

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME ONE

STUDY FIFTEEN

After the Teaching . . . The Testing

Mark 4:21–41

Strong teaching followed by severe testing reveals the hard truth of my maturity.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WITH focused gaze, we hear one lecture after another. We take notes and highlight what is important. We raise our eyebrows, nod, and smile, showing that we understand . . . until the day the teacher gives us a pop quiz. Only then do we realize how much we've learned from the long hours of instruction.

Likewise, week after week, month after month, we sit under the teaching of God's Word, but gathering information is not the same as learning. We may know about God, but do we know Him? Can we trust Him? The answer becomes clear when the testing comes.

Some tests feel like a hammer pounding a nail into submission, a file eating away the rough edges of a piece of metal, or a furnace burning every combustible thing into ashes. The most severe tests appear without warning. Your doctor reveals that you have cancer, and it is rapidly spreading. You find out that your position has been cut, and you must find a new job. A family member's marriage is in trouble, and divorce seems certain. Financial setbacks, relational conflicts, family heartache—life's tests seem endless.

Trials like these expose our fears. Can we face hard things without running away? They test our faith. How much do we lean on God or turn to substitutes for inner strength? They reveal our maturity. Have we grown in quiet confidence to the degree that nothing gets the best of us?

Tests are a core element in Christ's spiritual curriculum for His followers. His teaching gives us knowledge—which is essential for faith. But His testing shows the genuineness of our faith.

The original twelve disciples were the first students to enroll in Jesus' teaching/testing course. In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll hear them receive strong teaching from Jesus. We'll watch them be thrown into a life-threatening ordeal, which will be the testing ground for their faith.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

“Speak, LORD, your servant is listening.” (1 Samuel 3:9)

Echo these words that Eli told the young Samuel to utter when he realized God wanted to speak to the boy. In a prayer, express your readiness and willingness to turn all your attention to God in this study of Mark’s gospel, so you can learn His precious truths and hear His heart.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Suffering is necessary for growth, even for Jesus. Regarding the Messiah, Isaiah foretold that “it was the LORD’s good plan to crush him and cause him grief” (Isaiah 53:10). The writer to the Hebrews confirmed Isaiah’s prophecy: “Even though Jesus was God’s Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). God did not shield His Son from suffering.

Jesus’ disciples sat in the front row as He “taught the crowds that were coming to him” (Mark 2:13). They watched Him cast out an evil spirit from a man (1:21–28), heal a man of leprosy (1:40–45), and make a paralyzed man walk (2:1–12). They believed in Him and accepted what He taught, yet the question remained, “Did they trust Him with *their lives*?”



Observation: The Disciples’ Faith Is Put to the Test

The first step of the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method is observation. Observe [Mark 4:21–41](#) by reading it carefully, noting repeated phrases, action verbs, sequence of events, and main themes.¹

The Disciples Receive Strong Teaching—Mark 4:21–34

What repeated words or phrases do you find in [Mark 4:21, 24, 26, 30, 33](#) (NASB)? What do these verses emphasize?

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Read Mark 4:21–34 again and summarize what each parable says.

Parables	Observations
Lamp Mark 4:21–25	
The Growing Seed Mark 4:26–29	
The Mustard Seed Mark 4:30–34	

What “insider” comments did Mark add in 4:33–34?

Again and again, there is intake, intake, intake. Instruction, teaching, stories, parables. All along the way, He’s giving them strong teaching, but it will not be without a time of testing. Count on it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Disciples Experience Severe Testing—Mark 4:35–41

What did Jesus say to the disciples in Mark 4:35? What was Jesus’ intention after a long day of ministry?

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What happened along the way, according to Mark 4:36–39? How would you describe the disciples' reaction to the test? How did Jesus intervene? What did Jesus say to the disciples in 4:40, and how did they respond in 4:41? After all the teaching they had received, what did the disciples finally *learn*?

They forgot the teaching. How quickly we forget during times of testing what we learned during times of teaching. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Tests That Reveal a Lack of Trust

Read again the parable about the lamp and the basket in [Mark 4:21–25](#), comparing the NLT with the AMP. What message does this parable communicate?

Review the parable about the crops and the harvest again in [Mark 4:26–29](#) in the MSG and J. B. Phillips translations. What main point does it convey?

The third parable illustrates the kingdom of God. Review [Mark 4:30–34](#) in the NET translation, and read the NET Bible's accompanying explanatory notes. What does this parable teach about the kingdom of God that Jesus was inaugurating? What does it teach about faith in Him?

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After the strong teaching regarding faith, growth, and maturity comes the severe testing in the storm. In his masterpiece, *Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee*, Rembrandt captured the dramatic moment when the disciples awakened Jesus, pleading, “Teacher, don’t you care that we’re going to drown?” (Mark 4:38). View the painting and imagine yourself in the boat. Which disciple do you most identify with? What faith message does this scene communicate to you?

Now they forgot two things. First of all, Jesus didn’t say, “We’re gonna go to the bottom.” He said, “We’re gonna go to the other side.” They could count on that. Second, they have God in the boat. Last time I checked, God doesn’t sink. So if you’re with God in the boat, you’ve got it made. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Divine Curriculum of Hardship

Throughout Scripture, God calls His people to trust in His sovereignty, great power, protection, and provision. Compare our passage with *Psalms 105:17–19; Romans 5:3–4; 8:29; James 1:2–4; and 1 Peter 1:6–7*. How did God use the divine curriculum of hardship in the life of Joseph? To what do these passages liken our trials and tribulations? What role does the furnace of suffering play in our maturity?

*Your life is like this block of stone. God starts with a hammer to reshape it. He’s shaping you so that your life looks like Christ. It takes a lot of pounding. It’s painful. He’s chipping here, He’s chipping there. And then He decides the rough edges need filing. And then He puts you through the furnace. When you’re finished, it’s amazing. You’re going to look a whole lot like His Son.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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God spoke the world into existence, parted the Red Sea for the Israelites to cross on dry ground, walked on water, and commanded a storm to hush (*Genesis 1:1; Exodus 14:13–30; Jeremiah 32:17, 27; Matthew 14:22–33; and Mark 4:35–41*). What message do these passages communicate to you about God?

And you know what Jesus' message is? It's this: He says, "I am in full control of your situation." By the way, He never has trouble with the winds obeying Him. "Wind be still." And then He talks to us. "Trust Me." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Trust the God Who Is Always in Control

As you invite the Lord to probe within, consider two questions that emerge from our passage. The first one is “Why am I still so afraid?” Think of a couple of verses from this Bible study that you can memorize that will embolden your faith. Note them below.

The second question is “Why is my faith still so fragile?” What faith-weakening thoughts has the Holy Spirit pinpointed? How can you bring these thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ?

Quite likely you have entertained the thought that Jesus doesn't care. If He cared, He'd change things. No, He wouldn't. He's sovereign. He can do whatever He wants, whenever He wants to do it. If He chooses not to do it, He doesn't owe us an explanation. He's in control. How much more proof do you need? He's brought you this far. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Maybe you've gone through or are going through a period of intense suffering. What heart posture and attitudes of the mind can you display by the power of the Holy Spirit?

Father, teach us through the hammer and the file and the furnace and a hundred other ways the value of trusting You, relying on You, being in awe of You. And in the process of waiting, teach us to keep our mouths shut—to be among those who have learned to trust You in the midst of the pain, waiting in silence for You to bring relief. And I pray that You would give strength, encouragement, and fresh hope . . . directly from Your Word. In the name of our Savior, who teaches and tests, we pray. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Express your heart's response to the timeless truths the Holy Spirit has revealed to you in this passage of Scripture. Conclude your prayer with a declaration of your trust in God, who loves you deeply and has promised you His presence through the hammering, the filing, and the burning. May you continue to trust Him.

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://www.insight.org/how-does-pastor-chuck-swindoll-study-the-bible)" at [insight.org](https://www.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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