

THINGS THAT HINDER YOUR YEARS AT SEMINARY

People Who Make the Ministry Difficult

2 Timothy 3:1–5

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

A great paradox pervades life: people bring out in us the most exuberant smiles . . . and the heaviest tears. Yet nothing offers more reward—nor creates the most risk—than making ourselves vulnerable through acts of selfless love. Ministry amplifies the risks and rewards because it's all about people, and that compels all Christians to learn how to deal with the troublemakers.

We see this paradox in the life of the apostle Paul. A radical realist as well as an energetic optimist, Paul found the positive behind prison bars. He didn't put his head in the sand but acknowledged the pain the unruly produce, and he taught future gospel ministers how to navigate the rough waters of difficult people. We'll look at that topic with Chuck Swindoll, a man who has spent more than fifty years working in the church.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In this three-part series, Chuck focuses on three difficult aspects of ministry. All Christians serve in some capacity whether vocationally or avocationally, so we all must know how to handle difficulties, and even avoid some of them, if we want to minister effectively. Three areas of difficulty are:

1. **People:** those with whom and to whom we minister
2. **Ourselves:** harmful vices and destructive habits we carry
3. **Circumstances:** uncontrolled and unforeseen events that bombard our time and assault our peace

Let's examine [2 Timothy 3:1–5](#) using Chuck's four-step *Searching the Scriptures* process: observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. Helpful resources are vital to anyone who wants to grow deep in his or her knowledge of the Bible. For this study, you may consider purchasing Chuck's commentary *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* from his excellent Living Insights New Testament Commentary series.

Quotable

I want you to get into and enjoy, as best you can, a life of ministry even as you live in this depraved world.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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First, however, we should pray before engaging God's Word. Write your own prayer below, asking God's Spirit to strengthen you during this series that you may grow in wisdom, perseverance, and confidence to navigate the difficulties of ministry.



Observation: Reading Carefully

Patience and focus fuel observation. We need no extra resource and no seminary degree to be a keen observer of the text. We just need to read it. Thoroughly. Repetitively. Reflectively. That's what we'll do with 2 Timothy 3:1–5. You may even read multiple translations. Chuck's favorites are the [New Living Translation](#) and the [New American Standard Bible](#).

Write down what you observe, looking for the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* of the paragraph.

It's often helpful to finish the detailed analysis of observation with a simple subject-complement summary. We summarize the passage's topic (i.e., the subject) and then articulate what the author says *about* the topic (i.e., the complement). For example, if the subject of a paragraph is **money**, then what the author says **about money** is the complement.



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Write down the subject of 2 Timothy 3:1–5.

In a simple and clear sentence, write what Paul said about this subject.



Interpretation: Understanding Clearly

Thorough observation allows for an enriching interpretive experience because we can better know what questions to answer, what cultural norms to learn, and what words to define. And our passage has many words! In fact, Paul used nineteen different terms or phrases to describe difficult people in these last days.

Using Chuck's commentary or [Constable's online commentary](#), peruse the meaning of each of the eighteen descriptors of difficult people characterized in 2 Timothy 3:2–4. Record those insights that are especially helpful for you in understanding this passage.

The nineteenth and last portrayal of difficult people is especially poignant for our topic. Notice how it says such people have a form of godliness but deny its power (2 Timothy 3:5). What does that look like in a person? What would that look like in a church leader?



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2 Timothy 3:1–5

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This stark picture of people's dark side—especially those in the church—will aid us to be more effective ministers. Chuck says it well in his commentary: “Over the years, Paul’s realism in these verses has kept me from becoming disillusioned.”¹ Backbiters don’t surprise us—they’re just part of ministry, part of life. But we risk for the reward because we know God transforms people with His radical love. So we refuse to let the backbiting turn us into bitter cynics who have no enthusiasm in our service.



Correlation: Comparing Precisely

Because core truths and life principles thread the entire Bible, we correlate the main verses of our study with other biblical passages to develop an increased understanding of God’s character, God’s actions, and God’s instructions.

Matthew 10 addresses the same idea as *2 Timothy 3:1–5* but from an alternative vantage point. *Matthew 10* contains Jesus’ directives, warnings, and encouragements to His disciples as He sent them out to proclaim His gospel. Review this chapter and record how it complements what you’ve learned from *2 Timothy 3:1–5*.



Application: Integrating Thoroughly

After reflecting on *2 Timothy 3:1–5* as well as on his decades of gospel ministry, Chuck provides ten principles to add to our bucket of wisdom for ministering effectively. Contemplate each principle, and choose one most relevant to your season of life.

1. *Be extremely cautious regarding those you endorse to fill leadership roles.* Because leaders have such influence in the ministry, take time to thoroughly weigh each candidate’s character, personality, and skill set to ensure he or she will not bulldoze relationships or hijack ministry goals.



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2. *It's easier to find purity than confidentiality.* Know that what you choose to share with one may be heard by many—even if that person has no ill-intent in repeating what you said. Develop a few key relationships with people who won't broadcast across the town or Web what you've said in confidence.
3. *Watch out for those who play a significant role in your being called to a particular place of ministry.* Your most vocal proponents may have hidden reasons for supporting you and may undermine you later if you don't promote their agenda. When joining a ministry, get to know a cross-section of people, and beware the flatterers.
4. *Keep your distance from the opposite sex.* Avoid car drives or lunches alone with the opposite sex. Don't get emotionally attached. Actively guard against any temptation or appearance of infidelity if you're married or immorality if you're single.
5. *No matter how much you need it, don't take money from anybody.* Don't give anyone reason to accuse you of greed after preaching or teaching. Have them put the money in the offering plate at the end of a service.
6. *Some people are not just difficult, they're dangerous.* Jesus promised persecution would persist until His next coming, and so it continues in our day. The dangers are plenty: deranged folks threaten to kill Christian ministers, scam-artists rob ministries and gullible Christians, and vindictive individuals assault the integrity of prominent Christian leaders—to name a few. Be as “shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16).
7. *When you are targeted by the enemy, some do not have your good at heart.* Some members do not intend only to drive their agenda in the church or nonprofit ministry—they plan your downfall, failure, and humiliation in the process. Live above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2).
8. *When hiring or releasing someone from your ministry, do not manipulate the process.* If the ministry of which you're a part has developed an effective system to vet candidates and release those who don't fit into the ministry's culture, don't insert your influence and deviate from the plan. Emotions can run high in these circumstances, preventing rational thinking. Stick to your ministry's process.
9. *When you're led to leave a place of ministry, do not expect everyone to understand and affirm your decision.* Because others don't have the privilege of your perspective, don't anticipate all will see your rationale for leaving—especially if they really like you. Know that you can't control how another person feels or thinks, so it's best to accept your limitations and avoid unnecessary paralysis or relational anxiety.
10. *If you're married, your relationship with your spouse is the single most important relationship in your life aside from your relationship with Jesus.* Schedule consistent time with your spouse. Pray together. Read the Bible together. Prioritize quality time with your spouse.



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Certainly more than one of the principles above speaks to your current situation, but pick just one to meditate upon. After prayerfully thinking it over, write down what you need to do in light of that principle and your circumstance.

Remember the inestimable worth of every single person. Remember Jesus' love for you despite your evil nature, disobedience, and lack of faith. We all have strayed from Him, but He searches for us as a loving shepherd. He instructs us—sometimes with the rod of discipline. He always loves us with a tender, unconditional love—the kind of love that can melt the hardest of hearts, soften the steeliest of wills, and uplift the lowliest of our days. It's that love that allows us to walk in divine power as we minister in the presence of difficult people.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You know how difficult I can be. You know my desire to live with integrity, to have an upright heart that follows Your ways and expresses a nonjudgmental love toward those to whom I minister. Please give me wisdom to navigate the inconvenient political and relational troubles caused by difficult people, and give me the strength not to retaliate with anger but with love. I pray this so Jesus might be glorified in my life. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 11 (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 228.



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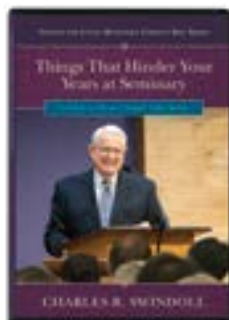
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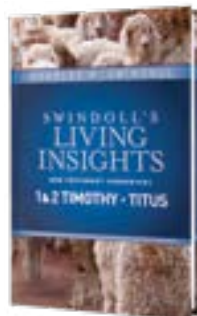
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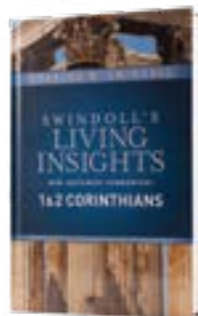
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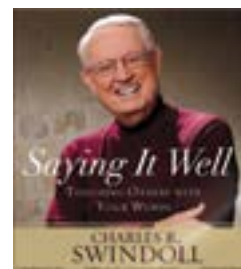
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THINGS THAT HINDER YOUR YEARS AT SEMINARY

Things We Do That Make Ministry Difficult

2 Corinthians 4:1–5

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

Amidst the varied difficulties of ministry, those we can certainly count on are the ones that come from . . . ourselves. That's right. We can't always predict people. We can't foresee the waves of trials the sea of life will hurl at us. But we *can* know ourselves. Our strengths. Our weaknesses. We can know what tempts us to fail—what entices us to act in ways that prevent us from effectively ministering to others.

We can gain an upper hand on our temptations by letting them impel us to depend upon God and to cultivate those habits that foster our own godliness. Employing these godly practices, we can beat temptation and say at the end of our lives, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful,” as Paul did while awaiting death in Mamertine prison (2 Timothy 4:7). In this study of 2 Corinthians 4:1–5, we'll examine with Chuck Swindoll some of those principles that Paul himself practiced during his ministry, so we can successfully continue in the same work.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As you may recall, this study forms the second slice of our three-part series on the difficulties of ministry. We first looked at difficult people, and now we turn to things *we* do that make ministry difficult.

The emotional letter of 2 Corinthians—probably written in AD 55—allows us a glimpse of the apostle Paul's heart for authentic gospel ministry. You may want to peruse this [overview](#) of 2 Corinthians, or you can purchase from our web store [Insights on 1 & 2 Corinthians](#) from Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary series.

Quotable

*Ministry is
not for those
who see themselves
as important.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Today we're examining just five verses from the fourth chapter of 2 Corinthians. Nevertheless there's much to be gained from a thorough study, which we'll do using Chuck's four-step method for studying the Bible.¹

1. **Observation:** We read what the text says—perceiving how each word fits in sentences, how each sentence fits in paragraphs, and how each paragraph fits in the book.
2. **Interpretation:** We seek to understand what the text means—delving into word studies, cultural practices, history, and theology.
3. **Correlation:** We compare our passage with other biblical passages—examining what they teach on similar topics covered by our main passage.
4. **Application:** We integrate into our lives biblical truths and principles—obeying Jesus' commands, believing Jesus' promises, and walking with Jesus always.

Before diving into the text, pray for God to use this time in His Word to give you the spiritual nugget of insight you need to overcome anything hindering your ministry effectiveness.



Observation

Begin by slowly reading [2 Corinthians 4:1–5](#). Read it out loud a few times to force yourself to pronounce every word. Then read it quietly, stopping at the main terms to churn them over and make new connections you've never seen.

Write down the most important observations you see in the passage.



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THINGS THAT HINDER YOUR YEARS AT SEMINARY

Things We Do That Make Ministry Difficult

2 Corinthians 4:1–5

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Interpretation

Now that we know what the text says, let's determine what it means. First, we'll examine [2 Corinthians 3](#) to aid our understanding of the context of 2 Corinthians 4:1–5. Then we'll use Chuck's three helpful principles as our guide through the text.

Context

The “therefore” at the beginning of [2 Corinthians 4:1](#) connects us with [2 Corinthians 3](#) in which Paul introduces the new kind of “ministry” (2 Corinthians 4:1 NASB) that came through Christ. Second Corinthians 3 contrasts the old covenant, through Moses and the law, with the new covenant, through Christ and the Spirit. According to 2 Corinthians 3:6, what is the result of the old covenant and the result of the new covenant?

According to 2 Corinthians 3:13–16, what happens when someone reads the old covenant versus when someone believes in Christ? (Note: the phrase “believing in Christ” in 2 Corinthians 3:14 NASB means the same thing as “turns to the Lord” in 2 Corinthians 3:16 NASB.)

In 2 Corinthians 3:17–18, Paul defined what it means to say, “the Spirit gives life” (3:6). “Wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (3:17 NASB). That was Paul's ministry—the ministry of Christ extending the Spirit of God who produces freedom in us. Now notice Paul's two descriptions of the meaning of *freedom* in 2 Corinthians 3:18.

According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, *freedom* means:

1. Seeing and reflecting _____
2. Changing into _____



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THINGS THAT HINDER YOUR YEARS AT SEMINARY

Things We Do That Make Ministry Difficult

2 Corinthians 4:1–5

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Today you and I engage in the same ministry of freedom and glory and transformation as Paul. However, even the most dedicated ministers can set up personal road blocks that hinder ministry. Paul listed some of these ministry-defeating behaviors in 1 Corinthians 4:1–2: we might “give up,” engage in “shameful deeds,” utilize “underhanded methods,” try to “trick” others, and even “distort the word of God.” How can we avoid these things that make ministry difficult?

With Every Ministry, Special Mercy Is Needed

What allowed Paul to not give up or “lose heart” in ministry (2 Corinthians 4:1 NASB)?

In Every Ministry, the Same Things Must Be Rejected

In *2 Corinthians 4:2*, Paul summarized how he performed ministry, as compared to certain Corinthians who dismissed his authority. In your own words, write down those things Paul rejected or avoided in his ministry, and then give an example or two of each as they may appear in our current day.

Through Every Ministry, a Convincing Example Must Be Modeled

Now let’s consider what Paul *did* do. Summarize the last part of *2 Corinthians 4:2*.

In *2 Corinthians 4:5*, Paul proclaimed Jesus Christ, not for his own gain but for Christ’s glory. Paul served the inhabitants of Corinth for Christ’s fame and their good—not for his own pride or praise.



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2 Corinthians 4:1–5



Correlation

How did Paul model these principles and avoid destructive habits that fester into unneeded difficulties? Let's correlate 2 Corinthians 4:1–5 with Paul's advice to his pastoral apprentice, Timothy, in [1 Timothy 4:6–16](#).

In this section, Paul provided Timothy a helpful list of things to do and things to avoid. Read the section and create a list of each to summarize Paul's guidance for those in ministry leadership.

Avoid	Do

Which of these admonitions stand out as advice for you to follow?

Let's draw some applications from Paul's teaching to shine as lights on our ministry path.



Application

Chuck imparts seven timeless ministry principles from this passage. Remember to identify the one that's most relevant to your situation of life.

1. You cannot control everything.
2. You cannot fix anyone.
3. You cannot be somebody you're not and get away with it.



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2 Corinthians 4:1–5

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4. You cannot meet everybody's expectations.
5. You cannot dodge the tough questions in the difficult issues.
6. You cannot concern yourself with who gets the credit.
7. You cannot let criticism get to you.

As applicable as all of these are, choose the one you need to act on the most. Are you burying yourself under the load of others' expectations? Are you trying to force someone to change? Did you let criticism keep you awake last night? Write down the principle you've chosen and why you've chosen it. Ask God for inner strength to accept that truth quickly so that you may be free to serve Him more fully.

Remember: Jesus will give you the special mercy you need to trust Him.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I want to release what's keeping my ministry more difficult than it should be. You've called me to freedom, and I want to be free to serve with joy and to rest in the assurance that I'm doing what You've called me to do. Father, I just want to proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord and glorify His name in all I do and say. For His sake, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2017), 79–105, 107–33, 135–58, 159–84.



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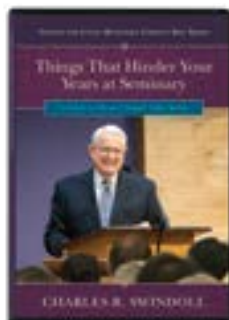
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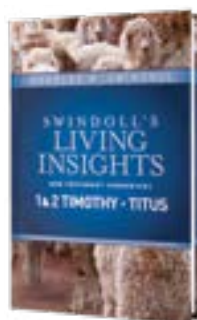
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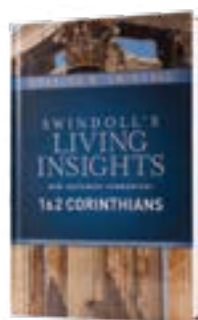
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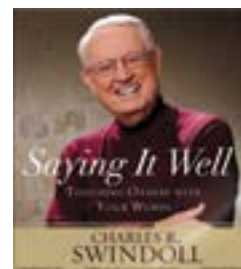
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THINGS THAT HINDER YOUR YEARS AT SEMINARY

Pressing On through the Unexpected

2 Corinthians 1:1–11

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

No Christian receives immunity from the unforeseen trials of life—a miscarriage, a destroyed home, cancer, or divorce, to name a few. No servant of God receives an easier life due to his or her acts of service. But there are truths to affirm and principles to follow that help us through these trying seasons.

We simply don't know what difficulties God will allow us to endure, but we do know that God is the final arbiter of our time on earth. We have the hope of resurrection beyond death, and we have Jesus' promises to strengthen us during those dark days we face until resurrection.

The heavy topic of suffering, which you may now be experiencing, is the focus of this study. We'll join Chuck Swindoll as he walks through 2 Corinthians 1:1–11, and glean insights that will aid us in those unexpected difficulties of ministry.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

"Pressing On through the Unexpected" will end our three-part series on things that make ministry difficult. As you'll recall, we've reviewed how people as well as ourselves can make ministry tough.

If you wish to explore the topic of suffering beyond this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we recommend Chuck's book *Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance*.



Searching the Scriptures Tip: Prayer

Always, always, always—we want to pray before and during our time in God's Word. As Chuck says, "Study without prayer is an incomplete process—a futile effort."¹ The Spirit illumines our minds to understand what *God* wants us to understand.

Quotable

*Don't give in or
give up when facing
that dreaded,
unexpected turn
in life.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2 Corinthians 1:1–11

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Before using the *Searching the Scriptures* study method, let's pray:

Father, in light of what Your Son Jesus has said, "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows" (John 16:33), I pray for the peace, strength, and wisdom that can come only from You, the divine fountain of life and sustainer of all things. Please bless me in this study and use it for Your purposes. For Christ's glory and my joy, amen.



Observing 2 Corinthians 1:1–11

In observation, the first step of our Bible study, we slowly read the author's words, examine the way he connected sentences and paragraphs, and mull over the ideas and imagery he used. Remember: we don't apply the text to ourselves in this step—we merely want to observe what it says. Bible students are like chefs who must prepare and bake the cake before eating it.

Start by reading [2 Corinthians 1:1–11](#), and make notes of what you see.

Who God Is—2 Corinthians 1:3

According to 2 Corinthians 1:3, in what two ways did Paul describe God?

According to the same verse, what response did these attributes of God produce in Paul?



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THINGS THAT HINDER YOUR YEARS AT SEMINARY

Pressing On through the Unexpected

2 Corinthians 1:1–11

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What God Can Do—2 Corinthians 1:9

Now look carefully at 2 Corinthians 1:9. What about God led Paul to rely on Him through suffering?

Paul felt like he was hanging with just a few fingers on the rocky edge of life—expecting all to end. But God rescued him from mortal danger. Notice how God’s provision in the past led Paul to trust God for the future (2 Corinthians 1:10).



Interpreting 2 Corinthians 1:1–11

During interpretation, we move from observing what the text says to discovering what the text means. We ask some interpretive questions like, *How did the original hearers understand it? What’s the theology in the text? What cultural symbols were used then that aren’t used now?*

Why We Suffer

In 2 Corinthians 1:1–11, Paul explains why we may go through suffering. He’s not exhaustive and doesn’t explain all the mysteries in God’s universe, but he offers a helpful launching pad for us to better grasp the topic of suffering. Let’s explore Paul’s thoughts.

In 2 Corinthians 1:4, Paul introduced the *first reason* why we suffer. Notice the “so that”—it’s the clue. What’s the *first reason* we suffer?



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THINGS THAT HINDER YOUR YEARS AT SEMINARY

Pressing On through the Unexpected

2 Corinthians 1:1–11

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In 2 Corinthians 1:5–9, Paul recounted his excruciating experiences building up to the *second reason* for suffering. Just look at Paul's intense language. "Weighed down with troubles" (2 Corinthians 1:6), "crushed and overwhelmed" (1:8), "expected to die" (1:9). Unable to stay in the thick mud of despair, Paul elevated his thoughts to find hope in God's purpose for suffering. It's there at the end of 2 Corinthians 1:9. See it? Record below the *second reason* we suffer.

The *third reason* for suffering lies embedded in 2 Corinthians 1:11. To find it, restate the verse in your own words, uncovering assumptions and clarifying connections. This is a helpful method for interpreting the Bible because we must understand it to reword it. For this exercise, you might consult multiple Bible translations and perhaps an online commentary, such as [Constable's notes](#) or [William Barclay's thoughts](#). Barclay is one of Chuck's favorites. Now restate the verse and note the *third reason* for suffering.



Correlating 2 Corinthians 1:1–11

Correlation expands our interpretation so that we peruse other parts of God's Holy Word to see what He said elsewhere that complements what He said in our main passage. We do this to better understand God's grand redemption narrative, the historical events of the Bible, theology, and how to lead holy lives.

Today, we'll provide a passage that adds another angle on suffering: [Revelation 21:1–7](#). We do not lose heart during suffering because of our eternal guarantee illustrated in this text. Slowly read and reflect on Revelation 21:1–7, and summarize how and why it complements our study of 2 Corinthians 1:1–11.



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2 Corinthians 1:1–11

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Applying 2 Corinthians 1:1–11

By applying the Bible to our lives with the power of God's Spirit, we become like Christ, and God the Father will see our transformation through to the end.

Application increases our awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives, helps us see as the Father sees, and animates us to interact with the world as Christ would.

In his sermon "Pressing On through the Unexpected," Chuck tells us:

Rather than fighting, surrender. Rather than resisting, release. There will be occasions in your ministry when you will reach up because that is the only way you have to look.

Is there something in your life or ministry that you're doing everything you can to make happen, but it isn't? Take a moment and begin your surrender to God through prayer.

Is something happening in your life or ministry that you're resisting with all your power? It may be something you need to release to God. Loosen your grip, and rest in God's goodness.

Do you need to reach up right now? Are you yearning for healing or strengthening from God's Spirit? Express your heart to God. He hears you.



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THINGS THAT HINDER YOUR YEARS AT SEMINARY

Pressing On through the Unexpected

2 Corinthians 1:1–11

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Prayer allows us to unlock the door and enter the house of God's blessings. "It gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom" (Luke 12:32).



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You hear us even if our suffering is too great for words. I know that You choose to use our suffering for ends which I can't see, so I trust in Your promises. Even as Christ endured the cross for the joy set before Him, I pray that You allow me to endure in life because of the joy awaiting me in You. Thank You for allowing me to have a taste of that joy right now. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2016), 128.



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THINGS THAT HINDER YOUR YEARS AT SEMINARY

Pressing On through the Unexpected

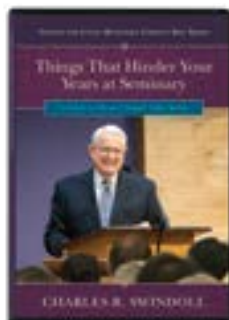
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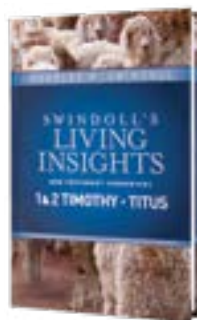
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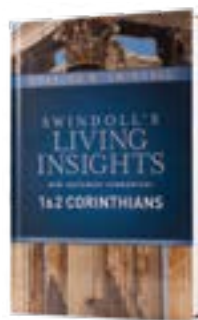
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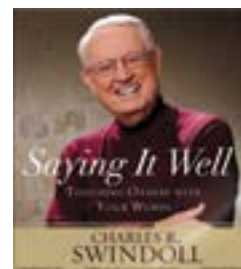
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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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