

WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

STUDY THREE

Never Quitting

2 Timothy 3:1–5, 10–12, 14; 4:1–5

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

—Charles R. Swindoll

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

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



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

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

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



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

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



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Observation: Account of Failure

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

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

A Frightening Prediction

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

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

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

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



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A Passionate Reminder

Certainly, Timothy felt similar emotions. Like a loving but firm father, Paul then appealed to young Timothy to stick to the *core commitments* of being a Christ-follower: “But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you” (2 Timothy 3:14).

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

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

Antioch (Acts 13:50)

Iconium (14:5–6)

Lystra (14:19)?

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

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



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

—Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Five Urgent Commands

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

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

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

(2 Timothy 4:1–2)

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



Correlation: Paul’s Character Proven through Hardship

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

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



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

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

Application: Reassuring Signs Leading to Recovery

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

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



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

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



A FINAL PRAYER

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

ENDNOTES

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



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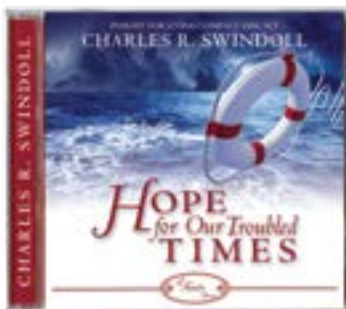
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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

