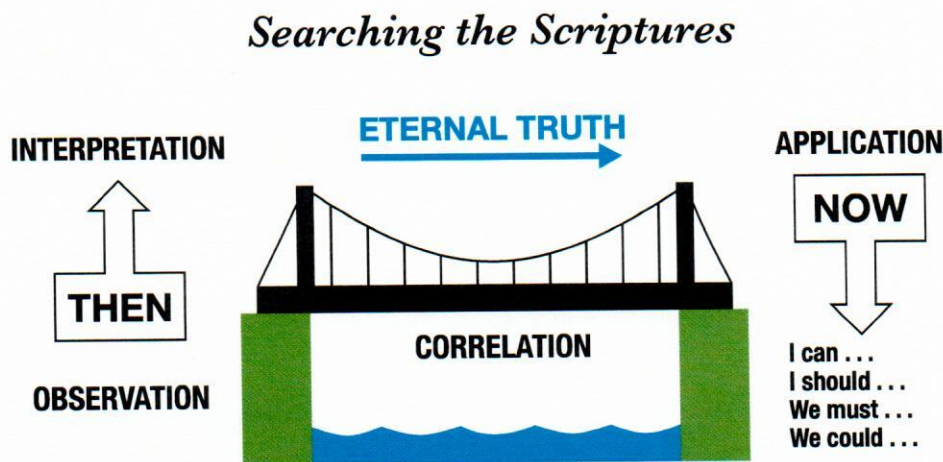


MODULE SIX

SERMON AND LESSON PREPARATION

We have looked in some detail at the four phases of Chuck Swindoll's Bible study method: observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. Now it's time to see how these principles come together.

The following diagram that we introduced in the previous lesson illustrates all the components of *Searching the Scriptures*.



By putting these principles into practice, you will be able to prepare your own spiritual meals from the nutritious truths of God's Word and nourish yourself spiritually as you grow more like Christ. And then, as Chuck intended, you can pass along your knowledge to others. Chuck writes:

My main desire in writing this book has been to pass the baton in this all-important relay of the truth. I've written with the purpose of helping you know how to search the Scriptures on your own. Once you've mastered that skill, I want to stimulate you to pass the baton to others so that they, too, will learn to find precious treasures in God's Word and have their lives transformed.¹

When we study the Bible carefully and consistently, we grow spiritually. But for pastors and teachers, such personal growth is only the beginning. We don't only study the Scriptures for our own benefit but also that others might be inspired to grow alongside us. We are called to explain God's Word, modeling obedience and encouraging others to grow to maturity. To meet this call, we must communicate clearly, confidently, and persuasively the fruits of our discovery to our congregations.

Luke 4:16–21—A Worked Example for *ABC*

Module 2: Observation

What Do I See?

“I notice”:

- This happened at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (context).
 - This all happened in the village where Jesus grew up.
 - This happened on a sabbath.
 - This all happened in the setting of the synagogue (bookended).
 - The atmosphere is neutral, calm, deliberate.
 - He was in good standing, nobody objected. Jesus was qualified to read the Scriptures.
 - There is concentric symmetry in the action:
 - Jesus stood up.
 - The scroll was handed to Him.
 - He unrolled the scroll.
 - The Spirit of the Lord sends good news to the poor.
 - Captives will be released.
 - The blind will see.
 - The oppressed will be set free.
 - The Lord’s favour has come.
 - He rolled up the scroll.
 - He handed back the scroll.
 - Jesus sat down.
 - Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61:1–2a. He does not finish the quote, but leaves it dangling at “the time of the Lord’s favour has come.”
 - There is a symmetrical structural focus on “the blind will see.”
 - Everybody looked at Jesus intently (their eyes were fixed on Him).
 - Jesus asserted that Isaiah’s words were fulfilled that day.
-

Module 3: Interpretation

What Did It Mean?

Allowing for Language

Are there words that need explanation?

- The Scriptures were kept at the **synagogue** where they were read and studied. The synagogue was the preferred domain of the Pharisees (rather than the temple). Ten adult men were required before a synagogue could be established, so even quite small communities could build one. The word means “assembly” or “gathering.” Synagogue assemblies were not the same as temple worship. No sacrifices were made there; it was just a place of assembly for study and prayer.
- **Scrolls** were written on parchment (sheep or calfskin) stitched together into long rolls like wallpaper. The complete scroll of Isaiah from Qumran is seventeen sheets of parchment stitched together to make a twenty-four-foot document in fifty-four columns. Isaiah 61 occurs in the forty-ninth column of that scroll, about five feet from the left-hand end. (Hebrew reads right-to-left.) Such a location suggests the choice of text was deliberate, being close to—but not at—the very end of the scroll. Jesus *either* chose the reading or chose the day when that reading was due.

Allowing for Genre

What type of writing is this?

Gospel narrative in Luke’s hand. Luke was deliberate and careful, using many sources to craft his “orderly account” (Luke 1:1–4 ESV). Luke could have learned of this episode from James or Mary, who would have been almost certainly present at the time, as this was Jesus’ hometown debut.

Allowing for Culture

What customs and politics need to be considered?

- This was a chosen moment, not a random (walking-in-the-fields) event. The audience was specific—they knew Jesus as one of their own.
- This was a Jewish-oriented event. The setting of the synagogue on a Sabbath suggests the entire Jewish community would have been focused on God and His works. Nazareth was a small town, so most of the village would have been in attendance.
- The Jews were under Rome’s thumb and longed for God to free them from Rome’s oppression and reestablish them as His favoured children. They were looking for the long-awaited Messiah. Isaiah chapters 60–62 particularly feature the prophet’s anticipation of Israel’s glory once her Anointed King comes.

Summary

Christ purposefully orchestrated the announcement of His ministry. He was Israel’s promised Messiah-King, come to open their eyes to the truth and restore God’s favour to the Jews.

Module 4: Correlation

How Does It Fit?

Context

- **Pre-text:** Jesus' ministry is validated in the wilderness, and He establishes an early reputation in the synagogues of the north.
- **Post-text:** Jesus' ministry is rejected by the Jews of Nazareth because He intentionally draws their attention to the fact that God can also show grace to Gentiles. The idea is offensive to Jews under Roman occupation.

The Fulfilment of Prophecy

- **Isaiah 61:1–2** is the key passage, but the omission of verse 2b is significant. The hint is that Jesus has come to offer grace this time but not wrath or vengeance. That part of Isaiah's prophecy awaits.
- **Isaiah 9:1–2** is cited in Matthew 4:13–17. Inaugurating His ministry in Galilee was anticipated for the Messiah, perhaps signifying a revived united kingdom of twelve tribes, since the ten northern tribes had been decimated by Assyrian invasion within Isaiah's lifetime (722 BC).

The Ministry of Jesus

- **Matthew 10:5–7:** When Jesus chose the twelve apostles and first sent them out, He explained the sequence: *“Don't go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, but only to the people of Israel—God's lost sheep. Go and announce to them that the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”*
- **Matthew 15:24:** Jesus was inclined not to help the Canaanite (Gentile) woman who begged for Jesus' help because: *“I was sent only to help God's lost sheep—the people of Israel.”* Jesus conceded to rescue her daughter from demonic power because of her faith.
- **Romans 15:8–9:** Paul understood that Christ's mission was first to the Jews. After the resurrection it became clear that His mission extended also to the Gentiles.

Universal Truth

Jesus is, first, the Messiah to the Jews; His plan is precise.

Module 5: Application

What Difference Does It Make Today?

Motivation to Study

If Jesus was a Jew and came for the Jews, it seems reasonable to ask what is the significance of Judaism today? It's worth a serious look. A solid study of Romans 9–11 would be a start as well as Revelation 7.

Encouragement to Persevere

If God can keep a promise over the span of seven hundred years (Isaiah to Christ), then He is a God who keeps His promises in His own time; He is a God of long horizons:

- I can be patient when I don't get an answer to prayer when I want it.
- I can trust God's perfect timing and be ready to respond quickly to His leading.
- You might have been waiting a long time for your prayer to be answered. Don't give up, and don't stop praying. Don't stop longing for the outcome. When God wills it, it will be. And it will be just right.

Challenge to Precise Speech

Precision of speech was important to Jesus: He didn't say more than He intended (Isaiah 61:2b), but He did say everything He intended.

- You might be one who says too little, not putting the whole message on the table. An incomplete story leaves people to "draw their own confusions," which can result in error.
- You might be the kind who says and offers too much too often. We can't promise more than God does.
- Either way, we can learn a lesson in precision from our Lord. Determine what *must* be said and *say it*. Equally, determine what goes too far—stretches the truth or takes too much liberty—and *don't say it*.

Module 6: Message Preparation

What Can I Tell You (in 1,000 Words)?

Inaugural speeches are always significant. Whether it's a new principal addressing a school or a new president broadcasting to a nation, that first official speech counts for something. It offers a glimpse into the thoughts and intentions of the new leader. It's a snapshot of what to expect under his administration.

So when Jesus knew it was time to announce the official beginning of His ministry on earth, He chose the time and the place with great precision. After proving His credentials in the wilderness, tempted by Satan, Jesus headed for the north-country. To the old-time tribal allotments of Issachar, Zebulun, and Naphtali. Tribes that were long-gone, vanished—hailed off to who-knows-where by the Assyrians during the time of Isaiah.

In the seven long centuries since, the Jews had known a particular hunger: a hunger for a hero who could restore their fortunes and give them back their former glory. The prophets spoke of such a hero—God's anointed servant who would bring peace, freedom, and justice.

Jesus knew the north-country well. He had grown up in Nazareth, up among the hills that overlooked the valley of Jezreel and the Way of the Sea—the ancient trade route to the Mediterranean. This was the land of His youth. But now Jesus was grown, and it was time to take up the work of His calling. And in Nazareth He chose His moment. He went to the synagogue and delivered His inaugural speech.

Luke recounts the moment in chapter 4 of his gospel, beginning at verse seventeen:

The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the oppressed will be set free,
and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."*

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. (Luke 4:17–20)

Jesus had their attention—of course. Every Jewish heart would leap at these words from Isaiah 61! This is the song of the Anointed: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." And this is what the Anointed promises: relief, liberty, and the renewal of God's blessings.

After standing to read the Scriptures, Jesus sat and took the opportunity to deliver His crucial message for the Jews of Nazareth—and by extension all of Israel. This is the moment when He rocked their world. Jesus said:

"The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!" (4:21)

You can just imagine that second or two of pregnant silence while His words hung in the air. This Jesus, born in Bethlehem but raised in Nazareth, laid claim to the title of Messiah—the Anointed One of the

Jews. This one that Isaiah spoke of—this long-awaited one who is to come with the promise of liberty and justice and grace—Jesus said “that’s me, I have come, I’m here today, it’s happening!”

His inaugural speech lasted less than a minute. But there it was—out in the public domain. This Jesus, who grew up among them, had laid out His agenda. This was the snapshot of how things would be in His kingdom.

As a pastor, there’s a lot to take in and think about concerning this brief talk in a small synagogue. But there’s one thing that intrigues me about this little big speech: Jesus carefully, methodically read from Isaiah’s prophecy—but then He didn’t finish the line. He broke off without completing the verse that reads:

*That the time of the LORD’s favor has come,
and with it, the day of God’s anger against their enemies. (Isaiah 61:2)*

Everything had been too meticulously deliberate. This omission was no mistake, no oversight. God’s vengeance was clearly not included in Jesus’ inaugural speech.

Of course the Scriptures have plenty to tell us about God’s intention to judge wickedness and deal with the Enemy—when He tramples out the grapes of His wrath against a sinful world. But Jesus was careful to set that aside for another time.

While we all wait for the *next* time Jesus comes, we can learn a lesson from the care and precision that Jesus demonstrated that day in the little synagogue in Nazareth.

As pastors, preachers, and teachers, we are all about the work of presenting God’s plan to our people. Every talk, every sermon, every lesson exists to set out His agenda for our lives. That sort of speech demands a high degree of care. We don’t want to miss out what needs to be said—but at the same time we dare not make promises that stretch the truth or take liberties with our text. *What God says* should drive us, not *what we want Him to say*.

I have heard some preachers make some bizarre promises—often based on a single verse or phrase, out of context, misunderstood, and misapplied. That’s not preaching; that’s ear-tickling. That’s not us.

I have heard plenty of incomplete gospels too. Talk of being a good neighbour and showing kindness is all well and good, but those virtues—commendable as they are—cannot save. If we’re talking about salvation in Christ and peace with God, then we must show how that cannot come from just being “nice.”

James says this:

Not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect. (James 3:1–2)

When we take up the call to speak God’s Word to His people, we step into the crosshairs of that warning. Learn this lesson from Jesus, and it will help us all. Say everything that *must* be said, but learn to hold back from what *shouldn’t* be said.