



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Impossibilities. We can all name a few problems we've faced that defied solutions. The disciples encountered their share of daunting obstacles, such as the time when more than five thousand people gathered and Jesus asked Philip to buy bread to feed them. As Philip fingered the pennies in his pocket, he cast a dubious eye over the crowd. *It can't be done! Impossible!*

Do words like *can't . . . won't work . . . impossible* leap from your lips when the financial numbers don't add up? Or a medical condition defies treatment? Or a dispute snarls into an irresolvable impasse?

In this study, we'll see how Jesus overcame not one but two humanly impossible obstacles by multiplying food to feed thousands and walking on water to rescue His disciples. He performed these miracles to open our eyes to what lies beyond our dead ends. His miracles replace the word *impossibility* with a new word: *opportunity*. Because all things are possible for God, our impossibilities become opportunities for God to reveal His power, inspire our faith, and give us hope.

Let's raise the curtain on a biblical scene where the disciples faced an impossible problem: how to feed a multitude when the cupboard was bare!



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

What's your impossibility? It may relate to a recent turn of events, such as a financial setback or a job loss. Perhaps your impossibility involves a relationship or health issue. Identify your impossibility by writing it in the space below.

Quotable

*One sage wrote,
"We are all faced
with a series of
great opportunities,
brilliantly disguised
as unsolvable
problems."*

— Charles R. Swindoll



Now, read the following verses out loud as you prepare your heart to receive the lessons from John 6:1–21.

“O Sovereign LORD! You made the heavens and earth by your strong hand and powerful arm. Nothing is too hard for you!” (Jeremiah 32:17)

“I am the LORD, the God of all the peoples of the world. Is anything too hard for me?” (32:27)

“What is impossible for people is possible with God.” (Luke 18:27)

Pray this simple prayer as you place your impossible situation on the altar before the Lord:

Lord, I offer You my circumstance that seems impossible to me but poses no problem to You. Help me to sense Your presence in this study today. May I gain a firm conviction that with You all things are possible. Amen.



Observation: Biblical Examples of Impossibilities

A key principle in the *Searching the Scriptures* process is observation. The observation process helps you grasp the flow of the passage and identify the parts that make up the whole. Chuck Swindoll divided this passage into four parts: the setting, the opportunity, the test, and the response. As you read a passage of Scripture, remember to look for repeated words, commands, questions, and emphatic statements.

Read John 6:1–21, and write down your initial observations here.

The Setting

The first four verses of John 6 establish the setting for God's power to meet the seemingly immovable obstacle of human impossibility. After each of the following key phrases, write down the answer to the questions.

“After this” (John 6:1). Jesus returned to His home base of ministry from where (5:1)?



According to Mark's account, what else were Jesus' disciples doing prior to Jesus feeding the five thousand (Mark 6:30)? And what was the purpose for Jesus leading His men to a remote place (6:31–32)?

"Jesus crossed over" (John 6:1). John stated that "Jesus crossed over to the far side of the Sea of Galilee" (6:1). On this Bible map titled "*Ministry of Jesus*," locate the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee. Find letters "H" and "I," which identify the possible areas where Jesus fed the five thousand and walked on water.

"Jesus climbed a hill and sat down" (6:3). Although Jesus and His men tried to find refuge, "a huge crowd" interrupted their retreat (6:5). For what reason did the crowds gather (6:2)?

The Opportunity

"Jesus soon saw a huge crowd" (John 6:5). When observing a text, always notice *repetition*, *emphasis*, and *detail*. Observe John's repetition of the phrase "huge crowd" in verses 2 and 5 and Andrew's emphatic description of the crowd in verse 9. He uses the Greek word *tosoutos*, which means "so many." John details in verse 10 the number of men in the crowd—five thousand. Including women and children, this figure could have easily been eight or ten thousand!

The *size* of the crowd is a key element of the story. Why do you think John put so much emphasis on the size of the crowd?



One reason the size is significant is the contrast it highlights between the human and divine points of view. In the following chart, write your own list of contrasts between how the disciples most likely viewed the crowd from their human point of view and how Jesus viewed the crowd.

The Disciples’ Perspective of the Crowd <i>Impossible Problems</i>	Jesus’ Perspective of the Crowd <i>Divine Opportunities</i>

Jesus viewed the swarm of people not as an interruption but an opportunity to teach His followers about trusting God when faced with impossibilities.

The Test

“*[Jesus] was testing Philip*” (John 6:6). John noted that Jesus “already knew what he was going to do” (6:6). However, He kept His plan to Himself to test His disciples’ faith. Look closely at Jesus’ question to Philip: “Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?” (6:5). They were far from any town, and Jesus knew they had little money. So if Jesus knew the answer to His question, what was His purpose in asking Philip?

Andrew went “shopping” for food in the crowd but found only a boy with five loaves and two fish. His question, “But what good is that with this huge crowd?” (6:9) literally means in the Greek, “What good is so little for so many?”



Philip's and Andrew's answers revealed their limited, human perspective. What answers would have reflected a divine perspective toward impossibilities?

The Response

Jesus answered Andrew's question, "What good is so little for so many?" with a miracle that illustrated God's power in an impossible situation. What do you observe about Jesus' calm and deliberate actions (John 6:10–13)?

What do you observe in the people's response (6:14–15)? Instead of submissive faith, the people displayed what typical human flaws?

As the food in the disciples' stomachs digested, the faith in their hearts dissipated. How did they respond when a stormy sea put their lives in danger (6:16–21)?





Correlation: Deeper Insight

The parallel account in Mark 6:47–52 offers deeper insight into the disciples' faith struggles. What did Mark say about the disciples' hearts?



Interpretation: Biblical Principles about Impossibilities

Bible stories are a rich source of principles for godly living. We learn best by example, don't we? Lists of points are quickly forgotten, but the images of Jesus feeding the five thousand and walking on water set memorable pegs in our minds so that the next time we're called to trust God, we have some solid truths to hang on to.

Divine Perspective of Impossibilities

These two miracles demonstrate the nature of Jesus' true kingship, where He provides generously out of His abundance and rules over creation. Viewing impossibilities from a *divine* perspective reassures us that nothing is impossible for Him. He can multiply the little we offer Him and calm our fearsome storms.

Write down in the form of a principle the meaning of the miracles Jesus performed in John 6:1–21.

Faith When Faced with Impossibilities

As Chuck explains in his commentary, *Insights on John*, the disciples' fledgling faith faltered because:

According to Mark, "their heart was hardened" (Mark 6:52 NASB). This idiom didn't mean they were unkind or cruel (as it does in English). Rather, their reasoning and emotions were resistant to development. We would say they were "thickheaded." Nevertheless, Jesus remained patient with His disciples. If He rebuked them at all, He was gentle (Matt. 14:31).¹



What principle do you glean as you consider the meaning of the disciples' struggles with faith?



Application: Valuable Lessons We Can Learn

In his commentary, Chuck outlines four applicable lessons based on John 6:1–21:

First, *acknowledge your own inadequacy and the Lord's omnipotence. . . .*

Second, *be certain the challenge before you glorifies the Lord, obeys one of His commands in Scripture, or helps to fulfill a scriptural mandate (such as the Great Commission). . . .*

Third, *give the challenge back to the Lord as an opportunity for Him to accomplish it on your behalf and to receive glory for the victory. . . .*

Fourth, *do what you can, supply what you have, put forward your effort, then allow the Lord to multiply it (or not) at His discretion.²*

Thinking back to the impossible situation you noted at the beginning of the study, how can you apply Chuck's four insightful steps? Write down what you intend to do.

We live in an era of specialization. We have specialists in medicine, law, computers, finances, education, and the list goes on. However, only God can claim to be a specialist in impossibilities. Now, pray to the Impossibility Specialist with a heart filled with faith!





A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I bring to You what little I have and all I have. Give me Your perspective on my impossible situation, restore my hope, and help me to rest in Your will. Nothing is impossible for You, and I commit to You the people, situations, and problems that are out of my control. I give to You the challenges I face, whether impossible tasks or fearsome storms. Work Your will in Your way and in Your time. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on John* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 140.
2. Swindoll, *Insights on John*, 141–42.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

God's Specialty: Impossibilities

John 6:1–21

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY



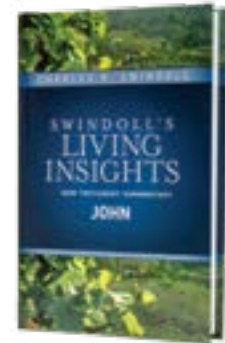
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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