

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY ONE

Let's Meet the King

Selections from Matthew

My hope as we undertake this series on Matthew, which will be lengthy and detailed, is that we will get new glimpses of Jesus, the Son of the Living God, and that our love for Him will intensify as time passes.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

OUR God is full of surprises! He delights in adding a touch of the unexpected to whatever He does. For instance, when He devised His redemption plan, He kept it a mystery, hidden in Himself, until the time of its unveiling. According to 1 Peter 1:12, even the angels didn't know what to expect!

At just the right moment, the King of all creation presented Himself to the world as Savior. A surprise to us all, He did so in the form of a helpless baby born in a stable, not a palace; to peasants, not royals.

Yet, that arrival wasn't the only wonder. He launched His ministry with a ragtag assortment of fishermen, zealots, and outsiders—not the elite or educated. He presented Himself to His own people as their King and Messiah, but they rejected Him and had Him crucified. Then the most unexpected of all happened . . . *Jesus resurrected!*

Surprise after surprise—and they all were part of His plan.

In our study of Matthew, we'll become very acquainted with this God of surprises. We'll hear His astonishing teaching, watch how He dwells among the poor, praise how He invites the outcast to feast at His table, weep over His unjust death, and rejoice at His shocking resurrection.



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Let's Meet the King
Selections from Matthew

At the end, we'll join our risen King on the Galilean mountaintop where He commanded us to "go and make disciples of all the nations" while assuring us that "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19–20). May Pastor Chuck Swindoll's series on Matthew spark a fire in your soul to love, obey, worship, and share Christ more deeply than you ever have.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Use the prayer below as your own petition to ready your heart for study.

Father of grace and strength, be with me now to bless my time in Your Word. How precious is Your Word to me. Use it to grow my understanding of Your surprising work in Christ as I draw near to You through Him. In Him alone do I trust. Before Him alone do I bow. For Him alone do I live. Yet, what countless depths of His person and work remain unexplored. So, take me deeper. Increase my awe. For Christ's glory, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Imagine walking up to Leonardo da Vinci's twenty-nine-foot-wide painting, *The Last Supper*. After taking in the whole, only then do you focus on the table bread, the facial expressions, or the disciples' postures. It's best to study any book of the Bible the same way, taking in the big picture before examining each brush stroke. First, let's compare Matthew with the other gospels then overview Matthew itself.¹

COMPARISON OF THE FOUR GOSPELS				
	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Portrait of Jesus	Promised King	Suffering Servant	Perfect Man	God the Son
Original Audience	Jews	Romans	Greeks	The World
Author	Tax collector, one of the twelve disciples	Close associate of and assistant to the disciples	Gentile physician, early convert	Fisherman, one of the twelve disciples
Theme	The messianic King has come, fulfilling Old Testament promises.	The Son of God has come to seek, to serve, and to save.	The Son of Man has come to redeem all of humanity.	The eternal Son of God has become incarnate.
Response	Worship Him!	Follow Him!	Imitate Him!	Believe in Him!



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

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Based on Pastor Chuck's chart, do you notice anything surprising about Matthew's gospel?

It's the story of the great King who left the riches of heaven to become a commoner on this earth that we, the commoners, after believing in Him, would become the regal children in His family. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Let's Meet the King

Selections from Matthew

Read an introduction to Matthew's gospel. You can find one in your Bible dictionary, Pastor Chuck's [commentary on Matthew](#) pages 3–10, or at insight.org. Summarize what you find to be especially helpful?

Lastly, we recommend you grab a copy of Pastor Chuck's book [Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs](#) if you don't have one in your library.² In it, Pastor Chuck unfolds his Bible study method—the same method we use in these studies to help you prepare your own spiritual meals.



Observation: The King of Kings

In observation, we focus on the words of the text. We read—unhurriedly, carefully, repeatedly, meditatively—what God says. Knowing comes first. Then understanding.

Observe [Matthew 2:1–4](#). What two titles did Jesus receive?

1. _____
2. _____

What do you think is the significance of these wise men—delegates from a foreign country—seeking Jesus as “king of the Jews”?



Let's Meet the King

Selections from Matthew

Observe [Matthew 7:28–29](#). What does this passage teach us about Jesus' reception?

Observe [Matthew 16:13–28](#). What does this passage say about Jesus' identity?

Observe [Matthew 28:16–20](#). The final words of Jesus. How did Matthew decisively and climactically convey Jesus' kingly authority and divine nature in this passage?

We don't have all authority, He does. For anyone to say, "I have all authority over heaven and earth," would be a fool. But not Jesus. He's made the heavens and the earth. None of it is unfamiliar to Him. He's the one in full authority, worthy of our trust.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

He arrived. Many received Him. Some opposed and eventually killed Him. But that didn't end the story. Jesus resurrected and triumphed. He has ascended to God's right hand in heaven and now reigns as King of Kings, our deliverer and ruler.



Let's Meet the King

Selections from Matthew



Interpretation: The Gospel Writer

What happened in the apostle Matthew's life that led him to record Jesus' story? We explore that now in a few references to him individually in the New Testament.

Review *Matthew 9:9–10; 10:1–4; Mark 2:14; 3:13–19; Luke 5:29; 6:12–15*.

What other name did Matthew have? _____

Which disciple was likely Matthew's brother? _____

What was Matthew's occupation before Jesus called him? _____

How did Matthew respond to Jesus' call? _____

What event did Matthew host following his call from Jesus? _____

The Jews of Jesus' day despised tax collectors, who were like mafia bosses extorting more money from people than they actually owed. They viewed tax collectors as traitors and puppets of Rome, linking them with the worst of sinners. "The Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at His disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?'" (Luke 5:30 NASB).

James, the probable brother of Matthew and a loyal Jew, probably despised Matthew for his vocation.

Record how Jesus' influence likely changed the dynamic of Matthew and James' relationship.



Let's Meet the King

Selections from Matthew

Explain how Matthew's profession would have aided his written account of Jesus.

Why four? Why not one? Why wouldn't we just be satisfied with one gospel? Well, these four give us four eyewitness accounts. These four let us see different flavors, different shadings, different scenes from each perspective. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

No matter your past. Regardless your skills. You'll rarely anticipate how God will use you. God redeems. Matthew never expected the King of Kings to walk by his tax booth that day. But He did. Matthew left the old to receive the new. He then penned one of the most important texts in history.



Correlation: The Kingdom

Matthew uses the word *kingdom* fifty-five times in his gospel. Thirty-two times, the word appears in the phrase *kingdom of heaven* which is a reverent, Jewish phrase often meaning “God” or the blissful realm of “God’s rule.” Read the verses below and record how they help us understand Jesus’ kingdom.

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



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“And I tell you this, that many Gentiles will come from all over the world—from east and west—and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven. But many Israelites—those for whom the Kingdom was prepared—will be thrown into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 8:11–12)

About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” . . . Then he said, “I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.” (Matthew 18:1, 3–4)

“And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:14)

Jesus' kingdom does not mirror the kingdoms of this world. It will not fade, or weaken, or cower, or surrender, or fail, or darken. It knows no tyranny, or oppression, or chaos, or lawlessness. Only joy and peace, victory and light. Its nature and destiny rest on its King.



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Let's Meet the King

Selections from Matthew



Application: Your King

The thematic flow of Matthew's narrative follows the chronological seasons of Christ's life and offers insightful application to our lives:

1. *When we were born again, the King arrived in our lives.* Life receives a freshness from the newness of our relationship with Jesus.
2. *When we began to grow spiritually, the King demonstrated His power in us.* We live empowered, saying no to sin and saying yes to God's ways.
3. *As growth accelerated, opposition and spiritual testing increased around us.* Satan, this world, and our indwelling sin assault our growth.
4. *When all seems lost, Jesus arises victorious in our lives as He did over the grave.* We stay the course, not swerving left or right; and we overcome the obstacles until, eventually, we see Jesus face to face, and He gives us the crown of life.

Where do you find yourself in the journey? Why? What is one step you can take to grow as a citizen of God's kingdom and ambassador of the King?

The arrival of Jesus in Bethlehem jolted the world. It jarred us when He entered our lives. How shocking His radical goodness, how earthshaking His wisdom, and how spiritually electrifying His presence! Truly, Jesus still proves to be the God of surprises.



Let's Meet the King

Selections from Matthew



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for arriving in my life, redirecting my course, and giving me a place in Your royal family. Thank You for working through Matthew's pen to preserve for us the person, work, and words of King Jesus, Your Son, our Lord. I want to know Him more deeply, trust Him more fully, and follow Him more faithfully. In His strong name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 7.
2. You can also learn about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](https://www.insight.org/how-to-study-the-bible-for-yourself)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY TWO

The Genesis of Jesus

Matthew 1:1–17

Hopefully, you will not see this genealogical passage as boring and uninteresting. It is in fact an essential document that has its purpose in being included in the pages of Scripture.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

FEW events spark more celebration than a parade with tickertape flung from windows and celebrities waving to cheering crowds. Matthew kicks off his gospel with a parade of sorts—a procession of Old Testament dignitaries who follow one after the other in the genealogy of Jesus.

Leading Matthew's parade is Abraham and his son and grandson, Isaac and Jacob, the family from whom all Jews trace their lineage. Partway along, riding in a royal coach, comes King David, the progenitor of the messianic line. Dozens more people pass in review, some famous and some lesser known but all from the same bloodline and all celebrating and pointing to Jesus, the Hero of the parade.

At first reading, we might yawn at Matthew's long list of names, but this royal rollcall was necessary to legitimize Jesus' messianic claim. Commentator N. T. Wright helps us understand the significance of Jesus' genealogy:

It is important not to think that this is a waste of time. For many cultures ancient and modern, and certainly in the Jewish world of Matthew's day, this genealogy was the equivalent of a roll of drums, a fanfare of trumpets, and a town crier calling for attention. Any first-century Jew would find this family tree both impressive and compelling.¹

Let's grab a curbside seat and join the adoring crowds who gaze with wonder at the people in Jesus' genealogy. After all, who can resist a parade, and this one is the best!



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STUDY TWO

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

The Genesis of Jesus

Matthew 1:1–17



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Let the words of this prayer be your heart's expression to God as you embark upon this study.

Father, Your Words are more precious than gold—even more precious than all the benefits the finest gold can bring. Yes, more precious than honey, sweeter to my soul than the best of delicacies to my tongue. Thank You for speaking. Thank You for helping me understand. Bring me closer to You and increase my confidence in You to use me, ordinary and fallen me. For I am called by Your grace to walk in Your grace. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Matthew penned his purpose for writing in the very first line of his gospel: “This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus *the Messiah*” (Matthew 1:1, emphasis added). Matthew was a Jew writing to persuade Jews that, indeed, Jesus was the Messiah the prophets foretold. Before Matthew could tell about the life of Jesus, he had to validate Jesus' royal pedigree.²



Observation: The Beginning

Throughout our studies, we'll use the same method for understanding and applying the Bible, as described in Pastor Chuck Swindoll's book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*.³ We begin with observation.

Read [Matthew 1:1–17](#). Right away, you will notice the phrase, “the father of,” which is a standard formula in genealogies. As you read, mark any variations to the formula. Matthew intended these points to stand out. Note especially what Matthew repeated in 1:1 and 1:17.



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The Genesis of Jesus

Matthew 1:1–17

List the four key persons or events that Matthew uses to divide history.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

By tracing the pedigree through David all the way back to Abraham, Jesus' royal lineage is established. You know that's important because he mentions it more than once.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

List the five women mentioned in the passage.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Only two people receive titles in this passage. Matthew twice referred to Jesus as *Messiah*. And in 1:6, Matthew did not ho-hum through David but emphasized *King* David. The royalty and power and divine import that clothed David will also clothe his regal descendant, Jesus.



Interpretation: The Messiah

On the *Messiah*, or “Anointed One,” all the hopes of Israel rested. The advent of the Messiah would ignite a new work of God—a work of redemption and restoration, peace and prosperity.

In Matthew's short genealogy, He states, in effect, “Yes, the only God has been our God, the God of Israel, preparing us for such a time as this: the Messiah's arrival. *Get ready!*”



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The Genesis of Jesus

Matthew 1:1–17

Matthew specifically connects Jesus to Abraham and David. To understand the reasons, first, review God's call on Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3:

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:1–3)

In one word, summarize the promise God gave to Abraham: _____

Second, review God's promises to David in 2 Samuel 7:12–16:

"For when you die and are buried with your ancestors, I will raise up one of your descendants, your own offspring, and I will make his kingdom strong. . . . And I will secure his royal throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. . . . Your house and your kingdom will continue before me for all time, and your throne will be secure forever." (2 Samuel 7:12–14, 16)

What did God's promises emphasize to David?

What did Matthew indicate, then, by stating that Jesus is heir to both Abraham and David?



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The Genesis of Jesus

Matthew 1:1–17

Of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba (Uriah's wife), Pastor Chuck wrote in his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*:

All of them entered the messianic lineage through less-than-ideal means. Tamar feigned being a prostitute to sleep with her father-in-law. Rahab was a prostitute prior to being incorporated into the community of Israel. Ruth came from Moab, a country often at odds with Israel. And Bathsheba became the wife of David only after David committed adultery with her and arranged for her husband to be killed. Think about it. Each of these women would have been viewed by pious Jewish readers as “tainted” or “stained” in some way.⁴

Their inclusion signifies God's grace through their circumstances. Now think of the fifth woman, Mary. Imagine her pregnancy and the likely social stigma that accompanied it. By including the first four women in the genealogy, how did Matthew prepare his readers for God's work through Mary?

Everyone in this list are folks just like us. They're just sinners that made their way on the list. By His grace He includes all these sinful people, so in the list that leads up to Jesus, we don't have a list of perfection, we have a list of reality. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The dark years of waiting gave way to a new dawn of light that would bring good news of great joy for all the people.



The Genesis of Jesus

Matthew 1:1–17



Correlation: The Exile

Matthew's genealogy radiates excitement in contrast to the sting of exile. Many Israelites wrestled with God during their anguish in Babylon. Read [Psalm 137:1–4](#) and write down the psalmist's description of their desperate condition.

Contrasting the white flag of surrender in Psalm 137, Isaiah waves a banner of joy that will accompany Israel's return from exile. Read [Isaiah 52:7–12](#) and write down how God promised to turn Israel's wailing into singing. How did Isaiah prophesy the Israelites' joy at the end of exile? What would God do to end exile?

While God had returned His people to the land in the 500s BC, full restoration would have to come later. The Jews of Matthew's day awaited something spectacular, and that moment arrived when "Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah" (Matthew 1:16).



Application: The Call

Reflect on the rollcall of ordinary folks in Jesus' genealogy. They inhabited this world as we do—frail and foolish humans with lives spoiled by sin and marred by guilt. But God used them. Though believers have been adopted into Christ's family, had you lived back then, God might have selected you to be part of Jesus' lineage. *What a thought!*



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The Genesis of Jesus

Matthew 1:1–17

How can you find encouragement from this gracious, redemptive aspect of God's character?

Now, how can you let this truth empower you in your spiritual service?

Even a genealogy, mundane to our modern-day ears, sounds a trumpet to God's grace. No matter where we turn in the canon of Scripture, we find such grace sitting and waiting, bidding us to receive it, enjoy it, and share it.



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STUDY TWO

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The Genesis of Jesus

Matthew 1:1–17



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I find Your ways truly unfathomable. In people, short-lived and fragile, You work Your eternal, unshakable plan. I confess my own frailty. I acknowledge my wayward heart. By nature, I forget Your grace and narrow my vision, so keep me ever mindful of Your good gifts and global plan. Use me as You will. In Jesus' royal name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1–15* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 2. As quoted in Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 15.
2. Some in Matthew's audience may have doubted Jesus' pedigree, like the people in Nazareth who scoffed that Jesus was just the son of a carpenter (*Matthew 13:54–57*).
3. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](https://www.insight.org/how-to-study-the-bible-for-yourself)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org). This page provides you an introduction to four important methods in Bible study—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—along with other helpful study tips.
4. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 17.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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STUDY THREE

Try Standing in Joseph's Sandals

Matthew 1:18–25

Think about this outstanding individual, Joseph. He fully accepted what he could never fully explain.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

JESUS said, “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me” (Matthew 5:11 NASB).

That blessing would fall first upon the subject of this study, Joseph. He received the blessing before Jesus ever spoke it. He received it amid a situation unlike any other situation of those who received it.

But he did receive it. It took an angel to convince him. Surely many wagged their heads at Joseph, scorning Mary's pregnancy. With courage, integrity, and faith, craftsman Joseph willingly bore the reproach of Christ without fully comprehending the divine plan.

We don't know much about Joseph. Yet, we do know that this strong man of quiet faith proves worthy of our contemplation—our task for this study—and makes him worthy of our emulation—our goal for this study.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Make the prayer below your own before studying God's Word.

Father, thank You for the privilege of having Your Word. How precious and comforting it is to me. Please give me the patience, insight, and sensitivity to learn and receive it that I may fully benefit from it. As I read of a courageous couple who exercised great faith, allow me to stand in awe of Your Work and walk in the same steps of faith. In the wondrous name of Christ, amen.



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Try Standing in Joseph's Sandals

Matthew 1:18–25



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In his book, *Searching the Scriptures*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll helps us understand why we take time when we read God's Word:

Most people read their Bible in a hurry so they can get through an entire chapter in ten or fifteen minutes. But if you wish to become a serious student of the Bible, you need to forget your speed-reading course. There's no rush.¹

Remember that you'll profit from these studies more so if you do them slowly in multiple sittings rather than hurriedly in just one.



Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

Just as we need tools in the kitchen to help us cook our meals, we need Bible study tools to help us feed ourselves God's Word. An essential tool for our studies is Pastor Chuck's two-volume commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15* and *Insights on Matthew 16–28*.²



Observation: A Revelation in a Dream

A helpful practice in observing a text is to put yourself in the key character's "sandals." Imagine Joseph hearing news that his betrothed bride is pregnant. If you were in Joseph's position, what thoughts and feelings would you have? Imagine the room where Joseph slept and the mat on which he was laying when the angel appeared to him in a dream. What would you have done when you woke from the dream? Let's see what Joseph did.

Read [Matthew 1:18–25](#). In the space below, write down your observations.



Try Standing in Joseph's Sandals

Matthew 1:18–25

How do verses 1:18a and 1:22–23 differ from the rest of the passage? How do they relate to the other verses in the passage?

How does 1:20–21 (Joseph's dream) relate to 1:24–25 (Joseph's response)?

So Joseph awakens from his dream. And at this point he demonstrates what great character he has. He takes Mary as his wife . . . and what a treasured thing their relationship was! The secret they had between themselves was now shared deeply. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

How does the confirmation of Mary's virginity when she conceived Jesus in Matthew 1:18 relate to Isaiah 7:14 quoted in Matthew 1:23?

Matthew gave us a peek into a most exquisite event . . . where God's Spirit would "overshadow" a young virgin (Luke 1:35) . . . where the Divine took human DNA . . . where God called blue-collar, callous-handed Joseph of Nazareth, inconsequential in the world's eyes, to raise the Son of God.



Try Standing in Joseph's Sandals

Matthew 1:18–25



Interpretation: Joseph's Character

In a parallel passage, Luke recorded Mary's visit from an angel named Gabriel, who told Mary that she would "conceive and give birth to a son" (Luke 1:31). When she responded, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin" (1:34), Gabriel replied:

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age!" . . . A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to [be with Elizabeth]." (Luke 1:35–37, 39)

Likely, in those "few days," Mary relayed the story of her pregnancy and the angel's visit to Joseph, who was betrothed to Mary at the time of her pregnancy. Read about ancient Jewish betrothal practices on page 25 of Pastor Chuck's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–17*, and record the intriguing and enlightening facts you discover.

In Joseph's eyes, Mary's apparent infidelity left him three options:

1. Marry her despite her seeming immorality—which would break Jewish law
2. Publicly divorce her, bringing her a lifetime of shame (Deuteronomy 22:23–24)
3. Quietly divorce her, protecting his character and her reputation



Try Standing in Joseph's Sandals

Matthew 1:18–25

“As he considered” these things, the angel appeared to Joseph (Matthew 1:20). What does Joseph’s response (1:24–25) to the angel’s commands (1:20–21) reveal about his character?

Joseph would know the truth of it, but to this very day none of us can explain it. For it's a miracle. And if you can explain virginal conception, it isn't a miracle. But it is. Christ's conception is beyond explanation, and in many ways, it's beyond our ability to understand.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Let your imagination explore Joseph’s life. Record below the social sneering he must have carried during Mary’s pregnancy and Jesus’ upbringing.³

What did the angel tell Joseph to name the Son, and why, according to Matthew 1:21? What name from Isaiah’s prophecy did Matthew ascribe to Jesus, and why, according to Matthew 1:23? What do these names tell us about God and God’s intent?



Try Standing in Joseph's Sandals

Matthew 1:18–25

At this crucial moment, young Mary needed more than a husband. She needed an advocate. In Joseph—a man of humility and courage—she had her protector who stood by her under the wedding canopy, kept her a virgin until the birth of Jesus, and devoted himself to her the rest of his life.⁴



Correlation: Immanuel in Isaiah

Matthew interweaved Old Testament quotes in Jesus' birth narrative to interpret the divine meaning of Christ's earthly origins and to show how Jesus' birth continues the story begun in the Old Testament. Read [Isaiah 7:1–25](#) to get the context of the quote Matthew used to support Mary's miraculous conception.

Summarize what frightened King Ahaz, what he refused, and what sign God gave him.

The fulfillment of the prophecy would occur in the near future and the distant future. Isaiah explained the “near” fulfillment in the birth of the woman's son in [Isaiah 8:3–4](#) and the “distant” fulfillment in the birth of the future messiah in [9:6–7](#).

Read pages 27–29 of Pastor Chuck's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, for a detailed explanation of Isaiah's prophecy. In the space below, record what you discover.

Immanuel—God with us. In Christ, the Lord has returned to His people by becoming incarnate as Messiah, the agent of salvation. Through Christ, Yahweh will draw all nations to Himself.



Try Standing in Joseph's Sandals

Matthew 1:18–25



Application: Walking in Joseph's Footsteps

Joseph's faith led him through a life-altering decision to endure the criticism of others and to advocate on behalf of Mary. Do you find yourself in one of these three situations?

1. *Has God brought you to a place in which you must make a tough decision?*
2. *Will you have to bear the ignorant judgment of others for doing what is right?*
3. *Do you need to support someone bearing immense troubles?*

Pray through the questions. Write about your situation and what tough decision God may be calling you to make in faith.

As I look back over my life, some of the best decisions I ever made were some of the hardest decisions I had to make. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Joseph knew far less of God's messianic plan than we know today. His simplicity of devotion and conviction shines through the pages of Scripture as a model worth emulating because we today, like him then, worship the same God who calls us to act with the same courage.



Try Standing in Joseph's Sandals

Matthew 1:18–25



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I stand grateful for the passage You have preserved in Your Word. I stand in awe of the birth of Your Son and the people of faith whom You brought together to raise Jesus from a little child to become my Prince of Peace. I ask for His peace to rule in my heart through the decision You have called me to today. For His glory, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 87. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Other tools we recommend are a Bible dictionary, such as [The New Unger's Bible Dictionary](#) and a whole-Bible commentary, such as the two-volume [The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament](#) and [The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament](#). Versions of the Bible are available at [BibleGateway.com](#), and an excellent online Bible commentary by Thomas L. Constable is at [netbible.org](#).
3. An example of the sneering that Jesus' family endured was the Pharisees' accusation of Jesus, "We aren't illegitimate children!" (John 8:41). The implication: Jesus was illegitimate. No doubt, Mary and Joseph endured similar scorn regarding Jesus' birth.
4. Scripture does not indicate that Joseph kept Mary a virgin for the rest of their marriage or had children by another wife. Mary bore Jesus' younger brothers and sisters naturally.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY FOUR

Wise Men, Wicked Men . . . and Us

Matthew 2:1–12

Let me urge you, after you study this passage, to do like the wise men did, and like wise men and women still do: bow down and worship Christ, who is the King above all who would make themselves king and Lord above all who want to make you think they're lords.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

FALSE ideas sometimes creep into tradition, coloring our imagination so vividly that they lodge themselves in our beliefs. Take one of our favorite Christmas songs “We Three Kings of Orient Are.” Verse one reads:

We three kings of Orient are;
bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star.¹

While the magi likely served kings, they weren't kings. The “king” label probably originated with early church teachers like Tertullian and Augustine. They reasoned from texts such as Psalm 72 and Isaiah 60 that the magi must have been kings because those passages refer to kings giving gifts to the anointed one.²

More than 1500 years later, we are still singing about “three kings.” In fact, we know very little about these magi. We don't even know how many there were. But Matthew tells us all we need to know about them. No need to speculate. It's time to set aside the clutter of tradition and learn just how significant and instructive these magi prove for us today.



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Wise Men, Wicked Men . . . and Us

Matthew 2:1–12



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before the magi presented their gifts to Jesus, they bowed in worship. Likewise, before we explore the treasures of God's Word, we bow our hearts before God in prayer.

Father of light, every good gift I have comes from You. I thank You for them. My relationships, my worship community, the clothes on my back, and food in my stomach. You are truly a good Father. I especially thank You for Your Word. Use it to instruct my mind and fuel my soul that I may fall on my knees like the magi and worship You in Spirit and in truth. In Christ's name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

For his Jewish audience, Matthew had to address an important question. How could Jesus be the Messiah if He hailed from Nazareth? Micah had prophesied that the “ruler of Israel whose origins are in the distant past” would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

Matthew confirmed that Jesus was indeed born in Bethlehem just as Micah had prophesied. But Matthew went even further by describing the events *after* Jesus' birth. For, these events affirmed Jesus' authority as eternal Ruler of Israel. Let's find out what happened.



Observation: Letting Scripture Speak

Observe [Matthew 2:1–12](#). Note below the four sets of characters and three locations mentioned.



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Wise Men, Wicked Men . . . and Us

Matthew 2:1–12

What two ways did God engage, or lead, the wise men?

1. _____
2. _____

What facts in Matthew's account are missing from the traditional story of the magi that you are familiar with? Are there any facts new to you?

In his account of Jesus' birth, Luke used a Greek word translated, "baby," to identify Jesus as a newborn (Luke 2:16). Luke also hinted at the location as a stable by saying that Jesus was laid in a feeding trough, or "manger," because "there was no room for them in the inn" (2:7 NASB).

Matthew, however, identified Jesus *not* as a baby and His location *not* near an inn at the time of the magi's visit. According to Matthew 2:11, what words did Matthew use? And what do these words suggest about the timing of the magi's visit?

Imagine the wonder that rushed upon Mary and Joseph at the sight of these elegant and exotic men who had traveled so far to worship Jesus. Despite how our nativity sets depict this scene, however, this worshipful moment didn't occur on the night of Jesus' birth. The setting was a house, not a stable; and Jesus was likely a toddler, not a newborn. A Christmas myth debunked!



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STUDY FOUR

Wise Men, Wicked Men . . . and Us

Matthew 2:1–12



Interpretation: A Tale of Two Kings

Matthew's account did portray kings . . . two in fact. Let's take a closer look at the first, Jesus the Messiah King.

The Messiah King—Matthew 2:1–2; 4–6

What title did the wise men give Jesus, according to [Matthew 2:1–2](#)? And what titles did the “leading priests and teachers of religious law” use in the prophesy they quoted, according to [2:4–6](#)?

Herod knew what these titles meant. *King*, *ruler*, and *shepherd* pointed to only one individual in Jewish Scriptures, and, according to [2:4](#), Herod immediately identified Him as the Messiah.

Do a brief background study of this individual foretold in the Old Testament by reading the online article “*Messiah*” in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* at [biblegateway.com](#). Specifically, note the section titled, “The Ideal King.” Record what you discover in the space below.



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Matthew 2:1–12

In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains that the magi were from Persia, the land where the exiled Jews once lived. They had probably read about the Messiah in “Jewish Scriptures like the books of Isaiah and Daniel, which would have been known among Jewish communities spread through Arabia, Persia, and Babylon.”³

After the wise men followed the star to the house, they reacted to the child in three ways ([Matthew 2:10–11](#)). List them below.

Reflect on the symbolic meaning of the magi's actions. Why do you think Matthew included the account of the magi in his gospel?

These wise men wisely saw Jesus for who He truly was, the ultimate King at whose feet all people will one day bow. As commentator William Barclay insightfully observed, the coming of the magi was “the first sign and symbol of the world conquest of Christ.”⁴

The “Monster” King—Matthew 2:3, 7–8

In contrast is the “monster” king—the insanely paranoid King Herod who later ordered the massacre of children in Bethlehem under the age of two (Matthew 2:16–18).



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Matthew 2:1–12

Read pages 35–36 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, and summarize key points about Herod the Great's brutal reign.

Pastor Chuck's favorite Bible dictionary, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, sums up the character of King Herod:

Herod was not only an Idumaeon in race and a Jew in religion, but he was a heathen in practice and a monster in character. During his administration as king he proved himself to be exceedingly crafty, jealous, cruel, and revengeful. He exercised his kingly power with the disposition of a very despot.⁵

How does Herod's history of treachery shed light on his true intentions in his response to Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:3) and his desire to locate the child-King (2:7–8)?

Jesus was "born king of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2); Herod, on the other hand, was not a Jew and took his crown by force. Jesus, the "Prince of Peace . . . will rule with fairness and justice" (Isaiah 9:6–7). Herod's rule was marked by violence and persecution. No greater chasm of extremes exists between two kings.



Wise Men, Wicked Men . . . and Us

Matthew 2:1–12



Correlation: From Bethlehem

Let's take a closer look at the prophecy quoted by the priests and teachers of the Jewish law. They actually quoted two passages from the Old Testament. Read [Micah 5:2](#) and [2 Samuel 5:2](#) together. Now read Matthew 2:6 below and notice how the verse in Matthew combines and interprets the two Old Testament verses.

*“And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
are not least among the ruling cities of Judah,
for a ruler will come from you
who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.” (Matthew 2:6)*

1. From Micah 5:2, “Ephrathah” changed to _____
2. From Micah 5:2, “are only a small village” changed to _____
3. From Micah 5:2, _____ was omitted
4. What phrase from 2 Samuel 5:2 was included with Micah 5:2? _____

Bethlehem “in the land of Judah” emphasized the tribe and birthplace of David where the Messiah must be born. Matthew also carefully showed that the One born would rule like a shepherd over Israel, not like tyrannical, narcissistic Herod nor the ambivalent, negligent religious leaders who did not go to Bethlehem to look for the Messiah.



Application: Joining the Wise

As we conclude this study, let's reflect on Matthew's cast of characters—King Herod, the religious leaders, and the Gentile magi—who model three responses to Jesus.

1. Herod responds to Jesus' birth with hostility masked in devotion and interest.
2. The religious leaders understood God's plan but felt indifferent toward Him.
3. The magi knew little about God but embraced His plan and worshiped the Messiah.



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Wise Men, Wicked Men . . . and Us

Matthew 2:1–12

Can you identify these types of people in your world? What do those who are hostile or indifferent toward Christ do? What do true worshipers do?

What is one thing you can do (or stop doing) to help you avoid the pitfalls of hostility or indifference and help you worship Jesus with a heart of devotion like the magi?

Although God had called Israel's kings and priests to lead the nation in worship, ironically, the true worshipers in Matthew's account were pagan magi. These wise men were truly wise, not because they could read the stars but because they could recognize the only One worthy of adoration.

Matthew 2:1–12 needs no added color from false traditions. Once understood on its own merits, God's purpose shines right through. Even at the Messiah's birth, the nations came to fall on their faces, give their gifts, and worship.



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Matthew 2:1–12



A FINAL PRAYER

Let's conclude our study in praise of the Christ-child, offering Him your heart as a gift. Write down your final prayer of worship.

ENDNOTES

1. John H. Hopkins, "We Three Kings of Orient Are," hymnary.org, https://hymnary.org/text/we_three_kings_of_orient_are.
2. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 62.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 34.
4. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 1, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 27.
5. Howard F. Vos, "Herod," in *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, ed. Merrill F. Unger and R. K. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 556.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY FIVE

Destination-Driven Dreams

Matthew 2:13–23

When God leads you to do something, it will often include things you've never experienced before. It will really stretch you.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

How does God lead? In ancient times, He led His people by speaking in visions to prophets who declared God's message to anyone who would listen. The newly freed Hebrews found their way through the Sinai desert by following God's cloud by day and pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21).

Today, God declares His message through Scripture, our bright light for journeying through the dark wilderness of the world. Scripture teaches us God's truth so we can recognize the Spirit's inner promptings; seek counsel from wise, godly friends; and tune into His affirming peace when we take those first tenuous steps in obedience to God's leading.

Joseph and Mary, however, didn't have a Bible like ours, nor did they have the indwelling Holy Spirit. So God led through dreams—which is not the sort of guidance we'd expect today, but it fit a pattern in Matthew's account of Jesus' birth. Five times at crucial moments, God supernaturally declared His will in a dream.

Let's take a closer look at God's use of dreams in Matthew 2:13–23 and the ways God protected Joseph and Mary during Jesus' tender and most vulnerable childhood years.



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Destination-Driven Dreams

Matthew 2:13–23



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Quiet your heart before Jesus and invite His presence into your time in His Word.

Father, I come before You spiritually hungry and needy, desperate for Your help, Your guidance, and Your comfort. Your Word is very comforting indeed. Thank You for it. Thank You for presenting Jesus, our Lord and Savior, so clearly in it. I want to use this time to know Him more deeply so I can follow Him more faithfully. For His glory and in His name I pray, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Matthew 2:13–23 does not contain the only dreams we encounter in Matthew's gospel. First, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream telling him to take Mary as his wife (Matthew 1:20). And, second, an angel appeared to the magi in a dream telling them to avoid Herod (2:12). As we'll see ahead, those two dreams were only the start of it!

Let's use the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method to explore three additional ways the Lord led the beloved family of His Son.¹



Observation: Away from Home, Away from Comfort

Slowly and thoughtfully read [Matthew 2:13–23](#). Note below the characters and places mentioned.



Destination-Driven Dreams

Matthew 2:13–23

What three verses from this passage record God's use of a dream? Who received the dream and what outcome did each dream produce?

Verse	Person	Outcome

Matthew mentions a dream five times in two chapters. Any time you run across the repetition of a phrase or word that many times, it's telling you something. God is leading them into His will through dreams. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Three particular events “fulfilled” prophecy. What Old Testament texts did Matthew quote (*Matthew 2:14–15, 17–18, 23*)?

Did you catch verse 14? “That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary.” God revealed His will to Joseph in a dream, and Joseph wasted no time in obeying God's instructions. Once he knew the right action and direction, he took flight on the wings of obedient faith.



Destination-Driven Dreams

Matthew 2:13–23



Interpretation: God's Protection

Let's interpret what we've observed by formulating principles, which are timeless truths that summarize the theological meaning of a passage. Think of principles as bridges of truth from the past to the present. To kick us off, can you think of a principle based on Joseph's trusting and unhesitating response to God's warning?

While you may be impressed with Mary for getting up right away and trusting her husband and going, I'm impressed with Joseph too. He got it. There's not any resistance, there's no argument. There's not any wrestling. "Let's go. God says this, let's go." He's a fine man. Not enough has ever been said about Joseph's faithfulness and what a tough journey they endured. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Joseph and Mary would have travelled as far as 300 miles if their destination in Egypt was Alexandria. How would Joseph and Mary have paid for their sojourn in Egypt ([Matthew 2:10–11](#))? What principle can we draw from how God provided for Joseph and Mary?



Destination-Driven Dreams

Matthew 2:13–23

Roughly one million Jews resided in Egypt when Joseph and Mary fled there. Lest they settle in and make a life for themselves in Egypt, God instructed them to return to Israel. How did God protect the family from Archelaus, Herod's son and heir to the throne ([Matthew 2:22](#))? Find Nazareth on your [Bible map](#). Why do you think Joseph settled his family in this rural, hill-country village?

Jesus would grow up in the mundane, obscure, even despised Galilean village of Nazareth. Sometimes, God wants us to live quiet, unneeded, inconsequential lives in the eyes of the world. Write a principle about how God sometimes guides us to unknown places and His reasons for doing so.

It is in these seasons of quiet growth unseen by others that we still ourselves before God, enjoy His presence, and prepare for what He has for us next, whenever or whatever that may be.



Destination-Driven Dreams

Matthew 2:13–23



Correlation: Early Movements, a Clue to Jesus' Identity

Matthew refers to Old Testament prophets on three occasions to interpret Jesus' early movements from Bethlehem to Egypt and Egypt to Nazareth. Those movements *fulfilled* what the ancient prophets wrote. In the original Greek language of Matthew's gospel, "fulfill" means "complete." The completion might refer to:

- A type (like glorious king Solomon), which points to its antitype (the all-glorious King Jesus)
- An illustration (like Passover), which awaits its referent (like Jesus our sacrificial lamb)
- A promise (like a Davidic Messiah), which needs its realization (like the arrival of Jesus)
- A series of events (like Israel's return from exile), which anticipates its climax (Jesus' salvation).²

Matthew quoted Hosea 11:1 to show how Jesus, the true Son of God, would undo the continued disobedience of God's adopted son, Israel. Matthew quoted Jeremiah 31:5 to show that hope lay on the other side of Bethlehem's tragedy just as salvation awaited Israel after gathering in Ramah to trek to Babylon in exile (Jeremiah 40:1).

But Nazareth? Matthew stated that his third quote comes from the *prophets*. Technically, you won't find that quote anywhere in your Old Testament. Matthew likely had one of two ideas in mind.

The first is a play on words—almost a prophetic pun. In Isaiah 11:1 the prophet anticipates a new "shoot" from the line of Jesse. In Hebrew that word for "shoot" is *nzr*. It's easy to see how Matthew recognized the *nzr* in *Nazareth* as a literal fulfilment of Isaiah's words.

Alternatively, Matthew might be thinking of the passages that foretold a humble Messiah, such as Isaiah 53:3, "He was despised." It follows that a despised Messiah would come from a despised town like Nazareth.

How does [John 1:46](#); [7:41–42](#); and [7:52](#) depict the bad reputation of Nazareth of Galilee?



Destination-Driven Dreams

Matthew 2:13–23

How do Old Testament prophecies *Psalms 22:1–8; 69:5–12; and Isaiah 53:1–3* depict God's Anointed as having an unappealing reputation?

Jesus, the Messiah, resided in Nazareth fulfilling, in part, the prophecies that showed how this world disdained and despised Him. In God's mysterious and wonderful plan, however, Jesus' rejection led to His crucifixion . . . and His crucifixion would lead to His resurrection, and His resurrection now leads to the redemption of many.



Application: God's Will Today

We don't need divine dreams to learn God's will like Joseph did. But we do need certain faith-filled disciplines to follow God's will, which Joseph himself modeled. Reflect below on Pastor Chuck's teaching that connects the nature of God's will and the corresponding disciplines needed to follow it.

- 1) *Sometimes God's will is sudden and quick.* This requires the discipline of *trusting God* even when we can't stay as many steps ahead as we would like. Joseph simply gathered up his family and took them to Egypt.
- 2) *Sometimes God's will is surprising and confusing.* This requires the discipline of *waiting on God* without knowing exactly how God will come through in the situation. Joseph went to Judea and waited there in fear of Archelaus until God said move.
- 3) *Sometimes God's will is mysteriously mundane.* This requires the discipline of *humility*, of being faithful where God has placed us. Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Nazareth where Jesus would live in obscurity until Jesus began his ministry when He was about thirty years old (Luke 3:23).



Destination-Driven Dreams

Matthew 2:13–23

Which of the three traits of God's will characterizes His call on your life right now?

What discipline must you exercise to prove faithful to the task? And how must you exercise that discipline?

Wherever you find yourself, may the discipline necessary for that time become yours. Think about your situation. You may be in a discipline of trusting God since He brought you here unexpectedly or where you are in life. It may be a discipline of waiting on God because it's confusing and surprising. Or it may be a discipline of accepting God's plan as the mundane days stack into weeks and months and years. Be still and know that He's God.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Destination-Driven Dreams

Matthew 2:13–23



A FINAL PRAYER

Reflect on what God taught you through this passage and how He is leading you. Record a fitting prayer below.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Read page 47 in *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15* for Pastor Chuck Swindoll's full explanation of the different ways Matthew uses the word *fulfill* with reference to prophecy.



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Destination-Driven Dreams

Matthew 2:13–23



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- An illustration (like Passover), which awaits its referent (like Jesus our sacrificial lamb)
- A promise (like a Davidic Messiah), which needs its realization (like the arrival of Jesus)
- A series of events (like Israel's return from exile), which anticipates its climax (Jesus' salvation).²

Matthew quoted Hosea 11:1 to show how Jesus, the true Son of God, would undo the continued disobedience of God's adopted son, Israel. Matthew quoted Jeremiah 31:5 to show that hope lay on the other side of Bethlehem's tragedy just as salvation awaited Israel after gathering in Ramah to trek to Babylon in exile (Jeremiah 40:1).

But Nazareth? Matthew stated that his third quote comes from the *prophets*. Technically, you won't find that quote anywhere in your Old Testament. Matthew likely had one of two ideas in mind.

The first is a play on words—almost a prophetic pun. In Isaiah 11:1 the prophet anticipates a new "shoot" from the line of Jesse. In Hebrew that word for "shoot" is *nzr*. It's easy to see how Matthew recognized the *nzr* in *Nazareth* as a literal fulfilment of Isaiah's words.

Alternatively, Matthew might be thinking of the passages that foretold a humble Messiah, such as Isaiah 53:3, "He was despised." It follows that a despised Messiah would come from a despised town like Nazareth.

How does [John 1:46](#); [7:41–42](#); and [7:52](#) depict the bad reputation of Nazareth of Galilee?



Destination-Driven Dreams

Matthew 2:13–23

How do Old Testament prophecies *Psalms 22:1–8; 69:5–12*; and *Isaiah 53:1–3* depict God's Anointed as having an unappealing reputation?

Jesus, the Messiah, resided in Nazareth fulfilling, in part, the prophecies that showed how this world disdained and despised Him. In God's mysterious and wonderful plan, however, Jesus' rejection led to His crucifixion . . . and His crucifixion would lead to His resurrection, and His resurrection now leads to the redemption of many.



Application: God's Will Today

We don't need divine dreams to learn God's will like Joseph did. But we do need certain faith-filled disciplines to follow God's will, which Joseph himself modeled. Reflect below on Pastor Chuck's teaching that connects the nature of God's will and the corresponding disciplines needed to follow it.

- 1) *Sometimes God's will is sudden and quick.* This requires the discipline of *trusting God* even when we can't stay as many steps ahead as we would like. Joseph simply gathered up his family and took them to Egypt.
- 2) *Sometimes God's will is surprising and confusing.* This requires the discipline of *waiting on God* without knowing exactly how God will come through in the situation. Joseph went to Judea and waited there in fear of Archelaus until God said move.
- 3) *Sometimes God's will is mysteriously mundane.* This requires the discipline of *humility*, of being faithful where God has placed us. Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Nazareth where Jesus would live in obscurity until Jesus began his ministry when He was about thirty years old (Luke 3:23).



Destination-Driven Dreams

Matthew 2:13–23

Which of the three traits of God's will characterizes His call on your life right now?

What discipline must you exercise to prove faithful to the task? And how must you exercise that discipline?

Wherever you find yourself, may the discipline necessary for that time become yours. Think about your situation. You may be in a discipline of trusting God since He brought you here unexpectedly or where you are in life. It may be a discipline of waiting on God because it's confusing and surprising. Or it may be a discipline of accepting God's plan as the mundane days stack into weeks and months and years. Be still and know that He's God.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Destination-Driven Dreams

Matthew 2:13–23



A FINAL PRAYER

Reflect on what God taught you through this passage and how He is leading you. Record a fitting prayer below.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Read page 47 in Swindoll's *Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15* for Pastor Chuck Swindoll's full explanation of the different ways Matthew uses the word *fulfill* with reference to prophecy.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY SIX

Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10

I warn you to guard against Pharisaism. We must work regularly and faithfully to keep from looking like we're one way when, in reality, we're another. How valuable is authenticity, and if nothing else, John the Baptizer was authentic.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THROUGH the years, God has selected unusual preachers to deliver powerful messages. Noah must have come across odd to his neighbors as he hammered for years on his giant-sized boat and warned of God's coming judgment: a sweeping flood.

Elijah wore "a garment of hair and had a leather belt around his waist" (2 Kings 1:8 NIV) and was known for his emotional ups and downs. With the courage of a lion, he faced down 450 prophets of Baal; but, under the hot glare of Jezebel, his confidence evaporated like mist, and so he ran away in fear (1 Kings 19:1–4).

Despite their peculiarities, God used Noah, Elijah, and many other unusual and imperfect people to grab our attention and shake us out of our complacency.

Matthew opens the curtain in chapter 3 to reveal perhaps the oddest of God's preachers: John the Baptizer. A prophet fashioned after Elijah, John was chosen by God to announce the King of kings, the One who would transform the world.

John's wild looks and bug-eating habits may put us off, but his message is anything but off-putting. It's exactly what we need to hear. Let's follow the crowds to the desert and open our hearts to this strange preacher and his strong proclamation.



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Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you seek God's personal message to you through John, pray the following prayer.

Father, help me today to come to You as I am. Deliver me from a secret life that appears to be one way on the outside but different on the inside. Teach me the spiritual disciplines John the Baptizer modeled in the wilderness: time alone with You and surrender to Your will. With open hands, I come to You now to fill me with Your Word, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we begin by carefully reading Scripture, absorbing every word.¹ Read [Matthew 3:1–10](#), and note Matthew's description of John's appearance. Also, look for details about John's message and ministry.



Observation: The Preacher and the Proclamation

In the observation phase, we look for the who, what, where, how, and why of a passage. Let's begin by observing Matthew's portrait of *who* John was.

The Preacher—Matthew 3:1, 3–4

In his gospel account, Matthew seems to drop John out of nowhere. Who is he and where did he come from? According to Luke's account, the angel Gabriel foretold John's birth to John's father, Zechariah, while he was performing his priestly duties at the temple.

You can read about the angel's prophesy and the events that followed in [Luke 1:5–25, 57–66](#). Write down what you find out about John's spiritual preparation and calling, “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17 NASB).



Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10

According to [Matthew 3:1, 3–4](#), how did John live out that calling?

Imagine John as a young man reflecting on Isaiah's ancient prophecy in Isaiah 40. Can you put yourself in John's sandals? What must it have been like for John to know that *he* would be "the voice" declaring the coming of the Messiah?

Seeing yourself in the Scriptures puts a permanent chill up your back. John never lost that chill. Realizing Isaiah wrote about John seven centuries before he was born gave strength to John's voice—taking away all resistance, all reluctance, and all tendency to compromise his message. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Proclamation—Matthew 3:2, 5–10

Next, observe John's strong proclamation: "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near" (Matthew 3:2). We'll look closer at the meaning of this message in the interpretation section. For now, let's look at *how* people responded to John.



Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10

Those Who Received John's Message—Matthew 3:5–6

What did those who came to “see and hear” John do to demonstrate their belief (*Matthew 3:5–6*)?

Those Who Rejected John's Message—Matthew 3:7–10

In contrast to the crowds were the Pharisees and Sadducees, who came to “watch” with critical eyes and weigh John's words on their scales of judgment. What did John say to these people who didn't believe his proclamation or, in their own view, need to repent (*Matthew 3:7–10*)?



Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10



Searching the Scriptures Background Study

The Pharisees and Sadducees make their first appearance on the stage of Matthew's gospel in Matthew 3:7. Knowing who these antagonists are is vital to understanding Jesus' life and ministry. For helpful background information, read "The Pharisees and Sadducees" on page 56 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*.² Record what facts stand out in the space below.

Even before Christ opened His mouth to speak, the nation of Israel was already forming sides: those who would receive Him and those who would reject Him. Let's dive deeper into the *what* of John's message, "Repent . . . for the Kingdom of Heaven is near" (Matthew 3:2), which also became the principal proclamation of the One who baptized with the Holy Spirit.



Interpretation: Repentance, Baptism, and the Kingdom of Heaven

In the interpretation phase, we search for the meaning of key words and phrases. "The word translated 'repent' is the Greek word *metanoeō*," according to Pastor Chuck Swindoll, "which means to 'change one's mind,' resulting in a change of allegiances, lifestyle, or trajectory."³

For those who received John's message, the first fruit on the tree of repentance was baptism—which was a rite of purification. Read the following explanation of John's baptism and summarize the meaning in the space below.



Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10

John's baptism was an outward symbol of inward devotion to God, submission to His will, and identity with the true people of God. And it was more than just a mark of repentance from sin; it was also a consecration to a life of loving service to God and to holiness. Take note, however, that the audience of John's address was not . . . Gentiles, but Jews! He was saying, in effect, "Because of your sin, you are outside of Abraham's covenant with God—*unclean!* You must repent like a Gentile and come to God as if for the first time."⁴

Why do you think the Pharisees and Sadducees would have resisted John's call to repent and be baptized?

Picking up the prophet's pen set down by Malachi 400 years earlier, John sketched a frightening scene of judgment upon the unrepentant religious leaders. Compare [Malachi 3:1–3](#) with [Matthew 3:7–10](#) and write down the similarities between these two passages.



Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10

God's judgment always makes way for God's blessing—the "kingdom of heaven," also known as the kingdom of God. Read Pastor Chuck Swindoll's explanation of the kingdom of heaven on page 54 of *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. For an online source, consult [Constable's Notes](http://netbible.org) at netbible.org. What was the kingdom of heaven that John was referring to?

John's calling was to be the forerunner for the King who ruled over the kingdom of heaven: Jesus. Let's examine John's unique role that sprouted from the prophetic roots of Isaiah and Malachi.



Correlation: The Forerunner and the King

How did Isaiah describe the forerunner and what the forerunner would do, according to [Isaiah 40:1–5](#)?

How did Malachi compare the Messiah to the sun rising, according to [Malachi 4:2–3](#)? Who would the forerunner resemble and what would he do ([Malachi 4:5–6](#))?



Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10

What can you conclude from John's fulfillment of Isaiah's and Malachi's prophecies regarding the legitimacy of Jesus as the true Messiah?

John wasn't about increasing himself. His message was all about Jesus. Jesus was the Word; John was just the voice. He was the Light; John was just the lamp. He was the living God on earth in human flesh; John was just a man. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Three Thoughts to Remember

John's message of repentance still rings loud and clear. However, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, we sometimes have a problem coming clean about our sin. What makes it difficult for you to admit sin?

Imagine yourself as one in the crowd who received his message. What sins might you confess? How would it have felt to experience the cleansing waters of baptism?



Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10

Our baptism in Christ is different than John's baptism, for our baptism joins us with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. "For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by *the glorious power* of the Father, now we also may live new lives" (Romans 6:4, emphasis added). What new specific way might the Father empower you to live today?

Claim Christ's power for a changed life and close your study by praying the following prayer of consecration, thanking God for His forgiveness and security you have in Christ.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, through confession and forgiveness, I receive Your grace to live Your way. Thank You for purifying me in the blood of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for my sins. I have died with Him, and I now live with Him today and forever, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. For helpful instruction about *Searching the Scriptures*, consult our online instructional web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)." This page provides you an introduction to four important methods in Bible study—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—along with other helpful study tips. You can also follow the link to purchase a copy of Pastor Chuck's book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, on which our studies are based.
2. You can obtain a copy of Pastor Chuck's two-volume commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15* and *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, on the Insight for Living Ministries website.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 53.
4. Swindoll, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, 55.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY SEVEN

Surprised by Jesus

Matthew 3:11–17

Jesus got in line with sinful people to be baptized—not because He had sin to confess but to identify with sinful people. Though without sin, He came to take His place among those without righteousness.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN ancient times, when a king planned to visit a city, a forerunner would come in advance and call the citizens to prepare for his arrival. Everyone would get busy picking up trash, cleaning the town until it gleamed, and even filling potholes to smooth the road for the king's coach. On the day of arrival, messengers ran ahead shouting, "The king is coming!" Banners waved and people lined the streets cheering as the king made his grand entrance.

Isaiah foresaw the King of creation coming into the world in similar fashion. In his prophecy, he heard a messenger calling for a roadway through the wilderness to be built for the Lord's arrival. He envisioned valleys filled in, mountains leveled, curves straightened, and rough places made smooth; and he saw everyone on earth welcoming the Lord as He arrived in regal splendor (Isaiah 40:3–5).

As forerunner of the Messiah, in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, John the Baptizer shouted in the wilderness that the Lord was coming. He called for people to repent, clear away the rubble of sin in their lives, be baptized, and get ready to welcome the Lord.

To John's surprise, however, the Messiah didn't come in a royal coach in regal fanfare. Instead, Christ walked as an ordinary man along the dusty wilderness road to the Jordan River and joined the crowds in line to be baptized. Only John recognized Him when He appeared. "Look!" John exclaimed, "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).



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Surprised by Jesus

Matthew 3:11–17

Jesus veiled His glory that day; however, His coming in unveiled glory will happen when He returns (Matthew 25:31; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10). But one thing is certain: the Lord of creation whom Isaiah prophesied had arrived to redeem the world.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Imagine yourself at the scene when Jesus came to the Jordan River to begin His salvation mission. To prepare to receive your Savior's message, pray the following prayer from your heart.

Father, thank You for my refuge in Christ, for His love that moved Him to come from heaven to earth to seek and save me, and for His wounds that heal my soul. I find comfort in Your grace and Your Word, which reveal the light of Christ and show me Your way in the wilderness, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Open your Bible and read the passage in context from verse 1, [Matthew 3:1–17](#). Notice that Matthew begins with John preaching in the wilderness that “the Kingdom of Heaven is near” (Matthew 3:1–12) and culminates with Jesus’ coming “near” as the King of the kingdom and the heavens opening to welcome Him (3:13–17).



Searching the Scriptures Study Tools

Just as we need tools in the kitchen to help us cook our meals, we need Bible study tools to help us feed ourselves God's Word. The tools we recommend for studying Matthew are a Bible dictionary, such as [The New Unger's Bible Dictionary](#), and a commentary, such as Pastor Chuck Swindoll's two-volume set, [Insights on Matthew 1–15](#) and [Insights on Matthew 16–28](#). [The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament](#) is also an excellent resource for your library, and all these books are available at [insight.org](#).



Observation: John's Predictions and Jesus' Appearing

Observation is an important first step to putting together the pieces of a passage of Scripture. As you read, look for contrasts, comparisons, repeated expressions, and emphasized words.¹ Let's focus on the contrasts in Matthew 3:11–17 as we observe two main sections: John's predictions (Matthew 3:11–12) and Jesus' arrival and baptism (3:13–17).



Surprised by Jesus

Matthew 3:11–17

John's Predictions—Matthew 3:11–12

In what ways did John contrast himself with Jesus, according to [Matthew 3:11](#)?

John already predicted that the Lord will chop down and burn unfruitful trees, separating them from fruitful trees (Matthew 3:10). How did John say the Lord will use fire in [3:12](#)? What are repeated themes in these metaphors of the unfruitful trees and the chaff?

Patterned after Old Testament prophets, John warned of coming judgment. Phase 1 in the prophetic timeline has always been judgment followed by blessings (Malachi 4:1–2). However, Jesus came “not to judge the world, but to save the world” (John 3:17). And the Messiah’s first saving step was to join with sinners in the waters of baptism.

Who's in the line to be baptized? Sinful people. Jesus gets in that line, but He has no sin. Jesus came to be identified among us. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Surprised by Jesus

Matthew 3:11–17

Jesus' Arrival and Baptism—Matthew 3:13–17

What contrasts do you see in [Matthew 3:13–15](#) between John's estimation of himself and his role versus Jesus and His role? And what contrast do you see between what John expected the King to do at His arrival and what Jesus intended to do?

Jesus' followers often misunderstood His mission. Just as Peter would later try to stop Jesus from predicting His death (Matthew 16:22), John tried to stop Jesus from being baptized. In the interpretation section, we'll examine the meaning of Jesus' baptism. For now, observe what happened after Jesus came out of the water ([3:16–17](#)). Why do you think this moment is crucial at this point in Jesus' life and ministry?

Jesus knew no sin, did no sin, had no sin. He was undiminished deity without question, but He was truly human. That's why He can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. That's why we never hear from heaven, "Shame on you!" —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Surprised by Jesus

Matthew 3:11–17



Interpretation: The Meaning of Jesus' Baptism

In the interpretation phase, we aim to understand the theological implications of key events, such as Jesus' baptism. Consult your own Bible study resources and read page 59 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. Write down what you discover about two essential elements in Jesus' baptism: His identification with sinners and His divine inauguration for ministry.

Pause here and let the awesome wonder of this holy moment sink in. Each member of the Trinity was working together in divine union to inaugurate and empower Jesus as the rightful King to save the world—including you. What does it mean to you personally that the Son of God identified with your sin in His baptism and sought you as His own?

What an awesome moment! The Trinity appears in words and invisible form: Jesus is visible, the Spirit descends, and a voice from the Father follows. Son, Spirit, Father in one moment. Let the wonder in. Be still and know this is God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Surprised by Jesus

Matthew 3:11–17



Correlation: Spirit from Heaven and Voice of the Father

Luke added a small but important detail that Jesus “was praying” while He was baptized. Right then, as He was communing with the Father, the Holy Spirit “descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove” (Luke 3:21–22). The Holy Spirit descended *like* a dove, not an actual dove. How does this act fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy in [Isaiah 42:1](#)?

Read [Matthew 12:15–21](#), in which Jesus quotes Isaiah 42:1–4 as fulfilled in Himself, and write down how the Spirit empowered Jesus in His ministry.

The Father then made a significant pronouncement, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Matthew 3:17 NASB). How does the Father’s pronouncement fulfill [Psalm 2:6–9](#)?

The Father’s statement goes far beyond a pat on the head. It is a regal installment of Jesus as the long-awaited messianic Servant-Savior, the promised King in the line of David. His identification with sinners and His inauguration complete, Jesus’ courageous mission to redeem the world had just begun.



Surprised by Jesus

Matthew 3:11–17



Application: Jesus' Baptism and Us

Isn't it ironic? John's whole existence had been for the sole purpose of clearing the way for Jesus, and the moment Jesus arrived, John stood in His way. The Preparer had become the Preventer.

Jesus' request for baptism took John by surprise, but despite John's confusion, he still understood that Jesus had to be obeyed. Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers three words of application as we face Jesus' surprises in our lives.

- *Not recognizing Jesus in our midst doesn't mean He isn't there.* Jesus is with you, walking side-by-side with you even though you don't see Him.
- *Not understanding the whole message doesn't mean we should refuse to participate in any of it.* We should try to obey the commands we do understand and then ask God to give us insight into the parts of His Word that are unclear to us.
- *Not hearing God's voice of affirmation today doesn't mean He isn't well-pleased.* God always sees our obedience at times when no one else sees us doing what's right.

Have you been “surprised by Jesus,” perhaps because of a confusing trial in your life or maybe an unexpected change? If so, what has happened, and how might you adjust your thinking to welcome Jesus' surprises?



Surprised by Jesus

Matthew 3:11–17

Thinking we know God's plan, sometimes we resist it when it goes a different direction. As you close this study, write down a prayer releasing your will to Christ's will. Even though you may not understand His plan, you certainly know His heart as your Savior who stops at nothing to demonstrate His love.

Jesus didn't get baptized to be cleansed of sin because He was sinless. Rather, He submitted to baptism to identify with sinners and "carry out all that God requires" to save the world (Matthew 3:15). Jesus' baptism in the Jordan was merely the first milestone in His long journey to His ultimate "baptism"—His death, burial, and resurrection. Let's follow Him each step of the way as He leads us, intimately linked with Him in His work of righteousness in our lives.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, have I unknowingly been preventing You from fulfilling Your will in my life? Open my eyes to see my own hesitation and give me the humility of John to accept Your will and Your way. Lead me to the Jordan where the waters of purification wash over me and I sense the presence of Jesus with me. Have your way, Lord, in my life today, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. For helpful instruction about *Searching the Scriptures*, consult our online instructional web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY EIGHT

Acing the Devil's Tests

Matthew 4:1–11

God wants us to grow when He gives us a test. The devil is altogether different. His tests are always designed to make us fail.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

It must have been an emotional highpoint for Jesus when, at His baptism, the Spirit descended upon Him and He heard His Father's affirming words, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy" (Matthew 3:17). What a glorious moment!

On the wings of this favorable wind, we might think that Jesus would sail right away into public ministry. Instead, the Spirit led Him into the howling wasteland of the Judean wilderness where few people ventured. It was the ultimate setting for solitude, the perfect place to prepare spiritually for the demands and temptations of public ministry to come.

In the sun-scorched wilderness east of Jerusalem, jackals roam, water is scarce, and little vegetation grows in the blistered soil. These harsh conditions test human endurance to an extreme. Into this barren land, the Spirit led Jesus to be tested—not so much by the conditions but by the devil, an even deadlier threat.

Do we dare follow Jesus into this desert crucible, where the flames of the devil's temptations burn hot and furious? Thankfully, we have nothing to fear, for our Savior wins the battle and emerges worthy of His calling to overturn sin's curse and disarm the devil at Calvary. In this study, we'll grow in our admiration of Jesus, and we'll learn to trust Him and follow His ways through our own wilderness of testing.



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Acing the Devil's Tests

Matthew 4:1–11



PREPARE YOUR HEART

In the silence and solitude of your Bible study, come to the Father with an open heart as you pray.

Father, how profound is Your compassion for me when I struggle with temptation. Never once have You shamed me or turned a deaf ear to my cry for help. I do not wish to fight my battles alone but always with Your aid. I turn to You as I turn to Your Word to encourage me and guide me in Your path, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you read [Matthew 4:1–11](#), try viewing the temptations of Jesus through the eyes of Matthew's original Jewish readers. For the Hebrews, the wilderness represented a sacred *meeting place* with God and a *testing place*. After God led the Hebrews out of Egypt through the Red Sea, He met them in the wilderness. At Mount Sinai, God gave the law to guide His people in righteousness and guard them against evil. But when tested in the wilderness, they failed because of their disobedience.

Like the Hebrews, Jesus also went through water (His baptism) into the wilderness to be with God. But unlike the Hebrews, He passed His tests by obeying God's law. He proved Himself worthy as the ideal Israelite, the Messiah, who would fulfill God's covenant with Abraham to bless the world.¹



Observation: Three Temptations

Let's use Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method of observation to look closely at the tests that the devil uniquely devised for Jesus.² Jesus was divine but also fully human. Reflect on [Matthew 4:1–2](#). What physical and emotional factors made Jesus in His humanity most vulnerable to the devil's temptations?



Acing the Devil's Tests

Matthew 4:1–11

Let's observe each temptation, and then, in the interpretation phase, we'll analyze Jesus' response and draw principles we can follow when we're tempted.

The Temptation of Bread—Matthew 4:3

What do you observe about the devil's tactics in his first temptation in [Matthew 4:3](#)? Consider the Father's affirmation of Jesus at His baptism as "my dearly loved Son" (Matthew 3:17). Why do you think the devil began by saying, "If you are the Son of God" (4:3)? What attack was the devil making on Jesus' relationship with His Father?

The Temptation of Sensationalism—Matthew 4:5–6

What did the devil do next to tempt Jesus ([Matthew 4:5–6](#))? What do you think the devil intended to accomplish by tempting Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the temple?



Acing the Devil's Tests

Matthew 4:1–11

The devil misinterprets and misapplies [Psalm 91:11–12](#) in his attempt to convince Jesus to rationalize a sin of presumption—which is doing something foolish and expecting God to pull off a miracle. Essentially, it's testing God. Will God come through for us the way we want Him to? What do you observe about how the devil twists the truth to tempt Jesus to test God?

The Temptation of Power—Matthew 4:8–9

What was the devil's final test for Jesus ([Matthew 4:8–9](#))? What perceived authority did the devil have to offer Jesus rulership over the world? [Second Corinthians 4:4](#) gives a clue.

How did Jesus respond to each of these temptations? Like a champion! Let's examine His responses as a model for us.

Jesus didn't play with the Enemy. The devil is no plaything. He wants your soul! Don't ever doubt it. He wants your marriage, your dreams, your successes. "Mr. Charm" wants you to team up with him. But Jesus told him, "No!" —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Acing the Devil's Tests

Matthew 4:1–11



Interpretation: Jesus' Model Response to Temptation

Only Jesus has ever been tempted to turn stones into bread. We all, however, have been tempted to *distrust* God's *providential care*. How did Jesus respond when the devil whispered in His ear, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread” (Matthew 4:3)?

*But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say,
‘People do not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (4:4)*

Jesus quoted [Deuteronomy 8:3](#), which refers to the manna God provided the Israelites in the wilderness. What lesson was God giving the Israelites about trusting His care, and how did Jesus apply that lesson to His situation?

Write a principle from Jesus' example as a guide when you're tempted to distrust God's providential care for you. (Biblical principles are statements of theological truth that apply at all times to all people.)



Acing the Devil's Tests

Matthew 4:1–11

In response to the devil's second temptation, Jesus replied, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the LORD your God'" (4:7). Likewise, only Jesus was tempted to jump off the temple. We, however, will be tempted to *do something sensational, even risky, to test the Lord*.

By quoting [Deuteronomy 6:16](#), Jesus referenced the Israelites' sin of testing the Lord at Massah, when they complained about lack of water, angrily shouting, "Is the LORD here with us or not?" (Exodus 17:7). They were forcing God's hand rather than waiting in faith. What lesson was God giving the Israelites about not testing Him, and how did Jesus apply that lesson to His situation?

Write a principle from Jesus' example as a guide when you're tempted to test the Lord.

In response to the devil's third temptation, Jesus put his foot down.

*"Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say,
'You must worship the LORD your God
and serve only him.'"* (Matthew 4:10)



Acing the Devil's Tests

Matthew 4:1–11

Jesus quoted [Deuteronomy 6:13](#) from Moses' sermon to the Israelites before they entered idol-filled Canaan. What lesson was God giving the Israelites about serving Him alone in an idolatrous culture, and how did Jesus apply that lesson to His situation?

Write a principle from Jesus' example as a guide when you're tempted to serve the worldly gods of our age.

When tempted, Jesus did what the Israelites should have done back in Old Testament times—as well as what we should do today: *quote Scripture and obey it*. He is our model and our Savior, our example to follow in our battle with sin and our Champion in defeating the Enemy.



Correlation: The Devil's Tactics from the Beginning

We can trace his diabolical strategies back to the garden of Eden. According to Satan, God couldn't be trusted. Satan insinuated that God was keeping something good from Adam and Eve, and they deserved the fruit's seductive power to make them wise like God.



Acing the Devil's Tests

Matthew 4:1–11

Compare [Genesis 3:1–6](#) with what you've studied about the devil's temptations of Christ. Notice how Satan twisted God's words, sowed seeds of doubt in God's goodness, offered tantalizing pleasures, and hid devastating consequences. What similarities do you see in the devil's tactics?

The goal of the Enemy is to lead you into the realm of sin and hold you there. Sin will take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, cost you more than you want to pay. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Four Reminders and Warnings

As we consider Satan's tactics, let's keep four vital principles in mind to help us say no to temptation.

1. *Satan is a defeated enemy, so don't be afraid of him or intimidated by his temptations.* We have the Spirit of Christ in us who is greater than the spirit of the Adversary (1 John 4:4).
2. *Scripture is alive and powerful, so don't hesitate to stand on the Word of God.* Study the Word, memorize it, and put it into practice.
3. *The Savior is your shield and sustainer, so don't lean on your own strength.* Christ understands our weaknesses, and we can depend on His strength.
4. *Sin is a choice, so remember that you don't have to yield to temptation.* Like every other Christian, you can use your power of choice to say no to sin and yes to God's right path.



Acing the Devil's Tests

Matthew 4:1–11

How can you put these principles into action today? What verses might you memorize to fend off temptation's attacks?

The poison in every cup of temptation is distrust of God's goodness. As you close this study, write down a prayer affirming your trust in Christ as your Good Shepherd who will lead you in paths that are good for you. You don't need what sin offers because you have all you need in Christ's sufficient provision.

Had Jesus succumbed to the devil's tests, He would have disqualified Himself not only as King but also as Savior. He would have joined the world rather than redeemed it and lost His ministry before it had even begun. Much was at stake, but thankfully Jesus prevailed, and with His help, so can we.



Acing the Devil's Tests

Matthew 4:1–11



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I claim Your power through Your Word and Your Spirit to guide me into victory over sin. Thank You for Jesus who defeated the devil in His hour of testing and is able to come to my aid during my tests. I trust You wholly as my Rock, Redeemer, and Faithful Friend. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. According to Paul, the Israelites passing through the Red Sea was a kind of baptismal experience (1 Corinthians 10:1–2). God intended His redeemed people to be a “kingdom of priests” and a “holy nation” (Exodus 19:6), representing God to the world. However, they failed in this mission. According to Hebrews 5:5, God chose His Son to fulfill Israel’s priestly role when God announced, “You are my Son. Today I have become your Father,” after Jesus passed through the water of baptism.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY NINE

Where and How It All Began

Matthew 4:12–25

We are on the pages of Matthew's gospel. Jesus comes into our lives as into the lives of the disciples and reaches us with His message. He issues "our calling," and we're drawn to Him and cannot say no.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN the days leading up to the Olympics, runners relay a flame lit on Mount Olympus, Greece, to the site of the opening ceremony. Holding the torch high, the last athlete in the relay runs into the stadium and lights a giant cauldron, signaling the beginning of the games. The torch relay symbolically links the past with the present and unites all nations around the Olympic spirit of goodwill.

In a similar sense, the prophets of the Old Testament have relayed through the nations a flame of salvation lit in the heavenlies. From prophet to prophet and year after year, the torchbearers passed the flame until John the Baptizer appeared as the final link from the past to the present. When John announced, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" (John 1:29), he lit a great beacon of hope and signaled the start of Christ's work of redemption.

In this study, we'll witness a momentous transition when John's ministry comes to a close after his arrest and Jesus launches His ministry in Galilee. With these events, the countdown of history reaches its zero hour. The moment to which all the prophets looked forward in wide-eyed anticipation has begun as the Light of the world blazes for all to see.



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Where and How It All Began

Matthew 4:12–25



PREPARE YOUR HEART

One of Jesus' first actions was to call certain individuals to follow Him. Prepare your heart to hear His calling through your study as you open in prayer.

Father, I place myself before You as I read Your Word. Count me among the first disciples, Peter, Andrew, James and John, who heard Jesus' call and followed. Speak clearly through the Scriptures today that I may respond with understanding and a willingness to obey, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you read [Matthew 4:12–25](#), notice three sections. First, Matthew explains when and where Jesus ministered and the prophetic significance of that place (Matthew 4:12–16). Second, we learn the central message Jesus preached (4:17). And third, we see the response to Jesus' threefold ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing (4:18–25).



Observation: When, Where, What, and Who of Jesus' Ministry

Searching the Scriptures starts with observing the text closely to pick up all the important details the author intended us to know.¹ Let's begin with when and where Jesus began His ministry.

When and Where Jesus Ministered—Matthew 4:12–16

When Jesus learned about John's arrest and imprisonment, Jesus "left Judea and returned to Galilee" (Matthew 4:12). Matthew explained why John was arrested in [14:1–5](#); what was the reason?



Where and How It All Began

Matthew 4:12–25

John's imprisonment meant that his job as the "voice shouting in the wilderness" and clearing the road for Jesus was done (Matthew 3:3). It was time for Jesus to step onto the road John prepared and start His messianic journey. Where did Jesus go, according to 4:13?



Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

Bible maps are a vital tool in the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study. Find the locations on the maps in the back of your Bible. You can also locate the cities and regions by going to the maps titled "*Ministry of Jesus*" and "*Twelve Tribes of Israel*" on the Insight for Living Ministries website. Take a few minutes to follow Jesus' route and acquaint yourself with the area in which so many of the events of Jesus' ministry occurred. For background information on Capernaum, read page 74 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. In the following space, you can write down notes on what you discover.



Where and How It All Began

Matthew 4:12–25

As you read about the prophetic significance of this region in [Matthew 4:14–16](#), note the focus on ministry to the Gentiles and the emphasis on light shining in the darkness. Why do you think God chose this region—an international crossroads—as the lampstand on which to set the light of His Son?

Don't think that those who live in darkness enjoy the darkness. In their hearts is an emptiness and a frustration that they can never please the gods they worship. When Jesus preached repentance, many responded, "I've been waiting all my life to have peace and the assurance of eternal life, to know that the One I'm worshiping has accepted me by grace into His family." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What Jesus Preached—Matthew 4:17

Matthew used the phrase, “From then on,” to mark the official beginning point of Jesus’ public ministry (Matthew 4:17).² What message did Jesus preach, according to [4:17](#)?

Like John, Jesus called people to repent—to change their thinking about God and go a new direction. To repent is to *turn from* living our own way and *turn to* living God’s way. Why repent? Because “the Kingdom of Heaven is near” (4:17). The kingdom would bring righteousness, justice, and peace, but also judgment—which was the reason both John and Jesus called for people to repent.



Where and How It All Began

Matthew 4:12–25

Although John and Jesus proclaimed the same message, what do you think made Jesus' preaching as the King of the kingdom more appealing (*John 4:22–36*)?

How People Responded to Jesus' Ministry—Matthew 4:18–25

Look for the phrase “followed him” in *Matthew 4:18–25*. Write down who followed Jesus, where they were from, and the reasons they followed.

Jesus focused His ministry on three functions, according to Matthew's list in *4:23*. List them below.

When Jesus said, “Follow Me,” He didn't offer a pension plan. There was no insurance package. The disciples weren't hired to follow Jesus; they were called. No one is hired into the family of God; we're called to serve Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Where and How It All Began

Matthew 4:12–25



Interpretation: Preaching, Teaching, and Healing

Matthew paints a picture of Jesus' ministry with three broad brushstrokes: *preaching*, *teaching*, and *healing*. To discover the meaning and significance of these facets of Jesus' ministry, read page 79 of *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. For an online resource, consult the *IVP New Testament Commentary Series* at biblegateway.com and read the section under the heading, "*Jesus Demonstrates God's Reign with Power (4:23–25)*." Write down what you find about the differences between preaching and teaching and the reasons Jesus engaged in a healing ministry.

Jesus' light shone brightly wherever He went "in the land where death casts its shadow" (Matthew 4:16). Drawn to His light, Jesus' disciples gave up everything to follow Him. Let's look closer at John's account of how the disciples were called to follow Jesus and fill in a few gaps in Matthew's gospel.



Correlation: Jesus' Call of the Disciples

According to John 1:35–42, Andrew and another disciple (probably John the apostle) were disciples of John the Baptizer when they saw Jesus for the first time at the Jordan River. What happened that day, and how did Andrew introduce Simon to Jesus?



Where and How It All Began

Matthew 4:12–25

John fills in other details about Jesus' first disciples.

- Jesus called Philip, who brought Nathanael to Jesus (John 1:43–50).
- Jesus performed His first miracle at the wedding in Cana, and “his disciples believed in him” (2:11).
- In Jerusalem, His disciples watched Jesus clear the money changers from the temple (2:13–22).
- Jesus with His disciples baptized people in the Judean wilderness, and people were leaving John to come to Jesus (3:22–36).
- Jesus left for Galilee through Samaria, where He met the woman at the well (4:1–42).

Around this time, John the Baptizer was arrested, and that's when Matthew picks up the action, with Jesus leaving Judea for Galilee. Apparently, Simon, Andrew, James, and John had returned to fishing. Seeing them in their boats, Jesus issued His call to full-time ministry: “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” (Matthew 4:19).

So, it took a while for the disciples to get to the point of following Jesus as a vocation. What principles can you glean regarding how Jesus calls us and the growth process involved in deciding to follow Him.

In Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, read pages 77–78 about how God worked in Pastor Chuck's life over time to call him into vocational ministry. What can you learn from his example?



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STUDY NINE

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
STUDY

Where and How It All Began

Matthew 4:12–25

I didn't have any idea what I was getting into or the direction we would be going, but I was called—like Peter, Andrew, James, and John. I look back, and I just shake my head thinking how gracious God was. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Responding to the Light of Christ

He still calls people to follow Him today. His calling may involve vocational ministry like the calling of the disciples. He may call those who are “weary and carry heavy burdens” (Matthew 11:28) to find healing and restoration in Jesus. Another group, the “large crowds,” may follow Jesus from a distance out of curiosity (4:25). He calls all of us in whatever place He finds us.

Have you felt drawn to Jesus' light and sensed His call? What draws you to Jesus? How have you answered His call?

Do you sometimes feel resistant to Christ's call? If so, what might be holding you back?



Where and How It All Began

Matthew 4:12–25

What does it look like to answer Christ's call today? What might He be calling you to do that's new or different than what've you've done before?

The events in Matthew 4 marked a point of transition. Jesus' years of quiet obscurity in small-town Nazareth and the Judean wilderness were over, and a new season of public ministry had begun. The wheels that would carry Jesus to the cross were set in motion and there was no turning back. That's how it is to follow Jesus; once we set out, there's no turning back. But we're so glad we did.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, free me from fear and take away that longing for earthly security that really is not secure at all. Drive far from me any interest in leaning on my own understanding. Bring me face to face with Your Son and the joy of serving Him and following Him wherever He may lead, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. In 16:21, Matthew used the same phrase, "From then on," to mark a shift to *private* ministry, as Jesus focused on preparing His disciples for His death and resurrection in Jerusalem.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY TEN

The Sermon of All Sermons

Selections from Matthew 5–7

Of the millions of sermons preached through the centuries, none is more famous, more convincing, or more enduring than the one Jesus preached shortly after beginning His ministry. We know it as the Sermon on the Mount.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN the first four chapters of his gospel, Matthew laid the groundwork for the life and ministry of Jesus. In the *book chart* from our first study, we titled this section, “Announcement and Arrival of the King,” and the emphasis was Jesus’ messianic credentials.

- The genealogy of Jesus traced Jesus’ lineage to Abraham and David (Matthew 1:1–17).
- Jesus fulfilled Scripture from His divine conception through His birth and childhood (1:18–2:23).
- John the Baptizer prepared the way for Jesus (3:1–12), who was consecrated for ministry at His baptism (3:13–17) and tested for ministry in the wilderness (4:1–11).
- Finally, after all this preparation, Jesus launched His ministry in Galilee (4:12–25)—just as the Scriptures foretold.

To Matthew’s Jewish readers, Jesus could be none other than David’s rightful heir, the King whose “kingdom will endure as the sun” (Psalm 89:36). Jesus was the long-awaited King . . . and more. He was the Savior from heaven, Immanuel, who would “save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).



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The Sermon of All Sermons

Selections from Matthew 5–7

With this foundation in place, Matthew guides us into the next part, “Proclamation and Reception of the King” (chapters 5–15). In the opening scene of this section, we find ourselves elbow-to-elbow with other eager followers who have thronged a hillside to hear Jesus preach. What was Jesus’ message that day? The Sermon on the Mount.

Of all the sermons in history, this address by Jesus is the most famous, convincing, and enduring. In his commentary, Pastor Chuck Swindoll helps us understand the reason no other sermon touches our souls like Jesus’ sermon:

Through these words, Jesus—with penetrating insight—exposed the brittle veneer of all self-righteousness prevalent in His day . . . and in ours. He explained the essence of true righteousness, which leads to a deep-seated joy. . . .

Jesus preached this sermon to bring about permanent life change, and His concern was (and still is) that we live in stark contrast to the world’s system. He desires that His followers be Christlike to the core—a divine minority who live differently from the rest of the world.¹

In this study, we’ll overview Jesus’ message in four parts:

- Out with Hypocrisy! (5:1–48)
- Down with Performance! (6:1–34)
- Up with Acceptance! (7:1–5)
- On with Commitment! (7:6–29)

Now take a seat on a patch of grass among the people who have gathered by the beautiful Sea of Galilee on that warm, breezy day, and let’s listen to Jesus deliver His sermon of all sermons.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Open your heart to the words of Jesus as you pray.

Father, like the people who heard Jesus speak that day long ago, I too seek Your kingdom and Your righteousness. Silence the noise and chatter of the voices that fill my world so that I can hear Your Son’s words, grasp their meaning, and apply their truth, amen.



The Sermon of All Sermons

Selections from Matthew 5–7



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The Sermon the Mount can be read in about fifteen minutes. Set aside some time to read Matthew 5–7 and try to capture the flow of the sermon as Jesus moves from topic to topic. Look for recurring themes, such as true righteousness, hypocrisy, Jesus' explanation of the law, judging others, prayer, and the kingdom of God. Write down a few lines from the sermon that stand out to you as central ideas.



Observation: A Strong Plea for Authentic Righteousness

In the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we try to see the action from the viewpoint of those who were there.² As we “listen” along with the crowd, we can feel Jesus' heartfelt concern for His listeners who had been misled by their self-righteous religious leaders. The average Jew could only see his or her leaders' righteous façade, but Jesus could see behind the masks to the wickedness sheltered in these leaders' hearts.

What does Jesus say about the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees in the following verses from Matthew's gospel? And what warnings does Jesus give?

5:20 _____

6:2 _____

6:5 _____

6:8 _____

7:15 _____



The Sermon of All Sermons

Selections from Matthew 5–7

Can you imagine how these lines shocked Jesus' audience? The Jews admired their religious leaders as experts in right behavior and considered their teaching as authoritative as Scripture. By exposing the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus opened people's eyes to what righteousness truly was. Let's follow the outline of Jesus' sermon and observe the flow of His ideas.

The worst kind of hypocrisy in my opinion is religious hypocrisy. So-called spiritual leaders present themselves one way, but in reality they do not live that way. The Lord doesn't expect perfection, but He does expect authenticity. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Out with Hypocrisy! Matthew 5

In His opening lines known as the Beatitudes, Jesus got right to the heart of the matter: inner character. What personal qualities do you see in Jesus' list of those who are blessed ([Matthew 5:1–12](#))?

What happens when we put these qualities into action so everyone can see them, according to [5:16](#)?



The Sermon of All Sermons

Selections from Matthew 5–7

Jesus taught that true righteousness comes from the inside out, and He illustrated this point by explaining the true meaning of the Mosaic law. List the subjects that Jesus touched on in [Matthew 5:17–48](#).

Down with Performance! Matthew 6:1–34

According to Jesus, hypocrisy causes the most problems when it turns our sacred religious activities into a performance. What issues does Jesus address in [Matthew 6:1–18](#)?

What does a genuine relationship with God look like? Sum up Jesus' answer from [6:31–33](#)?



The Sermon of All Sermons

Selections from Matthew 5–7

Up with Acceptance! Matthew 7:1–5

Jesus pinpointed the core issue in the hearts of hypocrites in [Matthew 7:1–5](#). What was it?

On with Commitment! Matthew 7:6–29

Jesus wrapped up His message emphasizing true commitment to the gospel (Matthew 7:6), prayer (7:7–11), truth, and, most importantly, Himself (7:13–27). In a crescendo conclusion, He challenged His audience to take His narrow way—not the world's wide way, to be true believers, and to put His words into action.

How did His audience respond, according to [7:28–29](#)? What was it about Jesus' teaching that set Him apart?

No one dozed through Jesus' sermon! The Greek tense Matthew used suggests that the people were amazed all the way through the message—or, as we might say, *blown away*!



The Sermon of All Sermons

Selections from Matthew 5–7



Interpretation: The Meaning of Hypocrite

How might Jesus' audience have understood the term *hypocrite*? Consider the following explanation.

The term *hypocrite* is taken from the ancient Greek stage. Often, an actor would have to perform several parts through the course of a play, the different roles signaled by various masks. He might place a humorous mask in front of him and rattle off a few sidesplitting lines of comedy. Then he would go to the side of the stage and get another mask, perhaps one of sorrow or sadness, and pour out some heart-wrenching lines of tragedy.

The actor was called a *hupocrites*, which is transliterated into the English word *hypocrite*. As time passed, the etymology of the word evolved to become a synonym for three things. First, it was used to describe someone who participated in an artificial role, one who lived an unreal life behind a mask. Second, it came to be used to describe someone who concealed true motives under a cloak of pretense. Third, it came to mean an individual who hid a hideous heart beneath a righteous exterior.³

Based on this explanation, why do you think Jesus so strongly denounced hypocrisy? What dangers did it pose then . . . and today?

Jesus' concern is that those who follow Him will continue to follow the Pharisees and the scribes, to live like and sound like and ultimately look like hypocrites.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



The Sermon of All Sermons

Selections from Matthew 5–7



Correlation: The Roots of Hypocrisy

In the correlation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we survey Scripture for added insight in our understanding of the passage. What did the Lord tell Isaiah is the root sin that leads to hypocrisy, according to [Isaiah 29:13](#)?

How did Jesus apply this passage from Isaiah to His rebuke of the Pharisees and scribes ([Matthew 15:7–14](#))?

The poisonous roots of hypocrisy grow out of a heart of rebellion against God, the original sin that leads to all other sins. Let's conclude our study with a look into our hearts as we lay ourselves open before the Lord.



Application: Vulnerable Confessions before God

We must admit a few things to God before we can begin to make changes in our lives. Let's start by being honest with ourselves and then confessing:

- *I am not completely free of hypocrisy.* Like the Pharisees, I can play a part, act out a role, and wear a religious mask.
- *I do not always search my motives.* Lord, reveal to me any hidden desire that leads me away from You.



The Sermon of All Sermons

Selections from Matthew 5–7

- *I have not stopped judging others.* It's in my nature to tolerate logs of sin in my own eyes as I complain about specks of fault in others.
- *I dare not continue to ignore Jesus' words.* I come to Jesus with a longing for authenticity. I invite Him to guide me in His way, no matter how narrow and different than the way of the world.

Form your own prayer of confession and petition from your heart and write down your prayer in the space below.

The Sermon on the Mount convicts but also comforts. Our Savior longs for us to put His words into action, and His Spirit fills us with the grace we need to be authentic followers of Christ.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the map of righteousness that Jesus unfolded in His Sermon on the Mount. Help me to follow His way and stay true to His commands. Fill me with Your grace and empower me, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 85, 86.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
3. Insight for Living Ministries, *Simple Faith Bible Study Guide* (Anaheim, CA: IFL Publishing House, 1991), 1.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY ELEVEN

Checklist for Lasting Joy

Matthew 5:1–12

It's good to remember that the Beatitudes are pronouncements. They're not commands. They're celebrations! The Beatitudes represent a new way of life based on a new way of thinking that Christ enables.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

JESUS began the Sermon on the Mount with a series of blessings we call the *Beatitudes*, a title based on the Latin word for “blessings.” The Beatitudes challenge our notions about who is truly blessed—not those who appear well off by external standards but those whose inner life reflects the values of God’s kingdom. Taken as a whole, the Beatitudes paint a portrait of true followers of Jesus, “a kind of mosaic of the Christian character.”¹

The Beatitudes aren’t laws like the Ten Commandments; rather, they are statements of celebration, like the exuberant declarations we find in the Psalms:

*Oh, the joys of those who do not
follow the advice of the wicked. (Psalm 1:1)*

Oh, the joys of those who trust the LORD. (40:4)

Oh, the joys of those who are kind to the poor! (41:1)

Joining His voice with the psalmists’, Jesus declared, “God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him” (Matthew 5:3). Put another way, “*Oh, the joys of those who are poor and desperately need God.*” Why do these “poor” have joy? Jesus explained: “for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs” (5:3).



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Checklist for Lasting Joy

Matthew 5:1–12

Each beatitude showers blessings on ordinary people who follow the way of Christ, not the religious elite or rich aristocracy who think they are the blessed ones. Jesus opened God's blessings for everyone.

Do you seek joy? Not just feelings of happiness that ebb and flow, but true and lasting joy marked by contentment and peace? Let the Beatitudes light the way to a new way of living, a truly blessed life in the kingdom of God.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is like a pathway that *guides us* past the pitfalls of the world and *guards us* from the religious hypocrisy like that of the Pharisees. His Beatitudes speak directly to our hearts, so prepare your heart to receive His words, using the psalmist's prayer to prompt your own prayer:

*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)*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read [Matthew 5:1–12](#) in the New Living Translation, New American Standard Bible, and the Amplified Bible. You can see how the versions reflect different translation styles. The New American Standard Bible is more a word-for-word translation from the original Hebrew and Greek, while the Amplified Bible fleshes out the concepts with modern-day language to add insight. In his personal study, Pastor Chuck Swindoll often reads multiple Bible versions to get a range of meaning and enhance his understanding.



Observation: Examining the Beatitudes

In the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we ask, “What do I notice in the passage? What words are repeated or contrasted? Is there cause-and-effect? How do the ideas progress? How are the thoughts organized?” Keep these questions in mind as you walk through the passage.²



Checklist for Lasting Joy

Matthew 5:1–12

Jesus addressed “His disciples” (Matthew 5:1)—a group that included all the people who were following Him, not just His inner circle of twelve. If we consider [Matthew 5:11–12](#) an extension of the final beatitude and a summary, how many beatitudes are there? Do you see a thematic grouping of the first half and the second half? If so, what do you observe?

What pattern do you notice in the Beatitudes?

The first line of each beatitude explains *who* is blessed, for example, those who are “poor in spirit” (5:3 NASB). The second line of each beatitude explains *what* the blessing is—which is the reason for joy—“for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (5:3 NASB). We might phrase the formula like this:

- Oh, the lasting joy of those who . . .
- Because they experience the blessing of . . .



Checklist for Lasting Joy

Matthew 5:1–12

How are the first beatitude ([Matthew 5:3](#)) and the final beatitude ([5:10](#)) similar? What is the significance of this similarity?

The line, “for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs” (5:3, 10), bookends the Beatitudes and holds them together within the overall theme of life in God’s kingdom. If the kingdom of God is a future reign of Christ, how do the Beatitudes relate to us in the present? Let’s take a look.

We truly enter into kingdom living. Even though we live on this earth, we experience the blessing of living like kingdom people. We give up our own kingdom to live in the realm of God’s kingdom. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of the Beatitudes

In his commentary, Pastor Chuck Swindoll connects the Beatitudes with Christ’s future kingdom and explains how we can live by Christ’s kingdom values now.³

The ethical underpinnings of the Beatitudes are essentially those of the future kingdom of Christ—but lived out in the present interim of the church by His people. When we live out the values and virtues of the coming kingdom prior to Christ’s return, the world will be stunned by the contrast and will be insatiably curious. It will blow their minds!⁴

In His eight statements, Jesus explained how we “live out the values and virtues of the coming kingdom.” The following chart lists each beatitude’s characteristic along with its corresponding blessing. Fill in your understanding of each point by consulting your resources, including the various Bible versions of [Matthew 5:1–12](#) you read earlier, pages 88–91 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, or [Constable’s Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#).



Checklist for Lasting Joy

Matthew 5:1–12

Characteristic	Blessing
“those who are poor and realize their need for [God]” (5:3)	“the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs” (5:3)
“those who mourn” (5:4)	“they will be comforted” (5:4)
“those who are humble” (5:5)	“they will inherit the whole earth” (5:5)
“those who hunger and thirst for justice” (5:6)	“they will be satisfied” (5:6)



Checklist for Lasting Joy

Matthew 5:1–12

“those who are merciful” (5:7)	“they will be shown mercy” (5:7)
“those whose hearts are pure” (5:8)	“they will see God” (5:8)
“those who work for peace” (5:9)	“they will be called the children of God” (5:9)
“those who are persecuted for doing right” (5:10)	“the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs” (5:10)

Jesus’ Beatitudes begin with our relationship with God—acknowledging our spiritual bankruptcy, grieving sin, humbling ourselves before God, and hungering for His truth and righteous way. They work their way into our relationships with people as we show mercy, live purely, make peace, and even suffer patiently at the hands of enemies.

The longer I spend studying the Beatitudes, the more I realize how different this teaching is from anything the world can offer. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Checklist for Lasting Joy

Matthew 5:1–12



Correlation: The Model of Jesus

There is no greater model of the tenets expressed in Matthew 5:3–12 than Christ Himself. Referencing the following verses, write down the ways that Jesus lived the Beatitudes and how He can be your example.

Jesus mourning over sin and sorrow—*Luke 13:34; John 11:33–36*

Jesus showing mercy—*John 8:1–11*

Jesus exhibiting humility and gentleness—*Matthew 11:28–30*



Checklist for Lasting Joy

Matthew 5:1–12

Can you think of other examples of Jesus modeling the values and virtues of the kingdom of God? What verses do you find?

The pure in heart get glimpses of the Lord, the living God. They bear the very image of Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Being the Beatitudes

Why would we settle for the baubles of this world when the riches of God are ours to enjoy? A share in His kingdom, an inheritance in His creation, comfort in our sorrow, satisfaction in our longing, mercy from God's hand, seeing Him face to face, the security of being His child.

Do you hunger and thirst for His kingdom and all its blessings? Like the psalmist, do you desire God “more than anything on earth” (Psalm 73:25)? In the space below, express your longing for the Lord, His kingdom, and His blessings.



Checklist for Lasting Joy

Matthew 5:1–12

Which of the characteristics of the Beatitudes describes you currently? Are you like those who are “poor and realize their need for him” (Matthew 5:3)? Are you mourning? Have you tried to show mercy or make peace? Are enemies persecuting you? What is your current situation and which blessing do you seek?

Which of the Beatitudes would you like to make more part of your life?

In whatever situation you find yourself, open your hands to the Father in the name of Christ. Ask for His power to “be” the Beatitudes in your world and receive His blessings that come to those who live a kingdom life now.



Checklist for Lasting Joy

Matthew 5:1–12



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for offering me a better world than this earthly existence. In this ethically upside-down world, You turn things right-side up with the Beatitudes, showing me the way to live as Christ lived and experience a kind of contentment and peace I find nowhere else but with You. I praise You for Your blessings and the hope of Your kingdom to come, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 61.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
3. God promised David, "your throne will be secure forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). David's future heir, the Messiah, would rule the earth on a "throne [that] will be as endless as the days of heaven" (Psalm 89:29). Jesus is David's messianic heir, and when Jesus returns, He will rule as king over the millennial kingdom in fulfillment of God's covenant with David (Revelation 20:1–6).
4. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 87.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY TWELVE

Shake and Shine!

Matthew 5:13–16

The Beatitudes describe who we are—poor in spirit, peacemakers, merciful, humble, pure in heart. Matthew 5:13–16 talks about what we must be in the world—salt and light.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE Beatitudes are more than platitudes. They are Jesus' marching orders for a countercultural mission to change our world for good. What a daunting task! Is world-change even possible?

In biblical terms, the “world” is an organized system run by the devil that is hostile toward God and bent on undermining His redemptive work. Long ago, Satan corrupted God's good world into a breeding ground for every form of evil. Just glance through the morning headlines to confirm the deep-seated depravity: murder rates rise, sex traffickers enslave innocents, domestic abuse shatters families, scammers defraud the elderly, violence enflames city streets, and the grim list goes on.

Jesus told us bluntly to expect hatred, persecution, and tribulation in this world (John 15:20; 16:33). How can we hope to survive in such a hostile place? How can soldiers of the cross—armed only with humility, contrition, gentleness, a longing for righteousness, mercy, purity, and peace—ever make a lasting impact on a world set on our destruction? The same way Jesus did.

Armed with these same characteristics, Jesus engaged an even more hostile world. His response to its hatred was love; to its lies, truth; to its harshness, gentleness; to its cross, forgiveness. With these qualities, He triumphed over His opposition, defeating the devil himself.



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Shake and Shine!

Matthew 5:13–16

We learn from our Master that the secret to making a difference is to be different. We counter the might of the world with meekness, the vices of the world with virtue, and the violence of the world with peace. As the Beatitudes change us, the world around us changes. And as the Beatitudes shape the essence of *who* we are, *what* we are takes shape too. According to Jesus, we become salt and light—two influences our decaying and dark world desperately needs.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As we open God's Word, let's prepare our hearts to receive the teaching of Jesus, the One who preserves our souls and lights our paths:

Father, the sinful state of Your world grieves You. Your love for the world sent Your Son to find the lost and save sinners—of whom I am one. Help me to relate to others with Your love, even toward those who hate Your Son and persecute His followers. Illumine and encourage my heart through Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you read [Matthew 5:13–16](#), you'll notice the two metaphors of *salt* and *light* that describe our influence in the world. Jesus often packaged truths in word pictures to help people understand His teaching and recall it later. Each time those in His audience used salt in preparing food or lit a lamp in their home, they would remember Jesus' words. You can do the same as you bring Jesus' teaching points into your everyday life.



Observation: You Are Salt and Light

Before digging too deeply into the metaphors, write down everything you observe in these four verses. Patient observation is essential in gleaning the most from your Bible study.¹



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STUDY TWELVE

SEARCHING
THE
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STUDY

Shake and Shine!

Matthew 5:13–16

Do you see the parallelism in [Matthew 5:13–14](#)? How are the sentences similar? Whom did Jesus address? Whom was He *not* addressing? Where is the salt located? Where does the light shine?

Notice the present tense of the verb, “you are.” Salt and light are not something we become but something we are. *If we are* followers of Christ, *then we are* salt and light. Our condition, however, can impact our effectiveness. *What* must the salt be to be effective ([Matthew 5:13](#))? And *how* must the lamp be displayed to fulfill its purpose ([5:14–15](#))?

If Christians are like salt and lamps, what is it about us that makes us salty and full of light? In [5:16](#), Jesus answered this question regarding the lamp only. What did He say is the light that shines out of the lamp? And what are the results when we let our lights shine?

*You don't carry salt. You're not handing out bags of it. You don't give out saltshakers.
You are the salt. You don't shine big lights in people's faces. You ARE the light.*
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Shake and Shine!

Matthew 5:13–16



Interpretation: The Meaning of the Metaphors

Ordinary salt mined around the Dead Sea along with common oil-burning lamps made from clay had many practical uses in first-century Israel. As we uncover their uses, we'll discover the gems of truth Jesus taught and the reasons He chose these objects as word pictures.

Salt for a World in Moral Decay—Matthew 5:13

In his commentary, Pastor Chuck Swindoll lists four uses for salt.

Salt adds flavor to food, and it also serves as a preservative, keeping meat from spoiling. Furthermore, when people consume salt, it makes them thirsty. Finally, salt can serve as a kind of detergent, making things clean.²

How are these benefits of salt similar to the ways Christians can benefit the world?

What exactly is the “saltiness” that we bring? Although Jesus didn't say directly, we can pick up clues from the context. Recall the ethical values and blessings of the kingdom of God that Jesus taught in the Beatitudes ([Matthew 5:3–12](#)). Take a moment to imagine what the world would be like if none of these values existed—no desire for God, no sorrow for sin, no gentleness, no yearning for justice, no mercy, no peace, and no refuge for the persecuted. *How much more trouble would the world be in!*

How do we help preserve a morally decaying world by living out Christ's “kingdom values”?



Shake and Shine!

Matthew 5:13–16

What did Jesus mean when He said, “But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor?” (Matthew 5:13)? What was He implying about Christians who’ve lost their virtue and lived identical to those in the world?

By showing mercy, we point people to our merciful God. By calming conflict with words of peace, we give people a taste of God’s peaceful kingdom. But if we live like the world, full of anger and retaliation, our salt has lost its flavor. Our world needs us to shake some kingdom-of-God “salt.” *Where else can true goodness be found?*

Light for a World in Spiritual Darkness

Reflecting on Christ’s metaphor of a brightly shining lamp, can you name some benefits of light?

In places of the world where no light from the works and words of Christ exists, what are some of the consequences of the spiritual darkness?



Shake and Shine!

Matthew 5:13–16

Jesus pointed to “a city *on a hilltop* that cannot be hidden” and a lamp “placed *on a stand*” (Matthew 5:14–15, emphasis added). What principle about our Christian witness was Jesus teaching by highlighting the importance of light being visible out in the open?

Light helps us find our way. It keeps us from being afraid, shows us the dangerous places so we don't walk into them, and points out the path that leads us where to go. Just one light in the darkness does all that. Just live your godly convictions, and the blacker the darkness, the brighter your light will shine. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Reasons the World Hates Us

We might think that people in the world will appreciate our salt and be drawn to our light, and some may. However, persecution is often the world's response. In His private instructions to His disciples on the night of His betrayal, Jesus explained the reasons the world will hate His followers. Read the following verses and write down at least three reasons the world will hate you.

“If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. Do you remember what I told you? ‘A slave is not greater than the master.’ Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you. They will do all this to you because of me, for they have rejected the one who sent me. They would not be guilty if I had not come and spoken to them. But now they have no excuse for their sin.” (John 15:18–22)



Shake and Shine!

Matthew 5:13–16

How does Christ's warning prepare you for being salt and light in your world?

We can expect hateful treatment because the world rests in the lap of the evil one. But don't fight fire with fire. Jesus didn't do that, and neither should we. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Thoughts on Being Salt and Light

In closing, here are three don'ts that will help us become a more positive and effective witness in the world.

- *Don't overdo it.* Don't rub salt into someone's fresh wound and don't shine a flashlight into somebody's eyes. There's no need to be hurtful or offensive. Just shake the salt and raise the light high for people to see.
- *Don't hold back.* Risk getting involved with spiritually lost people who are morally dying. Risk standing up even when others don't stand with you.
- *Don't worry about those who resist it.* People may shout insults, fight against us, even try to destroy us. Anticipating the backlash guards us against discouragement and, actually, affirms that we're going the right way—the way of Christ.

Which of these “don'ts” apply most to your situation? How so? In response, what can you do?



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STUDY TWELVE

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Shake and Shine!

Matthew 5:13–16

Jesus' goal was to inspire His followers to simply be who they were. They didn't need to become super-disciples; instead, they were just to follow His lead and influence people naturally as they displayed His love and virtue. In what ways can you be an influencer for Christ in your family and among your friends?

We often complain about cultural morals going bad. But why should we be shocked? Decay naturally occurs without a preservative. Who can blame meat for spoiling on the counter? Shake some salt in your world by putting into practice the ethics of Christ's kingdom. And let the light of your good deeds lead someone out of the darkness.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, the times are confusing. The world is frightening and unpredictable, and it's easy to become paranoid and want to hide. Give me the courage to run into the world, not from it. To let the salt of Christ's character rub off on others and the light of His truth show them His way. In the end, You will receive all the glory and praise. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 92.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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STUDY THIRTEEN

Crucial Truths, Rarely Understood

Matthew 5:17–20

Without the Holy Scriptures we have no standard. The Word of God gives us measuring marks for our lives. “Thy Word is truth,” Jesus said. Without truth, we do what seems right in our own eyes.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

HAD we been sitting with the crowds listening to Jesus preach the Sermon on the Mount, we would have been just as “amazed at his teaching” as they were (Matthew 7:28). In his book, *Simple Faith*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains the reason.

[Jesus] spoke with authority—the all-powerful, invincible authority of the Scriptures. Human opinions no longer mattered, not even the longstanding, rigidly enforced pharisaic rules and regulations.

Are we talking about merely making an impression or being persuasive? No. Webster defines *authority* as “the power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior.” I would use two additional words to describe authority: *convincing force* . . . a force far greater than any human can muster.¹

Jesus was not just any human. He was the Son of God, the King of God’s kingdom. His words flowed like spring water from heaven across the Galilean hillside, and although the people may not have fully understood His identity, they tasted the divine truth in His teaching . . . *and they were amazed!*



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Crucial Truths, Rarely Understood

Matthew 5:17–20

The scribes and Pharisees, on the other hand, were angered. They accused Jesus of setting Himself above the Mosaic law, of which they considered *themselves* the sole arbiters. In response, Jesus clarified His views on the law and His relationship to it as the perfect law keeper. He also clarified the role of Scriptures in our lives as a light to lead us on the path of His righteousness—a righteousness wholly different than the superficial religiosity of the scribes and Pharisees.

Let's uncover the crucial truths in Jesus' teaching about the authority of God's Word and righteousness and, once again, sit in awe before this amazing Teacher.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Although we can't hear Jesus' actual voice, we can read His words and sense His calling. Jesus said, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). Open your heart to hear Jesus' voice inviting you to follow Him and ask the Father to guide you in the way of His Son.

Father, in a world that's lost its way, take me by the hand through the darkness and lead me in the way of Christ. Tune my heart to hear His words clearly and accurately as I learn from Him. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In [Matthew 5:17–20](#), Jesus addressed a question that was on people's minds about the purpose of His ministry. “Don't misunderstand why I have come,” Jesus said (Matthew 5:17). Perhaps rumors had spread from false charges planted by the Pharisees that Jesus intended to abolish the law. As you read this passage, notice how Jesus corrected their misunderstanding and explained His real reason for coming. He praised God's law and urged His followers to obey it as God intended. We can view this passage under two headings: *Christ and the law* and *Christians and the law*.



Crucial Truths, Rarely Understood

Matthew 5:17–20



Observation: Christ and the Law, Christians and the Law

In the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we look for main verbs and contrasts, such as, “I did not come” and “I came.” We also look for parallelisms and cause-and-effect statements, such as “if you ignore . . . you will be called the least” and “anyone who obeys . . . will be called great” (Matthew 5:19).²

Read the passage again and write down what you see. In addition to contrasts and cause-and-effect, do you find repeated words or phrases? Do you see comparisons, such as Christ’s purpose for coming and the purpose of God’s law? Use the following space to record your observations.

Christ and the Law—Matthew 5:17–18

To what was Christ referring when He said, “the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets” (Matthew 5:17)? How did Jesus correct the misunderstanding that He wanted to “abolish” the law and the prophets?



Crucial Truths, Rarely Understood

Matthew 5:17–20

The prophets began their messages, “This is what the LORD says,” drawing their authority from God. Religious teachers buttressed their words by starting with “Teacher ‘so-and-so’ says . . .” Jesus, however, bypassed the prophets’ preamble and pharisaic footnoting. Looking at Matthew 5:18, how did Jesus introduce His own words? What was Jesus implying about His own authority by doing this?

Consider the scope of Jesus’ life—from His birth to His death and resurrection. In what ways did Jesus fulfill Old Testament prophecies? The following verses give a few specific examples: [1:21–23](#); [8:16–17](#); [12:16–18](#); [21:1–5](#).

Jesus not only fulfilled messianic prophecies, He also met the Old Testament’s requirement for perfect righteousness. The entire sacrificial system came to fulfillment in Christ when He gave Himself as the once-for-all and for-all-time sacrifice for sin ([Hebrews 9:27–28](#); [10:11–12](#)).

Prophetically, doctrinally, and ethically, Jesus accomplished every “jot and tittle” of Scripture by living His life in harmony with it and accomplishing its grand purpose.³

God cares so much about His Word that not even the smallest letter of any part of the Word of any verse of Scripture will pass away. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Crucial Truths, Rarely Understood

Matthew 5:17–20

Christians and the Law—Matthew 5:19–20

Having upheld the sanctity and authority of Scriptures, even to the tiniest pen strokes, Jesus urged His followers to live under its authority. According to [Matthew 5:19](#), what did Jesus say to avoid and to do?

The logical question that follows is *how* do we obey God's laws? Certainly not by following the example of "the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees" (Matthew 5:20). What did Jesus say in [5:20](#) about the consequences of following their misdirected leadership?

Let's dig deeper into Jesus' warning that our righteousness must be *better than* the righteousness of "the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees" (5:20). What did Jesus mean?

Jesus understood the nature of righteousness, which had nothing to do with external living but all with internal. It's not what goes into the person that corrupts him or her; it's what comes out from the inside. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Internal versus External Righteousness

In Jesus' day, "the teachers of religious law" (Matthew 5:20), also known as scribes, drafted rules of religious life to dictate how people should apply the Mosaic laws. They defined what counted as "work" forbidden on the Sabbath, for example, or what was ritually clean and unclean. Their longwinded pronouncements were passed down orally from generation to generation and considered as binding as Scripture.



Crucial Truths, Rarely Understood

Matthew 5:17–20

While the scribes defined the rules, the Pharisees separated themselves from ordinary life to keep themselves pure and act as judges of everyone else. In the eyes of average Jews, the Pharisees stood on high pedestals of holiness; they were the most righteous among them and the worthiest of entrance into God's kingdom.

Jesus shocked the crowd by teaching that His followers' righteousness must be "better than the righteousness of the teachers of the religious law and the Pharisees" (Matthew 5:20). What was Jesus implying about the *nature* of the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? Why was their righteousness *unworthy* of the kingdom of God? For help with the answer, read page 98 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. For an online resource, consult [Constable's Notes](http://netbible.org) at netbible.org.

How can our righteousness surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? Commentator John Stott explains, "Christian righteousness is greater than pharisaic righteousness because it is deeper, being a righteousness of the heart."⁴

Two prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, foretold a "new covenant" in which God's people could obey His law from their hearts and not superficially like the scribes and Pharisees. Let's take a brief look at these texts and the new covenant they describe.



Correlation: The Law Written on Our Hearts

Later in His ministry, Jesus exposed the scribes' and Pharisees' hypocrisy by quoting Isaiah. According to [Matthew 15:7–9](#), what fault lines of sin undermined their religious works and brought them tumbling off their pedestals?



Crucial Truths, Rarely Understood

Matthew 5:17–20

The Pharisees had a “heart” problem that God would remedy in the new covenant foretold by the Old Testament prophets. What did Jeremiah prophesy about the new covenant that makes it better than the covenant God made with Moses ([Jeremiah 31:31–33](#))?

According to [Ezekiel 36:25–27](#), what makes heart-righteousness possible for us?

The “better than” righteousness of the heart is possible because of Christ’s new covenant with us (Luke 22:20). Christ’s atonement on the cross, new life through His resurrection, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit mark the path to the kingdom of God.

The beauty of the cross of Christ is that it’s able to change a heart given to selfishness and arrogance and lust and covetousness and pride. It’s able to wash it clean through the blood of Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Putting Ourselves Under the Right Authority

How can we move beyond the pretense of external righteousness into a life of holiness lived from our hearts? Pastor Chuck Swindoll sums up his counsel in three words: *respect, obedience, and commitment*.



Crucial Truths, Rarely Understood

Matthew 5:17–20

- *Our respect for the Scriptures must be absolute, not almost.* When God issues a rebuke in His Word, don't overlook it but receive it as from His loving hand.
- *Our obedience to the Scriptures should be total, not partial.* We must beware the pharisaical traps of rationalizing and covering up our sin behind religious masks.
- *Our commitment to a scriptural lifestyle must be inward and deep, not external and superficial.* Don't dress up your faith to impress others but live it authentically before God from your heart.

Think back to your opening prayer. Did you hear your Shepherd's voice inviting you to a deeper walk with Him that flows from your heart? Righteousness that is better than what the Pharisees could muster in their own strength is not possible apart from Him and His empowering Spirit in you. In what area of your life may the Lord be inviting you to follow Him more closely and obey Him more deeply?

Kingdom-living begins by living under the authority of the King. As you close, affirm your commitment to the Lord as your highest authority and to depend on and respect His Word as your sole guide for living.



Crucial Truths, Rarely Understood

Matthew 5:17–20



A FINAL PRAYER

Use the following space to pen your own declaration of “dependence” on God and His Word today.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Simple Faith* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 63.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
3. The phrase, “one jot or one tittle” (Matthew 5:18 NKJV), bears explaining. The word *jot* refers to the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, the *yōd*, which resembles an apostrophe. The word *tittle* refers to a tiny projection of a Hebrew letter that distinguishes it from a similar letter, much like the upward projection on an *h* distinguishes it from an *n*. Jesus was affirming the authority and enduring value of all Scripture, even the smallest detail.
4. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5–7), *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1978), 75.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY FOURTEEN

Steering Clear of Murder

Matthew 5:21–26

When you come to Christ, the Spirit of God makes His residence in your life. He lives there to control your emotions, to restrain your rage, to calm your tendency toward retaliation, and to give you genuine peace.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus laid out a roadmap to deeper righteousness, which was not the kind of righteousness that the scribes and Pharisees modeled. Their piety was all external, bound up in countless regulations and meaningless rituals.

For example, the scribes and Pharisees interpreted the Mosaic law's prohibition of working on the Sabbath as carrying a burden. But what counted as a "burden"? According to commentator William Barclay, these nitpickers went to extremes to define acceptable burdens:

They spent endless hours arguing whether a man could or could not lift a lamp from one place to another on the Sabbath, whether a tailor committed a sin if he went out with a needle in his robe, whether a woman might wear a brooch or false hair, even if a man might go out on the Sabbath with artificial teeth or an artificial limb. These things to them were the essence of religion. Their religion was a legalism of petty rules and regulations.¹

Jesus warned people not to take this religious rabbit trail. He led His followers into the kingdom of God along the path of inner change. While the religious leaders placed their emphasis on appearances, Christ emphasized character. They focused on rules of the flesh; Jesus focused on the motivations of the heart.



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Steering Clear of Murder

Matthew 5:21–26

In the remainder of Matthew 5, Jesus illustrates this deeper righteousness through six subjects that include murder (Matthew 5:21–26), adultery (5:27–30), divorce (5:31–32), oaths (5:33–37), retaliation (5:38–42), and love (5:43–48).

For each of these topics, Jesus repeats a pattern: “You have heard. . . . But I say . . .” (5:21–22, 27–28, 31–32, 33–34, 38–39, 43–44). By using this rhetorical technique, He sets His teaching of the Mosaic law against the teaching of the religious leaders, proving His heart-level righteousness is “better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees” (5:20).

Let’s begin where Jesus began with a deeper understanding of the law’s prohibition of murder.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Murder is a subject we might not think applies to us. But Jesus wasn’t addressing the act so much as the attitude that inspires the act. His teaching applies more than we realize! Prepare your heart to receive Jesus’ words with the following prayer.

Father, I need Your insight as I read Jesus’ teaching on anger. Reveal to me the ways that I have stabbed a friend in the back with gossip or cut down an enemy with criticism or attacked a stranger with a rash judgment. I need to hear Jesus’ words. Lead me into peace with others in Your kingdom, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Now read [Matthew 5:21–26](#) in light of the larger context of Jesus’ explanation of deeper righteousness. What broader subjects does Jesus address under the topic of “murder”?



Steering Clear of Murder

Matthew 5:21–26



Observation: Murder, Anger, and Reconciliation

In the first stage of *Searching the Scriptures*, we simply observe what the passage says, noticing main verbs and nouns, contrasts and comparisons, sequences and patterns, and examples and illustrations.²

Outward Act of Murder, Inner Attitude of Anger—Matthew 5:21–22

What do you observe about Jesus' comparison of murder with anger in [Matthew 5:21–22](#)?

What illustrations of anger did Jesus list? And how did Jesus illustrate the increasing harm? Hint: notice the levels of the courts that Jesus references.

Jesus' illustrations of anger move from an insult to a pronouncement of condemnation. It's what we do in a burst of temper when we take off all restraints. It's an anger that won't forget, refuses to forgive, won't be pacified, and seeks revenge. It's when we see the deep within and cultivate hatred for another person. We're dealing with murder in the heart.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Steering Clear of Murder

Matthew 5:21–26

Reconciliation—Matthew 5:23–26

Although we may never commit murder, we may cut into another person's soul with angry words. Or, just as hurtful, we may cut people out of our lives by shunning them *as if* they were dead to us. What can heal the wounds of anger? Forgiveness and reconciliation.

In Matthew 5:23–26, Jesus illustrates these remedies with two situations. What do you observe in the first situation ([Matthew 5:23–24](#))? What is the person doing, and what comes to mind? Who is responsible for taking the first steps in reconciliation, the one offended or the offender? What does Jesus say takes priority—even over a sacred duty?

Pick out the key actions (verbs) in [5:23–24](#). Write them down as steps to reconciling with someone you have offended.

When you remember you have said something or done something that is cutting and you know you are wrong, go and be reconciled. Turn enmity into amity. Turn the offense into a resolution. Reconcile with the brother or sister you have hurt. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Steering Clear of Murder

Matthew 5:21–26

In [Matthew 5:25–26](#), Jesus switches scenarios from the temple courtyard to the city courthouse. What aspect of this conflict is different than the conflict in verses 23–24? What is similar?

Notice that in Jesus' teaching on murder, He contrasts people considered guilty "before the court" (Matthew 5:22) with people settling their differences *before they go* to court (5:25). Also, He refers to two different courts: a human court and the divine court. Read [5:21–26](#) again and write down any other themes weaving through Jesus' teaching.

I encourage you to cultivate reconciliation with others. Is it humiliating? It can be. It's certainly humbling. Begin with these words: "I was wrong. I want to make it right. Please forgive me." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Steering Clear of Murder

Matthew 5:21–26



Interpretation: Escalation of Anger to Murder

What did Jesus' teaching mean to His original audience? His listeners were used to measuring their righteousness by the Pharisees' standards: if a person doesn't murder someone, then he or she is guiltless before God. What principle did Jesus teach in this passage to open His listeners' minds to a deeper standard of righteousness?

In Matthew 5:22, Jesus cited two forms of verbal abuse: calling someone *raca*, an Aramaic term meaning “empty,” and calling someone *moros*, a Greek term meaning “fool.” What do these derogatory names communicate about the heart of the person saying them?

The natural course that such name-calling takes leads toward murder. If we assassinate someone's character without remorse, could actual murder be very far behind? The Pharisees themselves stepped across the line from contempt to murder when they plotted to kill Jesus (Matthew 12:14).



Steering Clear of Murder

Matthew 5:21–26

In a later setting, Jesus taught this same concept, saying, “From the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. These are what defile you” (Matthew 15:19–20). What was Jesus teaching about the key to righteous living under God’s rule?

The Pharisees taught the law, but they never dealt with the anger. They were the ones who led the way to the crucifixion of Jesus. He shattered their self-righteousness, and they despised Him for it. By teaming up with the Romans to nail Jesus to the cross, they hoped to silence Him. On the contrary, they set the message free. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Heart of Anger

Other passages in Scripture describe the harm inflicted by harsh words. What do these passages say about the destructive power of anger in a person’s heart?

Romans 3:10–15



Steering Clear of Murder

Matthew 5:21–26

James 3:5–10

James 4:1–2

By pronouncing angry judgment on others, we turn the tables and place *ourselves* on the scales of judgment. Thankfully, Christ leads us to a place of peace within ourselves, with others, and with God. Let's follow Him as we apply His teaching.



Application: Responding to Jesus' Counsel

Bundling together Jesus' words, we can sum up His thoughts with the following truths.

The principles of kingdom living go deeper than the external. Because Jesus loves us, He doesn't just deal with surface matters. He enters the parts of our hearts where our deepest fears and resentments reside to bring about real and lasting change. In what part of your deeper life would you like Jesus to help you change?



Steering Clear of Murder

Matthew 5:21–26

The potential of anger is far greater than mere words. Our words betray our true thoughts and feelings and inflict immense harm. Reflect on your speech. Do you need to address an anger issue that may be erupting in your words? If so, what is at the core of the issue?

The power of reconciliation is stronger than revenge. When the man in Jesus' story remembered he had offended someone, he went right away to be reconciled. Is there someone you have offended? How can you make it right with this person?

When we reconcile with someone with whom we're in conflict, it's amazing the burden it lifts from our hearts. The Pharisees argued about what counts as burdens we should not carry on the Sabbath. They fussed over whether a tailor should carry a needle. *How ridiculous!* How about whether we should carry anger? Now that's a burden worth releasing!



Steering Clear of Murder

Matthew 5:21–26



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me to live in an angry world without responding with anger in return. Give me the heart to live differently, to refrain from cursing others with contempt and labeling others with derogatory names. Free my spirit to live under Your rule and feel the joy of Your peace. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 1, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 128.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY FIFTEEN

Whatever Happened to Fidelity and Honesty?

Matthew 5:27–37

Truth is the most powerful thing on the planet. When we live in it, we have no skeletons. We have no fears. We have nothing to be found out. We sleep well. We die with a clear conscience. No elaborate verbiage; just tell the truth.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

JESUS opened His Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes—eight world-changing declarations about humility, piety, mercy, purity, gentleness, seeking what's right, and living in peace. Armed with these qualities, those who follow Christ influence culture as “salt” and “light.” We trailblaze a higher ethical standard than the world, and by being different we make a difference.

Broadly speaking, the Beatitudes embody the moral values of the kingdom of God. As we saw in our previous studies, Jesus presented these kingdom values *not* to replace the laws of the Old Testament but to express them in their truest sense so that His followers could obey God's Word as God meant it to be obeyed.

As we learned in the previous study, truly obeying the sixth command of the Ten Commandments, “You must not murder” (Matthew 5:21), means more than refraining from homicide. It includes resisting anger in all its forms—hatred, name-calling, disdain, contempt, revenge. How do we solve the murder problem in our streets? By resolving the anger problem in our hearts.

From Jesus' point of view, the roots of a poisonous plant are just as deadly as the fruit because they feed the fruit. He taught us to deal with sin at the germination stage and to cultivate a deeper kind of righteousness that comes from a changed heart.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Whatever Happened to Fidelity and Honesty?

Matthew 5:27–37



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare to study God's Word, reflect on Jesus' sixth beatitude, "God blesses those whose hearts are pure" (Matthew 5:8). Our relationships flourish when our hearts are pure—free from deceit, cleansed from impure thoughts, and unbound by selfishness. Ask the Lord to purify your heart as you receive His Word.

Father, illumine me through Jesus' teaching on fidelity and honesty in my closest relationships. Refine my motives, reinforce my commitments, and purify my heart so that all my relationships reflect Your faithful love. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read [Matthew 5:27–37](#) and notice the three times these phrases repeat, "You have heard" and "But I say" (Matthew 5:27–28, 31–32, 33–34). On these phrases hangs Jesus' teaching about three sensitive issues: *adultery*, *divorce*, and *breaking vows*. Before diving into the details, reflect on the subjects as a collective. Do any common themes link these issues? If you see some, write them in the space below.



Observation: Marital Fidelity and Verbal Integrity

Use your skills of observation to examine our passage closely. Imagine yourself as a detective with a magnifying glass in hand, looking at the details of the passage and searching for the smallest clues that may unlock the meaning of the text.¹

Let's group the issues of adultery and divorce under one heading: *Marital Fidelity*.



Whatever Happened to Fidelity and Honesty?

Matthew 5:27–37

Marital Fidelity—Matthew 5:27–32

The Pharisees strictly abided by the Mosaic law's prohibition of adultery. They cruelly condemned adulterers and sentenced them to be stoned—such as the adulterous woman they brought before Jesus (John 8:1–11). Jesus also took seriously the sin of adultery, but He went beyond the letter to reveal the heart of the law.

Adultery and Lust

What did He say about adultery in [Matthew 5:28](#)? Who was just as worthy of condemnation as an adulterer? How do you think His followers would have responded to His teaching?

Jesus redrew the line of sin to include not only the act but also the thoughts that might lead to the act. The central question on Jesus' mind was “Do we *want* to commit adultery?” Just as He said anger is murder in the heart, Jesus taught that lust is adultery in the heart. Righteousness in God's kingdom comes from the inside out.

Like a compassionate physician who cares about our total health, Jesus addressed our disease at its source rather than wait for its symptoms to surface. What was Jesus' treatment plan for dealing with lust, according to [5:29–30](#)?

Jesus wasn't saying that we should literally pluck out our eye or cut off our hand. Rather, He was telling His followers to do whatever it takes to stop lust at the eye-gate, the point where it enters our hearts.



Whatever Happened to Fidelity and Honesty?

Matthew 5:27–37

With our eyes, we may desire a person other than our spouse. With our hands, we may touch someone inappropriately and enflame lust. In the application section, we'll discuss practical ways to guard ourselves against lust and keep our hearts pure.

Jesus was ruthless in dealing with lust! The only way to be ruthless is to use extreme language that gets our attention. Plucking out an eye was His way of saying, "Stop staring at another woman." As Job stated in Job 31:1, "I made a covenant with my eyes / not to look with lust at a young woman." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Adultery and Divorce

The topic of adultery led Jesus to the subject of divorce as it relates to adultery. What do you observe in His teaching in [Matthew 5:31–32](#)? Read [Deuteronomy 24:1–4](#) to see the "law" to which Jesus referred.

In the interpretation and correlation sections, we'll explore the meaning of Jesus' teaching on divorce. For now, reflect on the heavy impact of His warnings in [Matthew 5:27–32](#). His followers probably figured that as long as they avoided adultery, they were without sin. What was Jesus helping them to understand about their need for heart-level cleansing that only He could provide?



Whatever Happened to Fidelity and Honesty?

Matthew 5:27–37

Verbal Integrity—Matthew 5:33–37

The topic of breaking our marriage vows through adultery naturally led Jesus to talk about the importance of *keeping our word*. Restate Jesus' instructions in your own words ([Matthew 5:33–37](#)).

Even in our day, we add little oaths to our promises, like, “Cross my heart” or “So help me God,” because we worry that people might not take our word seriously. A better plan, according to Jesus, is to make promise-keeping a lifestyle so that our character speaks on our behalf.

*Isn't it refreshing to be around a person who says, “Yes, I will do that,” and they do it?
Promise keeping is never more important than between a husband and a wife.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



Interpretation: Jesus and Divorce

Let's examine further Jesus' teaching on divorce. As we read earlier, the biblical backdrop is Deuteronomy 24:1–4. In the original context, Moses was adjudicating a complicated case in which a husband “found some indecency” in his wife and wrote her “a certificate of divorce” (Deuteronomy 24:1 NASB). The religious teachers missed Moses' bigger point about purity in marriage and got sidetracked with debates over the meaning of *indecency*. They were preoccupied with finding grounds for divorce while Jesus focused on preserving the sanctity of marriage.



Whatever Happened to Fidelity and Honesty?

Matthew 5:27–37

On pages 101–102 of his commentary, Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains Jesus' teaching in light of this context. Read this section and write down what you discover about the meaning of [Matthew 5:31–32](#). Feel free to consult other resources, such as [Constable's Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#).

Jesus was constantly lifting God's moral standard higher than the standard other rabbis taught. While the rabbis were giving husbands a way out of marriage, Jesus was barring the door. Even His exception clause legitimizing divorce, "unless she has been unfaithful" (Matthew 5:32), wasn't meant to be taken lightly. Grounds for divorce occur when there is ongoing sexual sin, but even in such situations, like Moses, Jesus would not have *prescribed* divorce only *permitted* it as a concession to sin.

God originally planned the marriage bond to be between one man and one woman for life. If a partner is unfaithful and seeks forgiveness and restoration, the other partner, ideally, will forgive and find a way to deal with it. Divorce is a divine concession, not a divine command. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: More of Jesus and Divorce

Later in His ministry, the Pharisees pressed Jesus on His views about divorce, and Jesus took the opportunity to teach about marriage in more depth. Read the encounter in [Matthew 19:3–12](#). We'll dig deeper into this passage in a later study. For now, write down one or two key points Jesus made about God's view of the permanence and sanctity of marriage.



Whatever Happened to Fidelity and Honesty?

Matthew 5:27–37

According to Jesus, Moses “permitted divorce only as a concession to your hard hearts” (Matthew 19:8). It was a concession not a commandment. For a more thorough explanation of Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage, refer to Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s discussion of Matthew 19:1–12 in the second volume of his *Insights on Matthew* commentary.² Other verses on the subject include Genesis 2:18–25; Malachi 2:13–16; 1 Corinthians 7:1–16; Ephesians 5:22–33; 1 Peter 3:1–7.



Application: Fulfilling Our Commitment to Jesus’ Teaching

Jesus’ words shine into our world like a moral beacon giving us much-needed direction in this morally wayward world. Two overarching truths sum up Jesus’ teaching:

- *When you marry, marry for life.* Permanence is essential to true partnership.
- *When you speak, say what you mean and mean what you say.* Make keeping your word a habit and people will never question your integrity.

Perhaps you can add more principles based on Jesus’ teaching. What would they be?

How can you bring to life these principles in your relationships?



Whatever Happened to Fidelity and Honesty?

Matthew 5:27–37

Sexual intimacy in marriage is a gift from God, however, we compromise the sanctity of sex with lustful thoughts. Jesus spoke in hyperbole to “gouge” out an eye or “cut” off a hand that causes us to sin (Matthew 5:29–30). However, His point is clear: *we must be ruthless in the measures we take to keep our hearts pure*. What steps can you take to shield your eyes from lustful images?

For further help in overcoming sexual sin, we encourage you to speak with your pastor or Christian counselor. Also consult the topical pages, [Men's Purity](#), [Women's Purity](#), and [Pornography](#) at insight.org. Here you will find more resources, including a Bible study designed for you to complete with an accountability partner, titled, “Shield Your Eyes, Guard Your Heart.” With God's help, you can experience the blessings of “those whose hearts are pure” (5:8).



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I confess that I am a sinner in need of Your cleansing touch. Shield me from the Enemy's condemnations for past sins and offenses. Open a doorway to a new way of living that is pure and healthy, joyful and free. Thank You for Your fidelity to me despite my moral failures and may I always be faithful to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. Swindoll's *Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 16–28*, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 94–108. Other verses on the subject include Genesis 2:18–25; Malachi 2:13–16; 1 Corinthians 7:1–16; Ephesians 5:22–33; 1 Peter 3:1–7.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY SIXTEEN

Shocking Advice to the Selfish and Strong-Willed

Matthew 5:38–48

*When we make Jesus' words our lifestyle, we will be like our heavenly Father.
What is the Father like? He is loving, full of mercy, and grace.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN the apostle Paul, by the Holy Spirit's power, gazed down the corridor of time and viewed the state of the world's future, he set his eyes on a disturbing scene.

In the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. (2 Timothy 3:1–4)

The apostle's predictions are today's headlines, aren't they? They describe our culture with sobering accuracy. Thankfully, in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stands against the tide of moral decline and invites His followers to join His countercultural movement. His teaching about life in the kingdom of God is downright revolutionary!

In His final instructions in Matthew 5, Jesus reaches the apex of His countercultural strategy. In Matthew 5:21–37, He teaches us what *not* to do. Now, in Matthew 5:38–48, He teaches us what to do—*love our enemies*.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Shocking Advice to the Selfish and Strong-Willed

Matthew 5:38–48

Commentator John Stott reflects on this ultimate manifestation of kingdom living:

Nowhere is the challenge of the Sermon greater. Nowhere is the distinctness of the Christian counter-culture more obvious. Nowhere is our need of the power of the Holy Spirit (whose first fruit is love) more compelling.¹

And, we might add, at no time in history is the need greater for Christ's revolutionary love.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The apostle Paul warned us not to allow the world to squeeze us into its mold (Romans 12:2). When we love our enemies, we not only resist the mold, we break it! Pray the following prayer, as you seek to understand and follow Jesus' teaching.

Father, I am surrounded by the dog-eat-dog mentality of the world in which I live, and I need Your otherworldly perspective. Teach me to love all people as You love them. Help me understand Jesus' words and in the power of Your grace change my world with His love. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you read [Matthew 5:38–48](#), imagine hearing Jesus' teaching in person, as though you were one of His Jewish followers fettered by Roman rule. These Jews hated the Romans for their pagan practices, heavy taxes, and brutal treatment. Against this backdrop of foreign oppression, the passage holds even deeper meaning. Notice the two sections in which Jesus gives instructions on how to respond to a person who does evil to us (Matthew 5:38–42) and how to treat an enemy (5:43–48).



Observation: Release Not Resist, Love Not Hate

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, it's important to observe central themes, repeated words, phrases, or patterns.² Look for the ways Jesus contrasts our usual reactions to evildoers and enemies with the responses of those who live by Christ's principle of love.



Shocking Advice to the Selfish and Strong-Willed

Matthew 5:38–48

Response to an Evildoer—Matthew 5:38–42

What Old Testament law did Jesus quote in [Matthew 5:38](#)? Read the cross-references in your Bible to find the verses Jesus may have been quoting. What is the underlying principle on which this law is based?

This principle was woven into Israel's legal fabric as a way for judges to end a dispute without it escalating. Once the punishment was paid, the case was closed. However, while the law of retaliation may have balanced the scales of justice, it fell short of Christ's higher law.

What four illustrations did Jesus give in which the injured person released his or her rights of payback ([Matthew 5:39–42](#))? Notice the verbs: *do not resist*, *offer*, *give*, *carry*, and *don't turn away*. What heart attitudes did Jesus imply were motivating the person to return a blessing for a curse?

What do you do when ugly things are said about you? Let it glance off you. Overlook it, ignore it. Look past it. We turn the other cheek when we refuse to take it personally and refuse to retaliate. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Shocking Advice to the Selfish and Strong-Willed

Matthew 5:38–48

Response to an Enemy—Matthew 5:43–48

What Old Testament law did Jesus quote in [Matthew 5:43](#)? Read the cross-references in your Bible to find the verses Jesus may have been quoting. Note: you won't find any references for "hate your enemy" . . . *because that statement is not in the Bible!* Jewish teachers added this phrase to the law and encouraged hating enemies, especially the Romans.

In [5:45](#), Jesus compared showing love to all people with what benevolent actions by the heavenly Father?

What comparisons did Jesus make in [5:46–47](#)?



Shocking Advice to the Selfish and Strong-Willed

Matthew 5:38–48

What motivations did Jesus give for loving our enemies in these verses?

It's not about hating our enemies. Hate never accomplished anything except to make us more angry and bitter. Jesus doesn't say, "Love the way your enemies live" or "Support them when they are doing wrong." He says, "Love them as people." We can do that.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Love and Limits

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we seek to understand what Jesus was saying . . . and what He wasn't saying. By instructing us to cool the urge to retaliate, Jesus never implied that we condone evil behavior or forbid the administration of justice. He taught us to gauge our *personal* response not by the "eye for an eye" standard but by the higher standard of love.

Read pages 103–104 in Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, as well as the following explanation of Matthew 5:38–42 by commentator John Stott. In the space below, write down your understanding of how love guides our responses to evildoers.

[The] principle is love, the selfless love of a person who, when injured, refuses to satisfy himself by taking revenge, but studies instead the highest welfare of the other person and of society, and determines his reactions accordingly. He will certainly never hit back, returning evil for evil, for he has been entirely freed from personal animosity. Instead, he seeks to return good for evil. So he is willing to give to the uttermost—his body, his clothing, his service, his money—in so far as these gifts are required by love.³



Shocking Advice to the Selfish and Strong-Willed

Matthew 5:38–48

Love not only guides; it sets limits. Sometimes the most loving thing to do is to confront wrong. “True love, caring for both the individual and society, takes action to deter evil and promote good.”⁴ How might a follower of Jesus respond in a loving way to wrongdoing, without taking revenge or resorting to retaliation against the wrongdoer?

Just as children naturally follow in their parents’ footsteps, we act most like our heavenly Father—and *unlike* the world—when we shower grace on our enemies. What did Jesus mean, “But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48)? Consult Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, pages 104–105 or, for additional insight, [Constable’s Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#).

Our lives beam with godliness when we return good for evil. Paul elaborated this theme in his letter to the Romans. Let’s look closer at Paul’s teaching as it correlates with the teaching of Jesus.



Shocking Advice to the Selfish and Strong-Willed

Matthew 5:38–48



Correlation: Paul on Retaliation

Romans 12 goes hand-in-hand with the Sermon on the Mount and is an inspired commentary on Jesus' teaching. Read [Romans 12:14–21](#) and write down Paul's line of reasoning regarding Jesus' teaching on working for peaceful relationships, releasing our rights to revenge, and loving our enemies.

According to Paul, why is doing good to those who have wronged us like heaping “burning coals of shame on their heads” (Romans 12:20)?

How can we apply Jesus' teaching on loving our enemies instead of taking revenge? Certainly not in our own strength. As we wrap up our study, let's look to our Lord for the resources we need to obey His law of love.

The Lord Jesus Christ releases His power through you so that you can forgive. You can ignore an insult. You can go the extra mile. You can give up your rights. People can say things against you that are absolutely untrue, and you don't have to set the record straight. You don't have to do that because the Lord is at work on your behalf.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Shocking Advice to the Selfish and Strong-Willed

Matthew 5:38–48



Application: Responding to Christ's Call to Love

Following Jesus' teaching on loving our enemies is the ultimate test of godliness and spiritual maturity, and it is only possible through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and the presence of Christ.

Have you experienced a similar situation to the ones Jesus illustrated? Perhaps someone slapped you in the face with an insult, threatened to take something from you, demanded you do a humbling task, or asked something from you that you didn't want to give up. What is your situation?

Yield yourself to the Spirit and invite Christ to guide your words and actions. Write a prayer as you release your rights and trust God to make things right in His time.

What can you do today to follow Jesus' teaching on nonretaliation? Is there someone with whom you can share your journey, who can support you and pray for you as you take steps to love your enemy?



Shocking Advice to the Selfish and Strong-Willed

Matthew 5:38–48

Throughout history, many godly men and women have walked Jesus' way of love. William Wilberforce patiently endured slanderous "slaps" as he crusaded to abolish the slave trade in England. In a Nazi concentration camp, Corrie Ten Boom prayed for her captors even when they cruelly mistreated her and took the life of her dear sister, Betsy.

Will loving your enemies be easy? Christian history teaches us no. But the struggle will transform you into the image of your heavenly Father. He is our model of grace toward enemies, as Paul declared, "God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8).



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I pray for the wisdom and courage to embrace the evildoer while standing up to the evil. To resist the pull of the world to pay back evil for evil. To have more concern for people than for my own rights. Give me the love I lack and empower me to do what only Jesus can do. Fill me with Your Spirit and encourage me with the presence of Christ, for it is in His name that I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5–7), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1978), 103.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
3. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5–7), 107.
4. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5–7), 108.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY SEVENTEEN

Beware! Religious Performance Now Showing

Matthew 6:1–8

God isn't looking for impressive performances before the public but deep, inner character that comes from pure devotion to Him—doing what is right, showing kindness and compassion to others, and walking in humility.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN a starless night on a raging sea, the most hopeful sight for a captain navigating a ship to safety is a lighthouse. The beacon serves two vital purposes: to point ships to the harbor and to warn of the rocks below.

Jesus accomplishes similar purposes in His Sermon on the Mount. He illumines our way through the world's tumultuous seas into the kingdom's calm, and He warns of the jagged rocks that could shipwreck our faith. Earlier in His Sermon, Jesus flashed a caution:

But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven! (Matthew 5:20)

In the opening of Matthew 6, Jesus flashes another warning:

“Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven.” (6:1)

If we're not careful, currents of pride can pull our sincere devotion onto the rocks of performance, and our righteousness will be no better than the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. In his book, *Simple Faith*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll describes the religious wreckage of those who followed the Pharisees:



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Beware! Religious Performance Now Showing

Matthew 6:1–8

A humble, uncomplicated walk with God had been replaced by a prime-time performance of religion. It was righteousness on display . . . strut-your-stuff spirituality led by none other than the scribes and Pharisees who loved nothing more than to impress the public with their grandiose expressions of piety on parade.¹

With a firm grasp on the helm and a keen eye on Jesus, let's heed His warning and follow His light into God's presence as He teaches on the spiritual disciplines of giving and prayer.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you quiet yourself before the Lord, open your heart to His truth as you study His Word.

Father, Your words “are my joy and my heart’s delight” (Jeremiah 15:16). Draw me into the joy of Your presence as I learn from Your Son how to walk closer to You with authentic and pure devotion. In Jesus’ name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read [Matthew 6:1–8](#) and look for Jesus' warning followed by two applications. Verse 1 states Jesus' main warning not to do good deeds to be admired. In 6:2–4, Jesus applies this principle to giving, and in 6:5–8, He applies it to praying. In the space below, write down the main warning in 6:1 which forms Jesus' overall thesis.



Beware! Religious Performance Now Showing

Matthew 6:1–8



Observation: Instructions for Giving and Praying

Observation is the first step in *Searching the Scriptures*, which lays the foundation on which we build our interpretation and base our principles.² Some students of Scripture like to write their observation notes directly on the pages of their Bibles. Others like to print the passage on a piece of paper, mark it, and clip it in a notebook. Digital Bibles now include highlighting and notetaking tools, and your notes can be saved for later reference.

Whichever method you prefer, take a few minutes to reread the passage and note in the margin the section on giving (Matthew 6:2–4) and the section on praying (6:5–8). Then, underline or highlight the phrases that are parallel, such as *when you give*, *when you pray*, *reward*, *publicly*, and *in private*. Circle the word, *don't*, which Jesus repeats six times like a flashing light. Put a square around the contrasting word, *but*, which indicates Jesus' shift from what to avoid to what to do.

Now, let's organize these parallel and contrasting ideas in a chart for each topic.

Instructions for Giving—Matthew 6:2–4

Jesus contrasted the hypocrites' giving style versus how His followers should give. Summarize Jesus' teaching on giving by noting what Jesus warned against and the results for those who do not heed His warning. Also, write down what Jesus instructed us to do, along with the results of following His teaching.

Verse	Actions	Results
How the hypocrites give (<i>Matthew 6:2</i>)		
How Jesus' followers should give (<i>6:3–4</i>)		



Beware! Religious Performance Now Showing

Matthew 6:1–8

What did Jesus say is the hypocrites' reason for giving? What can you conclude about the proper motive for giving in contrast to the hypocrites' wrong motive?

Instructions for Praying—Matthew 6:5–8

Jesus warned against praying like the hypocrites or like the Gentiles. Fill in the open spaces on the following chart to contrast the dos and don'ts of praying.

Verse	Actions	Results
How the hypocrites pray (<i>Matthew 6:5</i>)		
How Jesus' followers should pray (<i>6:6</i>)		
How the Gentiles pray (<i>6:7</i>)		
How Jesus' followers should pray (<i>6:8</i>)		



Beware! Religious Performance Now Showing

Matthew 6:1–8

What did Jesus say is the hypocrites' reason for praying? What can you conclude about the proper motive for praying in contrast to the hypocrites' wrong motive?

What did Jesus say the Gentiles falsely assume will result from their babbling on and on? How did Jesus correct that assumption for His followers?

For a final observation, note Jesus' insights into the attributes of God the Father. According to Jesus' teachings, what does God *see* and *know* (6:4, 6, 8)? What do Jesus' insights about the Father say about our relationship with Him?

We live our lives naked before God. There is no such thing as hidden sin or an unspoken motive. He sees and hears it all. We can't fake it. We can't act like we're more holy than someone else. The Father who sees in secret would love in secret to reward you. And He does. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Beware! Religious Performance Now Showing

Matthew 6:1–8



Interpretation: Meaning and Principles

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we seek to understand what Jesus meant by asking key questions and finding the answers in our Bible study resources. For help, consult pages 109–112 in Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. Another excellent resource is *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*.

Does Jesus' warning in Matthew 6:1 contradict His command in 5:16?

Jesus warned us *not* to “do our good deeds publicly” (Matthew 6:1), but earlier He told us, “let your good deeds shine out for all to see” (5:16). What is the difference between the two instructions? To find the answer, compare the motives and results of doing good deeds in [6:1](#) versus [5:16](#). Who gets the glory in each case?

Write a principle about doing good deeds based on your conclusions from comparing these verses? A biblical principle is a timeless truth that applies to all people, not just those in Jesus' day.



Beware! Religious Performance Now Showing

Matthew 6:1–8

What rewards did Jesus refer to?

Although Jesus didn't specify the nature of the rewards, He did identify the source, either "others" or "your Father" (Matthew 6:1). Our reward comes from whomever we seek to impress. If we give or pray to receive people's applause, then their applause is our only reward. However, if we give or pray in private from hearts full of love for God alone, our reward comes from Him alone. What do you think the Father's reward might be?

Write a principle about the inner blessings of unseen acts of devotion to God.

What does Jesus mean, "Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (6:3)?

What do your resources say is the meaning of Jesus' expression? For an online resource, consult [Constable's Notes](#) at netbible.org.



Beware! Religious Performance Now Showing

Matthew 6:1–8

Write a principle about not drawing attention to ourselves when we help others in need.

What was Jesus teaching us about the attributes of God?

According to Jesus, our heavenly Father “sees everything” (Matthew 6:4, 6) and “knows exactly what you need even before you ask him” (6:8). What truths can you draw regarding the attributes of God?

Conclude this section by writing a final principle about the nature of the Father and our secure relationship to Him.

When you pray, give up all the extra words. Just come to God as a Father and tell Him what you need. Pour it out in all honesty. If you want to sing to Him, He loves your song. He loves to hear your heart. He loves that you will level with Him on things that you maybe would level with no one else about. That's intimacy. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Beware! Religious Performance Now Showing

Matthew 6:1–8



Correlation: What Does God Look for from Us?

Like Jesus, the prophet Micah contrasted outward displays of religious piety that we may think God wants from us with quiet expressions of faith. In Micah 6:6–8, Micah echoed the people's questions for God to know how they could win back His favor. What religious extremes did the people think God wanted them to do, according to *Micah 6:6–7*?

In response, what simple acts of faith did Micah say God really wants (*Micah 6:8*)?

Micah summed up true religion in the most basic areas of life: our *actions*, our *heart*, and our *character*. The hypocrites in Jesus' day may have done what they thought God wanted, but their hearts were far from God and their character was riddled with pride. As we apply Jesus' teaching, let's focus on the heart and character that God seeks from those who walk with Him.



Beware! Religious Performance Now Showing

Matthew 6:1–8



Application: Principles in Action

Jesus described a *simple* faith that blossoms in an intimate relationship with God. What can we learn from Jesus' teaching? Here are three basic principles to take away from our study.

1. *When devotion becomes a performance, we lapse into hypocrisy.* Keep a watch on your motives as you serve God.
2. *When giving lacks secrecy, we lose our reward.* Anonymous generosity directs our focus to others instead of ourselves.
3. *When prayers are public demonstrations, we lack God's power.* Don't pray to impress your audience but to commune with your heavenly Father.

Which of these principles would you like to apply this week, and how?

Turn back in your study to the principles you wrote down. Pick one of these principles that touches your heart most deeply. How can you live out this truth this week?

Had Micah been in Jesus' audience, his heart would have burst with joy as the light of Jesus' teaching and warnings flashed brightly, like a lone lighthouse in a dark night. Jesus was reflecting the simple faith Micah flickered centuries before: "Walk humbly with your God."



Beware! Religious Performance Now Showing

Matthew 6:1–8



A FINAL PRAYER

Instead of reading a prayer, write your own private prayer of devotion to your heavenly Father who loves to hear the expressions of your heart in the quietness of your private communion with Him.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Simple Faith* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 121.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY EIGHTEEN

Prayer and Fasting Minus All the Pizzazz

Matthew 6:9–18

The best place to pray is in a private room. We do our best work of prayer on our knees when nobody is around.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN Matthew 6:2–8, Jesus was specific. He said we should give simply, sincerely, and secretly, trusting that our good Father sees us and will reward His loving children. When we pray, Jesus specified *where* we are to pray: “go away by yourself, shut the door behind you” (Matthew 6:6); *to whom* we are to pray: “to your Father” (6:6); and *how* we are to pray: “don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do” (6:7).

In this study, Jesus teaches us *what* to pray: the Lord’s Prayer. Undoubtedly, this prayer, which Matthew preserved for us in 6:9–13, is the most well-known prayer ever uttered. Rarely does our Lord design a one-size-fits-all pattern of worship for His disciples, but here is an exception. What follows is a paradigm for prayer, a divine model for all God’s children to follow.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Make the Lord’s Prayer your prayer as you open His Word. You may have memorized the prayer in another Bible version, which you may wish to quote. Here is the prayer from the New Living Translation.



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Prayer and Fasting Minus All the Pizzazz

Matthew 6:9–18

“Our Father in heaven,
 may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
 as it is in heaven.
Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
 as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation,
 but rescue us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:9–13)



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read the full passage on giving, prayer, and fasting, [Matthew 6:1–18](#), and notice the emphasis on *private* and *personal* devotion to the Lord.

- “When you give . . . don't do as the hypocrites do” (Matthew 6:2); *instead*, “Give your gifts in private” (6:4).
- “When you pray, don't . . . pray publicly” (6:5); *instead*, “pray to your Father in private” (6:6).
- “When you pray, don't babble on and on” (6:7); *instead*, “Pray like this” (6:9).
- “When you fast, don't make it obvious” (6:16); *instead*, “comb your hair and wash your face” (6:17).

Shining like a glittering jewel in a setting of gold, the Lord's Prayer is the centerpiece of this passage. We could title it the “Disciple's Prayer” because Jesus designed it as a teaching tool to help us experience the kind of daily and dependent relationship He had with His Father. Look closer at this prayer, observing two main themes: adoration (6:9–10) and petition (6:11–13). And then, we'll conclude with Jesus' teaching on fasting.



Observation: The Lord's Prayer and Fasting

A loupe is a magnifying glass that jewelers use to see the tiniest details of a gemstone. Using your *Searching the Scriptures* observation skills, examine the Lord's Prayer like a jeweler looking through a loupe.¹



Prayer and Fasting Minus All the Pizzazz

Matthew 6:9–18

Adoration of the Lord—Matthew 6:9–10

Look first at the Lord's *name*. How do we address God, and what does this title say about our relationship with God and His character ([Matthew 6:9](#))?

Second, notice the Lord's *realm*. What realm does the Lord inhabit, and what do we pray for as we come before Him ([6:9](#))?

Realm implies “rulership,” so the third facet is the Lord's *rule*. Over what does the Lord rule, and what do we pray for regarding his rule ([6:10](#))?



Prayer and Fasting Minus All the Pizzazz

Matthew 6:9–18

Finally, we put ourselves under the Lord's rule by submitting to His *will*. Where do we pray for the Lord's will to be accomplished and in what manner (6:10)?

Pause and imagine just these verses of the Lord's Prayer fulfilled—all people adoring the Lord and surrendering to His will in complete submission. What would our world be like?

When the will of God is done in our lives, we become the living personification of the kingdom of Christ. When we give up our wills and embrace His will, we enthrone the Lord and model "kingdom life." God's kingdom is at work in us and through us.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Petitions to the Lord—Matthew 6:11–13

What did Jesus say we are to ask the Lord to give us ([Matthew 6:11](#))? What do you notice about this brief request?



Prayer and Fasting Minus All the Pizzazz

Matthew 6:9–18

While the first petition is physical in nature, the second is spiritual: *forgive us*. As nourishing as bread is to our bodies, forgiveness is to our souls. What did Jesus say about our need for God's forgiveness and our need to forgive others ([Matthew 6:12](#))? What explanatory point did Jesus add in [6:14–15](#)?

Third, having been forgiven for past sins, we look forward and petition the Lord to *lead us*. The statement, “do not lead us into temptation” (6:13 NASB), is a permissive imperative in Greek, which can be stated, “don’t let us yield to temptation” (6:13). We can’t avoid the tests and temptations that lurk around every bend. So we ask the Lord to lead us in such a way that they not overwhelm us. Try stating this petition in your own words.

In addition, we ask the Lord to *deliver us*. From what and whom do we ask deliverance, and why do you think Jesus taught His followers to make this request ([6:13](#))?



Prayer and Fasting Minus All the Pizzazz

Matthew 6:9–18

Our adversary hates everything we love. He hates the will of God. He hates the Word of God. The devil hates our joy in Christ. Cast out of God's presence, the devil looks with envy on us who have a favored position near God because of the death and resurrection of Christ.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

When We Fast—Matthew 6:16–18

Jesus included fasting in His theme of personal and private devotion. What did He warn against and what did He encourage (*Matthew 6:16–18*)? How is His teaching about fasting similar to giving and prayer?

Why do we fast? Fasting helps us concentrate on issues. It's good for our health. It enables us to rearrange and fix our priorities. It encourages us to examine our lives and motives. It assists in finding the Lord's will. It strengthens our self-control. It helps us deal with our grief. It brings us back to the basics and simplifies our lives. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of Key Concepts

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, let's seek to understand the meaning of three key concepts: *hallowed*, *kingdom*, and *forgiveness*. Pastor Chuck explains these concepts on pages 113–114 of his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. Consult those pages as you answer the following questions. A helpful online resource is Constable's Notes at netbible.org.



Prayer and Fasting Minus All the Pizzazz

Matthew 6:9–18

“Hallowed Be Your Name”—Matthew 6:9 NASB

The word, *hallowed*, is a passive imperative. We pray that the Father’s name be hallowed. Consult *Insights on Matthew 1–15* and read the ways the [New Century Version](#) and [New English Translation](#) Bible versions translate the word. What does *hallowed* mean?

In your own words, elaborate upon this prayer in a few sentences to help you get a firmer grasp of its full meaning.

We pray for God who is holy to be revered as holy, and, in a similar way, we pray for God who already reigns to spread His reign in people’s hearts as more people come to faith in Him. Let’s look closer at this part of the Lord’s Prayer.

“May Your Kingdom Come”—Matthew 6:10

What does this request mean? With eyes to the future, we pray for God’s kingdom to come—when Christ returns to rule in the millennial age—and we join our voices with the apostle John’s, “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20). At the same time, we plant our feet in the present and pray for God to spread His reign in us and to people everywhere *now* as we enthrone Christ in our hearts and live out His kingdom principles.



Prayer and Fasting Minus All the Pizzazz

Matthew 6:9–18

Express the dual meaning of this part of the Lord's Prayer in your own words.

“Forgive Us Our Sins”—Matthew 6:12

How does Pastor Chuck explain the correlation between God forgiving us and us forgiving others (*Matthew 6:12, 14–15*)?

Forgiving others doesn't earn God's forgiveness, for we are saved by grace through faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8–9). Forgiving others, however, does allow us to enjoy the blessings of God's forgiveness and the intimacy of fellowship with Him. Let's take a deeper look into this principle.



Correlation: The Consequences of Unforgiveness

In *Matthew 18:23–35*, Jesus told a story about a king who forgave his servant a great debt. However, when the ungrateful servant refused to forgive the small debt of another servant, the king summoned him and said, “Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?” (Matthew 18:33). Then the king “sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt” (18:34).

This negative story of the consequences of unforgiveness illustrates a positive point: *God's mercy is a powerful force*. When truly received, it *will* transform our hearts and empower us to forgive others as our Father forgave us.



Prayer and Fasting Minus All the Pizzazz

Matthew 6:9–18

Write down your understanding of Jesus' teaching on forgiveness as it relates to God forgiving us.

If you're holding a grudge, today is a great day to give it to the Lord. Say to Him, "I don't deserve Your forgiveness. How could I hold an offense against another person?" Release the debt and forgive. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: The Lord's Prayer in Action

Bring to life the Lord's Prayer by taking the following steps. First, *make the heavenly Father, not people, your main focus*. Hallow His name. Build His kingdom. Do His will. How can you take this step today?

Second, *make the secret place, not the public place, your primary platform*. Only in the private space of our prayer closet can our devotion to God be formed. What can you do to follow through with this principle?



Prayer and Fasting Minus All the Pizzazz

Matthew 6:9–18

As you close, pray the Lord's Prayer again slowly and meditatively. Reflect on the many sparkling facets of this magnificent prayer. Own this prayer by inserting your name: _____'s Prayer. Make this prayer reveal the heart of *your* relationship with God and then carry it with you into the wide expanse of all your relationships.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, may people everywhere acknowledge the wonder of who You are and all that You do as they join the heavenly host in submitting to Your rule. Nourish my body and refresh my soul today. Forgive me as I forgive others. Lead me on Your righteous path. And deliver me from the snares of the evil one. I trust You as my provider and protector this day and every day. I pray in Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

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



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY NINETEEN

The Lure of a Lesser Loyalty

Matthew 6:19–24

Evaluate who you are following, who you are patterning your life after. Keep serving the right Master.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

OUR heavenly Father “sees everything,” declared Jesus (Matthew 6:4). He sees our anonymous acts of generosity and our time alone with Him in prayer. He knows everything, too, even our secret thoughts. He knows what we are going to say before we say it (Psalm 139:4). He senses our needs even before our lips form a plea for help (Matthew 6:8).

Our lives are open books before our all-seeing and all-knowing God. Omniscience has no blind spots! Peering into the inner chambers of our souls, He knows when our hearts are completely devoted to Him.

So, why did Jesus instruct us to seek God *in private* (6:6)? For our sake, not His. Rival contenders constantly vie for the single throne in our hearts—a throne meant only for One. That battle for loyalty primarily occurs in private and is primarily won in private. God wants us to win the battle, not because it meets His need but because it fosters our own good.

Thankfully, in Matthew 6:19–24, Jesus teaches us how to privately focus our affections on our Father as our one and only sovereign so that our loyalty is pure in private and in public. Let's dig into this passage and learn Jesus' method for resisting the lure of a lesser loyalty.



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The Lure of a Lesser Loyalty

Matthew 6:19–24



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open the Word, pray with the psalmist: “Search me, O God, and know my heart” (Psalm 139:23). Invite the Lord to reveal anything about yourself that you may not realize. Make this humble request: “Point out anything in me that offends you” (139:24). And conclude by placing your hand in His: “lead me along the path of everlasting life” (139:24).



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read [Matthew 6:19–24](#) in which Jesus gives an example of one of God’s rival contenders: our earthly possessions. Notice the two issues that determine the object of our devotion: what we *treasure* (Matthew 6:19–21) and where we *focus* our desires (6:22–23). And then, watch how Jesus wraps up His teaching in a succinct admonition: “You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money” (6:24).



Observation: Treasures and Focus in Contrasts

In *Searching the Scriptures*, we begin by observing the passage, noting important features such as metaphors, comparisons, commands, questions, and figures of speech.¹ In Matthew 6:19–24, Jesus masterfully uses *contrast* to clarify His points, just as an artist offsets dark colors with light highlights to add depth to a portrait. Fill in the following charts to identify the concepts that Jesus casts in contrasting light to help us remember His lessons.

Treasures in Contrast—Matthew 6:19–21

Verse	Command	Reason
“Don’t store . . .” (6:19)		
“Store . . .” (6:20)		



The Lure of a Lesser Loyalty

Matthew 6:19–24

Jesus concluded in [Matthew 6:21](#) with a principle—a timeless truth that applies to everyone in every era. Try putting this principle in your own words.

From the metaphor of “treasure,” Jesus switches to the metaphor of the “eye” to illustrate His point.

Focus in Contrast—Matthew 6:22–23

Verse	Command	Reason
“When . . .” (6:22)		
“But when . . .” (6:23)		

So far, Jesus has set up multiple contrasts: *earth* versus *heaven*, *destroys* versus *cannot destroy*, *healthy* versus *unhealthy*, *eyes* versus *the whole body*, *light* versus *darkness*. What additional contrasts did He use in His concluding point in [6:24](#)?



The Lure of a Lesser Loyalty

Matthew 6:19–24

Now, observe the passage as a whole. Look at the first line of [Matthew 6:19](#) and the last line of [6:24](#). How do these lines “bookend” the passage and capture the essence of Jesus’ message?

What is Jesus warning against? He’s denouncing the accumulation of more and more stuff. He’s warning against selfishness and an extravagant lifestyle that keeps you from being generous. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Key Principles about Possessions

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we seek to discover Jesus’ meaning. The last line of [Matthew 6:24](#) points to Jesus’ subject, which is “money” and the danger of being “enslaved” to it.

Other translations such as the New King James Version use the word, *mammon*, which is an English transliteration of an Aramaic word for “wealth.” What falls under this broad category of “money” or “wealth,” and what happens when a person becomes “enslaved” to these things?



The Lure of a Lesser Loyalty

Matthew 6:19–24

When we treasure our “treasures” (possessions) above everything else, including God, they become our master.² How is “treasure” in [Matthew 6:21](#) related to our heart’s desires? For help with the answer, consult pages 118–119 in Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*.

Interestingly, *where* our treasures reside—whether on earth or in heaven—indicates *what* we treasure—either worldly possessions or spiritual rewards. What is the difference between treasures on earth and treasures in heaven? What did Jesus imply about the *nature* of the person who stores up treasures on earth versus heaven?

Jesus’ final metaphor in [6:24](#) is “master.” Without endorsing slavery per se, Jesus made a point based on a fact His audience understood, namely, *two masters can’t own the same slave*. What principle was Jesus teaching about exclusive loyalty to God?

Store your treasures in heaven. Keep viewing life by the light of eternity. Keep evaluating earthly things on the basis of your final home. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



The Lure of a Lesser Loyalty

Matthew 6:19–24



Correlation: Heavenly Treasure

Correlation is the *Searching the Scriptures* study tool that compares Bible passages to aid our understanding. In this way, we let the Bible explain itself. Compare Jesus' point about an "eye" fixed on the light with Paul's teaching about our thoughts focused on heaven.

How did Paul say we can keep our affections on eternal things rather than earthly things, according to [Colossians 3:1–4](#)?

In Jesus' terms, Paul's "eye" was healthy because he focused His thoughts on the light—the truths and values of God and His kingdom. On what specific values did Paul say we should fix our thoughts, according to [Philippians 4:8–9](#)?

"Fix your thoughts on what is true," Paul wrote—which is a fitting statement to wrap up our study. When we feel the lure of lesser loyalties, focusing on what's true has a way of knocking some sense into us and drawing us back to God.



The Lure of a Lesser Loyalty

Matthew 6:19–24



Application: Living in the Truth

Lesser loyalties make cruel masters that demand our time, energy, dreams, even our souls. What do these lesser loyalties offer in the end? Only material for rust, food for moths, and easy prey for thieves.

If we're stuck on the treadmill of pursuing earthly treasures, how do we get off? How do we make progress along the path of heavenly reward? Determine to live in the truth. According to Pastor Chuck, the way of truth is the surest road to travel. How so?

First, *by living in truth, our options remain open*. Pursuing wealth at any cost chains us to a grindstone of nonstop demands. But living in the truth breaks the chains. It gives us the option of saying no to wrong and the joy of saying yes to what's good, assured that God's reward lies ahead. Living in truth sets us free! What might that freedom look like for you today?

Second, *living in truth also keeps our focus clear*. Instead of focusing on the “what” of earthly possessions, we focus on the “who”—our Shepherd who will never leave us no matter how dark the night. In the space below, write down your intention to set your affections on God alone as your sole master through life.

In Matthew 6:25–34, Jesus illustrates the freedom God offers those who seek Him over earthly treasures. Next time you see a bird soaring freely in the sky and lilies blooming in the sunshine, imagine the calm-hearted and clear-headed life that can be ours by living under God's care. Interested in learning more? We will in the next study!



The Lure of a Lesser Loyalty

Matthew 6:19–24



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You know me inside and out. You know the condition of my heart, my wishes and dreams, worries and fears. I set my whole affection on You in total devotion to Your Son, Jesus. He is my singular focus in this life and my greatest treasure in the life to come. May I find complete satisfaction in the sufficiency of living in Your kingdom. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Jesus isn't prohibiting owning possessions. We need to provide for ourselves and those in need (1 Thessalonians 4:11–12; Ephesians 4:28). Neither is Jesus telling us not to plan for the future or enjoy the things we own. Using money wisely to take care of our families is a virtue (1 Timothy 5:8).



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY TWENTY

Our Favorite Sin

Matthew 6:25–34

Worry is simply distrusting the promises of God. When we worry, we say to God in so many words, “I don’t trust You.”

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN the previous study, we learned to set our affections on God alone, not on money and the things of this world. But how can we know where our loyalties lie? The “trust” test is a good measure. Where does your trust lie?

Many people invest all their trust in their bank accounts. We even call our monetary investments, *securities*, because that’s where people place their security. But what if our account balance drops to zero? What then? Our sense of security would vanish with our cash.

On the other hand, if our security rests in God alone, our King who safeguards our heavenly treasure, the vanishing of our earthly wealth would have far less of an effect on us. A deep assurance of God’s provision steadies us. So how can we tell, then, when our trust creeps away from God? We start to worry.

Jesus spotlights this vital truth in Matthew 6:25–34. He warned us to watch out for worry. In fact, He says we can actually live without worry as we seek God alone—our all-knowing, all-powerful, all-sufficient Master who lovingly tends to His own.



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Our Favorite Sin

Matthew 6:25–34



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Invite God's presence into your time in His Word.

Father, in Your gentle way, pull out the weeds of worry that wrap around my faith and keep it from growing strong and healthy. Dig deep into the roots of fear that feed my anxious thoughts, that stunt me spiritually, and that rob me of contentment. I do believe that You can provide for all my needs. Help me to rest completely in Your care, in Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you read [Matthew 6:25–34](#), imagine sitting on the hillside by the Sea of Galilee where Jesus preached His message. Above the gently rising slope, birds fly overhead. Along the shore, wildflowers bloom in a palette of vibrant colors. Listen to the Master, who created this beautiful world, speak to the tenderest parts of your soul about trusting God's care.



Observation: Commands, Questions, Illustrations, Conclusions

In *Searching the Scriptures*, we put ourselves into the biblical scene to fully engage with the imagery and meaning of the passage.¹ As you read, admire the birds and smell the lilies. Ask yourself specific questions like: *What words and phrases did Jesus emphasize? Are there any patterns and figures of speech, contrasts and comparisons? What commands did Jesus issue?*

Repeated Commands—Matthew 6:25, 31, 34

Three times, Jesus commanded His followers not to worry. Write down what He told us *not* to worry about in [Matthew 6:25, 31, 34](#).



Our Favorite Sin

Matthew 6:25–34

Think of these worries as large buckets in which we could dump dozens of similar concerns. What other worries might we include in each category?

Penetrating Questions—Matthew 6:25–28, 30

Jesus focused His questions like searchlights to expose our misguided priorities, self-protective motives, and mistaken assumptions. What questions did Jesus ask in [Matthew 6:25–28, 30](#)?

Rabbis in Jesus' day often taught their students by asking questions. What was Jesus teaching through these questions?



Our Favorite Sin

Matthew 6:25–34

Vivid Illustrations—Matthew 6:26, 28–30

Earlier in His sermon, Jesus illustrated His point with salt and lamps, two common items in every household (Matthew 5:13–16). Here He points out two common sights. What truths would Jesus' followers recall every time they saw birds gathering food and flowers displaying their glory (6:26, 28–30)?

We are made in the image of God, with minds to know God, hearts to love God, and wills to obey God. Animals don't have that. If God will do so much for birds, how much more will He provide for us? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Convicting Conclusions—Matthew 6:31–34

Jesus argued from a lesser truth to a greater one. If the “lesser” is true, then the “greater” is true, and Jesus' conclusions must also be true. By comparing the value of birds and flowers to the greater worth of God's own children, what was Jesus' conclusion about God's provision and our worry ([Matthew 6:31–32](#))?



Our Favorite Sin

Matthew 6:25–34

Notice how Jesus emphasized His points with repetition. He said three times, “Not to worry” or “Don’t worry” (Matthew 6:25, 31, 34) and three times, “all these things” (6:32–33 NASB). He also repeated the main verb, “seek” (6:32–33 NASB). What do unbelievers seek, and why? What did Jesus urge His followers to seek instead, and why (6:32–33)?

Compare 6:25 and 6:34. How did Jesus wrap up His lesson on worry and link His final point back to the beginning?

Unbelievers stay preoccupied with materialistic things and . . . always want more. But we have a heavenly Father. He is timeless. He hears everything, knows our needs, and understands us. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: What Is Worry and Why Is It Wrong?

The Greek for worry in this passage is a compound word, *merimnaō*, which is made up of two words, *merizō*, meaning “to divide,” and *nous*, meaning “the mind.” So literally, it means “to divide the mind.”

When we’re worried, our mind feels divided, doesn’t it? One fear after another pulls our thoughts in different directions. During the day, we become agitated, unfocused, and distracted; at night, a fresh set of “what-ifs” invades our thoughts, and we can’t sleep.



Our Favorite Sin

Matthew 6:25–34

What sin turns the key and starts our worry engines racing? Jesus hinted at it when He said, “These things dominate the thoughts of *unbelievers*” (Matthew 6:32, emphasis added). Why is this sin so destructive for those who follow Christ?

The ambitions of unbelievers orbit the nucleus of *self*—*self*-security, *self*-provision, *self*-enrichment. Jesus’ followers, however, center their lives around God. What did Jesus mean, “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously” (6:33)? For help with the answer, read page 122 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*.

If worry divides our minds, then seeking God’s kingdom and His righteousness unifies our thoughts, and the result is peace. Let’s look at this blessing from God for those whose thoughts are fixed on Him (Isaiah 26:3).



Correlation: The Opposite of Worry: Peace

Our minds are at peace when our scattered thoughts come together around a singular aim—to submit to the reign of God and pursue His will in every endeavor of life. Paul picked up this theme of trusting God through prayer in his letter to the church in Philippi.



Our Favorite Sin

Matthew 6:25–34

How did Paul fight off worry (*Philippians 4:6–7*)?

How did Paul trust God to supply his needs (*4:11–13*)?

What promise did Paul give his readers (*4:19*)?

Put these instructions and examples from Paul into a principle for your own daily living.



Our Favorite Sin

Matthew 6:25–34

Start putting first things first. Pray first thing in the morning. Don't wait until breakfast. Pray to prepare yourself for whatever the day may bring. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Breaking Free from Worry

Jesus gave us a two-step plan to break the grip of worry. The first step requires us to rearrange our priorities; and the second, to simplify our perspective.

First, *start by putting first things first*. “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else” (Matthew 6:33). Apply this principle by looking over your current list of worries. For each concern, lift up a prayer putting each concern under the kingship and authority of God.

What does He want you to do in each situation to “live righteously” (6:33)? If there is an action to take, what is your King telling you to do? If there is a relationship at stake, what is He telling you to say? If there is a decision to make, which direction is He telling you to take?



Our Favorite Sin

Matthew 6:25–34

Second, *stop living more than one day at a time*. Don't overload your mental circuits trying to sort out tomorrow's problems . . . which may never come! Instead, how can you address the problems under your control today? Leave the problems outside your control to God.

Prayer is a surefire cure for the spiritual disease of worry-itus. As you close this study, make a commitment to start each day with a brief prayer before you get out of bed. The following prayer is the one Pastor Chuck Swindoll prays every morning and throughout the day. Make it your own to start worrying less and trusting God more.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I want Your will today, and I want Your way. Grant me the contentment of trusting You to do what is best for me. I seek Your timing for all my endeavors, and I ask for contentment that comes from Your peace. Remind me through the day that this day is in Your hand. In the name of Jesus, amen.

ENDNOTE

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



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY TWENTY-ONE

Attention, All Speck Inspectors!

Matthew 7:1–5

Why is it wrong to judge others? First, we never know all the facts about other people. Second, we are prejudiced people by nature, so we can't be completely objective. Third, we put ourselves in a place only God fits. He alone qualifies as judge.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

ON the heels of Jesus' closing statement in Matthew 6, "Don't worry" (Matthew 6:34), comes an equally emphatic command to begin chapter 7: "Do not judge others" (7:1). These sins are like cousins because they have a similar harmful impact on our relationships—vertically toward God and horizontally toward others. In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains:

In the Christian life, if worry is our favorite pet sin, then judging is our favorite pastime. Worry represents a lack of faith and trust in God; judging flows from a lack of love and acceptance of others.¹

Certainly, we have all stumbled into these relational pitfalls. We've fretted when we should have trusted God and condemned others when we should have showed compassion. But, thankfully, Jesus offers a hand up from the pit so we can follow Him on His better path.

In this study, we'll focus on the second of these two sins so we can heed Jesus' warning about the dangers of judging and learn how to turn words of criticism into acts of mercy.



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Attention, All Speck Inspectors!

Matthew 7:1–5



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Just as fear feeds our worrying, pride fuels our criticizing. Before you open God's Word, pray that the Lord will free you from pride and give you the deep humility needed to love others.

Father, I open my heart to receive Your truth through the teaching of Your Son. His words are both challenging and liberating. Help me apply what He says and follow Him in obedience. In His strong name I pray, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read [Matthew 7:1–5](#) in several Bible translations. *The Message*, a modern paraphrase that uses contemporary language to express the spirit of the passage, helps us feel the intensity in Jesus' command not to judge others: "Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults" (Matthew 7:1 MSG).

Have you witnessed people verbally tearing others to shreds? Have you ever been the victim of hurtful faultfinding or been cruelly condemned? What is it about the destructive nature of judging that inspired Jesus to speak so passionately on this subject?

Now, let's dig deeper into these brief but powerful remarks from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.



Observation: Jesus' Command, Explanation, and Reproof

In *Searching the Scriptures*, we begin by observing the literary features of the passage—metaphors, figures of speech, sequence of thought, cause-and-effect.²

In this passage, Jesus began with a command, "Do not judge others" (Matthew 7:1). Next, He explained His reasons for this command (7:1–4). He then concluded with a strong reproof, "Hypocrite!" (7:5). Let's follow this simple outline as we make our observations.



Attention, All Speck Inspectors!

Matthew 7:1–5

First, Jesus' *command* is straightforward; however, the term *judge* can have a range of meanings, which we'll consider in the interpretation phase. For now, simply notice the *agent* and the *object*. To whom did Jesus command not to act as an agent of judgment? Look ahead to [Matthew 7:3](#) to find the person who is the object of judgment.

Second, let's observe Jesus' *explanation*. Jesus could have given us many reasons not to elevate ourselves as judge. For example, we don't know all the facts, we don't know another's motives, and we can't be entirely impartial. Without doubt, God is the only truly qualified judge. And yet, Jesus explained His command with another reason. Can you state it in your own words ([Matthew 7:1–2](#))?

The same standard by which we point a finger at others, others will use to point back at us. As we're taught as children, "What goes around, comes around." To think we could get away with a double standard is ridiculous—as ridiculous as the person in Jesus' exaggerated illustration. What is the illustration in [7:3–4](#), and what two mistakes does the person with the "log" in his or her eye make?



Attention, All Speck Inspectors!

Matthew 7:1–5

Third, what shocking *reproof* to His own followers did Jesus give in Matthew 7:5?

We can't be judge because we, too, have failed. We have a soiled record. We have "logs" in our lives, and we must deal with our own stuff before we restore another person.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Difference between Judging and Discerning

By teaching against judging, Jesus wasn't excluding *discernment*. Judging truth from error is a mark of maturity. In the next study, we'll see an example of proper judgment when Jesus tells us to discern the type of person before we give that person something precious.

"Don't waste what is holy on people who are unholy. Don't throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you." (Matthew 7:6)

What then did Jesus mean, "Do not judge others" (7:1)? On page 126 of his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, Pastor Chuck explains in more detail the kind of judging Jesus was and was not prohibiting. For an online resource, consult [Constable's Notes](http://netbible.org) at netbible.org. Write down the difference between judging and discerning and the intent of Jesus' command.



Attention, All Speck Inspectors!

Matthew 7:1–5

Some judging is not only acceptable, it's commendable. We teach our children not to get into the car of a stranger. That's discernment. What is Jesus saying? Do not conduct your life with a judgmental or negative attitude. Stop being suspicious of everyone. Don't find petty faults and then point them out. The judging Jesus forbids is a condemning attitude toward others. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Difference between Judging and Restoring

Likewise, by teaching us not to judge our friends, Jesus wasn't stopping us from *being a friend*. When someone has a “speck” that needs attention, we can help. How did the apostle Paul say we can restore a person struggling with sin, according to [Galatians 6:1](#)?

What a beautiful description of an agent of healing, *not judgment!* In contrast is the harsh, judgmental Christian who rubs salt of condemnation into people's wounds. What did Paul say to this critical believer in [Romans 14:4, 10](#)?

As we seek to strike a balance between judging and restoring, we recall Jesus' final words in Matthew 7:5, where He offers three steps we can apply.



Attention, All Speck Inspectors!

Matthew 7:1–5



Application: Replacing Criticism with Compassion

The stepping-stone words, *first*, *then*, and *deal with*, in the following verse mark the path of compassion to apply Jesus' teaching:

“First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.” (Matthew 7:5, emphasis added)

Is there someone in your life with a “speck” in his or her eye—a sin or fault? If you feel God tugging at your heart to help this person, what does Jesus say to do first? What sins or faults do you need to examine, and how can you acknowledge these issues in humility before approaching the person?

Next, Jesus said that you will be able to “see well enough” (7:5)—in other words, empathetically understand the other person's struggle to be gentle as you guide this person. What can you do to truly “see” the person you're helping?



Attention, All Speck Inspectors!

Matthew 7:1–5

Finally, remember the goal is restoration and recovery, not condemnation and probation. What approach do you need to take to “deal with the speck” (Matthew 7:5)?

Jesus chose the eye for His illustration on purpose. The eye is such a delicate organ in the human body. As you reach out to remove the “speck” in your friend’s life, be sure your hands—and heart—are clean. Take great care and be sensitive. Finally, always treat him or her as you would want to be treated—which is the Golden Rule and the subject of our next study!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, teach me to be the kind of person who is easy to live with, who accepts others and leaves all judgment to You. Forgive me for dressing myself in Your judicial robes and passing a critical verdict on another person. I don't know all the facts or the person's motives. Help me to think the best of people who are different than me and to reach out with compassion, not criticism, to those who need Your help. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 125.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY TWENTY-TWO

Pearls, Pigs, Prayers, and People

Matthew 7:6–12

Universally loved and quoted, the Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” forms the capstone of the Sermon on the Mount.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

ONE well-crafted wise saying can contain more value for those who live by it than all of King Solomon's treasures. How beautiful and precious are wise words! As Solomon himself once said:

*Timely advice is lovely,
like golden apples in a silver basket. (Proverbs 25:11)*

As we've seen, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount contains many such golden apples of timely advice. In fact, it's advice for all time . . . and for all people in all places. No matter the subject He addresses, Jesus' statements prove enlightening and useful.

Even in the short span of the seven verses in Matthew 7:6–12, Jesus, using carefully fashioned expressions, reveals three timeless truths:

- *How should we respond to people who don't want to hear spiritual truth?*
- *What do we do when God seems oblivious to our needs?*
- *Can one simple saying truly guide, and even improve, all our relationships?*

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll mine the depths of Jesus' memorable words to answer these vital questions.



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Pearls, Pigs, Prayers, and People

Matthew 7:6–12



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prepare your heart to receive the words of Jesus, whose wisdom is more valuable than gold.

Father, as I open the Scriptures, may the truth of the message ring with relevance in my life. Unleash once more the power of the written Word to change my heart and transform my world. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you read [Matthew 7:6–12](#), these three subjects might appear disconnected at first, but when seen in light of Jesus' whole sermon, you'll notice they fit together like puzzle pieces, helping complete the picture of kingdom-living. With these pieces in place, we can draw three key principles about discernment, prayer, and living like Christ in a lost world.



Observation: Pearls, Pigs, Prayers, and People

In the observation phase of Bible study, we examine the particulars of each verse as well as their logical connection within the context of the section and book.¹ In the following sections, write down what you observe as you answer the questions about the verses.

Speaking and Restraining—Matthew 7:6

In Jesus' day, dogs and pigs (which were more like wild boar) were unclean animals to Jews. They were untamable, filthy, and dangerous. Read [Matthew 7:6](#) and note the intensity of the verbs: *waste*, *throw*, *trample*, and *attack* (or *tear to pieces*, NASB). What extreme contrasts did Jesus make?

In the interpretation section, we'll examine the meaning of these metaphors. For now, let's move on to the next subject of prayer.



Pearls, Pigs, Prayers, and People

Matthew 7:6–12

Praying and Receiving—Matthew 7:7–11

In [Matthew 7:7–8](#), do you see a progression of urgency in our asking, seeking, and knocking? How do these actions express our motives for praying? What promises did Jesus make?

What contrasts do you find in [7:9–11](#)? How did Jesus teach the trustworthy character of our heavenly Father?

Set these verses within the context of Jesus' earlier instructions. What is the difference between the prayers of the hypocrites and Gentiles in [6:5](#), [7–8](#) as compared to God's children praying in [7:7–11](#).



Pearls, Pigs, Prayers, and People

Matthew 7:6–12

Others and Us—Matthew 7:12

Now look closely at [Matthew 7:12](#). What do you observe? Read the same verse in [The Message](#) and try restating this verse in your own words.

The next time we see someone struggling or going through a tough time or who is difficult to deal with, remember this verse. What can we do for this person that we would want him or her to do for us if we were in the same straits? The beauty of the Golden Rule is that Jesus leaves its application up to us. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Discernment, Persistence, and Modeling

In the interpretation phase, we seek to understand Jesus' teaching as His original audience would have understood it. We craft universal, timeless principles that we can apply in our lives based on the timeless truth we learn about God and life.

First, let's look at what Jesus meant by His warning about dogs and pigs.

The Wisdom of Discernment

“Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6 NASB). What was Jesus telling us not to give and to whom? On page 128 of his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains these metaphors. For an online resource, consult [Constable's Notes](#) at [netBible.org](#). Write down what you discover.



Pearls, Pigs, Prayers, and People

Matthew 7:6–12

If people's hearts are cold toward God, we should avoid overly sharing Jesus' message with them. Otherwise, they may angrily attack us and drag Jesus' sacred name through the mud. Perceiving people's hostile nature is not the same as judging them—for God alone is their Judge (Matthew 7:1). Jesus frees us to walk away until their hearts are more receptive ([10:14](#)).

Write down a principle about discernment based on Jesus' teaching in [7:6](#).

The Value of Persistence

Unlike Gentiles who “babble on and on” in prayer to their stone idols (Matthew 6:7), Jesus' followers have a genuine relationship with God in which He invites us to “*Keep on asking. . . . Keep on seeking. . . . Keep on knocking*” (7:7, emphasis added). What characteristics of our relationship with God did Jesus highlight in [7:7–11](#)?

Did Jesus imply that God will answer every prayer as we wish? How does Pastor Chuck explain the answer on page 129 of *Insights on Matthew 1–15*.



Pearls, Pigs, Prayers, and People

Matthew 7:6–12

Sum up Jesus' teaching with a principle about persistence in prayer.

The Honor of Modeling

A negative form of the Golden Rule predated Jesus, and we can find it in the apocryphal book of Tobit: “Don’t do to others what you would hate to have them do to you.”² This well-known *rule of restraint* taught the principle of “do no harm,” to which Rabbi Hillel—who lived a few years before Jesus—famously added, “This is the whole law; all the rest is only commentary.”³

Well, the rabbi was wrong! He overlooked the *heart* of the law—the core principle of love that Jesus’ entire sermon reveals and His Golden Rule encapsulates. Jesus’ innovative, positive spin on the old rule captures the true spirit of the law, or as Jesus rightly added, “the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

What is the difference between the rabbi’s negative rule, “Don’t do to others . . .” and Jesus’ Golden Rule, “Do to others . . .” (7:12)?

Think of Jesus’ Golden Rule as more than a rule for living . . . it is truly a *rule for loving*. But who can obey such a high calling? Only those whose hearts are full of the love of the King Himself and have been made new by the power of the Spirit.

Living the Golden Rule has everything to do with living the life of Christ. If we base our actions on this rule, we will have little difficulty sharing the Savior with the person we help.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW
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STUDY TWENTY-TWO

SEARCHING
THE
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STUDY

Pearls, Pigs, Prayers, and People

Matthew 7:6–12



Correlation: Biblical Wisdom on Prayer

Jesus taught us to be persistent in prayer and to trust our Father's goodness. What complementary principles do these verses teach?

Psalm 55:22

James 5:16

1 John 5:14–15

We know that our heavenly Father is good; He doesn't have a bit of evil in Him. When He decides to give His answers and pour forth His blessing, oh, He will amaze us all!
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Pearls, Pigs, Prayers, and People

Matthew 7:6–12



Application: The Greatest Message We Communicate

Use the following questions as aids in applying Jesus' wise words on discernment, prayer, and living His Golden Rule.

Have you been wasting time trying to force-feed someone who doesn't want to hear the message of Jesus? If so, what do you think the Lord is guiding you to do?

Have you weakened in prayer because the answer has not come as you hoped? How do Jesus' words on prayer encourage you?

Finally, do you wonder how best to respond to those around you who may be hurting? What wisdom do you find by following the Golden Rule?



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STUDY TWENTY-TWO

SEARCHING
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Pearls, Pigs, Prayers, and People

Matthew 7:6–12

To live by the Golden Rule is to walk in communion with Christ everywhere—at home, at the workplace, in our neighborhood, on our travels, at the gym, in our play. Close this study in prayer, asking the Lord for His life and wisdom to flow through you in every avenue of daily life.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me in this journey from earth to heaven to see life through the eyes of Your Son, Jesus. May I seek to understand as I wish to be understood. Forgive as I would like to be forgiven. Show mercy as I would hope others would show mercy to me. In all these ways, may the love of Christ guide my steps and lead my way, in His name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Tobit 4:12, as quoted by Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 130.
3. Talmud, Shabbath 31a, as quoted by John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7)*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1978), 190.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY TWENTY-THREE

Three Non-Politically Correct Warnings

Matthew 7:13–23

When Jesus came toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount, He said, in so many words, “You cannot remain on the fence. You must get off on one side or the other.”

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

JESUS composed His Sermon on the Mount like a symphony in four movements. As you recall from our overview in *“The Sermon of All Sermons,”* Jesus opened with an inspiring overture, the Beatitudes, introducing the movement titled, “Out with Hypocrisy!” (Matthew 5:1–48). In this first section, Jesus taught us how to live by God’s kingdom-values—making us the salt and light of the world—and what it means to model true righteousness from the heart.

In the second movement, “Down with Performance!” (6:1–34), Jesus told us to avoid religious grandstanding by giving, praying, and fasting privately to truly experience life with God. The third movement, “Up with Acceptance!” (7:1–5), trumpets a warning against the hypocrisy of judging others and pointing out their sin while ignoring our own.

Jesus arranged His sermon to climax in the fourth movement, “On with Commitment!” (7:6–29). In just one verse, He summed up righteous-living and right-relating to conclude the main body of His sermon:

“Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.” (7:12)

He then transitioned to His application section—the *grand finale*! Having presented God’s truth, Jesus now compels us to action. In this *Searching the Scriptures* study and the next, we’ll tune our hearts to these soaring strains of Jesus’ masterful composition.



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Three Non-Politically Correct Warnings

Matthew 7:13–23



PREPARE YOUR HEART

In your own words, express your willingness to receive God's Word as well as your desire for Jesus to strike up a melody of devotion in your heart.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read Jesus' complete applicational section, [Matthew 7:13–27](#). Notice that Jesus continues His technique of teaching in “twos.” Previously, Jesus contrasted *two kinds of righteousness*—external and internal; *two treasures*—earthly and heavenly; *two masters*—mammon and God; and *two kingdoms*—of this world and of God. Now, Jesus' words hit closer to home.

Will our righteousness be external or internal? Where will we invest our treasure? Whom will we serve? And, ultimately, will we seek His kingdom? We must decide. There is no middle ground. No muddled “both-and.” The decision He sets before us is a firm “either-or.”

Jesus illustrated His challenge with four more “twos”: two *paths* (Matthew 7:13–14), two *trees* (7:15–20), two *responses* (7:21–23), and two *foundations* (7:24–27). In this study, we will examine the first three of these illustrations and save the fourth for the next study.



Observation: Paired Alternatives, Controversial Warnings

Observation is the initial task in *Searching the Scriptures*.¹ Look intently at what the verses say and try not to assign meaning too quickly or add concepts that aren't there.



Three Non-Politically Correct Warnings

Matthew 7:13–23

Two Paths—Matthew 7:13–14

What do you see in [Matthew 7:13–14](#)? Describe the gates and paths. How many people are on each path? Where do the paths lead?

Two Trees—Matthew 7:15–20

How did Jesus describe “false prophets” in [Matthew 7:15](#)? How do they deceive people and what is their true nature?

According to [7:16–20](#), how did Jesus say we can identify false prophets? How can we know the true nature of people in general?



Three Non-Politically Correct Warnings

Matthew 7:13–23

Two Responses—Matthew 7:21–23

In Matthew 7:21, Jesus says, “Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter [the Kingdom of Heaven].” In contrast are those who, like false prophets, disguise themselves behind religious masks—only putting on the appearance of living in obedience to God. What did Jesus say these people *claim*, according to 7:21–22?

On judgment day, what will Jesus say to these pretenders? Despite their claims, what did they *actually do* that sealed their judgment (*Matthew 7:23*)?

Jesus said that there is a wide and narrow gate. There is good and bad tree. There is a right and wrong response. We must come to terms with this truth, whether we like it or not. We can't stay neutral. It's either Christ or it's lostness. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of Jesus' Illustrations

Remember the interpretation rule of thumb: a *text* is best understood in its *context*. Throughout His sermon, Jesus had been teaching the heart of the law and putting true righteousness on display (Matthew 5:20). Christ alone has fulfilled God's law (5:17), and He alone can help His followers truly obey it.



Three Non-Politically Correct Warnings

Matthew 7:13–23

Enter the Narrow Gate

The first step to following Jesus on His good path is to enter “the narrow gate” and not the “wide” gate (Matthew 7:13). On pages 134–135 of his commentary, Pastor Chuck Swindoll says that by pointing people *one* way, Jesus rejected the popular notion of “pluralism”—which states that many paths lead to God. According to Pastor Chuck, why might Jesus’ teaching sound naive to the politically correct, pluralistic thinker?

On the broad “highway,” there are no morals to obey and no truths to believe (7:13–14). Why does this broad road lead to destruction? And why is Jesus’ narrow way difficult?

Jesus is the only entrance to life eternal. Jesus, the One who is the most compassionate, gracious, and caring was also exclusive and narrow. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Three Non-Politically Correct Warnings

Matthew 7:13–23

Bear Good Fruit

Although false prophets or false teachers appear trustworthy, they are bad trees who bear bad fruit. What “bad fruit” do you think gives away a false teacher (*Matthew 7:15–16*)?

What “good fruit” do you think Jesus was referring to in (*7:17–20*)? For help with the answer, reflect on Jesus’ teaching throughout His sermon about the “good fruit” of true righteousness—such as the Beatitudes (*5:3–10*), loving our enemies (*5:43–45*), prayer (*6:5–13*); seeking God’s kingdom (*6:33*), and the Golden Rule (*7:12*).

Listen to the person teaching you! Does this teacher have a high view of Scripture? Does this teacher exalt Christ above all others, including himself or herself? If not, you have a false teacher on your hands. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Three Non-Politically Correct Warnings

Matthew 7:13–23

Do the Will of the Father

Like the wolves who wore sheepskin, people who claim Christ as their lord but break God's laws are pretenders. They are all talk and all show, and their deeds shine glory on themselves rather than draw praise for the "heavenly Father" (Matthew 5:16). Conversely, what reveals the nature of a true follower of Christ, according to [7:21](#)?

What did Jesus mean when He said, "do the will of my Father in heaven" (7:21)? The Lord's Prayer provides a clue ([6:9–13](#)).

Don't be impressed by so-called miracle workers or those who use impressive religious language or who claim to exorcise demons. Not all of them are of God.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Way, the Truth, and the Life

Correlating our passage with other Scriptures clarifies and confirms our interpretation. Jesus described one way to God's kingdom: "through the narrow gate" (Matthew 7:13). What insight do the following verses offer regarding Christ's pathway versus the broad path?



Three Non-Politically Correct Warnings

Matthew 7:13–23

Proverbs 14:12

John 10:9; 14:6

1 Timothy 2:5

Write a principle summing up the truths these verses teach about Christ?



Three Non-Politically Correct Warnings

Matthew 7:13–23

False teachers are as dangerous as wolves because they point people toward “wide” gates that lead to destruction. What insight about these pretenders did Paul give in [2 Corinthians 11:13–15](#)? How does Paul’s explanation help you understand the reason for Jesus’ judgment?

Satan is not a little, red-skinned creature with a pitchfork and horns. He’s an angel of light and can impress massive numbers of people with his appeal. Beware of the suave, appealing style of false teachers! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Personal Questions

Jesus designed His illustrations to knock us off the fence of uncertainty and point our feet His way. He presented only two gates to enter, two paths to follow, two crowds to join, and two destinations to pursue. Which do we choose?

Which way does your heart lead you? Do you feel the tug of the Holy Spirit leading you? Use the space below to express to the Lord in prayer the path you long to travel through life and the fruit you wish to bear.



Three Non-Politically Correct Warnings

Matthew 7:13–23

Not everyone is trustworthy who claims to lead you the right way. Can you identify any “wolves” who may be deceiving you? If so, bring your relationship with this person before the Lord and find a faithful friend who is a Christ-follower to help you identify the good or bad fruit. What action might you need to take?

The music of Jesus stirs our hearts to respond to Him. Let His truth fill your soul with worship and a longing to listen to His voice, obey His teaching, emulate His life, and follow His way.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I hear the melody of Christ resonating through my soul, plucking my heartstrings, and filling my life with love. Because He leads the way, I know where to go; because He speaks truth, I am confident in what I believe; and because of His life, I can depend on His power to do Your will. In His name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTE

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



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY TWENTY-FOUR

The Secret of an Unsinkable Life

Matthew 7:24–29

We shouldn't be surprised that when Jesus comes to the end of the most famous sermon He ever preached, He finishes with a story.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SERMONS that linger in our minds and touch our hearts often include a final story that reinforces the speaker's points. The most memorable stories feature relatable people, common situations, and timeless lessons that, if applied, can alter the course of our lives.

To drive home His points at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told a life-changing story about two builders. Each decided to construct his house on a different foundation which led to drastically different consequences. Through the course of His story, Jesus cements in His listeners' minds a lasting lesson built upon these builders' decisions. Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains:

The great sermon Jesus preached on the mountain has not been preserved simply because it is a literary masterpiece. It is here to be acted upon. We are to step into it, make its truths our own, and in doing so, discover the simple secret of an unsinkable life. That means building on the right foundation . . . *the solid Rock of Christ rather than the sinking sands of a self-made life.*¹

Jesus left no one who heard His sermon wondering what to do. The question was: *Would they build their lives on His truth?* The same question applies to us. *Will we?* Jesus' parable of the two foundations presses us into action now. Storms will surely come. Lives are at stake. Let's dig into Jesus' final urgent appeal in the Sermon on the Mount and discover wisdom for a lifetime.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

The Secret of an Unsinkable Life

Matthew 7:24–29



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Have any storms swept through your life lately? Perhaps you've been affected by ill-health, or maybe you've suffered loss or endured problems at work or conflicts in relationships. Whatever your situation, receive God's Word for you today.

Father, may I hear Jesus' words in Scripture as if I were sitting on the hillside and He were speaking them to me today. Help me to imagine His face, His caring expression, His urgent inflections. Help me build my whole life on Him, in His name I pray, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you read [Matthew 7:24–29](#), look for identical elements, contrasting factors, and opposite results. Also, notice the crowd's reaction when Jesus stops preaching. It was as if Matthew took a microphone into the audience and recorded the post-sermon buzz. How effective was Jesus' story? What impact did Jesus' sermon have on people, according to [7:28–29](#)?

Step into your study with this same heightened sense of wonder at Jesus, who speaks like none other because of who He is—the Son of God.



Observation: Elements, Factors, and Results

As you observe the passage, notice the figure of speech Jesus used.² It's called a simile—a comparison using *like* or *as*. Jesus said that obeying or not obeying His teaching is *like* the actions of two builders. Jesus' illustration was so powerful and the implication so obvious that He didn't have to issue a command at the end of His message. The illustration was the imperative, and the people knew what they must do!



The Secret of an Unsinkable Life

Matthew 7:24–29

Identical Elements

How are the two main characters the same (*Matthew 7:24, 26*)?

What identical occurrence happens in the lives of both characters (*7:25, 27*)?

Each man worked hard to build his house, maybe even followed the same blueprint. Passersby would have admired both houses' sturdy walls, trim rooflines, and attractive design. They would have seen the men's families living happily in their new homes. However, the difference wasn't in the aboveground construction but in the foundation no one could see.

Contrasting Factors

What comparison did Jesus make to the men's wise or foolish choice of foundations, according to *Matthew 7:24, 26*?



The Secret of an Unsinkable Life

Matthew 7:24–29

Opposite Results

Not until the storm struck did the builders' wisdom or folly become known. What dramatic language did Jesus use to communicate the relief for the wise man and the disaster for the foolish man ([Matthew 7:25, 27](#))? How does [The Message](#) capture the scene?

Floods came and winds blew against the houses. It was a severe storm. It was like a tornado that leaves splinters of wood and shards of glass where a house once stood. Life is difficult. Storms happen. It's impossible to live a full life without times getting hard.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Revealing the Foundations

In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we examine the meaning of Jesus' story. First, what do the houses represent? And what does it mean to “build” a house?



The Secret of an Unsinkable Life

Matthew 7:24–29

Second, what did Jesus say we are *doing* when we build our house “on solid rock” (Matthew 7:24)? And, conversely, what are we *not doing* when we build our house “on sand” (7:26)?

Third, what does the “storm” represent? What is it about a storm that reveals the unseen truth about a house’s foundation? Likewise, what is it about the stress of hardships that reveals the unseen truth about our life’s foundation?

Jesus foresaw the storms we would endure, and out of His deep love, He taught us how to live in such a way to withstand the calamities that loom on the horizon. But hearing His teaching isn’t enough. We must ground ourselves in Him and put into practice everything He said. Then, our foundation will be sure and our lives will stand through the harshest storm.

The question isn’t, “Am I building my life?” Of course we are. Neither is the question, “Will hard times come?” Of course they will. Winds blow, rain falls, and floods rise. The real question is, “Is my foundation sure?” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



The Secret of an Unsinkable Life

Matthew 7:24–29



Correlation: Hearing and Doing

Jesus' half-brother, James, understood the vital importance of expressing our profession through practice, matching our creeds with our deeds. What did James teach about hearing and doing the Word of God (*James 1:22–24*)?

How does James' teaching mirror Jesus' parable of the foundations?



Application: Seeing Yourself in the Story

We come to the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5–7, the first main block of Jesus' teaching in Matthew's gospel.

Jesus' implied question, "Is your foundation secure?" rings in our ears just as it rang in the ears of His original listeners. Let the ringing encourage you to sink the pillars of your faith deep into the person of Jesus, our solid Rock. Then, look closely at your daily actions. The following two principles from Pastor Chuck Swindoll can guide your application.



The Secret of an Unsinkable Life

Matthew 7:24–29

First, *if you're only hearing the truth, you're not prepared for life's storms*. Hearing about an approaching hurricane doesn't mean you're prepared to ride it out. You must act on what you hear. What actions do you need to take today to put into practice Jesus' teaching in His Sermon on the Mount and firm up your foundation?

Second, *if your foundation is sure, no storm will cause your life to collapse*. Storms may come in the form of tragic accidents, death of loved ones, sudden financial collapse, an enemy's attack, even the approach of the end of our own lives. It's reassuring to know our hope in Christ as our Savior is sure.

Now stand strong on your foundation every day! Use the space below to express in prayer your dependence on Christ and His principles for living during your current storm.

We end our study with the same invitation Jesus gave. Let's live a life that displays all the righteous features He so carefully blueprinted in His sermon. Build wisely and your house will stand firm.



The Secret of an Unsinkable Life

Matthew 7:24–29



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, take me on a tour of the construction project called “my life.” Reveal any weak beams that I have laid on the shifting sand of self and help me to anchor them to the sure foundation of Your Son. What lessons of Jesus do I need to apply? What commands can I obey? Thank You for helping me withstand the howling gale of whatever storm I may face today. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Simple Faith* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 247, emphasis added.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”

