

## A LIVING HOPE

### When God Untied the Death Ropes

Acts 2:22–24



#### LET'S BEGIN HERE

Irascible, bold, rough around the edges, and earnest to a fault, Simon spent his days reacting: to the fish that fought to stay in the sea; to his brother Andrew, who wanted to introduce him to an uncommon leader; and to his environment, fraught with occupation and oppression. Chuck Swindoll described Peter this way:

Here is a man who all his life has longed for some way to conquer himself. Some restraint on his tongue. Some ability to get beyond his old nature, which he could never pull off.

Then, Simon answered Jesus' call, and his world—and destiny—changed . . . forever.



#### DIGGING DEEPER

*Petros*, the name Jesus gave to Peter in Matthew 16:18, is defined as “rock,” taken from the Greek *petra*—the bedrock, stone, or foundation. Upon the rock of truth—that Jesus is Messiah, Son of the living God, as properly observed by Simon—Jesus promised to build His church.

HELPFUL HINT: Before proceeding, find *petra* in a Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia. Take a few notes about what you discover. Those thoughts may become extremely valuable to you as you prepare to share with others what you learn!

Yet Peter would demonstrate that the life of a disciple isn't just one of immutable faith but also of paralyzing sin—the word translated “petrified” also comes from the root *petra*. Many of us know what it's like to be chained to sinful patterns to the point of immobilization. This is what death ropes do; they bind. They restrict. They hold hostage.

#### Quotable

*Christ breaks  
the dominion. He  
stops the chain.  
He cuts the rope.  
He sets you free.*

— Charles R. Swindoll





### Learning Where We Fit in the Story

Do you ever feel like the life of faith is a seesaw, rather than a straight line? You're not alone.

To be clear: this seesaw struggle isn't an indication that we are not saved. Peter, after all, was *chosen* by Jesus. He had walked, talked, fished, and dined with Jesus, and he *still* rebuked, doubted, and denied the Savior. Just within the space of one chapter in Matthew 16, Peter went from the ecstasy of properly identifying Jesus to the agony of being on the receiving end of Jesus' sharp rebuke.

People in the Bible who were chosen by God still had bouts of doubt, rebellion, and resistance. Abraham lied about his relationship to Sarah, putting her at risk to preserve his own safety. David was silent when his daughter Tamar was raped, forced his will on Bathsheba, and murdered Uriah the Hittite. These awful instances had very real repercussions—but God did not abandon His chosen people, even when they strayed from Him.

In the same way, we can be *chosen* by God, yet divided in being ruled by our sin or by our Savior. This battle for dominion isn't once-and-done. No wonder Paul cried out in Romans 7:24, "Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?"



### Searching the Scriptures Tip: Self-Inventory

When you prepare to share biblical truths with audiences—that includes friends, the folks at Bible study, your children, your coworkers—live with those truths first. Your aim in talking about the Bible with others isn't to lecture them on what you know but to lead them to Jesus. One way to avoid sounding like a cold, disconnected lecturer, is to *live out the texts you will share*.

Let's take this message from Chuck about the transformation of Peter as an example. It is essential that we not only have a cerebral knowledge of who Jesus is, but that we respond to His identity as Messiah by how we live. Do you live as you believe? Are you bound by sins, or are you free in Christ? Don't let this message roll out of your mind without examining yourself. How are you like Peter?

Read Romans 8:13; 13:14; and Ephesians 6:10–18. How do these passages respond to Paul's question of "who will free me?"



Peter's transformation from a rash fisherman in the Gospels to a bold witness for Christ in the book of Acts boils down to one Person: the Holy Spirit. This truth should not only take root in your mind but capture your heart and soul as well: The Power that worked in Peter is the Power working in us . . . when we submit ourselves to Him.

[A great resource for working through spiritual issues is a series called *Counseling Insights*. Here's an excerpt of the series that will help you to take a personal inventory.]

**Remember that, as far as God's concerned, we died with Christ.** Romans 6:3 says, "Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death?" The word *baptize* has to do with identification. Our identity has been changed by our coming to Christ in faith and by God's act of uniting us with Christ. No matter what we have done or left undone, we are acceptable in God's eyes—as acceptable as His own Son.<sup>1</sup>

Because you were baptized into Christ's death, who are you now? Whose are you now?

- **Keep in mind that you are not bound to respond to temptation.** As Romans 6:11 puts it, "So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus." We are, or can be, dead and unresponsive to sin's once-powerful call because Christ has changed who we are. Out of our fleshly nature emerge the spiritual enemies of worry, stress, temptation, pride, deception, and lust to dog our steps and capture us. Paul, throughout his epistles, encouraged believers to resist the flesh and flee to Christ instead.

Name one petrifying area that you will commit to resist. Describe what it would look like to "flee to Christ" instead.

- **Give every ounce of yourself to serve your new master, God Himself.** Romans 6:19 says, "Previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin. Now you must give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living so that you will become holy."



What does it look like for you to be a “slave to righteous living”?



### **Counseling People Living on the Spiritual Seesaw**

At first, it may be difficult to know how to begin to counsel someone who is having a crisis of faith because he or she struggles with a pattern of sin that seems intractable. Here are a few guiding questions that can help you to assess the person’s spiritual maturity and emotional needs.

[Below is also an excerpt from *Counseling Insights*, a great resource for ministry and lay leaders alike.]

- What is your counselee’s understanding of basic concepts like justification by faith, grace, spiritual warfare, unity with Christ, and walking in the Holy Spirit?
- What misconceptions about God might be hindering your counselee?
- What stresses are most evident in your counselee’s life? Does he or she recognize them? Do any hidden beliefs play a role in his or her stress level?
- What kind of disillusionment and disappointment is your counselee struggling with? Are these past, present, or both?
- What resources are available to your counselee through friends, family, pastor, church, or other ministries? What spiritual stumbling blocks might also be present in these?<sup>2</sup>

What additional questions would you ask your counselee in order to gain an understanding of his or her struggles and spiritual maturity?





### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, we are free because of Your compassion. We are free because of Your Son's loving sacrificial work on the cross. We are free because we accept His rescue as the Spirit guides us to faith. Help us to live, move, and have our being in Jesus and outside of the death ropes that no longer hold us captive. Amen.*

#### Endnotes

1. Adapted from Insight for Living Ministries, “Spiritual Failure: Welcoming a Returning Prodigal,” in *Counseling Insights* (Frisco, Tex.: IFL Publishing House, 2007), 543.
2. Adapted from Insight for Living Ministries, “Spiritual Failure: Welcoming a Returning Prodigal,” 540.



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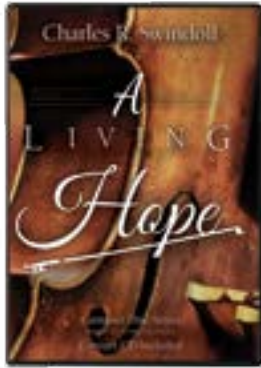
Acts 2:22–24

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For the 2017 broadcast, this Searching the Scriptures study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department in collaboration with Mark Tobey, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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### LET'S BEGIN HERE

When Jesus ascended into heaven, He didn't take the apostles and other believers along with Him. Why? Jesus had plans for them—plans that only they could fulfill, only by the power of the Holy Spirit. Shortly before His departure, Jesus gave His followers what we now call “The Great Commission,” outlined in Matthew 28:16–20.

These “marching orders” to make disciples throughout the world are vibrantly current—it's been the privilege of believers from the first century until today.



### DIGGING DEEPER



#### **Searching the Scriptures Tip: Structure Your Study**

When searching the Scriptures, a helpful first step is to gather resources that will guide you in your study. Make certain you have handy a Bible dictionary and a concordance, as well as a reliable commentary on the book of the Bible you're studying. (If you don't yet have these materials, find a solid concordance and Bible dictionary online.) For this message, we recommend you get a copy of *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Acts*. You'll find a description of that and other resources on the last page of this study.

- Reading different Bible versions can help you to read the same passage with fresh perspective. If you don't have different versions handy, visit [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com) or [bible.org](http://bible.org).
- Remember: *Observation* is a critical beginning technique you will want to use to put together the pieces of a passage of Scripture. Paying particular attention to Matthew 28:16–20 and Acts 1:9–11, make some

## Quotable

*This is the highest Christology to be found in all Holy Scripture: “All authority.” Such God-granted authority requires one response from everyone: complete submission, absolute obedience.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



initial observations about what you see—for instance, *are there any repeated words? Did Matthew and Luke use any connecting words that offer clues into what they were emphasizing?* Write down your observations and discoveries.



### Observation: The Mount of Olives in Acts 1

Often, in order to sufficiently study a passage, we need to investigate the text preceding or following it for proper context. In observing Acts 1:9–11, for example, we jump into the middle of the action. It's easy to overlook the setting where the action is taking place—where *are* these folks? When we read Acts 1:12, however, we discover that “the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a distance of half a mile.” Learning the setting of the passage in this case gives us a treasure trove of biblical import.

Read what Chuck Swindoll says about the significance of the Mount of Olives:

[Jesus] led His followers to a spot on the Mount of Olives, probably over the ridge from Jerusalem, somewhere down the eastern slope. It's a deeply meaningful place in the Old Testament. When the light of God's presence departed the forsaken temple, never to be seen there again, “the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is east of the city” (Ezekiel 11:23). According to the prophet Zechariah, the Lord will come to this mount before taking control of Jerusalem. Only the all-powerful King won't climb and then descend the mountain; the mountain will miraculously move out of His way, parting like a curtain before Him (Zechariah 14:4).<sup>1</sup>

How elegant, how incredibly consistent is God's Word, that the risen Jesus would ascend from the very spot where Zechariah prophesied the Messiah would make a supernatural stand on the Mount of Olives to judge the nations. The ascension wasn't Jesus' only association with the Mount of Olives. Jesus ministered many times at the Mount; He taught about the end times there (Matthew 24:3–25), His triumphal entry took place there (Mark 11:1–10), and finally, He wept and prayed there shortly before the crucifixion (Luke 22:39–48).

And we glean all of this by taking note of location.







### Feeding the Hungry: Grow Your Teaching from Good to Great

The Word of God is our spiritual bread, and people are starving. But even when they have access to the Bible in abundance, people don't always know how to dig in. Great teachers take their students down a path from their current circumstances to the context and principles of the Bible and back again. Great Bible teachers bridge the concepts of the Bible so that these concepts are clearly understood and applicable to life.

Read the following tips that Chuck typically follows when he's preparing to teach or preach:

#### ***Know whom you're talking to.***

Is your audience comprised of believers or unbelievers? What's your motivation for speaking to this individual or group: to instruct, to condemn, to make an introduction or an appeal, to inspire?

#### ***Use what your audience knows to teach new concepts.***

What are the everyday lived experiences of the people in your audience? Is your audience in a rural context or a college town? Do they live in the city or the country? What are their passions and pastimes?

How would you explain the concept of the Great Commission to a group of kindergarteners, using concepts already familiar to them?

#### ***Do your homework. Make things plain.***

Consider yourself honored whenever a person or group offers you an audience. Honor that time by being prepared to speak. Even when you are spontaneously given an opportunity to speak to people, create a bull's-eye in your mind . . . a point where you plan to land. In this case, one "target" could be a question. For example:

Matthew 28:17 says, "When they saw [Jesus], they worshiped him—but some of them doubted!" Which kind of disciple are you?



What are some other bull's-eye points from Matthew 28:16–20 that you would share with an audience you were teaching?

***Never underestimate the power of a good story or metaphor.***

There's nothing quite like a tale, a metaphor, or a word picture to paint a portrait in the mind's eye. For example, when David was blinded to his own sin with Bathsheba, the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to tell David a *story* (2 Samuel 12:1–7). Nathan's narrative created enough emotional distance for David to unwittingly begin to recognize the depth of his sins.

What are some effective similes, metaphors, or stories that you know that would help people understand the Great Commission better?

***Give them an application.***

A good teacher will give his or her students a wonderful lesson, but a great teacher will utilize the opportunity to prompt listeners to be better disciples after the lesson ends. Give your listeners an action, a takeaway that moves them from passively listening to active worship. In his sermon notes in highlighted letters, Chuck Swindoll typed, "Those men turned the world upside down! The question is: will we?" The question stirs up another in the minds of the audience: "What will I do to turn the world upside down for Christ? How will I make the Great Commission a part of my goal for every day?"



# A LIVING HOPE

## Marching Orders from the Master

*Matthew 28:16–20; Acts 1:9–11*

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What are some applications that you have found for Matthew 28:16–20?

Chuck says in his book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, “When Scripture is properly studied and taught, God’s Spirit will move and draw those whose hearts are hungry for the Bread of Life. Our goal is to prepare it well and serve it in the most appealing way possible. When we do, the hungry will be fed . . . and God will be glorified.”<sup>2</sup>

May we be teachers who, with conviction and excellence, prepare God’s Word and serve the hungry.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Thank You, Lord, for the hope we gain through the authority You have given to Your Son. Give us the compassion and the power of Your Spirit to make disciples. Help us to faithfully teach and mentor the disciples with whom we are privileged to be in relationship.*

#### Endnotes

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Acts* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale, 2016), 23.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale, 2016), 245.



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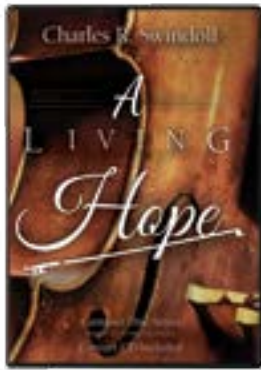
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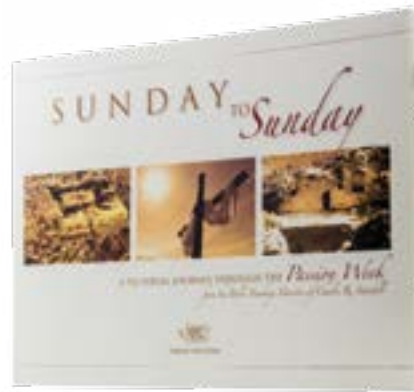
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