

# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY ONE

## The Value of Knowing the Scoop

*1 Timothy 4:1–6; 1 Peter 3:13–16*

*God wants us to pursue spiritual knowledge with passion and with our whole heart.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**I**n the internet age, we can search the web on any subject with just a few taps on our smartphones. So vast is the knowledge at our fingertips that our brains can't process it all. In the massive mountain of data, which facts are truly meaningful? How do we know what is true? Which of the so-called experts should we believe?

It's understandable when people say they suffer from *information overload*.

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we search the *Scriptures* to find the truth our souls crave and the information we can't live without. On these ancient pages, we discover the surest answers to life's deepest questions:

- Does God exist? What is He like? How can I know Him personally?
- Is this mortal life all there is? What happens when I die? What does the future hold?
- What is my purpose? Where do I belong? How should I live?

We won't find dependable answers to these questions in any storehouse of human musings, no matter how vast. The knowledge we seek exists only in the infinite mind of God which, thankfully, He has revealed in His Word.



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## **The Value of Knowing the Scoop**

*1 Timothy 4:1–6; 1 Peter 3:13–16*

In our information-saturated times, it's vital that we know the real scoop on what matters most and that we root ourselves in God's truth. Our souls depend on it.



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Before searching the Scriptures, we always pray for God's Spirit to illumine our minds and hearts. You may wish to pray as Pastor Chuck Swindoll prays: "I often pray, 'Lord, speak to me. Help me understand what this passage is saying. I am listening. I am sensitive to Your truth. Lead me into it.'"<sup>1</sup> Write your prayer below.



#### ***Searching the Scriptures Study Tool***

For helpful instruction from Pastor Chuck Swindoll on this method, consult the Insight for Living Ministries online instructional web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)." There, you can also follow the [link to purchase a copy](#) of Pastor Chuck's book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*.



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

The Scriptures place a high value on spiritual knowledge. In Exodus, God etched His words into stone. In Deuteronomy, Moses placed knowledge of God's law at the center of family life ([Deuteronomy 6:1–6](#)). In the gospels, Jesus often appealed to the Scriptures in debates with opponents: "Have you not read?" ([Matthew 12:3–5](#); [19:4](#); [22:31](#)). And in the epistles, Paul frequently pressed his points: "I do not want you to be unaware" ([Romans 1:13](#); [1 Corinthians 10:1](#); [12:1](#)).

Choose "knowledge rather than pure gold," counsels the writer of Proverbs (Proverbs 8:10). Why is knowledge of God and His Word so valuable? Let's look at two main reasons.



## The Value of Knowing the Scoop

1 Timothy 4:1–6; 1 Peter 3:13–16



### Observation: Reasons for Knowing the Scoop

*Searching the Scriptures* is a four-step Bible study method. In the *observation* phase, we examine what the biblical passage says. Take your time as you read. Notice the action words. Observe commands, statements of truth, contrasts and comparisons, figures of speech, and cause-and-effect. Careful observation is the key to accurate understanding.

#### To Explain Our Hope in Christ—1 Peter 3:13–16

Read [1 Peter 3:13–16](#) to understand the first reason knowing doctrine is valuable. In this passage, Peter urged his persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ not to “worry or be afraid” of the threats from their enemies (3:14). Instead, what did Peter tell them to do? What manner and reason did he give them for obeying his instruction according to [3:15–16](#)?

#### To Counter False Teaching—1 Timothy 4:1–6

Turn from Peter’s instructions to Paul’s warning in [1 Timothy 4:1–6](#)—the second reason for knowing doctrine. Read carefully the warning in [4:1](#). Who is the source of the warning? How did Paul emphasize the warning’s serious nature? What did Paul say would happen? When? Why?



## The Value of Knowing the Scoop

1 Timothy 4:1–6; 1 Peter 3:13–16

Paul responded to the false teaching by explaining several points of sound theology in 1 Timothy 4:2–5. What points did Paul list?

In 4:6, what was Paul's conclusion to Timothy about the reasons for knowing "good doctrine" (4:6 NASB)?

*I must constantly nourish myself in the Book. The greater the pressure and the more the problems, the more I have to pore over this Book. As my mind stays sharp with the truth, then I can deliver it and, most importantly, live it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: Training in Sound Doctrine

The next phase is *interpretation*, in which we seek to understand the meaning of the passage for the original readers. In 1 Peter 3:15, Peter used the Greek word, *apologia*, which his readers would have recognized "as a legal term in the courts," according to Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest.<sup>2</sup> "Make a defense" is the New American Standard Bible's translation of the word.



## **The Value of Knowing the Scoop**

*1 Timothy 4:1–6; 1 Peter 3:13–16*

What did Peter mean by using this term? How would Peter have expected his readers to “be ready” to defend their faith (1 Peter 3:15)?

Peter urged his readers to explain their faith using reasoned arguments, much like the arguments a defense attorney might present in a courtroom. In a similar way, Paul corrected false teaching through reasoned arguments based on solid doctrine. How would Timothy have understood Paul’s admonition to nourish himself “on the words of the faith” and “good doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:6 NASB)? To what was Paul specifically referring?

So, whether we’re defending our beliefs to unbelievers or correcting believers who have drifted into false teaching, knowing the doctrines of our faith is essential. Draw your own conclusions about the value of sound doctrine. In what ways will “knowing the scoop” benefit you?



## **The Value of Knowing the Scoop**

*1 Timothy 4:1–6; 1 Peter 3:13–16*



### **Correlation: Consequences of Lack of Knowledge**

In *correlation*, we examine similar passages to aid understanding. In Hosea's day, the people of Israel had morally descended into a deep pit of sin. What transgressions did the Lord identify in [Hosea 4:1–3](#)?

At the root of their sin was an absence of virtue—"no faithfulness, no kindness"—and the reason for their absence of virtue was their lack of "knowledge of God" (4:1).

Who was responsible for teaching spiritual truth, according to [Hosea 4:4–6](#)? What were the consequences of their lapse of responsibility?

What warning can you draw from Israel's negative example?



## The Value of Knowing the Scoop

1 Timothy 4:1–6; 1 Peter 3:13–16

*Ignorance is not bliss. Ignorance is the breeding ground for fear, prejudice, and superstition. What is true regarding general knowledge is even more true in the realm of spiritual knowledge. Sound doctrine is invaluable as a means to survival. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Application: Bringing the Benefits Home

Now that we understand the importance of knowing God's Word and the dangers of not knowing it, the next step is *application*: "How can I put the principles I learned into practice?"

Pastor Chuck Swindoll summed up the passages we studied with six benefits of knowing the scoop about sound doctrine.

1. *It gives substance to my faith.* I don't have to rely on emotion or another's opinions.
2. *It stabilizes me during times of testing.* I stand on God's Word amid life's stormy trials.
3. *It enables me to handle the Bible correctly.* I am less likely to misinterpret Scripture.
4. *It equips me to detect and confront error.* I can spot false teaching and warn others.
5. *It makes me confident in my walk with God.* I live with contentment and conviction.
6. *It filters out my fears and superstitions.* I trust the Sovereign Lord who made it all.

Which of these benefits sounds the most helpful for you today as you seek to cultivate intimacy with Jesus and obedience to His Word? Why is that benefit most important to you right now?



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY ONE

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

## The Value of Knowing the Scoop

*1 Timothy 4:1–6; 1 Peter 3:13–16*

Of the questions listed in the introduction, which ones echo the questions your heart is asking? Are there other questions to which you'd like to find answers in the Scriptures?

What goal would you like to set at the outset of our in-depth series on Bible doctrines? What would you like to achieve through your study?

Close your study time with a prayer of willingness to seek God's knowledge as a treasure more valuable than any riches this world can offer. In this quiet moment, hear God's invitation:

*Choose my instruction rather than silver,  
and knowledge rather than pure gold.  
For wisdom is far more valuable than rubies.  
Nothing you desire can compare with it. (Proverbs 8:10–11)*



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## **The Value of Knowing the Scoop**

*1 Timothy 4:1–6; 1 Peter 3:13–16*



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

*Father, I truly desire Your knowledge more than pure gold and godly wisdom more than the costliest gems. Nothing I own is as precious to me as the assurance of Your promises and the hope of Your Word. I know that You have a plan for my life that is far more wonderful than I can imagine. Teach me Your Word. With all my heart, I seek to know You. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### **ENDNOTES**

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 128.
2. Kenneth S. Wuest, *First Peter in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1942), 89.



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY TWO

## Don't Forget to Add a Cup of Discernment

*Acts 17:11–12; 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 3 John 1:9–10*

*The Bible gives us an inspired recipe for a balanced, healthy approach to life that requires a cup of discernment mixed in well with biblical knowledge.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

As essential as knowledge is to our faith, a diet of knowledge alone is actually detrimental to our spiritual health. When knowing Bible doctrines becomes the only goal, when knowledge remains theoretical and impersonal without the commingling of love and grace, our spiritual arteries stiffen, and pride all-too-easily hardens our heart.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll recalls a time in his young adult years when pursuing Bible knowledge consumed him.

Thanks to the teaching of a very persuasive and powerful minister whose stated desire was to communicate the doctrines of the Bible, I became virtually brainwashed with his approach and system of thinking. And all who sat under his ministry for very long had the same mind-bending experience. A knowledge of doctrine became our watchword. Everyone outside our circle was judged on the basis of how much they knew. And since they never seemed to know as much as we did, we looked down our noses at them!<sup>1</sup>



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## **Don't Forget to Add a Cup of Discernment**

*Acts 17:11–12; 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 3 John 1:9–10*

“Knowledge makes us feel important,” wrote Paul (1 Corinthians 8:1). Or, as the New King James Version bluntly puts it: “Knowledge puffs up” (8:1 NKJV). That’s it, isn’t it? Without love to bring us down to earth, we float above everyone else in our inflated ego. Knowing all the spiritual answers can make us feel superior, self-important, even snobbish.

How do we avoid this unhealthy condition? By adding a cup discernment to our mix of Bible knowledge.



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Practically speaking, discernment is wisdom in shirtsleeves. It is the ability to put knowledge to work in a way that is wise, insightful, and useful. So rare and valuable is this skill that King Solomon famously asked God for it rather than asking for riches or fame:

*Lord my God, . . . give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, to discern between good and evil. (1 Kings 3:7, 9)*

Literally, Solomon asked God for “a heart that listens.”<sup>2</sup> A heart that is open, receptive, sensitive, and teachable. Let’s follow Solomon’s lead as we explore biblical doctrine. In the space below, write your own prayer for discernment and humility.



**Don't Forget to Add a Cup of Discernment**

*Acts 17:11–12; 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 3 John 1:9–10*



**TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

Solomon set the standard (at least, early in his life) for the kind of godly wisdom that results when discernment accompanies knowledge. Biblical history highlights plenty of people who, like Solomon, balanced their knowledge with discernment. Others, however, did not.

In this study, we'll learn from their examples by contrasting two individuals and two churches, gleaning key principles that we can apply.



**Observation: Positive and Negative Examples of Discernment**

Charts are a helpful tool in *Searching the Scriptures* to contrast observations. In the following charts, write down what you observe about discernment's presence or absence.

**Diotrephes and Apollos**

Diotrephes was a leader in a church that John addressed in his epistle, 3 John. Diotrephes was puffed up with knowledge but lacked discernment. Apollos, on the other hand, displayed a wise balance. Write down the characteristics of both men in the chart below.

<b>Puffed-Up Diotrephes</b> <i>3 John 1:9–11</i>	<b>Balanced Apollos</b> <i>Acts 18:24–28</i>



Don't Forget to Add a Cup of Discernment

Acts 17:11–12; 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 3 John 1:9–10

What central difference between these two individuals stands out to you?

*There's something blinding that occurs when we lack discernment. I plead with you to remain gracious and tolerant. Perceive the logs in your own eye lest you become one who looks for specks in the eyes of others. Do not be blinded with your own importance. Diotrophes was a man like that. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

The Corinthians and the Bereans

The Corinthian believers had all the knowledge and gifts required for a body of believers to flourish spiritually. And yet, Paul admonished them for their petty arguments and shameful behaviors. They were rich in self-assurance but bankrupt in discernment. In contrast was the church at Berea, a city about 200 miles north of Corinth. The churches were not that far apart geographically, but they were worlds apart in spiritual maturity. Use the following chart to contrast the characteristics of these churches.

Puffed-Up Corinthians <i>1 Corinthians 1:4–12; 8:1–3, 9–12</i>	Balanced Bereans <i>Acts 17:10–12</i>

## Don't Forget to Add a Cup of Discernment

*Acts 17:11–12; 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 3 John 1:9–10*

What main difference emerges between these churches?

*It takes discernment to gauge one's actions. We don't simply become knowledgeable and then run wild with it, caring little about others. A person with discernment thinks about his or her lifestyle. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: Principles on Discernment

The insights we gain from these examples help us craft principles. A theological principle is a biblical statement of truth that universally applies to all people. Principles transcend culture and time. If a principle was true in the first century, it's true today.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll based the following three principles on the passages above.

1. *No one person has all the truth.* Diotrephes claimed sole authority and rejected the apostles and other teachers. Balanced believers are wary of Diotrephes-type leaders and draw knowledge from a variety of trusted, biblically-sound sources.
2. *No church or ministry owns exclusive rights to your mind.* Our primary allegiance is to Christ alone, and we should be distrustful of cultic leaders or organizations that demand loyalty.
3. *No specific interpretation is correct just because a gifted teacher says so.* Just because a teacher is persuasive doesn't mean he or she is accurate biblically. We should all be Bereans, who studied the Scriptures to confirm what they had been taught.



## Don't Forget to Add a Cup of Discernment

*Acts 17:11–12; 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 3 John 1:9–10*

What other principles about discernment can you draw from the passages above? What warnings do the negative examples of Diotrephes and the Corinthians offer? Or what helpful guidelines do the positive examples of Apollos and the Bereans offer?



### Correlation: Complementing Passages

In *correlation*, we scan the Scriptures for other passages that shed light on the subject. Two really stand out for this study's topic. Read [1 John 4:1–3](#) and [Philippians 1:9–10](#). Based on these verses, what do mature people with a balanced mix of knowledge and discernment do?

*Being balanced spiritually means being free from extremes, able to see the whole picture, and maintaining equilibrium. Balanced Christians are realistic. They are not afraid to say, "I don't know." They're tolerant, gracious, and have fun! They value other's opinions, even when they disagree. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Don't Forget to Add a Cup of Discernment**

*Acts 17:11–12; 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 3 John 1:9–10*



### **Application: Life in Color**

Reflecting on the days when he focused on knowledge alone, Pastor Chuck Swindoll recalls how unidimensional and inflexible his life had become:

My world was reduced to a spectrum of blacks and whites and a very few grays. No color. No beauty. No cushion. No room for people who happened to disagree. Not much laughter and, most unfortunately . . . not much love.<sup>3</sup>

When Pastor Chuck recognized his lack of balance, he set out to study the grand truths of Scripture in a way that enriched, rather than stifled, his relationships with God and others.

As you take the next steps in your study of Bible doctrine, remember that *a healthy study of doctrine will grow your heart as well as your mind*. Paul distilled the essence of head-heart health this way:

*While knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church. Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much. But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes.* (1 Corinthians 8:1–2).

As you learn Bible doctrine, what can you do to grow love along with knowledge? Humility along with skill?



## **Don't Forget to Add a Cup of Discernment**

*Acts 17:11–12; 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 3 John 1:9–10*

Reflect on the principles of discernment from this study. Which ones do you sense the Holy Spirit drawing you toward? What can you do to keep your knowledge balanced with discernment?

With a prayerful attitude, a hopeful spirit, and a discerning eye, we take another step in our journey into the amazing world of knowing God and His plan for us and our world. Close your study with this final prayer.



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

*Father, guard me from the pitfall of gaining knowledge for the sake of knowledge. I long to know You for the bigger purpose of loving You more and experiencing a richer life filled with Your grace. Help me to stay balanced, to be realistic, compassionate, and teachable—more interested in loving others than winning debates. Give me a “heart that listens.” In Jesus’ name, amen.*

### **ENDNOTES**

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life: Returning to Our Roots* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1986), 35.
2. New American Standard Bible, 1 Kings 3:9, footnote. Accessed at biblegateway.com.
3. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life*, 36.



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY THREE

#### God's Book—God's Voice

*Psalms 119:98–100; 2 Timothy 3:14–17; 2 Peter 1:19–21*

*If I could have one wish it would be that God's people return to the Word of God.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**D**URING his ministry, Pastor Chuck Swindoll has consoled families devastated by grief. He has spoken to spouses after infidelity shattered their marriages. He has visited desperately ill people hanging onto life in the ICU, encouraged business owners who lost everything, and comforted survivors of disasters sifting through the rubble of their once-beautiful homes.

Walking with sufferers through their pain, Pastor Chuck has observed the unhealthy ways people try to cope in crisis. Some escape through denial or chemical dependence. Cynicism consumes others, and they turn bitter and angry. In desperation, some run to self-help gurus or even consult mediums and dabble in the occult.

None of these strategies plants a person's feet on solid rock when the bottom drops out. Instead, Pastor Chuck writes, "They leave the victim in quicksand—more desperately confused than at the beginning."<sup>1</sup>

On what reliable authority do we rest secure when crisis strikes? Which lighthouse guides us to a safe harbor? Whose voice speaks truth? These questions touch on the deepest yearnings of our soul for security and hope, and they all point to the answer: God's Book—God's voice.



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## God's Book—God's Voice

*Psalm 119:98–100; 2 Timothy 3:14–17; 2 Peter 1:19–21*



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

God is the “God of truth,” Isaiah declared (Isaiah 65:16), and, therefore, God’s “word is truth,” Jesus affirmed (John 17:17 NASB). As you open your Bible, reflect for a moment on the divine wisdom in your hands and pray . . .

*Father, thank You for revealing to me Your infinite thoughts and unchanging ways through this Book. You have spoken truth through its pages. Your Word is the only true “light for my path” (Psalm 119:105), and I pledge myself to You as I study. Teach me Your ways, O Lord. In Jesus’ name, amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Countless books of wisdom have been written. What makes the Bible our surest foundation through this life and beyond? What makes the Bible stand apart and above other sources of guidance?



### Observation: Identity, Inerrancy, and Reliability

A helpful *observation* technique is to find common concepts and themes by comparing verses. We’ve grouped the verses to compare under the following headings that summarize three remarkable attributes of the Bible.

#### The Bible’s Identity

In all of literature, there is nothing else like the Bible. It is truly one of a kind. What did post-resurrection Jesus say about Scripture in his walk with two men to Emmaus in [Luke 24:13–27](#)?



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY THREE

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

## God's Book—God's Voice

*Psalms 119:98–100; 2 Timothy 3:14–17; 2 Peter 1:19–21*

How do the following verses describe the Bible: *Psalms 119:142, 151, 160*? What do you learn from Jesus' prayer for His followers in *John 17:17*?

In *1 Thessalonians 2:13*, how did Paul refer to the message that God gave the church through the apostolic writings?

What qualities did Peter ascribe to the Bible in *1 Peter 1:23–25*?



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# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY THREE

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

## God's Book—God's Voice

*Psalm 119:98–100; 2 Timothy 3:14–17; 2 Peter 1:19–21*

Piece your observations together into an answer to the question, “What about the Bible’s identity makes it unique?”

*Think of it this way: God’s Book is God’s voice. If He were to make Himself visible and come and stand in this place, His message of truth would tie in exactly with what we see in Scripture. His opinions, His counsel, His commands, His desires, His warning . . . His very mind is in this Book. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

### The Bible’s Inerrancy

The Bible’s source is God, so it must be true . . . and yet, it was written by fallible human authors. How did God safeguard the Bible against error? Read [2 Timothy 3:16–17](#) and [2 Peter 1:20–21](#) and write down the phrases that describe how God expressed His Word using individuals.

At times, God spoke directly to individuals who wrote down precisely what God said, such as when God spoke to Abraham in [Genesis 12:1–3](#). Most of the time, however, God didn’t dictate His Word. Instead, He *inspired* people or *moved* them to write Scripture.



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# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

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# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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## God's Book—God's Voice

*Psalm 119:98–100; 2 Timothy 3:14–17; 2 Peter 1:19–21*

We'll examine the meaning of these two concepts in the interpretation phase. For now, reflect on the connection between the divine source of Scripture and the truth of Scripture. How can we be certain the writers of Scripture didn't make errors?

*We have a Bible full of human personality and style, and yet it's God who breathed out His message. Because God superintended the entire process, no error was present in the original text right down to the very words. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

### The Bible's Reliability

The rubber meets the road on the issue of reliability. Can we trust the Bible when we need an ethical compass to guide our business decisions? When we need a moral scale to determine right from wrong? When we need a ballast of truth to stabilize us in life's storms?

Observe the answers to these real-life issues in [Psalm 119:9–11, 23–24, 27–28, 41–42, 49–50, 61, and 165](#). In what ways did the psalmist lean on the Scriptures?



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## God's Book—God's Voice

*Psalm 119:98–100; 2 Timothy 3:14–17; 2 Peter 1:19–21*

We truly can cling to the lifeline of God's Word in our darkest hour . . . because we can cling to God. Read the following verses slowly, letting them soak into your soul and pausing to thank the Lord for speaking truth through Scripture.

*Your eternal word, O Lord,  
stands firm in heaven.  
Your faithfulness extends to every generation  
as enduring as the earth you created.  
Your regulations remain true to this day,  
for everything serves your plans.  
If your instructions hadn't sustained me with joy,  
I would have died in my misery.  
I will never forget your commandments,  
for by them you give me life. (Psalm 119:89–93)*



### **Interpretation: Revelation, Inspiration, and Illumination**

In the interpretation stage, our observations of the Bible's identity, inerrancy, and reliability become the basis of three key doctrines.

#### **Revelation—How God Communicated His Word**

God reveals Himself to humankind through *general revelation* in His creation (*Psalm 19:1–4; Romans 1:18–20*) and *special revelation* in His Son (*Hebrews 1:1–2*) and His Word (*2 Peter 1:16–21*). To dive deeper into this doctrine, consult the article, “*What is general revelation and special revelation?*” at [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org). Write your findings here.



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## God's Book—God's Voice

*Psalm 119:98–100; 2 Timothy 3:14–17; 2 Peter 1:19–21*

### Inspiration—How Individuals Received God's Word

The means by which individuals received and recorded God's revelation is inspiration. The Greek word for *inspired* in 2 Timothy 3:16 means “God-breathed.” Sometimes we say that human artists were “inspired” when they created a masterpiece. But how is “God-breathed” inspiration unique to God's Word?

The content of the Bible originated in the mind of God, who “moved” individuals as they wrote the holy text (2 Peter 1:21). The NET Bible translates the Greek word, “carried along” (1:21 NET), which captures the nautical sense of the word. The writers were caught up in the current of the Spirit as divine and human elements operated together perfectly to create Scripture.

### Illumination—How We Understand God's Word

Special revelation and inspiration have ceased. Illumination, however, continues as the Holy Spirit opens our minds to help us understand God's truth. What did Jesus promise the Spirit would do for His followers, according to *John 16:12–15*?

*Right now, the Holy Spirit is incessantly at work instructing you, challenging you, and giving you hope and direction as you study God's Word. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



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# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY THREE

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

## God's Book—God's Voice

*Psalm 119:98–100; 2 Timothy 3:14–17; 2 Peter 1:19–21*



### Application: Hearing God's Voice in God's Book

Today's pundits and philosophers deny truth exists or, they say, if truth does exist, no one can know it. Since God has spoken in Scripture, however, we *can* know the truth . . . and God's voice does not waver. He tells it straight when He declares good and evil, right and wrong, holiness and sin.

How does the unwavering nature of God's voice in the Bible give you stability in your current situation?

*God's Book gives you a deep sense of purpose and meaning through stormy times.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

"I have more insight than my teachers," the psalmist stated, because he knew Scripture (Psalm 119:99). Do you sometimes feel intimidated in today's critical culture? How does knowing God's Word give you more understanding than humanistic teachers?

*Knowing Scripture and seeing it work in our lives helps us face criticism and not feel intimidated, because we have the truth.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

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## STUDY

### God's Book—God's Voice

*Psalm 119:98–100; 2 Timothy 3:14–17; 2 Peter 1:19–21*

What new truth about Scripture have you learned or what idea has been reinforced through this study that can bolster your confidence in God's Word? Share this insight with someone to encourage him or her.

In our day of shifting moralities, we long for a solid foundation on which to build our lives. Thankfully, God's voice speaks to us through His Book—the bedrock of truth on which we stand secure.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, You are the Author of the Book I hold in my hands. Thank You for presenting it to me as my guide through life and for preserving it from error so I can count on it today. Through Your Spirit, illumine my mind with truth and fill my heart with devotion as I obey Your Book and follow Your voice. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life: Returning to Our Roots* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1986), 55.



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# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE Returning to Our Roots

## STUDY FOUR

### Handling the Scriptures Accurately

*Nehemiah 8:1–18; Matthew 15:1–14; 16:5–12*

*Our problem is not a lack of Bibles but a lack of people who carefully handle the Scriptures in their teaching.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' day devoted their lives to knowing and keeping every detail of the Mosaic law. People admired their spiritual zeal and considered their teaching as sacred as Scripture itself.

And yet, despite their strict regimen, extensive study, and expansive knowledge, the scribes and Pharisees mishandled the Word. They piled their own laws on top of God's law, and then they laid that cumbersome load on God's people, crushing them under a burden of impossible religious regulations. It was a classic example of spiritual abuse.

Spiritual abusers live on. They may be gifted communicators, seemingly brilliant theologians, or popular personalities. But just because a person can draw a large audience, doesn't mean he or she can teach Scripture accurately. Abusers can twist the meaning of the biblical text, sometimes without realizing it, and when they do, people are hurt.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll learn to handle the Scriptures accurately from a priest-turned-teacher named Ezra. Even if we never teach the Bible, Ezra's fine example of exposition shows us how it's done correctly so we can spot and avoid Scripture mishandling.



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## **Handling the Scriptures Accurately**

*Nehemiah 8:1–18; Matthew 15:1–14; 16:5–12*



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

For us to handle the Scriptures accurately, the Holy Spirit must “guide [us] into all truth” (John 16:13). We’d be lost in a maze of speculation without His illumination. So, as you open God’s Word, invite the Spirit to help you see the true meaning of the text, just as the psalmist prayed.

*Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your instructions. (Psalm 119:18)*



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

The historical setting of Ezra’s ministry is the period after the Jewish exile, when waves of Jews returned from Babylon to their homeland.

The Babylonians had destroyed Solomon’s original temple in 586 BC, so, under Zerubbabel’s leadership, the first group to return built a new temple, which was finished in 516 BC. Soon after, the Persian king Artaxerxes commissioned Ezra to lead a second group of Jews to Jerusalem, including Levites and priests, to reestablish worship. The king generously supplied Ezra with silver and gold from the royal treasury, along with grain, wine, oil, and “whatever the God of heaven demands for his Temple” (Ezra 7:23).

Imagine Ezra’s delight when he surveyed the bounty! “The gracious hand of our God was upon us,” Ezra joyfully declared as he led the caravan through the desert to Jerusalem (8:18). When Nehemiah returned with a third group of Jews and rebuilt the walls, the restoration of Jerusalem was complete. God had turned the wheels of world affairs to bring tens of thousands of Jews back to the land of promise.



## Handling the Scriptures Accurately

*Nehemiah 8:1–18; Matthew 15:1–14; 16:5–12*



### Observation: How to Handle the Scriptures Accurately

The people had a heart to obey God, but who would teach them God's commands? They had built the walls "with the help of [their] God" (Nehemiah 6:16); now the Jews turned to Ezra for help in building their lives with the Word of God.

*All the people assembled with a unified purpose at the square just inside the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had given for Israel to obey. (8:1)*

Ezra's message is one of the clearest examples in the Bible of genuine exposition of the Scriptures. Read the account in [Nehemiah 8:2–12](#) and observe the key components.

What is the first essential component in accurately handling the Scriptures in [8:3](#)?

*I don't begin preparing a lesson or sermon by reading the newspaper or a book. I read the Bible. What does it say? I read it aloud. I read repeatedly. I read with emphasis and feeling. I pause. I think. I pray. The focus of my concentration is the Book.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What does accurately handling the Scriptures include next, according to [8:4–6](#)?



GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE  
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STUDY FOUR

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Handling the Scriptures Accurately

*Nehemiah 8:1–18; Matthew 15:1–14; 16:5–12*

*They stood in reverence and in silence. This wasn't just a casual listening.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What element of accurately handling the Scriptures do you observe Ezra and the Levites modeling in [Nehemiah 8:7–8](#)?

*The desire of the careful student of Scripture is to understand what the passage meant at the time it was written and then make it meaningful today.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Handling the Scriptures accurately isn't complete until it includes what final component, modelled by the listeners in [8:9–12](#). Read [8:13–18](#), which goes into more detail.



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## Handling the Scriptures Accurately

*Nehemiah 8:1–18; Matthew 15:1–14; 16:5–12*



### Interpretation: Read, Explain, Respond

In the interpretation stage, we drill down into the meaning of the passage.

#### Reading and Respecting Scripture

Ezra's focus on Scripture started in his preparation, long before he stepped in front of his congregation. The book that bears his name, Ezra, reveals the man's personal life in the Word.

*Ezra had determined to study and obey the Law of the LORD and to teach those decrees and regulations to the people of Israel. (Ezra 7:10)*

Ezra wouldn't have thought of teaching others until he had first studied and obeyed the Law himself.<sup>1</sup> With this insight into Ezra's personal life, look back at how the people assembled as Ezra read Scripture in [Nehemiah 8:1–3](#). What principle can you draw from Ezra's preparation, his focus on Scripture, and the people's respect for the Word?

Thankfully, we have Bible study resources Ezra never dreamed of to help us stay true to Scripture. You can read Pastor Chuck Swindoll's list of favorite resources in the online article, "[Basic Bible Study Tools](#)," or watch the video, "[How to Use Bible Study Tools](#)," as Pastor Chuck discusses this subject.

#### Interpreting and Explaining Scripture

According to the New American Standard Bible, the Levites "read from the book . . . *translating* to give the sense so that [the people] understood the meaning" (Nehemiah 8:8 NASB emphasis added). The word, *translating*, in Hebrew can either refer to translating from one language to another or to explaining. Either way, the goals were clear communication and clear understanding of the meaning of the Scripture.



## Handling the Scriptures Accurately

*Nehemiah 8:1–18; Matthew 15:1–14; 16:5–12*

What principle do you glean from this central feature of exposition?

*When you study the Bible, look at the words. Pull out your dictionary. Examine the meaning of the words in context. Compare the words found in another place in Scripture to help enrich the meaning. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

### Responding to and Obeying Scripture

After Ezra's teaching, the people bowed down and worshiped the Lord; they shouted "Amen!" lifted their hands, wept, celebrated, and obeyed. What a response!

What was most striking to you about the people's response in [Nehemiah 8:6–18](#)? What principle can you conclude from this culminating aspect of accurately handling Scripture?

*Bible study is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end. The Jews heard what God said, and they did it. They wept. They changed, and they celebrated God.  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Handling the Scriptures Accurately

*Nehemiah 8:1–18; Matthew 15:1–14; 16:5–12*



### Correlation: Confronting Spiritual Abusers

Fast-forward from Ezra's day to Jesus' day and contrast Ezra's faithfulness to the Word with the scribes and Pharisees' abuses. How far these first-century Bible teachers had drifted! Jesus had to confront them on their poor handling of Scripture.

Which key element in Ezra's expositional ministry did Jesus point out in his confrontation of the Pharisees in *Matthew 9:13*?

In *12:3*?

In *15:7–9*?



## Handling the Scriptures Accurately

*Nehemiah 8:1–18; Matthew 15:1–14; 16:5–12*

In your own words, what was Jesus conveying in His rebuke?

*Just because people call themselves teachers of the Bible, don't believe everything they say. Just because they have great followings and people hang on their every word doesn't mean they're right. Be careful about people who adapt lines from the Scriptures to say what they want the passage to say. They miss the meaning of Scripture. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Application: Rules to Remember

Five rules of thumb make our study memorable. They focus on the *what*, *who*, *why*, *where*, and *when* of handling the Scriptures accurately.

1. Never forget *what* you're handling . . . God's Word. This will keep you *sensitive*.
2. Always remember *who* has the authority . . . the Lord. This will keep you *humble*.
3. Keep in mind *why* you are teaching . . . not to impress others or grind your own axe but to explain the meaning of the text. This will keep you *accurate*.
4. Think about *where* people are . . . their world. This will keep you *interesting*.
5. Focus on *when* the teaching ends . . . at the point of application. This will keep you *practical*.



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY FOUR

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

## Handling the Scriptures Accurately

*Nehemiah 8:1–18; Matthew 15:1–14; 16:5–12*

Slip these tips in your Bible and refer to them as you're studying or preparing to teach. You can also use them to evaluate the Bible-teaching you're receiving. You'll know if they are there because your heart will resonate with "amens" as you listen. When you truly understand God's Word, you'll long to respond with joyful celebration and obedience as the Jews did. Do you notice any of these guidelines present in your Bible teacher? Which ones?

Are any of these elements absent? Do you think you may be attached to a teacher who is mishandling the Word?

We don't often hear about spiritual abuse, but it is devastating and disillusioning for its victims. If you're suffering under a spiritual abuser, consult a trusted Christian counselor who can help you heal. Also, feel free to contact the [biblical counseling ministry](#) at Insight for Living Ministries to schedule a phone appointment with one of our pastors on staff. Help is near.



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## Handling the Scriptures Accurately

*Nehemiah 8:1–18; Matthew 15:1–14; 16:5–12*



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for the Scriptures that cause my heart to celebrate when I hear and understand. Guide me into the wonders of Your Word and fill my heart with a willingness to do what You say. Draw me nearer as I learn more and more of Your ways. In Jesus' name, amen.*

#### ENDNOTE

1. Learn more about the Bible-study method Pastor Chuck Swindoll uses and the basis of our *Searching the Scriptures* Bible studies on the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY FIVE

## Knowing God: Life's Major Pursuit

*Isaiah 6:1–5; Jeremiah 9:23–24; Daniel 4:33–35*

*Those who get serious about knowing God find that it alters their lifestyle and changes their whole reason for living.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**M**ANY people know God only as a caricature, not the real God. In his book, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll draws a sketch of the God you may picture.

Isn't it true, more often than not, that the God you picture in your mind is old, has a long beard—and maybe leans on a cane? Isn't that true? You picture Him standing in the North with His cheeks pushing out as He blows real hard, right? Sure you do. He wears a robe, has big toes, sandals. He's not too sure about modern things like nuclear physics . . . laser beams, and electronic computers. He's more of a kind old grandfather that is gonna be there when you need him . . . But He's sort of losing touch.<sup>1</sup>

Does this grandfather image of God flash through your mind sometimes? Usually, it does when we go through hard times and we wonder whether God is really able to handle our problems. Maybe He is a little out of touch, or maybe He's preoccupied with other things.

Certainly, we know facts about God. We may even be able to recall reading Bible verses that describe God as all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-wise. But when push comes to shove, do we know Him well enough to trust Him? Maybe not.

What would it be like to know God . . . really *know* Him? What benefits come from knowing Him? Knowing God truly can change your life, and in this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll learn how.



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## **Knowing God: Life's Major Pursuit**

*Isaiah 6:1–5; Jeremiah 9:23–24; Daniel 4:33–35*



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Begin by asking the Lord to reveal Himself. Perhaps this prayer captures your heart's desire.

*Father, I believe that You are with me even though I can't see or hear You. "You hold my right hand," the psalmist said (Psalm 73:23). I believe that's true, but I don't always feel connected to You. I long to know You on a deeper, personal level, like I know the people closest to me, only more so. Reveal the depths of Your character and nature to me through this study. In Jesus' name, amen.*



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

Following the Lord was the central focus of the Israelites when they entered the promised land. Over time, however, they strayed. Through Jeremiah, God pinpointed the root cause of their waywardness: "They do not know me" (Jeremiah 9:3). The Lord confronted their misplaced priorities through Jeremiah:

*This is what the LORD says:  
"Don't let the wise boast in their wisdom,  
or the powerful boast in their power,  
or the rich boast in their riches.  
But those who boast  
should boast in this alone:  
that they truly know me and understand that I am the LORD  
who demonstrates unfailing love  
and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth,  
and that I delight in these things.  
I, the LORD, have spoken." (Jeremiah 9:23–24)*

How can knowing God be more valuable than acquiring wisdom, power, and riches? We could list many reasons, but five stand out.



## Knowing God: Life's Major Pursuit

*Isaiah 6:1–5; Jeremiah 9:23–24; Daniel 4:33–35*



### Observation: Five Reasons for Knowing God

Read the verses under each point below more than once, linger over each key word, and ask the Lord for insight. Listening for God's voice in His Book helps you know Him more personally.

#### Knowing God Gives Me the Desire to Be Like Him

Read [Jeremiah 9:23–24](#) again in different versions. Pick your favorite version and try memorizing the verses. Reviewing this passage throughout your day will remind you what's truly important. What did the Lord say we should know about Him in 9:24? What virtues does He delight in?

How does His delight motivate you to emulate Him, like children wanting to please their father?



### Searching the Scriptures Biblical Insight

The attributes of God that, to a lesser degree, we can possess as humans are called “communicable” attributes. These include qualities such as love, creativity, goodness, mercy, justice, grace, mercy, and truthfulness. Through the Spirit's sanctifying power, expressing these virtues comes more naturally to us as we are transformed into Christlikeness.



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY FIVE

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

## Knowing God: Life's Major Pursuit

*Isaiah 6:1–5; Jeremiah 9:23–24; Daniel 4:33–35*

*The more I get to know God, the more I am equipped to be like Him. I discover He's holy, and I want to be holy. I discover He's in control, and I don't panic. I can calmly move through life. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

### Knowing God Reveals the Truth about Myself

In a vision, Isaiah saw the Lord in all His splendor. What was Isaiah's immediate response, according to *Isaiah 6:1–5*?

God's glory and transcendence sets Him apart from His creation. While we delight "in the Lord's perfections" (Psalm 27:4), our imperfections cry out, "I am doomed" (Isaiah 6:5). Seeing God's glory reveals our true condition. Why was this important for Isaiah?



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## **Knowing God: Life's Major Pursuit**

*Isaiah 6:1–5; Jeremiah 9:23–24; Daniel 4:33–35*

What did the Lord do for Isaiah that He does for us through Christ, according to *Isaiah 6:6–7*? What did Isaiah want his readers to know about their relationship with God?



### ***Searching the Scriptures* Biblical Insight**

The attributes of God that are His alone are called “incommunicable” attributes, such as glory, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, immutability, sovereignty, and transcendence. These attributes set God apart as God and cannot be shared.

*When you study the Lord, you discover He's holy and you're unholy. Something occurs in the contrast that causes His character to overshadow your need. The knowledge of the Holy One equips you to change. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

### **Knowing God Enables Me to Interpret My World**

Nebuchadnezzar was king of an immense empire. His lofty position inflated his ego, and he declared his kingdom to be “a display of [his] majestic splendor” (Daniel 4:30). How did God humble Nebuchadnezzar in *Daniel 4:31–33*? What did God want the king to know?



## Knowing God: Life's Major Pursuit

*Isaiah 6:1–5; Jeremiah 9:23–24; Daniel 4:33–35*

When Nebuchadnezzar came to his senses, what knowledge about God did he confess in [Daniel 4:34–35](#)?

*When you get ahold of the knowledge of God and see that He is in charge, you don't panic every time you read the newspaper. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

### Knowing God Makes Me Strong and Secure

Later in his book, Daniel painted a grim picture of end times when a future world leader would rage against God's people. And yet, what did Daniel say about those "who know their God" in [Daniel 11:32](#)?

*God is the sovereign of the universe and He's never once lost control. See the value of knowing God? See what it does to your perspective? You are calmer because the world isn't out of hand. He can take care of it. His kingdom will not fail! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

### Knowing God Introduces Me to the Eternal Dimension of My Existence

We arrive at the pinnacle of our list with this statement from Jesus:

*And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you have sent. (John 17:3)*



## **Knowing God: Life's Major Pursuit**

*Isaiah 6:1–5; Jeremiah 9:23–24; Daniel 4:33–35*

“Eternal life” is more than life in heaven. *It is life with God under His rule in His kingdom—now and forevermore.* What did Jesus teach about accepting His message and believing God in [John 5:24](#)? When does passing from “death to life” happen?

Sum up what you’ve observed about God in these Bible passages. What do you now *know* about God’s character and how to relate to Him?



### **Interpretation: What Knowing God Means and Doesn’t Mean**

The word for “know” in the Old Testament is *yada* in Hebrew, and in the New Testament, it is *ginosko* in Greek. Both words imply relational knowledge or knowing by personal experience in addition to knowing facts.

What’s missing when we know theology but don’t know God in this richer, biblical sense?



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY FIVE

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

## Knowing God: Life's Major Pursuit

*Isaiah 6:1–5; Jeremiah 9:23–24; Daniel 4:33–35*

Recall the Lord's complaint about His people through Jeremiah, "They do not know me" (Jeremiah 9:3). What did the Lord mean?

Knowing God intellectually should lead to knowing Him relationally. Consider Paul, a top-notch theologian whose intellect deepened his relationship with God. The more truths Paul learned about God, the more mysteries he realized he couldn't fully know—the trinity, God's sovereignty, His glory, and His majesty. He exclaimed,

*Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways! (Romans 11:33)*

How does knowing God intellectually and knowing God relationally work together to help you develop a deeper personal relationship with God?



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## **Knowing God: Life's Major Pursuit**

*Isaiah 6:1–5; Jeremiah 9:23–24; Daniel 4:33–35*



### **Application: Putting Knowledge into Life**

It is possible to trust God easily and naturally, just as you trust your spouse or closest friend, but we have to discard the caricatures of God and really *know* Him. Which of the five points about knowing God strikes you as most valuable? How can you orient your walk with God using this principle as a guide?

What is one attribute of God that you know by personal experience? How did you come to know God in this way?

With one voice, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel, and Jesus Himself urge us to know God. If they were speaking today, what encouragement might they give you in your current circumstance?



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY FIVE

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

## Knowing God: Life's Major Pursuit

*Isaiah 6:1–5; Jeremiah 9:23–24; Daniel 4:33–35*

Let's add one more voice to the chorus. The prophet Hosea also urges you to know the Lord as your life's major pursuit. Personalize Hosea 6:3 by reading the "we/us" as "I/me" and make it your concluding prayer.

*"Oh, that [I] might know the LORD!  
Let [me] press on to know him.  
He will respond to [me] as surely as the arrival of dawn  
or the coming of rains in early spring." (Hosea 6:3)*



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for shining Your light through my darkness and blessing my life with Your refreshing presence. I pledge myself to knowing You intimately so that trusting You becomes second nature. Help me not to depend upon my own smarts and resources, but to completely depend on Your wisdom and faithfulness. I make knowing You my major pursuit today and always. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life: Returning to Our Roots* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1986), 99.



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# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY SIX

## Loving God: Our Ultimate Response

*Psalms 18:46–49; 32:1–5; 37:1–9; 46:1–3*

*Walking with God is a day-by-day commitment that says, “Today I’m going to know God better. Today I’m going to love God more.”*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**K**NOWING who God is and how we relate to Him is foundational. Without that knowledge, we grope in the dark through a maze of meaningless pursuits. Knowledge, however, is only one side of the coin in our relationship with God.

Moses gave us the flip side in a creed that has been recited by Jews for thousands of years. The creed is called the Shema, which means “listen.” It begins,

*Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:4–5).*

Jesus called this command, “the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:37). No other response to God precedes or surpasses loving Him. It is absolutely essential in our relationship with Him. As our love for God increases, so does our desire to know Him better, which leads to greater love. The cycle of pursuing knowledge and responding with love continues as our relationship with God grows richer and deeper over a lifetime.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study traces love’s response to God recorded in the book of Psalms. We’ll look at God’s marvelous deeds in three psalms and then learn from David’s response of love in three more psalms. Few have loved God with all their heart, soul, and strength as much as David did, and he invites us to walk in his footsteps through his psalms.



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## Loving God: Our Ultimate Response

*Psalms 18:46–49; 32:1–5; 37:1–9; 46:1–3*



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

David's simple prayer in Psalm 18:1 captures the purity of his devotion. We'll look at more of his psalm later, but here is a good starting place for this study and whenever you open God's Word.

*I love you, LORD,  
you are my strength. (Psalm 18:1)*

Repeat David's prayer a few times and then pause in silence to let these words settle into your heart and soul.



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Ever since God freed His people from Egypt and led them to the promised land, the Israelites had experienced God's provision, protection, mercy, and faithful love. David and other poets set their praise to music in the book of Psalms. The psalms were written to be sung, so as you read them, try to imagine yourself in a worshipful setting with a congregation praising and petitioning the Lord together.



### Observation: God of Grace, Man of Gratitude

The psalms rang out a message to God's people like bells pealing in a cathedral tower: *Remember what God has done and trust Him.* Human ingenuity, weapons of war, clever scheming, or political power hadn't saved God's people in the past and wouldn't save them in the future. God alone was their refuge and strength.



**Loving God: Our Ultimate Response**

*Psalms 18:46–49; 32:1–5; 37:1–9; 46:1–3*

**God of Grace and Mercy**

In the chart below, read the verses listed and write down the compassionate actions from God that the people desperately needed.

Selections from Psalms	God's Compassionate Actions
<i>Psalms 31:1–4</i>	
<i>Psalms 31:9–15</i>	
<i>Psalms 37:1–9</i>	
<i>Psalms 46</i>	

*Trust God. Love God. He won't hang you out to dry. He knows you have integrity. Release your defenses and trust Him. That's the message of the psalms. No substitutes for God. No other refuge but the living God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

**Loving God: Our Ultimate Response**

*Psalm 18:46–49; 32:1–5; 37:1–9; 46:1–3*

**Man of Gratitude and Love**

When we embrace God’s compassion, grateful love for Him flows in return—a response David modeled in the psalms listed in the following chart. We’ve included the likely backdrop for each psalm. Read the verses and write down how David’s circumstances led to his response.

Psalm	Backdrop	David’s Response to His Circumstance
<i>Psalm 18:1–6, 46–49</i>	God rescued David from his enemies and Saul.	
<i>Psalm 32:1–7</i>	God forgave David’s sins of adultery and murder.	
<i>Psalm 40:1–4</i>	God lifted David out of his despair.	

*The heart that loves God bursts forth in songs of praise. It is wonderful when your heart is so in love with your Lord that the only way to express it is to sing.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

## **Loving God: Our Ultimate Response**

*Psalm 18:46–49; 32:1–5; 37:1–9; 46:1–3*



### **Interpretation: Why Loving God Is the Greatest Commandment**

David expressed love for God by telling God he loved Him, crying out to the Lord (*Psalm 18:6*), confessing his sin (*32:1*), hiding himself in the Lord's protection (*32:7*), waiting on Him (*40:1*), and trusting Him (*40:4*). What a close relationship David had with his Lord!

Jesus ranked the command to love God higher than all other commands—higher than commands against idolatry, murder, stealing, adultery, lying, or coveting. Loving God is greater than all the ceremonial commands for ritual purification and the whole sacrificial system.

Why do you think the command to love God comes before all other Christian duties—before attending church, giving, or even loving others?

*God wants us to say, “I love you, Father. I trust You. I cling to You.” The better you get to know your God, the more comfortable you will be with that kind of response.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



### **Correlation: Love and Obey**

The people of Israel had a history of heart problems. They would go through the religious motions without love for God, genuine obedience, or actual life change. How did Jesus get to the heart of the Pharisees' problem in *Matthew 15:7–9*?



## Loving God: Our Ultimate Response

*Psalm 18:46–49; 32:1–5; 37:1–9; 46:1–3*

How did Jesus connect love with obedience in *John 14:15, 23–24*?

What principle about knowing God, loving God, and obeying God can you write to conclude your study?

*When you go through affliction and feel God's presence, what happens in the process? You and your Lord become close, so close it really can't be explained in human terms. You link yourself to the Almighty, and you walk together. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Application: Those Who Truly Love God

God knows that a heart filled with love toward Him provides the perfect growing conditions for obedience to bloom. Those who love God experience God like David did. They know God's power because God has delivered them. They know God's peace because God has forgiven them. They know God's presence because God was near them in their affliction. They respond with abiding, deep love for God that no power on earth or heaven can take away.



## **Loving God: Our Ultimate Response**

*Psalm 18:46–49; 32:1–5; 37:1–9; 46:1–3*

What experiences have you had with the goodness, grace, and protection of God? How have these experiences inspired your love for Him?

Struggling with fear, guilt, or weakness of faith can weigh you down. Which of David's ways of living for God would you like to emulate to lift you up right now?

How can you grow your love for God? By meditating on the Psalms as you did in this study, taking God at His word, recalling God's grace in your life, and simply saying the words, "I love you, LORD. You are my strength" (Psalm 18:1). Love is the first and greatest command because from it springs a lifelong walk with God that is secure, intimate, and a fountain of everlasting joy.

*Oh, the joys of those who trust the LORD! (Psalm 40:4).*



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

*Father, thank You for the closeness You offer me. You are the Maker, holy and separate from Your creation. And yet, You come near through Your Son and the indwelling Holy Spirit. My body is Your temple, and I love to dwell in Your presence every moment of every day. In Jesus' name, amen.*



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY SEVEN

## Mary's Little Lamb

*Luke 2:1–20*

*Jesus is undiminished deity and true humanity forever in one body from conception throughout eternity. He is God's gift too wonderful for words.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**I**t was a rare moment when the apostle Paul couldn't find the right words to express spiritual truth, but when he put his pen to parchment to describe God's gift of grace in Jesus, no word came to mind.

"Thank God for. . . ." Paul must have paused to contemplate what to write next. The great theologian's vocabulary could have filled a dictionary, but his mind was a dry inkwell from which to draw words to describe the wonder of Jesus. So Paul penned, "Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

What puts Jesus beyond description? Certainly, one reason is His divine nature. In Jesus, whose birth we celebrate every Christmas, "lives all the fullness of God in a human body" (Colossians 2:9). Jesus "radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God" (Hebrews 1:3).

Who can begin to describe Jesus—undiminished deity and true humanity existing together in the fragile frame of a little baby? Amazing! Jesus is the ultimate gift of grace from the supreme Giver—a gift too wonderful for words.



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## **Mary's Little Lamb**

*Luke 2:1–20*



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Sometimes a picture can communicate what words fail to express. For centuries, artists have attempted to capture the wonder of the nativity. One of the most touching paintings is *Adoration of the Shepherds* by Gerard van Honthorst, which is exhibited at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne, Germany.

Linger over the range of emotions the faces express—delight, hope, awe, love. Notice how all the figures orient toward the baby who is the focal point of the scene.

In the space below, express to the Lord your desire to make Jesus the focal point of your life, and ask God to help you draw closer to His Son through the narrative of Jesus' birth.



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

To step into *Luke 2:1–20* is to enter a world of wondrous miracles. Read the passage as if for the first time. Watch for signs of the invisible hand of God and the interplay between heaven and earth. View the contrasts between global edicts and local events, public mayhem and maternal tenderness, pastoral tranquility and explosions of celestial light and sound. Write down any phrases that stand out as central to the passage.



## Mary's Little Lamb

*Luke 2:1–20*



### Observation: Setting, Birth, Responses

The more times you read a passage, the more you see. Now that you have an overview, look at it again as if through a magnifying glass, examining the setting, who is talking, and the action. Watch for themes, contrasts and comparisons, metaphors, and repeated phrases.

#### The Setting—Luke 2:1–5

Having already placed His divine seed in Mary's womb, God planted an idea in Caesar's mind that would begin to turn the giant wheel of world events. What details did Luke include in [Luke 2:1–3](#)? Why did Luke lay this groundwork before describing Jesus' birth?

What key points was Luke making about Jesus' lineage and Joseph's relationship with Mary in [2:4–5](#)?

*In perfect harmony with God's sovereign plan, Mary went alongside her husband to Bethlehem. Luke used the word, "engaged," to remind us that Joseph has not touched Mary sexually even though they are husband and wife. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Mary's Little Lamb

*Luke 2:1–20*

### The Birth—Luke 2:6–7

Notice how Luke narrowed the focus. He took his readers from the marble throne room of Caesar, to the teeming masses of humanity, to an unknown couple, to an unborn baby hidden in the darkness of his mother's womb.

What details did Luke give about the modest circumstances of Jesus' birth in [Luke 2:6–7](#)? What subtle implications do you think Luke was making about the purpose of Jesus' coming?

*For the first time, at Jesus' birth, God breathed earth's air with human lungs and made sounds through human vocal chords. God had taken on human flesh.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

### The Responses—Luke 2:8–20

Few on earth knew that the long-awaited King had just been born—the One who would establish an eternal reign of celestial magnitude. How did the angel of the Lord announce the royal birth in [Luke 2:8–12](#)? What important details did the messenger from heaven give the shepherds?



## Mary's Little Lamb

*Luke 2:1–20*

What praise did the angelic host give in [Luke 2:13–14](#)? Step back and view the scene in your mind's eye. What contrasts do you see that heighten the impact of the moment?

*Angels are timeless and ageless. The angels were there when Jesus created the earth. How appropriate that they were present at His birth. The same angels who sang at creation were there to sing at the incarnation. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

The news of the ages tumbled like jewels from heaven into the shepherds' calloused hands. What did the shepherds immediately do, according to [2:15–18](#)?

Review the passage and count the number of times “manger” is mentioned. What do you think is the significance of this repeated detail?



## Mary's Little Lamb

*Luke 2:1–20*

In [Luke 2:19–20](#), Luke concluded with what tender insight into Mary's heart and what final word about the shepherds?

*The first evangelists were shepherds, garden-variety people like you and me. They told everyone they met. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: The Meaning of Jesus' Birth

In *interpretation*, we'll examine the meaning of Jesus' birth. View Luke's account against the prophetic backdrop of [Isaiah 9:2, 6–7](#) and [Micah 5:2](#)—which Luke's readers would likely have known. In what ways did Jesus' birth fulfill these prophecies? How do we better understand Jesus' identity based on these prophecies?



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY SEVEN

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

## Mary's Little Lamb

*Luke 2:1–20*

Why did the angels announce the birth of the King to shepherds? What did their lowly place in society imply about the newborn King's heart?

In addition, what are the connections between the shepherds and the prophecies of the coming King in *Isaiah 40:9–11* and *Ezekiel 34:22–23*?

Reflect on the responses of the angels, the shepherds, and Mary toward the birth of Jesus. What principles for us can you draw from their examples?

*Mary's response was wonderment and silence. In the twilight hours, she pondered all the things that had taken place as she tucked Jesus in for His first night's sleep.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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## **Mary's Little Lamb**

*Luke 2:1–20*



### **Correlation: The Response of Others**

As we correlate Luke's nativity account, we find other ways people responded to Jesus. Read Simeon's and Anna's encounters with the Child in [Luke 2:25–38](#). How do they model right responses toward Jesus?

Compare Simeon and Anna with the worship of the Magi in [Matthew 2:1–12](#). What do you glean from their example?

*What's your response? Now that the gift has been unwrapped and has smiled at you today, who do you say He is? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### **Application: Receive His Gift**

After contemplating the nativity, our hearts yearn to respond, yet how difficult it is sometimes to verbalize the full spectrum of our emotions. Like Paul, we may be at a loss for words. Simply imagine sitting by Mary as she ponders the wonder of Jesus.



## **Mary's Little Lamb**

*Luke 2:1–20*

She has protected and nourished this life inside her for nine months. Finally, she gets to meet her intimate stranger face-to-face. She cups His doll fingers in her hands; she lingers over his delicate lips, His pudgy chin, His tuft of newborn hair. Then the Child's eyelids slowly part, and she gazes into pools as soft and deep as the starlit night. The angel's message, the shepherd's report . . . it all races through her mind . . . that she is cradling deity, the Lord of the universe, her own Creator.

Do you need a tangible expression of God's love? Ask Mary to let you hold her Baby. Coo at Him until He gives you a smile. Feel His tiny hand reach for your cheek. Consider how He gave up eternity to come to earth. How it must have wrenched the Father's heart to send Him to such a hostile place. That's why the gift is so unspeakably precious—because the cost was so great. Jesus is God's greatest demonstration of love for you.

Won't you receive His gift? Take a quiet moment of worship as you treasure Your Savior, Messiah, and Lord.



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

*Father, others may have no room, but my heart swings open to welcome You. I only wish I could fly to the heavens to worship with the angels. Or run with the shepherds to see Your Son's face and spread Your news. Or sit quietly with Mary and ponder Your beauty. Perhaps in eternity, I will. Thank You for caring enough to come near. In Jesus' name, amen.*



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY EIGHT

## When the God-Man Walked Among Us

*Matthew 14:22–33; Mark 1:40–42; Luke 8:22–25; John 11:30–44*

*It's important that you know who Jesus is. Otherwise, you won't know how to interpret what He has done, and you will never be able to give yourself to Him.*  
—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**W**<sup>HO</sup> is Jesus?

The angels announced Him as “the Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord” (Luke 2:11). The magi revered Him as “the king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2). John the Baptizer declared Him, “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29). God the Father pronounced Him, “my dearly loved Son” (Matthew 3:17). When Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do you say I am?” Peter knew the answer: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:15–16).

*Savior. Lord. Messiah. King. Lamb. Son of God.* The facets of Jesus’ identity sparkled with the clarity of a flawless diamond; however, not everyone who encountered Jesus had the spiritual eyesight to see His true worth.

His hometown neighbors scoffed, “He’s just the carpenter’s son” (Matthew 13:55). “He’s out of his mind,” some family members accused (Mark 3:21). “He’s possessed by Satan,” the religious leaders smirked.



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## **When the God-Man Walked Among Us**

*Matthew 14:22–33; Mark 1:40–42; Luke 8:22–25; John 11:30–44*

Everywhere Jesus went, the question on everyone’s mind was, “Who is this?” (Matthew 21:10). Public opinion shifted with the wind. Some tried to push Him to lead their revolution and “force him to be their king” (John 6:15). Others rumored that He was a prophet back from the dead—maybe Elijah, Jeremiah, or John the Baptist (Matthew 16:14).

Jesus, however, left no doubt about who He was. This *Searching the Scriptures* study follows Jesus as He clearly demonstrated His true identity as God in the flesh, the God-man who walked among us.



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Open your study with prayer.

*Father, in a world of vacillating viewpoints, take me by the hand and lead me to the truth. Help me hear Jesus’ words accurately, and open my eyes to the beauty of His nature so that I can more fully give myself to Him. In His name, amen.*



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

In the previous study, we witnessed the miracle of the incarnation, when God’s Son, who has always existed, took on human flesh and “made his home among us” (John 1:14). Jesus ate, slept, felt pain—all things humans do. And yet, He *also* did things that only God could do. As God in the flesh, Jesus often expressed His humanity and divinity together. Let’s flip through the gospels to four examples in which we find Jesus’ deity and humanity on full display.



**When the God-Man Walked Among Us**

*Matthew 14:22–33; Mark 1:40–42; Luke 8:22–25; John 11:30–44*



**Observation: Four Examples of Jesus’ Humanity and Deity**

In the following charts, closely read the passage in the heading and write down your observations of Jesus’ humanity and deity. This side-by-side comparison illustrates the ways in which Jesus’ human nature “rubbed shoulders” with His divine nature, making Him exactly who His Father and the angels said He was.

On His Knees and on the Water <i>Matthew 14:22–33</i>	
Evidence of Jesus’ Human Nature	Evidence of Jesus’ Divine Nature

Feeling Compassion for a Man with Leprosy <i>Mark 1:40–42</i>	
Evidence of Jesus’ Human Nature	Evidence of Jesus’ Divine Nature



**When the God-Man Walked Among Us**

*Matthew 14:22–33; Mark 1:40–42; Luke 8:22–25; John 11:30–44*

Asleep in a Storm <i>Luke 8:22–25</i>	
Evidence of Jesus' Human Nature	Evidence of Jesus' Divine Nature

Bringing Lazarus Back to Life <i>John 11:30–44</i>	
Evidence of Jesus' Human Nature	Evidence of Jesus' Divine Nature

Sum up your observations in the space below. What stands out about Jesus' human nature? His divine nature?



## When the God-Man Walked Among Us

*Matthew 14:22–33; Mark 1:40–42; Luke 8:22–25; John 11:30–44*

*Only God walks on water. Only God cleanses leprosy. Only God calms the sea. Only God raises the dead, and at the resurrection, He will! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: Two Natures, One Person

In *interpretation*, we seek to understand the meaning of the passages we observed. How do Jesus' two natures exist together? Wouldn't being God make Jesus less human? On the other hand, wouldn't being human make Jesus less God?

Theologians who have wrestled with these questions have concluded that when Jesus, who always existed as God, took on human flesh, His two natures became inseparable. And yet, Jesus' divine nature and human nature are distinct. They exist together unmixed and undiluted—two natures united forever in His one Person.

Read more about Christ's nature in your Bible dictionary or read the articles on the [hypostatic union](#) and the [incarnation](#) at the Christian website, [gotquestions.org](#). Summarize what you learn about Jesus' identity as the God-man in the space below.



### Correlation: The Reason Jesus Came

In *correlation*, we look at other passages to elaborate upon the truths we studied. We know who Jesus is: God in the flesh. But why did He come?



## When the God-Man Walked Among Us

*Matthew 14:22–33; Mark 1:40–42; Luke 8:22–25; John 11:30–44*

Read *Hebrews 9:13–15* and *1 Peter 1:18–20* and write down the reasons the Son had to take on flesh.

Jesus did what only God could do. He walked on water, healed diseases, calmed the stormy sea, and even raised the dead. But He also did what only God *in human flesh* could do—obey the commands of Scripture without fault, bear sin’s judgment as the perfect sacrifice, and rise from the dead to give hope beyond the grave. The God-man who walked among us is the only One who can save the world.

*Jesus Christ, who is the God-man, was nailed to the cross and bodily raised from the dead so that you can have a relationship with Him by faith. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Application: Praise the One Who Bore Our Sin

How does the truth that Jesus is God inspire you to trust Him today?



**GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**  
**Returning To Our Roots**  
**STUDY EIGHT**

**SEARCHING**  
**THE**  
**SCRIPTURES**  
**STUDY**

**When the God-Man Walked Among Us**

*Matthew 14:22–33; Mark 1:40–42; Luke 8:22–25; John 11:30–44*

How does the truth that Jesus is God *in the flesh* help you draw close to Him in His humanity?

Close this study by following the example of the disciples when Jesus saved Peter from the waves.

*When they climbed back into the boat, the wind stopped. Then the disciples worshiped him. “You really are the Son of God!” they exclaimed. (Matthew 14:32–33)*

Make the blank below a sacred space for expressing your worship to the One who commands the sea . . . yet weeps beside you when storms wash over your heart.



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# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY EIGHT

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

## When the God-Man Walked Among Us

*Matthew 14:22–33; Mark 1:40–42; Luke 8:22–25; John 11:30–44*

Jesus' titles convey His mission well—*Savior, Lord, Messiah, King, Lamb, Son of God*. Let Paul's praise of Jesus in Philippians 2:6–11 fill the cathedral of your soul as you worship the Lord.

*Though he was God,  
he did not think of equality with God  
as something to cling to.  
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges,  
he took the humble position of a slave  
and he was born as a human being.  
When he appeared in human form,  
he humbled himself in obedience to God  
and died a criminal's death on a cross.  
Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor  
and gave him the name above all other names,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.*



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, I am in awe of Your Son, who rules as Creator and King yet who took on human flesh to bear my sin. Knowing who He is, I understand better what He did and why. And so, I give myself to Him as my Savior and Lord, the King who exchanged His glory for my shame and now sits once again in glory, forever. For Him, I live. In His name, amen.*



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# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY NINE

## Changing Lives Is Jesus' Business

*John 4:7–34, 39–42; 9:1–38; 20:24–28*

*God is in the process of shaping us, remaking us, and molding us like a potter with clay.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE work begins with a formless lump of clay. The potter kneads the clay like dough, washing it with water and removing hard bits as he or she pushes and stretches it. When the lump is pliable and smooth, the potter drops the lump on a wheel and sets it spinning.

From the clay's perspective, the work must seem pointless. Why all the pressing and pulling, cleaning and spinning? The potter, however, sees what the clay cannot imagine. As the wheel turns, the potter applies the pressure that experienced hands know, and the lump rises into a shape. A cup, jar, pitcher, pot, or vase—whatever vessel the potter wills. A marvelous transformation occurs as what was once formless becomes a beautiful, functional work of art.

Like a potter, God is shaping us according to His will. He sees the potential in our raw form. He presses and kneads us, cuts out the sharp stones and washes us until we are soft and malleable.

Unlike clay, however, we have wills of our own. We can push back against the Potter. Even so, He does not give up on us. His firm and patient hands press and shape us until we finally trust Him and let Him form us into masterpieces that bring glory to His name. Such is the nature of God's skillful artistry of changing lives—which was beautifully expressed in the ministry of Jesus.



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## **Changing Lives Is Jesus' Business**

*John 4:7–34, 39–42; 9:1–38; 20:24–28*



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Begin this *Searching the Scriptures* study in prayer.

*Father, I want to be pliable, but sometimes I resist Your hand—perhaps because I am afraid of change or because I struggle to trust Your intentions. Through this study, reveal Your heart and give me a glimpse of Your plan so that I can relax in Your will. In Jesus' name, amen.*



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

In this study, we'll observe and interpret passages about God's transformational work. And then we'll look at examples of how Jesus as God-in-the-flesh did that *same kind of work* during His ministry. If you need help with interpretation, consult a study Bible or commentary. For an online resource, we recommend [netbible.org](https://www.netbible.org). Simply select the book and chapter of the Bible passage and click on the tab, "Constable's Notes," for the commentary.

*The key to life is change. When I meet people who have walked through valleys of hardship, I search for the reason they hang on and keep growing. The reason is the hope of change, the inner conviction that God is at work changing them. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*





### **Observation and Interpretation: God's Work of Transformation**

In the charts following, write down in the left column what you see in each set of verses, and in the right column, record the meaning.



## Changing Lives Is Jesus' Business



*John 4:7–34, 39–42; 9:1–38; 20:24–28*

<p>God's Work of Transformation</p> <p>Old Testament</p>	
<p>Scripture opens with God sculpting what was “formless and empty” into a radiant paradise (<i>Genesis 1</i>). His transformative work continued in the lives of people and nations, which we read about in the following Old Testament passages.</p>	
 Observation:	 Interpretation:
<p>1a. Read <i>1 Samuel 10:1–9</i>. After Samuel anointed Saul as king, what change did God perform in Saul? What phrases stand out?</p>	<p>1b. What is the Spirit's role in transformation during the era in which Saul lived?</p>
<p>2a. Read <i>Proverbs 21:1</i>. What does this verse say?</p>	<p>2b. What principle does this verse teach?</p>
<p>3a. Read <i>Isaiah 64:8</i>. Who is God to His people and what does He do?</p>	<p>3b. What does this verse teach about God's character, His work, and our response?</p>
<p>4a. Read <i>Jeremiah 18:1–6</i>. What do these verses say about God's role and work?</p>	<p>4b. What prerogatives does God have as the potter?</p>

*You may be on the potter's wheel, and it's painful. It's no fun. You feel like a shapeless mass, and you can't understand the purpose. Trust the Father. He's changing you. He knows what He's doing. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

## Changing Lives Is Jesus' Business

*John 4:7–34, 39–42; 9:1–38; 20:24–28*

God's Work of Transformation New Testament	
Take a look at how the New Testament authors described God's transformational work.	
 Observation:	 Interpretation:
1a. Read <a href="#">Romans 8:26–31</a> . What does the Spirit do? What is the goal? What phrases stand out?	1b. Summarize what this passage teaches regarding God's desire for us, the Spirit's work in us, and our identity?
2a. Read <a href="#">1 Corinthians 15:51–52</a> . What do you observe? What words are repeated?	2b. What does this passage communicate about the future? What hope does it reveal?
3a. Read <a href="#">Ephesians 2:10</a> . What does this passage say about who we are and our purpose?	3b. What does it mean to be created "anew in Christ Jesus"?
4a. Read <a href="#">Philippians 1:6</a> . What progression do you see in this verse? What key words?	4b. What principles do you glean about God and about His work?

*God is working. We are His craft. He is shaping and molding and making us like He wants us to become. He's never been known to walk away from an individual and say, "He or she is too stubborn." He will complete the job of changing us. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Changing Lives Is Jesus' Business

*John 4:7–34, 39–42; 9:1–38; 20:24–28*



### Correlation: Jesus' Ministry of Transformation

Turning to the gospels, we recognize the Potter's skill in the hands of Jesus as Jesus lovingly sculpted masterpieces out of the raw material of humanity. In the following chart, summarize three accounts of Jesus changing lives. *Look at the previous charts for inspiration on the principles Jesus illustrates.*

Changing a Wayward Woman <i>John 4:1–42</i>	
Summary of the Account	Key Principles

Changing a Blind Beggar <i>John 9:1–38</i>	
Summary of the Account	Key Principles



**Changing Lives Is Jesus' Business**

*John 4:7–34, 39–42; 9:1–38; 20:24–28*

Changing a Discouraged Disciple <i>John 20:19–28</i>	
Summary of the Account	Key Principles

*The One who changes people is committed to you as much as He was committed to the woman at the well, the blind beggar, and the disciple who doubted. He will not give up. He will change you. Won't you let Him? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

 **Application: Life on the Potter's Wheel**

What have we discovered about life on the Potter's wheel from God's transformational ministry through Jesus? At least five applications emerge.

1. *It's Christ's job to bring change.* People can't change people. Our job is to love, encourage, be truthful, and support people through the transformational process.
2. *Change can come quickly, but usually change takes time.* Don't get discouraged if change comes slowly.
3. *Life on the wheel can be disorienting.* Like Thomas, we may struggle to make sense of what Jesus is doing. Stay near Him until your eyes are opened.
4. *Jesus stays at the work.* The Potter's hands never lose touch as they gently shape our hearts. Be encouraged.
5. *The goal is to be conformed to the image of Christ.* We are God's masterwork, created as image-bearers of Christ to do the good He designed for us before we were born. Stay focused on Christ.

## **Changing Lives Is Jesus' Business**

*John 4:7–34, 39–42; 9:1–38; 20:24–28*

What other applications from this study did you discover?

Which of these scriptural truths soaks into your soul the deepest? Why does it mean so much to you?

What new perspective or encouragement can you take with you into your week? What action might you take?

Malleable, pliable, and submissive. These are the qualities the Potter looks for in His clay. For us, it means patience, obedience, and trust. Let your spirit yield to His hands as He molds the raw substance of your life into His masterpiece, wonderfully crafted for work in His kingdom.



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

*Father, thank You for never giving up on me. You continue to do Your work, even when I resist. When I slump in despair or tear away in rebellion, You patiently reshape me and try again. Thank You for Your gentle yet firm touch. I yield today to Your hand. In Jesus' name, amen.*



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY TEN

## The Spirit Who Is Not a Ghost

*John 16:6–14*

*The most powerful force in your life as a Christian is something you can't see.*  
—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**I**n the Scriptures, the Hebrew word for *spirit* is *ruach*, and the Greek word is *pneuma*. These Greek and Hebrew words can also mean “air,” “wind,” or “breath,” which are fitting metaphors of the Holy Spirit.

Like *air*, the Holy Spirit is invisible. No one can see or touch the Spirit, yet we know He exists and is a dynamic force. Like *wind* that “blows wherever it wants” (John 3:8), the Spirit has His way and can’t be controlled or manipulated. Like *breath* that fills our lungs, the Spirit fills our being, giving us spiritual life. John wrote, “God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us” (1 John 4:13).

And yet, the Holy Spirit is much more than an intangible, invisible force. He is a Person, one of the three Persons of the godhead, the same in substance as the Father and the Son yet distinct in His personality and role.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we’ll look to Jesus to help us understand the special role of the Spirit in our walk with God. Who better to introduce us to the Holy Spirit than Jesus, the One who knows the Spirit best and makes our relationship with Him possible? Let’s listen to what Jesus has to say.



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## **The Spirit Who Is Not a Ghost**

*John 16:6–14*



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

One vital function of the Holy Spirit is helping us understand Scripture. As you open the Word, invite the Spirit to give you insight.

*Father, by the Spirit You have provided through the blood of Christ's redemption, open my eyes to the truth in Your Word. Fill my mind and my heart with the wonders of Your grace and power and help me walk closer to You in the power of the Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.*



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

On the last night of Jesus' earthly ministry, Jesus explained to His disciples the Spirit's new role in their lives. In that intense moment, the beleaguered disciples couldn't grasp the full implications of what Jesus was saying. Their hearts were breaking over Jesus' news that He would be leaving.



### **Observation: The Holy Spirit's Unique Role**

Try to put yourself in the scene of the lamplit upper room. Pull up a cushion beside the disciples who had just eaten what would be their last meal with Jesus before the cross. Feel the heaviness of their sorrow, confusion, and fear as they react to what Jesus was saying.

### **Persecution and Promise—John 16:1–7**

What warning did Jesus give the disciples in *John 16:1–4*?



## The Spirit Who Is Not a Ghost

*John 16:6–14*

What reassurance did He give in *John 16:5–7*?

*In His earthly body, Jesus could only be in one place at one time. When the Holy Spirit came, He would be everywhere at once. Furthermore, because the disciples would have to trust the Spirit they couldn't see, their faith would be strengthened.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

### The Holy Spirit's Ministry in the World—John 16:8–11

In their grief, the disciples felt only *loss* over Jesus leaving, but Jesus tried to help them see the *gain* of the Spirit coming. When the disciples went into the world after Jesus was gone, what crucial ministries would the Holy Spirit perform among unbelievers, according to *John 16:8–11*?

*My responsibility is to tell everybody that Jesus died for them and that forgiveness and a relationship with God is available through His Son, if they will only believe. I don't have to convince them they're lost. That's the Spirit's job.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## The Spirit Who Is Not a Ghost

*John 16:6–14*

### The Holy Spirit's Ministry in Believers—John 16:12–15

What crucial ministries would the Holy Spirit have in believers, according to *John 16:12–15*?

*If you are ever in a ministry that glorifies itself, the Spirit of God is not in that ministry. If the leader is getting the glory, the Spirit isn't empowering his or her leadership. Mark it down. The Spirit glorifies Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



#### Interpretation: Functions of the Holy Spirit

In the New Living Translation of *John 16:7*, Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as “the Advocate.” The Greek word is *parakletos*, or paraclete. Finding a suitable equivalent for this word in English is difficult. What stands out to you about the word as you see it translated in other *versions* of the Bible?

The Greek word is made up of *para*, which means “alongside,” and *kletos*, which means “called.” So, the Paraclete is called alongside believers as an advocate to help, counsel, comfort, strengthen, and intercede. His ministry is truly multifaceted.

Jesus was our paraclete before the Spirit. Jesus bore our sins, was resurrected, and ascended into heaven. The Holy Spirit took over as “another Advocate” (John 14:16), but in a different role.



## The Spirit Who Is Not a Ghost

*John 16:6–14*

Jesus said, “it is best for you that I go away” (John 16:7). What is the Holy Spirit able to do for us that Jesus, in His earthly flesh, could not do? Reflect on the *action words* you observe in [John 16:1–15](#), and explain what Jesus meant.

How did the survival and growth of the early church depend on these vital functions of the Spirit?

How does your survival and growth depend on the Spirit today?

*The Holy Spirit matures us. He nurtures us. He comforts us when we're fractured with fear. He tells us there's hope when we can't see the end of the tunnel and gives us a reason to go on. He guides us into all truth. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## The Spirit Who Is Not a Ghost

*John 16:6–14*



### Correlation: More Functions of the Holy Spirit

In *John 14:16*, Jesus gave us a glimpse into the inner workings of the godhead. What do you learn about the relationship between the Father, Son, and Spirit? What unique identity and function does the Holy Spirit fill?

The Holy Spirit is not “energy” or some cosmic “force,” but a Person to whom we can relate just as we relate to the Father and the Son. Also, He is active and involved in our lives, guiding us into truth and disclosing God’s will. According to the following verses, what else does the Spirit help us do and be?

*Acts 1:8:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Romans 7:6:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Galatians 5:16:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Ephesians 1:13–14:* \_\_\_\_\_

*2 Timothy 1:14:* \_\_\_\_\_

*The Holy Spirit holds you until Christ comes and secures your destiny, ushering you into eternity. I call that powerful! In the meantime, He is ready to work and move and transform your life. You have His power, waiting to be used. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **The Spirit Who Is Not a Ghost**

*John 16:6–14*



### **Application: The Holy Spirit at Work in Me**

Let's pack up our study into four parcels of truth to take with us today.

1. *Because the Spirit is a relatable Person, He heals our relationships with others.* He melts our pride, cools our anger, and helps us experience true fellowship together in the Spirit.
2. *Because the Spirit is active and involved, He comforts us in our sorrows and guides us in our pursuits.* Every day, He leads us in God's path.
3. *Because the Spirit is real and relevant, He gives us power and perseverance.* He helps us in our weakness by accomplishing more than we could ever accomplish on our own.
4. *Because the Spirit is God, He controls our circumstances and transforms our lives.* He prays for us with inexpressible groanings, shaping us in harmony with God's will.

What new truth about the Holy Spirit's role in your life have you discovered through this study?

In what current situation or relationship do you need His power and presence?



## **The Spirit Who Is Not a Ghost**

*John 16:6–14*

What will you do differently today because of what you know about the Spirit's role in your life?

We can't see the Spirit, but we certainly can see His handiwork. He opens our eyes to truth, stirs our hearts with love for the lost, protects us from evil, restores relationships, draws us close to Christ, gives us courage to go on, prays for us when we don't know how to pray . . . the ways are many! He truly is the Advocate whom Jesus knew we needed.



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

*Father, fill me with the Holy Spirit. Melt my proud and stubborn heart. Mold me through His power into Your will. Use me as only the Spirit can, to accomplish what only the Spirit can do, so that Christ receives all the glory. In Jesus' name, amen.*



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY ELEVEN

#### From Creation to Corruption

*Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15–17; 3:6–13; Romans 3:9–18*

*God created humans unlike anything else He created. Humans have the image of God stamped on them.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**W**HEN God created the heavens and the earth, He simply spoke the words, and the universe came to be.

“Let there be light,” He said, and light penetrated the darkness (Genesis 1:3). “Let there be a space between the waters,” and the sky was formed (1:6). “Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place,” and dry land appeared (1:9).

With each creative act, the master Artist transformed order out of chaos, shaping what was “formless and empty” into perfectly symmetrical parts. On the ground, He made “seed-bearing plants, and trees with seed-bearing fruit.” (1:10). Into space, He flung the stars, the sun, and the moon (1:14–18). He supplied the oceans with “great sea creatures” and fish; He filled the skies with “every sort of bird”; and He stocked the land with “every sort of animal” (1:21, 25). He made living things able to reproduce new life “according to their kind” (1:11–12, 24–25).

God pronounced His creation good, but it was incomplete. With whom would He share His masterpiece? Who would live in the paradise He made to appreciate it and take care of it in a close relationship with Him? On the sixth day of creation, God made human beings, and the reasons for God’s creative work became clear. God created the heavens and the earth to reflect His glory and to express His love.



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## **From Creation to Corruption**

*Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15–17; 3:6–13; Romans 3:9–18*



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Join the psalmist in praise of your Creator as you draw near to Him through His Word.

*O LORD, our LORD, your majestic name fills the earth!  
Your glory is higher than the heavens. . . .  
When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—  
the moon and the stars you set in place—  
what are mere mortals that you should think about them  
human beings that you should care for them?  
Yet you made them only a little lower than God  
and crowned them with glory and honor.  
You gave them charge of everything you made . . .  
the flocks and the herds  
and all the wild animals,  
the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea,  
and everything that swims the ocean currents.  
O LORD, our LORD, your majestic name fills the earth! (Psalm 8:1, 3–6, 9)*



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

From the opening chapters of Genesis flow the rest of Scripture and, for that matter, all of human history. We discover in this biblical fountainhead not only the origin of all things, but also the source of our identity and purpose and the backstory of all that is right in our world . . . and all that is wrong.

Adam and Eve's sin corrupted God's good creation. But thankfully, the account didn't end there. Their sin led to a Savior, the One to whom human history ultimately points. Let's pick up Genesis 1 after the creation of nature and discover God's design for humanity, how that design was tarnished, and how humanity's sin leads to Jesus Christ.



## From Creation to Corruption

*Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15–17; 3:6–13; Romans 3:9–18*



### Observation: Creation and Instruction, Temptation and Corruption

Be certain to observe the repeated words and phrases because they emphasize central themes. Notice the sequence of events that fall like dominoes, as well as key words you want to define later.

#### Creation and Instruction—Genesis 1:26–31; 2:15–17

Write down your observations of [Genesis 1:26–27](#). What sets humans apart from the rest of God's creation? What is the basis for our identity and what role did God assign to humans?

What do you observe about God in [1:28–31](#)? About humans? About creation?

Peruse [2:4–25](#), in which the author details God's creation of the Garden of Eden and the first man and woman. What specific instructions did God give Adam in [2:15–17](#)?



## From Creation to Corruption

*Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15–17; 3:6–13; Romans 3:9–18*

*Humans were unlike anything God created. No other created being had a heart to love God or a mind to know God or a volition to obey God. No other created being had an eternal destiny. God made humans distinct. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

### Temptation and Corruption—Genesis 3:1–13

According to [Genesis 3:1](#), how did Satan twist God's instructions when he tempted Eve? What do you observe about her dialogue with Satan in [3:2–5](#)?

What convinced Eve to eat the fruit and give it to Adam to eat, according to [3:6](#)?

In [3:7–10](#), what did the first humans feel and do after they sinned?



## From Creation to Corruption

*Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15–17; 3:6–13; Romans 3:9–18*

How did they try to avoid responsibility when God confronted them in *Genesis 3:11–13*?

Summarize God's judgment on Satan and humankind in *3:14–24*. What hint of hope do you see in *3:15*?

*Depravity intercepted innocence. As a result, our minds are veiled and clouded, our emotions are fragile, our wills are rebellious. Instead of loving God, we fight with Him. Instead of believing what He says, we reject His truth. Instead of wanting to do what He would have us do, we delight in doing what we want to do. Instead of facing sin, we cover it up. It all goes back to this first scene. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: Image of God, Innocence, and Depravity

God stated the central truth about our identity when He said, “‘Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us’” (Genesis 1:26, emphasis added).



## From Creation to Corruption

*Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15–17; 3:6–13; Romans 3:9–18*

In what ways do humans uniquely bear the image of God? Consult your Bible study resources for help with the answer. For online resources, consult the article answering the question, “*What does it mean that humanity is made in the image of God?*” at [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org) or the article, “*Image of God*,” in the Encyclopedia of the Bible at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).

In their innocent state, the first humans were morally pure, relationally whole, and were not subject to death. All that changed the moment “their eyes were opened” (Genesis 3:7). What does that line mean? What changed?

*Trouble had entered the home of Adam and Eve. Created in innocence and beauty, they found themselves distant from the One who made them. At this moment, depravity, the presence of sin, had invaded their lives. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## From Creation to Corruption

*Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15–17; 3:6–13; Romans 3:9–18*

What does the theological term *depravity* refer to? Feel free to consult your resources or look online to [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org) for help.

How did Cain illustrate human depravity in *Genesis 4:1–8*?

*People don't look depraved. Most of us do a masterful job of covering up. But deep down inside, there is this disease that eats away at us and creates in our thoughts, words, and actions sinfulness. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Correlation: New Creation in Christ

Let's step into the New Testament, where we find further evidence of both humanity's *identity* as image-bearers and humanity's *condition* as sinners. How did James set the two concepts side-by-side in *James 3:8–9*? What realities did James convey about humanity?



From Creation to Corruption

Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15–17; 3:6–13; Romans 3:9–18

How did we inherit sin, according to *Romans 5:12*? What is the extent of our sin problem?

In the rest of the passage, *Romans 5:12–21*, Paul contrasted the effects of Adam’s sin with the promise of Christ’s righteousness. In the following chart, write down the contrasts you see.

Romans 5:12–21	
Deadly Effects of Adam’s Sin	Life-Giving Promise of Christ’s Righteousness
<i>Romans 5:12, 14, 16–19, 21</i>	<i>Romans 5:15–19, 21</i>

Paul declared, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, this person is a *new creation*” (2 Corinthians 5:17 NASB, emphasis added). In Adam, we were under the curse of the old creation, but in Christ, we are created anew under grace.

*Isn’t that good news? There’s One to whom you can turn—the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

## **From Creation to Corruption**

*Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15–17; 3:6–13; Romans 3:9–18*



### **Application: From Creation to Corruption to New Creation**

People still tend to respond like Adam and Even when they sin. They cover up their sin, hide from others, and point fingers of blame. Grace, however, frees us to be honest about our sin because we know we are secure in Christ.

If you've felt shame's pull to hide, what can you do to come openly before the Lord and receive His grace? Who can you talk to?

What phrases from our study assure you that you are no longer under sin's condemnation?

What practical benefit does this assurance have for you today?



## **From Creation to Corruption**

*Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15–17; 3:6–13; Romans 3:9–18*

God designed us to have a close relationship with Him. Despite our sinful condition, we bear God's image, and because God loved us, He sent His Son—His exact image—to bear our sin. Through faith in Christ, we are restored. We go from creation to corruption to *new creation* in Christ.

As you close, celebrate your freedom in Christ as your Savior, and join Charles Wesley, the writer of the hymn, "And Can It Be That I Should Gain," in praising the Lord.

No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness Divine,  
Bold I approach the eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.  
Bold I approach the eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.<sup>1</sup>



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

*Father, who am I that You should think about me and care for me? And yet, You designed me for relationship and for Your glory, all of which I give to You. Created in Your image, I devote my mind to know You, my emotions to love You, my heart to trust You, and my will to follow You. In Jesus' name, amen.*

#### **ENDNOTE**

1. Charles Wesley, [www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/296](http://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/296).



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE Returning to Our Roots

## STUDY TWELVE

### Exposing the Dark Side

*Genesis 6:5; Psalm 51:1–5*

*Our deadliest killer isn't cancer. It's depravity. Every one of us has it, and every one of us suffers from its consequences.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**W**E all have parts of our personal lives that we would rather hide than expose. As Mark Twain observed, “Everyone is a moon, and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody.”<sup>1</sup>

Mark Twain penned this famous line at a time of financial setbacks and deep personal loss. While he entertained thousands with his hilarious tales and heartwarming anecdotes, he never revealed his dark side of fear and sadness.

Like Twain, we spend a lot of time on life's stage putting on a good show to cover our real feelings. But the darkness goes deeper than emotions. Humanity's dark side includes depravity—the whole-person corruption inherited from Adam that renders all humans spiritually dead and subject to God's judgment.

In society, we see the ugliest expressions of depravity scrawled across headlines heralding war, violence, greed, and evil of all kinds. Every heart bears its imprint—selfishness, shameful vices, and a rebellious nature. Twain was right. There's more darkness in people than they let on.



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## **Exposing the Dark Side**

*Genesis 6:5; Psalm 51:1–5*

How do we deal with our depravity? God helps by telling the truth about humanity's dark side and candidly exposing it in the people of Scripture. In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll take heed from their sins and follow their lead to find God's restoration and forgiveness.



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

It's good that we know the truth about our sinful condition. By acknowledging our sinfulness, we more willingly accept God's grace. Open your heart through prayer as you begin your study.

*Father, show me the truth about myself. I open my heart to You because I know You love me even when I am least loveable. Expose my sin so I can receive in fullest measure Your grace-powered transformation. In Jesus' name, amen.*



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

"Everyone has sinned," wrote Paul (Romans 3:23). Everyone occupies a berth on depravity's ocean liner, including the most respected people in the Bible such as Noah, Moses, David, Peter, and Paul. Yes, even them. Their voyages in sin remind us that it's not just the despots and criminals who need grace. We all are sailing in the same boat headed to the same destination unless our Savior rescues us.



### **Observation: Five Sinners Who Point Us to Jesus**

Observe the following episodes of depravity within the context of each person's life. Reflect on how their sins knocked them off the "pedestal of perfection" and remind us that they were ordinary people in need of grace, just like us.



## **Exposing the Dark Side**

*Genesis 6:5; Psalm 51:1–5*

### **Noah's Drunkenness—Genesis 9:20–23**

Noah's portrait hangs prominently in Scripture's hall of faith, as it should. At a time of deep darkness when everything that people "thought and imagined was consistently and totally evil" (Genesis 6:5), righteous Noah was "the only blameless person living on earth" (6:9). And yet, what did Noah do *after* he obeyed God, built the ark, and saved his family and the animals from the flood, according to [Genesis 9:20–23](#)?

### **Moses' Hot Temper—Exodus 2:11–15; Numbers 20:2–12**

Few in Scripture are honored more than Moses, who was destined from birth to liberate his people from slavery in Egypt. And yet, according to [Exodus 2:11–15](#) and [Numbers 20:2–12](#), how did Moses' hot temper get the best of him? What consequences did his dark side unleash?



## **Exposing the Dark Side**

*Genesis 6:5; Psalm 51:1–5*

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### **David's Adultery—2 Samuel 11**

The Lord considered David to be “a man after his own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14), and David’s psalms exude his deep devotion. And yet, even the sweet singer of Israel had a dark side. What sins did David commit, and how did he try to hide them in [2 Samuel 11](#)?

### **Peter's Denials—Matthew 26:69–75**

Peter’s confident statement that Jesus was “the Messiah, the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16:16) still stands as a monument of bold faith. And yet, how did Peter’s courage crumble in [Matthew 26:69–75](#)?



## Exposing the Dark Side

*Genesis 6:5; Psalm 51:1–5*

### Paul's Struggles—Romans 7:15–25

Paul was unmatched in his ability to articulate Christian theology. And yet, even with all his knowledge, Paul still battled sin. How did Paul describe his inner struggle, according to [Romans 7:15–25](#)?

*Each one of these people we studied made a deliberate decision to sin. They weren't duped. They played into the hand of the old nature and that carried out exactly what the old nature performs, that is sin. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: Where Our Inner Struggle Leads

If Noah, Moses, David, and Peter had looked in Paul's mirror of Romans 7, no doubt they would have seen their faces too. Like Paul, they wanted to do what was right but they did the very things they hated.

According to Paul, the “power within [us] that is at war with [our] mind” is our drive to sin or “flesh” (NASB). What is the connection between our flesh (sinful inclination) and our depravity (sinful condition)?



## Exposing the Dark Side

*Genesis 6:5; Psalm 51:1–5*

Paul asks in desperation, “Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?” (Romans 7:24). His answer resounds, “Jesus Christ our Lord” (7:25)! *How* does Jesus liberate us? Read [8:1–4](#) to see Paul’s full explanation.

*We can live as victors through the power of Jesus Christ. When you face evil, claim the power of God that you have in Christ and pray, “Lord, give me the grace to get through this.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Correlation: Jesus Christ, the Exception to Depravity

The disease of depravity passed to *every* human. According to David in [Psalm 51:5](#), how is sin imprinted in each one of us?



## Exposing the Dark Side

*Genesis 6:5; Psalm 51:1–5*

Jesus, thankfully, is the exception. Because Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb, He was not subject to the depravity inherited through the human lineage. How did Luke describe Jesus' conception in [Luke 1:35](#)? How does [Hebrews 7:26](#) confirm Jesus' holy nature, although He was human?

*Scripture says three things of Christ: He knew no sin, He had no sin, and He did no sin. Born without sin, He didn't have a sin nature. Only He qualifies as the sinless Lamb who can bear our sin and cleanse us. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Application: Walking in the Light

We may have a dark side of sin, but we don't have to live under its shadow. We can walk in the light of Christ's righteousness through the power of the Holy Spirit.

How? Honesty about our struggles is a first step to move out of the darkness and into the light, followed by confessing our sin and receiving God's forgiveness. Are there any dark parts of your life you need to reveal to Him? Here is some space to write.

*But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all wickedness. (1 John 1:9)*



## **Exposing the Dark Side**

*Genesis 6:5; Psalm 51:1–5*

Be honest about your sin. Confess it openly and let Christ's forgiveness flow over your soul as you walk in His forgiveness today.

You're not alone when you confess your sin and receive God's forgiveness. You're in the company of Noah, Moses, David, Peter, and Paul . . . and that's good company! Take some private time now to thank the Father for His Son who makes victory over sin possible.

*So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)*



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

*Father, I claim Your forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ. Help me now to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, who gives grace to help me do what my heart most deeply desires—that is, to love You and serve You and follow Your ways. In Jesus' name, amen.*

#### **ENDNOTE**

1. Mark Twain quote. [www.twainquotes.com](http://www.twainquotes.com)



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY THIRTEEN

## “Mr. Smith, Meet Your Substitute”

*Romans 3:9–31*

*When I address “Mr. Smith,” I’m talking to the common man and woman who happens to find himself or herself in a precarious predicament. It’s called sin.*  
—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**M**ET Mr. Smith. Like many spiritually lost people, he is vaguely aware of God, but he doesn’t really know who God is or how to find Him. Mr. Smith—or Mrs. Smith—could be your neighbor, coworker, or friend. He or she could be your in-law, your uncle or aunt, even your own child. Your goal is to guide him or her to the Savior. But what do you say? Where do you begin?

This *Searching the Scriptures* study explains the greatest news ever told—how to know God personally through faith in Jesus Christ. To make the message memorable, Pastor Chuck Swindoll bases his explanation of the gospel on a simple outline:

Four Major Issues

Three Crucial Questions

Two Possible Responses

One Final Reminder.

*Four, three, two, one . . . the countdown to new life with God!*



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## **“Mr. Smith, Meet Your Substitute”**

*Romans 3:9–31*



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

As you open the Word, pray for your unsaved friend or family member.

*Father, You know the life story of those I love and how much they need a personal relationship with you. You desire “everyone to be saved” (1 Timothy 2:4), and so I pray that Your Spirit convicts them of their sin. Open their hearts to Jesus and draw them by Your grace. May they hear You calling their name, and may they come to You in faith. In Jesus’ name, amen.*



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

In Romans, Paul explained how to have a personal relationship with God. He called his message the gospel—“this Good News about Christ”—and in it resided “the power of God” to save everyone who believed it (Romans 1:16).

What does the good news tell us? According to Paul,

*This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, ‘It is through faith that a righteous person has life.’ (1:17).*

In Romans 3, Paul detailed his explanation of the gospel with four major issues pertaining to what God has done for us.



### **Observation: Four Major Issues**

As you read Romans 3, observe the major issues rising to the surface. They explain *who we are* and *who God is*, *what we need* and *what God did* to meet our need. Let’s begin with the first issue, which compels us to take an honest look at ourselves.



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY THIRTEEN

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

### “Mr. Smith, Meet Your Substitute”

*Romans 3:9–31*

#### Our Condition: Totally Depraved—Romans 3:9–18

What do you observe in the mirror of *Romans 3:9–18*? What is Paul’s assertion in verse 9?

How does he support his assertion in verses 10–18? Write down the emphatic phrases that Paul uses.

The Scriptures shoot straight, don’t they? Not just some, but “all have turned away” (3:12). “No one is righteous” (3:10), no exceptions. We are sinners through and through—totally depraved. Now that doesn’t mean we’ve committed every possible sin, rather, it speaks to our condition. Sin has tainted every part of the human—mind, body, will, and emotions—so that “no one does good” according to God’s holy standard, which we’ll examine next (3:12).

*If depravity were “blue,” we’d be “blue” all over. Even when we try to hide our depravity, it comes out when we least expect it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



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## **“Mr. Smith, Meet Your Substitute”**

*Romans 3:9–31*

### **God’s Character: Infinitely Holy—Romans 3:19–20, 23**

Some people might argue, “I may have my faults, but I’m not as bad as so-and-so. Besides, look at the good I’ve done!” However, people don’t set the moral standard; God alone defines righteousness—which He expressed in the law of the Old Testament. What was the purpose of the law and what did it prove, according to *Romans 3:19–20*?

How did Paul sum up his points about human nature in *3:23*? What did he declare about God?

God’s standard is based on His holiness. “God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all” (1 John 1:5). How can humans who live in sin’s darkness endure the scrutiny of God’s light? How can we hope to escape the sentence of death for our sins (*Romans 6:23*)? Even our best efforts at righteousness fall short. We *need help!*

*Here we are, sinners by birth, sinners by choice, sinners by nature, trying to reach a standard and attain a relationship with the God who made us. We’re dead in sin. Our condition is depravity. God’s character is perfection. We need a substitute.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY THIRTEEN

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

### “Mr. Smith, Meet Your Substitute”

*Romans 3:9–31*

#### Our Need: A Substitute—Romans 3:21–22

Because of our helpless state, someone must keep God’s law for us and bear sin’s judgment in our place. Is there such a person? Mr. Smith, meet your substitute: Jesus Christ.

How did Paul describe our need and point us to Jesus in [Romans 3:21–22](#)?

*We need someone to get us out of the hole we’re in. We need an advocate, someone who can represent our cause. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

#### God’s Provision: A Savior—Romans 3:24–31

What did God do for sinful humanity, according to [Romans 3:24–25](#)?



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# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY THIRTEEN

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

## “Mr. Smith, Meet Your Substitute”

*Romans 3:9–31*

What about sinners who died prior to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross? How did they have the opportunity to receive pardon from sin’s punishment, according to [Romans 3:25–26](#)?

How are sinful humans made right with God, according to [3:27–31](#)? What important contrast did Paul make in these verses? What is the essential message of the gospel?

*Think of the cross as a spiritual sponge that absorbs the sins of humankind—past, present, and future. At the moment Christ died, He bore our sins and satisfied the righteous demands of the Father. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: Three Crucial Questions

As Mr. Smith listens to these four major issues, three crucial questions cross his mind. The first question is this: “*Is there any hope for lost sinners?*” How did Paul answer this question in [Romans 3:22](#)?



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**GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**  
**Returning To Our Roots**  
**STUDY THIRTEEN**

SEARCHING  
THE  
SCRIPTURES  
**STUDY**

**“Mr. Smith, Meet Your Substitute”**

*Romans 3:9–31*

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What does it mean to place one's faith in Jesus alone?

Second, Mr. Smith wonders, “*Isn't there any work for the seeker to do?*” How did Paul answer this question in *Romans 3:24 and 28*?

In 3:24 in the New American Standard Bible, three key words need explaining—“gift,” “justified,” and “redemption.” How would you help Mr. Smith understand the difference between salvation as a free gift versus an earned wage? For help, you can refer to Paul's elaboration in *4:4–5*.



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# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY THIRTEEN

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

## “Mr. Smith, Meet Your Substitute”

*Romans 3:9–31*

When we place our faith in Him, God justifies and redeems us. *Justification* is an act of God’s mercy in which He declares believing sinners righteous while they are still in their sinning state. *Redemption* is God’s act of paying the ransom price to release us from our bondage to sin. In the space below, put these concepts in terms that “Mr. Smith” can understand.

Third, “*Is there any way to lose the gift of salvation?*” If our salvation depended on us to earn it, then it would depend on us to keep it. How does receiving salvation as a gift give us security in our relationship with God?

Let’s review the answers to these questions. Is there any hope for lost sinners? *Yes—Christ!* Isn’t there any work for a seeker to do? *No—just believe!* Is there any way to lose the gift of salvation? *No—never!*



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## “Mr. Smith, Meet Your Substitute”

Romans 3:9–31



### Correlation: The Good News in Summary

The message of the gospel reverberates like a church bell sounding out hope for sinners. How do the following verses express the good news about Christ?

John 3:16: \_\_\_\_\_

2 Corinthians 5:21: \_\_\_\_\_

1 Peter 2:24: \_\_\_\_\_

*God holds out His grace and makes it available for anyone to receive.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



### Application: Two Possible Options and One Final Reminder

We’ve come now to *two* and *one*. Mr. Smith has *two possible options*: he can either believe in Christ and accept the gift of salvation, or he can refuse to believe and reject the gift.

Now if he rejects Christ, God won’t zap him with a lightning bolt. God never twists an unsaved person’s arm to take His gift of salvation. But there is *one final reminder*—people don’t have endless time to make their decision. When the moment of death comes, the choice to accept or reject Christ is set for eternity (Hebrews 9:27).

How about you? Perhaps you never really understood how to have a personal relationship with God through faith in Christ . . . and now, for the first time, you understand. You can’t earn your way to God through religious duties. Jesus Christ did all the work for you when He bore your sin on the cross. Now, simply place your faith in Christ. Receive God’s pardon for your sin and step into the secure hope of eternal life in Christ.

If you’re making the decision today, the following prayer can be your guide:

*Dear God,  
I know that my sin has put a barrier between You and me. Thank You for sending Jesus to bear my sin and open a way to You. I accept Your gift of eternal life and ask Jesus to be my Savior. I desire to walk with You in a personal relationship. In Jesus’ name, amen.*



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY THIRTEEN

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

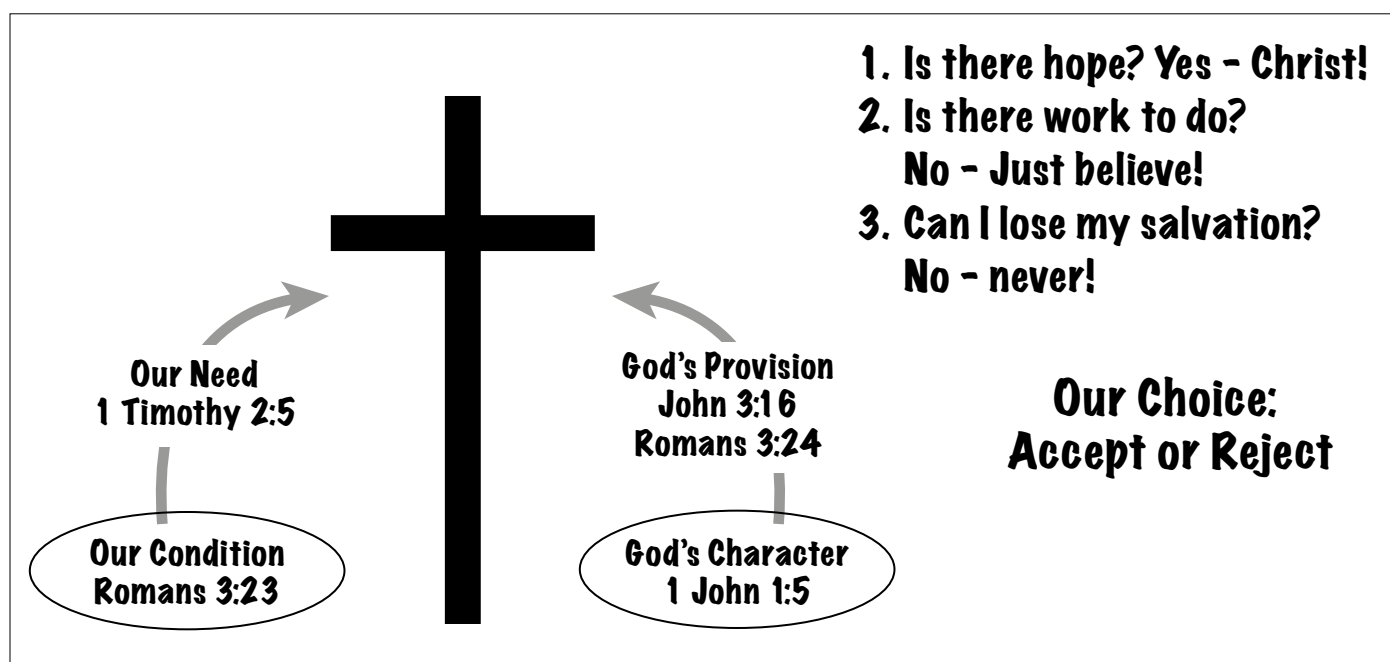
### “Mr. Smith, Meet Your Substitute”

*Romans 3:9–31*

If you trusted Christ as your Savior just now, blessings! Connect with a pastor at your local church or one of our [biblical counselors](#) for next steps in your walk with God.

Now, are you ready to share the gospel “countdown” with someone? To help you remember Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s explanation of the gospel, we’ve included the illustration below. Take a few moments to study it. Look up the verses and slip them into your memory so that when you explain the diagram, you can quote the verses.

Never underestimate the power of the gospel. It can change a person’s life forever. Share the good news with someone soon!



### A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for making a way for me to have a personal relationship with You through Your Son. The gospel is a miracle of grace, and I embrace it with my whole heart. Give me the opportunity to share Your love with others who need the hope of salvation. In Jesus’ name, amen.



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# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY FOURTEEN

## The Remedy for Our Disease

*Leviticus 4:1–7; Isaiah 53:1–6*

*The cross has served its purpose and it's gone. But the Savior who died on that cross lives on. He is our glory.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**C**RUCIFIXION was a terrifying sight in the Roman world, devised as the cruelest and most inhumane form of execution. Victims might languish for days on a cross before finally succumbing to death. The Romans erected crosses with victims nailed to them along busy thoroughfares as a warning to would-be lawbreakers: *This will be your fate if you dare defy Rome.*

The cross epitomized the merciless justice of Rome that crushed all transgressors. And yet, to followers of Christ, the deadly cross came to signify something life-giving—the *merciful justice* of God. Transgressors who put their faith in Jesus weren't punished when they came to His cross, rather, they were set free from the judgment they deserved. At the cross of Christ, they received life!

How did a terrifying instrument of punishment become a beacon of hope to sinners? The answer lies in Israel's ancient sacrificial system which, when applied to Christ's cross, transforms this instrument of punishment into an altar of grace. Let's take a closer look at this symbol of death to find life in its message. It is "the very power of God" for those whom God has saved (1 Corinthians 1:18).



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## **The Remedy for Our Disease**

*Leviticus 4:1–7; Isaiah 53:1–6*



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Regret for sins committed can weigh heavily on a person's heart. As you examine the meaning of Christ's death on the cross in this *Searching the Scriptures* study, ask the Lord to help you embrace your forgiveness and experience true freedom in Christ.

*Father, my heart aches sometimes because of my sinful choices, and I need Your grace today to lift my burden. I come to You through Your Word for relief. Speak to me through Your Spirit about the hope I have in Christ. In His name, amen.*



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

The search for the meaning of the cross leads us down the hall of history to the period of the exodus. After God delivered the Hebrews from Egypt, He instructed them to build the tabernacle, a sacred tent where God's presence dwelled. At the tabernacle was an altar where priests daily offered sacrifices on behalf of the people.

A person atoned for his or her individual sins by following four steps outlined in [Leviticus 4](#).

- 1) The sinner brought an animal without defect to the altar (4:3, 14, 23, 28, 32).
- 2) The sinner laid hands on the animal, symbolizing the transfer of guilt to the blameless animal (4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33).
- 3) The priest killed the animal as a substitute for the person (4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33).
- 4) The priest sprinkled or smeared the blood as required (4:6, 16, 25, 30, 34).

The Lord accepted the sacrifices and mercifully pardoned His people. And yet, God didn't intend animal sacrifices to provide a permanent remedy for sin but to foreshadow the ultimate remedy, the single sacrifice to fulfill them all.



## The Remedy for Our Disease

*Leviticus 4:1–7; Isaiah 53:1–6*



### Observation: Isaiah's Prophecy of the Substitute

Isaiah prophesied the coming of the One who would bear humanity's sins. Carefully observe Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 53. Look for key verbs and adjectives that describe the coming Savior and what He would do.

### The Person of the Messiah—Isaiah 53:1–3

How did Isaiah describe the Messiah in *Isaiah 53:1–3*?

What was this description prophesying about the person of Jesus?

*Nothing in Jesus' appearance caused Him to stand out from anyone else. He had all the marks of humanity, just like us. He was God, but you couldn't tell it from His appearance.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## The Remedy for Our Disease

*Leviticus 4:1–7; Isaiah 53:1–6*

### The Work of the Messiah—Isaiah 53:4–9

Highlight the pronouns “our,” “we,” and “us” in *Isaiah 53:4–6* and write down the words Isaiah used to describe our sinful condition.

Now, find the pronouns “he,” “his,” and “him” in this same passage and record what Isaiah prophesied Jesus would do for sinners as their substitutionary sacrifice.

How was Isaiah’s prophecy in *53:7–9* fulfilled in Jesus?

*Jesus was pierced through, crushed, chastened, and scourged. Why? Because “the LORD laid on him the sins of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## The Remedy for Our Disease

*Leviticus 4:1–7; Isaiah 53:1–6*

### The Results of the Messiah's Work—Isaiah 53:10–12

With whom did this plan originate, according to [Isaiah 53:10](#)? What does this fact signify?

What would Christ's atonement accomplish, according to [53:10–12](#)?

What similarities do you see between the animal sacrifices on the altar in Leviticus and Isaiah's description of Christ's sacrifice on the cross? What was unique about Christ's sacrifice?

*When Christ died on that cross and poured out His blood, He said, "It is finished! It's over! It's complete! It's done! No one need ever offer another sacrifice." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **The Remedy for Our Disease**

*Leviticus 4:1–7; Isaiah 53:1–6*



### **Interpretation: The Meaning of Atonement**

The cross represents Christ's atonement for our sin. In his book, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll defines *atonement* in this way:

The term is found only in the Old Testament, where it means “to cover” and carries with it the thought of putting sin out of sight, covering it over by blood.<sup>1</sup>

Covering sin doesn't mean that our sins never existed. Rather, it means that God, in His grace, doesn't count our sins against us. Why not? Because a price was paid by the innocent blood of Christ. Atonement releases sinners from judgment.

Why was innocent blood required to cover sin, according to [Leviticus 17:11](#) and [Hebrews 9:22](#)?

What does *substitutionary* atonement mean? Reflect on the key phrases that describe Christ's work in Isaiah 53, and for further insight, consult the article, “[What is the substitutionary atonement?](#)” at [gotquestions.org](#).



## The Remedy for Our Disease

*Leviticus 4:1–7; Isaiah 53:1–6*

Although we stand guilty before God, Christ shed His blood on the cross to cover our sins, which was an act *only Jesus could perform*. As God, Jesus was sinless—the Lamb of God without defect. As a human, Jesus could die in the place of humans. Only His shed blood, which represented His innocent life poured out on the altar before God, could be sufficient to cover “the sins of all the world” (1 John 2:2). Because of *who* Jesus is, His substitutionary sacrifice was superior to all the animal sacrifices combined. Only Jesus’ death offers complete atonement.

*Why all the blood? Why the altar? Because God stated, “The life of the body is in the blood. . . . It is the blood, given in exchange for a life, that makes purification possible” (Leviticus 17:11). —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Correlation: Christ’s Once-for-All Sacrifice

According to [Hebrews 10:1–4](#), what were the limitations of the sacrificial system?

What makes Christ and His atoning sacrifice superior, according to [10:10–14](#)?



## **The Remedy for Our Disease**

*Leviticus 4:1–7; Isaiah 53:1–6*

What did Jesus mean when He declared from the cross, “It is finished!” according to *John 19:28–30*?

Jesus’ death on the cross was the once-for-all-time, sufficient atonement for sin. God offers all people a real remedy for sin’s disease through Christ’s death, not a pill to treat the symptoms or a drug to numb the pain. When we put our faith in Jesus, He is our cure.



### **Application: Life of Gratitude**

What do people see when they look at a cross? Some see a religious symbol and don’t feel much connection to it. Others see a fashion statement or maybe a political view.

Has this study enhanced the meaning of the cross for you? What do you see when you look at a cross?

If God etched one word into the cross to communicate His heart for humankind, surely the word would be *love*. God sent “Christ to die for us while we were still sinners” as the ultimate expression of His love (Romans 5:8). The innocent was sacrificed for the guilty. The One who least deserved death died for those who most deserved it so they could have life. Such love moves us to tears!



## **The Remedy for Our Disease**

*Leviticus 4:1–7; Isaiah 53:1–6*

Take a moment to express your love for Christ who bore your judgment on the cross, covered your sin, and made a way for you to have a personal relationship with God.

*Something remarkable happens inside us when we realize that Jesus took our place and bore the punishment we deserve, leaving us absolutely free and clear. Something inside the heart of the forgiven says, “I will love my Savior forever and ever.”*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

Father, there is no greater love than the love you showed by sending Your Son to die for me. Thank You for finding a way to make me right with You. Atonement through Christ is the most precious gift I could ever receive, and I cling to Him as my Savior and Lord. In His name, amen.

#### **ENDNOTE**

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life: Returning to Our Roots* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1986), 413.



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY FIFTEEN

## His Coming Is Sure . . . Are You?

*1 Thessalonians 4:13–18*

*The hope that gets me through the tests on this earth is the same hope that will get me through the grave at death. The One in whom I have believed has gone before me and paved the way.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

NEXT to the truth of our salvation stands the hope of our resurrection. Christ not only saves us from judgment through His death on the cross, but He also secures our life beyond the grave through His resurrection. Jesus assured us, “Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying” (John 11:25). We will live after death. Our resurrection is as certain as the sun rising on a new day.

These twin doctrines of salvation and resurrection are the mountain peaks of our faith, lifting our eyes upward with hope when we need it most. When a loved one dies, our hearts break and we grieve. But we do “not grieve like people who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Unlike the tears of the hopeless, our tears fall from eyes fixed on our Savior who will someday raise the dead and restore all things.

The New Testament resonates with anticipation of Christ’s return, mentioning it over three hundred times. It’s even the final thought of Scripture: “Yes, I am coming soon!” promised Jesus, and John responded, “Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).

What would it be like to wake up every morning with the hopeful thought, “Christ may come today!”? What a wonderful perspective! This *Searching the Scriptures* study stirs our anticipation of meeting Jesus face-to-face as we discover what the Bible says about His coming and the promises He will fulfill.



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## His Coming Is Sure . . . Are You?

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

“Wake up,” the apostle Paul calls to his readers, “for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11). If your spiritual senses have felt drowsy lately, ask the Lord to rouse them with the anticipation of His coming.

*Father, awaken my heart with the exciting truth of Your Son’s coming. All the prophecies pointing to His first advent are fulfilled, and now, His coming can happen at any moment. Teach me from Your Word the truths I must know to ready myself for His appearing. In His name, amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

A full study of the end times events would take us deep into Daniel and Revelation, but we’ll limit this study to two aspects of our future destiny found in [1 Corinthians 15:50–58](#) and [1 Thessalonians 4:13–18](#). The Corinthian passage emphasizes the *changes* that will come over us when Christ returns, and the Thessalonian passage emphasizes the *order of events* surrounding the coming of Christ.



### Observation: Scriptures that Describe Our Destiny

When observing didactic passages, look for the logical sequence of ideas, action words, commands, contrasts, and key words to define in the interpretation phase. Read the verses carefully, lingering over each line.

#### How Our Bodies Will Change—1 Corinthians 15:50–58

What point did Paul make about earthly bodies and the Kingdom of God in [1 Corinthians 15:50](#)?



## His Coming Is Sure . . . Are You?

*1 Thessalonians 4:13–18*

What “wonderful secret” did Paul reveal in *1 Corinthians 15:51*? Notice the contrast.

How did Paul explain the transformation of our bodies in *15:52–53*? What will happen to the bodies of those who have died and those who are alive when Christ returns? What is the purpose of the transformation?

*There must be some kind of molecular reconstruction that will come upon us in a glorified state that will equip us to last eternally. Our existence in eternity will be in a body, not simply in spirit. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

What does the glorification of our bodies signify, according to *15:54–57*?



## **His Coming Is Sure . . . Are You?**

*1 Thessalonians 4:13–18*

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How did Paul apply this truth to our daily experience in *1 Corinthians 15:58*?

In the instant we see our Savior's eyes sparkle, our bodies will be changed. What will our new bodies be like? We'll hold that question for the interpretation section. For now, let's uncover more details about Christ's return in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians.

### **The Order of Events When Christ Returns—1 Thessalonians 4:13–18**

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians to address their fear that loved ones who died before Christ's return might miss the coming kingdom. What did Paul say to correct the misunderstanding in *1 Thessalonians 4:13–14*? Whose spirits will the Lord bring with Him when He returns?

Who was the source of Paul's information about Christ's return in *4:15*, and what was the promise?



## His Coming Is Sure . . . Are You?

*1 Thessalonians 4:13–18*

Paul was teaching new information that He received directly from the Lord. Write down the order of events that Paul outlined in *1 Thessalonians 4:16–17*.

*I observe four points in Paul's teaching. First, we are to be informed—ignorance is not bliss. Second, we are not to grieve as those without hope. Third, we are to face death without fear. Fourth, we are to know the order of events when Christ returns. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

What did Paul say you should do with this information, according to *4:18*?

This passage raises our curiosity. What does it mean to be “caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (4:17)? Now we have two questions to answer in the interpretation section.



## His Coming Is Sure . . . Are You?

*1 Thessalonians 4:13–18*



### Interpretation: Key Questions to Answer

First, what will our resurrected, glorified bodies be like? John provides a clue to answering this question in *1 John 3:1–2*. What did he say?

What features of Jesus' resurrected body did He exhibit in *Luke 24:28–43*? What do the characteristics of His glorified body imply about our future bodies?

Second, what does it mean to be “caught up”? Survey the explanation of this phrase in your Bible study resources and write down a few notes about its meaning. You might consult Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, or the online resource, [gotquestions.com](http://gotquestions.com), in the article, “*What is the rapture of the church?*”



## His Coming Is Sure . . . Are You?

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

In summary, when Christ returns, “We will all be transformed!” Paul said (1 Corinthians 15:51). Christ will transform first the bodies of dead believers (whose spirits had already gone to heaven) and then the bodies of living believers. *Finally*, all believers in their glorified bodies will “be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17), the event known as the rapture of the church.

The *transformation* of our earthly bodies into glorified bodies and our *transportation* to “be with the Lord forever” will be instantaneous (1 Thessalonians 4:17). What a comfort to know that death will never again separate us from our loved ones, and we will live with the Lord forever.

*The return of Christ is a promise to claim when trials break out and there seems to be no reason for them. Remember, when He comes, it will all make sense. Believe His Word . . . He is coming again. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Correlation: What Christ Said About His Return

During His ministry on earth, Jesus frequently mentioned His return, sometimes as a sober warning to unbelievers of the coming judgment. What did Jesus warn in [Matthew 24:37–39](#)?

Jesus also looked forward to reuniting with His followers, like a husband anticipates embracing His bride after a long absence. What encouragement did Jesus give in [John 14:1–3](#)?



## **His Coming Is Sure . . . Are You?**

*1 Thessalonians 4:13–18*

What promise did the angels give to the disciples on the Mount of Olives right after Jesus ascended into heaven, according to [Acts 1:9–11](#)?

After witnessing Christ's ascension, the disciples tucked the angels' promise of Christ's return into their hearts and returned to their homes full of hope. Soon after, at Pentecost, the church was born when the Holy Spirit came, and Christ's mission to spread the gospel to the world was launched—a mission we still obey.



### **Application: Actions that Reveal Our Readiness**

Jesus urged His followers to watch for His return. “Be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected” (Matthew 24:44). What does readiness look like? We are ready for Christ's return when we . . .

Walk by *faith*, not by sight.

Live in *peace*, not in panic.

Rely on *hope*, not on self.

These ideals are possible only in the power of the Holy Spirit. In what circumstance do you need the Spirit's power to help you walk by faith today? Live in peace? Rely on hope? Ask for His power.



## **His Coming Is Sure . . . Are You?**

*1 Thessalonians 4:13–18*

How can setting your mind on Christ's return help you walk by faith, live in peace, and rely on hope?

Earlier, we asked the question: What would it be like to wake up every morning with the hopeful thought, "Christ may come today!"? Begin tomorrow morning with that thought by writing Revelation 22:20 on a card and placing it on your bedside table. Jesus said,

*"Yes, I am coming soon!" Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:20)*

Say the words when you wake, carry them with you through the day, and remember them before you go to sleep. Set your hope on Christ's coming, and watch your faith, peace, and hope grow.



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

*Father, thank You for the promise that Jesus will return to transform my body so I can live with You for eternity. What a comfort to know that the old enemy death has lost its power. I need not fear the future because my future is secure with You. "I am coming soon," Jesus said. Come, Lord Jesus, come! In His name, amen.*



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY SIXTEEN

#### Until He Returns . . . What?

*Mark 13:31–37; Luke 19:11–27; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Titus 2:11–15*

*When you hear about tragedies in the news, remember, Christ is coming.  
When trials surprise you, remember, He's coming. Hope takes the sting out.  
Life won't be so hard if you live in the light of His soon return.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**A**FTER Jesus told His followers that He would leave them, He comforted them with a promise. “When everything is ready,” He said, “I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am” (John 14:3).

Ever since that day, Jesus’ followers have clung tightly to the hope of His return. At any moment, Jesus will come for His own—what a day that will be! His return is *imminent*, which means He could appear before you finish reading this sentence. Nothing stands in His way. He’s not waiting for the fulfillment of any other prophecy before He returns. He might appear today, tomorrow, or years from now. We don’t know when, but we can be certain that He *will* return.

Until then, how does the Lord want us to live? How are Christ’s followers supposed to conduct themselves between His departure and His return?



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## Until He Returns . . . What?

*Mark 13:31–37; Luke 19:11–27; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Titus 2:11–15*



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

In Jesus' parable of the bridesmaids, five of the ten young ladies met the bridegroom with their lamps full of oil and burning brightly (Matthew 25:1–13). In prayer, tell the Lord of your desire to be ready for Christ's return and ask Him to show you how in His Word.

*Father, when Your Son appears, I want to be ready. What can I do now to prepare myself to welcome Him? I long to keep the lamp of my devotion burning for Him, and I ask for Your help. In Christ's name, amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The coming of a king to a village naturally prompts the villagers to make ready for his arrival. They hoist festive banners, plant colorful flowers, clean their houses, don their finest clothes, and eagerly watch for him.

Our heavenly King's arrival inspires even more enthusiasm to ready our hearts. Whenever the Scriptures mention Christ's coming, an exhortation to godly living always follows. Godliness demonstrates our eagerness to see Him and our devotion to obey Him. The following sets of passages describe four godly actions we can take to ready our lives for the King.



### Observation: What to Do While Waiting for Christ's Return

Each chart below lists two passages on related themes. Read each passage in its entirety and then summarize the verses in the space provided, noting key words and similarities.



## Until He Returns . . . What?

*Mark 13:31–37; Luke 19:11–27; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Titus 2:11–15*

Live Responsibly	
In their eagerness for Christ to return, some believers go to extremes. They quit their jobs, stop paying their bills, and live “by faith” on handouts from others. Scripture doesn’t condone this kind of response. What do the following passages say about living responsibly while we wait?	
<i>Luke 19:11–24</i>	<i>2 Thessalonians 3:6–13</i>

*Do you want to know how to occupy this world until Christ comes? Live responsibly. Work diligently. Think realistically. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Purify Your Hearts	
What do these passages say we should do while looking for “the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:13 NASB)?	
<i>Titus 2:11–15</i>	<i>1 John 3:1–3</i>

*Bring to the Lord’s attention whatever may have broken your relationship with Him. Keep short accounts. Live with a clear, clean conscience. It’s a lot easier to keep your life pure when you think of His coming. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

## Until He Returns . . . What?

*Mark 13:31–37; Luke 19:11–27; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Titus 2:11–15*

Be Watchful	
Our eagerness for Christ's coming is like the excitement of a bride watching with hopeful eyes for her beloved. How do these passages say we should conduct ourselves while we wait for our heavenly bridegroom? What honor will He give us?	
<i>Mark 13:31–37</i>	<i>2 Timothy 4:7–8</i>

*God honors being watchful, having a heart that pumps faster when we think of Christ's return. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Worship	
Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as an ordinance of worship for the church. What do you observe in these passages about the link between worship and waiting?	
<i>Luke 22:14–20</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 11:23–26</i>

*"Until He comes." Every time we observe the Lord's Table is another reminder that He's coming. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

## Until He Returns . . . What?

*Mark 13:31–37; Luke 19:11–27; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Titus 2:11–15*



### Interpretation: “The Crown of Righteousness”

For his devotion and faithful service, Paul anticipated receiving “the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give [him] on the day of his return” (2 Timothy 4:8). Then he added,

*And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing. (4:8)*

Those whose hearts beat with loving anticipation for Christ’s return will be in line right behind Paul to receive this crown.

What is the nature of the reward? For help with the answer, consult your Bible study resources and the online commentary, [Constable’s Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#), where there is a chart listing all the crowns described in the New Testament. Write down the high points of your study in the space below.

What contrast did Paul use in [1 Corinthians 9:25](#) to describe heavenly rewards? What is it about heavenly rewards that fills you with anticipation?

*How about that! The crown of righteousness is reserved for those who live their lives anticipating the Savior’s return. He honors us for living with a watchful eye.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## Until He Returns . . . What?

*Mark 13:31–37; Luke 19:11–27; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Titus 2:11–15*



### Application: How to Stay Alert and Ready

How should we conduct ourselves as we wait for Christ's return? To find the answer, let's sum up the four commands from our study.

- 1) **Occupy** your days by living responsibly, working diligently, and thinking realistically. This will help you avoid extremes.
- 2) **Purify** your heart by turning from sin and living with “wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God” (Titus 2:12). This will keep your conscience clear.
- 3) **Watch** for Christ's return by “eagerly looking forward to his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8). This will guard you from loving the things of this world.
- 4) **Worship** the Lord “until he comes” by remembering His life is in us (1 Corinthians 11:26). This will keep your mind focused on Him.

What's one insight from the passages that motivates you most to obey these commands?

Pick one of the commands and write down what you can do today to obey it more intentionally.



## Until He Returns . . . What?

*Mark 13:31–37; Luke 19:11–27; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Titus 2:11–15*

Anticipating the loving embrace of his Savior and the blessing of his eternal rewards, Paul could face death unafraid. “For to me,” he wrote, “living means living for Christ, and dying is even better” (Philippians 1:21). Why was dying better? Because he would see Christ even sooner! Every day Paul lived, he eagerly looked forward to seeing Jesus. That hope gave Paul the courage to endure whatever hardship life handed him, and it can give us courage to face our trials too.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, each time I observe the Lord’s Supper—taste the bread and drink from the cup—I affirm that the life of Jesus is in me. As I symbolically receive His body and blood, I remember the reason He came. Taking the elements sparks an even brighter flame of longing in my heart to see Him when He comes again. Help me be diligent as I work, pure in my thoughts, watchful in my devotion, and worshipful in my spirit . . . until He comes. In Christ’s name, amen.*



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY SEVENTEEN

## Visiting the Real Twilight Zone

*2 Corinthians 4:14–18; 5:1–8*

*Everybody has an eternal soul. The question is this: Where will you spend your eternity?*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**T**HE subject of death fascinates people . . . and frightens them. They long to look behind the veil that shrouds the afterlife, and yet they shudder to think what they might find.

Through His Word, God calms our fears about death by shining the light of truth on it. It may surprise you to know that God created humans to live forever. Death was not in God’s original blueprint for creation. Adam and Eve planted death’s seed in the soil of humanity when they sinned against God (Genesis 2:16–17; 3:1–7), and, as a result of their disobedience,

*sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.*  
(Romans 5:12)

From the moment we take our first breath as a newborn, our biological clocks start ticking away our time on earth. According to the Scriptures, “Each person is destined to die” (Hebrews 9:27); “No one can escape the power of the grave” (Psalm 89:48).

And yet, while inevitable, death is not the end. We walk *through* the valley of the shadow of death, and we need not fear because the Lord walks “close beside [us]” (Psalm 23:4). Where does He lead us? What will greet us on the other side? What happens after death? Let’s look behind the veil and find out.



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## Visiting the Real Twilight Zone

*2 Corinthians 4:14–18; 5:1–8*



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Invite the Lord to deepen your understanding of death and the afterlife.

*Father, I admit that death is a frightening subject, and I worry about those I love who do not know You. Assure me of Your control over matters that are out of my hands. Lead me through the mist of uncertainty into the light of Your presence and truth. In Jesus' name, amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The Scriptures not only reveal death's origin, but they also tell us what happens when we die. In [2 Corinthians 5:1–8](#), Paul used an analogy of a “tent” to describe our mortal bodies, and then, he switched to “house” to describe our bodies after they are resurrected. Read this passage once through, slowly and thoughtfully, before answering the questions below.



### Observation: What Happens After Death?

In this passage, Paul was talking to Christians—those who had placed their faith in Jesus as their Savior. What did Paul say happens to the “earthly tent” at death, according to [2 Corinthians 5:1](#)? What does the “house in heaven” refer to?



## Visiting the Real Twilight Zone

2 Corinthians 4:14–18; 5:1–8

In 2 Corinthians 5:2–4, how did Paul describe what it's like to live in “earthly bodies”? What metaphor did Paul use to describe receiving our “new bodies”? What will happen to our “dying bodies”?

What wonderful assurance did Paul communicate to his readers in 5:5–8?

*When death occurs, the soul and spirit are removed instantaneously from the physical body which has died. The inner part—the people we really are—is taken into the presence of the Lord. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

How did Paul contrast physical bodies with eternal spirits in 2 Corinthians 4:16–18? What distinction did he make?



## Visiting the Real Twilight Zone

*2 Corinthians 4:14–18; 5:1–8*

In a word, death is *separation*. When a person dies, the soul leaves the body as the inner part of us is separated from the outer. At a funeral, we see merely the physical shell—the body of the person—lying in the casket. The soul of the person has already departed.

For Christians, the soul immediately goes to heaven to be with God—“to be absent from the body” is “to be at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8 NASB). But what happens to non-Christians?

What warning did Jesus give unbelievers in *Matthew 25:31–33, 41*?

What did John see in his vision of the final judgment in *Revelation 20:11–15*? How is John’s vision similar to Jesus’ teaching?

In *Mark 9:43–48*, Jesus used what phrases to describe the place of judgment?



## Visiting the Real Twilight Zone

*2 Corinthians 4:14–18; 5:1–8*

These images of suffering are terrifying, and our hearts ache for the lost. In the next *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll consider important questions about the destiny of unbelievers—such as the question, “How can a loving God send people to hell?” For now, let's examine the meaning of the passages we've studied.



### **Interpretation: The Afterlife for the Saved and the Lost**

In Paul's teaching on death, he said our bodies are “earthly tents we live in” (2 Corinthians 5:1). In what ways are our earthly bodies like tents and our eternal bodies like houses?

According to Paul, why do we “grow weary” (5:2)? And why do “we groan and sigh” (5:4)?

What did Paul mean when he wrote “these bodies will be swallowed up by life” (5:4)? When will that occur, according to *1 Corinthians 15:21–23*?



## Visiting the Real Twilight Zone

*2 Corinthians 4:14–18; 5:1–8*

Our souls depart from our bodies at death, but God did not intend for us to be disembodied spirits, “spirits without bodies,” forever (2 Corinthians 5:3). Rather, God “prepared us for this”—that is, for eternal life in glorified bodies; and “as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit” (2 Corinthians 5:4). According to *Ephesians 1:13–14*, when did God give us his Holy Spirit as a guarantee?

Based on the passages you’ve studied, summarize what happens to believers when they die. What happens to their earthly bodies? Where do their souls go? What glory do they look forward to?

In contrast, summarize what happens to unbelievers when they die. What happens to their earthly bodies? Where do their souls go? What happens when they are raised to judgment?



## Visiting the Real Twilight Zone

2 Corinthians 4:14–18; 5:1–8

*When the believer dies, the body goes into the grave and the soul goes immediately to be with the Lord Jesus, awaiting resurrection. When the unbeliever dies, the body goes into the grave, and the soul goes into Hades or hell. There the person awaits the judgment of the lost. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Correlation: The Central Issue

What determines a person's destiny? What did John say is the central issue in [1 John 5:10–12](#)?

What assurance did John offer in [5:13](#)?

By putting your faith in Jesus as your Savior who bore your judgment on the cross and rose from the grave, you can know with *certainty* that you have eternal life. Even the fingers of death cannot pry you out of God's loving hand.

*I am convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries for tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38–39)*



## Visiting the Real Twilight Zone

*2 Corinthians 4:14–18; 5:1–8*



### **Application: Response and Result**

Every person will face death one day, but, with Christ as your Savior, you don't have to be afraid. Jesus bore sin's curse and freed you from judgment. Rest assured that you have "victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57). One day, death will be no more!

*Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:*

*"Death is swallowed up in victory.*

*O death, where is your victory?*

*O death, where is your sting?" (15:54–55)*

What are your feelings about death?

What relief do the passages in this study give you? What truth or truths stood out as the most reassuring?



## Visiting the Real Twilight Zone

*2 Corinthians 4:14–18; 5:1–8*

Who do you know who needs this assurance? Write their names here and pray for an opportunity to share these Scriptures with them.

Our journey through the afterlife continues with “An Interview with One from Beyond” in the next *Searching the Scriptures* study. Jesus Himself conducts the interview through an account of two men who died, so we know the facts are true and the lesson He teaches contains wisdom beyond anything of this world.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for the promise of my eternal house—my glorified body You will make for me at the future resurrection. Thank You, also, for the promise that, one day, when I close my eyes in death, I will open them to see Your face. What a relief to know that death has lost its power and I am secure in the Lord Jesus Christ. In His name, amen.*



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY EIGHTEEN

#### An Interview with One from Beyond

*Luke 16:19–31*

*When you attend the funeral of a believer, the body you see is going to be changed into a new kind of body that can endure eternity. The person's spirit is with the Lord. The person's body will be raised in the future.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**W**E usually think of death in physical terms. A person dies when his or her body ceases to function. In the Scriptures, however, death can also refer to a person's spiritual condition. When Adam and Eve sinned, they cut themselves off from God, the source of all life—which resulted in spiritual as well as physical death. For the first time, sin entered God's created world and brought death "to everyone, for everyone sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Just as separation characterizes physical death when the soul leaves the body, so also separation characterizes spiritual death when the soul is cut off from God. People are dead spiritually when they are "without God and without hope" (Ephesians 2:12).

Those who die in their sins without God remain in that condition, separated from God for eternity. Jesus urgently warned people about the eternal consequences of unbelief. One of His most glaring warnings was in His story about the rich man and Lazarus, an actual account of two men who died—one saved and one unsaved—and their experiences in the afterlife.



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## **An Interview with One from Beyond**

*Luke 16:19–31*



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

As you enter the realm of the dead through Jesus' teaching, pray for clarity and insight into God's compassion for the lost.

*Father, You know people's hearts better than anyone, and Your offer of salvation is available to all people. Your divine love excludes no one, and You deeply desire everyone to be saved. I pray for insight into Your redemptive plan and the faith to trust the wisdom of Your judgments. In Jesus' name, amen.*



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

In the context, Jesus had been teaching that no person can serve two masters, specifically, God and mammon—an Aramaic term for wealth (Luke 16:13). "The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, heard all this and scoffed at him" (16:14).

In response, Jesus peered deeply into their souls and said,

*"You like to appear righteous in public, but God knows your hearts. What this world honors is detestable in the sight of God." (16:15)*

Jesus' teaching on the rich man and Lazarus followed as a rebuke to the proud and hypocritical Pharisees and a warning to all people whose hearts are hardened against God.



### **Observation: The Rich Man, Lazarus, and Abraham**

While observing this passage, imagine yourself in Jesus' original audience. You see the Pharisees standing nearby, scowling, arms folded, and aloof. But you also see others sitting at Jesus' feet, receiving His words as water from an eternal spring. Think of yourself as one of those thirsty souls, drinking in every word Jesus said.



## **An Interview with One from Beyond**

*Luke 16:19–31*

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### **A Study in Contrasts—Luke 16:19–21**

Jesus used contrast as a central communication tool in this message. How did Jesus contrast the rich man and Lazarus in *Luke 16:19–21*? Write down Jesus' descriptions.

The dogs licked Lazarus' sores while the rich man didn't even toss Lazarus the kitchen scraps usually thrown to the dogs. What was Jesus' point of irony?

### **An Analysis of the Afterlife—Luke 16:22–26**

When the two men died, what did Jesus say happened to Lazarus, according to *Luke 16:22*? In what ways was Lazarus' afterlife opposite his earthly life?



## An Interview with One from Beyond

*Luke 16:19–31*

What was the rich man's experience after his death according to *Luke 16:22–23*?

What did the pitiless rich man ask from Abraham in *16:24–26*? How did Abraham respond?

From Jesus' description of the place of torment in which the rich man languished, list the characteristics of hell that you observe.

*There is a remarkable reversal of circumstances at death. Death is the greatest of all levelers. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## An Interview with One from Beyond

*Luke 16:19–31*

### A Plea for Those Still Living—Luke 16:27–31

In his agony, the rich man thought of others perhaps for the first time. An odd sort of missionary zeal came over him when he considered the fate of his brothers. What did he ask Abraham in [Luke 16:27–29](#)? How did Abraham answer?

In [16:30–31](#), the rich man pressed his plea. What did he request and how did Abraham answer?

The brothers represent the proud Pharisees who refused to repent and turn to God. Abraham seems to speak from the grave directly to them: “They won’t be persuaded *even if someone rises from the dead*” (16:31 emphasis added). What point was Jesus driving home to these hard-hearted hypocrites?



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY EIGHTEEN

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

## An Interview with One from Beyond

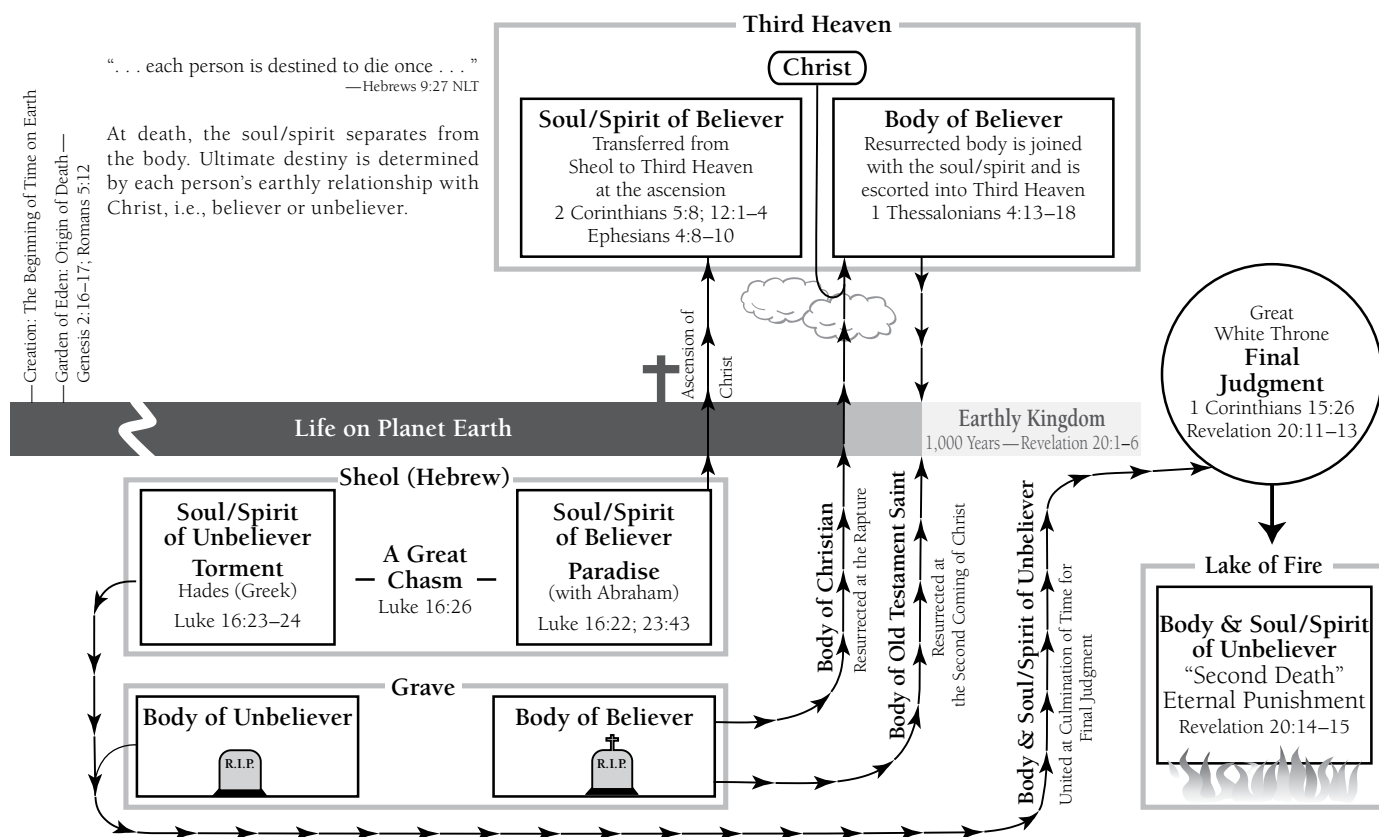
Luke 16:19–31

*Even if we could bring someone back from the dead, we couldn't have as great an impact on the lost as we can by presenting the Scriptures to them. Jesus' message could be put into one sentence: Those who ignore the Word of God in life will not be ignored by the God of the Word in death. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: The Afterlife for the Saved and the Unsav

To set Christ's teaching against the larger context of Scripture, we've included the chart, "When People Die . . . What Happens?". Consult the chart as you probe the meaning of Luke 16:19–31.



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## **An Interview with One from Beyond**

*Luke 16:19–31*

The rich man and Lazarus are examples of those who died prior to the cross. The Old Testament referred to the place of the dead as *Sheol*. In faith, David declared, “You will not abandon my soul to Sheol” (Psalm 16:10). David believed that God would bring him to heaven, and at the Ascension, according to [Ephesians 4:8–10](#), Jesus did just that for David and all the Old Testament saints.

Locate the section of the chart labeled, *Sheol*. In Sheol, the unsaved rich man was in “Hades” (Greek for *hell*), while saved Lazarus was in Paradise with Abraham. Find the arrows that illustrate the transfer to heaven of the souls of the Old Testament saints when Christ ascended into heaven.

After the cross, according to [2 Corinthians 5:8](#), the souls of dead believers immediately go to heaven. What will happen to the bodies of Christians? Find the arrows illustrating Christ gathering His followers “in the clouds to meet [Him] in the air” ([1 Thessalonians 4:17](#)). At what point in the timeline of future events will this occur?

At the final judgment, unbelievers will be raised. What will happen to them, according to [Revelation 20:11–15](#)?



## An Interview with One from Beyond

*Luke 16:19–31*

Based on your observations of Luke 16:19–31 and the chart, summarize what you've learned about the destiny of the saved and the unsaved.

*The rich man was in literal pain. He was fully conscious. He had his senses, and he had his memory. He could see, hear, and taste. In addition, it was impossible to change his destiny. The chasm was fixed. No companionship exists in hell. There is an awful sense of loneliness. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Correlation: Questions to Answer

Jesus' teaching on hell is serious and sobering, and it naturally raises questions. Let's correlate our passage with other Scriptures to find the answers.

**How can a loving God send people to hell?** The sad fact is that people choose hell by their disbelief. This question supposes that God might not care that people reject His offer of salvation. What does [2 Peter 3:9](#) reveal about God's true heart toward the lost?



## **An Interview with One from Beyond**

*Luke 16:19–31*

**What about those who have never heard the gospel?** Paul offers insight into the answer in [Romans 1:19–20](#) and [10:14–17](#). How does God reach out to all people, even those who reject Him?

**What about deathbed repentance?** Can an unsaved person turn to Christ at the last moment? Yes! What hopeful truth does [Luke 23:39–43](#) teach?

**What about infants who die?** David's words in [2 Samuel 12:19–23](#) upon the death of his child offer grieving families great comfort. How do you understand this passage?



## An Interview with One from Beyond

Luke 16:19–31

**Is reincarnation valid?** Some eastern religions teach that our souls return after death in an unending cycle of death and rebirth. However, how does [Hebrews 9:27](#) counter this view?

A golden thread of God's compassion for the lost weaves through the Scriptures. God sacrificed His Son to save people from the consequences of their sin. All a person must do is accept His gift of grace through faith in Jesus to have "peace with God" and the promise of "joyfully looking forward to sharing God's glory" (Romans 5:1). "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life" (1 John 5:12).

*Someday, graves will open, and our bodies will be removed in a gloried state to be forever with Jesus. For the Christian, there is hope, wonderful hope. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Application: Response and Result

Although it's unpleasant to think about hell, we must. Not until we honestly face the destiny of the unsaved will we truly comprehend the depth of God's love and appreciate Christ's sacrifice.

"Think lightly of hell," warned Charles Spurgeon,

And you will think lightly of the cross. Think little of the sufferings of lost souls, and you will soon think little of the Savior who delivers you from them.<sup>1</sup>

Conclude this study by thinking *highly* of your Savior and thanking Him for your salvation. "Once you were dead because of your disobedience and many sins" (Ephesians 2:1). But Jesus bore the sin that would have condemned you. When you placed your faith in Christ as your Savior, God eternally united you with Christ and "forgave all your sins" (Colossians 2:13). Now you stand confident in God's grace, fully accepted in Christ.

Praise the Lord for His marvelous salvation and the hope of eternal life with Him!



## **An Interview with One from Beyond**

*Luke 16:19–31*



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

Use the space below to express your prayer of gratitude.

*Father,*

#### **ENDNOTE**

1. C. H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon at His Best*, compiled by Tom Carter (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1988), 98.



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# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY NINETEEN

## God's Body-Building Program

*Matthew 16:13–18; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27*

*God is involved in two worldwide projects—reaching the lost and then equipping those who come to know Christ in a building project called His church.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**T**HE first mention of *church* in the Bible appears on the lips of Jesus. “I will build my church,” He declared, “and all the powers of hell will not conquer it” (Matthew 16:18).

The setting was *Caesarea Philippi*, an ancient site of paganism where people had worshipped false gods for centuries. At this epicenter of idolatry and demonic darkness, Jesus launched His unconquerable movement to carry the hope of the gospel to the world.

The Greek word translated “church,” *ekklesia*, means, “called-out ones,” which aptly describes the assembly of believers called out from the world into the body of Christ. The foundation of the church is Christ Himself, of whose identity Peter proclaimed, “‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God’” (Matthew 16:16).

Through Peter, whose name means “rock,” God revealed the rock-solid reality about Jesus’ divine nature and messianic mission. On this bedrock of truth, Christ would build His church. His building program continues to this day and will continue unhindered until He returns.

Let’s look deeper into Peter’s confession and Jesus’ announcement of the church, marvel at the church’s astounding growth, and discover six vital signs of a healthy church body—all discussed in this *Searching the Scriptures* study.



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## God's Body-Building Program

*Matthew 16:13–18; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27*



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Every time you open God's Word, pray for the Spirit to illumine your mind and help you apply the truth to your life.

*Father, through Your Spirit, reveal the meaning of Your Word so that I can respond appropriately. Your Word is "a lamp to guide my feet" and "I will not stop obeying your instructions" (Psalm 119:105, 109). In Jesus' name, amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read [Matthew 16:13–18](#), noticing how Jesus narrows His questions from *general* to *personal* and then how Jesus caps the interchange by announcing the church. This passage about Jesus is the center point of Matthew's gospel—indeed, the truth it declares is the culminating point of human history.



### Observation: Question, Confession, and Announcement

Each line in Matthew 16:13–18 is important, so observe the verses carefully as you take in the significance of this passage.

#### General Question—Matthew 16:13–14

How did Jesus begin His conversation with the disciples in [Matthew 16:13–14](#), and how did the disciples respond?



## **God's Body-Building Program**

*Matthew 16:13–18; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27*

Jesus didn't fit the popular messianic mold of a Jewish warrior-king, so the Jews cast Him in a lesser role as a teacher, prophet, or forerunner. Hearing their answer, Jesus turned to His disciples.

### **Personal Question—Matthew 16:15–16**

“Who do you say I am?” Jesus asked (16:15), using a plural form of *you*. Although Jesus addressed all the disciples, Peter alone spoke up.

Read aloud Peter's confession in [16:16](#) as you imagine nearby pagan worshipers offering sacrifices at their temples and bowing to Caesar as son of god. How did each word of Peter's confession of the authority and divinity of Jesus contrast the setting?

### **Jesus' Announcement—Matthew 16:17–18**

Jesus was now ready to announce His church. But first, He had a *blessing* for Peter: “You are blessed, Simon son of John” (16:17) According to [Matthew 16:17](#), why was Peter blessed?

After blessing Peter, Jesus made His announcement in the form of a promise in 16:18:

*“Upon this rock I will build my church.”*



**GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**  
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**God's Body-Building Program**

*Matthew 16:13–18; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27*

First, observe the ownership of the church. To whom does the church belong . . . and *not* belong? Who is ultimately responsible for the church's survival and growth?

Second, observe the process—"will build." When? With what materials? What does "building" imply about the process?

Third, observe the name, "church." He didn't say, "churches." To what was He referring? How was Jesus' *church* unique among all the sects and religions of the world?



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## God's Body-Building Program

*Matthew 16:13–18; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27*

Then Jesus sealed His promise with a guarantee in Matthew 16:18:

*“and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.”*

The text literally states, “gates of Hades” (16:18 NASB). Jesus was saying that even if Satan himself flung open the gates of hell and sent his entire battalion of demonic forces to attack Christ’s church, they could not crumble its walls. How did this promise embolden Jesus’ disciples then . . . and now?

*The church is not the work of the pastor or the elders. It’s not the work of a denomination or the pope. Christ alone is our boss. He holds the patent on the church. It was His genius that originated it and deposited into it the truth of heaven, which Peter and all His disciples ever since proclaim. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: Definition of “Church”

We can knit together the concepts from Matthew 16:13–18 into a helpful definition of the church:

The church is the ever-enlarging body of born-again believers who comprise the universal Body of Christ over whom He reigns as Lord.<sup>1</sup>



**GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**  
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**God's Body-Building Program**

*Matthew 16:13–18; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27*

Let's divide this definition into parts. What biblical truth from our passage is reflected in the phrase, "ever-enlarging body of born-again believers"?

What biblical truth is reflected in the phrase, "universal Body of Christ"?

What biblical truth is reflected in the phrase, "over whom He reigns as Lord"?



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## **God's Body-Building Program**

*Matthew 16:13–18; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27*

Reflect on the following central ideas about the church and explain each concept in the space provided. The church is . . .

- 1) *Universal in scope:* \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) *Continually in process:* \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) *Exclusive in membership:* \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) *Impervious to destruction:* \_\_\_\_\_

As a follower of Christ, you are part of this remarkable, divinely inspired, powerful, undefeatable movement of God!

*The longer I live, the more I believe in Christ's universal program called the church. I admire what God has done, and I want to be involved in it until my last breath. It is the most exciting thing! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### **Correlation: Growth and Signs of Health**

The church Jesus instituted was born on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1–12). Filled with the Spirit, Peter went into the streets and preached what he had confessed at Caesarea Philippi, that Jesus was “both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36). As a result, 3,000 people believed and were added to the church that day (2:41).

The rest of Acts chronicles Christ's building project in Jerusalem and beyond. Read the following verses, and write down some of the phrases that describe the church's remarkable growth: [Acts 5:14](#); [6:7](#); [11:19–21](#); [12:24](#); [19:18–20](#).



## God's Body-Building Program

*Matthew 16:13–18; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27*

As the young church grew, the apostles nourished the body of Christ with a balanced spiritual diet. The charts below list six signs of a healthy church from *1 Corinthians 12:12–27*. Notice how the principles balance each other. As you read the passages, explain the principles in the space provided.

Principle	Scripture	Explanation
<i>Presence of unity and harmony</i>	12:12	
<i>Absence of favoritism, status, and prejudice</i>	12:13	
<i>Emphasis on individual value and mutual variety</i>	12:14–20	
<i>De-emphasis on independence and self-sufficiency</i>	12:15–24	
<i>Support of others</i>	12:25	
<i>Exaltation of Christ</i>	12:17	

Think of the sequence of events in the launch of the church. Peter boldly confessed Jesus' identity, which prompted Jesus to institute His church, which led to the empowerment of the Spirit at Pentecost, which resulted in the miraculous growth of the church. What's our role in God's ever-growing mission?

### **Application: How Healthy Am I?**

How can you contribute to God's body-building program? First, commit to boldly confessing as Peter did that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Second, use the six signs of a healthy body to evaluate your own spiritual health.

## **God's Body-Building Program**

*Matthew 16:13–18; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27*

Prayerfully reflect on the following list of questions and, in the space below, write down what you do well and what you could do better.

- 1) *Do I pursue unity at church or do I favor people of status or even show prejudice?*
- 2) *Do I value each member, or do I value only certain, high-profile people?*
- 3) *Am I using my gifts and seeing them as vital?*
- 4) *Do I support others who are hurting and give honor to those who deserve praise?*
- 5) *Do I exalt Christ above all?*

As believers, we are part of a divine movement that is much bigger than we may realize. Church is not a source of Christian entertainment. It's the ever-enlarging, worldwide body of Christ in which He reigns as Lord and through which His name is proclaimed. The church is the greatest force for good in the world, and no evil can overcome it! May we never lose sight of the glory of Christ's church.



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

*Father, thank You for the body of Christ, for building it up, for gifting individuals to serve, and mostly for Your Son, the head of the church. Use me at my church to build up others in love and give strength to the needy as I exalt Christ. In His name, amen.*

#### **ENDNOTE**

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life: Returning to Our Roots* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1986), 339.



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY TWENTY

## Three Cheers for the Church

*Philippians 1:1–18, 23–27*

*The church is the conscience of the nation. As the pulpit stands on moral issues, the people stand. Let the light shine. Let the salt bite. These are our roles. The world expects us to stand for the truth.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EVER since Jesus declared, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18), He has been growing His worldwide family of believers. From every continent, nationality, and ethnic group, followers of Christ unite around His teachings and hold together with the cords of His love.

Christ’s church is universal in scope, but it is also local. Each church, like a small flame, dots the landscape as points of light in the darkness. Wherever believers gather, music and message mingle to proclaim the gospel of Christ. Ministries of the church refresh sagging spirits, confront wrong, point the way, model the truth, help the hurting, rejoice over new life, and care for the dying—all done in the name of our Savior to the glory of God.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study celebrates the significance of the local church and its uniqueness by examining three passages in the writings of Paul.



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## **Three Cheers for the Church**

*Philippians 1:1–18, 23–27*



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Consider the positive influence of the local church. Most likely, it was at church where you . . .

- Realized God loves you and sent His Son to die for your sins
- Learned the Bible from teachers you respected
- Developed lifelong gifts and talents
- Leaned on others during the worst times of your life
- Met your spouse and were married
- Celebrated the births of your children
- Found close friends who also loved the Lord
- Received comfort when a family member died
- Worshiped with like-minded believers who reminded you that you're not alone

In what ways has the local church enriched you? As you open the Word, say a prayer of thanksgiving for the vital role of your local church in your life.



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

In Philippians 1, Paul illustrated the significance of the local church. First Corinthians 11:23–28 and Romans 6:1–7 explain the Lord's Supper and baptism as unique practices in Christianity. Let's explore these passages.





**Three Cheers for the Church**

*Philippians 1:1–18, 23–27*

 **Observation and Interpretation: The Significance and Uniqueness of the Church**

Two key questions guide our reading of the Scriptures—*What does this verse say?* and *What does this verse mean?* In the charts below, write down what the verses say by answering the questions in the left column. Record your interpretations in the right column.

<b>The Significance of the Local Church (Part 1)</b> <i>Philippians 1:1–30</i>	
The believers in Philippi held a special place in Paul’s heart. They were the first in Macedonia to receive the gospel. His fondness for them and his zeal for the Lord, expressed in Philippians 1, illustrates the significance of the local church in the world, community, and individuals.	
 <b>Observation</b>	 <b>Interpretation</b>
1a. In <i>Philippians 1:1–6</i> , how did Paul express his gratitude and fond memories for them?	2a. What positive impact can the church have on its members based on Paul’s experience?
1b. In <i>1:7–8</i> , what feelings did Paul express for their support of him?	2b. What emotional and spiritual support does the local church offer in times of crisis?
1c. In <i>1:9–11</i> , how did Paul pray for these believers? Note his key verbs and nouns.	2c. How is Paul’s prayer instructive for the church when it offers prayers of blessing?



# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES



## STUDY

*Philippians 1:1–18, 23–27*

*Churches may go from one extreme to another in their style of worship, approach to ministry, and methodology. But churches worth attending have the same pivot point: Jesus Christ is proclaimed. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

## Three Cheers for the Church

*Philippians 1:1–18, 23–27*

The Uniqueness of the Lord's Table <i>1 Corinthians 11:23–28</i>	
On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as a regular practice for His followers ( <i>Luke 22:14–20</i> ). Paul instructed the Corinthians how to observe this ordinance in their church.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
1a. Read <i>1 Corinthians 11:23–28</i> . What are the elements of the Lord's Supper? What commands did Jesus give?	2a. What do the bread and the cup represent? What truth about our relationship with Christ does the Lord's Supper symbolize?

The Uniqueness of Baptism <i>Romans 6:3–4</i>	
Jesus instituted baptism as an ordinance of the church in the Great Commission ( <i>Matthew 28:18–20</i> ). In Romans 6:3–4, Paul explained the spiritual meaning of baptism.	
1a. Read <i>Romans 6:3–4</i> . What did Paul say happens when we are spiritually united with Christ at our salvation?	1a. In what ways does water baptism reenact our spiritual baptism? Why is it important for Jesus' followers to be water baptized?

*The ordinances are sermons without words. The Lord's Table is saying, "He died for me."  
 The baptismal celebration is saying, "He lives in me." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Three Cheers for the Church**

*Philippians 1:1–18, 23–27*



### **Application: Three Cheers for the Church**

What a marvelous thing is the local family of God! Where else but in Christ and His church can people of every social class and nationality find true unity? Where else can you link arms with other believers in worshiping God and walking in His path? What other institution still holds fast to godly values and points society in the direction of biblical morality?

In local churches, families are celebrated and strengthened. Children flourish in a loving environment that develops their spiritual capacity. Discouraged youth find guidance and friendship and even family. Single-parent families find support and care. We are able to love God and follow Christ with others in an unbreakable bond of fellowship.

Through this study, what new aspects have you come to appreciate about the local church as well as the Lord's Supper and baptism?

Have you felt disillusioned with the church because of a hurtful experience? If so, who might you talk to about your past? What might help you reengage with a local church?



## **Three Cheers for the Church**

*Philippians 1:1–18, 23–27*

If you've never been baptized, what might be the next step in obeying Christ's command to be baptized?

How can you reach out in Christ's love through a church ministry this week?

No other organization makes such a significant contribution to the world, the community, and the spiritual life of believers than the local church. At the center of the church's significance is the faithful preaching of Christ's message and the faithful practice of Christ's ordinances. Christ is the hope of the world, and He has chosen His church to embody and channel His saving message of redemption and renewal.



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

*Father, I love to worship You with other believers in a place that is safe from persecution and free from the world's influences. Guide the leaders and pastors of my church in the wisdom of Your Word. Help me to contribute in meaningful ways for the building up of the body of Christ. In His name, amen.*



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY TWENTY-ONE

## Encouragement Served Family Style

*Hebrews 10:19–25*

*The church is not the place for verbal put-downs, sarcastic jabs, and critical comments. It's where people come to be encouraged.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**W**HO is your encourager? The person you call on when your shoulders slump and confidence sags? The friend who listens patiently and speaks a positive word that fills your sails with a fresh wind of hope? Moses had Aaron. Elijah had Elisha. Naomi had Ruth. David had Jonathan. Mary had Elizabeth. Paul had Barnabas. Do you have an encourager?

Our English word *encourage* comes from an Old French word that means “to put courage into.” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* says it means “to inspire with courage, spirit, or hope: hearten . . . to spur on: stimulate.”<sup>1</sup>

We all need someone to inspire us with courage and lift our spirits from time to time—particularly these days. With each passing year, the end-times clock ticks closer to Christ’s return, and the tide against Christians grows stronger. Paul warned us that “in the last days there will be very difficult times” (2 Timothy 3:1). More and more people will scoff at God and “hate what is good” (3:3). The need for encouragers to bolster our faith and steel our hearts is greater now than ever.

Do you have an encourager? Are you an encourager? It goes both ways, you know. Anyone can learn to be an encourager, and in this *Searching the Scriptures* study, God’s Word shows us how.



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## Encouragement Served Family Style

Hebrews 10:19–25



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Reflect on the characteristics of the person who has encouraged you in the past. What qualities did you appreciate? Thank the Lord for this person as you seek to follow in his or her footsteps.

*Father, I long to be the kind of person who puts courage into others, who fills others with hope, the one whom others turn to when they thirst for spiritual refreshment. Help me be an encourager. In Jesus' name, amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

When Christians encourage, they do more than flatter—“You’re a winner”—or give a verbal pat on the back—“Just believe in yourself.” We base our encouragement on our relationship with Christ who dwells within us. Our confidence and strength are in Him.

The writer to the Hebrews encouraged suffering Christians to anchor themselves to Christ. He wrote, “Let us run with endurance the race God has set before us” (Hebrews 12:1)—by believing in ourselves? No, we run with endurance . . .

*by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. (12:2).*

Jesus is our champion! What does Jesus do for us that gives us confidence to persevere and to encourage others to do the same? Let’s find out in Hebrews 10.



### Observation: The Biblical Basis for Encouragement

To see what God wants us to see in the Scriptures, sometimes we must read a passage several times. Linger over the words and write down everything you observe.



## Encouragement Served Family Style

*Hebrews 10:19–25*

### Our Source of Encouragement—Hebrews 10:19–20

According to [Hebrews 10:19–20](#), what privilege do we have because of “the blood of Jesus” that we wouldn’t have otherwise? (Note: the “curtain into the Most Holy Place” in verse 20 shielded sinful people from God’s holy presence.)

The first word in 10:19 in the New American Standard Bible, *therefore*, indicates the following points build upon the points that just preceded. According to [10:11–18](#), what did God’s people have to do in order to come to Him under the old covenant? What did Christ’s “single sacrifice for sins, good for all time” accomplish under the new covenant (10:12)?

*Jesus opened for us a new and living way to the Father. We don’t have to go through a system of works. We don’t have to go through a priest. We don’t have to work our way into the presence of God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Encouragement Served Family Style

Hebrews 10:19–25

### Our Ministry of Encouragement—Hebrews 10:22–25

“Since we have a great High Priest who rules over God’s house” (Hebrews 10:21), what should we do, according to 10:22–25? In the following spaces, complete the sentences that begin with “Let us.”

Verse 22: “Let us \_\_\_\_\_.”

Verse 23: “Let us \_\_\_\_\_.”

Verse 24: “Let us \_\_\_\_\_.”

Verse 25: “Let us \_\_\_\_\_.”

How do these commands logically flow together and build on each other?

*Encouragement is a relational thing. It is not the responsibility of a gifted few, but of all those of the family of God. It is all the more needed in the last days when those who love Christ are the target of affliction. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Encouragement Served Family Style

Hebrews 10:19–25



### Interpretation: The Meaning of Encouragement

All believers follow Christ's crimson carpet into God's presence, coming together under one heavenly roof, the "house of God" (Hebrews 10:21 NASB). God intends His family to come together under one earthly roof, too, at church or in a home to encourage each other. What is encouragement, exactly?

The Greek word for *encourage* in Hebrews 10:25 comes from two words, *para* ("alongside") and *kaleo* ("to call"); encouragement literally means "to call alongside." An encourager is someone who comes alongside us to walk with us and keep us on the road to Christ.

Connection with other believers is a must. Look over [10:21–25](#) again, and write down, specifically, what we do for one another when we encourage.

*Battered and bruised from the savage world, we stumble into church. This is the place we come when we need an encouraging word. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Encouragement Served Family Style

Hebrews 10:19–25



### Correlation: Right Words Motivated by Love

To add color to your understanding of encouragement, look up these proverbs and write down the wisdom of using the right words.

Proverbs 10:11: \_\_\_\_\_

10:20–21: \_\_\_\_\_

12:18: \_\_\_\_\_

15:4: \_\_\_\_\_

16:24: \_\_\_\_\_

18:21: \_\_\_\_\_

*“Death” words destroy, hurt, and create never-forgotten hateful and humiliating feelings.  
“Life” words build up, lift spirits, center on truth, and set free a person in bondage.  
Encouragement is a transfusion of strength. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Encouragement includes using the right words at the right time, but there is more. Jonathan’s friendship with David modeled the necessary relational context for encouragement.

On the run from King Saul, David survived by keeping one step ahead of the tip of the jealous king’s spear. Read the background of David’s friendship with Jonathan in [1 Samuel 18:1–4; 19:1–3](#).

According to [23:15–17](#), what did Jonathan do to encourage David? How important was the context of their friendship to his encouragement?



## Encouragement Served Family Style

Hebrews 10:19–25

Based on these passages, encouragement is most effective when we say the **right words** with the **right motivation**—love—and we direct our words to the **right target**—the person's fear.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll ties it all together:

The best kind of encouragement . . . is when the person doing the encouraging genuinely loves the other individual and expresses it. That's our friend Jonathan. In such situations, the person needing encouragement honestly admits his fear, which causes a meaningful connection between the two. In that situation, soul meets with soul. And the deepest level of needs begin to be met. *That* is our goal . . . *effective* encouragement served family style!<sup>2</sup>



### Application: Three Questions to Consider

As we reflect on the principles from our study, three questions rise to the surface.

**Whom should I encourage?** Ideally, everyone. Realistically, the most natural people to encourage are those with whom you already have a relationship. Effective encouragement takes time, give-and-take, and a willingness to listen and to be involved. Do you know someone who needs to hear life-words motivated by love? Who?



## Encouragement Served Family Style

*Hebrews 10:19–25*

**How can the “levels” of defense be penetrated?** No one automatically pulls down his or her defenses in a conversation. It takes patience and a sensitive spirit to break through to a person’s innermost fears. Considering the person(s) above, how can you best get through to him or her?

**What essential techniques should you remember?** Here are a few tips to consider:

- Talk less so you can feel more.
- Be sensitive to timing, wording, and response.
- Do everything in your power not to judge.
- Use gentleness.
- Don’t telegraph shock when the person unloads his or her story.
- Watch your motive—speak the truth in love.

Some of these techniques may not come naturally for you. On which ones do you most need the Holy Spirit’s help? Can you think of any other techniques you might add?



## **Encouragement Served Family Style**

*Hebrews 10:19–25*

If you need encouragement, who can offer you the right words with the right motive directed at your fear? “David found strength in the LORD his God” (1 Samuel 30:6), and perhaps you can too by turning to Him for encouragement now. Express to the Lord your need.

Commit to the Lord all your interactions. Draw near to His throne through Jesus, your great High Priest. Ask the Lord to fill your heart with His love and your mouth with His words of life as you “motivate one another to acts of love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24). Encourage someone today!



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

*Father, give me the words most needed in the moment for the person who most needs to hear them. Remove my protective layers and help me to love others genuinely. Help me to encourage those I love to hang on when they feel like giving up and to keep their hope alive because of Christ. In His name, amen.*

### **ENDNOTES**

1. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2014), see “encourage.”
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life: Returning to Our Roots* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1986), 384.



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY TWENTY-TWO

## Worship: Let It Shine! Let It Shine!

*Psalm 95:1–7*

*In worship, we connect with the living Lord. In that moment, we are lost in the wonder and praise of God.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN jewelers craft a ring, they mold a band from a precious metal such as gold or silver. They attach prongs that are just the right size and strength to secure the gemstone. The final touch is to mount the jewel, and the ring is complete. The ring's wearer can now flash the beautiful gem for all to admire. What is the purpose of a ring if not to show off the jewel?

Our purpose is worship. God designed our souls to connect to Him and to respond in praise. Worship is the sparkling focal point of our lives, and when worship is missing, we feel incomplete.

In their book, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel*, Ron Allen and Gordon Borror shine a light on what worship really is.

*Worship is an active response to God whereby we declare His worth. Worship is not passive, but is participative. Worship is not simply a mood; it is a response. Worship is not just a feeling; it is a declaration. . . .*

The English word worship is wonderfully expressive of the act that it describes. This term comes from the Anglo-Saxon *weorthscipe*, which then was modified to *worthship*, and finally to *worship*. Worship means “to attribute worth” to something or someone.<sup>1</sup>



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## Worship: Let It Shine! Let It Shine!

*Psalm 95:1–7*

Worship is declaring the worth of God. It is “showing off” God by talking about Him, singing His praises, reflecting His character, and modeling His values. Worship is the dazzling jewel mounted in the setting of our lives. Let it shine! ***Let it shine!***



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Open your study of the Scriptures with prayer.

*Father, I long to worship You in a meaningful way. Show me how to honor You with my whole life—not just at church on Sunday but every day and in everything I do. Help me see You more clearly and fill me with love, wonder, and praise. In Jesus’ name, amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Worship can be an elusive concept because it doesn’t come with a set of rules. There aren’t “Five Steps to Worship” or a list of dos and don’ts. Worship is relational in nature, so it includes experiential and emotional components that may be difficult to corral with precise parameters.

Worship is also personal. Some Christians relate to God mostly with their minds and are uncomfortable expressing feelings. Others swing to the opposite extreme and relate to God only by feelings. The book of Psalms keeps us balanced and helps us connect to the living Lord with our whole being—mind, emotions, and will. Let’s examine a sampling of psalms to find biblical guidance for our worship.



### Observation: The Meaning and Significance of Worship

Psalms falls in the category of biblical poetry. As poets, the psalmists used symbolic language and figures of speech to stir their readers’ emotions while communicating truth about God. They flooded the page with expressions of deep devotion and loving adoration. As you read the poetic lines, sense the emotions flowing through the psalmist’s pen. Read with your mind and your heart.



**GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**  
**Returning To Our Roots**  
**STUDY TWENTY-TWO**

SEARCHING  
THE  
SCRIPTURES  
**STUDY**

**Worship: Let It Shine! Let It Shine!**

*Psalm 95:1–7*

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**The Meaning of Worship—Psalm 95:1–7; 139:9–10**

Psalm 95 begins with an open-door welcome. What did the psalmist invite us to do, according to *Psalm 95:1–2*?

Can you feel the psalmist's enthusiasm? "*Let loose your joy!*" the psalmist excitedly encouraged. What was the reason for his exuberance, according to *95:3–5*?

What personal perspective does *Psalm 139:9–10* add to our worship of God?



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# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY TWENTY-TWO

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

## Worship: Let It Shine! Let It Shine!

*Psalm 95:1–7*

For the Hebrew poets, nothing in nature matches the vastness of the sea or the majesty of the mountains. And yet, God is greater by far. In His hand, God holds the sea and mountains, and by His hand, He formed them. With that same hand, God guides us wherever we may wander in this wide, untamed world.

Does this revelation of God's *powerful* yet *personal* nature inspire a response of awe, gratitude, and love? If so, you're worshipping!

What physical response of worship did the psalmist encourage in *Psalm 95:6–7*? Have you ever worshiped that way? How do you prefer to worship?

*The amazing thing about worship is you don't care what anybody else thinks. You couldn't care less what someone else thinks about your lifting of hands or looking up or silent awe. It seems like everything else is blocked out because you have been touched by God.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

### The Significance of Worship—Psalm 91:1–2; 92:1–3

What symbolism did the psalmist use in *Psalm 91:1–2*? What feeling did the psalmist express? How does he call us as his readers to respond?



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## **Worship: Let It Shine! Let It Shine!**

*Psalm 95:1–7*

What did the psalmist say about music in worship, according to *Psalm 92:1–3*? Why do you think he said, “It is good” (92:1–2)?

How drab life would be without songs of worship that lift our spirits and lighten our hearts!

Summing up our observations, worship is an invitation to praise the Lord in response to His greatness (Psalm 95:1–5). It is a bodily experience that may include singing, declaring, bowing, and kneeling (95:6–7). In worship, our souls draw close to the Lord where we feel safe in His care, and we trust Him (91:1–2). Finally, worship is a morning-to-evening, all-day, whole-life experience, and it is good for us to sing and make music to the Lord (92:1–3).



### **Interpretation: The Definition of Worship**

Piece these observations together and write down your own definition of *worship*.



## Worship: Let It Shine! Let It Shine!

*Psalm 95:1–7*

What facet of the worship “jewel” in these psalms caught your eye for the first time?

In his book, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers this simple and concise definition of worship: “Worship is a human response to a divine revelation.”<sup>2</sup>

Humans are hard-wired to glory in the glorious. We naturally respond with delight at the beauty we see in the brilliant colors of a sunset. Or with awe at the grandeur of a snow-capped mountain. Or with rapture at the creativity of a musical masterpiece. Likewise, when we see God for who He truly is in all His glorious wonder, our souls can’t help but respond with awe, adoration, and songs of praise.

*Add singing to your time with God. Get up in the morning with a song before anything in the day has a chance to squeeze the song out of you. Read the psalms, and sing His songs back to Him. That’s the kind of worship the Lord seeks. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Correlation: The Worship God Seeks

Our journey of worship leads us from the Psalms into the gospels. Jesus taught a key principle about worship in His conversation with a woman in [John 4:19–24](#). The woman asked Jesus *where* God wants His people to worship—Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim (4:19–20). How did Jesus answer her question in [4:21–22](#)?



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY TWENTY-TWO

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

### Worship: Let It Shine! Let It Shine!

*Psalms 95:1–7*

According to Jesus, the Father isn't interested in the externals, such as where we worship. What is the Father looking for in those who worship Him, according to [John 4:23–24](#)? What did Jesus mean?

Next, we go to the epistles. Paul elaborated Jesus' concepts on worship in [Romans 12:1–2](#). How did Paul explain the kind of worship that pleases the Lord most?

*Worship must align with the revealed Word of God. That's truth. Worship must also be in spirit. It is in the unseen realm of the "felt." It is in our inner connection with the Spirit. You don't need a choir or a pipe organ. Worship must be part of one's personal life. It must be in spirit and in truth. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



#### Application: Sparkling Beauty of the Rediscovered Jewel

Reflecting on his own journey of worship, Pastor Chuck Swindoll writes candidly,

I have found that it is impossible to lead a group of people in something that is not a part of me personally. So I had to cultivate a *private* worship without talking about it, without spelling it out, without even confessing to the struggles of it. And I had to add to my discipline of prayer such things as meaningful times of singing, and to my walk with God quiet moments of silence. And even in the pressured times I had to work out a way for worship to fit. It was so delicate . . . even elusive.<sup>3</sup>



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# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY TWENTY-TWO

## Worship: Let It Shine! Let It Shine!

*Psalm 95:1–7*

How do you describe your journey of worship?

Pastor Chuck lists the soul-health benefits that he experiences when he worships:

- 1) *Worship magnifies my God. . . .*
- 2) *Worship enlarges my horizons. . . .*
- 3) *Worship eclipses my fears. . . .*
- 4) *Worship changes my perspective. . . .*
- 5) *Worship refreshes my spirit. . . .*
- 6) *Worship enhances my work.<sup>4</sup>*

How does worship benefit your soul?



# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY TWENTY-TWO

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY

## Worship: Let It Shine! Let It Shine!

*Psalm 95:1–7*

Worship is participatory, not passive; active, not aloof. It enhances every aspect of our lives. What area of your life can the jewel of worship enhance today?

Let the jewel of worship shine as you “show off” God. As you talk about His goodness and display His character in your conversations. Rise in the morning with songs of worship, sing them throughout your day, and go to sleep humming them in your heart. Find joy in the jewel as you delight in God, rest in His care, and sing the wonders of His praise.

*Come, let us sing to the LORD!*

*Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. (Psalm 95:1)*



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, I have seen the roots of my faith deepening through this series of studies. I have grown in my knowledge of You and love for You, and my worship is flourishing as a result. As my roots sink deeper into You, my soul rises higher in praise. May I continue to worship You in spirit and truth for the rest of my days, and when I see You face-to-face, may I glory in Your glory for all eternity. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### ENDNOTES

1. Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1982), 16.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life: Returning to Our Roots* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1986), 395.
3. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life*, 393.
4. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life*, 397.



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# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning To Our Roots

### STUDY TWENTY-TWO

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

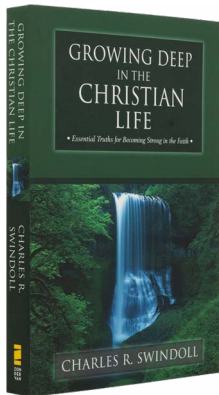
## STUDY

### Worship: Let It Shine! Let It Shine!

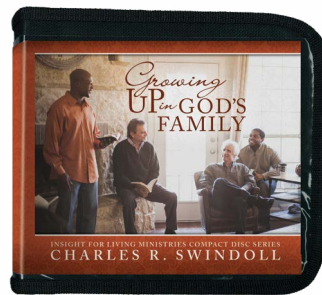
*Psalms 95:1-7*



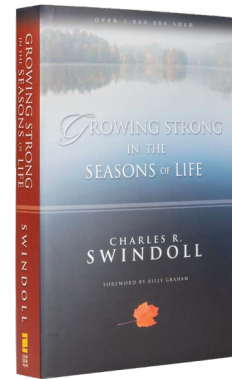
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