

THINGS THAT ENHANCE YOUR YEARS AT SEMINARY

Meaningful Messages in Misfortune

Romans 8:28; Philippians 1:12–14

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Life can be hard. It's not a question of *if* tough times will come but *when* they will come. And in a culture that places a premium on instant success and blue-chip leaders, it's easy to get lured into believing that true ministry success results from our own competence. You may be surprised to learn that often the most lasting lessons in ministry flow not out of the rapid climb up the ladder of achievement but from the painful descent into the pit of failure.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

The most trustworthy guidance in life and ministry comes from the Scriptures—particularly those passages that offer overt promises to us as followers of Christ as well as passages that illustrate faith amid trying times. Both flowed generously and freely from the pastoral heart of the apostle Paul.

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory. (Romans 8:28–30)

And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear. (Philippians 1:12–14)

What joy to know how God works in and through and for us, especially in times of misfortune. Before diving into this study, pause to offer praise to Him for sustaining you and your family with His gracious provision during those times when you felt life spinning out of control!

Quotable

*In this limited,
tight radius called
the “now,” we
are forced to come
to terms with the
fact that what
we’re going through
presently doesn’t
make much sense.
But God has a
purpose in it all.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Meaningful Messages in Misfortune

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Observation: A Window into Meaning

By the way, it's important to understand that you don't need a seminary degree to search the Scriptures. You do, however, need a commitment to open the Word of God and *read* it. Observation, which unlocks the window to meaning, begins with reading the Bible. As you read you begin to see details that are repeated, phrases that highlight key ideas, and clues that reveal the author's original intentions.

Let's observe Philippians 1:12–14 in this way. Paul opened a window that reveals faith amid misfortune looks like. What details did Paul include that shines light through that window?

The verses immediately preceding the passage we're considering in this study set the context for the apostle's words:

But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. (Romans 8:25–26 NASB)

Paul reminded his readers that, unlike God, they could not see into the future, nor did they have sufficient knowledge of the future to pray effectively without the Spirit's help.



Interpretation: God's Higher Ways

In his message, Chuck Swindoll explained that the truths about God's sovereignty and omniscience help us understand how our misfortunes can become valuable lessons for life and ministry.

In Paul's letter to the believers at Philippi, he also illustrated how misfortune can turn to gain.

And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear. (Philippians 1:12–14)



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How did Paul describe his situation? What do you sense was his attitude about being in prison for his faith?

What did Paul list as the benefits of his being imprisoned for the gospel? How did his misfortune become an opportunity for spreading the gospel?

What lessons might be learned from Paul's experience?

How does Paul's experience in a Roman house prison reflect his declaration of God's sovereignty in Romans 8:28–30?



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Meaningful Messages in Misfortune

Romans 8:28; Philippians 1:12–14



Correlation: Threads of God's Sovereignty

The theme of God's sovereignty threads the entire Bible—from the Old Testament to the end of the New Testament. We can correlate the main verses of our study with other biblical passages to develop an increased understanding of God's character, God's actions, and God's instructions. And because both our passages are found in the New Testament, we glean a helpful perspective by correlating them with an Old Testament passage.

Chuck referenced a powerful passage in Isaiah 55 during his message delivered at Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS). Let's take a closer look at why Chuck chose Isaiah's ancient words.

*"My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the LORD.
"And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.
For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so my ways are higher than your ways
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8–9)*

Through the grand prophet Isaiah, God declared that His omniscience and eternal nature infinitely exceed our ability to understand Him. He is far above us in all possible ways.

How does God's declaration about His nature align with Paul's words in Romans 8:28–30 and Philippians 1:12–14?

How would you use Isaiah 55 to teach a Bible study lesson on learning to trust God in times of misfortune?



Meaningful Messages in Misfortune

Romans 8:28; Philippians 1:12–14



Application: Making a Personal Connection

Chuck concluded his message at DTS with some pointed statements applicable to anyone desiring to serve as a minister of Christ's gospel:

- I hope you will not know early success. Rather, I hope you will encounter difficulties that drive you to your knees.
- I hope you will experience obscurity and anonymity after you leave these halls of learning—especially if you are greatly gifted and bright.
- I hope you will fail because you relied on your own flesh to reach certain goals. . . . You will learn far more from times of failure than through great accomplishments.
- I hope you will be forced to deal with a difficult leader (person) in the church you serve or face disagreements with someone with whom you serve closely.
- I hope you will be hindered by unexpected obstacles that keep you from reaching your goals in ministry as you had planned.

Ultimately, the only way to learn full dependence on the Lord is to experience misfortunes and failures that bring you to the end of your own resourcefulness. Only then can you turn in full confidence and humility to the One who delivered you from a past from which you could never recover and who leads you into a future you cannot see.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for this trial—this misfortune—that I face today. Forgive me for complaining about my circumstances and expressing such dismay at my current lot in life. Open my eyes to Your plans and purposes in the gathering clouds of defeat or failure . . . and shelter me with Your gracious presence and love until this storm passes by. In Jesus' name. Amen.



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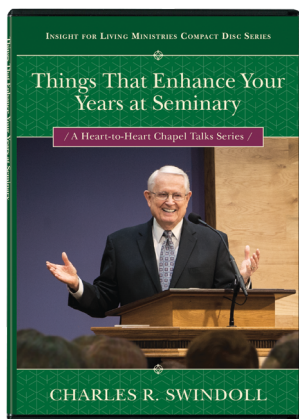
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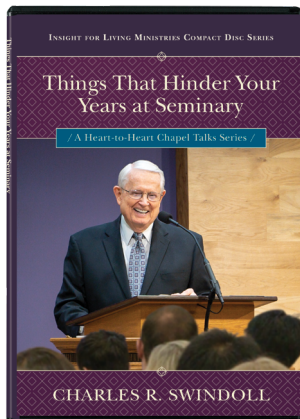
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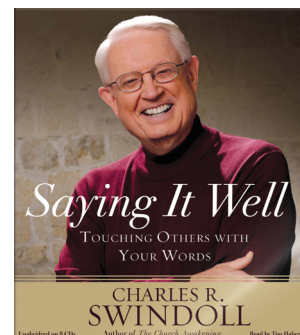
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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles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



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THINGS THAT ENHANCE YOUR YEARS AT SEMINARY

Focus on These Things

Philippians 4:8–9

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

The work of ministry can be both exhilarating and rewarding as well as perilous. Consider the apostle Paul's testimony:

Are they servants of Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger? If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am. God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, who is worthy of eternal praise, knows I am not lying. (2 Corinthians 11:23–31)

Based on Paul's witness, who would aspire to such work? The answer is anyone who has accepted Christ's call to serve! Chuck Swindoll encouraged graduate students at Dallas Theological Seminary to focus on six biblical virtues described by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians.

Quotable

*You reach a place
where your walk
with the Lord is
such that He's
the One who is so
magnificent that
all other faces and
reputations pale in
comparison to Him.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In this two-part series, Chuck focuses on virtues worthy of any minister's meditation and focus. All Christians serve in some capacity whether vocationally or as lay ministers, so we all gain much from considering these powerful principles for ensuring a lifelong ministry of effectiveness and integrity.

Let's zoom in on Paul's message.



Observation: Reading Carefully

Patience and focus fuel observation. We need no extra resource or seminary degree to be a keen observer of the text. We just need to read it. Thoroughly. Repetitively. Reflectively. And *prayerfully*. That's what we'll do with [Philippians 4:8–9](#). You may even read multiple translations. By the way, some of Chuck's favorites are the New Living Translation and the [New American Standard Bible](#).

Here's our passage as rendered in the New Living Translation:

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. 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. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8–9)

In his message, Chuck referred to this passage as a helpful checklist for ministry—especially when discouragement sets in:

This is what I call an excellent checklist for ministry. Believe it or not, I go back to it frequently. Cynthia and I talk about it as much as we do any verses of Scripture. This sort of sums it up and helps us stay on target because, let's face it, there are days you will feel disappointed, underappreciated, and lacking in that enthusiasm I've been talking about. So you need to return to a checklist that will keep you on target. —Chuck Swindoll

Paul must have had a similar thought as he picked up his stylus to write these words to the believers at Philippi. Let's look closely at the passage.

To whom was Paul writing?



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Philippians 4:8–9

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What did Paul urge his readers to do with their thoughts?

What was the promise Paul offered for doing so?



Interpretation: Understanding Clearly

Thorough observation allows for an enriching interpretive experience because we can better know what questions to answer, what cultural norms to learn, and what words to define. And our passage has important words!

For each word listed, consult a commentary about its meaning, and write in your own words what you believe Paul intended. (HINT: You can go back and listen to Chuck's sermon, too, and draw your response from his explanation of each word!)

True

Honorable

Right, Just



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THINGS THAT ENHANCE YOUR YEARS AT SEMINARY

Focus on These Things

Philippians 4:8–9

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Pure

Lovely

Admirable

How does focusing our minds on these things lead to an effective life and ministry?

What was Paul's final exhortation to the Philippian believers (Philippians 4:9)?

What do you think he meant by "putting into practice" everything they had learned from him?



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Focus on These Things

Philippians 4:8–9

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Correlation: Comparing Precisely

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

In Paul's letter to the believers in Rome, he gave a similar exhortation related to renewing their minds:

Don't copy the behavior and customs of the 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. (Romans 12:2)

How does Paul's exhortation to the Romans relate to his words in Philippians 4:8–9?

How does focusing our thoughts on worthy things transform the way we think and act?



Application: Making It Real to You

Application takes what you've discovered and makes it real in your own life and in the lives of others. So many people, even Christians, struggle to fend off negative thoughts about themselves, others, and the world around them. Paul's words in Philippians 4 provide a powerful antidote to counter such debilitating patterns.



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Philippians 4:8–9

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Write down three personal applications for your own life and ministry based on what you've learned in this study.

1.

2.

3.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You are truth, and Your Son came full of grace and truth to set us free from the power of sin and death. Thank You for delivering me from the dark, debilitating patterns of my past and bringing me into the light of Your truth. Help me to focus on these things that You have revealed in Your gracious Word. For the praise and glory of Your name! Amen.



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Focus on These Things

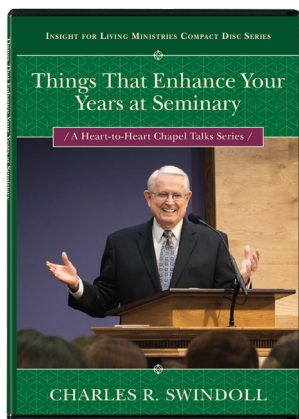
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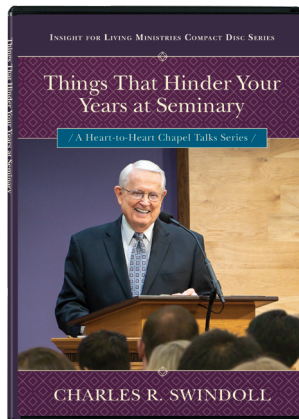
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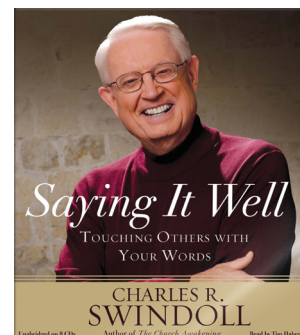
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