

## THINGS TO STOP AND START STUDY SEVEN

### Stop Acting Perfect and Start Being Vulnerable

*1 Corinthians 2:1–5; 2 Corinthians 4:1–7*

*What does it mean to be authentic? It means we're unafraid of exposure and willing to acknowledge reality. It's the ability to be open, unguarded, and unhesitant to disclose the truth about ourselves.*

—Charles R. Swindoll

**W**HO doesn't like to make a good impression? We all do! We want others to think the best of us, admire our appearance, and believe we're able to handle any challenge. This striving to put on a good show starts early in life when, as children, we were told to "put on a happy face," even when we felt sad. Over time, we cultivated a deep-seated habit of *faking* it. However, the older we get, the harder it is to maintain a perfect, put-together image. Keeping up appearances is exhausting!

And it's isolating. Fearing that people will see the cracks beneath our veneer, we hold others at a distance. The last thing we want is for them to get so close they're able to discover the truth, namely, that we're nowhere near the person they think we are.

In this study, we're going to learn from Paul how to strip off the façade and *be real*. By following Paul's example, we can *stop acting perfect* and *start being vulnerable*. The practice requires letting down our guard and allowing people to see us as God sees us—His beloved but imperfect children.



#### PREPARE YOUR HEART

We can only be as vulnerable with others as we are secure in our relationship with our heavenly Father. He loves us despite our faults. And the assurance we feel in His care gives us confidence to risk criticism, even rejection, as we open our lives to others.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Read Paul's declaration of security in God's love and write a prayer asking the Lord to give you confidence in Him as you start your journey of transparency.

*And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38–39)*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In his prior life as a law-keeping Pharisee, Paul worked hard at acting perfect (Philippians 3:3–5). But God freed Paul from the yoke of the law when God joined Paul to Christ. Paul described his new life of faith:

*I died to the law—I stopped trying to meet all its requirements—so that I might live for God. My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”  
(Galatians 2:19–20, emphasis added)*

Paul's intimate union with Christ blossomed into the beautiful trait of vulnerability. Let's look closer at two passages from Paul's letters to the Corinthians in which Paul's vulnerability is vividly displayed.



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 **Observation: The Presence of Vulnerability**

In the first phase of the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, observation, we look for key components in the text such as:

- 1) The who, what, where, when, why, and how
- 2) What you can see, touch, taste, hear, and smell
- 3) What’s repeated, emphasized, related, compared, and contrasted
- 4) The logical connections, flow of thoughts, and range of subjects<sup>1</sup>

**Paul Models Vulnerability before Others—1 Corinthians 2:1–5**

Read *1 Corinthians 2:1–5*. Take your time. Read slowly, as if you’re strolling through a garden, admiring the fruit of Paul’s dependent relationship with Christ.

Did you observe Paul’s use of contrast? Use the following chart to write down what Paul *did* versus what he *didn’t do* when he came to minister to the Corinthians.

<b>What Paul Did</b> <i>1 Corinthians 2:2–5</i>	<b>What Paul Didn’t Do</b> <i>1 Corinthians 2:1, 4</i>
Empty space for notes	Empty space for notes



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Paul’s vulnerability is on full display in his honest admission: “I came to you in weakness—timid and trembling” (1 Corinthians 2:3). The stalwart apostle never lacked courage, but he postured himself as weak to make a point. And, considering Paul’s intellectual genius, his refusal to boast was remarkable. How did Paul keep the focus off himself and resist relying on his personal power (2:2, 4)?

*Keep your ministry simple. Stay on mission. Focus on Christ. Get out of the way. Step aside. Make certain that people are impressed with the Savior, not the one talking about the Savior. —Chuck Swindoll*

### Paul Models Vulnerability within Ourselves

Paul’s public display of vulnerability flowed out of his private life of humility. To uncover the source of Paul’s humility, read *2 Corinthians 4:1–7*.

Paul’s statements in 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 echo through 2 Corinthians 4:1–7. Let’s compare phrases to see the parallels:

- “I didn’t use lofty words and impressive wisdom” (1 Corinthians 2:1)
- “We don’t go around preaching about ourselves” (2 Corinthians 4:5)
- “My message and my preaching were very plain” (1 Corinthians 2:4)
- “We tell the truth before God” (2 Corinthians 4:2)
- “Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches” (1 Corinthians 2:4)
- “We don’t try to trick anyone” (2 Corinthians 4:2)

We can also compare Paul’s focus on Christ and dependence on divine power. Find the similar statements and write them in the following charts.



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*1 Corinthians 2:1–5; 2 Corinthians 4:1–7*

Paul's Focus on Christ	
<i>1 Corinthians 2:2</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 4:5–6</i>

Paul's Dependence on Divine Power	
<i>1 Corinthians 2:4–5</i>	<i>2 Corinthians 4:7</i>

How did Paul learn such humility to be so vulnerable? Let's move to the interpretation phase to find the answer.

*Paul said that he was just a fragile clay jar containing great treasure. No pretense. No showmanship. No manipulation. No narcissism. How could Paul turn out like this? How could a man this great become this gracious? The answer is through suffering.*

—Chuck Swindoll



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### Interpretation: Lesson in Humility Learned through Suffering

In the interpretation phase, we examine the meaning of the biblical account—which Paul hints at in his description of his suffering. Read *1 Corinthians 4:8–10* and write down how Paul’s hardships developed his dependency on Christ.

Paul’s suffering brought him to the end of his own resources and strength and forced him to rely “only on the power of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:4). On his knees, he learned that “our great power is from God, not from ourselves” (2 Corinthians 4:7). Suffering taught Paul the secret of surrender and the source of true power.



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### Correlation: Paul's Vulnerability Despite His Circumstances

In correlation, we look for other passages that shed further light on the meaning of the passage. Later in 2 Corinthians, Paul filled in the details about the sufferings he endured. Read *2 Corinthians 11:23–27* and catalogue the list of Paul's extreme hardships.

How did Paul's hardships help him minister to his fellow suffering believers (*2 Corinthians 11:28–29*)?

While other teachers boasted in their credentials, Paul boasted in his humiliations which had taught him the paradoxical truth that strength comes through weakness as we learn to totally depend on our heavenly Father who loves us.

*Let me tell you what it takes to be vulnerable: security and humility. It takes both. So don't run from suffering. Don't hate the pain or the pressures. It's all designed to make you secure in Christ and humble before others. —Chuck Swindoll*



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### Application: The Necessity of Humility

A proud person puts his or her accomplishments on show as he or she struts across center stage. A person who has learned vulnerability avoids the limelight. Vulnerability never appears on the platform of pride; rather, it arises from a spirit of humility. Paul's life teaches us three points to apply if we want to follow his example.

*Identify the hardships that have brought you to your knees.* Paul listed his trials, not to gain sympathy but to remember the times Christ lifted him up when he was down.

*Acknowledge your own humanity.* If you must boast about something, boast in your weaknesses. Draw attention to the cracks in your life that reveal the true treasure of Christ inside.

*Rely on others who come to your rescue.* In one of Paul's lowest moments, he was on the run and had to escape a city by being lowered by ropes over the wall in a basket. Paul couldn't help himself; he had to depend on others. Who held the "ropes" in your life when you needed help? Asking for help and receiving it with gratitude develops humility.

Focus on Christ as the one who lifts you up when you have no strength of your own. Don't be afraid of letting others see the cracks in your life. Admit your need and be willing to receive help from others.

As you reflect on your current situation, how can you put these principles into action today?

The risk is not nearly as daunting when we see the opportunity for a closer walk with God that can only be experienced through vulnerability. Don't miss out on the power that comes through weakness.



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### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, I invite You to change my habits of concealing my flaws to impress others. Trying to act perfect puts so much pressure on me! Teach me to rest in the security of Your love, trust in Your power to work beyond my abilities, and allow Your light to shine through my weaknesses. Help me to simply be who I am without pretense and not hide my faults . . . so that You can receive all the glory! Amen.*

#### ENDNOTE

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



# THINGS TO STOP AND START

## STUDY SEVEN

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

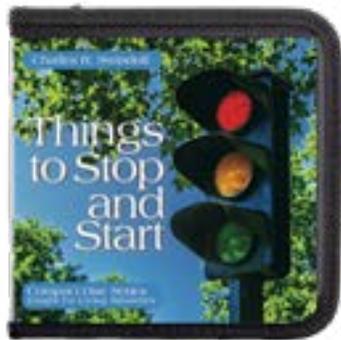
## STUDY

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#### Tools for Digging Deeper



**Things to Stop and Start**  
by Charles R. Swindoll  
CD series



**Leisure: How to Recharge  
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by Charles R. Swindoll  
booklet



**Rules for Running a  
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For the 2019–2020 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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