

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME ONE

STUDY TWELVE

Misunderstood by the Family

Mark 3:20–21, 31–35

I've got to be careful how I say this. When you truly trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, you enthrone Him as top priority in your life. As you grow in maturity, He becomes more important to you than life itself, even more than family.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE anguish of being misunderstood runs too deep for words.

It happens when people label your decisions as wrong and call your actions foolish. The hours we spend trying to convince them otherwise feel like wasted time. Their minds are set, and there's no changing them. Our frustration increases even more, and our pain becomes harder to bear when the ones misunderstanding us come from our intimate circle of family and friends.

Misunderstanding often happens in the lives of those who recently came to faith in Christ. They opened their hearts to the love of Christ and put their trust in Him as their Savior. Jesus broke the chains of heartache and sin and freed their souls to soar in His grace. They couldn't wait to tell their family and friends about Jesus and their new hope.

Non-Christian family members and friends who see their excitement, hear their joy, and learn about how their entire lives have been transformed don't always like the change. They say things like, "Since you got religion, you're no fun." "It's just a phase; it'll pass." "You're not one of us anymore." "You're not welcome in the family." "You're on your own now."

Jesus felt the same anguish when His family—including His own mother—misunderstood Him. As we follow His steps through the streets of Capernaum, we witness Jesus making a choice between His biological family and His spiritual family. We see how Jesus handled being misunderstood, we gain practical wisdom and grace for navigating conflicts, and we learn how to prioritize God's will above all else.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

Misunderstood by the Family

Mark 3:20–21, 31–35



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prayer is your response to God's invitation:

*My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me."
And my heart responds, "LORD, I am coming." . . .
Even if my father and mother abandon me,
the LORD will hold me close. (Psalm 27:8, 10)*

Come to Him as you begin your study of His precious Word. Express your faith in the trustworthiness of our heavenly Father, who will always hold you close.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The literary structure of Mark 3:20–35 is like a sandwich. At the beginning and end, Mark features Jesus' family. In the middle, he focuses on the scribes.

- A. Jesus and His family, part 1 (Mark 3:20–21)
- B. Jesus and the scribes (3:22–30)
- A. Jesus and His family, part 2 (3:31–35)

Mark's structure invites the reader to consider how each account informs the other. We'll examine the center section about the accusations from the scribes in the next *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study. For now, open Mark's gospel to 3:20–21 and 3:31–35 and observe what happened when Jesus' own family tried to stop His ministry.

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Observation: Jesus Is Misunderstood by His Family

Observation is the first step in *Searching the Scriptures*. Read [Mark 3:20–21, 31–35](#) slowly and thoughtfully, imagining the scenes. See the actions. Feel the tension. Hear what is said and sense what is not said, as if you were present watching the interactions and feeling the emotions under the surface.¹

Jesus Is Misperceived—Mark 3:20–21

Put yourself in the shoes of Jesus' family members when they heard about the movement that Jesus started. Jesus was supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit while Mary was a virgin. But Joseph and Mary bore other children after Jesus, so Jesus had younger half-brothers and half-sisters (see Mark 6:3). It is quite likely that Joseph had died, as he's not mentioned here or throughout Jesus' ministry, so, as the eldest, Jesus would have been responsible for the family.

Can you sense the family's shock about the group of people Jesus chose to run around with Him? Can you feel their fear when Jesus crossed the Pharisees? What demands on Jesus warranted their concern in Mark 3:20? What other concerns do you think they had?

And you're thinking, why would they be out to get Him? He's doing the right thing. Well, wait a minute. Hold it. I want you deliberately to put yourself in the sandals of Jesus' mother and His brothers and sisters for the next few moments. For almost thirty years, He has been an intimate part of the family. All of a sudden, one day, He's gone. You read nothing in this gospel or in any of the gospels that He left a word of explanation. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Read [3:21](#) in the MSG and J. B. Phillips translations. When Jesus' family heard of His ministry and zeal, how did they intervene? Why were they trying to seize Him?

We would say today, "It's time for an intervention." Not surprisingly, they show up to rescue Him from Himself. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Jesus Redefines the “Family”—Mark 3:31–35

Think of Jesus’ role as the firstborn. What do you observe about Jesus’ mother and brothers in Mark 3:31–35? What did the crowd say to Jesus? What was His response?

Did you hear the priority? “Whoever does the will of God—that’s closer than natural family ties.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Jesus Prioritizes His Spiritual Family

During the step of interpretation, explore the definitions of some important terms in the passage, as well as the cultural and historical context to better grasp their meaning.

In [Mark 3:20–21, 31–35](#), we observed that Jesus’ family came to take custody of Him because they thought He had lost His senses. At [billmounce.com](#), look up the two Greek terms [krateo](#), translated “take custody” (Mark 3:21 NASB); and [existemi](#), translated “lost His senses” (3:21 NASB). How do both terms deepen your understanding of how Jesus’ family felt about Him?

*“He’s lost it. He’s gone berserk. He’s gone a little nuts.” Interesting word, existemi. It was used in the classics to describe “the act of driving one out of his senses, throwing one out of his mind, to be beside oneself, to be insane.”
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Look at [Mark 3:31–35](#) in the MSG and J. B. Phillips translations. Jesus’ family was trying to interfere in His ministry and pull Him away from His followers. They wanted to speak to Him so they could talk some sense into Him!

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Why did Jesus prioritize His spiritual family over blood lineage? You can consult [Constable's Notes](#) at netbible.org. What encouragement does this passage bring to believers who are suffering persecution for their faith?

All of us in the family of God are born into the family through faith in the Lord Jesus. So, we have a common birth. We have a common hunger and thirst for righteousness. Amazingly, we find ourselves closer to someone else who hungers and thirsts for righteousness than our own blood brother or sister. We have a common obedience to the same Master, and we have common goals and priorities. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Prioritizing God and His Righteousness

God created the family. Read [Genesis 2:18–24](#); [Exodus 20:12](#); [Psalm 127](#); [John 19:26–27](#); [1 Timothy 5:8](#). Summarize from these passages how God values family relationships.

How can we reconcile these passages with [Mark 3:20–21, 31–35](#)? What wisdom do Christ-followers need to apply when dealing with family conflicts?

It's delicate because it forces one out of a traditional way of thinking, like natural family, but it's abused because some handled these truths unwisely. And they've treated their natural family disrespectfully. Jesus doesn't say that to His own mom and brothers; He says this to the crowd. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Compare [Matthew 6:33; 10:34–39; Luke 14:25–33](#) in the MSG translation with our passage. What principles do these passages teach Christ-followers about what's most important and the cost of our commitment to Christ?

When Christ comes in and takes His place in one's life, He is enthroned in that life. And all the priorities change. But the family doesn't get it because He isn't enthroned in their lives, necessarily. Now if they are, they love it.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Practical Ways to Deal with Misunderstanding

Pastor Chuck shares with us three simple statements to help us handle being misunderstood. The first statement is to *face it*. How does this passage equip you to face being misunderstood—even by the people closest to you?

You come to realize that family members who don't know Christ just won't understand. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The second statement is to *accept it*. How can you develop and demonstrate an attitude of acceptance toward those who do not understand your relationship with Christ?

It's God's job to change them. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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The third statement is to *adjust to it*. How has the Holy Spirit adjusted your lens to understand that, until the Lord turns their hearts around, family members who do not know Christ will not grasp the joy, the zeal, the delight, and the motivation you have for living? In what ways can you demonstrate God's love to your family?

Few heartaches are greater than the heartache of being rejected by those closest to you. You feel abandoned, alone, and misunderstood. Trying to make peace and reconcile did not work, and now you're feeling cast aside. Who can understand you now? The answer is Jesus! Yes, He truly can identify with your heartache, and He is with you to hold you and comfort you as only He can. Lean on Him, and He will carry you through.



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for always holding me close. Grant me patience, wisdom, grace, love, and understanding, as I continue this delightful journey with You. Speak through my life to my family. In the name of Jesus, our Savior and God, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. 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.

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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