

# WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

## Sustaining Enthusiasm

Joshua 1:1–9

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

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.



### DIGGING DEEPER

Israel's journey through the wilderness is 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. To better appreciate Paul's point in recounting Israel's wilderness years, let's take a minute to examine the Israelites' journey on a map of Egypt and Palestine.

## Quotable

*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



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### *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 to 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 an 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.

What information do you glean about the conditions that the people endured, the distance traveled, and the contrasts in topography and climate during their forty-year journey?

### Tragic Story of Spiritual Apathy

Now let's look at Paul's summary of the wilderness journey and the lesson 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 NLT)



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

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?

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. God wanted His people to respond with trust and worship. Yet instead of a bouquet of devotion, a weedy infestation of grumbling grew out of 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 Israelites did in each sin category, and then read the backstory in Exodus and Numbers.

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

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*.

Sustaining enthusiasm can be a challenge for people who beat the same spiritual path week after week. 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.

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, and obeying these commands will help us as well.



### Four Commands to Sustain Enthusiasm

In Joshua 1:1–5, God first reissued His mission—namely, for the Israelites to take the land that was promised to Moses. Read these verses in Joshua, and look up the boundary locations on your Bible map.

To accomplish this mammoth mission, 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?

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





### Bring It Home

How does obeying these four commands pump enthusiasm into our spiritual life? *Each one connects us to our God through faith.* We can only be strong and courageous when we trust in God's promises. We can only obey when we truly believe that God's way is best. We will only study His Word when we long to hear God's voice. 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.



### 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

## Sustaining Enthusiasm

*Joshua 1:1–9*

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

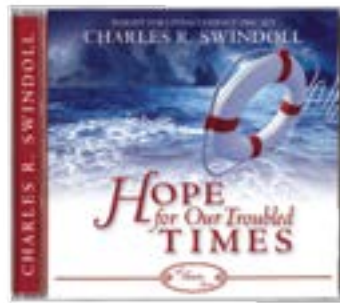
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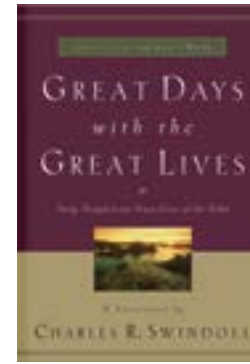
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### LET'S BEGIN HERE

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 past failings. He knows that 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.



### DIGGING DEEPER

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 pens, "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, hope is what we desperately need!

#### 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 NLT).

## Quotable

*You can't take care  
of your own failure.*

*You need help  
from the outside.*

*The One who will  
help is Jesus.*

— Charles R. Swindoll





Observe the wording of Jesus' warning. Why do you think He twice used Peter's Hebrew name, Simon? A clue might be in Jesus' original meeting with Peter. Read John 1:42. Why might Jesus, at this moment, want Peter to recall his first encounter?

Also, note that Satan requested to sift "each of you," referring 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.

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)

Jesus prayed that Peter's failure would not destroy his faith but strengthen it through repentance so that he could 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, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" (Luke 22:33).

Impetuous Peter had yet to learn the lessons that only experience teaches. Freeze-frame this prideful moment, and let's fast-forward to a time in his life when he is older and humbler as we correlate this passage with a passage from 1 Peter.



### *Searching the Scriptures Tip*

When studying a Bible character, don't miss the opportunity to look for 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 that 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 when he wrote 1 Peter compare to his attitude in Luke 22:31–34? What does the difference suggest that he had learned?

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?

Picking up the action in Luke 22:34, 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" (NLT).

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

Matthew cast Peter in the same light as the cursing and swearing soldiers who arrested Jesus. Peter’s raw humanity exposed, he was 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.

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” (Luke 22:62 MSG).

A look can sail a message deep into the private harbor of our hearts. 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, and if it's a negative message that you imagine, what would be Christ's message of compassion to you?

### Grace-Filled Glimpses of Hope

The next regret-filled days passed like a living nightmare for Peter. However, hope arose when Jesus rose from the grave. 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 NLT, emphasis added). Why single out Peter?

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?





### Bring It Home

With each question that Jesus asked and each response by Peter, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You,” Jesus revealed deeper layers of debilitating shame, covered it with grace, and enabled Peter for the task ahead: “Tend my lambs.”

Wounded and healed, Peter was then fit for the healing work of ministry. Brought low and raised up, he 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 3:14–41)!

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 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.

As we close this study, write in a journal about a past failure that may be holding you down. See Christ’s look of compassion. Receive His outstretched arms of forgiveness. Hear His call to a hopeful, productive future.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, 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.*



# WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

## Overcoming Failure

Luke 22:31–34, 54–62

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

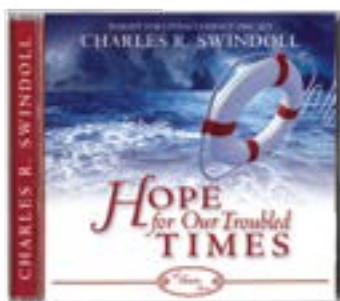
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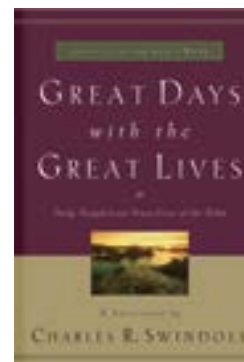
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### LET'S BEGIN HERE

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, he continued his ministry. The Christian-hating Nero could stifle the great apostle's voice, but he could not still his 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.



### DIGGING DEEPER

The steel in Paul's fortitude was forged early in his ministry. Let's take a closer look at his previous jail experiences to discover some of Paul's character qualities that served him well at the end of his life.



### Searching the Scriptures Tip

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, "Has Paul ever been 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 season of hardship.

## Quotable

*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





Fill in the following chart by reading the account, noting the location of the imprisonment and observing Paul's qualities.

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

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). "To live is Christ and to die is gain" was Paul's life motto (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 fire 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 on his flame?



### A Frightening Prediction

After encouraging Timothy in the first two chapters of the letter, Paul reached through the page and grabbed the young man by the shoulders: “You should know this, Timothy” (2 Timothy 3:1 NLT). His attention focused, Timothy received Paul’s frightening prediction.

In the last days there will be very difficult times.<sup>1</sup> 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! (3:1–5 NLT)

Sadly, Paul’s predictions could be today’s headlines. Or they could land much closer to home and describe your company’s newsletter or even your family’s Facebook page. 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 in a journal, write a prayer to the Lord sharing your feelings with Him.

### A Passionate Reminder

Certainly, Timothy felt similar emotions. Like a loving but firm father, Paul spoke through his young friend’s fears to his core commitments: “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 NLT).



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 (2 Timothy 3:10–11).

What persecutions did Paul endure in each of these three cities: Antioch (Acts 13:50), Iconium (14:5–6), and Lystra (14:19)?

And yet, through every episode of suffering, Paul declared, “the Lord rescued me from all of it” (2 Timothy 3:11 NLT). Then he made a statement that causes many Christians to shudder: “Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus *will suffer persecution*” (3:12 NLT, 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 NLT). In other words, never quit!

### Urgent Commands

To steady Timothy's hand on the helm of the church, Paul pointed him forward with five urgent commands, 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 appears 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 NLT)

Can you pick out the five commands? Write them in the space below.



God's Word is the North Star by which we steer our ship; exposition 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.<sup>2</sup>

Just as Timothy's congregation could have, the people in our church may reject Bible exposition for ear-tickling stories and board a pleasure cruise of their own desires (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 NLT)

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." His pearls of wisdom polished by years of hardship and delivered from death's door offer us the wisest counsel for our troubled times.



### Bring It Home

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.





### 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. “In the last days,” the days between Jesus’ birth at Bethlehem and His second coming in glory, “there will be very difficult times” (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.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2016), 191.



# WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

## Never Quitting

2 Timothy 3:1–5, 10–12, 14; 4:1–5

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

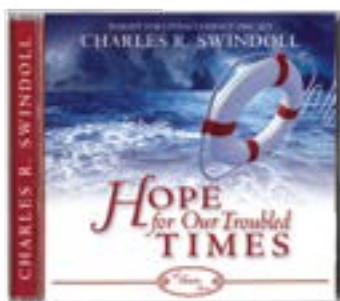
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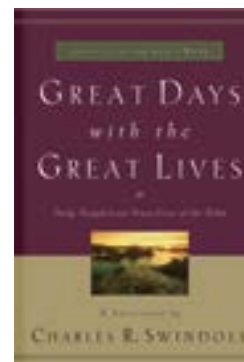
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### LET'S BEGIN HERE

What does it mean to “think biblically”? How do we know when our thoughts reflect the heart of God’s Word? Nestled in the historical account of the monarchs of Israel, Josiah’s example is preserved for our admonition as an enduring model of biblical thinking . . . and action. Amazingly, this boy-king reflected the zeal and love for the Lord ten years before he discovered a single scroll of Scripture and despite his checkered paternal lineage. If Josiah—with those disadvantages—could please the Lord, how much more so can we?



### How to Handle Biblical History

History in the Bible concerns itself with three broad subjects: the history of God’s activities in the world, the history of humanity, and the history of God’s chosen ones—Israel and the church. Every interpretation of Scripture must consider one or more of these subjects.

Regardless of the specific passage we’ve chosen to study, we must step back and ask questions about the book. Because every book of the Bible was written by a specific historical author to a specific historical audience living in a specific historical situation, to arrive at a general theological principle—a timeless truth—we must explore the specific history of each biblical book.

Two major sources used in recreating accurate biblical history are the Bible itself (primary source) and extra-biblical references (secondary sources), such as histories about ancient Israel, Egypt, Babylon, or Greece, biographies about biblical personalities, a Bible dictionary, a Bible atlas, a Bible commentary, or a Bible encyclopedia. Looking internally at the Bible and externally at the work of Bible scholars, we want to determine the general historical setting of the author and the audience.

## Quotable

*A person who  
takes God seriously  
says that His Word  
is my guide for the  
priorities I choose,  
the decisions I  
make, and the way  
I handle things in  
my home.*

— Charles R. Swindoll







### DIGGING DEEPER

Using the resources listed above (or online resources like the NET Bible or biblegateway.com), let's dig into the background surrounding 2 Chronicles 34.

Who wrote the Chronicles (early Hebrew manuscripts did not divide the books into 1 and 2 Chronicles)?

While scholars do not know the identity of the author of the Chronicles, they agree that a single author penned the works, due to the uniformity of writing style. Some scholars hypothesize that the Chronicles were written by Ezra.

Who was the original audience?

Because of the emphasis on the Davidic line and the priestly emphases, the people of Judah were most likely the original audience.

When were the Chronicles written?

Scholars estimate that the book couldn't have been written prior to 400 BC.

What purpose did the Chronicles serve in the Bible?



### Two Filters for the Brain

Romans 12:2 says, “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” (NLT).

The world’s system is the air we breathe. Our issues aren’t that different than the ones Josiah’s generation faced. We still have idols vying for our time: materialism, sex, greed, self-promotion, pleasure-seeking and amusement, to name a few. Many of us have privileges that rival or surpass the kings of ancient Israel—information and virtual connection at the touch of a button, food to eat that we don’t cultivate, clean water, fast transportation. And like the kings of ancient Israel, we can be good stewards of the resources the Lord has blessed us with or we can take them for granted or even abuse them. The world’s system calls these abuses “the pursuit of happiness.” But God’s Word says, in contrast:

There is a path before each person that seems right,  
but it ends in death. (Proverbs 14:12 NLT)

To think biblically, we need *filters* from the world’s air. Josiah had two important filters that Chuck mentions in his message.

#### ***Filter #1: Josiah had a believing parent instructing him.***

Absolute power corrupts absolutely without a filter—Josiah’s father Amon and grandfather Manasseh testified to this sad maxim. We know that Josiah began to “seek the God of his ancestor David” (2 Chronicles 34:3 NLT) when he was 16 years old, but that Law (scholars surmise that they had unearthed a copy of Deuteronomy) wasn’t discovered until Josiah was 26 years old (34:15). Who stood in the gap, telling Josiah about Yahweh?

Read 2 Kings 22:1.

Who was Josiah’s mother?

Read Deuteronomy 6:7.



What were God's instructions to parents?

Read 2 Chronicles 17:7–9.

What did King Jehoshaphat do to instruct the people?

Chuck says “Why did [Josiah] do what he did? Why did he think like he thought? First was the influence of a godly parent. I’m convinced that Jedidah nurtured and nourished her son in the things of God. . . . Not unlike Timothy, who was under the influence of Eunice.”

Jedidah resisted the idolatry that plagued her kingdom and her household. Her dedication to the Lord was a filter of righteousness for her young son until he was old enough to honor God himself.

How could you use the story of Jedidah to encourage women?

How could you use her example to instruct parents?



Jedidah's testimony as a godly woman shines far beyond the one verse in which she's mentioned. Do you want to honor mothers on Mother's Day? Would you like to seek opportunities to build into the lives of the women in your churches? Tell them about Jedidah.

#### **Filter #2: Josiah had a dynamic reception of God's Word.**

In other words, the second filter was the Word of God itself and Josiah's willingness to act upon it. Let's consider this filter by correlating the narrative of 2 Chronicles 34 with other Bible passages.

Read James 1:22–25:

But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. (NLT)

This passage contains a metaphor for Bible reading. What is the metaphor?

What is the blessing promised in this passage?

The Bible is consistent across the Old and New Testaments. Before the half-brother of Jesus was born, Josiah lived out James' inspired words.

Read 2 Chronicles 34:19. How did Josiah react when he "looked in the mirror" of God's Law?



Why would Josiah tear his clothes in despair? He surely heard some sobering commands.

Read Deuteronomy 17:18–20. What were the requirements outlined for the king in this passage?

Read 2 Chronicles 34:29–32. Did Josiah “walk away” or “look carefully” after hearing God’s Law?



### Application

In today’s world, we still ought to think biblically. Chuck offers three ways to think more biblically—starting today:

- Where to start: wherever you are allowing the world’s system to corrupt your mind
- What to ignore: whatever is keeping you from taking God seriously
- How to proceed (filters!):
  - Start with an open Bible
  - Cultivate a tender heart
  - Be willing to change



What are some additional applications that you picked up from engaging with 2 Chronicles 34? Write them down here.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, help us do as Paul described in Philippians 4:8: “Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.” May our actions follow our thoughts, and may our thoughts and actions glorify You. Amen.*



# WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

## Thinking Biblically

2 Chronicles 34

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

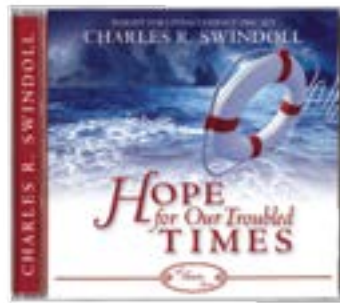
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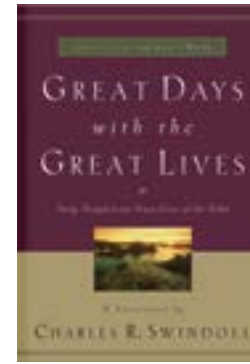
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S04  
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### LET'S BEGIN HERE

Proverbs 3:7–8 says,

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. (NLT)

Let's meet a woman named Abigail, who deftly and exquisitely applied godly wisdom to a tenuous situation and turned a future king from evil. Abigail stood in the breach between David's rash murderous intent and her husband's insulting indifference. Abigail's story is compact: it's all told in 1 Samuel 25. This narrative has it all: an unfair, self-serving boss; a careless husband; frustrated employees; a strained marriage; and a wife who saved her husband's neck. Abigail's example is relevant to us today, as we seek to apply godly wisdom to our everyday challenges.



### DIGGING DEEPER

Chuck Swindoll says, "There are great stories in the Scriptures. Some of them run through several chapters. . . . Others are snapshots that are all covered in a single chapter. . . . I think of them as plays. Three-act plays that open the curtain at the introduction of the main characters. And then to the plot which opens the curtain for act two. And then you come to a surprising conclusion, act three."

Today, we will examine 1 Samuel 25 as one of those great three-act plays, paying special attention to its genre: narrative.



### Getting into the Narrative

The Bible can be studied as literature. Its books contain law, history, poetry, letters, and prophecy. To correctly interpret the Bible, we need to discern the genre that we aim to study.

## Quotable

*Rash reactions  
are never  
the best  
reactions.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



1 Samuel is a historical book, but the genre of literature employed in 1 Samuel 25 is *narrative*.

For narratives, or stories, we want to focus on three items:

First, we ask questions about the *setting*, noting physical, temporal, and cultural components.

Let's apply this technique to 1 Samuel 25.

Read 1 Samuel 25 in its entirety and then answer the following questions to glean more out of the narrative.

How would you describe the *physical* setting of 1 Samuel 25?

What is the *emotional* setting for David, given the intro in 25:1?

How can observing the state of David's emotional and physical setting aid you in reading the passage?



Next, we want to note the *characters* in the story. How do they interact with each other? What do they say or think? How do they act?

List the characters—both major and minor—who appear in 1 Samuel 25. If it's helpful, fill in this simple chart. Otherwise, use the free space below.

Characters' Names	Do they have a title or position? Do they speak? Do they act?



Who are the major characters?

Who are the minor characters?

Which characters drive the action that takes place in the story?

Lastly, in studying narrative, we examine the *plot development*—the sequence of events that follow the model of the beginning, middle, and end. This is what Chuck refers to as a “three-act play.”

Plot development is the vehicle driving the narrative. Without a plot structure, there’s simply no story.

Let’s answer some *plot development* questions about 1 Samuel 25.

What type of conflict is in view—physical, character, spiritual, or a combination?

What makes the plot interesting or suspenseful—danger, tests, questions of destiny, or divine-human encounters?



What are the relationships between events—cause/effect, change/no-change?

What challenges must the main character master—resourcefulness, mental acuity, or physical strength?

What changes occur between the beginning and the end of the narrative—solutions to problems or character growth?

What do the details of the narrative tell us about the author's purpose—perspective on reality or teaching of morality?



### Questions Are Key

Chuck says “you’ve got to ask yourself questions when you’re reading stories” like the one found in 1 Samuel 25.

What are some questions you unearthed while reading 1 Samuel 25? In answering the questions you unearth, you may need tools like a concordance, Bible dictionary, commentary, or an online resource like [lumina.bible.org](http://lumina.bible.org).



Here are some sample questions to get you started:

- When Nabal asked, “Who is David?” (1 Samuel 25:10–12), do you think Nabal was being honest? Ignorant? Snobbish? How did Abigail know David, then (25:29)?
- What does “Abigail” mean?
- How did Abigail know that the Lord would reward David with a lasting dynasty (25:28)? What does this knowledge imply about her walk with God?

Write your own questions (and their answers) below.



### Learning Where We Fit in the Story: Application

1 Samuel 25 offers a trove of wisdom from which we can learn today. Here are some applications from Chuck’s message, based on each character:

We learn from David that *rash reactions never lead to anything good*.

We learn from Nabal that *insensitive husbands always leave heartaches in their wake*.

We learn from Abigail that *wise wives seldom miss the best use of timing and tact*.

Although Chuck’s applications are tucked into the marriage rubric, one doesn’t have to be married in order to learn life lessons of wisdom to apply immediately to his or her life. Timing and tact are *always* worthwhile. Insensitivity or rashness are never traits that we want to purposely act on; they are counter to the fruit of the Spirit.



Write down your additional applications from 1 Samuel 25.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Lord, keep us humble. Keep us self-aware, so that we don't run over people with our rash reactions or tactless words. May these words inhabit our responses:*

*A gentle answer deflects anger,  
but harsh words make tempers flare.  
The tongue of the wise makes knowledge appealing,  
but the mouth of a fool belches out foolishness. (Proverbs 15:1–2 NLT)*

*In the name of Jesus, Amen.*





# WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

## Demonstrating Wisdom

1 Samuel 25:1–42

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

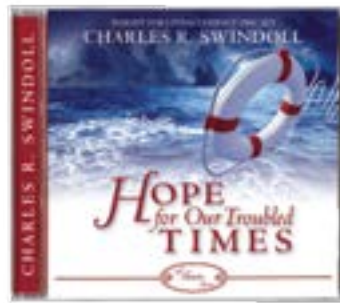
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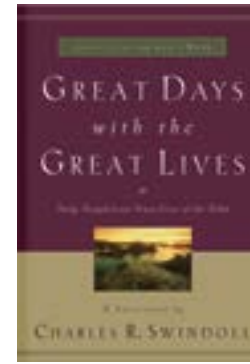
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S05  
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### LET'S BEGIN HERE

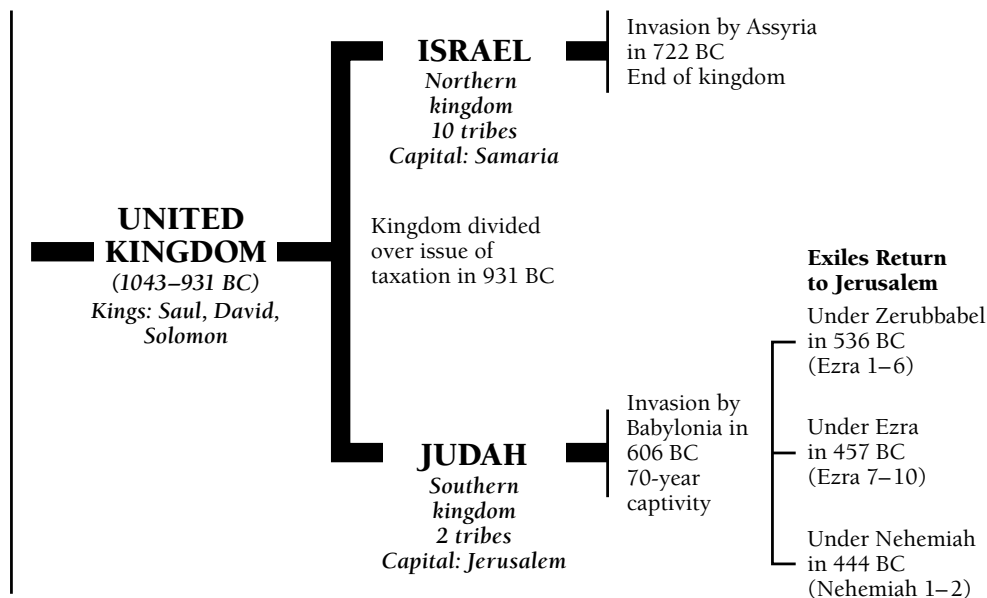
As the Creator, God is at the center of all things and is the ruler of all He has made. Whatever He has built, He owns. Regarding how the world works, He sets the rules. And when mapping the course for our lives, He has the decisive say. God is the *final* authority. He is “Father of all, who rules over 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 comes divine assistance from God’s Word. Let’s seek God’s wisdom from the story of Nehemiah, a role model for obedience, who followed God’s directive to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.



### DIGGING DEEPER

We begin Nehemiah’s story by reviewing the events and people that shaped his nation.



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### Quotable

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

— Charles R. Swindoll



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This diagram charts Israelite history beginning with the united kingdom when the twelve tribes of Israel formed a coalition under Saul. After Saul, God anointed David to be king and promised him an everlasting kingdom (2 Samuel 7:11–16).

The kingdom divided under David's grandson, Rehoboam, 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 in Jerusalem. In 606 BC, the Babylonians invaded Judah and began deporting from Jerusalem young leaders such as Daniel. Judah continued as a vassal state, but when Judah's king Zedekiah did evil in God's sight God used the Babylonians, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, to send the Jews into exile.

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.



### *Searching the Scriptures Study Tool*

Envisioning the historical setting is a key component in the *Searching the Scriptures* process. Imagine the scene from the point of view of the weeping Hebrew people as they stood on the Mount of Olives watching the flames engulf their home city and Nebuchadnezzar's war machines break down the fortress 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 was once their city?



After Nebuchadnezzar destroyed their capital, he took the people away 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?

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." (NLT)

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.





### A Word about Applying Promises

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.<sup>1</sup> Take care 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. 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!



### Your Turn in the Scriptures

After the fall of Jerusalem, the Babylonian empire fell to the Medes and the Persians. Cyrus king of Persia allowed the first group of Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, the temple was rebuilt, and Jeremiah's seventy-year prophecy was fulfilled. A final task God reserved for the cupbearer Nehemiah.

#### Nehemiah as Cupbearer

In the capital of Susa, Nehemiah was serving King Artaxerxes I when the King of Kings tapped him 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 NLT)<sup>2</sup>

Read 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 trades his cupbearer's apron for the clipboard of a construction supervisor. What was the purpose behind his nighttime tour of the walls, and how did he inspire the nobles and officials to join his plan?

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 NLT)

### 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 in spite of 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.





### Bring It Home

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 NLT). 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 NLT)

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. 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.
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.





# WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

## Taking Responsibility

*Nehemiah 1:1–4; 2:1–18; 6:15–16*

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

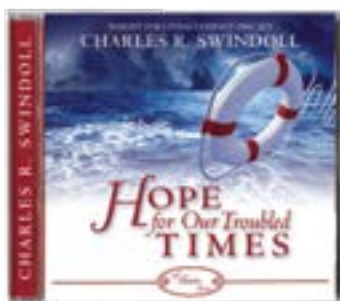
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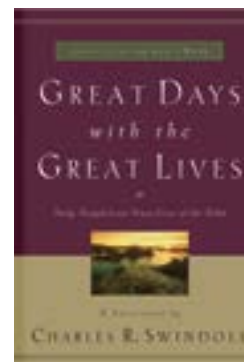
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### LET'S BEGIN HERE

Do you believe that one person can make a difference in the world? Do you believe that your life can have an immeasurable influence on your family and your community?

If you're not convinced, know this: God *does* believe that one person can make a difference in the world. Jesus is the ultimate example of this! As bearers of God's image, we, too, can be empowered by the Spirit to glorify God by standing up for truth, calling people to repentance, and demonstrating God's love . . . or His justice.

The book of Esther is chock-full of examples of one person making a difference—both for good and for evil. The extraordinary power of Esther's story is in her bravery and determination, despite her disadvantages as a foreign, orphan woman.

There's nothing like a huge dose of sound theology to put steel into our bones, and Esther 4 reminds us that though we cannot do *everything*, we should always do the thing we *can* do.



### DIGGING DEEPER

In this study, we're going to get cooking in the book of Esther by practicing the basics of Bible study methods.



### Getting Down to the Background—Observation

*Observation answers the question: What does it say? It's vital to carefully observe words, phrases, names, places, repetition, comparisons, and contrasts before leaping to interpretation.*

When studying or teaching the book of Esther (or any other book of the Bible, for that matter), it's extremely helpful to know the background; context makes the biblical text come alive. The biblical characters' virtues, courage, and fears are illuminated above the foils of the current events of their day.

## Quotable

*You are the  
only you, placed on  
this busy planet  
for a purpose.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



Using commentaries, a Bible dictionary, or online resources such as [lumina.bible.org](http://lumina.bible.org) or [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com), answer the following questions to delve into the background of the book of Esther as an observation exercise.

Before you begin, pray Psalm 119:18:

Open my eyes to see  
the wonderful truths in your instructions. (NLT)

In what era do scholars estimate the book of Esther was written?

Did the book of Esther take place before, during, or after the Babylonian exile?

When was the earliest known historical mention of the book of Esther?

Over which empire did King Ahasuerus reign?

Where was Susa (Esther 1:2)? (Use a map. A hint: it's located in modern-day Iran.)



What was King Ahasuerus' more popular name? (Hint: it begins with an X)

Check out [this link](#) to get a glimpse into the personality of Ahasuerus, according to ancient historian Herodotus, or look him up in a Bible dictionary (a great free resource for dictionaries and commentaries online is biblestudytools.com). Take notes on what you find out about his personality.

Look at Israel on a map. What geographical regions surrounded Israel?



### Interpretation

*After you observe, interpretation is the task of discovering: What does it mean?*



### Correlation

*Correlation is the process of discovering: What does it say elsewhere? This is done by cross-referencing passages with others.*

We've gathered a lot of observational data that gives dimension and context to the passage. Now, let's get to the delicious task of investigating the significance of Esther 4:1–17, in light of what we've observed. (Yes, it is delicious to discover more about the Word and its Author!) Often, during Bible study, you'll weave the practice of correlation into your interpretation process—since Scripture interprets Scripture.



Now that we have observed information about the background of Esther, let's interpret Esther 4:1–17 by asking more nuanced questions.

Esther 4:4 says: “When Queen Esther’s maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was deeply distressed. She sent clothing to him to replace the burlap, but he refused it” (NLT). Has anyone ever attempted to silence or diminish your sadness or grief? Was it effective?

How does Esther’s initial response to Mordecai differ from Jesus’ response to hurting people? (See Isaiah 53:3–5 and John 11:33–35 for examples.)

Name three (or more!) other incidents in the Bible where a character was faced with impossible odds but stood alone for the sake of faithfulness to God and his/her people.

Are there other biblical passages related to God’s providence that lend credence to Mordecai’s warning/encouragement to Esther in Esther 4:13–14? Write them down. (Hint: see Proverbs 24:12 and Romans 8:26–28.)



Esther's most famous words are "if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16 NASB).

Based on what you discovered about Ahasuerus/Xerxes, does Esther's apprehension in Esther 4:10–11 seem reasonable?



### Application

*Application is our opportunity to answer the question: What does it say to me and to others?*

There are two applications Chuck Swindoll gleaned from Esther 4:1–17:

- *Not until you believe one person can make a difference will you be willing to stand alone.*
- *Only when you move from the safe harbor of theory to the troubled waters of reality will you know what it means to stand alone.*

**Write down your additional applications from Esther 4:1–17.**



In his message, Chuck includes practical ways to stand against issues that adversely affect the vulnerable. This includes:

- Abortion
- Hunger
- Homelessness
- Substance abuse
- Racism
- Pornography
- Sex trafficking
- Fallen believers
- Those who haven't heard the gospel

What are some ways that you can commit to making a stand in your neighborhood, at your job, or in service to the community? Write them down.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Lord of Hosts, please guard our hearts from watching out for our own protection, rather than upholding Your reputation and the truth of Your Word. May the conviction to stand up for You—even alone, at times—make a difference in lives, in families, in homes, in neighborhoods, in cities, in this nation, in our world. In the matchless name of Christ our Savior we pray. Amen.*



# WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

## Standing Alone

*Esther 4:1–17*

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

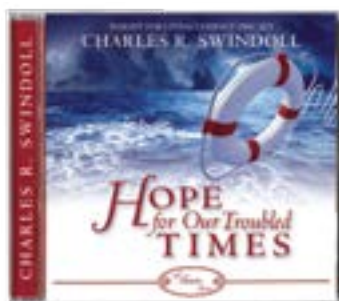
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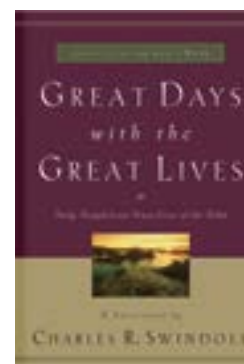
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S07  
7



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

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 18:6a NLT). 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!" (1 Samuel 18:6b–7 NLT)

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

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 search the Scriptures to discover David's response and gain instruction for relating to those in authority over us.

### Quotable

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

— Charles R. Swindoll







### DIGGING DEEPER

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

Passage	Commands	Qualities
Exodus 20:12		
Psalms 51:16–17		
Micah 6:8		
Romans 13:1–2		
Hebrews 13:17		

Summarize God’s teaching about respecting authority.

Our nature is to clench our fists in defiance of authority rather than lower our heads in submission, which Chuck Swindoll acknowledges in his sermon:

Isn’t it strange that everything within us screams to resist an authority figure? To resent those who are correcting us. To rebel against being told what to do or what to stop doing. The favorite words of the twenty-first century are, “I will sue you,” not, “I want to thank you. I needed that reproof.”



The roots of our *resistant*, *resentful*, and *rebellious* nature sink deep into the soil of human history, all the way to the first family. Cain's defiance of God's authority 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).

Read 1 Samuel 18:8–30, and write down what Saul did. Also, note David's actions in response to his king who was trying to kill him.



### *Searching the Scriptures* Study Tool

A key principle in the *Searching the Scriptures* process is observation. As you look back through 1 Samuel 18:8–30, can you observe any repetitive themes or phrases (specifically, verses 12, 15, and 29)? What might these repetitive ideas tell you about Saul's motives and character? About David's motives and character?

### David's Example of Respecting Authority

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 his enemy. The manner in which David faced Goliath and Saul required heroic faith—just different amounts of patience!



An encounter with Saul in a cave put David's respect-and-trust strategy to the ultimate test. Read 1 Samuel 24:1–4a. 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 24:4b–7. What thought pricked David's conscience, and how did he communicate that to his men?

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

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. Has someone injured you? How can David's example help you confront your offender?



### A Word about Applying Stories

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 of 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?

The final scenes of Saul's life read like a Shakespearean tragedy, climaxing with Saul consulting a medium who foretold his death, being wounded by Philistine archers, and begging his aide to plunge a sword through his heart. In the end, Saul died 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 his friend Jonathan (2 Samuel 1). David remained respectful even after Saul's death.





### Bring It Home

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 NLT).

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.



### A FINAL PRAYER

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 NLT)

### My Prayer of Trust



# WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

## Respecting Authority

1 Samuel 18; 24

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

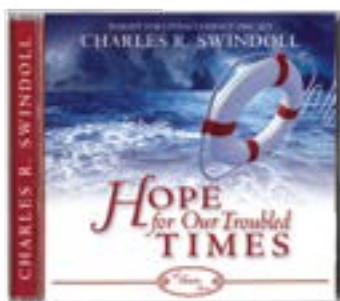
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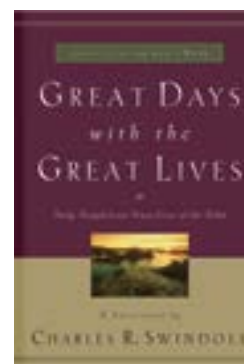
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### LET'S BEGIN HERE

John the Baptist was the perfect picture of humility: from the time he leapt in Elizabeth's womb upon hearing Mary's voice, to the last moments he spent languishing in Herod's dungeon, John was faithful to his calling as the forerunner to Jesus the Messiah.

The famous words John spoke in John 3:30 — "He must increase, but I must decrease" (NASB) — perfectly summarize our disposition as Christians. Cultivating humility is a tender endeavor; once we *think* we've attained humility, we fall prey to pride.

Let's learn how to cultivate humility by studying the Bible and receiving guidance from Chuck Swindoll's message.



### DIGGING DEEPER

When searching the Scriptures, a helpful first step is to gather resources that will guide you in your study. Make certain you have handy a Bible dictionary and a concordance, as well as a reliable commentary on the book of the Bible you're studying. For this study of John, we recommend you get a copy of *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: John*.

Take a few minutes to read through John chapters 1 and 3. Read these verses carefully, as if it's the first time you've read them.



### Helpful Hints

- Reading different Bible versions can help you read the same passage with fresh perspective. If you don't have different versions handy, plenty of Web sites can help, such as biblestudytools.com, bible.org, or biblegateway.com, to name a few.

## Quotable

*False humility  
stinks a lot worse  
than raw conceit,  
and we can smell it  
a mile away. True  
humility is knowing  
that you have a  
place in God's plan,  
and you're not the  
star of the show.*

— Charles R. Swindoll





- Remember: *Observation* is a critical beginning technique you will want to use to put together the pieces of a passage of Scripture. Paying particular attention to John 1 and 3, make some initial observations about what you see.
- Reading the Bible is not merely an academic exercise. Never forget that.
- Prepare yourself to receive the richness of God's Word through prayer. Pray for God to search your heart, and take time to confess and repent if need be. Pray for focus and enthusiasm to infuse your study.
- Take time. Don't expect years of biblical depth to flow from a few minutes of study.



### Your Turn in the Scriptures

Using John 1 and 3, apply the primary approaches to studying the Scriptures—*observation*, *interpretation*, *correlation*, and *application*—to begin. Take some time first, however, to read any material you find in your commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and online tools that covers this section of John. *Pray* for the Holy Spirit's guidance. Jot notes in the margins of your Bible as you go or type them in the space provided.

#### Observation: What Do You See?

Use the space below to record your findings as you look closely at the text. Remember: Look for repeated words, commands, questions, emphatic statements, and images or figures of speech. Your notes can be specific and detailed as you examine the passage.





### John 1:6–39

If you need some help in observing John 1, here are some questions to help:

- Where was John the Baptist baptizing people?
- What are some geographical locations mentioned in John 1?
- List the characters mentioned in John 1.
- List the questions that the priests and Levites asked John the Baptist in order to identify him.

### John 3:23–36

If you need some help in observing John 3:23–36, here are some questions to help:

- List the characters mentioned in John 3.
- Which words are often repeated in John 3?
- Observe the text for judiciary language, such as “witness” or “testify.”
- Use a commentary to research ceremonial cleansing, for context into John 3:25.



### Interpretation: What Does It Mean?



#### The Friend of the Bridegroom

In John 3:28–29, John the Baptist offers a metaphor to the contingent of his followers who were jealous that more and more people were heading to Jesus’ disciples to be baptized. He said,

“You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent ahead of Him.’ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been made full.” (NASB)

In his commentary on John, Chuck Swindoll gives readers cultural context on the “friend of the bridegroom”:

The “friend of the bridegroom” in ancient Near East culture held considerably more responsibility than the “best man” today. In addition to helping the bridegroom prepare his home for the eventual day when the bride would come to stay, he helped direct the wedding feast at the end of the betrothal period. His most significant duty was to guard the bridal chamber during the feast, especially after the bride had slipped into the room unnoticed by the guests. No one except for the groom was allowed to go near the bridal chamber. When the “friend of the groom” heard the groom’s voice, he stood aside. His joy was complete when the groom arrived.<sup>1</sup>

In keeping with the metaphor, how did John the Baptist “guard the bridal chamber” for Jesus?

Why did John the Baptist refer to Jesus as “the Lamb of God”?

John 3:31 contains a vulnerable admission of John the Baptist. How does this demonstrate humility?



### **Correlation: How Does It Compare?**

Read the following passages, and write a note or two on how they help confirm the meaning of John 1 and 3 concerning John the Baptist.

Isaiah 40:3

Malachi 3:1

Matthew 11:11–14

List four other biblical characters who exemplify humility. (Hint: one excellent example is found in Luke 1:38)

### **Application: What Difference Does It Make?**

Chuck gleaned three applications from studying John the Baptist in John 1 and 3 that exemplify the essence of the phrase, “He must increase, but I must decrease”:

- *First, it means saying, “I am constantly committed to two goals: His increasing and my decreasing.”*
- *Second, it means saying, “I don’t perform; I permit.”*
- *Lastly, acknowledge that in order for Christ to increase, we must decrease. Decreasing is not an option. It is essential.*



In the space below, write out a few specific personalized applications (responses) to what you have studied about John the Baptist in John chapters 1 and 3.



### A FINAL PRAYER

Allow the hymn called “May the Mind of Christ My Savior,” written by Kate Wilkinson, to be your meditation and a prayer to decrease as Jesus increases.

*May the mind of Christ, my Savior,  
Live in me from day to day,  
By His love and power controlling  
All I do and say.*

*May the love of Jesus fill me  
As the waters fill the sea;  
Him exalting, self abasing,  
This is victory.*

*May I run the race before me,  
Strong and brave to face the foe,  
Looking only unto Jesus  
As I onward go.*

*May His beauty rest upon me,  
As I seek the lost to win,  
And may they forget the channel,  
Seeing only Him.<sup>2</sup>*

### Endnotes

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: John* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 80.
2. Kate Barclay Wilkinson, “May the Mind of Christ, My Savior,” public domain.



# WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

## Cultivating Humility

*John 1; 3*

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

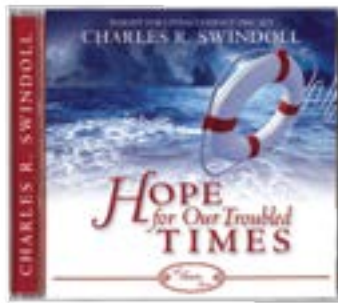
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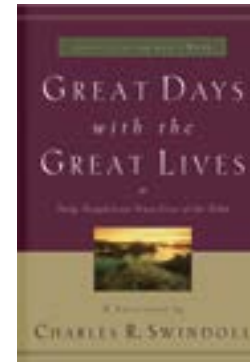
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# WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

## Studying Hard

*Ezra 7:1–10; Nehemiah 8:1–8, 12*

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## STUDY



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

God called Ezra from the priestly class 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 the way of God clearly. 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.

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.



### DIGGING DEEPER

The historical setting of Ezra's story is the period of the Jewish exile after the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem 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.

## Quotable

*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



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### **First Group Led by Zerubbabel**

The first group to return 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 that God gave the Jews 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).

### **Further Study**

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. A copy of this classic Bible study resource can be obtained in the Insight for Living Ministries Web store.

### **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.<sup>1</sup> 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 is the phrase that Ezra repeats in the following verses: Ezra 7:6, 9, 28, and 8:18?

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? Chuck Swindoll says in his message, "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."

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.

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.

### ***Third Group Led by Nehemiah***

A few years later, God moved once again in the heart of Artaxerxes 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?





### How Ezra Prepared for His 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" (Ezra 7:6).

Can you observe four key concepts in the following verse that describe how Ezra prepared for his calling?

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, emphasis added)

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

Ezra *determined*. He set his heart. Made a personal commitment. Daniel made a similar commitment in Daniel 1:8. Now, add your own ideas.

Ezra *studied*. He became a student of Scripture. For an example, look up Joshua 1:8.

Ezra *obeyed*. He put into action the truth that he learned. Another verse is James 1:22.



Ezra *taught* others. He shared what he learned with other people. Look up Romans 12:7.

As Ezra diligently studied, his calling to proclaim God’s truth clarified. The oil lamp that flickered on his study desk became a flame in his heart that burned brighter and brighter until the day when God set him on a lampstand to be a light of truth for the nation.

### Bible Exposition on Display

The day for which Ezra so faithfully prepared came when, 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 from the text and write a principle for Bible exposition today.

### *Reading of and Respect for the Scriptures*

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



### Response to the Scriptures

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, but Nehemiah wiped away their tears with an exhortation to "celebrate with great joy because they had heard God's words *and understood them*" so now they could follow God's way (Nehemiah 8:12, emphasis added).



### Bring It Home

The Bible is *the* source of truth. "No other book is like it," says Chuck, "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."

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.

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!



### 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.*

### Endnote

1. Ezra's name means "help."



# WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

## Studying Hard

*Ezra 7:1–10; Nehemiah 8:1–8, 12*

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

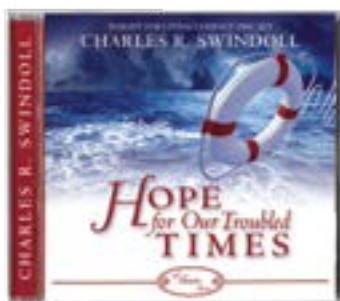
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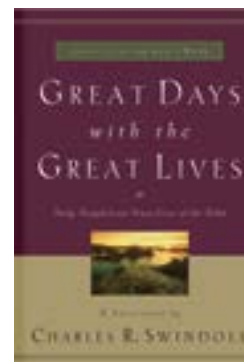
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### LET'S BEGIN HERE

Which entity is more relentlessly binding: the law of the Medes and the Persians or the faithfulness of God? In this account found in Daniel 6, the faithfulness of God is strong enough to shut the mouths of lions. Daniel's blamelessness, dependability, and steadfast faith in God—in a word, Daniel's *integrity*—served as the perfect foil for God's faithfulness to shine brilliantly.

Let's learn more about how this amazing man of God managed to faithfully serve both his God and his king and remain above reproach, even as he was trafficked from Judah to serve a pagan, foreign nation.



### DIGGING DEEPER

It's fascinating to watch a story unfold where a Persian king is in bondage to the law of the Medes and Persians, the law *he* created, while the true King—God—is free to work out of the bounds of nature and predictability in order to keep safe His servant. The juxtaposition of Darius and Daniel is also worth noting. Both are bound by shame and honor to keep their word, and both individuals *do* keep their word. But while Darius lies on his soft couch, free on the outside, his soul is vexed to the point of insomnia. Only Daniel gets a good night's sleep.

Integrity reproduces that. When we are at peace with our God and our actions, we can handle the crush of unpredictable circumstances with quiet confidence.



### HELPFUL HINTS

- Reading different Bible versions can help you read the same passage with fresh perspective. If you don't have different versions handy, there are plenty of Web sites ([biblestudytools.com](http://biblestudytools.com), [bible.org](http://bible.org), or [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com), to name a few) that can help you.
- Make some initial observations about what you see.

## Quotable

*A person with integrity has nothing to hide and nothing to fear and lives her or his life welcoming scrutiny.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



- Reading the Bible is not merely an academic exercise. Never forget that.
- Prepare yourself to receive the richness of God's Word through prayer. Pray for God to search your heart, and take time to confess and repent if need be. Pray for focus and enthusiasm to infuse your study.
- Take time. Don't expect years of biblical depth to flow from a few minutes of study.



### Your Turn in the Scriptures

Chuck Swindoll uses four techniques of Bible study methods every time he prepares a sermon.

*Observation: What do you see?*

*Interpretation: What does it mean?*

*Correlation: How does it compare?*

*Application: What difference does it make?*

**We cannot underestimate the importance of application—this is where the rubber meets the road.** If the lessons learned from the Bible are not then *lived*, then observation, interpretation, and correlation don't at all matter; they reduce Bible study to a mere academic exercise.

Daniel's sin is never recorded in Scripture. Rather, his faithfulness to God and his righteous actions—no matter the circumstances—are emphasized in the Bible. His life is a study in application. He lived what he believed.

Have you ever had a person offer a piece of advice that he or she clearly does not practice? Even if the advice is good, we're left questioning its value. If the counsel were *that* good, after all, wouldn't the person actually *do* what he or she said?

When it comes to the Word of God, we must practice what we preach—or study. As James succinctly stated in his epistle, "Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works" (James 2:26).



Read Deuteronomy 11:1.

What does this passage reveal about application?

Read James 1:22.

Summarize what this verse implies about application of Bible study.

How did Daniel display faith in his actions in Daniel 6:1–27?



### Apply the Scriptures to Your Life First

Let's hone in on application as we study Daniel 6.

Describe two examples of integrity that you've encountered in your own experience. Why do these examples stand out in your memory?



Read the following verses, and paraphrase them using your own words:

Proverbs 10:9

Proverbs 20:7

Proverbs 22:1

Have you ever done the following at work:

- Taken office supplies for personal use
- Used company time for personal business
- Called in sick when you weren't
- Wasted company time surfing the Internet
- Visited inappropriate Internet sites
- Reported improper or extra expenses for reimbursement<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps you have fallen short of displaying integrity at work. Daniel displayed extraordinary professional faithfulness, and all of us, whether we're the picture of integrity or our character can use some work, can be inspired by this verse about him, found in Daniel 6:4: "The vice-regents and governors got together to find some old scandal or skeleton in Daniel's life that they could use against him, but they couldn't dig up anything. He was totally exemplary and trustworthy" (MSG).





Take some time to write down your prayer to God for help in improving your character in the workplace.



### **Prayer: A Strong Cord**

Daniel was taken from Judah when he was a youth. He was separated from his home, his culture, his language, his customs. He was forced to serve a king and kingdom not his own. Any one of these things could have spelled disaster for Daniel. The only remnant of home that he kept, however, turned out to be the most important: his devotion to the living God.

Prayer was a bond between Daniel and the Lord—a cord that grew stronger through prayer.

Read Matthew 5:43–45; 6:5–6.

How did Daniel exhibit the tenets found in these passages?

Read Luke 5:16.

Note the habit and the identity of the person described in the verse.

Is prayer a strong cord connecting you with God? How can you organize your day to prioritize prayer?



Is there a correlation between a person's prayer life and his or her level of integrity? Explain.

### Chuck's Application: God Is at Work

Chuck gives a final encouragement to listeners: "God is a God of impossible situations. You may be facing one, but no worse than Daniel's. Take a lesson from this: God is at work."

Here are the six applications Chuck gleaned from Daniel 6:1–27.

*When you choose to live a life of integrity, you have:*

- *The sustained cultivation of exemplary character*
- *The continued relief of a clear conscience*
- *The personal delight of intimacy with God*
- *The priceless inheritance of a lingering legacy*
- *The crowning reward of finishing well*

List the action steps that you will apply to your life from this study.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for prayer. Help us to strengthen the cord of communication to You, so that we may seek You, listen to You, and obey You. Amen.*

#### Endnote

1. Adapted from Insight for Living Ministries, *Daniel — Volume 1: God's Man for the Moment Bible Companion* (Plano, Tex.: IFL Publishing House, 2008), 82.



# WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

## Modeling Integrity

*Daniel 6:1–27*

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

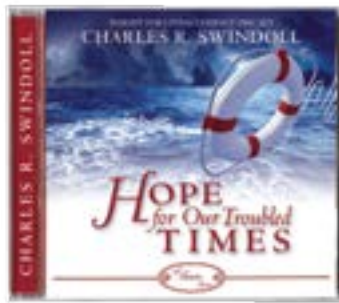
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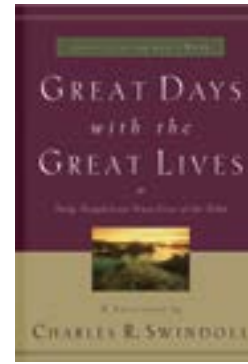
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### LET'S BEGIN HERE

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 be cashed 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, and 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. Rather than catalog offenses, Joseph teaches us to release them; rather than even the score, we are to extend grace.



### DIGGING DEEPER

Joseph's catalog of offenses against him could fill the thickest book in the library! Let's dig into Scripture to discover what happened to him when he was tested and how he responded to the tests.

## Quotable

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

— Charles R. Swindoll



### Joseph: What Happened to Him?

In the chart below, we've listed the many ways that Joseph was victimized, along with the 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.

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.	Hatred Jealousy
37:5–11	Joseph's dreams turned his brothers against him.	Bullying
37:12–24	His brothers planned to kill Joseph and hide his body in a cistern.	Conspiracy to murder Threats Assault
37:25–36	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.	Enslavement Rejection Betrayal Cover-up
39–40	Potiphar's wife accused Joseph of rape, so Potiphar threw him into prison. Another prisoner forgot his promise to help him when released.	False accusation Unjust imprisonment Forgotten

In just a few years, Joseph had tumbled from favored son to forgotten prisoner in a foreign land. Who could help 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.





### *Searching the Scriptures* Study Tool

A key technique in the *Searching the Scriptures* process is to use your imagination to enter a biblical scene. 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.

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 NLT).

Can you hear 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?

Perhaps you have stared at the four walls of Joseph’s cell from the inside of your own victimization. Like Joseph, you did nothing to deserve what happened to you, and yet mistreatment struck you down. What thoughts have you had about your offender and 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. In Potiphar's house, God blessed Joseph with responsibilities (Genesis 39:2–6). In prison, God blessed him with the trust of the warden (39:21–23). Although all others abandoned him, "the LORD was with Joseph in the prison and showed him his faithful love" (39:21).

In his sermon, Chuck Swindoll comments about Joseph's deep connection with God through his victimization:

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.



### Key Principle One

When studying individuals like Joseph, a life principle will emerge from the pages of Scripture almost as if the person himself or herself is talking directly to you. 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.

### 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 (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 he was at their feet begging for his life (42:21).

Would he 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.



### Key Principle Two

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 do Joseph's tears teach about the importance of working through emotions in the process of forgiveness? How would you communicate this principle to others?





### Joseph: How He Responded

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

After Jacob died, Joseph's brothers feared that Joseph might finally take his revenge. Joseph reassured them in the following grace-filled, God-trusting message to his offenders, one that is a model for anyone who has been a victim.

But Joseph replied, "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)



### Key Principle Three

You can see God's plan through your victimization, just as Joseph did—without justifying or excusing the wrong but by honoring God and His redeeming power. Write a final principle based on what you think Joseph would teach you about extending grace to your offender.





### Bring It Home

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.

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 that was done against you, extend grace by realizing that God can redeem an act of evil for your ultimate good.*

The same grace that frees you from bitterness enables you to see God's sovereign hand through it all.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Dear Father, I am surrounded by hateful people who sometimes target me. Help me learn from Joseph the important power of extending grace. Just as Joseph showed grace, help me to show grace. Just as Jesus forgave, help me to forgive. Amen.*



# WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

## Extending Grace

Genesis 50:14–22

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

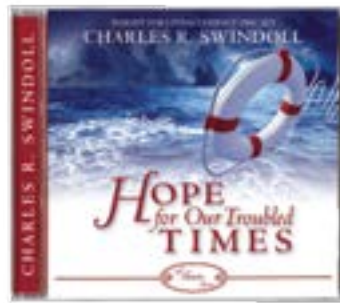
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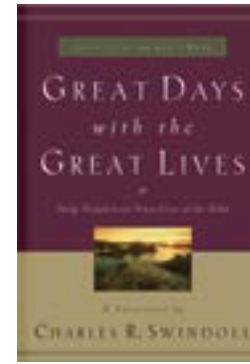
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### LET'S BEGIN HERE

Three back-to-back commands appear toward the end of the letter to the Hebrews. It is a message for all believers, regardless of our location or situation: “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 NLT). If you have been looking for a timely “statement for life,” consider that one.

It is impossible to measure the worth of mutual encouragement. Whether spoken or written, a few encouraging words can make an enormous difference in the outcome of a single event or, in fact, someone’s entire life. Let’s focus our attention on a man named Joseph, whose life was known for such thoughtfulness. Amazingly, his nickname, Barnabas, became far better known than his given name, as it announced his commitment to encouraging others.



### Your Turn in the Scriptures

Chuck Swindoll uses four Bible study methods every time he prepares a message:

- *Observation: What do you see?*
- *Interpretation: What does it mean?*
- *Correlation: How does it compare?*
- *Application: What difference does it make?*



### Observation Tip

A pen or pencil and a journal will *revolutionize* your Bible study. There’s just not room enough in your Bible’s margins for all the richness you can observe when you study the Word. Taking notes is essential because 1) it helps to cement your comprehension of a passage; 2) you can look back at your notes

## Quotable

*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



later, add to them, and reflect on them; and 3) you can draw! For example, you may want to create a chart to compare and contrast Barnabas' authentic generosity in Acts 4:32–37 with the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira in 5:1–11.

In the process of observing the text, you can create diagrams, charts, and brainstorm bubbles. You are not limited to just words on a page.



### Random Acts of Encouragement

Everyday life provides plenty of opportunities to apply the principles found in Acts 4:32–37 regarding Barnabas' encouragement. In fact, Chuck Swindoll mentions several opportunities in his sermon: in teaching, coaching, parenting, marriage, work, pastoring . . . there are an abundance of opportunities to practice encouragement, and you're never too young, old, rich, or poor to start.

Chuck said, "You can't beat a flock into joy and happiness. You don't beat sheep. You lead sheep. You encourage them." Let's delve into that now. The following example shows us how to apply the principles of the passage to a specific group.

### Teaching Children to Be Little Encouragers

In the beginning of his message, Chuck emphasized that encouraging others is a command—an imperative. What a gift we give to the children in our lives when we endeavor to plant the seeds of encouragement in their hearts. Here are some lessons to share with children regarding encouragement:

- Designate special savings for kids to store up funds. Help the children to contribute any change they find to the special savings. Every six months, donate the funds to people in need (Acts 4:34, 37).
- Teach children to have "kind eyes": on the playground, during Sunday school, in the lunchroom, during team sports. Encourage your kids to look out for the boys and girls who are eating alone or who are getting picked on. Let children know that they can invite a lonely child to their table to eat or strike up a conversation with a child who looks like he or she may be vulnerable to bullying (9:26–27).
- Model selflessness to children by responding in joyful enthusiasm to their good news. Nurture them to celebrate the successes and gifts of their siblings (11:23).
- Mentor your children. Take them to deliver meals to people. Practice compassion through volunteering with kids (some suggestions for volunteering: an animal shelter, camps for kids with disabilities, a community farm) (12:15).



Write down any additional advice for teaching encouragement to children that you garnered from the passage:

Think of another group of people for whom you could teach/preach/write a study of Barnabas' example of encouragement. You can choose from Chuck's list or find your own category. Then write down the group you've thought of.

Conduct a word search on "Barnabas" in the book of Acts. Jot down notes of what you observe (What does it say?) from each passage. Pay attention to other characters, settings, and, finally, Barnabas' actions.

Now focus on interpreting your observations (What does it mean?). What did you learn about Barnabas from your observations?



Can you think of any present-day anecdotes that would help your audience connect Barnabas' gifts of encouragement with their own lives? Write your illustration ideas down here:

What other Scriptures would help to illuminate the topic of encouragement? For example, find passages that talk about generosity in giving, forgiving people and giving them second chances, or the power of teamwork and mentorship. (You'll notice that whenever Chuck Swindoll preaches, he *correlates* one Bible passage with another. Correlation is when you compare Scripture with Scripture in order to amplify your understanding of a given passage. When you answer this question, you're correlating!)

Finally, write down the applications you want to teach your audience. Pray for God to help you humbly serve your audience in your application points. Be specific.

### Chuck's Application: Many Ways to Encourage

Becoming an encouragement to others does not require a lot of time, money, possessions, training, or even great intelligence. You do not need to be a certain age before you have earned the right to reach out, come alongside others, and elevate their spirits to greater heights. What you do need is the willingness to place yourself in someone else's shoes, imagine how they must feel, and then step up.





Here are the ways to encourage that Chuck observed from the life of Joseph/Barnabas:

- *Financial encouragement:* Think of opportunities to give financially to a need. When you become aware of a genuine need, help out!
- *Endorsement encouragement:* Is there someone you could vouch for? Could your words help correct wrong thinking or prejudice? Speak up!
- *Servant-hearted unselfish encouragement:* Give others the chance to share in the privilege of ministering to others. Unselfishly ask another to take your place.
- *Second-chance encouragement:* Do you know someone who has failed or fallen in the past, who is now repentant? Your reassurance could help this person get back on his or her feet.

This is an application you can add to your life right away! Make a game plan to commit random acts of encouragement:



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, with responsibility comes sacrifice. Help us to bear our responsibilities with spotless character and unwavering devotion to whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good repute. May our character grow from time regularly spent with You. May our lives herald the excellence and praise that only comes from You. We give You all the glory. Amen.*





# WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

## Encouraging Others

Acts 4:32–37

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

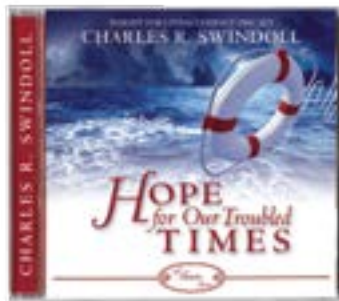
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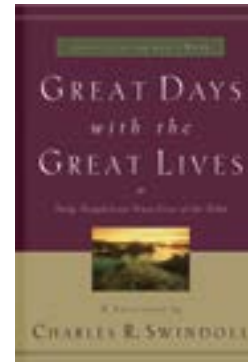
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For the 2017 broadcast, this Searching the Scriptures study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department in collaboration with Mark Tobey, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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