

COMPELLED BY THE CROSS

STUDY ONE

Jesus' Magnificent Obsession

Matthew 16:21–26

Jesus understood His mission. It was His magnificent obsession—to die for people like you and me.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE Son of God took on human flesh “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

This mission was the focal point of Jesus' life. It was the resolve that guided every step of His earthly journey. Not once did He veer from His intended course. But He kept His eyes fixed on the cross, where He would pour out His blood as the once-for-all sacrifice for our sins (Matthew 26:28).

Jesus was compelled by the cross.

This *Searching the Scriptures* series joins Jesus at key places on His journey. *Caesarea Philippi*, where He told His disciples that He would die. *Bethany*, where a woman anointed Him with expensive perfume. *Jericho*, where He healed a blind man before His triumphal entry. In the *upper room*, where He made a final appeal to His betrayer and washed the disciples' feet as a demonstration of His love.

Across every scene stretched the shadow of the cross, beckoning our Savior. When the day of His crucifixion finally came, Jesus died *not* in defeat but in victory. On the cross, He paid the ransom price for our sin and broke the ancient curse. Then, on the third day, He conquered death by rising from the grave!

Let's follow Jesus to these significant places on His way to the cross and listen to His heart as He shares His magnificent obsession to save the world.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

What kept Jesus going on His road to the cross was His love for us. Welcome His love as you open this study. Affirm your desire to follow Him wherever He may lead.

Father, the love of Jesus that compelled Him to the cross compels me to follow Him. My heart breaks at the thought of His suffering. Yet without His sacrifice, I would be lost. So I humbly receive His love and devote myself to Him as I listen to His words of life. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The setting where Jesus first told His disciples that He would die and rise again was *Caesarea Philippi*, an ancient site of paganism where people had worshiped false gods for centuries. At this epicenter of idolatry and demonic darkness, Jesus revealed His magnificent obsession.

Simon Peter had just confessed Jesus' true identity: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Note his emphasis on *living*. Perched in niches and housed in temples, dozens of lifeless idols surrounded the disciples, and right in their midst stood the one, true God embodied in human flesh.

So rock-solid was Simon Peter's confession that Jesus consecrated the moment by affirming his name as Peter, the "rock." However, it didn't take long for this rock to show signs of cracking.



Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

Pastor Chuck Swindoll's approach to studying the Bible in his book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, follows four steps: observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. For helpful instruction from Pastor Chuck, consult our online instructional web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself.](#)"



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Observation: Revelation, Reprimand, Rebuke, Requirement

God had directly revealed Jesus' true identity to Peter (Matthew 16:17)—but not Jesus' *true mission*. Peter and the others thought the messiah would throw off Roman rule and rain down blessings on the Jewish nation. Jesus, however, came to redeem the world, not to conquer it. To overthrow death, not Rome. To liberate captives from bondage to sin, not Caesar. To swing open the gates of God's blessing to all people, not just the Jews.

Use your skills of observation as you answer the questions below and write down what the passages say. Read the verses carefully, noticing the strong verbs, figures of speech, key words, and logical flow. Take your time in the observation phase, which lays a solid foundation for interpretation.

Jesus' Revelation—Matthew 16:21

What does “From then on” in [Matthew 16:21](#) indicate? How does the word *plainly* contrast with Jesus' previous teaching when He hinted at His destiny by referencing Jonah (see [12:40](#))?

Specifically, what did Jesus reveal? Watch for those verbs. Who would be His chief antagonists?

When Jesus said, “They will kill Me,” the disciples stopped there. If you’ve ever heard shocking information, you know how it blocks out everything afterward. I don’t believe they heard what He said about rising again. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Peter's Reprimand—Matthew 16:22

What did Peter do and say in response to Jesus' revelation, according to *Matthew 16:22*?

What contrasts do you see between Peter's bold confession in *16:16* and his brazen reprimand? What did Peter not understand about Jesus? What do you think may have caused Peter to crack?

*While Peter was thinking, Jesus cannot die, Jesus was answering, "I must die."
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Jesus' Rebuke—Matthew 16:23

Peter's reprimand eerily echoes Satan's temptation in *Matthew 4:1–11*, especially when the devil offered to Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory" (Matthew 4:8). Like Satan, Peter told Jesus, in so many words, to grab the glory now and avoid the cross. Just as He resisted the devil's temptation, Jesus resisted Peter's.



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What rebuke did Jesus give Peter in *Matthew 16:23*?

What was the “dangerous trap”? What primary flaw in Peter did Jesus point out?

Jesus is the master; we are the servants. He is the potter; we are the clay. He is the leader; we are the followers. He is God, and we are not. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jesus' Requirement—Matthew 16:24–26

In a short span, the disciples must learn to follow a *suffering* Messiah. *But how?* Jesus gave the answer in *Matthew 16:24–26*. What did Jesus tell them they must be willing to do?



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What contrasts stand out in these verses?

By taking the disciples to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus had led them to a crossroad. Would they follow their master now that they knew what came next? Would they “give up” their lives to save them . . . or “hang on” and lose everything? What did Jesus mean by “take up your cross”? Let’s take a deeper look.



Interpretation: Deny, Take Up, and Follow

Feel free to use Bible study tools when seeking the meaning of a passage—commentaries and Bible dictionaries. Keep in mind that the most reliable resource is the Bible itself, for it is consistent in its meaning and will never contradict itself.

Deny Yourself

In the New American Standard Bible, Jesus said first, “If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself” (Matthew 16:24 NASB). How do other *Bible versions* translate “deny himself”? What meaning do you draw from these translations?



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Take Up Your Cross

The Romans often forced condemned criminals to carry to the crucifixion site the horizontal beam upon which they would be hung. If Jesus must walk the way of humiliation and death, His disciples must be willing to take up their own crosses too.

What does it mean to “take up your cross” (Matthew 16:24)? Look for possible answers in your Bible study tools. For an online resource, consult *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.

Follow Me

What does it mean to “follow me” (Matthew 16:24)? The Greek verb is a present imperative, which describes a command to an ongoing action. This verb contrasts “give up” and “take up.” The emphasis is complete action. What must Jesus-followers do continually?

That day, Peter and the other disciples learned a vital lesson about following Jesus. The way of Christ includes setting aside our self-interests, accepting the rejection of the world, and being willing to suffer for His sake—even to die.



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What did Jesus promise in exchange for losing our lives, according to *Matthew 16:25–26*?



Correlation: Those Who Followed Jesus

Peter took Jesus' words to heart and later passed them on to other believers. How do Peter's instructions in *1 Peter 4:1–2, 12–14* reflect Jesus' requirements of denying self, taking up one's cross, and following Jesus?

How did Paul also reflect these requirements in *Galatians 6:14*?

Understand that our times are in God's hands. Our God and our God alone is the One who determines when we are born and when we die. He is in charge. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Application: Three Principles to Apply

Three principles emerge from our passage. First, Jesus' unexpected revelation about His suffering and death teaches: *We must never think that just because a death is shockingly unexpected that it is unacceptable.*

Does Jesus' talk of death cause you to ponder your own death or the death of those you love? What comfort does He give you that can replace your fear with peace?

Second, Peter's reprimand of Jesus illustrates: *We must stop thinking that the Lord should alter His plan to fit our preferences.*

Have you ever tried to tell God what He can or cannot do? What preferences may Christ be asking you to set aside to follow Him?



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Third, Jesus' requirements for discipleship reveal: *It's impossible to be a close follower of Jesus without consistent and sacrificial self-denial.*

Are you willing to give up your agenda, take up your cross, and follow Jesus? What specific step can you take to embrace His way today?

At Caesarea Philippi, the disciples had come to a decision point. Would they turn their backs on the world to follow their King to the cross? The same question applies to us all today. Jesus' magnificent obsession beckons us as well.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I confess that I wish Your plans would fit my preferences. I long for my path to be easy, but Christ's road was anything but smooth. Help me, Lord, to stop clinging to what I want, to accept whatever You may have for me, and to follow Jesus wherever He may lead. In His name, amen.

