



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

John the Baptist was the perfect picture of humility: from the time he leapt in Elizabeth's womb upon hearing Mary's voice, to the last moments he spent languishing in Herod's dungeon, John was faithful to his calling as the forerunner to Jesus the Messiah.

The famous words John spoke in John 3:30—"He must increase, but I must decrease" (NASB)—perfectly summarize our disposition as Christians. Cultivating humility is a tender endeavor; once we *think* we've attained humility, we fall prey to pride.

Let's learn how to cultivate humility by studying the Bible and receiving guidance from Chuck Swindoll's message.



### DIGGING DEEPER

When searching the Scriptures, a helpful first step is to gather resources that will guide you in your study. Make certain you have handy a Bible dictionary and a concordance, as well as a reliable commentary on the book of the Bible you're studying. For this study of John, we recommend you get a copy of *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: John*.

Take a few minutes to read through John chapters 1 and 3. Read these verses carefully, as if it's the first time you've read them.



### Helpful Hints

- Reading different Bible versions can help you read the same passage with fresh perspective. If you don't have different versions handy, plenty of Web sites can help, such as biblestudytools.com, bible.org, or biblegateway.com, to name a few.

## Quotable

*False humility  
stinks a lot worse  
than raw conceit,  
and we can smell it  
a mile away. True  
humility is knowing  
that you have a  
place in God's plan,  
and you're not the  
star of the show.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



- Remember: *Observation* is a critical beginning technique you will want to use to put together the pieces of a passage of Scripture. Paying particular attention to John 1 and 3, make some initial observations about what you see.
- Reading the Bible is not merely an academic exercise. Never forget that.
- Prepare yourself to receive the richness of God's Word through prayer. Pray for God to search your heart, and take time to confess and repent if need be. Pray for focus and enthusiasm to infuse your study.
- Take time. Don't expect years of biblical depth to flow from a few minutes of study.



### Your Turn in the Scriptures

Using John 1 and 3, apply the primary approaches to studying the Scriptures—*observation*, *interpretation*, *correlation*, and *application*—to begin. Take some time first, however, to read any material you find in your commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and online tools that covers this section of John. *Pray* for the Holy Spirit's guidance. Jot notes in the margins of your Bible as you go or type them in the space provided.

#### Observation: What Do You See?

Use the space below to record your findings as you look closely at the text. Remember: Look for repeated words, commands, questions, emphatic statements, and images or figures of speech. Your notes can be specific and detailed as you examine the passage.



### John 1:6–39

If you need some help in observing John 1, here are some questions to help:

- Where was John the Baptist baptizing people?
- What are some geographical locations mentioned in John 1?
- List the characters mentioned in John 1.
- List the questions that the priests and Levites asked John the Baptist in order to identify him.

### John 3:23–36

If you need some help in observing John 3:23–36, here are some questions to help:

- List the characters mentioned in John 3.
- Which words are often repeated in John 3?
- Observe the text for judiciary language, such as “witness” or “testify.”
- Use a commentary to research ceremonial cleansing, for context into John 3:25.



### Interpretation: What Does It Mean?



#### The Friend of the Bridegroom

In John 3:28–29, John the Baptist offers a metaphor to the contingent of his followers who were jealous that more and more people were heading to Jesus’ disciples to be baptized. He said,

“You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent ahead of Him.’ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been made full.” (NASB)

In his commentary on John, Chuck Swindoll gives readers cultural context on the “friend of the bridegroom”:

The “friend of the bridegroom” in ancient Near East culture held considerably more responsibility than the “best man” today. In addition to helping the bridegroom prepare his home for the eventual day when the bride would come to stay, he helped direct the wedding feast at the end of the betrothal period. His most significant duty was to guard the bridal chamber during the feast, especially after the bride had slipped into the room unnoticed by the guests. No one except for the groom was allowed to go near the bridal chamber. When the “friend of the groom” heard the groom’s voice, he stood aside. His joy was complete when the groom arrived.<sup>1</sup>

In keeping with the metaphor, how did John the Baptist “guard the bridal chamber” for Jesus?

Why did John the Baptist refer to Jesus as “the Lamb of God”?

John 3:31 contains a vulnerable admission of John the Baptist. How does this demonstrate humility?



### **Correlation: How Does It Compare?**

Read the following passages, and write a note or two on how they help confirm the meaning of John 1 and 3 concerning John the Baptist.

Isaiah 40:3

Malachi 3:1

Matthew 11:11–14

List four other biblical characters who exemplify humility. (Hint: one excellent example is found in Luke 1:38)

### **Application: What Difference Does It Make?**

Chuck gleaned three applications from studying John the Baptist in John 1 and 3 that exemplify the essence of the phrase, “He must increase, but I must decrease”:

- *First, it means saying, “I am constantly committed to two goals: His increasing and my decreasing.”*
- *Second, it means saying, “I don’t perform; I permit.”*
- *Lastly, acknowledge that in order for Christ to increase, we must decrease. Decreasing is not an option. It is essential.*



In the space below, write out a few specific personalized applications (responses) to what you have studied about John the Baptist in John chapters 1 and 3.



### A FINAL PRAYER

Allow the hymn called “May the Mind of Christ My Savior,” written by Kate Wilkinson, to be your meditation and a prayer to decrease as Jesus increases.

*May the mind of Christ, my Savior,  
Live in me from day to day,  
By His love and power controlling  
All I do and say.*

*May the love of Jesus fill me  
As the waters fill the sea;  
Him exalting, self abasing,  
This is victory.*

*May I run the race before me,  
Strong and brave to face the foe,  
Looking only unto Jesus  
As I onward go.*

*May His beauty rest upon me,  
As I seek the lost to win,  
And may they forget the channel,  
Seeing only Him.<sup>2</sup>*

#### Endnotes

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: John* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 80.
2. Kate Barclay Wilkinson, “May the Mind of Christ, My Savior,” public domain.



# WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

## Cultivating Humility

John 1; 3

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

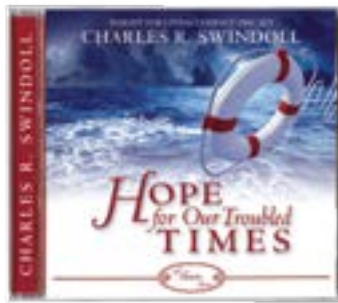
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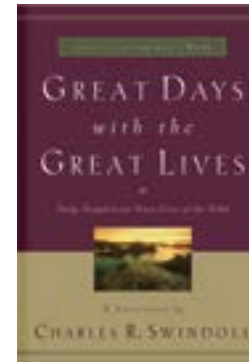
### Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2017 broadcast, this Searching the Scriptures study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department in collaboration with Mark Tobey, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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