

PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY NINE

Released in Order to Obey

Acts 13:1–5, 13

Part of the reason Paul lived with such a clean heart before God is because of the constant changes that he accepted from His hand. For Paul, life is not a problem to be solved but an adventure to be lived.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN once quipped, “In this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes.” But there’s another certainty we can count on: *change*.

For most, change is about as dreadful as getting the flu. Unsettling, unexpected, and disruptive, change yanks us out of our comfort zones and catapults us into the unknown. Synonyms for change include *switch*, *modify*, *alter*, *shift*, *transfer*, and *transform*. The word implies leaving something behind and exchanging what we had for something new or different. Change isn’t always negative, however. While it introduces the possibility of something worse, it alone offers the potentiality of something better.

That’s why God leads us into change. Immediately, it might be unpleasant and frightful, but ultimately it will be beneficial and fruitful.

Saul of Tarsus was a man well acquainted with pain, solitude, obscurity—and *change*! In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we draw back the curtain on Saul’s adaptability and obedience. When God moved, Paul moved. Let’s learn from the way he embraced God’s change at the start of his ministry journey.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Reflect on the following prayer and make it your own as you prepare to engage God's Word today.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your dependable, unchanging, and unending loving-kindness toward me. I confess that often I live by sight, rather than by faith, and therefore doubt Your goodness and fail to discern Your purposes and plans. Help me to hold life—my plans, my relationships, and my dreams—loosely. Help me to embrace whatever changes You introduce into my life because those changes strengthen my faith, transform me into the image of Your Son, draw me closer to You, and bring glory to Your name. In the name of Christ whose name is above all names. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

We pick up Saul's account in Acts 13. He has reappeared from the shadows and has faithfully ministered alongside Barnabas and three other church leaders in Antioch for over one year. That close-knit team taught the Word, shared the gospel, and lovingly shepherded the flock of God. The spiritual and numerical growth in Antioch mushroomed.

The Antioch church leadership team was committed, faithful, and diverse—diverse in their background, in their gifting, and in their sphere of service. The church in Antioch was soaring to new heights! Then God proved Himself, yet again, to be the God of surprises.

Think about your own journey. Have you, or a friend, had things going well and then felt the call to something new? What was that like? What did you experience?

Whenever we go through a time of change, we become different. It's good for us, and it's hard for us. We always want to pursue what is most comfortable, not what is best. And the surprises are just unending, aren't they?
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Observation: Plucked Locally to Plant Globally

Observation is like a slow stroll through a vibrant garden. You try to take in all the natural artwork. No speed walking or cursory glancing. Each flower and plant offers something delightful in its own way. In a narrative passage like *Acts 13:1–13*, we look for the who, what, where, when, why, and how.¹ Use your observation skills and note the top five things that stand out to you.

Look carefully at *13:1*. What two leadership roles did Luke mention, and who were the five leaders at the church in Antioch?

Read *13:2–3* in both the NLT and the NASB. What two activities were these leaders doing when the Holy Spirit intervened, and how did they respond?

Lord, You're going to reach down in our ranks and pull two significant individuals and move them from this new church that's just now getting grounded? You're going to take two-fifths of the leadership? . . . Yes!
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Next, turn to *13:4–5*. As Barnabas and Saul were sent out by the Holy Spirit, they launched the first missionary journey by traveling west by way of Seleucia to Salamis on the island of Cyprus. Review these locations in the free, online map titled “*Paul’s Missionary Journeys*” at insight.org.

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Who accompanied Barnabas and Saul while they proclaimed the Word of God on the island of Cyprus, and what was his role?



Interpretation: The Advent of Paul’s First Missionary Journey

In Interpretation, we’ll dig deeper into the meaning of our biblical passage by consulting our Bible-study resources and looking up key terms.

Start by looking up *prophets* and *teachers*—the terms Luke used to describe those who served the Antiochian church in [Acts 13:1](#). Find a helpful explanation in [Constable’s Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#). Distinguish the function of these two roles. Then, describe what you discovered about the three lesser-known leaders: Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen.

In [13:3](#), Luke wrote that the church at Antioch “laid their hands on” Barnabas and Saul. Read the article “[Laying On of Hands](#)” in the *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, available for free at [studylight.org](#). Summarize your understanding of this phrase.

From [13:1](#), we read that among the leaders of that church was Manaen, “who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch” (NASB), also known as King Herod Antipas. Review [Mark 6:14–19](#) and [Luke 23:7–12](#). What was Herod’s relationship to John the Baptist and to Jesus? Why is this an ironic twist, and how does it demonstrate God’s sovereignty in the lives of His people and in His plans?

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According to [Acts 13:2](#), the Holy Spirit appointed Barnabas and Saul for the first missionary journey. Given our previous *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study on their respective backgrounds, why do you believe He chose them to minister together? What do you think they thought and felt about this call? Brainstorm and note various practices and attitudes that would have caused them to fail and to succeed.

How did the Antiochian leaders, Barnabas, and Saul respond to the Holy Spirit's directive, found in [13:3–4](#), and how is their response instructive for believers today?

No questions asked. No spirit of suspicion. No selfish clinging. They fasted, they prayed, and they let them go. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Man Plans . . . But the Lord Directs

The Lord expects we will exercise wisdom in stewarding our lives . . . *meaning, we plan*. But He reserves the right to change our plans without permission or notice . . . *meaning, He directs*. If we are willing to keep our hands open, it's easier for us to yield and obey and receive what He has in store for us. Scripture consistently addresses this truth from a variety of angles.

Check out [Proverbs 16:9](#) and [19:21](#). Paraphrase Solomon's counsel in your own words.

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Review the beloved passage from [Romans 8:28–29](#) in both the NLT and NASB. What is the relationship between “change” and God’s purposes?

Consider the examples of two Old Testament heroes from [Hebrews 11:7–8](#). What key word is repeated that links these two men and God’s plan for them?

Reflect on Paul’s words in [Acts 20:22–23](#). While he felt compelled to travel to Jerusalem, what awaited him? How do Paul’s convictions mirror those he expressed in Romans 8:28–29?

In ministry, we serve a head whom we cannot see, we listen to a voice we cannot hear, and we follow a will that we cannot predict. All the way through, we are subject to change. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Choosing Change and Risking Release

Four application principles rise to the surface of our study on embracing and navigating change.

1. *Do not remove any possibility.* We fare best when we remain open to whatever God has for us. Obedience equals change.
2. *Do not allow activity or busyness to dull your sensitivity.* Even church activity can desensitize us to the Lord’s still, small voice. Stay attuned.
3. *Let God be God.* He is sovereign. He is selective. He knows best. He will have us where He wants us to be, doing what He wants us to do.
4. *Be ready to say yes to God.* We do well to “go” and not wait until we have all the details laid out. Hardship may come. Christ is with us always.

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Reflect on a time in your Christian experience where God plucked you from your known, comfortable circumstances. What did He do in your life? Why was it difficult? What benefits did you receive after the change?

Are you currently facing, or are you about to face, another period of change and transition? What is your challenge? What did you learn from this study that will be especially helpful to you and why? What have you learned about His faithfulness to you that will help you weather this transition? Who can come alongside to encourage and support you?

Don't be afraid. If you're called of God and you're led of God, then do it! Don't wait for all the answers. Don't wait for all the ducks to get in a row. If you do, there's no faith at all involved. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Close your study with your heart open to God and His leading.

Father, help me to adjust to Your will. Give me a sense of peace and reassurance. If necessary, break my heart and break my will in the process, so that the clay becomes moldable and soft and again useful. Help me to take away all the restrictions and limitations that the world would give. Release me, Father, from the trap of predictability, suspicion, hardheartedness, and stubbornness. Give me the thrill of adventure, since life is an adventure to be lived, not a problem to be solved. I pray this in the name of the Savior.

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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