

# PAUL

## A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

### STUDY ELEVEN

## A Game Plan for Facing Extreme Circumstances

*Acts 13:6–16, 45–46; 14:11–27*

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*The remarkable thing is that Paul and Barnabas finish this first journey and hardly lick their wounds. When they come back home to tell of the journey, they don't throw a pity party. They come back "rejoicing" over what the Lord had opened up for them to do.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN life hands you lemons, make lemonade." Are you familiar with this expression? It's a clever way of saying that while we can't choose our circumstances, we can choose our attitude in those circumstances and our response to them.

Jesus told us to be ready for tough times—"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows." But then, He reassured us, "Take heart, because I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Living in this fallen world, we will suffer. But we belong to the One who conquered sin, death, and the devil at the cross, and He has a plan for us beyond this world.

Three qualities give us the best chance at enduring and even thriving through hard times. First, a clear sense of *personal identity*—understanding who we are as God's sons and daughters in Christ. Second, a strong sense of *personal mission*—understanding what we're called to do as ambassadors for Christ. Third, a deep sense of *personal purpose*—understanding how it all fits into God's grand plan when all things become new at the return of Christ.

*Know who you are, what you're here for, and where you're headed.* If these qualities are interwoven within the fabric of our soul, you're positioned to sustain the best attitude and make the best decisions, despite the lemons life throws at you.

Paul and Barnabas model these qualities in [Acts 13–14](#). In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we return to these chapters to take a fresh look at their game plan in maturely responding to challenges while preaching to the lost and building up the saved.



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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare to engage God’s Word today, meditate on these tried-and-true words of Paul, the very attitude he modeled throughout his first missionary journey.

*And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. (Romans 8:28–29)*





## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the previous study, we explored the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas with an eye especially on the challenges they faced, which give ministry a jagged edge. We saw that Paul’s ministry was saturated with the Word of God as he offered the gospel to the lost and grace to the saved. Now, we’ll focus on Paul’s mature responses to the public’s mixed reactions. As you work through *Acts 13–14*, look for the way Paul operated with his clear sense of *identity*, *mission*, and *purpose*. Take a few minutes right now to read through these chapters and record what you see.



Use your observation and interpretation skills in the charts below.<sup>1</sup> For interpretation, use your Bible-study resources like *Constable’s Notes* ([netbible.org](http://netbible.org)), *IVP New Testament Commentary on Acts* ([biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com)), *Bible maps* ([insight.org/maps](http://insight.org/maps)), and the *Holman Bible Dictionary* ([studylight.org](http://studylight.org)). Also, in case you don’t have a copy in your library, be sure to grab Pastor Chuck’s commentary *Insights on Acts* at [insight.org/store](http://insight.org/store).

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*Acts 13:6–16, 45–46; 14:11–27*

Number One: A Mature Response to a Phony Prophet <i>Acts 13:6–12</i>	
 <b>Observation</b>	 <b>Interpretation</b>
Read <i>Acts 13:6–12</i> . Summarize the challenge the false prophet presented to Paul.	What was Paul's mature response, and how can believers today model his response?



*This was no time for Paul to be tolerant and passive. When he had to be firm, Paul stepped up. It won't happen often, but sometimes it'll be your responsibility to rebuke. Leave the results with God. Be sure He's guiding you. Pray for wisdom and speak up. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Number Two: A Mature Response to Desertion <i>Acts 13:13–14</i>	
 <b>Observation</b>	 <b>Interpretation</b>
What happened in <i>Acts 13:13–14</i> that required a mature response from Paul?	Record a principle or two that you find in Paul's and Barnabas' response to this challenge.



*When another defected, Paul pressed on. In every church you will ever be a part of there will be leaders who will be a part of the leadership and then later they'll not be a part of the leadership. One of the marks of maturity in life is that you press on regardless of who walks out of your life. Press right on. Bid them farewell, wish God's best for them, give them God's blessing, and go right on. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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Number Three: A Mature Response to Unexpected Opportunities <i>Acts 13:15–16</i>	
 <b>Observation</b>	 <b>Interpretation</b>
Read <i>Acts 13:15–16</i> . What is the unexpected opportunity Paul received?	Record Paul’s response to this opportunity and how it is instructive for Christ-followers today.



*When Paul is invited to speak, he does. People are starved for the Word of the Lord. When the food is packaged well and when the grass is green and when the heart is hungry, there’s no problem with getting a crowd. When you have an opportunity to speak, speak. Say it. Do it with all the sincerity and passion that you can muster. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Number Four: A Mature Response to Open Rejection <i>Acts 13:45–46</i>	
 <b>Observation</b>	 <b>Interpretation</b>
Look at <i>Acts 13:45–46</i> . What happened to Paul and Barnabas in these verses?	What is Paul’s mature response to this situation, and how is it helpful for believers today?



*When Paul was rejected, he did not quit. There will always be some who will take issue with what you’re saying. There will always be those who don’t go along with it. There will always be people who reject it. If you know who you are and if you know your mission and if you know the purpose of that mission, you press on. Don’t quit. No sniffing. No self-defense. No changing the message. No apology. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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Number Five: A Mature Response to Praise <i>Acts 14:11–15</i>	
 <b>Observation</b>	 <b>Interpretation</b>
Observe the surprising event that happened in <i>Acts 14:11–15</i> and summarize your findings.	Record a principle related to Paul's response that is important for Christians.



*When they were inappropriately exalted, they humbly resisted that kind of praise. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Number Six: A Mature Response to Unfair Treatment <i>Acts 14:19–20</i>	
 <b>Observation</b>	 <b>Interpretation</b>
What happened to Paul in <i>Acts 14:19–20</i> ?	How did Paul respond to this challenge, and how might his response inspire us today?

*When unfairly treated and abused by his enemies, Paul persevered. Learn a lesson from this man who had a wisdom far beyond most of us. It wasn't their opinion that called you into the work you're doing. Keep going.  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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Number Seven: A Mature Response to a Mission Accomplished <i>Acts 14:21–28</i>	
 <b>Observation</b>	 <b>Interpretation</b>
Review <i>Acts 14:21–28</i> . What is significant about this part of Paul's missionary?	What is Paul and Barnabas' mature response to a mission accomplished according to <i>Acts 14:22–23</i> ?

*When Paul returned to places he had ministered before, there were no regrets. Only encouragement and affirmation. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Correlation: Paul's Eternal Perspective**

Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch to report all that God had done through them. Paul had maintained an eternal perspective which fueled his response to each challenge. Read and reflect on some examples from Scripture below.

As Paul embarked on his first journey, his *focus was heavenward*. How does *Colossians 3:1–2* capture this mind-set?

As Paul encountered challenges, he *ran with endurance*. *Hebrews 12:1–2* captures this perspective. Summarize the point of these verses below.

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Amid his challenges, Paul *kept his eyes on the prize*. *Philippians 3:13–14* portrays what this looks like. Review this passage and record its main idea in your own words below.

*Let me tell you why Paul was able to persevere. It was because he never set his affection on temporal things. That's a remarkable discipline. You are doomed to disillusionment if you fail to focus on the eternal. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Application: God's Ministry . . . God's Glory**

Paul's mature responses to ministry's challenges boil down to two practical principles.

1. *Ministry is about what God does, not about what we accomplish.* Though Paul was commissioned to a task, it was God who delivered the results. God alone is worthy of all the glory.
2. *A life saturated in the Word of God is a well-examined life.* Paul filtered every thought, every attitude, and every action through his God-given identity, mission, and purpose, and so should we.

Who in your life embodies the three important qualities we reviewed: a sense of personal identity, a sense of personal mission, and a sense of personal purpose? How has that person positively impacted you in your pursuit of Christ?

Articulate and summarize your own sense of personal identity, mission, and purpose.

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Is there any other principle that proved especially relevant to you from your time in God's Word? Reflect and record below what the Spirit is putting on your heart and mind.

Paul never forgot that God was the One who not only gave him his mission but also fulfilled it. The work may be ours, but the ministry and the glory is God's. The credit belongs to the Lord alone. When we have our focus on that goal—to give glory to God in all we do—we gain a proper perspective when hard times come.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for the model of Paul and the model of Barnabas. Not gods, but good men—good because of Your work in their hearts. Thank You for the way You teach me through their model. Begin a process of changing me and making me more like Christ. I love You, Father, and I thank You for the privilege of being exposed to truth. May it find its way deep into my life and change me. I ask for Jesus' sake. 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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