



LET'S BEGIN HERE

It was early morning in Jerusalem. The city was still damp with dew as purple shadows fell among the temple columns. Echoing through the courtyard were the words of Jesus, who, in rabbinical fashion, had sat down to teach the gathered crowd.

John described this serene scene and then explained what followed.

Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. (John 8:1–3)

The sudden interruption drew all eyes from Jesus to the disgraced woman. She was a pawn in the Jewish leaders' political game to get rid of Jesus. Would Jesus condemn the woman or show mercy? Either way, the legalists would have grounds to discredit their rival and send Him away humiliated.

Jesus, however, refused to play their insidious game. Let's see how Jesus turned the tables on the Jewish leaders to expose their hypocrisy while compassionately confronting the woman's sin . . . without condemning her.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Our passage today is about Christ's mercy toward us in our sin and shame. As you open your Bible to John 8:1–11, open your heart before the Lord in prayer. In his book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Chuck Swindoll writes of the importance of prayer as we seek to understand and apply God's Word.

Study without prayer is an incomplete process—a futile effort. . . . I often pray, "Lord, speak to me. Help me understand what this passage is saying. I am listening. I'm sensitive to Your truth. Lead me into it."¹

Quotable

The Son of God stood eye-to-eye with the adulteress. And suddenly, there was an incredible bridge between them . . . just like the bridge He built between us and Himself when we came to know the Lord."

— Charles R. Swindoll



Take a moment to pray Chuck's prayer for yourself in your own words, and write down your thoughts to the Lord in the space below.



Observation: The Setting, Attack, and Answer

In these studies, we follow Chuck's approach to Bible study described in *Searching the Scriptures*, which includes four essential methods: observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. You can purchase a copy at Insight for Living Ministries' [online store](#). Also, we recommend that you add to your study library Chuck's commentary on *John's gospel*. Online tools for our study include [BibleGateway](#), [Lumina](#), and William Barclay's classic commentaries in The Daily Study Bible Series at [StudyLight](#).

Now, read John 8:1–11 to get an overview of the account. Then, answer the questions below as we follow Chuck's outline and make observations of the text.

The Setting—John 8:1–2

Notice Jesus' pattern in John 8:1–2. When Jesus visited Jerusalem, He would spend the night on the Mount of Olives. In the morning, He would enter the temple courtyard, crowds would gather, and, perhaps in the shade of Solomon's columned portico (John 10:22–24), He would sit down to teach.

What similarities do you see between Jesus' activities here in John 8:1–2 and His Passion Week activities later in Luke 21:37–38? What do Jesus' habits say about His priorities?

Every day at the temple, judgment and mercy met at the altar where sacrifices were slain and sinners were pardoned. In this place, Jesus taught the gospel—the good news of God giving His Son as the supreme sacrifice for our sin (John 3:16). And here, the religious leaders put Jesus' gospel of grace to the supreme test.



The Attack—John 8:3–6

Interruption. The “teachers of religious law and the Pharisees” (John 8:3) interrupted Jesus while He was teaching and roughly shoved the woman before the crowd for all to see and scorn.

What do these teachers’ and Pharisees’ actions say about their attitude toward this woman and any other lawbreaker trapped in sin?

Accusation. Write down what you observe about the teachers’ and Pharisees’ accusation of adultery. What does the phrase “caught in the act” imply (8:4)?

We can’t help but wonder, *Where was the adulterous man?* The law demanded punishment for him too (Leviticus 20:10). Perhaps, when the moral police raided the love nest, he escaped. More likely, he was in on the plot—a collaborator. Surely, these religious authorities didn’t merely happen by these lovers’ bedroom window. No, the incident smells of a premeditated trap to snare the woman and use her to catch the ultimate prize: Jesus.

Question. Embedded in the question, “The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?” (John 8:5), are venomous fangs poised to strike Jesus the moment He answers. “They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him” (8:6).



Commentator William Barclay explains the deadly dilemma:

The dilemma into which they sought to put Jesus was this. If he said that the woman ought to be stoned to death, two things followed. First, he would lose the name he had gained for love and for mercy and never again would be called the friend of sinners. Second, he would come into collision with the Roman law, for the Jews had no power to pass or carry out the death sentence on anyone. If he said that the woman should be pardoned, it could immediately be said that he was teaching men to break the law of Moses, and that he was condoning and even encouraging people to commit adultery. That was the trap in which the scribes and Pharisees sought to entrap Jesus.²

Rather than trap Jesus, however, the accusers' own words entrapped themselves. Read the verse again in the NASB: “Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone *such women*” (John 8:5 NASB, emphasis added). Do you see the holier-than-thou, us-versus-them labeling in the phrase, “such women”? What about this statement betrayed the religious leaders' hypocrisy?

What Jesus did next turned the tables on these smug hypocrites.

The Answer—John 8:6–9

Observe what Jesus did and said and how the crowd responded (John 8:6–9). What do you notice about Jesus' frame of mind under pressure?





Getting to the Root

What did Jesus write in the dust with His finger? The Greek word translated into *wrote* in John 8:6 and 8:8 is not the word normally used for writing in the New Testament—*grapho*. Rather, it is the word *katagrapho*, “which can mean *to write down a record against someone*. . . . It may be that Jesus was confronting those self-confident sadists with the record of their own sins.”³

While the religious authorities pointed to the woman’s sin, Jesus pointed to the religious leaders’ sins with His writing in the dust. His statement, “Let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” (John 8:7), referenced sins not just of the body, like adultery, but also of the heart, like lust, covetousness, guile, hypocrisy, and hate.

What does “throw the first stone” mean (8:7)? Literally, it means to execute the woman by stoning her to death. But figuratively, the phrase implies a broader meaning that other passages of Scripture help us interpret.



Interpretation and Correlation: The Meaning of Throwing Stones

What possible definitions of “throwing stones” do these verses offer?

Matthew 7:1–5

James 4:11–12



The Counsel—John 8:10–11

Jesus, the only One who had the right to condemn, spared the one who deserved condemnation. What did Jesus say to the woman in John 8:10–11?

After the crowd departed the scene, Jesus turned to the woman. In that poignant moment, the sinless One built a bridge of redemption to the sinner. How did Jesus balance confrontation of her sin with care for her soul (John 8:11)?



Application: The Principles

With the sound of Jesus' caring yet confronting words to the woman ringing in our ears, let's bring home our study with three principles from Chuck about confronting, condemning, and correcting wrong.

The practice of confronting wrong calls for humility, not pride. In keeping with Jesus' example, the apostle Paul wrote, "if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself" (Galatians 6:1).

The privilege of condemning wrong is based on righteousness, not knowledge. We must "get rid of the log" in our own eye before we "deal with the speck" in our friend's eye (Matthew 7:5).



The principle of correcting wrong starts with forgiveness, not rebuke. Forgiveness restores the relationship so that the truth can be received. Speaking the truth in love, just as Jesus spoke to the adulterous woman, is the key to confronting with care. Author and counselor David Augsburger outlines four *ineffective* ways to confront someone and a fifth *best* way.

- I win; you lose.
- I want out; I'll withdraw.
- I'll give in for good relations.
- I'll meet you halfway.
- I can care and confront.⁴

Is God prompting you to gently and humbly restore someone to the right path? Take a moment to reflect on your approach. What can you do to confront with care?

We can't leave this study without imagining ourselves as the woman caught in sin. What is our gentle and humble Savior saying to you as you stand before Him?

Receive His words of pardon, and, in the power of His grace, respond to His call to sin no more. Let's conclude our study with prayer.





A FINAL PRAYER

Father, like the woman caught in the act of sin, I stand before You as I am—in need of Your love and help. Relieve the weight of my shame. Lift my head so that I can look into Your Son’s eyes of compassion, and help me receive His noncondemning words of grace. Fill me with Your Spirit’s power and the inner resolve to sin no more and live freely. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2016), 128.
2. William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, (Chapters 8 to 21), rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 2.
3. Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, 3.
4. David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to Confront*, rev. ed. (Ventura, Ca.: Regal Books, 1981), 17.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Letters in the Sand

John 8:1–11

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



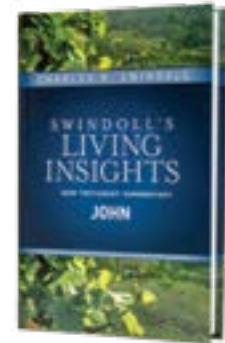
Tools for Digging Deeper



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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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