

GOD KNOWS WHAT HE'S ABOUT

God Chooses His Servants

Matthew 1:18–25



LET'S BEGIN HERE

For Abraham, there was an unmistakable call to move. Moses was 80 years old, by a burning bush, when his call came. It happened for David when he was summoned as he faithfully watched over his sheep.

In Mary's case, we don't know exactly what she was doing when the angel Gabriel visited her . . . but her call was unmistakable: God had chosen her to bear the Christ. She accepted her calling with grace and enthusiasm—what extraordinary faith! Joseph, who could have rejected Mary and walked away from social disgrace, bravely responded in faith as well.

Throughout the Bible, God chooses His servants in a variety of ways: through angelic visits, inaudible instructions, astonishing movements in the fullness of time, and visions. One thing is for certain: once a servant answers God's call, his or her life is never the same.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Are you a believer? Then God has chosen *you* to be His servant; God has called *you*. The apostle Paul put it this way:

For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, *he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory.* (Romans 8:29–30, emphasis added)

We may not have stars or angels to supernaturally guide us, but that does not mean we are not called. The people of God whose stories were chronicled in the Bible did not have the privilege of possessing the completed canon of Scripture. We have in the Word everything we need to be God's servants. We have, from the life of Christ, the model of obedience.

What did the call look like for Mary and Joseph? What does it look like for us?

Quotable

*God's still doing
what He chooses—
including His
selection of you in
the plan that He
has devised.*

— Charles R. Swindoll





Observation: Entering the Scenes

Observation is a key discipline to develop in order to see what the Bible actually says. This discipline is especially important for those passages of Scripture we hear and read regularly, so that we don't presume upon the text and then create faulty interpretations based on anemic observation.

A great way to observe a passage is to take visual notes, which includes double-underlining verbs, circling nouns, noting who's speaking, and jotting down which senses—sight, smell, taste, touch, hearing—are utilized in the passage.

In your Bible or on a printout of Matthew 1:18–25, make some visual notes to help you observe the text. The character names have been highlighted to get you started.

This is how Jesus the **Messiah** was born. His mother, **Mary**, was engaged to be married to **Joseph**. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the **Holy Spirit**. **Joseph**, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "**Joseph**, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take **Mary** as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the **Holy Spirit**. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

All of this occurred to fulfill the **Lord's** message through his prophet:

"Look! The virgin will conceive a child!
She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him **Immanuel**,
which means 'God is with us.'"

When **Joseph** woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took **Mary** as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And **Joseph** named him **Jesus**.



Interpretation: Understanding the Meaning

Now let's seek to interpret the meaning.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

There's nothing like a good story, and the Gospels are chock full of them. *Narrative* drives the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Gospels. There are some key questions that we can examine in order to interpret the Bible passage with as much depth as Chuck Swindoll.

Read Matthew 1:18–25 again, and ponder these questions:

Is there a conflict of some kind taking place—an internal conflict or a spiritual dilemma or a conflict between people?

Is there a crucial choice to be made, a twist in the story, a test?

What are the relationships between the events—cause/effect, change/no-change?

What challenges does Joseph face in this passage?



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Is there a shift in Joseph's attitude or decisions?

Is there a lesson for us in Joseph's process in Matthew 1:18–25?

Here's how Chuck beautifully interprets the challenge Joseph may have experienced, based on asking interpretive questions of the text:

So all of this is churning in Joseph. He wasn't there. He didn't talk to the angel. He only has his fiancée's words to go by. They're shocking words and, to make matters even more complicated, she's gone. She leaves! She goes and spends three months with Elizabeth, her relative. Elizabeth is an older woman who is carrying her child, not by way of a miracle, but by a remarkable conception in that Elizabeth is so old, as is her husband. But at least they knew who had fathered their child. So, maybe needing counsel, maybe needing reassurance, Mary leaves the message with Joseph and leaves to be with Elizabeth.

If there's one thing you want to do at a time that is filled with surprises like this, it's to talk. But there's no one for Joseph to talk to.

Interpretation in Matthew 1 leads the reader to develop better application because the reader realizes that, while settings may differ, the internal struggles, emotions, and challenges put forth in the passage are very much the same as he or she experiences today.



Correlation: Comparing Scripture with Scripture

Chuck says correlation is “comparing one Scripture with other Scriptures, precept upon precept and line upon line, to amplify our understanding of what the Bible is teaching.”¹





Searching the Scriptures Tips

Just as we need tools in the kitchen to help us cook our meals, we need Bible study tools to help us feed ourselves God's Word. The tools we recommend for studying Scripture are a Bible dictionary, such as *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, and a commentary, such as *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Versions of the Bible are available at BibleGateway.com, and an excellent online Bible commentary by Thomas L. Constable is at lumina.bible.org.

There's a stand-out phrase in Matthew 1:18–25 that sums up God's encouragement to Joseph . . . and to us: "do not be afraid." Through an angel, God reassured Joseph to let go of his fears concerning Mary's fidelity and pregnancy. His letting go of these understandable concerns required a great leap of faith.

Do not be afraid is a phrase often uttered throughout Scripture. Using this [online NASB concordance](http://onlineNASBconcordance.com) provided by biblestudytools.com, scroll through the places in Scripture that include this phrase. Write down your thoughts on what this phrase means for the people of God, including you.



Application: God's Choice Checklist

Chuck expounds on how the Lord chooses His servants, based on the narrative of Matthew 1:18–25. Read each characteristic. Which ones stand out as they relate to your own life?

When God chooses His servants, He chooses those who . . .

- Often seem least qualified to carry out God's plan
- Often are the most surprised to be selected
- Often are called to fill roles no one else in their family ever filled



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- Often are challenged to believe Him against all odds
- Often must stand alone as they obey His will
- Often are unable to explain why God has led as He led
- Often are among those most amazed at the way He used them as He did

Write down which of these characteristics most resonates with you and why.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, we're not worthy or adequate in our own strength or merit, yet You generously allow us to be a part of Your grand plans. Thank You for doing extraordinary things through ordinary people. Help me to say yes to Your will. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2016), 141.



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SEARCHING
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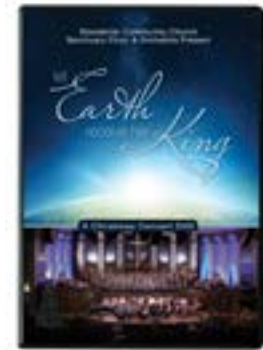
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2017 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department, based on the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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