

PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY FOUR

The Necessity of Solitude, Quietness, and Obscurity

Galatians 1:10–17

A thousand-plus days of quietness, solitude, and obscurity. If Paul ever had been addicted to popularity, he lost the addiction in Arabia. If he ever had found himself significant in the equation of spirituality, that equation got fuzzy in Arabia. As a matter of fact, I believe that his time in Arabia was a time in which he was still before the Lord and learning that God is God.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

NO-MARGIN schedules, long work hours, mountainous debt, poor diet, no exercise, more screen time than face time or sun time, an undying pursuit of what's superficial . . . let's say it like it is: our society places little value on the deeper life, making it easy to become addicted to the frenetic!

Jesus, however, calls His disciples away from the superficial. Out of the shallows of our culture and into the deep waters of dependence on Him is where our faith and character can grow.

God cultivates our inner lives in ways we wouldn't expect. His process of maturing us involves protracted periods of sitting still rather than running ahead. Listening more than speaking. Sidelining us as nobodies rather than spotlighting us as somebodies. More often than not, God uses times of anonymity far from the crowds to turn His servants into leaders.

This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study recounts Saul's apostolic preparation when God transformed his heart by putting him temporarily on the "shelf" in Arabia, a place of solitude, quietness, and obscurity.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

David waited 12 years after Samuel poured oil on his teenaged head before he became king in Judah. Suffering defined that interim period as Saul sought to end David's life. But during those uncertain years of running and hiding, David learned the humility and trust to be the king God wanted to lead His people. You can discern his humility in Psalm 131. Reflect on this poetic passage as you prepare to engage God's Word and quietly orient your heart.

*LORD, my heart is not proud;
my eyes are not haughty.
I don't concern myself with matters too great
or too awesome for me to grasp.
Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself,
like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother's milk.
Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me.
O Israel, put your hope in the LORD—
now and always.*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Scripture is full of examples of those whom God forged through years of seclusion and anonymity. Let's consider a few.

1. **Moses** lived in secret as a shepherd for 40 years in Midian, and then the Lord called him to lead God's people out of Egypt at age 80.
2. **Joseph** was sold into slavery by his brothers, unjustly accused by Potiphar's wife, imprisoned, and forgotten before he became prime minister in Egypt.
3. **Elijah** was directed by God to hide at the brook of Kerith, after Elijah confronted idolatrous King Ahab.
4. **John the Baptist** spent most of his life off the map in the wilderness, preparing himself for the coming Messiah.

Reflect on the ways God has used solitude and obscurity in your life and in the lives of mature Christians you know. How can such seasons be helpful for us?

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Stop and think for a moment—and be as painfully honest with yourself as you can—when was the last time you took the time to be absolutely alone? Time for reordering your private world, simplifying your life, renewing your walk with Christ, and for being out of the race for a while. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Observation: Chosen and Called . . . Alone with God

Galatians is likely the earliest letter from Paul we possess. Read the introduction of *Galatians* by Pastor Chuck at insight.org, or from one of your own resources, for its historical background. Getting a bird’s-eye view of a book is always helpful before digging into the details.¹ Paul opened Galatians by recounting his God-appointed conversion and apostleship.

Read *Galatians 1:10–17*. Record a few of your key observations at this initial reading.

In 1:10 (NASB), note the phrase, “If I were *still* . . .” and explain what it implies about Saul’s pre-conversion motivation?

In 1:11–12, how did Paul address his readers? In defending his authority and message, what did Paul reveal about how he received the gospel message?

In 1:13–14, Paul parenthetically reflected back to his “Sauline” ways of persecuting the church. What do you observe about Saul’s level of zeal and busyness?

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In Galatians 1:15, what word picture describes Saul’s divine call? According to 1:16, who did the calling, and what was Saul called to do?

Galatians 1:16–17 informs us of four things Saul did after his Damascus road experience. What two things did Saul *not* do, and what two things *did* he do?

Crucial to this study’s topic is 1:17b which refers to Saul’s time in “Arabia.” Find the northern part of Arabia on a Bible map (free at insight.org/maps). Notice Saul was about 100 miles east of Damascus. He likely sojourned in Arabia for three years where solitude and obscurity became his companions. Then he went up to Jerusalem to meet with Peter (*Galatians 1:18*).

Saul was busy pleasing people. He actively engaged in his misguided pursuit. He was advancing, more extremely zealous than his contemporaries. All of that stopped at his conversion, and he got alone with the Lord in Arabia and deliberately slowed his pace. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Alone in Arabia

Saul needed to grow new spiritual roots in Arabia—especially in light of the suffering he would undergo, which was first revealed through Ananias. His Arabian experience proved crucial for many reasons.

Return to *Galatians 1:11–12*. Paul claimed he received the gospel by “direct revelation from Jesus Christ.” Why would that have been important to the Galatians, who were hearing teachers telling them a different gospel than Paul’s? Research the answer in your Bible study resources. Check out *Constable’s Notes* at netbible.org.

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Saul clarified in *Galatians 1:16–17* that he did not consult with other people or with the apostles in Jerusalem. Why was it important to Paul to tell the Galatians that he didn't consult others after his conversion?

According to *1:17*, Saul then “went away to Arabia.” Why did Saul find it necessary to retreat into Arabia? What parts of his perspective changed? How do you think his prayer life might have changed? How did his life mission change?

Saul's spiritual retreat in Arabia provided him extended time alone with God to research, restudy, and rethink the Old Testament Scriptures about the Messiah and to grow comfortable with his new mission in service to the God of grace.

There he discovered the real Saul. There he discovered he had gifts for ministry. There he saw the ugliness of his depravity. There, lost in wonder, love, and praise, he truly worshiped as he had never worshiped before. There his blindness was really relieved. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Contemplative or Complicated?

Saul was zealous and busy—sincere but mistaken—in serving God. The Lord introduced him to the contemplative life, which proved the most beneficial to his soul. Three Old Testament texts reveal God's design for our pursuit of solitude and obscurity.

Turn to *Ecclesiastes 7:29*. Read the verse in the NLT, NASB, and GNT versions. What does Solomon teach about the contemplative and the complicated? Phrase the verse in your own words.

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The prophet Isaiah addressed the topic and its benefit in *Isaiah 30:15*. What does this Scripture teach?

Perhaps *Ecclesiastes 3:1–9* provides a comprehensive summary of this principle. How does this passage discuss the concept of contemplation, solitude, and quietness?

Chances are good that your life is more complicated now than it was years ago. It's not that we're unhappy. It's that we're strung out. It's that we lack the depth we could otherwise know and experience and share. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Growing Deep with the Savior

We've learned much from Saul's Arabian retreat when he grew deep with the Savior. We, too, by the Holy Spirit's enablement and power, can grow deep with our Savior. Three strategies can help us achieve this goal.

First, *rather than speed up, slow down and rethink*. This may require commitment and discipline. What is truly important? Second, *rather than talk more, be quiet and reflect*. Continuous noise can drown out the voice of God. Third, *rather than seeking a position of power or prestige, be still and release*.

Which of these strategies proves especially relevant in the season you find yourself in? Why? Is there another important truth that hit home with you in today's study of Paul's solitude?

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Perhaps your spiritual journey has become crowded, complicated, and clamored. What practical steps do you want to implement to create spiritual margin, quietness, and depth with the Lord?

How can I break the tendency toward more and more, and come back to what is essential for depth? How can I have a complete makeover of my inner self? In part, through quietness, solitude, and obscurity. So I'm making plans for that, and I hope you will too. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Close your study with a few minutes of quiet reflection and prayer.

Lord God, You are very patient and gracious. Thank You for the wooing of Your Spirit, who has a way of finally getting my attention. Give me, our Father, a holy aversion to activity for activity's sake. May I become Your chosen vessel, fitted and prepared for the tasks You have for me. I ask it through Jesus Christ our Lord, 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?](#)"

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2001, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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