow of the passage and identify the parts that make up the whole. Chuck Swindoll divided this passage into three broad sections:

- Case and Cure (John 9:1–7): Jesus restores the beggar's sight.
- Questions and Answers (9:8–34): The neighbors and Pharisees interrogate the man.
- Belief and Unbelief (9:35–41): Jesus affirms the beggar's faith and exposes the Pharisees' spiritual blindness.

We can also outline John 9 by listing the cast of characters. Read the passages below and fill in the people who interacted with the beggar in each of the following scenes:

- Scene 1: _____ and the beggar (9:1–7)
- Scene 2: _____ and the beggar (9:8–12)
- Scene 3: _____ and the beggar (9:13–34)
- Conclusion: _____ and the beggar and the Pharisees (9:35–41)



Centerstage thematically is the contrast between the humble faith of the beggar and the hardened unbelief of the Pharisees. Read the verses in the following chart and write down additional contrasts you find between the beggar and the Pharisees regarding the issues of sin and guilt and their views of Jesus.

| Issue | The Beggar | The Pharisees |
|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Sin and Guilt | John 9:1–3 | John 9:39–41 |
| Views of Jesus | John 9:11, 17, 38 | John 9:16, 24, 28 |

Now let's raise the curtain to reveal the first scene, which begins with Jesus and His disciples encountering the unlikely hero of faith hidden beneath a tattered beggar's shawl.

Case and Cure—John 9:1–7

Based on their question to Jesus, what did the disciples assume about the beggar's disability since he was blind from birth (John 9:1–2)?

The disciples viewed the man's congenital impairment negatively, wondering, as many do when they see disabled people, *How could this terrible thing have happened?* But Jesus corrected their nearsighted perspective, stating the positive, in effect: "What an opportunity! God can use this person to show His sensitivity, power, and glory!"



Read Jesus' answer to His disciples (John 9:3–5). What attributes of His Son did God intend to display through the beggar's disability?



Searching the Scriptures Tip

As we picture Jesus relating to the beggar, let's employ Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* tool of reading a text with all our senses. "As we learn to engage the senses," writes Chuck, "the verses come alive in our minds . . . and ultimately in our lives!"² Imagine the man's sightless existence as he lived in total darkness. Imagine how people treated him as an outcast to be pitied but never embraced. Imagine Jesus' compassionate touch and hopeful words. What did Jesus say and do to communicate the man's value and dignity?

Questions and Answers—John 9:8–34

The man obeyed Jesus' command to "go wash [himself] in the pool of Siloam" (John 9:7). As he washed the mud from his eyes, to his amazement, the veil of darkness dissolved. For the first time, he saw his own hands. As he looked up, a new world unfolded before him. Color and light cascaded through his mind, flooding his soul with childlike wonder. He ran home to his neighbors, who rejoiced with him and threw a party! Well, no, not exactly.



The Neighbors and the Beggar

Instead of confetti, these killjoys pelted the man with skeptical questions (John 9:8–12). Who? How? Where? Their response reflected suspicion, doubt, and resistance. What do you think was at the root of their fearful attitude? (Hint: Their actions in John 9:13–14 may offer a clue, along with the beggar's parents' fear in 9:22.)

The Pharisees and the Beggar

By making mud and performing a healing on Saturday, Jesus had violated the Pharisees' rules against working on the Sabbath—an intricate web of regulations spun from their own traditions rather than from God's law (Mark 7:7–8). For a fuller explanation of the Pharisees' Sabbath rules, read the section "Prejudice and Conviction" (John 9:13–16) in William Barclay's commentary on John 9, *The Gospel of John*.

Like prosecuting attorneys, the Pharisees pressed the beggar for information that would convict Jesus as a Sabbath-breaking sinner. At first, they were divided over Jesus. What was the reason for their difference of opinion (9:16)?

Unwilling to accept the beggar's view that Jesus was a prophet (9:17), the Pharisees cast doubt on the miracle, questioning whether the beggar had truly been blind (9:18). They called the parents to the witness stand. What did the beggar's parents say about their son but refuse to say about Jesus (9:19–23)?



Even ironclad evidence for the miracle could not break the Pharisees' rock-hard bias against Jesus. Follow the dialogue in John 9:24–34, and write down the Pharisees' prejudicial accusations and how the beggar beat them at their own game.

The Pharisees heaped abuse on the beggar, accused him of being born in sin, and ordered him out of the synagogue. Barclay writes,

The moment insult and abuse and threat enter into an argument, it ceases to be an argument and becomes a contest in bitterness. If we become angry and resort to wild words and hot threats, all we prove is that our case is disturbingly weak.³



Correlation: Miracle and Prophecy

Earlier, when the Jewish leaders questioned Jesus' messiahship, Jesus pointed to His miracles as proof of His identity. Jesus said, "I have a greater witness than John—my teachings and my miracles. The Father gave me these works to accomplish, and they prove that he sent me" (John 5:36).

Healing the blind man was particularly convincing evidence that Jesus was from God because it was a fulfillment of what prophecies in Isaiah 35:4–5 and 42:6?

The Pharisees' spiritual blindness, which was harder to heal than the beggar's sight impairment, was evidence of what other prophecy in Isaiah 56:10?



Because the man was born blind, the healing had to be a miracle. No other explanation was possible—and neither was any conclusion other than Jesus was the Son of God. The real issue wasn't believing the miracle but believing in Jesus as the miracle worker.



Interpretation: Belief and Unbelief

All lines of the account converge in its interpretation, which was meant to lead John's readers to a decision point. Would we follow in the faith of the once-blind beggar? Or in the hardened unbelief of the Pharisees?

Read John 9:36–41, and describe the characteristics of belief that the beggar displayed versus the Pharisees' characteristics of unbelief.

Jesus interpreted His own actions in verse 39. In His words, what was the meaning of His miracle? How did His actions demonstrate grace to the outcast of society as well as to the religious elite?

John 9 opened with the disciples' question, "Who is the sinner?" The Pharisees pointed their judgmental fingers at the beggar and Jesus, but truly they were the ones living in spiritual darkness. Jesus gave the beggar a healing touch and the Pharisees a disciplinary rebuke, but His objective was the same, as with every person He encountered: to bring all people to repentance and faith.



Application: What's Our Response?

Just as the Light of the World gave sight to the man born blind, so also Jesus can lead us out of spiritual darkness when we admit our need and reach out to Him.



What blind spot or weakness in your life is impairing you? Bring this need out of the dark into the light of Jesus' grace. What compassionate touch do you desire from Him?

Jesus helped His disciples change their perspective toward the beggar. What changes in perspective can you ask Him to help you make?

As we conclude our study, invite the Word made flesh to incarnate Himself in your life and fill every dark corner with His light of peace, joy, and hope.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, in the quietness of this moment, I surrender my will to Your will. Like the man born blind, I have no capacity to see beyond the darkness of my surroundings. Reattach the broken parts and restore my eyes of faith; help me see only Jesus and His grace. And help me keep my eyes on Him, who leads me each step of my way. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, (Chapters 8 to 21), rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 31.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2016), 94.
3. Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, 49.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Blind Men's Bluff

John 9

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



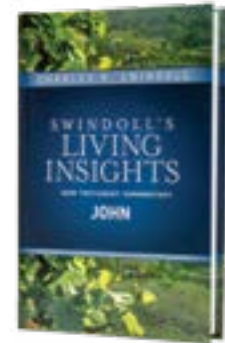
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For the 2018 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's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



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LET'S BEGIN HERE

In the previous study, a sight-impaired beggar was healed. And when he opened his eyes, he opened his heart to the Light of the World. “Yes, Lord, I believe!” exclaimed the man to Jesus, worshiping Him with uncontainable joy (John 9:38). This man displayed genuine faith—with childlike humility and sincere love.

In contrast, the proud Pharisees turned a blind eye to Jesus and His amazing miracle. God’s power and mercy passed right in front of their eyes, but the Pharisees couldn’t see beyond their own egos and would never bow their knees to worship Jesus.

Commentator William Barclay sums up the central truth of John 9:

The man who is conscious of his own blindness, and who longs to see better and to know more, is the man whose eyes can be opened and who can be led more and more deeply into the truth. The man who thinks he knows it all, the man who does not realize that he cannot see, is the man who is truly blind and beyond hope and help.¹

These lessons about *spiritual sight* spill over into lessons about *spiritual leadership* in John 10. The Pharisees excommunicated the beggar, slamming the door of God in his face. But in John 10, Jesus, *the Living Door*, opened the way for anyone with an open heart to enter the fold of God. Additionally, Jesus, *the Good Shepherd*, gave His life for lost sheep and leads them into abundant life. Let’s take a closer look at these beautiful images of our caring Shepherd as we open His Word.

Quotable

Jesus gives us life abundantly, which means we have the real things in life that money can’t buy: peace, purpose, and the joy of facing the grave without fear.

— Charles R. Swindoll





YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Observe the themes of John 10 by reading three central statements by Jesus as they appear in the New American Standard Bible.

“I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:9–10 NASB)

“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.” (10:11 NASB)

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.” (10:27–28 NASB)

Using your cursor, highlight the phrases that give you assurance and hope. And then, in prayer, thank the Lord for these spiritual blessings that flow from the heart of Jesus. Also, ask Him to reveal new insights about your relationship with your Good Shepherd through our study. Write your prayer below.



Searching the Scriptures Tip

We recommend reading more than one Bible translation. If you don't have different versions handy, there are plenty of Web sites that can help you, such as BibleGateway.com. Other tools include a Bible dictionary, such as *The New Unger Bible Dictionary*, and commentaries on John, such as Chuck Swindoll's *Insights on John*, which can be obtained through the Insight for Living Ministries online store.





Observation: The Teaching of Jesus

As a master teacher, Jesus often brought His principles to life with illustrations from the surrounding countryside. A shepherd leading sheep was one of the most familiar sights in Palestine. To fully appreciate the Master's shepherd illustration in John 10, we must do a little research on shepherding practices in first-century Palestine.

Background

If you own a copy of Chuck Swindoll's commentary *Insights on John*, read the introductory section for John 10 on pages 201–203. For an online resource, read the section “*The Shepherd and His Sheep*” (John 10:1–6) in William Barclay's *The Gospel of John* in his Daily Study Bible series. As you read, look for these points:

- The close bond between the shepherd and his sheep
- The types of enclosures for sheep
- How the shepherd called his sheep and their response
- The ways the shepherd protected his sheep

What did you discover?

In what is called The Good Shepherd Discourse, Jesus instructed the crowd, explained His teaching, and then revealed a truth about future followers. Let's follow our Shepherd as we learn from Him.

Jesus Instructs the Crowd—John 10:1–6

Read John 10:1–5. Shepherds in the same area often intermingled their flocks in a common enclosure for protection at night. How did the shepherds enter the communal pen in contrast to thieves who would try to take what doesn't belong to them? And what was the role of the gatekeeper?



How did the sheep respond to their shepherd versus strangers? And how did the shepherd lead his flock?

Thieves sneaking over a wall into a sheepfold . . . a gatekeeper opening the gate to the true shepherd . . . the sheep following their shepherd but running from strangers. What do these images mean? The crowd got the picture; they just didn't get Jesus' point . . . "so he explained it to them" (John 10:7).

Jesus Explains His Illustration—John 10:7–15

Jesus painted Himself into the picture with two analogies: He is the gate—in Greek *thura*, which is translated into "door" in the New American Standard Bible. And He is the Good Shepherd—in Greek *o poimēn o kalos*, which, translated literally, is "the shepherd, the good."

When shepherds led their flocks to graze in the hills, they would herd them into a cave at night and lay down at the entrance to guard the sheep from predators or thieves. Perhaps Jesus had this image in mind when He said, "I am the gate for the sheep" (John 10:7). Read John 10:7–10, and use your observation skills to write down the contrasts between Jesus, "the gate", and the thieves and robbers.

| | Jesus as the Gate | Thieves and Robbers |
|--------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| John 10:7–10 | | |



While the “gate” image emphasizes *security*, the “good shepherd” image emphasizes *relationship*. Jesus loves His sheep with a sacrificial love (John 10:11) and knows them intimately (10:14). Read John 10:11–15, and write down the contrasts between Jesus as the Good Shepherd and the hired hand.

| | Jesus as the Good Shepherd | The Hired Hand |
|---------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| John 10:11–15 | | |

This section in verses 11–15 is bookended by a parallel thought. In verse 11, Jesus said that He “lays down His life for the sheep” (10:11 NASB) and in verse 15, “I lay down My life for the sheep” (10:15 NASB). These hints of Jesus’ death led Him to give us a glimpse into the future after His death and resurrection.

Jesus Reveals the Future

Read John 10:16–18, and write down the insights Jesus shared about His imminent death on the cross.

By means of His atoning sacrifice for sins (1 Peter 2:22–25), Jesus, the Shepherd, will call “other sheep” to follow Him and create “one flock.”



Correlation: The Other Sheep and the Flock

Let’s compare John 10:16 with the apostle Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 2:11–18. Based on what Paul wrote, who are those whom Jesus called “other sheep” that join the fold, and what is the “one flock” (John 10:16)?



Upon hearing Jesus, some of the crowd dismissed Him as “demon possessed and out of his mind” (John 10:20) while others countered, “This doesn’t sound like a man possessed by a demon! Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?” (10:21).

The contentious atmosphere stirred ominous storm clouds of hostility toward Jesus. A few months later, at the Feast of Dedication, also known as Hanukkah, those clouds grew into a thunderstorm when Jesus spoke once more on His identity as the good and rightful shepherd from God.

Hostile Discussion at Hanukkah

Read John 10:22–42. The scene was the temple in wintertime, just a few short months before Passover and Jesus’ Passion Week. Hanukkah celebrates the dedication of the temple in 165 BC, the highpoint of the Maccabean revolt that temporarily freed Israel. With independence fever running high, a mob surrounded Jesus and demanded that He announce clearly whether He was the next liberator of Israel. What was Jesus’ answer, and how did they react (John 10:22–33)?

What evidence did Jesus offer to prove that He was the Messiah, just not the one they wanted (10:34–38)?

Where did Jesus spend the remainder of the winter, and what was His reception there (10:39–42)?



Interpretation: Key Figures

Let’s sharpen our focus on the meaning of the key figures in this passage.



To whom may the *gatekeeper* who opened the gate for the shepherd refer, according to John 1:32–33? Why is it significant that the gatekeeper opened the gate only for Jesus and not for the thieves and robbers?

Jesus identified Himself as the *Good Shepherd*. He purposefully used the word *good* as opposed to *true*—as in “true bread” (John 6:33) and “true grapevine” (15:1)—to make a point of comparison. Israel had many bad shepherds throughout its history (Jeremiah 23:1–4 and Zechariah 11:15–17), and the current religious leaders were just as worthless. Jesus was not just *a shepherd*; He was *the Good Shepherd*. What qualities made Him good, according to John 10:3–4, 10–11, 14–15, 27–28?

The thieves, robbers, and hired hand all refer to the religious and political leaders of the day: Pharisees, scribes, priests, and kings. What characteristics described them (John 10:1, 8, 10, 12–13)?

Finally, the sheep were those who responded to Jesus with genuine faith, like the healed beggar in John 9 and the disciples “beyond the Jordan” who “believed in Jesus” (10:40, 42). What qualities described the sheep (10:2–5, 8–9, 16)?

How about you? Have you heard the Shepherd’s voice and followed Him as one of His sheep?





Application: Four Qualities of the Good Shepherd's Flock

If you are one of the sheep in the Good Shepherd's flock, then put into practice the following sheep-like qualities.

- *God's sheep are sensitive to His leading* (John 10:27). Listen for His voice, and run from the voice of false shepherds.
- *God's sheep are eager to obey His commands* (10:27). When He calls, come! As He leads, follow! He will take you to green pastures where you'll experience peace, purpose, destiny, and the next quality, confidence.
- *God's sheep are confident* (10:28). When we follow the Good Shepherd, we feel confident because He is near us, He knows us, and He protects us when the thief, Satan, tries to steal our souls.
- *God's sheep are secure* (10:29). The fruit of faith is the security of knowing our eternal life is assured. No one can snatch us from Christ's or the Father's hand. That's double security!

Has the Lord answered your prayer from the beginning of our study? What new insights has He taught you, and what can you apply today?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You have given me all I need to live abundantly. I desire to follow the Good Shepherd over mountains and through whatever valleys may lie before me. The way may be rocky and treacherous, but I will not fear; my Shepherd is with me, guiding me with His rod and staff. Thank You for the confidence and security I experience with You as a sheep in Your fold. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, (Chapters 8 to 21), rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 50.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

The Living Door

John 10

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



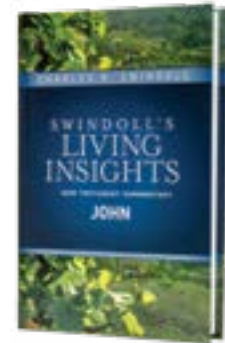
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LET'S BEGIN HERE

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is the seventh and final sign of Jesus that John records.¹ It is the climactic sign because it illustrates beyond doubt Jesus' power to triumph over death. Many times in John's gospel, Jesus revealed His life-giving power:

- He said that only through believing in Him can we have eternal life (John 3:15–16).
- He offered the water of life (4:14; 7:37–38).
- He saved the life of the royal official's son (4:46–54).
- He offered Himself as the Bread of Life (6:33, 35, 47–48, 53–58).
- He declared Himself as the Light of the World who grants us the light of life (8:12).
- As the living Door, He opened the way to abundant, eternal life (10:7–10).

All that Jesus said and did culminated in His most spectacular miracle in John 11, which displayed His crowning claim: "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25).

Raising Lazarus not only proved Jesus' power, it prefigured His own approaching death and resurrection and opened the door to the Passion Week. "The raising of Lazarus leads directly to the death of Jesus," explains commentator Lesslie Newbigin.

It is at the cost of life that he gives life. The "abundant life" that he gives is life through death. He is the life only because he is the resurrection from the death (v. 25). It is in this sense that the illness of Lazarus is for the glory of God (v. 4).²

Quotable

*My friend,
there is a place
in the beloved
family of God
for tears.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



With this big picture in mind, let's enter the text fully aware of the significance of what Jesus was foreshadowing when, standing at Lazarus' tomb, He commanded, "Roll the stone aside" (John 11:39).



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

We may deny death's reality, get angry about it, feel depressed, or even try to bargain with God to avoid it. Nevertheless, death awaits us all. It's likely that you or someone close to you has journeyed grief's dark valley during the past year. As you begin this study, open your heart to the Lord—He is with you in your grief just as He was with Martha and Mary in the cemetery. Write a prayer inviting the Lord to minister to you through His Word and His tears.



Observation: The Miracle and the Reactions

Take a few minutes to read John 11 in its entirety. Enter the scenes with your senses alive. Hear the weeping mourners, see the tomb, and imagine the reassuring voice of Jesus bringing calm and comfort.

As you read, notice key words that John repeats for emphasis, such as *love*, *death*, *weep*, *believe*, *glory*, and *life*. Circle or underline these words in your Bible, if you wish, and any other key words, contrasts, or cause-and-effect statements that you find.



Searching the Scriptures Tool

In these *Searching the Scriptures* studies, we use the same Bible study method Chuck Swindoll uses. It consists of four steps: observation, correlation, interpretation, and application. During observation, we examine closely the words, phrases, and flow of the text. During interpretation, we use study resources, such as Chuck Swindoll's *Insights on John*, which can be obtained through the Insight for Living Ministries online store. Another reliable commentary that we'll use in this study is *Constable's Notes* which can be accessed online.



As you trace the themes, observe five sections: the sickness of Lazarus, the response of Jesus, the reaction of Martha and Mary, and the raising of Lazarus—followed by the plot to kill Jesus.

The Sickness of Lazarus—John 11:1–3

John 10 ends with Jesus leaving Jerusalem to go “beyond the Jordan River near the place where John was first baptizing” (John 10:40). He stayed there through the winter weeks and then, perhaps, traveled to Perea or Galilee, which was at least a two-day walk from Bethany.

Find these locations on a map in the back of your Bible, or you can access a set of maps at the Insight for Living Ministries Web site, [NLT Bible Maps](#). Scroll down the list and find the map “Bethany, Jerusalem, Emmaus, Mount of Olives, and Bethlehem.”

Now that you have your bearings, focus on John 11:1–3. What are the crisis, problem, and names of the central characters? Also, what did the sisters naturally assume Jesus would do when He received the message of Lazarus’ death?

Martha and Mary’s spirits sank deeper with each sun that set without Jesus. What could be keeping Him?

The Response of Jesus—John 11:4–16

John 11:4–7 explains the reason Jesus delayed in going to Bethany.³ What did Jesus mean when He said, “Lazarus’s sickness will not end in death” (John 11:4) if Jesus knew Lazarus would die?

Some might say that if Jesus had the power to heal but didn’t, He lacked compassion. And yet, Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters (11:5). Or, they might say that if Jesus loved but didn’t heal, He lacked power. And yet, Jesus healed the government official’s son who was gravely ill and even did so from a distance (4:46–54).



Jesus must have had higher purposes for delaying—reasons so vastly important as to defer His love and restrain His mighty hand. What greater good compelled Jesus to delay (John 11:4, 15, 40–42)?

Now read John 11:8–16, which includes the disciples' attempts to talk Jesus out of returning to Judea. What were their concerns?⁴

The Reaction of Martha and Mary—John 11:17–35

Read what happened when Jesus met Martha and Mary as He neared the village in John 11:17–32. We'll come back to Jesus' "I am the resurrection and the life" statement in verse 25 when we interpret the passage. For now, enter the heartache and confusion of the two sisters. What emotions were they expressing when they both said to Jesus, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21, 32)?

Although the sisters' words are identical, their approach to Him was different. What do you observe about Martha's approach to Jesus in John 11:21–22 versus Mary's reaction in 11:32–33?⁵



Martha expressed her grief in words, and Mary, in tears. Martha needed an explanation, and Mary, an emotional connection. Compare John 11:23–27 and 11:33–35. Write down how Jesus met each woman at her point of need.

Martha needed to know that Jesus was in control, so Jesus gave her truth. Mary needed to feel that Jesus cared, so Jesus showed her His tears.

**Correlation: Jesus Meets Our Needs**

Jesus had dealt with the disciples' fears, handled Martha's grief, and empathized with Mary's heartache. They all felt safe with Jesus to express their feelings honestly, and not once did He shame or scold them. What do the following verses say about God's understanding and our freedom to express our feelings to Him?

Psalm 56:8; 116:15; Hebrews 4:14–16; 1 Peter 5:7

The Raising of Lazarus—John 11:33–44

Mary's weeping struck a chord of emotion deep within Jesus' heart. No more delays. *It was time to act.* Read John 11:33–44, and notice the range of Jesus' emotions: anger, anguish, grief, and love all mixed together.⁶

What do you think prompted so many emotions in Jesus? (Note: Jesus' anger was righteous indignation toward death's curse and the pain it caused.)



How did Jesus explain the reasons why He brought Lazarus back to life in John 11:40–42?

The Plot to Kill Jesus—John 11:45–57

Infuriated by Jesus' growing popularity, the religious leaders grew more determined to kill the Life-giver. They called on the Sanhedrin—the ruling council of the Jews—to plot Jesus' death, etching in stone Israel's official rejection of Jesus.

What did the Sanhedrin discuss, and what unintended prophecy did Caiaphas make (John 11:47–53)?

Caiaphas' prophecy that *one should die so many should not perish* (11:50) echoed Jesus' words to Martha: "Everyone who lives in me and believes in me *will never die*" (11:26, emphasis added). Let's look more closely at Jesus' statement, "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25)—the center-point of Jesus' message.



Interpretation: "I Am the Resurrection and the Life"

As we interpret a passage, it's helpful to consult a reliable Bible commentary. Take a few minutes to read Chuck's *Insights on John*—if you own a copy—on page 216. Also, read the online commentary "Constable's Notes," which is available at lumina.bible.org. Find John 11:25–27 in the left panel, and then select "Constable's Notes" in the right panel.

Martha believed in the doctrine of the resurrection, but Jesus urged her to put her trust in Him. Based on your reading, what did Jesus mean when He said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25)?



What is the meaning of Martha's confession of belief in John 11:27 in light of John's purpose for writing his gospel (John 20:31)? By comparison, Peter's similar confession is the focal point of Matthew's gospel and the foundational doctrine of the church (Matthew 16:16–19).

Are you sitting in the waiting room of God's delays? Are you mourning the loss of a loved one or a cherished dream? We leave Lazarus' empty tomb with hope in a God who cares and comes just when we need Him.



Application: Truth for Today

Chuck offers two words of counsel:

- *Although the Lord delays, He is never late.* God keeps time by His watch, not by our deadlines. Remember, when delays occur, God has better timing and a better way.
- *When facing sickness and death, we can trust God.* The human perspective makes demands on God for immediate action, but the divine perspective trusts Him for a better plan and a better purpose.

Jesus delayed in going to Bethany so that when He did arrive, God would be glorified and many would believe. In your waiting period, how can God be glorified and your faith strengthened?



Whether our need is intellectual or emotional, Jesus meets us where we are. He speaks to our minds where faith is formed or ministers to our hearts where devotion is kindled. Take a moment to express your heart to the Lord as Martha and Mary did. Never has the Lord refused His tearful child who draws near for reassurance. What do you need to express to the Lord, and what is He saying to you through His Word?

Let's close in prayer with the assurance of the Lord's promise of eternal life and the anticipation of our own empty tomb.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, like Martha, I confess my wholehearted belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, who has come into my world. I am "eagerly waiting for him to return as [my] Savior" (Philippians 3:20), and I proclaim my trust in Him who will take my weak body and change it into a glorious body like His own. Thank You for this hope. You are my resurrection and my life. Amen!

ENDNOTES

1. The seven signs in John are these: Jesus turned the water into wine (John 2:1–12), healed the official's son (4:43–54), healed the lame man at Bethesda (5:1–15), fed the 5,000 (6:1–15), walked on water (6:16–21), gave sight to the blind man (9:1–7), and raised Lazarus from the dead (11:1–44).
2. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 138.
3. Jesus waited two days (John 11:6). The trip by foot from Galilee to Judea took two additional days. When Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days (11:17), which meant that Lazarus may have died around the time the messenger arrived four days earlier.
4. Jesus faced increasing danger with each trip to Jerusalem, narrowly escaping arrest and stoning on several occasions (John 7:30–32; 8:59; 10:31, 39).
5. Each time Mary, the sister of Martha, appeared in the Gospels, she was at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39; John 11:32; 12:3).
6. "The Greeks believed in an isolated, passionless and compassionless God. What a different picture Jesus gave. He showed us a God whose heart is wrung with anguish for the anguish of His people. The greatest thing Jesus did was bring us news of a God who cares." William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, (Chapters 8 to 21), rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 98.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Back from Beyond

John 11

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



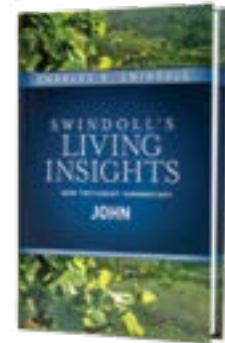
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LET'S BEGIN HERE

After the raising of Lazarus, many more people believed in Jesus. The Pharisees could no longer curb the rising tide of support for this Miracle Worker, so they turned to their rivals, the Sadducees, to help them plot Jesus' death.

Killing Jesus was for the good of the nation, the Sadducees smugly rationalized during the Sanhedrin council, saying,

*If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him.
Then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation. (John 11:48)*

Of course, their interests were entirely self-protective. The Sadducees were comprised of wealthy priests, and the temple was their silk purse. They feared Rome would counter any groundswell of civil unrest from Jesus' followers with a tidal wave of destruction, wiping out their livelihood along with the temple.

In the end, Jesus *would* die for the good of the nation . . . and the world. But He would make His sacrifice in His own time, so He withdrew with His disciples to Ephraim, a remote city north of Jerusalem (John 11:53–54). In seclusion, “Jesus stopped his public ministry” (11:54) and prepared for His final week.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Imagine yourself among Jesus' disciples, and in prayer express your desire to draw close to Him. As John leads us through the final days of Jesus' life on earth, ask the Lord to reveal deeper truths about Himself, His plan for His followers, and His love for you.

Quotable

*When Mary
anointed Jesus'
feet, she didn't
care who saw her.
When we're lost
in wonder, love,
and praise, we're
oblivious to our
surroundings.*

— Charles R. Swindoll





Observation: Survey and Study

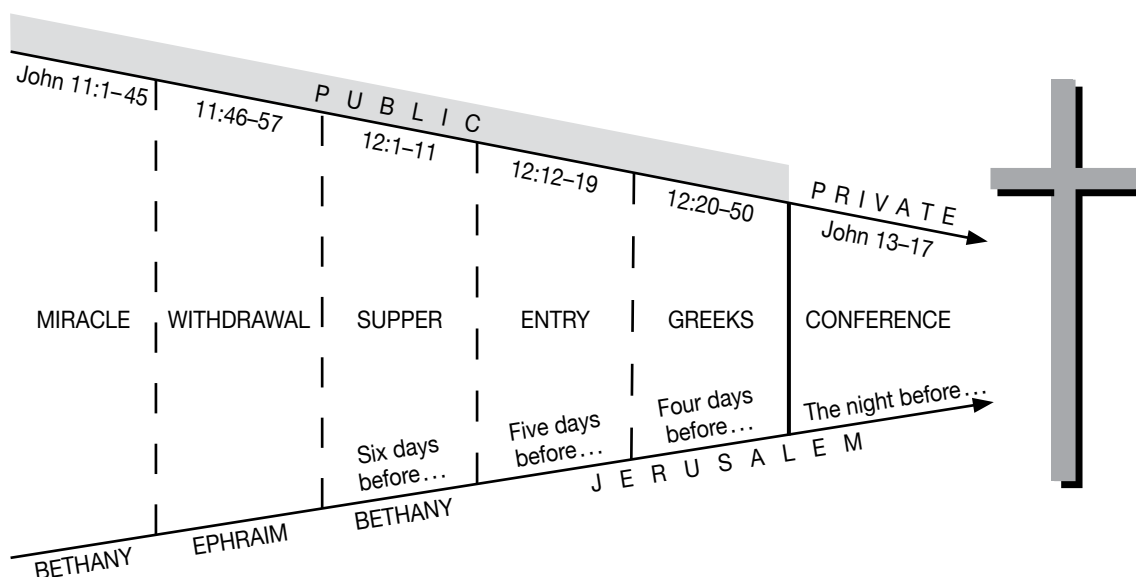
Observation is the *Searching the Scriptures* process of seeing what's in the text—the flow of thought, contrasts and comparisons, emphases, repetition, and context. In this phase of study, we examine details, but we also step back to survey large sections of Scripture.

A Survey of the Final Week—John 11–17

Chuck Swindoll's chart of Jesus' final week according to John illustrates the progression of time, including events from Jesus restoring Lazarus' life to the night of Jesus' arrest.

Study this chart, then in the space below write down what you observe.

Final Week: From Public To Private According to John's Gospel



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During His three-year ministry, Jesus invited His people to receive Him as their promised Messiah. The Sanhedrin's plot to kill Jesus, however, marked *Israel's official rejection of Jesus*. The religious leaders had crossed the line. Jesus, who was now "the stone that the builders rejected" (Psalm 118:22), became the "cornerstone" of God's plan of redemption through Jesus' death and resurrection.

- He changed his public outreach to a private one (John 12:36).
- He shifted His emphasis away from signs and concentrated on quiet, intimate conversation with His disciples (John 13–17).
- He reduced His travels, returning to Jerusalem (12:12). He was not out evangelizing. He was preparing to leave and preparing the disciples for His departure.

A Study of the First Part of the Week—John 12

John 12 includes three time-stamps that mark the progression of events. Note how the apostle recorded passing time, and write a one-sentence summary of the events in each passage below.

John 12:1–11, note John 12:1.

John 12:12–19, note John 12:12.

John 12:20–50, note John 12:36.



Six Days Before—John 12:1–11

Counting back six days from Passover puts Jesus' meal in Bethany on Saturday. The gospel of John contrasts Mary's devotion with Judas' disapproval and the people's fascination over Lazarus with the priests' treachery. Write down what you observe about each person's or group's actions that reflect characteristics of belief in or rejection of Jesus.

| Characteristics of Belief | Characteristics of Rejection |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Mary's Devotion (John 12:1–3) | Judas' Disapproval (John 12:4–8) |
| The People's Fascination (John 12:9) | The Priests' Treachery (John 12:10–11) |

Mary performed her extravagant act of worship without reserve, unloosing her hair in public and interrupting the men at their meal. Mark's gospel adds that she anointed Jesus' head as well (Mark 14:3). With the anointing scent lingering in the air—along with the hint of Judas' coming betrayal—Jesus was ready to enter Jerusalem and face His destiny.



Five Days Before—John 12:12–19

As you reread John 12:12–19, look for answers to the following questions.

What heightened the anticipation of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (John 11:56–57; 12:12, 17–18)?

What did Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a young donkey communicate to the nation about the nature of His messianic rule (12:12–15)?



Correlation: The Peaceful Entry of the King

Although known as Jesus' triumphal entry, Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem could be considered His peaceful entry. He did not come as an emperor on a stallion intent on conquest through war but as a humble king intent on salvation through sacrificial love. This is the true prophetic image of the Messiah. Read Zechariah 9:9–13, and write down what you discover about the Messiah's reign.

The people got it right when they shouted, *Hosanna!* The word means, “save now,” which was exactly what Jesus came to do.



Four Days Before—John 12:20–50

According to Matthew's account, after His entrance into Jerusalem in fulfillment of prophecy, Jesus cleared the money changers from the temple and "returned to Bethany, where he stayed overnight" (Matthew 21:12–17).

The next day, some Greeks Philip and Andrew attended came to Jesus, and Jesus delivered His final public teaching on four themes. Write down what He said about each theme.

The cross is imminent (John 12:23–26, 32–33).

The pain will be great and so will be God's glory (12:27–29).

The need is urgent (12:35–36).



The response will be varied—some will reject Him, while others will accept Him (John 12:37–50).



Interpretation: Salvation and Worship

As we interpret this passage, let's look for meaning regarding two central ideas: salvation and worship.

What was required of Jesus to save the world from sin (John 12:23–24, 31–33)? And how does Jesus expect us to acquire salvation (12:36)?

Martha worshiped Jesus by serving (12:2); Lazarus, by sharing his restored life with others (12:2, 9); Mary, by blessing Jesus (12:3); and Philip and Andrew, by leading seekers to Him (12:20–22). What do these worshipers teach you?





Application: A Summary of the Truth

Draw from our study three points of application that hit home with you as you reflect on Mary's worship, the Lord's peaceful entrance into Jerusalem, and His teaching on salvation through faith.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What deeper truth about Jesus did you discover in John 12 that you can carry with you this week?

Let's close in prayer with the assurance of the Lord's promise of eternal life and the anticipation of His return.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, what a faithful and trusting Father You are. Thank You for accepting me and for loving me just as I am. At the same time, thank You for calling me to a life of obedience and providing Jesus as my Savior and the Spirit as my guide. I give my all, like Mary, to worship You and honor Your Son who gave His all for me. Amen.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Seeking before Hiding

John 12

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STUDY



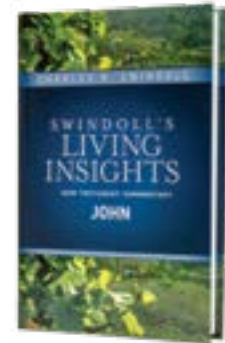
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LET'S BEGIN HERE

Jesus declared His identity through seven “I am” statements in John’s gospel. With the clarity of cathedral bells, Jesus’ words rang out:

- I am “the bread of life” who nourishes the soul (John 6:35).
- I am “the light of the world” who chases away sin’s darkness (8:12).
- I am “the gate” who invites all lost sheep to come into the fold (10:7).
- I am “the good shepherd” who knows His own and leads them (10:11).
- I am “the resurrection and the life” who gives hope beyond the grave (11:25).
- I am “the way, the truth, and the life” who leads us to God (14:6).
- I am “the true grapevine” who gives life and fruitfulness (15:1).

But these weren’t the only “I am” statements made by Jesus. In a rare moment of self-disclosure, Jesus gave us an inside look into His personality with this “I am” statement in Matthew’s gospel:

“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28–29, emphasis added)

Humility and gentleness. These two beautiful qualities characterize our Savior, a true servant. It should not surprise us that in His final hours, Jesus’ humility took centerstage as He served His disciples by washing their feet.

Quotable

*The disciples
were ready
to fight for
a throne but not
for a towel.*

— Charles R. Swindoll





YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

John 13 launches the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus' longest discourse (John 13–17). As we cross this literary threshold with Jesus into the upper room, pause to ask the Lord to reveal Himself to you. Write down a prayer for open eyes, a receptive mind, and a responsive heart.



Observation: Background, Setting, and Illustration

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method, a crucial first step in examining a passage of Scripture is observing the text through the magnifying glass of questions. Take a few moments to review John 13:1–17, asking, “What is the setting?” “Who is present?” “What does Jesus do?”

Background and Setting—John 13:1–3

The occasion is the Passover; the location is an upper room of a house in Jerusalem, the setting for the Last Supper. To fill in some details about the meal, read Luke 22:1–14, and write down how the disciples secured a room to celebrate the Passover. Particularly, note the diabolical forces at work behind the scenes.



In addition, note the undercurrent of conflict that churned in the group. What were the disciples fighting over (Luke 22:24–27)? The Greek word for *argue* in verse 24 means “a verbal fight.”

For Jesus, the hour “to leave this world and return to his Father” was fast approaching (John 13:1). Although a fleeting 15-hour timespan remained, Jesus did not knit His brow or pace nervously. Completely at peace, Jesus accepted His role as the Paschal Lamb who would be the sacrifice for sin, just as the Scriptures prophesied (Isaiah 53:10) and the Father willed.

Unlike the lamb, though, Jesus was not an unfortunate victim. A powerful inner drive compelled Jesus to *willingly* choose His destiny. What do the insights in John 1:14; 3:16; and 13:1 say about His motivation for sacrificing Himself?

In the murky shadows, the religious leaders conspired, the Devil schemed, and the disciples bickered. And yet, shining through in bright contrast was the love of Jesus as displayed in an unforgettable act of service.

Illustrating Humility—John 13:4–11

Why did Jesus wash the disciples’ feet? And what principles did Jesus illustrate? Let’s observe the text to find out.



Two Reasons Jesus Washed the Disciples' Feet

As we've already noted, the disciples had been arguing about who was greatest (Luke 22:24–27). So, the **first** reason that prompted the foot-washing was *the disciples' proud hearts*. Jesus couldn't teach about intimacy with God, the Holy Spirit's power, unity, or love until He addressed their pride. Why was Jesus' lesson about humility foundational to everything that followed?

The **second** reason was *the disciples' dirty feet*. It was customary for the first guests who arrived to wash the others' feet if no servant was present. However, each man considered himself too important to do the menial task. The disciples were ready to fight for a *throne* but not for a *towel*.

But Jesus, who loved His disciples "to the very end" (John 13:1), did what a person who loves always does: He saw a need and gladly served.¹ What lesson was Jesus teaching about true greatness when He stooped to wash the disciples' feet (Mark 9:35; 10:31)?

Now let's observe Jesus' actions and glean four principles about humility that the supreme Servant illustrated.

Four Principles Jesus Taught about Humility

Without speaking, Jesus' actions declared His **first** principle: *humility is unannounced*. What did Jesus do (John 13:4–5)? And what did His silence imply about humility and leadership?



Second, *humility is willing to receive—without embarrassment*. This principle emerges as a contrast to Peter’s *unwillingness* to allow Jesus to wash his feet. Observe Peter’s responses to Jesus in John 13:6–9:

- “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”
- “No . . . you will never ever wash my feet!”
- “Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!”

Peter put on a show of false humility, and then he tried to take charge by telling Jesus what to do! What do you think may have motivated him to resist love and control the situation?

Just as it takes humility to serve, it also takes humility to receive grace—which Peter struggled to do. Truly humble people are vulnerable. They admit their need, release control, and humbly slip their dirty feet into the bowl to be washed.

Jesus’ response to Peter modeled the **third** principle: *humility is not a sign of weakness*. Jesus, although humble, was no pushover. Peter’s resistance and controlling personality didn’t deter Jesus from doing the job the Father gave Him to do—purify His people.

To understand Jesus’ responses to Peter and the distinction between “bathed” and “wash” (John 13:10), read Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on John*, page 247. For an online alternative, read the section on John 13:10–11 in Constable’s notes in lumina.bible.org. Do a little digging on your own, and write down what you discover.



The **fourth** principle is *humility does not play favorites*. Jesus washed the feet of each disciple, even the feet of His betrayer, Judas. What was Jesus teaching His disciples about dealing with enemies (Matthew 5:43–48)?



Interpretation: The Meaning of the Illustration

Jesus interpreted His own actions when He explained the object lesson.

Discussing Humility—John 13:12–17

When Jesus finished, He put away the bowl and towel and reclined at the table. A hush settled over the room as all the men listened to Jesus explain His actions. Cleansed from pride as thoroughly as their feet were cleansed from dirt, their hearts were opened wide to receive a lesson about humility they would never forget.

What did Jesus teach about *serving one another*, not just serving the Lord (John 13:12–15)?

What did Jesus teach about *doing what He taught*, not just knowing what He taught (13:16–17)?





Correlation: Washing Feet and Cleansing Souls

We correlate the Bible when we compare the meaning of one biblical passage to another. Do you see a connection between Jesus' washing dirty feet and His atoning for sin on the cross—Jesus' ultimate act of service to humanity? Read Titus 3:4–7, and write down the parallels you discover.



Application: Putting On the Towel

Application allows the Bible's lessons to take hold of our lives, causing us to examine ourselves and act on what we have learned. Review the principles we learned in the text:

- Humility is unannounced.
- Humility is willing to receive—without embarrassment.
- Humility is not a sign of weakness.
- Humility does not play favorites.

Which of these principles hits closest to home for you right now? And what can you do to put the principle into action?



Remember, it's not enough to know about serving others. The blessing of serving won't be ours until we put on the towel, kneel with a bowl of water, and start washing. What specifically do you plan to do this week and for whom?

Let's pray, thanking the Father who sent His Son to become the Servant as a model for us.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You sent Your Son, Jesus, as my Master but also my Servant. Thank You for His ultimate act of love when He died on the cross to cleanse me. Just as He washed the soles of the disciples' feet, He purged my soul from the filth of my sin. Help me to receive His love, give His love, and even be humble enough to accept love from others. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. The phrase, "to the very end," in Greek is *eis telos*, which means, "literally, 'to the final goal.' He had loved them to completion, to the fullest, all the way to the end." Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on John*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 245.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Humility Personified

John 13:1–17

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



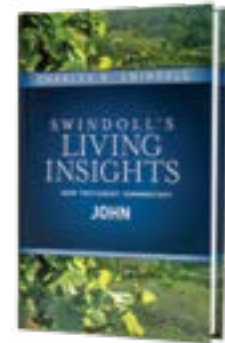
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FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

How High Is Your A.Q.?

John 13:18–30

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The account of Judas and the Last Supper reveals something magnificent about our Savior. Because of His great compassion, Jesus was able to accept Judas despite Judas' sin. In this study, we'll take a closer look at Jesus' ability to accept others and use His example to measure our A.Q. —our "acceptance quotient."

Chuck Swindoll defines "acceptance quotient" as our ability to receive another person *without restrictions of prejudice or requirements of performance*. Just as an I.Q. test measures our minds, an A.Q. test measures our attitude and openness toward others.

Acceptance doesn't nullify discernment; we need to see people for who they really are. And it doesn't deny depravity; we all have a sin nature. But it *does* allow for maximum freedom and individuality. With a high A.Q., we can accept people as they are, and, at the same time, speak the truth to them—just as Jesus accepted Judas and spoke the truth to him.

Accepting a person like Judas, who was caught up in the most heinous forms of greed and guile, would go against our most basic impulses to fight back or run from people who threaten us. Relating to a Judas would put our acceptance ability to its greatest test. Can we truly love our enemies? Thankfully, there's no better person to help raise our A.Q. than Jesus, who, with a heart of pure acceptance, loved His disciple-turned-betrayer to the end.

Quotable

*Acceptance is the
ability to receive
another person
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— Charles R. Swindoll



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YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

If you've ever endured the heartache of betrayal, you understand Jesus' anguish over Judas. If a friend, family member, or even a spouse stabbed you in the back, the pain most likely still sears your soul. We can't launch a study on accepting a betrayer without allowing a moment for honest expression. Lean on the soft shoulder of our Lord, and pray the psalm of David:

*Feel my pain and see my trouble.
Forgive all my sins.
See how many enemies I have
and how viciously they hate me!
Protect me! Rescue my life from them!
Do not let me be disgraced, for in you I take refuge.
May integrity and honesty protect me,
for I put my hope in you. (Psalm 25:18–21)*

Write a prayer of hope in the Lord, and ask Him for the strength to respond to your betrayer(s) as Jesus responded to His.



Observation: An Illustration of Acceptance

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. Read John 13:18–30, and as you read, look for four main sections: truth about the traitor (John 13:18–20), treatment of the traitor (13:21–26), change in the traitor (13:27–29), and reaction of the traitor (13:30). Read slowly, looking for clues about the setting, contrasts, emphasized phrases, or connected ideas.



The Truth about the Traitor—John 13:18–20

In the Upper Room, Jesus and His disciples reclined on pillows to observe the Passover. Tradition dictated the meal to be a joyful celebration of the memory of freedom from Egypt and the hope of future liberation. This night's festivities, however, were shrouded in two dark realities.

Look closely at John 13:18 for the first reality, and connect what you see in verses 2 and 11. Based on Jesus' quote of Psalm 41:9, what did Jesus know Judas would do?

The first reality was that Judas had already committed to his plan. The second reality was that he had skillfully concealed his intentions. This wolf in sheep's clothing acted the part of a loyal friend with such cunning that he fooled everyone except Jesus. His charade was treachery at its worst. What about Jesus' identity enabled Him to see through Judas' disguise (John 13:19–20)?

Later, the disciples would recall Jesus' prediction and know He was the true Messiah. Never taken by surprise, Jesus was always in control of His destiny and always extending grace. At any moment Jesus could have exposed Judas, yet the Master remained in the traitor's crosshairs so that He could take every opportunity to appeal to him to repent.

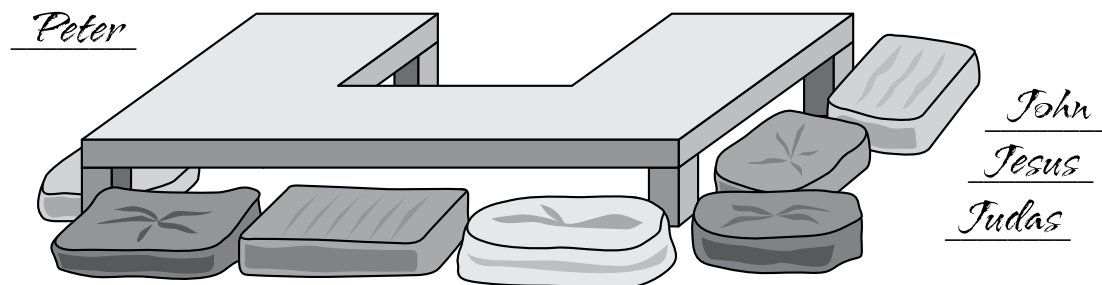
The Treatment of the Traitor—John 13:21–26

Again and again, Jesus threw Judas a lifeline to rescue him from his own choices. Even the seating arrangement for the Last Supper communicated acceptance. The disciples and Jesus likely ate the Passover meal at a low, U-shaped, Middle-Eastern style table with pillows for reclining instead of chairs for sitting. The men leaned on their left elbows, leaving their right hands free to eat with.



Read John 13:21–26, noting the possible seating positions of Jesus, John, Peter, and Judas from the diagram below, and then fill in the following points.

Diagram of the Lord's Table in the Upper Room (John 13)



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Jesus' emotional statement (John 13:21): _____

The disciples' reaction (13:22): _____

The location of John, "the disciple Jesus loved" (13:23): _____

Peter's question to John (13:24): _____

John's question as he leaned toward Jesus (13:25): _____

Jesus' response (13:26): _____

Apparently, the others didn't notice Jesus' interaction with Judas. So it's likely that Judas was on His left as they lay on their sides. Just as John leaned back toward Jesus to ask a private question, Jesus would have leaned back toward Judas. Commentator William Barclay explains the significance of this seating:



The revealing thing is that *the place on the left of the host was the place of highest honour, kept for the most intimate friend*. When that meal began, Jesus must have said to Judas: “Judas, come and sit beside me tonight; I want specially to talk to you.” The very inviting of Judas to that seat was an appeal.¹

The Change in the Traitor—John 13:27–29

The drama climaxed when Judas ate the morsel from Jesus’ own hand (John 13:26). As you observe John 13:27–29, what clues reveal that this poignant moment between the Son of God and the “son of perdition” (17:12 NASB) was the turning point in the scene?

Giving the morsel to Judas was Jesus’ ultimate gesture of acceptance . . . and Jesus’ final appeal. What statement from Jesus indicated the end of His acceptance (13:27)? What signaled to Jesus that Judas had crossed the line and He should release Judas?

The Reaction of the Traitor—John 13:30

What did Judas do next, and why do you think John specifically added the detail, “going out into the night” (John 13:30)? Hint: recall Jesus’ words in John 3:18–20 and 12:35–36.





Interpretation: Principles of Acceptance

What does Jesus' acceptance of Judas mean to us? As we raise our A.Q. to Jesus' level, we can expect the following characteristics of our acceptance of others.

Willingness to Accept People without Partiality

As we noted in the beginning of the study, acceptance means we receive others *without restrictions of prejudice*. How did James explain this principle in James 2:1–4, 9 with regard to preferring some people over others?

Willingness to Accept Another Style without Jealousy or Criticism

Acceptance also means that we receive others *without requirements of performance*. In other words, we don't expect everyone to act just like us before we accept them. How did the disciples learn this lesson when they met others intruding on their ministry (Mark 9:38–40)?

Paul experienced something similar when he encountered others who “do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ” (Philippians 1:17). He refused to be jealous or critical. Instead, he tolerated them as long as the message about Christ was being preached (1:18).



Willingness to Accept Offenses without Holding a Grudge

On this point, the A.Q. test gets exceedingly difficult. Could we wash the feet of our Judas or extend to him or her a gesture of love like when Jesus touched the lips of Judas with a morsel—the same lips that would betray Jesus with a kiss? What principles do you see in Romans 12:14–21 to help you pass this part of the test?

The fragrance of Jesus' acceptance of Judas filled the Upper Room with a sweet sacrificial aroma to God. And when we apply these principles, we fill our world with a kind of love that is not of this world.



Correlation: The Limits of Acceptance

Remember, acceptance *doesn't* turn a blind eye on discernment and depravity. There are times when we refuse to tolerate the actions of certain people. After many attempts to restore, as Jesus attempted with Judas, discipline is sometimes necessary. What guidelines do these verses offer?

Galatians 6:1; James 5:19–20

Matthew 18:15–17

Like Jesus, we must hold out our hand of fellowship as long as possible, until people take that final rebellious step. Then we must release them into the night.





Application of A.Q.

This lesson on acceptance must find its way off the page and into the fiber of our character. Review the principles below, consider the following questions, and write down ways you can accept others just as Jesus accepted Judas.

- *Be willing to accept others without partiality.* How do I treat people from a different social class, culture, or ethnicity than mine? How do I relate to people with disabilities? Do I show favor to some people more than other people?
- *Be willing to accept other people's styles without being jealous or critical.* Are my words judgmental toward others who don't fit my style of worship? Am I jealous of other ministries God is blessing? Do I criticize others who don't fit the mold I expect them to fit?
- *Be willing to accept offenses without holding a grudge.* Do I think about getting even with others who have hurt me? Have I let go of hurts from the past? Am I ready to release the poison of bitterness?

In the beginning, you wrote a prayer to express your heart to the Lord. Now pray again, asking for His Spirit of acceptance to fill your heart with divine grace.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I ask You to turn up the heat in my heart to boil off all my bitterness, hurt, and anger. Let any grudges I hold toward others dissipate as steam from a pot. Purge me of prejudice and condemnation. Reduce me to pure love. Sweeten me with the Spirit of Christ, who is my Savior. May words of acceptance pour from my heart as I reach out to others with the compassion of Jesus. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, rev. ed., vol. 2, The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 145–46.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

How High Is Your A.Q.?

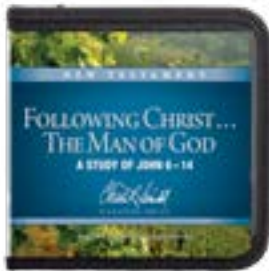
John 13:18–30

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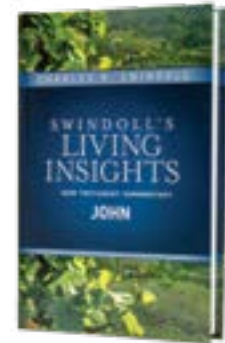
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FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Agapē . . . Authentic Love

John 13:31–38

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The quality that distinctively sets apart believers as followers of Jesus is not a pithy bumper sticker or a fish emblem dangling from a necklace or a gilded dove pinned on the lapel. These are only symbols of our faith. The true mark of a Christian is love.

Arthur Pink, in his commentary on John, said it well:

Love is the *badge* of Christian discipleship. It is not knowledge, nor orthodoxy, nor fleshly activities, but (supremely) *love* which identifies a follower of the Lord Jesus. As the disciples of the Pharisees were known by their phylacteries, as the disciples of John were known by their baptism, and every school by its particular shibboleth, so the mark of a true Christian is *love*; and that, a genuine, active love, not in words but in deeds.¹

In John 13, Jesus gave His eleven true disciples a mandate that added a new dimension to the meaning of love. And this new dimension not only changes lives but, in a compelling way, shows the world we belong to Jesus.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Our love for others flows from the spring of Christ's sacrificial love for us. Take a few moments to meditate on Paul's prayer, and then write your own prayer, inviting Jesus to reveal the depths of His love to you through this study.

May you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. (Ephesians 3:18–19)

Quotable

*Jesus' love was
one massive
crescendo that
never diminished.
He loved to the
end, the Lover
of my soul.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Observation: Divine versus Human Love

Let's make some initial observations of John 13:31–38. When observing, we zoom in on each word, looking for repetition, contrasts, tense, emphasis, and key definitions. Read the text and, in the space below, write down words or phrases that stand out to you.

During observation we also widen the lens to examine the flow of thought. Read the text again, and this time look at the passage in sections, keeping in mind the overall theme of *sacrificial love*. What do you see in verses 31–32 about the Father and Son's relationship?

How did Jesus want His love to be passed on to His followers according to verses 33–35?

In verses 36–38, how did Peter exemplify the shortcomings of even the most noble human love?





Searching the Scriptures Tip

Observation is one of the four central components of inductive Bible study:

Observation: observe the text of Scripture.

Interpretation: probe the meaning of Scripture.

Correlation: compare the truths of Scripture.

Application: apply the wisdom of Scripture.

Now let's discover the meaning of the text as we dig a little deeper to interpret Jesus' teaching.



Interpretation: The Meaning of *Agapē* Love

Interpretation, like a seedling, should always grow from the soil of the context in which it was planted. John 13:31–38 follows two significant events that directly impacted the meaning of Jesus' words regarding His departure and His command.

His Departure

What event occurred to prompt Jesus to say, “The time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory” (John 13:31)? To find the answer, read John 13:26–30.

When Judas rejected Jesus' final appeal of love and Satan entered him, Judas set in motion a series of events that would culminate in Jesus' death. However, instead of Jesus saying, “The time has come for the Son of Man to die,” He said, “to enter into His glory” (13:31, emphasis added). How can Jesus' death be His glory?



Commentator William Barclay helps us understand the connection:

The glory of Jesus has come; and that glory is the Cross. The tension is gone; any doubts that remained have been finally removed. Judas has gone out, and the Cross is a certainty. Here we are face to face with something which is of the very warp and woof of life. The greatest glory in life is the glory which comes from sacrifice. In any warfare the supreme glory belongs not to those who survive but to those who lay down their lives.²

Jesus also said, “God will be glorified because of him” (John 13:31). How did Jesus’ sacrifice glorify God?

Read John 17:4–5. How did God respond to Jesus’ sacrifice by glorifying Jesus?

Sometimes hard words are the most loving words. What three hard facts did Jesus give His faithful disciples, His “dear children,” in John 13:33?

There was a distinct finality in Jesus’ words, which posed an enormous problem for His disciples: How would they go on? With their Master gone, along with their connection to Him, what would be their identity?



His Command

Anticipating His followers' insecurity, Jesus set their drifting ship on a new course and filled their sails with fresh wind:

“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”
(John 13:34–35)

Our Savior's great mandate to His followers included a dynamic internal power, His divine love for them, and an impact in the world that still exists today.

The Dynamic—Divine Love

The dynamic is love, but not just any love. The Greek word John used for “love” is *agapē*, which essentially means to seek the highest good of another. Although the Mosaic Law commanded God's people to love one another (Leviticus 19:18), there was something about Jesus' command to love one another that made it *new*—that is, fresh, unprecedented, or unique. What was that something? For help with this answer, read Constable's notes on John 13:34 at lumina.bible.org.

Jesus' new command would be an outcome of the new covenant He would establish through His atoning sacrifice and the filling of the Spirit. Jesus set Himself as the ever-flowing river of love out of which His followers would forever draw their love for one another. He was telling His disciples—including us—to base their love for one another on His example and indwelling power. Jesus was telling them, in so many words:

“I left the splendors and comforts of heaven because I loved you, even when you were stubborn and closed-minded, I corrected you when you stepped out of line. I washed your feet on the way to My death. All this was for your highest good. My interest was not in Myself but in you. Now, you love each other as unselfishly as that.”

Could this kind of love really make an impact in the Roman world in which the disciples lived?



The Impact—Proof to the World

In his commentary, *Insights on John*, Chuck Swindoll explains the way Christian love impacted the first-century world as early Christians branded the term *agapē*.

The Greek word *agapē* is rarely found outside the Bible. The Greek language celebrated *erōs*, an intoxicating, impulsive love between men and women, and honored *philia*, the warm, noble affection of deep friendship. But *agapē* remained pitifully undeveloped as a term. The human authors of the New Testament needed a Greek word to express the kind of love taught by Christ and commanded by Him in the upper room, but the most common Greek terms wouldn't suffice. Fortunately, *agapē* was relatively unknown and largely undefined, so it perfectly suited their purposes. . . .

While believers began to adopt this new kind of love, their secular contemporaries decried the steady loss of virtue in Roman society. More and more, their peers exchanged venerable *philia* for fleeting *erōs*. As the two cultures moved in opposite directions, the contrast could not have been more absolute.³

What new understanding about the word *agapē* and Jesus' command do you glean from Chuck's explanation of the social context?

His Prediction

In contrast to the resilient love of Jesus, who loved His disciples “to the very end” (John 13:1), Peter's love, which was human to the core, would shatter when placed in fear's furnace later that night. Read John 13:36–38 and the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction in John 18:15–18, 25–27. What did Jesus mean by telling Peter, “you will follow me later”? Read John 21:18–19 for the answer.



Jesus' prediction of Peter's denials must have stung Peter's pride. Why do you think it was important for Jesus to tell Peter the harsh truth . . . for Peter's sake and for the other disciples' sake?



Correlation: *Agapē* Explained

Before applying what we've observed and interpreted, let's analyze the word, *agapē*, in light of another New Testament passage. What definitions did Paul list in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 to add color and contrast to the meaning of *agapē*?

With the words from Jesus' great command lingering in the air, let's transport His message from the Upper Room into the rooms of life where we live.



Application: Authentic Love

This study teaches three truths about how we should express Christ's love to others.

- *Authentic love is unconditional in its expression.* There are no *ifs* attached to authentic love, no manipulation, and no hesitation. *Agapē*, the true love of Jesus, flows over the most impenetrable barriers and into the most hardened hearts with no concern for love in return.
- *Authentic love is unselfish in its motive.* Christ's love isn't self-focused. It isn't concerned about getting a return on investment. It doesn't exclusively look after number one but always looks after number two. True love gives—with no thought of getting anything in return.
- *Authentic love is unlimited in its benefits.* When we love unconditionally and unselfishly, we always walk away a winner, even though that's not our aim. It just happens! Not only are others encouraged, but our hearts are filled with Christ's presence!



Which of these applications is the Holy Spirit pointing your heart toward? Real, authentic, vulnerable *agapē* is the hardest thing in the world to carry out. You can't do it without the Spirit's power. In the space below, write down your desire to love, and then pray for the Spirit to pour Christ's love into your heart so it can overflow to others.

Now, close in prayer by thinking back to your prayer at the beginning of this study. Drink deeply from the great ocean of Christ's love for you as you pray.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, please equip me today to be a dispenser of authentic love by loving others as Your Son, Jesus, loves me. Thank You for broadening my life with the magnificent words of Jesus and for opening my heart to a new commandment that will prove with actions what I say with words. I place myself before You as a living sacrifice of love to be poured out to a needy world. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Arthur Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968), 341.
2. William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 148.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on John*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 4 (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 260.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Agapē . . . Authentic Love

John 13:31–38

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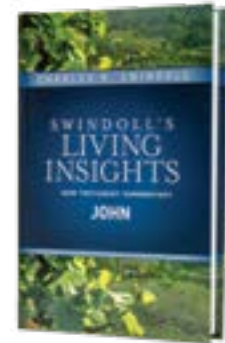
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LET'S BEGIN HERE

The disciples' hearts were troubled . . . understandably so! Jesus had just told them He would remain with them only a little while longer and that where He was going, they could not follow (John 13:33).

Worrisome questions swirled through their minds: *Where is He going? Why can't we follow? What are we to do now?* For about three years, they had devoted their lives to following Jesus. They had abandoned their jobs and left their families when He had said to them, "Follow me" (1:43), and now He said they couldn't follow Him?

The next words from Jesus must have sent shivers up their spines. Upon hearing Peter's bold pledge of loyalty, Jesus predicted Peter would deny Him—not once but three times (13:36–38)! If the bravest among them was going to break under pressure, what would be their fate?

Sensing the troubled hearts within His disciples, Jesus calmed the men with tranquil words that turned their thoughts toward a place of safety and love—the presence of God in His heavenly home. Let's take a deeper look at Jesus' words and discover six consoling truths that we can apply to our troubled hearts.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

What circumstances, people, or problems are troubling you? As we begin this study take the pulse of your anxious heart, and let these words from Psalm 73 focus your mind on God and His strength.

*Then I realized that my heart was bitter,
and I was all torn up inside. . . .
Yet I still belong to you;
you hold my right hand.
You guide me with your counsel,
leading me to a glorious destiny.*

Quotable

*You've counted
on Jesus for your
eternal security.
Now count on Him
for your daily needs.
He invites you,
"Trust in Me."*

— Charles R. Swindoll



Whom have I in heaven but you?
I desire you more than anything on earth.
My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak,
but God remains the strength of my heart;
he is mine forever. (Psalm 73:21, 23–26)

Write a prayer to the Lord, expressing your concerns to Him and your desire to hear from His Word today.



Observation: Tranquil Words for Troubled Hearts

Let's make some initial observations of John 14:1–24. In this study, 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.



Searching the Scriptures Tool

Observation is a critical beginning technique to putting 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.



Observe Key Words and Phrases

Read John 14:1–24. Note the following key words and phrases, and, if you write in your Bible, identify them according to the following marking scheme. If you prefer, you can print a separate copy of John 14:1–24 and mark the paper rather than your Bible.

- Circle the words *God* and *Father*.
- Underline the words *trust* or *believe* (depending on your Bible).
- Double underline the phrases that describe Jesus *going* and *coming again*.
- Draw a box around the phrase that speaks about us being *with* Jesus or the Father.

What stands out as you observe your markings?

Observe Key Questions

You probably noticed the questions the disciples asked. These questions form natural breaks in Jesus' dialogue. Jesus opened with a statement (John 14:1–4), which prompted the first question (14:5). His answer (14:6–7) prompted the second question (14:8), and His next answer (14:9–21) prompted the third (14:22).

In the following chart, write down Jesus' statement or answers that prompted the disciples' questions. Also record the questions, noting who asked each question. Then write what you think was the troubling thought behind each man's question.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Tranquil Words for Troubled Hearts

John 14:1–24

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| Disciple's Name | Jesus' Statement/Answer | Disciple's Question | Troubling Thought |
|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Before we interpret the text, let's make one more observation.

Observe New Teaching about the Holy Spirit

In the middle of this passage, Jesus revealed a new truth that He elaborated on throughout the rest of His discourse. John hinted at this truth in chapter 7. What did Jesus say then, and what did John explain in John 7:38–39?

What did Jesus promise in John 14:16–17?



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Having identified key words, phrases, questions, and a central teaching about the Holy Spirit, let's explore Jesus' meaning when He offered tranquil words to His disciples' troubled hearts.



Interpretation: Six Truths That Quiet the Heart

John 14:1–24 stitches together a quilt of counsel so strong that it will keep us warm and secure through even the most inclement of circumstances.

Personal Faith in a Personal God Brings Personal Strength

The first truth is the centerpiece of Jesus' teaching on overcoming fear: "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me" (John 14:1). Jesus' first command, "*Don't let your hearts be troubled*," is negative and passive. This command could be accomplished by obeying His next two commands, which are present tense and imply continuous action. In the Greek text, the word for "trust" bookends the sentence for emphasis, which literally reads, "Keep on trusting in God, and in me, keep on trusting."

What meaning do you glean from this insight into the Greek words?

To trust is to rely on something to hold you up, such as the chair you're sitting on. Spiritually, we initially rely on God to save us through Christ. Then we rely on God to hold us up as we walk with Him—like Abraham trusted God when he journeyed to the Promised Land (Genesis 12:1–6) and the Israelites trusted God to get them safely through the Red Sea (Exodus 14:15–31).

While Preparing a Place for Us, Jesus Is Preparing Us for That Place

Jesus promised to "prepare a place" for us in His Father's home (John 14:2–4). What did He mean?



Chuck Swindoll says that while Jesus is preparing a place for us, He's preparing us for that place. What tools does God use to fashion us for heaven (Romans 5:3–4; James 1:2–4)?

Jesus' answer to Thomas, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), is the sixth of Jesus' seven "I am" claims (6:48; 8:12; 10:9, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1). Here, in a nutshell, is what we believe about Jesus. Jesus doesn't just point us to salvation; He is our Savior. He doesn't just teach us the truth about God; He is God. He doesn't just tell about life; He is the source of all life.

How do you interpret His statement, "No one can come to the Father except through me" (14:6)?

The Sovereign Hand of God Is at Work

What does Jesus teach in John 14:7–11 about His relationship with the Father and how the Father is at work in Him . . . and in us through our faith in Christ (Philippians 1:6; 2:13)? How is this a comfort for Jesus' followers?

Throughout John, Jesus repeatedly said the Father sent Him, that He spoke only what the Father told Him, that He did only what the Father instructed Him to do, and that He and the Father are one.¹



Greater Things Occur When We Pray in Jesus' Name

The fourth truth is about prayer. Read John 14:12–14, and write down what it means to pray in Jesus' name. For an online source, read Chuck's *Insights on John*, page 270. Constable's notes at lumina.bible.org can also help with this answer.

You Are Not Alone; You Have an Inward Helper

What did Jesus promise the Holy Spirit would do for us, according to John 14:16–18? And what reassurance does His presence bring?

Your Life Is Inseparably Linked to Christ Himself

Jesus invited us to look for Him with our faith-trained eyes, and He promised we'll see Him alive and at work in us and through us. The following promise anticipates His resurrection, "Since I live, you will also live. When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you" (John 14:19–20). What does this mean?

Jesus began calming His disciples with hopeful words about His Father's house. While in this world, they would not be alone. The Spirit, the Father, and He would always be with them, indwelling them and working through them. What reassuring promises!



The roots of Jesus' words sink deep into the soil of Old Testament prophecy. Let's dig into the past to find the source of Jesus' teaching.



Correlation: The Promised Holy Spirit

Correlation is the *Searching the Scriptures* study tool that compares passages to aid our understanding. In this way, we let the Bible explain itself. Write down what you find in the Old Testament prophecy of the Holy Spirit in Ezekiel 36:25–27.

The New Covenant held out the hope that God would put the power His people lacked in their hearts so they could obey His commands. How does this prophecy relate to Jesus' teaching in John 14:15–17, particularly His emphasis on obedience?

The promised day had come when Jesus offered the Holy Spirit to His disciples, an offer that was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit filled the disciples with power (Acts 2:1–21). You can read more about the significance of Jesus' offer of the Spirit in Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on John*, on page 272. Read Constable's notes on John 14:15–17 at lumina.bible.org. Do a little digging, and write down what you find out!





Application: Strengthening the Heart

Chuck Swindoll sums up the application of this passage with three easy-to-remember principles:

- *Knowledge of the truth removes fear.* Jesus faced death, the most fearful of all adversaries, with peace because He knew He was secure in the Father's love. Truth steadies the nerves.
- *Application of knowledge reduces anxiety.* Obeying Christ's commands through any trial keeps our hearts calm and focused.
- *Love for the Lord releases guilt.* Peter released his guilt when, later, he declared his love for Jesus (John 21:15–17). When we've strayed from the path of righteousness, the way back is declaring our love for the One on whom our life depends.

Write down your own principle from the passage, a truth you learned that you can apply.

Now write down how you intend to put that truth into practice regarding the trouble you expressed to the Lord at the beginning of our study.

In prayer, "give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you" (1 Peter 5:7).



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, the troubles I face today are tools in Your hands to work Your will through me. Glorify Your name through my trials as I rely on You each step of the way. When I feel abandoned, I trust You are with me. When I fear failure, I trust I am always loved. When I don't know where to turn, I recommit myself to follow Jesus and take another step on the path of obedience. This is my prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. See John 5:17, 19–23, 30, 36–37, 43; 6:38, 57; 7:16–18, 28–29; 8:16–18, 28–29, 42; 10:14–15, 30, 36–38; 11:42; 12:44–45; 49–50; 13:20. Clearly, Jesus doing the will of the Father was a key theme in Jesus' ministry.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Tranquil Words for Troubled Hearts

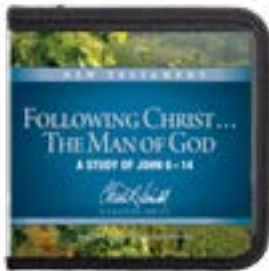
John 14:1–24

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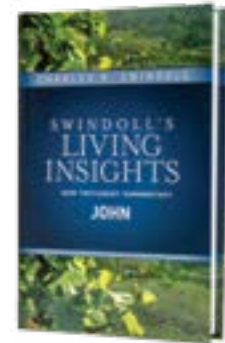
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LET'S BEGIN HERE

Can you imagine life without fear? Without fear, most of the problems we face personally and in society would disappear. In the trash would go all those medications we take to calm our nerves. Nights of peaceful rest would replace sleepless nights of tossing and turning. Worry would wisp away from hearts like steam from a calming cup of tea.

In the beginning of creation, fear didn't exist. But when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit, the creeping vine of fear entered Eden and entwined itself around our original parents' hearts. Genesis records humanity's first expressions of fear:

When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. Then the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

He replied, "I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked." (Genesis 3:8–10)

When sin planted the first seed of shame, fear sprouted. And from fear grew a host of thorns and thistles: cover-ups, hiding, blaming, broken relationships, rejection, envy, treachery, and, ultimately, death. Fear truly is the most troublesome of the fall's fallouts. But the good news is Christ's fruitful vine of peace can replace fear and its weedy outgrowths. Jesus lived without fear, and He generously offers His peace to all His disciples *today*. Let's study His words and find four guidelines for overcoming fear.

Quotable

*The world has no
peace to give.
But Jesus offers
His peace as
"a gift the world
cannot give"
(John 14:27).*

— Charles R. Swindoll





YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

What fears have been crowding out your peace lately? As we launch our study, share below your list of anxieties and worries with the Lord in a time of confessional prayer.

Jesus preached a kind of peace that can be experienced only by citizens of His kingdom. Let's enter His realm of peace as we study His Word together.



Observation: Jesus Offers Peace

Observation is the *Searching the Scriptures* process of seeing what's in the text—the flow of thought, contrasts and comparisons, emphases, repetition, and context. John 14:25–31 continues Jesus' Upper Room Discourse, which began with Jesus washing the disciples' feet and issuing what command (John 13:34)?

Jesus washed His disciples' feet to illustrate the kind of love that would brand them as His disciples (13:35). Not only would the *love of Jesus* set them apart, so would the *peace of Jesus*. According to John 14:1, what command launched Jesus' discussion of peace, which He repeated in 14:27?



The disciples must have felt like sailors on a sinking ship when Jesus announced He was leaving (John 13:33; 14:12). But Jesus promised to send them a lifeboat, the Holy Spirit.

In John 14:16 and 26, Jesus called the Holy Spirit “Advocate,” a translation of the Greek word *paraklētos*. How do other Bible versions translate this Greek term? Multiple versions are available at biblegateway.com.

We’ll dig into this Greek word in the interpretation phase. Until then, continue observing by circling each time you see the pronoun “I” in John 14:26–31. Write down what Jesus said He was doing or was going to do, and identify the promises He made to His disciples and us.



Interpretation: Four Ways to Overcome Fear

The *Searching the Scriptures* method of interpretation seeks to uncover golden nuggets of truth that apply to all people in any era and every culture. We can identify at least four principles for overcoming fear today.

Depend on the Person of the Holy Spirit—John 14:25–26

Jesus intended His followers to depend on the Holy Spirit just as they had depended on Him. Read pages 276–277 of Chuck Swindoll’s *Insights on John* to learn more about the Greek title, transliterated as “Paraclete.” The online resource *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* includes an [article](#) on the Holy Spirit’s ministry. What additional insights into *paraklētos* did you discover?



What did Jesus say the Holy Spirit would do in His place (John 14:26)?

The Spirit not only helps us learn truths of Scripture but also recall them when our knowledge is put to the test. It's as Chuck Swindoll says in his message:

How marvelous an experience it is when you're all alone and . . . suddenly you get just the truth you need, and it calms your nerves. That's the work of the Holy Spirit.

Claim the Peace of Christ—John 14:27

Read John 14:27, and write this verse, restating in your own words the rich meaning of Jesus' words.

The peace of Jesus is a gift more valuable and more lasting than an inheritance from a rich uncle! Commentator William Barclay elaborates on this part of Christ's heart freely given to us:

In the Bible the word for *peace*, *shalōm*, never means simply the absence of trouble. It means everything which makes for our highest good. The peace which the world offers us is the peace of escape, the peace which comes from the avoidance of trouble and from refusing to face things. The peace which Jesus offers us is the peace of conquest. No experience of life can ever take it from us and no sorrow, no danger, no suffering can ever make it less.¹

How is the peace of Christ different and better than the peace offered by the world?



Accept Christ's Plan for the Future—John 14:28–29

Jesus had informed the disciples of His planned departure (John 13:33; 14:2–3). According to John 14:28–29, what positive perspective about His leaving did Jesus want His disciples to understand?

Jesus could see beyond His death to the glory on the other side. Our future is equally glorious because we are fellow heirs to His promise (Romans 8:15–17). Read Chuck's comment, and explain the reason we need never be fearful about our future.

The arrangement that the Father has laid out of the events of the future is as clearly defined as the arrangements of history that we can read in books. It is impossible to really accept the plan of the future and stay pessimistic—impossible!

Follow the Pattern of Obedience—John 14:30–31

Even while facing death and Satan himself, Jesus exuded a calm obedience that set an example for the disciples and us. How did Jesus connect obedience with love in His relationship with His Father (John 14:30–31)? How is that a model for our relationship with Him (14:21, 23)?





Correlation: The Holy Spirit's Role, Our Response

Correlation is the *Searching the Scriptures* study tool that compares Bible passages to aid our understanding. What light does 1 Corinthians 2:10–12 shed on the Holy Spirit's role as the One who teaches and reminds us of truth?

According to Hebrews 12:1–3, how does keeping our eyes on Christ as we run the race of obedience help us follow His example of obedience?

As the Holy Spirit brings to our minds Christ's teaching during our storms, Jesus can calm our inner tempest as we take steps of obedient faith.



Application: The Mind at Peace

Chuck summarizes the four points:

Children of God, you have the Spirit of God upon whom you can depend. You have the peace of Jesus Christ to claim. You accept the plan of God for the future. And now, it falls to the matter of doing what you know the Scriptures say to do.

What *can* you do? These four ideas will get you started.

- Acknowledge your source of power.
- Begin your day with prayer.
- Correct your habit of pessimism.
- Devote yourself to persistence.



Which of these suggestions do you want to put into practice? Or what other ideas would you like to apply? Whatever steps you choose, take one this week.

Now, spend a few moments worshiping our Savior who faced death and Satan with determined obedience and a heart full of peace. Pray in the name of Jesus for God to supplant whatever fears you confessed to Him with the *shalom* of Christ that is like nothing this world can give!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I claim at this moment the peace Jesus offers. Give me the part of Jesus' heart that was so connected in love to You that He could face Satan and death undaunted. Send me into the storm, not with the guarantee of smoother seas but with the assurance of peace amidst the storm. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 171.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Overcoming Fear

John 14:25–31

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



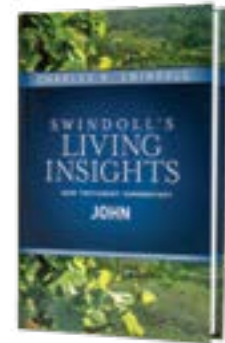
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For the 2018 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's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



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