

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs

Choosing the Recipe

Pursuing the Treasures of Scripture

Selections from Psalm 119

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

MESSAGE MATE



LET'S BEGIN HERE

All of us have had the same experience. We sat and listened as a gifted teacher or preacher opened the vault of Scripture, revealed some of its hidden treasures, and used those truths to give us insight and direction for living. Naturally, we wondered and we asked: “How is that person able to do that? . . . How can someone dig out such insightful treasures and then, on top of that, help us grasp their relevance?” Our amazement is intensified when those same Scriptures seemed so unclear and confusing to us. We have often wondered if it would be possible for us to do that for ourselves . . . or does it require a special gift or maybe advanced training at a Bible school or seminary or perhaps mastering a number of resourceful books on theology? None of the above! You will be pleased to know that by putting into practice several practical techniques—*really, only four*—you can get well underway in carrying out your desire of pursuing the treasures on your own. You can actually prepare your own spiritual meals!



Whetting Your Appetite: Getting Started

Tucked deep into the Old Testament book of Psalms is a familiar but, at first glance, daunting psalm. For generations, Psalm 119 has been considered a treasure trove of truth about God, the nature and power of His Word, and the profound importance of joining faith to the principles and promises of God. It's important, as with any passage of Scripture, to begin by focusing on what you see.



Read Psalm 119:1–12.

What words or phrases do you see repeated in the first twelve verses of this psalm?

Quotable

*You need to know
the joy of discovery
and the pleasure
of doing your own
digging so that you
become spiritually
and biblically
self-sustaining.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Based on what you observe, what or who is the main focus of this psalm?

How many times does the psalmist make reference to the Lord? Write down a few examples.

The psalmist also emphasized the importance of the Word.

In these opening verses of Psalm 119, describe how the psalmist viewed the Word of God.

Write down the words the psalmist used to describe the Scriptures.

Using a Bible concordance (for a definition of this valuable Bible study resource, see “Some Helpful Tools” below) and look up the word *law*. Write down three or four references where that word is used. Look up those verses, and make some notes on the different ways *law* is used.



What emotions do you notice are expressed in these verses?

What emotions do you feel when thinking of the value of God's Word?

By observing the multiple use of the pronouns *You* and *Your* in reference to the Lord, we can determine that this psalm is primarily a prayer about the wonder and glory of His Law.



A CLOSER LOOK

Psalms Become the Language of the Heart

The book of Psalms in the Old Testament swells with examples of deep human emotion—from the triumphant declaration of godliness in Psalm 1, to the strident questions of a doubting king in Psalm 13, to the fortress-like confidence which flows from Psalm 46. Each reflects a real-time human experience and the language of a believer going with God in prayer. Image and metaphor become the language of appeal for the faithful—and in the psalms, we find a prayer language of our own as we wrestle with how to talk to God.

By becoming students of the Psalms, we can learn to pray and deepen our experience with the Lord. For instance, David cried out to the Lord in Psalm 42: “I hear the tumult of the raging seas / as your waves and surging tides sweep over me” (Psalm 42:7).

This is the language of a prayer of desperation—the words of one feeling as if life, like a mounting wave, threatens to overtake him.

Psalm 37 contrasts the fate of the wicked with the favor of those who put their trust in God. David, Israel's shepherd king, called on the Lord in prayer, rehearsing the promises of His goodness for “the one who delights in him” (37:23 NIV).

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Any believer struggling to find words to express the deepest loss or the highest praise needs only turn to the Psalms to find his or her voice and a holy script to bring to God in prayer.

Heart Essentials (Psalm 119:1–2, 11–12)

By observing the following key elements in the opening verses of Psalm 119, we discover certain conditions of the heart, or attitudes, essential for studying the Scriptures.

- *Personal integrity and purity*
Joyful are people of integrity,
who follow the instructions of the LORD. (Psalm 119:1)
- *A willingness to follow His commands*
Joyful are those who obey his laws
and search for him with all their hearts. (119:2)
- *A commitment of time for prayer and meditation*
I have hidden your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.
I praise you, O LORD;
teach me your decrees. (119:11–12)

Some Helpful Tools

Just as an archaeologist would never search for buried artifacts without the proper tools, we should never search the Scriptures without these helpful tools for study.

- A Bible. Make certain you have your own copy of the Scriptures in a translation you can understand.
- A Bible dictionary. This resource defines and provides in-depth information about key words and characters in the Bible.
- A concordance of the Bible. This is virtually an alphabetical listing of every major word in the Bible.
- A set of Bible maps. Most study Bibles today include a very reliable set of maps, typically as part of the end matter. You can also purchase a Bible atlas, which not only includes an extensive selection of maps but scholarly contextual information too.
- Students can also consult important tools online or use very helpful Bible-study software found at www.logos.com, www.biblegateway.com, www.soniclight.com, and many others.



Personal Promises

As you do the hard work of digging deep into the Scriptures, personal promises will emerge from your study. By the way, when you are searching the Scriptures, be on the lookout for promises God offers to you. So many passages in the Bible are full of these truths. Psalm 119 is no exception. You can gain . . .

- The promise of spiritual wisdom (Psalm 119:97–98)
- The promise of spiritual insight (119:99)
- The promise of spiritual understanding (119:33–40)

Ways We Absorb God's Truth

From our study of Psalm 119, we find five specific ways we absorb God's truth:

1. We absorb God's truth by hearing it (Romans 10:19).
2. We absorb God's truth by reading it (Psalm 119:18).
3. We absorb God's truth by studying it (2 Timothy 2:15).
4. We absorb God's truth by memorizing it (Psalm 119:13).
5. We absorb God's truth by meditating on it (Psalm 119:23).

Techniques That Reveal the Treasure

Now you're ready to dig into the truths of Scripture on your own. To begin to discover the riches of God's Word, you can use four simple techniques to help you in your study.

1. **Observation**—*What do I see?*
2. **Interpretation**—*What does it mean?*
3. **Correlation**—*How does it relate?*
4. **Application**—*What difference does it make?*



YOUR TURN IN THE KITCHEN

The *Searching the Scriptures* series is designed to help you not only gain a deeper and more substantive understanding of God's Word but perhaps more importantly to teach you how to dig deep into the Scriptures for yourself. Over time, you will develop a skill and a style that will serve you for a lifetime.

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Not unlike a skilled chef surveys the shelves of the kitchen for all the necessary and perfect ingredients for a delightful and nourishing meal, you can begin a process of learning to prepare spiritual meals for yourself. Ultimately, the goal will be for you to offer these truths to others in ways that are both palatable and enriching spiritually.

So before going any further, you need to put on your apron and ready yourself to try your hand at preparing a wonderful meal of biblical nourishment and encouragement. Are you ready to try your turn? Below are six practical exercises to get you started.

1. Take time to carefully read Psalm 119:1–40. Make a list of everything this psalm says about God’s Word. (Remember that God’s Word can also be referred to as commandments, laws, instructions, decrees, and regulations.) For example, “People who obey God’s Word are joyful” (verse 1), and “God has charged us to obey His commandments” (verse 4).

2. What kind of wisdom can a person get from studying God’s Word? Use Psalm 119:97–105 as your guide.

3. In any substantive Bible concordance, you will find multiple Bible verses that include the word *integrity*. If you have a concordance, find this word in your volume and scan the references it includes. Also, look up each of the following references in your Bible and note God’s calling for believers in each one:

- Deuteronomy 9:5
- 2 Samuel 22:26
- 1 Kings 9:4
- 2 Chronicles 19:7
- Psalm 119:1
- Proverbs 2:7, 21
- Proverbs 10:9, 29
- 1 Timothy 3:8



What do these verses teach you about the biblical call to a life of integrity?

4. As we learned in this message, it's helpful to look up words in the dictionary, especially in a Bible dictionary, to learn their meanings. Note the key word *sacrifice* in the following verse:

This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved
us and sent his Son as a *sacrifice* to take away our sins.

(1 John 4:10, emphasis added)

Turn to this verse in your own Bible and notice the word that is used. Some translations use “atonement” while others say “propitiation.” Look up the word used in your Bible in a Bible dictionary.

How is it defined?

Once you understand the meaning of this important word that illustrates what Jesus accomplished on the cross, describe *sacrifice* (or whatever word is used in your Bible) in your own words, using these passages to assist you.

Romans 3:25

Hebrews 2:17



1 John 2:2

5. A map can help you understand the context for the stories and events that take place in the Scriptures. Turn to the maps in the back of your Bible or to online maps. Locate one that traces the second journey of Paul. Follow that long journey with your finger, and as you do, take note of the places he traveled. You'll see that when he arrived at Troas in the western part of Asia Minor (the country known as Turkey today), he had to sail across the Aegean Sea to reach Europe. Once there, he went to Philippi and then on to Greece, where he continued to preach the gospel. Again, trace the remainder of his lengthy second journey with your finger. Pause and imagine how rugged his journey must have been as he traveled that distance in the first century.
6. Read and study Psalm 19:7–11. What promises are given to the believer who studies God's Word? (List at least five descriptions of God's Word from these verses.)



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, deepen my love for Your Word and give to me a greater desire to search the Scriptures on my own. Thank You for revealing Yourself in the pages of Your Word and in the person of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.



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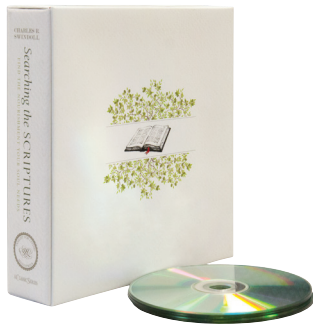
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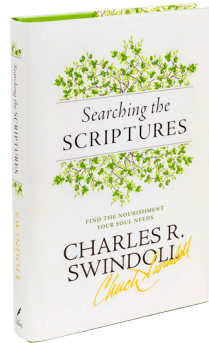
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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs

Reading the Ingredients

Observing the Text

Psalm 119:18; Proverbs 2:1–5

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

The Bible was never meant to be a mystery. God has not spoken to us, as some would claim, in hidden codes waiting to be deciphered through cryptic means. Rather, as the psalmist declares, the Word of God was given to be “a lamp to guide [our] feet and a light for [our] path” (Psalm 119:105). Though the Bible contains words that at times are hard to understand and names and places we often struggle to pronounce, the Scriptures flow with truths we can rely on, offering instruction and insight we desperately need. Still, you may be wondering, *How can I learn to understand and apply the Scriptures to my life?*

To begin with, we must learn the all-important technique of *observation*. Observation focuses on answering the question: *What do I see?* Truth be told, many may read words on the pages of the Bible, but most do not really observe what the words say. We’re going to learn how to do that in this study and then take some time to practice what we learn. Ready? Open your eyes! There’s so much to see.



Whetting Your Appetite: Getting Started

A good definition of *observation* would be taking careful note of what is presented by paying close attention to the details. Keep in mind, observation is different from *interpretation*. Observation answers the question, *What does it say?* Interpretation answers the question, *What does it mean?* A common mistake in studying the Scriptures is attempting to understand what the passage means before making a careful study of what the passage says by focusing on what you see.



Read Psalm 119:18.

What did the psalmist ask the Lord to do?

Quotable

*Too many people
read their Bibles
hurriedly so they
can get through the
chapter quickly.
Forget your speed-
reading course
when you come to a
serious study of the
Bible.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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What was the psalmist hoping to find in God's Word, based on this request?

Every time you begin to study a passage of Scripture, take a moment to pray this very prayer, asking the Lord to *open your eyes* so that you might see important details and principles you might otherwise easily overlook.

Now read Psalm 119:17 and 19. Write down some things you see about how the psalmist described himself and his purpose for studying God's Word.

How many different words did the psalmist use to refer to the Scriptures? What are they?

When we study God's Word, we want to see with our physical eyes, but we want the Lord to open our *spiritual* eyes too!



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A CLOSER LOOK

Seeing with Spiritual Eyes

The apostle Paul in his later years struggled with diminishing eyesight. He labored at times to write letters to the churches. He often enlisted the help of an editor who'd listen to him speak and then impart his words onto the page. How frustrating the aging process must have been for Paul whose zeal for the gospel only intensified as he grew older but was often hindered by the push back of old age. Perhaps that's why he offered a tender prayer for the believers at Ephesus when he wrote, "I pray that the *eyes of your heart* may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18 NASB, emphasis added). When our physical eyesight fails us, we can still see with the eyes of our hearts.

Learning to open our eyes to *observe* what the Scriptures say is the first step in opening the windows of our hearts so the brightness of God's truth can lead us from spiritual darkness into the transforming light of Christ.

Clues in the Text (Acts 1:8)

In this familiar text that begins the book of Acts, Luke, the writer, offered clues to how the story would unfold. In this single verse, there is much to be learned by paying close attention to the words Luke used to set the scene.

Take a moment to read Acts 1:8. Read it slowly and carefully, even aloud if you'd like.

Notice that the word *but* begins this verse. This is a *connecting* word that signals a contrast in thought. When you see a word such as *but* or *therefore* or *since*, it's a clue that what has just been written or said is linked closely to what will follow.



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Read Acts 1:4–7 carefully and aloud. What were the disciples doing when Jesus spoke these words? What was their location?

What did Jesus say in verse 7 that would have caused Him to use the contrasting word *but* in the very next verse?

Did Jesus use a positive or negative expression in verse 7?

What did Jesus tell the disciples they would receive in verse 8?

Did they already have what He promised, or would they receive it sometime in the future? How do you know? Explain your answer by writing down what you see in the verse.



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By paying close attention to what was happening and being described in Acts 1:8, you can learn some important principles of observation. We've already highlighted one clue: *contrast*. Here are some others you should watch for in your observing.

- *Contrast*

“But [contrast] you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes . . .”

- *Cause and Effect*

“But you will receive power [effect] when the Holy Spirit comes upon you [cause] . . .”

- *People and Places*

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit [God] comes upon you [the disciples]. And you [the disciples] will be my [Jesus] witnesses, telling people [unbelievers] about me [Jesus] everywhere—in Jerusalem [city], throughout Judea [region], in Samaria [region], and to the ends of the earth [all nations].”

You can begin to see the significance and expansive impact of Jesus' vision for the disciples simply by taking note of what you see—*observation*—in the text.

Four Ways to Read the Text with Open Eyes (Observation)

Below are four important principles for you to learn and ultimately to practice each time you sit down to search the Scriptures for yourself.

1. **Read as if you are reading the passage for the very first time.** This guards against the danger of familiarity. You might try reading the same passage in several different versions and then comparing expressions. Fresh eyes are the best eyes for searching the Scriptures.
2. **Read the passage as if you are reading a love letter from a special someone or dear friend.** That means you are reading with great care and paying close attention to every word, not skimming or speed reading.
3. **Read the passage like a detective**—looking for clues such as details, dialog, emotions expressed, etc. Take careful notes!
4. **Read as if you're in the text**—placing yourself in the story or in the context of when and where it was written. Imagine the scenes, chock full of sounds, smells, and impressions.

All of these principles will only enhance your observation technique and deepen your understanding of the passage.



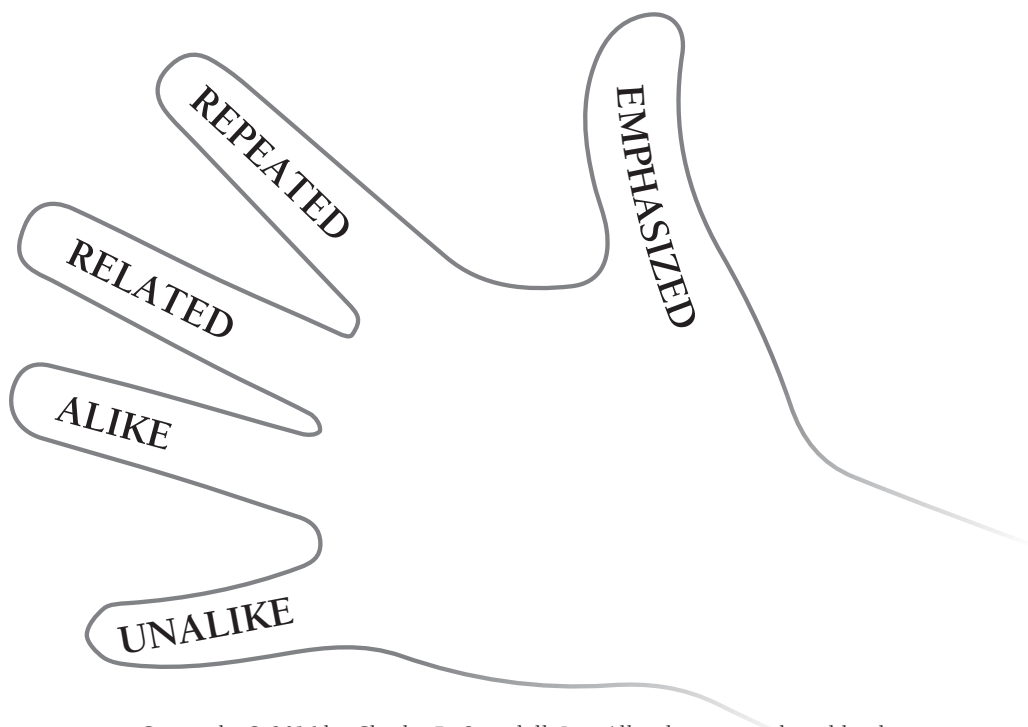
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YOUR TURN IN THE KITCHEN

Observation as a technique for searching the Scriptures is much like how reading the ingredients in a recipe is a careful process—one that's critical for ensuring that a meal turns out right. Similarly, it's helpful to develop your observation skills as you're studying the Scriptures. Here are several exercises for you to try:

1. One of the ways you can hone your general observation skills is by using all of your senses. Go to a familiar public place, such as a coffee shop, and sit there for thirty minutes. During that time, write down only the new observations you make about that place. Record what you observe through your five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch). What did you observe that you never noticed before? What did you learn about the power of observation?



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2. Look up John 3:16 in your Bible. Then take time to read all of chapter 3 to understand the context. In your journal or on a piece of paper, write down several observations from John 3:16. Look for the clues we used when studying Acts 1:8 (above). What do you see?

3. While observation begins with an individual verse, it's important to observe a passage of Scripture in context. This skill will be useful whether you're studying God's Word on your own or preparing a lesson or sermon. Slowly and carefully read Philippians 4:4–9, then write down a few observations. Take your time, following the instructions from this message. Write down what you observe.

4. It's important to observe the teachings of Jesus because they provide a foundation for our faith. One of Jesus' most common teaching methods was telling parables or short stories to present and explain His point. Read the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37. Make several observations about what you see in this parable and its context. Pay close attention to what prompted Jesus to tell this story.



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Reading the Ingredients

Observing the Text

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5. The Bible is full of stories where God interacts with people and nations. Learning how to observe a narrative well is important in both studying and teaching the Scriptures. Carefully read the story about Daniel in the lions' den in Daniel 6:1–28. Make several observations about this true account.

6. Practice using your imagination to picture a biblical scene in your head. Carefully read Isaiah 6:1–8, then describe how the seraphim might have looked. How might Isaiah have felt? Use the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) to describe the scene. How does creating this scene in your imagination affect your understanding of it and your ability to communicate it?

Additional tip: Develop a marking system in your Bible for observing the Scriptures. For instance, you could draw a box around connecting words (*and, but, therefore, since*); underline promises; and write “def” in the margin when you come to a word that is defined in the verse (such as *faith*, which is defined in Hebrews 11:1). Write down your system and use it consistently when you study the Scriptures. You may wish to use colored pens to mark words and/or verses in your Bible. Colors can help you emphasize certain words you want to remember. For example, you might want to underscore important commands in red or circle prominent names in blue or highlight significant questions in yellow. The possibilities are endless. Just remember to be consistent with your system.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, Your Word tells me that though people see what's on the outside, You see what's in my heart. Lord, please open the eyes of my heart so that I may know You in deeper and deeper ways. In the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.



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Reading the Ingredients *Observing the Text*

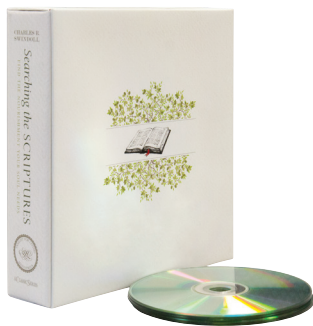
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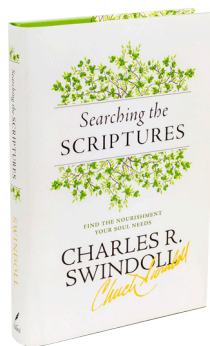
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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs

Understanding the Nutrients

Interpreting the Text

Psalms 119:27, 33–34; Acts 8:26–35

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

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

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



Whetting Your Appetite: Getting Started

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



Read Psalm 119:27.

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

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

Quotable

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

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Understanding the Nutrients

Interpreting the Text

Psalms 119:27, 33–34; Acts 8:26–35

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Why do you feel the psalmist made this request?

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

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

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

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

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



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

Key Questions to Interpreting the Scriptures

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

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

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

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





YOUR TURN IN THE KITCHEN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Understanding the Nutrients

Interpreting the Text

Psalms 119:27, 33–34; Acts 8:26–35

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MESSAGE MATE

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

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

Why do you believe he made this command?

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

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

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



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Understanding the Nutrients

Interpreting the Text

Psalms 119:27, 33–34; Acts 8:26–35

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MESSAGE MATE

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

What do we learn about Daniel?

Why do you think God used him so effectively?



A FINAL PRAYER

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



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Understanding the Nutrients *Interpreting the Text*

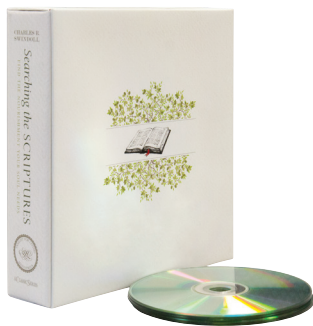
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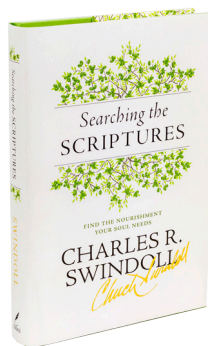
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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs

Comparing the Flavors

Correlating the Text

2 Peter 1:16–21; 3:15–18

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

MESSAGE MATE



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The process of searching the Scriptures can be a thrilling and satisfying experience. Once you learn the necessary techniques and put them into practice over the course of several studies, you will begin to feel an increasing joy and confidence in your work. An important technique in developing that confidence is *correlation*—comparing the passage you are studying with related passages throughout the Bible. Correlation deepens and adds much-needed context to your interpretation and ultimately to the application of the truths you discover.



Whetting Your Appetite: Getting Started

One of the many wonders of the Word of God is how it came into existence. The Bible is a collection of books and documents written by men who were supernaturally enabled by the Holy Spirit to record Scripture.

The apostle Peter wrote:

Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:20–21)

That's why this technique of *correlation* remains so critical for searching the Scriptures. Correlation recognizes that all Scripture is *God-breathed*, thereby establishing the credibility and value of the whole Bible. So comparing one verse—by highlighting a particularly significant word or truth—to another verse in a different section of the Bible, helps to broaden your understanding and to confirm your interpretation. That's how correlation works.

By the way, just in case you are skeptical about the value of including the technique of correlation in your study of the Scriptures, take a look at the master Teacher as He uses precisely the same approach!

Quotable

*We're learning
together how to get
in the Word of God
for ourselves.
We're learning how
to be spiritually
self-sustaining
through God's help
and, of course,
through a serious
and in-depth study
of His Word.*

—Charles R. Swindoll



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A CLOSER LOOK

Jesus Shines the Light of the New onto the Old

Jesus, the Light of the World, broke through the thick veil of four centuries of spiritual darkness which spanned the close of the Old Testament era to the dawn of the New. He came, John declared, as “one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone” (John 1:9).

Just as a handy flashlight brings much-needed clarity to the dark corners of a dusty attic, Jesus, as He taught, shined the light of understanding onto the shadowed, often misunderstood passages of the Hebrew Scriptures.

At times, Jesus went toe-to-toe with the harsh and judgmental religious clerics who routinely presented themselves as the ultimate theological authority. On one occasion, Jesus shone the light onto their erroneous claims regarding the truth of the resurrection when He said, “Your mistake is that you don’t know the Scriptures, and you don’t know the power of God. . . . Haven’t you ever read about this in the Scriptures? Long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, God said, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ So he is the God of the living, not the dead” (Matthew 22:29, 31–32).

Enter Jesus—the master of correlation!

By comparing what He was teaching to a misrepresented passage in the Old Testament book of Exodus, Jesus reversed centuries of bad teaching on what would soon emerge as the bedrock doctrine of the New Testament.

Jesus’ use of correlation literally brought to life—from the damp, darkened tomb of Pharisaic misinterpretation—the wonder and power of the resurrection!



Comparing the Flavors Correlating the Text

2 Peter 1:16–21; 3:15–18

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In light of Jesus' own use of correlation, take a few minutes to consider the following benefits of mastering the technique of correlation in your study of the Scriptures.

- **You will base your interpretation on clear discernment instead of vague opinions.** Everyone has an opinion about what a verse or passage “means to them.” But do any of those opinions matter? Absolutely not! What matters is God’s intent and what the divinely inspired writers were moved to communicate when they penned the Scriptures.
- **As your knowledge broadens, your understanding will deepen.** By comparing passages from throughout the whole Bible, just like Jesus did when correcting the Pharisees, you ensure greater accuracy in your determination of what the Bible means.
- **You will cultivate a reasonable and balanced approach to the Scriptures.** How easy—and dangerous—it is to become unyielding in your teaching of the Scriptures. Correlation provides a firewall to protect against such unnecessary dogmatism by guaranteeing a balanced and more gracious presentation of truth.
- **You will become able to separate truth from error quickly.** Correlation hones your ability to detect subtle errors in the teaching of others who promote incorrect ideas and who handle the Scriptures carelessly.



YOUR TURN IN THE KITCHEN

Just as comparing flavors and ingredients in great cooking takes time and experimentation, correlating the Scriptures works in the same way; you won’t really learn how to do it until you give it a try. The following exercises will help you begin. Enjoy!

1. Look up Mark 3:10–11, Luke 4:31–35, and Acts 16:16–18. Using the chart, “Demon Contact in the New Testament,” fill in the blank boxes with the details you observe. Take your time and work carefully. If you need to recreate the chart on a separate sheet for more room, feel free!



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DEMON CONTACT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

	MARK 3:10–11	LUKE 4:31–35	ACTS 16:16–18
VICTIM			
TORMENTOR			
VICTIM'S EXPERIENCE			
METHOD TO EXPEL DEMONS			
DEMON'S RESPONSE			
FINAL RESULT			

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2. What do you learn by correlating these three accounts of demon contact in the New Testament?



Comparing the Flavors *Correlating the Text*

2 Peter 1:16–21; 3:15–18

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3. What consistencies do you see when you look at each of the following categories represented in the three passages: the victim's experience, the demon's response, and the final outcome?

4. Take a few minutes to read John 3 and the story of Nicodemus. Then read carefully John 8:27–28 and John 12:31–36. How do these latter passages help you understand Jesus' words to Nicodemus in John 3 about being "born again"?

5. The apostle Paul revealed some important lessons on the power of prayer in Philippians 4:4–9. Take a few moments to read that passage and refresh your memory. Now it's time to correlate Paul's teaching with other key passages that will help you understand what Paul meant. Carefully read Matthew 6:5–7, James 4:3, and Psalm 66:18, and observe what they say. Write down three things you find that help you gain a broader understanding of Paul's statement on prayer in Philippians 4:4–9.



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2 Peter 1:16–21; 3:15–18

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6. In Luke 10:25–37, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan in response to a question about loving one's neighbor. Read Leviticus 19:15–18, Romans 13:8–10, and Galatians 5:14. How do these verses help you understand the importance of the parable of the Good Samaritan?
-
-
-



Helpful Hint

Locate a map that shows the topography of Israel in the back of your Bible or in a Bible atlas. Locate on the map the city of Jericho, just northeast of Jerusalem. Notice Jericho is down near the Jordan River, below sea level. Jerusalem, on the other hand, sits up high in a range of rugged mountains, nearly three thousand feet above sea level. The Samaritan in this parable was said to be “traveling down to Jericho” from Jerusalem. Think about the terrain of that area and the ruggedness of that journey.

Now that you've studied the important technique of correlation, make sure you add it as a necessary part of your process of searching the Scriptures. The more you practice, the more comfortable you will become in using the whole Bible in your study and ultimately your presentation of the truths you discover.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, strengthen my ability for searching the Scriptures by teaching me to use the whole Bible to bring perspective and understanding to what I'm studying. Thank You for Your Holy Spirit, who guides me and illumines my mind to the truths of Your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.



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Comparing the Flavors *Correlating the Text*

2 Peter 1:16–21; 3:15–18

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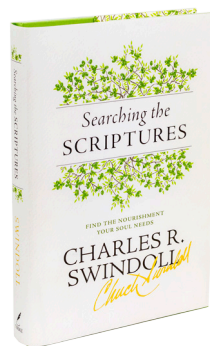
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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs

Adding the Spices:

Applying the Text

Psalm 139:1–7, 23–24

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

MESSAGE MATE



LET'S BEGIN HERE

In this study we will look at the crowning technique in the searching the Scriptures process—*application*. Failing to apply the truth of Scripture is like a chef gathering everything possible to prepare a wonderfully fulfilling meal, then leaving everything on the kitchen counter! No one is fed and the meal is wasted. Observation, interpretation, and correlation combine to prepare a nutritious spiritual meal—but it's incomplete if application is omitted. Application adds the final spices then delivers it to the waiting guests.



Whetting Your Appetite: Getting Started

In the beginning of the New Testament book of James we find one of the most potent metaphors for the importance of applying Scripture to our lives. James compared the Word of God to a mirror reflecting the unguarded truth about our lives.

By the way, *applying* basically means *obeying*. When we apply God's Word it simply means we are doing what God tells us to do. Let's take a closer look at how James put it. NOTE: Using either the notes that precede James' New Testament letter in your study Bible or using a commentary on James, check out the background from which James wrote.



Read James 1:22–26.

Remember: Before you read, ask the Lord to give you a fresh perspective on this familiar passage. Then, read it as if you're reading it for the very first time.

Why is the metaphor of the mirror so significant to the meaning of this passage?

Quotable

*If you are a teacher,
make certain that
you don't simply
teach the meaning
of whatever Bible
verses you are
considering—
always take the
time to spell out
in practical ways
how those verses
apply to life.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Adding the Spices: *Applying the Text*

Psalm 139:1–7, 23–24

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MESSAGE MATE

What results when we only listen to or read the Word but stop short of applying those truths (James 1:22)?

Based on this passage, how would you explain to someone the difference between simply listening to a message about the Bible and actually obeying the truths they hear?

Read James 1:25 again. What does God promise to us when we follow through with applying what we learn from the Word to our lives? Be specific.

Now read James 1:26–27. Using the analogy of the mirror, look closely at these two verses. Imagine your entire Christian life passing in review. Don't hesitate to be open and vulnerable as you answer the following questions.

What specifically does this passage say about the tongue? Allow these verses to say what they say.

Have you had trouble recently controlling words that come from your mouth? Have you uttered anything hurtful to someone? Have those words in any way been dishonoring to the Lord? Think deeply before answering.



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Adding the Spices: *Applying the Text*

Psalm 139:1–7, 23–24

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MESSAGE MATE

Have you participated in or initiated a conversation about someone else that could be construed as gossip? As you apply the image of the mirror to such talk, what do you learn about gossip from James 1:26?

How would you describe your attitude toward people in real need, such as widows and orphans, and the destitute and the homeless?

Write down a couple ways to apply the role of compassion in your life. Search your soul and be specific.

Following Through on Applying Truth

David's Psalm 139 is a triumphant celebration of both the divine attributes of Almighty God and the personal power of His Spirit in bringing those attributes to bear on our circumstances. Take some time in your study and digest this magnificent psalm. Read it aloud as if for the first time. Let the words speak afresh to you.

Like a grand concerto, Psalm 139 builds to a powerful crescendo as the psalmist applies these truths personally (notice the change in pronouns in verse 23). David was submitting himself to the most vulnerable and exacting scrutiny by the Holy Spirit when he prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you (literally, the original words are "any way of pain"), and lead me along the path of everlasting life" (Psalm 139:23–24). Such transparency! Such confidence and trust in the Lord! No wonder God called him "a man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22)!



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Adding the Spices: *Applying the Text*

Psalm 139:1–7, 23–24

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SCRIPTURES

MESSAGE MATE

What would it take to bring you to open the innermost vault of your affections and thoughts to the penetrating gaze of your Savior? Pause before you answer. Think about it: What else could you possibly engage in today that would be more effective or more helpful to bring you understanding? What is it that grips you in the vise of discouragement? When you apply this prayer to your situation, be ready for the Spirit to reveal “any way of pain” within you.

Write down your thoughts as you reflect on these things.

To release the full impact of Psalm 139:23–24, openly acknowledge the details of what you just described to the Lord. Boldly ask Him, as David did, to *test* your attitude toward your situation and to *examine* your motives thoroughly. Take your time. Implore the Lord to reveal anything in you that may be hindering or blocking the free flow and full control of His Spirit.

As you gain insight from Him, write down those discoveries. Below are some prompts to help get you started:

I need to _____.

I now realize _____.

I'm sorry I _____.

Lord, please _____.

Some Additional Tips on Applying Truth Practically

As you approach your study of the Scriptures, either in your personal times with the Lord or during your times of ministry preparation, keep these following questions in mind:

- Is there an example for me to follow?
- Is there a promise I need to claim?
- Is there a prayer I need to offer?
- Is there a sin I need to confess?
- Is there a command I need to obey?
- Is there a habit I need to break?
- Is there an attitude I must change?
- Is there a challenge I need to face?
- Is there a person I need to forgive?
- Is there a person from whom I need to seek forgiveness?



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YOUR TURN IN THE KITCHEN

Now it's your turn to try your hand at application. Are you ready? The following exercises will help you hone the technique of *application*—answering the question, “What difference does it make?”

1. The apostle Paul gave specific instructions about Christian behavior to the church in Ephesus. Read Ephesians 4:17–32. Pray for the Holy Spirit to make these verses clear to you. Remembering Psalm 139, search your heart for any wayward attitude or action. Return to observation. Write down things you notice in these verses that stand out as significant.

2. Next, use your Bible tools (concordance, Bible dictionary, commentary) to help you correctly interpret Ephesians 4:17–32. What is the main point of Paul's words?

3. Now we're ready to look elsewhere (that's *correlation!*). Can you find other passages with similar commands that tie in with Ephesians 4:17–32? Check out 1 Corinthians 5. Are there cross references in the margins or notes section of your study Bible? Look up a few of those passages and compare the readings. It may be helpful to consider how they may apply to your church.



A FINAL PRAYER

Lord, I'm so thankful for this lesson on the importance of application. I desire not only to hear Your Word, but also to apply what I'm learning from it. Thank you especially for Jesus, my Savior, who provides a living example of obedience and surrender to Your perfect will and Your powerful Word. In His great name I pray. Amen.



Adding the Spices: *Applying the Text*

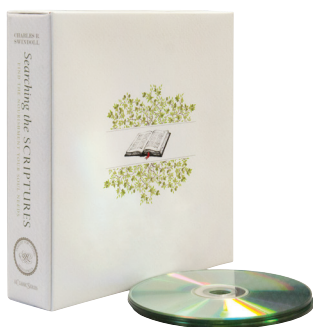
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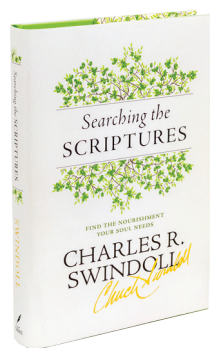
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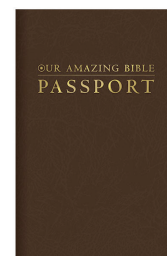
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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs

Setting the Table:

Preparing to Dig into God's Word

Joshua 1:1–9

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

MESSAGE MATE



LET'S BEGIN HERE

There is no substitute for thorough preparation, regardless of the task. Whether you're adding a deck onto the back of your home, planning to make a cross-country trek with four children and the family dog, or leading a group of short-term missionaries to the Congo, preparation is key to ensuring the best result.

The same is true in searching the Scriptures with the view of preparing a spiritual meal for those who need it. In preaching, for instance, this valuable process in preparing a sermon is called *exposition*—an essential approach to digging into God's Word with the purpose of sharing its truths with others.

HELPFUL HINT: For this study you will need a Bible atlas or study Bible with maps of the Old Testament and a Bible dictionary!



Whetting Your Appetite: Getting Started

Let's begin by looking closely at a definition of *exposition*.

Exposition is the process of learning and explaining the meaning and purpose of a given biblical text. This might happen in a sermon, in a classroom or small group setting, or anywhere people are gathered to read, receive, and apply principles from the Scriptures.

Exposition occurs when

- the biblical text is carefully observed, clearly understood, and interestingly explained;
- the text remains the central focus of attention throughout the delivery of a message;
- the text is illustrated and applied in keeping with today's real-world needs.

Quotable

*God has
written His will in
His Word, and
the keener you are
in the study and
preparation of
His Word, the better
equipped you will
be in teaching it
to others.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Setting the Table: *Preparing to Dig into God's Word*

Joshua 1:1–9

SEARCHING
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An Example from Biblical History

One of God's requirements for spiritual leadership of His people is that the leader be a student of the Word of God—not only committed to digging deeply in studying the Scriptures but exemplifying a life of full surrender and devotion to its commands and counsel.

Joshua—Moses' successor—was such a qualified leader. But early on, after Moses' death, he must have stepped into this role of leading Israel with certain trepidation and perhaps even anxiety.

The Lord must have known Joshua would require some encouragement in his new post when He spoke these words:

“Moses my servant is dead. Therefore, the time has come for you to lead these people, the Israelites, across the Jordan River into the land I am giving to them. I promise you what I promised Moses: ‘Wherever you set foot, you will be on land I have given you—from the Negev wilderness in the south to the Lebanon mountains in the north, from the Euphrates River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west, including all the land of the Hittites.’ No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. For I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you.” (Joshua 1:2–5)

God's promise to Joshua included a detailed description of the boundaries of the land. Find a map of the topography of Palestine either in the back of your study Bible or in a Bible atlas. Take some time to locate each of the places and divisions God mentions to Joshua: *Jordan River*, the *Negev wilderness*, the *Lebanon mountains*, the *Euphrates River*, the *Mediterranean Sea*. Now find your Bible dictionary and look up each area or body of water mentioned, and read the description of each.

What are some of your observations?

What are some things you learned for the first time about the boundaries of the Promised Land?



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Describe the varying types of terrain represented in each of these areas of the land. Why would terrain be significant?

Look up the word *Hittites* in your Bible dictionary. Where were they located? What kind of people were they? Why would they have been significant to mention here?

Now take some time to think about how you might illustrate, explain, and teach through the geography of the land as it is described in Joshua 1:2–4. Imagine your audience and how you would specifically communicate what you have discovered. Write down some notes below.

By the way, make your lesson personal by first thinking through how Joshua may have felt as he contemplated filling Moses' sandals. What emotions might he have been feeling? Think through how you would feel if you had to follow a leader of such immense reputation and remarkable stature. Share a story below of a time when you felt intimidated about a role you may have not felt fully prepared to fill.



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Setting the Table: *Preparing to Dig into God's Word*

Joshua 1:1–9

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YOUR TURN IN THE KITCHEN

Preparing to teach or preach through a biblical passage is much the same as setting the table on which to serve a delicious meal. But before you serve the meal you have prepared, you must first taste it for yourself to make certain everything is right. Serving spiritual meals is the same. First, we need to apply to our own lives what we have discovered and learned from the Scriptures before serving those truths to others. The following few exercises can serve as a “taste test” of sorts to make certain you are on the right track.

1. At the end of the last message, we worked on applying Ephesians 4:17–32. Now it's time to get ready to present what you learned. Think of a person or group you might be able to teach these truths to. Perhaps it's a Sunday school class, your small-group Bible study, or a youth group. Once you've identified your audience, plan how you will present the truths in Ephesians 4:17–32 in a way that is engaging and helpful.

Here are some questions to consider:

What can you do to help your students see the observations you made in the text?

What needs to be explained so they will understand the meaning of the verses? (NOTE: This would be a good time to consult a commentary on Ephesians for some important insights.)

What other passages should you highlight to show the correlation between Paul's commands and other Scripture passages? Would it be helpful to use an additional Bible version or a paraphrase?

What are three or four specific applications that would be most helpful for those you are teaching? Remember: Be as specific and relevant as possible.

Take your time as you prepare the lesson you will present to your audience. Your listeners will benefit when you patiently yet confidently lead them through the passage and present the truths you have discovered.



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Setting the Table: *Preparing to Dig into God's Word*

Joshua 1:1–9

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2. Now go back through one of the other passages we have studied so far in this series, and go through the same steps outlined above. You can use Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus in John 3, Paul's charge to the church at Philippi in Philippians 4:4–9, or Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37. Be sure to have an audience in mind to whom you will make your presentation.

Prepare whichever passage you choose by going through the questions. Press on with enthusiasm and great anticipation. Add color to your talk by consulting Bible dictionaries and commentaries that provide helpful and often unknown details about the people in the stories and the cultures in which they lived.

Remember: God's promise (as He made to Joshua) is that He will never leave you or forsake you. So take courage! You're going to be great at this!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I am humbled to know that You would use me and the insights You have taught me from the Scriptures to prepare a spiritually nourishing meal for others. Thank You for the privilege and the joy of serving You. Enable me through Your Holy Spirit to discover wonderful lessons for my own life that can also be shared with those You've called me to teach. I pray this in the name of Your Son, my Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.



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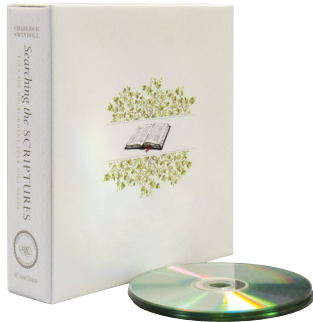
Joshua 1:1–9

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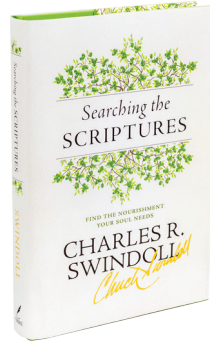
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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs

Tasting a Sample:

Learning Where We Fit in the Story

Mark 4:1–20

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

MESSAGE MATE



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The famous eighteenth-century poet Emily Dickinson mused:

Tell all the truth—but tell it slant.

In her poem by that same title, Dickinson declares that truth when told is best absorbed in story. The human mind thinks in pictures, and pictures help us find ourselves in the story being told. In this study we want to explore the very valuable technique in the searching the Scriptures process referred to as *learning where we fit in the story*.



Whetting Your Appetite: Getting Started

At the beginning of this series of studies we learned that the Bible is comprised of varying forms of literature—books of the law, historical books, which are mainly narrative in form, poetry, wisdom literature, prophecy, the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), and the epistles or letters. When Jesus taught, He often told a story to illustrate a particular truth He wanted His listeners to grasp. Jesus was the master at telling the whole truth, but telling it “slant” by telling a story, or *parable*.



Helpful Hint

Locate your Bible dictionary and look up the word *parable*. Read the definition carefully and turn to any examples of parables in the New Testament that are listed. Also, for fun, on a separate notepad, write down as many of the parables of Jesus recorded in the Gospels as you can recall, such as the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Quotable

*When you illustrate
a truth, you use an
illustration from the
familiar so that the
unfamiliar can be
made known.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Tasting a Sample: *Learning Where We Fit in the Story*

Mark 4:1–20

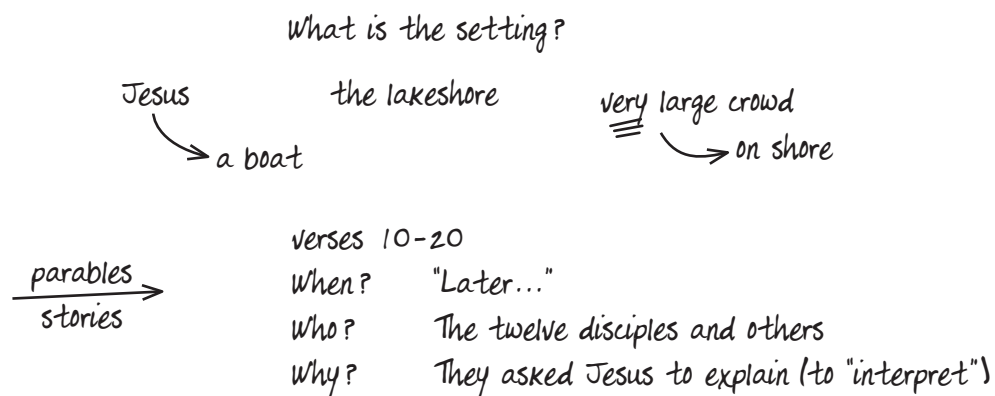
SEARCHING
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MESSAGE MATE

Using what you have learned about the searching the Scriptures process—primarily the techniques of *observation*, *interpretation*, *correlation*, and *application*—take a closer look at one of the classic stories in all the Scriptures. It's the occasion during Jesus' ministry where, from the bow of a small boat anchored just offshore on the Sea of Galilee, He told a *parable*—a story about a farmer sowing seed. And just in case you are worried about how to *interpret* Jesus' parable, there's no problem. He explained it for us in the same setting!

Turn to Mark 4 in the New Testament. Hold your place in chapter 4 and turn back a few pages to find if there is any introductory material provided for you just prior to chapter 1 of Mark's gospel. If so, read through that section and familiarize yourself with the reason why Mark wrote and if there are any major themes Mark emphasized.

As you begin your study of Mark 4, jot down observations, hints about the setting, and ideas about how you might begin to apply what you are discovering to your life. An example is included below.



Carefully and slowly read Mark 4:1–20. As you read the passage, write down anything you see that is significant. Or simply circle the word or detail in your Bible, or make a note in the margin.

What do you observe about the setting of this story? Who is there? How did Mark describe the crowd of people?



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Tasting a Sample: *Learning Where We Fit in the Story*

Mark 4:1–20

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MESSAGE MATE

This would be an excellent time to pause in your study and consult a map of Jesus' ministry. Locate it in the back of your study Bible or in a Bible atlas. Look for the region called *Galilee*. Do you see the Sea of Galilee? What kind of terrain do you think would have been around the lakeshore and surrounding region?



Helpful Hint

When Jesus told the parable of the farmer sowing seed, He likely had the surrounding grain field and rocky shoreline in mind. Look for clues in the text!

By the way, what kind of bird might there be in the area surrounding a large body of water such as the Sea of Galilee? Hold that thought for when you reach the section of Jesus' parable where He described how birds came to snatch away the farmer's seed.

Building Your Story

As you think about how you might teach the truths you discover from Mark 4, write down some notes about a story you could tell to your audience of a time you were by a lakeshore or large body of water and what you experienced. Did you walk a footpath? Were there large sand dunes filled with fluttering birds overhead? Describe the scene and then be prepared to insert that story in your lesson.

Now reread Mark 4:10–20. Read it slowly and with a mind to feel what perhaps the disciples were feeling at this point in the story. Remember: It's important to *find yourself in the story*.

If you don't understand something you are being taught, how do you respond?

How did the disciples respond when they realized they didn't really know what Jesus meant by the parable? What did they do?



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Tasting a Sample: *Learning Where We Fit in the Story*

Mark 4:1–20

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To find ourselves in the story, it helps to ask questions about the situation. For instance:

If you were to choose one of Jesus' types of soil to describe your current readiness to receive and obey God's Word, which soil sample would you choose? Why? Be as specific and transparent as you can in your response.

Who do you most identify with in the story? Would you be one of the disciples, following closely to Jesus but still having questions and maybe even a bit frustrated with His storytelling? Or would you fit more comfortably in the large crowd, preferring to remain anonymous and not yet really accountable but curious? Or do you identify more with the farmer, working hard to plant seeds of spiritual truth but frustrated that such a small percentage of those seeds ever really take root in people's lives? Take some time to think this through.

Perhaps by now you're beginning to see the power of finding yourself in the story, especially as it relates to drawing out the rich and penetrating meanings of these real-life scenarios portrayed in the Scriptures.



YOUR TURN IN THE KITCHEN

Now it's your turn to spend time thinking through some of these principles we studied together. Here are a few more exercises for you to complete to further hone your searching the Scriptures technique. Enjoy finding yourself in God's story!



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Tasting a Sample: *Learning Where We Fit in the Story*

Mark 4:1–20

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MESSAGE MATE

1. Read 1 Peter 1:13–2:3 slowly and thoughtfully, and observe the passage carefully. List the types of ungodly behaviors that Peter told believers to rid themselves of.

2. In what ways does Peter's teaching about the significance of obeying God's Word remind you of Jesus' parable of the farmer sowing seed in Mark 4?

3. Since we have tasted that the Lord is good, what nutrition did Peter suggest we are to crave, and why?

4. Read Isaiah 6:10–13. In this passage the prophet Isaiah was calling the people of Judah to surrender their self-reliance and submit to God. What are you to do (and not do) with your eyes, ears, and heart in order to respond in obedience to God's holy Word?

5. Try to find yourself in this scene where Isaiah was preaching. Given the state of your spiritual sensitivity at this point, how do you think you would respond to these convicting words? Explain your answer in the most honest way possible. (Remember: Your transparency will connect deeply with the audience with whom you are communicating truth.)



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Tasting a Sample: *Learning Where We Fit in the Story*

Mark 4:1–20

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MESSAGE MATE



A FINAL PRAYER

Lord, how thankful I am to be part of Your great story of salvation . . . that You broke into the dark setting of my stubborn life and rescued me from myself and from my own sinful ways. Teach me to find myself in the wonderful stories of Your Word. And by Your Spirit, transform me more and more into the likeness of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who prompts me to praise You in His name. Amen.



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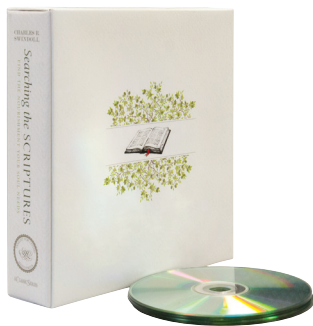
Mark 4:1–20

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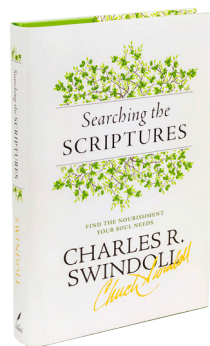
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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs

Feeding the Hungry: *Presenting the Truth*

Acts 17:16–34

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

MESSAGE MATE



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Imagine yourself preparing to deliver a message to a group of unbelieving college students. They have arrived on campus from a variety of backgrounds—some are eager to learn and expand their minds, others are present simply to “live it up” while they’re young. But you have been given a rare opportunity to share the claims of Scripture with these young minds. How do you prepare? What would you say? What would be your approach to first gain their hearing, then keep their attention to the end?



Whetting Your Appetite: Getting Started

In Acts 17, the apostle Paul found himself facing that kind of rare occasion. Having made his way through Athens, teeming with commerce and awash in idolatry, he most certainly had his work cut out for him. But using the techniques of observation (looking around and making mental notes of what he saw), interpretation (understanding how steeped in idol worship the Athenian people had become), and correlation (comparing the worldview of the Greek culture to the claims of the Old Testament), Paul ascended Mars Hill ready to apply the truth about God to a waiting and curious audience. It doesn't get any better than that!

Using Paul's encounter on Mars Hill as a model, we will learn several helpful principles for *putting everything together*. We'll see how Paul skillfully combined all the necessary ingredients in order to serve a nourishing spiritual meal to the Athenian elite who didn't even realize how starved they were for truth.

Let's allow the story to unfold on its own. Read carefully through Acts 17:16–34, which is printed on the next page for your convenience. Feel free to read this passage in your copy of the Scriptures if you prefer. You might consider reading it in a couple of translations to broaden your perspective.

Quotable

The apostle Paul built verbal bridges to lead his audience from where they were to the place he wanted them to go. You get there with words. Words that are interesting, understandable, reasonable, and logical. Build bridges with your words.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Feeding the Hungry: Presenting the Truth

Acts 17:16–34

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MESSAGE MATE

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city. ¹⁷ He went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there.

¹⁸ He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. When he told them about Jesus and his resurrection, they said, “What’s this babbler trying to say with these strange ideas he’s picked up?” Others said, “He seems to be preaching about some foreign gods.”

¹⁹ Then they took him to the high council of the city. “Come and tell us about this new teaching,” they said. ²⁰ “You are saying some rather strange things, and we want to know what it’s all about.” ²¹ (It should be explained that all the Athenians as well as the foreigners in Athens seemed to spend all their time discussing the latest ideas.)

²² So Paul, standing before the council, addressed them as follows: “Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way, ²³ for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: ‘To an Unknown God.’ This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I’m telling you about.

²⁴ “He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn’t live in man-made temples, ²⁵ and human hands can’t serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need. ²⁶ From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries.

²⁷ “His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ ²⁹ And since this is true, we shouldn’t think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone.

³⁰ “God overlooked people’s ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. ³¹ For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead.”

³² When they heard Paul speak about the resurrection of the dead, some laughed in contempt, but others said, “We want to hear more about this later.” ³³ That ended Paul’s discussion with them,

³⁴ but some joined him and became believers. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the council, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

What are some of your initial observations? Where was Paul? Based on this text, write down how you would describe the setting. Try to use words that employ all the major senses. What would Paul have heard? What aromas may he have encountered? What would he have seen?



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Feeding the Hungry: *Presenting the Truth*

Acts 17:16–34

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

MESSAGE MATE

How did it come about that Paul was able to address this audience of philosophers and scholars? Look closely at the text to explain your answer.

This would be a good time to consult a Bible dictionary. Look up the word *Athens*. Read through what is written about first-century Athens and the Greek culture of that time. Next look up *Mars Hill* and also the word *Areopagus*. Also, in a reliable Bible commentary on the book of Acts, find the section on Acts 17. Take a few minutes to read carefully what is written about the context in which Paul delivered this remarkable speech on Mars Hill. What details strike you as particularly interesting? Write down how you might incorporate those details into your lesson.

Who were the *Epicureans* and the *Stoics*? Take some time to do a little study on these two groups of philosophers. Look each one up in a Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia. Or do a Web search, typing into the search box “who were the Epicureans and Stoics on Mars Hill?”

Below, write down what you learn.

What characteristics of Epicurean and Stoic thought are present today?



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Feeding the Hungry: *Presenting the Truth*

Acts 17:16–34

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MESSAGE MATE

How might you begin to build a bridge of understanding from where your audience is to what they will discover in the Scriptures?

Now using Paul's approach, examine five specific strategies he used to build a bridge from where the Athenians were to where he wanted them to go.

1. *Paul started where they were* (Acts 17:22–23). Paul resisted heading straight to the biblical truth about the God he knew personally through his relationship with Jesus Christ. He started where his audience were by recognizing that they were “religious” and surrounded by many gods.
2. *Paul used the familiar to introduce the unfamiliar* (17:23–24). Paul turned his listeners' attention to the “god” they had designated as “unknown” by claiming a personal relationship with their unknown god, thus piquing their interest! This is the principle of building bridges with your words.
3. *Paul developed his theme clearly and logically* (17:24–28). Paul patiently and logically moved his listeners toward a clearer understanding of the fact that the god they had designated as “unknown” was actually the God who was knowable and desired a relationship with them! Notice Paul's logical progression:
 - God as Creator—He cannot be contained. (17:24)
 - God as Originator—He has no inherent needs. (17:25)
 - God is intelligent—He has a definite plan. (17:26–27)
 - God as Sustainer—He is not dependent on anything. (17:28)
4. *Paul held his audience's attention with relevant illustrations* (17:28). Paul drew from Greek literature and culture, even quoting a popular poet in order to illustrate the truths he proclaimed.



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Helpful Hint

When thinking about your audience, it would be helpful to do some personal study on their background and orientation. For instance, if you are preparing to speak to a group of 18- to 25-year-olds, spend some time reviewing the social media posts of college students you may know. Invite some college students from your church to lunch, and probe them with questions. Ask about what concerns them, who their heroes are, and what types of music they enjoy. Make some mental notes or write down your insights. These observations can become the source of valuable illustrations that will ensure your talk remains interesting and relevant.

5. *Paul applied his message personally and effectively* (Acts 17:29–31). Paul put himself in the robes and sandals of his listeners. Once he gained a hearing, he set the proverbial hook and proclaimed the truth of repentance and resurrection!



YOUR TURN IN THE KITCHEN

Feeding the hungry isn't always easy. Paul on Mars Hill made it look pretty easy, didn't he? But your experience may not always line up with all the conditions Paul faced in Athens. Yet, every audience has a unique mind-set worth considering as you prepare to present the Scriptures to them. Now it's your turn to put it all together.

1. Find an opportunity to present a passage of Scripture and its meaning to someone else or a group. We already discussed one possibility: a group of curious but unbelieving college students. Follow the model of *observation, interpretation, correlation, and application* as you make your way through the Scriptures. Remember to find yourself in the story and search out relevant and personal illustrations.
2. Carefully consider your audience, using the example of Paul preaching to the Athenian audience on Mars Hill in Acts 17. Make your way back through the five strategies Paul used and that we discussed in this message.



Feeding the Hungry: *Presenting the Truth*

Acts 17:16–34

SEARCHING
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MESSAGE MATE

- Remember the spiritual maturity level of your listeners. Are they mature believers, new Christians, unbelieving but interested seekers?
- Use the familiar to build a bridge to the unfamiliar. Use everyday examples to connect your listeners to something they have never considered.
- Develop your theme carefully and logically. Keep your progression clear and simple.
- Use personal stories and illustrations to keep your lesson interesting. Tie the truths of God's Word directly to your listeners so they feel the impact on their own lives.
- Apply the message personally and effectively. Call your listeners to action and encourage them to respond.

Don't forget to pray! What you ultimately need and desire is for God to prepare the hearts of your listeners prior to their encounter with His Word and to move them to respond in obedience and surrender once they have heard the message from the Scriptures! Don't forget to offer to the Lord a prayer of thanksgiving for His faithfulness.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the wonderful privilege of searching the Scriptures and applying what I learn to my life. I ask that You will graciously prepare me to prepare nutritious and life-changing spiritual meals for those You have called me to serve. Glorify Your name through the ministry of Your Word, and draw those who don't yet know and love You to bring their lives willingly and humbly to Your Son, Jesus Christ. In His great name I pray. Amen.

Bon appétit!



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Acts 17:16–34

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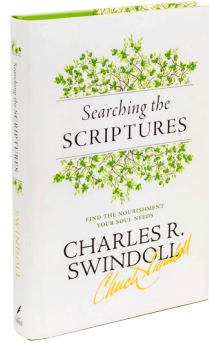
MESSAGE MATE



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



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