

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY ONE

Out of the Crowd . . . a Leper!

Matthew 4:23–25; 8:1–4

Jesus' compassion was disarming and eloquent. His first response was to reach out and touch the leper.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

As we open *The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13*, let's take a moment to review. According to Pastor Chuck Swindoll's overview chart of Matthew on the next page, Matthew wrote his gospel to portray Jesus as the long-awaited King of the Jews, the Messiah who has come to "save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

The opening section, Matthew 1–4, certifies Jesus as the messianic heir to David's throne as foretold by the prophets. Consecrated at His baptism and tested in the wilderness, Jesus launched His public ministry by teaching, healing, and announcing "the Kingdom of Heaven is near" (4:17).

The next section, Matthew 5–15, begins with the Sermon on the Mount (5–7) and Jesus casting His vision of the kingdom as a spiritual movement to transform hearts, not a political movement to overthrow Rome. Having described the kingdom of God *in words* through His sermon, Jesus then displayed the kingdom of God *in deeds* through His miracles—where our current study picks up.

Today's passage begins a two-chapter collection of miracles in Matthew 8–9.¹ These signs authenticate Jesus' messianic claim and give thirsty souls a taste of the goodness of God's kingdom. The people for whom Jesus performed miracles were the most *unlikely* and *unexpected* recipients of kingdom blessings: Gentiles, the demon-possessed, the unclean, and the untouchable. What mattered most to Jesus was not their present condition but their faith. They recognized Him as the King of heaven come to earth, and, like the man with leprosy in our passage, they believed in Him with their whole hearts.



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Out of the Crowd . . . a Leper!

Matthew 4:23–25; 8:1–4

MATTHEW

	Announcement and Arrival of the King Main Emphasis: His Credentials <u>Birth</u> <u>Baptism</u> <u>Temptation</u> CHAPTERS 1–4	Proclamation and Reception of the King Main Emphasis: His Message <u>Sermon on the Mount</u> <u>Miracles</u> <u>Discourses</u> <u>Parables</u> CHAPTERS 5–15	Opposition and Rejection of the King Main Emphasis: His Suffering and Death <u>Spread of opposition</u> <u>Preparation of disciples</u> <u>Final predictions</u> <u>Crucifixion</u> CHAPTERS 16–27	Resurrection and Triumph of the King Main Emphasis: His Conquest <u>God's power</u> <u>Great Commission</u> CHAPTER 28
The King	His identity: Israel's promised King		His destiny: "Crucify Him!"	
Scope	Teaching the vast multitudes		Teaching the Twelve	
Location	Bethlehem and Nazareth	Ministry in Galilee	Ministry in Judea	
People's Reaction	Increased popularity		Increased hostility	
Theme	Jesus is the King, Israel's long-awaited Messiah.			
Key Verses	16:16–19; 28:18–20			
Christ in Matthew	Jesus, the Messiah, fulfills the prophecies, promises, types, and expectations of the Old Testament Scriptures (16:16–19; 28:18–20).			

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open the Word, come to Jesus as the leprous man, with hands outstretched to receive the Lord's compassion.

Father, I bring to You my need. See me for who I am and take pity on me, just as Your Son took pity on the humble man with leprosy. As I open the Scriptures, I also open my heart to You and Your cleansing touch. In Jesus' name, amen.



Out of the Crowd . . . a Leper!

Matthew 4:23–25; 8:1–4



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The closing verses of chapter 4 and the opening verses of Matthew 8 bookend the Sermon on the Mount. Read *Matthew 4:23–25* and *8:1–4*, and write down what ties these passages together.

The same Greek phrase for “large crowd” appears in 4:25 and 8:1, indicating not just a single group but many groups of people from all over the region—all needy, all seeking help. Out of these crowds, the afflicted man came alone to Jesus, parting the sea of people who drew back at the dreadful sight of him. Let’s look closer at this man’s terrible disease, his humble heart of faith, and Jesus’ remarkable act of compassion.



Observation: Encountering a Man with Leprosy

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we first observe the passage by reading carefully and slowly, absorbing every word.²



Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

Just as we need tools in the kitchen to help us cook our meals, we need Bible study tools to help us feed ourselves God’s Word. An essential tool for our studies is Pastor Chuck’s two-volume commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15* and *Insights on Matthew 16–28*.³ For background study, we recommend a Bible dictionary, such as *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*.

The Man’s Condition and Action—Matthew 8:2a

Known today as Hansen’s disease, leprosy deadens nerve endings causing sufferers to unknowingly injure themselves. Years of untreated wounds, infections, and ulcerations lead to loss of limbs and irreversible decay. “It is a kind of terrible progressive death in which a man dies by inches.”⁴



Out of the Crowd . . . a Leper!

Matthew 4:23–25; 8:1–4

Use your resources to research *leprosy* in Bible times. Read the inset article, “Leprosy,” on page 145 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. What do you discover?

The physical suffering was severe, but the misery of isolation was worse. According to commentator William Barclay,

Lepers were treated “as if they were, in effect, dead men.” Immediately [when] leprosy was diagnosed, the leper was absolutely and completely banished from human society. . . . The leper had to go with rent clothes, disheveled hair, with a covering upon his upper lip, and, as he went, he had to cry: “Unclean, unclean” (*Leviticus 13:45*).⁵

Try to imagine this man with leprosy making his way to Jesus. What physical, religious, and social obstacles would he have had to overcome? What news might he have heard about Jesus that filled him with determination? What actions showed he understood *who* Jesus was?



Out of the Crowd . . . a Leper!

Matthew 4:23–25; 8:1–4

The Man's Humble Faith—Matthew 8:2b

Observe carefully the man's statement: "Lord . . . if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean" (Matthew 8:2). What do you see? What part of this passage reveals his faith?

The Greek construction of the conditional phrase, "if you are willing," suggests that the Lord may or may not have been willing to help. And the man held no expectations. No presumptions, no bargaining. He truly believed Jesus *could* make him whole, but he never assumed that Jesus *would*. What does the man's approach say about his humble heart?

The Lord's Compassionate Response—Matthew 8:3–4

What did Jesus do that no other rabbi would have done (*Matthew 8:3*)? Also, what did Jesus do that *only* He could do?



Out of the Crowd . . . a Leper!

Matthew 4:23–25; 8:1–4

What do you think Jesus communicated to the man and the crowd by *touching* the leprous man? In addition, what two attributes of His nature did Jesus convey by saying, “I am willing” and “Be healed!” (Matthew 8:3)?

The sores fell away in the moment it takes to wash dirt from our arms. The man must have cried out with joy, but the Lord put a finger to His lips. How did Jesus’ instructions show respect for God’s law (8:4)?

Why did Jesus say to the man not to tell anyone? Because He was the Messiah, and the timing had to be just right for His plan. People would want to make Him their king based on His power to heal. His ministry was not only to heal but transform lives.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Our Savior’s Response to Faith

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we examine the meaning of the passage. By including this account of Jesus cleansing the man of leprosy, Matthew intended his original readers to learn certain truths.



Out of the Crowd . . . a Leper!

Matthew 4:23–25; 8:1–4

What do we learn about the person of Jesus? For insight, consult Pastor Chuck's, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, pages 144–45.

What do we learn from the example of the man's faith and approach to Jesus?

Matthew didn't use the Greek word for "heal" in reference to leprosy, rather, *katharizō*, which means "cleanse." Read *Matthew 10:7–8* and *11:4–5* in the New American Standard Bible to see how the word *cleansed* is used specifically with leprosy.

Leprosy is often compared to sin in Scripture, and just as Jesus cleansed the man of His leprosy, "the blood of Jesus . . . cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Let's look deeper into this connection between cleansing of leprosy and cleansing of sin.



Correlation: The Contrite Heart and Cleansing of Sin

By correlating our passage with similar passages, we can confirm our interpretation and gain a broader understanding of God's Word. Jesus told the cleansed man to go to the priest for ceremonial purification, in accordance with the protocols of the Mosaic law.



Out of the Crowd . . . a Leper!

Matthew 4:23–25; 8:1–4

Leviticus 14:1–9 describes the process for ceremonial purification for the people of Israel, and *14:10–32* outlines the intricate details for making offerings to the Lord. Scan these complex requirements to get an idea of what was required for purification. And then, against this backdrop, read David's psalm of contrition and plea for God to cleanse him from his sin in *Psalms 51*.

What does *51:1–2, 7–10* say about how God cleanses us?

What does God desire from us when we sin, according to *51:16–17*?

As David declared, God will never “reject a broken and repentant heart” (Psalm 51:17)!

What makes a contrite heart such a beautiful sacrifice to God? It makes no demands. It nurses no blame or grudges. It entertains no expectations. It offers no conditions. It anticipates no favors. It is the attitude God loves! And that's the attitude of the leprous man. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Out of the Crowd . . . a Leper!

Matthew 4:23–25; 8:1–4



Application: Understanding the Principles

Leprosy has long been a poignant illustration of sin's wasting effects in a person's life. Pastor Chuck offers three reassuring principles to take away from this study.

- First, *the magnetic presence of Jesus draws us closer to Him*. He doesn't reject us because of our shameful condition. Whoever comes to Him with a contrite heart will hear the Lord saying, "Come near."
- Second, *the quiet compassion of Jesus invites us to ask Him for relief*. When we know that the Lord will not shame us, we are free to state with confidence that we believe He can cleanse us.
- Third, *the transforming touch of Jesus changes us deep within*. Sinful people can't defile Jesus. He purifies sinful people with His transformative touch.

Take a few moments of quiet reflection to let these principles sink in. What is your need for the Savior's cleansing touch? In what ways can you invite Him to purify your life?

Jesus came to touch the untouchables and to offer the Father's cup of compassion to the parched lips of humanity. Drink deeply as the love of God cleanses your soul.



Out of the Crowd . . . a Leper!

Matthew 4:23–25; 8:1–4



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, just as death's tentacles had grabbed hold of the body of the man with leprosy so can the power of sin bind the human soul. Thankfully, Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted, release captives from their guilt, and cleanse the poor sinner's shame. I cling to nothing as I come to the cross with my hands open to receive His mercy, grace, love, and purifying power. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. The miracles appear in groups of three. The first group is cleansing the leprosy man (Matthew 8:1–4), healing the centurion's servant (8:5–13), and healing Peter's mother-in-law and others (8:14–17); the second group is calming the sea (8:23–27), casting out demons from the two Gadarenes (8:28–34), and healing the paralytic (9:1–8); the third group is healing the woman and raising the official's daughter (9:18–26), healing two blind men (9:27–31), and casting out a demon from the mute man (9:32–34).
2. For helpful instruction from Pastor Chuck, consult our online instructional web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)." This page provides you an introduction to four important skills in Bible study—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—along with other helpful study tips. You can also follow the link to purchase a copy of Pastor Chuck's book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, on which our studies are based.
3. Other tools we recommend are a whole-Bible commentary, such as the two-volume *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* and *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. Versions of the Bible are available at BibleGateway.com, and an excellent online Bible commentary by Thomas L. Constable is at netbible.org.
4. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 1, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 295.
5. Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 295–96.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY TWO

Snapshots of Power, Far and Near

Matthew 8:5–17

Jesus can do whatever He wishes, whenever He chooses, always within His plan and purpose for His glory and our good.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THROUGHOUT His earthly ministry, Jesus always had the full use of divine power at His fingertips. In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll describes the extent of Jesus' supernatural ability:

When we consider the power of Jesus, we're talking about awesome divine power. He possesses all the attributes that are true of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. As fully divine, Jesus is omnipotent—a word meaning “all-powerful.” His divine power comprises the ability to do anything that is consistent with His character and according to His will. . . .

No obstacle is insurmountable, no circumstance is impossible, no situation is unapproachable, no person is unchangeable, and no problem is unsolvable.¹

Whenever Jesus displayed His power, He had a purpose—often to teach a lesson in faith. Also, He never limited Himself to set patterns or formulas. He would heal a person with a touch or with just a word. Sometimes He released His power privately . . . sometimes in public with all eyes watching. As in our passage, He healed at a distance in one situation and up close in another. Regardless the circumstances, Jesus' power was unlimited, absolute, and awe-inspiring.

After cleansing a man of leprosy (Matthew 8:1–4), Jesus went into the city of Capernaum where He continued to perform miracles. Let's follow Him into this bustling city on the Sea of Galilee and marvel at His power to meet humanity's most desperate needs.



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Snapshots of Power, Far and Near

Matthew 8:5–17



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Are you facing a problem that is humanly impossible to resolve? Perhaps you've pursued countless remedies to no avail, and your well of resources has run dry. As you open the Word, shift your focus to the Savior and His limitless reservoir.

Father, through my study, help me see Jesus as the people on these pages of Scripture saw Him. Open my eyes to the awesome, divine nature of Your Son, settle my fears, and enlarge my faith. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 8:5–17*. Find Capernaum in your Bible atlas or on the online map at insight.org, "*Ministry of Jesus*," which lists the events that occurred at or near Capernaum. Read through the list and notice how many events happened there! Capernaum was the central hub and home base of Jesus' early ministry in Galilee.



Observation: Who, Where, What, and How

In the observation stage of *Searching the Scriptures*, we look for the who, where, what, and how of the passage.² In the following chart, fill in *who* received the miracle, *where* the miracle occurred, *what* was the desperate need, and *how* Jesus dealt with the problem using His divine power.



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STUDY TWO

Snapshots of Power, Far and Near

Matthew 8:5–17

	Healing from a Distance <i>Matthew 8:5–13</i>	Healing Up Close and Personal <i>Matthew 8:14–15</i>	Relieving Many Who Came <i>Matthew 8:16–17</i>
Who received the healing?			
Where did the healing occur?			
What is the desperate need?			
How did Jesus perform the miracle?			

As you look over the chart, what is similar about these “snapshots” of Jesus’ divine power?



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STUDY TWO

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Snapshots of Power, Far and Near

Matthew 8:5–17

What differences do you observe?

Now focus on Jesus. What do you see in the way He heals, His heart toward the suffering, or anything else that stands out about His divine nature and awesome power?

By quoting *Isaiah 53:4* from the messianic prophecy of the Suffering Servant, what conclusion did Matthew draw about who Jesus is (*Matthew 8:17*)? Based on these passages, how would you describe Jesus?

Never doubt the Lord's ability to bring an immediate change. Everything within us is based on our scientific upbringing and empirical evidence. Here are examples of what the Lord can do that defies scientific explanation. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Snapshots of Power, Far and Near

Matthew 8:5–17



Interpretation: The Centurion's Remarkable Faith

How do we interpret these miracles? By spotlighting the Roman officer, Matthew made a significant point: the Jewish Messiah is for *all* people. Even a Gentile in the Roman army can possess the key of faith to unlock the blessings of the messianic kingdom.

What do we know about this officer? He was a centurion, a commander of one hundred soldiers. Centurions were men of noble character, and every centurion in Scripture is mentioned with honor.³ According to Luke's account, the Jewish elders said this centurion was "worthy" (NASB), because he had built the synagogue as a gesture of love toward the Jewish people (Luke 7:1–5). And yet, the centurion never flashed his credentials before Jesus or expected favor.

What characteristics of faith did the centurion express? Examine his words to Jesus in [Matthew 8:8–9](#) and write down some principles about the kind of humble faith Jesus seeks.

Seeing past the officer's Roman armor to his believing heart, Jesus was amazed—not only at the centurion's faith but at the absence of similar faith among the Jews. What is the "feast" Jesus mentions in [8:11–12](#) and who is present? For help with the answer, consult Pastor Chuck's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, page 147. An online resource is [Constable's Notes](#) at netbible.org.

Jesus' "feast" metaphor came from the Old Testament and would have been familiar to the Jews in His audience. Let's clarify what Jesus meant by looking through the lens of prophecy.



Snapshots of Power, Far and Near

Matthew 8:5–17



Correlation: A Banquet for All Nations

Jesus had in mind a glorious future event when the kingdom of God has come in full and the curse of sin, sickness, and death is no more. Someday, redemption's plan will culminate in a great celebration. What did Isaiah say about this lavish banquet in *Isaiah 25:6–9*? Who will be present? What will happen? What similarities do you see in *Revelation 21:1–4*?

Who is this powerful and compassionate Savior who will “swallow up death forever” and “wipe away all tears” (*Isaiah 25:8*)? He is the same one who healed the centurion's servant from a distance, restored a fevered woman by touching her hand, and gave relief to those tormented by demons. What power! What compassion! And He is the same one in whom we trust in our desperate times.

The Lord is for us, not against us. The Lord is full of compassion and understanding. He's not some distant deity frowning and judging us. He is capable of handling whatever we're struggling with, and He is ready to hear us when we call. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Responding to Similar Needs Today

What is your impossible situation? Perhaps someone you love is far away and struggling, and you can't change his or her heart or situation. Perhaps you're on your sickbed like Peter's mother-in-law. Or perhaps you feel tormented by spiritual or mental anguish. Here are three principles from our study to guide you.

First, *don't let distance hold you back from faith*. Whether physical or relational, the distance you feel between a loved one can seem like an impassable gap. Come to the Lord as the centurion came, believing that the Lord can heal from a distance with just a word.

Second, *don't be afraid to ask for the Lord's divine touch*. Focus on the Lord's divine power and leave it with Him to heal according to His will.

Third, *don't think your torment is too evil or bad for the power of Jesus to resolve*. Jesus is powerful enough to fight our spiritual battles, just as He helped those tormented by demons.



Snapshots of Power, Far and Near

Matthew 8:5–17

Which of these principles most applies to your circumstances? In what way can you apply it today?

As you close this study, focus on the power of Christ. Release your impossible situation to Him in a prayer of faith.

Now, rest in the compassion of Christ. He bears our griefs and carries our sorrows, feeling them as His own. Whether He releases His healing power now or someday, we can rest assured that His gentle hand will wipe away our tears. Focus on His power and rest in His compassion today.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I rest in the truth that You are intimately aware of all my struggles. You are interested in the details of my life, and You are not removed from what troubles me. Grant me a quiet confidence in You and a grounded faith in Your Son. Help those I love who need Your touch. Take my burden as I give it to You now. In the name of Jesus, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 143.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
3. Other positive references include the centurion at the foot of the cross who acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God (Mark 15:39); Cornelius in Caesarea who received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:1–48); the centurion who aided Paul in Jerusalem (22:25–26); and the centurion who protected Paul on the ship to Rome (27:42–44).



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY THREE

How *Not* to Follow Jesus

Matthew 8:18–27

Jesus isn't looking for a following; He is looking for followers—committed, dedicated disciples, men and women who mean what they say.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SOON after Mary gave birth to Jesus, wise men from the East travelled to Israel in search of the one born king of the Jews. They had seen “his star as it rose,” so they came to worship Him (Matthew 2:2).

Years passed and Jesus grew up in quiet obscurity. But when He launched His ministry, His “star” rose once more—in the form of national notoriety. Jesus amazed audiences with His teaching, and His miracles drew attention from people far and wide. More than a few witnessed His dazzling displays. Matthew wrote, “Large crowds followed Jesus,” implying not just one crowd but many crowds (8:1).

However, not everyone sought Jesus in genuine devotion as did the wise men. Some were curious stargazers who came for the thrill of seeing a miracle. Others got swept up in the excitement, professing allegiance to Jesus only to abandon Him later. Still others wanted to share in His fame solely for personal gain. But Jesus could spot the phonies. Because of His keen discernment, He perceived people’s self-seeking motives beneath their sincere-sounding words.

Matthew purposefully inserted into his account of Jesus’ miracles a revealing glimpse at the types of people who followed Jesus and how Jesus responded to them. If we pay close attention to our study of Matthew 8:18–27, we will learn by their example how *not* to follow Jesus.



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How *Not* to Follow Jesus

Matthew 8:18–27



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Whenever we read Jesus' words in Scripture, we sense His call to follow Him. Prepare your heart in prayer to respond to Jesus' will through this study.

Father, speak clearly through the Scriptures today that I may hear the voice of my Shepherd calling me as one of His sheep, and may I respond with understanding and obedience. In Christ's name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you read *Matthew 8:18–27*, look for four categories of people: the *crowd* (Matthew 8:18), the *scribe* (8:19–20), the *other disciple* (8:21–22), and the *twelve disciples* (8:23–27). Jesus' responses to these people revealed their true motives. Let's look through His lens of spiritual discernment to see what Jesus saw in them and then reflect on what He might reveal to us today.



Observation: The Discernment of Jesus with His Followers

Pastor Chuck Swindoll writes that observation is “the process of seeing what the Bible actually says. . . . You're simply reading the words on the page.”¹ Use your skills of observation to answer the following questions.

First, let's consider Jesus' response to the *crowd*. Where was the crowd, and what did Jesus say to His disciples (*Matthew 8:18*)?

From Capernaum, Jesus told His disciples to take Him across the lake to Gentile territory. Jesus didn't give a reason for departing, other than seeing the crowd “around him” (8:18). We'll explore the meaning of His response to the crowd in the interpretation phase. For now, consult your Bible map to see where Jesus went across the sea.



How *Not* to Follow Jesus

Matthew 8:18–27



Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

Bible maps are a vital tool in *Searching the Scriptures*. Reference the map in the back of your Bible or in your Bible atlas to find Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. You can also locate Capernaum on the map, *Ministry of Jesus*, on the Insight for Living Ministries website. Jesus embarked from Capernaum heading southeast. Find Gergesa, a seaside village in the region of Gadara. Gergesa is a possible site where Jesus cast out demons—which we'll read in our next study on Matthew 8:28–34. Trace the distance between Capernaum and the land of the Gadarenes.

Second, consider the *scribe*. Scribes were highly respected members of the religious elite and were accustomed to first-class treatment. What did Jesus tell the scribe to expect if he signed on as a disciple (*Matthew 8:19–20*)?

Third, how did Jesus respond to the *other disciple*, who said he wanted to follow Jesus but not right away (*8:21–22*)? We'll dig into the meaning of Jesus' interesting statement later.



How *Not* to Follow Jesus

Matthew 8:18–27

Fourth, what did Jesus say to the *twelve disciples* when they woke Him during the storm, and what did He do to calm the wind and waves (*Matthew 8:23–27*)? Notice the extreme contrast between the “fierce storm” (8:24) and the stillness of the “great calm” (8:26). How does the storm illustrate the disciples’ inner turmoil, and how does the calm sea reflect Jesus’ inner rest?

How did the disciples respond to Jesus’ miracle? Remember to fit this event in the context of Matthew 8. Compare the questioning disciples with the confident centurion, who saw Jesus for who He was and who acknowledged Jesus’ infinite authority (8:8–9).

The disciples thought they would drown. Hold it. They were with God! God doesn't drown! What concerned Jesus? Not the disciples' normal human fear but the panic . . . the excessive fear that fears the worst. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Four Principles for Following Jesus

Once we uncover Matthew’s intended meaning for his original readers, we can craft our interpretation into a principle for today—a timeless, universal truth. How are we *not* to follow Jesus? Let’s consider four pitfalls to avoid.



How *Not* to Follow Jesus

Matthew 8:18–27

Following the Crowd—Matthew 8:18

Jesus perceived something in “the crowd around him” that made Him wish to leave (Matthew 8:18). What do you think concerned Him about these curiosity-seekers?

Jesus was more interested in gathering faithful followers than large followings. What principle can you write about the pitfall of following a crowd instead of following Jesus?

Jesus is looking for dedicated disciples. Do not follow Jesus because of the size of the crowd.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Following for Personal Gain—Matthew 8:19–20

Hearing Jesus tell His disciples to cross the lake, the scribe wanted to hop in the boat with them: “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go” (Matthew 8:19). But did the scribe, who was used to studying in the comfort of libraries, get the full picture of life on the road with Jesus?



How *Not* to Follow Jesus

Matthew 8:18–27

To find out more about scribes and their drive to share in the fame of a popular rabbi for their own gain, read pages 152–153 in Pastor Chuck's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. What do you discover about scribes and the reason Jesus wanted this man to understand the cost of discipleship?

Write a principle about the problem of following Jesus to promote oneself.

Don't follow Jesus full of yourself. Be ready to deny yourself, not going your way but going His way. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Following with Reservations—Matthew 8:21–22

While the scribe considered what he must do to follow Jesus, the next man had to consider what he must leave behind. The man's stipulation, "Lord, first let me return home and bury my father" (Matthew 8:21), meant he wanted to stay home until his father dies. Jesus said, "Follow me now" (8:22). Consult your resources and page 154 of Pastor Chuck's commentary to explain what Jesus meant, "Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead" (8:22).



How *Not* to Follow Jesus

Matthew 8:18–27

What principle can you write about the peril of postponing following Jesus?

Do not follow Jesus with reservations. Don't have your own agenda.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Following with Little Faith—Matthew 8:23–27

We don't know whether the scribe or the other disciple obeyed Jesus, but the wind and the waves certainly obeyed Him when they stopped at His command! “Who is this man?” the disciples asked in amazement—which is the central question in Matthew's gospel. The answer determines our faith. Matthew builds a case that Jesus is the King of all creation, and Jesus' calming the sea leaves no doubt.

Who do you say Jesus is? How does your belief in Christ as your sovereign ruler help calm your waves of fear? Write a principle about the importance of building your faith on Jesus' identity.

Don't follow Jesus if you're going to doubt His sovereignty when the situation becomes impossible. In the storms of life, He is the eternal life preserver! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



How *Not* to Follow Jesus

Matthew 8:18–27



Correlation: The Son of Man

For the first time in Matthew, Jesus refers to Himself as “Son of Man,” a title He used again and again throughout His ministry. It’s a reference to [Daniel 7:13–14](#)—which the scribe would have immediately recognized. What did Jesus want the scribe to realize about His identity?

And yet, Jesus, whose “kingdom will never be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14), did not reside in royal comfort or rule from a regal throne. The same King who was laid in a manger lived as a humble peasant with “no place even to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). What does this juxtaposition of sovereignty versus lowliness tell you about Jesus as our “Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us’” (1:23)?

None of the people in this study truly grasped who Jesus was. “Who is this man?” the disciples asked, and none of them knew the answer—not yet, anyway. But we do! As you apply this study, allow your understanding of Jesus as the one born King inspire your dedication to Him as your sovereign Lord.



How *Not* to Follow Jesus

Matthew 8:18–27



Application: Following Jesus as Dedicated Disciples

Look over the principles you wrote earlier about how *not* to follow Jesus: by following the crowd, for personal gain, with reservations, and with little faith. Into which of these pitfalls do you tend to slip?

To avoid these hazards, use the following statements to affirm your willingness to follow Jesus with your whole heart.

- *I will follow Jesus even if I'm the only one.*
- *I will follow Jesus even if it means sacrificing personal comfort, reputation, or gain.*
- *I will follow Jesus today and not postpone my commitment.*
- *I will follow Jesus believing Him to be the ruler of all things, my sovereign Lord in whose hands I entrust my life.*

What words would you use to express your dedication to being Christ's disciple?

As the storm calmed on the Sea of Galilee with just a word from Jesus, the disciples made a declaration that you can keep in mind: “Even the winds and waves obey him!” (Matthew 8:27). Let the storms you encounter today prompt you to remember this truth and renew your faith in the one who rules the seas!



How *Not* to Follow Jesus

Matthew 8:18–27



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You allow turbulence in my life so that I will come to Your Son—like the disciples in the wind-tossed boat, who shouted, “Lord, save us!” Fill my heart with faith in the one who can calm the storm. And give me the peace of Christ so I might rest in Your sovereign care. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 71. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY FOUR

Dealing with Demons

Matthew 8:28–34

When we are in the presence of evil forces that we cannot otherwise explain, we must stand in faith and pray in the Spirit. Don't underestimate the power of prayer.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

JESUS has cleansed a leprous man, restored the centurion's paralyzed servant, cooled the fever of Peter's mother-in-law, and healed those gathered at His door (Matthew 8:1–17). In some ways, Jesus' ministry resembled that of the prophets—people whom God had empowered at times to perform miracles. But then Jesus calmed the raging sea, displaying divine authority like no other (8:23–27).

“Who is this man?” the astonished disciples wondered after Jesus rebuked the wind and waves like a parent might scold an unruly child (8:27). In time, the disciples' eyes would open, and they would see Jesus as sovereign ruler of creation.¹ For now, they were still trying to reconcile Jesus' humanity *and* His divinity.

While the disciples wrestled with their question, the answer flowed freely from the most loathsome and unexpected source, as we'll discover in Matthew 8:28–34. Demons that had taken residence in two pitiful men from Gadarene immediately recognized Jesus as the “Son of God” (8:29) when they encountered Him.

Let's pick up our study as the disciples put ashore on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee and follow Jesus as He shines heaven's light into the realm of demonic darkness.



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Dealing with Demons

Matthew 8:28–34



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Demons are real but invisible creatures; devious, insidious servants of Satan that intend us harm. Their existence sends chills down our spines, but Christ's authority over them gives us the backbone to stand against them in Jesus' name. Open your study in prayer, inviting the Lord to illumine your mind through His Word, fill you with wonder at Christ's power, and give you courage to stand firm in His power.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you read *Matthew 8:28–34*, notice the flow of the passage as Matthew describes the *setting* (Matthew 8:28), Jesus' *dialogue* with the demons (8:29–31), the *deliverance* of the men from demonic control (8:32), and the *results* when the townspeople realize what Jesus can do (8:33–34).



Observation: The Setting, Dialogue, Deliverance, and Results

Observation in *Searching the Scriptures* lays the foundation on which we build our interpretation.² Look closely at the action words, the descriptions, contrast and comparison, cause and effect, and any surprising elements in this account—such as the unexpected ending.

Matthew identifies the *setting* as “the region of the Gadarenes” (Matthew 8:28). Locate the possible site in your Bible map or atlas. A map is included on page 159 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15* and online, “*Ministry of Jesus*.” For a brief history of this Gentile region, consult your resources or the online *Encyclopedia of the Bible*. What did you find out?



Dealing with Demons

Matthew 8:28–34

The two men were *demonized*, as the Greek term literally states, meaning they were under the control of demonic powers. What about these men and how they lived would have repulsed and terrified Matthew's Jewish readers (*Matthew 8:28*)?

In their *dialogue* with Jesus, the demons' questions reveal their understanding of two facts. What do even demons know (*8:29*, see also *James 2:19*)?

The villagers feared being attacked by the demonized men. The demons, however, were *far more* afraid of Jesus. What sent waves of terror through the demons? What did they beg Jesus to do instead (*8:30–31*)?



Dealing with Demons

Matthew 8:28–34

In Matthew's account of the *deliverance*, Jesus said one word: "Go!" (Matthew 8:32 NASB). What does this word and the demons' instant response convey about the nature of Jesus and the nature of demons (8:32)?

Every demon knows the Son of God, and every demon knows that its days are numbered. Satan will ultimately be cast into the lake of fire, which has been prepared for the devil and his angels. They know they are living on borrowed time. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The *results* of Jesus casting out the demons and the pigs plunging off the hillside draws a poignant and tragic comparison and contrast between the townspeople and the demons. What did the people beg Jesus to do (8:33–34)?

Jesus came to the land of the Gadarenes to display His divine authority and offer Himself to anyone in need. We would expect the townspeople to embrace Jesus after He rid the demonic blight from their community. But how did the people respond? They cast out Jesus!



Interpretation: The Supernatural Power of Jesus

Let's examine what Matthew intended his readers to learn about the person of Jesus, the nature of demons, and the choice for people.



Dealing with Demons

Matthew 8:28–34

The Person of Jesus

It's not an accident that Jesus' encounter with these demons comes on the heels of His encounter with the stormy sea. What do we learn about the lordship of Jesus in these natural and supernatural settings?

What do the sea's tempestuous waves and demoniacs' tormented souls illustrate about our condition apart from Jesus? What can He do for us?

The Nature of Demons

Read the brief article, "Excursus: Demonology 101," on page 161 in Pastor Chuck's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. Write down a few Bible facts about what demons are and what they can and can't do.



Dealing with Demons

Matthew 8:28–34

What facts about demons does Matthew's account of the Gadarene demoniacs confirm?

Demons are actively engaged in evil objectives. They are aggressive and relentless. They have supernatural power, but they are not all-powerful. They operate under the permissive will of God. They must bow to His authority and obey His commands.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Choice for People

The Gentile Gadarenes could have displayed the same faith as the Gentile centurion, who bowed to the authority of Jesus. But they sent Him away. Perhaps Jesus' show of authority over the demonic world was too much evidence of a power the people didn't care to reckon with. Sadly, they would rather push Jesus away than risk Him changing their lives too.

What message does Matthew teach his readers regarding the Gadarenes' rejection of Jesus?

The people gave not one word of gratitude that the men who were demonized were restored. Not one word of gratitude that they are now safe because Jesus cast out the demons.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Dealing with Demons

Matthew 8:28–34

 **Correlation: Added Details from Mark's Account**

Mark 5:1–20 and Luke 8:26–39 present longer accounts of Jesus' casting out the demons in Gadara. Use the following chart to summarize details from *Mark's account* that add deeper insight. Mark featured one of the two demoniacs from Matthew's account. Only through this man, the demons spoke to Jesus.

Matthew 8:28–34	Mark 5:1–20
<p>The Setting—8:28</p> <p><i>When Jesus arrived on the other side of the lake, in the region of the Gadarenes, two men who were possessed by demons met him. They came out of the tombs and were so violent that no one could go through that area.</i></p>	<p>The Setting—5:1–5</p>
<p>The Dialogue—8:29–31</p> <p><i>They began screaming at him, “Why are you interfering with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torture us before God’s appointed time?” There happened to be a large herd of pigs feeding in the distance. So the demons begged, “If you cast us out, send us into that herd of pigs.”</i></p>	<p>The Dialogue—5:6–12</p>
<p>The Deliverance—8:32</p> <p><i>“All right, go!” Jesus commanded them. So the demons came out of the men and entered the pigs, and the whole herd plunged down the steep hillside into the lake and drowned in the water.</i></p>	<p>The Deliverance—5:13</p>
<p>The Results—8:33–34</p> <p><i>The herdsmen fled to the nearby town, telling everyone what happened to the demon-possessed men. Then the entire town came out to meet Jesus, but they begged him to go away and leave them alone.</i></p>	<p>The Results—5:14–20</p>



Dealing with Demons

Matthew 8:28–34

Both Mark and Luke's account include the postscript of the formerly demonized man traveling through the Decapolis, proclaiming "the great things Jesus had done for him" (Mark 1:20). What a transformation Jesus brought this man—from being a prisoner of darkness to becoming an ambassador of the light of Christ!

Jesus said to the man, "Go and let people know what happened to you," which is the central message of a great testimony. We who know the Lord Jesus have a story to tell!

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Vital Principles Worth Remembering

This study has demonstrated the reality of demons and our need to know how to deal with them. Here are four words of counsel from Pastor Chuck.

First, *expect struggles with unseen forces*. Remember that "we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but . . . against evil spirits in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

Second, *stand firm in the full armor of God*. If we're going to fight with confidence, we must wear the armor God provided: the "belt of truth," "body armor of God's righteousness," shoes [of] peace," "shield of faith," "helmet [of] salvation," and "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (6:14–17).

Third, *hold up the shield of faith and pray in the Spirit*. Have faith in Jesus and surround yourself by His Spirit through prayer.

Fourth, *never forget you are on the winning side*. No one knows better than the devil and his demons that in the end, God wins, and we with Him!

In light of this study, how will you handle those spine-tingling brushes with the forces of darkness that we all sense from time to time?



Dealing with Demons

Matthew 8:28–34

What encouragement can you take from our study about the Savior's power over spiritual darkness in this world (1 John 4:4)?

It takes keen spiritual discernment to know whether an evil spirit is loose in our lives or if we're suffering the fallout of living in a sinful world. Demons are not responsible for every emotional crisis or physical illness. However, we must be wary. If Jesus' example teaches us anything, it's that we are to be ready for spiritual battle . . . to be fully equipped to engage the enemy in Jesus' most powerful name. *He alone is the Son of God!*



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for not leaving me alone in this world but providing Your Spirit and Your power, which are made possible through Jesus Christ. Deliver me from the fear of spiritual darkness. Remind me that Your Spirit in me is greater than any spirit in the world. I trust You to guide me as I follow Christ and live in His armor of protection. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. When the disciples saw Jesus walk on the water, they fully understood who He was. They worshiped Him, declaring, "You really are the Son of God!" (Matthew 14:33)
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY FIVE

A Soul-Searching Walk Alongside Jesus

Matthew 9:1–13

Jesus said, "I'm not here because people are healthy. I'm here because people are sick. That's why the Father sent Me on this mission called salvation."

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

As we read Matthew's gospel, let's travel through the portal of our imagination and picture ourselves walking alongside Jesus. Matthew 9 opens, "Jesus climbed into a boat and went back across the lake to his own town" (Matthew 9:1). Let's climb in with Him!

We feel the boat lean as the morning breeze catches the sail and mists our faces. We hear the wooden mast creak and the water splash against the bow. As we glide across the lake, perhaps we listen to Jesus reflect on casting out demons in Gadara and the fearful Gadarenes begging Him to "go away and leave them alone" (8:34). We hear the compassion in His voice as He prays for the formerly demonized man who stayed behind to tell others about "the great things Jesus had done for him" (Mark 5:20).

After we dock in Capernaum, we sense the vibrant buzz of the town as we walk beside Jesus. The scent of the fish market, the crush of the crowd, the eager faces of people as they catch sight of Jesus, the murmurs of critics behind His back. The air tingles with anticipation! What will Jesus do next?



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Invite the Lord to hone your senses and open your heart as you open this passage.

Father, bring to life these events so I can experience Jesus as if I were hearing His words and seeing His actions firsthand. Stir in me a deeper love for Him and search my soul with the light of His truth. In His name, amen.



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A Soul-Searching Walk Alongside Jesus

Matthew 9:1–13



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 9:1–13* and reflect on the scenes as if you were present. Put yourself there when Jesus forgave the man's sins and healed him, when Jesus called Matthew and dined with his “disreputable” friends, and when Jesus confronted the Pharisees on both occasions. What feelings emerge in you? What impresses you most about Jesus?

It was quite a busy day! Let's look closer at the significance of these events as they relate to Jesus' life and mission.



Observation: Jesus with Sinners

Searching the Scriptures starts with observing the text to pick up all the important details the author intended us to know.¹ *Who* was present? *What* was said and done? *How* did people respond?

Proof of Divine Authority—Matthew 9:1–8

According to the parallel accounts of this event in Mark 2:1–12 and Luke 5:17–26, Jesus was in a house teaching to an overflow crowd that included Pharisees and religious teachers “from every village in all Galilee and Judea, as well as from Jerusalem” (Luke 5:17). As you imagine yourself elbow-to-elbow with Jesus, look around and write down a description of those who are there (*Matthew 9:1–8*).



A Soul-Searching Walk Alongside Jesus

Matthew 9:1–13

Jesus strategically arranged the sequence of events in this scene to prove a point. Write down the order of what was said and done and the reason Jesus gave for arranging the sequence.

How did the healed man and the people respond, according to Matthew's account (*Matthew 9:7–8*)? Mark's account (*Mark 2:12*)? Luke's account (*Luke 5:25–26*)?

Forgiving sins was a central component of Jesus' mission, wasn't it? Restoring souls, not simply healing bodies. It follows, then, that we find Jesus *with sinners*. We have witnessed Jesus' divine authority; now, let's watch Him display His divine mercy.

Display of Divine Mercy—Matthew 9:9–13

Who is present in these scenes (*Matthew 9:9–13*)?



A Soul-Searching Walk Alongside Jesus

Matthew 9:1–13

As a tax-collector, Matthew was considered a traitor by his fellow Jews, for he earned his bread by taking money from them, giving the Romans their due, and hoarding what he overcharged. Everyone despised him, but, seeing the emptiness in Matthew's bankrupt soul, Jesus offered His hand of mercy. Without hesitation, the scales of Matthew's heart tipped toward Jesus, and he left his business gold mine for the spiritual riches Jesus offered.

Again, picture this scene and the dinner party scene as if you are there. Write down what you hear and see. How does Jesus explain His role, and how do you see it contrasting with the law-enforcement role of the Pharisees?

Note the same word, *but*, intersects both this event (*Matthew 9:11*) and the previous event (*9:3*). Summarize the essence of the Pharisees' accusations against Jesus—which they will keep hurling at Jesus through the rest of His ministry.

The room was filled with people we would have looked down on because of what they did for a living. But they're all having the time of their lives with Jesus.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A Soul-Searching Walk Alongside Jesus

Matthew 9:1–13



Interpretation: The Meaning of Forgiveness and Mercy

Jesus spoke two phrases that stand out: “Your sins are forgiven” (Matthew 9:2) and “I want you to show mercy” (9:13).

Until this point, Jesus had spoken only about the Father forgiving sins—in the Lord’s Prayer in which we pray for the Father to “forgive us our sins” (6:12). What was Jesus saying about His authority and nature when *He forgave* the sins of the paralyzed man (9:2)?

We can’t forgive sinners like Christ did, but we can forgive those who sin against us (6:12). And we can follow Christ’s example by showing mercy toward sinners—exactly what the Pharisees refused to do.

Use the following chart to contrast Jesus’ attitude toward sinners with the Pharisees’ attitude. How did Jesus beam mercy while the Pharisees flashed condemnation? How would you feel if you were there?

The Mercy of Jesus	The Condemnation of the Pharisees

In Matthew 9:13, Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6 which originally stated, “I want you to show *steadfast love*,” the operative Hebrew word in Hosea being *hesed*. The context of this passage is a beautiful description of God restoring repentant sinners—exactly what Jesus does! Let’s take a closer look.



A Soul-Searching Walk Alongside Jesus

Matthew 9:1–13



Correlation: Restoring the Repentant from Hosea

God told His prophet Hosea to marry a woman who would be unfaithful to him to illustrate Israel's spiritual unfaithfulness. Throughout the book of Hosea, God pronounces judgment on His unfaithful people who commit spiritual adultery with idols. But the Lord, like a faithfully steadfast husband, always follows with promises of loving restoration if His people repent and return.

Read Hosea's plea to his people to return to the Lord in [Hosea 6:1–3](#). Can you imagine Matthew calling with the same urgency to his sinful friends when he invited them to his banquet with Jesus? How did Jesus model the healing restoration of God that Hosea described?

Jesus quoted Hosea 6 to the Pharisees to call them to repentance. Unfortunately, they wouldn't budge from their pedestals of superiority to seek forgiveness or show mercy. How do we respond?

Jesus was saying, "My heart goes out to the outcasts, those who live in the muck and mire of disgrace and shame. My mission field is to reach them." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll.



Application: Coming to Terms with the Truth

At the heart of Matthew's passage is the contrast between the merciful Physician and the condemning Pharisees. They swished their self-righteous robes at sinners while Jesus enfolded them in His garments of grace.



A Soul-Searching Walk Alongside Jesus

Matthew 9:1–13

Jesus looked past Matthew's sin to see him as a potential disciple. How about us? How do we see people whose unsavory habits put us off? What might you do to see people through the eyes of Jesus?

What else strikes you about your imagined walk with Jesus through this passage? Do you need His physician-like touch for an ailing part of your soul? In what ways? What words would you like to share with the Savior?

Remember our morning boat ride with Jesus from the beginning of this study? Let's take that sense of tranquility with us as we continue our journey with Him. And we don't have to use our imagination. He is with us each step of the way!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for showing Your mercy to me through Your Son. He is the Physician of my soul who has bandaged my wounds, forgiven my sins, and restored me to wholeness in Your presence. May I share His forgiveness and mercy with those I know who need His healing touch. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY SIX

A Nonstop Day of Miracles

Matthew 9:14–34

How good of God to provide us a guideline for life that never needs to be called into question! His Word is written for our correction and admonition so that we through patience and comfort from the Scriptures would find hope, the one element that is so missing all around us—the hope that He gives.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WE all know the meaning of a busy day—the kind where the chaos of random challenges and surprising demands meets us every hour. It feels as though we're being asked to achieve the impossible. In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, Matthew records for us a unique glimpse into one of those days in the life of Jesus.

Typically, the gospel writers noted singular events that occurred on single days. But Matthew 9:14–34 portrays Jesus being pulled one way and then another and then another in this day of impossible demands . . . impossible for us, at least. It must have been an exhausting day for Jesus; however, sacrificing for others is why He came. He came to serve and not be served, to busy Himself not for personal gain but for meeting the needs of others. When Jesus performed the impossible, He did so from His heart of love with grace and mercy toward hurting people like us.

Let's walk with Jesus through His busy day and learn the value of trusting in the only One who is worthy of our devotion.



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A Nonstop Day of Miracles

Matthew 9:14–34



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a moment to reflect on Jesus' purposes for performing miracles. Consider what they teach us about His character and His presence with us in this life. Then think over how they relate to His promises about the life of the world to come. After a bit of reflection, write your request below for the Holy Spirit to guide Your study of His holy Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus didn't wake up that morning with His daily planner filled with ten to-do items. The page was blank. He likely got up, prayed, and ate breakfast. Then he casually strolled outside only to find a full agenda of others' needs awaiting Him. *What an agenda it would turn out to be!*



Observation: Winding Through the Streets of Capernaum

Matthew parachutes us into Jesus' day when John the Baptizer's disciples rush up to Jesus to ask Him about fasting. We'll save the short, imagery-laden response of Jesus in Matthew 9:14–17 for interpretation. During His response, however, a synagogue leader ran up to Him with an urgent request.

Dive into the action by reading [Matthew 9:18–34](#). Observing the text means paying careful attention to the details.¹ Note each person's assumption about Jesus and the miracle Jesus performed for them.



A Nonstop Day of Miracles

Matthew 9:14–34

Person(s)	Assumption	Miracle of the Pharisees
9:18–19, 23–26		
9:20–22		
9:27–31		
9:32–33	N/A	

Did you catch how the demonized man “was brought to Jesus” (Matthew 9:32), whereas the others came to Jesus? Even though the demon-possessed man’s assumption about Jesus wasn’t explicitly stated, that he “was brought” to Jesus likely clues us into to his thoughts about Jesus. What do you think his assumptions about Jesus and himself might have been?

Just look at that power! Don’t ever, ever, ever doubt God’s power. In His time and in His way and for His purpose, He demonstrates it, and He does so rarely when we expect it . . . and usually in ways we would have never imagined. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A Nonstop Day of Miracles

Matthew 9:14–34

Multiple times (Matthew 9:24, 26, 30–31, 34) Matthew noted the response to Jesus' healing ability. We always want to pay attention to repetition because biblical authors use this literary device for emphasis. Summarize and contrast the responses below.

To one person and to the next—one need to another—miraculous power flowed from Jesus at every angle that day. What a king, right? The rulers of this world use their power for coin and prestige, pleasure and ease. But the Creator of the universe wore a peasant's robe and bestowed His power for the restoration of His creation.

Never forget that such signs confirm further the biblical promises of an imminent new world at the end of all things—the re-creation of heaven and earth and the final release from sin's curse.



Interpretation: A Growing Reputation

During interpretation, we explore the historical meaning of a biblical passage to determine its significance for us today. We use other resources from other men and women of God to aid us in this endeavor.²

The Comparison Issue

Carefully read [Matthew 9:14–17](#). So many images! Using your extra-biblical sources, like Pastor Chuck's *Insights on Matthew* commentary (pages 172–174), summarize the key idea of Jesus' reply to the question from John's disciples. How is Jesus' response relevant today?



A Nonstop Day of Miracles

Matthew 9:14–34

Meeting Impossible Needs

Knowing the Jewish cultural context reveals quite a bit about the character of the suffering woman and Jesus' redemptive power (*Matthew 9:20–22*).

What did the Jewish ceremonial law say about her condition? Why would she want to touch only the fringe of Jesus' robe? Jesus told this ailing woman (9:22), along with the blind men (9:29), that their faith had made them well. In these two verses, what is Matthew teaching us about faith and the object of our faith?

Almost without exception, when there is a divine healing, truly a healing, it is instant. Be careful what you call miracles. . . . Don't throw the word around lightly or frequently.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Negative Reactions

The father of the dead daughter had to steer clear of the skeptics who “laughed at” Jesus (Matthew 9:24) so that fear wouldn't replace his faith. The Pharisees, however, fought to ensure faith wouldn't replace their fury. How did they respond to Jesus' healings (9:34), and why is their response ironic? What does their response teach us about our depravity and our need for God's intervention?



A Nonstop Day of Miracles

Matthew 9:14–34

In his commentary, Pastor Chuck offers an insightful reflection on the character of Jesus, as portrayed throughout this busy day of healing:

Note that Jesus isn't merely in the business of imparting physical healings; He is also interested in relating to people personally, ministering to them emotionally, and restoring them spiritually. He is concerned with their *whole being*.³



Correlation: God's Power and Our Faith

Let's explore a few verses from Paul's letter to the church at Rome that also deal with God's power, our desperate situation, and the gift of faith. Read and reflect upon *Romans 1:16–20*. Summarize below what this passage claims about these three topics and how it doctrinally complements what we saw in action in Matthew 9:14–34.

I'm not asking you today simply to be impressed with a man who lived and died and whose name is now known among multiple millions around the world . . . as though He were merely a fine man, a martyr for a cause, a good teacher—silly answers. They're shallow. Great moral teachers would never say what He said. Jesus was either crazy . . . or divine.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: The Appropriate Response

Pastor Chuck likes to say application is the final setting of the diamond of truth. Bible study without application is like mastering the contents of a menu at a nice restaurant without actually eating the food. Assimilating the truth of the Word of God fosters a life in close communion with the God of the Word.

The leader of the synagogue, in grief over his daughter, had to learn a few lessons concerning his walk with God. For humility to displace skepticism, one must often reach the point of desperation. For truth to eclipse our panic and impatience, we must learn to respect the times of delays. Do either of those truths meet you in your walk with God?



A Nonstop Day of Miracles

Matthew 9:14–34

If so, record below why it does and how it can help you grow on your journey of faith.

True faith translates into action. The hemorrhaging woman went to Jesus with her need. Is there a need in your life that neither you nor anyone else can fix? Go to Jesus. Turn to Him for strength. Make your requests known to God because He is a merciful God who hears you.

Matthew emphasizes how the report of Jesus' activity spread like a wildfire. Often, encountering Jesus spills over into conversations about His goodness in our lives. Do you have someone on your heart who needs to hear of that goodness? If so, write that person's name below, pray for him or her, and then develop a plan to share with him or her the good news of Christ.

Jesus' busy day put divinity on full display for the eyes of the whole world to see. He met them all with the exact act of mercy they needed and wanted. Not only did He do it for them. But He did it for you that you might know with certainty and clarity the kind of God you worship and serve.



A Nonstop Day of Miracles

Matthew 9:14–34



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, what a privilege to even know the name of Jesus, what a privilege to read about His remarkable life, and to participate in the life-giving power of the gospel that has made its way to my ears and into my heart. Embolden me, Lord! Busy me with Your eternal mission rather than my own temporal goals. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. For helpful instruction from Pastor Chuck, consult our online instructional web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)." This page provides you an introduction to four important methods in Bible study—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—along with other helpful study tips. There, you'll also find a link to purchase a copy of Pastor Chuck's book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, on which our studies are based.
2. Other tools we recommend are a whole-Bible commentary, such as the two-volume *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* and *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. Numerous versions of the Bible are available at [BibleGateway.com](#) along with a wonderful commentary on *Matthew* in the IVP New Testament series. Find an excellent online Bible commentary by Thomas L. Constable is at [netbible.org](#).
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 179.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY SEVEN

Listen Well, Think Right, Talk Straight, Travel Light

Matthew 9:35–10:10

We don't need a halo to work in the Lord's harvest fields. We don't need to look pious to be one of His workers, as if we've never known failure. We are just as qualified as any of the twelve disciples.

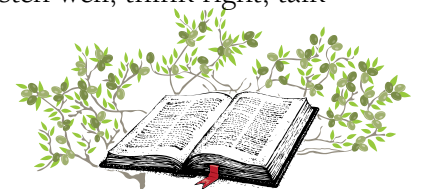
—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

JESUS had His work cut out for Him. In a little more than three years, He had to convey His message to as many people as possible and accomplish His mission to save the world from sin. On top of that, He had to train His followers to continue His work and “make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). No back-up plan existed if His original strategy didn't pan out. The future of Christianity depended on Jesus' disciples carrying His message to the world.

Jesus selected twelve disciples on whose shoulders to place His mantle of ministry. What stood out about these men? Well, from a human point of view, not a lot!

For the most part they were common laboring men, probably having no professional training beyond the rudiments of knowledge necessary for their vocation. . . . By any standard of sophisticated culture then and now they would surely be considered a rather ragged aggregation of souls. One might wonder how Jesus could ever use them. They were impulsive, temperamental, easily offended, and had all the prejudices of their environment. . . . Not the kind of group one would expect to win the world for Christ.¹

And yet, when Jesus called them to follow Him, they left everything and wholeheartedly entrusted their lives to Him. They were His *mathetes*—“disciples, learners.” But learning was only the beginning. Jesus' goal was to send them out as *apostolos*—“apostles, messengers sent on a mission.” It was a mission Jesus modeled and explained in precise detail. Their part was simple enough that we, too, can do it: listen well, think right, talk straight, and travel light!



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Listen Well, Think Right, Talk Straight, Travel Light

Matthew 9:35–10:10



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The gospel of Mark states that Jesus chose the twelve disciples to “be with Him” (Mark 3:14 NASB). Being *with* Jesus is just as essential for us. In fact, it’s primary. Picture yourself at His feet now as you learn from His teaching. Ask your heavenly Father to reveal His specific direction for your life through His Son.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 9:35–10:10*, which portrays Jesus ministering just as before—“teaching in the synagogues,” “announcing the Good News about the Kingdom,” and healing “every kind of disease and illness” (Matthew 4:23; 9:35). An ominous shadow, however, had crept across the backdrop of Jesus’ ministry.

The Pharisees had just accused Jesus of being a satanic counterfeit of the real messiah, saying, “He can cast out demons because he is empowered by the prince of demons” (9:34). To attribute Jesus’ power to Satan was the ultimate rejection, and in time, their hatred would emerge as a dark and deadly conspiracy. Until then, Jesus kept on shining His light by loving and helping hurting people and equipping His disciples to do the same.



Observation: Jesus Ministering and Sending

The passage divides nicely into two main sections.² First, we see Jesus ministering to the public. Matthew recorded what Jesus *did*, what He *felt*, and what He *said*. Second, we observe Him focusing on His closest disciples: *selecting* the Twelve and *instructing* them in ministry.

Jesus Ministering to the Public—Matthew 9:35–38

Jesus built His ministry on what three pillars, according to *Matthew 9:35*? These activities reflect generally what Jesus *did*. How did these areas of ministry complement one another?



Listen Well, Think Right, Talk Straight, Travel Light

Matthew 9:35–10:10

In a rare look into Jesus' *feelings*, Matthew picked the strongest word for “compassion” in the Greek language.³ It is a verb, meaning, to show compassion from the core of one's being, our “guts.” We've already seen Jesus express His compassion in His touch of a leprous man (Matthew 8:3), His meal with “disreputable sinners” (9:10), His miracle for grief-stricken parents (9:23–25). List below how you might describe the depth of Jesus' compassion to someone who didn't know Him.

What did Jesus see that stirred His compassion? Read [9:36](#) in several versions and write down how Matthew expressed the desperation of the people.

What did Jesus say to His disciples, according to [9:37–38](#)? Who owns the “fields,” and to whom does the harvest belong? What work did He say the workers need to do? What is the role of prayer, and who calls and sends the workers?

These verses form a literary bridge between chapters 8–9 and chapter 10, upon which Jesus transitions from *doing* ministry to *sending* His disciples to do what He modeled.



Listen Well, Think Right, Talk Straight, Travel Light

Matthew 9:35–10:10

Jesus Sending His Disciples—Matthew 10:1–10

Matthew 10 opens with Jesus *selecting* the twelve disciples He would send as apostles. What did Jesus give them that was essential to their new role as apostles, according to *Matthew 10:1*?

Compare the lists of the twelve apostles in *10:2–4*; *Mark 3:16–19*; *Luke 6:14–16*; and *Acts 1:13*. Notice the three sets of four individuals in each list. Simon Peter heads the first set of Andrew, James, and John. Philip heads the second set of Bartholomew, Thomas, and Matthew. And James, son of Alphaeus, heads the third set of Thaddaeus, Simon (the zealot), and Judas Iscariot.

What *instructions* did Jesus give these men, according to *Matthew 10:5–10*? List the specifics of *to whom* they should go, *what* they should say and do, and *how* they should travel.



Interpretation: The Meaning of Jesus' Instructions

How do we interpret Jesus' words to the apostles? According to Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, the "original disciples had unique apostolic authority," and they "had a unique scope" of ministry.⁵ Consult page 189 of Pastor Chuck's commentary to answer the following questions.



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STUDY SEVEN

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Listen Well, Think Right, Talk Straight, Travel Light

Matthew 9:35–10:10

What apostolic authority sets them apart from us (*Matthew 10:1, 8*)?

The apostle's scope of ministry was unique to that time in biblical history (*10:5–6*). Why do you think Jesus wanted them to announce the kingdom to the Jews only?

Why did Jesus instruct them to travel light, to not “acquire” money “or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff” (*10:9–10 NASB*)? How do you think traveling light benefited their ministry? How do these instructions relate to us today?



Listen Well, Think Right, Talk Straight, Travel Light

Matthew 9:35–10:10



Correlation: Expanding the Scope

Jesus' instructions to the apostles were meant for a specific era in God's plan. As people received or rejected His message, the Lord broadened the scope of ministry beyond the Jews. Fast-forward to the time of Christ's ascension, after He had died on the cross and been resurrected.

What were Jesus' instructions to the apostles in [Acts 1:8](#)?

How did the apostles continue the ministry that Christ had earlier commissioned them to do, according to [2:42–43](#)?

While the apostles initially preached only to the Jews, what did their ministry as the foundation of the church eventually accomplish, according to [Ephesians 2:17–22](#)?



Listen Well, Think Right, Talk Straight, Travel Light

Matthew 9:35–10:10

Jesus sent His apostles in His name and with His power to cast out evil spirits and heal diseases to validate the same message He preached, “the Kingdom of Heaven is near” (Matthew 10:7). The apostles became true extensions of Jesus—gathering souls for the Lord’s harvest.



Application: Important Principles for Them and Us

The fields are just as ripe for harvest today as they were in the days of the apostles. What principles can we apply as Jesus sends us as His laborers?

First, *the apostles’ motives and methods are similar to ours*. We carry the message of Christ with the same heart of compassion. And we always begin every effort by praying for the Lord “to send more workers into his fields” (Matthew 9:38).

Second, *reaping the harvest calls for the same roles*. We must have *goers* who take the message to the lost and *givers* who support the effort.

Third, *we must have the same character and commitment modeled by the apostles*. They were authentic, not phony or hypocritical. They lived in simplicity and were not greedy, proud, or selfish. Their integrity and moral purity made them trustworthy.

Pick a principle modeled by the apostles that the Lord may be urging you to follow. What instructions might Jesus be giving you today based on that principle?

Do you ever feel inadequate to follow Christ’s instructions? How might the Lord be encouraging you?



Listen Well, Think Right, Talk Straight, Travel Light

Matthew 9:35–10:10

If you think you could never make Christ's list of disciples, you might be surprised. Jesus sees beyond our faults and failures to the person we can become in Him. He finds the God-given gemlike qualities inside us and polishes them until they shine for His glory. He's the master at doing the extraordinary with ordinary folks like us!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for calling me to be a worker in Your field. Shape me into just the right tool for Your use. I need Your work in me today so I can do the work You have designed for me. I long for the joy of harvesting souls for Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1963, 1964), 22–23.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
3. The gospel writers reserved this special word to describe Jesus or a character in His parable who displays God's compassion, such as the prodigal son's father (for example, [Matthew 14:14](#); [15:32](#); [Luke 7:12–14](#); [15:20](#)).
4. Some disciples were called other names. Thaddaeus and Judas, son of James, are the same. Simon the Cananaean is also called Simon the Zealot. Bartholomew is called Nathanael in John 1:45. Thomas is called Didymus ("twin") in John 11:16; 20:24; and 21:2. James is called "the Less" in Mark 15:40. Matthew is called Levi in Luke 5:27, 29.
5. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 189.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY EIGHT

Sheep among Wolves: What to Expect

Matthew 10:11–31

What can we expect? The same treatment as the disciples, so don't be surprised by persecution. What must we remember? Don't be afraid. The same promises that were given to them are ours to apply.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

FROM the inception of His ministry, Jesus determined to invest Himself in others so they could carry on His work after Him. Of all His followers, Jesus chose twelve individuals to be His most trusted disciples, the ones into whom He would pour His life and vision.

Jesus taught these handpicked students not in a classroom but in the context of a close relationship. They walked with Him, ate with Him, endured hardship with Him, laughed with Him, and sat by the crackling fire to talk life with Him. They marveled at His miracles and hung on His words. Then, at the right time, Jesus sent them out to do what He had trained them to do.

Through modeling and mentoring, Jesus transformed *followers* into *leaders* who would train others. These new disciples would do the same for others and then others in an ever-expanding circle of believers.

In this grassroots way, Christianity grew from few to millions. But the growth didn't come easy. The apostles and all who came after them endured blistering winds of persecution which Jesus warned about in the passage we'll focus on in this study.



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Sheep among Wolves: What to Expect

Matthew 10:11–31



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Persecution. What comes to mind? Perhaps Christians thrown to the lions in the Roman colosseum or soldiers in faraway places burning down churches. But persecution can come in less extreme forms too, such as rejection, criticism, and slander. Invite the Lord to strengthen you through His Word to faithfully endure whatever hardships you might face for His name's sake.

Father, because You love me, You tell me about the persecution that might await me and my family because we follow Your Son. Show me the heart of Christ as I read His warnings, and fill me with His courage and calm, in His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you read [Matthew 10:11–31](#), recall the context. After selecting the Twelve, Jesus “gave them authority to cast out evil spirits and to heal every kind of disease and illness” (Matthew 10:1). Then He commissioned them as apostles to announce the kingdom of heaven with miraculous signs to validate the message (10:6–8).

Jesus instructed them to travel light and depend on the hospitality of kind-hearted people wherever they went (10:9–10). Our previous study stopped at this instruction, but Jesus continued.

If townspeople rejected them, what were the apostles to do? Jesus said to leave that town and “shake its dust from [their] feet” (10:14). God would settle accounts on the day of judgment (10:15). In the next section, Jesus elaborated on the subject of hostility, specifying what sorts of persecution they could expect and how to respond.



Observation: Warnings and Reassurances

When we observe the passage, we look for figures of speech, repeated phrases, contrasts, cause and effect, and commands.¹ In this passage, Jesus' commands form the general structure. The first main command is “Beware!” (Matthew 10:17), and the future tense verbs that follow describe the *dangers ahead*. The second main command is repeated three times: “Don't be afraid” (10:26, 28, 31), as Jesus reveals our *future hope*.



Sheep among Wolves: What to Expect

Matthew 10:11–31

Dangers Ahead—Matthew 10:16–25

What analogies did Jesus make in *Matthew 10:16*? What did the Shepherd tell His “sheep” that would have surprised them, and how do you think they felt?

We’ll examine what it means to “be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves” in the interpretation section. For now, feel the distress in Jesus’ flock upon hearing His words. And Jesus had even more hard things to say.

First, what persecution would they suffer from their own *religious leaders* (*Matthew 10:17*)?

Second, what persecution would they endure from *governmental authorities* (*10:18–20*)? Notice Jesus said, “When you are arrested,” not “If you are arrested.” He never sugarcoated the reality of what lay ahead. However, what opportunities for the gospel would their persecution bring?



Sheep among Wolves: What to Expect

Matthew 10:11–31

Third, perhaps the harshest of all, what persecution *at home and abroad* did Jesus say His followers would face (*Matthew 10:21–22*)?

Jesus then rephrased what He said earlier. He already told them if they visit a town whose citizens won't listen to the gospel, the disciples are to “shake its dust from [their] feet as [they] leave” (10:14). He later added, “When you are persecuted in one town, flee to the next” (10:23). What reason did Jesus give for not wasting time with unreceptive people (10:23)?

As Jesus wrapped up this section of warnings, He told them the real reason people would reject them. What did He say, according to 10:24–25. (See also *John 15:18–21*.)

These warnings were fulfilled in the days of the apostles and in various times throughout Christian history. And we are living to see the fulfillment of them right now. This isn't paranoia. This is the fulfillment of prophetic teaching. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Sheep among Wolves: What to Expect

Matthew 10:11–31

Future Hope—Matthew 10:26–31

And yet, rays of hope beamed through the stormy clouds. Why did Jesus say His followers should not be afraid of those who threaten them (*Matthew 10:26–27*)? What coming *freedom* did Jesus describe?

Why did Jesus say His followers should not be afraid of those who want to kill them (*10:28–31*)? What hopeful *promise* did Jesus offer?

Before moving on, let these reassuring words from the Lord settle into your soul, particularly if you've been suffering persecution lately. Bask in the warmth of your value to God and take a moment to thank Him for knowing you intimately and caring for you deeply.



Interpretation: Shrewd as Snakes, Harmless as Doves

This passage raises a few interpretive issues, such as the meaning of Jesus' saying, "So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves" (*Matthew 10:16*). Jesus was giving the apostles some practical counsel for what to do when surrounded by "wolves." What did His advice mean?



Sheep among Wolves: What to Expect

Matthew 10:11–31

To find the answer, read pages 194–195 in Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. Or for an online resource, consult *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org. What do you discover?

Jesus didn't intend His warnings to encourage a "martyr complex." We don't have to stay with hurtful people who hate us and our Lord. He told His followers to leave, even flee, hostility so they could find people who *want to hear* about Christ. Why? Because the "Son of Man will return" soon, and many more need to receive Him before He comes (Matthew 10:23).

Through centuries of persecution, believers have fearlessly faced torture and even death because of Jesus' reassuring words in *10:26–31*. How do we interpret Jesus' teaching? Pastor Chuck offers three reasons why Christ's followers need not fear persecution.

First, God wants His message revealed not concealed (10:26–27). Therefore, He would see to it that they were protected and that His word would be proclaimed. Second, even if the enemies of the gospel succeeded at putting His witnesses to death, they would continue on to eternal life (10:28). . . . Third, God never ceases to love and care for His disciples even in the midst of great trials and tribulations.²

As you reflect on Jesus' reassurances in this passage, write down in your own words what you understand Jesus to mean so that you can endure persecution unafraid.

"Do not fear." This is the most common command given in the New Testament. "Fear not, fear not!" —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Sheep among Wolves: What to Expect

Matthew 10:11–31



Correlation: Prophetic Passages on Persecution

The authors of the New Testament wrote frequently about persecution to encourage their readers who were suffering terribly. How do the following verses mirror Jesus' original teaching about persecution?

Romans 8:35–37

2 Thessalonians 1:5–8

2 Timothy 3:1–3, 12–14

Even today, Christ still sends out His sheep among wolves, and we can't ignore the howls in our anti-Christian culture growing louder and louder. How do we respond?



Sheep among Wolves: What to Expect

Matthew 10:11–31



Application: Principles for Today

Pastor Chuck gives us two guidelines from this study's passage.

First, *we can expect ill-treatment for declaring the message of Christ*. And yet, according to Jesus, persecution can become a platform for the gospel. When the apostles were ever arrested for their faith, Jesus said, "This will be your opportunity to tell the rulers and other unbelievers about me" (Matthew 10:18). He also assured them that "the Spirit of your Father" would be with them and speak through them (10:20). And we can apply that same promise.

If you are facing hostility, how does thinking about persecution as an "opportunity" and relying on the Spirit to empower you in the moment give you courage?

Second, *we don't have to be afraid*. Amid persecution, we can sing the song of the psalmist:

*The LORD is for me, so I will have no fear.
What can mere people do to me? (Psalm 118:6)*

Hateful people may attack us like wolves, but their threats have no teeth because our souls are safe with God. How does this promise give you hope to endure hostility and keep on sharing Christ?

Only God can soften a hostile person's heart. We simply declare His message. So be shrewd but innocent, aware of danger but unafraid, always secure in our precious value to God.



Sheep among Wolves: What to Expect

Matthew 10:11–31



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, give me the ability to be discerning without being paranoid, to be courageous but not belligerent, to be snake-like in my awareness but dove-like in my attitude. Thank You for the promise that no one can truly harm me because my soul is safe with You. Make me strong but keep me gracious as I declare the message of Christ in an increasingly hostile world. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 199.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY NINE

A Severe Checklist for Disciples

Matthew 10:32–11:1

Loyal disciples acknowledge that there is one commitment that supersedes all other commitments. Love for Christ is greater than all other loves.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

UNTIL Jesus sent the twelve disciples to minister on their own, they lived in the shadow of their Master. They watched Jesus teach the crowds, show compassion to the needy, answer questions, and confront His critics. But now they would be the ones to engage the spiritual enemy and feel the heat of persecution.

None of these men had any experience in public ministry, and none had been without Jesus. So, to outfit them for the struggles ahead, Jesus issued His new recruits the essentials to persevere. Think of it as a kind of checklist of commitments they would need in order to press on and not panic—to stand their ground and not run from hard times.

In his commentary, Pastor Chuck Swindoll describes the gravity of Jesus' instructions.

Jesus was like a commander preparing His platoon for spiritual combat. There was no room for “making them feel good” about the situation. They needed to think realistically about it. In helping them do this, Jesus pointed to four vital qualities of a loyal disciple enlisted in the Master's service.¹

Like the apostles, we enter our own spiritual battles every day. Let's listen closely as our Commander outfits us for combat with this checklist for loyal disciples.



A Severe Checklist for Disciples

Matthew 10:32–11:1



PREPARE YOUR HEART

On every front in our culture, attacks on Christian values intensify. Do you worry about family members and friends who are easy targets for the enemy? Do you sometimes feel battle fatigue fighting for what's right? As you study Christ's teachings, take a moment to tell the Lord your concerns and ask Him for renewed strength and courage from His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 10:32–11:1*. You can almost hear the rumble of war in the background, can't you? While Jesus was prepping His apostles for the struggles ahead, He assured them of the victory and the rewards awaiting them. Now let's examine each section in more detail.



Observation: A Checklist for Loyal Disciples

Notice how Jesus made His points memorable by using these three *poetical devices*:

- **Couplet:** two lines beside each other developing or contrasting the same topic
- **Inclusio:** a stanza beginning and ending with a similar idea for thematic completion
- **Repetition:** a repeated word or thought for emphasis

Let's look at Jesus' instructions through these literary lenses, and then we'll draw principles based on the interpretation of what we observe.²



A Severe Checklist for Disciples

Matthew 10:32–11:1

Acknowledging versus Denying—Matthew 10:32–33

Read the two-verse *couplet* in *Matthew 10:32–33* in which verse 32 makes a statement and verse 33 contrasts it. What points of the *couplet* are similar and what points are opposite?

Christ's soldiers stand not on some lofty ideal but on a person. We fight under Jesus' flag, defend His honor, and confess His name. Why do you think Jesus placed such importance on public confession?

In the next section, Jesus tells His followers that, when they go public, they should expect conflicts even in their closest relationships.

Expecting Conflicts—Matthew 10:34–36

In *Matthew 10:34–36*, Jesus uses an *inclusio* to make His point. How does 10:36 explain 10:34? How do the middle lines in 10:35 illustrate the kind of sharp conflict (or “sword”) His disciples might have to face at home?



A Severe Checklist for Disciples

Matthew 10:32–11:1

So, we observe how one experience leads to the next. Publicly confessing Jesus' name leads to conflicts in close relationships, and, as Jesus explains next, these conflicts lead to difficult choices.

Choosing Priorities—Matthew 10:37–39

Observe the *repetition* in *Matthew 10:37–38*. What phrase did Jesus repeat, and what might make a disciple “not worthy”?

Remember, Jesus was prepping His disciples for spiritual battles. When family members force us to choose between love of family or love of Jesus, we always choose Jesus. Enemies may even force us to choose between life or death! In this ultimate battle, what did Jesus say we must be willing to do, according to *10:38–39*?

Thankfully, not all people would be enemies drawing swords. Some would open their arms to Jesus' followers as they would to Jesus Himself. Along with the battles would come victories and rewards.



A Severe Checklist for Disciples

Matthew 10:32–11:1

Anticipating Rewards—Matthew 10:40–42

According to *Matthew 10:40*, what did Jesus say to inspire His disciples? Were the disciples *really* on their own?

Jesus used repetition again to emphasize the positive side of ministry. What could Jesus' followers expect when they ministered to “prophets,” “righteous people,” and “the least of [Jesus'] followers,” according to *10:41–42*? What refrain did Jesus use as an encouragement?

Every deed done for the glory of God, every righteous act, every self-denial, God notices. He remembers, and He will reward. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Questions and Answers

While the meaning of Jesus' teaching may have been crystal clear to His original audience, we may be a bit puzzled. In the interpretive phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we seek answers.



A Severe Checklist for Disciples

Matthew 10:32–11:1

What did Jesus mean by, “I came not to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34)? To find the answer, read Pastor Chuck’s interpretation of this statement on pages 203–204 of his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. For an online resource, consult [Constable’s Notes](#) at netbible.org. What meaning do you discover?

What did Jesus mean by, “If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine” (10:38)? The article, “Carrying Your Cross,” on page 205 of Pastor Chuck’s commentary explains the meaning of “take up your cross.” Read this article and explain how far a worthy disciple is willing to go in following Jesus.

Throughout history, countless Christians have chosen to die as martyrs rather than deny their Lord. While we may not lose our lives for following Christ today, we may lose our livelihood. What might it mean in your context to “give up your life for [Jesus]” (10:39)?



A Severe Checklist for Disciples

Matthew 10:32–11:1

Jesus promised a person who is willing to give up his or her life for His sake will “find it” (Matthew 10:39). What does this promise mean for Christians in the present and for their future?

What does “take up your cross” mean in the twenty-first century? It means self-denial. It means being willing to die to yourself for the purposes of Christ. To carry out His will, not your will. To walk His way, not yours. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Denial and Forgiveness

Jesus will acknowledge us before the Father in heaven when we publicly acknowledge Him before people on earth (Matthew 10:32). However, if one retreats under fire and publicly denies Him, Jesus will deny him or her before the Father (10:33). The most famous soldier of Christ who wilted in combat was Peter. Read the account of Peter's denials in [Mark 14:66–72](#) in light of Jesus' instructions to him and the other apostles in our passage.

In what ways did Peter fail to be loyal to Jesus during this intense spiritual battle in his life?



A Severe Checklist for Disciples

Matthew 10:32–11:1

Realizing his cowardice, Peter “broke down and wept” (Matthew 14:72). Can you identify with Peter’s sorrow in some ways? If so, how?

As long as there is life, there is a *lifeline of hope* from Jesus’ heart. After His resurrection, Jesus reinstated Peter, according to [John 21:15–17](#), by asking Peter to publicly confess his love for Jesus three times. What does Jesus’ grace toward Peter reveal about His longing to forgive your moments of weakness on the battlefield?

Jesus intended His checklist not to intimidate us but to be like steel rods to help us stand strong. As we conclude our study, let’s formulate four principles based on Jesus’ teaching that we can apply today.



Application: Principles for Loyal Disciples

First, *loyal disciples openly acknowledge Christ before the world*. Do you ever have opportunities to declare your faith? In what ways might you publicly state that you’re a follower of Jesus?



A Severe Checklist for Disciples

Matthew 10:32–11:1

Second, *loyal disciples willingly accept rejection, even from their own family members*. Have you endured conflict in your family because of your faith? If so, what rejection have you faced or might have to face?

Third, *loyal disciples sacrificially choose their essential priorities*. Are you willing to sacrifice everything, even your life, for Christ? Spend some time with the Lord, sharing your heart of commitment to Him.

Fourth, *loyal disciples humbly anticipate and accept eternal rewards*. God sees our courage to speak out, willingness to accept rejection, and determination to make sacrificial choices. How do His promises encourage you to keep ministering even in the heat of battle and giving cups of “cold water” in His name to those who are struggling (Matthew 10:42)?



A Severe Checklist for Disciples

Matthew 10:32–11:1

Today's enemies of Christ launch attacks in all areas of society. They bombard us in the media, the courts, and the halls of government. Even our children and grandchildren are involved in skirmishes in their schools. Jesus issued marching orders to steady us in the fight. The struggles we face are not new to Him or unexpected. We can be certain that He will be with us to the end.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I admit that fear of opposition sometimes robs me of courage. Fear paints my enemies bigger than they really are. Help me to see life as You do in proper perspective. You are all-powerful and in charge, even when I feel weak. Strengthen me with Your promises as I follow in faith. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 202.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY TEN

When Disappointment Leads to Doubt

Matthew 11:2–11

What do you do with your doubts? Most people are afraid to admit them, thinking they will shove us out of God's favor. John the Baptizer expressed his doubt openly and with a lot of emotion—which gives us hope when we doubt.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

JOHN the Baptizer first appeared in Matthew's gospel as the "voice shouting in the wilderness" sent by God to clear a path for the Messiah (Matthew 3:3). For the repentant, John offered cleansing baptism. Against the arrogant, he wielded a message of "coming wrath" (3:7). He was the last of the Old Testament prophets—a steel-tipped arrow of conviction, tempered in the desert and aimed right at the heart of the nation.

Herod Antipas arrested John near the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (4:12; 14:3). By the time of the events of Matthew 11, the desert-dweller had been sitting in prison for some time, hearing about Jesus' preaching and healing ministry across Galilee and the surrounding region. John began wondering, "Why hasn't Jesus begun judging the wicked and freeing the oppressed?"¹

As is often the case when we build up expectations, John may have imagined a reality that wasn't in God's plan. Jesus came first to *bear* sin's curse, and then bring judgment at His second coming. When the events John envisioned didn't happen, a dark cloud settled into his damp cell. His disappointment became a breeding ground for doubt.

Let's join John in his dungeon of doubt as He sends an agonizing message to Jesus: "Are you the Messiah we've been expecting?" (11:3). It's the kind of question we may have asked from our own pit of despair, "Jesus, are You who You say You are?" Thankfully, Jesus' reply set free John's heart, and it can do the same for us.



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When Disappointment Leads to Doubt

Matthew 11:2–11



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Do you ever feel doubt's prison walls closing around you? Perhaps when tearful prayers find no answer, you secretly wonder about God's goodness. Or, when you suffer for doing right, you doubt God's fairness. Where can you go with your questions? John the Baptizer took his to the Lord. Use the space below to write down any doubts you may have. Then lay them at the feet of the Lord in prayer as you seek answers through His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 11:2–11* and take time to linger over the verses. Peruse one paragraph two or three times in a row and pause between each reading. Then go to the next paragraph and do the same. Reading Scripture thoughtfully helps us internalize the words and see them not just with our eyes but with our heart.²



Observation: John's Doubts and Jesus' Response

Did you notice the basic outline of Matthew 11:2–11? It includes John the Baptizer's *question* (Matthew 11:2–3), Jesus' *answer* to John (11:4–6), and Jesus' *address* to the crowd (11:7–11). Also, did you notice the absence of admonishment from Jesus toward John? Not one word of shame falls from Jesus' lips, only assurance and support—exactly what sincere questioners need.



When Disappointment Leads to Doubt

Matthew 11:2–11

John the Baptizer's Question—Matthew 11:2–3

John bundled his doubts and desperation into a heartfelt question with two parts: “Are you the Messiah we’ve been expecting, or should we look for someone else?” (Matthew 11:3). According to prophecy, the Messiah, David’s heir to the throne, was to “bring justice” (Isaiah 42:1) and “proclaim liberty to captives” (61:1 NASB). What mental and emotional issues might have influenced John’s questions?

John wasn’t throwing rocks at Jesus for being a fraud. Rather, he was laying his broken spirit before Jesus in a humble search for answers. Let’s see how Jesus tenderly handled John’s confusion.

Jesus’ Answer to John—Matthew 11:4–6

When the messengers delivered John’s questions, Jesus answered without a hint of rebuke. What proof of His messianic identity did Jesus give (*Matthew 11:4–5*)?

In the spiritual realm, Jesus was bringing justice and He was setting captives free. As commentator R. V. G. Tasker noted, Jesus was “*attacking the citadel of evil* by restoring health and sanity to human beings suffering from the ravages of sin and disease” (emphasis added).³



When Disappointment Leads to Doubt

Matthew 11:2–11

Next, read *Matthew 11:6 in several Bible versions*, summarize the blessing Jesus gave John, and explain how it logically connects to 11:4–5.

Blessings await those who are not offended because an answer hasn't come as they expected. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jesus' Address to the Crowd—Matthew 11:7–11

After John's messengers left, Jesus turned to the crowd. What did He say about John's *convictions* (*Matthew 11:7*)? His *self-denial* (*11:8*)? And his *calling* (*11:9–10*)? What high honors did Jesus give John (*11:11*)? By implication, what was Jesus saying to us when we seek Him with our honest doubts?

Jesus concluded His address with a curious contrast: “Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than [John] is!” (*11:11*). *What did Jesus mean by this statement?*



When Disappointment Leads to Doubt

Matthew 11:2–11



Interpretation: Understanding Jesus' Point of View

Jesus viewed the kingdom of heaven within the larger framework of God's redemptive plan—the details of which were hidden to prophets like John. According to Pastor Chuck Swindoll,

Jesus knew things John didn't. He knew of His impending atoning death and miraculous resurrection. He knew of His commissioning of the apostles and His ascension to the right hand of the Father. He knew of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the establishment of the church, and the preaching of the gospel throughout the church age. . . . He knew of His second coming, when He would finally bring about the perfect kingdom John the Baptizer and all the Jews of the first century were hoping for. *John wasn't wrong in his picture of what the messianic age would look like; he was just wrong about the timing of the events* (emphasis added).⁴

To visualize John's view of prophetic events, read the article, "Prophetic Telescoping," on page 213 of Pastor Chuck's commentary *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. How does Pastor Chuck explain the previously unforeseen gap of time between Christ's first and second coming?

As great as John was as the forerunner of *Christ*, he didn't enjoy the spiritual position we have in *Christ*. "Our position in Christ situates us in an exceedingly glorious place," writes Pastor Chuck.⁵ God has "raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 2:6). And in the "future ages," we will be shining examples of God's grace because of our union to Christ (2:7).



When Disappointment Leads to Doubt

Matthew 11:2–11

What, then, did Jesus mean when He said, “the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than [John] is!” (Matthew 11:11)? For help with the answer, consult page 214 of *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. For an online resource, see *Constable’s Notes* at netbible.org.

Our *position* in Christ brings us an even greater blessing than John received as the *proclaimer* of Christ—not because of anything we have done but because of God’s grace!

Jesus said something of John He said of no one else: “Among all of those on earth, none is greater than John.” And He said this on the heels of John’s doubting.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Insight from Luke’s Account

Luke’s account of this same incident includes a tidbit of information that adds even more insight into God’s grace. What was happening at the exact moment the messengers asked John’s question to Jesus, according to *Luke 7:20–22*?



When Disappointment Leads to Doubt

Matthew 11:2–11

Reflect on the divinely orchestrated timing of the events. What was the significance of the messengers *seeing with their own eyes* the answer to John's doubts? What does this timing say about God's gracious ways of reassuring us when we doubt?

No one is immune to succumbing to doubt. No one moves from earth to heaven sailing on calm seas, never knowing the feeling of sinking. It's a wonderful fact that Jesus did not shame John for his doubting. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: What We Need to Remember about Our Doubts

Our doubts about the God we love can weigh us down like heavy chains pulling us into an abyss of uncertainty. And yet, in the darkest depths, God often reveals His richest treasures. What spiritual riches might we discover from Christ's response to John?

First, *doubts arise because we are human*. As in John's case, our hopes form a reality that may not be in God's plan. When anticipation leads to unfulfilled expectation, we become vulnerable to disappointment when things don't work out. Then disillusionment. Then doubt.

Have you seen this pattern in your life? If so, can you trace the roots of your doubts back to their source and invite God to help you trust His plan that you can't fully comprehend?



When Disappointment Leads to Doubt

Matthew 11:2–11

Second, *doubts may temporarily disturb our relationship with God, but they won't destroy it.* How does Jesus' honoring of John give you assurance that God won't abandon or shame you when you have doubts?

Third, *special blessings await those who can live with life's inequities.* Think of all the saints in Scripture who made it through their hard times to receive God's blessing.

- Blessed are the Jobs, who suffer yet stay faithful.
- Blessed are the Josephs, who endure unjust treatment yet refuse to live in bitterness.
- Blessed are the Hoseas, who continue to walk in obedience even though their spouses leave them.
- Blessed are the Pauls, who pray for relief from a thorn in the flesh yet hear the Lord's response, "My grace is all you need" (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- And blessed are the Johns, who can live with unanswered questions, who rest in what they can see, and who wait patiently for God to reveal what they can't see.

On your journey through doubt, "keep on asking," "keep on seeking," "keep on knocking" and the Lord's door will always "be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7).



When Disappointment Leads to Doubt

Matthew 11:2–11



A FINAL PRAYER

At the beginning of this study, you laid your questions and doubts at the feet of Christ. Now close by using the space below to pen your own prayer of trust in the Lord.

Father,

ENDNOTES

1. The cause of John the Baptizer's arrest brings his doubt into clearer focus. John had publicly rebuked Herod Antipas for divorcing his wife to marry Herodias, the ex-wife of his half-brother. Herod Antipas arrested John "as a favor to his wife Herodias" (Matthew 14:3)—who was pulling all the strings. Herodias was a hot-headed Jezebel, spoiled by power, and bent on killing John, who, like Elijah, dared expose her and her husband's sin. Why hadn't Jesus confronted these wicked rulers of Israel as the messianic prophecies foretold?
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
3. R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 115.
4. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 212.
5. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, 214.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY ELEVEN

When Jesus Turned Up the Heat

Matthew 11:12–26

Despite the fact that Jesus had done the work of Messiah and spoken the words of Messiah, the skeptics wanted nothing to do with Him. Jesus put up with them for a while, but now it was time for them to hear the truth straight from His mouth.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WITH patience and grace, Jesus responded to John's question, "Are you the Messiah we've been expecting?" (Matthew 11:3). Jesus' answer left no doubt that He was the One.

"The blind see, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor." (11:5)

Yes, Jesus was the Messiah, and His miracles proved it! However, not everyone accepted Jesus' claim, despite the evidence right in front of their eyes.

According to Luke's account, in the crowd were Pharisees and scribes who had brazenly "rejected God's plan for them" (Luke 7:30). Too proud to admit their need for repentance, "they had refused John's baptism" (7:30)—snubbing the Lord's "messenger" who was sent to prepare the way for the Messiah (Malachi 3:1).

Likely these were the same cynics who, earlier, brushed off Jesus by declaring, "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons" (Matthew 9:34 NASB). There was no denying that Jesus could do miracles. But, in their view, He did miracles by the power of Satan, not God. Their refusal to repent plus their disbelief in Jesus as the Son of God set the stage for a climactic showdown with Jesus in Matthew 12 and their final rejection of Christ as their King.



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When Jesus Turned Up the Heat

Matthew 11:12–26

While Jesus welcomed doubters like John the Baptizer, He reserved His harshest words for cynics like the Pharisees. In our passage, we'll see Jesus turning up the heat on those who turned up their noses at Him and His generous offer of the kingdom.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The Pharisees' rejection of Jesus and His kingdom was truly a tragedy. When Jesus confronted them, a deep sadness must have filled His heart, the same ache He feels when we resist His love. But no matter the resistance, Jesus opens His arms to all who will come. Bow to Him in prayer, thanking Him for offering Himself as your King and His kingdom as your eternal home.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

John the Baptizer was in prison and, as only Jesus foreknew, destined for the executioner's blade. Jesus' tribute to John in 11:7–11 had the tone of a eulogy. He grieved for John but even more for the lost opportunity that John's martyrdom represented. Jesus' rebuke in this passage flows like rapids in a mountain river, churning and foaming with emotion.

Read *Matthew 11:12–26* with this context in mind. Look for His *strong words to the aggressive* (Matthew 11:12–19), *serious warnings to the passive* (11:20–24), which culminates in Jesus' *prayer to the Father* (11:25–26).



Observation: Straight Talk from Jesus

Close observation is key to understanding the meaning of a difficult passage like this one. Look at the words carefully, identifying the main subject, action verbs, comparisons, metaphors, if-then clauses, references to time, and any other features that stand out.¹

Who were the individuals and groups Jesus mentioned in *Matthew 11:12–15*? What is Jesus' main subject in these verses?



When Jesus Turned Up the Heat

Matthew 11:12–26

Note the time references: “from the time . . . until now” and “before . . . to this present time” (Matthew 11:13). To what periods of time do they refer? What forces did Jesus say are in conflict. What strong words describe that conflict?

The phrase, “this generation” refers to the stiff-necked leaders in Jesus’ day and those who followed them (11:16). How did Jesus describe in *11:16–17* the stubbornness of these people who refused to dance to either of the children’s tunes?

How did Jesus describe the fickleness of these people in *11:18–19* whose opinions swayed from one extreme to another?



When Jesus Turned Up the Heat

Matthew 11:12–26

What was the central reason for Jesus denouncing the citizens of Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (*Matthew 11:20–24*)? What similarities and contrasts do you observe in His judgment?

In Jesus' prayer, what "things" had the Father hidden and revealed (*11:25–26*)? What characteristics of the "wise and clever" make them unreceptive to Christ? What characteristics make the "childlike" receptive to Christ?

Jesus' message of hope and reassurance through the kingdom of heaven was rejected and attacked by the very people Jesus came to reach. We witness the same today.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Active and Passive Resistance to Christ

Since John the Baptizer's arrest, Jesus had been serving the people of Capernaum and surrounding cities, such as Korazin and Bethsaida. He had spread before them the most sumptuous delights of the kingdom of heaven and invited them to satisfy their hungry souls. How did people respond? Did they gratefully accept Jesus' offer and join Him at His feast? Sadly, many did not, and many still reject His offer today.

Jesus' rebuke in our passage displays two general ways that people express their rejection of Christ: aggressive resistance and passive indifference.



When Jesus Turned Up the Heat

Matthew 11:12–26

Aggressive Resistance—Matthew 11:12–19

In Matthew 11:12, Jesus says, “violent people are attacking” the “Kingdom of Heaven.” In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll identifies the violent people as “the wicked leaders among the Jews.”² According to [11:14](#), what would have happened if the leaders had submitted to Jesus as their messianic king and accepted His kingdom? For help with the answer, read page 216 in Pastor Chuck’s commentary. Also, read [Malachi 4:1–5](#) for the context of the prophecy Jesus mentioned. What do you discover?

Jesus explained the leaders’ aggressive nature by comparing them to whining children, impossible to please ([Matthew 11:16–17](#)). Their self-righteous taste buds found fault in everything God set before them! They criticized John as a man “possessed by a demon” and Jesus as “a glutton and a drunkard.” Why so belligerent and mean-spirited? According to Pastor Chuck, “They simply didn’t want to believe.”³

Can you think of a principle from the Jewish leaders’ deeper, heart issues? What motivates people who aggressively attack Jesus and His followers?



When Jesus Turned Up the Heat

Matthew 11:12–26

Passive Indifference—Matthew 11:20–24

While some directly attacked the Host of God's kingdom, others just walked past the delicious food He had prepared, patting their bellies that they had filled with worldly fare. These were the passive citizens of the three cities Jesus denounced.

Consult your resources or read page 220–221 in Pastor Chuck's commentary to see the locations of the three cities, as well as an explanation of *Matthew 11:20–24*. Based on your research, why do you think Jesus' rebuke was so severe to the people of these cities?

Just across the border of Israel, in Tyre and Sidon, lived masses of people with emaciated souls who would have gladly joined Jesus' feast had it been offered to them. These Gentiles would have repented of their sins and received Jesus' life in His kingdom. While others died from spiritual starvation, Jesus' own people shrugged off the bounty in front of their noses.

Reflect on the heart condition of passive people. What motivates people who are apathetic toward Jesus and life in His kingdom?

Indifference. Business as usual. The “who-cares?” attitude. Passivity is an enemy.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



When Jesus Turned Up the Heat

Matthew 11:12–26



Correlation: Jesus and the Father

When Jesus lifted His eyes to heaven to pray, we get a glimpse into His relationship with the Father. Moving behind the scenes of Israel's rejection of Jesus, the Father was orchestrating His plan of redemption through His Son. Ironically, "those who think themselves wise and clever" in Israel couldn't see the wisdom of heaven in Jesus (Matthew 11:25). But the childlike could!

Paul observed a similar irony:

God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. (1 Corinthians 1:27–28)

Why did God turn the tables on the wise and powerful through the cross? Read [1 Corinthians 1:29](#), and write the answer below.

Aren't we glad the Father opened our eyes to the life Jesus offers? *Indeed!* Let's live fully in the spiritual blessing of His kingdom as we await its full consummation when Christ returns.

God reveals the truth. Unfortunately, we get strong and independent and go our own way. We dare not do that. Trust in the Lord Jesus. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



When Jesus Turned Up the Heat

Matthew 11:12–26



Application: Where Are You in All This?

With all their religious training, the Jewish leaders should have recognized Jesus as their Messiah. But they didn't. What lessons can we learn from their mistakes? First, *let's not forget the responsibilities that come with the privilege of knowing Christ.* Second, *let's make use of the opportunities that come with hearing God's truth.*

Is God revealing any responsibilities and opportunities for you? What might they be?

What other lessons have you gleaned from Jesus' rebuke of the proud religious leaders and the passive citizens?



When Jesus Turned Up the Heat

Matthew 11:12–26

As you did in the beginning of our study, close by thanking the Father for offering His Son to you as your King and His kingdom as your eternal inheritance. Join Jesus in His prayer and then add your own words of gratitude to your heavenly Father.



A FINAL PRAYER

“O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike” (Matthew 11:25).

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, *“How to Study the Bible for Yourself.”*
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 215.
3. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, 216.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY TWELVE

Get Some Rest

Matthew 11:27–30

To you who are broken and bruised, outcasts and offensive. To all who are failures and have fallen. To all who are ashamed and rejected. All who are brutal and bullies. All who are victims and offenders. Jesus says, “Get into My yoke. Submit to Me, My plan. Obey My instructions. Follow My lead. Feel the reins across your back as I’m leading you in the direction I would have you go. Walk with Me, all of you who would learn new ways to live and to relate to others.”

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

GREAT gifts often come in small packages, don't they? We see this truth frequently in the Scriptures. With just a handful of words, God provides encouragement for the downtrodden and gives rest for the weary. We find one of these great gifts wrapped in a few verses at the end of Matthew 11 during Jesus' address to the crowds.

After Jesus spoke about John the Baptizer's identity, He condemned those who rejected John as well as those who rejected His own teaching. Thankfully, Jesus then clarified that He didn't come only to condemn. He also came to reveal the Father and extend rest to those who receive Him with childlike faith.

Now, He's not talking about a year-long-vacation kind of rest nor a loads-of-cash-in-the-bank kind of rest. He's talking about *soul rest!*

So what is soul rest exactly? In this *Searching the Scriptures* study on Matthew 11:27–30, we'll explore just what Jesus means by offering rest for our souls. To give you a hint . . . it's the kind of rest everyone desperately searches for but only God can give.



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Get Some Rest

Matthew 11:27–30



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Day-to-day worries can easily blind us from what God wants to do in and through our lives. Take time now to still your heart and mind as you come before Him. Ask Jesus to help you focus on His words so you can live in the peace and power of the soul rest only He provides.

Thank You, Father, for all the gifts You have given me. As I come to Your Word today, I ask that You would remove any fears, worries, or burdens that might distract me from understanding Jesus' words. I ask these things in His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

By way of review, read all of [Matthew 11](#).¹ Take note of the flow of Jesus' address, which we summarized in the introduction above.

Look especially at Matthew 11:25–27. How do verses 25–26 logically relate to verses 1–24? Next, how does verse 27 logically relate to verses 25–26?

In [verse 27](#), Jesus made some very controversial theological statements—in a public prayer of all places! Below, list the claims Jesus made about Himself and His Father. What claim prepares us for what Jesus said in verses 28–30?



Get Some Rest

Matthew 11:27–30

Now, let's look more closely at what Jesus said in verses 28–30.



Observation: Straight Talk from Jesus

Read *Matthew 11:28–30*. Jesus employed five different kinds of words that *invite*, *expose*, *describe*, *promise*, and *relieve*.

We'll use these five categories as our observation guides. First, Jesus used words that *invite*. He offered an invitation to His audience in 11:28–29 by using three commands. List these three commands.

Second, let's look at the words Jesus used to *expose* our condition. Scripture works like a mirror that reveals our character. Reread 11:28 and note the words Jesus used to expose our true selves.

Next, let's look at how Jesus *described* Himself. After highlighting others, Jesus then focused on Himself. In fact, this passage is the only place in Scripture where Jesus personally described His own character. What two phrases did He use in 11:29?



Get Some Rest

Matthew 11:27–30

Fourth, Jesus used words of *promise*. What did Jesus say He *will do* in 11:28? And what did He say *will happen* to those who respond in 11:29?

Finally, what gracious words did Jesus offer to *relieve* His listeners of their weary condition in 11:30?

We come on His terms. We come receiving His offer, believing in Him, trusting in Him. Please observe that we are not obligated; it's an invitation. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Come to Jesus, Take His Yoke, and Learn from Him

Jesus said, “*come to me*.” He didn’t say, “come to a creed” or “come to church” or “come to a ministry.” Jesus then explained what we do when we come to Him. He said, “take my yoke upon you.” During interpretation, we explore the meaning of cultural references, like a “yoke,” to better understand what these references teach historically and theologically.



Get Some Rest

Matthew 11:27–30

Read pages 224–225 of Pastor Chuck's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, and discover what Jesus meant when He told everyone to take His yoke upon themselves.² You can also freely access the NET Bible's notes along with *Constable's Notes* at NETBible.org. By using this image, how is Jesus opposing the teachings of the rabbis of His day?

In Christ are “hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). He alone has the words of eternal life (John 6:58). Indeed, He's inexhaustible, never-ending, everlasting. Our knowledge of God will only grow throughout eternity because God is infinite. *What a reality!* Jesus has more than a little to teach us. It all starts with the fact that He alone reveals the Father.

In Matthew 11:29, Jesus *described* Himself as humble and gentle at heart. Don't think of humility and gentleness as *weakness*. Think in terms of strength under control. Like a vigorous racehorse brought under control by its rider. Why is it significant that Jesus characterized Himself in this way while extending His invitation?

Take just a moment to let the identity of Christ, the offer of Christ, and the character of Christ really sink in. Mull these over. Consider the tremendous privilege for us who've been given such knowledge. Life is but a brief vapor within the vastness of eternity, isn't it? So it's eternally worthwhile to spend all our lives on Him.



Get Some Rest

Matthew 11:27–30



Correlation: Rest Now and Forever

Jesus' invitations represent a *promise* for His listeners. We can only accept the rest that Jesus offers within our lifetime, but we will enjoy His rest now *and* beyond the grave. Look at what [Revelation 14:13](#) teaches about the rest we receive from Jesus. Summarize what it says below.

You don't find worry or strife in that picture of paradise. That glorious future awaits all who "die in the Lord." Until then, we receive a foretaste of the soul rest Jesus gives. To experience eternity's appetizer, we must personally come to grips with the words of Jesus that *expose* and *relieve*.



Application: You Will Receive Rest

Jesus' words that *expose* help us apply His teaching because they reveal the onerous condition of all people today.

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

Do the terms *weary* and *heavy burdens* describe your situation? Are you trying to earn God's favor or the approval of others? Does the voice of legalism still whisper in your conscience? Are you running incessantly in culture's hamster wheel?



Get Some Rest

Matthew 11:27–30

Jesus described His yoke as “easy” and his burden as “light” (Matthew 11:29). This statement may seem contradictory, but it flows from the spring of Jesus’ character. How has accepting Jesus’ easy yoke allowed you to be free from the burdens of performance-based religion?

Following Jesus doesn’t always feel easy or light. Jesus Himself stated that His followers will face persecution and trials because of their commitment to Him. Yet, in these few verses, we see a great gift wrapped in a small package—the beautiful promise that even amid life’s most strenuous difficulties, Jesus gives rest. Go to Him, bear His yoke, learn from Him.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for being a God who invites us to Himself with open arms. Forgive me for the ways that I have taken on the yoke of the world and looked for rest in all the wrong places. Forgive me for the legalistic ways that I have tried to earn good standing with You. Help me to take on Your yoke so that I can receive the true soul rest that only You can offer. I ask these things in Jesus’ name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 224–25.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY THIRTEEN

Sabbath Lord vs. Religious Nitpickers

Matthew 12:1–15

The Pharisees never knew what to do with Jesus. They came up with rules, restrictions, and regulations, and He ignored most of them . . . to teach the Pharisees not to put their traditions on a level with God's truth.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EVERY encounter with Jesus only led to more antagonism from the Pharisees. Ironically, the Pharisees got the most “worked up” when Jesus broke their rules for the Sabbath rest. So what was the big deal about the Sabbath rest anyway?

Sabbath's origins trace back to creation when God Himself rested after six days of fashioning stars and filling the earth with creatures. Consequently, “God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy” (Genesis 2:3).

Later in biblical history, God codified in the Ten Commandments the Sabbath as a “day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work” (Exodus 20:10). By refraining from work, the Jews expressed trust in their God to supply everything they needed. The Sabbath was a weekly reminder of God's power and provision—a day to take a break from wearisome labors, rest in His sufficiency, and delight in His goodness.

More than a millennium later, the Pharisees inherited God's merciful principle of rest only to twist it into a merciless tangle of rules. By adding hundreds of Sabbath restrictions, the legalists had laid on the people's necks a back-breaking burden of religious obligations. Jesus would have none of it.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll explore vital truth about God and His purposes when the Pharisees find their Sabbath's list of rules broken by none other than the Sabbath's Lord!



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Sabbath Lord vs. Religious Nitpickers

Matthew 12:1–15



PREPARE YOUR HEART

No one stood up to legalists like Jesus did, which makes us admire Him even more. As you open the Scriptures, invite the Lord to deepen your appreciation and devotion to Jesus.

Father, take me back in time to the day Jesus put Himself on the line for me, making Himself the target of hateful people who seethed with evil intent to kill Him. Willingly, He walked into the firestorm for the sake of those He loved. Fill my heart with worship as I learn more about Him. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In Matthew 12:1–15, the “law” that the Pharisees accused Jesus of violating refers to the Pharisees’ Sabbath restrictions that “served as a kind of ‘oral law’ or ‘case law’ added to God’s inspired Word.”¹ According to William Barclay, the disciples broke four of these restrictions:


By plucking the [grain] they were guilty of *reaping*; by rubbing it in their hands they were guilty of *threshing*; by separating the grain and the chaff they were guilty of *winnowing*; and by the whole process they were guilty of *preparing a meal* on the Sabbath day.²

Read the *passage*, imagining yourself in the scene. What would it have been like to live under such restrictions, constantly afraid of crossing a moral line without realizing it?



Sabbath Lord vs. Religious Nitpickers

Matthew 12:1–15

 **Observation: Working and Healing on the Sabbath**

Observation lays the groundwork for understanding the meaning of a passage.³ The timestamp in Matthew 12:1, “At about that time,” connects these events with the growing opposition from the previous chapter. Jesus had been inviting the Jews to follow Him out of their religious bondage, to replace the Pharisees’ heavy yoke of regulations with His light yoke of rest (Matthew 11:28–30). This enraged the Pharisees who, like Pharaoh of old, did not want to let the people go!

In the following chart, compare the features of the back-to-back controversies in Matthew 12:1–15 about working and healing on the Sabbath. Note the characters, the issue that prompted the conflict, the Pharisees’ accusation, and Jesus’ response.

Location	Conflict in the Fields	Conflict in the Synagogue
Passage	<i>Matthew 12:1–8</i>	<i>Matthew 12:9–15</i>
Characters		
Issue		
Accusation		
Response		



Sabbath Lord vs. Religious Nitpickers

Matthew 12:1–15

What is the basis of the Pharisees' authority versus the basis of Jesus' authority?

Contrast the Pharisees' mind-set with Jesus' mind-set toward those in need.

How did the Pharisees' obsession with the letter of the law compare with Jesus' attention to the intent of the law?

When we live by grace we ought to love and understand one another and, as best as we can, get along. But legalists are not built to "get along." They're built to take charge and keep others under their thumbs. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Sabbath Lord vs. Religious Nitpickers

Matthew 12:1–15



Interpretation: The Authority and Mission of Jesus

Let's focus the light of interpretation on Jesus' responses to the Pharisees. In the conflict about working on the Sabbath, Jesus answered the accusation, "Look, your disciples are breaking the law by harvesting grain on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:2), with biblical arguments centered around the temple.

First, Jesus compared Himself and His disciples to David and his companions (12:3–4). Ahimelech the priest gave David and his hungry men the holy bread set out fresh each Sabbath in the temple (1 Samuel 21:1–6). What implication did Jesus make about His connection to David? Also, what theological point did He make about showing mercy?

Second, Jesus argued that priests worked on the Sabbath (12:5). The priests' intercessory ministry at the temple superseded Sabbath restrictions. How did Jesus and His authority "greater than the Temple" relate to all the priests ministering there (12:6)?



Sabbath Lord vs. Religious Nitpickers

Matthew 12:1–15

Jesus draws the conclusion about His divine identity, saying, “For the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!” (Matthew 12:8). What was Jesus saying about His identity? For help with the answer, read page 234 in Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*.

According to Mark’s gospel, Jesus added, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27 NASB). God designed the Sabbath to serve His people’s need for rest, but who could rest with all these religious hoops to jump through? The Pharisees had braided God’s law into a whip of a thousand regulations they used to beat the people, and they weren’t about to hand over to Jesus their position of religious authority.

The Pharisees tracked Jesus from the fields to the synagogue and set their trap, “Does the law permit a person to work by healing on the Sabbath?” (They were hoping he would say yes, so they could bring charges against him)” (Matthew 12:10). The Pharisees saw the man and his deformed hand as a potential code violation, but Jesus saw the need and the man’s suffering. What was the meaning of Jesus’ comparison of the man with a stranded sheep (12:11–12)? To what higher principle did Jesus appeal?



Sabbath Lord vs. Religious Nitpickers

Matthew 12:1–15

What irony do you see in the Pharisees' response to call "a meeting to plot how to kill Jesus" (Matthew 12:14)?

This is the turning point in Matthew's gospel. At this point, everything changes. Jesus goes more underground; the Pharisees get more hostile. And it climaxes in chapter 27 when they shout, "Crucify Him!" —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Convicted by Their Own Words

Later in Matthew 15, Jesus explained how the Pharisees' own regulations convicted them. What command of God did the Pharisees violate by their hypocritical rule about making vows to God, according to *Matthew 15:3–6*?

Their law simply legalized their greed rather than honored God. What was the Pharisees' core problem, according to *15:7–9* which is a quotation from Isaiah 29:13?



Sabbath Lord vs. Religious Nitpickers

Matthew 12:1–15

Like the ancient Israelites, the Pharisees' heartless worship was "a farce." No wonder God wasn't impressed by their showy sacrifices (*Hosea 6:6*). What does God want to see His people doing more than perfunctory religious rituals (*Matthew 12:7*)? How did Jesus model this ideal?



Application: Practical Questions

Jesus asked questions to stop the Pharisees in their tracks and help them see a better way. Here are three questions based on our passage to guide your way.

First, *do you allow legalists to control you?* If so, perhaps Christ's example can encourage you to stop playing their blame-and-shame game. You'll never be able to please people bent on controlling you, and you have no reason to try. They don't speak for God, do they? What can you do to throw off the yoke of legalism imposed from others or even yourself?



Sabbath Lord vs. Religious Nitpickers

Matthew 12:1–15

Second, *can you discern between God's instructions and others' expectations?* Under grace, we are free by the power of Christ to follow His way, submit our will to His, and obey His instructions for living. Reflect upon and record below how you have found this truth significant in your own walk with Jesus.

Third, *are you becoming an agent of grace?* We marvel at the picky Pharisees, but we must admit that sometimes we can be as judgmental. Can you look past potential “code of conduct” violations in others to see the needs Jesus sees? To whom can you be an agent of grace? What can you do to show mercy today?

Jesus sought to meet the needs of hurting souls more than meet the expectations of powerful leaders. It's tragic to think how His mercy offended the religious elite and would eventually cost Him His life. The tide has now turned in Matthew. From here on, each incident leads Jesus one step closer to His death on the cross for our sake.

It's there on the cross that God's power, provision, and goodness take on new meaning, and it's there that Jesus secured true, eternal rest for our weary souls.



Sabbath Lord vs. Religious Nitpickers

Matthew 12:1–15



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, my devotion to Your Son grows with each scene I witness. His willingness to defend His hungry disciples increases my hunger to follow Him more closely. His healing of the man's deformed hand with just a command thrills my heart with His determined, even defiant, love. Thank You for His courageous expressions of grace for my sake. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 232.
2. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 2, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 22.
3. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY FOURTEEN

God's Servant or Satan's Pawn?

Matthew 12:15–30

Jesus knows the Pharisees are plotting to kill Him, but He continues to show compassion, understanding, goodness, grace, and justice. For His name will be the hope of the world.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE Pharisees always viewed Jesus with jealous eyes—envying His popularity, resenting His teaching, scorning His claims. But Jesus' latest defiance of their Sabbath laws and His claim to be “Lord, even over the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8) set their teeth on edge. According to Luke's account, “the enemies of Jesus were wild with rage” (Luke 6:11) . . . *a murderous kind of rage.*

Jesus' healing a man on the Sabbath in the synagogue and right in front of them was the final straw. “The Pharisees called a meeting to plot how to kill Jesus” (Matthew 12:14). With this brief but chilling statement, Matthew marked the point of no return for the Pharisees.

What would we do if powerful people hung a bullseye on our backs? Call the police? Plot revenge? Run and hide? In Matthew 12:15–30, we'll see Jesus' steady and focused response. Even while the Pharisees plotted, God was working out His plan to redeem the world.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The power-obsessed Pharisees thought they held Jesus' life in their hands, but Christ never relinquished His rule as King. Pray for insight into the nature of Jesus and for a deeper understanding of His Word through your study.



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God's Servant or Satan's Pawn?

Matthew 12:15–30



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 12:15–30*. Note how Jesus calmly continued His messianic ministry while knowing that the Pharisees were conspiring against Him. What character qualities shine through Jesus' actions in this passage?



Observation: General Description and Specific Incident

In the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we look for main verbs and repeating phrases, such as, “Jesus knew what they were planning” (Matthew 12:15) and “Jesus knew their thoughts” (12:25). We also look for parallel structures, such as the “if” statements Jesus used in His response to the Pharisees: “if Satan is casting out Satan” (12:26), “if I am empowered by Satan” (12:27), and “but if I am casting out demons by the Spirit of God” (12:28).¹ Observe how this passage flows from general to specific—Jesus healing *many* people to *one* person and Jesus' *broad* warning to His address on a *specific* subject. Let's dig in!

A General Description of Jesus' Ministry—Matthew 12:15–21

Jesus “knew what [the Pharisees] were planning” in secret (Matthew 12:15). As the Son of God, He could see behind their closed doors and hear their treacherous whispers, and He could have mounted a resistance movement to destroy them. But, according to *Matthew 12:15–16*, where did He go and what did He do? What did He say to those He healed?



God's Servant or Satan's Pawn?

Matthew 12:15–30

Jesus' reluctance to fire up a coup didn't surprise Matthew who knew the Scriptures. The prophet Isaiah had foretold the Messiah's gentle spirit and determination to fulfill His mission. According to *Matthew 12:17–21*, what did Isaiah say about the Messiah, and how did Jesus mirror these prophecies?

Months earlier, when Jesus launched His ministry, Matthew cited the prophecy of the Messiah filling the "Galilee of the Gentiles" with glory (*Matthew 4:14–16 NASB*). From the beginning, Jesus yearned for the Gentile nations. Now that Israel's religious leaders had officially rejected the messianic kingdom, it was time for Christ to offer Himself to the world.

What do you see in Isaiah's prophecy in *12:17–21* that reflects a shift from going "only to the people of Israel—God's lost sheep" (Matthew 10:6) to going to lost sheep everywhere?

Who wouldn't be attracted to a Savior like Jesus? He had all the power of the Godhead but never once threw Himself around like some kind of superman. He lived under Spirit-directed restraint. He was meek and lowly of heart, and by following Him, we find rest for our souls. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

A Specific Incident That Sparked Controversy—Matthew 12:22–30

From the many whom Jesus healed, Matthew narrowed the focus to one demonized man who could not see or speak. When Jesus healed him, the people wondered whether Jesus was the Messiah. After all, Isaiah had foretold the miracle that Jesus had just performed!



God's Servant or Satan's Pawn?

Matthew 12:15–30

*And when he comes, he will open the eyes of the blind
and unplug the ears of the deaf.
The lame will leap like a deer,
and those who cannot speak will sing for joy! (Isaiah 35:5–6)*

What did the people ask, and how did the Pharisees shut down any discussion of Jesus being the Messiah (*Matthew 12:22–24*)?

Ironically, the Pharisees resembled the demon Jesus cast out. How were they trying to blind the people to the truth and mute the voices of those saying Jesus was the Messiah?

As the Pharisees quietly spread their poison through the crowd, Jesus “knew their thoughts,” even though He may not have heard their murmuring (12:25). Previously, when the Pharisees made this same accusation, Jesus said nothing (9:32–34). But this time, perhaps for the sake of those in the crowd whose hearts were open, He gave an impromptu rebuttal. Can you see the three points Jesus made in His argument (12:25–29)? Summarize them in the space below.²



God's Servant or Satan's Pawn?

Matthew 12:15–30

How did Jesus' conclusion draw a line in the sand (*Matthew 12:30*)?

“You're either for me or you're against Me,” Jesus said. There can be no straddling fences. You're either a believer or an unbeliever. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: A Clash of Kingdoms

Jesus' three arguments proving His divine authority pulled back the curtain on the unseen spiritual conflict between God and Satan. A popular misunderstanding today is that the forces of God and the devil are equal in power and are locked in a perpetual battle of good versus evil. This misunderstanding, however, has its roots in Eastern spirituality not biblical orthodoxy.

Read the excursus, “God vs. Satan,” on page 247 in Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. In the space below, write down your notes on what the Bible teaches about Satan and his ultimate submission to God.



God's Servant or Satan's Pawn?

Matthew 12:15–30

Defeated at the cross, the devil's only recourse is to try to dishearten and intimidate Christ's followers. He may try to destroy us, but Jesus has promised, "I will build my church, and *all the powers of hell will not conquer it*" (Matthew 16:18, emphasis added). What do other passages of Scripture teach about our enemy and the confidence we have in our King? Let's take a look.



Correlation: Scriptural Truths about Spiritual Warfare

While Satan and demons would have us believe they are all-powerful, they *must* obey the word of Christ. Read [Luke 10:17](#) and [1 John 4:4](#) and write a principle based on the truth of Christ's authority over the forces of darkness.

Now let's explore what other passages say concerning spiritual warfare. First, what does [2 Corinthians 4:4](#) teach about Satan's influence in the world?

How does [Ephesians 6:10–12](#) clarify our role in defeating Satan?



God's Servant or Satan's Pawn?

Matthew 12:15–30

What does *Colossians 1:13–14* say Christ did for us when He saved us?

Spiritual battles do rage around us in the unseen world, but we can stride with confidence under the banner of our King. Never forget that Christ is on our side, and with just a word, He always wins.



Application: Personal Response

When Jesus raised His divine scepter and cast out the demon “by the Spirit of God” (Matthew 12:28), the air practically pulsated with the power of the messianic kingdom. Tragically, the Pharisees falsely attributed the Holy Spirit’s power to Satan, committing the ultimate sin of blasphemy and turning their backs on Jesus. In the end, they were the pawns of Satan.

In the next study, we’ll see the terrible consequences of the Pharisees’ disbelief. Until then, reflect on Jesus’ challenge which Matthew placed at the center of chapter 12 like a lighthouse on the point of a peninsula:

“Anyone who isn’t with me opposes me, and anyone who isn’t working with me is actually working against me.” (12:30)

Jesus’ words flash a warning but also broadcast an invitation. He calls us to march under His flag and submit to Him as King. Use the space below to express in prayer your loyalty to Christ. Confess your commitment to walk with Him and join Him in His campaign to call people out of Satan’s kingdom of darkness into God’s kingdom of light.



God's Servant or Satan's Pawn?

Matthew 12:15–30

Jesus truly is “the hope of all the world” (Matthew 12:21). Only by the authority of His name can justice prevail and the forces of evil be vanquished. Let's proclaim His kingdom wherever we go!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for rescuing me from the domain of darkness and bringing me into the kingdom of Your Son. May my loyalty always lie with Your Son as my Sovereign, and may I walk daily in the power of Your Spirit, who fills me with Your presence and gives me hope of ultimate victory when Your kingdom comes. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. If you need help with the answer, here is Jesus' basic outline: first, Satan would be defeating his own purposes if he empowered Jesus to cast out demons; second, the Pharisees would have to accuse their exorcists of being empowered by Satan too; third, only God is strong enough to overpower Satan, so Jesus must be of God.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY FIFTEEN

Severe Warnings Everyone Must Remember

Matthew 12:30–37

The Pharisees had called a meeting to plot how to kill Jesus. Later, they would play a major role in Jesus' arrest, torture, and crucifixion. They were snakes in religious robes, and they were ready to strike.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

HAVE you ever had enemies? Perhaps certain people considered you a threat, and they determined to bring you down. If malicious people have ever targeted you for attack, you know how terrifying it can be.

Rarely do enemies call attention to themselves or forewarn their assaults. They are snakelike in their tactics—subtle, cold-hearted, and cunning. Jesus called His enemies—the Pharisees who were conspiring to kill him—a “brood of vipers” (Matthew 12:34 NASB). He considered them offspring of the serpent, the devil, who attacked our first parents in the garden of Eden.

However, the Pharisees couldn't intimidate Jesus. Never had they met someone like Him who did not cower in fear when they cast their judgments. In response, Jesus took the role of an Old Testament prophet issuing severe warnings to Israel's leaders who were preventing people from accepting their King. He spoke the truth with a clear voice in the power of the Spirit—which is always the best way to confront an enemy.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Jesus' warnings to His enemies reverberate in our ears too. They remind us of the serious nature of the King's battle against evil and that neutrality in the global campaign is not an option. In prayer, ask the Lord to help you understand the meaning of this *Searching the Scriptures* study's difficult passage and give you insight for standing strong in the truth.



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Severe Warnings Everyone Must Remember

Matthew 12:30–37



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll helps us view Jesus' warnings in the broader context of His ministry.

At this point in Jesus' ministry, the sides were forming, the crowds were dividing, and the true character of His detractors was coming to light. Those who were being driven further and further away from faith in Christ began to act out in a shocking way. They attributed the works of the Spirit of God to the power of Satan. . . . They were essentially calling the eternal, divine Son of God a tool of the devil!¹

Read *Matthew 12:30–37* with this backdrop in mind and notice the line Jesus drew between Himself on one side and His enemies on the other, between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.



Observation: Three Warnings

Observation is the first step in *Searching the Scriptures*. We simply look for what's in the verses without attempting to decipher the meaning.² Observe Jesus' black-and-white language as He pictures those who are for Him or against Him. No diplomatic "greys" in Jesus' speech. Write down the vivid verbs, nouns, and adjectives that stand out to you.



Severe Warnings Everyone Must Remember

Matthew 12:30–37

The Impossibility of Neutrality—Matthew 12:30

Previously, we witnessed the clash of two kingdoms when Jesus banished the evil spirit. The spirit that demonized the man represented Satan's kingdom, and the Spirit of God by whose power Jesus cast out the demon represented God's kingdom. In *Matthew 12:30*, how did Jesus clarify the impossibility of taking a neutral position in our allegiance to one side or the other?

Jesus drew a line in the sand. His enemies were on one side. His friends and followers were on the other. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Severity of Blasphemy—Matthew 12:31–32

Building on His for-Me-or-against-Me principle, Jesus went on to expose the Pharisees' slithering sin that spawned all their evildoing: *blasphemy against the Holy Spirit*. In *Matthew 12:31–32*, Jesus explained what is commonly known as the “unpardonable sin.” We will explore the meaning of this sin in the interpretation section. For now, describe the contrast Jesus made between “every sin and blasphemy” and “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.” Look for words of contrast.

Those who understood what Jesus did but deliberately, persistently, and blatantly rejected it as satanic . . . found themselves in an unpardonable situation. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Severe Warnings Everyone Must Remember

Matthew 12:30–37

The Anatomy of Depravity—Matthew 12:33–37

The Jews in Jesus' day revered the Pharisees as guardians of spiritual truth and morality. How then could these religious leaders be guilty of the worst kind of sin? They looked holy, like a tree laden with fruit might look healthy. As Jesus said, the only way to know the true condition of the tree is to taste the fruit, *and these Pharisees were rotten!*

Using this analogy of a tree and its fruit in [Matthew 12:33](#), what did Jesus imply about the Pharisees' spiritual condition? By implication, what would have to change for them to produce the sweet fruit of true righteousness?

How did Jesus apply His tree-and-fruit analogy to others in [Matthew 12:34–37](#)?

The reservoir within us that holds the truths we accept or deny is our heart. Our tongue dips into our heart like a bucket into a well, lifts what's in the heart, and spills it out in our words. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

To summarize: Jesus warned about, first, the impossibility of neutrality—choose sides in the battle of the kingdoms. Second, the severity of blaspheming the Holy Spirit—avoid the Pharisees' road to destruction. Third, the anatomy of depravity—repent to change one's heart and good fruit will follow. With these points in our pocket, let's dig into the meaning of the unpardonable sin.



Severe Warnings Everyone Must Remember

Matthew 12:30–37



Interpretation: The Unpardonable Sin

Jesus began His teaching on the unpardonable sin with a note of mercy: “every sin and blasphemy can be forgiven,” and even someone who “speaks against the Son of Man can be forgiven” (Matthew 12:31–32). What a relief for repentant skeptics and scoffers who wonder if Christ will receive them. *He will!*

The most famous blasphemer who found forgiveness was Paul whom Jesus called to be an apostle even though he “blasphemed the name of Christ” (1 Timothy 1:13). Paul explained the reason God forgave him:

In my insolence, I persecuted his people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief. Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was! He filled me with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus. (1:13–14, emphasis added)

Unlike Paul, the Pharisees witnessed *irrefutable proof* of Christ's identity and the Spirit's *undeniable power* through the miracles Jesus performed. Read page 250 of Pastor Chuck's commentary and write down the difference between the “pardonable” nature of Paul's blasphemy versus the “unpardonable” nature of the Pharisees' blasphemy.

Pastor Chuck sums up the peculiar characteristic of the Pharisees' sin against the Holy Spirit:

So the prospect of this unpardonable sin, from which there was no opportunity for repentance, was unique to the eyewitnesses of Jesus' miracles and message—those who rejected it knowingly, willingly, and persistently. In that narrow sense, such blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is no longer possible because Jesus' earthly ministry is over.³



Severe Warnings Everyone Must Remember

Matthew 12:30–37

What would you say to a believer who fears he or she may have committed the unpardonable sin? For help with the answer, read page 252 of Pastor Chuck's commentary. For an online resource, consult *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.

The Pharisees rejected Jesus as their Messiah and refused Him as their Lord. But they went beyond disbelief. When the light of heaven shone around them, they called it darkness, and when the goodness of the Holy Spirit freed a soul in bondage, they called it evil. How tragic that those who dressed in such fine robes of religion could have hearts of stone.



Correlation: Disqualification Today

While blasphemy against the Holy Spirit might not occur in our day, there is a sin that correlates with it. Jesus mentioned this sin in John's gospel, and then the aged apostle commented upon it in his short letter, 1 John. What sin results in God's judgment according to [John 3:16–18](#) and [1 John 5:10–12](#)?



Application: The Necessity of Reality

While it may have been too late for Jesus' enemies to heed His warnings, it wasn't too late for those in the crowd who saw His miracles and heard His teaching. It's not too late for us either. Ponder these points as you begin to apply our study.



Severe Warnings Everyone Must Remember

Matthew 12:30–37

First, *it's easy to take a neutral position and hide in the shadows of religious ambiguity when enemies attack our Lord.* Has the pressure of unbelievers who are hostile toward Christian values weakened your resolve to speak for what you believe? If you've been blending in rather than speaking up, what step can you take to show you are with Christ and His kingdom cause?

Second, *replay the mental recording of your words lately.* Have they reflected the condition of your heart? Most likely, they have. If your words flow from a heart of fear, bring that fear to the Lord. If from anger or bitterness or a grudge toward someone, bring that to the Lord. Ask Him in the following space to cleanse your heart and purify your words.

When Jesus confronted His enemies, all who heard Him benefited from His warnings. Let's take them to heart as well, invite Him to transform us from the inside out, and confess Him as our Lord whenever we have the chance.



Severe Warnings Everyone Must Remember

Matthew 12:30–37



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, the secret to bearing good fruit is a changed life. Reach into the treasury of my heart and deposit Your riches of love and hope, faith and peace, joy and trust. Transform my spiritual DNA so that I naturally and eagerly do what's right and speak what's good. In every way, make me like Christ and fill me with Your Spirit, in Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 249.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
3. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, 252.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY SIXTEEN

Miraculous Signs, Evil Spirits, Startling Statement

Matthew 12:38–50

May God deliver us from external religion and make us aware of how deeply we need His truth and His Son to set us free.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

As the crowds of people swelled around Jesus, so did the waves of attacks from His enemies. The Pharisees pressed Jesus at every opportunity with questions to entrap Him, accusations to condemn Him, and demands to make Him bow to their authority.

Yet Jesus stood firm against them. He defended His divine authority as “Lord, even over the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8), and He proved that His power over spiritual forces came from the Spirit of God (12:28–29).

Now, in this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we’ll focus on the Pharisees challenging Jesus’ miraculous signs:

One day some teachers of religious law and Pharisees came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove your authority.” (12:38)

While their request may seem genuine, a strong undertow of cynicism swirled beneath the surface. They came not with hearts open to believe but with arms crossed—daring Jesus to meet their standard. Jesus refused to subject Himself to their judgment. In fact, by their own words and actions, they judged themselves. Let’s enter the scene as Jesus stands up to His critics and issues strong words of confrontation.



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Miraculous Signs, Evil Spirits, Startling Statement

Matthew 12:38–50



PREPARE YOUR HEART

When fears grow and we struggle in our faith, we may cross the line from trusting God to testing Him, from calling out for help to demanding the Lord to prove Himself. As you turn to His Word, open your heart and draw near to the Lord as your closest family member, which, as you will see in our passage, He is! Write your prayer below, bringing any fears or struggles you may have to your heavenly Father.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 12:38–50*. Keep in mind that Jesus aimed His rebukes specifically at the Pharisees and scribes and their followers. Jesus called them “this evil generation” (Matthew 12:45), because they had the unique privilege of seeing the Messiah in person, but they rejected Him.

The Pharisees had already condemned Jesus as a counterfeit in league with Satan and had begun plotting to kill Him. In light of their hostility toward Jesus, why do you think they were asking Him for a sign now?



Miraculous Signs, Evil Spirits, Startling Statement

Matthew 12:38–50



Observation: Signs, Spirits, and Siblings

A technique in *Searching the Scriptures* is to use your imagination to enter a biblical scene.¹ Picture the cynical Pharisees as they demanded, “we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove your authority” (Matthew 12:38). Hear their mocking tone when they addressed Jesus as “Teacher” and see their faces set like stone in a condescending scowl. It’s understandable that Jesus would respond as harshly as He did.

Miraculous Signs That People Crave—Matthew 12:38–42

What comparison did Jesus make between Himself and the prophet Jonah, according to *Matthew 12:39–40*?

In the interpretation section, we’ll look at what Jesus meant. For now, how did Jesus say the Jews were *unlike* the people of Nineveh and the queen of Sheba (*Matthew 12:41–42*)?



Miraculous Signs, Evil Spirits, Startling Statement

Matthew 12:38–50

Jesus purposefully declared that He was greater than Jonah the *prophet* and greater than Solomon the *king*. Referring to *priests* serving in the temple, Jesus previously stated that He was “greater than the Temple!” (Matthew 12:6). Put these three “greater than” statements together and write down what Jesus was saying about His three messianic roles.

In Matthew’s gospel, Gentiles kept appearing as models of what the Pharisees lacked. The magi were willing to follow Christ’s star, the Roman centurion exhibited great faith, the Ninevites repented with weeping, and the foreign queen of Sheba eagerly sought God’s wisdom. In contrast, the Jewish leaders ignored the prophecies, mistrusted Jesus, refused to repent, and would not listen!

As a result, according to Jesus, the consequences would be severe.

Evil Spirits That Leave and Return—Matthew 12:43–45

Because the Pharisees had the ideal opportunity to accept the Messiah but rejected Him, they would end up worse off than if they had never met Jesus. How did Jesus describe the Pharisees’ tragic condition in *Matthew 12:43–45*?

The Pharisees said that Jesus did His miracles by the power of Satan, when, in fact, they were the ones oppressed with demons. They were the ones wicked enough to speak for the enemy. Their cynicism and self-righteousness were signs of external reform with no internal transformation. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Miraculous Signs, Evil Spirits, Startling Statement

Matthew 12:38–50

Spiritual Relationships That Outrank the Family—Matthew 12:46–50

Just as Jesus was rebuking His enemies, His mother and brothers arrived. Jesus took their coming as an opportunity to make a point to His followers. According to [Matthew 12:46–50](#), what did Jesus say to encourage the faithful?

In the family of Christ, relationships can be deeply satisfying and fulfilling because they are like relationships in our family. We could go anywhere in the world and spend time with someone in the family of God and he or she would be just like one of our own family.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Three Nights and Three Days

Perhaps the religious authorities expected Jesus to turn a staff into a snake, like the sign Moses gave Pharaoh to prove his authority. To their surprise, Jesus gave them a sign from Jonah's experience in the belly of a big fish.

What Jonah-like miracle did Jesus say would prove His authority, according to [Matthew 12:40](#)? For help with the answer, read pages 258–259 in Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*.



Miraculous Signs, Evil Spirits, Startling Statement

Matthew 12:38–50

The answer comes with an interpretive problem about the amount of time Jesus would spend in the “heart of the earth.” Read the excursus in Pastor Chuck’s commentary on page 259 and write down the nature of the problem and how it is resolved.

Although veiled, this prediction of Jesus’ death and resurrection is the first of two other predictions in [16:21](#) and [20:17–19](#). What facts did Jesus reveal in increasing detail in these verses?

The Pharisees’ demand for a miraculous sign was an obvious smokescreen for their lack of faith. Even after Jesus became a walking miracle after His resurrection—an undeniable demonstration of His authority over sin and death—the Pharisees still refused to believe!

Pause for a moment to reflect on the resurrection as proof of Jesus’ *ultimate* authority. How does recalling this miracle encourage your faith when you struggle?



Miraculous Signs, Evil Spirits, Startling Statement

Matthew 12:38–50



Correlation: Jesus' Own Family

At this time in Jesus' ministry, Jesus' hometown friends and even His family struggled to believe in Him. Let's explore what the following verses say about those closest to Jesus and their attitudes toward Him.

What does *Matthew 13:55–57* say about those who knew Jesus when He grew up in Nazareth?

How did certain family members respond to Jesus in *Mark 3:20–21*?

How did Jesus' brothers react to Jesus in *John 7:1–5*?

Unlike the Pharisees, however, Jesus' brothers heeded the sign of the resurrection. "The brothers of Jesus" (Acts 1:14) were among the believers waiting for the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, confirming their turn from skepticism to faith. Jesus' half-brother, James, even went on to become the leader of the Jerusalem church and the author of the epistle of James. So, it's encouraging to remember that those we care about the most can come to faith in Christ.



Miraculous Signs, Evil Spirits, Startling Statement

Matthew 12:38–50



Application: Three Questions to Consider

Let's conclude our study with some soul-searching questions. The Pharisees' example of extreme disbelief prompts us to ask ourselves: *Am I becoming cynical, even in a small way? Is it enough for me that Jesus is raised from the dead and alive today? Or do I need more signs to prove Himself to me?*

Weighing themselves on the scale of religious merit, the Pharisees regarded themselves as holier than anyone else. Why repent? They had no *need*. Such is the central flaw of moralists, who refuse to look past their external morality to deeper issues of the heart. So ask yourself, *Am I becoming more open to the inner work of the Spirit?*

Finally, the most fundamental question: *Am I placing Jesus Christ first in my life?* Jesus' own family could have stood in the way of Him fulfilling His calling, but He didn't let them. If your family stood in your way, would you still put Jesus first and follow Him regardless?

Use the following space as a mini journal to reflect on these questions. Take your fears and faith-struggles to the Lord and write down your desire to trust Him completely. Invite His Spirit to transform you and follow Him with your whole heart.

If you are the only Christian in your family, you may feel some alienation. The love may be present but not the unity. Jesus Himself bore a similar heartache, and He offers a spiritual intimacy that family members can't provide. Draw near to Him in prayer and come alongside other believers in fellowship as you follow God's call.



Miraculous Signs, Evil Spirits, Startling Statement

Matthew 12:38–50



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, forgive me for the times I wavered in faith, questioned Your goodness, and put Your power to the test. The resurrection of Christ is all I need to know without doubt that You are sufficient. When I feel distant from others, draw Me near Your Son. When the people I love don't love You like I do, help me find a Christian friend who will walk with me. Thank You for being my Father and for giving me an eternal family of faith, in Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY SEVENTEEN

A Story for the Hard of Listening

Matthew 13:1–23

Jesus' parable reveals a very important truth. The condition of one's heart determines its receptivity to the truth.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

By today's bigger-is-better standard, Jesus' ministry had reached the top. Any minister would have been thrilled with the size of the crowds Jesus drew—and *after only a few months of preaching at that!*

However, as Jesus scanned His growing audience, He was thinking more about hearts than numbers. Were the people sincerely devoted to Him? Did they see Him as God's Son sent from heaven? Did they grasp His message about a kingdom marked by sacrificial love versus conquering power and by heart-renewal versus rule-following?

From Jesus' point of view, He needed to purify the flock, not multiply it. How would He do it? Using parables—Jesus' best teaching tool for separating the curious onlooker from the devoted disciple.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As we'll see, the parables in Matthew 13 portray the immense importance of *illumination*—the Spirit's opening of our eyes to truly understand God's Word. We pray to the Holy Spirit to illumine our hearts and minds anytime we open the pages of Scripture. Do that now before we explore a new phase in Jesus' ministry.



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A Story for the Hard of Listening

Matthew 13:1–23



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

According to Pastor Chuck, Jesus intended His parables to whet the spiritual appetite of serious disciples:

In parables, a teacher uses common, everyday circumstances to communicate things that are unfamiliar or even supernatural. Parables appear to communicate something simple and obvious, but they invite the listener to think more deeply in order to really hear the truths being conveyed.¹

The people's response to the parables reflected their heart toward Jesus. Those who yearned to know Him would seek and find the parable's deeper meaning. Those with complacent hearts would scratch their heads, shrug their shoulders, and walk away.

Parables, then, revealed *and* concealed truth, acting as a kind of sieve in which the devoted disciples would filter through to discover the heavenly treasure. So, as we read Jesus' first parable in Matthew 13, let's open our ears and our hearts to find the riches in Jesus' teaching.



Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

Look up the word, *parable*, in your Bible dictionary, such as *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. Also, read the explanation of *parables* in the following sources by Pastor Chuck Swindoll:

- *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, pages 121–122
- *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, page 270

What guidelines for understanding Jesus' parables do you discover?



A Story for the Hard of Listening

Matthew 13:1–23

 **Observation: The Sower, Seed, and Soils**

In *Searching the Scriptures*, observing the setting helps us picture ourselves in the scene.² How did Matthew describe the setting for Jesus' teaching (*Matthew 13:1–2*)?

Next, read Jesus' parable of the sower, seed, and soils in *Matthew 13:3–8* and use the following chart to record the type of soil and what happened after the sower cast the seed.

Verses	Soil Type	Results of the Planting
13:3–4		
13:5–6		
13:7		
13:8		



A Story for the Hard of Listening

Matthew 13:1–23

No doubt, the disciples perceived a shift in Jesus' teaching, from His plain style in the Sermon on the Mount to His cryptic style in the parables. Only those with ears to hear would be able to understand (Matthew 13:9). So the disciples asked Jesus, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" (13:10 NASB). How did Jesus respond in *13:11–13*? Pay attention to His contrast.

Hearing Jesus wasn't the problem. Jesus said the problem lay elsewhere, and then He quoted Isaiah in *Matthew 13:14–17* to explain. Summarize Jesus' explanation.

In this agrarian society, the disciples had seen enough wasted seed to know what Jesus was talking about. However, they couldn't unravel the meaning of the story until they opened their hearts. For them, Jesus interpreted the parable.

All those who have the seed planted in their lives hear, but they don't all listen. They are not hard of hearing; they are hard of listening. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of the Parable

During interpretation, we use additional resources to fill in our understanding of the passage's context—from history and language to culture and geography. Bibleplaces.com has photos of the cove where Jesus might have taught His parables.



A Story for the Hard of Listening

Matthew 13:1–23

This website also has an audio recording taken upslope from the shoreline of a person reading one of Jesus' parables at water's edge. *Notice how the speaker's voice is remarkably clear!* What features of this place made it ideal for addressing a large crowd? Why do you think Jesus changed from teaching in synagogues to teaching mostly outdoors (*Matthew 4:23*)?

Now let's discern the meaning of the parable. What did Jesus say the "seed" represents, according to *Matthew 13:18–19*?

For many months, King Jesus had been scattering kingdom "seeds" everywhere through His teaching and miracles. His "message about the kingdom" was His invitation to believe in Him—to submit to His rule as King.

The soils represent the condition of people's hearts which, in turn, influences their response to Jesus' invitation. Describe the four conditions in *Matthew 13:18–23* that determine a person's receptivity. For help with the answers, read pages 274–275 in Pastor Chuck's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*.



A Story for the Hard of Listening

Matthew 13:1–23

<p>The Hard Heart 13:18–19</p>	<p>The Shallow Heart 13:20–21</p>
<p>The Crowded Heart 13:22</p>	<p>The Healthy Heart 13:23</p>

Because parables can be simplified to a single point, what principle, then, does this parable teach?

The condition of the heart determines its receptivity to the truth. The “heart” is not the organ that pumps blood. It’s the inner person. It’s where we form decisions and where we come to terms with life. It’s where we make or break habits. It’s that mixture of soul and spirit deep within us that represents who we are. Who we are determines how we respond.
 —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A Story for the Hard of Listening

Matthew 13:1–23



Correlation: Examples from Scripture

To put flesh on Jesus' teaching, we look no further than people in the New Testament who responded to God's truth just as Jesus said they would. What did Governor Felix do when Paul shared the message of Christ in *Acts 24:24–25*?

When Jesus taught a challenging message, some people who considered themselves disciples “began to murmur in disagreement” (John 6:41). Others said, “This is very hard to understand. How can anyone accept it?” (6:60). Under the strain, what did these shallow, rootless disciples eventually do (in contrast to the faithful disciples) in *John 6:66–69*?

How does once loyal Demas represent a person with a crowded heart (*2 Timothy 4:10*)?



A Story for the Hard of Listening

Matthew 13:1–23

Finally, how does young Timothy, student of Paul and pastor of the church in Ephesus, represent a healthy heart and the bountiful harvest of a thriving ministry (*2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14–15*)?

Timothy's example confirms the main principle of Jesus' parable: *The harvest depends on the heart*. Fruitfulness in Christ's kingdom doesn't depend on our talents or abilities, rather, on what matters most: the condition of our hearts.



Application: Finding Ourselves in the Parable

What's your heart condition? Are you open? Teachable? Imperfect, to be sure, but authentic? Do you love the Lord? Even when others turn away, do you stay true? Do you affirm with Peter, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God" (*John 6:68–69*)? Express your heart's desire to the Lord in the space below.

Perhaps, though, your heart has become crowded with the worries of this life and striving for worldly things has sprouted thorny tendrils. If so, what can you do to eliminate the weeds?



A Story for the Hard of Listening

Matthew 13:1–23

Maybe you came to Christ when the spiritual conditions were just right, at a camp meeting or a crusade. The summer heat of life's difficulties and persecution may have withered your commitment. If so, how can you recover what you once had?

Finally, could there be some hardness? Deep beneath your religious routine may lie an encrusted layer of disbelief. If so, bring your hardness to the Lord and invite Him to break up the clay and make you receptive to His love and truth.

Which soil represents your heart? Maybe a little of all four during different seasons of your life. As you close this study, we encourage you to invite the Master Gardener to do whatever it takes to make you wholeheartedly receptive to Him and His truth.



A Story for the Hard of Listening

Matthew 13:1–23



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, in the solitude of this moment, I offer myself to You as my sole source of life and hope, wisdom and truth. Do Your will in my life to make me more receptive to You, more responsive to Your Word, more secure in Your love, more devoted to Your Son, and more open to His will. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 270.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY EIGHTEEN

A World Full of Wheat and Weeds

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

A parable is a story comparing something familiar with something unfamiliar to teach one main truth. To understand a parable, listen carefully, think deeply, and open your heart.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN we see the evil in our world and the pain people inflict on one another, we sometimes wonder, *Why doesn't God do something?* We know God is loving and holy. So why does He hold back His hand of justice? Why does He permit so much wrongdoing and suffering?

In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll admits how hard it is to witness unchecked evil.

We long for our righteous Lord to step in and deal with evil sooner rather than later. *Now, not then.* But He doesn't do it—at least not usually. It's not uncommon for us to wait a long time for God to judge wrongdoing and to weed out the wrongdoers. Most often, we have to wait and wait . . . and wait some more.¹

However, we believe that, through our waiting, God is working out His plan. We live in a period between the arrival of the King at His first coming and the consummation of His messianic kingdom at His second coming. The Old Testament prophets didn't see this in-between age in which the King has defeated but not banished the enemy. Satan still “prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). This present era in God's redemptive plan is a *mystery*—a divine secret that Christ was revealing through parables.



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A World Full of Wheat and Weeds

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

In His parable of the wheat and weeds, Jesus addressed the tension between good and evil in our world. He also reassured us that God is growing us to maturity during this waiting period as we anticipate the day when Christ will cage the enemy and set things right for all time (Revelation 20:1–3).



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prayer is a good place to begin this study. We know things are not right and we yearn for Christ to come and fix our broken world. Using the space below, pour out your heart to the Lord and bring Him your hopes and fears as you open His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Speaking from the boat just offshore on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus was peeling back layers of the kingdom of God with each parable. In the previous parable of the sower, seed, and soils, He used the image of *good soil* to teach how we must open our hearts to receive His “message about the Kingdom” (Matthew 13:19).

Jesus changed the image to *good seed* in His next parable of the wheat and weeds. Read about this parable in [Matthew 13:24–35](#), which also includes two more parables: the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the yeast. Put yourself in the scene by the shore and imagine yourself as a first-century farmer listening to Jesus tell stories about subjects as tangible as the loaf of bread in your lunch sack!



A World Full of Wheat and Weeds

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43



Observation: Wheat, Weeds, and Mustard Seeds

As you observe the passage, examine what it says without trying to unravel what it means.² In the next phase, we'll dig into the interpretation of the parables. For now, write down what you observe in Jesus' story about the farmer who planted good seed and his enemy's treacherous deed (*Matthew 13:24–30*).

Did you notice the periods of time in the story? The time for planting, the time for waiting, and the time for harvesting. During the waiting period, the farmer allowed the wheat and weeds to grow at an ordinary pace. Jesus' next parable of the mustard seeds also addresses the kingdom's growth. What do you observe about it in *13:31–32*?

Now read about the parable of the yeast in *13:33–35*? How does this parable describe the growth of the kingdom, and how does it complement what Jesus taught in the previous parable?



A World Full of Wheat and Weeds

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

Reflect on these three parables and write down the common features. What elements appear in each parable?

Tucked into these everyday stories is heavenly wisdom, “things hidden since the creation of the world” (Matthew 13:35). But not everyone was allowed a peek into the secrets. Only those to whom Jesus chose to reveal them. *Let's take a look!*

Matthew noted that “Jesus always used stories.” Remember to use illustrations when you teach and to rely on analogies to get the point across. Begin with the familiar before going to the unfamiliar. That's what Jesus did. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of the Parables

What were the weeds Jesus referred to in the first parable? Well, *they weren't dandelions!* The Greek word is *zizanian*, also translated “tare.” “Weeds” or “tares” refers to a poisonous type of rye grass indistinguishable from wheat while growing. Sowing these weeds was an act of sabotage, an attempt to spoil the crop and destroy a farmer's livelihood.

Read more about this killer weed in your study resources or the online article, “*Tares*,” in the Bible encyclopedia at biblegateway.com. What do you discover?



A World Full of Wheat and Weeds

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

Jesus left the shoreline for a house in nearby Capernaum where the disciples pressed Jesus for an interpretation. According to *Matthew 13:36–43*, what did Jesus say each of the following elements represents in the parable of the wheat and the weeds?

Farmer: _____

Field: _____

Good Seed: _____

Weeds: _____

Enemy: _____

Harvest: _____

Reapers: _____

It must have troubled Matthew's original readers that Christ would leave false believers in the church as weeds among the wheat. What warnings, as well encouragement, would the story have given these persecuted believers? What meaning does the parable have for us? For help with the interpretation, read pages 283–284 of Pastor Chuck's commentary.



A World Full of Wheat and Weeds

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

Jesus didn't explain the parable of the mustard seed or parable of the yeast. Take a moment to use your resources and dig out the theology of these short stories. Check pages 281–282 of Pastor Chuck's commentary for his interpretation.

The prophets envisioned the Messiah as a mighty warrior sweeping out of Jerusalem, overwhelming Israel's enemies, and ushering in an age of peace and justice (*Psalms 2:6–12; Isaiah 9:6–7; Jeremiah 23:5–6*). How did Jesus modify the prophets' picture of the kingdom, regarding its expansion and ultimate victory?



Correlation: The Cosmos in Which We Live

In our current period of waiting, between “planting” and “harvesting,” we remain vulnerable to the enemy's treachery. Why? Because we live in the “field” known as the *cosmos*—the sinful world system that is hostile toward God and Christ.



A World Full of Wheat and Weeds

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

Paul pegged Satan as “the commander of the powers in the unseen world” (Ephesians 2:2), even “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). What false treasures did John say Satan’s world offers, according to *1 John 2:16–17*?

Although the “entire world is guilty before God” (Romans 3:19), God *loves the world*. “He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Just as God sent His Son, Jesus sent *His followers* into the world as ambassadors of His kingdom and showpieces of His love (*13:34–35; 17:15–18*).

So while the world is a spiritually hostile place and will be judged, it is the “field” in which God has planted us. How does this truth help you accept God’s delay in judging the world and inspire you to flourish where you’re planted?

The devil is real. He’s the one who plants the weeds among the wheat, the ones who come across as workers for good but, in fact, are representatives of evil. We cannot tell the difference by looking, so we must use discernment based on what the Scripture teaches.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A World Full of Wheat and Weeds

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43



Application: Where Are You in This Parable?

Let's view our own circumstances through the lens of Jesus' parables.

First, *remember that hostile powers are always at work in our world*. Be wary of those who might do us harm as we model His love—as Jesus said, “Be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

Second, *it is hard to distinguish the good from the evil*. So be discerning. Don't let impressive people sway you from solid doctrine.

Third, *beware the tendency to rush to extremes*. The workers would have yanked out the weeds at the risk of harming the wheat. As we live in the cosmos, we must stay focused and balanced, loving our enemies while remaining faithful to Christ. That takes wisdom!

Fourth, *never forget that God is just, and He will judge*. The waiting period *will* be over someday when Christ returns. What a day that will be!

Which of these principles strike you as the most applicable personally? Do they calm your concerns and pacify your fears? How so?

We can be assured that the prophets were right. The King is coming as they foretold, perhaps not in the time they envisioned but certainly in the way. He will sort things out, the weeds from the wheat, and in the end, “the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom” (13:43).



A World Full of Wheat and Weeds

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43



A FINAL PRAYER

To conclude this study, pen your own prayer of praise for the hope we have in the Son and our future glory with Him.

My Father,

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 279.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY NINETEEN

Get It? Got It? Good!

Matthew 13:44–52

When I think of the kingdom, I'm thinking of kingdom life, the kind of life Jesus offered. Life abundantly.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

LIKE a master chef, Jesus served His most exquisite teaching in Matthew 13 in two banquets. First, to the crowd along the seashore, Jesus opened with the parable of the sower, seed, and soils (Matthew 13:3–9). And then, after pausing to explain this parable to His disciples (13:10–23), He laid out three more parables for the people: the wheat and weeds (13:24–30), the mustard seed (13:31–32), and the yeast (13:33).

Leaving the public for the intimate setting of a home, Jesus offered His second feast of teaching to His disciples. He set the table with an explanation of the wheat and the weeds parable (13:34–43). And then, as we'll see in this *Searching the Scriptures* study, Jesus delivered three parables (13:44–48), paused for explanation (13:49–51), and concluded with a final parable—a sweet finish to His day of teaching (13:52).

So, pull up a chair and join the disciples in the house with Jesus! Enjoy teaching that is certain to nourish your soul and whet your appetite for life eternal with our Savior.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Whenever we read Jesus' words in Scripture, we sense Him speaking directly to us. Prepare your heart in prayer to respond to Jesus' call through this study.

Father, only Your Son has the words of life that can feed my deepest needs for hope, peace, and security. Nothing in this world satisfies my soul like Jesus, so fill me up with His grace and lead me in the way of His kingdom, amen.



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Get It? Got It? Good!

Matthew 13:44–52



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

According to commentator Thomas Constable, Matthew 13 can be outlined in a chiasmic structure, a kind of symmetry in writing which is typical in Hebrew literature. Notice how the sections ascend and descend in the following diagram, focusing on the center section.

A Introduction (verses 1–2)

B The first parable to the crowds (verses 3–9)

C An explanatory interlude: purpose and explanation (verses 10–23)

D Three more parables to the crowd (verses 24–33)

E An explanatory interlude: fulfillment and explanation (verses 34–43)

D' Three parables to the disciples (verses 44–48)

C' An explanatory interlude: explanation and response (verses 49–51)

B' The last parable to the disciples (verse 52)

A' Conclusion (verse 53)¹

At the center of this symmetrical arrangement lies a gleaming jewel of truth from Jesus to all His followers: “Then the righteous will *shine like the sun in their Father’s Kingdom*” (13:43, emphasis added). What an encouraging hope! Nothing satisfies our soul more than the assurance of eternal life in the loving shelter of our Father’s kingdom. And, as Jesus teaches in Matthew 13:44–52, our life with God *begins now*, becoming our *most valuable possession*.



Get It? Got It? Good!

Matthew 13:44–52

 **Observation: Treasure, Pearl, Net, Homeowner**

Observation is an important first step to putting together the pieces of a passage of Scripture. As you read, look for contrasts, comparisons, repeated expressions, and emphasized words.² Read the two parables in *Matthew 13:44–46*. What similarities and differences do you find in them?

Similarities	Differences

The parable of the fishing net is like the parable of the wheat and weeds. Read these two parables in *Matthew 13:36–43, 47–50* and fill in the five comparable features in the following chart.³

Wheat and Weeds <i>Matthew 13:36–43</i>	Fishing Net <i>Matthew 13:47–50</i>



Get It? Got It? Good!

Matthew 13:44–52

Before His final parable, Jesus asked the disciples whether they understood His teaching. “Get it?” He asked. “Got it,” they replied. “Good!” Jesus responded (in so many words). Jesus commends His disciples in *Matthew 13:52*. Restate this parable in your own words in the space below.

As the Lord swings wide His net, He catches us. You may remember how the Lord found you by His grace. He came to your rescue, and what a change He has made. The worth of the life He has brought you is immeasurable. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of the Parables

The treasure and the pearl represent the kingdom of heaven and its inestimable worth. What is the *kingdom of heaven*?

In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains this phrase’s two-sided meaning. On the one hand, Jesus referred to “the long-anticipated kingdom that will come with the return of the Messiah.” At the same time, Jesus’ parables introduced a mystery—“an interim form of the kingdom between the first and second comings of the Messiah.”

Pastor Chuck continues,

During this in-between time, those who have accepted Jesus as their Messiah and have experienced the new birth by grace through faith are to live by a different code in anticipation of the kingdom coming fully on earth. In this sense, the parables refer to one aspect of the kingdom as a *saving and transforming relationship with God through Jesus Christ* in the present. (emphasis added)⁴



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW
The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13
STUDY NINETEEN

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Get It? Got It? Good!

Matthew 13:44–52

In a nutshell, the glittering treasure and the precious pearl are metaphors for life with God through Christ, **now and forever!** Both the man and the merchant “sold everything” they owned to possess the treasure and the pearl (Matthew 13:44, 46). What do you think makes life with God in His kingdom so valuable?

What was Jesus teaching about the comparative value of worldly things?

What encouragement would these parables give Matthew's readers?



Get It? Got It? Good!

Matthew 13:44–52

The parable of the fishing net highlights the central duty of the disciples, of whom many were fisherman. What was the lesson for them (Matthew 13:47–50)? For help with the answer read page 290 of Pastor Chuck's commentary.

The final parable commends the disciples as true students of Torah because of their understanding of the kingdom of heaven. What do you think Jesus meant by saying they would bring home “new gems of truth as well as old” (13:52)?

Jesus offers kingdom life—life that is lived in peace with the Holy Spirit residing within. It's a life of power, a life that has reason to it, a life that has a destiny filled with hope.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: When Paul Discovered the Pearl

Paul thought he was the top student of Torah until the day he met the Lord on the road to Damascus. His life changed instantly, and he sold everything in terms of status, credentials, and purpose to experience kingdom life with God through Christ.



Get It? Got It? Good!

Matthew 13:44–52

Read about Paul's shift in values in *Philippians 3:5–9*. How did Paul resemble the merchant in Jesus' parable? How did he describe the pearl he found?

Describe the inestimable value of Christ in your life. How precious is Jesus to you?

Who else can heal a broken heart or a fractured marriage like Christ? Who else can give hope to a depressed soul? Who else can relieve guilt and remove shame like Christ in His acceptance of us and willingness to forgive? Who else can release our grip on money or fame or significance or selfishness? Only Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: A Challenge for All Disciples?

Jesus encouraged His disciples that life with God in His kingdom was worth whatever they had given up to follow Him. They were as wise as the man who discovered the treasure and the merchant who found the pearl. He would encourage us in the same way, and perhaps add a challenge: *don't lose your passion*. What can you do to keep your eyes on Christ as your truest treasure?



Get It? Got It? Good!

Matthew 13:44–52

Also, Christ taught His fishermen disciples to keep tossing the net. They are not responsible for the “catch,” only to be faithful to the task of sharing with others the good news of life in the kingdom. Who can you talk to about how much you value Jesus?

Our Savior prepared a wonderful meal for His closest disciples to savor. And we receive it as well, for it nourishes us with the truth of our forever relationship with God in His kingdom now and for eternity.



A FINAL PRAYER

The psalmist expresses our affection for Christ with his words of love for God. Make this your prayer as you close our study and repeat it through the day to remind you of the inestimable value of your life with God.

*Whom have I in heaven but you?
I desire you more than anything on earth.
My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak,
but God remains the strength of my heart;
he is mine forever. (Psalm 73:25–26)*

ENDNOTES

1. Thomas L. Constable, *Constable's Notes*, netbible.org/bible/matthew+13.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
3. The five comparative features are field/water, good seed/good fish, weeds/bad fish, harvesters/angels, sorting out/separating.
4. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 287, 288.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY TWENTY

Home, Cynical Home

Matthew 13:53–58

The hills, the lakes, and all Jesus made received Him and obeyed Him. But Jesus came to His own people, “and those who were His own did not receive Him.” Not even His own household welcomed Him.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

AFTER months of nonstop ministry, Jesus decided to pause His hectic pace and travel to His hometown, Nazareth. Why go home? Perhaps, He wanted to check in with His family who had come to see Him earlier (Matthew 12:46–50). Perhaps seeing familiar haunts and visiting old friends sounded refreshing. He needed a break!

Whatever His reasons for the trip, Jesus' departing Capernaum marked a milestone. Matthew's wording: “he left that part of the country” and “returned to Nazareth” (13:53), recalls a previous trip in the opposite direction. To *begin* His ministry, Jesus “left [Nazareth] and moved to Capernaum” (4:13). Circling back to Nazareth signaled an *end*. The first season of Jesus' ministry was over, and the next season was beginning.

The people's warm welcome of Jesus during His early ministry had given way to a wintry cool of opposition. Rejection's chill was in the air. Religious leaders were plotting to kill Jesus, and many of the Galileans had closed their hearts toward Him—even in cities like Capernaum where Jesus performed some of His greatest miracles (11:20–24). Jesus' trip home and the unwelcome reception awaiting Him in Nazareth symbolized the intensifying theme. Jesus' own people were rejecting Him as their Messiah, even those in His own hometown.



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Home, Cynical Home

Matthew 13:53–58



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Of all Jesus' experiences of rejection, surely the saddest involved family and friends. Jesus was fully human, and the scorn in Nazareth must have hurt deeply. Perhaps you've endured rejection's sting, either from friends or family. Ask the Lord to minister to you as you open this brief but painful chapter of His life. Use the space below to invite Him into your study.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

While fully human, Jesus was also fully divine. Amid His heartache, He never lost connection with His heavenly Father and His mission.

The parables of Matthew 13 assure us that all is not lost. Although the kingdom may take an unexpected turn and its King may be misunderstood, scoffed at, and rejected, Jesus will prevail and His kingdom will rise—like a mighty tree from a tiny mustard seed!

Read *Matthew 13:53–58* with the dual image of Jesus as human and divine, tender of heart and resolute of will.



Observation: Nazareth from Three Points of View

In the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we highlight key locations, nouns, and actions words.¹ Let's use our observation skills to view these verses geographically, relationally, and spiritually.



Home, Cynical Home

Matthew 13:53–58

Geographically—Matthew 13:53–54a

A Bible map is an important tool in your Bible study toolbox. Find Capernaum in the maps in the back of your Bible or in a Bible atlas. You can also find an excellent online map, “*Ministry of Jesus*,” at insight.org. Then locate Nazareth, southwest of the Sea of Galilee. As the crow flies, the distance between these two points is about 20 miles, but in sandals, the rugged trail from Capernaum to Nazareth is 40 miles of strenuous hiking uphill! What does the distance and difficulty of this trip tell you about Jesus?

Relationally—Matthew 13:54b–57a

According to [Matthew 13:54](#), what was the setting for Jesus to teach and perform miracles? What was the townsfolk’s first response to Him, and what did they want to know?



Home, Cynical Home

Matthew 13:53–58

These people had watched Jesus grow up from a toddler to manhood. Many had sat beside Him in synagogue classes and celebrated with Him at weddings and festivals. They might have seen Him take over the family business when Joseph died.² What did they know about Him, according to [Matthew 13:55–56](#)? What assumptions were they making?

The townspeople's road to rejecting Jesus started with them being "amazed," and then they "scoffed." Over what ledge did their hard hearts take them, according to [13:57](#)?

Spiritually—Matthew 13:57b–58

How did Jesus respond to their unbelief ([Matthew 13:57–58](#))?

Our own family members can be the most difficult people to convince of our faith in Jesus. "Who do you think you are telling me this?" they sometimes respond. Our conversion is beyond their ability to comprehend. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Home, Cynical Home

Matthew 13:53–58



Interpretation: The Meaning of Jesus' Trip Home

Let's take another look through these three lenses, and this time focus on the meaning Matthew intended for his readers.

Geographically

In *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll paints the rural features of this small town, in which a few hundred people lived:

Because Nazareth was “off the beaten path,” with no direct access to major highways or trade routes, its people lived simple lives by farming the land and raising cattle. . . . This would have given the inhabitants a rather negative reputation of being “backward.” To be associated with Nazareth would have been like calling someone a “hillbilly” today.³

What insights does this picture of Nazareth give you about Jesus as a person growing up there and His mission to reach folks everywhere? For a reminder of Jesus' compassionate heart, read *Matthew 5:3, 5; 9:12–13; 11:28–29*.

Relationally

Try to view Jesus from the perspective of His siblings and friends. Jesus probably picked up Joseph's trade, becoming one of the town's *tektōn*, which means a *craftsman* who could build or fix anything. If Jesus lived today, we might imagine Him wearing coveralls and work boots, driving a pickup truck loaded with ladders and buckets.

No wonder the people looked at Him slantwise when He came into town acting like a rabbi. His kinfolk thought He had lost His senses by claiming to be the Messiah. Early on, they even tried to take custody of Him, saying, “He's out of his mind” (Mark 3:21).



Home, Cynical Home

Matthew 13:53–58

Reflect on the people's downward spiral into rejection:

- *Amazement*: They couldn't believe their eyes.
- *Scoffing*: They couldn't get past their assumptions.
- *Taking Offense*: They couldn't bury their pride.
- *Refusal to Believe*: They couldn't open their hearts.

What do you think Matthew wanted us to know about the hurdles some people must overcome to believe in Jesus?

Spiritually

Interestingly, this was Jesus' last appearance in a synagogue in Matthew's gospel. Based on what happened in Nazareth, what do you think Matthew wanted his readers to know about the spiritual condition of the nation and its religious structures?

The old axiom is true: "Familiarity breeds contempt." Jesus was shut down because of the people's unbelief. Their response hindered Him from saying and doing anything else.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Home, Cynical Home

Matthew 13:53–58



Correlation: What Changed Their Hearts?

Although Jesus' half-brothers rejected Him at first, they later became believers. James and Jude even went on to write the New Testament epistles that bear their names. What changed their hearts? Let's track their journey of faith.

What scoffing tone of unbelief among the brothers do you pick up in *John 7:1–5*?

What experience did James have after Jesus' death based on *1 Corinthians 15:3–7*? In what ways do you think that experience changed James' mind and heart?

What leadership role did James go on to play in the Jerusalem church, according to Paul's references to him in *Galatians 1:19; 2:9*? (Also, read about James' prominence in the Jerusalem Council in *Acts 15:13–20*.)



Home, Cynical Home

Matthew 13:53–58

What about Jude? He was among his brothers who gathered in the upper room for prayer after Jesus' ascension (*Acts 1:14*). He also refers to himself at the beginning of his epistle as “a brother of James” (Jude 1), aligning himself with the faith of his brother.

What encouragement do you find in the faith journeys of Jesus' half-brothers?

Do not think that because you have spoken of Christ to your family and it wasn't received, that it will never be meaningful. Your words, no doubt, will never be forgotten.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Let's Respond to What We've Learned

Jesus' own people rejected Him, and we may know what that kind of rejection feels like. To feel like strangers in our own families, to be left out of neighborhood get-togethers, to be made to look the fool—sometimes that's what it's like to be a follower of Christ.

How does the Lord's rejection help you endure the world's opposition toward Christians in general?



Home, Cynical Home

Matthew 13:53–58

The world's scorn is heavy enough, but who can bear rejection from one's own family? Jesus must have walked away from His hometown with a heavy heart. Can you share your burden with Him? What might Jesus say to you as an encouragement?

Jesus' rejection in Nazareth closes the second part of Matthew's gospel. This somber juncture in Jesus' life is like the end of the middle act of a theatrical play. As the curtain falls, it appears as if all is lost. The antagonists seem to have the upper hand, the hero is on the run, and things appear bleak. But remember, the play isn't over!

In the next part of Matthew, Jesus returns to the Sea of Galilee to perform some of His most amazing miracles—feeding the 5000 (Matthew 14:13–21), walking on water (14:22–36), and revealing His glory at His transfiguration (17:1–9). So continue your journey with Jesus, the King of Kings. The best is yet to come!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, despite the wounds I sometimes receive from those I love most, help me not to get sidetracked in my path of following Your Son. Where else can I go for hope and assurance? Draw me closer to Him as I feel pressure from others to fall away. Keep my spirits up when others push me down. Focus my vision on Christ today, in His name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Because Mary appears alone in the gospels after Jesus' childhood trip to Jerusalem, many scholars believe that Joseph died while Jesus was a youth.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 292.

