

# STRENGTHENING YOUR GRIP

## HOW TO BE GROUNDED IN A CHAOTIC WORLD

### STUDY ONE

## Strengthening Your Grip on Priorities

*1 Thessalonians 2:1–13*

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*I'm convinced that our whole reason for existence as a body of Christians can somehow get lost in the rat race and maze of misplaced priorities. When a local church does not get a grip on its priorities, it is in danger of these problems: uncertainty of purpose, blurred vision, compromised values, and replacing volunteerism with professionalism.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**A** FIRM grip is crucial, whether scaling a mountain or climbing the craggy cliffs of the spiritual life. A frail branch or a crumbling ledge is no substitute for a solid handhold. For the climber ascending a mountain or for the Christian traversing life's ups and downs, what we hang on to and how vigorously we hang on to it determine our success . . . and survival.

This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study series is designed to strengthen your grip on what matters most. We'll cover topics such as integrity, purity, prayer, godliness, attitudes, and family.

On top of the list of essentials is *priorities*. A firm grip on our priorities keeps us from wandering aimlessly and enables us to handle the challenges of life effectively. What's true in our spiritual lives is particularly applicable in our local congregations. When our churches have a firm grasp of their biblical priorities, our communities mature and our spirits soar as we climb new heights in our walk with God.

Let's join a first-century Christian community in a prominent Macedonian city, Thessalonica, and receive the heart-to-heart message Paul taught on keeping our ministries and personal lives vibrant in Christ.



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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

As the divine author of the Scriptures, God is available and willing to enrich your study of His Word and strengthen your obedience to Him. So, take a deep breath. Turn your heart to Him. Seek His presence. Write your prayer in the space below and remember the areas where you need His guidance for this Bible study:



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll stresses *the importance of checking the context* of every passage, which means acquainting ourselves with the surrounding verses.<sup>1</sup>

After founding the church of Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (see [Acts 17:1–4](#)), Paul received good news from his envoy, Timothy, that the new Christian community was excelling. So, he responded with a letter of encouragement: 1 Thessalonians.

The message of Christ had radically changed the Thessalonians' lives, and Paul commended the young believers' "faithful work," "loving deeds," and "enduring hope" (1 Thessalonians 1:3). Their hearts overflowed with great joy, even in their "severe suffering" (1:6). The vitality of their faith made the headlines in churches throughout Greece, and the believers in the region looked up to them (1:7–9).

Now, grab your magnifying glass as we turn to Paul's autobiographical statements in 1 Thessalonians 2 and see his priorities on display.



## Observation: Priorities for Spiritual Vitality

First, *observe the text*.<sup>2</sup> Read [1 Thessalonians 2:1–4](#) carefully, slowly, and repetitively in different translations. Imagine yourself sitting among the members of the Thessalonian congregation, listening to someone read Paul's letter.

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When Paul recalled the things that marked his ministry to the Thessalonians, what did he preach amid great opposition, according to *1 Thessalonians 2:2–4*?

Now look at *2:13*. The people could tell that Paul wasn't dishing out "mere human ideas." What was special about Paul's message that caused the Thessalonians to accept it? From these observations, write down the first priority for spiritual vitality.

Paul shifts the emphasis from the message to the messenger in *2:5–6*. How did Paul describe himself as a minister of God's Word? Based on these observations, write the second priority for spiritual vitality.

What was Paul's attitude toward the Thessalonians, according to *2:7–11*? Write some words or phrases that describe this essential attitude in church leaders and the third priority for spiritual vitality.

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Observe [1 Thessalonians 2:12–14](#) for the fourth priority. As a father would be toward his own children, Paul “pleaded . . . encouraged . . . and urged” the people to do what, according to 2:12? Write your observation in the space below and write a fourth priority for spiritual vitality.

*To make a ministry meaningful, it has got to be biblical, authentic, gracious, and relevant. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: Priorities for Spiritual Vitality Explained

Now let’s *interpret the text*. After you have observed what the passage says, seek to grasp the author’s intended meaning for the original readers. In our observation of [1 Thessalonians 2:1–14](#), we noted four priorities that characterized Paul’s ministry to the Thessalonians. Let’s dig deeper to better understand them.

The first priority to make a ministry meaningful and vital is that *it must be biblical*. “We were entrusted with the gospel,” Paul declared (1 Thessalonians 2:4 NASB). Write down the definition of the verb *entrust* from the online [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#). Record why that word is significant for this verse and for shaping our priorities.

*We have been entrusted with the gospel. It is a trust. Just as a bank or a loan company takes money and uses it, it is entrusted with that money. It is not their own. So it is with Scripture. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

We saw in [2:5–6](#) that the second priority of vital ministry is *authenticity*. Look up the term *authentic* in the online [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#). Write the definition in the space below and then write under it the negatives that Paul mentioned were not characteristics of his ministry.

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*When I think of someone who is authentic, I think of one who is believable, free from deception. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

We noted the *gracious spirit* of Paul as the third priority of spiritual vitality in *1 Thessalonians 2:7–11*. The Greek word for “tenderly cares” in 2:7 in the New American Standard Bible is *thalpo*. Look it up in the online Greek dictionary at [billmounce.com](http://billmounce.com). Then, combine the maternal and paternal imageries of verses 7 and 11. Why did Paul use both perspectives to paint the picture of his ministry to the new believers in Thessalonica?

The fourth priority essential to spiritual vitality is *relevance*, according to *2:12–14*. Some fear that being relevant can soften the message of the gospel and lead to compromise. Paraphrase *2:12* in the space below and explain why we can be gentle, up-to-date, *and* biblical.

*I'm convinced you can be right and loving . . . because God is.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Vitality in ministry requires us to address today's issues, not the issues of yesterday. To look *forward* rather than look *backward*. To be firm about God's message while being flexible about our methods. To be willing to break from doing things “the way we've always done them” to reach a new generation.

*The Bible is alive with relevance. All we have to do is see it and pull it out and let people realize how relevant it is. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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## **Correlation: Priorities for Spiritual Vitality Confirmed**

*Correlation* enhances your understanding and confirms your interpretation by comparing our passage with other biblical passages. Compare what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians with *Ephesians 4:11–16*; *Hebrews 4:12*; and *1 Peter 2:1–3*. Why is preaching or teaching God's Word central to spiritual vitality?

*When God's Word is proclaimed, God's people are fed—and that includes the pastor. God's truth falls like a seed on fertile soil. Once received, it takes root in our lives, grows, and produces fruit. Everyone benefits. Everyone is nurtured.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

In *Galatians 1:6–11*, Paul described the dreadful outcomes when a church substitutes preaching God's Word for something else. What did Paul say that people-pleasing leads to?

God's eternal truths fortify believers. Prophets and kings anchored their lives to the fixed points of God's truth (*Psalms 119:89*; *Isaiah 40:8*). His Word shines the light of wisdom and guidance for the young and the old (*Psalms 119:9, 11, 105*). It is the training manual for righteous living (*2 Timothy 3:16–17*). In a world filled with so-called experts pulling us in all directions, the solid handholds of scriptural truth will keep us secure.



## **Application: Prioritize These Essentials!**

*Application* of this in-depth study of the Scriptures is important to spiritual vitality. Here are some questions to help us apply any passage: Is there a command to obey? Is there a prayer to offer? Is there a habit to break? Is there a challenge to face? Is there a person to forgive? Is there an example to follow?

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Keep those questions in mind as you reflect on the four spiritual priorities below.

1. *How can I strengthen my grip on being biblical?*
2. *How can I strengthen my grip on being authentic?*
3. *How can I strengthen my grip on being gracious?*
4. *How can I strengthen my grip on being relevant?*

Which of these priorities is most important to you in your current walk with Christ and why?

How is the Lord leading you to strengthen your grip on this priority?

Biblical accuracy, authenticity, graciousness, and relevance. Just as climbers cling to anchor points on a rock wall, hold on to these priorities as you scale the heights of God's mountain. They are solid principles on which to build your ministry and your life.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, You are my strong Rock! I cling to You. Thank You for Your eternal truths I can cling to in a world that is constantly changing. Thank You for Your strength that will help me have a firm grip on the most important things. Help me be biblical, authentic, gracious, and relevant. Help my church family hold tightly to these four essentials, so we can tread new heights for Your glory. In Jesus' precious name. Amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 85.
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?](#)"

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1980, 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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