

THINGS TO STOP AND START STUDY ONE

Stop Drifting Along and Start Digging In

Proverbs 2:1–9

You have a prayer list? Put at the top of your prayer list, “My need for wisdom.” Pray for it every day.

—Charles R. Swindoll

WHAT do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you!” (1 Kings 3:5). That’s quite an offer! The Lord visited Solomon in a dream and said that He would grant whatever the king requested. Solomon could have chosen any glittering prize his heart desired—wealth, fame, power, long life . . . anything! Instead, Solomon prayed for wisdom:

“Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong.” (1 Kings 3:9)

Have you ever faced a large task like Solomon’s and prayed God would help you discern the right way from the wrong way? The good news is that wisdom is readily available in Jesus Christ, for “in him lie hidden *all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (Colossians 2:3, emphasis added). What a marvelous thought! All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are as near to us as our Savior. A prayer in His name, a search for truth in His Word, and a willingness to walk in His footsteps are the keys to unlocking wisdom’s storehouse.

What can we expect to discover when we seek the Lord’s wisdom, which is far more valuable than wealth, power, or fame? In Proverbs 2:1–9, King Solomon described the treasures of wisdom that he discovered. Let’s dig in and see what gems we find!



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Stop Drifting Along and Start Digging In

Proverbs 2:1–9



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Digging in to God's truth requires something from us. It's easy to drift into a shallow and superficial life, swept along by the currents of our fast-paced world. God calls us to a deeper life, however, one in which we take time to understand His Word and apply His wisdom.

Use the following verse as a prompt to write a prayer to the Lord, expressing your desire to *stop drifting along and start digging in* to His Word so that you can become a wiser, more mature Christian.

*Open my eyes to see
the wonderful truths in your instructions. (Psalm 119:18)*



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we first observe the passage and make notes on what we see. Reading at least two versions of the Bible is a good study practice. So, read [Proverbs 2:1–9](#) in the New Living Translation, then read below the same passage in the New American Standard Bible. Notice how the NASB makes clear the conditional clauses. Find the words *if* and *then* and circle or highlight them. Also, mark the word *for* in 2:6.

*My son, if you will receive my words
And treasure my commandments within you,
Make your ear attentive to wisdom,
Incline your heart to understanding;
For if you cry for discernment,
Lift your voice for understanding;
If you seek her as silver
And search for her as for hidden treasures;*



Stop Drifting Along and Start Digging In

Proverbs 2:1–9

*Then you will discern the fear of the LORD
And discover the knowledge of God.
For the LORD gives wisdom;
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.
He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
Guarding the paths of justice,
And He preserves the way of His godly ones.
Then you will discern righteousness and justice
And equity and every good course. (Proverbs 2:1–9 NASB)*

Can you see Solomon's flow of thought? If we do "x," then "y" follows for the result of "z." In the chart below, write down the main verbal phrases associated with the *if* and *then* clauses. We can call these "conditions" and "discoveries." Also note the verbal phrases associated with the word *for*, which reveal the "promises." We included the first phrases as samples.

Conditions "If" Verbal Phrases (Proverbs 2:1–4 NASB)	Discoveries "Then" Verbal Phrases (Proverbs 2:5, 9)	Promises "For" Verbal Phrases (Proverbs 2:6–8)
"receive my words" (2:1 NASB)	"discern the fear of the LORD" (2:5 NASB)	"the LORD gives wisdom" (2:6 NASB)
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Stop Drifting Along and Start Digging In

Proverbs 2:1–9

As you reflect on these *conditions*, *discoveries*, and *promises*, what else do you observe? Do you see any repeated or emphasized thoughts? Any contrasts or comparisons? Metaphors or similes?

Now let's dig deeper into the meaning of Solomon's words in the interpretation phase.



Interpretation: The Essential Ingredient—Wisdom!

This passage contains Solomon's *instructions* for gaining the wisdom of God. He began by addressing pursuers. What must we do if we wish to pursue wisdom?

The Conditions for Pursuers—Proverbs 2:1–4

Solomon highlighted four disciplines that we must maintain. Can you name them? Look back at your observations above and write down a brief explanation of their meaning as you answer the following questions.

What does it mean to “receive my words” (Proverbs 2:1 NASB)?



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What does it mean to “make your ear attentive” and “incline your heart” (Proverbs 2:2 NASB)?

What are we doing when we “cry” and “lift” our voices (2:3 NASB)?

What is implied when we “seek” and “search” for wisdom (2:4)?

As patient pursuers of wisdom, we are like *archaeologists*, who methodically sift dirt on a site and carefully examine artifacts, and we are like *miners*, who doggedly dig for treasure. We stay at the task until we find the truth we seek!

The Lord does not give His wisdom to the hurried soul. It takes time, effort, sacrifice, and determination. —Chuck Swindoll



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Proverbs 2:1–9

The Treasures We Discover—Proverbs 2:5–9

What treasures will those who pursue wisdom discover? Name them from the verses below and write a brief explanation of their meaning.

What does the “fear of the LORD” mean (Proverbs 2:5)?

What does it mean to “discern righteousness and justice / And equity and every good course” (2:9 NASB)?
Hint: helpful insights into these words are in the New Living Translation of [Proverbs 2:9](#).

Fearing the Lord doesn't mean you become afraid of Him. It means you take Him seriously, and with fear of the Lord comes hatred for the things that drive you away from Him.
—Chuck Swindoll

The Benefits That the Lord Promises

Finally, what benefits of wisdom does the Lord promise to give us? Note these benefits from the following verses as you answer the questions below.



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Proverbs 2:1–9

What do you think is the difference between wisdom, knowledge, and understanding (Proverbs 2:6)?

What will the Lord do for those who not only find wisdom but who live wisely (2:7–9)?

Weave your thoughts into three principles that you have gathered from this study so far.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What is wisdom? It is “the cultivated skill of applying God’s truth to knowledge.” It includes discerning truth from error (knowing right from wrong). It provides a heightened awareness of danger and evil. It also opens our eyes to ourselves and others. —Chuck Swindoll



Stop Drifting Along and Start Digging In

Proverbs 2:1–9



Correlation: Shedding Light on Wisdom

In the correlation phase, we shed more light on wisdom by looking at other Bible passages. What is the first step we should take when we need wisdom, according to [James 1:5](#)?

Like a father who delights in sharing his wealth with his children, God freely and generously pours His wisdom into our hands. However, God intends us to follow His counsel. According to [Proverbs 1:23–31](#), when wisdom rebukes us, what must we do? And if we do *not* choose godly wisdom, what consequences may follow?

If you choose to live without wisdom, you will live in the jaws of consequences. You will be confused and never realize why bad things happen. With wisdom, you will be free from panic, and God will open your eyes to understand what He wants to teach you. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Four Results of Going Deeper

When we stop drifting along and start digging in to the wisdom of God's Word, what can we expect to happen? Chuck offers four benefits of the deeper life.



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- *Depth gives substance to our faith.* The wisdom of the Word will anchor our lives when doubts threaten to toss us around.
- *Depth stabilizes us during testing.* What keeps us standing during the worst of life's storms? Roots that go deep in the wisdom of Scripture.
- *Depth enables us to handle the Word of God accurately.* Grounding ourselves in truth helps us interpret the more difficult sections of the Bible.
- *Depth equips us to detect truth from error.* Wisdom helps us recognize false teaching.

Which of these benefits (or any of the other benefits of wisdom from our study) do you need the most and why?

What nuggets of wisdom have you dug up in our study that you can apply to your life today?

You'll never find a course titled "Getting Wisdom" in the catalog of your local college. But God's classroom is open, and all students can register for His course at any time. Take a moment to enter Christ's presence and pray for wisdom. And then, open your heart to His words and ways. You can never hope to own any greater treasure than Christ's wisdom and knowledge!



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Proverbs 2:1–9



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, in my journey from earth to heaven, help me slow down on the world's highway of fast-paced living. I long to gaze into the face of the Lord Jesus and learn from Him the insight of the ages that only He can offer. I patiently await Your wisdom. Pour over me Your truth and empower me to live in it today. Amen.



THINGS TO STOP AND START STUDY TWO

Stop Procrastinating and Start Following Through

Ecclesiastes 3:1–11; Ephesians 5:15–17

God is engaged in our time. Maybe you thought time was all yours and God had nothing to do with it. Actually, He has everything to do with it. Your birth was because of His grace, and your living is covered by His providential care. Your day of death is planned already. Our time is in His hands!

—Charles R. Swindoll

YOU’VE heard the saying, “Time is money!” Well, what if that were true, literally? Imagine each second equals one penny. And imagine waking every morning to a fresh deposit in your bank account of the number of pennies equal to the seconds in one day—86,400. These daily deposits would grow in a year to \$315,360! If seconds were pennies, then we’d all be rich!

Time may not be money, really, but it is valuable because it forms the building blocks of living. Each day, we exchange time for activities. Individuals who make the greatest impact for good in our world invest their “pennies” over a lifetime in worthwhile endeavors. Read any biography of a notable person, and you’ll see copious examples of time well spent.

God not only gives us time as a precious gift, but He also gives us the power to use it. We can spend our seconds any way we wish . . . but here’s the catch: we can only spend them once. Each second we live is a second we spend; and once spent, wisely or unwisely, that moment can never be retrieved.

So, the real question isn’t *what is our time worth?* But *what is worth our time?*

In this study, we’ll look at two key Bible passages on how we spend our time. We’ll examine God’s perspective on what truly matters in life, and we’ll hear Him urge us to make the most of our time. Once we know His priorities for us, we must *stop procrastinating and start following through* by investing our time wisely!



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Stop Procrastinating and Start Following Through

Ecclesiastes 3:1–11; Ephesians 5:15–17



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a moment to thank the Lord for His engagement in the time that fills each of your days. Even as you open your Bible and relate to your Creator through His Word, the Lord is with you. Make the psalmist's declaration of dependence on God your own prayer as you focus on being present with Him:

*But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD,
I say, "You are my God."
My times are in Your hand. (Psalm 31:14–15 NASB)*



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Read the first passage of our study, [Ecclesiastes 3:1–13](#). These poetic lines are best read aloud. As you read, feel the rhythm of the lines in verses 1–8. In verses 9–13, notice the author's conclusions and the final, climactic line: "these are gifts from God" (Ecclesiastes 3:13). The passage opens by describing *life under heaven* (3:1) and then concludes by focusing on the *God of heaven* (3:13).



Observation: Wise Sayings from Ecclesiastes

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we observe the text by looking for words that are emphasized, repeated, related, alike, or unlike. The poetry in Ecclesiastes 3:2–8 is beautiful in its repetition and symmetry. Notice the groups of seven. The seven verses contain fourteen opposites in which the word *time* appears twenty-eight times.

According to Bible scholar Donald R. Glenn,

The fact that Solomon utilized polar opposites in a multiple of seven and began his list with birth and death is highly significant. The number seven suggests the idea of completeness



Stop Procrastinating and Start Following Through

Ecclesiastes 3:1–11; Ephesians 5:15–17

and the use of polar opposites—a well-known poetical device called merism—suggests totality (cf. Ps. 139:2–3).¹

How would you define the word *time* as Solomon used the term in *Ecclesiastes 3:1–8*?

Think of the opening contrast, “A time to be born and a time to die” (Ecclesiastes 3:2), as the dates of birth and death on a gravestone that delineate a person’s life span. What follows in Solomon’s poem is the “dash” between the dates—a list of activities that occur between birth and death. What contrasts do you observe in verses 2–8? And why do you think Solomon listed these activities?

Rather than evaluating life’s events as good or bad, right or wrong, Solomon was simply observing the back-and-forth cycles. We plant and harvest, tear down and build up, love and hate, keep and throw away, make war and make peace—and then we do it all again! Endlessly, humanity swings between extremes. *And to what end?* Solomon must have wondered. He wrote earlier, “Everything is meaningless—like chasing the wind” (2:17). Life does seem futile . . . until we observe time from God’s point of view.



Stop Procrastinating and Start Following Through

Ecclesiastes 3:1–11; Ephesians 5:15–17

“Yet God . . .” verse 11 begins, shifting the focus from the human perspective to God’s perspective. According to this verse, what makes life beautiful (*Ecclesiastes 3:11*)? And what was Solomon’s concluding advice (*3:12*)?

God is engaged in our time. Maybe you thought time was all yours and God had nothing to do with it. Actually, He has everything to do with it. Your birth was because of His grace, and your living is covered by His providential care. Your day of death is planned already. Our times are in His hands! —Chuck Swindoll

Solomon’s concluding thoughts cast a rainbow of heavenly wisdom across an otherwise dismal landscape. Let’s take a closer look at Solomon’s statement that God “has planted eternity in the human heart” (*3:11*).



Interpretation: Eternity in Our Hearts

From observation, we progress to the next phase of the *Searching the Scriptures* method: interpretation, which seeks to understand the meaning of a passage.

So far, what have we learned from Solomon? The seasons of life may seem like a carousel, spinning around and around; nevertheless, God is engaged in our time. As He fits our lives into His grand scheme, which only He can comprehend, He makes the cycles of life good and meaningful—in a word, *beautiful*!

As you reflect on this context, what would you say is the meaning of Solomon’s assertion that God has “planted eternity in the human heart” (*Ecclesiastes 3:11*)?



Stop Procrastinating and Start Following Through

Ecclesiastes 3:1–11; Ephesians 5:15–17

During the interpretation phase, it's helpful to consult a commentary or two. One excellent online resource is by former Dallas Theological Seminary professor Thomas Constable. Go to netbible.org, find the verses for Ecclesiastes 3, and click on Constable's Notes to read this scholar's interpretation of Ecclesiastes 3:11. Write down what you discover in the space below.

What we do has eternal dimensions. We have a mind to think, emotions to feel, and a will to obey. God has made us like Himself, and in doing so, He's put eternity in our hearts. We can grasp the concept of eternity, and we should, because we will give account for the use of our time. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Warning and Directives

In the correlation phase, we compare the meaning of one biblical passage to another. The authors of the Bible considered themselves part of a cohesive story, so they alluded to God's work in the past to explain God's actions in the present.

In light of Solomon's teaching, what should we do with our time? The apostle Paul offered a warning and two directives. What was Paul's warning in [Ephesians 5:15](#)? Give some examples of the foolish deeds Paul warned us not to do ([Ephesians 5:3–11](#)).



Stop Procrastinating and Start Following Through

Ecclesiastes 3:1–11; Ephesians 5:15–17

What were Paul's directives in *Ephesians 5:16–17*? What did Paul say the Lord wants us to do (*Ephesians 5:18–20*)?

Although fleeting, time is extremely valuable. Why? Because God, who is engaged in our time, gives eternal significance to each season of our lives. Consequently, as Paul taught, we must watch how we live and make the most of every opportunity, “redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (5:16 NKJV).

“This year, Lord, I want to please You in what I do.” He will love you no matter what. But His Spirit is working in your heart to convict you of things that you need to give attention to. Look accurately at how you walk. Don’t lie to yourself. Don’t ignore reality. Don’t act like something else is happening. Don’t rationalize around it or procrastinate any longer.
—Chuck Swindoll



Application: Suggestions Applied Practically

How do we heed Paul's warning and follow his directives? By doing battle against procrastination and putting into practice three key habits.

1. *Set priorities.* Take some time to think seriously about your priorities regarding the following aspects of your life: relational, vocational, physical, spiritual, and missional. What is truly most important in each area?



Stop Procrastinating and Start Following Through

Ecclesiastes 3:1–11; Ephesians 5:15–17

2. *Set realistic goals.* Pace yourself as you build new habits. Physical fitness takes time, and new diets require long-term management. A slow-and-steady strategy will take you further than the sprint-and-crash approach. Write realistic goals that match your top three priorities.
3. *Plan your tasks in order of importance.* Procrastination is the thief of time. Don't put off doing what's important in order to do what's urgent or more pleasing. What three actions can you do today to achieve your most important goals?

So, what is worth your time? That's a question we all must ponder. Because God is engaged in our time, He will help you set your priorities and empower you to follow through with accomplishing your goals. Rest assured that your time is truly in God's hands, both today and for eternity!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You are sovereign over eternity and each moment of my life. Thank You for not standing aloof but actively engaging in time. You sent Your Son to live on the earth He created, bound by time and space, to in part show me how to use my time wisely. Please give me wisdom to steward well the time You've given me. In the powerful name of Jesus Christ, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Donald R. Glenn, "Ecclesiastes," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 983.



THINGS TO STOP AND START STUDY THREE

Stop Shaming and Start Honoring

Luke 15:11–32

Stop giving shame any respect. It grows if you don't deal with it. It's like dealing with a bully. Shame's plan is to hurt you, wound you, make you afraid, and put you under the thumb of the one shaming you. Refuse to hear the shame, tolerate it, or give in to it.

—Charles R. Swindoll

SHAME is like a dark cloud that overshadows the soul. Sometimes, it signals within us a need to make things right when we sin. Other times, however, shame goes beyond remorse and intensifies into an emotional storm that batters us into feeling utterly worthless and hopeless.

Shame and guilt are often connected, but there is a difference. While guilt targets our behavior, shame, in its most damaging form, attacks our being. Guilt prompts us to admit failure, but shame attaches a condemnatory label: “I *am* a failure!” Guilt motivates us to right a wrong and leads to forgiveness, restoration, and a fresh start. But shame pushes us into a pit of self-reproach with no hope of rescue. Guilt allows us to retain our dignity as we struggle to get past a failure. But those living under shame’s storm cloud believe nothing they do is good enough or worthy of forgiveness, acceptance, or belonging. Essentially, shame is fear of disconnection in which we tell ourselves: *I’m unlovable, I will never measure up, and there is no chance for reconciliation with those who have cut me off.*

Recorded in Luke 15:11–32 is Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son. It’s a beautiful story of a father who opened his arms to his wayward son and rescued him from shame’s dark cloud rather than cast more shame on him. What did the father do? How does our heavenly Father rescue us from shame in a similar way? And how can we *stop shaming and start honoring* others who desperately need a glimpse of God’s grace through shame’s cloud? Let’s dig into the Scriptures and find out!



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Stop Shaming and Start Honoring

Luke 15:11–32



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The safest refuge for the shame-bound soul is Christ's inviting presence. Use the following verses as a prompt to write a prayer expressing your desires to draw near to the Lord, release yourself from shame, and honor rather than shame others.

I prayed to the LORD, and he answered me.

He freed me from all my fears.

Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy;

no shadow of shame will darken their faces. (Psalm 34:4–5)



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Open your Bible and read [Luke 15:11–32](#). Take a moment to put yourself in the setting of the story. Imagine the faces of the father and his two sons. Try to picture the family's property with servants doing chores. Imagine the prodigal son *living it up* in a foreign land and then *winding up* in a pig sty. Finally, picture the son's return, the feast, the older brother's outrage, and the father's final words to his sons. As you read, linger over Rembrandt's masterpiece [The Return of the Prodigal Son](#) for a powerful image of the story's climactic scene.



Observation: Two Brothers Lost in Sin

Jesus mounted this gem of a story in a cultural setting to enhance its meaning. A helpful resource to gain insight into the customs of Jesus' day is [Insight's Handbook of New Testament Backgrounds: Key Customs from Each Book](#). Also, we recommend Chuck Swindoll's commentary [Swindoll's New Testament Insights: Insights on Luke](#) for a deeper understanding of Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. Now let's observe the passage.



Stop Shaming and Start Honoring

Luke 15:11–32

The Short-Sighted Younger Brother—Luke 15:12–21

Read [Luke 15:11–12](#). The younger son brazenly demanded from his father, “I want my share of your estate now *before you die*” (Luke 15:12, emphasis added). Can you feel the jab to the father’s gut? This same boy who, as a child, sat on his father’s knee and lovingly hugged his neck now, as a young rebel, wished his father dead so he could have his father’s money.

What attitudes characterize the prodigal?

Put yourself in the father’s shoes and describe his heartache as well as the cultural shame he must have endured because his son loved his father’s money more than his father.

Rather than shame his son, the father absorbed the son’s hurtful words. He didn’t lash back, cling, or lecture; instead, he calmly “agreed to divide his wealth between his sons” (15:12), gave the prodigal what he asked, and let him go.¹ What qualities of the father do you observe?



Stop Shaming and Start Honoring

Luke 15:11–32

Read [Luke 15:13–16](#). This Jewish boy scorned his father, family, and his own heritage by bolting to Gentile territory. When his money ran out and famine stripped the countryside as bare as his bank account, the once unbridled youth bound himself to a Gentile farmer and ate pig slop to survive. He was alone and ashamed, rejected and unclean by Jewish standards, and starving.

Put yourself in the sandals of Jesus' listeners. One group consisted of "tax collectors and other notorious sinners," and the other group, "the Pharisees and teachers of religious law" (Luke 15:1–2). Describe how these groups might have responded to this part of the story. Would they have felt compassion toward the young man? Or judged him? Perhaps the Pharisees remembered [Proverbs 13:15](#), [18](#), and [25](#). Reflect on each group's view of the young man in his shame.

Read [Luke 15:17–21](#). The opening line in verse 17 is the turning point of the story, "When he finally came to his senses." A stubborn will does not crumble easily. For the son, it took an onslaught of hardship to break through his pride before he finally surrendered. What signs of shame do you observe in the young man's thoughts? Through his actions, what did the father communicate to his son without saying a word?

The prodigal said, "Father, I've sinned against both heaven and you." His actions brought guilt, but he went too far when he said, "I'm no longer worthy of being called your son." Shame teaches us that we're unworthy. —Chuck Swindoll



Stop Shaming and Start Honoring

Luke 15:11–32

The Shaming Older Brother—Luke 15:25–30

Before examining the father's words in Luke 15:22–24, let's skip ahead in the drama to the older brother. While the younger brother illustrated the "tax collectors and other notorious sinners," the older brother mirrored the "Pharisees and teachers of religious law" (Luke 15:1–2). Read [Luke 15:25–30](#), and list the pharisaical characteristics displayed in the older brother's actions and words.

How did the older brother shame the prodigal, show ingratitude to his father, and express his true nature?

Like the older brother, the Pharisees kept the rules but lacked what their Father had in abundance: love. Without love, their obedience had hardened into angry legalism. To them, sin must be punished, forgiveness earned, kindness deserved, and repentance proven. The Pharisees were just as lost in sin as the "sinners." Both groups were self-centered and rebellious at heart, and both needed their Father's grace.



Interpretation: The Father Reaching Out with Grace

From observation, we progress to the next phase of the *Searching the Scriptures* method: interpretation, which seeks to understand the meaning of a passage. In Jesus' parable, we'll focus on a deeper understanding of the father, who exhibits grace in his responses to his two sons.



Stop Shaming and Start Honoring

Luke 15:11–32

The Grace-Based Father—Luke 15:22–24, 31–32

Read [Luke 15:20–24, 31–32](#). Jesus put the Father’s loving heart on full display—which was the point of His story and the purpose of His earthly mission. Jesus came from heaven to earth to display His Father’s love—a love that disregards its own dignity to run and restore our dignity and welcome the lost who are mired in the filth and stench of our sinful condition.

What did the elements which the father used to honor his son represent: the finest robe, the ring, the sandals, and the extravagant feast ([Luke 15:22–24](#))? And what do they teach us about God’s forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration?

God’s love is equally as shocking in its extravagance as the love of the prodigal’s father. Just as the father covers his son’s shame with a robe of honor and restores his identity with the family signet ring so also our Father covers and restores us. In this moment of grace, prodigals drink their fill of true love and, once satisfied, never wander again.

How did the father show grace to his other son? Rather than chastise him for his hypocrisy, the father addressed him with a gentle hand on his shoulder. As Jesus formulated His words, we can imagine Him stretching out His arms to the Pharisees—the angry, proud, grimly dutiful older brothers. What grace did Jesus, through the father’s words, show to the older-brother Pharisees ([15:31–32](#))?



Stop Shaming and Start Honoring

Luke 15:11–32



Correlation: Warning and Directives

In the correlation phase, we compare the meaning of one biblical passage to another. Read [Matthew 9:35–36](#) about the compassion of Jesus, and write down how the Father loves you through Christ and restores you as His own. Note: the same Greek word for *compassion* in Luke 15:20 is used in Matthew 9:36 to describe Jesus.

Let's cultivate genuine compassion. Compassion is a relationship between equals. The father met his returning son as an equal when he saw him come over the hill. He didn't meet him as his judge. He was one with him. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: How Can We Be Resilient to Shame?

Let's apply this passage from the perspective of those who feel shamed by others (the younger brother) and those who shame others (the older brother).

For the recipient of shame:

1. *Stop giving shame any respect.* Shame is like a bully we must fight against and refuse to tolerate or succumb to.
2. *Start sharing the hurt with others who understand.* When you feel shame, don't hide or keep your thoughts secret. Share your feelings with someone who welcomes you with open arms, like the prodigal son's father.



Stop Shaming and Start Honoring

Luke 15:11–32

When you hear shaming words from others, or even from yourself, how can you escape the cloud of shame?

For those who tend to shame others:

1. *Stop judging others.* The only rightful judge is the Lord because only He has all the facts and has never sinned.
2. *Start cultivating compassion.* The older brother had no compassion because he had elevated himself above his brother. The proud brother couldn't see his own sin, and he only thought of himself. We develop compassion when we can put ourselves in the heartache of other people and see ourselves as equal to them.

If you feel tempted to judge others, what can help you stop shaming and start honoring?

God's grace makes us want to celebrate, doesn't it! Whether we're more prodigal or more pharisaical, let's determine not to stay away from the Father too long. He's calling all His children to His party, and we don't want to miss one minute of it!



Stop Shaming and Start Honoring

Luke 15:11–32



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me on my journey home to keep my eyes on You and Your welcoming arms of love. Dark clouds of shame often obscure my view, so shine Your light of grace through my darkness. And when I am tempted to shame others, remind me of Your grace toward them and fill my heart with Your love. Through my union with Jesus Your Son, I receive Your robe of honor, ring of identity, sandals of dignity, and feast of joy! Thank You! Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. According to Jewish law, the father could release the inheritance before his death. The older brother would receive a “double portion” (two-thirds of the estate, in this case), and the young brother would get the remainder (Deuteronomy 21:17). It’s only fair that both boys received their portion. If the younger son got his share, the older should get his also.



THINGS TO STOP AND START STUDY FOUR

Stop Blaming and Start Forgiving

Matthew 5:23–24; 18:21–35

Forgiveness 101 is not an elective in the Christian life. It's a required course.
—Charles R. Swindoll

IN the school of Christian life, all of us must take a course on forgiveness. No one has the option to bypass this class, because we all need to forgive someone *or* to seek forgiveness from someone we've offended. The only student who can opt out of Forgiveness 101 is the one who has never hurt anyone or been hurt by anyone—and because that person doesn't exist, everyone must enroll!

Our teacher is Jesus, the world's leading expert on forgiveness, who prayed for His enemies, “Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). His exams can be tough when we're asked to follow His example.

Our natural tendency is to hold grudges rather than forgive. And when we're the offender, we tend to blame others rather than seek forgiveness. However, neither holding grudges nor blaming can heal a wounded relationship, unite a divided family, or build up a community that is torn apart. Seeking and giving forgiveness can do all that and more. It restores our soul!!

Let's join our teacher, Jesus, on the hillside by the Sea of Galilee where He is delivering the Sermon on the Mount and His first lecture on the topic of *stop blaming and start forgiving*. This lesson is for those who have wounded another person and who need to ask that person to forgive them.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Stop Blaming and Start Forgiving

Matthew 5:23–24; 18:21–35



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As we imagine spreading our blankets and taking our seats on that Galilean hillside, let's prepare our hearts to receive Christ's message. His subject reaches into the most tender parts of our hearts, where our deepest wounds reside. We may hesitate to invite our Savior into these areas, and yet, we can trust Him to be a skilled physician who heals and never harms. Pray the following prayer and invite the Lord to reveal areas of your life that need His tender touch.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
Point out anything in me that offends you,
and lead me along the path of everlasting life. (Psalm 139:23–24)*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read meditatively the following verses, hearing the Lord's voice as He teaches on seeking forgiveness from those we've offended.

Lesson One: Seeking Forgiveness from Those We've Offended

"So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God." (Matthew 5:23–24)



Observation: When Someone Has Something against You

Let's use our *Searching the Scriptures* skills of observation, interpretation, correlation, and application.¹ First, imagine yourself as the person making an offering at the temple. List the action words that you *observe* in Jesus' teaching.



Stop Blaming and Start Forgiving

Matthew 5:23–24; 18:21–35

This teaching comes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). For the immediate context, read [Matthew 5:21–22](#) in which the subject is relationship conflict. What infractions did Jesus say were just as much a violation of God's law as murder?

Friction between individuals may smolder as resentment or flame up as anger, spark as name-calling or ignite as out-of-control rages. Regardless the degree of heat, Jesus said the fire must be doused immediately, both in our heart where sin begins and with our feet as we rush to make amends.



Interpretation: Go and Be Reconciled

Next is interpretation. What is the meaning of Jesus' teaching? What does He say about the issue of priority?

The issue of urgency?



Stop Blaming and Start Forgiving

Matthew 5:23–24; 18:21–35

The issue of taking responsibility?

Go a little deeper into interpretation by using a concordance to explore the meaning of the Greek word for “be reconciled.” First, look up the word *reconciled* in *The Strongest NASB Exhaustive Concordance*. Beside Matthew 5:24, you’ll find the number, 1259, which is the key to the Greek word. Look up this number in the back of the concordance to find the root Greek word *diallasso* and its meaning, “change, exchange,” and the number of times the word occurs in the New Testament.² Interestingly, it appears only once—here, in this verse.

Now use the online tool, *NET Bible*, at netbible.org. Locate Matthew 5:24 in the NASB, and then click “Greek” on the right panel. Slowly move your cursor over the words in the Greek text of this verse. An explanation of each word appears below in a box. Find the Greek word for *be reconciled* and its definition, which is “1) to change 2) to change the mind of anyone, to reconcile 3) to be reconciled, to renew friendship with one.”³

Fascinating! Reconciliation includes *change*. Hostility changes to friendship as we reconcile through forgiveness. Based on your study, how would you explain *diallasso*? How does this meaning enhance your understanding of Jesus’ command?

*Instead of turning to blame, instead of rationalizing—go! The command is not, “Think about.” It’s not, “Pray.” Jesus said, “Go and be reconciled to that person” (Matthew 5:24).
—Chuck Swindoll*



Stop Blaming and Start Forgiving

Matthew 5:23–24; 18:21–35



Correlation: Reconciliation with God and Others

Now, correlation. Paul applied the concept of reconciliation to our relationship with God in [2 Corinthians 5:18–20](#). Read these verses in the New American Standard Bible in comparison with Jesus' teaching on reconciliation. Both are in the passive voice, "be reconciled." We seek forgiveness, but reconciliation requires a response from the other party. Reconciliation must be *received* to be complete. Although we seek reconciliation, a person may rebuff our attempt at *diallasso*. God, however, will always welcome us with open arms.

Through Christ, we can be certain of our reconciliation with God. How does this security stabilize you as you seek reconciliation with others who may not be as willing or able to forgive?



Application: Do You Need to Seek Reconciliation?

Finally, application. Are you in conflict with someone because you've offended him or her? Is God leading you to seek reconciliation? What steps do you need to take with God's help?

This is difficult. It's difficult to make arrangements to be with someone who doesn't want to talk to you because of your offense. You have to plan it carefully. The time has to be right. Your wording has to be delicate, sensitive, caring, without condemnation. You go to make reconciliation, to turn enmity into amity. I can tell you in a personal testimony today, it works. —Chuck Swindoll



Stop Blaming and Start Forgiving

Matthew 5:23–24; 18:21–35

Lesson Two: Forgiving Those Who've Offended Us

Jesus not only taught about forgiveness in His Sermon on the Mount; later, He gave a second lesson focusing this time on *offering forgiveness*. Peter had asked Jesus about the frequency of forgiving: “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?” (Matthew 18:21). Jesus’ answer must have shocked Peter, “No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!” (18:22). Then Jesus offered a lesson on forgiving that Peter never forgot. Read His words in [Matthew 18:23–35](#).



Observation: When You Have Been Offended

Let’s *observe* this passage. Peter viewed forgiveness through the narrow lens of human limitations. Figuring that our capacity to forgive runs out sooner or later, he sought permission to limit forgiving to no more than seven times.

Jesus, however, broke down all limitations! Rather than restrict forgiving to a certain number, He set us free to forgive anytime in any relationship. For Jesus, the issue wasn’t *frequency* but *freedom*, and the measure wasn’t a human standard but the limitless grace of God. He illustrated God’s grace in His parable, which contained three parts: the king’s forgiveness of the servant’s tremendous debt (Matthew 18:23–27); the servant’s unforgiveness toward his companion and his small debt (18:28–30); the king’s response when he found out (18:31–34).

Forgiving is truly a matter of the heart. What does the magnitude of the debt forgiven say about the heart of the king who forgave it? Likewise, what does the small debt that the servant refused to forgive say about his heart?



Stop Blaming and Start Forgiving

Matthew 5:23–24; 18:21–35

Summarize Jesus' point about how receiving God's forgiveness can free our hearts to forgive others.



Interpretation: “The Torturers”

What does it mean, “handed him over to the torturers” (Matthew 18:34 NASB)? Chuck explains it as the torment of unforgiveness. It is the gnawing resentment and bitterness, the awful gall of hate or envy from which we can't escape because we won't let go of a grudge toward someone who hurt us.

If the pain of an offense has taken root as bitterness in your heart, take a moment to express your feelings to the Lord. Acknowledge the heartache as well as the difficulty of forgiving and moving on.



Correlation: Christ's Forgiveness Enables Us to Forgive

Who can help us forgive? Our Teacher not only instructs us but through His transforming power enables us to forgive. Paul's instructions based on Jesus' teaching reveal the source of our forgiving power.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:31–32)



Stop Blaming and Start Forgiving

Matthew 5:23–24; 18:21–35

We can't offer the cup of forgiveness if our inner well is dry. God's forgiveness must first flood our soul, and then we have the resources to "get rid of bitterness" and forgive "one another." How does this truth encourage you to take the next steps of forgiving your offender?

I choose not to blame the other person but to forgive and to go from there to the next step, which is a life of harmony and relief and release. Plus, I sleep a whole lot better! The relief is palpable. I long for that in your life. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Do You Need to Forgive?

Let's wrap up Jesus' teaching on forgiveness with two principles on forgiving those who have offended us:

1. *To refuse to forgive is hypocritical.* How can we not forgive the sins of others when our King has freely forgiven us?
2. *To refuse to forgive inflicts inner torment on the offended.* Unforgiveness makes our bad situation worse; it multiplies the pain of the offense with the torment of bitterness.

Close this study by drawing near to our teacher, Jesus, in prayer. If you need to reconcile a relationship, ask Jesus for the *courage* to seek forgiveness. Or if someone has injured you, ask the Lord for the *grace* to extend forgiveness.



THINGS TO STOP AND START

STUDY FOUR

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Stop Blaming and Start Forgiving

Matthew 5:23–24; 18:21–35

Jesus gave two lessons on forgiveness, one to those who've wounded and the other to those who've been wounded. Whether you're the one who is seeking forgiveness or the one who needs to forgive, be assured our Lord is walking with you on your journey of forgiveness. He will help you each step of the way!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, sleepless nights and restless days are the plight of the tortured soul who will not forgive. I submit myself to the authority of Your Word that marks the path to healing. Help me to seek forgiveness from those I've offended. Help me to forgive, even as I have been forgiven by Christ. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. *The Strongest NASB Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 902, 1520.
3. Greek note on Matthew 5:24, *Net Bible*, Bible.org, netbible.org/bible/Matthew+5.



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THINGS TO STOP AND START STUDY FIVE

Stop Worrying and Start Trusting

Philippians 4:4–9

Rejoice in the Lord every day. Release your burdens to Him every day. Relax in His peace every day. When you turn your worries over to the Lord, He removes the burden and gives you in its place, peace.

—Charles R. Swindoll

ONE of the most precious words in the lexicon of any language is *freedom*. We all want freedom, treasure it, even fight for it! Its source is God Himself, who stamped freedom's imprint on the basic elements of the human soul—the mind, heart, and will.

- He made us with minds that we might *think* freely.
- He made us with hearts that we might *love* freely.
- He made us with wills that we might *obey* freely.

The Lord didn't create us as "people puppets" with no wills of our own. He designed us as free beings who can choose our own way . . . ideally, to choose the way, the truth, and the life that is found in Christ (John 14:6). Nothing brings God more pleasure and glory than when we freely love and follow His Son.

Ironically, freedom's road can also lead us to bondage. Free to choose wrong as well as right, we can make choices that eventually lock us in a self-made prison called addiction—the tragic dead end of freedom out of control.

In this study, we'll examine an addiction that we might not typically think of as an addiction, but it is perhaps the most universal of all bad habits and the most stubborn to break: *worry*!



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Stop Worrying and Start Trusting

Philippians 4:4–9

Do you sometimes feel you can't break free from constant fretting about this or that? Worry's chains are heavy and can bind our hearts with fear. Thankfully, from the beginning, Christ's mission has been to set captives free (Luke 4:16–21). And He offers this promise to sin's prisoners: "If the Son sets you free, you are truly free" (John 8:36). Jesus really can help us *stop worrying and start trusting* as He transforms our fear into faith. Let's find out how!



PREPARE YOUR HEART

What worries have been weighing heavy on your heart lately? Jot down a few of them here.

In a few moments of quiet prayer, invite the Lord to come alongside you to share your burden. Mention each of these concerns to Him. As you read the following verse, ask the Lord to help you release your worries to Him through this study and thank Him for His care.

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. (1 Peter 5:7)



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read the following verses and look for four streams of thought that Chuck Swindoll identified in his message: rejoice, release, relax, and respond.

Rejoice

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. (Philippians 4:4–5)

Release

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. (4:6)



Stop Worrying and Start Trusting

Philippians 4:4–9

Relax

Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)

Respond

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. (4:8–9)

The four concepts expressed in these verses sum up what we might call God's therapy for worry-free living.



Observation: Living Worry-Free

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, Chuck Swindoll recommends digging into the circumstances surrounding the writing of a Bible passage.¹ Paul briefly mentioned his circumstances in *Philippians 1:7*. You can find out more about Paul's situation in the notes of Philippians in The *Swindoll Study Bible*. Chuck's commentary, *Swindoll's Living Insights: Insights on Colossians, Philippians, Philemon*, can fill in some details as well. For an online resource, read the introduction to Philippians in Constable's Notes at NETBible.org. Write down the background information you find about Paul's situation during the time he wrote on the subject of worry.



Stop Worrying and Start Trusting

Philippians 4:4–9

Prisoner Paul had plenty of reasons to fret as he awaited his day in court before Caesar. And yet, he was at peace. Rome was holding him captive but *not worry!* His heart was as free as the birds flying outside his cell window. How could that be? Every day, he was following God’s plan to get rid of the worry habit. Releasing worry liberated the apostle, and it can liberate us too!

Rejoice in the Lord—Philippians 4:4–5

God’s first word of counsel in His program for worry-holics is this: “Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4).

What truth about Christ could Paul count on to always fill him with joy? For the answer, read *Philippians 4:5* in the New Living Translation and the New American Standard Bible.

The Greek word for “coming soon” or “near” is *eggus*, a word rich with meaning that we’ll explore in the interpretation phase. For now, let’s observe God’s next word of counsel.

Release Your Burdens Every Day—Philippians 4:6

With our focus heavenward, we’re ready to take the second step. Read *Philippians 4:6* and write down the instructions you observe in this verse. What specific directions do you read about prayer?



Stop Worrying and Start Trusting

Philippians 4:4–9

The only way to break a bad habit is to replace it with a better habit. *Daily worries melt away in the healing practice of daily prayer.* Right now, take a moment to practice prayer therapy by telling the Lord what you need and releasing that need to Him. Then offer thanks for all that He has done for you.

Lay your pack on the Lord and He will bless you. He will relieve you. Drop that heavy-hearted load off your shoulders. Give it to Him. Give it to Him. Release your burden every day. —Chuck Swindoll

Relax in the Peace of Christ—Philippians 4:7

Rejoicing leads to releasing, which flows into the next step in God's plan: *relaxing*. What does [Philippians 4:7](#) say? Observe this verse closely to find any connections with the previous verses and any cause-and-effect statements.

In this world, only Christ has God's peace to give—and He gives it freely! He said to His followers:

"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid." (John 14:27)

This same peace that soothed Jesus in His most difficult hours, even allowing Him to sleep during a storm (Mark 4:35–40), is available to us. When God's peace guards our hearts and minds and keeps fear outside the gate, it is possible to rest during life's troubles—it really is!



Stop Worrying and Start Trusting

Philippians 4:4–9

If the peace of God surrounds you, it's amazing what it does to your mind and your heart. Place your problems before Him daily, and He will march guard duty around you with a peace you can't explain. —Chuck Swindoll

Respond by Focusing Your Thoughts on the Right Things—Philippians 4:8–9

The final step is to focus on what's right rather than on how bad things are. What does Paul encourage us to fix our minds on according to *Philippians 4:8–9*?

Worries multiply when we dwell on what's false, dishonorable, wrong, impure, ugly, and unadmirable. But where in this broken world can we find what's worthy to think about? We can always focus our attention on the One who is the embodiment of all that's right and good. Keep your mind on Christ, for He is always near!



Interpretation: The Lord Is Near

“The Lord is near” (Philippians 4:5 NASB). Of all the encouraging thoughts in this passage, perhaps the most reassuring is the nearness of Christ. Interestingly, the New Living Translation translates the sentence differently: “Remember, the Lord is coming soon” (4:5). Which is the correct translation?

The Greek word, *eggus*, can mean either “near” (for example: “The LORD is close to all who call on him” [Psalm 145:18]) or “coming soon” (for example: “the coming of the Lord is near” [James 5:8]).² Which is the intended meaning here?

Bible scholars suggest the word hints at *both* meanings. Jesus (not Caesar) is the true judge who will vindicate suffering believers when He returns. Jesus is coming someday . . . but He is also near us now. Both our future and our present are secure. Think of it this way: *Christ is the light on our horizon . . . and the warmth in our hearts!*



Stop Worrying and Start Trusting

Philippians 4:4–9

Look up the analysis of this verse in the online resource, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, at NETBible.org, and write down what you discover.



Correlation: Warning and Directives

In the correlation phase, we compare the meaning of one biblical passage to another. Read the following passages and write down the encouragement you find.

Isaiah 26:3–4

Matthew 6:25–34



Stop Worrying and Start Trusting

Philippians 4:4–9

Certainly, prison life was no laughing matter for Paul, and neither are our trials. Even so, despite his dreadful circumstances, Paul could rejoice when he took his eyes off the four walls of his cell and focused on His Lord. Let's follow Paul's example by *rejoicing* in the nearness of Christ, *releasing* our worries, *relaxing* in God's peace, and *responding* to our fears by dwelling on what's right and good.



Application: Learning the Secret of Moment-by-Moment Trust

Which of the four steps in God's therapy program for worriers do you find the most difficult? Rejoicing, releasing, relaxing, or responding?

Would you like to take that step right now, before you complete this study? Here is some space to share your heart with God. And don't forget to take a moment or two in quiet reflection to receive His peace as you experience Christ cutting the chains to your worries.

The wonderful hope for worry addicts is Jesus Christ. Through Him and in His power, we truly can lay our cares before God and put our confidence in God. As Isaiah prophesied, Jesus comes to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners—this includes prisoners of worry. Experience His freedom today!



Stop Worrying and Start Trusting

Philippians 4:4–9



A FINAL PRAYER

We close with a prayer from Chuck taken directly from his message. May it be your prayer today as well.

Lord, I trust You right now. I lean on You with my mind that can play tricks on me and with my heart that's given to all kinds of extremes. I ask that You enable me to so focus on You that my trust remains unshakable. —Chuck Swindoll

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. *The Strongest NASB Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), see "1451. eggus."



THINGS TO STOP AND START STUDY SIX

Stop Resisting and Start Submitting

1 Samuel 15:1–23

A defiant spirit is never from the Lord. Resisting God's will is never appropriate or acceptable. Choosing to go our own way is never pleasing to God.

—Charles R. Swindoll

THE young rebels of the 1960s expressed their defiant attitude toward the older generation with slogans like, “Don’t Trust Anyone over 30!” and “Question Authority!” These days, this rebellious attitude has spread beyond the youth to almost every level of our society . . . and intensified. Angry defiance is not only tolerated, it’s defended and encouraged.

Granted, some leaders abuse their power. We need to stand up to bullies and tyrants who deny basic human rights or take away religious freedom. However, there’s a difference between standing for what’s right and having a fight-back attitude toward everyone in charge—for no other reason than to get our way.

King Saul bears the infamous reputation in the Old Testament as one who resisted the very God who had appointed him king of Israel. Where David is known as a man after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22), Saul could rightly be labeled a man after *Saul’s* own heart. Just look at his track record of rebellion.

In 1 Samuel 13, Saul defiled God’s holy standard by offering a sacrifice himself, rather than waiting for the prophet Samuel to do it (1 Samuel 13:8–9). In 1 Samuel 14, prideful Saul made an impulsive vow that nearly cost his son’s life (14:24–25). In 1 Samuel 15, God instructed Saul to defeat Israel’s enemies, the Amalekites, but he only partially obeyed. Why did Saul resist God’s authority again and again?

In this study of 1 Samuel 15:1–23, we’ll examine Saul’s “my way” mind-set that fueled his resistance. And we’ll uncover the subtle ways that we, too, rationalize our sin and justify our compromises. Our goal is to learn from Saul’s negative example so that we can *stop resisting and start submitting* to God’s authority.



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Stop Resisting and Start Submitting

1 Samuel 15:1–23



PREPARE YOUR HEART

It can be difficult to see the truth about ourselves. The prophet Jeremiah declared, “the human heart is the most deceitful of all things” (Jeremiah 17:9). Only the Lord can “search all hearts and examine secret motives” (17:10).

Take a few moments for quiet prayer and invite God to search your heart as you study the account of Saul’s self-deceit and sin. Ask the Lord to reveal to you your secret motives, to illumine for you His path of righteousness, and to give you a heart to serve Him.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Read *1 Samuel 15:1–23*, and as you read, notice the following outline: God instructs (1 Samuel 15:1–6); Saul disobeys (15:7–9); Samuel confronts (15:10–21); and Samuel teaches (15:22–23).



Observation: A Classic Example of Carnal Rebellion

A key principle in the *Searching the Scriptures* process is observation.¹ As you look back through 1 Samuel 15:1–23, can you observe any repetitive words or themes? Specifically, notice the word *destroy* or *destroyed* in verses 8, 9, 15, 18, and 20. Also find the passage’s central themes: “obey” in verses 10, 19, 20, and 22; and “sacrifice” in verses 15, 21, and 22.



Stop Resisting and Start Submitting

1 Samuel 15:1–23

Clear Instruction from the Lord—1 Samuel 15:1–6

What instructions from the Lord did Samuel give to Saul (*1 Samuel 15:1–3*)?

What grievous crime had the Amalekites committed to warrant God's severe judgment, and what instructions did Moses issue regarding the Amalekites (*Deuteronomy 25:17–19*)?

In what other ways did the Amalekites attack Israel (*Judges 6:3–5*)?

After centuries of the Amalekites tormenting the Israelites, God decided enough was enough. It was time for Israel to put an end to their enemy.



Stop Resisting and Start Submitting

1 Samuel 15:1–23

Incomplete Obedience of the King—1 Samuel 15:7–9

The Commander-in-Chief had given direct orders: “completely destroy” (1 Samuel 15:3) and “do not spare him” (15:3 NASB). But what, in fact, did Saul do (15:7–9)?

Saul spared King Agag and the premium livestock as trophies to honor his victory. Although Saul later claimed he kept the best for the Lord (15:15, 21), the king’s *secret* motivation was his own fame. What did Saul do immediately after the victory that revealed his primary motive (15:12)?

Years earlier, Moses’ first act after defeating the Amalekites was to build an altar to the Lord and proclaim, “Yahweh-Nissi (which means ‘the LORD is my banner’)” (Exodus 17:15). Saul’s first act after his victory over the Amalekites was to erect a monument to himself!

The human heart is deceitful above all things! Even Saul couldn’t see the pride lurking inside . . . at least, not until he viewed himself in Samuel’s mirror of truth.

Strong Confrontation and Weak Responses—1 Samuel 15:10–21

As you observe the verses in this section, notice the contrast between Samuel’s grieving and Saul’s gloating, between Samuel’s brokenness over sin and Saul’s blindness toward it.



Stop Resisting and Start Submitting

1 Samuel 15:1–23

What did Samuel say to confront Saul, and how did Saul defend himself (1 Samuel 15:10–15)?

In his self-delusion, Saul had convinced himself that he was serving God by *disobeying* Him! Such is the deceptive power of rationalization. According to *Merriam-Webster*, *rationalization* is “a way of describing, interpreting, or explaining something (such as bad behavior) that makes it seem proper.”²

Saul tried to make it “seem proper” to spare King Agag and the best animals. What facts did Samuel give to open Saul’s eyes to Saul’s sin? And how did Saul try to rationalize his actions again (15:16–21)?

Samuel asked, “Why haven’t you obeyed the LORD?” (15:19). That’s a penetrating question for all of us, isn’t it? What is the *real* reason we disobey?

Saul concealed his pride behind his spiritual-sounding plan to sacrifice the animals to God. God, however, saw through his religious façade to his secret pride, and He sees our true motives even when we hide them behind a show of spirituality. Samuel’s lesson for Saul is the same for us—namely, only through obeying God do we truly honor Him.



Stop Resisting and Start Submitting

1 Samuel 15:1–23



Interpretation: Samuel Teaches a Lesson for All of Us

In the interpretation phase, we examine the meaning of the biblical account—which Samuel provides in his concluding lesson. What lesson did Samuel teach Saul, as well as the nation, about obedience as the true measure of our devotion to God (*1 Samuel 15:22–23*)?

What is the link between rebellion and witchcraft and between stubbornness and idolatry (*15:23*)? For help, you may wish to consult a commentary. For an online resource, you can read Constable's Notes on this verse at NETBible.org.

Can you summarize Samuel's teaching by writing a *principle*? A principle is an “eternal truth” that applies to all people at all times, not just the biblical author's audience in his day.



Stop Resisting and Start Submitting

1 Samuel 15:1–23

It's always wrong to disobey the living God. To put all of that in two simple words, I call it "carnal rebellion." It's the opposite of genuine humility, the kind of submissive spirit modeled by none other than Jesus Christ. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Warning and Directives

Can we find this principle on obedience from 1 Samuel 15 elsewhere in Scripture? Read the following verses and write down the spiritual truths they teach.

James 4:10

1 Peter 5:5

If only Saul had trusted God to exalt him rather than trying to exalt himself, Saul's life may have turned out differently. The prideful king spent the rest of his years floundering in paranoia, afraid of losing the crown, and unwilling to submit to the Lord. He bowed to circumstances, he bowed to himself, he even bowed to others. But he refused to bow to God.



Stop Resisting and Start Submitting

1 Samuel 15:1–23



Application: Progressing from Resistance to Submission

How can we and those we love avoid the pitfalls that Saul experienced? First, we can train our children or grandchildren while they're young to submit to authority. Children need loving limits and boundaries, and when they resist a parent's authority, they need correction. Discipline tells our children that their parents love them too much to let them rebel (*Proverbs 13:24*).

What can you do to help your children learn obedience?

Second, as children of God, we can all learn to submit to our heavenly Father's authority. Just as parents show love through correction, so God disciplines those He loves because He knows the security and joy we will experience when we submit to His will (*Hebrews 12:10–11*).

Can you identify any ways you might be resisting God's authority? In what areas might you be following Saul's "my-way" example instead of Christ's example when He prayed to the Father, "I want your will to be done, not mine" (Luke 22:42)?



Stop Resisting and Start Submitting

1 Samuel 15:1–23



A FINAL PRAYER

We close this study with a prayer of surrender to the Lord written by Dwight L. Moody. May his words give voice to your fervent desire to let God rule your life.

Use me then, my Savior, for whatever purpose, and in whatever way, you may require. Here is my poor heart, an empty vessel; fill it with your grace. Here is my sinful and troubled soul; quicken it and refresh it with your love. Take my heart for your abode; my mouth to spread abroad the glory of your name; my love and all my powers, for the advancement of your believing people; and never suffer the steadfastness and confidence of my faith to abate; so that at all times I may be enabled from the heart to say, “Jesus needs me, and I am his.”³

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rationalization>, see “rationalization.”
3. Dwight L. Moody, as quoted in *The One Year Book of Personal Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1991), 9.



THINGS TO STOP AND START STUDY SEVEN

Stop Acting Perfect and Start Being Vulnerable

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

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

—Charles R. Swindoll

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

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

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



PREPARE YOUR HEART

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



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Stop Acting Perfect and Start Being Vulnerable

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

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

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



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

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

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

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



Stop Acting Perfect and Start Being Vulnerable

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



Observation: The Presence of Vulnerability

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

- 1) The who, what, where, when, why, and how
- 2) What you can see, touch, taste, hear, and smell
- 3) What's repeated, emphasized, related, compared, and contrasted
- 4) The logical connections, flow of thoughts, and range of subjects¹

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

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

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

What Paul Did <i>1 Corinthians 2:2–5</i>	What Paul Didn't Do <i>1 Corinthians 2:1, 4</i>



Stop Acting Perfect and Start Being Vulnerable

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

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

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

Paul Models Vulnerability within Ourselves

Paul's public display of vulnerability flowed out of his private life of humility. To uncover the source of Paul's humility, read [2 Corinthians 4:1–7](#).

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

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

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



Stop Acting Perfect and Start Being Vulnerable

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

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

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

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

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

—Chuck Swindoll



Stop Acting Perfect and Start Being Vulnerable

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



Interpretation: Lesson in Humility Learned through Suffering

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

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



Stop Acting Perfect and Start Being Vulnerable

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



Correlation: Paul's Vulnerability Despite His Circumstances

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

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

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

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



Stop Acting Perfect and Start Being Vulnerable

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



Application: The Necessity of Humility

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Stop Acting Perfect and Start Being Vulnerable

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



A FINAL PRAYER

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

ENDNOTE

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



THINGS TO STOP AND START STUDY EIGHT

Stop Lying and Start Acknowledging

Ephesians 4:21–29

You and I can have closer fellowship if you know that I'm telling the truth and if I, in turn, know that you are doing the same. Truth cultivates trust.

—Charles R. Swindoll

OF all the bad habits we could address, few are more prevalent yet more acceptable than lying. And few are more destructive to our relationships and our integrity. As painful as it may be to hear, the U.S. is a nation of liars. One reliable survey reveals that 91 percent of Americans lie regularly.¹ The majority of Americans find it hard to get through a week without lying!

Unfortunately, Christians are not the exception. In their book, *Keeping Your Ethical Edge Sharp*, Doug Sherman and William Hendricks surveyed a large sample of Christians and concluded that “the general ethical conduct of Christians varies only slightly from non-Christians.”² These two authors discovered that Christians are almost as likely as non-Christians to falsify their income tax returns, steal from the workplace, and selectively obey the laws.

It is time for us to face it: lying is an ongoing habit that we must expose, analyze, and stop! We must *stop lying and start telling the truth*, and with God's help through the guidance of His Word, we can do just that.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Unlike humans, God never lies. It goes against His nature to lie, so it follows that when God became flesh, *truth* became flesh as well, as the apostle John reminds us:

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 NASB)



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Stop Lying and Start Acknowledging

Ephesians 4:21–29

Grace and truth flowed through everything Jesus did and said, so we can trust Him knowing that He will never lead us astray. Take a few moments to invite God to use His Spirit to “guide you into all truth” (John 16:13) and to help you walk with Christ in truth.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul teaches us how to live truthfully in Ephesians 4:21–25. If you’re in a private place, read aloud the following verses about how to live truthfully. Reading aloud focuses our mind and tunes our ears to hear Paul’s emphasis:

Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. (Ephesians 4:21–25).



Observation: A Biblical Appraisal and Analysis of Lying

Observation is the *Searching the Scriptures* method of looking in the text for contrast, comparisons, repetition, cause-and-effect, flow of thought, and other features that might help us understand the author’s intended meaning.³



Stop Lying and Start Acknowledging

Ephesians 4:21–29

The word, *since*, signals the starting point from which Paul's thoughts flow. How does Paul's statement, "you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him," give the reader a foundation for what follows (Ephesians 4:21)?

Paul moves forward from this point, laying down commands like stepping stones on a path. In the space below, write the commands you see in verses 22–25.

Notice the small but crucial word, *so*, in verse 25. This word indicates results. The commands "So stop telling lies" and "Let us tell our neighbors the truth" (4:25), *result from* following the commands in 4:22–24. Do you see the progression? We "throw off," then "renew [our] thoughts," and then "put on" (4:22–24). One act follows the other until we are able to stop lying and start telling the truth.

In the interpretation phase of our study, we'll examine what these commands mean. For now, let's take a quick tour of other passages in the Bible that address lying.

God's Appraisal of Lying

God addresses lying in the following verses. Observe what God says about lying and write down any reasons you can find for God's displeasure when His children deceive one another.



Stop Lying and Start Acknowledging

Ephesians 4:21–29

Psalms 15:1–3

Proverbs 6:16–19

Paul's Analysis of Lying

Paul also wrote about truth-telling to the believers in Rome and Colossae. What did Paul teach in these passages below? Compare these verses to Ephesians 4:21–25. Do you see any repeated themes?

Romans 3:10–13



Stop Lying and Start Acknowledging

Ephesians 4:21–29

Colossians 3:8–10

Lies don't originate on the tongue but in the innermost parts of who we are. So, if we hope to break our lying habit, we must experience a transformation from the inside out. Let's examine how this process happens.

The one who speaks the truth, speaks from a sincere heart. The tongue is like a bucket; the heart is like a well. The bucket goes down, lifts from the heart whatever is there and spills it out. —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Understanding the Renewal Process

Paul urges us to throw off our old ways, renew our minds, and put on Christ's new ways (Ephesians 4:22–24). Commentator William Barclay explains the vividness of Paul's language:

[Paul] says, "Put off your old way of life as you would put off an old suit of clothes; clothe yourself in a new way; put off your sins, and put on the righteousness and the holiness which God can give you."⁴

Imagine the habits of our old life as an old tattered and stained T-shirt or as a pair of old rotten sneakers. Paul urges us to throw away the vestiges of our old life—not just set them aside for later use but toss them into the incinerator never to wear them again! And put on beautiful clothes befitting our new identity as God's children.

The key to "putting off and putting on" is letting "the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes" (4:23). The following chart lists some thoughts from our old life that lead to lying. What might be a correlating, Spirit-renewed thought of the new life? The first one is filled in as an example, and verses are listed to help you.



Stop Lying and Start Acknowledging

Ephesians 4:21–29

Lie-Prompting Thought	Spirit-Renewed Thought
“If others find out what I did, they will reject me.”	<i>Hebrews 13:5</i> “God will never reject me, no matter what I’ve done.”
“Exaggerating my accomplishments helps me get ahead.”	<i>Proverbs 16:18–19</i>
“Everyone lies to customers. It’s part of doing business.”	<i>Colossians 3:23</i>
“What people don’t know won’t hurt them.”	<i>Luke 12:2</i>
“I have to tell people what they want to hear for them to like me.”	<i>Galatians 1:10</i>
“The system is corrupt, so it’s okay for me to lie to avoid getting ripped off.”	<i>Proverbs 17:20</i>

As truths from the heart of the Spirit flow through our renewed minds, they surface as words in our mouth. The more we speak the Spirit’s truths, the more of the old life we toss aside and the new life we model. But it takes deliberate effort to stop lying and tell the truth.

Please observe that a clean and holy life is not automatic once you’ve come to Christ. You and I are responsible to carry out this matter of personal holiness. You train yourself to start thinking thoughts that are purer than you used to think. You have the Holy Spirit living within you. He is there to prompt you. The renewed mind frees you from the bondage of an old nature. —Chuck Swindoll



Stop Lying and Start Acknowledging

Ephesians 4:21–29



Correlation: The Source of All Lies

In correlation, we look for other Bible passages that shed further light on the meaning of the passage. If the fountainhead of all truth is God, then from what spring do the bitter waters of deception flow?

To find the answer, read the following verse and summarize the points Jesus was making as He was talking to the Pharisees who were plotting to kill Him.

For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

Our behavior reveals our spiritual heritage. For this reason, Paul pleads with those who follow Christ, “Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children” (Ephesians 5:1). We mouth the thoughts of the devil when we lie; conversely, we mouth the thoughts of our heavenly Father when we speak truth. How much better is that!



Application: Three Suggestions for Breaking the Lying Habit

In his message, Chuck Swindoll offered a three-step plan to help us stop lying and start telling the truth. These steps guide us in the process of throwing aside the old habit of lying, letting the Spirit renew our minds, and putting on the new habit of telling the truth. Chuck’s plan includes questions to ask ourselves to help us evaluate the truthfulness of our speech.



Stop Lying and Start Acknowledging

Ephesians 4:21–29

Before You Speak . . . Think Ahead

- *Is what I'm about to say the truth?*
- *Should I speak or remain silent?*
- *Do I feel under pressure to say something to please someone else?*
- *Am I thinking of cheating?*

During Your Speaking . . . Ask Yourself

- *Am I saying this correctly according to the correct facts?*
- *Should I give someone else credit for my ideas?*
- *Am I exaggerating to impress others?*
- *Am I holding back something that I should say?*

After You Speak . . . Consider This

- *Do I regret saying what I said?*
- *Should I correct or clarify what I said?*
- *How could I have said what I said in clearer way?*
- *Was I trying to hide something?*

Can you remember these questions the next time you are in a situation which might prompt you to lie? One idea is to write them on a card to carry with you so that you can review them from time to time. Breaking the habit of lying won't happen without a plan and intentional effort. Put this plan into action today!

Do you really want to break the habit of lying? One person is the key: yourself. Coupled with the power of the Holy Spirit, any habit can be broken! —Chuck Swindoll



Stop Lying and Start Acknowledging

Ephesians 4:21–29



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I invite You to send Your Spirit to scrub my mind clean of the thoughts from my old life and renew my mind with thoughts from the new life You have given me. Thank You for calling me Your child and giving me a new identity with Christ. Help me to trust You enough to say the truth, even if the consequences are difficult to bear. Keep me in Your care as I follow the truthful way of Christ. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. James Patterson and Peter Kim, *The Day America Told the Truth: What People Really Believe about Everything That Really Matters* (New York: Plume, Penguin, 1991), 45.
2. Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, as quoted in Charles R. Swindoll, *The Finishing Touch: Becoming God's Masterpiece* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 25.
3. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
4. William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, The Daily Study Bible Series, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 154.



THINGS TO STOP AND START STUDY NINE

Stop Criticizing Earth and Start Contemplating Heaven

John 14:1–3; Revelation 21:1–7

The Lord has given us just enough revelation about heaven to whet our appetites—to make us aware of the remarkable difference between where we are and where we will be.

—Charles R. Swindoll

DO you take time to reflect on the wonder of heaven? Do you think about eternity with God, relief from pain and suffering, and the complete and total banishment of death and sin? Do thoughts of heaven influence your earthly days?

There is more to live for than the here and now. John 14:1–3 and Revelation 21:1–7 remind us that we are not home yet, but some day God will make His home with us, and we will commune with Him, see Him, and know Him in a way that we can only dream about now.

For our final study in this series, let's lift our eyes from the things of this earth and focus on the splendor of our Lord in His heavenly home which will one day be ours as well. *Stop criticizing earth and start contemplating heaven.* We have so much to look forward to!



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Jesus promised to prepare a place for His followers and to come back to get us and take us there. Read His promise in the following verses as if Jesus is speaking directly to you.



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Stop Criticizing Earth and Start Contemplating Heaven

John 14:1–3; Revelation 21:1–7

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.” (John 14:1–3)

What has troubled your heart lately?

Commit your troubled thoughts to the Lord in prayer and invite Him to encourage you through His Word today.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

A rule of thumb in the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study is to always examine a passage in its context. Answering the simple questions, where, who, when, what, why, and how will help you determine the context.¹

Jesus spoke the words recorded in John 14:1–3 in the Upper Room (*where*). The disciples (*who*) were celebrating the Passover, which took place in spring (*when*). Fear filled the disciples when Jesus told them that He would remain with them only a little while longer (*what*).

The disciples’ hearts were troubled. *Why?* Because worrisome questions swirled through their minds: *Where is He going? Why can’t we follow? What are we to do now?*

Sensing His disciples’ troubled hearts, Jesus calmed them. *How?* With tranquil words that turned their thoughts toward a place of safety and love: the presence of God in His heavenly home.



Stop Criticizing Earth and Start Contemplating Heaven

John 14:1–3; Revelation 21:1–7



Observation: Our Eternal Home

Observation helps us piece together the flow of thought in a passage of Scripture. Reread John 14:1–3, noticing the commands “Don’t . . . be troubled” and “Trust in God, and trust also in me” (John 14:1). These commands are linked—you can’t be free from a troubled heart without trusting in God. And if you’re truly trusting God, you won’t have a troubled heart!

Observe carefully what Jesus told His disciples to trust Him for (14:2–3). Write down the three promises that begin, “There is,” “I am,” and “I will.”

Jesus had just told His friends, “I will be with you only a little longer” (13:33). In light of that upsetting news, Jesus’ promise, “you will always be with me” (14:3), must have reassured them greatly. Four assurances from Jesus about our eternal home emerge from John 14:1–3: there is “enough room,” there is “a place for you,” “I will come,” and “you will always be with me.” How do these promises reassure you in your current situation?

When you’re troubled about what appears to be the unknown, trust God. Simply say, “Lord, I don’t know what the future holds, I don’t know what Your plan is, but I trust you right now to get me through. Keep me from being submerged in my fears.” —Chuck Swindoll



Stop Criticizing Earth and Start Contemplating Heaven

John 14:1–3; Revelation 21:1–7



Interpretation: What Will Heaven Be Like?

Young John was among the disciples who heard Jesus' promises. Decades later, when John was old and near the end of his life, Jesus revealed to John in a vision what heaven will be like. Let's use our skills of interpretation to understand what John saw as we study [Revelation 21:1–7](#).

You may need to consult Chuck Swindoll's commentary on [Revelation](#) to help you decipher the meaning of this passage. We also recommend Bible scholar Dr. Thomas Constable's extensive [study notes on Revelation](#) in his online commentary.

What Will Heaven Look Like?

In John's vision of the future, "a new heaven and a new earth" created by God will replace the old heaven and earth (Revelation 21:1). What is the focal point of this new creation, and how does John describe it (21:2)?

Jesus referred to this city as "my Father's home" (John 14:2). Using the metaphor of a bride, John described the city in which God prepared His people to dwell ([Hebrews 11:16](#); [12:22–23](#)). How might the characteristics of a bride on her wedding day describe the place we will one day call home?



Stop Criticizing Earth and Start Contemplating Heaven

John 14:1–3; Revelation 21:1–7

What Will Life Be Like in Heaven?

What earthly ills will be no more in our eternal home (*Revelation 21:3–6*)?

Why do you think John purposefully chose this list of ills? Hint: compare these ills with the curses God pronounced on Adam and Eve after they sinned (*Genesis 3:6–7, 16–19*). Do you see similarities?

John emphasized God's personal presence with His people as the greatest of all blessings in our eternal home. Why is this significant? Hint: contrast the union of God's people with God in Revelation 21:3 with the banishment of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden in *Genesis 3:22–23*. How is God's redemptive plan fulfilled in our eternal home?

I hear people speak of who they anticipate meeting in heaven, and they name some great saint or one of the apostles. I will simply find my greatest satisfaction in being in the presence of my Savior. I'll see Him, and I'll know Him face-to-face. —Chuck Swindoll



Stop Criticizing Earth and Start Contemplating Heaven

John 14:1–3; Revelation 21:1–7

Who Will Be in Heaven?

The ancient curse removed (Revelation 22:3), the redeemed will be gathered together in God's presence. To whom is John referring in [21:6–7](#)?

The “victorious” are all those who are in Christ, as Paul declared in his letter to the Romans, “overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us” (Romans 8:37). We inherit all the blessings of heaven, not because we earned them—inheritances can't be earned—but because we are God's children through faith in Jesus.

We overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. We triumph in Christ. We are triumphant because our Savior has triumphed. We get there by the blood of the Lamb. We get there through the cross of Christ. We get there through faith in the Savior! We're called the children of God. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Other Glimpses of Heaven

In correlation, we look for other passages that shed further light on the meaning of the passage. What light do these passages shed on our glorious future?

2 Corinthians 5:1–8



Stop Criticizing Earth and Start Contemplating Heaven

John 14:1–3; Revelation 21:1–7

1 Thessalonians 4:16–17

The Word of God is like a glass through which glimmers the joy that awaits us with our Savior. What a magnificent anticipation we have as we await our final home! We can face any earthly sorrow, even death, confident of what lies beyond. In his book, *The Divine Symphony*, Calvin Miller captures the spirit of our hope in these poetic lines.

I once scorned every fearful thought of death,
When it was but the end of pulse and breath,
But now my eyes have seen that past the pain
There is a world that's waiting to be claimed.
Earthmaker, Holy, let me now depart,
For living's such a temporary art.
And dying is but getting dressed for God,
Our graves are merely doorways cut in sod.²



Application: You Can Be Sure of These Things

Our study of heaven cultivates three fruitful vines of truth from which we can glean encouragement when we feel burdened by earth's ills.

- *Any place God plans us to be, we want to go there.* God's home offers satisfaction for every human longing. Why would we want to be anywhere else than where God is?
- *Anything God removes, we don't need.* Heartache, sorrow, and pain . . . fear, suffering, and tears. These are earthly loads God will lift from our shoulders, never to burden us again.
- *Anytime God makes an offer, we're wise to accept it.* According to Revelation 21:6, God declares from His throne, "To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life." Let us drink deeply from that spring!



Stop Criticizing Earth and Start Contemplating Heaven

John 14:1–3; Revelation 21:1–7

Which of these healing truths settle your troubled soul today?

Pick a line or a verse from John 14:1–3 or Revelation 21:1–7 to memorize and repeat through your day when you feel tempted to focus too much on earthly problems. Let the truths from these promises inspire you to trust in God who has your future in His hands.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I imagine a relationship with You unencumbered by the weights of earthly sorrow, filled with the delight of Your presence as I experience the life You designed me to live. The thoughts of a heavenly home, a place free from trials, heartache, and tears thrills my soul. Bless me with a heavenly homesickness, a genuine longing for Your presence as I anticipate a place by Your side forever. Amen!

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Calvin Miller, *The Divine Symphony* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2010), 139, as quoted in Randy Alcorn, *50 Days of Heaven: Reflections That Bring Eternity to Light* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2006), 268.



THINGS TO STOP AND START

STUDY NINE

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Stop Criticizing Earth and Start Contemplating Heaven

John 14:1–3; Revelation 21:1–7



Tools for Digging Deeper



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



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without Guilt**
by Charles R. Swindoll
booklet



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



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