

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME ONE

STUDY SIX

Changing a Leper's Spots

Mark 1:40–45

I'm telling you there is hope for us, and the only One who can cleanse us from our leprosy is named Jesus Christ.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

INVISIBLE burdens that are too big for our backs to bear. Grief and sorrow that encamp around our hearts and refuse to leave. Habits that we can't seem to break no matter how hard we try. These weaknesses illustrate our human frailty, made worse by humanity's spiritual condition that theologians term *depravity*—the inherent sin passed down from Adam to every person.

The Hebrew prophet Jeremiah lamented the depravity of his people and their helplessness to change. Changing their nature, he wrote, would be like a “leopard [taking] away its spots” (Jeremiah 13:23). It's impossible!

Only God has the power to change our nature, as Elvina M. Hall beautifully expressed in the second stanza of her hymn, “Jesus Paid It All.” Switching the metaphor from leopards to lepers, she wrote:

Lord, now indeed I find
Thy pow'r, and Thine alone
Can change the leper's spots
And melt the heart of stone.¹

We need divine intervention from the One who can do the impossible—the only One who can change a *leopard's* spots or a *leper's* spots.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll join a leper bowing before Jesus. His pitiful physical condition symbolizes the emotional anguish and spiritual corruption of the human heart. We'll see our Lord reaching out and cleansing the man, and we'll experience the cleansing relief of His forgiving touch on our sin-stained souls.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

Changing a Leper's Spots

Mark 1:40–45



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The chorus of Elvina M. Hall's classic hymn praises our Savior:

Jesus paid it all;
All to Him I owe.
Sin had left a crimson stain;
He washed it white as snow.²

Express your confidence now and throughout the study in God's ability to bring the cleansing transformation we could never bring ourselves.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Leprosy is a dreaded disease. The Hebrew term for "leprosy," *tsaraath*, refers to a variety of chronic or malignant skin infections. "Ancient cultures regarded leprosy as God's affliction for sin (which cannot be healed, only cleansed)."³ To show their perpetual mourning, according to the law of Moses, those afflicted with leprosy must observe these requirements:

"Tear their clothing and leave their hair uncombed. They must cover their mouth and call out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' As long as the serious disease lasts, they will be ceremonially unclean. They must live in isolation in their place outside the camp."
(Leviticus 13:45–46)

Shunned by their families and banished from society, lepers were treated as if they were already dead. The shame and mental distress were as hard to bear as the disease itself. When they walked down the road, people kept their distance. Mothers covered their children's eyes. Doctors shook their heads. No one dared step too close to an open grave—no one, except Jesus, the only One who can bring life to the lifeless.

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Observation: Jesus Cleanses a Leper

Begin the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method with its first step, observation. Thoughtfully read [Mark 1:40–45](#) in various translations.⁴ Try to visualize the scene, imagining the man in his pitiful condition, the expression on Jesus' face, and the response of those around Him. Let the account touch your heart.

Surprising Encounter and Request—Mark 1:40

We find two surprises in Mark 1:40. First, there was no shouting of the word *unclean*! Second, the leper made a remarkable statement to Jesus. What emotional message do you hear in his words?

Compassionate Response and Miracle—Mark 1:41–42

According to Mark 1:41–42, what prompted Jesus to act on this leper's behalf? What did He do that no one else did or could? What did Jesus do and say that broke with years of tradition and condemnation?

Following that twinge of compassion, please observe—and I love this—“Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him.” Oh, people never touched a leper. But Jesus reached out. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Stern Warning and Dismissal—Mark 1:43–44

Cleansed! This man, who spent his life looking down in shame, never daring to make eye contact with anyone, now gazed deeply into the compassionate eyes of his Savior. Feel his eagerness to tell his family and friends about Jesus. What did Jesus tell him in Mark 1:43–44 as He dismissed him? Why do you think He wanted the man to comply with the law, rather than make a spectacle of the miracle?

Public Announcement and Results—Mark 1:45

Although Jesus told the healed leper not to spread the news of his healing, what did the cleansed man do according to Mark 1:45? What happened because of the healed leper's proclamation? How did Jesus respond?

[The healed leper] just didn't quite get that clear, did he? The verse begins with "but," appropriately. Here is the Man of God who does this great work, has an aversion to enlarging His audience, and, wouldn't you know it, people came from everywhere—but for the wrong reasons! They didn't come for their souls to have surgery but for their bodies to be healed. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Jesus' Compassion, Power, and Priority

Look at the leper's words again in the Amplified and NET translations of [Mark 1:40](#). His request is structured as a third-class condition in Greek, suggesting the real possibility that Jesus may not have wanted to make him clean.

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The article, “[Clean](#),” in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* at [biblegateway.com](#) explains the serious consequences of touching a leper:

Impurity is contracted mainly by physical contact. Everything Levitically unclean conveys impurity to that which touches it. . . . Leprosy was regarded as a most serious cause of pollution not only because of the physical deadliness of the disease itself, but also because it was considered a mark of divine disfavor. For this reason the purificatory rites required additional sin and burnt offerings (Leviticus 14:13).⁵

What do you think was the leper's state of mind when he made his request of Jesus?

At best we could say “hopeful doubt.” The man has spent years of his life isolated from family and friends, and now he comes and says to the only One who could give him hope, “If You’re willing, You can cleanse me.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Moved by compassion, Jesus cleansed the leper. Read [Mark 1:41–42](#) in the Amplified and NET translations. At [billmounce.com](#), look up the Greek term *splanchnon*—the noun that is the basis of the verb, *splanchnizomai*, “moved with compassion” (Mark 1:41).

What stands out regarding the meaning of these words? What does the passive voice of the verb, “be cleansed” (1:41 NASB), emphasize?

Deep within the body is the Greek term, the splanchnon, the entrails, the visceral part of one's inner being. Jesus down in the depths of His being feels deeply. He's filled with tenderness for this man in his helpless condition. This divine power housed within the divine Son of God passes through Him at the touch, and the man is cleansed. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Read [Mark 1:43–45](#) in the Amplified and NET translations. Why did Jesus warn the cleansed leper not to tell anyone about the miracle? What was more important to Jesus, and why? You can consult [Constable's Notes](#) online at netbible.org. Record your answer.

He says to him, "Don't run out and spread the word. Go to the priest." What's that about? First, understand Jesus is guarding the timing of His messianic identity. Second, He's not interested in increasing the crowds. He's most concerned that this cleansing, this miracle, stand the test of an official examination. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Only God Can Do the Impossible!

Pastor Chuck Swindoll specifies four reliefs that only God can bring.

- Only God can heal our diseases.
- Only God can forgive our sin.
- Only God can raise the dead.
- Only God can cleanse our minds of the stigma of leprosy.

Look at Jesus' great power in [Luke 5:17–24](#) and [John 11:17–27, 30–46](#). How do these passages highlight that Jesus did what only God can do?

How do [Isaiah 64:6](#) and [2 Corinthians 5:17–21](#) distinguish “righteous deeds” and true righteousness that only God can provide?

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We are hopelessly lost in our sins, should God not intervene. Sins must be forgiven, and only God can forgive sins. Sin brings guilt and condemnation. The only way to find relief from either or both is through forgiveness, and we are promised forgiveness through the cross. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Acknowledge Your Need for Relief

Respond to Jesus' great power as the leper did. In what areas do you need relief from the physical, emotional, and spiritual burdens you carry?

Come to the One who has the power to cleanse and ask Him, as the leper did, to bring the relief you need. What does His compassion toward you feel like?

Anyone who comes to Christ through the cross can come in the same way. "I acknowledge that I am a sinful person, I acknowledge that I am deep down inside diseased with this sinfulness. Nothing in my own hands can I bring that would in any way ingratiate You. I come at Your mercy. Forgive me, cleanse me, take me. I trust in Christ for that cleansing." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Express your gratitude to God for His Son's cleansing, restoring, forgiving touch. What does it feel like to be made whole? Close your study by offering a gift of praise through prayer to your compassionate Savior.

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You're in pain; healing can come only from the living God. You're sinful; forgiveness can only come from the living God. You fear the grief and the tragedy of death; the hope of resurrection can only come from God. You have the stigma of shame in your life; relief and cleansing can only come from the living God.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Holy Father, thank You for reaching out to me in Your great compassion. Thank You for Your grace that touched me and cleansed me. You washed my crimson stain white as snow. Thank You for Your Holy Spirit who dwells within me, granting me the power to reflect Your compassion and holiness. Help me tell others that relief is always available through You. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Elvina M. Hall, "Jesus Paid It All," in *The Celebration Hymnal: Songs and Hymns for Worship* (n.p.: Word Music/Integrity Music, 1997), hymn 305.
2. Hall, "Jesus Paid It All," hymn 305.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Mark*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 2 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 51.
4. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](https://insight.org/how-does-pastor-chuck-swindoll-study-the-bible/)" at insight.org.
5. "Clean," *Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Bible Gateway, biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/Clean.

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2010, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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