

MOVING AHEAD TOGETHER WITH
A WINNING MINDSET

STUDY EIGHT

Needed: A Safe Place to Heal

Joshua 20:1–9

We have a Savior who accepts us just like we are, sin and all. Let's follow suit for those who need us. Let's become their place of safety, their city of refuge.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN his book, *Dropping Your Guard*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll reflects on our need for a place of refuge when we're hurting.

Where does a [person] go when the bottom drops out? To whom do we Christians turn when stuff that's embarrassing or a little scandalous happens? Who cares enough to listen when we cry? Who affirms us when we feel rotten? Who will close their mouths and open their hearts? And . . . who will embrace us with understanding and give us time to heal?¹

Where can we go to find caring people? Christ intended His church to be such a place—a haven for shipwrecked hearts, a hospital for wounded souls, a home where hurting people can remove their masks, tell it like it is, and find genuine acceptance.

Illustrating this spirit of compassion were the cities of refuge established by Joshua, outposts of mercy our hearts yearn for when we need a safe place to heal.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Have you been weathering a storm lately? Use the following space to tell the Lord about your need for shelter and ask Him to encourage you through His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Since crossing the Jordan River, Joshua has been following Moses' instruction manual for conquering and possessing the land. In *Joshua 15–19*, just as Moses commanded, Joshua distributed territory to each of the tribes, except for the tribe of Levi. "Moses did not assign any allotment of land to the tribe of Levi" (*Joshua 13:14*), because the Levites lived off the Lord's provision through their priestly work.

One of Joshua's final duties involved selecting the cities of refuge according to Moses' instructions in *Numbers 35:9–29*, which Joshua followed precisely.



Observation: Six Cities of Refuge

According to *Joshua 20:1–3*, where did the concept of "cities of refuge" originate? What was their purpose?



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These cities were not intended to be hideouts for cold-blooded murderers. What were the key factors in determining whether a person qualified for refuge according to *Numbers 35:22–25*?

In His grace, God provided places where people could escape to and be safe. The cities of refuge were to give a fugitive running for his or her life a hop ahead of the hounds.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What procedures did the fugitive follow to gain entrance, according to *Joshua 20:4*?

What protection and legal “due process” did the citizens of the city provide in *20:5–6*?



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Read *Joshua 20:7–9* and find the locations of the cities of refuge on your Bible map. They are indicated by a white dot on the online map, “*Twelve Tribes of Canaan after the Conquest of Canaan*.” What do you observe about where the cities are located?

Those within the cities of refuge were willing to go the distance with the fugitive. They had an attitude of loving compassion rather than judgment. They were available to help in practical and tangible ways, and they were committed to the restoration of the person on the run. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of Cities of Refuge

Cities of refuge served as theological object lessons pointing to God’s heart of refuge. What aspects of God’s nature did the cities of refuge express, based on the following psalms?

Psalms 7:1–2: _____

Psalms 71:1–3: _____

Psalms 91:1–4: _____

Not by coincidence, each city of refuge was a city inhabited by Levites (*Joshua 21:13, 21, 27, 32, 36, 38*). The Levites served as priests at the tabernacle who mediated between sinful people and God. They were ideal ones to judge a fugitive’s case and mete out mercy on God’s behalf.

We no longer need Levitical priests as mediators. Jesus is our “merciful and faithful High Priest before God” (Hebrews 2:17) and our “advocate who pleads our case before the Father” (1 John 2:1).



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Although Christ did away with the Mosaic law and altar sacrifices, we still fill priestly roles as followers of Christ. What did Peter say is our responsibility as “royal priests” in *1 Peter 2:9*?

Summarize the theological connection between cities of refuge and churches, priests and Christians. How do cities of refuge serve as a model for today’s ministries?

Christians should be people of compassion and comfort. That includes listening better, judging less—still discerning, of course, but having hearts that are able to be touched and even broken. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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 **Correlation: Reasons People Need Cities of Refuge**

Like fugitives on the run, hurting people still seek refuge. In Psalm 31, David described three reasons he came to the LORD “for protection” (Psalm 31:1). Identify David’s reasons in the chart below. In the righthand column, give examples of hurting people who might come into your life seeking refuge in a similar way.

Psalm 31	Reasons for Seeking Refuge	Examples
<i>31:9–10a</i>		
<i>31:10b</i>		
<i>31:11–13</i>		

Ridiculed, criticized, rejected, slandered by gossip, stalked, and threatened—David desperately needed a safe place to heal. Maybe you can identify with David, or perhaps you know people like him. Let’s explore ways we can provide refuge for today’s fugitives.

 **Application: Extending Christ’s Heart of Refuge**

Christ’s church is not a building made of brick and mortar but a people united by a common faith who minister to wounded souls with the compassion of Christ. Pastor Chuck describes what’s involved if we take seriously the “city of refuge” mandate.

- 1) *A willingness to go the distance for someone in trouble.*
- 2) *An attitude of loving compassion for the needy.*
- 3) *Availability to help in practical, tangible ways.*
- 4) *Helping people feel needed and important in this high-tech, contemporary society of ours that makes us acutely aware of our insignificance.²*

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Perhaps you are the fugitive seeking shelter. What heartache needs healing? To whom can you reach out—your pastor, Christian counselor through your church, a friend?

Perhaps the Lord has brought to mind someone who needs help. What is this person's need? In what practical ways can you express Christ's heart of refuge?

Imagine Joshua erecting a billboard at the entrance to your town: "City of Refuge. Fugitives Welcome!" How about such a billboard at the entrance to your church? Your home? In a sense, Christ has already posted the sign—the symbol of the cross. All fugitives are welcome at the foot of the cross . . . and that includes all of us.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, remind me that I, too, was a fugitive on the run from sin. Thank You for Your Son who welcomed me at the cross and gave me refuge in His mercy and grace. Help me to show that same welcome to others like me, wounded souls in need of a safe place to heal. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Dropping Your Guard: The Value of Open Relationships* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 128.
2. Swindoll, *Dropping Your Guard*, 139.

