

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs

Understanding the Nutrients

Interpreting the Text

Psalm 119:27, 33–34; Acts 8:26–35

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

MESSAGE MATE



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The psalmist invites us to “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Psalm 34:8 NIV)!

God’s Word spreads before us as a smorgasbord of nutritious and satisfying truths necessary for us to grow in Him. Yet just as it would be difficult to prepare a wonderfully fulfilling holiday dish if you didn’t understand the recipe, so preparing spiritual meals proves virtually impossible if you don’t understand the meaning of Scripture.



Whetting Your Appetite: Getting Started

In this study, we are going to move from understanding *observation* to learning the importance of *interpretation*—the technique of searching the Scriptures that helps you answer the question, *What does the Bible mean?* Remember: observation focuses on what the Bible says. Interpretation helps you discover what the passage means. Ready to get started?



Read Psalm 119:27.

David, Israel’s shepherd king, possessed a profound devotion for the Word of God. In fact, he composed Psalm 119 as an ode to Scripture—extolling the wonders and pleasures of knowing God through His Law. Yet David fully understood that mere human understanding of Scripture was insufficient. That’s why we regularly hear David ask for the Lord’s supernatural enablement in understanding the meaning of Scripture. In the same manner, then, anyone desiring to search the Scriptures must approach God and His Word with the same supernatural perspective.

What specific request did the psalmist make of the Lord in Psalm 119:27?

Quotable

Understand this; many people are waiting for a voice or looking to the clouds for a message or listening late at night for an audible whisper. It isn’t going to come that way. He shouts at us from His Word.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Why do you feel the psalmist made this request?

Before you study a passage of Scripture, take a moment to pray this very prayer, asking the Lord to help you understand the *meaning* of His Word.

Now read Acts 8:26–35. Before moving forward with interpretation, use the technique of observation that you learned in the last message and make some notes about what you see. How many people are in the story? Who are they? Where are they from? Are there any supernatural elements included?

Using a map, either in the back of your Bible (try locating a map titled “Ministry of Jesus”) or using an online Bible atlas, locate the city of Jerusalem. Using your finger, first trace upward and find the region of Samaria. Once there, move your finger down to the bottom and a bit to the left to find Gaza. It’s right on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Would you say that would have been a quick or lengthy trip for Philip? Why?

Take a few minutes to reread the conversation Philip had with the Ethiopian traveler. Now using the technique of interpretation, answer the following questions.

What was the basis of the conversation? What was the result?



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How do you think the story would have been different if the angel of the Lord and the Holy Spirit had not been involved? Why?

Key Questions to Interpreting the Scriptures

When studying any particular passage of Scripture, several key questions help you unearth the context. *Context* has to do with the geographic, historic, and cultural setting of the biblical passage. In short, it's the *who, what, when, and where* of the text. Ask:

- **What is the setting?** Observe people, places, names, clues about the time of year, the weather, or the geography of the scene. It all helps to put together the rich fabric of the story or passage.
- **What is the genre?** Is this passage *poetry*, as in the Psalms or Ecclesiastes? Is it *narrative*—that is, does it tell a story, like Exodus, as the Israelites wander in the wilderness? Perhaps it's a *parable*—smaller, fictional pieces that pack a powerful lesson, as when Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 or the farmer sowing seed in Matthew 13. Or is it *prophetic*, as in the grand oracles of Ezekiel, Daniel, or the New Testament book of Revelation?
- **Who is the author, and why was it written?** Understanding who wrote the particular Scripture you are reading, and why, will also help you unlock its overall meaning.

There are also important hazards to avoid when attempting to interpret a passage of Scripture. When putting together your interpretation of Scripture, guard against . . .

- **Reading your personal bias into the text.** Interpretation is not setting out to find passages that prove your theory or reinforce your particular point of view. Interpretation is discovering truth and meaning *out of* the text, not bringing your view *to* the passage.
- **Being overly confident and dogmatic.** Guard against becoming a self-appointed expert on a passage that has for centuries, possibly even millennia, remained a mystery! That's why the reminder to ask the Lord's help is so critical at this stage of searching the Scriptures.
- **Placing yourself above the authority of Scripture.** Ultimately, God's Word must govern every aspect of our lives. It is essential that the student not only be careful and diligent in his or her study of the Scriptures but also live humbly and consistently in submission to them.





YOUR TURN IN THE KITCHEN

Now that you've studied the importance of interpretation, it's time for you to give it a try on your own. Are you ready? The following exercises will help you hone the technique of *interpretation*—answering the question, “What does it mean?”

1. In your Bible, read Romans 12:1–2. Observe these words slowly and carefully so you begin to understand what they're saying. Take time to write down your observations.

What did Paul mean when he wrote “give your bodies to God” (Romans 12:1)?

What was Paul referring to when he mentioned “the behavior and customs of this world” (12:2)?

What does it mean to “learn to know God's will for you” (12:2)?

Take your time as you answer these questions. Tasty meals take time to prepare, and great chefs aren't in a hurry. Let the words simmer, and before long, the aroma will begin to emerge.

2. In the previous message, “Reading the Ingredients: *Observing the Text*,” you made observations on John 3:16. After reviewing all of John 3, it's time to see how the Bible helps to interpret itself. Often this is done when a New Testament passage interprets or explains an Old Testament passage.



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In John 3:14–15, Jesus refers to a story recorded in Numbers 21:4–9. Read this story in your Bible about Moses lifting up the bronze snake on the pole, then jot down some notes of how it helps interpret what Jesus is saying in John 3:14–15. If you're not sure, reread the verses in both John and Numbers. Again, take your time as you let the Scriptures soak in. Record your notes.

3. In the previous message, you also made observations about Philippians 4:4–9; now it's time to interpret this passage. Review Philippians 1:1–30 to get some of the context in which Paul wrote this letter. Now read Philippians 4:4–9. In spite of Paul's imprisonment, what did he command the young church in the city of Philippi to do?

Why do you believe he made this command?

4. Also in the previous message, you made observations about Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. Now take some time to reread Luke 10:25–37 and explain Jesus' purpose in telling the parable.

Why is this kind of storytelling a powerful way to teach?

As you read these stories, remember that parables are a specific type of Scripture, so be sure to tread softly when studying them. Guard against stretching the meaning too far.



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5. In the previous message, you made observations about the story of Daniel in the lions' den. Now let's return to Daniel 6:1–28 and interpret the passage. What do we learn about God from this story?

What do we learn about Daniel?

Why do you think God used him so effectively?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, how thankful I am for Your goodness in helping me not only to see Your Word with fresh eyes but also in guiding my understanding of it. Help me never to get over the wonder of Your Word and the miracle of revelation. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.



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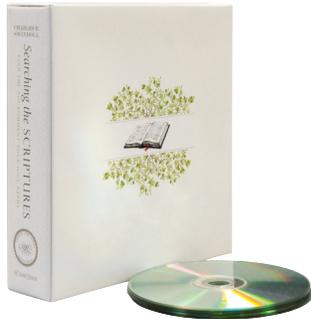
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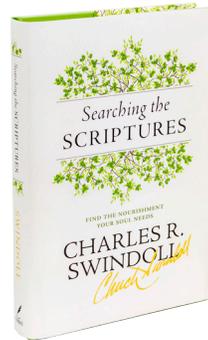
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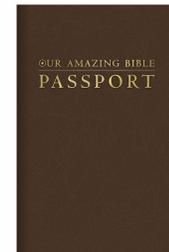
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When the book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* was written, the format for this STS study was developed by Charles R. Swindoll and Rhome van Dyck and published at the end of Chapter Five under the title “Your Turn in the Kitchen.” For the 2016 broadcast, this STS study was expanded with additional material by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Charles R. Swindoll based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts. It was released as a Message Mate through Insight for Living Ministries.



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