



LET'S BEGIN HERE

In the opening of his gospel, the apostle John declared that Jesus “existed in the beginning with God” and “God created everything through him” (John 1:2–3). As the Son of God, Jesus is the source of all life, the spark from which all living things generate and are sustained.

“His life,” according to John, “brought light to everyone” (1:4). Like the sun rising on a new day, Jesus’ light dawned on the world at His birth and radiated throughout His ministry. During the Feast of Tabernacles, the perfect opportunity came for Jesus to unveil His true identity at the lighting of the lampstands ceremony. “I am the light of the world,” He declared as the massive temple candelabras lit up the night sky (8:12).

However, just as the apostle predicted, Jesus’ own people rejected His light (1:11). Why would they turn their backs on Jesus and His offer of life? In our passage for this study, John 8:12–59, John revealed the reasons why people rejected Him and even tried to snuff Him out. These reasons endure today in the hearts of those who prefer darkness to light (3:19). Let’s not be like them; instead, let’s come out of sin’s dark shadows, welcome the Light, embrace the life He offers, and follow Him!



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Each time we pray, we invite the light of Christ’s presence to flood our souls. Pause in this moment of preparation to open your heart to the Lord. Perhaps there is a dark corner of fear or distrust that Jesus’ light can chase away with hope and faith. Write down your prayer here.

Quotable

*Jesus spent His
days fearlessly
declaring the truth,
continually joyful,
and yet constantly
in trouble.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



Let's start our study by reading three life-giving invitations Jesus made amidst the onslaught of hostility from the religious leaders.

"I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life." (John 8:12)

Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (8:31–32)

"I tell you the truth, anyone who obeys my teaching will never die!" (8:51)

With the highlight function, highlight the three key responses to Jesus' invitations: "follow me" (8:12), "remain faithful to my teachings" (8:31), and "anyone who obeys" (8:51). Hang on to these thoughts, and we'll come back to them. Now, let's dig into the text!



Observation: Background and Setting, Declaration and Response

Observation is a critical beginning technique in Chuck Swindoll's approach to Bible study described in his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*. Observe the phrase at the beginning of John 8:12: "Jesus spoke to the people *once more*" (emphasis added). "Once more" indicates that Jesus was repeating *and* continuing His teaching, signaling us to look at our passage within its broader context.



Searching the Scriptures Tip

In *Searching the Scriptures*, Chuck writes, "We understand a verse of Scripture better when we grasp its context—when we acquaint ourselves with the surrounding verses."¹ Context gives us clues about the text's historical background, literary themes, and the author's overarching message. To know the meaning of the *text*, we must know the *context*.



Background and Setting

Review John 7, which we studied along with Chuck’s message, “Jesus in the Lions’ Den,” and then scan John 8:11–59. Do you notice similarities or thematic threads that weave through both texts? What was the festival that brought Jesus to Jerusalem (John 7:2), and where was Jesus teaching (7:14, 28; 8:20, 59)?

Notice the statements that suggest continuation of time: “midway through the festival” (7:14), “On the last day, the climax of the festival” (7:37), “once more” (8:12), and “Later Jesus said to them again” (8:21). What is repeated in 7:30, 32, 44–45, and 8:20, which culminates with an attempt to stone Jesus (8:59)? Also, what phrase is repeated in 7:8, 7:30, and 8:20?

From these connections between John 7 and 8:12–59, what can you conclude about these two passages?

Declaration and Response

Jesus declared, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12) at the temple treasury (8:20), which was located near the Court of Women. “According to the Mishnah,” writes Chuck in his commentary, *Insights on John*,

Priests erected four giant lampstands in the Court of Women during the Feast of Tabernacles. Each evening at sundown, young men climbed ladders to light these enormous oil lamps, which, according to Mishnah tractate Sukkah 5:3, reflected in every courtyard in Jerusalem.²

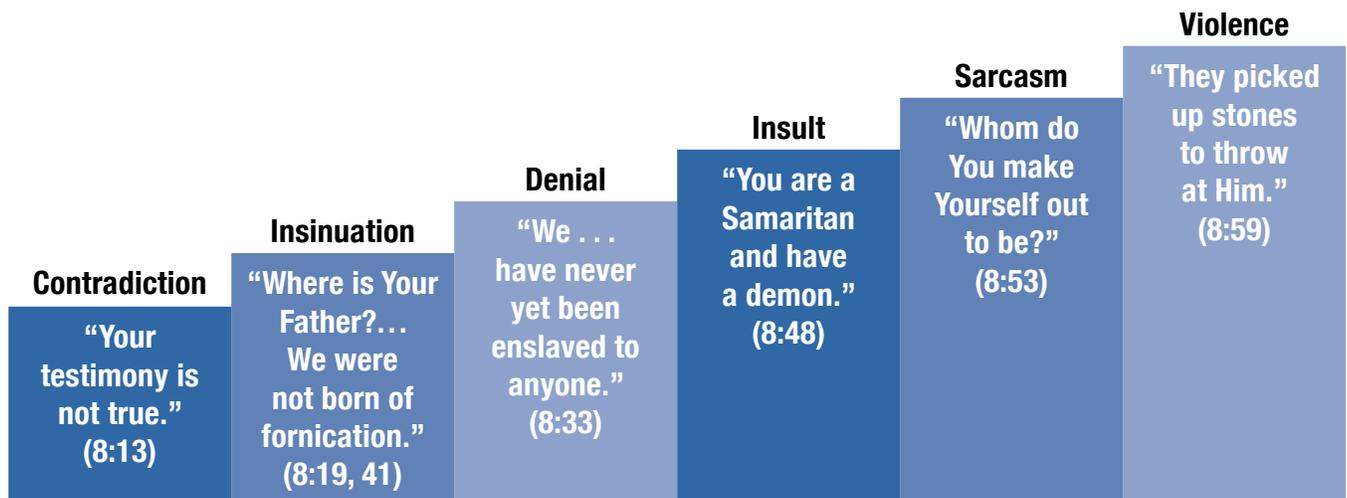


These magnificent beacons emanating from the temple were a reminder of God’s pillar of fire that glowed over the tabernacle and guided Israel through the wilderness (Numbers 9:15–17). Against this blazing backdrop, Jesus’ declaration was profound! Read John 8:12 one more time as you consider the following italicized words, and write down in your own words what Jesus was saying about Himself:

- Exclusive claim: “I am *the* light . . .” (not just *a* light)
- Inclusive offer: “. . . of the *world* . . .” (not just of the *Jews*)
- Salvation invitation: “. . . *follow* me . . .” (as the Israelites followed God’s *fire*)

The implications of Jesus’ claim inflamed the Pharisees, whose hostility intensified from a smoking coal into white-hot fury. The following chart illustrates their rising rage.

Progressive Attitudes of Hostility



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Let's follow the Pharisees' trail of hostility as they rejected Jesus. Emerging from the text are five reasons for rejection—five gates of unbelief that people tend to pass through on their way to a hardened heart.



Interpretation: Deciphering the Reasons for Rejection

Dig out the deeper meaning from Jesus' messages to the Pharisees to understand why people, then and now, reject Jesus.

Lack of Knowledge—John 8:14, 19

Because the Pharisees didn't know God's essential character qualities of mercy, compassion, justice, and truth, they didn't recognize these divine attributes in Jesus. Read John 8:14, 19, and summarize Jesus' words.

Lack of Perception—John 8:15, 23

The Pharisees' lack of perception was linked to their faulty mind-set. "You judge me by human standards," Jesus told them (John 8:15). They didn't have the discernment to look beyond the horizontal plane—Jesus' flesh-and-blood ancestry—to the vertical plane of His divine origin. Why could they not see who Jesus was (8:23)? And what was the tragic result of their error (8:24)?



Lack of Appropriation—John 8:37, 43

The word *appropriation* means “to take exclusive possession of . . . to take or make use of.”³ Although the Pharisees had appropriated the Scriptures and knew the Law better than anyone, they refused to appropriate Jesus by believing in Him and taking His words into their hearts. Why not (John 8:37, 43)?

Lack of Desire—John 8:44–45

The Pharisees’ biological heritage linked them to Abraham, a man of deep faith and obedience, but what did Jesus say was the root of the Pharisees’ unbelief and lack of desire to obey Jesus (John 8:44–45)?

Lack of Humility—John 8:52–53

As illustrated by the chart earlier, the Pharisees contradicted Jesus (John 8:13), then they insinuated that He was illegitimate-born (8:19, 41). They also denied His words (8:33) and insulted Him (8:48). Now, with smug superiority, they taunted Him with sarcasm: “Who do you think you are?” (8:53).

Jesus responded with one of His clearest declarations of His divine identity in the Gospels. Jesus had already declared, “*I am* the bread of life” (6:48, emphasis added) and “*I am* the light of the world” (8:12, emphasis added). In 8:58, He said simply and boldly, “I AM.” Let’s compare Scriptures to discover the meaning of this title.





Correlation: The Meaning of the Title “I AM”

By stating, “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I AM!” (John 8:58), Jesus claimed not only timeless existence but also equality with the God of the Old Testament. Read Exodus 3:13–15, and note the background of Jesus’ claim.

Jesus declared Himself to be God! Heaven’s light shone for all the world to see, but the Pharisees refused to open their eyes. Tragically, these Bible scholars who memorized and mastered the Scriptures couldn’t receive the Word (John 1:1). Filled with hell’s fury, these children of the devil “picked up stones to throw at him” in an attempt to execute Jesus on the spot for blasphemy; but “Jesus was hidden from them and left the Temple” (8:59).



Application: What’s Our Response?

The Pharisees slid down rejection’s slippery slope from ignorance to violence. Perhaps you’ve been a victim of someone rejecting you, and you have felt the sting of misunderstanding or even the bruising attack from an abuser.

Jesus is an understanding friend to the rejected, and He invites you to come out of the darkness of your pain and confusion into His light. Take another look at the verses we read at the outset of our study: John 8:12, 31–32, and 51. What are the amazing promises Jesus makes to you in these verses?



By faith, cling to His promises of life, truth, and freedom, and respond to His invitations: “follow me” (John 8:12), “remain faithful to my teachings” (8:31), and obey (8:51). What can you do, even in your difficult circumstance, to follow, remain faithful to, and obey Jesus?

Let’s close our study in prayer, raising hands not filled with stones of rejection but with love for the Light who leads us out of darkness.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I open my eyes to the Light of the World, Your Son, and I see Your grace and truth shining on His face. I reject the darkness, and I follow my Savior wherever He may lead. Help me to obey Him, even when I feel the sting of rejection from others. Comfort my heart, satisfy my longing for peace, and give me hope as I follow Jesus. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2016), 128.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on John*, (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 179.
3. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam Webster, 2007), see “appropriate.”



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Reasons for Rejection

John 8:12–59

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

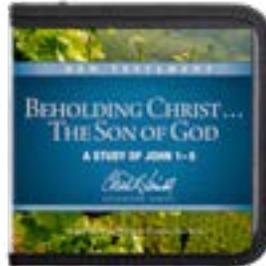
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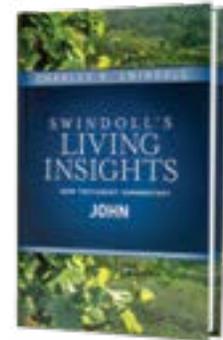
Tools for Digging Deeper



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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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