

JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY Two

A Relationship, a Courtship . . . a Miracle

Selected Scriptures

Christmas is a reminder of that great word, grace. It's a season when God takes us from where we were and brings us to where He wants us to be. —Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

E ACH December, people hope for the perfect Christmas. They decorate their homes with festive wreaths covered with ribbons and bows and set out their finest holiday china. Children gaze with wonder at the Christmas tree, lit up with lights and adorned with ornaments, and dream of Christmas morning.

Despite our best plans, however, few Christmases rise to the level of perfection. Most of the time, the Christmas season is a bumpy ride of mishaps and mayhem. The car breaks down, the kids get the flu, the dog knocks over the Christmas tree, the roast burns, and the eggnog spills. Christmas can get messy.

The first Christmas was messy, too, but in its own way. Christ's birth took place in less-than-ideal circumstances. Mary delivered Jesus in a stable, laid Him in a feeding trough, and wrapped Him in rags—hardly the sterile environment of a hospital or the cozy atmosphere of a home. The "mess," however, started long before Mary and Joseph ever made their way to Bethlehem. It all began in the rough, backwater town called Nazareth.





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Selected Scriptures



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open the Word, ask the Lord to help you understand what it must have been like for Mary and Joseph during the days leading up to the birth of Christ.

Father, Your Son entered this world in the humblest of ways. A poor young couple welcomed Him in the bleakest of settings and most difficult of circumstances. Yet, they accepted God's plan with submissive obedience. May I learn from them and receive You as they did, with my deepest affection and faith. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

For this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll turn to two passages: *Luke* 1:26–38 and *Matthew* 1:18–25. In the first passage, Gabriel visits Mary in Nazareth, and, in the second, an angel (perhaps Gabriel) appears to Joseph in a dream.

The timeline went something like this. In early spring, Gabriel came to Mary to tell her that she would bear the Messiah. After she became pregnant, Mary went to the hill country of Judea to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, where she stayed three months (*Luke 1:39–40, 56*). When Mary returned to Nazareth, she could no longer conceal her pregnancy, and she told Joseph everything. Soon after, the angel appeared to Joseph in a dream.

Let's rewind to the beginning when Gabriel visited Mary with news she never dreamed she would hear.

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Observation: The Mess and the Miracle

In *observation*, we look at what the verses say before trying to interpret their meaning. Note the circumstances, the people, and the dialogue.



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The Town—Luke 1:26–27

What do you observe in *Luke 1:26–27* about the setting and the characters?

What can you infer about the reputation of Mary and Joseph's hometown based on Nathaniel's comment in *John 1:45–46*?

Nazareth was a little town in Galilee, insignificant and unimportant. One of my sources said, "People of Nazareth had a bad name among their neighbors for irreligion and laxity of morals." There was a military barracks there. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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The Courtship—Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:27

Mary and Joseph were "betrothed" (Matthew 1:18 NASB; Luke 1:27 NASB)—which is a bit different from a marital engagement. Look up betrothal in your Bible-study resources and write down what betrothal meant to first-century Jews. For an online resource, consult the online article, "Mary, Mother of Jesus" in The Encyclopedia of the Bible.

The Problem—Matthew 1:18–19; Luke 1:28–34

Describe Gabriel's visit with Mary, according to Luke 1:28–33. Note the words the angel repeats to reassure Mary. How did Mary respond to seeing Gabriel? What key phrases did he use in his message to her?

What problem did Mary state in 1:34?



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In the betrothal period, Mary was legally Joseph's wife although they didn't live as husband and wife. Joseph naturally assumed Mary was pregnant by another man. What problem confronted Joseph, according to *Matthew 1:19*? What do you learn about Joseph's character based on what he considered doing?

If a woman is promiscuous during the betrothal year, the man has the right to take her before the elders of the synagogue and have her stoned. Or he could publicly disgrace her. Or, if he had compassion, he could divorce her quietly and pay to send her away to have the baby in secret. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Miracle—Matthew 1:20-25; Luke 1:35-38

The angel offered a single, divine answer that resolved both Mary's and Joseph's problems. In the chart below, compare what the angel said to Mary with what he said to Joseph. What key words stand out?

The Message to Mary Luke 1:35–37	The Message to Joseph Matthew 1:20–23



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What similarities and differences do you notice in the messages?

Now compare Mary's response with Joseph's response and write down what you observe.

Mary's Response Luke 1:38	Joseph's Response Matthew 1:24–25

When you link an act with God, nothing falls in the category of impossibility. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: The Miracle of Jesus' Conception

Interpretation seeks to understand the passage as the original audience would have understood it. In the first century, the betrothal period was a busy time. Joseph would have been building his and Mary's house. Mary would be sewing her ornate wedding dress while her parents excitedly arranged all the wedding details.

Suddenly, Mary was pregnant, and everything got messy. Her pregnancy cast a dark cloud of suspicion over her and shame over both families. From all appearances, it was a scandal. Mary and Joseph's dreams of the perfect wedding and ideal newlywed life came crashing down.

Despite the ripples of ugly gossip swirling through Nazareth, Mary knew God was with her. He was replacing her wedding-day dreams with a far greater reality: *she would give birth to the Messiah*. The biblical text makes two points undeniably clear about Mary's pregnancy.



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First, *Mary was a virgin until the birth of Jesus*. The Greek word for "virgin" in *Matthew 1:23* and *Luke 1:27* is *parthenos*, which, in general, can refer to a young unmarried woman. But in Mary's case, the writers were specific. They intended the word to mean, "virgin."

Read *Matthew 1:18, 25* and *Luke 1:34* in the New English Translation, for a literal translation of the Greek with explanatory footnotes. How did the biblical authors clarify in these verses that Mary was a virgin when she conceived and gave birth to Jesus?

Second, *Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit*. In Matthew's account, the baby was conceived "of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:18) and "by the Holy Spirit" (1:20). In Luke's account, Gabriel explained how:

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35)

God's power overshadowing Mary reminds us of the account of creation, in which "the Spirit of God was hovering over" the empty earth before God spoke and created life (Genesis 1:2). How was the conception of Jesus similar?

Mary's virginity and miraculous conception of Jesus prove that Jesus was the "Son of God" (Luke 1:35), not the son of Joseph. In the next *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll explore the union of divinity and humanity in Jesus in more detail. For now, let's look at other ways the gospels affirm God is Jesus' father.



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Each one of us has a part of our life that's got "Nazareth" written all over it—shameful, embarrassing, perhaps scandalous. But God, in His grace, brings us from Nazareth to Bethlehem. He has in mind a new birth, a new future, and a new direction. -Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Jesus' True Father

In the genealogy recorded in *Matthew 1:16*, how was Joseph listed?

How did Luke explain Joseph's role in Jesus' genealogy, according to Luke 3:23?

Even as a boy, Jesus knew the identity of His true Father. What did Jesus say to Mary and Joseph when they were looking for Him in Jerusalem, according to Luke 2:49?



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In John's record, Jesus consistently refers to His true Father as God. What was Jesus' response to the Pharisees when they asked Him about his father in *John* 8:18–20?

God is our Father, too, in a spiritual sense. But, by miraculous conception, only Jesus was fathered by God. Jesus alone is the Son of God who took on Adam's curse (fully human) without Adam's sinfulness (fully divine).

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Application: From Nazareth to Your Hometown

Imagine starry-eyed Mary dreaming of matrimony, then suddenly hearing an angel say that she would become pregnant before her wedding. No one else heard the angel's words. Only Mary heard them, and only she experienced the miracle. Society would shame her. Her friends would shun her, and yet, to bear the Christ-child, Mary was willing to bear the scorn.

"'May it be done to me according to your word," Mary told the angel in humble obedience (Luke 1:38 NASB), foreshadowing Jesus' own submission: "'Not my will, but Yours be done" (22:42 NASB).

Are you enduring hardship, even persecution, for doing God's will? How does Mary's faith encourage you?



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Knowing Mary needed support from her husband, God sent the angel to Joseph. In obedience, Joseph surrendered his dreams too. "He did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife" (Matthew 1:24). Joseph willingly sheltered his bride and her baby in his arms of care.

Perhaps God is calling you to be a "Joseph." What qualities does Joseph inspire? Whom has God called you to shelter and support?

Joseph and Mary were nobodies from nowhere. They had neither noble pedigrees nor exceptional abilities. Not one drop of aristocratic blood flowed through their veins, and yet, their hearts surged with willing faith—and that's all God requires from us as well.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, Your values run contrary to the values of the world. You see what no one else sees: the faith in a person's heart. I commit myself to You even as Mary and Joseph did, surrendering to Your plan for my life. Light the way, and I will follow wherever You lead. In Jesus' name, amen.



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When the Son of God became a man, His divine nature and human nature came together. He became the God-man, the object of our affection and the subject of our praise.

-Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHAT makes Jesus the greatest life of all? Certainly, He performed astounding miracles. He touched untouchable lepers and made them whole. He cured the sick and restored the disabled. He even roused the dead as if waking them from a deep sleep. His deeds were unparalleled in power and goodness.

Likewise, no one in history has spoken with His authority or stirred hearts like He did. His sermons ushered people out of a world of conflict and fear into a kingdom of love and hope. In His parables, a wayward son returned to his father's open arms. Those deemed unworthy found welcome at a king's table. The proud and powerful got what was coming to them. Jesus' words set right all of humanity's wrongs and gave people a vision of life as God meant it to be—real life under God's rule and care.

But it wasn't just what Jesus did or what He said that make His life the greatest of all. It was who He was—indeed, who He *is*.

Jesus rules nature because He is its *creator*; He speaks truth because He is its *author*. He is God in the flesh, undiminished deity yet true humanity, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This *Searching the Scriptures* series is a biographical study of Jesus and so much more. It is a journey into the heart of God—the God of the universe in the person of Jesus.





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PREPARE YOUR HEART

The sharper our vision of Jesus, the stronger our hearts beat with adoration of Him. His beauty, goodness, and truth transcend this earthly existence and lift our souls in praise. Begin your study with worship.

Father, all honor, glory, and praise belong to Your Son, the Prince of Peace, the eternal glory of heaven, my Savior. Open my eyes to new vistas of His beauty, to grander appreciation of His goodness, and to deeper understanding of His truth as I study Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The gospels portray Jesus clearly as the Son of God, and yet, few in His day recognized His divine nature simply by looking at Him. No halo hovered over His head, His face didn't glow with celestial light, and His voice didn't reverberate with an otherworldly pitch. Many could not see beyond Jesus' flesh-and-blood form, even when His words and deeds revealed divinity.

The blind, the poor, and the shunned to whom Jesus ministered were the quickest to recognize Jesus as the Son of God. For others, the pathway to faith was an uphill climb. Many who encountered Him walked away scratching their heads, struggling to comprehend divinity in sandals. Responses ranged from perplexed to amazed, curious to outraged. Let's take a brief tour of responses to Jesus in the gospels to see the ways people saw Him and the questions they asked.

Searching the Scriptures Method and Resources

Searching the Scriptures is a four-step Bible-study method that includes observing the passage, interpreting the meaning, correlating with similar passages, and applying the principles. For helpful instruction, consult the Insight for Living Ministries online 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.*



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Observation: Questions about Jesus' Identity

As you read the passages, simply observe what the author is saying. *Observation* is the foundational phase in *Searching the Scriptures*. Take your time. Notice the context, action, and dialogue. Observe commands, statements of truth, contrasts and comparisons, and cause-and-effect. Accurate interpretation depends on careful observation.

The charts below highlight how people responded to Jesus. You'll notice similarities in the responders' words, but their attitudes vary. Note the questions people asked as well as the tone, and whether their hearts were open or closed to Jesus.

Questions from Religious Leaders		
Verses	Summary of Jesus' Words and Actions	Response
Luke 5:17–21		
Luke 7:36–49		

Question from a Political Leader		
Verses	Summary of Jesus' Words and Actions	Response
Luke 9:7–9		

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Question from Jesus' Disciples		
Verses	Summary of Jesus' Words and Actions	Response
Mark 4:35–41		

Questions from People in Jesus' Hometown		
Verses	Summary of Jesus' Words and Actions	Response
Mark 6:1–3		

The central issue for people was Jesus' identity, not His methods for performing miracles or His techniques for preaching. They wanted to know who He was. When Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (Matthew 16:13), what was their response in *Matthew 16:14?* Why might people in Jesus' day mistake Him for these men?



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Jesus asked His disciples, "But who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16:15). What was Peter's response in *16*:16? Why is Peter's answer so crucial to the message of Matthew?

John filled in details about Jesus' identity in *John 1:1–5*, *14*. Write down your observations of this passage, and in the next section we'll explore its meaning.

John's purpose for writing was that people might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that, by believing, they might have life in His name. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: Jesus as the Word

In the *interpretation* phase, we seek the meaning that the author intended his readers to understand. John's audience would have been familiar with the Greek concept of *logos*—"the Word" (John 1:1). According to Pastor Chuck Swindoll in his commentary on John, the term *logos*

had been a profoundly significant concept among philosophers for a least three centuries before Christ. It referred to an uncreated divine mind that gives meaning and order to the universe. John essentially co-opted the concept, saying in effect, "The concept pagan philosophers have theorized about actually exists; He is God, and Jesus Christ is He."¹



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In *John 1:1*, John stated three facts listed in the questions below about Jesus as the Word. To answer the questions, use your Bible-study resources, including Pastor Chuck's commentary, *Insights on John*, or the online commentary, *Constable's Notes*, at netbible.org.

First, what does it mean that Jesus existed "in the beginning" (1:1)?

Second, what does it mean that Jesus was "with God" (1:1)?

Third, what does it mean that Jesus "was God" (1:1)?



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John was guiding us into the mystery of the Trinity—the co-eternal, co-existent, and co-equal innerworkings of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. What did John say that the Son did and continues to do in His role in the Trinity, according to *John 1:3–5*?

Jesus is the *Logos*—the creator and sustainer of all things. In addition, Jesus is the Savior who "became flesh, and dwelt among us" (1:14 NASB). Jesus gives life to those who are dead spiritually. To those in spiritual darkness, Jesus shines the light of His truth. What did John say is the requirement for salvation, according to 1:12–13?

What is your answer to the question, "Who is Jesus?"

Jesus has always been deity. When He became a man, His divine nature and human nature were put together, unmixed and distinct, but together. In bodily form, He became the God-man. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: The "Fullness of Deity" in Bodily Form

Paul also referred to Jesus' preexistence. What similar facts to John's did Paul offer in *Colossians* 1:15–17? What insights did Paul add?

How did Paul state Jesus' identity as God-man in 1:19 and 2:9?

Does it make a difference what we think of Jesus' identity? Yes, it makes *all the difference*! To reduce Jesus to the level of a great teacher, a gifted humanitarian, or an admirable religious leader cuts out the heart and substance of the gospel. Only the God-man can die for the sins of the world. Only Jesus is Lord and Savior.

Application: Practical Significance of Jesus' Identity

What other points of significance are found in the deity of Christ? First, *we have a Bible we can trust*. The credibility of the Scriptures rests on Jesus' deity. The biblical writers staked their lives on the truth about Jesus, whom they witnessed firsthand and whom the Holy Spirit revealed.

Second, we have life that Jesus sustains. Jesus "holds all creation together" (Colossians 1:17). He is in control, and we can fully depend on Him.

Third, *we have a church that He leads.* Jesus is the "head of the church" (1:18), and He has first place in everything. He is the focal point of history, the star of the show! He is preeminent in all things, and no one else can take His place.



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What is the significance of Jesus' deity for you?

As you move through your day, what difference does Jesus as God make regarding how you handle problems? Face fears? Deal with disappointments? Plan for the future?

In the coming *Searching the Scriptures* studies, we'll learn more about how Jesus shined heaven's light in our dark world, offered abundant life, died for sin, was raised from the dead, and promised to come again. But none of these studies will mean much if Jesus is not foremost in your heart. Today, put Jesus first above all others as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I confess my faith in Jesus Christ as the One who bore my sin on the cross and was raised to life as my hope of future resurrection. He is the creator and sustainer of all things, including my life and all I have. He holds first place in my heart, my Redeemer, my Good Shepherd, and my Lord. All praise, honor, and glory go to Him! In His name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on John (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 19.



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All

Study Three

Deity in Diapers

Selected Scriptures

Unlike the Christmas carols we sing, there was nothing calm or bright about the world in which the Lord Jesus entered as a little baby.

-Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

D URING World War II, a chaplain decided to accompany the crew of an Army Air Force bomber on a raid into Germany. The B-17 encountered heavy resistance when enemy fighter planes swarmed the plane and antiaircraft artillery peppered the sky. To steady the men, the chaplain activated the intercom and said, "It's all right, men. Have no fear. God is with you."

The tail gunner, who was frantically firing his weapon, shouted back, "God may be with you guys up front, but He's not back here!" Within a few seconds, an enemy shell passed through the tail of the plane and out the top, leaving gaping holes but not detonating! After a moment of stunned silence over what appeared to be a miracle, the tail gunner added, "Correction. *God just walked in*!"¹

Jesus was born at an equally turbulent time. A power-mad Roman dictator occupied the throne. Violence erupted without warning. Public executions were commonplace. Oppressive taxation bled the people dry, and everyone lived on the edge of desperation. Then suddenly, angels lit up the sky with praise to announce that God had entered His creation as a baby born in Bethlehem. *God walked in!*





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PREPARE YOUR HEART

We need God's peace now, just as much as when Jesus was born. Pray for peace as you open His Word.

Father, in some ways, nothing has changed since the first century. Senseless violence, moral decay, and terrible abuses still darken our world. We need Your peace. I need Your peace. As I study Your Word, may the light of Christ's hope fill my world. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

When Jesus was born, heavenly glory broke through the dark night and an angel of the Lord declared:

"I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!" (Luke 2:10–11).

For generations, the Jews had been awaiting the coming of the messiah, and the ones who first heard the news were lowly shepherds. Let's examine three aspects of that history-shaping event: the prophecy that was fulfilled, the circumstances of Jesus' birth, and the significance of God becoming flesh.



Observation: Prophecy, Birth, and Incarnation

Observation involves looking closely at the verses to see every aspect of what the biblical writer was saying. It's important to lay a good foundation of observations before discerning the interpretation. Read carefully each word and phrase as you take notes.



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Prophecy—Isaiah 7:14; 9:6–7

In *Isaiah 7:14*, Isaiah prophesied that a virgin would give birth to a son, and his name would be "'Immanuel (which means "God is with us")." Read this verse from Isaiah, and then compare it to its fulfillment according to the angel's message in *Matthew 1:20–23*. What key facts do you observe in this prophecy?

Isaiah also described the roles and responsibilities of the coming Son in *Isaiah 9:6–7*. Write down who the Son would be and what He would do.

The shepherds must have thought Isaiah's prophecies were a million miles from reality, but then God just walked in. Within a matter of minutes, they found themselves in the stable, looking into the face of deity. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Birth—Luke 2:1–7

In what ways was God orchestrating world events leading up to the birth of Jesus, according to *Luke* 2:1–4? What was the prophetic significance of Bethlehem (see *Micah* 5:2)?

What details about Jesus' birth do you observe in Luke 2:5–7?

A member of the Trinity blinked human eyes and cried in a manger. This little infant, who held the universe in place, was dependent on His mother's milk to survive. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Incarnation—John 1:14; Philippians 2:1-7

If it hadn't been for Caesar's imperial decree that a census be taken, Joseph and Mary would have never gone to Bethlehem. Caesar may have had great power, but he wasn't really the one in charge. *God* was steering the wheel of world affairs, just as the prophets foretold, to enter His creation through the birth of Jesus. The theological term for God becoming flesh is *incarnation*.



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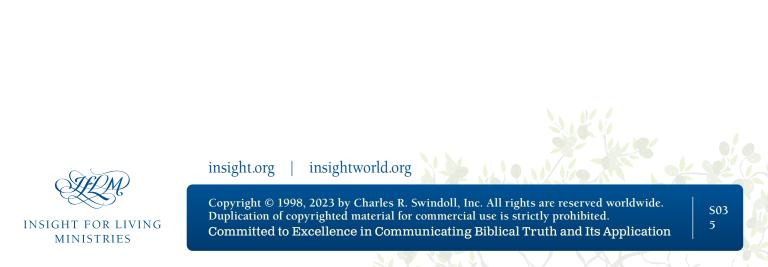
How did John describe the purpose of the incarnation in John 1:14?

In *Philippians* 2:6–8, Paul explained Christ's descent from deity to humanity. Write down the key words that describe what the Son of God did to become human.

Joseph and Mary knew in their hearts something no one else imagined, that she was carrying the one Isaiah had prophesied would come. She had God in her womb. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: The Meaning of "Emptied Himself"

Interpretation tackles the issues that our observations raise. Jesus "existed in the form of God," Paul declared, affirming that Jesus was God (Philippians 2:6 NASB). In Philippians 5:7, however, Paul wrote that Jesus "emptied Himself" (NASB). The Greek word used to describe this act of "emptying" is *kenosis*. What does this word mean? Let's take a closer look.



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Of what did Jesus empty Himself? Did He shed His deity when He became a baby? How can a baby be God? Do a little digging in your Bible-study resources to find some answers. Read The Message paraphrase and J. B. Philipps translation of Philippians 2:7. Also, a helpful online article is "What is the kenosis? What does it *mean that Jesus emptied Himself?*" at gotquestions.org. Use the space below to summarize your findings.

Through the incarnation, the Son of God took on a human nature while remaining God. He was God, and yet He was human in every way. He hurt. He laughed. He hungered. He even wept, and in His tears, people saw the compassion of God.

Why did God become human? Write down the reason for the incarnation in 2:8.

Four key words trace Jesus' journey from the throne room to the cross: "existed," "emptied," "humbled," "death" (2:6–8 NASB). Use these words to explain what the incarnation means to you and why it is an essential doctrine of the faith.



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The one who was with the Father and the Spirit, eternally existing as Creator, Lord, and Savior, was reduced to the infinitesimal size of a human embryo. He deliberately emptied Himself of the voluntary use of His divine attributes and pitched His tent on earth. It's a mind-boggling truth. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: The Virgin Birth

Correlation enhances our interpretation by examining related passages. A key element of the incarnation is the virgin birth. Jesus was fully human . . . yet without sin. His sinlessness was possible in part because He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit.

What vital facts regarding Joseph's relationship with Mary did Matthew include in Matthew 1:18 and 25?

Adam's sin spread to every human and with sin came death (*Romans 5:12*). Sin's power, however, didn't affect Jesus because He was not humanly conceived. Reflect on 1 Peter 1:18–20 and explain the reason the virgin birth was necessary for Jesus to redeem humanity.

Jesus is the unique God-man. The One who had power over death submitted Himself to the power of death for our sake. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Application: God Became Flesh for You

As we close our study, take a moment to ponder the deeper meaning of Christmas. Gaze on the Christ child nestling in Mary's arms and hear these truths ringing like bells on Christmas Eve.

First, *God can do anything*. If He can shape history and move the mind of Caesar, spark life in the womb of a virgin, and clothe Himself in an infant's body, then imagine the great things He can do in your life.

Second, *God can change anyone*. Through His Son's death and resurrection, God transformed death into life. Think of the ways He might change your heartache into hope, your turmoil into peace, your fear into trust.

Third, *God can lead anywhere*. He led Christ from heaven to the cross and back to glory. Through our dark valleys, He can lead us as well.

Which of these implications of Christ's birth encourages you most?

What does it mean to you that God "walked in" and became human for your sake?



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Deity in Diapers

Selected Scriptures



Conclude by allowing the truth of the incarnation to sink into your soul. Don't hide your emotions as you express your gratitude to the Lord of the universe, the Babe in the manger, the Lamb on the cross, the Savior seated on the throne.



A FINAL PRAYER

Use the following space to write your final prayer of adoration to the Lord.

ENDNOTE

1. Jane Polley, ed., "God Just Walked In," in American Folklore and Legend (Pleasantville, NY: Reader's Digest, 1978), 393.



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY FOUR

Responding to the Redeemer

Selected Scriptures

Everything in the Scriptures before the birth of Christ is written in anticipation. Everything after is about responding to the One who has come. —Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A M and Eve's original sin plunged humanity into deep darkness. God warned them that if they ate the fruit from the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" they would be "sure to die" (Genesis 2:17). But, wanting to decide right and wrong for themselves, they ate the fruit, and just as God warned, their sin "brought death, so death spread to everyone" (Romans 5:12).

In the darkness, however, God lit a flame of hope.

He promised that from the seed of the woman, a certain One would come to crush sin and death at its evil source. "He will strike your head," God told the serpent (Genesis 3:15), foretelling Christ's victory over Satan at the cross.

For centuries, Israel's prophets prophesied the coming of this One. The day finally arrived when Jesus was born, and the angel declared the good news of Jesus' birth. All the Scriptures written before looked forward to that day, but now the wait was over. *The Savior had come!* The question now was not, "When would He come?" It was, "Would people receive Him?"

This *Searching the Scriptures* study looks at the people who received Him with open arms, beginning with the shepherds who were the first to hear the news of His coming.





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Responding to the Redeemer

Selected Scriptures



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The Lord "knows the secrets of every heart" (Psalm 44:21). He understands your hopes, heartaches, fears, and longings. So open your heart as you seek Him.

Father, I see myself in the faces of the people in Scripture. I have responded to You like many of them did—with joy, in quiet, sometimes wavering. I offer myself to You as I am today, willing and open. Reveal the wonder of Your Son as I see Him through the eyes of those who first saw Him. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Let's look at a sampling of people who encountered Jesus at different stages of His life—as a newborn, a child, an adolescent, and a man. In each stage, Jesus had an impact on those who came near to Him. Their responses to Him varied depending on their circumstances, backgrounds, and even their personalities. As we see the variations in their responses, we'll gain insight and encouragement from their examples.

Observation: Through the Eyes of Those Who Saw Him

The first step in studying the Bible is to *observe* what the Scripture says. Be inquisitive as you read. Look for key words, repetitive patterns, and figures of speech. Put yourself into the scenes and imagine what it must have been like for each of the characters.



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Responding to the Redeemer



Selected Scriptures

The following chart lists people who interacted with Jesus. Read the passage about the encounter, and then write down a summary of what happened and the unique way each group or individual responded.

People	Summary	Response
Shepherds Luke 2:8–20		
Mary Luke 2:18–19		
Magi Matthew 2:1–12		
Rabbis Luke 2:41–47		
Disciples <i>Mark</i> 1:16–20; 2:13–15		



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All **STUDY FOUR**

Responding to the Redeemer

Selected Scriptures



From infancy to adulthood, Jesus touched the lives of people from all walks of life. What common threads do you observe in these people's responses to Jesus?

What differences do you observe?

When the magi looked into the face of the Christ-child, they realized He was unlike any other child who was ever or ever will be born. This is Jesus, the Savior, and they worshiped Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: Responses to Jesus

Interpretation digs deeper into the Scriptures to uncover gems of meaning. The people in our passages illustrate the many ways to respond to Jesus.



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Responding to the Redeemer

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Selected Scriptures

The *shepherds* witnessed the night sky explode with an angelic revelation from God. Not your everyday experience! No wonder the shepherds couldn't stop talking about what they had seen and heard, "glorifying and praising God" (Luke 2:20). What principle can you glean from their example about sharing a spiritual experience with others?

In contrast, *Mary* quietly "kept these things in her heart and thought about them often" (2:19). Her reflective response was just as real and valid as the shepherds' response. What do you learn from her example?

As we would expect, the *wise men* demonstrated wisdom. They perceived Christ's star in the night sky and dauntlessly sought its meaning. They appropriately honored Christ and willingly obeyed God's warning "not to return to Herod" (Matthew 2:12). What guidelines do you discover in their example?



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Responding to the Redeemer



Selected Scriptures

Instead of shooing off adolescent Jesus, the *rabbis* in the temple interacted with Him for three days, "amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Luke 2:47). What characteristics of responding to Jesus did they model?

The *disciples* represent our final example. The shepherds eagerly talked about Jesus; Mary treasured every moment she had with Him; the magi worshiped Him; the rabbis were mesmerized by Him—but the disciples *followed* Him. Let's focus on Jesus' call of His disciples and examine their response in more detail.

Jesus said, "I'll give you a call that you've never imagined. I'll change the whole direction of your life." Immediately, they left everything and followed Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: Jesus' Magnificent Call

Read Luke's extended version of Jesus' call of Peter, James, and John in *Luke 5:1–11*. What fascinating details did Luke add about Jesus' interaction with Peter?



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Responding to the Redeemer

Selected Scriptures



Can you identify stages in Peter's emerging faith? What insight does this give you into how people respond to Jesus?

When Jesus called Peter, what vision did Jesus cast that sparked a blaze in Peter's heart?

Jesus issues a call to all those who follow Him. What has been Jesus' call in your life?

Have you found and are you fulfilling the central purpose of your life? God's call includes a sense of drive, intensity, and eternal purpose that has little to do with things like amenities, perks, salary, and image. Those are the "nets" we leave behind. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Responding to the Redeemer

Selected Scriptures

Application: Responding to Your Redeemer

Which of those we studied do you most identify with—the eager shepherds, devoted Mary, the searching magi, the studious rabbis, the committed disciples? Perhaps characteristics of them all? Write down how you respond to Christ.

Jesus gave Peter a clear sense of his calling. He said, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" (Mark 1:17). Do you know your calling—the eternal purpose God has for you? Responding to Jesus begins with trusting Him as your Savior, but it goes on to following Him and obeying His purpose for your life.

Consider the following factors that make up who you are, and then ask the Lord to guide you in discovering your calling.

Spiritual gifts:	
Natural talents: _	
Areas of interest:	
Personality type:	
Leadership style:	



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All **STUDY FOUR**

Responding to the Redeemer

Selected Scriptures



Write a prayer inviting the Lord to give you a life mission—a calling that defines your purpose based on the way He has made you and the gifts He has given you.

If you have an idea of your calling, write it down in the space below.

God has crafted you into a unique and intricate person to join Him in building His kingdom. You'll be amazed at what Christ will do through you as you follow His call.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, like the shepherds, I am humbled that You revealed to me the truth of Your Son. Like Mary, I treasure Jesus in my heart. Like the magi, I worship Him and give Him my all. Like the rabbis, I seek wisdom and truth from Him. And like the disciples, I willingly leave everything to serve Him as my Master. Show me the unique purpose for which You have designed in me, and help me fulfill my life's calling in the power of Your Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY FIVE

Life . . . as God Intended It

Selected Scriptures

Since life exists in such a small sphere of time, doesn't it make sense that we live it as it was meant to be lived?

-Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN Jesus called the twelve disciples to follow Him, He offered no medical benefits, no retirement package, no vacation hours, no signing bonus . . . not even a salary. But Jesus did offer them something found only in Him. Giving that something freely to all who believe in Him was His purpose for coming.

"I came so that they would have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10 NASB)

Abundant life is the ultimate perk and worth more than anything this world has to offer. It's what everyone longs to experience, and it's what God intended all people to have. This *Searching the Scriptures* study explores its meaning and how we can live it. We'll gather clues from the gospels, where we'll trace it back to its purest source: the person of Jesus Christ.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

John wrote plainly about Jesus:

The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. (John 1:4)





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S05 1

Life . . . as God Intended It



Selected Scriptures

Turn to the Light in prayer.

Father, Your Son is life, and in Him alone is abundance. You designed me to live His kind of life, and now I seek to know Him more intimately and experience His life more fully. Unlock for me the treasure of abundant living in Christ as I study Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Open the Scriptures to the book of John, where the gospel writer recorded some of Jesus' most poignant words about Himself:

"I am the bread of life." (John 6:35)

"I am the resurrection and the life." (11:25)

"I am the way, the truth, and the life." (14:6)

Jesus is life, and He gives life "to anyone he wants" (5:21)—not just any kind of life, but "a rich and satisfying life" (John 10:10). What is the nature of this life only Jesus gives? Let's find out.



Observation: What Abundant Life Is Not and What It Is

Sometimes, the best way to grasp a concept is to compare it with what it is not. Use your skills of *observation* as you read Jesus' parable of the rich fool to discover what *abundant life* does not refer to.

What Abundant Life Is Not

What prompted Jesus' parable, according to Luke 12:13-14?



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Life ... as God Intended It

Selected Scriptures



What truth about possessions did Jesus teach in *Luke 12:15*? Read several Bible versions and note the different ways the translators phrased this principle.

Jesus illustrated His teaching with a story in 12:16–21. Write down the main points of the story and the concluding lesson.

What is not abundant life, according to Jesus?

We read about abundant living and think in terms of material possessions. Abundant living has nothing to do with your salary, the size of your home, or the kind of car you drive. You may have possessions and live abundantly or not live abundantly. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Life . . . as God Intended It

Selected Scriptures



What Abundant Life Is

Now let's consider what abundant life is. The theme of *life* is prominent in John's gospel and epistles. Let's take a brief tour of this theme in his writing and see its connection to living abundantly.

First, Christ existed "in the beginning"; He was "with God" and "was God" (John 1:1–2). In light of who Jesus is and His divine nature, what is the first characteristic of the life Christ gives, according to *John* 3:15–16; 6:47–51; 10:27–28?

Second, Christ "gave life to everything that was created" (1:4). Because He is the creator and sustainer of all things, what can we say about the source of life He offered? For the answer, reflect on the metaphor Jesus used in 4:13-14. What was Jesus offering the woman at the well?

Third, while we know that physical life begins at conception, how does abundant life begin, according to 3:3-6?



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Life . . . as God Intended It

Selected Scriptures



Finally, while motivational speakers tantalize crowds with "keys to successful living," the life Jesus speaks about is the richest and most satisfying. It can only be found where, according to *1 John 5:11–12*?

Christ's abundant life sparkles from many angles. Look over your observations and sum up the facets you see so far. Abundant life is . . .

We get human life through our parents, but there is an eternal dimension of living that comes from the creator of life and that gives light to otherwise blind eyes. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: What "Abundant" Means

The Greek word for "abundant," *perissos*, means "more than sufficient, over and above."¹ The quality of Christ's life is "over and above" (far surpasses) the quality of life the world offers. No amount of money can buy the abundant life because it has eternal dimensions that transcend physical reality.



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Selected Scriptures



Abundant life is a feature of *eternal life*—which is only accessible by belief in Him. How did Jesus explain eternal life in *John 17:3*?

According to Jesus, we can experience eternal life *now* by knowing "the only true God, and Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). What does the word, *know*, mean in this context?

Abundant life is also a feature of the *kingdom of God*. How did Paul describe the kingdom of God in *Romans* 14:17?



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Life . . . as God Intended It

Selected Scriptures

Let's piece together all we've discovered to form a composite picture. Abundant life is:

- Eternal in nature because Christ is eternal
- Created by Jesus who is the source of all life
- Available to us when we are spiritually born again
- Found only in God's Son
- Experienced through a relationship with God, both now and in eternity
- Evidenced by "goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (14:17)

God created each human with the capacity for this kind of life. What does it look like, specifically? Let's explore some signs of abundant living.

If you refuse to believe in the Lord Jesus and to live under His control, you don't have abundant life. Without life's eternal dimensions, it's dull, boring, and futile. It's the empty passing of time. Jesus, however, provides a quality of life worth living. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: What the Abundant Life Looks Like

In *correlation*, we dig deeper into our subject by examining other Scriptures. What evidence of the abundant life did Jesus promise His followers in His final discourse and prayer in the following verses?

John 14:27:		
15:9–11:		
16:12–13: <u> </u>	 	
17:13:	 	



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY FIVE



Life ... as God Intended It

Selected Scriptures

Jesus lived abundantly, even though He owned no possessions and had no money. He didn't even have a place "to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). Joy, peace, love, goodness, and purpose overflowed in Him and spilled over into the lives of those who followed Him. The abundant life is Christ Himself-who lives in you and through you!

An abundant kind of life can't be measured by income or by health or by anything tangible. It's the life of Jesus Christ being lived out in the believer. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Application: Living the Abundant Life

What are some ways you can start living the abundant life today? The beginning point is to place your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior. Receive His living water just as the woman at the well did. Put your trust in Him and believe that His death on the cross atoned for your sins and that His resurrection secures your eternal life.

Have you trusted Christ as your Savior? If you're not certain, express your trust in Him right now through a prayer of faith.

Jesus promised to give the Holy Spirit to those who believe in Him, and the Spirit has the power to generate within us an abundant life marked by Jesus' joy, peace, love, goodness, and purpose.



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Life ... as God Intended It



Selected Scriptures

When Christ's life flows through us, we are able to do the following.

- 1. We soar. We live above the drag of fear, superstition, worry, and negativism.
- 2. We *ignore*. We refuse to take our cues from those who operate from a worldly mind-set, because we listen only to God's voice.
- 3. We *risk*. We break out of our comfort zones by seeking God's will and stepping out in faith.
- 4. We *release*. We let go of our craving for control by putting Christ in the driver seat and letting Him steer our lives.

As a believer, are you tasting the fruit of Christ's abundant life? What aspect of abundant living do you long for more than anything you have found in this world? In prayer, ask Him to fill you with His abundance.

The world operates by the scarcity principle. Since there is not enough of what we need to go around, people must fight for what they want and live in fear and worry. In Christ, we can live by the abundance principle. Christ has all we need, and He freely gives His life to us. We can rest in His provision and feel the joy of His presence, regardless of what we possess or don't possess. What next steps can you take to live in Christ's abundance today?



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Life ... as God Intended It

Selected Scriptures



Living abundantly is directly related to *living in relationship with Christ*—resting in Christ, abiding in Christ, and depending on His power, which are the themes we'll explore in our next *Searching the Scriptures* studies.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, Your hand is at work to shape me into the likeness of Your Son. Set me apart for Your service and, through Your Holy Spirit, deepen my walk with Christ. I long for His joy, peace, love, and grace, which I can't manufacture on my own. Give me the boldness to risk living beyond my own strength and trusting completely in the power of Christ in me. In His name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTE 1. G. Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), 357.



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY SIX Resting in Christ Matthew 11:28-30

Why do we live under so much stress? I have the answer that is simple and may be misread as simplistic, but it isn't. The answer is we do not know how to rest.

-Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

OURS is an age of ease. At no other time in history have people enjoyed more time-saving conveniences and leisure-inducing comforts. And yet, despite all our advances, many people feel more frantic than ever.

Therapists make a living by calming the fretful. Many of the illnesses that physicians treat are symptoms of anxiety and stress. Headaches, stomach problems, joint pain, weight gain, sleep loss. The top-selling medications in America are digestive aids and anxiety reducers. If pharmaceutical sales are a gauge of the emotional well-being of a culture, we're a stressed-out bunch—uptight, overwhelmed, maxed out, wound up, and ready to snap.

Why are stress levels so high? Simply put, people don't know how to rest.

God built in us a need for rest, and our best teacher is Jesus, who offers His rest to anyone who comes to Him. By "rest," Jesus means more than a Sunday afternoon nap—although most people could use more sleep! His rest is a frame of mind that is free from worry, frantic rushing, nagging futility, and fear.

Jesus' rest sounds inviting, doesn't it? Let's look closer at what Jesus is talking about and discover His rest through a closer walk with Him.





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S06 1



Resting in Christ

Matthew 11:28–30



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take your first step in response to Jesus' invitation in prayer.

Father, during His earthly ministry, Jesus never rushed or worried. He modeled a trusting relationship with You as His Father that I long to have and can have through Him. Teach me His restful way as I learn from Him through Your Word. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

We open Matthew's gospel at a midpoint in Jesus' ministry, which began in Galilee and included Jesus:

teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. (Matthew 4:23)

People flocked to Jesus from everywhere—from "the Decapolis, and Jerusalem, and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan" (4:25 NASB). They came in droves. "Large crowds followed him wherever he went," Matthew wrote (4:25). "And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed—he healed them all" (4:24).

But what good was physical healing if people remained spiritually sick? So, Jesus invited people to come to Him for inner restoration—"rest for your souls" (11:29).

Observation: Jesus' Invitation to Rest

Read *Matthew 11:28–30* in three versions of the Bible—The New American Standard Bible for a literal translation, the Amplified Bible for an explanatory translation, and The Message for a paraphrase. Observe how the translators communicate Jesus' words in different ways. Write down a phrase or two that intrigues you and speaks to your need.



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY SIX



Matthew 11:28–30



There's so much here, isn't there! Let's examine Jesus' teaching phrase-by-phrase, using a fourth version, the New Living Translation, as our guide, but keep the other versions in mind.

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light." (Matthew 11:28–30)

Commands and Promises—Matthew 11:28–29

Can you spot Jesus' three commands (or invitations) in *Matthew* 11:28–29? Write them on the lines below.

1.	 (11:28)
2.	 (11:29a)
3.	(11:29a)

What promises do you see in these verses? The sentences contain the verb, "will."

Jesus said, "Come to Me." The "Me" is capitalized, referring to Jesus. Rest is directly connected with the person of Jesus. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Resting in Christ

Matthew 11:28–30

Contrasts and Descriptions—Matthew 11:28–30

What is the condition of the Jewish people Jesus addressed, according to *Matthew 11:28*? Note the reason for their condition in 23:2–4, and record what you observe.

You're under a burden, you're under stress, you have a quota to meet, you have demands people place on you, you have one of those bosses who's never satisfied. Work, work, work, try, try. Try harder! It's always more. Exhausted. Heavy-laden. It's where we live. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Instead of "religious rituals that provide no peace" (11:28 AMP), Jesus offered another spiritual path. How did Jesus describe His "yoke" and "burden" in 11:30? What appeal did Jesus have in contrast to the way of the Pharisees?



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Resting in Christ Matthew 11:28-30



The center point of these verses is Jesus' self-description. Why should people trust Jesus, according to *Matthew 11:29*? What contrast do you see between the character of Jesus and the Pharisees?

I'm not saying that there won't be pressures. That's unreal. I'm not saying that there won't be times of confrontation or disappointment or broken dreams. I'm saying that you can rest through them. Jesus' rest is available all day, every day, and every night. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: Defining Key Concepts

Interpretation unlocks the door to meaning. How would Matthew's readers have understood Jesus' invitation to rest? Commentator William Barclay sheds light on the nature of their weariness:

Jesus spoke to [people who were] desperately trying to find God and desperately trying to be good, who were finding the tasks impossible and who were driven to weariness and to despair. He says, "Come unto me all you who are exhausted." . . . It is Jesus' claim that the weary search for God ends in himself.¹

Jesus' "yoke is easy to bear" (11:30), unlike the exhausting demands of the Pharisees. If you have a commentary on Matthew or a Bible dictionary, look up the meaning of Jesus' metaphor of a "yoke" and write down what you find. For an online resource, consult *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.



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Resting in Christ Matthew 11:28-30



Jesus appealed to people trying to keep the Mosaic law and Pharisaical traditions—a burden that Paul later called "a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1 NASB). Jesus' yoke, however, is unlike anything found in any other world religion. What does it mean to wear His yoke? For help in answering this question, look for clues in the other Bible versions of our passage that you read earlier.

When oxen were yoked together, they pulled together. They worked together. The discipline of discipleship certainly must be in the back of Jesus' mind. He said, "I offer you something you enter into with Me." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Message calls Jesus' way of living as "unforced rhythms of grace" (Matthew 11:29 MSG). Why is Jesus' way of living a light burden and not "heavy or ill-fitting" (11:30 MSG)?

What did Jesus mean by saying, "I will give you rest" and "you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28–29)?



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S06 6



Resting in Christ

Matthew 11:28–30

Look up the definition of the Greek word *anapauo*, which is the word for "rest." Write down what this word means and any insight you gain.

By inviting people to *come* to Him, *take* His yoke, and *learn* from Him, what was Jesus asking people to do, specifically? What did they have to leave behind? What did they have to submit to? Into what new relationship did they have to enter?

The Greek word has to do with "refreshment." Resting from one's efforts. Relaxing, even amid responsibility. Wouldn't that be a great way to live? That's exactly what Christ offers us. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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S06 7



Resting in Christ

Matthew 11:28–30



Correlation: Fulfillment of Prophecy

Correlation takes us to Jeremiah's prophecy that Jesus was fulfilling by offering His rest. Read *Jeremiah* 6:16 and write down what this verse says.

What crossroads do you think the Jewish people stood at in Jesus' day? What crossroads do we stand at in our day? What two ways lay before them and us?

If you come to terms with what Jesus taught, your life will be transformed. You will live no longer under your circumstances. You'll live above them. You will no longer be driven by shame or guilt. You'll live on a plane above it all, because you have applied what it means to rest like Jesus taught and modeled. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Resting in Christ

Matthew 11:28–30

Application: Following Jesus to a Life of Rest

When we submit to Jesus' leadership and let Him teach us, we learn how to live as He lived. We learn to . . .

- Cope with hardships as He coped with them
- Handle pressures as He handled them
- Respond to enemies without retaliating
- Forgive others even when they don't realize their offenses

We see life through the lens of eternity, patiently enduring short-term difficulties because we have a long-term perspective. We relate to people as Jesus did—as souls created in the image of God who all have the same basic needs for love, hope, and peace.

This way of living can only be "easy" and "light" if we yoke up with Jesus—that is, live as His disciples in a trusting, interactive, submissive, teachable relationship with Him.

Imagine yourself going through this day yoked with Jesus. What would you do differently? How would you face trials? Relate to people? Experience rest?

How does Jesus' character-that He is "humble and gentle at heart" (Matthew 11:29)-comfort you?



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Resting in Christ

Matthew 11:28–30

How can you experience Jesus' rest each day? Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers this strategy: start each day in prayer.

Before you put your feet on the floor, pray, "Lord, today is Yours. Start to finish, it's Your day. I want to get in the yoke with You. When I put my clothes on, I want to think of it as putting a yoke on that belongs to You. Let's link together. I release the cares of my day to You. The pressures, demands, and stresses are Yours. I walk in Your strength. I relax in Your power and care. In Jesus' name, amen."

Pray Pastor Chuck's prayer now and each morning. Enjoy the peaceful pace of walking with Jesus.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for sending Your Son so that I can come to Him by Your Spirit, submit to His yoke, and learn His ways. Thank You for helping me come back to Him when I stray and stumble. I entrust myself to You as I follow Your Son. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 2, The Daily Study Bible Series, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 15–16.



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All Study Seven It Is Best to Rest

Hebrews 4:1–11

Following Christ is about turning your life over to Him and receiving in return His life, His power, and His ability to handle life's situations as He handled them.

-Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

G op created the heavens and the earth in stages, like a sculptor shapes raw material step-by-step into a beautiful masterpiece.

The earth was without form and cloaked in darkness, so on day one, God pushed back the darkness and made light. On the second day, God separated the waters and formed the sky. On the third, He created dry land and brought plants and trees into being. On the fourth, He set the sun and moon in the sky and flung the stars into space.

On the fifth day, God filled the oceans with fish and the sky with birds. On the sixth, God created animals—from tiny mice scurrying in the grass to wild beasts roaming the forests. Then, with a flourish of His masterful hand, God made human beings as His image-bearers, the pinnacle of His creation.

But the week wasn't over. On the seventh day, God "rested from all his work" (Genesis 2:2). God rested.

He rested not because He was tired, but because He was satisfied. Having put the final touch on His masterpiece, He did what all artists do—stepped back and enjoyed His handiwork. He "looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!" (1:31).





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It Is Best to Rest Hebrews 4:1–11



God remains in a state of rest—wholly satisfied, eternally contented, completely at peace. What's more, He makes His rest available to us through Jesus Christ. Wouldn't you like to join God in His rest and live there? Our passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* study shows you how.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

This is the same rest that the Son of God offered when He said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

What burden are you carrying? Take a moment of silence to lay it before the Lord, and then, lift up this prayer.

Father, I deeply need Your rest. Often, I collapse in exhaustion, worrying about what's left to do. But that's not Your rest. "Enough is never enough" is the motto of my world. In Christ, however, I can find real peace, true satisfaction, and relief from anxious striving. Light the way into Your rest through Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Hebrews* 4:1–11 and note the repetition of the word *enter*. How many times do you see the word or a form of the word?

From your initial reading of the passage, what is the writer of Hebrews intending by this repetition?

The writer addressed his letter to Jewish Christians, and He feared they might make the same error as their ancient Hebrew ancestors. Let's put our fingers on the pulse of his message and feel this writer's heartbeat.



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Observation: Lesson from the Past, Hope for the Future

Hebrews 4 flows out of the previous chapter, which recounts the Israelites' failure to enter the promised land. According to *Hebrews 3:7–11*, what did the Israelites do that resulted in forty years of wandering?

The main concern of the writer to the Hebrews is that we enter a certain kind of rest that the Israelites refused. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Warning—Hebrews 4:1

The Israelites came to the door of the promised land but stopped at the threshold. What warning flare did the writer fire in *Hebrews 4:1*?

The core of the Israelites' problem was "their unbelief" (3:19). Unbelief hardens people's hearts toward God, and they sink into a churning place of worry, fear, complaining, and rebellion. They fail to enter God's rest.

"There remains available the Sabbath of God." It never ended. This rest in which God engaged Himself is now yours to claim. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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It Is Best to Rest Hebrews 4:1–11

Explanation—Hebrews 4:2–8

The good news is God still offers His rest. It's so close we just need to take one step to move into it. What is required for people to enter His rest, according to *Hebrews* 4:2–3?

How did the writer say we can be certain God's rest is real, according to 4:4–6? How did the Israelites miss it?

When the Israelites finally entered the promised land under Joshua, they *still* missed God's rest. Why? Because rest is not in a physical place but in a relationship with God—and the Israelites chose idols over God.

Instead of removing His rest, according to 4:7–8, God reserved it for when? What evidence did the writer cite to prove God's ongoing offer of rest?



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It Is Best to Rest Hebrews 4:1-11



The Command—Hebrews 4:9–11

What conclusion did the writer make in *Hebrews* 4:9–11?

You need to have faith in the right person. You can link your life to some religious teacher who promises he or she will get you into the resting place, but you'll miss it by a mile. You need Jesus to get you from where you are to where you need to be. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: Rest from Our Labors

Interpretation tackles the meaning of the passage. Those who enter God's rest have "rested from their labors, just as God did after creating the world" (Hebrews 4:10). To what "labors" was he referring? For help with the answer, consult your Bible-study resources, such as Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Hebrews*. Or, for an online resource, consult the article, "*How Can We Enter into God's Rest?*" at gotquestions.org.

The word *rest* essentially means "to cease." Those who put their faith in Christ and His finished work on the cross *cease* working to earn their salvation. God's rest isn't just found in heaven in the future. The writer to the Hebrews coined a new Greek word: *sabbatismos*, "Sabbath-rest." We can live in God's rest now. Every day can be a spiritual Sabbath as we trust in God to provide for our needs and rest in His care.



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It Is Best to Rest Hebrews 4:1–11



The writer said we must "make every effort to enter that rest" (Hebrews 4:11 NASB). Sounds contradictory, doesn't it? Make an effort to rest. What did he mean?

God's rest is available, but our entering it is not automatic. Entering this rest means we must have the right formula: hearing the truth plus believing it equals rest. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: Cast Your Burden

Correlation clarifies our understanding of a passage by comparing it to other passages. We *hear* the good news that Christ accomplished the work of our salvation, but then we must exercise *faith* in Him for our present and our future. How did the psalmist say we can demonstrate daily faith in *Psalm* 55:22?

How did Peter echo the psalmist's counsel in 1 Peter 5:7?



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It Is Best to Rest Hebrews 4:1–11

If Christ can handle your sin problem at the cross, He can handle your worry problems all through your life. But you have to be diligent to enter His rest. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Following Jesus to a Life of Rest

Along life's often troubled path, we'll have to move past three barriers to find God's rest: *presumption*, *panic*, and *pride*.

- 1. We become *presumptuous* when we think we know how God will act. Instead, we must trust Him to do what He deems best, even when it's not what we expected.
- 2. We *panic* when, like the Israelites, we see our problems as giants. We must take God's point of view. Our biggest challenges are grasshopper-sized to God.
- 3. We become *prideful* when we believe we can handle our own problems. Instead, we must give room for God and then give glory to Him.

Identifying the barrier is the first step to breaking through. Which of these barriers stands in front of your entrance into God's rest?

What is the key that will unlock the door to God's rest for you?



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It Is Best to Rest Hebrews 4:1–11



It's possible to go about your business today in a Sabbath-state of rest with God. Would you like that? Take a moment in quiet prayer to give your burden to the Lord and enter His rest today.

Now, through each endeavor of your day, walk in close relationship with Him and find Him to be sufficient for every task. Receive His rest.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I release my presumptions, my panic, and my pride to You. I surrender my will completely to Your will. Wherever my path may lead, I am content. I leave the outcomes of my problems in Your hands, knowing that You are my salvation and my sufficiency. I enter Your Sabbath rest today, and, in Christ, I remain satisfied and content with You for now and eternity. In Jesus' name, amen.

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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY EIGHT The Astonishing Power of Jesus

Selected Scriptures from John

Miracles are very unusual. They can never be explained. They are always surprising . . . and they are enough to change your life. —Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

MPOSSIBLE! Has this word crossed your lips lately as you peer at an unsolvable problem?

The dictionary defines *impossible* as "incapable of being done, attained, or fulfilled: insuperably difficult."¹ What is your "insuperably difficult" circumstance? Perhaps it involves a marriage in which you and your spouse hardly speak to each other. Maybe it's a prodigal who refuses to return. An unrelenting addiction may be your impossibility, an unscalable mountain of debt, or an untreatable medical condition.

Whatever the impossibility, two realities are present: there's an *impassable* obstacle and an *intolerable* heartache—and no counselor, friend, pastor, or family member can bring the needed relief.

The situation is impossible for any human, but *not* for God. For our Almighty, no difficulty is insuperable. No illness is irremediable. No problem is unsolvable. Jesus declared confidently, "What is impossible for people is possible with God" (Luke 18:27). Inside the seemingly uncrackable shell of your impossibility is an incredible opportunity for God to act. When He does, our lives are never the same.





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S08 1



The Astonishing Power of Jesus

Selected Scriptures from John



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Miracles are rare, and we never know when God might perform one. So, pray for miracles with open hands, believing that God can do the impossible but submitting to His sovereign plan.

Use the following space to lay out your impossibility to the Lord. Ask Him for understanding of His Word as you view His miraculous ways through Jesus in this *Searching the Scriptures* study.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As God in the flesh, Jesus frequently displayed divine power during His ministry. The book of John records seven miracles that show Jesus' astonishing power over insurmountable obstacles. We'll look at all seven miracles in our Bible-study steps of observation and interpretation.

Observation considers what the passage is saying, noting action words, characters, dialogue, and the flow of thought. It requires slow and thoughtful reading. *Interpretation* seeks to grasp the author's meaning and message. The charts below will help you do both for each of Jesus' seven miracles in the book of John.



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The Astonishing Power of Jesus



Selected Scriptures from John

Turning Water into Wine John 2:1–11		
Observation	Interpretation	
Observe <i>John 2:1–11</i> . What is the context of this miracle, and why did Jesus perform it?	Why did Jesus perform His first miracle at a wedding, and what did the wine symbolize?	

Healing the Official's Son John 4:46–54		
Observation	Interpretation	
Observe John 4:46–54. What key word repeats three times, which was also in 2:11?	What point did Jesus make by healing the boy from a distance?	

The Lord's power is absolutely unlimited. Jesus said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18 KJV). —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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The Astonishing Power of Jesus



Selected Scriptures from John

Healing the Lame Man by the Pool of Bethesda John 5:1–9		
Observation	Interpretation	
Observe John 5:1–9. Contrast the duration of the man's infirmity and Jesus' healing.	Why did Jesus ask His question? What is the main message of this miracle?	

Feeding the Five Thousand John 6:1–14		
Observation	Interpretation	
Observe John 6:1–14. What objections did the disciples make? Where was their focus?	What point did John make about the identity of Jesus?	

Our Lord's promise is totally unconditional. Miracles occur and promises are fulfilled by our God who sovereignly says, "Now." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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The Astonishing Power of Jesus



Selected Scriptures from John

Walking on the Water John 6:15–21		
Observation	Interpretation	
Observe John 6:15–21. Read 6:20 in several versions. How did Jesus identify Himself?	What message was John giving about Jesus' divine nature and power?	

Healing the Man Born Blind John 9:1–7		
Observation	Interpretation	
Observe John 9:1–7. What statement did Jesus make about Himself?	What does this passage teach about undue, and seemingly random, suffering?	

The man faced a great opportunity brilliantly disguised as an impossible situation. Jesus said, "Go wash." The man did, and he could see. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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The Astonishing Power of Jesus



Selected Scriptures from John

Raising Lazarus John 11:17–45		
Observation	Interpretation	
Observe John 11:17–45. What central phrases stand out?	What truth about Himself did Jesus illustrate by raising Lazarus?	

Jesus' miracles in the gospel of John, like beacons, forever shine the light of hope. *What is impossible for humans is possible with God.* What relevance does this truth have for you today? Let's find out.

Application: The Opportunities in Our Impossibilities

The seven miracles of Jesus recorded by John illustrate God's power to overcome any obstacle.

- 1. Power over quality—water into wine. God is the God of transformation.
- 2. Power over distance—a son healed. God's spoken Word knows no limits.
- 3. Power over time—the lame walked. God's touch brings hope to a lifetime of pain.
- 4. *Power over quantity—thousands fed.* God turns our little into what we need.
- 5. Power over nature—waves stilled. God's quiet hush stills the raging chaos of this world.
- 6. Power over misfortune—disabilities redeemed. God's grace restores what once was lost.
- 7. Power over death—the dead rise. God's glory shines through, bringing life from death.



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The Astonishing Power of Jesus

Selected Scriptures from John



Is your impossibility an issue of dishonor you can't shake, distance you can't travel, time you can't make up, quantity you can't meet, nature you can't change, misfortune you can't reverse, even death you can't avoid? Which obstacle from this list towers over you and stands entrenched in your path?

Why don't you take a moment to pray Jeremiah's prayer in *Jeremiah 32*:17 regarding your impossibility? Finish the phrase, "O sovereign Lord, nothing is too hard for You regarding ______," and write down your personal impossibility. Then commit to surrendering that impossibility to the Lord.

If John were sitting with you today, the wise old apostle would urge you to not give up hope but to keep trusting the Savior. Miracles are surprising, unexplainable, and as rare as a flawless pearl. But they do occur. We can't say when God will sovereignly say, "Now," and transform our impossibilities. What we can do is have faith in His power, trust in His goodness, and rest in His will.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, my faith rests solidly on the foundation of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. I know Christ will return and make all things new. That hope rises over any obstacle I may encounter. I walk straight through any insuperable difficulty believing with my whole heart, mind, and soul that You are with me. **Nothing is too difficult for You!** I walk today in Your power and rest in Your will. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2014), see "impossible."



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY NINE The Ultimate Healer

Selected Scriptures

Being sovereign, God can do whatever He pleases with whomever He wishes whenever He desires.

-Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

I N the previous *Searching the Scriptures* study, we witnessed our Savior's healing power in action. At His word, the official's son rose from his sick bed (John 4:46–53), a lame man stood up and strode down the street (5:2–9), and a blind man opened his eyes to see a brilliant blue sky (9:1–7). Even death released its grip when Jesus called lifeless Lazarus out of the tomb (11:40–44).

Jesus is the ultimate healer . . . and His power to heal didn't end when He ascended into heaven.

In the name of Jesus, Peter told a man who was lame from birth, "Get up and walk!" As soon as Peter gave the command,

The man's feet and ankles were instantly healed and strengthened. He jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk! (Acts 3:7)

The man's healing was instantaneous, complete, and permanent—certain signs of divine healing. Nothing has changed in Jesus' power to heal . . . which makes us wonder, *Do we as His followers have the authority to heal people in His name? How do we minister to the infirmed? If we fall ill, should we expect divine healing?*

To discover the answers, we need to dive deeper into the Scriptures, beginning with James' instructions to suffering and sick Christians in James 5:13–16.





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The Ultimate Healer

Selected Scriptures



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a few moments in prayer to offer yourself to God and receive grace to understand what His Word says about healing.

Father, I humble myself before You as the Maker and Healer of my body and soul. Grant me wisdom as I learn Your ways and follow Your prescription for my life. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

James wrote to persecuted Christians caught in the jaws of suffering. He opened his letter by helping them see their trials as faith-building opportunities and find joy through them. In his final chapter, James returned to the subject of trials and urged "patience in suffering" with Job as a model (James 5:10–11). He concluded with practical steps to follow when we're suffering and sick—prayer being his central theme.

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Observation: What to Do When We're Suffering and Sick

Observation is the first phase of *Searching the Scriptures*. As you read the verses, look for patterns, questions and answers, steps to follow, commands, and promises.

What instructions do you observe in James 5:13?



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Selected Scriptures



How are our responses to suffering hardships and being happy similar?

What steps do you observe in James 5:14?

What teaching about prayer and confession do you observe in 5:15–16?



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Selected Scriptures



Interpretation: The Meaning of Key Words

An accurate interpretation of Scripture often hinges on definitions of key words. First, let's examine *suffering* and *sick* in *James 5:13–14*. In the following chart, click on the Greek root word linked to the online Greek dictionary at billmounce.com and fill in the definitions.

English Word	Greek Root Word	Definition
suffering (5:13)	kakopatheo	
sick (5:14)	astheneo	

These terms describe two conditions that call for specific actions involving prayer. James didn't say explicitly, but what did James imply the *suffering* person should pray for?

Pray for wisdom. Pray for help from a counselor. Pray for endurance. Pray for direction. Pray for patience. Pray for relief. Just pray. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What about the *sick*? People in this condition are too weak to function normally and often are bedridden. What should they do and what should the elders do, according to *5*:14?



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This is a person who is debilitated physically. He or she is never told to go to a faith healer, here or anywhere else. The sick person is responsible to let the church elders know. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

In his commentary, Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter, Pastor Chuck Swindoll sheds light on the meaning of anoint.

We find two distinct uses of anointing with oil in the Bible. One involves a religious or ceremonial act as a symbol for consecration, as in the anointing of David as king of Israel (1 Sam. 16:13). A more mundane type of anointing was for medicinal or hygienic purposes. . . .

Most likely James has the second use of oil in mind. The idea behind the use of both prayer and anointing [is] that the church should seek to come to the aid of both the physical and spiritual needs of a sick person. The medicinal use of oil provided physical comfort and promoted the healing process. Please observe that for James there was *no* conflict between prayer and medicine.¹

In James' day, anointing with medicinal oil was one means of medical care. For example, the good Samaritan, in Jesus' parable of the same name, rubbed oil in the wounds of the victim on the side of the road (*Luke 10:34*). So, the implication for our day is that not only should the elders come to pray, but also the sick person should seek medical treatment. Prayer and wise medical care go hand in hand.

The elders are to pray and anoint the person *"in the name of the Lord"* (James 5:14, emphasis added). What does it mean to pray "in the name of the Lord"? Why is it important to always pray in the Lord's name?

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INSIGHT FOR LIVING MINISTRIES S09 5

The Ultimate Healer

Selected Scriptures



God alone has the say regarding our healing. James wrote, "the *Lord* will make you well" (James 5:15, emphasis added) and "raise [you] up" (5:15 NASB). Sometimes, the Lord answers our prayers and miraculously heals the sick person. In Greek, the word for *heal* in 5:15 is *sozo*, which means "save" or "rescue" or "preserve." What else did James say that God alone has authority to grant in 5:15?

James concluded his instructions in *5*:16. Put this verse in your own words and, from the context, summarize the roles of prayer and confession in healing body and soul.

The sick person seeks the best medical help he or she can find. We pray again and again for healing. And then, we wait on God. We pray in faith that God will do what only He can do. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: Five Laws of Healing

Correlation looks at a passage from a broader, whole-Bible perspective. From this vantage point, we can build a framework for understanding healing. We begin by nailing down basic principles about the nature of sin and its connection to suffering and sickness.



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Primarily, there are two types of sin: original sin and personal sin. This statement is based on comparing Psalm 51:5, "I was born a sinner," with 51:7, "Purify me from my sins." We are sinners by nature who commit sins through our actions. Look up *original sin* and *personal sins* in your Bible-study resources and explain what these terms mean. For an online resource, consult *The Encyclopedia of the Bible* at biblegateway.com.

Because we have original sin, we commit acts of sin—sins of thought, sins of word, sins of actions, sins of motives. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Original sin introduced sickness, suffering, and death to the human race. Romans 5:12 and 1 Corinthians 15:21 elaborate this point. Next, read Romans 5:13–19, and explain how Paul connected the first sin of Adam to sickness, suffering, and death in the world.

Through sin came death, our "enemy." The last enemy to be destroyed will be death. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Selected Scriptures



Sometimes there exists a direct relationship between personal sins and physical sickness. David's experience in *Psalm 32:3–5* illustrates this point, along with Paul's warning in *1 Corinthians 11:29–30*. How might personal sins lead to physical sickness?

Sometimes there is no relationship between personal sins and human afflictions. Jesus corrected the disciples, saying, "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins" (John 9:3). What can you conclude in regard to making assumptions about the cause of a person's suffering?

Guard yourself from blaming someone's sins for their sickness. You don't know. If you knew, you'd be God. We never know the reason people are suffering, so don't even hazard a guess. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Sometimes it is not God's will that we be healed. Paul's experience related in 2 *Corinthians* 12:7–9 and also the ongoing illness of Trophimus 2 *Timothy* 4:20 confirms what point about God's will and healing?



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If it is God's will that everyone be healed, wouldn't God have healed Paul, His most prominent spokesman? No one prayed with more faith, but God said no. As a result, Paul found that God's grace in weakness was sufficient. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Application: Principles about Healing to Apply

Let's tie together all these principles from Scripture with five cords of application

- *The will of God is paramount—respect it.* God "does whatever He pleases" (Psalm 115:3 NASB). He alone has the power to heal and the prerogative to choose the timing.
- *The use of medical assistance is imperative—seek it and obey it.* Asking for prayer but ignoring proper medical treatment was not James' point. Do both.
- *Confession of sin is healthy—employ it.* Don't let sins build up in your life to the point that they make you physically ill. Confession and forgiveness bring relief from guilt.
- *Praying for one another is commanded—practice it.* If you become ill, call upon the elders of your church to come and pray for you. Pray for healing and ask others to pray.
- When healing comes from God—accept it gratefully. Whether or not the illness is the result of personal sin, when God heals, remember to thank Him and give Him the glory.

Write down how you can apply these principles. Do you need to ask for prayer? To pray for another person? (Take a moment right now to pray!) To seek medical advice? To confess sin?

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Selected Scriptures



As we read in James 5:13–16, prayer connects a believer's heart with the sovereign will of God—trusting the One who may or may not choose to heal. If we have joy and health, we should sing praises to God. If we suffer with mental, emotional, or physical pain, then we must pray for healing, confess our sins, and receive God's forgiveness. Most importantly, we must entrust ourselves to God's perfect plan.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your marvelous power to heal us physically and restore us spiritually. I seek Your will for my situation. Bind up my broken heart. Strengthen my failing body. Renew my suffering spirit according to Your wise and merciful plan. In the name of Jesus and according to Your will, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on James, 1 and 2 Peter, vol. 13 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 124.



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY TEN Abiding in Christ John 15:1–11

Jesus' disciples came to Him, they followed Him, they believed in Him. Now they must learn to abide in Him.

-Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WITH arms outstretched, Jesus welcomed weary souls weighed down by the demands of their religious leaders. "Come to me," He declared with a gentle voice and a promise of rest (Matthew 11:28). He offered eternal life to anyone who believed in Him (John 11:25), and He invited everyone to be His disciple. "Follow me," He said (Matthew 16:24).

On the night before He went to the cross to be crucified, Jesus was celebrating a Jewish feast, called the Passover, with His closest disciples—those who had come to Him, believed in Him, and followed Him. Now, nearing the end of His time with them, Jesus offered a new, deeper dimension of discipleship, one that could be experienced even after He was no longer physically with them. "Abide in me" (John 15:4 ESV).

As Jesus' followers, we still hear His invitation to abide in Him. What did Jesus mean? How can we experience this level of spiritual intimacy with Christ?





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Abiding in Christ

John 15:1–11



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Begin this study with a prayer to intensify, in a profound way, your closeness with Jesus.

Father, open my mind to comprehend and my heart to be stirred by Jesus' invitation. May I find a deeper walk with You as I experience new realms in my relationship with Your Son. In His name I pray, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The setting for Jesus' comments was the upper room after the Passover meal was finished. Judas had already left the group to betray Jesus, and in a short while, Jesus and His disciples would go to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus would be arrested.

Knowing His final hours were quickly slipping away, Jesus filled these moments with lasting lessons.

- The Passover meal depicted *Jesus' sacrifice* as the Lamb of God.
- Washing the disciples' feet illustrated *Jesus' call* to humble service (*John 13:1–17*).
- Jesus' promises of heaven and the Holy Spirit would sustain them through the coming storm (14:1-31).

In John 15, Jesus turned to their relationships with Him (15:1–11), with each other (15:12–17), and with the world (15:18–27). The following chart shows how these subjects fit together.

Verses	Relationship	Key Term (NASB)	Emphasis
John 15:1–11	Believer with Christ	"Abide" (10 times in 11 verses)	Union
John 15:12–17	Believer with believer	"Love" (4 times in 6 verses)	Communion
John 15:18–27	Believer with the world	"Hate" (8 times in 10 verses)	Disunion

The single most important priority for disciples, according to Jesus, is our *union with Him*—our source of life and our wellspring of love, peace, joy, and hope.



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Abiding in Christ John 15:1–11

Jesus offered the *abundant* life to His disciples in John 10:10, and now He offered the *abiding* life. In John 15:1–11, He used a vineyard metaphor to illustrate the link between the two. Just as branches must abide in a vine to produce fruit, so also we must abide in Christ to live abundantly as God intended. Let's look closer at Jesus' analogy to comprehend the many facets of Jesus' teaching.

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Observation: Vine, Branches, and Fruit-bearing

Read *John* 15:1–11 in the New Living Translation and the English Standard Version, verse-by-verse, sideby-side, a few times. Note the different ways these Bible versions translate key words. Write down the key words you see.

We'll explore the meaning of these words in *interpretation*. For now, answer the following *observation* questions. Who was Jesus addressing, according to 15:3? Put another way, who was Jesus' teaching meant for?

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The word *abide* (or *remain* in the NLT) appears 10 times in this passage. Write down the phrases in which it appears. Who abides in whom? In what do we abide? Who is our model in how to abide?

In this passage, Jesus wasn't addressing how to become a Christian but how to be a fruitful disciple. Write down the progression you see in fruit-bearing in *John 15:2, 5, and 8* from no fruit to much fruit.

When one abides in Christ, a union like none other you can experience is established. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: What It Means to Abide in Christ

Interpretation weaves together our observations into truths we can apply. Three subjects emerge from Jesus' teaching for us to interpret: the vine, the vinedresser, and fruit-bearing.



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Abiding in Christ John 15:1–11

Abiding in the Vine—John 15:4–5; 7–11

Jesus identified the vine as Himself: "I am the true grapevine" (John 15:1). What did He mean by saying He was the *true* vine? What did Jesus mean when He said, "For apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5)?

List several principles that the vine-and-branches analogy conveys about the nature of our relationship with Jesus. For example: *Like a branch depends on the vine, we must constantly depend on Christ for everything we need.* Now you try.

1.	
2.	
3.	

When we abide in Christ and His "words abide in [us]" (15:7 NASB), Jesus said, "You may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!" (15:7). What did Jesus mean?



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Abiding in Christ John 15:1–11

What do you learn about abiding from Jesus' relationship with the Father, according to 15:9–11?

The most natural process in the world is when the vine bears fruit. Abiding in Christ is a wonderful way to live! You connect to the Vine and to His strength and direction, and then you trust Him for the fruit. This is what the Christian life is all about. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Role of the Vinedresser—John 15:1–2

Jesus identified the vinedresser or "gardener" as the Father (John 15:1). In this role, the Father "takes away" the barren branch and "prunes" the fruit-bearing branch (15:2 NASB).

The Greek word for "takes away" is *airo*, which can also mean "to take up, lift, raise." In this sense, the Father lifts up and restores the downtrodden disciple like a gardener picks a low-hanging branch out of the dirt, cleans it off, and supports it with the trellis.

What does "pruning" mean? What might the Father cut away? How does pruning help us be more spiritually productive?

Fruit-bearing is the cultivation of character qualities that characterize the person of Jesus. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Abiding in Christ John 15:1–11

The Branches and the Fruit—John 15:3, 6

Notice, Jesus did not command His disciples to bear fruit but to abide. When we focus on abiding in the vine, fruit naturally follows as Christ reproduces His abundant life in the lives of His followers.

What "fruit" will Christ produce in us? Name some qualities of Christ that abiding in Him will make evident. Some examples are the fruit of the Spirit in *Galatians* 5:22–23.

A believer who doesn't abide in Christ is still saved. He or she remains in Christ positionally but is not drawing upon Christ's life *practically*. Just as a severed branch withers, a carnal believer operating on his or her own can't exhibit the abundant life or any Christlike qualities.

Frankly, we can do many things in the flesh without depending on Christ. We can work hard, even in a ministry, but if Christ isn't enabling us and at the center of all we do, there will be no fruit. Jesus said that this person is "thrown away like a useless branch" (15:6) by an act of divine discipline in which a believer may be removed from ministry or a position of influence.

Taking the consequence a step further, in the next section of the verse, Jesus shifted from singular to plural, from "he" to "them," saying, "they gather *them* and throw *them* into the fire" (15:6 NASB, emphasis added).

If "he" refers to the *useless* branch, what is thrown into the fire? "Them" can refer to a carnal believer's *worthless* deeds, which are burned up—not the believer. Let's examine God's judgment of believers' works in Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

Christians are connected to Christ but must abide in the One to whom they are connected. We must live dependently on Christ. If we operate in our own strength, our own wisdom, our own scheming, then all our efforts will result in zilch because they aren't coming from the vine. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Abiding in Christ John 15:1–11

Correlation: Purged by Fire

Paul used a building analogy instead of Jesus' vineyard analogy, but the main idea is the same.

Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames. (1 Corinthians 3:12–15)

How does Paul's metaphor correlate with Jesus' metaphor about worthless deeds being burned up?

At the final judgment, our work before the Lord will be revealed with fire. The useless fruit, the fruit of carnality, will be burned up as empty, needless, and unrewarded works. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: The Good in Store for Those Who Abide

What blessings does abiding in Christ offer? Jesus taught four compelling benefits.

- 1. *Our prayers will be answered* (John 15:7). Abiding helps us pray like Jesus prayed, in the Father's will, and we experience the satisfaction of seeing His plan unfold through our intercessions.
- 2. *God will be glorified* (15:8). The fruit we bear reflects the Giver of all good things and points others to Him.
- 3. *Love will be stimulated* (15:9–10). Abiding surrounds us in Christ's love and the love of the Father. What a secure place in which to dwell . . . and to invite others into!
- 4. *Joy will reach the maximum* (15:11). The most delightful of all fruit is Jesus' joy overflowing our hearts.



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Abiding in Christ John 15:1–11

Regardless of your circumstances, you can abide in Christ. While we may not have control over much in life, we can choose to abide by:

- Trusting in His control
- Depending on His guidance
- Receiving His provision
- Thinking His thoughts
- Speaking His words
- Relaxing in His grace
- Relying on His strength
- Adopting His purposes
- Dwelling in His love

In what area can you focus on abiding in Christ today?

Close this study by expressing your heartfelt desire for a deeper level of closeness with Your Savior. Come near and experience the blessings of seeing prayers answered, glorifying God, and finding Christ's love and joy.



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Abiding in Christ John 15:1–11



A FINAL PRAYER

Write your prayer here.

Father,



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All Study Eleven The Gathering Storm

Selected Scriptures

When it seems like no one is standing for the truth, stand alone and stand strong. Jesus is our model.

-Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

You don't have to be a meteorologist to know the signs of an approaching storm. Dark clouds billow on the horizon. Flags waving lazily in the breeze droop and then turn the opposite direction, flapping wildly. Electricity charges the air as flashes of lightning dance in the distance.

A storm is coming.

Those near Jesus could sense a gathering storm of trouble when they saw Jesus clash with powerful religious leaders. On one occasion, Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath in front of a group of scrutinizing Pharisees. Jesus' act of mercy on the Sabbath violated their religious code and threatened their position of power. Their faces clouded with judgment. Their eyes flashed. They wasted no time in scheming Jesus' death.

At once the Pharisees went away and met with the supporters of Herod to plot how to kill Jesus. (Mark 3:6)

There was no doubt about it. A storm was coming . . . just as Jesus foresaw.





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The Gathering Storm

Selected Scriptures



PREPARE YOUR HEART

No one likes conflict, but sometimes it is unavoidable when we stand against wrong. Pray for courage as you study Jesus' confrontations with the religious leaders.

Father, I need Your wisdom in responding to those who are doing wrong or who unfairly oppose me. Jesus is my model and guide. Fill me with His courage, words of wisdom, and discerning insight. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus was well-aware that His message would stir things up. "'Don't imagine that I came to bring peace on the earth! I came not to bring peace, but a sword," Jesus said (Matthew 10:34). This sword of conflict would even divide families. Quoting the prophet Micah, Jesus continued,

'I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Your enemies will be right in your household.' (10:35–36)

Didn't Jesus offer a way to peace through Him? Yes, but His enemies fought against Him. They were envious of His following and, in their pride, hated Him for exposing their sin. They ridiculed His messianic claims (*Luke 5:20–21*) and condemned His miracles as satanic magic shows (*Matthew 12:24*).

Jesus could have compromised His message to "keep the peace," but true peace can only be won by overcoming evil, not by making a truce with it. So conflict was inevitable, and Jesus expected it. It was part of His messianic mission to save the world from sin.



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Observation: The Issues Jesus Stood Against

Thunderheads gathered around Jesus each time He confronted the religious leaders. What exactly did Jesus stand against? Let's *observe* a few biblical passages to discover the main issues.

Jesus Stood against Man-Made Religion—Matthew 15:1-12

A delegation of Pharisees and scribes came from Jerusalem to evaluate Jesus and His followers. What ceremonial violation did they point out, according to *Matthew 15:1–2*?

Some of God's laws required handwashing before certain ceremonies (*Exodus 30*:17–21), but there was no biblical law demanding handwashing before every meal. Which biblical law did the Pharisees break and how, according to 15:4–6?



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What rebuke from Isaiah did Jesus apply to the Pharisees in Matthew 15:7–11?

How did the disciples respond to Jesus in 15:12? What fear do their words express?

Talk about courageous. Jesus stood ramrod straight, looked into the eyes of His enemies and called them what they were. The Pharisees were offended, and they never forgot it. The storm was gathering. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jesus Stood against Hypocrisy—Matthew 23:1-33

Jesus also confronted the Pharisees' hypocrisy. Of what did Jesus accuse the Pharisees Matthew 23:1–12?



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In the style of a prophet, Jesus then pronounced seven "woes" against these religious charlatans.¹ Briefly summarize each charge in the chart below.

Jesus' Seven Woes of Matthew 23:13–33				
Verses	Summary			
23:13				
23:15				
23:16–22				
23:23–24				
23:25–26				
23:27–28				
23:29–33				

The Pharisees couldn't stand such exposure. Their hatred of Jesus knew no bounds, but Jesus didn't back off. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jesus Stood against Greed—Luke 19:45-48; John 2:14-15

While Jesus gave a tongue-lashing to the hypocritical Pharisees, for the greedy priests who ran a racket in the temple, Jesus gave a lashing of a different sort. How did Jesus stir things up in the temple, according to *Luke 19:45–46 and John 2:14–15*?



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What was the response from the religious leaders in Luke 19:47-48?

Stand and be counted at your school, in your neighborhood—anywhere issues are discussed and nobody is standing for the truth. Stand alone and stand strong. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: Lessons Learned from Jesus' Example

Looking at biblical passages through the lens of *interpretation* clarifies the meaning. First, let's consider the issue of the Pharisees' *control*.

Ceremonies, such as handwashing, came from a large body of oral teachings on the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. These rabbinic traditions were later written down and compiled into the Mishnah (A.D. 135–200). Initially, the rabbis intended them to be safeguards against breaking God's law. In Jesus' day, however, some rabbis believed these traditions carried as much authority as Scripture, and the Pharisees used them to control the people.

Why do you think Jesus spoke against these man-made traditions? What was the spiritual harm in them?

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Second is the sin of *hypocrisy*. Saying one thing and doing another is one aspect of hypocrisy. The Pharisees "don't practice what they teach," Jesus said (23:3). Another is putting on a false show of piety, as the Pharisees also did (23:5–7). What sin fuels hypocrisy and what was Jesus' antidote, according to *Matthew* 23:8–12?

Third is the problem of *greed*. Review Jesus' cleansing of the temple in *Luke 19:45–46*. What spiritual damage were the priests and merchants at the temple causing? What abuses were worth Jesus getting so angry about?

Control, hypocrisy, and greed—three insidious invaders that can corrupt leaders and steal the hearts of God's people. What makes them so deadly in our culture and our churches?

There's a war on. Opposition is lurking. Spiritual assaults are ready. Don't be lulled to sleep by good times. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: A Prophet's Warning

Jesus often took the role of a prophet in His ministry. When He asked His disciples who the people thought He was, they said that some people mistook Him for "Elijah . . . Jeremiah or one of the other prophets" (Matthew 16:14).

Jesus' "woes" against the Pharisees sounded like Jeremiah's "woe" against the corrupt leaders of his day. What did Jeremiah say to false shepherds in *Jeremiah* 23:1–6? How did Jeremiah foretell Jesus' coming?

We're not prophets, but when we stand up to the control, hypocrisy, and greed of false leaders in our day, we speak the words of Christ in a world that needs His freedom and hope. It's a cause worth fighting for.

Application: Four Concluding Guidelines

As followers of Christ, how do we exhibit His courage in confronting wrong? Here are four guidelines worthy of applying.

First, *remembering our mission helps us navigate through the storm. This will keep you focused.* What mission has God given you? How can staying focused on that mission help you in a current conflict?



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Second, *encountering evil often requires sword-like confrontation*. This helps you stay alert. Is the Lord revealing an issue requiring confrontation that, perhaps, you've been overlooking?

Third, *being bold when there's a principle worth fighting for is worth the risk. This will keep you courageous.* You probably can identify with the disciples' fear when Jesus stood up to the powerful Pharisees. Have you been avoiding a problem because it's too risky to address it? If so, ask the Lord to give you guidance through the Holy Spirit to know what to say, when to speak up, and how to speak in love.

Fourth, *speaking up for what is right is no guarantee you'll win or be respected. This will keep you realistic.* Jesus' confrontations eventually led Him to the cross. He won the victory in the end, however, and we are on His winning side. What can help steady you if or when you suffer loss for standing for what is right?



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Jesus said that the world will hate us because it hated Him, and yet, Jesus also taught us to view the world's curses through the lens of God's blessing.

"God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven." (Matthew 5:11–12)

Are storm clouds gathering around you because of your stand for Christ? Take courage and keep your eyes on the ray of hope shining through the darkness—the joy of God's blessing.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I hear the voice of Your Spirit through the life of Christ encouraging me to stand for Your truth when others are speaking falsehoods. I don't always know what to say, but I trust the Holy Spirit to give me the words in the moment and to help me endure the consequences I may face. Lord, give me grace in the moment and courage to navigate the storm. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Some Bible versions include *Matthew 23:14* as an eighth woe, but this verse appears only in later Greek manuscripts, so most Bible translations don't include it.



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY TWELVE Betrayed and Arrested

Selected Scriptures

Judas wasn't always a traitor. He became a traitor when something happened in the erosion of his character.

-Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EXPECTANT parents often peruse lists of baby names for ideas to name their newborn. Among girls' names, you'll find Olivia, Emma, and Ava. Boys' names might include Oliver, Noah, or Liam. One name, however, never makes the list—*Judas*. The name is forever tarnished by Judas Iscariot, the betrayer who delivered Jesus into the hands of His enemies to be arrested and crucified.

The name, however, wasn't always draped in dishonor. In the first century, Jewish parents *proudly* named their sons Judas after the warrior priest, Judas Maccabeus who led the Jewish uprising against the Seleucids. When he liberated Jerusalem, Judas Maccabeus destroyed the altar that the pagans erected in the temple and replaced it with God's altar. The Jewish holiday of Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the temple—an event that many Jews thought would usher in the messianic age.

Judas was the name of a hero, not a traitor. His deeds inspired messianic hope. *Judas* means, "praised," in Hebrew. But now simply uttering the name grates the teeth with scorn.

Who was Judas Iscariot, and how did he become the world's most infamous betrayer? The gospel writers don't unravel all the mysteries inside this man's soul, but we can follow Judas' trail to see possible reasons he took such a treacherous turn . . . and to take heed to avoid his path.





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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Judas' betrayal of Jesus is a tragedy, and yet, none of the events took Jesus by surprise. In prayer, turn to the Lord who knows our hearts and reaches out in love even to His enemies.

Father, in the darkest hour of betrayal, Your Son showed mercy on His enemies. As I dig into the life of the disciple who turned against his Master, may I find comfort in Your grace and forgiveness freely given to anyone who repents. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Luke set the scene.

The Festival of Unleavened Bread, which is also called Passover, was approaching. The leading priests and teachers of the religious law were plotting how to kill Jesus, but they were afraid of the people's reaction.

Then Satan entered into Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve disciples, and he went to the leading priests and captains of the Temple guard to discuss the best way to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted, and they promised to give him money. So he agreed and began looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus so they could arrest him when the crowds weren't around. (Luke 22:1–6)

Why did Judas turn against his Lord? What changed his heart from loyal friend to backstabber? Let's see what light the gospel writers can shed on Judas' fall.



Observation: Judas' Downward Path

In *observation*, we read the Scriptures as a detective might investigate a crime scene. In this case, the crime is betrayal, and as we read the following passages, we look for clues that might solve some of the mystery of Judas' treachery.



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Disillusioned Judas—John 6:1–15, 60–71

One of Jesus' handpicked disciples, Judas had a front-row seat for Jesus' sermons and miracles. Jesus even sent Judas as an apostle to preach the kingdom of God and heal the sick in Jesus' name (*Mark* 6:7–13). Judas was *in the boat* when Jesus stilled the storm (4:35–41) and *ate the bread and fish* that Jesus multiplied (*John* 6:1–13).

Why would someone basking in the glorious light of Jesus try to snuff Him out? John gives us the first clue. How did the people respond in *John* 6:14 after Jesus fed the 5,000 and what did Jesus do that may have surprised even the disciples in 6:15?

Jesus wasn't performing miracles to feed bellies alone, but to inspire faith. Later in Capernaum, Jesus said,

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (6:35).

Some left because this teaching was hard to accept, so Jesus addressed His closest disciples in 6:60–71. How do these verses preview the shift in Judas' character?



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Iscariot may be related to the word, *sicarius*, which means "dagger bearer" or "assassin"—a name for Zealots fighting against Roman occupation. If Judas was a Zealot, then how might he have been disillusioned and even provoked by Jesus' words and actions?

Could it be that in the heart of Judas was the hope that Jesus would be the one to overthrow Rome? If Judas really wanted Jesus to become king, then maybe something snapped in him when he realized Jesus wasn't a revolutionary. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Deceptive Judas—John 12:1-9

Disillusionment, left to simmer, can boil over as resentment, bitterness, anger—feelings people can leverage to justify sin. What sin did his reaction to Mary's extravagant expression of love expose in *John 12:1–5*?

What true motive did John unmask in 12:6? How did Jesus rebuke Judas in 12:7-8?



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Judas was seeing Jesus for who He was, and He was not who Judas wanted. He wanted Jesus on his terms. Judas was in it for what he could get out of it. Jesus was in it for what He could give away. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Devilish Judas—Matthew 26:45-50; Luke 22:3; John 13:26-30

Lying had become a way of life for this sticky-fingered disciple . . . and an open door for the "father of lies" (John 8:44). What happened next, according to *Luke 22:3*? What last gesture of grace did Jesus offer in *John 13:26–30*?

Judas must have known Jesus would go to Gethsemane to pray, and so on that sacred ground Judas arranged to betray Jesus. Describe the events in *Matthew* 26:45–50. What do you observe in Jesus' spirit throughout the scene?

Satan infiltrated the person of Judas so that Judas was a walking model of the enemy himself. Judas was without shame and without fear of God. Don't ever play with the enemy. He will win. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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SEARCHING RIPTURES STUDY

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Despairing Judas—Matthew 27:1-5

When the terrible truth of his actions hit him, what did Judas do to try to relieve his guilt, according to Matthew 27:1–5?

Judas couldn't get rid of the blood money fast enough. But where could he go to ease his throbbing conscience? The priests to whom he confessed his sin rejected him, and he had rejected Jesus, the only One who could absolve him. Judas was utterly, hopelessly left in his guilt.

Interpretation: Lessons Learned from Judas' Tragedy

What meaning do we glean from the account of Judas' betrayal of Jesus? First, Satan is not a harmless red imp that cartoonists draw but a real and dangerous force of evil. What did Paul warn about the nature of our spiritual battle in *Ephesians* 6:11–12?



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Second, Judas' sin gave a foothold for "the schemes of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11). Judas was a skilled cover-up artist. No one but Jesus truly knew him. When he left the upper room, the others thought Judas was going to "give money to the poor" (John 13:29). What was it about Judas' double life that made him vulnerable? What lesson do you learn?

The devil despises the things of God. He wants nothing more than your demise, the loss of your testimony, the ruining of your spiritual walk, the shaking of your marriage, and the destruction of your thinking. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: Adoration for Jesus' Triumph

On the surface, it appeared that Judas *gave* Jesus into the hands of Jesus' enemies. In fact, however, what did Paul say actually happened in *Galatians 1:4* and 2:20?



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Betrayed and Arrested

Selected Scriptures



What was the real reason Jesus was "handed over to die," according to Romans 4:25?

Jesus controlled each event in His journey to Golgotha, even His betrayal. No one *took* His life. He *gave Himself* for our sins—a truth that forever gives hope to sinners. Despite Judas' treachery, God was at work turning evil into the greatest good.



Application: Choosing to Learn and Live

Four insightful caution lights flash from Judas' tragic life.

- 1) Association with the godly is no guarantee of godliness. Years of rubbing shoulders with Jesus didn't make Judas godly. The work of godliness must be done in the heart.
- 2) Wickedness in secret is as wrong as wickedness in public. Sins we conceal behind a guise of respectability aren't any less destructive to ourselves or others.
- 3) Satan and his demons are willing to work with anyone who desire to work against God. Enemies of God are allies with Satan, whether or not they realize it.
- 4) No sorrow can compare to the remorse of those who discover too late that they're on the wrong side. Guilt hounded Judas to the grave. Christ's loving call is urgent.



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Betrayed and Arrested

Selected Scriptures



Do you struggle with guilt? What hounds you?

Jesus never shamed Judas, *not once*. Jesus' love freely flowed toward Judas, and flows toward you, regardless of your sin. How would you like to respond to Jesus' gesture of grace in this moment? It could be confession and repentance, or it could be praise and thanksgiving.

The priests at the temple may have rejected Judas, but Jesus, our High Priest, welcomes and pardons all who come. With Jesus, you are never left in your guilt. The following verses invite you to "go right into the presence of God." Spend time in prayer receiving God's love through Christ. Give Him praise for His cleansing grace.

And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. (Hebrews 4:21–22)



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me heed the warnings from Judas' life and guard me from the evil one, who seeks my ruin. In Christ, I no longer bear the guilt of my sin, and in Christ, I dwell securely. Keep me close to Him, free from sin, far from evil, and always walking by His side. In Jesus' name, amen.



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY THIRTEEN Analysis of a Courtroom Fiasco

Selected Scriptures

Jesus was condemned before He ever stood trial. There was brutality and prejudice against Him, but not once did Jesus lash out against His enemies. —Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

LIKE stalking lions, Jesus' enemies had been watching for a way to pounce. Judas' nighttime betrayal of Jesus in Gethsemane gave them the cover they needed to arrest Jesus and bring Him to trial—six trials, actually, all devised to convict Jesus and send Him to the cross.

In a brazen rush to judgment, Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane around 1 a.m., tried, found guilty, sentenced, and nailed to the cross at Golgotha by 9 a.m.—from capture to crucifixion in eight hours.

"It is safe to say," states Pastor Chuck Swindoll, "that there has never been a more illegal, unfair, shameful set of trials conducted in the history of jurisprudence than the six trials that led to the crucifixion and death of the Lord Jesus Christ."

In these trials, however, is a divine paradox. Pastor Chuck continues,

From those acts of injustice, the justice of God was satisfied. God's wrath against sin was completely released upon Christ at the cross. As a result, the only thing that now separates lost humanity from God is unbelief.¹

Out of this polluted soil God grew the tree of eternal life—the means of salvation for all who come to Christ in faith. Only our God could bring such good out of such wrong. As we study the trials of Jesus in this *Searching the Scriptures* study and the next, keep your eyes on Jesus and His light of hope boldly flickering in the night.





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PREPARE YOUR HEART

We have entered the final period of Jesus' earthly life known as the Passion. As you follow Jesus' agonizing journey, invite the Father to walk with you.

Father, the forces of darkness descended on Jesus through the injustices inflicted upon Him. The innocent One was condemned, but as a result, guilty sinners are set free. Deepen my faith in Christ and my affection for Him as I study the gospel accounts of His passion. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read John's account of the betrayal and arrest of Jesus in *John 18:1–12*. The priests and Pharisees were bitter adversaries. But their mutual hatred for Jesus magnetized these opposite poles as they united against Jesus.

Flanking Judas when he betrayed Jesus were temple guards and Roman soldiers—a regiment of hundreds possibly—as a show of force against any uprising. Despite having no sleep and being physically depleted from intense prayer (Luke 22:43–44), Jesus maintained complete control. How did He demonstrate that He was in charge, even while surrendering?

Jesus responded in submission, not to the soldiers, but to the Father's mission. From the moment they arrested and bound Him, He was no longer a free man. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Analysis of a Courtroom Fiasco



Selected Scriptures

Observation: The Jewish Trials

After His arrest, Jesus was tried before Jewish authorities in three trials, which we'll study in this *Searching the Scriptures* study. In the next study, we'll examine the three Roman trials.

The chart, "The Trials of Jesus," at the end of this study lists all six, including the officiating authority, Scripture passage, accusation, legality, type, and result. Also, you'll find the chart, "Chronology from Gethsemane to Golgotha," which lists the timing of events. Use these charts as guides as you follow Jesus from trial to trial in Jerusalem, beginning with Jesus' appearance before Annas at about 2 a.m.

Trial 1: Before Annas—John 18:13, 19-24

Annas was the patriarch of a family line of high priests who succeeded him. Still referred to as "the high priest" (Acts 4:6), he held tightly to the reins of control and was the wealthy kingpin of the moneychangers and merchants in the temple. Jesus' cleansing the temple was a direct challenge to Annas' authority.

What was Annas' relationship to Caiphas, according to John 18:13? ____

Attempting to find grounds for prosecution, Annas asked Jesus "about his followers and what he had been teaching them" (18:19). How did Jesus assert His innocence in *18:20–23*? How did Jesus respond when the guard hit Him?

Unable to find any dirt on Jesus, Annas sent Jesus to Caiphas to dig deeper.

Annas knew the law but deliberately ignored it. When Jesus reminded Annas of it, the guard resorted to brutality. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Trial 2: Before Caiphas—Mark 14:53-65

Where was Jesus taken and who was there, according to Mark 14:53-54?

By now, it was around 3:30 a.m. Caiphas, the priests, and members of the council (the Sanhedrin) were dressed and waiting. The whole charade was prearranged and designed to reach a guilty verdict before the public could rise up in Jesus' defense.

Jewish law required witnesses. What failed attempts did the prosecutors make to find witnesses against Jesus in *14*:55–59?

In frustration, Caiphas took over the prosecution. What did he ask Jesus, and how did Jesus respond in 14:60-62? Write down the references of the Old Testament verses Jesus quoted, which you can find in the notes of your Bible. We'll look closer at these verses in *interpretation*.



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In *Mark* 14:63–65, the religious leaders bared their fangs and attacked. What cruelties did they unleash on Jesus? What contrasts do you see between Jesus and those who judged Him?

No actual witnesses, no defense attorney, no evidence, no proof, no appropriate proceedings, no proper voting. It was a prejudiced court in the middle of the night. All of it, illegal. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Trial 3: Before the Sanhedrin—Luke 22:66–71

The third of the Jewish trials was a mere formality. How did Luke depict this sham trial in Luke 22:66–71?

The punishment for blasphemers was stoning (*Leviticus 24:14*), but the Romans did not give Jewish authorities the right to carry out the death penalty. So to kill Jesus "legally," the religious leaders dragged Jesus before Pilate with a charge that would require execution under Roman law—treason.

We'll continue with the Roman trials in the next *Searching the Scriptures* study. For now, let's look closer at Jesus' claims.

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Interpretation: The Meaning of Jesus' Claims

When Caiphas asked Jesus, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" (Mark 14:61), he had in mind a human descendant of David who would free Israel and rule as God's specially selected and empowered king. Jesus' answer, however, was a claim to be much more.

Jesus said, "I AM. And you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand and coming in the clouds of heaven." (Mark 14:62)

By referencing three Old Testament passages, Jesus clearly communicated His identity to these Jewish scholars who knew their Scriptures. Read the verses that Jesus cited and write down who is the focus of each passage.

"I am" comes from *Exodus 3:13–15*.

"The Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand" comes from *Psalm 110:1*.



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"The Son of Man . . . coming on the clouds of heaven" comes from *Daniel* 7:13–14.

Based on Jesus' response and the verses He referenced, who did Jesus claim to be? What authority did He claim to have?

The religious leaders should have fallen on their knees in worship, instead, they pummeled God's Son with their fists. They were the true blasphemers deserving judgment, and yet, even in their contempt, they were playing a part in fulfilling God's redemptive plan.



Correlation: The Purpose of Jesus' Coming

Earlier, Caiphas made a statement that turned out to be prophetic. What did Caiphas say in *John 11:47–53*? How did Caiphas, without realizing it, declare the gospel?



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Analysis of a Courtroom Fiasco



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Jesus rules all creation and someday all people will stand before Him as their judge. First, though, He had to "give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). In so doing, Jesus endured the worst of humanity's injustice and abuse. Through His suffering, He gives us hope.

Application: Our Hope When We Suffer Unjustly

When unfair treatment blindsides us, our whole world starts spinning in a blur of inequities. Everything solid turns to sand. The legal system fails us. Longtime friends eye us with uncertainty. Then there is the inner raging—anger steals away our sleep, thoughts of revenge sap our appetites, and doubt in God's goodness darkens our soul. Finally, we cry out to God in desperation, "How long must I suffer?"

Our questioning inevitably leads us to the trials of Jesus. Having felt the sting of injustice Himself, Jesus looks upon our pain and confusion with understanding eyes. We can draw closer to Him now than ever before.

Has injustice struck you? In what ways?

How do the unjust trials of Jesus provide consolation and strength?



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What encouragement do you glean from *1 Peter 2:20–25*? What does it mean for you to leave your "case in the hands of God"?

Through your unjust suffering, it is possible to experience a depth of oneness with Jesus you've never felt before. Paul called it "the fellowship of His sufferings" (Philippians 3:10 NASB). Stand firm in the Lord who knows the truth about your situation and always judges fairly. He is your solid rock in shaky times.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, through the lens of my suffering I see more clearly the suffering of Jesus—and admire His unbending resolve and deep peace. Fill me with His fortitude and draw me close to His side. I need His strength. I wholly lean on Jesus in this moment and entrust myself to Him for whatever may come. In His name, amen.



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The Trials of Jesus						
Trial	Officiating Authority	Scripture	Accusations	Legality	Туре	Result
1	Annas, former high priest AD 6–15	John 18:12–23	No specific charges brought.	 Illegal: No jurisdiction Held at night No charges No witnesses Abused during trial 	Jewish and religious	Found "guilty" of irreverence and sent to Caiaphas.
2	Caiaphas, high priest AD 18–36, and the Sanhedrin	Matthew 26:57–68; Mark 14:53–65; John 18:24	Claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God, which they deemed blasphemy.	Illegal:Held at nightFalse witnessesNo formal chargeAbused during trial	Jewish and religious	Declared "guilty" of blasphemy and held for sentencing until morning.
3	Sanhedrin	Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66–71	As a continuation of the earlier trial before the Sanhedrin, the charges remained the same.	Illegal: • Accusation changed • No witnesses • Improper vote	Jewish and religious	Sentenced to be turned over to Romans for execution.
4	Pilate, governor of Judea AD 26–36	Matthew 27:11–14; Mark 15:2–5; Luke 23:1–7; John 18:28–38	Charged with treason and sedi- tion against Rome.	 Illegal: Found "not guilty," yet kept in custody No defense representation Abused during trial 	Roman and civil	Declared "not guilty" and pawned off on Herod Antipas to find a loophole.

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	The Trials of Jesus continued						
5	Herod Antipas, governor of Galilee 4 BC– AD 39	Luke 23:8–12	No specific charges brought. Questioned at length by Herod.	Illegal:No jurisdictionNo specific chargesAbused during trial	Roman and civil	Mistreated, mocked, falsely accused, and returned to Pilate without a decision made.	
6	Pilate	Matthew 27:15–26; Mark 15:6–15; Luke 23:13–25; John 18:39– 19:16	As a continuation of the earlier trial before Pilate, the charges remained the same.	Illegal: • Declared "not guilty," yet condemned.	Roman and civil	Declared "not guilty" but sentenced to be crucified to mollify the angry mob. Simultaneously, a man guilty of murder, treason, and sedition was released.	

Chart adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 263. Copyright © 2020 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

Chronology from Gethsemane to Golgotha					
Event	Scriptures	Approximate Time			
Prayer and agony in Gethsemane	Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:39–46; John 18:1	1:00 a.m.			
Betrayal by Judas and arrest of Jesus	Matthew 26:47–56; Mark 14:43–46; Luke 22:47–53; John 18:2–12	1:30 a.m.			
Irregular, unauthorized interrogation at Annas' residence	John 18:12–23	2:00 a.m.			
Illegal trial at Caiaphas' residence	Matthew 26:57–68; Mark 14:53–65; Luke 22:54, 63–65; John 18:24	3:00 a.m.			

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Selected Scriptures

Chronology from Gethsemane to Golgotha continued				
Formal but illegal meeting of the Sanhedrin to confirm capital sentence	Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66–71	6:00 a.m.		
First interrogation by Pilate at his residence	Matthew 27:1–2, 11–14; Mark 15:1–5; Luke 23:1–7; John 18:28–32	6:30 a.m.		
Audience before Herod	Luke 23:8–12	7:00 a.m.		
Final judgment of Pilate	Matthew 27:15–26; Mark 15:6–15; Luke 23:13–25; John 18:33–40	7:30 a.m.		
Scourging in Praetorium, mocking by soldiers, and public condemnation	Matthew 27:26–31; Mark 15:15–20; John 19:1–16	8:00 a.m		
Walk to Golgotha and nailing to the cross	Matthew 27:32–35; Mark 15:21–24; Luke 23:26–33; John 19:17–18	9:00 a.m.		
Events at the cross, climaxing in darkness over the land	Matthew 27:36–45; Mark 15:25–33; Luke 23:34–44; John 19:19–27	9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.		
Jesus' final words, death, and earthquake	Matthew 27:46–56; Mark 15:34–41; Luke 23:45–49; John 19:28–30	3:00 p.m.		

Chart adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 271. Copyright © 2020 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, as quoted in the Bible-study guide, *A Look at the Book: Traveling the Original Route 66*, co-authored by Lee Hough and Bryce Klabunde (Anaheim, CA: Insight for Living, 1994), 108.



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY FOURTEEN

The Last Trials and Torture of Jesus

Selected Scriptures

Jesus had to be of an enormous physical strength to take the blows, but He took them. "By His wounds you were healed."

-Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WITH one voice, the high priest, the leading priests, and the supreme council of the Jews had declared their verdict—"Guilty!' they all cried. 'He deserves to die!'" (Mark 14:63).

In their frenzied rush to judgment, these guardians of morality had broken almost every judicial code. According to the Talmud, trials were to be held during the daytime, in public, and not during a festival. The religious leaders, however, had tried Jesus at night and in secret during Passover week. They had no credible witnesses. Jesus had no defense attorney. The high priest himself led the questioning. The sentence was given without deliberation. All violations of their own laws.

But they had their death sentence. Now they needed the means to carry it out. Only the Romans could execute criminals, so the Jewish leaders took Jesus to Pontius Pilate to try the case.

How would Pilate judge Jesus when he came face-to-face with Him? Would Pilate see Jesus as a criminal deserving death? A misunderstood idealist unjustly accused? Or the only true King at whose name every knee will one day bow?

What would Pilate do with Jesus?





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The Last Trials and Torture of Jesus

Selected Scriptures



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a moment to ready your heart to experience the Roman trials of Jesus. Offer a prayer of worship to Christ and ask for deeper insight into the love that compelled Him through it all.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The Roman emperor, Tiberius, appointed Pontius Pilate as procurator of Judea to maintain order in this volatile region—a daunting task for even the most skilled diplomat. Pilate, though, was an arrogant and churlish man with a habit of offending people, particularly the Jews whom he didn't understand or care about.

In his first visit to Jerusalem, he marched into the city with soldiers carrying Roman standards capped with a metal bust of Caesar—a graven idol to the Jews—and posted the standards as a reminder of Rome's rule. The standards outraged the Jews. A large delegation of Jews trailed Pilate back to Caesarea and dogged him for days to take them down. Pilate surrounded them in the amphitheater with a regiment of sword-wielding soldiers, but the Jews were willing to die rather than allow the standards to remain in Jerusalem.

Pilate acquiesced and removed the standards rather than risk news of unrest getting back to Caesar. From that point on, the Jews knew that they could bend Pilate to their will. When they brought Jesus to Pilate, they were confident Pilate would give them what they wanted.



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The Last Trials and Torture of Jesus

Selected Scriptures

Observation: The Roman Trials

Pilate followed Roman trial procedures, which included four phases: accusation, interrogation, defense, and verdict.

Trial 4: Before Pilate—Luke 23:1–2; John 18:28–38

What did the Jewish officials do when they brought Jesus to Pilate, according to *John 18:28–30*? What hypocrisy do you observe in their sudden piety?

Accusation. The actual charge was blasphemy, but they didn't say that to Pilate. How did Luke record the accusation in *Luke* 23:1–2?

Pilate was no fool. He could see what was really going on (*Matthew 27:18*), and he tried to dismiss the case. What did the Jews say to press him into probing further, according to *John 18:31–32*?



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Interrogation. Was Jesus a threat to Rome? To find out, Pilate questioned Jesus—who asked questions of His own. What did Pilate and Jesus say to one another in *John 18:33–35? Who was interrogating whom*? What did Jesus want Pilate to think about?

Defense. Pilate allowed Jesus to argue His case. But Jesus was more interested in declaring the truth about Himself and inviting Pilate to believe in Him. Jesus was doing what He had always done—seeking a lost sheep.

In John 18:36–38, how did Jesus help Pilate search his own soul?

Verdict. What verdict did Pilate reach, according to John 18:38?

The case was closed it seemed, but the Jews weren't satisfied. They kept wagging their fingers at Jesus and stretching the truth, saying, "But he is causing riots by his teaching wherever he goes—all over Judea, from Galilee to Jerusalem!" (Luke 23:5).



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The Last Trials and Torture of Jesus

Selected Scriptures

When Pilate realized Jesus was Galilean, he jumped at the chance to dump the whole mess on someone else. What did Pilate do next, according to *Luke* 23:6–7?

One thing was certain, Jesus didn't deserve death. But Pilate had the emperor Tiberius breathing down his neck and the Jews about to turn him in. Herod was his out. Herod would take the case! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Trial 5: Before Herod—Luke 23:8–12

Herod Antipas was half Jewish, but by any moral standard, he was all Roman. He sent away his own wife so he could marry his sister-in-law with whom he was having an affair. When John the Baptizer denounced Herod, he arrested John and then beheaded him at the whim of Herod's new wife, whose daughter tantalized him with a sultry dance (*Matthew 14:1–12*).

Debauched. Self-indulgent. Weak-willed. This was the vile nature of the man who now sat in judgment over the Son of God.

What was Herod hoping for when Jesus was brought to him, according to *Luke 23:8–10*? Why do you think Jesus kept silent? Take a look at Jesus' own teaching in *Matthew 7:6*.



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Selected Scriptures

What was Herod's point in dressing Jesus in a royal robe when he sent Him back to Pilate in *Luke 23:11–14*? What do you think was Herod's verdict of Jesus?

Trial 6: Before Pilate Again—John 18:39–19:16

Neither Pilate nor Herod considered Jesus a threat to Rome. The Jews, however, wouldn't back down. What attempt to release Jesus did Pilate try next, according to *John 18:39–40*?

Still unwilling to condemn an innocent man, Pilate thought the near-death punishment of a Roman scourging would satisfy the crowd's bloodthirst. What did the soldiers do to Jesus, according to 19:1–5? See the article, *"Scourge."* How did Pilate hope the crowd would respond when they saw Jesus, now barely recognizable from the brutal torture?



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The Last Trials and Torture of Jesus

Selected Scriptures

Back and forth Pilate went between the crowd and Jesus in *John 19:6–16*. How did the Jews tighten the screws? How did Pilate attempt to wriggle free from responsibility? How did Jesus keep reaching out to Pilate? What blasphemy did the Jews commit?

In Matthew's account, Pilate washes his hands of the whole mess. His problem isn't dirty hands. The only way for Pilate to wash his heart is through the Lord Jesus, but he's long past that, so Pilate says, "Crucify Him." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Jesus' Message to Pilate

Pilate was caught in the grip of a terrible dilemma. Would he order the death of an innocent man to pacify the Jews? Or would he release Jesus but risk the Jews reporting him to Caesar? Unable to discern a solution, Pilate despaired, "'What is truth?'" (John 18:38). In the end, as commentator William Barclay plainly states, "Pilate crucified Jesus to keep his job."¹

Sympathizing with Pilate's plight, Jesus preached a profound sermon to him on faith. Piece together Jesus' words in the following verses and summarize Jesus' message.

John 18:36–37: _____

John 19:7–11: _____



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The Last Trials and Torture of Jesus

Selected Scriptures

What was Jesus declaring about Himself? What was He urging Pilate to do?

What should you do if you're trapped in a sticky ethical dilemma? What principle can you glean from Jesus' message to Pilate?

Correlation: The Message Behind Barabbas

Matthew painted the scene with Barabbas in more detail, including a warning from Pilate's wife and Pilate washing his hands. Read Matthew 27:15-26.

The innocent Jesus died in place of the guilty Barabbas. What truths from Isaiah 53:5; Romans 5:6–8; and 2 Corinthians 5:21 are behind Barabbas' story?



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8



The Last Trials and Torture of Jesus

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Jesus, the King far greater than any earthly king, sacrificed Himself so that people might enter His Kingdom. What a Savior!

I'm convinced that the cross Jesus was nailed to was a cross originally prepared for Barabbas. No one ever had his place taken by Jesus like Barabbas did. The one who deserved it was set free, and the One who didn't was crucified. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Who Are You in These Scenes?

In his final hours, Jesus was surrounded by people from all walks of life. Even today, we look around and find people:

- 1. Like Pilate—wanting to believe Jesus and do what's right but swayed by peer pressure.
- 2. Like Herod—too self-centered and superficial to take Jesus seriously.
- 3. Like Pilate's wife—trying to warn her husband but helpless to change the outcome.
- 4. Like the mob—driven by hatred and willing to abandon principle, justice, reason, and God.
- 5. Like the soldiers—sadistically and ignorantly mocking Jesus.
- 6. Like Barabbas—guilty and deserving death but set free.

Do you find yourself in any of these personalities? If so, whom and how so?



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The Last Trials and Torture of Jesus

Selected Scriptures

At the center was the regal Jesus. Even when bloodied and broken, He was still reaching out to Pilate. Can you imagine Him reaching out to you in your current state? Based on what you've studied in these passages, what might His message be to you?

What response do you give Him?

We marvel at the strength of Jesus to endure suffering and to master His circumstances. At no time was Jesus a victim of events out of His control. He stood unshaken in the eye of the storm swirling around Him—just as He stands now in your storm. Cling to the Savior and keep your faith firmly planted in Him.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, the Jesus who bore the whip and wore the thorny crown, who patiently endured the mocking and hateful scorn, whom the world rejects and devils disdain—this Jesus is my Lord and Savior. I stand by Him no matter the consequences because He is my King. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. William Barclay, The Gospel of John, vol. 1, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1975), 240.



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Selected Scriptures



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a moment to ready your heart to experience the Roman trials of Jesus. Offer a prayer of worship to Christ and ask for deeper insight into the love that compelled Him through it all.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The Roman emperor, Tiberius, appointed Pontius Pilate as procurator of Judea to maintain order in this volatile region—a daunting task for even the most skilled diplomat. Pilate, though, was an arrogant and churlish man with a habit of offending people, particularly the Jews whom he didn't understand or care about.

In his first visit to Jerusalem, he marched into the city with soldiers carrying Roman standards capped with a metal bust of Caesar—a graven idol to the Jews—and posted the standards as a reminder of Rome's rule. The standards outraged the Jews. A large delegation of Jews trailed Pilate back to Caesarea and dogged him for days to take them down. Pilate surrounded them in the amphitheater with a regiment of sword-wielding soldiers, but the Jews were willing to die rather than allow the standards to remain in Jerusalem.

Pilate acquiesced and removed the standards rather than risk news of unrest getting back to Caesar. From that point on, the Jews knew that they could bend Pilate to their will. When they brought Jesus to Pilate, they were confident Pilate would give them what they wanted.



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The Last Trials and Torture of Jesus

Selected Scriptures

Observation: The Roman Trials

Pilate followed Roman trial procedures, which included four phases: accusation, interrogation, defense, and verdict.

Trial 4: Before Pilate—Luke 23:1–2; John 18:28–38

What did the Jewish officials do when they brought Jesus to Pilate, according to *John 18:28–30*? What hypocrisy do you observe in their sudden piety?

Accusation. The actual charge was blasphemy, but they didn't say that to Pilate. How did Luke record the accusation in *Luke* 23:1–2?

Pilate was no fool. He could see what was really going on (*Matthew 27:18*), and he tried to dismiss the case. What did the Jews say to press him into probing further, according to *John 18:31–32*?



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Interrogation. Was Jesus a threat to Rome? To find out, Pilate questioned Jesus—who asked questions of His own. What did Pilate and Jesus say to one another in *John 18:33–35? Who was interrogating whom*? What did Jesus want Pilate to think about?

Defense. Pilate allowed Jesus to argue His case. But Jesus was more interested in declaring the truth about Himself and inviting Pilate to believe in Him. Jesus was doing what He had always done—seeking a lost sheep.

In John 18:36–38, how did Jesus help Pilate search his own soul?

Verdict. What verdict did Pilate reach, according to John 18:38?

The case was closed it seemed, but the Jews weren't satisfied. They kept wagging their fingers at Jesus and stretching the truth, saying, "But he is causing riots by his teaching wherever he goes—all over Judea, from Galilee to Jerusalem!" (Luke 23:5).



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The Last Trials and Torture of Jesus

Selected Scriptures

When Pilate realized Jesus was Galilean, he jumped at the chance to dump the whole mess on someone else. What did Pilate do next, according to *Luke* 23:6–7?

One thing was certain, Jesus didn't deserve death. But Pilate had the emperor Tiberius breathing down his neck and the Jews about to turn him in. Herod was his out. Herod would take the case! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Trial 5: Before Herod—Luke 23:8–12

Herod Antipas was half Jewish, but by any moral standard, he was all Roman. He sent away his own wife so he could marry his sister-in-law with whom he was having an affair. When John the Baptizer denounced Herod, he arrested John and then beheaded him at the whim of Herod's new wife, whose daughter tantalized him with a sultry dance (*Matthew 14:1–12*).

Debauched. Self-indulgent. Weak-willed. This was the vile nature of the man who now sat in judgment over the Son of God.

What was Herod hoping for when Jesus was brought to him, according to *Luke 23:8–10*? Why do you think Jesus kept silent? Take a look at Jesus' own teaching in *Matthew 7:6*.



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The Last Trials and Torture of Jesus

Selected Scriptures

What was Herod's point in dressing Jesus in a royal robe when he sent Him back to Pilate in *Luke 23:11–14*? What do you think was Herod's verdict of Jesus?

Trial 6: Before Pilate Again—John 18:39–19:16

Neither Pilate nor Herod considered Jesus a threat to Rome. The Jews, however, wouldn't back down. What attempt to release Jesus did Pilate try next, according to *John 18:39–40*?

Still unwilling to condemn an innocent man, Pilate thought the near-death punishment of a Roman scourging would satisfy the crowd's bloodthirst. What did the soldiers do to Jesus, according to 19:1–5? See the article, *"Scourge."* How did Pilate hope the crowd would respond when they saw Jesus, now barely recognizable from the brutal torture?



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The Last Trials and Torture of Jesus

Selected Scriptures

Back and forth Pilate went between the crowd and Jesus in *John 19:6–16*. How did the Jews tighten the screws? How did Pilate attempt to wriggle free from responsibility? How did Jesus keep reaching out to Pilate? What blasphemy did the Jews commit?

In Matthew's account, Pilate washes his hands of the whole mess. His problem isn't dirty hands. The only way for Pilate to wash his heart is through the Lord Jesus, but he's long past that, so Pilate says, "Crucify Him." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Jesus' Message to Pilate

Pilate was caught in the grip of a terrible dilemma. Would he order the death of an innocent man to pacify the Jews? Or would he release Jesus but risk the Jews reporting him to Caesar? Unable to discern a solution, Pilate despaired, "'What is truth?'" (John 18:38). In the end, as commentator William Barclay plainly states, "Pilate crucified Jesus to keep his job."¹

Sympathizing with Pilate's plight, Jesus preached a profound sermon to him on faith. Piece together Jesus' words in the following verses and summarize Jesus' message.

John 18:36–37: _____

John 19:7–11: _____



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All **STUDY FOURTEEN**



The Last Trials and Torture of Jesus

Selected Scriptures

What was Jesus declaring about Himself? What was He urging Pilate to do?

What should you do if you're trapped in a sticky ethical dilemma? What principle can you glean from Jesus' message to Pilate?

Correlation: The Message Behind Barabbas

Matthew painted the scene with Barabbas in more detail, including a warning from Pilate's wife and Pilate washing his hands. Read Matthew 27:15-26.

The innocent Jesus died in place of the guilty Barabbas. What truths from Isaiah 53:5; Romans 5:6–8; and 2 Corinthians 5:21 are behind Barabbas' story?



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The Last Trials and Torture of Jesus

Selected Scriptures

Jesus, the King far greater than any earthly king, sacrificed Himself so that people might enter His Kingdom. What a Savior!

I'm convinced that the cross Jesus was nailed to was a cross originally prepared for Barabbas. No one ever had his place taken by Jesus like Barabbas did. The one who deserved it was set free, and the One who didn't was crucified. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Who Are You in These Scenes?

In his final hours, Jesus was surrounded by people from all walks of life. Even today, we look around and find people:

- 1. Like Pilate—wanting to believe Jesus and do what's right but swayed by peer pressure.
- 2. Like Herod—too self-centered and superficial to take Jesus seriously.
- 3. Like Pilate's wife—trying to warn her husband but helpless to change the outcome.
- 4. Like the mob—driven by hatred and willing to abandon principle, justice, reason, and God.
- 5. Like the soldiers—sadistically and ignorantly mocking Jesus.
- 6. Like Barabbas—guilty and deserving death but set free.

Do you find yourself in any of these personalities? If so, whom and how so?



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The Last Trials and Torture of Jesus

Selected Scriptures

At the center was the regal Jesus. Even when bloodied and broken, He was still reaching out to Pilate. Can you imagine Him reaching out to you in your current state? Based on what you've studied in these passages, what might His message be to you?

What response do you give Him?

We marvel at the strength of Jesus to endure suffering and to master His circumstances. At no time was Jesus a victim of events out of His control. He stood unshaken in the eye of the storm swirling around Him—just as He stands now in your storm. Cling to the Savior and keep your faith firmly planted in Him.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, the Jesus who bore the whip and wore the thorny crown, who patiently endured the mocking and hateful scorn, whom the world rejects and devils disdain—this Jesus is my Lord and Savior. I stand by Him no matter the consequences because He is my King. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. William Barclay, The Gospel of John, vol. 1, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1975), 240.



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY FIFTEEN

Delivered Up to Be Crucified

Matthew 27:20-34; John 19:16-30

By spending time at the cross and forcing ourselves to look at scenes too harsh for eyes to see, we will leave all the more grateful that He paid the price for our sins with His body on the tree.

-Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

To die on a cross was to die in shame. Even the Romans believed it to be "a most cruel and disgusting punishment."¹ Few could witness crucifixion without turning away in horror. Even picturing it in our imaginations causes us to shudder.

Welling up in our souls is the question *why*? Why did Jesus have to die this way? Why the beating and scourging? Why the thorns and nails? Why the brutality and mocking? Was all that necessary?

Yes . . . to display sin's true and ugly face.

The crucifixion of Christ was the crowning sin of our race. In his death we shall find all the sins of mankind uniting in foul conspiracy. Envy and pride and hate are there, with covetousness, falsehood, and blasphemy, eager to rush on to cruelty, revenge, and murder. As all the rivers run into the sea, and as all the clouds empty themselves upon the earth, so did all the crimes of man gather to the slaying of the Son of God.²

Look squarely at the cross and you'll see sin as it really is—repulsive and deadly. And you will appreciate like never before the price Jesus paid to save us and the love that compelled Him when He died for the sins of the world.





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Delivered Up to Be Crucified

Matthew 27:20-34; John 19:16-30



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Follow Jesus' tortured steps to the cross by first bowing in prayer.

Father, the injustice and brutality that Jesus endured overwhelms my senses. Through it all, what serenity and strength He displayed! I worship the One who was willing to suffer so much for my sake. In my Savior's name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The sentencing of Jesus took place when Pilate "sat down on the judgment seat on the platform that is called the Stone Pavement (in Hebrew, *Gabbatha*)" (John 19:13). Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, but to satisfy the bloodthirsty mob and save his own position, he "turned Jesus over to them to be crucified" (19:16).



Observation: Following Jesus to the Cross

Sentencing was the first step along Jesus' *Via Dolorosa* (way of suffering). Let's walk with Him through the phases of His ordeal.

Scourging—Matthew 27:26

Pre-crucifixion scourging was a common practice. It shortened the time it would take a condemned person to die but exponentially multiplied the pain. Matthew matter-of-factly stated that Pilate "ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip." His readers knew what scourging meant, so he didn't go into detail, but we need an explanation.

A man called a *lictor* administered the scourging. Trained in torture, a Roman *lictor* was a master at inflicting the maximum degree of pain without killing the person. Jesus would have been stripped, tied to a post, and flogged to an inch of His life. The sharp bone and metal tied to the ends of the leather thongs would have ripped Jesus' skin and the tissue beneath into strips, causing excruciating pain and profuse bleeding.

Jesus would have been in critical condition. But, as if the physical trauma of scourging were not enough, He also endured the emotional pain of humiliation from the soldiers.



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Delivered Up to Be Crucified

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Matthew 27:20–34; John 19:16–30

The Robe, Crown, and Scepter—Matthew 27:27-30

The soldiers gathered around Jesus like a pack of animals circling their prey. As a sadistic form of entertainment, they took Jesus into the courtyard of "their headquarters and called out the entire regiment" to watch a mock coronation of Jesus (Matthew 27:27).

Read *Matthew* 27:28–30. Use your Bible-study resources to find out what the "robe," the "crown," and the "reed" might have been. A helpful online resource is The *IVP New Testament Commentary Series* at biblegateway.com.

Put yourself in this scene not as a soldier but as a disciple. You weep as you see Jesus suffer, but what do you see in His manner as He absorbs the blows and ridicule?

The Journey to the Cross—Matthew 27:31-34

Silently, patiently, and with the dignity of a true king, Jesus took every blow. The soldiers had never witnessed such an indomitable spirit. It wasn't long before the air went out of their sport.

When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified. (Matthew 27:31)



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Delivered Up to Be Crucified

Matthew 27:20–34; John 19:16–30



The cross's horizontal crosspiece, called the *patibulum*, would have been placed on Jesus' shoulders to carry. And then, surrounded by four Roman soldiers and led by a centurion, Jesus was paraded through busy city streets to the site of the crucifixion just outside of town. How did Matthew describe the way to Golgotha in *Matthew* 27:32–34?

The Romans believed that viewing capital punishment was a deterrent to crime; therefore, they made crucifixion as public as they could. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What route did Jesus take? Read the article, "Via Dolorosa" in the online Encyclopedia of the Bible, and record what you discover regarding this traditional path to the site of Jesus' crucifixion.

The Crucifixion—Matthew 27:35–37; John 19:16–30

Jesus refused the "wine mixed with bitter gall" numbing agent (Matthew 27:34). He was determined to accomplish the work of our salvation with a clear mind. The soldiers "nailed him to the cross" (27:35), lifted the wooden beam, and secured it in place. For six hours, Jesus hung suspended between heaven and earth. (To understand the details of Roman crucifixion, read the article, "*What Is the History of Crucifixion*?" at gotquestions.org.)



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Matthew 27:20–34; John 19:16–30

Read John's account of what happened in those six agonizing hours in John 19:16–30.

What was significant about the sign that stated Jesus' "crime"?

What tender words did John record between Jesus and those who stayed by His side?

According to John, Jesus' last words were, "It is finished!" (19:30). What was finished? Let's take a closer look at the meaning of Jesus' statement.

You and I deserved that cross. Jesus really took our cross and bore it in our place. How grateful we are that He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: What Did Jesus Accomplish on the Cross?

Certainly, Christ's ordeal was finished. The agonizing contortions of His pain-wracked body gasping for air were over as He settled into death's relief. But that was not His meaning.

Jesus' words were not the final exhale of a weary soul but an exclamation of victory. Through His death, Jesus broke "the power of the devil, who had the power of death" and He "set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying" (Hebrews 2:14–15). Jesus put an end to the curse that had plagued humanity since the Fall. *Death's reign was finished*. Jesus had accomplished the work of salvation that He came to do.



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Matthew 27:20-34; John 19:16-30



Under each category below, put in your own words what each of the verses teach about the blessing we receive through Jesus' death.

Reconciliation—Colossians 1:19–22; 1 Peter 3:18

Redemption—Galatians 3:13–14

Salvation—Romans 5:8–11

Jesus was no victim. No one took His life, rather, Jesus "*gave up* his spirit" (John 19:30 emphasis added), just as God had predetermined in ages past.

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Delivered Up to Be Crucified

Matthew 27:20-34; John 19:16-30





Correlation: How Did Jesus' Death Fulfill Prophecy?

Everything happened as God said it would. What parts of Jesus' passion are reflected in Isaiah 53:3-5, 7?

What precise details of Jesus' crucifixion did the psalmist foretell in Psalm 22:11–18?

As Peter later testified, Jesus was "delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23 NASB). Christ's death made possible eternal life to all who believe. This is the victory Christ won at the cross.

Our gratitude knows no bounds as our hearts are lifted up in thankfulness for Him who gave His last breath on our behalf and bore our sins in His body on the tree. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Application: In Christ's Death, We Live

It is true, the worst of humanity paraded its horrors at Christ's crucifixion. The sum of our sins was accounted for at the cross, and *Jesus bore them all*. There was no wrong that Jesus did not make right. There was no darkness that He did not scatter with His light.



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Delivered Up to Be Crucified

Matthew 27:20–34; John 19:16–30



If you think you have committed an evil that Jesus cannot forgive, then you have not reckoned with His cross. Pour out your sins at His feet. He has seen your worst and accepted you a long time ago. Have you been holding on to your shame, feeling too unworthy for Jesus to forgive? Release it into His grace and let it go.

What thanks can you give in return? Perhaps the praise from John's vision says it well. Sing with the angels . . .

Then I looked again, and I heard the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders. And they sang in a mighty chorus:

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing." (Revelation 5:11–13)



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, through Christ's disgrace, You poured out Your grace on me. How can I praise You enough for Your marvelous ways? In Your predetermined plan from ages past, You had my salvation in mind. Why? Because of Your great love which showers upon me as a blessing from heaven. In return, what can I give? My life, my heart, my unending praise. In Jesus' precious name, amen.

ENDNOTE

- 1. Cicero, as quoted by John R. W. Stott in *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 24.
- 2. C. H. Spurgeon, Spurgeon at His Best, compiled by Tom Carter (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 47.



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY SIXTEEN Not to Worry . . . He Is Risen! Matthew 27:55-60; John 20:1-10, 24-28

Because Jesus lives, we will live forever with Him.

-Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

N the day Christ was crucified, at noon, when the sun was at its peak, darkness fell like sackcloth "across the whole land" (Matthew 27:45). The light of the sky dimmed as the Light of the world died.

Sunlight eventually returned, but clouds of grief followed the disciples. Gloom draped the men who removed Jesus' body from the cross and wrapped Him with "spices in long sheets of cloth" (John 19:40). Sorrow weighed heavily on the women, who watched the men put Jesus' body in the cave-like tomb carved in the rock and "roll a great stone across the entrance" (Matthew 27:60).

The devil, it seemed, had achieved his diabolical mission to imprison the world in darkness and death. And yet, in his prophecy, Zechariah told "those in the darkness" to keep their eyes on the horizon—

Through the heartfelt mercies of our God, God's Sunrise will break in upon us. (Luke 1:78 MSG)

All hope was *not* lost. In the darkest hours, the light of dawn broke through when the Son of God rose from the dead!





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S16 1



Not to Worry ... He Is Risen!

Matthew 27:55-60; John 20:1-10, 24-28



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Do you sometimes live under death's shadow? What fears do you carry in your darkest hours? Bring them to the Lord in prayer.

Father, life's worries surround me all around—my own eventual death, the passing of a loved one, the decline of health, the end of a career, the loss of a relationship. I hand them over to You. Help me to find hope in Jesus' empty tomb, where the promise of eternal life still glows. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Some have claimed that Jesus merely lapsed into a coma. The tomb's cool air revived Him, and He walked out in His own power. That theory is impossible. Read *John 19:28–41*, and write down the conclusive proofs of Jesus' death.

Jesus was dead, but the Jewish leaders still wrung their hands. According to *Matthew* 27:62–66, what did they worry about, and what did they do?

Despite the extraordinary measures to secure the tomb, the women who came discovered what no one, not even Jesus' closest friends, could have imagined. *Jesus' body was gone!*



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Not to Worry ... He Is Risen!

Matthew 27:55-60; John 20:1-10, 24-28

Observation: The Glory of Christ's Resurrection

Let's compare the resurrection accounts in the gospels. Each writer emphasized a particular point of view. Use your skills of observation to summarize how the disciples discovered the empty tomb and how they realized that Jesus was resurrected from the dead.

In Matthew's and Mark's accounts, the angel is the central character. What did the angel do and say? Who all heard the angel's message and how did they respond?

The angel and the earthquake Matthew 28:1–4	
The women's discussion Mark 16:1–4	
The angel and the women Matthew 28:5–8; Mark 16:5–7	

The resurrected body of Jesus didn't need to have the stone removed to exit the tomb. In His glorified state, space and matter were not obstacles. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Luke focused on the women's experience. Summarize their encounter with the angels at the tomb, the message they received, and their report to the men.

The women's encounter	
Luke 24:1–7	
The men's response	
Luke 24:8–12	

The women got it! No one had taken the body. Jesus had, in the power of the living God, been raised from the dead! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Not to Worry . . . He Is Risen!

Matthew 27:55–60; John 20:1–10, 24–28

John highlighted Mary Magdalene's, Peter's, and John's discovery of the empty tomb. How did each of these people process what they saw?

Mary John 20:1–2	
Peter and John John 20:3–10	

Jesus had come out of the tomb before the stone was removed. The stone was rolled back to let the disciples see in. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: How Peter and John Came to Believe

The disciples didn't immediately grasp the reality of Jesus' resurrection. John used three Greek words for *saw* in his account to show Peter and John's progression from seeing to believing.

John was the first to arrive at the tomb. "He stooped and looked in and *saw* the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in" (John 20:5 emphasis added). The Greek word for *saw* is *blepo*, which is the general word for physical sight, as when a blind man gained sight (*John 9:25*).

When Peter arrived, he pushed past John and entered the tomb.

He looked at the linen wrappings lying there and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings but folded up in a place by itself. (John 20:6–7 NASB)

Peter "looked at" the scene like a policeman examining a crime scene. The Greek word is *theoreo*, from which we get the word *theorize*. Remember, Mary told Peter that she thought thieves had stolen Jesus' body (*John 20:2*), so Peter was looking for signs of a grave robber. But what was so unusual about Jesus' graveclothes that perplexed Peter?



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Not to Worry . . . He Is Risen! Matthew 27:55-60; John 20:1-10, 24-28

Peter was still examining the scene when John entered and "saw and believed." (20:8). The Greek word for *saw* here is *eiden*, which means "to perceive." What did John perceive? What did he now believe? What clicked in his mind, according to *John 20:9*? ("The Scriptures" may refer to *Psalm 16:10*).

Peter and John were staring at the greatest miracle in all the New Testament. Not all the disciples became immediately convinced. But when each did, his entire personality was transformed. No longer fearful, no longer unsure or insecure. They were ready to proclaim the message to the world, and they died as martyrs doing so. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: What Jesus' Resurrection Means

The resurrection of Jesus is the center point of Christianity. It confirms everything Jesus said and did, and it lays the foundation for everything we believe. Look up the following verses and write down the spiritual implications of the resurrection.

Romans 6:4:	
Romans 8:11:	
1 Corinthians 15:17–18:	
2 Corinthians 4:14:	
1 Thessalonians 4:14–17:	

The resurrection validates Jesus' death as being effective for forgiving sins. It enables us, through His Spirit, to live in power over sin. It gives us a living hope, assuring us of our future resurrection when Christ returns. Because Jesus was raised, so will we!



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY SIXTEEN



Not to Worry ... He Is Risen!

Matthew 27:55-60; John 20:1-10, 24-28

When we come to death's door, we move through the door into eternity with God. We could never have done that had Jesus not been raised from the dead. Because He lives, we will live also. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: The Journey from Doubt to Belief

The disciples' reactions represent some of the ways people respond to the message of Jesus' resurrection.

- 1. Some people hear the message and respond immediately—like the women at the tomb. They heard the angels and they believed.
- 2. Some people immediately reject the message—like the disciples at first. The women's story "sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it" (Luke 24:11).
- 3. Some people won't believe until they see proof—like Thomas. When Jesus appeared and showed His scars to Thomas, only then did Thomas believe. "My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed (John 20:28).

What has been your response to the message of Jesus' resurrection? Describe your journey of belief.

Jesus told Thomas, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me" (20:29 emphasis added). The blessing comes in many forms—peace of mind, hope for the future, new life in Christ, and freedom from fear.



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Not to Worry . . . He Is Risen! *Matthew 27:55–60; John 20:1–10, 24–28*

What blessing have you received because you believe without seeing?

For those who believe in Jesus' resurrection, death is not a hopeless plunge into the unknown. It is a door that leads us through Christ into the presence of our heavenly Father. Some people may follow a dead hero into death, but only a living Savior can lead us out of death into life—out of the darkness into the dawn.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I praise Your name because You have raised Your Son from the dead and seated Him in a place of power. He reigns over all things. He lifts me above the worries of this life and takes me on a journey from earth to heaven. I am secure in my hope because Jesus has risen from the dead. In Jesus' name, amen.



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY SEVENTEEN Encountering Jesus along Life's Road Luke 24:13-35

Sometimes on the road of life, you can almost feel the warmth of Jesus' presence. He helps you. He quiets you. He calms you with the truth. —Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

ESUS' death had devastated His followers, and it took time for some of them to embrace the reality of His resurrection.

A week earlier, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey, just as the prophet said the messiah would come (*Zechariah 9:9*). Messianic fervor washed across the city as people lined the road, waving palm branches, spreading their cloaks before Him, and shouting, "Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the LORD!" (Luke 19:38). They sang, "Hosanna!" which means, "Save us now!"—which they fully expected Jesus to do (Mark 11:9 NASB).

Now it was Sunday, seven days later. What a difference one week made.

In a cascade of horrors, Jesus had been arrested, tried, convicted, tortured, and crucified. Jesus was dead and buried—and so was his disciples' hope for a free and restored Israel. Adding to the confusion were reports that His body was missing. Some said He was alive . . . but where? *Nothing made sense*.

Trying desperately to sort through the splintered debris of their faith, two of His disciples left for their home in Emmaus. Where else could they go? They had sacrificed everything to follow Jesus. Now what would they do?





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S17 1



Encountering Jesus along Life's Road

Luke 24:13–35



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Have you travelled the road of dashed dreams? Feelings of disillusionment and confusion accompanied you then, and perhaps they still do. In prayer, invite the Lord to walk beside you through His Word.

Father, encourage me through this account of two men who encountered Jesus on the road. They had left home to pursue a dream, but their dream shattered. Even so, You had a plan far greater than they imagined. You have a plan for me, too. Help me find Your way for my life. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Let's review the sequence of events from Friday through Sunday. On Friday at 3 p.m., Jesus died, and His body was laid in the tomb just before sunset (*John 19:38–42*). The next day, the Sabbath, soldiers sealed the tomb and stood guard (*Matthew 27:62–66*).

Early Sunday morning, an earthquake struck, an angel rolled away the stone, and the terrified guard "fell into a dead faint" (28:2–4). The women arrived to anoint Jesus' body and discovered Jesus missing. Mary Magdalene rushed off to tell Peter and John (*John 20:1–2*). Two angels appeared to the remaining women, explaining that Jesus had risen from the dead (*Luke 24:4–8*). While the women hurried to tell the disciples, the soldiers left to tell the Jewish authorities, who bribed them to say the body was stolen (*Matthew 28:11–15*).

Meanwhile, Mary reached Peter and John, who ran to the tomb, saw it empty, and left (*John 20:3–10*). Mary returned alone. She stood weeping at the tomb when Jesus appeared to her (20:11–18). Jesus also appeared to the other women as they were on the way to tell the angel's message to the disciples—who thought they were crazy (*Matthew 28:8–10*; *Luke 24:11*)!¹

All morning, people were in a frenzy—racing to and from the tomb, words spilling out, emotions bouncing wildly between anguish, skepticism, and uncontainable excitement. It was that afternoon when the two disciples, dizzy from the chaos, packed up and headed for home.



Observation: The Emmaus Road Encounter

In *observation*, try to put yourself in the scene, as if you were a silent companion with the two men walking to Emmaus. Feel the warm sun, hear the men's conversation, and sense the emotion in their tone.



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Encountering Jesus along Life's Road

Luke 24:13–35

The Men Walked without Understanding—Luke 24:13–24

As the men treaded the dusty road, they were "talking and discussing" (Luke 24:15 NASB). The Greek word for "discussing" implies an emotional exchange—a heated debate. Suddenly, yet naturally, Jesus stepped into their pain and confusion.

What do you see in Jesus' approach, His manner, and how He entered the conversation in *Luke 24:13–19*? Can you pick up the irony in their response to Jesus?

Why do you think Jesus led them on rather than reveal Himself immediately?

What stands out to you in the men's perspective of the week's events in 24:19–24?

These men had no knowledge of God's plan in the Scriptures. Their viewpoint was all human. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Encountering Jesus along Life's Road Luke 24:13-35

Jesus Shed Light from the Scriptures—Luke 24:25–27

How did Jesus correct their misunderstanding of God's plan, according to Luke 24:25-27?

Christ's mission was to redeem individuals from sin, not to set Israel free. That will come when Jesus returns to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. The men missed God's redemptive purpose, and they missed God's awesome power in raising Jesus. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Men's Eyes Were Opened—Luke 24:28-35

How were the men's eyes opened, according to Luke 24:28-31?

What did the men do in their excitement, in 24:32–35? What did they find out when they returned to the disciples?



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Encountering Jesus along Life's Road

Luke 24:13–35

The men said, "It's real! Jesus has risen! It's true! It's true!" These were the same ones who, just hours earlier, were sad on the road to Emmaus, but now their perspective had changed. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: How Disciples Learn and Grow

Luke preserved this eyewitness account as evidence that Jesus really was alive and as an illustration of how disciples learn and grow. Let's take snapshots of these men *before and after* Jesus revealed Himself to them and learn from their faith-development process.

Growing Awareness of God's Sovereign Plan

Before. The two men had a limited perspective. What preoccupied Cleopas and his friend's thoughts, according to their report of recent events in *Luke* 24:19–24? Do you find any mention of God?

Like we often do, these disciples viewed life on the horizontal plane—people and events—not the vertical—God's plan. How did Jesus open their awareness of God's sovereign plan in *Luke* 24:27?



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Encountering Jesus along Life's Road

Luke 24:13–35

After. When Jesus opened their eyes through the Scriptures, the disciples said that their hearts "burned within" them (Luke 24:32). Now, they saw God at work.

What principle can you write to capture the lesson? "When circumstances are confusing and seem out of control, Christ's followers should"

In life, when things look like they are out of control, God's predestined plan is running its course. If you doubt that, you'll be sad and depressed. Remember that, and it will make all the difference in your perspective. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Growing Understanding of God's Redemptive Purpose

Before. The two men had a political agenda. Their faulty assumptions distorted their view of Jesus. They saw Him as "a prophet who did powerful miracles" and a "mighty teacher," hoping He was "the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel" (Luke 24:21).

How did Jesus explain God's redemptive purpose for the messiah, according to *Luke 24*:25–26? Surely, Jesus quoted *Isaiah 53* for them.



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Encountering Jesus along Life's Road Luke 24:13-35

After. The two disciples saw Jesus clearly when they "recognized him as he was breaking bread" (Luke 24:35)—symbolically giving His body to them. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross suddenly made sense.

Write another principle: "Christ's followers can adjust their faulty expectations by . . ."

We often come into situations with our own agenda. We have our plans and expectations, and we live our lives disappointed because we didn't get our way. Instead, live for whatever God wants and whatever God plans. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Growing Appreciation of God's Power

Before. The men put limits on God's power. They heard the women's story, but they couldn't believe resurrection was possible. As a result, "sadness [was] written across their faces" (Luke 24:17).

After. But then, "their eyes were opened, and they recognized him" (24:31). They had a new appreciation of God's power to raise the dead! Now the men couldn't contain their excitement, so what did they do, according to *Luke 24:33–35*?



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Encountering Jesus along Life's Road Luke 24:13-35

Write a final principle: "Believing in the living Jesus emboldens His followers to . . ."

These men spoke of Christ and brought reassurance to their friends. They were now witnesses as a result of what they experienced. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: Disciples Transformed

Skeptics who deny Christ's resurrection have a hard time explaining the before-and-after transformation in His followers. On the day Christ died, the disciples were frightened like deer running for their lives. But only a few days later, they were courageous as lions, witnessing and willing to die for their Master.

What recurring themes do you find in the disciples' bold messages? Read Acts 2:22-24; 3:18; and 4:27-31.

What transformed these men and women? They saw Jesus.



Application: Learning from Jesus, Growing in Faith

Have you been stumbling down your road to Emmaus trying to make sense of a recent heartache, groping for answers, not able to see past a disappointed dream? It's a lonely road, but it's one on which Jesus meets us.



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Encountering Jesus along Life's Road Luke 24:13-35

How might Jesus be coming alongside you to help deepen your faith? Is He helping you to grow in your awareness of God's sovereign plan? In your understanding of God's redemptive purpose? In your appreciation of God's power? Look back at the principles you wrote down. Which one do you really need to cling to in your current circumstances?

What's the key to deeper, bolder, more resilient faith? The two disciples' experience on the road illustrate the answer—time with Jesus.

Spending time alone with Jesus opens our eyes and changes our perspectives.

Jesus can meet us on the mountaintop, but usually He meets us on the same old road we've travelled a thousand times, right where we already are. Below, write a reflective prayer in response to your time with Jesus through this study. Express your gratitude. Express what He has taught you. Express your needs and hopes.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father,

ENDNOTE

. This sequence of events is based on the chart, "Forty Days—From Resurrection to Ascension," by Louis A. Barbieri, in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 91).



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY EIGHTEEN Listening to Jesus beside the Sea John 21:1–22

We need to listen to Jesus beside the Sea of Galilee. His words echo through the centuries. They're still relevant and they're still true.

-Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

UNTOUCHED by the passage of time, the Sea of Galilee is as lovely as it was in Jesus' day. About eight miles across at its widest point and thirteen miles long, the lake is a glistening blue jewel set against rugged hills to the east and sloping fertile plains to the north.

Many fishermen still harvest the sea's bounty as their ancestors once did. Pulling at the oars of their wooden boats, they glide across the water to their favorite fishing spot. They fling nets into the rising sun's reflection on the water and wait for their morning catch.

Jesus' first disciples were fishermen. Along the northern shore was where Jesus called them to follow Him and become fishers of people (*Mark 1:16–20*). The Sea of Galilee was the geographical hub for Jesus' early ministry. In surrounding cities, He healed the sick, cast out demons, and preached the kingdom of God. He taught the Sermon on the Mount with the sea as His backdrop. He sailed across its waters; and late one stormy night, He walked on its waves.

Jesus' death on the cross stirred up a storm like none the disciples had ever faced. But, just as the furious waves could not pull Jesus under, death's grip could not hold Jesus in the grave. The angel at the tomb told the disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee. "You will see him there," said the angel (Matthew 28:7). So, they went back to where it all began, back to the Sea of Galilee to meet Jesus.





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S18 1



Listening to Jesus beside the Sea John 21:1-22



PREPARE YOUR HEART

You can meet Jesus right where you are in prayer.

Father, take me back to my first steps in following Jesus. Stir in me the joy of pure, undistracted devotion to Him. Fill my heart with His love for the broken, His grace toward sinners, and His vision for life in Him. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The angel's message to the women was specific: "Now go and tell his disciples, *including Peter*, that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee" (Mark 16:7 emphasis added). Why single out Peter?

Before Jesus' arrest, Peter had boasted to Jesus, "'Even if everyone else deserts you, I never will'" (14:29). How those words must have haunted Peter! Not only had he deserted Jesus, he had denied Him three times (14:66–71). After his humiliating failure, Peter must have wondered, *Why would Jesus want to see me*?

But, with arms of grace open wide, Jesus *especially* wanted to see Peter, and in John's account of Jesus' post-resurrection appearance by the Sea of Galilee, we will see why.



Observation: Jesus' Appearance by the Sea of Galilee

Use your skills of observation as you read John's account and answer the questions below. Picture the setting and imagine the events as they unfold. Write down everything you see.

The Miraculous Catch—John 21:1-6

"'I'm going fishing," Peter said (John 21:3). Who was with Peter and what happened in *John 21:1–3*? Why do you think Peter wanted to go fishing? What must the men have felt after their long night?



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Listening to Jesus beside the Sea John 21:1-22



What happened to lift their spirits at dawn's first light, according to *John 21:4–6*?

The Surprise Meeting—John 21:7–14

"'It's the Lord!" John blurted out (John 21:7). What did Peter do, according to *John 21:7–11*? What thoughts might have been racing through his mind? What did he want to prove to Jesus?

What did Jesus do and say in 21:12–14? What aspects of Jesus' heart did His act of service demonstrate?



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Listening to Jesus beside the Sea John 21:1-22

Jesus' Conversation with Peter—John 21:15–17

In the chart below, compare the three interchanges between Jesus and Peter in John 21:15–17.

John 21:15	
John 21:16	
John 21:17	

Why do you think Peter felt "hurt" that Jesus asked the question three times?

Jesus' Prophecy about Peter—John 21:18-22

What was Jesus' prophecy about Peter, and how did John explain it in John 21:18–19?



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Listening to Jesus beside the Sea John 21:1-22

Curious about the kind of death John would face, Peter asked, "What about him, Lord?" (John 21:21). How did Jesus reply in 21:20–22?

Jesus was saying to Peter, "A lot has happened in the last three-and-a-half years. Peter, My plans are for you to shepherd My sheep. Come on. Travel with Me." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: Jesus' Restoration of Peter

Interpretation looks deeper into the passage to decipher its meaning as John's readers would have understood it. Although Jesus would have spoken in Aramaic—the common first-century language of the Jews—He communicated subtle inferences that John captured in the Greek text.

The Greek word for "love" in Jesus' first two questions, "Do you love me more than these?" and "Do you love me?" (John 21:15–16), is *agapao*—the highest form of self-sacrificing love. Jesus was asking Peter to evaluate his heart, saying, "Are you willing to sacrifice everything in your devotion to Me?"

Peter responded twice, "you know I love you," using *phileo*, the Greek word for familial affection, brotherly love (21:15–16). What did Peter communicate about the level of his love?

This is Peter after his denials, after his bitter weeping. This is Peter in all his vulnerability. This is Peter at his best—unguarded, not trying to impress, not putting his foot in his mouth. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY EIGHTEEN

Listening to Jesus beside the Sea John 21:1-22



In His third question, Jesus' switched to phileo, "Do you love me?" (John 21:17), graciously accepting Peter as he was and not asking more than Peter could honestly give.

Notice the similarity between this episode and Peter's denials. In the high priest's courtyard, Peter denied his Lord three times by a fire before witnesses (18:17–18, 25–27). Now, Jesus invited Peter to declare his love for Him three times by a fire before witnesses. Why do you think Jesus recreated the scene for Peter?

This was a restorative moment for Peter—and an instructive moment for all disciples who love the Lord but have failed in their commitment. What lesson do you learn?

In the years that followed, the fires of persecution would test Peter's love for Christ. Peter would utter no denials then. Instead, according to tradition, he would be crucified for his faith. What hints did Jesus give in 21:18 regarding the "kind of death [by which Peter] would glorify God" (21:19)?



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Listening to Jesus beside the Sea John 21:1-22

> Did you know that Peter said to his captors that he didn't deserve to die like his Lord, so he requested to be crucified upside down? They stretched out his hands and took him where he didn't want to go. John outlived Peter by two decades, so he knew of Peter's death. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: Back to the Beginning

This appearance was the "third time Jesus had appeared to his disciples since he had been raised from the dead" (21:14). The first time was on Sunday evening (*John 20:19–23*). The second time was eight days later when Thomas was present (20:24–29). For His third appearance, Jesus chose the Sea of Galilee for a reason: *to take His disciples back to the beginning of their relationship with Him.*

What similarities do you see between the disciples' meeting Jesus in *John* 21:1–6 and their first encounter in *Luke* 5:1–11?

Jesus even repeated His call, "Follow me" (John 21:19 and 22). What vital lesson was Jesus communicating to His disciples by recreating His first encounter with them?

Jesus was saying, "Remember when I first called you from the boat and you dropped your net and we traveled together? Now, get on the road with Me. Let's go together." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Listening to Jesus beside the Sea John 21:1–22





Application: Listening to Jesus' Lessons by the Sea

What lessons can we draw from Jesus' time with His disciples beside the sea? First, *when the Lord offers an opportunity to transform futility into fruitfulness, be open to change.* These men were fishing pros, and yet their nets were empty. When Jesus told them to cast their nets on the other side, they caught a boatload of fish. It's not our ability but our obedience to Jesus that causes results.

Despite your best efforts, have you been coming up empty lately? What change might the Lord be leading you to make that requires you to depend on Him and obey Him?

Second, when He moves you in a new and challenging direction, expect to do some soul-searching. Peter's failure humbled him and made him more qualified to lead the fledgling church, not less. With firsthand experience, he could testify to Christ's redeeming grace and encourage others who had failed. When the Lord takes you in a new direction, don't focus on your past failures but your present devotion.

Has the shame of past failures been holding you back? Search your soul. Do you love the Lord? That's the crucial issue, isn't it? What restoration is He offering? What new direction may He have in store?

Third, *as you follow Christ, don't compare yourself to others*. When Peter shifted the focus to John, Jesus drew Peter's eyes back to Him. "You, me, *follow*!" was what Jesus literally told Peter.



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Listening to Jesus beside the Sea John 21:1-22

Have you been comparing yourself to others lately? How can you shift your focus to Jesus and keep your eyes on Him today?

Jesus isn't looking for perfection in His disciples. He is looking for honesty, humility, vulnerability, and most of all, wholehearted love for Him. Like Peter, you can grow through your failures. Jesus has the grace to restore you. He just wants to know if you love Him, and you can let Him know right now.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, from the depths of my soul, I declare my love for You and for Your Son. I bring myself to You as I am, with a history of failures but with a willingness to receive Your grace and move forward in Your will. I desire to keep my eyes on Jesus and follow Him wherever He may lead. In His name, amen.



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All STUDY NINETEEN Challenged by Jesus on the Mountain

Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-15; Acts 1:6-8

The goal of the Great Commission is to make disciples. It's reaching people with the gospel and then staying with them as they grow in the faith. —Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

 F^{orty} days. That was all the time the disciples had between Jesus' resurrection and His ascension to see their risen Savior. It was a narrow but precious window of time.

No one knew how Jesus came and went. His glorified body was unconstrained by time or space or physical barriers. When He appeared to His disciples in a locked room, all John could say was, "Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them!" (John 20:19).

He appeared so casually that people often didn't recognize Him at first. Mary Magdalene thought He was the gardener. The two men on the road to Emmaus viewed Him as a fellow traveler. To the seven disciples on the Sea of Galilee, He was a curious stranger calling from the shore.

When Jesus appeared, He acted normally. He sat at a table, ate a meal, and conversed. But He was intentional. He took time to restore the fallen and encourage the doubting. He also delivered vital instructions, which He issued in two mountaintop meetings.

On a mountain in Galilee, Jesus gave His marching orders for His disciples until He returns—the Great Commission. On the Mount of Olives, He explained how they would receive power to fulfill their mission. In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll examine both mountaintop moments when Jesus' gave parting words before His ascension.





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Challenged by Jesus on the Mountain

Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:14–15; Acts 1:6–8



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Pray for insight to understand Jesus' commands and for strength to fulfill His mission.

Father, I treasure every word Jesus spoke. May His truth penetrate my heart and direct my steps. Give me the courage to follow His commands. Help me to know my role in spreading His message and fulfilling the Great Commission. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus commissioned His disciples to their ministry in the same region He began His ministry, Galilee. Matthew didn't pinpoint the location; he only stated,

Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him—but some of them doubted! (Matthew 28:16–17).

On this mountain, Jesus appeared in His new, immortal body, and yet, He still bore the scars from His sacrifice for our sins. No wonder the disciples worshiped Him . . . *and yet some doubted*. Perhaps they were uncertain how they could carry on without the Master. Jesus strengthened His weak-kneed disciples with words that have launched countless fearful but willing disciples to boldly proclaim His name.

Observation: The Great Commission

Read *Matthew* 28:18–20 slowly and thoughtfully, highlighting key words and central phrases. Notice the words that repeat.

How much authority has been given to Jesus?

To what nations did Jesus send His disciples?

Which of Jesus' commands are His disciples to obey?



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Challenged by Jesus on the Mountain

Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:14–15; Acts 1:6–8

How long will Jesus be with His people?

How does the connecting word, "therefore," link *Matthew* 28:19 with 28:18? On what foundational truth was Jesus' command to "make disciples" based?

What is the central command in 28:19—the goal of the Great Commission?

How did Jesus say to accomplish that goal in 28:19–20?

What is the objective? To make disciples. Going, baptizing, and teaching are subordinate to the main command, "make disciples." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Challenged by Jesus on the Mountain

Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:14–15; Acts 1:6–8

Interpretation: Jesus' Plan to Reach All Nations

Each component of this passage aids our interpretation. Even the setting is meaningful.

"The mountain"—Matthew 28:16-17

In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll suggests a possible site as Mount Arbel. This vantage point would have given the disciples a panoramic view of the Galilee region and the international highways that linked Israel to the world.¹

What did Jesus communicate to His disciples through this setting?

Review the prophecy about Galilee at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in *Matthew 4:12–17*. Do you see any interpretive connections between the launch of Jesus' ministry and His commissioning of His disciples?

"All Authority in Heaven and on Earth"—Matthew 28:18

Matthew developed the theme of Christ's authority throughout his gospel (7:29; 9:6; 16:1–4; 21:23–27), culminating in Jesus' authority over death in His resurrection.



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Challenged by Jesus on the Mountain

Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:14–15; Acts 1:6–8

What did Jesus mean by, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18)? Try restating His declaration in your own words to draw out its meaning.

"Make Disciples"—Matthew 28:19

Jesus commissioned His followers to make disciples, not just converts. What does *disciple* mean? What characteristics distinguish a disciple? Pastor Chuck's commentary can help with the answer. For an online resource, read the article, *"What is the difference between a Christian and a disciple?"* at gotquestions.org.

The goal is not just winning souls. Jesus looked these men in the eyes and, with scars on His hands and His feet, He said, "Make disciples." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Challenged by Jesus on the Mountain

Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:14–15; Acts 1:6–8

"Go . . . Baptizing . . . Teaching"—Matthew 28:18–19

Making disciples requires going, baptizing, and teaching. Let's take a closer look at these three concepts.

Go has the force of a command. It can mean go to "all the nations." It can also mean "in our going" as we live our daily lives. When we go, what good news do we communicate?

Baptizing includes not only the rite of baptism, but also the spiritual meaning. According to Pastor Chuck, baptizing is "initiating people into a conscious commitment to the triune God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."² Why is baptism essential to discipleship?

Teaching builds on the foundation of a person's saving faith in Christ. What do we teach, according to *Matthew 28:20*? What are some examples?



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Challenged by Jesus on the Mountain

Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:14–15; Acts 1:6–8

"I am with you always"—Matthew 28:20

How does Jesus' assurance in Matthew 28:20 encourage and empower His disciples?

Just think—the God of the universe cares about us, gives us purpose in life, reveals to us His plan for the world, and equips us with His presence to do what He commands!

The disciples were still wearing the same old robes they wore when they walked with Him. They still had the same dirty sandals. The same bad habits. They were just folks. The Great Commission is about folks like us. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

In the upper room before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would come. According to *John 16:8*, *13–15*, what did Jesus say the Holy Spirit would do to aid His disciples in their mission?



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Challenged by Jesus on the Mountain

Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:14–15; Acts 1:6–8

Right before Jesus ascended into heaven, He met His disciples one last time. The setting for this encounter was the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem, and Jesus had a final word of instruction for them. According to *Acts 1:8*, what did Jesus say about the source of their power, the job they were to do, and where they were to go?

"Jerusalem" is where you live. Start there. "Judea" is the surrounding area. "Samaria" is the place you might not choose to go, but God will still use you. Go to the whole world! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Application: The Great Commission, Our Mission

What principles can we apply from Christ's Great Commission? At least four streams of application flow from His powerful words.

First, *Jesus spoke to very ordinary people who knew Him personally*. No super-spiritual saints were in the group of people who received the Great Commission. They were people just like us.

Second, Jesus presented a plan that was brief, simple, and clear. Anyone can grasp the action points—make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching. His plan is doable because we operate under His authority and in His power, not our own.

Third, *Jesus was intense about the mission but relaxed regarding the method*. Jesus used the word *all* to communicate His passion: "all authority," "all the nations," "all the commands I have given you" (Mathew 28:18–20). We must be "all in" regarding His mission, but Jesus didn't specify how to go, baptize, or teach. We can adapt our ministries to be as effective as possible.

Fourth, *Jesus expected obedient action from all His followers*. Each follower of Christ *can* participate in the Great Commission, and we should. Making disciples is not optional.



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Challenged by Jesus on the Mountain

Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:14–15; Acts 1:6–8

As you conclude this study, pray for clarity and wisdom about how God would have you move forward in a new way in His Great Commission. If He's made it clear, then pray for courage to do what He's revealed. Write down the one thing you know to do this week to further His plan.

God will always guide you as you find new ways to share the glorious news of His Son, Jesus. May God give you opportunities to speak about His mysterious, glorious plan in Christ to those who desperately need good news.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I give You my heart, hands, and feet in Your Son's service. Give wings to the words of the gospel as I proclaim Your truth to others. Motivate me to find new ways to participate in fulfilling the Great Commission. Thank You for the reassurance of Your Son's abiding presence and the Spirit's energizing power to make Your kingdom's presence felt on earth. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

- 1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 16–28*, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 320–21. "It is quite possible that, at this gathering, the group numbered over five hundred. . . . Paul mentioned that at some point 'He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time' (1 Cor. 15:6). . . . If so, this would also mean that the Great Commission was meant not only for the small circle of eleven disciples but also for this larger group of His followers—and, by extension, for you and for me."
- 2. Swindoll, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 16–28, 321.



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JESUS: The Greatest Life of All

STUDY TWENTY

Watching for Jesus in the Air

1 Corinthians 15:50-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-13

At any moment Jesus could come. Isn't that exciting? Every morning, you wonder, "Today, Lord?" Everything will change in His presence. We'll spend forever with Him.

-Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

BIOGRAPHIES inevitably end the same. No matter how world-changing the person's contributions, how noble his or her character, or how engaging his or her personality, the hero dies in the final chapter. The *single* exception, notes Pastor Chuck Swindoll, is Jesus Christ.

The account of the greatest life of all is different. Not only does the subject continue to live, but a significant chapter of His story remains untold. The conclusion has been written in prophecy, but not yet in history.¹

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He promised His followers:

"I will come again and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am" (14:3)

Jesus will return, and this time He won't come as a baby in a manger but as the Mighty One the prophets foretold—"the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30).

So, our final *Searching the Scriptures* study is not an epilogue, looking back on a life well-lived, but a prologue, looking forward to a glorious new beginning when Christ returns. Only one conclusion fits Jesus' biography—"to be continued."





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Watching for Jesus in the Air

1 Corinthians 15:50-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-13



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Open your study of Christ's return praying for the Lord to kindle an even brighter fire of hope in your heart.

Father, the sky could split open at any moment and Your Son return. I believe that's true, but I have questions that only You can answer through Your Word. Guide me in Your truth and fill my soul with anticipation. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The hope of Christ's return has sustained Christians through the darkest times. More than 300 New Testament references to the coming of Christ shine like beacons in the night. Even death can't extinguish our hope because, when He returns, Christ will raise us from the dead.

Two central passages address the destiny of believers who have died and the destiny of those who are alive when Christ returns: *1 Corinthians 15:50–57* and *1 Thessalonians 4:13–18*. The Corinthian passage emphasizes the *transformation* that we can expect, and the Thessalonian passage emphasizes the *order of events*.

Observation: Scriptures that Describe Our Destiny

The early believers wondered what would happen to their bodies when Christ returned. In response, Paul penned answers that the Lord Himself revealed only to him. In these 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 15:50–57

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



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Watching for Jesus in the Air

1 Corinthians 15:50-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-13

What mystery, or "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?

In order for us to endure through eternity, we must be given imperishable bodies. Isn't that a great thought? You'll never show the marks of age. We'll have bodies that will last forever. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What does the glorification of our bodies signify regarding the end of death's curse, according to 15:54–57?

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.



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1 Corinthians 15:50-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-13



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 souls 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?

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



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Watching for Jesus in the Air

1 Corinthians 15:50-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-13

When Christ returns for His bride, His beloved church, millions of believers will have already died. Their bodies will be miraculously brought out of the grave in a glorified state. Those who are alive, the second group, "will be caught up together with them in the clouds" (1 Thessalonians 4:17 NASB). —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What did Paul say you should do with this information, according to 1 Thessalonians 4:18?

This passage raises our curiosity. You might wonder, what does it mean to be "caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (4:17)?

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?



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Watching for Jesus in the Air

1 Corinthians 15:50-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-13



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, in the article, "*What is the rapture of the church*?"

In summary, when Christ returns, "We will all be transformed!" Paul said (1 Corinthians 15:51). Christ will transform first the bodies of deceased 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.

Magnificent! You'll see the wonderful people from generations past—your grandparents who prayed for your salvation. Your mother or your dad, whoever in your background had a hand in where you are today. We'll be together forever. Isn't that great? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Watching for Jesus in the Air

1 Corinthians 15:50-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-13



Correlation: Encouragement for Heavy Hearts

Jesus 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*?

What hope did the angel 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 angel's promise 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. The early Christians never stopped watching for Jesus in the air . . . and neither should we.



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Watching for Jesus in the Air

1 Corinthians 15:50-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-13



Application: Actions that Reveal Our Readiness

Jesus urged His followers: "Keep watch! For you don't know what day your Lord is coming." (Matthew 24:42). Stay alert! Be prepared! The apostle Paul listed the actions that reveal our readiness.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing <u>salvation</u> to all people, instructing us to <u>deny ungodliness</u> and worldly desires and to <u>live sensibly</u>, righteously, and in a godly manner in the present age, <u>looking for the blessed hope</u> and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. (Titus 2:11–13 NASB, emphasis added)

The underlined words in these verses underscore four application questions.

- 1. *Have you received the salvation God provided through Christ?* If you're not certain, put your faith in Jesus Christ right now to receive eternal life. Read *"How to Begin a Relationship with God"* at insight.org to learn how to be sure about your destiny in heaven.
- 2. *Are you resisting an ungodly lifestyle*? Say no to the enemy's attacks and to temptation so that when Christ appears, you will be ready to welcome Him.
- 3. *Do you live your life in a sensible manner*? Live as if Christ might come today. Be responsible for what God has given you. Stay involved in Christ's mission. Share His love with others.
- 4. Will you, from now on, keep looking for the blessed hope of Christ's return? Remind yourself often of that "wonderful day" when Christ appears, which may be today.

After reflecting on these questions, what truth do you especially want to focus on in your life right now? What takeaway from this study do you want to cling to as you reflect on Jesus' earthly life and His accomplishment on the cross?



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1 Corinthians 15:50-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-13



What would it be like to wake up every morning thinking, "Christ may come today!"? Begin tomorrow morning with that thought and carry it with you through your day while you drive to work, drop off the kids, shop for groceries, do chores, fix dinner, wash the dishes, enjoy a sunset, settle in for the night, and drift asleep.

Christ's biography didn't end when He left earth for heaven, and since our lives are united with Him by faith, so are our destinies. Our future and His are . . . to be continued. We have eternity to enjoy His presence!



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.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, Jesus: The Greatest Life of All (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 288.



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