

PAUL
A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

Twenty-Two Studies on the Life of Paul

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES



INSIGHT FOR LIVING

The Bible-Teaching Ministry of Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Welcome to Our Biblical Kitchen!

Studying God's Word for Spiritual Nourishment

People hunger for spiritual truth, but they often have trouble finding it. Pastor Chuck Swindoll counts it his profound privilege to offer spiritual nutrition found only in God's Word—nutrition every soul needs and craves. Solid Bible-teaching stirs people to follow Jesus, praise God, trust in God's plan, and rest in His care. A constant supply of such spiritual nourishment is vital for walking with Christ.

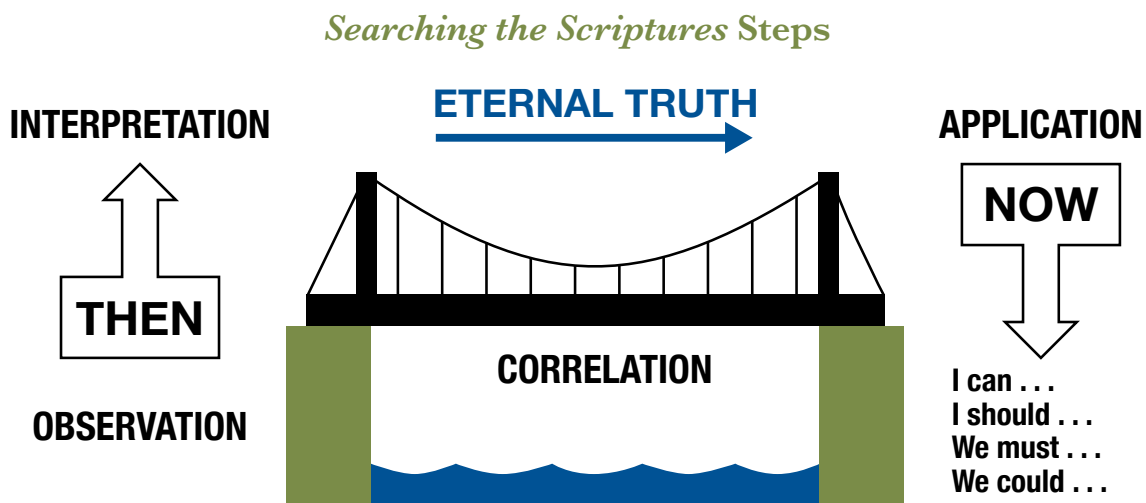
But wouldn't you like to cook up your own biblical meals?

It's easier than you think! Don't be intimidated. You can become your own spiritual chef, and Insight for Living wants to help you in this journey. The first thing you need is the right method. In his book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck helpfully explains his simple and reliable Bible-study process, which he learned in seminary and cultivated through his decades of ministry.

In the book, he explains four steps to always use to study a passage from God's Word:

- 1) **Observation:** Thoroughly reading the passage to discover what it says
- 2) **Interpretation:** Deeply understanding the passage to determine what it means
- 3) **Correlation:** Carefully comparing multiple passages to know how they relate
- 4) **Application:** Personally applying the passage to live by its truth

It's important to follow these steps without skipping or rushing. Would a chef leave out an ingredient in his recipe, skip a step in the cooking process, or cut short the required bake-time? No. The meal wouldn't taste as good. Likewise, it's important to perform all four steps to really grasp a biblical passage and incorporate it into your life. Here's a diagram to illustrate the process, and on the next page is a chart to summarize how you can apply each of the four steps.



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Bible-Study Review Chart

OBSERVATION

Read the passage thoroughly.

Observe the passage by examining:

- 1) The who, what, where, when, why, and how components
- 2) What you can see, touch, taste, hear, and smell
- 3) The logical connections, flow of thoughts, and range of subjects
- 4) What's repeated, emphasized, related, alike, and unlike
- 5) What's written before and after

INTERPRETATION

Understand the passage deeply.

Interpret the passage by studying:

- 1) The cultural, biblical, and historical context
- 2) The literary genre and use of language
- 3) The author's intent for writing
- 4) The author's beliefs, assumed and stated, about God and life

CORRELATION

Compare the passage carefully.

Correlate the passage by comparing it with:

- 1) Scriptures that correspond in historical events
- 2) Scriptures that correspond in theological principles
- 3) Scriptures that correspond in application points

APPLICATION

Internalize the passage personally.

Apply the passage by:

- 1) Reflecting on your daily habits, attitudes, and relationships
- 2) Inviting the Lord to reveal what you should stop and start
- 3) Asking specific questions about how you should respond
- 4) Pursuing new paths that lead to wholeness and spiritual health
- 5) Aligning your beliefs, desires, thoughts, and actions with God's truth and way

*I have rejoiced in your laws as much as in riches.
I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways.
I will delight in your decrees and not forget your word.
(Psalm 119:14–16 NLT)*

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What Are *Searching the Scriptures* Bible Studies?

Insight for Living creates *Searching the Scriptures* Bible studies using the Bible-study methods from Chuck's book. These studies accompany each of Chuck's sermons, focusing on the same Bible passages Chuck focused on, and are like recipes for using your biblical cooking skills. They help you navigate your way through God's Word so that you can better understand God's truth and deepen your relationship with Jesus.

Each study follows this path:

- 1) **Introduction**—learn the topic and relevance of the study
- 2) **Prepare Your Heart**—open yourself to God to receive His Word
- 3) **Turn to the Scriptures**—step into the context of the passage
- 4) **Observation**—look at what the passage says
- 5) **Interpretation**—determine what the passage means
- 6) **Correlation**—compare the passage to other passages
- 7) **Application**—respond to the truth you learned
- 8) **Final Prayer**—pray to conclude your time in His Word

How Can You Use *Searching the Scriptures* Bible Studies?

Insight for Living creates these studies to be used in a variety of ways. They are available as downloadable PDFs at insight.org/studies and through our mobile app. You can type your notes directly into the digital file, or you can print them. Here are the ways folks like to use these resources:

- 1) **Overview.** In 15 minutes, you can read through a *Searching the Scriptures* study to glean Chuck's key points from his sermon and the biblical passage.
- 2) **Deep Study.** You can spend 2–3 hours, all at once or across a few days, digging into the biblical verses and consulting our recommended resources.
- 3) **Small Groups.** These studies ask questions focused on the biblical text as well as on life application. They're perfect for guiding and fostering a small-group discussion.
- 4) **Sermon Preparation.** Pastors and teachers can use these studies for generating ideas during their sermon preparation.
- 5) **Bible-Study Training.** Those who are preparing for ministry can learn how to study the Bible and use these studies for practice or for help delivering a devotional.

Download the Digital File of This Bible Study Guide





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Twenty-Two Studies on the Life of Paul

From chief of sinners to apostle of grace, Paul shines a beacon of hope to the wayward and a reminder of Christ's radically transforming power at work today.

Join Pastor Chuck Swindoll in this insightful and challenging series on the life and times of the apostle Paul. Learn life-changing lessons of grace from the man who faced all circumstances with maturity, determination, and joy.

As you dig deeper into Paul's life, allow his story to influence and change yours too!

1. **May I Introduce to You Saul of Tarsus**
Acts 5:12–39; 7:54–8:3
2. **The Violent Capture of a Rebel Will**
Acts 9:1–9
3. **The Memorable Faith of a Forgotten Hero**
Acts 9:10–22
4. **The Necessity of Solitude, Quietness, and Obscurity**
Galatians 1:10–17
5. **Mission Underway . . . Thanks to the Lesser-Known**
Acts 9:3–31
6. **Out of the Shadows**
Acts 11:19–26
7. **Finding Contentment in God's Sufficient Grace**
2 Corinthians 12:1–10
8. **The Pleasure of Being in Ministry Together**
Acts 11:21–30; 12:24–25
9. **Released in Order to Obey**
Acts 13:1–5, 13
10. **The Jagged Edge of Authentic Ministry**
Selections from Acts 13–14
11. **A Game Plan for Facing Extreme Circumstances**
Acts 13:6–16, 45–46; 14:11–27
12. **The Day Two Missionaries Duked It Out**
Acts 15:36–41
13. **Traveling as Paul Traveled**
Selections from Acts 15–23
14. **Preaching as Paul Preached**
Acts 17:15–34
15. **Leading as Paul Led**
1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

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- 16. Responding as Paul Responded
Selections from 2 Corinthians
- 17. Thinking as Paul Thought
Selections from Acts 21–23
- 18. Dealing with Critics as Paul Did
Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12
- 19. Standing Tall as Paul Stood
Acts 25:13–26:32
- 20. How to Handle a Shipwreck
Selections from Acts 27
- 21. Arrested, Confined, but Still Effective
Acts 28:30–31; Philippians 1:12–14
- 22. Shackled, Deserted, but Still Undaunted
Selections from 2 Timothy

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STUDY ONE

May I Introduce to You Saul of Tarsus

Acts 5:12–39; 7:54–8:3

Any time we engage in a serious study of a great life, we need to brace ourselves for surprises. Interestingly, the greater the life, sometimes the more shocking the surprises.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

TRUTH often defies appearances.

Especially in a world like ours that's obsessed with image and out of touch with the past. It's easy to see someone's *great* accomplishments, position, or skill and view that person's whole life through rose-colored spectacles.

Surely, one who rises to political power was reared with flowery ease and enjoyed the fruit of high-class connections. The razor-sharp mind, so astonishing in a tenured scholar, must be the direct result of an educated, esteemed lineage. Then there are the musical virtuosos, the Olympian champions, the Nobel winners, the billionaire entrepreneurs—all great. But have they always known greatness? Most likely not.

Everyone's life is full of *surprises*.

We are awed to learn how the powerful politician grew up in a shack in the woods and how the keen-minded professor suffered from dyslexia in early life with little hope of getting a university education. The truth defies appearances.

Turning to the New Testament, we may again be *surprised* to learn the backstory of the apostle to the gentiles. That keen-minded, bold, Christ-loving evangelist and church-planter, the champion of grace, did not begin his life as such! His past certainly holds some shocking surprises. This study kick-starts our exploration of a great life that became characterized by grace and grit—the man we know now as the apostle Paul who was first Saul of Tarsus.



May I Introduce to You Saul of Tarsus

Acts 5:12–39; 7:54–8:3



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prepare your heart to engage God's Word today by making this prayer your own.

Father, as we approach You through Your written Word, give us eyes to see, to consider, and to reflect upon the early life of the man who would become that great saint, the apostle Paul. Remind us, as we peer into the dark, rebellious, and ruthless heart of Saul of Tarsus, that we, too, once possessed an unbelieving, even ruthless heart. As we have had our own Damascus Road experience, may our focus be upon Your infinite ability to transform even the hardest of hearts and employ us to Your service, and for Your glory. In Jesus' powerful name. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Before his Damascus Road encounter with the risen Jesus, the apostle Paul—Saul of Tarsus—proved a hateful, antagonistic, and violent persecutor of the early church, the “followers of the Way” (Acts 9:2). How did Saul's hostility toward Christians reach that point? Let's get acquainted with Saul of Tarsus and consider his background, education, and upbringing.

First, read [Acts 21:39; 22:3](#). Then locate [Tarsus in Cilicia](#) on a Bible map like ones found at insight.org/maps. What details do you find about Saul's birthplace and education?

Next, read an overview of his birthplace, education, and life in a Bible dictionary article on “Paul.” You can access a free, online article titled “[Paul the Apostle](#)” in *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* at bibleportal.com. Record your key thoughts.

May I Introduce to You Saul of Tarsus

Acts 5:12–39; 7:54–8:3

Lastly, turn to [Philippians 3:4–6](#). Paul summarized his own pedigree. Read the verses and list the seven ways he described himself.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Now that we have a grasp of Saul's context, character, and credentials, let's read Saul's first documented encounter with the early church found in Acts 7.



Observation: Murderous Heart and Hands

After we seek God's presence and guidance in our Bible study, we always begin with observation—which is carefully noticing as much as we can about the text. It's simply reading the verses.¹

We'll do that now with Acts 7—and Saul's initial encounter with the early believers is not for the squeamish!

It is about Stephen, a Christian described as “a man full of God's grace and power” (Acts 6:8). He had just addressed the Jewish Council (Sanhedrin) with a sermon for the ages, a stinging rebuke of their hardness of heart toward the truths of Scripture and God's anointed, Jesus. We pick up the scene in Acts 7:54.

Carefully observe [Acts 7:54–8:3](#). Note the threefold progression of anger which the Jewish leaders displayed according to 7:54, 57, 58–59.

May I Introduce to You Saul of Tarsus

Acts 5:12–39; 7:54–8:3

Tucked within that rageful mob was Saul. Paralleling the threefold progression of the mob, according to Acts 7:58, how was Saul first involved?

Next, what do you discover about his attitude toward Stephen's murder in 8:1?

Finally, what did his attitude in 8:1 lead to, based on 8:3?

Looking at 7:55–56, 59, now contrast Stephen's perspective with what you read of Saul's. Where was Stephen's gaze? What did Stephen exclaim in 7:60, and how did God fulfill this prayer considering what you know of Saul's life?

While we read about the advent of Saul's violent persecution of Christians in Acts 7–8, his anger had likely been seething for some time.

Saul was in the audience while Stephen gave his testimony. And not only Stephen but others before him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

May I Introduce to You Saul of Tarsus

Acts 5:12–39; 7:54–8:3

Acts 5 uncovers those others—the apostles—who, like Stephen, incited rage from the Jewish leaders. Spend a few minutes reading [Acts 5:12–42](#). From 5:12–16, detail what the apostles were doing that sparked jealousy among the Sadducees.

According to 5:17–25, what event authenticated the apostles' teaching?

After the apostles were rearrested, Peter spoke boldly in 5:29–32. What two accusations enraged the Sanhedrin?

Acts 5:33–40 forms a crucial section in this standoff between the Jewish leadership and the apostles. Who is the central figure? What was his counsel? From your research in the “Turn to the Scriptures” section above, what was his relationship to Saul?

Present in the council chambers was young, hot-headed Saul. Tossing aside Gamaliel's wait-and-see advice, Saul bolted from the meeting with his mind set on murder.

The first pen portrait of Saul of Tarsus that hangs in the biblical gallery is both brutal and bloody. The blood of the first martyr was splattered across his own garments, and he's nodding in agreement. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

May I Introduce to You Saul of Tarsus

Acts 5:12–39; 7:54–8:3



Interpretation: God's Miraculous Intervention

Acts 5:33–40 is a crucial text in our study as, indeed, God miraculously intervened in the course of history. Gamaliel, a Pharisee and prominent, influential member of the Sanhedrin, is reminiscent of the importance of Queen Esther in the Old Testament.

Read [Esther 4:14](#). As Esther was instrumental in sparing the Jewish people from a planned massacre, Gamaliel was instrumental in the apostles' protection. Review this short article about [Gamaliel](#) in the free, online *Holman Bible Dictionary* at studylight.org.

Then, reread [Acts 5:30–31](#). Within this text, Saul would have considered Peter's words blasphemous for two reasons. What claims did Peter make about Jesus that would have infuriated orthodox Jews?

Given his murderous mind-set, as Saul intently listened to his mentor's reasoned counsel in [5:33–39](#), what was going through his mind?

Look closely at [5:40](#). How did Gamaliel mirror Esther's intervention, and what is its significance for Peter and the future of the church?

May I Introduce to You Saul of Tarsus

Acts 5:12–39; 7:54–8:3

After their flogging and severe warning to cease proclaiming Jesus, the apostles faced a decision. They could have obeyed the Sanhedrin, or they perhaps could have moved to another area to continue their ministry. However, they persisted in proclaiming Jesus in Jerusalem. How did their persistence fulfill Jesus' mandate from [Acts 1:8](#)? How did God work in the church in Jerusalem prior to Saul's conversion?

God was preparing Saul for a radical spiritual transformation.

*Peter was alive then and in the years that followed because of Gamaliel.
Gamaliel saved his life. They would have stoned the whole bunch.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



Correlation: A Brief Autobiography

Long after Saul's radical transformation through Christ, he never dismissed, disavowed, nor diminished his former blasphemous ways. Saul, now Paul, during his trial before King Agrippa, recounted candidly his ways as a zealous Pharisee who mercilessly persecuted the church.

According to [Acts 26:10–11](#), what four ways did Saul persecute the church? What do these verses tell us about the level of Saul's Jewish commitment and the power of our personal confession when sharing the gospel?

Later, in his first epistle to his protégé Timothy, [1 Timothy 1:12–13](#), Paul reiterated his persecutory testimony. How does 1:12 inform you of the depth of Paul's understanding of forgiveness? In 1:13, what reason did Paul offer for God's mercy toward him?

May I Introduce to You Saul of Tarsus

Acts 5:12–39; 7:54–8:3

Paul claimed to be the chief of sinners. He may very well have been. He wasn't trying to be modest. That's the Saul of Tarsus you need to know before you read Paul the apostle of the letters of the New Testament. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Amazing Grace . . . How Sweet the Sound!

The truth defies appearances. Life is full of surprises. The end of our study brings us to the advent of grace. Saul of Tarsus sat on the precipice of grace. Three application principles emerge from a study of Saul of Tarsus.

1. *No matter how you appear to others, everyone has a dark side.* We are sinners by birth and sinful by choice. Each one of us is among the wretched.
2. *Regardless of what you have done, no one is beyond hope.* No one is beyond the Lord's long reach of grace.
3. *Even though your past is soiled, anyone can find a new beginning with God.* It's never too late to begin doing what is right and follow Jesus.

As you reflect on your relationship with Christ, can you look back and “inventory” your sinful past? Spend a few moments recognizing what you once were. Then, give thanks for what you now are—forgiven and free, redeemed and renewed!

As a believer, are you soiled in some area of your life which is a challenge to clean up? Confess it, thank the Lord for His pardon, make a plan to purge it, and move forward in His Spirit's power.

May I Introduce to You Saul of Tarsus

Acts 5:12–39; 7:54–8:3

Is there someone in your circle—family member, friend, acquaintance—who is persecuting you? Remember, God changed even Saul’s hard heart! Record his or her name and pray that this person will “come to [his or her] senses and escape from the devil’s trap” (2 Timothy 2:26).

When the Lord saved Saul, He didn’t put him on probation!
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Close your study by making this prayer your own.

Lord, we thank You for seeing us as we really are and for loving us in spite of it. It’s wonderful to know the One who knows us best loves us the most. Remind us, Lord, that Your grace is sufficient to cover any sin. If You are able to snatch one such as Saul from a horrid pit, You could save any one of us. So I count on You to do that, Lord, and to begin that work right now. 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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PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY TWO

The Violent Capture of a Rebel Will

Acts 9:1–9

If we're going to talk about remarkable conversions, there is none more notorious than Saul of Tarsus. No conversion in the history of Christianity was ever more remarkable than the one that happened on the road to Damascus. Because no opponent of Christ was ever more notorious than Saul of Tarsus.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

CONVERSIONS of the famous intrigue us.

It could be the promiscuous Hollywood star or a ruthless mobster, the drug-abusing politician or a bad-tempered chief executive. At the very least, these people couldn't care less about Christ, but it's more likely they were unabashedly against Him and His ways. Then, one day, you see it in the headlines when the celebrity gets baptized and joins a local church.

Do you think? *How wonderful! . . . or . . . We'll see how long this lasts.*

How quick we jump to judgment and wonder if the whole thing is genuine or just another publicity stunt. It might be tough to accept that God could forgive such a person. If he or she stumbles soon after converting, everyone is quick to write it all off. Time often reveals whether a conversion is genuine. After all, when God is composing the score of our spiritual lives, our conversion is the opening downbeat to the whole piece.

Perhaps there is no more notorious conversion than Saul's, that Jewish Pharisee from Tarsus. If ever a person's conversion proved to be genuine, it was his. Jesus stopped Saul on the dusty Damascus Road while he was on mission, targeting Christians in a bloodthirsty attempt to annihilate the church. This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study recounts Saul's riveting story of how God pursues and captures even the most rebellious of hearts.



The Violent Capture of a Rebel Will

Acts 9:1–9



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prepare to engage God’s Word today by reflecting on the following lyrics, “Amazing Grace” by John Newton, and then praying for God’s blessing on your time with Him.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed. . . .

When we’ve been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun,
We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise
Than when we’ve first begun.¹



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In our previous Bible study, we learned that Saul of Tarsus was a hateful and hostile persecutor of early Christians who followed “the Way” (Acts 9:2).

Take a few minutes to review these verses which depict Saul’s anger and aggression: [Acts 8:1, 3; 9:1; 22:3–5; 26:9–11; 1 Timothy 1:13](#). Summarize your findings.

According to 9:2, Paul “requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.” Locate [Damascus](#) on a Bible map like the one called the “Roman Division of Palestine” at insight.org/maps.

Damascus stood more than 130 miles north of Jerusalem. Considered by some the world’s oldest occupied city, Damascus functioned as a safe haven for fugitive Christians. Review the article on [Damascus](#) in the free, online *Holman Bible Dictionary* at studylight.org.

As Saul approached Damascus with his mind fixed on hunting down Christians, his world was suddenly and radically turned upside down.

The Violent Capture of a Rebel Will

Acts 9:1–9



Observation: The Violent Capture of Saul's Will

We pick up the scene in Acts 9:3. Carefully observe [9:3–9](#). Observation looks closely at what's said in the text.² For narratives like this one, look for who, what, where, when, why, and how. Describe Saul's experience recorded in 9:3.

The light from heaven may well have been the [Shecaniah](#) glory of God. Read about this light in *Holman Bible Dictionary* at studylight.org. Record your insights below.

From 9:3–4, list the sequence of events as Luke recorded them.

According to 9:4, what did the voice say to Saul? What does [26:14](#) indicate about the language the voice used? What detail does [22:9](#) add to our understanding of 9:4?

Acts 9:5 records Saul's first words. What did Jesus say in response to Saul's question according to 9:5–6? What did Jesus repeat in 9:4 and in 9:5, and why is this significant?

The Violent Capture of a Rebel Will

Acts 9:1–9

What did Saul's traveling companions experience according to Acts 9:7?

According to 9:8–9, how did the Shecaniah glory affect Saul, and what did his companions do for him?

With Jesus' instruction and the help of his companions, Saul stumbled into Damascus.

When the hounds of heaven caught the scent of this sinner, it was only a matter of time before irresistible grace violently captured this rebel will.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: In the End, God Wins

God has never met His match. Humbled to his knees, temporarily blinded, fasting without food or water for three days, and fully dependent on the care of others, Saul found himself in Damascus ruminating on every word he had just received from the risen Lord. Saul was now on a radically different mission.

Return to [Acts 9:4–5](#). In the exchange between Jesus and Saul, three important realizations strike Saul. First, given that Saul assumed Jesus was nothing more than a misguided, dead zealot, how did that assumption immediately transform when he heard Jesus identify Himself?

The Violent Capture of a Rebel Will

Acts 9:1–9

Second, when Jesus addressed Saul by name, what did Saul recognize about the resurrected Jesus?

Third, Jesus told Saul He was the one Saul was persecuting, “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!” Why did Jesus say that? What does His comment teach about His relationship with the church?

In [Acts 26:14](#) (NASB), Jesus said Saul was kicking “against the goads” to describe Saul’s persecutory actions. Look up the meaning of [goad](#). StudyLight.org offers a short article in *Holman Bible Dictionary*. Farmers plowing their field while working with stubborn oxen would employ a sharp, pointy “goad” to prompt the oxen to submit to their direction. If the oxen resisted and kicked back against the goad, it only incurred pain.

With this idiom, what did Jesus signify to Saul? Who was doing the goading? How is this idiom instructive for those who follow Jesus today?

In the end, God won. Graciously and mercifully so. Saul thought he was going to Damascus to destroy the church, but God led Saul on that road because Jesus had a divine appointment with the man He would transform into Paul, the apostle to the gentiles.

“I am JESUS whom you are persecuting. I’m alive from the dead. I will never again go to a cross.” At this moment there is the beginning of the manufacture of a saint. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Violent Capture of a Rebel Will

Acts 9:1–9



Correlation: From Terrorist to Missionary

As God graciously but persistently goaded Saul, He knew the strength of character Saul possessed. Saul's fortitude was forged through years of zealous, religious training. God used that to Saul's advantage. Turn to [Galatians 1:13–14](#). Focusing on 1:14, what specific words did Saul (now Paul) use which reveal his pre-conversion, Jewish accolades? Though misguided, what or who fueled Saul?

In his fanaticism to exterminate the church, Saul might have been considered a terrorist. His thinking mirrored that of someone steeped in a cult, unable to see truth. After his sudden conversion, Saul would have much to “unlearn.” Why would that prove challenging and require time?

The remarkable thing is, Saul did what he did in the name of religion, which proves the point that there is no greater terroristic work than what's done in the name of one's god. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: God's Preparatory Goadings

Saul experienced a sudden, dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. But that doesn't mean God wasn't already at work in Saul's life. God was “goadings” him—moving in his heart through the conviction of the Holy Spirit ([John 16:8](#))—in three ways.

First, Saul was probably haunted by Jesus' life, teaching, miracles, and even the events surrounding His crucifixion. Second, Saul may have been haunted as an accomplice in Stephen's death (Acts 6:5–8:3). Third, Saul may have been goaded by the courage and resilient faith demonstrated by the Christians he persecuted.

The Violent Capture of a Rebel Will

Acts 9:1–9

What goads did God use in your life to bring you to Him in your conversion?

God transformed Saul's Pharisaic fanaticism into an irrepressible zeal for Christ. What character qualities has God used from your past in your service to Christ?

Is there a person you deeply care about who is outside of Christ? What goads do you see God using in his or her life? Have those goads been effective? Take a moment now to pray for your loved one.

Those goads pricked and prodded the Pharisaic ox, Saul, to such an extreme he couldn't stop, until he was blinded by that laser-like light from heaven. . . . And the hounds of heaven caught him. Isn't that a great thing? I love it. You can run, but you cannot hide. You can hide, but you cannot escape. It's only a matter of time. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Close your study with prayer.

Father, thank You for the doubts that plague us, for the Stephens who haunt us. Thank You for the evidence of truth that dogs our steps. Whatever it takes, I pray that You will bring me to the place of full surrender and submission, so that I might know the kind of peace that only You can give as a result of faith in the One who died and was raised for me. I trust You in the strong name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. John Newton, "Amazing Grace," in *The Celebration Hymnal: Songs and Hymns for Worship* (n.p.: Word/Integrity, 1997), hymn 343.
2. 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?](#)"

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PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY THREE

The Memorable Faith of a Forgotten Hero

Acts 9:10–22

There are thousands of forgotten heroes in the church. Thousands still doing heroic things, like an iceberg under the surface, not known by the great majority of us but faithfully doing their work . . . right where God wants them . . . doing what God wants them to do.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SAUL of Tarsus wasn't the only one the Lord visited unexpectedly. There was another—a faithful follower of Jesus named Ananias.

Like all the believers in Damascus, Ananias heard about Saul's violent background and his hatred toward Christians. No doubt, accounts of Saul arresting Christians, even "hounding some to death" (Acts 22:4), had spread through the church. Now, this violent persecutor was coming to Damascus! A thunderhead of impending persecution gathered over the city as Saul's fury was about to strike.

Then, surprisingly, the Lord commanded Ananias in a vision to find Saul and minister to him. How could that be? A shock of panic must have jolted Ananias' soul.

What would you do if God told you to seek out a treacherous enemy who was hunting you? Would you double lock your door in fear and refuse to go? Or would you venture into the storm, offering yourself to serve the Lord even if it meant imprisonment and death?

Ananias doesn't usually come to mind as a hero of the church. He's mostly forgotten to most Christians, but his role was crucial during Saul's first unsteady steps as a Christ-follower. In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, let's explore what happened to Ananias and see how this common guy displayed uncommon faith, becoming one of the church's least-remembered but most-admirable heroes.



The Memorable Faith of a Forgotten Hero

Acts 9:10–22



PREPARE YOUR HEART

God calls us to engage in situations that require feats of faith. Fear of risk creeps in to weaken us and paralyze us. Have you ever found (or do you now find) yourself in a spot like that? As you prepare your heart to engage God's Word, let David's prayer of trust in Psalm 56:3–4 be your own.

*But when I am afraid,
I will put my trust in you.
I praise God for what he has promised.
I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?
What can mere mortals do to me?*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Having just seen Jesus in a dramatic vision, Saul was spiritually humbled and physically blinded. His companions led Saul by hand into Damascus. How long was Saul blind, and what did he do for that period according to [Acts 9:9](#)?

What parallel event occurred in [9:10](#), and to whom did it occur?

Very little is stated in the Scriptures about Ananias. His life was abruptly interrupted with a vision of his own just like Saul's. So we pick up the story with two believers—one hungry for divine direction and the other receiving direction he's not so sure is divine.



Observation: “But Lord, I’ve Heard . . .”

Solid observation requires careful reading.¹ Who speaks, what is said, and how much space each speech is given display emphasis. Trace the conversation slowly and try to get a sense of the emotion behind the words.

The Memorable Faith of a Forgotten Hero

Acts 9:10–22

As Saul awaited instruction, the Lord broke into Ananias' world. Read [Acts 9:10–22](#). According to 9:10, was Ananias receptive or unreceptive to the vision? In 9:11–12, what command did God give to Ananias, and what assurance accompanied His command?

Ananias quickly contended with the Lord. In 9:13–14, what two arguments did he use to question God's instruction? What do you think caused Ananias' initial lack of faith?

Fix this message really clearly in your mind. Ananias is a Christian. Saul kills Christians. Ananias has been given a vision. He wonders, Can I trust it?
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

God then reissued His command for Ananias to “Go.” While that charge may have been enough, God provided Ananias with additional details. According to 9:15, what did the Lord reveal about Saul? Whom was Saul going to preach to?

Perhaps surprisingly, the Lord provided Ananias with a sneak peek into Saul's future. In 9:16, what was revealed?

The Memorable Faith of a Forgotten Hero

Acts 9:10–22

Acts 9:17–19 are crucial verses in the narrative. What did Ananias do—and notice what he immediately called Saul—and what does that act reveal about his faith? What happened to Saul? Note any observations that stand out to you or that you might want to explore for deeper understanding in the Interpretation section.

Summarize what occurred in 9:20–22. Who are the key people, and why are they featured in these verses? What echoes of Ananias' initial reaction to the Lord's command do you hear in the people's reactions?

One of the forgotten heroes of the Christian church is Ananias. There are thousands like him. Thousands still doing heroic things, like an iceberg under the surface, not known by the great majority of us but faithfully doing their work. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: From Persecutor to Proclaimer

Saul's seismic transformation propelled him as a juggernaut *for* the Messiah and *for* the church. Our passage carries several concepts worthy of deeper study. Return to [Acts 9:15–16](#). The Lord clarified to Ananias that Saul was God's chosen instrument. Consult a Bible commentary, like the free *IVP New Testament Commentary on Acts* at biblegateway.com. Consult the article, "[Saul the Chosen Vessel](#)," to understand the significance of God choosing Saul as His instrument. Record insights you uncover.

The Memorable Faith of a Forgotten Hero

Acts 9:10–22

Shortly after his conversion and immediately after his eyesight was restored, Saul was baptized, according to [Acts 9:18](#). Take a fresh look at baptism by reviewing an article on baptism in a Bible dictionary, such as [Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#) or the [Holman Bible Dictionary](#) at [studylight.org](#). Record key points you hadn't realized before.

In what way did Saul keep “confounding” the Jews (Acts 9:22 NASB)? Consult [Constable's Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#) for further explanation. Why is it significant that this was Paul's new message?

It's great how the Lord used the brilliance of a mind like Saul's. As the enemy once owned that mind, now the Lord has it and is transforming his message.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

God used Ananias' heroic faith to help transform Saul of Tarsus into Paul the apostle. Reflect on Ananias' conversation with the Lord—his initial reluctance and eventual obedience—and record any inspiration or instruction his example offers to you.



Correlation: Maturation Through Suffering and Seasoning

It was approximately AD 35 when Saul met Christ on the Damascus Road and launched his gospel ministry. While he was already trained in all aspects of Judaism, Saul needed maturing in the faith which only suffering and seasoning, as designed by God, could perfect. According to [Acts 9:16](#), God gave Ananias a sneak peek into the suffering that lay ahead for Saul.

The Memorable Faith of a Forgotten Hero

Acts 9:10–22

Fast forward to AD 55. Paul, now a seasoned apostle, was writing to the church at Corinth attempting to persuade them of his authenticity. His suffering proved his office. Turn to [2 Corinthians 11:23–28](#) where he detailed what he had been through. Record each of the ways in which Paul suffered for Christ. What is the role of suffering in service to the gospel?

“I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake. . . .” God said it straight. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Obeying like Ananias

We can learn much from the life of Ananias. His faithful obedience to the Lord’s direction merits our attention and our gratitude. Ananias’ obedience profoundly impacted Saul . . . who then profoundly impacted the world for Christ. Four key principles emerge from Ananias’ encounter with God.

1. *Surprises are always part of God’s leading.* That was certainly true in the lives of both Saul and Ananias. Neither had an inkling of what God was about to do.
2. *Surprises always intensify the need for faith.* Ananias chose faith in a trustworthy God to overcome his fear.
3. *Stepping out in faith always results in further clarification of God’s unfolding plan.* Only when Ananias and Saul took that first step of obedience did the Lord reveal what was next . . . and next.
4. *Obedience always stimulates spiritual growth.* Ananias’ obedience was rewarded through Saul’s miraculous healing and transformation.

Where do these principles find you? Is one of them especially relevant to you right now? How so? How is the Spirit leading you to trust in His plan and risk walking in faith?

The Memorable Faith of a Forgotten Hero

Acts 9:10–22

Did you have an Ananias who played a role in your conversion experience—or in your growth as a believer? Spend a few moments reflecting on how God worked in your life through an Ananias.

Have you been, or how can you now be, an Ananias in the life of a loved one or of a friend? What might that encounter entail? What words, encouragement, or challenge do they need?

You might be the Ananias, the courageous messenger, who, against his own wishes and will, obeyed. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Close your study by making Jude 1:24–25 your prayer to God.

Now all glory to God, who is able to keep me from falling away and will bring me with great joy into Your glorious presence without a single fault. All glory to You who alone is God, my Savior through Jesus Christ my Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen.

ENDNOTE

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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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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

The Necessity of Solitude, Quietness, and Obscurity

Galatians 1:10–17



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?

The Necessity of Solitude, Quietness, and Obscurity

Galatians 1:10–17

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?

The Necessity of Solitude, Quietness, and Obscurity

Galatians 1:10–17

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.

The Necessity of Solitude, Quietness, and Obscurity

Galatians 1:10–17

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.

The Necessity of Solitude, Quietness, and Obscurity

Galatians 1:10–17

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?

The Necessity of Solitude, Quietness, and Obscurity

Galatians 1:10–17

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

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PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY FIVE

Mission Underway . . . Thanks to the Lesser-Known

Acts 9:3–31

We are watching a strong and self-willed man become crushed under the mighty hand of God. It was necessary in his training so that he might become the man God wanted him to be.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

HERCULEAN personalities fascinate us. The headstrong, self-willed, independent types who become cultural icons. They catch a vision, take command, and do what needs doing despite all obstacles.

Take Amelia Earhart. Remember her from your history books? She was a pioneering woman in aviation—the first female to fly alone and nonstop across the Atlantic. She set many records in her lifetime, achieving celebrity status in the late 1920s.

Determination like Amelia Earhart's is inspiring. But that maverick spirit can prove risky. On July 2, 1937, at age 39, Earhart disappeared over the Pacific in her attempt to circumnavigate the world. Her plane has yet to be found.

While pushing ourselves to accomplish an adventurous goal is certainly not wrong, trailblazing our own way rather than God's way is. God's Word warns us against being fiercely independent. Often, God must break that habit out of His servants before He uses them.

Before the independent, headstrong Saul of Tarsus could become Paul the apostle to the gentiles, he needed to learn humble dependence upon God and others. This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study explores how God made that transformation in Paul's life and the benefits that come by joining conviction with dependence.



Mission Underway . . . Thanks to the Lesser-Known

Acts 9:3–31



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before engaging the Word of God, it's always important to engage the God of the Word—to seek His help, blessing, and insight. Reflect on the following Psalm and then express your dependence on Jesus.

*Bend down, O LORD, and hear my prayer;
answer me, for I need your help.
Protect me, for I am devoted to you.
Save me, for I serve you and trust you.
You are my God.
Be merciful to me, O Lord,
for I am calling on you constantly.
Give me happiness, O Lord,
for I give myself to you. . . .
For you are great and perform wonderful deeds.
You alone are God.
Teach me your ways, O LORD,
that I may live according to your truth!
Grant me purity of heart,
so that I may honor you.
With all my heart I will praise you, O Lord my God.
I will give glory to your name forever. (Psalm 86:1–4, 10–12)*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

God had big plans to use Saul in building His church. Saul's preparation, though, would prove arduous and painful. God needed to crush him of his *independent spirit* and fashion within him a *dependent spirit*.

Mission Underway . . . Thanks to the Lesser-Known

Acts 9:3–31

First, in [Acts 9:3–21](#), Jesus revealed Himself to Saul as Saul traveled to Damascus, bent on a single-minded mission to annihilate the church. Saul was converted to Christ but blinded. He had to be led by the hand into Damascus. God began His transforming work by humbling Saul through the service of many *lesser-known heroes* in Scripture.

Ananias courageously met with Saul and prayed for him. Saul regained his sight, received the Holy Spirit, was baptized, ate food, and enjoyed fellowship with other believers. *Saul took his first course in the school of dependency.*

Next, God led Saul into the Arabian wilderness. [Galatians 1:17–18](#) specifies he spent three years there. It's safe to assume Saul integrated his understanding of the Old Testament with the life and work of Jesus as Messiah. As he drank from the deep well of theology, he cultivated a deep connection with Christ. *Saul completed his second course, learning dependency on Christ alone.*

What more do you think Paul needs to learn? Think about your experience in the courses of dependency? What have you learned so far in your spiritual journey?

Next, we explore how Saul learned dependency by becoming a Christian fugitive—course three. Lesser-known heroes, like we saw in Ananias, helped him. God often takes the long, slow track when He refines us. Character development, humility, and wisdom all take time.

In the following charts, we combine observation and interpretation as we look at our passage in three sections. First, carefully observe what the text says. Then, seek to understand its meaning and relevance for following Christ today.¹ During interpretation, consult your resources like [Constable's Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#) or the [IVP New Testament Commentary on Acts](#) at [biblegateway.com](#).

Mission Underway . . . Thanks to the Lesser-Known



Acts 9:3–31

Lowered in a Basket <i>Acts 9:22–25</i> Saul preached in Damascus that Jesus was the Messiah and publicly confounded the Jews, which put him in danger.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read Acts 9:22–25. What happened in 9:23–24?	What do you find ironic about the source of danger, given who commissioned Saul for his initial mission into Damascus?
What reaction did these events trigger in Acts 9:25?	How is Saul’s circumstance a fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy to Ananias in <i>Acts 9:16</i> ?
	Who were the lesser-known heroes God used to deliver Saul? What is significant about their remaining nameless?

You ever had a contract out on your life? Probably not. Some of you may have. It’s terribly serious. This man was so wanted that they guarded every gate around Damascus. That’s pretty humiliating. It’s pretty frightening. I don’t care if you’re Saul of Tarsus. He now has Jews planning to kill him. But that’s all part of God’s plan. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Mission Underway . . . Thanks to the Lesser-Known

Acts 9:3–31

Fellow Believers Are Skeptical <i>Acts 9:26–27</i> Anticipating safety and a warm welcome in Jerusalem from his Damascus escape, Saul met with the unexpected.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
What happened in Acts 9:26? Record the concerns that had driven the believers.	Read a Bible dictionary article on Barnabas and record key insights you learn.
Who helped Saul in Acts 9:27 and how did he help him?	Discuss the weight of Barnabas' recommendation and how Paul must have felt receiving it? How does God use relationships to further His plans?

“But Barnabas” (NASB). Isn’t that a great line? Out of the blue. Did Saul call Barnabas? No. Then how did Barnabas hear? I don’t know. God’s sovereign. Barnabas wasn’t confused, saying, “Oh, what am I going to do with Saul?” God tells him, “Okay, here’s right where I want you. Barnabas, pssstt, get over there.” Every time you see Barnabas, he’s encouraging. Standing up for the guy who’s losing it. Standing in place of the one who’s got a bad track record.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Mission Underway . . . Thanks to the Lesser-Known

Acts 9:3–31

On the Move Once Again

Acts 9:28–31

After fellow believers finally welcomed him, Saul stepped behind another pulpit in Jerusalem. Then danger came knocking, and Saul once again was on the move.



Observation

What happened in Acts 9:28–29? Whom did Paul offend, and how did they react?

Who entered into Saul's life in Acts 9:30, and how did they help him?

Acts 9:31 offers a summary statement from Luke. What did he describe?



Interpretation

Look up *Hellenistic* online in the *Holman Bible Dictionary* and summarize what you find.

Why is it significant that Saul was sent away to Tarsus?

Reflect on Acts 9:31. Based on this verse, list what's indispensable for the vitality of the church.

The secret of the church is not Saul of Tarsus; it is God Almighty. It is not about a man. It isn't about independence. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Mission Underway . . . Thanks to the Lesser-Known

Acts 9:3–31



Correlation: God's Calling—Our Humility

God wants to create a *dependent spirit* in every believer. One of God's aims for that process is the cultivation of humility. Let's consider three texts with slightly different angles on this topic.

Turn to [Proverbs 27:2](#). What is Solomon's point, and how does it relate to humility?

The apostle Peter addressed the topic directly in [1 Peter 5:6](#). The verse commands us and links that command to one of God's attributes. What promise is contained in this verse?

Finally, [Philippians 2:3–9](#) provides a blueprint on the topic of humility. Who is our model, and what does this passage teach about humility?

God does not use the strong, the stubborn, and the independent. He uses the humble, the broken, the bruised, those who have suffered, who have been desperate, who have been crushed. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Mission Underway . . . Thanks to the Lesser-Known

Acts 9:3–31



Application: Stripping Away Our Independence

God put Saul through challenging, painful, and solitary training, and that wouldn't be the end of it! God “crushed” him to free him of his fiercely independent spirit. Three lessons from Saul's experience serve us well today.

1. **Value others.** Rather than viewing others as those who hold us back, we must embrace the fact that they are the key to our survival and success.
2. **Humble yourself.** God knows you and sees you. Yield yourself to Him and serve as unto Him. He will exalt you in His time.
3. **Trust God.** Accept that you are not indispensable. It's God's mission and plan, not yours. Accomplish the Lord's work according to the Lord's way in the Lord's *time*.

What truths from the reflections above or from your time in this study's passage are most relevant for you and why?

Reflect on your Christian experience. Can you identify another believer who, through humble service outside the limelight, has guided, served, or protected you? Describe that experience. How did it bolster your faith?

Similarly, have you come alongside a brother or sister in Christ and humbly served him or her in anonymity, willing to be that “lesser-known” person? Describe your experience. How did that encourage or stretch you? If you haven't had that opportunity, has the Lord placed anyone on your heart to quietly serve?

Mission Underway . . . Thanks to the Lesser-Known

Acts 9:3–31

Rather than being tutored to handle the limelight, we need to treasure and embrace the shadows. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Close your study in prayer.

*Thank You, Father, for reducing me to a place where I would listen, believe, and obey.
Thank You for the needed reminder of Your rule when I am self-willed, determined, and
in a hurry. Make me patient to wait with You as You prepare me for Your ministry, in
Your time. In the precious name of Jesus, I pray. 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?](#)"

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PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY SIX

Out of the Shadows

Acts 11:19–26

The Lord called Saul from weakness and brokenness and obscurity and neglect. The Lord placed his feet on a rock and said, “Now is the time.” The believers were first called Christians in Antioch. What a difference Saul’s teaching made, because Saul was different.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

LIFE is like a game! Most of us want to be in the arena. We want to do our part, to be in the action, to have some fun. What athlete enjoys being on the sideline?

Imagine you’re entering your first year as a collegiate swimmer. You just completed an intense preseason training regimen in anticipation of joining the relay groups. You’re ready! Skilled up and full of excitement, you want to help bring home the championship. So, patiently, you wait for the day your coach posts his picks.

The day arrives. You scan through his selections . . . and . . . you see your name . . . at the bottom. Not chosen. Except for a couple of races here and there, the coach practically put you on the shelf for the season.

It’s tough when life throws you into a season of waiting. You feel alone and unwanted, like you’re *in the shadows*. Perhaps you know that feeling all too well, or perhaps, you can only imagine it at this point in your life. We’ll all be there at some point. But being in the shadows doesn’t mean God has overlooked you. In fact, He does some of His best work in our lives when we’re in that protracted period of *waiting . . . and waiting . . . and waiting*.

Then, when you stop expecting a change and feel the least ready for something new, God taps you on the shoulder. After Saul spent years in Arabia, he anticipated entering into God’s work immediately. But God put him on the bench for years in Tarsus . . . until Barnabas came knocking at his door. Let’s explore what Paul learned waiting in Tarsus and how God used the Son of Encouragement to call Saul out of the shadows.



Out of the Shadows

Acts 11:19–26



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Perhaps you're in a period of waiting on the Lord, uncertain about what He's doing with you and why you're on the sidelines. What's the point? Has He forgotten you? Express your frustrations and disappointments to your Father and request comfort, clarity, and direction through your time in His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Saul's conversion stirred up a whirlwind for Saul. He was physically blinded for three days and then spent three years in solitude and obscurity in the Arabian desert. Back in Damascus, the Jews tried to kill him, but some believers—the same people Saul once sought to kill—saved his life by lowering him over that wall in a food basket. He journeyed to Jerusalem, where skeptical Christians doubted his faith and a group of Hellenistic Jews plotted his death. Friends rushed him to safety by sending him back to Tarsus, his hometown, by way of Caesarea.

Whew. All of that, with unnamed believers assisting him along the way. While Saul enjoyed sporadic opportunities to proclaim the Messiah, his life reflected anything BUT the apparently big plans Jesus had for him. Had he misunderstood the Lord? Where was the glorious movement of God's hand upon Saul's promised ministry?

Saul's faith journey reflects an unforgettable principle: *Exceptional work is preceded by extended waiting*. How does Saul's experience remind you of your own faith journey?





Observation and Interpretation: Others in the Spotlight

While Saul was in waiting, God was building and strengthening and expanding His church through others. Saul wasn't ready to help lead God's people, and God's people weren't ready for his leadership.

Out of the Shadows

Acts 11:19–26



In the following charts, let's explore how God prepared both Saul and the church. For interpretation, use your Bible-study resources like [Constable's Notes](http://netbible.org) (netbible.org), [IVP New Testament Commentary on Acts](http://biblegateway.com) (biblegateway.com), and the [Holman Bible Dictionary](http://studylight.org) (studylight.org).¹

Peter in the Spotlight <i>Acts 10:1–48</i> As Saul lived in the shadows at Tarsus, the apostle Peter and his ministry shone brightly in the spotlight. Jewish Christians needed to enlarge their vision of God's worldwide mission.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read Acts 10:1–26 . Record key observations about the main characters, the locations (Caesarea , Joppa), and the themes.	What is the meaning of Peter's vision?
Continue your reading in 10:27–48 . Record your top five observations.	What is the significance of Peter meeting with Cornelius?
	How does Acts 10 relate to Ananias' revelation in 9:15 ?

Through Cornelius, Peter got a glimpse of gentile ministry.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Out of the Shadows



Acts 11:19–26

<div>Barnabas and Other Believers in the Spotlight</div> <div>Acts 11:19–24</div> <div>After the apostle Peter helped launch God’s ministry to the gentiles, the spotlight turns to Barnabas and other believers—while Saul remained in Tarsus.</div>	
<div> Observation</div>	<div> Interpretation</div>
<div>Read Acts 11:19–24. Record key observations about the main characters, the locations (<i>Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch</i>), and the themes.</div> <div>According to 11:19–21, who was responsible for driving the growth of the church? What people group showed the most converts?</div>	<div>How does Acts 11:19–24 relate to God’s revelation to Ananias in 9:15?</div> <div>Why do you think the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to Antioch? Review his roots in 4:36. What is the connection?</div> <div>According to 11:23, what was Barnabas’ primary task for the church in Antioch?</div>

Barnabas was a Cypriot. There were people from Cyprus. He knew that culture. He knew that language. He understood those people. He also had his eyes opened regarding the gentiles. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Out of the Shadows

Acts 11:19–26

<p>“Now Is the Time!” —God <i>Acts 11:25–26</i></p> <p>With the church in Antioch blooming, Barnabas realizes he could use some help.</p>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>Reread <i>Acts 9:30–31</i> and then read <i>11:25–26</i>. Record your observations.</p> <p>According to 9:30–31, where was Saul sent? What was the condition of the church after Saul’s departure?</p>	<p>Given the circumstances in Antioch we read about in Acts 11:19–24, why do you think Barnabas sought Saul?</p> <p>What do you imagine Saul thought and felt when he received Barnabas’ invitation?</p>

Barnabas gets alone with the Lord and realizes he needs help. He’s got an enormous revival on his hands. He doesn’t have the gifts necessary, nor the energy necessary, nor the knowledge necessary to teach these people as he should. And he remembers one who does. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Out of the Shadows

Acts 11:19–26



Correlation: Preparation through Waiting

God routinely uses the principle of *waiting* and *resting* in the lives of His saints. Let's take a look at this topic from several angles to fill out our understanding of God's design.

Start with [Psalm 27:14](#). What command did David include with *waiting*?

Consider [37:7](#). What counsel did David offer while *waiting* on the Lord?

Look at [37:34](#). What additional direction and promise did David highlight for us as we wait?

Romans 8 is an exalted chapter on living by the Spirit in anticipation of our future deliverance from the curse. A principle on waiting surfaces in [Romans 8:25](#). Summarize this principle.

Very few people jump into exceptional work even though we all want to. It takes honing. It takes shaping. It takes breaking. It takes polishing. It takes reshaping. It takes waiting. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Out of the Shadows

Acts 11:19–26



Application: Go . . . and Wait Likewise

Four vital principles flow from Saul's experience of waiting in the shadows.

1. *When God prepares us for effective ministry, He includes what we would rather omit—a period of waiting.* That builds endurance.
2. *As God makes us wait, hiding us in the shadows, He shows us we're not indispensable.* That builds humility.
3. *While God hides us away, He reveals new dimensions of Himself and new insights regarding ministry.* That builds depth in us.
4. *When God finally chooses to use us, it arrives at a time we least expect and we feel least qualified.* That makes us effective.

Which of these points prove most relevant in your season of life right now? Do you feel as though you are in the shadows? How has this study given you insight and encouragement?

What lessons has God taught you during your periods of waiting? What character qualities blossomed?

Is there a loved one in your circle who is living in the shadows? How can you use your experiences to help him or her or maybe even become a “Barnabas” to them?

Out of the Shadows

Acts 11:19–26

Every person at this moment has something she or he is hoping for that hasn't yet happened. My answer? "Wait eagerly for it with perseverance."

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Close your study by reflecting on this prayer, and then spend a moment lifting up your own prayer to the Lord.

Lord, I want to thank You for Your patience with us when we have so often rushed ahead. Forgive us, our Father, for wasted effort, for hurried moments when we must have tried Your long-suffering. Deliberately teach us to wait. And in the process, deepen us for that exceptional work to which You have called us, whatever it may be. I ask it through Christ. Amen.

ENDNOTE

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PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY SEVEN

Finding Contentment in God's Sufficient Grace

2 Corinthians 12:1–10

Paul's theology of pain is well honed from the crucible of suffering. He knew what it meant to be misunderstood, mistreated, left for dead, forsaken, forgotten, abused, mistreated, maligned, attacked, imprisoned.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SUFFERING in the Christian life is not a popular subject. The *theology of pain* is not a pleasant study. Few preach it. Fewer receive the Bible's teaching on it. No one likes it.

After all, our impulse is to think that if God is a God of love, grace, and mercy, then suffering must come from somewhere else or someone else, right? Satan and his demons or evil people might be the source, or suffering might be self-inflicted or due to natural calamities. But surely it could never come from God, could it?

As tough as it might be to accept . . . yes, the Bible teaches that God enrolls each of us in His school of suffering, in some way or another, because maturity follows more often from the groan rather than the grin. His purpose is to transform us through suffering. As the God of redemption, He orchestrates suffering to produce good in our lives that otherwise could not have come to us. It's just as tough to understand as it is to accept.

For that reason, we keep our gaze fixed on Jesus, “a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief” (Isaiah 53:3). The great apostle Paul had learned to do so and instructed us to do the same because he, too, was a man acquainted with great suffering, being “weighed down with troubles” (2 Corinthians 1:6).

This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study explores a deep passage in which the apostle Paul autobiographically records his privilege, his potential pride, his pain, his petition, and his renewed perspective on God's good purposes.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

Finding Contentment in God's Sufficient Grace

2 Corinthians 12:1–10



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prepare to engage God's Word today by reflecting on Psalm 6:2–4 penned by Israel's King David. Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance through Paul's profound statements on this weighty topic.

Have compassion on me, Lord, for I am weak.

Heal me, LORD, for my bones are in agony.

I am sick at heart.

How long, O LORD, until you restore me?

Return, O LORD, and rescue me.

Save me because of your unfailing love.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Throughout his powerful ministry, the apostle Paul endured extensive hardship, pain, and suffering. Among his 13 New Testament letters, 2 Corinthians is his most autobiographical. He wrote it around AD 55 less than a year after writing 1 Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians, Paul defended his apostleship against accusers. In doing so, he elaborated on his sufferings.

Beginning in [2 Corinthians 1:8–9](#), to what extent were Paul and Timothy afflicted? Where did they find confidence to endure?

From [4:8–10](#), list the verbs which detail their types of suffering.

Finding Contentment in God's Sufficient Grace

2 Corinthians 12:1–10

According to [2 Corinthians 6:4–5](#), what additional trials did they encounter?

Now look at [11:16–28](#). Paul compared himself with his accusers. What additional hardships and suffering did Paul reveal? Observe how Paul shifted between pronouns in this passage. What do you notice? How does that make his description more personal?

The suffering Paul endured, captured throughout the letter, sets the stage for his teaching on the *theology of pain* in 12:1–10.



Observation: Privilege . . . Pain . . . Petition . . . Perspective

Observation involves carefully reading the biblical text, noticing every word. It helps the reader discern the feelings behind what is written. For a letter like 2 Corinthians, observation nails down the subjects, the ways the author connected those subjects together, and how the author described those subjects. Do that now with 2 Corinthians 12:1–10.¹

Privilege—2 Corinthians 12:1–4

By the close of chapter 11, Paul had vigorously defended his God-appointed apostleship before his opponents. Read [2 Corinthians 12:1–4](#). In 12:1, what posture did Paul assume about his “boasting”? What was he about to share which would bolster his apostolic authority?

Finding Contentment in God's Sufficient Grace

2 Corinthians 12:1–10

What did Paul experience, according to 2 Corinthians 12:2–4?

While Paul stated twice that he was uncertain of his *physical orientation*, “whether in the body or out of the body,” what was he certain about regarding his *location*? In 12:4, did Paul reference what he *heard* or what he *saw*?

Pain—2 Corinthians 12:5–7

Read [2 Corinthians 12:5–7](#). While Paul could have boasted about his revelations from the Lord, what did he choose to boast about instead? Why?

In 12:7, Paul was given a “thorn,” or a “pointy stake.” Stated by Paul twice, what was its purpose?

Petition—2 Corinthians 12:8

Next, look at [2 Corinthians 12:8](#) in both the NLT and the NASB. What do you notice about the sincerity of Paul's request?

Finding Contentment in God's Sufficient Grace

2 Corinthians 12:1–10

Perspective—2 Corinthians 12:9–10

According to Paul's request, God delivered His verdict. In [2 Corinthians 12:9](#), the Lord said two things and Paul responded. Summarize the exchange.

How did Paul incorporate the Lord's response and instruction in 12:9 into a life and ministry principle, found in [12:10](#)?

After the glory came, the groan came. On the heels of privilege came throbbing pain. Following the exalted supernatural series of revelations came humiliating and anguishing suffering, and he lived with it incessantly for the rest of his life.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Paul's Privilege Fortified His Ministry

Paul recorded unique and fortifying truths which provided him the necessary endurance for the suffering service that awaited him. Let's dig more deeply with several word studies.

In 2 Corinthians 12:1, Paul wrote that he received "[visions](#)" and "[revelations](#)" from the Lord. Review these terms in your Bible study resources like the online *Holman Bible Dictionary* at [studylight.org](#). What did you discover? Then, consult a Bible commentary on this verse like *Constable's Notes* at [netbible.org](#) and elaborate on what you find.

Finding Contentment in God's Sufficient Grace

2 Corinthians 12:1–10

In 2 Corinthians, verses 12:2 and 12:4 inform us that Paul was “caught up.” Get a deeper understanding of this Greek word, *harpazo*, and how it is used in the New Testament at billmounce.com and record key insights you learned.

The same phrase is used by Paul in *1 Thessalonians 4:17*. What is significant about its parallel usage, and what did Paul's personal experience in 2 Corinthians 12 foreshadow?

Paul recounted in 12:2 that he was caught up to the “third heaven” and in 12:4 that he was caught up into “*paradise*.” Review this term in the free, online *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* at studylight.org and summarize what you find.

In 12:4, Paul communicated that he was “not permitted to speak” what he had heard in paradise. Why do you believe he was forbidden to share?

Finding Contentment in God's Sufficient Grace

2 Corinthians 12:1–10

Dig deeper into Paul's mind-set on suffering by consulting Bible commentaries on 2 Corinthians 12:7–10 like [Constable's Notes](#) at netbible.org. How did God answer Paul's prayer, and why did he receive that answer? Why was the thorn good for Paul? Based on this passage, write your own summary statement on the *theology of pain*.

His vision fortified him for future suffering and service. This was Paul's equipment for future ministry. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: God's Purpose in Our Suffering

Suffering in the Christian life is rarely welcomed or enjoyable, but it is purposeful. God *can* and *does* use it. Several passages offer this hopeful perspective.

Job, perhaps the oldest or one of the oldest books in the Bible, addresses suffering in depth. Read [Job 5:7](#). Summarize the author's point in this verse.

God sometimes uses suffering as a disciplinary tool in the Christian life. What does [Hebrews 12:11](#) inform us about this kind of suffering's specific benefit?

What does Paul's example in [Philippians 4:11–13](#) teach us about one of God's purposes for our suffering? How does this text mirror 2 Corinthians 12:9–10?

Finding Contentment in God's Sufficient Grace

2 Corinthians 12:1–10

While each of the passages cited in Correlation demonstrate the personal fruit of suffering, [2 Corinthians 1:3–4](#) provides “other-focused” fruit from our suffering. What is Paul’s point?

The devil is not always the one responsible for our pain and suffering. It is not always the Father’s will that you be relieved of the pressure. It is not the Father’s will that everybody be happy. Suffering frequently comes directly from the hand of our Father, who knows what is best for us in light of what He’s doing within us. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Suffering Frequently Plays a Beneficial Role

Suffering is a reality we naturally flee from rather than embrace. We gravitate toward comfort, ease, and predictability—not pain, hardship, and volatility. However, our God knows what’s best for us. What lessons can we draw from our study? Here’s three.

1. *We must remember that suffering is not new.* Avoid the temptation to question God’s goodness and faithfulness when bitter times come.
2. *We must realize that suffering plays a beneficial role.* As we embrace this realization, our questions move from “Who caused this?” to “How do I respond?”
3. *We must release the idea that contentment requires comfort.* Ouch. The apostle Paul learned contentment by going *through* suffering, not *around* it!

Are you suffering with a painful thorn? What is it? How has this study helped you understand it and strengthened you to endure it? How does the truth you learned guide your prayers about that thorn?

Finding Contentment in God's Sufficient Grace

2 Corinthians 12:1–10

What unexpected blessings have you received from past thorns? Do you know someone else navigating a season of trials? Pray for him or her and consider how you can offer comfort and spiritual encouragement.

It's not about the cause—it's about my response. It's not about someone's actions—it's about my attitude. Our desire is to grow in Him in grace and endurance and wisdom. I'm not interested in being happy. That's a byproduct of contentment. I want to know what it is to find contentment in whatever may come my way. That's what I want. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Our Father, it's a comfort to know that Your Son is a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." How enormous was the burden of the sin of the world that He bore. Forgive me, Father, for my lack of wisdom and for my superficial view of life. You are doing things in my own life that I need. I want You to know, Lord, I give You the entire burden, and I entrust it to You for the outcome You have, not that I have. In Jesus' comforting name. Amen.

ENDNOTE

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PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY EIGHT

The Pleasure of Being in Ministry Together

Acts 11:21–30; 12:24–25

My hope today is to convince you that not only are two better than one but sometimes three and four and more. Not only is it unbiblical to try to make it on our own . . . it is unhealthy.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SOLID partnerships enrich our lives. Going solo rarely makes us as deep and takes us as far than going together. Think about some partnerships that dot the landscape of history.

The musical chemistry between John Lennon and Paul McCartney was unprecedented. Many of us can't imagine a life without Microsoft products courtesy of Bill Gates and Paul Allen. Where would women's rights be without Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton? If not for the Wright brothers, Wilbur and Orville, perhaps we'd still be driving everywhere, rather than flying.

They would all readily admit that it was their *partnership*—their *togetherness*—that propelled them to achieve their heights of success.

In Scripture, we see the same. Moses . . . Aaron. David . . . Jonathan. Jesus dispatching the Twelve . . . in pairs. In church history, you have the Wesley brothers—John and Charles—one a theologian, one a musician. More recently? Look no further than Billy Graham and George Beverly Shea—renowned evangelist and gifted musical soloist. Powerful ministers working *together* for the magnified glory of God.

God unites people into partnerships to accomplish His plans at a level they could never do alone.

In our last study of the life of Paul, we examined how God used suffering to fashion him into the kind of leader and person He wanted him to be. In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we explore how God called upon Paul, still named Saul, to launch his ministry—not as a lone ranger but arm in arm with Barnabas, so the two of them would experience the pleasure of being in ministry together.



The Pleasure of Being in Ministry Together

Acts 11:21–30; 12:24–25



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prepare to engage God's Word today by meditating on the words of Solomon recorded in Ecclesiastes 4:9–12. Thank God for the blessing of others He has placed in your life. Ask Him for guidance in your time in His Word today.

Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

We rejoin our study in Acts 11 where Luke recorded that a revival was sweeping across the ancient world. Beginning in Jerusalem at Pentecost, the revival had moved northward to the regions of Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch of Syria. Locate these areas in a Bible map you can find here at insight.org/maps. How far is Antioch from Jerusalem?



When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, he realized he needed help, so he sought Saul who was in his hometown of [Tarsus](#). How far is Tarsus from Antioch?

Antioch was a large city (about 500,000 people). It was a strategic, cosmopolitan, maritime city in the Roman Empire, noted for both its commercial success and sinful reputation—like Corinth of its day. You can read about [Antioch](#) in the free, online *Holman Bible Dictionary* at studylight.org.

The Pleasure of Being in Ministry Together

Acts 11:21–30; 12:24–25

In the following charts, we explore the surrounding events of Barnabas' and Saul's partnership by combining observation and interpretation. For interpretation, use your Bible-study resources like *Constable's Notes* (netbible.org), *IVP New Testament Commentary on Acts* (biblegateway.com), and the *Holman Bible Dictionary* (studylight.org).¹

<p>The Antioch Revival and the Spiritual Needs <i>Acts 11:19–24</i></p> <p>When they realized how the Spirit was moving across Antioch and the surrounding region, the church in Jerusalem dispatched Barnabas to strengthen and lead Christ’s people.</p>	
<p> Observation</p>	<p> Interpretation</p>
<p>Read <i>Acts 11:19–24</i>. Record your observations about the unfolding events in Antioch, Barnabas’ character qualities, his reaction, and his responsibility.</p>	<p>Compare <i>Acts 4:36</i> with 11:24. List three reasons the Jerusalem church chose Barnabas for Antioch? Why was he instrumental?</p> <p>Given your reading about the city of Antioch, what likely prompted Barnabas’ reaction in 11:23? What did Barnabas encourage the believers to do, and what did he mean?</p>

These new believers had no teaching and very little understanding of Christ. All they knew is that they needed Him and they trusted Him. So the people of Jerusalem said, “Barnabas is the man, let’s let Barnabas go.”
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Pleasure of Being in Ministry Together

Acts 11:21–30; 12:24–25

Barnabas and Saul Form God's Team

Acts 11:25–26

In need of support and complementary giftedness, Barnabas sought, found, and brought Saul to Antioch.



Observation

Read *Acts 11:25–26* and record your observations.



Interpretation

Why did Barnabas need Saul in Antioch?



Based upon Barnabas' and Saul's relationship, which we looked at in prior studies, why do you think they complemented one another as a ministry team?

Jews and gentiles are worshiping the same Lord, and this calls for help. Saul has been removed from Barnabas, but Barnabas hasn't forgotten Saul. Right in the middle of this exciting time at Antioch, God brings a man like Saul to work together with Barnabas. It's terrific and it makes sense.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Pleasure of Being in Ministry Together

Acts 11:21–30; 12:24–25

The Fruit Produced by God's Team <i>Acts 11:26–30; 12:24–25</i> Barnabas and Saul ministered together and produced abundant fruit to the glory of God.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read <i>Acts 11:26–30</i> . Record your observations about the ongoing events in Antioch.	According to Acts 11:26, what was the primary ministry of Barnabas and Saul? Why was Saul instrumental in that work?
	What does 11:29–30 imply about the character of both Barnabas and Saul?
Continue your observations by looking at <i>12:24–25</i> .	In 11:30 and 12:25, whose name was listed first and why is this significant?

Why was it such a pleasure for Barnabas and Saul to work alongside each other? There was no competition between them. There were no ego battles. There was no disagreement in philosophy of ministry. There were no hidden agendas. There were no unrealistic expectations. There was no unresolved conflict.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Pleasure of Being in Ministry Together

Acts 11:21–30; 12:24–25



Correlation: The Fingerprints of Barnabas and Saul

Barnabas and Saul formed a ministry dream team. Their “sum” was greater than their “parts.” Look at how their strengths complemented each other in the following diagram.

Barnabas	Saul
Jewish—from the island of Cyprus	Jewish—from the intellectual center of Tarsus
A natural encourager	A teacher and preacher
A man of compassion	A man of intellect
Reached those downtrodden	Held firm in faith and theology

Return to [Acts 11:26](#). Look up the word *Christian* in a Bible dictionary like this free one, *Holman Bible Dictionary*, at studylight.org. How might the Barnabas/Saul ministry team have led to the first use of the term *Christian*?

We have names today. We call them “Houstonians.” We call them “Bostonians.” Meaning they are people who represent that place or movement. People who represent Houston. People who represent Boston. These are “Christians.” They are people representing Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Look again at [12:24–25](#). How did Barnabas and Saul expand their “team” and why do you think they did so?

The Pleasure of Being in Ministry Together

Acts 11:21–30; 12:24–25

Later in Paul's ministry, he encouraged the churches to work together according to each person's gifting. Read what he wrote in [1 Corinthians 12:12–26](#) and jot down three key points that stood out to you on the pleasure of doing ministry together.



Application: Togetherness Truths

Three application principles emerge from our study on ministering together.

1. *Whatever God plans, He pursues.* Ministry is about Him—His plan, His purpose, His empowerment. In addition, God's plans frequently involve surprises.
2. *Whomever God chooses, He uses.* God graciously chooses to use us in ministry, despite our imperfections.
3. *Wherever God selects, He sends.* God is in the business of pursuing and rescuing a lost world, and He places His servants where He wills.

After reflecting on this study's biblical passages and the application points above, is there an insight that stood out to you more than anything else? What was it, and why is it especially relevant for you?

Think of the people God has placed in your life with whom you have served the Lord. Who are they? How did, or how do, they complement you? What fruit have you witnessed from your partnership?

The Pleasure of Being in Ministry Together

Acts 11:21–30; 12:24–25

Is there someone God has placed on your heart to whom you can reach out and encourage or serve? How might you do that in some practical way?

If you were to interview Saul or Barnabas, each man would identify himself as a servant of the living God, the Lord Jesus. Wherever we serve and in whatever capacity and however large or small the group, that's what is most important.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Thank You, Father, for Your sovereign work in me and among those with whom I serve. This is about You and Your work. Show us how to lead in such a way that we would truly lead, not control. That we exercise our gifts, not look for opportunities to be ambitious. Find us wherever we are, Lord, and then take us to wherever we need to be. We make ourselves available to You. I ask this believing in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. 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?](#)"

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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.



Released in Order to Obey

Acts 13:1–5, 13



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

Released in Order to Obey

Acts 13:1–5, 13



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](#).

Released in Order to Obey

Acts 13:1–5, 13

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?

Released in Order to Obey

Acts 13:1–5, 13

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.

Released in Order to Obey

Acts 13:1–5, 13

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.

Released in Order to Obey

Acts 13:1–5, 13

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

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PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY TEN

The Jagged Edge of Authentic Ministry

Selections from Acts 13–14

Welcome to the ministry. One moment they're worshiping you, the next moment they're stoning you. Imagine being stoned. Imagine being that hated. People literally picking up rocks and striking you with them until you're unconscious and left for dead. I love it that Paul didn't accept the worship, and I love it that he didn't give up when they stoned him.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

GRAND events draw the whole world's attention. Think about a few of them—like the Kentucky Derby and the Monaco Grand Prix, the U.S. Open and the Academy Awards. What comes to your mind? Celebrities sauntering the venue? Elites showcasing their excellence? Flashy attire? Journalists clamoring for interviews? Photographers snapping the perfect shot? It's hard to capture it all in a single word, but if one could, it might just be *grandeur*.

Now contrast that image with Christian ministry . . . your leaders, your venues, your missionary friend in a faraway land. What image do you see? Celebrity? Fashion? Opulence? Acclaim? Perhaps a bit, but most of the time, you won't find much. Authentic ministry isn't so slick. More often, it's jagged in nature. Its costs can be great while many of its benefits and rewards won't come until heaven.

The apostle Paul, during his first missionary journey, navigated this reality head-on. In some areas, people received him as an angel, and in others, people vilified him as a demon. This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study travels with Paul and Barnabas on their first gospel tour of duty to learn the secrets of authenticity and consistency during the ups and downs of ministry.



The Jagged Edge of Authentic Ministry

Selections from Acts 13–14



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Glory comes later, not now, and the glory to come far outweighs our troubles today. Prepare to engage God's Word by meditating on 2 Corinthians 4:16–18. Then pray for Christ's blessing and guidance for your time with Him.

That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Of the 27 books in the New Testament, Paul penned 13. But have you ever thought about the fact that he wasn't first and foremost a writer? He was a pioneer missionary. Three of his journeys (which occurred AD 47–57) are recorded in Acts. After the events of Acts, Paul probably went on a fourth journey to Spain, which concluded in AD 63 (see Romans 15:24, 28). His letters served his greater, gospel-centered purpose: planting and strengthening churches.



God spent many years preparing Paul for all he would endure on his missionary journeys. As we've seen, that preparation included solitude and obscurity in the Arabian desert learning deeply from the Lord, fierce spiritual opposition and persecution, mistrust among the early believers, and several flights for his safety.

Then, finally, Paul locked arms with Barnabas, arriving in Antioch to carry out a fruitful year of ministry with Simeon, Lucius, and Manean. They formed a church leadership “dream team,” or as close to a dream ministry as you can get. When the church reached enough strength and stability, the Holy Spirit said it's time to expand, “So Barnabas and Saul were sent out by the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:4).

Use your observation and interpretation skills in the charts below.¹ For interpretation, use your Bible-study resources like [Constable's Notes](http://netbible.org) (netbible.org), [IVP New Testament Commentary on Acts](http://biblegateway.com) (biblegateway.com), [Bible maps](http://insight.org/maps) (insight.org/maps), and the [Holman Bible Dictionary](http://studylight.org) (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](http://insight.org/store) at insight.org/store.

The Jagged Edge of Authentic Ministry



Selections from Acts 13–14

The First Stop: Challenge on Cyprus <i>Acts 13:4–12</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read <i>Acts 13:4–12</i> . List where they stopped and locate these places on a map.	Consult your resources to learn more about Paphos, Bar-Jesus, and Sergius Paulus. Record any insights that stand out to you.
Who are the key people in this passage?	What is the significance of the first challenge they faced? What positive traits do you find in Paul and Barnabas in navigating this challenge?
What is the key event in this passage and the outcome of the event?	Read Acts 13:12. How do you think Paul and Barnabas reacted and felt when they witnessed this outcome?

As soon as you commit to serving Christ, you open the gates of hell against you. The adversary despises everything you love and works against every Spirit-led thing you attempt to achieve. Serving Christ is a calling, however, and is wonderfully rewarding and fulfilling as anything I could imagine.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Jagged Edge of Authentic Ministry



Selections from Acts 13–14

The Second Stop: Challenges in Perga and Pisidian Antioch <i>Acts 13:13–52</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Carefully read <i>Acts 13:13–52</i> . Note your top five observations in this passage.	In Acts 13:13, while in Perga, what challenge did Paul and Barnabas face? How do you think they felt about it?
Summarize Paul’s message in 13:17–41.	According to 13:42–52, how did Paul and Barnabas respond to the Jews’ jealousy and hostility?
Describe the various responses to Paul’s and Barnabas’ preaching.	What positive traits for ministry do you see in Paul and Barnabas in this passage? How did God use their tough challenges for a greater good?
How many challenges do you find in this passage? List them below.	

You don’t go to where it’s comfortable, and you don’t go where you prefer to go. You go where you’re called when you’re in ministry. And so, the Lord led them to go up to Perga at Pamphylia. Then John deserted them. They lost their helper. John left them when they really needed him and at a time of perhaps great physical stress. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Jagged Edge of Authentic Ministry

Selections from Acts 13–14

The Third Stop: Challenges in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe <i>Acts 14:1–28</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Observe <i>Acts 14:1–28</i> . Who are the key people, and what are the key places in this chapter?	According to Acts 14:1–6, how did Paul and Barnabas respond to the challenge they faced, and how did God use it for good?
What are the key events in this passage? Also, list the challenges Paul and Barnabas faced.	According to 14:6–20, what unusual and contrasting events unfolded which posed a deadly challenge for Paul and Barnabas? How did they respond?
	What traits do you see in Paul and Barnabas that enabled them to uphold an authentic ministry—true to God and loving to others?

A ministry that lasts is a ministry that will go right through times of enormous persecution. It is not fickle, it does not need the applause of people, and it rejects being enshrined and turned into a god. It is a ministry that delivers faithfully the truth of God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Jagged Edge of Authentic Ministry

Selections from Acts 13–14



Correlation: Undaunted . . . Proclaiming the Gospel

Throughout his first missionary journey, Paul remained laser-focused and undaunted through his difficulties because he understood a critical principle about the gospel. That principle is found in [Romans 10:17](#). Take a moment to read the verse.

Unsurprisingly, Scripture is crystal clear about the jagged edge facing those who profess and proclaim the name of Christ. Consider Jesus' words in [John 16:33](#). While fellowshiping with His disciples in an upper room not long before His crucifixion, Jesus made them two promises. What were His promises?

While on their third stop in the region of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, the apostle Paul reminded his disciples of the reality of hardships. Review [Acts 14:22](#). Note that Paul's words came in the context of “strengthening” and “encouraging” the believers.

Toward the very end of his life, as he was about to meet his Savior face-to-face, Paul recorded a powerful command to Timothy, his young protégé. Read [2 Timothy 3:10–12](#). What directives and truths did Paul teach that urge us to remain authentic through the ups and downs of ministry?

There's a jagged edge of authentic ministry. Most folks never think there are that many pressures or that many responsibilities connected with handling the Word of God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Ministering Authentically

Paul modeled three ministry principles in his first missionary journey:

1. *Paul's ministry was saturated with the Word of God.*
2. *Paul's message emphasized the gospel to the lost and grace to the saved.*
3. *Though the public's reaction was mixed, Paul's response was mature.*

The Jagged Edge of Authentic Ministry

Selections from Acts 13–14

Which one of these principles most resonates with you, and why? Has anything changed in your thinking about ministry and upholding an authentic ministry despite the difficulties?

Have you experienced persecution for living out your faith? At whose hands have you suffered, and what was the context and outcome? Did God bring about good in your life or another's from that experience?

When their ship weighed anchor for Cyprus, Paul, Barnabas, and Mark had big dreams of ministry, but they could not imagine the troubles that awaited them. Dream big, but remember that authentic ministry has a jagged edge. Let Paul's example light your way through the rugged parts of the journey. Press on and keep your eyes fixed on the glory to come. "For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever" (1 Corinthians 4:18).



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the pleasure of authentic ministry, for the joy of worship that turns attention away from people and focuses attention on the Savior and the Word that He has left in His legacy. Thank You for the gospel that delivers us from the horrors of a life lost in sin and for grace that frees us to fly above the demands and pressures of others. Bring to our attention the importance of time spent with You, and may this be the beginning of a whole new way of life. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

ENDNOTE

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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

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.



A Game Plan for Facing Extreme Circumstances

Acts 13:6–16, 45–46; 14:11–27



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.¹ For interpretation, use your Bible-study resources like [Constable's Notes](#) (netbible.org), [IVP New Testament Commentary on Acts](#) (biblegateway.com), [Bible maps](#) (insight.org/maps), and the [Holman Bible Dictionary](#) (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](#).

A Game Plan for Facing Extreme Circumstances

Acts 13:6–16, 45–46; 14:11–27

Number One: A Mature Response to a Phony Prophet <i>Acts 13:6–12</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
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>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
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

A Game Plan for Facing Extreme Circumstances

Acts 13:6–16, 45–46; 14:11–27

Number Three: A Mature Response to Unexpected Opportunities <i>Acts 13:15–16</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
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>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
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

A Game Plan for Facing Extreme Circumstances

Acts 13:6–16, 45–46; 14:11–27

Number Five: A Mature Response to Praise <i>Acts 14:11–15</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
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>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
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*

A Game Plan for Facing Extreme Circumstances

Acts 13:6–16, 45–46; 14:11–27

Number Seven: A Mature Response to a Mission Accomplished <i>Acts 14:21–28</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
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 Acts 14:22–23?

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.

A Game Plan for Facing Extreme Circumstances

Acts 13:6–16, 45–46; 14:11–27

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.

A Game Plan for Facing Extreme Circumstances

Acts 13:6–16, 45–46; 14:11–27

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?](#)"

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Insight for Living
Study 11 • Page 8

PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY TWELVE

The Day Two Missionaries Duked It Out

Acts 15:36–41

When we see Paul and Barnabas in the last few verses of Acts 15, they are in such a heated argument that it might seem they could never come to terms with it and they separated.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

DISAGREEMENTS are inevitable. Reconciliation is not.

None of us venture far into significant relationships without some sort of conflict. When that happens, our consciences tell us the right thing—extend charity, kindness, and forgiveness for the sake of unity and peace. Sounds simple, right?

Would you loan money to a friend who hasn't reimbursed you for his last loan? Would you loan your car to a friend who had wrecked it the last time she drove it? Would you loan your home to a friend who had a party and trashed it when he stayed there alone a few months ago? Suddenly, the situation changes. What if he or she causes the same problem?

Here's the issue: *Should someone who was irresponsible be given a second chance?* How we answer reveals our point of view. Do we look at the *person* or at the *principle*? Which is more important? Which is wiser? Which is more loving? The answer isn't so simple.

Paul and Barnabas were good men. They were godly men. They were missionaries—and friends. However, they were not perfect men. They had served so capably and compatibly on their first missionary journey. Yet, such smooth sailing is not guaranteed. This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study takes a look at their painful difference, disagreement, and eventual disbanding.



The Day Two Missionaries Duked It Out

Acts 15:36–41



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prepare to study God's Word today by talking with Jesus. Invite His presence during your time in His Word. Let the following prayer guide your conversation.

Our Lord, I confess that my life is too often strewn with the wreckage of conflict and broken relationships. It's so easy, so natural, so human, to see and judge others from my own perspective, while failing to seek to understand. Thank You for so lovingly stooping into our world and overcoming a chasm of relational conflict and brokenness between You and me—due to my sin. Help me deeply internalize that truth and give me the courage to humble myself, seek to understand others, and seek to be a reconciler. Thank You, Jesus, for being with me. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Their first missionary journey came to an end. Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch of Syria. “And they stayed there with the believers for a long time” (Acts 14:28).

While in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas glowingly reported on God's powerful work and inroad of grace to the gentiles (14:27). But then, Jewish Christians from Judea arrived and insisted that the gentile Christians must be circumcised to be saved (15:1). Paul and Barnabas vehemently disagreed with the men. This was a serious matter, so the church sent Paul and Barnabas as “delegates to Jerusalem” to discuss the issue with the apostles at a meeting called the Jerusalem Council—a pivotal event in church history. Read [Acts 15:1–35](#) and then read the [article](#) about this council in the free, online *Holman Bible Dictionary* at studylight.org. Record key insights you discover.

Paul and Barnabas were pillars of the church, ministering side-by-side in a solid partnership. Then Paul, who was likely prompted by the Holy Spirit, floated an idea to Barnabas. That's when cracks began to form.

The Day Two Missionaries Duked It Out

Acts 15:36–41



Observation: A Wholesome Suggestion Sparks a Blowout

Use your observation skills below to explore how Paul's wholesome suggestion sparked a relational rift.¹ In [Acts 15:36–37](#), what did Paul recommend and what was his intended mission? What was Barnabas' response?

Paul replied in [15:38](#). Compare the verse in the NLT and in the NASB. What was his rationale?

According to [15:39](#), how would you characterize the “temperature in the room”?

In [15:39–41](#), how did Paul and Barnabas resolve their dispute? Look up the destinations they traveled to by using a Bible map, like “[Paul's Missionary Journeys](#)” at [insight.org](#). What does their route tell you about their decision and the purpose for their mission?

The idea wasn't the problem. Both of them wanted to go. It's what followed the idea that created the rift. They showed themselves, warts and all.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Day Two Missionaries Duked It Out

Acts 15:36–41



Interpretation: One Issue . . . Two Viewpoints

The disagreement between Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:39 is described as “sharp.” The Greek word is *paroxysmos*, which is defined in the online *Mounce’s Greek Dictionary* at billmounce.com. What does your research inform you about the magnitude of their disagreement? Write your own paraphrase of this verse.

In every disagreement, there are the same ingredients. First: an issue. The issue is objective, and it involves principles. There is an issue at stake, it’s clearly stated, and there are principles that surround it. Second: various viewpoints. The viewpoints are subjective, and they involve personalities. In many disagreements, each side has validity. Both sides have strengths. In heated disagreements, someone usually gets hurt. And, the higher the heat, the deeper the hurt. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Let’s consider each person’s side of the argument.

Barnabas

What does [Colossians 4:10](#) tell us about the relationship between Barnabas and John Mark? How is this connection helpful for our understanding of Barnabas’ argument?

Barnabas, whose name means “son of encouragement,” was naturally inclined to come alongside in support of others. How did his personality shape his viewpoint?

The Day Two Missionaries Duked It Out

Acts 15:36–41

Scripture brings further clarity. According to [Psalm 40:1–3](#), what did David, and later Barnabas, understand about God’s character?

What does [103:11–12](#) add?

How does [Lamentations 3:22–23](#) fit within Barnabas’ perspective?

Paul

Paul—formerly a Hebrew of Hebrews, consummate Pharisee, educated under the gifted Gamaliel, now a man dramatically converted on the Damascus Road and deeply steeped in Christian theology direct from the Holy Spirit—possessed a very different viewpoint about John Mark. How might Paul pose a strong argument for his attitude toward John Mark, according to [Proverbs 25:19](#)?

[Matthew 10:38](#) and [Luke 14:27](#) echo the theme. How might the teaching of these verses fit within Paul’s perspective?

The Day Two Missionaries Duked It Out

Acts 15:36–41

Shortly after John Mark's desertion, Paul uttered in [Acts 14:22](#) what had been his attitude all along. What must others have understood about Paul? How does this verse help us make sense of Paul's response to John Mark?

Barnabas is looking at the man; Paul is looking at the principle. Barnabas is looking ahead; Paul is looking back. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Multiplication by Division

Paul and Barnabas, unable to find compromise in their dispute, went their separate ways. While Barnabas is mentioned only a few other times in the New Testament outside of Acts, it's very likely he continued to serve the Lord. Paul continued his missionary journeys with a new team and, of course, authored 13 of the 27 documents in the New Testament. Despite their difference, we read of no lingering bitterness between the two.

Not all separations lead to bad conclusions. Every time we read Mark's gospel, we taste the fruit of Barnabas' ministry in the life of the young man who became a biographer of Jesus and who eventually won Paul's respect and admiration. "Make Mark welcome," Paul told the Colossian believers. Paul considered him one of his "co-workers" in Philemon 1:24 and "helpful" in his ministry (2 Timothy 4:11).

Some of the finest churches, seminaries, or businesses have emerged better than before because of a split. In God's sovereignty and goodness, He can multiply His ministry by sending His servants in different directions. By dividing yet continuing to serve the Lord, how did these men model the spirit of [Philippians 2:3–4](#)?

How did their separation reinforce the truth of [1 Corinthians 12:14–18](#) and [Ephesians 4:16](#)?

The Day Two Missionaries Duked It Out

Acts 15:36–41

We come a long way in life when we realize that there may be another idea outside the one we thought of—and it goes even further than our own—that God may be pleased to bless. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Seeing Viewpoints and Seeking Compromise

Take a look at these four application principles that emerge from our study about conflict in ministry.

1. *When engaged in a disagreement, work hard at seeing the other point of view.* Required qualities include: listening, honesty, objectivity, and humility.
2. *When both sides have good support, seek a wise compromise.* Compromise isn't always a weakness.
3. *When the conflict persists, care enough to work it through rather than walk away.* Conflict may urge us toward either “fight” or “flight.” But slamming objects, silent treatments, and quitting on relationships are never appropriate responses.
4. *When the conflict cannot be resolved, graciously agree to disagree without becoming disagreeable.* In the absence of resolution, commit to suspending further discussion and judgment.

In the throes of their conflict, do you naturally find yourself identifying with Paul or Barnabas? Why?

Reflect on a conflict you are or have been involved in. What was the issue? What were the viewpoints? How was the conflict resolved? Or how would you like to help resolve it?

The Day Two Missionaries Duked It Out

Acts 15:36–41

What insights or life principles on conflict have you drawn from this Bible study? How can you use the four principles stated above to help you work through a conflict?

A wise person once said, “In essentials . . . unity. In non-essentials . . . liberty. In all things . . . charity.” What a way to live. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the beautiful way You mend and heal and bring about release and reconciliation. Thank You for the relief that comes through forgiveness. Broaden our shoulders and deepen our wisdom and break our wills as we humble ourselves to do what must be done. May we do it graciously and willingly, as You give the strength that's needed. It's not just about Paul and Barnabas, but it's about us. I trust You, Father, to do it deeply and permanently, that the wound might heal and that a full life might follow. I ask it through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

ENDNOTE

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Study 12 • Page 8

PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY THIRTEEN

Traveling as Paul Traveled

Selections from Acts 15–23

Paul really traveled well. I don't mean he traveled in luxury. I mean he traveled in obedience.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SUCCESSFUL traveling often includes one staple. Whether you're traveling locally on your weekly grocery trip or you're traveling globally on an exotic vacation like an African safari . . . you need a solid plan.

But what do you do when plans don't unfold as you'd like?

On your way to Africa, the flight to Nairobi is delayed for 16 hours. You miss your connection which causes you to miss your first excursion—that hot-air balloon ride over the Serengeti. But if you reschedule that, you forfeit the jeep ride. The elephant lodge with panoramic views closes just before you arrive because of a broken water line—so you're rebooked at the high-rise hotel downtown.

How do you handle such unexpected setbacks? Those inevitable changes to your plans?

The apostle Paul was an adventurer for God—well acquainted with planning and sudden changes. In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we consider how he dealt with the unexpected, difficult “setbacks” as they appeared. We'll see how his best responses came from possessing a strong awareness of his identity in Christ, a clear mission, and a deep sense of God's purpose in whatever he faced.



Traveling as Paul Traveled

Selections from Acts 15–23



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before you engage God's Word today, meditate on David's hymn, [Psalm 23](#). Paul must have prayed through this psalm hundreds of times during his missionary journeys. Reflect on why this prayer is so important when we experience the unexpected, and then ask God to bless your time in His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

At the completion of his first missionary journey, Paul returned to Antioch with Barnabas for local ministry, mixed with time for rest and recovery. Paul and Barnabas were delegates to the Jerusalem Council. God's grace had flowed through their ministry to gentiles. Should the new gentile believers become like Jews with all their rituals and procedures? The Jerusalem church said no. Gentiles were not required to adopt all Jewish customs to be saved.



Paul suggested that he and Barnabas venture out and return to the same cities to teach and strengthen the believers. But, the two divided after a sharp disagreement over John Mark's place on the missionary team. Barnabas took John Mark and sailed for Cyprus.

Paul devised a plan to preach the gospel to gentiles and plant churches. To do so, he assembled a new team and began the second missionary journey, which is where we pick up in Acts 15.

Use your observation and interpretation skills in the charts below.¹ For interpretation, use your Bible-study resources like [Constable's Notes](#) (netbible.org), [IVP New Testament Commentary on Acts](#) (biblegateway.com), [Bible maps](#) (insight.org/maps), and the [Holman Bible Dictionary](#) (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](#).

Traveling as Paul Traveled



Selections from Acts 15–23

Assembling a New Missionary Team <i>Acts 15:40–16:10</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>Peruse Acts 15:40–16:10. Who joined Paul? (Note, one is not named.)</p> <p>Their journey took them through Syria, Cilicia, Derbe, Lystra, Phrygia, Galatia, Mysia, Bithynia, Troas, and Macedonia. Locate these areas on a Bible map found at insight.org/maps and look up these destinations in your favorite Bible dictionary like the Holman Bible Dictionary at studylight.org. Record insights you'd like to remember below.</p>	<p>In Acts 15:40, what is significant about Silas' commissioning?</p> <p>According to 16:1–3, what made Timothy worthy of joining Paul's team? Further, how did Paul demonstrate cultural sensitivity given Timothy's heritage?</p> <p>Write a couple of principles that stand out to you based on your study of Paul's selections.</p>

Paul met a young disciple named Timothy. Paul wanted him to join him. There was something of a soul connection with Timothy. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Traveling as Paul Traveled



Selections from Acts 15–23

God's Blessing for Obedient Travelers <i>Acts 16:6–40</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read Acts 16:6–8. What happened to Paul and Silas' plans?	On two occasions in Acts 16:6–8, the Holy Spirit closed the doors to preaching the gospel. Why do you think He did so?
According to 16:9–15, what prompted the team to travel to Macedonia, and what unfolded in Philippi?	According to 16:9–15, what is significant about the gospel taking hold in Philippi? What impact did that have on Paul and on the New Testament church?
Look at 16:16–24. What actions of Paul stirred such anger? What consequences did he and Silas face?	From 16:16–24, how did Paul's discernment, conviction, and obedience eventually lead to his and his team's suffering?
Read 16:25–40. How did God miraculously intervene? What unfolded with the Philippian jailer and with the Philippian officials?	Acts 16:25–40 details God's reward for Paul's obedience. Summarize that reward below and explain its relevance for Christ followers today.

When you are going through turmoil, difficulty, persecution, and hardship, it does not necessarily mean you're out of His will. It could mean you're right in the nucleus of His will. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Traveling as Paul Traveled

Selections from Acts 15–23

Perseverance in Church Planting . . . Persistence through Persecution <i>Acts 17:1–16; 32–34; 18:1, 18; 19:1, 8, 10; 20:13–16</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read Acts 17:1–16. Where did Paul plant churches? Who opposed him in both locations?	What is significant about the churches planted in Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus? How did their establishment impact the New Testament, and how does it impact believers today?
Read 17:15–16, 32–34. Where did Paul travel next? Did he plant a church there? What troubled him?	
Read 18:1, 18. As Paul wrapped up his second missionary journey, where did he next establish a church?	What was unique about the Berean church? How is its example relevant for believers today?
Read 19:1, 8, 10. Immediately, Paul began his third missionary journey. Where did he plant his next church? How long did Paul stay?	As Paul established churches, who persistently opposed him? What was Paul's practice in the face of such opposition?
Read 20:13–16. In an effort to return to Jerusalem, Paul completed his third missionary journey. To locate the areas mentioned on the second and third missionary journeys, consult the <i>Bible map</i> found at insight.org/maps .	

Traveling as Paul Traveled

Selections from Acts 15–23

Think of the hostility they met with and the lack of comforts. They lived in harm's way, with dangers and perils. Nevertheless, he pressed on.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Paul's Sensitivity Sharpened His Obedience

Paul's ability to travel obediently was sharpened by his sensitivity. He possessed a deep sense of God's sovereign hand of protection as he journeyed as well as a keen sensitivity to God's opening and closing of doors as he proclaimed the gospel.

Luke 9:1–6 contains Jesus' directives to His disciples to go and preach. Read and reflect on what Jesus said. Record your observations below. Note any principles from Jesus that you found enlightening for your study on Paul's travels. See especially 9:5 on the topic of closed and open doors.

When you travel as God would have you travel like Paul, you're sensitive to doors that open and doors that close, and people who are ready and people who aren't. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Traveling Well

Reflect on these four application principles based on Paul's travels in this study.

1. *When you travel, don't go alone.* Paul always traveled with others, with a team. Whether your mate, a family member, or a friend—two are better than one. Three are better than two.
2. *When you travel, don't lose touch with home.* Paul always stayed close with family and friends, remaining accountable with reports from his journey. He was accountable and vulnerable.
3. *When you travel, don't believe everything you hear.* Paul was worshiped and adored as well as rejected and mistreated. He was neither swayed to make his own pedestal nor derailed from his mission.
4. *When you travel, don't become aloof.* In the busyness of his missionary ministry, Paul never erected a spiritual wall. He stayed available. He stayed real. He stayed accessible.

Traveling as Paul Traveled

Selections from Acts 15–23

What did you learn from this study on traveling well that will be especially helpful to you, and why?

Which of the four application principles most resonates with you in your current journey? Why?

There's no journey like the journey to the cross to change you forever. I invite you to come. And when you do, I need to warn you: you better be ready for some changes. He'll change your thinking. He'll change your motives. He'll change your whole direction. He'll solve your selfishness. He'll remove that antagonism that is a part of your life. He'll turn your ugliness into sweetness. He'll relieve you of the guilt and the shame of your sins. That's what happens when you come to the cross. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Thank You, Lord, for this model, Paul, who traveled so well and who finished so strong. Help me to see the significance of Paul's travels, the providence of including Paul in Your plan and, of all things, including me too. I dedicate these words to You and my life as well. In the lovely name of our fairest Lord Jesus, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

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PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY FOURTEEN

Preaching as Paul Preached

Acts 17:15–34

Paul spoke what he spoke because he felt as he felt. And he felt as he felt because he saw what he saw. Good preachers see what the majority don't see.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

CHURCHES must be places where pastors preach God's Word, the lost hear God's call, and God's people are comforted by God's grace and challenged to follow God's Son, our Savior.

Sadly, some pastors preach to entertain rather than to declare the message of Christ. They serve enticing munchies to make people feel good instead of a nutritious banquet that feeds their souls. What's the cost of giving people a diet of spiritual junk food? Underdeveloped church members whose faith is too weak to endure persecution, whose convictions are too flimsy to stand against false teaching, and whose lives are too worldly to shine Christ's light.

Pastors who faithfully proclaim God's Word tell people what they *need* to hear, not always what they *want* to hear. They refuse to hand out trifles to people or what Paul termed “catchy opinions that tickle their fancy” (2 Timothy 4:3 MSG). When Paul arrived in Athens, he encountered a city teeming with philosophical experts dishing up the latest ideas—even religious ideas. “Catchy opinions” were the only items on the menu, until Paul spread before them a feast from God's Word.

This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study traces Paul's steps, observations, and words as he entered the intellectually stimulating, culturally sophisticated, lavish—but spiritually dark—city of ancient Athens. There, he faithfully, creatively, and eloquently taught the Word of God. Unsurprisingly, some turned up their noses to it. Some wanted to hear more. But only a few opened their hearts to the risen Christ, and their lives were changed forever.



Preaching as Paul Preached

Acts 17:15–34



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare to study God’s Word, orient your heart toward praise with a portion of Edward Perronet’s hymn, “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name.”

All hail the pow’r of Jesus’ name!
Let angels prostrate fall;
Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown Him Lord of all. . . .

Let every kindred, every tribe
On this terrestrial ball,
To Him all majesty ascribe,
And crown him Lord of all. . . .

O that with yonder sacred throng
We at His feet may fall!
We’ll join the everlasting song,
And crown Him Lord of all!¹



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

On their second missionary journey, Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke traveled city to city proclaiming the good news of the crucified and risen Christ. After establishing churches in Thessalonica and Berea, Paul went on to Athens alone and waited for his teammates to rejoin him (Acts 17:15–16). To review the location of these cities, consult the Bible map, “[Paul’s Missionary Journeys](#)” at [insight.org](#).

Athens had been the home of the great ancient philosophers—Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. The opulence and beauty plus the cultural, architectural, and sculptural sophistication of Athens was unmatched. But no amount of intellectual achievement could satisfy the Athenians’ searching hearts. So, to fill their emptiness, the people gorged themselves on idolatry.

Athens had become a junkyard of idols—tens of thousands of stone, wood, and metal idols cut into public buildings, stationed along streets, and memorialized in shrines and temples. These idols outnumbered the city’s human population!

Preaching as Paul Preached

Acts 17:15–34

Can you fathom how Paul, formerly a devoutly monotheistic Jew, and now a zealous Trinitarian Christian, must have felt? Luke records that Paul was “deeply troubled by all the idols” (Acts 17:16). How do other Bible translations describe Paul’s reaction, according to [Acts 17:16](#)? What do you think was at the heart of Paul’s angst?



Observation: Paul’s Message to the Athenians

Determined to shine a beacon of truth into this dark city, Paul first went where he knew he could gain a hearing. Use your observation skills to join him.²

Paul in the Synagogue—Acts 17:17

Where did Paul initially go to proclaim the name of Jesus, according to the first part of [Acts 17:17](#)? Why did he start here?

He tried to “reason” with the Jews and God-fearing gentiles. The Greek word is *dialegomai*. Look up this word online in *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* at studylight.org. How would you describe his engagement with this audience?

His heart breaking for the lost outside the synagogue walls, Paul took his message to “the public square,” speaking daily to “all who happened to be there” (17:17).

Preaching as Paul Preached

Acts 17:15–34

Paul at the Marketplace—Acts 17:17–18

According to [Acts 17:17–18](#), where and with whom did Paul proclaim Jesus and the Scriptures?

In the marketplace, Paul debated the [Epicureans](#) and the [Stoics](#). Read about these groups of philosophers in *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* at studylight.org. In a few words, what did followers of these worldviews believe?

Some of them scoffed at Paul, calling him a “babbler” (Acts 17:18), which, in Greek, literally means “seed-picker”—a derogatory term for people who scavenged here and there for ideas. Paul piqued their curiosity, however. What did they say and where did they invite him to speak, according to [17:19–21](#)?

Paul's Message on Mars Hill

The Areopagus, also known as Mars Hill, was where the “high council of the city” (Acts 17:19) met to deal with “ethical, cultural, and religious matters, including supervision of education and controlling the many visiting lecturers” (17:19 NET, footnote b.).

Rushed to the site, Paul preached without notes a powerful sermon. In [Acts 17:22–23](#), how did Paul connect with and affirm his audience?

Preaching as Paul Preached

Acts 17:15–34

In [Acts 17:24–26](#), Paul introduced the Athenians to the one true God. What key points did Paul make about God’s nature, authority, and works?

The God whom Paul described was unknown to the Athenians—but He is not unknowable. In [17:27–29](#), what did Paul say about how we relate to God?

In [17:30–31](#), Paul applied his message to each individual. What did he invite his listeners to do to have a personal relationship with God? What vital point did Paul make about Christ—a point that all the apostles made in almost every message that Luke recorded in Acts (see 4:10; 10:40; 13:30; 23:5; 24:21)?

The High Council’s Response

As Paul finished speaking, his listeners were deeply divided. According to [Acts 17:32–34](#), into what three groups did they fall?

The same thing happens today. Every good sermon is followed either by sneering and rejection or by those who say, “This is fascinating. I’d like to hear what this is about.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Preaching as Paul Preached

Acts 17:15–34



Interpretation: Paul's Preaching Tools

Paul preached the sermon of a lifetime before the council on Mars Hill. He employed several tools from his intellectual and spiritual toolbelt to make his sermon impactful.

First, *he started where they were*. They all knew about the altar to the “Unknown God” (Acts 17:22). Second, *he used the familiar to introduce the unfamiliar*—the God they worship without knowing is, in fact, “the God who made the world and everything in it” (17:24). Then, Paul laid out his main points about God. Briefly outline Paul's argument in [17:24–29](#).

Finally, *Paul invited his listeners to respond to the truth*. What made his application points in [17:30–31](#) so effective for this audience? Why was it vital for them to see God not only as creator but also as judge? How did seeing God as judge lead them to Jesus?



Correlation: Preach the Word . . . Avoid Itching Ears

Paul's sermon on Mars Hill reflected what he wrote in his letters to the churches and their leaders. Paul lasered in on a singular mission: proclaiming the crucified, resurrected, and glorified Christ.

What was Paul's charge to Timothy in [2 Timothy 4:1–2](#)? What motivated his charge?

What did Paul warn Timothy about in [4:3–4](#)?

Preaching as Paul Preached

Acts 17:15–34

Paul addressed the same theme in his first letter to Timothy and to the church at Colossae. Read [1 Timothy 4:13, 15–16](#) and [Colossians 1:28–29](#). What did Paul highlight as the essential facets of proclaiming the Word? What did Paul desire to see in every believer's life?

Paul never spoke to entertain—he preached Christ. He never served spiritual junk food—he always served spiritually nutritious meals.

In the twenty-first century, sermonettes are being delivered. Sermonettes create Christianettes. They lead to spiritual starvation. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Proclaiming the Word like Paul

Paul was a preaching master! From his example, we can pick up valuable speaking tips for when we share the truths of Scripture.

1. *Always start where your audience is.* When proclaiming the gospel, you become the bridge—taking others from the familiar to the unfamiliar—from where they are to where they need to be.
2. *Always speak the truth without fear.* We need not be impressed nor intimidated by others. Regardless of one's status, financial worth, or level of interest, your task is to fearlessly speak the truth.
3. *Always stay on the subject, and the subject is the triune God—the Father, Son, and Spirit.* Christ is the theme of Scripture—His nature, His plan, His judgment, His resurrection, and His redemption.
4. *Always surrender the results to God.* Once you've communicated the truth, your responsibility has finished. You may continue to pray and maintain interest, but God will handle the rest.

What facets of Paul's sermon on Mars Hill grip you most? Why? How does that motivate you or shape how you proclaim and share the gospel?

Preaching as Paul Preached

Acts 17:15–34

Epicureans are today's live-for-today hedonists who don't believe in God or the afterlife. Stoics are today's moralists who talk about fate—the “universe”—but don't believe in a personal God or His Son, Jesus. Is there a worldview or philosophy others practice that you'd like to better understand to help prepare you to more effectively proclaim the gospel?

If Paul were speaking to people who follow today's philosophies, what would he say? How can you use these same truths in your conversations?

A man must be willing to face the risk of ridicule, the risk of losing wealth, name, and even life, if necessary, in order to be a worthy spokesman for the Lord Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Today, Lord, though the sermon ends, the message continues, and it will follow us. We come before You with gratitude in our hearts, with thankfulness for the way You have worked, even in this simple message about a man on whose life Your hand rested firmly. I pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who loves us and gave Himself for us. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Edward Perronet, “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name,” in *The Celebration Hymnal: Songs and Hymns for Worship* (n.p.: Word/Integrity, 1997), hymn 43.
2. 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?](#)”

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Insight for Living
Study 14 • Page 8

PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY FIFTEEN

Leading as Paul Led

1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

I am more impressed with Paul than I am with any leader I have ever studied. Woven through the texture of Paul's life—like gold and silver threads in a priceless garment—are qualities of leadership that deserve our special time and attention.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

ON September 11, 2001, nineteen Al-Qaeda militants hijacked four commercial airplanes in a coordinated attack against the United States. The terrorists flew the airplanes like missiles into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center complex, collapsing the two massive 110-story buildings into heaps of twisted metal and smoking rubble. They crashed the third plane into the Pentagon and were targeting the US Capitol building with the fourth plane when the passengers bravely fought back. Flight 93 crashed into an empty field in Pennsylvania, killing everyone onboard, but saving the Capitol and all those inside. The final death toll from the attacks was 2,977, the deadliest terrorist assault on American soil in US history.¹

The violence poured out that day demanded a vigorous response. In his book, *Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll describes the need for strong leadership.

The need of the hour was a series of clear and reassuring words about responsibility, vision, and courage. It was no time to sit and stare, immobilized by confusion and fear. Those savage acts of aggression called for words and actions that would bring confidence and reassurance to a country caught off guard. . . . Political rhetoric, screams of rage, and panicked responses would have left the nation seriously crippled. Heavy weights of hope and resolve hung on the thin wires of courageous leadership.²

The newly elected president George W. Bush rose to the occasion, demonstrating compassion to the grieving, resolve for the fearful, decisiveness in his response, and hope for the nation.



Leading as Paul Led

1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

We naturally look to those with a title, authority, and skill to lead. Before his conversion, Saul of Tarsus earned a title, but he relentlessly wielded his authority like a battering ram against Christians, hoping to collapse the movement at its inception. After his conversion, however, Saul gladly relinquished his title and misguided authority, content to receive grace and boast in his weakness. Saul no longer needed a title to lead but, through a transformed nature, became a loving and impactful servant-leader.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we carefully consider Paul's leadership traits—not theoretical qualities derived from a manual but time-tested qualities, refined through the fire of eternally minded, sacrificial service to others.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you engage God's Word today, remember that "God is our refuge and strength," and, although the "nations are in chaos," we need not fear because "the LORD of Heaven's Armies is here among us" (Psalm 46:1, 6, 7). Express through prayer your hope in God's supremacy.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

While on his second missionary journey, Paul proclaimed the gospel in Philippi but was badly treated by the authorities. Convicted on trumped-up charges, he was severely beaten and imprisoned, even though he was a Roman citizen.

Battered and bruised, Paul then traveled to Thessalonica and planted a church. Later, while in Corinth, he wrote his first letter to that church, 1 Thessalonians. For a refresher on the location of these cities, consult the Bible map, "[Paul's Missionary Journeys](#)," at [insight.org](#).

Like a family photo album, 1 Thessalonians holds treasured memories of Paul and the Thessalonian believers. Seven times, Paul reminds his readers how well they knew each other: "you know" (1 Thessalonians 1:5); "you yourselves know" (2:1); "as you know" (2:2); "as you well know" (2:5); "don't you remember" (2:9); "you yourselves are our witnesses" (2:10); "as you know" (2:11).

Leading as Paul Led

1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

Even this first look at the letter reveals a key to Paul's leadership style. What do you see in Paul's relationship with his readers?

Let's pick up our study in 1 Thessalonians 2 and find more qualities of godly leadership.



Observation: Paul . . . The Qualities of a Leader

Through careful reading and observation, identify in the following verses four negative traits of leadership to *avoid* and four positive traits to *adopt*.³

Four Negatives to Avoid—1 Thessalonians 2:1–6

After recalling the hardship he endured in Philippi, Paul reassured his readers of his intentions. What did Paul not do in his leadership, according to [1 Thessalonians 2:1–3](#)? How does this undermine leadership?

Based on [2:4](#), what was Paul's purpose as a leader, and what was *not*? Why is this quality so vital yet so difficult for many leaders?

What negative characteristic did Paul adamantly reject in [2:5](#)? What makes this vice so dangerous in leaders?

Leading as Paul Led

1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

What did Paul not seek, according to [1 Thessalonians 2:6](#)? How does avoiding this negative characteristic build trust?

The Thessalonians knew Paul. He was no distant celebrity. He was no penthouse-dwelling prima donna who lived away from them and above them. He walked with them and worked alongside them. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Four Positives to Adopt—1 Thessalonians 2:7–11

As a servant-leader, Paul modeled four positive traits of effective leadership. What essential quality did Paul model in his leadership in [1 Thessalonians 2:7](#)? How does this quality build trust among followers?

Instead of maintaining “professional distance” from the Thessalonians, what did Paul do instead, according to [2:8](#)? Why is this essential for leaders who represent Christ?

What word or two sums up the character qualities Paul lists in [2:9–10](#)?

Leading as Paul Led

1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

Finally, no leader can be effective without this quality in [1 Thessalonians 2:11 NASB](#)? What is it?

Every one of us engaged in a profession has an enormous opportunity to take advantage of and to seek glory from others. Good leaders are not self-serving. Good leadership has a balance between the tenderness of a nursing mother and the affirmation of a caring father. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Paul . . . Apostle of Christ

Paul was no longer a Pharisee but an “apostle of Christ,” a title he said God gave him. “God has appointed me as the apostle to the Gentiles,” Paul wrote (Romans 11:13). Let’s look closer at what it meant to be an apostle.

The term refers to one who is sent as a messenger, but in the New Testament, it refers to those appointed by Christ for a special function in the church. In [Acts 1:21–22](#), what was an important criteria for being an apostle?

Skim the online article, “[Apostle](#),” in *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Then read the section of this article, “Apostolic Authority,” and write down the responsibilities of the apostles. What authority were they given?

Paul witnessed the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus, where He called Paul as an apostle. Paul used his authority to teach, to perform “signs and wonders and miracles” (2 Corinthians 12:12), and to pen the inspired Word of God. And yet, Paul never abused his authority ([1 Thessalonians 2:7](#)).

Leading as Paul Led

1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

Apostles no longer exist, but their qualities of leadership live on. What quality did Paul model for all those in Christian leadership? How can leaders know when to use their authority and when to restrain?

One of the most obvious marks of genuine humility is the restraint of those who have great authority. It's not what they display; it's what they hold back that reveals true leadership. They don't throw their weight around. They don't try to impress other people. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Paul . . . From People-Pleaser to God-Pleaser

Paul's ability to consistently proclaim the gospel and lead in a God-honoring way, even in the face of continual adversity, was hewn from his unwavering gaze and singular concern: to live for an audience of One.

Before his conversion to Christ, Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee, was consumed with people-pleasing. Read [Galatians 1:10](#) in the NASB. What one word in this verse points to his admission of that truth?

In [Ephesians 6:5–7](#), Paul taught that believers are to obey our earthly masters. As we serve others and serve those in authority, what was his point in 6:6–7? Who are we to please?

Leading as Paul Led

1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

In [2 Corinthians 5:9–11](#), Paul addressed his motivation for pleasing his Lord. What drove him to live a Christ-pleasing life?

You cannot be a faithful bond servant of Christ and spend your life making people happy, telling them what they want to hear. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Emulating Paul's Leadership Qualities

Among all of Paul's leadership qualities, enthusiastic encourager stands out. Paul's encouragement inspired others to follow him. He was riveted on the eternal rather than the temporal, and his desire was that his followers focus on the same.

[First Thessalonians 2:12](#) captures Paul's leadership goal. His desire? That his followers walk in a manner worthy of God! The reward? God's calling them into His kingdom and glory!

Let's take a personal inventory.

Which of Paul's leadership qualities do you most admire? Why? How does that strengthen your daily walk with Christ?

Reflect on the characteristics to avoid. In your life, do you find any deception? People-pleasing? Greed? Self-serving? If so, which? Take a moment to jot a brief prayer of confession to the Lord.

Leading as Paul Led

1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

Reflect on the list of characteristics to adopt. In your life, can you identify sensitivity to others' needs? Affection toward people? Authenticity of life? Enthusiastic affirmation of others? Where do you find the Lord blessing you and using you in these areas of leadership? Take a moment to write a brief prayer of thanksgiving to Jesus.

Why concern ourselves with these qualities as leaders? We lead like this so others will live like that—walking worthy of the God who calls them!
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Thank You, dear Father, for never giving up on us, for working with us, and amazingly, by Your grace, working through us. Thank You for speaking in such a way that each one of us knows what the next step needs to be. Be with us as we take it, and let us never return to the way we were. Thank You for Christ, who not only comes to transform us but enables us and energizes us. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. 9/11 Memorial and Museum, "9/11 FAQs," 911memorial.org/911-faqs; Peter L. Bergen, "September 11 Attacks," Britannica.com, britannica.com/event/September-11-attacks.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 215, 216.
3. 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?](#)"

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PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY SIXTEEN

Responding as Paul Responded

Selections from 2 Corinthians

This was the apostle Paul, crippled from the blows, broken in body but never in spirit. It is not about himself—it is about his Savior. It isn't about the actions that were done against him—it's his response to those hardships that make him so great and cause us to admire him so much.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WE know her fondly as Joni.

For decades, Joni Eareckson Tada has touched millions of Christians worldwide through her winsome personality and gripping life story. She inspires, encourages, and motivates by way of radio, television, film, and books. It was anything but easy attaining such an influential platform.

An active, athletic, and outdoorsy young woman, Joni found herself a quadriplegic at age 17 after a diving accident into the Chesapeake Bay. In the prime of her youth! During her rehabilitation she endured deep depression and suicidal thoughts. Through the prayer and support of her Christian community, she rediscovered hope, joy, and purpose.

Joni's more recent journey hasn't been a bed of roses. She's a two-time breast cancer survivor and bears chronic pain. But she manages to sing and record music despite diminished lung capacity, and she can paint with a brush held between her teeth!

Pastor Chuck Swindoll notes, "I've said for years that life is 10 percent what happens to us and 90 percent how we respond to it." Joni's story inspires others not *because* of her life situation—that's the 10 percent. But how she has *responded* to her situation—that's the 90 percent.

Much like Joni, our modern-day heroine, the apostle Paul affords us a similarly inspiring, biblical portrait. In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we candidly consider Paul's pain, suffering, and hardship. When he was knocked down, he got back up. What were the secrets of his ability to respond so well?



Responding as Paul Responded

Selections from 2 Corinthians



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare to engage God's Word today, meditate on these words from the poem, "Blessed by Bitter Things," by Florence White Willett.

I thank You for the bitter things
They've been a friend to grace,
They've driven me from the paths of ease
To storm the secret place.

I thank You for the friends who've failed
To meet my soul's deep need;
They've driven me to the Savior's feet
Upon His love to feed.

I'm grateful too, through all life's way
No one could satisfy,
And so I've found in God alone
My rich, my full supply!¹



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

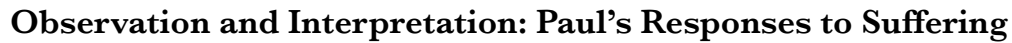
Before Paul had written his second letter to the Corinthians, this seasoned apostle and missionary endured tremendous physical, emotional, and spiritual trials in advancing the gospel of Christ. Just as Joni can speak with authority on hardship because she has endured so much hardship as a quadriplegic and cancer survivor, so, too, could Paul speak with authority given his suffering.



At the close of his letter to the Galatian churches, Paul defended himself by calling attention to his wounds. "See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!" Paul scratched on parchment (Galatians 6:11 NASB). Whether the reason for writing large letters was because of his poor eyesight or his aching hand or some other ailment, Paul's disabilities demonstrated his authority.

"I bear on my body the scars that show I belong to Jesus," he wrote (6:17). The Greek word for "scars" is *stigma*. Paul pointed to his "scars" as a brand that proved Jesus was his master. For more insight into the Greek term "stigma/stigmata," read about it in [Strong's Greek Lexicon](#) at [studybible.info](#) or in [Constable's Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#).

Let's turn to 2 Corinthians to see three ways that Paul responded to hardship and suffering.

Selections from 2 Corinthians



In Affliction Paul Trusted God Alone <i>2 Corinthians 1:8–10</i>	
Paul allowed the affliction he encountered to teach him to trust only in God.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read 2 Corinthians 1:8–10. To what extent were Paul and his traveling companions troubled? What did Paul think might happen?	What do you note about the tenses Paul used when addressing God’s rescue? Why is that significant?
What did Paul’s dire circumstance prompt him to do?	

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Responding as Paul Responded

Selections from 2 Corinthians

In Affliction Paul Focused on Things Unseen

2 Corinthians 4:7–9, 16–18

Paul allowed the affliction he encountered to remind him to focus on the things unseen.



Observation

In 2 Corinthians 4:7–9, what do you observe about Paul’s perspective within the four contrasting couplets?

In 4:16–18, what contrasts do you see?



Interpretation

In 2 Corinthians 4:7, what is the “treasure in earthen containers” (NASB)?

In 4:16, what does it mean that “our spirits are being renewed every day”?



In 4:17, how do troubles “produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them”?

In 4:18, what are the “things that cannot be seen”?

Nothing of what touched Paul externally would cool him internally. In fact, it fueled him internally. The longer the persecution continued, the hotter his fire for God. He focused on the One who works His eternal purposes in the unseen realm. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Responding as Paul Responded

Selections from 2 Corinthians

In Affliction Paul Acknowledged His Weakness <i>2 Corinthians 11:23–28; 12:7–10</i> Paul allowed the affliction he encountered to remind him to acknowledge his weakness, inadequacy, and dependence on God.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>In 2 Corinthians 11:23–28, how many types of trials and pressures did Paul list? What stands out to you?</p> <p>In 12:7–10, why was Paul given a thorn in the flesh? What do you notice about Paul's attitude?</p>	<p>In 2 Corinthians 11:23–28, what was Paul's purpose in extensively listing his trials? What did he want his Corinthian readers to understand?</p> <p>11:23–27; 11:28; and 12:7 cite different types of affliction, pointing to Paul's weakness and dependence on God. How would you describe those different categories?</p> <p>In 12:9–10, why was Paul able to boast in his weakness? While it may sound counterintuitive to delight in his weakness, how did that free him?</p>

Your humiliations, your struggles, your battles, your weaknesses, your helplessness, and your disqualifying infirmities MAKE you effective, they don't keep you from being effective. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Responding as Paul Responded

Selections from 2 Corinthians



Correlation: God Alone Is the Answer

Paul fleshed out the major biblical principle that—no matter the circumstance, the trial, the hardship, the affliction—God alone is the answer. He doesn't simply provide an answer, HE is the answer and makes all necessary provision for His children.

Read [1 Samuel 30:1–6](#). Given the magnitude of the tragedy faced by David and his men, where did David alone find strength?

In [Proverbs 18:10](#), how did Solomon's insight mirror David's?

According to [2 Corinthians 1:4–6](#), what is one practical purpose for individual suffering? As suffering increases, what also increases?

Have you ever been there? Nothing around you gives you strength. Not even on your closest friends can you rely, quite possibly. Your situation is bleak. Your future is uncertain. It may be threatened. You find yourself at a loss. And the only direction you can look is up. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: How Will You Respond?

How about you? Are you excessively afflicted, burdened, or pressured? Perhaps even despairing of life itself? God intimately knows your circumstance. Look up. **Trust God alone** to minister to you. Are you feeling confused, misunderstood, beaten down—crushed? Making plans to get even? Perhaps your focus is there. Instead, **focus on the unseen** and the everlasting—the “eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17 NASB). Are you facing an impossible situation? Feeling ill-equipped to handle it? **Acknowledge your weakness** and lean on God's strength—“for when I am weak, then I am strong” (12:10).

Responding as Paul Responded

Selections from 2 Corinthians

Reflect on Paul's responses: trusting God alone, focusing on the eternal, acknowledging weakness and dependency. Which response most encourages you? How can you incorporate that response to grow your daily walk with Christ?

Where do you most struggle in your response to God when you encounter affliction? Jot a brief note of confession and petition to Him, asking Him to supply exactly what you need in your current circumstance.

It is our response to life's situations that makes for greatness, not the situations themselves. It is not action but reaction that leads us to greatness.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Thank You, Father, for this man of greatness, who was just a man, but he had learned in his more than 60 years on this earth how to respond to life's contingencies. All this trouble of life is the perfect opportunity to trust You and You alone. It's the perfect opportunity to focus on what's unseen rather than what's seen. It's the perfect opportunity to admit my own inadequacies and weaknesses. And in each case, You're the answer. Bring me to You, Father. I ask in the name of the Lord Himself. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Florence White Willett, "I Thank God for the Bitter Things," as quoted in Charles R. Swindoll, *Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit* (Nashville: Word, 2002), 242.
2. 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?](#)"

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PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY SEVENTEEN

Thinking as Paul Thought

Selections from Acts 21–23

The apostle Paul is able to gather up what he truly believes, and, before audiences who were either hostile or ignorant, to set forth the truth in plain, straight thinking.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

JULY 16, 1999, proved a fateful day for the tragedy-stricken Kennedy family.

Decades after the assassinations of his father, John F. Kennedy, and his uncle Robert F. Kennedy, pilot John F. Kennedy Jr., along with his wife and sister-in-law, died in a Piper Saratoga plane crash off the coast of Martha's Vineyard. The official investigation determined that the probable cause of the crash was pilot error, specifically spatial disorientation.

The reduced visibility of a hazy night sky, with Kennedy likely depending upon his sight for orientation and direction, proved deadly. Had Kennedy been qualified to fly his Piper by “instrumentation only,” he would have flown by the failsafe authority of a navigational system and would have safely landed in Martha's Vineyard.

In the spiritual realm, we need the objective “navigational authority” of God's Word to find our way through the haze of cultural opinions and false religions. We can't always depend on our subjective experience to keep us on the right course.

The apostle Paul was a straight thinker. He relied on and reasoned solely from the Scriptures. That method served him well when his enemies attacked him and the gospel. In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we consider Paul's able thinking as he defended himself and proclaimed Christ in the face of sham charges and kangaroo courts.



Thinking as Paul Thought

Selections from Acts 21–23



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Paul mastered and modeled straight thinking—the ability to thoroughly reason from the Scriptures. As you prepare to engage God’s Word today, ask the Lord to help you think “about things that are excellent and worthy of praise” (Philippians 4:8) by “renewing your mind” (Romans 12:2 NASB). Here’s space to write your prayer.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

We join Paul after his tearful goodbye to the elders of the church at Ephesus and “hurrying to get to Jerusalem . . . in time for the Festival of Pentecost” (Acts 20:16). He and his team had completed their third missionary journey, founding churches throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia. To refresh your learning, revisit these areas in your Bible map or the online map, “*Paul’s Missionary Journeys*” at insight.org.

Upon returning to Jerusalem, Luke, who traveled with Paul, recorded that Paul was warmly welcomed by James, the elders, and the Jerusalem church. They praised God when they heard about gentiles coming to Christ through Paul’s ministry. “Many thousands of Jews have also believed,” they told Paul (21:20). But they warned Paul about malicious rumors that he was teaching all Jews to forsake the law of Moses. What instructions did the Jerusalem elders give Paul to counter the false accusations, according to [Acts 21:23–24](#)?

Paul’s peaceful visit to the temple turned tumultuous, however, and would end with Paul in chains once again. Let’s see what happened.



Observation and Interpretation: Paul . . . A Ready Apologist

Use your observation and interpretation skills in the charts below.¹ For interpretation, use your Bible-study resources like *Constable’s Notes* (netbible.org), *IVP New Testament Commentary on Acts* (biblegateway.com), *Bible maps* (insight.org/maps) and the *Holman Bible Dictionary* (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.

Thinking as Paul Thought

Selections from Acts 21–23

A Temple Beating, Arrest, and Mistaken Identity

Acts 21:27–40

In the temple, Paul encountered danger, beating, arrest, and a case of mistaken identity.



Observation

Read Acts 21:27–32. What do you observe about the mob mentality and its actions?

Read 21:33–38. Record your observations about the commander's investigative procedure. What assumptions did he make?

Read 21:39–40. Given what Paul just experienced, what do you note about his composure?



Interpretation

In Acts 21:27–32, with a lack of clear thinking and speculation rampant, what could have happened had someone not intervened? Of what would they have been guilty?

In 21:36, the crowd shouting for Paul's death is reminiscent of what incident from the gospels? What parallel can you draw?

In 21:39–40, how did Paul demonstrate clarity, courage, and compassion?

These are not just people who disagree with him intellectually or on a few points of theology. These are people who have murder on their mind.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Thinking as Paul Thought

Selections from Acts 21–23

Paul's Defense Before the Temple Mob . . . And a Roman Reminder

Acts 22:1–29

Paul presented a courageous defense and reminded his captors of an important truth.



Observation

In Acts 22:1–20, what was Paul's approach for connecting with his Jewish audience and presenting Jesus as Savior?

Read 22:24–29. What assumption did the Roman commander make about Paul's innocence or guilt?

What did Paul remind the commander?



Interpretation

In Acts 22:21–23, as the Jewish crowd listened intently to Paul, what provoked them to rage? Why was that provocation inflammatory?

In 22:24–29, through both his timing and his words, how did Paul demonstrate clear thinking?

This man is now messing around with gentiles. We don't talk to gentiles. We don't relate to gentiles. We don't live among gentiles. And now he's trying to reach the gentiles. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Thinking as Paul Thought



Selections from Acts 21–23

Paul's Defense Before the Sanhedrin <i>Acts 22:30–23:10</i> Paul presented a clever defense before rival groups of the Sanhedrin.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>In Acts 23:1–5, what was Paul's approach and retort before the Sanhedrin, and how did it backfire?</p> <p>In 23:6–10, Paul cleverly changed his approach. Describe his tactic. What ensued?</p>	<p>How did Paul's apology in Acts 23:5 demonstrate quick thinking and theological insight?</p> <p>With wit, in 23:6–10, Paul turned the trial into a theological debate between two rival groups, the <i>Sadducees</i> and the <i>Pharisees</i>. Read about the differences between these groups in the free, online <i>Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology</i> at studylight.org.</p> <p>In a few sentences, what did each sect believe?</p> <p>How did Paul's move force an end to his trial?</p>

Paul just let them battle it out. The Roman commander, who wasn't allowed to come inside, was waiting outside and heard the uproar. He went to get Paul, and he brought him out. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Thinking as Paul Thought

Selections from Acts 21–23

The Plot to Kill Paul . . . And an Unlikely Hero <i>Acts 23:11–18, 22–24, 31–33</i> A Jewish mob plotted to kill Paul, but God intervened and delivered him safely to Caesarea.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read Acts 23:11–18. Record your observations about the murder plot and how it was foiled.	How does the promise in 23:11 convey the central theme of Acts and God’s sovereignty?
Read 23:22–24, 31–33. What did the commander do?	Where else in this passage do you find God’s sovereign hand of protection and deliverance, and how does that fulfill the promise of 23:11?

The Lord is in charge of this man’s life. You wouldn’t know it if you just looked around for the evidence. But Paul knows it. He knows he has the Lord’s word to count on. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Always Be Ready

In [1 Peter 3:15](#), the apostle Peter succinctly penned what Paul aptly displayed. Read this verse in both the NLT and the NASB.

Thinking as Paul Thought

Selections from Acts 21–23

Peter used the Greek word *apologia*, meaning “to have or to make a defense.” This is quite different from the common English language usage of the word *apology*, meaning “to admit or to confess a wrong.” Try writing your own paraphrase of 1 Peter 3:15, noting what it means to defend “the hope that is in you” (NASB).

Paul’s hope was rooted in the resurrection of Christ—which guarantees our resurrection. Paul consistently talked about the resurrection when he defended his faith ([Acts 23:6](#); [24:15](#); [26:8, 23](#)). How is your hope tied to Christ’s resurrection? What would you say to someone who asks about your hope as a believer?

When it looks like the bottom has dropped out and there is no way we’re going to make it, the Lord intervenes, and we realize we’re exactly where He wants us.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Thinking and Trusting like Paul

Paul ably prepared himself with gospel truth—then entrusted himself fully to the Lord. God promised Paul He would use him in Rome, so He put a shield around Paul to get him there. In the end, God always wins. Because we’re in His family, no matter how dire our situation, we win too. Clear thinking anticipates that He will deliver us.

Reflect on Paul’s responses from our study: his outreach to the Jewish mob, his defense before the Roman commander, and his defense before the Sanhedrin. Which response most encourages you? Why? What did you learn that you can apply in trials or difficult situations?

Thinking as Paul Thought

Selections from Acts 21–23

How prepared are you to apply the words of 1 Peter 3:15 NASB, “to make a defense” of the faith? What are your strengths? What needs shoring up?

You are never out of God’s hand as God’s child. You feel alone. You are mistreated. You are misunderstood. Your life is disrupted. The Lord is in our midst. He has a plan. He is working it out. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I need the kind of straight-thinking confidence and faith that rests in the promises of Your Word. I pray that I will return to them often and confidently and rely on You to get me through the tough times. Deepen my confidence in You, dear Lord, and my trust, even when I cannot see where You are leading me. I pray in Jesus’ name. 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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Study 17 • Page 8

PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY EIGHTEEN

Dealing with Critics as Paul Did

Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12

You know what the problem is for the Jewish officials? It's old wounds. It's the bleeding of bitterness coming out from the past. Paul used to be one of these men, and now he is a turncoat in their eyes, following this Jesus and "Telling us He has been raised from the dead." So Paul goes on defense.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

CRITICS are a lot like yellowjackets.

Yellowjackets—those annoying, sometimes dangerous pests that sting, inflict great pain, and then fly off. Worse yet, when a yellowjacket stings, it releases an alarm pheromone that stirs nearby yellowjackets to follow suit and relentlessly sting their unsuspecting and throbbing victim. They swarm and are nearly impossible to get rid of. Something like a mob mentality.

Critics can inflict great pain as well. They tend to be the wrong people, who show up at the wrong time, with the wrong information, who unload in the wrong tone. A casual friend may offer “constructive criticism” after we’ve made an innocent mistake, but it doesn’t help. It just stings.

Sometimes, criticisms are levied anonymously, cowardly, from those hiding behind a keyboard. In a world of critics, our challenge—in life and in ministry—is to build up a tough hide that can shield against their stingers while keeping a tender heart that still exudes the love of Christ.

The apostle Paul was no stranger to criticism. Everywhere he traveled proclaiming and teaching the gospel, he ran into hives of yellowjackets, enemies who accused and criticized him relentlessly.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we consider a long line of constant critics who hounded and hated Paul, seeking any way possible to defame and destroy him. We’ll zero in on how Paul calmly defused his critics, defended his innocence, and declared the Messiah.



Dealing with Critics as Paul Did

Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Amid lies and hateful criticism, Paul stood firmly on the promises of God. Meditate on [Psalm 119:49–56](#) in *The Message*, and as you open the Word, write your own prayer of trust in God's promises.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

At the close of his third missionary journey, Paul returned to Jerusalem. He had been mistreated, maligned, and misrepresented throughout his travels. Paul praised God for his successes, “for a wide door for effective service has opened to me,” while admitting the struggles, “there are many adversaries” (1 Corinthians 16:9 NASB).

His persecution wouldn't cease. Adversaries from Asia trailed him all the way to Jerusalem. According to Acts 21–23, they stirred up crowds and stirred up trouble. Paul was beaten, falsely accused, and arrested. In five venues, he would defend himself and the gospel he proclaimed. His first defense was before the temple mob, and the second was before the Jewish Sanhedrin. Take a moment to review these defenses in [Acts 22:1–21; 23:1–10](#), which we examined in the previous study.

Then, the Jews conspired to kill him. But, the Lord told Paul that he would “preach the Good News in Rome” (Acts 23:11)—placing His sovereign hand of protection on Paul's life for future ministry. Hurried to safety in Caesarea, Paul would stand trial three more times, facing sham charges in a series of kangaroo courts. We'll cover two of these trials in this study—one before governor Felix and, two years later, the other before governor Festus.





Observation and Interpretation: Paul . . . Handling Criticism Well



Let's join Paul as he makes his defense in each situation and models *seven right responses* to criticism that we can use when critics lob accusations at us. Use your observation and interpretation skills in the charts below.¹ For interpretation, use your Bible-study resources like [Constable's Notes](#) (netbible.org), the [IVP New Testament Commentary on Acts](#) (biblegateway.com), [Bible maps](#) (insight.org/maps) and the [Holman Bible Dictionary](#) (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](#).

Dealing with Critics as Paul Did

Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12

Number One: Paul Refused to Be Caught up in the Emotion of the Charges <i>Acts 24:1–10</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read Acts 24:1–10 . Summarize Tertullus' presentation of the charges against Paul.	How did Paul demonstrate avoidance of emotional engagement in the charges directed at him? How can believers today model his response?



Chances are good when we are criticized, we pick up the emotion of the one criticizing us. And we become sometimes angrier than the one who's criticized us. At that point, straight thinking goes out the window, and we begin to get lost in the morass of defending ourselves and closing our minds to a wise approach to what might be used or said. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Number Two: Paul Stayed with the Facts <i>Acts 24:11–12</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read Acts 24:11–12 . What was Paul's focus when addressing the governor?	Record a principle or two from Paul's response that is instructive for Christians in similar situations.



He's just spelling out the facts—one, two, three. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Dealing with Critics as Paul Did

Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12

Number Three: Paul Told the Truth with a Clear Conscience <i>Acts 24:13–16</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read Acts 24:13–16 . Summarize Paul’s rejoinder to the charges levied against him. What did he affirm and what did he deny?	Record two timeless principles about faithfulness in truth-telling.



Don’t get anywhere near a falsehood. As soon as you step into a lie, you weaken your case, and you will never be free. It’s “the truth that sets us free.”
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Number Four: Paul Identified the Original Source of the Criticism <i>Acts 24:17–19</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read Acts 24:17–19 . How did Paul identify his original critics—the ones at the temple who falsely accused him?	How did Paul’s action build accountability into the trial? Record a principle about the impact of hearsay within the body of Christ.



It only complicates when you bring others into the setting and then shape their opinions based on what you have to say about this situation.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Dealing with Critics as Paul Did

Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12

Number Five: Paul Would Not Surrender and Quit <i>Acts 24:19–21</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read Acts 24:19–21 . Describe Paul’s method and tone when addressing the governor.	For believers, record a principle about tenacity when defending and/or advancing truth.



He had been beaten, but he got right back up. He had been accused, but he stood firm in the truth. He had been followed, but he didn’t run from them. He had been knocked down, but the man would not give up. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Number Six: Paul Did Not Become Impatient or Bitter <i>Acts 24:22–25:10</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read Acts 24:22–25:10 . Summarize Paul’s circumstances and experiences following his trial.	How was Paul able to maintain patience and clear thinking despite his circumstances? Record one principle for Christians today.

Paul was left in confinement for two years! Paul could be out, but he was left waiting. Two years! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Dealing with Critics as Paul Did

Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12

Number Seven: Paul Stood on the Promise of God <i>Acts 25:11–12</i>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read Acts 25:11–12 . What was Paul's challenge and appeal before Festus?	How was the exchange between Paul and Festus a fulfillment of Acts 23:11 ? Record one timeless principle about God's sovereignty and faithfulness.

*God, who is in heaven, is the sovereign of this earth and the heavens above us.
When He told Paul, "You will go to Rome," Paul went to Rome.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



Correlation: Fear Not . . . Be Strong

Scripture is full of God's promises for His children, and some specific promises are more than sufficient for believers to ably manage life's inevitable critics.

[Isaiah 41:10](#) contains both commands and promises. Record the commands and promises.

According to [Ephesians 6:10–12](#), what are Christians commanded to do? If we are obedient, who provides our strength? Who is our ultimate enemy energizing critics and their criticism?

Dealing with Critics as Paul Did

Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12

Paul issued similar commands in [1 Corinthians 16:13](#). What four commands do you observe?

Go back to the Book. Start with the Psalms. Look for the promises. Live in them. Walk with them. Let them be your guide and comfort. You'll not only be ready to live—you'll be ready to die. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Developing a Tough Hide

Are you facing unfounded accusations? Is someone after you—trying to prove things you know are untrue? Is someone attempting to imprison you with wounding words? If so, practice Paul's plan:

1. Avoid the emotion of the charge.
2. Stick with the facts.
3. Tell the truth with a clear conscience.
4. Identify the source of the accusation.
5. Don't surrender or quit.
6. Don't become impatient or bitter.
7. Stand firm on God's promises.

If someone has wounded you with unfounded criticism, what parts of Paul's response can you follow?

Dealing with Critics as Paul Did

Acts 24:1–16; 25:1–12

The seventh principle is perhaps the most important. To follow this step, first, record a brief prayer to the Lord—unburdening your pain and seeking Him for wisdom and direction about resolution.

Then, ask the Holy Spirit to help you find a promise in Scripture to claim.

Paul clung to God's promise that he would preach the gospel in Rome. God's promise to you may not be so specific; nevertheless, it can be your lifeline when critics try to sink your boat. Hang on to God's love for you and plan for your future, and you'll find your way through the storm!

You rest your case with the Lord Jesus Christ. You take up your battles with Him. You, with clear conscience and commitment to the truth, lay out your case before Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Lord God, how thankful I am for Your Book, Your Word that lives and abides forever. Thank You for coming to my rescue again and again by Your grace. When I am afraid, bring a sense of peace and refreshment as I turn to the promises of Your Word and find in them hope to go on. Through Christ the Lord, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

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PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY NINETEEN

Standing Tall as Paul Stood

Acts 25:13–26:32

A hero doesn't seem like a hero at the time, but later, we look back and say, "That person stood tall." There's hardly a day that passes in my life that I don't focus on one of my heroes. His or her heroic life motivates me to go on and to do better than I have done before.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHO qualifies as a hero? In his book, *Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers his own definition:

For me, a hero is someone who stands tall when others shrink back. A hero is someone who swims upstream while the majority of people go with the current. It's someone who speaks up for what's right as others look away, sitting silently on the sidelines.¹

No one is born a hero. Heroism germinates in our character and ripens over time, often without anyone noticing. A budding hero is often the most unlikely of people, recognized only after he or she is thrown into a crisis. Usually, heroism emerges in situations that follow a similar pattern:

1. *Something is wrong.* A cultural force or an emergency that threatens well-being must be met head-on.
2. *A principle is at stake.* A fundamental value is being sacrificed and must be upheld.
3. *An element of risk is involved.* In addition to risking personal safety, a hero faces being misunderstood, misrepresented, or mistreated. However, ignoring the problem makes matters worse. Taking a risk and doing something heroic often means acting alone.



Standing Tall as Paul Stood

Acts 25:13–26:32

Who are your heroes—those who stood for a principle and made a difference in your life? Because of them, you press on when you feel like giving up. You speak up when it would be easier to keep silent and look the other way. You stand tall when you would rather blend in.

Paul was a hero—a man of grace *and* grit, both of which are required to reach hero status in the kingdom. Let's see these qualities on display in Paul's final defense of his faith in Caesarea before a most intimidating audience.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a moment to thank God for your ordinary heroes, just as Paul did: “Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God” (Philippians 1:3). Then ask the Lord to inspire you through Paul's heroic example in the Scripture passage we'll study.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul's bold speech in Acts 26 was the fifth and final defense he made for the faith recorded in Acts. In the following chart, read the biblical passages that record his first four defenses. Then, in the space below, write down what you see in Paul's character as he stood tall in each situation.

Standing Tall as Paul Stood

Acts 25:13–26:32

Survey of Paul's First Four Defenses Acts 22–25			
Scripture	Situation	Audience	Result
22:1–30	Jews from Asia incite a riot in the temple against Paul. Roman officials arrest Paul. Paul speaks from the fortress steps.	The Jewish crowd	The Jews call for Paul's death. The commander orders Paul to stand trial before the Sanhedrin.
23:1–10	The high priest presides as judge in the council chamber.	Pharisees and Sadducees in the Sanhedrin	Conflict erupts. Jews plot to kill Paul. Romans take Paul by night to Caesarea.
24:1–27	Jewish officials make their case against Paul in Caesarea.	Jewish accusers, Roman governor Felix, and his wife Drusilla	Paul declares the gospel. Felix delays decision and keeps Paul in custody two years.
25:1–12	Jewish leaders accuse Paul in another trial in Caesarea.	Jewish accusers and Roman governor Festus	Festus wants to send Paul back to Jerusalem. Paul appeals to Caesar.

Now let's pull up a seat and listen to Paul's final defense before a royal court.



Observation: Standing Tall for Christ

In *observation*, it's helpful to set the scene, beginning with the characters.² For two years, Paul had been in custody in Caesarea under Felix. Felix was married to Drusilla—King Agrippa's sister who had left her husband to marry Felix after an affair with him. King Agrippa's other sister was Bernice, whom he was living with in an incestuous relationship. Their father, also named Agrippa, was the king in Acts 12 who sentenced James (John's brother) to die by the sword and ordered Peter to be thrown into prison. What a morally corrupt family!

And yet it was King Agrippa and his sister who presided as judges over innocent Paul. What happened in [Acts 25:13–22](#) that resulted in Paul gaining an audience with King Agrippa and Bernice?

Standing Tall as Paul Stood

Acts 25:13–26:32

Now, let's examine the setting. Describe King Agrippa and Bernice's arrival in [Acts 25:23](#) and the location. What impression about the setting and the audience did Luke intend to make for the reader?

What did Festus, the governor of Judea who succeeded Felix, say in his address in [25:24–27](#)? What did he admit regarding his own judgment of Paul?

Paul was the only man in chains but the only free man among them. What an irony. They, the ones without chains, were caught in the bondage of their own moral misery and sin. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Paul's Bold Message—Acts 26:1–23

Despite King Agrippa's intimidating power and showy protocol, this ruler was ruled by sin. Paul, the one in chains, would point the way for him to find true freedom in Christ. Let's look at Paul's method for sharing his faith.

He Built a Bridge

In his opening statements, how did Paul connect relationally with King Agrippa in [Acts 26:1–3](#)?

Let's learn a lesson from our hero, Paul. When you have an opportunity to be with those of high rank and significant authority, be courteous, be gracious. Treat them with respect. You may not agree with their lifestyle; nevertheless, it is a privilege for you to be heard. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Standing Tall as Paul Stood

Acts 25:13–26:32

He Explained His Life Prior to Christ

What did Paul say about his life as a Pharisee in [Acts 26:4–8](#)?

Mentioning the Jews, Paul turned to the Jewish audience: “Why does it seem incredible to any of you that God can raise the dead?” (Acts 26:8). What was Paul’s reason for asking this question?

Then, in [26:9–11](#), Paul openly confessed his former persecution of Christians. Why was Paul so transparent about his sin? What do you think was going through King Agrippa’s and Bernice’s minds?

He Shared His Conversion Experience

Paul was not seeking Christ, which makes his experience with Christ even more profound. What miraculous act of grace happened, according to [Acts 26:12–17](#)? Imagine you were in the audience as Paul spoke. What would you have thought and felt?

Paul drove his point home in [26:18](#). How did this statement explain Paul’s mission and precisely sum up the gospel?

Standing Tall as Paul Stood

Acts 25:13–26:32

He Described His Life after Conversion

How did Paul say his life changed after meeting Christ, according to [Acts 26:19–23](#)?

The Results of Paul’s Message—Acts 26:24–32

What responses did Paul’s message stir in Festus, King Agrippa, and Bernice, according to [Acts 26:24–28](#)?

How did Paul end his message in [26:29](#)? What did Paul’s passionate statement communicate about his heart?

Isn’t this a great moment? “Agrippa, would to God that you and all those around you were just as I, freed from the sin of our lives through Christ’s power, without chains.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What concluding declaration did the officials make in [26:30–32](#)? Why is this statement important in Luke’s telling of Paul’s life story?

Standing Tall as Paul Stood

Acts 25:13–26:32



Interpretation: The Heart of the Gospel

Let's dig deeper into some key points in Paul's message. Explain the meaning of the following verses in your own words and write down the reasons they are vital to our faith in Christ. Don't forget to consult your Bible-study resources like [Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Acts](#) available for purchase at [insight.org](#), [Constable's Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#), or the [IVP New Testament Commentary on Acts](#) at [biblegateway.com](#).

Our Hope—Eternal Life

"I am on trial because of my hope in the fulfillment of God's promise made to our ancestors. . . . Why does it seem incredible to any of you that God can raise the dead?"
(Acts 26:6, 8)

Our Need—Forgiveness

"I am sending you to the Gentiles to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in me."
(Acts 26:17–18)

Our Savior—Jesus Christ

"I teach nothing except what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Messiah would suffer and be the first to rise from the dead, and in this way announce God's light to Jews and Gentiles alike." (Acts 26:22–23)

Standing Tall as Paul Stood

Acts 25:13–26:32



Correlation: Paul's Testimony and Yours

Paul's evangelist heart for the lost poured out in his final appeal:

"I pray to God that both you and everyone here in this audience might become the same as I am, except for these chains." (Acts 26:29)

Even though he was a prisoner, Paul was the only truly *free* person in that auditorium. Christ had broken the chains of sin binding his heart, and *he longed for everyone to experience the freedom he had in Christ.*

Paul expressed his passion for the lost in [1 Corinthians 9:20–23](#). How does Paul's zeal inspire you?

God redeemed Paul's life so he could help others find redemption in Christ. What did Paul say about his past and how God was using him, according to [1 Timothy 1:15–17](#)?

How can God use your life story to help others?

Paul stood just as tall on the steps of the fortress in Jerusalem before a hostile mob as he stood in the palace auditorium before royalty. It didn't matter where he was or whom he addressed. Paul preached Christ with the confidence of a man whose heart had been set free.



Application: Standing Tall in Your Arena

Paul's example reflects two facts for standing tall in our day.

Standing Tall as Paul Stood

Acts 25:13–26:32

First, *when standing tall, you become so focused you feel invincible*. Paul was unconcerned about himself, unimpressed with those in authority, unintimidated when fighting alone, and uninhibited in zeal and determination.

Second, *after standing tall, you are often unaware of the impact you made*. King Agrippa was visibly moved by Paul's message, but did he convert? Paul never knew. Having done his part, Paul was satisfied to leave the results to God.

In what arena might God be calling you to stand up for your faith? Your family, your neighborhood, your work? How has Paul's example given you confidence?

Based on Paul's example of giving his testimony, what would you say about your faith in Christ if the opportunity came knocking? What key points in the gospel would you include?

Paul is a hero not because he spoke in his own strength but because he spoke the name of Jesus. He stood on the rock of Christ—the risen Savior in whom we all stand tall.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You that this message of hope in the risen Christ is as good today as it was back then. I pray, Lord, that You will cause this sense of hope to give me a renewed determination to stand tall without concern for others' responses, to do what is right without tiring of it, and to do so the rest of my life. May I be the hero that some need, whether they be my children or grandchildren, my neighbors or friends, or people whom I've never met. Life begins and ends with Christ, and I pray in His great name and for His sake. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 273.
2. 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?](#)"

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PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY TWENTY

How to Handle a Shipwreck

Selections from Acts 27

Our tendency is to focus on circumstances. God's focus is on the objective. When storms wash over us, He is interested in cultivating our inner being, our souls.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THOSE who enjoy sailing love the feeling of the wind in their face, the sight of the warm sun as it glistens off a calm sea, the tilt of the hull when the sail catches a breeze, and the rush of energy as the bow slips through the water. With one hand on the rudder and another gripping a line, sailors revel in the thrill of riding the wind to the horizon and home again.

Then, when the work week arrives, we sit in gridlock on our morning commute, smiling at the bumper sticker on the car in front of us—"I'd rather be sailing." We wholeheartedly agree. *I'd rather be sailing too!*

Unless . . . a storm strikes while we're at sea.

There's no controlling the wind when gale-force gusts blow like freight trains and threaten to capsize our boat. In a storm, we are at the mercy of the sea. Stow the mainsail! Furl the jib! Our sailboat that once seemed so steady pitches wildly as swells break over the bow. All we can do is strap ourselves down, cinch up our life jacket, and pray.

Paul endured such a terrifying storm during his journey from Caesarea to Rome. Luke recorded the perilous voyage in Acts 27—a passage that reads like an adventure novel. The point of the account, however, is not to excite our senses as much as to stir our soul with Paul's courage and inspire our hearts to trust God during our storms.

In the end, Paul's boat shipwrecks, but Paul's faith doesn't. Neither will our faith shipwreck when we anchor ourselves to the four principles on how to handle a shipwreck that we'll uncover in this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study.



How to Handle a Shipwreck

Selections from Acts 27



PREPARE YOUR HEART

In such times, the Lord reassures us,

*When you go through deep waters,
I will be with you. (Isaiah 43:2)*

Write a prayer to the One who is with you in your storm, sharing your fears and opening your heart to His message in the Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

“I appeal to Caesar,” Paul had declared to the governor, Festus, who wanted to send Paul back to Jerusalem (Acts 25:11). “You have appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar you will go!” ruled Festus (25:12).

The Lord promised Paul two years earlier that he would one day “preach the Good News” in Rome (23:11). But Paul probably had no idea he would be shipped there by the Romans. The Lord uses even our enemies to accomplish His will!

Luke, the author of Acts, along with a believer named Aristarchus from Thessalonica, accompanied Paul on his voyage (27:1–2). The pronoun “we” in the account identifies Luke as one of the passengers.

As you read Acts 27, imagine yourself joining the threesome. Board the wooden vessel and toss your seabag on your tiny berth next to Luke’s. It’s late August, AD 59. The winds are light and westerly. Pulling out your itinerary, you see on the map, “[Paul’s Journey to Rome](#)” at [insight.org](#), that the first leg of your journey takes you north from Caesarea along the shore of Syria with a brief stop in Sidon. Then the ship steers west to Myra, where the Roman commander Julius secures a second ship bound for Rome.

How to Handle a Shipwreck

Selections from Acts 27

Read Luke's account of the voyage to Myra. What do you note regarding Luke's description of the trip and Paul's relationship with Julius, the centurion, in [Acts 27:1–6](#)?



Observation: Rough Seas Ahead

Observe carefully Luke's meticulous record of the journey from Myra to Malta, where the shipwreck occurred.¹ The plan was to arrive in the imperial city by the end of October, but almost immediately, unfavorable winds tossed all expectations out the window.

On your [map](#) of Paul's journey, locate the ports mentioned and follow Luke's description of the journey to Fair Havens on the island of Crete in [Acts 27:7–12](#). Write down the difficulties the ship encountered along the way. What warning did Paul give? Why did the crew want to sail on to Phoenix, "farther up the coast of Crete, and spend the winter there" (Acts 27:12)? Whom did commander Julius listen to?

On a typical day in the Mediterranean, the trip up the coast would have been an easygoing, Sunday sail. What unforeseen crisis occurred? What drastic measures did the crew take to survive, according to [27:13–20](#)?

After tossing into the sea everything that wasn't battened down, the final and most precious cargo heaved overboard was hope. In this despairing hour, Paul stood up and cast four spiritual anchors needed to secure the people's hope in the only sure place: the Lord. Let's observe these anchors in the remaining verses of Acts 27.

This is not about a storm in the Mediterranean. This is about life and how to endure it when it impacts us and our ship is coming apart and there's a reef straight ahead and we're not going to make it without a wreck. How do you keep it together? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

How to Handle a Shipwreck

Selections from Acts 27

The Anchor of Stability—Acts 27:21–26

To what stabilizing anchor of truth did Paul first secure the people's hope in [Acts 27:21–26](#)? Write down the key points Paul made in his speech.

Your tendency will be to turn to every other source but the Word of God when you come to the end. I'm telling you: it is the first and only source you really need. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Anchor of Unity—Acts 27:27–32

God didn't promise Paul that the storm would end, only that His stabilizing presence would see the people through it. But they needed to stay together. When the storm raged on, what did the panicked sailors attempt, according to [Acts 27:27–32](#)? How did Paul stop them?

The great tendency is to get all alone, lock your door, pull the blind, get away from everybody. That's the worst thing you can do. If at any time you need the support of other brothers and sisters, it's in the storm. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Anchor of Renewal—Acts 27:33–37

How did Paul's words lift the people from hopeless to hopeful in [Acts 27:33–37](#)? What renewed their spirits?

Your personal nourishment is important during times of storm. You'll cut a corner on your meals, you'll cut a corner on your rest, you'll cut a corner on the things that are essential for good physical survival, and you'll miss something very important. You need nourishment. I also add, you need prayer. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

How to Handle a Shipwreck

Selections from Acts 27

The Anchor of Reality—Acts 27:38–44

The passengers believed God’s promise—“not a hair of your heads will perish” (Acts 27:34). But the reality of the situation still required them to jump off the sinking ship! To put their faith into action! What happened to the ship, and how did everyone make it to shore in [Acts 27:38–44](#)?

No one has some magic answer for you. You may have to go through hard work, even some therapy, even some redirection of your life, even the admission of wrong, the confession of your part in the problem. You will have to get engaged in the process. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Questions Worth Considering

For centuries to come, Rome would be a strategic hub for the growth of the church. If it was so vital for Paul to get to Rome, why didn’t God take him straight there? What was the purpose of the storm? The life-or-death struggles? The shipwreck? What reasons do you think God allowed Paul and the others to suffer this perilous journey? If you’d like, consult your Bible-study resources like [Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Acts](#) available for purchase at insight.org, [Constable’s Notes](#) at netbible.org, or the [IVP New Testament Commentary on Acts](#) at biblegateway.com.

We may never understand why God allows storms, even causes some. But the lessons in faith that we learn through the journey, we’ll never forget. Based on Paul’s experience, what lessons have you learned only in your storms?

How to Handle a Shipwreck

Selections from Acts 27



Correlation: Our Stability in the Storm

After days of relentless battering of the wind and waves against the wooden ship, in the darkest hour when all hope seemed lost, perhaps Paul recalled [Psalm 107:23–32](#). What does this psalm say to you in your storm?

How does this psalm anticipate our Lord's actions in [Mark 4:35–41](#)? What is He teaching you?



Application: Setting Your Anchors

We can see the debris from shipwrecked lives all around us. Splintered marriages, ruined relationships, battered hearts, sunken dreams. In times of storm—before your ship founders on the rocks—an anchor can be lifesaving. Let's review Paul's anchors:

1. *The anchor of stability.* When seas rage, the Lord's presence stabilizes. Cling to His promises and truths found in His Word.
2. *The anchor of unity.* We don't have to manage rough seas alone. We don't have to abandon ship! Stay with your brothers and ride out the storm together.
3. *The anchor of renewal.* Refresh yourself and strengthen your spirit with the Bread of Life—the spiritual nourishment of Christ you need to keep hope alive.
4. *The anchor of reality.* Don't be passive. The time will come to step out in faith. The Lord will let you know when it's time to act, and when He does, don't hesitate.

What strength can you draw from these anchors today?

How to Handle a Shipwreck

Selections from Acts 27

Which of the statements in Acts 27 lingers in your mind as a truth to which you can cling?

Has one of life's storms blown you into uncharted waters? Perhaps you've never experienced a trial so severe, and you feel rudderless against the wind. What would you like to say to the Lord as a prayer of faith?

God has given us promises to read and to claim, and God is trustworthy. Listen to the wind howling. Feel the sting on your face. Hear the cracks and the groans in the ship. See the swells in the waves around you, and then observe Paul's words, "I believe God." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Lord, thank You for taking me through this journey with Paul. I find encouragement and strength in Your Word, even amid the threat of a shipwreck. Give me Your peace in the person of Christ, knowing that in Him there is hope even when all seems bleak and barren and when there seems no reason to go on. Life begins and ends with Christ, and I pray in His great name and for His 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?](#)"

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PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY TWENTY-ONE

Arrested, Confined, but Still Effective

Acts 28:30–31; Philippians 1:12–14

Few people had a greater grasp of grace than Paul. Redeemed from a life of violence and rigid legalism, Paul was gracious to the core. But he was also a man of grit, enduring the most severe hardships without complaining. He learned to live above his circumstances.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

TIME is like a book. Somewhere, in some paragraph, you can find your name and the story of your life. You may try to thumb forward in time, but only God knows the words on those pages. If you're wise, however, you'll flip back and read about the men and women who have gone before you. Their stories teach valuable lessons that can change your present and determine your future.

Who made the most lasting impression on you? Whose life do you still try to emulate?

This person may be a parent or grandparent. A teacher or coach. A mentor who took you under his or her wing. Or a lifelong friend you still enjoy talking to even when you don't have much to talk about.

Through our studies, Paul may have made your list of personal heroes. Wouldn't it be great to talk with him in person? One subject that you probably would like to talk about is his face-to-face encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus, the moment he changed from Saul to Paul—a slave of the law to a son of grace. From that flashpoint forward, he never viewed life the same.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll admire one quality Paul learned from his encounter with Christ: *his ability to live above his circumstances*. Despite his great suffering and even imprisonment, he always saw himself as a victor, not a victim. Christ made that happen for him. Wouldn't you like to live that way? Let's find out from Paul how he did it.



Arrested, Confined, but Still Effective

Acts 28:30–31; Philippians 1:12–14



PREPARE YOUR HEART

To become a minister of grace, Paul first had to receive grace. As you open your study of God's Word, welcome God's grace in a prayer. Begin, "Father, I invite Your grace to fill my mind and refresh my soul." And then list the ways in which you need His grace today.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

We concluded the previous study with Paul and the other passengers abandoning their wrecked ship and swimming ashore to the island of Malta. Witnessing their ordeal, some islanders rushed to their aid and "built a fire on the shore" to welcome the exhausted, soaked-to-the-bone survivors (Acts 28:2). Just as He promised, God saved the lives of every person.

During the three months Paul stayed on the island, God continued showing mercy by saving Paul from the bite of "a poisonous snake" (28:4) and by healing the sick through Paul's ministry. Finally, when winter passed, Paul and the others boarded a ship bound for Rome. At stops along the Italian coast, believers met Paul, welcoming him with open arms.

Finally, Paul arrived in Rome, just as God promised (23:11). While Paul awaited his trial before Caesar, he was "permitted to have his own private lodging, though he was guarded by a soldier" (28:16). Even though he couldn't step out his front door, his influence stretched far. What hopeful statements about Paul and his ongoing ministry closed the book of Acts in 28:30–31?

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul revealed how he lived above his circumstances, the eternal benefits of doing so, and the attitudes that resulted.



Observation: Living Above Our Circumstances

Use your observation skills to discover the ways Paul remained effective despite his arrest and confinement.¹

Arrested, Confined, but Still Effective

Acts 28:30–31; Philippians 1:12–14

How Paul Lived Above His Circumstances

Paul’s statement in [Philippians 4:13](#) explained how he endured when his own strength failed. What powerful truth do you observe in this verse?

Leaning on Christ for daily strength while trusting God to do His will behind the scenes allows us to live above our circumstances—which yields eternal benefits.

Eternal Benefits of Living Above Our Circumstances

Seeing God at work lifted Paul out of the mire of self-pity and helped him be joyful and positive. In the chart below, note the eternal benefits of living above our circumstances.

The Eternal Benefits of Living Above Our Circumstances	
Philippians 1:12	
Philippians 1:13	
Philippians 1:14	

A better response when people ask us how we’re doing is this: “You know what, in spite of it all, let me tell you the great things that God is doing.” This response is a good habit for us to learn. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Attitudes That Accompany Contentment

Sometimes, we allow our attitude to be determined by the ups and downs of our circumstances—like riding a roller coaster, going up during good times and down in bad. But Paul was even-tempered, regardless. How did he explain his attitude of contentment in [Philippians 4:11–13](#)? How was his contentment tied to his walk with Christ?

Arrested, Confined, but Still Effective

Acts 28:30–31; Philippians 1:12–14

Contentment doesn't come naturally. Paul had to learn contentment by resting in God's will and relying on Christ's power—who was with Paul and shining through him. In the verses in the following chart, write down the Christlike attitudes that Paul displayed and encouraged in others.

Attitudes That Accompany Contentment	
<i>Philippians 2:3–5</i>	
<i>Philippians 2:14–18</i>	
<i>Philippians 3:14</i>	
<i>Colossians 4:2</i>	

When Christ is given the controls of our minds, He journeys into our experience and blocks us from all bitterness, all blame, all self-pity. He changes us to be like Himself. The model of Christlikeness? The apostle Paul.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Contentment in Christ

Jesus said that whoever takes His “yoke”—in other words, “walks closely with Him”—“will find rest for [their] souls” (Matthew 11:29). Paul lived in Christ's yoke. It didn't matter whether his situation was comfortable or miserable, Paul was at rest because he was yoked to Jesus. His demeanor was regulated and consistent. His spiritual thermostat was always set on contentment in Christ's sufficiency.

You may be thinking, *I wish I had Paul's personality*. But wait. Contentment isn't a personality trait. Rather, it's a result of training. Imagine Paul explaining to you how he learned contentment and how you can follow in his footsteps. What do you think he would say?

Arrested, Confined, but Still Effective

Acts 28:30–31; Philippians 1:12–14

The key to Paul's spiritual equilibrium was his attachment to Christ. What did Paul mean when he said, "I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13)? To what was Paul referring in the context of [Philippians 4:10–12](#)?

What can Christ help you do through His strength?

Refuse to let your situation determine your attitude. Instead, let your attitude dictate your situation. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Seeing through Eternity's Eyes

When we walk with Christ through hard times as Paul did,

- We may feel “pressed on every side by troubles” (2 Corinthians 4:8).
- We may be “perplexed” by the mysteries of God's will (4:8).
- We may be “hunted down” by our enemies (4:9).
- We may get “knocked down” (4:9).

And, like Paul, we may feel the weight of these circumstances dragging us under. When Paul felt himself sinking, however, he looked up. On what did he fix his gaze in [4:16–18](#)?

Throughout his ministry, Paul was brutally beaten, hounded by enemies, and abandoned by friends. And yet, his circumstances never crushed him or forced him to quit. Why? Because he viewed his suffering not as an impediment but as a path to achieving his life goal—“to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead” (Philippians 3:10).

Arrested, Confined, but Still Effective

Acts 28:30–31; Philippians 1:12–14



Application: Attitudes You Can Have Today

Reflect on Paul's attitudes and see if you can make them work for you. Let's list them.

Unselfish humility. Humility seeks the best for others and makes sacrifices for their sake. Jesus exhibited humility like none other. How can Christ express His humility through you?

Joyful acceptance. Listen to your words. If you're hearing a lot of complaining, Christ can help you accept your circumstances. How can He help you experience His joy despite them?

Strong determination. The quickest way to lose heart is to fix your eyes on your circumstances. Paul never gave up because he never let his eyes wander from Christ. What eternal view is God giving you to help you press on?

Genuine thanksgiving. Gratitude is like a spiritual vitamin that boosts your immunity to discouragement. What can you be grateful for today?

Christ's mighty power is available to you. Rest in Him. Let Him lift you above your circumstances and watch your spirit soar.

Arrested, Confined, but Still Effective

Acts 28:30–31; Philippians 1:12–14



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your goodness. Thank You for loving me and for knowing me so well. For forgiving me and removing not only my sin but also my shame. I am dependent on You, Lord, even for the breath in my lungs and the beat in my heart. I pray for comfort, hope, and reassurance in my current circumstances. Thank You for the joy of knowing Christ, who holds all things together, who is above all things, and who is in all things. In His sufficient name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTE

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PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY TWENTY-TWO

Shackled, Deserted, but Still Undaunted

Selections from 2 Timothy

Every time I open 2 Timothy, I think to myself, This is dungeon talk. It helps me understand why there is such passion and such tenderness in this letter. There is not a hint of self-pity. No blame. No bitterness. No regret. Paul writes straightforwardly to Timothy, the man who will carry the torch beyond Paul's years on earth.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN popular entertainers end their careers, they often give one last concert to bid farewell to their fans. Their final song on stage is their “swan song,” and it is usually the song that made them famous. The familiar song pours from their heart as the music crescendos and the final note rings out in a thrilling finale. The fans leap to their feet cheering and applauding while the performers bow again and again receiving the people’s adulation until, finally, the aging entertainers exit the stage never to return.

Paul’s swan song comes to its close with far less fanfare. No bright lights surround him. No one cheers him on. He writes alone in a dungeon cell, but his words leave behind a far more meaningful and lasting impact than any entertainer’s song. His final lines of 2 Timothy ring out in praise of God, resonating his life’s theme: “May the Lord be with your spirit. And may *his grace* be with all of you” (2 Timothy 4:22, emphasis added).

Grace. “Even before I was born,” the apostle once acknowledged, “God chose me and called me by his marvelous grace” (Galatians 1:15). Grace marked Paul from his mother’s womb, and even now, at the end of his life, his signature tune plays on. Grace in the beginning. Grace every step of the way. Grace to the very end.



Shackled, Deserted, but Still Undaunted

Selections from 2 Timothy



PREPARE YOUR HEART

For Paul, “knowing Christ Jesus” was life’s greatest treasure (Philippians 3:8). All his other accolades and achievements were worthless by comparison. Ask God to help you know Christ more intimately through your study.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The book of Acts ends with Paul still in Rome under house arrest. In AD 62, two years after arriving in Rome, Paul was finally released. Unfettered and undeterred, he resumed his missionary travels, visiting the churches he helped plant and mentoring his two protégés—Titus in Crete and Timothy in Ephesus. Paul passed along his pastoral wisdom to these men in two letters on church leadership: Titus and 1 Timothy.

In AD 64, violent thunderstorms of persecution began rolling across the Roman Empire. Emperor Nero ordered the death of prominent church leaders. Eventually, Paul was arrested in Troas and dragged in chains back to Rome. This time, Nero showed no mercy to Paul. He sent the aging apostle to the notorious Mamertine Prison where he remained until his execution in AD 68.

Read about these events in the online article, “[Historical Background of Paul’s Final Imprisonment](#),” at insight.org. Write down the facts you discover.

Shackled, Deserted, but Still Undaunted

Selections from 2 Timothy

Languishing in a cold, damp dungeon cell, Paul penned his final words in a letter to Timothy we know as 2 Timothy. His time short and his tone urgent, Paul braced Timothy for the days ahead. As you open 2 Timothy, feel the heartbeat of Paul's letter by reading these *key verses*: [2 Timothy 1:14](#); [2:3](#); [3:14](#); and [4:2](#). Identify a key phrase in each verse and write them below. What do you notice in your first brush with the passion of Paul's writing?



Observation: Paul's Final Words

When observing a passage, it's helpful to put yourself into the scene.¹ Imagine joining Luke on one of his visits to Paul in prison. Follow the guard down steep steps through stone hallways blackened by soot and age. When your eyes adjust to torchlight, make out the rows of cells as you feel your way down a dark passage. Arriving at Paul's cell, you see a sixty-year-old man, gaunt and malnourished, crippled from past tortures, scarred from beatings, sitting alone on the stone floor. Dusty rays of light filter through a street-level iron grate above him. He is piecing together the final touches of his letter, and when he is finished, he will place the scroll into the hands of Luke to carry to Timothy.

Though his circumstances were dreadful, he expressed no remorse, only the satisfaction of a life well lived. What did he say about his life in [2 Timothy 4:6–8](#)? To what hope did he cling?

In the final section of the letter, Paul bore his soul to Timothy. Based on his requests and statements in [4:9–11](#), [13–14](#), [16](#), and [21](#), how would you describe Paul's condition and his emotions?

We need the reminder that Paul was deserted. He was shackled. But he was undaunted. Here is a man who was strong to the very end. But he doesn't write without feelings—deep, deep feelings. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Shackled, Deserted, but Still Undaunted

Selections from 2 Timothy

Read the following [overview](#) of 2 Timothy. A Bible chart is a “literary map” of a book’s main points and features. After studying the chart, write down any impressions that stand out. What would it have been like to receive this letter?

2 TIMOTHY OVERVIEW BIBLE CHART

	GUARD THE TRUTH!	ENDURE SUFFERING!	REMAIN FAITHFUL!	PREACH THE WORD!
	2 Timothy 1	2 Timothy 2	2 Timothy 3	2 Timothy 4
	Paul's greeting Timothy's life God's precious truth Our responsibility	Passing on the truth Suffering for the truth Illustrations (soldiers, athletes, farmers, worker, utensil, servant)	Last days Evil people Standing firm Spiritual examples Biblical basis	A solemn charge Reason for the charge Personal conclusion
PERSPECTIVE	The past	The present	The future	
TONE	Gratitude	Compassion	Warning	Command
THEME	Paul's passing of the ministry torch to Timothy and encouragement for him to stay faithful in the midst of hardship			
KEY VERSES	2 Timothy 1:14	2 Timothy 2:3	2 Timothy 3:14	2 Timothy 4:2
CHRIST IN 2 TIMOTHY	Jesus is the Judge of the living and the dead, who strengthens us in times of weakness and rescues us in times of danger (2 Tim. 3:11; 4:1, 17).			

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Chart taken from *The Swindoll Study Bible*. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers.

Though addressed to a first-century pastor, the letter’s four chapters reveal how all of us can finish this life well. Let’s take a closer look.

Guard the Truth—2 Timothy 1

Read [2 Timothy 1:1–18](#), and write down the words and phrases that stand out to you. What was the essence of this seasoned pastor’s message to the younger pastor?

Shackled, Deserted, but Still Undaunted

Selections from 2 Timothy

The word, entrusted, is a banking term. Paul was saying, “The treasure that I have spent years depositing in you, oh, Timothy, guard it. Retain the standard and guard the treasure.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Endure Suffering—2 Timothy 2

In [2 Timothy 2:1–26](#), Paul spoke as a coach to his star player. Write down Paul’s list of essentials for running a good race as a follower of Christ.

Talk about a checklist for living faithfully! Be strong in grace, be faithful, be brave like a soldier, be disciplined like an athlete, be diligent like a worker, and be gentle like a servant. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Remain Faithful—2 Timothy 3

In [2 Timothy 3:1–17](#), Paul donned a prophet’s mantle and warned what was to come. What spiritual wisdom did Paul give Timothy on how to live in a dark and dying culture?

The apostle warned Timothy that there will be an erosion of the standard. There will be departure from the truth. There will be living in compromise. There will be hypocrisy and duplicity and lies and deception . . . and it will only get worse. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Preach the Word—2 Timothy 4

Then, in [2 Timothy 4:1–22](#), Paul spoke as a father giving his last words to his eldest son. What charge did Paul give Timothy? What requests did he make? What blessing did he give?

Shackled, Deserted, but Still Undaunted

Selections from 2 Timothy

“There will be very difficult times,” Paul warned (2 Timothy 3:1). Persecution would test the resolve of every Christian, and Timothy must “be strong” (2:1). He must fulfill his calling, preach the Word, and stay faithful to the end—just like Paul did.



Interpretation: The Crown of Righteousness

With each tick of the clock, death’s shadow crept closer and closer to Paul. “The time of my death is near,” Paul wrote (2 Timothy 4:6). He was a month, a day, maybe *an hour* from placing his neck on the executioner’s block. But did Paul fear death? No! His heart burst with anticipation! Paul longed to feel Christ’s embrace and receive his reward.

Now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing. (4:8)

What is the “crown of righteousness”? For what Christian virtue is this reward given? Consult your Bible study resources or the online commentary like [Constable’s Notes](http://netbible.org) at netbible.org to find possible answers.

Paul saw Christ as the returning King who would “someday judge the living and the dead when he comes to set up his Kingdom” (4:1). How did the hope of Christ’s coming and rewarding His faithful followers encourage Paul and help him face death? How does it encourage and help you?

Things you’re convinced of are things you will die for. They are convictions. They are the very pillars of your life. And you would not bend if you had to face a firing squad. You’d die for that truth. How are your convictions coming along? You pick up beliefs from a sermon, but you don’t pick up convictions until you digest them and make them your own. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Shackled, Deserted, but Still Undaunted

Selections from 2 Timothy



Correlation: Setting Our Hearts on Things Above

Whether in prison or set free, Paul lived with his feet on the ground but his eyes lifted to heaven. What did Paul teach about living with an eternal point of view in [Colossians 3:1–4](#)?

According to [3:12–15](#), in what positive ways can an eternal perspective impact your relationships? What happens in your spirit when Christ rules in your heart?



Application: The Final Journey

Wrap up your study of Paul's life by reading again the four key verses with Paul's rally cry ringing in your ears:

1. *Guard the truth!* "Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you" (2 Timothy 1:14).
2. *Endure the suffering!* "Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2:3).
3. *Continue the journey!* "But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you" (3:14).
4. *Proclaim the Word!* "Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching" (4:2).

How does his example inspire you in your current circumstance?

Shackled, Deserted, but Still Undaunted

Selections from 2 Timothy

As you close this study, sit beside Paul at the cross and draw strength from our Savior. In the space below, ask the Lord to show you His will through your study of Paul's life and to fill you with His Spirit of courage during this season of your life.

We've followed Paul from the streets of Tarsus down to Jerusalem and up the Damascus Road. We've trailed him into the desert of Arabia, to cities across Asia and Europe, over the seas of the Mediterranean, and into the dungeon where he spent his final days on earth. Paul's journey, however, didn't conclude in a prison cell. With the flash of the executioner's blade, this man of grace and grit was set free from his earthly bonds. His spirit soared into the heavens to be "at home with the Lord" forever (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Paul's swan song is not a mournful dirge but a victory march! His resolve has inspired suffering Christians everywhere to finish the race and receive the prize that awaits in heaven. What a glorious home that will be for all who call Christ their Lord!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Paul, who helps us think deeper and stand more confidently for You. Thank You for his courage to the end and his submission to Your plan. Thank You for his quiet resolve, which he learned from Jesus. Fill me like You filled Paul with the resolve of Your Son, who endured the cross with patience and joy because He anticipated the glory to come. May I take the torch of ministry. May I run hard and well. May I be found faithful, passionate, committed, and engaged for the cause of Christ until He returns. 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?](#)"

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Insight for Living

The Bible-Teaching Ministry of Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Insight for Living is committed to excellence in communicating the truths of Scripture and the person of Jesus Christ in an accurate, clear, and practical manner so that people will come to an understanding of God's plan for their lives, as well as their significant role as authentic Christians in a needy, hostile, and desperate world. That commitment has been our mission from our beginning in 1979, and it will never change. Visit insight.org.

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Cultivating Biblical Knowledge and Application Worldwide

Throughout our history, God has opened doors for Insight for Living to share His Word within numerous countries and in a variety of languages. Finding inspiration in Christ's Great Commission, we consider this international outreach essential in our mission. We call this global pursuit **Vision 195**. Our eyes are set on offering Pastor Chuck Swindoll's Bible-teaching resources in *all* 195 countries . . . while our hearts are set on translating these resources into *every* language. It's an audacious goal, but nothing is impossible with God! So, we press on in His mission while remaining sensitive to Christ's leading as He opens doors. Visit insight.org/vision-195.

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INSIGHT FOR LIVING CONTACT INFORMATION

Post Office Box 5000
Frisco, Texas 75034-0055

1-800-772-8888
+1-469-535-8436 (for callers outside the US)

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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES BIBLE STUDIES

PAUL: A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

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President, Insight for Living: Charissa Swindoll Gaither

Senior Vice President, Communications and Engagement: Linda Ricks, BBA,
Marketing and Accounting, Baylor University

Senior Vice President, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries: Aaron Massey, ThM,
Dallas Theological Seminary

Vice President, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries: Bryce Klabunde, ThM,
Dallas Theological Seminary; DMin, Western Seminary

Writer: Marshall F. Davis, ThM, Dallas Theological Seminary; PhD,
Bowling Green State University

Substantive Editor: Jim Craft, MA, English, Mississippi College; MA, Christian Studies,
Dallas Theological Seminary

Production Editor: Katie Hayes, BA, Communications, Southwest Baptist University

Cover Design: Cover illustration by David Bowers and design by David Carlson Design; adapted
by Impossible Pink

Layout Designer: Dameon Runnels, BA, Art—Mass Media; BA, Mass Communications,
Grambling State University

Project Manager, Publishing: Autumn Swindoll, BA, Humanities, Biola University

Production Artist: Nancy Gustine, BFA, Advertising Art, University of North Texas

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