

## HOLIDAY MESSAGES 2020

### STUDY ONE

## Let's Start Before the Beginning

*John 1:1–5, 14; Philippians 2:5–8*

*Jesus, the original Designer and Creator of all things, now comes as the Servant to give Himself for us. God, while remaining God, now becomes truly human. True humanity but undiminished deity.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**T**HE Christmas story, which we celebrate every year, did not start when Mary gave birth in Bethlehem or even before that when the angel visited her. Contrary to common thought, the story actually began *before* the beginning. Even before time existed.

To envision this part of eternity-past, allow your God-given imagination to provide the fuel and Scripture the map. For this eternal account can be told by no one except Christ Himself.

A Christmas postcard cannot adequately portray the start of it all—infinity's abode. A Christmas pageant cannot possibly capture the immensity of eternity past. Even a Christmas movie, using the latest computer technology, cannot fully express the wonder of what happened way back then.

While pictures, plays, and videos just don't cut it, one thing gets us close: words. We have inspired words that pull back the curtain of time to give us a peek inside one of the most remarkable conversations ever to occur . . . the conversation between the three persons of the Godhead at the Counsel of Divine Decrees.

There, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit agreed in splendid harmony to enact the most splendid plan. In this study, we'll gain a deeper appreciation of that plan by journeying back *before* the beginning.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

## Let's Start Before the Beginning

*John 1:1–5, 14; Philippians 2:5–8*



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Studying the Bible is more than a mental exercise. It's spiritual. If you treat your study as only mental, it's like reading a biography about your favorite hero of the past. But if you engage your study spiritually, it's like sitting down with your hero to enjoy a luxurious dinner together.

A posture of prayer makes Bible study spiritual. Of course, some components of study challenge the mind, which might keep your time from feeling spiritual. That challenge is normal. Embrace it . . . but also remember to embrace God. Take on that spiritual posture now with help from Pastor Chuck's prayer below.

*Thank You, Father, for this sweet story. More than sweet, thank You for this profound story of Your love for us, in giving us Your one and only Son. Thank You for the plan that defies imagination. Take us now to a time which we can hardly comprehend. Give us hearts to take in all that You would teach us and give us a willingness to respond in love to Your love as You have given us Your one and only. Amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The New Testament authors wrote astonishing statements about the divinity of Jesus. For example, look at what the author of the book of Hebrews wrote:

*Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. (Hebrews 1:1–3)*

What does the passage above claim about Jesus' divine identity?



**Let's Start Before the Beginning**

*John 1:1–5, 14; Philippians 2:5–8*

John, too, made many astonishing statements like that. For example, John wrote, “In the beginning was the *Word*.” (John 1:1 NASB, emphasis added). Here, John used the word *logos*. It’s a Greek term with numerous meanings.<sup>1</sup> It could mean “word,” “utterance,” “assertion,” “presentation,” “reason,” “matter,” or “account.”

John used *logos* to refer to God’s perfect self-expression in human form: Jesus—fully God and fully man. God’s perfect portrait of Himself. John could have used the Greek words the author of Hebrews used. But he didn’t. John used *logos*. He did so to emphasize God’s purposes, not His person.

It’s as if John is saying, “In Jesus, we not only have the cause of it all but also the reason behind it all.” Now, we’ll explore that “reason behind it all.”



**Observation: The Infinity of Eternity Past**

All good Bible study starts with observation. We take in the words of the author. We want our thoughts to mirror the author’s thoughts. We want to make the same logical connections the author makes. We keep from imposing our thoughts upon the author’s words.<sup>2</sup> We read slowly and repetitively and reflectively.

Observe *John 1:1–14*. Don’t rush. Ponder, wonder, and imagine. Note the key claims John, the author, made about Jesus’ divine identity, purposes, and activity.

<p><b>Identity</b> 1:1–3, 6–8, 14</p>	
<p><b>Purposes</b> 1:9, 12–13</p>	
<p><b>Activity</b> 1:4–5, 10–11</p>	



## Let's Start Before the Beginning

*John 1:1–5, 14; Philippians 2:5–8*

*Right out of the chute, we read that Logos is deity. “He existed in the beginning with God.” In fact, “God created everything through Him.” Most people don’t know that. We think of the Father as the creator, when in fact it was the second member of the Trinity who was given that responsibility in the Council of Divine Decrees. There was no alien creation. There was no surprising event. All planned, all carried out through the limitless power of the second member of the Trinity. Logos gave life to everything. Think of it. In creating these creatures and these living things—plants, animals, fish, or whatever—there is the existence of life because He gave life to each. Apart from Him there is no life. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: A Shocking Descent

The apostle Paul wrote exalted hymns about the eternal purposes of God in Christ. Perhaps you didn't realize it, but that is exactly what we find in Philippians 2:6–11 when Paul elucidated the humility of Jesus. He celebrated the greatness of God through song. We'll dive deep into the truths of the hymn so that we can sing all the louder during this Christmas season.

Read *Philippians 2:6–11*. Notice its structure and how Paul unfolds the progression of Christ's humility. Use Bible study *resources* like commentaries or dictionaries to help you interpret this passage.<sup>3</sup> Based on 2:6–8, describe the different statements about Christ's humility and explain their significance regarding God's divine purpose.

*This is probably the most important part of His incarnation. What does that mean? He certainly didn't empty Himself of His deity for He's stilling storms, healing the sick, raising the dead, and calming the waters. So what does it mean? Listen carefully. He willingly set aside the independent, voluntary use of His divine attributes and personal prerogatives while earthbound. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Let's Start Before the Beginning

*John 1:1–5, 14; Philippians 2:5–8*

According to Philippians 2:9–11, what was the outcome of Christ's humility? What additional information do we discover about God's purposes behind the incarnation.

Jesus' death did not come at random. His final breath did not thwart God's plan established at the Council of Divine Decrees. In fact, Jesus' death was not only part of the plan; it was central. It was central because God would not let death have the last say. By dying on the cross and then resurrecting, Jesus defeated death that He may give eternal life to all who would receive it.



### Correlation: The Beginning

Paul wrote another hymn that further reveals God's purposes in Christ. Colossians 1:15–20 emphasizes God's creative action through Christ and Christ's sustaining work.

Read the *hymn*, which has two parallel parts. Part one portrays the current order of creation (Colossians 1:15–17). Part two portrays the new creation that Jesus began when He resurrected (1:18–20). Study each part. See the parallel literary constructions. Record three key points from each part and how they connect with each other.



**Let's Start Before the Beginning**

*John 1:1–5, 14; Philippians 2:5–8*

Key Points	Colossians 1:15–17	Colossians 1:18–20
One		
Two		
Three		

*He existed before anything else. He holds all creation together. He is the head of the church which is His body. He's the beginning, the supreme over all who rise from the dead. He's first in everything, and it pleased the Father to reconcile everything to Himself as the Son comes to the cross. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



**Application: The Motive behind It All**

A single verse captures the reason behind it all:

*For this is how God loved 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)*



## **Let's Start Before the Beginning**

*John 1:1–5, 14; Philippians 2:5–8*

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God loves us. The deeper one realizes that truth, the more transformed he or she will live. Begin application by reflecting on all the wondrous, eternal truths you explored in this study. Write a few words on what you especially appreciate about the miracle of Christmas.

Now think over how you can share that truth with your loved ones or close friends. What can you do to help them appreciate God's purposes in the way that you have come to see them? What can you do to help them celebrate God's purposes in a fresh way during this Christmas season?



## Let's Start Before the Beginning

*John 1:1–5, 14; Philippians 2:5–8*



### A FINAL PRAYER

End your devotional time by singing a Christmas hymn to God. It can be the hymn below or one of your favorites.

#### Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King:  
peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled!”  
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,  
join the triumph of the skies;  
with th’angelic hosts proclaim,  
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”

Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King”

Christ, by highest heaven adored,  
Christ, the everlasting Lord,  
late in time behold him come,  
offspring of the Virgin’s womb:  
veiled in flesh the Godhead see;  
hail th’incarnate Deity,  
pleased with us in flesh to dwell,  
Jesus, our Immanuel.

Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King”

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all he brings,  
risen with healing in his wings.  
Mild he lays his glory by,  
born that we no more may die,  
born to raise us from the earth,  
born to give us second birth.

Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King”<sup>3</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

1. Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 598–601.
2. To review Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, visit the website [sts.insight.org](https://www.sts.insight.org) or grab a *copy* of the book for your library. Pastor Chuck also uses *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*. It’s one of his favorite Bible study tools.
3. Charles Wesley, “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,” rev. George Whitefield, Hymnary.org, [https://hymnary.org/text/hark\\_the\\_herald\\_angels\\_sing\\_glory\\_to](https://hymnary.org/text/hark_the_herald_angels_sing_glory_to).



## HOLIDAY MESSAGES 2020

### STUDY TWO

## Let's Witness a Troubled Romance in Nazareth

*Matthew 1:18–24*

*There is no courtship more intriguing, more fascinating than the one between Mary and Joseph of Nazareth—unique in every way! It's easy for us to forget that as we think of the Christmas story. We imagine it's all placid and simple and flowing so easily, but not so for this couple who were engaged to be married.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**A**T times, the Lord gives us assignments we would not have chosen for ourselves.

Perhaps that assignment is something others don't understand or wouldn't affirm. Perhaps the assignment defies logic, lacks common sense, or runs against conventional wisdom. But because it comes from God, it's His will, so it's the right thing to do. Therefore, we do it . . . even if we never anticipated it . . . we do it.

We do so because God's hand is in it. He has selected us to take on that assignment and walk that path, and it's in those moments when we sense a special awareness of God's presence as well as His goodness and faithfulness. It's in those moments when we truly learn the value of obedience—just as Joseph had learned it.

If we aren't careful, we might overlook that fact as we relive the Christmas story. So, in this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll take time to explore the courtship of Mary and Joseph—with an emphasis on Joseph. As we do, we'll come to appreciate afresh the value of obedience.



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## Let's Witness a Troubled Romance in Nazareth

*Matthew 1:18–24*



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

True obedience overflows from the heart. God looks beyond our footsteps and words into the deep recesses of our human spirit. God's Spirit empowers us to obey God from the heart by molding our character to reflect God's character. That's why King David received God's commendation for being a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14).

We today long for the exact same commendation from the One whose opinion matters most. To align our heart with God's, we must be people of prayer. Deep prayer. Consistent prayer. In a spirit of prayer always. For that reason, pray now for God to help you in this study and strengthen you in your pursuit of holy obedience to God Almighty.



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

We know very little about Mary and Joseph. Aside from Matthew's and Luke's genealogies, we know nothing of either's parents or grandparents. Occupants of Nazareth called Jesus the "carpenter's son" (Matthew 13:55). John tells us Mary's sister accompanied her at Jesus' crucifixion (John 19:25). Snippets like these, however, don't tell us what's most important.

In Luke 1:27, we read that Mary "was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph." Before the angel appeared to Mary and before she conceived a child by the power of the Spirit, Mary and Joseph loved each other. They pledged their lives to each other. They anticipated a lifelong marriage full of children, a common routine with few adventures—if any!

But God had other plans . . .



## Let's Witness a Troubled Romance in Nazareth

*Matthew 1:18–24*



### Observation: A Man Named Joseph

During observation, we read the biblical text slowly and let each word make its way into our imagination. We avoid taking any word for granted. It's like we're taking in every petal of a vibrant red rose.<sup>1</sup>

Begin by reading *Matthew 1:18–24*.

Note below what we know of Joseph from this passage.

*You and I are on this earth to fulfill God's way, to go His direction. God is in charge and He's leading us to do His will, His way, in His time, for His purpose. The Christmas story teaches us that life isn't about us. If we learn that by the time we are placed in our burial site, we will have reached true adulthood. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: True Obedience

Your imagination unlocks the door of understanding. For observation, you use your imagination to engage the senses, to transport you to the biblical author's time and place. During interpretation, however, we sharpen, or even correct, our imagination. We fill in the blanks by researching relevant geography, history, culture, theology, human nature, etc.<sup>2</sup>



## **Let's Witness a Troubled Romance in Nazareth**

*Matthew 1:18–24*

Now, we'll do that with Joseph. Based on Matthew 1:18–19, what thoughts streamed through Joseph's head once he learned of Mary's pregnancy? How did Joseph prove himself a good man based on these verses? What action specifically displayed that righteousness? You might want to use [commentaries](#) or other resources to research the nature of their engagement.

Before Joseph could follow through on his plan, an angel appeared to him in a dream. What did the angel reveal to him, and what did the angel command him?

After Matthew commented how Jesus' conception fulfilled prophecy (Matthew 1:22–23), he recorded how Joseph responded to the dream. How did Joseph respond? What does his response reveal about his character? Why are those traits special traits of character in the eyes of God, and what can we learn from them?



## Let's Witness a Troubled Romance in Nazareth

*Matthew 1:18–24*

*You may be facing a tough, life-altering decision. It's one that calls for sacrifice just like Joseph had faced even though the details are different. Should you follow the Lord in doing this? Or should you hold back? I urge you to follow Joseph's model and do it. Do the hard thing. Yes, it might be life-altering tough. Regardless, do it. It's a matter of obedience to the living God who made you and loves you. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Correlation: A Prayer of the Obedient

Psalm 26 gives us an intimate peek into the soul of one touched by a good and faithful God who simply wants to walk in a way pleasing to Him. Psalm 26 is a prayer of the obedient.

Take a moment to read and reflect on this *psalm*. How does this prayer inspire you to trust God in the path of obedience? How does it instruct you to walk on that path of obedience?

God's mercy and faithfulness put our feet on solid ground. The stormy winds of life batter us, but God keeps us upright and strong as we forge ahead on the path He has chosen for us.



### Application: The Value of Obedience

To help you integrate the truths of Scripture into your life, Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers four encouraging principles to help you obey your Father in heaven.

- 1) *Are you facing a tough, life-altering decision? DO IT!* Yes, God often calls for sacrifice. But the sacrifice is only temporary. Remember that His goodness lasts eternally.
- 2) *Are you running the risk of being the brunt of others' criticism if you obey God? GO THERE!* One second's worth of God's approval is better than thousands of years' worth of the world's approval.



## Let's Witness a Troubled Romance in Nazareth

*Matthew 1:18–24*

- 3) *Are you being forced to stand alone or become forgotten these days? STAND ASIDE!* You don't want to be the star of the show if God does not want you there.
- 4) *Are you about to fill a new place of quiet service or help for another? HUMBLE YOURSELF!* Jesus defines greatness by how we serve others. Someone the world has overlooked might need your attention.

Which of Pastor Chuck's four principles speaks to you in your current season of life? Why? What might God be leading you to do during this Christmas season?



### A FINAL PRAYER

Psalm 26:6–7 states:

*I come to your altar, O LORD,  
singing a song of thanksgiving  
and telling of all your wonders.*

No doubt, obedient Joseph sang a few songs of thanksgiving for all the wonders God worked in His life. Let's end this study with a song celebrating the greatest wonder God has worked on behalf of us all.<sup>3</sup> Sing it. Pray it—and let celebration fuel your obedience.



## Let's Witness a Troubled Romance in Nazareth

*Matthew 1:18–24*

### O Come, All Ye Faithful

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!  
Come and behold him, born the King of angels;

O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord!

God of God, Light of Light eternal,  
Lo! he abhors not the Virgin's womb;  
Son of the Father, begotten, not created,

O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,  
Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above:  
"Glory to God, all glory in the highest!"

O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord!

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;  
Jesus, to thee be all glory giv'n;  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;

O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord!

### ENDNOTES

1. To review Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, visit the website [sts.insight.org](http://sts.insight.org) or grab a *copy* of the book for your library. Pastor Chuck also uses *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. It's one of his favorite Bible study tools.
2. Check out Constable's Notes at [Netbible.org](http://Netbible.org) or the IVP New Testament Commentary on Matthew offered for free on [Biblegateway.com](http://Biblegateway.com).
3. John Francis Wade, attr., "O Come, All Ye Faithful," trans. Frederick Oakeley, Hymnary.org, [https://hymnary.org/text/o\\_come\\_all\\_ye\\_faithful\\_joyful\\_and\\_triumph](https://hymnary.org/text/o_come_all_ye_faithful_joyful_and_triumph).



HOLIDAY MESSAGES 2020  
STUDY THREE

## Let's Hear God's Voice in a Baby's Cry

*Luke 2:1–20*

*In appearance, Jesus looked like any other Jewish baby. The truth is—and talk about surprises—God who came to earth to live among us did not come as a raging whirlwind or in a devouring fire or to inhabit Caesar's halls, commanding the world to bow down and worship. No. What stands out is a term that no mighty king ever used: HUMILITY. What stands out is the humility, the obscurity, of it all.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**R**EMARKING on Christ's first appearing, Paul's words capture its significance perhaps better than anyone else:

*Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words! (2 Corinthians 9:15)*

Another version translates Paul's Greek exclamation in this way:

*Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! (9:15 NASB)*

Pondering the incarnation of God in Christ led Paul to rapturous praise. The incarnation truly astonishes no matter the angle of your gaze upon it. For this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we will look at the birth of Jesus our Savior from the angle of Luke 2:1–20.

Here, we find a nice juxtaposition of God's humility and humanity's pride. Juxtapositions often help us appreciate a subject. Dark is darkest when compared to the brightness of day. The strong appears strongest compared to the weakest of the weak. Below, we'll appreciate undiminished deity as He arrives in complete frailty and obscurity.



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## Let's Hear God's Voice in a Baby's Cry

*Luke 2:1–20*



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

In his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll emphasizes how your heart must be in the right condition before studying. A right condition includes upholding personal integrity, an overarching desire to follow Jesus, and a burning passion to learn God's Word.<sup>1</sup>

Quiet yourself inwardly now and search yourself before God. Open your heart to Him. Express how you depend upon Him fully to set your heart in the right condition. Pray for His abundant blessing on your time in His Word.



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

When you study biblical narrative, remember that the authors often convey their key ideas indirectly through the events of the story, the statements of key characters, or the mention of small details that would be considered irrelevant if not included.

Every detail, however small, has something to tell.<sup>2</sup>



### Observation: A Baby's Cry

Take time now to read [Luke 2:1–20](#) in your two favorite translations. Pastor Chuck's favorites are the New Living Translation and the New American Standard Bible.



## Let's Hear God's Voice in a Baby's Cry

*Luke 2:1–20*

What details in this passage signal the obscurity of the whole event? Note especially Luke 2:4, 6–7, 8–10, 15–17.

God did not come to Jerusalem with all its hustle and bustle to be born among the powerful and prestigious. Instead, Jesus was born in little Bethlehem. No earthly fanfare accompanied His arrival. He first laid His head in a feed trough stationed in an animal shelter reeking of all the common smells of a dirty barn.

It took an angel for humanity to learn the significance of the moment. But governors, centurions, or priests didn't hear heaven's praise. Instead, God's messengers went to shepherds . . . people who talked more with animals than humans. These lowly men would become some of the first to gaze upon undiminished deity in true humanity.



### Interpretation: God's Voice

Jesus' birth occurred in obscurity. Luke juxtaposed that obscurity with the angelic pronouncement regarding Jesus' exalted identity. This pronouncement conveys key historical and theological points which Luke wanted to make clear from the outset of his gospel.

Remember that God acts in human history *and* uncovers the intentions of His actions. The Bible—God's revelation—teaches us what happened as well as the meaning of what happened. Therefore, the Bible teaches history and theology. Interpretation seeks a clear understanding of any given passage's history in order arrive at its theology.

Use your Bible study resources like [netbible.org](http://netbible.org) and the Tyndale New Testament Commentary or *Luke* by Darrell Bock, offered freely at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).



## **Let's Hear God's Voice in a Baby's Cry**

*Luke 2:1–20*

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First, to history. Reread *Luke 2:4, 8–14*. To what person is Jesus linked, and what titles was Jesus given by the angels in these verses? Also, look especially at the use of “Lord” (Luke 2:9, 11). What is the historical, Old Testament significance of that person and those titles?

Second, to theology. What do these titles teach us about Jesus' identity? What specific traits do each of these titles speak of? What is the theological significance of these titles?

Third, to relevance. Biblical authors don't teach theology to satisfy idle curiosity. The author's tone (how he or she feels) and the author's mood (the emotional atmosphere of the author's subject) help relay relevance in biblical narrative. What is the tone and mood in Luke 2:1–20? Based on the tone and mood, how did Luke relate the story to his readers?



## Let's Hear God's Voice in a Baby's Cry

Luke 2:1–20

*My pleasure in this Christmas message is to make you aware of the Savior. Not that you won't enjoy your Christmas celebration. Enjoy it, delight in it. Have fun and sing and dance and rejoice together. But somewhere along the way, pause and let the wonder in and thank Jesus for coming and dying for you. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Correlation: From the Beginning to the End

Luke used details from the setting of Jesus' birth to testify to God's humility. Near the end of the apostle John's life, as he was exiled on the island of Patmos, he received a vision of the glorified Lord and recorded it in what we call the book of Revelation. To convey the gravity of his vision, John detailed Jesus' appearance.

John's depiction of Jesus contrasts nicely with Luke's. Luke wrote of the Lamb of God. John of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Read [Revelation 1:12–17](#). Note the elements of Jesus' appearance as well as other descriptive characteristics and what they teach us about Jesus' identity.

In Jesus, God's attributes hold together. Meek and almighty. Holy and near. Just and merciful. The vision of John in Revelation 5:4–8 states it perfectly. The conquering lion conquered by becoming a slain lamb. At the cross, God's attributes converge. Through the resurrection, they're unleashed.



### Application: Maker of the Universe

Application takes form in many ways. It involves doing and speaking, thinking and feeling, willing and longing. God seeks to transform our whole selves. Not just part of us. It all begins where many might least expect it—simply in beholding. Paul wrote:

*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*  
(2 Corinthians 3:18 NASB)



## Let's Hear God's Voice in a Baby's Cry

Luke 2:1–20

We just took time throughout this study to gaze upon the beauty of Christ and reflect upon His excellencies. For now, we'll continue in more of the same. Consider something new you learned about Jesus or something you already knew but have come to appreciate more deeply this Christmas season. Write it down below and state why it's personally significant to you.



### A FINAL PRAYER

End this study by savoring the hymn below that celebrates how undiminished deity came to dwell with us in frailty and obscurity. Let your heart sing of the wonder of the true meaning of Christmas.

#### The Maker of the Universe

The Maker of the universe  
As Man, for man was made a curse.  
The claims of law which He had made,  
Unto the uttermost He paid.

His holy fingers made the bough  
Which grew the thorns that crowned His brow.  
The nails that pierced His hands were mined  
In secret places He designed.

He made the forest whence there sprung  
The tree on which His body hung.  
He died upon a cross of wood,  
Yet made the hill on which it stood.

The sky that darkened o'er His head  
By Him above the earth was spread.  
The sun that hid from Him its face  
By His decree was poised in space.

The spear which spilled His precious blood  
Was tempered in the fires of God.  
The grave in which His form was laid,  
Was hewn in rocks His hands had made.

The throne on which He now appears  
Was His from everlasting years.  
But a new glory crowns His brow.  
And every knee to Him shall bow.<sup>3</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

1. See Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 58–59.
2. To review Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website [sts.insight.org](https://sts.insight.org) or grab a *copy* of the book for your library. Pastor Chuck also uses *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. It's one of his favorite Bible study tools.
3. Frederick William Pitt, "The Maker of the Universe," *hymnal.net*, <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/100>.



## HOLIDAY MESSAGES 2020

### STUDY FIVE

## Here's Something Worth Forgetting

*Philippians 3:4–14*

*All of us look back today to a year that has almost passed. Just a few hours and it's over. It's a good thing to remember what has been beneficial. It's healthy to forget those things that drag us down. Things that need to be forgotten. Things that we sought for our own glory and our own recognition.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**T**HE ancient Greek philosopher Socrates once said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” This pithy aphorism has ringed true throughout the halls of history into every room of culture, no matter the culture.

First, no one steps foot into this world perfect in stature. We journey from zygote to embryo to fetus to infant to toddler to adolescent to adult. As maturing creatures, we need guidance, education, and correction. Self-examination that leads to self-correction is a character trait that displays one's natural maturity.

Second, no one steps foot into this world perfect in nature. As fallen creatures, we require discipline and reproof—instruction for what to think and not to think, to say and not to say, to do and not to do. We need training in righteousness and truth. Self-examination that leads to self-correction is a godly trait that displays one's spiritual maturity.

The end of a year provides all people the perfect time for self-examination. To do this effectively, one must look behind *and* ahead, forget *and* remember, evaluate *and* plan.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study and the next, we will do just that. In the next, we'll look ahead, remember, and plan. For now, we'll focus upon divine insights for forgetting what lies behind so we can press on in the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

## Here's Something Worth Forgetting

*Philippians 3:4–14*



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

The apostle Paul emphasized the need to examine oneself. In 2 Corinthians 13:5, he wrote:

*Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Surely you know that Jesus Christ is among you; if not, you have failed the test of genuine faith.*

Specifically, Paul enjoined us to examine ourselves to discern whether we're true followers of Christ. Broadly, Paul testified to the basic need of self-reflection to assist in our spiritual growth. In Psalm 139, David testified to the Lord's provision of His strength and help for our self-reflection.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
Point out anything in me that offends you,  
and lead me along the path of everlasting life. (Psalm 139:23–24)*

Notice the desired outcome of self-reflection: walking in the path of everlasting life—full of peace and joy and fellowship in the Holy Spirit (see Romans 14:17).

Considering the verses above, begin the process of self-reflection. Meditate on those verses. Quiet your mind and set your heart toward God. Invite Him into this study and ask Him to bless your time in His Word.

*I'm grateful for this transition that comes annually. It's a natural time for us to pause and examine ourselves. By the way, when we examine ourselves, we discover things no one else knows. We dig into the secrets of our lives we've never shared. We acknowledge habits that we've begun to form, that quite likely no one else has noticed; and the self-examination is profitable. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Here's Something Worth Forgetting

*Philippians 3:4–14*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Often, Satan plants seeds of deception, distraction, or persecution shortly after the Spirit plants a local church. We observe this diabolical tactic used against the church in Philippi. In Philippians 3, Paul opened with a word of warning against legalists who taught that a true Christian must adhere to religious regulations. *FALSE!* The gospel isn't faith *plus* works. Only faith.

Irritated, Paul called these false teachers “dogs.” They exchanged true, Christ-centered assurance and joy for rule-following confidence and self-flattery. But such confidence stood on cardboard and spiritually satisfies about as much as eating cardboard. Such confidence rests upon our feeble efforts instead of Christ's achievement.

Spiritual confidence rests elsewhere. Look at what Paul said in his letter to the Philippian church:

*For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.* (Philippians 3:3 NASB)

According to this verse, what three ways does true Christianity differ from legalism?

Next, Paul expands upon the meaning of Philippians 3:3 in 3:4–14. There, we find the spiritual secret to forgetting what lies behind.



### Observation: Counting All Things as Loss

Good observation notices contrasts—at the sentence level as well as the structural level.<sup>1</sup> In Philippians 3:4–14, Paul contrasts his own religious credentials (of which he could have boasted but didn't) with God's free gift in Christ.



## Here's Something Worth Forgetting

*Philippians 3:4–14*

### Paul's Credentials

Observe *Philippians 3:4–6*. List the seven attributes and possessions Paul could have boasted in.

A true Hebrew of the Hebrews. Gifted and zealous, Paul likely stood in Israel's hall of fame at a young age. Then, with one look at the risen Lord, it all faded into the background. Paul goes on to say, "I once thought these things were valuable, BUT NOW" (*Philippians 3:7*, emphasis added). Let's explore the spiritual weight behind that simple transition.

### Christ's Value

Observe *Philippians 3:7–14*. According to 3:7–9, how did Paul classify his former credentials, and what did he count as more valuable than them, spiritually speaking?

Legalism promises a spiritual reward for the efforts of self-accomplishment. According to 3:10–11, how did God's provision in Christ redirect Paul's spiritual efforts?



## Here's Something Worth Forgetting

*Philippians 3:4–14*

What drove Paul's spiritual efforts according to 3:12–14? What role did "forgetting" play in Paul's pursuits?

Certainty of victory impelled Paul's race toward the finish line. He could run his course with joy knowing that, in Christ, he had a guaranteed win. Paul could have stayed stuck—maintaining the predictability of religious regulation and finding security in legalistic misery. But he forgot all that. Christ gives sinew to our spiritual legs so we can run freely, unchained by the past.

*Stop the bad habit of longing for things and for your own life to be as it has been, and start anticipating and focusing on the way things could be and should be through Christ.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



### Interpretation: Forgetting the Past, Looking Ahead

Now, we'll go deeper. We'll consider what fueled Paul to forget the past so that he could press on. Don't forget to turn to your trusted Bible study *resources* in this section. You may want to grab Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *commentary* on Philippians. *Commentaries* elucidate key events, ideas, and cultural norms to aid our understanding of what was written so many ages ago.

First, explain what Paul meant when he referred to the calling of God in Christ in Philippians 3:14 (hint: refer to 3:11).



## Here's Something Worth Forgetting

*Philippians 3:4–14*

Second, explain how Paul pursued that calling. Paul expressed “forgetting” as one method of pursuit (Philippians 3:13). Forgetting *what*, exactly? What did Paul actively pursue (see 3:10–11)?

How would Paul have missed Christ's call, and participation in the power of that call, had he relied on his own credentials?

*Before Saul became Paul, Saul was all about Saul—all about what he did, all about what he accomplished, all about his record, all about his deeds—until he found righteousness in Christ that could never be earned. What a difference! Saul became Paul: “That I might come to know Him better and better, deeper and deeper. That is my drive in life. And that I might know the mighty power that raised Him from the dead, and even suffer alongside Him as He once suffered. I live for that.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Here's Something Worth Forgetting

*Philippians 3:4–14*



### Correlation: Head Forward

Jesus, in just a single sentence, gave a simple illustration similar to that of Paul's. Observe and interpret *Luke 9:62* and explain how it correlates with the main passage of our study.

All the gifts, privileges, responsibilities, and possibilities of kingdom life overshadow our past. The best way we can love our family and friends, the best way we can perform our vocation, the best way we can contribute to society . . . it all comes by embracing all that God has for us as members of His kingdom.



### Application: Pastor Chuck's Five Insights for Pressing On

As a reflection upon Paul's vital teaching for pursuing the heavenly prize promised by Jesus' call, Pastor Chuck offers five useful guidelines to help you in your spiritual journey.

- 1) *God's plan is progress, not perfection.* In this life, we keep our feet moving in the right direction, one day at a time, despite our own limitations and imperfections.
- 2) *The past is over; leave it behind.* Living in the past is a complete waste of energy. Don't rehash your woes or bask in former glory. Press on!
- 3) *The future offers fresh hope; look forward to it.* In the race of life, run! Embrace it—lean into it!
- 4) *The secret is a determined attitude; maintain it.* Hold a “never-say-die” mentality. Let the Spirit fortify your resolve to persevere.
- 5) *The commitment is ongoing; stay at it.* Don't drift along in the winds of time or waver in the storms of woe. Jesus' promise is sure. His presence is near. His strength is sufficient.



## Here's Something Worth Forgetting

*Philippians 3:4–14*

Which of these guidelines proves most relevant to you in your season of life? Why? How have you been encouraged and challenged in this study to forget the past and press on in the year ahead? How do you plan to implement just one core principle that you learned?

We've just spent time soaking in all the divine insights that saturate Paul's passage in Philippians 3:4–14. You have learned what to forget. As you grow and mature in your walk with Jesus, remember to "hold on to the progress [you] have already made" (Philippians 3:16).



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for giving me a race that is truly worth running. Thank You for giving me something ahead that is truly worth looking at and pressing toward. Thank You for raising me up in Christ on wings like eagles. In Him, I can take the next step. For His glory, I will keep moving. In the strong name of Christ, I pray, amen.*

#### ENDNOTE

1. To review Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website [sts.insight.org](http://sts.insight.org) or grab a *copy* of the book for your library. Pastor Chuck also uses *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. It's one of his favorite Bible study tools.



HOLIDAY MESSAGES 2020  
STUDY SIX

## Here's Something Worth Remembering

*James 4:11–17*

*James is not a dreamer. He has a very practical mind. So, he speaks bluntly, and I will do the same. James isn't worried about whether you like him. He isn't worried about whether you feel good after you read what he writes. I feel the same after telling you what I say. My responsibility is not to make you feel good. My responsibility is to tell you the truth. I need to tell you the truth, whether you like to hear it or not, because only by truth can you deal with reality.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

ONE of the most resounding themes that echoes throughout the Bible sounds in just five words:

YOU ARE NOT IN CHARGE!

Many read those words, take a deep gulp, and shudder—as if it were frightening news. Others might read that statement, raise an eyebrow, and baulk—as if it were surprising, perhaps debatable. But it's not. The Bible doesn't leave you in a state of fright and surprise as it sings this song.

The Bible heralds that theme as great news. A good and powerful God rules the world. Not a whimsical, profane dictator or violent, colossal crowd or chaotic, unpredictable natural disaster. *God is in charge*—a truth to take comfort in and orient our lives around. Now that's something worth singing about!

In the last study, we reviewed the importance of self-examination at the start of a new year. Paul taught us how we need to forget certain things in our past that shackle us or block us from fully embracing God's call on our lives.



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## **Here's Something Worth Remembering**

*James 4:11–17*

For now, we'll explore what we need to remember. Specifically . . .

*WE ARE NOT IN CHARGE!*

Pastor Chuck Swindoll expounded this vital theme heard in James 4:11–17—the focus of today's *Searching the Scriptures* study. Jesus' half-brother presents this truth with such booming force that we do well to let it repeat within us every day.



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Proverbs 1:7 states, “Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true knowledge.” We gain wisdom by acknowledging that God exists, has acted in human history, and has provided all we need to know about His ways and His will. True knowledge rests on our belief that God is in charge—and that we are not.

Prayer is the appropriate first response to this truth. Take time now to pray. Express your dependence upon your heavenly Father. Ask for His guidance through this time in His Word. Request His blessing.



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

James wrote as a prophetic sage. He wrote plainly using simple imagery, short sentences, and lots of commands—59 imperatives in 108 verses! His words don't soar up into the theological clouds. Rather, he writes as one whose feet are on the ground to help you keep your feet on the ground so you can walk with God in the way of the righteous.

James teaches that you don't have to know much to live a significant life. You just have to take the simple truths of Jesus' message and incorporate them into every aspect of your life. James helps you do just that.



## Here's Something Worth Remembering

*James 4:11–17*



### Observation: Two Ways We Aren't in Charge

We'll observe below how James 4:11–17 teaches we aren't in charge.<sup>1</sup>

#### We Aren't in Charge of Others—James 4:11–12

Observe *James 4:11–12*. What is James' primary command at the beginning of 4:11? How did he explain the meaning of that command later in the verse?

What did James say about God in 4:12, and how did he contrast God's identity with our identity?

Our sinful nature leads us to speak ill of others behind their back and without the full story. God leads us to do the exact opposite. We seek out the full story, speak directly with the one whom we believe is in the wrong, and hold a humble posture as a fellow sinner who's accountable to the same God.

*If it's so bad and if something needs to be confronted and it's for the good of the other individual, wait until you're alone and at the right time and in the right tone confront the person to his or her face. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Here's Something Worth Remembering

*James 4:11–17*

### We Aren't in Charge of Ourselves—James 4:13–16

Observe *James 4:13–16*. Verse 13 speaks of five presumptions arrogant boasters make. List those presumptions below.

What corrections did James make to these presumptions in 4:14–16?

James' key truths we'd all do well to build our life upon:

- 1) *As mere mortals, we have no guarantee of tomorrow.*
- 2) *As mere humans, we have no clue what the future holds.*
- 3) *As mere creatures, we have no right to ignore our Maker's will.*

Talk about something worth remembering!



## Here's Something Worth Remembering

*James 4:11–17*



### Interpretation: To Know and to Do

Effective interpretation always leads to solid theology. We don't stop with grammar, history, or culture. We end with theology—unshakable principles and truths about God and life. Sometimes, unearthing that theology takes some excavating. Other times, it sits closer to the surface. Thankfully, James makes his theology explicit.

Read *James 4:11–17* and summarize the key ideas about God and why those ideas are significant according to James. Don't forget to consult your trusted Bible study *resources* and *commentaries* during this stage. We recommend you add Pastor Chuck's clear, practical, and engaging *commentary* on James to your library if you don't already own it.

*Pray like this when you plan: “Lord, You're in charge. This is Your day. It's on loan to me. Thank You for allowing me to live it, but it's Yours. It's got Your name written all over it. I want it to be for Your glory. I don't want to be involved in anything that You don't want. So stop me. Turn me. Reverse my plan if needed. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

How is 4:17 logically connected to 4:11–16?



## Here's Something Worth Remembering

*James 4:11–17*

In his excellent commentary, James Moo discusses the connection between verses 17 and 15 which state that failing to consider God in all our plans leads to the sin of omission. He writes:

James's reminder here is an important one. For we have a tendency, when we think of sin, to think only of those things we have done that we should not have done. I know my own confessions before the Lord tend to focus on these kinds of sins. But I should also consider those ways in which I have failed to do what the Lord has commanded me to do. Perhaps I did not reach out to help a "neighbor" in need; or perhaps I failed to bear witness to a co-worker when I had the opportunity. These also are sins for which I must seek God's forgiveness.<sup>2</sup>



### **Correlation: In All Your Ways, Acknowledge Him**

Numerous passages throughout the Bible address the two key topics that James 4:11–17 addresses: *we aren't in charge of others, and we aren't in charge of ourselves*. Carefully read the passages below, reflect upon them, and then summarize how they complement what you learned above.

*Proverbs 3:5–6*

*Matthew 7:1–6*



## Here's Something Worth Remembering

*James 4:11–17*

To plan for ourselves and to correct others are very noble and wise actions to take so long as we do them with the right attitude and in the right way. We plan with open hands in pursuit of God's will—not gleaming eyes of self-assurance. We correct with open hearts of love—not hammering words to drive people down.

### **Application: Do, Build, Give**

James wrote with vigor as he unfolded the truths that *God is in charge* and *we are not*. How important to remember for the new year ahead! To help you apply these truths, Pastor Chuck boiled down these truths into three points of application. Read each point. Reflect on your life as it relates to that point. Record one very specific way you wish to apply that point this year.

1) *Don't be satisfied merely knowing God's Word; do it.*

God wants us to know and do, to learn and apply, to reflect and act. What is one way you can apply this to your life this year that will foster your spiritual growth?

2) *Don't tear people down; build them up.*

God grants us the ability to speak. God reveals to us the truth of His ways. God gives us truth and words as a stewardship to love others, to build them up. What is one simple way you can begin incorporating this truth into your daily routine?



## Here's Something Worth Remembering

*James 4:11–17*

3) *Don't ignore God; give Him all the controls.*

Forgetting God leads to unwise decision making to say the least. It leads to distorted views of reality and concrete expectations that break when unmet. Acknowledging God in all our ways makes us wise planners receptive to His will. What is one basic way you can give God all the controls this year?



## Here's Something Worth Remembering

*James 4:11–17*



### A FINAL PRAYER

Horatio Bonar penned a beautiful hymn that extols God's control of our lives. You can take comfort in that fact. Ponder the hymn below to end your time in God's Word.

#### Thy Way, not Mine, O Lord

Thy way, not mine, O Lord,  
however dark it be;  
lead me by thine own hand,  
choose out the path for me.

Smooth let it be or rough,  
it will be still the best;  
winding or straight, it leads  
right onward to thy rest.

I dare not choose my lot;  
I would not if I might:  
choose thou for me, my God,  
so shall I walk aright.

The kingdom that I seek  
is thine, so let the way  
that leads to it be thine,  
else I must surely stray.

Take thou my cup, and it  
with joy or sorrow fill,  
as best to thee may seem;  
choose thou my good and ill.

Choose thou for me my friends,  
my sickness or my health;  
choose thou my cares for me,  
my poverty or wealth.

Not mine, not mine, the choice  
in things or great or small;  
be thou my guide, my strength,  
my wisdom, and my all.<sup>3</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

1. To review Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website [sts.insight.org](https://sts.insight.org) or grab a *copy* of the book for your library. Pastor Chuck also uses *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. It's one of his favorite Bible study tools.
2. Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 208.
3. Horatius Bonar, "Thy Way, not Mine, O Lord," Hymnary.org, [https://hymnary.org/text/thy\\_way\\_not\\_mine\\_o\\_lord](https://hymnary.org/text/thy_way_not_mine_o_lord).

