

THE CHURCH AWAKENING AN URGENT CALL FOR RENEWAL STUDY ONE

The Church: Let's Start Here

Matthew 16:13–18; Acts 2:41–47

A church must have teaching, fellowship, worship, and prayer to be a church. In mathematical terms, this is the lowest common denominator. You can have more than these four and have a church, but you cannot have less.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A strong current can push even the most powerful ship off course. So, to avoid letting the massive vessel drift, the helmsman must keep a close eye on the compass and continually make course corrections. No falling asleep at the wheel! Undivided attention is essential to keep the ship going the right direction.

Churches, just like ships, can also drift from their true purpose when they let strong cultural currents push them off course. Distracted by worldly notions of success and power, some church leaders have taken their eyes off the compass of God's Word and lost their bearings. A passion for growth has replaced their fire for God. Slick marketing strategies have undermined their mission to declare the simple truth of the gospel and give clear biblical instruction in doctrine and life.

We've designed this series of *Searching the Scriptures* studies to help you and your church avoid drifting and to help you recalibrate and even sharpen your perspective of the church with the original vision of Christ—the North Star who guides our way.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

A good practice when opening God's Word is to invite the Holy Spirit to illumine your heart with His truth. You may wish to pray as Pastor Chuck Swindoll prays before he studies the Word: "I often pray, 'Lord, speak to me. Help me understand what this passage is saying. I am listening. I am sensitive to Your truth. Lead me into it.'"¹ Write your prayer here if you wish.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In *Searching the Scriptures*, we study the Bible using a method featuring four vital steps:

1. **Observation:** *what does this biblical passage say?*
2. **Interpretation:** *what does this biblical passage mean?*
3. **Correlation:** *how does this biblical passage relate to other similar biblical passages?*
4. **Application:** *how should I respond to the truth of this biblical passage?*



Searching the Scriptures Tip

For helpful instruction from Pastor Chuck Swindoll on this method, consult the Insight for Living Ministries online instructional web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)." There, you can also follow the [link to purchase a copy](#) of Pastor Chuck's book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*.



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Observation: The Church's Origin and Early History

The first step is observation, which involves carefully reading the text and writing down what you see. Take your time. Each word in Scripture is an important piece of the puzzle revealing Christ's plan for His church.

Discovering the Church's Origin—Matthew 16:13–18

In Matthew 16:13–18, the term, *church*, appears in the Bible for the first time. The setting was Caesarea Philippi, a city in northern Galilee steeped in paganism and idolatry. Surrounded by temples to false gods, Jesus instituted the church in a private dialogue with His disciples.

How did Jesus begin His conversation with the disciples, according to [Matthew 16:13–14](#), and how did the disciples answer?

Jesus turned the discussion to the disciples' personal beliefs: "But who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16:15). Read aloud Peter's confession in [16:16](#). Imagine bold Peter stating these words while in the background pagan worshipers chanted praises to the false god, Pan, and bowed to Caesar as a son of god. Against this idolatrous backdrop, how does each word of Peter's confession emphasize Jesus' supreme authority?

Simon's confession was the key that unlocked Jesus' revelation of His church. Fill in the blanks in the following chart as you observe each part of Jesus' declaration: "I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it" (16:18). The first blank is filled in as an example.



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Revelation	Part of Speech	Observation
I	Subject	<i>Christ builds the church—not pastors, people, or programs.</i>
will	Tense	
build	Verb	
my	Pronoun	
church,	Object	
and <u>all</u>	Adjective	
the <u>powers</u>	Noun	
of <u>hell</u>	Noun	
will	Tense	
not	Adverb	
conquer	Verb	
it	Object	



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With these solemn words, Jesus christened the church age, which officially launched when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. Let's open the doors of the first church in Acts and see Christ's new vision in action.

The church is a body of people called out from the world for the unique purpose of glorifying their Savior and Master, Jesus Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Learning from the Church's Early History—Acts 2:41–47

As we turn from Matthew 16 to Acts 2, the setting shifts to Jerusalem soon after Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. The event the prophets foretold occurred when the Holy Spirit came upon and indwelt the disciples gathered in the upper room (*Ezekiel 36:25–27; Joel 2:28–29; Acts 2:1–13*). **The church was born!**

What four key functions did these new believers participate in, according to *Acts 2:42*?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Churches may reflect various *forms*, but these four *functions* are essential for a church to qualify as a true church. In the next section, we'll examine what these functions mean.

We have to have teaching. We have to have fellowship, worship, and prayer. We cannot have less than these four functions and be a church. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Teaching, Fellowship, Worship, and Prayer

In the interpretation phase, we ask questions such as these: What did Luke, the author of Acts, want his readers to understand about the early believers? What principles did Luke intend future believers to draw from their example? We fill the role of an interpreter as we answer these questions.



The Church: Let's Start Here

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Searching the Scriptures Study Tool: Bible Study Resources

The biblical context provides the best insight into the meaning of a passage. For additional understanding, feel free to consult *The Swindoll Study Bible* and reliable commentaries and Bible dictionaries such as: *Swindoll's Living Insights* New Testament Commentary series, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* consisting of both *Old Testament* and *New Testament* volumes, and *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*.

Drawing from the context of Acts 1–2 and using your Bible study resources, what is the meaning of the phrase: “All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42)? Note the significance of the source of the teaching: the apostles. Who were they and why was their teaching trustworthy?

In addition, the early believers were devoted “to fellowship” (2:42). What does that word mean within the context? Read [2:44–45](#) to find examples of *fellowship* in action. What attitudes characterized the early believers?



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Next, the early believers were devoted to “sharing in meals” (2:42), a phrase which implied the Lord’s Supper. Baptized at conversion, according to 2:41, the believers regularly celebrated the Lord’s Supper in obedience to the Lord’s commands (*Matthew 28:19; Luke 22:17–19*). What is the significance of these two essential ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper?

Commenting on baptism and the Lord’s Supper, Pastor Chuck Swindoll concludes, “An acceptable, all-inclusive term would be *worship*. For a church to be the kind of church Jesus promised to build, there must be worship.”² In addition, there must be “prayer” (2:42). *Prayer* is equally all-inclusive, and it can include an array of spiritual expressions. What types of prayer do you think Luke meant?

The apostles kept their priorities simple: teaching, fellowship, worship, and prayer. What was the result? “Each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved” (2:47).

In the early church, there were no politics or power grabs, no maneuverings, no financial squabbles, and no turf protection. This pristine setting provided room for the Spirit of God to work and guide. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: Christ the Head of the Church

In correlation, we look for supportive Bible passages to enhance our understanding. Paul explained the reason Jesus Christ takes the place of prominence in the church. Summarize Paul's declaration of Christ's supremacy in *Colossians 1:15–18*.

What implications can you draw from this passage about the central purpose of the church?

In a nutshell, the apostles kept the church on course by focusing on *four simple priorities* and *one ultimate purpose*: to exalt the name of Jesus Christ.

The church is not a building. It is a body without political roots, cultural boundaries, or linguistic restrictions. Christ's body has no denominational ties, and it is not a business with a cross stuck to it. It is a spiritual entity in which Christ remains the head.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Application: Three Principles to Apply

Do our churches follow the biblical example of teaching, fellowship, worship, and prayer? Is Christ the head of our churches? Does He have preeminence? To help you answer these questions, consider these guiding principles.

Clear, biblical thinking must override secular planning and a corporate mentality. The church is a spiritual entity with Christ as its head, not a secular business with a board of directors in command. We turn to the Bible for direction, not a corporate policy manual.

In what ways does your church's teaching, preaching, singing, counseling, serving, and educating have its roots in the Bible? How do your church's programs reflect a spiritual mind-set?

Accurate decisions must originate from God's Word, not human opinions. When decisions are communicated in your church, are there biblical reasons given and biblical guidelines followed? If so, write down an instance that you recall.



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Wise and essential changes must occur to counteract signs of erosion. Flexibility is the key. When God's Word points to a better way, change course! Based on the passages in this study, are there any changes you might need to make as a church member? Are there changes you might humbly and respectfully recommend to a church leader?

We can summarize these principles in three commands that apply to us as much as our churches: *think spiritually, stay biblical, and be flexible*. With these principles flying like banners on the masts of our churches and our lives, we'll be certain to sail the course God intended.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, keep us authentic in our relationships and biblical in our thinking. Guard us from distractions and hobbyhorses that shift our focus. Keep our eyes on Your Word and our hearts on Christ. Faith includes risk, so give us the courage to make changes if needed, and keep our churches Christ-centered, biblical, and Spirit-empowered. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 128.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *The Church Awakening: An Urgent Call for Renewal* (New York: Faith Words, 2010), 16.



THE CHURCH AWAKENING AN URGENT CALL FOR RENEWAL STUDY TWO

Challenges, Struggles, Solutions, Priorities

Selections from Acts 4–6

The world has lost its way. So it's not surprising that when a church takes its cues from the world, the church begins to lose its way.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost, the church was born and immediately grew. In response to Peter's first sermon, *three thousand souls* were "added to the church that day" (Acts 2:41). On the *first day* of ministry!

Understandably, with such growth came challenges. Can you imagine a church today expanding from a handful to three thousand members overnight? In addition to the logistical problems of where to meet and how to communicate would be a host of hazards common among fast-growing groups, including:

- Uncertainty of purpose
- Blurred vision
- Fuzzy priorities
- Power-hungry "professional" leaders
- Rigid bureaucratic policies



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Challenges, Struggles, Solutions, Priorities

Selections from Acts 4–6

Growing so fast, the early church could have derailed into an institutional mind-set. What kept it on track? Its *spiritual values*. Let's peek inside the early church bursting at the seams to see how their leaders managed the church's challenges with solutions based not on glitzy, big-business strategies but godly principles.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Jesus promised His followers that when the Holy Spirit comes, “he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). Invite the Lord, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, to reveal the hidden gems in His Word.

Father, lead me to the treasure You have stored in Scripture. Open my eyes to the insights I might not have seen before, the truths to light my way, and Your message of hope to give me courage to face my challenges and struggles. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The new believers were added to the “church” (Acts 2:41). What church? Not a steepled building on a street corner but the universal family of believers, a movement of God that “all the powers of hell” cannot conquer (Matthew 16:18). Although these insidious powers can't defeat the church, they will assault the church with all possible means, including persecution.



Observation: Strong Resistance, Internal Test, Valid Complaint

Let's observe how the early church handled the firestorm caused by Peter and John's healing of “a man lame from birth” at the temple gate (Acts 3:1–8) and by Peter's declaration, “Faith in Jesus' name has healed him before your very eyes” (3:16). Immediately, the Jewish leaders tried to censure the disciples for preaching the gospel of the resurrected Jesus, whom the Jewish leaders had crucified.



Challenges, Struggles, Solutions, Priorities

Selections from Acts 4–6

Persecution: Overcoming Strong Resistance—Acts 4–5

As you fill in the blanks in the following charts, use your skills of observation to summarize selected passages in Acts 4–5 that describe the persecution of the church.

Acts Passages	Challenges and Struggles When Persecuted
4:1–7	
4:16–18, 21–22	
5:15–18	
5:27–28, 33–40	



Challenges, Struggles, Solutions, Priorities

Selections from Acts 4–6

Instead of shutting down the church, the persecution had the opposite effect because of how the apostles and the church responded. What solutions did they use? What spiritual values did they model as their priorities? Write down what you observe.

Acts Passages	Solutions and Priorities When Persecuted
4:8–13	
4:19–20, 23–31	
5:29–32, 41–42	

When we’re filled with the Spirit and speaking for Christ, we’re invincible. We’re not filled with fright over what people will say or do. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Hypocrisy: Surviving an Internal Test—Acts 5:1–11

The early church withstood initial external assaults, but the adversary was too determined to wave a white flag and retreat. No, the devil just went undercover and slyly attacked from within.

Read *Acts 5:1–11*. What do you observe about an internal challenge the church faced from two of its members?



Challenges, Struggles, Solutions, Priorities

Selections from Acts 4–6

Summarize Peter’s response to Ananias and Sapphira. What spiritual values did Peter affirm as nonnegotiable priorities for the church?

God’s solution to Ananias and Sapphira’s sin: death for the couple. Why so severe? They were trying to fool God and the church by parading false spirituality. Their hypocrisy would have infected others and over time corrupted the church from within, much like hypocrisy had poisoned the Jewish leaders. The solution was severe, but it preserved the church.

The problem with Ananias and Sapphira was lack of integrity. Why is that such a big problem? Because so many people were counting on so few to walk in integrity. Leaders can’t compromise their integrity without affecting the church. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Favoritism: Dealing with a Valid Complaint—Acts 6:1–7

A third challenge the early church faced came through a valid complaint by certain members of the church. Read [Acts 6:1](#) and summarize the problem. What was at the heart of the Greek-speaking believers’ complaint? How serious was this problem?



Challenges, Struggles, Solutions, Priorities

Selections from Acts 4–6

What was the apostles' wise solution, according to *Acts 6:2–7*? What priorities did their solution illustrate?

We've observed three monumental challenges in the early church that could debilitate any church today: *persecution*, *hypocrisy*, and *favoritism*. Let's develop some key principles based on their example to help us thrive like the early church.



Interpretation: Principles to Help Us Face Our Challenges and Struggles

In the interpretation phase, we explore the meaning of the text and then draw principles. Principles are universal statements of truth that apply to Christians in all times. When writing a principle, it helps to include a “should” statement—to express the *what*; and a “by” statement—to illustrate the *how*. For example, “*When persecution strikes, we should . . . by . . .*” Review your observations under the headings above and write principles using the following prompts based on key verses.

Key Verse

So they . . . commanded [the apostles] never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, “Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:18–20)

Obedience Principle:



Challenges, Struggles, Solutions, Priorities

Selections from Acts 4–6

Key Verse

All the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God: “O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them. . . . O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word.” (Acts 4:24, 29)

Prayer Principle:

Key Verse

“Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? . . . You weren’t lying to us but to God!” (Acts 5:3–4)

Integrity Principle:



Challenges, Struggles, Solutions, Priorities

Selections from Acts 4–6

Key Verse

“Select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word.” (Acts 6:3–4)

Delegation Principle:

Do other key verses stand out from the passages you observed? If so, what principles can you write based on these verses?

We have nothing to fear serving our sovereign God! He never slumbers or sleeps. He never says, “Sir,” to anyone or asks permission of anybody. He is our Master. As a church, we answer to Him and exalt Him and seek to please Him. That’s what gives us a sense of invincibility. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Challenges, Struggles, Solutions, Priorities

Selections from Acts 4–6



Correlation: Growth as an Outcome

As a result of the early church's commitment to its values, the church grew. Read the following verses and in the space below, write down the reasons people converted. What deep needs of the soul was Christ meeting through His church?

They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. (Acts 2:46–47)

But many of the people who heard their message believed it, so the number of men who believed now totaled about 5,000. (4:4)

Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women. (5:14)

So God's message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too. (6:7)

And the believers were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. The same thing happened in Iconium. Paul and Barnabas went to the Jewish synagogue and preached with such power that a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers. (13:52–4:1)

People today still hunger for a soul-satisfying relationship with God, and when they find what their spirits yearn for in Christ and His church, they will respond. The key is to stay focused on our spiritual values, regardless of the pressure to compromise.



Challenges, Struggles, Solutions, Priorities

Selections from Acts 4–6

Application: Truths in Action

Our challenges and struggles may or may not be the same as those of the early church, but the solutions they modeled and the spiritual values they prioritized are the same. Write down one or two principles you gleaned from this study that stand out.

What positive changes in your life or the life of your church might result by putting this principle or these principles into action?

How might people's souls be nourished?



Challenges, Struggles, Solutions, Priorities

Selections from Acts 4–6

God was moving through the early church in extraordinary ways. What attribute of God stood out to you in the verses you read? How can that attribute encourage you in your walk with Him today?

Although the adversary still disrupts, the Lord always blesses churches that uphold His Word. At the heart of our mission must be prayer, boldness, honesty, love for all people, and a determination to proclaim the name of Jesus. Just as the first-century church endured, so will the church of the twenty-first century as we hold onto these core spiritual values.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the power of Your Word that brings us back to Christ, our Head. Guard us from chasing the glitter of the world and its promises of success and influence. Bind us to the spiritual values that secured the first church and can keep us on track with Your will, in Jesus' name, amen.



THE CHURCH AWAKENING AN URGENT CALL FOR RENEWAL STUDY THREE

Distinctives of a Contagious Church

2 Timothy 2:1–10

What causes the community to take notice of a church? It isn't the building. It's the people. Not the number of people but their passion, their Spirit-directed energy.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHAT draws us to one church over others? What stirs our excitement to drive miles to attend services, make friends there, and invest hours of our time? Why does *this* church attract us so much that we plan our family's schedule around the church's calendar and invite others to come with us?

One reason may be the sound, biblical preaching and teaching. But, as we discovered in our first *Searching the Scriptures* study, a healthy church must also have fellowship, worship, and prayer (Acts 2:42). And yet, of all the churches that offer these functions, what makes one church stand out? What gives a church that *contagious* quality that draws us in?

In his second letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul shed light on the distinctives that make churches contagious. Let's explore these distinctives so we can model them in our lives and then in our churches.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

You may love your church and feel at home there. Or you may be discouraged, wondering whether it's time to look for another church. Invite the Lord to minister to you where you are. In quiet prayer, express to the Lord your hopes for your church experience and ask Him to open your eyes to His truth in His Word.



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Distinctives of a Contagious Church

2 Timothy 2:1–10



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul wrote 2 Timothy while imprisoned in a cold, damp dungeon cell in Rome. His life nearing its end, Paul used this final letter to hand off the ministry to Timothy and, through the centuries, to us.

Having planted numerous churches, the aging missionary knew that the best materials to use in building a church were certain qualities in the lives of the people. After all, a church is not a building but a people. In his blueprint for Timothy, Paul included specs for four deeper life distinctives.



Observation: Commands, Insights, and Guidelines

In the observation phase, we look closely at the words Paul selected and how he structured his ideas. In 2 Timothy 2:1–10, Paul's commands act like pegs on which he hangs his instructions. Read the passage below and highlight the commands.

Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.

Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them. And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules. And hardworking farmers should be the first to enjoy the fruit of their labor. Think about what I am saying. The Lord will help you understand all these things.

Always remember that Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, was raised from the dead. This is the Good News I preach. And because I preach this Good News, I am suffering and have been chained like a criminal. But the word of God cannot be chained. So I am willing to endure anything if it will bring salvation and eternal glory in Christ Jesus to those God has chosen. (2 Timothy 2:1–10)

In the space below, write down the commands along with key words associated with each command.



Distinctives of a Contagious Church

2 Timothy 2:1–10

What metaphors did Paul use to illustrate his command in 2 Timothy 2:3?

What other observations can you make? How did Paul use his imprisonment and personal example to emphasize the urgency of his message to Timothy?

Paul was cold. He was lonely. He was coming to the end of his life, and it was time for him to pass along his insights for ministry. It's as if Paul was handing Timothy a baton in a relay, saying, "Run with it! Run now!" Having served so faithfully and so long, Paul was handing the ministry to Timothy and telling Timothy, in turn, to hand it to others.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Four Characteristics of Contagious Churches

In the interpretation section, we'll carve out of Paul's commands the four distinctives of contagious churches. The first distinctive emerges from the imperative, "be strong" (2 Timothy 2:1).



Distinctives of a Contagious Church

2 Timothy 2:1–10

Be Strong—2 Timothy 2:1

Paul didn't command Timothy to be strong in his own strength but through what divine empowerment, according to 2 Timothy 2:1? How would you explain this concept?

Grace must flow through every aspect of church life. What makes churches that *preach* a gospel of grace, *promote* a lifestyle of grace, and *practice* grace in relationships so attractive?

Conversely, what makes churches that preach a gospel of works, promote rules and regulations, and practice judgmentalism so toxic to our souls?



Distinctives of a Contagious Church

2 Timothy 2:1–10

What principle was Paul passing along to us about this essential distinctive?

A church of grace is alive, anticipating, willing to risk, and free of judgmentalism. Churches of grace are attractive places. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Teach—2 Timothy 2:2

Paul's second command was to teach others. What must we teach, according to [2 Timothy 2:2](#)? Whom must we teach? What concept was Paul explaining as an educational model for churches to follow?

What principle about contagious churches does this distinctive highlight?

A church is not a gathering of people who sit and listen to one person preach. We must use what we hear to build into the life of someone else. Otherwise, we're a stagnant lake with little life. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Distinctives of a Contagious Church

2 Timothy 2:1–10

Endure—2 Timothy 2:3–7

From his dark dungeon cell, Paul’s enduring faith shone like a beacon, encouraging Timothy to fearlessly carry on, to fight the good fight, and to finish the course just like Paul (2 Timothy 4:5–7). How does each of the three metaphors in *2 Timothy 2:3–7* illustrate aspects of endurance through suffering? Use the following chart to organize your interpretation.

Metaphor	Actions	Obstacles	Reward
Soldier			
Athlete			
Farmer			

Paul said, “Endure suffering *along with me*” (2:3, emphasis added). What is the attraction of a church in which the members of the body endure suffering together?

Drawing from his metaphors, summarize Paul’s principle about endurance as a church distinctive?



Distinctives of a Contagious Church

2 Timothy 2:1–10

When tested, the church body pulls closer together. That's the secret of a contagious church.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Remember—*2 Timothy 2:8–10*

What central truth in *2 Timothy 2:8* beats strong in the heart of a contagious church?

Paul built his life on his calling to preach the gospel and was willing to suffer if it meant that others might be saved. How does Paul's example shape the core mission of a contagious church, according to *2 Timothy 2:9–10*?

In a final principle, put together all four distinctives in a summary statement. Complete this sentence, "The members of a contagious church . . ."



Distinctives of a Contagious Church

2 Timothy 2:1–10



Correlation: Paul's Favorite Metaphors

Paul's favorite metaphors to illustrate the Christian life were *soldier*, *athlete*, and *farmer*. Correlate Paul's use of these images in our passage with the following passages. What other principles did Paul teach using these metaphors?

Soldier: Ephesians 6:10–12

Athlete: 1 Corinthians 9:25–27

Farmer: 1 Corinthians 3:5–9



Distinctives of a Contagious Church

2 Timothy 2:1–10

What is it that draws us to one church over another? We find in the church's leaders and the members qualities we admire—the courage of a soldier, focus of an athlete, diligence of a farmer. Key distinctives stand out. People minister in the power of God's grace, mentor their weaker brothers and sisters, suffer hardships together, and pursue the primary goal of proclaiming Christ as Savior. That's a contagious church!

Application: Making It Practical

Try on for size the four distinctives of a contagious church and see how you might live them out.

Have you been struggling in your strength and finding little success? Ask God for His grace to do what you can't on your own. How can you be strong in the grace of God in a particular area of work or ministry?

The essence of mentoring is loving people. It's building them up, helping them with their questions, listening to their concerns, praying with them, and passing on biblical knowledge. Whom can you come alongside as a spiritual friend? What steps can you take to develop a mentoring relationship with someone?



Distinctives of a Contagious Church

2 Timothy 2:1–10

Do you know someone who is going through a hard time? How can you be like Paul and suffer hardship together with this person or family?

The heart and soul of a contagious church is sharing the good news of Jesus. Who needs to hear the forgiveness and new life the Savior offers through His death and resurrection?

Imagine everyone in your church clothed in these distinctives—living by grace, being mentored and mentoring, enduring hardships together, and sharing the gospel. What an attractive place that would be!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, change begins with me. Help me to depend on Your grace today in all my doings. Build into my life Your truths so that I might use them to build into others' lives. Make me a person people come to when they need a helping hand, and give me the joy of sharing the hope of the gospel with someone else today. In Jesus' name, amen.



THE CHURCH AWAKENING AN URGENT CALL FOR RENEWAL STUDY FOUR

Worship: A Commitment . . . Not a War, Part One

Selected Scriptures

Worship is the contemplation of God. It is being absorbed in Him alone who is of supreme worth and, therefore, worthy of praise.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WE spend most of our days in a hurry, frantically juggling tasks and rushing to more activities than our overloaded schedules can bear. Everything we do feels urgent, as if each new task rings a fire alarm demanding us to put out the fire *now!*

What happens when we bring our hectic lifestyles to church? Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains the consequences.

When we substitute the urgent for the important in the church of Jesus Christ, we emphasize work, activity, involvement, doing, producing, impressing, and accomplishing. But it leaves us feeling flat and empty. Exhaustion replaces satisfaction.¹

It's time to stop and reflect. What is truly important in our lives and churches? What is the top priority that so often gets crowded out by the clanging demands of a busy life?

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll see Jesus reveal what's most important to a Samaritan woman searching for meaning. She had come to the well to fill her empty pot with water, but then Jesus poured His life into her empty soul. She walked away a changed person.

Jesus revealed to the woman the reason God created us: *worship*. Let's explore worship in all its splendor and make it the central pursuit of our lives and the purpose of our churches.



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Worship: A Commitment . . . Not a War, Part One

Selected Scriptures



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Perhaps you feel like a casualty on life's fast lane—wary from overwork, burned out from long hours, doing more but satisfied less. As you open the Word, express to the Lord your longing to worship Him as the true and living God and find contentment in Him alone. Let this prayer guide you.

Father, I come to the Word today hungry to be satisfied by Your presence. I come seeking to worship You and adore You and to express how worthy You are of my praise. You have expressed Your love to me through Your Son. He has captured my heart, and I long to follow Him as I learn from His words. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus encountered the woman at the well on His way through Samaria. The Jews despised the half-blood Samaritans, who had established a rival temple on Mount Gerizim. According to the notes in the NET Bible, the grudge between the groups went back centuries:

After the exile the Samaritans put obstacles in the way of the Jewish restoration of Jerusalem, and in the 2nd century B.C. the Samaritans helped the Syrians in their wars against the Jews. In 128 B.C. the Jewish high priest retaliated and burned the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim.²

The conflict between Jews and Samaritans was the original “worship war,” and it raged on and on with little hope of peace. But then, in His conversation with a broken Samaritan woman, Jesus cast a vision of a new way to worship. Jesus was ushering in a messianic era in which all sinful humanity, regardless of cultural differences, can worship God through Him.



Observation: The Irreplaceable Priority

Observation is the first step of *Searching the Scriptures*, in which we look closely at what the passage says before we explore what it means.



Worship: A Commitment . . . Not a War, Part One

Selected Scriptures

Put yourself into the scene John described in the opening verses of John 4. Feel the heat of the midday sun and the dryness in your parched throat. Picture the ancient well that God had provided to quench the thirst of His people since the days of Jacob. Write down what you observe in *John 4:1–7*.

Use the following chart to record the dialogue between Jesus and the woman along with the subtext. “Subtext” is the unspoken communication between characters based on what they are doing, thinking, or feeling.

For example, when Jesus asked the woman for a drink of water, he communicated more than the question itself (John 4:7). He was reaching across racial and social barriers with an open hand of acceptance and an offer of relationship. John helped his readers grasp the shocking nature of Jesus’ gracious action by commenting that “the woman was surprised” and “Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans” (4:9).

As you summarize the dialogue in the chart, try to fill in the subtext based on John’s commentary and the woman’s reactions.



Worship: A Commitment . . . Not a War, Part One

Selected Scriptures

Verses	Jesus' Words	The Woman's Reaction	Subtext
<i>John 4:7-9</i>	"Please give me a drink."	"You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"	The woman communicates suspicion and distrust of Jesus.
<i>4:10-12</i>			
<i>4:13-15</i>			
<i>4:16-20</i>			
<i>4:21-26</i>			



Worship: A Commitment . . . Not a War, Part One

Selected Scriptures

According to *John 4:28–29*, what did the woman do? She put the living water Jesus offered to her lips and believed in Him as Messiah. What did her actions communicate about how Jesus changed her life?

When we personally connect with God through Christ, we can't keep the worship from bubbling over. Praise is the natural response of “true worshipers” who “worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23). Let's take a closer look at what Jesus meant by *worship* and how it sets us free to experience the purpose for which God made us.

God seeks our worship. When we awaken in the morning, God seeks our worship. As we go through the day, God seeks our worship. He wants us to worship as we drive our car, rear our children, and walk alongside our spouses. When we're alone or with others, God wants our worship. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Primary Purpose of the Church

For both the Jews and Samaritans, worship depended on the location of the temple—the *place of meeting* between God and humankind. Only at the temple could priests atone for the sins of the nation and the people could come near to God in praise and worship.

Jesus, however, shattered this assumption about worship: “The time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem” (John 4:21).



Worship: A Commitment . . . Not a War, Part One

Selected Scriptures

To what “time” was Jesus referring? What will happen at this time, and why will the temple no longer matter? You can use commentaries or other Bible study resources to answer interpretive questions, including online sources such as [Constable’s Notes](http://netbible.org) at netbible.org.

What did Jesus mean by stating that “salvation comes through the Jews” (John 4:22)? How would the Jewish Messiah save the world and replace the need for temple sacrifices, according to [Isaiah 53:4–6](#) and [Hebrews 9:24–28](#)?

Because “God is Spirit,” Jesus said, we must worship “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). What did Jesus mean? How does worshiping in spirit and truth free us from needing a certain place of worship, style of worship, or time of worship?

We gather as the body of Christ at church for a unique worship experience, which is a practice that goes back to the first church in Jerusalem. Let’s take a closer look at how these believers worshiped.



Worship: A Commitment . . . Not a War, Part One

Selected Scriptures

The purpose of the church is to cultivate worshipers. It's a place where we learn about God so that our worship of Him becomes deeper, more meaningful, and understandable. Worship turns our full attention to the only one worthy of it. When you have worshiped, there is something so deeply satisfying and gratifying words cannot describe it.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: A Church That Put Worship First

The first believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). [Acts 2:43–47](#) illustrates these four expressions of worship with more specifics. In what ways do these verses describe worship at the center of the early Jerusalem church?

What principle or principles about worship can you draw from the example of the early church?

“Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe.” What was that? I can’t explain it to you. I just know when it’s not there. Our souls need to be nourished. Our hearts need to be lifted up. There needs to be a sense of awe in a worship service. It’s the presence of God.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Worship: A Commitment . . . Not a War, Part One

Selected Scriptures



Application: Making Worship the Main Thing

Our relationship with God is built on worship. When we worship, we see God in His proper place—supreme in authority, higher than all created things, magnificent in wisdom and purity. We also see ourselves in proper perspective—dependent on God for life, grateful to God for His grace, reliant on God for direction.

Worship naturally flows out of our hearts when we focus on God and His splendor. With the psalmist, we lift our voices,

*I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart;
I will tell of all the marvelous things you have done. (Psalm 9:1)*

Take a moment now to express your praise to the Lord. What marvelous things has He done for you?

Living under the tyranny of the urgent, are you too busy putting out fires to give God a thought? What can you do to cool the heat of urgent things to find spiritual warmth in worship? How can you carry that closeness with God into every segment of your life?



Worship: A Commitment . . . Not a War, Part One

Selected Scriptures

Jesus said, “The Father is looking for those who will worship him” (John 4:23). May the Father find those whom He is seeking at our churches and throughout the week. May the glory of heaven trickle down and seep into the soil of our lives as we worship the Lord in everything we do.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, in these quiet moments of reflection, may I see Your glory and majesty. May I magnify You as I diminish and deny myself. Occupy me with the most important thing, which is to keep You in my thoughts and to find in You hope and meaning. I seek Your will above all else, and I wait on You for guidance. Fill me with Your joy and sustain me with Your love. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *The Church Awakening: An Urgent Call for Renewal* (New York: Faith Words, 2010), 112.
2. NET Bible, John 4:4, note 8, netbible.org/bible/John+4.



THE CHURCH AWAKENING AN URGENT CALL FOR RENEWAL STUDY FIVE

Worship: A Commitment . . . Not a War, Part Two

Romans 11:33–12:2

Worship focuses on how worthy our God is. It is a declaration of His supreme majesty. It is losing ourselves in “wonder and love and praise.”

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

In the previous *Searching the Scriptures* study, we learned that “God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Worship is a *spiritual* response to God’s glory. As we contemplate God’s beauty, majesty, wisdom, and power, reverential awe should naturally flood our souls. Pastor Chuck Swindoll describes this internal experience as the *essence* of worship.

Worship is inward. It has to do with the mind, the heart. Worship is the personal contemplation and adoration of God. It is the natural response of those who recognize who God is and what He has done on our behalf. The *essence* of worship has to do with our internalizing our adoration.¹

Expressions of worship, on the other hand, are outward. True worship can’t be contained! When our hearts fill with wonder before God’s glory, we “burst out in songs of thanksgiving” (Psalm 28:7).

Expressions of worship encompass many forms—music, singing, poetry, speaking, serving, praying. Worship styles can vary with the types of people worshipping. Some worshipers are outgoing and energetic while others are reserved and quiet.

Regardless of the external form or style of expression, the essence of worship is always inward, representing certain characteristics that the Lord seeks in all those who worship Him. We’ll examine these characteristics in this *Searching the Scriptures* study.



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Worship: A Commitment . . . Not a War, Part Two

Romans 11:33–12:2



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Worship is a matter of the heart. Prepare your heart for studying God’s Word by inviting the Lord to reveal His heavenly wisdom to you. Let the apostle Paul’s praise guide your prayer.

Oh, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! . . . For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33, 36 NASB)



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The theme of worship weaves through the Scriptures like a golden thread, and whenever it emerges, people’s lives are changed. True worship transforms hearts. And yet, not all expressions of worship are heartfelt. People can put on worship like actors put on masks and perform for an audience. When people go through the motions of worship, we may not be able to tell true from false—but God knows the difference.

Inauthentic expressions of worship are the most spiritually destructive forms of hypocrisy. Let’s see how the prophets denounced it and Jesus exposed it.



Observation: Characteristics of True Worship

The first step of *Searching the Scriptures* is observing passages, noting figures of speech, contrasts, comparisons, descriptions, commands, and tone. When Jesus confronted the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, His tone was firm, reflecting one of the harshest rebukes in Scripture.

Hypocritical Lip-Service—Matthew 15:1–11

Read [Matthew 15:1–6](#). What accusation did the Pharisees raise against Jesus and His disciples (15:1–2)? In response, what charges did Jesus level against the Pharisees (15:3–6)? What contrasts do you observe?



Worship: A Commitment . . . Not a War, Part Two

Romans 11:33–12:2

According to *Matthew 15:7–11*, what core sin did the Pharisees commit? What destructive impact did this sin have on their worship?

The Pharisees sounded one way but they acted another. God doesn't want our lips; He wants all of us. In vain, the Pharisees worshiped. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Worship from the Heart—Romans 11:33–12:2

Paul, the Pharisee-turned-apostle, once wore a religious mask, honoring God with his lips while harboring pride. But then, in a blinding flash of glory, Jesus revealed Himself to Paul on the road to Damascus and transformed the hypocrite's heart (*Acts 9:1–20; 1 Timothy 1:12–17*).

What heartfelt expressions of worship do you observe in Paul's words in *Romans 11:33–36*?

Paul's humble expression of worship stands in stark contrast to the human-focused, finger-pointing pride of the Pharisees. What a difference! The eyes of true worshipers focus on God and God alone, not themselves and their spiritual achievements.



Worship: A Commitment . . . Not a War, Part Two

Romans 11:33–12:2

According to *Romans 12:1–2*, what characterizes those who worship from the heart? How do those who have trusted in Christ as their Savior respond to His glory and sacrificial love?

True worshipers are marked by a whole-life consecration to God, which leads to transformation in our mind and actions as we commit to do God’s will in every aspect of life.

It’s a spiritual service of worship. I crawl on that sacrificial altar. I say to God, “I give You each member of my family, my future, my past. I give You my worries and concerns. I give it all to You. I’m on the altar, and everything I am is Yours. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Presenting Our Bodies to God as a Sacrifice

In the interpretation section, we’ll dig deeper into Paul’s meaning when he commanded, “I plead with you to give your bodies to God” (Romans 12:1). Romans 12 represents a hinge in Paul’s letter. Up to this point, Paul focused on the foundational doctrines of our faith—what we believe about the gospel. In Romans 12, he shifted from beliefs to behavior.

In light of what God has done for us through Christ, Paul urged us to do something for God: offer our bodies to God as “a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable” (12:1). What did Paul mean?



Worship: A Commitment . . . Not a War, Part Two

Romans 11:33–12:2

How does *Romans 6:13* help you understand the meaning of Paul's command?

Write a principle about worship based on your interpretation of *Romans 12:1–2*.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul gave more specifics about how we embody worship as consecrated instruments of righteousness. Let's take a closer look.



Correlation: Doing All in the Name of Jesus

Through our faith in Christ, God has given us a new nature which bears the life of Christ. In Christ, all our differences disappear. What is most important in our churches, according to *Colossians 3:16–17*?



Worship: A Commitment . . . Not a War, Part Two

Romans 11:33–12:2

What guiding principle from these verses can you draw regarding how we express our worship at church and throughout our lives?

Our philosophy of worship has to do with the magnification of our great God. We bow before Him who is supreme. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: First Place in Everything

Through our worship, we acknowledge that Jesus Christ has first place in everything. Our internal commitment to Him forms the essence of our worship and motivates all our outward expressions, as Pastor Chuck explains,

The *essence* of worship drives our *expression* of worship. Whether it's a chorus written two weeks ago, or a hymn written two centuries ago, a statement of genuine, biblical worship set to music is always appropriate in the body of Christ.²

When we worship God with our whole lives—affections and actions—and not just our lips, we avoid falling in the tradition trap of the Pharisees, demanding certain forms and styles based on our preferences. Pastor Chuck offers these wise words: “Praise is a *sacrifice* to God; it's something we give *Him* . . . it's not done for ourselves.”³

How can your expressions of worship flow from your heart when you worship at church on Sundays?



Worship: A Commitment . . . Not a War, Part Two

Romans 11:33–12:2

How can your expressions of worship flow from your actions today?

Worship is an expression of our commitment. It's the fruit of our consecration to God and our desire to glorify Him not just on Sundays but every day of the week. Our whole being is a living, breathing sanctuary of worship for God!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me to set aside my preferences when I join the body of Christ to worship. Cultivate in me a private life of worship that expresses itself in my selfless service toward others, acceptance of my brothers and sisters in Christ who are different from me, and a genuine joy of being in Your presence every day. In Christ's name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *The Church Awakening: An Urgent Call for Renewal* (New York: Faith Words, 2010), 117.
2. Swindoll, *The Church Awakening*, 124.
3. Swindoll, *The Church Awakening*, 137.



THE CHURCH AWAKENING AN URGENT CALL FOR RENEWAL STUDY SIX

What Must the Church Realize?

2 Timothy 3:1–5

When we enter the Christian life, we enter a battleground, not a playground.
—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN a severe storm looms, weather forecasters warn the public of impending danger. Their job is to paint a realistic picture of the coming storm and sound the alarm. We fault them if they don't send a warning because their warnings save lives—but only if people actually hear and respond. People must both *realize* the threat and *react* with lifesaving actions.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll tune into Paul's broadcast of spiritual storm warnings in 2 Timothy 3:1–5. We'll hear about the hurricane of evil in our world and its threat to us, our families, and our churches. Listening to Paul's raw description, we may be tempted to cup our hands over our ears; however, ignoring the harsh reality of depravity won't weaken its impact. The church must fully realize the "difficult times" about which Paul warned (2 Timothy 3:1) and then, as we'll learn in the next study, react with a spiritual lifesaving response.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prepare your heart to hear some hard truth about the times in which we live and the destructive influence of sin in people's hearts. Pause now to ask God to give you wisdom, strength, and courage as you study His Word.



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What Must the Church Realize?

2 Timothy 3:1–5



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Writing from a dungeon cell and knowing death was near, Paul was passing the baton of ministry to Timothy, his younger protégé. From his years battling enemies of Christ and His church, the wise apostle knew the necessity of being prepared. Timothy’s survival and the church’s effectiveness depended on it.

Paul’s first words of 2 Timothy 3 sounded the alarm:

You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. (2 Timothy 3:1)

The phrase, “You should know this,” communicates urgency, as if Paul were poking Timothy (and us) in the sternum with his finger, insisting we pay attention. What will the world be like in the last days—the days in which we now live leading up to Christ’s return? Paul cast a grim picture in the verses to follow.



Observation: Depravity on Display

Observation, the first step of *Searching the Scriptures*, involves looking carefully at the words of Scripture like a detective might examine clues through a magnifying glass. With what small but important word did Paul begin 2 Timothy 3:2? What connection does this word imply between the “difficult times” in verse 1 and the list that follows in 3:2–5?

According to Paul, the source of the difficulties in the world is *sinful people*. When seeds of depravity take root in people’s hearts, their evil influence spreads like noxious weeds, even invading the church.



What Must the Church Realize?

2 Timothy 3:1-5

Paul detailed nineteen sins that characterize the people he had in mind. The chart below groups the sins into four columns and includes Paul's own words, transliterated from the Greek. Try pronouncing the Greek words to get the feel of the repetition of sound which Paul used to enhance the impact.

2 Timothy 3:2a	2 Timothy 3:2b-3a	2 Timothy 3:3b-4a	2 Timothy 3:4b-5a
People will love only themselves (<i>philautoi</i>)	disobedient to parents (<i>apeitheis</i>)	they will slander others (<i>diaboloï</i>)	be reckless (<i>propeteis</i>)
and [love] their money (<i>philarguroi</i>)	and ungrateful (<i>acharistoi</i>)	and have no self-control (<i>akrateis</i>)	be puffed up with pride (<i>tetuphōmenoi</i>)
They will be boastful (<i>alazones</i>)	They will consider nothing sacred (<i>anosioi</i>)	They will be cruel (<i>anēmeroï</i>)	and love pleasure (<i>philhēdonoi</i>)
and proud (<i>huperēphanoi</i>)	They will be unloving (<i>astorgoi</i>)	and hate what is good (<i>aphilagathoi</i>)	rather than [love] God (<i>philotheoi</i>)
scoffing at God (<i>blasphēmoi</i>)	and unforgiving (<i>aspondoi</i>)	They will betray their friends (<i>prodotai</i>)	They will act religious (<i>morphōsin eusebeias</i>)



What Must the Church Realize?

2 Timothy 3:1–5

Write down your initial observations of this list. What repeated words do you see, and where did Paul place them in the list?

Which of these sins describe a person's heart—something that is a part of his or her nature?

Which of these sins are directed toward God?

Which of these sins are directed toward other people?



What Must the Church Realize?

2 Timothy 3:1–5

Paul did not list the sins in random order. What do you notice about the sequence?

What is surprising—even shocking—about the last sin in the list?

The church can be a dangerous place, and those who are most dangerous are those we might think are pious. They will not look like the old caricature of the devil, and we tend not to think of them that way. But Paul reminded us of their existence. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of the List

In the interpretation section, we draw meaning from our observations. What deep truths did Paul intend his readers to understand? Let's dig beneath the surface and uncover vital principles from Paul's list of vices.

The Core Problem of Misplaced Affection

Paul began with misplaced affection, the root of all sin. Since the beginning of time, the devil's strategy has been to lure people away from God into the sanctuary of self where people "love only themselves and their money" (2 Timothy 3:2) and "love pleasure rather than God" (3:4).



What Must the Church Realize?

2 Timothy 3:1-5

Write a principle based on Paul's warning about the root sin of loving self rather than God.

This is the narcissistic individual at his or her worst. This is a self-lover who is a money-lover and, along with that, a pleasure-lover. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Disintegration of Character

Paul characterized those who worship at the shrine of self as “boastful and proud, scoffing at God” and “puffed up with pride” (2 Timothy 3:2, 4).

What principle can you draw from how loving self rather than God impacts a person's character?

These individuals bluster their way through life, unconcerned if others notice their pride on display. They are arrogant. Abusive. Spend time with a self-lover who is a money-lover, boastful, and arrogant, and abuse will follow. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



What Must the Church Realize?

2 Timothy 3:1–5

The Breakdown of Families

When the inner cesspool of sin overflows, those closest to the person are the first to be poisoned. What sins cause family relationships to break down, according to 2 Timothy 3:2–3?

Write down a principle about sin's impact on families.

The first circle to be impacted by the self-lover who becomes a money-lover, boastful and arrogant, is the family. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Fracturing of Communities

As Paul's list continued, depravity's destructive path widened to whole communities. Imagine workplaces, neighborhoods, and nations in which people "slander others and have no self-control," in which people are "cruel and hate what is good," and in which people "betray their friends" and are "reckless"—irresponsible, thoughtless, unrestrained, and violent (2 Timothy 3:3–4). In other words, imagine our world!



What Must the Church Realize?

2 Timothy 3:1–5

Summing up Paul’s list so far, what truth or truths was Paul communicating about “the very difficult times” in the last days (2 Timothy 3:1)?

The Warning for Churches

Paul concluded by bringing depravity to our church’s doorstep. These sinful people “will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly” (2 Timothy 3:5). What warning was Paul giving Timothy and all church leaders to come?

What final command did Paul give at the end of 3:5? What principle was he communicating about dealing with difficult people who can destroy a church?

Paul’s problem wasn’t with the lost person but with religious phonies who take advantage of their position. They are to be avoided! They do a church no good. They are scorpions in your sleeping bag. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



What Must the Church Realize?

2 Timothy 3:1–5



Correlation: Leaders Who Understood Their Times

In the correlation phase, we compare other verses that can shed light on our primary passage. Looking back into the Old Testament, we find a helpful model for today's church from a group of ancient leaders. The writer of the Chronicles described these leaders in *1 Chronicles 12:32*. Write what they did and how their actions can guide us.

The writer of Chronicles tells us two things about the sons of Issachar. The first was their discernment, they “knew their times.” Second was their decisiveness, “they knew what Israel should do.” One was awareness, the other was responsibility. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: What Must We Realize?

We've focused on awareness of the dangers of depravity in our world and how unchecked sin can damage our souls, our families, and our churches. What new truth did you realize from Paul's warnings in 2 Timothy 3:1–5?



What Must the Church Realize?

2 Timothy 3:1-5

Following Paul's lead, what warning can you offer those you love regarding the dangers of our times? With whom can you share this warning?

The spiritual storms on the horizon in Paul's day have struck. The battering winds of depravity are shaking our families and our churches. How can we stand strong against the torrent? Once we realize the dangers, what should we do? Paul will guide us in the next *Searching the Scriptures* study by teaching us how the church should react to our treacherous times. Stay tuned to Paul's next broadcast!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I'm grateful for Your presence and the simple truth of Your love for all Your children. Guard me from the temptation of loving myself over You and serving my interests and desires rather than Yours. Keep me safe in Your sanctuary worshipping You alone. Hold my heart in Your hands, and guide me through the storm into the safe harbor of my eternal home. In Jesus' name, amen.



THE CHURCH AWAKENING AN URGENT CALL FOR RENEWAL STUDY SEVEN

How Should the Church React?

2 Timothy 3:13–17

Hearing about danger is important but incomplete. What's missing is the right response. Responding to warnings is each person's responsibility.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

PAUL warned that in the last days, which include our day, “there will be very difficult times” (2 Timothy 3:1). *That's putting it mildly!*

The same Greek word for “difficult” was used in Matthew 8:28 to describe two demonized men living among the tombs near Gadara. In this verse, the word is “violent”—and that sums up our contentious times, doesn't it? We can even say, “vicious,” “dangerous,” “menacing,” “savage.” It's not an exaggeration to also say, *diabolical*, because the shadowy figure behind the world's curtain pulling the strings of evil is Satan, the invisible enemy of all that is godly.

Our churches must awaken to the reality of the spiritual threats in our world. That's what our series, *The Church Awakening*, is about; however, realizing the danger isn't enough if all we do is turn over and fall back asleep. We must react to Paul's alarm with decisive, discerning, and dedicated action . . . but what should we do? Let's pick up where we left off in our previous *Searching the Scriptures* study and find out from Paul's instructions in 2 Timothy 3:13–17.



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How Should the Church React?

2 Timothy 3:13–17



PREPARE YOUR HEART

In spiritual warfare, prayer is our lifeline to God and link to His power. Invite the Lord into your study of His Word by inserting personal pronouns into this prayer and making it your own:

*May the God of peace—
... equip [me] with all [I] need
for doing his will.*

*May he produce in [me],
through the power of Jesus Christ,
every good thing that is pleasing to him.*

All glory to him forever and ever! Amen. (Hebrews 13:20, 21)



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul concluded his list of vices from 2 Timothy 3:1–5 with the admonition, “Stay away from people like that!” (2 Timothy 3:5). These people “love only themselves and their money,” and they “love pleasure rather than God” (3:2, 4). Worse yet, they wear religious masks and “work their way into people’s homes,” preying on vulnerable church members with their “counterfeit faith” (3:5–6, 8).

Paul bore scars from battling enemies of Christ, and he warned Timothy that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (3:12). Even so, “the Lord rescued” Paul, and the Lord will see us through our battles as we follow Paul’s example of faithful endurance (3:11).

In the verses to follow, Paul continued his instructions to Timothy with an action plan for living in difficult times.



Observation: Four Reactions to Difficult Times

Observation is the first step of *Searching the Scriptures*, which includes examining the passage for parallel and contrasting concepts, logical flow of thought, and keywords. Reading different versions of the Bible can shed additional light on the text. Let’s get started!



How Should the Church React?

2 Timothy 3:13–17

Stay Realistic—2 Timothy 3:13

Second Timothy 3:13 begins with the contrastive *but*. Based on the context, with whom was Paul drawing the contrast? How did he describe the “people” in verse 13? What insights do you find in *The Message*?

The words *evil*, *imposter*, and *deceive* hint at the source of deception: the devil, the one who deceives even the deceivers and whom Jesus called, “the father of lies” (John 8:44). Realizing who we’re dealing with helps us *stay realistic* about our times, seeing through the devil’s deceptions and not being taken off guard when things get worse.

Look at the word, evil. Let it say what it says. Don’t soften it. It means “evil.” Times won’t improve. Don’t be surprised if things are worse ten years from now. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Be Convinced—2 Timothy 3:14–15

The next verse also begins with a contrast, “But you” (2 Timothy 3:14), as Paul turned to address Timothy. What instructions did he give, according to *2 Timothy 3:14–15*? Why should Timothy trust his teachers? What did they teach him beginning in childhood, and what did he glean?



How Should the Church React?

2 Timothy 3:13–17

Like Timothy, to endure our difficult times, we must *be convinced* of the longstanding truths we've been taught and be confident in the Scriptures.

*Don't question truth because it goes back to your childhood. Truth then is truth now.
Reliable information is timeless. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Stand Firm—2 Timothy 3:16

The first line of 2 Timothy 3:16 reveals the reason for our confidence: “All Scripture is inspired by God.” Don't pass over this brief sentence too quickly. What important points do you observe? On what was Paul telling us to *stand firm* in the winds of false philosophies that blow us off track?

When I'm not sure where to go, I seek the Scriptures and I go to prayer. I ask the Lord for guidance, and I ask Him to open my eyes to see how to respond. By doing that, we are standing firm on the inspired Word of God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Allow the Truth to Fulfill Its Purpose—2 Timothy 3:16–17

Because Scripture is inspired by God, it can speak to our souls in a way no other book can. Scripture has authority and power to accomplish what four benefits, according to 2 Timothy 3:16? Read the paraphrase of this verse in *The Message* for added clarity.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____



How Should the Church React?

2 Timothy 3:13–17

Through the world’s confusing chatter, God’s inspired Word calls us from the path of destruction to God’s path of wisdom. What is the outcome, according to 2 Timothy 3:17?

When we read the Bible, we get straightened out. We adjust our thinking to fit the Scripture. The Word of God is our standard and our guide. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of Inspiration

In the interpretation section, we dig into the meaning of crucial concepts, such as, “All Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Timothy 3:16, emphasis added). The reason we can trust the Bible as truth is its divine inspiration.

Look up the explanation of this doctrine in your Bible study resources, such as Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s book, *The Church Awakening: An Urgent Call for Renewal*, pages 193–195. For an online resource, read Pastor Chuck’s article, “[Why You Can Have Confidence in the Bible](#),” at [insight.org](#). You can also consult commentaries on 2 Timothy, including Pastor Chuck’s *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, and the online commentary, *Constable’s Notes*, at [netbible.org](#).

We sometimes say we feel “inspired” when we write a story or compose a song. But what did Paul mean when he said Scripture was inspired by God? How is biblical inspiration unique?



How Should the Church React?

2 Timothy 3:13–17

Truth has come under attack in our culture. Influential people claim there is no right and wrong, and they accuse those who hold a moral standard as hateful bigots. How might you defend the Bible as the cornerstone of truth in morally confusing times?

The Bible is the most valuable source of information in the world. We need it to survive. We need churches that teach it, pastors who speak on its behalf, and fellow believers who hold us accountable to its truths. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Process of Revelation

Along with Paul, Peter received divine inspiration, and in 2 Peter 1:20–21, he explained the process of revelation as it relates to the prophets of the Old Testament:

Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.

Sometimes God spoke directly to the writers of Scripture, who relayed His exact words as Moses and Aaron did before Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel.” Most of the time, the biblical authors were “moved by the Holy Spirit” as they penned the holy Scriptures.

What does it mean to be moved by the Holy Spirit? Pastor Chuck's online article, “[Why You Can Have Confidence in the Bible](#),” offers some help with the answer.



How Should the Church React?

2 Timothy 3:13–17

The Bible contains the clearest and best information on life's most important subjects. It is reliable, authoritative, and inspired truth that can anchor us during tumultuous times.

Application: How Should We React?

Try imagining your life without the Bible. It would be like being lost in a thick jungle with no trail to follow. Your only option would be to hack through the brush in one direction or another, hoping to stumble onto a right path but remaining forever lost. *Without the Bible, we would never find our way!*

Now imagine the benefits of having the Bible as your guide and the Holy Spirit as your illuminator. It's like someone with a map and compass coming to your rescue in the jungle and leading you in the right direction. What a difference! *With the Bible we should never lose our way!*

As a result of this study, do you have more confidence in God's Word to help you know how to react in difficult times? How so?

In his book, *The Church Awakening: An Urgent Call for Renewal*, Pastor Chuck wrote, "An awakened church is a powerful and effective influence in a world that's lost its way."¹ How can your church be an effective influence when the forces of the enemy are so strong and intimidating?



How Should the Church React?

2 Timothy 3:13–17

In his letter to Timothy, Paul encouraged us to wake up! Put into action these four principles:

1. Stay realistic about the spiritual warfare in our world.
2. Be convinced that the biblical truths we've been taught are still true.
3. Stand firm on the inspired Word of God.
4. Allow the truth to fulfill its purpose in our lives.

What can you do to act on these principles today?

It all comes down to knowing what God tells us to do and doing it—learning, believing, and living the inspired Word of God. But there's one other essential component that we'll discover in the next *Searching the Scriptures* study: loving Christ in everything we do.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You are the true author of all that's true and good, and You have communicated Your way in Your Word. More so, You sent Your Son, who is the Word, the ultimate message of hope, love, grace, and truth. I know how I must react in difficult times: cling to my Savior and what I know to be true about Him and what He's done for me. Help me stay faithful and kindle the fires of affection for Jesus, for it is in His name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *The Church Awakening: An Urgent Call for Renewal* (New York: Faith Words, 2010), 183.



THE CHURCH AWAKENING AN URGENT CALL FOR RENEWAL STUDY EIGHT

The Church on a Long Drift

Acts 19:1–41; 20:28–31; Revelation 2:1–4

It is a proven fact that things go from pristine and pure to weak and poor, from strong and good to bad and worse . . . never with a lot of announcement and often without people even knowing it's happening.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

In his book, *The Church Awakening: An Urgent Call for Renewal*, Pastor Church Swindoll illustrates what can happen when a church drifts from its scriptural center.

I can always tell when my truck's tires need balancing and rotating. When I lift my hands off the steering wheel, the vehicle slowly drifts to one side. The thought struck me one day that this is what the church's ministry is like. The world, the flesh, and the devil have irreparably thrown our churches off balance. We cannot for one moment take our hands off the wheel or our eyes off the road. If we do, it's just a matter of time until we drift off into the ditch of destruction. Only with our hands on the Scriptures and our eyes on the Lord can we restrain the drift.¹

The apostle Paul warned the leaders of the church of Ephesus to keep alert as they guided the church. Tragically, within a matter of years, a long spiritual drift occurred in the hearts of the church members. Let's examine how the church ended up in the spiritual ditch and learn from their example to keep our churches on track.



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The Church on a Long Drift

Acts 19:1–41; 20:28–31; Revelation 2:1–4



PREPARE YOUR HEART

If leaders drift spiritually, it's not long before the whole church loses its way. Use the space below to write a prayer for your church's leaders, that their hearts will remain fully devoted to Christ as they guide your church's ministries. Then pray for yourself to receive God's truth through His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The church at Ephesus was founded when Paul took his friends, Priscilla and Aquila, with him from Corinth to Ephesus (Acts 18:18–19). Paul then left Ephesus, promising, “I will come back later, God willing” (18:21). Staying in Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila mentored the young teacher, Apollos (18:24–28). In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul mentioned that the believers were meeting in Priscilla and Aquila's home, which gives us a clue about how the church functioned and the close fellowship of its members.

The leaders built the church on a solid biblical foundation. Apollos “knew the Scriptures well” (18:24), and under Priscilla and Aquila's guiding hand, he proved to be a capable Bible teacher. After Apollos transitioned his ministry to Corinth, Paul returned to find a core group of disciples and a church hungry for the Word.



Observation: The Growth and Testing of the Ephesian Church

When observing a narrative section of Scriptures, notice the sequence of events, often marked by transition words such as “so,” “then,” “when,” and “afterward.” Also look for time stamps, such as, “This went on for the next two years” (Acts 19:10) and “about that time” (19:23).

With these tips in mind, read *Acts 19–20* and summarize the key events in Ephesus as grouped under the following headings.



The Church on a Long Drift

Acts 19:1–41; 20:28–31; Revelation 2:1–4

Growth of the Ephesian Church—Acts 19:8–20

Paul saw the strategic potential of Ephesus as a gateway city for the gospel, staying there for about two years during his third missionary journey and witnessing the powerful impact of the church's influence.

Teaching—*Acts 19:8–10*. Describe Paul's Bible-teaching ministry. Find "the province of Asia" on a [map](#) of the region (19:10). How far did Paul's teaching reach?

Miracles—*Acts 19:11–20*. Note the results of Paul's miracles and how they spread the message of the Lord. Write down your observations in the space below.

The church at Ephesus was well-taught, but during the process of time, the enemy attacked. Not only is he strong, he is insidious and invisible. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



The Church on a Long Drift

Acts 19:1–41; 20:28–31; Revelation 2:1–4

Testing of the Ephesian Church—Acts 19:23–20:1

The believers in Ephesus lived in a city renowned for its paganism. The temple of the goddess Artemis stood as the city's crown jewel controlling the spiritual climate of the entire region and driving the economy of Ephesus. What did Paul do and say to upset the idol-worshipping industry (*Acts 19:23–31*)?

Summarize the hysteria of the rioters and how the incident resolved (*19:32–41*).

After the riots calmed, Paul gathered the believers together to encourage them. “Then he said good-bye and left for Macedonia” (20:1). Later, Paul had a final meeting with the leaders of the church when he stopped by on his way to Jerusalem.

Paul's Final Exhortation—Acts 20:13–38

The meeting took place at Miletus. What was the focus of Paul's exhortation to the leaders, according to *Acts 20:28–32*? What main threat to the health of the church was Paul *most* concerned about?



The Church on a Long Drift

Acts 19:1–41; 20:28–31; Revelation 2:1–4

In his final letter, 2 Timothy, Paul warned the church’s pastor, Timothy, to “carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you” (2 Timothy 1:14). Did Timothy and the church leaders do a good job guarding the truth? Yes, they did!

The “vicious wolves” would be cults, heretics, smooth-talking false teachers—people who are driven by secular goals, who have their own agenda, not the agenda of the living God. Be on guard! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Drift from Devotion to Christ

In the years that followed, the church leaders fortified the church’s doctrinal walls against invaders and protected the church against heresy. In the book of Revelation, John recorded “a revelation from Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:1), in which the Lord issued messages to seven churches, including the church at Ephesus. What did the Lord *commend*, according to [Revelation 2:2–3](#)?

Without realizing it, however, the leaders allowed the church to drift spiritually. What *correction* did the Lord give the Ephesian church in [2:4–5](#)?



The Church on a Long Drift

Acts 19:1–41; 20:28–31; Revelation 2:1–4

The New American Standard Bible translates the phrase in Revelation 2:4, “you have left your first love.” Look in your Bible study resources, including online commentaries such as *Constable’s Notes* in netbible.org, and explain what this phrase means.

While erecting walls against heretics, they had also walled off their affections toward the Lord. All that remained was teaching without worship, doctrine without love. What characteristics might a church have that is strong on doctrine but weak on devotion?

What pitfalls can we fall into if our walk with Christ is all religious duty with little relational affection toward the Lord or others?

The members of the church at Ephesus were busy, they were impressive, they were orthodox . . . but they had left their first love. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



The Church on a Long Drift

Acts 19:1–41; 20:28–31; Revelation 2:1–4



Correlation: Getting Back on Track

What can restore our first love for Christ? By his example, Paul helps us stir our love for the Lord. The apostle was contrasting his ministry with the flashy ministry of false teachers. What did these phony ministers brag about, according to *2 Corinthians 5:12*?

Their ministry put on a good show to stir up a crowd. Paul, on the other hand, was motivated by a purer purpose: “Christ’s love controls us” (*2 Corinthians 5:14*). The love of Christ—not power, influence, or prestige—drove everything Paul did. What does it mean for the love of Christ to control a person?

Imagine a church in which the leaders were controlled by the love of Christ. In what ways would their spiritual devotion be evident in the ministries of the church?

When we fully experience the love of Christ, love *for* Christ overflows in everything we do. As we conclude, let’s explore ways we can kindle, or rekindle, our devotion for Him.



The Church on a Long Drift

Acts 19:1–41; 20:28–31; Revelation 2:1–4



Application: Restoring Our First Love

The church at Ephesus didn't realize how far they had drifted. They were on track doctrinally, but they had lost sight of Jesus, the one to whom their doctrines pointed. The first step in restoring your first love is to fully embrace Christ's love for you.

Paul prayed that the Ephesians would understand “how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is” and “experience the love of Christ” (Ephesians 3:18, 19). Take a moment in prayerful meditation to ask the Lord to show you His love and to help you experience it deep in your soul. Write down your prayer here.

The second step is to return Christ's love to Him in the form of gratitude and praise. In the space below, write a letter to your Savior, expressing your heart toward Him.



The Church on a Long Drift

Acts 19:1–41; 20:28–31; Revelation 2:1–4

Finally, show others the love you receive from Christ. Let it fill you and control everything you do. What would it look like for Christ to love others through you today?

Don't allow the busyness of church life to distract your attention from the true purpose of the church—to experience the love of Christ, to love Him in return, and to show His love to the world. Stay devoted to Jesus, and your heart will never drift!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me to do all I do in the name of Christ, for the love of Christ, in the power of Christ, with a heart completely devoted to Him. In His name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *The Church Awakening: An Urgent Call for Renewal* (New York: Faith Words, 2010), 213.



THE CHURCH AWAKENING AN URGENT CALL FOR RENEWAL STUDY NINE

It's Time to “Restore the Years”

Ezekiel 33:30–33; Amos 8:11–12; Joel 2:21–27

The job of God’s spokesman isn’t to shape his words so that they’re easy to hear. They need to be accurate and relevant. But they must not be compromised.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

JESUS founded the church with this bold pronouncement: “I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it” (Matthew 16:18). We can be certain that the church will survive any attack, natural or supernatural. Even with all his might, the devil cannot overpower and vanquish Christ’s church . . . but that’s not to say he won’t try!

The devil may not be able to destroy the church, but he can demoralize its leaders, divert it from its mission, dilute its soul-saving message, or distract its members with worldly pleasures. He used these strategies on ancient Israel, enticing God’s people into idolatry and corrupting their leaders.

In those days, God sent prophets to awaken the nation spiritually. These courageous prophets stood alone against the winds of corruption in society. Fearlessly, they pointed bony fingers of conviction at powerful rulers, exposing their sins and consequently enduring severe persecution, even martyrdom.

If these dauntless prophets stepped off the pages of the Old Testament into our world, what warnings would they give today’s churches and pastors? In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we’ll listen to the messages of three prophets—Ezekiel, Amos, and Joel. We just may see ourselves in the people they rebuked, and, if so, we will know what we must do to return to Christ’s right way.



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It's Time to “Restore the Years”

Ezekiel 33:30–33; Amos 8:11–12; Joel 2:21–27



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you turn to God’s Word, open your heart to receive His message for you. Pray the following prayer and invite the Lord to reveal areas of your life that need attention.

*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

Of the three prophets we’ll study, Joel might have prophesied earliest, perhaps as early as the ninth century BC, in the southern kingdom of Judah. Later, Amos ministered in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam in the mid-700s BC. The prophet Ezekiel appeared much later, during the exile in Babylon after the nation had been conquered and the temple reduced to ruins.

We’ll look at the issues these prophets addressed in reverse chronological order: first, Ezekiel’s message for a complacent people, then Amos’ message for immoral leaders, and finally Joel’s message of hope for the nation suffering under a terrible plague.



Observation: The Words of Three Bold Prophets

Observe the main points of the prophets’ messages. Look for the core issue they addressed and the graphic ways they described the problem. Israel’s prophets painted vivid pictures with their words, much like Jesus did with His parables and similes. The purpose was not only to make a lasting impression but also to spark a flame of repentance and to inspire life-change.



It's Time to “Restore the Years”

Ezekiel 33:30–33; Amos 8:11–12; Joel 2:21–27

Ezekiel Speaks to a Fickle Congregation—Ezekiel 33:30–33

Ezekiel was a priest who had been deported along with thousands of Jews to a settlement in Babylon near the Chebar River. He was an eloquent speaker and respected spiritual authority. According to [Ezekiel 33:30](#), what did God tell Ezekiel about the people to whom he ministered?

The people seemed sincere, but how did their behavior betray their true nature, according to [33:31–32](#)?

What would be the tragic result ([33:33](#))?

Worship isn't a dead-end street. It isn't about being entertained or impressed. It's about changed lives. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



It's Time to “Restore the Years”

Ezekiel 33:30–33; Amos 8:11–12; Joel 2:21–27

Amos Warns of Coming Famine—Amos 8:11–12

God had called Ezekiel out of the priesthood, but He called Amos out of the fields. Amos was, in his own words, “a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs,” not a prophet (Amos 7:14 NASB). God sent this simple man into the palace to confront Jeroboam, one of the richest and most wicked kings of Israel. He called Israel’s corrupt upper class “fat cows,” indulging their appetites while they oppressed the poor and crushed the needy (4:1).

Amos prophesied during a period of unparalleled economic success . . . and unsurpassed debauchery. What was his message to the leaders who had turned up their noses to God’s Word, according to [8:11–12](#)?

The famine has come! We are in the midst of it! Listen to the religious comments made by so-called professionals. Listen for the truth. Are they teaching the Word of God?
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Joel Promises a Hopeful Future—Joel 2:21–27

We dial back the clock to hear Joel’s message, but Joel’s prophecies pointed forward in time. He envisioned renewal and restoration after God’s purifying judgments. How did he describe this period of the Lord’s blessing in [Joel 2:21–27](#)?



It's Time to “Restore the Years”

Ezekiel 33:30–33; Amos 8:11–12; Joel 2:21–27

What did God require of His people for restoration, according to *Joel 2:12–13*?

The Lord was saying to His people, “Turn to Me, trust Me, rely on Me. Break your heart before Me. I will be gracious and compassionate. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Path to Restoration

The context of Joel’s judgments was a devastating famine. Calamity had struck the farming culture of Judah in waves of natural disasters—drought (Joel 1:12) followed by wildfires (1:19). These disasters were awful, but the most destructive calamity was the swarms of locusts that stripped the spirit of the people as bare as the landscape, leaving the nation in complete ruin.

For an explanation of the shocking effects of a locust swarm, read the description under the heading “Locust” in the Animal Kingdom article in *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*. An online article on locusts in biblical times is at *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* at biblegateway.com.

What strikes you about the devastation of a locust plague?



It's Time to “Restore the Years”

Ezekiel 33:30–33; Amos 8:11–12; Joel 2:21–27

In chapter 2, Joel compares the locust swarm to an army of soldiers who “leap along the mountaintops” (Joel 2:5) and “break through defenses without missing a step” (2:8). As they charge, “the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars no longer shine” (2:10). It’s an apocalyptic nightmare, and who was “at the head of the column” leading the advance (2:11)? The Lord Himself and His righteous judgments.

Why was the Lord’s discipline so severe? Only a heavy battering ram could break through the defenses of the people’s stubborn will. God’s purpose, however, was not to destroy but to call His people to repentance and to set them on a path of restoration.

After the people turned from their sin to the Lord, restoration would descend like refreshing showers on a parched landscape. The blessings culminate with this wonderful promise: “The LORD says, ‘I will give you back what you lost to the swarming locusts’” (2:25). What does that mean? Look up the verse in various [versions of the Bible](#) to help you define Joel’s meaning and metaphor.

God promised to restore the years when His people followed Joel’s spiritual remedy:

*“Don’t tear your clothing in grief,
but tear your hearts instead.”
Return to the LORD your God. (2:13)*

What spiritual practice was Joel describing? What was he telling the people of Judah to do?



It's Time to “Restore the Years”

Ezekiel 33:30–33; Amos 8:11–12; Joel 2:21–27

It's time for there to be repentance from the phoniness, the greed, the perfunctory spirit, the lack of diligent and devoted prayer. We in ministry need to return to study, to meditation, to seeking God's mind, and to courageous and contagious preaching. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: A Prayer of Repentance

Review *Psalm 139:23–24* under the “Prepare Your Heart” section above. How did David model a repentant spirit in this prayer?

Identify four steps of repentance based on the verbs at the beginning of each phrase. Write them below and explain their meaning.

With hearts open and willing, we receive the Lord's corrections. The prophetic voices of Ezekiel, Amos, and Joel still ring today. If they were to come to our churches, how might they lead us in God's path of life? What might they say to help us restore God's favor upon the church? Let's consider some action steps we can apply.



It's Time to “Restore the Years”

Ezekiel 33:30–33; Amos 8:11–12; Joel 2:21–27



Application: Three Changes That Must Occur

Pastor Chuck Swindoll draws together the passages from our study with three pointed applications.

First, *the people of God must return to a hunger and thirst for righteousness*. Ezekiel's flock nibbled at the edges of God's truth when they came to hear Ezekiel's eloquent messages, but they returned to their worldly banquet when they left. What stirs in you a hunger and thirst for righteousness and an aversion to the things of the world? What whets your spiritual appetite to crave authentic exposition of the Scriptures?

Second, *the ministers of God must repent of their failure to fulfill their calling*. If you are a minister, have you been serving hearty meals from God's Word? Have entertaining stories been coming from your pulpit more than biblical exposition?¹ If so, perhaps you need to ask the Lord to forgive your lack of serious study. Confess your need for change in the space below.



It's Time to “Restore the Years”

Ezekiel 33:30–33; Amos 8:11–12; Joel 2:21–27

Third, *the house of God needs to represent its biblical purpose for existence*. Remember the four functions of the church outlined in *Acts 2:42*? Teaching. Fellowship. Worship. Prayer. How does your church measure up to these standards? How might you join efforts to help your church represent its biblical purpose?

We close with Pastor Chuck’s inspiring definition of the house of God and a final call to the people of God:

It is a house of prayer, not a house of business. It is a place of worship, not a place of entertainment. Jesus is our Savior whom we worship, not a brand to market. The body of Christ is a sanctuary of protection for the vulnerable—for children, single women, the abused, and the bruised and broken in life. . . .

The marvelous opportunity that lies before the church awaits only one thing: the church’s awakening. Stated simply, *the people of God* must return to a hunger and thirst for righteousness . . . *the ministers of God* must repent of their failure to fulfill their calling . . . and *the house of God* needs to represent its biblical purpose for existence. In spite of all the spiritual devastation and famine in our land, it is not too late to turn it around—by God’s grace.²



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I ask Your Spirit to do a work in my heart, to satisfy my hunger with Your Word, and to fill my mind with a true vision of Your church. Give me the integrity and courage to come to terms with the things that require attention. May good come from my repentance. May I know truth, fellowship, worship, and the free flow of peace that comes only through prayer. In Jesus’ name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. For an explanation of biblical exposition, see Charles R. Swindoll, *The Church Awakening: An Urgent Call for Renewal* (New York: Faith Words, 2010), 257–61. For help in preparing expository sermons, read his books, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* and *Saying It Well: Touching Others with Your Words*, available at insight.org.
2. Swindoll, *The Church Awakening*, 261–62.

