

WHAT IF . . . ?

What If God Chooses You to Do Something Great?

Exodus 3:1–8, 10–11, 13–15; 4:1–4, 10–11, 13, 29–31

LET'S BEGIN HERE

We plan a new venture, and as we scan the landscape of possibilities that stretches before us, our hearts leap with visions of a fruitful future. But then doubt grows like a weed in our freshly planted field of dreams. The question we all fear creeps in . . . and multiplies!

What if . . . ?

What if I run out of money? What if others criticize me? What if I fail? A hundred questions like these spring up from the seeds of fear that lie dormant beneath the surface.

Alongside every bad seed of fear, however, are good seeds of faith waiting to sprout. Money may run out, but God will provide. Others may scoff, but God will smile. I may fall on my face, but God will pick me up. What's the answer to the *what if* questions? God!

This series helps us manage the *what ifs* of life, the ones that spring from fear but are answered by faith. In this study, we'll look at the question from both sides. What if God chooses you to do something great? Fear replies, "Oh, no!" But faith answers, "Let's go!"



DIGGING DEEPER

When God called Moses to do something great, fear choked his initial response. At age 80, Moses was no superhero of the faith. Quite the opposite, he was like us—human to the core and a fearful victim of life's hard knocks. What difficult circumstances frayed his faith? Let's explore Moses' past as it's chronicled in Exodus 1–2.

Quotable

*God is not through
speaking and
choosing individuals
to do great things
for Him.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Exodus 3:1–8, 10–11, 13–15; 4:1–4, 10–11, 13, 29–31



Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

In this series, we'll use our *Searching the Scriptures* skills of observation, interpretation, correlation, and application, as well as a Bible dictionary, concordance, and a reliable commentary on the book of the Bible we're studying. We recommend *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* and *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*. You'll find these and other resources at the "Bible Study Tools" section of Insight for Living Ministries' online store.

Another key resource is *The Zondervan Essential Atlas of the Bible* by Carl G. Rasmussen. In this atlas, locate the map of Egypt and Sinai during the period in which Moses lived. A Bible atlas is worth owning because it features pertinent historic details that aid understanding. If you have a study Bible, you can turn to the back and locate the maps. You'll find a map that shows lands of the Bible in the Old Testament. Use one of those maps to find Egypt. Take a few moments to study whatever map you find, and make some notes about what you see.

Moses' Background

The pharaoh during the days of Joseph gave Jacob and his family the land of Goshen, which you can locate on your map (Genesis 47:5–6). In the four hundred years that followed, the family grew into a nation large enough to loom over the security of the Egyptians.

Observation

What policies did Pharaoh enact to enslave the Hebrews and check their population growth (Exodus 1:11–22)? Locate Pithom and Rameses on the map.

Moses was born during a perilous time for Hebrew babies. To save him, his mother set him adrift in a basket on the Nile near Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted and raised him as an Egyptian prince. Review the thrilling story in Exodus 2:1–10 and the insightful commentary in Hebrews 11:23–25.



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If anyone was suited to save the Hebrews, it was Moses. But he ran off to Midian! Locate Midian on a map. What happened to cause Prince Moses to flee Egypt for Midian and trade his royal scepter for a shepherd's staff (Exodus 2:11–15)?

Moses' failure signals a shift in the story from no hope of freedom to new hope for divine deliverance. Read Exodus 2:23–24. What does God promise?

When God Speaks: Four Common Answers

Forty years later, God set the wheels of freedom in motion by calling Moses to the Hebrew people in Egypt. The setting was the Sinai wilderness, specifically the “mountain of God”—a place where God would later meet His people (Exodus 3:1, 12; 4:27; 19:1–25). In this sacred place, God spoke to Moses through a bush that “was engulfed in flames” but “didn't burn up” (3:2).

Interpretation

The following chart follows the dialogue between God and Moses. Take a few minutes to read the entire interaction in Exodus 3:1–4:17. Then fill in the sections of the chart that summarize Moses' resistance to God's calling to do something great and God's response to Moses' resistance.



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God's Calling

“Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh.
You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt.” (Exodus 3:10)

Verses	Moses' Resistance	Verses	God's Response
Exodus 3:11, 13		Exodus 3:12, 14	
Exodus 4:1		Exodus 4:2–9	
Exodus 4:10		Exodus 4:11–12	
Exodus 4:13		Exodus 4:14–17	



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Correlation

Let's lay Moses' fears on the table and compare them with God's responses to each fear as supported by other Scripture passages. Fill in the blank to indicate what fear his resistance may indicate. We filled in the first one as an example.

Moses' Resistance

- "I will not have all the answers." *Fear of ignorance.*
- "I may not have all their respect." *Fear of _____.*
- "I do not have all the ability." *Fear of _____.*
- "I'm not as qualified as all the others." *Fear of _____.*

God's Responses

- "You will have Me!" Compare Exodus 3:12 with Deuteronomy 31:8 and Hebrews 13:5.
- "You will have My power!" Compare Exodus 4:2–9 with Psalm 17:7.
- "You will have all that is needed!" Compare Exodus 4:11–12 with Philippians 4:19.
- "You will have help!" Compare Exodus 4:14–17 with Hebrews 13:6.

Summarize what you learn as you compare Moses' resistance and God's responses, along with the correlated verses.



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Bring It Home

Application

Do you see yourself in Moses' worried face? Do your knees buckle like his did when God pulls up your secure anchor? Can you hear your voice in Moses' protests when God sets a course into unknown, treacherous seas?

God's calling for you to do "something great" may be rearing children in godliness, going back to school, reaching out to love a neighbor, volunteering at a crisis pregnancy center, signing up for a short-term mission trip, or any number of ventures that require you to depend on Him. If God is speaking, answer yes!

Chuck Swindoll offers an encouraging word:

Maybe you've run ahead of your own strength. Maybe you've retreated in the shadow of shame. . . . Maybe you're still resisting even though you know that God might very well have plans for you. . . . Stop the resistance. Stop the retreating. Say yes. Just say yes, and watch God work.

What might God be calling you to do? In the space below, reflect on His call, and express your heart to Him.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, may I not see this study simply as the story of Moses but as my story. Thank You that I have You. Your power is all I need. And the help of others—the Aarons You bring to stand with me when I feel weak. Do Your work of greatness as I do my part, which is to obey. Amen.



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



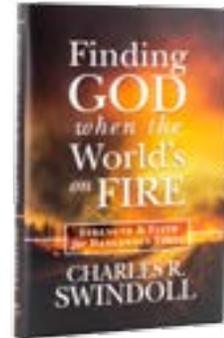
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WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Suddenly Lose Everything?

Job 1:1–3, 6–11, 20–21; 2:1–6, 8–10; James 4:13–16

LET'S BEGIN HERE

Job said, “Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?” (Job 2:10).

There’s an insidious fallacy, a false teaching that plagues Christian theology: if we have enough faith in God and live blameless lives, we as believers can expect health, wealth, and overall prosperity.

The book of Job—the life of Job—flies in the face of such false teaching. *God Himself* characterizes Job as blameless. Even so, Job experiences excruciating trial after trial at the hand of Satan. Everything Job has is snatched from him, yet God demonstrates to Satan His confidence and approval in Job’s character (Job 2:3).

Our circumstances in this utterly sin-besmirched world are *not* accurate reflections of our spiritual standing with God. Job’s life is an Old Testament pre-incarnational perspective on the preeminence of faith in God and a foreshadowing of Jesus, the Suffering Servant who perfectly yielded Himself to the will of God the Father.



Resources to Enhance Your Bible Study

When you study the Bible, a helpful first step is to gather resources that will add theological depth and context. Make certain you have handy a Bible dictionary and a concordance as well as a reliable commentary on the book or topic you’re studying. For this particular message, you may want to supplement your study with a copy of Chuck Swindoll’s book, *Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance*. This easy-to-read work guides readers through Job’s tough themes of senseless tragedy, false accusation, the mystery of God’s will, faith in the face of trial. It’s a fantastic source of encouragement.

If you don’t have a library full of resources, don’t fret. There are fantastic, free online tools at your disposal. Check out biblegateway.com or lumina.bible.org.

Quotable

God doesn’t exist to make you healthy and happy. He exists to glorify His own name. And you are the channel through which the glory comes. Get that.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Reading different Bible versions can help you glean fresh perspectives from the same passage. If you don't have different versions handy, use biblegateway.com or biblestudytools.com.

Searching the Scriptures in Job

When you survey the shelves of the many genres of biblical literature, you discover that Job belongs in the category of literature known as poetry. Also included in that category are the books of the Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes. When studying a passage of Scripture in one of the poetry books, it's important to pay close attention to dialog, repeated patterns, imagery, and figures of speech. Though Job appears in narrative form (basically telling a story), the writer used poetic forms to emphasize meaning. A Bible commentary on Job is an excellent place to start as you explore this fascinating genre of biblical literature.

**YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES**

It's your turn to use the *Searching the Scriptures* methods—*observation, interpretation, correlation, and application*. Pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Observation: What Do You See?

Observation is a critical beginning technique you can use to put together the pieces of a passage of Scripture. Paying attention to Job 1 and 2, make some initial observations about what you see; for instance, *are there any repeated words? Did the narrator use any connecting words that offer clues into what he was emphasizing?*

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



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Interpretation: What Does It Mean?

What does the name “Job” mean? How does this name align with the subject matter of Job 1 and 2? (HINT: This would be a good time to look up *Job* in your Bible dictionary. Read the material presented there to get a wider feel for the kind of literature this book represents and the cultural background surrounding this epic story. Make some notes!)

Read Job 1:1–4, and list the characteristics the narrator uses to describe Job.

Read Job 1:8 and 2:3. How does God describe Job?

Describe in your own words how Satan views Job’s faith in contrast to God. Finding this section of Scripture in a Bible commentary and reading about the dialogue between God and Satan will provide valuable insight as you seek to interpret its meaning.

Paraphrase Job 2:10 in your own words.



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*Job 1:1–3, 6–11, 20–21; 2:1–6, 8–10; James 4:13–16***Correlation: How Does It Compare?**

Read the following passages, and write a note or two on how they help confirm the meaning of Job 1–2. If another passage of Scripture comes to your mind, write that one down in the margin and include that in your study.

Genesis 50:19–20

Isaiah 53:3–12

John 9:2–3

Romans 5:3–5

2 Corinthians 1:6–7

Hebrews 5:8



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James 1:2–4

James 4:13–16

Application: What Difference Does It Make?

In his message, Chuck highlights four questions to ask yourself in preparing your heart for perseverant faith in God during times of great loss. We encourage you to pray and thoughtfully answer each question:

What kind of person are you becoming? Are you cultivating dependence on God? How do you handle life's tests?

What do you see in the future? How can you make James 4:13–16 a part of your planning?

Can you discern good advice from bad? In times of trial, people will give you all sorts of advice. Do you have a good truth filter?



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Job 1:1–3, 6–11, 20–21; 2:1–6, 8–10; James 4:13–16

How will you respond to suffering? Will you grow bitter and angry? Or will you give yourself space to grieve and still trust and worship God?

In the space below, write out a few specific personalized applications to what you have studied in Job 1–2.



A FINAL PRAYER

Lord of heaven and earth, I submit my life to You. I don't know what will come tomorrow or even at the next moment . . . but I do know that I live to glorify You. Help me to overcome my unbelief and shore up my perseverance, even in the midst of suffering. Help me to lean on You when I don't understand the whys of life. In Your Son's name, amen.



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



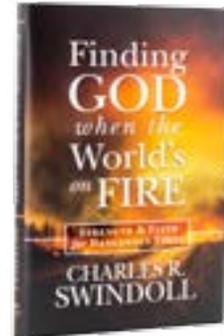
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S02
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WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Are Being Stalked?

1 Kings 19:1–14; Jeremiah 17:9–10



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Have you ever been stalked? If yes, most likely the experience was a nightmare you've never forgotten. If no, your chances of falling victim may be higher than you realize. Stalking is a serious problem.

What does a stalker do? The Web site of the Attorney General of Texas provides this description:

A stalker tries to control his or her victim through behavior or threats intended to intimidate and terrify. . . . Stalking can take the form of verbal threats or threats conveyed by the stalker's conduct, threatening mail, property damage, surveillance of the victim, or by following the victim.¹

Control. Intimidate. Threaten. Terrify. These are the tools of the stalker's trade. Ever-present yet rarely visible, these menacing individuals take sadistic delight in the hunt, pursuing tirelessly—like King Saul chasing David for twelve years (1 Samuel 18–26)—and plotting obsessively—like the Jewish leaders scheming in the shadows to kill Jesus (Matthew 26:3–4).

Jezebel hunted her prey, the prophet Elijah, with a treacherous vow: “May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you” (1 Kings 19:2). In this study, we'll open this case file and see Ahab listed as a stalker as well. We'll discover how Elijah responded when he was being stalked and learn how God tenderly cares for victims.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

What events sparked the fire in Jezebel's fury against Elijah? It all began with the sin of Jezebel and her husband, Ahab, king of Israel. What sins did this couple commit (1 Kings 16:29–34)?

Quotable

Stalking has been going on ever since there was a devil.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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What If You Are Being Stalked?

1 Kings 19:1–14; Jeremiah 17:9–10



Searching the Scriptures Study Tools

The *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method includes using various study tools to dig deeper into the background of a text. A reliable commentary like John F. Walvoord's *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* is a great place to start. Read the discussion of these verses and record your findings. Another fine resource is the notes section in lumina.bible.org. Specifically, read “Constable’s Notes,” and reflect on the impact to the nation’s soul when, for the first time, Baal worship officially replaced Yahweh worship.

Read 1 Kings 17:1 to discover the discipline that God enacted in response to Ahab and Jezebel’s sin. For a detailed discussion of Baal worship, visit Bible History Online, www.bible-history.com. Click on “Amazing Facts” in the words surrounding King Tut’s mask, then “Baal Worship” in the Table of Contents on the right-hand side. Record the results of your research, and write down how God’s control of the weather proved His supremacy over Baal’s supposed domain.

The Stalking of Elijah

Instead of repenting under God’s discipline, Ahab blamed Elijah as the “troublemaker of Israel” (1 Kings 18:17). Blaming is a typical response of stalkers, who would rather rage at their victims than admit wrong. How did Ahab stalk Elijah (1 Kings 18:10)?



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1 Kings 19:1–14; Jeremiah 17:9–10

For three years, as He turned up the heat on His disobedient people, God protected Elijah from Ahab. Finally, God told Elijah to announce an end to the drought, but not before a showdown between His man Elijah and 450 prophets of Baal. Read the dramatic story in 1 Kings 18:16–40. What was the people’s response and the fate of the false prophets?

The scene on Mount Carmel ended with heavenly raindrops refreshing the land and washing away the nation’s sin. When the curtain rose on the next scene, Jezebel thundered onto stage, vowing to kill Elijah: “May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you” (1 Kings 19:2). How did fearless Elijah, who stood up to hundreds of opponents on Mount Carmel, respond to the heat of Jezebel’s rage? He *wilted*.

Elijah’s Fearful Reaction

The prophet became “afraid and fled for his life” (1 Kings 19:3). The power of the stalker’s influence can be great—even the most courageous of Old Testament prophets broke under it! The issue here isn’t that Elijah acted to preserve his life. After all, in obedience to the angel’s bidding, Joseph fled to Egypt to protect baby Jesus from Herod’s death edict (Matthew 2:13). Elijah’s problem was that he let fear—instead of the Lord—call the shots. Let’s observe the fault lines that weakened Elijah’s faith, so we can learn from his example and be better prepared when attacks come our way.

Elijah Focused on the Horizontal

First, Elijah shifted his mental focus from God’s power to Jezebel’s bullying, from the vertical to the horizontal. Read 1 Kings 19:3–4 below, observing any evidence of that shift in the text. With your cursor or a marker, highlight the evidence you find and then comment on the impact of the shift. Take, for example, the word *afraid*. In the past, Elijah had urged others not to be afraid (1 Kings 17:13). This is the first time



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1 Kings 19:1–14; Jeremiah 17:9–10

we see Elijah allowing fear to take control because he lost his focus on the Creator and Sustainer of all life. What impact did Elijah's letting fear take the reins have?

Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died." (1 Kings 19:3–4)

Elijah Miscalculated the Situation

Compare Elijah's statements in 1 Kings 19:10 and 14 with the facts in 18:4 and 19:18. Misbeliefs and exaggerations fuel self-pity and despair. What strategy could Elijah have used to keep his mind on the truth that God is at work in ways we can't see?

Elijah Neglected His Personal Needs

Elijah had pushed himself to the brink of physical and emotional exhaustion, as evidenced by God's first-aid-style response to the prophet in 1 Kings 19:5–7. What principles about God's care of us and about self-care can you draw from this passage? Also, note God's provision of a companion in 19:19–21.



**Bring It Home**

Our God ministers tenderly to all victims, particularly those who have experienced the mental anguish of a stalker's intimidation. Chuck Swindoll helps us sum up our study with four reminders:

- *We're not immune.* Old Testament prophets weren't the only ones vulnerable to attack; any of us could be a victim of persecution—just as Jesus warned in His Sermon the Mount. But He also promised a special blessing and reward for those who are persecuted (Matthew 5:11–12).
- *We're not superhuman.* We need rest. We need refreshment. Beware the Elijah Complex that makes us think we don't need self-care.
- *We're not alone.* Don't think that going solo implies strength. True strength comes from admitting need and linking arms with others.
- *We're not in charge.* Submitting to God's sovereign plan gives peace instead of panic. Be wise. Be watchful. Take precautions. Install an alarm on your house, if you need to. But knowing God is in charge will keep panic at bay and help you sleep at night.

Which of these reminders hits close to home for you? How has fear impacted your life . . . your family . . . your circle of influence? Take a few minutes to reflect and write a prayer to the Lord about your fear and the action steps you'd like to take.

**A FINAL PRAYER**

Father, our enemy, the Adversary, prowls like a lion looking to devour me. He knows when I'm down and vulnerable. He sends enemies to terrify me. Lord, I need Your help. Help my thoughts not to run wild with fearful imaginations. Remind me of what is true: Your faithful presence and sovereign control. Come to my rescue, just as You came to Elijah's aid. I need You, Lord. I need You every hour! Amen.

Endnote

1. The Attorney General of Texas: Ken Paxton, "Information about Stalking," <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/cvs/information-on-stalking> (accessed June 27, 2017).



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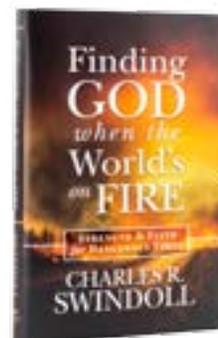
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WHAT IF . . . ?

What If a Longtime Friend Deceives You?

2 Kings 5:5, 10–16, 20–27



LET'S BEGIN HERE

We've all felt the deep wounds of betrayal: scars from a former grade school playmate or a high school best friend, pain from a messy breakup or divorce, infidelity, embezzlement, and gossip. Deliberate deceit cuts deep. David's writing reveals he knew this anguishing experience: "Even my best friend, the one I trusted completely, the one who shared my food, has turned against me" (Psalm 41:9). In this message, Chuck Swindoll delved into the deceit of Gehazi, a minor character in Israel's history known for betraying the major prophet Elisha.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, using Gehazi's story, we'll dig deep into the root of deceit by tracing the character differences between those who trust in the Lord and those who help only themselves.



DIGGING DEEPER: CONTRAST IN NARRATIVE

Much of the Bible is written as narrative—including 2 Kings, which chronicles the history of Israel. Can you think of other examples of historical literature in the Bible?

About the intentional history-narrative combination, Chuck Swindoll notes, "Often this historical section of Scripture is called *narrative* because God is communicating His Word as a grand story."¹

Don't let the word *story* mislead you. The stories of the Bible are absolutely true! *Story* simply refers to the style and skill with which God brought together the Scriptures. The Bible is rich with literary devices that not only enrich the movement of the grand story, but also cue the reader about God's providence and kindness and about the characters whose actions demonstrate they are God's people.

Quotable

"What is the right thing to do?" If you ask yourself that question, you will not be a deceiver.

— Charles R. Swindoll



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If a Longtime Friend Deceives You?

2 Kings 5:5, 10–16, 20–27

One of the most rewarding and intriguing aspects of narrative is how observation, interpretation, and correlation occur simultaneously as we process what we're reading. To enhance our vision, let's pull those tasks apart and focus on doing each one.

Let's start with observing *contrasts* in 2 Kings 5 by zooming in on the prophet Elisha and his servant Gehazi. Along the way, we'll also make correlations and then bring the two together to interpret what we've read.

In verses 5 through 19, we see Elisha's values on full display. He demonstrates the preeminence of God's presence and power. He shuns the appearance of being bought or bribed. He flees from favoritism or nationalism. Gehazi was this man's trusted servant. Yet Elisha's values never quite rubbed off on his servant. How do we know this? Gehazi declared as much:

But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God, said to himself, "My master should not have let this Aramean get away without accepting any of his gifts. As surely as the Lord lives, I will chase after him and get something from him." (2 Kings 5:20)

The word *but* begins this verse—a major signal that we should contrast what came before and what was written after.

What did Gehazi think about his master's actions?

What modifiers does the narrator use to describe Elisha? How is he characterized?

How does Gehazi identify Naaman? Does he call him by name? What implications lie in how Gehazi identifies Naaman?



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If a Longtime Friend Deceives You?

2 Kings 5:5, 10–16, 20–27

Did you notice that Gehazi said, “As surely as the LORD lives”? That’s not the the first time we’ve seen those words. Repetition in Scripture always warrants a closer look. Just a few verses up in 5:16, Elisha declared the same thing. How does his declaration differ from Gehazi’s?

Through repetition, the writer invites us to *contrast* the statements of the two men. Why? So we will understand that Gehazi is *not* serving the Lord, but himself.

Now read 2 Kings 5:2–3:

At this time Aramean raiders had invaded the land of Israel, and among their captives was a young girl who had been given to Naaman’s wife as a maid. One day the girl said to her mistress, “I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy.”

What does 2 Kings 5:2 report about the relationship between the Israelites and the Arameans?

Was the young girl with Naaman there voluntarily? How do you imagine this circumstance would have influenced the young girl’s relationship to Naaman and his wife?



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If a Longtime Friend Deceives You?

2 Kings 5:5, 10–16, 20–27

How does the young girl refer to Naaman? By name? What does her word choice say about their relationship?

The young girl has only one recorded sentence. What do her words reveal about her character?

Both the young girl and Gehazi use the term “my master” to describe Naaman and Elisha, respectively. Was Gehazi serving his master? Explain why or why not.

Now, jot down some notes about the contrasts between Elisha’s servant and Naaman’s.

A Tale of Two Servants

If anyone had reason to be resentful and angry at Naaman, it was the young girl, stolen from Israel and forced into slavery in the country of her captors. Yet because of her character, that young girl became a vehicle of God’s grace to pagan people.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If a Longtime Friend Deceives You?

2 Kings 5:5, 10–16, 20–27

Throughout the Old Testament, God's people often found themselves in exile as a form of punishment from God. Using a resource like lumina.bible.org, do a search for the word *exile*. Observe how often the word appears and note a few examples or turn to this word in a Bible dictionary for some additional insight. Make notes of what you discover.

God's people lived in exile in a variety of countries for a variety of reasons. Yet always, no matter where they were or why, God's expectations of good character and His instructions on how they were to live their lives remained the same.

Read the letter to the people exiled in Babylon in Jeremiah 29:4–23, and zoom in on verse 7:

“Work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare.”

The “I” in that sentence is *God*. In 2 Kings 5, a young, nameless slave girl embodied the heart of God, as spoken in Jeremiah's prophecy, with more grace and spiritual depth than Elisha's right-hand man! Her actions aligned with Elisha's. Both individuals were fueled by their loyalty and service to the God of grace. Both embodied the humility and confidence that come from serving God rather than mammon.

The result of Elisha's and the young girl's faithfulness? A miracle even greater than healed leprosy! Naaman proclaims, “From now on I will never again offer burnt offerings or sacrifices to any other god except the LORD” (2 Kings 5:17).

Then Gehazi enters the scene and interrupts the process of repentance. He doesn't want to see “this Aramean” gain God's grace without penalty. Gehazi thinks Naaman needs to pay up.

Read 2 Kings 5:20–27. What actions do you see Gehazi take? What motivated him? What consequences did he face?



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If a Longtime Friend Deceives You?

2 Kings 5:5, 10–16, 20–27

Does Gehazi's attitude show up in our churches today? How? What impact do "Gehazis" have on those around them?

Does Elisha's and the young girl's attitude show up in our churches today? How? What impact do "Elishas" and "young girls" have on those around them?

Where are *you* aligned—do you more closely resemble Gehazi or the young girl and Elisha? How? Be specific.

Are there "Arameans" whom you believe should have to pay? Write a prayer to God about it.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If a Longtime Friend Deceives You?

2 Kings 5:5, 10–16, 20–27



Bring It Home

Chuck offers two helpful takeaways from this passage to implement into our lives.

- *Leave no room for deception.* Do this by always asking yourself: “What is the right thing to do?”
- *Guard against rationalization.* Do this by always asking yourself: “What is my motive?”

Now that you have studied the contrasts between Gehazi, Elisha, and the young girl, what are some applications that you have gleaned?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, guard my heart from deceit. Give me Your wisdom to discern the right thing to do, with the right motivation, in every circumstance. May the company I keep be known by their honesty and guilelessness. Give me the faith to serve You with purity on my lips and in my heart.

Endnote

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale, 2016), 6.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If a Longtime Friend Deceives You?

2 Kings 5:5, 10–16, 20–27

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



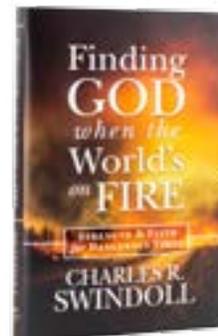
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S04
8

WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Should Confront Someone in Sin?

2 Samuel 12:1–14



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Living by grace does not mean living without accountability. No one ever showed people more grace than Jesus did. And because He loved people, He confronted them when they moved in a wrong direction.

Chuck Swindoll explains what *confrontation* is and is not:

It's love in action. It's caring for another's welfare—helping someone realize he or she is headed for trouble, for danger, if nothing changes. And the proof of your love is that you will not look the other way. It doesn't mean that you want to gain control over the person or legalistically put that person under your thumb. You see, there's a vast difference between confronting another one who needs to hear it and trying to control that other person so that he or she becomes like you.

One of the finest examples of caring confrontation in Scripture is Nathan's confrontation of David who had sinned with Bathsheba. Let's use our *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study to dig deeper into this episode and learn what to do if we confront someone in sin.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Correlation is one of the four central components of inductive Bible study:

- *Observation*: observe the text of Scripture.
- *Interpretation*: probe the meaning of Scripture.
- *Correlation*: compare the truths of Scripture.
- *Application*: apply the wisdom of Scripture.

Quotable

What is confrontation? It's love in action. It's caring for another's welfare—helping someone realize he or she is headed for trouble, for danger, if nothing changes.

— Charles R. Swindoll



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Should Confront Someone in Sin?

2 Samuel 12:1–14

By correlating Bible passages about Nathan, we add color to our character sketch of the man who confronted David. A helpful resource is *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, which is available through the Insight for Living Ministries online store. In this Bible dictionary, the entry, *Nathan*, lists five individuals by that name. Interestingly, David named one of his and Bathsheba's sons Nathan (1 Chronicles 3:5)—perhaps in tribute to the man who had the courage and concern to confront him!

The prophet Nathan was part of David's life long before confronting him. Nathan first appeared in Scripture encouraging David to build the temple (2 Samuel 7:2–3). But after a vision from the Lord, Nathan told David that God had not chosen him to build the temple; instead, God would build a “house” for David—that is, a line of kings from his descendants. David's was no ordinary dynasty, however.

What makes God's covenant with David central to the story of the Bible and God's redemptive plan? Compare the following passages, and write down your findings: 2 Samuel 7:16; Psalm 89:34–37; Isaiah 9:6–7; Luke 1:30–33.

After confronting David, Nathan helped secure the proper succession of David's line. How did Nathan help pass the royal scepter to God's chosen son—the one divinely ordained to build the temple? Read 1 Kings 1:11–30, and record what you find.

What other influence on David's household did Nathan have regarding his writings and his sons' involvement with Solomon? Read 1 Kings 4:5; 1 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Should Confront Someone in Sin?

2 Samuel 12:1–14

What does your study reveal about the nature of Nathan's relationship with David?

An Example of “Tough Love”

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend,” the proverb states (Proverbs 27:6 NASB). God called upon Nathan, David's friend, to inflict on him a deep surgical wound—not to destroy David but to save the patient's soul.

David's sin of adultery with Bathsheba began as all cancers do, in secret and almost undetectable. But then the diseased cells multiplied to include a cover-up of her pregnancy, an arranged battlefield killing of her loyal husband Uriah, and a scandalous marriage. Read the sordid affair in 2 Samuel 11, which concludes with this pronouncement: “The LORD was displeased with what David had done” (2 Samuel 11:27).



Searching the Scriptures Study Tip

Chuck Swindoll recommends using your imagination to step into the biblical text and fully engage with the emotion and meaning of the scene. Try this technique as you read 2 Samuel 12:1–14.

Step into the shoes of Nathan—a friend of David and his family—as God revealed to him the extent of David's sin and commanded Nathan to confront him (2 Samuel 12:1). Write down what you imagine were his thoughts and feelings.

What was the purpose of Nathan's story (12:1–6)? And what made it so effective for David, who once was a poor shepherd himself?



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Should Confront Someone in Sin?

2 Samuel 12:1–14

Observe carefully the text of Nathan’s words of confrontation in 2 Samuel 12:7–14. With what components of his confrontation can you identify? It may help to divide the section into three parts: 12:7–9; 12:10–11; and 12:13–14.

Nathan’s story gives David an emotional word picture that gives him *sight*—a visual image that touches his heart. Then Nathan speaks directly: “You are that man!” (2 Samuel 12:7). This turns the window into a mirror which gives David *insight* into his true nature. But Nathan doesn’t abandon David in his sin. He gives him *vision* of the reality of the consequences along with the *hope* of forgiveness. “The Lord has forgiven you” (12:13).

How do these components work together to make the most effective confrontation model?

What to Remember When Confronting Others

Chuck offers six guidelines for confronting as Nathan confronted David:

- *Let God lead.* The Lord sent Nathan. So also when we confront, we must sense God’s leading.
- *Choose the right time.* Pray for the best time to have the conversation, choose a private place free from distraction, and speak face to face.
- *Speak the truth.* Do your homework so that you can concentrate on accuracy and focus on objective facts.
- *Use wise words.* Nathan used a story. When you confront, use an emotional word picture to soften the person’s heart and bring down his or her defenses—rather than put the person on the defensive by issuing an accusation before he or she is ready to hear it.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Should Confront Someone in Sin?

2 Samuel 12:1–14

- *Always offer hope.* Your goal is always restoration through forgiveness, not condemnation and shame.
- *Leave the results with God.* You may not get the response you hoped for. Still, you have done your part. Let God continue to work in the person's life.

Is the Lord leading you to confront a friend or family member whom you love? Use these guidelines in formulating a plan.

Two final thoughts from Chuck Swindoll conclude our study:

[Confront] with tears, never with pride, never with joy. Your heart is broken, and because it's broken you have to say something because you care about that individual.

Confrontation is to be a gentle experience, not shameful. Not yelling, harsh anger, but gentleness lest you, too, one day fall under the same temptation.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, give me courage. Give me great grace. Give me good timing as I wait on Your leading as You work patiently in the lives of those I care about. In this period of grace, I pray that You soften the heart of the sinning person and use me to open the door for Your Spirit to heal and restore. Amen.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Should Confront Someone in Sin?

2 Samuel 12:1–14

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



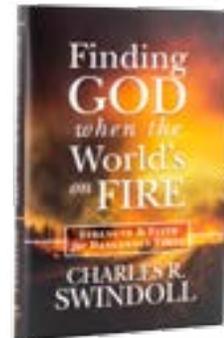
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S05
6

WHAT IF . . . ?

What If Someone Kicks You When You're Down?

2 Samuel 16:5–14



LET'S BEGIN HERE

David, already at his lowest, was pummeled with stones and debris and cursed in public. All this hate came from a man named Shimei, in 2 Samuel 16:5–14. Chuck Swindoll outlined in his message just how much we can learn from this ugly and vile scene about enduring mistreatment.

In today's study, we're going to focus on *how* David got to this low point with Shimei in the first place.



DIGGING DEEPER: OBSERVING THE CONTEXT

Chuck's message zoomed in on David's taunting by Shimei in 2 Samuel 16:5–14. David was at his low point. How did he get so low? If we just look at this passage in isolation, we will miss a good portion of *why* David was the butt of cruel treatment in the land of Bahurim instead of safe in his own kingdom.

In his book *Searching the Scriptures*, Chuck Swindoll writes,

There are some crucial questions we need to ask when we're interpreting the Bible to ensure that we do it responsibly and accurately. A good place to start is by asking, "What is the setting?" Every verse has a context, even the first verse of the Bible. When we begin reading in the middle of a paragraph . . . we need to see what comes before and after the verse. We need to place the verses we're studying into their proper contexts. If we fail to do so, we will be awash, and it won't be long before we slide down the slippery slope of error. The context helps us hold true to the correct meaning.¹

This would be a good place to pause and turn to a good commentary on 2 Samuel. First, read through the introductory material at the beginning of the section. Then locate the specific passage and make some notes about what is discussed. What jumps out at you as significant? What detail about this passage is highlighted in the commentary that will help you understand the setting of David's plight?

Quotable

*God will always
seem slower
than we expect,
especially when
we're going through
unfair treatment.
But count on this:
God misses nothing.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If Someone Kicks You When You're Down?

2 Samuel 16:5–14

How did David go from being king of the castle to fugitive pelted by rocks?

Let's read Scripture to discover the context that led to David's low point in Bahurim. (We're going to do a fair amount of reading in this lesson!)

Toxic Roots, Mangled Family Tree

- *David had many wives and children.*

Read 1 Chronicles 3:1–9, and list David's wives and children. Note that this is not an exhaustive list.

- *David sat in his palace when he should have been at war.*

Read 2 Samuel 11:1. Note how the narrator begins this chapter.

- *David raped Bathsheba and made sure her husband was murdered.*

Read 2 Samuel 11, and jot down observations.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If Someone Kicks You When You're Down?

2 Samuel 16:5–14

- *David did not protect his daughter Tamar or punish his son Amnon.*

Read 2 Samuel 13:1–22, and observe the people who speak and the people who are silent.

- *Absalom acted because David was absent and passive.*

Read 2 Samuel 13:22–39, and note the language, action, silence, and distance. Note Absalom's familiar strategy to ensnare and murder.

- *David longed for Absalom but could not bring himself to fully reconcile. Instead, David remained silent and distant.*

Note 2 Samuel 14:24, then 14:28–32. Did David's distance allow bitterness to fester in Absalom?

When David sinned against God, Bathsheba, and Uriah, how long did it take for God to allow David back into God's presence?



- Absalom sets in motion a coup d'état in 2 Samuel 15.

Read 2 Samuel 15 to see how Absalom campaigned to win the people's favor by being present. Jot down notes and observations.



Like Father, Like Son

There are two kinds of trouble a family can experience: trouble from without and trouble from within. Trouble from within devastated David's household. Deuteronomy 17:17 says, "The king must not take many wives for himself, because they will turn his heart away from the LORD," and David's insatiable collecting of women had devastating results. Second Samuel 11 is just a snapshot of what happens when the powerful king chooses what's right in his own eyes rather than the law of God.

David had been forgiven of his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11), but he had to live with the ongoing consequences of his sin.

Chuck Swindoll clarifies, "Some of you are saying, 'Well, wasn't David forgiven?' Absolutely. 'Well, didn't that mean that all was well?' Absolutely not. Some sins are followed by consequences, though there is forgiveness for any sin. And these consequences are bitter and difficult."

What were the consequences for David? God had pronounced that one of David's "companions" would lie with David's wives in broad daylight (2 Samuel 12:11 NASB). In other words, the sins David committed in secret would be committed against him for all to see.

The Hebrew word for "companion"—*rea*—has a significant semantic range, meaning "friend," "intimate partner," or "fellow." But coupled with Nathan's pronouncement that the disaster would come from David's *household* or family, "companion" in 2 Samuel 12:11 implies "relative."

In 2 Samuel 16:22, Absalom, in full view of Israel, had sex with his father's concubines—perhaps on the very roof from which David gazed upon Bathsheba. This act was also a political one: to sleep with the king's concubines was to declare oneself as king. When Absalom took David's concubines, Nathan's sad prophecy came to fruition.



Though the family dynamics of 2 Samuel 16 may not be the most cheerful Father's Day text, the relationship between David and Absalom serves as a potent cautionary tale. David's secret, selfish strategies—the assault of Bathsheba, the contract murder of Uriah—became the template of lust and power for David's sons, Amnon (2 Samuel 13:1–20), Absalom (16:20–23), and Adonijah (1 Kings 2:15–25).

Applying Scripture: What David's Context Means for Us

Now that we have obtained the historical context, we can see how David ended up at this low point in Bahurim. We can also admire his humble response to Shimei and deduce that perhaps David's acceptance of Shimei's words are a result of his recalling how his own sins catalyzed his circumstances.

Here are some lessons we can learn from studying David's path to Bahurim:

- Though God graciously forgives Christians, we often tell ourselves that grace means that all consequences for sin are removed. Sometimes that mentality allows us to be sucked under by the power of the flesh. But we have the power in the person of the Holy Spirit to say no to sin at every turn of our lives.²
- Though we think we're committing sins in secret, they are in full view of the living God.
- The people under our influence—children, coworkers, peers, spouses—are observing and emulating us more than we think.
- Men, the boys around you will learn how to regard women based on what you do and say.
- In Psalm 51:17 David wrote, “The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. / You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God,” because he *lived* it. God won't withdraw from us in our brokenness. God accepts our repentance.
- Even the godly can screw up. God's love still amazingly abounds.
- Seek reconciliation, not isolation. Don't expect less mature people to do the right thing: *you* do it.
- *Say something*. Don't be silent or passive in the face of injustice.

What are some additional applications you have gleaned from today's study?



Chuck's Application: Four Practical Suggestions

Chuck found four applications for us to remember when we're facing harsh and even unfair criticism:

- Ask God to give you a tougher hide.
- Remember that God is fully aware and engaged, even though He might be silent.
- Rely on God's grace to make things right.
- Find comfort by resting in God's mercy. Chuck says, "Mercy is God's ministry to the miserable. Do you realize that in the Scriptures there's a reference to the mercy seat? Sit there."



A FINAL PRAYER

Meditate on this hymn, "Come Ye Disconsolate," as a prayer to sit in God's mercy seat.

*Come, ye disconsolate, where'er ye languish;
Come to the mercy seat, fervently kneel;
Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish;
Earth has no sorrow that heav'n cannot heal.*

*Joy of the desolate, Light of the straying,
Hope of the penitent, fadeless and pure,
Here speaks the Comforter, tenderly saying,
"Earth has no sorrow that heav'n cannot cure."*

*Here see the Bread of Life; see waters flowing,
Forth from the throne of God, pure from above;
Come to the feast of love; come, ever knowing
Earth has no sorrow but heav'n can remove.³*

Endnotes

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale, 2016), 120–21.
2. Adapted from Insight for Living Ministries, *Insight's Bible Application Guide: Joshua–Esther* (Plano, Tex.: IFL Publishing House, 2013), 75.
3. Thomas Moore (st. 1–2, 1816, 1824) and Thomas Hastings (st. 3, 1832), "Come Ye Disconsolate," public domain.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If Someone Kicks You When You're Down?

2 Samuel 16:5–14

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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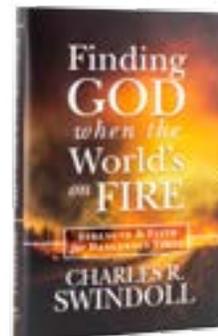
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WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Need a Second Chance?

Acts 13:2–5; 15:36–41



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Imagine a world in which second chances were not allowed. One chance would be all we would get, and a single mistake would disqualify us from trying again. No do-overs. No appeals for leniency. One misstep, and done!

What a harsh world that would be! And yet we can put ourselves into that world whenever we fail and decide to give up rather than try again. Perhaps we quit because, in our shame, we think we don't deserve a second chance. Or maybe, we give up because no one ever came alongside us with a consoling embrace and an offer to help us succeed.

In this study, we'll read the account of a young man whose failure landed him in the harsh world of no second chances . . . until a man whose name means "Son of Encouragement" ushered him into the kingdom of grace, where no sin is beyond forgiveness and no failure is final.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

We enter the story as Paul and Barnabas discuss plans to "go back and visit each city where [they] previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers are doing" (Acts 15:36). On this plan, they agreed. But then they hit a reef of conflict, as even the best of friends sometimes do.

What was their point of disagreement? Read Acts 15:37–38.

Quotable

*We talk today
about second
chances, but what
we're really dealing
with is forgiving
someone again and
again and again
and again and
again.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Need a Second Chance?

Acts 13:2–5; 15:36–41

Their argument spilled over from the rough seas they encountered on their first missionary journey. Among the many troubles on the trip was the heartbreaking blow when John Mark, who accompanied Paul and Barnabas “as their assistant” (Acts 13:5), deserted the mission in the port town of Perga on the coast of Pamphylia. The text doesn’t mention the reason, just the fact: “John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem” (13:13).

Let’s do a little digging to discover who John Mark was and some possible motives for him abandoning ship.



Searching the Scriptures Study Tools

In our *Searching the Scriptures* method, a handy tool to help unlock the meaning of a passage is a map of the region during that period of history. Visualize the physical backdrop of the story by locating Pamphylia. We recommend *Zondervan Essential Atlas of the Bible* by Carl G. Rasmussen, which you can purchase in the Insight for Living Ministries online store. This resource contains an excellent set of maps of the missionary journeys of Paul. You can also find Paul’s journeys in the maps section of your Bible.

Trace the route of Paul’s first missionary journey from Antioch in Syria through the island of Cyprus and then north to the coast of Pamphylia and beyond. Find the city of Perga, noticing its location in the Cestrus River plain at the foot of the treacherous Taurus Mountains.

Next, go to the Web site, Bible History Online (www.bible-history.com), click the “Tools” tab, open the *ISBE Bible Dictionary*, and read the article “Pamphylia.” What do you learn from this intriguing discussion of the history and conditions of the region?

Why Did John Mark Leave?

Bible commentators have offered various theories to solve the puzzle of why John Mark deserted the team to return to Jerusalem. One clue was his destination. To whom in Jerusalem may John Mark have longed to return, and how may that longing have played into his decision (Acts 12:12)?



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Need a Second Chance?

Acts 13:2–5; 15:36–41

Another clue is buried in Paul's comment to the Galatian believers about Paul's poor health when he first met them (after John Mark left). Read Galatians 4:13 in light of what you learned about "excessively hot" Pamphylia above, and then surmise a reason for John Mark calling it quits.

Other possibilities are listed at lumina.bible.org. Find Acts 13 in the left column and click on Constable's Notes in the right column, locating the comments on verse 13. Whether one or all of these motives prompted John Mark to leave, the bottom line is that in the heat of battle the young soldier went AWOL.

Issue and Viewpoints

The issue that sparked the clash between Paul and Barnabas was this: *Should someone who had defected them in the past be given a second chance?* Barnabas said, "Yes!" Paul countered, "No way!"

In *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Acts*, Chuck peels back the English biblical text to reveal their argument's passionate intensity as reflected in the Greek:

In Acts 15:37–38, the phrases "wanted to take" and "kept insisting" both use imperfect tense verbs, which indicates ongoing or repetitive action. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark and wouldn't let the issue go. Paul felt equally determined and refused to relent. Neither man would back down, which caused the argument to escalate to the point of "sharp disagreement" (*paraxysmos* [3948]). We derive our English word "paroxysm" from this Greek term. . . . Classical Greek medical writers use the word to describe a sudden, violent spasm, such as a body-racking cough or an epileptic seizure. The air grew thick with passion as each man convulsed with fiery emotion in response to the other.¹

As with most heated disagreements, *aspects of both viewpoints can be valid*. On the one hand, Barnabas was concerned about his cousin. Yes, John Mark was his *cousin* (Colossians 4:10)! On the other hand, Paul was concerned about the mission. For Barnabas, the issue involved his own flesh and blood and the future of a promising minister. For Paul, it was a matter of the salvation of souls and the future of Christianity. In Barnabas' sight line was the *man*; in Paul's, the *ministry*.²



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Need a Second Chance?

Acts 13:2–5; 15:36–41

As you consider Barnabas' and Paul's points of view, list the reasons for and against giving John Mark a second chance. To prompt your thinking, we've included a few Bible verses that the men could have referenced to support their case.

Barnabas' Viewpoint Psalm 103:8–10; Acts 9:26–30; 11:25–26	Paul's Viewpoint Proverbs 25:19; Luke 9:62

Each view aligns with Scripture. Both sides have merit. But neither man backed down. Unable to find middle ground, these two missionaries whose relationship held the closest of filial bonds chose the only course on which they could agree. Read Acts 15:39–41, and write down what happened and how God brought good out of a difficult circumstance.

Epilogue

Paul went on to plant churches through Asia and Europe, and Barnabas mentored John Mark, who later became the writer of the gospel of Mark and the object of Paul's highest regard (Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). The separation strategy worked. John Mark got his second chance *and* Christianity spread!



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Need a Second Chance?

Acts 13:2–5; 15:36–41

Bring It Home

What if, like John Mark, you need a second chance because of a past failure or sin? First, open Christ's door of forgiveness to enter God's throne of grace, where you will receive mercy for sinners in need (Hebrews 4:14–16). Second, pray for an encourager like Barnabas to mentor you. And third, follow these steps to maturity: humbly admit your wrong without making excuses, seek forgiveness from those offended, make restitution, accept any consequences, and, most of all, be teachable.

What if, like Paul and Barnabas, you disagree with someone about the wisdom of offering someone a second chance? If so, Chuck offers this path: work hard at seeing the other point of view, seek a wise compromise, care enough to work through it rather than stomp out of the room in anger, and, if you can't find resolution, determine to disagree without becoming disagreeable.

Are you in either of these situations currently—deciding whether to give someone a second chance? Review the points of this lesson, pray, and write down the direction you need to go.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me to see issues from all points of view. Deliver me from being closed-minded and disagreeable. Make me both a “forgiver” like Barnabas and an “achiever” like Paul—a person who balances forgiving grace and missional passion. And when I fail, help me not to quit in shame but to accept Your second chances and find encouragers who will guide me to a better way. Amen.

Endnotes

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Acts* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2016), 311. You can purchase this commentary at our online store, <https://store.insight.org>.
2. For an insightful imaginary dialogue between Paul and Barnabas, see Charles R. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Nashville: W Publishing, 2003), 171–72.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Need a Second Chance?

Acts 13:2–5; 15:36–41

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



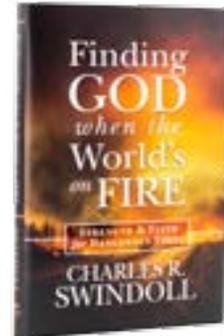
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S07
6

WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Struggle with a Permanent Disability?

2 Corinthians 12:1–10



LET'S BEGIN HERE

We are all disabled in one way or another. Our disabilities may not be obvious to other people, but they are there nonetheless. Like an illusionist who skillfully hides a playing card in the palm of his hand or up his shirtsleeve, we too hide our pains, heartaches, diseases, wounds, broken parts, and imperfections.

Shame and pride keep our disabilities safely tucked out of sight. In shame, we fear the humiliation of finger-pointing when others see our weaknesses, and in pride, we suppose that a show of perfection will elevate us to heights of success and acceptance.

However, a disability is not necessarily a disadvantage. What disables can *enable* us to achieve what we never imagined possible as we depend on a power outside ourselves: God's grace. In this study, Paul's story teaches that weaknesses can unlock spiritual power and raise us to higher levels of maturity. We just have to be vulnerable enough to show the hand we've been dealt.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In 2 Corinthians 12:1–10, Paul revealed parts of his life that he had held close to his vest. Read this passage once to get the flow of his thoughts, and then read it again with the following four-point outline in mind:

- Paul's unsurpassed privileges (12:1–4)
- Paul's uncommon humility (12:5–6)
- Paul's inescapable pain (12:7–8)
- Paul's paradoxical power (12:9–10)

Quotable

*God uses pain
and brokenness to
replace arrogance
and pride to make
us consciously
dependent on Him.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Struggle with a Permanent Disability?

2 Corinthians 12:1–10



Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

When searching the Scriptures, gather resources that will guide you in your study. Make certain you have a Bible dictionary and a concordance handy as well as a reliable commentary on the book of the Bible you're studying. One resource that we'll refer to throughout this study is Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: 1 and 2 Corinthians*, which is available at the Insight for Living Ministries online store: insight.org.

Now let's use our *Searching the Scriptures* tools of observation, interpretation, correlation, and application to discover the treasures in this passage.

Observations of 2 Corinthians 12:1–6

Putting the first two main points together, make observations of what you see in 2 Corinthians 12:1–6. First, what experience does Paul mention in verse 1, and how does he describe it in verses 2–4?

Second, what do you notice about Paul's humility in verses 5–6?

According to the timeline on page 278 of Chuck's commentary, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians about AD 55 while he was in Macedonia. If he had his vision 14 years earlier (12:2), where would he have been? Read Acts 9:30 for a clue.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Struggle with a Permanent Disability?

2 Corinthians 12:1–10

Paul’s “wonderful revelations from God” (2 Corinthians 12:7) occurred sometime before Barnabas brought him from Tarsus to Antioch (Acts 11:25), which happened about a year prior to his first missionary journey. During that time, Paul kept his story a secret in order to avoid drawing people’s attention away from Christ and to himself. Now the apostle was on his *third* missionary journey, having planted churches in Asia, Macedonia, and Greece—including the troublesome church at Corinth.

Paul had already dealt with problems of immorality and disorderliness. Now Paul’s opponents in Corinth were slinging mud at him, forcing him to boast in himself to defend his apostleship. This was a fine kettle of fish for humble Paul who found himself in a terrible bind. He always put Christ and the gospel center stage and never sought the spotlight for himself (2 Corinthians 12:5–6). What was he to do?

Read the complete introduction to 2 Corinthians in Chuck’s commentary for a fascinating explanation of the background of this letter and, specifically, Paul’s defense of his ministry. Also, you can access a helpful online source at <https://lumina.bible.org>. Click on Constable’s Notes, and read his introduction to 2 Corinthians. What additional observations does your research uncover?

Chuck sums up,

As Paul wrote his response to this new turn of events in the drama of the Corinthian church, he unleashed his emotions like never before. . . . He “boasts” in the manner of his adversaries, setting forth his superior qualifications as an apostle of God (11:16–12:21), *concluding that his authority comes just as much from his suffering in weakness as from his astonishing revelations and miracles.* (emphasis added)¹



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Struggle with a Permanent Disability?

2 Corinthians 12:1–10

Observations of 2 Corinthians 12:7–10

Although the false apostles intended to lure Paul into prideful boasting, Paul did what only a true apostle would do: exalt the power of Christ. What words and phrases stand out in 2 Corinthians 12:7–10?

How does Chuck explain what Paul refers to as “a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan” in his commentary on page 469? For an additional resource, read Constable’s notes on 2 Corinthians 12:7 at lumina.bible.org. What does your research reveal?

Interpretation of 2 Corinthians 12:1–10

Now let’s summarize the passage. Read 2 Corinthians 12:1–10 again, and this time, write down in your own words what the passage is saying.

As you interpret a passage, you will discover timeless truths that apply in any culture. For example, here’s a principle from Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 12:6, “I don’t want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message.” *The most effective witness isn’t accomplished by spiritual bragging but in a changed life and a clear message about Christ.*



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Struggle with a Permanent Disability?

2 Corinthians 12:1–10

Now you try. In the chart below are some statements from the passage. Write down the principles that you glean.

Bible Verses	Principles
So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh. (2 Corinthians 12:7)	
Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” (12:8–9)	
I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. (12:9)	
That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (12:10)	

Paul’s painful affliction was a disability in the sense that it disabled him from functioning in his own strength. It also pulled the plug on his pride! No neon marquee displayed Paul’s credits. Because of his limitations, he had to give credit to Christ who worked beyond Paul’s weakness.

What a paradox! The pain that limited Paul gave him access to Christ’s unlimited power! Once Paul settled into this truth, he could say, “I was glad to let it happen.”

I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ’s strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become.
(2 Corinthians 12:9–10 MSG)



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Struggle with a Permanent Disability?

2 Corinthians 12:1–10

Correlation with 2 Corinthians 4:5–10

Correlate this passage with an earlier passage in Paul's letter, 2 Corinthians 4:5–10, and write down the insights you gather as you compare this passage with what you learned in 12:1–10. What additional treasures of truth do you uncover?



Bring It Home

Application is the final step. Pick one of the principles above, and write it in such a way that is most effective to you. Use “I” statements as you state your desire to put the truth into practice, and give an action plan for what you intend to do.

Chuck's applications give you further encouragement.

- *Accept your disability.* God has a plan that might seem beyond your abilities. This will give you perspective!
- *Think of your disability as a friend, not an enemy.* It can draw you closer to God as you depend on His power. This will give you joy!
- *Focus on the flower, not the thorns.* See your disabilities in light of the “glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!” (2 Corinthians 4:17). This will give you hope!



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Struggle with a Permanent Disability?

2 Corinthians 12:1–10



A FINAL PRAYER

As you would write in a journal, conclude this study by writing your own prayer to the Lord, reflecting on Christ's power and His presence through your disability.

Father,

Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale, 2015), 285, 286.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Struggle with a Permanent Disability?

2 Corinthians 12:1–10

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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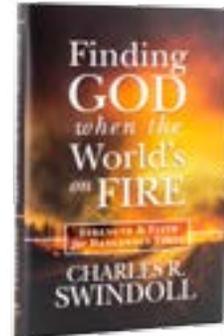
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S08
8

WHAT IF . . . ?

What If a Person Is an Unrepentant Troublemaker?

Romans 16:17; Titus 1:4–7; 3:3–11



LET'S BEGIN HERE

In his message, Chuck Swindoll said:

Every minister of the gospel must be “as wise as a serpent and as harmless as a dove.” We who are engaged in ministry must be both tough and tender. Not either/or but both/and. Both devoted and disciplined. Both compassionate and strong. Both understanding and discerning. Both gracious with people and impervious to destructive criticism.

This is a huge responsibility! Before we dismiss the charge to strike a “both/and” balance in dealing with unrepentant people as something relegated solely to pastors, we need to remember that *every one of us is a minister of the gospel*.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, let's delve deeper into the background of the book of Titus—the epistle containing the principles of balance as a minister of the gospel.



DIGGING DEEPER

Now would be a good time for you to look at the table of contents page of your study Bible. Do you see where Titus fits into the overall organization of the Bible? Titus is part of what we call the *Epistles*—a genre of literature in the New Testament written by apostles to provide believers guidance for daily living. Titus is a Pauline epistle, which simply means that Paul penned the letter to Titus.

Titus is one of the lesser-known epistles of the New Testament, so take some time to get to know the book. Locate a commentary on the book of Titus and spend some time reading the introductory material that orients you to the nature, context, and literary uniqueness of this letter. All of this will help you discover the meaning of the passage you are studying.

Quotable

You want a church that's healthy and encouraging and positive? It starts with you.

It started with me.

— Charles R. Swindoll



**Surveying the Shelves . . . Background on the Book of Titus**

Paul identified himself as the author of the letter to Titus, calling himself a “bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ” (Titus 1:1 NASB). The origin of Paul’s relationship with Titus is shrouded in mystery, though we can gather that Titus may have been converted under the ministry of Paul, who called him “my true child in a common faith” (1:4 NASB).

Titus accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey, during which the apostle sent him to Corinth at least once (2 Corinthians 2:12–13; 7:5–7, 13–15; 8:6, 16–24). Paul clearly held Titus in a position of great respect as a friend and fellow worker for the gospel, praising Titus for his affection, his earnestness, and his bringing comfort to others.

Paul wrote his letter to Titus from Nicopolis in AD 63, after the apostle’s release from his Roman imprisonment. Upon leaving Timothy in Ephesus to minister there, Paul accompanied Titus to the island of Crete, where he intended Titus to lead and organize the island’s churches in their early years of existence. While the gospel had no doubt spread to Crete soon after Peter’s sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:11), Paul and Titus likely evangelized on the island in the weeks before Paul commissioned Titus to a leadership position there.

Why Is Titus So Important?

Three summaries of the incarnation dot the pages of Titus, providing a framework within which the Christian can view the work of God in the world and in individual lives (Titus 1:1–4; 2:11–14; 3:4–7). All three passages involve the manifestation, or appearance, of God in Christ, rooting the Christian faith in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. When God the Son took on human flesh in the person of Jesus, He poured out His grace on all humanity, cleansing us from sin and purifying us for Himself.

What’s the Big Idea?

The doctrine of the incarnation in the letter to Titus grounds its message of producing right living through the careful attention to theological truth. The churches on Crete were just as susceptible to false teachers as any other church, so Paul directed Titus to establish a group of faithful elders to oversee the doctrinal purity and good conduct of the believers on Crete. Paul exhorted Titus to “speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1 NASB), a clear direction that this should be the young pastor’s primary role.

However, Paul also understood that when a body of believers embraces sound doctrine, the result is changed and purified lives that produce “good deeds” (mentioned in Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14 NASB). God’s grace is the motivation for all good deeds. Paul gave instructions to Titus about the roles of specific groups of people—older men, older women, young women, young men, and slaves—as well as general instructions to all believers about their conduct. Right living was essential because Christ “gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed,” saving us “by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (2:14; 3:5 NASB).



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If a Person Is an Unrepentant Troublemaker?

Romans 16:17; Titus 1:4–7; 3:3–11

What are some personal applications that you take away from reading the background of Titus?

How Do I Apply This?

How seriously do you consider your beliefs about God in the overall scheme of your life? The book of Titus reminds us that our beliefs about God impact every decision we make. Sometimes it is difficult for believers today to see the point of getting all worked up about the person and nature of Christ or the doctrine of the Trinity. However, Paul made clear that a church that teaches and preaches sound doctrine will see results in the lives of its people. Not only will people be saved from their sins, but God’s grace will also motivate them to live out that saving faith with renewed and purified lives.

Many churches today focus more on the form of their worship—music styles, lighting, and building designs—than they do on the content of the faith they mean to proclaim. And while the form of a church’s worship is vital to reaching its community for Christ, without a firm base of sound doctrine, the church will lay its foundation in shifting and sinking sand. Make doctrine a priority in your own life, as well as encouraging it in your churches. Nothing is more significant than a solid foundation in Christ.

What Are “These Teachings”?

In his message, Chuck refers to Titus 3:8: “This is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to insist on **these teachings** so that all who trust in God will devote themselves to doing good. These teachings are good and beneficial for everyone” (emphasis added).

What are “these teachings?” The reader cannot definitively know unless he or she looks back to previous verses for context.

Chuck says, “You’ve heard me say it before, and I’ll repeat it. Every verse has a context. This is a classic example of a verse in the middle of a context.”

Which verses in Titus 3 specify what “teachings” Paul referred to?



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If a Person Is an Unrepentant Troublemaker?

Romans 16:17; Titus 1:4–7; 3:3–11

Chuck referred his listeners to Titus 3:4–7 to glean the context of “these teachings”:

“When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.”

Take a few moments to read “these teachings,” so you know them for yourself.

Why did God our Savior save us?

What did He do with our sins?

Through whom do we have new life?

Are believers right in Christ’s sight?



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If a Person Is an Unrepentant Troublemaker?

Romans 16:17; Titus 1:4–7; 3:3–11

What future occurrence can we be confident in?

Accurate teaching prevents counterfeit faith. Paul wrote this letter to Titus to thwart false teaching, namely the attempts of some troublemakers to constrain the grace of Jesus with hierarchy and legalism: “Do not get involved in foolish discussions about spiritual pedigrees or in quarrels and fights about obedience to Jewish laws” (Titus 3:9).

Chuck’s Application: A Helpful Guideline

Chuck concludes his message with an ancient guideline passed down within the Christian faith for centuries:

“In essentials . . . unity. In nonessentials . . . liberty. In all things . . . charity.”

Jot down your paraphrase of this guideline, noting how it relates to the background of Titus.

What are some of your takeaways from today’s study?



A FINAL PRAYER

Lord, help me to extend to others the grace You have given me. Through Your Spirit, help me to call others to repentance when necessary—and to joyfully restore the repentant. Lord, keep me from relishing the opportunity to correct a brother or sister in Christ. And may I be a source of support and encouragement to those in spiritual leadership. In Jesus’ name, amen.



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What If a Person Is an Unrepentant Troublemaker?

Romans 16:17; Titus 1:4–7; 3:3–11

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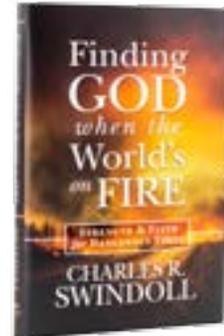
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S09
6

WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Talk Too Much?

Matthew 15:10–20; James 3:1–12



LET'S BEGIN HERE

That's quite a personal question! *Me? Talk too much?* If you're not certain whether this topic applies, carefully reflect on these questions:

- Have you thought, *I shouldn't say this . . .* and then you go right ahead and spill it?
- Have you promised to keep information confidential only to leak it later?
- Do you sometimes fill the air with many words but say very little?
- Have you spoken against others behind their backs and then said something completely different when you are standing alongside them?
- Have you spewed criticism one moment and then, later, oozed insincere compliments?

See yourself? If so, take heart. We all have talked too much . . . or said something hurtful . . . or let our words run wild when we should have leashed them. Taming our tongue is a discipline that everyone must master, and there's no better teacher than our Lord Jesus. He revealed the *heart* of our tongue problem.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

According to Luke 6:43–45, what did Jesus say is the source from which our words flow?

Quotable

You have been given the power to control your speech. He is called the Holy Spirit. You can't tame your own tongue, but the Spirit of God can.

— Charles R. Swindoll



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Talk Too Much?

Matthew 15:10–20; James 3:1–12

Our tongue is neither friend nor foe. It's merely a delivery device, like a bucket that draws water from a well. According to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 15:17–20, what sins can poison the well?

Our words both *reveal* and *relay* our true nature, whether good or bad. They are the buckets that draw sweet or bitter water from the well, the channels into which our pure or polluted spring flows and which convey to the world the truth about us. Consequently, those who control their words must control far more than just the muscle that forms the words in their mouths; *they must have mastery over the deepest parts of who they are.*

Such mastery is no small accomplishment! It follows, then, that those who influence others with their words should be held to a higher standard of spiritual maturity, as the apostle James explained in James 3:1–12—a section on controlling the tongue we'll study next using the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study.



***Searching the Scriptures* Study Tool**

When searching the Scriptures, gather resources that will guide your study, including a concordance and a Bible dictionary. A reliable commentary on James is *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: James, 1 & 2 Peter*, which is available at the Insight for Living Ministries online store: insight.org.

Helpful Hint

Remember: *observation* is a critical starting point. Read James 3:1–12, and make some initial observations about what you see. For instance, are there any repeated words? Did James use any connecting words that offer clues into what he was emphasizing? Make notes on a separate sheet of paper about what you discover.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Talk Too Much?

Matthew 15:10–20; James 3:1–12

Warning to Teachers

We all depend on teachers to tell us the truth, be responsible guides, and live what they teach—three essential characteristics of qualified teachers. If any group of people must master their tongues, as well as their lives, it is this group, which includes pastors, counselors, mentors, and anyone who uses words to influence. What warning did James give in James 3:1?

What explanation did James offer in verse 2?

Examine a correlating passage: 1 Timothy 1:1–7. It might be helpful to read 1 Timothy 1 in its entirety to get the context for Paul's instructions to young pastor Timothy. How does this passage relate to what James was concerned about in James 3:1–2?

James and Paul understood that words have the power to build up or tear down—a power that James vividly described in James 3:3–12.

Since we're on the subject of teachers, let's examine this passage from the point of view of a teacher preparing an expository Bible lesson. Exposition is drawing principles and application from the biblical text, verse by verse, and presenting those principles in ways that will be helpful to an audience.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Talk Too Much?

Matthew 15:10–20; James 3:1–12

Read again James 3:3–12, noting how James organized his instruction into three sections. Each section concerning the tongue could become a Bible study, sermon outline, or main point in a brief devotional prepared for a group. Take a close look at the expositional outline below. Fill in some explanatory interpretations next to each set of verses about what seems significant to you.

The Tongue . . . Small but Powerful (James 3:3–5)

Illustration	Interpretation
A horse with bit and bridle (3:3)	
A ship with a rudder (3:4)	
A fire with a spark (3:5)	

What would you say is the overarching **principle** regarding the tongue, based on these three illustrations?



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Talk Too Much?

Matthew 15:10–20; James 3:1–12

The Tongue . . . Necessary but Dangerous (James 3:6–8)

Illustration	Interpretation
Fire . . . a danger that has its roots in Satan's intent to destroy (3:6)	
Beasts . . . contrasted with the untamable tongue (3:7–8a)	
Poison . . . the grim perspective of an uncontrolled tongue (3:8b)	

What would you say is the overarching **principle** regarding the tongue, based on these three illustrations?

The Tongue . . . Helpful but Inconsistent (James 3:9–12)

The human tongue can offer blessings one moment and curses the next! What does James say about the fickle nature of the tongue (3:9–10)?

What is his point in contrasting our words' inconsistency with nature's consistency (3:11–12)?



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Talk Too Much?

Matthew 15:10–20; James 3:1–12

What would you say is the overarching **principle** regarding the tongue, based on these verses?

Application

Good exposition always includes relevant application. Wrap up your lesson plan by imagining a group that you'd like to teach. Write down three specific applications the group members can put into practice as they interact with each, based on the exposition above.

1.

2.

3.

Bring It Home

Pick one of the principles from above, and write it in such a way that is most effective to you. Use “I” statements as you state your desire to put the truth into practice, and give an action plan for what you intend to do.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Talk Too Much?

Matthew 15:10–20; James 3:1–12

Chuck's applications can offer further guidance.

- *You'll never regret restraining your tongue.* You'll always be grateful you controlled your words rather than letting them run wild. Once loosed, unrestrained words can wreak terrible damage.
- *Apologize for the times you failed to restrain your tongue.* Can you call to mind people whom your words have hurt? Admit the wrong, seek forgiveness, and make it right.

**A FINAL PRAYER**

As you would write in a journal, conclude this study by writing your own prayer to the Lord, reflecting on your need for the Spirit's power to control your tongue and transform your heart.

Father,

Amen.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Talk Too Much?

Matthew 15:10–20; James 3:1–12

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



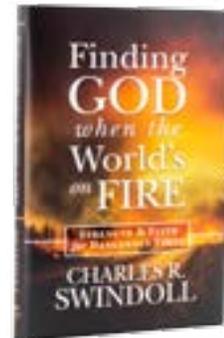
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WHAT IF . . . ?

What If Your Boss Is Unfair and Disrespectful?

Genesis 1:1, 27, 31; 2:1–2, 15; 3:1, 4, 10–19; 1 Peter 2:13–21



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Read these quotes by Chuck Swindoll from today's message:

“We need a better theology of work.”

“Think about it. When was the last time anyone in any church that you have attended, including the pulpit or some teacher . . . seriously addressed the subject of your everyday job?”

“How can anyone remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of your life?”

How often *have* we discussed and developed a practical theology of work . . . not one that creates a false dichotomy between the secular and the sacred but a theology that helps those of us—the majority of us—who are employed in the marketplace? How do we do our jobs in a way that honors our Savior? Let's dig in and create a lesson plan to develop a robust theology of work.



DIGGING DEEPER: THE GENESIS OF WORK

The first and second chapters of Genesis provide us with a framework of idealism that characterized the world before sin entered it. Even in this sinless Eden, work was a vital part of perfect, everyday life. In fact, work existed before humanity existed.

Chuck zoned in on specific verses to highlight the genesis of work.

Take notes to paraphrase Genesis 1:31–2:2.

Quotable

*Life is not divided
into sacred and
secular categories.
Everything we do is
for God's glory.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Genesis 1:1, 27, 31; 2:1–2, 15; 3:1, 4, 10–19; 1 Peter 2:13–21

Now, list the different attributes and duties of man and woman as listed in Genesis 1:26–28.

Would any of the attributes or duties listed qualify as work?

Chuck gleaned three principles from God’s creative work in Genesis 1 and 2:

- *God can do nothing that is not inherently good, so work is good.*
- *God referred to His own work as “very good,” so work has intrinsic value.*
- *Work that is originated by God has dignity and significance.*

Based on the commands God gave to man and woman in Genesis 1:26–28, what are some principles concerning work that you can glean?

Read Colossians 3:17, 23. List some opportunities in your daily life that you can purpose to not only do well but use to represent God.



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Work = Slavery?

A great resource to augment your theology of work would be *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: James, 1 & 2 Peter*. This book is packed with the theological depth and practical application you've come to expect from Chuck Swindoll.

In this excerpt, we learn more about the uncomfortable subject of slavery and how to interpret the principle behind Peter's first century words to apply to our lives today.

Knowing the human tendency to rebel against unfair treatment, Peter urges Christian servants to submit to their masters, even to those who are rough and unreasonable. Admittedly, that's a hard load to bear. But Peter's exhortation to submission makes sense when we connect it to our calling to shine as reflections of Christ's character in a dark, godless world. Peter makes this point clear when he brings it back to Christ's own unjust suffering: "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:21–22). When we suffer unjustly at the hands of a cruel dictator or an unfair and overbearing boss, we participate in Christ's own ministry of unjust suffering on behalf of others. Christ suffered on behalf of us. We suffer on behalf of unbelievers who need to see the gospel lived out in our everyday lives. . . . [Peter] points us to Jesus Christ as the epochal example. Christ entrusted Himself to "Him who judges righteously," and could therefore endure injustice with hope. Similarly, we can entrust ourselves to the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls (2:25). In short, by following the example of Christ, we can secure an unshakable hope in hurtful times.¹



Teaching the Lesson

Let's take this opportunity to plan a lesson around the theology of work. A lesson isn't relegated to a Sunday sermon or a Sunday school class, but it is a way to honor the principle of 1 Peter 3:15: "Worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it" (NLT). This might be an opportunity through your church or over coffee with a friend. Whether you're teaching to one person or a small group, take time to prepare carefully. Here's how:

You Are the First Audience

You are the first person impacted and changed by what you teach—at least, you ought to be. Set the same—or higher—expectations for yourself that you will for your audience. Wrestle with the text; seek God through prayer; and do what the Word says: forgive. It probably won't be long before you have an opportunity to practice what you teach.



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Be Humble . . . Be Compassionate

Do you remember a time when someone shamed you or shouted at you with such fervent condescension that your heart and mind were changed? Remember that time when a person who didn't even know your name "felt led" to criticize you? Remember how "grateful" you were?

Chances are, you came away hurt and discouraged. If there was any truth hidden in that person's message, it was lost in his or her vitriolic delivery. Very few people can learn when they feel attacked. Conversely, when a person communicates love and care along with a message, we are more likely to receive it.

Humility and compassion are absolutely vital for effective teaching. As the saying goes, "They won't care what you know until they know that you care."

List the opportunities for compassion that you can potentially have while teaching a theology of work. Think about God's motivation to create a setting for humans to work, His priorities of rest and reflection, Jesus' example of work and rest, and Jesus' unjust treatment. Also, ruminate on your own stories connected to being an employer or employee—what you wish you had known.

Check Your Theology

Be careful about contorting a principle to fit a purpose apart from what the original author intended. For example, it's possible to teach 1 Peter 2:18–19 as a proof-text for slavery and abuse. That's why *correlation* is such an important step in studying a passage. Comparing Scripture with Scripture helps us to interpret what we read accurately. First Peter 2 exists in subjection to the entire biblical canon. From the time of Moses in the book of Exodus to the words of Jesus in John 8:36, God had been about *freedom*. Paradoxically, though, Jesus used His freedom to lay down His life for us.

How do you check your theology?

- *Correlation.* You can use technology or a concordance to investigate what the Bible says about work and service.



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Genesis 1:1, 27, 31; 2:1–2, 15; 3:1, 4, 10–19; 1 Peter 2:13–21

- *Commentary.* As previously mentioned, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: James, 1 & 2 Peter* provides great commentary on 1 Peter. You will also want to check a commentary on the book of Genesis for a fuller view on the origin of work. Good commentaries will reverence the inerrancy of the Bible, draw on scholarship from the church fathers to present day, engage in word studies, and give a range of scholarly theories when they examine difficult passages.
- *Context.* The context of 1 Peter is wildly different than that of Genesis 1 and 2. The apostle Peter recorded the intense persecution the newborn Christian church was experiencing under the merciless hand of Roman Emperor Nero. Most of us cannot fathom the brutality Christians suffered. Consider and make plain to those whom you teach the *depth* of faith necessary to submit to authorities and employers in that hostile environment!
- *Conversation.* We weren't meant to learn the Bible in an individualistic vacuum. Talk about the Bible with other Christians who are walking with the Lord, in environments where you are *not* the teacher.

Glean the Principles

What is the universal (true for all time) principle of the passage—the kernel of truth that must be shared? One universal principle that Chuck gleans is this: *employees should be trustworthy and cooperative, and employers should be fair and caring.*

Take a moment to think of some additional principles that would help you teach on the theology of work. Write them down here:

Know Your Audience

This isn't always possible, but it's best to know to whom you are speaking. Different audiences may face age or gender-specific challenges and may be in varied stages of spiritual maturity. Ideally, you want to tailor your teaching to that audience in such a way that they have tangible takeaways to go and *live* what they have learned.



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Who is a potential audience for you to teach? (This includes your children, relatives, coworkers, as well as more traditional ministry contexts.) How would you tailor your teaching to reach your chosen audience?

Chuck's Application: A Theology of Work in Four Statements

- *Jesus Christ is Lord over all life.* There is nothing you can name that doesn't fall under His lordship.
- *Life is not divided into two separate categories—secular and sacred.* No job you hold is unimportant or less important than another.
- *The nature of work is good, not evil.*
- *The way you do your work is a direct reflection on the One who called you to it.*

What are some applicational takeaways you garnered from the message and study?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I am in awe of Your Son, who knew His work and accomplished it, despite the slander, setbacks, and setbacks. May I follow in His footsteps and faithfully represent Him with my work. Amen.

Endnotes

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: James, 1 & 2 Peter* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale, 2014), 197, 198.



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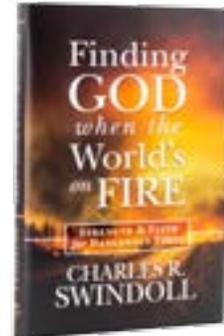
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WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Were to Die Tonight?

Luke 16:19–31



LET'S BEGIN HERE

In this series on the “what ifs” of life, we’ve come face to face with the possibility of losing everything, failure, being lied to, having a permanent disability, and even a situation in which our worst enemies stalk us from the shadows. Just recalling these topics can make us *shudder!*

Thankfully, our mighty God has walked with us into each fearful circumstance, shining the light of His Word and inspiring steady faith. “Don’t be afraid,” He reassures us, “for I am with you. . . . I will hold you up with my victorious right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

In our final, climactic study, we venture through the iron gate of our hometown cemetery into the most terrifying of all fears: death. Here, we peer into the darkness of our own grave as we ask the question: *What if you were to die tonight?*

Oh, how we need God’s reassuring hand and the light of His Word to help us answer this question!



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Secular wisdom stands helpless at death’s threshold, unable to unlock the mysteries of the afterlife. The Scriptures, however, lead us through the veil and illumine a realm beyond our world, revealing what life is like on the other side of death.



Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

One of Chuck Swindoll’s recommended Bible study tools is a chart. Charts help us visualize and consolidate passages into a map to guide our understanding of God’s truth.

The chart by Chuck Swindoll on the following page illustrates the Bible’s teaching on what happens to believers and unbelievers after they die. Let’s study this chart in detail and, afterward, read an instructive story from Jesus about the contrasting fates of two men who died.

Quotable

*God’s written
Word is the
most compelling
information to
prepare us for life
after death.*

— Charles R. Swindoll

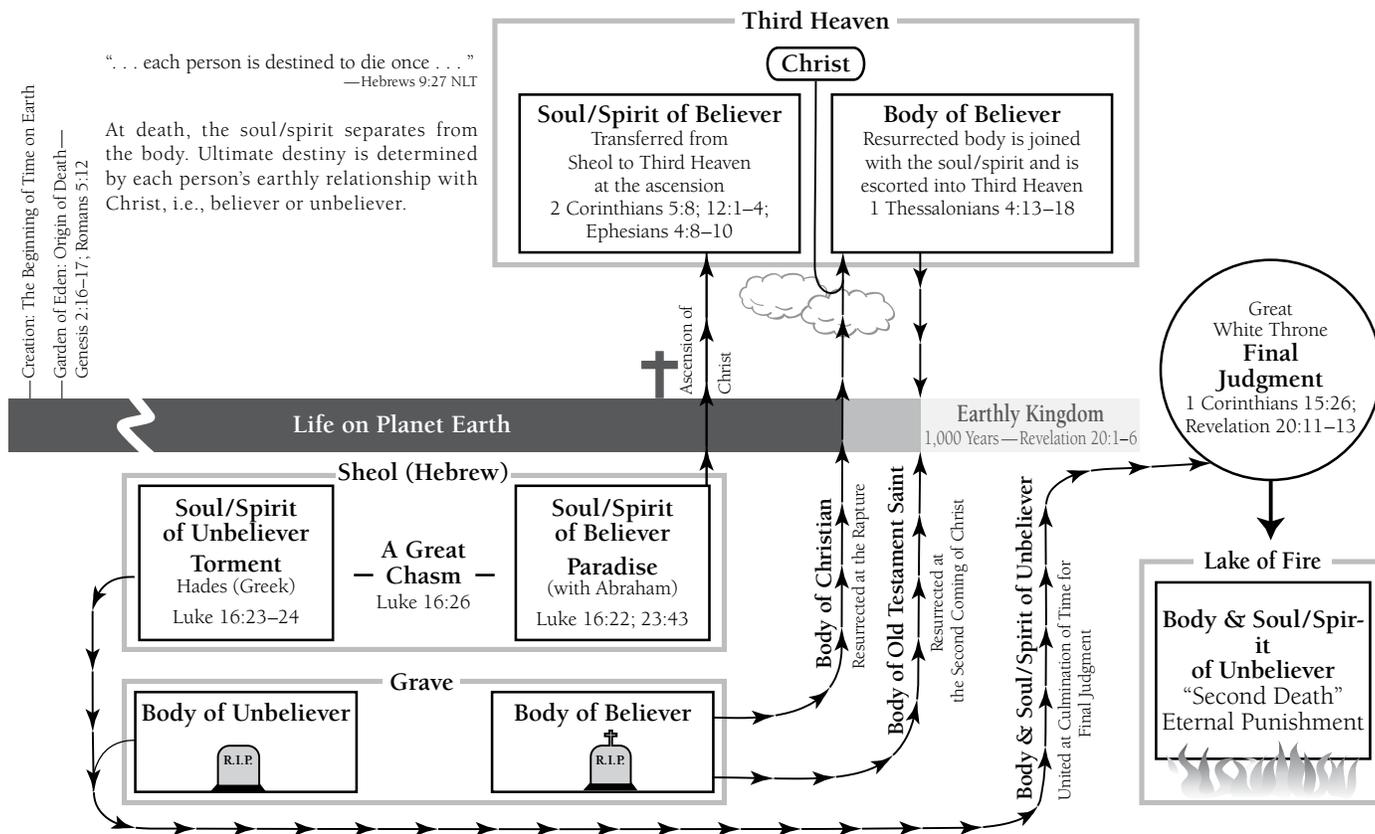


WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Were to Die Tonight?

Luke 16:19–31

When People Die . . . What Happens?



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A General Understanding of the Life Beyond

When did the seed of death first enter the soil of human history, and what was the bitter fruit (Genesis 2:16–17; Romans 5:12)?



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Luke 16:19–31

What happens when we die? Our soul/spirit (our *intangible* part, the real *us* that lives on) separates from our body. Our body (the *tangible* part) dies and decays.

In the chart, the thick black line represents time before and after Jesus' death on a cross and resurrection three days later, history's pinnacle events that give hope to every person who has ever lived! What did Christ accomplish for us through the cross and the empty tomb? Look up the following verses, and write down what they say.

1 John 2:2

Acts 2:24; Romans 6:9

Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8–9

On the cross, Christ gave Himself as the sacrifice for our sins, and then He *conquered death* by rising from the grave. He offers eternal life to all who receive His gift through faith. By faith in Christ, we cling to the hope that “God will raise us from the dead by his power just as he raised our Lord from the dead” (1 Corinthians 6:14; see also 15:23; 2 Corinthians 4:14).

When will God raise us from the dead? And what about those who reject Christ's offer of salvation? To find the answers, follow the timeline on Chuck Swindoll's chart, and fill in the following blanks.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Were to Die Tonight?

Luke 16:19–31

First, let's look at the timeline prior to the cross. At death, the bodies of Old Testament *believers and unbelievers* went into the _____.

Where did the soul/spirits of dead Old Testament *unbelievers* go? _____

And where did the soul/spirits of dead Old Testament *believers* go? _____

The Hebrew word for the place of the dead is _____. It is a single destination, but its two parts are divided by _____.

The Destiny of Unbelievers

What is the ultimate destiny of unbelievers? Find the boxes “Soul/Spirit of Unbeliever” and “Body of Unbeliever” on the lower left side, and follow the arrowed line to the circle “Final Judgment” and box “Lake of Fire.” Read Revelation 20:11–15, and write down what you discover.

The Destiny of Believers

In stark contrast to the destiny of unbelievers is the destiny of believers. Find the two boxes titled “Soul/Spirit of Believer,” one below and one above the timeline. The box above the timeline represents heaven where Christ is—which Paul called the “third heaven” in 2 Corinthians 12:1–4. The box below the line represents the Old Testament believers who died before Christ. Christ transferred their soul/spirits to heaven when “He led captive a host of captives” (Ephesians 4:8 NASB) at His ascension.

What happens to believers' soul/spirits after death? Read 2 Corinthians 5:8 and Philippians 1:23, and write down the phrases that indicate that we go directly to Christ's presence in heaven when we die.



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Were to Die Tonight?

Luke 16:19–31

What happens to believers' bodies after they go into the grave? Those Christ-followers who died after the death and resurrection of Christ are part of His church. Write down what happens to these believers' bodies, according to 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18.

When Christ gathers or “raptures” His church, He will give them new bodies—which Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 15:42–44, 51–57. What do these verses say?

What about the bodies of Old Testament believers? They will be part of the resurrection that John refers to in Revelation 20:1–6. What do these verses say?

We've zoomed through a lot of biblical theology! Now let's take a seat in Jesus' audience and listen in as He gives us a rare peek into the afterlife through His story of The Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19–31.

A Story of Two Men Who Died

As the curtain opens on Jesus' story, we see an opulent estate, where a rich man enjoys a luxurious lifestyle, while Lazarus, the beggar at his gate, hungers for the scraps that feed the rich man's dogs. Read the first scene of the story, Luke 16:19–21. What key words and descriptors do you observe?



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Were to Die Tonight?

Luke 16:19–31

In the second scene, the fortunes of both men reverse as their souls pass through the portal of death. Read Luke 16:22–26, and describe what you see. Where do these men fit in the chart above?

The third scene contains the moral of Jesus' story. Read Luke 16:27–31, and write down the lesson that Jesus is teaching.

A Summary of Lessons Learned

Chuck's summary includes three points about the precious value of God's Word to help us understand the ultimate issues of life, death, and the life to come:

- *God's Word is the most important evidence.* Nothing else is as effective in convincing people of the truth. Even a miracle won't soften a person's heart like God's Word will.
- *God's Word is the most compelling information to prepare us for life after death.* The Bible is more compelling than people's opinions, superstition, or any worldly philosophy.
- *Those who ignore the Word of God in life will be rejected by the God of the Word in eternity.* This is a heavy truth to bear. The writer to the Hebrews clearly sets before us both the warning of judgment and the promise of salvation:

And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ died once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him. (Hebrews 9:27–28)



WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Were to Die Tonight?

Luke 16:19–31

Bring It Home

Ask yourself the question that began our study, “What if you were to die tonight?” Would you spend eternity with Christ in heaven?

If you’re not certain that death would usher you instantaneously into the presence of Christ, please make certain right now by trusting Christ as your Savior. Answer yes to Jesus’ question in John 11:25–26.

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” (NASB)

Yes, I believe!

Now, with eternity in your heart, spend your life with eternity in view. Don’t be like the foolish rich man, who lived in luxury during his days on earth but was destitute for eternity. Instead, store up treasure in heaven by helping those in need—the Lazarus who lies at your gate. And when the “what ifs” of life threaten you, don’t let fear control you. Instead, “Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3)—safe and secure forever.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the life You offer . . . abundant life . . . a life of forgiveness filled with purpose and meaning. Take all of my fears and superstitions, and fill my emptiness with hope when the bottom drops out or sickness comes. I turn to You. I put my faith in Your Son, Jesus. And I rest in the promise of Your Word both now and forever. Amen.



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Luke 16:19–31

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



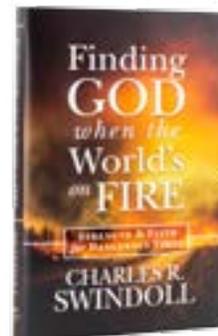
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