

# THINGS THAT HINDER YOUR YEARS AT SEMINARY

## Things We Do That Make Ministry Difficult

2 Corinthians 4:1–5

SEARCHING  
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SCRIPTURES

STUDY



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

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

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



### YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

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

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

## Quotable

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

— Charles R. Swindoll



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

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

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



### Observation

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

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



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### Interpretation

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

### Context

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

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

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

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

1. Seeing and reflecting \_\_\_\_\_
2. Changing into \_\_\_\_\_



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2 Corinthians 4:1–5

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

### With Every Ministry, Special Mercy Is Needed

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

### In Every Ministry, the Same Things Must Be Rejected

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

### Through Every Ministry, a Convincing Example Must Be Modeled

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

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



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2 Corinthians 4:1–5



### Correlation

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

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

Avoid	Do

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

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



### Application

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

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



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

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

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



### A FINAL PRAYER

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

#### ENDNOTE

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



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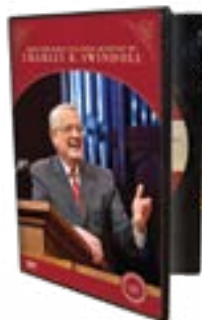
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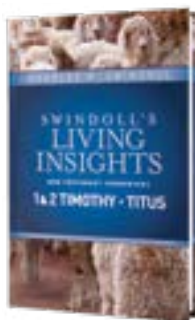
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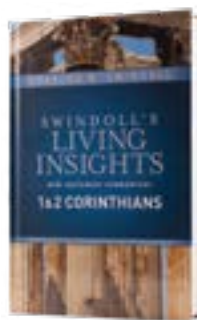
### Tools for Digging Deeper



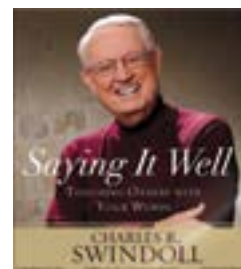
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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon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



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