

WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

STUDY ONE

Sustaining Enthusiasm

Joshua 1:1–9

Overexposure to religious activities can lead to spiritual monotony. You can become weary in doing good. You can lose heart for spiritual things. You can lose your awe of God.

—Charles R. Swindoll

HOW precious is wise counsel when we need it most, during times of trouble! When the heat is on and the stakes are high, we so appreciate words of wisdom that correct our perspective, give us vital insight, and point us in the right direction. Anyone can see clearer in hindsight after the consequences of our actions are set in motion. But foresight—wisdom in advance—who can measure its value?

Joshua needed wise counsel when he and the vast nation he was leading came to the edge of the Promised Land at the banks of the Jordan River. His mentor and friend Moses had recently died. Absent on his shoulder was the weathered hand of the old prophet who had guided him all those years. In its place was the heavy burden of sole leadership and weighty concerns for his people.

Enemies awaited just ahead. And an even greater, invisible enemy lurked just behind: the mistakes of Israel's past. The danger of people repeating the sins of the wilderness must have weighed on Joshua's mind. He needed God's wise counsel more than ever, and so do we. The same invisible enemy that haunted the tents of the Hebrews stalks us as well. Let's find out what this enemy is and, using God's wise counsel to Joshua, learn how to put this enemy out of our lives.



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Sustaining Enthusiasm

Joshua 1:1–9



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Are there any enemies lurking in the shadows of your life? Your adversary may be a person who wishes you harm. Or, perhaps, the enemy is regret which attacks you sometimes. Maybe your enemy is spiritual in nature. Perhaps apathy has settled into your soul and deadened your spiritual senses toward the Lord.

As you begin your study, take a moment to acknowledge your foe and seek the Lord's help by offering this prayer for rescue:

*O LORD, hear my plea for justice.
Listen to my cry for help. . . .
Show me your unfailing love in wonderful ways.
By your mighty power you rescue
those who seek refuge from their enemies. (Psalm 17:1, 7)*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we begin by reading the passage carefully and slowly, absorbing every word. For helpful instruction from Chuck Swindoll, consult our online instructional web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)." On this page, you can link to purchase a copy of *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*.

Now read *Joshua 1–9*. Notice who is speaking: *the Lord!*



Observation: A History *Not* Worth Repeating

The Lord gave wise counsel to Joshua just as Joshua was preparing to lead the Israelites across the Jordan River. From where had God's people traveled and where were they going? Before observing the specifics of the Lord's counsel in Joshua 1:1–9, let's review the Israelites' journey on a map of Egypt and Palestine.



Sustaining Enthusiasm

Joshua 1:1–9



Searching the Scriptures Tip

Bible maps illustrate the regions where Bible characters lived, the topography, and the routes they took during their travels. Studying a Bible map helps you step into the world in which the people lived and imagine yourself traveling alongside them. You might wish to add an atlas to your Bible study library. A Bible atlas contains hundreds of detailed maps as well as fascinating historical background information. We recommend *Zondervan Essential Atlas of the Bible*, which can be ordered through the Insight for Living Ministries online store.

If you don't have a Bible atlas, find Israel's wilderness journey on a map in the back of your Bible. Locate the starting point of Israel's exodus and the location where the people camped before crossing the Jordan. Does your map indicate possible sites where the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and received the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai? Try to find these locations.

Then notice the region where the people wandered for forty years. Using the scale of miles on the map, estimate the distance between the starting point by the Nile and ending point by the Jordan.

In *Joshua 1:1–5*, God issued His mission for the Israelites to take the land that was promised to Moses. Look up the boundary locations on your Bible map for the sites mentioned in Joshua 1:1–5. What do you observe about these boundaries?

So much land to conquer! What a daunting task! No wonder the Lord reassured Joshua, "No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. For I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you" (Joshua 1:5).



Sustaining Enthusiasm

Joshua 1:1–9

Showers of Blessings in the Wilderness

Israel’s journey through the wilderness was a checkerboard of good and bad experiences. The apostle Paul traced the good and the bad in 1 Corinthians 10:1–12—which is an excellent background passage to Joshua’s story.

Read Paul’s summary of the wilderness journey and the lessons he teaches.

I don’t want you to forget, dear brothers and sisters, about our ancestors in the wilderness long ago. All of them were guided by a cloud that moved ahead of them, and all of them walked through the sea on dry ground. In the cloud and in the sea, all of them were baptized as followers of Moses. All of them ate the same spiritual food, and all of them drank the same spiritual water. For they drank from the spiritual rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ. Yet God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. (1 Corinthians 10:1–5)

Notice the phrase, “all of them,” repeated five times. Use the select tool to highlight these phrases. Then, find the contrasting phrase, “most of them,” and highlight it as well. You can right-click on this phrase and change the color, if you wish, to make it stand out.

In the chart below, write down the blessings experienced by the Israelites as Paul listed them. Read the Old Testament account to understand the background of Paul’s reference. In the last row, write down what “most of them” experienced.

Phrase	Experience	Backstory
<i>All of them</i>		<i>Exodus 13:21–22</i>
<i>All of them</i>		<i>Exodus 14:21–29</i>
<i>All of them</i>		<i>Exodus 14:31</i>
<i>All of them</i>		<i>Exodus 16:2–31</i>
<i>All of them</i>		<i>Exodus 17:1–7</i>
<i>Most of them</i>		<i>Numbers 14:20–23</i>



Sustaining Enthusiasm

Joshua 1:1–9

Like a cool spring rain, the Lord showered blessings upon His needy people: guidance from the cloud, protection through the sea, sustenance through daily manna, and water from the rock. And yet God was not pleased with them. Why?

Tragic Story of Spiritual Apathy

God intended the Israelites' exodus, sojourn, and arrival at Canaan to illustrate His plan of *redemption*, which is God through Christ paying the price to rescue sinners and lead them to eternal life with Him. God wanted His people to respond with trust and worship. Yet instead of a bouquet of devotion, a weedy infestation of grumbling grew in the people's hearts. Worse still, they shunned God and embraced idols.

Read [1 Corinthians 10:6–10](#). Note Paul's explanation of what the Israelite's did in each sin category, and then read the backstory in Exodus and Numbers.

Sin Category	Explanation	Backstory
<i>Idolatry</i>		<i>Exodus 32:1–6</i>
<i>Immorality</i>		<i>Numbers 25:1–9</i>
<i>Testing the Lord</i>		<i>Numbers 21:4–6</i>
<i>Grumbling</i>		<i>Numbers 16:41–50</i>

This is quite a list of sins! No wonder “God was not pleased” (1 Corinthians 10:5). Paul sums up the Israelites' sin issue with a warning for his readers in verse 6: “Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did” (NIV).

Paul was concerned that the Israelites' shift of devotion from God to evil would take root in the Corinthian believers as well. What is Paul's wise counsel? Don't set your heart on evil things! Positively stated, *sustain your enthusiasm for God*. In fact, the Lord had given this same counsel to Joshua centuries earlier! Let's take a closer look at the Lord's words to Joshua in the interpretation phase of our study.



Sustaining Enthusiasm

Joshua 1:1–9



Interpretation: Understanding the Renewal Process

Standing on the waters' edge of the Jordan River, Joshua must have wondered, *Would history repeat itself now that this new generation of Israelites had arrived at the Promised Land?* God's wise counsel in the following four commands to Joshua helped the nation sustain enthusiasm and stay engaged with His calling.

To accomplish the Lord's command to take the land that was promised to Moses, Joshua had to obey four commands. So vital was the first command that God repeated it four times! Read it in Joshua 1:6–7, 9, and 18. What is it?

Find the second command in verse 7 and write it in the space below.

The third command is in verse 8. What is God exhorting in this verse?



Sustaining Enthusiasm

Joshua 1:1–9

And what do you find as God's final command in verse 9?

*When you give it your all, there's maximum reward that comes. Give it your best.
Hold nothing back. Set your enthusiasm free; leave the results with God. —Chuck Swindoll*



Correlation: The Source of All Lies

Of all the enemies we face as Christians, perhaps the most insidious is the apathy that comes from overexposure to religious activities. Overexposure to religious activities can harden our once-lush spiritual life, and we become bored, even cynical. So involved in the work of God, we lose our awe of God. This was the invisible enemy that attacked the Israelites: *spiritual monotony*. Boredom with God's blessings led the Israelites into a spiritual wilderness more barren than any desert landscape.

What did the Berean believers do to stay enthusiastic about their walk with God (*Acts 17:10–12*)?



Sustaining Enthusiasm

Joshua 1:1–9



Application: Four Pathways to Enthusiasm

How does obeying the four commands that the Lord gave Joshua pump enthusiasm into our spiritual life? Each command connects us to God through faith.

- *Be strong and courageous, not weak and waffling.* We can only be strong and courageous when we trust in God's promises.
- *Be careful to obey all God's instructions.* We can only obey when we truly believe that God's way is best.
- *Study daily and meditate on God's Word.* We will only study His Word when we long to hear God's voice.
- *Do not be afraid or become discouraged.* We will only refrain from fear and discouragement when we are certain that God is with us.

If you're experiencing spiritual blahs, perhaps one of these areas of faith needs addressing. Search your soul, and ask yourself: *Am I trusting in God's promises? Do I believe God's way is best? Do I long to hear His voice through His Word? Am I certain that He is with me?*

Pick one of these questions to prompt reflection in the space below. Address this issue before God and see Him boost your enthusiasm for spiritual things.

The Lord assured Joshua as he was about to cross the Jordan River and battle his enemies, "I will not fail you or abandon you" (Joshua 1:5). Claim His promise for yourself today as you step into your future with enthusiasm and faith!



Sustaining Enthusiasm

Joshua 1:1–9



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, may I live my spiritual life by giving it my all, engaging my spiritual muscles, and acting with the strength and courage that only You can provide. Draw me closer to the fire of Your presence and kindle in me a heart that is set on You.



WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

STUDY TWO

Overcoming Failure

Luke 22:31–34, 54–62

What do we need in moments of failure? The grace of God. Grace says, “I’ll reach down and lift you up. I’ll give you a future and a hope.”

—Charles R. Swindoll

FEW troubles are as hard to endure as the heartache that accompanies failure. The failure may have been a mistake in judgment that led to financial ruin, a violation of trust that collapsed a relationship, or a fall into sin that hurt those you love. Maybe it was a promise you broke or a principle you compromised or a tender soul you wounded. Whatever it was, living in self-blame can be unbearable. Regret, like a Sahara wind, can scorch a person’s soul.

You may be trudging through life under guilt’s searing sun, and if so, that’s no way to spend your days! Our Lord desires you overcome your failure. As a God of love, mercy, and grace, He wants you to find victory over the past. He knows you are weak and imperfect, and He is willing to hear your confession and forgive all your transgressions. Then He will enable you to move beyond failure and live a productive life.

The Scriptures are filled with accounts of those who overcame failure, recovered from their shame, and went on to be greatly used by God. There’s no better example than a man named Peter.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Just as battered ships find shelter in safe harbors, we, too, find shelter in the restorative grace of God. As you read the following lines from Psalm 103, enter the haven of grace and receive God’s welcome for sinners seeking restoration and hope.



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Overcoming Failure

Luke 22:31–34, 54–62

*Let all that I am praise the LORD;
may I never forget the good things he does for me.
He forgives all my sins
and heals all my diseases.
He redeems me from death
and crowns me with love and tender mercies.
He fills my life with good things.
My youth is renewed like the eagle's! (Psalm 103:2–5)*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Stamped across Peter's case file in bold, red letters is the word, *hope*. Although he failed by denying Christ, he overcame his failure through the grace of God. Peter's example gives us hope of our own new beginning. "For whatever things were written before," Paul penned, "were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4 NKJV). When we've failed, we desperately need hope!



Observation: Account of Failure

Let's use our *Searching the Scriptures* skills of observation, interpretation, correlation, and application.¹ First, read *Luke 22:14–34*. Put yourself in the scene alongside Peter and the other disciples. As you read, imagine how the action might have unfolded between Jesus and Peter. Let's look closer at verses 31–34 as we see Peter take his first steps toward failure.

Peter's Failure Examined

Peter's story of failure and restoration begins on the night of the Passover when Jesus was arrested. Jesus warned Peter of a menacing storm on its way: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat" (Luke 22:31). The phrase, "each of you," refers to all the disciples in the room. Satan intended to scatter the weak disciples like chaff in a stiff wind, and he was particularly interested in exposing Peter's paper-thin loyalty.



Overcoming Failure

Luke 22:31–34, 54–62

Why target Peter? What impact would the failure of Peter have on the rest of the disciples?

Jesus allowed Satan to sift His disciples but shielded Peter with prayer. He assured Peter:

“I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:32 NASB)

Jesus prayed that Peter’s failure would not destroy his faith but strengthen it through repentance so he might strengthen others.

We might think that Peter’s failure would disqualify him. How might Peter be better suited to help others after his failure?

At this time in his life, Peter saw himself as immune to failure and was insulted by Jesus’ insinuation that he was weak. Instead of humbly acknowledging his need for prayer, he proudly puffed up his allegiance for the others to admire: “Lord, I am ready to go to prison with You, and even to die with you” (22:33). Impetuous Peter had yet to learn the lessons that only experience teaches.

Three Public Denials

Jesus deflated Peter’s pride with a sobering prediction: “Peter, let me tell you something. Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me” (Luke 22:34).



Overcoming Failure

Luke 22:31–34, 54–62

Jesus then led His disciples to the garden of Gethsemane where He was arrested and brought to the high priest’s home for His first trial. The other disciples scattered, but Peter followed at a safe distance and entered the courtyard hoping to watch from the shadows. The stage was set for Peter’s fall.

In the chart below, read parallel accounts of Peter’s denials and write down who speaks, what is said, and Peter’s response.

	Speaker	Accusation	Response
Denial 1 <i>Matthew 26:69–70;</i> <i>Luke 22:55–57</i>			
Denial 2 <i>Matthew 26:71–72;</i> <i>Luke 22:58</i>			
Denial 3 <i>Matthew 26:73–75;</i> <i>Luke 22:59–60</i>			

Matthew cast Peter in the same light as the cursing and swearing soldiers who arrested Jesus. Peter’s raw humanity exposed, he revealed himself to be no better than they were. Luke included a heart-wrenching look from Jesus just as Peter’s third denial crossed his lips and the sound of the fated cock crowed.

At that moment the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Suddenly, the Lord’s words flashed through Peter’s mind: “Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me.” (Luke 22:61)

The look from Jesus exposed Peter’s sin and his real, weak-willed self. His true nature stripped bare, Peter ran . . . not from the soldiers with their swords but from Jesus with His searching eyes. According to Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase, Peter “went out and cried and cried and cried” (22:62 MSG).



Overcoming Failure

Luke 22:31–34, 54–62

A look can drive a message deep into our soul's inner chambers. What cargo did Jesus' look carry to Peter? Did His look deliver shame—"I knew you'd never amount to much"; guilt—"Look at the mess you've made"; blame—"I warned you but you didn't listen"; or condemnation—"You will suffer for what you've done"?

Knowing our Lord's love for sinners, His look most likely conveyed empathy, not shame; grace, not guilt; compassion, not displeasure. What do you see in Jesus' eyes when you sin? In the space below, reflect on this question. Do you imagine a negative response from Jesus? If so, according to this passage, what would be Christ's actual response to you? A message of displeasure or one of compassion?

Now let's take the next step from observing Scripture to understanding its deeper meaning as we continue Peter's story and see God's grace rescuing and restoring this fallen disciple.



Interpretation: Grace-Filled Glimpses of Hope

The next regret-filled days passed like a living nightmare for Peter. However, when Jesus rose from the grave, so did hope. To the women who found the tomb empty, the angel announced Jesus' resurrection and pointed them back home: "Now go and tell his disciples, *including Peter*" (Mark 16:7, emphasis added). Why single out Peter?



Overcoming Failure

Luke 22:31–34, 54–62

In another post-resurrection scene, Jesus spoke to Peter face to face. Read the account in [John 21:1–17](#), focusing on the three times Jesus asked Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” in verses 15–17. What do you think is the connection between these three questions and Peter’s three denials?

Who else would be better qualified to tell people about the grace of God than the man who needed it the most? And when the church was founded, who was the one who took the prominent role? Peter. Not Paul, not yet. It was Peter who fed and cared for the sheep. It was as if the Lord was saying, “You still have a future and a hope.” —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Peter’s Growth Over Time

When studying a Bible character, don’t miss the opportunity to look for that person’s personal growth over time. Often, Scripture sketches portraits of individuals throughout their lives, such as in Peter’s case. As a brash, young disciple, Peter trumpeted himself and took no mind of Satan. After the events of Passover night, his tune changed regarding both the value of humility and the seriousness of Satan’s threats.

Read [1 Peter 5:6–9](#). How does his attitude in 1 Peter compare to his attitude in [Luke 22:31–34](#)? The differences in these two passages suggest he learned what lesson?



Overcoming Failure

Luke 22:31–34, 54–62

In the furnace of failure, the dross of our lives is purged away revealing the precious qualities of humility and dependence on Christ. Can you see growth through failure in your own life? If so, in what ways?

Application: Reassuring Signs Leading to Recovery

John’s account of Peter’s final encounter with Jesus reveals Peter’s response to each of Jesus’ questions: “Yes, Lord . . . you know I love you” (John 21:15–17). With each question Jesus asked, He revealed deeper layers of debilitating shame in Peter’s soul, covered Peter’s shame with grace, and enabled Peter for the task ahead: “Take care of my sheep” (21:16).

Wounded and then healed, Peter became fit for the healing work of ministry. Brought low and raised up, Peter was ready to lift up others. Guilty but forgiven, Peter was qualified to preach the gospel of grace—*with power!* When he preached on the day of Pentecost, three thousand souls were saved in one day (Acts 2:14–41)!

As we close this study, write in a journal about a past failure that may be holding you down. Envision Christ looking with compassion at *you*. Receive His outstretched arms of forgiveness. Hear His call to a hopeful, productive future.



Overcoming Failure

Luke 22:31–34, 54–62

Reminders of your failure will haunt you. Every dawn, roosters will crow your failure, but do as Peter did: hear the rooster's crow as a reminder of Christ's compassion and as a daily calling to share your restoration with others. Let's face it; we've all failed. But by God's grace, your failure need not define you or linger as a disabling presence in your life. From failure's bondage, Christ has set you free!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, through your Word, I hear Your voice saying, "Trust Me to take care of your sin." I do trust You and desire to release my past failures into Your hands of grace. You say, "I offer you a future and a hope." Thank You for giving me a reason to live and the power to overcome and move on. Guide my steps as I humbly and gratefully depend on You each day. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

STUDY THREE

Never Quitting

2 Timothy 3:1–5, 10–12, 14; 4:1–5

Those who are determined to stand fast are the people we most admire—the people of the Bible who refused to quit against all odds.

—Charles R. Swindoll

THE apostle Paul spent his final days in the Mamertine prison in Rome, awaiting his appointment with the executioner's blade. It was a horrid place. All the unfortunate souls who descended the stone steps into the Mamertine descended into despair. Hope flickered and died when prisoners crossed the threshold of their dungeon cell and heard the iron gate clang shut.

If there was any time in his life for Paul, in his 60s, to fold his hands and quit, it was then. And yet, despite the depressing conditions, the apostle kept ministering! The Christian-hating Roman Emperor Nero could stifle the great apostle's voice, but he could not still Paul's pen. From his dimly lit dungeon and with a determined hand, Paul wrote his final letter, 2 Timothy. This letter ignited a flame of inspiration for young pastor Timothy to never quit his calling and, after him, for future generations of Christians to fulfill theirs.



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Never Quitting

2 Timothy 3:1–5, 10–12, 14; 4:1–5



PREPARE YOUR HEART

What might make a person quit his or her calling? Criticism, persecution, lack of encouragement, disillusionment when dreams never materialize, failure—these are a few of the chief reasons. Have life's problems ever tossed you in a cell of despair regarding your calling in your career, in your role in the home or society, or in your ministry? What locked you in your prison?

Ask the Lord for the key that frees you from the dungeon of discouragement and restores the joy of your calling. Let's dig into the Word to discover the secrets of Paul's never-quit determination!



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *2 Timothy 3:1–14* and look for evidence of Paul's indomitable attitude coming through his words. Print the passage from the online Bible and underline what initially seems important. Or use your cursor to highlight the sections on the screen. Note below any questions you may have.



Never Quitting

2 Timothy 3:1–5, 10–12, 14; 4:1–5



Observation: Account of Failure

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, a crucial first step is observation, which involves examining the text by asking questions such as where, who, what, when, how.¹ We know where Paul was—in a Roman prison. And when—toward the end of life. We know to whom he was writing—his young apprentice Timothy, who was the pastor of the church at Ephesus.

Next comes the “what.” After encouraging Timothy in the first two chapters of the letter, Paul got down to business, as if he were reaching through the page and grabbing young Timothy by the shoulders: “You should know this, Timothy” (2 Timothy 3:1). What exactly did Paul want Timothy to know?

A Frightening Prediction

First, Paul relayed a frightening prediction. Read what Paul told Timothy.

In the last days there will be very difficult times.² For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that! (2 Timothy 3:1–5)

Sadly, Paul’s predictions could be today’s headlines. Or they could land much closer to home and describe your company newsletter or even your family’s social media pages. Reread the list of characteristics and highlight the ones that particularly describe the world in which you live.

Pause in your study of the Word to reflect on your emotions as you think about our dangerous, decadent times. Do you feel any fear? Discouragement? Have you had thoughts of giving up? As if writing in a journal, write a prayer to the Lord sharing your feelings with Him.



Never Quitting

2 Timothy 3:1–5, 10–12, 14; 4:1–5

A Passionate Reminder

Certainly, Timothy felt similar emotions. Like a loving but firm father, Paul then appealed to young Timothy to stick to the *core commitments* of being a Christ-follower: “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” (2 Timothy 3:14).

Timothy had followed Paul’s teaching and single-minded devotion to Christ. He was intimate with Paul’s ability to endure suffering, which included abuse like Paul experienced at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra (3:10–11).

What persecutions did Paul endure in each of these three cities:

Antioch (Acts 13:50)

Iconium (14:5–6)

Lystra (14:19)?

And yet, through every episode of suffering, Paul declared, “the Lord rescued me from all of it” (2 Timothy 3:11). Then he made a statement that still causes many Christians to shudder: “Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will *suffer persecution*” (3:12, emphasis added).

This warning could have derailed Timothy. But Paul bucked up his young friend with the phrase, *su de*, “But you.” “But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught” (3:14). In other words, never quit!



Never Quitting

2 Timothy 3:1–5, 10–12, 14; 4:1–5

Paul was saying, “Timothy, difficult times are coming. Savage times.” . . . And my words to you as a Christian living in this twenty-first century are “Step up!” Stop looking for a reason to set aside life or to find a way to get away from the pressure. Stand firm.
—Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Five Urgent Commands

Paul’s fire for the gospel still burned hot in the cold, damp Mamertine dungeon. From this place, he could see storm clouds brewing on the horizon that would unleash a torrent of troubles for the young churches. Would their determination be equal to his? What could he say to pass his flame?

Let’s use our interpretation skills to uncover principles based on Paul’s five urgent commands to Timothy. Paul designed these commands to steady Timothy’s hand on the helm of the church, and they are all based on a single focal point: the exposition of God’s Word.

I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he comes to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching.
(2 Timothy 4:1–2)

Did you notice Paul’s five commands? Write them in the space below, along with five principles that we can apply in our day.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



Never Quitting

2 Timothy 3:1–5, 10–12, 14; 4:1–5

God’s Word is the North Star by which we steer our ship; *exposition* of God’s Word is the skill required to stay the course. Chuck Swindoll defines *exposition*:

The process of learning and explaining the meaning and purpose of a given text. This might happen in a sermon, in a classroom, in a small group setting, or around the dinner table—wherever people are reading and applying a passage of Scripture.³

Many local churches today—just like Timothy’s congregation—reject Bible exposition for ear-tickling, aimless stories (2 Timothy 4:3–4). But we must listen to Paul’s call to keep our compass needle on true north, regardless the cost.

But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don’t be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you. (4:5)

With his life’s clock ticking closer to its end, Paul wrote only what was most important. “Keep a clear mind,” he exhorted Timothy, *and us*. “Don’t be afraid. . . . Work at telling others the Good News . . . carry out the ministry.” Inspiring words!



Correlation: Paul’s Character Proven through Hardship

In the *Searching the Scriptures* process, a helpful exercise is to look for patterns of character in correlating passages. Bible students ask questions, such as, “Was Paul ever in a similar situation? What can we learn about his character by comparing the situations?” In this case, by comparing Paul’s imprisonments, we can glean deeper insights into his soul to help us when facing our own seasons of hardship.

Let’s take a brief look at his previous jail experiences to discover some of Paul’s character qualities that served him well at the end of his life. Fill in the following chart by reading the account, noting the location of the imprisonment and observing Paul’s qualities.



Never Quitting

2 Timothy 3:1–5, 10–12, 14; 4:1–5

Verses	Location	Paul's Qualities
<i>Acts 16:22–31</i>		
<i>Acts 24:1, 22–27</i>		
<i>Acts 28:16–31</i>		

Whether he was singing while locked in stocks or boldly preaching while bound in chains, Paul's dauntless spirit soared despite the confined quarters of prison. What was the fire that burned in his soul's furnace? A calling from God to *preach Christ* even in the most difficult circumstances (Philippians 1:18).

Application: Reassuring Signs Leading to Recovery

How can you stand firm? First, *beware the tendency to compromise your convictions*. Is there any area of your life that once was firm but now is soft? If so, what can you do to reinforce this moral weakness?

Second, *resist the temptation to drift from the Word*. Continue to use these *Searching the Scriptures* studies and stay faithful to a church that focuses on the exposition of God's Word. And finally, remember to adhere to the truth. *Truth*, not majority opinion, will keep you strong.



Never Quitting

2 Timothy 3:1–5, 10–12, 14; 4:1–5

“To live is Christ and to die is gain” was Paul’s life motto that kept him always focused on his Lord and never quitting his calling (Philippians 1:21 NASB). Remembering a sentence or phrase that concisely states your core values will help you never quit during trials. What is your life motto or life verse? Write it below, and if you’ve never selected one, take time now and ask God to help you find one.

Paul’s pearls of wisdom to Timothy apply to us as well. Polished by years of hardship and delivered from death’s door, Paul’s words of encouragement offer us the wisest counsel for our troubled times.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Deliver me from the temptation to go elsewhere or to be satisfied with less. Keep me on course, and give me the power to hold on when fear weakens me and enemies distract me. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. “In the last days,” the days between Jesus’ birth at Bethlehem and His second coming in glory, “there will be very difficult times” (2 Timothy 3:1). The Greek word for “difficult,” *chalepos*, is used only one other time in Matthew 8:28 where it describes two demoniacs as “extremely violent” (NASB). The word means “dangerous,” “fierce,” or “menacing.”
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 191.



WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

STUDY FOUR

Thinking Biblically

2 Chronicles 34

Who are the people that take God seriously? They're the people who say God's Word is not just another book. These people see the Bible as a life-giving text and guide for the priorities they choose, the decisions they make, the way they handle things at home, the way they conduct themselves in business, the close friends they select, and the way they spend their money.

—Charles R. Swindoll

REMEMBER when you first discovered the truth of God's Word? How it came alive and spoke into your life with the gale-force winds of relevance. How it created such awe before the majesty of God the Father, imparted such clarity of vision of God the Son, and sparked such joy through the Holy Spirit.

From time to time, we should purposefully recall those special seasons of God's fresh activity in our lives. If you have not done so recently, use this study to do just that. Chuck Swindoll takes us to a rare scene in ancient Israel's history where God's Word kindled repentance in one king's soft heart igniting a nationwide revival in God's people.

That king was Josiah, who serves as a model for us today on how to think biblically.



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Thinking Biblically

2 Chronicles 34



PREPARE YOUR HEART

We depend on God to soften our hearts so we might receive His Word like Josiah did. For that reason, we always need to pray that God help us not only understand what He preserved in the Scriptures but also receive His Word into hearts and minds. Do that now.

Father, how I greatly depend upon You. I sit in desperate need of Your continued presence and involvement in my life through Your Spirit. Do not let me run past You. Do not let me run away from You. I still myself before You. I open my heart and hands to receive all the good things You have given and promised me through Your Word. In the strong name of Jesus, I pray, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

First, let's review Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method.¹ This [overview chart](#) lists the four steps we use to study God's Word and the function of each step. Take a moment to read the chart to understand how Chuck gleans truths from the Word and how you can too!

We engage in very serious work when we gather before God's Word to hear what the Spirit has set forth through the printed page. Learn now, if you have never before, to take God seriously. To listen when He speaks. —Chuck Swindoll

Now let's begin with the first phase of Bible study: observation.



Observation: In Ancient Days, a Man Who Made a Difference

Read the account of Josiah recorded in [2 Chronicles 34](#) and summarize what happened.



Thinking Biblically

2 Chronicles 34

What did Josiah remove from Judah and Jerusalem, and what did Josiah decree that led the author of 2 Chronicles to praise him?

Second Chronicles 34:33 summarizes the spiritual impact of Josiah's accomplishments:

So Josiah removed all detestable idols from the entire land of Israel and required everyone to worship the LORD their God. And throughout the rest of his lifetime, they did not turn away from the LORD, the God of their ancestors.

Because of the actions of one man, thousands of people lived fulfilled, meaningful lives in close connection with God's presence and in ways which promoted the peace and welfare of the entire nation. Amazing!



Interpretation: Why He Did It

Let's calculate Josiah's age by referencing 2 Chronicles 34.

Josiah became king at age _____ (2 Chronicles 34:1).

Josiah sought the God of David at age _____ (34:3).

Josiah purified the nation at age _____ (34:3).

Josiah began repairing the temple at age _____ (34:8, 14).



Thinking Biblically

2 Chronicles 34

Second Kings 22:1–2 provides a complementary panorama of the reign of this righteous king.

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. His mother was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah from Bozkath. He did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight and followed the example of his ancestor David. He did not turn away from doing what was right.

What can we infer from the short statement of Josiah's mom and her influence in his life? What important principle can we draw from this?

How does 2 Chronicles 34:19 indicate Josiah's soft heart toward God?

It's no longer the faith of his mother; it's now his faith. —Chuck Swindoll

According to 34:23–28, how did God view Josiah's response and change His plans for Judah?



Thinking Biblically

2 Chronicles 34

What principles can we derive from 2 Chronicles 34:19–28 today? Principles are truths that can be applied to all people, in any culture, and at any time in history.

Talk about taking God seriously! Only once did Josiah have to hear from God to enact radical life-change in himself and promote it among his people. Josiah took God at His Word and believed God would do what He says. Josiah is a model of the faith we can emulate today.



Correlation: Be Transformed in Your Thinking

Paul's writings contain many such exhortations to take God at His Word. To believe what's promised, do what's commanded, and heed what's warned. All of this requires a change in perspective, the next step after placing our faith in Christ. Look at what Paul wrote:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:1–2)

How does Paul's command complement Josiah's response of doing away with the old and embracing the new?



Thinking Biblically

2 Chronicles 34

The Greek word for “customs of this world” is *aion*. One commentator offers a classic expression of how Paul used this word in Romans 12:2:

All that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, but which constitute a most real and effective power, being the moral, or immoral, atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again inevitably to exhale—all this is included in the αἰών, which is, as Bengel has expressed it, the subtle informing spirit of the . . . world of men who are living alienated and apart from God.²

Don't rush past that important quote. Reflect on it. What worldly streams of thought most influence your thinking? How can you be more aware of them and combat them with the truth of God's Word?

Don't let your mind absorb the thinking of the majority. Don't get lost in the horrendous propaganda of the times in which you live—all the politically correct information, all the STUFF of our society. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Making a Difference in Today's World

To close this study on biblical thinking, Chuck wants you to ask yourself three simple questions. They provide a road map for applying to your life the truth of 2 Chronicles 34.

- 1) *Where do I start?* Pick one thought-pattern you want to change.
- 2) *What should I ignore?* The enemy always puts something or someone in our lives to lead us to think wrongly about God or wrongly about life.
- 3) *How do I proceed?* An open Bible. A tender heart. A willingness to change. Decisive action.



Thinking Biblically

2 Chronicles 34

Think over the questions carefully and record your road map for improving your biblical thinking.

Jedidah prepared Josiah to have a heart like David's. One that was responsive to God. Josiah eliminated the idolatry of Judah and then heard the words of the covenant for the very first time. God's Word stopped Josiah in his tracks. He repented and God blessed him and the nation of Judah. Just imagine what God can do through His Word in your life!



A FINAL PRAYER

Record a fitting prayer in response to what you learned from God's Word.

ENDNOTES

1. We recommend you purchase Chuck's *book Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* if you do not already have a copy. You can also read Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* introductions on sts.insight.org.
2. Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1880), 217–18.



WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

STUDY FIVE

Demonstrating Wisdom

1 Samuel 25:1–42

Rash reactions never lead to anything good. Nothing good happens to us because of them. Nothing good happens to others.

—Charles R. Swindoll

VIRTUOUS living exudes a kind of magnetic, glistening splendor. Like dewdrops lit by the rays of the sun, people of noble character sparkle and attract our notice as we pause to ponder the beauty of lives well lived.

God designed human beings to live virtuously—to express the goodness of His character, uphold the truth of His Word, and display the fullness of His image. In this series, we’ve been exploring certain virtuous traits highlighted through great lives from God’s Book. In this study, we shine the light on Abigail, whose life encourages us to exercise that classic virtue of wisdom in action—*prudence*.

According to *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, the meaning of the word *prudence* includes many facets:

1. The ability to govern and discipline oneself by the use of reason
2. Sagacity or shrewdness in the management of affairs
3. Skill or good judgment in the use of resources
4. Caution or circumspection as to danger or risk¹

This definition perfectly describes Abigail—the woman whose quick thinking and wise action spared the future king of Israel! Though Abigail appears only briefly in the grand narrative of Scripture, her example proves instructive for those wanting to follow in the same path of wisdom.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Demonstrating Wisdom

1 Samuel 25:1–42



PREPARE YOUR HEART

What do you hope to learn from this study? Express to God your need for Christ to work in your heart during this study. Turn that reflection into a prayer below.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Keep the following in mind as you navigate your way through 1 Samuel 25 using the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method.²

Occasionally, as I see these single-chapter stories, I think of them as plays—three act plays that open with the introduction of the main characters in act one. Then you go to the plot which opens the curtain for act two. Then you come to a surprising conclusion, act three. First Samuel, chapter 25 is no exception. It's one of the great stories you'll ever read in the Bible. —Chuck Swindoll



Observation: Meeting the Characters

Begin observation with a careful read of *1 Samuel 25*.

Who are the three main characters in this chapter?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Demonstrating Wisdom

1 Samuel 25:1–42

Who are minor characters in this chapter?

When and where did the events of this chapter occur?

What kindness did David show Nabal? How did Nabal belittle David's request?

How was Nabal's perspective skewed in his reply to David? How did David act rashly?



Demonstrating Wisdom

1 Samuel 25:1–42

Armed with sharp swords, David and his four hundred, flint-faced men walked with an indomitable gait to slay the arrogant Nabal. David took no time to reason. Anger steered him. A rampage of revenge awaited Nabal's camp.



Interpretation: The Plot, The Surprise

Only one person in the Bible lived perfectly: Jesus. Nevertheless, many scenes thread Genesis through Revelation in which God's people wonderfully reflect God's character—like Abigail.

What actions did Abigail take that displayed her wisdom?

Here is wisdom at work. I mean, you don't argue with a fool. How stupid it would have been for Abigail to walk in and demand of her husband, "What were you thinking, Nabal?" Abigail was not going to stop David's group from coming. They were on their way with blood in their eyes. She did not even talk to Nabal. You can't talk to a Nabal, not a fool like him. She learned that over the years of living with him. But without wasting any time, she put together the first catering service. —Chuck Swindoll

How did Abigail display wisdom and humility in her conversation with David?



Demonstrating Wisdom

1 Samuel 25:1–42

How did Abigail's prudent use of her resources and wise management of her affairs benefit both Nabal and David?

What surprise did the author record to conclude this biblical three-act play?

Let's now examine the theology of 1 Samuel 25:23–35. Often, biblical authors use speech in narratives to insert theology and highlight God's hand in the matter. How did Abigail and David interpret God's involvement in Abigail's actions? In what way is their theology important for Christians to remember today?

God preserved David—and not merely for David's sake. God protected David from bloodshed because God had a kingdom for David to rule, divine truth for David to steward, and chosen people for David to bless through his God-centered governance.



Demonstrating Wisdom

1 Samuel 25:1–42



Correlation: Biblical Wisdom

The biblical authors address the topic of wisdom from beginning to end. Review each of the passages below and record what they teach about the importance of wisdom.

Proverbs 3:7–8

*Don't be impressed with your own wisdom.
Instead, fear the LORD and turn away from evil.
Then you will have healing for your body
and strength for your bones. (Proverbs 3:7–8)*

Proverbs 4:5–8

*Get wisdom; develop good judgment.
Don't forget my words or turn away from them.
Don't turn your back on wisdom, for she will protect you.
Love her, and she will guard you.
Getting wisdom is the wisest thing you can do!
And whatever else you do, develop good judgment.
If you prize wisdom, she will make you great.
Embrace her, and she will honor you. (Proverbs 4:5–8)*



Demonstrating Wisdom

1 Samuel 25:1–42

Proverbs 24:3, 17

*A house is built by wisdom
and becomes strong through good sense
. . . wisdom is sweet to your soul.
If you find it, you will have a bright future,
and your hopes will not be cut short. (Proverbs 24:3, 14)*

Through her dependence upon wisdom, Abigail displayed virtuous living. Through her acts of humility, she protected many lives in the house of Nabal—not to mention her own—and won for herself a bright future and honor in the eyes of God’s chosen king.

Application: Lessons from the Characters

Chuck ends his sermon with three application points tied to the three main characters.

David’s Rashness

Rash reactions never lead to anything good. Some of you are given to anger. You have a temper. Often you do not realize how difficult you make it for those around you. I challenge you to be mindful of your anger and leave room for the Lord to intervene in your situation.
—Chuck Swindoll



Demonstrating Wisdom

1 Samuel 25:1–42

If you sense a habit of rash reacting in your own day-to-day living, think over what might be causing it. Develop a plan to help you better trust in Christ's leading.

Nabal's Folly

We learned from Nabal that insensitive husbands always leave heartaches in their wake.
—Chuck Swindoll

If you're a man whom God has blessed with a wife, consider ways you might be acting like a Nabal. Note below what comes to mind, plan to apologize if necessary, and determine the way to move forward toward spiritual wholeness, joy, and encouragement in your marriage.

Abigail's Wisdom

From Abigail, we learn that wise wives seldom miss the best use of timing and tact.
—Chuck Swindoll



Demonstrating Wisdom

1 Samuel 25:1–42

If you're a woman whom God has blessed with a husband, consider ways you can use better timing and tact to love your husband and foster a thriving marriage. Write those ways below.

Neglecting God's wisdom often makes life difficult, dwindles joy in life, and can even wreak havoc in the lives of others. But upholding and using God's wisdom nourishes us like a life-giving tree. As we see in prudent Abigail, wisdom proves to be a marvelous gift from above!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your provision and faithfulness in my life, for giving me wisdom to know You, worship You, and follow Your good ways. I pray that I would not act rashly when tempted, but that You would increase my wisdom so I can live intentionally and be a blessing to others. In Jesus' sweet name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Merriam-Webster, Inc., *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2003), see "prudence."
2. We recommend you purchase Chuck's *book Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* if you do not already have a copy. You can also read Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* introductions on sts.insight.org.



WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

STUDY SIX

Taking Responsibility

Nehemiah 1:1–4; 2:1–18; 6:15–16

Nothing you do is secular when you consider all the hats you wear as God-given responsibilities.

—Charles R. Swindoll

GOD is at the center of all things and the ruler of all He has made. Whatever He has built, He owns. Regarding how the world works, He sets the rules. And when mapping the course for our lives, He has the decisive say. God is the *final* authority. He is “Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all” (Ephesians 4:6 MSG).

Our role in His cosmic design is to take responsibility for whatever God assigns us. He is the master, and we’re the managers. Thankfully, with divine assignments come divine assistance from God’s Word. Let’s seek God’s wisdom from the account of Nehemiah, a role model for obedience, who followed God’s directive to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Whenever you open God’s Word, remember that the Lord is with you as He was with Nehemiah. Like Nehemiah, you can trust God to help you accomplish whatever monumental tasks await you. Read the psalmist’s declaration of dependence on God and declare your own prayer of trust in God as you study His Word.

*But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD,
I say, “You are my God.”
My times are in Your hand. (Psalm 31:14–15 NASB)*



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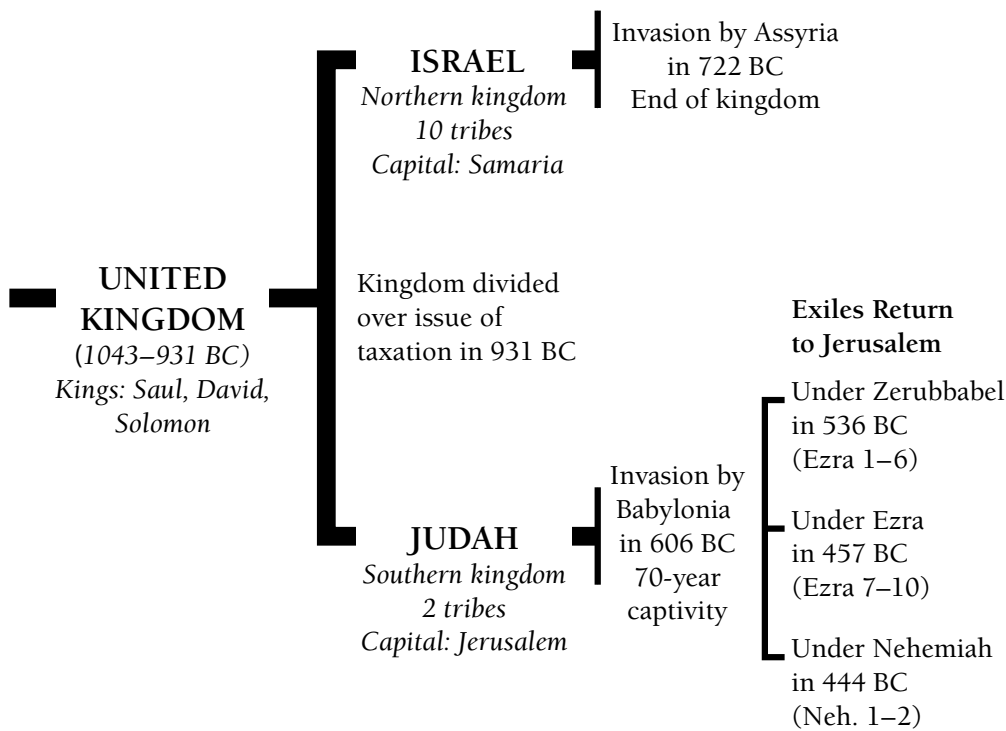
Taking Responsibility

Nehemiah 1:1–4; 2:1–18; 6:15–16



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

A key ingredient in the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study is understanding the *historical background* of the passage you are reading.¹ Nehemiah’s story flows out of the events and people that shaped his nation. The chart below diagrams Israel’s history beginning with Israel’s first united kingdom. As you read the chart, note the invasions by Assyria and then Babylonia that sent the Jews into exile for a period of seventy years.



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As you can see from the chart, the kingdom divided in 931 BC, when the northern ten tribes formed their own nation and kept the name Israel. Judah, in the south, preserved David’s kingly line and retained Jerusalem as the capital.

In 606 BC, the Babylonians began deporting to Babylon from Jerusalem young leaders such as Daniel. Judah continued for some time as a vassal state. However, when Judah’s king Zedekiah did evil in God’s sight, God used the Babylonians, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, to conquer Judah, destroy Jerusalem, and deport the Jews to Babylon where they lived in exile.



Taking Responsibility

Nehemiah 1:1–4; 2:1–18; 6:15–16

Read the account of the destruction of Jerusalem in *2 Chronicles 36:17–20*, which occurred in 586 BC. In the space below, list the devastations inflicted on the capital city and its people.

Imagine the scene from the point of view of the weeping Hebrew people as they stood on the Mount of Olives watching Nebuchadnezzar's war machines break down the city walls. In ancient times, breaking down the walls of a conquered city was a way to break the independent spirit of the people. What did the walls represent to the people of Jerusalem? What losses did the people feel when they viewed the rubble that once was their city?

From the people's viewpoint, their heritage, connection with God, and hope for the future went up in smoke the day Jerusalem fell. And yet God did not abandon His people, nor did He revoke His covenants to Abraham or David. Read God's promise in Jeremiah 29:10–14:

This is what the LORD says: "You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. I will be found by you," says the LORD. "I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes. I will gather you out of the nations where I sent you and will bring you home again to your own land."



Taking Responsibility

Nehemiah 1:1–4; 2:1–18; 6:15–16

Highlight the “I will” statements that the Lord makes. In the space below, reflect on what this promise must have meant to the people in exile, and reflect on what it means personally as you consider God’s faithfulness then and now.

After the fall of Jerusalem, the Babylonian empire fell to the Medes and the Persians. King Cyrus of Persia allowed the first group of Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel in 536 BC to rebuild the temple. Jeremiah’s seventy-year prophecy was fulfilled! God reserved a final task for Nehemiah . . . rebuild the walls!



Observation: What Were Nehemiah’s Responsibilities?

Read *Nehemiah 1:1–11*, noting Nehemiah’s job in the court. Beginning with his humble position as cupbearer to the king, Nehemiah played three essential roles in fulfilling God’s calling.

Nehemiah as Cupbearer

In the capital of Susa, Nehemiah was serving King Artaxerxes I when the King of kings tapped Nehemiah on the shoulder through a message from Nehemiah’s brother:

“Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.”
(Nehemiah 1:3)²



Taking Responsibility

Nehemiah 1:1–4; 2:1–18; 6:15–16

According to Nehemiah 1:4–11, what was Nehemiah’s response to the news which arrived in the winter (Kislev on the Jewish calendar)?

Read *Nehemiah 2:1–6*. How did God answer his prayer when Nehemiah approached the king in the spring (Nisan)?

Nehemiah as Construction Supervisor

Read *Nehemiah 3:11–18*. Nehemiah traded his cupbearer’s apron for the clipboard of a construction supervisor. What was the purpose in his nighttime tour of the walls, and how did he inspire the nobles and officials to join his plan?



Taking Responsibility

Nehemiah 1:1–4; 2:1–18; 6:15–16

Against all odds and in the face of intense opposition, the people under Nehemiah’s leadership completed the wall. Nehemiah wrote in his record:

So on October 2 the wall was finished—just fifty-two days after we had begun. When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated. They realized this work had been done with the help of our God. (Nehemiah 6:15–16)

Nehemiah as Politician

Once the construction was complete, God had a new role for Nehemiah: governor. In this role, he confronted the wealthy nobles who were taking advantage of the poor (*Nehemiah 5:14–19*). He also restored the reading of Scripture and observance of holy days (*8:13–18*).

In whatever role God gave Nehemiah, whether cupbearer, construction supervisor, or governor, he modeled the qualities of a great leader:

- He pressed on despite strong opposition.
- He motivated the workers who grew tired.
- He rallied the people when they were fearful.
- He handled himself with sacrificial integrity, unlike former leaders.
- When the mission was accomplished, he gave all the credit to the Lord.



Interpretation: A Word about Interpreting Promises

God made specific promises to the Jewish people about their exile and return. The *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study teaches us to exercise care when interpreting and applying the promises in the Bible.

The promises in Jeremiah 29:10–14 are good examples of *historical* promises made to specific individuals in a particular era. God fulfilled His promises when the Hebrews returned from Babylon seventy years after the initial invasion.³ Be cautious when applying a historical promise to your current situation. Don’t assume, for example, that God’s promise to “restore your fortunes” is meant for you when it was clearly directed to His people in exile.



Taking Responsibility

Nehemiah 1:1–4; 2:1–18; 6:15–16

However, you can apply what you learn about the *character of God* who kept His promise to the Jews. The same God who was faithful to His covenant with David will be faithful to the new covenant in Christ. We do have a future and a hope in Christ (Romans 5:1–5). That’s a promise you can claim!



Correlation: The Land and the Covenant

After Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Jewish capital, he removed the people from their homeland by sending them into exile. What did the land represent to the people spiritually? Read [Genesis 17:1–8](#) and [Joshua 1:3–6](#) to understand the connection between the land and their covenant with God.

Along with the promised land, the Jews also lost the promised throne of David. Read [Psalm 132:11–18](#) and the messianic prophecy in [Isaiah 9:6–7](#). What were the implications of losing Jerusalem regarding God’s plan for Israel’s future?

Nehemiah fit perfectly into God’s timeline for Israel and the fulfillment of His promises. How important was it for Nehemiah to rise to his calling and take responsibility to do what God asked? Extremely important! Even though we may not be in Nehemiah’s position of influence, we still can follow his lead in taking seriously the job God gives us . . . no matter what our field of employment may be.



Taking Responsibility

Nehemiah 1:1–4; 2:1–18; 6:15–16

Application: What Are Your Responsibilities?

What are your God-given responsibilities? We tend to view our roles and responsibilities in categories of secular and sacred. Assembling parts at the factory, that's secular work. Leading a children's choir, that's serving God. But God views all of life as spiritual. We serve God at our 9-to-5 job as much as we serve Him by ushering at church on Sundays. "Whatever you do or say," Paul urges, "do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17). And he reminds us that Jesus is our true boss,

Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. (3:23)

Wrap up this study by asking yourself, "What difference would it make to see all my responsibilities as God-given?" How would that perspective change your work ethic, attitude, and vocational goals?

Remember, you don't work for a company or a church. You don't have a job. You have a calling to fulfill as you work for your master, Jesus.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I am a simple cupbearer in a world filled with Your presence. Forgive me for seeing my job as anything less than a sacred calling from You. Help me to work as if I was clocking in on Your shift and You were giving my review. May my work, attitude, and goals please You. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Hanani and the men from Judah who gave Nehemiah this alarming report were probably referring to an attempt to rebuild the walls that had failed due to opposition from local officials (Ezra 4:12–16, 21–23). The walls lay in ruins once again, as they had when Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed them more than 140 years earlier.
3. Some Bible scholars also see Jeremiah's prophecy fulfilled with the rebuilding of the temple in 516 BC, seventy years after the destruction of Solomon's temple in 586 BC.



WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

STUDY SEVEN

Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17

There is nothing like a huge dose of theology to put steel in our bones. That is why I often encourage you to “Learn to think biblically.” Regardless of what is happening to you, revert to what you have learned from the Scriptures about God and about His power and His purpose and His plan. You will be given strength at the time you need it if you will rely on the truth you have learned and believe in God.

—Charles R. Swindoll

IN view of the billions of people that populate our planet, how easy to feel like a statistical speck of human dust. How easy to downplay the importance of our actions, the importance of our words. How easy to rationalize passivity!

Yet, the Bible calls us to war against those *life-zapping* thoughts. We engage such battles by submitting our mind and will to the *life-giving*, inspired Word of God. No one walks the earth as a divine afterthought penciled into history. God made everyone unique and has gifted us all to accomplish a specific purpose.

Sometimes that giftedness includes standing alone, like Esther. In the fourth chapter of the book of Esther, Scripture reveals why God made her, how He sustained her through difficulties, and how He used her to rescue the lives of many.

Chuck Swindoll traces the work of God in this season of Esther’s life to teach how one person, when empowered by the Spirit of God, might make a difference in the world.



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Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17



PREPARE YOUR HEART

To the churches in Galatia, Paul wrote:

My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
(Galatians 2:20)

Consider that truth in your life—how Christ loves *you* and gave Himself for *you*. It's that truth that impels us to study God's Word and obey it. Record a prayer below thanking God for His love for you through His Son, Jesus. Invite the One who lives in you to empower you to make a difference in your world.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The author of Esther recorded a time in Jewish history after God led His people out of exile back to the promised land in 536 BC under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:1). The author answers, “What happened to those who didn't return to Israel?” The events revolve around the Jews living in the provinces of Persia from 483 BC to 473 BC. The account of Esther occurs about thirty to forty years before Nehemiah returned to rebuild the walls in 444 BC.

If you own a Bible dictionary, now is the time to pull it from the shelf. If you don't, we recommend buying the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. For an online alternative, consult, “*Encyclopedia of the Bible*.” Let's research the following people and places that are mentioned in the book of Esther and record a few notes on them.



Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17

Xerxes or Ahasuerus (Esther 1:1)

Susa (1:2)

Persia (1:3)

With a clearer understanding of the historical and geographical background of Esther, let's review the key events in Esther's life.



Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17

Esther 4 builds to the climax of the story which occurs in Esther 5. Here's what happened leading up to Esther 4:

- 1) *Esther 1*: Persian king, Xerxes (also known as Ahasuerus), deposed his wife Queen Vashti in 483 BC, which was about the time Xerxes engaged in the second Persian invasion of Greece. The first Greco-Persian war was fought by Xerxes' father, Darius the Great.
- 2) *Esther 2*: After Xerxes returned defeated, God orchestrated the circumstances that led the young Jewish woman, Esther, to become queen of Persia.
- 3) *Esther 3*: Xerxes' primary official, Haman, convinced the king to assert his authority and decree a mass slaughter of the Jewish people.

We enter the story with great suspense and terror in the air. *How will God deliver His people?*



Observation: Mordecai's Dilemma

In observation, we focus on what the text says so we don't make it say something it doesn't.¹

Mourning and Weeping

Read *Esther 4:1–4*.

How and where did Mordecai express his sorrow after learning of the king's command regarding the Jews?



Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17

Sometimes, biblical authors use repetition for emphasis to reveal their intent. How did the author use repetition for emphasis in *Esther 4:1–4*?

What news did Esther's eunuchs and maids share with her? How did she respond?

Informing and Responding

Observe *Esther 4:5–12*. This paragraph chronicles the first of the exchanges between Esther and Mordecai.

In *Esther 4:5–9*, what steps did Mordecai take to convey all the information which Esther didn't know? In what verse, and in what way, does it seem that Mordecai had insider knowledge to the innerworkings of Haman's plot?



Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17

What two reasons did Esther use to evade Mordecai's command (Esther 4:11)?

Esther is left with a dilemma. It's difficult to appreciate life as it existed at that time. You didn't simply walk into the king's presence, even though you were the queen. If the king hadn't invited you and you barged in, it could mean your death. She knows the rules.
—Chuck Swindoll

Pleading and Praying

Observe *Esther 4:13–17*, the last of Esther's and Mordecai's exchanges in this chapter.

In what four ways did Mordecai appeal to Esther to petition the king?

Esther faced two choices—both of which would likely result in a speedy death. What did Esther require of Mordecai before she did what he asked?



Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17

She's turning over in her mind what this will require, just as everyone does who stands alone in a situation that includes great risk. She weighs all of this in her head. She ponders Mordecai's message and she realizes that what he says makes all the sense in the world, so she steps up. This is where she shows her true colors. She weighed his words. She realized her calling. Now notice she's not doing it in her own strength. She said, "I need you to pray for me. I need you to be there for me. I need you to fast. I need you to represent me before the throne of God." —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Courageous Decision of One Woman

During interpretation, we answer the question, "What does the text mean?" We seek to understand the text in its historical context so we can grasp its timeless theology.

How did Mordecai demonstrate faith in Esther 4:13–14? What does Mordecai's statement teach us about the character of God?

Esther demonstrated a change in attitude between verses 11 and 16. What was that change? How would her faith in God have produced that change to lead her to stand alone?

Mordecai helped Esther think more clearly about God and His work in our world. As she pondered the truth, belief overcame her fear. She strengthened herself in God to walk where her feet did not want to walk.



Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17



Correlation: Defining Faith

During correlation, we ask, “How does the biblical passage compare with other passages?”

Carefully read the passage below:

Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see. Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation. By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God’s command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen. . . . And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him. (Hebrews 11:1–3, 6)

How did Esther demonstrate the truth of the passage above as she prepared to stand alone?

*Even though God may not appear before you in visible form, He is sovereignly at work, which makes the book of Esther all the more interesting because the name of God does not once appear in the book. The only book in all the Bible where that’s true. However, you can see His footprint; you can see His thumbprint. You can see His hand in the life of one who was called to stand alone when there was no one else who could do what she could do.
—Chuck Swindoll*



Application: Responding in Faith

During application, we answer the question, “How should we respond to the text?” We should not skip it. Chuck quotes Howard Hendricks: “If you observe and interpret and correlate the Scriptures but fail to apply the Scriptures, you have committed an abortion.”² Challenging words. Let’s look at Chuck’s two application points from Esther 4.



Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17

The Difference of One

Not until we believe one person can make a difference will we be willing to risk.

As we read in Hebrews 11, God's power can pour through one person for the benefit of many. As the first step to live this truth, write a prayer acknowledging to God His power and stating your willingness to be used for His purposes even if it means taking actions that risk your comfort or convenience.

From Theory to Action

Only when we move from the safe harbor of theory to the world of reality do we make a difference.

Often our consistent, small actions—though seemingly insignificant—make the most difference. Are you silent when you know you should speak? Passive when you know God has called you to action? Take a moment to write down where you need to step out of the safe harbor of theory.

In chapter five, Esther did go before the king, made her case, and received his favor. She risked her life and saved the countless Jews who had not returned to Israel. Even in chaos and conflict, God works His sovereign plan for our eternal good.



Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for performing wonders in my life. Thank You for moving in the hearts of others to lead me to Your glorious Son, Jesus. I confide in His power, believe in His Word, and want to walk in His way even if it means standing alone. In His precious name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. We recommend you purchase Chuck's *book Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* if you do not already have a copy. You can also read Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* introductions on sts.insight.org.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2017), 160.



WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

STUDY EIGHT

Respecting Authority

1 Samuel 18; 24

My strong advice that I believe we need to hear is this: “Stop questioning authority and start respecting it.”

—Charles R. Swindoll

THE course of David’s life changed the day he killed Goliath. He may have entered the field of battle an unknown shepherd boy, but he emerged a national hero. With the sling of a single stone, Goliath’s body crumpled to the dirt and David’s star rocketed to the sky.

News of David’s victory echoed through the canyons of Judah. When the Israelite army marched home for a ticker-tape-style parade with King Saul in the lead, citizens lined the streets cheering. “Women from all the towns of Israel came out to meet King Saul” (1 Samuel 18:6). The women greeted Saul, but their voices acclaimed David.

*They sang and danced for joy with tambourines and cymbals. This was their song:
“Saul has killed his thousands,
and David his ten thousands!” (18:6–7)*

Their song’s lopsided praise of David ignited Saul’s jealous heart with hatred toward the young champion. David had done nothing against Saul, yet in the coming days, Saul would attempt to kill David, forcing the next rightful king of Israel to flee like a felon on the run.

Even though Saul behaved in an un-kingly manner, he was still the Lord’s anointed—a role that demanded respect. How would David respond to Saul: by kneeling before a king or attacking an enemy? Let’s dig into Scripture to discover David’s response and gain instruction for relating to those in authority over us.



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Respecting Authority

1 Samuel 18; 24



PREPARE YOUR HEART

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we always pray for God's Spirit to illumine our minds and hearts as we open God's Word. As Chuck Swindoll advised, "Study without prayer is an incomplete process—a futile effort."¹ You may wish to pray as Chuck prays before he studies the Word: "I often pray, 'Lord, speak to me. Help me understand what this passage is saying. I am listening. I am sensitive to Your truth. Lead me into it.'"²

Write your prayer here if you wish.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Humans have been resisting authority since the beginning of time. The roots of our *resistant*, *resentful*, and *rebellious* nature sink deep into history's soil, all the way to the first family. Adam and Eve's son Cain defied God's authority, and he stoked a rage that led him to murder his own brother (*Genesis 4:1–16*). Similarly, Saul's disobedience and God's rejection of Saul as king led to his murderous hatred of David, God's next choice for king (*1 Samuel 15:1–26; 16:1–13*). Now, dig deeper into Scripture by reading carefully *1 Samuel 18:8–30*.



Respecting Authority

1 Samuel 18; 24



Observation: A Biblical Example of Respecting Authority

A key principle in the *Searching the Scriptures* process is observation.³ As you review *1 Samuel 18:8–30*, can you observe any repetitive themes or phrases (specifically, verses 12, 15, and 29)?

Write down what Saul did against David.

What were David's responses to his king who was trying to kill him?



Respecting Authority

1 Samuel 18; 24

What might Saul's actions tell you about Saul's motives and character? What do David's responses tell you about his motives and character?

Which of David's character qualities stand out the most to you based on your current circumstances?



Interpretation: David's Strategy of Respect and Trust

David's most dangerous opponent wasn't the nine-foot-nine-inch tall human war machine named Goliath; rather, his greatest foe was his own king, the man who at one time loved him as a son. David felled Goliath with the frontal assault of a well-placed stone. Dealing with Saul would require a different strategy for David: *showing respect to Saul because Saul was the Lord's anointed and trusting God to take care of David's enemy.*

As we seek to understand the meaning of David's actions for us today, let's examine the episode when David encountered Saul in a cave.



Respecting Authority

1 Samuel 18; 24

A Difficult Dilemma

The encounter with Saul in a cave put David's respect-and-trust strategy to the ultimate test. Read *1 Samuel 24:1–4*. In this situation, what unlikely factors combined to lead David's men to conclude that the Lord had delivered Saul into David's hands to kill him?

With revenge tantalizingly feasible for David and his men, David crept toward Saul with his knife in his hand. Would David succumb to temptation and stab Saul in the back? Read what David did in *24:4–7*. What thought pricked David's conscience, and how did he communicate that to his men later?

A Remarkable Response

Read the dialogue between David and Saul after Saul left the cave in *1 Samuel 24:8–22*. How did David's respect win over his enemy (*Proverbs 16:7*)?



Respecting Authority

1 Samuel 18; 24

If David had bitten off a piece of sweet revenge and killed Saul in order to ascend to the throne, what sour aftertaste would have occurred? What may have been the consequences of his disrespect of the Lord's anointed?

David may not have plunged his knife into Saul's back, but he did break through the stony wall that Saul had erected around his heart. Reread *1 Samuel 24:8–15*, noting David's confession, honest expression of feelings, and reassuring words to Saul—all characteristics of a well-handled confrontation.

God's Reward

What was the eventual outcome of David's respect-and-trust-God strategy (*2 Samuel 2:4*)?

Learn from David; there are lessons to be learned in humility. There are things you can pick up and begin to model. Are you being hurt? So was David. He wrote songs for you in the book of Psalms. David's story is a magnificent story of how the Lord takes a situation that is a real dilemma, where a man has the power to retaliate, but he doesn't because of the respect of God's hand in the life of another. And as a result, the Lord rewards him.

—Chuck Swindoll



Respecting Authority

1 Samuel 18; 24

Principles to Live By—Then and Now

Bible stories are a rich source of principles for godly living. We learn best by example, don't we? Lists of points are quickly forgotten, but the story of David's confrontation with Saul sets memorable pegs in our mind so that the next time we're dealing with a Saul-type enemy, we have some guidelines to hang on to. Just keep in mind that adjustments for context are required.

No one today is the "Lord's anointed"; however, the principle of respect for authority remains true. You probably won't confess snipping the corner of a king's cloak, but you may need to confess hurting your boss with verbal snips and cutting criticisms. Consolidate key points of the story as you can, and then create principles—such as: *When confronting someone in authority, be honest about your actions and feelings, address their fears directly, and spell out your values.* David didn't stay hidden in his cave of hurt feelings; he bravely stepped into the light and spoke to his enemy. Perhaps his example will help you do the same.

Can you draw more principles from David's respectful approach to Saul?



Correlation: The Theme of Respect in Scripture

The theme of respect for those in authority winds through Scripture like a mountain stream. Dip your hand into a few passages and note the commands that God issues and character qualities He expects.

Passage	Commands	Qualities
<i>Exodus 20:12</i>		
<i>Micah 6:8</i>		
<i>Romans 13:1–2</i>		
<i>Hebrews 13:17</i>		



Respecting Authority

1 Samuel 18; 24

Summarize God's teaching about respecting authority.

Only with a David-like faith in God's sovereign plan for our future can we take the first steps toward respecting those God places in authority over us.

Application: A Few Insights on Cultivating a Submissive Spirit

The final scenes of Saul's life read like a Shakespearean tragedy. His account climaxes with Saul consulting a medium who foretold his being wounded by Philistine archers, his begging his aide to plunge a sword through his heart, and his death by his own hand (1 Samuel 28; 31:1–4). David never once gloated over the death of his enemy but grieved the loss of his king, Saul, as much as the loss of his friend, Jonathan (2 Samuel 1). David remained respectful even after Saul's death.

What can we glean from this account?

- *Expect to be mistreated.* A jealous, fearful, paranoid “Saul” may enter the drama of your life's story in any scene.
- *Anticipate feelings of revenge.* Be prepared to resist the urge to take matters into your own hands.
- *Refuse to fight in the flesh.* Enlist the Spirit of Christ as your source of strength to entrust yourself to God.
- *Determine now to leave all vengeance with God.* “Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God” (Romans 12:19).



Respecting Authority

1 Samuel 18; 24

Which of these truths can you apply to your situation in the coming days and in what ways?



A FINAL PRAYER

Conclude your study of David's respect for Saul by fortifying your soul with the following Psalm and then writing a prayer to trust the Lord and leave all vengeance with Him.

*Don't worry about the wicked
or envy those who do wrong.
For like grass, they soon fade away.
Like spring flowers, they soon wither.
Trust in the LORD and do good.
Then you will live safely in the land and prosper.
Take delight in the LORD,
and he will give you your heart's desires.
Commit everything you do to the LORD.
Trust him, and he will help you.
He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn,
and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun. (Psalm 37:1–6)*



Respecting Authority

1 Samuel 18; 24

My Prayer of Trust

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2017), 160.
2. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures*, 128.
3. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

STUDY NINE

Cultivating Humility

John 1; 3

How unusual to meet someone as committed and gifted as the Baptizer, yet in no way interested in getting the attention or grabbing the glory. If you have had the pleasure of having a person in your life play a significant role known for humility, you are thrice blessed, because you've been around a rare individual. In fact, humility is a subject you will rarely, if ever, hear in the public square, so where could be better source to learn about cultivating humility than the Word of God.

—Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN thinking over the rewards of humility, one might wonder why so many neglect this godly virtue. Humility inspires us to:

- Lend others a listening ear
- Work hard to do the job correctly
- Keep our mouths from opening too much
- Put down the hammer of criticism
- Act on the best ideas even if they're not our own
- Draw nearer to Jesus



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Cultivating Humility

John 1: 3



PREPARE YOUR HEART

John the Apostle wrote the following in his prologue before introducing John the Baptizer, the one who would prepare God's people for the arrival of God's anointed: Jesus the Messiah, the Word.

*In the beginning the Word already existed.
The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He existed in the beginning with God.
God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him.
The Word gave life to everything that was created,
and his life brought light to everyone.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it. (John 1:1–5)*

As you meditate on the passage above, bask in the glory of Christ—the One before whom John the Baptizer humbled himself. Ask God to reveal the splendor of His Son to you through this study—for only in the presence of true glory is true humility formed.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES



John the Baptizer lived a unique life. Scarcely there'd be a church that would hire him in our day. He dressed in camel's hair, ate honey, stayed in the Judean wilderness, and spoke against the Jewish elite—all to prepare for the One who would baptize not with water but "with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11; see also, [Joel 2:28–29](#) and [Malachi 3:2–5](#)).

In this study, the observation and interpretation steps of the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method are combined for each passage to help you trace John's mission and humility. Make sure you perform observation before moving to interpretation.¹ Also, if you haven't recently added a resource to your library—Chuck recommends you add about one a month—grab a copy of *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on John*.



Cultivating Humility

John 1; 3

The Man and His Mission John 1:6–9, 19–27	
John the Baptist's public ministry created a stir among the Jewish leaders. Notice how John the Apostle helps us interpret John the Baptist. Note, also, the assumptions in the Jewish leaders' questions.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>1a. Observe <i>John 1:6–9, 19–27</i>. Why did God send John according to 1:6–9?</p> <p>1b. Who came to John and what did they want to know about him?</p> <p>1c. How did John describe himself (John 1:23) and compare himself with Jesus (1:26–27)?</p>	<p>2a. How did John conquer the temptation of pride and display humility?</p> <p>2b. Research and explain why John baptized in order to prepare people for Jesus' coming (<i>Zechariah 13:1</i>).</p>

John displayed true humility. False humility stinks a lot worse than raw conceit, and we can smell it a block away. Don't try to look wormy or come across as though you're "unworthy of breathing." That's not humility. It's knowing that you have a place in God's plan, and you're not the star of the show—like John. You have a place. Play your part. Let it happen.
—Chuck Swindoll



Cultivating Humility

John 1; 3

The Responsibilities and Their Temptations

John 1:29–42

In the previous passage, John spoke to the skeptics—those Jewish leaders who sought only intrigue and inquiry. In this passage, John spoke to those who knew, trusted, and followed him. John’s relationship with his followers proved yet another show of humility.



Observation



Interpretation

1a. Observe *John 1:29–42*. How did John identify Jesus and describe His purpose?

2a. In what way did John display humility in this scene?

1b. How did John’s disciples respond to John’s testimony about Jesus? (*John 1:35–37*)

2b. What did John mean when said Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (*Acts 1:1–8; 2:1–4*)?

2c. What did John mean by calling Jesus the lamb of God who takes away the world’s sin (*1 Peter 1:18–19*)?



“I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals.” John really believed that. That is humility. He didn’t say it to impress anybody. We don’t see a hint of pride in John’s pointing his disciples to Jesus. Not a glimmer of self-promotion. The more you study the Baptizer, the more impressed you will be of his authentic humility.

—Chuck Swindoll



Cultivating Humility

John 1; 3



This Joy of Mine Is Now Complete John 3:22–36	
As Jesus’ ministry waxed, John’s ministry waned. Jesus journeyed north after John baptized Him. John remained south in the Judean countryside. Now, we discover what happened as Jesus returned south and their ministries crossed paths.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>1a. Observe <i>John 3:22–36</i>. What sparked John’s statements in this text?</p> <p>1b. In one sentence, summarize how John identified himself.</p>	<p>2a. What statements from the Baptizer illustrate his continued humility?</p> <p>2b. John elaborates on Jesus’ identity from chapter 1. In what way did John do so (<i>John 3:28–29, 35</i>)?</p>

“He must become greater and greater; I must become less and less.” Talk about a statement worth memorizing. That’s not phony baloney. That’s the real thing. What a wonderful and humble attitude of John to be filled with the joy of Jesus’ success. —Chuck Swindoll



Cultivating Humility

John 1; 3

Of Flesh and Blood, No One Is Greater Matthew 11:1–11	
<p>Because John had called out Herod Antipas' adultery, Herod imprisoned John in Machaerus of Perea, east of the Dead Sea. From prison, John sent his disciples to ask Jesus a question. Jesus answered the question and then made a most remarkable statement about the Baptizer.</p>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>1a. Observe <i>Matthew 11:1–11</i>. What did John ask, and how did Jesus answer?</p> <p>1b. How did Jesus describe John's identity?</p>	<p>2a. Why did John ask his question to Jesus? Explain the meaning of Jesus' reply.</p> <p>2b. What is the theological meaning of Matthew 11:11? For help, read <i>Constable's Notes</i> on this verse.</p>

Other than Jesus, John carried more significance than any other person born. He gave the clearest testimony about the divine activity in and through the person of Jesus Christ. What John foresaw and predicted about Jesus' work, the Spirit has applied and empowered within us.



Cultivating Humility

John 1: 3



Application: The Key That Unlocks Humility

“He must increase, I must decrease.” This punchy line from John the Baptizer forms the foundation of our humility. Chuck provides four thoughts for applying this verse personally.

- 1) *Commit to two goals: decrease self, increase Christ.* We exalt Christ, letting Christ steer our lives so that His eternal luster shines brighter.
- 2) *Both goals must occur together.* You can't have one without the other for true humility to blossom. Self-exaltation prevents Christ's increase in our lives.
- 3) *We must permit both goals to happen internally.* True humility cannot be external only. Eventually, pride and arrogance will show their ugly faces. True humility begins inside, then works its way out.
- 4) *These goals require our full commitment.* Our decrease and Christ's increase is not optional. It's essential to true humility just as true humility is to true joy.

Ponder the course of your life and the attitude of your heart. How do Chuck's application points above relate to your spiritual life this season?

Choose one attitude you can embrace or action you practice to allow Christ to increase in your life.



Cultivating Humility

John 1; 3

John had the single-mindedness to prepare people for Christ's ministry on earth. Once Christ arrived, John the Baptizer, in his joy, directed people to follow the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Because John beheld Jesus in true glory, John could exude true humility—and so can you!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I pray that You vanquish any vanity in me and tune my heart to sing the praises of Your Son. Only by Your Spirit's work in my heart can I live a truly humble life exalting the Light of the World. Thank You for showing me that light. Please help me to continue walking in it. In the strong name of Jesus I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. We recommend you purchase Chuck's *book Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* if you do not already have a copy. You can also read Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* introductions on sts.insight.org.



WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

STUDY TEN

Studying Hard

Ezra 7:1–10; Nehemiah 8:1–8, 12

There are two great days in everyone's life. The first great day is the day you were born. And the second great day is the day you discover why.

—Charles R. Swindoll

GOD called Ezra from his role as a priest serving in the temple to be a teacher of the law—a scribe. But hearing God's call was not enough. He had to prepare for his calling by studying hard, so that when the time came, he could confidently declare God's Word to the exiles who had returned to Israel:

That day came when, with the newly constructed wall of Jerusalem as his backdrop, Ezra lifted his voice to teach the Scriptures to the nation and call them to obedience. The truth shone through Ezra's words like a beacon, and the people, who had lived for years in darkness, saw clearly the way of God. God moved mightily in people's hearts as He used Ezra to open their eyes. In this thrilling moment, Ezra was doing what he was born to do.¹

Ezra's example demonstrates the powerful results of combining the study of Scripture with the call of God. Do you yearn to know, prepare for, and live out God's calling? Let's take a closer look at Ezra's life as a model for our own walk with God.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Studying Scripture is like mining for gold. With a bit of effort, we can uncover great eternal truths. Take a moment to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the invaluable nuggets of spiritual wisdom in the Bible using this simple prayer from the psalmist.

*Open my eyes to see
the wonderful truths in your instructions. (Psalm 119:18)*



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Studying Hard

Ezra 7:1–10; Nehemiah 8:1–8, 12



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The historical setting of Ezra's story is the period of the Jewish exile after the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC and moved the people out of the land. As you recall from our study of Nehemiah in study 6, "Taking Responsibility," the captivity lasted seventy years. Then the exiles returned to their homeland to rebuild the temple, reestablish worship, and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.



Observation: A Closer Look at the Historical Context

As we launch the observation phase of the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, let's examine the historical context in which Ezra ministered.²

First Group Led by Zerubbabel

The first group to return from exile was a large company of almost 50,000 Jews who followed Zerubbabel along a similar route that Abraham had taken nearly 1,500 years earlier. Read in [Ezra 1:1–4](#) the decree of Cyrus king of Persia that prompted this return. What was the mission to the Jews that God spoke through Cyrus?

The returnees laid the foundation for the temple, but enemies blocked further construction. The project lay dormant for sixteen years until God spoke through the prophet Haggai, who exhorted them to complete the mission they were called to do:

"Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins? . . . Now go up into the hills, bring down timber, and rebuild my house." (Haggai 1:4, 8)

The temple was completed in 516 BC and dedicated with a great celebration (Ezra 5:1–6:22).³



Studying Hard

Ezra 7:1–10; Nehemiah 8:1–8, 12

Second Group Led by Ezra

The temple now built, Ezra asked King Artaxerxes to send him and a second group of Jews including priests and Levites to Jerusalem to help the people reestablish worship. The king commissioned him, donating opulent adornments to beautify the temple and instructing Ezra to exhort the people to obey God's law. Read Artaxerxes' letter in [Ezra 7:11–26](#).

Imagine Ezra's delight as he read the king's commission! He credited the Lord for moving in the king's heart ([Ezra 7:27](#)) and humbly acknowledged God's calling on his life. What phrase did Ezra repeat in the following verses: [Ezra 7:6, 9, 28](#), and [8:18](#)?

Heeding God's call, Ezra and about 1,500 others including priests and Levites journeyed to Jerusalem from Babylon in a caravan with camels loaded with donations for the temple, ready to proclaim God's law to the people.

There are two great days in everyone's life. The first great day is the day you were born. And the second great day is the day you discover why. —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Bible Exposition on Display

A few years later, God moved once again in Artaxerxes' heart to commission Nehemiah to lead a *third group* to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls ([Nehemiah 2:1–9](#)).

Through three mass migrations under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, God turned the wheels of world affairs to bring tens of thousands of Jews back to the land of promise. The same divine hand that removed them because of their disobedience now ushered them home. The people had a heart to obey God, but how could they do so without someone to teach them God's commands?



Studying Hard

Ezra 7:1–10; Nehemiah 8:1–8, 12

Under Nehemiah’s leadership, the Jews completed the walls of Jerusalem. The people built the walls “with the help of our God” (Nehemiah 6:16); now they turned to Ezra for help in building their lives with the Word of God.

All the people assembled with a unified purpose at the square just inside the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had given for Israel to obey. (8:1)

Ezra’s message is one of the clearest examples in the Bible of genuine exposition of the Scriptures. Read the account in *Nehemiah 8:2–12* and note the key components of Bible exposition. Under each heading below, explain what happened in the passage and write a principle for Bible exposition applicable today.

Reading of and Respect for the Scriptures—Nehemiah 8:2–5

Explanation of the Scriptures—Nehemiah 8:7–8 (Note: As Ezra read, the Levites circulated through the crowd, translating the Hebrew into Aramaic, the language of the common people.)



Studying Hard

Ezra 7:1–10; Nehemiah 8:1–8, 12

Response to the Scriptures—*Nehemiah 8:6, 9–12*

Why did the people weep? For years, they had lived in *ignorance* of God’s Word, which created *instability*. They had no ballast to keep their lives upright as they tipped over into superstition. *Uncertainty* settled into fear, because they had no compass to guide their life’s course. The people wept tears of remorse for the wandering years without God’s Word, but Nehemiah wiped away their tears with an exhortation to “celebrate with great joy because they had heard God’s words *and understood them*” (Nehemiah 8:12, emphasis added). Now they could follow God’s way.



Correlation: Bible Exposition as a Calling

God selected Ezra to be the nation’s teacher, a priest whose family line traced back to Aaron, the brother of Moses and first Israelite high priest. As priest, Ezra could enter the temple, bring sacrifices, and represent the people before God. As a scribe, he “was well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given to the people of Israel” (Ezra 7:6).

Let’s look closer at how Ezra prepared for his calling as we excavate the meaning of the central verse in our study:

Ezra had determined to study and obey the Law of the LORD and to teach those decrees and regulations to the people of Israel. (7:10)

What are the four key concepts in this verse that describe how Ezra prepared for his calling?



Studying Hard

Ezra 7:1–10; Nehemiah 8:1–8, 12

Try fleshing out these concepts by elaborating what they mean and looking for other verses that illustrate them. (An excellent resource is a Bible concordance or an online Bible website such as [BibleGateway](#).) We've given you a start for each concept. Add your own ideas as you search the Scriptures!

Ezra *determined*. Ezra set his heart; he made a personal commitment. Daniel made a similar commitment in [Daniel 1:8](#). Now, search for other verses with the word *determined* to find additional examples. (Be certain to check out [Psalm 119:30, 112](#).)

Ezra *studied*. He became a student of Scripture. For an example, look up [Joshua 1:8](#). What does this verse say? Can you find other verses like it?

Ezra *obeyed*. He put into action the truth that he learned. Another verse is [James 1:22](#). Can you find another?



Studying Hard

Ezra 7:1–10; Nehemiah 8:1–8, 12

Ezra taught. He shared what he learned with other people. Look up [Romans 12:7](#). What other Scripture passages enhance the meaning of the word?

Wrap up this section by summarizing the meaning of Ezra 7:10. What principles can you draw from this verse for your life today?

As Ezra diligently studied, his calling to proclaim God's truth became clearer. Like the oil lamp that flickered on Ezra's study desk, the flame in his heart grew from a flicker to burn brighter and brighter until the day when God set him on a lampstand to be a light of truth as the teacher of the nation.

No other book is like the Bible because in these pages are truths to guide your life, to raise your family, to conduct your business, to form your ethics and your integrity. All of that is in this book, but it takes study. —Chuck Swindoll



Studying Hard

Ezra 7:1–10; Nehemiah 8:1–8, 12

Application: Bible Exposition Today

Out of your study of the Word of God will come the understanding of God and the calling of God—what God would have you do. Ezra’s example challenges us to:

- Spend time in the Scriptures
- Stay faithful to Bible study groups
- Trust God to use us to counter the ignorance, instability, and uncertainty of our day

Reflecting on his success, Ezra gave all credit to the Lord: “I felt encouraged because the gracious hand of the LORD my God was on me” (Ezra 7:28). As you review the fabric of your life, do you, like Ezra, recognize God’s hand at work? Can you see Him stitching together events and people and weaving a pattern in your personality and abilities to make you who you are? Have you discovered why you were born—your calling? Use the space below to reflect on God’s movement and calling in your life. Share with a friend, mentor, or your pastor what you write.

Don’t worry about when or how God may use you, where He may send you, or what platform He may give you. Just be available and ready . . . and stay in the Word!



Studying Hard

Ezra 7:1–10; Nehemiah 8:1–8, 12



A FINAL PRAYER

Dear Father, thank You for filling our minds with food for the soul. Give me an appreciation for the Word, how it guides me in the ways I should go. Hold me faithful, Lord, to Your calling, and may I trust You to use me to help others know You and Your way. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Ezra's name means, "help."
2. We recommend you purchase Chuck's *book Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* if you do not already have a copy. You can also read Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* introductions on sts.insight.org.
3. For a fascinating description of Zerubbabel's temple and its 500-year history until Herod the Great expanded it around 20 BC, read the "The Temple of Zerubbabel" section of the "Temple" article in *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* by Merrill F. Unger.



WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES
STUDY ELEVEN

Modeling Integrity

Daniel 6:1–27

Integrity is a subject that can hardly be addressed enough, since we are in an eroding culture where integrity is so rarely witnessed or even mentioned. How valuable for us to understand what it involves.

—Charles R. Swindoll

IN every human soul God has placed a spiritual muscle called integrity. Like a heart to a body, our integrity is central to our spiritual life. Just as our bodies cease functioning when our heart stops pumping, our spiritual life sputters when our integrity fails. Unlike a heart, however, integrity doesn't operate automatically. We have the choice whether to flex our integrity muscles and do what's right even when no one is looking, speak the truth regardless of the cost, and live purely when everyone else is compromising.

Integrity, or its absence, affects every minute of our lives—when we're alone or socializing, working or playing. When we forsake integrity, this vital spiritual muscle deteriorates. Strong integrity guards us against moral flabbiness. With strengthened integrity we achieve the purpose for which God made us. God fashioned us to be moral as He is moral that we may represent Him and do as He does no matter the arena of life.

Integrity's vast importance makes it supremely worthy of our attention. In this study, we'll learn from Daniel, who modeled integrity in the most challenging circumstances—when surrounded by enemies intent on his demise.



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Modeling Integrity

Daniel 6:1–27



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Living with integrity requires not only insight but also courage and faith. Take a few moments to still yourself before God. Request His blessing on your study and ask Him to provide you with what you need to live with integrity.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Let's review the book of Daniel before examining chapter 6. Look over the chart below, and note how chapter 6 fits within the book's structure. Also, read an introduction to Daniel. Introductions give flyover context. Chuck provides his introduction to Daniel at Insight.org.

DANIEL

	Biographical Section Daniel Interprets Others' Dreams	Prophetical Section Angel Interprets Daniel's Dreams		
	MAIN EMPHASIS: DANIEL THE PROPHET Introduction and setting (1) Nebuchadnezzar's apocalyptic dream (2) Historical narratives (political and personal) (3–6)	MAIN EMPHASIS: THE PROPHECIES OF DANIEL Daniel's foundational vision (7) Prophetic visions (near and far) (8–12)		
	CHAPTERS 1–6	CHAPTERS 7–12		
	POLITICAL POWERS Babylonian Rule Nebuchadnezzar Belshazzar	... IN DANIEL'S DAY Medo-Persian Rule Darius Cyrus	... AND AFTERWARD Grecian Rule Alexander the Great Four generals	Roman Rule Last of the Gentile powers
Theme	God's sovereignty over kingdoms and His unfolding plan for the future			
Key Verses	2:20–22, 44; 4:34–37			
Christ in Daniel	The stone that will crush earth's kingdoms (2:34–35, 44); Son of Man (7:13–14); the coming Messiah who will be crucified (9:25–26)			

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Modeling Integrity

Daniel 6:1–27

As you read Daniel 6, consider how it contributes to the main theme: God’s sovereignty over the nations and our involvement in that unfolding plan.

 **Observation: Integrity in Jeopardy**

Read *Daniel 6:1–27* and observe words or phrases that contrast, repeat (for emphasis), or illustrate a cause-and-effect relationship.¹

Chart the key characters along with their actions and motivations.

Characters	Key Actions	Motivation



Modeling Integrity

Daniel 6:1–27

How did Darius' administrators use Daniel's integrity against him?

The administrators and high officers could not find any dirt on Daniel. They looked for places where he had been fudging or where he had been taking a little money on the side. Perhaps Daniel had been giving himself special promotions or bonus checks. They found nothing wrong. I mean nothing. Daniel was clean as a hound's tooth which will frustrate anyone looking for dirt. —Chuck Swindoll

Look at Darius' description of Daniel in [6:19–23](#) and note what the author of Daniel emphasized by this repetition.

Even after Daniel scanned the law and weighed its warnings, he chose to honor God. He went to his room, opened the window toward Jerusalem, knelt on his knees, and prayed. Daniel did not kowtow to Darius in fear. Daniel flexed the spiritual muscle of integrity by worshiping his sovereign God and prizing God over any benefit from the hand of a Persian king.



Modeling Integrity

Daniel 6:1–27



Interpretation: A Man Who Modeled Integrity

In his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Chuck Swindoll wrote:

Interpretation is not the same as imposing your opinions on the Bible. You might have been taught something all your life that is incorrect, and you find yourself looking for proof in the Bible. That's not interpretation; that's trying to verify what someone has told you. Interpretation is drawing out what the text says and what it means.²

In Bible narratives, the authors emphasized two main points: the work of God through and for humans and the faith of an individual. Daniel 6 contains examples of both—Daniel's faith in God and God's protection of Daniel.

How did the author emphasize Daniel's spirituality and integrity?

Daniel had no scratch, no bite, and not even a drop of blood from his night with the lions. God protected Daniel from the lions just as God had guarded Daniel from his lion-like enemies who had tried to tear him apart (Psalm 7:1–2, 10). Then King Darius responded to Daniel's divine preservation by composing a remarkable decree (*Daniel 6:25–27*). What did the king's decree state, and what did the author of the book of Daniel emphasize about God by noting this decree?



Modeling Integrity

Daniel 6:1–27

Daniel's integrity toward God and his miraculous deliverance from his enemies brought the king to his knees in worship. Darius paid homage empire-wide to the God of Daniel, Yahweh, whose dominion will never be destroyed and whose authority will never be thwarted.



Correlation: The Wisdom of Integrity

Rome's rule in the first century AD did not readily accept those who followed Christ. Emperors like Nero made a Christian's life especially difficult, sometimes dangerous. Nero enacted savage persecution of Christians—even crucifying them and setting them aflame. Nero's volatile and harsh rule makes Peter's statements in 1 Peter 2:13–25 all the more startling.

Peter wrote his first epistle while Nero reigned. In *1 Peter 2:13–25*, Peter addressed the subject of integrity, especially its uniquely Christian trait. Read this passage and summarize it.

How did Peter encourage his readers to live lives of integrity?

God is the God of lions. God is the God of impossible situations. Perhaps you are facing one. Perhaps it's as difficult as Daniel's. No matter how rough, take it from Daniel: God is at work. —Chuck Swindoll



Modeling Integrity

Daniel 6:1–27

Application: The Rewards of Integrity

For your encouragement, Chuck lists six rewards of integrity. Consider them as they relate to you.

SIX REWARDS OF LIVING WITH INTEGRITY	
[branch]	<i>Integrity sustains the cultivation of exemplary character.</i>
[compass]	<i>Integrity gives the comfort of a clear conscience.</i>
[fire]	<i>Integrity fosters the delight of intimacy with God.</i>
[group]	<i>Integrity bestows the inheritance of a lingering legacy.</i>
[ear]	<i>Integrity provides the privilege of being a mentor.</i>
[roots]	<i>Integrity presents the reward of finishing well.</i>

Which of the rewards motivate you most to pursue a life marked by integrity? Why?

How does Daniel's integrity in Daniel 6 inspire you?



Modeling Integrity

Daniel 6:1–27

What area of your life do you feel most tempted to shed integrity? What specific way do you need Jesus to strengthen you to uphold your integrity?

Daniel's integrity amid threats of death brought the greatest reward of all: *glory to God*. Through one man's obedience, God exalted Himself among the nation of Persia. Daniel became a sign pointing to the future coming of the Messiah, God the Son, whose obedience brought glory to God the Father and will make the many righteous.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You are good and Your ways are righteous. All the peoples will celebrate Your justice. Integrity does not always have its reward in this life, but I know You always reward the life of integrity. Help me to do justly, speak truthfully, and live purely that I may bring honor to the all-glorious One, Jesus Christ. In His name, I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. You can review introductory articles on Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method at sts.insight.org.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 111.



WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

STUDY TWELVE

Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

The grinding feelings of resentment are not resolved by acts of revenge. They're resolved by extending grace.

—Charles R. Swindoll

LOOK inside your heart's vest pocket. Are you carrying with you a little book of revenge? Most of us keep one handy so that when someone wrongs us, we can stick that offense like a trading stamp on the pages of the book. Collect enough stamps, and our revenge book is ready to cash in for an act of justifiable retaliation.

We all have been a victim of unfair, undeserved treatment. We've been betrayed, maligned, disrespected, and stabbed in the back by people who once said they loved us. The wounds are real, and the scars are deep—and our books are full.

What do we do with our books of revenge? Some might say that retaliation is fitting: "Give them a dose of their own medicine!" However, instead of healing our pain, revenge poisons our soul. Joseph, whose account appears in the book of Genesis, models a better solution. The catalog of offenses committed against Joseph could fill the thickest book in the library! However, rather than keep a detailed account of his hurts, the story of Joseph teaches us to tear up the list. Rather than even the score, we are to extend grace.



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Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The abuse Joseph suffered at the hands of his family and his captors must have left deep physical and emotional scars. Perhaps you have suffered at the hands of others as well. When others' sins wound us, where can we go for comfort, protection, and justice? We run to the Savior, who, as the prophet Isaiah foretold, makes a safe place for victims:

*He will not crush the weakest reed
or put out a flickering candle.
He will bring justice to all who have been wronged. (Isaiah 42:3)*

Take a moment for quiet communion with your Savior. Ask the Lord to reveal His care for you through the account of Joseph's abuse and recovery. And pray that He will redeem your past, heal your wounds, then help you see His perfect plan for your life.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Let's dig into Scripture to discover what happened to Joseph when he was tested and how he responded to the tests. In the following chart, we've listed several ways he was victimized along with the corresponding biblical accounts. Read the passages to find out the details of the story and write down under the *Victimization* heading any other descriptors that come to mind.



Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

Genesis Reference	Account	Victimization
37:3–4	Joseph’s brothers hated him because their father loved him best and made a special robe for him.	<u>Hatred</u> <u>Jealousy</u>
37:5–11	Joseph’s dreams turned his brothers against him.	<u>Bullying</u>
37:12–24	His brothers planned to kill Joseph and hide his body in a cistern.	<u>Conspiracy to murder</u> <u>Threats</u> <u>Assault</u>




Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

<p>37:25–36</p>	<p>His brothers sold Joseph to Midianite traders, who transported him to Egypt where he was sold. The brothers lied to their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.</p>	<p><u>Enslavement</u></p> <p><u>Rejection</u></p> <p><u>Betrayal</u></p> <p><u>Cover-up</u></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>39–40</p>	<p>Potiphar’s wife accused Joseph of rape, so Potiphar threw him into prison. Another prisoner forgot his promise to help him when released.</p>	<p><u>False accusation</u></p> <p><u>Unjust imprisonment</u></p> <p><u>Forgotten</u></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

In just a few years, Joseph suffered almost every conceivable form of abuse that humans inflict on one another. From favored son to forgotten prisoner in a foreign land, Joseph was in a pit so deep he could not escape and there was no one who could rescue him. His father who loved him thought him dead, and his brothers didn’t care if he were dead. His only hope was the Lord.

 **Observation: God’s Grace toward Joseph**

A key technique in the *Searching the Scriptures* process is to use your imagination to enter a biblical scene.¹ For the next few moments, with your mind’s eye, picture a cavern in an underground Egyptian dungeon. Step into the filthy, dimly lit, stifling-hot chamber with Joseph the prisoner, and hear him recount his story.



Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

For thirteen years, young Joseph suffered physical and mental abuse, mistreatment, and rejection beyond what most people could endure. “I was kidnapped from my homeland,” Joseph said, “the land of the Hebrews, and now I’m here in prison, but I did nothing to deserve it” (Genesis 40:15).

Can you sense the emotion in Joseph’s words? Imagine what a resentful, angry person might say to you if he or she were in Joseph’s situation. What thoughts might he or she express about the offender? About God?

God wraps victims in His arms of compassion and grace. Read *Isaiah 61:1–3*, imagining the Lord saying these words of hope to you. What phrases of comfort stand out in this passage for you?

At each stage of Joseph’s lonely saga, God blessed him with reminders of His presence. How did God bless Joseph in Potiphar’s house (Genesis 39:2–6)?



Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

In prison, how did God bless Joseph (*Genesis 39:21–23*)?

Although all others abandoned him, “the LORD was with Joseph in the prison and showed him his faithful love” (39:21). God was extending grace to Joseph so when the time was right, Joseph had the resources to extend grace to his abusers.

In the mind of Joseph, there is a relationship with the living God that is so significant that none of the evil things happening to him blot it out. Hear me on this. It’s a remarkable thing, but it’s the background of grace. His relationship to God was greater than any of the punishment he was living with. His confidence in God’s plan was broader, deeper, bigger than anything anyone had ever done to him. —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Joseph’s Grace toward His Brothers

In the interpretation phase of Bible study, we look for the meaning of the narrative. What lessons did the author want his original audience to learn about God and how we relate to others who have harmed us? As you reflect on Joseph’s account, draw out three principles that capture the meaning of the passage and can be applied in any generation.

Joseph: When He Suffered

If Joseph could speak from his prison cell about his relationship with God through his suffering, what life principle might he give you based on what you know about Joseph from your study so far? Use this principle as you teach this story to others.



Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

Principle One: Relating to God through Suffering

Joseph: When He Was Tested

Finally, after two years in prison, a rescue party arrived for Joseph when his ex-prison mate mentioned his name to Pharaoh who called on him to interpret his dreams. God revealed the interpretation through Joseph to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh was so pleased that he made Joseph second-in-command over all of Egypt. Read [Genesis 41:1–46](#).

On wings of heavenly grace, Joseph rose out of the *pit* to the *pinnacle*. He prospered and had two sons: Manasseh and Ephraim. What did the births of these two boys signify to Joseph? The answer is in the meaning of their names ([Genesis 41:50–52](#)).

Although his pain was behind him, *Joseph's greatest test lay just ahead* when his brothers arrived disheveled, desperate, and starving because of a famine. They came to Egypt for the grain that Joseph had wisely stored for such a season.

As Joseph's brothers entered his ornate chamber, "they bowed before him with their faces to the ground" (42:6). Joseph's adolescent prophetic dream had become reality! At his feet begging for food were the same heartless brothers who turned a deaf ear when Joseph was at their feet begging for his life (42:21).

Would Joseph take revenge? Would he do to his brothers as they had done to him? Did Joseph lick his lips at the opportunity to crush his brothers? How tempting is the elixir of revenge—the intoxicating swill of power when you return hurt for hurt and show no mercy when your offender pleads for it.



Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

You may be in a testing period like Joseph, caught in the emotional middle between the pain from the past and the relief of moving forward. Read the way he dealt with his brothers in Genesis 42–45 and, specifically, his emotional outbursts in [Genesis 42:21–24](#); [43:29–31](#); and [45:1–2](#). What principle does Joseph’s tears teach about the importance of working through emotions in the process of forgiveness? How would you communicate this principle to others?

Principle Two: The Process of Forgiveness

Joseph: How He Responded

Eventually, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers. As you read the passage, record in the space below the many times that Joseph focused on the sovereign plan of God. Also note the ways that Joseph extended grace to his undeserving brothers and their families. Read [Genesis 45:1–15](#); [47:1–12](#).

After Jacob died, Joseph’s brothers became afraid that Joseph might finally take his revenge. Joseph reassured his offenders with the following grace-filled, God-trusting message—a model for anyone who has been a victim:

“Don’t be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. No, don’t be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children.” So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them. (Genesis 50:19–21, emphasis added)



Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

Like Joseph, we too can often see God’s plan at work within our victimization—without justifying or excusing the wrong but by honoring God and His redeeming power. Write a final principle based on what Joseph’s account teaches you about extending grace to your offender.

Principle Three: Extending Grace to My Offender



Correlation: Bible Exposition

Like Joseph’s imprisonment, perhaps your own victimization has been like staring at the four walls of a prison cell. And like Joseph, you did nothing to deserve mistreatment, yet it struck you down. We should emulate Joseph’s model of forgiveness and grace. In the correlation phase of Bible study, we look for similar teaching in other passages. What does *Romans 12:17–21* say about restraining revenge and extending grace?



Application: Throw away Your Book of Revenge

The offenses in your book of revenge may include a business partner who stole money from you. A friend who made a joke about you in public. An employer who fired you because a coworker pinned his or her mistakes on you. A person you tried to help who accused you of things you never did. You may bear the consequences of someone else’s sin, such as a spouse’s adultery or a parent’s alcoholism. The list could go on and on.



Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

As you consider how to release offenses and extend grace, keep in mind the following guidelines:

- *When someone is afraid you will retaliate, extend grace by not doing so.*
- *When you have the authority to punish someone for hurting you, extend grace by refusing to play God and enact your own vengeance.*
- *When you recognize the wrong done against you, extend grace by realizing that God can redeem an act of evil for your ultimate good.*

Reflect on Joseph’s life story, the three principles you wrote previously, and the three guidelines above. What action is God leading you to take as you respond to those who have offended you?

The same grace that frees you from bitterness enables you to see God’s sovereign hand *through it all*. Allow Joseph’s words to his brothers to assure you that God can work in your life despite suffering. Keep his words in mind as you follow God’s plan through your hardship: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good” (Genesis 50:20).



A FINAL PRAYER

Dear Father, I am surrounded by hateful people who sometimes target me. Help me to learn from Joseph the important power of extending grace to those who do not deserve it. Just as Joseph showed grace, help me to show grace. Just as Jesus forgave, help me to forgive. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. We recommend you purchase Chuck’s *book Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* if you do not already have a copy. You can also read Chuck’s *Searching the Scriptures* introductions on sts.insight.org.



WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES
STUDY THIRTEEN

Encouraging Others

Acts 4:32–37

Remember this: No matter how high you may climb in life, no matter how great the promotion or important the title, it is always appropriate that you take time to encourage.

—Charles R. Swindoll

IF you have been looking for a timely, thematic goal to govern your next season of life, consider this one: *I will be an encourager.*

What force, what energy, what influence can flow from just a few words or a simple act of encouragement. Encouragement can change the whole course of a person's life. Who can harness such power? *Anyone!* No one must complete a rite of passage or ace a lengthy exam or wait for the pastor's orders. God has endowed everyone with the ability to encourage.

But to resist the temptation to leave the encourager's hat on the rack, we all need reminders about the importance of encouragement and the ways to develop this habit. We'll do that in this last study of *Wise Counsel for Troubled Times* as we explore four scenes from a thoughtful and inspiring churchman named Joseph—also known as Barnabas, “Son of Encouragement.”



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Encouraging Others

Acts 4:32–37



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Use the space below to write a prayer and open your heart to Jesus, who is your encourager. Ask Him to reveal His heart as He speaks to you through the Scriptures, which “give us hope and encouragement” (Romans 15:4). How do you need encouragement today? Ask the Lord to encourage you and help you turn His kindness toward you into a blessing for others.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Before we explore the life of Barnabas, let’s review this passage in the book of Hebrews.

Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24–25)

Encouragement plays a major part in God’s mission for the church. The author of Hebrews knew this. So he fleshed out the meaning of encouragement and tied its importance to perseverance.

How did the author of Hebrews define *encouragement*?



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Acts 4:32–37

What connection does encouragement have with regular spiritual meetings? And how does encouragement relate to spiritual perseverance?

In the following charts, we combine three phases of the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method: observation, interpretation, and application.¹ As you fill in the charts, keep in mind the names of people you know who may need the encouragement of Barnabas. You can become a “Barnabas” starting today . . . and here’s how!

We examine the life of Barnabas because I want you to become an encourager. I don’t want you to merely be able to point out how Barnabas encouraged others. Barnabas has become a model of encouragement for us to emulate in our walk with Christ. —Chuck Swindoll





Encouraging Others


Acts 4:32–37

Encourage One Another with Your Finances

Acts 4:32–37

Once Pentecost arrived, God’s Spirit rushed upon 120 of Jesus’ disciples who had gathered in a room to pray. Just days afterward, the Spirit had touched thousands, growing the church from a small flicker into a great conflagration. Visitors to Jerusalem grew so excited about Jesus they didn’t want to leave. As they all devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, needs arose. It’s in the context of these needs that we become acquainted with Barnabas.

 Observation	 Interpretation
Summarize the actions and probable motivation of Barnabas in <i>Acts 4:32–37</i> .	How did God use Barnabas to encourage the church? What was the impact of his actions?

 **Application: Releasing Your Grip on Money**

First, pause and give God thanks for those who have financially encouraged you. Even let your encouragers know how thankful you are for them. Has God, through this passage, inspired you to encourage someone financially? If so, whom? How?





Encouraging Others

Acts 4:32–37

Encourage One Another through Personal Endorsements

Acts 9:19–27

With blood on his hands, the zealous Pharisee Saul journeyed from Jerusalem to Damascus to imprison those agitators heralding Christian teaching. Then a flash of heavenly light stopped him on the road as the thunderous voice of Christ struck his ears and his heart. Saul the Pharisee became Paul the Christian. Because many Christians looked with skepticism on the post-conversion Paul, he needed a credible endorsement to prove his newfound faith. One man took it upon himself to do just that.

 Observation	 Interpretation
Summarize the actions and probable motivation of Barnabas in Acts 9:19–27 .	How did God use Barnabas to encourage Paul? What was the outcome of his actions?

 **Application: Using a Kind Word to Create Connections**

Relationships often determine one’s direction and success. Think about where you are because of who you know. Next consider just one person you could bless by putting in a good word for him or her, then do so. Let it be a pleasant surprise.



Encouraging Others

Acts 4:32–37

Encourage One Another with Selfless Acts of Service

Acts 11:19–26

Notoriety and honor clothed the leaders of the early church. New converts not only gave these teachers and leaders food and clothes, silver and gold, but also time and attention. How pride must have tempted these leaders! But far be it from Barnabas. He did not hoard what honor he received. As his influence grew, so did his character. He became an exemplar of Christ’s words, “Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant” (Mark 10:43 NASB).



Observation



Interpretation

Summarize Barnabas’ actions and probable motivation as recorded in *Acts 11:19–26*.

How did God use Barnabas to encourage the church? What was the impact of his actions?



Application: Sharing the Responsibility, Sharing the Excitement

Sharing responsibility encourages others by helping them grow, increasing their confidence, and giving them purpose. How can you put into practice this important form of encouragement?





Encouraging Others

Acts 4:32–37

Encourage One Another by Giving Second Chances

Acts 15:36–41

Like any organization, like any movement, like any relationship—conflicts arose in the early church. Paul and Barnabas, the best of friends, collided over John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. Paul chose one way. Barnabas another. The event in this scene, Barnabas’ encouragement, might be the very act that spurred John Mark to persevere in God’s mission. Mark would go on to write that cherished, ancient text which we call “The Gospel According to Mark.”

 Observation	 Interpretation
Summarize the actions and probable motivation of Barnabas in <i>Acts 15:36–41</i> .	How did God use Barnabas to encourage the church? What was the impact of his actions?

 **Application: Restoring a Relationship with Forgiveness and Trust**

Too many relationships sever due to one member’s unwillingness to extend forgiveness and trust. Not all people deserve such gifts. But more do than we would care to imagine. If anyone in your life comes to mind, make it a resolution to reconnect and extend the healing power of forgiveness. Give him or her a second chance as God has given you such chances.



Encouraging Others

Acts 4:32–37

God did not design us to operate independent of Himself. He longs to abide with us, the most special of His creation. God directs all of His dealings within humanity throughout history toward this end, namely, that we accomplish His will as people who worship Christ in our hearts and follow Christ in our ways.

In this series, we have examined such people as models for us to emulate. The author of Hebrews urges:

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7 NASB)

As one of many saints from the past, Barnabas walked with God and shared His love with others through his kind words and actions. Let's imitate his faith as we encourage others like he did.



A FINAL PRAYER

Use these final moments to reflect on becoming a “Barnabas” in your circle of friends and family members. Commit a plan of action to the Lord and ask for His grace to see it fulfilled through you.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”



Encouraging Others

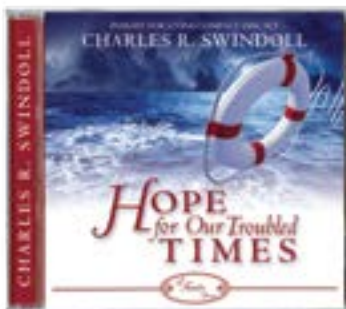
Acts 4:32–37



Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

